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by Clifford D. Simak

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Editorial

WHAT MAKES THEM RUN?

IT IS hardly news that magazine science fiction, from the very beginning, has suffered from a lack of characters in an overwhelming majority of stories published since 1926. Ideas, after all, are what make a given story *science* fiction—ideas rooted in the sciences, or in a scientific approach to such human arts as sociology, politics, government, psychology, healing, and so on. The starting point being intellectual, it isn't astonishing that, for a number of years, "story" was little more than a vehicle for the author's scientific speculations, and characterization in stories consisted of the barely essential devices for distinguishing one name from another name, if as much as this.

When "story" began to grow in importance with magazine editors—partly because the ideas became thinner, and partly because of the realization that circulations could not increase, let alone hold up, solely on mechanics dramatized—characterization began to consist of a bit more than the minimum devices. One of the reasons why "The Skylark Of Space" was regarded as a "classic" by science fictionists for so long was that, in addition to the (then new) cosmic range of the story, Smith and Garby offered characterization far beyond the measure offered by most other authors. (Jules Verne's tales were chockful of characterization, and H. G. Wells presented *characters;* but the former's ideas were dated, and the latter's people belonged to an earlier generation. They were real enough, but passe to the readers of the 20's and 30's.)

[*Turn To Page* 136]

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SHORT STORIES

FEATURES

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Editor: ROBERT W. LOWNDES MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.
Art Director: WILL LUTON DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.
COVER BY EMSH Illustrations by Emsh, Freas, Garrett and Orban

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THE SONGS OF SUMMER

An Off-Trail Story

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

(author of "The Lonely One")

illustrated by KELLY FREAS

1. *Kennon*

I WAS on my way to take part in the Singing, and to claim Corilann's promise. I was crossing the great open field when suddenly the man appeared, the man named Chester Dugan. He seemed to drop out of the sky.

I watched him stagger for a moment or two. I did not know where he had come from so suddenly, or why he was here. He was short—shorter than any of us—fat in

an unpleasant way, with wrinkles on his face and an unshaven growth of beard. I was anxious to get on to the Singing, and so I allowed him to fall to the ground and kept moving. But he called to me, in a barbarous and corrupt tongue which I could recognize as our language only with difficulty.

"Hey, you," he called to me; "Give me a hand, will you?"

He seemed to be in difficulties, so I walked over to him and helped him to his feet. He was panting, and appeared almost in a state of shock. Once I saw he was steady on his feet, and seemed to have no further need of me, I began to walk away from him, since I was anxious to get on to the Singing and did not wish to meddle with this man's affairs. Last year was the first time I attended the Singing at Dandrin's, and I enjoyed it very much. It was then that Corilann had promised herself. I was anxious to get on.

But he called to me. "Don't leave me here!" he shouted. "Hey, you can't just walk away like that! Help me!"

I TURNED and went back. He was dressed strangely, in ugly ill-arranged tight clothes, and he was walking in little circles, trying to adjust his equilibrium. "Where am I?" he asked me.

"Earth, of course," I told him.

"No," he said, harshly. "I don't mean that, idiot. Where, on Earth?"

The concept had no meaning for me. Where, on Earth, indeed? Here, was all I knew: The great plain between my home and Dandrin's, where the Singing is held. I began to feel uneasy. This man seemed badly sick, and I did not know how to handle him. I felt thankful that I was going to the Singing; had I been alone, I never would have been able to deal with him. I realized I was not as self-sufficient as I thought I was.

"I am going to the Singing," I told him. "Are you?"

"I'm not going anywhere till you tell me where I am and how I got here. What's your name?"

"My name is Kennon. You are crossing the great plain on your way to the home of Dandrin, where we are going to have the Singing, for it is summer. Come; I'm anxious to get there. Walk with me, if you wish."

I started to walk away a second time, and this time he began to follow me. We walked along silently for a while.

"Answer me, Kennon," he said after a hundred paces or so. "Ten seconds ago I was in New York; now I'm here. How far am I from New York?

"What is New York?" I asked. At this he showed great signs of anger and impatience, and I began to feel quite worried.

"Where'd you escape from?" he shouted. "You never heard of New York? You never heard of *New York?* New York," he said, "is a city of some eight million people, located on the Atlantic Ocean, on the east coast of the United States of America. Now tell me you haven't heard of that!"

"What is a city?" I asked, very much confused. At this he grew very angry. He threw his arms in the air wildly.

"Let us walk more quickly," I said. I saw now that I was obviously incapable of dealing with this man, and I was anxious to get on to the Singing—where perhaps Dandrin, or the other old ones, would be able to understand him. He continued to ask me questions as we walked, but I'm afraid I was not very helpful.

2. *Chester Dugan*

I DON'T know what happened or how; all I know is I got here. There doesn't seem to be any way back, either, but I don't care; I've got a good thing here and I'm going to show these nitwits who's boss.

Last thing I knew, I was getting into a subway; there was an explosion and a blinding flash of light, and before I could see what was happening I blanked out and somehow got here. I landed in a big open field with absolutely nothing around. It took a few minutes to get over the shock. I think I fell down; I'm not sure. It's not like me, but this was something out of the ordinary and I might have lost my balance.

Anyway, I recovered almost immediately and looked around, and saw this kid in loose flowing robes walking quickly across the field not too far away. I yelled to him when I saw he didn't intend to come over to me. He came over and gave me a hand, and then started to walk away again, calm as you please. I had to call him back. He seemed a little reluctant. The bustard.

I tried to get him to tell me where we were, but he played dumb. Didn't know where we were, didn't know where New York was, didn't even know what a city was—or so he said. I would have thought he was crazy, except that I didn't

know what had happened to me; for that matter, I might have been the crazy one and not him.

I saw I wasn't making much headway with him, so I gave up. All he would tell me was that he was on his way to the Singing, and the way he said it there was no doubt about the capital S. He said there would be men there who could help me. To this day I don't know how I got here. Even after I spoke and asked around, no one could tell me how I could step into a subway train in 1956 and come out in an open field somewhere around the 35th century. The crazy bustards have even lost count.

But I'm here, that's all that matters. And whatever went before is down the drain now. Whatever deals I was working on back in 1956 are dead and buried now; that is where I'm stuck, for reasons I don't get, and here's where I'll have to make my pile. All over again—me, Dugan, starting from scratch. But I'll do it. I'm doing it.

AFTER THIS kid Kennon and I had plodded across the fields for a while, I heard the sound of voices. By now it was getting towards nightfall. I forgot to mention that it was getting along toward the end of November back in 1956, but the weather here was nice and summery. There was a pleasant tang of something in the air that I had never noticed in New York's air, or the soup they called air back then.

The sound of the singing grew louder as we approached, but as soon as we got within sight they all stopped immediately.

They were sitting in a big circle, twenty or thirty of them, dressed in light, airy clothing. They all turned to look at me as we got near.

I got the feeling they were all looking into my mind.

The silence lasted a few minutes, and then they began to sing again. A tall, thin kid was leading them, and they were responding to what he sang. They ignored me. I let them continue until I formed a plan; I don't believe in rushing into things without knowing exactly what I'm doing.

I waited till the singing quieted down a bit, and then I yelled "Stop!" I stepped forward into the middle of the ring.

"My name is Dugan," I said, loud, clear, and slow. "Chester Dugan. I don't know how I got here, and I don't know where I am, but I mean to stay here a while. Who's the chief around here?"

THEY LOOKED at each other in a puzzled fashion and finally an old thin-faced man stepped out of the circle. "My name is Dandrin," he said. in a thin dried little voice. "As the oldest here, I will speak for the people. Where do you come from?"

"That's just it," I said. "I came from New York City, United States of America, Planet Earth, the Universe. Don't any of those things mean anything to you?"

"They are names, of course," Dandrin said. "But I do not know what they are names of. New York City? United States of America? We have no such terms."

"Never heard of New York?" This was the same treatment I had gotten from that dumb kid Kennon, and I didn't like it. "New York is the biggest city in the world, and the United States is the richest country."

I heard hushed mumbles go around the circle. Dandrin smiled.

"I think I see now," he said. "Cities, countries." He looked at me in a strange way. "Tell me," he said. "Just *when* are you from?"

That shook me. "1956," I said. And here, I'll admit, I began to get worried.

"This is the 35th century," he said calmly. "At least, so we think. We lost count during the Bombing Years. But come, Chester Dugan; we are interrupting the Singing with our talk. Let us go aside and talk, while the others can sing."

HE LED me off to one side and explained things to me. Civilization had broken up during a tremendous atomic war. These people were the survivors, the dregs. There were no cities and not even small towns. People lived in groups of twos and threes here and there, and didn't come together very often. They didn't even *like* to get together, except during the summer. Then they would gather at the home of some old man—usually Dandrin; everyone would meet, and sing for a while, and then go home.

Apparently there were only a few thousand people in all of America. They lived widely scattered, and there was no business, or trade, or culture, or anything else. Just little clumps of people living by themselves, farming a little and singing, and not doing much else. As the old man talked I began to rub my hands together—mentally, of course. All sorts of plans were forming in my head.

He didn't have any idea how

I had gotten here, and neither did I; I still don't. I think it just must have been a one-in-a-trillion fluke, a flaw in space or something. I just stepped through at the precise instant and wound up at that open field. But Chester Dugan can't worry about things he doesn't understand. I just accept them.

I saw a big future for myself here, with my knowledge of 20th Century business methods. The first thing, obviously, was to reestablish villages. The way they had things arranged now, there really wasn't any civilization. Once I had things started, I could begin reviving other things that these decadent people had lost: money, entertainment, sports, business. Once we got machinery going, we'd be set. We'd start working on a city, and begin expanding. I thanked whoever it was had dropped me here. This was a golden opportunity for me. These people would be putty in my hands.

3. Corilann

IT WAS with Kennon's approval that I did it. Right after the Singing ended for that evening, Dugan came over to me and I could tell from the tone of his conversation that he wanted me for the night. I had already promised myself to Kennon, but Dugan seemed so insistent that I asked Kennon to release me for this one evening, and he did. He didn't mind.

It was strange the way Dugan went about asking me. He never came right out and said anything. I didn't like anything he did that night; and he's ugly.

He kept telling me, "Stay with me, baby; we're going places together. I didn't know what he meant."

The other women were very curious about it the next day. There are so few of us, that it's a novelty to sleep with someone new. They wanted to know how it had been. I told them I enjoyed it.

It was a lie; he was disgusting. But I went back to him the next night, and the one after that, no matter what poor Kennon said. I couldn't help it, despite myself. There was just something about Dugan that drew me; I couldn't help it. But he was disgusting.

4. Dandrin

IT WAS strange to see them standing in neat, ordered, precise rows, they who had never known any order, any rules before, and Dugan was telling them what to do. The dawn of the day before, we

had been free and alone, but since then Dugan had come.

He lined everybody up, and, as I sat in the shade and watched, he began explaining his plans. We tried so hard to understand what he meant. I remembered stories I had heard of the old ones, but I had never believed them until I saw Dugan in action.

"I can't understand you people," he shouted at us. "This whole rich world is sitting here waiting for you to walk out and grab it, and you sit around singing instead. Singing! You people are decadent, that's what you are. You need a government—a good, sturdy government—and I'm here to give it to you."

Kennon and some of the others had come to me that morning to find out what was going to happen. I urged them not to do anything, to listen to Dugan and do what he says. That way, I felt, we could eventually learn to understand him and deal with him in the proper manner. I confess that I was curious to see how he would react among us.

I said nothing when he gave orders that no one was to return home after the Singing. We were to stay here, he told us, and build a city. He was going to bring us all the advantages of the 20th Century.

And we listened to him patiently, all but Kennon. It was Kennon who had brought him here, poor young Kennon who had come here for the Singing and for Corilann. And it was Corilann whom Dugan had singled out for his own private property. Kennon had given his approval, the first night, thinking she would come back to him the next day. But she hadn't; she stayed with Dugan.

In a couple of days he had his city all planned and everything apportioned. I think the thought uppermost in everyone's mind was *why:* why does he want us to do these things? Why? We would have to give him time to carry out his plans; provided he did no permanent harm, we would wait and see, and wonder why.

5. Chester Dugan

THIS CORILANN is really stacked. Things were never like this back when! After Dandrin had told me where the unattached women were sitting, I looked them over and picked her. They were all worth a second look, but she was something special. I didn't know at the time that she was promised to Kennon, or I might not have started fooling around with her; I don't want to antagonize these people too much.

I'm afraid Kennon may be down on me a bit. I've taken his girl away, and I don't think he goes for my methods. I'll have to try some psychology on him. Maybe I'll make him my second-in-command.

The city is moving along nicely. There were 120 people at the Singing, and my figures show that fifteen were old people and the rest divided up pretty evenly; everyone is coupled off, and I've arranged the housing to fit the coupling. These people don't have children very often, but I'll fix that; I'll figure out some way of making things better for those with the most children, some sort of incentive. The quicker we build up the population, the better things will be. I understand there's a wild tribe about five hundred miles to the north of here, maybe less (I still don't have any idea where *here* is) who still have some machines and things, and once we're all established I intend to send an expedition out to conquer the wild tribe and bring back the machines.

There's an idea; maybe I'll let Kennon lead the expedition. I'll be giving him a position of responsibility, and at the same time there's a chance he might get knocked off. That kid's going to cause trouble; I wish I hadn't taken his girl.

But it's too late to go back on it. Besides, I need a son, and quickly. If Corilann's baby is a girl, I don't know what I'll do. I can't carry on my dynasty without an heir.

THERE'S another kid here that bothers me—Jubilain. He's not like the others; he's very frail and sensitive, and seems to get special treatment. He's the one who leads the singing. I haven't been able to get him to work on the construction yet, and I don't know if I'm going to be able to.

But otherwise everything is moving smoothly. I'm surprised that old Dandrin doesn't object to what I'm doing. It's long since past the time when the Singing should have broken up, and everyone scattered, but they're all staying right here and working as if I was paying them.

Which I am, in a way. I'm bringing them the benefits of a great lost civilization, which I represent. Chester Dugan, the man from the past. I'm taking a bunch of nomads and turning them into a powerful city. So actually, everyone's profiting—the people, because of what I'm doing for them, and me. Me especially, be-

cause here I'm absolute top dog.

I'm worried about Corilann's baby, though. If it's a girl, that means a delay of a year or more before I can have my son, and even then it'll be at least ten years before he's of any use to me. I wonder what would happen if I took a second wife—Jarinne, for example. I watched her while she was stripped down for work yesterday and she looks even better than Corilann. These people don't seem to have any particular beliefs about marriage, anyway, and so I don't know if they'd mind. Then if Corilann had a girl, I might give her back to Kennon.

And that reminds me of another thing: There's no religion here. I'm not much of a Godman myself, but I realize religion's a good thing for keeping the people in line. I'll have to start thinking about getting a priesthood going, as soon as affairs are a little more settled here.

I didn't think it was so much work, organizing a civilization. But once I get it all set up, I can sit back and cool my heels for life. It's a pleasure working with these people. I just can't wait till everything is moving by itself. I've gotten further in two months here than I did in forty years there. It just goes to show: You need a powerful man to keep civilization alive. And Chester Dugan is just the man these people needed.

6. Kennon

CORILANN has told me she will have a child by Dugan. This has made me sad, since it might have been my child she would be bearing instead. But I brought Dugan here myself, and so I suppose I am responsible. If I had not come to the Singing, he might have died in the great open field. But now it is too late for such thoughts.

Dugan forbids us to go home, now that the Singing is over. My father is waiting for me at our home, and the hunting must be done before the winter comes, but Dugan forbids us to go home. Dandrin had to explain to me what "forbids" means; I still don't fully understand why or how one person can tell another person what to do. None of us really understands Dugan at all, not even Dandrin, I think. Dandrin is trying hardest to understand him, but Dugan is so completely alien to us that we do not see.

He has made us build what he calls a city—many houses close together. He says the advantage of this is that we

may protect each other. But from what? We have no enemies. I have the feeling that Dugan understands us even less than we understand him. And I am anxious to go home for the autumn hunting, now that summer is almost over and the Singing is ended. I had hoped to bring Corilann back with me, but it is my own fault, and I must not be bitter.

Dugan has been very cold toward me. This is surprising, since it was I who brought him to the Singing. I think he is afraid I will try to take Corilann back; in any event, he seems to fear me and show anger toward me.

If I only understood!

7. Kennon

DUGAN has certainly gone too far now. For the past week I have been trying to engage him in conversation, to find out what his motives are for doing all the things he is doing. Dandrin should be doing this, but Dandrin seems to have abdicated all responsibility in this matter and is content to sit idly by, watching all that happens. Dugan does not make him work because he is so old.

I do not understand Dugan at all. Yesterday he told me, "We will rule the world." What does he mean? *Rule?* Does he actually want to tell everyone who lives what he can do and what he cannot do? If all of the people of Dugan's time were like this, it is small wonder they destroyed everything. What if two people told the same man to do different things? What if they told each other to do things? My head reels at the thought of Dugan's world. People living together in masses, and telling each other what to do; it seems insane. I long to be back with my father for the hunting. I had hoped to bring him a daughter as well, but it seems this is not to be.

Dugan has offered me Jarinne as my wife. Jarinne says she has been with Dugan, and that Corilann knows. Dandrin warns me not to accept Jarinne because it will anger Dugan. But if it will anger Dugan, why did he offer her to me? And—now it occurs to me—by what right does he offer me another person?

Jarinne is a fine woman. She could make me forget Corilann.

And then Dugan told me that soon there will be an expedition to the north; we will take weapons and conquer the wild men. Dugan has heard of the machines of the wild men, and he says he needs them for our city. I told him that I had to leave immediately to help

my father with the hunting, that I have stayed here long enough. Others are saying the same thing: This summer the Singing has lasted too long.

TODAY I tried to leave. I gathered my friends and told them I was anxious to go home, and I asked Jarinne to come with me. She accepted, though she reminded me that she had been with Dugan. I told her I might be able to forget that. She said she knew it wouldn't matter to me if it had been anyone else (of course not; why should it?) but that I might object because it had been Dugan. I said goodbye to Corilann, who now is swollen with Dugan's child; she cried a little.

And then I started to leave. I did not talk to Dandrin, for I was afraid he would persuade me not to go. I opened the gate that Dugan has just put up, and started to leave.

Suddenly Dugan appeared. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked, in his hard, cold rasp of a voice. "Pulling out?"

"I have told you," I said quietly, "it is time to help my father with the hunting. I cannot stay in your city any longer." I moved past him and Jarinne followed. But he ran around in front of me.

"No one leaves here, understand?" He waved his closed hand in front of me. "We can't build a city if you take off when you want to."

"But I must go," I said. "You have detained me here long enough." I started to walk on, and suddenly he hit me with his closed hand and knocked me down.

I went sprawling over the ground, and I felt blood on my face from where he had hurt my nose. People all around were watching. I got up slowly. I am bigger and much stronger than Dugan, but it had never occurred to me that one person might hit another person. But this is one of the many things that has come to our world.

I was not so unhappy for myself; pain soon ceases. But Jubilain the Singer was watching when he hit me, and such sights should be kept from Singers. They are not like the rest of us. I am afraid Jubilain has been seriously disturbed by the sight.

After he had knocked me down, Dugan walked away. I got up and went back inside the gate. I do not want to leave now. I must talk to Dandrin. Something must be done.

8. Jubilain

SUMMER to autumn to every old everyone, sing win-

ter to quiet to baby fall down. My head head hurts. My my hurts head. Bloody was Kennon.

Kennon was bloody and Dugan was angry and summer to autumn to.

Jubilain is very sad. My head hurts. Dugan hit Kennon in the face. With his hand, his hand hand hand rolled up in a ball Dugan hit Kennon. Outside the gates. Consider the gates. Consider.

They have spoiled the song. How can I sing when Dugan hits Kennon? My head hurts. Sing summer to autumn, sing every old everyone. It is good that the summer is ending, for the songs are over. How can I sing? Bloody was Kennon.

Jubilain's head hurts. It did not hurt before did not hurt. I could sing before. Summer to autumn to every old everyone. Corilann's belly is big with Dugan, and Jubilain's head hurts. Will there be more Dugans?

And more Kennons. No more Jubilains. No more songs. The songs of summer are silent and slippery. My head hurts. Hurts hurts hurts. I can sing no more. Nononononononono

9. Dandrin

THIS IS tragic. I am an old fool.

I have been sitting in the shade, like the dried old man I am, while Dugan has destroyed us. Today he struck a man—Kennon. Kennon, whom he has mistreated from the start. Poor Kennon. Dugan has brought strife to us, now, along with his city and his gates.

But that is not the worst of it. Jubilain watched the whole thing, and we have lost our Singer. Jubilain simply was unable to assimilate the incident. A Singer's mind is not like our minds; it is a delicate, sensitive instrument. But it cannot comprehend violence. Our Singer has gone mad; there will be no more songs.

We must destroy Dugan. It is sad that we must come to his level and talk of destroying, but it is so. Now he is going to bring us warfare. and that is a gift we do not need. The fierce men of the north will prove strong adversaries for a people that has not fought for a thousand years. Why could we not have been left to ourselves? We were happy and peaceful people, and now we must talk of destroying.

I know the way to do it, too. If only my mind is strong enough, if only it has not dried in the sun during the years, I can lead the way. If

I can link with Kennon, and Kennon with Jarinne, and Jarinne with Corilann, and Corilann with—

If we can link, we can do it. Dugan must go. And this is the best way; this way we can dispose of him and still remain human beings.

I am an old fool. But perhaps this dried old brain still is good for something. If I can link with Kennon—

10. Chester Dugan

ALL RESISTANCE has crumbled now. I'm set up for life—Chester Dugan, ruler of the world. It's not much of a world, true enough, but what the hell. It's mine.

It's amazing how all the grumbling has stopped. Even Kennon has given in—in fact, he's become my most valuable man, since that time I had to belt him. It was too bad, I guess, to ruin such a nice nose, but I couldn't have him walking off that way.

He's going to lead the expedition to the north tomorrow, and he's leaving Jarinne here. That's good. Corilann is busy with her baby, and I think I need a little variety anyway. Good-looking kid Corilann had; takes after his old man. It's amazing how everything is working out.

I hope to get electricity going soon, but I'm not too sure. The stream here is kind of weak, and maybe we'll have to throw up a dam first. In fact, I'm sure of it. I'll speak to Kennon about it before he leaves.

This business of rebuilding a civilization from scratch has its rewards. God, am I lean! I've lost all that roll of fat I was carrying around. I suppose part of the reason is that there's no beer here, yet—but I'll get to that soon enough. Everything in due time. First, I want to see what Kennon brings back from the north. I hope he doesn't ruin anything by ripping it out. Wouldn't it be nice to find a hydraulic press or a generator or stuff like that? And with my luck, we probably will.

MAYBE WE'LL do without religion a little while longer. I spoke to Dandrin about it, but he didn't seem to go for the idea of being priest. I might just take over that job myself, once things get straightened out. I'd like to work out some sort of heating system before the winter gets here. I've figured out that we're somewhere in New Jersey or Pennsylvania, and it'll get pretty cold here unless things have changed. (Could the barbarian city to the north be New York? Sounds reasonable.)

It's funny the way everyone lies down and says yes when I tell them to do something. These people have no guts, that's their trouble. One good thing about civilization—you have to have guts to last. I'll put guts in these people, all right. I'll probably be remembered for centuries and centuries. Maybe they'll think of me as a sort of messiah in the far future when everything's blurred. Why not? I came to them out of the clouds, didn't I? From heaven.

Messiah Dugan! Lawsy-me, if they could only see me now!

I still can't get over the way everything is moving. It's almost like a dream. By next spring we'll have a respectable little city here, practically overnight. And we can hold a super-special S i n g i n g next summer and snaffle in the folks from all around.

Too bad about that kid Jubilain, by the way; he's really gone off his nut. But I always thought he was a little way there anyway. Maybe I'll teach them some of the old songs myself. It'll help to make me popular here. Although, come to think of it, I'm pretty popular n o w. They're all smiling at me all the time.

11.

"Kennon? Kennon? Hear me?"

"I hear you, Dandrin. I'll get Jarinne."

"Here I am. Corilann?"

"Here, Jarinne. And pulling hard. Let's try to get Onnar."

"Pull hard!"

"Onnar in." "And Jekkaman." "Hello, Dandrin."

"Hello."

"All here?"

"One hundred twenty."

"Tight now." "We're right tight."

"Let's get started, then. All together."

"Hello? Hello, Dugan. Listen to us, Dugan. Listen to us. Listen to us. Hold on tight! Listen to us, Dugan."

"Open up all the way, now."

"Are you listening, Dugan?"

12.

Dandrin plus Kennon plus Jarinne plus Corilann plus n

I THINK we'll be able to hold together indefinitely, and so it can be said that the coming of Dugan was an incredible stroke of luck for us. This new blending is infinitely better than trying to make contact over thousands of miles!

Certainly we'll have to maintain this *gestalt* (useful word; I found it in Dugan's mind when I entered) until after Dugan's death. He's peacefully d r e a m i n g now, dreaming of who knows what conquests and battles and expansions, and I don't think he'll come out of it. He may live on in his dream for years, and I'll have to hold together and sustain the illusion until he dies. I hope we're making him happy at last. He seems to have been a very unhappy man.

And just after I joined together, it occurred to me that we'd better stay this way indefinitely, just in case any more Dugans get thrown at us from the past. (Could it have been part of a Design? I wonder.) They must all have been like that back then. It's a fine thing that bomb was dropped.

We'll keep Dugan's city, of course. He did make some positive contributions to us—me. His biggest contribution was me; I never would have formed otherwise. I would have been scattered—Kennon on his farm, Dandrin here, Corilann there. I would have maintained some sort of contact among us, the way I always did even before Dugan came, but nothing like this! Nothing at all.

There's the question of what to do with Dugan's child. Kennon, Corilann, and Jarinne are all raising him. We don't need families now that we have me. I think we'll let Dugan's child in with us for a while; if he shows any signs of being like his father, we can alway put him to sleep and let him share his father's dream.

I wonder what Dugan is thinking of. Now all his projects will be carried out; his city will grow and cover the

world; we will fight and kill and plunder, and he will be measurelessly happy—though all these things take place only within the boundaries of his fertile brain. We will never understand him. But I am happy that all these things will happen only within Dugan's mind so long as I am together and can maintain the illusion for him.

Our next project is to reclaim Jubilain. I am sad that he cannot be with us yet, for how rare and beautiful I would be if I had a Singer in me! That would surely be the most wonderful of blendings. But that will come. Patiently I will unravel the strands of Jubilain's tangled mind, patiently I will bring the Singer back to us.

For in a few months it will be summer again, and time for the Singing. It will be different this year, for we will have been together in me all winter, and so the Singing will not be as unusual an event as it has been, when we have come to each other covered with a winter's strangeness. But this year I will be with us, and we will be I; and the songs of summer will be trebly beautiful in Dugan's city, while Dugan sleeps through the night and the day, for day and night on night and day.

★

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

by Robert A. Madle

AS I SAW IT ....

BY THE end of the 21st century man had reached the moon. Several years later the planets of the solar system were visited. This was soon followed by the invention of the quanto-gravetetic hyper-drive which enabled man to attain speeds many times that of light—speeds which permitted him to reach and colonize the stars....

The above is not a description of Isaac Asimov's or Poul Anderson's latest cosmic epic, but it is the introduction to MGM's initial science fiction film, "The Forbidden Planet." Filmed in technicolor and Cinemascope, "The Forbidden Planet" is a masterpiece of film making. It is obvious that the budget was tossed out the window when they made this one: top stars (Walter Pidgeon and Anne Francis), intriguing story and plot, good acting, terrific technical effects and—no budget involved here—an intangible something which few (if any) s-f films of the past contained. Briefly, the plot follows:

A spaceship is sent from our solar system to the fourth planet of the star Altair to search for survivors who had wrecked there twenty years before. Leslie Nielson portrays the part of Captain Adams, in command of the ship. Although warned not to land by Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) they request landing coordinates and land on Altair-4.

A robot (the Most intricate—and most logical yet seen on a motion picture screen) is sent by Morbius to bring Captain Adams and his assistants, Lt. Farman and Dr. Ostrow, to him. Morbius is a philologist, the Captain's records quickly indicate.

They arrive at the residence of Morbius, a place of scientific splendor, and, after eating, are again warned to leave. Morbius

[*Turn To Page* 98]

GALACTIC CHEST

NOVELET

by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

(author of "The Spaceman's Van Gogh")

illustrated by EMSH

I HAD just finished writing the daily community chest story, and each day I wrote that story I was sore about it; there were plenty of punks in the office who could have ground out that kind of copy. Even the copy boys could have written it and no one would have known the difference; no one ever read it—except maybe some of the drive chairmen, and I'm not even sure about them reading it.

I had protested to Barnacle Bill about my handling the community chest for another year. I had protested loud. I had said: "Now, you know, Barnacle, I been writing that thing for three or four years. I write it with my eyes shut. You ought to get some new blood into it. Give one of the cubs a chance; they can breathe some life into it. Me, I'm all written out on it."

But it didn't do a bit of good. The Barnacle had me down on the assignment book for the community chest, and he never changed a thing once he put it in the book.

I wish I knew the real reason for that name of his. I've heard a lot of stories about how it was hung on him, but I don't think there's any truth in them. I think he got it simply from the way he can hang onto a bar.

I had just finished writing the community chest story and was sitting there, killing time and hating myself, when along came Jo Ann. Jo Ann

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In the long run, every person, every race, has to solve its own problems. But if some of the little details that obscure the big issues could be cleared away. . .

was the sob sister on the paper; she got some lousy yarns to write, and that's a somber fact. I guess it was because I am of a sympathetic nature, and took pity on her, and let her cry upon my shoulder that we got to know each other so well. By now, of course, we figure we're in love; off and on we talk about getting married, as soon as I snag that foreign correspondent job I've been angling for.

"Hi, kid," I said.

And she says, "Do you know, Mark, what the Barnacle has me down for today?"

"He'd finally ferreted out a one-armed paperhanger," I guessed, "and he wants you to do a feature..."

"It's worse than that," she moans. "It's an old lady who is celebrating her one hundredth birthday."

"Maybe," I said, "she will give you a piece of her birthday cake."

"I don't see how even you can joke about a thing like this," Jo Ann told me. "It's positively ghastly."

Just then the Barnacle let out a bellow for me. So I picked up the community chest story and went over to the city desk.

BARNACLE BILL is up to his elbows in copy; the phone is ringing and he's ignoring it, and for this early in the morning he has worked himself into more than a customary lather. "You remember old Mrs. Clayborne?"

"Sure, she's dead. I wrote the obit on her ten days or so ago."

"Well, I want you to go over to the house and snoop around a bit."

"What for?" I asked. "She hasn't come back, has she?"

"No, but there's some funny business over there. I got a tip that someone might have hurried her a little."

"This time," I told him, "you've outdone yourself. You've been watching too many television thrillers."

"I got it on good authority," he said and turned back to his work.

So I went and got my hat and told myself it was no skin off my nose how I spent the day; I'd get paid just the same!

But I was getting a little fed up on some of the wild goose chases to which the Barnacle was assigning not only me, but the rest of the staff as well. Sometimes they paid off; usually, they didn't. And when they didn't, Barnacle had the nasty habit of making it appear that the man he had sent out, not he himself, had dreamed up the chase. His "good authority"

probably was no more than some casual chatter of someone next to him at the latest bar he'd honored with his cash.

OLD MRS. CLAYBORNE had been one of the last of the faded gentility which at one time had graced Douglas avenue. The family had petered out, and she was the last of them; she had died in a big and lonely house with only a few servants, and a nurse in attendance on her, and no kin close enough to wait out her final hours in person.

It was unlikely, I told myself, that anyone could have profited by giving her an overdose of drugs, or in any otherwise hurrying her death. And even if it were true, there'd be little chance that it could be proved; and that was the kind of story you didn't run unless you had it down in black and white.

I went out to the house on Douglas avenue. It was a quiet and lovely place, standing in its fenced-in yard among the autumn-colored trees.

There was an old gardener raking leaves, and he didn't notice me when I went up the walk. He was an old man, puttering away and more than likely mumbling to himself, and I found out later that he was a little deaf.

I went up the steps, rang the bell and stood waiting, feeling cold at heart and wondering what I'd say once I got inside. I couldn't say what I had in mind; somhow or other I'd have to go about it by devious indirection.

I needn't have worried; I never got inside.

A maid came to the door.

"Good morning, ma'm," I said. "I am from the *Tribune*. May I come in and talk?"

She didn't even answer; she looked at me for a moment and then slammed the door. I told myself I might have known that was the way it would be.

I TURNED around, went down the steps, and cut across the grounds to where the gardener was working. He didn't notice me until I was almost upon him; when he did see me, his face sort of lit up. He dropped the rake, and sat down on the wheelbarrow. I suppose I was as good an excuse as any for him to take a breather.

"Hello," I said to him.

"Nice day," he said to me.

"Indeed it is."

"You'll have to speak up louder," he told me; "I can't hear a thing you say."

"Too bad about Mrs. Clayborne," I told him.

"Yes, yes," he said. "You live around here? I don't recall your face."

I nodded; it wasn't much of a lie, just twenty miles or so.

"She was a nice old lady. Worked for her almost fifty years. It's a blessing she is gone."

"I suppose it is."

"She was dying hard," he said.

He sat nodding in the autumn sun and you could almost hear his mind go traveling back across those fifty years. I am certain that, momentarily, he'd forgotten I was there.

"Nurse tells a funny story," he said finally, speaking to himself more than he spoke to me. "It might be just imagining; Nurse was tired, you know."

"I heard about it," I encouraged him.

"Nurse left her just a minute and she swears there was something in the room when she came back again. Says it went out the window just as she came in. Too dark to see it good, she says. I told her she was imagining. Funny things happen, though; things we don't know about."

"That was her room," I said, pointing at the house. "I remember, years ago ..."

HE CHUCKLED at having caught me in the wrong. "You're mistaken, sonny. It was the corner one; that one over there."

He rose from the barrow slowly and took up the rake again.

"It was good to talk with you," I said. "These are pretty flowers you have. Mind if I walk around and have a look at them."

"Might as well. Frost will get them in a week or so."

So I walked around the grounds, hating myself for what I had to do, and looking at the flowers, working my way closer to the corner of the house he had pointed out to me.

There was a bed of petunias underneath the window and they were s o r r y - l o o k i n g things. I squatted down and pretended I was admiring them, although all the time I was looking for some evidence that someone might have jumped out the window.

I didn't expect to find it, but I did.

There, in a little piece of soft earth where the petunias had petered out, was a footprint—well, not a footprint, either, maybe, but anyhow a print. It looked something like a duck track—except that the duck that made it would have had to be as big as a good-sized dog.

I squatted on the walk,

staring at it and I could feel spiders on my spine. Finally I got up and walked away, forcing myself to saunter when my body screamed to run.

Outside the gate, I *did* run.

I GOT TO a phone as fast as I could, at a corner drugstore, and sat in the booth awhile to get my breathing back to normal before I put in a call to the city desk.

The Barnacle bellowed at me. "What you got?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe nothing. Who was Mrs. Clayborne's doctor?"

He told me. I asked him if he knew who her nurse had been, and he asked how the hell should he know so I hung up.

I went to see the doctor and he threw me out.

I spent the rest of the day tracking down the nurse; when I finally found her she threw me out too. So there was a full day's work gone entirely down the drain.

It was late in the afternoon when I got back to the office. Barnacle Bill pounced on me at once. "What you get?"

"N o t h i n g," I told him. There was no use telling him about that track underneath the window. By that time, I was beginning to doubt I'd ever seen it, it seemed so unbelievable.

"How big do ducks get?" I asked him. He growled at me and went back to his work.

I looked at the next day's page in the assignment book. He had me down for the community chest, and: *See Dr. Thomas at Univ.—magnetism.*

"What's this." I asked. "This magnetism business?"

"Guy's been working on it for years," said the Barnacle. "I got it on good authority he's set to pop with something."

There was that "good authority" again. And just about as hazy as the most of his hot tips.

And anyhow, I don't like to interview scientists. More often than not, they're a crochety set and are apt to look down their noses at newspapermen. Ten to one the newspaperman is earning more than they are—and in his own way, more than likely, doing just as good a job and with less fumbling.

II

I SAW THAT Jo Ann was getting ready to go home, so I walked over to her and asked her how it went.

"I got a funny feeling in my gizzard, Mark," she told me. "Buy me a drink and I'll tell you all about it."

So we went down to the

corner bar and took a booth way in the back.

Joe came over and he was grumbling about business, which was unusual for him. "If it weren't for you folks over at the paper," he said, "I'd close up and go home. That must be what all my customers are doing; they sure ain't coming here. Can you think of anything more disgusting than going straight home from your job?"

We told him that we couldn't, and to show that he appreciated our attitude, he wiped off the table—a thing he almost never did.

He brought the drinks and Jo Ann told me about the old lady and her hundredth birthday. "It was horrible. There she sat in her rocking chair in that bare livingroom, rocking back and forth, gently, delicately, the way old ladies rock. And she was glad to see me, and she smiled so nice and she introduced me all around."

"Well, that was fine," I said. "Were there a lot of people there?"

"Not a soul."

I CHOKED on my drink. "But you said she introduced..."

"She did. To empty chairs."

"Good Lord!"

"They all were dead," she said.

"Now, let's get this straight..."

"She said, 'Miss Evans, I want you to meet my old friend, Mrs. Smith. She lives just down the street. I recall the day she moved into the neighborhood, back in '33. Those were hard times, I tell you.' Chattering on, you know like most old ladies do. And me, standing there and staring at an empty chair, wondering what to do. And, Mark, I don't know if I did right or not, but I said, 'Hello, Mrs. Smith. I am glad to know you.' And do you know what happened then?"

"No," I said. "How could I?"

"The old lady said, just as casually as could be—just conversationally, as if it were the most natural thing in all the world— 'You know, Miss Evans, Mrs. Smith died three years ago. Don't you think it's nice she dropped in to see me.' "

"She was pulling your leg," I said. "Some of these old ones sometimes get pretty sly."

"I don't think she was. She introduced me all around; there were six or seven of them, and all of them were dead."

"She was happy, thinking

they were there. What difference does it make?"

"It was horrible," said Jo Ann.

So we had another drink to chase away the horror.

JOE STILL was down in the mouth. "Did you ever see the like of it? You could shoot off a cannon in this joint and not touch a single soul. By this time, usually, they'd be lined up against the bar, and it'd be a dull evening if someone hadn't taken a poke at someone else—although you understand I run a decent place."

"Sure you do," I said. "Sit down and have a drink with us."

"It ain't right that I should," said Joe. "A bartender should never take a drink when he's conducting business. But I feel so low that if you don't mind, I'll take you up on it."

He went back to the bar and got a bottle and a glass and we had quite a few.

The corner, he said, had always been a good spot—steady business all the time, with a rush at noon and a good crowd in the evening. But business had started dropping off six weeks before, and now was down to nothing.

"It's the same all over town," he said, "some places worse than others. This place is one of the worst; I just don't know what's gotten into people."

We said we didn't, either. I fished out some money and left it for the drinks, and we made our escape.

Outside I asked Jo Ann to have dinner with me, but she said it was the night her bridge club met, so I drove her home and went on to my place.

I take a lot of ribbing at the office for living so far out of town, but I like it. I got the cottage cheap, and it's better than living in a couple of cooped-up rooms in a third-rate resident hotel—which would be the best I could afford if I stayed in town.

After I'd fixed up a steak and some fried potatoes for supper, I went down to the dock and rowed out into the lake a ways. I sat there for a while, watching the lighted windows winking all around the shore and listening to the sounds you never hear in daytime—the muskrat swimming and the soft chuckling of the ducks and the occasional slap of a jumping fish.

IT WAS a bit chilly and after a little while I rowed back in again, thinking there was a lot to do before winter came. The boat should be

caulked and painted; the cottage itself could take a coat of paint, if I could get around to it. There were a couple of storm windows that needed glass replaced, and by rights I should putty all of them. The chimney needed some bricks to replace the ones that had blown off in a windstorm earlier in the year, and the door should have new weatherstripping.

I sat around and read a while and then I went to bed. Just before I went to sleep I thought some about the two old ladies—one of them happy and the other dead.

The next morning I got the community chest story out of the way, first thing; then I got an encyclopedia from the library and did some reading on magnetism. I figured that I should know something about it, before I saw this whiz-bang at the university.

But I needn't have worried so much; this Dr. Thomas turned out to be a regular Joe. We sat around and had quite a talk. He told me about magnetism, and when he found out I lived at the lake he talked about fishing; then we found we knew some of the same people, and it was all right.

Except he didn't have a story.

"There may be one in another year or so," he told me. "When there is, I'll let you in on it."

I'd heard that one before, of course, so I tried to pin him down.

"It's a promise," he said; "you get it first, ahead of anyone."

I let it go at that. You couldn't ask the man to sign a contract on it.

I WAS watching a chance to get away, but I could see he still had more to say. So I stayed on; it's refreshing to find someone who wants to talk to you.

"I think there'll be a story," he said, looking worried, as if he were afraid there mightn't be. "I've worked on it for years. Magnetism is still one of the phenomena we don't know too much about. Once we knew nothing about electricity, and even now we do not entirely understand it; but we found out about it, and when we knew enough about it, we put it to work. We could do the same with magnetism, perhaps—if we only could determine the first fundamentals of it."

He stopped and looked straight at me. "When you were a kid, did you believe in brownies?"

That one threw me and he must have seen it did.

"You remember—the little helpful people. If they liked you, they did all sorts of things for you; and all they expected of you was that you'd leave out a bowl of milk for them."

I told him I'd read the stories, and I supposed that at one time I must have believed in them—although right at the moment I couldn't swear I had.

"If I didn't know better," he said, "I'd think I had brownies in this lab. Someone —or something—shuffled my notes for me. I'd left them on the desk top held down with a paperweight; the next morning they were spread all over, and part of them dumped onto the floor."

"A cleaning woman," I suggested.

He smiled at my suggestion. "I'm the cleaning woman here."

I THOUGHT he had finished and I wondered why all this talk of notes and brownies. I was reaching for my hat when he told me the rest of it.

"There were two sheets of the notes still underneath the paperweight," he said. "One of them had been folded carefully. I was about to pick them up, and put them with the other sheets so I could sort them later, when I happened to read what was on those sheets beneath the paperweight."

He drew a long breath. "They were two sections of my notes that, if left to myself, I probably never would have tied together. Sometimes we have strange blind spots; sometimes we look so closely to a thing that we are blinded to it. And there it was—two sheets laid there by accident. Two sheets, one of them folded to tie up with the other, to show me a possibility I'd never thought of otherwise. I've been working on that possibility ever since; I have hopes it may work out."

"When it does..." I said.

"It is yours," he told me.

I got my hat and left.

And I thought idly of brownies all the way back to the office.

I HAD JUST got back to the office, and settled down for an hour or two of loafing, when old J. H.—our publisher—made one of his irregular pilgrimages of good will out into the newsroom. J. H. is a pompous windbag, without a sincere bone in his body; he knows we know this and we know he knows—but he, and all the rest of us, carry out the comedy of good fellowship to its bitter end.

He stopped beside my desk, clapped me on the shoulder, and said in a voice that boomed throughout the newsroom: "That's a tremendous job you're doing on the community chest, my boy."

Feeling a little sick and silly, I got to my feet and said, "Thank you, J. H.; it's nice of you to say so."

Which was what was expected of me. It was almost ritual.

He grabbed me by the hand, put the other hand on my shoulder, shook my hand vigorously and squeezed my shoulder hard. And I'll be damned if there weren't tears in his eyes as he told me, "You just stick around, Mark, and keep up the work. You won't regret it for a minute. We may not always show it, but we appreciate good work and loyalty and we're always watching what you do out here."

Then he dropped me like a hot potato and went on with his greetings.

I sat down again; the rest of the day was ruined for me. I told myself that if I deserved any commendation I could have hoped it would be for something other than the community chest stories. They were lousy stories; I knew it, and so did the Barnacle and all the rest of them. No one blamed me for their being lousy—you can't write anything but a lousy story on a community chest drive. But they weren't cheering me.

And I had a sinking feeling that, somehow, old J. H. had found out about the applications I had planted with a half dozen other papers and that this was his gentle way of letting me know he knew—and that I had better watch my step.

III

JUST BEFORE noon, Steve Johnson—who handles the medical run along with whatever else the Barnacle can find for him to do—came over to my desk. He had a bunch of clippings in his hand and he was looking worried. "I hate to ask you this, Mark," he said, "but would you help me out?"

"Sure thing, Steve."

"It's an operation. I have to check on it, but I won't have the time. I got to run out to the airport and catch an interview."

He laid the clips down on my desk. "It's all in there."

Then he was off for his interview.

I picked up the clippings and read them through; it was a story that would break your heart.

There was this little fellow,

about three years old, who had to have an operation on his heart. It was a piece of surgery that had been done only a time or two before, and then only in big eastern hospitals by famous medical names—and never on one as young as three.

I hated to pick up the phone and call; I was almost sure the kind of answer I would get.

But I did, and naturally I ran into the kind of trouble you always run into when you try to get some information out of a hospital staff—as if they were shining pure and you were a dirty, little mongrel trying to sneak in. But I finally got hold of someone who told me the boy seemed to be O. K. and that the operation appeared to be successful.

So I called the surgeon who had done the job. I must have caught him in one of his better moments, for he filled me in on some information that fit into the story.

"You are to be congratulated, doctor," I told him and he got a little testy.

"Young man," he told me, "in an operation such as this the surgeon is no more than a single factor. There are so many other factors that no one can take credit."

Then suddenly he sounded tired and scared. "It was a miracle," he said.

"But don't you quote me on that," he fairly shouted at me.

"I wouldn't think of it," I told him.

Then I called the hospital again, and talked to the mother of the boy.

IT WAS a good story. We caught the home edition with it, a four-column head on the left side of page one, and the Barnacle slipped a cog or two and gave me a byline on it.

After lunch I went back to Jo Ann's desk; she was in a tizzy. The Barnacle had thrown a church convention program at her and she was in the midst of writing an advance story, listing all the speakers and committee members and special panels and events. It's the deadliest kind of a story you can be told to write; it's worse, even, than the community chest.

I listened to her being bitter for quite a while, then I asked her if she figured she'd have any strength left when the day was over.

"I'm all pooped out," she said.

"Reason I asked," I told her, "is that I want to take the boat out of the water and I need some one to help me."

"Mark," she said, "if you

expect me to go out there and horse a boat around..."

"You wouldn't have to lift," I told her. "Maybe just tug a little. We'll use a block and tackle to lift it on the blocks so that later I can paint it. All I need is someone to steady it while I haul it up."

She still wasn't sold on it, so I laid out some bait.

"We could stop downtown and pick up a couple of lobsters," I told her. "You are good at lobsters. I could make some of my Roquefort dressing, and we could have a..."

"But without the garlic," she said. So I promised to forego the garlic and she agreed to come.

SOMEHOW or other, we never did get that boat out of the water; there were so many other things to do.

After dinner we built a fire in the fireplace and sat in front of it. She put her head on my shoulder and we were comfortable and cozy. "Let's play pretend," she said. "Let's pretend you have that job you want. Let's say it is in London, and this is a lodge in the English fens..."

"A fen," I said, "is a hell of a place to have a lodge."

"You always spoil things," she complained. "Let's start over again. Let's pretend you have that job you want..."

And she stuck to her fens.

Driving back to the lake after taking her home, I wondered if I'd ever get that job. Right at the moment it didn't look so rosy. Not that I couldn't have handled it, for I knew I could. I had racks of books on world affairs, and I kept close track of what was going on. I had a good command of French, a working knowledge of German, and off and on I was struggling with Spanish. It was something I'd wanted all my life—to feel that I was a part of that fabulous newspaper fraternity which kept check around the world.

I OVERSLEPT, and was late to work in the morning. The Barnacle took a sour view of it. "Why did you bother to come in at all?" he growled at me. "Why do you ever bother to come in? Last two days I sent you out on two assignments, and where are the stories?"

"There weren't any stories," I told him, trying to keep my temper. "They were just some more pipe dreams you dug up."

"Someday," he said, "when you get to be a real reporter, you'll dig up stories for yourself. That's what's the matter with this staff," he said in a sudden burst of anger. "That's

what's wrong with you. No initiative; sit around and wait; wait until I dig up something I can send you out on. No one ever surprises me and brings in a story I haven't sent them out on."

He pegged me with his eyes. "Why don't you just once surprise me?"

"I'll surprise you, buster," I said and walked over to my desk.

I sat there thinking. I thought about old Mrs. Clayborne, who had been dying hard—and then suddenly had died easy. I remembered what the gardener had told me, and the footprint I had found underneath the window. I thought of that other old lady who had been a hundred years old, and how all her old, dead friends had come visiting. And about the physicist who had brownies in his lab. And about the boy and his successful operation.

And I got an idea.

I went to the files and went through them three weeks back, page by page. I took a lot of notes and got a little scared, but told myself it was nothing but coincidence.

Then I sat down at my typewriter and made half a dozen false starts, but finally I had it.

The brownies have come back again, I wrote. *You know, those little people who do all sorts of good deeds for you, and expect nothing in return except that you set out a bowl of milk for them.*

At the time I didn't realize that I was using almost the exact words the physicist had said.

I DIDN'T write about Mrs. Clayborne, or the old lady with her visitors, or the physicist, or the little boy who had the operation; those weren't things you could write about with your tongue in cheek, and that's the way I wrote it.

But I did write about the little two and three paragraph items I had found tucked away in the issues I had gone through—the good luck stories; the little happy stories of no consequence, except for the ones they had happened to—about people finding things they'd lost months or years ago, about stray dogs coming home, and kids winning essay contests, and neighbor helping neighbor. All the kindly little news stories that we'd thrown in just to fill up awkward holes.

There were a lot of them—a lot more, it seemed to me, than you could normally expect to find. *All these things happened in our town in the*

last three weeks, I wrote at the end of it.

And I added one last line: *Have you put out that bowl of milk?*

After it was finished, I sat there for a while, debating whether I should hand it in. And thinking it over, I decided that the Barnacle had it coming to him, after the way he'd shot off his mouth.

So I threw it into the basket on the city desk and went back to write the community chest story.

The Barnacle never said a thing to me and I didn't say a thing to him; you could have knocked my eyes off with a stick when the kid brought the papers up from the pressroom, and there was my brownie story spread across the top of page one in an eight-column feature strip.

No one mentioned it to me except Jo Ann, who came along and patted me on the head and said she was proud of me—although God knows why she should have been.

Then the Barnacle sent me out on another one of his wild-goose chases concerning someone who was supposed to be building a home-made atomic pile in his back yard. It turned out that this fellow is an old geezer who, at one time, had built a perpetual motion machine that didn't work. Once I found that out, I was so disgusted that I didn't even go back to the office, but went straight home instead.

I RIGGED up a block and tackle, had some trouble what with no one to help me, but I finally got the boat up on the blocks. Then I drove to a little village at the end of the lake and bought paint for not only the boat, but the cottage as well. I felt pretty good about making such a fine start on all the work I should do that fall.

The next morning when I got to the office, I found the place in an uproar. The switchboard had been clogged all night and it still looked like a Christmas tree. One of the operators had passed out, and they were trying to bring her to.

The Barnacle had a wild gleam in his eye, and his necktie was all askew. When he saw me, he took me firmly by the arm and led me to my desk and sat me down. "Now, damn you, get to work!" he yelled and he dumped a bale of notes down in front of me.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"It's that brownie deal of yours," he yelled. "Thousands of people are calling in. All of them have brownies; they've been helped by brown-

ies; some of them have even seen brownies."

"What about the milk?" I asked.

"Milk? What milk?"

"Why, the milk they should set out for them."

"How do I know," he said. "Why don't you call up some of the milk companies and find out."

THAT IS just what I did—and, so help me Hannah, the milk companies were slowly going crazy. Every driver had come racing back to get extra milk, because the most of their customers were ordering an extra quart or so. They were lined up for blocks outside the stations waiting for new loads and the milk supply was running low.

There weren't any of us in the newsroom that morning who did anything but write brownie copy. We filled the paper with it—all sorts of stories about how the brownies had been helping people. Except, of course, they hadn't known it was brownies helping them until they read my story. They'd just thought that it was good luck.

When the first edition was in, we sat back and sort of caught our breath—although the calls still were coming in—and I swear my typewriter still was hot from the copy I'd turned out.

The papers came up, and each of us took our copy and started to go through it, when we heard a roar from J. H.'s office. A second later, J. H. came out himself, waving a paper in his fist, his face three shades redder than a brand-new fire truck.

He practically galloped to the city desk and he flung the paper down in front of the Barnacle and hit it with his fist. "What do you mean?" he shouted. "Explain yourself. Making us ridiculous!"

"But, J. H. I thought it was a good gag and..."

"Brownies!" J. H. snorted.

"We got all those calls," said Barnacle Bill. "They still are coming in. And..."

"That's enough," J. H. thundered. "You're fired!"

He swung around from the city desk and looked straight at me. "You're the one who started it," he said. "You're fired, too."

I got up from my chair and moved over to the city desk. "We'll be back a little later," I told J. H., "to collect our severance pay."

He flinched a little at that, but he didn't back up any.

The Barnacle picked up an ash tray off his desk and let it fall. It hit the floor and broke. He dusted off his

hands. "Come on, Mark," he said; "I'll buy you a drink."

IV

WE WENT over to the corner. Joe brought us a bottle and a couple of glasses, and we settled down to business.

Pretty soon some of the other boys started dropping in. They'd have a drink or two with us and then go back to work. It was their way of showing us they were sorry the way things had turned out. They didn't say anything, but they kept dropping in. There never was a time during the entire afternoon when there wasn't some one drinking with us. The Barnacle and I took on quite a load.

We talked over this brownie business, and at first we were a little skeptical about it, laying the situation more or less to public gullibility. But the more we thought about it, and the more we drank, the more we began to believe there might be really brownies. For one thing, good luck just doesn't come in hunks the way it appeared to have come to this town of ours in the last few weeks. Good luck is apt to scatter itself around a bit—and while it may run in streaks, it's usually pretty thin. But here it seemed that hundreds—if not thousands—of persons had been visited by good luck.

BY THE middle of the afternoon, we were fairly well agreed there might be something to this brownie business. Then of course, we tried to figure out who the brownies were, and why they were helping people.

"You know what I think," said the Barnacle. "I think they're aliens. People from the stars. Maybe they're the ones who have been flying all these saucers."

"But why would aliens want to help us?" I objected. "Sure, they'd want to watch us and find out all they could; and after a while, they might try to make contact with us. They might even be willing to help us—but if they were they'd want to help us as a race, not as individuals."

"Maybe" the Barnacle suggested, "they're just busybodies. There are humans like that. Psycopathic do-gooders, always sticking in their noses, never letting well enough alone."

"I don't think so," I argued back at him. "If they are trying to help us, I'd guess it's a religion with them. Like the old friars who wandered all over Europe in the early days.

Like the Good Samaritan. Like the Salvation Army."

But he wouldn't have it that way. "They're busybodies," he insisted. "Maybe they come from a surplus economy, a planet where all the work is done by machines and there is more than enough of everything for everyone. Maybe there isn't anything left for anyone to do—and you know yourself that a man has to have something to keep him occupied, something to do so he can think that he is important."

Then along about five o'clock Jo Ann came in. It had been her day off and she hadn't known what had happened until someone from the office phoned her. So she'd come right over.

She was plenty sore at me, and she wouldn't listen to me when I tried to explain that at a time like this a man had to have a drink or two. She got me out of there and out back to my car and drove me to her place. She fed me black coffee and finally gave me something to eat and along about eight o'clock or so she figured I'd sobered up enough to try driving home.

I TOOK it easy and I made it, but I had an awful head and I remembered that I didn't have a job. Worst of all, I was probably tagged for life as the man who had dreamed up the brownie hoax. There was no doubt that the wire services had picked up the story, and that it had made front page in most of the papers coast to coast. No doubt, the radio and television commentators were doing a lot of chuckling at it.

My cottage stands up on a sharp little rise above the lake, a sort of hog's back between the lake and road, and there's no road up to it. I had to leave my car alongside the road at the foot of the rise, and walk up to the place.

I walked along, my head bent a little so I could see the path in the moonlight and I was almost to the cottage before I heard a sound that made me raise my head.

And there they were.

They had rigged up a scaffold and there were four of them on it, painting the cottage madly. Three of them were up on the roof replacing the bricks that had been knocked out of the chimney. They had storm windows scattered all over the place and were furiously applying putty to them. And you could scarcely see the boat, there were so many of them slapping paint on it.

I stood there staring at them, with my jaw hanging

on my breastbone, when I heard a sudden *swish* and stepped quickly to one side. About a dozen of them rushed by, reeling out the hose, running down the hill with it. Almost in a shorter time than it takes to tell it, they were washing the car.

They didn't seem to notice me. Maybe it was because they were so busy they didn't have the time to—or it might have been just that it wasn't proper etiquette to take notice of someone when they were helping him.

THEY LOOKED a lot like the brownies that you see pictured in the children's books, but there were differences. They wore pointed caps, all right, but when I got close to one of them who was busy puttying, I could see that it was no cap at all. His head ran up to a point, and that the tassle on the top of it was no tassle of a cap, but a tuft of hair or feathers—I couldn't make out which. They wore coats with big fancy buttons on them, but I got the impression—I don't know how—that they weren't buttons, but something else entirely. And instead of the big sloppy clown-type shoes they're usually shown as wearing, they had nothing on their feet.

They worked hard and fast; they didn't waste a minute. They didn't walk, but ran. And there were so many of them.

Suddenly they were finished. The boat was painted, and so was the cottage. The puttied, painted storm windows were leaned against the trees. The hose was dragged up the hill and neatly coiled again.

I saw that they were finishing and I tried to call them all together so that I could thank them, but they paid no attention to me. And when they were finished, they were gone. I was left standing, all alone—with the newly-painted cottage shining in the moonlight and the smell of paint heavy in the air.

I suppose I wasn't exactly sober, despite the night air and all the coffee Jo Ann had poured into me. If I had been cold, stone sober I might have done it better; I might have thought of something. As it was, I'm afraid I bungled it.

I staggered into the house, and the outside door seemed a little hard to shut. When I looked for the reason, I saw it had been weather-stripped.

With the lights on, I looked around—and in all the time I'd been there the place had never been so neat. There wasn't a speck of dust on any-

thing and all the metal shone. All the pots and pans were neatly stacked in place; all the clothing I had left strewn around had been put away; all the books were lined straight within the shelves, and the magazines were where they should be instead of just thrown anywhere.

I MANAGED to get into bed, and I tried to think about it; but someone came along with a heavy mallet and hit me on the head and that was the last I knew until I was awakened by a terrible racket.

I got to it as fast as I could.

"What is it now?" I snarled, which is no way to answer a phone, but was the way I felt.

It was J. H. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled. "Why aren't you at the office? What do you mean by..."

"Just a minute, J. H.; don't you remember? You canned me yesterday."

"Now, Mark," he said, "you wouldn't hold that against me, would you? We were all excited..."

"*I* wasn't excited," I told him.

"Look," he said, "I need you. There's someone here to see you."

"All right," I said and hung up.

I DIDN'T hurry any; I took my time. If J. H. needed me, if there was someone there to see me, both of them could wait. I turned on the coffee maker and took a shower; after the shower and coffee, I felt almost human.

I was crossing the yard, heading for the path down to the car when I saw something that stopped me like a shot.

There were tracks in the dust, tracks all over the place —exactly the kind of tracks I'd seen in the flower bed underneath the window at the Clayborne estate. I squatted down and looked closely at them to make sure there was no mistake and there couldn't be. They were the self-same tracks.

They were brownie tracks!

I stayed there for a long time, squatting beside the tracks and thinking that now it was all believable because there was no longer any room for disbelief.

The nurse had been right; there had been something in the room that night Mrs. Clayborne died. It was a mercy, the old gardener had said, his thoughts and speech all fuzzed with the weariness and the basic simplicity of the very old. An act of mercy, a good deed, for the old lady had been dying hard, no hope for her.

And if there were good deeds in death, there were as well in life. In an operation such as this, the surgeon had told me, there are so many factors that no one can take the credit. It was a miracle, he'd said, but don't you quote me on it.

And someone—no cleaning woman, but someone or something else—had messed up the notes of the phsysicist and in the messing of them had put together two pages out of several hundred—two pages that tied together and made sense.

Coincidence? I asked myself. Coincidence that a woman died and that a boy lived, and that a researcher got a clue he'd otherwise have missed? No, not coincidence when there was a track beneath a window and papers scattered from beneath paperweight.

And—I'd almost forgotten—Jo Ann's old lady who sat rocking happily because all her old dead friends had come to visit her. There were even times when senility might become a very kindness.

I straightened up and went down to the car. As, I drove into town I kept thinking about the magic touch of kindness from the stars or if, perhaps, there might be upon this earth, co-existent with the human race, another race that had a different outlook and a different way of life. A race, perhaps, that had tried time and time again to ally itself with the humans and each time had been rejected and driven into hiding—sometimes by ignorance and superstition and again by a too-brittle knowledge of what was impossible. A race, perhaps, that might be trying once again.

V

J.H. WAS waiting for me, looking exactly like a cat sitting serenely inside a bird cage, with feathers on his whiskers. With him was a high brass flyboy, who had a rainbow of decorations spread across his jacket and eagles on his shoulders. They shone so bright and earnestly that they almost sparkled.

"Mark, this is Colonel Duncan," said J. H. "He'd like to have a word with you."

The two of us shook hands and the colonel was more affable than one would have expected him to be. Then J. H. left us in his office and shut the door behind him. The two of us sat down and each of us sort of measured up the other. I don't know how the colonel felt, but I was ready to admit I was uncomfortable. I wondered what I might have

done and what the penalty might be.

"I wonder, Lathrop," said the colonel, "if you'd mind telling me exactly how it happened."

"How you found out about the brownies."

"I didn't find out about them, Colonel; it was just a gag."

I TOLD him about the Barnacle shooting off his mouth about no one on the staff ever showing any initiative, and how I'd dreamed up the brownie story to get even with him. And how the Barnacle had got even with me by running it.

But that didn't satisfy the colonel. "There must be more to it than that," he said.

I could see that he'd keep at me until I'd told it, anyhow; and while he hadn't said a word about it, I kept seeing images of the Pentagon, and the chiefs of staff, and Project Saucer—or whatever they might call it now—and the FBI, and a lot of other unpleasant things just over his left shoulder.

So I came clean with him. I told him all of it and a lot of it, I granted, sounded downright silly.

But he didn't seem to think that it was silly. "And what do you think about all this?"

"I don't know," I told him. "They might come from outer space, or..."

He nodded quietly. "We've known for some time now, that there have been landings. This is the first time they've ever deliberately called attention to themselves."

"What do they want, Colonel? What are they aiming at?"

"I wish I knew."

Then he said very quietly, "Of course, if you should write anything about this, I simply shall deny it. That will leave you in a most peculiar position at the best."

I don't know how much more he might have told me—maybe quite a bit. But right then the phone rang. I picked it up and answered; it was for the colonel.

He said "yes," and listened. He didn't say another word. He got a little white around the gills, then he hung up the phone.

HE SAT there, looking sick.

"What's the matter, Colonel?"

"That was the field," he told me. "It happened just a while ago. They came out of nowhere and swarmed all over the plane—polished it and cleaned it and made it spic and span, both inside and out.

The men couldn't do a thing about it. They just had to stand and watch."

I grinned. "There's nothing bad about that, Colonel. They were just being good to you."

"You don't know the half of it," he said. "When they got it all prettied up, they painted a brownie on the nose."

That's just about all there's to it so far as the brownies are concerned. The job they did on the colonel's plane was, actually, the sole public appearance that they made. But it was enough to serve their purpose if publicity was what they wanted—a sort of visual clincher, as it were. One of our photographers—a loopy character by the name of Charles, who never was where you wanted him when you wanted him, but nevertheless seemed to be exactly on the spot when the unusual or disaster struck—was out at the airport that morning. He wasn't supposed to be there; he was supposed to be covering a fire, which turned out luckily to be no more than a minor blaze. How he managed to wind up at the airport even he, himself, never was able to explain. But he was there and he got the pictures of the brownies polishing up the plane—not only one or two pictures, but a couple dozen of them, all the plates he had. Another thing—he got the pictures with a telescopic lens. He'd put it in his bag that morning by mistake; he'd never carried it before. After that one time he never was without it again and, to my knowledge, never had another occasion where he had to use it.

THOSE pictures were a bunch of lulus. We used the best of them on page one—a solid page of them—and ran two more pages of the rest inside. The AP got hold of them, transmitted them, and a number of other member papers used them before someone at the Pentagon heard about it and promptly blew his stack. But no matter what the Pentagon might say, the pictures had been run and whatever harm—*or good*—they might have done could not be recalled.

I suppose that if the colonel had known about them, he'd warned us not to use them and might have confiscated them. But no one knew the pictures had been taken until the colonel was out of town, and probably back in Washington. Charlie got waylaid somehow—at a beer joint most likely—and didn't get back to the office until the middle of the afternoon.

When he heard about it, J. H. paced up and down and tore his hair and threatened to fire Charlie; but some of the rest of us got him calmed down and back into his office. We caught the pictures in our final street edition, picked the pages up for the early runs next day, and the circulation boys were pop-eyed for days at the way those papers sold.

The next day, after the worst of the excitement had subsided, the Barnacle and I went down to the corner to have ourselves a couple. I had never cared too much for the Barnacle before, but the fact that we'd been fired together established a sort of bond between us; and he didn't seem to be such a bad sort, after all.

JOE WAS as sad as ever. "It's them brownies," he told us, and he described them in a mannner no one should ever use when talking of a brownie. "They've gone and made everyone so happy they don't need to drink no more."

"Both you and me, Joe," said the Barnacle; "they ain't done nothing for me, either."

"You got your job back," I told him.

"Mark," he said, solemnly, pouring out another, "I'm not so sure if that is good or not."

It might have developed into a grade-A crying session if Lightning, our most up-and-coming copy boy, had not come shuffling in at that very moment.

"Mr. L a t h r o p," he said, "there's a phone call for you."

"Well, that's just fine."

"But it's from New York," said the kid.

That did it. It's the first time in my life I ever left a place so fast that I forgot my drink.

The call was from one of the papers to which I had applied, and the man at the New York end told me there was a job opening in the London staff and that he'd like to talk with me about it. In itself, it probably wasn't any better than the job I had, he said, but it would give me a chance to break in on the kind of work I wanted.

When could I come in? he asked, and I said tomorrow morning.

I hung up and sat back and the world all at once looked rosy. I knew right then and there those brownies still were working for me.

I HAD A lot of time to think on the plane trip to New York; and while I spent some of it thinking about the new job and London, I spent a lot of it thinking about the brownies, too.

They'd come to Earth be-

fore, that much at least was clear. And the world had not been ready for them. It had muffled them in a fog of folklore and supersition, and had lacked the capacity to use what they had offered it. Now they tried again. This time we must not fail them, for there might not be a third time.

Perhaps one of the reasons they had failed before—although not the only reason—had been the lack of a media of mass communications. The story of them, and of their deeds and doings, had gone by word of mouth and had been distorted in the telling. The fantasy of the age attached itself to the story of the brownies until they became no more than a magic little people who were very droll, and one occasion helpful, but in the same category as the ogre, or the dragon, and others of their ilk.

Today it had been different. Today there was a better chance the brownies would be objectively reported. And while the entire story could not be told immediately, the people still could guess.

And that was important—the publicity they got. People must know they were back again, and must believe in them and trust them.

And why, I wondered had one medium-sized city in the midwest of America been chosen as the place where they would make known their presence and demonstrate their worth? I puzzled a lot about that one, but I never did get it figured out, not even to this day.

JO ANN WAS waiting for me at the airport when I came back from New York with the job tucked in my pocket. I was looking for her when I came down the ramp, and I saw that she'd got past the gate and was running toward the plane. I raced out to meet her and I scooped her up and kissed her and some damn fool popped a flash bulb at us. I wanted to mop up on him, but Jo Ann wouldn't let me.

It was early evening and you could see some stars shining in the sky, despite the blinding floodlights; from way up, you could hear another plane that had just taken off; and up at the far end of the field, another one was warming up. There were the buildings and the lights and the people and the great machines and it seemed, for a long moment, like a tableau built to represent the strength and swiftness, the competence and assurance of this world of ours.

Jo Ann must have felt it,

too, for she said suddenly: "It's nice, Mark. I wonder if they'll change it."

I knew who she meant without even asking.

"I think I know what they are," I told her; "I think I got it figured out. You know that community chest drive that's going on right now. Well, that's what they are doing, too—a sort of galactic chest. Except that they aren't spending money on the poor and needy; their kind of charity is a different sort. Instead of spending money on us, they're spending love and kindness, neighborliness and brotherhood. And I guess that it's all right. I wouldn't wonder but that, of all the people in the universe, we are the ones who need it most. They didn't come to solve all our problems for us—just to help clear away some of the little problems that somehow keep us from turning our full power on the important jobs, or keep us from looking at them in the right way."

THAT WAS more years ago than I like to think about, but I still can remember just as if it were yesterday.

Something happened yesterday that brought it all to mind again.

I happened to be in Downing street, not too far from No. 10, when I saw a little fellow I first took to be some sort of dwarf. When I turned to look at him, I saw that he was watching me; he raised one hand in an emphatic gesture, with the thumb and first finger made into a circle—the good, solid American signal that everything's okay.

Then he disappeared. He probably ducked into an alley, although I can't say for a fact I actually saw him go.

But he was right. Everything's okay.

The world is bright, and the cold war is all but over. We may be entering upon the first true peace the human race has ever known.

Jo Ann is packing, and crying as she packs, because she has to leave so many things behind. But the kids are goggle-eyed about the great adventure just ahead. Tomorrow morning we leave for Peking, where I'll be the first accredited American correspondent for almost thirty years.

And I can't help but wonder if, perhaps, somewhere in that ancient city—perhaps in a crowded, dirty street; perhaps along the imperial highway; maybe some day out in the country beside the Great Wall, built so fearsomely so many years ago—I may not see another little man.

★

If one life-form—or better still, one single entity—is indifferent to the continued existence of another, is, as a matter of fact, quite willing to end it without adequate motivation, then you have a psychopathic society. And all over Earth, people were obtaining legal permits to kill others for the sole purpose of advancing an artificial social status!

SOCIAL CLIMBER

NOVELET

by MILTON LESSER

(author of "Through A Glass Darkly")

illustrated by KELLY FREAS

THE MAN said suddenly, accusingly, "Snoop."

"Snoop I am, of course," admitted the thing which had just entered Robert Holland's mind. Whole books had been written about Snoops, but no one knew what they really were. "You'll get used to me," the Snoop predicted.

"Please," Robert Holland pleaded. "Come back some other time; this is important to me."

"That's why I'm here."

"But you'll ruin everything."

"Not necessarily; its all up to you. For example, you needn't address me vocally. People will hear you talking to yourself. I'm not talking vocally, am I?"

"You couldn't," said Robert Holland, who had once read a book about Snoops. It was called *It May Happen To You*, but Robert Holland had never believed it.

"That's better. I can understand you if you merely think the words. I could, though."

"You could what?"

"Talk vocally. You see?" It was the Snoop talking, using Hollands vocal chords. "I could use your speech apparatus."

"All right; all right—don't."

"I just wanted to show you."

"Why did you have to pick me? There are more interesting subjects around. Aren't there?"

"Your b r a i n," said the Snoop, "was radiating theta waves at a furious rate."

"Theta?"

"Anxiety; it attracted me. Go about your business, and the symbiotic relationship will work itself out automatically."

"Symbiotic, like hell," Holland said. "You get a charge out of strong emotions. That's why you're here, isn't it?"

"Not at all," answered the Snoop. Holland could sense it sitting—sitting was the only word he could think of—comfortably in his mind, waiting for the emotional feast to begin.

"Snoop?" he said, tentatively.

THE SNOOP was there, but did not respond. Holland s h r u g g e d. There was no known way to exercise a Snoop; when it found a more suitable host, a Snoop departed. In the interval, it feasted. Unfortunately, according to the case histories in *It May Happen to You*, the relationship was quite parasitic. A host became nervous, edgy, eventually incapable of the proper response to environmental challenge. Naturally, though, Holland thought, beginning to feel better about things, those were the case histories of confessed Snoop hosts. What percentage of the whole they represented would never be known; but it could be assumed that those hosts who withstood the Snoops successfully never bothered to confess at all.

Holland squared his shoulders and sprinted for the elevator at the end of the corridor, where a crowd was waiting. The small elevator would never accommodate them all, Holland realized. He hit the crowd on the run, jabbing expertly with his elbows. Something gave before a rapier-thrust of his left elbow. He saw an old man staggering back, holding his face. A woman grabbed the tails of Holland's jacket, so he would run her interference into the elevator car. He spun quickly in a full circle, crouching and jarring her chin back with his shoulder. She whimpered and fell back into the pushing, shoving crowd.

WITH A quick, blurring motion, the elevator door slid shut, trapping a man's hand. Holland worked it free for him, because the elevator wouldn't start until that was done. The man looked grateful, but glanced at Holland's face and said nothing.

They could have made the elevator larger, Holland supposed, but you had to keep in practice, didn't you? The Snoop worked Holland's jaw muscles into a grin.

"Stop it," Holland said silently.

"I was thinking."

"Well, don't."

"Twenty-eight," called the elevator P. A. "Weapon sales and repair." Several people left the elevator.

"Thirty. Hand-to-hand combat." A big raw-boned girl gazed about defiantly and got off the elevator.

"Thirty-seven," said the P. A. "Assignations." Holland shoved his way forward in the still-crowded elevator, receiving no co-operation from its passengers. He barely made it in time before the door whisked shut.

"Some theta," said the Snoop; "you're a bundle of anxiety."

"Listen," Holland said, hoping he could convey anger with the un-vocal words. "This is very important to me. I don't want my partner to know I've got a Snoop."

"Oh, you needn't worry. We don't reveal our presence to outsiders."

"Well, I've got a Joint Status Advancement Permit, and—"

"A Climber's License," said the Snoop, thinking a chuckle.

Holland nodded and was glad the corridor was empty. "You'd better not interfere, that's all."

The Snoop did not answer. Holland stood for a moment outside the door of room 3718, took a deep breath and opened it.

"I THOUGHT you would be older," the girl said, studying him.

"I didn't expect a girl," Holland told her.

"What's wrong with a girl?"

"I didn't expect one."

"Have you looked at the J.S.A.P.?" she asked.

"Haven't had the chance; I usually like to meet my partner first."

"Oh? You've had a Joint Permit before?"

"Naturally," said Holland. "It's the only way you can really get ahead."

"This is my first," the girl admitted. She seemed less sure of herself now than when Holland had first entered the small room. "You must have a pretty high status," she said. "You'll see what I mean when you read the Permit."

"Later," Holland told her. "Yes, I'm a Twelve; but don't get any ideas."

"How could I? I'd need a Permit, wouldn't I?"

"It's happened before," Holland said. "You come in here, slug my real partner, and—"

"I would if I could," she replied boldly, "but I lack the status. I'm a Four."

"I've never worked with a Four," Holland said distastefully.

"Where'd you start?"

"Six."

"You were lucky, then. I started as a Two; I received a Permit for another Two and took care of him."

"Two plus Two; so now you're a Four. Married?"

"No. The Permit says you're single, too."

HOLLAND nodded. "I was expecting a man. You never know what you're getting yourself into with a girl."

She shrugged. "You could turn down the Permit, of course; but there's no telling how long you'd have to wait for another one like this. We've got the most we could under the circumstances. A Sixteen."

Holland whistled.

"You're really Climbing," the Snoop observed.

"Shut up," Holland said silently.

"I won't be a liability," the girl predicted; "I've got much more to gain than you have."

"And far less experience."

Shrugging again, the girl took out a cigaret case and opened it. She reached for a cigaret and dropped the case at Holland's feet.

"Hell, she's crude," Holland told the Snoop. She was going to try something, of course, to prove her capability. But it was so patently obvious—for under normal circumstances Holland wouldn't retrieve the cigaret case for her.

"Go ahead," the Snoop said. "It might be amusing."

HOLLAND crouched and reached out for the cigaret case. It was gold, with a single synthetic gem set in the center of the cover. Holland looked up and saw the girl's foot moving swiftly as his fingers closed on the case. With his free hand he grasped her ankle and twisted. She yelped, lost her balance and fell heavily. Holland was still holding her ankle. She wore a high-heeled shoe with retractable leather on the heel; a deadly two-inch spike of metal was exposed.

"Let go of me," she gasped, grimacing with pain. "I was only going to show you I can take care of myself; I wouldn't have cut you."

"You couldn't have," Hol-

land said, releasing her foot. She stood up and glared at him. "You're not merely wrong," Holland went on relentlessly, "you're pathetic. The man's a Sixteen, you said. Know what that means? You've got to be subtle. Unless you're subtle, you'll never get close enough to use that trick heel or anything like it. Is that how you killed the other Two?"

"I'm not required to talk about that. Well, are you going to look at the Permit, or aren't you?"

"I won't return it, if that's what you're worrying about; I'll go through with it. But let's get one thing straight: I'm in charge. You do whatever I say."

The girl pouted. "Yes, sir."

"And don't act subservient; that would give us away. Look, I've never had a female partner before, but according to what I've read, it might be a good idea if we got married."

"Married?"

"That should be interesting," the Snoop said.

HOLLAND scowled irritably, not bothering to answer the Snoop. "Yes, married; that way we could be together all the time without arousing suspicion." The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea; they could really work as a team. A female partner might have her advantages, after all. "Is it all right with you?"

"If we include an automatic divorce clause, I guess so."

"Splendid," Holland said. "Now, about the division of this Sixteen's status—"

"Oh, that's no problem; it's an even number. Eight for you and eight for me."

"Like hell," Holland said. "You want to triple your status while I make a gain of two-thirds? You think I'm crazy? If I took twelve and you took four we'd each be exactly doubling our status. That's the best you'll get from me. I think it's plenty lenient, anyway; I *am* a Twelve, you know."

"Lenient," she muttered bitterly.

"Take it or leave it." Holland headed for the door.

"Wait. That would make you a Twenty-four; you can't go higher than that in this city."

"I'll apply for an exit permit."

"You'll be awfully young, for a Twenty-four."

"Youngest in the city, I think."

"And probably not half as sharp as you believe," the girl mused.

HOLLAND smiled. "Now you're using your head. You'll know all about me. How I operate. My personal habits. If you could arrange to link up with another Sixteen—assuming we succeed—and get a Permit to tackle me, you'd really be Climbing."

"Doesn't it frighten you?"

"I'm trembling," Holland said, still smiling.

"Well, it's a deal: Four for me and twelve for you. I think we'll get along fine, mister." The girl took the manifold copy of her Joint Status Advancement Permit from a pocket of her blouse. She had, Holland observed, already broken the seal on it. He removed his own copy from his billfold and broke the seal. They filled in the acquisition of status points on each copy and initialed it with a pen the girl supplied.

"You're a sharp trader," the Snoop told Holland. "All those points and marriage too, while it lasts. I've found a splendid host. She's quite beautiful, you know, Holland; we're going to enjoy ourselves, aren't we?"

"You damn Snoop!" Holland said silently, savagely. "That's all you really want, isn't it? I'm nothing but a vehicle. You latch onto me and enjoy sensual pleasures."

"Whatever you say," the Snoop told him calmly.

"Well, is there another explanation for you?"

"You humans haven't thought so."

"I'm asking you."

"We've been here for fifty years. Your psychologists have tried their best to explain us—after spending a decade or so trying to explain us away!"

"Don't be so amused," Holland protested. "You're making me smile. She's looking at me; she'll wonder—"

"What's the matter?" the girl asked.

"I'm reading the Permit," Holland told her.

THE SNOOP settled back comfortably in his mind. "And still," the Snoop said, "you know nothing. Nothing. Have you ever thought of us in terms of an invasion—from space, say?"

"I've read it in the Sunday supplements."

"How do you think the idea was planted, Holland?" the Snoop demanded.

"Some other time," Holland snapped. Then aloud, after quickly scanning the J.S.A.P.: "Saul Gurdin, eh? I've heard of him. He's never taken out a Permit in his life; he ought to be easy game."

"He's been too busy," said the girl, whose name, accord-

ing to the Permit, was Julia Randall. "He builds bridges on Venus, but he's a citizen of this city."

"He spends a lot of time on Venus, though," Holland offered.

"Just the other day over a telecast, I happened to see where he's on Venus now."

"Oh, great," Holland said.

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"We can apply for a temporary exit permit to fulfill the terms of the J.S.A.P. We can get married and take our honeymoon on Venus. There's a Marriage Bureau here in Status Center, isn't there?"

"Yes," said Holland.

"I can't wait," the Snoop declared happily. Holland got the notion of the bodiless entity stretching languidly inside his mind.

"What are you so glum about?" Julia Randall asked Holland, who was busy cursing the Snoop silently. "This won't be the first J.S.A.P. marriage; we might as well get to know each other."

"Yes," said Holland. She came into his arms and let him kiss her. It was a long kiss and a good one. She both wanted to be kissed and knew how to kiss.

"Are you going to murder Jason Gurdin on your honeymoon, or when it's over?" the Snoop asked Holland.

II

JULIA SAID, "Really, darling, if you want to read a book on our first night out in space... What is that book, anyway?"

Holland propped his knees up under the covers so she wouldn't see the title on the dust jacket of the book. It was a foolish gesture, he realized; she could always look at the book later. "Why don't you go out to the clubroom and have a drink?" he suggested. "I'll join you in a while. It's still early."

"What's the matter with you?" the Snoop asked. The Snoop seemed disappointed.

Julia went into the dressing room of their suite and soon re-appeared in comfortable cruise clothing. "All right," she said, but not happily; "I'll see you in the clubroom. Aside from everything else," she reminded Holland, "we have a lot of planning to do."

Holland nodded and heard the door shut behind her. He returned with unrewarded eagerness to his book. He had read fifty pages so far and still knew next to nothing about Snoops. The book was Morrison's supposedly defini-

tive *Snoops: Fifty Years of Silent Invasion.*

"That won't really help you," the Snoop said. Holland had learned to understand the Snoop's way of expressing itself. Those words had been said almost with a yawn. "He's on the wrong track entirely."

"But you said yourself it was an invasion of some kind."

"Well, yes; other than that, Morrison knows nothing."

"Statistically, he gives the incidence of Snoop seizure broken down by status groups." Holland found himself defending the almost worthless book.

"Does he, indeed? But how does he know? Many hosts keep their seizure a secret. "You will, for example; won't you?"

"If I can help it, yes."

"Then Morrison doesn't really know what he's talking about."

"This will be the biggest status jump I ever attempted," Holland said. "Is that why you're here?"

"What on earth ever gave you that idea?"

"I thought perhaps the government—"

"You mean, that I'm artificial? Dear me, Holland, no. I assure you, I am as real and as live and—yes—as natural as you are. Naturally, if a man attempts an enormous status jump, he's going to be filled with anxiety, which is what attracts me."

"IT'S Morrison's estimate," Holland continued doggedly, "that there are some three thousand Snoops on Earth. His statistics don't include Venus, Mars, or the Jovian Moons."

"Three thousand? The estimate is too conservative. Although, at one time, our number here was far less than that."

"You've had reinforcements?" Holland asked, feeling ridiculous as he remained consistent with Morrison's idea of an invasion.

"Reinforcements? No, Holland; we are natural and fully alive. We grow and grow old; we have all the natural functions of a living creature. We don't need reinforcements. We reproduce."

Holland could not accept the statement without considerable reservations. "You aren't physical," he said, as if that gave the lie to the Snoop's avowed ability to reproduce.

"Holland. I'm surprised at you. When your first spaceships reached the moon, the explorers found life. The scientists were astounded, but there it was."

"That's different," Holland protested. "The lunas manufacture oxygen and water from the moon's surface; they can also adjust to a comparatively wide range of temperature. But they're as physical as any life on Earth is. The same basic elements: carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen. Besides, you're sentient and the lunas are not."

"There was life on Mars, but you expected that. And Venus?"

"We thought Venus would be a planet-wide dustbowl. It wasn't; it's a water-world. Of course there's life."

"And life on the Jovian Moons. Where else, Holland?"

"We haven't been anywhere else."

"YOU'LL find life everywhere, Holland—everywhere. Whatever power created the universe, its purpose was life; it has been immensely successful. In empty space, you wouldn't expect life to have physical substance, would you?"

"Space isn't empty," Holland said with petty triumph.

"But what exists in space is more tenuous than any vacuum you can produce on Earth. Unless you can conceive of an impossibly tenuous creature, spreading over millions of miles of space and somehow achieving an organizational whole despite the limitations, you've got to admit that life in space—"

"*If* there's life in space."

"—would probably not be physical. Capable of symbiosis with a physical creature, of course, for a charge of energy in a vacuum learns nothing. Don't argue with it, Holland; accept it. I'm here."

"What do you want?" Holland asked.

"Doesn't Morrison tell you?"

"Morrison says you feed on emotion; he says you live according to a rigid calculus of hedonism. As soon as you find a host who emotes more powerfully, you'll scram. He says you make no dictinction between pleasure and pain or success and failure. He says..."

"He couldn't be further from the truth," the Snoop replied crisply. "In fifty years your people have learned next to nothing about us."

"Morrison—"

"Well, that isn't *quite* true. Some of you learn, but wisely don't talk. They couldn't very well, not in a culture of social psychopathy."

"What the hell are you talking about now?"

"You'll see," said the Snoop... "Perhaps."

"You won't tell me?"

"I never do. Not unless... but I'm tired. I'm going to sleep now. Even pure energy needs rest and replenishment. Ahh..."

"Snoop? Snoop?"

There was no answer.

THIS WAS the third time in the thirty-six hours since the Snoop had entered his mind that it had apparently ceased to exist. Unfortunately, Holland knew, this was only temporary. The Snoop was resting; the Snoop would be back.

While dressing, Holland was thinking about Saul Gurdin. Gurdin was big—Sixteen. Some few people were satisfied with their status, and Gurdin was one of them. In the twenty years since reaching his majority, Gurdin had never taken out a Permit. Holland licked his lips; it meant Jason Gurdin ought to be a pushover. Certainly more of a pushover than you could expect a Sixteen to be under any other circumstances.

After dressing, Holland headed for the clubroom, using the handrails in the corridor to pull his weightless free-falling body forward. Julia Randall—make that Julia Holland—was really living it up, he thought. She was visiting a Ten-to-Fifteen clubroom for the first time in her life, thanks to her marriage. Thus Holland decided he could make demands on her, although their marriage was obviously contracted only for the sake of their Joint Permit.

Holland whistled cheerfully as he floated along. He was glad now he'd been occupied with the Snoop. Julia had seemed mildly upset, so maybe the demands could hardly be regarded as demands. Anyway, it was better this way. A clubroom with more status value than she had ever visited before, some drinks and sensual weightless dancing...

BUT IT did not work out that way. When Holland reached the Ten-to-Fifteen clubroom, Julia was thoroughly occupied with a young mining engineer from Mars. She waved airily at Holland when she saw him, but continued dancing. The young engineer was very good, gliding and floating in a complex three-dimensional rhythm, while Julia followed him with a seemingly effortless abandon. They were easily the best dancers in the air, Holland observed, although the clubroom was crowded. For a few moments he watched the cou-

ples swirling and floating, then shrugged and sat down at a table anchoring the magnetic soles of his shoes on the floor-plate under his chair.

"What emotion is that?" the Snoop asked him. "It isn't a simple one, Holland."

"Go to hell," said Holland, and ordered a drink.

"Jealousy? But that's incredible. I thought jealousy was reserved for matters of status. Oh, I see. But it's subtle. You're angry at Julia because she isn't concentrating on your J.S.A.P. This leads you to believe the job will be difficult, which makes you jealous of Saul Gurdin's status. Interesting."

JULIA WAVED again from directly above Holland's table. Seconds later, the music stopped. With her partner, Julia came floating down. As was customary, the ship-steward had earlier introduced the passengers by status and occupation, not by name.

Now Julia said, "Larry, I'd like you to meet my brother, Robert Holland. Bob dear, this is Harry Gurdin."

"Gurdin?" said Holland foolishly as Julia and Harry Gurdin sat down at the table.

"Yes. His father is Saul Gurdin, the famous Venusian bridge builder. You've heard of him, haven't you?"

"Your sister is lovely," Larry Gurdin said. He was a pale, thin boy of perhaps twenty-two. He had started out in life at his father's status, which was Sixteen. He spoke condescendingly. "I never would have come to the Ten-to-Fifteen clubroom," he admitted, "if I hadn't spotted your sister."

"Drink?" Holland asked him.

"Of course," said Larry in a voice that brooked no argument. "I'll pay."

There were four more rounds of dancing before Holland returned alone to their suite. During the third, he had one dance with Julia. He glowered at her but she seemed to find it amusing, for they danced together sedately and without sensual abandon. "After all," Julia said, "we're brother and sister."

"Well, I hope you know what you're doing."

"He's Gurdin's son, don't you see? If I play this right he'll introduce us to the old man as soon as we reach Venus, be careful, Bob; don't hold me like that. He'll suspect."

"But damn it, we—"

"It's only a marriage of convenience, so calm down; I won't be able to dance with you at all if you don't."

He was going to make a

nasty remark, but the Snoop said, "Be objective, Holland."

HE RETURNED with Julia to the table and spent the rest of the evening glaring into his drink. Larry Gurdin monopolized all of Julia's time after that; and although Holland had brought along a copy of *Who's Who in Status Sixteen*—so they could plan the elder Gurdin's demise with the help of the biographical material the book contained—they planned nothing.

"Intuitively, I know this is the right way to go about it," Julia said on the third night. On the fourth shipboard night, Julia came into their suite very late, and looking very flushed and happy. She wouldn't let Holland touch her, but by then he had given up trying.

On the final night before Venusian planetfall, there was a status murder aboard ship. The victorious Ten, a woman of considerable charm who had enticed a male Ten to her stateroom and killed him there, was given a party by the ship's captain. For once the barriers of status were overlooked and the brand new Twenty was feted by everyone except the steward, who was busy filling out the necessary official forms and flushing the body into space.

LARRY GURDIN cornered Holland at the party. Young Gurdin had had too much to drink but looked very natty in a cruise suit of a shimmering silver fabric. As a Twelve, Holland could not afford such clothing and felt a stab of jealousy as Larry said: "Old man, I've been meaning to talk to you about your sister. You're Twelves, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Holland.

"Well, I'm going to give Julia a chance for advancement that she wouldn't get unless she killed someone." Larry chuckled softly. "I'm going to ask her to marry me as soon as we reach Venus."

Holland looked at him blankly.

"Well, what do you think? I've already asked Julia about your family. She told me you have none—which makes you her guardian. Naturally the perogative is mine but I wouldn't do it without your approval. Wouldn't want my brother-in-law applying for a Permit now, would I?"

"No," said Holland.

"Well, then?"

"Julia; it's up to Julia. I'll speak to Julia."

"In that case if I have your permission, let me speak to her. You realize, this will be

a great help to your own status. Through me, you'll be able to make contacts above your status level. While it's true that a man can take out a Permit with an unspecified victim, your chances are that much greater if you know exactly who the victim will be. Agreed?"

"Yes," Holland said automatically. "And I appreciate it."

"I'll speak to Julia tomorrow. Well good night."

I'll speak to her tonight, Holland thought.

"BUT DARLING, that's just wonderful," Julia said later after Holland had explained the situation. "What are you so glum about? Don't you have any imagination at all?"

"What will you tell him?"

"I'll tell him yes—but a girl can't be expected to marry immediately, not without preparation. We'll get to meet his father. We won't have any trouble at all; this ought to convince you about a woman partner, Bob."

She leaned down over Holland and brushed her lips against his cheek. He reached up and held her, but she seemed very cool and distant. He released her and watched her climb into bed. She was asleep almost immediately.

"What are you going to do?" the Snoop demanded.

"Why, I don't know; Julia is probably right."

"It depends on whose viewpoint you use."

"What do you mean?"

"I would merely like to point out that if you and Julia are successful, her status jumps from Four to Eight under the terms of your agreement."

"Which is a pretty commendable jump."

"Yes, but," said the Snoop. "*But* what? Go ahead and finish it."

"I'd rather you did your own thinking."

"You mean about Larry Gurdin? Oh," said Holland suddenly, "I see. He's a Sixteen, like his father. If he asks Julia to marry him, which he will, and if Julia agrees—"

"Which she will."

"You think so?" asked Holland, shocked.

"Go ahead with your thought."

"If she agrees, her status jumps from Four to Sixteen, since a wife receives the status of her husband. But," added Holland triumphantly, "we've got this Permit."

"WHICH she can break merely by visiting the Status Office in the nearest

Venusian city. She doesn't have to inform you of it; the office does. By the time they get around to it, it could be too late."

"Yes," said Holland grimly. "Now I see what you mean. Julia agrees to marry Larry and doesn't give a damn about me. She breaks the Permit without telling me, because she's too busy—"

"Wrong," said the Snoop: "Because she doesn't want to tell you. What happens if a Permit is rendered invalid, but you go ahead with your plans anyway?"

"I've had it," said Holland. "I'm broken all the way down —to Four probably, and possibly even to two. Provided I commit a crime in the process. But if she tells Larry—"

"Assume that young Gurdin doesn't care for his father: The typical filial antagonism, no matter what the status. Why weren't you born an Eighteen or a Twenty, Pop, instead of a Sixteen? That sort of thing. Now, if Julia invalidates the Permit and—"

"Let *me* finish. Julia invalidates it but doesn't tell me. I go ahead with our plans; I kill Saul Gurdin. Naturally, his lost status doesn't belong to me, but it has to be accounted for in some way. *Who's Who* says he's a widower, and therefore his son, Larry, will inherit his status."

"Precisely," said the Snoop. "Thus, by marrying Larry Gurdin and leaving you in the lurch, Julia not only jumps from a Four to a Sixteen instead of merely to an Eight, but stands a good chance of hitting Thirty-two —which, as you know, is the highest possible status. How many thirty-two's are there in the solar system, Holland?"

"Ten, I think," Holland said glumly.

"Some figure like that—and they're untouchable: They've reached the top and cannot be considered Permit material. That's the possibility facing Julia right now, Holland. You can't blame her, but you'd better be careful."

"But she can't—can't turn on me like that!"

The Snoop worked Holland's jaw muscles into a smile. "Wouldn't you?" it said.

"I—yes, I suppose so. But what can I do about Julia now?"

"That," admitted the Snoop, "is a good question."

"Did you say something, darling?" Julia asked sleepily.

Holland felt like strangling her. He didn't, though; strangling Julia under the current circumstances was illegal.

III

JULIA DISAPPEARED soon after they had gone through Venusian customs. Holland, who had expected it, was nevertheless furious. He waited for her in their hotel room, wishing the Snoop would awake inside his mind. He needed someone to talk to; even a Snoop would be better than nothing.

He picked up the dial-server to order a drink, but a voice said: "Mr. Holland? Are you in to callers?"

"What callers?"

"A Mr. Saul Gurdin."

"What did you say?" Holland shouted.

"Mr. Saul Gurdin is here to see you."

"Send him up," said Holland; "send him right up."

Holland dialed for drinks, quickly; they were iced and ready when Saul Gurdin entered his room. The elder Gurdin was a great shaggy bear of a man, who wore shorts and sandals and nothing else. His skin was bronzed and leathery, covered with a considerable growth of gray hair. He had not shaved in two weeks, Holland judged; his heavy, pear-shaped face was bristling with stiff white whiskers. His head was completely bald.

"You're Holland?" he said. "I won't have it."

"You won't have what, sir? Drink?"

"Thank you, thank you." Gurdin downed his drink in two quick gulps. He looked at Holland's, which hadn't been touched yet; Holland slid it across the table toward him and dialed for more.

"Understand," said Gurdin, smacking his lips, "I have nothing against Twelves. Some Twelves are very nice people, I'm sure; *you* look like a decent sort, I'm sure. And it isn't that I like my son," Gurdin added defensively, "so don't misunderstand. I've never cared for the boy at all, Holland. It's the prestige I'm thinking of. This marriage is out of the question."

"They told you?" Holland asked.

Larry called from the ship yesterday. He's not going to marry a Twelve while I'm alive, you can bet on that." Gurdin chuckled, loosening phlegm in his throat. "And I'm pretty damn indestructible, Holland, so don't get any ideas. You know how many folks have lost status trying to fulfill a Permit on me?"

"No," admitted Holland.

"Fifteen; and five more died trying. It's why I haven't tried for advancement myself,

Holland. Sixteen is pretty good, I figure. If I go higher than that, unless I reach Immunity, then just that many more folks will try to get Permits on me. Know when I'm well off, I guess."

"YOU COULD reach Immunity," Holland said boldly, "if you got a Permit on your son."

"What are you talking about?" Gurdin gasped.

"You understand," Holland said, "I'm telling you this only to protect myself. Julia Randall Holland is not my sister; she's my wife."

"Your wife?" Suddenly wary, Gurdin looked about the room for a weapon. He headed ponderously for the desk, but Holland said: "I wouldn't."

When Saul Gurdin turned around, he was facing a stunner which Holland held easily, familiarly in his hand. "Calm down," Holland said. "I'm sure you'll find the usual guest arsenal in the desk, but you'd never reach it."

"Are you going to kill me?" Gurdin demanded. "That would be a crime, wouldn't it?"

"I'm not sure; depends on the time. If Julia hasn't reached the Status Office yet—but it's too risky. No, I won't kill you, unless you make it necessary. Will you listen to me now?"

"I don't have much choice, do I?"

"Julia Randall and I contracted marriage because we took out a J.S.A.P. on your life. When Julia met Larry, I think she changed her mind. Originally, she was only a Four and we had decided to split your status eight and four. When Larry proposed, though, she got other ideas: To marry him; to let me kill you, which would be illegal if she cancelled the Permit—which I think she's doing right now. Then Larry would be willed your status, and Julia and Larry would be Thirty-two's—and immune. Neat, isn't it?"

SAUL GURDIN smiled. "Hearing that, I can almost feel affection for the boy. I didn't know it, but he's a real Climber."

"What are you going to do about it?" Holland asked.

"How can I be sure you're telling the truth?"

"Julia's my wife, not my sister. If she marries Larry, our own marriage automatically becomes null and void, since Larry's status is higher than mine. But what's in it for Larry? He probably feels the same way about inferior status as you do. With Julia's

help he can become a Thirty-two."

"But he doesn't need *her* help. If he really wanted to, he could just take out a Permit on me."

"Think of the risk," Holland pointed out. "If he was to fail, you might kill him. This way, though, there isn't any risk for him. If I kill you illegally, he inherits your status; if I fail, he's lost nothing."

"He'd be saddled with an inferior wife."

"He could always get a divorce."

"You still haven't given me any conclusive proof."

"And I won't be able to, Mr. Gurdin. But you might be willing to buy this: if I find Julia's cancelled our Permit, it would be pretty conclusive, wouldn't it?"

"I'm not sure I follow that."

"IT'S SIMPLE. Even if she really wanted to marry your son, and let it go at that, she'd have no reason to cancel the Permit. She could have her cake and eat it, as the expression goes: Because, if we were successful, she'd add the four status points under our agreement to the Sixteen she'd have when Larry marries her, making her a Twenty. Larry wouldn't mind, would he?"

"We've never been very close," mused Gurdin.

"So, if she cancels the Permit, it can mean only one thing: She and Larry want me to kill you illegally."

"Sound logic," said the Snoop, awakening; "I'm proud of you."

"You keep out of this," Holland replied, silently.

"I suppose so," Gurdin admitted reluctantly. "But what can I do about it?"

"Plenty" Holland told him enthusiastically. "I'm going to the Status Office as soon as Julia gets back. If she's cancelled our Permit, I'll wait until she marries your son, then I'll take a Permit out for her."

"Twelve, eh? But you can't; she'd rank you by four points."

"I hadn't thought of that," Holland admitted. "I know: I'll take the permit out immediately, while she's still my wife. Then, if I kill her after she's married, I'd only get the twelve points I contracted for and the four extra points will go into the annual lottery. The government's always happy with an arrangement like that."

"You Climbers," Saul Gurdin said, with reluctant admiration; "I've got to hand it to you. It takes a lot of sweating, Holland. That would

make you a Twenty-four, eh? It's more than you would have received under the original Permit, too.

"Well, you can put that stunner away now, boy. What do I do about all this?"

"That's easy," Holland replied. "You take a Permit out on Larry. Here's your chance to reach Immunity at one blow. What do you think?"

"AN HOUR ago, I would have said no. I don't like the boy, but he *is* my own flesh and blood. Still, if he's in this with your wife, as you claim—"

"It makes sense, doesn't it?"

"Too much sense," Gurdin admitted. "Holland, I think I'll do it. Makes a man feel wonderful, the prospect of Immunity. Well, let me know about that Permit business, will you? Whether she cancelled it or not?"

Holland nodded and followed Gurdin toward the door. Just then they heard footsteps in the hall. "That will be Julia," Holland gasped; "we'll have to hide you somewhere." He grasped the older man's arm and pulled him back toward the center of the room. "The closet?"

"What do you have to hide him for?" the Snoop wanted to know.

"What do you have to hide me for?" Gurdin asked. "I'm here on a social call. My son called from the ship; naturally I'm interested in meeting my prospective in-law."

"But if Julia learns we've been talking together—"

"We'll pretend we've just met. There, now, it's too late, isn't it?"

Saul Gurdin was right. Together they turned and watched the door open.

"SO YOU'RE Robert Holland." Gurdin said jovially, as if they had just met. "It's a pleasure, a real pleasure."

"I certainly didn't expect to meet you, Mr. Gurdin," Holland replied. He hoped his voice sounded convincing.

"Oh, am I interrupting something?" Julia asked. She was wearing the briefest of Venusian tour garments. Since the current fashion trend was to reveal and highlight rather than conceal, and since it had only come off the drawing boards at Paris, Denver and Canalopolis two or three years ago, Holland and Saul Gurdin stared at her in frank and not a little breathless admiration.

"Your sister is very lovely," Gurdin said.

"Darling, who is your nice

friend?' Julia asked Holland.

"You're not interrupting anything," he said. "This is Saul Gurdin—you know, the mining engineer's father?"

"Larry's father. Well, this is an unexpected pleasure. Mr. Gurdin, I hope you don't think...these fashions, I mean—"

"Not at all, my dear," Gurdin chuckled. "I'm not *that* old." He studied Julia with what seemed to Holland unnecessary attention to details. He said, "I understand that Larry has asked you to marry him."

"That's right, sir," Julia said.

"Well, Holland," Gurdin beamed, "your sister and I ought to get better acquainted, don't you think?"

"Bob probably has a million things to attend to, anyway," Julia said. "Don't you, Bob dear?"

"You'd better get out of here," the Snoop told Holland; "you're getting angry."

"Well, I don't like the way he's looking at her," Holland said silently. "You think it's all right to leave them? There's one possibility I hadn't thought of."

"I know," said the Snoop, who sounded infinitely amused. "The idea is probably just occurring to Saul Gurdin."

"That no good—"

"Temper," cautioned the Snoop.

"Well?" Gurdin demanded. He went to the door and opened it for Holland.

"Goodbye, dear," Julia called over Gurdin's bare, bristly shoulder.

"If," Holland said to the Snoop as he headed for the elevator, "Julia decides she prefers Saul Gurdin to his son—"

"Exactly what I was thinking," agreed the Snoop.

"But I could still go ahead and take out a Permit on Julia."

"Yes, you could do that. Except that Saul Gurdin knows all about it."

IV

"LET ME see," said the clerk at the Status Office. "Permit NY-46-02, issued at New York, on Earth. Contracting parties, Twelve Robert M. Holland and Four Julia P. Randall. Here we are. May I see your identification, please?"

Holland showed it to him.

"Yes, sir; that Permit was cancelled by the Four less than an hour ago."

"I'd like to take out another Permit," Holland said.

"But that would be impossible, sir."

"Impossible?"

"Yes. You have a temporary exit permit from New York City; it terminates with the Permit under consideration. In other words, it has already terminated. You can remain on Venus, of course—"

"Oh, sure," said Holland bitterly.

"But that makes you fair game for anyone, including those of lower status. Naturally, under the existing statutes, we will have to publish that fact."

"Don't I have a period of grace?" Holland asked. "It wasn't my idea to terminate the Permit; I'd still like to go through with it, but of course I can't."

"You will have several hours," said the clerk, "until such time as the facts in your case have been published. This is not a legal period of grace, you understand. The time-interval is unavoidable."

"When's the next ship for Earth?" Holland asked. He had no choice now. The whole business was a dismal failure for him, however it turned out for Julia Randall. He'd been outfoxed and now the situation was suddenly, perilously dangerous. He'd be fair game for anyone, once the knowledge was made public.

"You'd better see a travel agent," the clerk suggested.

"Well, tell me this: Don't they have to take out a Permit?"

"Who?"

"Anyone who wants my status points?"

"Why, no. No, that isn't the situation at all. You have no business here, so your status is completely excess now. You're fair game, as I said. A Permit could be issued on request, retroactively, after your demise."

"Thank you," said Holland dully. He turned around and began to walk away.

"Careful," said the Snoop. "The clerk's a Six. He'll never have another chance like this, and he's beginning to realize it."

HOLLAND spun around swiftly, dropping to his knees as he did so. A stunner blast roared over his head, bouncing harmlessly off the wall behind him since it was only lethal to nerve cells. He groped for his own stunner, found it, dived headfirst as the clerk fired again. Holland shot the clerk in the face with his stunner, killing the man instantly.

The investigation was brief but thorough. Holland was guilty of no crime; he had killed in self-defense. The police wouldn't press the point

anyway, since the dead clerk's status points went into the lottery. The bigger the annual lottery, the greater chance you had of winning a few free status points.

But everyone looked at Holland strangely as he left: the three policemen, the two stretcher-bearers from the morgue, the official from Lottery.

"They're all afraid," the Snoop pointed out. "that if they start something someone else might finish it for them and get your status. It's the only thing saving you now."

"I know," Holland admitted bleakly. "I'd better hurry to a travel agent."

"No; they'll be expecting that. They probably have friends among the travel agents. You wouldn't have a chance."

"The spaceport?"

"The same thing. You're in trouble, Holland. I'm afraid this symbiotic relationship of ours is going to end very shortly. I'm truly sorry."

"Symbiotic, hell," Holland stormed as he left the Status Office quickly. "You've brought me nothing but trouble since you first showed up."

"I? I have done nothing. If I had been given an opportunity...but one can't work on the psychopathy of a corpse, can he?"

"WHAT ARE you so glum about?" Holland asked the Snoop an hour later. "Nothing happens to you if I'm killed, does it?"

"Certainly not. But we Snoops are capable of a high degree of empathy."

"Literally, you mean," said Holland.

"No. In the old classic sense. You humans have lost it almost entirely, you know. It's why you—"

"No philosophic lectures, please," Holland said. "The thing that gets me mad is Julia. She's not here on an expired exit permit. Oh no, not her."

"I don't see the distinction."

"If she's promised a marriage contract by either Saul Gurdin or his son, the law doesn't apply to her. But me, I'm fair game for anyone. What does she care about that, though?"

"No empathy," insisted the Snoop. "You see?"

Holland was sitting in a bar and grill, half a mile from the spaceport. He had called the port earlier to learn when the next earthbound ship was leaving. He was waiting now, chain-smoking and drinking cup after cup of strong native coffee.

"You'll never make it," the Snoop predicted. "Haven't you had the feeling that someone was following you?"

"No, Holland said.

"I'm better at that than you are. You should have studied those men at the Status Office more closely; look over there."

HOLLAND felt his neck craning to the left as the Snoop sent motor impulses to his neck muscles. "Those two fellows at the corner table?" the Snoop said.

"They do look familiar."

"They should. You saw them an hour ago at the Status Office; they carried the clerk's body out."

All at once, Holland felt vulnerable. He had been sitting with his back to the two goverment mortuary flunkies. He squirmed around in his chair until he could see them without craning his neck. They were watching him boldly.

"But what are they waiting for?" Holland asked.

"Why should they settle for six points each? They're each waiting for the other to lose patience. They have nothing to lose, waiting another half hour or so; they know the ship schedule."

"I'll make a run for it the last possible moment," Holland said desperately. "If I kill them, it will be self-defense."

"And then what?"

"Why, I'll go back to Earth. To New York."

"You'll still be fair game on the ship. With no hiding place."

HOLLAND didn't answer. It was one thing to fail in a Status Advancement Permit and have your status reduced; it was quite another to die in the process. Out of frustration and anger he had blamed the Snoop, but it really wasn't the Snoop's fault. The Snoop hadn't been anything but an observer, as far as he could tell. He could place the real blame at Julia Randall's doorstep, though. The more he thought about it, the angrier he became. That girl. Yes, that girl. Climbing all over Holland to get where she was going. And still his wife, as of right now...

"Say, wait a minute," said Holland. "All aspects of the status of the suprior spouse can be claimed by the inferior."

"You were the Twelve and Julia the Four," the Snoop reminded him.

"No. I'm thinking of another aspect entirely. Julia is still under the extended pro-

tection of her exit permit from New York, because she's contracted a marriage with Larry Gurdin. But until the moment that marriage is actually joined, I'm still her husband. Therefore, if legally I share the advantages of her status, the clerk at the Status Office made a mistake. I'm not fair game after all, am I?"

"It's a subtle point," said the Snoop. "But I like your mind, Holland. With all its devious ways. However—"

"Uh-oh," mumbled Holland.

"Yes, whatever those verbal grunts mean. I merely want to point out that when a Climber determines to bring about your violent demise, he won't stop to study any loopholes in the law. You'll be dead and unlamented before the loopholes are found. Perhaps they would then strip the victorious Climber of his status points, but that wouldn't concern a dead man, would it?"

"You mean—even if I'm right, that wouldn't help me with those two birds over there or anyone like them."

"Precisely. I should also like to point out, by the way, that if you left here now and ran all the way you might possibly reach the spaceport before the Earth liner blasted off." And, when Holland stood up quickly, pushing his chair back: "It wasn't a very good idea anyway. Sit down."

HOLLAND glanced at the two mortuary flunkies, who were still thorough students of Robert Holland's every move. As Holland watched them, one of them glanced at his wrist-chrono, relaxed considerably and leaned across the table to mutter something to his companion. They smiled and lit cigarets.

"They realized you've missed your spaceship," the Snoop told Holland. "They figure you're not going to make a break for it now."

"What am I supposed to do?" Holland groaned. "Just sit here and wait until they decide which one of them will kill me?"

"You could make a break for it; you're armed."

Holland considered his chances. He was closer to the exit than the mortuary flunkies were. They were obviously armed, and watching him like a pair of hawks; and while each one probably hoped he could earn Holland's twelve points for himself, a sudden attempt at flight on Holland's part might swing the balance in favor of a joint effort.

"They'd never let me leave

here alive," Holland told the Snoop.

"Alone, they wouldn't; but look who's coming." Laughter bubbled in Holland's throat. Holland grimaced. He didn't feel like laughing; it was the Snoop.

HOLLAND looked up suddenly, Snoop-motivated. Larry Gurdin came in quickly through the door, spotted Holland and rushed toward his table. Larry's face was white, his eyes big. He glanced about furtively; he did not resemble his confident bear of a father in the slightest.

"Holland," he said, falling into a chair. "Thank God I've found you."

"How did you know where I was?" Holland demanded, grim visions of half of Venus flocking to the little bar and grill to be on hand for his demise.

"I was to meet Julia in your hotel lobby. When she wasn't there, I went upstairs, thinking you had somehow found out—"

"Hah!" Holland spat, surprised at the pretty triumph he felt. "Then you admit everything?"

"It doesn't matter. Not now."

"It certainly doesn't," the Snoop agreed.

"I found them there," Gurdin said. "Your wife—"

"She told you we're married?"

"My life's in danger," Larry said, "and so is yours; I think we can help each other. They—they were very cozy. I know my father. That look in his eyes—like when he wins a big bridge-building contract. I went to the Status Office, found out what happened, knew you'd be someplace near the spaceport—"

"All right, you're a good detective. What do you what?"

"Get off your high horse, Holland; you're fair game for anyone now. Well, aren't you?" And, when Holland nodded glumly: "Of course, I'm not; but when my father and your wife form an alliance—"

"Marriage?"

"YES, BUT will you let me finish? She'll convince him we were out to get him. She'll distort the truth, poisoning his mind against me, and—"

"Admit it, you damn hypocrite. Wasn't that the idea?"

"I," said Larry Gurdin haughtily, "never would have laid a hand on my father. Naturally, if through ignorance you had gone ahead with your original plan—and if Julia and I had followed through with ours—we stood to inherit

my father's sixteen points upon his death."

"But Julia was never really fond of you. She seems fond of your father, genuinely. Is that it?"

"Yes," Larry admitted. "Probably, they'll get married. Believing he can't trust me—although I'd be more than happy to drop the whole thing now—my father will decide to be a Climber for the first time in his life. They'll take a Permit out on my life; but since my father is thoroughly naive when it comes to Climbing, your Julia will be the executioner."

Holland chuckled. He waited for the Snoop to make some comment. but the Snoop was silent. He glanced quickly at the two mortuary flunkies, who were looking not at Holland but at Larry, discussing this unexpected complication in low tones. "That's tough," Holland said finally. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

"Without help, you'll never leave Venus alive. I can give you that help; I'll do it provided you help me."

"How can you get me off Venus?"

"We Gurdins are wealthy. A disguise. A bribe to a spaceship captain with no questions asked..."

"IT'S A chance," the Snoop told Holland. "He could probably do it."

"What do you want in return?" Holland asked.

Larry licked his lips, his eyes darting anxiously to the door. "Kill Julia."

"But I have no status on Venus. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't take out a Permit."

"I'm not asking you to take out a Prmit. Kill her."

"Murder," said Holland coldly. "is crime punishable by life imprisonment."

"You know Jullia", Larry pleaded. "You lived with her aboard the spaceship; you know her habits. If you can kill her without getting caught, that will buy your escape. If you refuse, it means your own life and you know it."

"But to commit murder—"

"Man, you're a Climber, aren't you? What's the difference how you label it? Don't tell me you have moral compunctions?"

"Not after the way Julia's been double-dealing."

"Then what is it?"

Holland shrugged. "The last thing a Climber worries about is getting caught. It doesn't matter; there's no necessity to cover your tracks. But at murder I'd be a novice."

"That", said Larry "is your

problem. If you consider it a bigger problem than your lack of status on Venus—"

"No. No, I don't. Are you sure about your father and Julia?"

"Sure enough to believe my life's in danger. He said he was taking her out to our estate. My guess is they'll stop at the Status Office first for a Joint Permit." Larry gulped. "Oh me."

"And if I said yes?"

"COME TO the estate with me," Larry Gurdin said eagerly. "I'll pretend to be pretending I think you're Julia's brother; you pretend to be in the dark about everything. They'll suspect nothing. If you succeed in killing Julia, I know my father will forget about the whole thing. Well, what do you say?"

The Snoop stirred in Holland's mind. "Agree to it," the Snoop said. "Even if you're not sure. At least young Gurdin can help you leave this place alive."

Holland nodded. "All right," he said slowly. "It's a deal. But first," he gestured toward the two mortuary flunkies, and explained.

A few moments later, Larry got up and walked to the bar to order something. This placed him behind the two mortuary flunkies, who were now giving Holland all their attention. When Holland then stood up and came toward them, the two would-be assassins were suddenly busy studying their fingernails, the grease-splattered menu, each other, the checkered tablecloth, the very bad oil paintings of Venusian flora and fauna on the wall, anything.

HOLLAND smiled as he reached them. "Don't turn around," he said in a conversational tone. "My friend is watching you; he's holding a blaster in his hand. If you try anything, he'll kill you."

"There must be some mistake," one of them men blurted.

The other one merely turned ashen.

"Here's what," Holland said. "Sit perfectly still. I'm getting out of here." He watched the ashen one turn around and look at Larry Gurdin, becoming, if anything, whiter. Holland went on: "Give me all your money, please."

"Our money?"

"Come on. Yes." He waited while they went through their pockets. He collected their money. "Now," he asked, "are you hungry?" And, when they didn't answer: "Because you're going to order a meal, a large meal."

"But you just took our cash; we couldn't pay—"

"Now you're beginning to understand. Waitress!" Holland yelled.

A plump girl appeared with her little order pad. "My friends," Holland said, "would each like the biggest steak you have, with all the trimmings."

"Domestic or terrestrial, sir?"

"Terrestrial. It's more expensive, isn't it? Splendid. They will also start with two Sun of Venus cocktails, native clams, chowder..."

"Honest," said the ashen one. "I'm not very hungry."

Holland looked behind him at Larry Gurdin and went on ordering the rest of the dinner. The waitress departed with a professional smile.

"When they find out we can't pay," the ashen one groaned, "they'll call the police."

"Fine," said Holland, and waited until the girl brought their drinks. He smiled, toasted them with an invisible glass, signaled Larry, and headed for the door. Larry covered his retreat, then followed him outside.

"That was very neat," Larry said in the bright hot glare of the Venusian cloud-blanket.

"I thought so."

"You're shrewd, Holland; you should do very well at Bridge Haven."

"Bridge Haven?"

"Our estate. Come on, we'll get a 'copter cab."

V

"THIS IS an unexpected pleasure," Saul Gurdin said. He was wearing slacks and a sport shirt, lounging clothes circa mid-twentieth century style. He still looked like a bear. He addressed his words at Holland, avoiding his son's eyes altogether. "Julia has been telling me so much about her brother."

Brother? thought Holland. For Larry's benefit? Probably. Saul Gurdin knew that Larry was aware of the truth about Julia and Holland, Holland decided. But the elder Gurdin did not know if *he* were supposed to be aware of it, from his son's point of view.

"Is Julia here?" Larry asked.

"Preparing herself for dinner," Gurdin said. "You're barely in time."

"And plenty hungry," Holland admitted. He needed time to think, and realized he wouldn't get it. He found the idea of killing Julia sans status advancement surprisingly appealing. She de-

served it, certainly; often a status victim didn't.

"That's excellent," the Snoop told him.

"What's excellent?"

"It's the first moral distinction of that sort I've seen you make. An out-and-out psychopath wouldn't."

"YOU'RE always harping on psychopathy," Holland retorted silently while the elder Gurdin led them inside through a long, alabaster white Georgian portico.

"True, I am. Did it ever occur to you that psychopathy might be the bane of life?"

"I never thought about it."

"Well, it did occur to you that life in abundance seems to have been the aim of our Creator, didn't it?"

"I guess so," Holland said.

"And if one life-form—or better still, one single entity—is indifferent to the continued existence of another, is, as a matter of fact, quite willing to end it without adequate motivation—"

"You lost me somewhere."

"One kills for food, or to protect one's mate or offspring, or in self-defense—but in a completely artificial system like the social status system here in your culture one kills, indifferently, for what on the natural level is a completely unsatisfactory reason."

"You mean status advancement? But it's getting ahead."

"Yes? How?"

"Well—"

"Additional status does not necessarily mean additional wealth, even granting wealth as a sufficient motive for killing. Status advancement brings no more food, or protection of self or family, no greater health, no longer life, no increased number of progeny. What you gain, I take it, is social prestige?"

"WELL," Holland said, suddenly and strangely on the defensive, "the ultimate goal of a Climber is Thirty-two and immunity. That's protection for the self and family, isn't it?"

"How many Thirty-twos have you at any given time? Ten? A dozen perhaps? They are hardly significant, Holland. But to return: the point I make is that for the first time you actually weighed killing. Tell me: At this moment would you rather kill Saul Gurdin legally, and gain his status points—assuming that were possible—or murder Julia outside the law because of her double-dealing?"

"Julia," Holland said at once.

"You see? There's hope for us."

"Us?"

"I am neither parasite nor disinterested observer. I told you our relationship was symbiotic."

"I still don't see how."

"Life," said the Snoop. "The purpose of the Universe. Life and more life. A psychopathic society is anti-life. If you grant this, if you grant both of these points and if, as it has been postulated both by your religion and your astrophysics that there is a constant conserver of the physical universe, doesn't it seem possible to you that a conserver of the life of the universe might also exist?"

"You?" Holland gasped, forgetting himself and using his voice.

"What was that?" Saul Gurdin asked.

"Nothing. Nothing." They had entered the estate proper, now. It was vast and Georgian, two dozen Monticellos asprawl over the filled in Venusian marshland. Holland could smell the marsh and wondered what they used for insect control at night.

"SNOOP?" Holland called inside his mind. The Snoop didn't answer.

"There's Julia now," Gurdin said.

Julia came across a polished hardwood floor toward them. She wore a white low-necked gown which fit the mood of Bridge Haven. Holland half-expected to hear the lilting strains of a minuet and see the great hall fill with curtseying girls and bowing men.

"Larry!" Julia cried, running into the younger Gurdin's arms. It didn't seem to bother Saul Gurdin at all, Holland observed. Naturally, it wouldn't. If they had already taken out the Permit on Larry, which seemed likely, Julia would want to gain and hold his confidence. "I've been waiting for you to come, hoping you would come tonight so you could show me around Bridge Haven," she said. "Your father wanted to do the honors, but it wouldn't have been the same. Do we have time before dinner?"

"I doubt it," Gurdin replied. "Dinner is probably ready now. What you children forget is that a Venusian day is nearly a month long; you don't have to worry about nightfall. Well, shall we eat?"

THEY DID, in a dining room as unnecessarily vast as this mammoth Monticello had augered. That is, all but Larry ate. Larry said he wasn't hungry, although he did take coffee from the pew-

ter pot which was brought to the table. After dinner, Saul Gurdin leaned back with a cigar and patted his belly, which had swelled considerably. "You children take the grand tour if you want," he said. "Brandy and a cigar is what I want."

"Join us, Bob?" Larry asked, as Julia took his hand and led him from the table.

"Now, Larry," Julia said, pouting. "I hardly ever get a chance to be alone with you. I'm sure my brother will understand; won't you Bob dear?"

"But he hasn't seen Bridge Haven," Larry protested weakly.

"After cigar and brandy, let your father show it to him," Julia said by way of dismissing the subject.

Larry looked forlornly at Holland, but followed Julia from the dining room. "Brandy?" asked Saul Gurdin.

"What about our conversation of this afternoon, Mr. Gurdin?"

"Yes, that. Well, you see—" Gurdin's voice trailed off in sullen confusion.

"Well, well, well," Holland said. "Don't tell me Julia decided an additional criss-cross was possible."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, I guess." Gurdin's attitude, however, served to confirm his son's suspicions.

"I'm still considering it," Saul Gurdin said and abruptly launched himself into an effusive lecture on the points of interest at Bridge Haven. This took the better part of half an hour and showed no signs of ending until a scream cut the flow off in mid-sentence.

"That was Julia!" Gurdin gasped. He sounded very surprised.

TOGETHER, they ran from the dining room. The scream had seemed quite distant to Holland, but Saul Gurdin covered ground with unexpected speed, if not grace. They sped through sculptured gardens and across streams which were spanned by miniature suspension, cantilever, concrete-arch and continuous truss bridges.

Julia screamed again. Much closer. A hot wind plucked at Holland's clothing. With the heat and humidity, they couldn't run much further.

"The marsh," Gurdin panted; "she's in the marsh."

And then, crossing a final bubbling stream—flowing from a hot spring, Holland decided—they came upon Larry. He was standing perfectly still, leaning forward from the hips slightly.

He was watching Julia.

Who was waist-deep in quicksand and floundering.

"Courage!" Gurdin cried. "Courage, child; I'll get some branches."

"Extend your arms like floats," Holland said practically. "They'll distribute your weight so you'll sink more slowly. And don't flounder like that; you'll only go quicker. Keep calm. We'll get you out with the branches." He could hear Gurdin plunging back across the miniature bridge toward the nearest of the gardens.

"My boy," the Snoop said paternally. "Do you realize you're trying to *save* her life?"

"Gurdin saw; it would be murder. Then the younger Gurdin couldn't help me. Don't worry, I'm not getting soft."

"But I thought—"

"Well, you can just forget it."

Julia wailed, "It's pulling me. Like wet hands."

"You're rationalizing," the Snoop persisted. "What *did* Gurdin see? An accident, possibly. Julia hasn't accused Larry."

"She will, before she goes under—if we let her go under. We can't."

GURDIN came plunging back across the bridge with several large uprooted shrubs. Snorting and panting, he thrust them out across the bog toward Julia, who grasped the branches. The quicksand was now sucking almost at her armpits. Except for Julia's immersion, the sand looked wet but quite innocent.

"Here," Saul Gurdin told Holland. "Grab these shrubs and pull."

Holland did so. Between them, they drew Julia loose slowly. The sand made faint sucking, protesting noises. Larry Gurdin stood there watching, mopping his brow. When Julia finally reached firm ground, she sank down on it, exhausted.

"Did Larry—" Gurdin began.

Julia shook her head and pointed mutely at her throat. The elder Gurdin surprised everyone by producing a small flask, uncorking it and tilting it to her lips. Julia swallowed and gagged, her eyes suddenly filling with tears. Somewhere nearby, a bird chattered angrily at them.

"Well?" Gurdin repeated. He was looking at Larry now, his face livid.

"I told her about the bog," Larry said. "She insisted on seeing it. She said, 'What's

quicksand like? I never saw it.' We came here; she tried to push me. We struggled and she fell in." He out-stared his father. "Let her try to deny it."

"Are you strong enough to walk now?" Holland asked Julia.

"I think so."

HE HELPED her to her feet. She stood there for a moment, leaning against him, brushing the slime from her gown.

"Well, deny it," Larry said hotly.

Julia didn't look at him. "I don't want to talk about it," she said. "I only want to get away from here. I'm drenched."

They began to walk back across the bridge, Julia leaning against Holland for support. "If you tried to murder your future mother—" Gurdin began.

"Then you admit it!" Larry cried.

"Certainly I admit it. Julia and I will be married, won't we, my dear?"

Julia looked first at Larry, then at Holland. Holland tried to keep his face blank. Julia nodded slowly, drawing away from Holland and walking without aid when they crossed the third bridge. No one said anything on the long walk back to the house, but Larry tried to catch Holland's eye several times, particularly as they crossed the deeper, swifter streams. Holland couldn't help smiling but, he realized, it might have been the Snoop.

"Snoop," he said, "what am I going to do now?"

"Larry wants you to kill Julia. He tried once and failed. He probably knows he won't get another chance. Julia wants your protection. Saul Gurdin—"

"—Isn't sure," Holland finished for the Snoop. "Why doesn't Julia contradict Larry's story, though?"

"She wants your protection, but she's still going to try for Larry. She doesn't want to talk about it, doesn't want Saul Gurdin to know she's afraid. What are you going to do, Holland?"

"That's what I just asked you."

THE SNOOP had the advantage. It went away to the back of Holland's mind and although he tried to summon it, there was no response. There was likewise no response from either Gurdin or from Julia all the way back to the great house. They walked like robots, Holland thought, each immersed in his own plans.

One of Gurdin's servants, a leathery-skinned old settler with a grave face surprisingly like a chimpanzee's, opened the front door for them, then plucked at Holland's sleeve as Holland walked past him. "Begging your pardon, sir," he said. "You're Robert Holland, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Holland automatically.

"Heard all about you on the video," the old man said.

Holland waited until the others had walked on, then grasped the old man's tunic and drew the chimpanzee face close to his own. "What are you going to do about it?" he rasped.

"Oh, not I, sir. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I am an old man. I have no ambitions."

"Just don't you forget it."

"No, sir. I won't."

Holland began to walk away.

"But the others, sir."

"Others?"

"I thought I would tell you. They don't like old Jonah. Well, and what of it? I lose no love on them. However, certain of them are dreaming of ways to collect a certain twelve status points. The cook. The gardener. Even the chambermaid. Fair game, they said. Right here in this house. Oh, there's nothing specific. But my advice is to be on your guard, sir. Every step of the way."

"THANK you, Jonah," Holland said with feeling. The old man stuck a dry hot paw in Holland's hand. Holland shook it and went after the others. Outside Bridge Haven, it was bad enough. Fair game. Anyone could kill him, legally, but first they would have to identify him. Here he was known, and fair game as elsewhere.

He wondered if he should leave immediately. It seemed like a sensible idea, except that the chances of spacing out for Earth without help were nil. But if he could kill Julia now at once, Larry Gurdin would help him; that was the bargain. A vision swam before his eyes. Julia, exhausted, drawn from the bog.

Suddenly, quite unexpectedly, he felt sorry for her. It was ridiculous, he told himself. He had an impulse to laugh again. He cursed the Snoop thoroughly, but the Snoop did not respond. Why should he feel sorry for Julia? She had double-crossed him cheerfully enough, hadn't she?

"Sympathy," said the Snoop. "Empathy. Conscience. You're making splendid progress, Robert. May I call you Robert?"

"What the hell kind of splendid progress is that. I'm fouling up my own chances."

"Perhaps not. At any rate, you're almost cured. How do you feel about Climbing, Robert?"

"Why—indifferent! I just don't care about it. Besides, if a man didn't use up all his energy thinking of new and better ways to Climb, status-wise, he might be able to concentrate on making more money or having a good time, or getting married and raising a fine family—"

"Substitution. The first out-phase. If we can get you off Venus in one piece, you'll be a new man. And you won't be alone. You'll be surprised at the number of Climbers who have been cured."

"Cured? How?"

"SYMBIOSIS," said the Snoop. "My mind is not like yours. I've been living in yours, but you've also been living in mine. Since mine is directed toward your thoughts, that means you've been examining Robert Holland's mind through the eyes of a Snoop. Purely a figure of speech, naturally, since I have no eyes. At any rate, that is where the symbiosis—*watch out!*"

Holland had been walking through the well of the spiral staircase which ascended to the upper storeys of the mansion. He heeded the Snoop's warning almost instinctively, lunging aside as something large and heavy landed on the marble floor not two feet from him with a dull thud. Holland looked up but could see no one on the staircase.

What had fallen—what had almost struck him—was a suitcase. Holland hefted it. Fifty pounds or more, he judged. He opened it. The suitcase was filled with hundreds of microreader spools. Dropped several storeys, it made a weapon of sorts. Probably not lethal, he thought. The attempt had been a crude one, but there were born Climbers and there were failures. The next attempt might not be so crude.

It might even be successful.

"What floor?" Holland asked the Snoop.

"Third, I think."

"Let's go."

VI

THE CHAMBERMAID, a tall gray-haired woman with considerable fuzz on her upper lip, was feeding wet clothing into the wall ironer when Holland found her. He dropped the suitcase at her feet but she didn't bat an eye-

lash. Crude but cool. Well, there were people like that.

"Are you alone up here?" Holland demanded.

"I think so."

"Then you tried to kill me."

She shrugged. "There's a law against it?"

"No, damn you, but—"

"You can't kill *me*, Mr. Holland. No one saw me make the attempt, so it wouldn't be self-defense. I won't lie to you. If I get another opportunity, I'm going to try again. With more success, I hope. I'm only a Six, you see. Incidentally, do you have any advice?"

She spoke so matter-of-factly that Holland found himself replying: "Advice on what?"

"You're quite a Climber, I hear. Advice on committing status murder."

"Go," said Holland, "to hell." He was trying hard not to giggle. The Snoop seemed giddy; the Snoop wanted to giggle.

SAUL GURDIN was alone downstairs. He looked very unhappy. "Julia's in bed," he said. "Fagged, I guess. Larry's mooning, if Venus had a moon. What do you want?"

"Did you know I was fair game?"

"Servants told me. They're an ineffectual lot; got to keep them happy. You can take care of yourself, can't you?"

"Not when I'm asleep. Not when my food is poisoned."

"You can always leave if you want to. Can't you?"

"Where would I go?"

"Umm-mm. But you can't stay here permanently. Do you have some kind of a deal with Larry? Or Julia? I'm beginning to think I wouldn't put it past either of them."

"I thought you want to marry Julia."

"Sex and self-protection. A wife can't take out a Permit against her husband. But if you're planning something—"

Holland took out his blaster and pointed it at Saul Gurdin. The big bearish face blanched. "I could kill you now," Holland said. "I'm not going to; I only want to prove a point. You're safe. If I have any deal, it doesn't concern you. Now, I'm tired. It's been a long day. I want a safe place to sleep."

"Second floor," said Gurdin. "Any room. You can bolt the door from the inside. All right?"

Before Holland could answer, someone yelled. It wasn't Julia. It sounded like Larry.

"Not again," Gurdin wailed. "I'm beginning to wonder about Climbing. I should have

left well enough alone, as they say."

"It was upstairs!" Holland shouted. "Let's go."

"To the rescue?" the Snoop asked. The Snoop sounded amused.

"Larry's my ticket off Venus," Holland said, running for the stairs.

THEY MET the tall gray-haired chambermaid on the landing. "It came from in there," she said, pointing at one of the doors in the long hallway.

There was the sound of things being thrown, things shattering. Holland ran to the door grasped the handle, shook it. "Open up!"

"Help!" Larry Gurdin cried from inside the room.

The door was locked. Holland rammed it with his shoulder once, bruisingly. The door held firm. He fired his blaster at the lock mechanism and kicked the door in.

Larry Gurdin was on the floor. His shirt was torn and bloody, but the wound seemed superficial. The bedroom was a shambles. Julia stood over Larry, poised on one foot like a dancer. The heel of her raised shoe was retracted, revealing the three inch metal spike. She glanced at Holland and Saul Gurdin, not seeing Larry roll over and away. She brought the heel down swiftly where his neck had been. The metal spike caught in the hardwood floor. She shook her foot to get it loose, but the spike held fast.

Larry climbed unsteadily to his feet, staggering toward her, his arms outstretched. "I'll kill you with my bare hands."

Julia strained frantically, her foot abruptly coming clear of the trick shoe. Her momentum carried her head-first toward Larry, her head butting his chin and jerking his head back. He stumbled toward the bed and sat down on it.

"You!" Julia screamed at Holland and Saul Gurdin. "If you hadn't interfered, he'd be dead by now."

"A fine bargain you made," Larry told Holland sullenly. "I thought I'd have to do it myself. But she—"

Julia flung herself at him, shouting, "You call yourself a man!" They rolled off the bed, their hands about each other's neck.

"By God, I'll kill him myself!" Saul Gurdin stormed, grabbing the blaster from Holland's hand. Without turning, Holland drove his elbow into the older man's stomach and heard a woosh of air, which meant that Gurdin was out of commission for a while.

HOLLAND ran to Julia and Larry, kneeling near them, trying to pull them apart. Larry kicked him; Julia tried to bite his hand. He tore them apart but they both began to attack him, Julia with tooth and nail and Larry with awkward fists. Saul Gurdin reeled toward them with the blaster; his face was green. He clubbed at Larry with the stock of the large hand-weapon but hit Julia instead. She screamed and fell away from Holland.

Just then the chambermaid rushed into the room with a triumphant smile, plucked the weapon from Gurdin's hand and pointed it at Holland. "Twelve Points!" she cried, and fired.

But Holland was already moving before she fired. He felt the blaster sear air over his head, moved inside her long arm before she could fire again and grappled with her for possession of the weapon. He got it and pushed her away. She stumbled over Julia, who was just trying to get up.

"What do *you* want?" Julia gasped just before the chambermaid slugged her with a hard bony fist.

"You're fired!" Saul Gurdin cried, walking toward the chambermaid, who was now wrestling on the floor with Julia. Gurdin tripped over the spike shoe and fell on top of them. The chambermaid screamed.

"You turncoat," Larry told Holland, coming for him.

"Me?" Holland parried a clumsily-thrown right cross. "Me, a turncoat? I only want to get out of here with my skin."

LARRY swung again. It was his best punch and it took Holland on the side of the jaw; Larry went very white when Holland merely backed up a step, shook his head and waited for more—if any.

There wasn't any. "I'd already arranged it for you, before I came to Julia's room. It's the spacer *Orion*, leaving in five hours."

"But why, if you thought I—"

"I wanted to get rid of you. I thought you might make trouble. I—"

Saul Gurdin appeared from the swirl of arms and legs on the floor. He cuffed his son soundly with an open right hand. Larry sat down, which made Julia desert the chambermaid with a glad cry, and attack him with an even gladder one.

"You could have killed Larry with the blaster when he

attacked you," the Snoop told Holland.

"What for? He couldn't hurt me. I'm fed up with—"

"Wonderful!" chirped the Snoop, if a silent voice could be said to chirp. "My work here is almost finished. Listen to me, Robert. You'll get away. Larry's arranged things for you with the captain of the *Orion*. On Earth, you'll find others who are cured. You'll know them by their actions, their behavior, their indifference to Status which, unlike Saul Gurdin's former indifference, is permanent. You understand?"

"No. I—"

"You will. It's happening now, Robert. You're cured of psychopathy."

"How can you tell?"

"I can tell. It has nothing to do with you. It's me; it's my reward. Perhaps—who knows?—I'm a Climber, too. A Snoop cures psychopathy, which is a Snoop's purpose on any world in the universe, and then a Snoop—a Snoop—"

"Snoop? Snoop, where are you?"

IT HAD happened before, but not like this. The Snoop was going, permanently. He could sense it.

"—buds—" The Snoop's final word. *Buds?* What the devil did the Snoop mean by that?

Larry and Julia were fighting. Julia, who used teeth, elbows and knees uninhibitedly, was getting the better of it. All at once, she stopped. She stood up. "Who?" she said. "What—?"

Larry wiped blood from his face. He looked bewildered; he seemed to be listening to something.

"Who said that?" the chambermaid demanded. No one looked at her. "Voices..." she added.

Saul Gurdin alone seemed composed. He was almost smiling. "Snoop?" he said. Holland knew what the answer would be. *Snoop I am.*

The Snoop was a Climber too. The Snoop cured people —and budded.

The Snoop?

Four Snoops now.

Holland turned around and went outside. No one tried to stop him. If careful, he should be able to reach the spaceport, he thought. The captain of the *Orion* had been paid, expected him.

"Be careful," someone said behind him. He turned around. It was Julia, but it wasn't Julia's voice.

"Good luck," Gurdin called after Holland. It wasn't—quite—Saul Gurdin's voice either. "And thank you, Holland."

★

HOW TO COUNT ON YOUR FINGERS

ARTICLE

by the author
of "Wapshot's Demon"

FREDERICK PHOL

EVERYONE knows that the decimal system of counting, which is based on the ten digits 0 through 9, has driven out all other systems and has become universal, by virtue of being simplest and best. Like a good many things that "everyone knows", there is one thing wrong with that statement. It isn't so.

True, it is not that any of the predecessors of the decimal system is likely to make a comeback. There is, for instance, vanishingly little chance that we will return to the Babylonian sexagesimal (to the base 60) system—though that is a tough old bird, and will not be finally dead as long as we count sixty minutes to the hour, and 360 degrees to the circle. There are traces of systems to other bases surviving in such terms as "score" and the French word for eighty, *"quatre-vingt"*, suggesting an extinct system to the base twenty; and in terms like "dozen", "gross", and so on, which appear to derive from a system to the base twelve.

In science fiction, most of

the speculation on numbering-systems of the future has dwelt on this base twelve "duodecimal") system; but it is hard to understand why. It is argued that a twelve-digit system simplifies writing "decimal" equivalents of such fractions as 1/3 and 1/6; but that seems a small reward for the enormous task of conversion. Setting aside the merits or demerits of the duodecimal system itself, think of the cost of such a change. For a starter, our decimal system of coinage either goes down the drain, to be replaced by a new one, or lingers on as a clumsy anachronism like the British L/s/d. And that cost is only the bare beginning. Science is measurement and interpretation; without measurement, interpretation is foggy soul-searching; and measurement is number. Change our system of writing numbers, and you must translate nearly the entire recorded body of human knowledge—lab reports and tax returns, cost estimates and time studies, knowledge about the behavior of *mu* mesons, and knowledge about transactions on the New York Stock Exchange.

The project of converting the world's essential records from one system of numbering to another staggers the mind. Its cost is measureable not merely in millions of dollars, but in perhaps millions of man-years.

That being so, why is this enormous project now in process?

THE ANSWER is, simply, that machines aren't any smarter than Russian peasants.

This is not meant to run down the Russians, but only to observe that UNIVAC and Ivan have a lot of things in common—and one of these things is a lack of skill in performing decimal multiplication and division.

Let's take a simple sum—say, 87 x 93—and see how it would be done by us, by Ivan and by UNIVAC. You and I, having completed at least a couple of years of grade school, write down a compact little operation like this:

```
  87
 x93
 261
-----
 783
-----
8091
```

That wasn't hard to do. If we had to, we probably could have done it in our heads.

However, Ivan would find that pretty hard, because he didn't happen to go to grade school. (And neither did

UNIVAC.) What Ivan would do in a similiar case is a process called "Russian multiplication"—or, sometimes, "mediation and duplication." (Which is to say, "halving and doubling".) It consists merely of writing down two columns of figures, side by side. The first column starts with one of your original figures, which is successively halved until there is nothing left to halve. Ivan didn't understand fractions very well, so he simply threw them away—he would write half of 25, for instance, as 12.

The second column starts with the other number, which is successively doubled as many times as the first number was halved. As follows:

87	93
43	186
21	372
10	744
5	1488
2	2976
1	5952

Having got this far, Ivan examines the left-hand, or halved, column for even numbers. He finds two of them —the fourth number, 10, and the sixth, 2. He strikes out the numbers next to them in the right-hand (or doubled) column—that is, 744 and 2976. He then adds up the remaining numbers in the right-hand column:

93
186
372
1488
5952
8091

Having gone all around Robin Hood's barn to do it, as it appears, he has wound up with the same answer we got.

That may not seem like much of an accomplishment, at first glimpse, until you stop to think of Ivan's innocence of the multiplication table; and then it becomes pretty ingenious indeed. Ivan turns out to be a clever fellow.

Yet he was not so clever, all the same, but what he would have laughed in your face if you had accused him of seeking help from the binary system of numbering.

BUT THAT is what he did; and that, of course, is what UNIVAC and its electronic brothers do today.

To see *how* UNIVAC does this, let's take some numbers apart and see what is inside them.

Our own decimal numbers—87, for example—are simply a shorthand, "positional" way of saying (in this case) 8×10^1

plus 7×10^0. The larger the number the shorter the shorthand becomes. 1956, for instance, is shorthand for one-times-ten-cubed, plus nine-times-ten-squared, plus five-times-ten, plus six-times-one. Or:

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \times 10^3 &= 1{,}000 \\ 9 \times 10^2 &= 900 \\ 5 \times 10^1 &= 50 \\ 6 \times 10^0 &= 6 \\ \hline & 1{,}956 \end{aligned}$$

(In case it has been a long time since you went to high-school, 10^1 just means 10; 10^0 means ten divided by ten, or 1. No matter how long it has been since you went to high school, you ought to remember that 10^2 means ten times ten, or a hundred, and so on.)

It has been said in many science-fiction stories (and not very often anywhere else) that this is homo sapiens, "natural" system of counting, because, look, don't we have ten fingers on our hands? As a theory, let's not worry ourselves about this too much; if true, it will have plenty of chance to prove itself when our exploring rockets turn up some twelve-digited and duodecimal extraterrestrials. (Or alternatively, when our archaeologists discover that the Babylonians had six times as many fingers as the rest of us.) Still, if we assume the fable is true we can conveniently "explain" UNIVAC by saying that the computer, not having ten fingers to count on, has to use a simpler system. The name of this simpler system is the "binary" or "dyadic" system; and it is this system that most of the world's numbers are being translated into now, in order to be taped and fed into computers.

The binary system obeys all the laws of the decimal. It is positional; it can represent any finite number; it can be used for addition, subtraction, multiplication division, exponential functions and any other arithmetical process known to man or to UNIVAC. The only difference is that it is to the base 2 instead of the base 10. It lops off eight of the ten basic decimal digits—0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9—retaining only 0 and 1.

You can count with it, of course. 1 is one. 10 is two. 11 is three. 100 is four. 101 is five, 110 is six; 111 is seven; 1000 is eight; 1001 is nine; 1011 is ten, and so on. You can subtract or add with it:

Four	100
Plus three	11
Is seven	111

You can multiply or divide with it:

Six	110
Divided by three	11
Is two	10

And you can do all of these things rather simply, without the necessity of memorizing multiplication tables, thus freeing your pre-adolescent evenings for baseball and doorbell-ringing.

LOOK BACK at Ivan's system of Russian multiplication; let us do it over again in a slightly different way. Let's halve both columns, the right as well as the left. And instead of striking out any numbers, let us write a "1" next to the odd numbers and a "0" next to the even ones. As follows:

87	1	93	1
43	1	46	0
21	1	23	1
10	0	11	1
5	1	5	1
2	0	2	0
1	1	1	1

Now, you might not know what you have just accomplished—and Ivan certainly wouldn't—but you have translated two decimal numbers into their binary equivalents. Reading from bottom to top, 1010111 is binary for 87; 1011101 is binary for 93.

To see what these mean, remember how we dissected a decimal number. A binary number comes apart in the same sort of pieces; the only difference is that the pieces are multiples of powers of 2, not of powers of 10. 1010111, then, is a shorthand way of saying:

$$
\begin{aligned}
1 \times 2^6 &= 64 \\
0 \times 2^5 &= 0 \\
1 \times 2^4 &= 16 \\
0 \times 2^3 &= 0 \\
1 \times 2^2 &= 4 \\
1 \times 2^1 &= 2 \\
1 \times 2^0 &= 1 \\
\hline
&\quad 87
\end{aligned}
$$

which is what we said it was in the first place.

When you feed numbers like 87 and 93 into UNIVAC, its digestion gets upset—in fact, it won't accept them until they are predigested. So you must first convert them into binary digits ("bidgets" or "bits"), just as we did above. Such binary numbers as 1010111 and 1011101 UNIVAC handles very well indeed. Multiply them? No trouble at all. UNIVAC, in its electronic way, does something like this:

```
      1010111
     x1011101
     -------
      1010111
            0
     1010111
    1010111
   1010111
         0
  1010111
  ---------------
  1111110011011
```

That may look frightening, because it is unfamiliar; but it is still the same old product of 87 x 93; it is shorthand for:

1×2^{12}	4096
1×2^{11}	2048
1×2^{10}	1024
1×2^{9}	512
1×2^{8}	256
1×2^{7}	128
0×2^{6}	0
0×2^{5}	0
1×2^{4}	16
1×2^{3}	8
0×2^{2}	0
1×2^{1}	2
1×2^{0}	1
	8091

Observe the simplicity! True, the number is long; but see how simple manipulating it becomes. Addition, for instance, is reduced to simple counting. (Binary counting, of course—1, 10, 11, 100 and so on. You can call it "one", "ten", "eleven" and "one hundred" and so on, if you like, with no great harm.) To add a column of figures, like

```
  101
  100
  110
  111
 -----
10110
```

you simply count the ones in the right-hand column (1, 10; write down 0 and 1 to carry); then count the ones in the middle column, starting of course with the one you carried (1, 10, 11; write down 1 and 1 to carry); then count the ones in the left-hand column, again remembering the one you carried (1, 10, 11, 100, 101; write down 1 and 10 to carry; write down the 10.)

That is, I submit, about as simple as an arithmetical operation can get; and multiplication is nearly as much so. Multiplication becomes merely a matter of writing down the number, moved an appropriate number of places to the left, or not writing down the number at all (depending on whether the digit you are multiplying by is "1" or "0"). Thereafter it is addition; and addition, as we have seen, is merely counting. No multiplication tables! No tedious memorizing! No wonder UNIVAC and Ivan like it!

If binary arithmatic has a

fault, it is that it is so excessively easy. It becomes boring.

But the world's work is full of boring operations that get done, anyhow. We have found two good ways to handle them —either to turn them over to machines (like UNIVAC), which do not have the capacity for boredom; or to learn to do them as a matter of mechanical routine.

MY WIFE observes (as most wives sometimes observe) that it doesn't much matter what sort of change she suggests, I can usually find a dozen splendid reasons for keeping things just as they are. Since the human animal is conservative, most of us can find objections to any sort of change. ("Better the devil you know.") Since the human animal is also educable, we often, however, overcome our objections when the change promises rewards.

Let us see what the drawbacks and rewards of change-over to binary notation may be. Not that the case is really arguable, since the silent vote of the computers constitutes a carrying majority over our human veto; but let us see if there are any advantages for us borable, error-prone humans.

The drawbacks stand out immediately, starting with the sheer physical size of a binary number as contrasted with its decimal equivalent. Still, a binary number isn't so *very* much longer than a decimal (about three times) as to be *ipso facto* out of the question. As a matter of fact, really large numbers are hopelessly unwieldy in any notation at all. In the prevailing decimal system, scientific people express large numbers either as approximations (3×10^{47}, for instance) or in terms of their prime factors and exponents ($19^3 \times 641^5 \times 1861$), or in other factored or shorthand ways. Even the headlines in our daily papers are more likely to read $6.5 BILLION than $6.500,000,000.

For "household-sized" numbers—oh, up to a million, let's say—it doesn't seem as though the mere matter of length ought to be a prevailing count against binary notation. You might use twenty binary digits to write a number that big (as against seven in decimal notation); and a number such as—to take one at random—10100111100101100010 is pretty hideous. But is 1372866, its decimal equivalent, utterly lovely?

Perhaps the number itself isn't so bad; perhaps the way we are reading it could stand some improvement. Look at

the number 1111110011011, for instance. You just came across it a couple of pages ago (our old friend, the product of 87 and 93), and yet you almost certainly failed to recognize it. Is it because its recognition value is intrinsically low? Or because we lack practice in reading (and in establishing conventions of writing) that sort of number?

In decimal notation, remember, we simplify the reading of such large numbers by setting off groups of three. 5000000000000 is pretty hard to read by itself, though 5,000,000,000,000 reveals itself to be five trillion rather conveniently. Why should we not adopt a similar convention for binary numbers? There is no reason to stick to groups of three; let's make it groups of five, and thus write the expression for the product of 87 x 93—that is, 8091—as follows: 111,11100,11011.

Well, that's a help; but as is often the case, a little progress in one direction merely brightens the light on a related problem still unsolved. The related problem here is the problem of subvocalization. All of us are lipreaders; even if the motion of the lip muscles is so thoroughly suppressed as to be invisible to the naked eye, the larynx is still forming the sounds of everything we read—or think, for that matter. And groups like oneoneone comma oneoneoneohoh comma oneoneohoneone simply do not pronounce well.

But being able to state a problem is progressing far toward solving it. It is apparent that there is no difficulty involved in assigning more pronounceable phonetic values to the parts of binary notation.

ONE SUCH system is, in fact, already widely in use. If you walk into the *Bank of Ireland* bar in Chelsea on a noisy night, you may come across a couple of Merchant Marine officers having a relaxed and private conversation which is not subject to either eavesdropping or interference, regardless of the surrounding noise. If you do, they are probably radiomen; and they are talking to each other in code. For the dots and dashes of Morse there is a well established pronouncing convention; "dit" is a dot, "dah" is a dash. If we merely appropriate this convention for our binary numbers, we may sacrifice some efficiency —no doubt an even more compact and clear system could be worked out from basic phonetic principles. But it offers a very special advantage: it

works. We don't have to test it or doubt it; we know it works; it has worked all over the world for countless radio operators for a period of decades.

Let us then pronounce "1" as "dit" and "o" as "dah". 111,-11100,11011 then becomes dididit dididididahdah dididahdidit—

And we notice something odd. We already conceded that the binary system had an intrinsic drawback, in that its terms were by definition *always* less compact than the decimal.

Yet if we wish to transmit the decimal number 8091 in Morse code, it must be expressed like this: dahdahdahdidit dahdahdahdahdah dahdahdahdahdit didahdahdahdah. That is, four groups, each comprising five "bits", or twenty "bits" in all.

But its binary equivalent needs only three groups totalling thirteen "bits", as we have just seen.

Our concession was evidently premature. In this one special case, at least—and it is far from an unimportant one—the binary system can be made *more* compact than the decimal.

Having found one such case, let us be encouraged enough to look for more.

WHEN I was around ten, we kids used to kill time on long auto rides by playing a game of counting. We would pick a common phenomenon—cows, or Fords, or "For Sale" signs on farms—and see who, in a given period, had spotted the most. It almost always kept us quiet and out of the driver's hair for the first mile or two—and almost never beyond that.

The trouble was that we counted on our fingers. That worked beautifully for numbers up to ten, of course. It worked passably for numbers up to twenty, or even to thirty—it wasn't much of a trick to remember that we were on the second, or third, go-round of finger-counting. But when we got to numbers much above that we began to rely pretty heavily on our individually differing memories of just how many times we had counted up to ten; and that's when the fights would start.

Naturally, we were counting by the decimal system.

Could we have done better with the binary?

Spread out the ten fingers on your two hands before you (don't let's get into semantic arguments about whether a "thumb" is a "finger"—you know what I mean), and let's see what can be done with them.

We start by establishing a convention. An extended finger is a "1". A retracted finger is a "0".

Clench your fists, and begin to count:

Extend the right little finger. That is 1—in both binary and decimal notation.

Retract the little finger and extend the right ring finger. Read it as 10 (or, in decimal notation, two).

Keep the ring finger out and extend the little finger beside it. Read: 11. (Decimal notation, three.)

Retract both those fingers, and extend the middle finger of the right hand. Read 100 (binary) or four (decimal).

And so on. You may find that waggling your fingers like this requires practice or natural flexibility—unless, of course, you make it easy on yourself by resting the fingers against the edge of a table.

Your fingers are now indeed "digits", and you are using them in positional notation. Observe that you can represent any number from 00000,00000 (both hands clenched) to 11111,11111 (both hands extended). Next time you want to count a reasonably large number—say, the number of cars ahead of you in a tunnel jam, or the number of hits against a Giant pitcher—you might try this system. It's good anywhere from 0 to 1023. Indeed, by a few obvious extensions—for instance, by adding on successively extended or retracted positions of the wrist, elbows and so on—you can soon reach numbers beyond which you are never likely to count.

Moreover, your running total is available to you at any time (as it is not in the decimal system of finger counting, for instance, where you must count the fingers themselves to get such a total); you merely read it off. Suppose, for instance, you are out hiking with a companion (having lost your pedometer, let us say), and your friend wants to know how many paces you can go in a given period of time. You keep count on your fingers; and at the end of the time you see you have the little finger, index finger and thumb of the left hand, and the thumb and ring finger of the right hand, extended. Reading off your hands according to our established convention, you find you have come 10011,10010 paces, and you pass on the information to him according to the pronouncing convention: "didahdahdidit didahdahdidah."

Of course, your friend may

be a square who still uses the old stick-in-the-mud decimal system, so you may want to translate for him. That's easy enough, if you remember the decimal equivalents of each of the fingers:

Left Hand

Little finger:	$2^9 = 512$
Ring finger:	$2^8 = 256$
Middle finger:	$2^7 = 128$
Index finger:	$2^6 = 64$
Thumb:	$2^5 = 32$

Right Hand

Thumb:	$2^4 = 16$
Index finger:	$2^3 = 8$
Middle finger:	$2^2 = 4$
Ring finger:	$2^1 = 2$
Little finger:	$2^0 = 1$

Accordingly, to convert your finger-count into decimal figures, just add up the finger equivalents given above; for the aforementioned 10011,10010, read:

Left little finger:	512
Left index finger:	64
Left thumb:	32
Right thumb:	16
Right ring finger:	2
	626

And inform your friend you have come 626 paces.

AS PROMISED, we have found another case where an ingenious use of binary notation is actually more compact than decimal—*by a factor of 100*, as it turns out. Let us turn, then, away from the demolished "drawbacks" of binary notation in order to take a quick look at some of its more attractive features.

We recall that it has already been demonstrated that binary arithmetic is about as simple as arithmetic can get. That is what makes it so uniquely right for UNIVAC; but even on a less complicated level of computer design, it presents lovely aspects. Think, for example, of the beautifully compact desk adding machine that might be designed for binary numbers. No wheels and gear trains—therefore, at least for normal-sized calculations, no necessity for a power source to drive them. To handle addition or subtraction of, say, ten-place numbers (and multiplication and division are only slightly more demanding) you need only a row of ten levers with an up ("1") and down ("0") position. Of course, you wouldn't have to spend much money on a calculator as simple as that. You could build it yourself. Or alternatively, you could merely use the built-in ten-place binary computer we've just been talking about, the one that grows out of the ends of your arms.

For instance: You're remodeling your house; you have 13 4x8 panels of sheet rock on hand, and you discover that you have 650 square feet of wall to cover. Question: How many additional panels of sheet rock will you have to go out and buy?

That's not the most difficult problem in the world, true; but let's run through it once in binary arithmetic, using our fingers as computers. First we need to convert to binary numbers—*but only because we chose to start out with decimal ones;* it isn't fair to include conversion time as part of the time required for solving the problem.

In binary numbers, you have 1101 100x1000 panels on hand, and 10100,01010 square feet of wall to cover.

1101x100x1000, obviously, is merely a matter of pointing off places; you represent 01101 on your left hand, and 00000 on your right hand; that's how many square feet of sheet rock you have—uh, on hand, so to speak. Then the subtraction* is merely a matter of considering the successive digits, reading from the right, subtracting the digit shown on your finger from the corresponding digit in the written number you are subtracting from, *and carrying "borrowed" numbers.* (Are you able to remember how much trouble you had with "carrying" when you first learned the principles of decimal subtraction? Then don't give up on binary subtraction, if it takes you a few minutes to get the hang of "carrying" here.)

The result you "write", one digit at a time, on your fingers. That is, by the time you are subtracting your right-thumb digit from the written figure, the remaining fingers on your right hand are already indicating the last four digits of the answer. When you're done, you read the answer off.

AS ALREADY shown, the number of square feet of sheet rock you need to buy is 111,01010 (we padded the left-hand group out with zeroes to indicate all five finger positions in writing the subtraction). There are 1,00000 square feet in a panel; 111,01010 di-

* 10100,01010 sq/ft wall to cover
-01101,00000 sq/ft sheet rock on hand

00111,01010 sq/ft needed

vided by 1,00000 is obviously 111 and a fraction. But you can't buy part of a panel so you add 1 to the 111 and get 1000. Answer: You need to buy 1000 panels. (Or, in decimal numbers, 8.)

Look hard? Once again, consider it from the perspective of *relative* difficulty. After all, this is probably your first binary problem. Make up a few more; by the time you've done six, it won't be hard at all; by the time you've done a hundred, it will be semi-automatic; by the time you've done a thousand—

Well, hold on for a moment before you do your thousand; perhaps it will cheer you up to know that there are some special cases of binary arithmetic which aren't *ever* hard, not even the first time.

For example: Multiplication (or division) by powers of 2 is an obvious case; you simply point off and add zeroes. True, the decimal system has a similar situation in regard to powers of 10. But you still have to give the verdict to binary on this point, simply because in any finite series there are more powers of 2 than powers of 10.

But if you want to see something really *easy*, consider the strange case of the problem 1023-*n*.

Let's arbitrarily take *n* as 626 (because we happen to have a binary equivalent conveniently to hand—any other number less than 1023 would do as well, of course). Do this one on your fingers. First show yourself the binary representation of 1023:

11111,11111

Then cancel that, and represent on your fingers the binary equivalent of 626:

10011,10010

Don't bother about subtracting; you've already done it! Just reverse your convention for reading finger representations; read an extended finger as "0", a retracted finger as "1", and you get:

```
 11111.11111
-10011,10010
-----------
 01100,01101
```

In other words, any number *n* in binary notation is always the "reverse" of the number 1023-*n*. Not only that, but the same sort of rule can be made for the cases 511-*n*, 255-*n*, 127-*n*, etc.—for any number whose binary representation is "all ones", as you may already have realized. Try it and see.

It may be objected that such

special cases are comparatively rare. This is true enough; but in the decimal system, they are not only rare, they do not exist at all. And we have not, by any means, exhausted binary's bag of tricks. It is, in fact, hardly possible that any reader of this publication can spend as much as a single evening trying out experiments in binary arithmetic without discovering additional shortcuts to this one.

Decimal system?

That clumsy, s p r a w l y, quaint old thing!

★

Inside Science Fiction

(*Continued from page* 19)

explains that all of the other survivors died in a horrible manner. And, at this point, sex rears its pretty little head. Anne Francis enters the scene. clad in scanties of the type first popularized by Earle Bergey. Anne portrays Alta, the daughter of Morbius, who is the only other survivor.

The plot thickens when the spaceship's engineer is found horribly mutilated, and becomes quite complex when Morbius tells of the incredible secrets of the Krel (the former inhabitants who had mysteriously vanished from the planet thousands of years before). Morbius relates of utilizing a brain-boosting machine which increased his IQ manifold and which permitted him to understand (to a certain extent) the writings of the ancient civilization. Unenthusiastically, he takes the three officers on a tour of an incredible machine (so vast that it is almost a city in itself) which had been utilized by the Krel to provide everything they required.

The unknown monster which had killed the engineer attacks again, this time even electronic blasters couldn't deter it from killing several of the crew. The being is invisible and all precautions are made for the next encounter. A circle of atomic energy surrounds the ship, and all of the blasters available are made ready. And, as the creature attacks, one of the mightiest of all s-f scenes is enacted as the sum total of the ship's energy is directed at the monster. But even this does not destroy it: obviously it is composed of nothing known to man.

To describe the ultimate denouement would be to utterly destroy the picture for those who haven't seen it yet. Suffice to say, it is the most complex plot ever attempted by a motion picture producer. As a matter of fact, there is a definite van Vogtish element in the story and, it would appear, authors Irving Block and Allen Adler do a great deal of science fiction reading.

Years ago, science fiction fans dreamed of viewing on the screen the mighty inter-stellar concepts visualized by science fiction writers. However, thought they, such things are technically impossible. We must be content with more down-to-earth s-f film fare. Then came George Pal with his space epics of the near future. These were followed by Universal's noteworthy attempt at intergalactic adventure, "This Island Earth." But as good as these were, they are not in the same class with MGM's "The Forbidden Planet."

The film is replete with the most believable of scientific gadgets, equipment and conversation, is cloaked with the most intricate s-f movie plot yet devised (supplemented by suspense which has the viewer literally sitting on the edge of his seat), and is imbued with the original "sense of wonder." With "The Forbidden Planet," science fiction movie-making has come of age.

THE FAN PRESS

AN INDEX to Unknown & Unknown Worlds ($1.00 a copy from The Sirius Press, Black Earth, Wisconsin). This is another exceptional piece of work to be added to the many already compiled by the fan bibliographers. Stuart Hoffman (a printer by trade) displays his knowledge of his chosen profession and, at the same time, presents to the s-f world a unified key to one of the most well-remembered of all fantasy magazines, *Unknown*. John Campbell edited this off-trail magazine in 1939-1943, asd it appeared for 39 issues. It is probably the most authorized of all magazines—except maybe the early issues of *Galaxy*. Hoffman has indexed the magazine by the author, by story title, and by principal character. Robert Bloch, who appeared in *Unknown* himself with three gems, does the introduction. Professionally printed on slick paper with cardboard covers, this index will prove invaluable to those who possess a set of *Unknown*. And to those to whom the magazine is but a legend, Hoffman's work will also appeal. For the precise manner of editing and publishing almost brings *Unknown* into being once again.

Fanzine Index (10¢ from Bob Pavlat, 6001 43rd Avenue, Hyattsville, Maryland). The first and second in an anticipated series of fanzine indices have now appeared. They are an extension of the work of the original fanzine index compiler of the 30's, Dr. R. D. Swisher, and Swisher's basic format is continued. All of the amateur publications Pavlat and his associate, Bill Evans, have been able to obtain, read of, or hear talk of, are listed according to title, editor, dates, and volume numbers. For fanzine collectors and fan historians it will prove extremely useful. A commendable piece of work.

Magnitude (10¢ for a sample from Horizons Enterprises, 409 W. Lexington Drive, Glendale 3, California). This one is a neatly multilithed magazine of 20 pages, the current issue of which is one of the most interesting fanzines of the quarter. Ed M. Clinton tells "How To Become A Science Fiction Writer—Like Me." Many ideas are imparted—such as obtaining your plots from old (*very* old) issues of magazines. It is felt that numerous other authors have made use of this method, also. Helen M. Urban (who has been selling s-f stories of late) asks "Is Science Fiction Escape Literature?" It's an old question, one which has whiskers. However, Miss Urban goes to the nub of the matter and says that science fiction fans don't read the stuff to escape from reality. What they do is escape *into* s-f in order "—to find a medium of literary expression wherein intellectualism is not a vilification point." She further elaborated by saying, "...it makes of it an escape valve, a safety valve as it could be called, for the internal pressures that are built up by living out of cultural acceptance." This point cannot be argued, and it is the primary reason for the formation of s-f clubs and for the numerous conferences and conventions.

"Remember Us" by Paul Arram and Tad Duke is a radio-script written by two youngsters, but containing an adult impact. One of the best pieces of fan fiction we have ever read—deserves professional publication. There is also a column by Ackerman, an article on Disney's "Man and the Moon," and a travesty on 17th century space flight which you'll have to read to appreciate. With this issue of *Magnitude,* the Chesley Donovan boys have arrived.

Oblique (15¢ from Clifford I. Gould, 1559 Cable Street, San Diego 7, Calif.) This is a mimeographed zine, published in the standard letter-page size, averaging about thirty pages per issue. Oblique is the type of fanzine which takes neither itself nor anything else very serious, and the result appears to be a cross between those two top humor-zines, *Crue* and *Hyphen.* For instance, Dave Jenrette replies to Ray Palmer's plea not to let Tarzan die by intimating there are certain character, moral, and even sexual, traits apparently possessed by Tarzan which, perhaps, prove him *not* to be the superman he is alleged to be. Then, in the same tongue-in-cheek manner, David Rike attempts to statistically prove fans are slowly going blind—unbeknownst to this otherwise perceptive group, however. In the letter column, Robert Bloch accuses Bob Tucker (a man who deplored the dropping of water-bags from hotel windows at previous conventions) of dropping a loaded diaper from the 10th floor of the *Cleventionhotel.* Of course, Mr. Bloch is

only spoofing—at least Mr. Tucker would have you believe so.

THERE ARE serious aspects to *Oblique,* also. For instance. Lord Randall, in his department, "The Varnished Truth," ask pointedly why sex, religion, and cars are popular subjects for fanzines while politics is almost taboo. It would seem to us that the reason for the lack of articles of a political nature in fanzines is primarily the lack of political know-how of the fanzine publishers. Remember, many fanzines are published by youths, or very young adults and, in the majority of cases, political awareness develops with maturity. But there are plenty of fanzines which are loaded with political (and social) implications. Offhand, publications such as *Inside, Coup, Undertaking,* and *Fantastic Worlds* come to mind. And, as another example, the Carolina Science Fiction Society (average age 29) has been accused by some of its members of being a club for the discussion of sex, religion, and *politics.*

Columns, articles, and stories by Philip K. Dick, Vernon L. McCain, Lee Hoffman, Ed Cox, and Des Emery, round out a very satisfying issue. *Oblique* is rising rapidly. At its present pace it could reach the top.

Transuranic (10¢ from Al Alexander, Apt 8, 2216 Croydon Road, Charlotte, North Carolina). The official publication of the Carolina S-F Society has grown by leaps and bounds. It started out as a one-page news-sheet—the current issue consists of 34 well-dittoed letter-size pages. George L. Cole seems to be the prolific one this issue. He does a discerning review of "World Out of Mind," is the subject of an interview (one of a series featuring a CSFS member each issue), draws a portfolio of strange, other-worldly creatures and illustrates the magazine throughout—including the cover. Nicolas L. Falasca makes his first post-Clevention appearance (he was co-chairman of 1955's big event) with a piece of fan fiction which will appeal to the initiate, "The Abominable Pro-Fan." It's a whimsical story about an active fan who dies and goes to hell and then finds himself in a helluva mess. Robert A. Madle (who he?) pens what is alleged to be a tale of weird humor. Then there are fanzine reviews and a rather lengthy readers' department. This number of *Transuranic* is the biggest dime's worth of the quarter.

Vagabond (10¢ from John W. Murdock, c/o Henry Moore Studio, 214 E. 11th Street, Kansas City 6, Missouri). 20 pages of nicely-mimeoed material this time. George T. Wetzel tells of "The Real Horror of Brainwashing," in which he relates a tale (quite true, says George) of a nefarious machine possessed by certain USA institutions which plays on brain wave frequencies. Mr. Wetzel, who deserves the title of "The Poor

Man's Charles Fort" (which we herewith confer upon him) certainly comes up with some strange material. The research he does for his articles is awe-inspiring, and displays intense effort. And the subject matter for his researches is invariably—shall we s a y—off-trail? Charles Burbee is represented with what the editor claims to be one of the best pieces of fan fiction he has ever read. We agree. "The Wingless Rooster" is social satire—with a kick! Originally written in 1944, it has now been reprinted twice. There is a previously-unpublished note by H. P. Lovecraft titled, "Who Ate Roger Williams?" Gourmets will love this one. Various other items complete an interesting little magazine.

CAPSULE REVIEWS:

The Science Fiction World (Published by Gnome Press, 80 East 11th Street, New York, New York. Send for a free sample copy.) The second issue of this printed s-f newspaper just arrived. Edited by Robert Bloch and Bob Tucker, it presents the news in a light, whimsical manner. In addition to news reports, books and fanzines are dealt with handily, too. With some semblance of regularity the *SFWORLD* could be a real boon to s-f fandom for, we understand, it is well circulated in all of the bookstores.

Undertakings (15¢ a copy, Samuel Johnson, 1843 Embassy Drive, S. Jacksonville, Florida). Forty large mimeoed pages this time. The end result shows lots of work and effort. Interesting material by Harlan Ellison, Ronald Voigt, and George T. Wetzel. Well-illustrated, with a neat layout. Criticism: page after page of blue type on drab gray paper has a tendency to preclude the complete reading of the magazine. Suggestion: white paper, more illustrations will pep up the interior lots. Despite criticism, very good job.

Eclipse (10¢ for a sample, from Ray Thompson, 410 S. 4th Street, Norfolk, Nebraska). Thirty pages of good mimeography. Nice article by J. Martin Graetz on some of the s-f editors he has met. Graetz talks of Leo Margulies, John Campbell, Sam Mines, and says that Bob Lowndes and Larry Shaw are on the agenda for this season. Lots of fanzine reviews and letters round out the issue.

Fantasy Times (send for a free sample copy to Fandom House, PO Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey. Mention "Inside Science Fiction"). Year in and year out FT hits the mailbox every two weeks. Every issue features news about science fiction magazines, authors, artists, and fans The editors are located in the New York area and must prowl around the editorial offices of the various magazines most of their free time. For they manage to print the news before anyone else has even heard the rumors. And they have trained the

[*Turn To Page* 120]

When every day brings something *new;* when the *newest* is automatically assumed to be the best—and newness *thrilling*—then consumership has reached its peak. And from the peak...

CONSUMERSHIP

by MARGARET ST. CLAIR

(author of "Fort Iron")

illustrated by ORBAN

GROUP FATHER asked, "What will you have for supper tonight, kiddies?" He beamed approvingly at their hesitant faces. "Chinese, Japanese, Mexican food? French, Javanese, Swedish? Your mother can cook all of them. Or what about Swiss? Swiss is newest; your mother has just learned to cook Swiss."

"Swiss," Tommy said instantly.

Group mother smiled. He was the sweetest, most loveable, most discriminating of all the children in her care. He always knew what to ask for—what was best and new-

est. He'd grow up to be an adman; she was sure of it. She had discussed his future with all the fathers her group had had, and they always agreed with her. She was *thrilled* at the thought.

The faces of the others lit up like little sign boards. "Swiss!" they c h o r u s e d. "Swiss! Let's have Swiss!"

"What about our new little girl?" group father said playfully. "I suppose she'd like Swiss, too, but she hasn't said yet what she wants."

At the word "newest" their eyes had turned toward Marian. She was different; she was new; she might be better. They were still unsure.

Marian, leaning against one of the walls, twisted her fingers. "I don't know what is 'Swiss'," she answered. "But what I like, what I'd like is what we had at Gilda's, when she was my group mother. We had roast beef and potatoes, and a green salad. Apple pie. Except sometimes when we had chocolate cake. But usually we had apple pie."

Group mother's m o u t h opened shockedly. Group father motioned her to silence. Wait for Tommy, his gesture said.

"That's American food," Tommy said scornfully. "It's ob—obs'lete. N o b o d y eats American any more."

"I don't care," Marian answered. Her face was growing dark. "We had it all the time. I liked it; it was good. I liked it *because* we had it all the time."

THE TWO children glared at each other. *Oh, dear,* group mother thought. She'd been afraid that Marian was going to cause trouble, and now it was coming true. Gilda must be a very odd group mother, to produce such a child.

Aloud, she said, "Now, honey, you must do what the others want. If they all want Swiss, you don't really care."

"*He's* the only one that cares," Marian said, pointing to Tommy. "The others like whatever you tell them to. They don't care whether it's Swiss or—or Greek. They'd like mud, if you told them to."

Into the faces of the others was coming the look that group mother, and all group parents, dreaded. That expression—at once listless and confused—that deepened into a mask-like blankness, if you didn't do something about it immediately. Once they got into it, you could wave all the toys and treats in the world in their faces, and nothing would rouse them. They'd sit for a whole day, with their feet out in front of them on

the floor, staring at nothing. Something must be done; at once.

"We'll have American," group mother said brightly. "We haven't had it for so long it will be new and—and old-fashioned. Tommy, wouldn't you like to have American tonight?"

"Swiss," Tommy repeated, but with less pugnacity. His mouth relaxed. "Oh, well. If she wants American—all right."

The faces of the others, now that they knew what they wanted, grew happy. "American," they began to say. "We want that; we want American tonight."

GROUP MOTHER had to look up American style in a couple of cook books before she could find the recipes, but after she found them she cooked a very mouth-watering dinner. It turned out that one or two of the younger children had never had apple pie before. They were *thrilled* over it.

After dinner, they played the Brand Game. This part of the day was what the syllabus for group mothers called Reasoned Discrimination in Preference, but they all agreed it was as much fun as any game, so why not call it that? Tonight the topic was breakfast food.

"Brand?" group father said, pointing his finger at Tommy.

"Bubble Pops," the boy answered, quick as a flash. Bubble Pops was new; it had just come on the shelves; not all the children knew the name yet. Group father smiled.

"Reason?" group father asked, pointing again.

"Bubble-light, pop-corn crisp, gives needed bulk to bulk-starved modern systems!"

How well he knew it! Group mother laughed aloud, and all the children wriggled and smiled.

GROUP FATHER'S finger went around the circle, pointing. Mostly, the children gave the same brand Tommy had—though one or two mentioned older brands. They all got the reasons right. Later on, when the child who was asked to give the reason wasn't the child who had named the brand, it would be more difficult.

Group father's finger came to Marian, who was third from the end in the circle. "Brand?" he asked. Group mother, who knew him well, heard a note of apprehension in his voice.

"Wheat crisp."

It was an old brand, a brand

that hadn't been on the shelves for months, and it never had had much of a campaign to carry it. Group father frowned. "Why?" he wanted to know.

"I liked the way it felt in my mouth."

It wasn't the right reason, it wasn't a reason at all. Faces, here and there around the circle, began to wear the numb, blank look group mother dreaded so much. Tommy, his eyes shining with the joy of creation, saved the day.

"I know what she means!" he shouted. "I know! She means Wheat crisp has—has —has oral appeal!"

Group mother drew a long, happy sigh. He *was* going to be an ad-man; she was sure of it now. When a boy no older than Tommy started thinking creatively... She could hardly wait for it to be bedtime so she could start talking about it with group father.

MARIAN sat quite still for a minute. She pushed her chair back from the table and got up. "It's wasn't oral appeal," she said, "I don't care what you say. I just liked the way it felt in my mouth."

She walked away from the table. They heard the door of her room close.

"Let her go," Tommy said without turning. He hunched his shoulders. "Let's go, gang! Let's go on to the next part! What slogan begins with the words, 'Nuttier, crisper...'? Think hard; you all know it. Ready? All together! Now!"

"Nuttier, crisper, more profound,

Better flavor than fresh ground!" their voices rang out. Their faces glowed with pleasure at getting it right.

He was giving them leadership too, group mother thought. She was *thrilled.*

The Brand Game continued. The children grew more boisterous. The group dwelling —with the enormous increase in consumers that had taken place in the last ten years, all the new group dwellings were being erected in the littoral— the group dwelling began to rock gently in the incoming tide.

NEXT DAY was Applied Product Selection, or, as the group called it, supermarket day. The topic was cleansers, bleaches, and detergent flakes.

Group father coptered them in to the super-market. They had lunch at the soda fountain, which specialized in smorgasbord; they played amid the spun-glass snow and plastic rocks of the Kiddie Wonderland. By two o'clock, they were laughing and push-

ing their kiddie-sized shopping carts through the supermarket aisles. Product Selection went quickly, since they knew what they wanted. By four they were back in the group dwelling again.

"And what did *you* bring back, Marian?" group mother asked when the others had displayed their products and given the reasons for their selections. "Show us, dear."

Marian looked down. Her hands were behind her back. "I didn't bring back *anything*."

There was a tiny silence. Then Tommy said, "She did too bring back something. She picked up something in the Kiddie Corral. She's got it in her hand."

Group father was already prying gently at Marian's fingers. "Dear, you mustn't have secrets," group mother told her helpfully "The others show us everything."

The hand, in the end, opened without much force from group father. They all bent forward eagerly to see what Marian had been carrying.

IT WAS a small irregular bit of grayish translucent stone, having, in its depths, a faint suggestion of silvery spangles. It wasn't very pretty, really—not nearly so pretty as a synthigem.

"Why, it's just old junk!" Tommy said loudly, but group father was more generous. "You can keep it," he told Marian, folding her fingers over it. "We might even get you a little box to keep things like that in. 'Souvenirs of my super-market trips,' it could be called."

"That's a good idea," group mother said warmly, trying to fight the cold feeling in her chest. "We'll get boxes like that for all the kiddies. We're not due to take up Hobby Selection until summer, but it wouldn't hurt to start preparing ourselves for it now."

Marian's hand came open. The stone rolled on the table and dropped to the floor. "I don't want it," she said, blinking fast. "If everybody's going to have it, I don't want it any more." Tears began to roll down her cheeks, but she walked away with her head high.

The group parents had a long talk about her that night. They were worried. No use blaming Gilda for the quality of her group motherhood; what they wanted was to rescue Marian for consumership. In the end they decided they must just do the best they could with gentle, constant

suggestion and example. Tommy might be able to help.

THE CLIMAX came two days later, on doll and toy delivery day. Since Marian had joined the group late in the afternoon of Mail Order Choice Day, group mother had marked the catalogue for her, as she sometimes did for the less discriminating children, those who didn't know what they would want. Group mother had hesitated over triplet dolls—wonderful for educating little girls for consumer production—but she had settled at last on a life-sized baby with velva-plast skin; it slept, walked, talked, nursed, wet, and soiled its diaper.

The big, thrilling box arrived, the dolls and toys were given out. Marian received her new possession in silence. Her face seemed deliberately blank. She took the doll off to her room, though the others stayed in the living room with their toys.

An hour or so later, group mother was called from her deterging in the kitchen by Tommy. "Come and see," he said mysteriously. His eyes were shining. "Walk real light; you mustn't make any noise."

He led her down the buoyant corridor to Marian's room and opened the door a trifle. "Look," he said, whispering.

For a moment group mother couldn't believe what she saw. Velva-plast is hard to break; Marian must have devoted a great deal of ingenuity to breaking it. Later, group mother decided that she had put the doll's head on the floor under a table leg and jumped up and down on the table until she produced the initial break. However that might be, the doll, in pieces, was lying on the floor now, and Marian, with blunt-nosed scissors, was working industriously at the head of it.

GROUP MOTHER succumbed to a burst of avatistic fury. She rushed into the room, caught Marian by the shoulders, and began shaking her. "You wicked, wicked girl!" she said passionately. "How dare you, how could you! You've broken your doll. You wasteful, wicked girl! Your beautiful new doll!"

She released Marian so suddenly that the girl staggered against the wall. For a moment, group mother fought for self-control. Then she said, more calmly, "Why did you do it, anyhow?"

Marian looked at her with bright, defiant eyes. "I hate it," she said, "I hate it. I want the doll I had at Gilda's. I

want *that* doll; I want the doll I loved!" She began to sob wildly. "I don't want to have to love new things all the time!"

In the face of such a failure in consumer education, there was nothing group mother could do. Without even consulting group father, she called the Child Direction authorities. In half an hour or so they came, very friendly, very polite, and took Marian, who was weeping and shuddering, away with them.

GROUP MOTHER, in bed that night with group father, tried to take an optimistic view of things. "They'll be able to argue with her, persuade her, won't they?" she asked. "At the Child Direction clinic, they'll show her how she's wrong. Don't you think they'll get her over it?"

"Um," group father grunted. He gave a sudden chuckling laugh. "I was just thinking. Suppose the Child Direction clinic doesn't help her? Then she'll be sent to one of the in-clinics, like the Orthoscopic School. Suppose that doesn't help, either? The authorities won't give up, of course; they'll try what they can do with deep analysis."

"Well?" group mother said rather sharply, for she didn't like the possibilities group father was suggesting.

"Well, I was just thinking. In the end, she'll be a sort of consumer. She'll have learned a lot of consumership, from all the things the authorities have tried. She'll be a skilled consumer, when it comes to psychiatry."

Marian a consumer after all, and in spite of herself! Group mother giggled. Suddenly, she was feeling much better. How *discriminating* group father was!

She drew his head on to her shoulder and embraced him tenderly. "You're the nicest group father I've ever had," she told him warmly. "The very nicest. Yes, oh, yes."

"The latest one is always the nicest," group father answered; his voice sounded rather sad.

NOW THAT Marian was gone, life in the group dwelling settled down to being breathtakingly thrilling again. Some of the children went to other groups and new ones came, but they all were doing well. Group mother got a new group father. The group took up Hobby Selection and did marvellously with it. Now that Marian...

Yet sometimes group mother felt a paradoxical regret for the child. Her angry face

had been alive, her defiant eyes had been bright. The others were pliant, gentle, slogan-conscious...but their faces were a little like the faces of sheep. Group mother was glad that Tommy was still with the group.

The boy was developing wonderfully. He shot out slogans as a pinwheel shoots out sparks, he gave the others wonderful leadership. His vocation seemed certain. If group mother sometimes felt a little uneasy about him, she told herself it was because she couldn't believe in her good luck.

Summer passed, and Book Day came. Book Day came only twice a year, but it wasn't one of the most thrilling days. The children didn't like it as much as they did some of the other ones, though all of them over ten could read. Tommy, though, had always liked it especially.

The parcel was opened, and group mother gave Tommy the books she had helped him mark in the catalogue. There were four of them, all on the subject of advertising: *Admen, The Modern Magicians; Derge, The Wonderful Story of an Advertising Campaign; The Romance of Copywriting for Young People;* and *The Habit Shapers*. He took them in his arms and went to his room to look at them.

IT WASN'T more than two hours later that group mother and group father knocked at his door. They were all going swimming in the surf near the group dwelling; they had some wonderful new water toys, and it was part of what the syllabus called Training for Competence in Play.

When Tommy didn't answer, group mother knocked again. When he still didn't answer she and group father grew alarmed. They opened the door and went in.

Tommy was sitting on the floor with his feet out in front of him; his face was as blank as a mask. The books group mother had ordered lay about him. Most of their pages were gone. He had folded the torn-out pages into paper hats and boats. They were all over the floor.

Group mother had to lick her lips and swallow before she could speak. "Tommy... Tommy, what's the matter? We're going swimming. In the nice green frothy water. With wonderful water toys. Don't you want to go swimming with the rest?"

He didn't answer. Group mother licked her lips again. She tried to think of more

effective persuasions, but she felt a sort of despair. It had never happened with Tommy before.

GROUP FATHER motioned her to silence. "Tommy, you've got to stop this," he said authoritatively. "We're going s w i m m i n g. Swimming's fun. Don't you understand? You've got to want to go swimming. You've *got* to want."

Something—annoyance, fatigue, something—came into the impassivity of Tommy's face. "I don't want to have to want *anything*," he said.

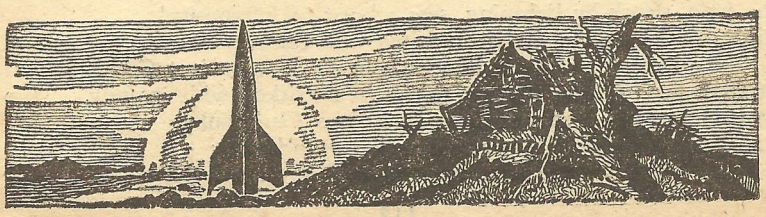
"But Tommy," group mother said—she was almost crying—"but Tommy, you can't not want things! Why, you're going to be an ad-man! You're going to spend your life telling people about all the thrilling, wonderful things they want!"

Tommy made a gesture like a man brushing a fly off his nose. "Don't want," he said. He sounded very tired. His eyes closed; his face grew blank. The group dwelling bobbed a little in the outgoing tide.

Group mother drew a shuddering breath. Tommy could be roused; she knew that, in the end, she could rouse him. All group children were this way sometimes. It was only that this was the first time for Tommy. It didn't mean anything; certainly not.

Yet, over his static head her eyes sought those of group father almost wildly. She was trembling from head to foot. Her hands were clenched on each other. Did group father see what she saw? . .

Had he heard in Tommy's words what she had? Had they sounded to him, against all reason, like the death warrant of a culture? The crack in the dam that presaged the roaring, uncontrollable flood? And did he feel at the thought, as she did, an intense relief?



L. SPRAGUE de CAMP'S

"Lest Darkness Fall"

A Review in Verse

by Randall Garrett

(*who also did the design*)

These rhymes 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.

The reader's tossed into this tale with great impetuosity.
The hero, struck by lightning, sees a burst of luminosity!
His vision clears, and he is overcome with curiosity—
The lightning's tossed him back in Time to ancient Gothic Rome!
At first, poor Martin Padway thinks he's stricken with insanity,
To find himself immersed in early Roman Christianity,
But finally he buckles down to face it with urbanity;
He knows that he's forever stuck and never will get home.

Now, Europe's just about to start the Age of Faith and Piety,
And such an awful future fills our hero with anxiety,
So he begins to bolster up this barbarous society
With modernistic gadgets that the Romans haven't got.
A moneylending Syrian of singular sagacity
Succumbs, in time, to Mr. P's remarkable tenacity,
And, though he makes remarks decrying Martin's vast audacity,
Proceeds to lend him quite a lot of money on the spot.

Now, in return, our hero starts, in manner most emphatical,
To show the banker how to solve his problems mathematical.
And one clerk gets so sore he ups and takes a leave sabbatical;
"I can't take Arab numerals," he says; "I've had my fill!"
But Mr. Padway takes the resignation with passivity.
The other men have shown a mathematical proclivity,
So, confident the system will increase their productivity,
He takes his borrowed money and goes out and buys a still.

Then, trading in on what he knows about historiography,
Our Martin Padway next invents the art of mass typography.
He hires a bunch of Roman scribes (He's fond of their chirography),
And makes them all reporters for his paper: *Roman Times.*
Because of a Sicilian he fired without apology,
He gets in lots of trouble on a charge of demonology.
But, using all the very best of Freudian psychology,
He gets himself released from prosecution for the crimes.

The Roman city governor, a certain Count Honorius
(A man who is notorious for actions amatorious),
Is then convinced by Padway, in a very long, laborious,
And detailed explanation of how corporations work,
That he (the Count), in order to insure his own prosperity,
Should use his cash to back, with all expedient celerity,
A telegraphic system Padway's building for posterity.
The Count proceeds to do so, with an avaricious smirk.

But while our hero is engaged in projects multifarious,
An army of Imperialists under Belisarius
Invades the Goths, who find that their position is precarious,
So Padway has to help the Gothic army win the fight.
He saves the King from being killed, to win his royal gratitude,
And though our hero's hampered by the King's fogheaded attitude,
He gets appointed Quaestor, which affords him lots of latitude.
He whips the Greek invaders in the middle of the night.

The King becomes so useless that he's almost parasitical,
And Padway finds himself up to his neck in things political;
He has to learn to tread with care, and not be hypercritical
Of how affairs are run in the Italo-Gothic state.
The Byzantines send in another army with rapidity,
And Bloody John, the general, attacks with great avidity.
Because the Gothic nation lacks political solidity,
The Byzantines march northward at a very rapid rate.

The Greeks go up through Italy with thundering and plundering;
The Gothic troops, as always, just continue with their blundering,
While Martin Padway, at their head, is worrying and wondering
Just what the Hell he's gonna do and where he's gonna go!
At last he comes in contact with Joannas Sanguinarius!
(The battle's very bloody, but de Camp makes it hilarious.)
And just as he's about to lose, the turncoat Belisarius
Comes charging in with cavalry and quickly routs the foe!

Now, though all through the novel we've been jollied with jocundity,
The story's ended on a note of very great profundity:
The Roman-Goth society's been saved from moribundity!
For two years, Padway's been in Rome—and things have sure changed since!
The greatest fighting man in Rome since Emperor Aurelian,
The sneaky little tricks he pulls are quite Mephistophelian;
Though modest and retiring once, he's changed like a chameleon
To something like a character from Machiavelli's "Prince"!

★

NEXT TIME AROUND

The cover will be from a story by Murray Leinster, entitled "Women's Work", one that has a very sound basis, regardless of whether you like it. This has nothing to do with one woman's work, when the woman is Judith Merril, and the work is a short novel, entitled, "Homecalling."

These men had saved their world, but there was a vital reason why they must never go home . . .

THE OTHER ARMY

by GEORGE HUDSON SMITH

(author of "The Three Spacemen")

WAR AND LUCK were funny things, thought Lt. Ed Kenyon, as he waited in General Tyler-Spence's office for the CIC of the Army of Mars to see him. Here he was on Mars doing nothing more exciting than listening quietly to the dry wind whisper outside. If he had been on Mars just two weeks ago, he'd have been listening to the screech of Rumi rockets. He didn't really know whether he was secretly glad or sorry that his training had been finished too late for the last victorious battles of the war that had started before he was born, twenty years ago. A war that had strained Earth's resources to the utmost, as it was fought on four of the planets of the solar system and on the planets of Alpha Centauri. A war that for years had been a very near thing for Earth, but which had ended in complete victory—due mainly to the fanatically-brave men of the Army of Mars, under the leadership of General Tyler-Spence.

He let his gaze wander outside to where most of the remaining veterans of the Army of Mars were drawn up in long lines, waiting for the transports which would take them back to Earth. It was hard to believe that these men were the s a m e who had stormed B e l g a t h, against twice their number—who had held the breach at the Halruth Canal. These men, whom he had passed on his way from the scout ship that had brought him from Earth with i m p o r t a n t and secret dispatches for the General, had saved Mars and the system; for by saving Mars they had

made victory for Earth possible. They didn't look like fanatical killers; they didn't even look like veterans. They looked more like a bunch of young men on a holiday outing. There was reason for their gaiety, of course, for they were going home for the first time in five years, going back to Earth—away from the thin air and rotten climate of Mars—back to blue skies and green grass instead of yellow skies and rust-red sand.

THE PRETTY blonde WAC Captain, who was the General's secretary, smiled at him as she said, "The General will see you in a few minutes. He's reading your dispatches now."

"Thank you...should I say 'sir' or 'ma'am'?" he grinned at her.

"Captain will do nicely, Lieutenant," she said turning back to her work without an answering smile.

"How long have you been here, Captain?" Ed asked after a few minutes.

Looking up briefly the girl replied, "Too long, Lieutenant; everyone who has ever set foot on Mars has been here too long."

"Oh? Well I'm sort of sorry I didn't get here sooner and ...you know...see a little action."

The WAC gave him a pitying look as she lowered her blonde head over her desk. Ed shrugged his shoulders and turned back to the window of the command post. In a few minutes a buzzer sounded and the Captain looked up to say, "You can go in now, Lieutenant."

Grand General Tyler-Spence sat behind a huge desk, with the dispatches spread out before him. He gestured with one leathery hand for Ed to sit down. He ran the other through his silvery hair in a gesture the lieutenant had seen at least a hundred times on TV screens. Suddenly it came to Ed that he was in the presence of a legend. This man, more than any other, was responsible for the defeat of the invaders. He could remember reading, as a boy, of this man's exploits. On Mars, On Venus, on the Alpha Centuarian planets of Naraka, Nestron, Erobus and Tartarus and now he was facing him across a desk.

"Do you have any idea, Lt. Kenyon, what these orders contain?" the General asked in his silvery voice.

"No, sir, I haven't; all I know is that I was to report here for duty, and to carry these dispatches to you."

"Yes. Well, then, you didn't know that you are to be my replacement?"

KENYON STARED goggle-eyed. "Your *replacement*, sir? I don't understand. A lieutenant replacing a Grand General in command of an Army?"

"The war is over, Lt. Kenyon. There isn't any need for a general on Mars any more; the Army won't be here."

"Oh, that's right. The Army of Mars will be going back to Earth now that the war's over."

"No, not exactly. Not exactly, Lieutenant."

"You mean that you and your men are moving out to some other planet?"

"This Army can never go back to Earth, Lieutenant; none of its members can ever go back."

"But I don't understand, sir; I don't know what you mean."

"If this Army ever returned to Earth, it would mean confusion and a catastrophe even worse than a defeat by the Rumi would have meant."

"What...what do you mean, sir?"

The general ran his hand through his silvery hair once more as he slumped down into his chair. "If you remember your history at all, you will recall that the great need of Earth in this long war has always been manpower. About ten years ago, it looked as if we were through—simply because of a shortage of men. It was then that the Army of Mars was created."

"Yes, sir. I remember reading about what a wonderful job the draft boards and replacement centers had done to raise another two million men for the Army of Mars."

"Hmm. Yes, they did a wonderful job—you might even say a miraculous job. A job that won the war. And that's why the Army of Mars can never return to Earth, and that's what the dispatches you brought with you deal with."

"But, sir... I still don't understand."

"The men of my army, Lieutenant, are all PFI's."

"PFI's? You mean..."

"Projected Force Images. Not really human beings at all, but electrical energy copies of human beings. The draft boards of Earth didn't have any real replacements to send out, but they did have complete life-patterns of all the men in the off-planet forces. They had the PFI reproducer, that had just been perfected by Dr. Schlitz of Berlin, and so they made two million copies and put me in

command of an army of electrical phantoms."

ED KENYON shook his head in amazement. "The men? I mean the men don't know, sir?"

"No; they think they are just as real as you are. They have all the memories and feelings of the men they are reproductions of. Right now as they prepare for me to review them for the last time their thoughts are of home and family."

"But, General, what are you going to tell them?"

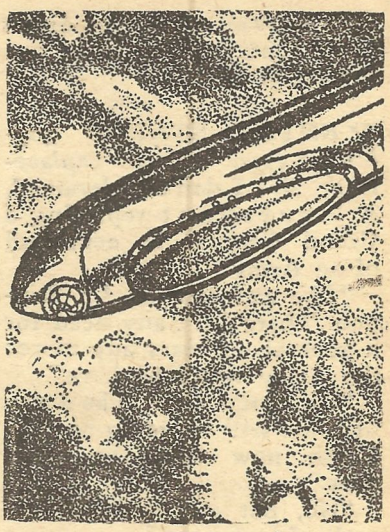
"I'm not going to tell them anything: I'm going to turn them off. My orders are to disactivate their energy receivers in a way prepared for a long time ago."

"But...sir. That's like murder," Lt. Kenyon leaned across the General's desk. "Would you murder your own men, sir?"

The General regarded him calmly. "Yes—it is murder in a way, for they are as much alive as any other men, I suppose."

"Then how? I mean...these are men who have fought under you, sir. Men you must have come to like and respect. How can you..."

"Lt. Kenyon," the general said sternly. "I love those men, but there's such a thing as duty. If you stay in the army long enough you'll learn what I mean."



"But sir... I..."

"Can you picture what would happen if these men were allowed to exist. Lieutenant? To return to the families that they think are theirs? What would happen when hundreds of thousands of wives found themselves with two husbands each virtually identical to the other and each thinking he was the only one? When millions of men found themselves fighting themselves for the same jobs, the same homes, the same families?" The general pressed a black button on a small transmitter he had picked up from his desk.

"But, sir...couldn't they be sent someplace else? Couldn't they be allowed to go on living some way? How can you...?"

"AND WHERE is there a place where they wouldn't come streaming back from someday? They want to go back to their homes. And if we told them the truth, what then? They might come to hate Earth; that, combined with the fanatical battle fury which was artificially instilled into their makeup, might make them a greater menace than the Rumi ever were."

"General, you're right—but I don't think you can go through with it," Kenyon said.

"But then, you don't know me very well," the General said, holding up the small transmitter-like device. He pointed to three buttons on it. "When I pressed this first button a moment ago the disbanding of the Army of Mars began. All base and office personnel were deactivated. Look in the outer office, Lt. Kenyon."

Ed Kenyon ran to the door and looked out. On the floor in front of the chair in which the pretty blonde Captain had been sitting, were a pair of low-heeled shoes; in the chair was a khaki shirt and skirt, and black lace panties.

Kenyon whirled on the General. "You can't do this; I won't let you."

"You can't help yourself, Lieutenant," the General said pointing a service blaster at Kenyon's middle. "I'm going to carry out my orders and then turn over my command to you. If you try to stop me, I'll kill you."

"But it's murder! This girl and all the others...it's murder."

A few minutes later the General and Kenyon were standing on the balcony of his headquarters, dressed in respirators. The General held the transmitter in one hand and kept Kenyon covered with the automatic in the other. Below them, the crack regiments of the Army of Mars passed in review. The officers and men strode by in their Martian battle armor... strode by and were gone. Nothing remained of them but piles of clothing and gear.

"Murderer! Murderer!" Kenyon yelled at the General.

"Your orders, Lieutenant. are to await the arrival of the next ship from Earth. With the work parties on board her you are to collect the weapons and clothing of the Army of Mars. I'm afraid that you'll find them scattered all over

the planet," the General said with tears in his eyes.

Kenyon glared at him. "And you'll go back to Earth. Back to another hero's welcome like you received after Venus and Naraka and Nestron. Tell me, did you murder your armies then?"

Smiling bleakly, the General asked. "Didn't you ever wonder how General Tyler-Spence could be in so many places throughout the two systems? Don't you wonder why there are three buttons on my transmitter, Lieutenant?"

Lt. Kenyon saluted as he watched the empty uniform of the General drop to the floor.

Inside Science Fiction

(*Continued from page* 102)

s-f magazine editors who are out of the New York area to let them know when something happens. If one were to limit his fanzine consumption to just one magazine, FT would have to be it.

Oopsla! (15¢ from Gregg Calkins, 2817 11th Street, Santa Monica, California). Twenty issues have appeared so far. One of the consistently readable fanzines, the number we have on hand features Lee Hoffman, Robert Bloch, P. Economou, and Vernon L. McCain. Excellent mimeoing and fine art-work and layout help keep *Oopsla!* in the upper fanzine bracket.

Crifanac (Orville W. Mosher, 429 Gilpin Avenue, Dallas 11, Texas). This is a newszine, and is one of the many dittoed publications which emanate from the Mosher address. Price is probably a dime. Would like to suggest that all Dallas fans get in touch with Orville as he is President of a live-wire s-f club, The Dallas Futurian Society.

Saucers (25¢ from Max B. Miller, PO Box 35034, Los Angeles b5, California). We've been receiving this neatly multilithed and well-edited publication for some time now but have never reviewed it as we felt it not to be a fanzine. However, for those who are interested in the saucer phenomenon, there is lots of meat here. And you lone saucer proponents can find a kindred group with Miller's "Flying Saucers International."

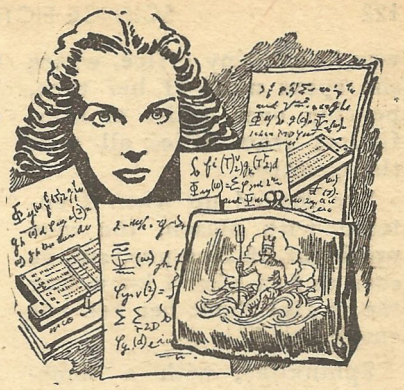
Well, that takes care of the fan press this time around. An effort has been made to review as many zines as possible this time mainly because several publishers have vaguely hinted that we've been neglecting their brainchildren. So keep sending them to Robert A. Madle, 1620 Anderson Street, Charlotte, N. C.

★

CO - INCIDENCE

by IRWIN BOOTH

illustrated by ORBAN



Mathematically speaking, any two objects can be made to meet at a given time and place, providing you know enough about these objects, and can exercise enough control over one of them.

I FIRST met Rosemary when I joined the editorial staff of *Neptune Books*, last summer. The job was my big chance, because prior to that time my editing experience had been confined mostly to the pulps and a chain of true crime magazines. For me, *Neptune Books* was a dream come true—a job with an unlimited future in a fast-growing phase of the publishing industry.

I suppose everyone is familiar with *Neptune Books*, those twenty-five cent reprints with a picture of a smiling King Neptune as their trademark. They say in the business that the reason Neptune is always smiling is that he's just seen the latest sales figures. And if it's true, he has plenty of reason to smile.

For in three short years *Neptune Books* have risen to the top of the field. Their sales are beyond belief, and even their own officers shake their heads in pleased amazement as the money pours in.

The cause of it all, as everyone in the publishing business knows, is Rosemary. At twenty-eight, she is already the brains behind Neptune's smile. The simple fact is that she is a mathematical genius, not just in the usual sense, but in a very unusual sense.

My first meeting with her came, as I've said, the day I started work at *Neptune*. She

was in her tiny office, where she spent most of her time, pouring over a list of sales figures from cities all over the country.

She looked up when I entered with Mason, the vice president of *Neptune*, and as soon as I saw her I knew that the stories about her had not exaggerated.

Sphinxlike, with a somewhat bony face, she was nevertheless attractive—especially when she came out from behind those horn-rimmed eyeglasses. She had the look, the sound, the manner of power. And I sensed then that she was a very unusual woman.

THIS INTUITION increased as the weeks went by, and I became one of Rosemary's few good friends. Whenever I could snatch an hour, I'd sit there in her office, discussing new titles we were planning to reprint and listening to her unfailingly brilliant advice. I was even beginning to feel a romantic inclination toward her, but she never indicated any such feelings toward me. I kept my own emotions in check.

But it was in the distribution end of our business that she proved her devotion and fantastic skill. *Neptune* handled all its own distribution, which meant shipping books to several hundred wholesalers scattered throughout the country. Rosemary had risen to the post of Circulation Manager, a rare job for a young woman, and perhaps the most important position in the whole company.

She would sit at her desk for hours, scrabbling over calculations, and then come up tired but triumphant with the solution. "Increase Salt Lake City's draw to 5,000 on this title," she'd order. Or, "Transfer a thousand Westerns from Dallas to Kansas City." I'd look at her in amazement, and sometimes I'd think she was over-reaching herself, but they always did what she said—and Neptune kept smiling on all those covers.

When I'd ask her about some fantastic bit of luck by which she'd transferred the right books to the right place at the right time, she'd simply sigh and say: "Oh, I heard they were having a convention out there, and figured they could use another thousand of that title."

After the first few months I got used to this wizardry, and like the others I stopped asking her. I just read books and helped decide which ones to reprint, and watched the money roll in.

THERE WAS only one thing about the job that was unpleasant. And that was Mason, the vice president. The real owner of *Neptune Books* was some shadowy midwest Croesus, whom no one ever saw; for all practical purposes, Mason was the big boss.

We were on the third floor of an ancient building on West 47th Street, and space was at a minimum. Not that the place wasn't big enough to start with; but with billing machines, bookkeepers, files, and the other necessities of distribution taking up so much room, we didn't have an awful lot of floor left for the executive end. Mason had solved his problem by erecting a partition ten feet square, and declaring that the space inside the wall was his private office. He was a big, overbearing boor about a lot of little things, and he kept getting under my skin.

About once a week he'd hold what he called a strategy meeting. We'd all crowd into his private office. He'd do most of the talking, outlining company policies and telling us about his foggy future plans. Rosemary, at least, was entitled to a chair at these boring lectures. But I, being the youngest of the editorial staff usually found myself sitting on the thick green rug that covered the floor.

It was obvious to me from the start that Rosemary and Mason hated each other. Rosemary hated him because he was the only person who stood between her and place to which she could advance. Mason hated her because he knew her feelings and desires for the vice presidency of *Neptune Books*. Of course, he couldn't fire her. By that time, Rosemary's word was gospel and her every decision went unquestioned. It was the old law of the jungle: Eat or be eaten.

We all knew that Mason was waiting for her to make just one mistake, but she never made it. The sales figures kept climbing and Rosemary kept on with her necromancy on paper at her desk. Pretty soon it got so that even a poor title sold a half-million copies—and a million copy sale was considered just average. Rosemary would dash into my office holding a hard-covered edition of some cheap novel that hadn't sold three thousand copies in the trade edition—and she'd insist we reprint it in soft covers. We'd argue that it hadn't sold well at all, but she'd simply say: "That's all the more readers left for us." Of course, we'd finally agree; and, of course,

the book would sell around two million copies.

BY THE time I'd been there six months, my friendship with Rosemary had increased to the point where I was taking her to lunch a couple of times a week. It was at one of these luncheon dates, in a little French place off Fifth Avenue, that I finally persuaded her to tell me the secret of her fantastic skill.

"Well," she said, "I've never told this to any of the other vultures, but somehow you're different." I thanked her quickly and she went on: "It's all done by figuring the percentage of incidents. It took me nearly five years to work out a sort of slide-rule mathematical equation. I've discovered that it's mathematically possible to cause any two objects to meet at a given time and place, provided you know enough about these objects and c a n exercise enough control over one of them. I aim one angle of incidence to meet another angle of incidence. Result? Co-incidence!"

It sounded even more fantastic to me, but I didn't interrupt.

"In the case of distribution," she went on, "I figure out just where and when the supply and demand will meet. I sent books to that spot—and people buy them. It's that simple."

I shook my head and asked for more details.

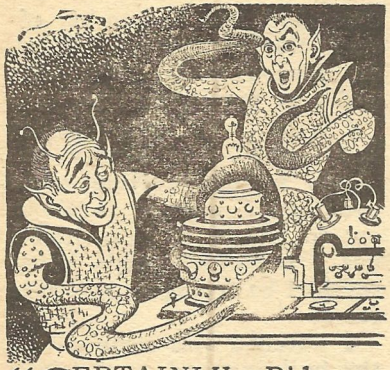
"Look," she said, "figuring mathematically that 500 people in Chicago will want one of our new mysteries next Tuesday, I see that that many books get out there. That's all; my equation works it all out for me. It means getting the books to exactly the spot where the consumer is when he decides he wants that certain book."

Her eyes drooped as she added ominously: "I can do the same thing with any two objects, knowing e n o u g h about them."

"Why did you choose publishing?"

"I knew it was the best way for me to get to the top fast. The big drawback in publishing has always been, it seems to me, that the books aren't around at the exact instant that most people want to buy them. By the time they see the book they wanted, the purchasing desire has decreased. Put the books into their hands when their purchasing desire is at its peak, and you've got sales."

"And you say you can do this with other things as well?"



"CERTAINLY. Did you ever stop to think that when a man gets hit with an automobile it's because both of them have come together at exactly the same time and place by a chain of events? Think of the millions of events, all unconnected, that have resulted in their coming together."

"And you claim you can control some of these events."

"*Some* of them. I can make calculations. If I can control some of the fractional events, I can bring man and book, or man and automobile, together."

She looked so serious that I laughed a little. "With that sort of power, you can control destiny."

She didn't laugh. "Yes, I suppose I could. . ."

The conversation ended there. Going back to work, I pushed the incident to the back of my mind. We had to line up some strong sellers—five million copy sellers—for the big Christmas trade, and I was busy fighting with publishers for rights.

IT WAS one afternoon around four that Rosemary and Mason had their last big fight. It was over a policy matter, concerning exactly what type of books we should concentrate on; and Mason, for once, wouldn't listen to Rosemary.

"I'm still in charge here," he told her sharply. "You haven't got my job yet. And if I have anything to do with it, you won't get it either; I'll keep it if I have to live to be a hundred."

Rosemary's bony face looked frostbitten. She said nothing in return; she simply retreated to her tiny office. I thought that the whole thing had blown over until, a few days later I happened to walk in and found her gazing out the window, making careful notes on a memo pad. When I asked her what she was doing, she was too absorbed to reply. But I had seen enough to know, anyway.

Rosemary was timing the traffic light on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street and ticking off the number of cars that passed.

In the days that followed, I caught her looking out the window several times, writing figures, timing automobiles as they rounded the corner. And she began watching Mason closely, too. He always left the office at three minutes to five. He was the kind of punctual man you could set your watch by; he always walked down the two flights of stairs, rather than wait for the elevator.

Rosemary began staying late at the office, until after Mason left. Then she would run to the window and time him as he left the building and crossed Forty-seventh Street on his way to Grand Central Terminal.

I told myself it was all sheer nonsense, but still...

It was on a Friday night, just before five, that she stepped from her office, stood in the hall and called to Mason as he was leaving. He frowned and walked over to her, glancing at his watch; she started discussing some quite irrelevant matter about a wholesaler out in California.

I GLANCED at the big wall clock as they talked, and I was aware that Rosemary was watching it, too. Finally, when they'd been talking for exactly fifty-five seconds, she suddenly cut the conversation short and retreated to her office, closing the door. Hastily Mason went down the stairs to the street.

I went to my own window and looked out. Slowly but surely an odd feeling crept over me. I wanted to shout out to Mason, to warn him—but I remained numb. What would I be trying to save him from?

I watched him come out of the building and start across the street.

He was halfway across, when a taxi rushed around the corner and struck him head on...

Well, shortly after Mason's funeral, word came from the big boss that Rosemary was now vice president of *Neptune Books*. We were all happy for her, of course, but it wasn't long after that that I left *Neptune* and went back to my old job on a true crime magazine.

Oh, I know the whole thing is fantastic, and that Mason's death was just a coincidence, but still I felt a chill about staying around here, near Rosemary.

Suppose I'd fallen hard for her and asked her to marry me. And she accepted. I'd spend the rest of my life wondering when she was going to stop me and talk to *me* for exactly fifty-five seconds!

THE LAST WORD

STAY-AT-HOME

Dear Sir;

Having in the past year or so become rather sour about the general field of science fiction, I must confess that I approached your May issue rather haphazardly. I took it with me while I soaked my current flu in a long hot tub, perhaps feeling that if I happened to drop it into the water, it would be no great loss.

This is to report that I did not drop it. In fact, I clutched it tightly and stayed wide awake as I went from front to back covers. 144 pages after I had gotten the water adjusted and stepped in to boil, I emerged considerably enlightened, parboiled and un-flued. Your May issue has been filed on my shelf of rare issues of occasional magazines which I feel I may want to reread.

Your editorial in itself is worth 35¢, while Jones' novel made me regret having recently spent three bucks on a hard-back science fiction novel which, on reflection, strikes me as having been worth maybe a dime. I wish Jones had written that three buck opus. I'd rather he got the royalties than the jerk who did.

Why did I sour? Well, I guess it was a case of space-sickness. I got tired of roving all over the universe, viewing an infinite number of fascinating worlds, each of which seemed a little more familiar than the last. I sort of lost interest in what was happening in some planetary system in another galaxy, because I kept wondering what might happen in our own, particularly on this little terrene mote we call home. For a story like Jones', even a bad one, which his certainly isn't, I'll happily pass up twenty voyages to other systems. It's our world; we've done our bit to help make it what it is; what's going to happen to it? This is what interests me. I'm willing to extrapolate as far as Mars, perhaps, but there are too many unanswered questions, speculations and implications about our own planet. I'll stay home, thanks, where life and history are quite complicated enough.

Some of my science fiction acquaintances laugh at this attitude, calling me "Dad" or "Fuddy-Duddy" or "Space-chicken." To which I say, "Well, kids, years ago I shipped out on the *Space Beagle*, and I guess I saw about all there was to see, because most of the stuff I've encountered since seems

vaguely reminiscent of that voyage."

"What about telepaths or mutants?" pipes Leo, from down the street.

"Well," say I again, "a *Slan* by any other name is merely a variation, atomic or otherwise.

"But say," I'll go on, "I read something really interesting last night, a story about a *Non-statistical Man.* You oughta come back to earth and read it."

Speaking for this old isolationist, at least, I hope your forthcoming issues are as good as this.

ROBERT L. COOK, Boulder, Colorado

The "wonders" of almost anything at all can pall on you, eventually, if that's all there is in the stories. But sometimes things at home can be explored more convincingly when the reader is taken far away from Earth and (seemingly) its problems.

THIN SKINS

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I can understand why authors themselves would prefer not to have a critic such as Damon Knight drag them and their stories over the coals, but why the readers should protest to hard-hitting criticism is something I can't understand. Writers, naturally, believe their own material to be among the best in all of science fiction, and therefore dislike to have Knight and others burst their bubble of self-satisfaction; but it would seem to me that readers would like to be shown the faults in new books and stories.

Henry Bott, reviewer of books for *Imagination,* made some rather biting stabs at Isaac Asimov's "The Caves of Steel" this time a year ago; this started a tidal wave of controversy which has died out only recently. Bott, contrary to Miller, Conklin, Boucher, and others, pointed out the weaknesses in Asimov's novel, and condemned what he felt was a poor book. Ike, in rebuttal, wrote an article in one of the leading fanzines, wherein he lamented the fact that writers such as himself should be cursed with reviewers like Bott. As I mentioned previously, controversy over the pros & cons of the Bott-Asimov feud sprang up like weeds throughout the fanzines and Bill Hamling's magazines.

Now I don't know what the impression was that other science fiction fans received from this entire thing, but Asimov lost a lot of my respect in the exchange. Everyone else literally lapped "The Caves of Steel" up, and why one really critical review should cause Ike such unhappiness is not clear in my mind. He certainly can't expect the weaknesses in his novels (and he has them; no writer is perfect) to be overlooked completely by everyone; if a particular reviewer feels that the book in question is of questionable merit, he has the per-

fect right, almost duty bound, to point out the flaws for the reading public. I don't care if the writer is an old hand like Bob Heinlein, Asimov, Leinster, or a youngster like Bob Sheckley, Poul Anderson, or Chad Oliver; no author is immune to criticism, and if he isn't mature enough to accept it humbly, he is in the wrong business.

Naturally, I cite the Asimov case only as an example. As a matter of fact, Ike is one of my favorite writers, and I include his "Foundation" books among my own personal science fiction classics. The willingness to accept criticism is a quality that should be in every author. I heartily support Damon Knight and all other reviewers who perform their job as critics wholly, or actually *do* criticize. More power to them, and may the writers and readers who cannot stand up under their probing fall by the wayside!

It may seem strange, but I am going to choose Irving Cox's short story, "Project Flatty", as the best in the May issue. (Strangeness comes in because it is in opposition to an eighty page novel, a featured short by Isaac Asimov, and material by Algis Budrys and Bob Silverberg.) The reason I pick "Project Flatty" is because of its snap ending and the fine way in which it compresses Cox's most interesting concept to date in short story form. The idea that a race of fourth dimensional beings could invade our continum by utilizing one of our race as a gineau pig is real food for thought, and the stimulation of thought is also a prime considerate of my idea of a good science fiction story.

Bob Silverberg is rapidly becoming one of my favorite young writers, and "The Dessicator" serves to strengthen his position. Let's have more by SilverBob.

KENT MOOMAW, Cincinnati, Ohio

A writer certainly has cause for objection if a critic calls him to task for something he hasn't done (that is, charges him with some literary crime of which he's innocent, rather than with neglect of something he should have done); or completely fails to see what he was doing; or berates him for not doing something that would have been wrong in this particular story if he had done it; or if the critic puts his own words into the author's mouth and then jumps him for saying something he did not say, and so on. Whether any of these apply to the Bott attack upon "Caves Of Steel". I have no idea— but the point I want to make is that there's a difference between an author's protesting that he's been misrepresented (and citing chapter and verse to prove it) and an author howling because someone doesn't seem to like his latest.

BROADENING

Dear Mr. Lowndes;

The first thing I thought of

when I saw the March issue of your mag was (frankly) oh, no, not another one! Then after purusing the contents, I noticed that the March issue is labeled Vol. 6 no. 5... Now I's wondering how come I ain't seed one afore now? Huh?

Anyways, I'm writing to tell you that I like it; and furthermore, what I like in it; and furthermore yet even (if this portabobble doesn't get too excentric) *why* I like what I like.

But, before we get in to that, if this fellow was painting in oils (cover) howcome he's using a watercoler brush? Back to the painting outside; one understands that maybe? If so he wouldn't be painting outside; one understands that said mediums were rather clumsey. Maybe that's why the story gave the impression that he was painting inside. Anyway I think the cover's very good; I do *so* like those original things Emsh puts in his Illos. Like that chronometer whatsis the painter is so proudly displaying on his right wrist. Just the sort of nice heavy thing a painter needs on his right wrist. Knew a painter once who always wore a heavy falcon gauntlet when he was painting. Said he wouldn't be without it. Gives one something to overcome you know. Sense of accomplishment and all that.

...and the ravening monster looks up from the gory pieces, hoping against hope that another antagonist will come into view. But the air which so lately had resounded to shieks and grones was once again nought but a peaceful noonday day buzz of lethargic insects ...and I might add at this point that if you think I like to run off at the typer you ought to be around when I can actually do it by *mouth.*

Thought all the features and article and stuff were excellent. I had just taken a large bite out of an apple upon reading the last line of Garrett's parody thing and I certainly hope there's nothing in those horrible stories that my dear little old granny used to tell me about naughty little children who swallow pits an stuff. Also enjoyed what Mr. Asimov had to say on the subject. That is if you call several minutes of laughter *enjoying* it. Sure an' it's Mr. Kipling as should feel grateful now.

I would like to ask Mr. Terwilleger a question. Did the magazines do anything really interesting during the several months in which you so silently watched them? Seems a rather hard go of it if they didn't. But then I know the lengths to which some of you fellows will go in the interests of Pure Science. I could never really understand it, but then perhaps I am not a Right Thinker.

Mr. Lowndes, you had several very well took points in ye olde editorial. I don't think that science fiction can teach anyone any but the most rudimentary of facts. But it can (and does, Ghu willing) give readers a broader outlook on

the facts they already possess. It might not actually teach one to add the sums of two and two, thereby arriving at the figure designated as four. But it should give one the wit to realize that two parts of water and two, of say oil, are not necessarily becoming a homogenous mixture of said four upon addition. (I trust you follow me?) And after all, that's half the battle. However, these qualities are not (as I believe you said) confined to science fiction. Any fiction worth its salt will start one thinking about (and possibly revising opinions of) what one has been handed as the Immutable Truths. I do think though, that science fiction can do this more readily. If only because the writer can handle his material more freely.

As for the fiction in your mag: Frankly, I *prefer* mine a little more on the sophisticated side. Yours does tread the balance between "action" and "mind" nicely, though. Is it your fault if I think such a nicely-treaded-upon balance merely makes for rather dull reading? Obviously not. And also obviously there are others who do not think as I do. But then, that's what makes the world go round and wars that keep the pop-u-lation down.

Now take that "Spaceman's Van Gogh", ferinstance. The plot reminds me of whitesauce with too little flour. Simmered for quite a long while and achieved a lovely texture, but the poor thing never *did* thicken much.

As for 'Through a Glass Darkly' in my humble (I don't believe it for a minute) opinion, the quotation gives a good deal more pause for thought than the whole novel. And while we're speaking of the quote, it really didn't have too much to do with the novel as a whole, did it? Oh, I take it back, maybe it did, too.

Can't think of anything witty to sign out on, so guess I'll just have to go.

PAT SCOTT, Spokane, Washington

Are you sure *that is a water-color brush in the artist's hand on the March cover? I have some oil-paint brushes, at home, which look just like it. "Texture", it seems to me is just what Simak was trying to get in "Spaceman's Van Gogh".*

RECOVERY

Dear Bob:

Yech! R. Frazier's defense of science fiction fans in your March ish of *Original* was oh, so good! Never in my entire four years as a fan have I seen such fire, such enthusiasm, such a display of loyalty from one person! Frazier got a lot off of my chest when he said those things, believe me. That boy is goin' places, yup!

No. I will not say that *Original* is the best mag on the stands. Because you know it, I know it, and everybody else knows it. So why should I say it is? But let me say

this, kid: your mag is light years from the bottom of the pile. You've got the right idea; you're on the right track. In shorter words, I predict that, in a coupla years, you *will* be on top! Just keep climbin' up that rough old ladder.

And I read your mag regularly. So you've still a customer.

Before I close this letter, with your indulgence, I'd like to state a pet theory of mine. And it concerns this *"slump"* in science fiction. In my own opinion, it's far from a slump. I believe that the drop is due to the final weeding out of poor writers in the field. And if the market grows, it'll not be just good, but terrific! Watch it. The science fiction industry is taking a much deserved breather after the boom. And when it recovers, you'll see something that'll make you proud. Have faith.

KENNETH TIDWELL, Austin, Texas

Unfortunately, a depressed market sometimes drives out good writers as well as the bad and the mediocre.

GO MONTHLY, HE SAYS

Dear Editor;

Your March issue was superb. Best of the stories was Milt Lesser's "Through A Glass Darkly". I think this is one of Lesser's best.

In your Jan. issue you said that the story "The Spaceman's Van Gogh" was a very unusual story and it had an idea you've never seen before. Well, you certainly were 100% right.

Here are the rest of my ratings:

(1)-The Vacationer
(2)-The Bloomers Of Shizar
(3)-Comes The Revolution

I enjoyed L. Sprague de Camp's article immensely, and I am looking forward to many more. Randall Garrett's parody was also enjoyed and I read it many a time. Knight's reviews didn't seem quite up to par this issue.

A few suggestions: Go monthly as soon as possible; increase the size of the letter department, and have a fanzine column.

I am eagerly anticipating your next issue.

If this sees print, I would like fans between ages 14-17 to write to me.

MARTY FLEISCHMAN, Bronx, New York

The letter department varies in length, both as to the number of letters received, and the space at hand when an issue is closed.

MINORITY REPORT

Dear Robert:

What the hell was Mr. Simak trying to convey in his "Spaceman's Van Gogh?" If *you* know, or if Clifford has a thought, please let me in on it. The symbolism was so vast and so vague that it sort of

ended up by swallowing its tale, and tail too. And me.

And by the Great God Pan—if one more burrow or room or castle or tunnel is lit by Clifford's "heaps of glowing material piled in dishes", or *glows* of *any* kind from whatever overburdened, overcliched source—why I will eat a copy of Norman Vincent Peale's "Guide to Confident Living" and go and sin no more. Brothers, let us just say the room, or burrow, or tunnel or castle is "lighted" somehow, hey? and let it go at that. How about that amazing and rarely thought of idea: "slits in the walls for the light to come thru?" Gad, what an innovation.

And while you're at it, toss the rest of this letter over to that cultivated and entertaining, (but sour grapeish) fellow Damon Knight. I read Vernon's "The Space Frontiers" and it was by no means as sour an apple as sourish Damon would have us believe. Some of you old cusses who have read everything and seen everything, forget that each year there is a whole raft of dewy new readers who discover science fiction and who have never heard even of Bradbury and the old boys. Seems unbelievable doesn't it veterans? And to the youngsters *everything* is new, exciting—even Simak's "heaps of glowing material".

Writers *do* have to mix up their fare don't they—or rather *shouldn't* they. Otherwise you get typed and stale in a few years, more's the pity. And Robert—it must be hard to have to turn down established writers' offerings, but I really think you should do it every now and then, for your magazine's sake.

Certainly glad I can find my way around to my farm chores with a flashlight. Might spill heaps of glowing material or get it kicked out of my hands by bossy. Science is *so* helpful.

ROBERT LaBOUR, Sand Lake, Michigan

The one letter of outright objection to the Simak story ought to be preserved in its uniqueness.

WHY DON'T THEY WRITE?

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

There has been much conjecture on what is the cause of the present decline of writing in science fiction. I would say first that it is not mostly the editors' fault, but that of the writers themselves. There are quite a number of authors who are not presently writing science fiction as often as they should, or could. Many of the authors not writing science fiction (or fantasy) are very good ones. In fact, I would say that most of the good writers are the ones sitting back and letting second-raters do the job.

Just take a look at the number of science fiction authors now not writing: Philip Jose Farmer, A. E. van Vogt, J. T. M'Intosh, Kris Neville, Frank M. Robinson, Fred-

eric Brown, T. L. Sherred, H. Beam Piper, R. Bretnor, Raymond E. Banks, Jerome Bixby, Walter M. Miller, Jr., Fritz Leiber, John Wyndham, John Christopher, George O. Smith, Edgar Pangborn, P. Schuyler Miller, H. B. Fyfe, Katherine MacLean, Ross Rocklynne, Jack Finney, Graham Doar, Charles L. Harness, Alfred Bester, Hal Clement, Fletcher Pratt, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Wilmar H. Shiras, William Sloane, and E. E. Evans. I also think that some short stories by the editors would also help science fiction—namely by Tony Boucher, H. L. Gold, John W. Campbell, Jr., and Bob Lowndes. I would also welcome the great John Collier to the pages of *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* These are all good authors (in my opinion) and if they wrote just two or three stories a year, science fiction wouldn't be in the predicament it is now.

A good example of the decline in science fiction is the disappearance of *Startling Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Fantastic Story Magazine,* and the annual. Just at the beginning of last year, the three titles were combined into one, which continued as a quarterly; then the quality of the stories dropped, and later *Startling Stories* was discontinued.

Let's take a look at the magazines individually. *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* in my opinion, is the best. Second comes *Astounding Science Fiction*—second merely because of the drop in quality from its standing of three years ago. Then you could find van Vogt, Heinlein, Robinson, Blish, Shiras, and Jones all in the same issue. Third is *If;* it has not shown much drop in quality, but had to go bi-monthly in order to maintain it. Fourth is *Science Fiction Stories,* and in fifth place lies *Galaxy Science Fiction,* showing a tremendous drop in quality from about four years ago. I honestly believe that it should go bi-monthly. One magazine that hasn't dropped in quality very much is *Fantastic Universe,* which averages about ten stories per issue—but about a fifth of them are very poor. Hamling's two magazines are going down like a sinking ship. Have you seen the latest issues? Another magazine that could be doing better is *Infinity;* I was particularly surprised at the number of grade C stories in that magazine. Palmer's show some sign of improvement, but that isn't saying much. He says he wants to make science fiction the wonderful thing it used to be under such guys as Heinlein and Sturgeon. About the only thing you can do is to publish stories by them. Last, but not least, is Browne's magazines. What in the world happened to them? About two or three years ago, they had writers like Bradbury, Sturgeon, Heinlein, Coppel, Leinster, and Matheson; and the stories were printed on good paper, and were accompanied by good illustrations.

Today, though, everything is the opposite.

Anyway, if the authors who could write good science fiction don't write, and if the over all quality doesn't improve with the lesser number of magazines, then the complete death of science fiction, as far as magazines go, is a surety.

Now is the time for all good men (science fiction writers) to come to the aid of science fiction!

W. G. CATHERINGTON
(address lost)

Are you positive *that the authors you list could write more often? Not knowing the circumstances in each case, I cannot sustain or overrule your claim; but I do know, for example, that Fletcher Pratt has been tied up in other commitments for a long time—which is why several "Gavagan's Bar" stories long since mapped out have not been written.*

WHO'S SORRY NOW?

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

To emulate my betters
In the science-fiction mags,
I have written several letters
While on criticism jags.
Being terribly faint-hearted,
Most of these I kept myself,
But the letters that departed
Ended up "upon the shelf",
So, tho' eager to be printed,
I was lacking what it takes,
When a certain author hinted
At a way to get the breaks:
When you want to write, you *rhyme* it;
What you say no longer counts;
You don't weigh each line, you *time* it;
You don't criticize; you *bounce.*
So, I'm being very jivy;
So I'm jumping up and down,
And I left the halls of ivy
For the clatter of the town.
So, dear Editor, please notice
That I've really done my stint,
And I've eaten of the lotus
Just to get my name in print.

FRANCES BOVE (address lost)

P. S.:

I would like to name the poet,
But my doggerel should scan—
So I can't, although I know it,
'Cause I can't pronounce the man.
He undoubtedly is *Gar*rett;
But I'd really be upset
If the star of all this narrat-
Ive turned out to be Gar*rett.*
In closing, I commend you;
Sir, your stories are the best.
Mars and Jupiter defend you,
And false Vulcan take the rest!

Now to state the matter briefly,
And perhaps avoid the grief the
Flat rejection of innum'rable
Future letters done in verse
Would create: Well, the consum'-
rable
Po'try quota's full. Don't curse:
If a myriad wish, I will
Confine this space to doggerell!

WHAT MAKES THEM RUN?

(*Continued from page* 1)

IN HIS excellent manual, "Writing To Sell"*, a volume that few commercial writers, and *no* science fiction authors should be without (unless its precepts are all ready within them), Scott Meredith entitled his chapter on Characterization, "Stuffing The Hollow Men". It would be difficult to imagine a more apt title for this chapter, since "hollow" describes more alleged people appearing in science fiction than is comfortable for anyone to count.

The author notes, in part, the means by which characters of real-life people are demonstrated to you in everyday living. How, after all, are you able to gauge and evaluate the inner workings of people around you, and eventually understand their characters and know them for what they are? You do so through your observation of three types of outward signs: the things they do, the way they act when things happen to them, and their obvious reasons for doing things. To put it another way, you judge people by their actions, reactions, and motivations."

Richard Seaton is a hollow man: we read about what he does in "Skylark Of Space" and its sequels; we read about his surface reactions to things that happen to him, and we read about his superficial motivations. But you cannot get to know anyone, or make any reliable evaluation of anyone's character, without learning something about what lies underneath his skin. One does not have to be a Freudian to realize that most people do not always act consistently with the way they talk; one only has to be observant, and to have a moderately good memory. Evaluating a man's character, then, includes being aware of the *differences* between the way he talks and the way he acts, and learning to some extent what relationship these differences have to each other.

WHERE—in what areas of his behaviour—are the

* Harper & Brothers, New York, 1950. $2.75, and the most underpriced book of its kind in print, for anyone capable of learning.

differences notable? Is he aware of them? If not, how does he conceal them from himself? Is it obvious to others *why* these differences operate and *why these*, rather than certain others? What fears do they reveal? (The *fundamental* nature of these and the way they originated lies in the province of psychopathology.)

Does he boast about his truthfulness, yet frequently tell flagrantly obvious little lies? Are these lies generally harmless, or at least not particularly malicious? Does he seem to *intend* to be truthful, whatever his failings in practice? Is he straightforward about matters where one familiar with his petty fabrications might expect him to be dishonest?

Here, then, is one type of character-trait, which cannot but play a considerable part in the person's actions, reactions, and motivations.

This sort of thing is called ambivalence, and nearly everyone has some kind of ambivalence, although it is by no means as overt as this in many, if not most cases. It bespeaks inner conflict, something again which everyone experiences in some way and some time or another. One wants to do something, and finds one can't—or inadvertantly does something else; one doesn't want to do something, and finds oneself doing it nonetheless. *Extreme* cases are what layman think of when you mention the word "neurotic", and when the extreme gets to the point where the person just can't cope at all we have the inmate—or potential inmate—of an institution.

But Seaton shows no ambivalence at all; his inner life is calm and untroubled. He has no anxiety—except where some incident such as his sweetheart being kidnapped, calls for it. Ambivalent behaviour comes from anxieties which are not a response to a direct, overt danger at the time. They make up what "normal" people think of as human "foibles", little eccentricities we observe in our neighbors and friends and relatives (some of whom we term "characters") while not being aware of what they may observe in us.

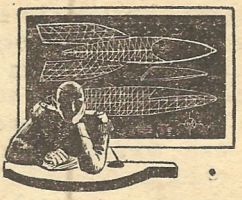
IT IS well to remember that the man who can make clear and sure decisions without feeling any stress, any ambivalence of motive, in crucial matters—particularly where worlds are at stake, as is so often the case in science fiction—is probably insane.

Seaton, of course, is not insane; he is merely hollow. He

speaks a kind of slanguage which was a relief to readers of the 20's brand of science fiction, filled with Victorian dialogue; he knows Right from Wrong (a riddle which has puzzled Saints); and he has all the cultural development of an adding machine. He does seem to be a rather good scientist and engineer, particularly when teamed with Crane; but outside of scientific matters, he shows a truly awesome inability to understand other people. (To a certain extent, the plot depends upon this.)

Marc C. DuQuesne, the main character Seaton fails to comprehend, emerges as a more believable person. His motives and methods are antisocial, but he knows what he wants, the purpose for which he wants it, and sets about to get it in a proportionate manner. When foiled, he doesn't curse the hero (as he might, were he on the same level of characterization as is Seaton) but merely tries a different tack, learning what methods to avoid from experience. His "villainy" is all to his practical ends; he doesn't indulge in crime or brutality for its own sake, and doesn't exceed the necessities of the occasion.

IN FACT, wherever DuQuesne and Seaton are on



anything like equal terms, DuQuesne wins; knowing the world as it is and people as they are, he knows how to get what he wants. Seaton, pure of heart and filled with sentiment, can cope well enough with people who are "good", as he is; otherwise, he's outclassed. Overwhelming equipment and armament is handed to him, and his technically brilliant and storywise boring victories ensue.

Much the same can be said of the Lensman stories, except that they lack even as rounded a character as DuQuesne. The alien beings, with whom the author has always been delightfully adept, are more vivid in these stories the author is able to exploit in them specific, usually more-or-less isolated human character traits and work them out with fascinating logic. Since we don't expect a combination lizard and centipede, etc., to behave like a human being, giving the creature one or two recognizably human characteristics, and going all out with them makes the *thing* much more "alive"

than a hollow man bearing some variety of "good guy" or "bad guy" designation on his corrugated cardboard forehead.

A STORY can contain skillful *characterization,* and still be deficient in character; this is what happens when the people in a story are poured into the plot like water into ice cube trays. In most cases just about everything about each main character of this type could be changed except his plot-function, without making any great difference to the story—just as you can substitute jello for water in a given section of the tray. It'll look different, but will take the same shape and bear the same relation to the shape and design of the ice cube tray as before. Take some science fiction story with an interesting plot, and see *how much* you can re-tailor the characteristics of the lead "characters" without making any essential change in the story necessary.

THERE IS one kind of story in which this cannot be

done: that is the story where the plot is *built upon and derives from* the character of a person or group of people. All you can shift then is minor stage business, and not too much of that. If one person has a twitch in the eye, you might be able to substitute some other type of twitch—but *the reason for this twitch* is also part of the reason why he does other essential things, too. That is, his personal inner conflicts are such as to produce this type of overt, outward manifestation as part of his general pattern of behaviour; it isn't just a "tag", any more than Captain Queeg's business with the little steel balls.

In the "characterized" plot-story, Captain Queeg would have rolled his little steel balls more or less continuously, which helped distinguish him from Lt. Keefer, but there wouldn't have been any particular meaning to the gesture; nor would it have necessarily borne any relation to the other things he did, to his general outlook and attitudes, and so forth. But the whole point of the mutiny lies in *why* Queeg fondles these little marbles, and what sort of circumstances produce this gesture. The story is built upon Queeg's tormented personality, related to the slightly less tormented, but more outwardly "normal" personalities of Lt. Keefer, and the others.

THE ENTIRE story doesn't revolve around Queeg's conflicts, or around those of any other one character: the story as a whole *does* derive from a group of personalities in inter-relation. There is ample plot, and incidents arise from situations outside the frame of character reference, as is needed in most stories. We see that plot consists of situation (command of a ship in wartime) and character-in-situation (Queeg's basic unsuitability for this type of command, his repressed awareness and fear of it); of ter-conflict (Keefer's white mutiny against Queeg, which went on for a long time before the actual "mutinous" act; the orders to the *Caine* that led up to the yellow stain incident); this complex altering situation in ways which incident of itself would not do (the orders to the *Caine* would not, of themselves, have produced the *Caine's* desertion of the landing boats, without Queeg's character-conflicts); of conflict between personalities (Queeg versus Keefer-Maryk-Keith, et al), and the total reacting

and inter-reacting all along the line.

Queeg and the others are characters; they are not names *characterized* to carry a plot; the plot derives from them.

In the better grade murder mysteries, such as those by Agatha Christie, Rex Stout, John Dickson Carr, and others, the essential gimmick is, of course, the solution to a puzzle. But this solution comes not only from tangible evidence and overt action which pile up "clues" for the detective, but through exploration of the personalities and character of both victim and suspects. Sheerly as a puzzle, the murder mystery palls as quickly as mechanics dramatized; the reader's emotions must be involved through the incident aggravating characters who will be interesting enough so that he will care whether one or another is guilty, and perhaps feel sympathy for the culprit as well as for the victim. (The device of making the victim so repulsive that no sympathy is felt for him has been worn out, and is essentially false in the first place.)

PERHAPS "empathy" is a better term, since the object of character-presentation is to get various feelings across to the unseen reader, to project understanding, rather than necessarily to enlist the reader's sympathies on one particular side. Empathy is needed in the instance of the victim, for we need to know what kind of a person he was. (Rigid and unyielding in some respects; he was determined that the Truth Must Be Told At All Costs.) Here we can find clues as to why he was killed, and what kind of person did it. (He Was About To Tell All. But since

he hadn't gone to the police, the issue in question wasn't criminal.) Almost anyone may kill under the right circumstances for that person, but we know these differ widely; what one may consider a "killing matter", another may disregard as trivial. And even if we have a situation where any one of a group might have considered the urgency sufficient to justify the risk of murder, it's unlikely that any two would employ the same method, the same means, the same time. These choices spring from character, where first degree murder is concerned.

"Character study" can, of course, be overdone in detective fiction and in science fiction; it has been overdone in both, at times. The chronic bursts of interest among science fictionists in various kinds of psychopathology and self-help, etc., have led some authors to forget that fiction is not case history, and that while an author should know his characters thoroughly, *all* he knows about them doesn't have to get into the story. Nor, with rare exceptions, will detailed psychoanalysis either aid the story or interest most of the readers. (We do not go into the reasons behind Captain Queeg's breakdown, for example, until *after* the mutiny; and there it plays a functional part in the action.) In the first place, character-conflict must necessarily be simplified; for the most part, fictional characters cannot be as complex as real people, cannot be as torn as many different ways simultaneously as we are at times in everyday life, cannot be as inconsistent, and so forth. But what *is* presented must be logical and believable within its own frame of reference.

THERE IS not, of course, any one sure-fire formula for character-presentation which will guarantee success, but a skeleton outline for general use and variation might go something like this.

1. A minor climax and a major direction in the story line, and plot thereafter, should derive from a decision that the lead has to make early in the story. This decision should be one about which his feelings are divided; he is faced with alternatives, none of which may be too desirable, but one of which seems more necessary than any of the others. The choice is not easy to make, and he is not at ease in making it, but he commits himself in one direction.

2. The ambivalence should continue through the story. The commitment involves

something the lead fears (not by any means necessarily physical) and following it will force him to change his attitudes, etc., as his involvement deepens—which it does.

3. Various incidents arise because of this commitment, or his ambivalence, which would not have arisen—or would have come about in a less rugged manner.

4. He may try to reverse himself, and either find it impossible, or find that this doesn't help.

5. In the end, this initial decision turns out to have been the right one—or the best one under the circumstances—both for the problem he is facing and for his own peace of mind, etc. He is in a happier state, generally, because of it.

6. The final climax, solution, plot-windup, etc., while not necessarily dependent upon the early decision is substantially shaped by it. He *might* have won, or the problem *might* have been solved, had he taken one of the alternate choices back then—but if this is the case, a sizeable fraction of what has become an all-over satisfactory resolution of plot and character would not have come through.

7. This is worked out through character inter-relations, as well as through plot twists, etc. The two should be at least equal in importance; in any event, the character development and relationships must not be subordinated to plot-machinations.

As with most formulas dealing with art, these are only general suggestions and needn't (and perhaps shouldn't) be followed to the letter at all times. However, I think they ought to be followed in spirit, if we are going to have life in stories and characters. R. W. L.

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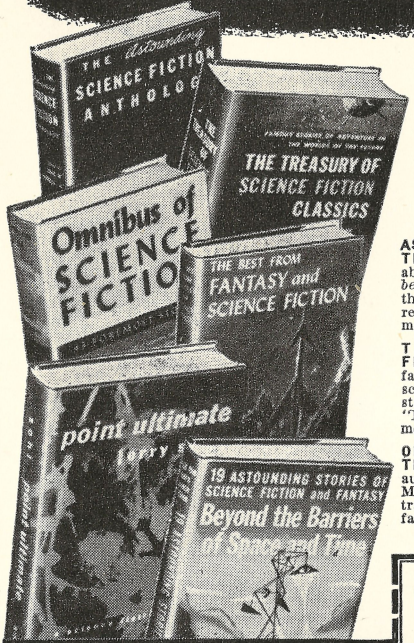

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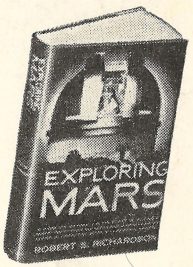

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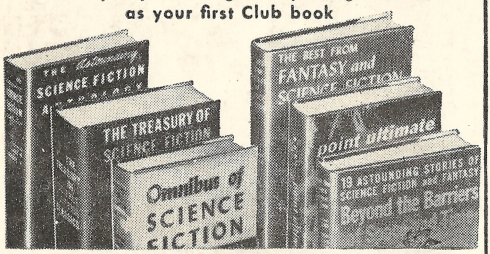

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