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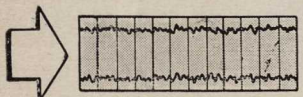

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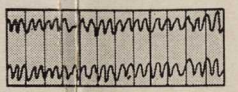

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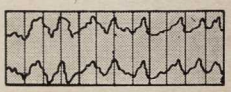

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NOVELETS

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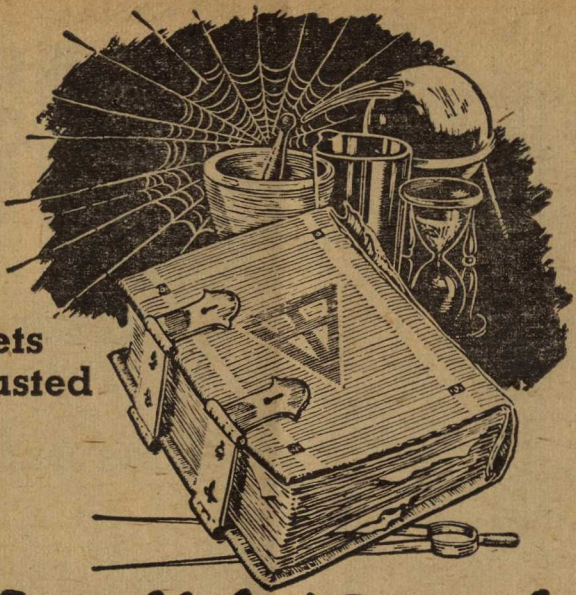

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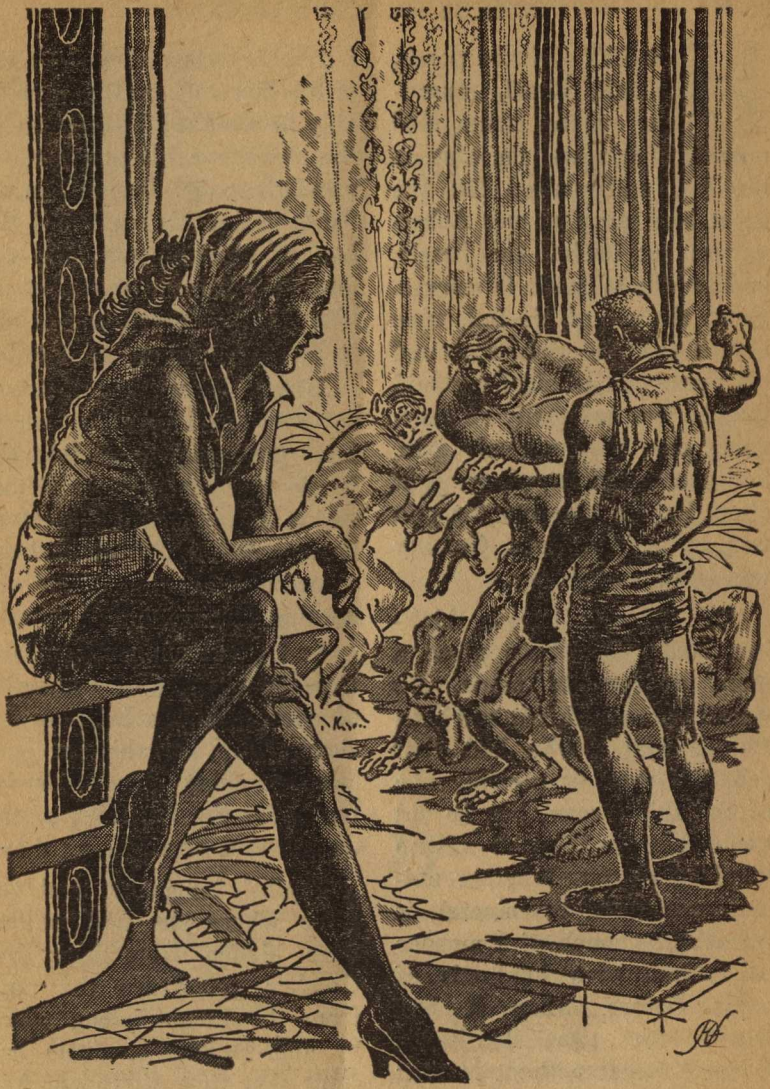
Novelet

riddle of the deadly paradise

by Charles Long

illustrated by FREAS

It was a pleasant, peaceful world, and the natives seemed to be both harmless and friendly. A perfect world for colonization — only all the former colonists had disappeared. All their belongings and homes had been found in perfect order. There was no indication of disaster — but the people had vanished. And John Crocker found that this second expedition was to be used as bait...



Crocker pointed to the jungle. "There lies the thing that killed our friends! Go find it for us." The natives were overcome with fright...

HE SAT ON the porch, a tall, blond, muscular young man clad only in shorts and the cast on his leg, and waited for the great blue sun that was Achernar to set behind the jungle, and for the Whoozit to emerge. From the set of his full, wide mouth and the crinkles around his eyes, you would have said that he was ordinarily an easy-going man with a ready grin, and you would have been right about it; but just now the grin was in eclipse. John Crocker was tense and jittery.

The Whoozit, he was thinking, could have been given a more appropriate name. He wasn't sure whether it had been Phyllis Hatch who had first called it that, or possibly one of the ship's crew, but he did know that the Whoozit was no laughing matter. Whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, it was still as much of a menace as it had been hundreds of years before, when it had wiped out two flourishing Earth colonies without leaving a clue.

At intervals, Crocker swept the jungle with his binoculars, but there was still no stirring of life there. There would probably be none until sundown; in the meantime, his preparations were all made. Beside him on the table lay his mask and the box of replacements, and the gun that would be useless to him if the Whoozit turned out to be what he expected it to be.

It was the waiting that was so nerve-racking. He would have preferred to go into the jungle in search of the Whoozit, as he had thought he would have to do—but things had not turned out that way. There was nothing for him to do but wait.

And while he waited, John Crocker thought of the series of events that had led to his sitting here with his leg in a cast, watching the jungle intently for the first sign of the danger that was lurking there.

Phyllis' bungalow, and the place where she had waited, were hidden from him; but Crocker could see the path from the jungle, along which he and Doctor Fairlittle had come that first afternoon. And he could remember looking forward with the same old mixture of eagerness and doubt to his

first meeting with Phyllis Hatch since he had run away to space, ten years before.

FOLLOWING Doctor Fairlittle along the narrow path, John Crocker was thinking that that had been the big mistake of his life. They had told him so, the older ones, the wiser ones; they had urged him to stay and finish his education. But at nineteen, Crocker was, too full of wanderlust, to grind away at books. The road to the stars lay invitingly open to him, and he took it...

Only to find that what had seemed a broad highway was in reality a dead-end street—to find that, though an education didn't matter so much on the milk runs of the interplanetary service, he needed a degree to be even a wiper on a starship.

He should have gone back to the University then. John Crocker should have acknowledged that his advisers had been right. But he didn't; he kept on blindly in the way that he had chosen, confident that some day, somehow, he would have a share in the adventure of man's expansion to the stars.

But the possibility seemed remote—he had begun to be discouraged—when Doctor Fairlittle offered him the chance to visit the lost colonies of Achernar V. It was ironic, Crocker thought, that his first trip to the stars should bring him once again in contact with Phyllis Hatch—from whom, as much as from the stodginess of book learning, he had run away ten years before.

This time it would be different, though. She was Doctor Phyllis Hatch now, zoologist of the expedition, and he would be her assistant—in reality little more than a bodyguard. Perhaps he could associate with her without feeling the old pulse-pounding madness.

HE HAD HIS doubts, though, when he first saw her standing in the shade of a pre-fab bungalow. The years hadn't changed her a bit, he thought. She had the same trim figure, cunningly revealed by what might have been the same halter-shorts outfit that she had worn when she had posed for the picture he still cherished

in his wallet. At any rate, the outfit was just as brief and to the point.

She was looking off toward the landing field, from which direction she had expected him and the Doctor to come, and there was anxiety in her face, John thought, or disappointment.

He and Doctor Fairlittle had taken a detour to get a closer look at the jungle; now they approached the camp along a different path than the one Phyllis watched. They were quite close before Phyllis turned and saw them. Then her face lighted up, and she stepped out from her shady place to meet them.

Her legs and arms and shoulders and her bare midriff, John saw, were a golden bronze; she could probably stand the intense blue light of Achernar better than he could. Just the same, he thought, she ought to be wearing something more on her head than the scarf that bound her thick black hair. John Crocker found himself wondering whether that hair still fell to her shoulders.

She came forward and offered John her hand, and her voice was warm and vibrant. "John! I'm so glad it's you! I was hoping Doctor Fairlittle would choose someone I know and trust."

AFTER THAT first warm greeting, she was more reserved. Though she was the same vivacious Phyllis that John had known, she had a mature poise that came of professional training and experience; and she managed to make it clear that her relationship with John would be strictly business—he would be the subordinate. She touched once lightly on their former romance, but then abruptly changed the subject, seemingly dismissing the affair as campus puppy love of no consequence.

John and Doctor Fairlittle left to find Crocker's quarters, agreeing to return for dinner, which Phyllis promised would be superior to the one they would find at the mess hall. John was to bunk in Fairlittle's spare room, since the dormitory was full.

There were five men in the dormitory, all specialists. John

Crocker would be the only person in camp without a doctor's degree. There were eight altogether, counting Crocker—not a very large expedition, John reflected, to conquer a planet.

True, there was the crew of the spaceship, who had a separate camp down the beach near the landing field; but they were engaged in exploring the other planets of the system and were away most of the time. When they were present, the Earth contingent was swelled to a dozen and a half.

Fairlittle had counted on the natives to do the heavy work of the camp, but no more than a dozen of these would consent to leave their islands. And they wouldn't allow a woman of theirs to come near the mainland.

"Which is why," Doctor Fairlittle said, smiling faintly behind his goatee and his rimless bifocals, "we take turns doing the cooking in the mess hall. And why it is such a welcome relief when Phyllis invites one of us to dinner."

IT WAS GROWING dark by the time John Crocker and Fairlittle set out to walk the few yards to Phyllis' bungalow. The stars were out. This far from Earth, of course, Crocker didn't recognize a single constellation, but all of the stars seemed brighter than even the stars that twinkled in the jet-black skies of Mars. One, low in the east, shone with a steady light that cast a shadow from the overhanging jungle. A planet, John Crocker thought.

Fairlittle noticed the direction of John's gaze. "Six is nearing opposition," he observed. "At such times, she is bright enough to take the place of the moon this planet lacks."

Six, John reflected, must be the next planet outward in the system from Achernar V. He noticed that a group of chattering natives had come out from the shadows behind the bungalow. Throwing up their arms to shield them from the light of the brilliant planet, they scampered swiftly across the lighted space and into the shadow of Phyllis' bungalow. Even there, Crocker thought he detected a note of terror in their chatter.

"The Whees don't seem to like Six very much," he said.

Fairlittle answered stiffly, "Since this is the only inhabited planet of the system, the proper name for them is Achernarians." His voice moderated as he added, "It seems sometimes that they are afraid of everything around them, especially when they are near the jungle. They must be the most timid people in the Galaxy, I think."

DINNER was not the concentrated synthetic fare that John Crocker had expected, but meat and fruits and vegetables provided by the natives from their islands. Phyllis confessed that she liked this part of her pioneering life the most of all.

"I don't like the cleaning and scrubbing very much, but I find to my surprise that I like to cook."

Watching her hustling about in a simple low-cut dress protected by an apron, Crocker thought that Phyllis Hatch looked more like a happy young bride than a Doctor of Science. He wondered what his life would have been like if he had married Phyllis and had settled down at the University to finish his education. Very different, he knew; he told himself that he had possibly made two mistakes when he had run away to space.

"You may cook for us at the mess hall any time you like," Doctor Fairlittle was saying—"especially when it's Stone's turn."

Phyllis' laugh sent the same thrill traveling down John's spine that it always had. "I'd rather hunt Whoozits!"

"I'd prefer," Fairlittle said drily, "that you stick to your cooking."

Phyllis didn't answer, but her lips tightened momentarily, and Crocker could tell that this was a subject of controversy between her and Fairlittle.

AFTER DINNER, John, Phyllis, and Fairlittle sat on the screened front porch of the bungalow. There was no air-conditioning in this outpost of civilization, but the porch was cool. A breeze had sprung up from the jungle to provide a welcome relief from the heat of the day on Achernar V. There was an exotic scent in

the air that had a sensuous quality, like the perfume of a wanton.

"It's the agave," Phyllis said. "I noticed this morning that it was about to blossom." She sniffed delicately. "Isn't it heavenly? It's as if the jungle were wooing us with its perfume."

John Crocker was thinking the same thing. He was thinking of how those first colonists had disappeared. From the evidence, they had casually walked away and deserted their homes and farms and industries, seemingly without a backward glance. In most instances, they had left doors ajar and windows open, as if they had expected to return shortly.

Crocker had heard many a weird tale from star travelers about carniverous vegetable life; he would have to take a close look at the agave in the morning. But, no...the scent from the jungle, though seductive, was scarcely that powerfully hypnotic.

"But, Doctor Fairlittle," he heard Phyllis say, somewhat petulantly, he thought, "how am I ever going to discover the Whoozit if I don't go into the jungle?"

"You're not going into the jungle," the Doctor snapped—"and that's final! Your theory is preposterous in the first place."

John saw Phyllis' lips tighten again; he grinned inwardly and, for the first time, felt at home in his new environment. It was evident that Phyllis Hatch still had the same stubborn streak in her, and he suspected that she might be capable of the same flaring temper he had known.

FROM OUTSIDE, he could hear the high-pitched whee-whee-whee of the native chatter. The Achernarians' voices had a monotonous quality, like the chirp of a cricket. It was no wonder, Crocker thought, that all attempts to decipher the language so far had failed. "Don't they ever stop?"

His question had the effect of lessening the tension, at any rate. Phyllis laughed. "Scarcely ever!" She glanced mischievously at the Doctor. "Doctor Fairlittle bears the brunt of it.

The Whees follow him wherever he goes."

"One of the Achernarians," Fairlittle said, drily stressing the name, "is very much attached to a certain young lady I know."

"Poor Bozo!" Phyllis murmured.

"He follows her," Fairlittle told John, "even to the edge of the jungle of which he is so afraid."

"I had to speak to him severely," Phyllis said, "to keep him from following me into the house."

John Crocker was thinking of the brutish appearance of the Achernarians—called "Whees" by everyone but Doctor Fairlittle—and he discovered that he disliked the idea of one of the creatures following Phyllis about wherever she went. The Whees were humanoid, but barely so. True, they seemed gentle enough—Fairlittle declared that they were incapable of violence—but they were powerful brutes, and might be dangerous if they should ever get out of control.

The thought gave John another clue to the identity of the "Whoozit"—so called even by Doctor Fairlittle—for want of a better name. His mind went back over what he knew of the planet, and the conditions under which the colonists had disappeared.

II

ACHERNAR V, the fifth planet of the Achernarian system, was almost identical with the Earth in size and mass and the composition of her atmosphere; there, the resemblance ended. Her day was only slightly shorter than an Earth day; but since she revolved about her giant blue sun at a mean distance of fourteen hundred million miles, it took nearly thirty thousand of those days to make a year. One year on Achernar V, therefore, was eighty Earth years.

"Doc," John Crocker asked, "how long do the natives live?"

Phyllis answered. "Doctor Case, our botanist, and I had quite an argument about that."

"Who won?"

"We compromised. We've agreed that the plant life is adjusted to the longer cycle, but

that the animal life in general has a much shorter life span."

"Then none of the present natives could have been alive at the time the colonists disappeared?"

"Scarcely!" Fairlittle said. "They would have had to live a thousand of our years—a hundred and twenty-five of theirs."

Phyllis seconded him. "They couldn't tell us anything if they had been alive then. They understand us well enough to obey simple commands, but no one yet has learned to recognize more than a few words of their chatter."

John nodded absently. He was reviewing his knowledge of the planet. Achernar V had three great land masses, but two of these were at the poles and were eternally ice-covered. The third, stretching along the equator, was dominated by the jungle that covered nine-tenths of its arable land. The remainder of the planet was ocean dotted here and there by archipelagoes. The islands were mostly rocky and barren, except in tropical latitudes, where they were thicky populated.

"Therefore," Fairlittle told John, "we must conquer the jungle or abandon all thought of colonizing the planet."

THE FIRST colony, John knew, had been located on the seashore, a few thousand yards down the beach from the campsite. It had flourished for generations. The first Earth ship to visit the planet had found a sizeable community of well-built homes and cultivated fields and humming factories. The ship had returned to Earth with such a glowing report that a new expedition had been fitted out, with a thousand new settlers for the colony.

The new settlers had found a ghost town where the beginnings of a city had been. Though reluctant to settle in the same locality, they had not come sixty-five light-years from Earth only to turn around again at the first setback. They had chosen a new site in the rolling plains country of the northwest part of the continent, a thousand miles from the site of the original settlement.

"Doc," John Crocker asked, "were there any natives around that second settlement?"

Fairlittle shook his head. "The seacoast was a hundred miles away, the nearest inhabited islands at least five hundred."

"Then that shatters my pet theory," John said.

Phyllis was quick to know his meaning. "John, that's ridiculous! The Whees are just what they pretend to be."

"We're sure of that," Fairlittle agreed. "And besides, the Achernarian culture is still in the stone age. The natives couldn't possibly have overcome determined men with modern weapons. That's aside from the fact that there was no sign of violence."

"There probably wouldn't be," Crocker said, "if it were done stealthily enough. Well, okay, Doc—we'll scratch that off. The new colony disappeared just as the first one did?"

"In precisely the same manner. The ships of the expedition left the new settlement firmly established. They returned to find it deserted, as the first had been."

"Didn't they find a single corpse, Doc?"

"Why, yes—skeletons, that is. You understand that it was a long time between space trips in those days, John." Fairlittle stroked his goatee thoughtfully. "That's the most baffling part of the whole affair. The skeletons were either those of infants or of persons incapacitated—the extremely aged, the crippled, the sick. Apparently the able-bodied settlers—men, women, and children—walked off and left their helpless to die of neglect."

"Or else were carried off."

"Or else were carried off. But there's not the slightest shred of evidence to support a supposition like that."

"Seems to me," John Crocker said, "that's the most likely theory."

PHYLLIS chimed in. "And whatever it was came out of the jungle. Doctor Fairlittle, don't you see...?"

"Phyllis, there'll be no more of that. You're not going into the jungle alone. Nor even with John. If any of us go, we all go in a body."

Crocker looked at Phyllis Hatch's rebellious face and

found himself at least partially on her side of the argument. "Doc," he said, "that'd only be eight of us."

"We'd take five or six of the ship's crew, heavily armed. I'd see to that."

"Doc, this is something that gobbled up a thousand persons at a whack. Let me go see what I can find. One of us would be just as safe as a dozen."

"Two of us," Phyllis said. "I'm going, too."

Crocker turned on her. "Phyllis, that's one thing the Doc and I agree on. You stay in camp."

Then he saw to his delight that he had been right about her temper. "John Crocker," she snapped, "who do you think you are, to talk to me like that?"

John grinned; this was a Phyllis he could handle. "I'm your assistant, Boss!" But the grin had faded when he turned back to Fairlittle. "Doc, we've got to find this thing, or else the next expedition from Earth will find *us* disappeared without a trace."

"That's another thing we agree on," Doctor Fairlittle conceded. He was pulling at his goatee again. "John, we expect the affair to come to a head in the next day or so. If it doesn't, then we'll see. In the meantime, you go around with Phyllis as planned."

John glanced at Phyllis Hatch and saw that she was seething with the knowledge that he was coolly taking over what she conceived to be her job.

AT BREAKFAST next morning, John Crocker met the other scientists. He wasn't greatly impressed with the lot; he was willing to concede that they were eminent scientists, but he couldn't see them as adventurers in an untamed jungle.

There were two exceptions: Simpson, the archaeologist, was a towering rock of a man with the upright posture of a soldier or an athlete, whose tanned, craggy features attested an active outdoor life. Glencote, the anthropologist, was white-haired and probably approaching seventy; but he was as lean and vigorous as he had been in his prime. He, too—to judge by

his appearance—had led an active outdoor life.

The others, John thought, were out of place in an expedition like this. Case, the botanist, was tall and thin and stooped, as fragile as one of the flowers he studied. Stone, the etymologist, was portly and pompous, a man of words. Vicks, the pathologist, was the youngest of the five, but that was his only qualification. He was short and dumpy and soft; he, too, would be a handicap in the jungle.

All five, though, had one thing in common; that was the affection they felt for Phyllis Hatch. They had resented her appointment at first, John gathered. Though acknowledging that she was a competent zoologist, they had felt that she owed her position to the fact that she was Doctor Fairlittle's protege. But their resentment had faded in the month that they had known her. Now they looked on her as a loveable (if spoiled, and at times unmanageable) child.

They were united with Doctor Fairlittle in opposition to her determination to go into the jungle. Listening to them one after another express this sentiment, John thought that Phyllis was in the position of an adventurous little girl with six over-watchful fathers. He chuckled, thinking that Doctor Phyllis Hatch probably had the same impression, and didn't like it.

After breakfast John Crocker went over to her bungalow, to report for duty, but Phyllis wasn't in. John strolled down past the dormitory to the long, rambling structure that housed the workshops and the laboratories, thinking to find her there. The first door he tried proved to be that of Vicks, the patheologist.

Vicks turned from the germ culture he had been examining. He took the gauze mask from his face and put it aside. Before John could say anything, he plunged into an animated discussion of his work.

VICKS HAD a fully-developed theory of the nature of the Whoozit. His idea was that the colonists had come in contact with some virulent disease germ in the jungle.

"What I have in mind," he said, "is one that would attack so swiftly and multiply so rapidly that its victim would not be able to leave the spot of infection. Such a bacterium, or virus, is not inconceivable. One after another, the colonists may have disappeared in this fashion. And the others, searching for them, may have stumbled in turn on the infected area."

"Even the children?" John asked skeptically.

"The children, perhaps, would have been the first to happen on the place." Vicks was warming to the subject, and his watery eyes behind thick glasses, were beginning to glow with inspiration. "I can envision a favorite playground of theirs—a secluded nook at the edge of the jungle where all the children were wont to gather. I can see the spot invaded by a swarm of disease-carrying insects, themselves immune to the infection..."

He went on to elaborate on his theory, overriding though not completely answering Crocker's objections. John went away impressed in spite of his skepticism. The pathologist's search was, in its way, as dangerous as any trip into the jungle. If Vicks were successful, John Crocker thought, he would need more protection than the gauze mask he wore over his face.

THE NEXT door was that of Case, the botanist. Case, too, had a theory, but he was not so positive about it. He was as indecisive as the gestures with which he accompanied his words. John Crocker gathered that, to prove his theory, Case would have to go into the jungle.

"I should be delighted to accompany Miss Hatch, of course," Case said. His long, pale artist's hands fluttered as he spoke. "But Doctor Fairlittle has expressed disapproval, and I am quite content to abide by his decision."

John looked at the frail, bent figure before him and thought that Phyllis Hatch would have scant protection if she were to go into the jungle with Case. Of the two, Phyllis would be much more competent to take care of herself.

"On the other hand," Case was saying, "perhaps it is my

duty. What do you think, Crocker?"

"I don't see that it's your duty any more than any of the others'."

"Ah, but that is just the point!" Case made another of his fluttery gestures. "If it should be true that the—er—Whoozit lies within my province rather than Miss Hatch's..."

"You think the Whoozit might turn out to be a vegetable?"

"Why...uh...one hesitates to entertain such a fancy, but it is undeniable that carnivores do exist among vegetable species. One sees them on Earth, on a small scale, to be sure..."

The botanist's voice trailed off into vagueness as usual, and he waited for Crocker to respond.

"It seems to me," John said, "that you and Miss Hatch—all of you—are too hipped on the subject of the jungle. Wasn't the second colony too far away to be attacked from there?"

THE BOTANIST'S hands fluttered as if to negate his reply in advance. "Miss Hatch's theory is that the—er—Whoozit is a creature that makes its home in the interior, coming out only at certain seasons of the year. For that matter, referring to my own—uh—fancy, there is a plant, the agave, that seems to abound in every climatic zone of the continent..."

"Agave?"

"A misnomer, I agree," the botanist said, "but Miss Hatch insists on calling it that because of a superficial resemblance. I point out to her that there are certain profound differences..."

"That's the plant that gives off the exotic scent?"

"Only when it flowers, of course."

"How often would you say that was, Doctor Case?"

"Why...uh... At a guess, once every two Achernarian years. The plant seems to lie dormant for long periods of time, then shoot up vigorously. Of late, one almost fancies he can see it growing. But doubtless you noticed that."

"To tell the truth," John said, "my first sight of the

jungle bowled me over. All I could see was the bigness of it."

"Then, come—you must see the agave for yourself. It is an interesting sight."

CASE HADN'T exaggerated. The first clump of the agave grew about a hundred yards from the edge of the jungle; even seen against that background, it was a monstrous plant.

From a rosette of broad, flat leaves—each ten feet long, sharp-pointed and edged with wicked-looking thorns—a single stalk shot up hundreds of feet into the air. Starting about thirty feet up, the stem was festooned with pink-petaled flowers, now closed against the morning sun. John Crocker had to tip his head back and crane his neck to see that the stalk was crowned by a single huge bud that apparently had not yet opened.

"By golly, Doctor!" he exclaimed. "You're right about it! You can almost see it grow!"

"It is fascinating to watch," the botanist agreed. "It has grown to this, from a weedy scrub, in less than a month."

John heard the voice of Phyllis behind him. "Doctor Case, if you men can spare my assistant, I'd like to borrow him for awhile."

The voice was slightly edged with sarcasm, John thought. He turned. "Hello, Boss! I've been busy learning things."

"I'm so glad you have!" Phyllis said. She was wearing a streaked and faded smock that tried to hide her figure but didn't succeed, and she had a smudge just to the right of her slightly-pouting mouth. "I've been dissecting insects when I'd rather be hunting Whoozits. Aren't you about ready to begin helping me gather specimens of something bigger than a butterfly?"

"Boss," John protested, "this is my first day. I've been circulating around getting ideas."

"You're not supposed to have ideas," Phyllis replied, but the pout left her lips. "Well, all right, then, here comes Bozo. I'll get him to help me again."

The native John saw shuffling toward him was a huge brute, hairless, with a thick

skin that glistened blue-grey in the light of Achernar. He must have weighed several hundred pounds and would have topped even Crocker's six feet if he hadn't walked with a slouch like that of a gorilla. John knew that the Whees usually swung along with their long, muscular arms as crutches; just now, though, Bozo couldn't. His hands were busy. They were cupped carefully over something John couldn't see.

THERE WAS a worried look on the Achernarian's broad face. His flat brow was corrugated, and his thick lips pursed into a tense round knot. Whatever he was carrying was fragile, Crocker thought, and he was being careful not to harm it.

"Bozo," Phyllis asked, "what do you have for me?"

Bozo looked up, and his big Brute's face was a brute's no longer. It shone with adoration. Then he ducked his head and slowly spread his cupped hands to reveal a great yellow moth with crimson-tipped wings.

"Bozo!" Phyllis exclaimed. "How lovely!"

Bozo's powerful body twitched with pleasure, but he didn't look up. His eyes watched the butterfly intently as, with deliberate caution, he closed his hands to keep the golden creature from flying away.

Phyllis turned to John. "And you and Doctor Stone think they're treacherous! Does that look like it?"

"Nope," Crocker conceded. "But I think I'd like to hear what Stone has to say. Where'll I find him?"

III

HE FOUND Stone at the native quarters, a five-minute walk down the beach toward the site of the abandoned settlement. The hot blue sun was high in the heavens by now, and John Crocker was perspiring freely by the time he saw Stone squatting, like some monstrous albino toad in his rumpled white suit, before a group of natives.

Stone sounded like a toad, too, as he pointed toward a long, tapering native oar and tried to imitate the native word

for it. What was a twanging musical note from the lips of the Achernarians was like the croaking of a bullfrog from the lips of Doctor Stone. John didn't blame the natives for their broad smiles.

Stone turned and saw John approaching. He came heavily to his feet. "Oh, hello, Crocker! I'm rapidly learning to converse with them, as you see."

"Learn anything from them? I'm trying to find out all I can about the Whoozit."

Stone snorted. "The identity of the Whoozit should be readily apparent to anyone of reasonably clear perception."

He swept a hand toward the natives. There were four of these, and they squatted on the ground, ape-like. Their limpid eyes were fastened intently on the massive figure of Doctor Stone.

"Look at them!" Stone said. "Can't you see the treacherous cunning in their eyes?"

The Achernarians looked only amused, John thought. "Doctor, they look harmless to me."

"Harmless!" Stone's snort was impressively gusty this time. "Crocker, look closely. Observe how they follow every word we say. They understand more than they pretend to. Much more. But watch! I'll show you. Observe this closely, Crocker."

HE TURNED toward the natives. Pointing a stern finger toward them, he demanded, "What killed our friends who lived here many years ago?" He swept the finger around until it pointed toward the jungle. "There lies the thing that killed our friends! Go find it for us!"

The natives' eyes followed the pointing finger. The amusement left their faces, was replaced by abject terror. They fell back on the ground and threw their arms up before their eyes. The sound they uttered was not the "whee-whee-whee" of their usual chatter, but more like the whinnying of a horse in fear or pain.

Stone turned triumphantly to John. "Did you observe, Crocker, how overly dramatic they were? Did you notice particularly how the tonal quality of their utterances changed

abruptly? I tell you, they not only understand us perfectly but could converse with us in our own tongue if they were willing. They are treacherous, man! Treacherous!"

The Achernarians looked only frightened to John. He had opened his mouth to say so, when he heard a hail from the direction of the camp. He looked up to see Simpson and Glencote approaching.

"There you are, Crocker!" Simpson said heartily. "Been looking for you. Going down to pay a visit to the ghost town. Want to go along?"

THE SETTLEMENT astonished John Crocker by its size. Or rather, by the evidence of its former size. The jungle had largely overgrown it by now, but the streets ran straight and true through the tangled vines and bushes, disappearing into the gloom cast by the giants of the forest.

A few substantial buildings clustered in the center had escaped the effects of time and humidity and were still intact; but most of the simple frame buildings had disintegrated into the humus of the jungle floor, leaving only vestiges of their hardwood skeletons to mark where they had been.

"Other settlement in better shape," Simpson said, "but this seemed like the logical place to attack the problem."

"Or have it attack us," Glencote said drily. He warned John against blundering into the spiny leaves of the agave that was everywhere. "Those thorns are sharp as needles. They can inflict painful wounds."

"If Case is right about it," Crocker said, "the agave can be more dangerous than that."

Glencote smiled wryly. "Each of us has his own theory, according to his bent. Case doesn't have a case, if you'll excuse the pun."

"Well, I don't know. That scent..."

"Might attract insects!" It was Simpson who interrupted him. "Not human beings!"

Glencote seemed to agree. "And besides, if the agave had anything to do with it, the natives would be afraid to go near the plant. On the contrary, they harvest the tender shoots

and store them to make the loathsome brew that is their native drink."

"Like the stuff so well they'll even visit the mainland to get it," Simpson said.

"Intoxicating?" John asked.

"Hypnotic. Causes hallucinations. Have a taboo against touching it before putting out in their canoes."

CROCKER was wondering how Simpson and Glencote knew so much about the natives. The two must have read his expression, for they both smiled, and Glencote answered the unspoken question.

"Simpson and I have got acquainted with them through visiting them on their islands. We can communicate with them better through our sign language than Stone can with all his fancy imitations of their wheeing sounds."

"What do you think of Stone's theory about them?"

"Frustration!" Simpson said. "First time in his life Stone's found a language he can't translate. Naturally suspects foul play."

The two scientists scoffed at each of their colleagues' theories in turn, but when Crocker challenged them to produce one of their own, they couldn't. They supported one, they said, had been put forward by Captain Blake of the spaceship. It was a poorly-kept secret, Simpson explained, that Blake, in his exploration of the Achernarian system, was searching for alien invaders.

"Only logical theory in the lot," he concluded.

"Yes," Glencote agreed, "but why are the aliens—if they exist—interested only in the continent?"

"Got a use for it, probably. Wouldn't surprise me if they have a complete installation tucked away there. Blake's wasting his time looking for them on the satellites of Six."

"Has Blake seen these aliens?" John Crocker asked.

"Same way Phyllis has seen her Whoozit, or Vicks his pet virus. Sounds more plausible, though. From the scanty evidence—ships' logs and so forth—both attacks must have come at or near oppositions of Six."

"BLAKE THINKS they come from the planet?"

"Thinks they came originally from outer space but have a base on one of the moons of Six. Better see Blake right away, Crocker, if you're interested. He's taking off again early in the morning."

"I'll go down there right after lunch," John promised.

But as he and Simpson and Glencote were walking back to camp, the sky began to darken rapidly. Thunderclouds were rolling up from seaward.

"Daily rain," Simpson said. "Comes in squalls this time of year. Violent but soon over."

Lightning was crashing, and the first drops were beginning to fall, when the three reached the dormitory door. While they foraged for lunch in the adjacent mess hall, the rain fell with the force of a cloudburst. As Simpson had promised, though, it was soon over. The blue light of Achernar was beating down on a steaming jungle when Crocker, Simpson, and Glencote came out of the mess hall.

The ground outside was soggy, however, and the paths looked muddy and treacherous. Simpson advised John to wait a couple of hours before paying his visit to the spaceship.

"Be back for dinner," he said. "My turn tonight. Promise you my cooking will make your mouth water."

SIMPSON and Glencote were off again on their own affairs, and John Crocker wandered about the camp in search of Doctor Fairlittle. He found the Doctor in his study, a small room but well lighted and overflowing with books and papers. Fairlittle put aside the typed pages he had been studying and welcomed John absently. Crocker began an account of his investigations of the morning.

"Doc," he said, "I'm beginning to have a theory of my own along that line."

Fairlittle nodded. It was evident that his mind was still on the papers he had been studying. "I'm calling a meeting for tonight, John, in the lounge of the dormitory. Be there. I'll be glad to hear your theory."

That was obviously a dismissal. John Crocker came to

his feet. "Okay, I'd rather you wouldn't. I'd rather you'd forget about the matter until the meeting tonight. My reason will be clear to you then."

SO JOHN, at a loose end, wandered out over the swampy ground for a closer look at the jungle. The jungle proper here began abruptly, as if it had signed a truce with the clearing and a line of demarcation had been drawn. The gloom was so intense, in contrast with the daylight of the clearing, that Crocker abandoned his half-formed intention of exploring when he was a little way inside.

After his eyes had become accustomed to the dimness, he could see that, although the vines and creepers were profuse overhead, the space between the tree trunks was clear of growth—except for the ever-present agave. Still, looking at the wicked thorns of the agave, he decided to wait until he was better equipped to tackle the jungle.

Nearby, a clump of the agave grew outside the forest covering. John Crocker turned to examine it more closely. Most of the broad, spiny leaves, he noticed, were curling outward or lying flat on the the ground; but here and there, the leaves of a plant would be tightly closed around the tall, slender shaft, resembling a giant seed pod.

John went closer to examine the ground around one of these, but the recent rain had obliterated any trace of the clue he had hoped to find there. Disappointed, he straightened, to hear Phyllis Hatch's voice behind him.

"If you're going into the jungle, you're not dressed for it. You need heavier clothing."

Phyllis, John saw, was dressed in riding pants and khaki shirt and heavy boots. Her hair, instead of being bound by the usual scarf, was tucked under a close-fitting helmet.

"I wasn't going into the jungle—and you're not, either. Doctor's orders."

To his surprise, Phyllis failed to resent his peremptory tone. "All right, then, come on back to the bungalow. I'll make drinks, and we'll talk."

As if this signaled a change in attitude, she dropped the reserve she had thrown about herself. After she had changed into her usual light sun suit, and had joined John on the porch, she was the Phyllis that Crocker had remembered from his University days. The afternoon passed so swiftly with reminiscing about old times that the sun had set before John remembered that he was supposed to go to the mess hall to sample Simpson's cooking.

"All right," Phyllis pouted, "if you'd rather eat Doctor Simpson's cooking than mine."

John grinned. "I'll stay," he said, "but remember you twisted my arm."

IV

IT WAS DARK when they set out together for the meeting. The bright planet, Six, had risen over a placid sea. She was like a minature full moon in the sky, much smaller than the moon of Earth but just as brilliant. A breeze was stirring from the jungle, and the cloying scent of the agave was in the air.

"The jungle woos us more urgently every night," Phyllis said.

"And Six grows brighter." John Crocker was beginning to believe that there was a connection between the two. On an impulse, he turned to the faithful Bozo, who had fallen into step behind Phyllis. Pointing to the sky in the direction of Six, John asked, "What is the name of that?"

Bozo cringed back. His arm went up before his eyes. His terrified whinny was the same that the natives had uttered when Stone had pointed toward the jungle. At the risk of intensifying his terror, John pointed toward a nearby clump of agave. "What name?"

Bozo's terror dropped away from him. He broke into excited chatter. There was, if anything, rapture in his voice.

"He's telling you about the joys of getting pie-eyed on agave juice," the amused voice of Phyllis said. "What was the idea of the imitation of Doctor Stone?"

"Just an experiment." John was trying not to show his disappointment. There was defi-

nitely a connection between the planet and the jungle menace; but if there was a connection between the menace and the agave, then the natives were not aware of it.

"You shouldn't have listened to Doctor Case." Phyllis was teasing him. She was sniffing the heavy perfume in the air. "The agave's scent is alluring, but can you imagine it luring a whole colony of human beings to their death?"

"No," John conceded, "I suppose not."

But he looked at the agave, some of whose spiked leaves were lying invitingly open, some closed tightly around their parent stems; and he thought of the giant buds that had not yet opened. John Crocker knew that he had not entirely abandoned his theory.

THE OTHERS were all gathered in the lounge when Crocker and Phyllis arrived. Simpson gave John a half-humorous glance of reproach, then looked at Phyllis and winked as if to say that he would have done the same thing in Crocker's place.

Doctor Fairlittle was seated behind the one table in the room. He had cleared away the books and outdated magazines that were usually piled there and had a sheaf of papers spread out before him. When John and Phyllis had found chairs, he called the meeting to order.

"Gentlemen," he began—"and Doctor Hatch— What I have to say in introduction may be embarrassing to you, but I hope you will not take offense. It must have occurred to you, however, that we are a queer lot of putterers to be sent in search of a dangerous alien menace. The truth may even have occurred to you: that we are not so much the hunters as the hunted. In other words—though it was perhaps unethical to bring you here for that purpose without your knowledge—we are here to serve as bait to lure the so-called Whoozit to our encampment."

He paused to look about him and observe the effect of his words. John Crocker, puzzled but not too greatly surprised, looked about him, too. He saw various reactions. Simpson and

Glencote were nodding at each other sagely, as if to say that they had known it all along. The others looked stunned, except Phyllis, who looked angry.

Fairlittle was continuing: "Captain Blake, as you may have suspected, is the true head of the expedition. I am merely his second in command. He should have been here to break the news to you in person, but he preferred to have me do the honors. Perhaps he is not the utterly fearless individual that he pretends to be."

THAT BROUGHT a laugh from even the tense, pale-faced botanist, Case. Doctor Fairlittle continued: "Captain Blake, as you perhaps know, believes that the disappearance of the colonists was brought about by intelligent alien invaders. We have established by our study of the fragmentary records that both events occurred during perihelion opposition of the sixth planet of this system. One such opposition we are experiencing now. In fact, the planet reaches her nearest approach tomorrow night."

"And then," Glencote asked in a calm voice, "we may expect the aliens to attack?"

Fairlittle nodded. "Only at such times, according to Captain Blake's belief, is our planet under surveillance from the aliens' base. He believes, as you know, that the invaders came originally from some other part of the Galaxy, establishing a base of operations on one of the satellites of Six."

"N o n s e n s e!" Simpson growled. "Find it in the jungle, as I tried to tell him."

"That is possible," the Doctor conceded, "but there can be little doubt that there is a connection between the invaders and the oppositions of Six."

That was what John Crocker was thinking. "How often do these oppositions come, Doc?" he asked.

"Ordinary oppositions come at intervals of two Achernarian years. Perihelion oppositions, however—the very near approaches such as we are experiencing now—are rarer."

"But even at ordinary oppositions the planet would look very bright from here?"

"Comparatively speaking, yes."

FAIRLITTLE was obviously puzzled by John's last question; so Crocker, not wishing to go into explanations at the moment, decided to drop the subject. But he was thinking that it might be only coincidence, after all, that the invasions came at oppositions of Six.

"Blake's going to be up there trying to intercept them?"

The Doctor nodded. "He hopes at least, if they elude him, to be able to trail them back to their base."

"While we stay here to be slaughtered!" Vicks was on his feet. "Doctor Fairlittle, are we to understand that we are considered to be of so little value to science and society. . ."

"Not at all!" the Doctor said. "I'm sorry if I failed to make myself clear. We are to be evacuated to the nearby islands where, from all indications, we will be perfectly safe. As you probably know, the natives have been becoming restive during the past few days. They had wished to go back to their islands. It was with difficulty that we persuaded them to wait until tomorrow morning and take us with them."

Stone, the etymologist, now rose ponderously to his feet. "Doctor Fairlittle, it is my considered opinion that you are making a grave error in that respect. I, for one, have no wish to put myself in the power of those cunning aborigines. They, as I have repeatedly pointed out, are the true menace."

"You may go with Blake on the spaceship if you wish," the Doctor said. "Or anyone else who prefers to."

He looked around him, but there was no response from the others, except for Case, who said, "I vote for the islands."

There were nods and murmurs of assent from Vicks and Simpson and Glencote. Phyllis Hatch, John noticed, was biting her lips and frowning thoughtfully; she was trying to come to a decision of some sort.

JOHN CROCKER had come to his decision. "Doc," he said, "it seems to me that you're going about this wrong. You're setting a trap for the

aliens, but taking away the bait."

"We shall leave the lights burning. The aliens then will think the camp still inhabited."

"They might be able to detect the presence of humans," Crocker insisted. "Scent, or something. One of us ought to stay."

"John, that would be suicide. I couldn't allow..."

"Hell, Doc, I'd be safe enough. As I understand it, they leave the helpless behind them—the ones they have no use for. If they come at me, I'll pretend to be an invalid. You might even bandage me up here and there to make it look convincing."

"John," the Doctor said, "what you suggest is unthinkable. Apparently the ones the aliens have no use for *are* left behind—but for all we know, they may be butchered first."

"I'm willing to take the chance, Doc. All I ask is that you leave me a strong pair of binoculars and a tape recorder. Then even if they get me, I'll be able to leave a record for you of what I see."

FAIRLITTLE was adamant until John Crocker got help from an unexpected quarter. Case, the fragile botanist, came up with an offer to stay and face the danger with John. Crocker refused the offer, but the deadlock was broken. The Doctor yielded.

Then a vote was taken to decide whether the party should go to the islands or with Blake on the spaceship. All voted for the islands except Stone, who stubbornly insisted that the natives were the true menace.

When it came Phyllis' turn to vote, she looked around the group with a somewhat shaky defiance in her eyes. "I'm not going. I'm staying with John."

That provoked another argument, a stormy one. Simpson settled it by declaring that Doctor Phyllis Hatch was going to the islands if he had to carry her away by force. To prove his point, he strode over to Phyllis and picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. Then Phyllis gave in, apparently with good grace.

But John looked at her and saw the rebellion still smoldering in her eyes, and he was

worried. Phyllis didn't like it a bit that she was not to be in at the finish; she was quite capable, John thought, of planning some last-minute mutinous action.

HE WAS RELIEVED when, next morning soon after sunrise, Phyllis meekly packed her things and followed the others to the long native canoe that was drawn up on the beach. The spaceship had been gone an hour, taking Stone with it, and John was alone in the camp.

He reasoned that he had until sunset, at least, to make his preparations, but he couldn't be sure. The attack might come at any moment. He scouted the camp to find the proper spot for his rendezvous with the Whoozit.

What John Crocker had had in mind at first was to take his station in the Doctor's study, with all the doors and the windows of the bungalow closed tight. But when he looked out the windows of the study, he found that none of them gave him the sweeping view of both the jungle and the campsite that he was after. From the screened front porch of the bungalow he would have such a view, but there he would be in an exposed position. He tramped about the deserted camp in search of a more suitable location.

The same objection applied to Phyllis' bunglaow that applied to F a i r l i t t l e ' s. The screened front porch was the only place where he would have the view he wanted. In the dormitory, he might manage by rushing from one window to another; but that would be awkward, and he might miss seeing what he expected to see.

Finally he settled on the Doctor's front porch as the only logical place. But there he would have to devise some means of p r o t e c t i o n—not against physical attack; he didn't expect that, though it was possible. What he needed was some sort of precaution against the chemical attack that he was sure would be a prelude to the main event.

Merely a handkerchief tied across his face might do the trick, but he was doubtful. He needed something more than

that; he needed a gas mask.

He snapped his fingers, remembering his visit to Vicks the previous morning. Vicks, on first seeing Crocker had removed a mask of some sort from his face. John had noticed the mask only briefly, but his memory of it was that it resembled the gauze face coverings that doctors wear during surgical operations.

That might be just the thing; at least it would be better than a handkerchief. John Crocker left the bungalow and walked, as rapidly as the cast on his leg would let him, down to the building that housed the workships and the laboratories.

HE FOUND the mask lying on a bench beside a row of dishes that contained germ cultures. He did better than that; in a nearby cabinet he found a box containing four of the masks. And the masks themselves were more efficient face-coverings than he had expected.

In outward appearance they were ordinary gauze masks, but they were equipped with filters that slipped into the nostrils. The filters could be changed without removing the mask, and there was a box of spare filters in the cabinet where he had found the masks. Delighted, John took both boxes back with him to Fairlittle's bungalow. He would be safe now if the attack took the form that he expected.

If it didn't... John Crocker shrugged. He would be a gone gosling in that event, no matter what preparations he made. He didn't kid himself that the cast on his left leg would fool a group of aliens intelligent enough to have conquered space.

Satisfied, he took a last look at his preparations. He had dragged out a table and had put it beside the chair he was to occupy. On the table he had put his binoculars, the tape recorder, and the gun that Blake had insisted on leaving him. Beside these he placed the boxes containing the masks and filters.

He hobbled about the camp, closing windows and locking doors and making everything secure. The cast on his leg

hampered him. He wished that he hadn't consented to it; but Simpson and Glencote had been intent on doing a thorough job of making him appear to be a hopeless cripple.

LAST ON the list was Phyllis' bungalow. He went about closing it as tightly as he had the other buildings. When he came to Phyllis' bedroom, he hesitated; it seemed like an invasion of her privacy to enter. But he did enter, and found the room as neat and tidy as the rest of the bungalow.

Her perfume lingered in the room, and John Crocker found himself wishing that he had sided with her and allowed her to stay with him. She would have been safe enough, as it had turned out, with one of the masks on.

But, no, the attack might come in some other way than the one he anticipated. In that event, he preferred to face the danger alone.

But when he had returned to Fairlittle's bungalow, and sat smoking on the screened front porch, he was still lonely and haunted by the wish that Phyllis were with him. The morning was only half gone, and he had a long, hot day to while away. And now that he was idle, the tension was mounting steadily.

Behind him, the Doctor's bungalow was closed as tightly as he had closed the other buildings, except that the doors were unlocked. These structures were designed with inclement weather in mind; their doors and windows sealed almost as tightly as a spaceship's ports. The material was a fairly good insulator, but the rooms would be uncomfortably hot under the midday sun of Achernar. But not so hot that he wouldn't be glad to retreat to them in case he found that he needed more protection than the mask afforded him.

The colonists had apparently left their doors and windows open in the muggy weather. Too, their homes had been hastily constructed of native woods and undoubtedly had not been nearly so weatherproof as these prefabricated structures of the camp. That, to Crocker's mind, was a vital

clue to the fate that had overtaken the colonists.

V

HE SAT ON the porch and waited with tense impatience for the great blue sun that was Achernar to set behind the jungle, and for the Whoozit to emerge. He was free to roam about the camp at will, of course; but the cast on his leg slowed him down, and John Crocker didn't want to go too far from his base.

He alternated between sitting in the chair and pacing up and down as well as his handicapped leg would let him. Whichever he did, he smoked constantly. The big ash tray on the porch was overflowing with half-smoked cigarets.

He swept the forest with his binoculars at intervals, but could see nothing of interest. Not even the powerful glasses could penetrate the dimness very far. John knew that there were animals lurking among the trees, some of considerable size, but so far as he could see, the jungle was populated only by the giant tree trunks and the profusion of parasitic growth. And by the agave, of course.

Even the birds and the insects seemed to be quiet. Crocker began to have the feeling that he shared a whole planet with the lush vegetation of the jungle.

He had eaten breakfast early, and by noon he was hungry, but he hesitated to leave his post. He began to wish that he had chosen Phyllis' bungalow instead of Fairlittle's. Her kitchenette would be well stocked, but the Doctor's, since he usually ate at the mess hall, was never used.

PHYLLIS' bungalow, however, was nearer than the mess hall. John hobbled over and unlocked the door and let himself in. As he had thought, there was plenty of food in the refrigerator. He gathered up as much as he could carry and lugged it over to stow away at Fairlittle's. Luckily the Doctor's kitchen, though unused, was completely equipped. John went back for another load and then another. By the time

he was through, Phyllis' larder was empty, but Fairlittle's was bulging with necessities. Now he would eat, no matter how long the siege.

He fixed himself a sandwich and went back to his porch to eat it. Stripped to his shorts, he was still uncomfortably warm, even in the light breeze that stirred from the jungle. He shrank from thinking of what it would be like in those stuffy, tight-closed rooms, if he were forced to retreat inside.

The rain came, suddenly as usual, before he had finished his sandwich. Fortunately it came straight down. It didn't blow in, so he stayed at his post. The light spray that did occasionally hit him felt cooling to his naked skin.

When the rain was over, the ground was steaming, as usual, but the mists cleared away as the afternoon wore on, and visibility was better than before. Still there was no stirring of life in the loomy fringes of the jungle.

JOHN CROCKER was glad when Achernar began to sink below the high jungle roof, casting long shadows out toward the campsite in the clearing. That meant that his ordeal was drawing to its climax and would soon be over. He began to use his binoculars more freely in the deepening twilight.

He began to dictate to the recorder, too, but he could say little except an occasional "Nothing to report." It gave him a grim sort of amusement to realize that the taped report, in case the scientists had to rely on it, would be a frustrating one. When the final test came and things began popping, he would be unable to dictate; his mouth would be covered by the mask.

He did, however, dictate a full explanation of his theory, addressing himself to Case and Phyllis, the two most directly concerned.

The planet Six rose in the east and sent a long pencil of orange light glistening toward him over the water. As she rose higher, John Crocker saw her as a ruddy pinhead among the pinpoints of the stars. She was much brighter than her size seemed to warrant; soon

the night was as brilliantly lighted as any moonlit night on Earth.

In the breeze that had sprung up from the jungle, Crocker could detect the sensuous perfume of the agave. The petals were opening after the long, hot day. John raised his binoculars. The jungle by now was only a looming wall of blackness, but the nearer agave were plainly visible. The flowers hanging from the tall central stalk, John knew, were a delicate pink, but they gleamed with a menacing blood-red lustre in the light of the brilliant planet in the east.

THE PERFUME was heavy now in the air, seductively wooing the senses with its musky odor. John had the sensation that he was truly being seduced to go in search of the source of the fragrance. But the sensation was in no way overpowering. Phyllis had been right about that part of it; not even on the night of an opposition, when it was flowering most heavily, would the agave's perfume be sufficient in itself to deaden the higher centers of intelligence.

Crocker swept his binoculars up along the trunk of the nearest agave plant until they came to rest on the giant bud at the very tip. The bud had grown to enormous size, and it was still perceptibly swelling. It seemed to be about to burst from the pressure of the forces locked up in it.

John Crocker looked to be sure that one of his masks was close at hand. "Won't be long now," he said into the microphone.

The binoculars brought the bud close to him, so close that it seemed to hang within a few feet of his eyes. Big as a bushel basket, it was heavy now; the long, thin stem bent under its weight. And still, like a child's balloon, it continued to swell.

John thought every minute that it must surely have reached the bursting point. His eyes were strained and beginning to water, and his arms ached from the effort to hold the binoculars steady, but still he watched the swelling, monstrous thing in fascination. It was probably only minutes, but it seemed like hours to

him, before the bubble burst, abruptly as from an internal explosion.

A VAPOROUS substance erupted from the bursting bud, like a spreading jet of golden steam. John swept his glasses around, saw other exploding buds, and knew that all the agave of the forest, likewise, were erupting. And he knew that he had guessed right.

"Putting on my mask now," he said to the microphone. "You take it from here. But there it is. You know now what to look for."

He hadn't long to wait before the golden fog bore down on him. It swept past, but swirled in eddies about him on the porch and began to settle down on everything in sight. It was a fine powder, Crocker saw, composed of almost microscopic particles. Like a desert sandstorm, it drifted into every crevice and clung to all exposed surfaces, covering them with a fine golden film. John himself was plastered with it, he knew. He was glad he had the mask on. He wouldn't care to breathe the stuff if it was as deadly as he thought it was.

Visibility outside was poor, but John Crocker could see faintly through to the nearest agave. He could see shadowy forms flick through his field of vision. The animals were beginning to stir from their jungle hiding places.

One of these came past the corner of the house, and John could see that it was a four-footed animal about the size of an antelope. It bounded forward, intent on its objective. Without hesitating, it sprang into the waiting leaves of the agave. The leaves snapped shut as if activated by a trigger and powerful springs.

Sickened, John arose. He had seen enough. He had established beyond a doubt the identity of the Whoozit. Tomorrow there should be plenty of evidence to convince the most skeptical of the scientists.

What John Crocker wanted immediately was to step under a shower and decontaminate himself. He wanted to get rid of the poisonous stuff that clung to every part of his body.

BUT AS HE arose, Crocker's eyes swept toward the beach, and he stood frozen where he was. Coming toward him through the swirling mist were two figures vaguely seen—but not so vaguely that he couldn't see that these were no quadrupeds. They walked on two legs, and one was slim and rounded, the other huge and stooped and shuffling.

They could only be Phyllis Hatch and the faithful Bozo!

"Phyllis!" John muttered through the mask. "My God!"

He stood frozen for only an instant; then he was hurrying toward the screen door to the porch. He stumbled outside and for a moment was facing the breeze. The golden storm blew into his face and blinded him, and he had the fleeting but panicky thought that the mask was not enough protection. Perhaps the stuff could penetrate even the pores of his body. If so, dressed only in shorts, he was fully exposed to it.

Snapping himself out of his panic, he turned around. Now his back was to the breeze, and he blinked his eyes and could see again. The two figures were within a few yards of him, but one of them had turned away and was headed toward the nearby clump of agave.

That was the slouching form of Bozo, Crocker saw with a sob of relief. If it had been Phyllis, he could never have reached her in time, handicapped as he was by the cast on his leg. He prayed that Phyllis would continue to plod toward him as she was doing, with her head down against the steady breeze.

WHEN SHE was quite close, she raised her head, and Crocker could see her eyes, round and staring. But the rest of her face was a blur. It took John Crocker a second or two to realize that she had had sense enough to take the scarf from her hair and tie it about her nose and mouth.

"Thank God for that!" he breathed, as he hurried toward her.

But Phyllis had stopped short and was staring at him with her great round eyes. They were like a sleepwalker's eyes, and John realized that

she was doped; enough of the poisonous stuff had seeped through the scarf to affect her.

Another step, though, and she would be safe. Crocker reached out his arms for her; but Phyllis, with a choking cry that was audible through the scarf that covered her face, eluded him and began to run toward the agave. John lunged for her.

In desperate fear, he tackled her harder than he had intended. They rolled on the ground together, and Phyllis was scrambling to escape him. Crocker managed to get an arm around her and hold her fast, but Phyllis struggled and beat her fists against him, moaning, "Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!"

Her scarf had slipped aside, John saw. His own mask was still securely in position, but the filters had become clogged, and his breathing was difficult. He would have to get Phyllis back to the house as soon as possible.

With one arm wrapped around Phyllis, he inched himself to his hands and knees and then to his feet. Phyllis Hatch was struggling frantically to escape him. John had all he could do to hold her. He slung her over his shoulder and started back with her toward Fairlittle's bungalow.

PHYLLIS was hard to manage. She was normally lithe and strong for a woman; and now her delirium lent her a desperate strength that made her twisting and her squirming and her flailing arms and legs a severe test of Crocker's own strength as he plodded toward the bungalow. Between that and the cast on his leg and his labored breathing, he was so exhausted that he very nearly lost his footing once or twice.

After he had staggered through the front door and had closed it carefully behind him, the first thing he did was to whip off the mask and draw a long grateful breath of the hot, still air into his lungs. Then he felt stronger; but it alarmed him that Phyllis had suddenly gone limp and hung, a warm, soft burden against his shoulder.

He went on through the nearest open door, which hap-

pened to be the door to Fairlittle's bedroom. He carried Phyllis over to the bed and laid her down gently there. Then he turned on the light and stood looking down at the unconscious girl.

Her breathing was slow and regular. She was only asleep, John thought; she would be all right. But she was covered with the golden poison. It clung to her arms and legs and her scanty bra and shorts were a mottled yellow instead of the white they should have been.

He, too, John Crocker realized, was covered with the stuff. Every move he made shook more of the powder into the air. He didn't suppose that he and Phyllis could breathe enough of the stuff to affect them seriously, but there was no use taking chances. The thing to do was to get rid of it as soon as he could.

He looked down at the sleeping Phyllis and knew the sensible thing to do. But he hesitated. Finally, he compromised by picking Phyllis Hatch up and carrying her over to the shower between the two bedrooms. Reaching in with one hand, he turned the faucets. When the water was gushing full force at the right temperature, he held Phyllis close to him and stepped inside.

THE SHOCK of the stinging stream of water had one immediate effect. Phyllis awoke and began to fight him again. But now her voice, though half strangled and angry, was her normal voice. "Let me go, you fool! What do you think you are trying to do?"

John didn't answer. He waited until he was sure the agave dust must be all washed away, then released her and stepped out to face a bedraggled Phyllis.

"John Crocker!" she gasped. "What in the world..."

John grinned. "You needed a bath," he said. "I gave you one." He reached for a towel and tossed it to Phyllis. "Here, dry yourself and see if you can find something of the Doc's to put on."

But when he had taken a towel for himself, he stood hesitant. Her recovery seemed to be complete, but he wasn't sure that he could trust her.

"You don't need to watch me," Phyllis said. "Can't you leave a girl a little modesty?"

John nodded, relieved. "Join you in the Doctor's study," he said. Then he retreated to his own room.

FAIRLITTLE's pajamas were of a cut and fabric designed for tropical wear, but Phyllis Hatch looked swallowed up in them. The costume was fetching, John thought; he told her so, but Phyllis declared that she was too warmly dressed.

John, too, in shorts and flimsy shirt, was decidedly warm, but he knew he didn't dare open a window. He and Phyllis might have put on masks and have gone outside, but neither of them cared to face that golden storm again. Besides, they wanted to talk.

Phyllis had a hazy memory of what had happened, but she wanted to be filled in on the details. John glossed over a part of the story. He let Phyllis think that Bozo had obeyed her order to go back out in the canoe. Tomorrow, he thought, would be time enough for her to learn the truth of that.

He did tell her about how he had watched the great bud open and had seen the four-legged animal captured by the agave. Phyllis shuddered. "It's pollen, isn't it?"

John nodded. "Also a powerful hypnotic drug."

"What I can't understand," Phyllis said, "is why the Whees are afraid of Six and not of the agave. They must have known."

"Even a lady scientist ought to be able to figure that one out," John said, grinning down at her.

"All right, then, if you're so smart, you tell me."

"WHY, THE way I figure it is this: None of the agave's victims, of course, ever lived to tell the tale. The survivors saw the bright star in the sky and jumped to conclusions."

"Yes. . . I suppose that's it." Phyllis shuddered again. "And it's going on around us right this minute. "You'd think the jungle would be depopulated."

"Probably some of the animals escape each time to multiply again. We'll upset the bal-

ance of nature, I suppose. when we eradicate the agave."

"Do you think we ever will?"

"Sure we will! We'll be settling colonists here in no time."

Phyllis was thoughtfully silent for a minute or two. It was obvious that she was debating something with herself. Then her eyes sought Crocker's, and they asked more than her words did. "You'll be one of them, won't you?"

"How'd you guess?"

"Well... I knew that you wanted to have a part in the conquest of the stars..."

"And this is my big chance, huh? Think they'll be able to use a lug like me, with more strength in the shoulders than in the thinking department?"

"You're not so dumb! I think they ought to name it Crocker's Planet and elect you the first governor!"

"I'll be satisfied," John said, "if they'll let me help build a new world here."

He looked down at Phyllis and saw that her eyes were questioning again, and her whole pose expectant. Fortunately, what she expected of him was what he wanted to do. He kissed her. "Has it occurred to you, that if I'm going to settle down to being a pioneer, I'll need a wife?"

Phyllis waited until she had been kissed again, thoroughly, before she answered. "Why do you think I asked Doctor Fairlittle to bring you here in the first place?"

? ? ?

Do You Know Your Physicists?

A Science Quiz Feature

by Joseph C. Stacey

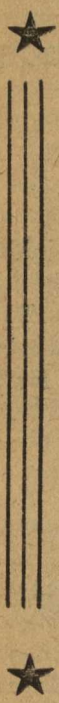
LISTED below are the names of 20 famous American, British, French, German, and Italian physicists (of the past and present). Can you identify at least 14 of them correctly for a passing score? 15-to-18 is good; 19-20 excellent.

Just put the proper initial in the space before each name: (A) for American; B) for British; (C) for French; (D) for German; and (E) for Italian.

—— 1. Henry Cavendish
—— 2. Andre Ampere
—— 3. Vannevar Bush
—— 4. Pierre Curie
—— 5. Enrico Fermi
—— 6. Robert Oppenheimer
—— 7. Albert Einstein
—— 8. Gabriel Fahrenheit
—— 9. George Ohm
—— 10. Michael Faraday
—— 11. Rene de Reaumur
—— 12. Galileo
—— 13. Wilhelm Roentgen
—— 14. Charles Wheatstone
—— 15. Arthur Compton
—— 16. Guglielmo Marconi
—— 17. Alessandro Volta
—— 18. Frederick Joliet-Curie
—— 19. Max Planck
—— 20. James Joule

(*Turn To Page* 107 *For Answers*)

Astounding Novelet of Super Science



THE SUN STOOD STILL

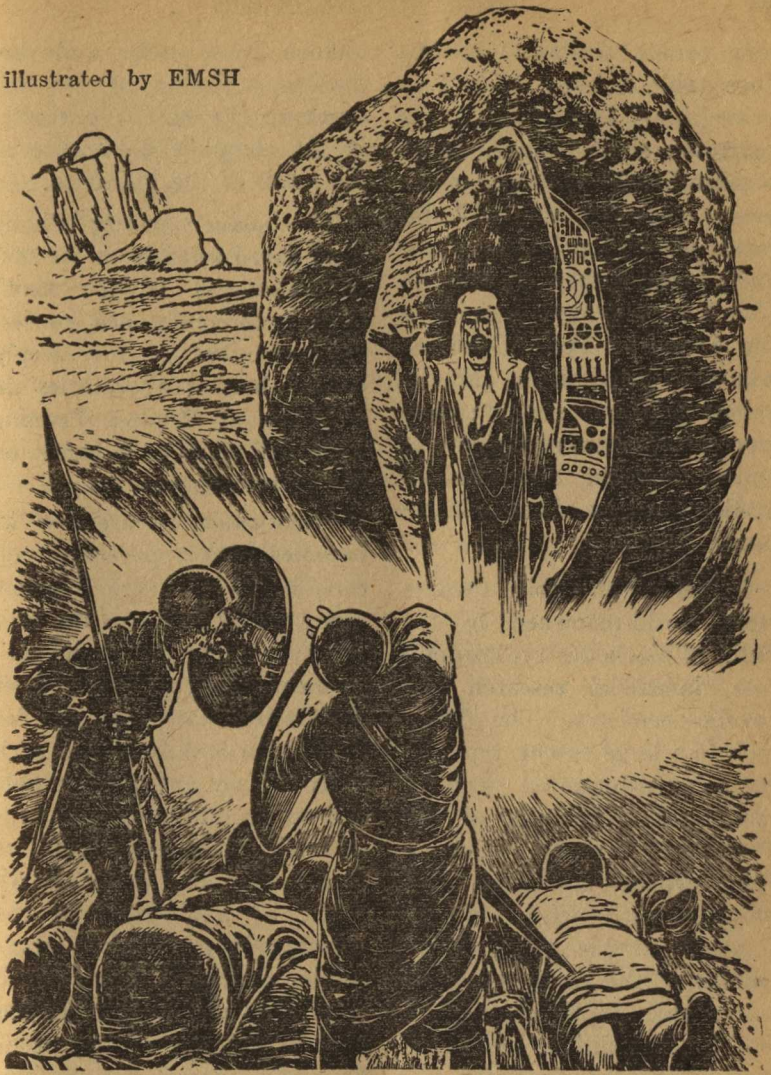
by Maurice Vaisberg, M. D.

Prologue

THE SEVEN Chinese scientists sat in tense anticipation of the opening words of their Director, Chung Shee. The ascetic-looking Shee stood at the head of a

It was a desperate chance to take; but, if it worked, the removal of one man could change the course of history. So Abou ben Kebir was sent back into the time of the great captain, Joshua, as he led his army against the five kings before the city of Gibeon...

illustrated by EMSH



None of the Habiru soldiers could see the open stone in that glare. When it died down, Abou ben Kebir seemed to have appeared by magic.

long ornate teakwood conference table holding up a thin veined hand for silence. To his right the short, rotund figure of Ahm Chu Lee fidgeted, nervously removing his thick bifocal glasses, polishing them and replacing them repeatedly. Chu Lee, the top physicist in the Sino-East Asia Combine, who had pioneered in and developed the process of the electromagnetic transmission of matter, was the acknowledged academic leader of the Scienceburo.

The other assembled savants were world-renowned in the fields of biochemistry, horticulture, industrial research and psycho-chemistry. The latter had, to a large extent, replaced the almost-forgotten psychotherapy and analysis of the Twentieth Century. Chung Shee, whose knowledge embraced a vast general field, was a most suitable political appointee of the government. As an affable diplomat, and a model of erudition, he served most effectively in a liason, administrative and supervisory capacity. In addition to his duties as coordinator of the numerous investigative and production activities of the Scienceburo, he was also secretly in the complete confidence of the heads of the Politburo.

The suave, courtly Chung Shee gazed intently at his seven colleagues in the neon-lighted, airconditioned conference chamber of the deeply buried bunker-laboratories in the City of Peiping. Leaning both well-manicured hands on the table he began.

"Gentlemen, we are now, as becomes more apparent to you each hour, in a serious emergency which threatens the very existence of our nation and government. As you know, after the United States and the Soviet Union had destroyed each other within the unbelievable and unforgettable week of hell-on-earth in the year 2020, we feared that the entire Earth might be annihilated in the cataclysmic geophysical repercussions over the entire world. After the writhing crustal upheavels and the volcanic eruptions had stopped, and the biospheric atmosphere had ceased its tidal convulsive hurricanes and typhoons, those of us who

had miraculously survived began to rebuild our shattered homelands, their industries, farms, commerce and economies.

"However the rise of the State of Israel, with its Arab Confederation, presaged an ominous future of enslavement and exploitation for us, notwithstanding their promises of cooperation and coexistence. Somehow, despite their disruptive propaganda and harassing minor aggressions, our government managed to maintain order, and regain control of our great Combine, embracing the hegemony of China, Tibet, Indochina, Indonesia and most of India."

"Yes," the cherubic Chu Lee took over, "I recall it very vividly. Despite the harassments of those in league with the State of Israel—such as Pakistan, the Phillipines, Australia and Ceylon—we managed, through stern suppressive measures at home and by our scientific skill in warfare, to prevent too deep a penetration of our territory. The true Dictatorship of the Proletariat shall not perish from the Earth!"

CHUNG SHEE took up the discourse, "It is unfortunate that neither side dared to employ fusion-fission weapons, since atmospheric contamination is so near to the saturation threshold that a few more explosions might very well mean the end of all life on Earth. Otherwise, with our present superior technical knowledge, we could have terminated this present all-out war long ago which would have left us in undisputed control of a new world."

The solemn voice went on, "Now, matters have gone from bad to worse, although the populace has been told that we are winning on all fronts. But we cannot conceal the true situation very long from them. Indeed it seems to be only a matter of six months before the hated capitalists will take the heart of our Union, this city of Peiping."

He paused to emphasize the gravity of the situation, then continued, "When you arrived here a week ago in response to my urgent summons, I briefly sketched the nature of the apparently insuperable

problem we face. I asked that you contact me concerning any suggestions you might have. In a week of individual and collective conferences and consultations, there have been a few promising—though drastic and potentially dangerous—methods offered to solve our Damoclean dilemma.

"One idea, which seems to offer the best hope, is that we use the teletemporter or time machine recently developed by Dr. Ahm Chu Lee. By this means we could alter history at some crucial point in the past and thus destroy the very nativity of the Israelis, without affecting the development of our peoples too drastically. Of course, you understand that there is the remote chance—if this mission is completed—that none of us may have ever had any reason to exist. We might be transported instantaneously to Limbo, or worse. But I'm sure that is a chance you are willing to take if success means the preservation of our ethnic groups, and the amelioration of the present threat of national destruction."

"IF THE OCCASION is so urgent and time so pressing, what do you suggest we do?", asked Fum Low, the wizened mathematical genius. Previous to his specialization, he had excelled head and shoulders above the intelligensia at the University of Peiping. Fum Low was a veritable encyclopedia, his mnemonic and integrative scope embracing such diverse subjects as history, geophysics, anthropology, archeology, sociology, political science, economics, and numerous other allied arts and sciences.

"I was coming to that," Chung Shee observed. "We shall all remain here in the underground laboratories of the National Scienceburo Institute indefinitely. Here, we are safe and impregnable for a long time. Your living quarters adjoin the work rooms and laboratories. This chamber will be used as a place for general discussions and conferences. There is available an exhaustive—in fact, the world's most complete—microfilm and sonic library for your use. Every possible facility of our great nation has been placed at your command

and disposal in order to achieve workable results in the shortest possible time.

"Comrades, I cannot impress upon you too much the vital importance of speed in this venture, which is essential to our very survival and continuance." He concluded with, "The maximum of time for work, the minimum for rest and food; and I do hope that we may have something tangible in two weeks or less. You brilliant and distinguished scientists have accomplished miracles in the past by yourselves. Now, as a team, I know you can attain the impossible. Good luck, for we need it desperately."

The conference did not break up at once. Each savant was eager, brimming over, anxious to discuss some proposal with an associate, or to secure some information to correlate with his vast and expert knowledge in his own specialty. An ardent, multi-angled conversational buzz, punctuated by delighted and quizzical exclamations ensued. In the midst of this serious engrossment, Shee left the conference room quite unobstrusively, smiling and ruminating, "Such enthusiasm *must* be productive of results. I am confident and relieved."

SINCE HUMAN nature had had very little reason—or indeed time—to change from early historic periods through ten millenia, the rival warring confederacies operated under the same obvious conditions as throughout all known and recorded history. The conglomeration encompassing China, Southeast, Indonesia, Tibet and India fought the Alliance of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Hashemite Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Aden, Kuwuit, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ceylon, the Phillipines, New Zealand and Australia. Every ageless weapon of intrigue, underground activity, sabotage, fifth and sixth columns, propaganda, and counter espionage was used mercilessly and to the full by both sides. Security had become so insecure that a counter-counter security branch had been established by both groups. The resultant uncertainty along with engendered suspicious fears set

man against man, brother against brother. The political and social health and structure was strained dangerously close to collapse. Mass psychoses were prevented only by the wholesale compulsory administration of anti-psycho chemicals by each faction.

Basically, it had been fear engendered by distrust that had caused the war. The ideology and indoctrination protested most vehemently on each side that the chief concern of the State was the ultimate good of the individual, for his welfare. The broad picture was similar to that which had prevailed in the Twentieth Century struggles, but this situation was infinitely more bewildering. No one on either side, from the highest echelon to the lowest worker, knew wherein the truth lay. The constant bilateral propaganda barrages and the internal subversive teachings made for political and intellectual chaos.

AND NOW, in the year 2050 the protagonists of a free world had almost exhausted themselves, economically and spiritually, after ten years of insuperably expensive attrition. The Alliance was winning the exhaustingly costly conflict in a fervid crescendo of all-out activity. Meanwhile, through a perverted quirk of human nature, the activities of spies, sympathizers, quislings and turncoats were at the peak of their productivity. Hence almost anything that was "top secret" on either side was almost invariably known by the other within a very short period of time. Thousands of summary executions, many on mere suspicion, served to stimulate rather than suppress all forms of subversion and treason.

In the natural bomb shelters afforded by the limestone caves near ancient Jericho, in the Mountains of Judah, the Allied Science Council had been in almost continuous emergency session and incessant intense activity for six months. They had no illusions as to the secrecy of their deliberations and discoveries; but concealment was no longer of any great importance. The tide of war had turned overwhelmingly against

the Sino-East Asia Combine. There was little their military could do except withdraw their planes and tanks and men in the execution of masterly retreats, in consolidation of rear positions and shortening lines of communication, thus presenting a harder more resistant central core to the Israel combine. Even when the Chinese high command, through its excellent intelligence, knew the details of an Allied campaign in advance, they could do nothing but withdraw to prepared positions.

IN THE COOL depths of a ventilated and well lighted cavern, Dr. Bel David, president of the Council, was admonishing his fellow-pundits.

"Yes, I understand and know that within a year—barring a supernatural miracle—we will conquer our enemy, and restore order and freedom to the undestroyed portion of our globe. But we must remember not to underestimate them; we must keep in mind that our enemies have scientists who are probably more adept, versatile and productive than we are.

"We have fed all available data to our apparently-unerring computers. They show final victory within the year. But we should not forget that man existed before computers, and we hope that he will continue to survive and advance long after we fully realize the basic inadequacies of such machines. Impending victory has dulled the acuity, diminished the depth, and encroached upon the scope of our thinking. Since we are winning with the indispensible help of robots and machines, we tend to assume they are the answer to our present and—by extrapolative reasoning—all future problems."

He continued without interruption from his audience of twelve. "Man devised and improved machines, but it is he alone, through his brain—that unattainable incomparable, self-improving, self-renewing computer—that he alone can outdo and outwit machines from now to eternity. I believe it has occurred to you that our enemies might conceivably devise some apparently-miraculous approach, through some

hidden technological by-path, to defeat us and to bring to naught all our efforts. This method might be so irresistable that, even though we were completely informed of it, we would be utterly helpless against it once the mechanism was set into operation. And were it irreversible, not even our enemy himself could stop it. I mentioned the possibility several weeks ago, and I trust you have given the problem your considered and profound thought since I broached it. We shall now have a short recess for informal discussion. Put yourself in the enemy's position and perhaps your joint ruminations and imagination may come up with more than one suggestion."

THE RELATIVE silence of the chamber was suddenly converted to an animated buzz and hum of conversation with cool discussions and heated arguments going on simultaneously in a cacophony of sound. One voice boomed above the others, "But they'd saturate the atmosphere with radioactivity. We'd all die." After about an hour, Bel David called for order again. He asked, "Has anyone any suggestions to offer?"

There was utter silence. The scientists stirred uneasily in their seats and looked quizzically at each other. Then, as if at a signal, they all burst out laughing and the giant physicist, Ibn Sulemin, roared out, "So much sweat, so much talk and not one spark of imagination among all of us alleged geniuses to uncover even a remote idea. I guess, Dr. David, that the chances are infinitely poor that they will come up with anything."

The savants were ready to break up in a jovial spirit when David raised his hand for attention, "Gentlemen, it is heartening and good indeed to have such a feeling of confident optomism, but the laws of probability still give this a chance of occurring sometime. Let us hope that it does not happen before we conquer them."

I

THE DESPERATE scientists at the Peiping Scienceburo Institute

had striven unceasingly and indefatiguably. In the electronics laboratory, Ahm Chu Lee, the physicist, and Fum Low, the encyclopedic mathematician, emerged from the duralloy door of the box-like teletemportor which shone brilliantly on its cradling platform. They seated themselves at a work bench and checked the plans of the last electrogravitronic circuits which had been installed.

Out of breath from his efforts, Lee wheezed, "There, it's all correct. I see that the overall dimensions of ten, by six, by six feet are quite sufficient to house the equipment, supplies and one occupant most comfortably. Tomorrow we shall have a trial run with our emissary to see how closely we can pinpoint the past, both as regards time and the point of arrival. Have you any idea of what crucial period of history we should select for our objective?"

"Yes, I have worked that all out," replied the historical expert.

"Now when and where would that be?"

"I have gone over the matter in great detail," Low answered earnestly. "I have spent sleepless nights in the library scanning all the archeological records I could find. I went back through the early known history of the Hebrews. In view of all that has been verified beyond a shadow of a doubt, and with the invaluable help of our computers, I have picked the battle for the relief of Gibeon, where Joshua defeated the five allied Kings of Jerusalem, Eglon, Jarmuth, Lachish and Hebron."

"That was the one in which Joshua bade the sun and moon stand still?" interrupted Ahm Chu Lee.

"Yes," continued Low, pleased with this corroborative information, "that was the occasion. I nearly burned out the cybernetics department in two days of continuous operations, and had the linear programming technicians in an almost exhausted state. But I found that this would be the most favorable critical period in the ascendency of the Jews where we would alter their future history. It would obliterate that

ancient upsurging Hebrew nation resulting in the nonexistence of the present State of Israel and the Arab Confederacy, which are the backbone of the Alliance.

"From every line of evidence gathered and computed, it would also be the time which would most likely least affect the peoples of the Far East and Pacific. Of course, we may come off much worse than we are now. We may have never been brought into being. This may be better or worse for us, depending on one's philosophy of life. But the emergency is so great that we must make the gamble. Now what have you been able to do with your machine?"

"AS YOU HAVE seen," answered Lee, "I have been able to teleport material and animals in the present. That was accomplished by the special electrogravitic circuits we have evolved. I had been working out additions to this basic machine for time travel. In the past year, we have added electromagnetic inductors, which produce the relative effect of motion faster than light. The apparatus has been condensed into a space of about a cubic foot. It generates a field which would make it travel faster than light if it were not held down. Since it is fastened securely inside the teletemporter, it causes the entire duralloy container to move. By polarizing it to the west, we go into the past—to the east, into the future. Which reminds me: I was under the impression that the exact dates and time of Joshua's invasion and battles had not been accurately established within a hundred years of their occurrence, if indeed the tales are true."

FUM LOW asserted quickly, "That was true until the year 2000, when some very assiduous and tireless archeologists at the Jerusalem School of Oriental Research unearthed a papyrus at Bethel. This scroll was the diary of one called Yashwey. It gave a precise account of Joshua's progress, the towns he captured and the battles he fought and won. By means of the manuscript the

archeologists were enabled to determine almost to the hour the exact chronological course of his conquest of parts of Canaan."

"Yes, it seems rather ironic that their scientific zeal should lead to their ultimate undoing," Chu Lee interjected. "But how about the significance of the miracle claimed in the Biblical account when Joshua ordered the sun and moon to stand still?"

Low quickly reassured Ahm Chu, "That event is not mentioned in the document found. The story seems to be a myth or a fable. Probably the miracle was inserted in the Bible as a later embellishment by some *post hoc* redacteur, who apparently did not implicitly believe in his own fanciful addition. He tries to justify the veracity of the occurrence of the miracle by adding, *'Is not this written in the book of Jasher?'* Hence, I feel that we can discount that wild story completely."

"I imagine that must be the case," commented the portly physicist. "Now I'd like to get your opinion of the arrangement we have made in selecting a suitable passenger to Joshua's time."

"Whom do you have in mind for our emissary for the task? Do I know him?"

The physicist expounded, "We have been most fortunate in finding a renegade Arab, Abou ben Kebir, who was an assistant professor of oriental languages at the University of Tel Aviv. He is extremely versatile and intimately conversant with virtually every Oriental and Semitic tongue since the time of inception of speech in homo sapiens.

"He was due for a promotion to full professorship. However, due to some political influence another man from a different county was chosen for the job. This affront embittered him so much that he swore vengeance in traditional Arab style. He came over to our side. We snatched him up for his usefulness in questioning prisoners, and for broadcasting enlightenment to the benighted people of our adversaries. In order to be absolutely safe we have put him under the influence of long-acting

lyserginate. By balancing this effect with lyserginase, the anti-enzyme, we have placed him in a fervent cooperative state. In fact we do not have tc tell him too much about our plans. If we give him a pilot mission in the present, he does exactly as he is told, and even cleverly meets unexpected contingencies. Later, he recalls nothing after we have given him amneosin."

"Then we have this man under control?"

"Yes, precise, exact and predictable. He is far easier to handle than a pre-set robot. If everything will go as smoothly as he reacts, then we will indeed succeed in our project."

AT THIS moment, Sin Tah, the psychochemist, entered the laboratory. Overhearing the tail end of the colloquy, he affirmed, "Yes, Abou ben Kebir is preferable to a perfect machine. He is most intelligent, too. He is completely and fanatically subservient to our will and instructions. As Lee says, if everything else in this plan were as infallible as he is, our success would be assured."

A questioning look came to his thin lips, "I'd like to have a little fill-in on what you two have been up to. I understand that the first trial run of the time machine takes place tomorrow."

"That's right," answered Chu Lee. "We are going to test the ability of the machine to pin-point the past, both as to exact time and precise locality. We plan to send Abou ben Kebir back to view the eruption of Krakatoa. He will stay there long enough to make sure of the volcano and that the time machine has landed on an adjacent island."

"But aren't you afraid he might fall right into the middle of the erupting cone?", asked Sin Tah.

"Even if the teletemporter does, the new duralloy of which it is made will resist anything except a concentrated atomic disintegrating beam. For the principal mission we have decided that the crucial time which would most likely destroy the Hebrews, and which would be most unlikely to affect us, would be some important event in the Canaanite vic-

tories of Joshua. I certainly trust that it works," appended the physicist hopefully.

SIN TAH looked askance at Chu Lee, "You certainly are not going to send that machine into that era as it is, looking so sleek and shiny? It will only arouse curious disbelief and enmity among the Hebrews in the time of Joshua. It does not fit in with the reality of that epoch."

"A very good point indeed," confirmed Chu Lee. "We are going to coat the entire box—which is now ten, by six, by six feet—with a tough plastic material in various colors, so that it will look like a boulder covered with a little earth. It will resemble the solitary rocks of that period, which is the same as the formations found there now. Polaunivis ports will enable Abou to look out through the box and ensheathing plastic. In addition, there is a cleverly-concealed televisor pickup, by means of which he will be able to obtain a panoramic view of all that goes on outside day and night. We will place the boulder in a well-traveled pass in the hills. Abou has several alternate modes of emergence from the machine, depending on conditions. He even suggested some himself. He is so anxious and keen to go on this venture that you might think he had more to gain than we do."

Chu Lee paused to mop his perspiring brow with a large ornate flowery kerchief he drew out of a pocket of his grease-stained coveralls. "It is indeed amazing how, under the influence of the drugs coupled with his basic desire for revenge, Abou has been so ingenious in helping us expedite arrangements in regard to his mission in early Palestine. However, we won't have to disguise the machine for tomorrow's trial passage to the eruption of the volcano. He won't be there any more than twenty minutes."

THREE DAYS later Chung Shee presided at another full conference to evaluate and coordinate all the data which had been accumulated. There had been a low murmur of conversation which ceased abruptly upon his entrance. The soundproof double doors were

carefully closed and locked behind him, after all secretaries, guards and attendants had first filed through it into the outside hallway.

"Even though the eight of us are alone in this protected, soundproof chamber," he began, "I have no doubt but that somehow the news of this will get to the enemy within forty-eight hours. However, it might not be a bad idea for them to get some notion of our experiment. It might give them cause to think and halt their combat activities in the realization that, within a few days they may never have been born, and that their Alliance, as it exists today, may never have come into being.

"The fulfillment of the mission to Krakatoa, as regards space and time placement, exceeded our fondest hopes. We put the machine down just where and when we wanted. Abou was so convinced that we had passed through the fourth dimensional coordinates accurately that he returned in five minutes. The telesonic films that were automatically recorded bear him out.

"Of course we have remote master controls here with which we can bring the time machine back in the event that any misfortune befalls Abou ben Kebir. This procedure has suggested a change in the Palestinian mission. After the teletemporter has left the launching site in the laboratory, we shall destroy both interphasal remote control instruments. We can disintegrate the one in the laboratory and the apparatus in the machine will fuse on arrival in the past. Thus, only Abou can bring the machine back through an automatically compensating return control board in the time mechanism."

"Why have you decided to take such a drastic step, cutting off both transmitter and receiver of the remote control setup?" asked Sin Tah.

"It is the ultimate precaution. Should the Alliance—through some unforseen inadvertance—m a k e an all-out sally and capture us, it is possible that they might get some of us to reveal the secret of a master control through the use of hypno-encephalographs on us. That is, if they caught us

before we could break the cyanide capsules sewn under the skin of each of us. Should they worm the technic and production methods out of us, it would be several months before another machine could be built to go after the first one. By that time we will be triumphant." He nodded at Fum Low.

THE ERUDITE scholar averred, "I have arranged the details as to how much of this secret conference shall be relayed to the Israel-Arab coalition. It will appear that they are getting this information through their usual channels."

"Yes," Shee elaborated, "their espionage system will inform them that we are going back into the past with an expedition to alter the course of their history at a key point, so that neither themselves nor the present situation will have ever existed. Further, we shall let them know that it is impossible to recall the time machine from this end. You see, if we sent them a 'diplomatic' note through neutral channels, they would never believe it. So we must pretend that their intelligence found out these details, and include microfotos of the machine exterior. We can only hope, for the nonce, that they will be so demoralized that they will discontinue fighting and wait to see what happens in a reasonable time. With nothing but impending cataclysmic non-existence to look forward to, men sink into apathy.

"Now the plan is this," the Director went on exultantly. "Abou will be sent back to near the camp of Joshua at Gilgal. The Hebrews had just made an alliance with the city of Gibeon and three other towns. The kings of five neighboring cities, fearful for their crowns, combined forces intending to destroy the threat posed by the invaders. They laid siege to Gibeon in order to entice Joshua into a trap in the mountains. The Hebrew general, according to the account, went up to Gibeon and roundly defeated the five kings.

"It is at this juncture, at the height of battle, that we want Abou ben Kebir to kill Joshua, after enlisting on his side un-

der the pretense of being a great magician. With a few 180 degree directional atomic grenades, he can wipe out the entire Hebrew armed force after disposing of Joshua. The Hebrew power will then be irrevocably broken. They will fade out as one of the most potent factors in Western civilization and certainly never achieve the present position of leadership which threatens us with annihilation."

THERE WAS an excited and eager general assent and approval of the scheme. "And if it should happen that we, too, are extinguished by this alteration," observed Ahm Chu Lee, "at least then we should never know of the present discomforture and suffering we have undergone. That is the infinitely small risk we must take. Even if it were a one-to-one chance, I feel sure you will all agree with me that the game is worth the candle." The members of the Scienceburo were so intrigued by the possibility of a happy outcome for themselves that they ignored the possibility of defeat or even a worsening of their state.

The next day, the entire group was assembled at the laboratory. Abou ben Kebir was conversing intently with Chu Lee and Fum Low. They were checking each detail of the necessary manipulation of the return controls inside the disguised time machine. He was already quite familiar with the rest of the interior, its equipment, the viewing ports, the televisor and the thick duralloy seal door.

He spoke reassuringly to the group, "My friends, my moment of vengeance has arrived. The capitalists have not only done me irreperable injustice, but have mercilessly inflicted torture and suffering on the proletariat. I go to exterminate them. By all the gods that be, wish me luck. I shall not fail our Cause and when I return we'll have a better, more equable world."

He entered the machine through the doorway and pushed a stud on the inner wall. The heavy door with its disguising plastic swung shut lightly; its bolts shot into place automatically, and a red light glowed on the small control

panel in the laboratory. Ahm Chu Lee fed a tape into the computer control and pushed the integration button. The big boulder began to lose definition, rapidly became a gaint hazy outline and then disappeared altogether. Lee ripped out the control box and handed it to a guard who took it over to the disintegrator box for atomization. The scientists watched the destruction in silence, then smilingly congratulated each other, agreeing rather volubly, "This day will go down in history as the beginning of the Millenium on earth."

II

THE ENCAMPMENT at Gilgal was more than a temporary site; it was the base of operations and headquarters of the Habiru. It lay in the midst of a very fertile watered area. Large crops of barley and wheat were available just for the harvesting. Across the Jordan to the east were the rolling, grassy plains of Moab where some of the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manassah had settled. These cattlemen were stockpiling cows, oxen, goats, sheep, donkeys and camels. Large herds grazed and wandered under guard in the lush grass and among the flowering oleanders, poppies, anenomes and phlox.

The campsite, set in semi-tropical verdure of palms, olive trees and banana trees, was about three miles west of the Jordan on ground slightly above river level. About four miles to the northwest lay the still-smoldering ruins of Jericho, with its partially-leveled walls enclosing fresh piles of blackened rubble.

In effect, Gilgal was a "fenced" city presenting a swelter of apparently-aimless, hectic activity. A rough palisade of upright stakes enclosed and protected the most vulnerable portions of the periphery. The sloping tents of black goat's hair were scattered in a haphazard fashion within the fenestrated barricade. A sentry stationed atop one of the bare, gashed, grotesque marl and limestone hillocks of the nearer foothills of the stark Mountains of Judah, could observe

a long line of groups of women moving between the camp and the southern valley of Achur, to fetch water from the Wadi el Qilt. They carried the precious fluid in earthen jars perched precariously atop their heads. Others walked back to the clustered tents bearing extraordinarily huge quantities of brush for campfires on their heads. Several carefully-shepherded small flocks of livestock were being driven for water to the Ain es Sultain just outside of the fallen ruins of the nine acres that was once proud Jericho.

THE VIGILANT observer could also see the outline of the pass through the barren hills of Judah, going off to the northwest toward destroyed Ai and reclaimed Bethel. Several patrols and scouting parties had ridden through the narrow, precipitous, boulder-strewn pass during the early morning. It was now about two hours before noon.

A small group of six Habiru soldiers was descending the pathway on their way home from a foray. Suddenly, the leader stopped, pointed and exclaimed, "You know, Ahab, I could swear that that large rock which stands in that flat area was not there this morning, or yesterday when we came this way. Do you remember seeing it there? It certainly could not have rolled down from any hillside in that spot."

"Oh, it must have been there all along, Joab. I think you're seeing things. You've been on too many raids lately, too much scouting. You're tired. Why don't you ask your captain for a leave? Rahab's got lots of pretty maidens. They'll give you both relaxation and rest. Then you won't be imagining stones falling from the sky."

As if in answer to his impious utterance, a wall of flame seemed to erupt at their feet halfway between them and the boulder. It roared and seethed in a large sheet; they ducked and hid their eyes behind their forearms, to avoid the blinding glare which blotted out all view of the boulder. The other four soldiers, in utter fear, cast themselves down on their faces on the ground and moaned,

"Oh Yahweh, spare us. We have done no wrong. We have obeyed your and Joshua's commands."

Another cried, "Search our souls, oh Lord, and You will know we have not sinned. Spare us."

ADJUSTING the automatic shut off valve of the flame thrower, Abou ben Kebir, fully equipped for all contingencies, stepped deftly through the duralloy door which closed swiftly behind him, leaving the boulder as before. As the flame gradually died down, the six frightened warriors saw before them a tall thin figure of a bronzed man. He was attired in full Beduoin regalia, consisting of a long white under tob, gathered kebr and roomy, sleeveless but slightly shabby aba over all. On his head was the useful, ubiquitous kuffeiyah held in place by two braids of the camel's-hair higla.

The stranger raised his right arm and called out in a sonorous tone, "*Sholem Alechim.* Fear not, I am a friend."

The warriors, still dazed from the dazzling flame and the sudden appearance of the stranger from the void, gaped open-mouthed in silence. Then Joab called weakly, "Oh, mighty one, we greet you. *Alechim es Sholem.*"

Before Joab could continue, the renegade broke in, "I am a mighty magician come from far off to help your cause. Take me to your Leader, Joshua, at Gilgal. I shall prove to him my great powers. Do not anger me, for it will be terrible. Let us hasten."

One of the soldiers, at Joab's command, brought a donkey forward and helped the socerer onto the crude saddle. The leader apologized, "If we had known you were coming, my lord, we would have brought a fast camel which would have been more comfortable. Forgive us, great one."

THE TRAVERSE was slow and uncomfortable, but in two hours they could discern the black tents at Gilgal with the pure white tent of the tabernacle standing commandingly on a slight rise in the plain. Numerous curious youngsters left their flock-tending to follow the patrol in questioning

chatter. Even in their immaturity, they sensed that something portentious was impending when they glimpsed a stranger being respectfully escorted on donkey-back to the tent of Joshua; usually "guests" were brought in bound and walking, or being dragged. A crowd of inquisitive women joined the motley parade, leaving their noon-time culinary efforts over brush fires. Impelled by that human factor known by the generic term of curiosity—possessed by all humans, but purported to be the special and unique essence of the female of the species—the women left their mid-day meal preparations in charge of the equally-inquisitive small fry with admonitory threats of, "Watch the cooking. Stay there or the devils of the desert will eat you up."

An excited, high-pitched shrill chatter of the adventitious entourage wound through the camp following the path to the tent of Joshua. This was a bit larger than most of the other goat's-hair tents. It did not differ from them in any other way. The side flaps were up inviting any errant cooling breeze.

Joshua arose from under the shelter and motioned his bodyguard to follow him. He was an imposing man, with desert-burnt features, a flowing mane of curly black hair coming shoulder length, and a full bushy beard streaked with gray. As he arose, he donned his flaming orange aba over the kebr. He carried his tall powerful frame with the lithe grace of a desert warrior, and the confident assurance of one dedicated to the ingrained sense of responsible leadership. His red kuffeiyah, held in place by a simple braided goat's-hair higla, flowed down waist length. His slitted, intelligent eyes, under bushy eyebrows, were widely separated by a strong, slightly aquiline nose. His lower lip was full and the upper thin, but there was a crinkled kindliness and understanding at the corners of his mouth and eyes. His entire mein was that of dignity combined with a firm yet tolerant comprehension. His guard followed on his heels, reverentially alert.

TWO STALWARTS of Abou's escort came forward, stopped within ten feet of Joshua and saluted by respectfully placing the left hand briefly to the forehead. "Sir," Joab said in an awed tone, "We have brought a friend, a mighty magi. He came from the sky in a pillar of fire. We met this great wizard in the rocky pass that leads to Ai and Bethel."

Joshua watched closely as two other soldiers deferentially and respectfully helped Abou ben Kebir dismount from the burro. He faced Joshua at about fifteen feet. Abou placed his right hand to his forehead, then over his heart and finally, bowing, swept the ground with it in the traditional Bedu gesture of friendship and respect.

Almost simultaneously, the Habiru leader did the same, after which they advanced till they were vis-a-vis. Each then placed his right hand on the left shoulder of the other. Joshua greeted, *"Sholem Alechism.* Welcome, my house is your house."

As the anxious group of bodyguards moved unobtrusively nearer to guard against treachery, Abou answered in the ancient Habiru tongue, *"Alechim es Sholem,* oh mighty Joshua, successor to the immortal Leader, Moses of Egypt. I have been sent here by Yahweh and brought in a chariot of flame by the captain of the hosts of Heaven. I come as a friend to help your cause and destroy your enemies. I bring powerful magic."

Joshua, always the practical man and the very essence of caution, understood only too well through actual experience the making of magic and miracles. He replied diplomatically, "Praise be to Yahweh for your coming in such troublous times." Thoughts flashed through his mind, *"I've had no augery of this, no voices have told me of this unexpected aid. We'd better be careful and watch him. I remember only too well the treachery of others who proferred friendship, even in our own tribes."*

During this brief pause Abou resumed, "I am Abou ben Kebir and I came here through the sky from a far off country beyond the rising sun, a land of much wisdom."

JOSHUA rejoined, "Great Magi, we shall always be grateful for any help you can give us. My house of hair is yours for as long as you want. But you must be tired and hungry. Enter under my humble tent and honor me by breaking bread."

Taking Abou by the hand, Joshua led him under the canopy and seated him ceremoniously on a thick mat placed on carpets laid on the ground. Bolsters and hassocks were arranged for greater comfort. As they sat crosslegged on the mats, the Habiru leader gestured to his guards to disperse the crowd of gawking onlookers. They were gently shooed away. The women and squalling moppets left reluctantly, with many a backward glance on their return to their neglected culinary operations.

The females of Joshua's household brought earthen jars of cool clabbered goat's milk, along with figs, bananas, olives and hot barley cakes. Joshua ate sparingly, but Abou devoured everything in large quantities, as rapidly as possible. Finally, satiated, he leaned back against the bolsters belching and burping loudly, in a most appreciative way. His warrior host beamed satisfaction at this demonstration.

It was this moment that Abou seized to explain, "You have doubtless wondered, and I don't blame you, if I can substantiate my claims as a great magician. I know that you have met with treachery before. Others must have tried to deceive you. Therefore I want to demonstrate my powers to you as soon as possible and show you feats others cannot do. It would be best for your peace of mind if you tested my loyalty to you and your cause."

Joshua, slightly startled, thought a moment and replied, "It seems that not only do you have great sorcery at your command, but you can somehow read the thoughts of others."

Abou ben Kebir hastened to reassure him, "Please understand. I do not blame you in the least for any suspicions you may harbor about me. A great general and statesman always

considers each detail, every probability and all possible pitfalls. That is wherein his genius must lie."

RISING from his mat, Joshua waited for the other to get up. Abou ben Kebir sprang to his feet eagerly and, as Joshua gestured him outside the tent, the Arab requested, "With your permission?"

Escorted by the guards, they strode to a family tent where a small flock of goats was grazing under guard of a tattered urchin. One of the guards picked the little lad up gently and carried him back to the group. Motioning his host and attendants back, Abou faced the goats by himself so that there was nothing but empty plain beyond the animals. He reached under his aba through his slitted kebr and tob to a wide-webbed belt strapped around his waist. He went through a few incantations and handwaving, while he palmed a thin duralloy pencil which generated high intensity ultrasonic waves. Holding the thin rod in his right palm he pointed at one goat; it dropped lifeless. Another and still another fell at his designation until a total of five of the caprine beasts lay still in instantaneous death. He quickly replaced the pencil in the belt. The guards drew nearer in awed amazement, involuntarally edging closer to the wizard, whose lethal powers filled them with both fear and wonder.

Joshua acknowledged in a pleased tone, "It is indeed miraculous. Reminds me of the feats of our great Prophet, Moses."

Abou turned and affirmed, "I can also do this to men. We can try it on some of your Amalekite captives whenever you wish. However I would like to show you what I can do to a city wall."

One of Joshua's guards interjected, "Sir, a piece of the wall of Jericho still stands."

Joshua considered, then said, "It's about four miles. Bring us four dromedaries, one for Abou ben Kebir, another for myself and two spare. The rest of you follow along on donkeys and horses."

The expedition was quickly prepared. Those of the guard who were not suitably attired

changed quickly to battle dress, while the animals were being readied. They donned bronze helmets or thick leather head coverings. Most wore bronze breast plates and iron swords which had been taken in the loot from Jericho and Ai. Several of the party of twenty carried quivers of arrows slung on their shoulders along with a primitive type of bow. A short kilt completed the dress. About half carried bronze tipped spears in addition. From a wide waist band hung some bronze darts and two sling shot cloths. Abou observed some of the regular soldiery in hardened leather padded breastplates. These wore a short dagger-like bronze chereb stuck in leather scabbards in their pliable wide belts.

IT WAS GETTING toward the cool, late afternoon when the cavalcade left Gilgal. In about half an hour they swept into the lush oasis near ruined Jericho. Green grass, date and cocoanut palms picturesquely dotted the landscape. They approached near to the antichariot ramp of the partially-leveled walls of the destroyed, desolate town. Abou ben Kebir called a halt. At a signal from Joshua the party dismounted. Selecting an undamaged portion of the drab baked mud-brick wall, Abou waved his escort back a safe distance. He strode to within fifty feet of the battlements. Turning toward Joshua, he shouted, "Now, my friend, watch the walls carefully."

He swung toward the rampart again and went through a kaleidoscopic gesturing abacadabra. During the process, he drew forth a somewhat thicker metal tube and waved it so that the portable disintegrator beam ate a swath through the base of the wall rapidly. In a few seconds, the barrier came tumbling down with a resounding crash. A thick obscuring cloud of rising dust enveloped him, hiding him from view. Seizing the opportunity, he replaced the disintegrator in his belt and drew out two cordite grenades from the folds of his voluminous pocket-lined aba. He drew the pins and flung one bomb and then another into the pile of fallen mud bricks.

There were two shattering explosions amidst bursts of colored flame; debris flew scatteringly in all directions peppering members of the convoy with pebbles and powdering them with dust. After a few minutes the choking cloud of dust subsided. The terrified and bewildered warriors slowly gathered their wits and courage as Abou strode impassively over to Joshua. Half in jest he remarked, "Well, my friend that's enough for today. Shall we go back to camp? No doubt you are hungry."

JOSHUA was delighted by the implied promise of invincibility which this friend seemed to offer, and a surging tide of grateful reverence was about to overwhelm him. But reflection on his vast experience cooled this ardency before it burst forth into flame. He'd seen what Abou could do. But the priests of Egypt, who feared not the Lord, had been mighty magicians, too. What lay in the stranger's heart?

It was most unusual for a man to give freely of his art and powers without asking for something as recompense or reward. Caution, considered mature judgement and a genius for evaluating both situations and men, inculcated by his great teacher, Moses, were among the qualities that made Joshua a leader. He remembered, too, that this stranger had not even mentioned the Lord of Israel. Nevertheless, he was more hopeful than he had been at any time since the fall of Ai, for the Lord moved in mysterious ways. Thus, Joshua's thankfulness to Yahweh was expressed by an unusually large number of animal sacrifices at the preprandial evening services at the Tabernacle.

Joshua instructed the captains of his bodyguard of the men of Gad, Reuben and Manassah, that the powerful stranger be honored through the camp and on all occasions, and that a special tent with suitable maidens and female houseworkers be put at his disposal. Yet he conferred with Sheman, his chief adviser and head of Habiru intelligence in Canaan, advising that his organization keep a constant sharp though

unobtrusive watch on Abou ben Kebir.

SHORTLY after dawn the next day, following a restful and enjoyable night, the linguist was escorted to the tent of Joshua. Following the usual ceremonious exchange of greetings, and inquiries concerning their respective states of health —including good wishes and other irrelevant matters— Joshua introduced Abou to three haggard warriors who had just arrived after riding hard all night from the west.

He explained, "These officers are from the city of Gibeon. They bring woeful tidings. The kings of Jebusi, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon are very angry at the defalction of the Gibeonites to our side. This occurred a few months ago, after we had razed Jericho and overthrown Ai. The news of the might of Yahweh and of our success so terrorized the citizens of Gibeon and of the towns of Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath-jearim, that they sent emissaries in rags to us, asking for freedom from the wrath of Yahweh and destruction in exchange for an alliance with us.

"Even though they misrepresented their economic status, we had sworn that, if they affiliated with us, we would not harm them. A non-aggression and mutual assistance pact was made among us. The small garrison we left there is inadequate to defend the city against the coalition. We had hoped to make a confederation and peace with Adoni-zedek of Jebusi; Hoham of Hebron; Piram of Jarmuth; Japhia of Lachish; and Debir of Eglon. But now that they have taken the bit in their teeth, we must move rapidly to destroy them before they take Gibeon, which they have sworn to lay waste. And it is most fortunate that you have come at this crucial time."

"I am ready to leave at a moment's notice, my friend," volunteered Abou. "I am entirely at your service and when we join battle with the enemy, I shall prove my full and unqualified loyalty to you and the great cause you lead."

Joshua spoke to the envoys, "Gentlemen, you must be tired.

I suggest that you get some sleep and rest after breakfast. I will send messengers with instructions to our garrison at Gibeon, and to the other allied towns. They will ride on our fastest war camels, which can cover thirty-five miles each hour for twelve hours if need be. It should take them about six hours to get there if they pursue the circuitous route to avoid capture. However, it will take two days of preparation to ready our army for the relief of Gibeon and to defeat our common enemies. Be strong and of good courage for I bring a most potent magic from Yahweh's moloch to help us." He nodded to Abou.

Ben Kebir smiled confidently and embellished Joshua's uttered hopes by averring, "Yes, we will utterly destroy all the enemies."

THE RETURN messengers were dispatched as the camp entered into a fervor of activity. The women were busy preparing emergency provisions for men and beasts. The female populace was being left at the base, with an adequate force of defenders. Joshua had learned long ago that his maneuverability was greatly enhanced without such impedimentia during a campaign.

The men were making last minute repairs in their war gear, smoothing dents in their bronze helmets and breastplates, and sewing up rents and gashes in padded leathern jerkins and plates. They also diffidently supervised the loading of the pack animals by the women and children. In fact, the females were so adept at this packing of camels and donkeys that the men never did it defensively as a purported matter of masculine pride. They really did not load, in order to avoid the opprobrium of the ladies for a job poorly done.

The armorers were engaged in sharpening the edges of the numerous bronze cherebum which had been taken out of Egypt in the Exodus. They experienced more difficulty in edging and honing the less numerous iron swords that had been looted from the fallen cities of Heshban, Bashan and especially Jericho and Ai. These were prized possessions,

and had been distributed only for special merit and Joshua's bodyguard. The smiths, aided by small boys, were making more arrows which were either bronze or flint tipped; similarly, tipped spears were being resharpened. Shafts of olive or willow wood were being smoothed down by the otherwise-unoccupied maidens. Shorter javelins and darts were being whittled from acacia trees, and shrubs brought from the plains of Moab south of Gilead across Jordan.

Abou ben Kebir, fascinated by all this activity, went all through the camp watching everything most carefully. He became so engrossed in the preparations that he found his zeal to help mounting subconsciously; sometimes he was startled at his overwhelming enthusiasm for the oncoming battle. He had to bring himself up short often, when he realized that he had almost forgotten the purpose of his mission. The vivacity, ardor and spirit of the people were so contagious that he began identifying himself with their aims and motives. However in less fervent, more sober, moments he dwelt very carefully on the details of the catastrophe he was soon going to inflict upon the Habiru.

ON THE FIRST day, he delighted the small fry knocking down sheep, without killing them, by what appeared to be only hand motions at a distance. Later, he told Joshua that he had to go into the Judean hills to commune with the moloch of Yahweh and obtain inspiration, guidance and instruction. Since this had been the habit of Joshua himself in the past, he did not consider this request unusual or of unfavorable significance. In fact, he seemed somewhat relieved as he sent Abou to the Gilgal-Ai pass with an armed escort. About an eighth of a mile before the bend in the pass concealing the teletemporter from sight, Abou requested his companions to wait for him while he climbed higher to be alone with his thoughts and the angel. The officer in charge laughingly remarked, "Be careful. If you are not back in half an hour we will come looking for you."

The Arab did not demurr but agreed with his admonition by nodding. Abou ben Kebir scrambled up the pass, turned round the bend and ran over to the disguised time machine. He looked around to make sure he was unobserved. Pressure on the concealed stud made the door swing open. The renegade jumped through the opening into the interior. Everything was in order. He replenished his supply of armaments, checked the mechanism of several atomic grenades which he carefully wrapped in a voluminous, brightly colored blue cloak, and then, satisfied that he had taken all necessary precautions he turned to the televisor. He cursed himself for almost having forgotten the prepared bronze chereb which concealed an atom-pistol in its hollow interior with the exit cleverly concealed at the point of the short sword.

Twenty minutes had elapsed when he turned on the televisor; the panoramic screen showed no one in sight. Leaving the machine, he depressed the closing stud and the door swung soundlessly shut. He covered the footprints in the soil around the boulder and then went on to a flat piece of higher ground. Sprinkling some incendiary powder in a six foot circle on the ground, he retreated a safe distance and ignited the chemical with the ultrasonic pencil beam. As intense s i z z l i n g white-yellow flame flared up leaving a mounting cloud of white smoke.

III

IN ABOUT ten minutes, the excited soldiers came panting up. The leader sighed with relief, "Praise Yahweh you're here. We thought that some harm may have come to you."

"Thank you for your solicitude," replied ben Kebir, "I was with the angel of Yahweh who left me this cloak as an omen of good portent. I shall wear it in the battle. It will assure us the victory. No—don't touch it, for it is sanctified. The moloch ascended to Heaven in a chariot of flame, which is a most favorable augery for our success."

"Yes, great Magi, we saw it

and we were frightened. Well let us go back and tell Joshua what we saw and you heard." The soldiers helped him onto the burro's back.

The escort was deeply impressed, for he had gone up empty-handed, and the warriors now found him with this resplendent blue-and-gold trimmed cloak, which had apparently been given him by some supernatural being. The party was soon back in the seemingly aimless tumult of the base camp. Abou had become such a fixture that he now evoked very little notice from the hurrying, harried men and women. The Commander was off on an inspection trip, and Abou would have time to ponder further on the story. A messenger was sent to inform the Leader about the Arab's return.

In a short time, Joshua came into the hair tent in dignified haste. They embraced cordially after the fashion of close friends. Had Joshua not been so engrossed in the extraordinary combat preparations, he would have noted the over-exuberance in the greeting of this stranger whom he had known for so short a time. His mind was so engrossed in matters of strategy and logistics that his inherent caution, and sharp observation at such close range, was temporarily suppressed.

ABOU SAID, "Behold, a moloch of Yahweh brought me this cloak to wear in battle alongside you. If I don it over my armour, it will protect me from harm, and also attract the enemy nearer to me to destroy me. That will give me a better opportunity to use my magic more effectively."

Joshua agreed with him in this premise and replied, "That's right, but all our strength comes from our Lord, Yahweh. He has told me to be strong and of good courage. But we must not rely entirely on our own efforts and valor, lest in success we say in our hearts, 'Our own hands have delivered us'. Woe be unto us and our children if we forget that it is the Lord who delivers our enemies into our hands."

The Habiru army of three thousand fairly well equipped, eager, seasoned warriors de-

parted from Gilgal long before dawn on the third day. Joshua left one thousand men behind to guard his rear communications and base. He directed his force northward along the serpentine Jordan, through the thicket-like Zor at the western edge of the Ghor rift skirting the Judean foothills. Break of day found the swiftly-moving mass of foot, horse, camels and pack burros about fifteen miles north of Gilgal. The army enfiladed westward with progress impeded by the bare gray and white, eroded and grotesque Mountains of Judah. After negotiating these through passes —found days before by Habiru scouts—the compact mass debouched onto the plateau about twenty miles north of Jebusi. Further westward, progress was very swift and uneventful. They approached beseiged Gibeon from the northeast in an arc swinging west and south.

THE CONTINGENTS of the five kings, under the supreme command of Adonizedek of Jebusi, presented an ill-assorted horde of ten thousand men-at-arms with about two thousand decorative but obstructive camp followers, including merchants, women, slaves, and others. This agglomeration sprawled haphazardly on the fertile wooded plain of the northern approach to Gibeon. Ten rolling platforms or short walls of timber had been built. These were about fifty feet wide, and towered to the height of Gibeon's stone walls; they had been pushed forward in various sectors to within about a hundred feet of the battlements. From these archers could pour showers of arrows—some with flaming pitch-soaked cloth tips—into the beleaguered city. By pushing the wooden contraptions against the stone walls, a direct frontal assault could be accomplished with greater facility and smaller loss of men than with scaling ladders under a cloud-like barrage of arrows.

However, it was now noontime. In order to avoid the ennervating effects of the hot midday sun, the soldiers had been recalled into the shade of the tents and trees. On one edge of the motley camp, a

group of Eglonese warriors and Jebusites were engaged in a violent argument over the disposition of some newly-captured slaves.

"These two young ones are mine. I saw them first," roared a swarthy, powerfully built stalwart from Eglon.

"But I got to them first and they gave themselves up to me, you scum from a camel's third granddaughter," protested the short, thin, pale, city-bred Jebusite.

The larger man pushed him away and attempted to seize the terrified girls. The smaller man drew his dagger from his belt and slashed his tormentor across the forearm. Several Eglonese soldiers came to the rescue of their comrade, but were repulsed by the spears of a larger number of shouting Jebusites. A few were wounded and the fray threatened to turn into a pitched battle when several officers, aroused by the commotion, the clash of arms, the hubbub and screams, came running to see what was amiss. It was with the greatest difficulty, with the aid of a police patrol, that they managed to separate the fighting factions. Each side took one of the weeping but interested maidens.

ABOUT FORTY feet from the scene of this fracas, a harlot—totally oblivious to the bloody fight—was shrilly scolding an irritated patron. "But you promised to give me that turquoise gem you have in your belt. Give it here now, or you'll never see me again."

"That's what I tell all the girls," the slightly-inebriated man retorted. "Besides, the time you gave me was not even worth the dust from off of my sandals. Call yourself a courtesan? You should see the girls at the temple of Ashtoreth at Hebron!" He pushed her away and spat, "Bah! it's I who never want to see you again."

The *fille de joie* pelted him with mud and dried camel's dung and fled for her life cursing, "You son of the offal from a cat's unfaithful harem. May the plague of Hadad seize you." Her picturesque invective was lost in the shielding welter of the colorful tents.

In the center of the encampment were the five decorated

high-peaked cloth tents of the allied kings. They were holding a council of war in the shade of Adoni-zedek's palatial abode.

He explained, "Our plan is really not to take Gibeon at once. This is actually a feint to draw that abominable Joshua up here. If I know his methods —and I should—he will come up through the Gilgal-Ai pass and then send men on further west to draw our main force in pursuit. His principal force will lay in ambush as we chase the decoying quarry. Yes, it's the same trick he performed at Ai. But I have sent one enveloping column eastward, and another north from Jebusi, to take his ambushing body from the rear. That will destroy him utterly.

"As soon as the Gibeonites find he is finished, and that the Habiru terror is at an end, they will surrender to us and we can deal with them later. Yes, harshly, to teach them and other traitorous cities a lesson they will never forget. We must always present a solid front to all foreign invaders. Had we done so against the Egyptians, Thutmose III would never have conquered Cannan and Syria."

THROUGHOUT the night and early day hours of his advance, Joshua had sent fast messengers to Gibeon and its allied towns, with instructions as to the plan of the impending battle. The strategy involved careful timing, for the Habiru leader fully realized the preponderance of numbers of troops against the relatively small forces at his command. When the enemy had settled down for its customary midday siesta, small parties of men from Gibeon's sister cities scratched and picked on the flanks of the confederated encampment.

Patrols rode into sight and then fled, drawing out a larger number of disturbed and irritated pursuers. Then the sweating men on the ramparts of Gibeon started throwing huge stones with the catapults and showering arrows on the near enemy sentries. Adoni-zedek felt that these unorthodox activities might presage sallies from the two main gates of the

city; accordingly, he dispatched two bodies of surly, grumbling warriors to each of the portals to prevent such action. Each force numbered a thousand men. The king of Jebusi had felt that the advance guard of the relief expedition would most certainly come upon the plain from the east.

In the midst of all this bewildering turmoil, both in his troops and in the mind of Adoni-zedek, the fresh, eager, experienced army of Joshua struck with great force from the north on the Jebusite's unprotected rear. The five kings bravely exhorted their troops to stand firm, but the surprise had been so great that the allies were overwhelmed. At this instant, when the two contingents at the gates were retreating to consolidate their positions, the mighty men of Gibeon sallied forth; a vengeful tide shouting and blowing ram's horns. To the confusion of the five commanders and their officers was now added the terror of the memory of those horns before Jericho.

As the Habiru, spearheaded by an inspired Joshua, neared the tents of the kings, Adoni-zedek, mounted on his fastest camel, shouted to his hard-pressed associates, "We must flee for our very lives. Take all the men you can and let us meet at our secret rendezvous in the cave at Makettah."

Those of the Amorites, Hittites, Hivites and Horites who could, followed their leaders in a wild rout westward, with the triumphant Habiru and their allies in hot pursuit. In a small valley near Beth Horon the exultant conquerers caught up with them. The five kings escaped, but the defeated army on foot, its chariots and its horse, moiled around in desperate confusion.

THE MAGNIFICENT figure of Joshua, closely followed by his bodyguard and foot soldier, was in advance. The entire Habiru army was closely massed and packed in the narrow valley, fighting, killing, without quarter or mercy. The General, outstanding in his gleaming bronze breastplate, ornate bronze helmet and flashing two-edged iron sword shouted encouragement to his fol-

lowers. He was oozing blood from many slashes. Alongside him was the resplendently cloaked Abou ben Kebir, not deigning to use his metal weapons of sword and shield, but waving his hands with incantations and imprecations. Every time he pointed a finger at an enemy, the man fell dead instantly. The rout seemed complete, even though a few of the braver fought desperately on against certain death.

Joshua had just pierced one of these when he half turned to Abou and panted, "We have won. You can rest with me for a while. But all you others follow and slay every last one of the enemy." The mass of his followers surged past him.

Stepping behind Joshua, Abou deftly screened him from view with his cloak, and fumbled for a new ultrasonic pencil. He drew it forth and was about to press the stud, with the point inches from the Leader's back, when Joshua raised both arms toward the sky and cried, *"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, Moon in the valley of 'Ajalon."*

There was a shimmer in the air behind him and Abou ben Kebir vanished completely, without even a warning cry.

IV

THE SUITABLE information had reached the heads of the Alliance, to the profound discomforture and dismay of the Science Council. An ominous, brooding sense of hopelessness and defeat descended upon them. For hours after the news was made known, they were in a state of dumb confusion. So the Chinese had a time machine, and had sent an emissary back to a crucial time in the past to alter their history. And to make matters worse, they had destroyed the return control apparatus, so the process was apparently irreversible. It took several more hours for the great minds to rise from the slough of despond into some semblance of lucid intelligence.

Bel David had recovered his equanimity first. There was a glimmer of hope in his keen mind, and a faint sparkle in his eye. At a lugubrious meeting, he tried to be cheerful, saying

to his fellow scientists: "Well, we did consider that they might come up with the impossible. Now it's our turn to undo the damage. This is not a time for lamentation or mental paralysis, but a time for action and decision, and that—fast."

"But what can we do?" cried one of the savants.

David went on soberly, "It would seem that in any problem it is essential that we obtain all the data—not by indirection, which might give us intentionally false information, but by direct and unequivocal knowledge of the facts involved. Gentlemen, we are going to Peiping."

A general gasp of astonishment pervaded the room although one or two members of the assemblage nodded and smiled.

The president expounded, "Several months ago, in anticipation of some unforseen contingency, we perfected and utilized a new method for creating a general force field. By employing anti-degravitational apparatus in our fastest personnel-carrying guided missles, we were able to dispense with heavy armour for protection. The force fields serve two purposes. One, they repel everything away from the ship and nothing will pierce the invisible wall created by the force fields. Two, we can extend the repulsive force in any direction for as far as we want. By a reversal of this process we can be in Peiping in seconds, without being subjected to accelerative and decelerative effects. He outlined his plan.

THREE HOURS later, before the automatic warning systems could even pick up the approach of the invading task force, ten silvery spheres, each about thirty feet in diameter, were floating above the site of the underground laboratories of the Scienceburo in Peiping. Rocket anti-aircraft and guided missile guns went into operation seconds later with an overwhelming barrage, that would have brought down every living and non-living thing in the sky area occupied by the invaders. But nothing happened. Shee and his confreres were hurriedly summoned. They observed the fireworks from the

shelter of a plastico-concrete bubble. "What do you make of it?" Chu Lee asked Chung Shee.

"It seems that our ordinary rockets are ineffectual. They must explode about 100 feet away from the ships. We will have to chance a barrage with our emergency atomic warhead rockets. If the small ones won't work, neither will the larger ones." A roaring, whistling cloud of small atomic rockets spewed forth straight for the spheres. About two hundred feet from the grouped ships, the missiles exploded in a blinding flash followed by an infernal roar. Since the warheads were 180 degree unidirectional on explosion, there was no spread toward the grount at limited range. Instead, a billowing spherical flaming while cloud enveloped the Israeli silvery globes, giving the impression of a boiling sun. As the Chinese scientists watched on the ground, the flaming ball began to expand in their direction. It came nearer and nearer elongating the seething, surging cloud into a tardrop shape. When the threatening destruction was about a mile from ground level, the now-terrified savants observed a welcome change.

Ahm Chu Lee, perspiring profusely, observed, "Why it's receeding back to the ships. But what happened to them? We have not seen them since the flame ball formed."

Chung Shee replied, "Something strange here."

Three miles up the entire atomic cloud evaporated and dissipated in small outward puffs, as if someone in the center was wafting the atomic cauldron away with gentle blasts of compressed air.

Chung Shee cried in amazement, "Why, they are all intact." Then looking through the telescopic televisor he continued, "Not a dent in them. They are beginning to come down. They can actually push the atomized cloud in any direction and repel its intense radioactivity. It's no use. We are lost. You know what to do: the cyanide capsules, quickly."

Before they could suit action to the words, the scientists and all personnel of the

giant underground bunker were seized with a complete muscular paralysis. Like struck tenpins they toppled to the floor, unable to talk, but still breathing very slowly.

IN THE COMMAND ship, Dr. Bel David cautioned his chief technician, "Better go easy on that selecto-paralysis ray. We want them alive, not dead through overzeal."

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "the control reactions on the prisoners we took along show that we are within safe limitations."

"Splendid." Turning to the televisicaster he ordered, "Descend ships. Keep protective directional force screens on constantly. Land on top of bunker."

The ten vessels came down rather rapidly. The firing had ceased, and the city lay helplessly waiting. The command ship, with two escorts, landed on top of the bunker while the other seven arranged themselves radially to repel any attack upon the segregated area. The Alliance scientists, preceeded by armed guards, left their spheres and scrambled down to the large airlock on the side of the bunker. Since the inner and outer doors were shut, it was necessary to force them with several blasts from the atom-rifles.

David ordered, "Find the Scienceburo men first and let me know at once over the walkie-talkies when you locate them. We have shut off the paralysis beam, but the effect should last for about three hours more. Remember we want the scientists alive. Let's hope they have not already broken their cyanide capsules."

In a few minutes, the savants had been located on the floor of the observation room. The rest of the Chinese guards, attendants and technicians had been removed to a separate room, where they could be watched by as few guards as possible on awakening. Bel David commanded, "Take these eight men to the hospital on the fourth tier and find where the cyanide capsules are located. Then have our surgeons remove the glass containers intact."

SEVERAL hours later, the confusion and disorder in

the bunker had been brought under control and some semblance of order restored. Both groups of opposing experts had assembled in the laboratory from whence the time traveler had been launched.

Shee was talking rather sullenly but with a triumphant overtone, "Well you went through all this effort rather needlessly, Dr. David. You see, the time machine cannot be brought back by any means. We destroyed the remote control apparatus at both ends. Even if you were to put us under the hypno-revelator, and uncover the technical details, it would take at least three months before you could construct another such time traveler. In the meantime, our objective will be attained and the reason for your very existence will never have been."

David rejoined, "Well it certainly looks like a checkmate for us. I wonder if you could satisfy the curiosity of a condemned man? Tell me, to what era in our past did you send the machine with its crew?"

"I can see no harm in telling you now," responded Shee. "Our plan involves the murder of Joshua and the destruction of the Hebrews at the time he was victorious at Gibeon."

"Gibeon?" queried David, unable to believe his own ears.

"Yes," confirmed Chung Shee, "just before he bottled up the five kings in the cave at Makettah."

The Israeli pundit was silent for a moment and then an enigmatic smile lit his lined countenance. "Please continue," he said noncomittedly.

CHUNG SHEE went on avidly, "And our calculations show that this is just about the time for the end of the battle there. Possibly our emissary may never return, but we can be sure of your destruction within the hour. You will doubtless agree that if you murder us this late juncture, it will serve no useful purpose."

"Yes indeed—perhaps more so than you think," agreed David crypticly.

"Look," one of the captured scientists excitedly pointed, "is my vision blurred, or is that a shimmering of the air I see over the launching platform?"

The astonished gaze of the mute onlookers saw a large boulder materialize on the stage. Horrified, Shee ran to the side of the machine and pressed the concealed opening stud. The door swung open and Shee with David at his shoulder looked inside. There on the floor of the teletemporter, his features contorted in a mask of indescribable terror, and with a thin trickle of bloody froth coming from the corner of his mouth lay Abou ben Kebir.

With a triumphant, yet relieved and understanding smile, Bel David clasped Shee around the back to steady him. He turned to the assemblage and in a voice shaken with emotion intoned, "Gentlemen, fortunately for all of us this attempted miscarriage of the Cosmos did not come to pass." Both groups of scholars pressed anxiously toward the machine's door to verify their chiefs' observations.

David turned benignantly to Shee and said softly, "In time, my friend, you will agree that this outcome was best." Looking toward the armed guards he commanded, "Take these men aboard my ship. They will share our quarters with us. We take off in half an hour."

Rather puzzled, an officer inquired, "Sir, why are you taking them along. Would it not be better to execute these murderous dogs out of hand right now?"

"It would be a pity and an incalculable loss to destroy such brilliant minds," explained the Hebrew leader. After all we might say, 'There, but for the grace of God go I.' I feel sure that with hypnosynthesis and chemical indoctrination they will soon be rid of their false, atheistic, ideological concepts. They will be of invaluable service in rebuilding our shattered world." A general chorus of approbation and admiration met this announcement.

TWO WEEKS later, after the unconditional surrender of the enemy forces, and the revolutionary formation of a friendly government, all the members of the Alliance Council again occupied the conference chamber of the hastily-re-

paired Allied Science Institute at Haifa. The eight Far Eastern scientists, now thoroughly rehabilitated, were discussing new rebuilding projects with their colleagues. Bel David, with two associates, was standing by the large space which had once enclosed a window. There was a faroff look in the pensive leader's face as he gazed down the step-like terraces of the city over the blue Mediterranian which sparkled in the brilliant sunlight. A soothing breeze evaporated the fine film of moisture from his forehead.

Glancing at his watch, David walked to the table and called for attention. Waiting for the others to seat themselves in silence, he began, "You have asked me to explain the failure of the Chinese attempt to change the course of history so that we might have become non-existent. It was a gamble, and they were willing to take the chance."

"Yes," interrupted an eager voice, "but how and why did it fail?"

David looked at him forgivingly. "That is undoubtedly uppermost in your minds. I know you will never rest until the answer is yours. What I tell you is the best and probably the correct—though unprovable—solution that I can give you after an entire fortnight of consultation and reflection." He continued, "Such portentious and shattering circumstances could never have happened in the first place. Now we have proof of this."

SHEE BROKE in, "But we figured every possibility from a physical and psychological viewpoint, and we were sure that something would occur."

David nodded and continued, "Yes, but your former ideological and scientific fundamental philosophy caused you to fail. You did not take the most important factor into consideration. This is a force under our very eyes, and in the depths of our souls, but you overlooked it completely.

"Let us conceive of cosmos as loosely-wound roll of very thick film on a spool. The material is infinitely elastic. No matter how much it is distort-

ed, it always comes back to its original shape and size. It is made basically of a *weldte-stoffe* (for want of a better name) which is neither matter or energy. Rather, this fundamental energy-matter is a collection of stress fields. Where the fields are more concentrated, we have the physical manifestation of either matter or energy depending on the pattern and the saturation of the *weldte-stoffe*. Each of these forms can be quantitatively converted into each other, as you are well aware.

"Sentient life, as we know it, arises mysteriously here. The rolled film or continuum is in itself eternal. But the fields and created energies and particles inside, whether they have 'life' or not, have the possibility of change and rearrangement. Thus are produced the multitudinous activities, both animate and inanimate, which go on in such a fixed continuum. In this way we can reconcile the concept of predestination with that of free will. Predestination implies that we are given the Cosmos as the bounds of our being and surroundings. In other words it is a Milieu with signs stating, 'This far and no further'. But we can play and work *within* this with our needs, desires and ambitions. Non-sentient, physico-chemical activities go on apace, simultaneously and concurrently with life, in their endless and infinite interacting permutations and combinations. We thus create our own fate and history. We either suffer or enjoy stewing around in a broth of our own free will or making."

"NOW, WHEN Abou ben Kebir was sent back to the time of Joshua, a tremendous strain and distortion was set up in the continuum. Had he succeeded in his plans, it would have entailed such a upset of the structure of the Cosmos as to threaten to disrupt the basically indestructible space-time continuum. A case of 'the immovable body and the irresistable force'. The tremendous electromagnetic stresses thus created, surged to a peak a split micro-second before the murder attempt on Joshua. The ensuing infinitely

great disturbances caused the electromagnetogravitronic 'brakes' to be applied to the turning Earth, stopping it. The visible effect was naturally a standing still of the Sun and Moon in the sky.

"The resultant interaction of the discordant fields was sufficient, involving as it did the perfect elasticity of the system, to throw back the time machine and Abou ben Kebir to whence they came, thus normalizing and stabilizing all the unnatural physical stresses. Neither human flesh nor heart could stand this cosmic reversal, and so Abou died. Thus, history, whose future pattern is unknowable, must go on without interruption. But we are constrained to remain within the bounds and structure of the space-time continuum."

Dr. Bel David solemnly concluded, "And this, then, was the factor that was overlooked: *That the ways of the omnipotent God are inscrutable, and His laws are immutable.*"

THE ISOLATIONISTS

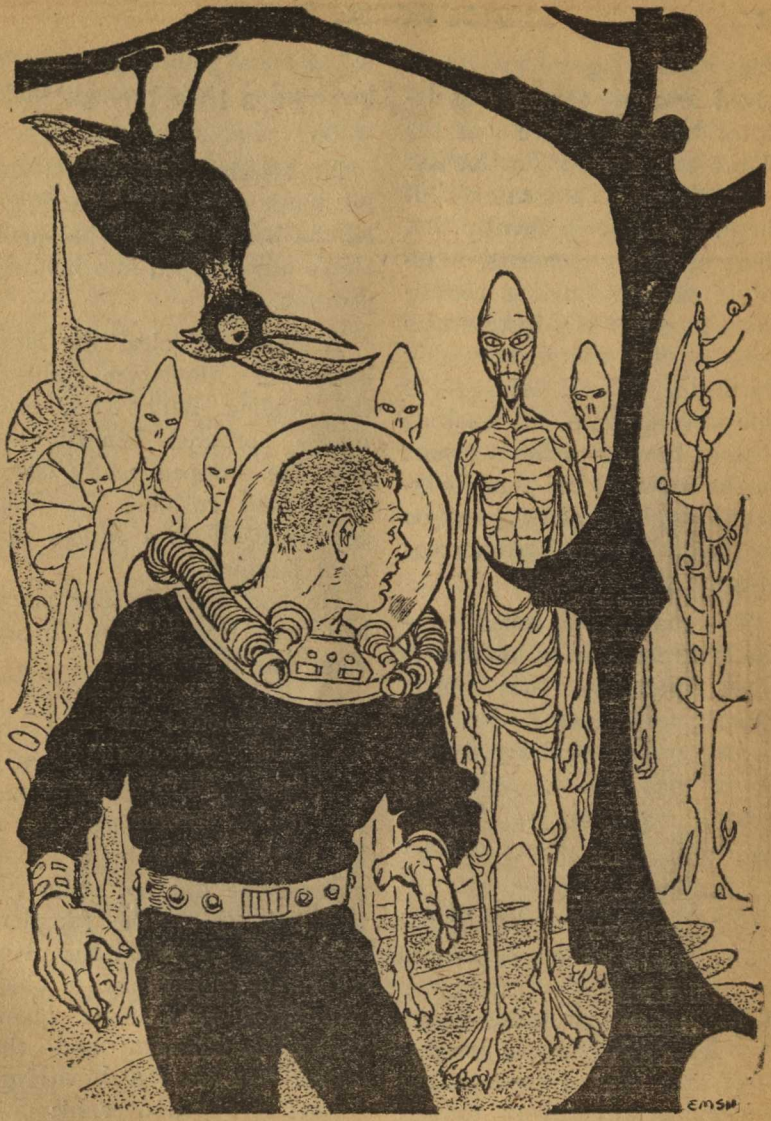
by George Osborne

Consider the far tomorrow, when benevolent Earthmen cruise around creation, offering culture to all intelligent aliens they can find — particularly those aliens whose own culture is hopelessly bemired in peace and stability. Macintyre is one of these happy Earthmen with a mission but — mistake not — his task is not always an easy one!

illustrated by EMSH

AS THE SMALL planet took shape in his screens, Macintyre felt the usual twinge of anticipation. Once, as a boy on Earth twenty years before, Macintyre had contemplated a boulder by the side of a swift-flowing stream for a long moment, then tipped it over. Revealed in the moist soil beneath the boulder were wonders: white grubs three inches long, with sparkling green eyes and furious little mandibles. Macintyre had never forgotten that incident. It was written large on his mind every time he prepared to make first landing on an unexplored planet; one never knew what gaudy surprises might lie hidden and waiting.

Macintyre checked his charts. The planet was the fourth of a fourteen-planet system, but it was the only one of the fourteen that looked habitable. The Mapping Corps had ticketed it for future survey.



Suddenly, Macintyre was surrounded by aliens...

The calibrating computer keyed into his ship's mass-detector told Macintyre that the planet was of .75 Earthmass: a 7000-mile diameter, but therefore lower in density and short of heavy elements. Macintyre set up landing coordinates at once. His instructions were to visit every reasonably Earthtype planet along the sine-wave curve of his tracking course; he was to file a report on the status of the planet's inhabitants, if intelligent, and on the feasibility of Terran colonization there.

The planet was inhabited—the little red star on his master chart told him that much. Macintyre wondered what particular grubs would lay underneath this stone. Inhabited planets were always full of surprises, and first contact came as a different sort of shock to different kinds of beings.

HIS SHIP dropped lower. It swung into a landing orbit, and roared through the thickening atmosphere toward the tawny land below. He wondered if the alien beings of this world were gathering to mark his blazing path through their skies.

He selected a continent on his tenth orbital pass, activated the braking jets. The small ship's tail dropped into landing position.

A stretch of clear flat land beckoned. Macintyre jabbed the landing buttons, and flames sprouted beneath his ship. He dropped gently down on a fiery cushion. The ship gentled itself to a square upright landing.

He had arrived. The stone had been tipped. Now to see what was beneath!

THE ALIENS did not arrive on the scene for nearly ten minutes, which allowed Macintyre something of a breather in which to look around. He did not roam far from his ship. The samplers had shown him that the planet's atmosphere was a chlorine one, with lesser quantities of nitrogen and the inerts. He wore a breathing-helmet strapped over his uniform, since no more than two good whiffs of that atmosphere

would be enough to scald his throat and rot his lungs.

The sky was a light yellow —due partly, Macintyre decided, to the murky wisps of chlorine drifting above, and partly to some refractive trick of the atmosphere. It was an oddly attractive effect, at any rate. The landscape was strangely rugged, with bare rock scooped into shell-like depressions by erosive action. Strange, almost surrealistic trees sprang up high, jointed and involute, twisted grotesquely, crested with bizarre and disturbing-looking flowers. In the distance, Macintyre saw buildings, sleek and colorful—fashioned, evidently, from some form of pink coral. A few birds drifted in the sky. Macintyre watched one come to light in an angular tree; the bird landed on a spatulate limb in an inverted position, as if it had sucker-pads instead of claws, and began to nibble on the pendulous fruits.

AFTER HIS first detailed glance at the landscape, Macintyre unshipped the portable Translator and set it up. He busied himself over the installation, jacking the input to his instrument belt and rigging a booster in case the aliens refused to approach near enough for the Translator's amplifier to reach them.

But his precautions were unnecessary. A voice said in crisp and unaccented Terran, "There will be no need of that machine, Earthman. We will be able to understand you fully."

The nine-year-old Macintyre had gasped in awed delight at the sight of the writhing grubs beneath the stone. The twenty-nine-year-old Macintyre whirled like a stung cat when the firm voice spoke.

"Who said that?"

"We did."

Macintyre turned and saw the aliens. There were seven of them in a tight group about a hundred yards to his left. Macintyre had not seen them approach. And, he thought, at this distance and in this sort of atmosphere it was odd that he had heard them so clearly.

They were beings as angular as the trees—six and a half or seven feet tall, Macintyre

estimated, with rich purple skins. He doubted if any of them would weigh as much as a hundred pounds under Terran gravity; here, they were even lighter.

They did not seem to have any flesh; they were merely skin stretched over bone, and light bone at that. Their heads were diamond-shaped and hairless, with long solemn chins and tapering pointed skulls; their nostrils were but slits, their mouths dark slashes, their eyes cold and hooded, their ears nonexistent. Macintyre guessed that they were a cold-blooded race. There was something reptilian about them. Their legs were like sticks, terminating in splayed claws.

They walked toward Macintyre in a body.

THE EARTHMAN looked uncertainly at the advancing aliens, then at his Translator. "You speak my language?"

"We speak all languages." It was impossible to tell which member of the group had spoken. Perhaps none of them had; perhaps all.

"You must be telepaths, then."

"Yes."

Can you understand what I'm saying? Macintyre thought. There was no response.

"I've just thought a message at you," said the Earthman. "Didn't you get it?"

"We can only respond to superliminal projection from you, Earthman. We reach the deep layer of your mind, but cannot detect surface thoughts."

Macintyre frowned. He didn't care for that sort of arrangement. But, after all, he *had* dealt with telepathic races before. In a way, this made things a good deal easier, for if they could see the deep layers of his mind they would not have to worry about his sincerity. They could tell whenever he was lying, and Macintyre did not intend to lie.

HE SAID, "I'm not a telepath myself."

"Of course. But we can communicate with you."

"Good. Since you've looked deep into my mind, you know

I've come here for peaceful purposes." There was no reply, and Macintyre went on with somewhat less assurance: "You *do* know that I'm here for peaceful purposes. I'm a representative of the Terran Confederation, a group of one hundred ninety worlds of the galaxy, offering mutual benefits and harmonious fellowship. Now, since this is the first landing an Earthman has made on your planet, you undoubtedly want time to think matters over, and..."

Macintyre was on the verge of launching into the standard *take-me-to-your-leader* pitch when the calm voice of the aliens—he saw now that the voice was collectively emanating from the group—interrupted him. "You are not the first Earthman to land here."

The statement, taken at its face value, made no sense. According to the charts, the planet was unexplored. Had the Mapping Corps outfit made a planetary landing? Unlikely. Had a previous Surveyor visited the planet and neglected to report the fact? Implausible. Had an unauthorized Earthman made an independent landing on an unexplored world? Impossible.

"I don't understand," Macintyre said. "How could other Earthmen have landed here? I mean..."

"YOU ARE the third one. The other two came in ships just like yours."

"When?"

"The first was eleven years ago. The second was five years after that."

"Local years?"

"Terran years."

Macintyre frowned, deeply troubled. Unreported visits by Survey men? What possible reason could a Survey man have for not reporting a planetfall? And why would it happen twice, years apart?

He took a deep breath. "At any rate, the Terran Confederation offers you..."

"We are not interested."

"At least let me tell you..."

The implacable mental voice cut him off once again. "We will join no Confederations. We do not want Earthmen landing on our planet."

MACINTYRE took a deep breath. He had run up across this sort of insularity and intransigence before, and he had special persuasive techniques to overcome it. Earth was geared to an infinitely expanding economy; it needed an infinitely expanding market as well, and with such conditions prevailing it was imperative that all possible avenues of trade be opened.

He said, "Please don't be hasty. At least let me explain the value of entering into friendly relationship with our Confederation. For instance, it would be possible to carry on trade without the necessity of a single space-ship landing on your soil. If..."

"We are not interested."

"Give me a few minutes. In my ship I have solido slides that will be helpful in..."

"No."

Macintyre began to feel exasperated. "Why won't you listen to me?"

"We have maintained our independence for many thousands of years. Our economy and ecology are balanced with equal precision. We are self-sufficient. We have no need of Earth and its Confederation."

"What would you do if we *forced* you to trade with us?" Macintyre said rashly. He doubted that Earth would go along with him on the use of force. but he wanted to see the alien reaction.

It was a mild one. "You would not do such a thing."

"Suppose we did?"

"You would not succeed."

"Why not?"

"You *could* not succeed."

MACINTYRE scowled. The seven aliens had not changed expression once during the colloquoy, indeed had hardly as much as moved—yet, the door was slammed firmly in his face. These people wanted to remain in isolation. That much was abundantly clear. But Macintyre did not give up easily.

"You owe a debt to the universe," he began, taking an abstract approach. "Your planet, your solar system, are all part of the great celestial machine. Do you think you can withdraw yourself totally from that machine? No planet is an

island, friends. There has to be an intermeshing of gears. Otherwise you'll pay the price of cultural decadence. You'll go the way of all..."

"We have survived successfully for many thousands of years. Our society is stable. We are not interested in the meddling ways of Earthmen. We made this clear to the other Earthmen who visited us."

"I don't know anything about them."

"They were like you. Stubborn, self-willed, convinced of their own possession of eternal truth. Spouting generalizations about the universe, fuzzy analogies, crude and pathetic syllogisms. Leave us, Earthman."

"Hold on a second," Macintyre burst out. "I'm a duly-accredited ambassador from the Terran Confederation. I don't intend to be brushed off this way. I demand to be taken to someone in authority on this planet!"

"We are all equals here," said the alien voice. It sounded tired; impatient, perhaps. "Return to your ship. Depart. Do not return."

"I won't leave until I've spoken to someone who..."

"You will leave immediately."

"What if I don't?"

MACINTYRE felt the equivalent of a mental shrug. "We are peaceful and passive people. We would not take direct steps to harm you. But if you fail to leave, you will cause harm to come to yourself."

"Please," Macintyre wheedled. "Don't fly off the handle. Let me try to tell you...!"

"You have been warned," came the weary reply.

"But..."

Macintyre heard two gentle plopping sounds above him. For an instant, he did not understand; then he swivelled head upward and he understood.

A chill quivered through him. He realized in that single panicky instant that he was about to die.

"YOU WILL not be harmed if you return to your ship at once," came the alien voice.

Macintyre stared. One of the birds he had seen in the strange trees had plummeted down and landed atop his breathing-helmet. Its sucker-equipped feet were firmly attached to the plastic dome. The bird was the size of a small hen, blue, with a bright red crest and glittering beady eyes. A conspicuous feature of the bird was its sharp and imposing beak.

At the moment, that beak was clamped around Macintyre's left-hand breathing-tube. One switch of the creature's jaws and the rubber tube would be severed; his air would rush out, and the deadly alien atmosphere come filtering in.

Macintyre tentatively reached his left arm up to pluck the bird away.

The alien voice said quietly, "The bird will sever your breathing-tube before you are able to remove him. You will die almost immediately."

Macintyre stared with popping eyes. The bird had made no attempt to bite into the tube yet; it simply sat there on Macintyre's helmet, grasping the tube in its beak and remaining motionless.

Macintyre froze. Any motion, he felt, might disturb the bird.

"Get him off me," he whispered harshly.

"The tube of your helmet closely resembles the large green worm of the flatlands which is this bird's chief food," the aliens remarked. "The bird is anxious to feed. Only our control is preventing him from doing so."

SWEAT TRICKLED down Macintyre's forehead faster than his air-conditioners could pump his helmet dry. "What do you want me to do?"

"Walk slowly toward your ship."

"And if I don't?"

"We will order the bird to sever the tube. You see, the choice is entirely in your hands. Refusal to enter your ship would be tantamount to suicide."

"You'll—*order*—the bird?"

"All life on this planet is in harmony, Earthman. This is why we have no need of your Confederation. The bird un-

derstands our orders—but the bird is hungry, Earthman."

Macintyre did not need further hints. He began to edge across the flat terrain, slowly, cautiously, as if the creature perched on his helmet were highly explosive. He was twenty feet from his ship. The twenty feet seemed to last forever.

At length he reached the open hatch of the ship. His alien tormentors were eyeing him gravely from where they stood.

"All right," Macintyre growled, "I'm back at my ship. Call off your bird!"

"Enter the ship."

"With the bird?"

"The bird will leave you."

BITTERLY, Macintyre grabbed the handhold and pulled himself up into the hatchway. Just before he drew himself back into the ship, he heard two loud popping sounds, and saw the blue bird fluttering up into the air.

He exhaled feelingly. Having those pincers on his air-tube had been like having a hand round his throat.

The bird hovered ominously in the air a few feet above Macintyre's ship, flying in a tight little circle, obviously ready to pounce once again if Macintyre shoould attempt to quit his ship. But Macintyre knew that this time the beak would close, and he remained where he was.

"Is your answer final?" he said to the aliens.

"Our ecology is a closed cycle and our economy is stable. We value our stability. We have no desire for contact, Earthman."

Macintyre nodded. The door had slammed shut. Short of coercion, there was no way to make these beings see reason.

He glowered at the hovering bird. He scowled at the motionless knot of aliens. He frowned at the whole weird landscape and yellow sky.

Failure.

Macintyre's hand grasped the actuating lever of the airlock control. He yanked. The metal sheath rolled smoothly into place, blotting out bird and aliens and landscape and sky.

Minutes later, his ship was

streaking out of the chlorinated atmosphere and heading for space.

MACINTYRE knew now why the two previous Survey men had neglected to mention the fact of their visits to the small world. Obviously, they had been too humiliated to care to record their encounter in the official record. The planet was an ecological whole; apparently the lean purple humanoids were merely first among equals. And the planet's inhabitants wanted to remain as they were—isolated.

They would have cooperated to repulse any invasion. They had driven Macintyre away with a bird the size of a hen—it isn't easy to sell Confederation when your air-tube is in imminent danger of puncture—and no doubt they had been equally imaginative in driving away the two previous Survey men. Macintyre amused himself by trying to picture the scene. A cloud of gnats? A horde of small lizards? It didn't matter. Humanity could not hope to win a conflict waged against the total inhabitants of a world. Defeating humanoids is possible; but when the birds and insects—and perhaps even the filterable viruses—join the fray, victory for the Confederation would become impossible.

MACINTYRE brooded long and hard before he tapped out his report on the planet. The easiest thing to do would be simply to neglect to mention the stop, as his predecessors had done; but Macintyre was too conscientious for that. He had to file a report.

He filed it.

Report of Survey Scout J. F. Macintyre on World Four of System 107b332.

Planet is inhabited by intelligent life. Contact was made but dominant life-forms show little interest in galactic affairs.

Hostile non-intelligent life-forms make the planet highly undesirable. This operative nearly lost his life in an encounter with a dangerous native life-form. Probability of other hostile life-forms is high.

Recommendation: This planet's inhabitants are not promising members of the

Confederation nor is the planet itself suitable for Terran habitation. Therefore it seems unwise to attempt further contact with this world.

Macintyre typed the report out on the black-bordered paper used for negative reports, and dropped the completed report in the polar facsimilizer. An electronic impulse flickered out along the subspace channels, and an instant later a reproduction of his report had arrived at the main headquarters of the Survey Corps, on Earth.

Macintyre knew the procedure. The report would be filed in the *negative* bank, and all references to World Four of System 107b332 would be altered to show the planet as not suitable for contact. In the course of events, Macintyre's negative report would come up for review, as regulations provided. He would be called upon to explain his reasons for filing such a report.

But, at last word, the Central Board was fifty years behind on reviewing. Macintyre shrugged and set up the coordinates for his next stop. By the time they got around to calling him up for an explanation, he would be pensioned off and no longer concerned with matters of pride. But, just for now, Macintyre thought with a red face, it was better that no one found out that on World Four of System 107b332 the mighty Terran Confederation had been repulsed by a bright-colored bird the size of a small hen.

editorial

FAIR WARNING

IT WAS A pleasant surprise to hear the voice of Randall Garrett coming out of my radio speaker, on Sidney Gross' "All Night Program" (WINS, New York), one Wednesday night this last May. It was one of those telephone interviews, entirely unrehearsed; and considering the fact that the victim heard his own voice booming out of his own speaker as he uttered each word, we thought Mr. Garrett did quite a creditable job of representing science fiction and his own opinions. Some listeners may have been somewhat shocked, though, when they heard the interviewer ask the victim if he thought there was a good living for hopeful writers to make in science fiction, and got a clear, decisive *"No"* in reply.

Mr. Garrett explained his reply, and I wish that the fundamentals of the answer were published in large, clear type in each and every book and magazine for writers and would-be writers. That "no" answer does *not* mean that no

one can (or does) make a good living writing science fiction. It means that the person who has decided to try his hand at writing should not say to himself, "Hmm, science fiction is going great guns these days; I guess that's where I can make some good money fast."

A few—a very few—authors have made, and are making, a good living writing science fiction exclusively. Many more authors make good money writing science fiction *as well as* other types of fiction, and/or non-fiction. Many persons augment their income by writing science fiction.

Of the few "exclusive" science fiction authors, Robert A. Heinlein springs to mind at once. Of the larger group, who make good incomes exclusively through writing, Murray Leinster and Robert Silverberg get a sizeable percentage of their earnings from science fiction. But the largest group is the third—those who augment earnings from non-writing occupations with science fiction production—and one thinks of Isaac Asimov immediately as a prime example.

Now, why is this? Is it that the field is so small? Are the editors in some sort of conspiracy against the new writer? Is science fiction so difficult that only the exceptional author can make his way in it?

FIRST OF all, the field is not so large as it may seem to be. There are a handful of magazines, which use varying amounts of material, at widely varying rates of pay. There are a few trade book houses (both hard and soft cover outfits) which have science fiction lists; and a couple—Gnome Press and Arkham House—are exclusively devoted to fantasy and science fiction. At this writing, there is at least one radio program where a science fiction writer's script will be welcome. At times, an author can do very well without going outside the field, but such times come and go—often unpredictably—and it is seldom that more than a few authors are able to take advantage of temporary situation. Those few are usually well-seasoned hands in the field, although it has happened that a newcomer

managed to start just at the right time, and made solid hits almost at once. Such authors were the exception; more—many more—hopeful writers were disappointed when they tried to do likewise.

There is no deep, dark conspiracy among editors to exclude the upstart newcomer. If any individual editor has operated on such a basis, he was working by himself. The majority—and it has always been close to 100%—are delighted to find a new writer who can deliver what the editor wants.

THE THIRD question, "Is science fiction so difficult that only the exceptional author can make his way in it?" requires the most lengthy answer. *In a sense, if you consider the vast number of persons who want to become writers—even those who are capable of realizing their ambition—this question must be answered "yes".* And I think the clearest way to explain this is to note the chief ways of approaching a story, and show how the approach to science fiction has to be different from the approach to most other kinds of fiction.

WITH ANY story whatsoever, you start with some sort of idea. Roughly, it may be a plot-idea, a background idea, a character idea, or a theme-idea—or the simultaneous combination of any or all of these.

Take the western story. A plot-idea might be, "Hired killer poses as benefactor of his victim". A background idea might be, "Gold Rush of 1849". A character idea might be, "Ex-soldier, afraid of guns". A theme-idea might be, "Honest dealing with Indians". You can start with any of these four, then work in the other three. A perfectly readable and saleable story can be written from plot-idea alone, when a skilled author automatically switches from that to presenting characters, background (and possibly theme) as he works out the plot. In some instances, the author will want to do a bit of research; in others, he already knows enough of the background, etc., to work on the fund of information he has.

NOW THERE is, sadly, a large amount of science fiction still being written and bought and published where an author has started with a plot idea, and just thrown in whatever came to mind to implement it. That is, he has not given more than a minimum of thought to background and theme, etc. The really sad instances are those where the author knew little or nothing about science fiction, or science. Good science fiction requires initial theme idea and background idea, carefully worked out.

For example, a year or so ago, I came across a fascinating item in the *Scientific American*, telling about situations where water will freeze at a high temperature—high in relation to the freezing point of water, that is. I passed it on the Thomas N. Scortia, saying, "How's about digging into this idea and working out a story?" The result was "Genius Loci", which ran in the September 1957 issue of *Science Fiction Stories*. You'll find the item in the story; it's extremely important—but Tom worked a lot of other material in, sweated out science and character and plot and theme to make use of that starting idea.

When I got the assignment to do a juvenile for Winston, a few years back, I was handed a plot outline. Fine. That gave me a starting point. But some weeks of brain-picking amongst my science-knowing friends in the field, plus dogged plowing through numerous texts, and the *Brittanica*, had to follow before I can whip up an outline of the plot. Lester del Rey (blessed be he) was virtually a guardian angel to me at that time; and no blame to him if he cussed me roundly when the telephone dragged him away from his own work as I'd ask, "Hey, they've got to have factories on Ceres, and the smoke has to be let loose outside the domes. What will it look like to people on the surface?" "In low gravity like that, wouldn't a spring-gun, shooting pellets that explode on contact be sensible?" And so on, day or night.

"THE DUPLICATED Man" arose out of the

idea of a device to duplicate human beings, where an operator (or one operator for each duplicate you wanted to make) fed the information into the works. Only (the plot-gimmick) when several people make duplicates, no two will be alike, because no two people see the subject in the same way—and no duplicate at all comes out right. What you get is not another Paul Danton, but the operator's idea of Paul Danton. James Blish and Micheal Sherman started with that gimmick—and wound up with an intensely complicated novel, with a background that took months to work out.

Hal Clement started with background in "Mission of Gravity"—and managed to sell his notes as a separate article. No telling how many nights Hal spent working out the math, etc., before he did anything storywise.

Robert Randall's "No Future in This" arose from theme and idea; a theological theme and a scientific idea. If one *could* build a time-viewer, what would one see? The time-viewer itself is magic; but the work therefrom called for the scientific approach.

Mr. Garrett stated that a science fiction author has to have a scientific background. And, in most instances—particularly if you hope to specialize in science fiction—that is virtually a must. Exactly how much is a moot point, but these days a degree in some science, and a good basic library are pretty much requisite. I, myself, manage to get by with a smattering of general science, and a shameless habit of brain picking better-trained authors, plus research of my own—but then, I don't try my luck very often on writing science fiction. The occasional writer can make out that way.

IN ADDITION, one has to know science fiction itself. You *can* get the flavor of western stories by intense reading over a short period. You *can't* get the flavor of good science fiction that way. It's significant that the steady writers—both the "big names" and the often-appearing names—are either in some scientific profes-

sion, or graduate science students, and have been known fans over a number of years, or steady readers over long periods.

The weekly increment of manuscripts in this office displays a number of people who want to write science fiction. Aside from those who can't write, or who haven't learned yet, there are always a number whose work shows that they know how to write a readable story—but don't know science, and have no background in science fiction. These manuscripts may have plot-idea, character-idea, or theme-idea; some even have background idea. But those which have more than plot or character ideas offer only ideas which have appeared innumerable times before, often in the same way. It isn't so much that some of these writers—who may well make the grade in other fields—haven't worked out ideas in a manner proper to science fiction as the fact that they are unaware of any such necessity. And this also goes for most established writers who decide to try their hand at science fiction. In their cases, it is obvious that they did not know what sort of treatment and development was necessary; their attempts are usually intelligent but simply uninformed. What they thought was a good idea was stale.

In westerns, a fresh approach to the sheriff's problems can and often does make a very good *new* story. In science fiction, a different plot or character twist to the "man from Mars" is almost sure to have been wasted effort. As many readers have pointed out, in our running reader-editor discussion of definitions and standards for science fiction, the one thing that you *cannot* get away from is that science fiction is a literature of ideas.

RAWL

Answers To The Quiz

"Do You Know Your Physicists?"

1-B, 2-C, 3-A, 4-C, 5-E, 6-A, 7-A, 8-D, 9-D, 10-B, 11-C, 12-E, 13-D, 14-B, 15-A, 16-E, 17-E, 18-C, 19-D, 20-B.

the tomb

by Diane Detzer

Only one man had the imagination required for the designing of this project — and Robby neglected to consider what that meant...

"I WANT A Great Tomb built which will be a memorial for all time of my life, and my greatness," the Leader said.

John examined his hands and then looked up at the other man. "I cannot understand why, when you have so many loyal designers and builders, you have employed me!"

The Leader moved his huge bulk in his chair in slight (and unusual) embarrassment. "Well, to tell you the truth, I must apologize for the years of discomfort which your odd theories brought upon you. Had I known that, fifty years later, there would not be another man to touch your imagination in building, I would not have imprisoned you. But all that is behind us. Neither of us are young, any longer, and the heat of passions and ambitions can now be forgotten in the pursuit of thoughts and ideas. You see, I am becoming much as you were, fifty years ago."

John said nothing for a long moment, and then, without moving the lines in his face, or his thin hands, or his body in any way to show inner conflict or fear (as most people did

when sitting in this room confronted by the Leader) he pulled out some paper and began to draw quick lines upon it.

"Something like this, Greatness?" he asked, at the end of an hour of rough sketching.

The Leader looked at the drawing and was much impressed by the vastness and power of the huge structure thus pictured. "One thing I should tell you. I want the inner room (where my body is to be laid) to be sealed for all time after my corpse is placed there. And the inner room should be a room big enough to hold a thousand people."

"Why?"

THE LEADER smiled, showing excellent teeth, and shrewd cynicism in his eyes. "For years, I have been reading accounts of the Great Leaders of the past. You know that from our occasional conversations. And I have noticed that, without exception, the minute they are dead, their one-time friends and followers fall all over themselves demeaning their memory. I shall not build a tomb which will not be remembered as a Memorial, due to the tongues of my intimates. All those who are, and have ever been, intimate with me (including, my dear friend, you yourself) will be in the inner room with my body. And don't try to design the building badly, against my specifications. Don't forget that I have other engineers and architects, who will be checking your drawings before and during the time it is built."

John looked at the other man. "What would happen if I said I would not design it?"

"I would get somebody else, much as I would hate to do it, who would build it exactly as I wish. And you would *still* be one of the inmates of the Inner Room."

"You are not giving me much incentive to build it," John said drily.

The Leader chuckled. "No, not very much. Your name will be emblazoned on the tomb on the outside, of course, and will last as long as the building does. And if I remember rightly, this is what you wanted more than life itself."

"If you kill me (or threaten to kill me, either way), I can become so afraid that it could affect my skill and talent in building anything," John said calmly.

"True. It might. But on the other hand, you are not a man who cares much about saving his life, if his building can be built. Also, at our age (and after your fifty unfortunate years in prison) I do not think you would have lived very much longer in any case. Nor do I think you care any more whether you are alive or dead."

"WOULD I, if I agreed, be allowed a pardon so that I could draw in a more convenient place than my cell? Will I be able to supervise the building of the tomb?"

"No, to both questions," the Leader said regretfully. "I could not trust you not to warn my intimates of their impending death, after this conversation. All the light and materials which you will need will be sent to you, but you will remain in your own cell until my funeral—unless I want to speak to you again. I will have perfectly competent, but loyal, architects supervise the building from your drawings."

John looked at the Leader appreciatively. "You think of everything, don't you? You have not lost your touch in fifty years. Let us hope that I have not lost mine. What about food, and so on?"

"Oh, yes, I can send you all such luxuries as you wish."

The two men looked across the enormous desk at each other measuringly. The Leader smiled slightly. "One other stipulation. You have only a year in which to complete your tomb and mine. The doctors say that that is the longest period of time in which I can be kept alive. It really is a great pleasure to talk to you, John. There is not another man to whom I can speak as freely, knowing he will understand me exactly."

"There were others, at one time. I suppose they are all dead?" John said noncommitally.

"Naturally. Only your own tenacity has kept you alive until this date. I admire you. I really do."

"WHO WILL succeed you? How do you know your successor will continue your rule exactly as you would wish?"

"He will. I am sure of that. I have been training him from birth. I have never met him, but from all reports he believes as he has been taught to believe —that my way is the only way."

John signified that he had no more questions, and said he would send word as to what his decision was to be. The Leader appeared satisfied, since he was sure that there was very little that John could do, one way or the other.

John, on returning to his cell, decided that his one-time friend, and then enemy, was quite right. He could not tell what he could or would do about this strange and unprecedented job offer. He sat staring into the darkness, remembering earlier days, when he and Robby had first arrived on Mercury and set up the nucleus of the colony together. They had both been very young at the time, one full of ambitions and the other full of dreams.

For some reason, never understood, colonists had been brought out here by the tens and hundreds of thousands, with all necessary equipment, and then the space ships had not returned. For five years the colony had fought and struggled with each other, and with the conditions under which they had had to live. And then Robby, now the Leader, had taken charge and control of the chaos. When order was restored, the colonists found that they were living under tyranny.

Many of them had revolted, John among them; but if Robby was to be believed, all had died except him. The colony must have grown and flourished considerably since he had been incarcerated in the subterranean cell under Robby's home, for the glimpses John had had of the outside showed phenomenal growth and achievement. He speculated on the fact that, in all probability all those now remaining alive—or born since—knew no other life except that of Robby's. John himself had spoken to no one but Robby for fifty years; he had seen no one but the

Leader and the deaf-mute guard who brought him his food.

TWENTY hours later, Robby, luxuriating in a warm and perfumed bathtub the size of a swimming pool, received word that John had agreed to build the tomb. Robby was not surprised; he let eight days go by before he sent for John again. Years of complete power, had a good many advantages, but one of the disadvantages was that Robby trusted no one. And in any event, there was, as he had said, no one now living except John to whom he could talk freely without watching them constantly, or without their watching him in fear and shrinking. It was a relief to have somebody to talk to who was neither afraid of him, nor one (considering John's position) he need fear.

"It's all a matter of balance, Robby," John said when he laid the drawings on the desk.

Robby had once considered ordering John to obey the dictates of court in his speech and action, and not speak to the Leader in this free and easy way. He abandoned the idea (after some thought) because strangely it seemed so pleasant to have someone who talked to him like this. He leaned over the desk now, redistributing his paunch to do so, and looked at the drawings with growing admiration and pleasure.

"You have not lost your touch, I see," he said. "Is there anything in the way of supplies, equipment, food or personal comfort which you wish to have?"

"No. The things you have sent, and are sending, me will be quite enough. You have forgotten, Robby, that we underwent quite strenuous training and hardships to get here in the first place. Our quarters on the space ship, and the conditions here, were harder and smaller than the cell I now live in, or the environment you have put me in in the past," John said, smiling.

ROBBY WONDERED again whether he should take steps to teach John some manners and respect, and again abandoned the idea. "You can

probably have no idea as to the materials we have found here, or the conditions of the ground, the temperature, and so forth—all factors which you will need to know to build the tomb properly. I will have all the papers and books on the subjects sent to you."

"How about giving me a surveyed plan of the ground where the tomb is to be, as well as samples of the soil there, and samples of the materials I will have to use?" John said, settling back comfortably in his chair.

"I can send them, as well, if you wish."

"Whatever happened to Mary?"

With an effort of memory, Robby dredged out Mary from the thousands of people he knew, and had known. "Oh, the girl I was in love with when you were sent to prison! She died of over-exposure a year later."

"Are you married now?"

"Oh, yes. I have several wives, the youngest only twenty years old. And I have twenty-nine children and seventy-five grandchildren."

"I gather they are all going to be in the inner room?"

"I'm afraid so," Robby said.

"What happened to my wife?"

Robby leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. "I'm not quite sure. She is either dead, or she disappeared—which on this planet is the same as dead. No one can survive outside the colony on their own. If I remember correctly, you had a son and a daughter, too."

"Yes," John said briefly.

"Your daughter I cannot remember about. Therefore, she was either not rebellious enough, or brilliant enough, to be brought to my attention. Your son, however, you would be very proud of. He grew up to be a fine man—in our governmental schools, of course. He married and has children of his own, now, who show a lot of promise."

"WHAT ABOUT the Captain and the Navigator?"

"Of the space ship we came on? Good Heavens, that was years ago! I haven't thought

of them for fifty years. Let me see... I think the Captain was blown up, after setting up a radio of tremendous proportions which contacted Earth. He only was able to send the first part of the signal through before my men caught him. The Navigator died in the last revolt, about the same time you were caught."

"How many people have you intentionally killed, or had killed?" John asked curiously.

"How can I tell? In the revolts, there must have been thousands who died, and since then, there have been thousands of necessary assassinations."

"I am surprised that you had enough people left to build up the colony," John said unemotionally.

Robby looked amused. "Naturally, most of the people wanted to stay alive, so they obeyed my laws. And since then, the younger ones are quite pleasantly dutiful."

"Aren't you ever lonely? Isn't there anyone you care about?"

"Lonely? Nonsense!" Robby said sharply. And then with a smile, "I care about you, or I wouldn't have asked you to build my tomb."

THE TWO men fell silent, as a servant brought them food and drink. Later, over an intricate game of chess, Robby, brought up the subject again. "I imagine you must have hated me for a long time. Why did you agree to come here?"

"When you asked for me the first time, or the second time?" John said, moving a piece carefully.

"Either time."

"Why not? Don't forget... I knew you before, Robby. Why shouldn't I come. As for hating you, no such thing."

"Come, now, you can't expect me to believe you approve of what I have done, now, any more than you did then!"

"No, I don't. But I have the oddest feeling, Robby, that what you have tried, and are trying, to do to the colony will not succeed."

"How could it fail?" Robby asked impatiently. "Don't let wishful thinking blind you to the carefulness of my plans."

"We shall see," John said, without committing himself.

WITHIN a very few days afterwards, a large supply of information and samples arrived in John's cell. He immediately set to work studying and reading and classifying what he now had. In a month, such was his absorption and thirst for detail, he had found out enough to begin his preliminary drawings. These took only five weeks and were then presented to Robby for approval.

Robby's renewed friendship for John (he had asked him to come a dozen times by then for a meal and a game of chess) did not put down his natural suspicions. He had the drawings checked by fifty different engineers and architects. And when their findings came back saying that the drawings followed the specifications exactly, with no quirks or peculiarities, Robby sent the drawings at once to the group of men who were to supervise the building of the tomb. Workmen were drafted in tremendous quantities, and the big machinery necessary for the construction was sent to the location.

Robby informed John that the tomb was being built. John, sipping a hot liquid which faintly resembled bygone and forgotten coffee, nodded disinterestedly, and moved another chess piece.

The conversations between John and Robby were held without any observer but the guard of John's cell, and Robby's personal servant—whom John correctly suspected to be one of the thousand intended to inhabit the tomb. John's guard was incapable of hearing or understanding the two men, and Robby's servant never heard any of the conversations at all. Robby, in spite of the growing pain in his middle, was still shrewd enough to trust nobody with the secret of the tomb. Except the man who could not talk anyway, the man who was in no position to talk to anybody.

SIX MONTHS after the first conversation, Robby told John that the foundations and air lock over the work structure had been completed. Now the work could go faster, since the workmen no longer had to wear insulated, air-tight suits

with the gas tanks attached. John asked mildly how Robby had solved the problem of air and water lack on the planet.

The Leader immediately, and enthusiastically, launched into a description of the process they had developed to get such necessary things from the planet. It had been an almost insurmountable and unsolvable problem when John had been imprisoned, one which had touched off panic and fighting when the colonists realized there would be no more space ships coming to the colony, possibly forever. John became as interested in the discovered processes as Robby was, although it was not his field.

"Just think, John, our tomb will survive even longer than the pyramids on Earth! What a storehouse of knowledge will be discovered by some distant and still unborn anthropologist or archaeologist! And your name and mine, and all our works, will be opened to the genius of a distant generation!"

John grunted at this, unappreciatively. "How is the pain?"

"Worse. But I shall last for the necessary four more months which it takes to build the tomb. I am, perhaps, as stubborn and tenacious as you are."

"Probably so," John said. He looked up from the photographs of the half-finished building and said, "This is quite good. I commend you on your choice of workmen, engineers and architects. I still don't understand, though, why you could not have found one, among these men, who could have done what I did."

"I don't know why it is, either," Robby said regretfully. "But in spite of all the training and advantages of the colony, there have been few, if any, people who are any longer able to think imaginatively."

"YOU SHOULD have expected that," John said with a smile. "Pure psychology, or genetics, could have warned you that it would happen. I admit it happened faster than even I could have guessed it would. But it is no matter. It is too bad, in a way, that when we two go into the tomb, we

will be the last original thinkers in the colony."

"I will be dead," Robby pointed out.

"True, but that doesn't destroy my point."

Robby thought about this for a while. "At least it will be peaceful, and industrious and prosperous," he said with a sigh. "I can say in all modesty that if it had not been for me, none of this would have been possible—and we would all be long dead."

John, as usual in these discussions, did not bother to argue the matter any further, but merely said, "I wonder how much the Captain was able to say in his contact with Earth, before you blew him up?"

"Not much, evidently. That was forty-eight years ago, and we have had no further word or indication from Earth."

There were very few further conversations between the two men after this. Robby was by now too ill and in pain to be willing or able to talk to anybody. And John spent most of the time, now, reading with great interest the books that were sent to his cell on the growth and history of the colonies.

JUST BEFORE Robby died, John was sent for again. He found the other man in bed, too sick now to even make a pretense at normality. The Tomb, Robby said, was completed, and arrangements had already been made for the Grand Parade and feast which would be the funeral. John listened to this without perturbation. He looked over the photographs of the completed building, and said he felt himself satisfied. Robby died a week later, without John seeing him again. John, in his cell, could naturally hear and see nothing, and so could not know what was happening above ground.

The first indication that Robby was gone was brought to him when he was taken above ground for the last time. The New Ruler had a list of people whom Robby had named to be the members of the parade carrying his body to the tomb.

Once outside the palace of the New Ruler, John looked around him with curiosity. He,

and all the rest of the members of the parade, were standing in the middle of a great roadway, which led through the streets of the main city from the palace to the new tomb. The crowds of people were beautifully and festively dressed, but were in the main silent and emotionless. They lined the streets as far as John could see. A band began playing, and the parade started, John's bent, thin figure inconspicuous and lost in all this g o r g e o u s assembly. John thought of nothing in particular all the long and tedious way to the tomb. Even when they all filed inside, and John should have known (best of all there) that soon they would discover they could not get out again, he merely stared into space blankly.

THE BAND stopped playing and lined the huge walls of the inner room. The people in the parade fell respectfully silent while Robby's eldest sons walked solemnly across the room with the casket on their shoulders. The casket was placed on the stone stand and the bearers fell back. There was a long silence, and then the parade began to retrace its steps. They passed out of the tomb and along the streets. Nobody noticed John drop out and disappear into the crowds along the way. The marchers reached the steps of the palace to be met by the forces of the New Ruler. Robby had trained him well. And while he did not (as John did) know that the marchers should have been imprisoned forever in the tomb, he wanted to make sure that few survived to make his own reign dangerous. Robby's intimates, however, were as suspicious by nature as the Leader's heir; they had marched fully armed, with their weapons hidden in their clothes.

They met at the steps, the two forces, and clashed with explosions of guns and screams of wounded men. Before the battle could do more than begin, however, the tomb began to emit strange sounds. The bystanders, as well as the two sets of belligerents, turned to stare at the huge structure.

THE TOMB continued to let out strange, piercing

and ear-splitting noises for the next week, accompanied by flashes that struck terror in the already terrorized population. The abortive battle which had begun openly on the steps had degenerated into secret hand-to-hand battles during the next week. The combatants had scattered on both sides, as well as the onlookers, and from then on only met in small numbers. The people, long trained to stay away from such battles, barricaded themselves in their houses. Up till now, that was all that was needed to separate civilians from fighters. Now this measure proved to be of no avail, for badly-frightened, untrained fighters began using the buildings themselves as fortresses and foxholes.

The people gradually became infuriated with such disorderly devastation and rose in revolt against both the New Ruler's forces and the old ruler's forces and the old ruler's intimates. A month after the Leader had died, the chaos had involved almost everybody in the colony.

And so when, at that date, a space ship arrived from Earth, neither of the original forces could claim to be in control of the situation. The space ship personnel quickly brought the fighting to an end. And in obvious perplexity the Captain gathered together as many people as he could to ask them what they were doing, and what had happened to the original colony that it should end up in this way.

JOHN, WHO had lived quietly in his son's home this entire time enjoying the

reunion between himself and his family, managed finally to get to the Captain of the space ship to talk to him. John told him the whole story, both of Robby and himself and of the colony. The Captain looked at him in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me you accepted a commission which would kill off a thousand people?"

"Yes, I did. I think it worked out quite well, don't you think?"

The Captain stared at the thin, bent figure before him incredulously. "What do you mean?" he asked more quietly, thinking there must be more to it than this, or that the man in front of him was insane. Either way, he should be handled with care.

"Robby, you know, expected that, when his body was placed on the platform, the weight of it would close off the entrance so that all inside would be sealed in. He wanted to perpetuate his name and way of life for all time to come; and I have no doubt that if I had not intervened his successor would have accomplished just exactly that.

"Unfortunately for his plans, Robby no longer had anyone alive who could understand a complicated original drawing. Even Robby himself had long since forgotten all that he knew about engineering. The connection between the platform and the door was not (as he thought) designed to close the door; it was designed to use the building itself as a giant signaling tower, to send one message over and over again to Earth. And I gather, since you came here, that the message went through."

"YES, IT DID," the Captain said, amazed. "Although, of course, we did not know who or what was sending the message. Since I gather from these people here," motioning at the silent, listening crowd of colonists around them, "that no space ship has arrived in fifty-five years, and so far as you all knew, space travel had been abandoned. How could you then know that your message would work? Or for that matter, that your drawings of the tomb

would be built by unskilled people as you wished?"

"The last question first. I knew it would be built exactly, because it was a glorious tribute to Robby, he thought. And Robby (since he could find nothing out of the way with the drawings) was enough of an egotist to insist that his flowery tribute be built exactly as I asked.

"The first question—how did I know the tomb would work, or that space travel still existed—is a little harder to explain.

"Put it this way. So far as I knew, space travel had *not* been abandoned, and I had to take the chance. I knew the tomb would work, because I was the one who had designed (although Robby did not know it) a similar tower, which after I was imprisoned, was built and used by the Captain. It exploded because Robby discovered what the Captain was doing and wanted to get rid of him and his project. But Robby told me the first tower worked, so I had no qualms about designing a second one like it. Why *did* space ships abandon this colony, incidentally?"

"Robby, I gather, was Lt. Robinson. He sent us a message, fifty-five years ago, that an alien and incurable epidemic had hit the colony and he advised us not to land for fear of picking up the contagion and taking it back to Earth. He also said that he was the last man alive in the colony, and that he himself was dying. Naturally we left the planet alone until enough time had elapsed for a safe investigation."

JOHN SMILED tiredly. "Then I can only guess that the first tower blew up before the Captain sent his message, if Robby's message was the last you heard of us."

"The Captain's message certainly did not come through."

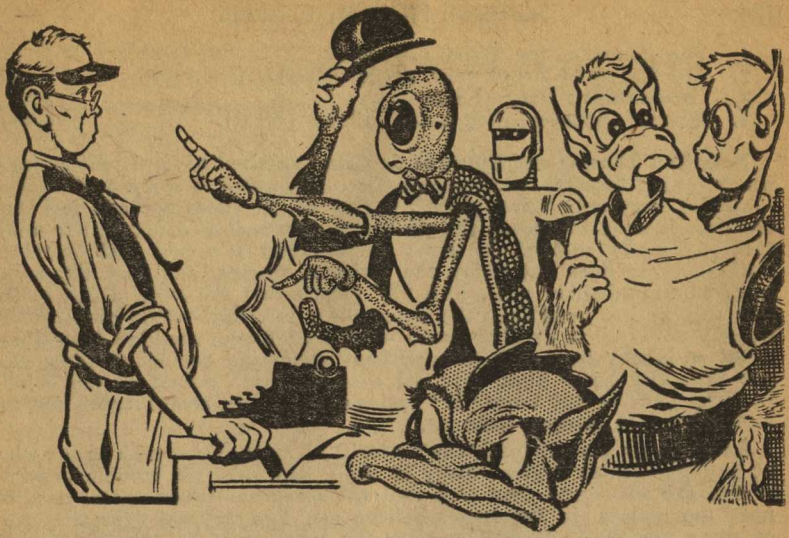
"I'm glad I didn't know that. Or even so desperate a gamble as the tomb would not have been built, had I thought that the original tower did not work. You see, I was counting on the fact that it did work, and therefore the fact that I didn't have an opportunity to test the tomb would not mat-

ter. Robby was mistaken in me. He thought that I cared so much about my work that I would rather see the tomb built than stay alive. What he didn't think of was that fifty years of deadly conditions would engender an almost passionate love of staying alive, even in such a man as I was. I had no intention of dying."

"Well, the whole thing is very curious," the Captain said, "And I must say I have the greatest admiration for you, sir, for what you have done."

John waved this aside, and with a slight smile walked out of the room to meet his worried son and daughter-in-law who were waiting for him outside. His son was, as Robby had said, an admirable person, with all of John's attributes, and his mother's, (as John had suspected) but so carefully trained that he never showed his true thoughts.

John spent the rest of his life pleasantly enough, greatly beloved by his family and new friends. And the tomb which Robby had wanted so much was avoided and deserted by the colonists, and only used by the operators of the signal tower. Robby, thought John, would be furious if he knew what had happened to his tomb, and how it was now used. He laughed lightly, and went back to his game of chess with his son.



The Last Word

(Yours, of course, Gentle Reader)

THE RECKONING

WE'RE SORRY to have had to shift to the 10-times-a-year schedule, and hope that conditions in 1959 will allow for 12 issues; our next issue, January, will put us back on the "every month" basis. You can help by continuing your support, introducing the magazine to your friends (or perhaps making new friends by such introductions) and sending in your vote *early*, on every issue.

Early returns show your vociferous approval of L. Sprague de Camp's "Tower of Zanid", which ran in our May to August issues. Well ... we think you'll be even more taken with our new serial, starting in the January issue. "Caduceus Wild", by Ward Moore & Robert Bradford takes a new and gripping angle upon the rebel against social tyranny — and shows an entirely possible social system which has never been explored before in science fiction. It's a novel of suspense and flight, but that's only a small part of the story!

Many readers, we know, do not like to cut up a copy of a magazine, even when the coupon is laid out so that no part of a story or article is lost. The coupon is there for the convenience of those of you who do not mind excerpting it. But a postal card, or a letter can serve the same purpose. However you do it, we want to hear from you — in a way so that we can display your opinions for the record. That's why phone calls, however complimentary, leave me with a frustrated feeling.

Your votes on the June issue showed the following:

1.	The Sound of the Wind (Thomas)	1.11
2.	The Tower of Zanid, part 2 (de Camp)	1.75
3.	Constabulary Duty (Knox)	3.28
4.	Mirror (Spencer) *tied with* Lullaby (Zirul)	3.50

Both Ted Thomas and Sprague de Camp received several "A" ratings, which meant that the particular voter considered the story outstanding — better than only "first place". (After all, at times one can feel that the best is none too good; the "A" rating leaves no doubt in our mind that you really enjoyed the story so marked.) It's only just to relate that everyone does not enjoy the Krishna stories, and that the serial received one "dislike" vote. (An "X" means that the story didn't strike you only as less good than the others — a tale that would have ranked higher, perhaps. in another issue — but that you wouldn't have liked it better in any issue.) Others, without indicating decided distaste, did not rank the serial high. Nor did everyone put "Sound of the Wind" in first place — but those "A" ratings more than compensated for the minority votes in each instance.

As much as I agree with the majority, I sympathize with those who, at any time, think a given story is really bad, take the trouble to write in and say so — and then find that the story has taken top honors, or near top honors, in the issue. Believe me, I've writhed over that sort of thing myself — as well as over the exact opposite, when a story I thought splendid came out at the tail end, and under an aura of detestation. (Happily, those who expressed dislike of one of the two top items in this issue were strongly in favor of the other, so our June book wasn't a total loss for them.)

There were a number of very favorable comments on the cover, but more of you either disliked it, or did not think it particularly good. The general trend of dislike here was for the subject matter; most of the opposition said, in substance, "Freas is a fine artist, and this is a good painting, but it isn't a good cover for *Science Fiction Stories*." I think that we'll have to assume that if the returns don't show a clear "yes" to a cover, then they indicate that we should avoid that sort of approach in the future. (Another reason why I want your votes on every issue.)

On the question of whether covers should illustrate a story in the issue (rather than just exist in solitary splender), your replies show a definite "Yes", 2 to 1. And quite a number of the votes we put in the "No" column really said, "sometimes", "don't mind", etc.

There was a bit of displeasure on the story picked for the cover scene (I might add that the Knox story was the most controversial we have run for a long time — it received ratings from 1 to X). Without going into lengthy details — "illustrated on cover" does not necessarily mean that I consider the story the best in the issue, or extraordinary (for science fiction, that is; I hope I'm not giving you "ordinary science fiction", whatever that might be!). Considerations governing cover selection lie mostly outside my authority or decision.

I cannot promise you an extended report in every issue; but I think that putting the "Reckoning" inside the letter department will give us more range for letting you know what the consensus was on an issue. So look for it here, from now on.

CYRIL KORNBLUTH

Dear Reader:

The best story I ever heard about Cyril Kornbluth is apocryphal, dealing with the time he served as an infant. A sweet old lady bent over the baby carriage, making the sort of noises that sweet old ladies consider proper consolation to young souls, freshly exposed to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Master Cyril opened one eye, took in this latter-day Job's comforter with a glance, then said in a deep bass voice, "Madam, I am not the infant you think."

There are variations upon the legend, as well as rumours that a changeling—which had been substituted for young Kornbluth at the proper moment, in the customary way—was hastily and frantically reclaimed and the true Cyril restored. If so, it was the dark ones' loss—not ours.

He was a man of infinite jest, which means that he was a good deal more than a funny fellow; in an earlier age, a wise king would have made his status official, leaving him free to observe that the king and others were naked, when men less favored dared not speak or see. He was lazy about many things where the rest of us would do well also to be lazy; but this often concealed the fact that, when he had something at hand that he thought worth doing—and had determined how he would proceed—he wasted no time. In less high-falutin' language, he worked hard and played hard—but when loafing was on the order of business, he knew how to loaf.

(The secret of loafing is much like the secret of floating—you don't have to do anything either to loaf or to float; you just avoid doing anything which prevents you from loafing or floating. For those who may have tender consciences, with something of a Puritan hang-over, the word "relax" can be substituted for "loaf".)

I first heard of him in 1938, when he and other young fans of the day—"young fans" as opposed to elder fans, who had started reading science fiction in the Gernsback days, or veteran fans, who had been in on the first "science correspondence clubs" back in the late 20s.—inaugurated what they called the "Science Fiction Circle". He was just fin-

ishing high school; and a year later, when Frederik Pohl became starting editor of *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories* the name, Cyril Kornbluth, was known around the fan world for highly literate contributions to the fan press.

But when he started writing for magazines, he started at the bottom—although even his most straightforward operations on the pulp formula story contained individual elements which just wouldn't do for the average formula-minded editor. Most of the S. D. Gottesman stories in Pohl's issues were plotted by Fred and written by Cyril, but "Before the Universe" was pure Kornbluth. However, it was with Don Wollheim's *Stirring Science Stories* and *Cosmic Stories* that we began to get an inkling of what Cyril could do. "Thirteen O'Clock" introduced Cecil Corwin, with the type of Carrollish fantasy that Kuttner and others were to make famous

in *Unknown*. The Corwin stories are pure Kornbluth, as are those signed Walter C. Davies and Kenneth Falconer; and one of them, "The Words of Guru", (by Kenneth Falconer) is rightly regarded as a minor masterpiece in fantasy. The knot of pseudonyms employed by the group of New York fans of which Cyril was a part in those days is hard to unravel, since the original intention of specific names was often forgotten or ignored. However, in most instances, it isn't worth bothering about. One exception might be "The Embassy" by Martin Pearson. (This alias was assigned to Don Wollheim, and except for "The Embassy", which was the work of Wollheim and Kornbluth, no one else ever poached upon it.)

If this sounds more like personal reminiscence than notes upon an author whose loss we mourn, there is a very good reason for it. Because the name "Cyril Kornbluth" means "1939-1942" to me—the days when it was all for one and every man for himself, but someone was always ready to lend a hand when someone else

[*Turn Page*]

had to move. The days of the endless literary and political debates; the fan feuds; the inter-group machinations; the flask of *Kimball Kinnison Reserve, Vat #333* (distilled over the stove from excessively cheap red wine—via tubes and flagons Cyril brought in and assembled, piece by piece—and aged 6 hours); poetry contests; encounters with Maxwell Bodenheim in the Village; the six-day shaggy dog story (on the 7th day, we rested); impromptu odes in latin, operas in English; cookery by ear, indigestion the orthodox way; the never-silent mimeographs; the occasional check or letter of acceptance —and rejection slips.

This was the Cyril Kornbluth we knew, and from whom we expected to see impressive works. And they began to take shape after the war, first the collaborations with Judith Merril and Frederik Pohl, then the solo novels. I don't think we would have had to wait much longer.

But now we *shall* have to wait longer; the big snow came, just at a time when he had taken an important editorial post. He arose that morning, chopped wood and shoveled snow, then walked to the railroad station to get on with the duties of the day. There he fell. What hero has done more? *R.A.W.L.*

ASIMOV TO POWELL

Dear Bob:

I picked up the June issue of *Science Fiction Stories* and naturally found Mr. Powell's letter on the clock paradox at once.

Although I admire Mr. Powell's letter intensely, I find I cannot accept his suggestion that Hara Kiri is mandatory. I have refrained from self-destruction even after receiving curt and cutting rejections of whole novels (it happens, alas) despite serious temptation at the time, and I shall certainly resist suicide under the far less serious circumstances of being scientifically wrong.

If all scientists killed themselves after making a mistake,

DON'T FORGET

1. We start a great new serial next issue.
2. We want to hear from every one of you!

there'd be no scientist left alive, with the possible exception of Mr. Powell.

I am impressed and a little terrified at Mr. Powell. I, myself, not considering myself an Authority, simply followed the majority line in theoretical physics (as nearly as I can understand it) and said, as quoted by Mr. Powell: "So it *seems* that the slowing of time with speed is real and not just apparent." (italics not in the original.) Mr. Powell on the other hand, refutes me by saying, "The *truth* of the matter is..." and so on (italics mine.) Now I myself am a cautious and conservative fellow who nevertheless admires the lofty perch upon which sit those few gifted individuals who know the *truth*.

I have no arguments to present to Mr. Powell, since I am not a theoretical physicist. I can only say that following the literature, I have noted that of the theoretical physicists who are willing to line up on one side or the other of the problem, only one— Dr. Herbert Dingle—insists that there

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is no time dilatation. All others insist there is. I confess I went along with majority opinion. It is still majority, now that the minority has doubled its numbers and counts Dingle and Powell.

I must admit that Powell's arguments against McCrea and others, (with whose views on time dilatation I have placidly gone along) are powerful. McCrea and the others are, it seems, a) "loons," b) fit for a "side-show", and c) possibly "NKVD men sent directly from the Kremlin."

It is possible they may also be unkind to their mothers and that would *really* knock their arguments into a hat.

I am also delighted to find out that observing data only means that you have observed data and that it is impossible to deduce conclusions from it. I have always secretly thought that when I observed a man laid in a coffin and buried, it only means that I have observed a man laid in a coffin and buried. It *doesn't* mean that he's very probably dead. I am glad to have this line of close-knit reasoning backed by an expert.

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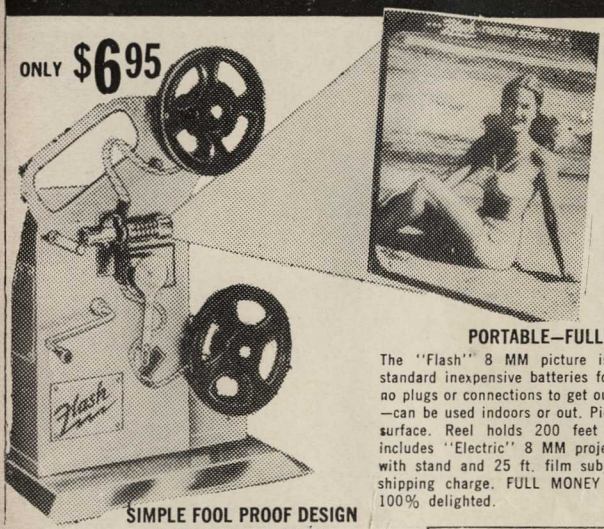

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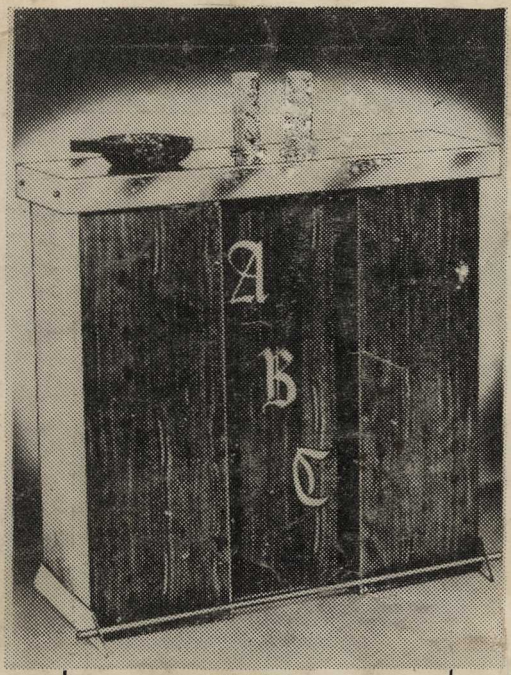

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