SPACEWAY

DECEMBER
1953

STORIES OF THE FUTURE

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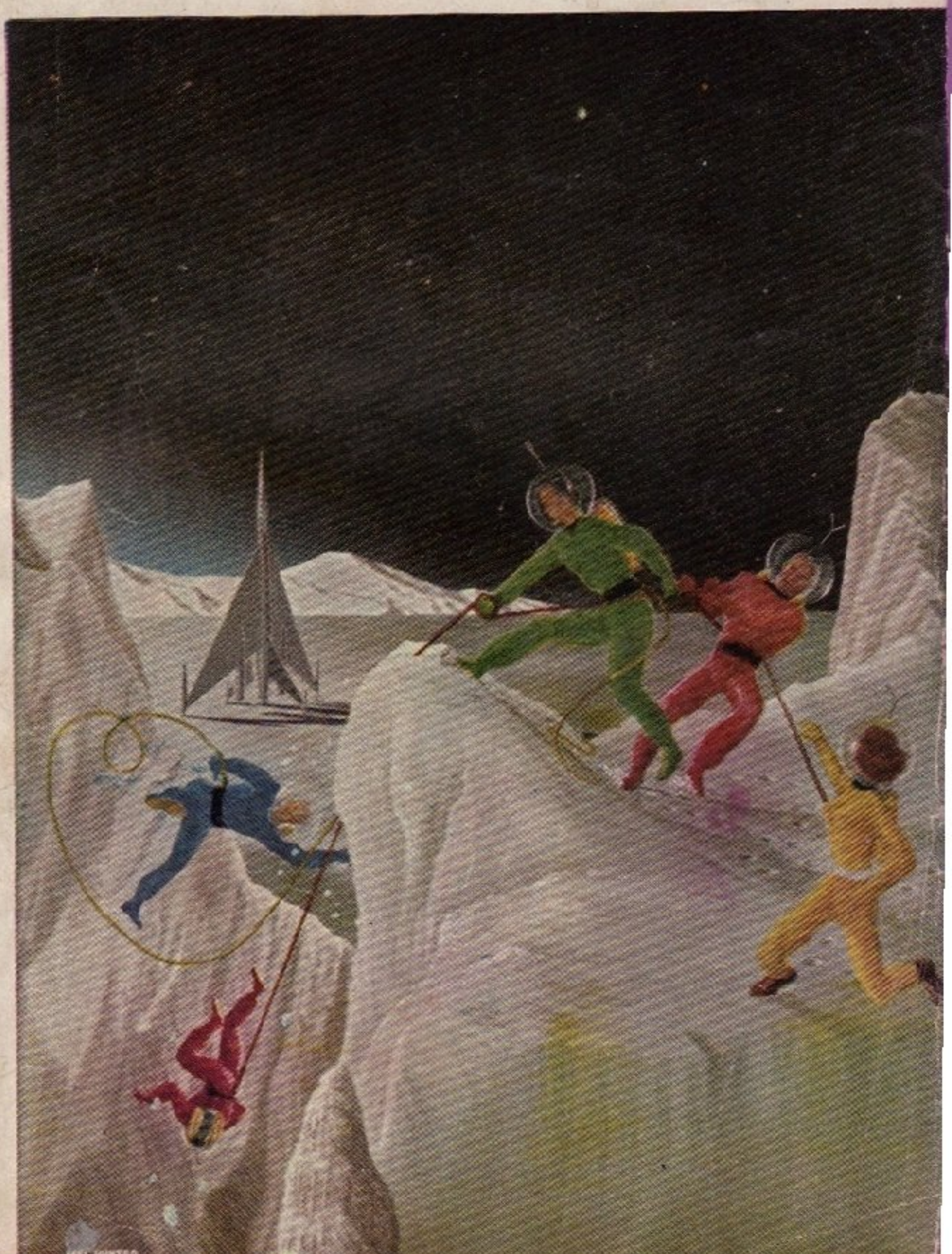
A Novelet by the Author of the Movie "SPACEWAYS"



SPACEWAY

STORIES OF THE FUTURE

Volume 1 **DECEMBER, 1953** **Number 1**

contents

Novelets

Short Stories

Serial

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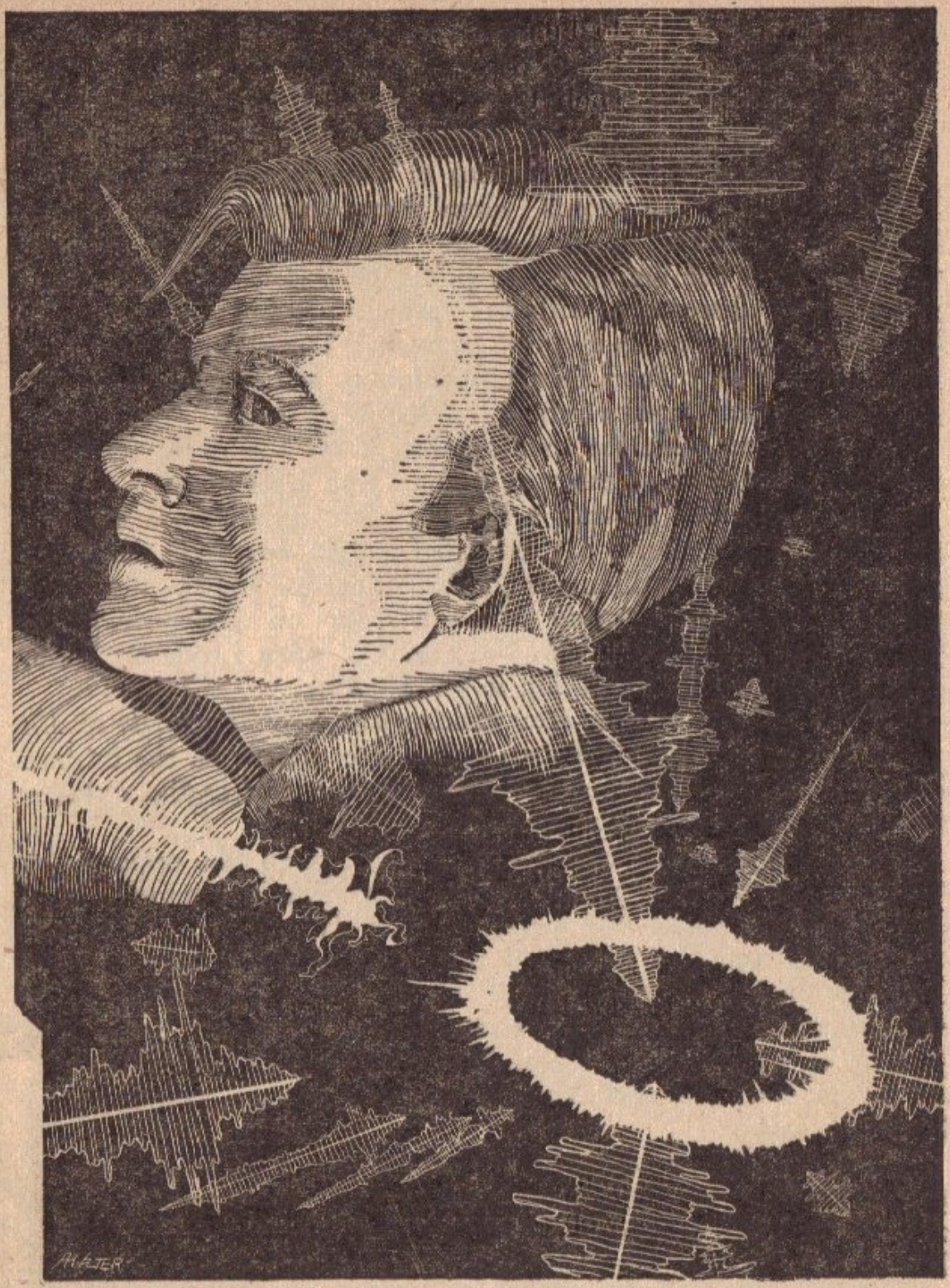
The OSILANS

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

ILLUSTRATED BY ARNOLD WALTER

¶ Strange patterns appearing on his oscillograph reveal to Jay Bard a brand new world of incredible adventure—and bring him to grips with the mysterious Osilans.



1

MESSAGE IN GREEN

My oscillograph went crazy.

I was reading the voice pattern of Don Beede and comparing it with his broadcast words, when it happened. Strange patterns suddenly appeared in the green line from which electrical impulses built the graph. I was proud of this gadget. I'd built it down in my basement, with my own hands and such pieces of electrical equipment as I could come by. Tinkering was a hobby with me. I'm Jay Bard. My profession is academic. I know just enough about electronics to be interested in its drama.

I could read back the oscillograms of all the radio celebrities to whom I listened, as easily as I could read a telegram.

Maybe I'd better go back a bit. My outfit consisted of wires insulated in white plastic. My principal gadget was little more than a transformer in a small box. It boosted a hundred and twenty volts to seven hundred and fifty and threw off sparks on occasion, which is why I didn't take anybody into the basement when I rode my hobby. I never knew when something might blow up.

I filed every oscillogram after making sure I could actually read it.

My screen was the usual two-inch white surface in the business end of a P1 tube, attached to my transformer and to the socket to which my radio was also attached.

When my gadgets were all turned on, a green line appeared on the white screen. This picked up whatever vibrations came over the radio, and the green line waved as if it danced to the sing-song voice or the music. I could tell which, without hearing the radio. I always photographed the graph with a high-speed camera, these oscillograms becoming my permanent record. I could go back weeks, pick up one, and read what Don Beede, of "Let The People Know," or anyone else, had said. Voices, music, sound, set my little green line to jumping.

I could do things with it, too, just for fun. I could reduce it to a point, simply by jiggling the buttons which operated my wiring system. I could broaden it, make it round, oval, rectangular, with buttons. All the time it would be trying its best to record whatever sound came over the radio. And no matter how I deliberately distorted the graph, I could read its photograph later. It wasn't much of an

accomplishment, but it gave me as much pleasure as any hobby could. . . .

Until the oscillograph, three weeks ago, went crazy.

I had discovered that magnets, temporary or permanent, disturbed and distorted the graph. I could even pull the green line into circles, doughnut-holed, with positive or negative poles of my magnets. With everything hooked up I could pull the green line, or whatever shape it might have at a given moment, off the screen. It slipped back on when I took the magnets far enough away.

* * * * *

Don Beede was saying . . . "thanks to all you lovely people 'Let The People Know' promises to be on the air from now on!"

I was, as usual, reading the oscillograph as Beede spoke. But all at once the graph did not agree with what Don Beede was saying! I knew, instantly, that what it *did* say, if anything, was, for all my skill, incomprehensible to me. The green band, or line, had widened, with no effort on my part, and something round was crawling along inside it, as if it were a piece of green hose! It came directly out of Walt Disney! Nothing quite like it had happened before, even when I distorted the graph with both magnets! A round bulge ran back and forth across the face of the screen, inside the green line. I began to check all my gadgets. Nothing was wrong with my hook-up. There was absolutely no reason for what was happening.

As if the pistoning bulge had been solely to attract my attention, the oscillograph now went into weird action. There were patterns like none I had seen since my hobby began; patterns that were too bewildering to be patterns at all. I had heard xylophones, marimbas, zithers, scores of languages, sopranos, altos, baritones, bassos, tenors, weeping, laughing, screaming, shooting, drums, trombones, *everything* that ever came over the radio—including singing mice!—but had never seen the graph-patterns that were now being shown me.

What the graph should have shown was the voice of Don Beede, saying: "Next week we'll bring you something entirely new in celebrities!"

There wasn't the slightest reason why the oscillograph should not have coincided with the voice pattern, *but the voice did not even effect it!* Something outside the radio, the electrical circuit—AC only—appeared to have taken charge of my gadgets.

There had to be something wrong with the hook-up, of course, but I could not find it. Intrigued more and more with each passing moment that I found no explanation, I kept my high speed camera busy on the jittery green line while I turned on every program I could find. None had the slightest effect on what had always been an oscillograph.

I turned off the switches, all of them. The green line stayed visible for two minutes! Then it vanished from the screen, so reluctantly that I realized, with a chill, *that it could have remained independently of the AC current in my basement!*

I turned everything back on. The oscillograph still did not respond to anything that came over the radio, and never, since I had fumbled the gadget into being, three years before, had it failed to correspond with the sound waves. It was simply *illegal!* Sweat broke out on me as my imagination got to work. The darting bulge, I reasoned, had been to attract my attention—as if the crazy stuff that followed wouldn't have done so! Maybe that bulge, which never did return, was a comedy opening to something that had no other touch of comedy in it, ever.

I tried to force the errant oscillograph back into known patterns, back into correspondence with the radio. It would not force.

I began experimenting with magnets. I had long ago discovered that either the positive or negative poles of magnets, placed close against the screen, distorted the green graph.

Now I tried to alter the patternless chaos of the new green shadows. They didn't respond to the magnets any more than they did to the radio! I kept at it until, quite by accident—I sincerely *hoped* it was by accident!—I held two powerful magnets directly out from the center of the screen. The green in the middle suddenly became a ring, doughnut-holed, and shot out from the screen! It darted under the magnets, swooped low toward the far wall of the basement, hit it without sound, and vanished—*leaving the screen blank!*

The green line did not reappear even after I took the magnets out of the basement entirely! I had to disconnect the oscilloscope, the radio, the tube, and start again. The hook-up warmed up as it always did and the green line, pencil thin, appeared as usual. When Don Beede's voice began to whine, however, it was obvious that whatever it was that was jamming my set was still in command. Soon Beede's sing-song had no effect on the graph whatever!

It was as mad in its gyrations as before, throwing up waves like none I had ever seen.

Once again, though with a feeling I might be doing something I should always regret, yet determined to get to the bottom of the graphic confusion, I held two magnets opposite the middle of the screen.

The green line became a green ring, white of center, swooped visibly off the screen, darted under the magnets, swooped down to the far wall of the basement and disappeared!

I must confess that I did this six times, purely in the interest of curiosity, before I realized that I was witnessing the impossible. If this were really possible, then an actor could step out of a movie screen and be himself in front of the curtain. The television artist could do the same thing.

The only thing material about what I had prevously done with the oscillograph were my oscillograms; they were prints of pictures taken by my highspeed camera. But I had just seen not one but six rings of green come out of the screen and vanish, under my two magnets!

I was rapidly beginning to realize that I was fooling with something far from normal. I'm not easily stampeded, for all my imagination, but I had at last convinced myself of one thing: my oscillograph was still an oscillograph, but the graph, the moving finger, wrote a record that was nothing I knew.

I shut off everything and studied my oscillograms. I would not have been surprised had my film been blank. It would have been in keeping with the eldritch behavior of the green line. It wasn't, but I couldn't make head or tail of the prints.

Two weeks of work and concentration solved nothing for me. Then, for some reason I had the urge to do it all over again, but to tone down the radio and listen with earphones! I was trying everything I could think of.

I began at once to hear *thoughts!*

But they were not the thoughts of anybody who was or had been on the radio during any portion of my investigations. I'm a man of more age than I care to mention. I've visited virtually every country in the world, listened to every language, including the dialects of the Ituri pigmies and Mundurucu Indians, but nothing I got here resembled anything I had experienced.

I jerked off the earphones, turned off everything. It was time

for me to share this with someone. There were people in the neighborhood who had hobbies like mine, and many of them visited me on invitation, were at home in my basement. But I hadn't asked anyone for three weeks, had indeed all but forgotten everybody but myself and my puzzle.

Jackie Loos, who has a basement something like mine, two blocks away, is only seventeen, but he knows stuff even Einstein doesn't. I telephoned him. He had a hook-up like mine, I knew, only better, less crude.

"Something queer, Jackie," I said. "How about coming over?"

He came. As he clumped down the steps from my dining room I looked at his face, wondering if *he* had been getting crazy stuff on his oscillograph. No, he'd have told me before this.

I switched on, and the normal wavy stuff that always came when a certain radio chap was doing his stuff, wrote itself automatically on my green graph! It was the first time in three weeks. It proved that there was nothing, and never had been anything, wrong with my hook-up. A singer named Marian Carson, an alto, was going to town. Her voice pattern was apparent on the green line, above and below it. I had scores of her oscillograms—and all were like the one now being made!

Jackie Loos, then, was not to see my oscillograph when it was berserk! I started to tell Jackie, decided against it, and he soon left. Without being too pointed about it, I had several other neighbors in, and my oscillograph behaved perfectly, as it had previous to three weeks ago!

But when I was alone it was always the strange "message"—or whatever it was—that wrote itself in green.

Intelligence of some kind meant for *me* to solve the eerie riddle. Intelligence did not intend anyone else even to *know* about it. I could *tell,* of course, but if the Strange Unknown wouldn't manifest for visitors, could I prove anything except that I, Jay Bard, had finally gone off the deep end with a dangerous hobby?

I was a frightened, a badly frightened man. I found myself talking aloud:

"All right, I'm listening. What's wanted of me? What are you? *Who* are you?"

Answers didn't come that easy. I had to work for what I got. I had to interpret what I thought were thoughts, coming to me over

the earphones—while the oscillograph was on full blast, at first, then when everything was turned off.

Finally I began to *sense* a word that made me almost certain that I was losing my mind. It was like a whisper, too far away to *hear*. It kept repeating a word:

"Albino! Albino! Albino!"

Finally *I* repeated the word:

"Albino!"

Instantly everything was as it had been previous to three weeks ago. Somehow, by using that word that made no sense, I had exorcized some strange electrical devil or other. My oscillograph responded to radio as always. For another week there was nothing to alter my mood of profound mystification. Then I was walking along a street in Lancaster. I noticed a man in white linen ahead of me. He turned on the instant and smiled, turned away again. *He was an albino!* I was to follow!

II

ALBINO CAMOUFLAGE

Albinism or albinoism wasn't unknown, even to me. It wasn't common, but was part of the experience of all animals—especially the domesticated kinds—plants and peoples. I would have been interested in the albino who turned and smiled at me on the streets of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in any case. But since the night, ten days or more ago, when I had caught that word, several times repeated, on my earphones, it had intrigued me.

I moved up until I almost stepped on the man's heels. He must have weighed two hundred pounds, with no fat on him. He was a good six feet six tall, immaculately dressed.

"Walk softly, Jay Bard!" he said over his shoulder without turning his head. "Don't call attention to me."

There was no mistake about it now. This was connected with the eerie behavior of my oscillograph.

I dropped back and we walked north on North Queen street. The albino might have attracted attention had it not been that he kept the brim of his Panama low over his face. Snowy skin and pink eyes were not common on the streets. The man paused finally, edging

over to the right of the sidewalk, toward the red brick wall of a store. I knew now I was to come up with him. He waited. Without looking at me he turned right into a narrow alley I had never noticed before. There was an air of unreality, of intrigue, in the place. The footfalls of the albino made no sound on the smooth pink and white mosaic of the alley's floor. The man didn't lumber as many big men do. He walked as smoothly as if all his joints were oiled.

He halted, touched a button on a door to the right. It opened. I followed the man through, turned and waited for him to close the door. He smiled at me, pushed his hat to the back of his head. He didn't offer his white hand, on which I noted pinkish-white hair.

"I am an Osilans, Bard," he said. "My name is Thors."

"Thorsen?" I said.

"Thors," he replied.

"And what is an Osilans?" I persisted.

"Rome," he informed me, "was not built in a day! Take your time!"

Now he pushed past me and I caught a strange odor I had not before noticed. It was like nothing I remembered, but I felt that in it somewhere there was a warning, as if every bit of sensitivity I enjoyed were crying to me: *"Look out! Look out!"*

I wasn't frightened, but I was excited, as Thors led the way down another corridor and into a room with white walls and pinkish drapes, as if walls to match the skin, drapes the eyes, of the five other albinos present. There were three men, all over six feet tall; three women, also over six feet tall! The men were striking, the women exquisite in spite of the lack of pigmentation. The symmetry of their bodies made up for all other lacks. They were white jade women, all three under thirty, I should say, and all three smiled at me slightly.

Those smiles also rang a warning bell in me. There was no mirth in them whatever! It's difficult to explain just what I mean, for my impression of them was not immediate, but a growing thing. I was with the six strange people for perhaps half an hour. I was uncomfortable the entire time, but not afraid. They were putting themselves out to be agreeable.

They were seated in a kind of semi-circle, in chairs which carried out the white-pinkish motif and almost overdid it. More chairs were pushed into the gap in the semi-circle for us, and not until

long later did I wonder whence they came. They weren't there, then they were! I didn't see who did the pushing.

The best defense is always some form of attack.

"You might begin by explaining the tricks on my oscillograph!" I said.

"We do not explain," said Thors. "We *instruct!*"

"And why did you make those unintelligible graph patterns?" I persisted. "Thors knows English. I imagine the rest of you do!"

"None of us knew English until you freed us!" said Thors. "None of us had any voice pattern!"

"Thors!" snapped one of the women. "We *instruct,* remember? We do not explain!"

Thors grinned, but flushed a little, resenting the squelch. The woman who had squelched him smiled at me again.

"I'm Zeda, Jay Bard," she said, "Zeda of the Osilans. We shall make use of your talents as an amateur electrician."

"You might *ask* me, Zeda!" I suggested. "I'm not one lightly *told!*"

Zeda laughed softly, but there was a sharp edge in her laughter.

"You will help," she said," if only to satisfy your curiosity. All men are alike."

"And women?"

"Worse!" she said it almost venomously, as if she hated the whole sex, herself included.

"Nobody has told me what Osilans means, if anything," I went on. "There is a mystery that has to be solved before I talk any sort of business."

"While the mystery remains you will remain interested!" said Zeda. "Dally with the name Osilans; perhaps you can solve it."

The women were dressed alike, yet were subtly different. They were not triplets, I was sure, for all their resemblance to one another, a resemblance built on albinism. They were dressed in light-blue dresses and shirtwaists, brownish stockings and oddly shaped shoes. A quick glance at Zeda's shoes gave me the idea that the toes were cleft like those of a Japanese richshaw coolie, but she immediately drew them back under the hem of her dress. The three men were dressed in white linen. The effect of their white skin, white hair and pinkish eyes and the white linen, was startling. They almost seemed to glow, the lot of them.

"What do you wish of me?" I asked. "I am interested in many things. I believe I am honest, so if it is . . ."

"We know all about you," said Zeda. She began to tell me about myself, going back to my own very first memories, stuff I had forgotten yet which burst on me the instant they came from Zeda's lips. As she talked the other five stared at me, unblinking, and occasionally nodded agreement. It became clear to me that they all knew more about me than I did myself! All six could well have been my bosom companions since my birth! This, of course, was ridiculous, but . . .

"Your first memory, of an event you made up your mind to recall at will, was of throwing a stick across the top of crusted snow and watching it slide and jump! You were two years, three months, two days and three and one half hours old at the time!"

Naturally I could not check this positive statement for complete accuracy, but I definitely remembered about the odd little business of throwing the stick—my father's walking stick—and making up my mind to remember just how it jiggled and slid.

The mystery piled up.

First, the green line on my oscillograph and the eerie method of first contact with me by these "osilans." Clearly this first contact had been only the first of which *I* was conscious, for these six had known *me* always.

Then, the word "albino," the meeting with Thors on a Lancaster street, no accident whatever but contrived—though I had left home by what I regarded at the time as a sudden *impulse!*—and the journey down an unknown alley to an unknown room to sit, as if on trial, facing three albino men, three albino women—who knew all about me.

They claimed to have known no English, nor even to have *voices*—or voice *patterns*—ten days ago. Now their English was impeccable, though their voices had a strange resonant quality I had never noted in other voices. I think they intended me to see this, or hear it, for all six spoke during my "trial," interrupting one another, interrupting Zeda's resume of my life secrets.

"What do you wish of me?" I persisted doggedly when Zeda paused. "It's clear you know all about me, even whether I am honest."

"No human being, even *you,* is honest!" said Zeda. "Why should *any* one be?"

That last, I knew, was a blunt feeler, pushed forward with all the finesse of a blow by a warclub.

"I try to be," I retorted. "What do you wish of me?"

"That beginning at once you interest yourself in crime!" said Zeda. "Too many innocent men and women are spending too many years in prison, or dying by noose, electricity or gas."

"And thousands get away with murder!" I said passionately.

"Isn't it the truth?" said Thors, leering, startling me with the slang expression. "And dreadful as your reformers think the situation is, they know very little of the real truth! *You* shall learn the truth, Jay Bard!"

I had been feeling the imbalance, the uncleanness, the brutality, the ruthlessness of these six, since I entered. Now the atmosphere of it flowed around me, bathing me, and its perfume was that peculiar fragrance I had noticed on Thors. Here were six people, "different" because of their pigmentation errors, who were outcast from other people, and resentful about it to the point of—the point of *what?*

I suddenly had the urge to ask a question, the answer to which had been previously evaded.

"How many are the Osilans?"

"As many as the people!" said Thors—and Zeda smote him across the mouth with the back of her hand. It was a dreadful thing to watch, for on the instant Thors caught her hand in both his own, sank his teeth into its back. Zeda did not draw away. She merely watched Thors, speculatively, as if interested in the result of the biting. Thors pushed the hand away. Blood flowed freely. Zeda studied it, lips slightly parted, no anger in her. Thors looked at me and winked, as if we shared a secret! If we did, I certainly had no idea of what it was!

I began fumbling in my inside pockets. My eyes are not the world's best and I carry several pairs of spectacles. One in particular is a facet of my hobbies. I call them my "color-blind" glasses. During World War Two, though people may not remember it, color-blind people were used to penetrate enemy camouflage—which they "saw through" because they did not see correctly, their colors being different from those used by enemy camoufleurs to bepuzzle normal-vision persons.

Zeda and the others would know of this, of course, but I took out the spectacles and put them on, anyway—and stared in utter

horror at my albino hosts! I no longer saw six "men and women" but six unbelievably hideous creatures, somehow caught up and held suspended in the forms of three tremendously powerful men and three exquisitely formed women! It was like looking at the shadows of abysmal evil. There was a suggestion of the upright serpentine, the saurian in black, the giant lizard—*all erect on the six white-pink chairs!*

With a cry I could not throttle I jerked off my "color-blind" spectacles—and the six "albinos" were back, and all were leering at me!

"Curiosity *does* kill cats—sometimes!" said Zeda.

"I want none of you!" I choked. "I just want out—to report to the police! Let me out or I'll kill . . ."

I choked on the word. Instantly Thors rose, beckoned me to follow him, led the way to the first door. I looked at each white face in turn, still horrified though I could not now look through at the reality of the six. Thors and the five were chuckling at my dismay.

"You want out?" said Thors. "You are free! You'll report to the police? We'll make it easy! Just follow the alley out. Shall I lead you?"

"I'll find my own way!"

"I didn't hear the door close behind me, but I looked and it was closed. It was oddly blurred, as if a brick wall were just behind it, hidden poorly under a coat of white paint.

The alley was just as I remembered it. I stumbled forward, feeling that ruthlessness pursue me. I thought I heard wild, human-like laughter through the walls. Thors, Zeda and the other four were very sure of themselves! But I was free, anyway. I didn't know what I'd do next, but I wasn't being trapped by these queer people.

I exited onto the sidewalk, with no memory of opening or closing any door. Confusion, a mounting terror, might serve as explanation.

A woman on whom I almost stepped screamed shrilly and fainted. A boy at the curb shrieked. Another woman began to dance up and down as if on a hot stove, to point at me without saying anything intelligible, but just screaming.

"He stepped right out of the brick wall!" shrieked the boy. "He's a hexer!"

I started to run. Many hands grabbed me, held me until police

came. I gave my name, which all of them knew when they heard it; but they did not release me on my own recognizance. They took me in for questioning. The Osilans, it struck me, had strange ways of enforcing interest! I *hadn't* escaped their trap!

III

SET PIECE

It was clearly a put-up job. Thors and Zeda couldn't have done better if they had laid it out in advance and hired the fainting woman, the yelling boy, and the police, to do as they did. Maybe they *did* lay it out in advance. For I'd turned and looked behind me after the people behaved so strangely, and I apparently *had* exited from a solid brick wall. But the people who made such a fuss about it must have been waiting for me! It certainly looked like it. But this didn't explain how—if I had—I had gone through a brick wall and returned. I'm definitely no spook.

"Nonsense!" I told the cop. "I just followed an albino back into that small alley. . . ."

"*What* alley, Mr. Bard?" the officer, quite reasonably, asked.

I couldn't show him. There was no alley. I didn't know just what to do or say, and I wasn't ready to tell about my oscillograph and my odd experiences so far with Thors and Zeda. No, I wasn't ready—wasn't ready, that is, to go to an asylum.

A goodly crowd followed us to the station, where the boy repeated his story, the woman who had fainted insisted that I had come through a brick wall—she had *seen* me!—and the law scratched its head. There was no law on the statute book forbidding anybody to walk through brick walls, so long as the walls were not harmed by such behavior.

"I'm not satisfied with what anybody says," said a lieutenant who was called in. "Jay Bard is a reputable citizen, up to now. There seems to be nothing against him. But I have the feeling that there is a lot he hasn't told. For instance, nobody seems much interested in something he said—but hasn't repeated, *definitely* hasn't repeated! —about an albino. If there were any albino in Lancaster . . ."

"There are six," I said, thinking I might as well confuse the issue to the point where the law would simply give up and let me

go home. "There are six albinos," I repeated, "three men and three women."

"Up that alley, that narrow little alley you mentioned," said the lieutenant. "Just what did they wish of you, since I presume you had an appointment with the pinkies?"

"To interest me in crime!" I blurted, knowing that this was one time when the exact truth—if I knew what the exact truth was!—could get me into a great deal of trouble, or at least cause me no end of embarrassment.

"Why you, especially, Mr. Bard?"

Here I decided to depart from the truth in favor of sheer invention.

"They wanted me to investigate an unsolved murder," I said, "which took place in Lancaster over twenty years ago. A police lieutenant was hammered, cut and bludgeoned to death. Not even a clue to his killer was ever turned up."

"What was this officer's name?" asked the lieutenant softly, too softly.

"John Blythe!" I said, using the first name that came to mind. I was beginning to sweat inside. Nothing looked right to me, until I discovered that I still wore my "color blind" spectacles. I took them off, elaborately unconcerned lest someone ask to see them, and thus be inspired to ask far too many other questions.

"John Blythe?" repeated the lieutenant. "John Blythe, lieutenant of Lancaster police?"

"Not state police, but Lancaster County," I said.

"And why were you especially asked to look into this old case?"

"I'm a private investigator," I said, "a *criminal* investigator!"

"How long have you lived in Paradise?"

"About a year, but what has that to do . . ."

"Maybe nothing!" the lieutenant rudely interrupted me. "Maybe everything! I'd like to know where you found out so much about the unsolved murder of police lieutenant John Blythe! Sergeant, bring in the record of the case!"

I went cold and silent at the same time. I suspected that something was going to boomerang in a way I could never, possibly, have expected. I couldn't, in that instant, understand for the life of me, why I had suddenly decided to tell such a big lie. I'd never heard of any John Blythe, naturally, nor been a criminologist. I hadn't the

least bit of interest in crime. But in a few minutes a record was laid on the table before me.

It was the unsolved case of John Blythe, murdered in the late 20s, by a person or persons unknown! I was taken aback, to make a real understatement. What had possessed me to tell such a story? *What had possessed me?*

I wasn't concerned because there was an unsolved murder, of a man named John Blythe, but I was concerned that after being "briefed" by six albinos, I would dig that name out of somewhere inside me to get myself into trouble with it.

"Maybe," said the lieutenant, "you'll explain?"

"Trick of memory," I said. "It was in the newspapers nationally. I read it. Somebody told me!"

"The six albinos maybe?"

"Maybe!"

"But you've said things about it, Mr. Jay Bard, that are not matters of public record. Just where did you find out such items?"

"You'll be asking me next if I *murdered* the officer?"

"That, too, is possible!"

"Look," I said, floundering in more deeply, "until I mentioned the name a few minutes ago I'd never heard of John Blythe, though I daresay it's common enough. But it could just as easily have been Martha Hyslop or Mary Dean Peters! I was so flabbergasted at being accused of walking out of a brick wall, so afraid that you'd think me crazy, that I decided to spin a tale. . . ."

I now told the truth, exactly as I've told it here, up to this point; but I began with the albino on the street, not with my oscillograms. The law, very silent now, let me go on. Then something nudged against my elbow on the table, and I looked down.

"Of course everybody reads newspapers, and there is nothing unusual about a man remembering famous murder cases," said the lieutenant, "but if you *didn't* remember, and don't read this sort of thing, how do you explain *this?* I'm beginning to think maybe Pennsylvania residence *has* hexed you!"

I find it difficult to believe, even yet, but I now studied, very briefly, and with blurred eyes, two more murder records—that of Mary Dean Peters, eighteen, murdered in 1919 under mysterious circumstances, the murderer never found. I also looked at the

record of one Martha Hyslop, assaulted and slain in 1934. But there was a difference here, and the very difference made me grow cold again. Her murderer had been found, but *fast,* convicted and executed.

I opened my mouth to say I had no idea what had caused me to use these two names, realizing even as I did so, that I could never explain away my knowledge, or seeming knowledge, as coincidence. I might accidentally mention a John Blythe I had never heard of; coincidence might even make him a police lieutenant; stretch it further and I might even describe the manner of his murder. But coincidence didn't give me the names of Martha Hyslop and Mary Dean Peters! What *had* given me the names?

I started to say something, but what came out was not what I had in mind:

"John Herschel did not assault and murder Martha Hyslop! The state of Pennsylvania convicted and executed an innocent man! The guilty man is still alive!"

There was a brief silence during which sweat broke out all over my body.

"I didn't say that!" I shouted. "I had no idea. . . ."

"You said it, all right!" said Lieutenant Roth. "Maybe you had no *intention* of saying it, whatever the idea is. I suppose you'll say that the name of John Herschel is an accident?"

"I've decided to say nothing further!" I stated.

"But you *will* say more!" said Roth. "You've either said too much or too little. Of course there's nothing on which we can hold you. . . ."

"Then I'm going home!"

"Except that you know more about three murders than the average man in the street is likely to know. Personally, I've heard several oldtimers, when murders were being discussed and compared, say they never believed John Herschel was guilty. And, the statute of limitations doesn't run on murder, so if you could manage to slip us the name of the real murderer, whom you say is still alive . . ."

"I don't know anything about it, about *anything!*" I choked out. "I was just minding my own business when you hauled me in here. Knowing I hadn't done anything wrong, I suddenly decided to have some fun! The names I mentioned were just picked at random out of my mind!"

"Three murder victims, one innocent man executed, a murderer

not yet named who has been a free man for sixteen years!" said the lieutenant. "We could ask you an awful lot of questions, but we won't if you will . . ."

I hadn't been third-degreed, mind you. The police had treated me with great courtesy. But I had had enough. I'd never been guilty of anything, but the very idea of being on the wrong side of the law filled me with terror. I wanted *out* of it!

"Just give me the name of the murderer of Martha Hyslop!" said Roth. "Maybe he murdered Mary Dean Peters, too!"

"Maybe he *did!*" I said. "Maybe he did, but you'll never find out from me!"

"Not even if we held you for investigation, overnight perhaps? It's our duty, Mr. Bard, to check back on the past of a man who comes to us in such strange circumstances, knowing so much nobody outside the police department knows, about old murders! In fact, my friend, it is theoretically feasible to say that only the murderer has any business of knowing so much!"

"I've told you all I know. I know just how it sounds! Albinos! Three men, three women, and nobody ever heard of six albinos together at one time! Then I name names. . . ."

"But not the name I'd like most to *hear,* Jay Bard!" said Lieutenant Roth softly. "You say John Herschel didn't murder Martha Hyslop, though he died in the electric chair for it; but that some man still alive *did* murder her. What's his name?"

"If I give you a name will you let me go home?" I asked.

"Yes. Naturally we'll keep an eye on you, and I'll ask you not to leave Lancaster County without letting me know!"

I had searched my mind for a name, *any* name, that would get me out of this mess. My inquisitors could think anything they wished; I knew that the names I had given were dredged up by pure chance. I had known nothing. I still knew nothing. Certainly I couldn't do it *again!* I'd make sure by using a most unusual name, made up of. . . .

"Find a man in his late fifties," I said hurriedly, "named Van Khmer!"

I knew, the instant I mentioned the name that something had gone wrong again, *dreadfully* wrong. But Roth said, almost in a whisper:

"Christian name?"

"Xon!" I said. Surely there could be no such name. But a queer

silence held sway in the police offices as I walked, not very steadily, out of the place and was driven home. No sooner was I free of police attention than I frantically fanned through my telephone book.

There was a Xon Van Khmer!

Still confused, more so than I had been, I raced down into my basement to see if the oscillograph had any explanation. I turned on all my stuff. I read the first apparently normal oscillogram caught by my high-speed camera.

"You've started very well indeed, Jay Bard!" it said. It bore a signature: *"Zeda!"*

I spent a sleepless night. I stayed away from the radio. I don't remember what I had for breakfast, maybe nothing. I was waiting for the newspaper. As I stepped onto my front porch to get it it was handed to me—by Lieutenant Roth!

"Page One!" he said, deadpan.

Xon Van Khmer had confessed the murder of Martha Hyslop during the night! He professed to be much relieved that his long struggle with conscience was ended. I read the first paragraph or two there on the porch, the paper rattling in my hands. Then I looked up at Roth.

"Should we talk?" he asked softly.

I shrugged, led the way into the house. I turned to wave Roth to a chair.

But by some queer trick of vision I had been mistaken; this man *wasn't* Lieutenant Roth!

IV

THE STRANGE LIEUTENANT

I knew the man was not Lieutenant Roth of Lancaster's police. The voice was the voice of Roth—*almost*. The difference would have been indistinguishable to anyone less interested in voices than myself. But I had spent so many months *bathed* in voices, to learn to read oscillograms, that I could not be mistaken. It was not the voice of Lieutenant Roth, yet this man could fool anybody in the world, including Lieutenant Roth's wife, possibly even the real Roth.

"I'd like to know just how you knew Xon Van Khmer killed Martha Hyslop!" he said.

The man didn't live who could actually take the place of another

as skillfully as this man was doing. Plainly he had a reason. That it tied in with the six albinos I was sure. But what was he after? The real Lieutenant Roth, I'd wager, would be along almost any time. Just what would this alter ego do and say if that happened? Yet he was unconcerned.

"Maybe I'm psychic," I suggested.

He smiled slightly.

"Or a seer!" I went on.

"Or perhaps a scientist with a most unusual hobby?" he queried.

Naturally it got me, for nobody, not even Jackie Loos, knew the strangeness of my recent oscillograms. I hadn't a theory myself, unless in some fashion I couldn't yet explain, the albinos who had insisted I interest myself in crime, were managing to "control" me, for some purpose which I couldn't remotely discover a hint of.

I was expected to play along with this "Lieutenant Roth" as if he actually *were* Lieutenant Roth. That was clear, else there would have been no reason for so close a copying of Roth; but *why?* I was being checked on by this impostor as closely as the real Lieutenant Roth soon would check on my sources of knowledge if Xon Van Khmer were to be convicted. In Pennsylvania even a confession had to be confirmed.

"I am not a scientist," I said. "I have no unusual hobbies."

"But you gave several names last night which proved you had a remarkable memory, to say the least—one name in particular which you couldn't possibly have connected with the murder of Martha Hyslop. . . ."

"Simply because the police didn't?" I interrupted, grimly.

The strange lieutenant smiled.

"I don't mind sarcasm at the expense of the police," he said, "since I was not a member when Martha Hyslop was murdered!"

"Do you mind in *any* case?" I managed.

He didn't rise to the bait, didn't tell me he wasn't Lieutenant Roth. Another idea had been circulating around in my much disturbed brain, to the effect that the six albinos I had visited in an alley in Lancaster, the six who said they hadn't understood English until I "freed" them, were definitely connected with the six green rings I had drawn out of my oscillograph with two magnets. I would not go so far as to say that the six rings were the six albinos, but it was the only thing I could in any way tie up with the queer statement that I had "freed" the six. I *had* "freed" those six green rings! They

had ducked under the magnets, as if they had been alive, and vanished through the cellar wall—to appear days later in Lancaster as my six albinos?

Ridiculous!

And how could that connect up with this queer lieutenant? He in no way resembled any of the six albinos, wasn't himself albino. The wild idea came to me that entities which could be green rings in an oscillograph one night, and paraphrases of human beings days later, could be anything or anybody they wished to be. They knew secrets no man knew, if there were any validity in this strange idea at all.

I must soon have a look at "Lieutenant Roth" through my special spectacles. Just to recall what the six albinos had looked like made me shudder. If this creature were "different," would he be less or more forbidding?

"You do much thinking, Jay Bard," said the strange lieutenant. "Is it by thought that you solved the murder of Martha Hyslop?"

"You're evading discussion of the albinos today, lieutenant!" I said, accenting the 'lieutenant' in a way I meant to be unmistakable. He might as well know that I was onto him.

"Are *you?*" he asked. "That is important! If you are, and hereafter, then more is to be said!"

My mind was scuttling all around, like a rat in a trap, seeking escape. It flashed back now to the strange knowledge of all my past apparently possessed by the six albinos. Nobody could possibly know all those little details I had forgotten. Even my late sainted mother wouldn't know. And she had been dead for thirty years. These albinos could never have known her. If she had known so much as *one* albino it would have been common family talk, for she was interested in every sort of knowledge, made sure that I was, too.

I recalled certain childhood "companions" such as every child has, or thinks he has; makebelieve children. Thinking back, they seemed as real to me again as they had when I had been small. Had those entities, those dream children—pathological liars, some children were called who told of them!—been *real?* It's easy to see how far afield I was going for an explanation.

"If I told you the full truth you'd lock me up," I said.

"Why? Xon Van Khmer has not only confessed the murder of Martha Hyslop, but has given the police enough information to

provide all the proof needed to substantiate the confession! Of course, you spoke of the murder of the police lieutenant, and of Mary Dean Peters!"

"Xon Van Khmer killed Mary Dean Peters," I said. "I don't know who killed John Blythe!"

"Xon Van Khmer has confessed the murder of Mary Dean Peters," said the strange lieutenant. "It hasn't been given to the newspapers yet, so you couldn't know it in any *normal* way! How do you know, Jay Bard? That's why I'm here, really."

I studied him for a few moments. Was the man trying to see how far I could be trusted with secrets? And for whom? For what purpose? His eyes, ever so slightly, were different from those of the real Lieutenant Roth and I had had occasion last night to look often and directly into the real police officer's eyes. The rakish hat was ever so slightly off-color, off-shape, off-size, and the ornament was a palpable counterfeit. In fact there were many things, when one studied the strange lieutenant closely, that gave one the creeps. The uniform was a little "off," the hair varied, the shoes—for just a flash I saw the toes divided as had been the shoe-toes of Zeda in the eerie hideout behind the alley in Lancaster. The man's hands, *apparently* perfect if one were not suspicious—and perhaps a little mad—became, as I looked at them long enough to cause the man to move them uneasily, travesties of hands, scarcely even human.

"Lieutenant Roth" looked as if he had been in a terrific hurry to become Lieutenant Roth, and had simply *thrown* on his personality—yet anyone but I, Jay Bard, would have accepted him at face value. I must admit that never once did he tell me that he *was* Lieutenant Roth. It was simply clear that he expected me to accept him as Roth. Or maybe he wanted to find out how *observant* I was! How was a much bewildered man to know?

"You said I would lock you up if you told how you knew," the stranger prodded into the silence that hung queerly between us. "I think you meant . . ."

"In a booby hatch!" I exploded. "Nobody would believe anything I say again, all my life, if I told the truth to anybody up to now!"

"You are *sure* of this?"

"As sure as *you* are!" I snapped.

"Then perhaps you'd better take me into your basement work-

shop!" said the strange police lieutenant, no smile on his face now—none whatever.

"You're afraid the real Lieutenant Roth will show up?"

"*Afraid?* Of what should I be afraid?"

"If you were not afraid of something you wouldn't be taking such pains to be sure of me!" I retorted.

"We're not afraid of you or for you," the man said. "We are concerned only with your discretion, your good judgment. You can't *thwart* our efforts, but you can delay them!"

"Osilans?" I said softly.

He shrugged. "Do I resemble any of the six? Thors? Zeda? Byd? Ryal? Net? Hoy?"

So far I had had only the names of Thors and Zeda. These four new names might be correct—or not. I had no means of knowing.

"You resemble none of the six you've mentioned—if Byd, Net, Hoy and Ryal are the albinos I wasn't introduced to. You shrug when I ask you if you are Osilans, though I myself haven't the haziest notion what an Osilans is, or Osilans *are!* What do I call you?"

He hesitated. While he paused I donned my colored glasses, the special ones, for a closer look at his "camouflage." I knew on the instant that he was like none of the six albinos! I saw in him none of the saurian background I had seen in the six. What I *did* see might be likened to a blank wall, a description which doesn't even remotely fit, yet comes closer than any other simile I can call to mind—or have been able to recall since I saw, and lost, the strange lieutenant.

"It isn't my name," he said finally, "but call me Emden, which you will eventually understand, and to differentiate between me and the six forerunners!"

"Emden?" I repeated stupidly. "It's a *German* name!"

"And not my correct one, as I told you," said Emden. "You could not pronounce my real one, my Ja-name, which really *has* no pronunciation. There will be many Emdens in your life, and soon, so let us say that *I* am Emden 5716!"

"Riddles!" I said. "Never anything but riddles! Emden is the name of a German warship. . . ."

"That *was!*" said Emden. "But why become disturbed? I promise that soon you will know all that you need to remain calm in spirit; perhaps not all that you would like to know, but enough. To this end am I here."

"How did you get here, then, if I did not 'free' you?" I demanded.

"Take your time, Jay Bard!" his chuckle was almost a *human* chuckle. "Rome was not built in a day. Neither was Ja! Neither was Emden's most interesting experiment!"

"Thanks for your sincere help!" I said sarcastically. "You may rest assured that I won't tell the *real* Lieutenant Roth the *real* truth of whence came my knowledge of the murders!"

"Do you really *know?*" he caught me up. "And it may interest you to know that my presence here has nothing whatever to do with what you do or don't tell Lieutenant Roth!"

"Then why did you don his cast-off personality?"

"To study your reaction time! Believe me, Jay, it is important!"

"But *not* important, apparently, that I know anything about you, or what in time you're talking about!"

"In time?" he repeated. "What do you know about time? Nothing! I'm going to take you back into some of it! Shall we now go down into your workshop, for some study of the Osilans, of Emden, of matters of which you have *dreamed,* but never heard?"

"Okay!" I said. "Maybe, for you, the Osilans will do their stuff! They wouldn't for anybody else—but *me!*"

"The Osilans," he said, with a touch of sadness in his voice that still so closely aped that of Lieutenant Roth, "have never done anything for me or mine. They never will. But always and forever I, and mine, do whatever the Osilans require of us!"

I led the way down into the workshop. Now mark closely. I had gone down those steps into my own basement hundreds of times. This was no different. Emden came right behind me, his feet clattering on the steps as they would have had he really been Lieutenant Roth. We had been talking in my sitting room, among my chairs, beside my piano, with my magazine racks at my right hand. We had taken the five steps to the basement door I had counted automatically for *years.*

There was nothing different now.

I turned on the lights in the basement from the top of the flight of eleven steps, as I always did. Then I led the way down to the basement. The atmosphere, slightly musty, was usual, homey, a *cellar* fragrance.

I turned to inform Emden that my basement was now his to command.

But there was no basement—not mine, anyway.

I stood, with Emden, in a "cavern measureless to man," brightly

lighted, a cavern of, I realized at once, infinite pulsations. I looked wildly about me, noting the scores of other "Emdens," busily engaged at countless banks of machinery—too busy to take any notice of me whatever.

"All I need to make my nightmare real," I managed to say to Emden, "is something or other leading 'down to a sunless sea'!"

"It's quite possible," said Emden, without humor, "that you have it!"

V

CAVERNS MEASURELESS

It was real. I called it a nightmare, but I knew it was real. I was not asleep. I was wide awake. Emden had prepared me for something strange, but never this.

"Take off your spectacles," said Emden softly, "and make yourself at home. I'll be leaving you for a little while, but I'll be right here! You may forget the spectacles, so remember them! And when you've had enough and wish to go back upstairs to your sitting room, to meet the real Lieutenant Roth—who will be much disturbed because he can't find you!—just call to me, wherever you may be! Remember now, *which* Emden! *Emden* 5716!"

What could this gibberish mean? I followed Emden's instructions. I took off my spectacles, the ones I had devised myself, for amusement's sake, in order to be able to see colors as color-blind persons saw them! Just an idea, it had been at first, based on a hunch—*but now, whose hunch?*

For when I took off the spectacles all the "Emdens," including 5716, were gone—every last one! The cavern remained—and I say again, it was *real*. It *is* real!

I've mentioned the pulsations. They were no more, I knew, than every living thing endures each day, but here I was *conscious* of them. Everything is bombarded, every split second of life, by all the pulsations there are. Some have effect, as loud noises, explosions, X-rays, raucous music, which can be tabulated. But how about the others, to list a very few? Pulsations of the spectrum colors, of atoms, *various* atoms, the intricate limitless pulsations of the Universe? We *all*, feel them *all*, but few of us feel them consciously, else the world and all the universe would go mad. That's my idea

of it anyhow, or was before I visited the "measureless cavern" and discovered that I knew nothing, that what I thought I knew was wrong.

First, finding myself in a place filled with "Emdens," who vanished out of my nightmare when I doffed my spectacles—would they return when I donned them again?—I knew I must orient myself. Going down into my basement to find it measureless, equipped with machinery of which I had never dreamed, made orientation very necessary. Clearly I could not trust my spectacles *or* my eyes. But I could trust my sensitive fingers. I knew this; without them I would never have been able to work out my oscillograph, to probe, and know, the inmost secrets of mechanical gadgetry.

The "cavern" was lighted, but I could see no lights. Turned on, or always on—or there might even be no lights. If I could dream up the cavern, borne of days of unreality, I could dream up the lights. But my fingertips would tell me the truth.

This instant, having moved not at all since reaching the bottom steps of my cellar, I should be able to touch the wall by taking two steps to my right. Having touched it, I could move around it, assure myself that nothing had really changed, that shortly I would waken—perhaps in a hospital!—and know that my queer adventure had all been in my own mind.

I shut my eyes, to close out the cavern and the lights whose source did not make sense, held out my hands, visualized my basement as I knew it must still be—and moved two paces to the right. Confidently I expected my fingers to touch my basement wall, but I was wrong! I could, of course, have erred, or forgotten measurements, though that seemed impossible. In my experiments it had been necessary, repeatedly, to have exact measurements of the basement. I should now be standing virtually against my north wall, but I was *not!* Holding out my hands still I took two more steps, and did not touch the wall. It was *gone!* Or *I* was!

I acutely remembered following Thors into an alley later proved not to exist, into a room that couldn't exist either, and now. . . .

I had walked through the place where my north wall should be, and now wasn't. I stepped back, to gain new perspective, but not before I had snapped my eyes open and seen the cavern, marching endlessly away. But no "Emdens" though I could *sense* their presence. It seemed to me, too, with the passage of minutes, that my perceptivity was increasing; that I was becoming more aware of the

pulsations I have mentioned. It was almost as if I could pick out *individual* pulsations, catalogue and identify them, as I picked out squiggles on my oscillograph and translated them into the voices of people whose oscillograms I had studied over the months of my hobby.

I knew it needless—I had proof enough—but I did it anyhow; I stepped back and started around what *should* have been the basement walls of my oscillographic workshop, and found no slightest trace of it, or of my machinery.

Machinery!

How little I, or any machinist of my acquaintance, knew of machinery. My gadgets, back home in Paradise, would have appeared tawdry, juvenile, imbecilic, beside the simplest gadget in this cavern.

I had no slightest idea where I was, except that I was ruled by pulsations, vibrations, *rhythm*. We always are, but now I *knew*.

There were vast banks of machinery, centered in one area, in a vaster space that had no partitions. There were panels on which strange marks, hieroglyphics simplified to the nth degree, probably informed the knowing of the panel's meaning. But they told me nothing. I felt as John must have felt on Patmos when an angel said of a book:

"Come and see!"

I had been told to make myself at home. I went to see! I pushed the first button I saw. The panel lighted. It was like a screen on an oscillograph, but larger, more intricate, delicate, *inclusive*. There was color, first, and I wasn't especially good at colors.

The screen was colored in capsicum red. I turned the button; the capsicum red became signal red, then at a turn, rye red. How many other tints, hues and shades of red there were I did not know, but I twisted the dials through *scores* of reds. Then on the same master panel of which this smaller panel was part, I tried another which began with verdigris green and gave me all the greens. I did this with all the spectrum colors, violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. I had always known—how else could I have mastered those oscillograms?—that each color had an infinite variety, *literally* infinite, and that colors merged into one another, yet no man living could actually name the exact *rhythm* where colors merged. The pulsations were long, or short, or many, for each, yet each was individual, as entities among men are individual, and the atoms of each individual are individual in their turn.

I felt I was beginning to get some picture of what I had dreamed myself into—knowing all the time how wrong I could be, since man is *always* wrong in some detail, large or small, whatever he does or thinks or says, so long as he is man.

How could I have guessed that right there I had put my finger on the need the Osilans had of me? How could I have guessed that I was only *one* of many millions?

I moved swiftly from dial to dial, button to button, bank of machinery to bank of machinery, feeling the "Emdens" all around me but not touching or seeing them. I wanted to learn all I could before I "returned" and I made up my mind to remember it, every bit—which man seldom does when he returns from dreams. I decided I *would* remember, though I did not take time enough to make notes. Making notes would have robbed me of experience because they required time I felt I could not waste—so what I write here is fallible because it is out of human memory.

Nations vibrated, pulsated—I sought out the panel devoted to a small nation, recognizing it when I turned it on only because I knew the land: Costa Rica. That other nations were likewise recorded here—perhaps even other planets, though at the time I did not go into that!—I knew at once, but I felt that what I found out about Costa Rica would apply to other nations, each within its own vibratory rate.

There were towns in Costa Rica: San Jose, Heredia, Esparta, Limon. I could show Costa Rica on the master panel. I could, and did, tune down to San Jose, the city. It lay before me panoramically, a living entity, which I knew because there I had learned liquid Spanish from loved friends. I had walked the streets, absorbed the people; Costa Rica was a second *home*. There was a favorite, though garishly colored, house in which I had lived—and I found it among the "Emdens" on the Costa Rican master dial, tuned down to San Jose!

I could dial down, tune down, to a single house. I selected the one I had best known, ten years before; the house in which I had lived and been happy. When I could have entered the patio I choked, unable to go on. It is bad enough to visit a place, unexpectedly, that one has loved, and where one's memorable secrets lie buried, but to do it deliberately after having made plans only to *forget* it, is a strange and dreadful thing. There had been a young woman there, who was young no longer—if she still lived—with

whom I had talked of dreams. Then I had gone away. I had written, she had answered. The correspondence had ended; as if by mutual consent, our lives had severed.

But I went into that house, and she was there! She was happy. There were children, a husband, and after the Latin fashion, far too many noisy in-laws, one of the reasons why I had been less eager than she could have hoped. The Latin idea of family would never be mine; yet now as I looked *and listened,* I deeply regretted, and there were lumps in my throat.

There was a vibration for people, too, one for each, an identifying vibration. I felt the full *memorable* vibration of Helena. . . . It filled me with a haunting sense of the old ecstasy, so that when I deliberately experienced that of her husband, *I did not like it, or him!*

I did it on impulse, without thinking of possible consequences.

"Helena!" I said, giving it the Spanish pronunciation *he-lane-a.* "I am here, Helena!"

I did not expect her to hear me.

But I was mistaken. Helena heard. Her smiling face and laughing eyes told me truly that she had not forgotten. She froze. Her bronze cheeks went white, her eyes wide and still. Her children heard, also, and stopped playing to look bewilderedly around for the source of the sound.

The husband, reading a newspaper, heard also, and turned to his wife. Her hands fluttered to her bosom—now somewhat ample, I had to observe!

"The *man* calls you, my love," said Ricardo in Spanish, liquid, soft, *too* soft. "He must stand without. Bring him in, my dear; I have always wished to meet him!"

"He is not outside, but here in the room!" said Helena. "The voice is *here!*"

"In your heart you mean, my love?" asked Ricardo, not endearing himself to me in the least. "Of course I have always suspected *that.* But I have never *heard* it before, nor have the children!"

"Maybe he is *dead!*" shrieked Helena, as if the very idea were a blow at her heart. I had to head this off.

"I am not dead, Helena, *except to Costa Rica!*" I said. "I don't understand this, but if your good husband will *continue* to read the newspapers, there may be an explanation in months to come! But be happy, all of you, since there seems no reason not to be!"

"This is an outrage!" exploded Ricardo Nunes. "If I knew where to find you, Jay Bard!"

I hesitated about giving my address. When I did, it was not because of Nunes, but because I needed proof of my visit—if, indeed this were not a nightmare.

"My deepest apologies for intruding!" I said at the last, speaking the whole time in the beautiful Spanish Helena had helped me master long ago. Then, I tuned away, from San Jose and all Costa Rica. I hesitated about the United States. I thought of tuning in the country, then Pennsylvania, then Paradise, then my own home, to see if Lieutenant Roth, the *real* Lieutenant Roth, were turning the place upside down for information as to my whereabouts—for he would certainly want to know by this time! And I might get a better idea of what all this portended than I now had.

But I didn't do it. I foresaw complications I might not be able to unravel.

With many misgivings I donned my spectacles. As I did so I noticed that they were as phony as Emden "Lieutenant Roth!" What had happened to mine, I did not know—but these had been substituted for them.

"Emden 5716" stood beside me, smiling.

He tendered an object on the palm of his hand. It was a shapeless *mass* of something. It was heavy, *material*. It reminded me of a disturbing thought: I had seen scores of metals, or what I took to be metals, in the measureless cavern, but not one that was familiar to me!

"We'll meet again," said Emden 5716, and vanished!

I stood in my cellar in Paradise, with nothing to remind me of the measureless cavern except the heavy piece of material Emden 5716 had given me! I had no idea what it was, but I was sure he'd given it to me for a purpose. . . .

VI

BEDLAMIC

I expected the worst when I went upstairs. I heard many feet making free with my house and wondered why no one, at this exact moment, was in my basement. I heard police car sirens. I heard radios, near and far. I could see that my basement had been ransacked. I heard footsteps on my front porch, side porch, back

porch, voices all around my house, voices at my garage where I kept my small car.

I was going to "make an appearance" again that I hadn't arranged, and there was no help for it—and no explanation that would serve or that I would care to make. I confess, too, that in some ways I enjoyed the prospect. I might as well start the ball rolling. I looked at my watch. I had been away—wherever away was!—either twelve or twenty four hours. Twelve, probably, though one could not be sure since my watch was that kind which winds itself with body movement, and I had been flipping my watch wrist all over the measureless cavern's panels and dials for *hours*. That it could have been twelve hours or twenty four I knew because often I had lost all track of time in my own laboratory, and this one I had visited was far and away more exciting and engrossing than mine.

I stepped into my own kitchen, where Minna, my housekeeper, and her husband, George Rake, were trying to be very small in the presence of far too many uniforms.

"Holy mother, it's Mr. Bard!" cried Minna.

Two officers who were disposing of a peach pie that must have been intended for me, choked on it a little—but *very* little—when I stared at them and walked past into the sitting room.

Lieutenant Roth was going through my books, my desk . . .

"I suppose I *might* ask you what you think you're doing?" I snapped at Roth. "You might also tell me whether you've a search warrant, who asked for its issue, and whether you're going to put my stuff back where it belongs."

"Where'd you come from?" he demanded, whirling on me, his mouth open wide.

"My basement, where else?"

"You can't get away with *that!* You've been away for twelve hours at least. Nobody but the law and people I've sent for have been in or out. You weren't down in the basement ten minutes ago!"

"No," I said, "I wasn't. But I just came from there!"

"You got secret panels, closets, tunnels down there?"

"Not that I know of. Besides, didn't you look already?"

"I did. Where did you come from?"

"Frankly, I don't know! All the clue I have is *this!*" I tendered the piece of metal, or ore, or whatever it was, that Emden 5716 had given me in the measureless cavern. "It was given me."

"By whom, if I may ask?"

"Your etheric twin, Lieutenant Roth!" I told him. "For minutes after he came to the house, after I left you yesterday—or whenever it was—I thought he was you. Then I realized that he had only donned your shadow for some reason of his own. What that was I don't know—*yet!*"

"Double talk, meaning nothing!" said Roth. "And when I ask you questions now there'd better be no double talk!"

"Or I'll be third degreed, is that it?"

"We don't use the third degree, but you'll be asked somewhat insistently for information of various sorts. So, you knew that Xon Van Khmer murdered Martha Hyslop? How did you know?"

"I *didn't* know!"

"But you told us, and when we taxed him with it he confessed it—and that he had, years previously, murdered Mary Dean Peters!"

"Then both old cases are settled, wiped off the books," I said, "so what more use can you find for me?"

"You told us about John Blythe," he said, sitting down, keeping his hat on, blissfully ignoring the mess he had made of my belongings, "but you didn't tell us who killed him, or whether his murderer is still alive. And don't say that Xon Van Khmer did that too!"

"I never heard any of those names until I spoke them in your office!" I said desperately. "*None* of them, understand? So how could I have known that Xon Van Khmer murdered Martha Hyslop and Mary Dean Peters?"

"But you *said* he did," persisted Roth.

"I just opened my mouth and the words and names came out! I had just sold my soul to six albinos and one or all of them controlled me, as bad spirits are said sometimes to control good mediums!" Naturally I didn't say these words to Roth, though they hammered at the back of my mind and teeth for utterance. I did not speak them because I didn't believe them myself; that is, I did and I didn't. I didn't because I don't believe in such nonsense; I did because I could think of no other explanation. The things I had said, the names I had spoken, had surprised me as much as they had the officers to whom I spoke them, and the name Xon Van Khmer had been what I believed to be a distinct effort of will on my part, an attempt *not* to use a name some *thing* had "dictated."

"Sometimes I am not responsible for what I say," was what I actually said to Roth.

"Yes? But how then does it happen that Xon Van Khmer is in

the pokey after confessing two murders, both of gals you named?"

"This is where we came in," I said wearily.

"It is. When you first came to me you had, according to witnesses, walked out of a brick wall on a Lancaster street. There's no law against it, unless the wall is damaged, and then only a civil action may be taken. But just now you've appeared out of your basement, where you couldn't possibly be, for I've hunted hiding places all through it! So, explain."

"I can't. Not yet, anyway. Maybe this piece of ore, or whatever it is, is a clue!"

Roth hefted it. I would not have been surprised had it dissolved on his palm, though he might have been. He stared at it steadily, frowning.

"It vibrates," he said softly. "Is it radium, vanadium, plutonium, uranium. . . ."

"Nothing I know," I said, "and I know the elements very well."

"Where did you get it?"

"I don't know. It was given me by your counterpart before you arrived."

"That makes another time you mentioned my counterpart! Tell me about *him!*"

I did, up to a point. I ended it where I went down into my basement with Emden 5716. I simply couldn't bring myself to tell Roth the whole story as I knew it. He already thought me nuts: He must have had doubts about himself too, for when I didn't tell him what had happened to Emden 5716, and he could see that I didn't believe he could take it, sweat broke out on him; he took off his hat, then frankly wiped his face with a big handkerchief.

"Now this gadget," I pointed to the piece of material, "holds the key. Let's take it to the police laboratory—if you have anything remotely resembling such a set-up. . . ."

"Some of Franklin & Marshall's top scientists give us their free time!" Roth sought to chill me. "They'll tell us what this is, if anybody can. I'll telephone some of them to be at headquarters when we get there."

"We?"

"*We!* Clearly you haven't seen the newspapers. Wilder stories have never been printed than those you've caused. People take most of it with a grain of salt, but the Xon Van Khmer affair is real stuff—and they think that since you solved that case you can solve the

John Blythe one, also! John Blythe was a great officer. Women and kids loved him. He never did a wrong thing in his life. Higher officers lost their jobs because they couldn't solve his murder. Many people remember. There is a public demand that you tell who murdered John Blythe!"

"And among those who demand is his murderer!" I said.

Roth's mouth came open again. He jumped to his feet.

"Come along," he said. "I knew you knew."

"I don't," I said. "I don't, I tell you!"

"You said his murderer demanded that you give the murderer's name," said Roth. "That's something to start on, even if you can't or won't give us the rest."

"I just said what came to mind!"

"A most unusual way to solve crimes," said Roth, "but if it continues to work, who cares? You tell us, and we'll find out if it is true, and if it is, we'll find the proof!"

* * * * *

When we got into my car for the drive to Lancaster, Roth handed me the latest newspaper, and without asking my permission slid behind the wheel.

"Bring yourself up to date," he suggested.

I sat back. I certainly did fill the newspapers. I'd never wanted undue publicity, had never seen its value—except as a nuisance. The thing all reports had gone to town on of course was the albinoism angle. Lancaster was being combed for albinos, but nobody had either found or seen an albino. The oldest residents, which included a score of old men and old women who were reputed to know all there was to know about Lancaster, had never even *seen* an albino, to say nothing of six.

It was the general consensus that I had invented the albinos.

Jackie Loos had got into the news, too. He told of the afternoon when I had told him to come, that there was something queer on my oscillograph, but that when he went nothing queer occurred—except that he wondered if *I* hadn't gone a little that way! Had Jackie furnished a clue to the "Jay Bard Mystery?" reporters wanted to know? They had also tried to find out by turning my basement inside out. They had put Jackie on my oscillograph—and nothing, nothing whatever, had happened!

"There's something strange in Mr. Bard's basement," Jackie had told a girl reporter.

There were pictures of my basement, taken while I had been away—wherever Emden 5716 had taken me. I chuckled, thinking what a puzzlement there would have been if Emden 5716 and I had appeared on the photos like those faked spirit pictures one sometimes sees in occult publications.

I read on. Albinos were making news everywhere. Men, women and children were "seeing" albinos. But when the statistics were all in it was amazing how *few* there were. So far, a newspaper canvass of the whole United States hadn't turned up six—though of course there must be that many or more.

Six albinos, just three men and three women, in comparatively small Lancaster? No! What my game was nobody could guess, but I proved I could "smell out" murderers, and there were many people who wanted the John Blythe case solved, even after more than a score of years.

"We want you to interest yourself in crime!" Zeda and Thors had told me. I had said no. They had clearly called up reinforcements in the shape of people who were naturally interested in a man who could walk through brick walls, see six albinos in a city where none had even been—nicely divided, three and three, as to sex!—and name names he didn't know!

I had refused, so now my nose was being rubbed in more crime than I had any idea of enjoying. Indeed, there was no intent anywhere that I enjoy it! I wanted to get my hands on Thors, Zeda, and their four assistants; but I didn't want it *too* hard, lest they appear at my call, bow obsequiously—in the presence of half of Lancaster!—and ask me what my next commands were, as if they had been six genii! *And maybe they were something of the kind!*

At headquarters Roth turned the unknown metal over to four gray-haired professors, who got busy on it at once. There were plenty of reporters about.

"While you're waiting for the spirit to move you to tell us about John Blythe," said Roth, "have you any suggestions?"

"Yes. Have one of the reporters get from his newspaper's morgue all the dope he can give me on the German post-war cruiser *Emden!* Mind now, don't try to make something of it; just get me the dope! It's only a hunch on my part."

"I like the way your hunches work," said Roth.

I thought of something else, which I didn't mention. *If,* as I had blurted, the murderer of John Blythe *were* among those who

demanded that I *name* the murderer, would he be as complaisant about it as Xon Van Khmer had been? Or would he make some attempt to shut my mouth before I named a name?

* * * * *

It was midnight of a hot night before a grave professor gave Roth a report.

"It's impossible, this material," he said. "I'd stake my reputation it's from some deep part of the ocean bed, far beyond human reach—from The Japan Trench or the Mindanao Trench, possibly. If you brought it," he stared at me, "you got it nearly six thousand fathoms under the ocean! What do you make of *that?*"

"Only this," I said, choking on the words. *"We're experiments, you and I, just experiments! Every mother's son and daughter of us! Just experiments!* By *whom?* Who can possibly know?"

(*To Be Continued*)

RATING SPACEWAY

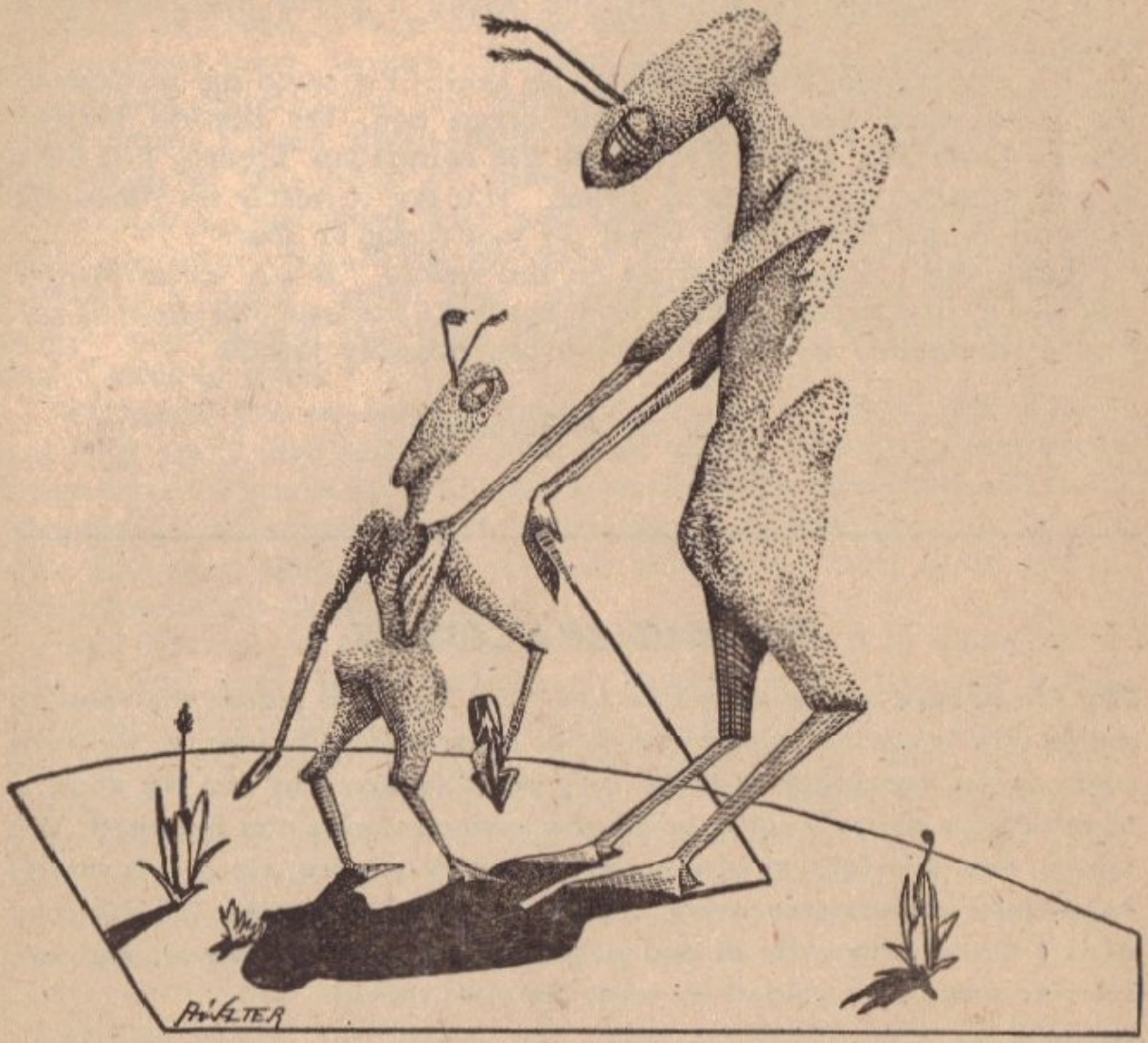
We believe that every editor has some desire to please the reading public. We know that we do—and like other editors before us, we have come to the conclusion that the only possible way this can be done is to conduct a department in which the various stories can be rated. We realize that this fails to give a very accurate picture, since it is utterly impossible to persuade every reader (or for that matter, the majority of the readers) to write in and express an opinion. However, we can, to some extent, be guided by what the polls reveal.

Therefore we sincerely hope that *you* will send us a letter or a post-card and let us know which stories you liked best. It will, of course, simplify our rating system if you cast a vote for *all* of the stories.

You can be sure that if you do this for us we will make a sincere effort to publish the type of material in SPACEWAY your letters indicate you want. And while you are voting, please let us know if you would like to see a department for readers' letters.

The Editors.

They came from outer space . . . and soon the people were enslaved and the planet a smoking beehive of activity.



SLAVES *of the* SYSTEM

By J. T. OLIVER

ILLUSTRATED BY ARNOLD WALTER

The farmer's time-worn cabin sat nearly a hundred yards from the highway, parallel to the concrete ribbon, as though the road had been built since the house. From the back door, facing "down" the highway, an observer could see green fields and orchards, bowing politely before a gentle wind. Green rounded hills, a few head of livestock contentedly grazing thereon, completed the artists' conception of rural tranquility.

From the front door, where the old farmer now stood, the scene was deplorably different. The green hills had been tunneled through and through, to get at the scarce mineral deposits. The fields and crops had been plowed under to make way for a boom-town: saloons, apartment houses, used gyro-car lots. The once cool and inviting river was choked with the garbage the city-dwellers were too busy to dispose of in a more sanitary manner. The whole ugly city gave the appearance of being *temporary*.

Some day the city would be deserted, the people gone. The river would wash the garbage out to sea and be clean again. The gutted hills would collapse under the heavy spring rains and regain their nature-given contours. The city itself, when once emptied of inhabitants, would fall to the ground and decay, to provide life-giving top-soil for future generations of farmers.

The old man knew this, but still he sometimes grew impatient. He wanted it gone *now*. Regretfully, he turned and walked back through the house and into the back yard, where his little grandson sat playing under a tree.

The boy jumped up and ran to meet him. In one grimy hand he clutched a tiny model of a gyro-car—in the other a toy blaster. The old man eyed the playthings with distaste, but at the same time felt a tinge of pride that his grandson, at the age of four years, could really understand such things.

"Hi Gramps!" shouted the boy.

The old man winced at the term, "gramps." He sat down on a bench under the shady tree and took the boy on his lap. "What are you playing today, Son?"

The boy gleefully related all his childhood adventures of the day, sometimes confusing yesterday with today, in his immature eagerness. His grandfather listened quietly, occasionally asking a minor question, or answering one.

When the boy finished his breathless narration, the old farmer sat silent for a long time, staring off into the distance. His mind

was occupied by the thoughts of yesterday, when life had been more pleasant—life before the Invader came.

His grandson stirred restlessly in his arms, waking him from his reverie.

"Tell me a story, Gramps," he begged.

"All right, Sonny. I'll tell you a story. It's a story you've never heard before. It's a story that happened long before you were born. It's a terrible story, too, because it happens to be true.

"Many long years ago," began the old man, "this was a quiet, peaceful valley. We were farmers, most of us. We had a good, simple life, of work, play and love. We had our troubles, naturally, but they were all small ones. We had a democratic government that didn't burden the people with excessive taxes or a lot of red tape. The world was united. Everybody had plenty, so there was no need to fight—"

"But Gramps," the boy interrupted, "what about the wars we read about in school?"

"That was a long, long, time ago, Son. After the Second Atomic War, when we almost destroyed the race, we learned to get along. We haven't had a war since I was born—not even in my father's lifetime.

"But let's get back to the story. As I said, we had peace and plenty. We had disarmed many years before, and the world had finally matured. But all this was before the invader came. . . .

"I'll never forget the day they landed. We—your grandmother and I—got up early that morning, as usual. Our little daughter—your mother—was still sleeping peacefully when I left the house.

"Right after sunup I turned all the livestock out to graze in the pasture until night. I was on my way back to the house when I saw the space-ship. Naturally, I'd never seen one before, but I knew it couldn't be anything else—for hundreds of years there have been unexplained reports of mysterious objects sighted in the skies. At first it was only a pinpoint in the sky, but as it slowly descended, it became bigger and louder. It landed in the middle of the pasture, burning a wide circle where the rocket flare touched.

"The livestock ran terrified over to a far corner of the pasture and hid behind a clump of trees. And I—well, I hid behind a bush, Sonny.

I was scared! I knew that our own air-force was experimenting with space-travel, but we had always assumed that it would be years

in the future. We certainly didn't expect some other planet to contact us first!

"Well, there I was, hidden behind a bush, and an alien space-ship sitting arrogantly in the middle of my pasture. What did I do? Why, I stayed hid, of course! I huddled there shaking with fright. The ship just sat, silent and patient.

"Then finally a door opened and out came four men. Yes, Son, they *are* men. I know they don't look exactly like us—their hair is different, and their skins—but you know how they look, you've seen them.

"Well, when I saw they weren't monsters like some imaginative writers have described, I decided they weren't dangerous, and got to my feet and went over to them. They were surprised at my appearance, too. I later learned that they expected to find something pretty weird here.

"They were friendly, of course. They showed me their ship, and everything they had brought along, which wasn't much. From what I saw, I gathered that we were pretty much alike—our civilizations must have developed along similar paths.

"I took them to the house, feeling very proud. Your grandmother, too, was honored. They stayed with us for three days, and I taught them all I could about our way of life. Showed them everything on the place. We couldn't communicate very well then, but we used sign language and gestures and managed to make ourselves understood.

"Then came the day when they left us and went into the city to make official contact with the government. Oh, but I wish I'd killed them! That was the last I saw of them, but since that day there have been more and more. Their ships started coming in droves, like metal clouds, bringing more and more of their terrible people. They didn't fire a shot, but slowly, surely, they took over. They worked their way into the government, gained control of our factories—everything!"

"But Gramps," protested the boy, "if they are like us, and they didn't hurt anybody, why are you so mad at them?"

The old man snorted impatiently, and pointed to the sky. "Look up there, Son. You can hardly see the sun for the smoke. And that wretched town over there—it's built right where I used to go fishing. And their people are no good. Instead of living quietly and letting things be, they are continually on the move, raping our

country, setting up more factories, changing our way of life. Pretty soon they'll have another war, and millions of our people will be killed. They have made the people more and more dependent on the government, which they now control.

"Yes, Son, they're invaders and conquerors, even if they don't use force."

The boy was silent for a long time, evidently trying to understand the strange things his grandfather had told him. Finally he spoke. "Gramps, if it's all that bad, why don't we run them off, or kill 'em?"

The old man said regretfully, "The Invaders are too smart to do anything that would cause open rebellion. And there are some traitors among us who actually *like* their way of life, base and decadent as it is."

The old farmer stood then, looked off toward the distant mountains, a purposeful look in his tired old eyes. He took a deep breath, his antennae quivered slightly, and he said proudly, "But it won't always be like this. Even now, up in the hills, an army of discontents is preparing for war.

"Zzzt, my son, I promise you that some day these foul Earthmen will be gone, and Mars will again be a fit place to live!"

• • • • •

RE-ENTRANT

By CLYDE BECK

¶ Back and forth across the universe they were shunted, caught in a time trap from which there was no escape.

Allison banged his fist against the raw wood of the table and sprang to his feet with an impetuosity that knocked his stool clattering to the floor. "I've got it, Ken!" he cried. "Come look at this, will you!" His hair bristled along the back of his neck; he felt the sweat of sudden excitement begin to trickle down his ribs.

Kennedy ceased his slow pacing of the little room and turned from aimlessly staring at section after section of blank wall.

"You'd better have it," he said. "It's got me whipped." With hot hands he scrubbed the fatigue from his eyes and face, then crossed to where his partner stood shuffling and scrabbling among the mass of papers that littered the table-top.

"It's essentially simple," Allison was saying. "The continuum is hyperdimensionally curved, and the curvature is re-entrant. A straight line sufficiently prolonged in hyperspace will meet itself. If you go far enough in one direction you come back to where you started from."

"Sure, we know all that. But what good does it do us? Travel for infinite time at infinite speed and you get somewhere. We can't wait that long."

"Not infinite, Ken. The whole point of the hyperdimensional geometry is that the apparent infinity of a given dimensional system of space is only an error caused by inadequate observational tech-

nique. Observe space in three dimensions and it's infinite. Observe it in four and it's re-entrant. In five, maybe you get the configuration; in six, texture, density—who knows what? A matter of perspective, you might say. For instance, an ant may think he's crawling on a vast plane, but we can see that it's only a tin can, and if he crawls all the way around, he's back where he was at first."

"And very much confused about the whole thing, no doubt. Like me. Okay, not infinite, then, but it's still a long old way around this can we're crawling on, and even with spacewarp drive it takes a very considerable number of kilowatts to accelerate even to one-tenth light in any reasonable time. And beyond that—if the converter could give us the juice, which it probably can't without spreading our dust all over the Milky Way, the tubes wouldn't handle it."

"But they don't have to, Ken. They don't have to handle a single watt above normal load. Look at this." Allison picked up a sheet of paper covered with closely-written mathematical symbols and handed it to him. "What happens if you throw an equal and opposite warp into the cup at each end of all three axes at the same time?"

"She goes boom," Kennedy said skeptically. Nevertheless he took the paper and began a perusal of the thickly-clustered formulae.

"She does not," Allison stated. "Look at this derivation here. The curvature of space is really multiordinal. It's like slicing up a cone. You can get a continuous series of curves—any size of circle, ellipse, hyperbola—anything from a point with infinite curvature to a straight line with curvature zero, depending on the position and orientation of the intersecting plane. Of course space is not necessarily conical, but that gives you an idea. At any point on the surface of a cone the curvature is actually anything from a circle to a straight line. And similarly, space is hyperdimensionally curved so that every point is the center of any one of an infinite family of curves. For any two points there is a curve of which the two points are conjugate foci."

Kennedy had been swiftly scanning the equations which the other had pointed out to him. Now he whistled. "You're right!" he ejaculated. "And instead of intersecting a solid with a plane we intersect a four-dimensional continuum with a three-dimensional field of force. The warp—"

"An equal and opposite warp applied at each end of all three axes of the drive will produce a stress which cannot be resolved in

three dimensions. The warp-generator and everything in its field goes over into hyperspace and—"

"And comes out at the conjugate focus!"

"Exactly. You see what it means, Ken. It's a means of practically instantaneous travel to any distance you like. Simply adjust the magnitude of the warping force to the radius of the curve you want to use. An extremely short curve will move you a few meters; a long enough one will land you out beyond the stars. The direction you travel in depends on the orientation of the three axes and of the warps imposed on them."

"Let me check that," said Kennedy tensely. He righted the upset stool and sat down at the littered table. Fatigue was forgotten; a growing excitement took possession of him as he studied sheet after closely-written sheet. At last, "We've got it!" he cried. "This is the biggest thing in astronautics since the first rocket to the moon! It's the way to the stars. It's the—"

"The hyperspatial drive!" Allison finished for him. "And the beauty of it is, it's been implied in the space-warp drive right along. We've had the warp for twenty years, and nobody even guessed!"

"Somebody did," Kennedy reminded him, looking at his partner quizzically.

"Well—yes," Allison admitted. "Somebody—"

"But who? I'd like to know. There's something damn queer about this whole set-up. Here we are lost, God knows where, with our ship broken down, and here's all this math worked out that seems to be what we need to get home. It looks too good to be a coincidence."

"Coincidence or not, who cares?" Allison demanded. "What I say is, if we can use it, let's."

Kennedy rubbed his jaw reflectively. "I guess you're right," he admitted. "Well, let's see if we really can." He took pencil and paper and began sketching a wiring diagram.

"Nothing to it," he said presently. "All we do is shunt out the Macpherson valve so we can excite both poles at once, take off one lead from each side of the dead-points of the input secondaries, feed one leg through the inverter of the emergency reverse . . ."

Allison hung over his shoulder, nodding at each swiftly spoken point, adding a comment of his own now and then. It was a matter of only minutes until Kennedy arose, gripping the scrawled sheets in his hand.

"This does it!" he exulted. "All the tools we'll need we have in the ship. Well, what are we waiting for, man? Let's go." He clapped his arm about Allison's shoulder and they marched through the door of the little building, the wiring diagram, a festive banner, waving overhead.

In their elation, neither of them noticed the opening of the opposite door nor the two figures which entered. The door swung to behind them, the spring lock clicked . . .

The spherical bulk of the warp-drive space-ship lay not far off, near the center of the forest clearing. To their gladdened eyes it seemed the sunlight lay brighter on the leveled ground than it had a short while before. In the top of a tree that might have been a beech tree a bird was singing, one sharp clear note, over and over, endlessly repeated.

Allison punched the studs of the com-lock, the door swung in and upward, the ladder descended at their feet. They climbed into the entrance-port, retracted the ladder, battened down the outer door behind them, opened the inner door, and entered the bowels of the ship. Somewhere a soft hum became audible as the air-purifier responded to the slight change of humidity and carbon dioxide content that their entrance had caused.

To the ordinary man of their time the drive compartment, located at the center of the ship, would have been a bewildering place, even alarming, but these two were specialists. They had had it all apart a dozen times and scattered on the deck. Familiarity had given them not contempt, but a thorough appreciation of the mechanism and a definite affection for it.

Dominating the center was the drive itself, a round framework resembling an armillary sphere, but it stood man-high above the deck. The members which divided the sphere into octants were as thick as a man's calf, and the pins of the gimbals in which the whole thing swung were the size of a thigh. Strength was needed here; this was the unit which bore the brunt of the huge thrust of the impulse cups, the six plate-sized, mirror-polished depressions set equidistantly around the sphere at the intersections of the octant arcs. Within these cups was applied the space-warp, the force which took hold of the organic structure of space itself, as the screw of an ocean liner clutches water, in order to hurl the ship across the void.

The squat heavy shape against one wall, with a nest of thick

cables snaking up to a bank of transformers above, that was the atomic converter which powered the ship. Only the slightest whisper came from it now as it yielded the insignificant amount of energy needed to operate the air-purifier and a few lights. For that matter, it was quiet enough at maximum safe load, but power was instinct in every line of it.

Against the opposite wall, a panel cluttered with meters, switches, dials—but each of them full of meaning to Allison and Kennedy, as the written page to the scholar. Even the maze of torn wiring that hung down from it did not seem hopeless now. And behind the panel, out of harm's way, the tubes, the generators *per se* of the space-warping force.

For all their familiarity, it was an hour and more before the wiring was unscrambled and put together again according to Kennedy's diagram. But it was finished at last. Only then did the two pause to open a couple of thermo-cans from the space stores.

"Ready to go, I think," said Kennedy, washing down a mouthful of beans with his last gulp of coffee. "Where to for the first hop? Shall we see what the galaxy looks like from outside? Or only the other side of this sun? A millimeter or a hundred parsecs—it makes no difference to the hyperspatial drive!"

"That may be true," Allison responded. "But if it's all the same to you, I think that for the first time a rather shorter trip would be in order—say across to the other side of the clearing."

"I think so too," said Kennedy drily. "Power—first notch. Okay, here goes."

He closed a switch. In the short interval while the tubes warmed, the drive-sphere was swung to the predetermined angle, the warp-orientations set up on the board, and the input-control lever moved to its lowest notch. Kennedy took the padded seat before the controls and Allison the one in front of the indicators.

"Ready?" Kennedy cried.

"Panel ready."

"This is it! Hang on!"

A switch snicked shut. A groan from the mounting of the drive-sphere, a shimmer in the impulse-cups—these phenomena Allison knew, but not the horrible feeling that followed of being turned inside out, the nausea of body and mind, the icy shock of utter strangeness in the space around him. Nor the panic fear. Fear that was by no means lessened when a quick look at the periscopes showed

only an interstellar black that crawled timelessly with obscene and distorted lines that might be starlight twisting down through hyperspace, with thicker ones that might be galaxies.

Then, in a flash of intuition, he knew. Low power gave them a curve, not of short radius, but of a low rate of curvature. The little nudge of power which they had used had thrown them into the focus of a hyperspatial curve of practically infinite radius. They would come out at the opposite end of the universe.

"Kennedy!" he yelled. "Full power quick!"

It was already too late.

Kennedy did not answer. A glance showed Allison that the twisting shock of rotating into hyperspace had laid him unconscious in his seat. Allison sprang toward the controls, but staggered and fell. His clutching hand tore loose a bundle of wires from the control panel. He did not notice that these were the very wires they had installed so short a time before, for blackness took him too.

It may be that the mind of man is not equipped for hyperspatial travel. We exist in space and live in time, and it may be that we send roots down into the continuum, as a tree sends its roots into the earth. The sense of continuity in time which makes a life one life can survive periods of sleep or unconsciousness. Hardly anyone ever doubts on waking in the morning that he is still the same person who went to bed the night before. But space and time are intimately related in human experience, and hyperspatial travel means crossing an extent of space without crossing the appropriate extent of time. Whether the person who emerges from such an experience is still the same person who began it, whether consciousness or even memory can survive such a violation, is not an easy question to answer. After fission, is a paramecium the same? Or twice, or only half as much the same? Or something altogether new?

Having tried, Allison should know if anyone. But Allison did not know. Allison knew nothing. For an infinite instant, Allison knew nothingness.

He heard a voice.

It said, "Wake up, Al."

He woke up.

Kennedy was shaking him. "No bones broken—I looked while you were out." Kennedy's grin was rueful. "But don't say where am I because I'm damned if I know either!"

Allison sat up and clutched his head in his hands, then shook it vigorously and looked about him. The converter whispered lightly. The gravitometer said one G; so did the seat of his pants. There must be a chunk of matter around somewhere—the automatic control had taken over and was doing its job of balancing with an equal and opposite force whatever gravitational warp was in the surrounding space. He conned the periscopes: above and all around sunlit air, on one side a blaze of light, a mottled greeny-brown beneath.

"It's a planet anyhow," he said.

"Sure, but what planet? What star, for that matter? That's no little trip around the moon we've just been on. You know that."

"No, it wasn't. Something went wrong, I remember. We were taking off. Where were we going—I can't remember that . . . I gave you the panel ready—you closed the switch—and then something went wrong. Something took hold of us. There was an awful turning feeling, and the stars twisting. Black space, and star-traces across the scopes—but wrong, somehow. Shapes that no star-trace could be. Like looking into the fourth dimension . . .

"Fourth dimension! That's it! Something took hold of us just as we were taking off and twisted us into hyperspace."

"Yes—but oh Lord, where to!"

"God knows."

"But anyhow we're going to have to ground her." Kennedy looked disgustedly at the wires dangling from the control-panel. "We'll have to cut power before we can put all that spaghetti back where it belongs. Good thing you didn't claw out the automatic when you took that dive."

"Right. But the remote from the keel port should still be working too. Let's set her down."

As Allison had guessed, the remote-control panel in the bottom observation-port was undamaged, and they were able to drop the ship gently toward the surface of the planet beneath. As they approached, the greenish surface resolved itself into a gently-rolling wooded landscape. The ship was maneuvered into position above a small opening which appeared among the trees, and after a careful observation had disclosed nothing alarming, dropped to the ground. Kennedy and Allison stood in the entrance-lock and regarded the world before them through the glass of the port.

"Homelike enough," said Allison. "Terrestrial type vegetation, gravity one G plus or minus a tenth, air pressure six-eighty, indicator

strips show no obvious poisons. Want an analysis before we step out?"

"No. There's analysis enough for me." Kennedy pointed to where a small animal, unmistakably a rodent, stood up from the grass on its haunches and regarded the ship for a moment with eyes and ears and twinkling nose before it scampered off among the trees with a flash of white tail.

A moment later they were on the ground, walking cautiously away from the ship to get a look about them. Suddenly Allison gripped his companion's arm.

"Over there among the trees," he whispered, pointing. "A shack of some kind!"

"Right," said Kennedy. "Got your rod?" he asked, slapping his own hip for reassurance. "Okay? Let's go see what gives."

"Take it easy," Allison cautioned. "Don't you notice something funny about that shack? Something—queer?"

Kennedy paused, examining his own mind. "Well, yes, now that you mention it, I do. It's like—" He uttered a short, nervous laugh. "Like in a dream, somehow."

"Yes . . . It gets away from me. It's like reaching for a reflection in the water. There's something I should know about it, but I can't quite remember what it is. It's a little—frightening."

"It is, at that. But all the same I'm going to see what's inside."

"Yes, I think we have to," Allison said. They moved on.

As they approached, they could see a door in the caststone wall which faced them, but no window or other opening. Kennedy's cautious touch found the door to be locked. The side wall was blank, the back had three openings. One was another door; the other two at each side of it, stopped with some transparent material, were too high up in the wall to see through. Kennedy tried the latch. It gave to his touch, the door opened, and both men stepped inside.

They were just in time to see two other figures disappearing through the opposite door, one of them waving a scrap of paper in the air.

"Those two seem to be in an awful hurry," Kennedy remarked.

"They'll be back. Let's see what they've got here." Allison's glance fell upon a paper-littered table near the center of the room. "They know a bit of mathematics, anyway. Look here." The papers on the table were covered with closely-written mathematical symbols. He sat down at the stool that faced the table.

"You know," said Allison, "I have a feeling that the answer to what we want to know is here in this room, if we can get it to make sense." He pawed among the papers, sorting and stacking.

"You try," Kennedy suggested. "I'm damned tired." He slumped into a chair and lit a cigarette.

An hour went by. Their unwitting hosts did not return. Kennedy got to his feet and began to pace aimlessly around the sides of the little room, staring at section after section of blank wall.

Suddenly, Allison banged his fist against the raw wood of the table and sprang to his feet. The overturned stool clattered to the floor behind him. "I've got it, Ken!" he cried. "Come look at this, will you!" The sweat of sudden excitement began to prickle his skin.

Kennedy turned from his pointless scrutiny of the wall. He scrubbed fatigue from his eyes and face with hot hands.

"You'd better have it," he said.

That was the third time he had said it.

But that was quite a while ago.

* * * * *

FUTURE FARE

In the February issue of SPACEWAY we will present a very unusual novel by a long-time favorite of science fiction readers, Stanton A. Coblentz.

THE MIDGETS OF MONOTON has all the elements of thought-provoking satire and tongue-in-cheek deftness of any Coblentz' story, but it is also a fast-paced action novel which keeps moving from start to finish.

THE OSILANS, by Arthur J. Burks, gathers impetus as Jay Bard learns more about the mysterious group from the depths of the Pacific.

And there'll be a number of interesting short stories.

SPACEWAYS *to* VENUS

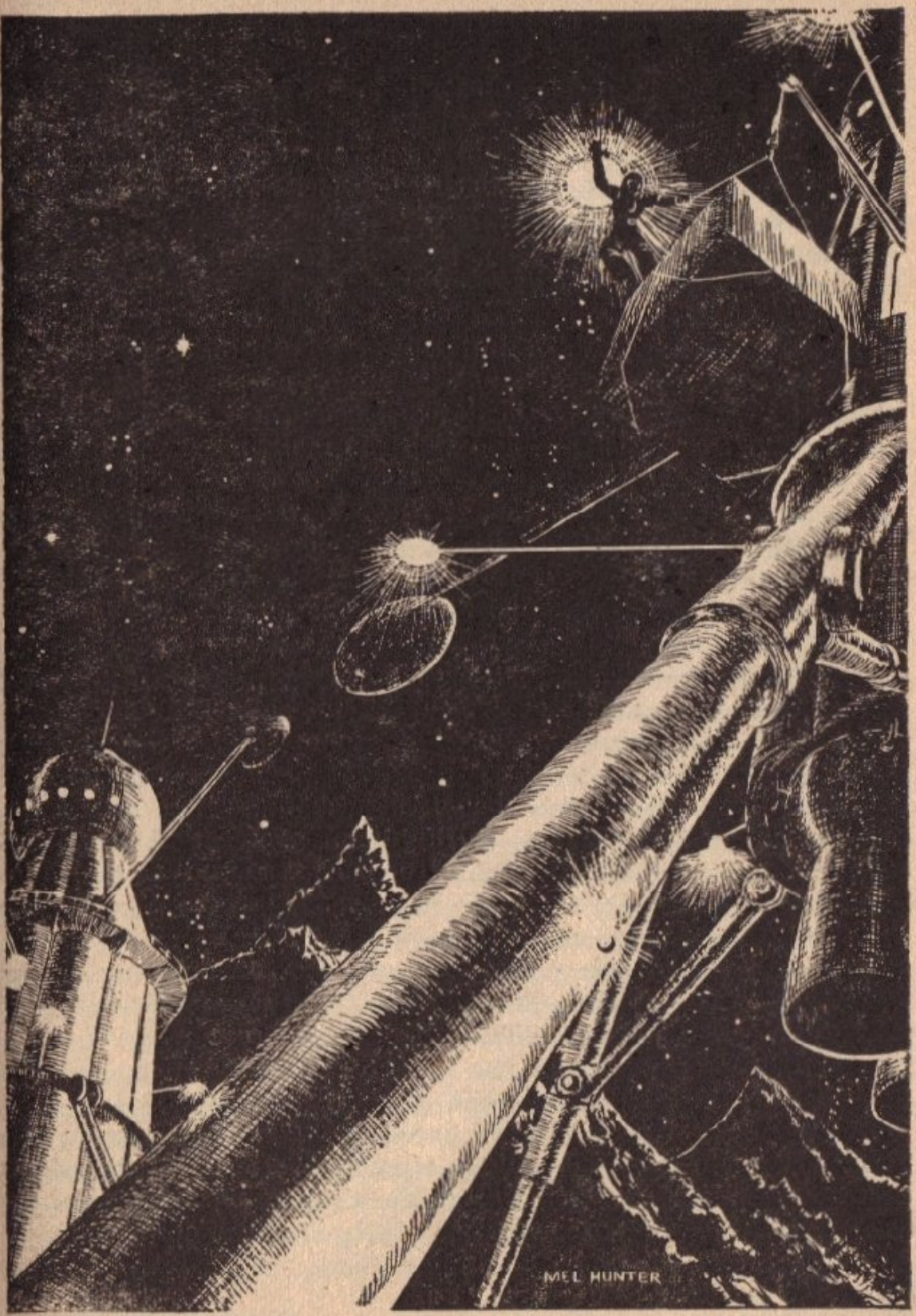
By CHARLES ERIC MAINE

ILLUSTRATED BY MEL HUNTER

¶ Our feature novelet, by the author of the original "Spaceways" movie script, returns to first principles. Much modern science fiction has become so complicated that the new reader often has difficulty understanding it. But the plot of "Spaceways to Venus" is refreshingly fundamental: the romance of the conquest of space realistically portrayed.

In a large comfortably furnished office on the twenty-third floor of the Spaceways Building, New York City, Dr. Carl Bressler was addressing an audience of four. They were seated around a small chrome and plastic table, on which were a number of files and papers to which Bressler referred from time to time. It was six p.m. Down below, in the streets of the city, the rush-hour was in full swing. Broadway was choked with traffic crawling as though in convoy—a mechanized ribbon fringed with pedestrian-dotted sidewalks; but none of the tumult permeated the cool gray walls of the conference room.

Bressler said: "I won't detain you long, gentlemen. This final briefing is largely a matter of routine. The main facts are already known to you. In ten days the United States Rocket-Ship *Zylex* will be launched from Spacedrome Two, near Detroit, and will, of course, be taking you with it—to Venus. Remember that this is not a journey of exploration, but is a rescue mission, and the sole purpose of the expedition is to find out what happened to Paul Vernon Klein and


MEL HUNTER

his crew, who landed on Venus in the rocket-ship *Anthaar* three weeks ago.

"I hope—I sincerely hope—that you will find the members of the previous expedition still alive. It is just possible, but not probable. If the worst has happened, and there are no survivors, then bring back the bodies, if you can locate them, together with the ship's log, all documents and photographs, and the sealed instrument panel in the radio vacuum chamber. Don't stay on the planet any longer than you have to. What we want is information about conditions on Venus, particularly regarding alien forms of life, so that the next exploratory party can be properly equipped to deal with all emergencies."

Bressler paused, and selected a cigarette from a flat silver box on the table. In the cold glow of the strip lights around the ceiling he looked lean and gray, an ageing man with an indefinable air of poise and responsibility; the sort of man who might be a business executive, or a surgeon, or the Technical Director of Spaceways, Incorporated, the largest and most progressive organization for the promotion of interplanetary travel and commerce.

"From the moment *Anthaar* made the landing on Venus to the moment when, on the following day, radio communication ceased, we received only four messages on the microwave R/T." He sifted the papers, and picked up a number of typewritten sheets clipped together, then continued: "The first signal was partly unintelligible owing to high interference level, but we succeeded in deciphering important details concerning the landing. It was rather tricky. The descent was made through four miles of dense cloud. Below the cloud ceiling visibility was poor because of the perpetual twilight effect and persistent torrential rain. They could see little—even though *Anthaar* had been set down in the daylit hemisphere. So you see, gentlemen, it won't be easy. You will be wholly dependent on your radar and instruments—your responsibility, Colby."

Bressler smiled wryly at the youngest member of his audience, Raymond Colby, electronics engineer who, at the age of twenty-eight was already a leading authority on electronics and microwave techniques, and had written a number of important books on the subject. He had played a personal part in the design and development of the radio and radar installations in both *Anthaar* and *Zylex*.

Colby snapped his fingers nonchalantly. "Can't fail!" he remarked, somewhat enigmatically.

Carl Bressler riffled the papers thoughtfully. "In the second signal from *Anthaar*, received four hours later, some important figures were given concerning temperature, humidity and atmospheric conditions at Venus ground level. Also radiation. I mention that because there is evidence of considerable radioactivity in the subsoil, which is a very good reason why we should inaugurate a commercial freight lane to Venus as soon as possible. In addition, the signal contained data regarding the performance of the atomic drive and torque jets during landing, which should be of particular interest to you, McCabe."

He passed a slip of paper to a short dour man with thinning hair who was leaning stiffly back in his chair. George McCabe was an atom man, and a specialist on atomic drive turbines. He could completely strip and reassemble an atomic rocket assembly in three days, relining the combustion chambers and boost jets and carrying out a full thrust and exhaust velocity test on the ground. That was something of a record.

McCabe accepted the paper with a grunt, and slipped it into his pocket without even glancing at it. There would be plenty of time for final calculations.

"Message number three from *Anthaar,*" Bressler went on, "gave valuable information about course corrections in flight. The original computations were about three degrees out, it seems, and the *Zylex* will need to enter free orbit at a slightly higher velocity—which means more acceleration, higher 'g', and more discomfort, I'm afraid. But the overall increase is relatively small, and nothing to worry about. I would like you to study this data, Captain Morgan."

He handed a folio of sheets to a tall red-haired man whose fierce and rugged appearance seemed a little out of keeping with the neat blue of his spaceline uniform. Morgan was a tough and astute pioneer of the spacelanes. He had piloted the first freight ship to Mars in the days before the atomic drive was perfected, and the gigantic cigar-shaped projectile consisted mainly of fuel. He was experienced, thoroughly reliable, and above all, could make instantaneous decisions in a crisis. Like most capable men, he could not tolerate incompetence; and in the early days of space travel he had been nicknamed 'Morgan the Gorgon' by his crew, because his baleful irate glare seemed to have a petrifying effect upon recipients who had been guilty of a technical error or lapse of duty.

"Thanks, Bressler," said Morgan. He rolled the papers together

and tapped them softly against his knee with suppressed restless energy.

Bressler continued: "The third signal also contained the report of the first exploration on Venusian soil, outside the ship. Blake and Dougherty went out, wearing oxygen masks. They found that at ground level the air contained sufficient oxygen to maintain human life without masks—but with considerable discomfort—breathlessness and nausea—due to the high carbon-dioxide content of the atmosphere. They report profuse vegetation reminiscent of tropical undergrowth on Earth, but in diverse colors. There is no green foliage. Therefore, Venusian plants do not employ chlorophyll for photosynthesis."

"Interesting," remarked a small, bald, bespectacled man seated next to Colby. The fourth member of the audience, he looked in some indefinable way grubby and old-fashioned, yet knowledgable, like a retired college professor who had fallen upon hard times. He was Doctor Ebenezer Jolly, world famous naturalist and Vice-President of the International Zoological Society.

"Visibility had improved owing to a thinning of the cloud banks, but it was still raining," said Bressler. "They could see that they were in a valley, roughly elliptical in shape, partially ringed by extremely jagged mountains. During a brief tour they collected specimens of soil, vegetation and fruits. Later tests with a Geiger counter showed unmistakable radioactivity—but that is incidental."

"Amazing!" breathed Dr. Jolly.

"What is?" Captain Morgan asked brusquely.

"Profuse vegetation in radioactive soil. Astonishing!" Dr. Jolly beamed through his spectacles.

Morgan regarded him with the detached air of a man whose business is vectors and velocities and ellipses of motion, and who fails to see any possible interest in anything that does not involve mechanics and mathematics.

Bressler selected one final paper and studied it thoughtfully. "The fourth and final signal from *Anthaar*, he said, "was short, and very incoherent. It was transmitted two hours ahead of scheduled time. It reads—'*Anthaar* to Spaceways Control. Message four. Time eighteen twenty-eight, Earth time. Located fauna. Two-hundred-plus small triped animals around ship. Electrically charged—many kv' . . . that is, kilovolts, or thousands of volts, of course . . . 'presumably via antennae on heads. Blake and Dougherty cut off and out of

sight. Conway and I will attempt to get them back with flame guns.' The signal is corrupt and indecipherable for some twenty words. Then there is the isolated phrase—'from under the ground'—more corrupt words, and finally— 'continual noise like *riti-riti*. Dangerous. Anticipate trouble. Over and out—Paul Vernon Klein, Captain."

Dr. Jolly, who had leaned forward at the mention of the word fauna, pulled a tattered notebook from his pocket, and jotted down two words with a stub of pencil. "Riti-riti," he breathed happily. "Riti-riti! Fascinating! Electric tripeds."

These remarks drew from Captain Morgan one of the famous petrifying scowls, but the Doctor's thoughts were far away. Morgan turned to Carl Bressler.

"Looks as though Klein and company ran into trouble with the natives," he observed.

"That's how it looks," the Director agreed. "No further signals have been received from *Anthaar*, making a total silence of three weeks We fear the worst. That is why we are sending a picked crew to take *Zylex* to Venus on a rescue mission. I personally selected you as pilot, Morgan, because I can rely on you to get out of a sticky situation, if it arises. Also you are a man who always obeys orders, and your orders are to take no action that will jeopardize the safety of your crew and the rocket. Find *Anthaar* and the others if you can, but above all, make sure that *Zylex* returns. McCabe was chosen because he is the best atomic drive engineer we have. Colby is the radio man. There isn't a finer one in the world, as you know. And Dr. Jolly is the man we are relying on to find out what makes these animals—these riti-riti—tick, and find some method of combating them. Dr. Jolly will have to conduct a one man war against the inhabitants of Venus. We want specimens of riti-riti brought back, if that is possible."

He paused, and looked round solemnly.

"One thing must be clearly understood, however. It is not the policy of this Corporation, nor in fact of the United States Government, to adopt a hostile attitude towards alien creatures without just cause. Therefore, if you should run into trouble, hold your fire. Try to find out what happened to the crew of *Anthaar*—that is the main purpose of your mission. But if, in spite of all your efforts, it comes to a straight fight, then let them have it. Show them how!

"You will fly to Detroit one week from tomorrow for final tests.

Take-off zero is at twenty thirty-five seventeen on Thursday the ninth of October. Until Tuesday the Corporation doesn't want to see you—in other words, you can take an unofficial vacation, but report here at nine-hundred hours on the seventh. I expect you'll have plenty to do in the meantime. Don't talk too much—news releases will be made to the press by our Publicity Department."

He stood up, and crossed to a large wall cabinet. "And now, business being over, I think we shall drink to the success of the rocketship *Zylex* and its crew," he announced, producing a bottle of Scotch.

Dr. Jolly coughed politely and said: "If you don't mind, I would prefer to drink my toast in orange-juice, please" . . . a request that brought an outraged glare from Captain Morgan.

A minute later five glasses were raised in the air as Carl Bressler solemnly said: "To you, gentlemen, and your ship, *Zylex*. Bon voyage, and a safe return."

And Morgan added crisply: "To the ultimate conquest of the universe and all space!"

Four glasses were emptied in one movement, but Dr. Jolly sipped his orange-juice with a happy pre-occupied expression on his face. He was thinking about a new world, with new flora and fauna, and in particular, the riti-riti.

Four men times ten days make forty man-days of increasing suspense. With the exception of Dr. Jolly, all of the crew were seasoned space-travelers, who had made both the Lunar and Martian trips on several occasions. Colby had spent six months on Mars supervising the erection of a giant radio transmitting station for interplanetary communication. McCabe, as a rocket engineer, had worked on most of the large freight ships operating on the Spaceways commercial routes. And as for Morgan—it was his boast that he had more space-hours to his credit than the other two had had dinners, which was, if anything, an understatement.

The naturalist, however, had remained relatively earthbound throughout his life. His brilliant work on Martian life-forms had been carried out with the aid of imported specimens. His services had been commissioned on many occasions by the Spaceways Corporation, and by the Government, to perform some special research directly related to the problems of planetary colonization.

Just prior to the *Anthaar* expedition, the Government had suc-

ceeded in persuading Dr. Jolly to journey to Mars to investigate a sudden fecundity of a certain species of poisonous reptile which was threatening to make the colonization of certain zones an extremely dangerous process. While the doctor was at Washington completing final arrangements, the news had been received of the landing on Venus of *Anthaar,* the first rocketship to attempt reconnaisance of that mysterious planet. Then, on the following day, the disaster—with the final hurried message from Captain Vernon Klein and the brief but disturbing mention of "riti-riti."

The Martian project had promptly been shelved, and the Spaceways Corporation, at the instigation of Washington, had immediately set about equipping a rescue ship. It was decided to ask Dr. Jolly to go to Venus instead of Mars, where his specialized knowledge of alien creatures might prove a vital factor in any attempt to rescue the crew of *Anthaar.*

However, in his characteristic way, Dr. Jolly, on hearing that the Martian trip was off, had disappeared without trace. For two weeks the country was searched for him, State police and F.B.I. co-operating in a mammoth comb-out. He was finally located in a small bivouac tent on the edge of a forest in North Carolina, where he had been collecting specimens of a rather rare type of weevil. When told about the change of plans, and his appointment as naturalist to the *Anthaar* Rescue Mission, he remarked: "With pleasure, gentlemen, but first of all I must find two more specimens of the female Colanthus weevil for my collection."

Captain Morgan, who by nature did not suffer fools and naturalists gladly, was not at all pleased at the prospect of accepting Dr. Jolly as colleague and companion during the eight-week journey from Earth to Venus. So strongly did he feel about this that while in New York during the pre-take-off vacation, he decided to call in at the Spaceways building on Broadway, and protest in person to Carl Bressler.

With customary candor he strode into the Technical Director's office, and without preamble said: "Look here, Bressler. I don't want Jolly on this trip. We can't afford to carry passengers!"

Bressler eyed him thoughtfully for a moment, then motioned him into a chair.

"I realize how you feel, Morgan," he replied, choosing his words carefully, "but this thing is bigger than you imagine. Dr. Jolly is no passenger. He may know little of the technicalities of space-

flight, but he's got a vital job to do at the other end, none the less."

Morgan slapped his hand down on the table. "I don't see it! This is a rescue mission, and we want strong-arm men with initiative —not an old fogey to tinker about with a microscope and a test-tube!"

"It won't be at all like that," Bressler smiled. "You are underestimating the difficulties. Don't forget that Captain Vernon Klein, and his men, Blake, Dougherty and Rankin, were all strong-arm men, and tough as they come. They were ready for any danger. Yet they succumbed, all four of them, with—it seems—hardly a struggle. And the only clue we have is a brief and very inadequate description of a small three-legged animal which by common consent seems to have been christened the "riti-riti."

"What happened to the *Anthaar* men can happen to you too, unless we take steps to find out a little more about these animals, with their power of generating high-potential electricity. Obviously it wouldn't be any use if you, or McCabe, or Colby, got to work on a captured riti-riti, because you are men of physics, and probably wouldn't know the head from the tail. The man we want must be a zoologist, with extensive experience of alien anatomy and physiology, who can discover exactly why the riti-riti were so successful in their attack against the crew of *Anthaar,* and so devise effective countermeasures, involving the minimum of bloodshed. After all, we don't want to blast our way into a new planet with flame guns and atomic bombs, do we?"

Grudgingly Morgan was forced to concede the point, and the interview ended shortly after.

Colby and McCabe, being married men (the latter having three children) spent the vacation at home. And Dr. Jolly carried on with various biological tasks, principally the making of hundreds of microtome sections of a mutant variety of lemon-fly to illustrate a paper he was to read at a forthcoming meeting of the American Branch of the International Zoological Society.

Forty man-days of increasing suspense—that was what the vacation amounted to for all of them, in greater or lesser degree. Not because of any great fear or apprehension of the unknown danger awaiting them on the planet Venus, but a suspense born of an innate urge to get into action. The tension was increased by the realization that four friends had already disappeared, completely and probably irrevocably. The *Zylex* mission was like descending into a dark pit

into which someone had vanished with only the ghost of a scream. Thinking about the drama got you nowhere; waiting was irksome; and the days dragged by with painful slowness. Action was the antidote for suspense: sudden and violent action on the rain-soaked ground of Venus.

Probably Dr. Jolly was the least affected of the four. He was aware of certain vague forebodings, but these were swamped by a much more powerful feeling of curiosity regarding the riti-riti, and a genuine dread of the act of space-flight in itself, which, whenever he paused to think about it, produced in him a kind of vertigo. But he had the happy knack of completely losing himself in his work, so that most of the time he was completely unaware of these unfamiliar sensations of mental and emotional stress, and, indeed, forgot about the *Zylex* mission altogether.

On zero-day minus two, the four men reported to Carl Bressler at the Spaceways building as instructed. Specific orders concerning the amount of permissible personal baggage had already been issued, (the maximum being forty pounds per man), but Dr. Jolly arrived with due ceremony in a cab burdened with two large suitcases and a massive traveling trunk—a total freight of well over two hundred pounds.

When Captain Morgan saw the doctor's personal effects, he inquired wrathfully if he, Jolly, thought he was going on his honeymoon. Bressler, highly amused, explained the regulations about luggage to the naturalist, and so, reluctantly, Dr. Jolly opened his bags there and then in the director's office, and jettisoned about four fifths of his belongings. Morgan looked on thunderstruck as a virtual library of books was unpacked, followed by a miniature laboratory of glassware, instruments and two microscopes, plus empty specimen boxes. There was also a chessboard with a set of chessmen, a pair of slippers, and two pyjama suits. The doctor selected those items which he considered essential (which included the slippers and chessmen in addition to scientific equipment).

Later, all four men were packed into a coach and conveyed to the airport, where they were efficiently bundled into a plane bound for Detroit.

At Spacedrome Two, some fifteen miles to the west of Detroit, Dr. Jolly saw for the first time the slender silver obelisk standing vertically erect on the far dispersal apron—the rocketship *Zylex,* destined to carry him through millions of miles of interstellar vacuum

to an alien world. He noted the abstract beauty of its curving lines, but as he looked, his hand trembled slightly, and he felt suddenly old and frail. The other three had seen too many rockets to sense any emotional reaction. McCabe summed it up in two words—"Clean lines," while Morgan added, more cynically, "Let's hope it will have a clean record!"

The two days before take-off were crammed with activity. There were innumerable ground-tests to be made, and Colby and McCabe went over the radio and atomic drive respectively with a fine-tooth comb. They didn't miss a thing. Morgan, for his part, spent most of the time in the Spacedrome control tower, checking the navigational computations—a lengthy process involving intricate mathematics. Only Dr. Jolly had nothing to do. After he had looked over the interior of the rocket, and seen the confined space with the array of instruments, and four padded beds, which was to be their home for many weeks to come, there was nothing he could do. The others were extremely busy. He sensed that he was in the way, and kept clear of the rocket and control tower, passing the time by reading in the room assigned to him for temporary accommodation.

At night, he slept badly. Once or twice he got out of bed and crossed to the window, where he could see the bright spot of light that was Venus, hanging low in the sky. Then his eyes fell to the distant dispersal apron, where a multitude of glittering lights indicated that work was continuing on *Zylex* throughout the night. He was tempted to dress, pack his bag, and clear out before it was too late; but an inner stubborness stabilized his mind, and he returned to bed feeling rather like the martyrs of old must have felt when they faced the lions.

When take-off day finally arrived, no-one could have remained ignorant of the fact for long. Spacedrome Two became the focal point for dozens of vehicles. Carl Bressler and other officials of the Spaceways Corporation arrived during the morning, and soon familiar faces of government men from Washington were seen in the vicinity of the Control Tower. A mobile television unit turned up in the late afternoon, and soon cables and cameras were arranged within safe distance of the firing apron. Newsreels were represented, and government official photographers. There was no restriction on the public, but sightseers who had no official business were restricted to a roped-off zone near the Spacedrome perimeter, at a

safe distance from the rocket. By early evening the drome was crowded, and the car-park full to capacity.

One hour before take-off Carl Bressler called a press conference, at which he released details of the mission to reporters, correspondents, and radio commentators.

At fifteen minutes to zero, Captain Morgan led the way into the rocket, via the enormous gantry erected alongside. Through the eyes of the television cameras millions of people watched the four men as, one by one, they turned and waved before disappearing into the dark circle that was the air lock. All, that is, except Dr. Jolly, who simply hesitated on the threshold, half turned irresolutely, then, as if finally making up his mind, stepped in hurriedly without looking back.

At zero minus five all four men were strapped in their positions on special gravity-cushions. Routine checks had been made. The pressure turbines were idling, filling the cabin with a subdued throb. Each man wore headphones for intercom. There was nothing to do but wait.

At zero minus one the booster pumps started up with a sudden roar. There were sixty seconds to go. Morgan watched the instruments with a practiced eye. Colby appeared to be asleep. McCabe stared vacantly at the rivets in the superstructure above his head. Dr. Jolly could see nothing but a blur; his heart seemed to be racing madly. He had left off his spectacles in order to accommodate the padded earphones better, but there was something unnerving, almost horrifying, in not being able to see at a time like this.

He half sat up, and fumbled in his pocket for his spectacles, removing the headphones with one hand. Morgan's shout of warning was drowned by the thunder of the pumps. Carefully the doctor took his spectacles from their case and balanced them on his nose, then lay back on his cushion, omitting to replace the headphones.

With all the power he could muster, Morgan yelled: "Take those glasses off or you'll have them embedded in your face!" But Dr. Jolly didn't hear a thing. Colby and McCabe were completely unaware of what was happening.

With the master-clock hand at zero minus twenty seconds, Morgan frantically pressed the snap release on his safety straps, and flung himself off the cushion. Furiously he snatched the spectacles from Jolly's eyes and threw them to the floor to the accompaniment of a

choice selection of oaths that were obliterated by the rocket machinery. The doctor's astonishment and indignation wilted before Morgan's obvious rage.

Then, with four seconds to go, Captain Morgan attempted to swing himself back onto his gravity cushion. He was up and on, when the rocket seemed to explode, and lurched violently. He slipped a little. The rocket shook and vibrated uncontrollably, but he hung on desperately, knowing what was in store for him if he let go. A relentless force seemed to suck and drag him downwards, a force that increased as every second passed by, the force of mounting acceleration. Then, after what seemed to be an era of agony, his muscles succumbed; he slipped from the cushion and crashed heavily to the floor.

Acceleration held them all in its paralyzing grip. Colby, McCabe, and Dr. Jolly blacked-out safely on the resilient pads of the gravity cushions. But Captain Morgan lay unconscious and curiously contorted—there was blood on his face and uniform.

The moment the fuel reached cut-off and the atomic-drive jets ceased firing, acceleration dropped instantly to zero. The noise and the throbbing ceased, and the cabin was filled with the intense silence of interplanetary space. Slowly consciousness seeped back into the brains of the three reclining men. McCabe was haunted by an urgent memory—the picture of Morgan snatching Dr. Jolly's spectacles and the tragedy of the strong and powerful Morgan being crushed like a baby against the steel flooring.

He released the safety straps, and cautiously pushed himself down, fighting grimly against the nausea that always overcame him when waking into the no-gravity conditions of free-fall. Holding the handrails, he pulled himself over to Dr. Jolly, and shook him viciously with one arm, shouting: "You goddam murdering fool!" Then he lowered himself to the floor, and carefully examined Morgan's inert body. He was in bad shape, but still breathing. One knee had been trapped under his chest, and there was every indication of a serious fracture of the ribs. In addition there was an ugly darkening bruise on one side of his face, and blood trickled from his mouth due to a laceration of the tongue.

Colby came down, thunderstruck. He had seen nothing of the incident, but McCabe explained vividly in a few words.

Then, a few seconds later the Doctor joined them, obviously

unaccustomed to moving in zero gravity, but full of concern for Morgan, and not understanding what had happened.

McCabe pushed him roughly away, then he and Colby gently lifted Morgan on to his bunk, and set about administering first-aid.

Dr. Jolly said: "I don't understand. What have I done? What happened to poor Captain Morgan?"

"You very near killed him," Colby snapped.

"But why—I don't understand. . . .?"

"In trying to save your goddam eyes from damage by your glasses he got trapped by 'g' at take-off. That's why."

Dr. Jolly wrung his hands in distress. "But couldn't he have postponed the take-off—just a little. . . .?"

"Don't talk stupid—the jets fire automatically."

"The point is, what happens now?" McCabe asked. "We're in space without a pilot. Morgan needs hospital treatment."

"I'll contact Control on the R/T," said Colby, swinging himself across to the radio panel.

Dr. Jolly shuffled forward and said quietly: "Look here, McCabe . . . I'm dreadfully sorry. Really I had no idea . . ."

McCabe turned on him savagely and shouted: "Get out of my sight, you imbecile, before I brain you. . . ." He raised his fist threateningly.

Jolly retired wearily to his bunk. As an afterthought, he fumbled around the floor for his spectacles and eventually found them—a pair of empty frames. The lenses lay shattered into a myriad fragments. He was not slow to appreciate the irony of the situation. He had brought with him more than enough scientific apparatus and instruments; yet for the one vital accessory—his spectacles—he had no spares. He was virtually crippled.

With shoulders drooping even more wearily, he lay down on his bunk and closed his eyes, holding the useless spectacle-frame in his limp hand.

There was a long delay of nearly three hours in contacting Control at Spacedrome Two by radio, due to transmitter trouble. Colby could tune up a weak carrier, but there was no trace of modulation. The voice of Control came through loud and clear at intervals with the same standard formula—"Control calling *Zylex* —Are you receiving?—Over." But Colby was unable to reply.

In exasperation he donned his pressure-suit, took the tool-kit and some likely spares, then let himself into the radio tank through

a small airlock. The tank was so called because of its shape. It was simply a large metallic cubicle, in which all of the radio and radar equipment was installed (the apparatus being remotely controlled from the operator's panel in the cabin). The tank had outlet vents through the hull of the ship through which the air escaped once the rocket had ascended above the atmosphere, the object of this being to provide an environment of vacuum in which large transmitting tubes could function efficiently without glass or metal envelopes. In this way radio techniques in airless space were revolutionized. It became possible to employ large unsealed tubes consisting solely of metal electrode structures, and for the first time parts of a tube could be replaced, if necessary. In addition, for ultra high frequency operation, tube electrode assemblies could be made an integral part of the microwave "plumbing," the waveguides, cavity resonators, and tube assemblies forming one single metallic structure of high efficiency and power.

It took Colby two hours to localize the fault—a fractured electrode in a modulator tube. In addition there was a loss of aerial power due to corona discharge from a badly welded antenna coupling loop. Once these two faults were cleared, the transmitter functioned normally, and contact with Earth was established.

By this time Morgan had recovered consciousness. Though in considerable pain, he made no comment about the accident, nor did he refer to Dr. Jolly, who had fallen asleep from sheer mental exhaustion. He talked quietly to McCabe while Colby called Control, then, having made contact, reported the incident, without laying undue stress on Dr. Jolly's part in the proceedings.

Control was non-commital, but said that the matter would be referred to Carl Bressler, who had returned to New York. His instructions would be relayed later. Then followed an exchange of routine technical information; and the transmission was over.

McCabe said—"I wonder what Bressler will do?"

Captain Morgan growled. "There's nothing he can do. I'm the captain of this ship, and I make the decisions."

"Candidly I think he'll recall us," Colby observed. "You need hospital treatment, Morgan. Apart from which I think we shall be justified in leaving Dr. Jolly out of the trip—he's unlucky."

"Stuff and nonsense," roared Morgan. "This isn't the first time I've flown a ship with a couple of cracked ribs. And as for Jolly,

he's a fool, that's all. Not unlucky, just a fool. But by Jove, I'll make a space-man out of him if it's the last thing I do."

McCabe and Colby stared incredulously. In Morgan's tone there was no hint of vindictiveness or contempt for the naturalist who had been directly (if inadvertently) responsible for his injuries—only a brusque and rather good-natured bad temper. They suddenly became aware of a new facet of the Captain's mercurial character—that in spite of his frequent rages, he was too big a man to hate anyone for their weaknesses.

A little more than an hour later, Control came on the air again with the anticipated reply from Carl Bressler. Control said: "Hello *Zylex*. Message from Carl Bressler, Technical Director of Spaceways Corporation, follows. Time of origin—twenty-three fifty-four. Return to base. Repeat. Return to base. Ambulance will be standing by. Is that understood? Over."

Colby looked questioningly at Morgan, who said, without evident emotion: "Return to fiddlesticks! Tell Control we're going on with the mission—Captain's orders."

"But . . ."

"Do as I say."

Colby shrugged his shoulders resignedly. He pressed the transmit key, and spoke into the microphone. "*Zylex* to Control. Message received and understood, but Captain Morgan thinks we shall be able to . . ."

"I don't think. I give orders!" roared Morgan, with unconscious humor.

Colby broke off and started again. "Captain Morgan's orders are that we go on with the mission. Over."

"That's better," muttered the Captain.

The voice of Control came through again. "Calling *Zylex*. Control calling *Zylex*. I repeat the instructions of Carl Bressler. Return to base. Return to base. You must comply without fail. Return to base. Over."

"What does he think this is—baseball?" snapped Morgan. "Repeat my orders, then close down. I don't propose to argue all night. I'm tired."

Colby pressed the key. "*Zylex* to Control. Cannot comply. Captain Morgan's orders are to proceed with mission. Over and out."

He thumbed the master-switch, and the apparatus went dead.

McCabe turned over on his bunk. "There'll be a helluva row

about this," he said. "You're a sick man, Morgan, and Bressler's doing the right thing. Naturally we'll tag along and do whatever you say, but . . ."

"You'll have to tag along," Morgan replied flatly. "Or else bail out!"

Space travel is very much a routine business. A rocket requires little navigating between take-off and landing, the course being an elliptical orbit pre-determined on the ground before launching. Apart from minor corrections—a matter of firing the small torque jets located around the hull—it can be safely left to its own devices.

Colby was the busiest of the four men, carrying out radio contacts with Control every three hours, apart from sleeping periods. Bressler had accepted the inevitable, and had soon ceased to attempt to persuade Captain Morgan to return to Earth. Morgan was, in fact, almost completely out of action. His chest swathed in yards of plaster (the entire contents of the first-aid kit), he was virtually confined to his bunk. The enforced idleness did not suit his temperament, but he knew that in order to be fit in eight weeks—the deadline for landing on Venus—he would have to rest, and allow the fractured ribs to set. Dr. Jolly, employing his detailed knowledge of bone structure and anatomy, had done a good job with the plaster strapping, and this had broken the ice a little between the two men.

Jolly was, however, consistently miserable and forlorn. He was only too well aware of his own inadequacy as a member of the crew. Apart from performing small tasks for Morgan, he was quite useless. The loss of his spectacles (for which the Captain had never apologized) was a great blow to him. He couldn't read nor write. He was unable to focus his eyes on objects near at hand. But at long distance his vision was normal, so that he spent much time gazing through the thick glass observation ports, studying the vast globe of Earth gradually receding into the jet-black silver-peppered black-cloth of space. Occasionally he passed the time by playing chess with himself, frowning and peering at the little wooden men in earnest concentration. He wore his slippers all the time. The others used the metal-soled magnetic boots to facilitate movement about the ship, but Dr. Jolly didn't move around very much, and preferred the warmth and comfort of his slippers with their thick crepe soles.

McCable, as flight engineer, had a big task to perform—nothing less than a complete overhaul of the atomic drive and rocket jets.

Working in a pressurized anti-radiation suit, sometimes inside the ship, sometimes outside—linked to the hull by a safety line—he had to strip and renew the special heat-resisting lining of the firing chambers and jets. The maximum life of this lining was only eight minutes, just a little more than the total firing period during normal high-g take-off from Earth. A similar overhaul would have to be carried out on the return journey from Venus. It was one of the many arduous routine tasks that go to make up the technique of space-flight.

Towards the end, time dragged enormously. Even conversation seemed to wear itself out, and the men talked less and thought more. Only Morgan seemed to grow more cheerful as the pain in his chest eased, and the stiffness slowly disappeared. At the end of the sixth week he was able to move around the cabin, and was optimistically looking forward to the landing on Venus, when he would be able to get out of the ship on to solid ground once more.

Venus was soon a large ball in the forward observation port, a white mysterious ball enshrouded in cloud. Towards the end of the seventh week Morgan, with evident delight, took his seat at the pilot's control panel, and in accordance with a carefully computed plan, fired the torque jets that would swing the rocketship round in its line of flight so that the nose faced Earth and the tail pointed to the destination Venus. Once this was accomplished, a brighter, more cheerful spirit seemed to descend upon the cabin. *Zylex* was reversed —tail down—ready for the final act of deceleration and settling on the surface of the new planet. It symbolized the end of the journey and of the interminable waiting in the confined space of the cabin. Even Dr. Jolly's shoulders drooped a little less—his jaded interest in the enigma of the riti-riti began to be stimulated once more.

There remained one more important task before landing—the location of the rocketship *Anthaar* standing vertically somewhere on the vast spherical surface of Venus. It would have been like searching for a needle in the proverbial haystack—but for radar. Every rocketcraft, before being issued with a certificate of space-worthiness (without which take-off was not permitted) had to carry a small reflex beacon. This was simply a compact radar transceiver, capable of more than a year's continuous operation from self-contained batteries. It remained idle until it picked up radar pulse signals from the search equipment of another ship. The incoming signals energized the transciever, causing it to radiate a series of

coded pulses, giving the identity of the owner-ship, and providing a signal on which the searching ship could effectively "home." The reflex beacon was essentially an emergency device, and had saved the lives of many space-crews who, for one reason or another, had been stranded in space in a powerless rocketship.

Some thirty hours before the estimated time of landing, Colby settled down in front of his control panel, and carried out a careful radar sweep of the rapidly approaching Venusian surface. In nine minutes flat, tiny patterned blips appeared on the radar screen before him, and a few seconds' scrutiny sufficed to confirm that they were indeed pulses from the reflex beacon of the rocketship *Anthaar*. The plan-position indicator screen showed that the signals were coming from the north-east sector of the planet, and subsequent checks during the next few hours enabled the approximate position of *Anthaar* at the time of landing to be predicted. On the basis of this information, Captain Morgan made two small corrections to the course of *Zylex,* in order to secure a touch-down reasonably close to the target of their mission.

And then, finally, after eight weeks of increasing monotony, the landing. In every respect it was a reversal of the launching. The tuned and tested rocket-jets, idle for so many weeks, roared into vibrant life, shaking the ship into violent deceleration. Once more the four men suffered the unpleasant physiological effects of high 'g', and, strapped on to their gravity cushions, blacked out under the stress. The great ship kicked back at the planet to which it was falling, kicked more and more under the sensitive control of robot apparatus, slowing down the rate of approach, until, as deceleration fell, Morgan recovered consciousness and was able to take over the controls again.

Hands taut, eyes keenly scanning instruments and flickering screens, he brought *Zylex* down. They were falling through atmosphere now, for the sky through the observation ports was no longer jet-black, but was purple in shade, gradually brightening into a deep cerulean blue. Then down into the cloud banks they fell. Visibility dropped to zero. There was nothing to be seen but fog—white at first, but gradually shading off into gray as less light filtered through.

The rockets were thundering more heavily now, and there was considerable turbulence in the surrounding atmosphere as *Zylex* tore through it. It was definitely an instrument landing. Morgan, tensely watched by his colleagues from their bunks, fired the final rocket

bursts as the instruments indicated hard level ground beneath. The altimeter quivered above zero, then suddenly was still. The rockets ceased. There was complete silence in the cabin, broken only by a metallic creacking as the rocket swayed gently on the flats of the stabilizing fins.

The landing was successful; the journey was over; and Captain Morgan rose to accept the customary handshakes and congratulations of his crew—a small ceremony that had become traditional in the spaceways in recognition of the high degree of skill required to bring a spaceship safely to the ground.

Looking through the observation ports they were surprised to find visibility reasonably good. Heavy cloudbanks hung over the panorama, but there was no mist or rain to blur the vision. The ship appeared to be on a small plateau of smooth gray rock that might have been of volcanic origin. Beyond, stretching to a forbidding semicircle of dark jagged mountains, was a veritable jungle of multicolored vegetation. Nothing grew very tall, but foliage colors were bright and almost luminous in effect, with yellows and orange hues predominating. Dr. Jolly afterwards explained that the perpetual cloud was probably responsible for stunted growth, while heavy rainfall accounted for sheer fecundity. The landscape was reminiscent of an impressionist work of art. It had the same unreal and dreamlike quality, pervaded by the half-light that filtered through the dense gray clouds.

The radar instruments fixed the position of *Anthaar* as less than half a mile distant, towards the south. McCabe was the first to detect the slim silver cigar shape protruding above intervening undergrowth. The rocket looked deserted. Nowhere was there any sign of life, or of recent activity.

Within five minutes of landing, Dr. Jolly had gathered together his specimen boxes and a selection of instruments, and was preparing to make his first excursion into the Venusian shrubbery. Morgan, catching sight of this activity, inquired: "What do you think you're doing, Doctor?"

The naturalist beamed. "I don't wish to waste any time," he explained. "I'll just slip outside for an hour or so while you gentlemen are doing whatever you have to do. I want to gather as many specimens as I can—and riti-riti, if possible."

Morgan gave vent to a roar of laughter, which was echoed by Colby and McCabe.

"Did I say something wrong. . . .?" asked Dr. Jolly.

"Do you ever say anything right?" Morgan countered. "Think again, doctor. This is an alien world, with unknown dangers all around. Do you suppose I would let you stick your neck out without first making a thorough reconnaisance?"

"I don't see why not."

"Well I do! You will stay in the ship, and we shall bring specimens to you for examination. Under no circumstances are you to leave this ship. Those are my orders. Do you understand?"

Dr. Jolly flushed crimson. "No, I do not understand. And I resent being treated like a small boy, Captain Morgan. I have my duty to perform, just the same as you. I am going out, whatever you say."

Morgan said quietly: "If you attempt to leave this ship I shall have you tied to your bunk. Is that clear?"

Jolly held his gaze defiantly for a moment, then said: "Very well. I obey your orders under protest." He turned disconsolately and lay down on his bunk, clenching his fists with frustration.

Morgan turned to McCabe. "You and I will make the first sortie," he stated. "We'll need oxygen masks, and flame guns."

"Just a moment, chief," said McCabe. "Don't you think it would be better if Colby and I went out first. You're still an invalid—or at any rate, convalescent—and you can't afford to take chances. How are your ribs going to stand up to a rough-house."

For a fraction of a second Morgan looked as though he were about to explode, but suddenly he relaxed and shrugged his shoulders. "That makes sense," he conceded. "Okay. You and Colby can go. But don't take any risks. Just look around—locally. Keep away from *Anthaar* for the present. Be alert for any signs of animal life. Get back here in half an hour, and don't wander out of sight of the ship. And—I nearly forget—bring back a few specimens to amuse the doctor."

"Specimens of what?" McCabe queried.

"It really won't matter," said Morgan. "He can't see a durned thing without his glasses."

The three men laughed, and Dr. Jolly, laying with closed eyes on his bunk, flinched a little, but made no comment.

After Colby and McCabe had left, Captain Morgan watched them for a few minutes from the observation port. They walked slowly across the hard damp ground of the plateau and disappeared down the declivity at its edge, only to reappear a minute or two

later among the massed vegetation of the valley. Here progress was more difficult. Rubbery branches and tendrils were intertwined to form an almost impenetrable thicket. There were plants resembling cacti in form, with long sharp spines that tore at their uniforms. A curious bird with transparent wings rose vertically from a brilliant yellow shrub immediately ahead, ascending swiftly until it vanished in the low-lying cloud. And here and there something unseen scurried in the undergrowth at the sound of their approach.

Colby picked up a small shiny green beetle from a crimson leaf—a pleasing contrast in color. "Do you know what," he said. "We forgot to bring a specimen box. Otherwise I'd take this fellow back to keep the doctor happy."

"There'll be plenty of time for that," McCabe replied.

"Why do you suppose Morgan confined him to the ship?"

McCabe grinned. "Obviously so that the old buzzard won't get himself lost. Besides, what use would he be against a hostile animal—say a riti-riti?"

"Well, he *is* a naturalist," Colby pointed out. "He may even do better than us so far as dealing with strange animals is concerned."

"Not without his glasses! He wouldn't. . . ." McCabe broke off suddenly as a faint grating sound impinged upon his ears—the noise of a rusty gate creaking slowly—riti . . . riti. . . .

They looked at each other meaningly. Colby withdrew the flame gun from his belt. It was comforting to feel its cold clean lines in the palm of his hand.

The sound came again . . . riti-riti.

"How's your insulation?" Colby jested.

McCabe frowned. "I don't think it would stand up to too many kilovolts right now."

"It certainly wouldn't in those boots," said Colby.

McCabe looked down at his feet, then regarded his companion questioningly.

"A fine radio man I am!" Colby announced with a cynical laugh. "We're both still wearing the metal-soled magnetic boots. Why didn't I think of that before! Those metal soles are a perfect ground contact, especially with the soil being continually moist through constant rain. That is probably the reason why Vernon Klein and the *Anthaar* men were so easily overcome by the riti-riti—had their feet been insulated they would undoubtedly have been able to

withstand the voltage shocks they received. What we need, and haven't got, is rubber boots—and the thicker the soles the better!"

McCabe whistled in astonishment.

"But ordinary leather shoes will do," Colby continued. "They will afford some protection. Let's go back and change our footwear before it's too late. I may even be able to find some spare rubber sheet to improvise soles. . . ."

They turned round to return to *Zylex,* and found themselves face to face with three curious animals. Standing some three feet high, they resembled small rotund barrels supported on three flexible sinewy legs. In the centre of the upper barrel was a deep circular cavity in which something gleamed—like a hidden eye. A number of small tentacles dangled from the lower rim like fronds, writhing in constant motion. Set atop of the whole animal, in the dead centre of the barrel, was a short silvery antenna—in every way similar to a miniature radio whip-antenna. It was impossible to tell whether this accessory was part of the animal or not; there was no obvious junction or attachment. All creatures were identical in size, form, and color—a deep coppery bronze.

"Riti-riti . . . riti-riti," said the centre of the three. There was no mouth—the sound seemed to radiate from the barrel-shaped head portion.

Colby raised his gun slowly, with unwavering hand.

Immediately the three creatures tip-toed softly backwards as though impelled by a single impulse. They retreated about five yards, then stopped, and once more came the sound "riti-riti."

"That scared 'em," remarked Colby, completely unconvinced.

There was a gentle rustling among the vegetation, and more bronze barrels appeared. Colby did a quick count, and made it eight—but even as he was counting, more riti-riti appeared, until, in the space of a few seconds, they were surrounded by a score or more of the creatures.

"These things work fast," McCabe muttered grimly. "I don't like it—let's get out of here." He drew his own flame gun, and stepped forward warily.

Instantly a tremendous clamor arose—a chorus of "riti-riti's" superimposed, resembling the noise of some huge antiquated and rusty machine. The riti-riti began to close in . . . slowly . . . menacingly.

Colby hesitated no longer, but squeezed the trigger of his flame

gun. A crimson pencil of light streaked from the muzzle and splashed into brilliant irridescence on the nearest bronze barrel. The thing should have melted there and then, in a shapeless mass of smoking fused protoplasm, but nothing happened. It came straight on into the heat beam. The bronze barrel glowed, became orange and then white. Only then did the rubbery legs falter and wilt, and the first of the riti-riti slithered on to the ground, dead, but still intact.

Colby couldn't believe his eyes. He realized immediately that their position was hopeless, for if it took so long and so much concentrated heat to put one of the creatures out of action, then there was no hope of fighting them all. They were as tough as a heavily armored warship.

Then they got McCabe. One of the riti-riti leaped at him from the flank. There was a multitude of blue sparks and flashes as the barrel touched McCabe's arm. Before Colby's horrified gaze, McCabe went down like a felled tree—his mouth open in silent stupefaction. He lay still, as though paralyzed. The riti-riti swarmed about him.

A fraction of a second later Colby was down too. He knew nothing about it. A terrific tearing shock ripped his consciousness out of his body, and he was aware of nothing more.

A myriad small trembling tentacles picked up the two men, and, to the accompaniment of triumphant creaking sounds, the riti-riti carried their victims away into the Venusian undergrowth.

After Captain Morgan had witnessed the departure of Colby and McCabe, he turned and eyed Dr. Jolly thoughtfully. The naturalist was still lying on his bunk, his eyes closed, his expression very melancholy. Morgan's face was inscrutable. There was no emotion of any kind visible in his eyes.

"Dr. Jolly," he called, after awhile.

The doctor stirred, and opened his eyes. "Yes?" he queried sulkily.

Morgan said: "As this is the first time we have been alone together since the mission started, there are one or two things I wish to say to you—if you are prepared to listen, of course."

There was something in Morgan's tone that caused the naturalist to sit up and look at the other in some surprise.

"I'm always willing to listen," he replied. "I'm not an unreasonable man."

"Ah! . . . but I am." Morgan smiled—an unusual event, for normally he scowled, or guffawed noisily.

"I'm bound to agree," said the doctor.

"I have to be unreasonable," Morgan continued. "A man of my calling and reputation has to have violent dislikes—and equally violent likes. Responsibility brings out the iron in a man."

"Possibly," ventured Jolly, wondering what all this was leading up to.

"Yet when I broke a few ribs because of your stupidity—did I rave and shout at you and call you filthy names?"

"No—I'll admit you didn't. But I didn't know about the spectacles—it wasn't my fault. . . ."

"Who said it was?"

"The others seemed to think so."

"Colby and McCabe . . . yes, I daresay. But if you're wise you don't pay too much attention to what they think. I'm the boss of this outfit."

"We know that only too well."

"And I'm a good boss, because I tolerate no nonsense. Things are done my way, because I know what's best."

"If you say so. . . ."

"I was the first man to pilot a commercial ship to the moon. I've spent more years in space than any man alive. I know space inside out and backwards. I've been a spaceman for thirty five years. I'm fifty-seven now. Do I look it?"

Dr. Jolly shook his head. "No. You don't look more than forty."

Morgan smiled again. "I should have retired two years ago. But I didn't want to, and they wouldn't let me. Do you know why?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "because you are the best spaceman in the world!" There was a hint of irony in his voice, but Morgan missed it.

"You're dead right. I'm the best spaceman alive. I've had more experience than anyone. Another man mightn't have survived that g-crush, but I rode it easily."

"G-crush. . . .?"

"Yes—gravity crush—when I was pinned down by acceleration at take-off. That could burst a guy's heart."

"But not yours, of course . . .?"

"No. I can ride it."

"Captain Morgan," asked Jolly, determined to get to the point. "Why are you telling me all this."

Morgan hesitated. For a moment Jolly could have sworn that a flush of embarrassment suffused his face. Then he said, quietly: "Well, the point is this. . . . I want you to realize that the orders I give and the attitudes I take are based on experience and space-sense, not prejudice. I'm a hard man, perhaps, but I work according to rules. My own rules. I don't hate you, Doctor, and I don't like you particularly. You're not my kind of man. But I admit your ability. I'm not getting in the way of your line of duty. You'll have your chance. But at present you must accept my authority, and permit me to organize things my way, without question."

"I undersand," said Jolly.

"And one other thing. . . . I—er—I want to say . . . ought to have said long ago . . . how sorry I am about breaking your glasses. It wasn't intentional, believe me. I was in a flat panic, and racing against time. I just want . . ."

Morgan broke off in some confusion, then, returning to his normal abrupt and official manner, said: "And now I have some work to do, so I'll leave you to continue your nap." He hustled over to the control panel, and started flipping switches and inspecting meters, as though completely unaware that such a person as Dr. Jolly ever existed.

"Thank you," breathed the naturalist, his eyes shining. "Thank you, Captain Morgan." He rolled back on to his bunk, no longer melancholy, vaguely happy for the first time in eight weeks.

When four hours passed by with no sign of Colby and McCabe, Captain Morgan began to feel worried, and said so in his usual aggressive manner. "If those two brainless idiots have gone and gotten themselves killed or kidnapped by the riti-riti, then we're sunk. I can't return to Earth without them, and we wouldn't have a snowflake's chance in hell of getting them back alive!"

Dr. Jolly grunted thoughtfully, for he too was worried, though he didn't say so. The disappearance of the two men had altered the entire complexion of things. Something had certainly gone amiss, for they would not have remained out four hours. Twice Morgan had tried to establish radio communication with Control on Earth, but reception conditions were extremely bad, and only a faint carrier hiss could be detected, with no trace of modulation. It needed the practiced hand of Colby to drag in the greatly attenuated signals from the home planet.

Morgan and Jolly had spent most of their time gazing out of the observation ports, watching eagerly for the first sign of the returning explorers. At irregular intervals a number of small rodent-like animals had scurried among the rocks of the plateau. Then a gorgeous gold-and-green winged creature, resembling an enormous dragon-fly, had actually settled for a moment on the outside glass of one of the observation ports. In great excitement the naturalist had rushed to his bunk in search of a magnifying glass to assist his blurred vision; but when he returned the creature had gone.

There had been riti-riti too. At first only one appeared, advancing cautiously over the southern rim of the plateau. Jolly could see quite clearly at that distance, and immediately identified the creature from Vernon Klein's final brief radio report.

The lone riti-riti had advanced to within ten yards of *Zylex,* and appeared to be studying the ship intently through the single recessed eye set in the black central hole. Then, uttering a characteristic cry . . . the sound "riti-riti," the creature had returned to the valley from which it had come.

From that moment on numerous riti-riti visited the plateau, all evidently keen to see the new rocketship that had arrived on their planet—but they did not approach too near.

Dr. Jolly scrutinized the riti-riti with considerable interest. Judged by terrestrial standards, they certainly looked harmless enough—no tusks, no claws or sharp teeth—nothing ferocious that the eye could see. But there was that small silver antenna on top of the barrel-shaped head, with its threat of dangerously high voltage.

As time went on the number of riti-riti increased, and they waited around longer, herded together, until there were more than twenty standing watching the ship with blank curiosity. Suddenly, unexpectedly, something seemed to click in Dr. Jolly's brain. He peered fiercely at the group of alien animals, seething with suppressed excitement. "Captain Morgan!" he cried.

Morgan wandered over somewhat disconsolately, looking very tired. "Yes, doctor, what is it?" he asked.

The naturalist pointed to the distant riti-riti. "Tell me something Captain. . . . I can't see them too well, and I would like your opinion. Are they all the same?"

Morgan looked at him querulously. "Of course they are—what d'you expect—Noah's Ark?"

At this the doctor became suddenly formal and dignified; the naturalist on home ground.

"That wasn't quite what I meant, Captain. However, let me put it this way. Would you say that the riti-riti out there are identical in every respect?"

Morgan regarded the doctor skeptically for a moment, and then studied the group of tripeds on the plateau outside. After awhile he replied—"Yes, they are identical. So what?"

The naturalist was obviously delighted. "I thought so," he said, with evident satisfaction. "Now, Captain, doesn't that strike you as very peculiar?"

"No, it doesn't!"

"But look at the vegetation in the valley—all shapes and sizes and colors. Even shrubs of the same species—for instance those yellow ones over there—vary enormously in form."

"Well. . . .?"

"Nature obviously functions much the same as on Earth—or Mars, for that matter. The principle of diversity and mutation—universal evolution. No two animals are exactly identical—not even among the protozoa and simpler life-forms. Supposing there were a herd of elephants out there on the plateau . . . wouldn't you be surprised to find that they were all exactly similar in size, shape and color?"

Morgan stood with his hands on his hips staring blankly at the naturalist. "Okay," he said, a little too affably, "let's say I'd be surprised. But those things out there aren't elephants. They're riti-riti!"

"Quite," said Dr. Jolly, beaming. "And they're all identical!"

Slowly Morgan stroked his chin, studying the naturalist's face with assumed patience. "Look, doctor," he appealed at length, "you may think you're on to something, but candidly, I don't get it. Why shouldn't they all be identical?"

"Exactly! Why shouldn't they all be identical? Why shouldn't all cats, and dogs, and birds, and monkeys be identical? Because nature doesn't work that way. No two animals in the universe are identical."

"All right. Then you tell me. Why do all those riti-riti look as though they came off the same assembly line?"

The doctor smiled. "Yes, I'll tell you. The riti-riti don't conform to the laws of nature because they aren't natural. They look as though

they came off the same assembly line because in fact that is just what they did. They're not animals—they're machines! Robots!"

The doctor stepped back with the satisfied air of a college professor who has just elucidated a difficult theorem and written QED on the blackboard. Morgan was speechless for a second, then recovered his composure and snapped: "You're crazy! You haven't examined a riti-riti—you haven't opened one up—you can't even see them properly. Yet you say they're machines! They don't look like any machine I ever saw, and they don't act like machines. You're crazy, doc!"

Dr. Jolly replied: "I admit that my reasons may not seem wholly conclusive to you, Captain, since the evidence is, in a sense, circumstantial. But circumstantial evidence is accepted in a court of law. It can hang a man, for example. There is the incontrovertible fact that the riti-riti are identical in form. Then they have this curious electrical property—thousands of volts, we have been told—which is unique in the whole known animal kingdom. Some animals can produce relatively small electrical charges by physio-chemical means —certain eels, for example—but they do not posses radio antennae. I suggest to you that the electrical charge carried in the body of these riti-riti is picked up by the small antenna they posses, and is not primarily a protective or aggressive device, but the energizing electrical supply which enables their mechanism to function. They pick up this radiated power in the same way as a wireless receiver picks up signals. You see what that implies, don't you, Captain?"

"I see nothing."

"It implies one or more powerful transmitters. I'm not a radio man, but even I can appreciate that. And if there are transmitters, then they must have been designed, and must be operated, by intelligent life-forms. Venus has a superior life-form capable of utilizing and manufacturing robots energized by radiated electrical power. Do you follow me?"

Either Morgan did not follow, or else he was unwilling to. He was essentially a practical man, with a practical outlook on life. Instinctively he was suspicious of any intricate theoretical structure based on a few doubtful facts. He looked out of the observation port again at the riti-riti. They seemed a little nearer to the ship, and sure enough, they looked as though they had all come off the same assembly line. But they did not look like robots; he was quite positive about that.

"All right, Dr. Jolly," he announced after some deliberation. "You say they're robots. I say you're crazy. We'll find out for certain. I'll go and get you a riti-riti, then you can take it apart and find out what makes it tick."

"You mean . . .?"

"I'm going out on to the plateau to get a riti-riti."

"No—Captain, you must not. . . ."

Morgan dismissed the naturalist's protest with a wave of his hand. "It's the only way," he stated flatly. "It's not even a question of whether you're right or I'm right. The point is that we are the only two left. Colby and McCabe have gone, so it's up to us to do something. We daren't do a thing until we know more about these riti-riti, so you see, I just have to go out there and bring back one of those walking barrels. It's our only chance."

It was obvious to the naturalist that Morgan had made up his mind, and nothing could cause him to change it.

The Captain slipped a flame gun into his uniform pocket, and strapped a compact oxygen feed kit on his back. Then, with a nonchalant wave of his hand, he disappeared into the air-lock, and was gone.

Dr. Jolly stared morosely out of the observation port. After a minute or so, Morgan appeared on the plateau immediately below, walking slowly and warily towards the group of riti-riti, his flame-gun held at the ready. His object was to cut off one animal from the herd, kill it, and drag it back to *Zylex*.

As he advanced, the creatures in the centre of the group retreated slowly, so that Morgan found himself walking into a semi-circle of silent riti-riti. He proceeded cautiously, conscious of an instinctive sinister riffling sensation down his spine.

He stopped and turned suddenly to his right, singled out the animal on the extreme right, and fired. A crimson pencil of heat streaked out from the gun with geometrical precision, striking the centre of the bronze barrel just above the eye-cavity, bursting at the point of contact into a dazzling nucleus of incandescence. But the riti-riti shuffled forward into the heat ray.

Morgan was startled beyond measure. This was something without parallel in his experience. He was suddenly aware that the whole mob of alien creatures was advancing on him, encircling him. They were no longer silent, but uttered the strange creaking sounds from which their name had been derived. "Riti-riti . . . riti . . . riti."

He swung the flame-gun, and sprayed a dozen or more in a wide arc, but the weapon was ineffective. They didn't pause or hesitate—but came on with deliberate purpose. Morgan searched wildly for an avenue of escape . . . but there was none.

As the nearest of the riti-riti came within range, he kicked out mightily with his foot, a blow that sent the animal spinning through the air to bowl over half-a-dozen others. But he knew no more. At the moment of contact his foot became outlined in blue fire. Thought and feeling were swept away in a paralyzing shock. He fell heavily to the ground.

And Dr. Jolly, watching the one-sided battle from *Zylex,* was in a state bordering on panic. He stood there helplessly as the riti-riti picked up the Captain's limp body and carried it away towards the rainbow undergrowth of the valley. For several minutes he was petrified—incapable of thought or action.

Then abruptly he was consumed with rage and a vicious hatred of the alien creatures that had left him a sole survivor in a space-ship which he couldn't navigate. He resitated no longer, but rushed through the air-lock, attired as he was in jacket, and slippers, without oxygen-mask or flame-gun, and flung himself energetically down the metal ladder which connected the ship with the plateau.

The air on the plateau was hot and humid, and heavy with aromatic perfume drifting up from the valley. Before he had taken three steps Dr. Jolly was gasping for breath. He realized vaguely that the oxygen content was very low, and carbon-dioxide was present in poisonous quantities, and that he should have donned an oxygen-mask; but there was no time to go back. He pressed on, dropping to a walking pace, fighting back the almost overpowering feeling of suffocation. The riti-riti had disappeared over the edge of the plateau, and were well ahead.

After a few minutes he seemed to gain a second wind, for breathing came easier, and the symptoms of distress were largely alleviated. He hurried on at faster pace. Here was the edge of the plateau, and the steep declivity dropping into the colorful miniature jungle of strange plants and shrubs. He plunged into the vegetation, following the worn trail taken by the riti-riti.

By this time his anger had abated, and he began to think logically once again. The situation was not comfortable. Foolishly he had come out with no weapon other than his own frail fists. If one of the riti-riti saw him, and attacked—well, he would go down just as the

tough and seasoned campaigner Morgan had gone down. But he had to find out where the creatures were taking the Captain—without that knowledge he would be completely helpless, and doomed to a certain death on this strange hostile world.

The trail twisted for about a mile through the dense vegetation, and most of the time the riti-riti were out of sight, being smaller in stature than the average height of the undregrowth; but he could hear the continual creaking noise of their conversation and knew that he was never very far behind.

He had been walking for about forty minutes, and was rapidly becoming footsore and exhausted, when suddenly he was at the edge of the vegetation. Before him stretched a large rectangular clearing, in the centre of which stood a small arched structure of what looked like smooth black basalt rock. It had the appearance of an entrance—but there was no building or construction into which it opened. But the mystery was soon solved, for the herd of riti, with Morgan's body in the centre, pushed their way into the semi-circular opening, and disappeared below ground level. The archway was obviously the door to a stairway, or incline, leading underground.

Dr. Jolly waited until the last of the riti-riti had gone, then cautiously crossed the open space to the arch. At the entrance he looked around, then peered into the semi-darkness. There was simply a long narrow arched tunnel, dipping steeply down under the ground, faintly illuminated by regularly spaced rectangles of phosphorescent material located near the floor. About a hundred yards ahead he could just make out the last of the aliens moving on into the increasing gloom.

He took a deep breath, then went into the tunnel, walking as silently as possible so as not to arouse suspicion. He was thankful for his crepe-soled slippers . . . they made no sound whatsoever. On and on, deeper and deeper into the subsoil of Venus, and then, rounding a corner, he saw the destination of the riti-riti, and stood amazed.

The tunnel terminated abruptly, opening into a gigantic cavern that seemed to have been cut out of solid rock by some mammoth machine. High up in the vast dome of the roof swirled a blinding nebula of intensely brilliant light, like an artifical sun, pouring warmth and radiance down upon the floor of the cavern, sharply etching out the cubic outlines of a hundred or more metallic build-

ings, standing proudly in serried lines, as though on parade. The buildings were simple in design, like huge biscuit boxes, windowless, but with tall wide doors that would almost accommodate an elephant. In the center of this miniature cubist city stood a tall oblong tower, surmounted at the apex by a complicated antenna array.

Jolly took in the whole scene at a glance, and immediately formulated a theory to account for all that he saw. This was a Venusian city, inhabited by the intelligent life-form of Venus. The houses were big, with wide doors, indicating that the master animals were much larger than their robot slaves—the riti-riti. And in the centre of the cavern stood the radio building, containing transmitters and associated equipment to energize and control the electrical tripeds.

As to the reason for it all—he could only surmise. Apart from numerous riti-riti, the avenues between the buildings were deserted. The true inhabitants of Venus were apparently all indoors. Possibly they had become emasculated and vulnerable through centuries of easy living and excessive mental evolution, so that robots were an essential part of their social organization—to bring food, perform physical labor, carry out building and excavation.

One thing was obvious. The life's blood of the riti-riti was transmitted electrical power. The powerful heart of the system was the central radio tower before his eyes. That, therefore, must be his target: if he could destroy the apparatus in that building, then the riti-riti would be helpless.

The radio tower was about a quarter of a mile distant, at the bottom on a broad avenue. As he stood there surveying the scene, and pondering over the best course of action to take, he became aware of a faint rustling from the rear. He turned swiftly, just in time to see half a dozen riti-riti rounding the bend in the tunnel. For a second they stood facing each other, the six Venusian tripeds and the Terrestrial biped, then Dr. Jolly spun round, and was off down the main central avenue as fast as his legs could carry him.

But the riti-riti were faster, and in a few seconds were outflanking him, uttering piercing shrieks of warning that brought more and more of the creatures into the avenue, until the doctor realized that he was surrounded, and hadn't a chance. He stopped running, and stood helplessly, panting heavily to regain his breath. The riti-riti came on. This is the end, he told himself . . . this is the end; and you can't do a thing about it.

As the first riti-riti leaped at him, he flinched involuntarily. The

think struck him heavily on the chest. He swayed, anticipating the inevitable electrical black-out, but it did not come. Instead there was a powerful burning shock that momentarily contorted his body—but no black-out—no unconsciousness. Exultant and overjoyed, he stood there for a few seconds, allowing the riti-riti to leap at him, almost savoring the cruel stabbing jolt of electricity at each contact. He couldn't explain it: the thing was impossible, but there it was. He could stand up to the riti-riti where Morgan and all the others had failed.

Then, growing bolder, he swept the barrel-shaped creatures aside with his arms, and set off down the avenue towards the radio tower, not knowing that his immunity to the electrical sting of the riti-riti was due entirely to his crepe slippers and the dry smooth ground—a combination that provided high insulation. But the knowledge that he was immune gave him abounding confidence and strength; he was conscious of a pleasant feeling of elation and triumph.

Riti-riti came from all sides to impede him and obstruct his progress, but he would have none of it, and pushed them aside with vicious energy, reveling in his newly-found sense of power. Breathless but victorious he reached the radio tower, and without hesistating for a moment, plunged through the wide gaping door.

He was in a large square room, brightly lit, but bare, apart from patterned and inscribed tapestries on the walls, suggestive of oriental art and technique on Earth. At the far end of the chamber was a further door, and beyond that a spiral ramp leading upwards to the next floor. Jolly went up, and this time found himself in a room that was clearly connected with radio. There were metallic fittings and panels set with glowing lights suggestive of control units, but completely unfamiliar in design. He did not feel satisfied, but ascended a further ramp to the floor above.

This, he knew, was the final destination. Here was the transmitter room. Although he knew nothing of radio, nevertheless he was able to recognize that the mass of equipment before him, fashioned in gleaming alloy and glass, with glowing filaments visible here and there in the assembly, was radio apparatus. There was an indefinable air of power. The floor throbbed gently, as though from a distant dynamo.

The next problem was . . . how to wreck a huge transmitter. Once again he was without any kind of weapon or tool, but searching around for some suitable missile, he came across a heavy cylindrical

block of unimaginable purpose. He lifted it with difficulty, supported it on his shoulder for a moment, then hurled it with all his might into the centre of the intricate machinery.

He was momentarily blinded by a sudden flash, accompanied by the crash of sabotaged metal and glass. Something glowed blue, then was obliterated by a rising cloud of dense pungent smoke, pushed upwards from the heart of the apparatus by livid tongues of flame.

Dr. Jolly stook back, satisfied, and surveyed his handiwork. The transmitter was well and truly on fire. This was the final proof that the riti-riti were robots. . . . They should now be helpless, and in effect dying from electrical starvation.

He turned towards the door, anxious to find out what had happened to Captain Morgan, and also Colby and McCabe, but stopped abruptly, white and shaken. The aperture of the door was almost entirely filled by a nightmare monster that filled him with horror and fear. Roughly in the form of a riti-riti, but more immensely complicated, it glistened like a gigantic gray octopus. It moved slowly and heavily on thick curling tentacles, and seemed to survey him through a multitude of black eye apertures ringing the squat cylindrical body.

After the first paralyzing shock of encounter, Dr. Jolly recovered a little of his self-confidence. Quite apart from the unpleasant appearance of the thing, there was really no suggestion of menace or threat; in fact, he had a distinct feeling that the creature was merely looking at him with mild curiosity. He advanced upon it warily, then, extending a forefinger, poked at its jelly-like body in a tentative manner.

The creature withdrew sharply, almost indignantly. Jolly repeated the prod, and the monster, apparently disgusted with its reception by the visitor from Earth, waddled clumsily out of the doorway, down the sloping ramp to the floor below, then down again to ground level. Dr. Jolly followed closely, poking the thing occasionally to maintain his mastery of it. This was his hour of triumph—he felt as though he had conquered a whole planet.

In the bare ground floor room a number of riti-riti lay prostrate on the floor, their rubbery legs sagging and lifeless. He touched one of them to make sure there was no electrical charge left. The bronze barrel was cold and metallic to the touch; and there was no move-

ment or reaction or sign of life. The riti-riti were just so many useless heaps of machinery.

The doctor prodded the giant octopoid creature through the main entrance door of the radio tower, and out into the avenue.

Slowly and painfully Captain Morgan recovered consciousness, to find himself lying on a cold hard stone surface. Through half-opened eyes he took in the brilliantly lit scene around him—the large metal buildings and the wide straight road, littered with hundreds of bronze shapes. . . .

Then he was suddenly wide awake as the full significance of the panorama burst upon him. The riti-riti were dead. That was the first wild thought that flashed through his mind, but a second later he dismissed the idea as too fantastic. Yet there they were—scores of riti-riti—scattered on the ground, helpless and inactive.

He stood up shakily, feeling a little weak and dizzy after the terrific electric shock he had sustained. Experimentally he put out a foot to nudge one of the riti-riti, but hesitated and abandoned the idea, not caring to risk a repetition of the electronic knock-out. Instead he took stock of his surroundings, noting the form of the cavern with its blazing artificial sun, and geometrically arranged dwellings. The problem was—where to find Colby and McCabe, if they were still alive; and also the crew of the rocketship *Anthaar*, if possible. He did not pause to wonder why the riti-riti were out of action. It was sufficient to accept the fact, and act upon it, then theorise later. But one thing he realized—that Dr. Jolly had been right. The riti-riti were indeed robots—that was the only way in which it was possible to account for this sudden unanimous breakdown of these lethal automatons. Old Jolly would be pleased when he knew. He pictured the naturalist waiting in the spaceship, sunk in misery and gloom, waiting for something to happen, and wondering if he were doomed to die on Venusian soil. A queer type, definitely . . . not a space man, not even a man's man, but brilliant in his own sphere, with a quiet dignity that did not match his shabby stooped appearance. No hero—but nevertheless, not entirely devoid of quality.

Morgan studied the radio tower thoughtfully. It seemed to occupy a central position in the cavern, and it occurred to him that the place could be a sort of headquarters to which prisoners might be taken. It was at least a starting point for his search. There was

a possibility of finding clues that might lead him to the others. Accordingly, he set off towards the tower, carefully threading his way between the prostrate forms of the riti-riti.

The town was silent and, apart from the inactive robots, completely deserted. He was surprised to find that he was still clutching the flame-gun in his hand—with the instinct of a warrior he had held on to his weapon even while unconscious. Looking at it, he was tempted to throw it away, since it had proved itself to be completely useless against the riti-riti; but he remembered Dr. Jolly's hint that the presence of robots on Venus implied the existence of a controlling intelligent life-form, and decided to retain it.

A few minutes later he was glad that he did, for turning a corner, and coming into full view of the radio tower, he caught his first glimpse of the ruling species of Venus. It was emerging from the wide gaping door at the base of the tower, a monstrous gelatinous entity, vaguely reminiscent of a giant octopus, moving heavily on thick sinewy tentacles. Morgan, tough as he was, went white and tense with transient fear—but that only lasted for a moment. He was essentially a man of action. Alone on a hostile planet, and confronted by a repulsive creature as big as an elephant, there was only one thing to do. He raised his flame gun and fired.

The thing dissolved into a welter of dense white smoke and flame, sizzling like frying fat. There was a long drawn out scream that seared his brain. He released the trigger, suddenly aware that the cry of pain he had heard possessed a very human quality. Then something staggered from behind the charred mass of the octopoid, and collapsed on the ground—something unmistakably terrestrial, wearing clothes, horribly burned and disfigured. For a moment he thought it was Colby or McCabe, and ran franticly towards the smouldering form; but as he drew near, he realized that the impossible had happened. The man on the ground was Dr. Jolly.

He turned him over gently, appalled at the havoc the flame-gun had wrought upon that frail body. Jolly was dying rapidly. His eyes, staring upwards at Morgan, already had a smooth glazed quality that signified the approach of death. Morgan said, in a choked voice: "I'm sorry, Doc . . . believe me, I didn't know. . . ." Somehow the words seemed inadequate. No words could express what he felt at that moment.

The naturalist's voice was a mere strained whisper, and Morgan bent closer to catch the words. "Don't worry, Captain . . . you

shouldn't have killed that thing . . . it's a Venusian man . . . ugly, but harmless. . . ." His lips tried to force themselves into a smile. "I was right about the riti-riti . . . wasn't I?"

Morgan nodded. The doctor closed his eyes, and continued: "I'm glad about that. Captain Morgan . . . will you bury me here . . . on Venus . . . on the plateau. Perhaps they'll think . . . think of me as a . . . space man—after all. You always said you'd make a space man out of me . . ."

His voice trailed off into silence. Morgan said: "Forget it Doc, you're going to be all right . . ." but there was no reply. He added gently, "All right, Doc. I'll do that. They'll remember you as a true pioneer of the spaceways."

There was nothing more to be said, and Dr. Jolly died a few minutes later. Morgan removed his tunic, and spread it over the small insignificant body. He took one final look at all that remained of the naturalist, and went into the radio tower.

There, on the second floor, he saw the story of Dr. Jolly's courage recorded in the smoke and flames of the blazing transmitter room.

During the next two hours, Morgan wandered through the city, searching for some clue as to the whereabouts of the others. He entered several of the cubic houses, and found them occupied by more of the giant octopus-like creatures. But there was no hostility. As he crossed the threshold, they cringed away from him, as though already fully aware of the deadly potentialities of the flame-gun in his hand.

Eventually he came to the outer perimeter of the town, to the empty border adjacent to the sheer walls of the cavern. He decided to follow the wall around its length, and before very long came upon a large arched opening, above which, on a rectangular slab, was a weirdly patterned inscription.

He passed through the opening, and found himself in a smaller cavern, illuminated more softly by a smaller nebulous sun near the roof. In the centre was a large circular garden, set with multicolored trees and plants, exuding a heavy perfume similar to that of the valley. Around the walls of the cavern were a series of large transparent windows, oval in shape, made from what appeared to be a tough resilient plastic. In each window, set amid characteristic Venusian surroundings of rock and colored vegetation, were animals, insects and birds of different species. For a few minutes he was puzzled by this obviously planned collection of local fauna, then

it struck him that the place was in fact a kind of zoo. Each recessed enclosed cavity contained particular specimens of one Venusian species.

Rather astonished at this discovery, he walked around the exhibits, scrutinizing sorrowfully the astonishing variety of life-forms on display. The animals looked well fed and clean. He thought how delighted Dr. Jolly would have been at this ready made collection of specimens . . . but that was past and done with, and he did not care to dwell in the past.

Then, about half-way round the circular walls of the cavern, immediately after a cage containing a pair of gaudy multi-eyed birds, he found McCabe. The engineer was in a cage of his own, sitting on a rock, chin in hands, gazing blankly and morosely through the plastic window of his prison. Morgan just stood and gaped in astonishment. McCabe—a specimen in a zoo! The idea was so ludicrous that, in spite of himself, he burst into a guffaw of raucous laughter. McCabe sprang up in wild excitement, caught sight of Morgan, then executed a dance of pure joy, waving his clasped hands above his head like a prizefighter.

And there, in the five neighboring cages, were Colby, Paul Vernon Klein, and the other three members of *Anthaar's* crew— all healthy-looking zoo specimens.

Morgan released them all by the simple expedient of burning through the transparent plastic windows with the flame-gun. In a few moments he was the centre of a congratulating crowd of men. They all tried to seize his hands and shake them at once. "Good old Morgan," cried Colby. "I knew you'd pull it off." "The finest spaceman in the universe," said McCabe. Vernon Klein, looking pale and anaemic after weeks of captivity in artificial light, in an atmosphere too replete with carbon-dioxide and insufficient oxygen, slapped Morgan on the back and said "Good man. I never gave up hope, because I knew they'd send you to bring us back."

But Morgan silenced them all, and said quietly: "I'm not the man you have to thank. I too was a prisoner of the riti-riti. The real hero was Dr. Jolly. He discovered the truth about the riti-riti—that they weren't animals at all, but robots. He found his way into this underground cavern and destroyed the transmitter in the radio tower, thus cutting off the energizing power supply to the riti-riti. Dr. Jolly was the man who rescued you—not me."

"Was . . .?" queried Colby, half guessing the truth.

"Yes," explained Morgan. "He's dead. I killed him."

There was strange silence for a few seconds.

"You killed him?" echoed Vernon Klein.

"Accidentally," said Morgan. "I fired at a . . . one of those octopus monsters. Jolly was behind it. I think he had captured it—or something of the sort. They were coming out of the radio tower, after Jolly had wrecked the transmitter. I saw the thing, and killed it. Then I saw Jolly . . . but it was too late to do anything. He died in my arms."

"I'm sorry," Colby murmured.

"We must get back to the radio tower, and take his body back to the plateau," Morgan continued. "His last request was that we should bury him here, on Venus, as a pioneer. It's the least we can do for him."

Solemnly the seven men filed back into the main cavern, towards the radio tower that was now a burning pyre adding a flickering orange glow to the cold white light of the artificial sun.

They buried Jolly on the following day in drizzling rain, close to the rocketship. McCabe constructed a small cross out of silver alloy, and inscribed on it "Dr. Ebenezer Jolly—Rescuer of the First Venusian Expedition—Pioneer of the Spaceways—May 9th, 2084." They erected the cross at the head of the grave, and said their last farewells to a little man who had risen high in their esteem.

Vernon Klein, in spite of his long sojourn in the Venusian zoo, could add but little to their limited knowledge of the octopus people of the cavern. He and his colleagues had been quickly and effectively taken prisoner by the riti-riti, as had the crew of *Zylex*. They had recovered consciousness in the cages, and there they had stayed, in perpetual imprisonment, during the long nightless weeks. The riti-riti had displayed no further interest in them after their capture, but from the first moment on, they had been subjected to continual observation and scrutiny by the octopoid monsters, who had filed past their cages to study the strange visitors from space. They realized that these creatures were the true inhabitants of the underground city, while the riti-riti were in the nature of slaves. But it had never occurred to Vernon Klein, or the others, that the riti-riti were, in fact, not animals but robots.

No attempt was made to communicate with them by the octopoids, nor were they molested in any way. They were fed regularly

on vegetable matter of curious taste, which, while not very appetizing, was nevertheless quite nourishing.

The truth was that they were treated with the solicitous but inquisitive detachment normally accorded to zoo specimens. "And," added Klein, "from now on every animal in a terrestrial zoo has my sympathy! It was the most demoralizing thing I have ever experienced —being on the wrong side of a cage-window."

Vernon Klein was of the opinion that there were many such colonies of octopoids served by riti-riti on Venus. This was the form into which Venusian civilization had crystalized—a weak and almost helpless, but highly intelligent, master race, employing tough radio-controlled robots to do all the work, and provide food. The source of power was undoubtedly atomic. Preliminary tests soon after the landing of *Anthaar* had revealed large underground deposits of radioactive material—probably uranium ore. For this reason alone it was essential that Venus should be colonized—the vast resources of fissionable matter would still further boost interplanetary travel, and increase the power of mankind.

And Dr. Jolly had provided the key to the problem of dealing with the riti-riti. Colby, the radio engineer, had previously hit upon the idea of insulated clothing; but Jolly, with his crepe-soled slippers, had carried out that idea successfully in practice. That was the reason they were all free once again to return to Earth.

There followed three days of intense activity, during which the two rockets, *Anthaar* and *Zylex* were minutely overhauled and prepared for the return journey. Morgan sent off a detailed report via radio to Control, and was pleased to receive a signal of commendation from Carl Bressler, but dismissed it in his characteristic manner. "Words! What good are words . . . it's action that counts!"

Then, finally, towards the end of the fourth day, as heavy clouds gathered and fog descended to darken the scene, the two rockets roared and spat flame in perfect synchronism. Slowly at first, then more and more swiftly, they rose from the damp Venusian soil, and thundered through the dense obscuring cloud. Then out of the mist, out of the atmosphere, and into the intense black star-jeweled vastness of interplanetary space. Only a small cross and a mound of stones remained to mark the landing-site of the first Earth-Venus Expeditions.

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FREDERICK

By ATLANTIS HALLAM

The Martian "bemmie" had dreamed of a way of life to which he hoped to become accustomed, and he found that utopia on Terra.

Lydia Andrews listened intently to the summertime newscast concerning the local mosquito plague. And being a meticulous housekeeper with an aversion to bugs, flies, and mosquitoes, she got up to check the living room windows. Satisfied, she sighed with relief as she returned to the wicker lounge chair once more. The screens *were* all right. They were new.

But even as she leaned back knowing that her geologist husband was due in any moment, she wondered what the *screwball,* as she affectionately pegged him, would bring back this time from his bauxite-exploration trip to Mars. Then she shrugged, and smiling to herself let it go. But even as she did, she heard the familiar *tum, ta ta tum tum,* boom boom, on the door.

"Liddie!"

"Darling!"

But he didn't catch her up in both arms as he came in. He held her instead, only with one arm. Looking at him, she then noticed he held a string in the other hand at his side.

"What's *that,* John . . . that thing behind you?"

"Oh, him . . ." and he laughed, wrinkling his nose at her. "He's for *you!*"

"Oh, *John,*" and she glanced ceilingward wearily. "Okay, what is it this time?"

"He's a bemmie, darling, and his name's Frederick. I found him in a strawberry patch on Mars. And I trained him, while I was getting those new ore samples."

As he spoke, John Andrews carefully took the string from about the neck of the clumsy-looking bird that stood there, about two feet high, his big eyes shyly regarding Lydia. She looked closely at Frederick, frowning a little. Immediately the bemmie hid behind her husband again.

"What's he hiding behind you for?"

"Not used to you, dear. They're all like that. He's self-conscious. All bemmies are."

"I've heard of them," she said suspiciously, "but I never expected to see one."

"Oh, they're real friendly and nice," John said hastily, "and they can *never* fly away."

"That's nothing in his favor," and Lydia moved a little to the side, to see behind John again. "He looks like an overweight goose."

"See—! He's curious about you too!"

"What can they do, I mean—are they good for anything?"

"Oh, *sure*. Lots of things!"

"Like what, for instance?"

"Well . . . Frederick, that's his name."

"Yeah. You told me that."

"Oh, you'll learn to like him, Liddie."

"But he can't even fly," and she looked at her husband, weighing her decision.

"But he enjoys sleep," John said hopefully. "And he likes to eat regularly. Strawberries, mostly."

"*Strawberries!* At today's prices!"

"Yes, dear," and John's voice sounded weak and far away as he looked down at Frederick again.

"He's absolutely worthless," Lydia said finally. "A *worthless* creature."

A worried look on his face, John glanced again at the homely bird as he sat down on the sofa.

"Come on, Freddie," he said, "come over next to papa."

Frederick, with a hurt glance at Lydia, waddled over to John. John leaned forward, tenderly stroking the bemmie's mud-colored feathers.

"See! Freddie likes to be petted too."

"Oh, *John!* Of all things—where in the world are we going to keep that Martian turkey, here in a one-bedroom apartment!"

"Oh . . . I thought maybe in there, honey, in the kitchen. We could get a box and—"

But even as John stood up from the couch to show his wife, they noticed something. Head low, bill tucked against his breast, Frederick was heading straight across the room. Her eyes wide, Lydia stood watching with her husband. Frederick went to the far corner of the living room, putting his stub beak squarely in the corner. Lydia turned quickly to John, a question on her lips.

"*Now* see what you've done," John told her.

"Me—what have *I* done?"

"You hurt Freddie's feelings, *that's* what!"

"Well, of all things! You mean to stand there, John Andrews, and tell me that Martian dodo *knows* what I said?"

"I certainly do. Bemmies are smart, 'specially Freddie. And sensitive too. And he can tell exactly how you feel about him, even if he can't talk."

"Well, of *all* things . . ." Lydia repeated, glancing again at the upturned tail feathers in the far corner.

"And he can coo lots too. But he'll never do that unless he's happy. Only if you pet him."

But though they were talking about him, Frederick hadn't turned. Instead, he pushed his beak deeper into the corner, his short non-flying wings tucked closely against him.

"Now," John said accusingly, "he won't even feel like catching mosquitoes, much less eating strawberries."

"Mosquitoes? Does he—does Frederick really catch them, John?"

"Oh, sure. Sure he does—" and he mentally kicked himself for not first mentioning Frederick's most redeeming quality. "He's a whizz at it! The slightest buzz and—"

But even as he spoke Frederick's head was suddenly up, alert, cocked in the air. He turned, neck outstretched, and headed for the window curtain. Lydia and John followed spell-bound. Then they saw it—a large mosquito, sounding like a miniature buzz saw. As they watched, the mosquito momentarily alighted on the curtain gauze. That was enough. Frederick's beak snapped. With its click, Frederick turned triumphantly. Noticing them behind him, he turned and went straight back to his corner.

"See! That's Freddie! I *told* you he could!"

"Gosh . . ." Lydia said. "He really catches mosquitoes."

"He sure does! And bemmies never fight or cause trouble, dear. They're harmless and keep away all insects. And Freddie's a real peace-loving soul. But," he added cautiously, "he still feels bad about what you said."

"He does? How—that is, John, what should I do?"

"Oh just talk to him—say his name real nice. Freddie can tell by your voice, if you like him."

"Oh, Frederick—? *Freddie* . . . come over to me, little Freddie."

As they both leaned forward from the sofa, Frederick looked out at them from his corner. He saw the smile on Lydia's face. Then John too stretched out his hand, and both he and Lydia spoke soothingly to the bashful bemmie. Hesitating a moment then feeling wanted, Frederick started toward them, his head cocked to one side as he solemnly regarded Lydia. She laughed softly as he came and placed his beak on her knee. Then Frederick gently leaned his brown-feathered head against her hand.

"I guess I'll never have to be afraid of bugs any more," she said, stroking Frederick's crested head, "now that Freddie is living with us. . . ."

As Lydia spoke, Frederick leaned closer, cooing contentedly.

"Sure," John agreed, "and Freddie's found a home!"

John and Lydia, that first night, had prepared a box in the kitchen for Frederick. And with a dish of thawed out frozen strawberries, his bed padded with clean straw, they had gone off to their bedroom happy in the knowledge that Frederick was completely at home.

But that was *that* night. And *that* night was two long weeks ago.

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John woke first and, raising up on his elbow from his place on the floor beside the sofa, he gently shook Lydia to waken her.

"Ohhh—it's you, John darling," and she smiled sleepily down at him from the living room couch. "How'd you sleep, dear?"

"Oh, okay I guess. But my back hurts."

"What time is it, John?"

"Only seven-thirty. Say—maybe I better go in the bedroom and wake Freddie?"

"Oh, *no* you don't! You know very well he doesn't like to be

disturbed. And besides, he flatly refuses to touch his strawberries before ten."

"Yes, dear," John said meekly. Roundly cursing Mars under his breath, he lay back down.

"And that reminds me—" Lydia said, jumping up and dropping the blanket on John's head as she climbed over him, "I *must* call the market. I'll have to order another case of fresh strawberries. Freddie doesn't much care for the frozen ones."

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DOMINANT SPECIES

By E. EVERETT EVANS

ILLUSTRATED BY ARNOLD WALTER

In his conquest of the galaxy man had met few serious threats to his supremacy. But this walking plant possessed a tremendous power—

Their eyes saw, but their minds refused to believe. Nothing yet seen on this new planet in any way resembled the *alienness* of this . . . this garden. For up until now, all the Surveyors had remarked on how this world might well be the twin of Terra.

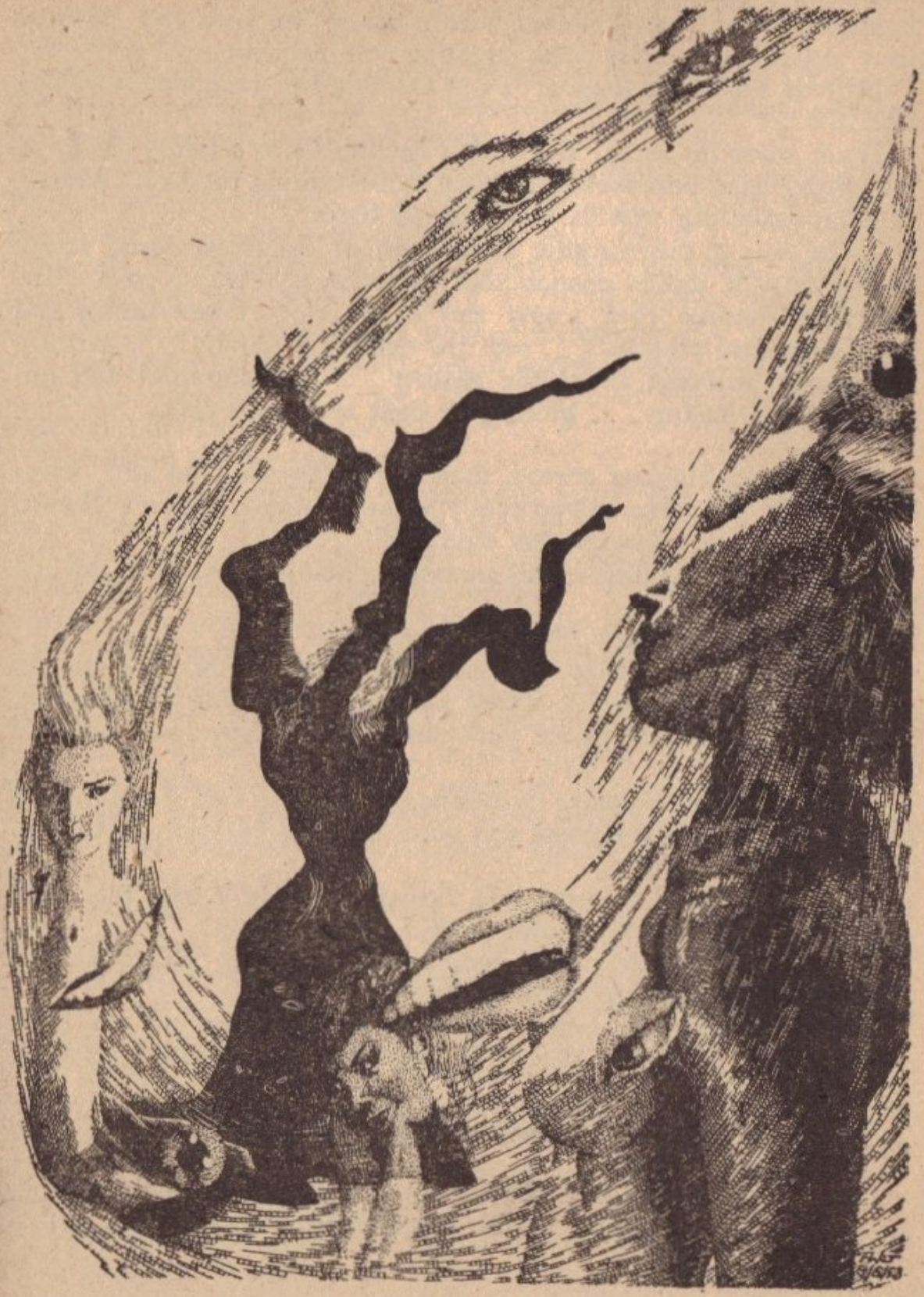
Lloyd Flane, geologist, ubiquitous cigarette dangling unheeded from slack lips, stepped jerkily forward into a light which suddenly seemed to have changed from clear sunlight to a rubrous and offensive dimness that had a quality like crimson rust intermingled with the leprous gray-green abomination of decay.

A continuation of the small, clear brook from which they'd drunk back in the forest, was now a sluggishly moving, viscous fluid with the color and consistency of poisoned, foetid blood.

Slowly Flane grew aware of Garry Hartner's actions. His huge-framed friend stood on out-spread legs, hands jammed in his pockets, fixedly staring at this strange garden. The flora here had the most unnatural, horrible shapes they'd seen on countless worlds. The leaves were small and of a pulpy, ulcerous appearance. Dark purples, dull reds and sullen blacks and greens predominated.

And up until now everything they'd seen on this new planet had more or less reminded them of the Home World. It had almost made them home-sick.

Flane watched in fascination as vines seemed to crawl and wind



around and among the stunted, twisted bushes. Their tendrils and branches, which were covered with a scum like verdigris, writhed in a sinuous dance that was repelling yet magnetic.

Hartner broke the silence. "Even Dante never imagined anything like this."

Flane made no reply. The sullen breezes were sending taints of the concentrated putrescence of every soul-wracking foulness creeping through quivering nostrils and into his brain.

There was a commingled fascination of longings, lusts, subtle knowledges of things unspeakable. Spots were forming in the air, and these became eyes, singly and in pairs . . . bewitching and beguiling. And mouths . . . red lips pursed invitingly . . . dancing a fantastic saraband above the garden . . . unsupported and unattached . . . calling . . . hinting by their very *otherness*.

Beside him, Hartner stirred, then started forward on stiff, knee-locked legs, plodding purposefully straight ahead. Flane followed slowly, compelled beyond his strength.

But somewhere, deep in his innermost being, a small alarm bell began ringing.

But he could not stop his steady advance.

Flane had gone perhaps a dozen feet when the scene began to change in his perceptions. Those morose colors shifted, blending into beautiful and iridescent pinks and blues, yellows and emerald greens.

Those mutilated-seeming bushes began opening and straightening until the stunted horribleness was gone, metamorphosed into bloom-covered plants.

The little stream thinned and cleared, became a cool mountain rivulet running swiftly, cleanly over a gravelled bed.

Fear left Flane. His step lengthened, his eyes gleamed with pleasure. He caught up with his friend.

"This is more like home, Garry," he said, slapping his huge companion on the back. "What the devil d'you suppose made us think at first it was such an evil . . ."

His voice died away in puzzled wonder at sight of his friend's face.

For this transformation into a beautiful garden must not—could not—have been apparent to the larger man. His face was still a mask of loathing.

There was a sharper note from that inner alarm in Flane's consciousness.

What could it . . . he *did* actually see all that horrible mess . . . but now it was so beautiful . . . what ailed Garry, anyway? Looked like he was in a daze, like he'd been . . .

"Hypnosis!" he marvelled, then as it really penetrated, he grabbed Hartner's arm and jerked on it. "Fight it, Garry!" he yelled. "Something here's hypnotic! Fight it. Think, Man, *think!*"

Slowly, ponderously, Hartner turned to face him. His face darkened. His lips drew back in a snarl. He sprang forward, his hands outstretched toward his smaller companion.

Speed saved Flane. He ducked and darted away.

"Garry, you fool!" he yelled. "Snap out of it! You're hypnotized. Fight! Think! Don't give in!"

His words had no effect.

Hartner came steadily toward him, great fists clenching and unclenching, lips twisted, voice bellowing.

Flane tried to lure him away, hoping to get him outside the sphere of influence . . . if there were an "outside." But Hartner wouldn't—or couldn't—go beyond a certain distance.

Flane became aware of a *compulsion* growing in his mind. Something calling him. Suggesting delights of mind and body so sensuous, so suggestive in their alien newness. He slowed, turned, and slowly re-advanced toward the center of the garden. Were those really exquisite bodies he saw? White, white breasts, and provocative lips?

His pace quickened, his breath came in lustful gasps. He was almost up to Hartner when the latter again reached out his great arms, menacingly.

Startled, Flane turned and ran deep into the nearby wood from which they'd so recently come. Ran until he felt himself free Kept on until every vestige of influence seemed gone from his mind.

"Must have time to think this out," he muttered, sinking onto a mossy knoll, panting and leg-weary.

He lit a cigarette, gratefully drawing soothing smoke into his mouth and lungs. The peacefulness of the almost-earthly wood soothed him. He glanced about at nodding flowers that might have been growing on Earth; up at chattering, gaily-plumaged birds, chasing each other in games of tag.

"Something's certainly screwy out there," he thought carefully. "Ever since the Expedition landed here, we've all been so surprised

that everything seemed like home. All the reports from all the experts pointed out that this was a perfect planet for colonizing. Atmosphere, temperature, gravity—all almost exactly like Terra. Metals in abundance; good water; plenty of edible and usable plant-life. Nothing inimical. No sign of intelligent life to dispute our taking over. And now this . . . this . . ."

He finished his cigarette. His trembling had stopped, his heart and lungs were behaving normally, his stomach had stopped doing flip-flops. Suddenly he arose decisively.

Carefully he retraced his steps towards the clearing of . . . *what?* He went fairly swiftly, yet his mind was vigilantly watching *itself* every step he took. He was seeking the exact instant and place in which that hypnotic spell started to take hold.

He came finally to the clearing's very edge. Took a slow, cautious step into it. Stopped and looked and listened.

To his sight the clearing now was like thousands of others they'd seen about the planet in the midst of the many forests that dotted its surface. Long waving grass, some bushes, a little meandering stream. And on all sides, the forest.

No garden at all!

He looked quickly about for Hartner. Saw him, finally, lying face down, near the center. Just in front of a bush, larger than most.

There was something peculiar about that bush.

Flane puzzled for moments. There was a queerness, a *twistiness* to it, a certain fuzziness of outline, as though it were surrounded by a thick haze, or seen through deep, clear water.

It *wavered*.

Slowly Flane paced backward, but the scene did not change. Forward again, even more slowly, one, two, three paces. Still no change.

Step by slow step he advanced, watching himself intently, hoping to notice any change in his mental processes, to be able to detect before it was too late just when the hypnosis began to take control.

"Maybe *What-ever-it-is* has quieted down," he thought. "I'm still my own master. I *think* I am," he repeated to himself, as though to give himself confidence.

He remembered having read that no one could be hypnotized against their definitely opposed will. He hoped this was true. He certainly was definitely opposed.

Flane finally came to a stop beside Hartner's body. He stooped

down, felt for the jugular. It was pulsing strongly, evenly. His breath suspirated in relief. Hartner wasn't dead, then.

He looked more closely at the peculiar bush.

Close-up the haziness was gone. He saw it was about five and a half feet high, its alienness partly due to its queer, hourglass shape, with its almost flat top. But the thing that caught and demanded attention was a bulbous growth in the slender central part—a translucent sort of bulb about the size of a large Terran grape-fruit. There was a shifting play of color within this globe, of strangely colored liquids, that fascinated him, rooted his eyes by its *aliveness.*

He became so engrossed that he did not notice movement at one side.

Two great arms reached out, two huge hands were suddenly about his throat, squeezing.

Flane's breath was stopped. He could feel his eyes bulging. His senses reeled beneath that horrible constriction.

Relentlessly, Flane did a thing he'd never have done under ordinary circumstances to any living man. Lifting his leg he viciously kneed Hartner in the groin. A terrible blow, delivered with all the force he could muster.

At once the great hands relaxed, as Hartner sank unconscious to the ground. Flane spasmodically gulped in air, massaging his hurting throat as he backed away.

Quickly he turned and ran again. Distance was the only protection he knew against this devilish thing. At the edge of the clearing he stopped to regain his wind and composure.

He started back into the wood, finally. But had gone only a few rods when he stopped. "Must get Garry away from there," he thought. "Can't leave him like that."

Rested a bit now, he ran back, grasped the heavy body by the shoulders and started dragging his unconscious friend.

He could feel mental tentacles plucking at the fringes of his mind. There was a compulsion to stay, to leave Hartner where he was. With every iota of soul and mind Flane fought against it. He *willed* himself not to think about that enigmatic and inimical plant.

In vain.

He tried envisioning some ordinary, everyday occurrence, some place well-remembered and loved.

"I *won't* be hypnotized again," he repeated stubbornly, over and over. "It just can't force me, now that I know."

Slow forcing of one foot ahead of the other, fighting . . . fighting . . . one . . . two . . . three, he counted the steps he took.

But wait, he mustn't do that. Mustn't concentrate on anything at all. He must diffuse his thoughts, he remembered, to make it harder for the hypnotist to gain control.

Wish I had some of Mom's potato pancakes. Centropolis is the capital of Terra.

He stopped over Hartner's body, lifted the shoulders once more.

Wonder whatever became of . . . what was her name, anyway? Remember those gorgeous sunsets on Alcibiades?

He swung the heavy body into a fireman's carry, his slight frame sagging as he staggered away towards the forest's edge.

Boy, was I proud when I won that medal for debating, back in High School. Wonder who's Inter-Plan baseball champs this year?

He'd not realized it was so far across the clearing. He was panting with fatigue long before he got there, but doggedly he persevered.

And made it.

An hour later, Hartner had not yet come fully out of his coma. He was lying on a mossy bank where Flane had laid him, moaning with pain which persisted in spite of cold, wet cloths which Flane was bringing from the nearby brook to place on the wounded, throbbing groin.

"What's that you're saying, Garry?" he asked sharply, hoping to penetrate to the other's consciousness.

"The bush . . . original home not here . . . but on planet name not pronounceable," Hartner's words were more understandable now. "Home planet burst by internal strain . . . spores broadcast by explosion . . . blown into space . . . traveled long time on light-waves . . . then one reached this planet . . . found suitable soil . . . sprouted and grew."

"So that's the story," Flane mused. "No wonder it seemed so definitely alien—even here."

He lit another cigarette and sat thinking. In a few moments Hartner started talking again.

"I asked it if it had racial memory. It said it did, and said further that its kind were the dominant species on their planet; that all other forms of life were subservient to them."

"Imagine that," Flane snorted, "a dominant vegetable life."

He lifted Hartner's head in his arms, poured a little brandy from

his flask into the other's mouth. Hartner choked, sputtered, swallowed, and seemed to come more fully awake.

"How'd I get here?" he demanded, struggling to rise, only to sink back with a cry of mingled astonishment and pain. "Ow, how'd I get banged there?"

Flane explained in detail. "I hated to do it, Pal, but you'd've killed me in another few seconds. I never realized the strength you've got in those grizzly paws of yours."

Hartner raised his great, ham-like hands and gazed at them. "I *am* strong," he said simply.

Flane grinned back, lighting two cigarettes and handing one to Hartner.

They sat smoking in silence, punctuated occasionally by a groan from Hartner. But these grew lighter and less frequent as time passed.

Flane finally rose, gathered wood, made a fire and prepared a meal. As they ate he thought of the rest of the Expeditionary crew, who were scheduled to join them in the morning. They would have to be headed off in some way.

"Well, what about this plant-thing?" Flane finally broke the long silence. He could almost see the cumbersome machinery of his partner's mind methodically revolving.

"We should study it," Hartner said, "if we can discover how to do so without getting caught again. Then destroy it."

Flane nodded slowly. "The thing that gets me is why we saw such a god-awful mess at first, and then it changed to such a beautiful earthly garden. Come on, now, you're the botanist and general phytobiologist of the Expedition. What's that bush got?"

"I think I've figured that out," Hartner was, as always, deliberate. "The first vision must have been its favorite home environment, telepathed to lure us on. Then, when it saw revulsion in our minds, it drew from our thoughts what *we* liked, and hypnotized us into seeing that."

"Look, chum, you're attributing some mighty wonderful powers to that hunk of vegetation."

"Well . . . ?" Hartner stared grimly at his friend.

"Ummm. Yeah, I see what you mean. And you're probably right. First, what *it* thought would attract, then what it found *we'd* be attracted by."

"Right. At the last I saw the most beautiful rose bush I'd ever

imagined, including blue and jet-black blooms. I just *had* to get up close and examine them. Then . . . blackout!"

"Look, Garry, d'you have any recollection either time of trying to kill me? You tried to choke me twice, you know."

"Not *you!* I knew Something was trying to harm those beautiful flowers, and I *knew* I must protect them."

"Were you *told* that, or did it just seem the thing you ought to do?"

"What're you driving at?" Hartner seemed puzzled by the trend of these questions.

"Trying to evaluate its powers," Flane explained. "Wondering if it has telepathic ability, or if it's just a sort of mental control."

Hartner's mind revolved that. "A little of both, I think. It's so dim I can't reconstruct it exactly. I know I was dazed and my mind not under my own control, but whether it was compulsion, hypnotism or telepathy I can't answer."

"While you were mumbling a bit ago, before you really woke up, you spoke as though you had *talked* to it."

"Did I? Well, I still don't know *how* I knew what I knew about it—the method, I mean."

Flane shrugged the problem away for the time being. "I suggest we get some sleep. The gang will be here tomorrow. And we'd better do something about this plant before they get here."

"Oke, we will. G'night."

Flane came slowly awake, aware that it was broad daylight. The odor of fresh coffee rode by on a breeze.

"That you, Garry?"

"It's all right. I'm not going to poison you," Hartner laughed from the fireside. Then, in shuddering tones, "Ye gods, what a dream I had!" He came to Flane's side with a steaming cup of coffee. "Or was it a dream?"

"If you mean that devil bush, it wasn't. How're you feeling?"

"I guess I'll survive." The response was lightened by the twinkle in the big man's eyes.

Some minutes later they were advancing cautiously toward the clearing of that enigmatic, alien plant. Flane's mind was carefully watching itself for any possible hypnosis.

"Welcome, human friends!"

Thoughts, forming in his mind, which translated them into words.

The two men stopped dead-still and looked at each other in amazement.

Flane asked tensely, "Did you hear what I heard?"

Hartner was equally tense. "I sense a voice within me saying it was sorry for trying to kill us yesterday; that it did not understand us and was merely acting in self-protection."

Hartner, standing on out-spread legs, hands jammed deep in his pockets, spoke in the slow, pedantic way he used when thinking seriously. "Is that what you heard?"

"Yes. But that means telepathy. How come we understand it? We're not telepaths."

"I imagine one can receive from an expert sender, even if he cannot transmit."

"Yeah, but this is a lot further than it could reach us yesterday. We're quite a way from the clearing yet."

"The range of contact is the same," that voiceless voice spoke in their minds. *"This being has moved nearer you."*

Another quick, puzzled look passed between the men, and they started forward. As they neared the edge of the clearing, there was the bush, almost at its edge. There were four strong but short roots, they could now see, entirely above ground.

The bush was crawling forward toward them on these.

"Was not aware of need for motility until you were seen walking," the thought came clearly, as the plant stopped. "Recognized the efficiency of locomotion, however, and found means of achieving it."

"Great jumping grasshoppers!" Flane's voice was awed. "How fast can you move?" he asked.

"About one thousand heights in one planetary revolution," it answered silently.

"That means about a mile a day," Flane figured quickly, and Hartner nodded solemnly.

"That makes this more serious," he said in Esperanto.

"Do you stupid ones not know that change of language makes no difference in telepathy?" that voice sounded almost amused.

They grinned at each other, ruefully. "Nice try, anyway," Flane said.

Hartner concentrated on telepathing a message. Flane heard the answer; guessed the question.

"Have had *awareness* for about twenty of these days. Just how long before that this spore reached this planet do not have knowl-

edge. However, memory, or instinct, says that spores take about thirty days from time of detachment from parent, or from lodgment in soil, to become body with awareness."

"How fast do you propagate?" Hartner could never forget that he was a botanical scientist seeking new facts.

"Am just about to bud, and in a few hours will be ready to throw out millions of spores to become plants like self. Such sporeing will cover an area about one of your kilometers in radius, not counting possible greater spread by reason of any moving air currents that may be present."

"That means at least a two-kilometer coverage every fifty days or so, for each plant," Flane said, hollowly.

"Not taking into consideration that now they can move a mile a day while waiting to bud," Hartner groaned. "They could cover this continent in a year, and the planet in three or less."

"Yes," proudly and ecstatically. "My plans will be greatly facilitated by this new power of locomotion."

"Just what plans are those?" Hartner asked in surprise.

"To make our kind the dominant species on this planet, as we were on our own."

"You just think you will, chum," Flane laughed. "You just never ran across *homo sapiens* before. They're the dominant species all throughout the galaxy. No damned plant will ever beat us out."

"Humans have much in the way of machines and physical and atomic sciences, I read in your minds," the plant answered, still with amusement apparent in its thoughts. "But of what avail are they against the powers of the mind which we possess? We shall make you our slaves, just as I am about to do with you two."

Flane felt tendrils of compulsion twining about his mind, and put himself on the defensive immediately. He negated the incoming thoughts as best he could, and ran. Hartner, he saw over his shoulder, was already the plant's mental captive.

There was a shout from across the clearing, and a shot whistled past his ear. Flane swivelled about, and saw that the big ship had landed, and that a number of the men were running towards him, guns out and blazing.

He jumped and yelled. He yanked his own heavy gun from the holster at his hip. Took quick but careful aim, and fired.

Six shots barked forth, their thunder reverberating among the forest trees.

There was a high-pitched keening, half scream, half whistle.

Hartner's dulled eyes looked at Flane in surprise. "What . . . what th' . . . ?"

Flane snorted. "The danged thing got to you again. And it caught the boys, too, and started them trying to kill us."

He raised his voice to the oncoming men. "Anyone got a flame-blaster on them?"

He pointed at the still-writhing bush. Its strange, bulb-like center portion was deflated, the last of a heavy viscous ooze running slowly from the punctures made by his gun's heavy slugs.

Quickly he related the story of the devil plant. With the flame gun he burned every single chip, flower, and leaf of it, and the ground all around it for many, many meters. Only when he was sure the job was thoroughly done did he desist.

The following two days were spent in sending a complete and comprehensive report to the Colonial Board on Terra. Planet IV of Star B-7-382 in Rift 4 was ready for colonization, they reported. It was exceptionally livable, they said, and listed competently on its atmosphere, gravity, land and water distribution and natural resources.

Within a year, they knew, the first shiploads of colonists would begin arriving. It was thus that Man was making himself the dominant species throughout the Galaxy.

But as they blasted off for the next planet on their list for exploration, a single spore, caught in a breeze when the bush was destroyed, began sprouting a mile away in another clearing.

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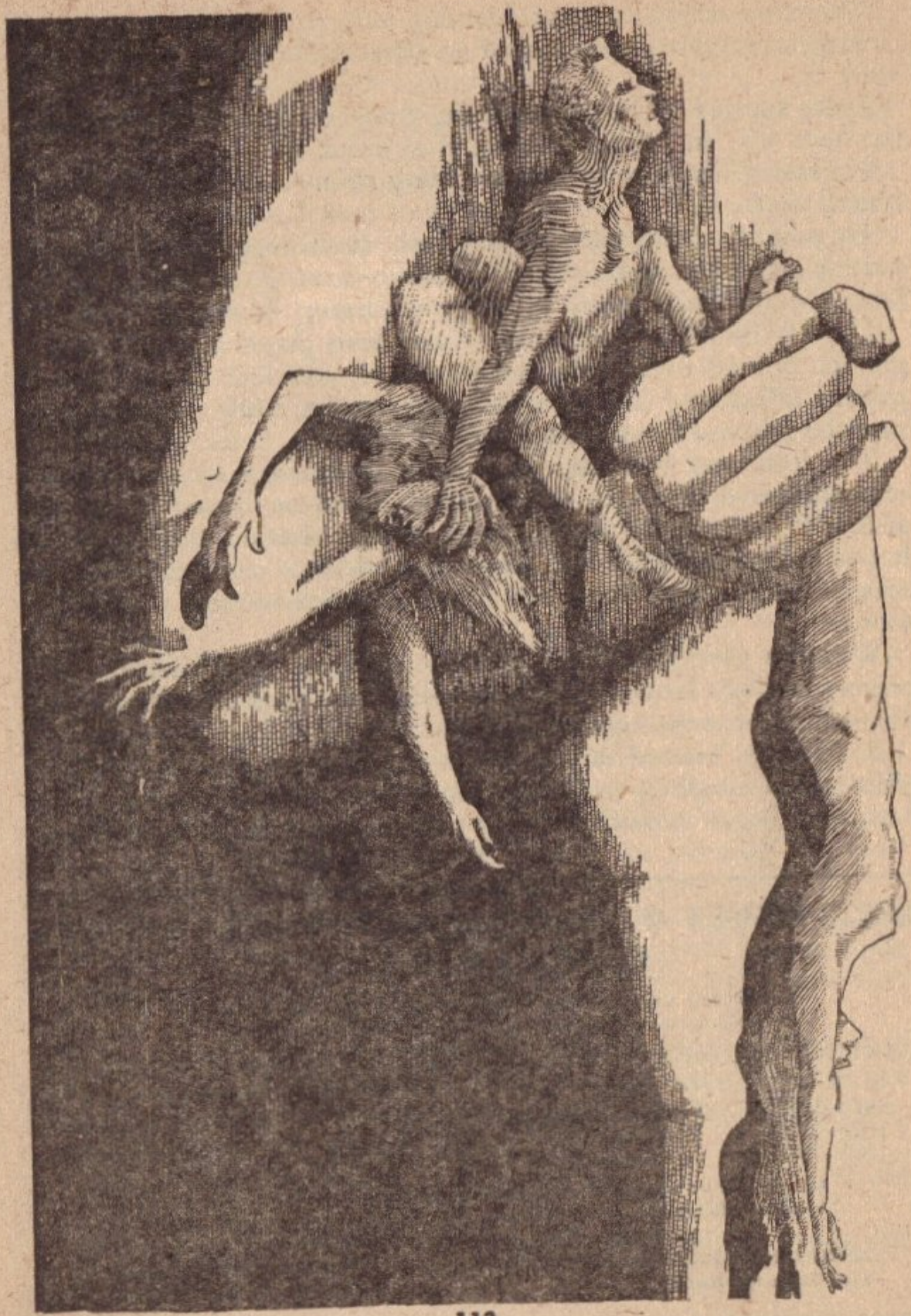


The REVOLT *of the* SCARLET LUNES

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

¶ The ultimate success of the Scarlet Lunes' revolt against their masters depended upon such a simple thing as a knowledge of mushrooms!

The twelve-hour daily shift was over. The workers of the Thirty-Ninth Level Mine District were pouring out of the Deeper Funnels into the Central Corridors, which, lighted with a pale bluish-white fluorescence from the ceiling, branched as intricately as the tunnels of an anthill. Here and there, with a continual puff, puff, puff, fresh air was forced in through shark-mouthed ventilation tubes; here and there, along the grimy rock-walls, one could see the refrigeration pipes, which, powered from the earth's internal heat, kept the temperature bearable in those ten-thousand-foot depths.

Even so, the air was hot and fetid; and the workers' skirts and jackets, glowing with a greenish phosphorescence, were of the thinnest of materials. The bright red neckbands worn by the vast majority, men and women alike, showed them to be Scarlet Lunes, or commoners; though every now and then one with a brilliant golden scarf, an Orange Lune or overseer, thrust his way imperiously through the crowd. In this year 302 of the Magnifats (2744 A. D., by the old reckoning), these were the earth's typical citizens; and the depths in which they lived were characteristic of the caverns wherein the toilers everywhere slaved for the Magnifats, their luxury-ridden lords.

Weary and grime-streaked, the laborers streamed toward the

Food Faucets, where hot and cold food was conveyed to them in pipes, and might either be used as a beverage or be allowed to freeze and be eaten solid.

But today an unusual interruption intervened. From loud-speakers along the walls, a blare was heard:

"Scarlet Lunes, give heed!"

Trembling, the workers halted. Apprehensively they glanced at one another. A woman sagged against a wall, near to collapse.

"Scarlet Lunes, give heed! His Radiance Grand Custodian Thoreth VII, First Prince of the Magnifats and Lord of the Earth and Moon, has made a decree for your benefit."

The workers groaned. But the voice thundered on.

"Ours, as you know, is a scientific civilization. Machines being superior to men, everything is regulated mechanically—everything, with one odd exception. Hitherto, faithful to an ancient superstition, we have permitted you freedom in selecting your mates. This custom, a relic of barbarism, will now be abolished!"

The voice halted; and a murmuring of fear and anger issued from thousands of throats.

"The principle of Automatic Selection," continued the unseen, "will be used henceforth. Every marriageable male will be given a number, according to his appraisal by a new machine, the Man Computer; and the same with every marriageable female; and those whose numbers correspond will be mated. Thus the unscientific element of personal whim will be prohibited. The law takes effect at once. Not to obey is treason. The penalty is death! Signed and decreed by Grand Custodian Thoreth VII on this second day of the year 302!"

The voice snapped into silence; and the Scarlet Lunes turned to one another with mumblings of dismay. Cowed, beaten, downcast, they yet showed signs of revolt in their pale faces and weary eyes.

But from one pair, withdrawn where a side gallery sloped into the black depths, there came open mutterings of rebellion. Clasped in the arms of a black-haired youth whose hollow eyes burned fiercely, a young girl clung and sobbed.

"But they can't do it!" she wept. "They can't! I won't let them take you from me, Olvan! They mustn't! I won't let them!"

"Hush! Hush, Mergyl!" he tried to calm her, as he glanced about him fearfully. "If one of those vipers of Orange Lunes overhears us, it will be the sulphur pits for us both!"

Hastily he led the weeping girl into the relative safety of the dark side-gallery; and there did his best to soothe her.

"But they can't do this! They can't!" she raged on. Weren't we two meant for each other? Haven't we been promised to one another since we were children? Weren't we to be married the seventeenth day of this year? And now—now is a machine to throw us each to someone else?"

"No, they can't do it, Mergyl," he replied, trying to keep control of himself while his lean, sinewy form swayed and quivered. "Listen to me! Sometime the tyranny of the Magnifats has to end! Now is as good a time as any!"

"I know—I know why he made that law!" rushed on Mergyl, between sobs. "His daughter Lilvia—they say she came down here last year, so disguised that they couldn't trace her, and married a Scarlet Lune. If they'd had this new law then, she couldn't have done it. And for that we have to suffer!"

Olvan clenched his fists with a fiery resolution.

"For that we will not have to suffer! Listen to me, Mergyl!" he exclaimed eagerly, though careful to keep his voice down. "All was not always as now. I have been talking to Gammer, an old workman. By torchlight, at the risk of our lives, he took me aside, and showed me the secret lore passed on from generation to generation. It is a marvelous lore—it teaches that there was once a world where men were free, and could act and speak as they wished. They had some wondrous knowledge then, the keys to which are usually thought to have been lost, though they have been secretly kept by a small group of Lunes, of whom Gammer is one. By means of that knowledge, we may regain our freedom!"

"But many attempts at revolution have been made—and failed," objected Margyl.

"True, many. Yet at last we will succeed. Do you know what else Gammer told me?"

His voice had dwindled to a barely audible whisper. He hesitated perceptibly, before going on,

"That a great revolt is being organized in our own Mine Level under a Scarlet Lune known as Halvoc. His chief partner is Auruk—which is the new name of Karg, who has gone in disguise ever since he ran away with the Grand Custodian's daughter."

"But you—how do you know about all this?" demanded Mergyl,

turning upon her lover with a sudden excited surmise. "If they have plans, they cannot allow them to circulate!"

His voice, if anything, became lower than before. "I know—because I have joined the revolt. This new marriage law makes me more determined than ever to deal a heavy stroke. Just you wait! the first blow is about to descend!"

II

In one of the ten-foot "Ovals" or underground living cells of the Scarlet Lunes, half a dozen men were gathered. Their voices, as they conferred, never rose above whispers; while one of them, hovering close to the little elliptical doorway, crouched low with his ear to the partition, as if on guard against intruders.

"The place to hit them, fellow Lunes," came the thin voice of the aged workman Gammer, "is in their vitals. The Magnifats are very ticklish, I hear. Our friend Auruk has shown us how to make them writhe. We will cut off their Kafful supply."

Now Kafful, as every Lune knew, was the peculiar pink mushroom which the workers for centuries had cultivated in the humid basements adjoining the Thirty-Ninth Level Mine District. None of the cultivators, until recently, had understood just what purpose Kafful served; but they had been apprised of its use by Lilvia, the run-away daughter of the Grand Custodian, and the wife of Auruk. When dried, Kafful made a powerful narcotic, which all adult male Magnifats (its use was forbidden to women) were in the habit of chewing every morning upon rising, as well as after all meals. Not only did this drug strongly stimulate the nervous system, but it formed such a habit that the user could not think clearly or act intelligently without it.

"In ancient times," went on Gammer, wrinkling his leathery face wrily, "when freedom was not yet considered a crime, the commoner had the right to quit working if he felt mistreated. So, at least the old books say. When thousands of workers quit all at once, they called it a strike. Of course, no strikes have ever been known under the Magnifats. But why not introduce our rulers to this pleasant ancient custom?"

"Yes, by the High One! even at the risk of our necks!" swore Halvoc, the leader of the rebel group. And his glittering eyes, his square jaws and outthrust chin looked fiercely resolute in the blue

fluorescent light. "Let me tell you what—I will organize a strike among the Kafful workers!"

"Exactly the thing! Already they are seething!" asserted Auruk. "I for one will be glad to die in the attempt!"

"I too!" concurred Olvan, the latest recruit to the group.

"Willingness to die is not enough!" muttered Gammer. "Too long our men have been dying—and all for what? It is time that some one live to lead us to triumph!"

"A worthy sentiment, indeed!" drawled the ironic voice of Spivak, a reedy figure with a face grotesquely scarred from a mine explosion. "And what, may I ask, will our dear masters be doing when we organize this—this what do you call it—this strike? Maybe they will not know how to match it with a strike of their own!"

"Naturally, they will," returned Gammer. "We know their weapons too well to despise them. Nevertheless, in the course of my delvings into the ancient books, I have made some discoveries. I have found a way—a remote chance, you may think it, but a chance at that!—to overwhelm them in the end, if only we are brave and resourceful!"

Crowded together in an eager knot, their heads not more than a few inches apart, the men listened while Gammer expounded his plan. And some heard with skepticism, and others expressed approval; but not until more than an hour of debate did the majority vote to give the scheme a trial.

"We must not ask everything of our masters at first," warned Gammer. We will have a better chance to gain our ends if we begin by demanding but one thing: Let us say, repeal of the Automatic Selection marriage law."

"Never was any law more unpopular!" growled Olvan. "Everywhere the people grumble. I, for one—"

"True, never have I seen the Lunes so near the edge of revolt!" interrupted Halvoc. "Nothing that has happened in three hundred years has stirred them so deeply."

"It is well that Thoreth, for once, has overstepped himself," meditated Gammer. "Such tyrants in the end are their own worst enemies. But listen! There is a vital part of our scheme still to be threshed out. When we have the Grand Custodian at bay, one of us must see him and arrange terms of peace. That may be the weakest link in the whole chain. Suppose that Thoreth has our envoy seized, and slain in the Constricting Cage?"

A silence followed.

"Why do you say suppose?" mumbled Spivak. "Is it not certain that this is just what he will do?"

"Nevertheless," said Auruk, "I would volunteer to be the envoy, were it not that I once faced Thoreth, and if he saw me again and recognized me, then our chances would be those of a wormtrodden underfoot!"

"I will be the envoy," stated Gammer. "I am old, and no one will miss this bag of skin and bone—"

"Quite the contrary! Who would we miss more?" vetoed Halvoc. "We need you too much—your brains, your knowledge."

"Let me be the volunteer!" eagerly proposed Olvan. "By my scarlet neck-band! Would I not risk the very blood of my heart to make them repeal that monstrous marriage law? My poor Mergyl! she wastes away to a phantom with weeping!"

Halvoc meditated. "You are young, and new to the Cause—"

"But he is brave—and he is honest," broke in Gammer. "Look at the strong set of his face. Look at those keen, level eyes. If I do not misjudge men—and I have lived to see more of them than any of you—he will make us a suitable envoy."

"So be it then!" acquiesced Halvoc. "We will let you know, Olvan, the proper time to act, and give you all instructions. And now, fellow Lunes, the hour grows late. Soon the Slumber Bell will ring, and if we are not back in our own Ovals at that time, the Orange Lunes will nip us with their fire-acid."

The men glanced at a little thermometer-like dial on the wall and lost no time about dispersing. But in Olvan's eyes, as he slid toward his own Oval, there was an exalted light.

Meanwhile, in the mind of Halvoc, a cool and detailed plan was taking form. Through a secret emissary, he was in constant touch with the Kafful workers, whose quarters he had often entered by means of a hidden gateway; already, thanks to his unremitting efforts, a clandestine organization existed among them, as among the mine workers. And it would, therefore, take but a word to Mardex, the head of the organization, to produce that stupendous, that unprecedented development—an order to stop work!

III

The Kafful Basements stretched bleak and gray beneath the light of

foggy-looking luminaries. On the innumerable culture beds, evenly spaced in unvarying ten-by-five rectangles, the countless little pink mushrooms stood ready to be cut; while thousands of minute sprays, supplying them with the proper moisture, kept the air as steamy as a tropical rain-jungle.

But no workers were reaping the crop. Hundreds of men and women, with their scarlet neck-bands and loose-fitting skirts and jackets, stood about sullenly, or defiantly squatted on the miry ground. After a time, one of them—a stalking giant of a man, Mardex by name—arose, turned to a large faucet-like spout on the wall, and twisted the spigot. Nothing came forth; and Mardex grunted, loudly enough to be heard across the Basements

"The ugly bats! They still have our food turned off!"

"And our air!" groaned a prostrate comrade. "It's getting hotter than a boiler down here!"

"Yes, and they threaten to turn off the refrigeration in our Ovals!" added Mardex. "They know very well that will bake us slowly in a furnace. The plan is to roast and starve us into submission. But who is there among you that will give in?"

"Not I! Not I!" answered a reassuring chorus.

"The way I take it," Mardex went on, "is that it's better to die than to live here as machines. If we cannot even marry—"

He was interrupted by a blare from a loud-speaker on the ceiling, fifteen feet above.

"Lunes of the Kafful Basements! For the last time, your Grand Custodian appeals to you! If you will return to work at once, he will restore your food and ventilation. He will pardon the criminal halting of your duties. But only if you begin to reap the Kafful at once. Even a minute's delay—and he will exact a red penalty!"

The voice echoed into silence. The Lunes muttered beneath their breath, and clenched their fists. But not one made a motion toward the Kafful beds.

"You have heard the orders," said Mardex. "Let all who wish hasten to reap the crops!"

Still none made any motion.

"The mine workers, the mill workers and the synthetic food makers are all ready to join the strike," the leader went on. "But it is upon us Kafful growers that the chief burden rests. If we fail, all fail. If we succeed, all succeed."

"We are with you, Mardex!" more than one voice replied. "We are with you! Long we have been waiting for a showdown. Let it be a fight to the end!"

That it was indeed to be a fight to the end became evident an hour or two later, when a dozen Orange Lunes, each distinguished by a golden neck-band, strode into the Basements, followed by a score of clanking ten-foot robots or Mechanical Privates, whose long weaving arms moved in response to the commands of the orange ones.

"Last chance to go back to work!" boomed Drudaz, the leader of the Orange Lunes.

Some of the strikers shuddered. But still not one moved toward the Kafful beds.

Drudaz eyed the rebels in the manner of a butcher selecting steers for the slaughter. "You!" he designated, flicking his left thumb toward one of the recreant workers. And, with a lightning movement, a Mechanical Private reached down and gathered up the indicated man with one hand; while, an instant later, a second victim was scooped up with his other hand.

Throughout the Basements Drudaz stalked, and did not halt until all the robots had their hands full of groaning, struggling victims.

"These are our hostages!" he snorted, as he started away. "In just five minutes, they will be crushed to death by the Mechanical Privates. If by that time the rest of you are not at work, we will be back for other hostages!"

As the Privates went clattering off with their prey, they were followed by hundreds of glances of terror and hatred. But Mardex, spared as if by a miracle, clenched his fists more tightly than ever; and observed with savage satisfaction that few of the workers showed any sign of yielding.

"They cannot kill us all," he muttered, reassuringly. "If they do, they will have no Kafful. And without Kafful they cannot live."

IV

Behind the ebony railing, on his throne of multi-colored crystal, Grand Custodian Thoreth VII sat with a sour expression on his crafty old features.

"What is this?" he was bellowing at Chief Councillor Eb-Horath, who was bowing just before the railing. "You say one of those rats of Scarlet Lunes has the effrontery to demand an audience?"

"Just so, Your Radiance," lisped Eb-Horath. "It seems incredible, does it not? Nevertheless, if you would place any weight on my humble and doubtless mistaken opinion, I would advise you to see the man."

"See the man?" fairly screamed Thoreth, turning his bloodshot little eyes up toward the domed iridescent ceiling as if in appeal. "I would sooner interview a leech!"

"Doubtless that would be more agreeable, Your Radiance. But may I not point out that we are not entirely—well, shall I say not entirely in the best strategic position? Already we have killed two hundred of those imbecilic workers. But the strike continues, and threatens to involve the mines and the synthetic food factories."

"Yes, and already we must ration Kafful!" groaned the Grand Custodian. "My High Commissioners for the Coast Cities complain that they can obtain none of it at all. Thousands are in despair. Why, according to a report just reaching me, some of our best people are going mad from the lack of Kafful. Others have been driven to burglary, and even murder. And there are rumors of a black market."

"Even worse," pointed out Eb-Horath, with a grimace of despair, "if this trouble keeps up, you and I will be denied our share of Kafful."

"Just what I fear!" sighed Thoreth. "Just what I fear! By the High One! who would have dreamt that we would ever come to such a pass!"

Shooting forward abruptly in his throne, he decided, "I'll tell you what I'll do! By my crown! I'll tell you what, Eb-Horath! We'll have all the strikers put to death! All of them! What do a few thousand Scarlet Lunes matter after all?"

"Yes, Your Radiance," argued the Chief Councillor, "but have you forgotten that these men and women have been trained in raising Kafful—trained in a specialized process, with a complicated technique? It would take years to provide fit successors. And meanwhile we would be Kafful-less. Since the substance keeps its flavor only for about a week after manufacture, our reserves are now down to—"

"I know! I know!" grunted Thoreth, shaking his bearded head sadly. "Those criminal Lunes don't seem to care if we have the most disastrous Kafful famine in history!"

"Perhaps, if Your Radiance will see this emissary of theirs," suggested Eb-Horath, mildly, "you will be able to arrange terms, and

get the criminals back to work. After that, there will be nothing to prevent you from sending the envoy to the Constricting Cage for his audacity in asking to see you."

"The Constricting Cage will be too good for him!" growled Thoreth. And then, with a sigh of resignation, "But let it be as you say. I will see the scoundrel. Only, this much I promise—this much I swear to you. That villainous Scarlet Lune will get no concession out of me—no, on the faith of a Magnifat, he will get no concession at all!"

V

Dazzled by the brilliance of the vast crystalline chambers, Olvan was ushered into the Tempilacrum. "Crawl!" he was commanded by his guide, an Orange Lune, as he approached the throne of the Grand Custodian. Hence it was from a dog's eye view that he first looked up at Thoreth. Yet within him there was nothing meek or cringing. For today the First Prince of the Magnifats must meet him on his own terms!

"Scarlet Lune, rise!" snapped the Grand Custodian, glaring as if he would have liked to devour the emissary.

Olvan arose.

"Out with your message—and make it fast!" rattled the sovereign. "I have no time for trifles!"

"This is no trifle, I assure you—" began Olvan.

"Say, Your Radiance!" prompted the Orange Lune, jabbing the envoy with a three-pointed dagger.

"Your Radiance—this is no trifle," Olvan corrected himself. "You want the Kafful producers to go back to work. And they are ready to comply—on one condition."

"Who are they to make conditions *to me?*" thundered Thoreth.

"But this condition, Your Radiance, is a very simple one."

"Well then—what is it?" barked the Grand Custodian, as he leaned angrily forward across the ebony railing.

"Merely that you repeal the Automatic Selection Marriage Law. If you allow the Lunes to marry freely, they will consent to work."

A red sparkle illuminated the dictator's bloodshot eyes. "Never!" he roared. "The Automatic Marriage Law is a modern, progressive enactment, based upon scientific principles. If you think we can repeal it just for a whim—"

While Thoreth was speaking, Olvan had drawn two objects from a fold of his garments. Two pink mushrooms, each about an inch across! "See these, Your Radiance?" he said, when the Magnifat had finished.

"What of them?" barked Thoreth. "They look to me like ordinary Kafful mushrooms."

"That is just the point, Your Radiance. One of them is a Kafful mushroom. The other only looks like one. Were it not for a secret marking I have made, I could not tell them apart. Neither could anyone tell them apart. Yet you could eat one of them without danger. The other would kill you within ten minutes."

"Humph!" yawned the ruler, sitting far back on his throne with a bored expression. "An interesting bit of natural history. Very interesting, indeed! But I fail to see the point."

"Then listen, Your Radiance!" A strange light had come into Olvan's eyes—a light part challenging, part mocking, yet bright with the confidence of triumph. "Consider this. What if the poisonous spores were to be mixed with those of the Kafful? What if the two were to be grown together, so that they couldn't be distinguished? What if, every time you took your morning chew, you risked your life—"

"Scarlet Lune, be quiet!" bellowed Thoreth. "I will not listen to such criminal ravings!"

He turned a switch; and instantly a Mechanical Private rattled forth from a niche of the floor, and Olvan was caught in an iron grip.

Yet there was something in the envoy's manner that arrested Thoreth despite himself. Instead of ordering the prisoner to be led away, he listened with a shocked fascination as Olvan went on,

"Your Radiance, I am not raving. The fact is that one of our men, studying the ancient records that are secreted in deep-hidden places, has found that the Kafful mushroom is descended from one with lethal qualities. He has experimented in accordance with the information given him by these records, and has cultivated some of the fungi in such a way as to make them revert to ancestral type. In other words, they are highly poisonous, though they look just like Kafful. The spores of the two could easily be mixed. And this, Your Radiance, is just what will happen should the strikers be driven to extremes."

The Grand Custodian shot out of his seat, and shook his right

arm furiously at his emissary. "What's that! you creeping cockroach! You dare threaten me? For that you will end in the Constricting Cage!"

He pulled a lever, and the Mechanical Private creaked, and began to stalk away with his victim.

But Olvan had time to cry out.

"Listen, Your Radiance, we expected just this! If I do not return safely to my friends, they will mix the spores of the poisonous fungus with those of Kafful."

Thoreth groaned, and pressed a lever—and Olvan was free.

"How do I know you speak truth?" the dictator growled. "What if this be all a ruse?"

"If you will test the mushrooms, Your Radiance, you will know."

"Very well—I command you to eat them both!"

"Then I will die, Your Radiance—and my friends will mix the spores, as I have promised."

Thoreth groaned once more. He took up the mushrooms; examined them carefully; then called a scientist, who also examined them, and was unable to find any difference between the two.

"You are too monstrously clever!" he finally growled at Olvan. "You should not have been born a Scarlet Lune! I tell you what. We will try the mushroom on a Womba."

The Wombas, as Olvan knew, were small pigs which the Magnifats cultivated as domestic pets. Omnivorous like all of its species, the intended victim had no hesitation about swallowing the mushroom that Olvan offered it; though Thoreth himself, to avoid all possibility of fraud, actually fed the morsel to the beast after making sure that Olvan did not get within reaching distance of it. And, simultaneously, Olvan devoured the second mushroom.

The witnesses had not long to wait. Within five minutes, the Womba showed signs of mortal illness; within ten minutes, it was writhing in its death convulsions. But Olvan suffered no ill effects at all.

The Grand Custodian had turned visibly paler. His whole body began to tremble as if from the ague; with the unsteadiness of one crushed beneath some gigantic weight, he arose again, and, staggering along the ebony railing, called out, "Eb-Horath! Eb-Horath! Come here! . . . Come here! I want you to take down a new law!"

Again the daily shift was over. Down in the Thirty-Ninth Level Mine District, a man and a girl were seated in the dimness of a

side-gallery. "Yes, Margyl," the youth was saying, "the Kafful workers are all back on the job. We have won our first concession in three hundred years. It is the opening wedge."

"The best of it all, Olvan," she said, as she let herself be folded in his embrace, "is that now after all we can be married. The Automatic Selection Law will never be revived."

"No, never!" he declared. "But that is not the best of it all. The best is that the Magnifats are no longer supreme masters of the planet."

There was a glow in his eyes, and the girl could see that he was looking forward to the day when the Scarlet Lunes would everywhere come into their own, and when it would be they and not the Magnifats that would dominate the Earth.

* * * * *

"Now You See Them—"

By GREGORY FRANCIS

Survey teams, charting the galaxy, frequently encountered strange conditions, but for sheer mystification this planet was tops!

In size, density, gravity and atmosphere it was another Earth. But that was only one of the things which Orden had in mind when he said: "Queer. Decidedly queer."

Raydon could find no fault with that. "No real traces of previous human influence," he said, "yet the aura of mankind persists."

"Which is a fine thing for a scientist to say," Orden commented.

There must be some natural law they knew nothing about. The planet was unique in having no predatory animals. No fight for existence. The question was: what was the check on population?

"Why not ask the monkeys?" Raydon asked. "Or the rabbits?"

"In a way," said Orden, "that's what I've done. I've cast a few pebbles into the peaceful pool, to see how the ripples spread."

"That sounds like poetry."

"Perhaps, but I've upset the rhythm of this world. I released two pairs of dogs this morning."

Raydon frowned. "You shouldn't have done that."

"Of course I shouldn't. I'm only a poor ignorant biologist. I should have consulted the physicist first."

"There's that, but it isn't quite what I had in mind."

"I know what you had in mind. You think the dogs will cause a slaughter. After all, they're hunting dogs. But I thought one question ought to be settled. No predatory animals—because there never were any, or because the local inhabitants know how to handle them?"

"The local . . . you mean the monkeys and rabbits?"

"I don't mean anything else. Come in, Carole. Yes, you are interrupting. Do I mind? It depends on the point of view." And he looked at her slim tanned legs.

Carole was Raydon's partner. By pure accident, the crew of the little survey ship was as diverse as it could reasonably be. Carole was brunette, Sandra blonde. Carole small, neat, quiet, introverted. Sandra tall, well-built, wildly extrovert. Orden, the biologist, was also tall, but thin and academic. On the other hand, Raydon, the physicist, who was not yet thirty, was already becoming fat.

"Cool off," said Carole. "Raydon's jealous. If he isn't, he damn well ought to be."

"I'm jealous and I'm angry," said Raydon. He didn't look either. He was still thinking about the green world outside.

"I came," said Carole, "to ring the dinner-bell. This no doubt interesting conversation can be continued some other time. At the moment my mind is on my stomach."

They joined Sandra in the dining-room.

"Ray's jealous and angry," said Carole. "I think you should know about that, Sandra."

"Don't boast. You just look after your big fat physicist, and I'll manage my skinny and lecherous biologist."

They were practiced on the topic, for often on long flights there was nothing to talk about but the triangle situation. If Orden didn't make passes at Carole, they had to pretend he did, or there would be nothing to say.

Orden sat down and toyed with his fork. "There's another topic now," he remarked. "It looks to me as if we could talk about this world for a hundred years."

"And get nowhere," retorted Sandra, unimpressed.

"Quiet, Sandra," said Carole. "Orden's going to talk for a hundred years."

"Temperate climate," Orden mused. "Never varies, since the axis of the planet is vertical to the plane of the orbit. No deserts, and roughly half the surface area is land. The sea is salty and teeming with life—fish and sea animals of all sizes and varieties."

"Try some of this canned meat," said Sandra solicitously. "It's rather tough, and you won't be able to talk for awhile."

"Many centuries ago on Earth," Orden went on, unruffled, "a sailing ship stopped at an island in the South Seas, a small island, no more than five miles long by three wide. Its only inhabitants

were birds. When the ship went away it left a pair of rabbits behind.

"Ten years later the same ship re-visited the island. Except for scrubby grass, it was a desert. And everywhere were bones, rabbit bones. To walk on the island was to walk on bones. Those two rabbits had multiplied unchecked. They'd overrun the island, stripped it of everything that grew, and finally starved to death."

He looked at the wall as if he could see, through it, the world outside. "It hasn't happened here. I wonder why?"

"A small island is hardly comparable to a whole planet, surely?" said Carole.

"Why not? The only difference is the time facctor. In time—"

"Don't explain," said Sandra. "We can just manage to work it out. You'd expect exactly the same condition here after all the centuries this world seems to have lasted as it is now. But say, biologist, can it be that the poor dumb blonde has noticed something you've missed?"

"Fantastic," said Carole gravely. "What is it that the poor dumb blonde has noticed?"

"These monkeys and rabbits have brains," Sandra said. "I didn't give them an intelligence test, I only looked at them. And if they didn't do anything very smart, they certainly never did anything stupid. Try your tests, and I think you'll be surprised."

"I didn't miss that," said Orden. "There's just one flaw. Have you tried to catch one of these monkeys or rabbits? I'm inclined to think that the labors of Hercules were merely children's games compared with that job."

Sandra stared at him, open-mouthed.

Raydon spoke after a long silence. "You've got it," he said. "I tried it. I could almost believe—as a physicist—that they're on another world or in a different dimension."

"The thought," Orden admitted, "had occurred to me."

* * * * *

Carole and Orden walked up a gentle slope on the quiet, friendly world. Their shoes sank into thick moss, grass and rich soil.

"Why did you release the dogs?" Carole asked.

"For the usual reason. To see what would happen."

"What did you expect?"

"I was very careful not to expect anything. But I certainly didn't

expect slaughter. If we can't catch the monkeys and rabbits, I don't think the dogs can. We'll see."

"But suppose you're wrong?"

Orden shrugged. "Sometimes a biologist seems callous. But at worst, we're on an island. A big island, admittedly, but still an island. You don't expect the dogs to build a boat, do you?"

"Not the dogs, no. But how did the rabbits manage to inhabit every little green island—swim? Or did the monkeys build them boats?"

"That's one of many possibilities," said Orden seriously. "One of the others is that the rabbits built the boats themselves."

Carole nodded without surprise. Orden surveyed her keenly.

"You got any ideas?" he asked.

"Not really. You mean because I'm not surprised? This survey work isn't as the books make out. You know that. Our conversation doesn't consist largely of "It can't be! It's fantastic! Incredible!'—partly because we get used to things which are fantastic and incredible. If you land on a new planet and don't find anything that's fantastic—that's fantastic. This world has one or two strange things about it. But it would be much stranger if it didn't."

Orden laughed. "True," he admitted. "Like here. To begin with, we know the animals. They're not new species that have to be given manufactured names, with bits of Latin and Greek in them. They're monkeys and rabbits. Not ordinary monkeys and rabbits, of course. They must have been here for thousands of years without interference, I'd say, so why should they be ordinary? I know the first space flight was only four centuries ago. Nevertheless, the monkeys and rabbits are here, and I don't think they came as recently as four centuries ago. There are no bones. There are no young monkeys and rabbits—"

"You mean—immortality?"

"I don't mean anything at the moment."

They reached the top of the hill. "Ah," said Orden softly. "That's interesting."

About two hundred yards away, beneath a giant tree, a colony of monkeys sat in the sun. Among them were two of the dogs Orden had released. The dogs would suddenly dart at one of the monkeys as if to tear him to pieces. Then, a few paces from their victim, they would veer at an angle and turn as if searching for him. The monkey, every time, did exactly nothing.

"That," said Orden mildly, "is probably what Raydon meant when he said he could almost believe that they were in another world or a different dimension."

Carole nodded. "The dogs seem to meet a barrier that isn't there in this world. I think I'll find out if it really is there."

Orden summoned the dogs with a shrill whistle. He fed them with biscuits from his pockets.

"You expected to find them here?" Carole asked.

"No, but I knew they wouldn't be far away. Pickings on this world are lean—for dogs, anyway."

"You're going to stand here and watch while I make a fool of myself—like the dogs?"

"Yes. But switch on your headset first."

"Oh," said the girl softly. "A light begins to dawn." She walked slowly down the hill. The monkeys paid no more attention to her than to the dogs.

"I'm only ten yards from the nearest," she said, her voice carried by the tiny headset. "And I'd swear he's here, on this planet, and quite solid. I can see every hair and I can smell him. Now . . . Well, what do you know. It shouldn't happen to a dog. I can't see him. Straight ahead, you say? But which is straight? No, there's nothing there. I'm turning around, am I? But I'm trying to go straight. All right, I'll concentrate. Got him! You should see the expression on his face, Orden, as he realizes I can see him. Strange, though, he hasn't attempted to struggle. No panic among the others, either, when I picked him up."

Approaching Orden, she stripped off her headset and shook her hair free.

"Watch out for the dogs," said Orden.

"They don't seem to know he's here."

"So he can still fool them, though not us."

"At least that settles Ray's problem," Carole said. "He's here, the monkey, I mean, and not in some other world or in some other dimension."

"Let's go back and tell the others."

"Must we?" She strained her neck to look at the little animal on her shoulder. "In certain circumstances three isn't a crowd."

"Why, Carole!" Orden exclaimed ironically. "I didn't know you cared."

"Oh, yes you did," she muttered.

Inside the ship, the monkey jumped to the floor and scampered around excitedly while Orden put the dogs in their quarters and fed them.

Carole left him to look for Sandra and Raydon. She came back in a few minutes, alone. "Why, the dirty so-and-sos," she said. "I think they're two-timing us. It's all very well for us to two-time them, but . . ."

"I quite agree," said Orden, laughing. "But about this world . . . I've got an idea."

"Never knew you when you hadn't," said Carole. "I must say that for you."

"How much would you give to be immortal?"

Carole considered him gravely, the laughter dying out of her eyes. "That would depend," she said, "on how long I thought about it."

"Would it be much?"

"It might be. People aren't really afraid of death—when they know they have to die. But if they knew that they might never have to—"

"That's it," Orden nodded. "You'd give a lot to be immortal. Perhaps not in the abstract, but certainly when there was a concrete choice. So would I. I'd give up Sandra, for example, like a shot."

Sandra came in with Raydon just too late to hear that. Before Carole or Orden had a chance to speak, Sandra caught sight of the monkey again perched on Carole's shoulder.

"You caught one!" she exclaimed, and darted over to pick it up. She stopped abruptly. "I could have sworn . . ."

"No need to swear," said Orden drily. "Look again. And keep looking."

But the strange thing was that neither Sandra nor Raydon ever saw that monkey again. They knew he was there, because Orden and Carole insisted he was, and they had seen him themselves for a few seconds. But he refused to reappear as far as they were concerned, although he never disappeared to Carole and Orden.

"Selective," Carole mused. "They know we are the two who count. We always said they were intelligent."

"Any more remarks like that," Sandra warned her, "and you'll need more than an invisible monkey to protect you."

Carole, her mind on something else, made the classic retort. "Against you and who else?"

Sandra tried for awhile to catch the monkey. But he seemed to have no trouble in avoiding her. Orden and Carole told her what he was doing. "He looks almost bored," said Orden.

When they were eating, the existence of the monkey, which Sandra and Raydon didn't seriously doubt, was proved by the disappearance of food.

"Somehow," said Orden, "they have developed a unique system of camouflage. At about five yards' range they become invisible. We were lucky in having a demonstration when the dogs tried to catch some of them. Now a dog doesn't rely on his eyes alone for perception. He sees with his nose as well. Therefore it isn't enough for the monkeys merely to disappear. The conclusion we reached was that the dogs were hypnotized into believing the monkeys just weren't there. It works on us, too, as you see."

"What I want to know," said Raydon, "is why he doesn't mind you seeing him, but won't have anything to do with us."

"That," said Orden absently, "ought to be obvious."

Carole caused a diversion by asking acidly how Sandra and Raydon had got on together. "No doubt she understands you, Ray," she said. "You've always been misunderstood."

"And I expect you've at last found someone who thinks you're beautiful, Sandra," Orden observed. "It only shows how his vision is occluded, for Carole and I, of course, know perfectly well you're hideous. You—"

Sandra was ready to react as she was supposed to react, but Raydon hadn't been born the day before.

"Pipe down," he told Sandra. "We seem to have discovered everyone wants a shift of partners. But that's a detail. The real point is that something very strange is going on in this world, and I think the sooner we're off it the better."

He introduced the idea calmly at first. But as he considered it, it seemed better and better to him, until he became almost violent about it.

Sandra was puzzled. Carole and Orden weren't.

"He's right," said Orden at last. "There's something here we could do without. Why waste a lot of time making up our minds?"

"I don't get this," said Sandra.

"You're not meant to, darling," Carole cooed.

"Do you want this world to remain a mystery? You know our first rule—find out. We never leave anything unsettled. We—"

"Talk about that in space," said Orden gently. He looked at Carole. She nodded imperceptibly. She understood.

The ship took off an hour later.

* * * * *

". . . cowardice," said Sandra angrily. "And that's the least you can say about it. Why, if we run when there's nothing to run from, what will we do when there's real danger?"

"You're perfectly right, Sandra," Raydon admitted. "Only this is the first time I've heard what you're saying."

"What?"

"Hypnosis, Orden said. He only called it hypnosis because he didn't know the right word. We don't have a word for it."

Sandra stared, then nodded. "Let's go back," she said.

"If we know the way."

"What do you mean, if we know the way?"

"At a rough estimate, we would have fifty worlds to examine. You're no astronomer, and I remember nothing. Where are Orden and Carole?"

"You mean you don't even know that?" Sandra seized his arm and felt his pulse wonderingly. "They stayed behind. It didn't bother you. You—"

"Never mind what I said or did. I remember what I'm allowed to remember, no more. You're probably the same."

"It's possible." She looked into the blackness of space, knowing she might be looking directly at the nameless planet of the rabbits and monkeys. Raydon, possessed as he had been, had done strange things to their course.

"We can find them," she said.

Raydon shook his head. "I don't think so. Not till they're ready. Orden and Carole and the other people on that world."

"People . . .?"

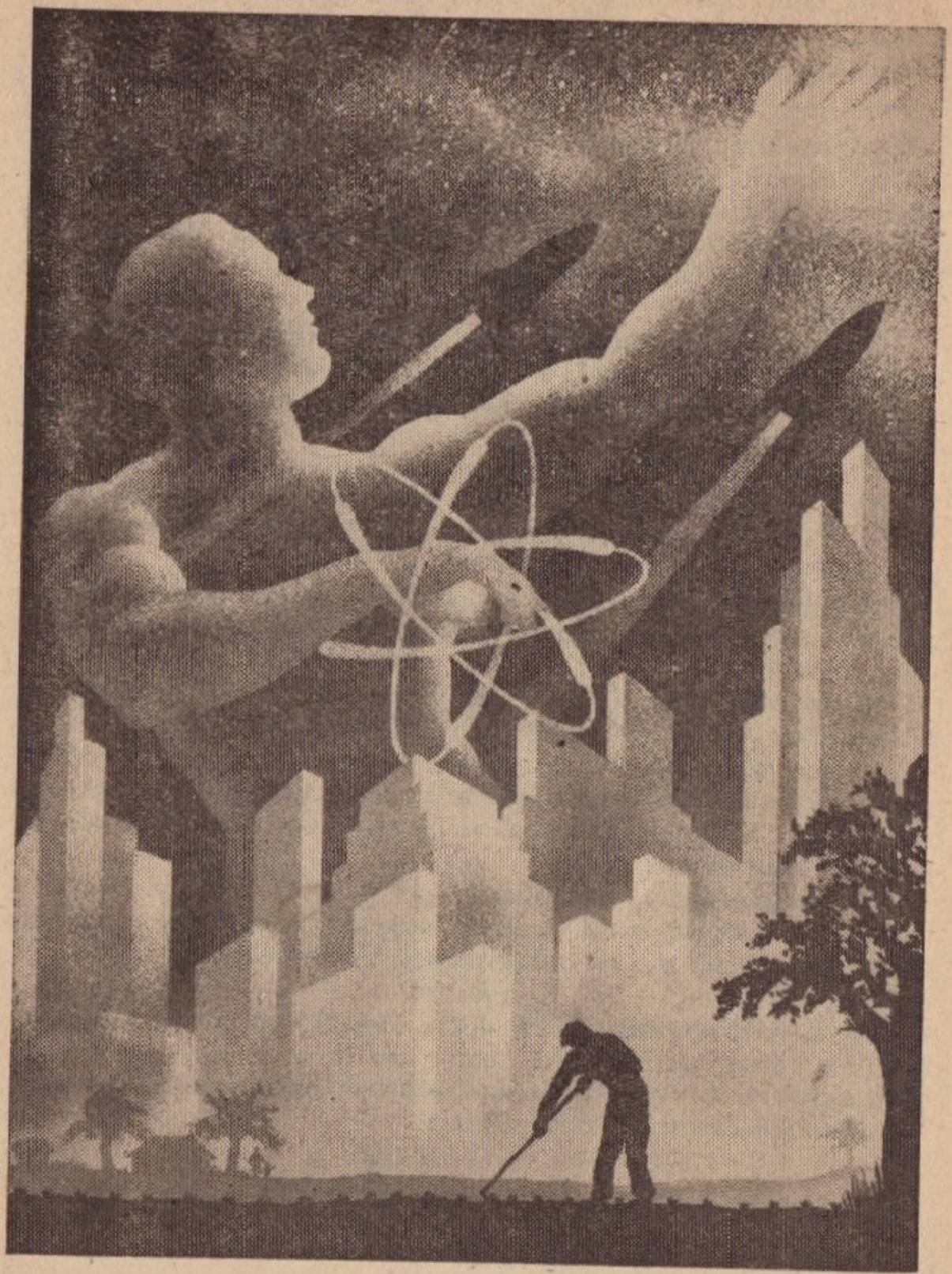
"Well, monkeys and rabbits, if you like. If one of the monkeys can hide himself at five yards, don't you think a whole world of them might be able to hide a planet at a few million miles?"

Realization dawned in Sandra's face.

* * * * *

Orden and Carole were still recognizably Orden and Carole. But

(*Continued on page* 159)



¶ Because she was getting old and fussy Earth was trying to sabotage her own colonies.

The GLAD SEASON

By GENE HUNTER

ILLUSTRATED BY MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS

"Youth is to all the glad season of life; but often only by what it hopes, not by what it attains, or what it escapes."

—Thomas Carlyle

"It is difficult to believe today," the lecturer droned on, "that the conditions we are studying existed only three centuries ago."

Jef Cortland squirmed impatiently in his chair, caring little for the subject at hand and thinking of his shaggy-haired *dogar* and the fresh, cool stream at home, so far away in the middle of a school day.

"Why," continued the lecturer with a little more fervor, "the ancestors of some of you very students were persecuted and discriminated against simply because of their ancestry or their particular coloring. A man with only a tiny fraction of Negro blood, for instance, was considered entirely 'black', no matter what his actual pigmentation, and most of his God-given rights were taken away."

Jef's interest perked up a little. He half remembered that in the times they were studying some of his own people had belonged to that special group the lecturer referred to. The image on the screen changed from a moving scene of sweating laborers to a still study

of a man—a man with black skin and tight, kinky black hair. He was naked except for a rude garment tight around his loins. He was in chains.

Jef studied the image curiously as the lecture tape spoke on about a half-understood state of affairs known as "slavery." Jef decided not to worry too much about it. He bore no resemblance to this pitiful specimen. His own skin was a golden tan, his lips two thin pink lines against his face. The only vestige of similarity was in the hair—its texture, not its coloring. Jef's hair was tight and curly, but of an almost white shade.

"Other races," the voice continued, "were accused of being cruel and war-like." The scene changed to one of a great battle with many strange land men-o'-war, obsolete guns and examples of sudden and horrible death in the field. "Blasting the Japanese almost into oblivion with the first crude missiles of atomic energy—" an atomic explosion filled the screen "—the so-called 'white race' won the greatest of all wars and immediately occupied the island empire. The occupying forces then brutally over-ran the land—murdering, raping, plundering—smashing it to a pitiful remnant of its former power."

As the scene shifted to one of less violence, Jef's interest waned again. He glanced over at the girl opposite him, wondering who *her* ancestors might have been.

Sara Matsunaga was a year older than Jef. The boy suddenly noticed that an adolescent girl began to subtly alter in appearance and a quiet investigation of this phenomenon occupied the rest of his time in class. The remainder of the lecture was lost on him.

Sara was apparently deep in concentration and missed his intent study of her. Apparently.

"Take *one*," Marta Cortland told her son, proffering him the plate of cookies, "then lift gravs out of here until dinner."

Jef took two, grinned impishly at his mother and headed for the living room. Marta planted a restrained smack on his retreating posterior and turned back to the studs and dials of her unikitchen.

Jef's father was scanning that evening's newstape, obviously bored. Jef watched for a while, munching the cookies. A mining strike on Pollux XV. A series of sensational murders on Venus. The dedication of a new building in Centauri. . . .

Mark Cortland reached out a long, delicate hand and flipped

off the viewer. He stretched, yawned and puffed a cigaret into flame.

"How's school, son?" he asked Jef.

The boy shrugged. "So-so."

Mark Cortland looked at him sharply.

"Okay, I guess," Jef amended.

"Pop," he continued after a minute, "if this was three hundred years ago and we were back on Terra, would we be—be different from other people?"

Cortland frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Well, in Social Science today, they said that a long time ago people were—were divided more into classes. By their color and stuff."

"Now why in the devil would they remind you of something like that?" Mark Cortland asked.

"Would we be dis—*discriminated* against, Pop? Would we be called Nee-growers?"

Cortland smiled. "Negroes," he corrected. "Why—yes, son—I suppose we would. But that was a long time ago."

"Would we have been slaves?"

"Oh, four or five hundred years ago, perhaps. Certainly not only three. Now what's this all about?"

"School. They showed us a view of a—a Negro from those times. He was black and ugly and dirty. They had him in chains. They said people with even a fraction of his kind of blood were persecuted —had their rights taken away."

Mark Cortland thought for a moment. Then he said: "Look, Jef—think of it this way. You're a boy, almost an adolescent. Sometimes you do foolish things or make mistakes that an adult wouldn't. That's as it should be. When you're grown, you won't act like a child, but like an adult. Understand?"

The boy nodded.

"The human race is the same way," his father continued, "but over an infinitely greater space of time. With every succeeding generation, man's viewpoints and horizons have broadened. Right now, I would say that mankind is in its 'young manhood' stage, or very close to it. We don't persecute people any more for non-existant reasons. If we once did, it was because we were young and blind."

He smiled. "I'm sure that's what your classes are trying to teach

you, or are building up gradually to make you realize. Just pay a bit closer attention and see if I'm not right. Okay?"

"Okay, Pop," Jef said.

"Din-ner!" Marta Cortland called.

Two weeks later, in the heat of a Thursday afternoon, Mark Cortland found himself with nothing at all to do—or at least nothing so important that he could not spare a few hours for relaxation—and wandered down to the wood-bound stream at the southern end of his property.

His son greeted him with a splashing "Hi, Pop!" and Cortland sat down on a log near the bank. Jef swam swiftly to shore and clambered out. Jojo—that magnificent result of crossbreeding a Terran German Shepherd with an Antarian *regar*—shook the water from his shaggy coat and nuzzled the elder Cortland.

The farmer, admiring his son's lean, bronze, healthy body, said: "You're growing up, son. Your days of swimming in the raw are about over, aren't they?"

Jef glanced down at his body, flushed a trifle, grinned back in pride at his father and slipped his leatheroid trousers on over his wet skin. He ran a hand through his tight, near-white hair and sat down.

"Grandia is a great place, in many ways," Cortland mused. "Life is long and healthy, but you're robbed of a lot of childhood. Puberty at ten, adulthood at thirteen. Certainly different from old Terra."

"Heck, nobody wants to stay a kid any longer than they have to," Jef pointed out.

His father leaned back, his hands behind his head. "No one but grown-ups," he ammended. "That brings to mind a point, son. There—there're things you ought to learn at about your age. I . . ."

"Yes?" his son urged.

"On second thought, I've a tape on it somewhere at home. I'll give it to you to view tonight."

"I've already seen it," Jef said matter-of-factly. "I found it in your library last week. I'd heard about most of it anyway, though."

"Oh," Cortland grinned. "Well, I guess that takes care of that phase of your education in good order. Any further questions?"

"No. Guess not."

"Then the subject's temporarily closed. Speaking of education, how's school going?"

"Oh, same."

"Have you borne in mind what I told you—about Terra's past, I mean?"

"Yeah, Say, Pop . . . ?"

"Hmmm?"

"Is Grandia *really* such a great place, like you said?"

Cortland cocked his head. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Well, heck. I was born here, wasn't I? I don't have any way of telling."

"No standard of comparison. Well, any dissatisfaction?"

"I don't know, Pop. The farm—everything. Why should we be stuck way out here just so a few people back on Earth can still eat the old-time food? Why should you and the rest of the farmers knock yourselves out just so *they* can be happy?"

"Your mother and I came here twelve years ago," Cortland said evenly, a little angrily, "because we wanted to. I studied five years just so I could emigrate to Grandia, or some other world like it. *You're* here because you were born here. This is your home. In a few years you'll be going to Terra to school. After that, you're on your own. Whatever you want to study—whatever you want to be—that's your affair."

Jef detected his father's annoyance. "They didn't *send* you here, then?" he asked, a little less certain of his ground.

"They made it seem damned inviting," Cortland admitted. "Maybe they built it up a little more than was actually true, but we came because we wanted to. Sol needs pioneers. The old, natural resources are gone from Terra, the only planet that was capable of supporting the Solar System. So they went into the stars and opened up virgin worlds, like this one, where natural food could be raised for centuries to come, so the people back Home could have *real* food instead of living off concentrates and poor substitutes."

"You mean—the *rich* people?"

"What?" Cortland snapped. "What do you mean?"

"Well, in Ancient History it says that the 'slaves'—like we were talking about the other day—were . . . were 'forced to work to provide—to provide luxuries for the rich'," the boy quoted. "Then there was some more and then it said something like 'much like the agricultural worlds of today.' That's us, isn't it?"

Cortland frowned, then shook his head. "Something's wrong,"

he said, half to himself. "Something's out of line. They've no right to say anything like that."

He was still shaking his head that evening at dinner.

II

On Monday morning, an hour after the copterbus had dropped down beside the Cortland home and taken Jef to school, Mark Cortland left the farm and its robotic attendents in his wife's hands and lifted gravs for Grandia City.

He landed at the school and went directly to the office of the Director—a tall, angular woman in her sixties. Introducing himself, he said: "I'd like to check out some of the tapes my son's class is studying, please."

The woman—Mrs. Randall, according to the plaque on her desk—looked him over coolly. She pressed a combination of studs and a plastifolder was ejected onto her desk from a wall-slot. She studied it for a few seconds, then looked up.

"May I ask the object of your request?"

Cortland frowned. "My boy's a student here. Isn't that reason enough?"

"As you must know," Mrs. Randall said, "the school is Federation-directed. If you have any complaints as to methods of teaching or of discipline, I suggest . . ."

"No complaints," Cortland said, "yet. I merely want to know what turns the boy's education is taking."

Mrs. Randall became coy. "Has he—mentioned anything irregular to you?"

Some subtle sense jabbed at Cortland's mind. "Of course not. I take it the boy's very happy in school. It's just that I feel I should take an interest in what he's doing."

Mrs. Randall smiled indulgently. "Well," she said, "such an attitude is rather rare these days. But of course—" she pressed another combination of studs "—your interest is appreciated."

Several rolls of tape slid onto her desk. She handed them to Cortland. "We'd like them back by the first of the week," she added smilingly.

Cortland nodded, thanked her and left.

In the copter, he glanced at the various titles. "All-Purpose Math," "Studies in Twentieth Century Literature"—a dry subject, Cortland

imagined—"Lingua Spatia, the Language of Space," "Ancient History," "Social Science," "The Building of Governments." All normal, conventional subjects, he decided.

Cortland returned to the farm to find that Marta had handled things well, as she always did during his occasional abscences. The rest of the day was taken up with routine examinations of sperm specimens from the cattle, a regular Monday routine. That evening the Redmonds, their closest neighbors, dropped over for an evening of cards and the old faithful game of "Spaceways." Lane, their son, and Jef went down to the stream for nightfishing, one of their favorite pastimes.

During the evening Mark asked conversationally how Lane was doing in school and Frank Redmond replied: "Oh, all right, I suppose. Doesn't talk about it much. You know."

Cortland let the matter drop.

He didn't manage to get to the school tapes until after dinner the next night. He found the mathematics volume elementary and undistinguished. "Lingua Spatia, the Language of Space" contained no surprising passages. Cortland had always found literature dull, and the names in that volume—Heinlein, Hemingway, van Vogt, Michener—meant little to him.

The Ancient History course was an interesting narrative, but Cortland could find no reference to the things Jef had mentioned. Wars were explained by the ignorance of the masses and unfortunate social conditions. The faces of the soldiers in the battlefields were plain and unrevealing as to racial characteristics. Slavery was explained simply. The views of its liberators were shown, as Cortland had said, to be the natural result of human development and those of its champions were logically proven to be politically and scientifically detrimental to humanity. There were no pictures of black men in chains. Cortland checked the indexes again, viewing the portions he thought might contain mis-statements, but found none.

Frowning, he turned to the Social Science tape and projected it. It turned out to be a simple, straight-forward explanation of the Solar Federation and the duties of its various departments and top officials. It could have been less dry, Cortland decided, but there was nothing questionable about it.

"The Building of Governments" supplemented the Social Science course, showing the development of the present Solar Federation out

of the old Terran capitalism and the reasons for its necessity under present-day economic conditions. Cortland enjoyed it most of all, but above everything, he was puzzled by the discrepencies in what his son had told him and what the tapes actually stated.

Finally he put the tapes away in his desk and walked to the sleeping compartments. He stood staring down at the deep-sleeping Jef for a long time, wondering. Finally the boy stirred and rolled over. Cortland, not wanting to disturb him, checked the thermostat and eased out of the room. He went to his own bed and lay down beside his wife. It was nearly dawn before he went to sleep.

The rest of the week was routine. Cortland said nothing to his wife and son, and returned the tapes to an apparently disinterested Mrs. Randall on Thursday.

That done, he dropped his copter on the roof of the Grandia Bar and descended into the little casino. It was a quiet day, since farmers usually came to town only over the three-day weekend and the city dwellers were too busy preparing for their trade to spend much time in recreation.

Cortland was just beginning his second beer, still wondering about Jef and the tapes, when he saw Frank Redmond enter. He hailed his friend in surprise, ordered more drinks and the two talked for a time of the usual matters. Eventually it developed that Redmond was in town to send money to his brother-in-law.

"The shiftless no-good got himself kicked off the ship at Tarko Sil," the tall, red-faced farmer explained. "A ne'er-do-well, but I like 'im. This'll get him on his feet for the time being and he'll be in the chips for awhile. Then I'll bail him out of some cooler again in a few months. Happens all the time. By the way—how come you're in town? Thought you *never* left the place during the week."

Cortland fingered his glass. "As a matter of fact," he said, "this is my second trip in four days."

Redmond was politely curious. "Big deal?"

Cortland considered evading the other's thinly veiled gambit, then thought better of it. After all, if his half-formed suspicions should prove correct, Redmond, as well as all the other parents on Grandia, would have a vital interest in what was going on.

"I came in to visit the school," he said frankly.

Redmond raised an eyebrow. "Jef having troubles? Funny. Always thought he was a pretty smart kid."

Cortland absently crushed out his cigaret. "Oh, I'm not worried about the boy's intelligence. He can handle anything they hand him. To tell you the truth, Frank, it's the school itself that's worrying me."

He proceeded to confide in Redmond his two conversations with his son, his own running of the school tapes and the strange discrepancies.

"Sounds odd," Redmond admitted. "Couldn't have imagined it or made it up, could he? You know how kids are sometimes."

"I don't think so. I don't know how Jef would have any knowledge of ancient conditions outside his studies. Besides, he's too old to make up things like that. No, Frank—the boy's being fed propaganda in some way—and for some reason. That means, of course, that the rest of the kids are getting it too." He spread his hands. "What's behind it?"

"Beats me," Redmond said, finishing his beer and rising. "Maybe—well, maybe you're being just a little too sensitive about it. I'll talk to Lane and see what he says. Meantime, guess I've neglected the farm too long. Have to get back. Nice to have seen you, Mark."

He extended his hand and Cortland returned the gesture. Despite the fact that he and Redmond met several times a month, the old courtesies were important on Grandia and one did not neglect them with friends.

A week and a half later, Redmond called on the visio and extended an invitation to the Cortland's to drop over the following evening.

"Thought you folks would be pretty tied up," Mark Cortland said, "what with having a visiting celebrity in the house."

Redmond grinned. "You mean Dirk? Confidentially, Mark, the guy's a bum. Remember that roll I sent him a couple of weeks ago when he was in a jam? Well, I thought that would be the end of him for awhile, but he spent it all for first-class passage out here. Said he'd been in space for ten years and never traveled as a passenger. Wanted to see what it was like—with *my* money! But he's Linda's brother, and a real character besides. Like you to meet him. That's why I called."

"I'd like to," Cortland said. "That's the trouble with our agricultural world. Not enough contact with Terra. Spacemen swarm in and out, but who gets to talk to them? The gamblers

and the call girls. Why, we haven't even had a new settler since the Matsunagas came in two years ago."

Redmond nodded. "Knew how you were about keeping in touch with Terra, Mark. Be a treat for Jef, too. Lane's proud as punch about his uncle—probably lord it all over your boy."

"He already has," Cortland chuckled. "This visio's been going like mad every afternoon. I don't know how your brother-in-law's had time to begin and end all those revolutions and save so many Rigellian princesses."

"Only one kind of 'princess' Dirk Calhoun was ever around," Redmond said, "but of course it wouldn't do to let Lane know about them."

III

Dirk Calhoun was every boy's idea of what a real spaceman should be. Cortland watched with amusement while Jef was introduced. The boy, although in awe of the great figure shaking hands witth him, was avidly taking in the shock of blond hair, the stern jaw, the twinkling eyes and the massive frame that made up Frank Redmond's brother-in-law.

Calhoun, of course, dominated the evening. Their previous visits with the Redmond's had been in a pleasant, if uneventful, groove. The boys always retired to Lane's room. Marta and Linda settled in a corner and discussed those things peculiar to feminine conversation, Cortland and Redmond talked agriculture and gave their own interpretations of the news and political developments from Sol.

But tonight the grooves were erased. Lane and Jef sat stiffly and listened intently to Dirk Calhoun's every word, trying to remember indelibly his every gesture. The two women, for the first time since either Cortland or Redmond could remember, kept their interest on things other than Grandian womanhood and child care. Linda Redmond watched her brother proudly. Marta listened with admiration.

Calhoun had fought, sweated and loved across three solar systems and the hour was growing late when he suddenly became impersonal for a moment. "Yeah," he said, ending a mysterious tale of intrigue in Cygni, "but it's you people on worlds like this who have the life—the real life. Terra's dead, and of course that means Sol is dead too. Centauri—well, Centauri's wide open and it's fun, but you get tired

of that kind of fun after awhile. As for the rest of 'em, not worth a damn.

"Out here in Antares, you're next to nature. You can raise kids the right way. You've got all the important things of life and none of the complications. Everything's new. No time to think about the old. Learn and advance, that's the motto of the frontier, just like old Sam Marley said when he proposed colonization of these worlds. I envy you people. No, damnit, I mean it—I really do. Someday I'm going to find myself a place just like this one—maybe Grandia, even—and drop gravs here for good."

Momentarily, he seemed to have run down.

"Pretty nice to have the old homestead spoken of so well, eh Mark?" Frank Redmond said.

"I've always said it," Cortland replied. He was watching Calhoun intently. There was, he knew, a peculiar sincerity to extroversion. The spaceman meant his grandiose compliments, he was sure. "But remember," he said, "we have our problems too— social as well as technical."

Calhoun smiled. "I don't think they'd prove to be as important as those back on Terra right now, Cortland."

"Just what are things like back Home, Mr. Calhoun?" Marta asked. "We'd like to know about it first hand."

Calhoun took a deep breath. "Well, Mrs. Cortland, I sort of compare Terra to a woman—if you don't mind, of course. Like a mother, now. She made a lot of mistakes in raising her brood. I guess she was as good a mother as she knew how to be, but she fouled up lots of times in spite of that. Wars, discriminations, tyranny. She was trying to do as well by her kids—the human race—as she could. Then, after the family had sort of grown up she was a pretty nice, proud old girl for a couple of hundred years.

"We were out exploring the planets and then the stars and we wrote home regularly and we sent her nice things. After while, though, we kind of grew away from her and she began to get old and a little lonesome. She wasn't the center of attraction any more—the kids were taking root in new, strange places. Rigel, Centauri, here in Antares. She resigned herself to it, but she got old and fussy all the same. And the kids were so busy and so far away they never noticed."

Cortland enjoyed the lengthy simile. "What do you mean, 'old and fussy'?" he asked.

"Well, there isn't any war any more—naturally, since one governmental systems takes care of everything—but outside of that, there's a lot of strife. Most of it is under cover, but if you dig a little you can see the effects. There's poverty, in places, and hatred and distrust. You'd find it hard to believe out here, but in a few isolated instances, there have even been flareups of the old racial and religious hatreds."

"That *is* hard to believe," Redmond said. "For instance?"

"Oh, there've been complaints against certain religions. Kids stoning churches. Certain racial groups claim discrimination has reared up in spots. You can read about it in Terran newstapes, but I doubt if any of it's considered important enough for your press out here. That's what I mean—the old girl's getting fussy."

Cortland and Redmond were listening to Calhoun, but their eyes were upon each other. Cortland was breathing quickly through clenched teeth. "It doesn't seem possible," he said. "It doesn't seem possible that Terra could have retrogressed to that stage."

"I wouldn't call it retrogression, really," Calhoun said. "Not yet, at least. And I wouldn't worry too much about it. It's restlessness and dissatisfaction with her present position that's bothering Terra, I guess. A fear that she's being pushed into the background, breaking out in the only way it knows how."

"But Terra has spent hundreds of years advancing to the point where the worth of the individual is recognized for itself alone," Marta Cortland said. "What's become of the decent, intelligent people who made it that way?"

"They're still there. They'll try to keep Terra on an even keel—at least until they're pushed so far into the background that the old girl is finally abandoned, that is."

"Terra abandoned!" Even Linda Redmond was apalled by her brother's latest flippancy. "That's a terrible thing to say, Dirk!"

"Didn't mean to shock you, Lin. You'll have to remember—spacemen get more of an insight into things than you folks. Think of us as intermediaries, with a more three-dimensional view than either the people back home or you pioneers. That's the general feeling, in space—that Terra is too old and backward to hold her power much longer.

"Why, look at yourselves, for instance. Antares has twenty-six planets, eighty moons. A total of a hundred and six worlds, over seventy of them inhabitable. You've new worlds out here, and in the

other frontier systems, too. New worlds and fresh blood. Believe me, folks, the whole scheme of things is going to split into two ideologies, like a gigantic amoeba. Perhaps not in our lifetimes—although I understand you're long-lived in Antares—but it will come, eventually."

Cortland was deep in thought. "Could it be possible," he asked finally, "that at least part of this 'restlessness' you spoke of could be organized, rather than spontaneous?"

"Hmmm. Well, there could be crackpots around who might spot such a trend and try to turn it to their particular advantage, I suppose. It would have to be a highly efficient organization, of course, and very secret. That's an interesting theory, Cortland. I'd never stopped to consider it before."

"Maybe no one else has either," the farmer mused. "Look, Calhoun—it's late and we've got to be getting on. I'd like very much to talk more to you and Frank about this. If we could get together, say in town some evening. . . ."

Redmond chuckled. "I know what's on your mind, Mark. Better arrange a get-together out here in the country. I'm afraid that if we got Dirk into town we couldn't hold him down to serious conversation for very long."

"Just a spaceman on an extended holiday," Calhoun told them. "But if you think you could arrange to have a small supply of Centaurian *chrardo* handy, I might be able to keep up one end of a discussion all right."

Cortland rose, stretching. "It'll be arranged," he said. "I guarantee it. But let's make it soon, shall we?"

The meeting did not come about as early as Cortland would have liked. Dirk Calhoun met one of Earl Donaldson's three grown daughters—stacked, in the spaceman's words, like a plastoid sani-cabinet—and managed, of course, to break her heart in a matter of days. Fortunately, her's was a heart that mended rapidly, so the incident provoked little interest except annoyance in the mind of Mark Cortland over the delay, and perhaps passing annoyance to Earl Donaldson.

When the two farmers and the spaceman did manage to assemble, Cortland found that the conversation that had seemed so important a week before had lost much of its meaning for Calhoun. That worthy had entertained the two Grandians—or so he thought—with an involved description of the Donaldson girl's particular

talents, comparing her in passing to numerous others of her sex he had encountered in apparently numberless solar systems.

Once or twice Cortland had tried to interject references to their previous conversation, but Calhoun had evaded the subject. It was not until fairly late, when Jef came into his father's den to bid him goodnight—a custom held over from his earlier years that neither he nor his father cared to dispense with—that the spaceman became quiet. His current tale was definitely not for youthful ears.

"Fine boy," he said when Jef had gone to bed. "Like Lane. Great kids, both of 'em. You raise them good out here, boys." He sighed. "Someday, when I settle down . . ."

"Since he met you," Cortland said, "Jef's talked of nothing except becoming a spaceman." He added dryly: "I'm not so sure."

"You'll let the boy pick his own life, won't you?" Calhoun asked.

"Of course. If spaceman he wants to be, then spaceman it is. I just hope he doesn't come home every year and shock the old folks. Look, Calhoun—it's about Jef and Lane and the rest of the kids on Grandia—maybe the rest of the kids in the whole damned Federation—that I wanted to talk to you. It's important to Frank and me. Do you mind if we get on with it?"

Calhoun was slightly chastened. "I'm sorry," he said sincerely. "All spacemen are boors to planetlubbers, I know. But if you think I'm bad, you should hear the Old Man on the last tub I worked. He spent two straight watches one cruise telling an involved yarn about his adventures with some tri-sexual race. . . ."

Redmond cleared his throat loudly. Calhoun grinned again and became quiet.

"I haven't talked to him, Mark," Redmond said. "You're a hell of a lot better conversationalist than me, so I saved him for you."

"Thanks. Well, we talked about the possibility of an organized scheme behind the agitation on Terra."

And Cortland launched into an account of his two conversations with Jef, the boy's questions and doubts, his own checking of the lesson tapes and the differences between Jef's accounts and his own findings.

When he had finished, Redmond added: "I asked Lane about it. Didn't seem too concerned himself, so I let it drop." He spread his thick hands. "Didn't know what else to do."

Dirk Calhoun had closed his eyes and folded his hands beneath his chin as Cortland talked. He retained this posture for a few more quiet seconds, then reached out for his empty glass.

"It's disturbing," he admitted. "Damned disturbing." He poured another drink, then said: "Look, boys—I talk a lot, but I try to keep from becoming shallow. There's plenty of free time in space. I've studied, when the mood struck me. Historians tell us, for instance, that back during the glacial periods on Terra, only those prehistoric 'men' with the cleverest minds and the strongest bodies survived, making the race potent enough to begin any sort of civilization at all. Right?"

"Accepted," Cortland said, "but what conclusions can you draw from the problems of prehistoric man that apply to our own here on Grandia?"

"The human race delevoped," Calhoun went on dreamily, "and gradually the natural catastrophes were eliminated. Hence, man had to provide his own unnatural ones—racial hatred, tragically unnecessary wars, intolerable coexistent ideologies—perhaps just to keep himself from going stale. After a few centuries of that sort of thing, we reached the age of space travel. *That* kept the greatest minds and the strongest backs busy, by God.

"First, the 'Hundred Years of Exploration' in Sol alone. Then stellarium and visits to the nearer stars. Then Frankhauser brought us to the point where we could exceed the speed of light and go damned near anywhere in that misnamed area called 'space' that we wanted. Now, the people who stayed home have used up just about every drive and ambition they ever had. What's left for them?"

" 'The Devil,' " Marta Cortland said from the doorway, " 'finds work for idle hands.' Isn't that what you mean?" She came forward and sat down on the huge arm of her husband's chair. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but the conversation was so interesting that I had to listen. Nobody asked me, but I think perhaps we Antarians have considered ourselves minor entities on backward worlds just a little too long. Why can't we start changing that attitude. Would that solve anything, do you suppose?"

Dirk Calhoun pushed his glass away. "I envy you, Cortland," he said. "You have that rarity—a warm, yet reasoning and logical woman. Now someday when I quit space and settle down somewhere. . . ."

IV

"Please realize," Mark Cortland told Marta later that night, "that I didn't have any definite ideas when I first found out about Jef's studies. That's why I didn't say anything to you."

"I'm used to that, darling," Marta said brightly. "You set the date with the justice before you did with me, remember? And I didn't even know which agri world we were going to until you showed me the tickets."

"I'm a neglectful brute," Cortland admitted semi-ruefully. "You seem to have survived very nicely, though."

His wife feigned sulkiness. "The only thing I've ever known about ahead of you was when Jef was on the way, and that not for very long. Sometimes it would be nice to be able to discuss things with my husband before the fact, you know."

Cortland chuckled. "I saw you looking over friend Calhoun," he chided. "*There's* a great conversationalist for you."

Marta pretended to consider. "No," she said finally, leaning over and pecking her husband lightly on the cheek. "Besides the fact that I like to say something now and then myself, I rather prefer having my man handy. A spaceman wouldn't do, I'm afraid."

Cortland made an attempt to return the kiss. "Uh uh," Marta evaded. "Here's one of our few chances to talk something over. Let's get at it. I'm not a bit sleepy."

"Neither am I," Cortland muttered.

"First the problem," Marta went on. "That we have. Now the question: What to do about it?"

"That was the reason I wanted to talk to Calhoun. As he said, a spaceman would have a better perspective. We only know Grandia and what we *hear* from Terra. A constant traveler would have knowledge of both ends."

"Think he'll come up with anything?"

"He'll think about it awhile, at least. He might possibly have ideas that could help us. The thing is, if it were an entirely localized problem, I wouldn't hesitate to suggest that we take action on our own. But any sort of revolt here would just give Terra further insight into the fact that the colonies might be slipping away from her."

Marta reached for a cigaret. "Darling, I think Calhoun's made a bigger impression on you than you realize. You're beginning to talk like him."

"He's made me see," Cortland admitted, "that provinces tend to grow away from their founders. History shows that's proven theory, of course, but a person doesn't always realize he's living in the midst of history."

"All right, Mark—we'll assume the Federation *per se* is doomed. But won't the final blow—the final break that Calhoun sees coming—be from within Terra itself?"

Cortland shrugged. "Within the Federation governmental structure, at any rate. Dishonesty in government, for instance—say the election of a corrupt Solar Council. A sudden tremendous rivalry between major corporations, perhaps. Radical new inventions—oh, any number of things might bring it about. But a colonial revolt against some Federation department—such as the educational system—that could cause the split to come about in the wrong way, with too much violence centered in the frontier, rather than at the real source of trouble."

"Ummm, I suppose so." Marta laid an arm across Cortland's chest. "Sort of disappointing, though. I was beginning to think my husband's discovery of skullduggery in Jef's school might be the impetus to major change. I guess a woman can never think of her man as being just a tiny burp in a huge chain reaction."

Cortland laughed and pulled her closer to him. "A beautiful simile. But at any rate, there's one thing that will never change."

It was Marta who turned out the light.

* * * * *

Regardless of what Cortland might have had in mind, Dirk Calhoun proved to be something else that would never change, so long as he kept his glands functioning properly, at least. The spaceman left Grandia quite suddenly, after earning the wrath of a righteous father—a respected member of the Grandia City council. There was a scandal, of course, and Linda Redmond was broken up over it for some time, but the ways and habits of spacemen are well known in the frontiers and the incident was soon shrouded by the passage of time and the advent of new topics of conversation.

Just as Grandia depended on the huge gold and silver ships that dropped gravs at regular intervals, so Cortland had depended on the spaceman's assistance to his problem. To be sure, that dependency had taken the form of only a vague assurance that Calhoun would "think of something," but it had helped his morale.

It was Marta who suggested he try to solve his uncertainty by

going directly to the core of the problem—Grandian youth. Not sure of just what course the conversation would take, Cortland called Jef into his study one evening, determined to lay the full problem before his son.

Jef was accustomed to discussions with his father, but he was not prepared for this particular evening. It was his first introduction to adult equality.

"You probably smoke when you're with Lane or alone by the river," Cortland began, and was interrupted by a startled gasp from a youth who did not realize that certain fathers hold vivid memories of their own boyhood. "You probably smoke and pretty soon you'll have to be taught to drink properly or else waste a lot of precious years learning by yourself, the hard way. We've got to talk and think, you and I, and I can't bring that about by continuing to regard you as a kid."

The farmer paused, voicing a silent prayer that he had started in the right direction. "I'm going to teach you to dry yourself behind the ears," he went on, "rather than have a bunch of sharpies do it for you later on. The only reason I'm not offering you a cigaret and a glass of beer right now is because I need your full attention and cooperation and I'm afraid you might get too excited to give it to me. Am I right?"

Jef was overwhelmed. He managed to nod.

"Now, then . . ." and Cortland proceeded to tell the boy of his personal study of the school tapes. He didn't editorialize—he merely stated.

When he had finished, Jef said: "But *why*, Pop?"

"Why? Because they don't want you to grow away from them, that's why. They want to hold you to their bosoms because they're afraid of being deserted by you or your progeny.

"Now get this, Jef. To a certain extent, the things they're teaching you really occured. Black men—men of many colors, in fact—*were* held in slavery, a long time ago. Later, after they were freed, they *were* discriminated against. There *were* terrible wars and, in many cases, awful retribution. In short, innocent people *have* suffered in the past because of false ideologies, carefully coated with numerous brands of sugar and spice to make people believe these things were right.

"But then people began to think for themselves—more and more each generation—and they put those old, false theories behind

them, and they took one of their greatest steps forward. Never forget, a sociological progression can often have twice the importance of a technological one. Those people I'm talking about were ancestors of ours and the Redmonds and the Matsunagas and the Kellys and all the other people throughout the Federation. But now a lot of people back Home are afraid of the far-sighted race they spawned and they're trying to teach you hatred and distrust and suspicion. If it takes, the kind of life we know today will cease and civilization will get switched over to another course, exactly as if an insane astrogator had irreparably altered the course of a spaceship.

"You heard what Calhoun said that night at the Redmonds—its spreading in Sol and it may well spread to the frontiers." Cortland inhaled deeply on a cigaret. "Hell," he said, tossing the package to Jef. "Go ahead and take one. But don't tell your mother or she'll skin us alive, and we're both too old for skinning."

Jef grinned, confidently and confidentially. Once the cigaret was burning—a nervous process during which he insisted on looking down his nose as the tip began to glow—Jef became as serious as his father.

"Gee, Dad—the schools are directly under the Federation, aren't they?" he asked. "The Department of Education?"

"Wait, son," Cortland cautioned. "I know what you're thinking, and it's a serious charge. It's possible that the government could be trying to pervert its own citizens, but it could also be the work of a subversive group that's infiltrating itself—very unobtrusively—into the educational system."

"Did anything like that ever happen before, though? I mean, in olden times?"

The older Cortland shrugged. "Perhaps. From what I remember from my history, those times—especially pre-space—were periods of overlapping and clashing theories. Possibly there were some groups who recognized the importance of its youth. Certainly there were unlimited potentialities there."

Jef grinned. "Makes me feel important," he said.

"You *are* important, you and all the others. The basic instinct of the importance of youth has always been with us, I suppose. Trouble is—" he lowered his voice—"that instinct has always been predominant in the mothers. Anyhow, it took civilization a long time to brush away its own complications and bring that natural tendency out into the open."

Cortland leaned forward to better stress his point. "But there's the rub. Your importance is unquestioned, and because of that you're especially vulnerable to exposure to an organized program of this sort."

"But Dad, we—we've spotted them. We know what they're trying to do. Now we can do something about it."

Cortland smiled. "But that won't be easy. We don't know what course to take. As far as I know, only you and I and your mother and Frank Redmond know about the inaccurate tapes. It hardly seems possible that this one tiny segment on one little planet out of a hundred in one system in hundreds would be the first to discover such an attempt, but it has to begin somewhere."

He got up and walked to the large window overlooking the Grandian countryside, dark now in the moonless night. "I won't say we're equal to the discoverer of fire or the inventor of the wheel, but we may well be comparable to the boy who found the leak in the dike, or the spaceman who saved a shipload of colonists by spotting a one-decimal error in a fuel mixture. Now we have to plug that dike, have to work out a means of computing fuel mixtures so that error can't possibly occur again."

The full importance of their problem had by now dawned on the boy. The peculiar combination of events, issues and his father's words had touched off that certain spark within him that began the subtle process of turning a carefree boy into a reasoning adult. He was young, but the forces conspiring against him were very old and they balanced the difference in years.

"Well, Pop—say that it is a subversive group and not the government. What kind of bunch could it be?"

"Oh, Lord—any kind, I suppose. Religious fanatics, an extremely reactionary political group, a cult of some sort—who knows?"

"Do you think it's happening everywhere—in every school?"

Cortland shook his head slowly. "No, it couldn't. They'd be overdoing it. Calhoun pointed out only isolated instances on Terra. They have to be building up slowly, so as not to excite suspicion. Grandia may just happen to be one of several worlds where they've installed false tapes."

"Then the school Directors in those places would have to be in on it," Jef said. "I mean, Mrs. Randall gave you the tapes we *should* be studying."

The farmer nodded. "A good point. We could try to find out

something about Mrs. Randall—her background and connections, if any, with various groups. Now, she might suspect me. I don't think she took my visit very lightly. Perhaps we can have someone else—Lane's father, for instance—make the inquiries."

He turned from the window. "There isn't much we can do, then, until we get more data." He grinned. "Say, let's have that beer."

V

The tiny jet of flame came from a dark side street in Grandia City on Friday night, four days after Cortland's conversation with his son. It seared his left arm and his side severely and would have killed him if it had struck two inches nearer the center of his chest. As it was, it created an ugly wound that required hospitalization.

There was an investigation, of course. Since Cortland gambled only for very small stakes and since he was known to be in love with no one's wife but his own, no particular motive could be determined. The blast was listed officially as an accident, cause or causes unknown, and no one but the Cortlands and Frank Redmond troubled themselves over any dark motives behind the attack.

"Dirk could be out somewhere shooting his mouth off about what's going on here on Grandia," Redmond told the wounded man when he visited the hospital on Saturday morning. "You know how that character is when he gets wound up."

Cortland shook his head. "I doubt it. He probably hasn't finished telling about his experiences among the innocent country maidens of a farm planet. More than likely our friend Randall has gotten word she's being investigated. Have you found out anything yet?"

"Not much, I'm afraid. She's been here a little over a year. She taught previously on Terra and in Centauri. Gets a lot of personal mail from both places. That much I dug up here. Wrote to Solarian and Centurian investigators for checkups on her past associates, but of course I won't hear from them for a few days." Redmond was glum. "Might turn out to be expensive, you know."

"We can handle it," Cortland told him. "We'll have to."

Redmond left after a few minutes of small talk, mentioning that with two farms to look after now, he couldn't take too much time off.

Shortly after noon Jef came to the hospital, with a bashful Sara Matsunaga in tow. They talked idly for half an hour and it developed that the two had come into town by copterbus to see a show.

Community events took precedent over family visio programs with the youngsters, a situation which the still young Cortland could understand. He started to caution Jef to be home early, checked himself and made a mental reservation to teach his son to operate the family copter as soon as he was back on the farm.

A worried Marta spent most of Sunday with him; he returned to the farm on Monday and was completely recovered by the following week-end. On Friday night the Redmonds called. The usual game of Spaceways was forgotten and the men retired directly to the den, their wives to the living room.

With the strange attack on his father, Jef now had enough prestige to dim the glow of the visit of Lane's uncle and felt himself on an equal footing with the young Redmond for the first time in weeks. The two went directly to their usual haunt by the stream.

"I've heard from Sol and Centauri," Redmond said as soon as the beer was poured. "We may have something on friend Randall."

"For instance?"

"Well, there was a teacher's group on Fhrona that was pretty unpopular with a few people—unpopular enough that there was an investigation, but you know how Centauri is. The investigating committee, finding nothing suspicious, lost interest. But before long, everyone involved either left Fhrona or filtered out of the organization until it folded up. Randall, for instance, came here."

"What kind of group was it?" Cortland asked.

"Well, the report didn't say much, except that they called themselves 'The Teachers' Committee for Free Expression.' " He brought forth a sheaf of papers. "You'd better go over it all yourself—I'm no detective. Look here, if we have to trace everyone who was in that group we'll have to get some money behind us. The bill's attached to the report. It hurts."

Cortland gazed unseeing into his glass. "When you haven't got capital," he said finally, "you have to have guts."

"You think we ought to take matters into our own hands, then?" Redmond asked.

Cortland rose to pace the floor. Quietly and savagely he ground his right fist into the palm of his left hand. His face was strained. "Wouldn't it be great if we could? If we could end our little sea of troubles here by opposing them." He turned to his friend. "Can we, Frank?" he asked simply.

Redmond scratched his head. "Can't quite see a local revolution," he answered. "Wouldn't work. Make *us* seem like the crackpots, rather than *them*. Look—couldn't we get hold of the tapes they're shoving at the kids? Send them to Terra with a request for an official investigation?"

Cortland sighed. "It'd be a devilishly slow proposition," he said. "You know how government investigations are. No, Frank—it isn't likely an inquiry would have much effect. Even if it did, it would be a long, slow process."

* * * * *

"But I mean, who could have done it?" Linda Redmond asked. "I mean, something like that could hardly be an accident, could it now?"

"I honestly don't know, Linda," Marta lied carefully. "But it had to be an accident. I hate to think of anyone saying anything against Mark, because he's certainly the last man on Grandia to get in a shooting scrape."

Linda narrowed her eyes. "But, dear—you can never *tell* about men. I mean, I wouldn't worry you for anything, what with all you've been through this past week, but everybody's wondering about it. I thought you ought to know that."

"Everybody? I'd have thought there were more important things to worry about than my husband's reputation. I'd have supposed 'everybody' would have forgotten about it by now."

"Well, I mean all the girls. . . ."

"Oh," Marta Cortland smiled.

* * * * *

"You take Sara Matsunaga to the show?" Lane Redmond asked idly.

Jef swished his line across the water carelessly. "Uh huh."

Lane said nothing for a few minutes, then: "She's a Jap, you know."

Jef felt his pulse quicken. "What's that?" he asked, feigning ignorance.

"You know. Like they talked about in school last month. The war."

Jef snorted. "Long time ago. I don't go for that ancient history stuff much. Don't matter any more."

"They were mean, though," Lane persisted.

"Lots of people were mean in those days, I guess."

After a short pause, Lane went on: "Don't it bother you because maybe your great-great-great-grandfather was a slave?"

The rapid pulse continued, but Jef pretended outward calm. "Too bad for him, that's all. What was your great-great-great-grandfather, anyhow?"

Lane shrugged.

* * * * *

Cortland reached for a cigaret, puffed it into flame and tossed the packet to Redmond. "By God, Frank," he said, exhaling a dense cloud, "there's one solution. We can have our revolution, if we work it right—a bloodless one."

"I'm for it," Redmond told him. "For anything that can be handled peacefully. Shoot."

"Calhoun gave us the clue when he spoke about Antares and its possibilities. He said something about 'new worlds and fresh blood.' He said that we couldn't help but drift away from the old order—that someday Terra would be abandoned by her children. It's reasonable. Why, Frank—we'd die if we were forced to return home, all of us. We *belong* out here. This is *ours*."

"In short, the hell with Sol?"

"Well, yes. In a way, I suppose so. Look at it this way. We—the race—are evolving out here. The oldtimers would have had us believe Man would suddenly sprout tendrils, develop telepathy and spurt ahead in intelligence in one generation, but it just isn't reasonable. Frank, no matter what Terra degenerates into, no matter what sort of outmoded theories they try to rub off on us, if we're wide awake enough we can keep them from taking. I'm not a fanatic and I don't feel like my eyes are blazing, but we're slowly developing into Homo Superior out here. We're the part of the race that can get humanity out of its childhood and onto the threshold of real maturity."

He stopped to drain his glass.

"I've talked to Jef, Frank. I've made him *see,* and with damned few words, too. The kids can save themselves, if we appeal to their sense of reason."

Redmond pursed his lips. "You and I can, maybe, but how about the others. Chances are the kids aren't even saying anything about school at home. Lane never does. It would all have to be undercover, too, and how about the other seventy-odd inhabited worlds in the system?"

"Don't worry. Someone's spotted those false tapes on the other worlds where they're operating, too—or they will very soon. Some other father will have a talk with *his* kid and then a talk with *his* neighbors and they'll start to worry just the way we have. Then they'll talk to the kids again and after awhile they'll realize that no bunch of screwballs and perverts can change the course of the development of the human mind."

"Sounds good," Redmond acknowledged. "Just hope your theory hasn't any flaws. So where do we begin?"

Cortland sat down at his desk, picked up a stylus and began jotting down names. *Cortland, Redmond, Webber, Stein.* "We know most of the other families with children in the Grandia City school." *Johnson, Lynne, White, Ruiz.* "We'll contact them. Right away. We'll get together with them and the kids." *Whitehorse, Kelly, Schiller, Matsunaga.* "It doesn't have to be undercover. It'll be best if it isn't." *Chun, Orvonsky, Di Sica, Ramirez.* "That way there won't be anymore blasts in the night. We'll be too damn' big for them." *Davis, North, Jeffries, Riordan.*

He finished the list and handed it over to Redmond. He stood up, walked to the window and looked out. In the night brightness he could see Lane and Jef walking up from the river arm in arm, a string of fish in each free hand, Jojo the dogar jumping at their heels. *Here they come,* he thought, *representatives of the greatest potential army of good in the galaxy.*

"Want another beer, Frank?" he asked his neighbor.

But Redmond was too preoccupied to answer. The list of Grandian families in his hand, he sat at the visio busily dialing the first number.

* * * * *

"Now You See Them—"

(*Continued from page* 133)

soon no Terran would ever know what they looked like. There would be other Terrans, of course.

Space flight, apparently, was discovered regularly, over and over again. The intervals, to the world of monkeys and rabbits—or the world that seemed to belong to the monkeys and rabbits—seemed very short.

Any interval seemed short to an immortal.

* * * * *

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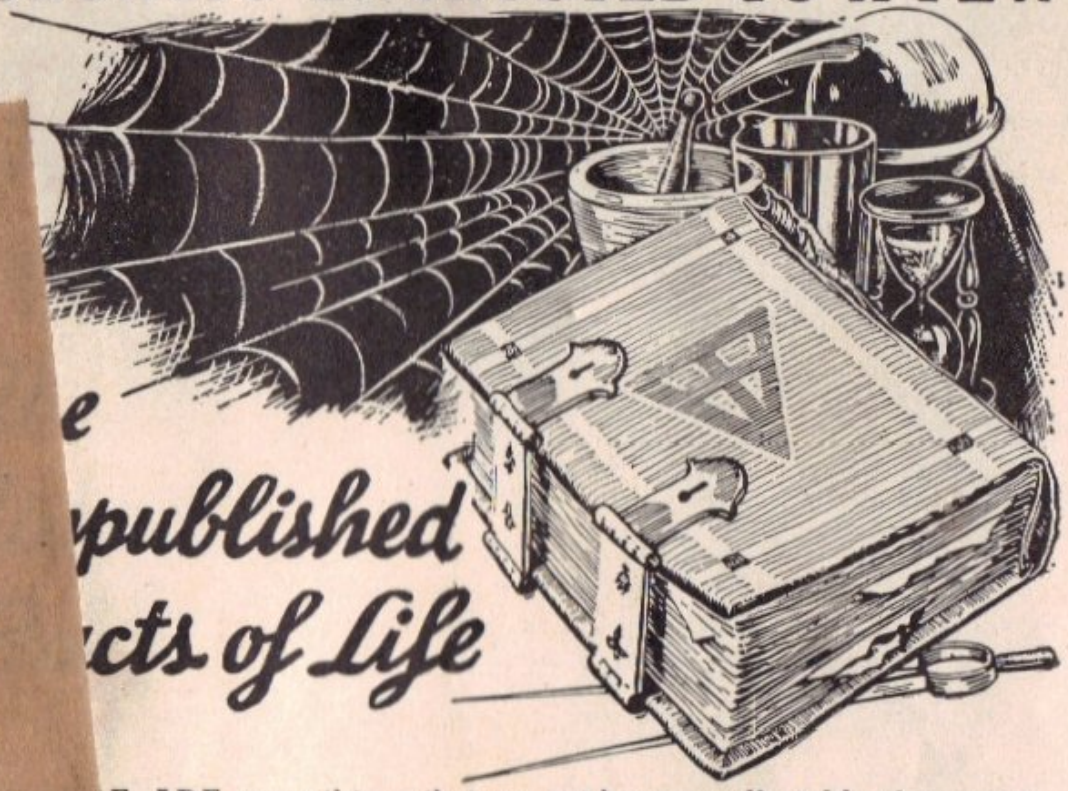

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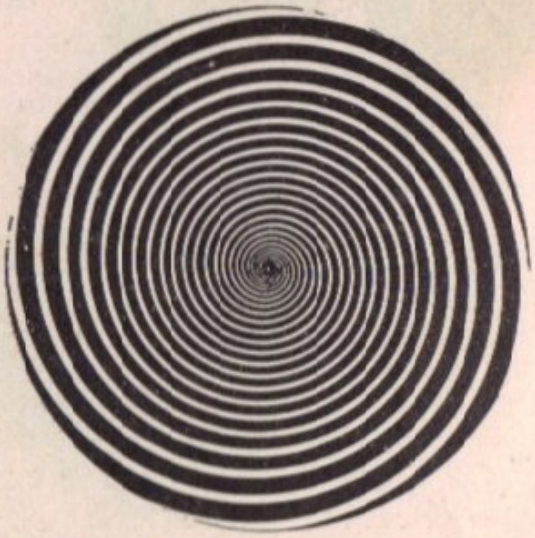

The Spiral to the left is print
enlarged form in

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spiral, and then READ TO
hypnotizing techniques given
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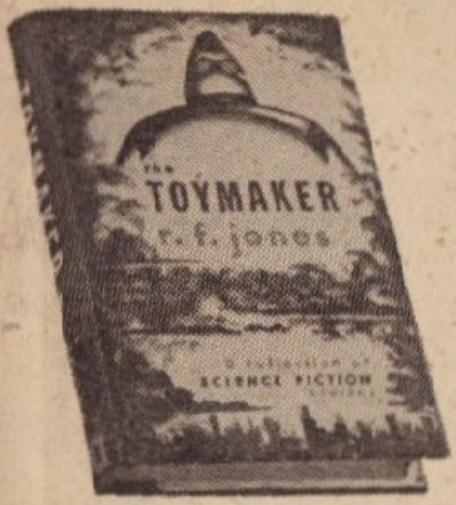

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