SPACE
SCIENCE FICTION

35c k
MAY

IN THIS ISSUE: CUE FOR QUIET BY T. L. SHERRED

WHY CAN'T YOU WRITE?

It's much simpler than you think!

NIA TRAINING RESULTS IN $600 PRIZE AWARD

"My entry in the 'Win A Bond' contest over WBKB not only won a $100 U. S. Savings Bond weekly award, but also the monthly prize of a $500 U. S. Savings Bond. My advice to anyone with writing ambitions is ENROLL WITH N.I.A., and you'll be glad you did."—Mrs. Frank A. Schreyer, #232 Parkland Apt. Hotel, 1550 East 63rd St., Chicago 37, Ill.

SECURES NAVY RATING AS A RESULT OF NIA TRAINING

"I wish to express appreciation to the Newspaper Institute. The course enabled me to attain the rank of Chief Journalist, the highest enlisted rank in the Navy, and also one of the hardest to achieve as there are only 46 in the entire Navy."—John B. Smith, JOC, USN, Headquarters, Naval Air Training Command, U. S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla.

SO MANY people with the "germ" of writing in them simply can't get started. They suffer from inertia. Or they set up imaginary barriers to taking the first step.

Many are convinced that the field is confined to persons gifted with a genius for writing.

Few realize that the great bulk of commercial writing is done by so-called "unknowns."

Not only do these thousands of men and women produce most of the fiction published, but countless articles on business affairs, science fiction, sports, hobbies, social matters, homemaking, travels, local, church and club activities, etc., as well.

Such material is in constant demand. Every week thousands of checks for $25, $50, $100 and more go out to writers whose latent ability was perhaps no greater than yours.

The Practical Method

Newspaper work demonstrates that the way to learn to write is by writing! Newspaper copy desk editors waste no time on theories or ancient classics. The *story* is the thing. Every copy "cub" goes through the course of practical criticism—a training that turns out more successful authors than any other experience. That is why Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on the Copy Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. And upon the very same kind of *actual assignments* given daily to metropolitan reporters. Thus you learn by *doing*, not by studying the individual styles of model authors.

Each week your work is analyzed constructively by practical writers. Gradually they help to clarify your own distinctive style. Writing soon becomes easy, absorbing. Profitable, too, as you gain the "professional" touch that gets your material accepted by editors. Above all, you can see constant progress week by week as your faults are corrected and your writing ability grows.

Have You Natural Ability?

Our FREE Writing Aptitude Test will reveal whether or not you have natural talent for writing. It will analyze your powers of observation, your imagination and dramatic instinct. You'll enjoy taking this test. There is no cost or obligation. Simply mail the coupon below, today. Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y. (Founded 1925).

Licensed by State of New York

Free

Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N.Y.

Send me, without cost or obligation, your Writing Aptitude Test and further information about writing for profit as promised in Space & Science Fiction.

Miss
Mrs. .....
Mr.

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ Check here if Veteran 38-C-593

(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.)

They claim this coupon brings you "good luck"

"Six months after mailing the coupon, I had a promotion and a big raise in pay!"

"From the moment I marked the coupon, my luck changed!"

"My break came when I sent the coupon!"

These statements are typical! I.C.S. gets letters like these regularly. Coupon senders report pay raises. Others win important promotions or new, interesting assignments. Still others find happiness, job security, opportunities never dreamed possible.

Is it LUCK? The results are so impressive, so quick in coming, that some say the I.C.S. coupon is "lucky." Of course, that's not true. The real reason for these amazing results is what happens to the person when he or she mails the coupon.

Coupon is first step! Naturally, you want to make good. But you've put off doing something about it. Mailing this coupon is *definite action!* It shows you're fed up with waiting for the breaks. You're determined to make your own breaks! And this determination alone accounts for much of the "luck" you'll start to experience.

You get free guidance! Within a few days you get the helpful and inspiring 36-page book, "How to Succeed." It's crammed with information. For example, it tells you in detail how to plan your career. Also how to prepare for advancement. In addition, you get a free catalog on the I.C.S. course that interests you. With your new-found determination and these two books as your guides, you're ready to cash in on your hidden abilities!

391 I.C.S. courses! You'll find a partial list of courses in the coupon below. Each course is up-to-date, extremely practical, completely success-tested. You study in your spare time. Set your own pace. Correspond directly with instructors. Cost is low. Diplomas are awarded to graduates. I.C.S. training rates high in all fields of business and industry. You won't find another school like it.

Call it being "lucky" or being "smart." Whatever it is, you're one step closer to your goal when you mail this famous coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2372-B, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW to SUCCEED" and the booklet about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

ART
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Magazine and Book Illustrating
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Fashion Illustrating

AUTOMOTIVE
- ☐ Automobile, Mechanic
- ☐ Auto-Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
- ☐ Diesel—Gas Engines

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- ☐ Airplane Drafting

BUILDING
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Arch. Drafting
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Carpenter Foreman
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Electrician

BUSINESS
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Personnel and Labor Relations
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ Managing Small Business
- ☐ Sales Management
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Analytical Chemistry
- ☐ Petroleum—Nat'l Gas
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Plastics

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Concrete Construction
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering

DRAFTING
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Sheet Metal Drafting
- ☐ Mine Surveying and Drafting

ELECTRICAL
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electric Power and Light
- ☐ Lineman

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Good English

MECHANICAL AND SHOP
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Machine Design-Drafting
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Gas—Electric Welding
- ☐ Heat Treatment—Metallurgy
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Sheet Metal Pattern Drafting
- ☐ Refrigeration

POWER
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Diesel—Electric
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering
- ☐ Stationary Fireman

RADIO, TELEVISION, COMMUNICATIONS
- ☐ General Radio
- ☐ Radio Operation
- ☐ Radio Servicing—FM
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Telephone Work

RAILROAD
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Railroad Administration

TEXTILE
- ☐ Textile Engineering
- ☐ Cotton Manufacture
- ☐ Rayon Manufacture
- ☐ Woolen Manufacture
- ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Finishing and Dyeing
- ☐ Textile Designing

HOME ARTS
- ☐ Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Cookery
- ☐ Tea Room Management

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Occupation_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada

Millions Speak ANOTHER LANGUAGE
SO CAN YOU WITH LINGUAPHONE

World's Standard Conversational Method
The Quick, Natural, EASY Method

YOU Bring foreign visitors right into your own home with Linguaphone —
YOU Listen — to native voices — for 20 delightful, adventuresome minutes a day —
YOU Hear — Men and women converse in their native tongue about everyday matters, just as they do in their own country
YOU Learn to Speak — correctly as they do, by imitation. The same easy natural way you learned English as a young child.
YOU Save — time, work, money.
YOU Gain — travel, business, armed services', cultural, educational advantages.
YOU — GO *PLACES* —

Stop Wishing! Start Talking!

FRENCH	**SPANISH**	**GERMAN**
ITALIAN	**RUSSIAN**	**JAPANESE**

any of 29 languages available

Write TODAY for Fascinating FREE Book "Passport to a New World of Opportunity."

LINGUAPHONE INSTITUTE 224-03 Mezz., Rockefeller Plaza, N. Y. 20
Over a million home-study students of all ages
World-wide Educational Endorsement

WRITE FOR FREE BOOK

LINGUAPHONE INSTITUTE
224-03 Mezz., Rock. Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Send me your FREE book. I want to learn.....
language for.....purpose.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....Zone.....State.....
☐ Check here if Veteran.

SPACE SCIENCE FICTION

MAY, 1953 **Vol. 1, No. 6**

SERIAL

CUE FOR QUIET, *by T. L. Sherred* (First of Two Parts) 6

FEATURE NOVELETTES

INSTANT OF DECISION, *by Randall Garrett* 58
SECOND VARIETY, *by Philip K. Dick* 102

SHORT STORIES

THE ADVENTURER, *by Cyril Kornbluth* 44
ALL THAT GOES UP, *by Kirby Brooks* 86

REVIEW

SCIENCE—FACT AND FICTION, *by George O. Smith* 81

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL 4
STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW 43
COMING EVENTS 157
TAKE-OFF 146

COVER BY EBEL • ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEECHAM • EBEL • FREAS • ORBAN • SMITH

JOHN RAYMOND • *Publisher*
BILL BRADLEY • *Circulation Mgr.*
DAVID GELLER • *Advertising Mgr.*
H. L. MITCHELL • West Coast Office

LESTER DEL REY • *Editor*
GEORGE O. SMITH • *Book Editor*
MILTON BERWIN • *Art Director*
JOHN VINCENT • *Assoc. Editor*

$3.50 per 12 issues in U. S. A. PRINTED IN U. S. A. 173 35¢ per copy

AN EDITORIAL ON

SIMPLICITY

We're closing Volume One with what we think is a particularly good issue. And we're also seeing one of our fondest dreams come true, with the return of T. L. Sherred to science fiction.

As a writer, he's a definitely unusual phenomenon. Five years ago—longer, in fact—his first story appeared. After that, editors begged for more, and readers wrote in demanding more. But there was only a long, loud silence. In five years, most stories are forgotten. Yet when we first began planning this magazine, we received a letter which mentioned that if we could get Sherred, we'd be more than justifying bringing out another magazine. Well, here he is, with his first story since the one that started all the fuss.

For a writer to make and hold a reputation on one story is something like going around an eighteen-hole golf course in just eighteen strokes. It means that writer has something definitely unusual. And Sherred's serial this time proves again that he has that.

It's about the rarest thing in science fiction: Simplicity! It's something we've been urging on writers, and crying for. And from the response, it's something most people don't even believe possible in science fiction. Yet, as in all other forms of literature, it's the real secret of a powerful, moving yarn.

You don't have to go out a thousand light years and half a million years of time to find a good story. It's just easier to do that—because then you can set up something completely fantastic, where you're not bound by the rigid rules we know. Unfortunately, you're also so far from the real world—and from any possibly predictable world—that the story might as well be a fairy tale.

We've tried to stick to a world that has the romance of the future and science, but avoid going off in all directions at a furious clip. Most of our lead stories have stuck pretty close to the world as it can be shortly. And that meant taking some fairly normal idea and really digging into it.

Because depth is as important to simplicity as it is impossible to the razzle-dazzle of multistellar Galactic Federations. Take an ordinary man, put him in a situation where even one single thing is unusual, and then *really* see what happens—and you'll have a good story. And that's what Sherred can do as few others can. Without complicated gadgetry,

without violating human nature, and without ever departing from or complicating his basic premise, he builds his story by doing what would be inevitable under the given circumstances.

It's a rare ability, and one that science fiction needs more and more. Given any old idea of science fiction, plus the ability to think it through to the limit—as we've been begging in our editorials—and you'll come up with something fresh—and something that will be long remembered.

A comparatively new writer, Philip Dick, has also done this for us, in a beautifully handled novelette. Here, he's simply taken the idea that's as old as Frankenstein—and then made the most of it. And a brand-new writer, with his first science-fiction story—Kirby Brooks—has done the same. In both cases, what they leave out in mere gadgetry they make up in honest, *human* emotions and logical development.

We're happy to find such examples to close out this Volume, and to back up our belief that the best science fiction is not the most complicated or farthest from current reality. H. G. Wells proved this repeatedly, but it's something that seems to need reproving, nowadays.

After all, simplicity—with thoroughness and depth—is the ultimate goal of science itself. The oxydation theory overcame the phlogiston theory because it was simpler, and because it accounted for more things. Science went off the deep end for a while on the birth of the planets, getting a more and more complicated theory that became more and more improbable; and then it broke down, and they returned to a much simpler (in effect, even if the thinking *behind* it is more complex) idea.

And simplicity is also the goal of all our philosophies and even our daily living. If you think that primitive life is simple, just spend twenty years—while avoiding being eaten or starving to death—learning the taboos that are necessary to keep the totally illogical gods from doing away with you! The clockwork behind the scenes may be elaborate, but life is growing simpler and simpler. That's because it's more efficient that way.

All right, now. Any time you can simplify something, you've made progress. Suppose you try it on some of the old ideas. What is the simplest set-up in end result for any given thing? Telepathy—space-suits—reincarnation—immortality; or robots, power to end wars, or anything else.

Sherred helps answer one of the questions. And naturally, like all true simplicity, there's more than meets the eye!

LESTER DEL REY

CUE FOR QUIET

BY T. L. SHERRED

ILLUSTRATED BY ORBAN

After too many years, T. L. Sherred returns with a story that gets our SPACE SPECIAL rating. It's the story of a man with a headache—who found a cure for it! And the cure gave him more power than any man could dream of. First of Two Parts.

So I had a headache. The grandfather of all headaches. You try working on the roof line sometime, with the presses grinding and the overhead cranes

wailing and the mechanical arms clacking and grabbing at your inner skull while you snap a shiny sheet of steel like an armored pillowcase and shove it into the maw of a hungry greasy ogre. Noise. Hammering, pounding, shrieking, gobbling, yammering, incessant noise. And I had a headache.

This headache had all the signs of permanency. It stayed with me when I slid my timecard into an empty slot that clanged back at me, when I skittered across a jammed street of blowing horns and impatient buses with brakedrums worn to the rivets, when I got off at my corner and stood in the precarious safety of a painted island in a whirring storm of hurtling hornets. It got even worse when I ate dinner and tried to read my paper through the shrill juvenile squeals of the housing project where I live surrounded by muddy moppets and, apparently, faithless wives and quarrelsome spouses. The walls of my Quonset are no thicker than usual.

When Helen—that's my wife—dropped the casserole we got for a wedding present from her aunt and just stood there by the kitchen sink crying her eyes out in frustration I knew she finally had more of a mess to clean up than just the shattered remains of a brittle bowl. I didn't say a word. I couldn't. I shoved the chair across the room and watched it tilt the lamp her mother bought us. Before the lamp hit the floor my hat was on my head and I was out the door. Behind me I heard at least one pane of the storm door die in a fatal crash. I didn't look around to see if it were the one I'd put in last Sunday.

Art was glad to see me. He had the beer drawn and was evening the foam before the heavy front door had shut us off from the street. "Been a while, Pete. What's new?"

I was glad to see him, too. It was quiet in there. That's why I go eight blocks out of my way for my beer. No noise, no loud talking or you end up on the curb; quiet. Quiet and dark and comfortable and you mind your own business, usually. "Got any more of those little boxes of aspirin?"

He had some aspirin and was sympathetic. "Headache again? Maybe you need a new pair of glasses."

I washed down the pills and asked for a refill on the beer. "Maybe, Art. What do you know that's new?"

Nothing. We both knew that. We talked for a while; nothing important, nothing more than the half-spoken half-grunted

short disjointed phrases we always repeated. Art would drift away and lean on the other end of the bar and then drift back to me and at the end of each trip there would be clean ashtrays and the dark plastic along the bar would gleam and there would be no dregs of dead drinks and the rows of fresh glasses would align themselves in empty rows on the stainless steel of the lower counter. Art's a good bartender when he wants to be. I held up my empty glass.

"One more, Art. Got the radio section of the paper?"

He handed it to me. "Might be something on the television."

We both laughed. We both feel the same way about television, but he has to have a set in his business for week-end football or baseball games. A big set he has, too, with an extra speaker for the far end of the bar for the short beer trade. I found the program I wanted and showed Art the listing.

He looked at it. "Strauss . . . that's that waltz music," and I nodded and he went over to the radio and found the station. These small stations can't sell every minute of their time for commercials, although they try, and every once in a while they run through a solid hour of Strauss or Bing Crosby or Benny Goodman. I like Strauss.

And there I sat drinking beer and eating stale popcorn when I should have been home with Helen, listening to quiet violins and muted brasses when I should have been doing something noisy and instructive. In my glass I could see whatever I wanted, wherever I would. I made circular patterns on the bar and drew them into a grotesque mass with fingers wet with the silver condensation of bubbles drawn magically through impervious crystal. Then Art turned off the radio.

He was apologetic, but he still turned off the radio. In answer to my unspoken question he shrugged and indicated Freddie. Freddie likes television. He likes dog acts and circus bands and bouncing clowns. He watches the commercials with an innocent unjaundiced eye. Sometimes he sings along with the animated bakers and cooks and gas stations at the top of his boyish beery baritone. He sings loud, and he likes his television the same way.

Art flipped up the lid of the television and stood there long enough to make sure the picture, whatever it was, would be in focus. Then he came back to me and poured another. Hesitating, he added another smaller glass. I can't afford that stuff on what

I make. Where I made my mistake was taking it. We each had another. And another. The headache got worse.

Ivan and Jack came in, and, when they heard the blast of sound, came down to my end of the bar where, although the extra speaker is overhead, you don't have to look at the source of the noise. Art handed us a deck of cards and a piece of chalk to keep score and we started to play euchre. You don't have to think to play euchre, which is good. It's about the only game you can play with sign language, the only game for a noisy bar. So we played euchre, and at ten-thirty Ivan and Jack left me alone to face the music. The little cords at the nape of my neck were tight as wires, the temple areas near my eyes were soft and tender and sore to the touch, and my head was one big snare drum.

That was when Freddie half-shouted to Art to get the Roller Derby on Channel Seven and—so help me!—to turn it up a little louder. The cards fell out of my hand and onto the table. I took out a cigarette and my lighter slipped out of my tight fingers and fell on the floor and I bent over to pick it up. My head swelled to twice its size, my glasses slid down a little on my sweaty nose, and the tiny red veins in my eyes grew from a thread to a rope to a flag to a tapestry of crimson rage and the noise abruptly stopped. And Art began to bellow. I stood up. The television set was smoking.

Well, it was fast while it lasted. Art didn't really need the fire department. There wasn't any flame to speak of. Someone pulled the plug from the wall and rolled the set out and used the hand extinguisher on the burnt innards of the set and with the rear exhaust fan going the last of the bitter smoke was drifting out before the sirens pulled up in front. The firemen were relieved, not angry, as they always are, and Art in his misery was thoughtful enough to slip a square bottle in the pocket of the lieutenant in charge. It was cold outside, at that. Freddie said so, when he left; there was no reason to stay at Art's any more when most other bars would have the Roller Derby. I watched him go, and mentally cursed the bearings in his new car. Well, fairly new. I went home. Helen was in bed when I got there, probably asleep. She was still probably asleep when I left for work in the morning. She gets like that.

The next day at Art's there was a big space lighter in color than the surrounding wall where

the television set had stood. I asked Art about it.

He didn't know. The serviceman had come out and collected it, clucking in dismay at the mess the extinguisher had left. No, no idea what caused it. Short circuit wouldn't make it that bad; fuses should have blown first. They'd find it, though. Art hoped it wouldn't be the picture tube; that wasn't covered in his service policy, and those tubes in that size cost money. Anything else was covered. At that, he was better off than Freddie.

I looked up. "What's the matter with Freddie?"

He told me. Freddie had ruined his motor on the way home last night. What hadn't blown out the exhaust pipe had gone out the hood, and right after his ninety-day guarantee had expired.

I remembered what I had thought of last night. "How did he do that?"

Art didn't know. He had been driving along and—that was it. The car was in the garage with nothing left between the radiator and the firewall and Freddie was trying to get something out of the insurance company. Fat chance, too, with that bunch of pirates. We'd all had experience with that sort of thing, hadn't we? Why—someone at the other end of the bar wanted some service and Art left. I sat back and began to add two and two. I got five.

Art came back and grinned at me. "You're not going to like this, Pete."

"What won't I like?"

"This," and a man in coveralls shouldered me aside and set a cobra on the bar in front of me, a snake with a twelve inch tube. Art went on to explain: "They're giving me a loaner until my own set gets back and they don't want to plug it in the usual place until they get a chance to completely check the wiring. Okay?"

It had to be okay. It wasn't my place of business. I moved down a bit and watched the serviceman plug it in. He tried the channels for clarity and without warning flipped the volume control all the way over and the whole building shook. I shook, too, like a bewildered Labrador throwing off an unwanted splash of icy water. The top of my head lifted from its moorings and shifted just enough for me to name that infernal serviceman and all his issue. He just sat there and grinned, making no attempt to tone down the set. Then I said what I thought about his television, and the set went quiet. Like that.

It began to smoke and the serviceman began to shuck tools from his box. Art opened his

mouth to yell and I walked out the front door. The High Hat, right across the street, would serve to keep me warm until the smoke and profanity was cleared and Art had the repairman under control.

I knew it! They had a jukebox inside the door with the same twenty top tunes of the week, the same gaudy front with the same swirling lights and the same tonsillectomied tenors. I shuddered as I eased by, and I murmured a heartfelt wish over my shoulder, something about the best place for that machine. I ordered a beer, a short one. The barkeep, a pleasant enough fellow, but with none of Art's innate joviality, rang up the dime.

"You didn't happen to pull the cord out when you walked by, did you?"

"Pull the cord out of what?"

He didn't bother to answer, and went over to the machine. That was the first I realized the music had stilled. He clicked the switch on and off a few times with no result, and went to the telephone, detouring by way of the cash register to pick up a coin. Thoughtfully sipping my beer I heard him dial and report a jukebox out of order. Then a relay clicked in the back of my head.

Could all this be a coincidence? Could be . . . Couldn't be! The beer grew warm in my hand as I remembered. Every time I'd wished, really really wished, something had happened. Now that I had time to think it over I remembered that red rotor spinning madly past my eyes, that horrible hatred and afterward, that sated sense of fulfillment . . . Better have another beer and forget it, Pete. Better make it two beers. Maybe three.

The High Hat sold me a lot more than two beers, or three. When I left there, although I was walking a mental chalkline I had a little trouble lighting a cigarette in the chill breeze. I didn't bother going back to Art's. Art was all right, and there was no sense in making trouble for a pal. Harry, now. He was a stinker. Go put the needle in Harry, two blocks away.

While Harry was drawing the beer I walked string straight to the jukebox, clicked in a quarter, and stalked back to the barstool. Turn your back, Pete, just as though you didn't know perfectly well what was going to happen. Now take a tasty sip of your beer, wait for the noise to start . . . Take a deep breath, now; Pete Miller, saviour of man's sanity. I closed my eyes and pretended to be covering a yawn.

"Tubes," I whispered, "do your stuff. Blow that horn, Gabriel—go ahead and—blow!"

The jukebox moaned as far as the first eight bars; I got my quarter back from a puzzled Harry; I listened to Harry call his repairman; I finished my beer; I got outside and almost around the corner before I began laughing like a hyena; I got to bed snickering and went to sleep the same way; and I woke up with a headache.

Hammering presses the next day I treated with the contempt of long practice. One single theme kept rolling around like a pea in a washtub; just what had happened to that television set and those jukeboxes? And what had made a fairly new eight-cylinder almost disintegrate, apparently on command? Agreed, that coincidence has a mighty long arm, but hardly long enough to scratch its own elbow. Forty years old and a superman? One way to find out. Let's go at this cold sober. Let's scratch this shiny new rubber band until it snaps.

At three-thirty I was first in line at the timeclock, second out the gate, and fourth or fifth to line up at the National Bar. "Aspirin and ginger ale," I ordered, and got a knowing grin from the barkeep. Laugh, buddy. You may think I feel bad now, but wait and see what happens to your bangbox. I dare someone to put in a nickel; I double-dare you. That's it—pick a good number from one to twenty and go back to your stool and sit down. Take it easy, now, Pete. Don't strain, don't press, no slugging in the clinches, and break clean. The place needs a good airing, anyway, and the floor could use a new broom, too. Bubble, bubble, go for double . . . no more music. No more noise. Smoke, you boiler factory, smoke! Hey, somebody, pull that plug. Not that one, *that* one. Pull it out. Pull it out! *Pull it out!*

Finally someone did pull it out, someone chattered excitedly into the telephone, and I slid out the front door when the fire engines were wailing blocks away. Coincidence, hey. And cold sober, too. I stood on the curb and watched the firemen dash in and straggle out. Dirty trick to break up a pinochle game in weather like this. Four red-eyed crimson giants snorted and whined their blunt noses back into the clogged traffic, back to wait another call. Three buses were sentinels at the safety zone, and one of them took me home to dinner. This was on a Friday, the night for the Olsens, next door, to have their weekly sangerbund. When Helen shook me into wakefulness the party was going strong.

"Pete, will you wake up? You

know perfectly well when you hear me!"

Yes, I heard her. "What time is it?"

"Never mind what time it is. You go over there and tell them you're going to call the police if they don't turn off that radio—"

I yawned. "After two o'clock."

"Almost two-thirty. You just get up and—"

I laughed out loud, as loud as you can laugh at that time of the morning. "Roll over and go back to sleep," I told her. "They'll shut it off in a minute."

I shut my sleepy lids and went through the deep breath routine. The radio stopped. Then an afterthought; this was Friday, and I wanted to sleep late on a Saturday unsullied and unwelcomed by soap operas. Another deep breath, complicated by a yawn, and I went back to sleep.

Over our coffee Helen pulled aside the kitchen curtain.

"I thought there was some reason I didn't wake up until ten. Look across the street," and she pointed.

In front of the Olsen's, a red panel truck, Chuck's Radio Service. Next door, in front of the Werner's, Harper Radio Parts. In the Smith's driveway, Rapid Radio Repair.

"What are you grinning at?"

"Me? I'm not grinning. Not at this time of the morning."

"Pete Miller, you were, too. Just like the cat that ate the fish."

"Canary, you mean."

"That's what I said. What's so funny?"

"Nothing," I said. "We just got a good night's sleep for a change. I like my sleep."

She harrumphed a bit, as suspicious as she usually is, and I went to the stove for more coffee. Over my shoulder I said, "Want to play a little cards tonight?"

She was skeptical about that. "At Art's, I suppose."

"Sure. Saturday night euchre tournaments."

"That noisy place? Nothing doing."

I told her the jukebox and the television set were out of commission and there'd be no noise she didn't make herself. She loved to play cards, I knew, and she liked Art. It was just the incessant roar that wore her down. I managed to talk her into it.

At Art's that night I listened with envy to the words that were used over the telephone when the jukebox gave up its ghost. I heard only Art's end of the conversation, of course, but I gathered that Art was being accused at the very least of sabotage. I

changed the subject quick when I caught Helen trying to figure out the look I must have been wearing. Women get so they're pretty good at that after they've been married awhile. Art himself drove us home at closing time. Helen and Art's wife did all the talking, and I'm sure no one noticed I held my breath before every bar or house and Helen commented, as I fit the key into the front door, on the fact that the Olsens and the Werners and the Smiths all picked the same time to turn off their radios. "Very nice of them," she said, "considering it's Saturday night."

Now, I use two buses to get to work, transferring from the Harper bus to the Clairmount line, and it's a forty minute ride. For two days I fed my ego by holding my breath. I likely looked queer with a bursting red face, but no one said anything, at least directly to me. I wouldn't have cared much, anyway, because I didn't care much what happened; after all, wasn't I a benefactor to practically all the human race, the thinking part, that is? Wasn't it going to be nice to live in a world without punctured eardrums and hamstrung nerves? Wasn't it going to be good to be able to eat a meal in peace, to sip your ten or sixty-cent drink without having some moron with a nickel prodding your ulcer? I thought so.

Thursday, or maybe Friday, my careful searching of the daily papers found my tiny item buried back of the stock reports, with the labor news. I read it three times.

JUKEBOX WAR SUSPECTED

An anonymous tip today told our labor reporter that serious trouble looms in the canned music industry. R. C. Jones, czar of Local 77, AFL, has issued orders to individually guard each machine serviced by his union. Jones had the classic "no comment" for publication, but it is an open secret that intra-union friction is high in the Harper-Gratiot area. Jones inferred that deliberate sabotage is responsible for the wholesale short-circuiting of jukeboxes and television sets. He named no names, but in an off-the-record statement threatened to fight fire with fire. "We're not," he snapped, "going to stand by and watch while goons ruin our livelihood. We will . . .

Now I was in a fix. They had to make a living. I'd forgotten that. A union man myself, who was I to break another's rice bowl? I could see no point in writing to this R. C. Jones. He'd think I was as crazy as they

come. And the newspapers—I could imagine the reactions of a tough city editor. So, wrapped up in my own thoughts, I stepped off the curb a little ahead of the green, and I jumped just in time. I swore at the truck that almost got me, and it happened so quickly I wasn't prepared to hear or to see the motor of the truck throw a piston right through the rusted hood. White as a sheet the driver got out of his cab, and I crossed the street against the red light and lost myself in the crowd. This curve I was putting on the ball, it came to me then, wasn't limited to jukeboxes and noisy radios and burnt-out bearings. I had to watch my temper, or I was going to get someone in trouble. I was in trouble myself, and I had to get out of it.

By the time I got home I'd thought it over quite well. This—this power whatever it might be, was the McCoy. Why should I waste it when an honest dollar might be turned? A factory job in Detroit is just a factory job, and I might keep mine for the next forty years if I lived long enough through the noise and the dirt and the uncertainty and the model changeover layoffs every Christmas. The Olsens' radio disturbed my thinking and it took only a second. Either they were going to get tired of putting new tubes into that gadget, or play it softer, or move. I didn't care which.

So I used my wife's portable to type out a letter to Naval Ordnance in Aberdeen where my brother-in-law used to be stationed, telling them what I'd done, what I thought I might be able to do, and asking them for an opportunity to give them a demonstration. In return, I asked for a steady government job in a warm climate. Until I could arrange a certain demonstration, I went on, I could understand they might think me a crank, so I wouldn't at present sign my name. I suggested they pay close attention through the week of the fifth through the twelfth to the various press association dispatches, and I would arrange later, in my next letter, for a more personal show if they wanted to take it any further.

The fifth fell on a Saturday. Bright and early I was up to ride the bus downtown, changing to the Woodward line, ending up at Ferndale, all the time concentrating furiously and holding my breath as much as I dared. On the way back home I tried to work it a little differently. Probably no one else on the streetcar beside myself noticed there wasn't a single passenger car, truck or bus that passed us. Every car, as we sailed by, stalled and every traffic

light we passed either turned three colors or blinked out completely. Most of the moving cars made it to the curb on their momentum. The others stayed where they were. When I got off in front of the City Hall, filthy old hulk that it is, the streetcar stayed immobile at the safety zone, It was a new PCC car, and the insulation poured smoke from under the wheels. Naturally there wasn't any moving traffic in back of it, or in front. I saw to that. Then I just strolled around Cadillac Square, bollixing up everything that occurred to me, from trucks to busses to traffic lights. You never saw such a verminous tangled mess in all your life. When the patrol wagons began to scream into the Square loaded with reinforcements for the helpless purple single cop at the Michigan intersection I let them get as far as the center of the street before I pinned them down. Even when I saw it later in the newsreels I couldn't believe it. Even Mack Sennett could have done no better.

I had to walk all the way out Gratiot to St. Antoine before I could find transportation home that wasn't walled off by screaming horns and haggard footpatrolmen, and when I got off at my corner all Gratiot and Harper behind me was as clogged as Woodward. I even knocked out every red neon sign within two blocks of a traffic light. That one might keep a few pedestrians alive a little longer.

Helen was over at her mother's helping her hang drapes when I got home. The icebox gave me a cold Jumbo bottle and I turned on our little portable set. On every station the spot broadcast crews were hoarse. I spun the dials and finally concentrated on one announcer—you know who I mean—with the raspiest, most grating voice this side of a vixen file. Unfortunately, the housewives seem to like him, including Helen, and it's the housewives who have the radio on all day. I knew he was broadcasting from the roof studios of one of our highest buildings, and I took an enormous and perverted pleasure in holding my breath and thinking about the elevator system there. On second thought, I held my breath again and the station left the air in the middle of a word. I hope he liked the walk downstairs.

The newspapers next day couldn't make things add, as was natural. They published silly interviews with all the top engineers in the city and a good many all over the world, including the Chairman of the Board of the company where I worked, and his answer was just as asinine as the

rest. All in all, it had been a good show, and I put in another letter to Naval Ordance. I knew I had gone much further than I had intended, and I suggested they get in touch with me, if they wanted, through the personal columns of one of the Detroit newspapers. I didn't want to get into trouble with the city police. I didn't sign my name to the second letter either. And that was a mistake.

Early in the morning of the tenth I felt good. I'd been sleeping well lately, now that I was rid of the Olsens' radio, not to mention the Werners' and the Smiths'. I rolled over and squinted at the luminous hands of the clock. Beer cheese in the icebox. Half a Dutch apple pie left over from dinner. Milk. Helen didn't wake as I eased out of bed and groped for my slippers, and the rustling and shuffling I heard as I tiptoed down the back stairs I attributed to an overbrave mouse. One of these days, I thought, I was going to have to get some traps and catch me a mouse. When I turned on the kitchen light the mouse was holding a howitzer nine inches away from my head.

"All right, you," the mouse snarled. "Reach!"

I reached. Quick.

The gunman backed to the outside door and flicked it open with one hand, never taking his eyes from me. Footsteps pounded on the back porch and hard faces filled the kitchen. One even had one of these gaspipe Sten guns, and I liked that even less than the howitzer. My pajama tops might have concealed an arsenal from the care I got when I was searched. No one said a word, and I didn't dare. Just about that time Helen got the sandman out of her eyes. Likely the noise had awakened her appetite, and she had come down to help me eat a snack. One of the gunmen heard her slippers clattering down the stairs, and a hard hand slapped over my mouth and a gun rammed viciously against my spine. Spun around and held as a human shield I had to helplessly watch her come yawning in the kitchen door. One look she got in at me, and the drawn guns, and her mouth opened for a scream that got no further than a muffled yip and a dead faint. They let her fall. The gunman took his hand from my mouth and swung me around.

"Shut up!" he snapped, although I hadn't tried to say anything.

At the point of his gun he held me there while the rest of the hard faced crew roamed the house, upstairs and down. None of the faces did I know, and I began to wonder if behind one

of those granite masks was the revengeful personality of R. C. Jones, President of Local 77, AFL. I heard footsteps pad on the back porch, and my head tried to turn in spite of myself. The gun in my back gouged a little harder. Out of the corner of my eye I could see who pushed open the screen door I hadn't got around to taking down yet. The gun in my back helped me stand up.

J. Edgar Hoover motioned to the gun and the pressure eased a trifle. His voice was reasonably unexcited, but to my present taste, ominous.

"All right. Someone go get him some pants." To me, "Your name Miller? Peter Ambrose Miller? Get that woman off the floor."

Yes, I was Peter Ambrose Miller. I agreed to that. My mouth was dry as popcorn, but I managed to ask him what this was all about.

Hoover looked at me and scratched his nose. "This is about your fingerprints being all over an anonymous letter received in Aberdeen, Maryland."

I gulped. "Oh, that. Why, I can explain—"

Hoover looked at me with the fond expression of a man who has cracked open a bad egg. "That," he said, "I doubt," and he turned on his military heel and walked out the back door. When they got me my pants I followed him. I had to.

I ended up at the Federal Building, which is a cavernous morgue, even during business hours. They gave me what might have been a comfortable chair if I hadn't had to sit in it. A young fellow was sitting opposite me with a stenographer's notebook, and I knew that any story of mine had better not be repeated two different ways. Hoover came in with a nondescript man with a hat pulled down over his eyes, who inspected me from all angles and then shook his head, a little resentfully, I thought. The hat-over-the-eyes left and I shifted nervously under those grim eyes staring at me.

"All right," said Hoover; "now we'll hear that explanation. Talk!"

So I talked.

When I finished my throat was dry and he was nodding as though he believed every word. He didn't. I asked for a cigarette and for news of my wife, and they gave me a cigarette. They told me my wife was all right, or would be, if I behaved.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll behave." They just laughed when I said that.

"Quite likely," said Hoover. "Now, let's hear that once more.

Begin at the beginning."

They gave me a room all to myself, finally. For three days, maybe more, I had that room all for myself and the various people that walked in at all hours of the day and night to ask me some of the silliest questions you ever heard just as though they expected sensible answers. After that first night I didn't see J. Edgar Hoover at all, which is just as well, because I don't think he liked me one little bit. They brought me a suit with the lining in the sleeve ripped and a shirt with the cuffs turned. When I got those I began to worry all over again about Helen, because I knew she had no part in picking out the clothes they brought me. I didn't feel too chipper when they came after me in force again.

The same room, this time more crowded. Older men this time, and a few of the usual high school boys. Again we went through the same routine, and once again my voice cracked dusty dry. They were all desperately sorry for such an incurable psychopathic liar. I hadn't felt so helpless, so caught-in-a-quicksand since my days in the army.

"I'm telling you the truth, the truth. Don't you see that I've got to tell you the truth to get out of here? Don't you believe me?"

Never such disbelief outside of a courtmartial. In desperation my eyes jerked around looking for escape. They slid over, and back to, the ventilation fan purring on the wall. I sucked in a loud gasp. The blades of the fan slowed to where you could see them as individuals, and the motor housing began to smoke.

"See?" I yelled at them. "Believe me now?"

The blades came to a standstill and the black smoke oozed toward the ceiling.

"See?" I yelled again. "Look at that fan!"

Their eyes showed their astonishment. The smoke began to disappear in the stillness. "What about that? Now do you believe me?"

Maybe they did. No one said anything. They took me back to my room. About an hour or so later they came after me again. The chair felt no more comfortable than it ever had, though it was beginning to shape itself to my seat. The same faces were there, but the air was a little different this time. On the desk, where I had seen sit no one but J. Edgar Hoover were a half dozen fans, plugged to an extension cord that snaked away and lost itself in a dark corner. My ears twitched hopefully. Maybe

this was going to get me out of here. One of the younger men spoke up.

"Mr. Miller," he said briskly, "can you stop these fans as you did, apparently, the other?"

I started to tell him that "apparently" wasn't the right word. One of the older men broke in.

"One moment," he said. "Can you stop any one of these fans, or all of them? Any particular one, and leave the rest alone?"

I thought I could. "Which one?" There were five fans whirring silently away.

"Well . . . the one in the center."

The one in the center. One out of five. Hold your breath, Peter Ambrose, hold it now or you can hold your breath the rest of your natural life and no one will ever know, nor ever care. The fan in the center began to smoke and the blades choked off abruptly.

I said, "The one on the far left . . . the one next to it . . . the far right . . . and four makes five." I watched the last blade make its last swing. "Has anybody got a cigarette?"

I got a full package. While I tore off the cellophane someone held a light. I filled my lungs so full they creaked and sat back defiantly.

"So now what?"

No one knew just what. Two men slipped out and the others drew together their chairs for a whispered conference full of dark looks in my direction. I sat quietly and smoked until even that got on my nerves. Finally I broke it up with a yell.

"Can't you fatheads make up your minds? Don't you know what you want? Do you think I'm going to sit here all night?"

That was a stupid question; I knew I was going to sit there until they told me to get up. But at the time I wanted to say it, and I did, and I said a few other things that were neither polite nor sensible. I was a little upset, I think. It didn't matter. They paid no attention to me, so I lit another cigarette and waited. The outer door opened and one of the two that had left came back in. He came directly to me, waving the others out as he came. They filed out and he stood in front of me.

"Mr. Miller. This is rather an awkward situation for all of us, particularly for you, obviously. I want to say this, Mr. Miller; I—that is, we here in the Bureau are extremely sorry for the turn of events that brought both of us here. We—"

At the first decent word I'd heard in days I blew up. "Sorry? What's being sorry going to do

for me? What's being sorry going to do for my wife? Where is she? What's happened to her? Where is she, and what are you doing to her? And when am I going to get out of here?"

He was a polite old man, come to think about it. He let me blow off all the steam I'd been saving, let me rant and rage, and clucked and nodded in just the right places. At last I ran down, and he moved a chair to where he could be confidential. He started like this:

"Mr. Miller, I, speaking personally, know exactly how you must feel. Close custody is as unpleasant for the jailor as it is for the jailee, if there is such a word, sir."

I snorted at that one. A jail is a jail, and the turnkey can walk out if he chooses.

"You must remember that you are and have been dealing with an official agency of the Government of the United States of America, of which you are a citizen; an agency that, officially or otherwise, can never be too careful of any factor that affects, however remotely, the security or safety of that Government. You understand that quite well, don't you, Mr. Miller?" He didn't wait to find out if I did. "For that reason, and for no other, you were brought here with the utmost speed and secrecy, and kept here."

"Oh, sure," I said. "I'm going to blow up a tax collector, or something like that."

He nodded. "You might."

"Blah, So you made a mistake. So you're sorry, so my wife is probably completely out of her head by now, I'm crazy myself, and you want to talk politics. All I want to know is this—when do I get out of here?"

He looked at me with an odd, queer smile. "This, Mr. Miller, is where the shock lies. I think, diametrically opposite to the opinions and, I might add, to the direct pleadings of some of my colleagues involved in this rather inexplicable affair, that you are the adaptable Teutonic type that likes to know exactly the odds against him, the type of man who likes to know where and when he stands."

"I know exactly where I stand," I told him. "I want to know just one thing; when do I get out of this rat trap?"

He mulled that over, his forehead wrinkled as he searched for the right words. "I'm afraid, Mr. Miller, very much afraid that you're going to get out of here very soon. But never out of anyplace else." And with that he walked out the door before I could lift a finger to stop him.

But when they came after me

to put me away I wasn't stunned. It took four of them, and one more that came in as reinforcement. They weren't rough deliberately, but they weren't easy. They had a time, too. I think I've been around long enough to know a few dirty tricks. I used them all, but I still went back to my room, or cell. I got no sleep at all for the rest of the night, nor most of the next night. I wondered if I could ever sleep again. If someone had mentioned "Helen" to me I likely would cry like a baby. I couldn't get her out of my mind.

When they came after me again they were all prepared for another argument. I didn't care, this time. Meekly I went along, back to that same conference room. Four men; the old man who had given me the spurs before, one of the high school boys, and a couple of uniforms. The old man stood up very formally to greet me.

"Good morning, Mr. Miller."

I snarled at him. "Good for what?"

One of the uniforms was indignant. "Here, here, my man!"

I let him have it, too. "In your hat, fatty. My discharge went on the books in forty-five!" He was shocked stiff, but he shut up.

The old man kept his face straight. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Miller?" I sat. I still didn't like the chair. "This is General Hayes, and this is General Van Dorf." They nodded stiffly, and I ignored them. He didn't introduce the young man, not that I cared.

"Mr. Miller, we'd like to talk to you. Talk seriously."

"Afraid that I'll get mad and fly out the window?"

"I said seriously. It won't take long. Let's compress it into one short sentence without the preliminaries: give these gentlemen a demonstration like the last one."

I told him what he could do with his demonstration, and I told him what he could do with his generals. The high school boy grinned when I said that. He must have been old enough to have served in the army.

The generals were crimson. You don't get that kind of talk where they worked. But the old man was unperturbed. "Let's make that one sentence a paragraph. Give these gentlemen a demonstration as effective as the last—and ten minutes after, if you like, you can walk out of here free as the air."

I jumped at that. "Is that straight? If I do it again you'll let me loose?"

He nodded. "If you really want to."

I persisted. "Straight, now? On your word of honor?"

He wasn't lying. "If you want my word you have it."

I grinned all over like a dog. "Bring on your fans, or whatever you have cooked up."

The young man went out and came right back in with a little cartload of electric fans. Either they had too many for general use, or someone had very little imagination. Come summer, with Detroit ninety in the shade, they were going to miss their ventilation. Me, I was going to be a long way from the Federal Building. He set the fans on the desk, and the generals craned stork-like to see what was going on. The old man bowed to them.

"Name one, gentlemen. Any one you like." They named the middle one again.

I called my shots again, as free and easy as though I'd been doing it for years. "The middle one first, you say? No sooner said than done, gentlemen. Right? Right! Now the far left, and right down the line. Eeney, meeny, and out goes me." They were all dead, and I stood up and asked the room, "Which is the express elevator to the main floor?"

The old man held up his hand. "One moment, Mr. Miller." He read my mind, which, at that second, wasn't hard to do. "Oh, no. You're free to go any time you so desire. But I would like to make this demonstration a little more convincing."

He meant it. I could go if I liked.

"You also, Mr. Miller, as I understand it, exhibit somewhat the same degree of control over internal combustion engines." And well he knew I did. That traffic tieup I'd engineered had traveled via newsreels all over the world. "Will you gentlemen step over to the window?" This was to me and the generals.

We all crowded over. I looked down and saw we were on the ninth floor, maybe the eighth or tenth. It's hard to judge distance when you're looking straight down.

"Mr. Miller—"

"Yeh?"

"If one of these officers will pick out a car or a truck down on the street below can you stop it? Stop it dead in its tracks?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"All right, then. General Hayes, we'll let you do the honors. Will you select from all those cars down there any particular item?"

I broke in. "Or any streetcar." I was feeling cocky.

"Or any streetcar. I would suggest, General, that you choose a target for its visibility. One that you cannot mistake."

The uniforms were suspicious,

as they conferred with their noses flat against the glass. They beckoned to me and pointed.

"That one there."

"Which one where?" They had to be more explicit than that.

"The big truck. The one with the green top and the pipe sticking out."

I spotted it. It slowed for a red light, and came to a complete stop. I concentrated. Blow, Gabriel.

The crosstraffic halted, and the truck again got under way. Then suddenly, as it must have been, although from where we were it seemed like a leisurely stroll, it veered through the other traffic lane and smoke burst from its hood. We could see the driver pop from his seat and race to the corner fire alarm box. Almost instantly traffic both ways was four deep. I turned away from the window. I don't like heights, anyway.

"Now can I go?" Walk, not run to the nearest exit.

The old man spoke directly to the uniforms, "Well, gentlemen, are you satisfied?"

They were satisfied, all right. They were stunned. They were probably visualizing a stalled tank retriever, a stalled 6x6.

"Thank you, Mr. Miller. Thank you very much." My grin was wide, as I started for the door.

"But I think that it is only fair, before you go, for me to tell you one thing."

With my hand on the knob, I laughed at him. "You mean that there isn't any Santa Claus?"

The corners of his mouth went up. "Not for you, I'm afraid. Are you insured?"

"Me? Insured? You mean the extra thirty cents I give the newsboy every week?"

"That's it. Insured. Life insurance."

I shrugged. "Sure. A couple of thousand as long as I take the papers."

"Suppose your subscription expires, or is cancelled, for certain reasons that should be obvious?" The generals stopped fidgeting and looked curiously at the old man.

I couldn't figure out what he meant, and said so.

"You can—well, let's say that you can 'interfere' with electrical or mechanical devices, can't you?"

Sure I could. At least, all the ones I'd ever tried.

"So, with that established, you would be in a military sense the theoretically perfect defense."

I hadn't thought about it that way. But if it ever came down to it I should be able to knock down an airplane, gum up the works on a fusing detonator, maybe even—. No, I didn't like that

idea. Not me. Not at all.

The old man's voice was hard and soft at the same time. "So you're the irresistible force, or maybe the immovable object. And if you walk out of this office right now—and you can, Mr. Miller, that was our agreement—knowing what you know and being able to do what you have been doing . . . Now, just how long do you think it would take the intelligence of a dozen different nations to catch up with you? And how long after that would you stay 'free,' as you put it? Or how long would you stay alive? There are all types of ways and means, you know." You bet I knew that.

My hair tried to stand on end. "Why, you'd be just cutting your own throat! You'd have to keep an eye on me. You can't back out on me now!"

He was sympathetic. "That's just what we're trying to do. We're trying to protect you and all you want to do is go home."

I sat down in the old chair. "So that's why you said I could go any time I wanted to." The old man said nothing. I ran my hands through my hair and tried to find the right words. "Now what?"

One of the generals started a preparatory cough, but the old man beat him to it. "I have a suggestion, Mr. Miller. You likely will not approve. Or, then again, you might."

"Yeah?"

"You know by now that this room, or its rough equivalent, is where you can be safe. This place, or one as well guarded."

"Yeah. And then what?"

He tried to make it as easy as he could. "Voluntarily—remember that word, and what it means—voluntarily put yourself in our charge. Put yourself under our care and our protection—"

"And your orders!"

General Van Dorf couldn't hold in his snort. "Good Heavens, man, where's your patriotism? Where's your—"

He got the worst of that exchange, and he didn't like it. "Where's your brains, man? Whatever patriotism I have left is pretty well worn after thirty-two months overseas. I'm sick of the Army and Navy; I'm sick of hurrying up to stand in line; I'm sick of being told what to do, and being told how and where to do it; I'm sick of being bossed. As far as I'm concerned there's only one person in this world who can tell me to do anything—and what's happened to my wife, anyway? Where is she? And where does she think I am right now?" The old man hesitated. "She doesn't know where you are. She's in the woman's division,

downstairs. She's been well-treated, of course—"

"Sure. Well-treated." That was when I got really mad. "Sure. Jerk her out of bed in the middle of the night and throw her in jail and give her enough to eat and a place to sleep and that's supposed to be good treatment!"

The generals left without excusing themselves. Evidently they knew what was coming and wanted no part of it. The old Army game of signing your name and letting the sergeant hear the howls. I think that was the only thing that kept me there, as furious as I was, to hear what the old man had to say. He had been handed the dirty end of the stick, and he had to get rid of it the best way he could. When they were gone he circled a bit and then got the range.

Boiled down, it was like this. "As of right now, you no longer exist. There is no more Peter Ambrose Miller, and maybe there never was. This I would suggest; your wife, being human, could keep quiet no longer than any other woman—or man. As far as she is concerned you're no longer alive. You were killed while escaping arrest."

The sheer brutality, the plain cruelty of that, almost drove me insane right there on the spot. I don't know what kept my hands off him. Now, of course, I realize that he was doing that deliberately to focus my hate on him, to present the bad side of it, to show me what could be done if I didn't cooperate. But I didn't know that then.

"So if I've got the name I'll have the game! Does it make any difference if I get shot in report or in fact? How would *your* wife like to know that you'd been shot down like a criminal? What would Helen say to her friends and my friends and her relatives and all the people we know?"

That was just the reaction he'd been waiting for. "I mentioned that only as a suggestion. That could be easily arranged another way. Let's say, for example, that you've been working for the Government ever since your legal discharge, in an undercover assignment, and you died in line of duty. It should be quite easy to see that your widow was awarded some sort of posthumous decoration. Would that help?"

I never thought that I would ever sit quietly and listen to someone calmly plot the complete obliteration of my whole life, my whole being. It was like one of these European novels when one sane man tries to live and find another sane person in a world of madness. A posthumous decoration. A medal for one that is dead and rotting. A night-

mare with no waking up.

"And perhaps—oh, certainly! —a pension. You can rest assured your wife will never want. You see, Mr. Miller, we want to test you, and your . . ability. Perhaps this unbelievable control you have can be duplicated, or understood. That we want to find out. We want to turn inside out all the enormous potential you have. In short we want—we must—have you in strictest custody and under rigid observation. If you like, I can see that you have a military or naval commission of rank commensurate with your importance. And don't think, Mr. Miller, that you're any less important than I've stated. Right now, from this side of the fence, it looks to me that you're the most important thing this side of the invention of the wheel."

I didn't want a commission. I wanted to lead a normal life, and I wanted my wife.

"The Marines, perhaps? Or the Air Corps?"

It wasn't just the Army, or the Navy; it was the system. If I had to be a Sad Sack I'd be a civilian.

"As you like. Agreed?"

I looked at him. "Agreed? What do you want me to say? Agreed. That's a good word for you to use to me."

"You can rest assured—" He saw what must have been on my face, and stopped short. For a long minute we sat there, he thinking his thoughts, and me thinking mine. Mine weren't pleasant. Then he got up and came over to me. "Sorry. This is a pretty big meal to digest all at once. I know how you must feel."

I stared up at him. "Do you?"

Then he turned and left. Later, I don't know when, the young fellow came back alone and took me to my cell. I must have finally gotten to sleep.

The young fellow, who turned out to be a fairly good citizen named Stein, came after me the next day. He wanted me to pack. Pack? All the clothes I had were on my back.

"Toothbrush, things like that. Tell me what you want in the line of clothes and you'll get them. Or anything else, within reason."

"Anything? Anything at all?"

"Well, I said anything reasonable." We didn't have to go any further into that. He knew what I meant.

When it was dark they took us away, Stein and myself. In the back of a mail truck, cramped and silent we rode for what seemed hours. Long before we rattled to a halt I could hear the familiar roars of motors being warmed. The tailgates swung open and a twenty-foot walk put

us into a military ship. That meant Selfridge Field. Stein and I sat in the old painful bucket seats, the twin motors blasted and we trundled down the paved strip, a takeoff to nowhere. So long, Miller; so long to your wife and your home and your life. So long, Miller; you're dead and you're gone, and your wife will get a medal.

When I awoke, the cabin was stuffy, and the sun was brassy and hot and high. Stein, already awake, came up with a thermos of coffee and a snack. A peep from the ports didn't tell me where I was, not that it mattered. Somewhere in the west or southwest, on a sandy waste on the far end of a landing strip away from a cluttered group of shacks, we walked long enough to get out the kinks. Then a hurried sandwich from a picnic basket left in the cabin by an invisible steward, and we transferred to a gray amphibian. The next time I had interest enough to look out and down we were over water, and toward the rim of the world we floated for hours. I dozed off again.

Stein woke me up. Wordlessly he passed me a heavy helmet, and the kind of goggles that present a mirrored blankness to the outside world. All this time I had seen none of the crews, even when we had landed. The two of us had strolled alone in a tiny world of our own. When the pilot cut his engines for the landing I had the old style helmet on my head. It was far too big, and hurt my ears. The galloping splash we made puddled the ports high, and we bobbed awkwardly until Stein got his signal from the pilot, who popped out an impersonal arm. From the wing-struts we transferred to a Navy dory, manned by enlisted men commanded by a blank-faced ensign in dungarees. We were both wearing the concealing helmets in the stifling heat, and the ensign's "Eyes Front," did no more than keep the sailors from sneaking curious looks from the corners of their eyes.

The small boat put us alongside what looked like more of a workship than a fighter. It might have been an oiler or a repairship, or it might not have even been Navy. But it was Navy clean, and the crew was Navy. Some gold braid, way out of proportion to the size of the ship, met us at the top of the ladder, saluted, God knows why, and led Stein and I to a cabin. Not too big, not too small. I heard the amphibian rev up and take off again, and the deck tilted a trifle beneath us as we gathered way. A yank, and the suffocating hel-

met was off and I turned to Stein.

"Navy ship?"

He hesitated, then nodded. "Navy ship."

"No beer, then."

I drew a big grin this time. He was human, all right. "No beer."

Like an oven it was in that cabin. In a shower stall big enough for a midget I splashed away until I got a mouthful of water. Salt. I paddled out of there in a hurry and spent the next two hours trying to get interested in a year-old House and Home. Hours? I spent three solid days looking at that same issue, and others like it. All the sailors on the ship must have had hydroponics or its equivalent on the brain. In between times it cost me thirteen dollars I didn't have to play gin with Stein. Then—

I never did find out his real name. Neither his name, nor his job, nor what his job had to do with me, but he must have been important, from the salutes and attention he got. Maybe he'd just gotten there, maybe he'd been there all the time. He told me, when I bluntly asked him his name and what he did, that his name was Smith, and I still think of him as Smith. When he tapped on the door and stepped into that airless cabin I could smell the fans and the generals and the Federal Building all over again.

"Hello, Mr. Miller," he smiled. "Nice trip?"

"Swell trip," I told him. "Join the Navy and see the world through a piece of plywood nailed over a porthole."

When he sat down on the edge of the chair he was fussy about the crease in his pants. "Mr. Miller, whenever you are above decks, day or night, you will please keep your face concealed with that helmet, or its equivalent, no matter how uncomfortable the weather. Please."

"Since when have I been above decks? Since when have I been out of this two-by-four shack?"

"The shack," he said, "could be smaller, and the weather could be hotter. We'll see that while you're aboard you'll have the freedom of the deck after sunset. And you won't if things go right, be aboard much longer."

My ears went up at that. "No?"

"On the deck, upstairs"—he was no Navy man, or maybe that was the impression he wanted to give—"are racks of rockets of various sizes. You might have noticed them when you came aboard. No? Well, they have been

armed; some with electrical proximity fuses, some with mechanical timing devices, and some have both. They will be sent singly, or in pairs, or in salvos, at a target some little distance away. Your job will be the obvious one. Do you think you can do it?"

"Suppose I don't?"

He stood up. "Then that's what we want to know. Ready?"

I stretched. "As ready as I'll ever be. Let's go and take the air."

"Forget something?" He pointed at the helmet, hanging back of the door.

I didn't like it, but I put it on, and he took me up, up to the rocket racks on the prow. Even through the dark lenses the sun was oddly bright. Smith pointed off to port, where a battered old hull without even a deckhouse or a mast hobbled painfully in the trough of the sea.

"Target."

He jerked a thumb at the racks.

"Rockets."

I knew what they were. I'd seen enough of them sail over my head.

"Ready?"

Yes, I was ready. He made a careless flick of his hand and an order was barked behind me. A clatter and a swoosh, and a cylinder arced gracefully, catching me almost by surprise. I felt that familiar tightening behind my eyes, that familiar tensing and hunching of my shoulders. The propellant was taking the rocket almost out of sight when the fuse fired it. "Wham!"

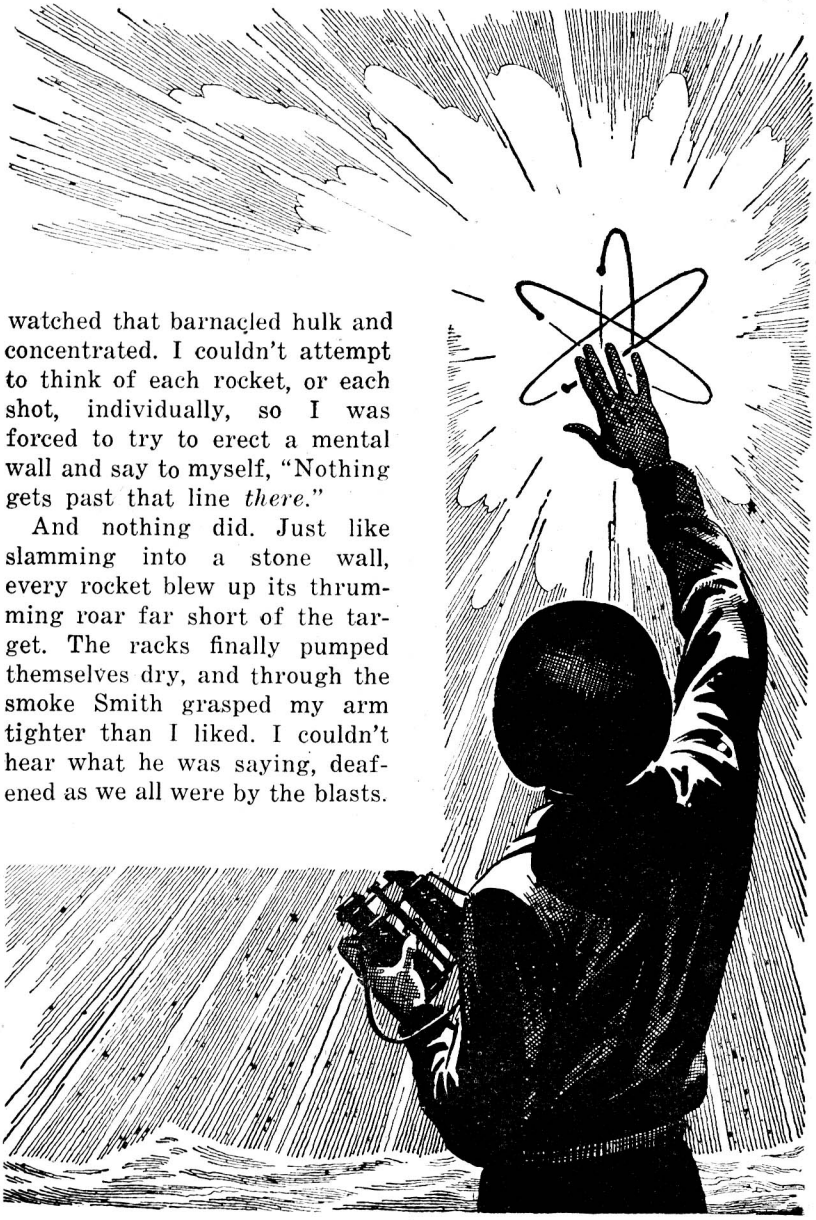
Caught that one in midair. Try another. Another "whoosh," and another "wham."

Then they tried it in pairs. Both of the flying darning-needles blew together, in an eccentric sweep of flame. Four, maybe five or six pairs I knocked down short of the target, some so close to us that I imagined I could feel the concussion. They switched to salvos of a dozen at a time and they blew almost in unison. They emptied the racks that way, and I was grimly amused at the queer expression of the officer in charge as the enlisted men refilled the maws of the gaping racks. Smith, the old man, nudged me a little harder than necessary.

"All racks, salvo."

All at once. I tried for a cool breath in that sweaty helmet. "Ready!"

I couldn't pick out any individual sounds. The racks vomited lightning and thunder far too fast for that. The rumble and roar bored itself into a remote corner of my brain while I



watched that barnacled hulk and concentrated. I couldn't attempt to think of each rocket, or each shot, individually, so I was forced to try to erect a mental wall and say to myself, "Nothing gets past that line *there*."

And nothing did. Just like slamming into a stone wall, every rocket blew up its thrumming roar far short of the target. The racks finally pumped themselves dry, and through the smoke Smith grasped my arm tighter than I liked. I couldn't hear what he was saying, deafened as we all were by the blasts.

He steered me back to the cabin and I flipped off drops of sweat with the helmet. I turned unexpectedly and caught the old man staring at me.

"Now what's the matter with you?"

He shook his head and sat down heavily. "You know, Miller, or Pete, if you don't mind, I still don't actually believe what I've just seen."

I borrowed a light from the ubiquitous Stein. His expression told me he'd seen the matinee.

"I don't believe it either, and I'm the one that put on the show." I blew smoke in the air and gave back the lighter. "But that's neither here nor there. When do I get out of this Black Hole of Calcutta?"

"Well . . ." Smith was undecided. "Where would you like to spend some time when we're through with all this?"

That I hadn't expected. "You mean I have a choice?"

Noncommittally, "Up to a point. How about some island somewhere? Or in the States? Cold or warm? How, for instance, would you feel about Guam or—"

"Watched by the whole Mounted Police?" He nodded.

I didn't care. "Just someplace where no one will bother me; some place where I can play some records of the Boston Pops or Victor Herbert;" (and I guess the nervous strain of all that mental effort in all the noise and smoke was fighting a delaying action) "someplace where I can get all the beer I want, because it looks like I'm going to need plenty. Someplace where I can sit around and take things easy and have someone to—" I cut it short.

He was one of the understanding Smiths, at that. "Yes," he nodded, "we can probably arrange that, too. It may not be . . ." What else could he say, or what other way was there to say it?

"One more thing," he went on; "one more . . . demonstration. This will take some little time to prepare." That, to me, meant one thing, and I liked it not at all. He beat me to the punch.

"This should be what is called the pay-off, the final edition. Come through on this one, and you'll be better off than the gold in Fort Knox. Anything you want, anything that money or goodwill can buy, anything within the resources of a great—and, I assure you, a grateful—nation. Everything—"

"—everything," I finished for him, "except the right to go down to the corner store for a magazine. Everything except

what better than me have called the pursuit of happiness."

He knew that was true. "But which is more important; your happiness, or the freedom and happiness of a hundred and seventy millions? Peter, if things political don't change, perhaps the freedom and happiness of over two billion, which, I believe, is the population of this backward planet."

"Yeah." The cigarette was dry, and I stubbed it in an ashtray. "And all this hangs on one person—me. That's your story." My mouth was dry, too.

His smile, I'm afraid, was more than just a little forced. "That's my story, and we're all stuck with it; you, me, all of us. No, you stay here, Stein. Let's see if we can get this over once and for all." Lines came and went on his forehead, as he felt for words.

"Let's try it this way: for the first time in written history as we know it one single deadly new weapon can change the course of the world, perhaps even change the physical course of that world, and the people who in the future will live in it. Speaking personally, as a man and as a reasonable facsimile of a technician, I find it extremely hard, almost impossible, to believe that at the exact psychic moment an apparent complete nullification of that weapon has appeared."

I grunted. "Maybe."

"Maybe. That's what we want to find out. Could you, Peter, if you were in my place, or you in your own place, get a good night's sleep tonight or any other night knowing that problem might have an answer without doing anything about it? Or are you one of these people who believe that there is no problem, that all things will solve themselves? Do you believe that, Stein? Do you think that Peter Ambrose Miller thinks that way?"

No, Stein didn't think that way, and Miller didn't think that way. We all knew that.

"All right," and he rubbed the back of his neck with a tired hand. "We have that weapon now. We, meaning the United States, and the whole wide world, from Andorra to Zanzibar. Now means today, in my lexicon. Tomorrow, and I mean tomorrow, or tomorrow of next year or the year after that, who will be the one to use that weapon? Do you know, Peter? Do you know?"

There was no need for an answer to that.

"And neither does anyone else. Peter, you're insurance. You're the cheapest and best insurance I know of. If! There's that big

if. I hate that word. I always have, and I'm going to eliminate 'if,' as far as Peter Ambrose Miller is concerned. Right?"

Of course he was right. Hiroshima could just as well have been Memphis or Moscow or Middletown. And I always had wanted to be rich enough to carry my own insurance . . .

Before Smith left he told me it might be a month or two before he would see me again.

"These things aren't arranged overnight, you know."

I knew that.

I would be landed, he said, somewhere, someplace, and I'd be my own boss, up to a point. Stein would be with me, and the secrecy routine would still be in effect . . . His voice trailed off, and I neither saw nor heard him leave.

Three miserable weeks I spent somewhere in some stinking Southern Pacific mudhole. Cocker spaniel Stein was never out of reach, or sight, and gave me the little attention I wanted. From a distance I occasionally saw Army and Navy. The enlisted men were the ones who brought me not everything I asked for, but enough to get along. Later on, I knew, I'd get the moon on ice if I were actually as valuable as appeared. At that time no one was sure, including some brass who came poking around when they thought I might be asleep. They stayed far away from me, evidently under strict orders to do just that, although they took Stein aside several times and barked importantly at him. I don't think they made much impression at Stein. I was aching for an argument at that stage, and it's just as well they dodged contact. When Smith showed up, with the usual officious bodyguard, I was itching to go.

Bikini I'd seen in the newsreels, and this wasn't it. The back forty would have dwarfed it. Just a limp palm or two and an occasional skinny lump of herbiage. Ships of all naval types and a civilian freighter or so spotted themselves at anchor like jagged rocks around the compass. The gray cruiser we were on never once dropped its hook; it paced nervously back and forth, up and down, and I followed, pacing the deck. With Stein at my heels, I saw daylight only through the ports. Only at night did I get to where I could smell the salt breeze free of the stink of paint and Diesel oil. From what I know about ships and their complements we must have had at least the captain's cabin, or pretty close to its mate. We never saw the captain, or at least he was never around when

I was. The buzzing mass of brass and high civilians I knew were there, the old man told me, were and berthed on the big flattop carrier that idled off to port. Only Smith dropped in occasionally to rasp my frayed nerves deeper. With all the activity seething around us, and with only Stein and myself to keep each other company, we were getting cabin fever. I told that to Smith, who soothed me with promises.

"Tomorrow's the day."

"It better be. How are we going to work this, anyway?" I was curious, and I thought I had a right to be. "From what I hear, you better have your holes already dug."

"Too true," he agreed. "The bomb itself will be released from a drone plane, radio-controlled. We will, of course, be far enough from this island and the target installations you might have noticed going up to be out of range of radiations—"

"You hope!"

"—we hope. Your job will be to keep the bomb from detonating, or if that cannot be done, to fire it harmlessly, or as much so as possible. *That's* what we want to know. Clear?" Of course it was clear. That's what I wanted to know, too.

The sun came up out of the sea as quickly as it always does, and although the cruiser deck was almost bare far off we could see the carrier deck swarming with tiny ants. The odd-angled posts and gadgets we could see sticking up must have belonged to the technical boys, and they must have had plenty of it, if we could see it at that distance. Overhead they must have had at least eight planes of all types, from B-36's to helicopters to Piper Cubs, all dipping and floating and racing madly from one air bubble to another. Smith took time to tell me that, regardless whether the Bomb was fired by Miller or Iron Mike the explosion data would be immensely valuable.

"These things cost money," he said, "and this is killing two birds with one stone." I didn't want to be a bird, and my smile was sickly strained. Smith went off with a wry grin.

The helmet itched the back of my neck and the glasses dug into the bridge of my nose. From the open space I had to work in they must have thought I was a ferryboat, until it dawned on me that all those armed Marines with their backs turned weren't there just for ornament. Peter Valuable Miller. Very, very, queer, I thought, that all those technicians swarming on the carrier deck could be trusted enough to

build and fire a Bomb and yet couldn't be allowed to know that there might be a possible defense to that Bomb. I watched Stein scratch his back against a projecting steel rib as the Smith strolled absently out of nowhere. Stein straightened sheepishly, and the old man smiled.

"Ready?"

Why not? I gave him the same answer as before. "Ready as I ever will be."

He handed me a pair of glasses, 7 x 50. "The drone ship took off ten minutes ago. Look due north—no, north is that way —and whenever it comes into whatever you consider your range—"

"Bingo!"

"Bingo!" He liked that. "When you fire it—"

"You mean, *if* I fire it."

"If you fire it, just before, you slide the filters over the ends of your binoculars like so. Or better still, turn your back."

Turn my back? I wanted to see what was going to happen.

"All right, but make sure you get those filters down in time." He cocked an ear as someone shouted something that was carried away in the freshening breeze. "Must have picked it up with radar. Let's see if we can find it," and together we set to sweeping the northern horizon.

Radar must have been sharp that day, because the drone, a battered B-24, was right on top of us before we picked it up, a mote in the sun's brazen eye. A flurry of orders relayed to the control ship sent it soaring back into the distance, a mile or so high. Just at the limit of visibility I used the corner of my mouth to Smith.

"Hold your breath and help me out." Maybe he did, at that. "Motors. I'll try to get the motors first."

The slapping of the salty waves against the cruiser's armored hull seemed to pause in midstride. Nothing happened—nothing, until the waves, with a frustrated sigh, gave in and began again their toppling roll and hiss. Then slowly, ever so slowly, so faintly that it was only a speck in the sky, the distant dot tilted and hung suspended on a wingtip, hung, hung, hung . . . A jerk, and a warped spiral. My ears rang, and the falling leaf, now swooping and sailing in agonized humpbacked scallops, seemed to double and triple in my tear-swimming eyes. Then I tried—

There was no sound. There was no booming roar, no thunder. But I forgot to yank down those dark filters over the ends of the Zeiss. They had told me that it would be like looking at

the sun. Well, the sun won't throw you flat on your back, or maybe I fell. Not quite flat; Smith threw a block as I reeled, and held me upright. I tried to tell him that I was all right, that it was just the sudden glare that paralyzed me, and to get his arms off my neck before I strangled. No attention did I get from him at all in that respect, but plenty of other unneeded help. Wriggle and swear as I might, with that helmet scoring a raw groove in my neck, I was toted below and dropped on my bunk with, I suppose, what whoever carried me would call gentleness.

The anxious officer in front of me, when the action was over, had the physician's harried look. He liked my language not one little bit, and only Smith's authority kept him from calling corpsmen to muzzle me while he examined my eyes. When my sore eyes had accustomed themselves to the dim light in the cabin, Smith led the officer to the door of the hatch or whatever they call it, explaining that the recalcitrant patient would doubtless be later in a more receptive mood.

"If you think so," I yelled at his indignant ramrod back, "you must try sticking in your head and see what happens." I don't like anyone to poke anything in my eyes anytime.

Smith shut the door quickly. "Must you bellow like that? He was trying to help you."

I knew that, but I was mad. "I don't want any help. I could have made it down here under my own power, and you know it."

Smith sat down. "These your cigarettes? Thanks." He lit his own and puffed furiously. "I don't think you can reasonably expect to be let alone, Peter. After all, you're a very valuable—"

"—piece of property. Sure. In the meantime I don't want anyone fooling around me."

He smoked in silence, thinking. That meant trouble.

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

He reached for the ashtray. "Ready to talk now?"

"Sure," I said. "Talk or listen?"

"A little of both."

I talk too much. It would do me no harm to listen. "Shoot."

"This, then, Peter, is the situation; you, without a doubt, are the most remarkable person in the whole wide world. Almost an institution in yourself."

I grinned. "Like the Maine farmer; a character."

"Right. As far as I, and anyone else that has had any contact with you at all, can tell or even guess, you are absolutely and perfectly unique."

"You said that before."

"So I did. You know—" and he held my eye steadily—"you're so completely unique, and so—dangerous, that more than once I have been personally tempted to arrange your—elimination. From behind."

I couldn't put up more than a weak grin for that. I had wondered about that, myself. A variation, a deadly one, of the old "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em" theme. And I hadn't been too cooperative.

He went on, slowly. "My personal reactions, for obvious reasons, do not enter into this. But I think, Peter, that you should consider those words very seriously before you are tempted to do or say anything rash."

I agreed that he was probably right, and that it might be better if I piped a quiet tune. "But that's not the way I operate. As far as I'm concerned, I'm responsible to myself, and myself alone. If I wanted to be told what to say and what to think, and when to say it, I would have stayed in when I got my discharge."

He shrugged. "It might be better for all concerned if you were under military discipline, although it might not suit your ego. Take, for example, the two generals you met in Detroit; Generals Hayes and Van Dorf. They both are regarded as brilliant; they are both regarded as too mentally precocious to be risked in physical action. They are two of the most agile minds on the staff."

I took his word for it. "They are still generals to me. And I don't have to stand at attention, and I don't have to take their orders."

"Exactly," and he reached for the cigarettes again. "It is not going to do any good by adding more fuel to your mental furnace, but it is only fair to tell you that the . . . elimination thing was more or less seriously discussed before you left Detroit."

He didn't give me a chance to blow up, but raced on. "General Hayes and General Van Dorf are sensible men, dealing in material and sensible things. You are neither practical or sensible, in many ways, this being one. They, as well equipped as they are, are not prepared to cope with such a problem presented with such as you. I might add here, that neither is anyone else. What are you laughing at?"

I couldn't help it. "The military mind at its best. First cross up the world by getting a weapon with no defense. Then when someone comes up with a defense for any weapon, including the

weapon with no defense, they start turning back flips."

"Take that idiotic grin off your face." Just the same, he thought it was rather comic, himself. "Neither of us are in the Armed Forces, so for the present we can talk and plan freely. If you think, Peter, that all this can be solved with prejudice and a smart remark, you're very, very wrong. The worst is yet to come."

I asked him if I'd had a bed of roses, so far. "I don't think I could be much worse off than I've been so far. How would you like to be penned up—"

"Penned up?" He snorted disgustedly. "You've had yourself a holiday, and you can't see it. Try to see the military, the legal point of view. Here is one person, Peter Ambrose Miller, one man and only one man, with the ability, the power, to cancel at one stroke every scientific advancement that armament has made in the past three thousand years."

"And the big boys don't like it," I mused.

"The little boys, as you use the word, won't like it, either," he said. "But, that's not the point. Not the point at all. The stem of the apple is this—what are we going to do with you?"

"We?" I asked him.

"We," he explained carefully, as to a baby, "is a generic term for the army, the navy, the government, the world in general. As long as you live, as long as you continue to be able to do the things you can do now, a gun or an airplane is so much scrap metal. But—only as long as you live!"

That I didn't like. "You mean that—"

"Exactly what I said. As long as you're alive a soldier or a sailor might as well be a Zulu; useful for the length he can throw a spear or shoot an arrow, but useless as he now stands. There is no army, apparently, right now that is worth more than its body weight—again, as long as you live."

"Do you have to harp on that?"

"Why not? Do you want to live forever, or do you expect to?"

He had me there. You bet I wanted to live forever. "Well?"

He yanked pensively at his upper lip. "Two solutions; one, announce you to the world with a clang of cymbals and a roll of drums. Two, bury you someplace. Oh, figuratively speaking," he added hastily as he saw my face.

"Solution one sounds good to me," I told him. "I could go home then."

He made it quite clear that Solution One was only theoretical; he was firm about that.

"Outside of rewriting all the peace treaties in existence, do you remember how our Congress huddled over the Bomb? Can you see Congress allowing you, can you see the General Staff agreeing to share you with, for example, a United Nations Commission? Can you?"

No, I couldn't.

"So," with a regretful sigh, "Solution One leaves only Solution Two. We'll grant that you must be kept under cover."

I wondered if Stein was somewhere at the earphones of a tape recorder. For someone with as big a job as the old man likely had, it seemed that we were talking fairly freely. He went on.

"And that Solution Two has within itself another unsolved problem; who watches you, and who watches the watchers?"

That didn't matter to me, and I said so.

"I suppose not to you, but it would matter to the army, and it would matter to the navy, and when J. Edgar Hoover gets around to thinking about it, it will matter to the FBI."

"So what? Would I get a choice?"

He was curious for a moment. "Would you want one?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I had a uniform once. The FBI go to college and take off their hats in the house, but they're still cops, and I don't like cops. Don't look at me like that; you wouldn't like cops either, if you made less than a couple of hundred a week. Nobody does. So I'm prejudiced against everybody, and just what difference does it make?"

"Not a great deal. I was just curious." He was honest, anyway. "But you can see the possibilities, or the lack of them."

"Look," and I got up to take as many steps as the cabin would allow. "This is where we came in. We could talk all day and get no further. All I want to know is this—what's going to happen to me, and when, and where?"

He followed me with his steady eyes. "Well, at the immediate moment, I'm afraid that—" He hesitated.

"I'm afraid that, quick like a bunny, you're going to have one solid headache if we don't quit using the same words over and over again. Here I am stuck in the middle of all the water in the world, and I'm tired, and I'm disgusted, and I'm starting to get mad. You're trying to smother my head in a pillow, I've got nothing but a first-class runaround from you and everyone I've seen, who has been one man named Bob Stein. I see nothing, I know less, I get cold shoulders and hot promises."

I sailed right on, not giving him a chance to slide in one word. "Why, there must be ten thousand men and maybe some women right upstairs, and who knows how many within a few miles from here, and do I get to even pass the time of day with any of them? Do I? You bet your sweet life I don't!"

"There aren't any women within miles of here, except nurses, and maybe a reporter, and I'm not sure about that."

"Nurses and reporters are human, aren't they?"

Had he found a chink in the armor? He frowned. "Is it women you want?"

"Sure, I want women!" I flared at him. "I want a million of them! I want Esther Williams and Minnie Mouse and anyone else that looks good to me. But I don't want them on a silver platter with a gilt chain. I want them when I want them—my wife and the waitress at Art's, and the beer I used to drink would taste a lot better than the beer you said I'd get and never seen!"

The Smith stood up and I sat down. "Women and beer. Anything else?"

"Sure," I snapped at him. "Women and beer and traffic piled up on Gratiot and the same double feature at all the movies in town—" I got a look at him. I felt silly. "All right, take out the needle. You win."

He was a gentleman. He didn't laugh. "Win? Yes, I suppose I win." Before I could think of anything else to say, he was gone.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW

This month, we're dropping the percentage ratings after the stories, and they are going to stay dropped. It simply isn't fair to class the first story with a rating of 1.5 and the fifth with a rating of 6.0, simply because readers liked all of them and couldn't agree about which was second! If a story is not liked, we'll report it. But we won't put a black mark against a good story. So here was the line up for Issue No. 4.

1. ULLR UPRISING, by H. Beam Piper
2. SECURITY, by Poul Anderson
3. EXILE, by H. B. Fyfe
4. THE HUNTERS, by William Morrison
5. RELATIVITY, by John Christopher

The first four seemed to be genuinely liked. The last received few real brickbats, but not many bouquets, either. Which helps to prove again that it's tough to write a short-short that can compete with full-length stories.

THE Adventure

BY C. M. KORNBLUTH

ILLUSTRATED BY FREAS

For every evil under the sun, there's an answer. It may be a simple, direct answer; it may be one that takes years, and seems unrelated to the problem. But there's an answer—of a kind . . .

President Folsom XXIV said petulantly to his Secretary of the Treasury: "Blow me to hell, Bannister, if I understood a single word of that. *Why* can't I buy the Nicolaides Collection? And don't start with the rediscount and the Series W business again. Just tell me *why*."

The Secretary of the Treasury said with an air of apprehension and a thread-like feeling across his throat: "It boils down to—no money, Mr. President."

The President was too engrossed in thoughts of the marvelous collection to fly into a rage. "It's *such* a bargain," he said mournfully. "An archaic Henry Moore figure—really too big to finger, but I'm no culture-snob, thank God—and fifteen early Morrisons and I can't begin to tell you what else." He looked hopefully at the Secretary of Public Opinion: "Mightn't I seize it for the public good or something?"

The Secretary of Public Opinion shook his head. His pose was gruffly professional. "Not a chance, Mr. President. We'd never get away with it. The art-


KELLY FREAS '92

lovers would scream to high Heaven."

"I suppose so . . . *Why* isn't there any money?" He had swiveled dangerously on the Secretary of the Treasury again.

"Sir, purchases of the new Series W bond issue have lagged badly because potential buyers have been attracted to—"

"Stop it, stop it, *stop* it! You know I can't make head or tail of that stuff. Where's the money *going?*"

The Director of the Budget said cautiously: "Mr. President, during the biennium just ending, the Department of Defense accounted for 78 per cent of expenditures—"

The Secretary of Defense growled: "Now wait a minute, Felder! We were voted—"

The President interrupted, raging weakly: "Oh, you rascals! My father would have known what to do with you! But don't think I can't handle it. *Don't* think you can hoodwink me." He punched a button ferociously; his silly face was contorted with rage and there was a certain tension on all the faces around the Cabinet table.

Panels slid down abruptly in the walls, revealing grim-faced Secret Servicemen. Each Cabinet officer was covered by at least two automatic rifles.

"Take that—that traitor away!" the President yelled. His finger pointed at the Secretary of Defense, who slumped over the table, sobbing. Two Secret Servicemen half-carried him from the room.

President Folsom XXIV leaned back, thrusting out his lower lip. He told the Secretary of the Treasury: "*Get* me the money for the Nicolaides Collection. Do you understand? I don't care how you do it. *Get* it." He glared at the Secretary of Public Opinion. "Have you any comments?"

"No, Mr. President."

"All right, then." The President unbent and said plaintively: "I don't see why you can't all be more reasonable. I'm a very reasonable man. I don't see why I can't have a few pleasures along with my responsibilities. Really I don't. And I'm sensitive. I don't *like* these scenes. Very well. That's all. The Cabinet meeting is adjourned."

They rose and left silently in the order of their seniority. The President noticed that the panels were still down and pushed the button that raised them again and hid the granite-faced Secret Servicemen. He took out of his pocket a late Morrison fingering-piece and turned it over in his hand, a smile of relaxation and bliss spreading over his face. *Such* amusing textural contrast!

Such unexpected variations on the classic sequences!

The Cabinet, less the Secretary of Defense, was holding a rump meeting in an untapped corner of the White House gymnasium.

"God," the Secretary of State said, white-faced. "Poor old Willy!"

The professionally gruff Secretary of Public Opinion said: "We should murder the bastard. I don't care what happens—"

The Director of the Budget said dryly: "We all know what would happen. President Folsom XXV would take office. No; we've got to keep plugging as before. Nothing short of the invincible can topple the Republic . . ."

"What about a war?" the Secretary of Commerce demanded fiercely. "We've no proof that our program will work. What about a war?"

State said wearily: "Not while there's a balance of power, my dear man. The Io-Callisto Question proved that. The Republic and the Soviet fell all over themselves trying to patch things up as soon as it seemed that there would be real shooting. Folsom XXIV and his excellency Premier Yersinsky know at least that much."

The Secretary of the Treasury said: "What would you all think of Steiner for Defense?"

The Director of the Budget was astonished. "Would he take it?"

Treasury cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I've asked him to stop by right about now." He hurled a medicine ball into the budgetary gut.

"Oof!" said the Director. "You bastard. Steiner would be perfect. He runs Standards like a watch." He treacherously fired the medicine ball at the Secretary of Raw Materials, who blandly caught it and slammed it back.

"Here he comes," said the Secretary of Raw Materials. "Steiner! Come and sweat some oleo off!"

Steiner ambled over, a squat man in his fifties, and said: "I don't mind if I do. Where's Willy?"

State said: "The President unmasked him as a traitor. He's probably been executed by now."

Steiner looked grim, and grimmer yet when the Secretary of the Treasury said, dead-pan: "We want to propose you for Defense."

"I'm happy in Standards," Steiner said. "Safer, too. The Man's father took an interest in science, but The Man never comes around. Things are very quiet. Why don't you invite Winch, from the National Art

Commission? It wouldn't be much of a change for the worse for him."

"No brains," the Secretary for Raw Materials said briefly. "Heads up!"

Steiner caught the ball and slugged it back at him. "What good are brains?" he asked quietly.

"Close the ranks, gentlemen," State said. "These long shots are too hard on my arms."

The ranks closed and the Cabinet told Steiner what good were brains. He ended by accepting.

The Moon is all Republic. Mars is all Soviet. Titan is all Republic. Ganymede is all Soviet. But Io and Callisto, by the Treaty of Greenwich, are half-and-half Republic and Soviet.

Down the main street of the principal settlement on Io runs an invisible line. On one side of the line, the principal settlement is known as New Pittsburgh. On the other side it is known as Nizhni-Magnitogorsk.

Into a miner's home in New Pittsburgh one day an eight-year-old boy named Grayson staggered, bleeding from the head. His eyes were swollen almost shut.

His father lurched to his feet, knocking over a bottle. He looked stupidly at the bottle, set it upright too late to save much of the alcohol, and then stared fixedly at the boy. "See what you made me do, you little bastard?" he growled, and fetched the boy a clout on his bleeding head that sent him spinning against the wall of the hut. The boy got up slowly and silently—there seemed to be something wrong with his left arm—and glowered at his father.

He said nothing.

"Fighting again," the father said, in a would-be fierce voice. His eyes fell under the peculiar fire in the boy's stare. "Damn fool—"

A woman came in from the kitchen. She was tall and thin. In a flat voice she said to the man: "Get out of here." The man hiccupped and said: "Your brat spilled my bottle. Gimme a dollar."

In the same flat voice: "I have to buy food."

"I said gimme a dollar!" The man slapped her face—it did not change—and wrenched a small purse from the string that suspended it around her neck. The boy suddenly was a demon, flying at his father with fists and teeth. It lasted only a second or two. The father kicked him into a corner where he lay, still glaring, wordless and dry-eyed. The mother had not moved; her husband's handmark was still red on

her face when he hulked out, clutching the money bag.

Mrs. Grayson at last crouched in the corner with the eight-year-old boy. "Little Tommy," she said softly. "My little Tommy! Did you cross the line again?"

He was blubbering in her arms, hysterically, as she caressed him. At last he was able to say: "I didn't cross the line, Mom. Not this time. It was in school. They said our name was really Krasinsky. God-damn him!" the boy shrieked. "They said his grandfather was named Krasinsky and he moved over the line and changed his name to Grayson! God-damn him! Doing that to us!"

"Now darling," his mother said, caressing him. "Now, darling." His trembling began to ebb. She said: "Let's get out the spools, Tommy. You mustn't fall behind in school. You owe that to me, don't you, darling?"

"Yes, Mom," he said. He threw his spindly arms around her and kissed her. "Get out the spools. We'll show him. I mean them."

President Folsom XXIV lay on his death-bed, feeling no pain, mostly because his personal physician had pumped him full of morphine. Dr. Barnes sat by the bed holding the presidential wrist and waiting, occasionally nodding off and recovering with a belligerent stare around the room. The four wire-service men didn't care whether he fell asleep or not; they were worriedly discussing the nature and habits of the President's first-born, who would shortly succeed to the highest office in the Republic.

"A firebrand, they tell me," the A. P. man said unhappily.

"Firebrands I don't mind," the U.P. man said. "He can send out all the inflammatory notes he wants just as long as he isn't a fiend for exercise. I'm not as young as I once was. You boys wouldn't remember the *old* President, Folsom XXII. He used to do point-to-point hiking. He worshipped old F.D.R."

The I.N.S. man said, lowering his voice: "Then he was worshipping the wrong Roosevelt. Teddy was the athlete."

Dr. Barnes started, dropped the presidential wrist and held a mirror to the mouth for a moment. "Gentlemen," he said, "the President is dead."

"O.K.," the A.P. man said. "Let's go, boys. I'll send in the flash. U.P., you go cover the College of Electors. I.N.S., get onto the President Elect. Trib, collect some interviews and background—"

The door opened abruptly; a colonel of infantry was standing

there, breathing hard, with an automatic rifle at port. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," the A.P. man said. "If you'll let me past—"

"Nobody leaves the room," the colonel said grimly. "I represent General Slocum, Acting President of the Republic. The College of Electors is acting now to ratify—"

A burst of gunfire caught the colonel in the back; he spun and fell, with a single hoarse cry. More gunfire sounded through the White House. A Secret Serviceman ducked his head through the door: "President's dead? You boys stay put. We'll have this thing cleaned up in an hour—" He vanished.

The doctor sputtered his alarm and the newsmen ignored him with professional poise. The A.P. man asked: "Now who's Slocum? Defense Command?"

I.N.S. said: "I remember him. Three stars. He headed up the Tactical Airborne Force out in Kansas four-five years ago. I think he was retired since then."

A phosphorus grenade crashed through the window and exploded with a globe of yellow flame the size of a basketball; dense clouds of phosphorus pentoxide gushed from it and the sprinkler system switched on, drenching the room.

"Come on!" hacked the A.P. man, and they scrambled from the room and slammed the door. The doctor's coat was burning in two or three places, and he was retching feebly on the corridor floor. They tore his coat off and flung it back into the room.

The U.P. man, swearing horribly, dug a sizzling bit of phosphorus from the back of his hand with a pen-knife and collapsed, sweating, when it was out. The I.N.S. man passed him a flask and he gurgled down half a pint of liquor. "Who flang that brick?" he asked faintly.

"Nobody," the A.P. man said gloomily. "That's the hell of it. None of this is happening. Just the way Taft the Pretender never happened in '03. Just the way the Pentagon Mutiny never happened in '67."

" '68," the U.P. man said faintly. "It didn't happen in '68, not '67."

The A.P. man smashed a fist into the palm of his hand and swore. "*God*-damn," he said. "Some day I'd like to—" He broke off and was bitterly silent.

The U.P. man must have been a little dislocated with shock and quite drunk to talk the way he did. "Me too," he said. "Like to tell the story. Maybe it was '67 not '68. I'm not sure now. Can't write it down so the details get lost and then after a while it didn't happen at all. Revolution'd

be good deal. But it takes people t' make revolution. *People.* With eyes 'n ears. 'N memories. We make things not-happen an' we make people not-see an' not-hear . . ." He slumped back against the corridor wall, nursing his burned hand. The others were watching him, very scared.

Then the A.P. man caught sight of the Secretary of Defense striding down the corridor, flanked by Secret Servicemen. "Mr. Steiner!" he called. "What's the picture?"

Steiner stopped, breathing heavily, and said: "Slocum's barricaded in the Oval Study. They don't want to smash in. He's about the only one left. There were only fifty or so. The Acting President's taken charge at the Study, You want to come along?"

They did, and even hauled the U.P. man after them.

The Acting President, who would be President Folsom XXV as soon as the Electoral College got around to it, had his father's face—the petulant lip, the soft jowl—on a hard young body. He also had an auto-rifle ready to fire from the hip. Most of the Cabinet was present. When the Secretary of Defense arrived, he turned on him. "Steiner," he said nastily, "can you explain why there should be a rebellion against the Republic in your department?"

"Mr. President," Steiner said, "Slocum was retired on my recommendation two years ago. It seems to me that my responsibility ended there and Security should have taken over."

The President Elect's finger left the trigger of the auto-rifle and his lip drew in a little. "Quite so," he said curtly, and turned to the door. "Slocum!" he shouted. "Come out of there. We can use gas if we want."

The door opened unexpectedly and a tired-looking man with three stars on each shoulder stood there, bare-handed. "All right," he said drearily. "I was fool enough to think something could be done about the regime. But you fat-faced imbeciles are going to go on and on and—"

The stutter of the auto-rifle cut him off. The President Elect's knuckles were white as he clutched the piece's forearm and grip; the torrent of slugs continued to hack and plow the general's body until the magazine was empty. "Burn that," he said curtly, turning his back on it. "Dr. Barnes, come here. I want to know about my father's passing."

The doctor, hoarse and red-eyed from the whiff of phosphorus smoke, spoke with him. The U.P. man had sagged drunkenly into a chair, but the other

newsmen noted that Dr. Barnes glanced at them as he spoke, in a confidential murmur.

"Thank you, doctor," the President Elect said at last, decisively. He gestured to a Secret Serviceman. "Take those traitors away." They went, numbly.

The Secretary of State cleared his throat. "Mr. President," he said, "I take this opportunity to submit the resignations of myself and fellow Cabinet members according to custom."

"That's all right," the President Elect said. "You may as well stay on. I intend to run things myself anyway." He hefted the auto-rifle. "You," he said to the Secretary of Public Opinion. "You have some work to do. Have the memory of my father's—artistic—preoccupations obliterated as soon as possible. I wish the Republic to assume a warlike posture—yes; what is it?"

A trembling messenger said: "Mr. President, I have the honor to inform you that the College of Electors has elected you President of the Republic—unanimously."

Cadet Fourth Classman Thomas Grayson lay on his bunk and sobbed in an agony of loneliness. The letter from his mother was crumpled in his hand: "—prouder than words can tell of your appointment to the Academy. Darling, I hardly knew my grandfather but I know that you will serve as brilliantly as he did, to the eternal credit of the Republic. You must be brave and strong for my sake—"

He would have given everything he had or ever could hope to have to be back with her, and away from the bullying, sneering fellow-cadets of the Corps. He kissed the letter—and then hastily shoved it under his mattress as he heard footsteps.

He popped to a brace, but it was only his roommate Ferguson. Ferguson was from Earth, and rejoiced in the lighter Lunar gravity which was punishment to Grayson's Io-bred muscles.

"Rest, mister," Ferguson grinned.

"Thought it was night inspection."

"Any minute now. They're down the hall. Lemme tighten your bunk or you'll be in trouble—" Tightening the bunk he pulled out the letter and said, calfishly: "Ah-*hah!* Who is she?—" and opened it.

When the cadet officers reached the room they found Ferguson on the floor being strangled black in the face by spidery little Grayson. It took all three of them to pull him off. Ferguson went to the infirmary and Grayson went to the Commandant's office.

The Commandant glared at the

cadet from under the most spectacular pair of eyebrows in the Service. "Cadet Grayson," he said, "explain what occurred."

"Sir, Cadet Ferguson began to read a letter from my mother without my permission."

"That is not accepted by the Corps as grounds for mayhem. Do you have anything further to say?"

"Sir, I lost my temper. All I thought of was that it was an act of disrespect to my mother and somehow to the Corps and the Republic too—that Cadet Ferguson was dishonoring the Corps."

Bushwah, the Commandant thought. *A snow job and a crude one.* He studied the youngster. He had never seen such a brace from an Io-bred fourth-classman. It must be torture to muscles not yet toughened up to even Lunar gravity. Five minutes more and the boy would have to give way, and serve him right for showing off.

He studied Grayson's folder. It was too early to tell about academic work, but the fourth-classman was a bear—or a fool—for extra duty. He had gone out for half a dozen teams and applied for membership in the exacting Math Club *and* Writing Club. The Commandant glanced up; Grayson was still in his extreme brace. The Commandant suddenly had the queer idea that Grayson could hold it until it killed him.

"One hundred hours of pack-drill," he barked, "to be completed before quarter-term. Cadet Grayson, if you succeed in walking off your tours, remember that there is a tradition of fellowship in the Corps which its members are expected to observe. Dismiss."

After Grayson's steel-sharp salute and exit the Commandant dug deeper into the folder. Apparently there was something wrong with the boy's left arm, but it had been passed by the examining team that visited Io. Most unusual. Most irregular. But nothing could be done about it now.

The President, softer now in body than on his election day, and infinitely more cautious, snapped: "It's all very well to create an incident. But where's the money to come from? Who wants the rest of Io anyway? And what will happen if there's war?"

Treasury said: "The hoarders will supply the money, Mr. President. A system of percentage-bounties for persons who report currency-hoarders, and then enforced purchase of a bond issue."

Raw materials said: "We need

that iron, Mr. President. We need it desperately."

State said: "All our evaluations indicate that the Soviet Premier would consider nothing less than armed invasion of his continental borders as occasion for all-out war. The consumer-goods party in the Soviet has gained immensely during the past five years and of course their armaments have suffered. Your shrewd directive to put the Republic in a war-like posture has borne fruit, Mr. President . . ."

President Folsom XXV studied them narrowly. To him the need for a border incident culminating in a forced purchase of Soviet Io did not seem as pressing as they thought, but they were, after all, specialists. And there was no conceivable way they could benefit from it personally. The only alternative was that they were offering their professional advice and that it would be best to heed it. Still, there was a vague, nagging something . . .

Nonsense, he decided. The spy dossiers on his Cabinet showed nothing but the usual. One had been blackmailed by an actress after an affair and railroaded her off the Earth. Another had a habit of taking bribes to advance favorite sons in civil and military service. And so on. The Republic could not suffer at their hands; the Republic and the dynasty were impregnable. You simply spied on everybody—including the spies—and ordered summary executions often enough to show that you meant it, and kept the public ignorant: deaf-dumb-blind ignorant. The spy system was simplicity itself; you had only to let things get as tangled and confused as possible until *nobody* knew who was who. The executions were literally no problem, for guilt or innocence made no matter. And mind-control when there were four newspapers, six magazines and three radio and television stations was a job for a handful of clerks.

No; the Cabinet couldn't be getting away with anything. The system was unbeatable.

President Folsom XXV said: "Very well. Have it done."

Mrs. Grayson, widow, of New Pittsburgh, Io, disappeared one night. It was in all the papers and on all the broadcasts. Some time later she was found dragging herself back across the line between Nizhni-Magnitorgorsk and New Pittsburgh in sorry shape. She had a terrible tale to tell about what she had suffered at the hands and so forth of the Nizhni-Magnitogorskniks. A diplomatic note from the Republic to the Soviet was answered by an-

other note which was answered by the dispatch of the Republic's First Fleet to Io which was answered by the dispatch of the Soviet's First and Fifth Fleets to Io.

The Republic's First Fleet blew up the customary deserted target hulk, fulminated over a sneak sabotage attack and moved in its destroyers. Battle was joined.

Ensign Thomas Grayson took over the command of his destroyer when its captain was killed on his bridge. An electrified crew saw the strange, brooding youngster perform prodigies of skill and courage, and responded to them. In one week of desultory action the battered destroyer had accounted for seven Soviet destroyers and a cruiser.

As soon as this penetrated to the flagship Grayson was decorated and given a flotilla. His weird magnetism extended to every officer and man aboard the seven craft. They struck like phantoms, cutting out cruisers and battlewagons in wild unorthodox actions that couldn't have succeeded but did—every time. Grayson was badly wounded twice, but his driving nervous energy carried him through.

He was decorated again and given the battlewagon of an ailing four-striper.

Without orders he touched down on the Soviet side of Io, led out a landing party of marines and bluejackets, cut through two regiments of Soviet infantry, and returned to his battlewagon with prisoners: the top civil and military administrators of Soviet Io.

They discussed him nervously aboard the flagship.

"He has a mystical quality, Admiral. His men would follow him into an atomic furnace. And —and I almost believe he could bring them through safely if he wanted to." The laugh was nervous.

"He doesn't look like much. But when he turns on the charm —watch out!"

"He's—he's a *winner*. Now I wonder what I mean by that?"

"I know what you mean. They turn up every so often. People who can't be stopped. People who have everything. Napoleons. Alexanders. Stalins. Up from nowhere."

"Suleiman. Hitler. Folsom I. Jenghis Khan."

"Well, let's get it over with."

They tugged at their gold-braided jackets and signalled the honor guard.

Grayson was piped aboard, received another decoration and another speech. This time he made a speech in return.

President Folsom XXV, not

knowing what else to do, had summoned his cabinet. "Well?" he rasped at the Secretary of Defense.

Steiner said with a faint shrug: "Mr. President, there is nothing to be done. He has the fleet, he has the broadcasting facilities, he has the people."

"People!" snarled the President. His finger stabbed at a button and the wall panels snapped down to show the Secret Servicemen standing in their niches. The finger shot tremulously out at Steiner. "Kill that traitor!" he raved.

The chief of the detail said uneasily: "Mr. President, we were listening to Grayson before we came on duty. He says he's de facto President now—"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The chief went doggedly on: "—and we liked what he had to say about the Republic and he said citizens of the Republic shouldn't take orders from you and he'd relieve you—"

The President fell back.

Grayson walked in, wearing his plain ensign's uniform and smiling faintly. Admirals and four-stripers flanked him.

The chief of the detail said: "Mr. Grayson! Are you taking over?"

The man in the ensign's uniform said gravely: "Yes. And just call me 'Grayson,' please. The titles come later. You can go now."

The chief gave a pleased grin and collected his detail. The rather slight, youngish man who had something wrong with one arm was in charge—*complete* charge.

Grayson said: "Mr. Folsom, you are relieved of the presidency. Captain, take him out and—" He finished with a whimsical shrug. A portly four-striper took Folsom by one arm. Like a drugged man the deposed president let himself be led out.

Grayson looked around the table. "Who are you gentlemen?"

They felt his magnetism, like the hum when you pass a power station.

Steiner was the spokesman. "Grayson," he said soberly, "We were Folsom's Cabinet. However, there is more that we have to tell you. Alone, if you will allow it."

"Very well, gentlemen." Admirals and captains backed out, looking concerned.

Steiner said: "Grayson, the story goes back many years. My predecessor, William Malvern, determined to overthrow the regime, holding that it was an affront to the human spirit. There have been many such attempts. All have broken up on the rocks of espionage, terrorism

and opinion-control—the three weapons which the regime holds firmly in its hands.

"Malvern tried another approach than espionage versus espionage, terrorism versus terrorism and opinion-control versus opinion-control. He determined to use the basic fact that certain men make history: that there are men born to be mould-breakers. They are the Phillips of Macedon, the Napoleons, Stalins and Hitlers, the Suleimans—the adventurers. Again and again they flash across history, bringing down an ancient empire, turning ordinary soldiers of the line into unkillable demons of battle, uprooting cultures, breathing new life into moribund peoples.

"There are common denominators among all the adventurers. Intelligence, of course. Other things are more mysterious but are always present. They are foreigners. Napoleon the Corsican. Hitler the Austrian. Stalin the Georgian. Phillip the Macedonian. Always there is an Oedipus complex. Always there is physical deficiency. Napoleon's stature. Stalin's withered arm—and yours. Always there is a minority disability, real or fancied.

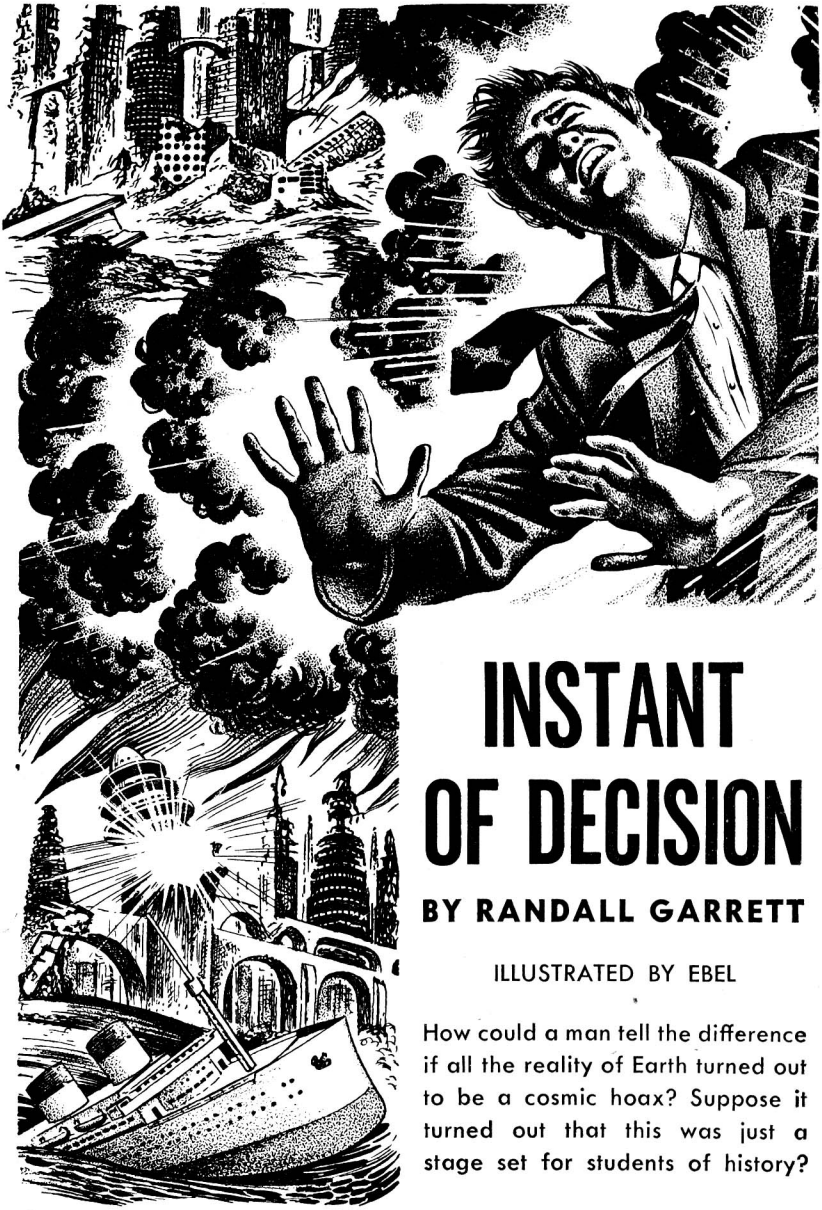
"This is a shock to you, Grayson, but you must face it. *You were manufactured.*

"Malvern packed the cabinet with the slyest double-dealers he could find and they went to work. Eighty-six infants were planted on the outposts of the Republic in simulated family environments. Your mother was not your mother but one of the most brilliant actresses ever to drop out of sight on Earth. Your intelligence-heredity was so good that we couldn't turn you down for lack of a physical deficiency. We withered your arm with gamma radiation. I hope you will forgive us. There was no other way.

"Of the eighty-six you are the one that worked. Somehow the combination for you was minutely different from all the other combinations, genetically or environmentally, and it worked. That is all we were after. The mould has been broken, you know now what you are. Let come whatever chaos is to come; the dead hand of the past no longer lies on—"

Grayson went to the door and beckoned; two captains came in. Steiner broke off his speech as Grayson said to them: "These men deny my godhood. Take them out and—" he finished with a whimsical shrug.

"Yes, your divinity," said the captains, without a trace of humor in their voices.

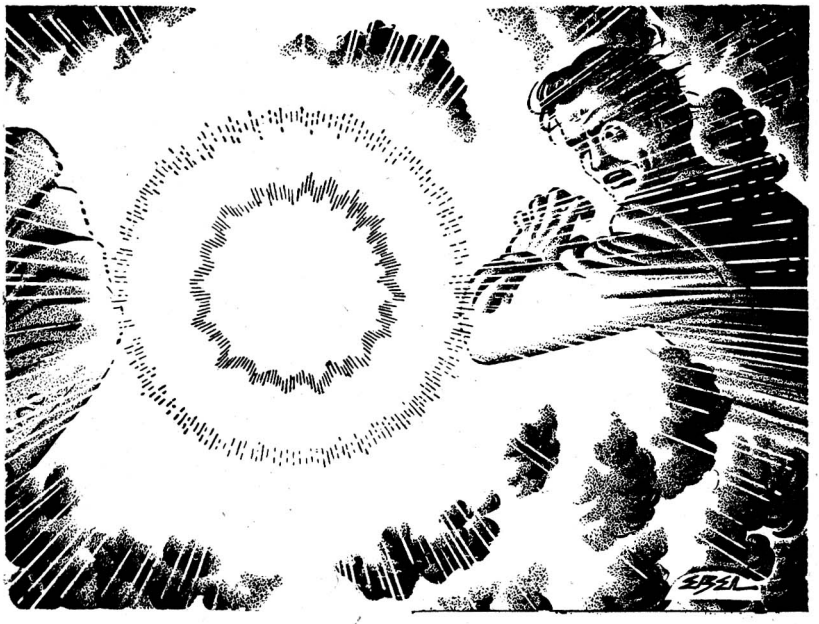


INSTANT OF DECISION

BY RANDALL GARRETT

ILLUSTRATED BY EBEL

How could a man tell the difference if all the reality of Earth turned out to be a cosmic hoax? Suppose it turned out that this was just a stage set for students of history?



When the sharp snap of a pistol shot came from the half-finished building, Karnes wasn't anywhere near the sandpile that received the slug. He was fifteen feet away, behind the much more reliable protection of a neat stack of cement bags that provided cover all the way to a window in the empty shell of brick and steel before him.

Three hundred yards behind him, the still-burning inferno of what had been the Assembly Section of Carlson Spacecraft sent a reddish, unevenly pulsating light over the surrounding territory, punctuating the redness with intermittent flashes of blue-white from flaring magnesium.

For an instant, Karnes let himself hope that the shot might be heard at the scene of the blaze, but only for an instant. The roar of fire, men, and machine would be too much for a little pop like that.

He moved quietly along the stacked cement bags, and eased himself over the sill of the gaping window into the building. He was in a little hallway. Somewhere ahead and to his left would be a door that would lead into the main hallway where James Avery, alias James Har-

vey, alias half-a-dozen other names, was waiting to take another pot-shot at the sandpile.

The passageway was longer than he had thought, and he realized that he might have been just a little careless in coming in through the window. With the firelight at his back, he might make a pretty good target from farther down the hall, or from any of the dark, empty rooms that would someday be officers'.

Then he found it. The slight light from the main hallway came through enough to show him where to turn.

Keeping in the darkness, Karnes' eyes surveyed the broad hallway for several seconds before he spotted the movement near a stairway. After he knew where to look, it was easy to make out the man's crouched figure.

Karnes thought: *I can't call to him to surrender. I can't let him get away. I can't sneak across that hall to stick my gun in his ribs. And, above all, I* cannot *let him get away with that microfilm.*

Hell, there's only one thing I can do.

Karnes lifted his gun, aimed carefully at the figure, and fired.

Avery must have had a fairly tight grip on his own weapon, because when Karnes' slug hit him, it went off once before his body spread itself untidily across the freshly set cement. Then the gun fell out of the dead hand and slid a few feet, spinning in silly little circles.

Karnes approached the corpse cautiously, just in case it wasn't a corpse, but it took only a moment to see that the caution had been unnecessary. He knelt, rolled the body over, unfastened the pants pulled them down to the knees and stripped off the ribbon of adhesive tape that he knew would be on the inside of the thigh. Underneath it were four little squares of thin plastic.

As he looked at the precious microfilm in his hand, he sensed something odd. If he had been equipped with the properly developed muscles to do so, he would have pricked his ears. There was a soft footstep behind him.

He spun around on his heel, his gun ready. There was another man standing at the top of the shadowy stairway.

Karnes stood up slowly, his weapon still levelled.

"Come down from there slowly, with your hands in the air!"

The man didn't move immediately, and, although Karnes couldn't see his face clearly in the shimmering shadows, he had the definite impression that

there was a grin on it. When the man did move, it was to turn quickly and run down the upper hallway, with a shot ringing behind him.

Karnes made the top of the stairway and sent another shot after the fleeing man, whose outline was easily visible against the pre-dawn light that was now beginning to come in through a window at the far end of the hall.

The figure kept running, and Karnes went after him, firing twice more as he ran.

Who taught you to shoot, dead-eye? he thought, as the man continued to run.

At the end of the hall, the man turned abruptly into one of the offices-to-be, his pursuer only five yards behind him.

Afterwards, Karnes thought it over time after time, trying to find some flaw or illusion in what he saw. But, much as he hated to believe his own senses, he remained convinced.

The broad window shed enough light to see everything in the room, but there wasn't much in it except for the slightly iridescent gray object in the center.

It was an oblate spheroid, about seven feet high and eight or nine feet through. As Karnes came through the door, he saw the man step *through* the seemingly solid material into the flattened globe.

Then globe, man and all, vanished. The room was empty.

Karnes checked his headlong rush into the room and peered around in the early morning gloom. For a full minute his brain refused even to attempt rationalizing what he had seen. He looked wildly around, but there was no one there. Suddenly he felt very foolish.

All right. So men can run into round gray things and vanish. Now use a little sense and look around.

There was something else in the room. Karnes knelt and looked at the little object that lay on the floor a few feet from where the gray globe had been. A cigarette case; one of those flat, coat-pocket jobs with a jet black enamel surface laid over tiny checked squares that would be absolutely useless for picking up fingerprints. If there were any prints, they'd be on the inside.

He started to pick it up and realized he must still be a bit confused; his hands were full. His right held the heavy automatic, and between the thumb and forefinger of his left were the four tiny sheets of microfilm.

Karnes holstered the pistol, took an envelope from his pocket, put the films in it, replaced the envelope, and picked up the cig-

arette case. It was, he thought, a rather odd-looking affair. It—

"Awright, you. Stand up slow, with your hands where I can see 'em."

Great God, thought Karnes, I *didn't know they were holding a tea party in this building.* He did as he was told.

There were two of them at the door, both wearing the uniform of Carlson Spacecraft. Plant protection squad.

"Who are you, bud?" asked the heavy-jawed one who had spoken before. "And whataya doin' here?"

Karnes, keeping his hands high, said: "Take my billfold out of my hip pocket."

"Okay. But first get over against that wall and lean forward." Evidently the man was either an ex-cop or a reader of detective stories.

When Karnes had braced himself against the wall, the guard went through his pockets, all of them, but he didn't take anything out except the pistol and the billfold.

The card in the special case of the wallet changed the guard's manner amazingly.

"Oh," he said softly. "Government, huh? Gee, I'm sorry, sir, but we didn't know—"

Karnes straightened up, and put his hands down. The cigarette case that had been in his right hand all along dropped into his coat pocket.

"That's all right," he said. "Did you see the lad at the foot of the stairs?"

"Sure. Jim Avery. Worked in Assembly. What happened to him?"

"He got in the way of the bullet. Resisting arrest. He's the jasper that set off the little incendiaries that started that mess out there. We've been watching him for months, now, but we didn't get word of this cute stroke until too late."

The guard looked puzzled. "Jim Avery. But why'd he want to do that?"

Karnes looked straight at him. "Leaguer!"

The guard nodded. You never could tell when the League would pop up like that.

Even after the collapse of Communism after the war, the world hadn't learned anything, it seemed. The Eurasian League had seemed, at first, to be patterned after the Western world's United Nations, but it hadn't worked out that way.

The League was jealous of the UN lead in space travel, for one thing, and they had neither the money nor the know-how to catch up. The UN might have given them help, but, as the French delegate had remarked: "For

what reason should we arm a potential enemy?"

After all, they argued, with the threat of the UN's Moonbase hanging over the League to keep them peaceful, why should we give them spaceships so they can destroy Moonbase?

The Eurasian League had been quiet for a good many years, brooding, but behaving. Then, three years ago, Moonbase had vanished in a flash of actinic light, leaving only a new minor crater in the crust of Luna.

There was no proof of anything, of course. It had to be written off as an accident. But from that day on, the League had become increasingly bolder; their policy was: "Smash the UN and take the planets for ourselves!"

And now, with Carlson Spacecraft going up in flames, they seemed to be getting closer to their goal.

Karnes accepted his weapon and billfold from the guard and led them back down the stairway. "Would one of you guys phone the State Police? They'll want to know what happened."

The State Police copters came and went, taking Karnes and the late Mr. Avery with them, and leaving behind the now dying glow of Carlson Spacecraft.

There were innumerable forms to fill out and affidavits to make; there was a long-distance call to UN headquarters in New York to verify Karnes' identity. And Karnes asked to borrow the police lab for an hour or so.

That evening, he caught the rocket for Long Island.

As the SR-37 floated through the hard vacuum five hundred miles above central Nebraska, Karnes leaned back in his seat, turning the odd cigarette case over and over in his hands.

Except for the neat, even checking that covered it, the little three-by-four inch object was entirely featureless. There were no catches or hinges, or even any line of cleavage around the edge. He had already found that it wouldn't open.

Whatever it was, it was most definitely *not* a cigarette case.

The X-ray plates had shown it to be perfectly homogeneous throughout.

As far as I can see, thought Karnes, *it's nothing but a piece of acid-proof plastic, except that the specific gravity is way the hell too high. Maybe if I had cut it open, I could have—*

Karnes didn't push anything on the case, of that he was sure. Nor did he squeeze, shake, or rub it in any unusual way. But something happened; something which he was convinced came from the case in his hands.

He had the definite impression of something akin to a high-pressure firehose squirting from the interior of the case, through his skull, and into and over his brain, washing it and filling it. Little rivers of knowledge trickled down through the convolutions of his brain, collected in pools, and soaked in.

He was never sure just how long the process took but it was certainly not more than a second or two. Afterwards, he just sat there, staring.

From far across the unimaginable depths of the galaxy, fighting its way through the vast, tenuous dust clouds of interstellar space, came a voice: "Are you ill, sir?"

Karnes looked up at the stewardess. "Oh. Oh, no. No, I'm all right. Just thinking. I'm perfectly all right."

He looked at the "cigarette case" again. He knew what it was, now. There wasn't any English word for it, but he guessed "mind impressor" would come close.

It had done just that; impressed his mind with knowledge he should not have; the record of something he had no business knowing.

And he wished to Heaven he didn't!

This, Karnes considered, *is a problem. The stuff is so* alien! *Just a series of things I know, but can't explain. Like a dream; you know all about it, but it's practically impossible to explain it to anybody else.*

At the spaceport, he was met by an official car. George Lansberg, one of the New York agents, was sitting in the back seat.

"Hi, slooth. I heard you were coming in, so I asked to meet you." He lowered his voice as Karnes got in and the car pulled away from the parking lot. "How about our boy, Avery?"

Karnes shook his head. "Too late. Thirty million bucks worth of material lost and Avery lost too."

"How come?"

"Had to kill him to keep him from getting away with these."

He showed Lansberg the microfilm squares.

"The photocircuit inserts for the new autopilot. We'd lose everything if the League ever got its hands on these."

"Didn't learn anything from Avery, eh?" Lansberg asked.

"Not a thing." Karnes lapsed into silence. He didn't feel it necessary to mention the mind impressor just yet.

Lansberg stuck a cigarette into his mouth and talked around it as he lit it.

"We've got something you'll

be getting in on, now that Avery is taken care of. We've got a fellow named Brittain, real name Bretinov, who is holed up in a little apartment in Brooklyn. He's the sector head for that section, and we know who his informers are, and who he gives orders to. What we don't know is who gives orders to him.

"Now we have it set up for Brittain to get his hands on some very honest-looking, but strictly phony stuff for him to pass on to the next echelon. Then we just sit around and watch until he does pass it."

Karnes found he was listening to Lansberg with only half an ear. His brain was still buzzing with things he'd never heard of, trying to fit things he had always known in with things he knew now but had never known before. Damn that "cigarette case"!

"Sounds like fun," he answered Lansberg.

"Yeah. Great. Well, here we are." They had driven to the Long Island Spaceways Building which also housed the local office.

They got out and went into the building, up the elevator, down a corridor, and into an office suite.

Lansberg said: "I'll wait for you here. We'll get some coffee afterwards."

The redhead behind the front desk smiled up at Karnes.

"Go on in; he's expecting you."

"I don't know whether I ought to leave you out here with Georgie or not," Karnes grinned. "I think he has designs."

"Oh, goodie!" she grinned back.

My, my aren't we clever! His thought was bitter, but his face didn't show it.

Before he went in, he straightened his collar before the wall mirror. He noticed that his plain, slightly tanned face still looked the same as ever. Same ordinary gray-green eyes, same ordinary nose.

Chum, you look *perfectly sane. You* are *perfectly sane. But who in hell would believe it?*

It wouldn't, after all, do any good for him to tell anyone anything he had found. No matter what the answer was, there wasn't anything he could do about it. There wasn't anything *anyone* could do about it.

Thus, Karnes' report to his superior was short, to the point, and censored.

That evening, Karnes sat in his apartment, chain-smoking, and staring out the window. Finally, he mashed out a stub, stood up, and said aloud: "Maybe if I write it down I can get it straight."

He sat down in front of the portable on his desk, rolled in a

sheet of paper, and put his fingers on the keys. Then, for a long time, he just sat there, turning it over and over in his mind. Finally, he began to type.

A Set of General Instructions and a Broad Outline on the Purposes and Construction of the Shrine of Earth.

Part One: Historical.

Some hundred or so millenia ago, insofar as the most exacting of historical research can ascertain, our remote ancestors were confined to one planet of the Galaxy; the legendary Earth.

The third planet of Sun (unintelligible number) has long been suspected of being Earth, but it was not until the development of the principles of time transfer that it became possible to check the theory completely.

The brilliant work done by—

(Karnes hesitated over the name, then wrote—)

—Starson on the ancient history and early evolution of the race has shown the theory to be correct. This has opened a new and fascinating field for the study of socioanthropology.

Part Two: Present Purposes and Aims.

Because of the great energy transfer and cosmic danger involved in too frequent or unrestricted time travel, it has been decided that the best method for studying the social problems involved would be to rebuild, in toto, the ancient Earth as it was just after the initial discoveries of atomic power and interplanetary space travel.

In order to facilitate this work, the Surveying Group will translate themselves to the chronological area in question, and obtain complete records of that time, covering the years between (1940) and (2020).

When the survey is complete, the Construction Group will rebuild that civilization with as great an exactness as possible, complete with population, fossil strata, edifices, etc.

Upon the occasion of the opening of the Shrine, the replica of our early civilization will be begun as it was on (January 3, 1953). The population, having been impregnated with the proper memories, will be permitted to go about their lives unhampered.

Karnes stopped again and reread the paragraph he had just written. It sounded different when it was on paper. The dates, for instance, he had put in parentheses because that was the way he had understood them. But he knew that whoever had made the mind-impressor didn't use the same calendar he was used to.

He frowned at the paper, then went on typing.

Part Three: Conduct of Students.

Students wishing to study the Shrine for the purpose of (unintelligible again) must obtain permits from the Galactic Scholars Council, and, upon obtaining such permits, must conduct themselves according to whatever rules may be laid down by such Council.

Part Four: Corrective Action to be Taken.

At certain points in the history of ancient Earth, certain crises arose which, in repetition, would be detrimental to the Shrine. These crises must be mitigated in order that—

Karnes stopped. That was all there was. Except—except for one more little tail end of thought. He tapped the keys again.

(*Continued on Stratum Two*)

Whatever in hell that means, he thought.

He sat back in his chair and went over the two sheets of typed paper. It wasn't complete, not by a long shot. There were little tones of meaning that a printed, or even a spoken word couldn't put over. There were evidences of a vast and certainly superhuman civilization; of an alien and yet somehow completely human way of thinking.

But that was the gist of it. The man he had seen in that new building at Carlson Spacecraft was no ordinary human being.

That, however, didn't bother Karnes half so much as the gray globe the man had disappeared into after he had been shot at. And Karnes knew, now, that the shots probably hadn't missed.

The globe was one of two things. And the intruder had been one of two groups.

(A) One of the Surveyors of Ancient Earth, in which case the globe had been a—well, a time machine. Or

(B) A student, in which case the machine was a type of spacecraft.

The question was: Which?

If it were (A), then he and the world around him were real, living, working out their own destinies toward the end point represented by the man in the gray globe.

But if it were (B)—

Then this was the Shrine, and he and all the rest of Earth were nothing but glorified textbooks!

And there would come crises on the Shrine, duplicates of the crises on old Earth. Except that they wouldn't be permitted to happen. The poor ignorant people on the Shrine had to be coddled,

like the children they were. Damn!

Karnes crumpled the sheets of paper in his hands, twisting them savagely. Then he methodically tore them into bits.

When the first dawnlight touched the sea, Karnes was watching it out the east window. It had been twenty-four hours since he had seen the superman walk into his gray globe and vanish.

All night, he had been searching his brain for some clue that would tell him which of the two choices he should believe in. And he couldn't bring himself to believe in either.

Once he had thought: *Why do I believe, then, what the impressor said? Why not just forget it?*

But that didn't help. He *did* believe it. That alien instrument had impressed his mind, not only with the facts themselves, but with an absolute faith that they *were* facts. There was no room for doubt; the knowledge imparted to his mind was true, and he knew it.

For a time, he had been comforted by the thought that the gray globe must be a time machine because of the way it had vanished. It was very comforting until he realized that travel to the stars and beyond didn't necessarily mean a spaceship as he knew spaceships. Teleportation—

Now, with the dawn, Karnes knew there was only one thing he could do.

Somehow, somewhere, there would be other clues—clues a man who knew what to look for might find. The Galactics couldn't be perfect, or they wouldn't have let him get the mind impressor in his hands. Ergo, somewhere they would slip again.

Karnes knew he would spend the rest of his life looking for that one slip. He had to know the truth, one way or another.

Or he might not stay sane.

Lansberg picked him up at eight in a police copter. As they floated toward New York, Karnes' mind settled itself into one cold purpose; a purpose that lay at the base of his brain, waiting.

Lansberg was saying: "—and one of Brittain's men got the stuff last night. He hadn't passed it on to Brittain himself yet this morning, but he very probably will have by the time we get there.

"We've rigged it up so that Brittain will have to pass it to his superior by tomorrow or it will be worthless. When he does, we'll follow it right to the top."

"If we've got every loophole

plugged," said Karnes, "we ought to take them easy."

"Brother, I hope so! It took us eight months to get Brittain all hot and bothered over the bait, and another two months to give it to him in a way that wouldn't make him suspicious.

"It's restricted material, of course, so that we can pin a subversive activities rap on them, at least, if not espionage. But we had to argue like hell to keep it restricted; the Spatial Commission was ready to release it, since it's really relatively harmless."

Karnes looked absently at the thin line of smoke wiggling from Lansberg's cigarette.

"You know," he said, "there are times when I wish this war would come right out in the open. Actually, we've been fighting the League for years, but we don't admit it. There have been little disagreements and incidents until the devil won't have it. But it's still supposed to be a 'worry war'."

Lansberg shrugged. "It will get hot just as soon as the Eurasian League figures they are far enough along in spacecraft construction to get the Martian colonies if they win. Then they'll try to smash us before we can retaliate; then, and not before.

"We can't start it. Our only hope is that when they start, they'll underestimate us. Say, what's that you're fooling with?"

The sudden change of subject startled Karnes for an instant. He looked at the mind impressor in his hands. He had been toying with it incessantly, hoping it would repeat its performance, or perhaps give additional information.

"This?" He covered quickly. "It's a—a puzzle. One of those plastic puzzles." *Maybe it doesn't work on the same person twice. If I can get George to fool around with it, he might hit the right combination again.*

"Hmmm. How does it work?" George seemed interested.

Karnes handed it to him. "It has a couple of little sliding weights inside it. You have to turn the thing just right to unlock it, then it comes apart when you slide out a section of the surface. Try it."

Lansberg took it, turned it this way and that, moving his hands over the surface. Karnes watched him for several minutes, but there didn't seem to be any results.

Lansberg looked up from his labors. "I give up. I can't even see where it's supposed to come apart, and I can't feel any weights sliding inside it. Show me how it works.

Karnes thought fast. "Why do

you think I was fiddling with it? I don't know how it works. A friend of mine bet me a ten spot that I couldn't figure out the combination."

Lansberg looked back at the impressor in his hands. "Could he do it?"

"A snap. I watched him twice, and I still didn't get it."

"Mmm. Interesting." George went back to work on the "puzzle."

Just before they landed on the roof of the UN annex, Lansberg handed the impressor back to Karnes. It had obviously failed to do what either of them had hoped it would.

"It's your baby," Lansberg said, shaking his head. "All I have to say is it's a hell of a way to earn ten bucks."

Karnes grinned and dropped the thing back in his coat pocket.

By the time that evening had rolled around, Karnes was beginning to get just a little bored. He and Lansberg had been in and out of the New York office in record time. Then they had spent a few hours with New York's Finest and the District Attorney, lining up a net to pick up all the little rats involved.

After that, there was nothing to do but wait.

Karnes slept a couple of hours to catch up, read two magazines from cover to cover, and played eight games of solitaire. He was getting itchy.

His brain kept crackling. *What's the matter with me? I ought to be thinking about this Brittain fellow instead of—*

But, after all, what did Brittain matter? According to the records, he was born Alex Bretinov, in Marseilles, France, in nineteen sixty-eight. His father, a dyed-in-the-wool Old Guard Communist, had been born in Minsk in nineteen forty.

Or had he been wound up, and his clockwork started in January of nineteen fifty-three?

The radio popped. "Eighteen. Alert. Brittain just left his place on foot. Carson, Reymann following. Over."

Lansberg dropped his magazine. "He seems to be heading for the Big Boy—I hope."

The ground car followed him to a subway, and two men on foot followed him in from Flatbush Avenue.

Some hours later, after much devious turning, dodging, and switching, Brittain climbed into a taxi on the corner of Park Avenue and Forty-seventh Street, evidently feeling he had ditched any tails he might have had.

Karnes and Lansberg were right behind him in a radio car.

The cab headed due south on

Park Avenue, following it until it became Fourth, swung right at Tenth Street, past Grace Church, across Broadway. At Sixth, it angled left toward Greenwich Village.

"Somewhere in the Village, nickels to knotholes," Lansberg guessed as he turned to follow.

Karnes, at the radio, was giving rapid-fire directions over the scrambler-equipped transceiver. By this time, several carloads of agents and police were converging on the cab from every direction. From high above could be heard the faint hum of 'copters.

Lansberg was exultant. "We've got them for once! And the goods on every essobee in the place.

The cars hummed smoothly through the broad streets, past the shabby-genteel apartment neighborhood. Back in the early sixties, some of these buildings had been high-priced hotels, but the Village had gone to pot since the seventies.

A few minutes later, the cab pulled up in front of an imposing looking building of slightly tarnished aluminum paneling. Brittain got out, paid his fare, and went inside.

As the cab pulled away, Karnes gave orders for it to be picked up a few blocks away, just in case.

The rest of the vehicles began to surround the building.

Karnes, meanwhile, followed Brittain into the foyer of the apartment hotel. It was almost a mistake. Brittain hadn't gone in. Evidently attracted by the footsteps following him, he turned and looked back out. Karnes wasn't more than ten feet away.

Just pretend you live here, thought Karnes, *and bully-boy will never know the difference.*

He walked right on up to the doorway, pretending not to notice Brittain. Evidently, the saboteur was a little flustered, not quite knowing who Karnes was. He, too, pretended that he had no suspicions. He pressed a buzzer on the panel to announce himself to a guest. Karnes noticed it was 523; a fifth floor button.

The front door, inside the foyer, was one of those gadgets with an electric lock that doesn't open unless you either have a key to the building or can get a friend who lives there to let you in.

When Karnes saw Brittain press the buzzer, he waited a second and took a chance.

"Here," he said, fishing in his pocket, "I'll let you in." *That ought to give him the impression I live here.*

Brittain smiled fetchingly. "Thanks, but I—"

Bzzzz! The old-fashioned lock

announced that it was open. Karnes stopped fishing and opened the door, letting Brittain follow him in. He stayed in the lead to the elevator, and pushed the button marked "4."

"You getting off before four?" he asked conversationally.

"No."

The elevator slid on up to four without another word being said by either man.

Karnes was judging the speed of the elevator, estimating the time it took for the doors to open as they did so, and making quick mental comparisons with his own ability to climb stairs at a run. The elevator was an old one, and fairly slow—

When the doors slid open, he stepped out and began to walk easily down the hall toward the stairway. When the elevator clicked shut, he broke into a run and hit the stairway at top speed, his long legs taking the steps three at a time.

The stairway was poorly lit, since it was hardly ever used, and, at the fifth floor, he was able to conceal himself in the darkness as Brittain turned up the hall toward 523.

Karnes looked closely at his surroundings for the first time. There was a well-worn, but not ragged, nylon carpet on the floor, dull chrome railing on the stair bannisters, and the halls were lit by old-fashioned glo-plates in the ceiling. The place was inexpensive, but not cheap.

Having made sure that Brittain actually had entered 523, he stepped back toward the elevator in order to notify Lansberg.

A sudden voice said: "You lookin' for-a somebody, meester?"

Karnes turned. An elderly man with a heavy mustache and a heavy body stood partway up the stairs, clad in slacks and shirt.

"Who are you?" frowned Karnes.

"I'm Amati, the supratendent. Why?" The scowl was heavy.

Karnes couldn't take any chances. The man might be perfectly okay, but—

Lansberg's steps sounded, coming up the stairs. With him was a Manhattan Squad officer of the Police Department.

"Shhh, Mr. Amati. C'mere a minute," said the cop.

"Oh. Lootenant Carnotti. Whatsa—"

"Shhhhhh! C'mere, I said, and be quiet!"

"You know this man?" Lansberg asked the policeman softly, indicating Amati.

"Sure. He's okay."

Lansberg turned to the superintendent. "What do you know about the guy who just came in?"

Amati seemed to have realized that something serious was going on, for his voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "I dunno. I don't-a see who it is. Whatsa goin' on, Lootenant Carnotti?"

"What about Apartment 523? Who lives there?" asked Karnes.

"Oh, them? Meester and Meeses Seigert. Artists. Sheesa paint pictures, heesa make statues." Then Amati's eyes widened knowingly. "Ohhh! You guys da Vice Squad, eh? I *theenk* theresa someteeng fonny about them!"

Footsteps sounded coming down the stairs from above.

"We watched the indicator needle on the elevator door in the lobby, and I signalled the 'copters on the roof," Lansberg whispered.

The hallway began to fill quietly with police.

Lieutenant Carnotti assigned one of the men to watch Amati, mainly in order to keep him out of the way, and Karnes led the men down the hall towards 523, guns drawn.

Karnes knocked boldly on the door.

"Yeah? Who is it?" asked someone inside.

Karnes pitched his voice a little lower than normal, and said: "It's-a me, Meester Amati, only me, the soopratendant."

The imitation wasn't perfect, but the muffling effect of the door would offset any imperfections.

"Oh, sure, Mr. Amati. Just a sec." There was a short pause, filled with muffled conversation, then somebody was unlocking the door.

Things began to happen fast. As the door came open, Karnes saw that it had one of those inside chain locks on it that permit the door to be opened only a few inches. Without hesitation, he threw his weight against the door. Lansberg was right behind him.

Under the combined weight of the two men, the chain ripped out of the woodwork, permitting the door to swing free. As it did so, it slammed into the face of the man who had opened it, knocking him backwards.

There were seven or eight other men and two women in the room. One of the men already had a heavy pistol out and was aiming it at the doorway. Karnes dropped to the floor and fired just as the other's pistol went off.

The high-velocity three millimeter slug whined through the air above Karnes' head and buried itself in Lansberg's shoulder. Lansberg dropped, spun halfway around from the shock. His knees hit Karnes in the back.

Karnes lurched forward a little, and regained his balance. Something flew out of his coat pocket and skittered across the floor. Karnes didn't notice what it was until one of the men across the room picked it up.

Brittain had picked up the mind impressor!

Karnes was aware that there were more men behind him firing at another of the conspirators who had made the mistake of drawing a weapon, but he wasn't interested too much. He was watching Brittain.

It only took seconds, but to Karnes it seemed like long minutes. Brittain had evidently thought the impressor was a weapon when he picked it up, and, after seeing his mistake, had started to throw it at the door. Then the impressor shimmered slightly, as though there were a hot radiator between the observor and the object. Brittain stopped, paralyzed, his eyes widening.

Then he gasped and threw the impressor against the floor as hard as he could.

"NO!" he screamed, *"IT'S A LIE!"*

The impressor struck the floor and broke. From its shattered interior came a blinding multicolored glare. Then there was darkness. Karnes fainted.

When Karnes awoke, one of the policemen was shaking him.

"Wake up, Mr. Karnes, wake up!"

Karnes sat up abruptly. "What happened?" He had no time to be original.

"I don't know for sure. One of the Leaguers threw a gas bomb of some sort, and it knocked out everyone in the room. Funny, though, it even knocked out all the Leaguers. When the rest of the boys came in, everybody was out cold on the floor. Most of them are coming out of it now, except for two of the Leaguers. They got some lead in them, though, not gas."

Karnes stood up. He felt a little dizzy, but otherwise there wasn't anything wrong. He surveyed the room.

On the floor was a slightly yellowed spot where the impressor had flared and vanished. Lansberg was unconscious with a copiously bleeding right shoulder. Two other men were rapidly being brought around by the police. Three of the League agents were still out; nobody tried to wake them up, they were being handcuffed.

One of the women was crying and cursing the "damned filthy Nations police" over one of the bodies, and the other woman was sitting stonily, staring at her handcuffs with a faint sneer.

"Where's Brittain?" roared Karnes. The man was nowhere in the room.

"Gone," said one of the cops. "Evidently he skipped out while the rest of us were unconscious. He was the guy who threw the bomb."

Karnes glanced at his watch. One sixteen in the morning. They had been out about twelve or thirteen minutes.

"Where the devil did he go? How in—"

Lieutenant Carnotti came up to him, a look of self-disgust on his face. "I know how he got away, Mr. Karnes; I just talked to the boys on the roof. He grabbed a uniform coat and cap off Sergeant Joseph while he was out and commandeered a 'copter on the roof."

Karnes didn't wait for further information. He ran out into the hall and into the open elevator. Within less than a minute, he was on the roof.

One cop was speaking rapidly into a transmitter.

"—number 3765. Left about ten minutes ago, supposedly for the hospital. Officer Powers in the 'copter with him."

He cut off and looked at Karnes, who was standing over him. His gun was out before he spoke. "Who are you, buddy."

Karnes told him who he was. The cop looked skeptical. Karnes didn't have his hat on, and his clothes were a bit rumpled after his nap on the floor.

Karnes didn't need to say anything; another policeman was going through his pockets, and he found the billfold. As soon as they saw the forgeproof identity card, they relaxed.

"Sorry, Mr. Karnes," said the man at the transceiver, "but we've already let one man get away. "

Karnes nodded. "I know. Pure blind luck that his suit was almost the same shade as that gray uniform you guys wear, or he'd never have got away with it. All he needed was the jacket and cap."

"Have any idea which way he went?"

The cop shrugged. "He came up here and told us that three men had been shot down below and some more gassed. He said Mr. Lansberg had sent him for a hospital call. Then he jumped in a 'copter with Powers and headed northeast. We didn't pay much attention. After all, he was wearing a sergeant's stripes."

Northeast. That would be toward Long Island. But, naturally, he would circle; he wouldn't be dumb enough to head in the right direction until he was out of sight. Or would he?

"Get on that radio again," he

told the radioman, "—and tell them I want that man alive. Get that—*alive!*"

"Right." The officer switched on his microphone and began to talk.

Karnes pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes in an attempt to concentrate. With Lansberg shot up, that put the Brittain case in his hands. Theoretically, he should be pumping the prisoners down below to find out how much higher the spy ring went.

But his real interest lay in Brittain, himself. There was no doubt that he had received another message from the impressor before he had thrown it down.

Evidently, when the thing broke, the unknown energies which powered it had short-circuited, paralyzing everyone in the room with their mind-impressing effect.

Then why hadn't it affected Brittain? Perhaps his recent exposure to a normal dosage had immunized him. There was no way of knowing—there never would be.

But what was the message Brittain had received from the impressor that would make him react so violently? It couldn't be the same one that he, Karnes, had received.

Continued on Stratum Two!

Sure; that was it! Like the pages in a book. He, himself, had been hit with page one; Brittain had page two. Page three? Lost forever.

Why hadn't they found that 'copter by now? It ought to be easy enough to spot.

He walked over to the edge of the building and looked down. The police were herding the prisoners into the ground cars. Presently, they were gone. One of the police officers touched his shoulder.

"Ready to go, Mr. Karnes?"

Karnes nodded and climbed into the 'copter. The machine lifted and headed toward the Central Police Station.

He was still trying to think when the phone rang. The policeman picked it up.

"3217. Brown speaking. Oh? Yeah, just a second. It's for you, Mr. Karnes."

Karnes took the instrument. "Karnes speaking."

"Radio Central, Mr. Karnes," came the voice. "We just got some more on Brittain. About ten minutes ago, he abandoned the police 'copter. Officer Powers was in the seat, shot through the head. We'll get the essobee on a murder rap, now."

"Where was the 'copter abandoned?"

Radio Central told him and

went on: "Funny thing was, he didn't try to hide it or anything. And he stole another 'copter from a private citizen. We're trying to get the description now. I'll call you if anything further comes in."

"Fine." Karnes hung up. The address where Brittain had left the 'copter was in almost a direct line between the apartment building and Long Island Spaceport. But if Brittain were actually heading there, why should he leave such a broad and obvious trail?

He turned to the officer who was driving the 'copter.

"I've got a hunch. Swivel this thing around and head for Long Island. I've got a funny feeling that Brittain will be there. He—"

The phone rang again, and Karnes grabbed it.

"Mr. Karnes, we've found that civilian's 'copter! It's at Long Island Spaceport! Just a second, the stuff's still coming in." Pause. "Get this: A man answering to Brittain's description bought a ticket for the West Coast rocket.

"As you know, that's UN territory, and we have no jurisdiction. The rocket is sealed for takeoff, but they're holding it for us until you get there!"

"Right! I'm headed there now!" he answered quickly.

It was twelve minutes later that the police 'copter settled just outside the rocket enclosure. Karnes had already notified the pilot to be ready for him. He sprinted up the ramp and stood at the airlock of the transcontinental rocket.

It sighed open, and Karnes stepped inside. He was met by a frightened stewardess.

"Tell him to get in here and not to try any funny stuff!" snapped a voice from the passenger cabin.

Brittain was standing at the forward end of the passenger compartment with a levelled gun.

The rocket was tilted at forty-five degrees for the takeoff, and the passenger's seats had swiveled with a section of the flooring to keep them level, which gave the effect of a stairway which climbed toward the pilot's cabin in the forward section of the ship. Brittain's position was at the top of the stairway.

Karnes raised his hands and kept them carefully away from his hip holster.

"All right," called Brittain, "Close that door and get this ship off the ground."

The pilot could hear him through the intercom system. The airlock door slid shut again.

"You and the stewardess get into a seat," the spy continued sharply. "If you try anything

funny, I start shooting the other passengers if I can't hit you."

Karnes saw then what hold Brittain had on the pilot. The rocketeer couldn't afford to risk the lives of his passengers.

He and the stewardess slid into the acceleration seats and strapped themselves in. Brittain stepped down the tiered floor and took a rear seat near a frightened-looking blonde girl.

"Anything funny, and Blondie here gets a bullet. Okay, pilot. Take her up!"

There was a faint hiss, and then the rockets began their throbbing roar. Acceleration pressure began to shove the passengers back in their seats. Karnes leaned back and tried—successfully—to suppress the smile of triumph that kept trying to come to his lips.

Brittain had finally made a mistake.

One hundred and twenty-five miles over Pennsylvania, the rockets cut out, and the ship went into free fall. And Brittain's mistake became evident.

With the abrupt cessation of weight, the padded acceleration seats expanded again, pressing the passengers up against their safety straps. But Brittain had failed to strap himself in.

The expanding seat shoved forward and toward the ceiling. Before he could recover from his surprise, Karnes had undone his own seat belt and snapped his body through the air toward Brittain. They collided with a thump and Brittain's body slammed against the roof of the cabin with agonizing force. The gun came out of his hand and clanged against a wall, then drifted off harmlessly. Brittain was out cold.

Karnes handcuffed him securely and, with the stewardess' help, tugged him back to the baggage compartment. One of the passengers was quietly retching into a vacuum disposal chute.

With Brittain securely strapped into an empty baggage rack, Karnes swam back to the pilot's compartment, pulling himself along the railing that ran along the floor.

The pilot looked relieved. "Thank heaven you got the devil! He got wise when we delayed the takeoff, and threatened to start shooting my passengers. There wasn't a thing I could do."

"I know. Let me use your radio."

It took a couple of minutes to get UN International Investigation on the hookup, but Karnes finally was talking to his superior in the UN office. He reported what had happened.

"Fine, Karnes," came the tight-beamed voice. "Now, here's

something else you ought to know. Our radar net has spotted robot rockets coming in over the Pole. So far, five of them have been hit by interceptor rockets, but we don't have them all by a long shot.

"Evidently, the League feels that they're ready to slam us, now that they've got Moonbase and two of our spacecraft plants out of the way. *The war is on,* Karnes."

Karnes acknowledged, they cut the connection.

There was one thing burning hotly in his brain. Brittain had fled New York without seeming to care how far they traced him or what kind of trail he left behind. *Why?*

He jerked open the door of the pilot's cabin, and, not bothering to use the rail, launched himself toward the rear of the ship, flipping himself halfway down to land with his feet against the baggage room door. He pulled the door open and pushed inside.

Brittain was still groggy, so Karnes began slapping his face methodically, rocking his head from side to side.

"Okay! Okay! Stop it!" Brittain yelled, fully awake.

Karnes stopped, and Brittain blinked, owlishly. Karnes' hunch factory was still operating at full blast; he was fairly sure that the lie he was about to tell would have all of the desired effect.

"You didn't really think you could get away, did you, bud?" he asked, nastily. "We're headed back for New York now, and you'll stand trial for murder as well as sabotage and espionage."

Brittain's eyes widened in horror.

"What did that mind impressor tell you?" Karnes went on.

Brittain was trying to keep his mouth shut, but at that moment there was a glare of light which flashed bluely through the hard quartz of a nearby window.

From somewhere far to the north, another interceptor rocket had found the atomic warhead of an enemy bomb.

Brittain knew and recognized that flash. He screamed wordlessly and then began to sob like a hysterical child.

Karnes began to slap him again. "Come on, what was it?"

"Don't—don't let them go back to New York! It said—it said—" he gasped and took a deep breath "—WE'LL ALL BE KILLED!" he screamed.

"Why?" Karnes's voice was cold.

"BOMB!" Brittain screamed again.

After a few more minutes of questioning, Karnes finally got the rest of the story from him.

The Galactics had found that on this date a nuclear bomb would get through the UN screen and completely destroy most of Greater New York. Only one other bomb would get through, but it would be thrown off course and land somewhere in the Pacific, having missed Los Angeles entirely.

"Anything else?" asked Karnes after a few seconds of silence from Brittain. "Didn't it say they would have to prevent that?"

Brittain's voice was dull now. "All it said was that the records would have to be preserved. It said that things must go on exactly as before. It said that nothing must interfere with the complete development, whatever that means."

Karnes pushed his way out of the room and back towards the pilot's compartment. What the pilot had to say was no news to Karnes.

"Radio from New York says that a bomb missed LA and hit the ocean. That was a close one."

Karnes nodded silently, and leaned back in the stewardess' seat to think.

No wonder Brittain had been so anxious to get out of New York.

New York would be destroyed, but that was inevitable. The thing that had bothered him, his dilemma, was solved.

Was this the real Earth that he lived in, or a museum that had been set up by the Galactics? If it was old Earth, then man would solve his present problems and go on to solve the problem of time travel and interstellar transportation. The present war would be just another little incident in the far past, like the battles of Gettysburg and Agincourt.

And if it were the museum Earth? No difference. For the Galactics had decided not to interfere. They had decided to let the race of Earth go on as it was —exactly as it had gone before. It made no difference, really. *No difference at all.* A perfect duplication of an original *was* the original, in every meaningful way.

"Funny," said the pilot abruptly, "I'm not getting any signal from New York."

Karnes took a deep breath and bit at his lower lip. But he did not look toward the horror that was New York. The city was gone, but the world was there—solid and real!

You'd better expand your museum a little bit, boys, he thought. *We'll need to include Mars and Venus before very long. And then the stars.*

BOOK REVIEWS:

SCIENCE: Fact and Fiction

by

GEORGE O. SMITH

One of the basic premises of Science Fiction is that there shall be no restriction placed upon locale. In fact, very few science fiction stories have been written which use the here and now world of today as a setting. The first science fiction story ever written was laid in an exotic civilization on the Moon by Lucian of Samosata in 160 A.D. From that time to the present (and I see no change for the future) the hallmark of science fiction has been the preoccupation with times, places, and cultural structures that are nowhere within our experience.

This complete freedom of motion; this basic tenet of science fiction, is oddly enough one of science fiction's own curses.

In other forms of fiction it is barely necessary to state the time and locale of the story. People who have been no farther out of New York City than Hoboken can read stories of The Old West without forcing the writer to explain in minute detail how a Texas Longhorn is constructed. No hero ever had to step out of the action so that he could explain to the audience that his automobile functioned due to the rapid combustion of a volatile liquid called "gasoline" which provides a linear thrust which is converted into rotational motion by a set of mechanical linkages, the end result of which is a forward linear motion.

The locale of a story can be set by a simple line or two. If the writer states that it is August in Chicago, the reader knows at once that the women will be wearing light dresses and that the action will go roaring up and down paved streets, in and out of living rooms, bedrooms, bars, and restaurants. The sun will rise about five o'clock in the morning out of the Lake and set about eight o'clock in the evening to the West.

The fact that we all have familiarity with places used in stories, or at least places similar to the locale, reduces the amount of wordage

that is devoted to background description and leaves the writer more space for action and characterization.

But in science fiction, the background conditions must be outlined rather completely. In fact, many of the science fiction stories are imaginary travelogues in which the description of the exotic culture or scenery is the prime motivation of the story. This requirement subtracts from the total wordage, resulting in a lower degree of action and characterization. It also takes a bit of the sting out of some of the action, now and then. There is nothing that falls so flat as a situation-joke in which the situation must be explained in detail before the joke can be appreciated.

Of course, no great preoccupation with background need be the case if the story is built around more or less accepted fact. The story set on the Moon, for instance, can devote less space to description, if the author is willing to use and accept the physical conditions of the Moon as we now know them. A few years ago this was not possible. Today, with the newspapers and radio catering to general public interest in space travel, everybody at all interested, even remotely, in space travel has a fair-to-middling idea of what conditions will be found on the Moon when our first explorers arrive.

I believe that this spread of knowledge will continue and that as a result, science fiction will be forced to spend less and less time in dry detail and more time on character and plot and action.

THE ROLLING STONES, by Robert A. Heinlein. Scribner's, $2.50. This is a rollicking, good-natured story of the Stone Family, three generations of which make their home on the Moon. They run from Grandmother to grandson, all enterprising, ambitious, and strictly of the pioneer type. Roger Stone, on a bet made previous to the story, is turning out a daily video serial that makes Captain Future, Tom Corbett, and other space operas look a bit tame. This is a lucrative proposition; so lucrative in fact that Roger Stone cannot afford to stop it.

His sons, twins named Castor and Pollux (age 16) are too bright for their own good, always starting something that is a little too big for them to handle. With some money gained by the invention of a small gadget they put a down payment on a second-hand spacecraft, which then takes care of Roger Stone's excess income from his radio script. In order to take time to put the spacecraft in order, he turns the writing of the video script over to Grandmother Stone, who continues writing it by getting her ideas from Grandson Buster, aged 8.

The dialog is fast and the story moves rapidly. Heinlein manages to create atmosphere and background without showing any of the hooks, eyes, and rivets as the Stones, in their reconditioned spacecraft (called *The Rolling Stone*) takes off for Mars, where the twins get into another economic hassle with the authorities. The action moves from crisis to crisis smoothly, and winds up still going forward. The Stones, instead of returning to their homestead on the Moon, are looking upward and outward towards Saturn to see the Rings, which gives the ending a spirit of enthusiasm and presents the pioneer, adventuring spirit of the Stone Family in a consistent manner.

This is supposed to be a juvenile, but don't be fooled. It makes good reading for any age. It is a fine example of why Robert A. Heinlein has been top dog in the science fiction business for something like fifteen years.

THE LEGION OF TIME, by Jack Williamson. Fantasy Press, $3.00. This novel appeared in Astounding in 1938, and was the first to receive the Croix de Campbell as a "mutant" story. While the basic plot is on the parallel time track theme, Williamson's approach was brand new. Not content with the old paradox of a man going back in time to change history, the Legion pulls a neat switcheroo, by having a couple of future groups return to the present to monkey with current events so that their own highly probable existences will become certain. As another concept seldom treated by time novels, this one recognizes the Present as that instant of time-passage when events actually happen. In other words, the time-travelling gang cannot just go back and tinker with events, they must plot and plan to put in their oar just at the right instant in time so that the always-moving Present can be changed. Because once the event happens then it cannot be changed. The fact that this novel was done up in the flamboyant style of 1938 does not really take anything away from a neat bit of plotting.

Also included is another novel entitled AFTER WORLD'S END which is an overdone space opera covering millions of years and hundreds of thousands of parsecs, warfare between men and machines and a fabulous planet yclept "Dark Mystoon" where the dastardly master robot holds the lovely heroine in durance vile (a fate not quite worse than death). Regular readers may not have seen this number because it appeared in a magazine which had a brief pre-war life. Don't let this inclusion stop you from enjoying the first novel; after all, some people do collect all kinds of junk, as well as science fiction—antique furniture, stamps, or other useless bric-a-brac.

THE MIXED MEN by A. E. VanVogt. Gnome, $2.75. And this number is in contrast to both of the above, in just about every way. The supercollossal star ship *The Star Cluster* has been exploring the Magellanic Clouds and finds evidence of a far-flung stellar culture which wants no part of coalition with the government of the main Galaxy. There are super-robots and androids, and humanoid characters who are viable offspring of man and android. There is the vast gas-storm that merges with a sun about to become a supernova at which point everything blows to hell in a superstupendous, ultraviolent uproar. *The Star Cluster* hits the superstorm and breaks up into its component parts, which conveniently turn out to be an aggregation of small spacecraft, one of which carries the Supreme Highness Lady Gloria and half-android Captain Maltby to an uninhabited planet, where for lack of employment otherwise they decide pragmatically to make love. They are located before any replenishing of this particular earth can get under way, and then, of course, the beauteous and haughty Lady Gloria has the mixed marriage dissolved by tossing Captain Maltby into the calabozo for having the temerity to suggest smoochmaking. Eventually a coalition between the main Galaxy and the Fifty Suns of the Magelannic Cloud is arranged, and then all the loose ends are tied up on the last page by a listing of several Royal Edicts.

The name of this should have been The Mixed (Up) Men.

Wow!

THE STARMEN, by Leigh Brackett. Gnome, $2.75. This appeared in shortened form in *Startling Stories* under the title The Starmen of Llyrdis. This is another one of the Changeling or Cinderella themes. Michael Trehearne is earthborn, but it evolves that he is not an earthman, but of the Vardda, a stellar race which for some unstated physiological reason are the only race capable of withstanding the rigors of interstellar travel. The Vardda are interplanetary traders who flit from system to system, and who are hated by their points of contact because no other race can take to deep space without dying a horrible death. Trehearne learns of a Vardda who once discovered a process (unstated) that would prepare any race for space travel, but who was banished by the High Vardda Council because it would ruin their monopoly. Trehearne, Vardda by birth but Earthman by upbringing, goes hunting for this banished super scientist and after a lot of "Trehearne went thataway" he succeeds in liberating the process, thus providing all the races of the Galaxy with their own interstellar business.

It is readable because Leigh Brackett is a smooth, accomplished writer. But the plotting and the background make me wish Leigh

Brackett would get back to Earth and surround herself with characters that look, act, and stay human.

Unfortunately, there is nothing available in the non-fiction field this month. I wish there were. The more popular books on science there are, the better off we will all be in this culture where people handle the practical results of applied science every day without owning the foggiest notion of how they work.

On the other hand, I have had the privilege of reading PROJECT MARS by Wernher von Braun in manuscript (translated, of course) which is a lengthy tale written around the project of making the first landing on Mars, using materials and devices which are now available. This is less of a story than it is an explanation, with calculations, scientific predictions, and flat statements, all of which have been worked out in minute detail by von Braun. The only thing Wernher von Braun omits is an explanation of how we get the fantastic sum of money required to tackle this project.

I hope this will get itself printed some day. It is a fine example of science fiction—the combination of cold fact and light story projected into the near future and completed by an appendix of tables, graphs, and mathematics which support von Braun's basic premise.

Ballantine Books recently created quite a furor with their plan to produce originals in both hard covers and pocket-size simultaneously. Now they've turned to science fiction, and their first book is due out March 16, 1953. It's an anthology, but every short story is brand new and hasn't previously appeared! STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, edited by Frederik Pohl (35¢ paperbound, $1.50 in hard covers) features stories by William Morrison, Cyril Kornbluth, Lester del Rey, Fritz Leiber, Clifford Simak, John Wyndham, William Tenn, H. L. Gold, Judith Merril, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Robert Sheckley, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Murray Leinster, and Arthur C. Clarke. The stories by Gold, Leiber, and del Rey represent the best by these writers, and rate high among even a generally excellent selection. But the prize goes to *Country Doctor*, by William Morrison; this should easily place among the top dozen stories of the year. In fact, the book looks like the best buy in science fiction for this or any other year.

all that goes up

BY KIRBY BROOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

At fifty, a man should be too old to go around flying off the handle, or wandering around on the ceiling. But what could a man do when he had a son who insisted on being a genius?

For a man my age, the middle 50's, life has a number of compensations. There're children—we have two; there's a good wife, and I'm certainly blessed in that respect with Mary; and there's the joy of coming home, slipping on my slippers, having a good dinner, then relaxing with coffee and a pipe. There's no compensation for being plastered to the ceiling. But, more of that later.

The after dinner coffee with a dash of rum in it, tasted very good, and so did the pipe. The meal was satisfying too. Thank goodness for that meal, because it was the last decent one I've had for quite some time. Oh, I've eaten all right, but you'd have to stretch your imagination to call any of it a meal. Can you picture eating food that keeps trying to move away from your face? That is, if you can keep the plate from moving away too?

As I say, Mary and I had just finished dinner, when Jim, our 22-year-old gangly son, who's home on summer vacation from MIT, called me.

"Can you come here a minute, Dad?"

"Sure," I said, heading down the hall to his combination laboratory, dark room, aviary, and just plain bedroom. Fortunately it was a big room so there was space for a bed in addition to all the stuff a boy can collect who becomes enamored of science while in High School, and who consummates the wedding with studying electronics in college

I pushed his door open a little wider and looked in before entering; a trick the family had acquired when Jim was in the Zoological-Biological, or frog-collecting age. "What do you want, son?"

"Just want to show you something," he said, pointing to the floor. He was bent over looking intently at what seemed to be a sheet of that fluorescent plastic that's used for signs. It was lying on the floor, was about two feet square, and was glowing a dim pink. Whether from light within itself, or from the desk lamp, I couldn't tell.

"What is it?"

"I don't really know, Dad, but watch what happens." So saying, he picked up a glove from the desk, tossed it onto the plastic plate. I should say he tossed it *at* the plate, because it didn't land, but rose fast, straight up! I watched it hit the ceiling with a splat! Where it stuck. It was then I noticed several other things all plastered to the panelling too; the mate to the glove, a package of cigarettes, a cigarette lighter and a golf ball or two.

Well, I had learned years ago in the Prestidigitation Age, or, "You too can amaze your friends with feats of Magic" that quite often Jim would go to great lengths to mystify anybody handy. I wasn't too impressed.

"Next thing will be to make a rope stand up, or saw a woman in half, I suppose?"

"No, Dad, this is no trick. Fact is, I think I've stumbled onto something that could be important . . . anti-gravity. Or, something that looks like it."

"Well," I said, "It could be, but just what is this thing?"

"Up at school I started fooling around with various metals, and one idea I had was to suspend them in tiny particles, colloidally almost, in plastic. Then I'd run various voltages and varying frequencies through the plastic."

"Yes, but why?"

"Well, the thing I had in mind originally was a wall or ceiling panel that would serve as a source of either cold light using a given voltage and frequency, or as a source of radiant heat, using some other voltage and frequency. All from the same panel."

"And you wind up with this?"

"Yes, and I'll be darned if I can explain just what this is. I'm really going to have to do some digging."

While Jim was talking, I had been looking the rig over. It consisted of the plastic plate lying on the floor, with two sets of wires running into it, and out of it. In turn, these four wires led

into what I took to be a transformer of some sort. Such as you'd use for a toy electric train. It had roughly calibrated dials on the top of it. A regular AC line from the transformer was plugged into the wall socket.

"What I can't figure," Jim mused, "Is why it does what it does. The measly three years I've spent at school don't even qualify me to make a good guess. Does it only work on small things that can be lifted without too much effort anyway? Or, if I increase the size of the plate will I also have to increase the voltage? Will it . . .?"

"Look boy, I'm confused enough already. What do you say we sit down and think about this a bit? It'll give you a chance to collect your wits, and besides that, I want another cup of coffee."

Four cups and two pipes later, after Johnny, that's our fourteen-year-old, and Mary had gone to bed, Jim and I were still just sitting. He was obviously thinking, and I was mostly sitting. Not much thinking. The trouble with my thinking was that a background of selling everything from Encyclopedias to, at present, used cars, and an education consisting mostly of high school and hard knocks just didn't qualify me in Jim's league. The silence lengthened. Pretty soon he stirred in his chair, cleared his throat and said, "Let's go look again."

"Have you come to any conclusions?"

"Well, yes and no," Jim said. "Look at it this way Pop; suppose this is not a fluke and I'm able to duplicate this thing. Suppose I'm able to take this transformer and duplicate it too. All on a larger scale. How could it be used to good advantage? It'd probably do away with elevators in most cases, except you'd have to walk down. But then, by making the field weaker, maybe I could fix it so's you'd float down. Then too, I wonder if it can be applied to aircraft of any kind . . . I suppose you could take it and . . . " his eyes were shining.

I interrupted; "Jim, you haven't really tested what the thing will do and it *is* late, so before you go into many more schemes, let's sleep on it. We can get right after it in the morning. You can, that is, because all I can do is watch."

The next morning bright and early I was awakened by Johnny, who was dancing around the room, shouting something on the order of "Hey! Somebody's gottoget'erdown! Somebody's gottoget'erdown!"

Making myself heard over the din, I hollered, "Who's got to get

who down? For Pete's sake, stop yelling so loud!"

Having been out-shouted, Johnny calmed down enough to catch his breath and gasp, "Say, Dad, Duchess is in Jim's room and she's on the ceiling, and yougottoget'erdown!"

Well, it dawned on me then what he was talking about. Duchess is our nine-months-old Great Dane pup. Weighs about a hundred pounds. So, pulling on bathrobe and slippers, I went down stairs, and hurried into Jim's room. Sure enough, plastered on the ceiling and looking mighty scared and sick and sheepish was Duchess. When I came in she wagged a feeble tail at me and squirmed a bit. Mary, Johnny and Jim were all standing looking at her.

"Dad, I don't know how it happened," Jim said. "Guess I forgot to pull the plug last night. First I knew was when I heard a thump and a yelp . . . woke up and she was practically right over my bed."

Duchess was apparently unhurt, so I walked over and reached up to coax her down. Just then Jim shouted, "Dad! Don't do . . .!" And my head hit the ceiling! Like a fool I had walked right over the plastic plate!

As soon as I could get my eyes to focus properly, I shut them again quickly. I was lying, (lying!) next to Duchess, on the ceiling, and she was thrashing me in the face with her tail. As soon as I pushed her around so my face was out of range I could see the dumbfounded looks on the rest of the family.

"Ralph," said Mary, in a tone of exasperation, "You and that dog come right down from there this minute!"

"Honey, I'd just be delighted to come down there, and if you and the boys will shove that bed under us, we'll try. Soon as Jim turns this damn thing off."

By this time, Johnny was lying on the floor about to bust a gusset laughing at his father and long-legged Duchess sprawled on the ceiling, and even Jim, who is always rather straight-faced, was beginning to grin a little around the edges. Mary still seemed convinced that Duchess and I had done it on purpose.

Jim finally gathered his wits enough to start pushing the bed under us. Between the three of them they managed to bypass the wires to the plastic plate and set the bed over it. I noticed that it bucked a little as the edge went over the plate, but I didn't get time to see much because no sooner had the bed been pushed over it than the whole thing with the exception of the frame, rose straight up

and smothered the dog and me very effectively! After the first moment of panic, consisting of flailing arms, legs, muffled barks and curses, I was able to shove the bedding aside so we could breathe again. I had just started to yell at Jim to turn the thing off and stand aside, when that's just what he did. I clutched at Duchess, hoping to break both our falls I guess, but nothing happened!

I looked at Jim, and he was looking at the plug in his hand. There was a dazed look on his face, and I'm sure there was one on mine too. Duchess just licked my face and wagged her tail. For a space of about two breaths no one spoke, then all started at once . . .

"Jim, you pull out that plug right now and get your father down from there!" That was Mary.

"Don't just stand there like a dope . . . turn that damn thing off!" That was me.

"Jimmy, where's your camera? I want to get a picture of this!" That was Johnny.

Duchess just whined, and wagged her tail apologetically.

"Jim," I said, very softly, "Will you please stop messing around and get us down from here?"

"I unplugged it, Dad . . . I don't know why you're still up there." He shook his head.

Johnny, bless his little heart, had what seemed to be a good idea; "Why not get hold of the wires and pull the plate out from under them?"

So Jim eased up to within about a foot of the plate, grabbed the wires and started pulling. I had no sensation at all. We just stuck there. Even with the plate out in the hall!

Jim stood for a moment in thought, then looked up at us and said, "Well, maybe it'll wear off in a little while, as you gradually discharge whatever kind of charge you got from the plate."

"What do you mean by 'charge'?" I asked.

"Well, not knowing what kind of field I generated with that plate, I couldn't tell you offhand, but it is probably something like this; you see, apparently what I did was not cut gravity off exactly, but changed the normal electrical charge in whatever object came into the field. Seems to me if I had cut gravity with the plate, you would have fallen when I turned it off. As it is, you're still there," he added rather unnecessarily.

And Jim, as his teen-age friends used to say, wasn't just whistling Dixie. We were definitely, unquestionably still there.

About this time I became aware of a pain in the small of my back. For a man who is pushing 60, I'm in pretty good shape except for my sacroiliac. Just my luck, I thought. Here I am, plastered to the ceiling, and that thing has to start acting up. In moving a bit though, I heard a scraping sound and found I had more than one pain in my back. Feeling carefully under me, I found that it wasn't the sacroiliac at all, but a cigarette lighter, two gloves, a pack of cigarettes, and two golf balls. I tried to toss the balls down to the floor and all they did was go almost down then curve right back up and bounce on the ceiling, where they settled. I tried the same thing with the gloves and back they came too. So I lit one of the cigarettes, even without my morning coffee.

Mary had been silent for awhile, but apparently she had the same thought. "Ralph, aren't you coming down for breakfast?" she asked, pleadingly.

"I don't know, honey. But I do know I'm sure getting hungry, even in this position." And turning so I could see her better, if you can turn while lying on the ceiling looking down, I said, "Do you suppose you could whip up something to eat? And maybe put it on a pole so you could hand it up?" She allowed as how she could, but Jim, who had been in one of his brown studies again spoke up; "I don't believe we'll need a pole, Dad. Now that the plastic plate's been turned off and moved, everything's all right."

"Everything's all right!" I growled. "If everything's so all right, why don't we come down? How long's it going to take, anyway?"

"Well, it's hard to say," Jim shrugged. "In fact, I've been thinking maybe I ought to call Professor Jordan up at school and ask him what to do."

"Is he an expert?"

"Well, I'd call him that. The trouble is, I don't know what I did, so I certainly don't know how to un-do it. Maybe he'll have an idea."

"Does he know about anti-gravity?"

"I don't imagine so, but he's the head of electronics and I know he's been working on the unified field theory just as a hobby. He's the fellow who got me to wondering about energized metal particles in colloidal suspension. Think I'd better call him?"

"Son," I said, trying to retie my bathrobe belt, "You not only call him, but if it's possible, get him to come here . . . I've got to get down. Hell, I haven't even

shaved yet this morning, and I've got to be at work in about two hours."

"You may not get down from there that soon, but I'll go call him right now."

Jim left for the phone, and shortly Mary came in with a steaming tray of food. That's where the fun began.

First of all, picture the old house. It was very old, and had high, pine-paneled ceilings . . . probably twelve feet high. Duchess and I were a little off-center, closer to the door, I guess. The room was big, and being on the ground floor, had a dormer window looking out on our rather scraggly garden. In fact, pretty soon I began to get the impression from the pine "boards" "beneath" me, that I was actually lying on a floor, and the ceiling to floor dormer window didn't do anything to help either. Curtains looked rather odd though, sticking straight "up."

About the food: Mary was right under us with the tray. She put it down, picked up a bowl of oatmeal and started to hand it to me. She couldn't reach high enough and I couldn't reach down far enough. The thought crossed my mind, "why not stand up?" Well, I tried it, Brother! what a sensation! As I began gathering my legs under me, the idea of being on a pine floor increased. Increased until I made the mistake of looking out the window! It's just plain impossible to describe, but try to imagine how it would look right now, if you looked out your window . . . at the top (to you) is the ground, and at the bottom? Nothing! Just nothing, but blue sky. The vertigo was pretty bad and I flopped back down, or rather "up" and tried to regain my equilibrium.

"What's the matter?" My wife asked. "Don't you want any breakfast?"

As soon as I caught my breath, I said, "Well, yes and no, honey. Could you or Johnny get a ladder? I think that might do it." I could stay lying down that way.

Johnny brought in the short stepladder, so without standing "up" I at least got my hands on the food. Hands is about all. Here's a picture for you . . . Flat on your back; an open dish of hot oatmeal open side to, coming right at you. When you grab it you have to reach around behind it to keep it from falling. You get it right up to your face, take the spoon and start to take a bite. How do you do it? I don't know either. I gave up oatmeal right then and there. Johnny, and again, bless his little heart, had the idea that saved us. "Hey,

Dad, why don't you try a banana?" It worked! In fact, most any food that was in a chunk could be eaten. Difficult, but it could be done. The big problem then was liquid, and again Johnny came to my rescue with some fountain straws from the corner drugstore. For Duchess it was easy. She just lapped.

About the time we finished the battle of breakfast, Jim came back with word from Professor Jordan.

"Dad, I don't think the professor believed me, but he's on his way here."

"Well, thank the Lord," I exclaimed. "Did he think you were completely out of your head?"

"Not exactly, but he did think I might be exaggerating just a little, I think."

"When will he get here?" Mary asked.

"He said he'd catch a plane out of there as soon as he could, and it's only a two and a half hour flight, mother."

"Then he'll be here this afternoon?" I asked.

"He seemed to think he would."

"Oh, goodness, I hope so," Mary said. "We've got a date with the Ripleys to go to a movie tonight."

I snorted. "Movies at a time like this! Why it might take days for us to get discharged."

Days? Holy Smoke! I wondered how long it *would* take? Already I was getting tired of lying down. Hey, wait a minute! What about the springs, mattress and covers stuck up here with me? There indeed was a thought.

Pushing Duchess aside and getting licked in the face once again for my trouble, I reached over and got hold of the mattress. In doing so I had to roll over partially. I really got the sensation then of being on a pine board floor. So much so in fact, that I rolled clear over onto my hands and knees. It wasn't so bad after all! Just like being on a regular floor, reaching for a mattress and covers. Really had to keep my eyes away from that window though!

I finally got the bed straightened out and got comfortable. Duchess, no doubt figuring this was a rather special occasion, proceeded to ease herself in bed with me. At that point I didn't care too much so I let her stay. It was a funny thing but she didn't seem to have much trouble standing up at all. In fact, she seemed perfectly happy with the whole arrangement, but everytime I glanced at that dormer window and pictured vast reaches of blue nothing, my stomach turned over a little.

Guess I must have dozed off,

because the next thing I remember was Johnny standing on the ladder, poking me with a tennis racquet.

"Wake up Dad," he was saying. "Mother wants to know if you and Duchess want any lunch."

"I don't know about Duchess," I yawned, "But I could certainly do with a bit to eat. Like to shave and brush my teeth too. Think you could figure out something?"

Johnny figured, and oddly enough it's no trick to brush your teeth (I'm lucky to still have my own) upside down. It's much the same as when you do it normally . . . bent over the lavatory. As for shaving, well I never cared much for them, but I used Jim's electric razor and that was taken care of. No shower though. Not even Johnny could figure that one out.

Mary came in with sandwiches and coffee, and with straws it turned out all right. Duchess did her usual lapping. There wasn't anything else to do but wait, so Johnny brought me the morning paper. Let me tell you, that's no snap, trying to read a paper that's continually trying to pull away from you. My arms got awfully tired after awhile so I gave that up. Noticing it was rather stuffy, I asked Johnny to lower the upper sash of the dormer so the air could circulate a bit, and as it became more comfortable, I must have dropped off to sleep again.

The next thing I knew I was awakened rather forcibly by loud screams and yells from the garden just outside the window. When I got my wits together and looked, the first thing I noticed was that Duchess was nowhere around. About that time, Johnny burst into the room, tears streaming down his face, and crying as though his heart would break. Close on his heels was Mary, also crying, and Jim was bringing up the rear.

"What in the world's the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, Ralph," Mary sobbed, "It's Duchess . . . she's gone!"

"She just flew right up in the air!" Johnny added.

"What do you mean, 'flew right up in the air', what are you all talking about?"

"She got out of the window, Dad," Jim said. "We were out in the garden talking, and I guess she heard us. Looks like she went to the window, scratched the screen loose, and out she went."

"Oh, Ralph, it was just horrible," Mary sobbed. "That poor thing, going up just like a balloon . . . getting smaller and smaller."

"Yeah, Dad," Johnny sniffed,

"We watched her till she went clear out of sight . . . she was kickin' her legs and we could hear her barkin' too."

"For heaven's sake, Ralph," Mary cried, "don't you go near that window!"

"Yes, you'd go up too, Dad," Jim added.

Clutching tightly to the mattress, I assured them I wouldn't go near the window, or the door either, for that matter. Just the thought of that poor dog sailing up in the air made me sick in the pit of my stomach.

"How high will she go, Jim?" I asked.

"Gee, I don't know, Dad. But I think she'll just keep right on going, clear up out of the air." Jim had a hard time keeping a sob out of his voice too.

"What'll happen to her, son?"

"Well, you see, between the cold and the lack of oxygen, she'll just go to sleep . . . I remember reading about fliers at high altitude."

"Thank Heaven," Mary breathed. And I added a silent "Amen."

About 3:30 Professor Jordan arrived and Jim brought him in and introduced us. The professor was probably 40, but looked hardly older than Jim, and was built along the same tall and gangly lines. A very business-like man though, thank heaven, and he got right to the point. After the first shock of seeing me on the ceiling, he turned to Jim, "Now, tell me. Exactly what happened, and what is this rig you have here?"

Jim told him the whole story of how Duchess and I got caught, then went into great detail about the plastic plate, the kinds of metal he had used, and the different settings on the transformer. He finished by telling how Duchess had sailed off into space.

At this, Professor Jordan looked more closely at the transformer hookup. "You say the settings are still the same?"

"Yes, sir, it's still the same. I haven't changed a thing except to pull the plate out in the hall."

"Have you tried it since your father was caught?"

"No, sir . . . in all the excitement I haven't gotten around to fooling with it again."

The professor walked out in the hall, reached in his pocket for a handkerchief, tossed it over the plate. It rose! Straight up, and stuck to the ceiling!

"My gosh! Jim blurted. "Somebody must have plugged that thing in again!"

Mary and Johnny, who were watching in silence, both spoke up to say that neither of them had. Jim reached down and picked up the AC line. Sure

enough, it *wasn't* plugged in!

"Well, this is going to take some studying," Professor Jordan muttered, looking rather awed at Jim's gadget. "Jim, let's start at the beginning again, and be sure you tell me everything you did, every move you made, what kind of metal you used, how finely divided it was, what concentration you used and what voltages and frequencies you used."

"I'll try, Professor," Jim said, "But it's going to be sort of a hit or miss proposition because I fiddled with this thing for an hour or so before accidentally dropping my cigarettes on the plate. When they went up, I was surprised, to say the least, so I tried other things."

"What we've got to figure out first of all, is whether it was caused by a combination of changes, or whether it was the last setting you used," Professor Jordan said. "If it was a combination of voltage and frequency changes, then we've certainly got a problem on our hands."

All this time of course, Mary and Johnny had been standing more or less open-mouthed, listening, and I, from my vantage point high on the ceiling, had been taking it all in too.

"Can you think of any way to run the experiment over?" The professor asked. "Do you think you can remember the formula for the plastic plate?"

Jim thought a moment, snapped his fingers and said, "By golly, I believe I've got another piece of that plastic around here somewhere. I made it up at school and had to cut a little piece off so I could get it in my suitcase. I'll see if I can find it." And stepping gingerly around the plate in the hall he came back into the room and started rummaging around in his luggage.

The professor looked at me. "Mr. Wilson, what sort of sensation did you have when you stepped on the plate?"

"Well, as near as I can remember, I *don't* remember," I said. "I started to reach up and pull Duchess down, and the next thing I knew my head hit the ceiling. Still got a bump big as an Easter egg."

"Did you have a giddy, light sensation?"

"No, as I say, I don't remember anything but the whack on the head."

About that time, Jim hollered, "Hey! I found it! Now maybe we can find out what goes on here."

Jim and the professor very carefully disconnected the transformer from the plate in the hall,

made sure the dial settings were the same, then hooked up the new plate. It was a lot smaller than the first one, being only about six inches wide and two feet long.

"I wonder if shape has anything to do with it?" the professor mused.

"We'll find out in a minute," said Jim. "Everybody stand back now, and I'll plug in the transformer."

He plugged it in and in a few seconds the plate began to glow the same as the other one. "We'll give it a few more seconds," Jim said, "then we'll see if it works."

The professor fumbled around in his pockets, started to toss his pipe onto the plate, thought better of it and put it back in his pocket. Johnny, who had been watching the whole proceedings, pulled out his Boy Scout knife. "You can use this, Professor."

Professor Jordan took the knife, got up close to the plate, gave it a toss, and plunk! It flew over the plate and went straight to the ceiling! And stuck!

"Well, thank goodness, we know it's the present combination of voltage and frequency, and not a series of changes," Jim said, relieved.

"Yes, and size and shape apparently have little to do with it too," the professor answered. "Now all we have to do is find out why. That's our problem."

"And how long it lasts too," said Jim, glancing up at me. Then turning to the professor; "Sir, I've been wondering what you think of the idea that maybe these plates change the electrical charge of whatever object is placed on them, or over them."

"I had that thought too, Jim, when I found out we couldn't turn that plate off. Any ideas how we might go about grounding or dissipating the charge?"

"Or getting me down from here? I don't know if you or Jim realize it, but old Mother Nature is going to make things rather uncomfortable for me pretty soon. I've been up here for almost eight hours already, and I'm getting a bit uneasy, to say the least."

For the first time the professor's eyes crinkled a bit at the corners, and looking up at me, he chuckled, "Mr. Wilson, you've brought up a rather touchy subject, and we'll hurry as fast as we can."

Mary came in then with some more sandwiches and coffee, and I went through the same routine with the straw, only this time I got choked. Thank Heaven I did! That sounds funny, but while I was coughing and sputtering, spewing coffee all over the place, Jim had walked over so that he

was right under me. He stood for a moment watching me sputter, then let out a whoop and hollered.

"Hey! Dad! Professor! Mom! I've got it! I've got it;" He paused a second, then, "I hope . . ."

I was still sputtering, but Mary and Professor Jordan both grabbed him and started asking questions . . . "What are you talking about? What's your idea?"

"Professor, did you see what happened to the coffee?"

"Your father got choked, why?"

"When he sputtered, did you see what happened? The coffee went *up!*"

"Well, yes, it did. But I don't see . . . By jove! Wait a minute! I see what you're driving at!" And turning to Mary, the professor added, "Mrs. Wilson, do you have a garden hose long enough to reach into this room?"

Mary was shocked. I was still listening between sputters.

"Why, yes, we have. What are you going to do?"

"I hate to tell you this, Mother," Jim said, "But if Professor Jordan is going to do what I think he's going to do, you're not going to be very happy about it. Neither is Dad."

"But we hope to get Mr. Wilson down," the professor said, "Even though it may get a little damp in here."

"If you can get Ralph down, I won't mind how damp it gets," said Mary. And turning to Johnny, who was standing open-mouthed, "Johnny, will you hook up the hose?"

"Yes, Johnny, and run it through the window so it'll come inside the room," Jim explained, quickly.

This whole thing sounded like Greek to me, but by now I had recovered from the sputtering spell, and if a garden hose run through the bedroom window would get me down I was certainly in favor of it. "Will this garden hose scheme you both seem to have thought of really work?"

"We hope so, Dad. It's going to make a mess in my room, but it's worth a try."

"What do I do, climb down it?"

"In effect you do," said the professor. "We'll know in a little while, I hope."

"Will someone unhook the screen?" Johnny was outside.

Jim unhooked the screen and pulled the hose into the room. "Do you want to try it, Professor?"

"Yes, but first, let's clear things out of the way."

"Hey!" I hollered. "You're not

going to turn that hose on in here are you?"

The professor chuckled. "Hope you don't mind too much, but we hope it'll get you down."

"Well, I sure don't see . . ."

"Dad, the professor and I had the same idea. Maybe I can explain it . . . you see, apparently anything you come in contact with takes on a bit of your 'charge.' In the case of the coffee, the small drops became charged and went up. I imagine that the plates and cups picked up a small charge too, while you held them, but it wasn't enough to make them rise. Is that about right, Professor?"

"It seems that way, Jim, Anyway, it's worth a try." The professor looked up at me, "Mr. Wilson, I'm afraid you aren't going to care much for this. As soon as we clear the room a bit I'm going to turn the hose on you."

My mouth dropped open. "Turn the ho . . .?"

"Yes . . . You see, if whatever you touch picks up a bit of the charge, then about the quickest way to 'discharge' you would be to touch you with a large volume of something. Water sounds logical, doesn't it?"

"Well, I suppose so," I mumbled. "But, there must be something . . . some other way . . ."

"There may be, Dad," Jim said, "but you want to get down from there fast, don't you? OK! Here we go!"

So, Jim turned the water on and in a few minutes of course, I was soaked through my bathrobe and pajamas, right to the skin. Johnny was looking through the window laughing fit to kill, and with a look of horror on her face, Mary was watching the water cascading across the ceiling and down into the room. Jim and Professor Jordan were watching me like hawks. Waiting for me to fall, I guess. Fortunately the weather was warm, because the water certainly wasn't. This must have gone on for an hour, but it apparently wasn't, because when they turned the water off, Jim said to the professor, "I hope you timed that, sir. I forgot to."

The professor had, and it turned out to be about ten minutes. He looked up at me, "Do you feel any lighter?"

"What do you mean, lighter?"

He grinned. "I mean can you push yourself away from the ceiling?"

I rolled over on my side and tried to push. By golly! I *did* seem to move a little easier! "I may be a little lighter, Professor, or maybe it's my imagination, but turn that hose on again!"

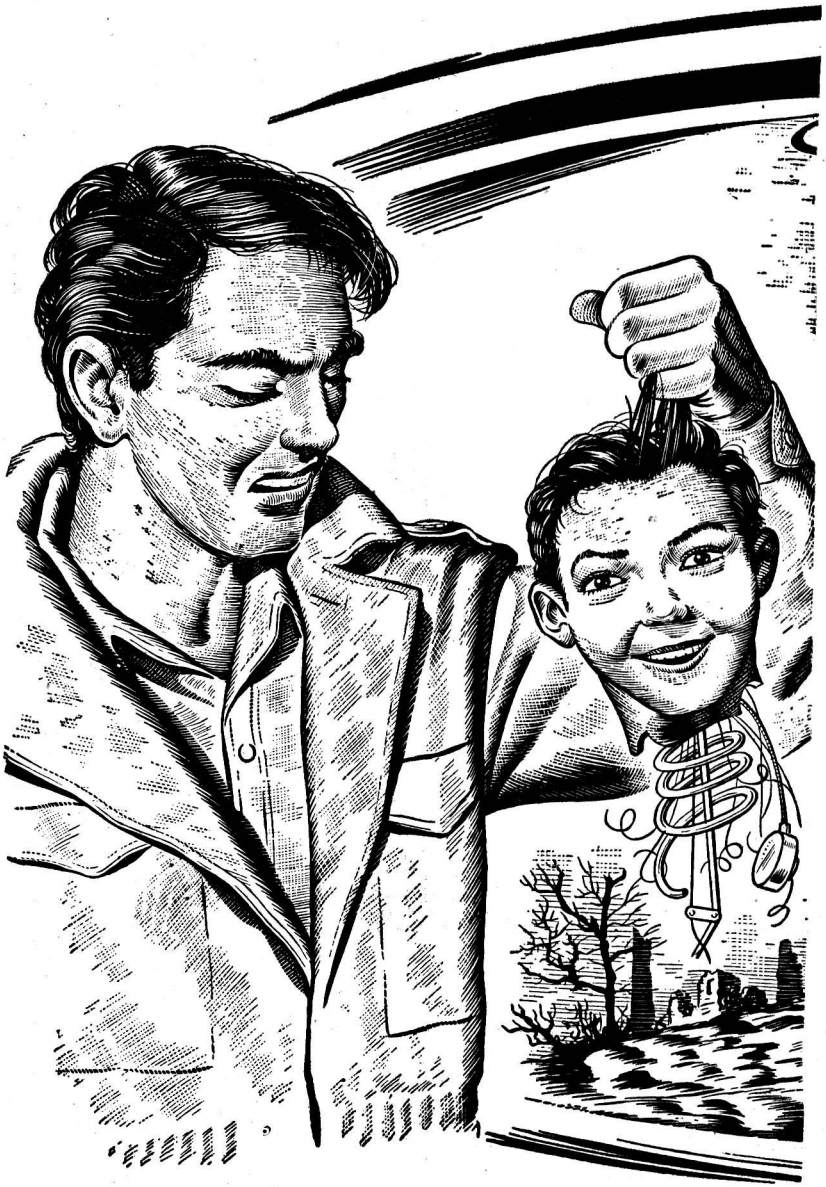
Splat! On it came, and it's

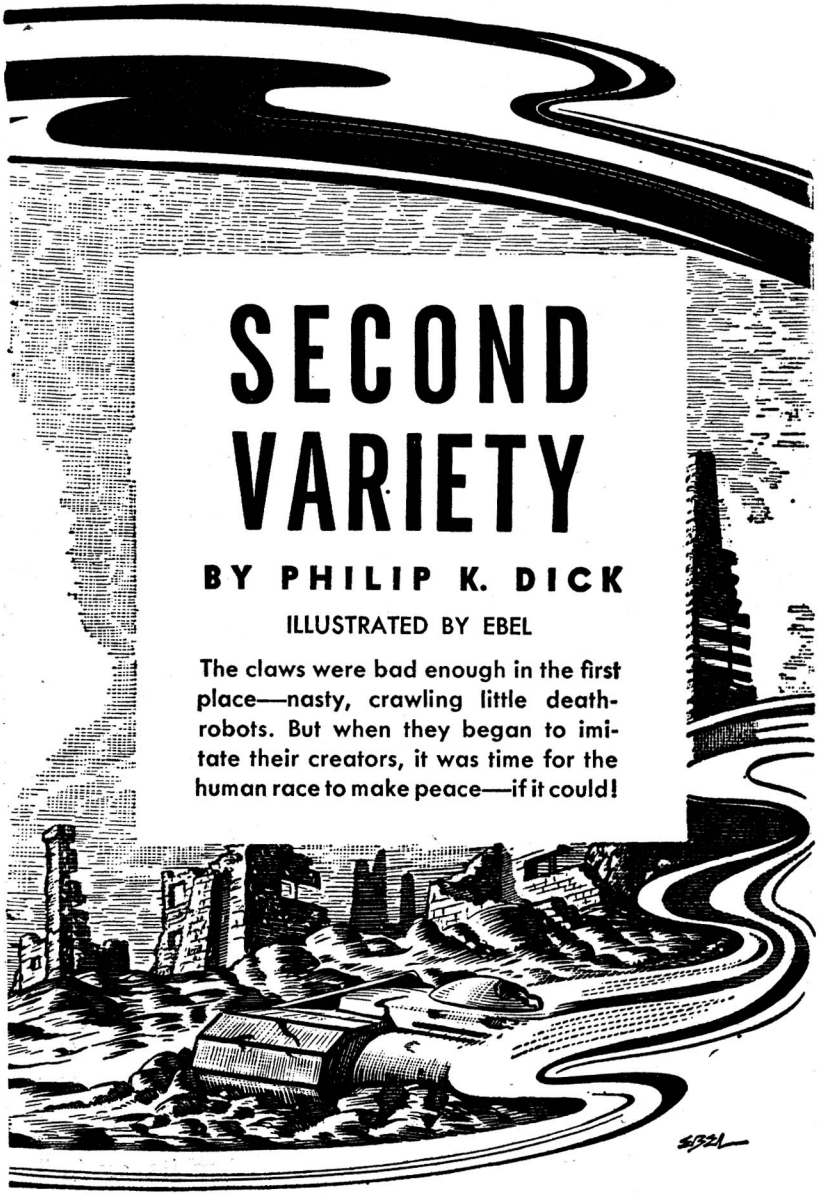
been on and off and on and off for, let me see, this must be the third day now. And I don't mind telling you I'm not going to need a bath for at least two months when I get down. When I get down! Do you know where I am right now? I'm about two feet from the ceiling, which puts me still ten feet from the floor . . . hanging there in the air like the assistant to an Indian fakir! Only this is no trick.

Oh, it's not so bad now; I'm wearing swimming trunks and Jim and Professor Jordan with the assistance of Johnny and Mary, rigged a sort of trough arrangement to carry the 'charged' water out of the window and up into the sky. The water that didn't pick up a charge and fell to the floor is being pumped out the window with a hand pump. Oh, yes, they had to dam up the doorway to keep the rest of the house from being inundated. And I shudder every time I think how much damage has been done to Jim's bedroom. I'm coming down though, slowly, and Professor Jordan has it figured that at the present rate it's going to take five to six more days. I don't know how he came to that conclusion, but I sure hope he's right and hasn't underestimated. The constant soaking has my skin looking like damp corduroy. All over too.

What about the transformer and plate? Well, I believe Professor Jordan is going to take a leave of absence and he and Jim are going to do some full time research on the device, whatever it is. They both think it has many possibilities. So do I, but I'm going to keep my feet on the ground. If they ever get there!

The sun has crossed up the scientists again, proving that even the nearest star is a hard nut to crack. They had just about gotten everyone educated to the "solar phoenix" idea in which a carbon atom keeps picking up atoms of hydrogen, until it gets so top-heavy that the four hydrogen atoms are bounced back out as helium—plus energy—and the carbon is freed to go to work again. Now it seems that most of the reaction in the sun is much closer to that of a hydrogen-bomb. Two protons are simply packed together in some eight billion years, then another is packed in during some four seconds, to give helium-3. In another four hundred thousand years, a fourth hydrogen nucleus is packed in— and that gives helium-4 directly. Modern technology has put the carbon atom out of work! And there's no relief in sight.





SECOND VARIETY

BY PHILIP K. DICK

ILLUSTRATED BY EBEL

The claws were bad enough in the first place—nasty, crawling little death-robots. But when they began to imitate their creators, it was time for the human race to make peace—if it could!

The Russian soldier made his way nervously up the ragged side of the hill, holding his gun ready. He glanced around him, licking his dry lips, his face set. From time to time he reached up a gloved hand and wiped perspiration from his neck, pushing down his coat collar.

Eric turned to Corporal Leone. "Want him? Or can I have him?" He adjusted the view sight so the Russian's features squarely filled the glass, the lines cutting across his hard, somber features.

Leone considered. The Russian was close, moving rapidly, almost running. "Don't fire. Wait." Leone tensed. "I don't think we're needed."

The Russian increased his pace, kicking ash and piles of debris out of his way. He reached the top of the hill and stopped, panting, staring around him. The sky was overcast, drifting clouds of gray particles. Bare trunks of trees jutted up occasionally; the ground was level and bare, rubble-strewn, with the ruins of buildings standing out here and there like yellowing skulls.

The Russian was uneasy. He knew something was wrong. He started down the hill. Now he was only a few paces from the bunker. Eric was getting fidgety. He played with his pistol, glancing at Leone.

"Don't worry," Leone said. "He won't get here. They'll take care of him."

"Are you sure? He's got damn far."

"They hang around close to the bunker. He's getting into the bad part. Get set!"

The Russian began to hurry, sliding down the hill, his boots sinking into the heaps of gray ash, trying to keep his gun up. He stopped for a moment, lifting his fieldglasses to his face.

"He's looking right at us," Eric said.

The Russian came on. They could see his eyes, like two blue stones. His mouth was open a little. He needed a shave; his chin was stubbled. On one bony cheek was a square of tape, showing blue at the edge. A fungoid spot. His coat was muddy and torn. One glove was missing. As he ran his belt counter bounced up and down against him.

Leone touched Eric's arm. "Here one comes."

Across the ground something small and metallic came, flashing in the dull sunlight of mid-day. A metal sphere. It raced up the hill after the Russian, its treads flying. It was small, one of the baby ones. Its claws were out, two razor projections spinning in a blur of white steel. The Russian heard it. He turned in-

stantly, firing. The sphere dissolved into particles. But already a second had emerged and was following the first. The Russian fired again.

A third sphere leaped up the Russian's leg, clicking and whirring. It jumped to the shoulder. The spinning blades disappeared into the Russian's throat.

Eric relaxed. "Well, that's that. God, those damn things give me the creeps. Sometimes I think we were better off before."

"If we hadn't invented them, they would have." Leone lit a cigarette shakily. "I wonder why a Russian would come all this way alone. I didn't see anyone covering him."

Lt. Scott came slipping up the tunnel, into the bunker. "What happened? Something entered the screen."

"An Ivan."

"Just one?"

Eric brought the view screen around. Scott peered into it. Now there were numerous metal spheres crawling over the prostrate body, dull metal globes clicking and whirring, sawing up the Russian into small parts to be carried away.

"What a lot of claws," Scott murmured.

"They come like flies. Not much game for them any more."

Scott pushed the sight away, disgusted. "Like flies. I wonder why he was out there. They know we have claws all around."

A larger robot had joined the smaller spheres. It was directing operations, a long blunt tube with projecting eyepieces. There was not much left of the soldier. What remained was being brought down the hillside by the host of claws.

"Sir," Leone said. "If it's all right, I'd like to go out there and take a look at him."

"Why?"

"Maybe he came with something."

Scott considered. He shrugged. "All right. But be careful."

"I have my tab." Leone patted the metal band at his wrist. "I'll be out of bounds."

He picked up his rifle and stepped carefully up to the mouth of the bunker, making his way between blocks of concrete and steel prongs, twisted and bent. The air was cold at the top. He crossed over the ground toward the remains of the soldier, striding across the soft ash. A wind blew around him, swirling gray particles up in his face. He squinted and pushed on.

The claws retreated as he came close, some of them stiffening into immobility. He touched his tab. The Ivan would have given something for that! Short hard radiation emitted from the tab

neutralized the claws, put them out of commission. Even the big robot with its two waving eyestalks retreated respectfully as he approached.

He bent down over the remains of the soldier. The gloved hand was closed tightly. There was something in it. Leone pried the fingers apart. A sealed container, aluminum. Still shiny.

He put it in his pocket and made his way back to the bunker. Behind him the claws came back to life, moving into operation again. The procession resumed, metal spheres moving through the gray ash with their loads. He could hear their treads scrabbling against the ground. He shuddered.

Scott watched intently as he brought the shiny tube out of his pocket. "He had that?"

"In his hand." Leone unscrewed the top. "Maybe you should look at it, sir."

Scott took it. He emptied the contents out in the palm of his hand. A small piece of silk paper, carefully folded. He sat down by the light and unfolded it.

"What's it say, sir?" Eric said. Several officers came up the tunnel. Major Hendricks appeared.

"Major," Scott said. "Look at this."

Hendricks read the slip. "This just come?"

"A single runner. Just now."

"Where is he?" Hendricks asked sharply.

"The claws got him."

Major Hendricks grunted. "Here." He passed it to his companions. "I think this is what we've been waiting for. They certainly took their time about it."

"So they want to talk terms," Scott said. "Are we going along with them?"

"That's not for us to decide." Hendricks sat down. "Where's the communications officer? I want the Moon Base."

Leone pondered as the communications officer raised the outside antenna cautiously, scanning the sky above the bunker for any sign of a watching Russian ship.

"Sir," Scott said to Hendricks. "It's sure strange they suddenly came around. We've been using the claws for almost a year. Now all of a sudden they start to fold."

"Maybe claws have been getting down in their bunkers."

"One of the big ones, the kind with stalks, got into an Ivan bunker last week," Eric said. "It got a whole platoon of them before they got their lid shut."

"How do you know?"

"A buddy told me. The thing came back with—with remains."

"Moon Base, sir," the communications officer said.

On the screen the face of the lunar monitor appeared. His crisp uniform contrasted to the uniforms in the bunker. And he was clean shaven. "Moon Base."

"This is forward command L-Whistle. On Terra. Let me have General Thompson."

The monitor faded. Presently General Thompson's heavy features came into focus. "What is it, Major?"

"Our claws got a single Russian runner with a message. We don't know whether to act on it —there have been tricks like this in the past."

"What's the message?"

"The Russians want us to send a single officer on policy level over to their lines. For a conference. They don't state the nature of the conference. They say that matters of—" He consulted the slip. "—Matters of grave urgency make it advisable that discussion be opened between a representative of the UN forces and themselves."

He held the message up to the screen for the general to scan. Thompson's eyes moved.

"What should we do?" Hendricks said.

"Send a man out."

"You don't think it's a trap?"

"It might be. But the location they give for their forward command is correct. It's worth a try, at any rate."

"I'll send an officer out. And report the results to you as soon as he returns."

"All right, Major." Thompson broke the connection. The screen died. Up above, the antenna came slowly down.

Hendricks rolled up the paper, deep in thought.

"I'll go," Leone said.

"They want somebody at policy level." Hendricks rubbed his jaw. "Policy level. I haven't been outside in months. Maybe I could use a little air."

"Don't you think it's risky?"

Hendricks lifted the view sight and gazed into it. The remains of the Russian were gone. Only a single claw was in sight. It was folding itself back, disappearing into the ash, like a crab. Like some hideous metal crab . . .

"That's the only thing that bothers me." Hendricks rubbed his wrist. "I know I'm safe as long as I have this on me. But there's something about them. I hate the damn things. I wish we'd never invented them. There's something wrong with them. Relentless little—"

"If we hadn't invented them, the Ivans would have."

Hendricks pushed the sight back. "Anyhow, it seems to be winning the war. I guess that's good."

"Sounds like you're getting the same jitters as the Ivans."

Hendricks examined his wrist watch. "I guess I had better get started, if I want to be there before dark."

He took a deep breath and then stepped out onto the gray, rubbled ground. After a minute he lit a cigarette and stood gazing around him. The landscape was dead. Nothing stirred. He could see for miles, endless ash and slag, ruins of buildings. A few trees without leaves or branches, only the trunks. Above him the eternal rolling clouds of gray, drifting between Terra and the sun.

Major Hendricks went on. Off to the right something scuttled, something round and metallic. A claw, going lickety-split after something. Probably after a small animal, a rat. They got rats, too. As a sort of sideline.

He came to the top of the little hill and lifted his fieldglasses. The Russian lines were a few miles ahead of him. They had a forward command post there. The runner had come from it.

A squat robot with undulating arms passed by him, its arms weaving inquiringly. The robot went on its way, disappearing under some debris. Hendricks watched it go. He had never seen that type before. There were getting to be more and more types he had never seen, new varieties and sizes coming up from the underground factories.

Hendricks put out his cigarette and hurried on. It was interesting, the use of artificial forms in warfare. How had they got started? Necessity. The Soviet Union had gained great initial success, usual with the side that got the war going. Most of North America had been blasted off the map. Retaliation was quick in coming, of course. The sky was full of circling disc-bombers long before the war began; they had been up there for years. The discs began sailing down all over Russia within hours after Washington got it.

But that hadn't helped Washington.

The American bloc governments moved to the Moon Base the first year. There was not much else to do. Europe was gone; a slag heap with dark weeds growing from the ashes and bones. Most of North America was useless; nothing could be planted, no one could live. A few million people kept going up in Canada and down in South America. But during the second year Soviet parachutists began to drop, a few at first, then more and more. They wore the first really effective anti-radiation equipment; what was left of American production moved to

the moon along with the governments.

All but the troops. The remaining troops stayed behind as best they could, a few thousand here, a platoon there. No one knew exactly where they were; they stayed where they could, moving around at night, hiding in ruins, in sewers, cellars, with the rats and snakes. It looked as if the Soviet Union had the war almost won. Except for a handful of projectiles fired off from the moon daily, there was almost no weapon in use against them. They came and went as they pleased. The war, for all practical purposes, was over. Nothing effective opposed them.

And then the first claws appeared. And overnight the complexion of the war changed.

The claws were awkward, at first. Slow. The Ivans knocked them off almost as fast as they crawled out of their underground tunnels. But then they got better, faster and more cunning. Factories, all on Terra, turned them out. Factories a long way underground, behind the Soviet lines, factories that had once made atomic projectiles, now almost forgotten.

The claws got faster, and they got bigger. New types appeared, some with feelers, some that flew. There were a few jumping kinds. The best technicians on the moon were working on designs, making them more and more intricate, more flexible. They became uncanny; the Ivans were having a lot of trouble with them. Some of the little claws were learning to hide themselves, burrowing down into the ash, lying in wait.

And then they started getting ino the Russian bunkers, slipping down when the lids were raised for air and a look around. One claw inside a bunker, a churning sphere of blades and metal—that was enough. And when one got in others followed. With a weapon like that the war couldn't go on much longer.

Maybe it was already over.

Maybe he was going to hear the news. Maybe the Politburo had decided to throw in the sponge. Too bad it had taken so long. Six years. A long time for war like that, the way they had waged it. The automatic retaliation discs, spinning down all over Russia, hundreds of thousands of them. Bacteria crystals. The Soviet guided missiles, whistling through the air. The chain bombs. And now this, the robots, the claws—

The claws weren't like other weapons. They were *alive*, from any practical standpoint, whether the Governments wanted to admit it or not. They were not machines. They were living

things, spinning, creeping, shaking themselves up suddenly from the gray ash and darting toward a man, climbing up him, rushing for his throat. And that was what they had been designed to do. Their job.

They did their job well. Especially lately, with the new designs coming up. Now they repaired themselves. They were on their own. Radiation tabs protected the UN troops, but if a man lost his tab he was fair game for the claws, no matter what his uniform. Down below the surface automatic machinery stamped them out. Human beings stayed a long way off. It was too risky; nobody wanted to be around them. They were left to themselves. And they seemed to be doing all right. The new designs were faster, more complex. More efficient.

Apparently they had won the war.

Major Hendricks lit a second cigarette. The landscape depressed him. Nothing but ash and ruins. He seemed to be alone, the only living thing in the whole world. To the right the ruins of a town rose up, a few walls and heaps of debris. He tossed the dead match away, increasing his pace. Suddenly he stopped, jerking up his gun, his body tense. For a minute it looked like—

From behind the shell of a ruined building a figure came, walking slowly toward him, walking hesitantly.

Hendricks blinked. "Stop!"

The boy stopped. Hendricks lowered his gun. The boy stood silently, looking at him. He was small, not very old. Perhaps eight. But it was hard to tell. Most of the kids who remained were stunted. He wore a faded blue sweater, ragged with dirt, and short pants. His hair was long and matted. Brown hair. It hung over his face and around his ears. He held something in his arms.

"What's that you have?" Hendricks said sharply.

The boy held it out. It was a toy, a bear. A teddy bear. The boy's eyes were large, but without expression.

Hendricks relaxed. "I don't want it. Keep it."

The boy hugged the bear again.

"Where do you live?" Hendricks said.

"In there."

"The ruins?"

"Yes."

"Underground?"

"Yes."

"How many are there?"

"How—how many?"

"How many of you. How big's your settlement?"

The boy did not answer.

Hendricks frowned. "You're not all by yourself, are you?"

The boy nodded.

"How do you stay alive?"

"There's food."

"What kind of food?"

"Different."

Hendricks studied him. "How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

It wasn't possible. Or was it? The boy was thin, stunted. And probably sterile. Radiation exposure, years straight. No wonder he was so small. His arms and legs were like pipecleaners, knobby, and thin. Hendricks touched the boy's arm. His skin was dry and rough; radiation skin. He bent down, looking into the boy's face. There was no expression. Big eyes, big and dark.

"Are you blind?" Hendricks said.

"No. I can see some."

"How do you get away from the claws?"

"The claws?"

"The round things. That run and burrow."

"I don't understand."

Maybe there weren't any claws around. A lot of areas were free. They collected mostly around bunkers, where there were people. The claws had been designed to sense warmth, warmth of living things.

"You're lucky." Hendricks straightened up. "Well? Which way are you going? Back—back there?"

"Can I come with you?"

"With *me?*" Hendricks folded his arms. "I'm going a long way. Miles. I have to hurry." He looked at his watch. "I have to get there by nightfall."

"I want to come."

Hendricks fumbled in his pack. "It isn't worth it. Here." He tossed down the food cans he had with him. "You take these and go back. Okay?"

The boy said nothing.

"I'll be coming back this way. In a day or so. If you're around here when I come back you can come along with me. All right?"

"I want to go with you now."

"It's a long walk."

"I can walk."

Hendricks shifted uneasily. It made too good a target, two people walking along. And the boy would slow him down. But he might not come back this way. And if the boy were really all alone—

"Okay. Come along."

The boy fell in beside him. Hendricks strode along. The boy walked silently, clutching his teddy bear.

"What's your name?" Hendricks said, after a time.

"David Edward Derring."

"David? What—what happened to your mother and father?"

"They died."

"How?"

"In the blast."

"How long ago?"

"Six years."

Hendricks slowed down. "You've been alone six years?"

"No. There were other people for awhile. They went away."

"And you've been alone since?"

"Yes."

Hendricks glanced down. The boy was strange, saying very little. Withdrawn. But that was the way they were, the children who had survived. Quiet. Stoic. A strange kind of fatalism gripped them. Nothing came as a surprise. They accepted anything that came along. There was no longer any *normal*, any natural course of things, moral or physical, for them to expect. Custom, habit, all the determining forces of learning were gone; only brute experience remained.

"Am I walking too fast?" Hendricks said.

"No."

"How did you happen to see me?"

"I was waiting."

"Waiting?" Hendricks was puzzled. "What were you waiting for?"

"To catch things."

"What kind of things?"

"Things to eat."

"Oh." Hendricks set his lips grimly. A thirteen year old boy, living on rats and gophers and half-rotten canned food. Down in a hole under the ruins of a town. With radiation pools and claws, and Russian dive-mines up above, coasting around in the sky.

"Where are we going?" David asked.

"To the Russian lines."

"Russian?"

"The enemy. The people who started the war. They dropped the first radiation bombs. They began all this."

The boy nodded. His face showed no expression.

"I'm an American," Hendricks said.

There was no comment. On they went, the two of them, Hendricks walking a little ahead, David trailing behind him, hugging his dirty teddy bear against his chest.

About four in the afternoon they stopped to eat. Hendricks built a fire in a hollow between some slabs of concrete. He cleared the weeds away and heaped up bits of wood. The Russians' lines were not very far ahead. Around him was what had once been a long valley, acres of fruit trees and grapes. Nothing remained now but a few bleak

stumps and the mountains that stretched across the horizon at the far end. And the clouds of rolling ash that blew and drifted with the wind, settling over the weeds and remains of buildings, walls here and there, once in awhile what had been a road.

Hendricks made coffee and heated up some boiled mutton and bread. "Here." He handed bread and mutton to David. David squatted by the edge of the fire, his knees knobby and white. He examined the food and then passed it back, shaking his head.

"No."

"No? Don't you want any?"

"No."

Hendricks shrugged. Maybe the boy was a mutant, used to special food. It didn't matter. When he was hungry he would find something to eat. The boy was strange. But there were many strange changes coming over the world. Life was not the same, anymore. It would never be the same again. The human race was going to have to realize that.

"Suit yourself," Hendricks said. He ate the bread and mutton by himself, washing it down with coffee. He ate slowly, findnig the food hard to digest. When he was done he got to his feet and stamped the fire out.

David rose slowly, watching him with his young-old eyes.

"We're going," Hendricks said.

"All right."

Hendricks walked along, his gun in his arms. They were close; he was tense, ready for anything. The Russians should be expecting a runner, an answer to their own runner, but they were tricky. There was always the possibility of a slipup. He scanned the landscape around him. Nothing but slag and ash, a few hills, charred trees. Concrete walls. But someplace ahead was the first bunker of the Russian lines, the forward command. Underground, buried deep, with only a periscope showing, a few gun muzzles. Maybe an antenna.

"Will we be there soon?" David asked.

"Yes. Getting tired?"

"No."

"Why, then?"

David did not answer. He plodded carefully along behind, picking his way over the ash. His legs and shoes were gray with dust. His pinched face was streaked, lines of gray ash in riverlets down the pale white of his skin. There was no color to his face. Typical of the new children, growing up in cellars and sewers and underground shelters.

Hendricks slowed down. He lifted his fieldglasses and studied

the ground ahead of him. Were they there, someplace, waiting for him? Watching him, the way his men had watched the Russian runner? A chill went up his back. Maybe they were getting their guns ready, preparing to fire, the way his men had prepared, made ready to kill.

Hendricks stopped, wiping perspiration from his face. "Damn." It made him uneasy. But he should be expected. The situation was different.

He strode over the ash, holding his gun tightly with both hands. Behind him came David. Hendricks peered around, tight-lipped. Any second it might happen A burst of white light, a blast, carefully aimed from inside a deep concrete bunker.

He raised his arm and waved it around in a circle.

Nothing moved. To the right a long ridge ran, topped with dead tree trunks. A few wild vines had grown up around the trees, remains of arbors. And the eternal dark weeds. Hendricks studied the ridge. Was anything up there? Perfect place for a lookout. He approached the ridge warily, David coming silently behind. If it were his command he'd have a sentry up there, watching for troops trying to infiltrate into the command area. Of course, if it were his command there would be the claws around the area for full protection.

He stopped, feet apart, hands on his hips.

"Are we there?" David said.

"Almost."

"Why have we stopped?"

"I don't want to take any chances." Hendricks advanced slowly. Now the ridge lay directly beside him, along his right. Overlooking him. His uneasy feeling increased If an Ivan were up there he wouldn't have a chance. He waved his arm again. They should be expecting someone in the UN uniform, in response to the note capsule. Unless the whole thing was a trap.

"Keep up with me." He turned toward David. "Don't drop behind."

"With you?"

"Up beside me! We're close. We can't take any chances. Come on."

"I'll be all right." David remained behind him, in the rear, a few paces away, still clutching his teddy bear.

"Have it your way." Hendricks raised his glasses again, suddenly tense. For a moment—had something moved? He scanned the ridge carefully. Everything was silent. Dead. No life up there, only tree trunks and ash. Maybe a few rats. The big black rats that had survived the claws. Mutants—built their own shelters out of saliva and ash. Some

kind of plaster. Adaptation. He started forward again.

A tall figure came out on the ridge above him, cloak flapping. Gray-green. A Russian. Behind him a second soldier appeared, another Russian. Both lifted their guns, aiming.

Hendricks froze. He opened his mouth. The soldiers were kneeling, sighting down the side of the slope. A third figure had joined them on the ridge top, a smaller figure in gray-green. A woman. She stood behind the other two.

Hendricks found his voice. "Stop!" He waved up at them frantically. "I'm—"

The two Russians fired. Behind Hendricks there was a faint *pop*. Waves of heat lapped against him, throwing him to the ground. Ash tore at his face, grinding into his eyes and nose. Choking, he pulled himself to his knees. It was all a trap. He was finished. He had come to be killed, like a steer. The soldiers and the woman were coming down the side of the ridge toward him, sliding down through the soft ash. Hendricks was numb. His head throbbed. Awkwardly, he got his rifle up and took aim. It weighed a thousand tons; he could hardly hold it. His nose and cheeks stung. The air was full of the blast smell, a bitter acrid stench.

"Don't fire," the first Russian said, in heavily accented English.

The three of them came up to him, surrounding him. "Put down your rifle, Yank," the other said.

Hendricks was dazed. Everything had happened so fast. He had been caught. And they had blasted the boy. He turned his head. David was gone. What remained of him was strewn across the ground.

The three Russians studied him curiously. Hendricks sat, wiping blood from his nose, picking out bits of ash. He shook his head, trying to clear it. "Why did you do it?" he murmured thickly. "The boy."

"Why?" One of the soldiers helped him roughly to his feet. He turned Hendricks around. "Look."

Hendricks closed his eyes.

"Look!" The two Russians pulled him forward. "See. Hurry up. There isn't much time to spare, Yank!"

Hendricks looked. And gasped.

"See now? Now do you understand?"

From the remains of David a metal wheel rolled. Relays, glinting metal. Parts, wiring. One of the Russians kicked at the heap of remains. Parts popped out, rolling away, wheels and

springs and rods. A plastic section fell in, half charred. Hendricks bent shakily down. The front of the head had come off. He could make out the intricate brain, wires and relays, tiny tubes and switches, thousands of minute studs—

"A robot," the soldier holding his arm said. "We watched it tagging you."

"Tagging me?"

"That's their way. They tag along with you. Into the bunker. That's how they get in."

Hendricks blinked, dazed. "But—"

"Come on." They led him toward the ridge. "We can't stay here. It isn't safe. There must be hundreds of them all around here."

The three of them pulled him up the side of the ridge, sliding and slipping on the ash. The woman reached the top and stood waiting for them.

"The forward command," Hendricks muttered. "I came to negotiate with the Soviet—"

"There is no more forward command. *They* got in. We'll explain." They reached the top of the ridge. "We're all that's left. The three of us. The rest were down in the bunker."

"This way. Down this way." The woman unscrewed a lid, a gray manhole cover set in the ground. "Get in."

Hendricks lowered himself. The two soldiers and the woman came behind him, following him down the ladder. The woman closed the lid after them, bolting it tightly into place.

"Good thing we saw you," one of the two soldiers grunted. "It had tagged you about as far as it was going to."

"Give me one of your cigarettes," the woman said. "I haven't had an American cigarette for weeks."

Hendricks pushed the pack to her. She took a cigarette and passed the pack to the two soldiers. In the corner of the small room the lamp gleamed fitfully. The room was low-ceilinged, cramped. The four of them sat around a small wood table. A few dirty dishes were stacked to one side. Behind a ragged curtain a second room was partly visible. Hendricks saw the corner of a cot, some blankets, clothes hung on a hook.

"We were here," the soldier beside him said. He took off his helmet, pushing his blond hair back. "I'm Corporal Rudi Maxer. Polish. Impressed in the Soviet Army two years ago." He held out his hand.

Hendricks hesitated and then shook. "Major Joseph Hendricks."

"Klaus Epstein." The other

soldier shook with him, a small dark man with thinning hair. Epstein plucked nervously at his ear. "Austrian. Impressed God knows when. I don't remember. The three of us were here, Rudi and I, with Tasso." He indicated the woman. "That's how we escaped. All the rest were down in the bunker."

"And—and *they* got in?"

Epstein lit a cigarette. "First just one of them. The kind that tagged you. Then it let others in."

Hendricks became alert. "The *kind?* Are there more than one kind?"

"The little boy. David. David holding his teddy bear. That's Variety Three. The most effective."

"What are the other types?"

Epstein reached into his coat. "Here." He tossed a packet of photographs onto the table, tied with a string. "Look for yourself."

Hendricks untied the string.

"You see," Rudi Maxer said, "that was why we wanted to talk terms. The Russians, I mean. We found out about a week ago. Found out that your claws were beginning to make up new designs on their own. New types of their own. Better types. Down in your underground factories behind our lines. You let them stamp themselves, repair themselves. Made them more and more intricate. It's your fault this happened."

Hendricks examined the photos. They had been snapped hurriedly; they were blurred and indistinct. The first few showed— David. David walking along a road, by himself. David and another David. Three Davids. All exactly alike. Each with a ragged teddy bear.

All pathetic.

"Look at the others," Tasso said.

The next pictures, taken at a great distance, showed a towering wounded soldier sitting by the side of a path, his arm in a sling, the stump of one leg extended, a crude crutch on his lap. Then two wounded soldiers, both the same, standing side by side.

"That's Variety One. The Wounded Soldier." Klaus reached out and took the pictures. "You see, the claws were designed to get to human beings. To find them. Each kind was better than the last. They got farther, closer, past most of our defenses, into our lines. But as long as they were merely *machines*, metal spheres with claws and horns, feelers, they could be picked off like any other object. They could be detected as lethal robots as soon as they

were seen. Once we caught sight of them—"

"Variety One subverted our whole north wing," Rudi said. "It was a long time before anyone caught on. Then it was too late. They came in, wounded soldiers, knocking and begging to be let in. So we let them in. And as soon as they were in they took over. We were watching out for machines . . ."

"At that time it was thought there was only the one type," Klaus Epstein said. "No one suspected there were other types. The pictures were flashed to us. When the runner was sent to you, we knew of just one type. Variety One. The big Wounded Soldier. We thought that was all."

"Your line fell to—"

"To Variety Three. David and his bear. That worked even better." Klaus smiled bitterly. "Soldiers are suckers for children. We brought them in and tried to feed them. We found out the hard way what they were after. At least, those who were in the bunker."

"The three of us were lucky," Rudi said. "Klaus and I were—were visiting Tasso when it happened. This is her place." He waved a big hand around. "This little cellar. We finished and climbed the ladder to start back. From the ridge we saw. There they were, all around the bunker. Fighting was still going on. David and his bear. Hundreds of them. Klaus took the pictures."

Klaus tied up the photographs again.

"And it's going on all along your line?" Hendricks said.

"Yes."

"How about *our* lines?" Without thinking, he touched the tab on his arm. "Can they—"

"They're not bothered by your radiation tabs. It makes no difference to them, Russian, American, Pole, German. It's all the same. They're doing what they were designed to do. Carrying out the original idea. They track down life, wherever they find it."

"They go by warmth," Klaus said. "That was the way you constructed them from the very start. Of course, those you designed were kept back by the radiation tabs you wear. Now they've got around that. These new varieties are lead-lined."

"What's the other variety?" Hendricks asked. "The David type, the Wounded Soldier—what's the other?"

"We don't know." Klaus pointed up at the wall. On the wall were two metal plates, ragged at the edges. Hendricks got up and studied them. They were bent and dented.

"The one on the left came off

a Wounded Soldier," Rudi said. "We got one of them. It was going along toward our old bunker. We got it from the ridge, the same way we got the David tagging you."

The plate was stamped: I-V. Hendricks touched the other plate. "And this came from the David type?"

"Yes." The plate was stamped: III-V.

Klaus took a look at them, leaning over Hendricks' broad shoulder. "You can see what we're up against. There's another type. Maybe it was abandoned. Maybe it didn't work. But there must be a Second Variety. There's One and Three."

"You were lucky," Rudi said. "The David tagged you all the way here and never touched you. Probably thought you'd get it into a bunker, somewhere."

"One gets in and it's all over," Klaus said. "They move fast. One lets all the rest inside. They're inflexible. Machines with one purpose. They were built for only one thing." He rubbed sweat from his lip. "We saw."

They were silent.

"Let me have another cigarette, Yank," Tasso said. "They are good. I almost forgot how they were."

It was night. The sky was black. No stars were visible through the rolling clouds of ash. Klaus lifted the lid cautiously so that Hendricks could look out.

Rudi pointed into the darkness. "Over that way are the bunkers. Where we used to be. Not over half a mile from us. It was just chance Klaus and I were not there when it happened. Weakness. Saved by our lusts."

"All the rest must be dead," Klaus said in a low voice. "It came quickly. This morning the Politburo reached their decision. They notified us—forward command. Our runner was sent out at once. We saw him start toward the direction of your lines. We covered him until he was out of sight."

"Alex Radrivsky. We both knew him. He disappeared about six o'clock. The sun had just come up. About noon Klaus and I had an hour relief. We crept off, away from the bunkers. No one was watching. We came here. There used to be a town here, a few houses, a street. This cellar was part of a big farmhouse. We knew Tasso would be here, hiding down in her little place. We had come here before. Others from the bunkers came here. Today happened to be our turn."

"So we were saved," Klaus said. "Chance. It might have

been others. We—we finished, and then we came up to the surface and started back along the ridge. That was when we saw them, the Davids. We understood right away. We had seen the photos of the First Variety, the Wounded Soldier. Our Commissar distributed them to us with an explanation. If we had gone another step they would have seen us. As it was we had to blast two Davids before we got back. There were hundreds of them, all around. Like ants. We took pictures and slipped back here, bolting the lid tight."

"They're not so much when you catch them alone. We moved faster than they did. But they're inexorable. Not like living things. They came right at us. And we blasted them."

Major Hendricks rested against the edge of the lid, adjusting his eyes to the darkness. "Is it safe to have the lid up at all?"

"If we're careful. How else can you operate your transmitter?"

Hendricks lifted the small belt transmitter slowly. He pressed it against his ear. The metal was cold and damp. He blew against the mike, raising up the short antenna. A faint hum sounded in his ear. "That's true, I suppose."

But he still hesitated.

"We'll pull you under if anything happens," Klaus said.

"Thanks." Hendricks waited a moment, resting the transmitter against his shoulder. "Interesting, isn't it?"

"What?"

"This, the new types. The new varieties of claws. We're completely at their mercy, aren't we? By now they've probably gotten into the UN lines, too. It makes me wonder if we're not seeing the beginning of a new species. *The* new species. Evolution. The race to come after man."

Rudi grunted. "There is no race after man."

"No? Why not? Maybe we're seeing it now the end of human beings, the beginning of the new society."

"They're not a race. They're mechanical killers. You made them to destroy. That's all they can do. They're machines with a job."

"So it seems now. But how about later on? After the war is over. Maybe, when there aren't any humans to destroy, their real potentialities will begin to show."

"You talk as if they were alive!"

"Aren't they?"

There was silence. "They're machines," Rudi said. "They

look like people, but they're machines."

"Use your transmitter, Major," Klaus said. "We can't stay up here forever."

Holding the transmitter tightly Hendricks called the code of the command bunker. He waited, listening. No response. Only silence. He checked the leads carefully. Everything was in place.

"Scott!" he said into the mike. "Can you hear me?"

Silence. He raised the gain up full and tried again. Only static.

"I don't get anything. They may hear me but they may not want to answer."

"Tell them it's an emergency."

"They'll think I'm being forced to call. Under your direction." He tried again, outlining briefly what he had learned. But still the phone was silent, except for the faint static.

"Radiation pools kill most transmission," Klaus said, after awhile. "Maybe that's it."

Hendricks shut the transmitter up. "No use. No answer. Radiation pools? Maybe. Or they hear me, but won't answer. Frankly, that's what I would do, if a runner tried to call from the Soviet lines. They have no reason to believe such a story. They may hear everything I say—"

"Or maybe it's too late."

Hendricks nodded.

"We better get the lid down," Rudi said nervously. "We don't want to take unnecessary chances."

They climbed slowly back down the tunnel. Klaus bolted the lid carefully into place. They descended into the kitchen. The air was heavy and close around them.

"Could they work that fast?" Hendricks said. "I left the bunker this noon. Ten hours ago. How could they move so quickly?"

"It doesn't take them long. Not after the first one gets in. It goes wild. You know what the little claws can do. Even *one* of these is beyond belief. Razors, each finger. Maniacal."

"All right." Hendricks moved away impatiently. He stood with his back to them.

"What's the matter?" Rudi said.

"The Moon Base. God, if they've gotten there—"

"The Moon Base?"

Hendricks turned around. "They couldn't have got to the Moon Base. How would they get there? It isn't possible. I can't believe it."

"What is this Moon Base? We've heard rumors, but nothing definite. What is the actual situation? You seem concerned."

"We're supplied from the

moon. The governments are there, under the lunar surface. All our people and industries. That's what keeps us going. If they should find some way of getting off Terra, onto the moon—"

"It only takes one of them. Once the first one gets in it admits the others. Hundreds of them, all alike. You should have seen them. Identical. Like ants."

"Perfect socialism," Tasso said. "The ideal of the communist state. All citizens interchangeable."

Klaus grunted angrily. "That's enough. Well? What next?"

Hendricks paced back and forth, around the small room. The air was full of smells of food and perspiration. The others watched him. Presently Tasso pushed through the curtain, into the other room. "I'm going to take a nap."

The curtain closed behind her. Rudi and Klaus sat down at the table, still watching Hendricks. "It's up to you," Klaus said. "We don't know your situation."

Hendricks nodded.

"It's a problem." Rudi drank some coffee, filling his cup from a rusty pot. "We're safe here for awhile, but we can't stay here forever. Not enough food or supplies."

"But if we go outside—"

"If we go outside they'll get us. Or probably they'll get us. We couldn't go very far. How far is your command bunker, Major?"

"Three or four miles."

"We might make it. The four of us. Four of us could watch all sides. They couldn't slip up behind us and start tagging us. We have three rifles, three blast rifles. Tasso can have my pistol." Rudi tapped his belt. "In the Soviet army we didn't have shoes always, but we had guns. With all four of us armed one of us might get to your command bunker. Preferably you, Major."

"What if they're already there?" Klaus said.

Rudi shrugged. "Well, then we come back here."

Hendricks stopped pacing. "What do you think the chances are they're already in the American lines?"

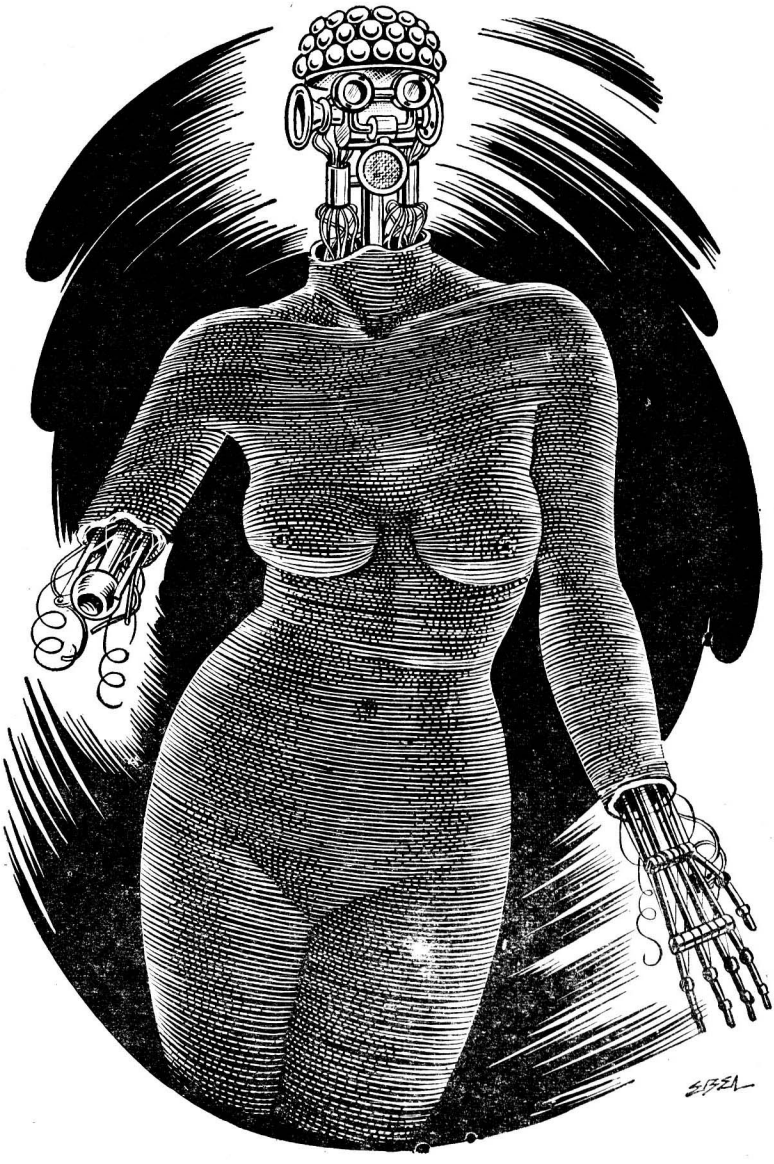
"Hard to say. Fairly good. They're organized. They know exactly what they're doing. Once they start they go like a horde of locusts. They have to keep moving, and fast. It's secrecy and speed they depend on. Surprise. They push their way in before anyone has any idea."

"I see," Hendricks murmured.

From the other room Tasso stirred. "Major?"

Hendricks pushed the curtain back. "What?"

Tasso looked up at him lazily


SIBEL

from the cot. "Have you any more American cigarettes left?"

Hendricks went into the room and sat down across from her, on a wood stool. He felt in his pockets. "No. All gone."

"Too bad."

"What nationality are you?" Hendricks asked after awhile.

"Russian."

"How did you get here?"

"Here?"

"This used to be France. This was part of Normandy. Did you come with the Soviet army?"

"Why?"

"Just curious." He studied her. She had taken off her coat, tossing it over the end of the cot. She was young, about twenty. Slim. Her long hair stretched out over the pillow. She was staring at him silently, her eyes dark and large.

"What's on your mind?" Tasso said.

"Nothing. How old are you?"

"Eighteen." She continued to watch him, unblinking, her arms behind her head. She had on Russian army pants and shirt. Gray-green. Thick leather belt with counter and cartridges. Medicine kit.

"You're in the Soviet army?"

"No."

"Where did you get the uniform?"

She shrugged. "It was given to me," she told him.

"How—how old were you when you came here?"

"Sixteen."

"That young?"

Her eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Hendricks rubbed his jaw. "Your life would have been a lot different if there had been no war. Sixteen. You came here at sixteen. To live this way."

"I had to survive."

"I'm not moralizing."

"Your life would have been different, too," Tasso murmured. She reached down and unfastened one of her boots. She kicked the boot off, onto the floor. "Major, do you want to go in the other room? I'm sleepy."

"It's going to be a problem, the four of us here. It's going to be hard to live in these quarters. Are there just the two rooms?"

"Yes."

"How big was the cellar originally? Was it larger than this? Are there other rooms filled up with debris? We might be able to open one of them."

"Perhaps. I really don't know." Tasso loosened her belt. She made herself comfortable on the cot, unbuttoning her shirt. "You're sure you have no more cigarettes?"

"I had only the one pack."

"Too bad. Maybe if we get back to your bunker we can find

some." The other boot fell. Tasso reached up for the light cord. "Good night."

"You're going to sleep?"

"That's right."

The room plunged into darkness. Hendricks got up and made his way past the curtain, into the kitchen.

And stopped, rigid.

Rudi stood against the wall, his face white and gleaming. His mouth opened and closed but no sounds came. Klaus stood in front of him, the muzzle of his pistol in Rudi's stomach. Neither of them moved. Klaus, his hand tight around his gun, his features set. Rudi, pale and silent, spread-eagled against the wall.

"What—" Hendricks muttered, but Klaus cut him off.

"Be quiet, Major. Come over here. Your gun. Get out your gun."

Hendricks drew his pistol. "What is it?"

"Cover him." Klaus motioned him forward. "Beside me. Hurry!"

Rudi moved a little, lowering his arms. He turned to Hendricks, licking his lips. The whites of his eyes shone wildly. Sweat dripped from his forehead, down his cheeks. He fixed his gaze on Hendricks. "Major, he's gone insane. Stop him." Rudi's voice was thin and hoarse, almost inaudible.

"What's going on?" Hendricks demanded.

Without lowering his pistol Klaus answered. "Major, remember our discussion? The Three Varieties? We knew about One and Three. But we didn't know about Two. At least, we didn't know before." Klaus' fingers tightened around the gun butt. "We didn't know before, but we know now."

He pressed the trigger. A burst of white heat rolled out of the gun, licking around Rudi.

"Major, this is the Second Variety."

Tasso swept the curtain aside. "Klaus! What did you do?"

Klaus turned from the charred form, gradually sinking down the wall onto the floor. "The Second Variety, Tasso. Now we know. We have all three types identified. The danger is less. I—"

Tasso stared past him at the remains of Rudi, at the blackened, smouldering fragments and bits of cloth. "You killed him."

"Him? *It*, you mean. I was watching. I had a feeling, but I wasn't sure. At least, I wasn't sure before. But this evening I was certain." Klaus rubbed his pistol butt nervously. "We're lucky. Don't you understand? Another hour and it might—"

"You were *certain?*" Tasso

pushed past him and bent down, over the steaming remains on the floor. Her face became hard. "Major, see for yourself. Bones. Flesh."

Hendricks bent down beside her. The remains were human remains. Seared flesh, charred bone fragments, part of a skull. Ligaments, viscera, blood. Blood forming a pool against the wall.

"No wheels," Tasso said calmly. She straightened up. "No wheels, no parts, no relays. Not a claw. Not the Second Variety." She folded her arms. "You're going to have to be able to explain this."

Klaus sat down at the table, all the color drained suddenly from his face. He put his head in his hands and rocked back and forth.

"Snap out of it." Tasso's fingers closed over his shoulder. "Why did you do it? Why did you kill him?"

"He was frightened," Hendricks said. "All this, the whole thing, building up around us."

"Maybe."

"What, then? What do you think?"

"I think he may have had a reason for killing Rudi. A good reason."

"What reason?"

"Maybe Rudi learned something."

Hendricks studied her bleak face. "About what?" he asked.

"About him. About Klaus."

Klaus looked up quickly. "You can see what she's trying to say. She thinks I'm the Second Variety. Don't you see, Major? Now she wants you to believe I killed him on purpose. That I'm—"

"Why did you kill him, then?" Tasso said.

"I told you." Klaus shook his head wearily. "I thought he was a claw. I thought I knew."

"Why?"

"I had been watching him. I was suspicious."

"Why?"

"I thought I had seen something. Heard something. I thought I—" He stopped.

"Go on."

"We were sitting at the table. Playing cards. You two were in the other room. It was silent. I thought I heard him—*whirr.*"

There was silence.

"Do you believe that?" Tasso said to Hendricks.

"Yes. I believe what he says."

"I don't. I think he killed Rudi for a good purpose." Tasso touched the rifle, resting in the corner of the room. "Major—"

"No." Hendricks shook his head. "Let's stop it right now. One is enough. We're afraid, the way he was. If we kill him we'll be doing what he did to Rudi."

Klaus looked gratefully up at

him. "Thanks. I was afraid. You understand, don't you? Now she's afraid, the way I was. She wants to kill me."

"No more killing." Hendricks moved toward the end of the ladder. "I'm going above and try the transmitter once more. If I can't get them we're moving back toward my lines tomorrow morning."

Klaus rose quickly. "I'll come up with you and give you a hand."

The night air was cold. The earth was cooling off. Klaus took a deep breath, filling his lungs. He and Hendricks stepped onto the ground, out of the tunnel. Klaus planted his feet wide apart, the rifle up, watching and listening. Hendricks crouched by the tunnel mouth, tuning the small transmitter.

"Any luck?" Klaus asked presently.

"Not yet."

"Keep trying. Tell them what happened."

Hendricks kept trying. Without success. Finally he lowered the antenna. "It's useless. They can't hear me. Or they hear me and won't answer. Or—"

"Or they don't exist."

"I'll try once more." Hendricks raised the antenna. "Scott, can you hear me? Come in!"

He listened. There was only static. Then, still very faintly—

"This is Scott."

His fingers tightened. "Scott! Is it you?"

"This is Scott."

Klaus squatted down. "Is it your command?"

"Scott, listen. Do you understand? About them, the claws. Did you get my message? Did you hear me?"

"Yes." Faintly. Almost inaudible. He could hardly make out the word.

"You got my message? Is everything all right at the bunker? None of them have got in?"

"Everything is all right."

"Have they tried to get in?"

The voice was weaker.

"No."

Hendricks turned to Klaus. "They're all right."

"Have they been attacked?"

"No." Hendricks pressed the phone tighter to his ear. "Scott, I can hardly hear you. Have you notified the Moon Base? Do they know? Are they alerted?"

No answer.

"Scott! Can you hear me?"

Silence.

Hendricks relaxed, sagging. "Faded out. Must be radiation pools."

Hendricks and Klaus looked at each other. Neither of them said anything. After a time Klaus said, "Did it sound like any of

your men? Could you identify the voice?"

"It was too faint."

"You couldn't be certain?"

"No."

"Then it could have been—"

"I don't know. Now I'm not sure. Let's go back down and get the lid closed."

They climbed back down the ladder slowly, into the warm cellar. Klaus bolted the lid behind them. Tasso waited for them, her face expressionless.

"Any luck?" she asked.

Neither of them answered. "Well?" Klaus said at last. "What do you think, Major? Was it your officer, or was it one of *them?*"

"I don't know."

"Then we're just where we were before."

Hendricks stared down at the floor, his jaw set. "We'll have to go. To be sure."

"Anyhow, we have food here for only a few weeks. We'd have to go up after that, in any case."

"Apparently so."

"What's wrong?" Tasso demanded. "Did you get across to your bunker? What's the matter?"

"It may have been one of my men," Hendricks said slowly. "Or it may have been one of *them.* But we'll never know standing here." He examined his watch. "Let's turn in and get some sleep. We want to be up early tomorrow."

"Early?"

"Our best chance to get through the claws should be early in the morning," Hendricks said.

The morning was crisp and clear. Major Hendricks studied the countryside through his field-glasses.

"See anything?" Klaus said.

"No."

"Can you make out our bunkers?"

"Which way?"

"Here." Klaus took the glasses and adjusted them. "I know where to look." He looked a long time, silently.

Tasso came to the top of the tunnel and stepped up onto the ground. "Anything?"

"No." Klaus passed the glasses back to Hendricks. "They're out of sight. Come on. Let's not stay here."

The three of them made their way down the side of the ridge, sliding in the soft ash. Across a flat rock a lizard scuttled. They stopped instantly, rigid.

"What was it?" Klaus muttered.

"A lizard."

The lizard ran on, hurrying through the ash. It was exactly the same color as the ash.

"Perfect adaptation," Klaus

said. "Proves we were right. Lysenko, I mean."

They reached the bottom of the ridge and stopped, standing close together, looking around them.

"Let's go." Hendricks started off. "It's a good long trip, on foot."

Klaus fell in beside him. Tasso walked behind, her pistol held alertly. "Major, I've been meaning to ask you something," Klaus said. "How did you run across the David? The one that was tagging you."

"I met it along the way. In some ruins."

"What did it say?"

"Not much. It said it was alone. By itself."

"You couldn't tell it was a machine? It talked like a living person? You never suspected?"

"It didn't say much. I noticed nothing unusual.

"It's strange, machines so much like people that you can be fooled. Almost alive. I wonder where it'll end."

"They're doing what you Yanks designed them to do," Tasso said. "You designed them to hunt out life and destroy. Human life. Wherever they find it."

Hendricks was watching Klaus intently. "Why did you ask me? What's on your mind?"

"Nothing," Klaus answered.

"Klaus thinks you're the Second Variety," Tasso said calmly, from behind them. "Now he's got his eye on you."

Klaus flushed. "Why not? We sent a runner to the Yank lines and he comes back. Maybe he thought he'd find some good game here."

Hendricks laughed harshly. "I came from the UN bunkers. There were human beings all around me."

"Maybe you saw an opportunity to get into the Soviet lines. Maybe you saw your chance. Maybe you—"

"The Soviet lines had already been taken over. Your lines had been invaded before I left my command bunker. Don't forget that."

Tasso came up beside him. "That proves nothing at all, Major."

"Why not?"

"There appears to be little communication between the varieties. Each is made in a different factory. They don't seem to work together. You might have started for the Soviet lines without knowing anything about the work of the other varieties. Or even what the other varieties were like."

"How do you know so much about the claws?" Hendricks said.

"I've seen them. I've observed

them. I observed them take over the Soviet bunkers."

"You know quite a lot," Klaus said. "Actually, you saw very little. Strange that you should have been such an acute observer."

Tasso laughed. "Do you suspect me, now?"

"Forget it," Hendricks said. They walked on in silence.

"Are we going the whole way on foot?" Tasso said, after awhile. "I'm not used to walking." She gazed around at the plain of ash, stretching out on all sides of them, as far as they could see. "How dreary."

"It's like this all the way," Klaus said.

"In a way I wish you had been in your bunker when the attack came."

"Somebody else would have been with you, if not me," Klaus muttered.

Tasso laughed, putting her hands in her pockets. "I suppose so."

They walked on, keeping their eyes on the vast plain of silent ash around them.

The sun was setting. Hendricks made his way forward slowly, waving Tasso and Klaus back. Klaus squatted down, resting his gun butt against the ground.

Tasso found a concrete slab and sat down with a sigh. "It's good to rest."

"Be quiet," Klaus said sharply.

Hendricks pushed up to the top of the rise ahead of them. The same rise the Russian runner had come up, the day before. Hendricks dropped down, stretching himself out, peering through his glasses at what lay beyond.

Nothing was visible. Only ash and occasional trees. But there, not more than fifty yards ahead, was the entrance of the forward command bunker. The bunker from which he had come. Hendricks watched silently. No motion. No sign of life. Nothing stirred.

Klaus slithered up beside him. "Where is it?"

"Down there." Hendricks passed him the glasses. Clouds of ash rolled across the evening sky. The world was darkening. They had a couple of hours of light left, at the most. Probably not that much.

"I don't see anything," Klaus said.

"That tree there. The stump. By the pile of bricks. The entrance is to the right of the bricks."

"I'll have to take your word for it."

"You and Tasso cover me from here. You'll be able to sight all the way to the bunker entrance."

"You're going down alone?"

"With my wrist tab I'll be safe. The ground around the bunker is a living field of claws. They collect down in the ash. Like crabs. Without tabs you wouldn't have a chance."

"Maybe you're right."

"I'll walk slowly all the way. As soon as I know for certain—"

"If they're down inside the bunker you won't be able to get back up here. They go fast. You don't realize."

"What do you suggest?"

Klaus considered. "I don't know. Get them to come up to the surface. So you can see."

Hendricks brought his transmitter from his belt, raising the antenna. "Let's get started."

Klaus signalled to Tasso. She crawled expertly up the side of the rise to where they were sitting.

"He's going down alone," Klaus said. "We'll cover him from here. As soon as you see him start back, fire past him at once. They come quick."

"You're not very optimistic," Tasso said.

"No, I'm not."

Hendricks opened the breech of his gun, checking it carefully. "Maybe things are all right."

"You didn't see them. Hundreds of them. All the same. Pouring out like ants."

"I should be able to find out without going down all the way." Hendricks locked his gun, gripping it in one hand, the transmitter in the other. "Well, wish me luck."

Klaus put out his hand. "Don't go down until you're sure. Talk to them from up here. Make them show themselves."

Hendricks stood up. He stepped down the side of the rise.

A moment later he was walking slowly toward the pile of bricks and debris beside the dead tree stump. Toward the entrance of the forward command bunker.

Nothing stirred. He raised the transmitter, clicking it on. "Scott? Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"Scott! This is Hendricks. Can you hear me? I'm standing outside the bunker. You should be able to see me in the view sight."

He listened, the transmitter gripped tightly. No sound. Only static. He walked forward. A claw burrowed out of the ash and raced toward him. It halted a few feet away and then slunk off. A second claw appeared, one of the big ones with feelers. It moved toward him, studied him intently, and then fell in behind him, dogging respectfully after him, a few paces away. A moment later a second big claw joined it. Silently, the claws

trailed him, as he walked slowly toward the bunker.

Hendricks stopped, and behind him, the claws came to a halt. He was close, now. Almost to the bunker steps.

"Scott! Can you hear me? I'm standing right above you. Outside. On the surface. Are you picking me up?"

He waited, holding his gun against his side, the transmitter tightly to his ear. Time passed. He strained to hear, but there was only silence. Silence, and faint static.

Then, distantly, metallically—

"This is Scott."

The voice was neutral. Cold. He could not identify it. But the earphone was minute.

"Scott! Listen. I'm standing right above you. I'm on the surface, looking down into the bunker entrance."

"Yes."

"Can you see me?"

"Yes."

"Through the view sight? You have the sight trained on me?"

"Yes."

Hendricks pondered. A circle of claws waited quietly around him, gray-metal bodies on all sides of him. "Is everything all right in the bunker? Nothing unusual has happened?"

"Everything is all right."

"Will you come up to the surface? I want to see you for a moment." Hendricks took a deep breath. "Come up here with me. I want to talk to you."

"Come down."

"I'm giving you an order."

Silence.

"Are you coming?" Hendricks listened. There was no response. "I order you to come to the surface."

"Come down."

Hendricks set his jaw. "Let me talk to Leone."

There was a long pause. He listened to the static. Then a voice came, hard, thin, metallic. The same as the other. "This is Leone."

"Hendricks. I'm on the surface. At the bunker entrance. I want one of you to come up here."

"Come down."

"Why come down? I'm giving you an order!"

Silence. Hendricks lowered the transmitter. He looked carefully around him. The entrance was just ahead. Almost at his feet. He lowered the antenna and fastened the transmitter to his belt. Carefully, he gripped his gun with both hands. He moved forward, a step at a time. If they could see him they knew he was starting toward the entrance. He closed his eyes a moment.

Then he put his foot on the first step that led downward.

Two Davids came up at him, their faces identical and expressionless. He blasted them into particles. More came rushing silently up, a whole pack of them. All exactly the same.

Hendricks turned and raced back, away from the bunker, back toward the rise.

At the top of the rise Tasso and Klaus were firing down. The small claws were already streaking up toward them, shining metal spheres going fast, racing frantically through the ash. But he had no time to think about that. He knelt down, aiming at the bunker entrance, gun against his cheek. The Davids were coming out in groups, clutching their teddy bears, their thin knobby legs pumping as they ran up the steps to the surface. Hendricks fired into the main body of them. They burst apart, wheels and springs flying in all directions. He fired again, through the mist of particles.

A giant lumbering figure rose up in the bunker entrance, tall and swaying. Hendricks paused, amazed. A man, a soldier. With one leg, supporting himself with a crutch.

"Major!" Tasso's voice came. More firing. The huge figure moved forward, Davids swarming around it. Hendricks broke out of his freeze. The First Variety. The Wounded Soldier. He aimed and fired. The soldier burst into bits, parts and relays flying. Now many Davids were out on the flat ground, away from the bunker. He fired again and again, moving slowly back, half-crouching and aiming.

From the rise, Klaus fired down. The side of the rise was alive with claws making their way up. Hendricks retreated toward the rise, running and crouching. Tasso had left Klaus and was circling slowly to the right, moving away from the rise.

A David slipped up toward him, its small white face expressionless, brown hair hanging down in its eyes. It bent over suddenly, opening its arms. Its teddy bear hurtled down and leaped across the ground, bounding toward him. Hendricks fired. The bear and the David both dissolved. He grinned, blinking. It was like a dream.

"Up here!" Tasso's voice. Hendricks made his way toward her. She was over by some columns of concrete, walls of a ruined buiding. She was firing past him, with the hand pistol Klaus had given her.

"Thanks." He joined her, grasping for breath. She pulled him back, behind the concrete, fumbling at her belt.

"Close your eyes!" She unfastened a globe from her waist.

Rapidly, she unscrewed the cap, locking it into place. "Close your eyes and get down."

She threw the bomb. It sailed in an arc, an expert, rolling and bouncing to the entrance of the bunker. Two Wounded Soldiers stood uncertainly by the brick pile. More Davids poured from behind them, out onto the plain. One of the Wounded Soldiers moved toward the bomb, stooping awkwardly down to pick it up.

The bomb went off. The concussion whirled Hendricks around, throwing him on his face. A hot wind rolled over him. Dimly he saw Tasso standing behind the columns, firing slowly and methodically at the Davids coming out of the raging clouds of white fire.

Back along the rise Klaus struggled with a ring of claws circling around him. He retreated, blasting at them and moving back, trying to break through the ring.

Hendricks struggled to his feet. His head ached. He could hardly see. Everything was licking at him, raging and whirling. His right arm would not move.

Tasso pulled back toward him. "Come on. Let's go."

"Klaus—He's still up there."

"Come on!" Tasso dragged Hendricks back, away from the columns. Hendricks shook his head, trying to clear it. Tasso led him rapidly away, her eyes intense and bright, watching for claws that had escaped the blast.

One David came out of the rolling clouds of flame. Tasso blasted it. No more appeared.

"But Klaus. What about him?" Hendricks stopped, standing unsteadily. "He—"

"Come on!"

They retreated, moving farther and farther away from the bunker. A few small claws followed them for a little while and then gave up, turning back and going off.

At last Tasso stopped. "We can stop here and get our breaths."

Hendricks sat down on some heaps of debris. He wiped his neck, gasping. "We left Klaus back there."

Tasso said nothing. She opened her gun, sliding a fresh round of blast cartridges into place.

Hendricks stared at her, dazed. "You left him back there on purpose."

Tasso snapped the gun together. She studied the heaps of rubble around them, her face expressionless. As if she were watching for something.

"What is it?" Hendrick demanded. "What are you looking for? Is something coming?" He

shook his head, trying to understand. What was she doing? What was she waiting for? He could see nothing. Ash lay all around them, ash and ruins. Occasional stark tree trunks, without leaves or branches. "What—"

Tasso cut him off. "Be still." Her eyes narrowed. Suddenly her gun came up. Hendricks turned, following her gaze.

Back the way they had come a figure appeared. The figure walked unsteadily toward them. Its clothes were torn. It limped as it made its way along, going very slowly and carefully. Stopping now and then, resting and getting its strength. Once it almost fell. It stood for a moment, trying to steady itself. Then it came on.

Klaus.

Hendricks stood up. "Klaus!" He started toward him. "How the hell did you—"

Tasso fired. Hendricks swung back. She fired again, the blast passing him, a searing line of heat. The beam caught Klaus in the chest. He exploded, gears and wheels flying. For a moment he continued to walk. Then he swayed back and forth. He crashed to the ground, his arms flung out. A few more wheels rolled away.

Silence.

Tasso turned to Hendricks. "Now you understand why he killed Rudi."

Hendricks sat down again slowly. He shook his head. He was numb. He could not think.

"Do you see?" Tasso said. "Do you understand?"

Hendricks said nothing. Everything was slipping away from him, faster and faster. Darkness, rolling and plucking at him.

He closed his eyes.

Hendricks opened his eyes slowly. His body ached all over. He tried to sit up but needles of pain shot through his arm and shoulder. He gasped.

"Don't try to get up," Tasso said. She bent down, putting her cold hand against his forehead.

It was night. A few stars glinted above, shining through the drifting clouds of ash. Hendricks lay back, his teeth locked. Tasso watched him impassively. She had built a fire with some wood and weeds. The fire licked feebly, hissing at a metal cup suspended over it. Everything was silent. Unmoving darkness, beyond the fire.

"So he was the Second Variety," Hendricks murmured.

"I had always thought so."

"Why didn't you destroy him

sooner?" she wanted to know.

"You held me back." Tasso crossed to the fire to look into the metal cup. "Coffee. It'll be ready to drink in awhile."

She came back and sat down beside him. Presently she opened her pistol and began to disassemble the firing mechanism, studying it intently.

"This is a beautiful gun," Tasso said, half-aloud. "The construction is superb."

"What about them? The claws."

"The concussion from the bomb put most of them out of action. They're delicate. Highly organized, I suppose."

"The Davids, too?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to have a bomb like that?"

Tasso shrugged. "We designed it. You shouldn't underestimate our technology, Major. Without such a bomb you and I would no longer exist."

"Very useful."

Tasso stretched out her legs, warming her feet in the heat of the fire. "It surprised me that you did not seem to understand, after he killed Rudi. Why did you think he—"

"I told you. I thought he was afraid."

"Really? You know, Major, for a little while I suspected you. Because you wouldn't let me kill him. I thought you might be protecting him." She laughed.

"Are we safe here?" Hendricks asked presently.

"For awhile. Until they get reinforcements from some other area." Tasso began to clean the interior of the gun with a bit of rag. She finished and pushed the mechanism back into place. She closed the gun, running her finger along the barrel.

"We were lucky," Hendricks murmured.

"Yes. Very lucky."

"Thanks for pulling me away."

Tasso did not answer. She glanced up at him, her eyes bright in the fire light. Hendricks examined his arm. He could not move his fingers. His whole side seemed numb. Down inside him was a dull steady ache.

"How do you feel?" Tasso asked.

"My arm is damaged."

"Anything else?"

"Internal injuries."

"You didn't get down when the bomb went off."

Hendricks said nothing. He watched Tasso pour the coffee from the cup into a flat metal pan. She brought it over to him.

"Thanks." He struggled up enough to drink. It was hard to swallow. His insides turned over and he pushed the pan away.

"That's all I can drink now."

Tasso drank the rest. Time passed. The clouds of ash moved across the dark sky above them. Hendricks rested, his mind blank. After awhile he became aware that Tasso was standing over him, gazing down at him.

"What is it?" he murmured.

"Do you feel any better?"

"Some."

"You know, Major, if I hadn't dragged you away they would have got you. You would be dead. Like Rudi."

"I know."

"Do you want to know why I brought you out? I could have left you. I could have left you there."

"Why did you bring me out?"

"Because we have to get away from here." Tasso stirred the fire with a stick, peering calmly down into it. "No human being can live here. When their reinforcements come we won't have a chance. I've pondered about it while you were unconscious. We have perhaps three hours before they come."

"And you expect me to get us away?"

"That's right. I expect you to get us out of here."

"Why me?"

"Because I don't know any way." Her eyes shone at him in the half-light, bright and steady. "If you can't get us out of here they'll kill us within three hours. I see nothing else ahead. Well, Major? What are you going to do? I've been waiting all night. While you were unconscious I sat here, waiting and listening. It's almost dawn. The night is almost over."

Hendricks considered. "It's curious," he said at last.

"Curious?"

"That you should think I can get us out of here. I wonder what you think I can do."

"Can you get us to the Moon Base?"

"The Moon Base? How?"

"There must be some way."

Hendricks shook his head. "No. There's no way that I know of."

Tasso said nothing. For a moment her steady gaze wavered. She ducked her head, turning abruptly away. She scrambled to her feet. "More coffee?"

"No."

"Suit yourself." Tasso drank silently. He could not see her face. He lay back against the ground, deep in thought, trying to concentrate. It was hard to think. His head still hurt. And the numbing daze still hung over him.

"There might be one way," he said suddenly.

"Oh?"

"How soon is dawn?"

"Two hours. The sun will be coming up shortly."

"There's supposed to be a ship near here. I've never seen it. But I know it exists."

"What kind of a ship?" Her voice was sharp.

"A rocket cruiser."

"Will it take us off? To the Moon Base?"

"It's supposed to. In case of emergency." He rubbed his forehead.

"What's wrong?"

"My head. It's hard to think. I can hardly—hardly concentrate. The bomb."

"Is the ship near here?" Tasso slid over beside him, settling down on her haunches. "How far is it? Where is it?"

"I'm trying to think."

Her fingers dug into his arm. "Nearby?" Her voice was like iron. "Where would it be? Would they store it underground? Hidden underground?"

"Yes. In a storage locker."

"How do we find it? Is it marked? Is there a code marker to identify it?"

Hendricks concentrated. "No. No markings. No code symbol."

"What, then?"

"A sign."

"What sort of sign?"

Hendricks did not answer. In the flickering light his eyes were glazed, two sightless orbs. Tasso's fingers dug into his arm.

"What sort of sign? What is it?"

"I—I can't think. Let me rest."

"All right." She let go and stood up. Hendricks lay back against the ground, his eyes closed. Tasso walked away from him, her hands in her pockets. She kicked a rock out of her way and stood staring up at the sky. The night blackness was already beginning to fade into gray. Morning was coming.

Tasso gripped her pistol and walked around the fire in a circle, back and forth. On the ground Major Hendricks lay, his eyes closed, unmoving. The grayness rose in the sky, higher and higher. The landscape became visible, fields of ash stretching out in all directions. Ash and ruins of buildings, a wall here and there, heaps of concrete, the naked trunk of a tree.

The air was cold and sharp. Somewhere a long way off a bird made a few bleak sounds.

Hendricks stirred. He opened his eyes. "Is it dawn? Already?"

"Yes."

Hendricks sat up a little. "You wanted to know something. You were asking me."

"Do you remember now?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" She tensed. "What?" she repeated sharply.

"A well. A ruined well. It's in a storage locker under a well."

"A well." Tasso relaxed. "Then we'll find a well." She looked at her watch. "We have about an hour, Major. Do you think we can find it in an hour?"

"Give me a hand up," Hendricks said.

Tasso put her pistol away and helped him to his feet. "This is going to be difficult."

"Yes it is." Hendricks set his lips tightly. "I don't think we're going to go very far."

They began to walk. The early sun cast a little warmth down on them. The land was flat and barren, stretching out gray and lifeless as far as they could see. A few birds sailed silently, far above them, circling slowly.

"See anything?" Hendricks said. "Any claws?"

"No. Not yet."

They passed through some ruins, upright concrete and bricks. A cement foundation. Rats scuttled away. Tasso jumped back warily.

"This used to be a town," Hendricks said. "A village. Provincial village. This was all grape country, once. Where we are now."

They came onto a ruined street, weeds and cracks crisscrossing it. Over to the right a stone chimney stuck up.

"Be careful," he warned her.

A pit yawned, an open basement. Ragged ends of pipes jutted up, twisted and bent. They passed part of a house, a bathtub turned on its side. A broken chair. A few spoons and bits of china dishes. In the center of the street the ground had sunk away. The depression was filled with weeds and debris and bones.

"Over here," Hendricks murmured.

"This way?"

"To the right."

They passed the remains of a heavy duty tank. Hendricks' belt counter clicked ominously. The tank had been radiation blasted. A few feet from the tank a mummified body lay sprawled out, mouth open. Beyond the road was a flat field. Stones and weeds, and bits of broken glass.

"There," Hendricks said.

A stone well jutted up, sagging and broken. A few boards lay across it. Most of the well had sunk into rubble. Hendricks walked unsteadily toward it, Tasso beside him.

"Are you certain about this?" Tasso said. "This doesn't look like anything."

"I'm sure." Hendricks sat down at the edge of the well, his teeth locked. His breath came quickly. He wiped perspiration from his face. "This was

arranged so the senior command officer could get away. If anything happened. If the bunker fell."

"That was you?"

"Yes."

"Where is the ship? Is it here?"

"We're standing on it." Hendricks ran his hands over the surface of the well stones. "The eye-lock responds to me, not to anybody else. It's my ship. Or it was supposed to be."

There was a sharp click. Presently they heard a low grating sound from below them.

"Step back," Hendricks said. He and Tasso moved away from the well.

A section of the ground slid back. A metal frame pushed slowly up through the ash, shoving bricks and weeds out of the way. The action ceased, as the ship nosed into view.

"There it is," Hendricks said.

The ship was small. It rested quietly, suspended in its mesh frame, like a blunt needle. A rain of ash sifted down into the dark cavity from which the ship had been raised. Hendricks made his way over to it. He mounted the mesh and unscrewed the hatch, pulling it back. Inside the ship the control banks and the pressure seat were visible.

Tasso came and stood beside him, gazing into the ship. "I'm not accustomed to rocket piloting," she said, after awhile.

Hendricks glanced at her. "I'll do the piloting."

"Will you? There's only one seat, Major. I can see it's built to carry only a single person."

Hendricks' breathing changed. He studied the interior of the ship intently. Tasso was right. There was only one seat. The ship was built to carry only one person. "I see," he said slowly. "And the one person is you."

She nodded.

"Of course."

"Why?"

"*You* can't go. You might not live through the trip. You're injured. You probably wouldn't get there."

"An interesting point. But you see, I know where the Moon Base is. And you don't. You might fly around for months and not find it. It's well hidden. Without knowing what to look for—"

"I'll have to take my chances. Maybe I won't find it. Not by myself. But I think you'll give me all the information I need. Your life depends on it."

"How?"

"If I find the Moon Base in time, perhaps I can get them to send a ship back to pick you up. *If* I find the Base in time. If not, then you haven't a chance. I imagine there are supplies on the

ship. They will last me long enough—"

Hendricks moved quickly. But his injured arm betrayed him. Tasso ducked, sliding lithely aside. Her hand came up, lightning fast. Hendricks saw the gun butt coming. He tried to ward off the blow, but she was too fast. The metal butt struck against the side of his head, just above his ear. Numbing pain rushed through him. Pain and rolling clouds of blackness. He sank down, sliding to the ground.

Dimly, he was aware that Tasso was standing over him, kicking him with her toe.

"Major! Wake up."

He opened his eyes, groaning.

"Listen to me." She bent down, the gun pointed at his face. "I have to hurry. There isn't much time left. The ship is ready to go, but you must tell me the information I need before I leave."

Hendricks shook his head, trying to clear it.

"Hurry up! Where is the Moon Base? How do I find it? What do I look for?"

Hendricks said nothing.

"Answer me!"

"Sorry."

"Major, the ship is loaded with provisions. I can coast for weeks. I'll find the Base eventually. And in a half hour you'll be dead. Your only chance of survival—" She broke off.

Along the slope, by some crumbling ruins, something moved. Something in the ash. Tasso turned quickly, aiming. She fired. A puff of flame leaped. Something scuttled away, rolling across the ash. She fired again. The claw burst apart, wheels flying.

"See?" Tasso said. "A scout. It won't be long."

"You'll bring them back here to get me?"

"Yes. As soon as possible."

Hendricks looked up at her. He studied her intently. "You're telling the truth?" A strange expression had come over his face, an avid hunger. "You will come back for me? You'll get me to the Moon Base?"

"I'll get you to the Moon Base. But tell me where it is! There's only a little time left."

"All right." Hendricks picked up a piece of rock, pulling himself to a sitting position. "Watch."

Hendricks began to scratch in the ash. Tasso stood by him watching the motion of the rock. Hendricks was sketching a crude lunar map.

"This is the Appenine range. Here is the Crater of Archimedes. The Moon Base is beyond the end of the Appenine, about two hundred miles. I don't know

exactly where. No one on Terra knows. But when you're over the Appenine, signal with one red flare and a green flare, followed by two red flares in quick succession. The Base monitor will record your signal. The Base is under the surface, of course. They'll guide you down with magnetic grapples."

"And the controls? Can I operate them?"

"The controls are virtually automatic. All you have to do is give the right signal at the right time."

"I will."

"The seat absorbs most of the take-off shock. Air and temperature are automatically controlled. The ship will leave Terra and pass out into free space. It'll line itself up with the moon, falling into an orbit around it, about a hundred miles above the surface. The orbit will carry you over the Base. When you're in the region of the Appenine, release the signal rockets."

Tasso slid into the ship and lowered herself into the pressure seat. The arm locks folded automatically around her. She fingered the controls. "Too bad you're not going, Major. All this put here for you, and you can't make the trip."

"Leave me the pistol."

Tasso pulled the pistol from her belt. She held it in her hand, weighing it thoughtfully. "Don't go too far from this location. It'll be hard to find you, as it is."

"No. I'll stay here by the well."

Tasso gripped the take-off switch, running her fingers over the smooth metal. "A beautiful ship, Major. Well built. I admire your workmanship. You people have always done good work. You build fine things. Your work, your creations, are your greatest achievement."

"Give me the pistol," Hendricks said impatiently, holding out his hand. He struggled to his feet.

"Good-bye, Major." Tasso tossed the pistol past Hendricks. The pistol clattered against the ground, bouncing and rolling away. Hendricks hurried after it. He bent down, snatching it up.

The hatch of the ship clanged shut. The bolts fell into place. Hendricks made his way back. The inner door was being sealed. He raised the pistol unsteadily.

There was a shattering roar. The ship burst up from its metal cage, fusing the mesh behind it. Hendricks cringed, pulling back. The ship shot up into the rolling clouds of ash, disappearing into the sky.

Hendricks stood watching a long time, until even the streamer had dissipated. Nothing stirred. The morning air was

chill and silent. He began to walk aimlessly back the way they had come. Better to keep moving around. It would be a long time before help came—if it came at all.

He searched his pockets until he found a package of cigarettes. He lit one grimly. They had all wanted cigarettes from him. But cigarettes were scarce.

A lizard slithered by him, through the ash. He halted, rigid. The lizard disappeared. Above, the sun rose higher in the sky. Some flies landed on a flat rock to one side of him. Hendricks kicked at them with his foot.

It was getting hot. Sweat trickled down his face, into his collar. His mouth was dry.

Presently he stopped walking and sat down on some debris. He unfastened his medicine kit and swallowed a few narcotic capsules. He looked around him. Where was he?

Something lay ahead. Stretched out on the ground. Silent and unmoving.

Hendricks drew his gun quickly. It looked like a man. Then he remembered. It was the remains of Klaus. The Second Variety. Where Tasso had blasted him. He could see wheels and relays and metal parts, strewn around on the ash. Glittering and sparkling in the sunlight.

Hendricks got to his feet and walked over. He nudged the inert form with his foot, turning it over a little. He could see the metal hull, the aluminum ribs and struts. More wiring fell out. Like viscera. Heaps of wiring, switches and relays. Endless motors and rods.

He bent down. The brain cage had been smashed by the fall. The artificial brain was visible. He gazed at it. A maze of circuits. Miniature tubes. Wires as fine as hair. He touched the brain cage. It swung aside. The type plate was visible. Hendricks studied the plate.

And blanched.

IV — IV.

For a long time he stared at the plate. Fourth Variety. Not the Second. They had been wrong. There were more types. Not just three. Many more, perhaps. At least four. And Klaus wasn't the Second Variety.

But if Klaus wasn't the Second Variety—

Suddenly he tensed. Something was coming, walking through the ash beyond the hill. What was it? He strained to see. Figures. Figures coming slowly along, making their way through the ash.

Coming toward him.

Hendricks crouched quickly, raising his gun. Sweat dripped down into his eyes. He fought

down rising panic, as the figures neared.

The first was a David. The David saw him and increased its pace. The others hurried behind it. A second David. A third. Three Davids, all alike, coming toward him silently, without expression, their thin legs rising and falling. Clutching their teddy bears.

He aimed and fired. The first two Davids dissolved into particles. The third came on. And the figure behind it. Climbing silently toward him across the gray ash. A Wounded Soldier, towering over the David. And—

And behind the Wounded Soldier came two Tassos, walking side by side. Heavy belt, Russian army pants, shirt, long hair. The familiar figure, as he had seen her only a little while before. Sitting in the pressure seat of the ship. Two slim, silent figures, both identical.

They were very near. The David bent down suddenly, dropping its teddy bear. The bear raced across the ground. Automatically, Hendricks' fingers tightened around the trigger. The bear was gone, dissolved into mist. The two Tasso Types moved on, expressionless, walking side by side, through the gray ash.

When they were almost to him, Hendricks raised the pistol waist high and fired.

The two Tassos dissolved. But already a new group was starting up the rise, five or six Tassos, all identical, a line of them coming rapidly toward him.

And he had given her the ship and the signal code. Because of him she was on her way to the moon, to the Moon Base. He had made it possible.

He had been right about the bomb, after all. It had been designed with knowledge of the other types, the David Type and the Wounded Soldier Type. And the Klaus Type. Not designed by human beings. It had been designed by one of the underground factories, apart from all human contact.

The line of Tassos came up to him. Hendricks braced himself, watching them calmly. The familiar face, the belt, the heavy shirt, the bomb carefully in place.

The bomb—

As the Tassos reached for him, a last ironic thought drifted through Hendricks' mind. He felt a little better, thinking about it. The bomb. Made by the Second Variety to destroy the other varieties. Made for that end alone.

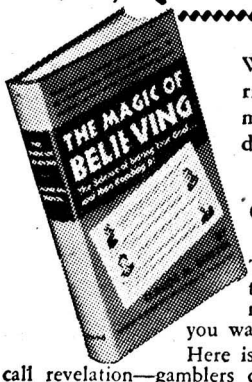
They were already beginning to design weapons to use against each other.

Start Using

FREE

for 10 Days

THE POWER THAT CAN GET YOU ANYTHING IN LIFE YOU WANT!



Whatever you want in 1953—a new home, a happier marriage, a healthy state of mind and body, a better job, more money — here is a remarkable method for turning your desires into REALITIES:

THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

(The Science of Setting Your Goal—and then Reaching It)

by Claude M. Bristol, writer, lawyer, lecturer

This unusual book shows you how to put your *inner mind* to work—how to utilize the power of your subconscious mind to help you overcome obstacles and succeed in whatever you want to accomplish.

Here is the secret of what women call intuition—religious leaders call revelation—gamblers call hunch—top executives call personal magnetism. "The Magic of Believing" shows you:

- How you can win success by working *less* hard than you do now.
- How belief makes things happen.
- How to get what you want easily through a process of making mental pictures.
- How to use "the law of suggestion" to step up your effectiveness in everything you do.
- How to let your imagination find the ways and means of pushing obstacles aside for you.
- How "the mirror technique" will release your subconscious.
- How to project your thoughts and turn them into achievements.

You can put this powerful force to work for you at once. *In just 10 days you will begin to see how this remarkable method can change your entire life!* It will reveal to you what steps to take; what decisions to make; who to see; what to say; when and how. "The Magic of Believing" can enable YOU to turn ideas into riches, dreams into reality; failure into success.

"I got a job I have been wanting and trying to get over a year."—*D. M. Eade, Englewood, Calif.*

"An exceedingly practical analysis of the technique of mental power . . . a guide-book to success."—*Mrs. R Bondurant, Portland, Ore.*

"This book is magic! Startling and instantaneous results seem to follow every chapter. Truly one of the best investments I have ever made."—*Mrs. J. F. Olsen, Duluth, Minn.*

READ THIS REMARKABLE BOOK 10 DAYS FREE

See for yourself—without risk or obligation—how "The Magic of Believing" reveals the *practical* way to get more of everything you want out of life. Mail coupon below.

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

PRENTICE-HALL, Inc., Dept. TSSF-353
70 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

Without obligation, send me a copy of "THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING," by Claude M. Bristol, for 10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL. At the end of 10 days I will either return the book and owe nothing—or keep it and send only $1.00 plus a few pennies for postage and packing, and then $1.00 a month until the low price of only $3.95 is paid.

Name.. ....

Address. .. ..

City. .... Zone.. .State.....

SAVE. Send $3.95 WITH THIS COUPON, and we will pay shipping charges. Same return privilege—your money back if not completely satisfied.

TAKE-OFF

Where the Readers take over and anything goes.

Dear Lester:

The stories in your November issue were pretty well written, but they all had such overworked plots. Have the authors run out of fresh plots? The only story I really liked was A LACK OF VERISIMILITUDE, by Sheldon, which I liked only because of its satirical humor.

The article entitled SAUCERS IN THE BELFRY, by Shaw, is the motivating force behind this letter. Although I can't deny the story's entertainment value, I do think author Shaw should have been more familiar with his subject matter. First of all, the little matter of wind noise. Didn't Shaw ever hear about the Southwestern sightings in which the air current generated by the saucer whipped the treetops violently?

What reason does Mr. Shaw have for assuming that the occupants of the saucers (if any) resemble us in physical structure?

And most important, why should their mental makeup resemble ours? Just for the sake of argument, let's say you're on an expedition to another planet like Venus, for instance.

You arrive there, and find it inhabited by a race resembling cows, only with slight physical differences. Would you particularly care whether the animals were startled by your ship? No. You'd gather a few samples and go home, examining it periodically in case anything new developed, wouldn't you? Another idea might be that the saucers come from a low-density planet, and can't land without crushing their ships.

May I point out also that several reputable aeronautical engineers have stated that a disc-shaped device with a revolving outer rim is entirely feasible? And as for Mr. Menzel's optical illusions, perhaps they account for some of the sightings, but I would like to know if Capt. Mantell was chasing an optical illusion when he died.

If this sees print I would like to correspond with any one who is interested in discussing stf, model planes, or flying saucers, and especially with any fans my own age. (12).

Sincerely,
ROY HOLMES

I'm afraid that Larry Shaw is

too familiar with his subject matter on the saucers, Roy. At least, too familiar not to recognize what a mixture of contradictory nonsense much of the so-called evidence is. All right, maybe one or two reports covered the wind, but most neglected it. And instead of your asking what reasons he has for assuming that the inhabitants have some protoplasmic limitations, let me ask you what reasons anyone can have for assuming that Captain Mantell could not have been chasing an optical illusion when he died. It wouldn't be the first such occurence to fliers.

If I found myself on Venus inhabited by a race of cow-like animals — who built railways, bridges, skyscrapers, rockets, and all such things, I'd do a helluva lot more than collect samples. And if they also had the atomic bomb, I'd care plenty whether they were startled by my ship. Or are you again saying that the mythical inhabitants can build ships but are too dumb to know it when others build flying machines? As for the low-density world theory — well, metal is metal; and if they can build ships to stand interplanetary trips, they can stand landing on the surface here— particularly if they can stand the acceleration they're supposed to develop.

Sorry, but you can't throw "why not" dodges around in a discussion of fact. You have to stick to why, because there is no way to answer anyone who thinks a thing is possible until it is disproved. It may be possible, but it's of no use to either science or daily living until it is proved. You can't disprove fairies, either. Menzel tested his theories, and they worked. Let the other side do the same!

L. R.

Dear Lester:

Congratulations from a new fan to a new magazine. The congratulations are belated, but I have only been reading s-f for about six weeks, and just caught up with you last week.

I enjoyed your letter column as much as I did your stories, although some of the letters left me gasping for breath as I tried to keep up with them. I only hope the authors of said letters don't live at the pace they write; the day of superman is not yet!

I do want to comment on the stories. UNTO HIM THAT HATH by Philip St. John, and WALK TO THE WORLD by A. J. Budrys. I like a story that makes me think about it, long after I have finished the actual reading. Both of these stories were thought-provoking at the same time they were entertaining. As far as I am concerned,

that is an unbeatable combination.

I cannot honestly say that I enjoyed all the stories in the issue, but you could hardly expect that, as I am a normal human being with all the attendant bias and prejudices. But while you can't please everybody all the time, you can try; and I think you do a remarkably good job of it.

Before I close, I want to tell you personally that I greatly admire your ability to take the slaps as gracefully as you do the compliments given you. I am sure the average reader knows there is no such thing as perfection and is well satisfied with the knowledge that you are striving for it.

I hope you will read this, despite the fact it is hand written, as I have no typewriter, and it is the best I could do.

AMARYLIS MCHUGH
4709 34th St., Apt. 9
San Diego, Calif.

Letters as plainly written as this one are no trouble at all—and even if we had to decipher it a letter at a time, we'd be happy to struggle through any correspondence from our readers. This applies to the gripes as well as the praises. We just naturally like to know what you think of the magazine.

On the business of taking the slaps—well, it isn't hard to do that gracefully. We expected them, they came; some of them were just, and some unjust. But the mere fact that the writer took the trouble to drop us his opinion more than makes up for anything he has to say against us. We only hope that the readers will take our return slaps in good spirits. Frankly, I enjoy a good skirmish.

L. R.

Dear Les,

SPACE will do. The stories measure up, the artwork's promising, the format needs improving and is. Copy I bought had some pages together, but printing, binding, cutting problems eventually get ironed out—if you iron 'em out.

Yeah. But this controversy over teleportation is getting rapidly nowhere. So far, you've assumed that a human individual can TP (teleport) any object anywhere—period. Beyond that, it gets complicated. So much so that I can't see a TP society would be much different, basically.

If a person can TP an object—move it—then apparently he/she could also stop a moving object. A falling boulder, an avalanche, a guided missile. That is, maybe. If TP works through some hyperdimension, perhaps they

would have to TP the falling boulder to one side, or off somewhere else, just so it didn't fall on them. But either way, a question immediately arises: if one person is TPing something, can another person stop it? Or if one person *tries* to TP something, can another person stop it? Can you prevent someone from tearing your heart out?

Most likely, it would depend on the "strength" of the minds involved — whatever that is. If other mental operations are any yardstick, you probably couldn't TP an object if anyone else held it down — you could probably struggle over it, wrassle with it, and perhaps break it up somewhat, but that's all. Cases would probably be rare where one person's mind was so "weak" and another's so "strong" that the other could wrest an object away from him/her.

And it seems almost certain that you couldn't so much as budge an object if two or more other people were holding it down.

The same situation would possibly apply at "the other end of the trajectory," if Willy doesn't mind us stepping on his toes. Here, though, there'd probably be an element of surprise. You might expect certain things you have to be filched; you could never be sure what you'd get, though—or when. People would probably arrange all belongings on wall-racks, behind glass panels, constantly in view. Police work wouldn't be much different —they'd still be catching most criminals by studying their Modus Operandi.

Where it really gets involved, though, is in determining *what* you TP. Could you TP your appendix out? Would you know enough to be sure you had your *appendix?* And you can't TP internal bleeding—you'd still die from loss of blood! Would you know where to seal off the bleeding, inside, if you could? As for the housewife TPing her garbage to the Red Spot on Jupiter, how well could she locate the Red Spot? Or Jupiter? Or, for that matter, her garbage—if she happened to be in the living room? Suppose 4-year-old Junior had pushed the garbage disposal can aside and was playing in that particular spot at the moment? (Child prodigies would be Hell!)

And how well could you TP yourself to a seat in a Broadway theater to catch a first-nite performance? Sure where the seat is? Sure someone else isn't sitting there? August Derleth, maybe?

Obviously, certain problems of construction engineering would arise. But then, we built escala-

tors; we got revolving doors; we got subways. It would merely be different in form.

There would undoubtedly be other "surface" differences—the same, old human pattern, but clothed in new flesh. First, "going out" would cease altogether to be any sort of ceremony; clothing styles would become as casual as lounging pajamas. Then, outdoors weather would cease to be a problem; clothing would get briefer, more like playsuits, bathing trunks. Nudism would possibly become quite a popular fad. Why risk embarrassment? Present-day exercise would no doubt be replaced by body-building, body-beautifying exercise—with a machine to administer it, of course.

Apartments would possibly have outside foyers built very much the same, all in the same location, but each with some distinguishing feature — a family coat of arms, or something—so friends can drop in at the right house. Others would still have to call, first. Construction engineering, again; that would depend entirely on how well you'd have to *know* something to TP it, or TP yourself to or inside it. Public buildings might have to have an "entrance lock" built in precise, uniform pattern—perhaps even to molecular content! Or maybe a simple, white dais in the middle of the lobby would suffice. Or maybe you wouldn't have to visit a public library; maybe you could "scan" it, see if the book you want is there, and TP the book without ever entering the joint. Maybe, maybe, maybe.

JOE GIBSON
24 Kensington Ave.
Jersey City, N. J.

The problem of trying to move something when someone else was trying to hold it down hasn't been brought up by anyone else yet. You're right—It is a problem. Thanks for bringing the brain to bear on it, Joe. The more these ideas are turned over and examined, the better science fiction is going to be.

L. R.

Dear Les,

I can't quite place you at the top of the heap; the best I can do is to rate you fifth or sixth; but with the news of your going monthly, this may put you up on the top quite soon.

The stories are fine, which is always good to say to a young magazine. I can't say as much for the artwork. Your interiors, I'm sorry to say, are lousy, and could easily be improved. Perhaps you can get Cartier to do some illustrations for you. The cover is an entirely different thing. I didn't know Bergey had

it in him. After those fem-bem covers he did for your competitors, I had the idea that was all he could do.

I'd like to thank you for that swell article on the convention. It gives the fen who can never make the conventions a pretty good idea of what goes on.

I would like to say a few things in answer to Mr. Freiman's letter. He should know that no matter what magazine he reads, be it s-f, western, mystery, or any of the slicks, he is going to find sex. Maybe he should stick to reading books about knitting and sewing; better still, he ought to go back to reading *Child Life* and magazines of that sort.

If this should get published, incidentally, I'd like to extend an invitation to all fen of all ages and sex, in and around Seattle, to drop in. The door is always open to anybody who enjoys science fiction and fantasy. I'll also be glad to get letters from all over this wonderful world—or other planets, if they happen to read SPACE.

And before I close, I'd like to say that just because you're an editor doesn't mean you should stop writing; and if you do keep turning out stories, it doesn't mean you can include some of your poorer ones. Just keep them up to the del Rey style that has kept you one of the top writers all these years.

OTTO W. PFEIFER
2907 E. 55th, Apt. 1
Seattle, Washington

Naturally, Otto, after that last paragraph, I had to publish this! You know, it has been quite a few years since I first got into this game — about fifteen of them. And that's long enough to make sure I'll keep banging out stories when I can find time. But not usually for the magazines, now. It's a tough job to try to evaluate your own work, and I've been pretty reluctant to publish material that wouldn't be good, just because I wrote it. If I honestly think it's right for SPACE, you'll find my work here; I'm not overly modest, as you may gather. And if I do pull a boner and run one that I shouldn't, I hope every reader in the country will help to box my ears.

Bergey was a darned fine artist. He drew exactly what was wanted of him. When they wanted bem-fem covers, he gave them the best in the business. When we asked him for a good rocket ship cover, we got it. Also, on art—we love Cartier as much as you do. But I understand Edd Cartier is currently doing very little work of this sort. It's a pity, too. But we'll try to improve the artwork with time.

L. R.

Dear Lester:

Issue number three of SPACE SCIENCE FICTION was so good that I can hardly find anything to complain about. I don't know whether I like that or not.

The only thing in the mag that I didn't like was that article by Larry Shaw. I don't think Mr. Shaw did a helluva lot of thinking before he wrote this article. He said that in saucer sightings, nobody ever mentioned hearing a noise. In reports of sightings from Steep Rock, Ont., in the summer of 1950 a noise was mentioned. A very strong wind was felt, and a noise described as a low "hum" was heard.

And as for the turns the saucers make, read John W. Campbell's article in the November issue of PIC. I understand Mr. Shaw could not have read this article before he wrote his article, but if he is a stf writer and/or fan he should know something about anti-gravity.

Why no good photographs? The camera may take a more detailed picture, but will it take it as fast as the eye? An object moving at great speed is very hard to photograph. Try taking a picture of a fast moving airplane some day, it's not so easy. Considering this, there have been some exceptionally good photos of saucers. In the back of Kenneth Arnold's and Ray Palmer's new book, *The Coming of the Saucers*, there are some very good photos.

I don't get this idea that a lot of people seem to have as to the origin of the saucers. Why must they come from Mars? Why Venus? Why our own solar system? From what we know of Mars and Venus, (which really isn't very much) they are not fit to *support* intelligent life. The south pole of our own planet will not support intelligent life either, but men can live there if food and shelter are brought to them. It seems to me, that if an alien race wanted to look over a planet inhabited by intelligent beings, they wouldn't land on that planet and set up a base. It is more likely that they would establish a base on a near planet.

Now to the stories. MOONWALK and BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY although they were very different, take first place.

A LACK OF VERISIMILITUDE was a good story. I liked the way it was written, and got quite a few laughs from it.

WALK TO THE WORLD and HERO'S WAY were both good.

UNTO HIM THAT HATH was good, but not as good as most of St. John's stories.

The editorial, letter column, and other features were all good. The art in this ish was very good, and the cover was the best

you have had yet. I don't mind seeing half undressed women on your covers, if the men are also half undressed. I don't believe that the female anatomy can stand extreme temperatures or airless space without some protection, any better than the male. So, if you are going to undress the ladies, undress the gents too.

HARRY CALNEK
516 West Mary St.
Fort William, Ont.

Another mention of the noise, eh? Okay, so some people heard noises—like a low hum. Now go out and listen to a jet plane going past the sound barrier as these saucers were supposed to do! If you're close enough to feel the wind, you don't get what might be considered a low hum! As for John Campbell's article—yes, Larry and I both read it. And while it's interesting to wonder what might be so if telepathy is assumed, it doesn't prove anything to add one unknown supposition onto other unknown puzzles. As to antigravity, no stf writer and/or fan knows anything about it! No scientist even really knows anything about gravity yet. Why not just as well argue that the saucers are vampires in disguise, if you have to go in for "why-couldn't-it-be" arguments?

You definitely can take photographs faster than the eye can see. Good, sharp photographs in broad daylight are possible in 1/1500th of a second with candid cameras. The eye has a speed of about 1/16th of a second! And considering what has been done in taking excellent pictures of fast planes at less distance and greater distance than the purported saucers, there has never been even one vaguely passable picture taken of one that I have been able to locate.

Now, on the subject of equality in undressing for both sexes, you've got a nice point. I'll see what I can do about it, though I have my doubts. Most women, even, seem to prefer to see a lovely young female disporting on the cover, rather than a seminude male. But I'll think about it, anyhow.

L. R.

Dear Lester,

Congratulations on going monthly. It was surprising, to say the least, to see you do so only after two issues. Whether or not it was worth it, I have yet to find out. But by the looks of things, it was.

I am very much in favor of serials. I like a *long* novel. And today the only way to get one is either in hard-covers or in serials.

I don't know what to say about

the stories. They were all good, but none of them attracted me too much. Now HERO'S WAY, by Judith Merril, is something altogether different. It's hard to put into words. The story was about the regular run of shorts, but there seemed to be something missing. Do you follow me?

How Larry Shaw managed to drag the Skylark stories into his SAUCERS IN THE BELFRY is beyond me, but I liked it. THE BIG CONVENTION was a positive shocker. How did you ever get in with it on time? I was there, you see, and never expected a pro mag report till maybe early next year.

The book reviews by a Smith named George O. are excellent. In answer to his last question following that hilarious bit on book listings by the New York Public Library, Jack Williamson was last seen at the Chicon II.

About the illustrations, they ran from good to fair. Who's this Ebel? And who did the one for Sheldon's story? Orban did all right on his two, with the first a bit better. But they can stand improvement. Your whole cover format tends to look cramped. I would suggest a smaller painting. And have the title in a banner-form. How about neater, more compact letters? The present ones look horrible to the eye.

HENRY MOSKOWITZ
Three Bridges, N. J.

We were a little surprised at going monthly, too, Hank. In fact, we still are. And to be perfectly honest, we've still not quite licked some of the problems. So if you find us late, it isn't because we aren't trying. Incidentally, subscriptions are by a year of twelve issues (except for the early six-month subscriptions, of course), and not by the calendar year, so everyone will get the full number.

We've been hearing a lot of complaints about running serials, and it's pleasant to find some who want them. Surprisingly, most people do, and for just the reasons you list. The people who don't like them also have a strange habit of listing the serial in first place, and still not liking the idea of serials. I suppose it's logical—none of us like to wait for months to read a story; and none of us like to buy a magazine and then find that we can only read part of it, because the serial takes up so much room. But as long as some of the best stories are too long for one-issue use, we'll just have to keep using serials. For instance, we never could have used CUE FOR QUIET in a single issue—but

we'd have hated like the deuce to pass it up.

Getting the report on the convention into the magazine almost at once was my own private dirty trick on the other magazines. I knew I'd be going to the Convention, of course; and I knew I'd want to have a report on it. By sheer good luck, a magazine was just ready to be put to bed before I left. So I held it up a few days—I had to, or miss the Convention, anyhow — and left the few pages I used open. When I got back to New York, I sat down at once, without stopping to rest, dashed off that hasty account, and crammed it into the issue. Luck and a bit of skullduggery.

Ebel is a young artist who has done a terrific number of hardcover book jackets, and who is just trying the science fiction field. He's a genuine discovery, and we're proud of him and of his work. The artist who illustrated Sheldon's story was Raymond. I can't give any details on him, but you might study the table of contents hard for a hint.

As to Orban's work standing improving, I think it's only fair to all our artists to do a bit of explaining. In trying to get onto a regular schedule, we've been calling them up and asking for practically overnight work. This gives no time to digest a story, or even to do the best work in the actual execution of the drawing. We think you'll find that the art work improves steadily, now that there's a bit more time for the artists. Orban is one of the most obliging men possible, and it would be a damned shame if he should be blamed for the haste which was just a favor to us. Take a look at his work in this issue, and I think you'll agree there's no finer man in the field.

We're working on the cover format, but here the size of the magazine imposes some pretty heavy difficulties. If a cover is reduced too much, detail will be lost. Also, it won't serve to catch the eye of the possible buyer. And we're frankly using our covers as posters to attract readers. After all, the more people there are who read SPACE, the better we'll be able to make the magazine.

How does it look this time?

L. R.

Dear Lester:

First let me give you congrats for a good pen name if for nothing else. It transmits a note of the future, etc. Secondly I will inform you that I read your mag from kivver to kivver. Don't get excited, it was for pure annalitical reasons only.

The Irish in me makes me put my hand in my pocket and the

Scotch in me makes me keep it there. Therefore I will dole out my 35¢ story by story! MOONWALK rated tops because of the plot. Its placement, and subject matter almost dropped it but I'll give the story 6¢. BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY was well told. It lacked only one thing, something to tell. It fell flat! 1¢. UNTO HIM THAT HATH was pretty good and handled a quite provoking thought in an interesting way. This St. John number I give 5¢. Next, A LACK OF VERISIMILITUDE carried an unexciting vein of thought but was new, at least to me and I'm in a mellow mood, so 3¢. WALK TO THE WORLD, ah, better. This along with the St. John work says something to be remembered. A. J. deserves 4¢. HERO'S WAY has a plot that twists and therefore, 4¢. SAUCERS IN THE BELFRY agrees with me and gives a nice change-off to the pure scientific, consequently, 5¢. THE BIG CONVENTION was lousy from the journalistic standpoint and shouldn't get the 1¢ I am giving it. Your REVIEW section is swell. I spare 3¢. And, last, TAKE-OFF receives 2¢ for the humor angle alone. There you are.

You are now reclining nicely thinking sweet dreams of my complems to you, but HALT!

Your art stinks to outer reaches. Outside and in it looks like the doodlings of an artist no better than myself. Transfer the art section from whoever is there to someone else. Unless this gets better I quit!

Besides this I think you keep blood and gore to the right proportions to scientific and psycho. I will not say that the mag will live on forever because that sounds feminine-forever-happiness, but SPACE does have something. It has to have, it's competing with dozens of the other stuff and competing hard. But there, I have made you cry.

Just don't let the hat size grow larger and I may write again.

PETER CLARKE
614 10th West
Kirkland, Wis.

Hey, I like that kind of rating. Stars and bells and everything else, I've seen. But this makes cents! (Okay, okay, it's too obvious!) Seriously, though, I've begun to have large purple doubts about this business of rating stories by percentage. The stories in SPACE aren't in competition with each other. They're already bought, I liked them, and nothing can change that. But I would like to see them rated according to how well liked they were individually. Maybe the old school system of A for excellent

through F for flop should be tried. Stories are in competition with all other stories, if they compete at all, not with just those in one issue. Should we class an excellent story in a really super issue as bad, just because six others were a trifle better? And, hence, you'll find no percentages used in our report on your opinion from now on.

Sorry you don't like the art work. We are trying to improve on that, though many do seem to like it. But doggone it, I still think the most important thing in a magazine is the story material! If you quit because of the art, you will have made me cry in exasperation, at least. Meantime, I'll try to work up enough sweat of the brow to keep the hat size from growing.

L. R.

COMING EVENTS

Next issue will be Volume 2, Number1, which is something of a landmark in the life of a magazine. It means that the first great hurdle lies behind, and we want to make it extra special for that reason and to show our gratitude for all who have helped support us. If you've begun T. L. Sherred's CUE FOR QUIET, you know that there's something unusually good in store for you.

The final installment doesn't just live up to the beginning. It picks up with every page, until it reaches the finish. And it's a beaut of a finish, too! We consider it one of the finest pieces of suspense-realism we've seen in a long time, right down to the last line, and for a few hours afterwards while it seeps in and begins to hit you. If we seem to be going overboard on the story, it's because it's that kind of a story.

With CUE FOR QUIET will probably be a story by the editor. We say probably because we're already getting cramped for room in the issue, and it's a long novelette. It isn't just tradition—the desire to hit Number One issue of both volumes—that led to our buying the story from our own staff. It's a top-flight suspense story in the opinion of everyone who has read it. Just a bunch of men out in a space ship, months from nowhere—who discover that someone has poisoned the plants that replenish their air. They don't know who, why, how, or much of anything else. But they do know they have to do something about it—and quick. Only, what can they do?

We'll try to squeeze it in, but if not—well, you can bet that it will be an issue that justifies that figure 2 after the Vol.!

Don't miss it. In fact, why not turn over this page and take a good look at the little coupon on the other side. That should help you to be sure of getting all of Volume Two, and all of Volume Three also!

SOMETHING MISSING?

When you write in saying you missed a copy of **SPACE** SCIENCE FICTION, we're as sorry as you are. We've tried to keep up with the growing demand, but it seems the supply is never enough. We *had* a few back issues at first, but even those have been exhausted now. It's a shame, but there is nothing we can do about those copies you have already missed. Something *can* be done about future copies, however. You *can* be sure of getting every top-notch issue, without hunting from newsstand to newsstand. How? Simple enough—just send us your subscription now, before you forget. You'll be saving yourself time, worry—and money. And that is definitely not shame—it's just common sense!

SPACE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
80 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

I'm enclosing my check or money order in the amount of $_____.

Please send **SPACE** SCIENCE FICTION regularly for _____ issues.

Name_____

Street & No. _____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

RATES: $3.50 for 12 issues in U. S. and possessions; $4.50 in Canada; $5.00 elsewhere

IF you re that man, here's something that will interest you

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $4,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then more difficult ones. If you could do this—and could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C P A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now*.

Over 3500 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

80 5th Ave., Dept. H 237 N. Y. 10.

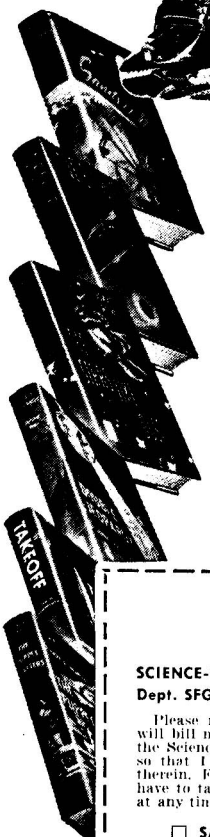
I want to be an accountant. Send me without obligation, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays."

Name.. ....*Age*.....

Address.....

City, Zone & State.....

Yes! Any 3 OF THESE Top Science-Fiction Thrillers Yours for Only $1.00



(Continued from Back Cover)

IMAGINE -- ANY THREE of these full-size, brand-new SCIENCE-FICTION books — yours for only $1.00! Each one is crammed with science thrills of the future... packed with the imagination that will make tomorrow's headlines... written by the most sought-after science-fiction writers of today. A $7.50 to $9.00 value, complete and in handsome permanent bindings — but yours for only $1.00 on this amazing offer!

The founding of this SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB is a recognition of the fact that Science-Fiction has won a place as an important *new kind* of literature — that it is a valuable addition to the library of every imaginative reader. Science-Fiction has grown so fast it's hard to keep up with it! How is one to know which are the BEST new Science-Fiction books — without wasting a great deal of time and money wading through good and bad alike?

Now — The Cream of New Science-Fiction Books — For Only $1 Each!

The SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB selects each month the best — *and only the best new* Science-Fiction book. And to enable you to ENJOY the finest without worrying about the cost, the Club has arranged to bring you the brand-new full-length books *FOR ONLY $1 EACH* (plus a few cents shipping charge)—even though they cost $2.50, $2.75 and up in publishers' original editions!

NO Dues or Complicated Rules

The operation of the Club is simple. Each month the Board of Editors reads all the promising new Science-Fiction books and selects the No. 1 title. Each selection is described well IN ADVANCE, in the Club's interesting free bulletin, "Things to Come." You take ONLY those books you really want — as few as four a year, if you wish. If you don't want the current selection, you simply notify the Club. It's that simple. There are no other rules, no dues, no fees.

Send No Money — Just Mail Postcard

We KNOW that you will enjoy membership in this unusual new book club. To PROVE it, we are making this amazing offer to new members! Your choice of ANY 3 of the new Science-Fiction masterpieces (described on the Back Cover) — AT ONLY $1 FOR ALL THREE. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. This liberal offer may have to be withdrawn at any time. So mail postcard RIGHT NOW to: **SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, Dept. SFG-3, Garden City, New York.**

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. SFG-3, Garden City, New York

Please rush me the 3 books I have checked, below, as my gift books and first selection. You will bill me only $1 for all three (plus few cents shipping charge), and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming monthly selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus a few cents shipping charge. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member)—and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

- ☐ SANDS OF MARS
- ☐ NEEDLE
- ☐ DOUBLE JEOPARDY
- ☐ THE PUPPET MASTER
- ☐ TAKEOFF
- ☐ THE STARS LIKE DUST

SPECIAL NO RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled!

Name.....
(Please Print)

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

Offer slightly different in Canada: 105 Bond St., Toronto, 2. Good only in U.S.A. and Canada.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD AT ONCE

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED