

Volume 5 No. 2

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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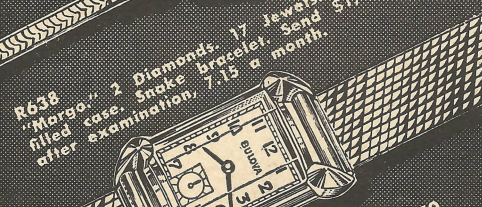
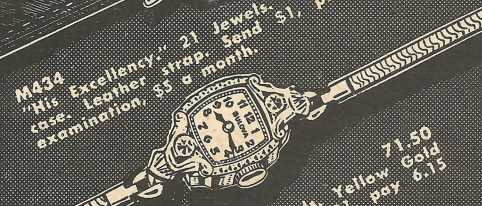
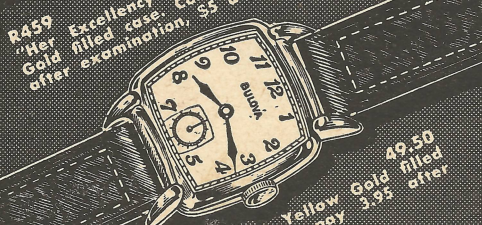
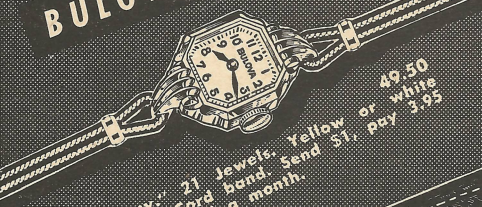
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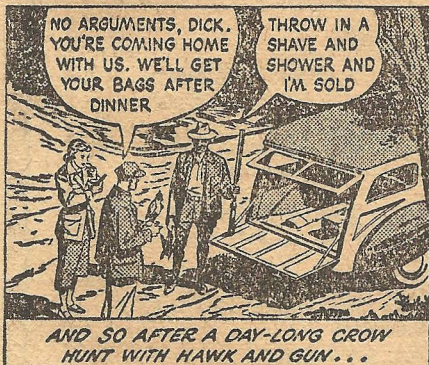
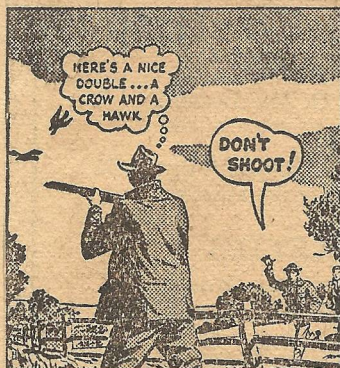
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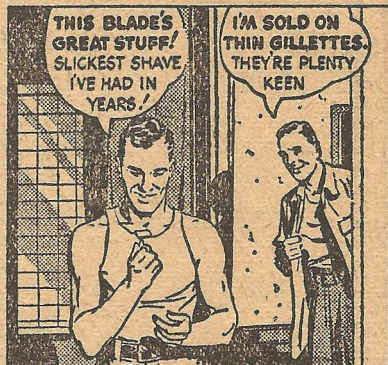
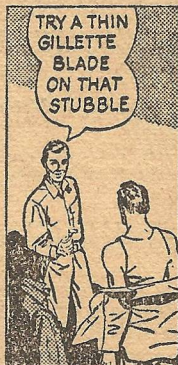
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VOL. 5

APRIL, 1949

NO. 2

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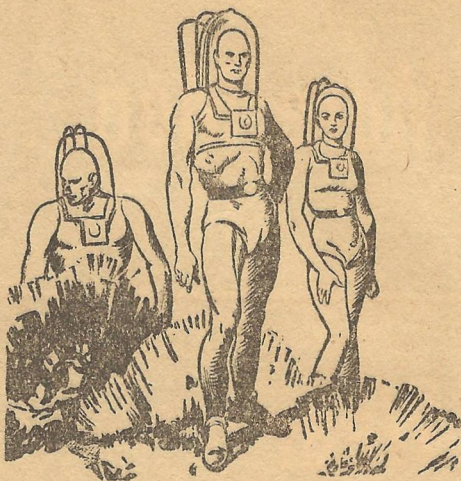
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FANDOM'S CORNER

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LAST year Ray Van Houten was struck with what he thought was a whale of an idea. He presented it to the Eastern Science Fiction Association (Esfa) and asked them for a money donation to get started on it. They also liked the idea and donated \$5 toward the project. Since then other organizations have offered or given him contributions. This April the first results of the idea will show up.

The idea was a simple one in itself; it was not new as applied to other fields; the movies have it, the detective story writers have it. But it is new to stf. Van Houten proposes to have the whole field, both pro and fan, get together (through representatives) and make annual awards for the best

(Continued on page 125)

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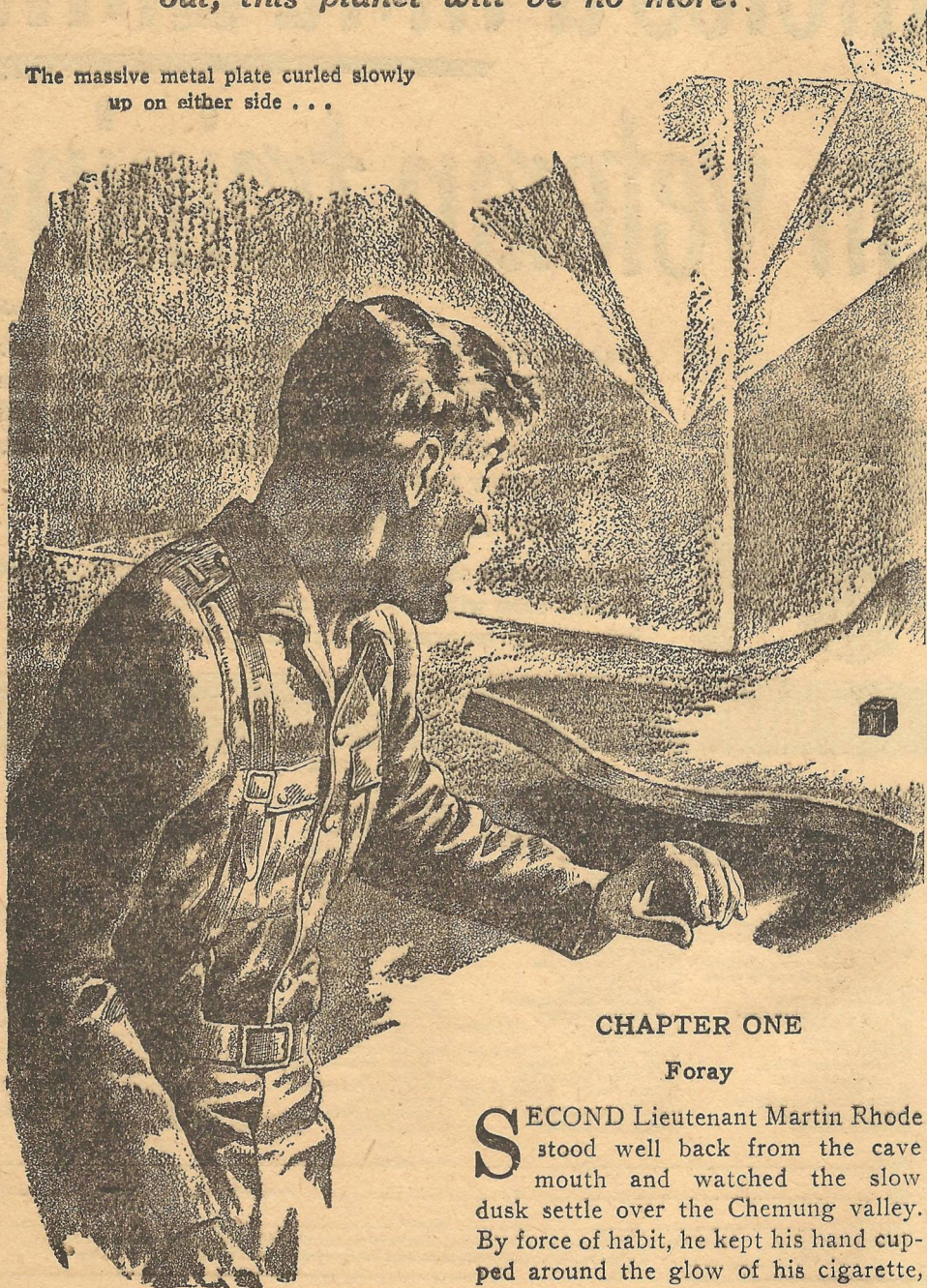
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Into the hearts of warring nations came Martin Rhode's voice, heard on every radio in the world: "You must lay down your weapons, live out your last days in peace. Because—before the week is out, this planet will be no more!"

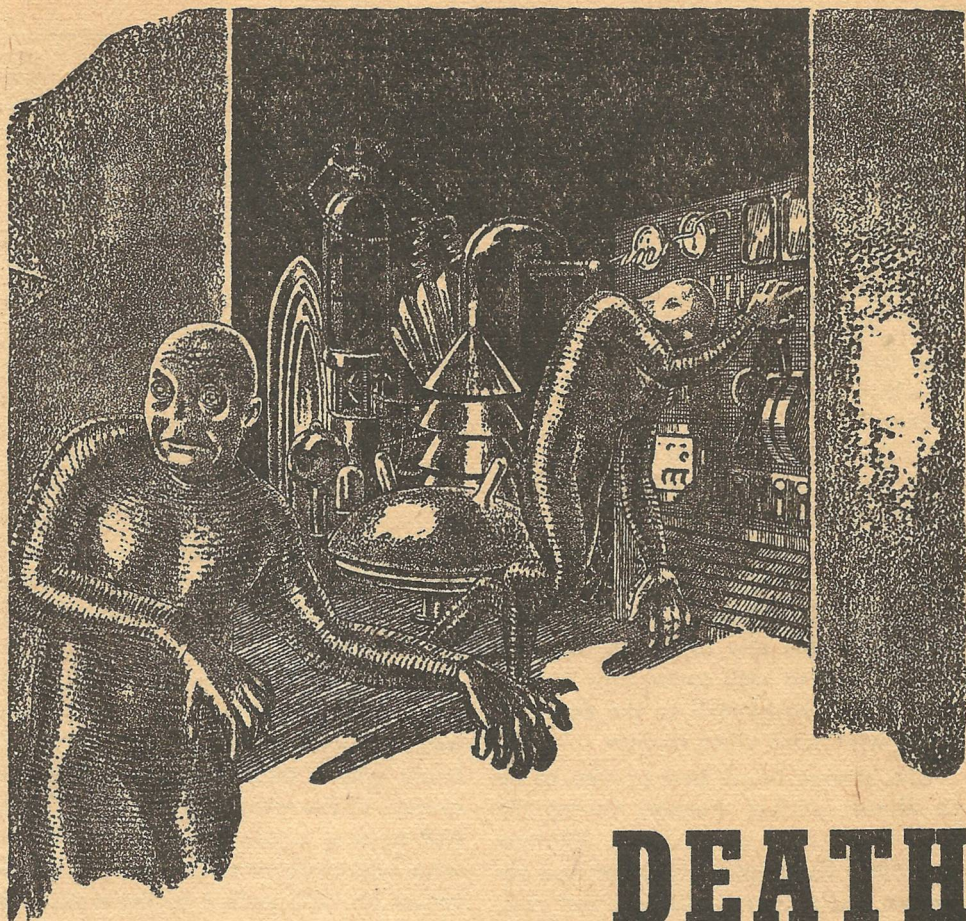
The massive metal plate curled slowly
up on either side . . .



CHAPTER ONE

Foray

SECOND Lieutenant Martin Rhode stood well back from the cave mouth and watched the slow dusk settle over the Chemung valley. By force of habit, he kept his hand cupped around the glow of his cigarette,



A Novelette by
John D.
MacDonald

DEATH QUOTIENT

though there was no chance that it could be seen from aloft.

Far down the slanting throat of the cave a shaft of light glowed, and Rhode turned, angrily warned the man who had carelessly parted the blackout curtains

"Sorry, Martin," the man said as he came up. Martin recognized the voice of Guy Deressa, the civilian responsible for convoy loading.

They stood together, looking toward

the silver-grey shape of the river a quarter-mile away.

"Anything new?" Martin asked Deressa.

"Same old picture. Enemy patrols penetrated our lines at several points during last night. Main lines still static. Our rockets were mostly intercepted, but a few got through and did unknown damage to enemy shore installations. As usual, the camera rocket failed to get through interception."

Martin yawned. "This was the 'twenty-minute' war," he said.

There was no mirth in Guy Deressa's answering laugh. "Twenty minutes or twenty years. Somewhere in between. Are you going to see Alice this trip?"

"If she can get away from the station hospital. But only for a few minutes. We'll have to turn around, and get back here before daylight. How many vehicles? They told me there'd be twenty."

"Only eighteen could pass inspection. The load is small arms and small arms ammunition. High-velocity stuff."

There was a lean, dark alertness about Martin Rhode. During the three long years of invasion, he had learned to relax in his idle moments. He had learned how to seek cover, how to kill, how to harden himself to the death of those who were close to him.

The atomic bomb had proven to be an almost perfect weapon during the first two weeks of the war. Millions had died. But human courage and resource had rendered obsolete the vast, white flare, the mushroom cloud.

In the first weeks of war, every center of industrial production in the United States had been wiped out, along with an estimated forty-five million people. But from the secret launching stations that were undamaged, the retaliatory rockets had smashed the vast resources of the potential invader.

There followed a lull of almost a year, while each participant licked wounds, decentralized, made a national inventory of tools and resources, and established new production facilities in deep places in the earth.

Having suffered the least damage, the invader was able to equip a fleet and, after almost crippling losses, establish a beachhead on the New Eng-

land coast. Six months later the expanded beachhead reached to within eighteen miles of where the city of Albany had once stood. It reached south to Atlantic City, and north to the eastern shore of Hudson Bay.

And for a year and a half the lines had remained practically static. It was vicious war, without principle, without mercy. Due to the decentralization of facilities and the use of vast underground defensive networks, the usefulness of the atomic bomb had become much like that of a sledge hammer for driving a tack. In the Second World War, no sane artillery commander would have tried to kill a single man on a distant hill by the use of a 240 mm. howitzer.

The parallel of trying to smash a small outpost with an atomic bomb was a close one. The production of each bomb was a serious drain on the resources of the weakened nations. There had been a return to guided missiles with high-explosive warheads. A dead-center hit with such a rocket would do as much damage to the personnel involved as would the far greater and more wasteful power of the atom.

The nations of the world had, for all practical purposes, given up the symbols of independent nations. There were merely "we" and "they."

The invader had a bridgehead of equivalent size in Brazil, and the third focus of combat was along the Salween River, where an industrialized India had joined forces with Burma and Siam to halt the invader in the heart of the malarial country.

For a year and a half it had been a war of knife and pistol and bare hands. As the rockets became more accurate, so did the interceptor rockets. As the powerful vortex stations increased the fury and height of their invisible aimed

cyclones, the crewed bombers flew ever higher. As pestilence struck, the inoculations became more effective, and bacteria distribution had been abandoned as an effective weapon.

In the end, both sides had learned that the weapon which would win would be brave men, armed with portable weapons, who could kill other brave men at close quarters.

Martin Rhode lifted the cigarette to his lips with an awkward gesture. Each week the stiffened shoulder became more limber. Soon, he knew, he would be returned from detached service to his original unit, and would once more head up his trained and experienced patrol on their nightly forays into invader territory. As he thought of it, fear was a cold, wet substance in his guts. Combat had been a hell of a lot different than he had expected. He had been eleven years old when he saw the movies of the Jap surrender in Tokyo Bay. At that time he had lived in a dream world where he was a staunch Marine running cursing up some sandy beach, hurling grenades, thrusting with the bayonet.

HE MASHED the cigarette out against the rock wall of the cave, followed Guy in through the blackout curtains. Eighteen huge trucks, loaded, with the tarps tied down, stood nose to tail on the quasi-level floor of the cave. The drivers stood in a small group, laughing and talking.

Since the roads had been pretty well smashed, the trucks were semi-tracked vehicles with drive on the front wheels as well, diesel-powered, weighing twelve tons empty.

"Okay," Martin shouted. "Ready to Roll."

The group split up and the men sauntered to their trucks, clambered up into the high cabs. The driver of the lead truck was already behind the wheel, wearing a black blindfold so that his night vision would be at peak as soon as they rolled out the tunnel entrance.

On handy brackets in each cab were the lightweight Galton guns, with their full drum load of two thousand of the tiny twelve-caliber slugs, ready to fire at muzzle velocity of 6000 feet per second, a cycle of fire of 1500. No man had ever survived who had been hit in any part of his body by a Galton slug within a half-mile range. The impact of the slug produced hydrostatic shot, exploding the heart. Very little talent was needed to fire a Galton gun effectively, as the drop was only an inch and a half at six hundred yards.

The massive trucks were loaded with more Galtons and tremendous loads of ammunition.

When they were ready, the tunnel lights snapped out. The driver of the lead truck took off his blindfold and as the curtains drew back, they could see ahead the pale oval of the tunnel entrance.

The starters whined and the motors caught, roared. The lead truck lurched into motion, crawling out through the tunnel entrance, turning left to reach the junction of what had once been Route 17. The destination was near the relatively undamaged town of Oneonta, a division supply point some nine miles beyond the town where camouflaged elevators would take the huge trucks, one at a time, down to the third level for unloading. Division vehicles would distribute the supplies from there.

The invader bomb that had smashed

Binghampton had been exploded at a height of nine hundred feet. The radiation from the jumbled debris had long since dropped below the danger point. The vast patch of vitrified earth made maximum night speed possible.

As the hours stretched out, Martin Rhode slouched in the seat and thought of Alice. He remembered how wan and tired she had been the last time he had seen her. Her resistance was low, and in a forward area, she was in more danger than he. He found himself wishing that the woman's draft had qualified her for factory work in some safe place far behind the lines, rather than in a forward hospital where there was constant danger of being overrun by an enemy patrol.

She too, had seen a lot of death. The moments they had together were precious beyond description, and his heart ached when he thought of the way her slim shoulders trembled when his arms were tight around her. The world was giving the two of them a damn poor break. The war was sapping their youth. Should she die, there would be little point in any of the rest of it. He knew that she felt the same way too.

Brogan had felt that way. Brogan and his girl. They had stolen supplies and a light plane and headed for the Canadian wilds. He smiled wryly in the darkness. Brogan had picked what he thought was wild and empty country, and had landed directly above one of the biggest synthetic food plants in the country.

The drumhead trial had lasted forty minutes. They had shot Brogan's wife first. Then him. Desertion in time of war.

He felt sleepy, but knew he should remain alert. If the invader's aircraft, so high as to be invisible and almost inaudible, appeared over them, only

the delicate radar would give them warning.

When it happened the driver, startled, braked the truck too fast and the jagged sound of crashes from the rear told that he had piled up the convoy. Martin Rhode was hurled, cursing, against the windshield.

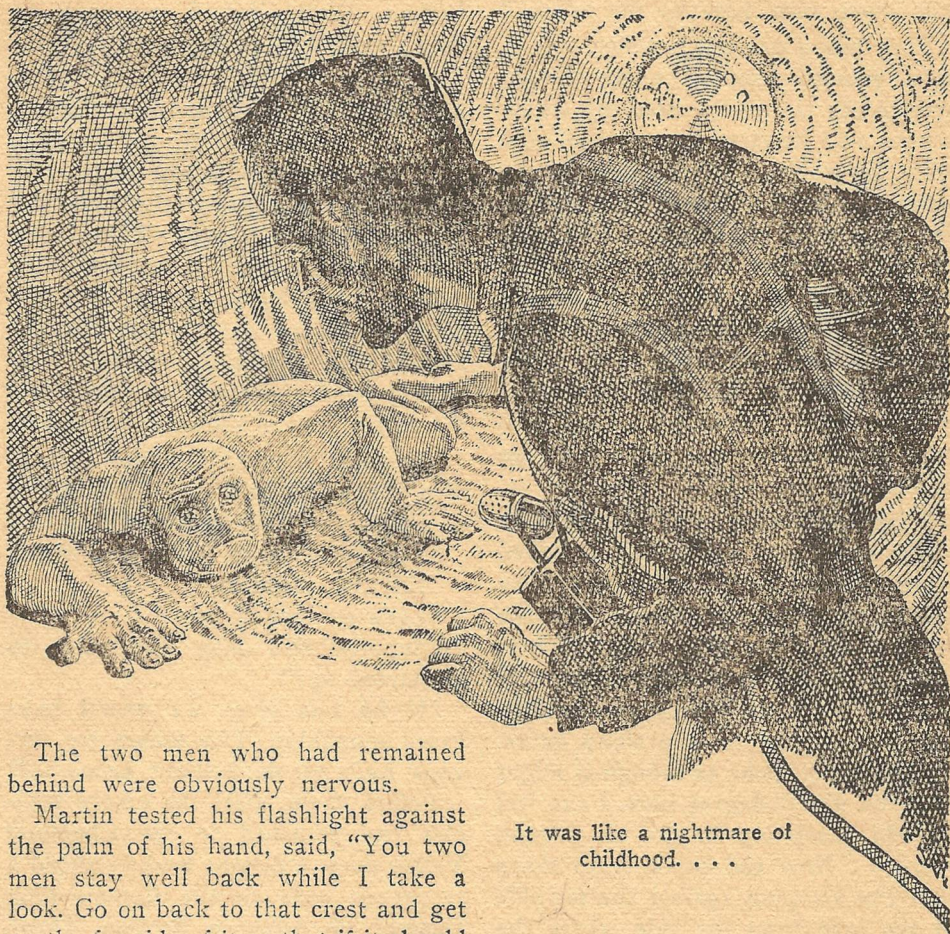
All Martin could think of was a perfectly straight bolt of lightning, thicker than any lightning flash he had ever seen, driving straight down from the cloudless heavens to bury itself in the earth with a thick, churning noise that seemed to shake the road.

"Sorry, sir," the driver said in a high nervous voice. "I was startled and I couldn't—"

"It's done now," he said shortly. He climbed down to take a look. All the other drivers were out of their trucks, looking over the damage.

Of the eighteen trucks, only three were so disabled as to be unable to continue. The driver of one of the disabled trucks was a competent-looking sergeant. Martin said, "Get in the lead truck, sergeant. You know the destination. Take the trucks on through. Whatever that thing was, it seems to have made a hell of a hole up ahead. I'm going to stay and find out what it is. Give that hole a wide circle. You two men, you'll stay with me. Pick us up on your way back, sergeant."

It took ten minutes to get the trucks in running condition untangled from the disabled trucks. The two drivers stood near Martin Rhode and watched the convoy lumber off, turning sharply across country to avoid the huge hole made by whatever it was that had flashed down out of the night sky. When he shut his eyes, Martin could still see the after-image of the blue-white line drawn from sky to earth.



The two men who had remained behind were obviously nervous.

Martin tested his flashlight against the palm of his hand, said, "You two men stay well back while I take a look. Go on back to that crest and get on the far side of it so that if it should blow up, some kind of a report will get back. I'll take a hand set and tell you what I see."

The starlight was bright enough to show him the dimensions of the vast hole. He gasped as he saw it, estimating its diameter at a hundred and eighty feet. The aged concrete of the highway had been sliced as cleanly as though by a sharp knife.

He said, "The hole seems to be close to two hundred feet in diameter, and it is very regular. Seems to be made by a cylindrical object much larger than any rocket known to be in use. I'm approaching it on the concrete. Now I'm on my stomach look-

It was like a nightmare of childhood. . . .

ing down over the edge. I'm shining my light down into the hole. It's beginning to clear a little. Dust from the broken concrete is still broiling around down there, so I can't see very well. It's beginning to clear a little. Now I can just vaguely see the bottom. It seems to be about six hundred feet deep. It's hard to estimate it. From here it looks as though the object took a curved path after it entered the ground. The concrete here on the edge is still warm to the touch from the pressure and friction. I can't hear anything or smell anything."

He stood up and walked back, saying into the hand mike, "One of you

men come over here to the trucks."

They found one truck which was in good enough working order to get over to the rim of the hole. Its winch carried two hundred feet of fine wire cable. By robbing the winches of the other two trucks, Martin was able to link up a cable six hundred feet long. In forty minutes he was ready, and with his feet in a loop at the end of the cable, his good arm wrapped around the cable itself, the mike close to his lips, he gave the details of his descent to the second man whom he had posted a good quarter-mile from the edge of the hole.

"The walls seem to be smooth. The object penetrated the topsoil and then crashed through various strata of rock without appearing to change its shape or size. Now the side walls are granite. There is considerable seepage of water. Now I can plainly see that the hole curves. Yes, it is a sharp curve. From here, it looks as though it might be a full ninety-degree turn. I can feel an odd throbbing in the air around me. . . . Now the curve is so sharp that I'm scraping against the far side of the hole from the side where the truck is parked. After I slide down a bit further, the slant will be shallow enough that I can climb down."

In a few seconds he shouted up the shaft, "Hold it right there. Don't haul up until I give the order."

Leaving the loop resting against the rock slope, he gave one quick glance up at the bright stars, then walked down to where the side became the floor of what seemed to be a mammoth tunnel stretching away into the gloom.

He turned his light down the tunnel. His voice was tense as he said into the mike, "I can see a shining object that reflects my light. It's only about a hundred feet from where I stand.

And . . . Wait! Yes, I can seem to detect some sort of move—"

TWENTY minutes later, hearing no further sound, the listener, one Corporal Denty, came cautiously to the edge of the hole. He whispered to Pfc. Chase, "Not a peep out of him for nearly a half-hour."

They both looked down into the darkness. Denty was the one who unhooked the spotlight, spliced wires so they could shine it down. They saw the empty loop of the cable far below.

"Cave-in maybe?" Chase asked. "No, it couldn't be. I would have heard it. What the hell happened!"

"You want to go down and look!"

"Not me, brother!"

"Let's get out of here!"

"Suppose he's okay and wants to be hauled up?"

"If he was okay we would have heard something. This makes me nervous. Let's get the hell out. Come on!"

Before dawn, after the empty vehicles had returned to the Chemung Valley cave, a distant tower radioed a report in code to the Commanding General of Advance Section Three. The general's name was Walter Argo, and he was a very tired and very apprehensive man. But he was also very familiar with the odd tricks that imagination can play in time of war.

He passed the report on to his G-2, who in turn gave it to the Staff Ordnance Officer who passed it on to Colonel Rudley Wing, the Rocket Disposal Officer, who assigned it to Captain Jakob Van Meer, who, shortly before noon, picked up the necessary equipment and a squad of nine technicians and two disposal trucks and headed back for the rear area of Advance Section Three to the spot indicated in the radio.

Jakob Van Meer was a doughty

little officer with a fat slack face, sleepy eyes and enough raw courage for a dozen men.

He whistled softly as he saw the size of the hole. Even in the autumn sunlight it looked ominous.

He deposited his radio truck a good six miles away after he saw the hole, and made very certain that each broadcast word was being inscribed on the metal tape. If this was a new weapon, Jakob Van Meer would give future disposal experts plenty to go on, when he himself went up in bits at the heart of a mighty blast.

One trustworthy man stayed on the brink with the special winch equipment. Before Van Meer went down the hole, he listened to the verbal account of Corporal Denty, then put what seemed to be a gigantic stethoscope flat against the ground and bent over to listen.

He frowned. "Damn! I can hear something down there. But there's no regularity to it. Just some miscellaneous thumping. Well, go ahead; lower away."

Colonel Rudley Wing, a lean and sallow man, felt a thickness in his throat as he read the report which was, in effect, the obituary of Jakob Van Meer. He shut his jaw hard and walked down the dimly-lighted corridor to the offices of General Argo. Argo saw him at once, had him sit down and held a match for his cigarette.

Wing's voice sounded odd in his own ears as he said, "That oversized rocket, sir. One of my ... No. My best officer investigated. He got halfway down when it all went wrong."

"Exploded?"

"No. This is pretty odd. The man on the brink went off his nut. Then a man posted three hundred yards back

felt panic and extreme exhaustion. He said he was being forced somehow to desert his post and run like hell. Even the men six miles back felt very depressed. After a time, the feeling of depression lifted. They went cautiously back to the hole. The one who had gone mad was dead. So was Van Meer when they hauled him up. His face was contorted. The examining doctor said there was serious damage to the inner ear. He also said that the cause of death was the generation of internal heat in the bodies of the two men. You know the answer to that one, sir."

"Hypersonics!" the general gasped, his face white.

"Yes, but more effective than anything we've heard of before. Panic within hundreds of yards. Black depression six miles away."

Argo picked up a pencil and tapped the point gently against the steel surface of his desk. "The projectile was what generated this hypersonic wave?"

"There's no other answer."

"Then that must be its purpose. I can't see how we can rightly anticipate a dual function there."

"What are your orders, sir?"

"Take one of Joe Branford's engineer units and seal the hole up for good."

Wing was relieved not to be asked to send another man. He knew that he would go himself rather than send another of his officers. And he did not relish the thought of hypersonic death.

Two hours after dusk the explosives blasted and hundreds of tons of crumbled rock and dirt filled the vast cavity. All civilians living within five miles of the edge of the hole were ordered to evacuate the area, and military roads were diverted to alternate routes.

CHAPTER TWO

The Wall

ALICE POWELL sat on the edge of the hard cot in her cubicle a quarter-mile underground. The circulation fan high in the corner made a soft droning.

The lid of her foot locker was open, and through tear-dimmed eyes she stared at the smiling picture of Martin Rhode, taped to the inside of the lid. It had been taken the day he enlisted, the day after the bombs had wiped out ten major cities. So long ago. Countless thousands of years ago.

She was a tall girl, her dusky blonde hair pulled tightly back, her uniform crisp and white. But her face was puffy with tears.

She held her own wrist so tightly that the nails bit into the skin, and yet there was no pain which could equal the pain of her great loss.

"There will, of course, be a posthumous decoration," Colonel Wing had said genly.

What good is that? When those strong brown hands are sealed in the eternal darkness far below the shattered earth.

She heard the distant determined whine of one of the ward buzzers. She sighed, stood up, brushed a wisp of hair back with the back of her hand. It was bed four again. The double amputation. With swift and gentle fingers she injected the morphine.

The lieutenant of engineers saluted crisply and Colonel Wing smiled tiredly, said, "How did it go?"

There was a taught look about the young man's mouth. "What's down in that hole, sir?"

"We don't exactly know. Some sort of device that generates supersonic waves, we believe. Why?"

"Well, sir, we sealed it. Did a good job, too. When we were I'd say about five hundred yards away, I looked back and saw dirt and rock go up like a fountain. I didn't hear any second explosion. It looked as though the dirt went up about two thousand feet. We went like hell to get out of there, but even so, a hunk of rock as big as my fist came down through the hood and disabled us. The driver said he could make temporary repairs. Two of my men and I went back and took a look. The hole was as clean as a whistle. The diameter at the brink was so much bigger that we couldn't seal it again. Not enough stuff with us. So I thought I'd better report, sir. Do you want me to try again?"

Wing looked at him for long moments, then stood up. "Come along. I want the general to hear this."

General Argo listened, asked a few questions, then said angrily, "That affair is taking too much of my time." He opened a switch on the interphone, said, "Benny? I've got a special job for one of your boys. Pick a good one, one that can drop a lump of sugar into a cup of tea from eighty thousand. Low level work. I want a four-thousand-pound D.A. dropped into some mysterious damn hole we've got in the rear area. Have your boy get the dope from Colonel Wing. Thanks, Benny."

The runway started in the heart of a mountain. Johnny Roak had the ship airborne by the time he hit daylight. The jets lifted the ship in an almost vertical climb as Johnny whistled between his teeth. It was one of the hit-and-run bombers, capable of a top speed of eleven hundred, and a minimum speed of forty, once the huge flaps were at full. As the tight cockpit began to heat up, Johnny increased the refrigeration. Directly un-

der him, concealed by the bomb-bay doors, was the egg he was to drop. In the map panel sandwiched between dials, the three-dimensional map, synchronized for ground speed and direction, moved smoothly.

He saw that he was nearing his target and decided to take a practice run at it, then make a 180° and come back. When he was ten miles away he looked at the landscape and frowned. The autumn grass and leaves had an odd look. Almost as though they had been scorched. The hole seemed to be well inside this scorched area, possibly at the middle of it. He saw that very soon he would begin to pass over the scorched area.

He began once more to whistle. It was a nice day.

Colonel Benjamin Cord wheeled on the young captain and said, "Let me know when you begin to need my permission to spit, or wash your face. Send another plane."

Three hours later Colonel Cord flung open the door of the general's office without knocking. Argo was on the verge of reminding Cord of the common courtesies when he saw the expression on Cord's face.

"What on earth is the matter, Benny?" he asked.

"That—that damnable hole! It's cost me three planes and three good men."

Argo's eyes widened. "How?"

"The first ship blew up in midair. So did the second ship, and at just about the same place. The third time I sent two, one trailing the other at a mile. The third ship gave a running verbal account. Apparently that hole you talk about is the center of a parched area. The following ship reported that as the third ship reached the edge of the parched area, it blew up. Just like that!" Cord snapped

his fingers. "Nobody had a chance."

The lead truck of a fast convoy stopped dead much faster than any brakes could have brought it to a halt. It was on the alternate route which was supposed to take it around the area where the mysterious rocket had fallen.

The two men in the lead truck were killed instantly, and the single man in the second truck was badly injured. The third truck was so far back that the driver had time to wrench the wheel over and slam into a deep ditch. The truck overturned, but the driver was uninjured. The other trucks managed to stop without serious injury.

The first man to reach the lead truck saw that the hood was curiously crumpled. The door was jammed, but he climbed up and flashed his light in the window. The heavy motor had crushed the two men where they sat. As yet he hadn't seen what they had hit. He stood and flashed his light ahead. There was nothing there. He wondered if some sort of dud artillery shell had hit the truck dead center.

He walked up to look, and slammed into something solid. It was so unexpected that it knocked him down. He flashed his light and saw . . . nothing. By then several other men had come up to him. He warned them, and then advanced cautiously. His fingertips touched a smooth hard surface, a surface that was faintly warm to the touch. The other men thought he was suffering from shock until he finally grabbed one of them and thrust him against the invisible wall. It was higher than they could reach and, at the deep ditch, it followed the contour so that there was no place to crawl under or measure the thickness of the obstacle.

They talked about it being some

new sabotage device planted there by an invader patrol, but it was too far in the rear to have been so planted.

One of the men suggested that it might have something to do with the large rocket that had fallen in the area, but he was laughed down. The rocket was three miles away.

Their lights shone through the obstacle without any of the distortion of vision which would have indicated a glassy substance.

The man who had first discovered the obstacle lifted one of the Galton guns from a truck and, standing six feet from the barrier, held the gun at waist level and fired a prolonged burst. There was no danger of ricochet, because the heat generated by impact at that velocity turned the tiny slugs immediately from a solid to a gas. The gun made its high siren wail, and the area of impact glowed red-white with the hot gases. After the burst that point of the barrier was too hot to touch. When it had cooled, they were able to feel no scratch or dent on its surface, thus proving it to be a harder substance than any they had ever encountered.

They found a drum which contained tracer load, and one man took a gun back two hundred yards. He fired short bursts at a constantly increasing angle. A thousand feet above the road the thin white lines of the tracer slugs still stopped sharply at the barrier.

The convoy was reorganized and before they left, one man found white paint and slapped huge crosses on the invisible barrier to warn any subsequent convoy. He was subsequently commended for this foresight.

ON PLEASANT days, Stanford Rider, the President of the United States, Supreme Commander of the United Forces of the Allied

Nations, was permitted to board the silent elevator and ride, with his bodyguard, up the two-thousand-foot shaft to the observation room.

The observation room fronted on a sheer rock wall in one of the lesser peaks of the Sangre de Christo Mountains. A powerful electric motor slid back the whole wall of the observation room; the wall was heavy because the outer surface of it was made of slabs of native rock.

Stanford Rider was a tall lean man with a pale, pouched face, sparse sandy hair and alert blue eyes. Years before, the lines in his face had accentuated his gift of laughter. But the years of war and danger, the constant threat of defeat, had sagged those lines into a continual moroseness, almost apathetic in its perpetual intensity.

His eyes brightened when he saw the blue of the sky, the misted purple of the far mountains. No three-dimensional color photography, no amount of synthetic sunlight could compensate for the reality he witnessed.

He knew that even as he had stepped into the elevator two thousand feet below, radar watch had been redoubled and fighters had been sent up so high as to be invisible. Interceptor rockets lay fat and sleeping in the deep launching ramps, their dull stubborn noses shining metallically, their single-purpose brains ready to begin functioning at the first thrust of incredible acceleration.

He stood, his shoulders slumped, his arms hanging slack at his sides, looking at the sunlight through which he could not walk in freedom. Far below, in the warm guts of the inner earth, the nine-man War Council was in session. Later he would listen to the transcription after all repetitions

and asides had been deleted. More decisions to be made. More lives to be lost. They were getting ever more anxious for him to launch another attack, impatient of the way he insisted on waiting for further development of the robot gun carriers.

He remembered the utter failure of the last attack, the horror and the agony of knowing that it had failed, and as he remembered, his mouth twisted. Yes, the attacking force had reached the sea, splitting the invader forces in half, but rocket supply had failed, they had been cut off and those who were not killed had been sent into slavery, the weapons they had carried being turned on their countrymen.

The potential attack was even more questionable in light of the odd new development in Advance Section Three. He puzzled over the report he had read. It was a war of technology, and he felt fear as he realized that the invader had created something beyond their ability to understand.

What was the name of the division commander? Oh, yes. Argo. Able man. He had sent in a very complete report. "The point of entrance of the large rocket appears to be the center point of a circular, transparent impenetrable barrier having a diameter of 9.14 miles. The surface of the barrier has a temperature of 88.1 degrees, and it accurately follows all ground contours. An attempt was made to tunnel under it, using the newest type mole, but at ninety feet below the surface, the mole struck the barrier and was unable to progress. Tests have indicated that the barrier reaches higher than the ceiling of any ship based here, but no attempt has yet been made to strike the barrier with a guided missile at stratosphere height, i.e. above one hundred miles. The vegetation inside

the barrier appears to be parched, as though it had been subjected to great heat. It is surmised that certain civilian personnel may have been trapped inside the barrier, but close watch has disclosed no sign of them.

"The barrier appears to be impervious to all except light rays. Close watch with high power spotting scopes has indicated no activity within the area enclosed by the barrier. The thickness of the barrier is not accurately known. By close observation of the movement of dried grass just inside the barrier, it is believed to be extraordinarily thin, possibly less than an inch in thickness.

"No reasonable conjectures can be made. Morale within this section is suffering due to there being no official explanation of this phenomenon. Were such a barrier to be created so as to enclose some of our essential subterranean production facilities, our position would be seriously affected.

"Recommendations: 1. That the best scientific minds available be sent immediately to examine the barrier at first hand. 2. That an atomic bomb be placed so as to explode against the barrier."

Yes, it was a good report. Within an hour or so, he would hear the report of the results of the atomic blast.

He took a long look at the sunshine, then turned and signaled to the guard. The motor droned and the wall slid slowly back into place. With tired, heavy steps he walked into the elevator. As it started down, he leaned against the inside wall and closed his eyes.

FIELD Marshal Torkel Jatz stretched out on the hard cot in his headquarters and frowned up at the ceiling. He knew that he was in no physical danger, and yet he was

oddly uncomfortable. His headquarters were two thousand feet below the surface of Manhattan Island. Above him were the shattered buildings, the lethal radioactivity that had resulted from the underwater explosions which had hoisted countless millions of tons of radioactive sea water high in the air, the in-shore wind carrying them across the shattered buildings and empty streets.

The entrance to his headquarters was through an amazingly long lateral tunnel which connected with a winding shaft, the opening of which was beyond the boundaries of dangerous radioactivity.

He thought of the biting sarcasm of the last orders he had received from his home country. Yes, they were growing tired of the holding war, tired of the ceaseless drain on resources and manpower.

Ah, but they did not understand these people. Yes, the invasion had been successful, and the beachhead, in the first weeks of surprise, had grown enormously. But these people fought for their home soil, prodigious in their courage, reckless in their hate.

They could not understand it at home, but all he could do was to cling tenaciously to his perimeter defences and continually request new and better weapons which would once more give him the edge, make a further advance possible.

He snorted. They were politicians who continually nibbled at him. Jatz had no interest in politicians. He was a soldier, a lean, hard, tough man in his middle forties, a man who, if necessary, could go out into the filth and mud of the lines and carry the burden of a combat soldier. A man who could handle any command in his forces, from platoon leader to Field Marshal.

Why did they keep sniping at him? Was Rinelli doing any better in Brazil? Was Sigitz performing any miracles along the Salween?

If only he could have the pleasure of the company of a few of those bureaucrats for several weeks. He'd take them out and give them a look at the vicious night-patrol warfare, let them hear the dread siren scream of the Galton guns, let them see a soldier struck by one of those tiny slugs, the instant convulsive death.

What they couldn't understand was that there were no targets for the rockets, no concentrations of production facilities. And the use of spies was technologically obsolete. Each man in the defending forces, before being given knowledge of any installation, was tested with the serums.

He remembered the attack that had split the beachhead into two parts, and had almost succeeded. Another such attack would be due before long. He hammered his fist against the stone wall, cursing the scientists of his country.

After being spurred on to peak activity, it was the defenders who, after all, had developed a new weapon. He didn't know very much about it yet. Just one report of it.

An aerial photograph had given the rocket command a faint target, a traffic pattern in the hills of the Chemung Valley, and what looked like a cave entrance.

Ten huge rockets had been launched simultaneously, with the idea that possibly one or two would get through. The observers had reported that the entire flight of rockets had been destroyed at the highest point of their arc. No interceptor rockets had gone up. Of that the observers were certain. Their report said that it was as though all ten rockets had hit some solid ob-

ject towering high above the earth.

His aide walked briskly in, saluted, his hand slapping the side of his thigh as he brought his arm down smartly.

"Sir, the robot gun carrier that was captured in the northern sector is ready for inspection."

Jatz stood up wearily, and he knew that in his heart he was afraid. Robot gun carriers, ray screens, rockets detonating harmlessly miles above the earth. How soon would they be driven back into the sea?

CHAPTER THREE

The Beast

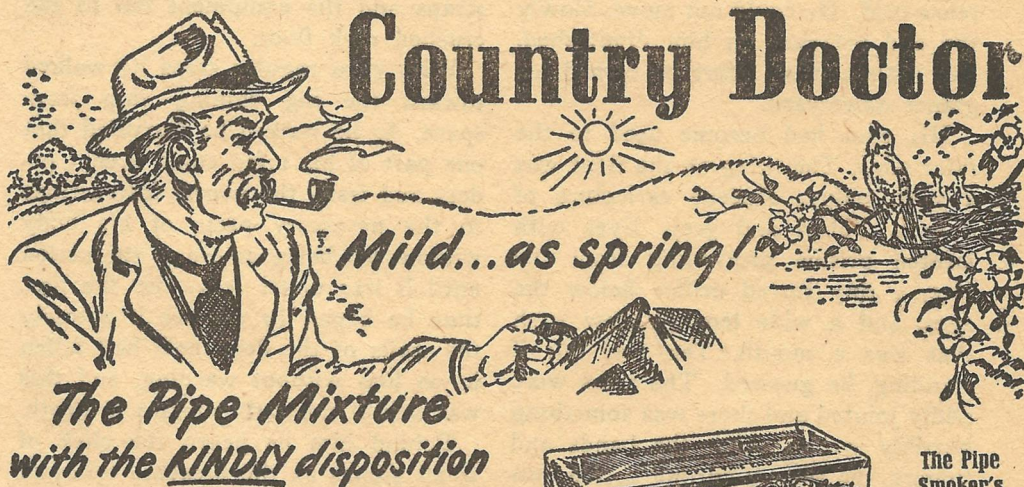
MARTIN RHODE had learned many new and intricate convolutions of the emotion commonly known as fear. There was,

of course, a feeling of horror, primitive, superstitious awe at seeing anything so completely alien. But that had gradually diminished in intensity.

The fear that didn't diminish was the acute physical fear of the sweating and the pain. He had walked a little way along the floor of the raw tunnel, the loop of cable behind him. Then he had seen movement. He had tried to tell of seeing the movement, and suddenly he could not move. The sweat boiled out of his body and he had stood, his underlip sagging away from his teeth, unable to change even the focus or direction of his glance.

The pain was in his ears and his head. Because it seemed to be focused in his ears, he thought of hypersonics.

He could see slow, fumbling movements in the distance, faintly lighted by a glow that seemed to come from a



The illustration depicts a man in a suit and hat, smoking a pipe, with a sun and a bird in the background. The text reads: **Country Doctor**, *Mild...as spring!*, **The Pipe Mixture**, *with the KINDLY disposition*.

Country Doctor Pipe Mixture has the warm hearted glow of friendliness and the unfailing goodness of the famous country doctor for whom it is named. A delightful blend of the finest, rarest tobaccos. Cool—slow-burning—satisfying. A wonderful flavor that finds favor with pipe smokers, young and old.

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huge metallic thing that filled the tunnel from wall to wall.

He could not move, and the fumbling thing had come toward him, and it was like a nightmare of childhood, himself unable to turn, unable to escape. It was a large thing, greyish white, moving along the dirt floor of the tunnel.

Because his eyes were still focused on the distant place, he could not look at it.

Greyish white, moving along the dirt floor.

It was as though mental fingers fumbled at his mind. It was as though a stranger were fitting an unfamiliar key to an unknown door in a strange house in a foreign city . . .

Thoughts, unexpressed in words. Thoughts to which he had to fit the words.

The thought of heaviness, and intense cold. He could not move. Slowly the odd pressure on him diminished, and with a great effort he turned his glance downward.

His eyes had become used to the faint glow. The thing on the floor was a vast, pulpy, obscene caricature of a man. Naked and grey. Eyes with faceted prisms protruding from the face, a tiny furred orifice below the eyes, and a wide lemon-yellow gash that was a mouth. Ten feet tall if standing, he guessed. The arms were oddly jointed and there was something horribly wrong about the hands and fingers, the fingers curling to the outside of where the wrists should be, rather than in toward the body.

Something else horribly wrong. The suety grey fat of the body was dragged down toward the floor of the cave, and the creature moved with great difficulty as though it were being subjected to a centrifuge. He comprehended that this was an alien, a crea-

ture from space, and that it was accustomed to far lesser gravity.

The mental fingers moved in his brain with more certainty. The thoughts said, "You are a primitive creature. Where are your masters?"

He found his lips could move. "There are no masters," he said, startled by the sound of his voice in the silence. He tried to lift the microphone to his lips but he could not move it.

"You are the apex of life on this planet," the thoughts said.

And he was ashamed, somehow. Humbled. As though contempt had somehow been put in his mind. It was primitive and absurd to have made sounds with his lips.

The creature seemed to be contemplating him. Suddenly the mike slipped, fell to the short length of flexible cord, banged against his thigh. Woodenly his hands unbuckled the straps and the equipment fell to the crushed rock floor.

With even regular steps he walked toward the big shining ship from space. As he walked he marveled that one part of his mind could accept orders and issue the neural instructions to the necessary parts of his body without his being aware of the action until it was under way. For the first time he began to wonder if actually the walls of the deep hole had fallen in on him without warning, and this was one of the early dreams in death.

Behind him he heard the click of small stones as the creature followed him laboriously. A vast port was open in the stern of the ship. He stepped through and his second step inside the ship, in the warm blue-grey glow, sent him floating toward a far wall. The sensation twisted his stomach and he was suddenly and violently ill.

When he turned, the creature was behind him, and it stood erect. He saw

that the hairless head was far too small for the massive body. In the lesser gravity inside the ship the big creature moved with the controlled ease of a man on earth. Martin's slightest movement sent him blundering out of control.

He turned sharply and floated into a slow fall as another of the creatures appeared in a huge doorway to his right.

He knew that they communicated with each other, as alien thoughts seemed to rush through his mind, just beyond his ability to comprehend. He detected the contempt of the second creature, and it seemed a sharper scorn than that which the first one had expressed.

One quick thought seemed to smell of death, and the first one protested and there was a mental shrug from the second one. A mental shrug which said, "Do what you please with it."

The second creature turned and left. The one who had crawled on the tunnel floor and now stood erect sent flashing into Martin's mind a vague thrust of amusement, of casual interest. Martin suddenly realized that it was the same sort of emotion that he might express concerning a strange dog who had wandered across his path.

At that, the creature's amusement seemed to grow more intense, and Martin guessed that he had intercepted and interpreted the thought.

The air inside the ship was very hot, and very moist. The creature seemed to sweat not at all. Martin Rhode felt his clothes clinging to him. He was still pauseated from the effect of the lesser gravity.

Once again his legs began to move without his volition, thrusting him awkwardly against a wall, then carrying him through the doorway. He gasped as he looked up a seemingly

endless corridor, illuminated by the blue-grey radiance that seemed to shine out from the metallic corridor walls. Everything was too big.

His steps carried him down the hall in long bounds, halting him before another doorway. He went into the room and he was alone. It was a room twenty feet square, half as high. He could move freely. He wanted to look out in the corridor again. But when he tried to go through the doorway, he ran against an invisible, transparent substance. He could not get through the doorway. He removed most of his clothes, and made a rude bed of them. He was tired and he went to sleep, as though ordered to sleep.

HE AWAKENED hearing a throb of power, a distant clanking. He was in a different part of the ship: a larger room with a huge port in one side. He stood up, forgetting the gravity, smacked lightly against the high ceiling and floated down gently.

He looked through the port and saw a vast square room. The two creatures he had seen before were outside the ship, and yet they moved easily. The room had evidently been hollowed out of the solid rock. It appeared to be at least two hundred feet square and fifty feet high. The side of the ship had been brightened in some manner so that the radiance of it filled the furthest corners of the room.

When he looked more closely at the two creatures, he saw that they wore close-fitting suits of metal. He guessed that the garments duplicated the gravitational conditions existing within the ship.

He was puzzled by their activities. apparently they were assembling some sort of equipment, but it was foreign to anything in his experience. The way they walked about was odd, due to

the extra joint in their legs, a joint which was like a second knee bending in the opposite direction.

A huge cube of milky glass, thirty feet on a side, rested near the far wall. Within the cube he could vaguely make out the intricate form of what appeared to be a large natural crystal formation, hexagonal in shape. The crystal seemed to shimmer behind the clouded walls of the cube.

Supports slanted out from the top four corners of the cube as though the cube were supporting the weight of a far greater area of the ceiling.

He saw no other representatives of the odd race, and began to wonder if only the two of them had arrived in this spaceship which had punched its way down through the Earth's crust, as though diving into water.

A great desire for sleep welled over him and he let himself sink to the floor. Something about the warm, moist air inside the ship, he guessed. . . .

He awakened the second time on a high bench. One of the creatures stood looking down at him, and he saw the fine hair encircling the oval orifice in the middle of its face move as it breathed. The lemon-yellow slash of its mouth showed no semblance of teeth.

The mental fumbling was gone. The thoughts were clear, precise, incisive.

"You are of a warlike race. We have had difficulty with your people. A — has been placed around this area to keep them away." One word was a blank. He had no word to fit the thought. It gave him the impression of immovable force, a linkage of particles of pure force.

"Where are you from?" Martin Rhode projected the thought as clearly as he could.

"A far place."

"Who are you?"

"This will be difficult for a primitive to comprehend. We are two of a warrior race. This planet is much as our planet must have been countless eons ago. I have never seen our home planet. My brother and I were born in space, as were thirty generations before us. We are accustomed to lesser gravity, and the constant heat inside our ship. Your planet is cold, and gravity makes us very heavy. My brother has requested that I destroy you, as we have learned from you all that is necessary for us to know. But I have a foolish sentiment about you. You are as our race must have once been. To see you is to look into the dim past. We have seen many primitives on many strange planets that circle unknown suns. You are more like what we must have once been than any we have yet seen. Thus, there is a sentiment that fills my mind when I look on you and think on your desperate, petty little wars, like children with rocks and slings."

In the thoughts there was such a powerful impression of great age and aloofness that Martin Rhode felt small and awed.

His lips trembled as he expressed the thought, "You called your people a warrior race?"

"Like yours. In the beginning tribe fights tribe, then city fights city, then nation fights nation, then continent fights continent. That is your present stage. Should you survive this stage, you will find planet fighting planet, then solar system fighting foreign solar system, and at last galaxy warring with galaxy. Who can tell? Possibly beyond that is universe making war with universe, or dimension against dimension. In each step there is always the possibility of mutual extermination, and with that, the peace that living things can find. Only in death is there

peace, and death is the final step."

There was horror in those thoughts. Horror and great age and great resignation.

"We have been at war with another race for eight hundred of your lifetimes. This other race is aquatic, and their spaceships are filled with the fluids of their home planet, long since destroyed. Our great fleets are no more. All told, we probably have no more than five thousand ships, four hundred thousand individuals out of the millions upon millions who once existed. This small patrol ship of ours was pursued. The ships from which we fled are somewhere in this vicinity."

Martin's head was whirling. He thought, "What are you planning to do here?"

"We will make certain preparations. Then we will let our presence here be known. When the pursuing ships are within proper range, we will explode this planet. We will die, of course, but the gases of the explosion with great speed, will engulf some of their ships and the heat will kill a great many of them, boil them alive in the fluids of their ships."

Martin Rhode's mind rocked under

the implications of the statement. He wanted to believe that it was some sort of a trick, and yet the calm certainty in the thoughts that had lanced his mind made belief inescapable.

"Kill all of us! All of us!" he said aloud.

"Believe me, creature, it is something that you will eventually do to yourselves if we do not do it. For uncounted generations we talked of the end of war. Now we know—there is no end."

Martin searched unsuccessfully for some way to refute the alien's argument. Impossible. The alien had all the weight of fact on its side. Fighting down his despair, Martin asked, "How will you explode our planet?"

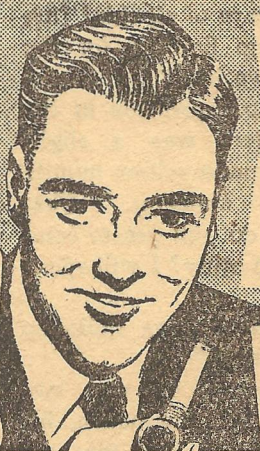
"With an ancient technique. It is a technique that you creatures possess. The power of the atom. It was used without avail against our —." Again that thought for which there was no word. "Our power is derived from the controlled oscillation of crystals subjected to electromagnetic impulses. That is what drives this ship at speed equal to forty times the circumference of your planet within a space of time equal to three pulsations of the organ which circulates your blood.

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"With the power of the crystals, we will compress hundreds of thousands of tons of the matter of which your planet is composed into a very small space. It is the principle which limits the maximum size of planets through molecular compression at the core. The atoms will be crushed. With this small substance of enormous weight, we will have a fuse. By heating it instantaneously to critical temperature, once again through the crystal, we will induce a chain reaction which will detonate this planet. That is the work my brother is doing now. He is setting up the necessary equipment to begin the task of compression. The ultimate bit of matter will have ten million times the density of water."

Martin was silent. The thoughts were once again clear to him. "I can feel your grief and your sense of loss, creature. You are thinking that those of your race will continue with their pointless war up to the moment of extinction. You are thinking that if you could escape, you could warn them. They would think you mad. They cannot come to this place because of the —. Your wish is futile."

Martin spoke aloud: "Could you—could you give my people some unmistakable evidence of all this? Just so they would stop fighting for the short time they have left?"

He could read no expression in the faceted eyes. There was a slight movement of the lemon-yellow mouth.

"It might be amusing. What mechanical device do you use to communicate with each other? I will speak to my brother."

"I dropped a short-range radio on the floor of the tunnel."

The creature stood up and left. Martin Rhode sat on the bench, his face in his hands. So this was the climax of the empty years. There was

no denying the truth of the thoughts he had read.

He guessed that it was a half-hour before the creature came back. "This is a simple device. Apparently your whole planet is served with less power than is needed to operate our small ship. Within a few hours I can construct a device which will enable you to reach every one of these devices on your planet, covering simultaneously all bands and wavelengths. Do many of your people have them?"

"Every soldier wears a small one on his wrist. Orders are given over them. There are few dwellings on the planet without one."

The alien grimaced. "My brother does not object to my amusing myself by giving all of your people some small period of peace before death."

IN THE long ward there was soft music, selected for its therapeutic value. It also concealed the drugged moans of the seriously wounded.

Alice Powell was marking a chart when the music faded and the strong voice, the familiar voice rang out. She dropped the pen and put her hand to her throat.

"This is Martin Rhode speaking. My voice is coming simultaneously from every radio set in the world. The earth has been invaded from outer space. The barrier which you cannot penetrate protects these strange beings while they work. I am held captive. I know their plans. . . ."

On Colonel Wing's desk was a picture of his wife and children. They had died during the first week of the war. After Martin finished speaking, Colonel Wing picked up the picture and sat very still, looking at the familiar faces.

Field Marshall Jatz listened until

the voice died, and then he struck his aide heavily in the mouth. "Listen!" he roared. "Another weapon they have developed! What is wrong with our people?"

The aide crawled to the doorway, blood smearing his chin.

Stanford Rider sat at his long desk, his face in his hands. After Martin had stopped speaking he began to laugh. The tone of his laughter crept constantly higher and the tears began to run down his face. It took a long time to quiet him.

In all the places below the hard crust of the world, people listened to the words of Martin Rhode. Many of them did not understand his language. But many millions did understand, and it was easier to believe that it was a trick than to believe what Martin Rhode had said.

Martin Rhode stood and looked into the shining screen as the huge grey-white creature manipulated the dials. In a barren ravine men fought and died, and blood stained the rocks in the pale sunshine.

"You see, creature, they did not believe you. It is as I told you."

Martin felt grief well up within him. "Can't you do anything to make them believe?" he asked desperately.

No thought came to Martin for many minutes. Then he received the thought of laughter. Wry laughter.

"You creatures do not communicate through thought. I believe I am beginning to understand your psychology. I will hook up the drive crystal of the ship, using it to amplify my thoughts. I will use you as a target so that my thoughts will be keyed to the minds of your creatures. Then I will give each of them a clear mental picture of me, an impression of great fear, and a view of the destruction of this

planet. Then they will no longer doubt."

An hour later the hookup was ready. A small room near the rear of the ship. A large metallic object, shaped like a funnel.

The full impetus of the thoughts crashed in on Martin Rhode's brain. In the beginning the thoughts had been like awkward fingers. Then they had achieved deftness and finish. But he knew at that moment that all that had gone before had been gentle, almost tender. These were not thoughts to be articulated into words. These were raw emotions, driven into his mind as though by a pneumatic hammer placed against the grey jelly of his brain.

He recoiled and he felt his mouth twisting, heard his own weak scream echo in his ears. In his mind he saw a huge image of one of the aliens, faceted eyes blazing. The fear was like no fear he had ever experienced. It was complete and utter horror! Then it was as though he were snapped off into space, looking down at the Earth, a planet the size of half a grain of rice. Huge ships ripped noiselessly by, headed for Earth. Then once again he was below the Earth's surface. The two grey-white creatures stood, intent, watching a view-screen. Red light emanating from the heart of a crystal played fitfully across a dark one-inch cube which rested in the centre of a huge plate of grey metal.

Once again he was in outer space. The ships drove closer to earth. This time Earth seemed to be the size of a baseball.

Suddenly it erupted into a glaring sheet of white flame which engulfed the spaceships, and he fell fainting to the floor.

When he awakened, before his eyes, he intercepted the thought of anger. He looked up into the face of the

creature. "You nearly destroyed the effect, creature. In the midst of it you made a loud sound with your mouth. It gave me pain. Do not do it again."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Final War

JOSEPH HUDDY, one of eight survivors of a daylight infiltration patrol, stood up behind the rock where he had sought shelter. He rubbed the back of a dirty hand across his wet forehead and glanced apprehensively toward the grey sky.

He thought, "That joker that talked this morning wasn't kidding!" He did not think it odd that, though he had failed to believe the broadcast at the time, he suddenly believed it now. If asked, he would have said, "Hell, all of a sudden I could see those zombies, the big grey boys. Scared me, damn if it didn't!"

Dazed, he looked up the small ravine. One of "them" was standing in plain sight. By force of habit, Joe snatched up his forgotten weapon, leveled it at the stocky foreigner. But suddenly he thought that it was pretty silly to get all hot about killing one of "them" when there was a far greater danger. His finger relaxed, slid off the trigger.

With sudden resolution, he tossed the gun aside, yelled, "Hey there!"

The stocky man looked down toward him, grinned nervously. A few moments later they had exchanged cigarettes, were squatting on their heels.

"I be damn," Joe said. "You all of a sudden saw that big grey thing too?"

"I see," the man said, his eyes round and wide. He shuddered.

"What about this war we're having?" Joe asked.

The man thumped his chest. "Me, I

quit. Go home. See wife before—boom!"

"Not a bad idea. Hell, if any officers see us though, we'll both be shot."

In response the man merely pointed with his thick thumb. Joe looked over his shoulder. Fifty feet away the lieutenant in charge of Joe's patrol stood chatting with an enemy officer. They both seemed excited.

"Something tells me the war's over," Joe said wonderingly.

General Argo and Field Marshal Jatz looked at each other with impassive faces. Suddenly Argo grinned. "I'm going to get myself court-martialed for this little tea-party."

Jatz relaxed and scratched his head. He looked worried. "I also. Never should have come here to this country in the first place."

Argo said quietly, "We've been trying to convince you people of that, you know."

Jatz grinned. "You have been very convincing, my friend. But somehow . . . I do not know how to say it. We were enemies. Now we are both . . . men. Brothers. Like two relatives fighting and along comes a peacemaker and they both turn on him. Now we have a strange race. A stronger enemy."

"Would you like to take a look at the barrier?"

For a moment Jatz hesitated. Then he shrugged. "I have nothing to fear from you, my friend. I would like very much to take a look at this barrier. I lost rockets against it and thought it was something you people had devised."

"We thought it was something you put there."

Side by side they walked down the long corridor toward the waiting elevator. Their staff officers followed along, seeing nothing particularly

strange in this odd and amicable alliance.

All over the world hate was forgotten—hate for other men. Fear of other men was forgotten. In its place was hatred of the invader from space, fear of the sudden death of the world.

The three battle fronts of the world dissolved. The leaders of all nations flew by fastest means to the hidden field in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

A lean and tired man presided at the long polished table. His name was Stanford Rider.

"Possibly all of you share my own feeling of guilt. We, the statesmen and politicians of the world, made possible the conditions which resulted in this deadly and barren war which has laid waste our countries and impoverished our peoples."

He paused, saw reluctant agreement on every face. He continued. "Now we are met on a far different battlefield. Now our conflicts between nations are childish by comparison. We are in the position of small creatures of the forest beneath whom has been placed a mighty charge of explosives. It may be that we will be as powerless to alter the course of events as the wild creatures would be to halt the operation of the time fuse on the hidden mines.

"These may be the last few days of

our lives. At least for these last few days there will be peace among men of all nations. Our psychiatrists have told me that the visions we all saw were activated by a projection of thought more powerful than we can contemplate. It is futile to question the accuracy of the visions we all saw. We saw our planet being destroyed in order to wipe out the ships of some unknown race which is at war with the strangers from space who have invaded our planet.

"In this perilous extremity, I invite your suggestions."

Every known force was applied to the barrier. The most powerful atomic explosion ever released on Earth was detonated close to the barrier. Squadrons of high-explosive rockets exploded in sequence, in unison, in bursts of ten, fifty and five hundred, expended their fury against the barrier.

And in the end they accomplished no more than would have been achieved by one small boy armed with a pebble and a dry stick.

MARTIN RHODE felt the distant rumble and thud, heard the flakes of rock dropping from the tunnel roof. He learned to operate the clear and perfect screen and watched the efforts to destroy the barrier. He saw that peace had come

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to the world, and smiled wryly, knowing that for the first time since crude pictures were scratched on the walls of caves, no men were locked in combat anywhere in the world. Here and now was the dream of all Utopians.

The alien had gained such new facility with Martin's mind that he could reach him from great distances.

"My brother has completed his preparations. It may interest you to watch the actual operation. Soon we will be ready."

The huge room that had been hollowed out of the rock had been enlarged to an incredible distance. Martin Rhode stood near the glowing hull of the spaceship and saw that six crystals stood at equal intervals around a dull black cube that measured ten feet on a side.

The thoughts knifed into his mind. "All the matter excavated here has been compressed into that cube. It weighs half a million tons. The atomic structure is partially crushed. Stay where you are. This final operation will completely crush the atomic structure, compressing it to a smaller area than exists at the heart of any known planet. This final operation will compress that cube until it is two centimeters on each side."

Martin gasped. Half a million tons contained within a space of eight cubic centimeters!

"The large block is resting on a metal plate. After the compression operation, the small cube will be supported by the thick metal plate, which is electronically stiffened to hold it. One crystal will be brought closer to it, with its heat potential focused directly upon it. At that point we will attract the attention of our pursuers and wait until they are within range. Every last fragment of the atomic energy in half a million tons of matter

will be released instantaneously. This planet will cease to exist, as it becomes, for a brief space, a supernova."

Martin Rhode stood and his nails bit into his palms and he gulped the hot, moist air in shallow breaths. The crystals began to glow and a low humming sound filled the chamber. Their glow was pale violet, and as the sound increased, the glow rose through the spectrum. By the time the glow was a hot, angry red, the humming had risen to a shrill scream. The scream faded away and Martin was torn by the agony of hypersonics.

The cube shrank! So slowly at first that he could barely see the change, and then more rapidly. Soon the top surface was level with his eyes, then he could see the top of it. From the cube came an angry crackling, a groan of tortured matter. It was the size of a hatbox. Constantly smaller. He felt his internal body heat rise under the unheard whine of hypersonics and the crystals vibrated until they could be seen only as deep glowing spots. spots.

Suddenly the pressure stopped. Martin's knees sagged and he nearly fell. As though hypnotized, he walked slowly forward so that he could see more clearly the tiny cube.

The thoughts that he intercepted were thoughts of satisfaction, of accomplishment.

He stood and looked down at the metal plate. The cube was black, and it shone like polished ebony.

Then he noticed an odd thing. It appeared to be sinking into the metal plate, and the metal seemed to be floating away from it as though suddenly molten.

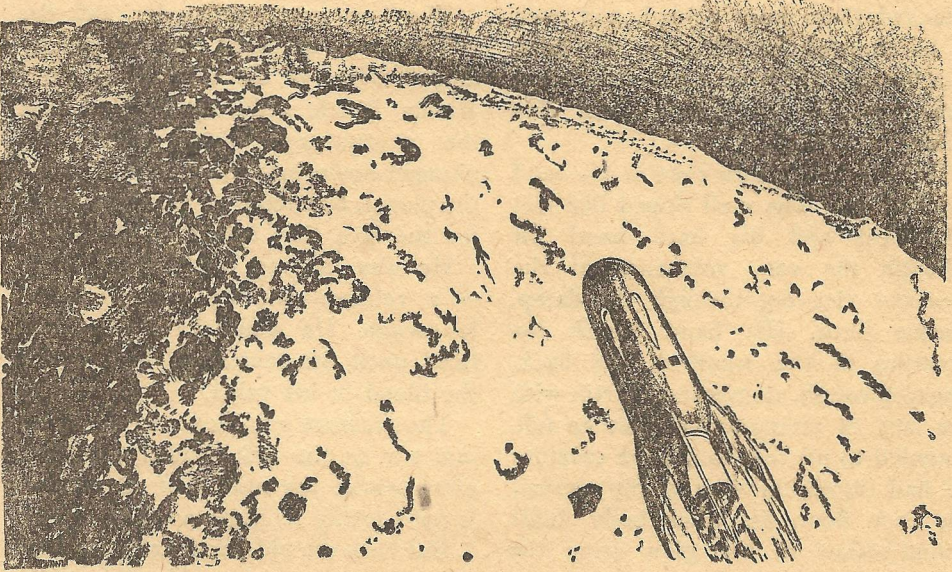
Even as he looked down at it, the warm and satisfied thoughts that had come to him changed abruptly to alarm. He caught scattered phrases.

"... gravity too great ... metal not strong enough ... reinforce quickly ... full power ..."

Quickly he comprehended that with the full half-million tons of weight, the tiny cube was like the point of a huge pyramid, and by pure weight it was sinking into the plate like the sharp point of a drill.

The running creature stumbled, fell heavily against the instrument panel and tumbled to the floor. The massive metal plates curled slowly up on either side, and then there was an odd noise, like a cork pulled from an enormous bottle through the underside of the plate.

He screamed again, the sound tear-



The alien ship was hovering out there, waiting . . .

He looked and saw one of the grey-white creatures running awkwardly toward an instrument panel which it had left but a few seconds before.

He remembered the anger that he had witnessed when he had screamed faintly under the shock of the emotional images that had been placed in his mind.

Even as the creature reached a pulpy hand out toward the instrument panel, Martin Rhode threw his head back and screamed with the full power of his lungs, screamed knowing that the alien vibration would torture them, screamed with the anger and pride and courage of all outraged mankind.

ing his throat as he watched the twisted faces of the two creatures.

When he paused to catch his breath, their thoughts came clearer to him, and in them he sensed resignation, as though someone were saying sadly and softly, "Too late, too late." Their anger was gone. The crystals were inert. There was a dim sound, the crackling and grinding of rocks, and that diminished into the distance, into the silence. Then there was nothing. . .

MARTIN knew that the tiny cube was sinking into the earth gaining speed with increased momentum, and not even the resources

of the two alien creature could halt its progress.

They ignored him. They turned, clothed in the light mail, and began to walk toward the ship: two towering grey-white creatures out of an obscene dream of horror. He knew that they ignored him because he was too puny, too powerless.

With a low sound in his throat he attacked them from behind, and even as he charged, he felt their thoughts, dim because they were not directed at him, thoughts of escape from this place. . . .

One started to turn even as his hand reached out. The mail ripped like wet cardboard and his hard hand bit through the very substance of the creature, cleaving through the damp, porous flesh. His hand struck the creature in the small of the back, ripped through, staggering Martin with the lack of resistance so that he fell, bounded to his feet to see the creature he had struck moving feebly against the rock floor, his thick body fluids lemon-yellow in the glow from the ship.

Once again the anger struck him and he bounded toward the remaining one, feeling the paralyzing whine of hypersonics, feeling the sudden heat that invaded his body. But he retained the will, the power to strike one blow before he became motionless. His clenched fist punched through the chain mail, slammed deep into the abdominal cavity of the thing, and it fell back toward the place where the metal plate lay, warped and useless.

But the faceted eyes still watched him and he stood, his face slack, trying in vain to break the paralysis engendered in him by the vibrations.

The creature held a grotesque hand over the torn hole in its middle, and tried to get up. Beyond it a wisp of

smoke rose from the tiny hole in the plate and an acrid, sulphurous odor filled the cavern.

There was a rumbling sound, a low roaring, in the bowels of the earth. The smoke danced grey-white in the glow of the ship. Martin Rhode stood frozen and helpless, his stained fist still clenched, his teeth meeting in the flesh of his lower lip.

The low roar was louder and the metal plate quivered, was suddenly flipped over, as by a careless giant. Martin Rhode suddenly realized that the enormously heavy pellet had plunged down into the molten heart of the planet, providing an escape channel for the lava that boiled far below.

He was hearing the yowling birth of a volcano—and he was powerless to escape. He would have to remain fixed until the increasing heat boiled the blood in his veins.

The creature was closer to the opening, and as the first tentative reddish glow seared the mouth of the orifice, it tried feebly to move away.

But with the old, familiar clarity, the thoughts arrowed into Martin's mind. He heard the mental laughter of the thing; wild laughter; the absurd, hysterical laughter of a being defeated by a far weaker creature.

The laughter slowly ended, and in its place came something oddly like compassion.

"Go!" the thoughts said. "Go quickly!"

The hypersonic spell was suddenly broken and Martin backed slowly away, his arm shielding his face from the increasing heat.

A viscous gout of lava arced up, splattered across the dying thing, and in Martin's mind was the scream, telephathed in naked clarity.

He raced into the ship, down the long corridor, out the rear port into

the tunnel the ship had made, floating and falling while in the ship, clawing raggedly at the smooth walls in his eagerness to leave.

No cable dangled as a means of escape when he reached the bend; but the explosions had made the hole like a vast funnel. Far above him sparkled the night stars. Sobbing aloud with reaction, with new fear, he clawed his way up where the slope seemed the most gentle, ripping his hands on the jagged rock, tasting the blood in his mouth from his mangled lip. Once a foothold crumpled and he slid, spread-eagled down for a dozen feet, stopped and clawed his way up with new anxiety.

At last he rolled panting, on the ground, the deep cavity beside him. The air was hot and still. He ran along the road, stumbling, falling, getting up once more, his breath wheezing and rasping in his throat, tears of weakness filling and stinging his eyes.

It seemed to him as though he were running in a dream. His legs were leaden, heavy, dull, and the pain was a jagged skewer in his side.

He ran against something solid, collapsed, his fingertips touching the firm warmth of the barrier, the concrete of the road warm and rough against his inflamed cheek.

Slowly and painfully he got to his feet, trapped in the odd warmth behind the barrier. He strained his eyes, staring into the night, trying to see if the atomic bombs had been tried at that place, leaving dangerous radioactives behind, which might sear him even through the barrier. The earth was pitted with high explosives, but he could see none of the vitrification that would indicate the use of atomics.

A distant thud and rumble behind him made him turn sharply. A red glare was spewing up into the night, the reflected glow pinkening the clouds that were shunted aside by the invisible barrier. He guessed that he had covered nearly four miles since clambering out of the deep pit. Even at that distance he could clearly make out the glowing white-hot clots of stone thrown toward the sky.

He was weak and he leaned one hand against the barrier for support. The barrier was indubitably created and maintained by some device aboard the spaceship. The spaceship was near the heart of the inferno. . . .

Suddenly the support was gone and he sprawled awkwardly, cool air striking his face. The barrier was gone as if turned off by a distant switch, gone as though it had never existed.

He made his way across the shattered earth. On a high crest he saw the

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lights of dwellings far ahead. It was so long since man had lived above ground, had been able to show lights during the night.

Once again there were tears on his face, but this time they were tears of joy and thanksgiving.

AFTER the conference, held for the sake of convenience in the great hall deep under the mountains, five of them rode up in the elevator: President Rider, Martin Rhode and the three guards.

The wall was already rolled back in the observation room. Stanford Rider's shoulders were straighter than they had been in many a day. Martin Rhode was still lean and haggard from his experience.

The conference of the heads of nations at which Martin Rhode had given a detailed summary of his eight days of captivity had been over for a half-hour.

"I hope I made them understand, sir," Martin said.

They stood side by side looking out across the wild and lovely mountains. "They understood," Rider said simply.

"How long will all this last, sir?" Martin asked.

"What do you mean, Rhode?"

"Before we got to war again. Before it all starts over again."

Rider's smile was amused. "Ah, the pessimism of youth! No, Rhode, I believe that you have underestimated the effect of all this. You must realize that for a few moments a great and deadly fear was implanted in the minds of men. Fear of the unknown. Fear of distant worlds and stronger beings. We all know now that the universe is peopled by beings more terrible than ourselves, and no man living will forget that fear. It will find its way into song and story.

"You see, Rhode, we know for a certainty that to survive we must put an end to wars of man against man. We have come to the end of that particular era. The volcano, now five thousand feet high, is a living memorial to the narrowness of our escape. From now on all nations will begin to forget the narrow boundaries of nationalism and begin to think of the human race as a unit. Our combined resources will bring the stars closer."

The fervor of his tone had increased as he had spoken, and Martin Rhode was infected by his enthusiasm. For the first time, the dream seemed possible.

Rider sighed. "But you've got to do more than to listen to an old man mumble his dreams, Rhode. It is stupid for me to try to make the gesture of thanking you in the name of humanity. Your own continued existence is your reward. I've lined up a series of conferences with the top technologists of all nations. They intend to pick your brains, Rhode, and find out just a little bit about the power crystals."

Martin felt sharp disappointment. There was something else. . . .

Rider laughed. "You don't have a poker face, my boy. And I guess I'm teasing you a little. Those conferences will start the day after tomorrow. In the meantime I took the liberty of sending for a . . . a certain young woman. She should be here by now."

Martin turned quickly toward the elevator, then regained control of himself, turned back and said, "Thank you, sir."

But Stanford Rider had already forgotten his presence. The lean man was standing, his hands locked behind him, looking out over the fair land where he and all his people could once again walk free and unafraid in the light of the sun.



I, MARS

by

Ray Bradbury

Alone on Mars, yet not alone
For old Barton's younger
selves lived on, hating, tormenting
him for his living proof that their
hopes were dead!

THE phone rang.
A grey hand lifted the receiver.
"Hello?"
"Hello, Barton?"
"Yes,"
"This is Barton!"
"What?"

"This is Barton!"

"It can't be. This phone hasn't rung in twenty years."

The old man hung up.

Brrrrinnng!

His grey hand seized the phone.

"Hello, Barton," laughed the voice.

"You have forgotten, haven't you?"

The old man felt his heart grow small and like a cool stone. He felt the wind blowing in off the dry Martian seas and the blue hills of Mars. After twenty years of silence and cobwebs and now, tonight, on his eightieth birthday, with a ghastly scream, this phone had wailed to life.

"Who did you think it was?" said the voice. "A rocket captain? Did you think someone had come to rescue you?"

"No."

"What's the date?"

Numbly, "July 20th, 2097."

"Good Lord. Sixty years! Have you been sitting there that long? Waiting for a rocket to come from Earth to rescue you?"

The old man nodded.

"Now, old man, do you know who I am? Think!"

"Yes." The dry pale lips trembling. "I understand. I remember. We are one. I am Emil Barton and you are Emil Barton."

"With one difference. You are eighty. I am only twenty. All of life before me!"

The old man began to laugh and then to cry. He sat holding the phone like a lost and silly child in his fingers. The conversation was impossible, and should not be continued, and yet he went on with it. When he got hold of himself he held the phone close to his withered lips and said, in deepest anguish, "Listen! You there! Listen, oh God, if I could warn you! How can I? You're only a voice. If I could

show you how lonely the years are. End it, kill yourself! Don't wait! If you knew what it is to change from the thing you are to the thing that is me, today, here, now, at this end."

"Impossible." The voice of the young Barton laughed, far away. "I've no way to tell if you ever get this call. This is all mechanical. You're talking to a transcription, no more. This is 2037. Sixty years in your past. Today, the atom war started on Earth. All colonials were called home from Mars, by rocket. I got left behind!"

"I remember," whispered the old man.

"Alone on Mars," laughed the young voice. "A month, a year, who cares? There are foods and books. In my spare time I've made transcription libraries of ten thousand words, responses, my voice, connected to phone relays. In later months I'll call, have someone to talk with."

"Yes," murmured the old man, remembering.

"Forty-sixty years from now my own transcripto-tapes will ring me up. I don't really think I'll be here on Mars that long, it's just a beautifully ironic idea of mine, something to pass the time. Is that really you, Barton? Is that really me?"

Tears fell from the old man's eyes. "Yes!"

"I've made a thousand Bartons, tapes, sensitive to all questions, my voice, in one thousand Martian towns. An army of Bartons over Mars, while I wait for the rockets to return."

"You fool," the old man shook his head, wearily. "You waited sixty years. You grew old waiting, always alone. And now you've become me and you're still alone in the empty cities."

"Don't expect my sympathy. You're like a stranger, off in another country.

I can't be sad. I'm alive when I make these tapes. And you're alive when you hear them. Both of us, to the other, incomprehensible. Neither can warn the other, even though both respond, one to the other, one automatically, the other warmly and humanly. I'm human now. You're human later. It's insane. I can't cry, because not knowing the future I can only be optimistic. These hidden tapes can only react to a certain number of stimuli from you. Can you ask a dead man to weep?"

"Stop it!" cried the old man, for his heart was sickening in him. He felt the familiar great seizures of pain. Nausea moved through him, and blackness. "Stop it! Oh God, but you were heartless. Go away!"

"Were, old man? I am. As long as the tapes glide on, as long as secret spindles and hidden electronic eyes read and select and convert words to send to you, I'll be young, cruel, blunt. I'll go on being young and cruel long after you're dead. Goodby."

"Wait!" cried the old man.
Click.

BARTON sat holding the silent phone a long while. His heart gave him intense pain.

What insanity it had been. In youth's flush, how silly, how inspired, those first secluded years, fixing the telephonic brains, the tapes, the circuits, scheduling calls on time relays:

Brrrrinnng!

"Morning, Barton. This is Barton. Seven o'clock. Rise and shine!"

Brrrrinnng!

"Barton? Barton calling. You're to go to Mars Town at noon. Install a telephonic brain. Thought I'd remind you."

"Thanks."

Brrrrinnng!

"Barton? Barton. Have lunch with me? The Rocket Inn?" ..

"Right."

"See you. So long!"

Brrrrinnng!

"That you, B.? Thought I'd cheer you. Firm chin, and all that. The rescue rocket might come tomorrow, to save you."

"Yes, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow."

Click.

But forty years had burned into smoke. Barton had muted the insidious phones and their clever, clever repartee. He had sealed them into silences. They were to call him only after he was eighty, if he still lived. And now today, the phones ringing, and the past breathing in his ear, sighing, whispering, murmuring, and remembering.

Brrrrinnng!

He let it ring.

"I don't have to answer it," he thought.

Brrrrinnng!

"There's no one there at all," he thought.

Brrrrinnng!

"It's like talking to yourself," he thought. "But different. Oh God, how different."

He felt his hands crawl unconsciously toward the phone.

Click.

"Hello, old Barton, this is young Barton. One year older, though. I'm twenty-one today. In the last year I've put voice brains in two hundred towns on Mars, I've populated it with arrogant Bartons!"

"Yes." The old man remembered those days six decades ago, those nights of rushing over blue hills and into iron valleys of Mars, with a truckful of machinery, whistling, happy. Another telephone, another relay.

Something to do. Something clever and wonderful and sad. Hidden voices. Hidden, hidden. In those young days when death was not death, time was not time, old age a faint echo from the long blue cavern of years ahead. That young idiot, that sadistic fool, never thinking to reap the harvest so sown.

"Last night," said Barton, aged twenty-one, "I sat alone in a movie theater in an empty town. I played an old Laurel and Hardy. Laughed so much. God, how I laughed."

"Yes."

"I got an idea today. I recorded my voice one thousand times on one tape. Broadcast from the town, it sounds like a thousand people living there. A comforting noise, the noise of a crowd. I fixed it so doors slam in town, children sing, music boxes play, all by clockworks. If I don't look out the window, if I just listen, it's all right. But if I look, it spoils the illusion. There's only one solution. I'll populate the town with robots. I guess I'm getting lonely."

The old man said, "Yes. That was your first sign."

"What?"

"The first time you admitted you were lonely."

"I've experimented with smells. As I walk down the deserted streets, the smells of bacon and eggs, ham steak, filets, soups, come from the houses. All done with hidden machines. Clever?"

"Fantasy. Madness."

"Self-protection, old man."

"I'm tired." Abruptly, the old man hung up. It was too much. The past pouring over him, drowning him. . . .

Swaying, he moved down the tower stairs to the streets of the town.

The town was dark. No longer did red neons burn, music play, or cooking smells linger. Long ago he had aban-

doned the grim fantasy of the mechanical lie. Listen! Are those footsteps? Smell! Isn't that strawberry pie! No, he had stopped it all. What had he done with the robots? His mind puzzled. Oh, yes . . .

He moved to the dark canal where the stars shone in the quivering waters.

Underwater, in row after fish-like row, rusting, were the robot populations of Mars he had constructed over the years, and, in a wild realization of his own insane inadequacy, had commanded to march, one two three four! into the canal deeps, plunging, bubbling like sunken bottles. He had killed them and shown no remorse.

BRRRRINNNNG.

Faintly a phone rang in a lightless cottage.

He walked on. The phone ceased.

Brrrrinnng. Another cottage ahead, as if it knew of his passing. He began to run. The ringing stayed behind. Only to be taken up by a ringing from now this house—Brrrrinnng! now that, now here, there! He turned the corner. A phone! He darted on. Another corner. Another phone!

"All right, all right!" he shrieked, exhausted. "I'm coming!"

"Hello, Barton."

"What do you want!"

"I'm lonely. I only live when I speak. So I must speak. You can't shut me up forever."

"Leave me alone!" said the old man, in horror. "Oh, my heart!"

"This is Barton, age twenty-four. Another couple of years gone. Waiting. A little lonelier. I've read *War and Peace*, drunk sherry, run restaurants with myself as waiter, cook, entertainer. And tonight, I star in a film at the Tivoli—Emil Barton in *Love's Labor Lost*, playing all the parts, some with wigs, myself!"

"Stop calling me," the old man's eyes were fiery and insane. "Or I'll kill you!"

"You can't kill me. You'll have to find me, first!"

"I'll find you!" A choking.

"You've forgotten where you hid me. I'm everywhere in Mars, in boxes, in houses, in cables, towers, underground! Go ahead, try! What'll you call it? Telecide? Suicide? Jealous, are you? Jealous of me here, only twenty - four, bright - eyed, strong, young, young, young? All right, old man, it's war! Between us. Between me! A whole regiment of us, all ages from twenty to sixty, against you, the real one. Go ahead, declare war!"

"I'll kill you!" screamed Barton.

Click. Silence.

"Kill you!" He threw the phone out the window, shrieking.

In the midnight cold, the ancient automobile moved in deep valleys. Under Barton's feet on the floorboard were revolvers, rifles, dynamite. The roar of the car was in his thin, tired bones.

I'll find them, he thought. Find and destroy, all of them. Oh, God, God, how can he do this to me?

He stopped the car. A strange town lay under the late twin moons. There was no wind.

He held the rifle in his cold hands.

He peered at the poles, the towers, the boxes. Where? Where was this town's voice hidden? That tower? Or that one there! Where! So many years ago. So long gone. So forgotten. He turned his head now this way, now that, wildly. It must be that tower! Was he certain? Or this box here, or the transformer half up that tower!

He raised the rifle.

The tower fell with the first bullet.

All of them, he thought. All of the towers in this town will have to be cut apart. I've forgotten. Too long.

The car moved along the silent street.

Brrrrinnng!

He looked at the deserted drugstore.

Brrrrinnng!

Pistol in hand, he shot the lock off the door, and entered.

Click.

"Hello, Barton? Just a warning. Don't try to rip down all the towers, blow things up. Cut your own throat that way. Think it over..."

Click.

He stepped out of the phone booth slowly and moved into the street and listened to the telephone towers humming high in the air, still alive, still untouched. He looked at them and then he understood.

He could not destroy the towers. Suppose a rocket came from Earth,

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impossible idea, but suppose it came tonight, tomorrow, next week? and landed on the other side of the planet, and used the phones to try to call Barton, only to find the circuits dead? Yes, imagine!

Barton dropped his gun.

"A rocket won't come," he argued, softly, logically with himself. "I'm old. It won't come now. It's too late."

But suppose it came, and you never knew, he thought. No, you've got to keep the lines open.

Brrrrinnng.

HE TURNED dully. His eyes were blinking and not seeing. He shuffled back into the drug-store and fumbled with the receiver.

"Hello?" A strange voice.

"Please," pleaded the old man, brokenly. "Don't bother me."

"Who's this, who's there? Who is it? Where are you?" cried the voice, surprised.

"Wait a minute." The old man staggered. "This is Emil Barton, who's that?"

"This is Captain Leonard Rockwell, Earth Rocket 48. Just arrived from New York."

"No, no, no."

"Are you there, Mr. Barton?"

"No, no, it can't be, it just can't."

"Where are you?"

"You're lying, it's false!" The old man had to lean against the booth wall. His blue eyes were cold blind. "It's you, Barton, making, making fun of me, lying to me again!"

"This is Captain Rockwell, Rocket 48. Just landed in New Schenecty. Where are you?"

"In Green Town," he gasped. "That's a thousand miles from you."

"Look, Barton, can you come here?"

"What?"

"We've repairs on our rocket. Ex-

hausted from the flight. Can you come help?"

"Yes, yes."

"We're at the tarmac outside town. Can you rush by tomorrow?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well?"

The old man petted the phone, pitifully. "How's Earth? How's New York? Is the war over? Who's President now? What happened?"

"Plenty of time for gossip when you arrive."

"Is everything fine?"

"Fine."

"Thank God." The old man listened to the far voice. "Are you sure you're Captain Rockwell?"

"Damn it, man!"

"I'm sorry!"

He hung up and ran.

They were here, after many years, unbelievable, his own, who would take him back to Earth seas and skies and mountains.

He started the car. He would drive all night. Could he do it? What of his heart—It would be worth a risk, to see people, to shake hands, to hear them near you.

The car thundered in the hills.

That voice. Captain Rockwell. It couldn't be himself, forty years ago. He had never made a recording like that. Or had he? In one of his depressive fits, in a spell of drunken cynicism, hadn't he once made a false tape of a false landing on Mars with a synthetic captain, an imaginary crew? He jerked his grey head, savagely. No. He was a suspicious fool. Now was no time to doubt. He must run under the moons of Mars, hour on hour. What a party they would have!

The sun rose. He was immensely tired, full of thorns and brambles of weakness, his heart plunging and aching, his fingers fumbling the wheel,

but the thing that pleased him most was the thought of one last phone call: Hello, young Barton, this is old barton. I'm leaving for Earth today! Rescued! He chuckled weakly.

He drove into the shadowy limits of New Schenectady at sundown. Stepping from his car he stood staring at the rocket tarmac, rubbing his reddened eyes.

The rocket field was empty. No one ran to meet him. No one shook his hand, shouted, or laughed.

He felt his heart roar into pain. He knew blackness and a sensation of falling through the open sky. He stumbled toward an office.

Inside, six phones sat in a neat row.

He waited, gasping.

Finally:

Brrrrinnng.

He lifted the heavy receiver.

A voice said, "I was wondering if you'd get there alive."

The old man did not speak but stood with the phone in his hands.

The voice continued, "An elaborate joke. Captain Rockwell reporting for duty, sir. Your orders, sir?"

"You," groaned the old man.

"How's your heart, old man?"

"No!"

"Hoped the trip would kill you. Had to eliminate you some way, so I could live, if you call a transcription living."

"I'm going out now," replied the old man, "and blow it all up. I don't care. I'll blow up everything until you're all dead!"

"You haven't the strength. Why do you think I had you travel so far, so fast? This is your last trip!"

The old man felt his heart falter. He would never make the other towns. The war was lost. He slid into a chair and made low sobbing, mournful noises from his loose mouth. He glared at the five other, silent phones. As if

at a signal, they burst into silver chorus! A nest of ugly birds screaming!

Automatic receivers popped up.

The office whirled. "Barton, Barton, Barton!"

He throttled the phone in his hands, the voice, the youth, the time of long ago. He mashed, choked it and still it laughed at him. He throttled it. He beat it. He kicked at it. He hated it with hands and mouth and blind raging eye. He furred the hot wire like serpentine in his fingers, ripped it into red bits which fell about his stumbling feet.

He destroyed three other phones. There was a sudden silence.

And as if his body now discovered a thing which it had long kept secret, it seemed to decay upon his tired bones. The flesh of his eyelids fell away like flower petals. His mouth became a withered rose. The lobes of his ears melting wax. He pushed his chest with his hands and fell face down. He lay still. His breathing stopped. His heart stopped.

After a long spell, the remaining two phones rang.

Twice. Three times.

A relay snapped somewhere. The two phone voices were connected, one to the other.

"Hello, Barton?"

"Yes, Barton?"

"Aged twenty-four."

"I'm twenty-six. We're both young. What's happened?"

"I don't know. Listen."

The silent rom. The old man did not stir on the floor. The wind blew in the broken window. The air was cool.

"Congratulate me, Barton, this is my twenty-sixth birthday!"

"Congratulations!"

Laughter drifted out the window into the dead city.

All of space-time shifted. . . . Gahn felt the scream tear his throat, felt the brink of nothingness, and screamed again. . . .



By John Wade Farrell

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

It is more than a problem of focus. It is more than a question of intellectual curiosity. Though the tendency is for divergence to swing back to norm, it is recognized that objective interference in any case may have a long range effect sufficient to cause objective alterations in present society. Thus, the entertainment quotient of Crime-seeking is perforce limited to those tenth-level mentalities where, due to knowledge, thalamic motivations can be recognized as such, and discounted. Any attempt by a tenth-level mentality to indoctrinate any lesser mentality in Crime-seeking procedure will result in social isolation for an indefinite period. The clearest analogy of the danger of objective interference is that of the primitive man who, clinging to a limb, saws it off between his body and the trunk of the tree.

JOHN HOMRIK sucked on the cigarette butt until the red ring crept close to his fingers, then with rigid nails he snapped it against the steel wall of the cell. The sparks showered, died.

"Like that," he thought. "Just like that." Please be seated, Mr. Homrik. We want to put this black cap over

your head. You don't mind if we strap your arms down. Of course not.

Heeney, the guard, sat on the far side of the corridor. The kitchen chair was incongruous, red and cream, chipped paint. He had thumbs under the gúnbelt and a slant of sun into the deathhouse cell block picked out the enlarged pores of Heeney's pendulous nose, the blackheads at the corners of his loose mouth.

Homrik walked over to the cell door, felt the chill of the bars in his sweating palms. He looked steadily at Heeney, was half amused to see Heeney turn away rather than meet his glance.

"Suppose it was you in here, Heeney," he said softly.

"I didn't kill any dames," Heeney said sullenly.

"That's right. Neither did I, Heeney. Suppose, knowing your own innocence, you were in here, like I am. What would you do? What would you say?"

"I wouldn't be in there," Heeney said.

Homrik grinned and there was no humor in it. "I'm in here, Heeney. And I didn't kill a 'dame'. I didn't kill anybody."

Heeney scowled, said, "Fella, I'm

One man sat in his death cell, hoping for the miracle he knew would never come. Another watched him, owl-eyed, across the abyss of time; and neither dreamed that their lives were bound up together—that of these two, who were separated by centuries, one must die for the other!

not as smart as you are. But if it was me, I wouldn't die before I made a full confession. It would make me feel better. You ought to get it off your chest."

John Homrik laughed. "You too, Heeney. You too." He walked over, sat on the cot, lit another cigarette. He looked at his hands, fingers outspread. The long months of prison hadn't faded all of the deep tan. His hands were deft and steady. They had called them the hands of a killer. And these were the hands that so soon would be forever stilled. Coffin hands. Rotting hands. Cold and dead after the convulsive twitch when the current hit.

With a quick movement he put them behind him. A sad knowledge filled him. He was innocent of murder, but no man would ever believe it. The pattern of the trial had been too clear.

"Yes, I knew that Anna had been unfaithful. But she was just a kid. Just eighteen. I forgave her. Certainly I forgave her. I tried to keep her from punishing herself over it. She wanted to kill herself. That was no good. That would solve nothing. I wanted to keep what we had. The two of us. Love and a home. No, it wasn't gone. Yes, I forgave her. I was away for a year. He saw her loneliness. I forgave her. It didn't matter. Only Anna mattered to me. We were together again. She wept. I comforted her. In the night I woke up. She wasn't beside me."

Stentorian voice, pointing finger. "And, John Homrik, you would have the jury believe that this child bride, this young girl, left your side in the darkness of the night of June eleventh, took the puppy's leash, knotted it about her throat, stood on a chair, tied it around the stem pipe and then kicked the chair away?"

"That . . . that is what happened."

Sarcasm. Irony. "And you, John Homrik, you rushed to her, cut the leash, untied it from her young throat and then called the police?"

"Yes."

Brazen accusation, throat of iron. "Then how do you explain that your fingerprints, not hers, were on the chair, your thumbprint, not hers, on the metal buckle of the leash? How do you explain the scratches on your face, the shreds of skin, proven to be yours, under her fingernails, the bruise on her shoulder? You have told us, John Homrik, that in the evening before she was murdered, you cheered her up, that the two of you indulged in horseplay, and that is how you were scratched and she was bruised. I ask the court, would a young girl, gay and happy enough to wrestle and fight happily with her husband, turn around and hang herself? No, this was murder! Foul murder!"

He sat on the cot and thought of Anna's smile, of the limp, dead heaviness of her body as he had cut her down, her staring eyes, thickened tongue, black-mottled face.

And though he thought there were no more tears, he sobbed once more. And in his heart he told Anna that in a very little while, in another fifteen hours, he would be with her.

Heeney belched, then began to stuff tobacco into his pipe with a blunt thumb.

John Homrik looked up at the far corner of his cell. Odd! It was as though he had detected some movement out of the corner of his eyes. But of course there could be nothing there. Of course.

GAHN, the younger, stood tense with anticipation. With hurried stride he went over to the communication screen, set the controls so

that, should anyone call him, the screen would advise that Gahn, the younger, was not at home.

Mixed with his anticipation was a sense of guilt and defiance. The Law said that a tenth-level mentality should mate with a tenth-level mentality. His lips twisted in scorn as he thought of the brittle, cool women of the tenth-level.

Coldly he realized that the feeling of guilt was the result of the stratification of society, drummed into him since he was first able to take the examinations for the first level at the age of four.

Defiance was the answer. What would they have him do? Mate with Dextra? That would be like the clash of bitter crystals. No, his blood yearned for the flowing warmth of Luria of the eighth level. With mild and affectionate condescension, he realized that she would never, never progress beyond the eighth-level. He had left the eighth level when he was seventeen. And in five more years he could aspire to the eleventh-level.

But should a man mate with an intellectual equal? There was a basic fallacy in that reasoning.

He felt the anticipatory thud of his pulse. With nervous fingers he again adjusted the arrangement of the slim pastel bottles on the ancient tray.

Luria liked the ancient ways. And so did he. A common yearning for the days that were gone.

Should any of his friends of the tenth level see her coming to his rooms . . . But none would. The acid of jealousy filled him as he thought of Powell. Luria spoke of Powell. He was eighth-level also, a hulking brute of a man. Gahn shuddered in distaste. If she should prefer Powell . . .

The door swung open with a suddenness that startled him. Luria, smiling, shut it softly behind her, then came quickly across to him as he advanced to meet her. Luria of the cobalt eyes, the honey flesh, the rounded warm arms and soft lips.

The golden mesh of her single garment made tiny chimes as he held her close, inhaled the heady fragrance of her.

"Darling!" she said. It was a word they had found in the ancient books. A word that was no longer used, except by the two of them.

They both knew that what they had was forbidden. And thus it was more sweet. There were many games. In one, he was a senator in the days of ancient Rome and she was a barbarian slave girl, and their love had to be kept from all the others.

Two hours later she was languorous beside him like a great golden cat. She



ran her fingertips down his cheek, along the line of his jaw and said, "Gahn, you are a Crime-seeker. Is that not true?"

For a moment his voice took on a tenth-level mentality speaking to one of the eighth level. "We do not speak of that."

Her eyes glittered angrily, and she pouted as she turned away. "Very well, then. We do not speak of anything."

Though he caressed her, kissed her indifferent lips, her sulky eyes, it was many long minutes before she would respond. Then her arms held him tightly and she whispered, "Tell me about being a Crime-seeker."

He could not risk making her angry again. He said, in an indifferent tone, "Oh, it is nothing. Just entertainment provided for us of the tenth-level. It is like a club, you know. Restricted membership."

She pouted. "I know what you do," she said. "You go into the past and watch the ancient ones. For us they have silly plays, made-up things. Things without blood and reality. They are stupid. I hate them. I want my entertainment from life. I am still annoyed with you, Gahn. And I will never come here again unless you show me how it is done."

He laughed uneasily. "But that is against the rules, Luria. I could do no such thing. You have to be prepared for . . . for Crime-seeking."

She looked at him coldly, stood up and fastened the clasps on the gold mesh garment. "Anything you say, Gahn. I must go now. I am to meet Powell."

He held her wrist. "Don't go, Luria. Please!"

"You said you loved me," she said coolly.

"I do. I swear I do!"

"Then this silly little Crime-seeker affair should not come between us. Goodby, Gahn."

He heard himself saying, "All right, Luria. I will show it to you. Together we will watch it." In his mind there was fear, but the step had been taken.

She turned to him, her smile brilliant, and lifted her lips to be kissed. "Now, Gahn? Now?"

Hand in hand they went into the front room. He darkened the room, unhooded the mechanism, arranged two chairs side by side six feet from the three dimensional screen. The instrument panel swung into his lap, and he locked it in place.

"You must promise never to speak of this," he said.

"I promise," she said, her eyes warm.

"This, as you know, is a device for time-travel. We do not go back in time, of course, but the lens and microphone of the seeker equipment can be placed in whatever era we desire. I . . . I have found the crimes of the middle twentieth century most absorbing."

"How do you decide where to start?"

"Here is a reference book. This one contains a list of all executions in the United States between 1940 and 1950. Select one."

Luria ran a tinted finger down a page selected at random. "How about this one? A man named John Homrik, executed at Ossining, New York on the third of February, 1949, at six in the morning. It says here that he killed his wife on June 11th, 1948, in their home at two ten Main Boulevard, Kingston, New York."

"It sounds like a routine case. Let's try a different one."

"No," she said, pouting. "I like his name. And I want to see him kill the woman."

The screen came to life, and Gahn, with practised fingers, selected cen-

tury, year, month, day, hour. The geographical selector was so compensated as to allow for the movement of the planet. The Ossining quadrant was familiar to him, and he brought the lens down through the grey roof of the death house at exactly five minutes of six on the morning of the third of February, 1949. He heard Luria gasp at the three-dimensional color image on the screen.

"This is all . . . real," she said in a small voice.

"Just as it happened."

He made minute adjustments, then took his hands from the dials. There was the bitter clang of steel, and a small group of men with grave faces stood in the corridor. They were seen at an angle, from a spot three feet above their heads.

A tall man with a grave face held a small black book and, in archaic English, he was reading, "I am the resurrection and the light . . ."

His voice droned on as the prisoner came out of the cell. He was a tall man with a strong face and a bitter mouth. His fists were clenched, the leg of his trousers slashed.

He stood, shoulders straight, the back of his head shaven bare, walked in the center of the group of men toward a door at the end of the corridor.

Gahn heard Luria's heavy breathing. He glanced at her, saw in the dim glow from the instrument panel that she was leaning forward, her lips parted, a wisp of her golden hair unnoticed across her forehead.

He smiled tightly in the darkness. The little group walked to the door, and he kept the lens behind them, following them. The voice droned on, and they heard the muffled tread of the shoes against the concrete floor.

The chair was waiting. With a

showman's knack, Gahn, the younger, brought the lens to within a foot of John Homrik's face, saw the writhing lips, the livid complexion, and then it was covered by the hood.

He moved the lens back, and then the man leaped against his bonds under the surge of current—and was still.

HE DARKENED the screen, brightened the lights in the room. "Enough?" he asked.

Her pretty, almost animal, face twisted and she said, "No, Gahn. I . . . I liked the way he looked. He looked strong and . . . like a man. In these days there are no men like that."

"No men that stupid," he said cuttingly.

"Gahn, I understand that you Crime-seekers try to find where justice has miscarried. I want to see **that man** kill his wife."

"You have seen enough."

"In that case, you have seen enough of me, Gahn!"

He sighed. Having given in once before, it was easy to give in this time. With flying fingers he set the dial, found the year, the day, found Kingston. It took fifteen minutes of search before he found the proper street, the proper house.

When he focused on the house from a distance of one hundred feet in the air, he saw the white vehicles parked in front, and knew that he had to set his time back just a bit. The screen blurred, cleared, and the cars were still there. Further back. It was night. Rain fell. He moved the lens down into the house, but could see nothing in the darkness. Slowly he reversed the time until suddenly he saw light.

John Homrik, a different John Homrik, a laughing John Homrik, was teasing a sturdy young girl who stood at a mirror, combing long pale hair.

Suddenly she turned and said, "You can say it's all right a thousand times, but that doesn't make it all right."

He sobered instantly. "Anna, darling, I know you as well as I know myself. You're not a cheat. You're not dishonest. I love you. One day I'll meet him. I want to hurt him, but not you, Anna."

Her eyes were not laughing. "You hate me," she said softly.

"I love you."

"John, I'm not worthy of you. I . . . I spoiled everything for us. Everything!"

Tears rolled down her face. He went to her, held her tightly. "Nothing is spoiled," he said.

Luria whispered, "He is not going to kill her."

Gahn shrugged. He watched the screen, saw the man and woman of a thousand years before hold each other tightly, saw the devotion and intensity of their love. The bedroom light clicked out, and in the screen they could see only the glow of the dial of the alarm clock, but they could hear the whispered endearments. Gahn reached out, took Luria's hand, held it tightly.

"He will soon kill her," he whispered.

Cautiously he advanced the time dial, releasing it when a dim light filled the room. The woman, Anna, stepped out of the bed, stood very still, looking down at the sleeping face of her husband. Then she moved so quickly that for a moment Gahn lost her.

He found her again in another room, and the light was on. She held a leather thong in her hand, and tears streaked down her face. She moved a chair over under a steam pipe, knotted the leather thong around her smooth throat, tied it firmly to the pipe over her head. She stood for a mo-

ment and they heard her whisper, "Good-by, my darling!"

The chair thudded over, and she hung, writhing, twisting, her face contorted, blackening, her hand flailing the smooth plaster wall, until at last she hung quietly.

He moved the lens back to the bedroom. John Homrik stirred in his sleep, and flung one arm out across the empty space beside him. The light from the room shone across him. Suddenly he sat up, knuckling his eyes.

He walked out, stood transfixed, screamed, "Anna! Anna!"

As he cut her down, lowered her dead body tenderly to the floor, Gahn darkened the screen. He turned up the lights in the room.

Luria's face was pale, and there were tears on her smooth cheeks. "He didn't kill her! He didn't kill her!" she said.

Gahn smiled. "You see? You are taking it too seriously. All that happened a long, long time ago."

"But it happened! It happened to him! Don't you see? He didn't kill her, he tried to save her, and for that they . . . put him in that chair."

"I've seen many such cases," he said calmly.

She jumped up. "How can you be so cold? Couldn't he be . . . warned, or something? If you could stop it, I'd think you'd have the decency to."

Gahn felt smoothly superior. "Of course I could stop it. It would be very simple in this case. All I would have to do would be to move the lens down until it appeared to penetrate his skull. Actually at the vision point there is a mild electrical discharge, sufficient to awaken him abruptly. And then he would catch her in time and—"

"Let's do it!" she said, her eyes glowing.

He laughed. "My dear girl, don't be absurd! To alter the objective past

would be like kicking out the bottom block of a tower.

"We are built on that past. As you saw, Homrik appears to have been a man of intelligence and determination. If he lived and his wife lived, some of their descendants would be alive today. And who knows what alterations they would have made? That's why this whole procedure is limited to tenth-level mentalities. We can perceive the dangerous results of doing such a foolhardy thing. It is only theory that any interference with the past would result in a divergence plus a tendency to return to the norm. For all we know, there would be no tendency to return to the norm. How do we know this is a 'norm'?"

She looked at him for long seconds, moved over to him, pushed the control panel aside and slid onto his lap, her warm arms around his neck. She daintily bit the lobe of his ear, and then whispered, "I want to look at it all again. I want to watch her hang herself."

He laughed. "You're a bloodthirsty minx, Luria. Well, there's no harm in it."

She went and sat in her own chair close to him, and he dimmed the room lights, turned it on again. This time he had no difficulty in locating the proper place and moment.

He watched carefully, thinking that Luria had hit on a very good case. He decided to mention it to Jellery and Blanz. They would enjoy it. The motives of the woman in the case were rather obscure; interesting. Sturdy little girl. Quite young. Guilt complex, apparently.

The light clicked on in the bedroom of a thousand years before. Anna slid her firm young legs out of the bed, stood up and looked down at her sleeping husband. She turned toward the bedroom door. Gahn, the younger, smiled and reached for the dial so as to follow her.

But instead of the dial, his fingers touched the warm flesh of Luria's plump hand. He looked at the screen, saw the head of the sleeper growing so as to fill the whole screen, and he instantly realized that Luria had merely pretended to agree, that she was trying to awaken the sleeper, that she was attempting to make an objective change in their common past, in the heritage of small events that supported the world as they knew it.

Even as he seized her hand, he knew it was too late. The lens slipped through the mastoid bone of the sleeper into moist darkness...

All space-time shifted in a grinding, shuddering wrench, that seemed to

(Continued on Page 127)



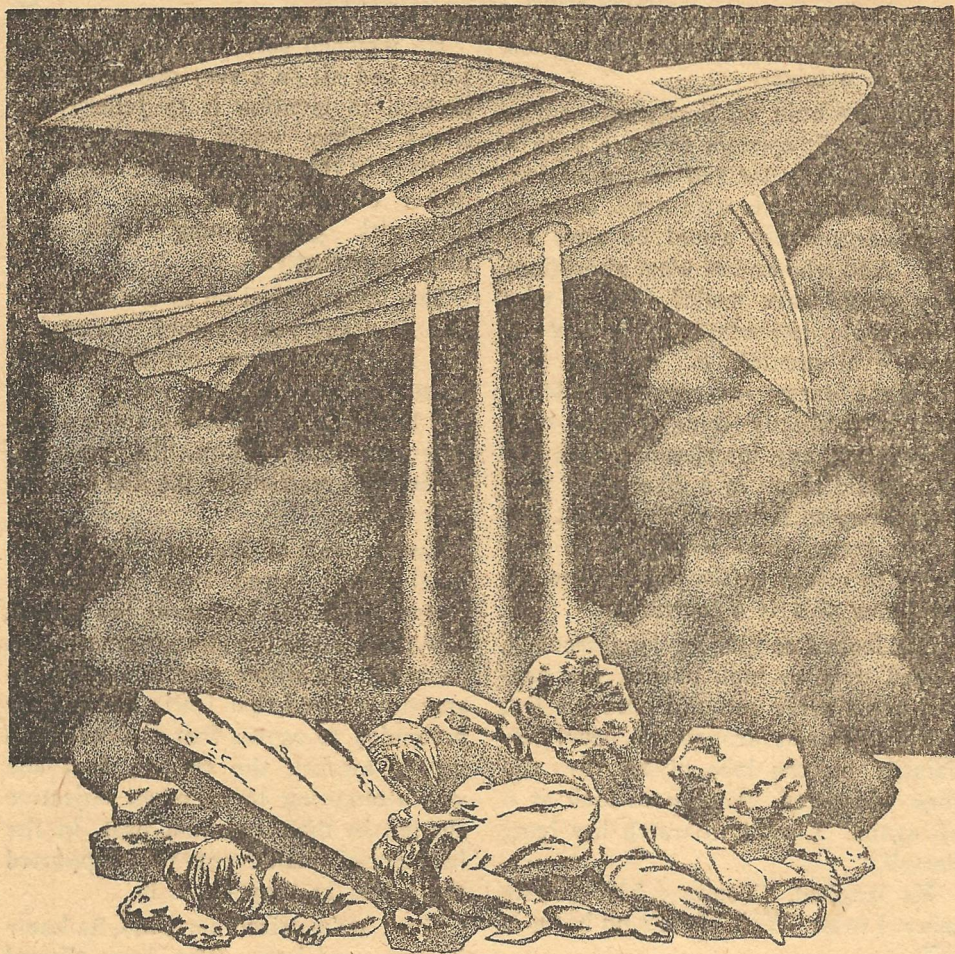
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Forty million people died in thirty minutes.

THE EARTH KILLERS

By A. E. van Vogt

CHAPTER ONE

Maiden Voyage

THE rockjet climbed steeply up on a column of crooked fire. In the machine, Morlake could feel the turbulent impluses of the gyroscopic

stabilizers. But the flow of upward movement was as slick as oil, and the acceleration brought nothing more than a feeling like that of a hand squeezing his stomach.

At sixty miles above Kane Field he leveled off and put the new plane through its paces. After five minutes



Eighty miles up, eye to eye with mankind's most terrible destroyer, Morlake helplessly absorbed the knowledge that branded him: "Traitor to Earth! Kill on sight!"

he turned on the radio and spoke softly.

"Morlake calling Gregory."

"Yeah?" Laconically.

"She likes the climate."

"How's the ultraviolet?"

"Blocked."

"Cosmics?"

"Registering."

"Good." The engineering officer sounded satisfied. "Until somebody

figures out a way of blocking cosmic rays completely, we'll be satisfied with minimums. Speed?"

"About one banana." That was code for seven hundred MPH.

"Feel anything?"

"She's singing a lullaby."

"Sweet, huh, at one banana. What do you think, generally?"

"Sadie's going to be with us for quite a while."

"As smug as that, eh?" The engineer turned away from the mike. His voice, though still audible, grew tiny. "Well, general, there you are. She ticks."

"Ought to," was the faint reply. "We were beginning to sweat. She cost four hundred million to develop."

The engineer's voice had a grin in it. "Where do we go from here? Mars? Or the moon?"

"Sadie is our top, boy. And we're lucky to have her. The new Congress is tired of our costly little experiment, and wants to reduce taxes. The new President thinks the development of weapons leads to war. He doesn't like war, and so in this year of 1964—"

He must have thought better of what he intended to say. There was silence, though not for long. Gregory's faraway voice said, "What's next?"

"Dive," said the general.

The engineer's voice approached the mike:

"Morlake."

"I heard."

"Okay. See if you can hit O'Ryan."

Morlake grinned. The three test pilots of Kane Field played a game against the famous isolationist publisher. Each time they dived they chose as target the Star-Telegram building, which peered seventy stories into the sky beside the flat, dead-looking waters of Lake Michigan. The idea was, if anything went wrong, they might as well take O'Ryan and his

penthouse into hell with them. And they meant it too, after a fashion.

The plane began to shudder. At eighty miles the jets were silent and useless, and the hammering of the rockets was a sharp sound carried by the metallic frame. The rockets were not meant to carry the load alone. All the smoothness was gone from his marvellous machine. Morlake paused for a final look at the universe.

It was tremendously, unnaturally dark outside. The stars were pin-points of intense brightness, that did not twinkle or glitter. The sun, far to his left, was only approximately round. Streamers of flame and fire mist made it appear lopsided and unnatural. A quarter moon rode the blackness directly overhead.

The rockjet, moving very slowly, not more than a hundred miles an hour, was over Chicago now. The city was lost in haze, quite invisible to the naked eye. But on the radar screen every building was etched, and there was no mistaking the Star-Telegram structure. Morlake waited until the hairline sights directly under his seat were touching the shadow of the building, and then he carefully tilted the nose of the plane downward.

He was in no hurry, but presently the front aiming device was pointed directly at the image on the radar screen. The speedometer was edged over to a thousand miles an hour, when there was a dazzlingly bright flash in the sky behind and above him. Something big and hot as hell itself flashed past him, and began to recede into the distance below.

Morlake cringed involuntarily. He had time to think: A meteorite! Speed about fourteen hundred miles an hour. Below him, the bright flame fuzzed and winked out. He stared at it astounded, removed his foot from

the accelerator; and then, there, twenty feet away, was the object. And it was not a meteorite at all.

Morlake gazed at the thing in blank horror, as the radio embedded in the cushions beside his ears clicked on, and Gregory's voice shouted:

"Morlake, we've just got word: New York, Washington, scores of cities destroyed in the last ten minutes by giant atomic bombs. Morlake — get away from Chicago with Sadie. She's our only working rockjet. Morlake, you hear me?"

He heard, but he couldn't speak. He sat frozen to the controls, glaring at the atomic bomb twenty feet away.

AFTER a blank period, Morlake stirred like a sick dog. His reflexes began to function in a dream-like fashion. His eyes shifted heavily over the instrument board. Slowly, he grew aware that the world around was becoming brighter. A faint dawn glimmered in the distance to either side, and the blaze of light below was like a vast fire bowl into which the bomb and the ship were falling.

He thought: The flame that had seared his ship when the bomb first passed him—that must have been its forward rocket tubes slowing the thing, so that it wouldn't burn up from sheer speed in the thick atmosphere lower down.

The thought passed as though it had never been, as if the thin, shrieking wind building up outside had torn it from his brain. In its place, a formless mind stuff, seeking shape, pressed and quivered inside him. Plans too fleeting to be comprehended multiplied and coalesced. Impersonal plans involving death for his body. Impersonal, because the city below was not his city. No one in it knew him or cared about

him, not even a secondary girl friend. He hated the place. Windy, dirty, wretched, miserable, hot in summer, cold in winter . . . No, there was nothing there, nothing at all. But the yeast of plans fermented with violence and direction.

"Morlake, damn your soul, answer me!"

Answer me, answer me, answer me! Over all the mad schemes that were now springing full-grown into his head, one took precedence. If he could deflect the bomb into the lake, five million people would have a chance for life.

He knew better. Even as he shoved his plane over on fingers of wan jet-fire, and felt the metal frame jar against the bomb, he knew that the greater bombs needed only to fall into the vicinity of cities. Direct hits were unnecessary.

But he pushed with the plane's vertical jets. His body shrank, expecting the blow of radiation. And at first nothing happened. There was not enough air to give power even to those superjets.

"Morlake, for God's sake, where are you?"

He was too intent for words to reach him. He had a fear that he would push the plane too hard, and that the curved fuselage would roll itself away from the streamlined bomb. Delicate manipulation, touch, pressure, oh, so delicate.

The movement began slowly. He noticed it first on the hairline sighting device in front of him. O'Ryan was no longer directly below. At that instant of infinitesimal success, the bottom of the bomb flashed white fire. One burst only, but it jarred his precious contact. He felt his machine slip clear of the bomb, and with a shock he saw that his sights were once more pointing

straight at the newspaper skyscraper.

The bomb has reacted to his pressure. It must be on a beam, and couldn't be diverted. Almost instantly, the bomb offered one more surprise. As he sat in a haze of uncertainty as to his next move, it sent a flare of light billowing over the rockjet. Morlake shrank, and then the light was gone. He had no time to think about it, because—

"Morlake, you blankety blank, save Sadie!"

Anger, despair, hate, frustration and the beginning of insanity—all were in that shout. Morlake would have ignored it too, would have been almost unaware, but at that split instant his gaze touched the altimeter. Twenty miles. Only twenty miles to earth.

The fever of his purpose burned out of him. Suddenly, he thought of Sadie as those desperate men at Kane Field were thinking of her. Sadie, the sleek, the gorgeous, Sadie of the high tail, the first of a fleet not yet built.

He spurted his forward jets. And saw the bomb sink below him. Instantly, it was gone into the mist. He began to turn, to try to pull her out of her dive. Three times he blanked out, and came to again, dizzy but alive. Finally, the plane was level. Morlake brought her nose up, and climbed on a long slant at an acceleration that clenched his body.

Behind him, below him, there was a glare as of a thousand times ten thousand suns. A supernal blaze it was, unmatched in the sidereal universe except by the unthinkable fires of a Nova-O sun at its moment of ultimate explosion.

CATASTROPHE for a continent! Forty million people in fifty major cities died in a space of not more than thirty minutes. It was

later estimated that each of the bombs dropped generated flash heats of forty thousand million billion degrees centigrade. Everywhere, the forces released were too great to be confined. The balance of a hemisphere was shaken. Earthquakes convulsed regions that had never known a tremor. And all that afternoon and night the ground settled and quivered with a violence that had not been paralleled in the history of mankind.

By mid-afternoon of the first day, a stricken people had begun to rally and reintegrate. Senator Milton Tormey, recovering from food poisoning in Florida, brought together two aged, ailing Congressmen in a resort hotel, and the three issued a manifesto ordering a six-month period of martial law. In Berlin, General Wayne, commanding American occupation forces in Germany, demanded that all countries in Europe and Asia open their borders to American planes. Delay or refusal would be construed as a confession of guilt, and would bring instant retaliation from secret American atomic bomb bases.

The national guard was called out. Radar and sonar stations were put on battle alert, and throughout the night hastily-armed men and women stared sleeplessly up into the skies, waiting for the paratroop armies that would surely arrive with the dawn to conquer a devastated nation.

Morning broke over the thousand horizons of America, and the sky and land were still untouched by alien sounds and alien purposes. The sun came up out of the east. People were able to look at their red-eyed neighbors, and to realize that the complete end of their world was not yet at hand. After a week the enemy had still shown no sign. It took a month for American plane patrols, fleets of planes and

divisions of men, to discover that no nation on earth was organizing for war. Everywhere, peaceful scenes met the frenzied searchers. They retreated finally, reluctantly, from lands they had so summarily entered.

Day by day it grew clearer that the enemy had struck a mortal blow at Earth's most powerful nation. And he had done it so skilfully that he was going to get away with it.

TWICE, Morlake, returning to base after his wild flight, made the sweep over Kane Field. The first time, he was past before he recognized the super-airfield. The second time he savored the desolation.

The surface buildings, the control towers, the markers, the lights were down. Planes in twisted heaps on the field and beyond. The wreckage spread into the distance southward as far as he could see! Planes and parts in every degree of destruction, sections of metal buildings, chunks of cement, of brick, of plastic and glass, and miles of splintered lumber. A giant had trod this land.

Morlake settled his machine on its vertical jets, like a helicopter, near one of the underground entrances. As he came down, he saw a score of human figures sprawled almost at the mouth of the entrance. When he rolled

nearer, they ceased to look so human. He glanced away quickly, and carefully guided his machine between them and the shelter.

A fierce wind was blowing as he climbed to the ground, but except for that, silence lay over the military air hub of the continent. He stepped gingerly over the wreckage of the underground entrance, and made his way down cracked steps. Plexiglass lights glowed in the upper corridors, untouched by the secondary violence that had raged through the corridors themselves.

Everywhere the walls were smashed. Ceilings had crashed down, and he could hear the remote thunder of loosened girders and earth and cement, tumbling to form barriers in the depths of the supposedly impregnable chambers. Morlake fumbled past two such partial obstacles, came to a third that blocked his passage completely. Then, as the ceiling a few yards behind him rumbled ominously, he began his retreat to the surface.

He reached the open air, breathing hard, and forced himself out of pity to examine the less damaged bodies. All were dead. He floated around the field, landing a dozen times to search shells of buildings, and to peer into underground entrances. He found two men whose pulses flickered with faint life.



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They failed to react to the stimulants in his first aid kit, so he loaded them into the jet. Up in the air again, he turned on his radio, and at first the ether seemed silent. It was only when he turned the volume almost to full that a faraway voice scratched through to him. It kept fading out, but each time it came back in, so that he did not lose the continuity:

" . . . People in cities over fifty thousand are ordered to leave, but all merchants in those cities must remain in their stores. Repeat: merchants must remain. Those who leave without authorization will be shot . . . Sell your goods to anyone who comes in, rationing*all customers . . . One suit, one blanket. . . . Groceries, about two weeks supply. . . .

"People in cities or towns of less than fifty thousand, stay at home. Understand—stay at home! . . . Repeat emergency warning to people on Lake Michigan. A tidal wave is sweeping up from Chicago at a speed of approximately four hundred miles an hour. All shore towns will be destroyed. Wait for nothing. Leave at once!

" . . . Flash! London. Great Britain announces declaration of war against unknown enemy. Other countries following . . . "

Morlake's mind couldn't hold to the words. The selectivity was too poor, the voice a mere segment of remote sound. And besides, the first stunned calm was slipping from him. He sat in his plane, thinking of millions of men and women whose bodies had been reduced not to ashes but to atoms . . . He was profoundly relieved when he reached his first destination, a small military airport near a sizeable city in Iowa. The two men were rushed off to the local hospital. While his machine was being refueled, Morlake had a brief conference with three wor-

ried executive officers. They agreed that his best course was to fly to one of the secret bases. It was to them that he mentioned for the first time that he had seen the Chicago bomb.

All three men grew excited, and he had a hard time getting away. They were certain that experts would be able to make much of his experience.

It was some time before he was allowed to approach the secret field. His radio roared with alarms and warnings that he "must leave at once." He insisted that the commanding officer be informed of his presence, and finally he was permitted to set his machine down into a cavernous elevator, and was drawn underground.

He was ushered into the office of General Herrold, and at that time he made only a brief report. He told the general the circumstances under which he had seen the Chicago bomb, and paused, waiting for the flood of questions he expected.

For a long time the old man looked at him, but he asked for no details. And Morlake was being ushered into his quarters on the next tier down before the meaning of the man's thin-lipped hostility penetrated. "By God," he thought, "he didn't believe me!"

It was staggering, but it couldn't be helped. No matter how incredible it sounded, it was his duty to tell what had happened.

He wrote his report as best he could, then phoned the general's office that it was ready. After some delay he was told to remain in his quarters, that an officer would come for the report. That was chilling, but Morlake pretended to see nothing wrong. When the officer had come and gone with the document, Morlake lay down, conscious of unutterable weariness. But his brain was too active for sleep.

Reaction to all the straining tensions

of the day took the form of blank horror, of a frank disbelief in what his eyes had seen. Slowly, his emotions became more personal. He began to picture the possibilities of his own situation here, where a suspicious martinet was in command. "Damn him," he thought in a fury. "All the radar stations designed to spot bombs coming down near cities must have been destroyed. And that leaves only what I saw."

But what did this experience prove? It was the one major clue, so far, to the identity of the enemy. And it seemed valueless.

Weeks had still to pass before he would realize how tremendous a clue it really was.

CHAPTER TWO

Morlake, Traitor

ORDER in the court." The hastily convened court-martial was about to begin.

"It is the intention of the prosecution," said the judge advocate after the preliminaries were over, "to bring evidence that will establish one or the other of two charges against Captain Morlake. The first charge is that he did not, as he has claimed, see an atomic bomb, and that in fact, his purpose was to procure cheap notoriety for himself out of a nation's most profound agony. It is the opinion of the prosecution that, if the court finds him guilty of this charge, the penalties should be severe in proportion to the monstrosity of the disaster that has befallen our country.

"The second charge," the judge advocate continued, "is more serious. It assumes that Captain Morlake did, in fact, see the bomb, as he has stated, but that he has deliberately falsified his report, or else was grossly negligent in

failing to observe the direction from which the bomb was coming."

For Morlake, the deadly part was that he knew no one. He was not permitted to subpoena character witnesses from fields to which men he had known had been scattered. By the time the two rocket experts had testified, he recognized that he was doomed. Shortly after his arrest, when one of his guards had whispered that fully half the officers of the secret field had lost members of their families in the bombing, he had realized what weight of emotion was against him. These men, twisted by disaster, could not feel, see, or think straight.

The crisis came swiftly after he himself was called to the stand.

"There is no doubt in your mind," the judge advocate said, "that what you saw was an atomic bomb?"

"It was an atomic bomb."

"And it was coming straight down?"

"Yes, it was. Absolutely straight."

"This was about how high above the ground?"

"At least seventy-five miles."

Pause; then, gravely:

"Captain Morlake, you have heard experts testify that any bomb accurately aimed from any point on the earth's surface would have been describing a parabolic curve of some kind at that height?"

"I have heard the witnesses."

"And what do you conclude from their testimony?"

Morlake was firm. "A short time ago I was convinced that our rocket science was superior to that of any other country. Now, I know that we've been surpassed."

"That is your sole comment on the death of forty million Americans. We have been surpassed."

Morlake swallowed hard, but he controlled himself. "I did not say that.

"The bomb was coming straight down."

"Hadn't you better think that over, Captain?"

Insinuating words. He knew what they wanted. In the short time since the trial had been scheduled, the prosecution had had several bright ideas. The previous night they had come to him with drawings of hypothetical trajectories of bombs. Every drawing was on a map of the world, and there were three different points of origin illustrated. If he would agree that the bomb had been slanting slightly in any one of the three directions, he would be a hero.

"You still have an opportunity, Captain," said the judge advocate silkily, "of being of great service to your country."

Morlake hesitated miserably. "I'm sorry," he said at last, stiff with fear, "but I cannot change my testimony. It was coming straight down."

The sentence was thirty years, and he was lucky. Within a month of his trial men were being hanged from lamp posts, and sedition trials sprouted like weeds over a land that could not discover its attacker.

ON THE ninety-fourth morning, Morlake put on his fatigue suit as usual. He had only the vaguest sense of ever having done anything else, the routine was so much a part of him: On the way to breakfast he glanced at the bulletin board, where the day's work sheet had already been posted. Ploughing the east field. Planting potatoes in the valley. Repairing the east fence. Cleaning the stables. Transferring feed to a new barn.

It was the usual pattern, with only one thing missing. His own name was not attached to any one of the details. Immediately after breakfast he report-

ed the omission to the day sergeant.

"Okay, you go along with the potato planting detail."

Morlake went, telling himself that, if his name were ever again missing from the board, he would report to the office of the clerks who made up the work sheet.

It wasn't that the work hadn't been good for him. He had always been as hard as nails, and his internal muscles were so perfectly balanced and organized that, in all the army air forces, he had proved by actual test that he could withstand more acceleration than any other man.

And he felt better now, healthier, more awake, more alive, more appreciative of life. But he didn't like planting potatoes. The army farm used the old, primitive method of bending down to place each seed-spud by hand . . . By noon, he was sweating and tired.

The mid-day dinner was eaten in the field. Men squatted on the grass with their plates and cups. And the chatter took exactly the same form as on the day before, and the day before that, and so on back into infinity.

"The bombs . . ." "Hey, did you hear what that new guy said the other day, about somebody staggering out of an undamaged basement in New York City?" "Some character in the Middle West is saying the bombs could only have come from the Moon . . ." "... It's the Germans, or I'll be dipped in . . ." "I'll put my money on Russia . . ." "Hell, if I was General Wayne in Berlin, I'd—"

The detail sergeant climbed lazily to his feet. "Okay, generals, up and at those potatoes, before the bugs move in."

The afternoon lengthened. About four o'clock a car detached itself from the haze that hid the farm buildings five miles to the north. It came lazily

along a dirt road, disappearing behind trees and into gullies, but always it came into view again, each time nearer, and obviously as puzzling to the detail sergeant as to the prisoners. The sergeant and his corporal walked slowly towards the road as the car approached, and stood waiting for it.

Up, down, up, down—The remaining guards kept things moving. The ploughs whuffed and thudded through the soil folding the fresh dirt over the seed potatoes. The horses champed and swished their tails. One of them noisily passed water. Up, down, up, down—Morlake, sweating and breathing hard, alternated the rhythmic movement with glances at the nearing car and with his own thoughts.

Of the various articles and newspaper editorials that he had read in the farm library, only one, it seemed to Morlake, contained a sensible idea: The purpose of the bombing had not been to destroy the nation or conquer it, but simply to change its political character. With the vociferous, noisy, highly-educated, politically conscious people of America's world-cities out of the way, power would revert to the isolationist agricultural communities. Every capitalistic state in the world would benefit from the markets from which American industry would have to withdraw. And the dozen Communist states had their own reasons for appreciating the end of American influence in Europe, Africa and Asia.

If the enemy were not discovered for several years, it was likely that the elected representatives of cautious farm states would not dare to retaliate.

Only three facts were known about the aggressor: He existed. He had left no clues in his own countries. And he had dropped his bombs straight down onto at least one city.

Unfortunately, the one man who be-

lieved the third item was Robert Morlake, and so far his sole thought was that the bombs must have been launched from the Moon . . . Morlake smiled wryly. He could imagine himself trying to convince other men that they must go to the Moon to find out the name of their enemy.

"Morlake!"

Morlake straightened slowly and turned. It was the corporal who had gone with the sergeant to the car. In the near distance, the machine was turning noisily around. Morlake saluted.

"Yessir?"

"You're wanted at the office. You weren't supposed to come out on a detail this morning. Come along."

Five minutes later, Morlake knew that he was being presented with an opportunity to escape.

WHAT had happened Morlake discovered gradually. On the East Coast, General Mahan Clark, ranking staff officer surviving, declared martial law on the afternoon of the bombing. For three months he worked eighteen to twenty hours a day to integrate the shattered armed forces and to organize the country. Railway, telephone and telegraph lines were repaired, and postal services resumed. Priorities and rationings were instituted, and an industrial census taken.

At the end of seventy days he had a picture of the country's resources. By the eightieth day, industries that needed each other's products were being coordinated on a vast scale. Troops patrolled cities and towns; a national curfew was put into effect; severe penalties were invoked against mobs and mob leaders. Mass hangings of known Communists ceased. People with foreign accents were still being molested, but the cases grew more isolated daily.

From the eighty-fifth to the eighty-eighth day, the general took a holiday, during which time he played dice, ate, rested and slept, and listened only to emergency reports. Back at his headquarters, he moved into a new office.

"From now on," he told reporters, "I'll delegate all except a minimum of administrative work. I will devote my attention to picking up technical matters at the highest level. I'm an engineer, not a politician. What I want to know is, what the hell happened to our advanced stuff on the day of the bombing? Where is it, and who's alive that knows something about it?"

Late in the afternoon of the ninety-first day, he looked up bleary-eyed from a mass of papers, and called in an adjutant.

"There's a report here that S29A was scheduled for a test flight on B-day. Was the test made? If so, what happened?"

Nobody knew until the following morning, when a lieutenant produced a report from Field R3 in Texas that the rockjet S29A had landed there a few hours after the destruction of its base, Wayne Field, ninety-two days before.

"Who the blank," said Clark, "is the misbegotten incompetent in charge of R3? Herrold? Oh!"

He subsided. He had once been under Herrold's command, and one observed certain amenities with former superiors. Late, though, he remarked to a ranking officer: "Herrold is an old fool. If a man under him has twice as much sense as another, he can't tell the difference. Drive, ability, leadership—he can't see them." He scowled. "Well, the best bet, I suppose, is to have the machine brought here. Inform Herrold, will you?"

The order for the plane caused a turmoil in the upper officialdom of Field

R3. No one there could fly the rockjet.

"It's a special plane," an air-force major explained to General Herrold. "I remember that the man who was to test it had to go to the factory and learn all kinds of preliminary things before he was even allowed to warm her jets. The difficulties, I understand, derive from an intricate combination of rocket and jet drives."

"Oh!" said General Herrold. He thought about it for some minutes, then, "It wouldn't take you long," he suggested, "to learn to fly it, would it?"

The big young man shrugged. "I've been flying jets for years—" he began.

He was interrupted. "Uh, Major Bates," Herrold said, "the officer in question, Captain Robert Morlake, is in prison for a most heinous offence. It would be a grave setback for discipline if he were freed merely because he can fly a plane. Accordingly, I shall have him brought here, and no doubt he can teach you to fly the plane in a day or so. I want you to hold no conversations with him except on purely technical matters. You will carry a gun, and remember that the plane is more valuable than the man."

Bates saluted. "I'll handle him, sir," he said confidently.

THE moment the rockjet was high enough, Morlake zipped her over into a power dive. Behind him, Major Bates clawed for the nearest handhold.

"Hey!" he yelled. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Morlake wasn't sure. He had decided at the moment he was sentenced to virtual life imprisonment that he would not accept the verdict of the court. But exactly what was going to happen now he didn't know.

"Now, look, Morlake," Bates said in

a voice that trembled slightly, "this is not going to get you anywhere. There's hardly any fuel in the tanks."

That was why he had wasted no time. Morlake said nothing, but sat blank-brained, waiting events. The day was clear as glass, the earth below plainly visible. It looked closer than it was.

"For God's sake, man!" The other's nerve was tottering badly. "You swore you still stood by your oath of allegiance to the United States."

Morlake broke his silence. "I do."

"Then what—"

"I happen to be the only man who knows how to find the enemy. If I let myself stay locked up, I'd be violating my oath."

It sounded wild even to Morlake. It probably seemed pure insanity to Bates. And Morlake did not fool himself. He felt emotional about this. It was not reasoned, objective, what he was doing. He had had a three-month's taste of a life sentence of hard labor, and the passionate beliefs he held, his justification for this, were rooted as much in horror of his fate as in patriotism.

The bomb had come straight down. If, as the experts maintained, it couldn't have come from Earth, then it had come from the Moon. Since that was not an idea to which Americans

would take easily, it was up to the one man who knew the facts to persuade them.

His thought ended. He jumped, as he saw that the ground was really rushing towards him now. Behind him:

"Morlake, for God's sake, what do you want?"

"Your gun"

"Do you intend to kill me?"

"Don't be a fool. Hurry."

The earth was a huge valley, with rearing hills no longer looking so flat. Morlake felt the gun shoved past his shoulder. He snatched at it, shouting:


"Get back! Back, away from me!"

He knew that would be hard, like climbing the side of a house. But he waited while the sweating officer fumbled away from his seat. He could hear the man cursing with fear. And his own heart was pounding, his body rigid, when at last he came out of his dive, and began to climb towards the black regions of the stratosphere.

The stars were as bright as jewels before he leveled off and began his race with the diminishing supply of fuel. At the rocket's most economical speed, thirty-five miles a minute, he sped through the darkness above an ocean of light.

He had two intermingled hopes: That he would be able to reach Kane

Boy, what a
HEADACHE!
starting to throb.



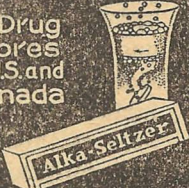
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Field and that he would find it deserted. The first hope was realized as the field swam into view in the distance. The second ended in dismay, as he saw that the entire area swarmed with men, with tractors, cranes, trucks and piles of material.

Morlake came down from behind a low hill some distance from the nearest group of workers.

"Get out!" he said to Bates.

"I'll see you hanged for this!" the big man snarled. But he got out. He did not move off immediately nor did Morlake. There was a prolonged silence, then:

"Tell them," Morlake said, "that I'm taking the plane because—because—" He paused. He felt a desperate desire to justify himself. He went on, "Tell them the top speed of Sadie is 47 miles a minute, and that she can climb 80 miles in 7 minutes plus, but tell them—" He hesitated, for if his words were given publicity, the unknown enemy would read them also—"tell them not to waste any more time building duplicates of Sadie. She isn't fast enough, she can't go high enough to reach the men who dropped the atomic bombs. And that's why I'm taking her. Because she's only a second-rater, and therefore worthless. Goodby."

He waved his hand. The vertical jets hissed with power. The machine reared slowly, then the rockets fired several bursts, and the ground began to flow below like a tremendously swift river. Morlake headed over the hills, straight towards a place where there had once been pipes leading up from an underground fuel tank. Men were working there amid a tangle of twisted metal, but some order had already been established. He landed.

A foreman, a slim, rugged-looking young man, came over, and said, "Sure,

we've got all the fuel you want. None of the tanks were busted by the earthquakes. Roll her over this way."

He was in no hurry, but talkative, curious. While his men attached piping to the tanks Morlake indicated, he asked pointed questions, which Morlake answered or evaded with a laugh. He knew how to talk to this kind of men, and the only trouble was that out of the corner of one eye, he saw Bates come into sight over the hill, and flag down a truck. The truck headed swiftly toward Morlake. When it was a third of a mile away, Morlake climbed into the plane.

"Thanks," he said.

The foreman waved cheerfully. "Give my regards to the general."

The truck was tooting its horns madly as the rocket became airborne.

Morlake's sense of exultation did not last long. He had enough fuel to fly around the earth. But his problem was to convince the people in authority that only by inventing and building a spaceship could they ever again hope to be free of danger. Where, how would he start? What ought his pattern of action to be?

When he came right down to it, he hadn't really given that much thought.

CHAPTER THREE

Hare and Hounds

NINE bullet-proof cars drew up before General Clark's headquarters one day some ten months after the bombing. There was a scurrying of men from the first four and the last four. Everywhere guns showed prominently, as the guards drew a cordon around the center car. As soon as the maneuvers were completed, a flunkey hurried forward and graciously opened the door of the

big machine. Then he moved back.

Senator Tormey stepped out. He frowned as he saw that no one had yet come out of the general's office to meet him. Then as the general himself appeared in the doorway, a smile wreathed the handsome though heavy face, and he walked over and shook hands with the officer.

"Got all the Morlake stuff ready to show me?" he asked.

"All ready," Clark nodded. "I'd have invited you to see it before if I'd known you were interested."

Tormey took that as an apology. He had come a long way in the past four months. On B-day he had called for martial law, to last for six months, and had then found that the army was not prepared to turn the government over to him at the specified time. The available press and radio echoed with the senators protests. He had no ambitions himself, but it was time for the government to be returned to civilians. As the ranking survivor of the federal congress, it was his duty—and so on. And so on and so on.

That was the beginning. And as army ruthlessness, as personified by tens of thousands of officers, had as usual alienated ninety per cent of the population, the senator was soon riding a crest of protest meetings, of which the army, in the person of General Clark, finally took cognizance.

The senator was invited to headquarters, and taken into the confidence of the military. He became a habitual member of General Clark's dice club, and his advice was sought on every important administrative problem. It was the army's bid for civilian support, and it seemed to work.

"This way," said General Clark, "to what we call the Morlake room."

It was a small room. There was a desk and a chair in it, and a filing

cabinet. On one wall was a huge map of North America, with pins stuck into it. The red pins indicated that Robert Morlake had definitely been seen in those areas. The green pins meant that he had "almost-certainly" been in the vicinity. The yellow pins were rumors, and the blue pins represented points at which a plane resembling S29A had been observed. Each pin was numbered and the numbers referred to a card index file, which contained a synopsized history of the hunt for Robert Morlake. The index itself was based on files of documents, which were kept in a cabinet beside the map.

"At first," General Clark explained. "Morlake's idea seemed to be to contact old friends of his. On the second day after refueling at Kane Field, he approached the residence of Professor Glidden in California. . . ."

AFTER watching Glidden Grove one day, Morlake got up at dawn, and walked two miles to where the low, long building of Dr. Glidden's research institute spread beside the banks of a winding stream. A caretaker was puttering beside the open door of a stucco, Hollywoodish laboratory. He answered Morlake's query curiously:

"Dorman? He lives with the professor. I guess the cook will be up by this time. That's the house, over there."

It was a glassed, tree-sheltered bungalow. As Morlake stode along a walk lined with towering shrubs, a woman emerged from a side path that led up from the creek, and they almost collided.

It was the woman who was startled. Morlake said nothing. Ninety-four days on the prison farm had frozen his nerves.

The woman was dark-haired and

blue-eyed; she wore a wrap-around dressing gown and a bathing cap. "Mr. Dorman," she echoed. "Oh, you mean the secretary." Her manner became indifferent. "Probably still in bed. It's a habit of people like that to sleep until it's time to punch the clock."

Her tone was carelessly contemptuous. Morlake, who had been about to pass on politely, paused for a second look. She was not the world's most beautiful woman, but it seemed to him that he had never seen a more passionate face. Her lips were full and sensuous, her eyes large and bright, her manner immensely assured.

"Aren't you a little early," she asked, "for visiting the help?"

She was irritating, and Morlake didn't like her at all. "May I by any chance," he asked, "be speaking to Professor Glidden?"

The remark pleased her, for she laughed. She stepped confidently up to him, and hooked her arm in his. She said, "I'll ask the cook which room is your friend's. You mustn't mind me too much. I like to get up when the birds start singing, and it makes me cross to have to wait five hours before there's anybody to talk to. I'm the physical type. Immense energy; and the only reason my brain is any good at all is because I never worry. Do you know anything about endocrinology?"

"Never heard of it," said Morlake, truthfully.

"Thank God," said the woman. She added, "I've been swimming in the old swimming hole—enlarged by damming, cemented into a pool, and improved by a ten-thousand-dollar heating system for cool days and nights. Just a little gadget of the professor's, hot and cold running water. Would you like to know all the local gossip? I've only been a guest twenty-four hours, but I already know

everything there is to know here."

Morlake did not doubt it. He was beginning to be fascinated. It cost him an effort to keep his mind to his purpose. The woman said; "The world is absolutely wretched, detestable and incorrigible. Here it is little more than three months after B-day, and—"

"After what?"

"Bomb day. That's what the army calls it. You can't go on saying 'the day the atomic bombs were dropped,' or 'day of the catastrophe.' You can't even expect people to remember that B-day was July 17th, can you?"

She did not wait for an answer, for they had reached the house.

"Wait here," she said. "I'll slip into my bedroom, and open the living-room door for you."

Morlake did not wait. The moment she disappeared around the corner, he followed. It had taken him a minute to catch on, but he was too conscious of danger to be fooled by a fast-talking woman. She had recognized him, and she would probably telephone the police before opening the front door.

There were three patio doors along the side and all of them were unlocked, but only the third one opened into an unoccupied room.

He knew it was possible that the woman had snatched up a gun in passing, but he was beyond that kind of fear. . . . The situation in the living-room was ideal for melodrama. She was at the phone, her back to him, saying urgently, "Keep trying! There must be an answer!" Morlake put his hand over the mouthpiece, and took the receiver from her instantly acquiescent fingers. For a long moment the woman sat frozen, and then slowly she turned and looked at him, her eyes widened.

Morlake did not replace the receiver, but stood there holding it tightly. He said in a monotone:

"How did you recognize me?"

She shrugged. "Newspaper pictures all over the house. Your friend, Dorman, talking about you, saying he can't believe you're guilty. But you are, aren't you? I've seen desperate men before."

Where? Morlake wondered, but all he said was:

"Who were you phoning?"

"The police, of course."

Answering that required no thought.

"The police would have replied—" he began. And then he stopped, as the operator's voice sounded from the earphone. He jerked the instrument up. "Yes," he said. "Hello."

"The party the lady called does not answer," trilled the female voices.

Morlake said, "Are you sure you have the right number?" Beside him the woman gasped. Before he could guess her intention, she reached down, snatched the cord, and, with a jerk that must have jarred her body, tore the wires out of the box. . . .

IN THE Morlake room at supreme headquarters, General Clark paused in his narrative. Senator Tormey said slowly:

"Who was the woman? Did you find out?"

The officer shook his head. "I can't remember the alias she used at Glidden Grove, but that name and a dozen others that she employed are all in the index there." Clark motioned toward the cabinet.

"You think she was after Morlake?"

"Definitely."

"How did she happen to be at that particular spot within two days after Morlake's escape?"

"That," said the general, "was what worried Morlake. Then and there he abandoned his plan to approach old friends of his, and attempt, through

them, to build up the nucleus of his organization. He realized that he had been forestalled by a group that had anticipated his plans and made a thorough study of his life history. When we came on the scene we found that virtually every friend he ever possessed had been under surveillance on that morning. A hundred different methods were used to gain intimate access to the different people involved. It was very thorough."

"How do you account for their preparation?" The senator was standing with closed eyes.

"It is our opinion," said Clark, "that they intended to rescue him from the prison farm, and kill him."

"But how did they know about him?"

The general hesitated. "Our theory there is a little wild, but the men who have gone over Morlake's written statement and court-martial evidence grew interested in the flare of light that enveloped the plane immediately after the bomb had rebuffed Morlake's attempt to throw it off-course. We think that that light was used to take a television picture of the rocketjet."

"Oh!" Tormey was silent. Finally, "What did Morlake do next?"

It was Morlake who broke the silence in the living room of Professor Glidden's bungalow.

"Where is your car?" he said.

The woman seemed resigned. "I'll get my car keys, and drive you back to your plane. I suppose that's where you're heading."

He went with her, conscious that he could trust no one, now that he knew. And that there wasn't time to talk to Dan Dorman, or to ask the questions he had intended to ask Dan's employer, Professor Glidden. He had come to Dan first of all, because of his connection with the world-famous

physicist. Depressing to be here at the spot, and realize that he had to leave without having accomplished anything.

Ten minutes later, the woman parked the car a hundred feet from where Sadie was drawn up under trees. "It's a pretty plane," she said. "How fast can it go?"

"Just over a hundred miles a minute," said Morlake carelessly. "Get out."

"W-what?" She must have thought he was going to kill her, for she turned pale. "Please," she begged, "I'm as innocent as you are. I know nothing."

Morlake gazed at her curiously, but he said nothing. Let her sweat for a minute. He didn't have time to question her, and so he couldn't judge how deeply she was involved. Not that it would have made any difference. He was neither judge nor executioner. He locked the car doors, then slipped the keys into his pocket. He saw that the woman had regained control.

"It's only two miles," she said. "I ought to get there before breakfast. Goodbye and—good luck."

He sent the rockjet straight up until the world was black, and stars were points of light above him. Then he flashed out over the Pacific, and, turning, came back in, coasting over trees straight into a deep arroyo. His new hiding place was less than half a mile from Manakee, California, the town four miles from Glidden Grove, where the telephone exchange must be located.

A bus coming along the nearby highway made his trip easy, and enabled him to inquire about the location of the exchange. . . . There were three girls at the switchboard. One of them, a washed-out looking blonde, said:

"Something went wrong with the line, so I drove in. Did you get the party?"

"Yep, I got her, then I couldn't get you."

Another woman! Morlake felt a thrill, then a sharp anxiety. It was as he had feared. The connection had been established. He hesitated, but there was no drawing back.

"Will you call again?"

"Sure. Got the number?"

Morlake was as ready for that as he could be. "Let me see. Hmmm, can't think of it offhand. But I have it here somewhere."

As he began to search aimlessly through his pockets, he saw that she was examining her notebook. She looked up.

"Never mind, I wrote it down. Lucy Desjardins, 476 Hartford Street, Crestolanto 9153."

For a moment Morlake could only trust himself to nod, then it was time to speak again.

"Just a moment," he said.

"Yes?"

"Did the party, uh, say anything, when you couldn't get her through to me?"

"Yeah, she said it didn't matter or something like that."

"Oh!" said Morlake. "In that case don't bother." He mustered a laugh. "She's a damned touchy woman. I don't want to get her down on me again."

He went out, perspiring but momentarily relieved and jubilant. The feeling didn't last long. The woman had said it didn't matter. That meant she had understood. The gang would be swinging into action.

He hailed a cruising taxi, and had it take him to the suburbs. As soon as it was out of sight, he raced along the highway and across the fields to his machine. The moment he was inside the cockpit, he turned on the radar, and waited.

At first there was nothing. The sky was empty, except for a haze of immensely high clouds. After thirty-seven minutes, a shadow darkened the screen. It was too far away, too high to form a clear image. But it was unmistakable, and it moved along with great speed at a height of about a hundred and twenty-five miles.

Morlake kept spinning his radio dial, and suddenly it caught and stopped, as a voice said:

"... Got away, looks like. We've been east and north and south, and out over the water, and there's not a sign of anything moving. His machine must be capable of far greater speed than we believed."

The answering voice was faint. "Don't give up. Take nothing for granted."

A third voice broke in loudly, "Hey, who's that talking. This is army station Miklaw. Identify yourself."

There was a faint laugh from the nearest voice, then silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Better Rat Trap

FOR Morlake, hiding, waiting, planning, in the arroyo near Manakee, time passed slowly. It was a strangely sad period, one man alone wondering how he could convince a nation that he was right and their leaders were wrong. Ghosts of forty million dead adults and children haunted his dreams, but already the fact that they had existed was a shadowy fact in his mind. To him, who had no family, and who had had the experience of friends dying in a war, death was not the ogre that it was to those who had never been trained to face it.

Far more real than the death that

had struck was the knowledge that out there somewhere on the surface of the Earth, cunning devil-men were waiting for the slightest hint that their identity had been discovered that, to save themselves, they must be prepared to rend the entire earth.

Their leaders would deny all accusations, would charge a conspiracy, and, with the tremendous advantage of control of the Moon, would be able to launch bombs toward any target at will.

Morlake quailed at the picture, and knew that his new plan to seek out the gang must parallel and complement his greater purpose of forcing a reluctant people to crawl up from the caves of fear into which their minds had collapsed, up to the special bravery and imagination that would be needed for the conquest of space.

At dawn, on his third morning in the arroyo, Morlake made sure the radar screen was blank, and then flew in a great circle around the Capistrano radar station of the army, to Crestolanto. He spent all that day watching 476 Hartford Street. It was a plain two-story structure, and during the morning it showed no sign of life. About mid-afternoon, a woman came out of the front door and walked to the nearby market. It was not the woman who had been visiting Professor Glidden's home, but a slim, distinguished-looking young woman with hair slightly greying at the temples.

When she had come back, he wrote a letter to General Clark, describing what he intended to do. He mailed the letter shortly after dark, and then he waited for black night. It was half-past nine by his watch when he crawled through a window, and moved stealthily toward the living-room, where a light was visible through a partly open door. . . .

SENATOR Tormey asked, "And then what happened?"

General Clark shook his head. "We have no direct information."

He pointed to a red pin rooted in a small west-coast city.

"There, Morlake made one of his four attempts to interest the general public. According to our reports, a woman did all the preliminary advertising for a lecture Morlake intended to give. According to our information, it was this second woman. The lecture was a flop. About a dozen people turned up, most of them old women, who thought it was a new religion, in which the Moon had been proved to be heaven."

"Then it would appear that Morlake and this, uh, nameless woman joined forces."

"Never," said the general, "have I had reports of a bolder couple. They were quite cautious at first. Now they're absolutely fearless."

The senator was silent. He wore contact lenses, behind which his intense blue eyes gleamed with alert fires.

General Clark walked to a window, and gazed out past the formal park toward the distant blue of hills. Without looking around he said:

"Last night you asked me about Morlake, and I invited you to come here. This is in line with the army's policy of cooperating with elected representatives of the people. As you know, we intend to permit the congressional elections next fall and the presidential elections in 1968, and so the country will resume its normal democratic functioning. What you do not know is that, though the elections will be held as scheduled, the announcement about them was made with the intention of lulling the enemy."

From behind him, Tormey said slowly, "I don't think I understand."

The general turned to face the bigger man. "When Morlake escaped with S29A, I received a garbled account of what had happened. It was so garbled, in fact, the loss of the plane so important, that I flew to Texas by jet, saw the court-martial papers of Morlake, and began to realize what tremendous information had been bottled up. Naturally, I relieved Herrold of his command instantly, and by the end of the week we had the information which I have described. Better still, our radar station at Capistrano saw the image of the enemy spaceship which was searching for Morlake, and so we had definite evidence that what he stated in his letter was correct.

"When Capistrano saw it, the spaceship was about two hundred miles up. They couldn't estimate the speed, but it was terrific."

He went on matter-of-factly:

"Normally, we might have paid no attention to such a report. So many, many reports come in hour after hour to all military districts. But at this time, on the basis of Morlake's written statement to General Herrold, our experts decided that they had narrowed the possible origins of the bombs to three:

"Two of them were the likeliest points on Earth. If we decided on either of these, we'd have to assume that our men or our instruments for detecting radioactivity were at fault. We rejected these possibilities because the piles necessary for the creation of vast quantities of radioactive materials could not escape detection. That left the third alternative, which assumed the bombs to be of extraterrestrial origin. I accordingly ordered the design and construction of five spaceships, and since it was always just a matter of money, in this case a billion dollars a ship, we had no difficulty. The ships

will be operational by next week."

The senator made a strange sound. It was not a word, and he did not repeat it. Instead, he walked unevenly to a chair and sat down.

"General," he mumbled at last, "you make me dizzy. You mean that all this uproar about Morlake has been unnecessary?"

"Very necessary." Clark was deadly serious. "His desperate efforts to get us to do something made it look as if we were paying no attention to him. We even ridiculed Morlake's propaganda. Personally, I think Morlake caught on, but right now I'd give a lot to have a talk with him. The time has come for coordinated action."

The senator said blankly, "But this means war."

"We'll smash them in one day," Clark said coldly. "No one else has dared to mobilize, for fear of rousing our suspicion. We'll put a million men into their cities overnight. We'll execute every man who had anything to do with the bombing of this country. For once, no one will have an excuse."

"And all this in about two weeks?"
"Possibly less."

There was a long silence. At last the senator climbed to his feet.

"It seems kind of funny after that, to talk of social activity, but are you still having your crap game tonight?"

"We don't dare change our habits now."

"How many will be there?"

"Six, besides yourself."

"Wonder if I could bring along a young friend of my wife's?"

"Why, sure. Which reminds me. When is your lady coming down here?"

Tormey smiled. "Couldn't tell you. She thinks I ought to retire from politics, and therefore she won't establish an official residence. She's pretty much of a traveler."

They parted on that note.

"GENTLEMEN," said Senator Tormey, "this is my friend, Morley Roberts."

There was a grunting response. Morlake sat down, and watched the dice bounce briskly from the far end of the table. He did not look immediately at General Clark, but concentrated on making his first bet. Presently, he picked up his winnings for the roll, and pressed his arm ever so lightly against the gun in his shoulder holster. It was still there, ready for the crisis which ought to come in a few minutes.

He lost twice in a row, and then won three times on his own roll. As he gave up the dice finally, he took his first good look at General Clark. A pair of eyes as sharp as his own met that one searching glance. The general said casually:

"So it's me you're here to contact, Roberts?"

Morlake brought his hand to the edge of the table, with the fingers held slightly downward and barely touching the surface. From there it was one foot to his gun.

He said steadily:

"General, you're a smart man, but you haven't figured it quite right."

There was an undertone in his voice, the beginning of tension, the beginning of deadly intent. Like darkness blotting out day, the atmosphere of the room changed. Some of the officers looked at each other, puzzled. Senator Tormey said:

"It's getting warm in here. Uh, I'll call one of my guards and have him open the windows wider."

"I'll do it, sir." Morlake was on his feet, without waiting for acquiescence.

He examined the windows and, as he had expected, the "glass" was a bullet-proof plastic. What he did then

was rooted in a profound discovery he had made during the previous six months: the discovery that if you say you will do something and then go and do something similar, no one will notice the difference—for a while.

Without a qualm, he closed and locked the three windows, and then he returned to the table. The dice rolled whitely against the background of the green cloth. Senator Tormey won from several of the officers. As he was raking it in, General Clark said:

"Morley Roberts. The name is familiar, but it is the face that makes a better identification. Suppose we change the name around a little, and say Robert Morlake, former Captain, army air forces, court-martialed, thirty years at hard labor. Am I getting warm?"

The general's voice went up, "Wait, gentlemen!" The men at the table froze, two with their chairs pushed back, one with a hand under his coat. The senator was the first to relax. He was sitting at the side of the table, and he hummed a small tune under his breath. Clark said softly:

"You came here tonight as the guest of Senator Tormey. I presume he knows who you are."

"I'm sure," Morlake said, "that the senator must have recognized me, but you will know better than I if he's made inquiries about me in the last two days. But now I'd better hurry. Gentlemen, this is a dangerous moment, not because of me directly—I'm only a catalytic agent—but because my appearance gave a certain person an opportunity to carry out a previously conceived plan.

"It was my intention," Morlake went on, "that he should use me for this purpose so that I might use him for mine.

"A brief case history is in order:

Picture a wealthy congressman, unscrupulous and with unlimited ambitions. It is very easy for him to think of himself as a man of destiny, frustrated by the stupidity of others. Having become senator, he discovered in two successive presidential campaigns that he had no chance to become chief of state. His wife began to suspect him shortly after she married him in 1959, and pretended to play along. But she didn't realize the truth until B-day. As you know, he was in a safe place on that day—very fortuitous. Afterwards, his main opposition was the army. It was clever of him to authorize martial law—which would have been done anyway. It was clever because he was later able to use it in his propaganda."

Morlake paused, and smiled to relax his eyes, to loosen his body, because the moment had come.

"His big opportunity came—it seemed to him—when I appeared on the scene, as guest of his wife. He saw it as his chance to kill General Clark and his staff, and throw the blame on me. I, of course, the highly publicized escaped army convict, would also be found dead, and—"

Morlake broke off. He said, "What's the matter, senator, has your nerve gone? You're not going to go down like a weakling, are you?"

The sweat was almost a mask on the heavy face. Tormey brought his hand up, and put it in his vest pocket. He fumbled for a long moment. Morlake said:

"I see, senator, that you're activating your little radio, calling your agents outside."

As if to punctuate the words, there was a crash of bullets on the window. Everybody except Morlake jumped. Morlake said tantalizingly:

"Too bad."

He reached across the table, and

snatched a tiny instrument from the senator's vest pocket. The man grabbed angrily at his hand, but he was too slow.

"Hm," said Morlake. "One of the printed variety."

With a visible effort, the other man straightened. "Never heard such nonsense," he snarled. "You've arranged this drama with bullets against the window. If you think such a simple scheme is going to work against me, you're—"

He stopped. His eyes, staring straight into Morlake's, widened. He must have realized that his denials were meaningless here, that the plans already boiling in his mind, to use the radio and the press, his control of the party, of the country, his skill at propaganda—all that meant nothing to this deadly young man. He had not even time to cry out in sudden terrified realization of his fate.

THE two shots that Morlake fired broke the big man's lungs. Tormey slumped over on the table, then slid down to the floor. Morlake paid no attention to the armed officers in the room. They could have shot him as he knelt beside the dying man, but his very helplessness was his safeguard. They watched, their bodies rigid, and they must have

been restrained, too, by the knowledge that he had acted with remorseless logic.

Morlake neither saw nor worried. The senator's eyes were open and staring widely. There was blood on his lips.

"Senator, what is the name of the enemy?"

That got them. General Clark came closer. An officer who had gone to calm the guards at the door half turned back into the room. Even Senator Tormey stiffened.

"You can go to hell," he muttered.

Morlake said, "Hurry, man, you've only got a minute—a minute."

The horror of that struck deep. The thick face twisted. "Die!" the senator mumbled. "Why—I'm going to die." The idea seemed to grow on him. He struggled, gasping for breath, then subsided. He lay so still for a second that he looked dead. His eyes opened wearily. He looked up, and mumbled:

"Was that my wife . . . at Crestolanto, in that house?"

Morlake nodded. "She used your organization. She received all California reports. That enabled her to locate me no matter which local agent saw me first. She had decided that if I came to Crestolanto she would ask me to help her. It was she who toured

(Continued on Page 128)

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FANTASY BOOKSHELF

APE AND ESSENCE by Aldous Huxley. Harper & Brothers, New York. \$2.50.

By the Twenty-second Century, the Third World War has been over long enough to let the children of the survivors grope back toward some sort of society. A Rediscovery Expedition from New Zealand, the only unharmed remainder of civilization, makes contact with the new nation on the coast of Southern California—a savage and decaying theocracy of Evil, founded on the strangely plausible assumption that the Devil has seized control of the world and of humanity.

Most of the story is told as a movie scenario, a vehicle which gives Huxley opportunity to employ a narrator and chorus to point up his moral. For science-fiction readers who relished the savage satire of **BRAVE NEW WORLD**, this new Huxley will be well worth reading. For others, the story may seem diffuse in its purposes and mystical in approach.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED by Jerry Walker. Cosmos Publications, New York. \$2.75.

This story of international spies battling and intriguing over the secret "atom rays" contains almost every ingredient that modern science-fiction has cast off and outgrown. There are deadly Mata Haris, inept professors, a "scientific" vocabulary culled from the early adventures of Tom Swift, sinister Japanese agents, and about as much plot and good writing as you will find on the head of an average pin. The publishers announce that **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED** is being made into a motion picture, which is a pity.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE by Charles Williams. Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York. \$2.75.

In London of today's time, but an empty and barren London, wander two lonely girls, knowing that something has happened to them but not quite realizing that they are dead. When a mystic named Simon the Clerk bridges the gap between life and death in an incredible scheme to dominate two

worlds, he brings peace and release to the dead girls—and destruction to himself.

Charles Williams has uncounted admirers in England and the Continent, but his books are almost unknown here. It is a credit to Pellegrini & Cudahy that they have brought his work to America, for he has a rare and delicate talent for fantasy, but it is a pity that this publication did not occur until after his death. *ALL HALLOWS' EVE* carries an appreciative critical introduction by T. S. Eliot, which adds enormously to the enjoyment of the book.

THE WEB OF EASTER ISLAND by Donald Wandrei. Arkham House, Sauk City. \$3.

From an ancient Druid burying ground in England to the aircraft-filled skies of Earth's farthest future, this novel proceeds in million-year jumps. Carter Graham starts it off by discovering a peculiarly horrid little image which has the unhappy property of bringing death in strange forms to its owners; in tracking down the secret of the image he discovers the existence of strange beings from outside time and space which own the world and use it for their own purposes. Hopelessly he battles against them, knowing that he cannot win.

This is fantasy rather than science-fiction, despite the time-travel theme; even as fantasy, it lacks logic and coherence as a novel. Yet Donald Wandrei's talent for making the flesh creep makes individual sections of the book excellent and rewarding in themselves.

THE CHECKLIST OF FANTASTIC LITERATURE, edited by Everett F. Bleiler. Shasta Press, Chicago. \$6.

Here is a book that has needed doing for almost a generation, and the mere

fact that now at last a bibliography of fantasy is available almost warrants overlooking the faults of the present volume. Apart from the almost inevitable inclusion of some stories which are by no means fantasy and omission of many which very definitely are, the most serious flaw in the *CHECKLIST* is its \$6 price—which makes it a fine investment for librarians and collectors, but hardly worthwhile for the casual fantasy reader who wants only a reliable guide to further reading.

The publishers reveal that seven years of research and checking library files went into the compilation of the *CHECKLIST*, which is not surprising. What is surprising is that so much of the research was done in library card-files and so little in the collections of fans throughout the country, who could have done wonders toward shortening the time of research and improving the accuracy of the book.

NO HIGHWAY by Nevil Shute. William Morrow, New York. \$2.75.

If it had not been left over from another experiment and available to the first research man who asked for it, Mr. Honey would not have chosen a tailplane from a new model transport for his experiments in the study of metal fatigue; if he had not used that tailplane, he would never have found himself in a series of adventures involving a flight in another plane of the same model, which he knows is doomed to crash.

NO HIGHWAY is science fiction of a rare and delightful sort, which seems to come only from England; it is reminiscent of the novels of E. C. Large rather than of any magazine science-fiction writer. There is science in plenty—and good, sound science, for Mr. Shute is a former aviation research

man himself. There is even a brief excursion into fantasy, involving clairvoyance on the part of a child. But the period of the story is today; and the huge new aircraft on which the story is hung differs only in detail from ships now in commercial use. Don't expect gadgets or weird fantasy in **NO HIGHWAY**; but do expect a tremendously enjoyable scientific romance.

THE TORCH, by Jack Bechdolt. Prime Press, Philadelphia. \$2.50.

In the post-Atomic-War New York of the year 2078 A.D., civilization has been very nearly destroyed and the local government is a form of medieval feudalism. A young soldier-aristocrat, Captain Fortune, finds that his sympathies are with the commoners rather than his own blue-blood fellows; in trying to reconcile his ideals with loyalty to his state, he helps precipitate a revolution which destroys the reigning oligarchy and gives mankind—in New York, at least—another chance at progress.

Read as an adventure story pure and simple, **THE TORCH** is neither dull nor unrewarding. But measured against the claim of being, in the inflated words of its publishers, "one of the finest pieces of prophecy since Daniel told off the Babylonian king . . . one of the finest stories ever written of man's everlasting fight for liberty", it falls ridiculously short. The story was originally published nearly thirty years ago, and its theme has been handled far better by many writers since.

SLAVES OF SLEEP by L. Ron Hubbard. Shasta Press, Chicago. \$3.

Jan Palmer, a milksop heir to millions, accidentally breaks the seal on an ancient Arabian jar and releases a **djinn**, who promptly places him under

a curse. While awake, Jan lives his normal life except that he is accused of committing an untidy murder of the djinn's; but while asleep, his mind inhabits a body in another world peopled primarily by djinni, where humans are lower than slaves.

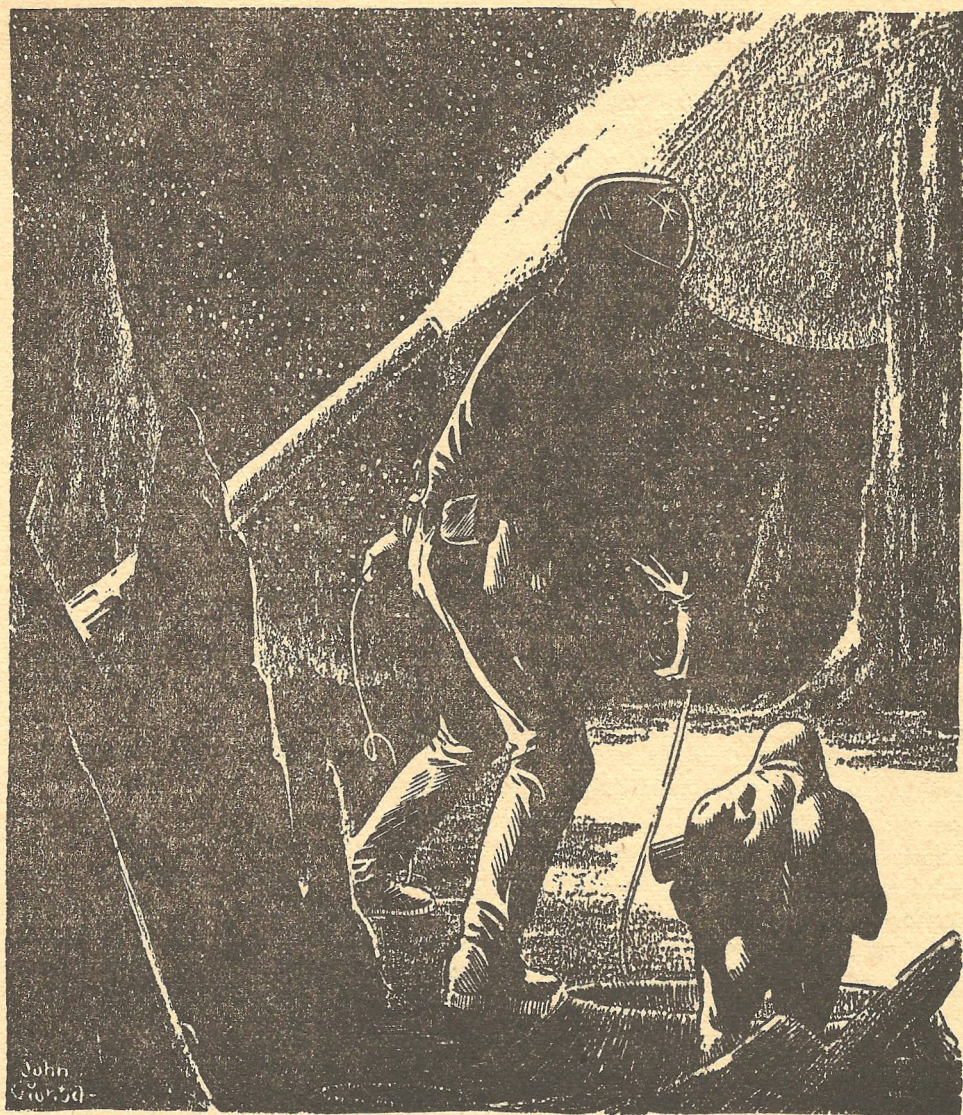
Jan's fight against danger on two worlds at once is a rollicking humorous fantasy. It is as untidily written as Hubbard's worst, but in comparison with his two recent books it is very good indeed.

THE FOURTH BOOK OF JORKENS by Lord Dunsany. Arkham House, Sauk City. \$3.

Here are thirty-three new stories of Jorkens and his cronies of the Billiards Club, ranging from an anecdote of a duel with rubber knives to a spiritualist's message from the Moon. Something more than half of them are fantasies, but even of the fantasies the bulk are presented with double-edged endings, leaving it up to the reader to decide how to accept them. Jorkens has carved out a niche for himself among literary heroes, and his admirers will want this book without question. For the average fantasy reader it offers an evening's entertainment, but little more.

MOONFOAM AND SORCERIES by Stanley Mullen. Gorgon Press, Denver.

Here are thirteen short stories and twenty-six poems by a young fantasy publisher-writer. Few of the stories are of fully professional quality, and most indicate only a promising literary talent which is a long way from being fulfilled. The illustrations by Roy Hunt are uneven but, apart from the highly decorative jacket, generally inferior. For dyed-in-the-wool collectors only.



DARKSIDE DESTINY

By James MacGreigh

One lunar night they had given him, a night fourteen Earth days long, to solve the riddle that was written in letters of stone on the Moon's dead surface — or die!

THE moon turned out to be almost as predicted. Air—zero; surface pumice and naked rock; watery vegetation, animals—none.

I didn't mind. I was rather pleased,

in fact. It was a triumph for our astronomers, that they'd been able to tell so accurately the conditions on the surface of a body a quarter of a million miles from their eyepieces. Of course, the three-hundred-inch mirror showed everything on the surface of the moon that was more than two hundred feet long, or rose high enough to cast a two-hundred-foot shadow. But it was still quite a feat, and I took pride in it.

Fowler didn't. I think he was disappointed. He'd spent a lot of his father's millions on building the *Pioneer*, and I think he wanted a little more for his money than the satisfaction of confirming the guesses of a bunch of astronomers.

He was glued to the belly-window as I, in the front, brought the ship down. He was supposed to be helping me land the ship, but we could have crashed through every mountain range on the satellite for all of him. Not a single word did he say, of warning or advice, till we finally touched the surface and skidded to a stop, throwing up a hundred-foot shower of powdered pumice in our wake.

I leaned back and breathed hard for a while, conscious of the moisture that was all over my face, the jumping muscles at the base of my neck and in my upper arms. Sheer nerves, the result of as racking a five minutes as I've ever spent. Fowler hadn't turned a hair.

He unstrapped himself and looked at me glumly. When I'd caught my breath and was convinced my voice wouldn't be too shaky if I tried it, I said, "What's the matter, pal? No men-in-the-moon?"

He flushed. "No," he admitted, "Not as far as I could see."

"And you certainly were trying," I agreed. "A fine lot of help you were.

Well, what did you expect? No air or water—life has to sustain itself somehow."

He grimaced without answering. He stood up gently, experimentally. There's no gravity to speak of on the moon. Standing up for the first time is quite an experience. Not exactly pleasant, but not unpleasant, either.

I watched him, grinning partly because he was a funny sight, solemnly flexing his knees and rising completely off the ground in a short, lazy hop every time he straightened them, and partly through relief from tension. I wished for a cigarette, but that was out of the question, of course. We had too little air.

When he thought he'd got the hang of it, he tiptoed daintily past me and stared out the front port, brows knotted.

"It's so dark," he complained, "Maybe if we could see a little better—"

"No such thing," I said. "There aren't any halfway measures here. We had to land on the dark side, or broil. Don't think I like it—I had to land in it."

Well, there was no point in going into that.

I unbuckled my harness and repeated Fowler's exhibition, getting my moon-legs. The worst thing about it, I found, was that my stomach was used to gravity, and had a tendency to want to come up in the absence of it. But I managed to keep from disgracing myself. After a while it was rather pleasant.

Fowler was watching my antics, but without amusement. As soon as he saw me looking at him, he said "How do you know that life needs air or water to exist, Ken?"

"I don't," I said. "But it seems logical. How else?"

HE FROWNED thoughtfully. "Well, what is life?" he asked.

"A living creature is a sort of transformer; it takes stored heat energy—in the form of food—and converts it into motion and neuro-electrical impulses, and heaven knows what all. But it's the transformation of energy that counts. Why does life have to take its energy out of cold storage, so to speak? I can imagine a living being right here on the moon. Instead of eating, it would absorb cosmic rays, or the radiation from the sun itself, or some form of energy that we don't know about on Earth because the atmosphere cuts it out. It could use its energy direct and quite as efficiently as—"

I shrugged. "You have a vivid imagination," I said. "Anyway, let's not argue about life. What we need now is that life-in-death the poets talk about—namely, sleep. I'm shot." And I was; it had just come over me. We'd gone thirty-eight hours without sleep, Fowler and I. The strain had ended, and the reaction was setting in.

Fowler looked at me moodily, but didn't say anything. I invited him to take the hammock while I curled up on the floor, but he shook his head without answering.

So I took the hammock and went to sleep about four seconds after I lay down. Fowler was still at the port, looking out, when I closed my eyes.

I had bad dreams. The reaction from the trip caused them, I guess; that and the strangeness of our surroundings. But they were pretty bad, all about something chasing me for hundreds of miles across the surface of the moon, while I went bounding along in hundred-foot leaps that were not quite enough to escape from this thing that followed me. When I woke

up I was taut as a drumhead and soaked through with sweat, but I couldn't remember any more of the dream than that horrible sensation of fleeing. . . .

Fowler was asleep by the window. While I was trying to decide whether to wake him up or not, he solved the problem for me. One eye opened and looked at me, then he yawned and got up.

He was red-rimmed around the eyes, and badly in need of a shave—but he grinned. "Let's eat," he said. "It's been a long time."

We ate, but on the fly. Our attention wasn't on the sandwiches we chewed nor the hyped coffee. We hunkered down by the port as we ate, staring out the window.

To us, it was morning, you see. But a Lunar night lasts fourteen days. We still had the electrics going in the ship. Outside was unrelieved blackness, with only the superbly brilliant stars for light.

We had landed about two hundred and fifty miles from the terminator, in the direction of its motion. Creeping toward us at ten miles an hour, in little more than a day the sunlight zone would be reaching us. We'd planned it that way, because we would want to see how the satellite looked with the harsh, naked sun pounding down on it. But at first we had to get out on the surface of this new sphere in our vacuum suits. And that we could do only in darkness, for even the thick hull of the *Pioneer*, triply shielded and insulated by every means we knew, could scarcely keep out that fierce heat. The suits would have let enough of the rays sift through to parboil us in an hour.

Fowler gulped down the last of his coffee and pushed himself gently to his feet.

"Let's move," he said. "We've got a couple of things to do before the sun gets here."

I joined him at the lockers where our vacuum suits were stored. We broke them out, tested the valves, checked the oxygen charges, found them in working order. I took out the brace of specially-designed pistols he'd had made—powered by compressed-air capsules. Compressed air, expanding in a vacuum, is more explosive than any mixture of chemicals, and a good deal lighter besides. One I gave to Fowler, the other I stared at thoughtfully for a second, then shoved into the clamp at the side of my suit. Fowler gravely followed my example. He forebore saying anything, for which I was grateful. True, I had meant it when I said there could be no life on the moon. But it was as well to take no chances, I thought. . . .

We dragged the flare charges out to the middle of the cabin floor, where we could get them when we needed them. Then we slammed the locker doors shut, leaving most of our supplies unpacked. That could wait.

The two of us in our bulky vacuum suits crowded into the tiny airlock, closed the door, lugged it down against the heavy pressure gaskets. Then, straining, we opened the valve that bled the atmosphere of the lock into the void outside. When the last of the air had shrieked through the lock, we closed it again. There was no pressure to hold it now; the outer door opened easily to our touch. The first men to set foot on the surface of another world, we stepped out into the powdery, soft blackness.

WE LEFT the landing beam aglow atop the Pioneer, and we each had a heavy electric torch that could throw a clear spot

as far as the eye could see. But those were the only lights on the surface of this world, except for a thin, sharp rim of light along the topmost spires of a mountain range far off on the horizon.

Fowler and I had worked out a rude sort of code with the lights—we had no radio. Fowler dot-dashed me to follow him and set off with huge sprawling bounds across the landscape. The footing was unpleasant—soft and dust-fine underneath, with the sharpest sort of hills and crevasses to leap over. On earth it would have been impossible. Some of the crevasses were forty feet wide, and deep beyond the ability of my eyes to measure. But of course, being nearly weightless as we were, we could soar over them without effort.

I signaled to Fowler to slow down, but he waved his torch at me angrily and kept going. He was heading for a comparatively level bit of ground about a mile away.

That's where we found the city.

It was a town in Lilliput, a doll village. It was tiny—and it was old, battered, smashed by the impact of countless meteor swarms.

Fowler got there before me, and he was kneeling, peering into an opening in a three-foot structure. He looked up at me as my last leap plowed up a feathery cloud of moondust beside him.

There was excitement in the way he bobbed his head, the gesturing of his arms. This was what he'd come a quarter of a million miles to see. This was his goal, attained just when it seemed lost forever.

I bent down to look beside him.

The building had no roof, nor did it seem ever to have had one. Whatever the beings were that had built these kitten-hutches, they had never been

more than eight inches in height. The buildings were empty. I poked my hand through the opening—no door hung in it; it looked as though there had never been a door—and pulled out one of the objects.

Well, it might have been a hassock for a pygmy, or a child's much-battered building block on Earth. It was three inches high, vaguely cubical.

Fowler plucked the thing from my gauntleted hand. He revolved it in his fingers, bending his face-plate low over it, his helmet light throwing a wide cone of light upon it.

I let him have it, stood back for a look around.

I marveled at finding the town at all. The buildings were minute; there were only a few dozen of them, wide-scattered over the relatively flat plain on which we stood. Whoever the moon-beings might have been, they lacked architecture. The buildings were utilitarian as a foot-rule, and no more graceful. Squat, octagonal objects of the pumice-like rock that composed most of the moon's surface. I watched Fowler. He was placing the hassock-like object gently back in the structure. He looked about, then leaped for another building, almost identical to the first. There was eagerness in the speed with which he bent down to peer within, disappointment in the slow way his back straightened when he'd seen it was as empty as the first.

I knew what he was looking for. People! And looking around the plain at the roofless houses, I knew he'd never find what he sought.

You see, those buildings had been there a long, long time. There is no air on the moon. No dust storms; no rain or hail; no freezing water to begin the slow process of erosion. There's only the eon-seldom pattering of cosmic silt, and the heat-and-cold

stresses that come twice in twenty-eight days, when the lines of the terminator pass and the sun's blazing heat suddenly expands the frigid rock, and its later passing cools it as quickly. These are not important forces, but they are all that work on the moon. Thousands of years was the minimum, beyond question. And no life can survive a hundred thousand years.

Then I swallowed abruptly, and the certainty I'd just felt went skittering away. A tiny figure I saw—no, two of them, in the light that my bobbing helmet lamp had cast for a second into the lee of a meteor-fragment. Two tiny figures, standing motionless—but real!

It took me a handful of seconds to collect myself. Shock—it was next to the greatest shock I'd ever had!

But I stood there motionless, eyeing them, the rays of my head torch playing over their tiny bodies. They were perhaps a dozen yards from me, watching me as steadily as I watched them. Tiny non-human bodies; small heads with one glittering eye, watching me.

THEY didn't move. After a moment I saw they were not watching. I stepped to one side. The eyes did not move; the figures twitched not an inch.

I thrust with my feet against the clinging, powdery rock dust, flew through the air and landed before them. Still no motion.

And I picked one of them up, and saw why. They were not alive. By the rock-hard feel of them, the chillness that even my vacuum suit could not keep out, they never had been.

Statues.

I dot-dashed to Fowler, who saw and came plunging toward me. I looked closely at the figurine I held

in my glove. Nine inches high, black as the ebony heart of hell's overlord, inhuman as a Gila monster. They were fear-dreams in the wrong end of a telescope, stepped-down nightmares.

The horrible thing was that there had been humanity in them. The proportions of the limbs, the shape of the skull—these were human. But the bloated torso, the face that was nothing but a great faceted eye in a blank convexity of rock, the sharp, wavy hair . . . those were noxious. There was neither nose or mouth, nor did the models for these figures possess ears. The slender, three-fingered hands, though, were almost human, and well designed for the shaping of tools.

Fowler was beside me. I handed the tiny thing to him, glad to be rid of it. If these figures were accurate representations of that which had lived on the satellite, I was grateful for their death.

Almost I could hear Fowler's bellow of excitement as he saw what I gave him.

I turned away and left him with it. The statue had made me oddly queasy. There was no reason, but I wanted to stay away from it, as far as possible.

I looked around. There was a bowl-shaped depression the size of a small amphitheater a few hundred rods off. I leaped over to it, examined it. It was lined with pumice, as was all the moon.

That was the spot, I thought, for our signal flare to Earth. A crude reflector. I memorized the location of the spot.

Fowler was signaling to me frantically. I bounded over to him, and he pointed to a recess beneath the boulder. I bent low to peer at it.

There was a glittering object within the shelter of the meteoric boulder. I **prodded at it with my space gauntlets,**

but it was somehow wedged there; it broke as I dragged it out.

The piece I held in my hand was like a cylinder, long and glittering. It was empty, open at both ends. I prodded around for what had broken off, but the fine pumice dust had hidden it.

I handed the thing to Fowler, nodding. It was interesting. It proved that these moon men had known the art of metal-working. But the Lunites, dead or alive, held only repulsion for me. I felt stifled, homesick.

I waved to Fowler and made back for the ship, guided by the beacon we had left burning on the hull. When I got back I passed the time while I waited for him to return by bringing out the equipment that went with the Earth-flare. Setting that off was our next job. I was anxious to get it over.

I was anxious to get the whole trip over, and to get back to Earth.

AND surprisingly, when Fowler came back, he seemed almost of the same mood.

He still held the metal tube as he came through the pressure chamber. He laid it down as he took off his suit, but picked it up again and gazed at it contemplatively. A nod was all the greeting I got.

"You look low," I said.

"I feel low" He stared at the metal tube. "I came a long way for this. I felt sure the moon would have life, some kind of life."

I tried to cheer him up. "You were almost right," I said. "Just a little late."

"A million years too late."

I saw it with shock—the man was heartbroken! He'd joked a lot about life on the moon, but I should have known; I should have seen by the reckless way he'd poured his fortune

into the Pioneer, the eagerness with which he glued himself to the windows as we came down on the moon for the first time, that it was more than a joke to him. Fowler had wanted to be the first man to see extraterrestrial life. As a boy, he'd read fantastic stories of pink Martians and lavender monsters from Proxima Centauri. The wonder they'd implanted within his mind had remained with him ever since.

"Let's send off the flare," I said. "We've got a lot of hard work ahead of us."

Well, we lugged out the great transparent bowl I'd invented, attached the detonator leads to the terminals, and ran the lines a quarter of a mile away. Whoever set it off could lie down there, behind one of the doll-sized buildings. Closed eyelids would be no protection against the flood of light that would come from that flare, scaled to be visible an astronomical distance away. And neither of us had any desire to go blind.

All that remained to be done was to get the batteries from the ship and hook them up. I rose from where I'd hooked in the wires to the detonator, leaving the battery leads open, and took a step toward Fowler.

Something crunched rustily under my foot.

I looked down. It had been one of the devil dolls—now it was nothing at all. Rock or not, the things were incredibly fragile. Even my light moon-weight had crushed this one. There were two more nearby, with one of the glittering metal cylinders beside them.

I bent down to examine the wreckage, and wished I hadn't. Horrible as the things were when they were whole, the crumpled, smashed fragments at my feet were infinitely worse.

I gestured to Fowler and we returned to the ship.

"Who'll set it off?" Fowler asked drearily when we were inside. He seemed to have lost interest in the whole expedition. The disappointment of finding the moon a dead planet after all had hurt him deeply.

I shrugged. We flipped a coin. It fell heads for Fowler.

Less than ten minutes later—I'd shuttered the windows on the flare side—the entire landscape lighted up with a harsh blue-white glow. It lasted for a handful of seconds, and died.

Earth had been notified that the first interplanetary voyage was successful! The thought had not come to me for hours; I'd almost forgotten. The papers on Earth would be rushing out extras; the radios would be shrieking our names. All over the planet, men and women would mention us to each other. History would never forget. . . .

I began to take an interest in things again. It was absurd to be so sickened, so almost frightened by a handful of tiny objects of stone. I felt better than I had since I'd seen the first of them.

Almost eagerly I waited for Fowler's return.

HALF an hour passed, and Fowler didn't return. An hour passed, and I decided to investigate. There was no reason, no reason at all for him to delay. He knew I was waiting for him before going on with our work. Despite his mood, he wouldn't keep me waiting like this unless there was something wrong.

I went out to look for him.

The moon was never emptier than then. There was I, a single human, alone in a silent blackness. Me in my fabric-held bubble of air that all the void around the moon was tugging at

with every iota of suction it could muster up, trying to steal it from me so that I would freeze and the blood would burst through my skin and congeal there, and I would die alone on the moon. . . .

The mountains were harsh threats all about me, and the soft powder underneath was a trap. A dull red glow of superheated metal showed me where the remains of the flare were cooling off. I struck off in the direction that led to where Fowler had set off the detonator.

He was still there.

He was dead.

I picked him up effortlessly, stepped over a gargoyle figurine and bore his almost weightless body back toward the ship. His gun dropped from his hand as I lifted him. A thin liquid ran from the hole in his suit that the bullet had made, but it soon froze and let no more run through.

More heartbroken than I had seen, he had been. Disconsolate enough, disappointed enough to carry out his one duty to me—to notify the Earth of our arrival—and then to take his own life. I could have picked up his gun and taken it with me, but I wanted no part of the weapon that had destroyed my friend.

It was hard work getting him through the lock, but I managed it. The pumps filled it quickly when I'd sealed the outer door, and I stepped inside.

I put Fowler down on his own cot and stood back to look at him. The half-inch slug of the air pistol had been kind to him. Only a tiny hole had been ripped in the fabric of his pressure suit. Just big enough to kill him—

Wearily, I gathered up his gear and began to stow it away. We had left

all the supplies out in our rush to visit the moon's surface a few hours before. I picked them up and put them in the lockers too. Working helped to clarify my thoughts.

I made a neat job of it. With Fowler's personal belongings in the lockers, there was no longer room enough for all the equipment. Two spare air flasks, the boxes of ammunition for the pistols, an emergency torch were left over. I heaped them on the chart table and stood regarding them abstractedly for a second.

I sealed my helmet again, went into the lock, started across the surface of the moon in the longest leaps I could manage. The terminator was a scant fifty miles away now. I had five hours before it reached me.

Five hours would be plenty for what I had to do.

I found what I was looking for—Fowler's gun. I clipped it to my pressure suit without examining it and was about to start for the ship when I saw the devilish figurine crouched immobile there, seeming to watch me, with its gleaming metal tube hugged to its scant chest like a precious treasure. There was no rhyme or reason in it, but a sudden rush of emotion came over me. And what I had once done by accident I did now with malice. My steel-bound boot came down on the crouched doll, and when it came up there were only fragments of curiously-shaped blackness where the statuette had been.

That made me feel a little better. But I could feel my jaw muscles working, could feel how my legs faltered under me as I bounced across the rough plain, could feel my arms moving spasmodically instead of with a smooth flow of effort as they swung by my side.

Nervous—I held tight to what con-

trol I had left. I needed it, badly. There was work to do.

A moment's work setting the fuel gauges, and the rockets bellowed, faltered, then sang out an even roar of power. Through the nose port I could see the sharp black-and-incandescent line of the terminator on the slope of a jagged mountain forty miles or more away.

I cut in the lift rockets in the nose, then loosed the main jets. The hull groaned and scraped for a scant second, then that noise stopped and the ship was in free flight in the clean emptiness of space.

I set course for Earth, slowing the acceleration of the ship so that the planet would have a chance to revolve beneath me till the home port in the Puget Sound area was within flight range.

I locked the controls and got up, wearily shedding my suit.

If only we hadn't set off the flare, it wouldn't have happened. Not then, at any rate; not until the terminator reached us and the sun's light came blasting down to do for fourteen days

what our flare had done for a few seconds. And perhaps we would have been gone by then. Perhaps, on other parts of the moon's surface, the danger did not exist.

Strange that pure light could be so deadly! I remembered what Fowler had said about creatures that might live on energy directly, receiving it, transforming it, giving it out. That explained the roofless houses, the scanty architecture. It was odd, in a way, that having achieved that much, Fowler had not carried the thought to its conclusion. Odd that he had not realized that that which lives by light, in darkness must be dead. But the death need not be permanent. It was like any machine; stop it, and it is dead. But the touch of power can bring it to life again.

I picked up Fowler's gun and looked at it closely, though that was not necessary. I had been right; it was empty.

I had known it would be, ever since the moment I saw the three boxes of ammunition, all we had brought with us, with the seals still unbroken.



DIAN OF THE LOST LAND

By Edison Marshall

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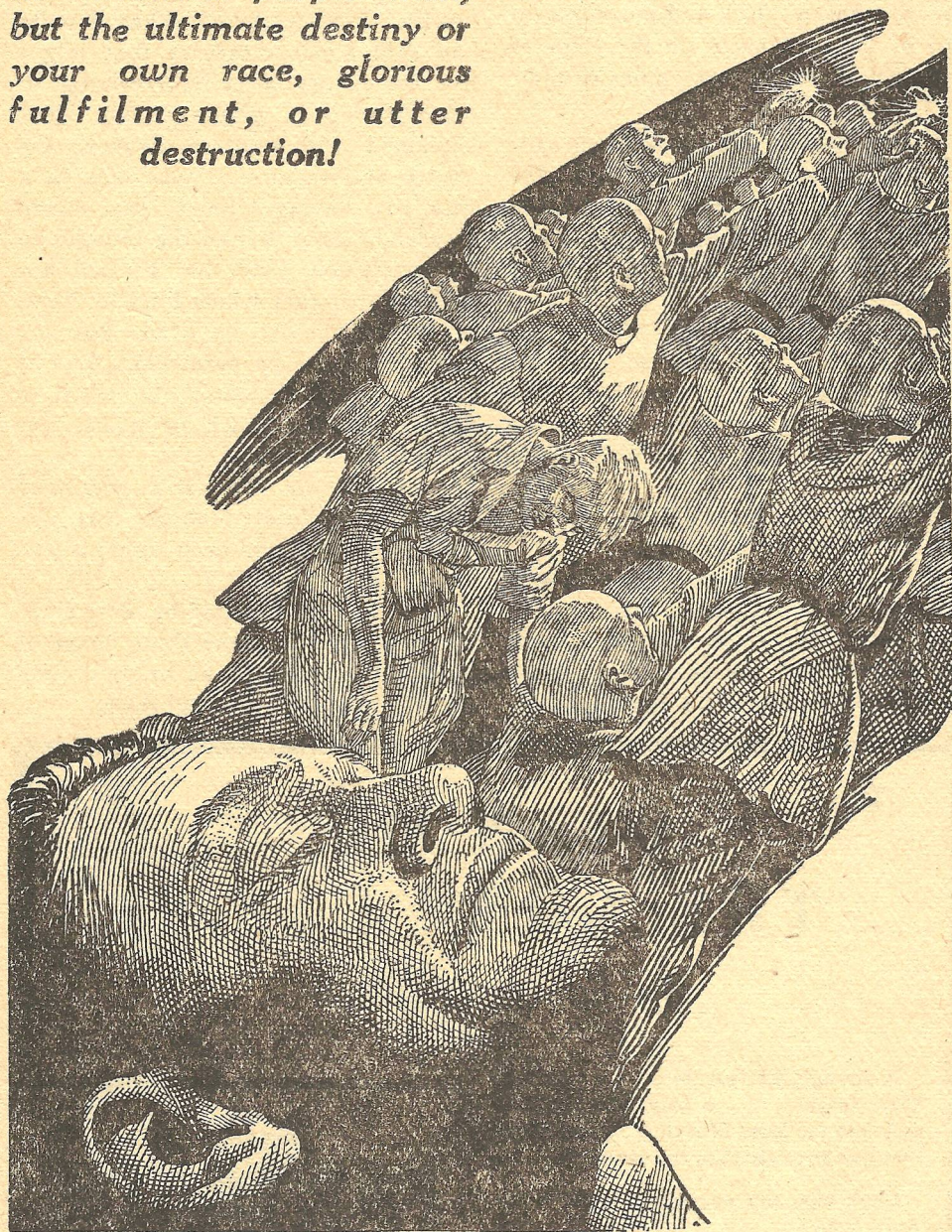
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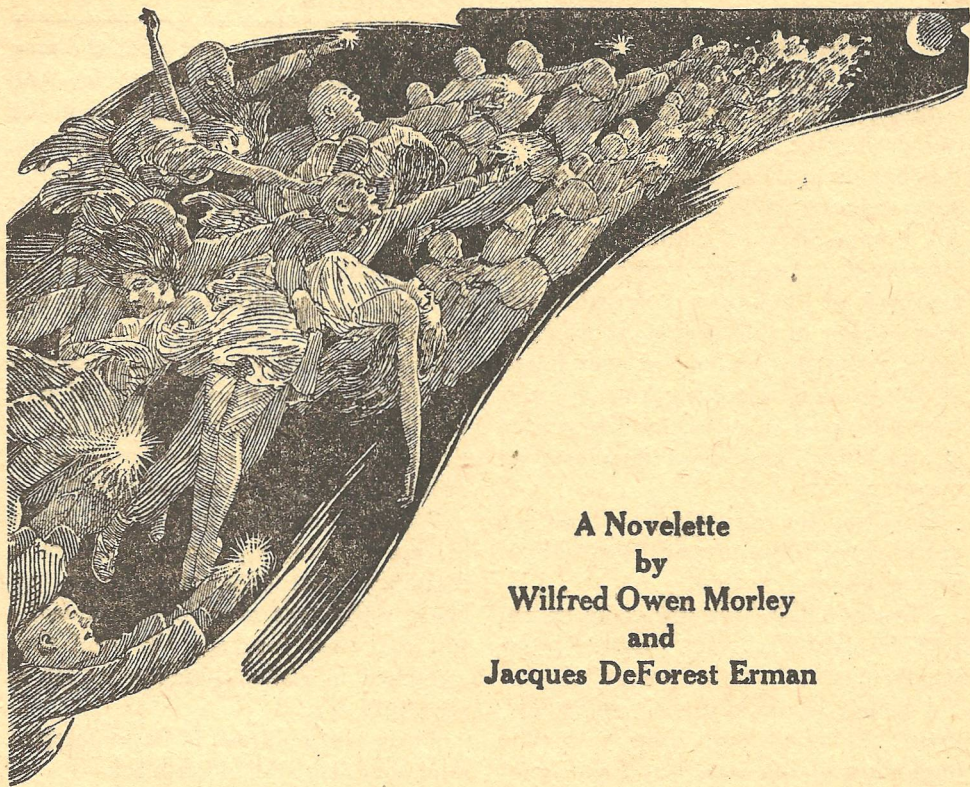


Famous 23.
FANTASTIC
Mysteries

*Do you recall the meaning
of that alien word? If you
do, you must speak — for
you have the power to
decide, not only the fate of
the doomed purple men,
but the ultimate destiny or
your own race, glorious
fulfilment, or utter
destruction!*

From behind dead, dark satellites they would
rush, lambent flames spurting from their ex-
tended hands, swooping down like hawks and
bearing away the fairest of the maids.





A Novelette
by
Wilfred Owen Morley
and
Jacques DeForest Erman

DHACTWHU! — REMEMBER?

CHAPTER ONE

Don't You Know?

DHACTWHU!
Remember?

If that word means anything to you, it means a lot to us all. Maybe I can awaken some latent memory in you. Your mind may hold the Rosetta Stone destined to recapture a lost secret of time and space. . . .

We were three lone men and an obsessing dream, pushing our way into the heart of well-nigh unexplored wilderness, somewhere in South America. Perhaps we were fools, too. But

I'm thinking of Andrew Milton; he'd been known for over twenty years to his students at that midwest university as a hidebound conservative. So I don't think you'd call him the fool. Then, Fletcher Amsbury. At one time or another he'd been in the service of nearly all of the allied nations, during the second world war. So you can't say he was a fool; fools don't last in his game. As for me, Stanley Denning—well, maybe. . . .

Three lone men, lost in the jungle, with only a dream to guide us. Plodding stubbornly on, after our guides and bearers had deserted us. Leaving a trail behind us which we knew would soon be obliterated. Hack-

ing our way ahead, when what maps there were warned us we could expect nothing here but fever and slow or sudden death.

What drew us to this lost world? I can't answer that for certain even now. All I know is that as long as I can remember, Amsbury and I had dreamed of finding a colossal black city, hidden in this jungle. It was the most persistent dream I've ever heard of. We grew up together, Amsbury and I, and we used to tell each other stories of the city, and try to guess its meaning.

But from the very first we knew we must never tell anyone else—unless they gave the sign first.

Then one day Amsbury came in and said simply: "Get ready. I think I know where it is."

I hadn't heard him enter my apartment; I hadn't seen him since the beginning of the war. But I got right up and started packing.

I knew what Amsbury knew, without asking.

And while we were checking out of the hotel, Amsbury mentioned the word of which you may have a hazy recollection. "Dhactwhu." He didn't upon it than if he were noting the time. But a tall, gray-haired man put say it loudly, and put no more emphasis down the paper he was reading.

"My name is Andrew Milton," he said. "I overheard."

And before either Amsbury or I could say anything, he added: "I will go with you."

After that it was the roll of tires, the rumble of trains, and the throb of ship's motors. Heat, and the soft dipping of canoe paddles in green river waters. Silent parading along beaten trails, then struggling into untrodden territory. The desertion of our guides and porters.

But on the third night after the men who had accompanied us broke and would go no farther, we came upon the great black city alone. Three madmen, and an impossible dream made real.

We stood in silent awe on the outskirts of the ebon metropolis. I couldn't even whisper to communicate my emotion to the others. But there was no need.

I wasn't afraid, simply wonder-struck before the bigness and beauty of it. I was ashamed to break the silence.

Finally Amsbury swallowed, choked: "This is as I have dreamed of it."

We stood on the fringe of the jungle in the moonlight, staring across a strangely clear expanse at sheer, jet-black walls that must have climbed a full fifty feet into the air. And they stretched in either direction as far as we could see.

There was no break in those barriers. And they were Abaddon black.

Three acolytes of an ancient mystery, worshipping before their dream. We couldn't see much of the wonder city itself, yet; only its spires and colonnades peered down on us from behind those walls.

Milton said: "I don't remember how to get in. There's nothing that looks like a gateway, arch or any other means of entrance. Do you remember, Amsbury, you, Denning?"

I roused myself from contemplation of the jet wall before us. "No, I can't remember how to get in."

"There was a path," Amsbury whispered, "a path as white as that wall is black, and almost blinding against the barrier. It led up to an opening in one of the spires. The path was resistant, yet it seemed to have no thickness whatsoever. I was afraid to step on it, yet I did . . ."

"And walked into the tower?" I asked.

He shook his head. "There's a break in my dream, then. The next thing I remember is being inside the city—alone."

Milton stretched. "I'm for shut-eye right now. Maybe you'll dream the missing link tonight. Let's continue tomorrow. You'd better turn in too, Denning—it's your turn to stand second watch."

"I'll come soon," I answered. "The moon isn't very high now, and I want to wait until it's over the far tower. Maybe something will happen then. I have a hunch—"

Milton started, his hand fumbling awkwardly at his hip. "Over there," he breathed tensely, his eyes flaring to indicate the direction. We crouched instinctively, our eyes straining in the dim lights, hearts hammering.

"Some animal?" whispered Amsbury.

"Probably just my nerves," muttered Milton as we drew back, "but we can't be too careful." He was silent a moment, then he murmured, "Dhactwhu!"

And something like a chill shot through me, yet it wasn't terror. It was a kind of secret joy, but there was sadness mixed up with it, and the melancholy lent a desperate quality to the joy. . . .

"Now you know?" I asked him anxiously.

He looked pained. "I ought to," he sighed. "I thought that when we found this place, just the sight of it would open something that's been locked up inside me. Locked up inside all three of us. But I still don't know any more than I did yesterday."

"I wonder if we came too late?" I said gloomily.

He shrugged his shoulders. "If there's a way into the city, we'll find it."

We prepared our sleeping bags and

crawled into them without saying good night.

SOMEONE was shaking me awake. For a moment I wasn't quite sure where I was. Then it was all clear in my mind. "Sorry, Fletcher," I mumbled. "I'll be right up."

"It's I. Milton," came a voice. "Amsbury is gone."

I sat upright, then, and all the shards of sleep fell off. "That's what I wanted to tell him!" I gasped. "I wanted to warn him to wait for the moon—"

"What are you talking about?"

I shook my head. "I'm—I'm not entirely sure, but there's one thing I seem to remember—"

"Amsbury told us about a sort of white road leading down from the tallest tower. But it isn't safe to walk on it until the moonlight is full on the spire. And you have to hurry, even then, because there's just enough time for a man to walk it quickly."

"Have you any idea what this road is?"

I shook my head. "But maybe we'll find out when we see it."

We followed Amsbury's trail up to the blank space between the walls of the city and the jungle surrounding it. Amsbury had passed this way; his prints led off to the right.

They led to a point, then broke off, as if Amsbury had dissolved into thin air.

I looked up at the forbidding black walls and rested my hand on their glassy surface. "There's no use looking," I said. "We won't find Amsbury tonight."

Milton nodded. "For some reason, I believe you."

"And," I added, "I think there's only one way we can get into this city. Tomorrow night, when the moon is high—when the moonlight touches that

tower. Then we will be able to see exactly what—"

Milton's eyes swept across the star-studded sky. "Why not?" he whispered. "Why not mechanisms activated by lunar rays? We know there are elements in the light reflected from the moon which are not found in ordinary sunlight."

"So? Well, you're the professor. It looks as if we may uncover plenty of secrets, if we can ever get into the city."

"I'll never know how we managed to endure waiting through that next day, waiting for night to come."

We were crouching by the great wall, watching Luna lift herself into the sky, and every faint stirring of air seemed to whisper, "Dhactwhu!" And with every breath we echoed that whisper.

If only we could remember! It seemed then as if the fate of worlds rested somewhere in the inner meaning of that alien word. And, in the end, we came to know that we were right.

Finally the vigil was over: The moonlight glowed upon the great wall.

Milton grasped my arm. "Look—the tower!"

The lunar rays hadn't touched that great spire yet, but something else was happening, and I felt fear race up and down my spine. For something was emerging from the windowless tower, something that looked partly like a two-dimensional snake, and partly like a wafer-thin river of light, flowing down to meet us.

White, it was, this languorous, writhing wonder—a blinking white that contrasted perfectly with the abysmal black of the city.

"The white path!" breathed Milton. "Amsbury's enchanted entrance into the city!" He started forward, as if to leap upon it.

"Wait!" I warned. "Wait for the moon!"

Milton looked up into the heavens. The rays from the full moon were not yet directly on the tower.

I reached down, picked up a branch from the ground, and flung it upon the blinding highway. It seemed to melt into the pure white of it, then disappear.

"That must be what happened to Amsbury!"

Milton's voice was a hoarse whisper. "Gone—vanished. Disintegrated."

THE moon had climbed higher, now.

I threw another branch onto the path; it bounded off, a little piece of it breaking loose and lingering near the edge—unharmful. "It's safe," I said, an unaccountable calmness controlling my voice.

I took a deep breath and hesitantly stepped up onto the white road.

It was solid, substantial as any concrete highway I'd ever put my foot on. I took a few more steps, trying not to look down.

If I closed my eyes, it would feel the same as if I were going up an ordinary ramp in the city, back home. I kept that thought in mind, and kept on climbing, Milton right behind me. As we drew near I could see what looked like a doorway in the dark.

Milton paused. "Don't stop," I warned him. "There's no telling how long this thing will be safe."

Ironical time to talk of safety, when we were about to step deliberately into what might well be a death-trap. I tried not to think about the diabolic welcoming devices with which some ancient cities were strewn, as I went through that door. An instant later, Milton was beside me.

"Why did you stop?" I asked him.

He grinned. "Just dropped some-

thing. My watch. See?" He pointed to it, resting on the white ramp a short way back.

"Don't go after it—" I started to say, then the watch melted into the whiteness, and was gone. Vanished—just like that first branch I'd thrown on it.

We couldn't see from here, but it was plain enough that the moonlight no longer bathed the tower. Below us, the highway was retreating, coming back to its source.

"Fantastic!" breathed Milton. "Utterly and completely fantastic!"

"But real," I added.

He nodded. "Quite real. And when fantasy becomes stark, objective fact, it's no use going into philosophical discussion about it. We have to find out why, now."

As if to punctuate that thought, the doorway through which we'd come seemed to fill in, becoming the same ultimate black as the walls around us. For a moment we were in total darkness, and I knew how a trapped animal feels.

Were we trapped? I fumbled around my belt for the handlamps we carried, unfastened mine.

But before I could snap it on, the room began to brighten, as if someone behind the scenes were working a rheostat, until the entire chamber was bathed in a sourceless glow.

"It's bare," Milton murmured, "and no sign of an exit—"

"Back against the wall!" I whispered. "There's something—"

Over at the far end of the room, the wall was parting; our hands fell instinctively to the heavy service pistols we carried. What manner of being would come through that portal? A giant spider? A monster bat?

It was a man—or, at least, it looked human. I slid my pistol out.

The man was tall, with a face like

a wooden dummy. That was my first impression, and it stayed. There was a grace and suppleness in his movements which made me think of seals sporting in the sea. He was simply clad: a cossack skirt, ski-jumper's trousers, and sandals.

Strangely, it was the colors of his costume which affected one most strongly. Purple and black! The colors that had always had a strange effect upon me—almost as strong as that of the single word the being uttered as it stood looking at us.

"Dhactwhu!"

CHAPTER TWO

The Purple Man

FOR a second my entire being surged with exaltation. I started forward, eager to return his greeting, as if I'd found a long-lost brother. But something tugged at my subconscious, warned me to wait. I clutched Milton's arm. "Don't answer," I murmured as softly as I could, speaking in the back of my throat, moving my lips as little as possible. "I've a hunch..."

Milton nodded shortly. "Hello," I called out in as genial tones as I could muster. "We come as friends." I held out both hands, and repeated the word. "Friends."

The purple one strode forward, no trace of expression on his face. His eyes were fathomless, black.

"Habla usted español?" I asked him. No reply. Milton, the professor, tried French, German, Latin, Russian and that mixture of Romantic languages, Esperanto. The figure shook its head, and repeated the word which still sent shivers of anticipation up and down my spine.

"Dhactwhu!"

Could it be a test? Was he repeating the word in the hope of some betraying response from us?

Milton turned to me gloomily. "Unless he has some way of reading minds—which I doubt—we'll have to resort to the old-fashioned system."

He shrugged. "Never mind, we can learn a lot in—"

He broke off suddenly, his eyes fixed on the doorway behind the figure. I followed his gaze, and started at the sight of the creature there.

It was vaguely like a dog, but not a nice dog. It might have been the inspiration for those legends of the hounds of Hades. A huge creature, eyes glowing phosphorescently, long fangs gleaming, body streamlined, it crouched there. Crouched, and—

"Look out!" cried Milton, seizing the purple man's arm and pulling him to one side. It was too late; the impact of that hurtling mass of killer-flesh hurled him to the floor.

I grabbed my gun, but the purple man was already grappling with the monster. He thrust a fist into that hellish throat, while the hound clawed and coughed and struggled, trying to rend its way free.

I dared not fire for fear of hitting the man, but in an instant I saw a break, and slammed the gun-butt down hard on the creature's head. There was a sound of bone cracking, a yelp, and it went limp.

I whirled round to the sharp report of Milton's pistol, to see a second hound twisting in midair from the impact of a heavy slug. It fell heavily to the floor, kicking.

The purple being rose, apparently unhurt. He motioned us to follow him, and walked toward the wall on another side of the room. A section slid aside: we followed him through.

"Noiseless," observed Milton. "I

wonder if it will open for anyone." He stepped backward quickly; again the section slid aside.

We hurried after the purple man, somehow feeling more secure, our pistols ready as we kept an eye out for any more of the devil dogs.

Our guide was up ahead in the passage we had entered. The faint glow seemed to be following us. We could see a short distance ahead, but already the section through which we had come was dark.

We followed the solitary figure to a small room, containing only a wide couch and a small table. On the latter a large flagon stood, filled with some fluid I didn't recognize; two handleless cups were beside it.

Without a word or gesture our guide left us.

Milton went up to the wall where we had entered. Nothing happened. Carefully he went around the entire wall-surface of the cubicle, his hands running along the smooth face of it. No doors appeared.

"It seems we're invited to stay," I said.

Milton dropped on the bed. "How's your huncher working?"

I fingered my forehead, absently poured out a cup of the fluid into the flagon. "Wish I knew. Something warned me it wasn't wise to let on we knew anything about 'Dhactwhu' yet. I don't know whether that was because of Purple-face, or what." I raised the cup to my nose. "This smells all right."

"If they wanted to do away with us, they wouldn't have to resort to poison," Milton pointed out.

"Unless there were rival factions in this city, and one side wanted to discredit the other—we two being guinea pigs in their game."

"Oh no, Mr. Baker! Not that!" Milton drained his cup and set it down.

"The stuff really tastes all right, too."

I followed suit, then stretched out on the bed. It had a comfortable resilient feel. "That being the case, I'm for a short rest. We can try to figure out strategy later. Unless my eyes have gone back on me, the light in here is fading."

"Call me if any food appears," he yawned.

"Have you any idea what the composition of this place might be? Or about that resistant ray we walked on?"

Milton shook his head. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"And Amsbury," I said. "Is he dead?"

"You saw what happened to my watch—and to that branch."

"I saw it," I admitted. "But they didn't disintegrate; they disappeared." Amsbury might still be alive. . . .

WHETHER the dreams preceded reality, or were inspired by it, I shall never be sure. I cannot recall the precise order of events, yet I know this came first: I awoke to find myself paralyzed. It was as if I had no corporeal structure whatsoever, but were sheer, matterless entity, capable of receiving sight and sound impressions.

I saw the purple man departing from the room where we lay, bearing the body of a man under his arm, carrying it easily. It was Milton he carried; Milton, lying utterly relaxed. Through the section of wall went the purple man, then I was alone in the night and the timelessness of that room. I couldn't think, I couldn't move.

Presently the alien returned and bent over me. I could still feel nothing, but the shifting vista told me that I, too, had been lifted, and was now being borne away.

Down limitless corridors the purple man bore me, until at last we stepped out into daylight. A clear, bright day where the azure of the sky above was a painted thing, hardly to be believed. I saw now that the solid masses within the city were also of that same jet material that composed the magnificent walls.

There was not much to see from my position; the sky constituted most of my range of vision, and seemingly reaching down from above me were several of the taller buildings and the distant wall. There were no breaks in any of the buildings that I could see.

A bird was circling over us; it swooped down toward the wall, as if to light upon its inner surface—and suddenly it was a bloody, headless thing, wings beating frantically to sustain its dying body.

The purple man bore me to a large platform, circular in shape, slightly raised above the ground level, where he joined a similar figure. I could not see at first, then the other figure moved so that I could see that it, too, bore a man slung carelessly under one arm. Milton.

I saw the second figure raise his arm, pointing to the sky.

And suddenly the ground was slipping away from under me.

There was no consciousness of motion, no dizziness. I could see the spread of terra firma, apparently curving up around me, see it gradually flattening out, flattening until at last it was the outer surface of a spheroid. Around me the azure had become a deeper blue and now and then we would plunge into titanic banks of clouds so that I could see nothing else around me.

How fast were we going? There was no sense of motion or time, nor could I feel the friction of my ascent. Yet, now that I recall it, it seems that we

could not have been rising at any great speed, otherwise my clothing might well have ignited like a meteor.

Below us, to one side now, I could see Earth diminishing gradually into a compact mass, luminous and blue. The medium through which we were traveling had now become dark and we must have been well beyond the stratosphere.

There was a brightness emanating from the figure carrying Milton, a coruscating brightness that looked for all the world like the fiery train made by Fourth-of-July sparklers hurled into the air. And around me I could see the glowing lights of stars, more stars than I had ever seen on earth.

I realize now that I could not have seen them in their true light, those celestial bonfires, glowing incandescently against the utter night of interplanetary space; had their real brilliance struck me, my eye would have been burned-out cinders, my brain a wilted brown lettuce-head.

No longer could I see the Earth. We might have been floating still in space. We had long passed the point where motion could be judged by the appearance of other objects; our acceleration, however great in itself, was nothing compared to the pace of these other masses; was, relatively speaking, no motion at all.

I am not an astronomer, so I cannot tell what course we took through the lanes of space to come to our destination. Even now, when it has been explained to me again and again, I do not understand. They have made it as simple as they could; have tried to clarify it by likening gravitational forces to winds and currents upon our own terrestrial oceans.

For all I know, lustrums, decades, might have passed—years and years of the void to a distant world. All I can Earth time—while we flashed through

tell is that at last I saw a spheroid approaching us and that gradually it grew and swelled until it filled the entire range of my vision. And the black of space grew lighter until it became a deep green. And we plunged into cloud-like masses, the verdant hue lightening, until at last the face of this world rose up and engulfed us and we came to rest.

One more thing I cannot explain. At one point in that interminable journey across the void, I saw that we were surrounded by a host of beings like the ones bearing Milton and myself. In their arms they carried lovely dark girls, motionless as we were.

They were a vast troop of purple-faced beings, their arms raised rigidly above their heads, and a trail of coruscations emanating, seemingly, from their very fingertips. For a time we were all in this stellar company, then they moved away from us and soon were out of my limited line of vision.

But that was before the green world came out of space.

We landed on a raised circular platform, mate to that on earth save that it was located on an open plain. The beings that bore us stood unmoving until the seeming "earth" before us slid aside and we were taken down into an airlock and the door to the surface slid shut above us. But not before I had seen that the tall grass that grew on the plain was yellow, that a small orange sun hung in a sky in which other stars were visible, and that the ground of this weird planet was a steelish gray.

I RECALL being carried again through corridors, of being placed upon something that looked like an operating table; then all impressions drifted away as true sleep overcame me. And my dreams were all of

the journey recently done, except that I was swimming in luminous ether, from world to world, in pursuit of dark-haired sirens.

And out of space came the purple ones to snatch my prizes away from me; from behind dead, dark satellites they would rush, lambent flames spurting from their extended hands, swooping down upon our party, swooping down like hawks and bearing away the fairest of the maids.

I would fly in pursuit, but they would wheel and fling a word which wrung all power out of me, so that I fell helplessly in the illimitable abyss. And as I fell, the word would echo in my ears with a growling thunder, as of doom unguessable.

"Dhactwhu!"

And I knew that if I could but remember the meaning of the word, the overhanging doom would be averted, the dark-haired girls no more tormented, and the evil purple ones would depart and become a happy people. . . .

So finally, despair haunting my heart, I screamed the word aloud, hoping the potent sound of it would shatter the mechanism by which the purple ones flashed through space.

"Dhactwhu!"

And the timbres of the word sped faster than a bullet of light. Arrowing through the ether, they overtook those who scintillated in the distance, so that they fell like lightning-blasted branches, toppling into the abyss where I floated helplessly.

But one of the purple beings reached out and grasped my shoulder and became—

Milton!

I was sitting up in a comfortable bed. "Milton! where are we?"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "We're—here. Just precisely at

what point in the known universe 'here' is, I'm not yet sure. But we arrived safely, and we've been in this place for several—days.

"They performed an operation on us back in the black city so we could endure the space-voyage; they reversed it here. Only it took you longer to come out of whatever species of anesthetic they use than I."

"Then my impressions that we were carried here by the purple-faced brutes, were just dreams? We came in a spaceship?"

He shook his head. "Your impressions were the same as mine, judging by what you were mumbling in your sleep. I've been up and around all day, but haven't seen much. They didn't want to start language instruction until you were awake."

I sighed. "No thought helmets?"

"No thought helmets, no hypnotic teachings, no telepathy. It appears there's no royal road, we'll have to learn the hard way. But chances are they've organized the technique of teaching language so we can be on primitive speaking terms in a few days."

Milton was right about one thing: they did have the business of teaching wonderfully organized. It took us only three weeks to get to the point where we could make ourselves understood about simple things.

They let us out into the underground city, let us roam free. But I could not enjoy such freedom, exploring this baby world within the parent planet. In the back of my mind something was stirring constantly, making me ever more impatient to discover the crux of this whole affair. Before it was too late, an inaudible voice warned me; before it was too late!

Why did those thoughts come to me then? I don't know. I thought them as Milton and I strode about among

strange sights. I tried desperately to remember something as we gazed upon lush growths of yellow plant-life, watching the odd-shaped birds twittering in the yellow trees, felt the steel-gray "earth" beneath our feet, and let our eyes follow the pink clouds in the greenish "sky." Had I known, I don't think I would have guessed we were not upon the surface of the planet, particularly after we were caught in a shower one day—a shower that splattered us greenly, like ink spots!

And I missed the smell of earth after that rain. And green grass, brown earth, blue water. Purple color here, but blue was seldom seen.

Even now, I dream of blue skies. . . .

It is hard to tell of the city, for we were like men moving through a dream. There were moving ways as well as footpaths; there were three-wheeled vehicles corresponding to taxis—only without drivers. And we rode those moving ways, trod those paths, and amused ourselves by being driven around in the robotaxis—without seeing a sign of human habitation.

We learned exactly one answer to the countless questions we fired at our alien mentor: his name.

ALTHANN-5, as we had come to know the single plum-colored being who had been our instructor, guide and sole companion since our arrival on the green world, did not seem surprised when one morning we faced him with a demand for straight answers to the myriad inquiries he had been evading.

"We are unhappy," said Milton. "Curiosity is a prime factor with us, Althann-5, and every time you refuse us an answer we feel disturbed and uneasy. Now we have reached the breaking point.

"We cannot help being lonely for

the world we have left, but we could endure it if our attentions were occupied with delving into the mysteries here. But when that is forbidden us, what is there for us to do but pine away like captured animals?"

"Only men of our world do not pine away peacefully, Athann-5," I added. "They take action."

We waited anxiously as the purple man considered our ultimatum, his face as inscrutable as ever. The closest we had ever known him to approach an emotion was an occasional expression of approval about our progress with language, or our deductions from what little we had been able to see. He had seemed to understand that such bits of praise spurred us on and made us content—if the word ever had any meaning to him.

"I am not sure you are as yet entirely ready," he replied, "in spite of your remarkable progress, but this unbalanced condition of which you speak makes the step advisable. Very well, then, we shall go to Althann now."

"Althann?"

"The original. Althann is as you; I and Althann-1, 2, 3 and 4 are but duplicates—machines."

Milton, I think, was more amazed than I. "Why didn't I realize that?" he gasped. "It explains innumerable things about you. But you didn't seem to act like a metal being; you seemed to require food and rest just as we—"

"I am not composed of metal," he interrupted. "Nor am I a machine in the sense that I have wheels, wires, springs, levers or other artificial, tooled parts within me. I am—what you might call a chemical copy."

He cut further conversation short by motioning us to follow him. We went out of the room, out of the building into one of the automatic taxis, heard him give the instructions into the

address-port. The room we had just left, the building, the street outside now seemed to take on new aspects; we thought of them as if for the first time, wondering if they would look the same when we knew the secret of this underground city.

A short trip, then we disembarked at one of the few taller buildings, rode a spiraling escalator to its top floor. The tension was such that I didn't retain much of what I saw, even though I was straining my eyes in all directions. We followed Althann-5 through rooms and corridors, entering at last what might easily have been an attractive apartment in uptown New York, allowing for the oddities of furniture design and appliances.

The android addressed the stranger who stood, his back to us, before what appeared to be a screen with a typewriter keyboard below it.

"They are here, Athann."

The man turned.

Milton stuttered first, "Am—Amsbury!"

"There's no time for detailed explanations now," said Amsbury after hand-clasps and the first shock of seeing our friend again had worn off. "Except to tell you that the white path broadcast me here—disintegration then re-integration."

"But you—Althann!" I gasped.

He smiled. "Only by adoption. The original Althann made me his heir. Come into the next room and look at some films. The entire history of these people is recorded on microfilm. The reason we've kept you waiting so long is that Thanya and I have been going over the historical library and carefully selecting the material we have to show you."

A door opened and a purple-skinned woman entered. There was something

regal and incredibly ancient about her. She extended a patrician hand—warm, slim, as lovely as could be offered by the loveliest woman of our own people. "Dhactwhu," she whispered.

Amsbury-Althann shook his head. "They don't know either, Thanya." He nodded to us. "Let's go."

EVEN if I had the space to describe in detail what Milton and I saw in that projection room (what we've seen many times over since) such a description would be impossible. There exist no words in any of the two thousand Terrestrial tongues; no experience in the general memory of the human race as referent for the unfamiliar terms. Just one example will suffice: I have said that the skins of these people were purple, that purple was the most common color on this world. To us, but not to them. The color-perceptions of these people are more complex than our own; to them there exist four primary colors: red, yellow, blue and indigo, all with permutations and combinations which we cannot sense.

On the screen we saw the golden age of the Elders, the builders of the black city of the jungle and of countless others, some of which are known either in their ruined forms, or in legends. The remains on Easter Island, the fantastic Zimbabwe, the better-known legendary Atlantis—these are but a few.

We saw them, in colossal factories, produce great mirrors which were perfect reflectors, saw these flawless mirrors placed in exact alignment, watched wide-eyed as light itself was captured between these polished surfaces and reflected between them indefinitely until its cosmic speed was tamed, its composition altered, until it metamorphosed into a solid mass; became in

fact, the elusive material of which the city in the jungle was constructed. A form of matter hard beyond imagining, to the eye blacker than total blackness, durable to the end of time.

And, in a less solid form, we saw them thus produce the resistant ray—actually not a two-dimensional beam, but a super-flexible “tape” which appeared to have no thickness.

And we saw the playgrounds of these people, vast areas where nature was permitted to run its course unchecked—where they went to lead the primitive lives of savages, fashioning their own weapons and tools, choosing caves for homes. During the winters in these playgrounds they decorated these caves with drawings of the plants and animals about them, using the crude paints they could make themselves.

I remember ejaculating to Milton as I saw this: “The Cro-Magnards!” And Amsbury nodded, “Quite right. Many were killed, or suffered death through natural causes in the playgrounds; it is their remains which puzzle the paleontologists of our people and make them wonder what happened to the Cro-Magnard race.

“No remains of the Elders, other than these, have been found because in the cities, their dead were always disintegrated.”

“Then, what happened to them?” whispered Milton.

“Watch and you’ll see,” the lovely Thanya replied.

I sank back, my attention again focused on the screen, wondering if scenes of terrific warfare or natural catastrophe would appear. But I hadn’t begun to understand.

We saw the Elders constructing rocket ships bound first for the moon, then the planets; saw them reach Earth’s satellite successfully, then land on Mars.

On the red planet they found a strange form of semi-vegetable life, living symbiotically with crustacean sand-dwelling mammals. The Elders made contact with this stapledonian creature, found it to be by far their superior in intelligence.

Then came the fateful expedition which marked the final step in the existence of the Elders. A slight defect in the mechanism of an exploring ship, a forced landing wherein several members were mortally hurt, and the ship damaged beyond hope of repair. And the Martian intelligence made the Elders a proposition. It was hopelessly bound to Mars as long as it existed side by side with the crustacean-creature; it had progressed there as far as it could possibly go.

But if it were to establish symbiosis with Earthmen, new vistas would be opened. With them, it could explore the entire universe; it could bring to them senses and perceptions they themselves could not hope to develop for many centuries; it could make them nearly immortal.

Some of the party, fatally injured, would soon die. Why not, asked the intelligence, try an experiment; perform operations upon these members, which the Martian supermind would direct. Unless their brains had been damaged, it could save their lives by taking direct command of their bodies.

I do not think I have ever seen so dramatic and intense a scene as this episode, as the expedition discussed and argued the question. Would not this symbiosis rob man of his individuality—make him little more than a physical servant of the Martian? Dying members of the expedition finally settled the dispute by insisting that the operation be performed—with the understanding that they would be put to death by their fellows should their

actions indicate that their identities had been submerged.

As breathless as if we were in the wrecked rocket, Milton and I watched the intricate operation, beheld the actions of the first New Men.

There was a difference—but even the most skeptical of the expedition had to admit that the marriage of Mars mind to earthmen did not seem to make the earthmen less human.

The reel ended with a way of communication with Earth being found, so that the entire party was rescued.

Amsbury turned to us and said, "Can you guess now what happened to the Elders?"

"The human race on Earth became New Men!" I said.

Thanya nodded. "Yes, with the exception of a small colony. But why did they leave Earth?"

"It must be that there was something about Earth which the Martian could not endure. So they simply packed up and moved."

The purple patrician nodded. "You are right," she said. "You will see the exodus in the next film."

MY BRAIN was a carousel for hours after we had seen the culmination of the flight from Earth to Ygrinat. Yet, dazed as I was, my curiosity was still unsatisfied.

"Amsbury, you still haven't explained one of the prime mysteries. Why are the New Men living in an underground city here—and where are they? What became of Althann? Where are Thanya's people?"

"And what is Dhactwhu?"

Amsbury turned and glanced at his purple companion, his eyes pitying.

"You remember my saying that some of the Elders chose not to become New Men and to remain on Earth? They did so, and in time became the progen-

itors of the human race of today."

Thanya said, "We kept in close touch with Earth and it is all recorded. You may see later. Changing conditions, disease and survival of the most fit changed them. But the human brain, even in the stunted primitives, remained. And part of the brain contains ancestral memories. Not the same memories in the case of every individual; some have little or none.

"But we are satisfied there are some humans alive today who still remember the Elders!"

"You mean," said Milton, "that 'Dhactwhu' refers to 'memory of the Elders'?"

"You are very near right," she said. "'Dhactwhu' is the beginning of a phrase—a proverb which the Elders knew. It refers specifically to the treatment of a certain sickness—one which we had conquered long before the first flight to Mars."

Her eyes went wide. "But that was thousands of years ago—tens of thousands! We had forgotten about such things, because when we became what we are today, the control our brains now had over our bodies was such that no sickness could touch us, we thought. No accident could harm us for long, unless the brain were hopelessly damaged. We could replace lost members as crustaceans do.

"But now—for over a century—our entire race has been sick. We have been dying, and are helpless to combat the illness. We do not know what it is; we haven't been able to find out."

"Then," whispered Milton, "your hope is to find some person on Earth who has the knowledge you seek in his hidden memories!"

"Yes. Somewhere on Earth there must be a man or woman—perhaps several persons—who remember. Who, when they hear the word 'Dhactwhu,'

will be able, without thinking, to repeat the entire phrase.

"We know this is so, because there are a number who are stirred by the syllables. You three, for example.

"There must be someone who remembers completely!"

"But how can such a person or persons be found, Thanya?"

"That's where we come in," Amsbury answered for her. "One of us must go back and try to find some way of getting the message before the world. And that is going to be a job.

"Althann-5 will take one of us back and remain in the city with Anthann-4. There are always some duplicates there to keep undesired attention away and to transport anyone who might be able to help the people of Ygrinat."

"Which of us shall go back?" asked Milton. "I would prefer to stay . . ."

"We'll settle that later," replied Amsbury. "First we must plan a campaign—figure out as many practical ways as possible of spreading the message to the people of Earth without attracting attention to what we're doing."

I turned to Thanya. "Are there—many of your people now?"

The purple of her skin became very faint. She shook her head wordlessly, and arose. "Come," she said simply, "I will show you . . ."

The chamber to which Thanya took us looked like a mausoleum. We gazed upon an even dozen little coffins, each containing a charming child.

"They are all," whispered Thanya. "Five boys and seven girls—the last twelve children born. We decided to put them in suspended animation as soon as they were old enough, in hopes that Dhactwhu might be found and they would have a chance to live."

My mouth was dry. "These are—all—?"

She nodded mutely as she lingered over the form of a little girl, lying amidst masses of soft, violet hair. "This is Thanala," she said without further comment.

I DO not know how long we slept, for we were thoroughly exhausted from the nervous strain of the past day; all I remember is being shaken and arising sleepily to see Amsbury fully dressed. His throat was husky as he spoke.

"It's happened, Stan. Sooner than I expected. We must prepare at once."

"What?"

"Thanya—during the night."

"Thanya! Oh, no! Then—then only those children—?"

"All who are left of the New Men."

I dressed absent mindedly. I was choking as I asked, "What can we do, Fletch? Thanya gone, and we know nothing of this city, really. What can we do?"

"The city will run itself for a thousand years to come; the duplicates—there are a good many of them left—will help us. Thanya gave them orders some time ago to cooperate with us."

I looked out the oval window at the rising orange sun, then remembered it was artificial. "But why was this city built beneath the surface?" I mused to myself.

"They originally thought the sickness was due to something in the atmosphere—something that came from outside. They spent years in removing, sterilizing everything below and sealing it off—but it didn't help. They are almost all gone, now, unless—Dhactwhu . . ."

Milton joined us later. "Two of us must stay here and wait. How shall we decide?"

"I'll go back," declared Amsbury. "Unless one of you feels he can't bear

staying here indefinitely. It really isn't essential, I suppose, if you feel you must go back to Earth. The androids can keep matters going . . ."

"I'll stay," I said. "So long as I know I can return when I want to, I'll stick around."

"Likewise," said Milton.

Amsbury nodded approvingly. "Very well, then. Stan—you're the writer; you're to write up the general outline of what has happened to us. I'll try to get it published back on Earth. It may take a long time, because care is essential—we must not attract attention to the city in the jungle or to what we are doing. Not yet.

"Just how I am going to go about spreading the word Dhactwhu without letting on the why and wherefore, I haven't figured out. Can't do it here. But I'll find a way when I get back."

"But why the secrecy?"

Milton chewed the ends of his mustache. "Lord, look at the mess they're making of atomics! This is too much for the human race to get all at once. If these people can be revived, then they can help us—and perhaps we can

help them. But to have the super-civilization of a race thousands of years in advance of us dumped suddenly in our laps—it could only mean disaster.

"I think I know what is on your mind, Amsbury. You plan not only to awaken Dhactwhu, but also quietly to kidnap a small group of people who can be trusted and bring them here—to form a colony?"

"Right! Stan, you thought you saw some of the duplicates carrying girls in their arms on your way here, eh? Well, I can't promise anything in the way of beauties, but you'll see some Earth people coming here soon; and if I can find any likely ladies with adventurous spirits, your vision will come true to a certain extent."

Althann-5 is taking Amsbury back to Earth with this manuscript. If you've Martian heritage, surely you will not fail to speak!

Whoever you are . . . wherever you are . . . speak the full phrase in the language of the Elders, and you will be heard.

Dhactwhu!

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DELUSION DRIVE

The space rat was green, had never been in a vessel that used the dread Rip . . . He had to learn the hard way that once you've entered the Rip, you're dead—or only a grey thought in the mind of a machine!

I SHIPPED out on the *Leandor*, one of the middle-sized freighters of the Troy Line, as a cook's helper. We were packed to the ports with hydroponic tanks for the colony on Negus IX, and the scuttlebutt was that we were bringing back a full load of the high vitamin concentrate that they were growing there. I'd read about it in the *Space Times*.

I signed on at the Troy offices and the man gave me my sign-on bonus and told me what day to climb aboard. I got there early and swaggered into the port, hoping that any crew member I saw would notice that even though I was eighteen, I was a hardened space rat. My kit was battered, but I had no plans of telling anybody that it got that way on a beat-up excursion liner in the VEM run. I wanted them to think I'd been outside the system and knew all about Space Rip, which was the way the *Leandor* traveled.

A sleepy guy showed me where to go to pick a bunk and when I got there, a fellow about my age was unpacking his duffel. He nodded absently and after I'd picked a bunk and stowed my stuff in the locker, I went to find the cook. He hadn't come aboard.

At noon sharp, when the last man came aboard, the ports were dogged down and the PA told everybody not on duty to hit the sack.

I felt a lot better when we blasted

off, because it was the same sort of thing I was used to—at least it felt that way.

As soon as the initial load was over, I forgot myself and called over to the young man, whose name was Jameson, saying, "What's so funny about this Space Rip?"

He gave me a sour grin and said, "Greeny, hey? We aren't in it yet. We take physical drive to our reference point and then rip off."

I shut up, wanting to bite my tongue off.

After a little while he said, "You'll know when it starts, Greeny."

He had a nasty, superior way about him and I didn't answer. But I saw that he kept licking his lips and that he was afraid.

It made me afraid to watch him and so I just watched the underside of the bunk overhead.

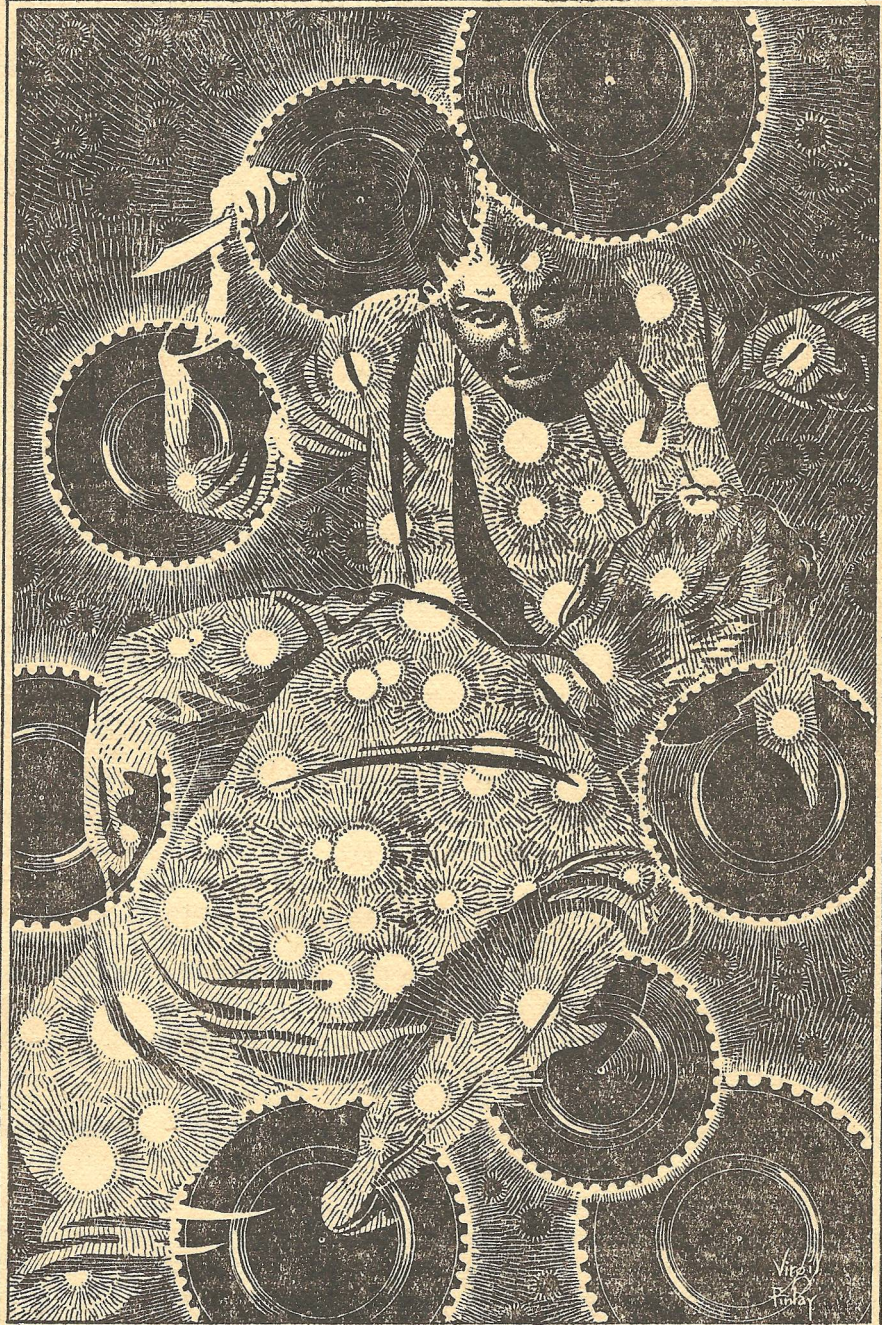
My remark had been stupid. I'd read enough about Space Rip to know that nobody has been able to explain the feeling.

The big gyros made a distant throbbing hum and I knew that they'd made a course correction. Somebody at the PA mike said, "Hold your hats, rats."

I grabbed the bunk stanchion to brace myself, but it wasn't that kind

By instinct I looked up at the speaker mesh. When I looked back, Jameson was nearly on me, the knife upraised!

by Peter Reed



of a jar, the sort that you can brace yourself against. It felt as if I had been swatted by a huge club, and yet instead of a club it was made of sharp knives set close together. The knives were so sharp that my body offered no resistance and so the big club passed right through me, leaving me . . . sort of misty and vague. Apart at the seams.

I noticed the greyness then. All colors gone. Everything was a shade of grey and everything had a slight, almost noticeable flicker about it, like the old movies in the museum.

All feeling of movement was gone.

While I was trying to get used to it, the PA, with blurred tone, somehow far away, said, "Cook's helper. Report to the galley."

Walking was a misty sort of dream and when I staggered against the corridor wall there was a funny unsubstantialness about the wall and about the hand that touched it.

The cook, a big sweating vision in black and grey, waved a cleaver in my face. "I tell you again," he said, his voice coming from far off like voices in a dream, "the underlying philosophical concept is unsound."

"I'm Bill Torrance," I said.

"Sure, sure. Hello. I'm Doc. As I was saying, boy, they haven't agreed on the concept. This is my thirty-fifth rip and I wish they'd make up their minds. Start dicing those onions.

"Dakin's formula gives the speed. Very simple, boy. The square root of the distance in light years equals the cube of the trip time in weeks. This trip is three weeks, so simple mathematics gives you a distance to Negus IX of seven hundred twenty-nine light years. Not accurate, you understand. Just rule of thumb. What do you know about the Rip, boy?"

I was weeping over the onions. They had authority. I sniffed and said,

"From what I heard, the Rip changes the ship into something that isn't physical and then it reassembles it on the other end."

He snorted. "If it isn't physical, what is it? They say it's a concept. You and I are concepts, just ideas in the head of some damn machine. You know how fast we're going this minute?"

"No," I said humbly.

"You aren't moving. You're gone. Just as though you never existed. That's what they say. You have ceased to live, boy. But just when you stopped living a damn mechanical brain got a concept of you and it's shoving that concept through space at a slow lope of eight trillion, seven hundred and seventy billion, six hundred and forty-four million miles an hour."

I put the knife down and stared at him. "Asteroids," I said weakly.

"Ha!" he said. "Nothing to fear, boy. Can an asteroid make a hole in a concept? A man's thought is quicker. He looks at a star fifty light years away. By looking at it, boy, he has pushed his mental concept right to that star in nothing flat. But he can't think so good. Not so clear. This mechanical mind has a slow brain but an accurate one. When it changes us back to physical matter at the end of the Rip, we're just like we were when it got the concept."

"Is . . . is that why everything looks misty and funny?"

"Right, boy. The machine can't think except in terms of shades of grey. You follow me so far?"

"I . . . I think so."

"Now here's where I fall off at the first curve. The machine, boy, dematerializes itself and turns itself into a concept and comes right along with us because it's part of the ship. That's where I find the philosophical flaw. If we exist only in the mechanical brain

of a machine as a concept, how in Gehenna can that mechanical brain be a part of the concept. It's like the snake eating his own tail!"

It made me sick.

He reached over my shoulder and picked up an onion. "You think this is an onion? Well, it isn't, boy. It's a mechanical thought of an onion being whisked across space at just the same speed that you are. You know what? You can open a port and throw that onion out!"

I was getting dizzy. "But the air . . . space . . ."

"No, boy. The concept is of a ship with the air in it. And of ports with hinges. So you can open the port of the concept but you can't let the air out of the concept. What's the matter, boy," he said, peering into my face. "You look sickish."

"Look, Doc," I asked, "so the onion is a concept. And so am I. So why do I want to eat the onion? Why do I have to?"

"Because the thought picture of you is so accurate that you're built with every urge and hunger intact. You'd be damn uncomfortable if you stopped eating!"

INSIDE of three days I got a little used to the dreamy look of everything, the faraway sounds, the soft feeling of the steel plates. But I knew that I could never be matter-of-fact about it. In my sleep I dreamed about what would happen if the machine didn't materialise us at the end of the trip. I had nightmares about going on and on forever, a thought that had missed its target.

Looking around, I could see that it got on the nerves of the others too. Nobody seemed to have enough to do. There were interminable Bull sessions, many of them turning into bitter quar-

rels over our exact status—whether or not we existed, and if so, where we were.

I took a lot of riding from the others because of it being my first Rip. They kept asking me how I liked it until the question got as boring as that hot weather question about whether it's warm enough for you.

One stocky, goodnatured engineer told fine stories about the adventures of Silas McCurdy, the first space pilot, and what happened when McCurdy, trying to achieve the speed of light with a physical drive, ran afoul of Fitzgerald's Contraction and, for a time, disappeared entirely. Another one that was good was about how McCurdy helped the scientists find the right frame of space.

Jameson was morose and gloomy, ignoring everybody. He kept looking at me in a funny way that made me uncomfortable.

Four of us were in the same cabin. I had as little to say to Jameson as he had to me. The days turned into weeks and soon there was that air of expectancy aboard that always signals a port ahead.

We were due to come out of the Rip at noon the next day when the stocky engineer caught me just outside my cabin and said, "Kid, I don't want to upset you or anything, but that Jameson is a bad actor. He's got a reputation that isn't so hot. You must have been snotty to him the first day out because he's had it in for you ever since. I figure the least I can do is warn you. I think the guy is going off his wagon."

He meant what he said. "But what can I—"

He forced a small automatic into my hand. "Here, Kid. You borrow Betsy. She's loaded and ready. If Jameson goes off his rocker completely, he'll

surer than hell come after you with that sheath knife of his. Just keep an eye on him."

He went off down the corridor. I put the automatic inside my blouse and went into the cabin. Jameson was on his bunk, staring at me. His deep-set eyes seemed to glow and his mouth was a tight, brutal line.

I knew then that the engineer was right.

If I reported Jameson to the captain, I might be laughed off the ship. I asked Doc for his advice. He told me to keep my mouth shut and keep the gun handy.

All that evening Jameson stared at me and his eyes seemed to glow brighter every hour. I went to sleep at last, after several hours of tossing and turning.

In the morning it was even worse. When I went to the mess hall, Jameson was right behind me. I could almost feel the point of that knife in my back.

At eleven-thirty Doc sent me back to my bunk. Jameson was there. The other men in the cabin were watching him as though they were afraid of him.

The silence and tension mounted.

Jameson sat on the edge of his bunk, took out the knife and began to clean his fingernails. After each nail he glanced over at me.

The PA startled me when it said, "Five minutes' warning."

By instinct I looked up at the speaker mesh. When I looked back Jameson was nearly on me, the knife upraised. The other men yelled. There was no chance of avoiding the thrust. With his face twisted, he sunk the knife deep into my belly with all his strength. He moved back and his lips writhed like grey worms. My hand closed on the butt of the gun. I pulled it out and emptied it into his chest. The slugs drove him back and he fell

and lay still, a trickle of grey blood coming from the corner of his sagging mouth.

I knew that I could not live through it. I stared down at the knife handle in horror. The life was draining out of me.

"Hold your hat, guys," the PA said abruptly.

Coming out of the Rip was unimportant compared with death.

There was a spinning madness and the vast club which had smashed through me at the beginning of the Rip smashed up in the other direction, filling in the vagueness, solidifying that which had been misty for so long.

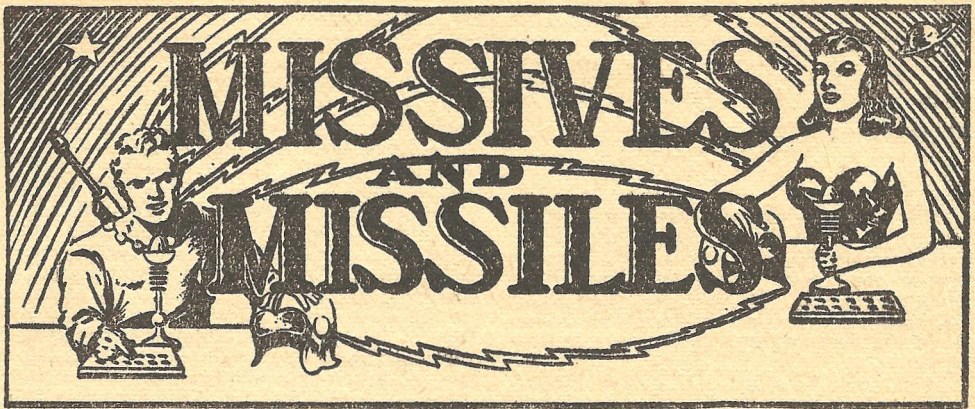
I blinked in the brighter light, my mind reeling under the sudden impact of color.

Then there was loud laughter and Jameson, a wide smile on his face, was coming toward me with his hand out. My first thought was that the gun had been loaded with blanks. He wanted me to shake hands with him, and me with a knife that he had driven into me! But the knife was in its sheath at his belt and there wasn't any hole in me.

Doc came in yelling, "How'd he take it? How'd the Kid take it? Any guts?" He turned to me and said, "Boy, they take it easier these days. Why, on my first Rip they told me that the ship was lost and then they opened a port and every damn man jack jumped out into space and left me alone. Thought I'd go nuts. Of course, since this is only a concept when you're in Rip, everything goes back to exactly the way it was when we started the Rip."

Jameson found my hand. His grip was solid and good.

"Come on, space rat," he said. "I know where there's a good bar!"



IN THIS issue we've made some progress in several directions, but we still haven't got that hefty letter department we mentioned hopefully in the January S.S. We've had many more letters than we expected this early, but there simply wasn't room for them all. To those whose letters were crowded out—many thanks, and please try us again.

We lead off with a minor whirlwind stirred up by one L. Shaw. The following two letters are representative:

Dear Editor:

If you don't mind, I should like to rave at the sci-fan calling himself Larry Shaw. (That's what his mother calls him, too—Ed.) Despite the huge words, gleaned carefully from some unabridged dictionary, his letter appears slightly juvenile. If he's looking for argument he's going to get it.

First of all, his suggestion to eliminate rockets and spaceships from science fiction seems to stem from the fact that ideas now advanced by writers may someday be of a classified nature and that they (rockets and spaceships) are old "stuff" in science fiction anyhow. Larry!! How in all hades are we to transport our brave lads, lassies and BEMs out into our own and distant galaxies for the purposes of exploration and colonization unless we have some material means of getting them there? Perhaps you have some method in mind?

Come now, Mr. Shaw, surely you will allow we poor fans to have our heroes equipped with some weapons. Disgun, raygun or something! Perhaps if they were armed with knives no national or international secrets would be exposed. Try fighting the nightmares I'm willing your way with a knife and see how fast you switch over to a dis or ray gun.

"Atoms are out," Larry calmly states. You mean that the writers of science fiction should drop the subject which they practically brought into the world. If you are old enough you will remember that sf magazines had atomic bombs long before scientists began to work seriously on atoms with a bomb in mind. It would be like a father deserting his son at an early age, to drop the subject of atoms and atomic energy when all

of the possibilities have not yet been completely covered by writers. Besides, atomic energy is the only practical means in view for the propulsion of spaceships. Little room is needed for fuel storage with an atomic engine in use while conventional engines require a great deal of fuel storage space to run for weeks or months at a time.

In your suggestions I noticed no alternate methods and/or mechanisms to take the place of those you reject as out of date, etc.

It was fun reading SSS, already I'm anxious for the next issue to come out on the news-stands. You have a first class magazine that hits the spots missed by the pure fantasy and technical science fiction magazines.

Yours very truly,
Clark E. Crouch
Box 824
Richland, Wash.

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I have ever read your magazine. It is wonderful. All except that letter from Larry Shaw. He is an insult to the Science Fiction Readers. He and his super-sonic thinking processes should be exiled to the furthest star in the universe, but sadly enough, I do agree with him on one thing—"Kill that sub-title, 'The Big Book of Science Fiction'."

I think the best story in the book is "A Handful of Stars" by Walter Kubilius.

What happened to Bradbury? "The Silence" is not up to par.

Keep up the good work, it is great.

Sincerely,
W. H. Gaskins, Jr.
5600 Queens Chapel Rd.
Hyattsville, Md.

To get the outraged fans off our neck, we asked the infamous Shaw to pen a reply. Here it is:

Dear Wobblehead:

Well, I admit that's one way to get me to keep writing letters to your book. Always did love these battles, whether I took part in them or not. Best gosh-durned thing about fandom, they are. So now, you old editor you, kindly get your natural-born lazy bones out of the way and give me room to swing the axe.

You, Junior Gaskins. Of course I'm an insult to the Science Fiction Readers. That's what I'm supposed to be.

But what's this about the furthest star in the place? You think there ain't fans there too? Shows all you know! Shows what kinda fan you are! Anybody that don't know the difference between Walter Kubilius and Ray Bradbury ain't got no right to talk, anyway!

Clark E. Crouch, you old Clark E. Crouch you, what you mean calling me a sci-fic fan? Want a fat lip? And talking about big words, what's those words you got ahold of your own self—"unabridged" and "dictionary"? What's them mean, wise guy?

Yes, I said eliminate spaceships. Eliminate the brave lads, lassies and BEMs, too. They're all stereotypes. And galaxies-schmalaxies! When you've seen one, you've seen them all! Let's free our minds of such narrow horizons!

Atoms stay out! You may like their possibilities, but I don't. Besides, it may interest you to know that science-fiction swiped them from Daddy Warbucks in the first place. Hah ho! Can't fool a literary gourmet like me, chum.

Oh yes, there's one more thing I must add to my list of forbidden material. No dad-blamed semantics, see? I don't believe a word of them.

Anybody else tired of living?

Bloodthirstily,
Larry Shaw
1301 State St.
Schenectady 4, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

The return of SSS to the sfantasy scene is welcome indeed, particularly so because of the fact that, at the time of its unfortunate lapse into suspended animation, the magazine was well on its way toward becoming tops in its field. I hope it'll be around now for a long while to come.

Despite my enthusiasm at its reappearance (I took time off during exam week to read it, which isn't the smartest move I ever made), I'm afraid that the contents of the January issue were nothing to make even the most rabid fan go delirious with ecstasy. Not that the stories were poor, but they seemed a bit dated. Am I correct in guessing that most of the material was on hand from the old Super?

Kuttner's *The Black Sun Rises* struck me as the best of the lot, and especially interesting as an example of the way Hank was writing circa 1943, as opposed to the work he is doing now. His talent was manifest even then, but he has come a long way. Ray Bradbury is without a doubt eons ahead of the field, both in weird and science fiction, with his brilliant writing and significant fiction. The "Silence" is a nice sketch, but hardly representative of this writer at his best. I enjoyed Kubilius' "A Handful of Stars," and Sanford Vaid's "The Other" was well done of its type. Cartmill was particularly disappointing in view of the fact that his last yarn for SSS was a minor classic.

Since Super's strong point always was its steady, often remarkable, improvement, I expect that the next issue will be a lot fresher and better. I'd bet on it.

Your art staff is virtually perfect. Reproduction of both text and pix leaves much to be desired—a temporary expedient, mayhap? The departments are fine, with the exception of the quiz, which is deadwood in any magazine. The book reviews are well done, whether or not the reader happens to agree with them. The summary of Austin Hall's creaking novel is a masterpiece of something or other.

Suggestion Box: More off-trail writing by the newer authors; Keller, Bradbury, and de Camp; avoidance of lurid covers; lots of Bok and Paul if possible; a long letter section; early resurrection of *Astonishing Stories*.

Many thanks for giving us SSS again, and here's wishing you the very best of luck.

Sincerely,

Chad Oliver,
2400 Tower Drive,
Austin, Texas.

Dear Editor:

A new science-fiction pulp is just what we need! Welcome! You made one ghastly mistake, however. Why, in the name of all that's Bemmmy, did you have to put the table of contents on page four? It may seem a small thing to you but the table of contents is much better on page five or any other odd-numbered page. That way there is less handling of the magazine. Take a poll; look at other magazines who have their table of contents on an odd page and see how much better it is to handle it. You wouldn't change it anyway. (You're so right!—Ed.)

The cover by Lawrence was super. *THE BLACK SUN RISES* by Henry Kuttner was average or a little below for him. *A HANDFUL OF STARS* was the best novelette (all my opinions, of course), followed by *MOONWORM'S DANCE* and last by *THE BOUNDING CROWN*. Somehow James Blish's stories all seem lik so much junk to me. Maybe it's the attitude I read them in or something.

The shorts were just average. *THE SKY WILL BE OURS* was good but low on plot. CABAL told a lot in a short bit of space; it started off with a jump. *THE OTHER*

was a good yarn but those kind can't be ground out wholesale and production is what counts (like Ray Bradbury for instance). Speaking of Ray, his **THE SILENCE** wasn't so hot in my opinion. Anyway, I suspect you only wanted his name on the cover in the first place. Ray is a good writer but this story was lousy.

To sum it all up, **A HANDFUL OF STARS** was the best novelette; **THE SKY WILL BE OURS** the best short; you ought to move the table of contents, get better paper; so long till next month.

Richard R. Smith
6 East 44th St.
Wilmington, Delaware.

Dear Editor:

I would like to request, or rather beg, all science-fiction and fantasy fans in the Portland area to get in touch with me, as I plan to form a live-wire science-fiction fan organization for fans in this area. I believe that a city of Portland's size should have a science-fiction fan club of some sort, don't you? There surely must be a number of fans in this area, as all those science-fiction magazines don't disappear all by themselves. Until next issue,

I remain,
S. M. Parks
113 N.E. Thompson
Portland, Ore.

Hello Lazarus:

The first of the revised triple S calls for sincere praise and a smattering of complaints.

First: I like the tone and balance of your stories. You are far enough off the beaten path to avoid being a repetition of your competitors.

Your stories fall into two general groups, the philosophical theme and the adventure of tomorrow type, and I prefer the former which included:

THE SILENCE—excellent writing.
MOONWORM'S DANCE—Food for thought.

A HANDFUL OF STARS—I hope it isn't so.

The other stories were all good, but seemed a bit weak. For a first issue you did incredibly well.

As for art: The cover was very tasteful but apparently off register on all copies. Can anything be done about this? Also the interior printing took so poorly that you murdered Bok's excellent artwork. What's wrong with the presses up in Canada? (Bear with us; we're working on it.—Ed.)

In your book reviews as elsewhere in your very interesting departments I'd like to see some more attractive type selections. Take a look at the old SSS and the current **FANTASTIC NOVELS**. Now where an old reader like myself will buy the mag because of content, a new reader may pick up a copy, thumb through it, look at the sloppy print job and say: "Hell, there can't be anything

much good in this cheap set-up." And there is another two bits that isn't headed your way.

By the way, who are the editors of SSS? I see that the original ed Fred Pohl is a columnist and welcome. (Well put.—Ed.) How about Dorothy Les Tina? Say! What the heck do I want for twenty-five cents?

Till next time—

Roscoe E. Wright,
146 E. 12th Ave.,
Eugene, Ore.

Dear Editor:

I was going to say something to the effect that the caliber of stories would be decreased with another market open, but after reading the ones you had to offer remarks are unnecessary. All were well knit, unpretentious, and inoffensive and accomplished just what they were supposed to do: entertain. I suppose that in keeping with the movement I should praise Ray Bradbury to the stars, but it is hard to get worked up about his work anymore. The only way he can go now is down and that doesn't seem very likely.

The only other remark I have to make has to do with the story **THE BOUNDING CROWN**. What happened? Did you run out of space? It resolved so quick that I thought that I had skipped some pages. It reminded me of a gangster movie after the Chicago censors had got through cutting out the scenes of violence. Hi, ho.

Here's to a better mag, old Ed. No matter what kind of a mag you turn out I'll still buy it, for I am a loyal fan, true and blue. (Said with hat held over heart.)

"Stiff"ly yours,
Robert A. Rivenes
157 N. Euclid Ave.
Oak Park, Ill.

Dear Editor:

First let me congratulate you on the revival of **SUPER SCIENCE STORIES**. Of all the magazines which ceased publication during the war, I most regretted seeing this one go. I can remember a good dozen stories which will live forever in my memory.

GENUS HOMO—Camp and Miller—March, '41.

LOST LEGION—Monroe—Nov., '41.

PENDULUM—Bradbury and Hasse—Nov., '41.

CROSS OF MERCURUS—(I don't remember)—Feb., '42.

SUNKEN UNIVERSE—Merlyn—May, '42.

CUBE FROM SPACE—Brackett—Aug., '42.

WE GUARD THE BLACK PLANET—Kuttner—Nov., '42.

A PLANET CALLED AQUELLA—Wollheim—Nov., '42.

THE ANGULAR STONE—Hasse—May, '43.

EXILE—Hamilton—May, '43.

THE DARKER LIGHT—Cartmill—May, '43.

THE PERSECUTORS — Cartmill — Feb., '43.
 READER, I HATE YOU — Kuttner — May, '43.

These are stories I will never forget.

But for the present issue, front to back.

The cover: Good symbolism but poor reproduction; it should have the clear-cut look of F.N. and F.F.M.

The Black Sun Rises — Henry Kuttner; this is the start of what could be a great novel. It is not a novel, however, merely an introduction.

The Silence — Ray Bradbury; neatly done in Ray's own completely unorthodox style. Since I first ran into his stuff in '42, he has become one of the best short-story writers in the fantasy field.

Moonworm's Dance — Stanley Mullen; this new author has written the best story of the new issue. Keep him.

The Other — Sanford Vaid; good short on an old theme.

The Bounding Crown — James Blish; always good for a new slant.

A Handful of Stars — Walter Kubilius; Walt is always good for a new concept.

The Science Fictioneer; a good department. How about a department especially devoted to answering questions about authors, such as is Lyle Monroe a real person or one of the pen names of Robert Heinlein, as so often rumored? (Monroe is Heinlein. — Ed.)

The Sky Will Be Ours — Manly Wade Wellman; throughout the years Wellman has managed to turn out some fairly good stories, though he has yet to write a classic.

Missives and Missiles — expand, expand! (Yessir, yessir! — Ed.)

Cabal — Cleve Cartmill — I was very disappointed in this story. It is not anywhere near the standard set by Cartmill in "The Darker Light" and "The Persecutors".

Some requests:

Could you persuade Ross Rocklynne to continue the "Darkness" series from Astonishing? I miss them very much. Also Merlyn's "Sunken Universe" could only have been the beginning of a novel or series. Could you persuade him to finish? Finally and forever — trimmed edges improve the appearance of a magazine tremendously.

Sincerely,

W. R. Clark,
 Box 307,
 Alma College,
 Alma, Mich.

Dear Editor:

Now that SUPER SCIENCE STORIES has finally begun to appear again I would like to compile a complete file of information on the back issues. Unfortunately I have only the following: Volume 1, Numbers 1 and 3; Volume 2, Numbers 2, 3 and 4; Volume 3, Numbers 2 and 4; Volume 4, Numbers 3 and 4. Out of a total of sixteen issues I have the above nine listed. If anyone with the other seven will please contact me, we could get together and get all the dope together.

I would also like to hear from anyone having Volume 1 complete of ASTONISHING STORIES. I am compiling information on that publication also and have Volumes 2, 3, and 4 completed, but nothing on Volume 1. Will someone give me a hand? Thank you.

The new SUPER SCIENCE STORIES is very good. There are some bad stories, CABAL leading the list, but aside from that atrocious cover (and by Lawrence, of all people!) the mag is a worthy addition to any fan's library. Keep up the good work!

If any reader of this letter lives in any U.S. Possession, Africa, South America or the Far East, he can be sure of receiving future issues if he will write me enclosing his address and a few friendly comments on our favorite subject, Science Fiction. Since a number of copies are being sent to Australia (to the Futurian Library) this offer does not apply there; nor does it apply in Canada or England for obvious reasons.

Joseph B. Baker,
 1438 Addison St.
 (Basement Apt.)
 Chicago 13, Ill.

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on the revival of your magazine SUPER SCIENCE. I think it is headed toward the top in the list of science fiction.

I have only one complaint to make and that is that the story "The Black Sun Rises" wasn't long enough.

I am hoping that you will continue to publish such wonderful stories as you published in the January issue.

As I have written to several sf. mags. and never had a letter published, I don't expect to get this one published.

I hope you have every sort of good luck and success there is. And keep up the good work.

Happy wishes,
 Steve Shipman,
 520 N. 7th St.,
 Frederick, Okla.

Dear Editor:

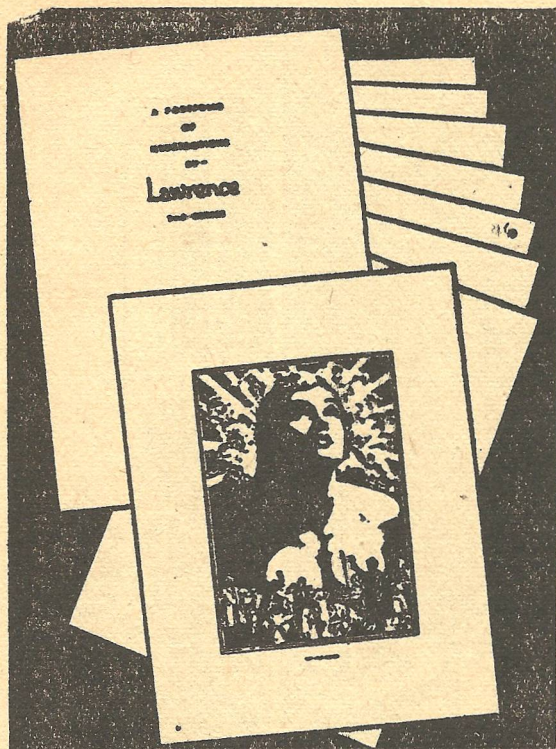
Congratulations on reviving S.S.S. again, and in my humble opinion your first ish was great. The stories stack up like this:

1. A HANDFUL OF STARS (Kubilius)
2. MOONWORM'S DANCE (Mullen)
3. THE BOUNDING CROWN (Blish)
4. THE SILENCE (Bradbury)
5. THE OTHER (Vaid)
6. THE SKY WILL BE OURS (Wellman)

The other two don't count. I know a lot of Kuttner fans aren't going to like this, but I've never yet seen a Kuttner yarn I've really liked. The artwork was above average, with the exception of page 60-61.

How about more Bradbury, Wellman, Kubilius, and Mullen? Also try and get Fearn, Heinlein, and Leinster. But Please! Please! Don't give us poor fans any of those One-

(Continued on page 129)



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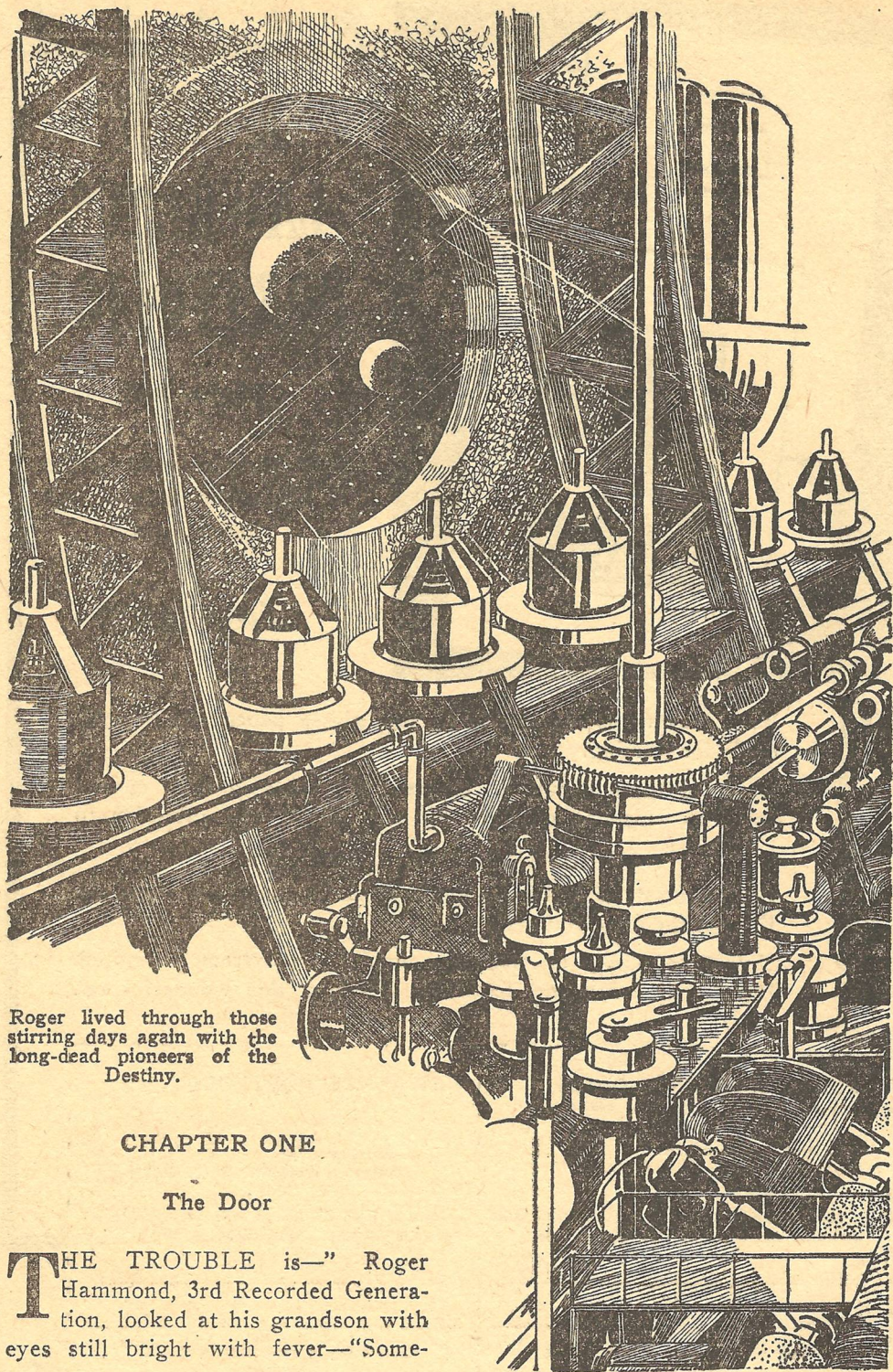
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Roger lived through those stirring days again with the long-dead pioneers of the Destiny.

CHAPTER ONE

The Door

THE TROUBLE is—" Roger Hammond, 3rd Recorded Generation, looked at his grandson with eyes still bright with fever—"Some-

SON OF THE STARS

By F. Orlin Tremaine

body miscalculated . . . perhaps as long ago as fifty years."

Roger waited anxiously.

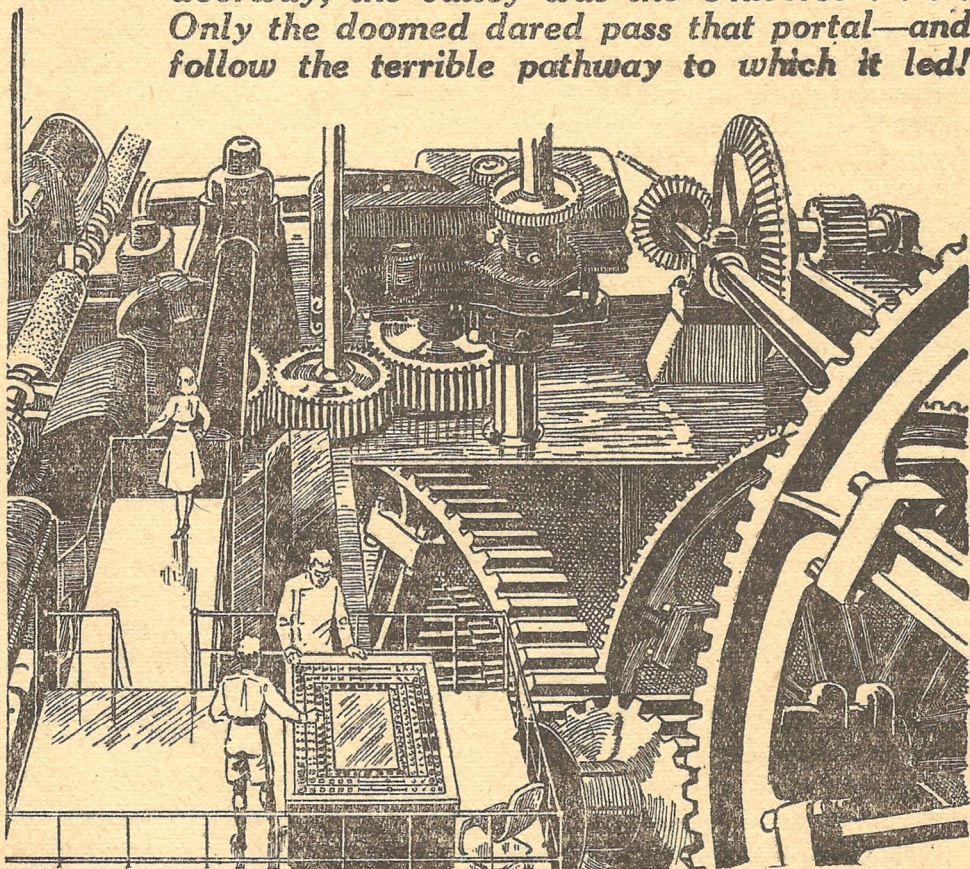
The old man's tongue liked at his parched lips; he swallowed. For a moment young Roger thought he had wandered into delirium again. His eyes closed tight, then opened slowly.

"You've been a little curious about the Door, Roger?"

"Yes, sir."

Roger 3 nodded slightly. "Of course. Just like your father at your age. Just like me. Well, now's the time. As soon as I'm over the fever and able to walk, I'll take you through. You'll

The sky met the hills that circled the valley; the streams rose at one end and vanished at the other; and once you entered the single doorway, the valley was the Universe Only the doomed dared pass that portal—and follow the terrible pathway to which it led!



understand then; I couldn't explain it to you now. All right?"

"Yes, sir."

Roger felt vaguely uneasy as he left the sickroom. He wanted to go through that mysterious door; he wanted to know; but there was nevertheless something ominous in the way Roger spoke of it—in the very fact that no one went through that door until he was adult.

He returned to his room and, moving automatically, took his fishing rod from its rack. Half-formed thoughts tumbled over each other in his brain as he rode down in the automatic elevator, turned away from the village, and walked along familiar paths across meadow, field and orchard.

Roger Hammond, 5th Recorded Generation, lay on the grassy bank of a stream, fishpole carefully balanced on one knee. His eyes squinted at the sky that hung like a painted bowl above the sun, but his thoughts raced far beyond that sun and sky. He was going through the door at the end of the valley! And he wouldn't be seventeen until next week. It was unheard of. Something was very wrong. Perhaps it had something to do with the strange fever that had taken so many. . . .

"Something eating you?" Ruth Eaton was standing over him, a quizzical frown between her wise brown eyes. "You look like a man with a problem," she added, and sat down casually on the grass beside him.

Her dark hair, long and almost straight, fell over her slim shoulders: casual, like everything about Ruth. Her costume was identical with his; white cotton shirt open at the throat, tan shorts, socks and low shoes.

"I'm going through the Door," he told her.

She nodded, as if he had mentioned

some commonplace everyday event.

"Four more people died today," she said. "That leaves only four hundred and sixty-one. There's less work required of course. . . ."

Roger sat up suddenly and reeled in his line. The two young people sat still for a long moment. Their bodies rocked slowly, as though to counterbalance the rolling motion of a deck on a smooth sea. Cattle, grazing nearby, braced themselves slightly as though they, too, felt the motion.

"It's a small world," Roger said finally. "Listen Ruth—have you ever—guessed?"

She nodded. "Sure. Lots of times. Lots of guesses. Come on." She stood up and held out a hand to him. They started slowly across the pasture toward the village two miles away.

Roger turned his head slowly, eyes following the horizon.

"This can't be all there is," he said. "The farms, and then the hills, and then the sky. The streams come up at one end of the valley and disappear at the other. Rain every fourth day. Sun the other three days. Same temperature the year 'round. A population that stayed the same for five generations till this epidemic." He paused. "And grandfather says somebody miscalculated. It all adds up. We're prisoners. This is no world."

She glanced at him cool brown eyes. "It's a pretty good place to live, though," she said lightly. And we're not supposed to talk about it, remember?" After a while she spoke again. "At least you're going through the Door. Thing of me, chum. I have to keep on guessing."

Roger grinned ruefully and nodded. After that they walked in silence toward the group of plastic buildings at the end of the valley. Lights were beginning to appear in the windows as

they neared the village. The arc of the sky seemed no more than five hundred feet away at this point.

They entered one of the buildings quietly. The automatic elevator carried them upstairs. It stopped at the fourth floor and the door opened.

"Good night, Rog." Without warning she leaned forward and kissed him lightly. Then the door closed behind her and the elevator continued upward. Roger found himself whistling tunelessly as he opened the door to his apartment. He stopped and shook his head.

"Women," he said softly.

THE three-quarter-mile walk to the Door seemed long. Old Roger Hammond 3 tired easily; they had to stop every hundred yards while he got his breath. Roger 5 sighed with relief when they finally reached the iron semi-circle of guard railings.

Roger 3 fumbled in his pocket and drew out a little plastic box. He set three tiny dials carefully at 1-8-7, showing the combination to Roger 5. Then he pressed a button and held the box against the gate lock. Roger watched every move; listened to every sound. He heard tumblers fall rhythmically, and the gate swung back silently. Before them stood the Door. They moved toward it, then paused.

Roger 3's voice sounded raspy, unpleasantly dry. "My great-grandfather, your great-great-grandfather, conceived and carried out this project, Roger. Many of the people in the valley have no idea what it means.

"Before we go in, let me tell you this much. The world you know was created as a solution to the problem of nuclear fission. In the larger world from which we come, the nuclear fission process threatened to destroy all life. Chain reaction, resulting ac-

cidentally, might conceivably disintegrate the planet. Yet atomic power could give men a life of complete happiness if only it were used for the benefit of all."

Roger 3 pressed the little box against a blue spot on the Door. Tumblers fell, one after another. Roger held his breath as the door swung inward. He felt as though a heavy weight lay on his chest.

"Come on." The elder Hammond took Roger's arm and guided him through the opening in the hillside. The door swung silently shut and locked.

They stood in a white-tiled room ten feet high, forty feet square. Three desks were ranged neatly in the middle of the floor. All along the wall were couches, and on several of them men were sleeping. One man, sitting alone at a desk, jumped to his feet as they entered. He spoke respectfully to old Hammond and grinned at Roger.

"News, Frank?" Hammond stepped around the desk and glanced at a chart.

"No trouble, sir. Objective on course. Speed constant. Estimate seventeen days four hours."

Roger Hammond 5 started violently. He said with difficulty, "Objective—speed—Do you mean—"

"Yes, Roger," the old man's voice was gentle. "Instead of being prisoners in a vast machine on Earth (as you may have guessed) we have been traveling through galactic space for nearly a century of Earth time—searching for a new planet fitted to our needs. Your father should have been guiding this expedition now, but when he passed away two years ago I found it necessary to carry on until you—" Hammond's words stopped suddenly. He swayed and gripped the desk. Roger and Frank Johnson were at his side quickly but he shook his head and

went on. "—until you were ready. It is your place to assume the Hammond responsibility—and to do it before your time."

Roger blinked and frowned, trying to accept the alien idea and make it seem real inside his head. Finally he said, "That explains the rolling motion of the land."

"Yes," Frank Johnson confirmed. "We haven't enough men to control the stabilizers. Haven't had for nearly two months. That is why we must land this time, no matter what."

"A friendly planet?" The words sounded absurd to Roger even as he spoke them, but Frank nodded gravely. "We hope so," he answered. "If not we can live aboard indefinitely. We're self-sufficient and impregnable—until we run out of something or something gives out."

Old Roger Hammond smiled at the younger man and the boy. Slowly the luster faded from his eyes. He swayed; his legs collapsed and he fell.

Frank and Roger bent over him instantly. There was no pulse. He was gone, but the smile was still on his lips.

Johnson stood up and pulled the boy to his feet. Roger 5 was trembling, and Frank put an arm around his shoulders.

Through a film of tears Roger became aware of other figures about him. Hammond's fall had awakened the sleeping men, whose faces bore the lines of near-exhaustion. One after another they shook his hand, and he noticed that the eyes of all of them glistened.

EVENTS crowded Roger. Frank Johnson, second in command, became his inseparable companion and tutor. Frank was forty, a man, muscular, quick and accurate.

"Your first job," he told Roger, "is

to learn the story behind this whole project. Reading steadily, you can cover the log in about twenty hours. Then we'll tour the shell. I'll try to keep things quiet so you can concentrate. Want to start?"

Roger nodded. The thought flitted through his mind that he must grow up fast. He sat down at the desk and turned the logbook back to page one. It was dated November 1, 1947 A.D. Location: New York City.

His eyes focused on the fine script, and mechanically he started to read. Gradually, despite himself, he grew fascinated. Hours flew by but he did not look up.

Nov. 7: Lecture before the committee appears successful. Long discussion. Rockefeller and Guggenheim representatives seem impressed but say government assistance will be required.

Nov. 9: Met the President today with representatives of Congress, Senate and the military. All were politely interested. More impressed by the statements of the two big foundations than by mine. Willing for experiment to proceed but question availability of funds. Funds needed admittedly equal to amount spent on atom bomb development. Cost estimated at two billion dollars.

Nov. 17: Military after consulting experts concluded ship would be valuable weapon. Suggest going ahead with plans with proviso that shell will be available for either peaceful or military use. Had to agree, but I pray it will never be weapon. Special executive meeting authorized secret procedure, subject to okay of plans and specifications. Spent four hours explaining charts and drawings.

Dec. 31: Plans okayed. Location okayed: Nevada. Construction to be started immediately.

Dates faded from Roger's consciousness. His eyes flew across the written lines, and his mind filled in the details while visions grew into a swiftly-moving panorama. Through the eyes of a man with an indomitable purpose

he saw the vast cities of the past teeming with life; cities in which millions of human beings lived and played and worked. And through the interplay of activity and communication he saw the part those cities played in the nation—a nation rushing headlong toward a crisis, a climax!

He contacted steel mills, mines, railways, watched great factories at work. The scene shifted and he saw ten thousand men, moving like ants, constructing dwellings; making a steel cradle, five miles in diameter take shape between two mighty mountains in Nevada.

He saw steel girders rising into place, and machinery—endless machinery—moving across the desert floor to be swallowed in the huge interior of a forming globe so vast it dwarfed all of man's past efforts.

A year spun by; two years; three; four! A gigantic sphere rested between the mountains—a sphere of case-hardened steel plates, cantilever steel girders bracing it rigidly to an inner shell one hundred feet from the outer surface. Between the two shells were catwalks, tubes, luminous discs that seemed to give forth energy.

Long lines of trucks, like segmented worms moved up winding ramps with loads of earth which were dumped on a steel diaphragm that bisected the sphere. Painters sprayed blue paint across the dome above to simulate a sky. Engineers rigged a mighty sun-lamp that would move slowly across that sky during each twelve-hour day.

Oxygen tanks were installed behind the hills that rose around the artificial plain. Water refreshers were moved into position; then pumps, condensers; an artificial gravity grid. Food supplies, grass, fruit and nut trees, berry bushes.

Plastic houses were built while grass

grew on the pasture lands, a plastic town of six-story buildings rose at one side of the huge, man-made valley. The streets between the buildings were narrow; a single loop of wagon road around the town provided for all necessary deliveries. Four of the buildings housed facilities for the unit factories of the self-sufficient world. Here cloth would be woven, hides tanned, grain ground into flour, utensils made and repaired, schools operated, entertainment provided.

Meantime the gravity repeller units were installed with utmost secrecy. No blast of destructive jets would be needed to send this tiny earth aloft. It could rise gently from its cradle, thrust its way from the atmosphere of the planet and pick its course toward a distant universe if its pilot chose.

There was no fear of damage from meteor showers. The repeller units would ward them off. There need be no fear of frictional heat, for the great sphere could slow its motion to the drifting point.

CHAPTER TWO

The Challenge

THE months sped by. The earth was gripped by panic. Inside the sphere, Roger saw the little artificial valley become a growing area. He saw three streams rising in the hills, joining, and flowing in a mile-long river big enough for boats and for swimming, to a swamp which swallowed it at the other side of the valley.

He saw the eager volunteers stream aboard the sphere. There were two hundred scientists and their wives; two hundred artisans and their wives, this group including doctors, dentists, veterinarians, and other essential professional people. There were four

hundred horticulturists, farmers and dairymen together with their wives. Almost four hundred children, none over five years of age, accompanied their parents, bringing the total population to slightly under two thousand souls.

All had been chosen carefully. Not a single individual whose body showed hereditary weaknesses, or discernable traces of disease, had been permitted to enlist in the company that was to populate the sphere.

Except for the scientists (all sworn to complete secrecy) every person in the company believed he had been selected to live in an impregnable fortress-hermitage until the war was past and the danger of annihilation ended. Even the wives of the scientists themselves held that belief. Only two hundred odd technical specialists and engineers knew what lay before them.

No person aboard the huge craft was more than 30 years of age, except Roger Hammond. Hammond was forty-two.

The ports to the outside world were closed and sealed. The inmates gradually became accustomed to their new life.

Seventy of the scientific group went through the mysterious steel door at the end of the valley every Monday and remained behind it a full week. This shift, thirty-five on tour and thirty-five off, maintained an arduous twelve-hour schedule checking the self-repairing machines with their sealed atomic motors. This gave the men each a two-week rest between week-long duty tours, and kept them physically and mentally healthy despite the strain of the tremendous responsibility that rested on each one.

Roger's vision grew as his imagination grasped the details of those first days aboard the *Destiny*. He lived the

early days of the colony again as its members adapted themselves to their new duties and to each other. At first it had seemed a lark to be cut off from Earth, yet sufficient unto themselves. There was no hardship. There were no crop failures, no long droughts, no early frosts or havoc-raising storms.

From the control room, the nature of which was unknown to nine out of ten of the sphere's residents, the first Roger Hammond kept daily contact with the White House in Washington. The rumblings of war, that had struck fear across the land, speeded its preparedness program. But the weapons which the military wanted to install in the *Destiny* were not yet forged. May passed, June; July. And then, under date of August 3rd, 1952, Roger 5 found a terse message: "The President instructs me to suggest that you move outward at once. Cleveland, Ohio, has been destroyed. No further orders will be issued to you. No further communications will be attempted. Good luck. —Secretary to the President."

Roger lived through those stirring days again with his white-haired great-great-grandfather. He could almost hear the order sending the crew to stations. He felt the beathless hush of expectancy as the sphere rose slowly from its cradle like a gigantic balloon, bringing panic to country-dwellers who saw its shadowy form against the sun. He heard the exhaled breaths as the engineers finally looked up from banks of gauges that told a story of perfect mechanical responses. There had been no faulty operation in the whole gargantuan machine. So perfect was the operation of the internal and external gravity screens, that of all the *Destiny's* crew, no one but the engineers suspected that the sphere was in motion.

As he read, Roger watched through

his ancestor's eyes while the *Destiny* passed the moon, so shimmeringly bright in the full glare of the sun that heavily-smoked glass was used to screen the telescopes. Photographs were made for later study, but the satellite was too close to Earth to remain stable in case the planet disintegrated. So they dared not stop. Outward they went, the thrust of the gravity repellers building acceleration as the distance increased.

They passed through a meteor swarm that lighted the darkness like sparklers for hundreds of miles; a show that held men spellbound at the observation ports. But the meteors parted as though by magic to let the *Destiny* pass through unscathed. Another point proven. The repellers had ended meteor hazards for all time.

Past Mars, just close enough to study it. Giant lichens could be observed. Some forms of animal life doubtless survived, but man obviously could not.

Relying on their repeller screens, they veered only slightly above the ecliptic to avoid the densest area of the asteroid belt. At length the field was past.

Jupiter loomed ahead, frightening in its immensity, its moons circling like flies about a dead carcass. But the gravity here was so great that a human body would sink to the surface like a puddle of jelly!

Month after month, the *Destiny* plowed through space. Five months had passed before Saturn loomed like a pinwheel on a Fourth of July evening in America. Its three glorious rings built a halo, thousands of miles wide, of luminous color around the gigantic orb of the planet itself. Nine moons spun around the gigantic planet in varied orbits and speeds.

Roger Hammond guided the *Destiny*

near enough to Saturn to obtain invaluable photographs in color of the planet and its rings.

Neptune and Uranus were on the far side of the sun. Pluto would be their last sight of the Sun's family.

Six and a half months after leaving Earth they moved on past the outermost planet of the solar system. Hammond set his course for another sun, and the repellers pushed the gigantic craft through space, building toward the speed of light.

LIFE in the little world inside continued placidly through the years. The eighteen hundred residents were unaware that they had left the cradle between two Nevada mountains in North America. Now and then someone wondered whether the war had not reached a conclusion by now, but as the years passed the questions came less often. The older generation became resigned to a pleasant fate; the new generation remembered no other world.

Normal life was being preserved so it could be transplanted when the time came. The population was kept stable. When a resident died, the couple at the head of the waiting list was permitted to have a child. Marriages between widows and widowers were encouraged, and several such unions were consummated.

Twenty years passed before the first violence occurred in the community; and that was due to a sudden dementia, the cause of which was obscure. The man who had committed the assault was confined and treated psychiatrically; a glandular disturbance was discovered and corrected. He resumed his place in the community at the end of three years.

Roger Hammond 5 was still reading when he drifted into sleep. He was

unaware of being lifted to a couch, or of the pillow that was placed beneath his head. He had been reading steadily for ten hours, and had been awake for twenty-seven, under a heavy nervous strain.

He was still unconscious when someone noticed he was developing a fever and had him carried back to his plastic apartment in the village. In his mind's eye, he was still watching the glorious panorama of the heavens as the *Destiny* left the Solar system behind and thrust its way toward the outer galaxies.

Dr. Hughson 4 and his young apprentice, Douglas White 5, had slept little in many weeks. The climax of the strain that had been growing for two long years showed in their tired faces. Between visits to critically ill patients and their test-tube studies of the deadly epidemic, there had been no time for rest.

But a slow feeling of triumph was growing in both men. Under the microscope a new bacillus had been isolated. After long months of frantic trial-and-error it had been found that the bacillus, though it resisted penicillin, was unable to withstand a brew of watercress which had been gathered from a chance growth in one of the smaller streams.

On the twelfth day of Roger's illness, Frank Johnson summoned every remaining scientist and engineer, sick or well, for extraordinary duty. They totalled only sixty-six now. Together, the thirty men not on duty went through the door to join those already at the control stations.

And on the twenty-third day after he had been gripped by the fever Roger opened his eyes after a long, natural sleep and gazed blankly at the ceiling. His eyes were clear. He was hungry!

It seemed to him that it had been ages since he had eaten. He caught a shadowy movement at the door and tried to call, but the door slowly shut and he was alone.

Minutes later Dr. Hughson came in, smiling. He felt Roger's forehead, looked quickly under the lids at the whites of his eyes and smiled again. Ruth Eaton, standing close behind the doctor, smiled also; a tired smile that spoke volumes.

Then memory clicked in Roger's head.

"I've had the fever?" he asked suddenly, trying to sit up.

"Steady, boy, steady. You're all right now. The fever has been conquered. You're going to be all right. As soon as you've had your first hot meal you may sit up. Then we'll see."

"But—the rolling motion—it's stopped—"

Ruth took his hand "Steady, chum," she said. "Yes it stopped six days ago. You've been unconscious for twenty-three days, but everything is all right now."

He looked at her, surprised.

"Then—you know?"

"I nursed you, Roger. You talked a lot. Your mind wandered. Yes."

Roger looked across at Dr. Hughson, and noted the look of sleeplessness in the physician's eyes. He turned back to Ruth. "When did you last see Frank Johnson?"

"Twelve days ago. He called just before he took all the remaining engineers through the Door. None of them has come back yet."

Something like panic gripped Roger. "Dr. Hughson, I have to go through the Door immediately. Can I make it if Ruth goes with me?"

The doctor nodded. "Perhaps I should go with you?"

"No harm in it, I think."

The journey to the Door was an effort for Roger, supported though he was on either side by his nurse and doctor. Cold drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, glistening like dew in the morning sun. But his head was clear and his temperature normal.

It was with a sense of deep foreboding that he set the dials on the little box and pressed it against the lock of the guard-fence. And it was with a deeper dread that he pressed it against the blue spot on the vault-like door in the hill and waited for it to swing inward. But he led his companions inside with firm, unflinching steps.

Frank Johnson's head rested on his arms as though he had leaned forward from exhaustion and fallen asleep across the desk. Dr. Hughson went quickly to his side and touched his face. It was cold, and still with the stillness of death.

On a signal board at the far side of the room, little red markers had dropped beside many numbers. A key-chart at the base of it was marked:

BLUE—Okay

GREEN—Adjustment needed

RED—Illness or accident

Roger deliberately counted the number of red markers that had fallen. There were sixty-five—and Frank Johnson had been in the desk room.

"I'm afraid, Dr. Hughson," Roger tried to keep the panic from his voice, "that your new medicine came too late for the crew. The fever germs must have thrived best in the outer sections. And that means that there's not a man alive who knows the secrets of the Destiny!"

He sat down on one of the couches

that lined the walls and dropped his head into his hands.

Weakness seemed to permeate Roger's body. He lay back on the couch and closed his eyes. There was a tense silence in the room until he opened them again. His decision was made.

"We three," he said slowly, "may be the only persons aboard who know that we've been traveling through space for a hundred years. so there will be a new regime aboard. The three of us will have to take control." He sat up. "We'll have to take care of Frank," he said, "and the others as we locate them."

Dr. Hughson nodded. "I'll attend to that, and arrange for services. His wife succumbed three weeks ago."

"Thank you, doctor." Roger continued to talk slowly, deliberately. "We've apparently landed on some planet and are secure for the time being. We can learn about that later. First we've got to rediscover our own little world. We don't even know how to get about the hull, and the maze of machinery under us fills several cubic miles. And we've got to keep life normal in the valley while we explore and make plans.

"I wonder," he mused, "if the atomic war the Destiny sailed away from a hundred years ago left greater problems on Earth than we face now?"

CHAPTER THREE

New World

THE remaining population of the Destiny's valley became more cheerful with the passing of time. The last traces of the apathy which had followed the scourge of the epidemic disappeared.

In the control room, adjoining the

council chamber, the triumvirs undertook a study of the galactic space charts which showed the course followed by the *Destiny*, thus hoping to determine their present location. This proved too difficult a feat for novices to accomplish on short notice, but it led to the discovery of a "transport plan" chart of the lower hemisphere which housed the machinery. Monorail cars provided fast travel between control points, running beside railed catwalks. These cars seated two men each, and were operated by pressing destination buttons on the dash-panels.

Ruth noticed a station marked **Sun Control** and pointed it out. She pressed a button opposite to it, marked **Ready Car**, experimentally. Instantly a wall panel slid back, disclosing a tube-shaped carrier slung below a steel rail. It was rounded at both ends and contained two leather seats, one ahead of the other.

"This seems like as good an investigation point as any," Roger remarked, stepping toward the car.

"Just a minute," Dr. Hughson interrupted. "Let's make certain that if you go out you'll be able to return." He studied the bank of buttons on the front-seat panel of the little carrier, then compared it with the one on the transport plan board. They were identical in number, position, and markings.

"I guess it's safe," he admitted, "but let's send an empty car on a trip first. Then we'll be sure."

The car departed silently. After fifteen minutes, Hughson pressed the button marked **Return** opposite **Sun-control**. About seven minutes passed, then the wall panel slid open as the car came to a stop, still swaying gently from its arrested motion.

"Satisfied, doctor?" Roger asked, smiling.

Hughson nodded.

"I'm coming along, Roger," Ruth said, but Hughson vetoed the idea abruptly.

"If our guess is correct," he said, "there'll be a body at almost every control point. These must be brought in. There are only two seats."

Ruth turned away, and Roger paled.

"I'll go, Roger, while you watch the controls," Hughson said. "I'm accustomed to death."

Roger shook his head. "It's my job, doctor. Tell me what to do. I'll bring them in."

Without another word Hughson brought a rubberized sack from a cabinet and handed it to Roger.

The car rolled silently along, swaying slightly beneath its overhead rail. Fluorescent tubes lighted along the way as the carrier approached, and were turned off after it had passed. By their light he could see considerable distances back into the maze of machines and supports on both sides of the track. He could see catwalks branching off to each separate mechanical unit, and could make out platforms running around the casings of great power units.

"And all this," he thought, "was made possible by the discovery of atomic power, which may have been used to destroy the world!"

Seven minutes from the starting point the car slowed and stopped alongside a twenty-foot-square platform of polished aluminum. Along its back was a bank of instruments and gauges. In the center was a table containing a miniature model of the valley, with the sky represented by a glassite dome. A tiny pinpoint of light showed almost midway across the dome. Roger checked it with his watch. The sun was operating properly!

Roger didn't linger. Sprawled on

the floor beside the table was a wasted figure, almost a caricature of a human being. As quickly as possible he slid the sack over the head and managed to get the body inside. It was not a pleasant job, and his nausea made him forget the tragic part of the affair until the job was done and the sack safely deposited in the rear seat of the car.

From the front seat, he pressed the Return button on the panel, then held his breath. The car glided smoothly ahead on a wide loop of track. It passed the Artificial Gravity Control center and he saw another body sprawled there, hands clawing at its throat as though the man had suffocated.

The awe and grandeur of the expanse of operating machinery, the size of the power tubes which ran diagonally, like struts, between them, kept his mind occupied until the car slowed down, a panel slid open and two anxious faces broke into smiles.

He stumbled out onto the platform.

"We can conquer it, given time," he said, after his lungs had drawn in two deep breaths in the air-conditioned room. "It is tremendous, breathtaking, and I saw only two of the control stations."

THE triumvirate of the Destiny, like many explorers, were diverted from their main purpose many times by exciting new discoveries. Beyond a door that opened only to the ray from the little black box, Roger found an Observation Room built against the outside shell of the great sphere. It contained powerful telescopes, instruments for testing atmospheric composition and pressure, radar controls—even radio broadcasting and receiving sets together with auxiliary telegraphic keys and earphones.

The suggested possibilities turned their thoughts to the outside even before they had covered all the circuitous routes inside the lower hemisphere.

"Actually," Ruth argued, "there's no sense in trying to find a way to get outside until we make sure we can live if we succeed."

The men agreed. The tests would be made as quickly as possible by Dr. Hughson, who understood atmospheric requirements. He began at once checking the equipment.

Meantime Roger and Ruth studied the telescopes. A model showing six co-ordinating points on the outer shell indicated that the view could be observed from any one of the six directions. Four points were equally spaced around the mid-section, one was at the top of the globe and the sixth was at the bottom. It was either a periscopic arrangement, which seemed doubtful, or a television setup.

The instrument itself was a central cone three feet wide at the base, anchored to the floor, and set with bullseye lenses around which the barrel of the telescope apparently moved, and through which it seemed, in some manner, to focus. The regulators were apparently automatic and, at Roger's suggestion, Ruth pressed one of the buttons.

There was a humming noise. The yard-long barrel of the scope moved slowly around the central cone until it contacted a bullseye. The humming stopped but a high, almost inaudible, whine continued. Roger put his eyes against the visi-glass and an exclamation broke from his lips.

"Ruth! Look! Buildings!"

The girl took his place and studied what she saw for a full minute. It was clear as though she stood in the street near them. Rocky, shale-filled soil stood out, free of any hint of vege-

tation, but from it rose a massive wall perhaps twenty feet high built not only by skilled masons, but by beings who knew how to hew and move huge rocks. "It might," she said, looking up, "indicate that life has disappeared from this area. Certainly there is no recent sign of life, even of vegetation."

Roger tried again. He studied the elevator wheel slowly. The field of vision rose. He was looking at snow-capped mountain peaks, and below the snow line he saw trees!

"There's air and moisture, Ruth," he said. "Look now."

Their excitement increased as they moved the scope to another port, but only a precipitous wall of shale faced them. The third presented a similar view. But the fourth opened a vista of a tree-filled valley a few miles away with snow-clad peaks above it, apparently stretching off into infinite distance.

"Bottom port next." Roger's voice had lost its thrill of excitement. "It looks like a nearly dead world. The earth couldn't be in much worse shape."

The humming sounded again as the gears turned in machinery they could use but didn't understand. The high whine followed. Roger looked from the bottom port, stiffened and turned slowly away.

"We're at least three hundred feet up from the ground! Johnson and the engineers did a wonderful job, settling us between two mountains, braced upright, without damage or even a jar, but apparently here we stay. How we need those men right now!"

"Good news, children!" Dr. Hughson came into the room, beaming. "The air on this planet is clear, pure, breathable. It is slightly rarified, as earth air would be several thousand feet above sea-level, but men can live in it."

"We're braced between two moun-

tains, so we may be at a high altitude," Roger told him.

"And there's more," Hughson went on. "No traces of fumes or dangerous radiations of any kind. Furthermore, the gravity is identical with that of the earth as nearly as I can calculate it."

The two men looked at each other suddenly, then turned almost as one toward the control room and the mono-rail cars. Roger pressed the button marked Gravity Grid Control. The panel door slid back. Without a word, they climbed into the seats of the waiting carrier.

"Wait here, Ruth," Roger said as the car slid away in its traveling light-path. Eleven minutes later it stopped at the control station platform, with the inevitable model on the table. They scrambled across the floor to the control board with its bank of gauges. The indicators stood at zero. The power had been shut off from the artificial gravity grids!

It was with mixed feelings that the two men rode back toward the central control room. The car swayed gently as it slid along under its rail between banks of machinery that stretched away on all sides like a vast metal forest.

Life within the valley could probably continue for a long time, placidly and comfortably. But the chance of release to a bigger world seemed remote.

AS THEY rejoined Ruth in the control room, Hughson made one further suggestion.

"Douglas White's hobby, from the time he was a tot, has been radio and telegraphy. Had he lived on Earth he doubtless would have been a 'ham' with a shortwave station of his own. He's read every book in the library on the subject and I think we can trust

him. Let's put him to work on the radio. Let him get the sets operating, try any signals he can devise, try the Morse Code. It can do no harm—and who knows but that it may do some good?"

Douglas White was instantly enraptured by the chance to study the apparatus. Within three hours, he was tapping out an S.O.S. in Morse Code, over and over again, on one frequency after another. With ear-phones plastered to his head he listened as though he had been using radios all his life instead of just reading and dreaming about them.

For two hours there was no resulting signal from his experimental broadcasts. But as he tuned his receiver in on one of the higher frequencies he heard music, and almost jumped out of his chair.

Without stopping to consider anything he set the broadcast wave steady on this beam, stepped up the power, and broadcast over and over, "S.O.S., S.O.S., S.O.S."

In a half-hour a recognizable answer came. Douglas White was alone at the receiving set when a voice broke into the musical program, saying something he thought sounded like Spanish. That was all he needed. He answered in his best, slowly enunciated English:

"Speaking from the space traveler Destiny which left Earth in 1952. Can you locate us? Can you tell us where we are down?"

He waited a moment, then repeated

the message. Pause. Repeat. Pause. Repeat . . .

There was a long silence in the ear-phones, then: "Stand by for one hour." The words were clear, but the speaker seemed to have difficulty pronouncing them.

White was tremendously excited. He dared not leave lest he miss a vital signal, yet he knew the others would want to be present when it came. This was one of the most significant moments in their lives. They were in contact with a speaking being from outside the sphere—for the first time in 97 years!

As it happened, the three came back in time to find their radio expert in a state of almost apoplectic frenzy.

"It came!" he yelled as they entered the door. "I asked where we're down. They answered me in English and said to stand by!"

The following twenty minutes were the longest any of the four had ever experienced. It was too good to believe—and yet—progress must have gone on during the past hundred years. Perhaps other ships—even colonies—

The radio crackled suddenly. White adjusted his dials and turned on the loudspeaker. The voice of an elderly man boomed out clearly.

"You say you are aboard the space-ship Destiny which left earth in 1952?"

White handed the microphone to Roger, who answered quickly: "That is correct. Can you tell us where we are? Have you got us located yet?"

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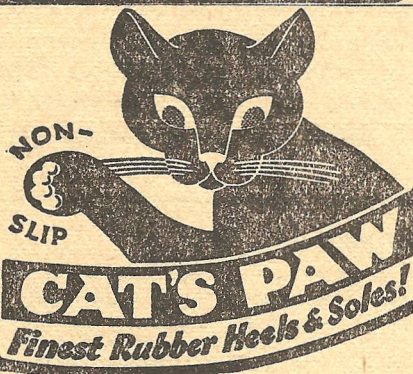
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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

The voice broke in: "All in due course. We need better identification. Jokes have been played before. What date in 1952?"

"August third, from Nevada, under command of Roger Hammond, at the suggestion of the President as conveyed in a message from his secretary after Cleveland, Ohio, had been destroyed. Is that sufficient?"

"Ample," the voice answered. "Your statement is accurate. I am Emmett Brown, curator of the Museum of Natural History in Boston. I was called because your signals seem archaic.

"Our finders place your message source as the upper Andes Mountains in Peru, South America. Indians have been fleeing the area in panic spreading tales of a moon that came down from the sky. Can you carry on?"

Roger cleared his throat: "We can live aboard indefinitely," he said. "The Destiny is wedged between two mountains, undamaged, but her bottom port is three hundred feet above the ground. We'll need help to get out."

The answering voice of the curator continued: "Stand by, then. We'll talk with you every night at five o'clock. A rescue party will be organized at once. But, let me warn you to be prepared for a changed earth. Asia and Europe are still deserts, but New America has grown until we number twenty million souls!" There was pride in the voice as it added: "Good night. Carry on."

Deathlike silence pervaded the observation room.

"We're back home!" Roger said, at last. "Home on the Earth we've never seen before!" His arms tightened around Ruth Eaton. "Did you hear? HOME!"

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

Continued from page 6)
story, best cover, best illustrations, best author, best editor, etc., etc., in both the fan and the pro field.

After months of writing to the top men and women in the stf. field and recording their suggestions and ideas, Van Houten has decided that the time has come to hold a convention to set up an Awards Committee. Van Houten has suggested that editors, authors, publishers, fans and other interested persons meet in April of 1949.

If you're interested, write to Ray Van Houten, 409 Market St., Paterson 3, N. J., and he will supply you with additional information. He has recently prepared a small booklet, reporting on all the letters and suggestions he has received up to August 1, 1948. A limited number of these may be obtained from him at 10¢.

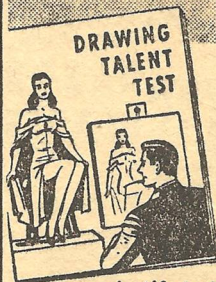
Fan-Mag Reviews

SPACEWARP, Vol. 4, No. 2, published monthly by Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich. 15¢. 21 pages of light and sometimes humorous doings of the fans and pros. Good mimeographing, though the paper is a little light.

PEON, Vol. 1, No. 3, published monthly by Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, 2116 Edsall Court, Alameda, Calif. 5c a copy; 25c a year. 20 pages of good fiction, poetry, articles and features. Well mimeographed, with a good cover by Grossman.

SPEARHEAD, Vol. 1, No. 3, irregularly published by Thomas H. Carter, 817 Starling Ave., Martinsville, Va. 10c. 37 pages full of good material by the top fans and some pros. Well worth the dime. The cover by Ray Nelson is an improvement over the first two issues.

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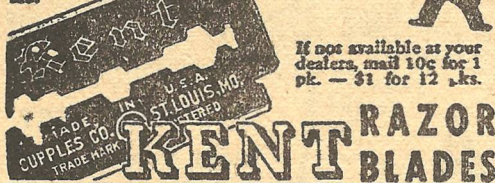
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CHRONOSCOPE, Vol. 1, No. 1, published quarterly by Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin Street N. E., Minneapolis 18, Minn. 15¢. One of the best mimeographed magazines, well illustrated with cover and some inside pages in two colors.

FANTASY REVIEW, Vol. 2, No. 11, published bimonthly by Walter Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex, England. With the next issue this magazine will increase number of pages and raise its price to 25¢ and well worth it. This is a 20-page printed magazine covering the entire pro field. Books and magazines of the U.S., Canada and England are reviewed and previewed. This issue features Bob Frazier's "First of the Fantastics," an article about one of the first stf. magazines, "The Frank Reade Library," published way back in 1892.

Note: Readers are cautioned that because of the unavoidable delay between the time these reviews are written and the time they reach print, specific issues mentioned here may be out of print and newer ones current.

It is also suggested that you enclose payment when you write for a sample issue of any of these mags. And when you request information from fan editors, it is always wise to enclose a 3¢ stamp for reply. Publishing fan mags is a hobby and most if not all, are published at a loss.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

(Continued from page 49)

tear all atomic structure, shift it instantaneously into a new pattern. Gahn felt the scream tear his throat, felt the brink of shuddering nothingness, and screamed again:

The tears dimmed her eyes so that the steam pipe above her head was a weaving blur. Once again she tried, and then she heard the pound of feet behind her, heard John's hoarse cry, and then he had pulled her off the chair down into his arms.

He rocked her back and forth and said thickly, "Oh my darling! My poor, silly darling! I nearly lost you."

And suddenly she knew that only the fates had kept her from being a fool—knew that she could never leave him. Never. Tears were salt on her lips as she tried to tell him.

Goland spat into the yellow dust, showed his broken teeth in a wide grin, and began to shake his begging bowl again. Surely the Martian sun was too hot, even for a space tramp. It had given him strange visions. Even now they were fading from his mind. How absurd to think he was someone named Gahn, the younger, messing around with a screwy time-machine. Waking dreams in the hot Martian sun are weird. And all that guff about tenth-level minds. Nice babe in that dream though. Eighth-level, whatever that meant. A nice lush blonde creature named Luria. Reminded him of that waitress about ten-fifteen years ago in the NewMex terminal. He looked with disgust at the few bits of metal in the begging bowl and began to shake it vigorously, yowling in his cracked voice, "He'p an ole man git back to Earth! He'p an ole man git back to Earth!"

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

Continued from page 71)

the country with me for all those weeks."

General Clark dropped down beside Morlake. "Senator," he said, "for God's sake, the name of the country, the enemy?"

The dying man looked at him with the beginning of a sneer on his lips.

"The country has only one name," he said. He laughed a satanic laughter, that ended hideously in a gush of blood. Slowly, the big head grew limp, the eyes though still open took on a sightless glare. A dead man lay on the floor.

The two men, Clark and Morlake, climbed to their feet. Morlake said in a low voice, "Gentlemen, you have your answer." He saw they still did not comprehend what he had suspected for long now.

General Clark was grim. "When I think we've been giving him our inmost secrets for months—" He choked, and held out his hand. "Thanks."

Morlake said nothing. His first sharp sense of victory was yielding to an intense gloom. He grew aware that the older man's penetrating gaze was on him. Clark misread his expression.

"I know what's ailing you," Clark said. "But you're wrong. We have spaceships." He described the planned attack on the Moon.

Morlake nodded, but his depression remained. Such an attack would be necessary, to locate the launching sites of the bombs, and to find out where and how Tormey and his group had obtained them. But that was incidental. He accepted Tormey's last words literally.

The first atomic war had been, not an international, but a civil war. And now that Tormey was dead, the gang would scatter. A gang of Americans.

The war was over. Irrevocably.

MISSIVES AND MISSILES

(Continued from page 108)

Man-to-Save-the-World blurbs that have been running wild in the stf mags since the end of the war. Why not let the nasty old Martians blow up the earth for a change? Oh, all right, if you've gotta save the earth find some other way to save it. Maybe two-men-to-save-the-world stuff, huh? Mutations are out too.

Hey, I got sixteen correct answers in your quiz. What does that make me? (I never shoot sitting ducks.—Ed.)

That's all for now, but I'll be back. Dreadful thought, isn't it?

Are you going to revive ASTONISHING too? I hope—

Neil Graham.
R.R. 4
Mitchell, Ont.
Canada.

Dear Editor:

There is no doubt that you have finally done what the fan world has been waiting and hoping for in reviving Super Science. Now that you have done this, the next thing to do is revive Astonishing Stories. You can charge fifteen or twenty cents for it. I doubt if you would have any trouble getting it. I would gladly pay a quarter myself.

But to get on with the analysis of the January issue. Cover: I guess it is just my personal preference, but I just don't take to these symbolic covers that seem to be all the rage these days. This strengthens my belief that the cover should portray a scene from some certain story. Put Lawrence on inside pics and Finlay on the cover.

Inside pics: Glad to see you have Bok and Paul back.

I know that I am sticking my neck out a yard for Finlay fans to lop off on Nos. 1 and 4, but these pics, although drawn by one of stf's top artists, do not belong in SSS. They belong in FFF or FN, but not here. Looking through my back files of mags, I find that both Bok and Paul did much finer work for you in the past. Let's hope they improve.

Departments: All okay except the science quiz. Get rid of it and put a review of future issues in its place. The department heads are all O.K. except the one for the quiz.

Stories: 1. A Handful of Stars. More. Much more.

2. The Bounding Crown. More from Blish.
3. The Black Sun Rises. This would be first except that I don't like this type.

4. The Sky Will Be Ours. Good plot.
5. Moonworm's Dance. Not bad. Who is this Mullen?

6. Cabal. This would have been better if it had been about three times as long.

7. The Silence.
8. The Other. Essence of hack.

I guess that I have taken up enough space so I'll sign off.

In closing, let me beg you to stay clear of

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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I would also like to put out a plea to anyone who has magazines to sell or trade. I hereby guarantee, world without end, that anybody who writes me will be answered.

More Bok. More Paul. Lawrence on inside.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Kenneth Paris
230 Spring Lake St.
Madisonville, Ky.

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I have ever made comment on any reading material, either verbally or written, during my 38½ years visit to this overgrown rock, although I probably have read at least a carload of S.F. during my time.

Now it may be that my taste has matured, or it could be that the quality of writers has depreciated; then again it could be that so many things I once enjoyed as pure romantic fiction are now fact and commonplace that the wealth of material has reached near exhaustion. I don't know what the answer is, but I do know it is an awful waste of time to read a dozen stories to get one good one.

However, this note is not designed for complaint, but rather for praise. This little story "THE SKY WILL BE OURS" by M. W. Wellman seems to combine that quality of feasibility and logic woven into an impossible fantasy. Few writers seem to achieve that, lately. While reading the story one is cognizant that it could not be so, although very entertaining. But later one has the feeling this must have already happened, just the way it was presented. Like rare wine, it tastes better after you have it down, even than while drinking it.

Please do not think I am setting myself up as a critic. I realize my lack of qualifications for such a noble calling. However, I do know what I like and sometimes I even know why I like it. At any rate if this fella can turn 'em out like that just every-now-and-then, I'm for having more of his stories.

Frankly, I am an avid reader of another S.F. monthly. Have been reading it off and on since I was a kid in high school. Your January issue is the first one for me. I happened to have a little more time than usual last week and having finished my usual SF meal for this month I bought it on impulse. I had to buy something, because I had nearly worn out the vendor's magazine racks, looking for something to pass the time with. I'm afraid I'm about to be proselytized.

Yours sincerely,

Sam L. Dennison
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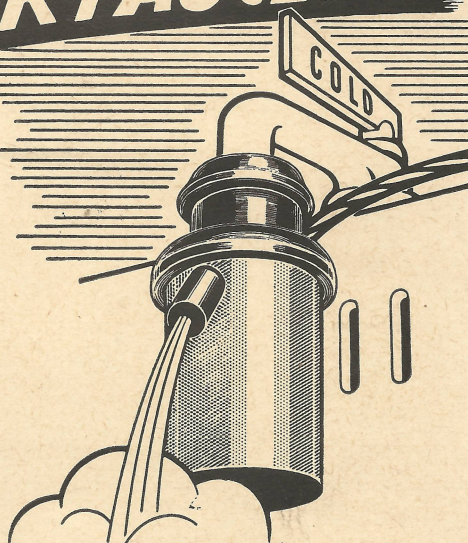
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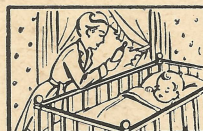
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