JULY

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THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

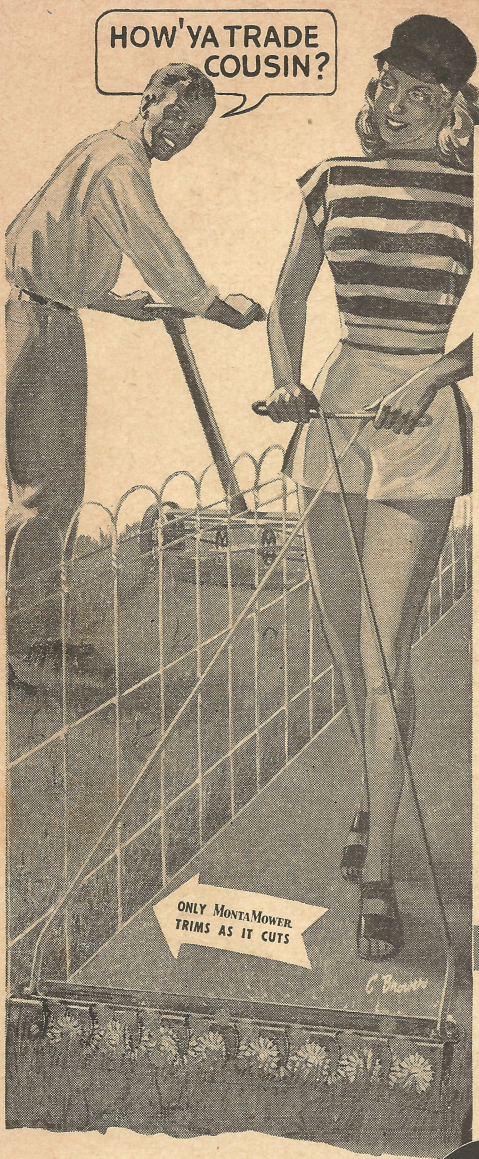
THE BRAIN BEAST

A NOVEL OF FORGOTTEN WORLDS

by WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

CHANGELING

by RAY BRADBURY



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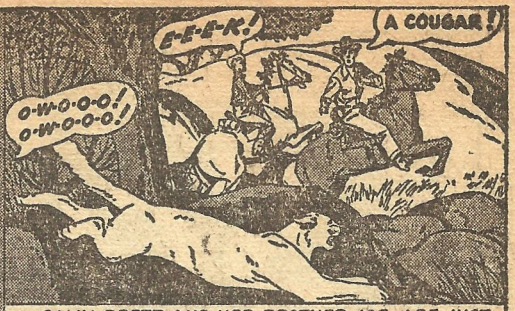
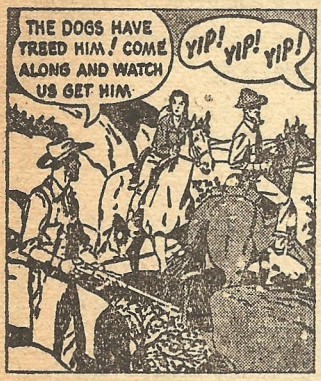
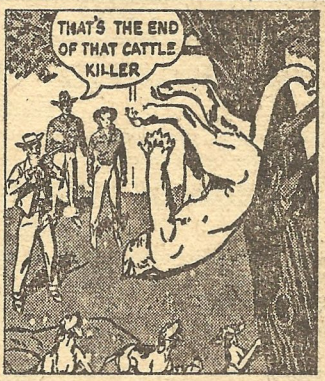
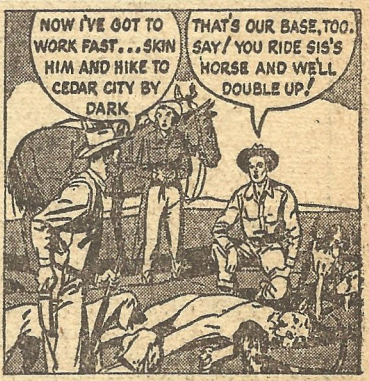


SALLY BRETT AND HER BROTHER JOE, ARE JUST TURNING HOMEWARD AFTER A DAY-LONG RIDE IN STATE CANYON FOREST WHEN . . .







- THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION -

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

25¢

THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 5 JULY, 1949 No. 3

A NOVEL OF FORGOTTEN WORLDS

EIGHT STORIES OF TOMORROW

DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

Illustrations by Bok, Finlay, Kramer, Lawrence, Leydenfrost and Paul
Cover by Lawrence

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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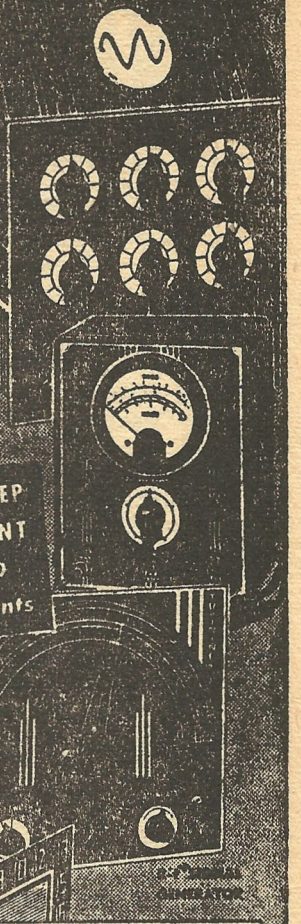

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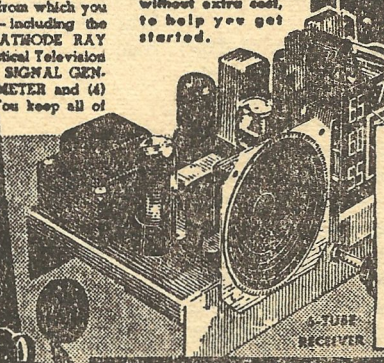

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For Comedy-Romance: "The Barkeleys of Broadway" with Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Oscar Levant, Billie Burke (MGM). Technicolor.

Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers put new meaning into the old Hollywood cliché—"together again." Back after nine years as Josh and Dinah Barkeley—a show-stopping, man and wife act—they sing, dance, cavort and quarrel through one of the gayest pictures in a long time. The plot? Well, what difference does it make when there is a bright musical score by Harry Warren and Ira Gershwin, Oscar Levant playing the "Sabre Dance" and solo and duet dance numbers by the two stars. "Shoes With Wings On," a routine by Astaire, is worth the price of admission. *Surefire entertainment for all.*

• • •

For A Western: "Stampede" with Rod Cameron, Gale Storm, Don Castle and Johnny Mack Brown (Allied Artists).

A dam on the ranch of Tim and Mike McCall (Don Castle and Rod Cameron) is cutting off the water supply from the grazing land of some new settlers. Connie (Gale Storm), one of the settlers' daughters, tries unsuccessfully to get them to open the dam but only succeeds in infatuating Tim He is killed protecting the dam from dynamiting. On a second attempt to destroy the dam, the settlers stampede the McCall cattle. Mike McCall loses the cattle but saves the dam after a vicious gun fight. Mike makes everything right in the end with Connie and the settlers. *Some inevitable aspects of a "Western"—cows, cowpokes, settlers—but a rootin', tootin' film.*

• • •

For Sports: "Champion" with Kirk Douglas, Marilyn Maxwell and Arthur Kennedy (United Artists).

Through crafty managing and put-up fights, Midge Kelly (Kirk Douglas) rises from a down-and-outer to a championship contender. Because he can't make any time with his opponent's flashy girl friend (Marilyn Maxwell), Midge wins a fight "the syndicate" wanted him to throw. For this, Midge is hailed as a symbol of clean sportsmanship by the newspapers, but outside the ring he continues as a ruthless character hurting all those who stand in his way—including four women, his manager and his crippled brother (Arthur Kennedy). To the very end, when he dies after winning the championship, the public only knows him as a great champion—"a credit to the fight game." *Ring Lardner's great prize fight story is told with force and realism.*

• • •

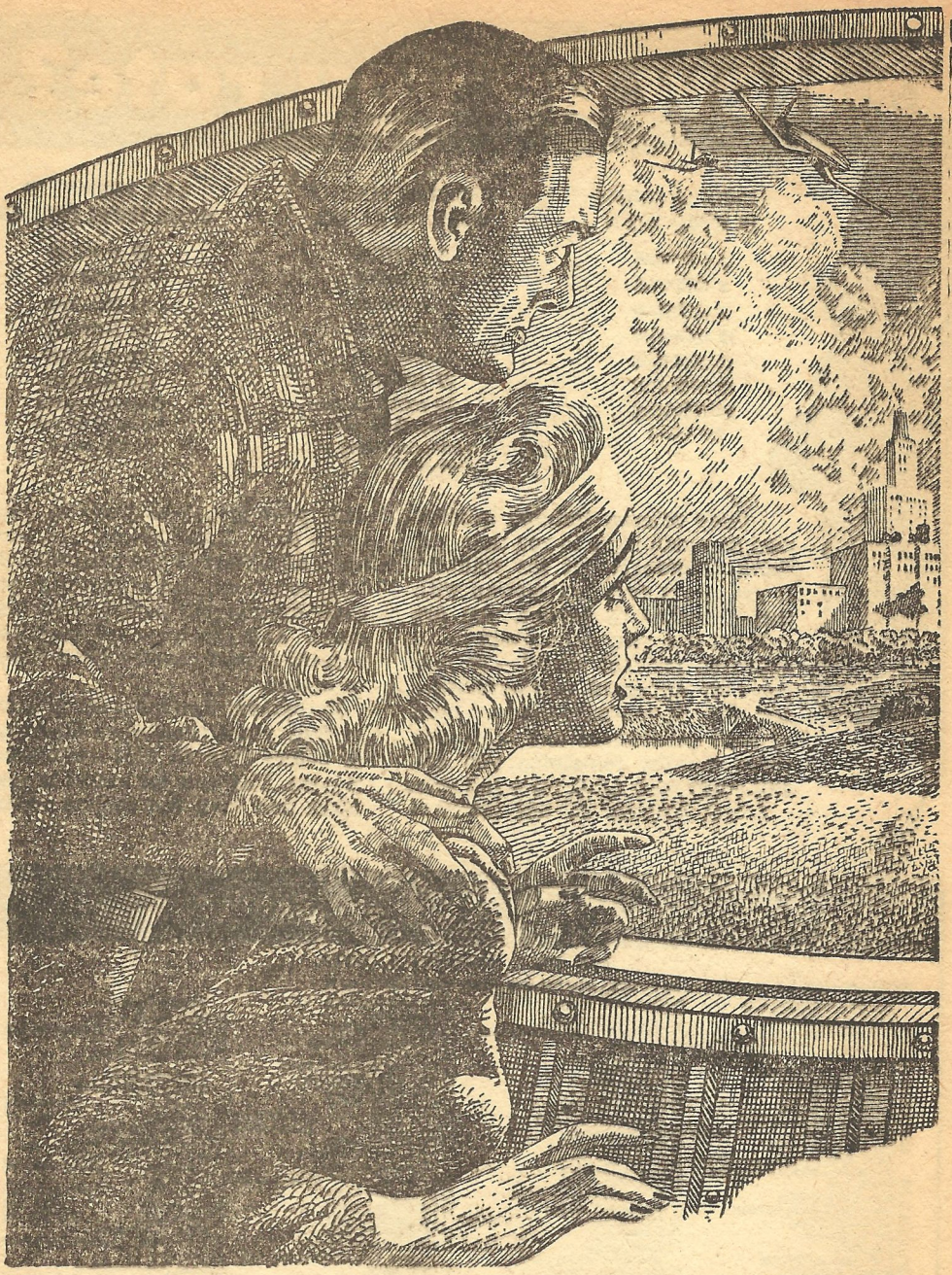
For Mystery: "Lust for Gold" with Ida Lupino and Glenn Ford (Columbia).

Four men have died in the last two years looking for the lost $20,000,000 gold mine in the Superstitious Mountains near Phoenix, Arizona. When Barry Storm is accused of murdering the last of these, he retraces his trail with the deputy sheriff to prove his innocence. From the deputy and a series of flashbacks he learns the history of the mine, which was first discovered by two Mexican brothers. Later a desert rat (Glenn Ford) comes into possession of the mine by killing off all contenders, including the scheming Julia Thomas (Ida Lupino). Back to the present, Storm discovers the murderer and the strange secret of the mine in the moonlight. *Worthwhile and off the beaten mystery trail.*

• • •

For Adventure: "Scott of the Antarctic" with John Mills, Derek Bond, Harold Warender, James Justice and Reginald Beckwith (Eagle-Lion). Technicolor.

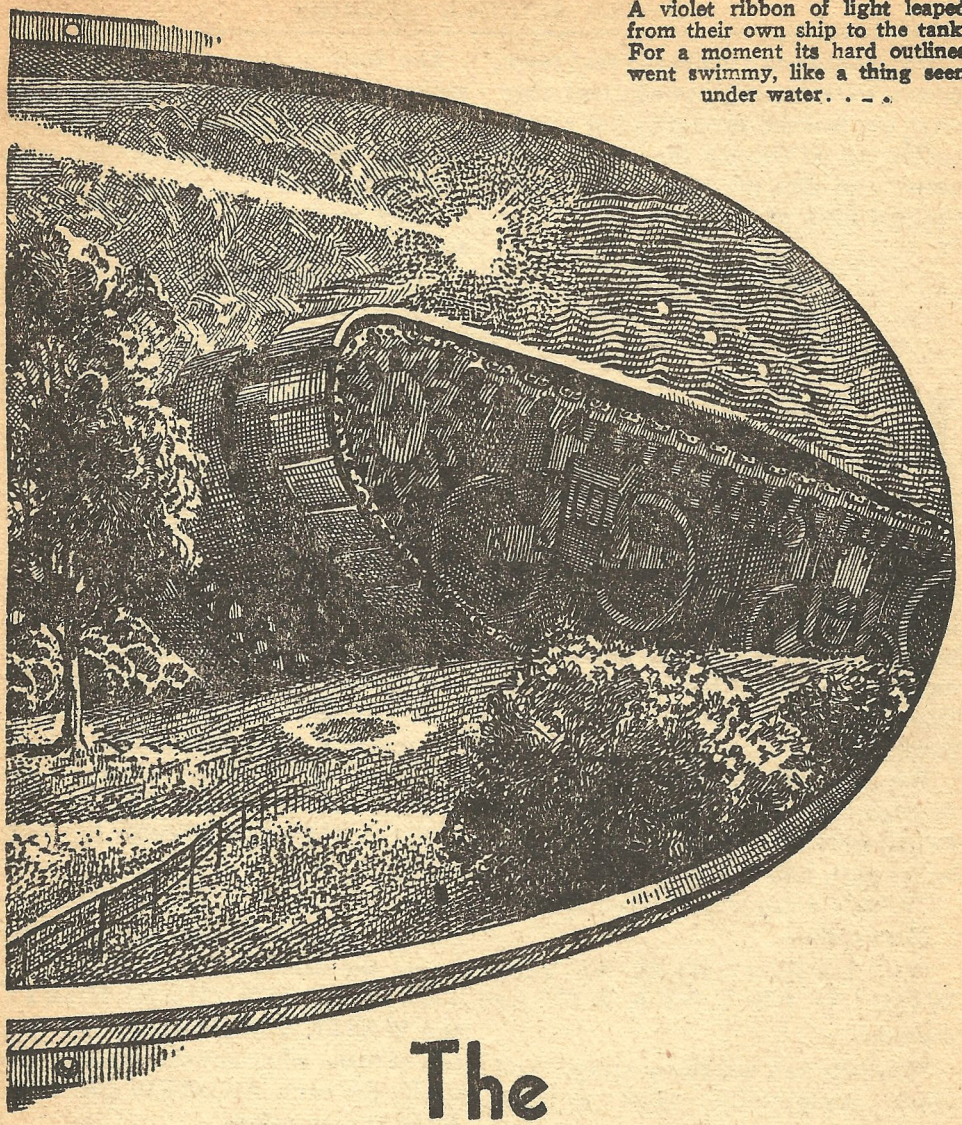
This is the true story of Robert Scott, an English naval officer, and his four companions whose expedition to the South Pole in 1909 ended in tragedy. Magnificently told, the picture follows the men from their homes in England, across the Great Ice Barrier of the Antarctic and on to the South Pole. Bitter with disappointment, they find that Amundsen's expedition had arrived at the Pole before them. On the way back from the Pole to their ship, the party fights the fierce Antarctic weather and terrain but loses the battle only eleven miles from safety. Their frozen bodies are discovered eight months later. *A well-played, well-photographed chronicle.*



A creator of life, who could not live . . . an insect who worshiped Man . . . three space-voyagers who made blood-sacrifice to Fear — a single destroyer who crouched in all their minds!

FOREWORD

IF, AT a moment when the patch of sunlight called the 25th May was sliding around the Earth, omniscient being had been asked what was



A violet ribbon of light leaped from their own ship to the tank. For a moment its hard outlines went swimmy, like a thing seen under water. . . .

The BRAIN BEAST

A Novel by William F. Temple

the most momentous event occurring at that instant on the globe, it would have indicated four widely separated points:

A house on a hill overlooking the town of Jacksburg, Ohio.

A radio station far out on the Arizona desert.

A room in a nursing home in the Surrey hills, England.

A ledge on the North Col of Mount Everest, in the Himalayas.

For omniscience could see that these points were interconnected; that they were not isolated mysteries but events coalescing to become the one greater event; and that the greater event was the real birth of humanity.

CHAPTER ONE

It's Not the Heat

MARY SLADE and her brother, Morton, lived in the house on the hill overlooking Jacksburg. At the moment, the center of their interest was the house next door.

Like theirs, it was wooden, white, with a wide front porch. A week ago one could scarcely have told the two houses apart. Each had the same chintz curtains, the same green lawn out in front, the same white-painted picket fence.

But now—Mary and Mort peered through the chintz at their neighbor as he hammered the fourth wooden notice, on its post, into his lawn.

"What's it this time?" asked Mary.

Mort craned.

"DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY," he reported.

"Perhaps he's not really crazy," said Mary thoughtfully. "Just a little cranky."

Long, hatchet-faced Morton turned to look at his young blue-eyed sister.

"Look, kid, if that was meant for his neighbors he'd plant it facing the road, wouldn't he? Well, look at it. It's like the others—facing his own front porch."

"Maybe it's to inspire him every time he looks out of the window?"

"He can't see out of any of his stupid windows! He fastened up all the outside shutters last Thursday."

"So he did," said Mary. "Hm."

She took a long peek at the new notice and the narrow back of their neighbor, Dr. Hartley. "I'm going out to see if he wants any help," she said.

"Why?"

"He's such a little man and that's such a big mallet."

"You mean, you want to be nosy again. Okay, so do I. Let's go. But we'll get the cold shoulder again."

"It's only reserve. You know how reserved Englishmen are. Especially the academic type."

"Yeah," said Morton. "But he never used to be like that. He was friendly enough before he started putting signs up on the lawn."

"Perhaps he's delirious. Come on."

They went out. They had scarcely put their feet over the dividing fence before the thin little man with the white hair spun around, mallet in hand. He regarded them coldly. He put up one hand to halt their advance, and pointed with the other at a notice: AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE.

Morton looked around at the other notices staggered over the lawn, all facing the doctor's house. IT'S NOT THE HEAT, IT'S THE HUMIDITY and WASTE NOT, WANT NOT said two of them, while one announced cryptically the name ANDREW CROSSE. All in Disney colors.

He asked, with some concern: "Dr. Hartley, have you been feeling the heat lately? Or the humidity? I mean, would you like me to fetch a doctor just to check up—"

"It never rains but it pours," interrupted Hartley, frowning.

"True. True," nodded Mary. "And all that glitters isn't a goldberg. I think you'd better have that doctor, doc."

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away," said Hartley in his grave, reedy voice.

Morton groaned. "It's enough to make even Andrew Crosse," he said. "By the way, who is Andrew Crosse? The name seems to ring a bell. Friend of yours, doctor?"

Hartley stared at him stonily for a moment. "Ugh!" he emitted suddenly. He turned on his heel, strode into his house and slammed the door.

"Not a friend of his," commented Mary. They strolled back to their own house. All Jacksburg lay spread out below them like a toy town. Distant windows glittered in the sun, model trolley cars moved slowly along the blocks. In the clear air you could even make out the moving specks of people.

"Andrew Crosse," muttered Morton, as they went indoors. "Wait a minute. . . . Got it!"

He accelerated along the passage, up the stairs, and dived into his den at the top front of the house. Mary found him scanning the yards of bookshelves. "Here it is," he said, sliding a book out from a top shelf. He riffled through the pages, then stood taut, reading intently.

Mary sat in the tubular steel chair, put her feet up on the desk, lit a cigarette.

TEN MINUTES later she stubbed the end out.

"Think you can make this world again?" she said.

Mort started. He looked around slowly, focused his eyes on the room as though it were the first time he'd seen it.

"Oh. You still here?" he muttered.

Mary pinched her own arm experimentally.

"Yeah," she reported.

Morton came over, bringing his book, and sat on the edge of the desk. "Maybe it's another Andrew Crosse," he said. "The guy in this book's been dead some time."

"Long as he's buried, I reckon that's okay," said Mary, callously. "What's the book?"

He held it so that she could see the title: "Oddities," by Lieutenant Commander R. T. N. Gould.

"Published by Geoffrey Bles, London," he said. "It's a collection of articles about queer facts. The facts are authentic enough—all documented. There's one about Andrew Crosse. He was an Englishman. Lived in an old mansion in the Quantock Hills, in Somerset. In 1837 he was the most reviled man in England."

"Why?"

"There's a lot to it. Listen. He was an amateur scientific research worker, but a careful and methodical one. In 1837 he was experimenting with the artificial formation of crystals by means of weak and long-continued electrical currents. He was trying to make crystals of silica by letting a fluid—a mixture of hydrochloric acid and a solution of silicate of potash—seep through a piece of porous stone. The stone was largely oxide of iron, kept electrified by a battery."

"Sounds exciting," yawned Mary, taking another cigarette.

"On the fourteenth day, observing through a lens, he saw a few small whitish excrescences projecting from the stone. On the eighteenth day they were bigger, throwing out filaments. On the twenty-sixth day they were perfect insects standing erect on a few bristles forming a tail. They had eight legs, and on the twenty-eighth day they moved 'em. A few days later they detached themselves from the stone, moved around freely. A few weeks later there were about a hundred of 'em."

"What did he do—sell 'em to a flea circus?"

"He called them 'acari.' He thought

they were from ova deposited by insects floating in the atmosphere. But—there were no signs of shells or remains of them. He thought they might have come from the water content. He examined the water. It was pure."

"They'd been hiding in the lump of stone all the time," said Mary.

"No. He discarded the stone. He electrified the fluid alone in a glass cylinder. The 'acari' appeared again, around the edge of the fluid, and sometimes two inches underneath it. They climbed up the electrified wire stuck in the fluid, and many of 'em escaped from the cylinder."

"How did they get in, in the first place?"

"That's what Crosse wanted to know. He got 'em clinging to a bit of quartz in flouric acid holding silica in solution—H_2SiF_6. Then he really got tough. He boiled his silica solution, put it piping hot in a closed, air-tight glass retort. One wire was fused through the wall of the retort; the other came in through a cup of mercury at the beak of the retort. He connected the wires to a battery. The oxygen and hydrogen liberated through electrolysis pushed the atmosphere in the retort out through the mercury, totally expelling it. So now there was no way extraneous matter could enter. The retort had been washed out with hot alcohol."

"And he got bugs again?"

"He did."

"Why didn't he try insecticide?"

Morton sighed. "I'll try some on you if you don't cut the cracks. You seem to have the brains of a louse. Can't you get what all this implies?"

"Do I have to?"

"All England got it in 1837, anyway, when he made his work known. They lambasted him for presuming to create life artificially."

"You mean, they swallowed his story whole?"

"Look," said Morton, patiently. "Crosse was a single-minded, straight guy."

"I get you. Not a double-Crosse."

Morton was patient. He resumed, "Another scientist did the experiment with even more stringent precautions. Same results. And does the name Faraday mean anything to you?"

"Wasn't he in that movie last week—?"

"He was one of the pioneers of electricity. At the height of the uproar in 1837, Faraday stated in a paper read at the Royal Institution that similar effects had occurred during his own electrical experiments."

"It says that in the book?"

"Yes."

"Where did the rest of the dope come from?"

"Mainly from two papers written by Crosse in 1837. One in the Annals of Electricity, October, 1837. The other in the Transactions of the London Electrical Society for 1838. Also, after his death—in 1855—his wife wrote out again the details of the experiments in a book called 'Memorials of Andrew Crosse,' published in 1857."

"That's a long time ago. Hasn't anyone found out anything more about it since?"

"No one seems to have bothered to try," said Morton.

"What about the little man next door? He's English. And he's a university lecturer—or was. And a Doctor of Science, or something. He knows about Andrew Crosse, too, and seems to want to advertise him. I bet he's producing bugs by the million next door."

"I doubt it," said Morton. "He's not a Doctor of Science, he's a Doctor of Literature."

He slid off the desk and went over to the window to gaze down at the front lawns.

"He's out again," he said, presently. "Putting up another notice. It's a beaut. Must have taken some work. No hard colors this time—all pastel stuff. Lettering in old gold, apricot, orange, sepia, on a background of emerald, olive, and beryl."

"Ugh. Sounds like decomposition. What's the lettering say?"

"HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY."

"Now I know he's nuts," said Mary. "Fetch the doctor."

"Okay," said Morton, and reached for the phone.

CHAPTER TWO

The Moon Terror

THE RADIO station stood alone in the Arizona desert like an empty white box someone had abandoned on the seashore. Near the far horizon something like a flattened oval mirror reflected the sun's rays dazzlingly. It was the patch of fused sand where the rocket ship had started for the Moon nearly two days before. The rocket was the first manned lunar ship—humanity's first physical stride toward a new world.

Inside the station, a single voice had priority. Even General Atkinson, whose irascible voice everyone dreaded, kept quiet when the voice spoke. It was coming secondarily from a loudspeaker on the wall; primarily from Mooring, one of the three men in the ship 150,000 miles away.

In the receiving room, a circle of technicians, Washington big shots, Army brass-hats and front-rank reporters sat very still, except that the reporters' pencils flickered over paper. It was a still-life contrast to the press room next door, which someone had thoughtfully soundproofed.

Here was more than news. Here was drama. Some unforeseen stress had attacked those people out in the void. And it was mounting.

The strain could be detected in the voice itself, fading and booming though it was, as the short radio waves battled to go through the ionosphere.

" . . . We must be batting along like an electron in a hurry, but you wouldn't notice it—the jets are off at the moment and we're coasting. I guess you guys down there know what you're doing. But you don't know how it feels to us up here. We feel that we're suspended, helpless. Hanging perfectly still, like a bathysphere on the end of a cable . . . The bottom of the oecan could hardly be blacker than this sky. It's like being stuck inside a tar barrel, along with a billion specks of radium dust . . . . The stars aren't quite what I'd expected. They don't twinkle and they don't seem friendly, somehow, any more. They all look smaller. Hard, bright, cold little pinpoints. Unsympathetic. Staring like insects' eyes. Millions of 'em.

"I thought that out here, with parsecs of nothingness all around, I'd get agoraphobia. It's the other way around. I feel shut in a tight little cell. A suffocating sort of feeling. I keep remembering there's only so much air for the three of us. The others feel it too! It's not just me. . . . And we can't do anything about it. We can't get hauled up and let out. Got to be, I suppose. All the same, I wish there were manual controls on this ship.

"Can see the Moon away on one side from where I am. Looking quite big. A disk, one half gray-black, the other, bright yellow-white splashed with silver. The Earth-light, on the dark half, is all we have to remind us of our home.

"The Earth itself is behind our tail. We couldn't see it without opening a port and craning out. I feel a terrific urge to do just that. To see Earth, break this claustrophobia, get a breath of fresh air. . . . That's ridiculous, of course. There isn't any air. Only what's in here. And that's rationed.

"Christ, I wish I were down there where you are! I'd go straight out on the open desert, walk miles, gulp the air down. . . .

"Feeling depressed. Signing off for a while. Hope to be reasonable when I come on again."

There followed now only the murmuring and crackling the antenna was gathering from the endless spaces.

Some reporters slipped hastily away to send the news hot. The wiser birds hung on to eavesdrop on Atkinson. He sat there, brooding. There were one or two nervous coughs, but no one dared break the silence before him.

He had always been a leader. At college, captain of the football team, a heavyweight boxer none could match, and a mathematician who before long was teaching his teachers. He did not seek honors or degrees: they came and attached themselves to him.

And then, in his late thirties, when he was rising to the top of the Army Technical Section, some obscure form of paralysis got him, reduced him to a chair-bound cripple. He fought it, was still fighting it after ten years. And by a mighty sustained effort of will he kept control over the upper part of his body.

So he was always braced for aggression, and the slightest opposition to his will had him spitting fire.

"Hm," he said, presently. "Their morale's crumbling. There's something funny going on."

One of the Washington big shots said: "Maybe that's just Mooring alone. The others—"

Atkinson rounded on him. "Mooring's the toughest of the three," he snapped. "I picked him. I insisted on him. I trust him like I trust my right hand. You can bet your bottom dollar that if he's cracking the other two are about broken."

The other recoiled slightly. "Oh, yes," he said pacifically. "But maybe we underestimated the psychological effect of putting them in a ship over which they've no more control than over a runaway train. Perhaps—"

"The reasons for this sort of control are manifold, as everyone else knows," said the general, as if addressing an idiot child. "Because the information for negotiating a precise and safe landing can only be supplied by radar. The crew can't observe for themselves, because there isn't room for the transmitter in the ship. Too much delicate stuff in it, anyway. Liable to be damaged by the takeoff, and then where would they be? Again, I wanted to spare them the worries of navigation, leave 'em free to make observations and notes. And still again, we couldn't be sure what effect the condition of weightlessness, during coasting, would have on human bodies. We thought it might cause sickness—as to some extent it has. Or upset the balance organs, impairing physical judgment—and their navigation would go to hell. That effect happened, as you've heard."

"Yes, I heard," said the politician, glad to agree about something. "Then there's this odd depression. It's just as well their guidance isn't in their own hands. They seem to have lost the will to go on."

The hostility died out of the general's eyes. He looked pensively at the radar screen showing greenly the shape of the rocket ship suspended amid a reticule of graduated hairlines. He glanced at the chronometer, then

pressed a button and moved a dial slowly. The faintest luminosity came from the tail of the ship. It began to move off the screen with the added speed of the jet. He busied himself with centering it, and then lapsed into silence.

"I don't get it," he muttered, presently. "All the first day they were bursting with excitement. Pleased as punch to have got off the Earth, mad crazy to get to the Moon. Full of speculation. And now. . . . they're already wanting to come back, before they've even got there!"

ONE OF the brass-hats ventured, "It's a pity we can't get through to them on the radio. A pep talk from you might have worked wonders."

"If we can't, we can't," said Atkinson, huffishly. "No good whining about it. Anyway, we've learned something about the ionosphere: it's easier to get through from outside. The odd thing is that the radar is faultless."

He turned a switch on the panel. A nine-foot square on the wall changed abruptly from blank gray to the luminous green of the cathode ray screen. It showed in fine detail the quarter of the Sea of Serenity about Bessel.

Atkinson glanced at the smaller screen before him showing the rocket ship in space, and then back at the green lunar scene.

"When I get her off this small screen onto the big one, I'll be happy," he said. "She'll come in at the bottom left-hand corner. We'll run her up forty miles or so towards Point NW 277395, then bring her down within ten miles of the lunar surface, rear first and braking jets at full blast. We get her in side elevation on the small screen. The landing will need some tricky fingerwork on the—'"

He checked himself. From the loudspeaker came the sound of a transmitter starting up. There was a preliminary cough, and Mooring's voice came again.

"Back again, not feeling any better. We all feel lousy—on edge, irritable, depressed. We keep snarling at each other. Like three General Atkinsons at their worst. I feel safe in saying that, general, with nearly 200,000 miles between us. Especially since it's not certain you can hear. But we know you're still watching and guiding us. The jets started up a few minutes back, and gave us weight again. And we're right on course.

"We ought to be grateful. But, dammit, we're not. We feel your hand on us, pushing us the opposite direction from the way we want to go. We resent it. That isn't all. We're scared green of going on. God knows why, but we're scared of the Moon! Every minute it gets worse.

"Then we've got the claustrophobia. I don't know how much imagination there is in it, but we feel half-suffocated. We've examined the air apparatus a dozen times. It seems all right. But . . . there must be something wrong somewhere! It's as stuffy in here as a telephone booth in summer. The sweat's running off me. . . . Pipe down a minute, you two! Can't hear myself talking on this thing. Besides, you're wasting air. . . .

"The Moon looks bigger and brighter. A dead world. Pockmarked, dried up, stained, like the face of a decaying corpse. . . . Gives me the willies to look at it. I dread the thought of touching it. If only . . . Look out, Paul!"

The voice had been slow, unsteady, punctuated by gasps, as if the speaker had been short of air. But the last three words were a sharp shout.

Followed a silence.

There was a stirring and muttering

among the crowd in the radio room. The reporters were tense with excitement. They held their pencils poised for action like darts.

"Quiet!" snapped Atkinson.

There was silence and stillness for five minutes, save for the continual wash of etheric noises and occasional crackle of static from the loudspeaker. Most of the waiting audience watched the green echo of the ship on the radar screen and wondered what drama was going on behind the hull that reflected those impulses.

At last Mooring's voice came again, obviously controlled with effort. "Got to report . . . two deaths. Paul Levett. Arnold Todd . . . They'd been arguing for quite a while. We all had . . . I was broadcasting. I didn't get the last of it. First I knew, I saw Todd grab a pair of steel compasses. He—stabbed at Paul. One point . . . went through Levett's left eye, pierced the brain . . . I asked Todd why he did it. He only—glared at me. He looked so dangerous I got my revolver out. I remember how we laughed when somebody suggested we bring a gun. 'There aren't any wild beasts in space,' we said. 'You never know,' you said, general. And we never knew—never knew we were going to be the wild beasts.

"Todd looked at the gun and said, 'I get it. Shot while resisting arrest, eh?' I asked him what he meant. He said, 'You know well enough. I was crazy mad when I killed Paul, but there was a solid reason behind it. The air's running out here. There's not enough for all. But there's more for only two. And even more for only one. You're getting ready to be the only one, aren't you?'

I said, 'Don't be a fool,' but he made a dive for my gun. I fired—missed. The second shot . . . got him through the head . . .

"I'm sitting here in the bright moonlight. It's pouring in through the ports on one side, slantwise. Queer effect. My first shot smashed the light batteries. All the acid ran out. Fubar, fubar. . . . I'm sitting here in bright moonlight, mike in one hand, gun in the other. The other side of the cabin is pitch dark. There are a couple of corpses lying there in that darkness. . . . And this—whatever the hell it is—is all around me. That's why I don't leave go of my gun. I'm trying to keep a grip on myself.

"The ship's still accelerating. Guess it's the final burst to cross the neutral point. Then down we go. Two dead men and a nervous wreck. It was self-defense! It had to be! How else could I—"

There was a sort of sob, and the transmitter was off again.

Atkinson's hands were gripping the arms of his wheel-chair so tightly that the knuckles stood out white. He was leaning forward, mouth tight and grim, eyes coldly glaring.

One of the world's leading astronomers dared to speak.

"Might I suggest, general, that in view of what's happened this project be abandoned? It's no use landing a man in that state on the Moon. Better turn the ship back, save it and what data has been collected. Then we could interview Mooring, get some idea of the psychological sickness that's attacked them, and guard against it on the next trip."

Atkinson turned his cold glare on the astronomer.

"Mooring's still trusting me," he said deliberately. "And I'm keeping my faith in him. He's got more guts than any other man I know. I'm backing him to come out of the other side of that nightmare. He's not going to give in, nor am I. That's final."

He looked at a chronometer and, timing the movement, turned a switch.

"The jets are off now," he said. "Ten minutes' coasting now will edge the ship over the neutral point. Then it begins a free fall to the Moon. We'll take care of it again later, when it appears on the big screen."

The company relaxed a little. They sat imagining the scene in the ship as it went falling with its cargo to the dead Moon.

CHAPTER THREE

Dream of the Id

IN THE room in the nursing home on the wooded Surrey hill, in England, another one-man struggle was going on.

He was a young man, thirtyish, but his hair was already more gray than brown. He lay on his side, in bed. He was alone in the room, which overlooked pine woods and gorse-covered heaths rolling away and up to the Hindhead ridge.

His struggle was with a pencil and a paralysed body, not a muscle of which he'd been able to stir for six years—until now.

Sweat stood on his brow, and his face was strained and pale, as he forced his fingers to grip and guide the pencil on the letter-pad he had managed to make the doctor understand he wanted. But the doctor was a busy man. He hadn't waited after the first few straggly words Morgan had succeeded in getting down.

"That's great," he'd said, examining them. "Keep it up. I'll come back later and see what you've done. We'll have you cured yet. This is all very promising. Good luck."

He went. And Morgan's struggle, it seemed, was left without an audience.

Actually, there were at least three watchers. Two of them were invisible and one nearly so.

For hours he wrote. And this is what the intent watchers saw him form, letter by letter:

Statement by Douglas S. Morgan

The doctors think my case is hysteria. What was called "shell-shock" in the first World War. It is not so. The thoughts run in my mind as freely as ever they did. And what thoughts they have been these last six years!

My body has been paralysed by a suggestion in my subconscious mind, certainly. But it was not a suggestion placed there by any fear on my part. It came from outside. Or, shall I say, very far inside?

This looks like gibberish. It's plain I must set out the whole story if any notice is to be taken of this effort. I hope I can last the distance. For years I've been fighting to move. I never gave up hope, though knowing my opponent, I judged my chances infinitesimal. I can't explain this sudden partial victory over my near-atrophied finger muscles. But there's no time to waste on theories. Here are the facts.

Leon Strang—the pianist and composer—was my friend. He was my private music tutor before he started out on his own career. But Strang had a number of interests—an all-round genius. Psychology was one. But I didn't know how deeply he'd gone into it until the Second World War.

Before I went abroad I used to call on him during my furloughs if he happened to be home.

One evening I found him in an armchair with a book. The piano stood neglected in a corner.

I said, "Hello, so you're still around."

"Yes," he said. "I hope to be for some time. You see, I employ my

brain pretty strenuously all the time."

"Don't see the connection," I said, reaching for the whisky decanter.

"Have you never noticed that most of our greatest thinkers, artists, and scientists exceed the 'three-score-and-ten' without much effort? To name a few at random: Galileo, Michael Angelo, Darwin, Newton, Schopenhauer, Plato, Eratosthenes, Goethe, Tolstoy, Shaw, Wells—even though some of 'em were life-long semi-invalids like Darwin and Wells."

"I didn't notice any musicians among that lot," I said.

He laughed. "I'm not great—yet. Anyway, I've other interests than music."

He showed me the book he held. Freud's "Traumdeutung."

"Was Freud another long liver?"

"Yes. An octogenarian. Despite a serious disease."

"You mean, it's a case of mind over matter?"

He sobered. "It's a case of a strong Ego resisting the pernicious death-suggestion of the subconscious mind, the Id."

The whisky was warming my stomach.

"Well, you've no need to worry," I said. "You're egotistical enough."

"That's self-confidence, not self-approval."

"Perhaps you're right. I admit you've terrific self-confidence. You had the London Philharmonic in the palm of your hand all through Brahms' Fourth last Thursday. In fact, I think your conducting is even better than your playing."

"My composing will prove better than either, in time."

Strang got up and played a few bars on the grand. They were mainly in the bass clef, and sounded sinister, ominous—a dark threat.

"What's that?" I asked.

"The opening of the first movement of my Id Symphony," he said, quietly.

"What the hell is all this 'Id' business?"

He went back to his chair, collecting a drink on the way.

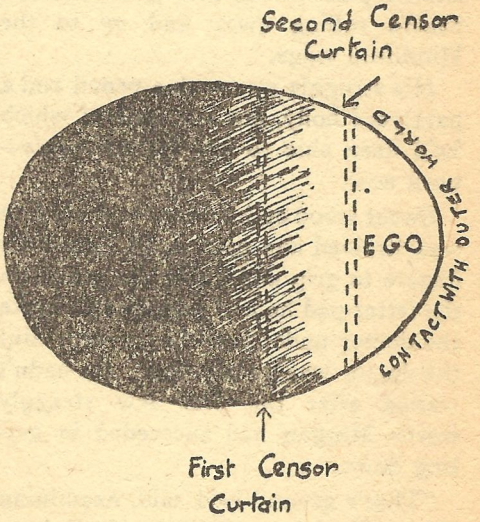
"I don't know it all. I'm still investigating. It's a solemn, awful business. I've been wandering alone on the edge of the unknown. I've never been afraid of anything before—I guess it's that self-confidence you mention. But this is making me damned uneasy. It's not so much what I actually know. It's what I surmise."

"Let's have it. I haven't much time. This was meant to be a flying visit. My pass expires at 10.30, and it's fifteen miles to my billet."

"I'll be as brief as I can, then."

He scribbled a sketch on the fly-leaf of "Traumdeutung."

I looked at it and raised my eyebrows.



"THAT'S a rough representation of Freud's idea of the human mind," Strang said. "The Ego is the only part of the mind that is you or

I, the part which has conscious control of the body. A small part, which would be completely overwhelmed by the influence of the subconscious were it not for two barriers of a force Freud calls the 'Censor', which act as buffers in between—and which we know vaguely as the 'conscience'.

"All the impulses that come from the subconscious—which Freud calls the 'Id'—are evil. Anger, greed, vanity, fear, hate. The Censor curtains take the direct impact of them and try to shield the Ego. The degree of the Censor's success depends upon the co-operation of the Ego in resisting. In the average person the Ego is weak. Not much will of its own. It acts more or less on the resultant force of the two obliquely opposing Id and Censor forces.

"The main battle-ground of the Id and Ego lies between the two Censor curtains. Freud calls it the 'pre-conscious.' Sort of no-man's-land. They thrust against each other. A trial of strength, the Censor aiding the Ego. If the Id wins and crowds the Ego back through the second curtain, then after the breakthrough it has the Ego at its mercy. We say the man is mad: he obey's every impulse his subconscious dictates. And those impulses are generally murderous or suicidal. In any case, the soul is killed.

"There are degrees of madness, of course, apart from the obvious homicidal maniacs and the manic-depressives. You have racial fixed ideas of suicide, like the lemmings — like the clear death-wish that lies deep at the heart of the German and Japanese races."

"I object," I said. "In the first place, there isn't any German 'race', and in the second, I think this racial explanation is an easy way of avoiding the real economic and social causes of war."

Strang shrugged. "It isn't important. Personally, I think most of us are nuts. We don't wish for wars, but we keep having 'em, bigger and noisier We pretend our Egos are functioning perfectly and providing sound reasons for these wars. Economic and social ones, among others. But it's the Id, pressing through the Censor curtains, that's thrusting these suggestions, these 'reasons', on us.

"But if the Ego is strong, it resists the suggestion. Does its own reasoning. These strong Egos are our geniuses. They are, I'm afraid, the only hope of homo sapiens. And they've got their backs to the wall these days, I'm telling you.

"One point you must understand. Humanity shares a common subconscious mind. Jung's theory, borne out by the practical laboratory work in extra-sensory perception by Rhine, Soal, Tyrrell, Thouless, Carington, and others. The same subconscious mind, the Id, attacks us all.

"Now, this is where I come into it . . .

"Several nights lately I've had the same dream. I find myself confronted by a white wall. No, something less substantial. Thick, white mist? No. More like a slow-motion film of Niagara Falls. A curtain of water, churned white, falling with majesty and restrained power. Anyway, I knew at once that it was the second Censor curtain.

"I advanced toward its brightness, passed into it like a wraith. Directly, a great and sweet exaltation surged up within me. I felt—it's hard to describe. The joy of faith vindicated, of love reciprocated, of reaching a safe haven in a storm, of peace, friendliness, serenity. That — and much more. Like Franck's Symphony indescribably glorified. I could feel cool tranquil

waves of force flowing about me, like a breeze on a hot day. I was utterly content. Wanted to stay there forever.

"Then suddenly I found myself drifting in a pinkish half-light, my sublimity on the ebb. I'd emerged at the far side of the Censor curtain. Oddly, the curtain I'd left was invisible from this side. This pink haze was all around. In the distance it became deeper and deeper, became red, then darker red, then, far away, merged into blackness. Across this blackness lay a thin shimmering white band. The other—the first—Censor curtain. Behind that must lie the mysterious realm of Id. I wanted to enter that realm and explore it.

"I began to move toward the curtain. Easily enough, at first. The region I was traversing could only be the preconscious. I got impressions of mighty conflicts that had occurred here in the past. Like unveiling an old battlefield.

"I went rapidly. Presently, the curtain was towering up like a white cliff. Then, when I could make out the descending streams of force, an unknown power suddenly barred my way. It was like walking into a wall of spongy rubber. I pushed on with increasing effort. I became exhausted, stopped pushing—and the force flung me back. I rested, and tried again. Same result. I gathered strength for a big effort. I penetrated farther, but the moment I had to rest from trying I was flung back to where I started.

"I rested, and then tried all-out. I got almost to the curtain.

"And then there was a sudden loud yell. Instantly, without volition, I went hurtling backwards across the pre-conscious, shot back through the second Censor curtain like a bullet going through a wreath of smoke—and awoke in bed with a start.

"It was dawn. Another cry sounded. It was the milkman beneath my window on his first round.

"I felt weak, spent, and hellishly annoyed. I could have got there, I thought. Then I remembered it was only a dream. But I had the dream again. And again. And each time some echo from this material world came at the crucial moment to awaken and defeat me. Finally the dream stopped recurring."

STRANG fell into brooding silence. I looked at my watch, shifted uneasily.

"Was that the end of it?" I ventured.

"Not quite. Last night I did everything calculated to make me dream. But first, I wanted no more interruptions. I took a quiet room at the back of the house. Hung thick blankets over the window. Stuffed up cracks and crannies. It was pretty well soundproof. And I arranged chairs to prevent me rolling out of bed—that had happened once. I read Wells, made my brain active, and ate an eminently indigestible supper of cheese, apples, and celery.

"I dreamed, all right. Same dream. But this time I broke into the further Censor curtain.

"It was the same as the previous curtain. Indescribable bliss. But when I drifted out of the other side of it, I passed abruptly into profound darkness. It was like being taken out of the bright-lit nave of a cathedral and dumped into the unlighted crypt. My uplift oozed from me.

"I felt cut off, utterly isolated, buried alive. The darkness seemed to press about me so thickly that I felt suffocated.

"Then, presently, I noticed dim blotches of color floating about in the darkness. Like those shapeless color

patches you seem to see when you close your eyes after looking at a bright light. Crimson, green, purple. Their aimless motion slowly became a circular one, like parts of a turning wheel. They became brighter, spun quicker. Then they were whirling dizzily, and my mind whirled with them. They became a gray blur, like the colors on a spinning Newton's disk. The grayness spread like a mist.

"Suddenly, this mist was split like a tissue, torn aside.

"I discovered myself in the center of a floor of highly polished stone, so lustrous it seemed unreal. I couldn't see any definite walls. A ring of tall plain pillars surrounded me, and outside were more pillars, and more pillars. An impenetrable forest of 'em. I had the impression that a huge black dome was arching over me. But it might have been the night sky. There were scattered points of light, like stars. Or it could have been some form of planetarium.

"Then gradually I became aware of another presence. Not human, but sentient. A faintly glowing ball of nebulosity appeared at the very edge of my perception. I couldn't get it into focus at all. It remained blurred and indistinct as though I were peering at it from the corners of my eyes or through someone else's spectacles.

"And then I heard a voice. Cold, hard, deliberate. Chilling, because it was utterly emotionless.

"'Your will is abnormally strong, little Ego,' it said. 'You are the only one to reach my frontiers for nearly ten millions of years. . . .'"

Morgan's pencil slipped from his cramped fingers, rolled off the pad onto the counterpane. He was exhausted. He closed his eyes. He tried to resist sleep, but it overcame him.

The watchers relaxed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Abominable Snowman

TWO MEN lay in their eiderdown sleeping bags in the two-man tent on the narrow ledge on the North Col of Mount Everest. They were at a greater height than any other men on Earth. They meant, in a few hours, to get higher yet. They were leading the current attack on the unconquered peak.

It was scarcely dawn, but they were already awake and talking—hoarsely, for the membranes of their throats were slightly frost-bitten.

One was Sherwood Parkston, from Ontario. A huge man, physically and mentally. Too heavy for top-flight mountaineering, the experts judged. But they left out his inflexible will.

The other was George Merling, Englishman, graduate from Cambridge University. Young, medium-sized, wiry. The right build, the experts said. He was as likely to make it as anyone.

Merling had been lying there, his nose a couple of inches from the snow-weighted convex bulge of the tent side, mentally picturing his position in time and space.

The coolies and rickshaws of Darjeeling seemed years ago—another life. The journey from there seemed more real. Somewhere away and below now stretched the dusty bare Tibetan plains, and the gorges, mountain passes and forest country of Sikhim. He remembered the pilgrimage that went on and on, over rocky tracks, past the lama-series where the lamas droned in worship and spun their prayer wheels.

Then the spectacle of the great Himalayan chain.

And at last Everest, and the last monastery in the valley at its foot.

Down there in the base camp they

were warm and comfortable—and wondering. Wondering whether he and Sherwood would make it that day. Down at Camp Five they'd be wondering, too—Dyke, Renson, West, Scriven, and the Nepalese porters who'd gone down again last night: the ledge was too narrow to sleep more than two.

"Sherry," he said, "do you ever stop to wonder why the hell we ever wanted to come to this bleak, freezing, and damned uncomfortable spot?"

The Canadian grunted.

"I'm comfortable enough. What's the matter with you—have your bedsocks come off?"

"No. I've just been reflecting that what started me on this crazy trip was an idiotic fancy I got in my teens. I read that the height of Everest was 29,002 feet. I always liked to see things neat and tidy, in round figures. That odd two feet irritated me. I got a yen to climb Mount Everest with an axe and chop them off. I grew out of that obsession, but the idea of climbing Everest stuck. And here I am."

"It might have been easier to have shoveled the two feet away from the bottom," observed Parkston. "If you'd have been young when I was, you'd have found there was 140 feet to cut off. The textbooks gave the height as 29,140 feet in the old days. That's what the first trigonometrical survey made it. Done by Sir George Everest—hence the name—in 1841. There were other estimates."

He rattled them off, giving the references, and mentioned incidentally that the Fourteenth Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica had given two different heights on two different pages.

He gave the page numbers and added that the current edition had been corrected.

Parkston had an amazing memory. Like the historian, Lord Macaulay, he could recite whole pages of print he had glanced at only once. And, like Macaulay, he liked to display the gift.

"Okay, okay," said Merling. "I believe you. But the question was; why did you elect to get in this spot?"

"I just like to try things people haven't been able to do before. The Will to Power, maybe. Overcompensation for an inferiority complex. Cussedness. Pioneer spirt. A showoff. Take your pick. I hadn't even thought of Everest until a couple of years ago. I might just as well have gone on that attempt to reach the Moon the U.S. Army were cooking up. If I could have got into the show, which seems unlikely."

"That rocket must be nearly there by now, judging from the last news I heard on the radio down at base. How does the darn thing work, do you know?"

"The radio?" yawned Parkston.

"The rocket, ass."

"It's two rockets in one, actually," mumbled Parkston from the depths of his black beard and his sleeping bag. "Atomic and chemical. The main drive in space is atomic. Liquid ammonia, turbo-pumped through uranium 233—U235 is less suitable—becomes super-heated, jets out at a helluva lick. But it can't be used for the takeoff or for braking on landing. Because the emitted gas is highly radioactive. On a takeoff from Earth it would blot out life for miles around. And if it were used to brake the descent on the Moon, the ship would land in the middle of a radioactive area of its own creation. Tough on anyone who tried to get out and explore. So they added chemical rockets."

"It's a pretty big ship, then."

"Yeah. But there's not much living room for the crew. The pile takes up most of the room, together with the

ammonia tanks... Bet they're cramped."

"Well, good luck to 'em," said Merling.

"To hell with them," said Parkston. "Good luck to us! We've got plenty on our hands. Nearly five thousand feet to climb and scarcely enough air to blow up a toy balloon. It's light now. Come on, George."

He wriggled slowly and with difficulty out of his bag. You had to do everything slowly at this height, even talk.

They had some hot and very strong black coffee from a thermos flask, munched a couple of stone-hard crackers smeared with meat extract. Then they wriggled out of the tent into the cold morning light, Parkston dragging the thirty-pound oxygen apparatus after him.

The only clouds were distant below them, tattered fragments floating along the valleys. Up here the air was marvelously clear. Peaks thirty miles off looked no more than a mile away. Others two hundred miles away were quite visible.

There was a slight breeze. They looked up. Two thousand feet above them the pyramidal peak was flying its usual pennant of something between snow and mist. But it was a short one today.

"Good sign," said Parkston. "I think the weather will hold."

His voice sounded faint and faded out in the open.

They looked down. None of the other camps stretching in a chain down the mountain was visible from here. Even the base camp was out of the line of sight. But there were the lesser peaks all around: snowy Ling-Tren, precipitous Pumo-ri, overhanging Gyachung-Kang.

"Everest is the king, plain enough," commented Parkston. "But when we stand on top, we'll be six feet higher than him. Come on."

They started.

IT WAS hours later.

George Merling was not the integrated being who had started out resolutely behind Parkston's broad back just after dawn. True, the back was just ahead of him, and they were still both moving upwards. But they were taking ten breaths to every step now.

Merling's purpose was breaking up. He was like a man in a dream. His mind wandered loosely through old memories, old experiences. Snatches of music, lines of poetry, passed through his head, hand in hand with scenes from movies and novels and his own childhood. It was like dotage. It was like "Finnegans Wake". He couldn't sort fact from fantasy and it was too much trouble to try.

It was too much trouble to do anything, except one vital thing: to keep following Parkston's back.

Merling, alone, would have lain down and died amid his sick fancies. But Parkston was the living proof that it was possible to go on. Following that broad back was the one fixed idea in Merling's chaotic mind.

But he did realize they were getting up the worst part—the stretch of rather loose steep rock between 28,200 and 28,400 feet. This, so went the theory, was where Mallory and Irvine had come to grief in the 1924 expedition. They'd been watched through a telescope from base camp. They were still climbing strongly for the summit when a veil of mist hid them. They were never seen again.

On the 1933 expedition Mallory's ice-pick was discovered. But there was no sign of his body then. Nor Irvine's.

And here, on the tricky slope itself, there was still no sign.

To the Hindus, the Himalayan chain was the abode of the gods. The legends of the Tibetan monasteries said Everest was the seat of "a Mighty One."

How had Mallory and Irvine disappeared?

It was like the vanished crew of the Marie Celeste. The celeste was first introduced by Tchaikovsky, in the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy." "There are fairies at the bottom of my . . ." Bottom was the weaver in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" . . . But this wasn't midsummer. Nor a dream. Parkston's back was still there.

They were over the rocks, onto the snow slopes above them.

Surely this was far enough? Surely this would do? No. Parkston's back was going on.

"His soul goes marching on . . . John Brown's body meets a body comin' thro' the rye—whisky. Could do with a slug of whisky . . ."

And then Merling just couldn't go on. He sank to his knees. Parkston's back receded. Merling tried to shout. No breath. He keeled slowly forward.

He seemed to be coming down from an immense height to hit the snow. Right beneath him he saw a strange footprint in that snow. Huge, it was. Much bigger than Parkston's big feet. It was—

He landed right on it, obliterated it with his stomach and chest.

Oh, delicious ease! "Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease . . . Is there any peace in ever climbing up the ever-climbing wave? . . . Let us alone . . ."

Someone lifted him off his face. Parkston.

"Up," said Parkston's hoarse, frost-bitten voice. "Get ya . . . two feet

Now he was dreaming again. A door in the mountain opened . . .

going . . . if ya . . . want the . . . two feet . . . off the top."

Damn the man! And bless him!

Parkston, the giant, the indefatigable, more than half carried him up.

The summit was visible. A pyra-

midal, snow-veined rock point, floating high.

It occurred dreamily to Merling that he ought to tell Parkston about that footprint. There must be others, too. But speech was far beyond him.

Then Parkston sagged and collapsed utterly. Merling rolled over him, lay on his back, looking up at the peak. It was no higher than an average English seaside cliff. God, to have to finish now!

Now he was dreaming again. It seemed that a huge square section of the peak came swinging open ponderously like the door of a bank strong-room. A huge door of rock it was, with the snow still clinging to it. And out floated a dull gray shape—like one of the old London barrage balloons, fins and all, but altogether bigger and darker.

It stopped, resting on a snow slope. From behind it, from the depths of the dark square-mouthed cavern now revealed, came bounding a fantastic figure. A naked, hairy giant, twelve feet tall. Its frontal development was like that of the skull in the museum at Neanderthal. There were ferocious brows on jutting bony ridges; wide nostrils; gaping mouth with eye-teeth very prominent. The thing came leaping down towards them with the vitality of an infuriated gorilla, looming bigger and bigger.

Merling goggled at it. Then he connected it with that footprint and knew what it was. In his horror and weakness, he fainted.

The uncouth giant landed in a final jump beside them. He crouched over them, his breath coming out in clouds of white vapor in the thin, freezing air. Then he lifted the two unconscious bodies, one under each arm, and strode easily up the slope to the waiting gray shape.

IT WAS Parkston who first opened his eyes.

In the beginning he was conscious of nothing except that there was plenty of air and he was breathing it freely. For a time he was content to lie there doing just that. Then he took stock of his environment.

He was in a small metal-walled cell. There was a window in one wall, a blank square glass screen in another, a shut door in a third. Merling's body lay on the floor beside him. That was all. He made sure Merling was still breathing, then tried the door. It was locked.

He crossed to the window, and saw nothing but empty sky, then caught his breath as he looked down. They were far above the clouds. There were a couple of gaps in the clouds and through them, far, far below, he glimpsed a dark green landscape. Jungle, perhaps.

Merling groaned, and got up on his elbow.

"What the hell—?" he said faintly.

Parkston knelt beside him. "Feeling all right, George?"

"Yes, but—where are we?"

"About thirty thousand feet up, I guess."

Merling looked at him incredulously.

"What? Was there a penthouse on top of Everest?"

"I don't know. We never made it. We're in a very silent airplane, or a dirigible."

"Dirigible?" echoed Merling. "Oh, I remember now. Something like a dirigible came out of the top of Everest."

"What's that?"

"You didn't see it? Oh, no, you were out . . . Hey, what in blazes made you come back for me? You could have made it alone. You threw your chance away."

"Never mind that," said Parkston,

shortly. "What were you talking about?"

Merling described the opening door, the big gray shape, and the naked ogre that came for them. "It's fantastic, but there's no doubt about it. It was an Abominable Snowman. The critters do exist, then. The moment I saw the footprint I remembered those photos in the London Times back in —1938, was it? They were close-ups of similar prints in the snow up in the Himalayas, and the natives swore they were traces of the Abominable Snowmen."

"I remember the fight about it," said Parkston. "The profs said they were only the prints of a giant panda. I could have told 'em they weren't that. But I'd never have believed the Snowmen stuff."

"The Nepalese and Bhotia porters believe it all right. Half a dozen of 'em had cousins or uncles who'd seen 'em in the distance. They were full of bloodthirsty yarns. They don't call them Abominable Snowmen for nothing. It seems they have no table manners. They prefer their meat uncooked, they prefer human meat, and they prefer to kill by twisting their victims' heads round back to front."

"Just a whim," said Parkston. "By the way, is my head on straight?"

Merling laughed.

"It's no joke, though," he said. "Who put us in here? Why are we kept here? And where's 'here', anyway?"

"I imagine your Tarzan pal put us in here. We may be kept here because it's the larder. But somehow I don't think the Abominable boys run this joint. From your description, I guess their I.Q. is no higher than a trodden-on flatfish. As for 'here', I may have a line on that—not that it gets us anywhere."

"What is it?"

"Something I read, belatedly, a couple of years ago. In fact, the thing that first made me get the idea of climbing Everest to find out what it was all about."

"I'll buy it. Give the usual chapter and verse, and word for word."

"In 'Everest 1933' by Hugh Ruttledge. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1934. You read it, no doubt. There's a bit in F. S. Smythe's chapter, 'A Solitary Climb.'

"He said: 'During my climb two curious phenomena were experienced.'

And went on: 'I was still 200 feet above Camp VI and a considerable distance horizontally from it when, chancing to glance in the direction of the north ridge, I saw two curious-looking objects floating in the sky. They strongly resembled kite-balloons in shape, but one possessed what appeared to be squat under-developed wings, and the other a protuberance suggestive of a beak. The two objects were very dark in color and were silhouetted sharply against the sky, or possibly a background of cloud.

" 'So interested was I that I stopped to observe them. My brain appeared to be working normally, and I deliberately put myself through a series of tests. First of all I glanced away. The objects did not follow my vision, but they were still there when I looked back again. Then I looked away again, and this time identified by name a number of peaks, valleys and glaciers by way of a mental test. But when I looked back again, the objects still confronted me.

" 'At this I gave them up as a bad job, but just as I was starting to move again a mist suddenly drifted across. Gradually they disappeared behind it, and when a minute or two later it had drifted clear, exposing the whole of the north ridge once more, they had vanished as mysteriously as they came.' "

"What was the other curious phenomenon Smythe saw? You mentioned two."

"The other phenomenon was that he didn't see anything. He had a strong feeling that he wasn't alone, but was accompanied by some invisible being. Presumably a friendly presence, for once Smythe involuntarily turned to offer it some chocolate. Still, that's a common enough experience for people alone and high up on mountains. Had it myself more than once, up on top."

"So have I. Maybe our guardian angels live on mountain tops."

There was a scratching outside the door.

"One of our guardian angels coming in now, by the sound of it," said Parkston, grimly.

The door swung open.

Merling felt his muscles contracting, the hair on his neck bristling. The primitive horror of the Abominable Snowman swelled rapidly within him.

But what came through the door was not a Snowman. It was not any sort of man.

CHAPTER FIVE

Black Juggernaut

THE DOCTOR'S car strained up the hill from Jacksburg and stopped outside the Slade homestead.

Morton Slade opened the door.

"What's your neighbor been up to?" asked the doctor.

"Take a good look," said Morton, "and then come in and tell us."

In the living room Morton and Mary sat and told him what little they knew.

"Sounds like you should've sent for a psychiatrist," said the medico. "Still, I might as well look the old boy over."

Morton took a peek through the window.

"He's out now," he said. "Putting up a new sign: LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. In puce, indigo, cream, and pale blue. Looks awful."

They hurried out and found Doctor Hartley amid his notices, watching them glassily.

"Doctor Hartley?" the doctor inquired.

Hartley didn't even look at him. He raised his fixed stare to the attic window

of his house. They followed his gaze. They saw the wooden shutters of the window slowly open from within. Then they tried to make sense of what they saw.

The glass panes were gone. In their place was a large round lens, nearly filling the window space. It was in a setting of what seemed to be black metal. It was directed down at the trio on the lawn.

They looked down again just in time to see the front door closing on Hartley's back.

"Whoops!" Mort took the porch steps in a bound, caught the edge of the door before it had entirely closed. He yanked it open, and all but dashed his brains out against what seemed to be a strongly-riveted black metal inner door, which was tight up against the door jambs and just as tightly shut.

He turned to regard the other two. "Any theories?"

Mary just shook her head. "Get an axe," the doctor said. "Let's smash the shutters of one of the windows and get in that way."

They got an axe from the Slade woodshed. Mort attacked Hartley's living room shutters. One leaf came off its hinges and fell out. The other swung outwards.

They peered through the window panes. The window was blocked on the inside by a sheet of black metal, entirely covering the space. Mort broke a pane, unfastened the window, attacked the metal with the axe. It was as unyielding as the screen over the door. They found that all the lower windows, including even the tiny larder window, too small for a dog, were similarly screened.

Mort wiped his brow and put his jacket on again.

"Leave it for now, doc," he said. "Come and have a drink."

They sat sipping mint juleps in the Slade parlor and discussed the situation gravely.

"Reckon he's got those damned screens behind all the bedroom windows, too," said Morton. He paused "I suppose—"

What he supposed was never known. He was interrupted by the floor, which tilted suddenly to an angle of twenty degrees. The table, the chairs and their occupants, and all loose objects slid into a confused heap on the lower side of the room, amid a great smashing of glass. But louder than the noise in the disjointed room came a great grinding and rumbling from outside.

"Earthquake!" shouted the doctor.

Neither Mort nor Mary answered. Mort was nursing the back of his head, which had tried to make a hole in the wall. Mary was dabbing with the back of her hand a bloody cut over one eye. She had jabbed herself with her own broken julep glass.

The doctor saw her injury. "Hold on, I'll fix that," he called. "I'll just get my stuff from the car."

He picked himself up as the heavy rumbling stopped. He was nearest the door and pulled himself up the slope to it. He vanished. Fifteen seconds later he was back again, popeyed.

"My God!" he said. "Come and look at this!"

"Can you make it, Mary?" Mort asked anxiously.

"Sure. Just lend me your handkerchief."

He did, and helped her up and through the warped doorway. There they stood as popeyed as the doctor.

An unbelievably monstrous black tank stood alongside their half-wrecked house, pointing in the direction of Jacksburg. Its caterpillar treads covered the entire site of Hartley's house and front lawn, and reached across

the road outside. From the huge waves of upflung earth, it seemed that the leviathan had risen out of the ground immediately beneath Hartley's house —like a whale surfacing under a long-boat.

The remains of Hartley's residence, a crazy floorless shape of torn and gaping planks, still perched like a very tattered white hat on the black turret fifty feet in the air. The tiles had spilled off the roof like a shower of playing cards, and through the joists a thing like a nacelle, with a lens mounted in its front end, had poked itself. It was moving slowly from side to side, like a submarine's periscope scanning the horizon.

There were far-off shouts, as neighbors came running to investigate.

The three gaped at each other, and then again at the tank. Its weight was so enormous that the track at the front had sunk a good yard beneath the level of the concrete road.

"The turret!" breathed Mort. "That was what we saw—just the turret. And it filled the whole damn house!"

A moment later the tank gave a jerk, and with a shattering grinding of gears began to move forward slowly. The ground trembled. The thing lurched across the road, stood for a moment on the brow of the hill, then began to plow downhill across the fields towards Jacksburg. It went slowly and very noisily, leaving a deeply sunken road behind it.

"That thing'll have to be stopped!" shouted the doctor excitedly.

He darted across the road after it. Morton and Mary followed to the hill brow, and looked down after him. He was running like mad alongside the huge furrow the tank was leaving in its wake. He overtook it, ran ahead, got out in its path, and stood facing it, waving to whoever was driving it.

The ponderous hulk plunged straight on towards the doctor, neither slowing nor deviating. The doctor stuck it out till the last few seconds. When it was plain that the tank wasn't going to stop, he leaped briskly to one side—or tried to. Actually, he leaped into a barbed-wire fence, dividing that field from the next, which he hadn't noticed.

The barbs caught in his jacket and held him. He tore himself free. Too late.

"Oh God!" said Morton hoarsely, swinging Mary round so that she could not see.

The doctor was dead—and buried.

"Come on, Mary!" snapped Morton, turning back. His thin hatchet face was flushed with anger. He had taken a liking to the doctor.

The piles of earth around the great tunnel had reached the back fender of the doctor's car, but luckily had not covered it.

"Get in and get started, Mary," Mort threw at her as he shot into their own lopsided house. He came out stuffing his revolver into his jacket pocket, and leaped into the car as she got it started.

"Take the winding road down," he said. "We're going to catch that tank."

She nodded, and trod on the accelerator. The car scattered a bunch of their neighbors coming cautiously up the road.

"Get the Army after that tank!" Mort roared at them.

Mary drove on. Her forehead was bleeding still. Mort's bloodstained handkerchief lay on her lap.

"What's the plan?" she asked, staring ahead.

"I'm going to jump on the back of that thing. I think the top is its only eye, and it's looking right ahead just now. It's blind at the back. There's a door somewhere in that turret—where Hartley got in, remember? I'm going

to try to get in there, and stick my gun in the ear of the driver. There may be only one man in it, and that Hartley. That's all we know of."

"But—he couldn't have built that thing alone!"

"I don't know. No time to theorize now. There it is!"

HALFWAY down the hill was the ten-story block of the State Hotel. The tank swung round, lined itself close alongside the hotel and stopped. Almost immediately a flash of red flame jetted from its front. A puff of gray smoke rolled out. Bang!

A shell wailed on its way to the town. The tall post office building suddenly wore a crown of black smoke. A few seconds later the splintering crash of the explosion rolled up to them.

"Declaration of war," said Mort, grimly. "Park over behind that house."

Mary did so. The house was a couple of hundred yards, laterally, from the tank.

Morton jumped out.

"Keep your head down," he said.

"Mort! Wait!" In agony she watched him running, swerving away downhill, keeping out of the line of sight of that lens.

The tank fired again. The shell landed in the center of the main shopping thoroughfare.

Mort had reached the back of the tank. He climbed one of the motionless tracks as though it were a ladder. He gained the turret, slid round to the front of it, and began hammering and kicking at a place where he had apparently located the door. Mary's heart was in her mouth. She could only see the tank's side. The door was invisible to her.

Suddenly Mort seemed to stumble forward right into the side of the turret, and passed from view. She guessed the door had opened inwards unexpectedly. Whether he'd forced it open, or someone had opened it, she could only guess.

She watched in awful suspense. She groped mechanically for her handkerchief, dropped it on the floor. She bent to reach for it, and saw something that petrified her. Mort's revolver lay on the seat beside her. He had stuffed it too hastily in his pocket. It had dropped out.

Then she heard the rumbling of the tank starting up. It was moving off. It turned the corner of the hotel, began grinding along the road away from her. It was clear that Mort had failed.

Hastily she bound the handkerchief round her head to keep the blood from trickling into her eyes. Then she started the car and followed the tank. In her red-smeared eyes was the same

look that had been in Mort's. She put the gun in the pocket of the door beside her, where it would be nearest to hand.

IN THE radio room in the desert station everyone stopped murmuring. Mooring's voice from the Moon rocket was coming through again. It was the very voice of despair.

"This is the last time you'll hear me. Can't stand it any longer. . . . Been trying to keep control, but can't. . . .

"Moonlight streaming in. Could shut the ports, but I'd be in the dark. Something screwy about bright moonlight. Any attendant in a nut-house will tell you. Dogs bay at the Moon. Human sacrifices—always made at the full Moon. . . .

"Sorry, General, if you can hear me . . . I've lost faith . . . in all existence . . . I've got my gun against my temple . . . Good-by . . . 'The rest is silence.' . . ."

It was.

The eminent astronomer said presently: "And now, General Atkinson, will you bring the ship back?"

Atkinson lifted a haggard face. For some time he had sat motionless, bowed head in hand. The astronomer thought he saw a trace of tears in the corners of those bleak eyes. But Atkinson's voice was quite composed.

"Yes. I agree there's no point in going on now."

"Perhaps if the uranium pile were more effectively screened—" the astronomer hazarded. "A leakage of radioactivity might have caused the mental unbalance—"

"Nonsense!" barked the general. "The Geiger counters didn't give a solitary click in the ship at any time. And I'm willing to bet that air apparatus is still functioning perfectly. No, it's something else, something I couldn't have foreseen. There's no reason for you, sir, nor any of the others—and I especially mean the reporters—to stay here a moment longer. I'll turn the ship around, but it'll take hours to check the present momentum. As you know, we're not bringing the ship back here. We're bringing it down in the sea two hundred miles off the California coast. That's where your story is now, gentlemen. I'll be glad if you'll leave as soon as possible."

He set himself to work out the turn-around of the ship.

The reporters rushed out with their story. The politicians and scientists followed slowly.

When Walker of the Tribune had got his story through, he remarked to a colleague: "That's that. The story is all washed up here. We'd better beat it for Frisco on the next plane."

His colleague agreed. So did all the newspapermen. They packed and left.

And so missed the biggest story in all mankind's history.

CHAPTER SIX

The Acari

THROUGH the door, into the amazed presence of Sherwood Parkston and George Merling, came something as tall as a man, but certainly not a man.

It was an eight-legged insect, stone white. It was advancing slowly, balanced on its ultimate two legs, which were larger, thicker, stronger than the other three pairs. It had two faceted eyes, and a pair of feelers waved slowly over its head like strands of seaweed on the sea-bottom.

"Good Lord!" muttered Merling, and shuddered.

Parkston whistled in astonishment, got a grip on himself, and said with too-studied politeness: "Do come in

and make yourself at home. Is it still raining outside?"

Deliberately, the creature shut the door behind it. It set on the floor a piece of apparatus it had been carrying with its upper four limbs. It was a metal box with controls on the top and a ground-glass screen let into the side, like a portable television set.

Both men got an odd reaction. They sensed that despite this strange creature's controlled and assured actions, it was a little uncomfortable in their presence—indeed, that it was to some degree in awe of them.

Suddenly it was as if a voice spoke in the mind of each man. "Please relax, Mr. Parkston, and you, Mr. Merling. I am sorry there are no chairs or couches. You will appreciate that our species has no use for them."

And naturally they found it impossible to relax when they realized that direct thought was this creature's method of communication.

As it addressed them, the creature clicked a switch under the square glass screen on the wall. It became a colored moving picture—a closeup of a writing pad with a yellow pencil moving on it. The tips of a human finger and thumb, holding the pencil, were visible. A streak of red and green jazz pattern lay along the edge of the pad—some sort of cloth it was resting upon. The fidelity was exquisite. Every thread of the cloth could be distinguished, every loop of the writing was plain.

"Please ignore that and give me your attention. There is much to explain and we are racing against time," came the thought. They looked back at the insect, and it seemed to be looking at them. Yet somehow they knew that those faceted eyes, with their wide angles of vision, were watching that writing at least as attentively as they themselves were being regarded—and that the creature's brain, unlike theirs, could hold more than one thought at a time.

"I am the first acarus," continued the thought. "That means the oldest and most highly developed. But it means nothing to you unless you know something of a countryman of yours, Mr. Merling, named Andrew Crosse . . ."

The voice in their minds told them the history of Crosse and his experiments. It told them that it was the first of the tiny acari produced by Crosse to escape by climbing up the electrified wire out of the jar and into the laboratory. It had reached the floor, gone down one of the cracks between the floorboards, and so burrowed deep into the earth under the Quantock Hills.

It came at last to an underground cavern where there was radioactive rock. Here it stayed, for radioactivity was life to it. Under that influence it grew rapidly in size and intelligence. Presently, others who had escaped in the same way joined it. The colony flourished. They sent out scouts to guide other wandering acari there. But there came an end to these immigrants. Andrew Crosse was dead, and the making of acari was finished.

"He was our Creator. We regarded him as God, and worshiped his memory. Because of him we worshiped all his kind, all men. We did not understand death through murder, disease, or old age. Such things did not happen to us. No acari, deep underground, died except through rare accidents. We felt not superior but inferior about this. We thought death a quality of the gods, denied us. We thought accidental death was a rare gift bestowed on us by man. For we believed the mind of Crosse, like those of other men, left Earth at death for other worlds, while we, his creatures, were Earthbound.

"If our theology was not exact, our

technological advance was rapid, greater than your own. We watched man—always with reverence—from a distance. With television instruments, like that on the wall—we have thousands of concealed cameras at work above ground. Or by personal surveillance from silent and fast-moving electric ships like this. Always unseen."

"PARDON me." interrupted Parkston. "Generally unseen. Not always. Your ships based on Everest were observed and noted by man. There have been many other occasions reported in our newspapers over the years. One man, Charles Fort, collected the reports, put them in his books. Chapter Ten of his 'Lo!' is full of things like this: 'In the EASTERN DAILY PRESS, January 28th, 1908, it is said that at night—moon bright—"a dark, globular object, with a structure of some kind on the side of it, traveling at a great pace," had been seen in the sky, by employees of the Norwich Transportation Company, at Mousehead. "It seemed too large for a kite, and, besides, its movements seemed under control, for it was traveling against the wind.'"

"That is interesting. That was this very ship, and I was in it," said the thoughts. "However, we mostly use less conspicuous observers these days, specialists—our Observer Corps. They are acari whom we breed of a very small size, not a great deal bigger than I was in Crosse's laboratory. But they're intelligent. They steer very small ships, no bigger than a house fly, and carry television cameras. They fly low and observe for us constantly."

"Is that set tuned into one of 'em?" asked Merling, nodding at the picture of the still writing pencil.

"Yes. It's coming from an operator stationed on the bracket of the electric lamp over the bed of a man named Douglas Morgan, in a nursing home in Surrey, England. It is vitally important. I will tell you about it."

"Just a moment," said Parkston, a little pugnaciously. "I don't want you to think you're entirely outsmarting us. Men have detected your Observer Corps too."

He cleared his throat and put on his Macaulay quoting-from-memory voice. "Extract from 'Proceedings of Institute of Radio Engineers.' October, 1947, page 110: 'Radar equipment operating on a wave length of approximately 1.25 cms and directed vertically has given fairly consistent unexplainable echoes at altitudes between approximately 300 and 3,000 yards. For want of a better term, these echoes have been dubbed "Angels" by Signal Corps personnel. The possibility exists that these "Angels" may be echoes from the same phenomena as have occasionally been observed on wavelengths in the vicinity of 10 and 3 cms. . . .

"'The number of echoes varies greatly during the day and from day to day. They are most numerous in the first 1,000 yards above the ground, and none has been observed much in excess of 3,000 yards. The duration of the echoes is short, varying from a fraction of a second to perhaps a maximum of 10 seconds. The short duration may, in part, be explained by the possible motion of the reflecting medium through the relatively narrow radar beam produced by the equipment. "Angels" have been observed on four different 1.25 cm radar systems, which lessens the possibility of equipment peculiarities. The obvious explanation that the echoes might be birds has been discarded by optical checks. Insects have been ruled out, since the echoes have been recorded in midwinter.

William B. Gould, Signal Corps Engineering Lab., Belmar, N.J.'"

"Men continue to surprise me," came the acarus' thoughts. "I did not know that. Acari, of course, are as active in midwinter as at any other time. There's an odd coincidence: it was at Belmar that men first made radar contact with the Moon, in January, 1946. Those men were doing a dangerous thing. Not through detecting our observers, but. . . . You will understand when I have told you the whole story.

"You may have observed that we are flying westwards, with the sun, at high speed. We are racing thousands of miles against time in a matter of life and death. I must be brief.

"The acari discovered a system of tunnels and caverns running under the whole Earth. We enlarged and shaped them with an implosive ray—a ray which, causing matter to implode, rather than explode, compresses matter into hard, heavy, shapeless little lumps. So we made space for ourselves. We had to. Our population increases through birth, but is not balanced by any decrease through death.

"At first we thought man's death a voluntary act. Further study revealed the astounding truth that it was not. Men did not wish to die, tried to avoid it. But always died. We had to reorient our view of men. We still loved and reverenced them, but we had to face the fact that they were not gods, not omnipotent. And therefore it was our duty, and not a presumption, to help them.

"One minor thing we did was to draw underground and train as our servants a race of sub-humans who inhabited the Upper Himalayas. You called them 'Abominable Snowmen.' They used to prey, horribly, on the real humans they encountered. I hope the one you saw did not frighten you?"

"No," lied Merling.

"They do our heavy work. We watched your attempt on Everest from the first. I went to our air base at the top and waited. I especially wanted to meet Mr. Parkston—for a purpose you'll learn. But I didn't want to spoil your attempt. I waited until you reached your limit. I think Mr. Parkston would have conquered the peak alone, but because he is a great man, he went back for you, Mr. Merling. Still, you would both have died, as Mallory and Irvine did, had I not saved you. I tried to save them, but I was too late. Their bodies are preserved by us, and there are devoted pilgrimages to their tombs. For though man is not a god, there's something god-like in his spirit.

"Your great men are great. For they're courageous, unselfish, strong-

willed and long-lived in spite of an immensely powerful enemy that tries constantly to make them weak, vicious, and short-lived. You two are great, in your way. So is General Atkinson. So was Leon Strang, the composer, and his friend, Douglas Morgan, who at this moment in England is fighting against terrible odds to do that writing you see on the screen. I, like all the acari, have been watching that great effort. So, too, has the intelligence Morgan is fighting against.

"I'm going to tell you what that pencil has already written, and bring you up to date with it as it moves. Together we can watch the end of it. We're waiting for one all-important fact to be given.

"This is the document so far: 'The doctors think my case is hysteria . . .'"

The acarus told it quickly but smoothly. Parkston and Merling sat there and forgot their own strange surroundings as they listened to the dreaming Strang describing the even more bizarre realm of the Id. . . .

"AND THEN I heard a voice. Cold, hard, deliberate. Chilling, because it was utterly emotionless. "'Your will is strong, little Ego,' it said. 'You are the only one to reach my frontiers for ten millions of years.'

"'You are the Id,' I answered, slowly. 'The influence that seeks to make man destroy himself. Why?'

"'It is simple. I was here before man. Man's form of life is a formidable rival. I do not intend to give place to it, to let it overwhelm me—as it will unless I stop it. Self-preservation is my reason. I kill rather than be killed, little Ego.'

"'You see man in your own foul image,' I said. 'Because you have no capacity for love you think they have none. Man is not cold and calculating like you, but generous and cooperative. You're employing the wrong methods.'

"They are successful," said that awful voice. 'This series of world wars is decimating you very well. The third should finish the operation.'

"'I'll expose you first. I'll tell all the world of you.'

"'Go on your mission, then, little Ego—and see who will believe you.'

"The pillared chamber seemed to be receding into the distance, the Id with it. It became small, vanished into utter darkness. I realized the effect was relative: I was moving backwards with great speed—and I awoke in my darkened room. . . . You'd better catch your train, Doug. Don't comment now. Think it over at leisure. And come and see me again."

I had to rush then. I never saw him again for a long time, for in a week I was in a troopship bound for Egypt.

But we met up again in Sicily—Messina. "Messina" ought to have been transposed—In a Mess. The Allied bombing had flattened it.

Strang was on one of his tours, playing to the troops. We met on a hillside overlooking the Straits, and Scylla and Charybdis. We looked down on the ruined town.

"The Id seems to have a particular grudge against this place," Strang remarked. "It flattened it once before, in 1908. Terrible earthquake."

"Yes," I said, noncommittally. I'd still not made up my mind about this Id business. I knew Strang believed it; but how far could I trust his judgment? He was an artistic genius, and a creative one. Such people dwell on the borderline of fact and fantasy and live half in a dream.

I asked if there had been any further developments.

"There's a fight on," he said. "I

realized the Id was right. No one would believe a word of my dream tales. Except you, Doug. I hope you do?"

"What's the fight?" I said.

"Oh . . . I decided to switch my attack from the victims of the Id to the Id itself. Attack the source of the trouble. But first I had to find where it was. Physically, that is."

"You think it has a physical body?"

"Oh, yes. Mind can't exist without matter, not even the Id's. All that weird landscape I traversed in my dreams was only some symbolic representations of moral states, which my memory cooked up out of Freud's ideas. I wanted to discover where that pillared chamber with the stone floor really was. It was a long time before I could dream and fight myself into the Id's presence again. I made it, last week. There I was in the chamber again, with the nebulous patch of the Id all but evading my sight.

"'I know why you are here,' it said. 'I've been trying to keep you out. You have more self-confidence than most of your kind.'

"'Your suggestion doesn't work with me,' I said.

"'Don't flatter yourself. It does,' said the icy voice. 'You want to know where this chamber is. It is nowhere. This was the sanctum of the ruler of Hausse-Mel. He was self-willed, too. He discovered and attacked me. Unfortunately, his country was where the bed of the Mediterranean now is. I destroyed the dam across the Straits of Gibraltar . . . and the ruler, and the sanctum, and the population. You are looking only at a memory I have suggested to your mind.'

"'I don't believe it.'

"'No? Look again.'

"I looked, and noticed a change. The pillars were elaborately carved. They had been plain before. Then the carving looked —like—like creepers entwined around—the boles of trees! And I was in a forest. The dark dome above had changed into a green arch of foliage.

"The scene changed again in a flash. I discovered myself a mere speck on a flat grassy plain, under a blue sky. The blue of the sky seemed to come down, mingle with the green grass. And presently all the plain was blue. It started heaving, rolling—it was the sea!

"The whole time, immutable against these dissolving views, the misty disk of the Id hung there.

"I knew all these surroundings were illusory. What were the real surroundings of the Id? I stared out over the sham horizon of that sham sea and concentrated my will—to see what was really there. The Id knew at once what I was doing. It put out all its mental power to resist me. I fought . . . but I failed. I woke up as weak as a kitten. . . . But I shall keep fighting. I'll get there in the end."

In the evening, in the canteen, Strang played me, on a battered upright piano, the first two movements of his Id Symphony. The first movement was slow, all menace and horror. The second movement conveyed brilliantly the clashing fight the composer was experiencing now.

"I can tell the world of the Id, you see," said Strang. "But through the medium of music, not words. . . . The third and last movement will be triumphant, a shining victory. My victory."

Strang had lost none of his self-confidence.

Nor had he reason to. He got the information he wanted. He told me next time I saw him, one day in his London house just before the Second Front. He had penetrated the phantasmagoria and seen the Id's real home. . . .

(The acarus' voice ceased in Park-

ston's and Merling's minds. The creature indicated the screen. The yellow pencil wrote on, slowly, laboriously.)

HE SAID: "I was in the center of a great ring of rocky cliffs. They were extraordinary clear-cut in the sunlight. The shadows were black. The sky was black too, although this was day. It was dusted with a multitude of hard, unwinking stars. Hanging low in it was a great globe, shadowy on one side, silver and cloudy gray-green on the other. I knew it was the Earth. The Id's home was in a crater of the Moon!"

"Good Lord, Leon!" I said. "It's quite out of our reach, then."

"No," said Strang. "It's getting within our reach. These new V rockets the Germans have started using on us are the beginning. After the war, they'll be developed rapidly. It's a certainty that, if we get a long peace after this war, man will reach the Moon in our lifetime. Then it'll be goodby, Id!"

"If we get a long peace," said I. "But the Id is working against that."

"I know. We've seen how successful it's been at that game. Attila's Huns, Jenghis Khan and his Mongols, the Punic Wars, the Thirty Years' War, the Hundred Years' War, the incredibly bloody American Civil War, Passchendaele, the Somme, the eternal cockpits of France and Poland, the battles of the Burmese jungles, China's plains, the Russian steppes . . . But there's one hopeful thing."

"What's that?"

"Men—the great men—are beginning to sense that in these wars they are not their own masters. Thomas Hardy, for instance—and, by the way, he lived to be eighty-eight. In 'The Dynasts,' his masterpiece, he described a queer, invisible Intelligence pulling the strings to bring about the Napoleonic Wars, and moving the soldiers on the battlefields as though they were pawns. He called it the 'Immanent Will', and thought it unconscious of what it was doing. He didn't know, as we do, that it only works through the unconscious, but is certainly conscious itself of what it does! Napoleon himself detected something more than that—"

He stopped suddenly. We both stood with ears cocked. Yes, it was the faint buzz of a flying bomb in the distance. They were frequent visitors in those days.

Strang resumed: "When he was leading the six hundred thousand men of his Grand Army to perish in the frozen wastes of Russia—for scarcely one per cent of them returned—to serve no other purpose than the will of the Id, he said 'I feel myself driven towards an end I do not know. As soon as I become unnecessary, an atom will suffice to shatter me.'"

"He said that?"

"Yes. He had a divination of the truth. I wonder if Hitler ever has? I myself have had a divination of a really tremendous truth lying behind this whole business. It struck me when I was reading my old friend, Freud. In his 'Civilization and Its Discontents' he says that a source of our unhappiness which is regarded as inevitable is 'the disposition to decay of—'"

We both flung ourselves to the floor and away from the window. The engine of the flying bomb had cut off almost directly overhead. We knew now the thing was plunging toward us. We'd too often seen the area of destruction a doodlebug caused. We had a second or two before it landed.

In that brief space, I heard in my mind—as Strang must have heard, too—a clear, cold, frightening voice, with

an edge like a wind from the Polar seas: "You have gone too far."

And I knew it was the mouthless voice of the Id.

I remember nothing of the explosion that blew half the house down. Strang was killed outright, of course. As the Id intended. What opportunism to seize that flying bomb out of the air, guide it towards Regent's Park, and cut off the engine at the exact moment!

They dug me out of it, unconscious. Paralyzed. I've been paralyzed ever since, until now. Either I'm winning my own fight against the Id, or its grip on me is weakening through some diversion of its attention. No doubt the first manned flight to the Moon is keeping it well occupied. I don't envy the men in that rocket. The more near they draw to the realm of the Id, the stronger will be its influence on them—the suggestion of death.

My story is told. I have won that fight. The struggle now is going to be to convince the doctor or anyone else that these are facts and not mental delusions. . . . I fear that will be hardest of all.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Lair of the Id

THE PENCIL slowed and stopped. The finger and thumb relaxed. The camera panned back, or up, and showed Douglas Morgan lying exhausted, with eyes shut.

"That seems to be all we'll get from Morgan," said the acarus. "Now you understand what you men are up against."

"Aren't the acari up against it too?" asked Parkston.

"We were not. It may be our thick shield of earth, our concealed existence. It may be the fact that our minds are constructed differently from yours. But the Id did not know of our existence until recently. Now it is trying to worm its way into our minds and control us. Probably that's the main diversion of attention Morgan suggests."

"Has it succeeded in any measure?" pursued Parkston.

"Yes. It's affecting the weaker minds. That means, primarily, our children. You see, our children don't

yet understand about the Id. They still think men are gods, who welcome death, who fight wars with enjoyment and like to be killed. You must admit that, in view of your history, an alien observer of mankind could not avoid that impression."

"Too true," said Merling.

"Some of our children have already declared war on you. We are passing near the scene of that war. We shall pause to stop it. But that's only part of our race against time. Morgan's story confirmed our own suspicions that the Id dwells in a lunar crater. I had hoped that Strang might have recognized the actual crater, given us a precise location. That was what I was waiting for. We must get that information. That's where I now need the help of Mr. Parkston."

"I'll help all you want," said Parkston, at once. "How?"

"You're one of the few men in the world with a will, or Ego, strong enough to face the Id and see through its stage scenery to that crater."

"Yes, but I don't know enough selenography—"

"That doesn't matter—I do," interrupted the acarus. It reached for the metal box it had brought with it. It passed a flexible band, on a lead from the box, to Parkston. "Please place that around your head. That's it. It's an electronic sleep-inducer. So settle yourself comfortably. Your dream-thoughts will be represented on the screen on the side of this instrument."

"But can I will myself to dream of the Id?"

"If you fall asleep thinking of it—and your mind should be full of it now—you'll dream of it. Relax, close your eyes, and keep thinking of Strang's experiences."

In a minute or so, Parkston was sound asleep.

THE SCREEN went cloudy. A few blurred pictures of memories appeared first: a view of Everest's peak; Merling's head protruding from his sleeping bag in the tent; the acarus itself. The pictures faded, became obscure, and then suddenly the screen went very bright indeed. It showed a white wall of some downpouring substance, like a milk mist.

"The first—that is, the Second—Censor Curtain!" exclaimed Merling, excitedly.

"Yes," came the acarus' thought briefly. The acarus itself was doing several things at once with its many arms and many-sided brain. It was watching Parkston and his dream images. It had switched on the wall television and was tuning it. It was manipulating knobs and switches in the little panel beneath the set.

"These are the manual controls of this ship," it explained. "There's no one aboard except ourselves. Up till now an automatic pilot has kept us on course. But we've got to land now, in Jacksburg, Ohio, and stop that." It indicated the television screen.

Merling, with his inadequate human eyes, was torn between the two screens. It was hard to take one's eyes from either. The television showed a huge black tank, stationary on one side of a green park, firing shells into the luxury apartment building. Each shell made a hole you could have driven a bus through.

Spasmodic, but valiant, smaller spurts of flame came from the courts and arches of the buildings—Army anti-tank guns, in a hopeless attack on a target their designers had never dreamed of: black metal, harder than steel, six feet thick. The tracks had received direct hits; they were scarcely scratched. Bomb craters surrounded the tank. Some of them were from

armor-piercing bombs which had simply bounced off the great hulk.

"Our children kept their secret well," said the acarus. "They constructed that thing bit by bit under a house overlooking Jacksburg—choosing a site where they could survey the town and plan in advance their attack on it. The turret they built up into the house itself, removing the floors and the furnishings and taking them away underground. The idea of the tank, its camouflage, and the blitzkreig method they took from observing the Nazis at war. They think it's a beautiful game and great fun all round."

"It seems to be," said Merling, grimly. "I suppose it was an unoccupied house?"

"Our Information Service reported one occupant. An old academician. They got the sleep-inducer on him one night, when he was asleep. And then . . . well, there's a way of reversing that apparatus, by projecting your own thought-images on the screen and inducing a state of hypnosis. They made him perform tasks for them about the house that they couldn't do themselves without revealing themselves prematurely."

"I see," said Merling, glancing back at the sleep-inducer screen. It was pink and red now, with a thin shimmering white band across its center.

"Sherry's out in the pre-conscious area!" he cried. Then he remembered that there was no need to draw the acarus' attention to it.

"Look at the other screen," came the thought almost at once.

Merling did, and saw an amazing thing. Charging across the park, directly toward the tank, came an open car. The fine detail of the television showed the face of its lone occupant, a girl with a bloodstained bandage around her head. Her eyes were fixed and determined, her mouth set grimly.

Merling jumped to his feet. "My God, that's suicide! Are we near enough to do anything?"

The ship was falling rapidly. "We'll try," said the acarus.

The car had stopped. The girl stood upright in it, aimed a revolver at the tank and fired three times quickly.

"She's mad," groaned Merling.

The ship landed with a slight jar. Merling rushed to the window. He saw they'd come down in the park, neatly interposing themselves between the tank and the car.

"The doors are open," the acarus said. "Go and get the girl in here quickly. Planes are overhead. We'll be bombed in a few seconds."

The cell door stood open. Merling rushed through, along a metal passage, and found the open outer door of the ship. He dropped a yard outside into the roaring of engines—the planes were beginning to dive.

The girl was still standing in her car. She raised the gun uncertainly as Merling ran towards her.

There was a whistling crescendo, and a sound like a great glass ball smashing. The first bomb—a hundred yards off. The girl was thrown off her balance; Merling caught her neatly, and started carrying her back to the ship. She struggled.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," he said breathlessly. "Keep still, darn you!"

He got her into the ship somehow, and pushed her into the cabin. She took one look at the dead-white acarus, at Parkston lying full-length on the floor and groaning in his sleep, and at the two screens. She tore herself violently away from Merling and rushed to the window. He followed her.

Something new was coming out of the tank: a cylinder perched on the

end of a long jointed rod of black metal.

Then a flash! A violet ribbon of light leaped from their own ship to the tank. For a moment its hard outlines went swimmy, like a thing seen under water. Then it buckled, went altogether shapeless, collapsing in upon itself like a balloon with the air escaping. It became a black, jagged-edged mass, and shrunk rapidly almost out of sight. Not quite. Merling could just detect something like a small piece of coal lying out there on the grass.

And then the grass, the park, and all Jacksburg fell away below him. It was as though he were trying to support ten times his own weight. He held onto the window frame beside the girl as the ship mounted vertically at a rate which left the bombers beneath it almost at once. The motion became horizontal. They had resumed their journey.

The girl—he noticed she was a remarkably pretty blonde, with pale blue eyes—had gone white. She looked as if she were about to be sick. He took her elbow, steadying her.

"Feeling woozy?" he asked, sympathetically. "Is it that bang on the head? Can I—"

She shook him off. She was still clutching her revolver. She pointed it at him and said in a low voice, trembling not with fear but with anger: "What happened to that tank?"

THE thoughts of the acarus sounded in Merling's mind as they answered the girl.

"I destroyed it. Your aim was true. You did as you intended. Your bullets smashed the lens of the television camera and made the tank blind. Unfortunately, the very sight of my ship would have checked those in the tank; then I could have ordered them to return whence they came. But you blinded them. And blindly they were going to continue the fight by using at random an implosive ray, which this ship carries as a tool, but which can be used as a deadly weapon. It was impossible to communicate with them in time to stop them. I used our own ray just in time."

The girl was a bit bewildered. Then, from the direction of Merling's attention, she realized that the thought message was coming from the huge insect.

"My brother Morton was in that tank," she said. "And one of our friends, a harmless old man. You killed them both!" She switched the gun suddenly to the acarus and pulled the trigger.

Merling gave a shout and grabbed the gun from her—but the hammer had sprung harmlessly. Morton's gun had contained only three shells. The acarus hadn't moved.

"Control yourself!" said Merling violently. And then, more quietly: "It's too bad about your brother and the other guy. But you must realize that their deaths were accidental. Those whom the acarus here killed deliberately were children of his own race. It's a long story, but you must believe me when I say that creatures like these would consciously kill themselves or their own kind rather than cause harm to men. He did it to save the people of Jacksburg, yourself among them."

"There were two of my own children in the tank," came the slow thoughts of the acarus. "But . . . they were no longer really mine. The Id had taken them."

Merling was silent. He did not know how to express his sympathy or his gratitude. He was deeply moved. The acari, obviously, still traditionally worshiped men as gods, greater than themselves. And what unworthy gods men were beside their adorers!

Mary Slade was puzzled and contrite.

"I'm so confused. It's poor Mort . . .

I'm sorry, I—What is this thing we're flying in? Who is that man sleeping? What is—that creature? What did it mean—the Id had taken his children? Where are you taking me? Everything seems to have gone mad lately. I'm—lost."

Merling put a friendly arm around her shoulders.

"I'm pretty well lost myself," he said. "A few hours ago I was climbing Mount Everest, and half my psyche still is. Guess we'll both have to try to get adjusted to all this. There's a lot of explaining to do. To begin with: the Id. The Id is what made you try to shoot the acarus just now—"

He broke off. The shimmering band of the First Censor Curtain, on the box screen, had been tall and towering for some time as the dreaming Parkston fought to enter it against an invisible influence. But now the whole screen had become milk-white.

Softly, without taking his eyes from the screen, Merling began telling Mary the whole story of the Everest climb, the acari, Strang and Morgan and the Id. He was aware, as he told it, that it sounded fantastically incredible. But his audience had seen part of the story herself, and now was confronted by visible evidence of the rest.

He was not halfway through when the screen went suddenly black. Not gray, as when the instrument was off. It was conveying the Stygian blackness beyond the curtain. Patches of vague color appeared in the darkness, began to revolve. . . . .

"Look," said Merling, gripping Mary's arm tensely. "You'll see the Id for yourself."

The screen had become one great gray-white whirlpool. Then abruptly the whirlpool opened out, ran off the edges of the screen. It left revealed the pillared chamber Strang had described—the polished stone floor, the dark dome. There was a faint patch of radiance, hard to pin down.

"The Id," Merling whispered, hoarsely. Why he whispered, he didn't know. The sleeping Parkston began to mumble loudly, but they couldn't make out his words. In his dream he was addressing the Id. Presently he fell silent, but went very rigid. His hands

were clenched into tight fists. He was biting his lower lip. His forehead went damp.

Merling knew he was putting forth a mighty effort of will to see past that illusory chamber to the lunar crater. Merling watched tautly, leaning towards the screen, fearful of missing the glimpse that might come.

IT CAME—for a split second. It was just a flash of a curving range of jagged mountains in vivid sunlight under a black starry sky, and a loose floor of tumbled pumice. Then utter darkness obliterated the scene.

"Wake him up quickly," came from the acarus. "The Id will threaten his sanity in the darkness. Only a stimulus from the outer world will get him back."

Merling knelt and shook Parkston's shoulders. He had to do it violently before Parkston opened his eyes with a groan. He muttered, "Am I glad to see you, George! Where did you get the skirt? What's she done to her head? . . . Any mail come for me while I've been gone? Hello, Acky, old man—did you get that peep at the crater? Sorry I couldn't hold it longer. That Id's plenty tough."

"I saw it, and recognized it," answered the acarus. "It's Sulpicius Gallus. Congratulations on winning the fight. I thought I had the right man in you. You'd better rest and get strength again. I have one more opponent for you."

"Well, I'll be—Who's that?"

"The only other living man who might have put up as good a fight as you did. If you'll come and sit over here, I'll tell you the plan, while Mr. Merling brings our traveling companion up to date. Time is running very short now."

Parkston looked at Mary.

"What's your name?"

"Mary Slade."

"I hope I get around to saying hello sometime. The acarus keeps us on a tight schedule—especially me. By the way, George, when I get a minute I must tell you of my tête-à-tête with the Id. Some conversationalist! O.K., Acky, shoot—"

He and the acarus went into a huddle. The acarus evidently could direct its thoughts at one person only when it chose, for nothing reached the others.

Merling continued his story as he did what he could to clean up the gash in Mary's forehead. When he'd finished, she told him about herself and Mort, Hartley and the crazy signs, the tank, the death of the young doctor, the car chase.

"I guess the signs were put up under the direction of the young acari," said Merling. "They built the tank themselves, piece by piece. Presumably they constructed their own television camera. The acari cameras record detail and color shades perfectly. I guess those colored signs were test objects to get the focus and color values exactly right."

"But why the proverbs?"

"They'd seen signs and adverts stuck up all over the place. I suppose they thought if they put up a few themselves they wouldn't look out of place. More camouflage. Long as they were in English they'd look ordinary enough—they thought. But about all the English they knew was the name of their creator, Andrew Crosse. They put that up, but it wasn't enough. So they picked a few common sayings out of Hartley's mind."

"He must have been reading texts," she said. "Mort and I laughed . . . . I can't get over Mort's—death. I loved him like no one else."

Merling said, "Your brother was willing to die to save the townsfolk. So I guess, if he knew, he'd be glad of what the acarus did. It—"

Parkston came over. "George, give me that gun."

"But it's empty."

"Doesn't matter." Parkston took it. "Thanks. I'd still like to meet you, Mary, but we're going to be busy again in a few minutes."

The ship was sliding towards the ground. The acarus was tuning in a new scene on the television screen.

It was a lone cubical building, standing like a white box in the spreading empty desert.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Immortality or Death!

THE REPORTERS had gone. So had all the big shots. There was no one in the radio room now but half a dozen technicians—and Atkinson.

There was no opposition to the general now. He had let himself sag, and sat hunched in his chair like an old man, unmoving—even when a strange gray shape came sweeping down out of the sky and set all the technicians agog.

"I'm going out to have a look," said one with a half-apprehensive look at the general. He slipped out of the room.

A few seconds later he was back, with his hands up and a revolver jammed against his spine.

"Where's the remote control of the ship?" asked Parkston, taking in the great radar screen on the wall with its closeup of the Moon.

The technician nodded his head. "General Atkinson is sitting at it."

One of the technicians began, "Hey, what—" He jumped back a yard when the gun abruptly pointed at him and Parkston boomed, "Be quiet. Stand still, all of you. I promise I'll kill anyone who interferes."

He pushed his captive technician towards the remote control panel.

"My information is that the rocket ship is returning to Earth. Is that so?"

"Y-yes," stammered the technician.

"Turn it around, then. Back to the Moon. Pronto."

"Only the general touches that. Only he knows how to use it. He won't allow—"

"Can that," said Parkston, tersely. "Get moving."

"I'll—I'll try."

The technician laid a hand on the panel. Atkinson, who had been sitting motionless through all this, staring before him with dull brooding eyes, came suddenly to life. "Hands off that!" he snapped. "What the hell are you doing?"

He glared at the technician, at Parkston, at Merling and Mary, who were just coming in, then back at Parkston. "Who are you?"

"I'm Sherwood Parkston, explorer and mountaineer, among other things."

"That's a lie, to start with. Parkston is in Tibet."

"Was in Tibet. I flew here on urgent business. I'll explain, if you'll turn that ship around right now."

"I'll see you in hell first. Here, you men, get his gun."

Parkston glared at the technicians. His beard seemed positively to bristle.

"Anyone care to try?"

They looked at his huge bulk, and then at each other, uneasily. They did nothing.

"My God!" blazed Atkinson. "If I only had the use of my legs!"

Parkston said coldly, "General, I'll shoot you where you sit if you don't

turn that ship around and land it on the Moon, as planned."

Atkinson fell silent with fury. He rolled his chair forward, pushing the technician out of the way, and came right up to Parkston.

"Get this," he grated. "No one but me can land that ship on the Moon. And I'm bringing it right back to Earth. I'm not throwing that ship away, with all its equipment, to suit you or any other lunatic. Now go ahead and shoot, and see where it gets you."

Parkston sighed.

"Look here," he said. "I know, through a certain information service, that Mooring and the other two were driven to kill themselves at the suggestion of a power inimical to man—to all men. Including you and me. Mooring was your curly-headed boy, wasn't he? You put all your faith in him. Well, he didn't let you down. He was overpowered, that's all. Now, I promise if you'll do what I say, you'll avenge Mooring—and all mankind."

Atkinson scowled. "Give me that gun," he said, and held out his hand.

"If I do, will you promise—promise, mind—to keep your tame technicians off and listen for just five minutes?"

"Yes," said Atkinson.

Parkston threw the gun in the general's lap. Merling, looking a little uncertain, but trusting Parkston as usual, came up to stand beside him in case the technicians started anything.

Atkinson examined the revolver. His face twitched, but he said nothing. He looked at Parkston.

Parkston said, "This alien power I spoke of is in a Lunar crater. It is immensely egoistic—it won't tolerate the existence of any other form of life but its own, and it's been trying to wipe us out all through history.

"It's getting dangerously near success. You had a small demonstration of its power with Mooring and the other two. I'm telling you the same thing will happen to any other expeditions you send to the Moon. Your only chance of success is to help me attack that Intelligence now. There's no time to waste, because the Intelligence can get most of the thoughts of the people in this room at this moment. It is part of our own minds. It knows I'm trying to move against it. It doesn't know exactly how, because I'm keeping my thoughts on the conscious level and out of its reach. But it will kill every one of us here just as soon as it can, now it knows we're gunning for it."

"Are we?" said Atkinson, sardonically. "Don't you think—"

A vivid streak of light shot down the sky visible from the window. There was a thud that shook the building. A mile away half an acre of desert lifted itself in a great fan-shaped cloud.

"What—?" began Merling, and was thrown off his feet as the room was filled with a dazzling blue glare. The whole station seemed to leap a yard in the air and come down with a jarring crash. Each wall sprang a spiderweb of cracks.

PARKSTON had kept his feet. "That's our friend gunning for us," he said. "Now, General, do you believe me?"

"I do not," said Atkinson. "No doubt you planted those bombs yourself."

"Hell, they weren't bombs!" snapped Parkston. "I don't know what they were, but—"

"They were meteors," said a quiet voice in everyone's mind. The acarus was at the doorway, supporting itself against a door-post. Three of its arms were ragged stumps. There was a great gash down its left side, and something like a golden gelatine was oozing out.

Mary gasped and started towards it.

"Don't waste time on me," came its instant thought. "There are more pressing matters. The Id diverted two meteors that happened to be near the Earth. The first missed by only a mile. The second was a direct hit on my ship outside. There are no other meteors big enough or near enough for it to use now. But it will try something else. An earthquake, very likely. But an earthquake is the result of a long chain of subterranean events. It will take much of the Id's strength to get that chain into motion. The result will not come for three or four hours. We must bring off our own plan before then."

Atkinson had been staring hard at the acarus.

"I don't know what you are or how you fit into this attempt at sabotage," he said. "Nor how you plant your thoughts in my head. But I always prefer to do my own thinking. Now get to hell out of here, the lot of you!"

"You utter fool!" stormed Parkston. "Here, I'll land that damned ship myself somehow, by trial and error."

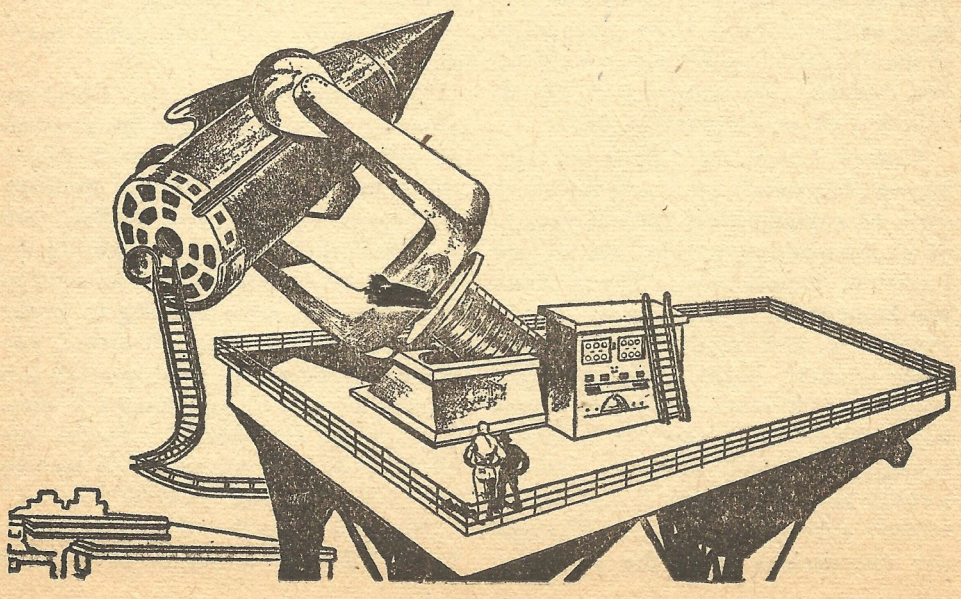
"Wait!" said the acarus. "There's no margin for error. One mistake and our chance is gone. Parkston, have you ever read Freud's 'Civilization and its Discontents'?"

"Yes," said Parkston, puzzled by the non-sequitur.

"Then I rely on your remarkable memory. Strang's last words, as the Id killed him, were an interrupted quotation from that book. About a source of mankind's unhappiness which is regarded as inevitable, being the disposition to decay of— Of what?"

Parkston thought. "Of our bodies," he said.

"I thought so. Strang's divination, for which the Id killed him because he had gone too far, was that human beings are naturally as immortal as we, the acari, are. Only physical injuries, on the scale of my own, should be fatal. Your race was designed for immortality. It would have spread light and knowledge through all the universe by now, had not the Id declared war on it from its birth. It deliberately implanted in man's mind the suggestion that his days were numbered. 'The



days of our years are three score and ten,' said the Id, through the Psalmist. Senility has been a perpetual mystery to your psychologists. There seemed no good reason why flesh and blood should not always go on replacing itself. There is no good reason—except the Id, and your complete acceptance of its suggestion."

"'I have immortal longings in me . . .'" quoted Parkston. "My God, no wonder! General, it's in your hands to give all mankind unlimited life. Think of it! The curse upon us has always been that no generation has had a chance to grow up. Most of us never mature, never get more than a glimmering of wisdom before old age clamps down on us and we're done. Only a few great men have resisted the Id's suggestion long enough to become to any degree wise, as Strang found. Think of the accumulated knowledge of Archimedes, the profundity of Plato, had they lived till now! And then think of what they might become! . . . The real birth of humanity is your decision, General."

"I think not," said Atkinson, and Merling was sick at heart to hear the same sardonic tone. "The great killer of men is neither old age nor accident, but disease. Do you expect me to believe that is imagination, too?"

"Alexis Carrel, in 'Man the Unknown', has pointed out that for every state of consciousness there seems to be a corresponding physical state," said Parkston, impatiently. "D'you think you know more than a man of Carrel's experience and reputation—a Nobel Prize winner? Lord, every physician knows a sick mind can cause a sick body. Duodenal ulcers are a classic example. Would microbes, germs, viruses matter a damn if our bodies weren't susceptible to 'em? Through our unconscious mind the Id makes our bodies their easy prey, besides giving us all sorts of fancy organic jimjams. The authentic faith-cures are rare cases of Egos making a stand against the Id, for once in a way—perhaps with the help of the Censor—but you wouldn't know about that."

"I wouldn't know about a lot of things," interrupted Atkinson, reflecting Parkston's impatience. "But I know I'm sick of all this prattling about the Id, whatever that is. Now get this in your head. I'm not going to throw that ship away, whatever you say or do. And—"

"And now listen to me!" snapped Mary, losing patience in her turn. "I was told you were a great man. You're nothing but an obstinate fool. We're not listening to General Atkinson, we're listening to the Id, using you like a ventriloquist's dummy. You think you're showing you've got a mind of your own, but you're not. Your mind belongs to the Id. You haven't done a bit of conscious thinking since we've been here. You're just a—a mish-mash of pride, jealousy, fear and hate. I think you're contemptible. The acarus is worth a million of you."

Atkinson was open-eyed, open-mouthed.

She went on furiously, "Because Mooring went under, you let yourself go with him. You're scared silly—frightened to put any faith in anything or anyone. Don't you realise, you numskull, that you've been fighting the Id for years yourself? That as soon as it realised you were planning to be the first man on the Moon, it struck you down with paralysis, tried to make you utterly helpless? You fought it then. Now you've surrendered. You've lost all hope of walking again, of leading your old active life. You're finished."

"Do you mean that if I do what you want, I'll have a chance of walking

again?" asked Atkinson, very slowly.

"You'll walk again. And you can still be the first man on the Moon," said Mary.

"That's right," said Parkston and Merling simultaneously.

"If the Id is defeated, it is certain," the acarus telepathed.

Atkinson looked at them in turn. He seemed to be undergoing a terrific internal struggle. Then suddenly he said, quietly, "I'll do it."

He wheeled his chair to the control panel and turned the rocket ship back to the Moon.

PARKSTON mopped his brow. "Lord!" he muttered. "That was the toughest battle of my life—and a girl won it for me. Mary, I've really got to meet you sometime."

"You ought to have seen her stalking that tank with a pistol," said Merling warmly. "She's some fighter!"

Mary started to reply. She stopped suddenly, ran to the side of the acarus. It had slid gently to the floor. The two men hurried after her. Parkston knelt to assist.

"I shall not see the end of it." The thoughts were weak now. "But it will be an end to the threat to both our races. And the true beginning for yours. Also, I know, the beginning of a great alliance. Humanity and the acari shall spread life together among the stars . . . Parkston, I want you to be the liason officer between our races. Do you accept?"

"Of course," said Parkston, and cleared his throat.

"The acari will know you. One of our observers is stationed in this room —has been all along. What we say and do here is being broadcast all over the acarian world.

"I'm finished now. It was the Id who set you and General Atkinson against each other, to waste your strength and gain time for itself. Be on guard against it until—"

It never finished the sentence.

Parkston got to his feet. He went over to Atkinson. "How's it going?" he asked.

"Well enough. I had only just countered the inertia of the ship in its original forward drive. It hadn't stopped going Moonwards, actually, though it was slowing constantly."

"Cram on all power, then."

"I have."

"How long before it gets there?"

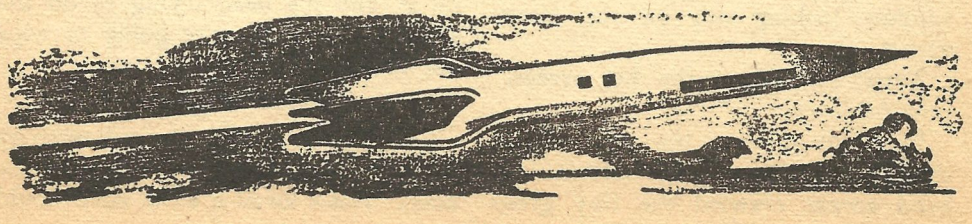
"Three and a half hours," said Atkinson.

"It's still a race," said Parkston. "The Id's earthquake might hit us first. Or some other funny trick."

One of the technicians had wandered near. Suddenly, he dived forward, snatched the gun from Atkinson's lap, jammed it against the general's heart and pulled the trigger. Just as rapidly Atkinson cracked his skull with a steel ruler.

"Your Id friend is slipping," said Atkinson, composedly. "It didn't even know what I noticed myself—that the gun was empty."

Parkston was shaken. "Thank heavens he didn't use it as a club," he said, and jut the gun in his pocket.



"Now listen, everybody. From now on every one of you may expect to get crazy impulses to do things like that. To kill the general or me, to smash apparatus, or blow the joint up. That'll be the Id working on you. Now it's up to you to keep those feelings in check. It's possible, when you realize what's really happening to you. Prove you are the master, not the Id. You men are the representatives of humanity in a fight with its mortal enemy. Keep self-control for three or four hours and you've won—we've all won. Got that?"

Everyone got it.

"Damn good thing we're in the middle of a desert," muttered Parkston to Merling, later. "Else it'd have been too easy for the Id to have worked up a lynching party."

ONE . . . TWO . . . three hours passed, very slowly. The sun went. It was night.

The technicians sat silently. Every now and then one clenched his fists, closed his eyes and fought a battle where none could aid him. But the others watched alertly to stop him should he lose. No one lost.

George Merling and Mary sat talking in low tones of many private things.

General Atkinson kept his eyes on the small radar screen and his fingers on the controls. The ship was very near the Moon now, and he'd turned it stern-down for landing.

Parkston paced restlessly up and down between the white, still, mutilated body of the acarus and the wide window looking out on the starlit desert.

Then: "She's on the big screen," said Atkinson.

Everyone gazed at the radar map of the Moon. Out of its bottom left-hand corner crawled the tiny green shape of the rocket ship. It began making for Point NW 277395.

Presently, Parkston said, "I reckon that's far enough, General. Now branch off southeast and land her in the crater Sulpicius Gallus. But don't us the chemical rockets to brake her, as you intended to. Use the atomic jet."

"Right," said Atkinson, without questioning.

But everyone else asked a mute question.

"I can tell you now the acarus' plan. It's too late, I hope, for the Id to escape—anyway, we'll soon know. You see, the acarus came from a silica solution in Andrew Crosse's lab—that's a long story we'll have to skip for now. But it knew all about silicon formations and their possibilities. When it saw the Id tryiing to conceal its hideout from me, it noticed something—the Id appeared dimly in all the fake scenes it thought up—as a glowing ball. But that was disguise too. When I got one glimpse through the veil and saw the crater, the Id didn't seem to be there. But it was. I was seeing it straight and plain. The Id is the crater Sulpicius Gallus!"

Even Atkinson looked surprised.

"The Id is silicon life—and Sulpicius Gallus is all silicon and pumice. I should have guessed it was something like that. There's no air or water on the Moon, and so carbon life, like the Earth's, isn't possible. The Id, silicon life, regards carbon life as a dangerous rival. The Moon is a dead world, because the Id wiped out all carbon life on it, and it's been trying to do the same here. But we're going to wipe out the Id instead."

"How?" asked Merling.

"A slow trickle of radioactivity probably benefits the Id, as it does the acari. But a lot of it all at once would

be fatal. The clouds of radioactive gas the ship will jet into that small crater as it descends will completely permeate it. The porous pumice will retain it long enough to burn out the mind of the Id altogether."

"Aren't you unwise in revealing this?" asked one of the technicians.

"Too late for the Id to do anything about it now," said Parkston. "It might have figured out some way of protection if it had known earlier. But we kept it guessing—I don't think it even suspected we knew which crater it was in, let alone that it was the crater. It couldn't have wormed anything out of the acarus' mind about it. I can only hope I've been as good a clam myself."

"We'll know in a few minutes," said Atkinson. "I'm landing her."

They watched the bright point of the ship settling into the ring of Sulpicius Gallus, and tried to imagine a strange life dying a strange death there.

There came a rumbling from far below ground. The room began to shudder. In its death throes, the Id was fighting them yet.

Then the rumbling died away.

"Landed," said Atkinson.

And then, suddenly, a great peace descended on the room. Every man felt the load of anxiety fall away, dissolve utterly, and his mind become clear and serene.

"It's done," said Parkston, and peals of bells seemed to ring through his head. His gaze fell upon the motionless, torn body of the acarus . . . He turned his head away and was silent.

The others were watching General Atkinson. He had levered himself slowly from the wheel-chair. He stood up straight, took one or two uncertain steps. And all at once he burst into tears.

Parkston shook himself, and went over to Mary and George. "'Bout time I met you, Mary," he said.

"Too late, Sherry—we're going to be married," said George.

"Oh," said Parkston. And then, "Congratulations! I've got a full-time job coming up, anyway—liaison officer. Remember, George, I told you there was a point to everything, even climbing Everest, once you saw the plan whole. I see where I fit in now."

"I see the point now, too," said George, squeezing Mary's arm. "I'd never have gone within miles of Jacksburg if I hadn't climbed Everest. By the way, we're honeymooning in England. We're going to look up Doug Morgan—I bet that guy's jumping round the bedroom at this moment and wondering what happened. We're going to tell him. And we're going to show him that his lone fight wasn't pointless, either."

THE HUNTED

THE LESSER gravity of Earth gave the two creatures a free bounding stride as they walked down the slope toward the pens. The myriad facets of their eyes caught the morning sun with the iridescent gleam of oil on water. As was the rule when inspecting the penned creatures, they both carried the tiny silver tubes which, when properly aimed, blocked all neural impulses except those necessary to sustain life.

To the two of them, the penned creatures were a source of excitement. Thome, the elder of the two, said in his piping voice, "A new lot came through yesterday. I want to get your opinion."

They stopped and looked through the electrified wire. Riss, the younger, made a high thin sound of satisfaction. "Excellent! They are in fine shape. Look at that one."

They both looked with proprietary pride at a young naked man who stood and stared sullenly at them. He was well over six feet tall, heavily muscled, his tan skin marked with the white scar

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

They are the best and most dangerous game in the solar system—better than the Venusian fire lizards or the awesome winged snakes of Callisto — these strange, vicious beasts called "Men"!

tissue of many wounds. His blue eyes seemed to flare with the instinct to kill as he looked at the two outside the fence.

"It seems odd," said Thome, "that the first of us to come here found these creatures repulsive. I have become quite fond of them."

"In a way," Riss said, "it is sad." He turned and pointed to the shattered skyline of Chicago. "They were far enough advanced to have built their crude cities, even to release a fractional part of the power of the atom. Who can tell what their destiny might have been?"

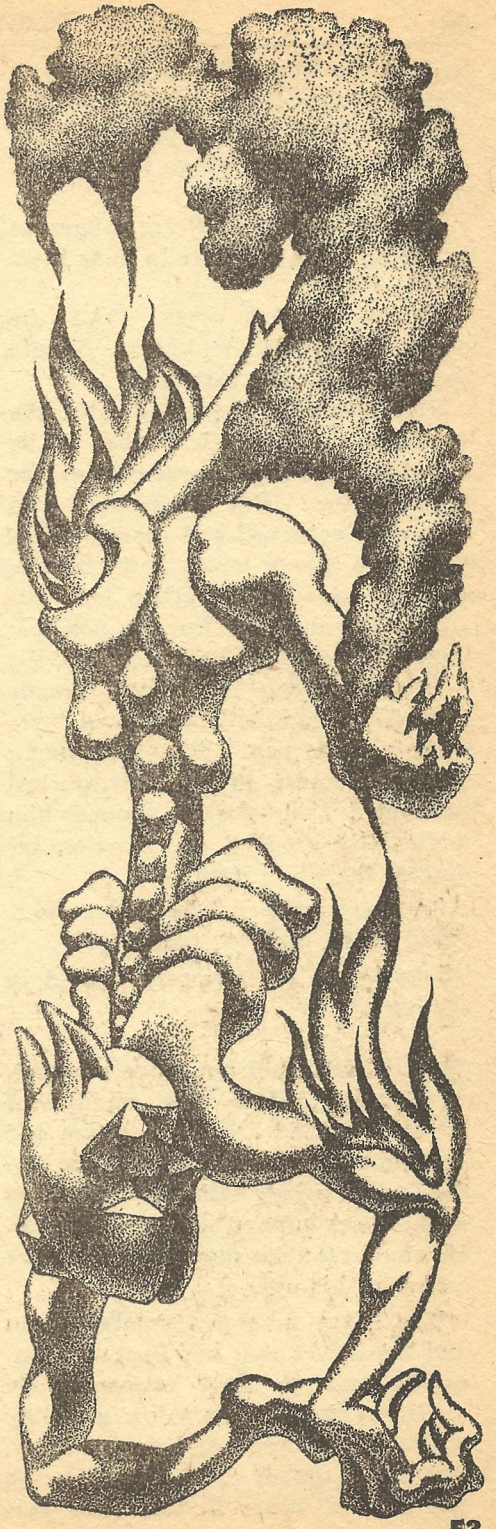
Thome giggled. "You are too imaginative. They are too wild to have continued to live with the atomic power in their grasp. We saved them from themselves."

Riss shrugged. "Maybe you're right. And then again, in the last eighty years of breeding, while we strove for ferocity and cunning, we may have bred out of the race some leavening factor which would have enabled them to overcome their innate murderous instincts."

"This group will make good sport," Thome said proudly.

"What is planned?"

"Tomorrow I am expecting a rather



A shattered figure spun over and over toward the pavement.

large party. We will release twenty of these creatures in the ruined city. All will contribute and a prize will be given to him who brings the most of them down."

Riss frowned. "They are dangerous in the city. It is better to hunt them on the plain."

Thome giggled again. "All the better. The sport lasts longer. Would you like to inspect that one?"

Riss nodded. Thome adjusted the switch on the small silver tube. As he aimed it, there were hoarse cries of fear from the pen. But the young blond man only crouched and drew his lips back from strong white teeth. Thome carefully sprayed the group with the silver tube and they froze in position. One, caught off balance, fell heavily.

After throwing the switch, Thome opened the gate and the two of them went into the pen. The blond young man was frozen in his half-crouched position. They walked around him while Riss prodded his muscles, inspected the white teeth.

"A fine specimen," he said at last. "Will he be used for breeding?"

"If he is not too seriously injured in the hunt."

PETER could not move his eyes. Many times this undignified thing had happened to him and each time it made him furious. The two dead-white beings with the silver tubes walked back out and slammed the gate. He could see their movement from the corner of his eye.

The silver tube was pointed again and the power that had kept him immobile was suddenly released. He looked at them, made a low growling sound in his throat and turned away. His hands itched with the desire to get hold of them, to tear their pale flesh, sink his teeth in their tiny throats, smash in the huge many-faceted eyes.

Vaguely he wondered why they had looked so carefully at him. This was a new pen. In the beginning, the first thing he remembered was the pen of the children. That was when he learned about the fence. Only once had he been thrown back stunned, after touching it. Yet he had seen others in the children's pen touch the wire many times.

In the end of the runway was the feeding trough. It was wise to run quickly at feeding time, to push the others away, to snarl and bite and strike out. If you missed too many feeding times, you became weak and then never again would you be able to feed. The others would push you away and then you would lie down on the dirt and breathe no more.

In the pen of the children he was the strongest. All bowed to his fist and his sharp teeth. He remembered the time they had moved him from the pen of the children to the pen of the young men. He had not wanted to leave the pen of the children. A week before, he would have been glad to leave, glad of the change. But he had begun to have an odd feeling when he looked at the girl-child they called Mary. He did not want to leave when they moved him.

The pen of the young men had been vast. There was not so much fighting there, because of the work. The work was strange. Great stones had to be carried back and forth without reason. And then, of course, there was the running.

He did not know how long he had been in the pen of the young men. It was like the children's pen in that there was a place for sleeping, with a roof, and the feeding trough. And the wire.

Then he had been moved. One sun

ago he and many from the pen of the young men had been moved to this much smaller pen. It was far too small. He felt cramped, stifled.

As the two walked away from the wire, back up the slope toward the white sphere in which they lived, Peter turned back toward the sleeping place. The others laughed at him because he had been prodded and inspected.

"Oh-eh, they will kill you and eat you, Peter," one of them said.

The others laughed deeply in their throats.

Peter pretended not to notice. He walked slowly by the group. Then, bunching the muscles of his huge legs, he threw himself at them, striking them at ankle height with his hurtling body. He was the first to scramble to his feet. He did not use the blows that kill; just punishing blows. His square fists smacked against flesh. One of them leaped onto his back and with a quick twist he threw the man against the wire. There was a puff, the smell of singed flesh. They crept away from Peter and laughed no more.

He inflated his big chest and thumped it twice with a heavy fist, making a hollow booming that resounded through the pen. At the sound, an older man swaggered out of the sleeping place. He was more scarred than was Peter. Peter had given the challenge.

Stiff-legged they walked around each other, making small sounds in their throats. Once the challenge has been made, the fight must be to the death. Peter saw that this was an old one, a clever one.

The clever one's body was nearly covered with tightly curled reddish-brown hair. His face was scarred so that one side of his mouth was always drawn up away from the yellow teeth in a snarl.

The old one feinted, thrust at Peter's eyes with long nails. Peter slid away from the stab, clamped his fingers on the other's wrist and spun. The old one cleverly threw himself in the right direction so that his arm did not snap. In doing so, he brought his shoulder close to Peter's mouth. Peter's teeth met in the meat of his shoulder, and then with a wrench of mighty neck muscles, he tore a long strip of flesh loose. The old one bawled, leaped away, blood staining his arm, dripping from his fingertips.

The others in the pen, some thirty of them, stood in a loose circle and watched without expression, without sound.

Once more they circled each other. This time the old one was more cautious. He knew his muscles were stronger, but that he was not so quick.

Peter dodged suddenly to one side, and then threw himself straight at the old one, knee plunging up toward the groin. The old one turned, caught the thrust on the hip bone, and his arms locked around Peter's torso. The old one made a small purring sound of approval. Slowly his arms began to tighten. Peter took a deep breath. The old one had his face tight against Peter's chest so that Peter could not get at his eyes. Peter grasped the hair of the old one's head with both hands, pulled the old one's head back. Then, letting go with his right hand, he quickly brought it around so that his forearm was across the mouth of the old one. Peter felt the stinging pain as teeth met in his arm.

His leverage was good, but the old one was stubborn. Sweat poured from both of them. Suddenly there was a dim crack, as of a dry twig in the forest. The old one slumped to the ground, his head at an odd angle. Peter kicked him full in the face with the

hard ball of his foot, then turned and once more issued the challenge. There were no takers. He walked into the sleeping place, stretched out on the straw and began to lick the wound in his arm. It was in a difficult place, but he knew that if he did not lick it, it would not heal properly.

Somehow he felt no urge to join the others. They had gathered the sticks and built the fire. He could hear them quarreling mildly over the more succulent portions of the body of the old one. Though they had just been fed, they would eat the old one, because there was no other way to gain the strength that the old one had possessed.

After a time Peter slept, his big chest rising and falling very slowly, his dreams filled with memories of battle.

The next day, just as the sun had risen, a large number of the masters with the little silver tubes came to the wire. One of their floating platforms was brought close. The little tubes were aimed and Peter felt the sudden stillness that could not be broken.

With their lifting sticks, they picked him up, floated him through the door set into the wire and dropped him heavily onto the floating platform. Though he tried with all his strength, he could not break the invisible bonds of the silver tubes.

Others were dropped near him. He felt the thuds of their bodies. Many thuds. One man landed across Peter's legs.

The gate closed and then the floating platform went off at great speed. He knew they were high in the air and it made him dizzy.

His stomach felt the sudden drop, the slowing, and once again the platform hung still in the air. They were all taken with lifting sticks and dropped onto rough broken pavement.

He heard the voice of one of those weak, soft men who served the masters. The hated voice of one of those who filled the feeding troughs and cleaned the pens.

"You are in the city. You are free. You cannot leave the city, because on one side is vast water and on the edges of the city are the areas of pain. But the city is large. There are many places to hide. The masters will come to hunt you down and kill you. If you can, you are permitted to kill first. There will be no punishment.

"In an hour the masters will come. Many of them. They will leave the city at dusk. They will return at dawn. If any of you last for three days without being found and killed, you will then be recaptured and sent to the pens where there are women."

The voice stopped. The pressure was suddenly released. Peter jumped to his feet, saw the floating platform soaring above the shattered roofs. He looked about, his head thrown back, sniffing the air.

So the masters were coming to kill! Good! They would come to be killed, also. He, Peter, would see to that. At last a chance to tear their pale flesh! In the full pride of his strength, he beat his chest once more.

It did not occur to him, nor to any of the others, to band together in defence or offense. Set down with a common nucleus, they drifted off in all directions, wary and alert.

It was the first time Peter had seen a city. He did not like it. Great mouldering walls, and streets blocked with rubble. Pavement heaved and torn. One had to step carefully, because of the shattered glass.

He walked aimlessly at first, then suddenly remembered that the masters would begin the hunt in one hour. He did not know what an hour was, but he

had the idea that it was a very short time. There were many hours in one sun.

A dark entrance looked like a place in which to hide. The doorway was almost blocked with rubble. He squeezed through, waited until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. A sagging stairway led up. He went up it rapidly, touching his knuckles to the stairs, his nose alert to the scents around him.

At the top of the stairs it was light. There was no roof on the building. It was not a good building in which to fight. He left it in disgust, but as he went down the stairs he wrenched free a stout club. It felt good in his hand. The firewood was always too small to use as a club. This was a fine, a wonderful club. He swung it, listened to the whistle it made. Ah, this club would smash the brains of the masters, the white, weak ones with the insect eyes.

The third entrance he tried was good. It was a very big place. His bare feet padded on some smooth cold stone on the floor. To his left were several cages made of metal. He stuck the club into an open place in the metal and twisted. The metal was weak. It broke under the strain.

The cage was dark inside. He looked up and saw that it went up a great distance and that long metal ropes, two of them, went up into the blackness. He wanted to climb the metal ropes to find a secret place high above him. Yet he could not climb and carry the club at the same time. It took a long time of thinking. Then he found a bit of rotted rope, tied it crudely where it seemed weakest, then tied one end to the club. He looped the other end around his waist and tied it.

He leaped up into the darkness, his powerful hands closing on the metal rope. Hand over hand, he went up into the darkness. The rope was sticky. His biceps began to crack and tingle with the strain. He locked his legs around the rope and rested for a time. Once he looked down and clung more tightly to the metal rope.

The second time he stopped to rest, he did not dare look down. He clung to the rope and shut his eyes. At last he came to the end. The metal ropes, both of them, went around wheels. There was a faint light. Above him was flat metal. His muscles ached with strain. He inched up further, clung with his legs and his right hand, and got the club with his left. He jabbed it up against the metal. There was a hollow sound, but it seemed solid. He waited for a moment, wondering what to do.

Then he saw a metal bar across the wall five feet away. Above the bar was a narrow space. He could squeeze through up there.

WITH sudden resolve, he grasped one of the wheels and swung across, reaching out his left hand, then hung, panting, to the metal bar. Slowly he worked his way up until he could stand on the metal bar. The narrow place touched his chest and his back. Above him was light. Finding small handholds, he worked his way up for a distance of about ten feet. Then the narrow space opened out and he found he could stand on a flat surface. As nearly as he could make out, the thing on which he stood was fastened to the metal ropes and fitted inside the shaft up which he had climbed. He wondered if it was used in the old world to carry people up and down the shaft.

Eight feet from the top of the box was an opening in the side of the shaft. He jumped, caught the edge with his

fingers and pulled himself up, rolled out onto a stone floor like the one so far below.

There were many doors opening onto the long hall. They sagged on their hinges as though they had been driven open by a blast. He looked in the first one. In great wonder he looked at the gray fragile bones of a man who sat, in death, behind a large box. There were tiny shards of glass on the floor. The floor was covered with a soft, rotted fabric.

In one corner was a smaller box and on top of it was a strange machine. Smaller bones were on the floor near the machine. Smaller bones and whisps of long pale hair. He could smell ancient death. His skin prickled.

The machine was rusted. It had a black roll across the top of it, and in the roll was a fragment of scorched paper. With a blow of his club he drove the machine off the smaller box. It fell in a reddish cloud of dust and rust.

Suddenly he remembered the danger. It would be wise to find out if there were another way to get to this place. He ran down the corridor, looking in each room, trying to find some place that led down. In most of the rooms there were machines and bones and the smell of dust.

At last he found a place where stairs led down. It made him angry. He growled low in his throat. The masters could come up this way.

If it was not blocked.

He went down many lengths of the stairs, going ever lower, and then he rounded a corner, fought for balance, his mind sick with fear. Below him was emptiness for fifty feet, and below that, the building started again. It was as though huge jaws had taken a bite out of the side of the building.

Returning, he went back up the stairs. He went back beyond the floor where he had climbed out of the shaft. The stairs ended. Above him was wood. He pushed against it and it opened with a creak of rusty hinges. He was out in the air. He was on a flat place bigger than the pen. It was surrounded with a low stone wall. He went to the wall, looked cautiously over. The street was a dizzy distance away.

Even as he looked he saw one of the floating platforms far below, cruising down the street. He growled deep in his throat. Two of the masters were on the front edge of the floating platform. His keen eyes saw that they did not hold the silver tubes. Instead, they held the thick, stubby, black rods with the glowing coil above the barrel.

Peter knew those rods. He had seen one used, on a man who had been blinded in one of the fights in the pen.

The master had pointed it. There had been a thick noise, like a husky cough, and the blinded man's head had disappeared, blood spouting from the neck stump.

They were looking for Peter to kill him with those black rods. He snarled. Then his eyes widened in quick interest.

As the floating platform speeded up, he saw a naked man leap from behind a pile of rubble, hurl a stone at the two masters. Without seeing where his stone landed, the man turned and ran.

Peter smiled in satisfaction as one of the masters toppled from the platform. The other one aimed the rod. The running man threw up his arms, stumbled and rolled in the cluttered street, was still, his blood bright and red in the sunshine. The platform settled to the pavement. The master who had killed the man hurried back to his companion. He leaned over him.

Suddenly Peter realized that they were almost below him. He looked

around for something to drop on them. Then he saw that the railing was made of large stones that had been fitted together. The substance which had fastened them together was crumbled.

He put his hands on the edge of it, braced his feet and pulled. The muscles stood out on his arms and shoulders. He pulled until the world went red in front of him, and slowly the stone came free, dropped onto the roof.

He looked over the edge. They were still down there. But they were some distance from the wall of the building. The stone would have to be hurled away from the building.

The sharp edges cut into his thighs, tore the flesh as he picked it up. By great effort he got it above his head, both palms flat against it. His legs shook.

He moved to the edge. They were still there, but the one who had been hit by the stone was sitting up. There was little time left. He moved a foot to the left, then took two quick steps, pushing the big stone as far out from the side of the building as he could. For a moment he thought he was going to follow it over, but he caught the edge with his hand.

Fascinated, he watched the huge stone dwindle, turning over slowly.

He thought it had gone beyond them, then suddenly they were blotted out. The white stone leaped into a hundred shattered pieces. After he had seen the pieces fly, he heard the crash.

Where the stone had hit there were clots of white pulp against the gray pavement, and a thin, watery substance.

The floating platform rested there, waiting for the ones who would not return. On the forward edge of it was one of the black rods.

Slowly the idea came to him that soon another one of the masters would come. The master would see the bodies, see the fractured stone.

Then he would look up, see the roof, come up after him on one of the platforms. That was a way of getting to the top of the building that he had not considered.

Thus his building was not good. Not a safe place.

But if a man could have one of those platforms . . .

HE RAN down the flights of stairs to the corridor, jumped down to the top of the box, squeezed down between the box and the wall, swung across to the cable and slid down. The heat of the friction seared his hands. At last he thumped against the floor, climbed out through the broken grille and went to the street door. Flies buzzed over the body of the man who had been shot down as he had tried to run. The black rod had bitten a head-sized hole through his torso.

All sense alert, Peter stood inside the doorway. There was no sound, no scent of the masters. He ran to the floating platform. He did not even look toward the white pulp of the two masters he had slain.

At first he made a motion to push the fearful black rod off onto the street. Then curiosity got the better of him. He picked it up, sighted it the way the master had done, and touched the button set into the side of the barrel. The body of the man up the street jumped and slid several feet further away.

He tried to remember how he had seen them work the platforms, and felt angry with himself because he had not watched more closely. The platform was of a silvery metal, and was as wide as he was tall, and twice as long. It was as thick as his thigh. Two tiny levers, made for the masters' childlike hands, protruded through two slots near the front of it.

He grasped one lever and pulled it back. The ascent was so rapid that it forced him down against the platform. By the time he overcame his shock and surprise, and got the lever pushed forward again, he was higher than the roof he had been on. Much higher.

In fear he pushed the lever too far forward. The drop was sickening. He brought it back to the halfway mark and the platform hung motionless in the air, moving slightly toward the building because that was the direction of the wind.

The slot for the other lever was bigger. He found that the second lever would move in any direction. More cautious than he had been with the first lever, he moved it to the left and the platform moved slowly away from the side of the building. He pulled the first lever back slightly, waited until he was above the roof, and then pushed the second lever to the right. The platform floated over the roof. He pushed the first lever slowly forward until the platform settled onto the roof with an awkward jar.

He made a warm sound of pleasure, scratched his chest and looked at the platform with pride of possession.

It was then that he heard the distant cough. A section of the stone railing flew off, and the rock dust bit into his face, stinging him so that tears came to his eyes.

With one motion, he snatched the black rod, whirled and dropped flat behind the railing. He scrambled far to one side on his belly, and then took a quick look. A second platform was coming up toward the roof on a long slant. One of the masters held a black rod. The second was guilding the platform.

He saw that they were going to pass right above him, and he felt fear. He brought the rod up to aiming position. Then he jumped to his feet, his finger tight on the button, aiming full at the two figures.

Near his feet a hole suddenly appeared in the roof.

A shattered figure spun over and over, down toward the pavement. A second, suddenly headless, hunched

over the control switches. The platform continued to angle up. It passed so close to him that he involuntarily ducked. Then it continued on at the same angle, constantly rising as it passed over toward the vast stretch of blue water.

With three bodies in the street, this would not be a good building. And sooner or later, one of the masters would fly over and see the silver gleam of the platform.

If only the platform could be hidden. If there were a hole to put it in and cover it over. He stared stupidly down at it. It was so large! Gradually he became conscious of the weight of the black rod in his hand.

There was a hole in the roof near his feet. He looked down the hole into a large corridor. Shaking with sudden excitement, he put the end of the rod close to the roof and touched the button. It cut through the roof. He moved it in a large rectangle, remembering at the last moment that he should be standing outside the rectangle. It sagged and, as he cut the last portion, fell through. There was a crash and a cloud of white plaster rose up. He hurried to the platform, and, with growing skill at the simple controls, moved it a foot off the roof, directly over the hole, and then pushed the first lever forward. It sank through the hole. He stopped it before it touched the floor, then eased it forward. There was a wall in the way. With the rod, he blasted a hole in the wall and edged through. He thought it might be necessary to leave quickly, and he mentally reviewed the lever motions that would be necessary.

WEARY with the hunt, Thome returned to find Riss standing near the depleted pen. The last rays of the sun touched the shattered towers of ancient Chicago.

Riss looked up. "I told you it would be dangerous," he said mildly.

Thome sagged to the ground. He shrugged. "They wished to have sport. Dangerous sport. I told them that the creatures were crafty and dangerous. But they were jaded and wished the excitement and the killing. They received it. And five of them were killed! I was nearly killed by one who attacked with a club in a narrow place we thought empty."

Riss gasped. "Five! I thought it was but two!"

"We found three more bodies. Of the twenty that were released, fourteen have been killed. There are only six live creatures left in the city."

Riss looked relieved. "Then tomorrow there will be little danger."

Thome plucked at the grass with his thin white fingers. "Little danger? One of them, we do not know which one, has captured a platform and a thrust gun. The hunted becomes the hunter."

"Then that ends the hunt," Riss said firmly. "They will bring over one of the ships and char the city, surely."

Thome shook his head. "No, Riss. They intend to stick to their bargain. After all, the creature will be clumsy with the platform and the thrust gun."

Riss asked quietly, "Will you join the hunt tomorrow?"

"Would you?" Thome asked.

THERE was a sagged place in the roof that held water. Before dawn Peter found it and drank thirstily. Thus, at dawn he saw the two platforms floating over the city.

He slipped down into the building and watched from the darkness. They seemed to be searching: two of them. The odds were against him, in spite of his new and satisfying weapons. He

guessed that they would now hunt in groups of two or more.

He faded out of sight. After a long search of the rooms he at last found a place where there was the smell of dried food. There were many round metal containers. Some of them had rusted, and the food had run out and dried on the shelves. He took two without holes, found a sharp piece of metal and punctured them. The taste was strange, but good.

It was while he was eating that the building began to quiver. He dropped the metal containers, ran to the roof. When he was certain that nothing hovered over him, he ran to the wall, looked cautiously over.

Two platforms hovered above the street. The masters, four of them, were aiming the black rods at the base of the building.

Even as he watched, the building jolted and sagged. There was an ominous sound of tearing metal, of the crunching of stone and plaster. He realized what they were doing. The building would fall. He would be crushed. He ran down to the platform, threw himself face down on it, the black rod under his chest, and slowly brought the platform up so that it was flush with the hole he had made in the roof.

The sweat of fear was on his body. If he caused the platform to fly up into sight, they would come after him. If he waited, he would be killed.

Slowly and majestically, the building began to move toward the street, tilting toward the smaller buildings on the opposite side.

He pushed the second lever to the left, moved with the building for a few seconds, then hung motionless while it fell away from him. The two other platforms shot up and he got a glimpse of them just before a vast cloud of dust rose up and he was deafened by the grinding, prolonged crash of the building.

The dust choked him. He pulled the first lever as far back as it would go for the maximum upward speed and wedged the second lever as far ahead as it would go. The wind tore at his face as he angled up out of the dust, rising at tremendous speed.

As he came out into the clear air, he had a chance for a quick shot at one of the other platforms. He saw the faceted eyes turn toward him, and then a gouge flew out of the rim of the other platform which held the control levers.

It seemed to hang in the air for a moment, and then went down like a falling leaf, spinning over and over. He looked behind him, saw the second platform match course with him. But it was far behind. In the remote distance, he saw two more leap up out of the city and turn toward him.

A great and intense pain suddenly knotted every muscle. He groaned and screamed and thudded his head against the cool metal in an ecstacy of pain. Then it was gone, and the city was behind him.

The pain had left him weak. He dimly realized that he had shot through it at such a great speed that it had not caused him to faint. Usually the pain did that. The masters were able to make the areas of pain wherever they pleased. Once he had escaped with two others from the pen of the children. From above they had been enclosed in a ring of pain. It was more certain than the wire. No man could crawl through it without fainting, remaining helpless until picked up. The pain had no effect on the masters.

As he slowly recovered his strength, he grew conscious of great cold. The earth was far below. Frost was beginning to appear on the silver sur-

face of the platform. He pushed the first lever slightly forward, without decreasing the speed. The platform behind him remained at the same distance.

Suddenly he wanted to be back in the pen, back among those who fought with fist and teeth and nails. He wanted the security of the pen. He wanted to weep with loneliness and with fear of the death which was coming so inexorably behind him. The masters could not be beaten. One must not escape from the masters. That was the Law.

He looked back. The distance between the two platforms was too great for the use of the black rod. Anger was black within him. He growled softly.

He shifted his position, stretched out on his belly. Then he held tightly to one of the small hand rails, brought the black rod up and aimed it at the following platform. Glancing over his shoulder, he hooked a cautious toe over the forward speed lever, suddenly yanked it back to full reverse.

The strain nearly tore his arm out.

The platform loomed up with startling suddenness. Finger on the button, he held the rod aimed at the two of them, saw them driven back off the platform in a spray of the clear watery liquid that had stained the street of the city.

Their empty platform shot by him on one side so close that he could have touched it. He scrambled quickly to the front of his own platform, grasped the leading edge and once more switched to full speed ahead.

The other two platforms were much closer. Almost as close as the first one had been. He did not dare try the trick again. They had seen it, certainly. They would be waiting.

Far ahead rode the empty platform that had passed him. Without the burden of passengers, it quickly increased the distance.

The sun was high when he approached the fringes of a huge forest. He glanced back. The pursuers held their position. He looked ahead. They would never find him in the immensity of that forest; yet they might mark the spot where he landed, and blast the

earth with some weapon other than the black rod.

He lowered the platform slowly without diminishing speed until he was but a few feet from the tops of the highest trees.

It was worth a chance. They were far behind him, so far behind that they were two white dots on a metal sheet half the size of his little finger nail.

He made his decision. Bracing himself as before, he threw the lever into reverse, and, as the platform came momentarily to a dead stop, he pushed the lever forward again, yanking the altitude lever back.

He let the platform speed out from under him. He had hoped to drop into the trees. Instead, he landed in a small clearing, landed with a force that drove the wind from him, dropped him into sudden darkness . . .

"SO THEY were all killed?" Riss asked.

"Nineteen of them were. The twentieth, the one you saw the day before yesterday, fled on a platform. He dropped off over the northern forest. An hour later his platform ran out of fuel and it was only then that the stupid ones who followed him found the platform empty and discovered that he had fallen. They could not find the place of course, but it is obvious that he died."

"He was more intelligent than the others," Thome said.

"A good beast to hunt, my friend. A dangerous beast. The best kind. Better than the fire lizards of Venus or the winged snakes of Callisto. This beast called man is the best of all."

"When is the next hunt?"

"We're expecting a shipment next week. But for the next hunt, there will be special, complicated controls on the platforms and thrust guns, so that the creatures cannot capture them and use them."

"Splendid idea," Riss said. He looked down toward the pen where the creatures were fighting to get at the food trough.

IT WAS night when Peter awakened. His head throbbed. Something bit into his side and he found that it was the useless fragments of the black rod, broken by his fall.

His sensitive nose savored the light breeze that blew along the forest floor. He broke the rope that still held the club to his waist. He got to his knees and listened. Something rustled in the leaves. He crouched, sprang, and killed it with the first blow of the club. It was a small animal.

By the pale light of dawn he saw that it was a beast with a hide covered with long stiff thorns. Its belly was soft. He tore it open with a sharp stick, ate the raw meat. It would have been better cooked, but there was no way to make fire.

An hour later he found a cold brook, drank deeply and bathed his bruises. He was stiff from the fall.

It was good to be free, to walk where he pleased. The free air had a good smell. The forest floor was pleasantly springy under his feet.

He walked aimlessly under the huge trees, and it was as though deep instincts were reawakened, as though all his senses had become sharper.

Even so, he did not know that they had surrounded him until he heard the hoarse shout that was a signal.

It happened in the middle of a clearing. He paused, saw the men step out from behind the clumps of brush. He turned, found them on all sides.

They were powerful men with wary eyes, tangled beards. They wore the skins of animals, belted around them

with leather thongs. He was oddly conscious for the first time in his life of his absolute nakedness.

There was no escape. They carried clubs, even as he, but to the ends of their clubs were lashed sharpened stones.

One of them, not as powerful as the others, and unarmed, stepped toward him. Peter lifted the club in a threatening gesture.

"Who are you?" the stranger asked.

"I am Peter."

"I am Saul. Where do you come from?"

"I was in the pens. The masters put me in the ruined city so they could find me and kill me. I killed them instead. I took their platform and their gun and I came to this place."

Saul looked at him with contempt. "You wear no skins and you are dirty. You come from the pens. That is plain."

Peter threw aside his club and growled low in his throat. "You lead these men? I can kill you."

"It is like that in the pens, but not here, my friend. He who leads here is the one best able to lead, not the one with the sharpest teeth. Should you strike me, these others would kill you quickly."

Peter looked sullenly around at the waiting men. He saw, on their faces, not the blood lust of those who watched the fights in the pens, but rather a sort of contempt, and amusement. It made him ashamed.

"Did you escape?" Peter asked the one who called himself Saul.

"My father escaped. I was born here in the forest. This place is called Nicolet. All of us were born here, except that one over there. He escaped five years ago."

"What do you do here?" Peter asked him.

The man called Saul looked proud. "We live in huts in the forest. We trap game, plant crops and increase in numbers. We are free and strong. We no longer call those beings our masters. We are our own masters." He looked around. The other men rumbled agreement.

"What will you do to me?" Peter asked.

"If we do not want you with us, we will kill you. If you want to come with us, you must remember that we do not fight among each other. We work, all of us. It is hard, but it is good. We will find you skins to wear. Among the daughters you will find a wife. Then all will help to build your hut. You will obey our laws and vote in the council of the adults as does every one of us."

AS THE first touch of night began to shade the forest, the hunting party topped the crest and went eagerly down the slope to the village. Peter was with them, clothed in fresh skins.

Hidden among the trees, the lights of the cooking fires twinkled. He heard the glad welcoming cries of the women, the soft sounds of the voices of the children.

He stood alone for a moment, and there was an odd stinging in his eyes and it seemed to him that he surely had been in this place before, heard these same warm sounds.

He started violently as Saul touched his arm.

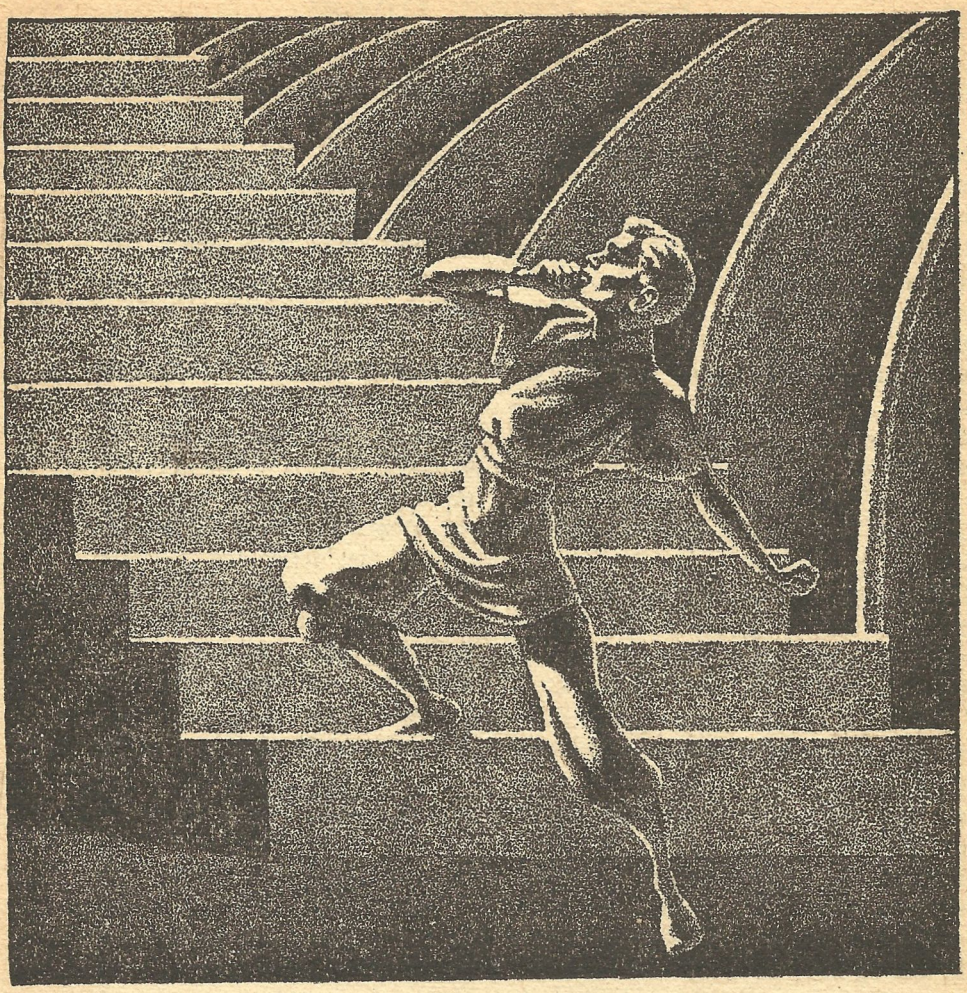
"Come, Peter," he said. "They are eager to see you. Already the men have told about you. Tonight you will share my food and drink and sleep in my hut."

Peter followed him slowly down into the glow of the firelight.

Ages ago the First Dynasty had walled up half the planet, and left no hint of their terrible reason. . . . Only Shervane dared to surmount that mile-high barrier, and learn the mind-shattering truth that lay beyond—

THE WALL OF DARKNESS

MANY and strange are the universes that drift like bubbles in the foam upon the river of time. Some—a very few—move against or athwart its current; and fewer still are those that lie forever beyond its reach, knowing nothing of the future or the past. Shervane's tiny cosmos was not one of these: its strangeness



By Arthur C. Clarke

was of a different order. It held one world only—the planet of Shervane's race—and a single star, the great sun Trilorne that brought it life and light.

Shervane knew nothing of night, for Trilorne was always high above the horizon, dipping near it only in the long months of winter. Beyond the borders of the Shadow Land, it was true, there came a season when Trilorne disappeared below the edge of the world, and a darkness fell in which nothing could live. But even then the darkness was not absolute, though there were no stars to relieve it.

Alone in its little cosmos, turning the same face always towards its solitary sun, Shervane's world was the last and

the strangest jest of the Maker of Stars.

Yet as he looked across his father's lands, the thoughts that filled Shervane's mind were those which any human child might have known. He felt awe, and curiosity, and a little fear, and above all a longing to go out into the great world before him. These things he was still too young to do, but the ancient house was on the highest ground for many miles and he could look far out over the land that would one day be his.

When he turned to the north, with Trilorne shining full upon his face, he could see many miles away the long line of mountains that curved around to the east, rising higher and higher, until they disappeared behind him in the direction of the Shadow Land.

On his left was the ocean, only a few miles away, and sometimes Shervane could hear the thunder of the waves as they fought and tumbled on the gently sloping sands. No one knew how far the ocean reached. Ships had set out across it, sailing northwards while Trilorne rose higher and higher in the sky and the heat of its rays grew ever more intense. Long before the great sun had reached the zenith, they had been forced to return. If the mythical Fire Lands did indeed exist, no man could ever hope to reach their burning shores.

All the inhabited countries of Shervane's world lay in the narrow belt between burning heat and insufferable cold. In every land, the far north was an unapproachable region smitten by the fury of Trilorne. And to the south of all countries lay the vast and gloomy Shadow Land, where Trilorne was never more than a pale disc on the horizon, and often was not visible at all.

These things Shervane learned in the years of his childhood, and in those years he had no wish to leave the wide lands between the mountains and the sea.

Since the dawn of time his ancestors and the races before them had toiled to make these lands the fairest in the world. There were gardens bright with strange flowers, there were streams that trickled gently between moss-grown rocks to be lost in the pure waters of the tideless sea. There were fields of grain that rustled continually in the wind, as if the generations of seeds yet unborn were talking one to the other. In the great meadows and among the trees the friendly cattle wandered aimlessly with foolish cries. And there was the great house, with its enormous rooms and its endless corridors, vast enough in reality but huger still to the mind of a child.

This was the world in which Shervane had passed his years, the world he knew and loved. As yet, what lay beyond its borders had not concerned his mind.

But Shervane's universe was not one of those free from the domination of Time. The harvest ripened and was gathered into the granaries; Trilorne rocked slowly through its little arc of sky, and with the passing seasons Shervane's mind and body grew. His land seemed smaller now: the mountains were nearer and the sea was only a brief walk from the great house. He began to learn of the world in which he lived, and to be made ready for the part he must play in its shaping.

SOME of these things he learned from his father Sherval, but most he was taught by Grayle, who had come across the mountains in the days of his father's father, and had now been tutor to three generations of Shervane's family.

He was fond of Grayle, though the old man taught him many things he had no wish to learn, and the years of his boyhood passed pleasantly enough until the time came for him to go through the mountains into the lands beyond. Ages ago his family had come from the great countries of the east, and in every generation since, the eldest son had made that pilgrimage again to spend a year of his youth among his cousins. It was a wise custom, for beyond the mountains much of the knowledge of the past still lingered, and there one could meet men from other lands and study their ways.

In the last spring before his son's departure, Sherval collected three of his servants and certain animals it is convenient to call horses, and took Shervane to see those parts of the land he had never visited before. They rode west to the sea, and followed the coast for many days until Trilorne was noticeably nearer the horizon. Still they went south, their shadows lengthening before them, turning again to the east only when the rays of the sun seemed to have lost all their power. They were now well within the limits of the Shadow Land.

Shervane was riding beside his father, watching the changing landscape with eager curiosity. His father was talking about the soil, describing the crops that could be grown here and those which must fail if the attempt were made. But Shervane's attention was elsewhere: he was staring out across the desolate Shadow Land, wondering how far it stretched and what mysteries it held.

"Father," he said presently, "if you went south in a straight line, right across the Shadow Land, would you reach the other side of the world?"

His father smiled.

"Men have asked that question for centuries," he said, "but there are two reasons why they will never know the answer."

"What are they?"

"The first, of course, is the darkness and the cold. Even here, nothing can live during the winter months. But there is a better reason, though I see that Grayle has not spoken of it."

"I don't think he has: at least, I do not remember."

For a moment Sherval did not reply. He stood up in his stirrups and surveyed the land to the south.

"Once I knew this place well," he said to Shervane. "Come—I have something to show you."

They turned away from the path they had been following, and for several hours rode once more with their backs to the sun. The land was rising slowly now, and Shervane saw that they were climbing a great ridge of rock that pointed like a dagger into the heart of the Shadow Land. They came presently to a hill too steep for the horses to ascend, and here they dismounted and left the animals in the servants' charge.

"There is a way around," said Sherval, "but it is quicker for us to climb than to take the horses to the other side."

The hill, though steep, was only a small one and they reached its summit in a few minutes. At first Shervane could see nothing he had not seen before: there was only the same undulating wilderness, that seemed to become darker and more forbidding with every yard of distance from Trilorne.

He turned to his father with some bewilderment, but Sherval pointed to the far south and drew a careful line along the horizon.

"It is not easy to see," he said quietly. "My father showed it to me from this same spot, many years before you were born."

Shervane stared into the dusk. The southern sky was so dark as to be almost black, and it came down to meet the edge of the world. But not quite, for along the horizon, in a great curve dividing land from sky yet seeming to belong to neither, was a band of deeper darkness, black as the utter night which Shervane had never known.

He looked at it steadfastly for a long time, and perhaps some hint of the future crept into his soul, for the darkling land seemed suddenly alive and waiting. When at last he tore his eyes away, he knew that nothing would ever be the same again, though he was still too young to recognize the challenge for what it was.

And so, for the first time in his life, Shervane saw the Wall.

IN THE early spring he said farewell to his people, and went with one servant over the mountains into the great lands of the eastern world. Here he met the men who shared his ancestry, and here he studied the history of his race, the arts that had grown from ancient times, and the sciences that ruled the lives of men. In the places of learning he made friends with boys who had come from lands even further to the East: few of these he was likely to see again, but one was to play a greater part in his life than either could have imagined. Brayldon's father was a famous architect, but his son intended to eclipse him. He was traveling from land to land, always learning, watching, asking questions. Though he was only a few years older than Shervane, his knowledge of the world was infinitely greater—or so it seemed to the younger boy.

Between them they took the world to pieces and rebuilt it according to their desires. Brayldon dreamed of cities whose great avenues and stately towers would shame even the wonders of the past; Shervane's interests lay more with the people who would dwell in those cities, and the way they ordered their lives.

They often spoke of the Wall, which Brayldon knew from the stories of his own people, though he himself had never seen it. Far to the south of every country, it lay like a great barrier athwart the Shadow Land. In high summer it could be reached, though with difficulty, but nowhere was there any way of passing it, and none knew what lay beyond. A hundred times the height of a man, it encircled the entire world, never pausing even when it reached the wintry sea that washed the shores of the Shadow Land. Travelers had stood upon those lonely beaches, scarcely warmed by the last thin rays of Trilorne, and had seen how the shadowy Wall marched out to sea contemptuous of the waves beneath its feet. And on the far shores, other travelers had watched it come striding in across the ocean, to sweep past them on its journey round the world.

"One of my uncles," said Brayldon, "once reached the Wall when he was a young man. He did it for a wager, and he rode for ten days before he came beneath it. I think it frightened him—it was so huge and cold. He could not tell whether it was made of metal or of stone, and when he shouted there was no echo at all, but his voice died away quickly as if the Wall swallowed the sound. My people believe it is the end of the world, and there is nothing beyond."

"If that were true," Shervane replied, with irrefutable logic, "the ocean would have poured over the edge before the Wall was built."

"Not if Kyrone built it when He

made the world, as the legends have it."

Shervane did not agree. "My people believe it is the work of man—perhaps the engineers of the First Dynasty, who made so many wonderful things. If they really had ships that could reach the Fire Lands—and even ships that could fly—they might have possessed enough wisdom to build the Wall."

Brayldon shrugged. "We can never know the answer, so why worry about it?"

This eminently practical advice, as Shervane had discovered, was all that ordinary men ever gave him. Only philosophers were interested in unanswerable questions: to most people, the enigma of the Wall, like the problem of existence itself, was a thing of no practical importance. And all the philosophers he had met had given him different answers.

First there had been Grayle, whom he had questioned on his return from the Shadow Land. The old man had looked at him quietly and said, "There is only one thing behind the Wall, so I have heard. And that is Madness."

Then there had been Artex, who was so old that he could scarcely hear Shervane's nervous questioning. He had gazed at the boy through eyes that seemed too tired to open fully, and had replied after a long time: "Kyrone built the Wall in the third day of the making of the world. What is beyond, we shall discover when we die—for there go the souls of all the dead."

Yet Irgan, who lived in the same city, had flatly contradicted this. "Only memory can answer your question, my son. For behind the Wall is the land in which we lived before our births."

Whom could he believe? The truth was that no one knew: if the knowledge had ever existed, it had been lost ages since.

Though this quest was unsuccessful, Shervane had learned many things in his year of study. With the returning spring he said farewell to Brayldon and his other friends, and set out along the ancient road that led back to his own country. Once again he made the perilous journey through the great mountain pass, where walls of ice hung threatening against the sky. He came to the place where the road curved down once more towards the world of men, where there was warmth and running water and the breath no longer labored in the freezing air. Here, on the last rise of the road before it descended into the valley, one could see far out across the land to the distant gleam of the ocean. And there, almost lost in the mists at the edge of the world, Shervane could see the line of shadow that was his own country.

HE WENT on down the great ribbon of stone until he came to the bridge that men had built across the cataract in the ancient days. But the bridge was gone: the storms and avalanches of early spring had swept away one of the mighty piers, and the beautiful metal rainbow lay a twisted ruin in the spray and foam a thousand feet below. The summer would have come and gone before the road could be opened once more.

He paused on the last curve of the road, looking back towards the unattainable land that held all the things he loved. But the mists had closed over it, and he saw it no more. Resolutely he turned back along the road until the open lands had vanished and the mountains enfolded him again.

Brayldon was still in the city when Shervane returned. He was surprised and pleased to see his friend, and together they discussed what should be done in the year ahead. Shervane's cousins, who had grown fond of their

guest, were glad to see him again, but their kindly suggestion that he should devote another year to study was not well received.

Shervane's plan had matured slowly, in the face of considerable opposition. Even Brayldon was not enthusiastic at first, and much argument was needed before he would cooperate. But after that, the agreement of everyone else who mattered was only a question of time.

Summer was approaching when the two boys set out towards Brayldon's country. They rode swiftly, for the journey was a long one and must be completed before Trilorne began its winter fall. When they reached the lands that Brayldon knew, they made certain inquiries which caused much shaking of heads. But the answers they obtained were accurate, and soon they were deep in the Shadow Land, and for the second time in his life Shervane saw the Wall.

It seemed not far away when they first came upon it, rising from a bleak and lonely plain. Yet they rode endlessly across that plain before the Wall grew perceptibly nearer—and then they had almost reached its base before they realized how close they were, for there was no way of judging its distance until one could reach out and touch it.

When Shervane gazed up at the monstrous ebony plane that had so troubled his mind, it seemed to be overhanging, about to crush him beneath its falling weight. With difficulty, he tore his eyes away from the hypnotic sight, and went nearer to examine the material of which the Wall was built.

It was true, as Brayldon had told him, that it felt cold to the touch—colder than it had any right to be, even in this sun-starved land. It felt neither hard nor soft, for its texture eluded the hand in a way that was difficult to analyze. Shervane had the impression that something was preventing him from actual contact with the surface, yet he could see no space between the Wall and his fingers when he forced them against it. Strangest of all was the uncanny silence of which Brayldon's uncle had spoken: every word was deadened and all sounds died away with unnatural swiftness.

Brayldon had unloaded some tools and instruments from the pack-horses, and had begun to examine the Wall's surface. He found very quickly that no drills or cutters would mark it in any way, and presently he came to the conclusion Shervane had already reached. The Wall was not merely adamant: it was unapproachable.

At last, in disgust, he took a perfectly straight metal rule and pressed its edge against the Wall. While Shervane held a mirror to reflect the feeble light of Trilorne along the line of contact, Brayldon peered at the rule from the other side. It was as he had thought: an infinitely narrow streak of light showed unbroken between the two surfaces.

Brayldon looked thoughtfully at his friend.

"Shervane," he said, "I don't believe the Wall is made of matter as we know it."

"Then perhaps the legends are right—those that say it was never built at all, but created as we see it now."

"I think so too," said Brayldon. "The engineers of the First Dynasty had such powers. There are some very ancient buildings in my land that seem to have been made in a single operation from a substance that shows absolutely no sign of weathering. If it were black instead of colored, it would be very much like the material of the Wall."

He put away his useless tools and began to set up a simple portable theodolite.

"If I can do nothing else," he said with a wry smile, "at least I can find exactly how high it is!"

WHEN they looked back for their last view of the Wall, Shervane wondered if he would ever see it again. There was nothing more he could learn. For the future, he must forget this foolish dream that he might one day master its secret. Perhaps there was no secret at all—perhaps beyond the Wall the Shadow Land stretched round the curve of the world until it met that same barrier again. That, surely, seemed the likeliest thing. But if it were so, then why had the Wall been built, and by what race?

With an almost angry effort of will, he put these thoughts aside and rode forward into the light of Trilorne, thinking of a future in which the Wall would play no more part than it did in the lives of other men.

SO TWO years had passed before Shervane could return to his home. In two years, especially when one is young, much can be forgotten and even the things nearest the heart lose their distinctness so that they can no longer be clearly recalled. When Shervane came through the last foothills of the mountains and was again in the country of his childhood, the joy of his homecoming was mingled with a strange sadness.

The news of his return had gone before him, and soon he saw far ahead a line of horses galloping along the road. He pressed forward eagerly, wondering if Sherval would be there to greet him, and was a little disappointed when he saw that Grayle was leading the procession.

Shervane halted as the old man rode up to his horse. Then Grayle put his hand upon his shoulder, but for a while he turned away his head and could not speak.

And presently Shervane learned that the storms of the year before had destroyed more than the ancient bridge, for lightning had brought his own home in ruins to the ground. Years before the appointed time, all the lands that Sherval had owned had passed into the possession of his son. Far more, indeed, than these, for the whole family had been assembled, according to its yearly custom, in the great house when the fire had come down upon it.

In a single moment of time, everything between the mountains and the sea had passed into his keeping. He was the richest man his land had known for generations; and all these things he would have given to look again into the calm gray eyes of the father he would see no more.

TRILORNE had risen and fallen in the sky many times since Shervane had taken leave of his childhood on the road before the mountains. The land had flourished in the passing years, and the possessions so suddenly become his had steadily increased their value. He had husbanded them well, and now he had time once more in which to dream. More than that—he had the wealth to make his dreams come true.

Often stories had come across the mountains of the work Brayldon was doing in the east, and although the two friends had never met since their youth they had exchanged messages regularly. Brayldon had achieved his ambitions: not only had he designed the two largest buildings erected since the ancient days, but a whole new city had been planned by him, though it

would not be completed in his lifetime.

Hearing of these things, Shervane remembered the aspirations of his own youth, and his mind went back across the years to the day when they had stood together beneath the majesty of the Wall. For a long time he wrestled with his thoughts, fearing to revive old longings that might not be assuaged again. At last he made his decision and wrote to Brayldon—for what was the value of wealth and power unless they could be used to shape one's dreams?

Then Shervane waited, wondering if Brayldon had forgotten the past in the years that had brought him fame. He had not long to wait: Brayldon could not come at once, for he had great works to carry to their completion, but when they were finished he would join his old friend.

Early the next summer he came, and Shervane met him on the road below the bridge. They had been boys when they last parted, and now they were nearing middle age, yet as they greeted one another the years seemed to fall away. Each was secretly glad to see how lightly Time had touched the friend he remembered.

They spent many days in conference together, considering the plans that Brayldon had drawn up. The work was an immense one, and would take many years to complete, but it was possible to a man of Shervane's wealth. Before he gave his final assent, he took his friend to see Grayle.

The old man had been living for some years in the little house that Shervane had built him. For a long time he had played no active part in the life of the great estates, but his advice was always forthcoming when it was needed, and it was invariably wise.

Grayle knew why Brayldon had come to this land and he expressed no surprise when the architect unrolled his sketches. The largest drawing showed the elevation of the Wall, with a great stairway rising along its side from the plain beneath. At six equally spaced intervals the slowly ascending ramp leveled out into wide platforms, the last of which was only a short distance below the summit of the Wall. Springing from the stairway at a score of places along its length were flying buttresses which to Grayle's eye seemed very frail and slender for the work they had to do. Then he realized that the great ramp would be largely self-supporting, and one one side all the lateral thrust would be taken by the Wall itself.

He looked at the drawing in silence for a while, and then remarked quietly, "You always managed to have your way, Shervane. I might have guessed that this would happen in the end."

"Then you think it a good idea?" Shervane asked. He had never acted against the old man's advice, and was anxious to have it now.

As usual Grayle came straight to the point. "How much will it cost?"

Brayldon told him, and for a moment there was a shocked silence.

"That includes," the architect said hastily, "the building of a good road across the Shadow Land, and the construction of a small town for the workmen. The stairway itself is made from about a million identical blocks which can be dove-tailed together to form a rigid structure. We shall make these, I hope, from the minerals we find in the Shadow Land."

He sighed a little.

"I should have liked to have built it from metal rods, jointed together, but that would have cost even more, for all the material would have to be brought over the mountains."

Grayle examined the drawing more closely. "Why have you stopped short of the top?" he asked.

Brayldon looked at Shervane, who answered the question with a trace of embarrassment.

"I want to be the only one to make the final ascent," he replied. "The last stage will be by a lifting machine on the highest platform. There may be danger: that is why I am going alone."

That was not the only reason, but it was a good one. Behind the Wall, so Grayle had once said, lay Madness. If that were true, no one else need face it.

Grayle was speaking once more in his quiet, dreamy voice.

"In that case," he said, "what you do is neither good nor bad, for it concerns you alone. If the Wall was built to keep something from our world, it will still be impassable from the other side."

Brayldon nodded.

"We had thought of that," he said with a touch of pride. "If the need should come, the ramp can be destroyed in a moment by explosives at selected spots."

"That is good," the old man replied. "When the work is finished, I hope I shall still be here."

BEFORE the winter came, the road to the Wall had been marked out and the foundations of the temporary town laid. Most of the materials Brayldon needed were not hard to find, for the Shadow Land was rich in minerals. He had also surveyed the Wall itself and chosen the spot for the stairway. When Trilorne began to dip below the horizon, Brayldon was well content with the work that had been done.

By the next summer the first of the myriad concrete blocks had been made and tested to Brayldon's satisfaction, and before winter came again some thousands had been produced and part of the foundations laid. Leaving a trusted assistant in charge of the production, Brayldon could now return to his interrupted work. When enough of the blocks had been made, he would be back to supervise the building, but until then his guidance would not be needed.

Two or three times in the course of every year, Shervane rode out to the Wall to watch the stock-piles growing into great pyramids, and four years later Brayldon returned with him. Layer by layer the lines of stone started to creep up the flanks of the Wall, and the slim buttresses began to arch out into space. For a third of every year the work had to be abandoned, and there were anxious months in the long winter when Shervane stood on the borders of the Shadow Land, listening to the storms that thundered past him into the reverberating darkness. But Brayldon had built well, and every spring the work was standing unharmed.

The last stones were laid seven years after the beginning of the work. Standing a mile away so that he could see the structure in its entirety, Shervane remembered with wonder how all this had sprung from the few sketches Brayldon had shown him years ago, and he knew something of the emotion the artist feels when his dreams become reality. And he remembered too the day when, as a boy by his father's side, he had first seen the Wall far off against the dusky sky of the Shadow Land.

There were guard-rails around the upper platform. Shervane did not care to go near its edge. The ground was at a dizzying distance, and he tried to forget his height by helping Brayldon and the workmen erect the simple hoist that would lift him the remaining

twenty feet. When it was ready he stepped into the machine and turned to his friend with all the assurance he could muster.

"I shall be gone only a few minutes," he said with elaborate casualness. "Whatever I find, I'll return immediately."

He could hardly have guessed how small a choice was his.

GRAYLE was now almost blind and would not know another spring. But he recognized the approaching footsteps and greeted Brayldon by name before his visitor had time to speak.

"I am glad you came," he said. "I've been thinking of everything you told me, and I believe I know the truth at last. Perhaps you have guessed it already."

"No," said Brayldon. "I have been afraid to think of it."

The old man smiled a little.

"Why should one be afraid of something, merely because it is strange? The Wall is wonderful, yes—but there's nothing terrible about it, to those who will face its secret without flinching.

"When I was a boy, Brayldon, my old master once said that Time could never destroy the truth—it could only hide it among legends. He was right. From all the fables that have gathered around the Wall, I can now select the ones that are part of history.

"Long ago, Brayldon, when the First Dynasty was at its height, Trilorne was hotter than it is now and the Shadow Land was fertile and inhabited—as perhaps one day the Fire Lands may be when Trilorne is old and feeble. Men could go southwards as they pleased, for there was no Wall to bar the way. Many must have done so, looking for new lands in which to settle. What happened to Shervane befell them also, and it must have wrecked many minds—so many that the scientists of the First Dynasty built the Wall to prevent madness from spreading through the land. I cannot believe that this is true, but the legend says that it was made in a single day, with no labor, out of a cloud that encircled the world."

He fell into a reverie, and for a moment Brayldon did not disturb him. His mind was far in the past, picturing his world as a perfect globe floating in space while the Ancient Ones threw that band of darkness around the equator.

False though that picture was in its most important detail, he could never wholly erase it from his mind.

AS THE last few feet of the Wall moved slowly past his eyes Shervane needed all his courage to prevent him from crying out to be lowered again. He remembered certain terrible stories he had once dismissed with laughter. But what if, after all, those stories had been true, and the Wall had been built to keep some horror from the world?

He tried to forget these thoughts, and found it not hard to do so once he had passed the topmost level of the Wall. At first he could not interpret the picture his eyes brought him: then he saw that he was looking across an unbroken black sheet whose width he could not judge.

The little platform came to a stop and he noted with half-conscious admiration how accurate Brayldon's calculations had been. Then, with a last word of assurance to the group below, he stepped onto the Wall and began to walk steadily forwards.

At first it seemed as if the plain before him was infinite, for he could not even tell where it met the sky. But

he walked on unfaltering, keeping his back upon Trilorne.

There was something wrong: it was growing darker with every step he took. Startled, he turned around and saw that the disc of Trilorne had now become pale and dusky, as if seen through a darkened glass. With mounting fear, he realized that this was by no means all that had happened. Trilorne was smaller than the sun he had known all his life.

He shook his head in an angry gesture of defiance. These things were fancies; he was imagining them. Indeed, they were so contrary to all experience that somehow he no longer felt frightened but strode resolutely forward with only a glance at the sun behind.

When Trilorne had dwindled to a point, and the darkness was all around him, it was time to abandon pretense. A wiser man would have turned back there and then, and Shervane had a sudden nightmare vision of himself lost in this eternal twilight between earth and sky, unable to retrace the path that led to safety. Then he told himself that as long as he could see Trilorne at all he could be in no real danger.

He went on, with many backward glances at the faint guiding light behind him. Trilorne itself had vanished, but there was still a dim glow in the sky to mark its place. And presently he needed its aid no longer, for far ahead a second light was appearing in the heavens.

At first it seemed only the faintest of glimmers. When he was sure of its existence, he noticed that Trilorne had already disappeared. But he felt more confidence now, and as he moved onwards the returning light helped to subdue his fears.

When he saw that he was indeed approaching another sun, when he could tell beyond any doubt that it was expanding as a moment ago he had seen Trilorne contract, he forced all amazement down into the depths of his mind.

Now at last he could see, faintly through the darkness, the ebon line that marked the Wall's other rim. Soon he would be the first man in thousands of years, perhaps in Eternity, to look upon the lands that it had sundered from his world. Would they be as fair as his own, and would there be people there whom he would be glad to greet?

But that they would be waiting, and in such a way, was more than he had dreamed.

GRAYLE stretched his hand out to the cabinet beside him, and fumbled for a large sheet of paper that was lying upon it. Brayldon watched him in silence, and the old man continued.

"How often we have all heard arguments about the size of the universe, and whether it has any boundaries! We can imagine no ending to space, yet our minds rebel at the idea of infinity. Some philosophers have imagined that space is limited by curvature in a higher dimension—I expect you know the theory. It may be true of other universes, if they exist, but for ours the answer is more subtle.

"Along the line of the Wall, Brayldon, our universe comes to an end—and yet does not. There was no boundary, nothing to stop one from going onwards before the Wall was built. The Wall itself is merely a man-made barrier, sharing the properties of the space in which it lies."

He held the sheet of paper towards Brayldon and slowly rotated it.

"Here," he said, "is a plane sheet. It has, of course, two sides. Can you imagine one that has not?"

Brayldon stared at him in amazement. "That's impossible—ridiculous!"

"But is it?" said Grayle softly. He reached towards the cabinet again and his fingers groped in its recesses. Then he drew out a long, flexible strip of paper.

"We cannot match the intellects of the First Dynasty, but what their minds could grasp directly we can approach by analogy."

He ran his fingers along the paper strip, then joined the two ends together to make a circular loop.

"Here I have a shape which is perfectly familiar to you—the section of a cylinder. I run my finger round the inside, so—and now along the outside. The two surfaces are quite distinct: you can go from one to the other only by moving across the thickness of the strip. Do you agree?"

"Of course," said Brayldon, still puzzled. "But what does it prove?"

"Nothing," said Grayle. "But now watch—"

THIS sun, Shervane thought, was Trilorne's identical twin. The darkness had now lifted completely, and there was no longer the sensation, which he would not try to understand, of walking across an infinite plain.

He was moving slowly now, for he had no desire to come too suddenly upon that vertiginous precipice. In a little while he could see a distant horizon of low hills, as bare and lifeless as those he had left behind him.

So he walked on: and when presently an icy hand fastened itself upon his heart, he did not pause as a man of lesser courage would have done. Without flinching, he watched that shockingly familiar landscape rise around him, until he could see the plain from which his journey had started, and the great stairway itself, and at last Brayldon's anxious, waiting face.

AGAIN Grayle brought the two ends of the strip together, but now he had given it a half-twist so that the band was kinked.

"Run your finger around it now," he said quietly.

Brayldon did not need to do so.

"I understand," he said. "You no longer have two separate surfaces. It now forms a single continuous sheet—a one-sided surface—something which at first sight seems impossible."

There was a long, brooding silence. Then Grayle sighed deeply and turned to Brayldon as if he could still see his face.

"Why did you come back before Shervane?" he asked.

"We had to do it," said Brayldon sadly, "but I did not wish to see my work destroyed."

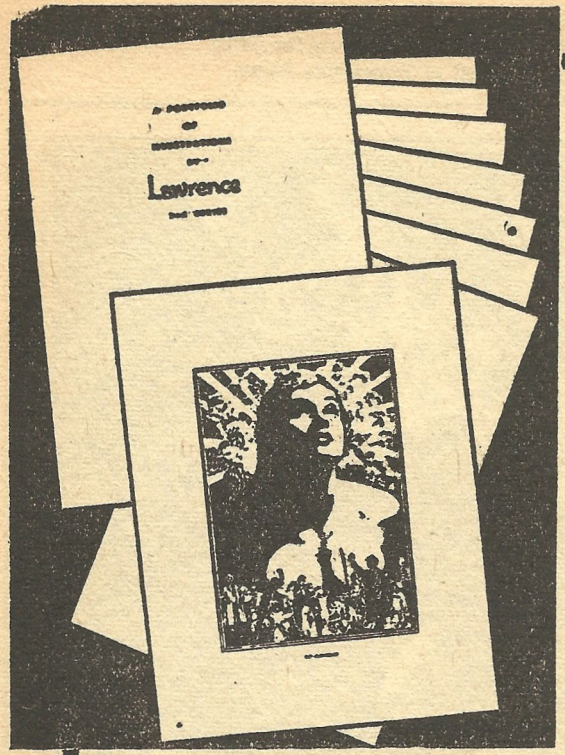
Grayle nodded in sympathy.

"I understand," he said.

SHERVANE ran his eye up the long flight of steps on which no feet would ever tread again. He felt few regrets: he had striven, and no one could have done more. Such victory as was possible had been his.

Slowly he raised his hand and gave the signal. The Wall swallowed the explosion as it had absorbed all other sounds, but the unhurried grace with which the long tiers of masonry curtsied and fell was something he would remember all his life. For a moment he had a sudden, inexpressibly poignant vision of another stairway, watched by another Shervane, falling in identical chaos on the far side of the Wall.

But that, he realized, was a foolish thought: for none knew better than he that the Wall possessed no other side.



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Kestrel realized then what had happened. He ran out into the desert, but it was too late. The sand for yards around the wing was a hell of impassable flame.

By Margaret St. Clair

DREADFUL DREAMER

"HERE, kitty," Kestrel called into the blue Martian dusk. He put the saucer with the food down on the sand.

"I didn't know you had a pet," Foner said languidly from within the tent. He was still young enough to find languor an amusing attitude.

"It adopted me. I haven't had a good look at it yet, but I think it's what Marcia would call a dwarf desert lynx."

"Company for you, I suppose," Foner said. There was a pause. "Listen, Kes, about your find—"

"Yes?"

"Frankly, I can't understand why you called me here. Mica, yes, but Mars already produces more mica than it can use. Anyhow, the commission didn't send you here to look for mica. I thought you had something valuable."

"You saw the indications," Kestrel said sharply.

"I saw the indications, yes. Do you think they add up to beryllium ore? The most you could hope for would be a trace."

Kestrel rubbed his forehead. "I was sure—listen, Foner, do you have to be back at Marsport tonight?"

"Not absolutely, no."

"Then stay with me. I want to check the diggings again with you by daylight. I can't understand this. It looked like high-grade stuff."

"As a favor to an old pal," Foner replied lightly, "okay."

"Good!" Kestrel's face relaxed. "I'm not the cook Marcia is," he went on, "but I can promise you something fairly edible. I found a can of pineta nuts this morning, and I'll cook a mess of my famous desert burgoo." He began rummaging about in boxes and tins.

"Let me help," Foner said, getting lazily to his feet.

"Well, there's not much—but you might open the pineta nuts. They're in that big chest."

Foner hunted in the chest Kestrel pointed to. "The can's not here," he said after a moment.

"Hunh? Sure it is! I saw it this morning myself. Look, what's that?" Kestrel pointed to a can.

"Lichee nuts," Foner replied.

Kestrel blinked. "So it is," he said slowly. "I must be seeing things. I'd have sworn that label read pineta nuts. And there's no ydrella in the chest either. What's the matter with me?"

Foner made no direct answer. His mouth was puckered up.

They dined on the burgoo, a rather insipid dish without its two main ingre-

The Mars cat would give you anything you desired—and it took nothing but friendship in return . . . nothing except one tiny thing you didn't want, and without which you couldn't live!

dients, and sat smoking in silence.

"It means a lot to you to find high-grade ore, doesn't it?" Foner asked.

"Yes, it does," Kestrel answered soberly. "My future, and Marcia's, all our plans—just about everything."

"Um."

From outside the tent there came a faint scratching of claws and then a delicate whine. It was not quite a meow. "That's the kitty," Kestrel said. "He shows up about this time every night for chow."

Foner had taken the pipe from his mouth and was listening intently. "That's no dwarf desert lynx," he said.

"Isn't it? Well, I said the identification was only tentative.

"When did it adopt you? Just about the time you found the beryllium ore?"

"Why, yes, the day before. How did you know?"

"You'd better stop feeding it. It's a dangerous animal."

Kestrel raised his eyebrows. "Dangerous?" he said. "How? It's not over a foot long. Has it got poisonous fangs?"

Foner permitted himself a smile. "It's not dangerous in that way. Don't you really know what you've got, Kes? It's a paididion."

Kestrel's face remained blank. "They call them Lyall's babies sometimes," Foner went on. "Does that ring any bells?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm new to this part of Mars."

"I see. Of course they have only a local distribution. No, ser'ously, Kes, you've got to stop feeding it."

"I don't understand. You say it's not poisonous; and it seems as friendly as it can be."

"That's where the trouble comes in." Foner took a deep breath. "The paididion," he said, his languor giving place to an unconscious pedantry, "is like the members of primitive races on earth. Stefansson, who did some fine work with Eskimos, says you must never put a question in the form, 'So-and-so killed a lot of bears, didn't he?' to an Eskimo, because he's sure to answer, 'Yes, he did, he killed an awful lot,' regardless of how many bears so-and-so really did kill.

"The primitive isn't lying, he's being friendly and courteous. He's telling you what he thinks you want to hear. A paididion is like that. Only he makes you see what he thinks you want to see."

KESTREL rubbed his forehead once more. He looked confused. "You mean that animal had something to do with my finding the beryllium ore?"

"With your thinking you found beryllium ore," Foner corrected, "yes. Somehow the paididion projects—I don't think they know how, exactly; paididions haven't been studied much—somehow it projects a very vivid image of what the person it's trying to please would like to see. Hence, the day after the paididion adopts you, you find a rich vein of beryllium ore.

"That's why you were sure you'd seen a can of pineta nuts in the chest. You knew I was coming, you wanted me to stay for supper, you wanted to be able to make your special burgoo. The paididion did the rest."

There was a silence. "How's it dangerous, though?" Kestrel asked at last. "I don't see that. I've gotten rather fond of the thing, Foner, since Marcia's been away."

"Well, it's made you waste two weeks hunting a nonexistent vein of beryllium ore," Foner pointed out. "Can't you think of situations in which believing that what you wanted to be true, was true, would be dangerous?

I can. Besides, people get addicted to them.

"That's how the animal got its popular name, Lyall's baby. Lyall lost his only child under terribly tragic circumstances. He was nearly crazy with grief. They found him two or three years later, almost starving, living in a cave with a paididion. When they tried to take it away from him and bring him back to normal, he killed himself. He said it was his baby."

"Brr-r-r-r," Kestrel said.

"Yes, quite. Of course the paididion doesn't mean any harm. I doubt it has a single malicious thought in what passes for its head. It's only trying to ingratiate itself. They're fond of human beings in the same way that dogs are. You say you've never really seen yours: That's because it's not sure, yet, that you're attached to it. When they know they're welcome. they're not a bit shy. . . . When did you say Marcia was coming back?"

"Tomorrow night. Flying her own wing. She mentioned something about bringing Alis with her for a day or two, if you could spare her. Anyhow, she can't come too soon for me."

"You and Marcia, me and Alis," Foner said, speaking, for the moment, perfectly soberly. Then, with a return to his usual manner, "Pitiful, isn't it, the way these women get their hooks into one. Well, when Marcia does come, my advice would be to get away from here as soon as you can. As I say, the paididion can be dangerous."

"Okay."

THE DIGGINGS, inspected in the hard light of a Martian day, proved as deficient in beryllium ore as Foner had insisted they were. Foner clapped Kestrel twice on the shoulder, murmured "Hard luck, hard luck," several times, and then started back to Marsport. He warned Kestrel against the paididion once more before he left. Foner, though he was not then aware of it, was to return to the camp that evening with the ambulance from Marsport Foundation Hospital when it flew in to pick the bodies up.

The story, as nearly as it could be gathered from Kestrel, who was almost incoherent from the pain of his burns, went like this:

Marcia had come back to the camp just at dusk, an hour or so before Kestrel had been expecting her. He was overjoyed to see her, though he scolded her severely for having made the dangerous landing in the bad light. She might have wrecked the wing, he said; he had been just on the point of going out to fix a beacon for her.

He noticed that she seemed silent and remote, but he put it down to

fatigue; he knew she had been working very hard. Once or twice the automatic signaler in the corner of the tent buzzed, but Kestrel was too absorbed in Marcia to attend to it especially.

Kestrel and his wife were still talking quietly in the soft glow of the tent lamps when there was an intense white-hot glare of light from the desert outside. Marcia vanished incontinently (the explosion had frightened the paididion) and, seconds later, the tremendous impact of the crashing wing shook the ground.

Kestrel realized then what had happened. He ran out into the desert, but it was too late. The sand for yards around the wing was a hell of impassable flame.

There were screams from the cabin. Kestrel tried twice to get in to the women, and was badly burned. He sent an emergency call in to Marsport for help, and then collapsed.

There was not much left of the wing when the ambulance got there. The attendants whistled at the sight of Kestrel's burns and proceeded to shoot him full of narcotics; but Foner—the self-possessed, worldly, sardonic Foner—they had to put in handcuffs, and even then it was difficult to handle him. The ambulance pilot thoroughly regretted that they had let Foner come with them. He was still screaming, "I told you it was dangerous!" when the wing took off.

From its hole near the cook-tent the paididion watched the departure with bright, unintelligent eyes. Then it went back to cleaning itself.

KESTREL was hospitalized for eighteen days; when he was released he took the first ship back to Terra and thus passes out of this history. But Foner's weeks grew into a month and then another one, and still he screamed and fought against the opiates which would have given him peace for an hour or two.

It was nearly three months after the crash that they let him out. He had lost much weight and his hands persisted in trembling. He hired a wing and flew to the place where Marcia and Alis had had their wreck.

It was late afternoon when he got there, and he waited patiently inside the wing until twilight came on. Then he got out and walked toward the spot where he thought the paididion was. He had bought food and a dish to hold it before he left the capital. "Here, kitty, kitty," he called into the rich blue dusk.

The paididion heard him. For a space it lay with its nose between its paws and listened. The process that was going on in its tiny mind could hardly be called thought; all the same it was gauging, and very accurately, too, the misery and need and hate which had driven Foner into the desert to look for it.

"Here, kitty, kitty," Foner called again. He drew back into the shadow of the wing, his gun in his hand.

There was a silence. The sky had grown quite dark, and the thin night wind of Mars was springing up. The man in the lee of the wing shifted his weight to the other foot and then leaned forward, peering intently. Was something drifting toward him over the surface of the sand?

The paididion waited. "It's—Alis," Foner said oddly. "Alis—Alis—" The moments passed and then, above the sighing of the wind, there was a dull sound which meant that the gun had fallen from his hand.

The paididion waited a little longer, waited until it was absolutely, perfectly sure. Then briskly and self-confidently it came trotting across the sand to him.

Dying from the gray fogs in his tortured brain, Calloran knew that he must not give in to the invisible destroyers—not till he had made his body a blazing cosmic beacon, warning all travelers—

SPACEMAN, BEWARE!

October 12, 2237. Sighted derelict at 0925 hours. Altered course to investigate. Design of ship appears totally alien. Coming alongside at 1218 hours—will send party to board and explore—full details to follow.

—Last message received by official helioflash from ISP cruiser Polaris

By Stanley Mullen

CALLORAN didn't need the wary glances shot at him by the rest of the crew to tell him what was wrong. Spacefog always began like this, with blind worms of mist crawling inside your brain and a jagged fringe of gray ice around the perimeter of vision. Medical bigwigs talked learnedly of a nervous disorder compounded of fatigue, nervous strain, and the mind-shattering emptiness of space. But the real thing is something else again, and the outer darkness is a grim laboratory. At the moment, Calloran knew more about spacefog than medical science ever would.

Later would come the curious distortions warping his judgments of time and distance, followed by an evil nightmare of delirium. If he lived through it, he would be twisted in both mind and body. He had seen it happen too often to others for him to have any delusions about his future. . . .

Inbound from the moons of Saturn, the interplanetary supply ship Procyon IV tobogganed sunward with a full cargo of trouble. The desk-chair daredevils back on Mars had decided to try out a new, shorter orbit back to Callisto. Procyon IV was the elected guinea pig.

On paper, the new orbit worked out perfectly, with great saving of time, which was money. In a jinxed blast-off from Titan, the ship had blown three atomic converter units and mangled a whole blank of correction tubes. Since then, in the long weeks of silent flight while Titan diminished to infinity astern, strains had mounted steadily until both men and ship were in such state as to make a cinch landing difficult and a difficult one impossible.

They knew now that so prolonged an orbit correction was too great a strain for the alloys used in a freighter, and probably the technicians were already at work on supermetals which would stand up. In the meantime, Procyon IV and Calloran, pilot and astrogator, worked out their destiny together in the great darkness.

Burrowing into the maze of charts and possible orbits, Calloran smiled grimly and tried to ignore the hysteria which shrilled in his brain. Anyone else aboard showing his symptoms would already have been overpowered, drugged and securely manacled in his bunk. But they needed him too desperately; Herndon (standing quietly by, ready to take over the control board) had too little experience for the messy work ahead. He had to hang on as long as he could. He would call the relief in plenty of time, before he cracked; until then, on the board, he temporarily outranked even Captain Glamis.

But he worked with a growing conviction of futility. The one calculation he dared not make was how much longer he and the ship would hold together. For the rest, equations danced through his mind in numerals of gray outlined in frostfire.

Calloran jumped as Captain Glamis came up quietly behind him.

"How do your figures work out?" Glamis asked.

"Not good. We'll converge with the orbit of Callisto about twelve hours late."

The captain frowned. "In that case, you'd better plot some corrections now. I'll put the engineers on it. Maybe they can do something . . . if the old crate holds together long enough."

Calloran laughed harshly. "It won't. I'll fudge up a correction, though. Give you something to do. Don't you figure I'll be with you that long?"

Glamis grunted. "You know more about that than I do. How are your eyes?"

"Bad. They're fuzzing already. I've tried drugs. They don't help."

"They never do. Do you think you can take us in?"

"No. But if you get through, give my love to Jean."

Captain Glamis turned away quickly to avoid looking at the pilot. He was wondering how he could tell Jean about Calloran . . . if he got through to tell her anything.

Calloran half-turned, reaching for the push button to call for relief. As his blurring vision whipped across the indicator board, he froze, automatically pedaling the emergency alarms.

Eerie howler signals shrilled through the confined galleries. Everywhere men abandoned what they were doing and stood by the intercoms for orders.

"What is it?" the captain asked.

"I don't know exactly. But there's something up ahead."

The forward visipanel showed only a blankness of dark, studded with hard, unwinking points of light. Glamis crouched at Calloran's shoulder, studying the boards intently. Herndon came in hurriedly, then paused, embarrassed. The pilot waved him to the spare board.

"Meteorites?"

Calloran shook his head sharply. "Too big. And too regular for any small asteroid. Mass thirty-eight hundred Castel units. Probably metallic, from the ratio. Thermal readings give only about thirty degrees difference between light and dark sides. Probably spinning rapidly. Albedo eighty-seven. There's a variable, which could mean two objects spinning around a common center. Could be spaceships, but—"

"Too big?"

Calloran nodded. "Never was a spaceship above six hundred Castels. We couldn't power it off a body larger than Luna, for one thing. And above six hundred the stresses would be impossible to handle."

"Then it couldn't even be two spaceships?"

"Not likely," grunted Calloran. "But we'll know soon enough. It's almost dead ahead." He sounded the acceleration warning.

PROCYON IV groaned and snapped ominously as the braking force was cautiously applied. Forward rocket tubes flared crimson to orange to purple. Racking nausea and the momentary blindness of the deceleration stunned Calloran. He gripped himself, knuckles whitening on the control bars as he inched them forward. It was all he could do to control the throttle and retain his faculties.

The mysterious object was still too distant to be seen, and the panels were obscured now as the braking tubes released their ravening energies. Palest violet flame faded into white as a cone of blinding glare formed around the nose of the ship. Plumes of snowy incandescence ringed with rainbow tints flared ahead in cometary splendor and beat furiously at the surrounding darkness.

Proximity gongs began to beat in quickening tempo, merging into steady clangor of sound. The ship checked, swerving slightly from its calculated orbit. Red danger lights blinked on the board.

Calloran cut the switches, gasping as the agony released him slowly. The panels cleared. At a signal, Herndon cleared the feed lines, shifting the power from the atomic converters to liquid fuel for close-in maneuvering. Procyon IV drifted, wobbling, spinning off center. Short blasts from the midship jets steadied the whirl. A blurring spiral of stars on the visipanels slowed, became solid and stopped.

While Herndon called readings, Calloran watched a point of light move across the field of stars.

"That's it," he barked. "Stay with it!"

Rocket tubes hummed again, a series of slight jars smoothed as Procyon IV moved in a long curve to intercept the glittering particle. Minutes trod a gulf of darkness.

"Spaceships, all right," Captain Glamis said hoarsely. "One of them looks like an ISP cruiser. What that other thing is, I don't know. I never saw anything like it before. Did you?"

Calloran squinted, trying to distinguish forms on the panel. He groaned audibly as the spacefog hit him. Momentarily, under stress of excitement, he had forgotten it, but now a shower of hot needles coursed through his brain. Gray mist clogged his thoughts. He tried to speak but only a choking babble came from his lips.

An ISP cruiser! Thank Heaven. Now maybe they could get him to the company hospital in Callisto in time. At least put a pilot aboard, or convoy the ship in. . . . .

He let go and sagged in his swivel stool. Groping blindly, he pushed himself from the board. He was vaguely conscious of words being spoken, but at first they didn't register. Through a whirl of pain, he grasped at meanings.

"It's the Polaris," someone said. "I'd know her anywhere."

The Polaris! The Polaris had been missing four months, unreported. . . .

Calloran gasped and then screamed. Rough hands reached for him as the convulsions began. He was aware of figures moving in gray mist, catching his arms, dragging him down away from the board. Struggling savagely, he struck out at them. A mass of writhing weights crashed over him, restraining his agonies. Sharp pain jabbed his arm.

Impenetrable darkness. . . .

CALLORAN passed quickly from sleeping to waking. First came the sound—incredible sound, with myriad brittle harmonies, as if shafts of chill crystal snapped one by one and fell upon the metallic floor. Then came the strident hiss of escaping air. Afterward, silence. Utter, unbelievable silence.

It bothered him. There should be some of the countless tiny sounds of human habitation; half-heard voices, the clatter of feet on metal floors or rungs, the general blurred murmur of life itself, even the throb, hum or burr of vital automatic machinery like the air pumps or the artificial gravity. But there was only stillness, vast, awesome.

He lay quietly, listening. With rest, some of the fogs had cleared from his brain. He was weak, dizzy and wretched, but his mind was functioning better. He'd had a pleasant dream, of Homeport back on Mars, and he was reluctant to leave it. He had dreamed of the lights and cities, and later of Jean Glamis—Tom Glamis' brat, that gangling creature of seventeen, all freckles and green eyes, with a perky nose. But the dream was ended. With a nasty start, Calloran remembered who he was, where he was, that all of his dreams were ended.

Slowly, he got to his feet and swayed across the cabin to the porthole. Staring through the fused quartz, he studied the two ships hanging against infinity. Startingly huge and close at hand, the great bulks clung airlock to airlock in a mad, whirling dance.

The smaller was Polaris. But what was the other! Even the airlocks and the rows of octagonal portholes were of alien design. The shell was elliptical in section, half a mile long and bulging at either end like an immense dumbbell. The outer surface was metallic, polished, glittering with reflected sun- and starlight. Calloran's eyes focused painfully on it, trying to puzzle out details.

Something must be wrong. Staggering from vertigo and weakness, he made his way to the corridor and shouted. His cry echoed along the empty gallery and lost itself in the stillness. He waited, called out again. No answer.

Chilled, he ran through the passage, shouting, opening doors, looking into empty cabins. The engine rooms were deserted. A generator ran wild with an angry, snarling whine, scarcely audible; its danger lights were globes of flickering crimson. Calloran broke the circuit, shut it off. He raced on into the holds.

Here, amid the great tanks of liquid fuel and the jammed storage vaults, his strength failed. He lay against a bulkhead, gasping for breath. From above came a low unearthly whistle of escaping air. Like a blind man, he groped his way to the ladder well. Rung by rung, he ascended, going by instinct, feeling for handholds. Twice, as paroxysms clawed at him, he almost fell, but he reached the upper decks.

ON THE galley stove a stewpot bubbled untended. He cut the switches and hurried on. The chartroom was empty. On the control bridge, robot pilots had been set to keep the ship automatically on a course circling the Polaris and its eerie companion.

The sound which had so merged with silence as to seem part of it was now more audible, more insistent. Following the shrill hissing, Calloran reached the forward escape hatch. Here was evidence of swift abandonment. Both the life shells were gone, their tackle hanging in hopeless confusion. Airlocks had been imperfectly closed and the atmosphere was seeping out with a high, droning whistle.

This was nightmare. It was heartless, inhuman. His comrades couldn't have gone off like this, abandoning him in midspace.

Calloran tried hopelessly to close the airlock door. It was useless; the door was sprung out of true. Two things were obvious. The escaping crewmen had not planned to return; it would be impossible to re-enter through such an airlock. Also, the condition of the warped frame showed that Procyon IV was breaking up fast.

Calloran fled to the corridor. Already the air in the sally-port was perilously thin, and the bone-freezing cold of outer space was finding its way into the chamber. He got the heavy door shut, but it too was out of line and would not close tightly enough to seal.

One chance remained. Calloran knew that one lifeboat shell had been damaged in the frowsy takeoff. It was in the stern lock. If even the leaky shell were left, he could still make his way to the Polaris. Slowly, he worked his way aft, fighting for breath. He wished now that he had thought to run a signal to the space patrol cruiser while he was still on the control bridge. Too late for that.

The damaged lifeboat still hung in its tackle, facing the escape tube. Guiding the clumsy shell from its tackle into the tube was hardly a one-man job at best. Considering Calloran's condition, it was a minor miracle that he managed at all.

With a harsh grind of tortured metal, the shell settled awkwardly into its cradle. Calloran got aboard, lowered himself through the manhole hatch and clanged down the lid. He spun dogs tight to seal the lid, then settled into the seat and punched the release.

There came a deafening blast of air-pressure, then a brief shock of movement. The shell popped from the tube like a cork from a champagne bottle. Calloran tripped jet-throttles with reckless abandon, guiding his frail

craft toward the Polaris. In his haste, he overshot the mark. The huge bulks swung closer, but instead of the patrol cruiser, the glittering monstrosity of the alien craft rose between him and the empty gulf of space.

The other lifeboats clustered about an airlock on the far side of the stranger. That was curious. On impulse, Calloran decided to follow their example.

In seconds he was among them, jostling them away from the airlock. With magnetic grapples, he made fast lock to lock.

Escaping air hissed sharply, and the doors came open automatically as pressures equalized. Calloran stared through both airlocks into a weirdly lighted interior.

Ill, frightened and angry as he was, Calloran yet found time to stare in awe at the immense interior. Architecture and decorations, even the implied functions of the furniture, were totally unhuman. He looked about him in amazement. The cabin was a treasure-house, with the wealth of dreams flung about in such careless profusion as to frighten him.

Plates of beaten gold, richly chased with figures of odd geometry, covered ceilings and bulkheads, and hangings of metallic cloth studded with patterns of gemfire bespoke a culture a thousand times richer and older than Earth's.

Pale daffodil light flooded the interior, seeming to come from no special source, but to be a quality of the air itself. Even the atmosphere was alien, richer in oxygen. A slight burning and tingling enveloped his lungs, but the sensation was not unpleasant. Stimulating, rather. . .

Calloran needed stimulation. The artificial gravity seemed set higher than that of Earth, but with the additional energies provided by his slight oxygen jag, Calloran felt his muscles respond easily. There was a bite of ozone in his nostrils, but his head seemed to be clearing. Thinking came easier, and his vision was less clouded by the blurring grayness.

He explored a dozen apartments, catching his breath at the esthetic and technical marvels revealed in each. Small wonder that his companions had callously deserted him.

It was easy to imagine what had happened. The first party must have gone aboard the alien craft, reporting their findings by helio or semaphore signals. The remainder, already terrified by the imminent breakup of Procyon IV must have tumbled helter-skelter into the other shells and set off to make certain of a share in the rich find. In his present mood, Calloran was cynically unsurprised that no one, not even Captain Glamis, had spared a thought for him.

Instinct led him to what must have been the bow of the ship. There, in the alien control room, he might find his companions. It would be an awkward moment for them, he promised himself. Jean must never know, of course, that her father had left him behind to die. But he'd have an accounting from Glamis and the others.

Calloran came suddenly into the control room, a great cone-shaped bubble roofed in some transparent substance.

"Tom — Herndon — Mack!" he shouted. "Where is everybody?"

A hollow, golden-throated echo vibrated unpleasantly in the bubble, but no answer came. Anger turned swiftly to cold fear as the echoes died unanswered.

CALLORAN stared at the maze of unfamiliar instruments, gauges, controls, hot-panels. His technical curiosity was excited. At another time, he would have liked to go over

them carefully, puzzling out their functions. They seemed mainly mechanical, and nothing mechanical could stump a good spacehound. But there was no time for that now.

A mistake to have wasted his effort searching the ship. Best to have cut straight through to the other airlock where Polaris was moored. Unless something dreadful had already happened, there would be a doctor aboard the cruiser—ISP ships always carried doctors. And Calloran must find help soon.

The airlock proved difficult to locate. Calloran was confused in a tangle of passageways, ending suddenly in a room which he took to be the fuel storage-hold. Not tanks of liquid hydrogen—not even the minor artificial radioactives—but heavy metals, in unbelievable quantity. Countless tons of them, the rarest and heaviest of metals, to judge from the shielding; and all must be activated or such shielding would not be needed. Calloran went cold as his mind automatically calculated the power-equivalent of such a store of metals. Enough power here to blast a solar system into a nova.

Wealth and power beyond all dreaming. All this, but a deadly danger, too. . . Whoever held this ship controlled the destinies of the five inhabited worlds of the system, in peace or war. His imagination rioted with the wonder and terror of it. But corroding depression settled over him. Such power was not good for men—it corrupted the best of them, did horrible things to their minds and their ambitions. The mystery of Procyon's desertion en masse no longer puzzled him, but the explanation was worse than the dread. Had they already struck at the crew of the patrol cruiser? What fearful conspiracies, what mad ambitions, were already at work? Were they already, secure in their strength and knowledge, watching him, waiting to strike him down, playing with him as cats play with a captive mouse?

Masters of the system! It was possible, hideously possible, with the limitless forces at their disposal.

Sickened, with something worse than physical terror gnawing at him, Calloran turned away to continue his search for the airlock. The situation was more desperate than ever now. If he could reach the Polaris, warn its crew— The ISP would know what to do. They were good men, loyal—not just loyal politically, but loyal to the best interests of the vast, brawling multitudes of mankind. In a tight situation they were not too fussy about legal details—they took care of it and argued with the lawyers afterward.

As he worked his way aft, trying to find his way to the airlock, Calloran was stopped time and again, puzzled by some new mystery of the alien ship. Its crew had obviously not been human. But he could find no picture, no representation of their form.

Who were these voyagers? And a greater enigma—where were they?

Even if all had died of disease, accident, exposure to deadly rays, surely some remnant of their bodies would remain. The deathlike silence of the leviathan frayed his already tortured nerves. Loneliness, the recurring symptoms of his ailments, and an unnatural dread of his surroundings built into a crescendo of hysteria. He was lost in the maze of corridors and passages; their very strangeness made all doors and chambers look alike; the corridors led nowhere. He had overshot his mark. From the distance he had traversed, he must be abaft the airlocks. He tried vainly to retrace his steps.

Time was running out swiftly. In weakness and indecision, he paused

while a phantasmagoria whirled in his sick brain. Could all this wonder and horror be part of the delirium of space-fog? That was a new thought, a terrible one.

Or suppose the aliens were still here, invisible, amused, studying him, waiting to pounce on his first unguarded moment? The sensation of being watched—stalked!—sent him in headlong flight through tangled galleries and apartments. He fled through rooms where robot machines labored tirelessly at tasks set them by the unthinkable entities who had manned the ship.

Careening wildly, panting out his breath in sobs, Calloran stumbled into a hold he had not seen before.

Near a bank of vats bearing hieroglyphic labels lay Herndon—or what was left of him.

On the floor, heavy clothing lying shredded about it, was a limp, still-twitching body. Calloran knelt quickly, examining. Herndon was dying. Skin and flesh had been eaten from his face and body, showing raw bone. Hideously exposed jawbone and teeth worked spasmodically, whether in last attempts at speech or in the purely mechanical contractions of a corpse. But the tongue was gone, dissolved as if by swiftly corrosive acid. As Calloran watched, part of the brain, visible through empty eye-sockets, crumbled in decay. The writhing body was still.

Calloran's mind rocked with horror. He raced down the nearest passage, shouting the names of his comrades. Scarcely noticing where he was, he came suddenly into the airlock chamber he sought. The pressure doors were still open.

SCREAMING with relief, he floundered and fell through the locks into the control room of the Polaris. Here at least were tables and chairs, chart desks, familiar controls, gauges, machinery, instrument panels.

On the floor, rocking slowly back and forth as his weight disturbed the equilibrium of the cabin, was a single shoe, its laces snapped. On one table, a pair of gloves, the leather of one half eaten away. Beside the gloves, in tumbled-out disarray, were leaves torn from the ship's logbook. Apparently acid had gotten to the pages also, for some were partially shredded and curiously dissolved.

But even here there was no living being. Calloran's frantic ringing of alarm bells and howlers brought no one to him. For a full minute, he sat in the chair and howled. Calming, he buried his face in his hands and wept.

"They can't do this to me," he moaned. "They can't—"

His eyes came to rest on the torn-out pages of the logbook.

Thursday, 12th: About 0930 hours, we sighted large object moving sunward at angle of five degrees north ecliptic. Investigation revealed large spacecraft, of unusual design. 1018, alongside, no response to signals— presumably derelict. Following procedure 14. 1024, boarding party away—reports curious. Grappled alongside. 1031, second party put aboard. Helioflash disabled, possibly from proximity of unusually strong force field. Alien ship deserted—apparently abandoned in haste. Second party still searching for first. No sign of life. Investigation continuing.

Maydell, First Officer.

Friday, 13th. Hope gone for No. 1 party. Keysing, semantics expert, still going over metallic plates. Ideographic form of writing. Difficult to decipher, but Keysing says he can break it in time. Matter unsol. . . . (Rest of page missing.)

. . . pparently the vessel started 900 years ago, or three of their generations. Exact source still unidentified, but one sheet is complicated star-chart. Astrogator working on it. Men growing restless. Can't blame them; so am I. 0120 hours. The astrogator's report in. Destination our own sun. Why? One more mystery. In search of something. Lucky for us they ran into trouble, my opinion. I don't like this. . . .

. . . Curious life form, not carbon jelly. Not even organic in our sense. Crystalline formation, possibly silicoid. What could have happened to them? Apparently all well, engines working properly, when ship in region of Pluto's orbit. Position then 3 degrees south ecliptic. Terrific orbit. Should be some clue to origin of ship.

0230. Trouble again on the strange ship. Two

men are missing. No one else aboard at time. Guards failed to report, no sign of either. Search continuing.

. . . some form of mold, which may have undergone mutation during voyage. Keysing thinks solar radiation may have stimulated it to unusual activity. Banks says they brought stuff along as medicine. . . . Still no sign of Rayce and Egan. Hope waning.

1530. Mystery solved. Men going mad with horror. Part of Rayce found in after hold of ship. Eaten alive by something. Two attempts at mutiny put down by officers. More trouble coming.

. . . mold, all right. Horror is loose again. After feeding it is quiescent for a time. Gives us a few hours. Think of something. . . . (rest of page missing.)

. . . hideous stuff fed on them, seems to absorb energies from any living matter, dissolves, digests. Became malignant and turned on its masters. Solar radiation. . . . Found Egan, still alive. Dying. Tried to speak, but gray foam burst from mouth and nostrils, dissolving flesh as we watched helpless.

It's everywhere. Comes from those vats whenever it senses living presence, probably sensitive to heat radiations. Those dancing motes in the air are spores! We came boiling back to the ship like maniacs, got the airlock doors closed and broke free. One thought, to get away. Seemed we had made it. But the stuff was already here. Gray muck started forming on Douglas' eyes. Carter shot him.

Alongside again. No escape. None of us can go back now. One thing left to do. Must take this ship out to the emptiest part of space and destroy it. Ourselves with it. No hope left. .

A little time now. It has fed. Keysing and Morell took a party to plot the course, figure out their controls. I laid out a rack of time torpedoes to take aboard, plant in the hold where they kept atomic fuels. Timing bad—the mold got all of them. I watched Morell die. Stuff clung all over him, gray-green mold, sticky and slimy with a sort of foam on top. Flesh dissolved down to bones. Even the bones, eventually. Only three of us left.

Lies dormant according to amount of its feeding. Jacobs offered to go in and let it take him, give us time to plant the torpedoes. No use. None of us left can manage those controls. . . Ship must be taken outside the system before the timers let go. We tried. . . .

Final entry. Time nearly up. Banks says a ship approaching from Saturn. Helio still too weak to warn them off. Will try to set hand-signals. Too late. . . . God help them! . . . . (The last page of the manuscript finished with a dreadful scrawl, and close beside the page was a dry, hideous smear as if someone had crushed a very large moth.)

CALLORAN'S mind reeled as he finished reading. It was clear now, all too clear. And clearest of all was what must be done.

The racks of time torpedoes were easy to find. He opened the locker, got out two full racks. If these were placed against the shielding in that alien storage hold, they would do the work. To be certain, he made two trips.

The alien ship's control might be difficult, but he could manage. A good spaceman can always manage. Transfer some of the robot mechanism from Polaris, if necessary. Then a simple matter of laying a course for outer space. Right angles to the ecliptic would be best. Just give the torpedo timers enough leeway. He must manage those controls. After that. . . .

A strange, wonderful calm descended over him. Something to do, something worth doing. There were problems, but none he could not face. One last responsibility, then he would be free.

Calloran made sure the magnetic grapples held Polaris fast—wouldn't do to have the cruiser break free, carrying its cargo of horror and pollution through an inhabited system. He set the fuses to explode at peak velocity, then made his way to the control room.

When those torpedoes let go against the shielding, all hell would break loose. Even the mold would give up its stolen energies. Holocaust! Too bad he wouldn't see the fireworks. From Earth or Mars, it should look like a supernova. They wouldn't know, but his going would at least be spectacular. . . .

Spacefog was closing in again as Calloran eased open the throttles. The big alien ship moved slowly, its nose pointing toward the pole star. Each acceleration pang sang a note of joy to Calloran. At peak velocity, the torpedoes would blow. All throttles open, the ship gathered speed. The gray fringe of fog did not mean anything now. He had beaten it. Frightful acceleration-nauseas racked him. He smiled grimly as gray fog filled his eyes. This was it. . . .

THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER

Conducted by Frederik Pohl

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FANTASY BOOKSHELF

WITHOUT SORCERY, by Theodore Sturgeon. Prime Press.

Here are thirteen of the Theodore Sturgeon stories that Theodore Sturgeon likes best, a baker's dozen of tales of science fiction fantasy and sheer horror. As an anthologist and critic of his own work, Sturgeon has many peers, though as a writer he has none. Those who know his writing will find some of the best left out of this book, and some of the worst given positions of honor. But it would probably be possible to make a very worthwhile collection of Sturgeon stories blindfold. There are very few bad ones, and the good ones include such authentic masterpieces (in the present volume) as:

"It," a nightmare story of a child and a half-alive monster of the woods.

"Microcosmic God," the story of a man who created a world of his own in miniature.

"Shottle Bop," whose hero was a mortal man given the priceless—and dangerous—power to haunt ghosts.

"Maturity," a brilliant performance which comes as close as any writer has ever done to depicting a fully mature superman in action.

If you have missed any one of these, it is worth the book's price to read it.

There is an introduction by Ray Bradbury and a number of other superfluous ornaments, including story headings by the author and a dispirited jacket by Tschirky.

THE HUMANOIDS, by Jack Williamson. Simon & Schuster.

This is the story of Dr. Webb Claypool, an astronomer on a faraway planet that bears a marked resemblance to the Earth, battling against one of the most subtle and dangerous enemies in science fiction—a devil's horde of humanoid robots, whose only purpose is to serve mankind and preserve it from harm . . . even at the cost of taking away its liberty. Claypool's allies are an old man, a child, a drug addict and a petty criminal. Against them are all the forces of a robot-ruled universe—yet the struggle is far from unequal.

Jack Williamson has written a novel that this reviewer was literally unable to put down until he had reached the

last page. It is possible to quarrel with the somewhat repugnant course Williamson allows his story to take, particularly in its climax, but his craftsmanship and vivid imagination are unsurpassed.

DIVIDE AND RULE, by L. Sprague de Camp. Shasta Press.
THE WHEELS OF IF, by L. Sprague de Camp. Fantasy Press.

Both of these new volumes by one of fantasy's favorite humorous writers contain a plurality of stories—"Divide And Rule" teamed with another short novel, "The Stolen Dormouse"; "The Wheels of If" leading off a collection of six other stories.

De Camp's special charm lies in an almost unmatched talent for translating life in any of the uncounted worlds invented by science fiction and fantasy into terms of human reactions of the 20th Century U.S.A. It is also his greatest weakness. For, in making the point that human beings are the same, regardless of the time in which they live or the planet they inhabit, de Camp manages also to make almost all de Camp stories very much the same. His characters, whether they are the armored nobles of "Divide and Rule" or the explorer of parallel time tracks in "The Wheels of If", are interchangeable parts; it is only the costumes that are different.

In "Divide and Rule" de Camp explores the possibilities in a future world which lies under the heel of an alien race who forbid humanity all the major fruits of scientific research; in "The Stolen Dormouse", in the same volume, his future world is governed by enormous family-owned industrial trusts, and his hero can't marry the girl he loves because their two corporations are at war.

"The Wheels of If" take a New York politician and thrusts him into a world on a divergent branch of time—it is his same city, and his same year, but in a civilization which might have come to pass if the Vikings had settled North America. The short stories in this volume include "The Best-Laid Scheme", "The Warrior Race", "Hyperpelosity", "The Merman", "The Contraband Cow" and the particularly memorable story of an immortal Neanderthal man, still alive in the 20th Century, "The Gnarly Man".

Both books are well printed and handsomely put together. "The Wheels of If" has an especially decorative four-color jacket by Hannes Bok.

LIFE EVERLASTING, by David H. Keller, M.D. The Avalon Company.

This is the story of four failures—a consumptive, a criminal, a woman of the streets, and a dying oldster—and a scientific discovery which brings them radiant health and immortality, at the price of inability to have children. Made over by a secret serum, the four attain ecstatic heights of success and well-being—yet, at the end, they give up the blessings of the serum forever, so that they may bring children into the world.

Dr. David Keller's story of unwanted immortality first appeared more than fifteen years ago, and won instant approval from that generation of science-fiction readers. Viewed in the light of today's science-fiction writing, it seems a ponderous morality story in which the "science-fiction" element is no more than a device to prove the author's preconceived notions of what is "right" and "good". Yet, though Dr. Keller's writing has all the neatness and subtlety of an avalanche, at times it has traces of an avalanche's crude power. It is not a story you can easily forget.

Ten of the author's short stories, some of which have never been published before, are also included in the volume, which contains a long introduction by Sam Moskowitz.

THE BLACK FLAME, by Stanley G. Weinbaum. Fantasy Press.

From the date on which Stanley Weinbaum's first story appeared in print until his death at the age of thirty-three, only seventeen months elapsed. Yet, in that time, he produced more than a score of memorable stories, winning a following among science-fiction readers matched by only a handful of writers.

"The Black Flame" and "Dawn of Flame", the other short novel which fills out the present book, were both published after his death. There is some doubt that Weinbaum intended both to be published, for there is much duplication of material between them; it is almost as though the author had written one and, dissatisfied with it, discarded it to use the basic plot and conception on another script. Yet each, read independently, is a first-rate science-fiction novel.

The two stories depict separate periods in the immortal lives of Joaquin Smith, the Master, and his sister and co-ruler of the world, Margaret of Urbs, known as The Black Flame. A devastating war has driven humanity back almost to barbarism, out of which it slowly emerges in these stories, guided by the two Immortals. In each story, there is revolt against the Immortals; in each, a leader of the enemy camp battles them fiercely, falls helplessly in love with The Black Flame, and is won over.

For color and drama, there are few writers alive who can match Stanley Weinbaum. This book, the first of a series, has an attractive jacket in three colors by A. J. Donnell.

THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER, by George Malcolm-Smith. Doubleday.

Henny Sherman woke up one morning with a hangover—but it was somebody else's hangover. During the night he had mysteriously switched bodies with a total stranger, and got the worst of the deal. Henny's frantic search to find out whose body he is wearing—and what has happened to his own—makes an entertaining fantasy in the Thorne Smith tradition.

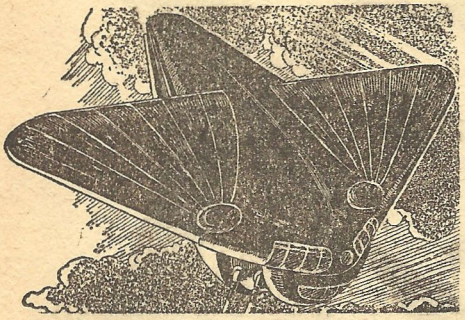
ROADS, by Seabury Quinn. Arkham House.

This tiny book is perhaps of only casual interest to the fantasy reader, since it is no more than a re-telling of the legend of Santa Claus—who may in reality have been the Norse mercenary in the Roman armies who is the hero of this story. It is handsomely printed, with a striking black-and-gold jacket and many interior illustrations by Virgil Finlay. For once, the illustrations add to the enjoyment of the story rather than detracting from it.

THE RADIO MAN, by Ralphe Milne Farley. Fantasy Publishing Co.

Myles Cabot, attempting to perfect a three-dimensional television transmitter, accidentally causes a short circuit—and suddenly finds himself torn from his Boston laboratory and cast onto a beach in a strange world, which turns out to be Venus. He finds that the sunward planet is inhabited by a dominating race of intelligent ants, to whom the humans of the planet are slaves. Naturally, Myles goes to work to free Venusian humanity from its shackles, which he accomplishes with very little trouble.

On the artistic score, the credits the book earns for its attractive two-color jacket must be taken away again because of the inexcusably bad interior illustrations.



TRIPLANETARY and SKYLARK THREE, by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. Fantasy Press.

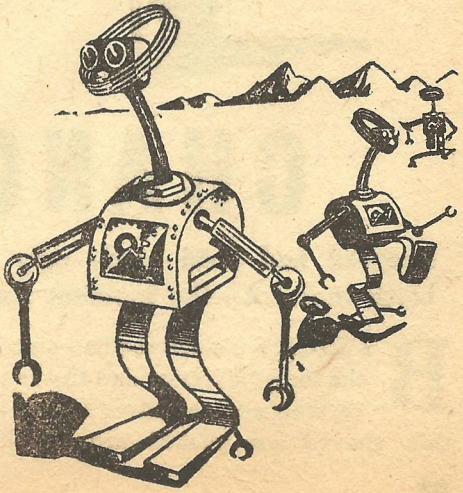
To a whole generation of fantasy fans, Edward E. Smith is Old Doc Science-Fiction himself. His first published story, "The Skylark of Space", set the style for every important science-fiction writer for years.

With Dr. Smith, it is the science in the term that is important, not the fiction—and the Smithian brand of science consists mostly of an expert use of technical terms to describe fuzzy concepts. Richard Seaton, of the "Skylark" trilogy, plays with rays of the third, fourth, fifth and eventually sixth and seventh orders; if there is a difference between them, it is not apparent in their effects, though each successive number is heralded as a scientific advance of the first magnitude. The original Skylark is built of steel; as soon as possible it is recreated in "arenak", for a half-inch of arenak is equivalent to six feet of steel. Then they discover "dagal", and rebuild for a half-inch of dagal is equivalent to six feet of arenak. Then someone tells them about "inoson"—so strong that six feet of dagal is only equivalent to half an inch of it. . . . The plot, then, of a typical E. E. Smith novel follows a predictable pattern: Just keep multiplying everything by twelve squared.

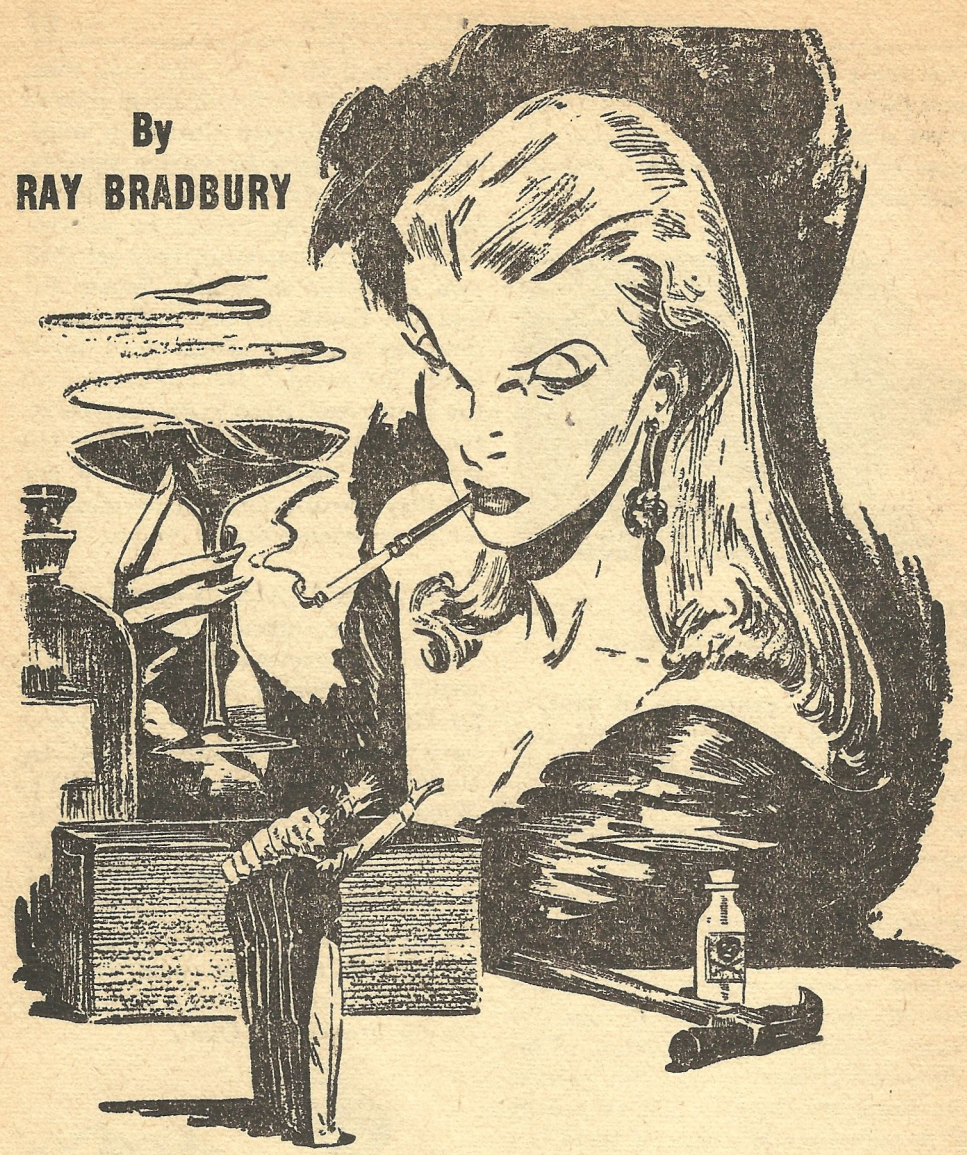
Yet, precisely because Dr. Smith's stories cannot be judged by conventional literary standards, they set their own standards as science fiction. Before Dr. Smith, science fiction was a timorous groping within fixed limits of the "believable". Dr. Smith removed the limits, and freed every science-fiction writer who came after him. His stories are neither literature nor art, but they are magnificent entertainment for every science-fiction reader.

THE PORCELAIN MAGICIAN, by Frank Owen. Gnome Press.

Here are fourteen short stories by a well-known writer of fantasies with an Oriental flavor, several of which have never been printed before. Included are such favorite stories as "The Wind That Tramps the World", "Pale Pink Porcelain", and "The Purple Sea". A brief introduction by David A. Kyle advises the reader to take the stories a few at a time—good advice for all but the most rabid devotees. The attractive jacket and illustrations are by Frances E. Dunn.



By
RAY BRADBURY



CHANGELING

Leonard had been made only for her, she realized in that final black moment—the moment she also knew he must be destroyed!

BY EIGHT o'clock she had placed the long cigarettes and the wine crystals and the silver bucket of thin shaved ice packed around the green bottle. She stood looking at the room, each picture neat, ashtrays conveniently disposed. She plumped a lounge pillow and stepped back, her

eyes squinting. Then she hurried into the bathroom and returned with the strychnine bottle, which she laid under a magazine on an end-table. She had already hidden a hammer and an ice-pick.

She was ready.

Seeming to know this, the phone rang. When she answered, a voice said:

"I'm coming up."

He was in the elevator now, floating silently up the iron throat of the house, fingering his accurate little moustache, adjusting his white summer evening coat and black tie. He would be smoothing his gray-blonde hair, that handsome man of fifty still able to visit handsome women of thirty-three, fresh, convivial, ready for the wine and the rest of it.

"You're a faker!" she whispered to the closed door a moment before he rapped.

"Good evening, Martha," he said. "Are you just going to stand there, looking?" She kissed him quietly. "Was that a kiss?" he wondered, his blue eyes warmly amused. "Here." He gave her a better one.

Her eyes closed, she thought, is this different from last week, last month, last year? What makes me suspicious? Some little thing. Something she couldn't even tell, it was so minor. He had changed subtly and drastically. So drastically in fact, so completely that she had begun to stay awake nights two months ago. She had taken to riding the helicopters at three in the morning out to the beach and back to see all-night films projected on the clouds near The Point, films that had been made way back in 1955, huge memories in the ocean mist over the dark waters, with the voices drifting in like gods' voices with the tide. She was constantly tired.

"Not much response." He held her away and surveyed her critically. "Is anything wrong, Martha?"

"Nothing," she said. Everything, she thought. You, she thought. Where are you tonight, Leonard? Who are you dancing with far away, or drinking with in an apartment on the other side of town, who are you being lovably polite with? For you most certainly are not here in this room, and I intend to prove it.

"What's this?" he said, looking down. "A hammer? Have you been hanging pictures, Martha?"

"No, I'm going to hit you with it," she said, and laughed.

"Of course," he said, smiling. "Well, perhaps this will make you change your mind." He drew forth a plush case, inside which was a pearl necklace.

"Oh, Leonard!" She put it on with trembling fingers and turned to him, excited. "You are good to me."

"It's nothing at all," he said.

At these times, she almost forgot her suspicions. She had everything with him, didn't she? There was no sign of his losing interest, was there? Certainly not. He was just as kind and gentle and generous. He never came without something for her wrist or her finger. Why did she feel so lonely with him then? Why didn't she feel with him? Perhaps it had started with that picture in the paper two months ago. A picture of him and Alice Summers in The Club on the night of April 17th. She hadn't seen the picture until a month later and then she had spoken of it to him:

"Leonard, you didn't tell me you took Alice Summers to The Club on the night of April seventeenth."

"Didn't I, Martha? Well, I did."

"But wasn't that one of the nights you were here with me?"

"I don't see how it could have been. We have supper and play symphonies

and drink wine until early morning."

"I'm sure you were here with me April seventeenth, Leonard."

"You're a little drunk, my dear. Do you keep a diary?"

"I'm not a child."

"There you are then. No dairy, no record. I was here the night before or the night after. Come on now, Martha, drink up."

But that hadn't settled it. She had not gone to sleep that night with thinking and being positive he had been with her on April 17th. It was impossible, of course. He couldn't be in two places.

They both stood looking down at the hammer on the floor. She picked it up and put it on a table. "Kiss me," she said, quite suddenly, for she wanted now, more than ever, to be certain of this thing. He evaded her and said, "First, the wine." "No," she insisted, and kissed him.

There it was. The difference. The little change. There was no way to tell anyone, or even describe it. It would be like trying to describe a rainbow to a blind man. But there was a subtle chemical difference to his kiss. It was no longer the kiss of Mr. Leonard Hill. It approximated the kiss of Leonard Hill but was sufficiently different to set a subconscious wheel rolling in her. What would an analysis of the faint moisture on his lips reveal? Some bacterial lack? And as for the lips themselves, were or were they not harder, or softer, than before? Some small difference.

"All right, now the wine," she said, and opened it. She poured his glass full. "Oh, will you get some mats from the kitchen to set them on?" While he was gone she poured the strychnine in his glass. He returned with the mats to set the glasses on and picked up his drink.

"To us," he said.

GOOD Lord, she thought, what if I'm wrong? What if this is really him? What if I'm just some wild paranoid sort of creature, really insane and not aware of it?

"To us." She raised her glass.

He drained his at a gulp, as always. "My God," he said, wincing. "That's horrible stuff. Where did you get it?"

"At Modesti's."

"Well, don't get any more. Here, I'd better ring for more."

"Never mind, I have more in the refrigerator."

When she brought the new bottle in, he was sitting there, clever and alive and fresh. "You look wonderful," she said.

"Feel fine. You're beautiful. I think I love you more tonight than ever."

She waited for him to fall sidewise and stare the stare of the dead. "Here we go," he said, opening the second bottle.

When the second bottle was empty, an hour had passed. He was telling witty little stories and holding her hand and kissing her gently now and again. At last he turned to her and said, "You seem quiet tonight, Martha? Anything wrong?"

"No," she said.

She had seen the news item last week, the item that had finally set her worrying and planning, that had explained her loneliness in his presence. About the Marionettes. Marionettes, Incorporated. Not that they really existed, surely not. But there was a rumor. Police were investigating.

Life-size marionettes, mechanical, stringless, secretive, duplicates of real people. One might buy them for ten thousand dollars on some distant black market. One could be measured for a replica of one's self. If one grew weary of social functions, one could send the replica out to wine, to dine, to shake

hands, to trade gossip with Mrs. Rinehart on your left, Mr. Simmons on your right, Miss Glenner across the table.

Think of the political tirades one might miss! Think of the bad shows one need never see. Think of the dull people one could snub without actually snubbing. And, last of all, think of the jeweled loved ones you could ignore, yet not ignore. What would a good slogan be? She Need Never Know? Don't Tell Your Best Friends? It Walks, It Talks, It Sneezes, Is Says "Mama"?

When she thought of this she became almost hysterical. Of course it had not been proven that such things as Marionettes existed. Just a sly rumor, with enough to it to make a sensitive person crawl with horror.

"Abstracted again," he said, interrupting her quietness. "There you go, wandering off. What's in that pretty head of yours?"

She looked at him. It was foolish; at any moment he might convulse and die. Then she would be sorry for her jealousy.

Without thinking, she said, "Your mouth; it tastes funny."

"Dear me," he said. "I shall have to see to that, eh?"

"It's tasted funny for some time."

For the first time he seemed concerned. "Has it? I'm sorry. I'll see my doctor."

"It's not that important." She felt her heart beating quickly and she was cold. It was his mouth. After all, no matter how perfect chemists were, could they analyze and reproduce the exact taste? Hardly. Taste was individual. Taste was one thing to her, something else to another. There was where they had fallen down. She would not put up with it another minute. She walked over to the other couch, reached down and drew out the gun.

"What's that?" he said, looking at it. "Oh my God," he laughed. "A gun. How dramatic."

"I've caught on to you," she said.

"Is there anything to catch on to?" he wanted to know, calmly, his mouth straight, his eyes twinkling.

"You've been lying to me. You haven't been here in eight weeks or more," she said.

"Is that true? Where have I been, then?"

"With Alice Summers, I wouldn't doubt. I'll bet you're with her right now."

"Is that possible?" he asked.

"I don't know Alice Summers, I've never met her, but I think I'll call her apartment right now."

"Do that," he said, looking straight at her.

"I will," she said, moving to the phone. Her hand shook so that she could hardly dial information. While waiting for the number to come through she watched Leonard and he watched her with the eye of a psychiatrist witnessing a not-unusual phenomenon.

"You are badly off," he said. "My dear Martha—"

"Sit down!"

"My dear Martha," he moved back in the couch, chuckling softly. "What have you been reading?"

"About the Marionettes is all."

"That poppycock? Good God, Martha, I'm ashamed of you. It's not true. I looked into it!"

"What!"

"Of course!" he cried, in delight. "I have so many social obligations, and then my first wife came back from India as you know and demanded my time and I thought how fine it would be if I had a replica of myself made, as bait you might say, to turn my wife off my trail, to keep her busy, how nice, eh? But it was all false. Just

one of those Sunday supplement fantasies, I assure you. Now put that phone down and come have another glass of wine."

She had stood staring at him in bewilderment during all of his pronouncement. She had almost dropped the phone, believing him, until he said the word 'wine'. Then she shook herself and said, "Wait a minute. You can't talk me out of this! I gave you some poison a while ago, enough to kill six men. You haven't showed a sign of it. That proves something, doesn't it?"

"It proves nothing at all. It merely proves that your chemist gave you the wrong bottle, is probably more like it. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I feel fine. Put down that phone now, Martha, and be sensible."

She held the phone in her hand. A voice said, "That number is A B one two two fower niyen."

"I just want to be certain," she said.

"All right," he shrugged. "But if I'm not to be trusted I'm afraid I won't come back to see you again. What you need, my dear lady, is a psychiatrist, in the worst way. You're right on the edge!"

"Hello, operator? Give me A B one two two four nine."

"Martha, don't," he said, sitting there, one hand out.

The phone rang and rang at the other end. Finally a voice answered. Martha listened to it for a minute and then put the phone down.

LEONARD looked into her face and said, "There. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," she said. Her mouth was thick. She raised the gun.

"Don't!" he screamed. He stood up.

"That was your voice on the other end," she said. "You were with her!"

"You're insane!" he cried. "Oh, God, Martha, don't, it's a mistake, that was someone else, you're so overwrought you thought it sounded like me!"

She fired the gun once, twice, three times.

He fell to the floor.

She came to stand over him. She was afraid, and she began to cry. The fact that he had actually fallen at her feet had surprised her. She had imagined that a Marionette would only stand there and laugh at her, alive, immortal.

I was wrong, she thought. I am insane. This is Leonard Hill and I've killed him.

He lay with his eyes closed, his mouth moving. "Martha," he said. "Why didn't you leave well enough alone. Oh, Martha."

"I'll call a doctor," she said.

"No, no, no." And suddenly he began to laugh. "You've got to know sometime. And now that you've done this, oh you fool, I may as well admit it."

The gun fell from her fingers.

"I," he said, choking on laughter. "I haven't been here with you for a—for a year!"

"What?"

"A year, twelve months! Yes, Martha, twelve months!"

"You're lying!"

"Oh, you won't believe me now, will you? What's changed you in ten seconds? Do you think I'm Leonard Hill? Forget it!"

"Then that was you? At Alice Summers' apartment just now?"

"Me? No! I started with Alice a year ago, when first I left you!"

"Left me?"

"Yes, left, left, left!" he shouted, and laughed, lying there.

"I'm an old man, Martha, old and tired. The rat-race was too much for

me. I thought I needed a change. So I went on to Alice and tired of her. And went on to Helen Kinglsey, you remember her, don't you? And tired of her. And on to Ann Montgomery. And that didn't last. Oh, Martha, there are at least six duplicates of me, mechanical hypocrites, ticking away tonight, in all parts of the town, keeping six people happy. And do you know what I am doing, the real I?

"I'm home in bed early for the first time in thirty years, reading my little book of Montaigne's essays and enjoying it and drinking a hot glass of chocolate milk and turning out the lights at ten o'clock. I've been asleep for an hour now, and I shall sleep the sleep of the innocent until morning and arise refreshed and free."

"Stop!" she shrieked.

"I've got to tell you," he said. "You've cut several of my ligaments with your bullets. I can't get up. The doctors, if they came, would find me out anyway, I'm not that perfect. Perfect enough, but not that good. Oh, Martha, I didn't want to hurt you. Believe me. I wanted only your happiness. That's why I was so careful with my planned withdrawal. I spent fifteen thousand dollars for this replica, perfect in every detail. There are variables. The saliva for one. A regrettable error. It set you off. But you must know that I loved you."

She would fall at any moment, writhing into insanity, she thought. He had to be stopped from talking.

"And when I saw how the others loved me," he whispered to the ceiling, eyes wide, "I had to provide replicas for them, poor dears. They love me so. You won't tell them, will you, Martha? Promise me you won't give the show away. I'm a very tired old man, and I want only peace, a book, some milk and a lot of sleep. You won't call them up and give it away?"

"All this year, this whole year, I've been alone, alone every night," she said, the coldness filling her. "Talking to a mechanical horror! In love with nothingness! Alone all that time, when I could have been out with someone real!"

"I can still love you, Martha."

"Oh God!" she cried, and seized up the hammer.

"Don't, Martha!"

She smashed his head in and beat at his chest and his thrashing arms and wild legs. She beat at the soft head until steel shone through, and sudden explosions of wire and brass coggery showered about the room with metal tinkles.

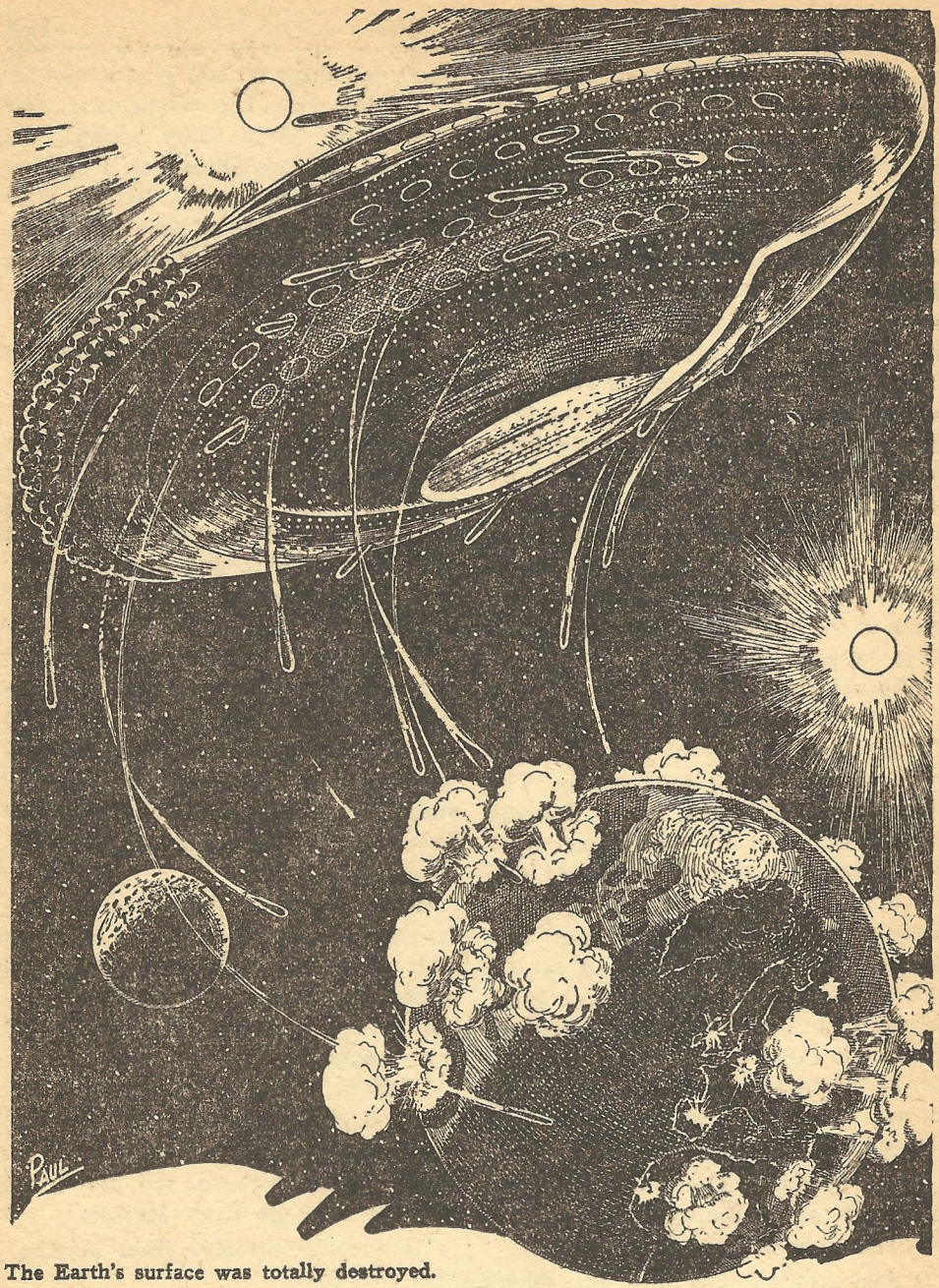
"I love you," said the man's mouth. She struck it with the hammer and the tongue fell out. The glass eyes rolled on the carpet. She pounded at the thing until it was strewn like the remains of a child's electric train on the floor. She laughed while she was doing it.

In the kitchen she found several cardboard boxes. She loaded the cogs and wires and metal into these and sealed the tops. Ten minutes later she had summoned the house-boy from below.

"Deliver these packages to Mr. Leonard Hill, 17 Elm Drive," she said, and tipped the boy. "Right now, tonight. Wake him up, tell him it's a surprise package from Martha."

"A surprise package from Martha," said the boy.

After the door closed, she sat on the couch with the gun in her hand, turning it over and over, listening. The last thing she heard in her life was the sound of the packages being carried down the hall, the metal jingling softly, cog against cog, wire against wire, fading.



The Earth's surface was totally destroyed.

By Bryce Walton

The human race was dead, though Anders and his wife still lived. Nothing was left for them now but the ritual of hatred—or the greater ritual of forgiveness!

THE SURVIVORS

FROM the observatory tower, Anders stared dazedly at the bitter Lunar landscape. He thought, The Moon at least is unchanged. Its harsh angles, its sharp black and white shadows over the shiny lakes of frozen lava had the frigid quality of eternity. The Moon had become a cenotaph, a satellite tomb, a frozen airless monument to the murdered Earth.

It had been a brief thing. Mary had run screaming into her room here in the Lunar Observatory tower and locked herself in. Was it luck that four people had been on the Moon and that two of those four still lived to look down at a blackened Earth?

Anders still sat, with the vision persisting on his retinas: the black ship suddenly there, belching out its many smaller ships like ferocious dark darting little bugs; the leaping flares of exploding cities; the incandescent vapor that had been teeming cities and men and history and the laboriously-built ideas of men.

Anders stared. About six miles away the black ship hovered in the shadow of mighty Theophilus where, an hour ago—immediately after the assault on the helpless Earth—it had settled like a giant scale that had been flung by cosmic force from some nameless and distant scab. Anders watched it. The ship hadn't moved. Anders hadn't moved. He studied it with intensity as though expecting it, like a lingering facet of nightmare, to fade into the lost sunlight of reality.

"Andy, I'm afraid."

"Mary!" He turned. She seemed sane still, and he was glad.

She tried to smile across the shiny floor. "I'm afraid, Andy, because of the way I feel. I—hate them so much."

Hate, fear, cold, he thought. Back to fundamentals.

Her eyes stared past him, fixed by the black ship's silhouette against the weird light of Earth's two suns.

He put his arms around her shoulders. Her skin was cold, her flesh rigid. Her profile was beautiful, more beautiful now than he'd ever seen it before, because of the powerful emotion shining from it—hate. It was a physical force, powerful, glittering.

"It wasn't even a war," she whispered harshly. "It came from nowhere and everything ended. I wonder how much suffering—"

The chains of fire had encircled Earth like necklaces and the holocausts had shot upward like fiery pearls. "It happened so fast," he said. "It must have been easy. Yes, it must have been. Are we lucky to be left, Mary?"

She shook her head. "Oh no, we're dead too, dead!"

He groped for words. "No . . . There's something we should do, a reason why we're left. There must be."

"Dr. Pangloss," she said, then smiled, her lips like thin dark wire.

He felt a chill over him as her face darkened, her eyes blazed. Her fingers curled, bit into his arm and her teeth bared and shone like an animal's. "We were left to hate!" she cried out suddenly. "We were left for revenge."

"No, that's wrong! We left that behind a thousand years ago. The Three Hundred Years' War ended that. We've got to keep the fire burning that man finally found—the fire of peace, love, understanding! Maybe this is the final test—"

Her laughter was ice. It fell over

him in harsh, frozen spray. She hated with an intensity man had forgotten long ago. Somehow, he began to feel it too. He half rose, turned his gaze toward the ship. Had the old emotions returned at the final curtain for the last laugh? Revenge—hate! Laughing, gloating puppets dancing and shrieking at man's stupidity.

No! Anders sat down and buried his face in his hands. Man had learned and he was the last man. He must not forget.

HER VOICE drifted to him. "You must feel this hate too, Andy. Help me! The neutrino machine Morley was working on—he never finished the projecting device. But if we could get it near the ship! It will work at short range the way it is—"

He scarcely heard her. "Curiosity," he murmured, "that's it. I'm curious. I don't hate them, whatever they are. I can't. I don't understand; I'm confused, nearly insane with the shock of it. But I can't let myself hate. That would be the last failure. If I can keep from hating, then I feel somehow there will be no defeat. You must see that."

"We could get very close to the ship," she said tensely. "I don't think they would see us. Then turn the neutrino distorter on it—"

"No, that isn't the way!"

He got up and stretched his short, muscular body. He pressed his left eye and some of the dull throbbing behind it was pressed inward and forgotten. He said, "A thousand years ago it would be easier to understand, before the Three Hundred Years' War. A thousand years ago, man was destructive, pathological; he made war on himself. There wasn't any reason for it, except his own insanity. He suffered from a vague fear, a free-floating anxiety—that is what our socio-psychological history tells us. He suffered a long, tormented time, Mary. Maybe too long."

He walked to a locker, opened it. He started climbing into the pressurized suit. He zipped up the front of it, checked the oxygen capsule and the valve. She wasn't looking at him, but at the ship.

"Yes, Mary," he heard himself saying. "Yes — evolution, psychobiotics, and a lot of luck and man finally climbed up out of the bog. It was a great era when he did that, Mary. Copernicus, Darwin, Freud, and Newton—they broke the old values, they were ego-deflators. They almost finished man. Man went crazy looking for a new sense of personal value. He was no longer a creature of fate, nor of Providence, Mary. He became his own value finally. He began to think in terms of a sad Chimera called progress. Progress was economics and science. Progress was size, it was bigger and better levers, pistons, explosions. . . ."

"Andy, I'm going down in the lab and get the machine Morley built. I know I can reach the ship and destroy it. Watch it fly into a million pieces—"

He went on talking, tried not to hear her. "Psychobiotics gave man a new life. Individual anxieties and hostilities gave way to warmth and sanity and a sense of personal value. But before that, we reached the zenith of horror through destructive warfare—"

Anders felt the playing of the weird double-sun light over his face. A war so terrible it had put two suns in the system in place of one, changed the planetary patterns, shifted orbits; ships vanished into hyperspace bent on conquest; planets turned to radioactive dust—the cosmobombs that turned Saturn and her moons into a second brilliant sun— and the shock taught

man the universal wisdom of non-violence, of peace, of the happiness and truth he could find only in himself.

Anders swayed weakly. He closed his eyes and looked straight ahead of him into the fathomless black pits of his lids. He blinked them open. "Mary, you've got to see it. You're mad with shock. Violence breeds violence. Hate rebounds on the hater. Even now, after what's happened, you must see that to hate is futile, negative, wrong!"

She screamed, "After what the black ship's done to us? Listen to me—Morley suspected what would happen. He felt it when our scope spotted the black ship that first time. Morley felt it, remember? No one would listen to him. He did it all on his own, hoping he could finish the projector. I understood him, but who else did? Nobody! Remember what Morley said? 'The ship's coming too fast, too intently. It won't be friendly. And Earth is totally unprepared for attack. There's only one ship —and one weapon, great enough, might stop them . . .' That's what Morely said. But he never got a chance to use the neutrino machine. The shock drove him and Burkson to suicide. But the machine's down in the lab. It's light. We could carry it easily to the ship. Andy, you've got to help me."

He shook his head slowly. "Maybe it's because you're a woman," he whispered. "A woman — watching all the children die, helplessly. A woman, cornered—the subconscious taking control —the subconscious, like the Law of Draco which makes hate and death the only possible punishment for crime. Mary—I can't help you. I'm sorry. . . ."

"You won't help me, then. But you won't stop me!"

"No," sighed Anders.

He watched the feverish eagerness of her. "But, Mary—give me a chance to do what I want to do first. Will you?"

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm going to try to find out what they are, if I can. Give me a little time."

She nodded. She didn't look at him, only at the ship. He kissed her, but she kept on looking at the ship. He dropped the oxygen helmet over his head and turned the clamps tight, adjusted the valve. She half-turned as he went out through the airlock. He waved, but she didn't move. Her face faded as though seen through the waters of an aquarium.

Anders sank down through the shifting, wavering moonlight. Caught between the two distant suns, the Moon was ever a glittering flickering kaleidoscope of color, as was the Earth.

In the thick pumice dust that rose to his thighs, Anders stood in the depths of overpowering awe. He stared at blackened Earth, and beyond it toward the icy pinpoints of the stars. What would the old system have done against the black ship? The old warring, armed system of pre-binary days? Shoot, ask questions afterwards—that had been one motto. They would have stopped the black ship. Maybe they would have sent out a fleet of big warships and met the black ship beyond the limits of the Solar System, and fought it out there, light years away.

Anders shrugged his shoulders inside the heavy inflated suit. He didn't know what men would have done in those days. He fought down and buried the tugging emotions of excitement that had grown within him for a moment as he thought of the old system and its terrifying ferocity and madness. It was a long time ago, an alien time. It was impossible to imagine how men had thought or acted in those times.

Inside the oxygen helmet, Anders' eyes were tense. He pushed, pushed with stubborn tenacity at the pumice dust that rose in lazy streaming rib-

bons and hung almost motionless. He wormed, wriggled, and his head moved slightly nearer to the black ship. Meteors exploded soundlessly on the beds of lava and seas of dust, shooting up thick motionless clouds that seemed almost solid. Above him, the eighteen-thousand-foot wall of the crater towered.

Anders sagged. Racking sobs exploded in the tiny helmet. Down the walls of the crater, across the lava floor, through seas of pumice, it had been a long way to reach the black ship. His head was mole-like, moving, a speck of shiny stuff, inching above the dust. Now he was within fifty yards of the black ship, and he lay there, his suit blending with the cold airless landscape.

The black ship lay in silent silhouette against a silent jagged landscape that had driven many pioneers mad with loneliness. The icy silence had never affected Anders before. But now it added inconceivably to the horror that had come from the stars, nameless and without reason. Now the Moon seemed a ghastly tomb, soundless, a lump of incredible loneliness without storm or wind or rain. The bitter deadly cold plucked at his suit. Its fingers were feather soft and mocking on his helmet plate.

And more silent still was the black ship: motionless and gigantic and silent. What did it wait for? For the smoke and flames to clear from the world it had destroyed? That would be unlikely. They had left nothing down there for themselves.

He crawled nearer. It had taken a long time to get this far, and his oxygen wouldn't last forever. A quiet desperation seized him. This was his way out. Mary had chosen her way. Who was to say who was right, or if such decisions mattered now? Perhaps his own stubborn clinging to the values of a destroyed humanity was only a form of unsanity. A last defense before the crumbling conclusion.

The ship loomed up before him, lengthened intolerably either way. The briliant glare of the sun that had been Saturn had become a flickering shadow of flames about the ship. He studied its length and height carefully. He listened. His ears ached with soundlessness. He watched, and his eyes wavered with the sight of nothing at all. It was incredibly frightening, because he knew the ship was not dead. It was a crouching monster, waiting with deadly patience for some alien purpose of its own.

He glanced back across the vast crater toward the top of the observatory. A natural camouflage of light and shadow made it indistinguishable unless one knew it was there.

He thought of Mary. She would be taking action, he knew that. She wouldn't be waiting. She would be wheeling that small but ghastly neutrino machine out into the airlock, donning a pressure suit. How long would she give him?

He thought of what would happen when she turned the neutrino rays on the ship. What had Morley said about his neutrino machine? Oh yes—neutrinos explained why electrons, shot out of the same atomic nuclei under the same conditions, do not have the same energy. Morley found that invisible neutronos shot away too, affecting the recoil of the atom. Neutrinos, two-thousandths the mass of electrons and with no electric charge by which they could be influenced electrically. Morley also found that there were antineutrinos. When the two met, they annihilated one another. It was this neutrino annihilation that resulted in the emission of gravitational waves. As a

weapon, Morley's invention was rather simple. It prevented momentarily this annihilation of neutrinos. The result was that the matter affected lost all cohesion and completely disintegrated.

It would be painless, Anders thought, which was a thing to be considered when the results otherwise were inevitable.

Anders leaped up and ran in long weightless jumps toward the ship.

Nothing happened. Nothing moved. No port opened to project destructive fingers at him. He thought of attempting communication with the radio on his belt. But whatever these creatures were, they were certainly too alien for that.

Anders stood beneath the upcurving side of the ship. He touched the space-scarred metal. What distant worlds had it known and forgotten? He moved around beneath its bulk until he stood beneath the rounded section that might be a port. He hesitated a moment. His throat was dry and he sucked at the precious oxygen, then he leaped upward and pounded the metal hinges of his hands against the metal.

HE DRIFTED down into the thick pumice dust again and waited. He felt his lips stretched tight and dry, and his heart pounding wildly.

The door began to open, revolving on a pivot, a massive metal disc opening without sound. The outrush of air into the Moon's near vacuum caught Anders full, hurled him back. He was on his hands and knees then, crawling back toward the ship. He stared at the suited outline in the airlock opening. The figure held some sort of coiled weapon.

Anders stared crazily. His ears begun to hum. His muscles were reluctant to respond, and sweat ran down his face, half blinding him. His own voice whispering was subdued thunder circling round his head, bounding inside the helmet.

It was impossible, impossible! It was insane!

Anders rose, fell forward, drifting, dazed and only partly conscious. The features behind the helmet plate expanded in Anders' sight, terribly magnified. They swam toward him. The coiled weapon loomed larger, wavered, disappeared. . . .

Voices filtered to him. He was sitting on a soft couch. Lights were gentle, soothing, trying to be kind. He straightened up jerkily, numbed, lost in a confused jumble of meaningless speculation. A large circular chamber, mesh-grilled. Bulkhead doors at either end. They had removed his helmet, and the air was good. He listened to them and looked at them, and wondered if he were still alive. Was this some fantastic, distorted memory of living?

Their pressure suits were removed. He listened and looked. They spoke English, though rather strangely. They were human.

He tried to understand what they were saying. Eyes swam before him. Faces blurred and solidified and blurred and ran together like streamers of gray paint.

Then a calmness gradually settled over him after they gave him a glass of liquid and he drank it. Opposite him, sitting on the edge of a deeply cushioned chair, was a small wiry man with pale drawn features, and thinning gray hair. He seemed prematurely gray, somehow ageless. His lips were thin and emotionless, and his sunken eyes remained fixed on Anders as though doubting his reality.

His words seemed controlled only by a terrific mental discipline. "I am the

captain of this ship. I am Richard Jackson III. My father and my father's father commanded this ship. You seem human. You talked—our language. I don't understand—"

"I am Joseph Anders, an astronomer. My wife, Mary, and myself, and two others were here on the Moon in our observatory when your ship—attacked Earth and finished it. Mary and I are still alive—I presume. Morley and Burkson committed suicide."

Anders sat there in a silent tomb. He remembered the perplexed, shocked whiteness of the faces of the others as they filed out of the chamber leaving Jackson and himself alone here. There were expressions of horror there, disbelief, illness.

"I don't understand," the man said to Anders. "My grandfather was the first captain. We left Earth in twenty thirty-four—" he paused. "Our orders were to carry man's conquest and domination throughout the galaxy. That was our only purpose. We have done that. But there were few worlds worthy of conquest, and most of those we encountered had to be destroyed. Strange life forms . . . alien, beyond man's ken —would not be conquered. We had to destroy. We destroyed fast and without preliminary, never giving them an opportunity to strike us. There were worlds with greatly advanced science that could have destroyed us too, so we adopted the policy of never giving them a chance, you understand?"

"No," Anders said. "I have not been conditioned to understand that."

The small man snapped irritably, "Stand at attention! Have you never learned discipline?"

Anders scarcely heard the order or the question. He said in a harsh whisper: "I remember now. It was impossible to believe that once man felt that way. Now I see. No, I don't say that I understand. Since your grandfather left to conquer everything, we learned to think differently. We acquired a completely different set of attitudes. There were no wars, after that. I remember how history tells of your ships going into deep space, for conquest. None of them ever returned, until now. They were thought lost. We had forgotten that once man sought such conquest—such senseless ego-projection."

"Stand at attention! Stand at attention! Who do you think you are?"

Anders didn't get up. It did not matter to him. "That's all finished," he said. "We've succeeded in destroying ourselves anyway, you see."

The captain of the black ship jumped to his feet. His hands clenched. "I don't understand! I've rechecked the maps since you were brought in. This system —it's binary! It has no resemblance to the Solar System my grandfather left! None at all. There are two suns. The planetary orbits are different. The one sign that would identify Earth's planetary system among any in the entire galaxy was Saturn! Saturn with its rings—unique in the galaxy! Where is Saturn? What—?"

The captain stopped talking abruptly. Perspiration streamed down his face. His mouth twitched.

Anders said, "The last war altered things. We conquered the Solar System. We fought the Martians for two hundred years. We blasted the inhabited moons of Saturn with cosmobombs. An unstable element reacted, and Saturn and her moons became a second sun. The planetary orbits shifted. That is what happened, Captain Jackson. Do not deceive yourself. You have come—home."

The captain's eyes wavered. "Stand at attention," he whispered. "Have you never learned discipline? What social disintegration occurred during our

absence? Perhaps you grew weak, undisciplined, and deserved to— No, I don't understand!"

Anders shook his head. "I wonder if I could explain it to you, now?" He rose slowly, turned his back on the captain, started for the bulkhead door.

"Stop! You're a prisoner. You—" his voice trailed away.

Anders turned slowly. "Why do you want to stop me? What is your purpose now? What does it matter now, Captain? Are you going on—destroying worlds? For whom?"

The captain leaned against the grill mesh of the wall. He slowly licked his lips.

Anders said, "You see what's happened? Historically, it happened before in Earth's history, very long ago. The armies of the Huns. They started on a campaign of conquest, and years later, in attacking an army, found they were attacking the descendants of their own people whom they had left behind. We've done the same thing, Captain. You might call it retribution —the sins of the fathers—"

Captain Jackson stared at the wall. His mouth twitched. His eyes were wide and shabby with strain. Anders said, "It isn't your fault, Captain. It's man's fault if there's any fault anywhere at all. We sowed the seeds of our own destruction long ago, and the seed grew to fruition that thousand years back when your grandfather's ship went into space with the command: 'Go—man is almighty, and he must prove it to the Universe!' And what we really meant was, 'I am man and I feel so unimportant, so worthless, and so lost. Somehow out there perhaps I can find an identity with the Universe; somehow, if I expand and conquer enough, I shall feel a true importance and a sense of everlasting power.'"

"What else is there?" the captain blurted. "If there is no desire to conquer and destroy and gain mastery, what reason is there to live? What philosophy could lead a man to assume such a thing as life free from conflict?"

"You destroyed the reason, Captain. And now there may be no way to show you."

"I—don't know," he whispered. "I don't understand. We have had a dream on this ship. For generations we have had it, never expecting it to come true of course. But we have thought that some day perhaps we, or our descendants, or their descendants, would some day come back to Earth. It was to be a return to Paradise. None of us really expected to return to it. It was a dream." The captain covered his eyes with the palms of his hands. He swayed on his booted feet. "One thing we were sure of—that if ever we did approach Earth—we would know it when we saw it."

AGAIN in pressure suits, Anders and the captain and a soldier stood in the airlock, and the door was open to the Lunarian landscape. Anders scanned the bitter harshness of the angles and shadows. "Mary," he said into the emptiness. "Mary, are you there, can you hear me?"

Silence, washed by the ghostly whispering of static. Then a voice, far away.

"You were in the ship."

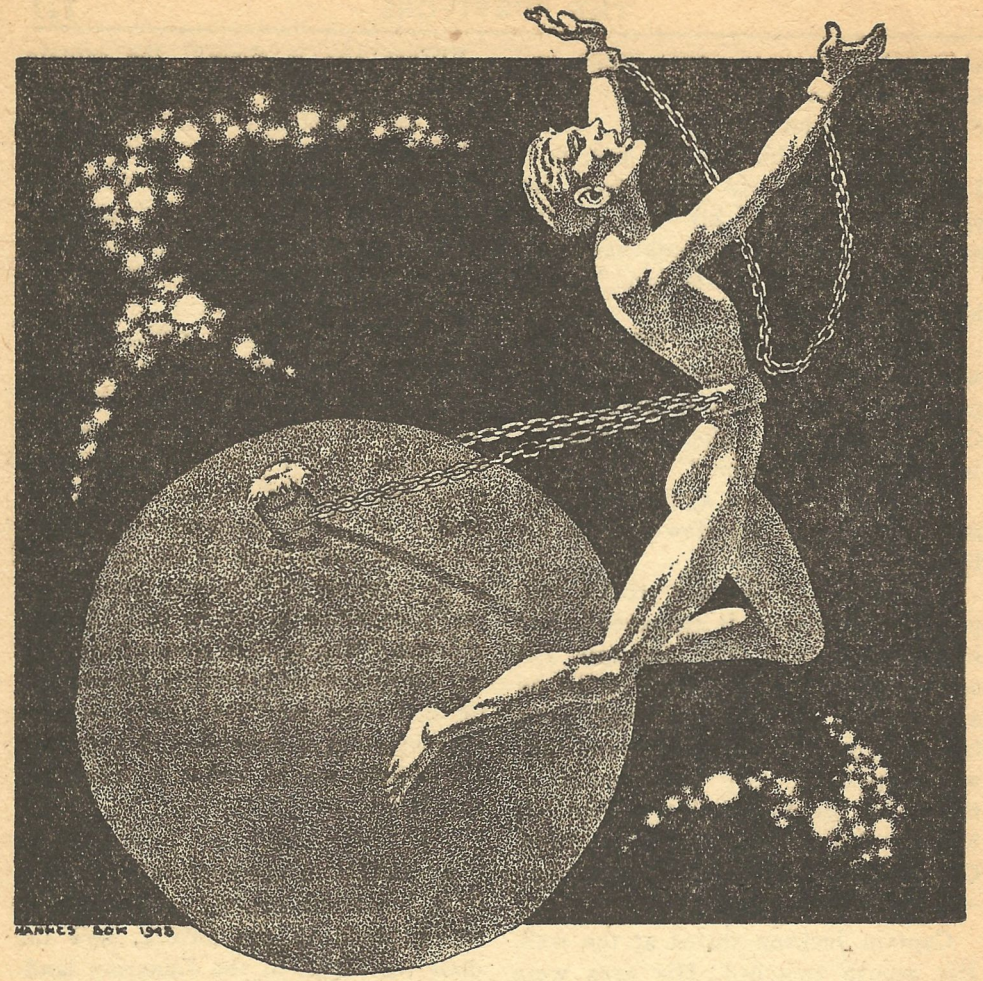
"Yes, Mary, listen to me," said Anders eagerly. "They're men, do you understand—they're the lost expedition. Mankind isn't destroyed—there's still a chance for us!"

Silence.

"Mary!"

How could he possibly explain to her, Anders thought. Humanity wasn't finished. Perhaps it never would be. And

(Continued on page 129)



GRAVITY TRAP

By

Damon Knight

High above in the frosty air the stas were cold — a myriad prisons to which there was no escape from the one freedom that was Robertson's birthright —Death!

"I TELL you," said Dr. Asa Becker, "there's sentient life out there! Why not? Why is it so difficult to believe?" He snapped the pencil he had been worrying for

the last half-hour and dropped the pieces on his disorderly desk.

Robertson sighed with relief. That pencil had been getting on his nerves.

"Well," he said, "atmosphere? Temperature and pressure? Energy? How do you explain—"

The astonomer stamped his foot. His white hair waved like palm-fronds over his withered brown face. "How do you explain pudding!" he said. "What do you want me to do? Give them a scientific name and a complete ecological description? Very well: **Incola spatium**; habitat, the mountains beyond the Moon; diet, green cheese; habits, unmentionable. Now; are you satisfied?"

Robertson shook his head, unruffled. "No," he said, "You haven't told me yet how these creatures can exist in interplanetary space."

Becker looked at him with a kind of baffled fury.

"Were do they get energy?" pursued Roberston.

"Where does a geranium get energy? A schoolboy could tell you."

"From the sun," said Robertson, "plus water, plus carbon dioxide, plus nitrogen, plus several thousand mineral compounds—none of which are found in space."

Becker stood up and peered at him as if he were a biologist and Robertson a rather disgusting specimen. "You," he said, "are E. W. Robertson, Executive Director of the World Federation's space-flight project. You have so many degrees after your name that you might be worth more as soup than as a scientist. I will go further: you are worth more as soup. Your brain is soup!" He slammed his open palm down upon the desk.

His fingers encountered another pencil, and he began rolling it furiously back and forth.

"'He mistakes his tribal customs for the laws of the universe,'" he quoted. "Listen to me. Get this into your head, if you have a head: This pebble we inhabit is not the cosmos. That is an important fact, Dr. Robertson. If you do not know that fact, you find yourself reasoning as follows: 'We in China subsist chiefly upon rice. Rice is not grown in foreign lands. Therefore there can be no life—not to call it life—anywhere but in China.'"

Robertson's smile was like a friendly dog's. "All right," he said. "I'll grant the possibility of indigenous life-forms in space. If you can show them to me, as you say, I'll even grant that they exist. But you'll still have to prove to me that they're dangerous to us."

Becker broke his second pencil.

"Dangerous to us," he repeated thoughtfully, rolling the sounds over his tongue. "Dangerous to us." He leaned over the desk. "Tell me, Dr. Robertson — give me the benefit of your opinion—is an elephant dangerous to an ant?"

Robertson smiled pleasantly and said nothing.

"Is a policeman dangerous to a lunatic?" cried Becker, springing up. "Is a jailer dangerous to a convict?"

"I don't understand you, doctor," said Robertson.

"No," snorted Becker, "of course not." He sat down with a thump, then leaned over the desk and pointed a bony forefinger like a pistol at Robertson's head. "Let me put the question more immediately. Not two weeks ago, your first moon ship, designed, built, manned and launched under your personal direction, vanished without a trace somewhere on the further side of the Moon. Do you call that dangerous?"

"Yes," said Robertson gravely. "I

would give anything to know what happened to that ship."

"I," said Becker, "have been trying to tell you for the last hour."

THERE was a taut silence, while the two men looked at each other across the littered desk.

Robertson was a man of fifty, with straight iron-gray hair and heavy, good-natured features. Becker was seventy-one, and his tall, reed-thin body looked almost impossibly fragile beside the other's squatness. Robertson had worked hard for his fame and won it; but he had come five hundred miles today, leaving urgent business behind him, because the summons came from Becker.

The old astonomer sighed finally, groped in his pocket, pulled out an ancient turnip watch. "The hundred-incher will be free in about ten minutes," he said, struggling to cram the watch back again. He missed the pocket twice, gave up and tossed the watch onto his desk.

"Come, Dr. Robertson. I am going to show you the dominant life-form in this solar system; and may you be damned if you refuse to believe what you see."

He stalked out the door, leaving Robertson barely time to pluck his topcoat from the rack, and clattered down the stairs. Following him, Robertson emerged into a pale violet twilight, in which the great starlit dome of the observatory, across the quadrangle, loomed like some fantastic fungus.

The sun had set, leaving only a violet glow over a quarter of the sky, and the observatory buildings stood out blackly, bright-edged, against it. High above in the frosty air, the stars were cold.

By half-running, Robertson caught up with the astronomer's tall figure at the farther door. They went up another flight of stairs together, and strode out into the vast, dimly lit observatory floor. Above them in the echoing vault, the spidery framework of the telescope showed as intenser black against black.

The old man called up to someone above, and in a moment a dark-haired, spectacled young man wearing what appeared to be three sweaters, one over the other, clambered down and grinned cheerfully at them. "All yours," he said. "Pretty good seeing, but it'll be better in a hour." He nodded and walked off into the dimness.

Becker climbed the ladder, Robertson following, and seated himself before the eyepiece. Robertson crouched uncomfortably beside him, holding his topcoat together at the throat, while the astronomer clipped a bulky filter over the eyepiece and made endless adjustments. Down below, a motor hummed gently as the long tube swung slowly back and forth; up and down. . . .

Becker straightened at last and peered at Robertson with an odd grin.

"All right," he said, and stood up.

Robertson slid into his place and put his eye to the lens.

At first he saw nothing but a blaze of stars, scattered like sparks on purple velvet. For a moment he imagined himself in the lost Moon ship that he had helped launch into those deeps, and he felt cold and alone.

"You're seeing in the high ultra-violet," said Becker in his ear. "It's never been done before. These cubs here don't know anything about it. Well, do you see it?"

Robertson did not reply. He was staring, transfixed, as — something — melted into view across the star-field. Spaced widely in the field were a red

disc and a red star that he recognized even in their unfamiliar tints: Mars and Betelgeuse. Between them, glowing transparently across all the myriad stars that lay between, was a violet shape that his mind rejected even as he saw. It was no shape that he had ever known before, but it was indisputably alive.

Around it were smaller shapes, each as unfamiliar as the first, each bearing so plainly the stamp of function, that for a wild instant he thought that he was looking at an elderly butterfly-hunter surrounded by his gear.

As he watched, it moved.

BECKER caught him at the edge of the platform and held him till he could think again. "I've just saved your life, Dr. Robertson," said the old man gravely. "That will cost you a quarter."

Robertson had all he could do, on the way down, to concentrate on putting his feet on the rungs. On the stairs, he had recovered himself sufficiently to ask, "How did you stand it, the first time?"

"I am an old man," said Becker, precisely. "Perhaps you had not heard that I was in the hospital for two weeks last month?"

They emerged onto the silent quadrangle and started across it in silence. Halfway across, Robertson glanced up and saw the fading violet glow in the sky.

He shuddered.

BECKER sat down behind his desk and folded his hands under his thin chest. "You have now seen an unquestionable reality," he said, "and in consequence, you will begin to ask silly questions." He folded his hands.

Robertson looked at him soberly. "I'll believe anything you say," he said, and meant it. "But there are some things about this . . . I must ask you—"

The lingering shapes faded momentarily and his doubt came back. "If they're all that you say," he asked, "why is it that they never come to Earth?"

"Silly question number one," remarked Becker. "I shall give you two silly answers to it. The first is Socratic: why don't we, and why won't we, ever go to Jupiter? The second is pragmatic: How do you know they don't?"

He produced another pencil from the litter on his desk and shook it at Robertson. "Neither answer means anything," he said fiercely. "What does mean something is this: It is a doubtful assumption that gravity bothers them. It is a fact that it bothers us.

"Lord!" he shouted, rising abruptly, "what a pack of idiots I have to deal with! If I say 'one G' to you, it means only a constant that you use in your calculations. You understand gravity on Jupiter, because you've been in an airplane. But you've never been in space, and so you don't understand gravity on Earth. Will you understand," he cried, shaking his pencil under Robertson's nose, "that you have lived all your life under a gravitational pull that would flatten you like a jellyfish if you weren't built of microscopic cells?

"Will you realize, man, that gravity has bent your back, worn out your muscles, and made the day of your death as certain as the falling of your arches? Will you ever understand anything, if you don't understand that?"

He sat down, trembling, as suddenly as he had arisen. "And has it ever

(Continued on page 130)

He was the last of the race that had hurled him into the cosmic dark, a lamp of knowledge for tomorrow's Earth. Surely the inheritors, whatever they might be, would grasp in friendship—

The Hand From the Stars

SOMEWHERE in the past there was a large chunk of forgetfulness. At first he thought he was awakening into a hangover, and he lay pleasantly warm and motionless, afraid that movement would bring morning-after nausea. Then, in fragmentary flashbacks, memory began to unreel; events came bubbling to the surface of his consciousness.

He thought first of Marena, and it was very pleasant. He thought of her scented hair and her full lips. . . . Then the lips tasted of salt, and an overpowering emptiness gaped up at him.

She was gone, and he was alone.

When last he had kissed her, he had felt a revolt growing. But he had quenched it. A lifelong philosophy cannot be overthrown that easily. And, lying there, remembering, he knew that he had acted wisely. Men, he thought and believed, are born into the world with duties. The most important is service to humanity, and that had been his duty. No, he had not revolted.

Marena was dead; he was alone.

He tried to shut out the thought and, for a moment, succeeded.

Other thoughts and memories replaced it.

The banquet room had been large; it was the main auditorium made over for this one night. It was cool and pleasant there, almost like outdoors. Overhead the high ceiling was spangled with artificial stars. The room echoed and re-echoed warmly with the low buzz of dinner conversation.

The buzz died when Commander Haden stood up. Haden's voice was warm and moving. At one point he said: "I know that each of you before me is possessed with a deep sense of reverence because of the force we are about to set in motion. I know, too, that all but one of you cannot help but feel a touch of envy for that one man who will be alive to witness the fruition of our labors. And to that one man I want to say: The responsibilities and the dangers are great; but they are scarcely equal to their ultimate reward."

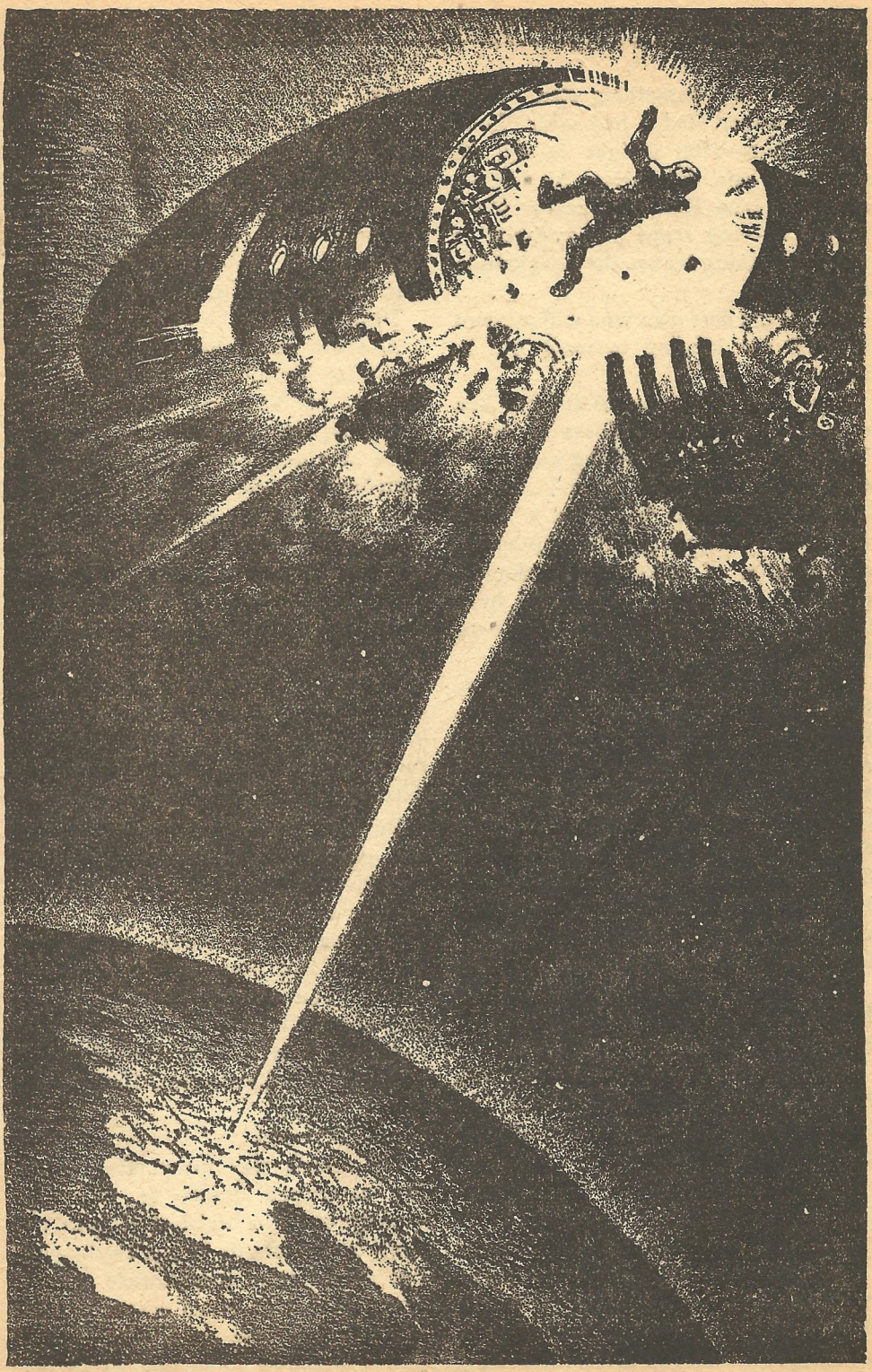
But afterwards— "I'm afraid," Marena had blurted. "So—so many things could happen. Out there." Then she bit her lip, for she had promised not to mention it. They were to spend that last evening as if nothing waited for him on the morrow.

"I'll be all right," he told her with a confidence he did not feel.

She swallowed and smiled weakly. "I'll—we'll all be praying for you. Praying as long as we live. And we'll teach our children—" She broke off there, and turned and ran.

Lying there, he shook his head savagely and muttered to his brain:

By Kris Neville



"Forget it!"

Think about something else.

Commander Haden had said: "Look well at him—after tonight we will not see him again. Tomorrow he will be speeding upon the epic journey of all time. The very scope and audacity of the undertaking leaves the imagination spellbound.

"He is the first man who will attempt to fulfil our longing to reach out to the stars!"

Epic. That word tasted stale to him now. In the cold loneliness of space, in the horrible void, nothing man could do deserved the title "epic." And he had been there. It had been a living nightmare of staring into impersonal instruments, of recording passionless data. He had been overpowered by a sense of loss and cosmic loneliness. Epic! He smiled bitterly.

That morning, lost in swirling time, had been the last moment when he believed it to be epic. Commander Haden, radiant with joy, shook his hand and said, "Good luck." Marena and her brother stood without joy, filled with the overpowering sadness of two pallbearers. And all the watching millions, indifferent to him as a living, breathing entity, saw instead a myth and legend in the making.

Then the port clanged shut hollowly behind him, and he stood alone in deathly silence.

Finally the all clear bell went off, horribly loud and fear inspiring. The last thing he wanted to do was to push that red firing stud.

He pushed it.

LATER, in space, he hurried to the "space coffin" in nervous haste. Sleep came almost immediately and the cold of space seeped in to surround him and force his strong, healthy metabolism lower and lower into the deep, dreamless sleep of suspended animation.

Now he lay awakening from the return trip to the stars.

More than two centuries should have passed according to the master schedule. Lethargy covered him; his job was done; his only remaining duty was to arise, land the ship and then—

Dead past.

And he would be as dead, inside. Powerful emotional currents tugged at him, for he came from a kindly, emotional race. He would be outdated, more of a scientific curiosity than an individual. No matter how they treated him, that was the way he would feel.

He would be denied even the consolation of further service. He would be a misfit. Times would have moved along and there would be no place for him.

He smiled bleakly. Because of the speed-limiting factor of mass in interstellar flight, he was sure no one had returned from the stars before him. That honor, at least, was his.

But his life of service was done; he had nothing to look forward to but the slow decline from fame to oblivion.

Time was relative.

Two days. Two weeks, perhaps, of his time had been two centuries of theirs. "You can't go home again," he told himself bitterly.

All his friends, even the seemingly indestructible Commander Haden, were dust.

And Marena!

His mouth was fuzzy. He reached for water and drank. It was wondrously cool; he swished it back and forth in his mouth before swallowing. But so shriveled from disuse was his stomach that he could scarcely retain it. Only by some deep well of willpower could he force himself to take three energy pills and another sip of

water. Weakness came. He sank back and waited for it to pass, wondering if it was a psychological reaction.

He felt old. Older than time! Older than space. One hand fluttered to his face in frightened motion and found that it had changed, had shriveled like his stomach. He glanced at the back of the hand. Hard but thin. Old, too.

He lay long, unthinking, marshaling his energy. Finally he felt that he could stand, and somewhat later moved weakly to his seat before the control panel.

After a timeless period, he switched on the electronoscope and swung it in a broad, searching arc. For a second he felt a chill of pure terror—

Then!

There! There, the Earth, swimming in emptiness. It was a shimmering, indistinct, misty blue.

He cut in the jets and blasted in a routine that was almost reflex toward the spinning ball.

The loneliness and alienness and oldness came back a hundred times more powerfully. All, all dead. Replaced by their children's children.

After what seemed hours, he set a circular course around the Earth and switched the scope to magnification.

His heart pumped wildly, painfully. He felt faint and for a moment he trembled on the edge of insanity.

The land masses, even, were no longer familiar. Nothing on the surface was recognizable. He tore his horrified gaze away and sat for a long, stunned moment.

After a while he grasped at the futile hope that he was off course—but even as the idea presented itself, he recognized it for what it was. Nonetheless he flicked the scope to the stars and superimposed a comparative star graph over the plate.

Changed. Even the stars. Not so much as to mean that he was off course. But changed.

It all crashed down on him and staggered his imagination: the immensity of time that had passed.

Again he flashed the Earth on the scope. It was still the same; this was no dream. And knowing this, he felt trapped. He felt as if he were beating his bloody fists against walls slowly closing in on him. For he knew that during this inconceivable span of time his race had died. He knew enough history for that: history is the study of impermanence.

How had they passed from the scene? Slowly? Quickly?

No matter.

Gone.

He tried to explain how two hundred years could have been transmuted into this and found no answer. Nor did it matter greatly; the past was dead.

And what now, below? Sterility?

Instinctively his mind shied away from that—repudiated the concept of all life dying.

There must be life below, he thought. Life, while changing, is eternal. In the cosmos it is the expression of some undying power.

He said, crazily, "The sea is a giant womb, and it will have borne more fruit."

He became logical. "If so," he wondered, "how far have they climbed along the evolutionary path?" He was afraid to guess.

HE FLICKED the controls on manual and blasted down in the slow landing spiral. Finally he pulled the ship up into an almost flat glide. He muttered a prayer to the mother-sea across which he sped.

He passed through light into dawn and then to pre-dawn darkness. And a

ragged coast appeared outlined on the scope.

Out of the darkness—

His heart almost stopped!

Lights?

Lights.

Artificial lights! Living intelligence! A city!

His mind had never before been so acute; it sang and throbbed with energy. He saw the city and in one instant catalogued it in evolutionary advancement: Product of slightly lower culture than his own. Using a crude form of electricity. Still cramped together in the knot of growing pains—centralization. Fifty to seventy years before complete atomics unless their culture was more rapid than his own had been, unless it was forced by circumstances to develop faster.

The cloak of futility slipped from him. All was not in vain. He knew a purpose again. He was no longer outdated; no—he was advanced. He had knowledge to give them; he had purpose now!

He was aware that he was shouting aloud in animal joy. The echoes reverberated hollowly, mockingly, in the cramped interior.

He swung his course toward the lights with a gentle blast and fired the retarding jets.

He slowed.

Glittering promise ahead, and he was almost there.

Then a finger of flame lanced out from below like a rocket tail. He glowed with warmth; it was a friendly gesture, like an extended hand. They had sent out a tug to meet a weary traveler.

He felt a questioning tap in his mind: How could they have a tug without complete atomics and space flight? . . .

* * *

EXTRA! **DAILY STAR** EXTRA!

The Truth Shall Make Ye Free! **A Free Press Means a Free People** Section I World News

Vol. XIII, No. 357 Monday, Dec. 2, 1949 Daily 5c

Rocket Shot Down Off Atlantic Coast!

Believe Missile Russian Launched!

Washington, Dec. 2 (AP)—High Army officials announced today in a special meeting that investigation is underway to determine the origin of the rocket shot down this morning 50 miles from Cape Cod, Mass.

ACT OF WAR?

Washington, Dec. 2 (AP)—Informed sources here say that high government officials consider the downed rocket as an overt act of war.

If the military investigation produces evidence that the rocket was of military construction,

Russia Silent As World Unrest Grows

Moscow, Dec. 2 (AP)—Attempts to reach Soviet spokesmen for a statement concerning the Cape Cod rocket met consistent rebuffs this morning. Molotov's secretary, reached by phone, said that no statement

FANDOM'S CORNER

Conducted By James V. Taurasi

IN THIS country, Canada, Australia, Great Britain and elsewhere, science-fiction readers have organized many clubs for the simple purpose of better enjoying their hobby. Many SUPER SCIENCE readers would like to join one or more of these organizations; most organizations would like to add new blood to their membership rolls. This department would like to aid these two groups in getting together.

We will publish complete information on all fantasy clubs now holding meetings; we want these clubs to write to us and give us the complete information for publication in Fandom's Corner.

Here's the information we want:

1. Name and location of club.

2. Names of officers of the club and address of officer to whom prospective members should write.

3. A brief outline of meeting programs if the organization is a local one; the aims of the club if the organization is of a national nature and no local meetings are held.

4. Membership requirements, etc. We will publish as much of this information as space will allow each issue. Send your information to Fandom's Corner, SUPER SCIENCE STORIES, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N.Y.

The 1949 World Science Fiction Convention

Science-fiction fans, writers, illustrators and editors will meet over the Labor Day holiday in Cincinnati, Ohio, for a three-day convention. Everyone is invited. For complete information, write to Donald E. Ford, Box 116, Sharonville, Ohio.

Fan Mag Reviews

Fantasy Advertiser, December, 1948, bimonthly publication of Gus Willmorth, 1503¾ 12th Ave., Los Angeles 6, Calif, 10¢ a copy, 50¢ a year. Forty pages, small size, professionally photo-offset. This is the leading advertising magazine in the field. Do you want to buy, sell or trade stf. items? This is the magazine for you. Many interesting articles and departments; interesting drawings, too.

Peon, January, 1949, published monthly by Charles Lee Riddle, PNI, USN, 2116 Edsall Court, Alameda, Calif. 25¢ a year. A neat 8-page mimeographed general fan-mag with a Navy flavor. Interesting fantasy items of all types.

Scientifantasy, Fall, 1948, published quarterly by Bill Kroll and John Grossman, 1037 W. 18th St., Des Moines, Iowa. A newcomer to the fan publish-

ing field. 15¢. A vest-pocket size, professionally photo-offset magazine of 32 pages loaded down with good material of all kinds and well illustrated. It features a story by Dr. David H. Keller and a fantasy cartoon by John Grossman, plus a cover contest.

The Cincy Report, January, 1949, published by the Cinvention Committee, 129 Maple Ave., Sharonville, Ohio. 6 pages mimeographed in eye-straining red ink, containing a report on the coming World Science Fiction Convention by Charles R. Tanner, chairman of the Cinvention Committee, and a list of about 100 names of the members of the Committee. Published only for members.

Fantasy Commentator, Winter, 1949, published quarterly by A. Langley Searles, 7 East 235 St., New York 66, N.Y. 25¢. One of fandom's most serious mags, and a real gold mine for book collectors. "This-'n'-That" by the editor gives us latest information on new fantasy books, and among a very interesting collection of articles and book reviews we find Sam Moskowitz still going strong with his "Immortal Storm", a history of fandom, Part XIV.

Fantasy-Times, No. 75, published semimonthly by James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, N.Y. 10¢ a copy, 3 for 25¢. Contains the latest news about the entire field, plus regular book, movie, fan club and science departments. This issue announces that the Portland SFS will bid for the 1950 World Stf. Convetnion. Cover by Herman Tok.

Spacewarp, December, 1948, published monthly by Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich. 15¢ a copy, 2 for 25¢. A 32-page mimeographed general fan mag, which does come out monthly. This mag gives you fan doings on the lighter side.

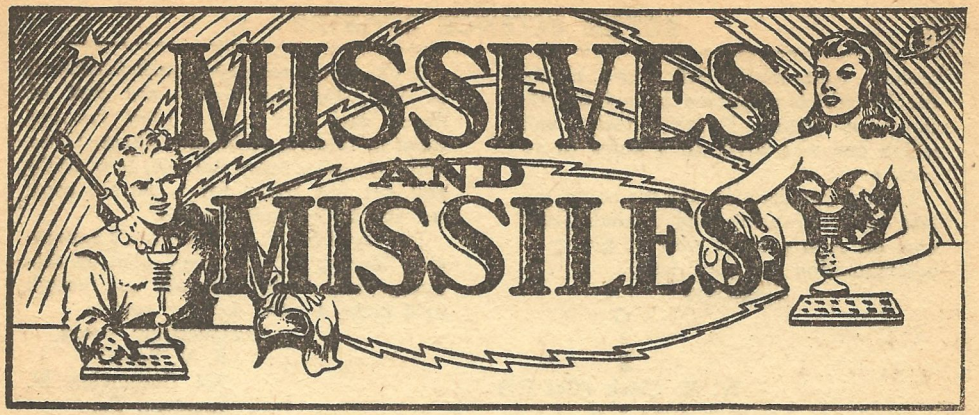
The Fanscient, Winter, 1949, published quarterly by the Portland SFS, 3455 N.E. 38th Ave., Portland 13, Oreg. 15¢. This magazine is the original pocket-size, photo-offset fan mag and it gets better and better with each issue. Thirty-two well-filled pages, featuring the biog of popular Ray Bradbury complete with picture and listing of all his stories. We also like "The Seven Ages of Fan", by Robert Bloch. We suggest you try this one.

Alien Culture, January, 1949, published irregularly by Jim Leary, 4718 Forest Hills Rd., Rockford, Ill. 15¢. A first issue with an excellent photo-offset cover by Berry. The rest of the magazine, 20 pages, is well mimeographed. Two stories, one by Keller and one by Jim Harmon are very good, as is the article, "Author vs. Critic", by Douglas Derleth. Poetry is also recommended.

Dawn, November, 1948, published bimonthly by Lester Fried, 2050 Midland. Louisville 4, Ky. 10¢. This magazine contains letters from fans on numerous fantasy subjects, plus illustrations and stf. items. We liked Ed Cox's fan-mag reviews. Mimeographed and a little poor in spots. The editor wants letters on any stf. subject for future issues.

The Fantopologist, No. 1, published by The Macro Press, Bethalto, Ill. H. T. McAdams, editor. 10¢. 16 pages, half size, hectographed. Not the usual fan material. The editor states ". . . we hope to bring to the attention of fandom the latent and neglected possibilities of topology, or non-metric geometry. . . ."

More fan mags will be reviewed in the next issue. Send yours to Fandom's Corner, SUPER SCIENCE STORIES, Popular Publications Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N.Y.



OKAY, pee-lots, deros, Bems, slans, fans, fannes — and, oh yes, you readers too — this still isn't the giant-sized letter dept. we promised, but this issues' letters are crunchier, flakier, tastier, and there are a lot of them. What more could anyone want?

Never mind. We lead off with a love-note from a guy who should really have come after us with a shotgun. Last issue, we committed the unforgiveable sin; we spelled his name wrong.

Dear Editor:

The second issue of SSS was a great improvement over the first, particularly in the story material. I rate the stories as follows:

THE EARTH KILLERS—A. E. van Vogt
I, MARS—Ray Bradbury (Love that man!!)
DELUSION DRIVE—Peter Reed
SON OF THE STARS—F. Orlin Tremaine
DARKSIDE DESTINY—James MacCreigh
ALL OUR YESTERDAYS—John Wade Farrell
DHACTWHU!—REMEMBER?—Wilfred Morley and Jacques DeForest Erman
DEATH QUOTIENT—John D. MacDonald

About the two lead novels (?) as you can see I rate one at the top and one at the bottom. Frankly, I was disappointed in MacDonald. His short stories had been showing great promise, but this was simply too badly based on both psychological and literary fallacies. (Sounds interesting. Tell us some more—Ed.)

Bradbury is unique in many ways, especially in proving that one person can write many variations of the same theme, and they will all be good!

Jacques DeForest Erman sounds just like the kind of a pen-name Forrest J. Ackerman would try to dream up, if I'm wrong I apologize, but I bet I'm right.

I did not like the cover. I fail to see the scientific significance of a BEM menacing a half-nude woman. Her beauty is appreciated and a credit to Lawrence but completely out of place. You are not selling sex-fiction but science-fiction. The most outstanding science-fiction magazine in the field has not displayed a cover like this since February, 1941. Suggestions: keep the printing separate from the cover illustrations, put the month and year both on cover and binding, and trim the edges.

Van Houten has a very good idea. I shall wish him great success. Keep up the book reviews. It helps greatly in knowing what books I do and don't want.

How come you don't have a next-issue department? (Our schedules are too fluid at present. When we have a larger inventory, we'll see what we can do.—Ed.)

May I suggest Charles L. Harness as a new author with very good possibilities.

Note to Neil Graham, perhaps you didn't know that Kuttner writes under the pen names of Lewis Padgett, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Keith Ham-

mond? And would Mr. Paris kindly specify which magazine passed on because of "Atom Doom" stories and which one was wrecked. I know of no such event.

I thank you for allowing me to see my last letter in print, and I shall from now on send a short note of praise or condemnation for each issue.

Sincerely,

C
l
a
W. R. Clack (Get it?)
k

Box 307
Alma College
Alma, Mich.

We get it, Mr. Clack, and we hope the printers do, too. You might be interested to know that they loused us up almost as thoroughly as you last time: A letter from Rosco E. Wright included the line, "I see that the original ed Fred Pohl is a colomust and wellcome." We commented "Well put" —and our inky-fingered friends altered the line to read "columist and welcome". People must have been puzzled.

Dear Editor:

On reading the January edition I decided to keep on reading SUPER SCIENCE STORIES. I'm reading the April edition now.

I've also read some of the letters to the editor. As for Larry Shaw—I'd like to see what kind of a science fiction book he'd write. If he wants to read a "logical" science fiction story refer him to "By Rocket to the Moon", by Otto Gail. I believe this book would satisfy his dull sense of fantasy.

Every story has met my expectations except two—"The Silence" and "I, Mars." Bradbury's type of book is hard to "swallow."

Two faults in the physical condition of the magazine discourage my interest in it:

1. I wish some day one magazine in the world would do away with all those unnecessary ads in the rear of the book. Some aren't so bad, but who cares who switched to Calvert. I think most of them are a waste of space and pages. (But they help pay the printer.—Ed.)

2. I'm trying to keep a small collection of SSS, but the covers are sort of flimsy and tear easily. (Try keeping them in folders, or binding them. If we made the mag more durable, how could you get five bucks for a perfect copy ten years from now?—Ed.)

I enjoyed Mr. S. L. Dennison's expression "during my 38½ years visit on this overgrown rock!" Sounds as though he'd make a good fantasy author.

Respectfully yours,
F. V. Scalzi
224 Greenwich St.
Reading, Pa.

P.S. I hope the vacuum in Larry Shaw's skull isn't as large as his letters!

Weird Things That Come In the Mail Department:

Dear Editor:

I believe the following is the phrase you want. I have written it in the symbols of the International Phonetic Association for convenience:

(You want us to buy the type and charge it to you, or shall we forget the whole thing?—Printer.)

majkL kinen
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

Dear majkL — Transliterating, we managed to get as far as "dthaktwu selnibay medrenaymawr", and then gave up. Can we still be friends?

Ed.

Dear Morley and Erman—Take it from here.

Wobblehead.

dear ed

boondoggles to SS! Van Vogt has flinkered a superrheostat and this hypersuperscientifantasmagorilover is beating ye gums on Asimov's old saying %.6.3x4/#" Ziff!

No, Jack Fusilari, Wade Plunkett's dourful doomdaditty, RECRUDESCENCE OF ULP doesn't send cosmic ooh-ahhs down this hypersuperscientifantispine. Too much nebular hypothesis and not enough hydroponics—and why in the name of all that's null-A should Balcla's left kneecap repel the gammatoma rays? Davis!

clark fink-wugnall
new york

Why Everybody Hates Larry Shaw Department:

Dear Editor:

Mr. Larry "Gourmet" Shaw, with his seemingly characteristic evasions, did not actually say anything in his answer to my letter in the last issue of SSS. Come on Larry, give!

Are you that Person from Porlock, sent here to destroy our faith in science fiction? Do you purposely tell the Editor of SSS to throw out the standbys ("stereotyped"—bah!) of science fiction and not offer suggestions for substitution?

Anyone can offer destructive criticisms but very few persons are qualified to criticize constructively. Your suggestions for the elimination of certain elements of science fiction may be good, but I, for one, would like to be told and shown. Any type of literature can make use of broader horizons but I don't wish to give up the "standbys" until I have seen a better treatment of facts and heard more constructive ideas than have appeared in your two letters. Touché!

My congratulations to Lawrence for creating the most bug-eyed BEM ever to grace (?) the cover of a magazine. (Please—can't you tone down the cover a wee bit? Six persons whom I passed on the way home will probably never be the same (or sane) again.)

Ed, I think that more stories by A. E. van Vogt would be in order.

Yours very truly,
Clark E. Crouch
Box 824
Richland, Wash.

Dear Ed:

I doubt if this letter will ever go to press but I can't resist congratulating you on the return of SSS (better late than never). The first issue was terrif (cover and all) with the exception of CABAL by Cartmill (I hope his next one is like old times).

Now let's take up the new issue. Here's how I rate them:

1. THE EARTH KILLERS — van Vogt—Tops—more of it.
2. I, MARS — Bradbury — Same old Ray—always at the top.
3. DELUSION DRIVE — Reed — Good but short.
4. ALL OUR YESTERDAYS — Farrell—Pretty fair.
5. DEATH QUOTIENT — MacDonald—okay but—

The other two aren't even worth mentioning but don't worry, SSS is still tops with me. Keep up the good work and all will be satisfied.

Sincerely,
Sid Herman
1 Sickles St.
New York, N.Y.

P.S. If Shaw had his way there would be no sense in putting out any Science Fiction Mags at all. I personally think he went a bit toooo far this time. If he has any squawks let him state them in another letter or in one to me personally, unless he knows when he's LICKED. If he's man enough to come out in the open and admit when he's licked good for him. If not, as I said, let him squawk.

Dear Editor:

I have just one real complaint to make this time. I am glad to see SSS back at the stands and so in the first issue I didn't mind. As the saying goes, "Twice is too much". Just who does this L. Shaw think he is. If any SF magazines took his advice they could just as well put out a sign "Out of Business". As I said, seeing his trash once was enough, twice repulsive. In issue 2, the replies he got should of taught him a lesson but what he wrote again was adding insult to injury. I, personally would just love to see Mr. (I'll give him the benefit of the doubt) Shaw. I can't think of any SF fan reading SSS the way he wants it and I'd tell him so to his face if I got the chance. I don't think he knows what type of book he's interested in, Science Fiction or Modern Love Stories.

I hope Shaw is notified and can read this letter because if he wants to squawk I'll be waiting. Before I close I want to say that I am the president of a science fiction club and that all the members (21) agree with this letter.

Ed: Our one request is that we hope that SSS keeps coming out as good (if not better) as the last two. I have submitted our report on how this last issue rates with a slight comment about Shaw but a vote decided that we let you know our opinion about Shaw. Even if you don't print the other report (and I hope you do) try and get this in. Thank You.

Yours,
Sid Herman
A.D./acting secretary

Dear Editor:

I am typing this letter with one hand tied behind my back. Figuratively, of course. I have decided that it is unfair to make use of my vastly superior intelligence and flashing wit in dueling with the gamins who use your letter pages for back fences. Also, it is a decided advantage to me to argue with them about myself; it would take them years of intensive study before they could even begin to comprehend the basic facts about just one of the countless facets of my complicated, sensitive, splendid character. So, though even my ethics are on a much higher plane than theirs, I'm going to meet them on their own grounds. This letter will be about your magazine's contents as they are, not as they ought to be.

The cover is shocking. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for using it. That monster hasn't got any clothes on!

Death Quotient: You remember that joke about the man who couldn't find his wallet, and who had looked in all his pockets but one, because if it wasn't there he'd drop dead? Well, I read all the stories but this one. If this stank, too. . . .

I, Mars: Bradbury is becoming, to say the least, predictable. I hereby predict that the title of his next story will be Hello Central, Give Me Mars, Because My Mommy's There. Come on now, Ray, you can have too many variations on a theme, after all.

All Our Yesterdays: Speak of corn, and you hear the rustle of its husks. I'd never have believed you could get away with this one any more. The writing wasn't bad, but there are illogicalities besides the trite idea. Why did they seek crime, anyway? Why not strip-tease? And what would happen to a tenth level couple if the husband advanced to the eleventh level and his wife couldn't make it? Would their children automatically become bastards? (Besides, I'd be lonely all by myself on the twentieth level.) (Come to think of it, I am.)

The Earth Killers: I would rather read the first story written by a nine-year-old second-level fan than struggle through a thing by van Vogt. And as far as I can see, this is caused by an absolute refusal on vV's part to turn the germ of an idea (which he often has) into a story, and then to tell that

story without devoting three-fourths of the wordage to an inane attempt to keep the reader fooled as to what it's all about. I like to wonder what's going to happen next, but I hate to read a yarn without ever knowing what is happening, and to finish it without ever finding out. Look, in the first chapter a problem is set up: Morlake is to use the clue that seeing the bomb has given him to figure out who the enemy is. That problem is **not** solved; the remaining chapters are ridiculous cloak-and-dagger claptrap. And will someone kindly tell me what the General's wife was supposed to be up to, all those months?

Darkside Destiny: This is, at least, an honest story, not a shaggy dog joke or a meaningless load of surplus crossword puzzle definitions. As such, it rates best in the book. As a matter of fact, it isn't bad. But I hate to admit it, so I won't.

Dhactwhu! — Remember?: A shame. Really a shame, to see these two great old-timers, authors of so many splendid classics, falling so low as to attempt to climb on the Shaver bandwagon for the sake of selling their stories. How have the mighty fallen!

Delusion Drive: Concept-schmoncept! So the guy woke up and it was all a dream. So what?

Son of the Stars. Great stuff. All it lacks is a plot. Of course, a few believable characters might help. I don't ask that Tremaine learn how to write; I suppose it's too late for that. But I'd like to know how he sold you this. It can't be his Big Name; he never had a name as a writer, as far as I know. Or is he the editor, maybe?

The book reviews were fine; keep them up. The illustrations were mostly satisfactory. The printing has improved; beat the printers a little harder and maybe the mag will be readable next time. Taurasi's column is dull, which is not his fault since it's about fans. Why not tell him to write about your more intelligent readers?

Missives and Missiles: No comment.

Your sincere well-wisher,
Larry Shaw
1301 State St.
Schenectady 4, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

I'm a little late, but I'll say "welcome back," anyhow. And I suppose enough people have told you your print job is awful by now, so I won't say it.

In the first issue, I liked the Blish

story best, closely followed by the Kuttner "novel." Kubilius writes well, but I am a little tired of Fortean cosmologies; still, his yarn has the edge over Mullen's "Moonworm," which was marred by faulty plotting. Of the shorter yarns I remember only Sanford Vaid's meteor story, which I liked, and Bradbury's piece, which was, as usual, awful.

"The Earth Killers", by van Vogt, is easily the best story in the second issue; the others hardly rate by comparison. The MacDonald story was okay, if somewhat confusing; "Delusion Drive" and "Darkside Destiny" were both nice idea stories; John Wade Farrell gets the prune this trip for stale ideas. Bradbury was readable, which for him is an achievement—it looks like you are going to follow your competitors and succumb to the Bradbury Madness, but I sure wish you wouldn't.

Both novelettes, I am sorry to say, were vile, the one with the six names signed to it being the worst science-fiction story I have seen since the unlamented Joseph W. Skidmore died. Can this be the same Wilfred Owen Morley who wrote "The Lemmings?" The story was disjointed, episodic, illogical, badly characterized, badly motivated, and written in a style that beggars description—a sort of verbal equivalent of Jello. Let us hope that Jacques DeForest Erman is the man who ruined this yarn, otherwise it is time to put a black wreath on Morley's doorstep.

Letters and book reviews are always interesting, but Taurasi and the science quiz leave me yawning. Out with 'em.

Authors I should like to see in SSS regularly: Blish, Kuttner, van Vogt, MacCreigh, Charles Harness, de Camp, Heinlein, Norman Knight, Asimov, Simak, Tenn, and Youd. You see I am in favor of the much-maligned "names"; they got to be names because they know how to write, whereas newcomers often do their learning in public. Who wants to pay a quarter to watch somebody practicing?

WHAT AM I SAYING? I take it all back; I have a short manuscript here, sir, and if you'll just give it a quick look. . . .

Yrs., &c.,
Al Wickham
19 W. 27th St.
New York 1, N.Y.

(Continued from page 111)

it deserved another chance, always. Survival was the important thing, always survival. No matter what the odds, no matter what the obscurity or confusion, a man had hope while he lived.

He stepped out of the lock, started walking forward through the pumice, looking for her. If he could only stop her, make her see. . . .

Anders had said to the captain, "This was a terrible thing, more terrible than you can comprehend. But no fault lies with you, or anyone on this ship. It lies in the past. You must realize that. You mustn't develop a feeling of guilt so overpoweringly strong that you stop hoping and living. You on this ship are the last hope of man's future. You must go on. I can show you how . . . I can teach you. . . ."

Abruptly there was motion in the sea of pumice. A helmeted head appeared, a puffed torso, arms holding a bulky machine.

Mary. She didn't look at him. She raised the weapon and pointed it.

In that last instant Anders saw the soldier standing in the porthole bring up his coiled weapon sharply. There was one moment in which he could have leaped forward to join Mary, and he remembered afterward the unutterable poignancy of that wish. But he did not.

He saw her face—a white damp blot against the flickering lights—straining, eager, frozen in a mask of hatred. And then the area erupted in a great soundless geyser.

For a long time Anders stood looking at the crater where his wife had been. Then he turned and walked slowly back to the ship. In the doorway, the Earthmen were waiting for him.

(Continued from page 115)

occurred to you," he said, "that gravitation is an extraordinary phenomenon in the universe?"

Robertson, stunned, began to get an inkling of the other's intent. "Do you seriously mean to say—" he began incredulously.

"I mean," thundered Becker, "that the doctrine of the Fall of Man is true! I mean that you are a convict—a convict in a prison whose walls and bars are gravity. I mean that the fourteen men who sailed in that Moon rocket were silly jail-breakers who thought their jail was the Universe—and who were duly apprehended for their crime!"

Robertson put his face in his hands. "All jails?" he muttered; "all the stars in the sky. . . ."

He looked up when he heard a gasp from Becker. The old man was shaking, writhing in his chair, his eyes staring crazily at nothing. Then his body jerked; his hand went to his heart and fell limply away again. His head lolled.

Robertson felt it then: a movement, too vast to be felt directly, that shuddered, not in his bones, but in the very molecules of his flesh. Something came ponderously into the room from distance inconceivable and stopped before him. He felt himself looked at.

Face distorted, he flung himself away. He tripped, and gravity felled him.

Half lying on the floor, half against the wall, he stared at the naked air before him, and in one brief instant thought he saw: a point, hollow within, widening away from him in impossibly huge perspective.

He squeaked once, like a guinea pig, as the needle took him.

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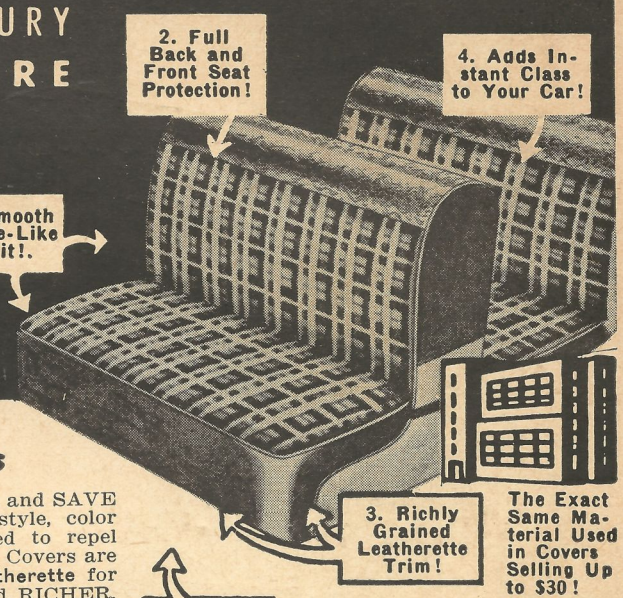

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