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STARTLING STORIES

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ISSUE



**THE GREAT
Ego**
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DANIELS**

**THE POINT
OF VIEW**
A Hall of Fame Classic
By **STANLEY G.
WEINBAUM**

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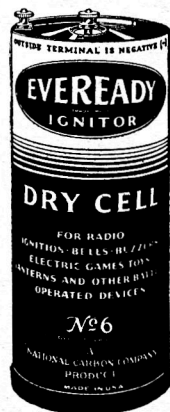
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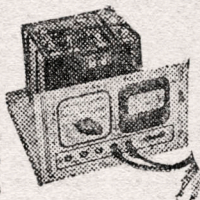
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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 10, No. 3

CONTENTS

Spring, 1944

A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel



The **GREAT EGO**

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

Jim Downing and a Courageous Girl Battle Against Odds to Thwart the Evil Plans of Two Power-Mad Maniacs—and to Save the World from a Strange Destructive Science 11

Unusual Short Stories

CANAL	Carl Jacobi	78
<i>Ex-Clerk Kramer Dodges Deadly Dangers on a Martian Quest</i>		
THE POINT OF VIEW	Stanley G. Weinbaum	88
<i>A Hall of Fame Story Reprinted by Popular Demand</i>		
SPAWN OF THE FURTHER DARK	Frank Belknap Long	100
<i>Bill Hilton and His Bride Thumb a Ride from a Mysterious Visitor</i>		
THE BARD OF CERES	Joseph Farrell	111
<i>A Space Pirate and Shakespeare Liven Things Up for Johnny Bates</i>		

Special Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES	Announcements and Letters	6
THRILLS IN SCIENCE	Oscar J. Friend	96
THIS STARTLING WAR	News from the Science Front	115
YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO VICTORY	Norman Angell	117
REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS	Sergeant Saturn	127
Cover Painting by Earle K. Bergey—Illustrating "The Great Ego"		

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Companion magazines: Thrilling Wonder Stories, Captain Future, Popular Western, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, RAF Aces, Sky Fighters, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Sports, Popular Sports Magazine, Range Riders Western, Texas Rangers, Everyday Astrology, G-Men Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Black Book Detective, Popular Love, Masked Rider Western, Rio Kid Western, Air War, Exciting Detective, Exciting Western, West, Exciting Love, Army Navy Flying Stories, and Rodeo Romances.

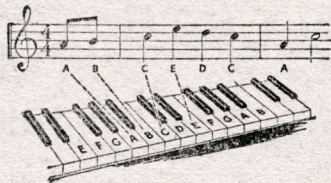
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THE ETHER VIBRATES

A Department Where Readers, Writers and Sergeant Saturn Get Together

WHAT sort of communiques are in the mail bag or on the operator's spindle this issue the old Sarge doesn't yet know—but I'm shuddering already. Snaggle-tooth, rip open the mail sack while I unchain the little ogres. First, perhaps I should explain to you space monkeys about Snaggle-tooth. He is the old space dog's new aide.

Wart-ears is the mess-age boy in the good ship **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**, Frog-eyes scrambles the communiques in **CAPTAIN FUTURE**, and Snaggle-tooth has the **STARTLING STORIES** space run. Once in a while the old Sarge may shift them around and get them mixed up, but that is nothing to the way they mix up the mail bags.

Before we have at the ethergrams, let's look over the manifest to see what cargo we are hauling next trip. Well, well, and again, well! What do you know? Our old friend Manly Wade Wellman has struck a rich vein of pay dirt on one of the outer planets and is shipping a big load home to Earth.

STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS, a full-length novel of the eerie and unnatural in science, will occupy the main hold. This story—the first long yarn from Wellman in some distance—is a powerful novel that deals with devil worship and weird cults in South America. It also explains a great many mysteries which have puzzled mankind for more than a thousand years.

Charles Fort once said, in essence: "At times I think we are fished for."

Bill Gardestang, returned veteran of World War II, tries to take up civilian life where he had left off a few years previous, and he finds that he doesn't fit in. The first flush of his youth is gone, people and ways have changed—his own perspective has undergone a metamorphosis. In fact, he is out of step, lost—until he runs into the opening sequences of **STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS**. And from thenceforth he is too busy and in too much peril and mystery to worry about being out of step.

The sweep and gathering power of this story has a vital and gripping something in it that will live with you after you have finished the story and laid the magazine down. There is such an other-worldness to this story that we have found a new artist to illustrate it for you. Donnelly is the name, and this artist has a touch that is reminiscent of both Finlay and Paul. The Old Sarge is awaiting your double reaction in some glee.

The companion Hall of Fame Classic will

be **BEYOND THE SINGING FLAME**, by Clark Ashton Smith, a sequel to **THE CITY OF SINGING FLAME**, reprinted in the January, 1941, issue. Along with other short stories, new **THRILLS IN SCIENCE**, various articles, and this delightful and serene department, the good ship **STARTLING STORIES** will be laden to the ceiling ventilators.

Now, on with the affairs of Snaggle-tooth.

ETHERGRAMS

OF THIS AND THAT

By Tom Pace

Dear Sarge: I just read the latest issue of SS and I wish to say that it is very good.

The cover is swell. The absence of any and all BEMs was a boon. And for once, Bergey's humans actually look human.

"The Giant Atom" was very well done. Nice work. M. J. Gardner's H. of F. classic was very good. Rocklyne stubbed his toe again. Kuttner has done better, but M.H.C. had a fine plot, was really a good SF-detective mixture. Glad to see Coblentz, although his tale should have been spread out. Condensed, as it was. The fine style of writing he uses would have been more apparent.

Pictures? Marchioni was far better than usual. Paul's pic was swell. The others are not much to speak of. What, no Finlay?

Am looking forward to "The Great Ego." Sounds like swell fantasy. Also looking forward to Virgil's pics. By the way, Better Pubs, Inc., must have bought a good deal of Finlay's and Paul's pics before they went into the army. Or are they turning 'em out between KPs?

Never mind trimmed edges. If they cause extra expense, don't get 'em.

Fran Laney, for some reason I like you. Maybe it's the sanity that pervades your missive. So many letter-writers go off the deep end nowadays.

Look what's talking.

Swell for a first Robert Moore. By the way, Xeno is a "combining form from the Greek 'xenos' meaning strange, foreign." Guess it is, at that!!! Even Raym. The Ark of Firebug became infected by the Xeno bug! Oh, well, it gets us all.

I am a Judo fan, so will you tell me, Sarge, what in the name of the blue stars is inter-dimensional Judo?

Say, Gardner! I thought that Last Woman seemed to bring up the thoughts of West's story. I do think that you treated the last woman rather harshly.

I liked West's ending a little better, though you had more dramaticism in your Woman opus.

Hurray for Femme Pee-lots! Clara, you have some very good ideas.

Say, Jay, you hit the nail on the head. I believe that us guys that read and enjoy SF and fantasy have a broader view of things than the realist. There are exactly two science fiction fans in my school, counting me, and we have been called every-thing from saps to d - n fools.

Ramsay should be teaching logic.

(Continued on page 8)



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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

I think that Pal Carter has a good idea. After all, variety is the spice of life, and I like hot food! Cut out the lead novel occasionally, and put in a long classic. Don't forget: John Lain, Stapledon, Merritt, Smith, Cummings (It would be good to see Girl in the Golden Atom), Weinbaum, and has anyone ever heard of Carl H. Claudy?

Keep the fanzine review. Would like to write for fanzines. I can write poetry and story better than I can letters. Ha.

Hope this is printed. So long until next ish. you old double-dyed space ape (to use your own words). I can answer better, if anyone can take a hint. By the way, Sarge, Hannes Bok is a swell artist. Get it?

My favorite fans are: Milt Lesser, Jay Chidsey, Chad Oliver, Paul Carter, Bill Stoy, Fran Laney, Raym Washington. Not that order, but they are all good.—*Estabaga, Alabama.*

What you have to say here, Pee-lot Pace, is neither startlingly good nor arrantly bad. It simply fails to arouse the old Sarge from his lethargy. So we will gently blast on to the next flash from the ether.

NUTS TO HONEY CHILE!

By Mrs. Frann Miescher

Dear Sarge: I haven't any kick against your magazines, stories and illustrations, but believe me you are a pain. It makes me sick to see you sloshing your mythical Xeno around and trying to sound grown-up with your trashy pee-lot and kiwi lingo.

One would think that with the paper shortage they'd limit you to sensible comments without benefit of cheap juvenile frills.

Now that I've wasted good paper telling you what I've been tempted to tell you since you first appeared years ago, I'll take time out to make a few comments on the Winter issue.

"Music Hath Charms" was interesting though not a new plot.

"The Sidereal Time-Bomb": That was a story where you built one up to great expectations with mystic symbols et al and then boom—you blow the planet up and the story, too. In fact, it just didn't make sense.

My only comment on the two-dimensional maze of "Beyond The Boiling Zone" is a question: Is there really such a planet as Vulcan and what is its orbit's time? Please!

The Hall of Fame is always good and "Last Woman" is no exception. Has there ever been a collection of these stories published in book form?

As for the "Giant Atom"—I should think the girls (front cover) in these clothes would freeze to death. The artists seem to be always at odds trying to see who can put the most clothes on the males while delicately reducing that of the females in a diminishing returns formula. "The Giant Atom" was just too much blood and thunder and mushy malds for me. However, your short stories are always good enough to counterbalance the novels.

It took a few years for me to get around to saying my say and, ye gods!—all I can say in closing is maybe someday someone calling himself Major Mars or General Gandymede will tell the Sarge where to get off.

Print a picture of yourself, Sarge, so we can see if that "honey chile" stuff fits your features.—*Paso Robles, California.*

Well, honey chile, what in the—sanguinary nethermost regions is wrong with you? Don't you all lak purty gals youahse'f? Sure, you do, and the old Sarge ain't gonna argue with you in any Tobacco Road dialect, either. Let's get on to your own sensible questions. The existence of Vulcan is still argued by astronomers, its possibility being in certain eccentricities in Mercury's orbit, etc. Nothing definite has yet been established.

And it's too late for Major Mars and officers of his ilk; the old Sarge has already been told off by Private Pluto.

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TOMORROW I AM A SOLDIER MAN

By Clinton Blackburn

Dear Sarge: This is the last letter you'll receive from me from the old home place. As of tomorrow I become officially a member of Uncle Sam's Armed Forces and leave for parts unknown. Sh-h-h-h, it's a military secret. However, I'm looking forward to many hours of my leisure time with my old pal, **STARTLING STORIES** and its companions. If your stories continue on the upswing as they are now, those hours will be very pleasurable indeed.

Now let us tear into the business at hand. First let us take the cover, the lead novel and illustration for same. The lead novel by Jameson was on the same old theme of hero-heroine-saving-world, to be sure, but was very good just the same. The menace was something new and was handled well. But was it a matter of chance that the atom followed the concrete highway? If so, it seems highly improbable that such a thing would ever happen, in fact, impossible. Or perhaps the atom showed a certain affinity to the concrete.

The illustrations by Marchioni were fairly good but could have been better. I was disappointed in his first-page pic. There was a certain raggedness about it that made it seem as if it were done in an awful hurry. Bergey's cover was pretty good as far as the painting was concerned. But doesn't the Earth seem to be awful close? I mean that Steve should have taken the atom farther from the Earth before he turned it loose. And why is the girl always dressed in some kind of an abbreviated sun suit? Now don't get me wrong. Bergey would be fine if we got his paintings interspersed with some others. As a regular diet—not so good.

"The Last Woman" left me with a feeling that it should have turned out different. This Hall of Fame story wasn't as good as last issue's. Paul's illustration was only fair. Is it as old as the story? That explains why. "Beyond The Boiling Zone" was good. However, I think the illustration was !!! Words fail me. I'll just have to say it was awful.

The detective story by Kuttner sported the best illustration in the book. Who did it?

"The Sidereal Time-Bomb" was another world-saving epic. However, I liked it.

There must be something wrong with me. I like almost every story I read. I am a novelty.

Say, who does this Francis T. Laney think he is? He starts out by thanking the Sarge for doing him a favor or something, then says the only thing that's bad in the whole mag is Sergeant Saturn. He then goes on to call me and millions of others goofs for saying we think trimmed edges are an asset and ends up by inviting the Sarge to read some more of this same kind of stuff in a publication of his own. What a guy!

Paul Carter's idea for a special issue featuring a long Hall of Fame story is an excellent one and I am all for it. See what you can do about getting that idea into effect immediately.

And how about Raym Washington's revolutionary idea of having a panel across the bottom of the cover announcing the feature story? One company tried it not so long ago and—er—had to suspend publication. But you will win through overcoming inconquerable odds.—Box 201, St. Anthony, Idaho.

I don't quite understand what you say about a panel across the bottom of the cover, Kiwi Blackburn. We always put the feature titles on the covers of all our magazines. Maybe you mean to put black type in a white box, or something? Thomas did the **MUSIC HATH CHARMS** illustration.

(Continued on page 116)

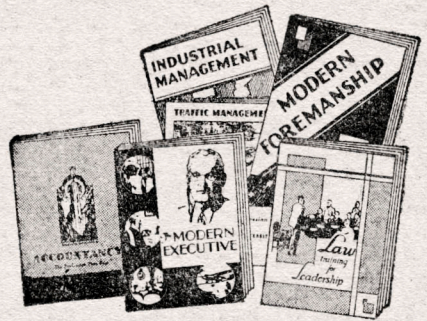
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The GREAT EGO

By
NORMAN A. DANIELS

CHAPTER I

Portrait of a Meek Man

THE diminutive figure advanced toward the bank with quick, mincing steps. He looked like one of those little men who seem to find it difficult to keep from being trampled underfoot.

He had thin, light-colored hair, mild blue eyes and almost invisible eyebrows. In manner of dress he might have been called almost dainty. His wing collar and somber tie were reminiscent of an era long since past. A derby hat rode his head with astonishing precision. His old-fashioned frock coat and striped trousers may have gone with an official's position in a bank, but certainly did not jibe with the job of teller.

Yet, Rodney St. George had never been known to wear anything else. A few people swore it was the same outfit he wore twenty-eight years before when he started work at the bank for the first time.

Although it would have been difficult to notice, Rodney St. George's mild eyes grew icy for an instant as he saw two people standing not far from the entrance to the bank. He knew both of them.

As he passed, there was no trace of



"I will make you queen of the stars!"
(CHAPTER XVIII)

AN AMAZING BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

Jim Downing Battles Against Odds to Thwart

hatred or coolness in his attitude. Formally polite, he removed the derby which rested atop his head, bowed and allowed the faintest notion of a smile to cross his lips.

"Good morning, Miss Brooke. Good morning, Mr. Downing," he greeted without slackening his pace or looking back.

Pamela Brooke shuddered just a little.



JIM DOWNING

and her arm, linked through that of her companion, tightened a bit.

"Jim," she said. "I—I don't like that man. There's something wrong with him. He almost seems to give off an aura of—laugh at me now—of evil."

Jim Downing did laugh. "Pam, Rodney St. George is the most in-offensive little guy in existence. But I brought you here to identify him. Is he the man who made those book purchases at Maur and Company where you work?"

"Yes, Jim. Having seen Mr. St. George in the bank several times—look, the bank doors are opening of their own accord just as he reaches them. Have you had an electric eye installed?"

JIM DOWNING saw the heavy copper doors of the bank swing open. A clock was striking nine at that instant. Rodney St. George was within three or four of his short steps when the doors started to open. He did not have to change his pace in the least. After he passed through, the doors closed again. At nine-thirty the bank would be open to the public for business.

Jim Downing looked down at Pamela. He almost forgot his troubles at the sight of her. She was small, a full ten inches shorter than his six feet, but trimly constructed. Her eyes were gray and level, her smile pleasant. Just now, there was a worried look in her eyes.

"No, Pam," said Downing, chuckling. "Those doors have opened for St. George at this precise instant for the last twenty-odd years. He's never early or late. As the clock begins to strike nine, he heads for the door and the guards inside don't even bother to look for him. They just open the doors and he trots through."

"That's hardly being human. How could anyone maintain such exact punctuality for so long a time?"

"St. George has. Never lost an hour from work in his life. Never late. At the close of the day his accounts tally to the penny. During the twenty-eight years he has worked at the bank millions upon millions of dollars have passed through his hands, and until now I'd have thought that money was as safe as the gold buried at Fort Knox."

"And now you are not so certain?" Pamela said. "I'm not asking you to tell me what it is all about, but, Jim—the way he looked at us. It was only a

A Girl's Dauntless Courage Helps to Save

the Evil Plans of Two Power-Mad Maniacs!

flash, but believe me there was no meekness in it."

"Nonsense," Downing derided gently. "Remember Foster who stole a lot of the bank's money and then hung himself last week? Of course, you do. I couldn't talk of much else for the following two or three nights when we were together. Well, included in Foster's loot were several greenbacks, the numbers of which were recorded for reasons quite remote from the theft. These bills turned up at Mazur and Company. Your firm deals only in ancient tomes, hand-written scrolls and such. Foster's reading never got beyond the sport pages, but Rodney St. George dotes on old books. So I am just curious."

PAMELA looked up at her fiancé. "You mean St. George is a thief? I'm sure he paid for his last batch of books. I saw him a few times in the bank, but he was always behind his teller's cage so I couldn't be sure. Now, meeting him face to face, I can swear he is the man who spent that money in our store."

Downing rubbed his chin. "I simply can't get used to the idea of St. George being crooked. It doesn't jibe with his character at all. There must be an explanation. Pam, I haven't even mentioned this to any other bank officers. I won't either because I think St. George must have an explanation of some kind."

Pamela shivered. "He recognized me, of course. Perhaps he even guessed why I was here on the corner with you. Don't tell him why you brought me here—please. I waited on him several times. It's all coming back now. He was so meticulously polite all the time. Jim how much does he make?"

Downing shrugged. "In the neighborhood of forty dollars a week. Why?"

Pamela frowned. "Because he has spent upwards of eight thousand dollars

in our store during the past year. Where did he get it?"

"Oh, come now," Downing said lightly. "Perhaps St. George saved his money. In fact, no one claims to have seen him spend a nickel. Or he might have been left a sum by the death of a relative. I'll find out."

They started walking slowly in the direction of the bank. Pamela held



PAMELA

onto his arm tightly as if she hated to let go.

"Jim, promise me you'll be careful. I know I may sound awfully silly to you, but—but something I can't explain repels me from Rodney St. George. I'm afraid of him. Please be very, very careful."

Downing nodded. "It's the business of tying St. George up with the death of Foster. The police and the medical examiner said it was obviously a suicide. You can't believe that St. George murdered Foster. Why, Foster was twice as

the World from a Strange Destructive Science!

big and could have smeared him in one second flat. Now run along. I've made you late for work already. Don't worry about St. George. Nor me, neither."

He watched her hurry down the street, grinned and waved when she turned and gave him one last agitated look. Downing chuckled as he proceeded toward the bank doors. Women were funny, he reflected. A little runt like Rodney St. George could make them imagine all sorts of things. If she only knew St. George as well as those who worked in the bank, she'd have never found a single worry in him.

In fact, Downing felt sorry for the man. He seemed so completely drawn into his shell, like a man afraid to stick his neck out to see whether it was raining or not. St. George was a bachelor, about forty-five, and he lived all alone in a modest little bungalow that went well with his nature.

Downing took a final drag on his cigarette and flipped it into the gutter. Instead of being worried because of St. George, he was worried about him. It was simply incredible that the meek little teller could have stolen any money or been Foster's partner in the theft. Foster had played the horses, gambled every time he got a chance and spent more than he earned. St. George was the direct opposite of this.

There'd be a logical explanation. Downing felt sure of it and sincerely hoped for it. Yet there were certain things against him, too. Men who inherit money usually talk about it, and St. George had never mentioned a relative in all his years at the bank, let alone speaking of being left some money.

When Downing entered, St. George was already in his cage, expertly counting bills and silver. He'd taken off the frock coat, replaced it with a lightweight gray jacket. He always wore brown paper cuffs around his wrists. Employees had to have their own coats cleaned, and St. George could manage to keep his from becoming soiled for weeks by using left-over bits of paper as cuffs.

Downing hesitated, undecided wheth-

er to question St. George now or wait until later. It was one of those things he could easily postpone from day to day. Downing hated to do it, but this was absolutely necessary. As assistant cashier of the bank, his duty was clear. Yet he could also give St. George every chance to absolve himself, approaching the problem with considerable tact.

St. George looked up, gave Downing a mild little smile and then went back to work. Downing walked slowly into his own private office and decided it might be better to handle this somewhere besides in the bank. Perhaps a visit to St. George's home would give him an opportunity to size up the little guy better. Certainly it would offer more privacy. He determined to wait until then, but to make the appointment now before he grew soft and postponed the matter.

Rodney St. George finished totaling his cash, made a neat little entry of the figure and gave a startled jump when a pencil was rattled across the bars of his cage. An impish office boy was laughing at him.

"Mr. Downing wants to see you and he don't mean later."

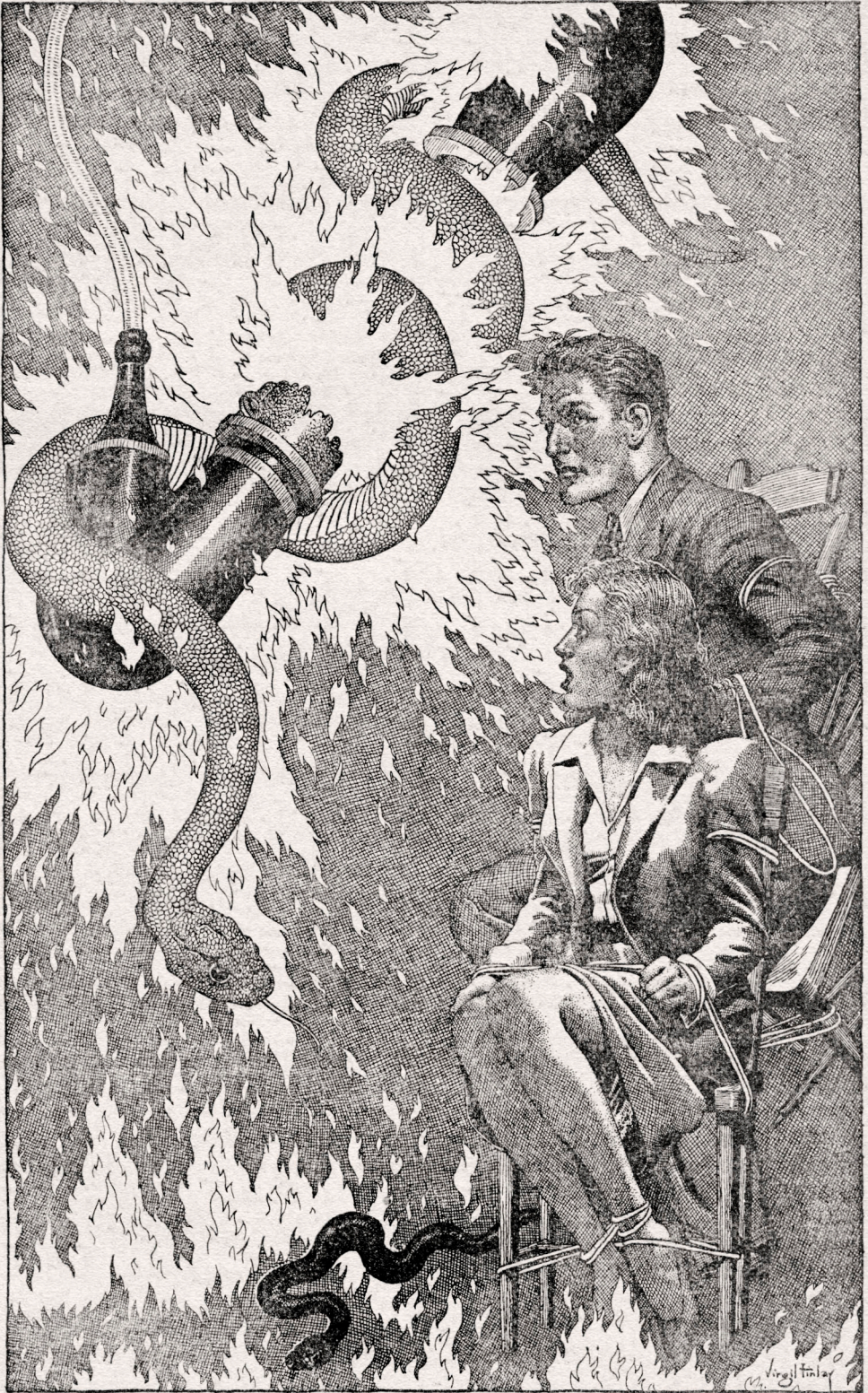
"Oh, my." St. George fluttered a bit. "Oh, my, it's almost time for the bank to open. Why doesn't he make these arrangements beforehand? It's spoiling my whole plan for the day."

"Is that so?" The office boy laughed. "But Mr. Downing is the assistant cashier, so you better scram, pal."

RODNEY ST. GEORGE didn't exactly scram. He never did things in a hurry. Very calmly, he removed his gray jacket, donned the frock coat and methodically brushed wrinkles out of the sleeves. The office boy stood there, watching him, entranced.

"Hey, St. George." The boy stuck his nose against the bar, "How come you got a fancy name like that? Fancy name and fancy pants. Maybe your great-great grandpappy was the guy who killed all the dragons over in England, huh?"

"I have no information on that score," St. George replied precisely. "Run along, my lad. You annoy me."



The coils of the black serpent tightened convulsively, and there was an explosion (CHAP. XXI)

The boy grinned. "You could be a dragon killer too if you wanted. If a dragon ever saw you coming, he'd split wide open laughing himself to death."

Rodney St. George didn't color with embarrassment. He showed no irritation. In fact, nobody had ever seen him display emotion of any kind. He was just a part of the bank, like the time lock on the big vault. He operated as smoothly and gave as little trouble.

The big doors of the bank swung open. The first customer to enter was a slender young man who kept his eyes down and walked rapidly toward the teller's cages. He glanced up, saw Rodney St. George behind his little barred window and nodded in satisfaction. He proceeded straight to St. George's cage. The bank page withdrew.

St. George saw him coming and fluttered again. His job was to accommodate customers, and Downing had broken into the routine. St. George leaned closer to the grilled window.

"Good morning, sir. Would you mind going to another teller, please?"

"Yes," the stranger grunted. "I would."

He was carrying a folded newspaper in one hand and he thrust this through the window. With an expert flip he caused the folds of the the newspaper to fall away, and Rodney St. George looked at the biggest gun he'd ever seen in his life.

"Listen," the man said in a low, terse voice. "Nobody else can see this gun. Just you. I don't want to hurt anybody, but I need cash. Five hundred dollars. Hand it over. Then you keep your mouth shut until I leave."

"What if I don't?" St. George asked.

The man turned paler. "Don't be a fool. I've got to have that money. I'll kill to get it. You can't make fifty dollars a week. Why die for small change like that? You'll only be a dead hero and somebody will take your place. I tell you I mean to have that money. Five hundred dollars!"

St. George's foot moved toward the alarm button on the floor. The gun moved, too, just enough to show that the bandit realized what was on St. George's

mind. The little bank teller sighed, picked up a sheaf of currency and counted out five hundred dollars. Without thinking, he reached for an envelope. He always gave clients envelopes when they took away a large amount of cash.

The bandit misunderstood that gesture. His gun flamed. The bullet zipped past St. George's cheek, making a funny kind of hollow sound behind him. Then the bandit reached under the window, grabbed the money and fled before the guards really knew what had happened.

Two of them rushed after him. Other employees raced toward Rodney St. George's cage. He was gently fingering his no longer immaculate derby hat. There was a bullet hole squarely through the middle of it.

"My," Rodney St. George said. "My goodness. I wonder if I can have the damage repaired without much cost."

CHAPTER II

Kitty in a Cell

TWO hours later Jim Downing stood in front of St. George's cage.

"The police caught our bandit, St. George. He's locked up in the precinct just around the corner. They want you to come over and identify him. By the way, we all appreciate the fact that you tried to save the bank's money."

"Oh, but I didn't," St. George replied truthfully. "I had decided to give it to him. He became rattled. Must I go to the police station now? Mr. Arnbuthy is due in a few moments to get the payroll for his firm. I always handle it. I should be here."

"Bother Mr. Arnbuthy," Downing grunted. "Put on your street clothes and get over to the police station before they back up the wagon and haul you out. This is serious business."

"Yes, sir," St. George answered meekly. "Of course, sir. I shall go there at once, sir."

Downing looked at the clock. "By the

way, St. George, I wanted to have a talk with you today, but it's rather late. You may go to lunch after finishing with the police. I'll be busy this afternoon, so may I pay you a visit tonight? At your home, I mean?"

Rodney St. George's face did not show his annoyance, as he slowly nodded. "It's very important to both of us," Downing added. "Expect me at eight. You won't be sorry, I assure you."

Downing walked away. Rodney St. George finished smoothing his coat and reached for his derby. The bullet hole through the top of it brought a deep frown. He fingered the frayed portions



RODNEY ST. GEORGE

and his cherubic face underwent a change.

Rodney St. George lost that fussy, timid look. His lips grew straight and thin. His eyes narrowed a bit and the muscles in his cheeks hardened slightly. A bullet hole through a twenty-year-old derby caused that. Something really important might have made a cruel despot of him.

A hefty police sergeant piloted him down a long, dark corridor toward the cell room. "All you gotta do," he said, "is look at the guy and tell us he's the one who stuck you up."

"Filthy place," St. George said softly. "Yeah." The sergeant grinned. "We got germs here. Some of the germs grow very big and you can see 'em. Especially after a few bums park here overnight."

Rodney St. George shivered and blamed it all on this stupid gunman who'd ruined his derby. St. George was becoming very angry with that man. He walked through the main cell door. The sergeant pointed at several cells.

"We got six or eight monkeys locked up in there, pal. Just so no smart mouth-piece can say we pointed the guy out to you, you pick him, see. I'll stand here while you do it."

St. George peered into the first cell, went on and did the same with the second. When he reached the last cell, he saw the gunman, still the same frantic-eyed, worried man of the holdup. He glanced at St. George and winced.

"I guess," he said nervously, "I'm not a very good bandit. Look, I really needed that money desperately. My kid brother was in a jam. I'm no good—got a prison record for shoplifting already, but I had to help the kid."

"You ruined my hat, did you know that?" St. George said. "You made me leave the bank at a particularly busy time. You brought me here to this filthy place, and now you plead with me."

"Give me a break, Mister. I could have put that bullet through your head instead of the hat. Just say I'm not the guy. Please, Mister. The bank got the money back. I'll do anything. Work for nothing I—I'll pray for you."

"Pray for me?" St. George frowned. "What makes you think I need prayer? But I will get you out of here. Look at me."

Rodney St. Clair gave a covert glance at the sergeant who stood near the door. Then Rodney St. George raised his right hand at the prisoner. He drew a straight line in the air, lifted the hand again and encompassed that invisible line with another one that seemed to circle about the first as a vine climbs a pole.

There sounded a distinct meow, and

a cat walked out between the bars of the cell door. St. George bent to pick it up. The cat shied away, its tail growing big, its lips hissing a warning. St. George grasped it by the back of the neck like an expert. He tucked the cat under one arm.

"Sergeant," he called out. "This is the gunman all right, but there is something wrong with him."

SERGEANT O'BRIEN hurried over, saw the cat and stared.

"Where'd you get that?" he asked.

"It was in the cell with the crook. I like cats, don't you? They're soft and silky. I like them very much."

"Holy Moses!" The sergeant fumbled in his pocket for a key. "Something's happened to Logan all right. Mister—beat it out front and have the lieutenant call a doctor, will you?"

Still holding the cat firmly, Rodney St. George obeyed the order. He was still at the station when the doctor emerged from the cell.

"The man is dead, but there isn't a mark on him," reported the physician. "Must have been his heart."

"Will you do an autopsy?" St. George asked.

The doctor nodded. "Yes, of course."

St. George smiled. An autopsy meant that the corpse would be cut up. He stroked the cat's head, turned so the animal could look into the cell. It seemed to draw back in his grasp as if what it saw was the most horrible spectacle on earth.

"Sergeant," St. George asked, "do you mind if I keep this cat? You did say it doesn't belong here and I will provide an excellent home."

"Sure—take it away. We'd only have to call the S.P.C.A. for it. Listen, buddy, was Logan stiff when you first looked in the cell?"

"Stiff? Oh, you mean dead? I really have no way of knowing, Sergeant. He looked dead. Logan—so that was his name. I think I'll call my new cat Logan, too. It's a nice name for him. Good-by, gentlemen. You will find me at the bank should you want me."

St. George walked happily out of the building, looked around for a clock and saw that it was the hour for the bank to close. He'd been forced to spend considerable time at the police station. He should return to the bank, but if someone else had taken his place, the cash would be mixed up, anyway. For the first time in twenty-eight years he decided to go home early and without checking out of the bank.

There was a little fuss on the bus because Logan, the cat, obviously wanted his freedom. Just as obviously, St. George was determined to keep him and he held the animal tighter and tighter until it emitted a decided squeal of pain. Several women glanced at him. St. George smiled back and eased up on the pressure.

He got off the bus about half a mile from his home and walked the rest of the way. A few blocks up the street, he entered a butcher shop. The butcher, a man with a face as red as the meat he handled, eyed St. George with a somewhat exasperated stare.

"Now, don't tell me you got another cat?" he said. "They'll eat you out of house and home and ration book. What's a man want with a flock of cats anyhow? Some old lady might like them, but a man like you ought to have a dog. I'd rather—"

"Please," St. George said, "I'm paying you for meat, not advice. I happen to like cats and I shall keep as many as I wish. Give me three pounds of liver. The inexpensive kind. Or wait . . . two and a half pounds should be sufficient. I'll save some ration points."

The butcher turned away and started slicing big chunks off the liver. St. George held the cat up a bit so it could watch the operation. The cat began mewling as if it were encased in a burlap bag with a few heavy rocks and on its way to the river.

"Be sure to wrap the liver well," St. George directed. "Last time, the blood leaked out. If it happens again, I shall send you the bill for having my clothes cleaned."

The butcher slapped the meat onto a

scale. "Ahhhh . . . rats!" he growled. "If you don't like the way I handle my business, don't buy here. Wrap it well! Ahhh."

St. George held the package of meat daintily in one hand and well away from his body. He turned from the street onto the walk which led to a neat little bungalow. It was white, scrupulously clean and set back from the street. The only unusual thing about it was the transformer box on the alley pole and the heavy electric light wire leading into it. The kind usually used to handle heavy loads of juice. Certainly a small house like this did not require so much current. Yet the wire was there and had been for quite some time.

MR. ST. GEORGE unlocked the door. Instantly, four cats came running up to him. They rubbed against his legs, purring loudly. He held the door open wide. "Wouldn't you like to go out?" he asked politely. "The door is open. Go ahead."

The cats continued their purring, not one showing the slightest inclination to leave. St. George closed the door, held his new cat at arm's length and then tossed it to the floor.

"There," he said. "Get acquainted. You'll all be here for a long time. As long as you live. With you, Logan, I don't care how long that is. I'll explain to you pretty soon. At the moment I am quite busy."

St. George shooed the cats into the kitchen, sliced the liver into smaller pieces and dumped it into dishes, one for each cat. He got an extra bowl for the new cat he called Logan. He placed these on the floor, filled up a water bowl and left the animals gulping their food.

Only the cat called Logan seemed to hesitate. It sidled closer, sniffed of the raw, bloody meat. It picked up one chunk gingerly, bolted it and then began eating furiously.

St. George doffed his coat, carefully hung it up and changed to soft slippers. He double-locked the front door, checked on the rear and examined a window. Then he went down cellar.

It was a rather small cellar, being mostly taken up by a medium-sized furnace and a coal bin. St. George glanced at the windows. They were thickly coated with black paint and there were steel bars for added protection. He walked gingerly across the floor, reached into his pocket and took out a single key.

He removed an old, dusty calendar of the year 1921 from the east wall. It had been held in place by a very large nail. St. George calmly unscrewed this nail, leaving a large hole. Into this hole he inserted the key, turned it, and there was a distinct click. He tugged, and a narrow section of the wall opened as a door.

The cracks formed by this door were most cleverly hidden by what seemed to be a layer of cellar dust, yet that layer moved like a hinge. St. George walked inside, closed the door and turned on lights.

A fairly large room was disclosed. It looked something like a doctor's office, with an examination table in the center and some sort of an X-ray machine just above it. St. George sighed, stretched himself out on the table and pulled the bullet nose of the ray machine closer until it was only an inch from his forehead.

Reaching down, he snapped home a switch. A buzzing noise filled the room. St. George just closed his eyes and lay there serenely for ten minutes. He timed it with a stop clock on the wall which started with the mechanism and stopped when he pulled the switch.

This done, St. George arose, stretched and yawned. All in all, it hadn't been a very good day. First of all, Jim Downing was growing suspicious. Then that fool Logan had almost killed him and practically ruined his derby. The butcher had topped it off by his insolence, but St. George really didn't care.

He turned out the lights, closed the secret door and walked toward the staircase. As he climbed the steps, he made a peculiar remark to himself.

"Now I'm ready for Mr. James Downing."

CHAPTER III

Cat's Eye View

JIM DOWNING phoned Pamela Brooke after dinner and begged the night off.

"You see," he explained, "I'm going to St. George's home. That way we can talk and, if he is mixed up in this mess Foster created, I may be able to give the man a break. If he deserves it, of course."

"Nothing I could say would stop you from visiting him?" Pamela asked nervously.

"I'm afraid not, darling. You see, it's part of my job to check on employees. I don't want to take action until I am sure. St. George's perfect record at the bank entitles him to all benefit of doubt."

"Jim," Pamela said tightly, "I spent part of today checking up on him. I called a lot of book stores. In the last ten years—and mind you, this is very rough—St. George has spent thousands of dollars more than he could possibly have earned. All of this went for two types of books. One type consisted of ancient tomes and scrolls. Terribly valuable stuff and hard to get. That's why the books dealers remember him."

Downing bit his lower lip. "I'll make St. George explain that. Give me a list of his expenditures. I'll write them down."

When Pamela finished this, she went on.

"The other type of book concerned X-ray machines and electrical apparatus. He bought everything on the life of Sir William Crookes, the man who really discovered X-rays. Jim, you were interested in science at one time. Is there any connection between these two things? The ancient books and the inventions of modern day science?"

"How could there be?" Downing asked. "Rays always fascinated me. I felt there was a lot more to them than

science has so far proven to exist. Sir William Crookes thought so, too. Now, Pam, stop worrying. I'll see you tomorrow. St. George isn't going to hurt me. You just got a bee in your bonnet and it's buzzing too much."

"I can't stop you, Jim. Just promise me you'll be careful. You didn't see that expression on St. George's face today. I did. I—I'm afraid of him. Honestly that sounds awfully stupid, but it's how I feel, Jim."

Downing laughed and their conversation delved into more personal phrases. He hung up, climbed into a taxi outside the drug store and had himself driven to St. George's house.

As he paid off the driver, Downing could have sworn he saw someone peeking behind a fold of the window curtain. He walked up onto the little porch and rang the bell.

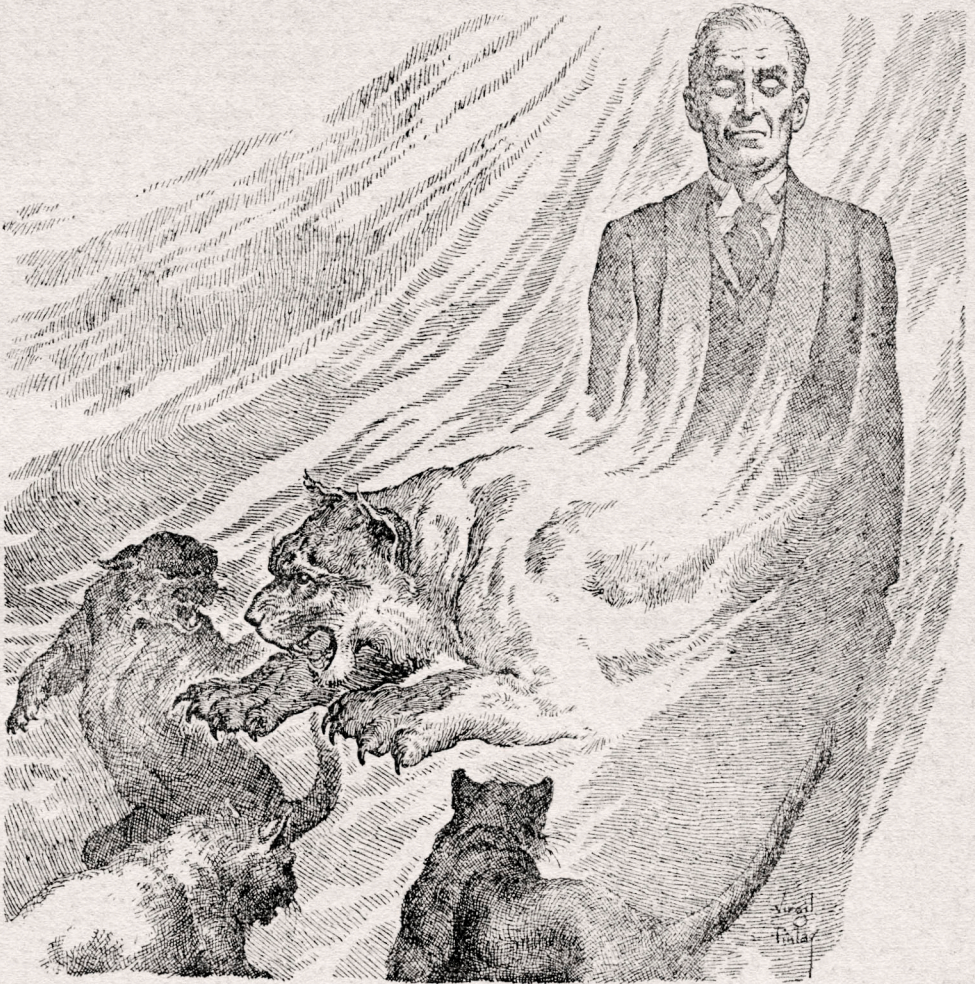
The moment it pealed somewhere inside the house, he heard the mewing of several cats. For some reason, Downing shivered. Then he had no further time to think. The door opened and the diminutive figure of Rodney St. George was welcoming him.

St. George wore an ancient smoking jacket, although he never smoked. Cigarettes were worth almost a cent each. Pipes were expensive and cigars completely out of the question.

"It's a rare pleasure having a guest," Sir John remarked. "No one ever comes to visit me. I have only my cats for company. Do you like cats, Mr. Downing?"

Downing glanced at the floor. Five cats were seated about a dozen feet away, all regarding him with what he could have sworn were quizzical expressions. One of the animals, a dirty-looking orange-colored beast, backed up suddenly and spat at him, with hunched back and swollen tail.

"They don't trust strangers," St. George explained. "Come into the living room, Mr. Downing. I'll close the door and keep the cats out. I'm really curious to know why you came. What is so important that it wouldn't keep until morning?"



The big cat leaped angrily down at them (CHAPTER VII)

Downing sat in a stiff, uncomfortable chair and looked around the room. It was littered with books, most of them dog-eared.

In several locked cases, he saw more books that looked old enough to be worth a lot of money.

"What do you do with them?" Downing waved a hand at the books.

St. George smiled. "I love old books. Some men have their pipes, their bottles of whiskey or a wife with whom they are greatly in love. I have only my books, but I am very satisfied. As you may have noted, I am a very retiring man."

"Yes—I've noticed. St. George, I'm going to be painfully blunt. You've been with the bank for twenty-eight

years. That's something of a record, you know."

St. George nodded happily. "And I'm proud of it. I was sixteen when I went to work there."

DOWNING didn't seem to have heard him. He went on.

"During those years you have never been late for work once and you've never taken a day off."

"I went home a bit early today," St. George said lamely. "I found a cat at the police station and I wanted to take it home. It was so close to quitting time—"

"That's nothing. By the way, the police called late this afternoon asking for you. Wanted to tell you an autopsy

on the dead crook showed absolutely no reason why he should have died. No poison, no organic diseases. Nothing."

"He deserved to die," St. George said somewhat sharply. "He almost shot me and ruined my hat."

"Let's just pass up everything but the reason why I came here." Downing waved a hand in conciliatory fashion. "You remember Paul Foster, of course. He worked alongside of you for four years. He embezzled about ten thousand dollars and two days later he hanged himself."

"I remember, naturally. Horrible experience. I went to poor Foster's funeral. It was on a Saturday afternoon, most fortunately, so I didn't have to utilize the bank's time."

"There you go again," Downing groaned. "St. George, you are what anyone could safely term an ideal employee. But are you—really?"

"Am I?" St. George queried in a puzzled voice. "I don't know. I try to be."

"Look," Downing said with infinite patience, "what I am going to tell you, nobody else knows. It is, perhaps, just a suspicion you can blast to the skies. I hope so. St. George, some of the money Foster stole was recorded. We had the numbers. A good portion of it turned up in a used book store. Nobody at the store knew Foster but, oddly enough, they all knew you. You spent that money there. Money which Foster stole and which was never found. Yet I can't seem to tolerate the idea that you are a thief."

"Good gracious!" St. George looked horrified. "Of course, I'm not a thief."

Downing took a small notebook from his pocket.

"Here I have entered several rather significant items. They concern money which you spent. It runs into thousands of dollars, much more than the bank ever paid you or than even careful investments would produce. Where did it come from, St. George? Just prove to me that someone left you the money, or that you secretly play the horses—anything at all. Only prove it."

Rodney St. George's appearance didn't alter much. Perhaps his nostrils flared out a little and his eyes became more piercing. Certainly, there was no change in his calm, measured voice.

"I have nothing to tell you. I do not like trouble," he said. "I detest it, Mr. Downing. I like to live my life quietly, without interference of any kind. It distresses me terribly when my routine is broken. Can you understand that?"

Downing closed his notebook with a snap.

"All I understand is that I fear you're a crook. Perhaps a murderer, too, because I don't believe Foster hanged himself. He wasn't the type to get up courage enough for even that. If you won't talk I must leave it for the police to decide."

Rodney St. George stood up. Downing had to smile as the runty figure drew up to its full height. "You are quite certain there is no other alternative?" St. George asked softly.

"None," Downing said. "What do you want me to do? Let you get away with a thing like this?"

Rodney St. George said, "Kitten!"

Downing looked up. "What? What did you say?"

"Kitten! I said, kitten. Look at me, Downing. Watch my hand."

St. George drew a straight line in the air and then twined another invisible line around it. Downing closed both eyes and sighed. He knew what was wrong now. St. George had lived alone too long. Nobody can exist with only a bunch of cats for friends. The little guy was bugs.

"Kitten!" St. George repeated.

JIM DOWNING gave a wry smile and opened his eyes. Very oddly, he saw two huge feet not six inches from where he sat. The feet of a giant. He blinked a few times. Everything had changed. The table was so high he could hardly see the top of it. The chairs seemed like immense bulwarks. The nap of the worn rug was inches high.

"What's wrong? What happened?"

Jim Downing tried to say.

All he heard was a piteous mewing. He raised one foot to move backward. His body seemed so close to the floor and it felt as though it had lengthened all out of shape. His leg came up and he saw it only it wasn't a leg any more. It was a paw. A small, furred paw!

He opened his mouth and a squeal came from his throat. He backed up hastily and discovered he could move very fast. He looked around. He'd grown a tail and he had four legs. No arms or hands.

Looking almost straight up, he saw Rodney St. George smiling down at him. He was the owner of those two huge feet. Downing saw something else now. There, in the chair he had occupied, sat James Downing. There sat himself. Eyes closed, chin resting against chest, notebook in hand. He sat there, and yet his conscious self was here on the floor.

Jim Downing screamed. All that came forth was another piteous mew. St. George's head was getting bigger and bigger. He was bending over, one hand reached out. Downing backed away, scampering madly on all four legs.

For the first time, he realized that this little runt was a devil. A fiend incarnate. Something that did not belong on earth, but only in the deepest pits of hell.

Downing found himself in a corner while St. George continued approaching. That gigantic hand came closer and closer. Then he moved with lightning speed, and Downing felt a hard blow. He went flying over and over, landed on his side and regained his four paws instantly.

Backing again, on his haunches now, Downing watched St. George. The man was talking, but it sounded only like the booming of a loud speaker turned on too loud. Also, they weren't words, just gibberish.

St. George was smiling slightly. Suddenly he made that strange sign in the air once more, and he himself began to shrink, to change color. No! St. George

was still standing there transfixed. *Something else* was taking shape on the floor. A black furry creature five times as big as Downing. A huge black cat with a red tongue that lazily licked its chops. Downing began to back away once more.

The black cat sprang suddenly. Its paw hit Downing and sent him catapulting against the wall. He regained his feet with miraculous ease and crouched, giving vent to angry mewing sounds.

The black cat sat down, cocked its head to one side and its mouth moved.

"We can talk now," the black cat said, and the voice seemed that of Rodney St. George. "That's why I converted myself into a cat. So we could understand one another. Just remember this, Mr. Downing—you actually are a kitten. I am for the moment a much larger and stronger cat. You are not the assistant cashier of the bank talking to a mere teller. Remember that."

"Nonsense!" Downing said, and this time he really talked. At least it sounded like talk to his ears. "This a trick. It's hypnotism—a fantastic nightmare. It's impossible. It—it just can't be..."

"I'm afraid you can't cope with this," the black cat said. "Downing, behind you is a chair. Jump on it and then jump upon the table. You'll find a mirror directly opposite. Take a look at yourself."

Downing looked up. "You mean I'm to jump up there? St. George, you're crazy. That chair is ten feet above my head."

"Try it," St. George said. "It's very easy."

Downing backed a little, crouched and tried to jump. Suddenly, he was on top of the chair and it seemed as though he attained this goal with a minimum of effort. He leaped onto the table, turned around a couple of times and saw a black and white kitten moving right along with him in the mirror opposite.

Downing's horror grew. He raised one hand. The kitten in the mirror raised a paw. Downing walked closer. So did the reflection. Then he knew

this was no dream. It was the real thing. Some evil magic which St. George had concocted.

Downing saw his own human form still seated in the chair. He saw St. George standing in the middle of the floor, one hand still raised as if he had just finished making that weird motion in the air.

Glancing in the mirror again, Downing saw his own image. That of a kitten. Instinctively he sat on the table, wet one paw with a tiny red tongue and methodically washed his face with it.

CHAPTER IV

Terrible Science

RODNEY ST. GEORGE spoke again.

"Come down here," St. George called, but it was the black cat who spoke.

Downing jumped to the chair and then to the floor. It was amazing how easily he could do it. The black cat came closer and sat down, tail waving slightly as if provoked.

"Now do you believe, Mr. Downing?" the black cat asked.

"I don't know what to believe," Downing said slowly. "It's some trick—must be. I don't pretend to understand it. I'm sitting up there in a chair. Yet my conscious mind is here on the floor, apparently imprisoned in a kitten's body. What's happened, St. George? What did you do, and how did you do it?"

"You wouldn't understand," the black cat said. "But shall we talk about Paul Foster now?"

"Foster? So you killed him," Downing accused.

"No. I wouldn't commit murder, Mr. Downing. I merely changed Foster into a cat. That orange-colored beast that arched his back at you when we came in. Foster recognized you and was afraid."

"Foster a cat," Downing said very slowly. "It becomes more and more bewildering. You said yourself you went

to Foster's funeral."

"The funeral of his hollow body. His soul and consciousness were gone. They live now in a cat. An empty shell was buried, Mr. Downing. You were right though. Foster did steal the money because I showed him how. Naturally, I couldn't just help myself to such a sum. It would have been discovered, but if they found out Foster had taken it, that made little difference to me. Don't you see?"

"You hung Foster's body," Downing accused slowly. "It was like hanging a dummy. His body was like mine is now. Like yours is standing up there, immobile. And you killed that crook in the police cell, too. That cat you pretended to find there was really Logan."

"Of course it was. Later, I shall introduce you to my cats, Mr. Downing. But let's return to us. Do you still think you'll turn me in?"

"I'll probably kill you," Downing said. "A man like you is a menace. This—this dream or whatever it is, will be broken after awhile. A spell will break. It must. Then look out, St. George. I'm warning you."

The black cat's green eyes glittered. If there was ever demoniacal fury written on a cat's face, Downing saw it now. Instinctively, he began to back up. The black cat gave a leap. Downing saw one huge paw slash at him. He felt the sharp claws slashed into his left arm—no . . . his left foreleg. There was blood on the fur. Downing rolled over and landed against the wall once more. He got up, mewing helplessly.

The black cat walked over and sat down.

"Do you still think this is hypnotism?" St. George's voice asked while the black cat's mouth moved in unison with each word. "You felt pain, didn't you? Under a hypnotic spell there is no pain. Perhaps I should teach you a deeper lesson, eh?"

"No." Downing crouched into a corner. "No, I've had enough. You could tear my throat open with those claws. I believe you, but I can't seem to understand just what—"

"It is unnecessary for you to understand," St. George said. "I should have preferred to go on just as before. Being a simple bank teller while I continued my experiments. But you saw fit to interfere and this is your penalty."

"You mean—I'll always be a kitten?" Downing gasped.

"No, you'll grow into a fine cat. A very fine specimen. You see, Mr. Downing, I'm a little further on than the rest of the world. I understand things that may become interesting scientific experiments in the future. Not for hundreds of years, I'm afraid, but that's all right. Are you interested, Mr. Downing?"

"Naturally," Downing said, although he was trembling.

"Excellent. You know, I'm really glad this happened. The others are stupid beasts. They have two thoughts and only two. Number one—when will they be fed? Number two—cats having short life span, will they die after living the normal life of a cat or will they live through the span allotted to a human being?"

"Well," Downing asked. "Will they?"

"They are cats. They will die when the time comes for a cat to die. Now I have you to talk with for a few years, and you are intelligent, Downing. I'll repay you with extra food. Perhaps a little cream instead of plain milk. Calves' liver instead of beef liver. That's a delicacy to a cat, you know."

"I hate the stuff," Downing said. "But go on. What sort of power do you possess that enables you to do this?"

THE black cat relaxed, its head between its paws, eyes sparkling brightly, tail lashing lazily. Downing was interested in an explanation for just one reason—to find a way out of this. It wasn't a nightmare. It wasn't hypnotism. This was the real thing. He was actually a kitten. St. George was really a huge, black cat. Yet there *had* to be some way out.

"Naturally," the black cat said, "I can't explain everything, Downing. It would be too dangerous. However, I may say this much. What has happened to you has a scientific explanation. I could have changed you into any living form I chose. A dog, a panther, a frog. But I happen to like cats, so I never change anyone into anything but cats."

Downing lay down, resting against one paw. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to do.

The black cat spoke almost lazily. "You heard me mention science. I meant exactly that. Remember reading about the ancient gods with miraculous powers? Of the witches who changed people into frogs? Of the strange cat people of Yugoslavia? Legends such as those are based on fact, Downing. On cold, provable fact. That has always been my theory."

"You've gone far beyond mere theory," Downing said. "The information which enabled you to perform these—miracles was found in ancient tomes, wasn't it? That's why you bought so many."

"Of course," St. George answered,
[Turn page]

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

All the same except one . . . which is the odd picture?



ANSWER:
Number Five. He is only "two-haired"



and Downing thought how odd it seemed that St. George's human form stood almost beside him, while his voice emanated from the mouth of a giant black cat.

Downing urged him on by half-hidden praise. "I thought those scrolls were written in ancient languages, even hieroglyphics?"

"I have mastered them," St. George said complacently. "It took all of my adult life until now, but you must work hard to accomplish something as big as this. Downing, I think I shall tell you a little. Take those ancient sorcerers, soothsayers, or medicine men. They lived on their reputations."

"Sure," Downing agreed, "because people of those times didn't possess the intelligence we do."

"Quite right and well put, too," St. George said. "I'm very glad you came. This is the first time I have been able to carry on an intelligent conversation about my work and, of course, I must boast now and then. Especially to someone with brains enough to appreciate me. You have the brains."

"Thank you," Downing said. "I'm greatly interested."

"Good. You're not a bad sort, Downing. In the years I worked under you, I don't recall a harsh order or any unfair treatment. Now—about my work. Those ancient legends prevailed because the victims really believed they had been converted into various forms by the soothsayers. Without this absolute belief the legends could never have come down through the ages."

"It was hypnotism," Downing commented. "And faith. Those victims believed in all the hocus-pocus."

"Yes, of course. Yet it was not all hocus-pocus, Mr. Downing. Indeed not. Those ancients were on the right track. Their incantations really meant something, and this is all revealed in those certain tomes I studied. They, too, had faith in themselves, but they lacked science. They knew what they wanted to do, but didn't have the method of accomplishing it. Now I have taken these ancient incantations and

incorporated them with modern day science."

"Wait a moment," Downing said. "You're traveling almost too fast for me. We, of modern times, would laugh and jibe at such incantations, but you have found a way—by means of science—so this is no longer a laughing matter. Somehow the victims of your experiments have no control over their own minds. They accept your mental suggestions because they can't help it, and these mental suggestions are so strong that they work this miracle."

"Brilliant," St. George said, and the black cat purred contentedly. "I wish I had let you in on this—no, no—that would have been fatal. You wouldn't quite understand my motives. Yes, I have discovered how to force my mental suggestions upon another. There is no mind strong enough to fight mine."

"It's done by some sort of electric ray," Downing said flatly.

The black cat sprang back as if in alarm. Its malevolent eyes were wide and cruel. Its mouth was agape and sharp white teeth glistened.

"How did you know that?" St. George's voice demanded. "Tell me or I shall rend you into pieces!"

CHAPTER V

Monster and Mouse

DOWNING was more than startled; he was really scared.

"Hold it," he implored. "I just guessed. Before I entered this house I noticed a big electric transformer on an alley pole and some heavy cable leading into your place. Coupled with all those books you have bought an electrical apparatus—well, I just put two and two together."

The black cat sat down again, and its tail ceased lashing. St. George's quiet laugh came from its throat.

"I might have known that was it," he said. "That transformer is a dead giveaway. To get the power company to in-

stall it and furnish me the power I needed I had to install some expensive electrical machinery in my cellar. Later on I sold the machinery at a slight loss. But how did you hit upon electric rays?"

"I was interested in this branch of electronics in school," admitted Downing. "My college courses were mostly scientific, even though I didn't follow research work up after graduation."

"A great pity," the black cat chided gently. "If you were an expert now, you could be of great use to me. However, you do happen to be the best audience I have ever had—in fact, the only one. Foster and the other cats know nothing."

"But how do those books of ancient legends and fantastic lore you have also been studying fit into the scheme?" asked Downing in mock humility, feeling his way along. "I don't grasp that angle at all."

The black cat almost purred. "Naturally, you don't. When I put in almost thirty years of hard study and research, how could you expect to understand it overnight, as it were? But I don't mind telling you somewhat about it. You'll never be able to tell another soul."

This was an ominous statement.

"Go ahead," invited Downing as calmly as he could. "I am amazingly interested."

"I have no doubt," agreed the black cat dryly. "First of all, in early mythology, there is Zeus and his mate Maia—the two greatest gods of ancient times. Their son, Hermes, was called the god of secrets and the originator of art, science and magic.

"Hermes actually possessed vast powers. The lesser gods learned from him. And all these gods, contrary to popular belief, originated in a pre-glacial age. They were really a humanoid race, survivors of a lost Golden Age when science was greater than we know it even today."

"If there really were such so-called gods," Downing added skeptically.

"Don't fret yourself," St. George replied patiently. "There were. And

they left behind them all sorts of facts which gradually became distorted into fabulous legends. These tales were handed down from mouth to mouth for a long time before somebody took the pains to write them down. Much was lost, many facts were distorted and lost their real meaning. But many of them exist today upon priceless scrolls and in hand-illuminated volumes. Half-truths are these for the earnest scientific scholar to decipher.

"I have been doing so. In the light of electro-magnetics and the various emanations of little-understood rays, I have been interpreting some of these secrets. That is the sum and substance of what I have done. I have welded electronics and mythology together to produce scientific power which the ignorant will still call miraculous."

"They certainly didn't teach anything like that in school," Downing admitted, wondering just how much truth there might be in what St. George had said, and realizing that the other had actually explained little.

"The ignorant teachers," St. George declared vehemently. "Now these so-called legends contained real facts. Down through the generations of mankind the old sorcerers lived by them. Their incantations were derived from the old gods. These sorcerers didn't possess the powers of gods, of course, but they did make good use of some of their secrets.

"Why, Downing, these legends were even used almost into modern times. Were witches burned to death two centuries ago simply because people were gullible? No! The judges and juries that sentenced those witches to death knew they had supernatural powers, but they didn't know those powers were older than history itself and came from the deeds of Hermes and the lesser gods."

ST. GEORGE ceased and yawned enormously.

"Do you mean to say," Downing queried, "those witches really turned people into frogs, for instance?"

"Perhaps they did," the black cat answered. "We have no evidence to the contrary and the people of those times believed it. You see, Hermes and the ancient gods could do it because they had the power of Zeus behind them. The sorcerers and witches had nothing but their own faith. Yet if that was strong enough, it may have worked."

"Oh, come now," Downing argued. "Witches threw things into stew pots. Hearts of sheep, the tail of a lizard, maybe some human blood. They did a lot of mumbo-jumbo over the kettles and black magic came forth. That's nonsense."

"Very well," the black cat replied. "I'll grant their actions were nonsensical, but the right idea was behind them. The witches and sorcerers knew from those legends that there was something which could give them great power. They were searching for it, but they did not have the benefits of modern-day science nor the use of many old scrolls which I have been laboriously locating and collecting. I have the benefit of both."

"And just how did you incorporate black magic with science?" Downing asked.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" the black cat spat out. "I shall say this much. Hermes, Zeus and the others really did turn people into any form of life they desired. Not by mumbo-jumbo, but by the powers they held. The mumbo-jumbo came later, from people who didn't possess those powers and had to alibi their strange actions somehow. It was done by sheer force of will. The gods had that will and could use it, transmit it to others. Perhaps some of the more recent witches also had the power. Perhaps it came to them from the depths of Hades. But I have those powers too and they come from my own brain, skill, and studies of those ancient books and legends. My work of almost thirty years,"

"It is very interesting," Downing said and wondered if he was dealing with a maniac. "I hope you don't mind my asking you those questions?"

"I am delighted," St. George said with genuine pleasure. "Now I can have someone to talk with, to outline my experiments. There is still much to be done. Later I shall explain a few things to you."

"That is hardly necessary," Downing answered. He was on dangerous ground, but determined to carry on anyway. He had to know as much about St. George's secret as possible.

"You mean—you know?"

"Of course not, but I can guess. For instance, X-rays are still a mystery. Even their name suggests it. Sir William Crookes developed them, but he was never satisfied. You are probably using his so-called 'radiant matter.' By means of these rays you are able to force your mental suggestions into the mind and even the soul of your victim. Yet I can't see how you do it. I noticed no ray machine here."

The black cat laughed. "And there is my great secret. The one I shall never reveal," St. George said. "The world will consider it sorcery, witchcraft—whatever it pleases. Only you will know almost the truth. Downing, pay attention. You are falling asleep."

Downing blinked his eyes a few times. It was warm and comfortable here. The floor was inviting and he lay down, resting his whiskered face against his paws. There was nothing he would rather do right now than sleep. After all, he was a tiny kitten and should logically be very tired after what had happened the last few minutes.

Then he roused himself with a jerk. He was not a kitten. He was Jim Downing, possessed of a human brain and the will power of an individual.

"I know how you feel," St. George chuckled. "It is very hard to keep awake. A cat loves sleep so much. You know, I'm a little afraid of you."

"Why?" Downing asked. "With the powers you possess I don't see why you should be afraid of anybody."

"You are very clever and basically a scientist. I must be very careful that you do not learn too much about my secret."

THIS was a prudent and natural precaution.

"But what happens to me?" Downing asked. He could still think like a human and a plan was slowly developing in his mind.

"I'm afraid you will . . . just die. That is, your body will die. Too bad, but quite necessary."

"May I ask how you intend to accomplish this?"

"Yes, of course. It's quite simple. I'll drag your body into the street and let a car run over it, that's all. You won't feel any pain because your mind—your ego is inhabiting the body of a kitten."

Downing's plan was getting clearer and clearer. The only way to handle this incarnate little devil was by deception and trickery.

"And you, I suppose, can turn yourself back into your own body?"

"Any time I wish," St. George replied. "I have only to make the proper sign. I may even explain that sign to you some day. When you have grown into a very old cat and liable to die at any time. Not before, Downing. My secret is much too valuable."

"I don't think you'll do anything of the kind," Downing said flatly.

The black cat reared up, tail lashing furiously now.

"What do you mean?" St. George's voice demanded angrily.

"Put it down to an act of self-preservation or an act of Providence," Downing said. "I had a strange feeling you were more than you seemed to be. I feared something might happen to me if I came here alone. So I wrote out a complete history of the Foster case. I enclosed some of the telltale currency with it and the whole business is locked in my vault at the bank. You can't open it. Not even the president can open it. I'm the only man."

The black cat was crouched, as if ready to spring. Downing didn't care. He had this black cat by the tail now and knew it.

"When I am discovered dead," Downing went on, "a legal order will be re-

quired to open the box and there must be witnesses. The letter I left will be read and then, St. George, what's going to happen to you?"

"What if they do arrest me?" St. George said. "What of it? Do you think any cell can hold me?"

"Perhaps not, but you can't lay your hands on ready cash any more. You can't continue to pose as a poor bank-teller. Or perhaps you don't intend to capitalize on this power of yours."

"Of course, I don't," the black cat surprisingly replied in St. George's voice. "Why should I when I am so content? I needed money only to buy more books, and there are still certain scrolls I must have. Stealing them don't do. I might be caught. I must keep my job. Downing, you will take your human form again and get that letter."

"In a pig's eye, I will," Downing retorted.

The black cat sat erect, raised one paw and once more Downing saw that strange sign created in thin air. Suddenly the black cat seemed larger than ever. It grew a hundred times. Downing laughed and even his voice had changed. Instead of the usual mewing, there was a thin, little squeak.

The black cat was walking around him, forepaws bent, hindquarters in the air. Its tail waved wildly. Its red tongue licked at its whiskers. Downing backed away in fear. This was real terror, the kind that made blood run like ice water, made the hair stand erect on a man's head. This was the unwholesome terror of a nightmare. It was unreal, inhuman.

A wave of colder air struck him. He turned. The other cats were coming in slowly, silently, with their beady eyes on him. He moved backward and saw one of his own paws. They'd changed. They were not furred little paws, but tiny, bony, taloned things.

Suddenly Downing knew what St. George had done. Downing was no longer a kitten, but a mouse. A tiny, gray-furred thing that would scarcely make a quick meal for any of those gap-

ing jaws before him. The pink, open mouths that drooled. The cats started to close in on him. Only the huge black cat stayed in the background. St. George was merely a spectator.

Downing tried to scream. Scream as a human being does. A tiny, little squeak issued from his throat and that was all.

CHAPTER VI

Ace in the Hole

DOWNING'S new form tensed. He knew that he was showing long, white teeth. He knew his tiny, little eyes glittered in ferocious terror. He found time in his extremity to wonder who the other two cats beside Foster and Logan had been in human life.

There was a door directly opposite, but the cats blocked that exit. Downing looked around frantically. It didn't seem strange to him that he searched for a hole—a rat hole in the floor. He scurried madly along the wall, hoping against hope that there would be an exit.

There was a single, poorly consoling thought. St. George very probably didn't want him killed and this was just a lesson. Downing wondered how he'd ever misjudged this apparently meek little runt of a guy. Meek? The man possessed colossal power and a vanity that was astounding.

Yet those other cats wouldn't know that St. George only wanted to teach a lesson. They'd follow instinct. He was just a mouse—legitimate prey for their claws and their sharp teeth.

The orange-colored cat leaped first. Downing jumped forward beneath the cat's arched body. He narrowly evaded a swiping blow from a black and white cat. His rushing escape became a mad flight as he sped across the hall, squealing shrilly and trying to tell the cats who he was. They'd been humans once and if they understood, he'd be saved.

But how could they understand?

Downing spoke only in the language of a mouse. These were cats who understood nothing but the cat language. All he could do was run for it and pray he'd find a hole somewhere.

He scooted through the next room, saw a fireplace that looked something like Boulder Dam to him. Luckily, there was no fire in the grate and Downing's human mind told him there must be an ash drop. If he could reach it, squeeze through, he'd be safe.

Downing gave one quick look backward. The orange cat led the rest of the pack and they were coming fast. Downing reached the ash grate and found it warped. There was an exit. As he wriggled his slim form through the narrow opening in the grate, the orange cat slashed him across his left hind leg.

Agony shot through Downing's body. He dropped into black space, went down . . . down for what seemed to be miles to the cellar. Then he hit the bottom where a heap of fine wood ash was piled up. Dust rose around him in a huge, choking cloud.

He could hear the savage yowling of the cats far above him. Perhaps one of the smaller animals could squirm through that grate. Maybe St. George would deliberately open it for them. Downing ran around in a crazy circle trying to find a way out of this ash pit.

Finally, he noticed a narrow ray of light and leaped toward it. There was a chink in the side wall of the ash pit. He thrust his head through it, looked around and then he managed to squeeze his body all the way through. There was a drop of about two feet to the cement cellar floor, but it seemed like two miles to Downing. Nevertheless, he jumped, landed lightly and wondered what to do next. The answer came with promptness equally surprising and terrifying.

The huge, black cat in whose body the mind of St. George reposed, ambled from a dark corner and sat down, licking its chops. Downing retreated. The cat suddenly sprang. So did Downing, but not quite far enough. A paw darted out. Downing was lifted

from the floor out. Downing was lifted about four feet.

Before he could dash to safety, the black cat stood over him, mouth yawning wide open, sharp white teeth flashing. The paw moved again and Downing tumbled over and over. The black cat was playing with him. Torturing him before the actual kill.

The sharp claws lacerated his body, sending excruciating waves of pain through his tiny system. Those claws caught him again, deeply imbedded this time and he was flung high into the air. He hit a wall, bounced off it and went limp. He couldn't run any more. He couldn't even move. Breathing was agony to his tortured lungs. It was better that this four-footed demon get it over with.

The black cat actually sauntered over this time, its sleek form moving with all feline grace. The open mouth came closer. Downing figured this was the finish.

BUT the cat backed up a bit, raised one paw and moved it. Downing felt himself growing larger. He looked down. He was a kitten again. The same little kitten he'd been before St. George transformed him into a mouse. He heard St. George's jibing chuckle. The black cat was laughing at him.

Downing, still examining his front paws, noticed something else. At least he had a human mind in that furred body. There were huge footprints beside him. The marks of shoes. Some led straight to the wall, some away from it, but a couple in particular were most intriguing. Half of the shoeprint disappeared *beneath* the wall.

"How did you like my little game, Downing?" St. George's voice startled him.

Downing looked over at the big black cat. "St. George, what I said still goes. You are a dangerous man. Your knowledge is so evil it has no right to exist. If the chance arose, I would benefit the world by killing you."

"Oh, please," St. George protested, "don't make me go through all this

again. Next time, I might not be able to stop the other cats from reaching you. If I can't, they'll toss you about just as I did. Then, when you are too weak to move, one of them would gobble you up before I could save you. Please listen to reason, Mr. Downing."

Downing thought fast. He was absolutely at the mercy of this cherubic-faced little man with supernatural powers that he claimed were scientific. Perhaps this was a time to mollify the runt and build up his one chance of freedom again.

"I said," Downing countered, "if I ever had the chance, I ought to kill you. Right now, I don't see how I'll ever find that chance. I've had enough. Being chased like a fox. Worse than that. A fox gets a break now and then. You hold the reins, St. George, and you know how to twist the bit. I'll be good. I swear I will."

"Ah," the black cat purred, "that's what I wanted to hear you say. Now follow me upstairs. I'll change you back into human form."

"You will?" Downing pretended stark amazement. "You really mean it?"

"Of course," the black cat said as he walked slowly toward the steps. "How else can I get those papers you locked in your vault? We shall talk about it later. Only I must warn you. Human or not, always keep in mind the fact that I can instantly change you into any form I choose."

"I won't forget," Downing said grimly. "How do you accomplish it, St. George? I mean, by using that strange sign?"

The black cat stopped and faced him. For a moment Downing thought he'd take another beating.

"And do not ask me that again, either," St. George snapped. "The secret I hold is mine alone. No one else must share in it. It could be a dangerous weapon in the hands of the wrong people. Personally, I intend using it only to further my own ambitions."

"Yes," Downing encouraged, "but what are your ambitions?"

THE black cat bounded up the steps and Downing followed. He discovered he possessed extremely powerful leg muscles and could move with more agility than he ever thought possible. Then he remembered that he was a kitten, a very young kitten at that.

At the top of the steps, St. George stopped. That is, the black cat sat down abruptly.

"You asked me about my ambition. Primarily, it consists of doing my job at the bank. Then there is my science. I am far ahead of the world in certain things, Downing. Very far ahead. Yet I am not satisfied. I must go still further and I shall. Now please be patient a moment."

The black cat rose up, raised a paw and again Downing saw that cabalistic sign drawn in the air. The black cat suddenly vanished. There was a heavy step beside Downing and he involuntarily scooted off beneath a chair for protection. He looked up. St. George, in his human form, looked at him with a smile.

Downing braced himself. He wondered what it would be like during the journey back into his own human body. St. George bent down and suddenly seized Downing by one paw. He dragged him out from under the chair, tucked him beneath one arm and walked into another room where he placed Downing on the floor.

The four cats were there. They seemed to have long since forgotten about the episode of the mouse. Three of them were curled up, asleep. The fourth, a pure white animal, sat on a window sill, looking longingly into the brilliant moonlit night.

CHAPTER VII

Cat Conspiracy

AT THE sound of St. George's footsteps, the sleeping cats awoke while the fourth one hastily jumped from the window sill and all four ran

toward Downing.

The white cat spoke.

"Hello, there. Are you one of us?"

"I'm one of you," Downing answered grimly. "My name is Downing. Which is Paul Foster?"

The orange-colored cat moved forward, sat down and, if a cat could smile, this one did.

"Well, if it isn't my old boss Downing. How are you, boss? I ought to scratch that face of yours into ribbons. You're the one who found out about the shortage and was set to call in the cops."

"Cool off, Foster," Downing advised. "We're all in this. Who are the rest of the—ah—boys?"

The white cat began licking its chops. Foster glanced at it.

"I've a score to settle with you, Downing, and I warn you it will be settled. But right now, seeing you'll be here for some time, I'll show you about. The white one is Peter Millbrook. He was the five times married play-boy who disappeared seven or eight months ago."

"Oh, yes," Downing said in faint surprise. "Hello, Millbrook. I wonder why St. George turned you into a cat when you were known as the Broadway Wolf."

"I'll tell you why," the white cat said sharply, "St. George was jealous of me, that's all. Jealous of my money and my little way with women. I'm what he would like to be only he doesn't know it. The night before I was to marry my sixth wife, St. George came to my apartment and turned me into a cat because he said he thought the girl I'd selected was too good for me."

"She probably was," Downing said dryly. "How do you like this life?"

"Well—not too bad. I was about to be taken by the draft so I think I might consider myself lucky."

Paul Foster butted in. "You've met our society representative. Now meet the other side of the tracks. The striped cat—Dirty Yellow, I call him—is a wife-killer. St. George decided to punish him. Then the black and white one is Logan, the bandit who stuck up the

bank this morning. He won't talk yet. He thinks this is some kind of a trick the cops are pulling."

"And you," Downing grunted. "The man whose funeral I attended and shed a few tears over. You were a very nice looking corpse, Foster."

"Wasn't I?" Foster chuckled. "Oh, yes, I saw myself. Quite an experience. St. George took me in the pocket of his overcoat. I kept very quiet and peeked out. Extremely interesting, I must say."

"Just for the record," Downing inquired, "how did St. George convert you?"

"Well—he caught me stealing a few dollars and suggested I take a lot more. I did, St. George just switched me into a cat and kept the money. Then he hanged my lifeless body and made it appear suicide."

"And you're not sore at him?" Downing asked, amazed.

"I was at first," Foster admitted. "Scared, too, but now I realize that St. George had to do it. He hopes to recompense all of us, however. There is another secret he is trying to discover. When he does, things won't be so bad."

Downing stretched himself on the floor. He felt extremely tired. Foster kept chattering and so did the other cats, but Downing scarcely heard them. He had one ear pressed against the floor. St. George was going downstairs to the cellar. Downing could hear every step very plainly.

Then there was a click, like a door opening in the cellar. Shortly afterwards, the lights dimmed for just a second, flickered a little, and then steadied. Downing heard the whine of some electrical instrument. It lasted about three minutes before it was cut off. The lights brightened. He heard that same door open and close, followed shortly by St. George's mincing footsteps mounting the stairs.

THE footprints in the dust meant something then. Part of St. George's horrible secret was hidden in the cellar, behind a secret door. Down-

ing knew where it was. He actually felt elated. If his trick worked, he'd have St. George with his back against the wall and then he and the police could investigate the secret of the cellar. Things were shaping up better than Downing had thought they would.

". . . and when he finds that information, he will grant us perpetual life. Say, are you listening to me?" It was Foster who spoke.

Downing looked up quickly. "What was that you said—about perpetual life?"

"St. George is seeking the answer to it and he'll find the answer. He promised us we'd live forever and a man with his present powers can develop more and greater ones. I believe him."

"To live forever, as a cat?" Downing asked. "I'd rather be dead. In fact, I can offer more hope than St. George. He disposed of your bodies, suppose. That means you can't resume life as a human being. I never thought of that before. It rather complicates things."

"What do you mean?" Foster asked quickly. The other cats came closer.

"I meant that St. George is restoring me to my own body very soon," Downing said. "He must because I've got him by the scruff of the neck. When I have two feet and two arms, I'll take the little squirt apart. I'll—hey, wait! What the devil is wrong with you men—cats?"

Foster stuck his nose almost against Downing's.

"You'll do no such thing. You won't even be returned to human form, do you hear me? We'll warn St. George. If you harm him or have him arrested or—or anything, we'll all die. We don't want to die. Downing, so help me, we'll kill you if you try anything."

"Let's polish him off now," the wife-killer hissed. "No use taking chances."

Downing scampered backward. "Now hold it. I've got to return to my human form. I left a letter telling what I suspected about St. George. The police are bound to investigate him if I don't show up. That will mean an end to you. St. George will be tried for robbery.

Maybe murder."

"Bah!" Foster said. "What of it? St. George can get away from anybody."

"But Downing is right," Peter Millbrook put in. "St. George could trick him, but they'd come here to look for him, find us and we'd probably be done away with."

"He's right," the wife-killer agreed reluctantly. "Better drop the whole thing. Here comes St. George."

The bantam-weight bank teller minced into the room and smiled down at his assortment of cats. He picked up Downing and carried him out. As the door closed, Peter Millbrook spoke.

"Foster, one of us must warn St. George. We must make him turn himself into a cat so he'll understand. That's up to you."

"I'll take care of it," Foster said. "Another thing—if Downing comes back as a cat, it's our duty to kill him. He's always been a trouble maker. Always on the right side of the fence. Kill him, I say!"

In St. George's living room, Downing was put on the floor again. He mewed. St. George found a small rubber ball and bounced it on the floor. Downing raced after it instinctively. His paw batted the ball, sent it whipping into a corner and he charged toward it. This was good sport—until his legs became so tired he could no longer stand up.

Then he stretched out on the floor and idly washed his face with one paw. He looked up at St. George, a huge monster who sat in a worn leather chair, eyes glued to a book that seemed almost ready to fall apart.

A COUPLE of times St. George glanced at him and smiled benignly. Otherwise, he remained strictly engrossed in the dog-eared volume. Downing curled up in a ball and began purring. No matter how hard he tried not to act like a kitten, it was no use. He kept on purring until he was asleep. Vaguely, just before he dropped off, he heard the other cats mewing. They were trying to attract St. George's attention so he'd turn himself into a cat

and enable them to tell how Downing hoped to work some trick.

Even that made no difference. Downing slept. St. George continued reading until the incessant mewing made him frown. He carefully put the book down and walked into the other room. The cats rubbed against his legs. Foster raised himself on rear paws and tugged at St. George's trouser leg with his claws.

St. George frowned again. He raised his hand and the cats moved back respectfully. Then St. George's empty human form stood there rigidly while the big black cat leaped angrily down at them.

"What's the meaning of all this commotion?" he snarled.

Foster moved forward.

"St. George," he said eagerly, "we thought you wouldn't understand and give us no chance to talk with you. Downing is up to mischief. He intends to get the best of you somehow."

St. George's voice came from the black cat.

"Oh, my! I hoped he wouldn't. What is the matter with him?"

"He's the bossy type. Got to have things his own way. You know how he acted in the bank. Listen. Just turn him loose in here and we'll take care of him. Please—you've got to. We can't afford to let anything happen to you."

"Thanks," St. George purred. "Thanks very much for your faith. Of course, I know it is self-preservation because your bodies have been buried and there is no returning for any of you. Yet, I do appreciate the warning. I shall be on guard, don't worry. Now I must get back to my studies."

"How is it coming?" Peter Millbrook sat down beside Foster. "The idea of giving us everlasting life, I mean?"

"Slowly," St. George admitted. "Very slowly, but I feel that I am on the right track. There are books I need and I shall get them, never fear. Meanwhile, you are all comfortable, I hope?"

"There's only one thing wrong," Millbrook said somewhat testily. "I get lonely at times. I wonder if—no, I

mustn't say it. Forgive me, St. George."

"No, no. Speak up," St. George encouraged. "I want to do everything I can to make all of you happy."

"Well," Millbrook said slowly. "There's a full moon tonight. I'd like to go out. I know a Maltese that lives up the road a bit. Nicely furred and colored. Sleek, too. Reminds me of some of the women I used to know. I'd like—"

"No," St. George said very firmly. "No."

CHAPTER VIII

Battle of Wits

JIM DOWNING awoke with a start. Again, he saw two immense feet before him. He blinked sleepily and wondered if this was still part of his ghastly dream. His mind seemed to be human enough, but his body was still a bundle of fur, paws, a tail, and whiskers sticking out like stiff wires from his cheeks.

He looked up. St. George stood there with one hand raised. Downing's mind went blank for a moment and then he roused himself for the second time. He was sitting in a chair. He stirred, felt pain in one arm and looked at the hand. It was streaked with dried blood, as though he'd been scratched.

"Feeling well this morning?" St. George asked.

Downing sat bolt upright. It hadn't been a dream. He really had been a kitten. A meek, inoffensive little kitten. Also, a mouse, which was worse. And the man responsible for it all stood in front of him now, wearing his incredible frock coat, striped trousers and derby hat with the bullet hole clumsily repaired.

Downing jumped up and started toward him. St. George gave a bleat of alarm, backed away and raised his right hand.

"Don't do it," he cried. "Don't, Downing, or I shall—"

Downing stopped short. His shoulders sagged and he emitted a long, dismal sigh.

"I forgot," he said slowly. "I thought for a moment it just couldn't be. That I'd been hypnotized. But these scratches on my arms—they were made by those cats and by you, St. George. It was real all right."

"Of course, it was real," St. George answered smoothly. "Now we are going to the bank together. You remember why, Downing?"

"Yes—to get that letter I wrote. Okay, I'll play your game, though heaven knows what it is."

St. George leaned against the wall beside the door.

"Mr. Downing, I think it is time we had an understanding about this. I am not an ambitious man although I must confess the power I hold is a gratifying thing. For twenty-eight years I took orders without argument. I am a small person. I was pushed around unduly until I came to hate large people, like yourself, for instance."

"You were never mistreated at the bank," Downing reminded him.

"Of course not. That is, a few minor employees went out of their way to tease me, but I paid no attention. Odd how a man with power can forgive others stronger, larger than he. It must be the fact that in my mind I knew other men were far below me in mental capacity and in actual power."

"Did it ever occur to you," Downing said slowly, "that once you reveal this power, people will be afraid of you? You will walk alone, like a leper or a man accursed in some other fashion. There will even be those willing to kill you."

"That I know, too," St. George nodded somberly. "Yet they will all understand some day that I am not to be trifled with. That I must be respected—yes, even honored. A few will be converted as I see fit. Examples, you know. Then I shall simply sit back and let the world wait on me. That shall be the fruits of my labor."

Downing repressed a shiver. "There is another man with similar ideas, St.

George. His name is Schickelgruber—or maybe you didn't even know we were at war."

"Indeed I do know," St. George snapped. "The last time I needed a replacement part for my machine, it was most difficult to get and I was literally robbed as to the price. The person who did that is on my list of examples. I think I shall turn him into a leech."

"And that," Downing said, "is tantamount to pure murder."

"Murder? No, it can't be classified that way. Yet I really don't care much. I mean to have my own way. Nothing will stop me because I am supreme. I say that honestly and without boasting. Meanwhile—until that day—I must be unmolested. There are many things yet to be done."

"Suppose," Downing said curtly, "we get down to the bank and have it over with. You're the boss now. How do we pull it?"

ST. GEORGE told him as they walked from the bus toward the bank. The doors opened as if controlled by a timer, for St. George was right on the dot. The guards saluted Downing, muttered a greeting to St. George. The two men walked through the lobby and straight into Downing's office.

"Now you quite understand," St. George said, "we shall go together to the safe deposit vaults as soon as they are opened. You will remove your box and bring it here to this office. I shall be with you all the time. If anyone wants to know why, it is bank business."

Downing sat in his accustomed chair behind the desk and wondered if he'd ever be there again. St. George was bound to turn him into a kitten when he turned over the letter. That is, if his trick failed.

St. George was beside him every moment. Twice, the insignificant little runt raised his hand as a warning gesture when Downing turned on him with fury blazing in his eyes.

In the privacy of his office again, with the box, St. George became impatient.

"Open it, Mr. Downing. Quickly. I

scarcely slept a wink all night worrying about the contents of this box."

Downing raised the lid slowly. "Well, you can stop worrying now. St. George, give me a break, will you? I'll keep my mouth shut—"

"Is there any money in there?" St. George disregarded Downing's plea. "You won't need it and I shall. There are books I must have, but some of the money I shall spend on you. Yes, indeed. Good food. Cream, kidneys, calves' liver, crab meat. The very best for you, Downing."

Downing looked at the smaller man. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I can't figure it out, St. George. First, you threaten me. Now, you try bribery. When I was a kitten, you batted me all over the place. In one breath, you demand my money; in the next, you agree to use part of it for my comfort and darned if I don't believe you."

"I mean it," St. George answered. "The letter, man! Give it to me."

"Wait a minute." Downing held the box away from St. George's eager hands. "Suppose we make a bargain. There are two thousand dollars in cash in this box. But I have more. Much more, in my accounts at this bank and others. Now I can't prevent you from turning me into a kitten. Yet this money can be yours very easily."

"How?" St. George asked. "I'm quite interested."

"Let me walk out of here with you. At your home, go ahead and change me into a kitten, but put my body somewhere. Keep it intact and let me return to it now and then. I'll make withdrawals and turn the money over to you."

St. George wagged a finger under Downing's nose, and the assistant cashier blanched and moved back a step. St. George chuckled.

"No, I won't convert you yet. But your proposition is wrong. All wrong. I knew you'd try something like this. You see, Foster warned me last night to be careful. No, Downing. I shall convert you right here. They'll find

you behind your desk, apparently dead."

Downing groaned, but inwardly he was elated. St. George had been looking for a trick and believed this was it. Downing had something else up his sleeve. Something much more direct.

"Don't feel so badly about it," St. George urged soothingly. "Really things won't be so bad. They'll give you a beautiful funeral and, if you wish, I'll take you to it as a kitten. Foster had that experience and found it most interesting. Now—the letter."

Downing handed the whole tin box to him. St. George smiled wryly and took it with his left hand, keeping the right half-raised. He laid the box on the desk, rummaged through it and tucked the cash into his pocket. Then he found the letter.

"Ah, good. Very good. I shall proceed to destroy it."

HE LAID the letter on the edge of the desk, using only one hand always. He picked up Downing's table lighter, snapped it and applied the flame to a corner of the letter. Slowly the letter was consumed and St. George kept moving it about as the fire ate into the paper.

Downing edged a bit closer and St. George paid no attention. He was too absorbed in watching the letter burn. Downing sucked in a long breath and then exhaled violently. The blast caught the small bit of paper still on the desk, whisked it off and as it fell, St. George bent to seize it.

At that moment, Downing jumped. Before St. George could straighten, turn and raise his hand, Downing had both his arms pinned securely in a painful lock, behind his back.

"You can't perform that devilish sign without the use of your hands," Downing gloated. "Now we'll see who is boss. You're going to the cops, St. George, and I'll stand behind you with a gun. If you so much as lift a finger, I'll blow your brains out. You're done. Finished."

"Please don't hold me so tightly," St.

George protested. "I'm afraid you may break a rib."

Downing gasped. This certainly wasn't the reaction he expected and it offered him no comfort whatsoever. St. George should have been stark mad with terror and pleading for a chance. Yet he took this very calmly.

St. George was gazing down at the burning letter. When it was consumed to ashes, he flicked out one foot and crushed the ashes to dust. Then he did an amazing thing. He began to scream for help at the top of his lungs.

"Shut up," Downing rasped. "Keep quiet or I'll knock you cold."

"Help," St. George yelled. "Help! Help!"

Someone flung open the door. It was a guard with his hand on a holstered gun. He took one look and started yelling himself. In a moment, two more guards were there and Henry Arnold, austere president of the Bank, elbowed his way into the office.

"What in the world—" he began.

"Mr. Downing, sir," St. George whined. "He's gone mad. He attacked me. He was burning things. He—"

"Arnold," Downing said, holding St. George firmly and turning him so they were both facing the staring group, "listen to me. You must listen. I'm not crazy. St. George turned me into a kitten. He did the same thing to Paul Foster. Then he hanged his lifeless body. He even took Foster to his own funeral. St. George isn't the meek little runt he looks or acts. He has supernatural powers. He—"

Arnold hastily moved back until he was surrounded by the guards. He said something in a low voice. Two of the guards took hitches in their belts and started toward Downing.

Downing sensed what was about to happen. He saw too late St. George's neat little trick. Everything was clear now. He'd placed himself in a ghastly spot.

"Arnold, I'm as sane as you are. St. George can turn people into cats or dogs or mice. Anything! I tell you he can do it. He—"

THE two guards leaped. Downing's grip was broken and they held his hands firmly by the wrists. St. George minced over to Arnold, methodically straightening the wrinkles in his sleeves as he did so.

"I don't know what came over him, sir. He asked me to go to the safe deposit vaults with him. Naturally, I obeyed because he is my superior. He brought the box back here, opened it and began burning things. I remonstrated with him and he turned on me. He said I was a magician. He accused me of changing him into a kitten. Naturally, I screamed for help."

"Yes, yes, I can see he's out of his mind," Arnold said nervously. "I've already sent for a doctor."

Downing shrieked. "Arnold, he's dangerous! Oh, confound it, why won't someone believe me? I'm not crazy. His hands. They are free. If he raises one of them and makes the sign, you'll all turn into cats. I've seen it done. Please believe me!"

Downing strained against the grip of the two guards and got one arm free. It was grabbed again almost instantly. The guard on his left gave Arnold a peculiar look and received a curt nod. The guard doubled one fist.

"I hate to do this, Mr. Downing," he said sincerely. "You're a good guy, but we can't take chances with a wack."

His fist traveled about three feet and collided with Downing's jaw. That guard had once been a policeman and he knew how to slug. Downing went limp and they eased him onto a chair.

St. George tottered over to another chair and sat down. He was shaking visibly.

"Poor Mr. Downing," he said. "I liked him very much. He was my friend as well as my superior. Did I hear him say I turned people into cats?"

"You did," Arnold answered grimly. "He's stark raving mad. The doctor will be here soon and an ambulance. I'd better have them bring a straitjacket, too. No telling what he may do when he wakes up."

A guard drew his gun and hefted it

significantly. "He won't do much, sir. I'll tap him if he starts anything."

St. George blew his nose very daintily and tucked the handkerchief away.

"He probably associated the fact that I found a cat in the police station yesterday. I told him about it this morning. Poor Mr. Downing. His twisted mind thought I'd created that cat. Poor, poor Mr. Downing."

There was a triumphant little smile on St. George's lips. A malicious glint in his eyes. Nobody noticed it. St. George had gone so long unnoticed even an event of this kind couldn't attract much attention to him.

CHAPTER IX

Eavesdropper

RODNEY ST. GEORGE padded behind Arnold to the president's massive office. During his twenty-eight years at the bank, St. George hadn't been in that office a dozen times.

Arnold sat down and motioned St. George to a chair.

"It's a terrible thing," he said. "A nice, young fellow like Downing going off that way. Terrible. I had plans for that man. Great plans. Now I must find someone else. St. George, you have worked faithfully for our bank many years. More faithfully than anyone who ever worked here. Therefore, I shall reward you. You shall take Downing's place as assistant cashier."

St. George's face colored slightly and then turned pale.

"Th-thank you, sir. I am honored. Highly honored. I—"

From somewhere in the bank, Downing's voice reached them. He was shouting about cats and St. George's weird power. There were sounds of a struggle and then silence.

St. George shivered. "I hope they don't have to use too much force on him. Poor Mr. Downing. As I was saying—I am deeply honored. I shall do everything in my power to carry out my

duties. Everything, Mr. Arnold."

"Good," Arnold said. "Take over Downing's office at once. That's all."

St. George minced out of the office, closed the door firmly and silently behind him and then literally skipped across the lobby of the bank toward Downing's office.

Arnold leaned back in his big chair and expelled his breath tremulously.

"What maniacs will think of. Imagine St. George turning people into cats. Why, the little mouse couldn't do a simple card trick. Wonder if he'll change with more responsibility."

Meanwhile Jim Downing was strapped to a stretcher inside the ambulance and taken for a fast, siren-moaning ride. They journeyed well out of the main part of the city and finally turned off through the imposing gates of a big estate. The gates closed and two uniformed guards took up positions.

Downing was unstrapped on his promise to behave. They led him into the building, firmly holding him by both arms. One of the guards tapped on a door marked, "Dr. Michael Jamison."

Downing walked in and sat down. Dr. Michael Jamison turned out to be a thin-faced, hawk-nosed individual whom Downing instinctively disliked. Jamison looked at him intently for a moment.

"Do you know your name?" he asked quietly.

"Certainly," Downing snapped. "It's Jim Downing. Look here, I'm not crazy. Oh, I realize my story sounds foolish, but that little squirt St. George did turn me into a cat. A kitten, rather."

"He what?" Jamison half arose from his chair. "What did you say?"

"He turned me into a kitten. Somehow, he took my spirit, my brain, my soul perhaps, and wrapped them all up inside of a kitten. But I wasn't the only one. There was Paul Foster who committed suicide, only he didn't. Foster was turned into a cat also and St. George hanged his lifeless body. You . . . don't believe me, do you?"

"Why, of course, I do," Dr. Jamison said soothingly. "Certainly, Mr. Down-

ing. Now you are going to be very well treated here. Your bank has asked us to give you the very best of care. First of all, a cold shower. A very cold shower to soothe your nerves. You've been through a great deal, you know. Turning from a human into a kitten and then back into a human again."

"Thanks," Downing grunted. "I'm glad somebody believes—oh, what the devil! You agree because it's supposed to soothe me. Listen—may I telephone someone first? My fiancée?"

"It can be arranged," Dr. Jamison agreed. Then he added, prudently, "After you have showered and been assigned to your room."

DOWNING cursed under his breath, but restrained his temper. To go off the handle here would only mean forcible restraint. An hour later he was in bed, calmly thinking out the details of the last twenty-four hours. After all, this was better than being a kitten at the mercy of St. George and his assortment of cats who were determined to murder him to preserve their own lives.

So long as he remained in this hospital, Downing was in no imminent danger. St. George wouldn't dare try any of his tricks. Downing relaxed, lit a cigarette and even whistled softly.

St. George was an odd personality—leaving out the power he possessed. Apparently meek and self-effacing, he was little short of a recluse. But he was coming out of that shell now. That retiring nature was undergoing a change. He could become the greatest menace the world had ever known and, worst of all, St. George knew it.

St. George had mentioned the fact that he still sought information. Was he merely laying low, adhering to his character of a meek, inoffensive little man until he mastered all phases of this weird power? Downing began to think so.

The door of his room opened and Dr. Jamison walked in. He sat down beside the bed, took Downing's pulse and made a few notes on a pad. Then he leaned back, crossed his legs and regarded the

patient intently.

"Tell me all about it," he urged. "Frequently, it helps a man to talk. Go ahead. I won't laugh. That's a promise."

"You won't laugh." Downing scowled. "If you'd been through what happened to me, laughter would be no part of it. St. George did transform me into a kitten. He formerly did the same thing to several other people including one rather famous person called Peter Millbrook."

"Peter Millbrook," Jamison grunted. "I knew him. He was an alcoholic and we had him confined here for some time. So he is a cat now. You realize, Mr. Downing, that Peter Millbrook was pronounced dead and decently buried some weeks ago."

"They buried an empty corpse," Downing said flatly. "St. George doesn't just switch a man into a cat. He creates the cat out of the victim's brain and soul. The body becomes inert. All the run has to do is make that funny sign in the air—"

"What sign?" Jamison asked sharply.

Downing shrugged. "What's the use? You're wasting my time and I'm wasting yours."

"No. I'm very much interested. Show me the sign he made."

Downing raised one hand, drew a straight line in the air and then wound another invisible line around the first.

"So that's it." Jamison nodded. "Thank you, Downing. By the way, Miss Brooke knows you are here and is coming to see you. I don't know whether or not it is quite advisable."

"Nonsense," Downing declared. "I'm as sane as you, doctor. It would do me a world of good to see her."

Jamison nodded and walked out. He closed the door softly and then began moving very fast toward his private offices. There he locked the door, went to a bookcase and drew out an old, old volume. He sat down and studied it intently.

"Blazes!" he said. "I haven't been wrong then. It can be done. Someone just beat me to it, that's all. Rodney St. George who works at the bank, eh?

Good. I shall see Mr. St. George and take steps to see that he does not change me into something or other. I must talk with Downing again. St. George didn't switch him back to a kitten again, and there must be some reason for it. Perhaps something to do with making the sign."

Dr. Jamison's thin face was alight as he stared into space. His eyes burned in an unholy glee and one hand kept stroking the ancient volume on his desk as though it were a living, breathing thing.

HE AROSE finally, put the book away and went back to Downing's room. The door was ajar and he heard a woman's voice. Jamison peeked in, saw Pamela Brooke there and took up a position from where he could hear every word. This was nothing new. None of the hospital employees would think twice about Jamison's actions if they saw him. A psychiatrist tries to listen in on his patient's normal conversation.

Pamela held both of Downing's hands and she looked extremely worried. He told her, in a low voice, the entire story.

"Finally," he went on, "I found my chance. I grabbed St. George's arms and kept him from using a hand to make that sign. He has to make it, Pam. I've proven that. I—I guess you think there's no hope. You can't possibly believe me."

Pamela said very quietly, "I do believe you, Jim. I believe you because I know you. The story sounds like the ravings of a lunatic. They'll probably hold you here for a long time and you'll be safe here, too. I'm glad you're in this hospital."

"So am I," Downing sighed. "Pam, you're not saying you believe just to bolster up my spirits? You do realize that St. George is probably one of the most powerful men on the face of the earth?"

"I do, Jim. I felt there was something—well, sinister about him when you pointed him out to me yesterday morning."

Downing closed both eyes. "What I can't understand is why he doesn't as-

sert himself. Why he still insists on playing the part of a meek little guy. He did mention that he was on the trail of something even bigger. That means something deadlier, more grotesque, Pam. We've got to stop him."

"We will, Jim. We will because you and I are on the right side. A man with the knowledge St. George possesses doesn't belong on earth. Jim, understand, I do believe you. I recognize the danger you are in."

"Danger!" Downing sat bolt upright. "I never thought of it. Pam, you must leave here and don't come back unless I send for you. If St. George finds out you believe my story, he may do something to you. We are both in danger. Terrible danger."

Pamela arose. She opened her purse and calmly repaired some damage to her makeup which had suffered from Downing's greeting kiss.

In the small vanity mirror she saw Dr. Jamison's white-coated form through the crack in the door. She betrayed no sign.

"I'll come back," she said. "I'm not afraid, Jim. Spend your time thinking. Try to figure out some way to either reveal him for what he is or a method by which we can—kill him if necessary. Good-by, darling. I'll return soon."

She bent over him as if to kiss him good-by. Instead she whispered:

"Jim, Dr. Jamison is listening to all this. I had a glimpse of his face in my mirror. He comes to the bookstore where I work—and he is interested in old volumes."

Downing frowned. "Thanks for the information, darling. Mostly though, thanks for having faith. I will think of something. Never mind about Jamison. He is interested in me only as a patient, nothing more."

Dr. Jamison was nowhere in sight when Pamela left the room. She signaled that fact to Downing. He leaned back against the pillows and his eyes narrowed a bit. Jamison had seemed intensely interested, especially in the weird sign which St. George made. Now Pamela's information that he was

also a customer at her store for ancient tomes, the same things from which St. George had derived his powers, was disturbing.

Was Dr. Jamison quite as innocent as he seemed? Downing groaned. He had enough to figure out now. Jamison only added another complication.

CHAPTER X

Birth of an Ego

ROCCO, swarthy cashier, head waiter, pastry server and, incidentally, owner of the Italian Spaghetti Palace, glanced through the front window of his restaurant and distorted his face into an unpleasant grimace. He clapped his hands.

"Luigi," he called. "Come here."

A bantam-sized, bow-legged waiter hurried over.

Rocco said, "Luigi, he comes. Today it is your turn. There is to be no squawking, you hear me?"

Luigi glanced at the door, doubled both fists and bit his lips to keep from exploding into voluble Italian curses as Rodney St. George minced into the restaurant and walked toward his usual table in a far corner.

"Him!" Luigi grew belligerent. "Mr. Five Cents. I wait on him like he leaves five dollars and I get five cents. Rocco, give me permission to dump the 'spaghet' down his neck, *si?* Just once—please."

Rocco grunted, "Some day maybe I do it myself. But business is business. He spends thirty cents each day. Spaghet and coffee. And always the second cup even when we cannot afford to give it to him. He has eaten here for many years, he tells me, and has it coming. Serve him, Luigi. There is nothing we can do."

Luigi tugged at the lapels of his coat, muttered something in Italian and walked over to draw a glass of water. His forefinger was stained somewhat with sauce. He thrust it into the water

and stirred it around. Then he felt a little better.

"Ah, good afternoon, Meester St. George," he bowed ironically. "You wish the same as usual, perhaps?"

St. George looked up and nodded. "Yes, please, and tell the chef to put a bit more sauce on the spaghetti, will you? I have heard of no priorities in sauces."

"Si, Meester St. George. Of course. I go now."

Rodney St. George fingered the menu idly and wondered what he should do about Jim Downing. The man had pulled a fast one. He was dangerous. Nothing must happen now. St. George was ready to take any steps, but wasn't it wiser to just let Downing remain in an asylum as a lunatic? Who would believe his wild story? St. George permitted himself to smile. That was the answer. Just let him stay there. If he got out it would be easy enough to find him and see that he caused no interference.

St. George leaned back. Someone stood beside him and he thought it was Luigi with his lunch.

"Aren't you Mr. St. George?" a pleasant feminine voice inquired.

St. George almost fell out of his chair. In his twenty-eight years of eating lunches in this place, nobody had ever spoken to him before. He looked up and gave a startled gasp. St. George had seen beautiful women before. He appreciated them, too, though no one ever guessed it. This woman was enough to take his breath away.

"Y-yes. Yes, I'm Rodney St. George," he half arose. "Oh, I recognize you now. You are Miss Brooke, who helped me so often at the book store. I shall always be very grateful."

"May I sit down?" Pamela Brooke asked and, without waiting for an affirmative reply, pulled out a chair and sat down. "My first name is Pamela. I am—the fiancée of Jim Downing."

"Oh," St. George gulped. "Oh, my. I did see you at the bank with him. I'm very sorry about Mr. Downing's breakdown."

"Isn't it terrible?" Pamela said. "They

let me see him. All he does is rave about having been changed into a cat. He seems to hold you responsible, Mr. St. George. I wonder how he ever acquired such a hallucination. I understand you've taken his place at the bank and I want to ask a favor."

"Y—yes?" St. George's eyes were very wide.

"Poor Jim has no one. I feel responsible for him. Naturally, there is little I can do, but with your help I might remove his possessions from the bank and keep them."

"Of . . . course," St. George said uncertainly, still a little stunned by the idea of an attractive woman at his table. "W—won't you join me in some lunch?"

"Thank you," Pamela answered. "I shall be delighted."

THEN St. George went whole hog. "Perhaps some wine? They tell me it is very good here."

"Chianti," Pamela said promptly. "The inexpensive kind."

Luigi, the waiter, came closer to fainting than ever before in his life. Somehow, he summoned the strength to fill that order and serve a luncheon to Pamela.

She said to St. George, "They tell me at the hospital there is little chance of Jim's getting better. He isn't violent, but the particular form of insanity with which he is afflicted happens to be almost incurable. Thank heavens we weren't married."

She said that somewhat callously, St. George thought. They talked about Jim then, for the rest of the meal. They walked to the bank together, astounding a bootblack, a newsstand dealer and a traffic cop, all of whom never thought they'd live to see the day when Rodney St. George walked with a woman.

The bank employees were considerably upset, too. St. George personally made a neat package of Downing's possessions and Pamela took this.

"I've had a lovely time, Mr. St. George," she smiled. "If I can ever do anything for you . . ."

Pamela caught the glint of interest in

St. George's eyes.

"Perhaps you can," he said. "There are one or two scrolls I am looking for. Your firm may be able to locate them for me. May I call on you at the store?"

"I'll be there," she told him.

St. George watched her walk out and knew there was now a rival for the elation he'd experienced when his experiments worked for the first time. It occurred to him that he'd missed something these many years. He wasn't an old man. Not too bad looking, either. And he was exceptional. Oh, yes, quite exceptional.

Why shouldn't he take Pam away from Downing? After all, Downing was doomed to spend his life behind the bars of an asylum.

To the victor go the spoils. St. George pursed his lips and whistled as he went to work. Something else that was utterly new. It did occur to him that he'd been so flabbergasted at Pamela's joining him for lunch that he'd forgotten to leave more than five cents for Luigi. He determined to attend to that tomorrow. He'd leave a dime to make up for it.

On his way home, St. George had an uneasy feeling that he was being followed. He tried to shake it off, but the sense of danger persisted. Even while he was on the bus, he felt eyes burning into the back of his head. He stopped only to buy liver and milk and walked rapidly toward his house.

A woman of ample girth was approaching. She lived next door and had never spoken to him, but now she smiled and inclined her head.

"Good evening, Mr. St. George. Congratulations on being promoted to cashier."

St. George started to correct her. He was just the assistant. Then he let it go. If she wanted to think he was the cashier, that was all right. It was about time he drew some respect from these eyebrow-raising people who were his neighbors.

He tipped his hat, walked on to the house and let himself in. Turning quickly, he peeked through a window. There was a tall, angular, hawk-faced man walk-

ing casually by. A stranger. St. George recalled seeing him on the bus, too. Maybe Downing had hired private detectives. Maybe someone had believed him, after all.

ST. GEORGE shivered. There was a chance that this stranger was in no way concerned with that sense of being trailed. It could be that Downing had escaped or been allowed his freedom. St. George kicked aside the mewling cats, walked into his living room and phoned the sanitarium.

"Mr. Downing's condition is about the same," someone told him. "He is resting quietly."

"Poor Mr. Downing," St. George said. "Thank you very much."

He hung up slowly and berated himself for being a fool. Then he glanced down. All four of his cats sat in a row before him, all looking up.

St. George scowled at them. "Confound you," he said. "I think I'm getting sick of having you around."

Foster, the orange-colored cat, came closer and tugged with its claws at St. George's trouser leg. St. George raised his hand and made the sign. His human form grew rigid. On the floor the big black cat appeared. Not like a wraith, slowly forming from plasma, but spontaneously—like a puff of smoke might suddenly rise from an explosion.

"St. George, we've been terribly worried," Foster said. "What happened to Downing?"

"First of all," St. George said, "I want this nonsense of making me turn into a cat every time you wish information, to be stopped. Is that understood? Once and for all, please remember that I am master here. Now what do you wish to know this time?"

"It's Downing," Foster said and prudently added, "sir. Watch out for him. He is clever."

"Downing," St. George said, "is now confined to an asylum as a hopelessly insane person who believes people can be turned into cats. They removed him in a straitjacket. Does that satisfy you?"

"No," Foster said, "it doesn't. I don't

mean to be rude, sir, but you'd be safer if you brought him back here, turned him into a kitten and let us finish him off."

"I can take care of Downing," St. George said irritably. "I might add that his fiancée had lunch with me today. She is an extremely nice girl. I'm very fond of her."

"Pam Brooke?" Foster cried. "She'd stick with Downing no matter what happened. They're laying a trap for you. Bring her here. Let us kill her for you."

The black cat eyed the other four with malevolently green eyes.

"You—all of you," St. George's voice emanated from the black cat, "are worried about one thing. Your own safety. It is no longer possible for any of you to return to your human forms because your bodies have been disposed of. The greatest fear you possess is that you will not live very long. Am I correct?"

"Well—yes, sir," Foster still acted as spokesman. "Cats live about twelve years. We're grown cats, half our life probably gone. You promised we'd be granted eternal life, sir. You said there was a book somewhere which held the secret."

"There is," the black cat purred. "I'm rapidly getting on the trail of it and Miss Brooke can help me find it. She works for one of the best book stores in the world. They specialize in finding lost documents and scrolls. So by acquiring her friendship, I am also helping you. Now that is quite all, my feline gentlemen."

PPETER MILLBROOK, the white cat, hissed at St. George.

"I'm not sure," he said. "Not sure at all. How do we know you're not jolly-ing us along. What have you to go on?"

"Yes," Foster joined in, "we're entitled to some measure of comfort."

The black cat bared sharp fangs and hunched its back a little. St. George's voice, coming from the black cat's throat, was no longer patient.

"Very well," he snapped. "I shall tell you this much. Tonight I am seeking a scroll. I have been on the trail of it for weeks and I know where it is. It was written by Hermes Trismegistrus, the

father of all magic and alchemy. What I know concerning these powers I obtained by studying his works. A man named Lloyd Chandler now owns it, but he doesn't realize its value nor does anyone else but me. When I master the secrets it contains, I shall then know what to look for next. What will enable me to turn each of you from an aged cat into a kitten so you may enjoy your lives all over again."

"Sounds like poppycock to me," Millbrook observed. "I think we're being stalled or kidded."

The black cat suddenly vanished and St. George's human form got out of the chair. He took a single step toward the white cat which was Peter Millbrook. His foot kicked out and the white cat went catapulting back to hit the wall with a resounding thud.

The other cats scampered hastily beneath chairs and tables.

"He's gone crazy," the orange cat squalled. "He never did that before."

"I wish I'd plugged the little rat when I stuck him up in the bank," Logan snarled.

"Wait," Foster gasped. "I think I know what's happening. St. George has suddenly discovered himself. Found he has an ego that has been deflated up to now. That dame Pamela Brooke is blowing him up with a sense of his own importance. With some reason in mind, too. Downing isn't licked yet and I've a feeling he'll get the best of us if we don't get him first."

"But how?" Millbrook reeled over as if he had too much catnip. "How can we reach him?"

"I don't know," Foster confessed. "We're handicapped, but I can tell you this much. Life won't be so pleasant from now on. St. George will pay less and less attention to us. As his ego blows up, he'll stop thinking about anyone except himself. We'll be lucky if—"

The sound of shattering glass broke off Foster's words. All four cats jumped nervously. The sound came from the cellar.

"Downing!" Foster hissed, and his tail began to swell.

CHAPTER XI

One Little Item

ST. GEORGE heard the crash of glass, too, and raced madly toward the cellar door. He switched on the lights and ran down the steps. With a sigh of relief he noticed that the steel bars were in place.

Only the glass had been broken and no one had gained admittance.

Yet St. George remained highly agi-

the closed front door. St. George kicked them aside and looked through the window.

He saw a dim form vanishing into the night.

Suddenly his knees trembled. That bit of ego which had been growing within, collapsed like a punctured tire. He dropped the furnace tool and its clatter made him jump. Back in his living room, he made a quick examination of his precious books. They were all intact. It seemed as though the intruder had at-

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tated. He hurried over to the secret door, opened it and stepped into the room where he kept that machine which looked so much like an X-ray apparatus. Nobody was there.

He closed the door again and then stiffened in alarm. Upstairs, the cats began to snarl and screech like maniacs. He heard heavy footsteps, a muttered curse and a chair overturned. Then the front door slammed shut.

St. George seized a furnace-cleaning tool and, armed with this, rushed upstairs. The four cats were spitting at

tempted to reach the book on St. George's desk, but the attack of the four cats had driven him off.

The cat, who had once been Logan, bank robber, sidled up to St. George and rubbed against his legs as if he wanted to be petted as a reward. St. George's temper—which he never knew he owned—boiled over. He raised the heavy furnace tool and struck the cat across the back of its neck.

With a yowl the cat staggered a few steps and then dropped. St. George kicked the carcass into a corner, waved

the furnace tool at the other cats and then sat down to steady himself.

He recalled a bottle of whiskey which a doctor had given him during the influenza epidemic of the first World war. He dug it out of a closet. He remembered the cost of this pint and shuddered. That was the main reason why he'd never even removed the cork. He did so now and took a healthy swallow that made him blink.

The fiery liquor warmed his blood, took the sting out of his nerves. He sat there, holding the bottle and looking at the dead cat over against the wall. He smiled thinly.

"That," he said aloud, "was for shooting a hole through my derby. I owed you everything you received, Logan. Anyway, I'm sick of you cats fawning and purring."

He took another swig, corked the bottle and put it in a drawer. His feet seemed lighter, his brain clear as crystal. For the first time in his life, Rodney St. George made certain his tie was correctly knotted. If there was time, he meant to see Pamela before the night was over, but first a little business with a tycoon named Lloyd Chandler. Somehow St. George thought he'd enjoy this visit.

He saw nothing of the three remaining cats when he left the house. Walking down the street, he met other neighbors who saluted him and St. George answered cheerily. This was good—excellent. They were noticing him now. He wondered what they'd say or how they'd act when they discovered what he really could do. St. George smiled smugly and swung aboard his bus.

At the next corner a passenger got up. Women climbed aboard. Ordinarily, St. George would have backed away from the empty seat and clung to the straps rather than impose upon anyone. This time he plopped himself down and glared at the two women disappointed in reaching the seat before he got it.

He changed buses and finally reached his destination. It was a huge house with an imposing estate around it. A concrete driveway artistically coiled itself around

one side of the house. Most of the lights were lit.

St. George ran a finger around his wing collar. The place got him, flattened that ego of his and made him the old meek, little bank teller he'd been. He took out his wallet, extracted a name card and armed with this, he approached the door.

THE name card had been printed only this same afternoon, as soon as he'd been made assistant cashier. St. George was proud of those cards and this was the first time he had used one.

A man of about fifty, portly, bald and impatient opened the door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said. "The servants don't seem to be around—as usual. What do you want?"

St. George felt an urge to take to his heels. Only the whiskey still vibrating through his system saved the day. He thrust his card forward with a stiff gesture.

Lloyd Chandler took it. "Assistant Cashier at one of my banks, eh? Well, I still don't know what you want, but a bank cashier can't be left standing out on a man's front porch. Your mission must be important."

"Yes, sir," St. George said. "I—I have some very confidential information. We should have strict privacy, if you don't mind."

"Of course not. Come upstairs to the library."

St. George sat down a moment later, derby hat held between his legs.

"I have come," he said, "on personal business. To make a deal. You own a certain book—"

"I own thousands of books." Chandler waved his hand at the huge cases jammed with volumes. "Never read 'em. Just buy 'em to show off. I'm too busy for reading."

"But this is a very special book," St. George insisted.

"Special? What's special about any book? Maybe you mean this one?" Chandler slammed his hand down on a volume that looked as though it might turn to dust under the weight of a toothpick.

"Paid twenty-four thousand dollars for it. Don't ask me why, except that a friend of mine paid fifteen thousand for some other piece of junk, so I wanted to show him up."

"That," St. George gulped, "is the very book—I—want."

Chandler gave him a peculiar glance. "An assistant bank cashier who wants to spend twenty-four thousand on a book. Are you serious, Mr.—er—St. George?"

Chandler laid the name card down and then tucked it beneath the leather binding of the desk blotter.

St. George answered rather quickly this time. He was getting sore. "I can pay for it and give you a slight profit. The volume is of no use to you. It is to me. I'm a collector."

Chandler's grin died away. "Oh, I see. This book is very valuable then. The title is dim. It says—'Laws of Osiris.' What's that mean?"

St. George remained quietly seated. There was nothing in his outward appearance to indicate what seethed within him.

"Osiris was a god—a myth, some people claim. I know better. Originally, this volume was written as a scroll by Thoth, the god of wisdom. Somehow, it passed into mortal hands and was reproduced. The volume you hold was never printed, Mr. Chandler. It's handwritten, by holy men of ages past."

"Is that so?" Chandler raised his eyebrows. "What do you want with it?"

"By studying that book," St. George said patiently, "I may find a clue to another scroll. Perhaps the most ancient one in history. I want it. Now will you name a reasonable price?"

"I really don't know," Chandler frowned. "Perhaps this volume belongs in a museum so that everyone can see it or even study it. I'm afraid, Mr. St. George, that I need the advice of other people before I should be willing to dispose of it to anyone."

"That is your final decision, Mr. Chandler?" St. George's voice was icy.

"I'm afraid so," Chandler replied. "I hope you see things my way."

"Does your wife like cats?" St. George

asked almost pleasantly. "Mangy, flea-bitten cats, Mr. Chandler?"

"She hates animals," Chandler replied. "Why? What's it got to do with—"

ST. GEORGE raised his hand and made that mysterious sign. Chandler stiffened. At his feet appeared an old cat, fur half-torn off, one ear flopping badly and a tail minus fur. It was probably the ugliest cat St. George had ever seen. It let out a yowl. St. George kicked at it. The cat scampered beneath the desk and kept up its yowling.

St. George seized the volume he coveted, found a piece of paper and carefully wrapped it. Then he paused to regard the lifeless, erect figure of Lloyd Chandler. He rubbed his chin in thought, walked over to a window and peered out. The concrete driveway was just beneath.

St. George's lips parted in a nasty little smile. He got behind Chandler, held him under the armpits and by degrees, pushed him over toward the window. He raised the sash all the way.

The mangy cat was out from under the desk, regarding all this with constant yowls.

"I wish I had time to talk to you," St. George said softly. "It would be very nice to tell you the fate in store. So, Mrs. Chandler hates cats. Wait until she sees the specimen you are."

St. George slid the stiff corpse back a little, tipped it and then raised the feet off the floor. He thrust it out of the window so it balanced. Then he very carefully allowed the head to point straight at the concrete driveway. He gave a little push. The form slid out. There was a crunch as the skull hit the pavement and the form went limp.

As that happened, the mangy cat gave vent to a screech of terror and began running around the room madly. St. George avoided it, reached the door and hurried downstairs.

Someone was asking what had happened in a very shrill voice. That would be Mrs. Chandler. St. George allowed himself a smug smile. This was the first time he'd ever enjoyed the fruits of his long years working over ancient books

and perfecting an apparatus which one of the greatest scientists the world had ever known, only began.

Before the body of Chandler was discovered, St. George was a long way from the house and highly delighted with himself. In the first place, not a soul had seen him enter. No one knew he had been there, he had not been expected. In fact, the household of Lloyd Chandler didn't know he existed.

But Rodney St. George had forgotten one little item. His name card was still thrust under the leather binding of Chandler's blotter.

CHAPTER XII

Mental Examination

JUST about the time that Chandler was turned into an alley cat, Dr. Jamison was pacing the floor of his private offices at the sanitarium. His eyes glittered, his hands clenched and unclenched. Finally, he picked up the telephone on his desk.

"Send the patient, James Downing, to my office at once. I wish to examine him further," he ordered.

Downing walked in, escorted by two husky guards. Jamison offered him a cigarette, lit it and then spoke to the guards.

"There is no need to remain. Mr. Downing will feel much more at ease without you around. There is nothing to worry about. I know my patients."

"Thanks," Downing said after the guards withdrew. "I'm glad somebody doesn't expect me to rip the place apart every time I raised my hand."

Jamison smiled and sat down behind his desk.

"Downing, the hallucination you suffered interests me tremendously. It's something new. I've never come across it before. Do you mind talking about the experience?"

"Not at all," Downing replied. "The fact is, Doctor, I don't want to leave this institution, so let's make it quite clear

now that I'm crazy. I'm as nuts as Adolph over there in Berlin when he thinks he can take over the world."

"Well," Jamison laughed. "Your description of insanity should be written up in medical books. Why do you wish to remain?"

"Frankly," Downing said, "because I'm afraid. Now laugh. Go ahead. Or else cluck your tongue in sympathy. It makes no difference. I'm happy."

Jamison leaned forward. "If I promise not to make any derisive or sympathetic remarks, will you just relate the whole thing to me? From a psychiatrist's point of view, your case is astounding. It's in a classification all by itself."

"Sure it does," Downing replied, "because it happens to be the truth coming from the lips and the brain of a sane man. This Rodney St. George is not a normal being, Doctor. Anything but that. I think I have him pegged when I say he has been a very retiring man for many, many years. He worked hard and faithfully to get money enough to carry on his experiments. Now that he has attained success, I don't know what will happen. That is, if I don't get him in time."

"What do you mean by that remark, Mr. Downing?"

"To put it quite simply, I propose to kill him. That's another reason why I want to keep on being adjudged nuts. A crackpot can't be punished for murder, especially one who is confined to an institution at the time of the murder."

"Oh," Dr. Jamison said. "I see. But the story. What makes you think this St. George does possess such powers? Where did he derive them?"

"The first question is easily answered." Downing inhaled a long pull at the cigarette. "He turned me into a kitten, turned himself into a big black cat and he spoke to me and four other persons he'd also changed into cats. Don't ask me how we spoke. Cat language, I suppose, but it made sense. We understood one another."

"And the second part of my question—about where St. George got his powers?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea except that he owns a collection of very odd books. Volumes on ancient gods and their alleged tricks. On magic and the black arts. Maybe he's a cousin of the Devil, I don't know."

"But you do know that he can change men into cats. Is that true?"

"It is. Now, Doctor, I know this will go no further. A so-called madman's dreams are of no particular interest and certainly aren't investigated, so I'll also say this. St. George, at the present time, doesn't seem to realize the power he possesses."

"Go on," Jamison said. "This is quite absorbing."

DOWNING glanced at the other and frowned.

"I may have to take that statement back," he said. "Perhaps he does know, but refuses to use these powers very much for fear of exposing himself. He's after something else. Something even greater than the changing of men into animals or insects. Maybe birds or fish."

"Can he alter a human into any other form other than that of a cat?"

"He turned me from a kitten into a mouse and sent those four cats after me. Man alive, that was a nightmare!"

"*Hmm*, so I imagine." Dr. Jamison pressed his fingertips together. "Now haven't you the vaguest idea as to what St. George is striving for beyond those powers he already possesses?"

"No. All I can say is that the four cats who were once men, want to protect St. George because he can do something for them. I think they'd fight anything to protect him. I—Doctor—your wrist! It's scratched badly. Scratched as if a cat's claws did it."

Jamison hastily pulled down his sleeves.

He smiled somewhat nervously.

"A cat did that all right, Downing. This one wasn't converted into a feline. Just a woman who was brought in here this afternoon. She was raving mad and became quite violent. Had long fingernails and I received a sample of them."

"Oh," Downing grunted. "I wondered

if you knew more about this business than you pretended. But then, how could you? I guess staying here is driving me a little wacky."

Dr. Jamison offered another cigarette. "I'm deeply grateful for your patience, Mr. Downing. Believe me, I shall study your case. If anything can be done for you, rest assured it will be."

"Then you don't believe me?" Downing asked as he peered above the flame which Jamison held for his cigarette.

"Do you expect me to?" the doctor asked with a smile.

"No, I guess not," Downing said wearily. "I wouldn't believe anybody else who told a wild story like that. I hope though, that whatever treatment you have in mind, won't be—"

A telephone jangled in the next office. Jamison excused himself, got up and walked toward the door. Downing's eyes narrowed a bit. He saw fur on Jamison's trouser legs. Orange-colored hair, gray, black and white hair. Cat fur! Those scratches hadn't come from any maniac!

Downing settled deeper in his chair and wondered what was going to happen next. Was Jamison associated with St. George, perhaps? Or had he believed the fantastic story and gone to investigate? Downing spotted a key ring on the doctor's desk. He got up quietly, made sure Jamison was still talking on that phone and then hastily removed one key from the ring. It was the key to his room. A peculiarly shaped key which he recognized instantly.

He tucked this into his pocket and was relaxed when Jamison returned. The doctor didn't sit down.

"I've some urgent business," he explained. "Sorry to cut our interview off like this, but tomorrow, perhaps, we'll have another chat. Meanwhile, Downing, I wouldn't talk about cats to anyone else. Try to clear your mind of them. It will help."

"Thanks," Downing said. "I'll do my best."

THE two guards returned after Jamison pressed a button. Downing walked out between them, still smoking

his cigarette.

"Say, boys," he looked at the guards, "you fellows have a pretty tough time here. I heard that woman brought in this afternoon. She put up quite a battle, didn't she?"

"What woman?" one guard asked. "There were no admittances today. Not one. What are you talking about, Mister? Oh—I get it. Yeah, we have patients who get violent all the time. That's because they don't obey the doc, see? You just take your medicine and rest easy. You'll be out of here before you know it. Here's the room, friend. Have a good night's sleep."

They closed the door on him and he heard the lock turn. He also heard that same guard express an opinion to his mate.

"Boy, sometimes these bugs get me going. Imagine that guy? First, he gets changed into a cat, and then he hears violent cases being brought in. Humor 'em, that's what I say."

Downing sat down on his bed and began to toss that key into the air. The key to freedom. But Downing was much less concerned with the idea of freedom than he was about Dr. Jamison.

From the first, Jamison had displayed too much interest in the story about cats. It was almost as though he expected a tale of this kind to crop out some day, somewhere. He had made no great attempt to treat Downing. Perhaps he didn't think the patient was insane.

Downing possessed a rapidly growing idea that Dr. Jamison was on the verge of causing some trouble.

CHAPTER XIII

None to Oppose Him

RODNEY ST. GEORGE started walking toward the street where he could get a crosstown bus and thence transfer to another bus which would take him home. He saw a taxi stand and hesitated. The only time he'd ever used a taxi was a dozen years before when

he'd sprained an ankle and had worked anyhow.

He got into the cab, brusksly gave his address and leaned back to enjoy the ride.

"Why shouldn't I ride these all the time?" he asked himself. "What's money to me? I can get all I need. Why shouldn't I enjoy the better things in life after those years of struggling to learn the secrets I now possess?"

His thoughts were following the same vein when he reached home, paid the taxi driver and added a five-cent tip. He wondered why the driver made a derisive noise with his lips, but St. George minced eagerly into his home with the precious book held tightly under one arm.

When he unlocked the door, there were no cats to greet him, fawn over him. He saw their green eyes reflecting light from beneath various tables and chairs. They were afraid of him. St. George smiled grimly. He was glad they feared him.

Much as he wished to study this volume, there was a detail which needed attention. The cellar window was still broken. He changed to older clothes, hurried to the cellar and felt elated that he'd carefully put away a sizeable piece of glass some fifteen years ago. He found this, cut a pane of the required size and puttied it into the frame. He screwed back the steel bars and felt a little better.

He took a quick look in that hidden room and hesitated a moment. It was about time for another of those treatments beneath the machine, but he felt tired and decided to let it go until morning.

Upstairs again, he closed the door of his living room, adjusted a lamp and settled behind the desk to study that book. It was written in Latin, but St. George had long ago mastered the language. He read and weighed each word. As the pages slowly turned, he became more and more excited. Here was the clue which might lead him to the final scroll which held the greatest secret of all. He made copious notes, memorized them and then destroyed the

bits of paper.

There was something else, too, in that volume, which interested him. A clock struck twice. He'd forgotten all about sleep and he felt tired. The rest could wait until tomorrow. He had plenty of time. St. George put the book away and went to his bedroom. Not once did the cats put in an appearance. He cared little about that and when he recalled that they hadn't been fed all day, he chuckled. Good enough for them.

He started removing his clothes and suddenly St. George froze. His eyes grew round in fear. That blasted name card he'd given to Chandler. It was still in the rich man's house. They'd find it and come to him for information. What could he tell them? Something about business for the bank? No! Who would verify it? He climbed into bed and tossed for an hour before he fell into a tortured sleep.

The next morning he went to the bank via his usual route and method, but he stopped to buy a morning paper. At precisely nine, the bank doors swung open and he went through, greeting the guards with a curt nod.

In his office he settled down to read the item about Chandler's death. Most of it concerned the man's history and associations.

Lloyd Chandler, millionaire financier, was either murdered or accidentally fell out of the second story window of his home. The police are inclined to the murder theory despite the fact there were no signs of a struggle and no one in the house heard an intruder. A very valuable book, a relic worth thousands of dollars, was missing. Nothing else had been taken, police learned after a careful check.

Oddly enough, a stray cat was found in the room from which Chandler fell to his death. No one could account for the presence of the animal and it was turned over to the S.P.C.A. for disposal. Police wonder if the cat could have accompanied a murderer into the house. Further investigations are in progress and the police promise quick results.

ST. GEORGE folded the newspaper and laid it on his desk. He mopped beads of sweat from his forehead. That statement about the police promising quick results worried him. There was

no mention of Rodney St. George's name card being found and that gave him the jitters. Obviously, the police wouldn't publicize their only clue.

The worry that crammed his system was registered in his apple cheeks and his mild little eyes. He arose and paced the floor, something he'd never done before. There was a slight sound behind him and he jumped nervously.

Dick Zarat, the office boy, stood there with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Oh," St. George snapped. "It's you. Well?"

Dick laid the papers on the desk. "Mr. Arnold wants you to check and okay these. Say—you look like you've just heard a lot of bad news. Maybe you knew Chandler, huh? I see you were reading all about his death."

St. George minced over behind his desk and sat down primly.

"You have worked here for three years, Zarat. For three years I have stood for your arrogance and ridicule. I no longer have to do that. You're fired. Get out!"

Dick stepped back a few paces and gaped.

"But—but I didn't mean anything, Mr. St. George—sir. Honest I didn't. You can't fire me for just—"

"I can do anything I wish," St. George shouted. "You are discharged. Get out of my office."

With a sound like a sob in his throat, the boy fled from the room. St. George curled his lip, tapped the flat of the desk for a moment and then hurled the newspaper into the wastebasket.

"I can do anything I want," he repeated the phrase he'd thundered at the boy. It sounded very good because he *could* do anything he wished. Who was there to stop him? All he had to do was make the sign and—no more opposition. He was somebody, after all those years. He was even bigger than this job as assistant cashier.

Then St. George forced such ideas out of his mind. It wasn't yet time to exert those powers of his. When he had them all, then he'd let certain people know about it. Gradually, he began thinking

of Pamela Brooke and he was smiling gently when Arnold, the president of the bank, walked in.

Arnold sat down. "Good morning, Rodney. I'm calling you Rodney because executives use first names, you know. What's this about Dick?"

"He was insolent," St. George said. "I fired him."

"Yes, yes, I know. Dick came to see me. Now, Rodney, why not give the boy another chance? He's done good work here and he is just a boy. Takes time to develop respect. We might lose a good man by letting him go. Suppose he apologizes and you call the whole thing off, eh?"

For a bare instant St. George wondered how Arnold would like being a cat. A skinny, mauled alley cat of nondescript color. But he thought better.

"Very well," he agreed. "If you wish it, I am willing to take him back."

"Fine, fine," Arnold arose. "I'll send him in. You've the makings of a real executive, Rodney. A real executive."

Dick Zarat came in shortly afterward to make a meek apology, and St. George waved his hand magnanimously.

"Quite all right, Dick. All of us lose our heads now and then. We'll forget all about it."

"Thank you, sir," Dick said. "I have a letter for you. It came to the bank so I opened it. A bill for some name cards. Here it is. You want me to have a check sent out, sir?"

St. George's jaws came together with a snap. "Yes, pay it. That's all."

THOSE cursed name cards again. St. George clenched his fists. There'd been a peculiar look in the boy's eyes. Did he know something? Had the police been to the bank and was Dick suspicious? It was odd how St. George feared the police, but it was an inbred terror deriving from those years when he'd feared everyone.

The police couldn't hurt him. This he knew, but the time wasn't ripe yet. He had to get that last scroll and learn the final secret. He had to complete his study of the book he'd taken from

Chandler, squeeze from it still another ancient secret which was bound to prove very useful. And this office boy probably knew and laughed behind his back. Gloated because he knew the police would soon act on this information about the name cards.

Something had to be done about that boy. And St. George realized he needed big money. Once on the trail of the scroll, he might be forced to purchase it rather than steal it. Taking that book from Chandler had developed almost fatal results. St. George shivered and tried to work.

Just before noon, St. George walked out of the bank. He could take a longer lunch hour now. Not that he needed it. He still possessed his frugal nature and the spaghetti palace had good, cheap food. He started walking rapidly down the street, hard heels clicking with each step.

The streets were crowded and he bobbed in and out of the throng like a sparrow hunting for food. The derby, with a clumsily repaired bullet hole through the crown, rested precariously on his head, but stayed there by some miracle.

His steps were in tempo with his thoughts. He wondered if he should buy a pair of high-heeled shoes to give him added height. Being small had always bothered him. He cherished the idea for a couple of blocks and then put it firmly out of his mind. If he got any money, he'd need every cent. That scroll meant everything to him.

Halfway to the restaurant, he remembered that detectives might be watching him. He looked nervously over one shoulder and gave a startled gasp. Dick Zarat, the office boy, was about two blocks away and coming up fast. He had a briefcase tightly held beneath one arm.

St. George knew what was in the briefcase. Fifteen thousand dollars in payroll cash destined for a firm further down the side street which St. George was now crossing. He wheeled and proceeded along that street. It was a narrow thoroughfare and many of the build-

ings were old rundown places which had been unoccupied for years.

St. George stepped into a doorway, tried the door and found it open. He entered a dismal corridor, listened and heard no signs of life. He saw a stairway, the bannister of which had almost fallen away. Some of the supporting pieces of wood sagged dejectedly. St. George yanked one loose and hefted it.

THE fifteen thousand dollars in that briefcase would fit nicely in his plans. He had to have it and at the same time take some measure of revenge against the office boy. Things were working out. Best of all, nobody at the bank would suspect that St. George knew Dick Zarat carried this money.

St. George returned to the dark corner just inside the door, raised his hand and made the sign. His body stiffened, still holding that length of wood. At his feet appeared a tiny brown-and-white puppy. It darted through the partially opened door and stood there waiting until Dick Zarat came along.

Then the puppy raised one paw as if it was injured and began to whine piteously. St. George's brain, lodged in that puppy, knew very well that no American boy could pass up an injured puppy.

Dick Zarat slowed up even though he had orders not to stop for anything. The bank used him to carry this cash because it was figured that bandits would never suspect a boy of carrying a payroll.

This time Dick Zarat forgot all about his instructions. He made friendly signs to the puppy, entered the doorway and tried to pick it up. The puppy, still squealing, retreated. Dick Zarat made another attempt to seize it and see what was the matter with its leg. The puppy darted through the door.

Dick Zarat hesitated until the squeals of the puppy came more piteously than ever from the hall. Dick pushed the door open and stepped inside. At that instant the puppy raised one paw, made the sign and vanished. The erect form of St. George moved fast. Dick Zarat

saw none of this. He was bent over trying to spot the puppy in the gloom.

The club landed on the back of his neck. He fell heavily and lay still. St. George hastily jerked the briefcase from under the fallen boy, extracted the money and tucked it into his inner pocket. He dropped the briefcase quickly, examined Dick for a second and saw that he was just knocked out. Then St. George hurriedly made an exit, reached the cross artery and walked rapidly in the direction of the restaurant.

He felt considerably elated—just like the moment when he had converted Lloyd Chandler. It seemed pleasant to use his powers for personal profit. Dick Zarat wasn't badly hurt, but when he tried to explain what had happened the chances were he'd be fired. St. George smiled smugly. He'd gain his own ends from now on. None could oppose him.

CHAPTER XIV

Alibi

ROCCO, owner of the Spaghetti Palace, saw St. George heading toward his door with the fastest steps he'd ever seen the little guy use. Rocco clapped his hands and Luigi hastened up.

"He comes," Rocco said. "There was something about no tip last time. You wish to wait on him again, eh, Luigi?"

"Yes. He may tip double today. Perhaps I get ten cents. I wish to see. Rocco—please—let me dump the 'spaghet' down his neck. Just once, eh?"

"Later, maybe," Rocco promised. "I am getting sick of him, anyway. Twenty years is too long to see a face like that every day. Later maybe. Maybe I do it myself."

St. George greeted Rocco with a nervous nod, wended his way between tables and heard his name called. He stopped short and broke into a cold sweat.

"Mr. St. George," the voice said. "I'm so happy to see you again."

He saw Pamela sitting at the table

which he usually occupied. St. George doffed his hat, forgot all about Dick Zarat and everything else. He basked in her warm smile.

"May I sit down?" he asked.

"Please do. That is, if the new assistant cashier will dine with a sales girl who works in a seedy old book store."

"Delighted. Absolutely delighted." St. George sat down. "We shall start with wine, eh? Luigi, wine. The best this time. The very best."

Luigi clapped a hand to his forehead. "*Madre mia*, I go crazy. The best. Ah *si, si*. The best it shall be."

Luigi served the meal with more decorum than he'd ever shown St. George before. He withdrew, but kept his eye on the table, ready to jump if anything was needed.

St. George, reaching for his glass of water, brushed hands with Pamela and then, summoning all his nerve, he took her hand firmly. It was smooth and warm. He liked the sensation.

"Please," she withdrew the hand. "Not quite so openly, Rodney."

"I'm sorry," St. George mumbled.

She leaned across the table. "Why? I like it. Rodney, I see we're going to be great friends. I haven't Jim any more and now that I never see him, I realize he just wasn't the man for me."

"You were in love with him," St. George said suspiciously.

She smiled. "Love is such an abstract thing, Rodney. Take Jim away and I forget. Then you come along."

St. George beamed and swallowed half a glass of potent wine. Like the whiskey, it warmed him, gave him a superior feeling.

"Then perhaps I can see you again? Dinner, maybe. If—if you don't mind going out with a-a little fellow like me."

"Nonsense," Pamela said. "It's not how high a man stands from the floor that's important. It's what's in here." She tapped her forehead significantly.

"Of course I'll see you," she went on. "Not dinner though. I can't make it. Perhaps later—say nine o'clock? I could come to your house. I can't ask you to call on me. I live in a boarding house.

You understand?"

"Yes. Yes, of course," St. George said eagerly. "Please do come. I-I have some books I want to show you. Perhaps we can talk about another book—rather, a scroll I need very badly. You might be able to help me find it."

"I'm sure I could," Pamela said, rising. "But I'll be late. See how gracious company makes me forget the time, Rodney?"

ST. GEORGE left a carefully folded dollar bill on the table. As he walked out, Luigi picked it up and practically raced to the desk where Rocco lorded over the cash register.

"I am astonish!" Luigi gasped. "If Mussolini returned to Rome and grew hair on that bald dome of his, I would not be so astonish. A dollar he gave me. For lunch. A dollar! The world has change. Rocco, you do me a favor, *si*? You tell nobody about this. I wait on him every day. The others hate him, but a dollar tip is different."

St. George walked on air back to the bank. Dark clouds loomed suddenly though. He saw a police car parked down the street in front of the doorway where Dick Zarat had fallen. St. George shivered and walked faster.

The bank was filled with policemen. A guard stopped St. George and whispered to him.

"Boy—er—Mr. St. George, things are popping. Poor Dick Zarat was knocked out and fifteen grand swiped from his briefcase. The cops are questioning everybody. They figure it was an inside job because nobody knew Dick carried all that dough."

"Oh, my goodness," St. George gasped. "That's awful. Simply terrible. I must see if there is anything I can do."

He walked into his office and found Arnold waiting for him. Arnold looked very grave.

"Sit down, Rodney," he said. "You heard what happened, of course. The police are checking. Did you know that Dick carried that cash?"

"I? Good heavens, no!"

"That's fine," Arnold said. "You would have found out in the normal course of events, but since you have been the assistant cashier only a day, it was improbable for such information to reach you. Dick was attacked not far from the restaurant where you eat. Rodney, just for the record, what time did you arrive at the restaurant? You left here at ten minutes of twelve."

St. George wondered if he showed the agitation seething within him. He'd taken almost twenty minutes to cover that five-minute walk. He couldn't explain the discrepancy. The police might start wondering about Chandler's death, too. They might tie him up with it.

He had to take a chance. Perhaps Pamela didn't know what time he had appeared. She was his only alibi, a very brittle one. He drew a long breath.

"I reached the restaurant where I usually eat at a few minutes before twelve, Mr. Arnold. I had lunch with a young lady. Mr. Downing's former fiancée. I think she can testify to the time. She works at Mazur and Company, book dealers. She's probably there now if you wish to reach her."

Arnold picked up the phone.

"Mind you, Rodney, I certainly don't suspect anything, but I'd rather establish your alibi than have the police do it. They can be very crude at times."

St. George didn't breathe at all for two minutes. Arnold got Pamela on the phone, talked and listened a few moments and then hung up.

"Well," he said, "that's that. Miss Brooks is willing to swear that you arrived just before twelve. She was waiting for you and kept looking at her watch. Rodney, why is your hand raised like that?"

St. George dropped his hand. "I—I was nervous, sir. Didn't know what I was doing. Thank you for corroborating my alibi. I know the police will demand one of every employee."

After Arnold left, St. George wilted against the leather cushions of his chair. He remembered that he'd forgotten to remove his hat. He flung it toward the hatrack.

WHY had Pamela lied? Perhaps her watch was wrong and she believed she was telling the truth. She said she had been waiting for him. St. George smiled a little. That was nice to know. And she was coming to his house tonight. He actually did need her help. Finding that final scroll would be difficult, but she could handle it without incurring any suspicion. Things were working beautifully.

One thing St. George knew very firmly. Once he had extracted the secret from Chandler's book, discovered the missing scroll and digested the information it contained, there'd no longer be any reason for him to sit back and stay mild and meek. He could assert himself. The police could suspect all they wished then.

"Think of it," St. George whispered to himself. "I shall never die. Never. I shall be afraid of no one, but the world will fear me. Important men will crawl to me, begging for my secret."

Nevertheless, the rest of that day was a nightmare. St. George could scarcely do his work or concentrate when others spoke to him. Police were all over the place. Dick Zarat was practically under arrest. That disposed of him.

Also, St. George had fifteen thousand dollars which would help to buy the final scroll in which the last secret St. George wished for would be found. If only the blasted police would stop poking around.

Mixed with his worry was some measure of self-confidence, too, and by quitting time, it was well to the fore. Along with the inflation of his ego which had lain dormant all these years came an almost irresistible urge to tell someone about his powers. He wished that Pamela were here.

He went home by taxi. After all, with fifteen thousand easily acquired dollars in his pocket, he could afford such luxury. He even parted with a ten-cent tip.

Inside the house, he recalled that he'd forgotten to buy food for the cats. Curse them! This was the second day they'd go hungry, but he didn't care much. They stayed away from him, hungry or not. The corpse of the cat who had been

Logan, still lay on the floor.

He spent a few minutes burying it in the back yard. Then he proceeded to the cellar, went into that hidden room and lay down on the table. He snapped a switch, listened contentedly to the hum of the motors. After ten minutes he shut off the apparatus and returned to his living room.

Locking himself in, he sat down to study Chandler's book. This was almost the final lap. In the book he now studied, he was sure to find clues which would identify for him that scroll upon which was written the greatest secret of all time, the secret of immortality.

That, and nothing else would bring him to the peak of perfection. Make of him someone to surpass the deeds of the greatest men of the ages. His mind had difficulty concentrating. Too many material things drifted through his brain.

Little guy, was he? Perhaps—but as Pamela put it, the size of a man's brain was what counted. Some day, the biggest of men would come crawling to him, begging his favor. Men like Chandler and Arnold, used to giving orders, not taking them. Just one more step . . . only one.

He thought of Jim Downing rotting away in an asylum. Why, Jim Downing was almost twice as big, but what had his size and strength availed him? Nothing, because no one alive could compete with Rodney St. George and the knowledge he had assimilated.

Gradually, he began concentrating. This book was a real find. If Chandler had possessed the brain to recognize and comprehend this work, he would have been willing to pay a hundred times twenty-four thousand dollars.

"One of the Hermetic books," St. George whispered aloud and once again he wished he had an audience. "Created by Hermes himself. Myth, was he? I'd like to see what people will think when I show them. Hermes, messenger of the gods. Son of Zeus and Maia! Winged sandals to transport him anywhere in the world. But the winged sandals were just a symbol. Hermes transported himself through powers he learned from the

older gods. Powers which are described here. The Tau cross. Hermes' own symbol. That's it. The Tau cross!"

He forgot there was a modern world now as he dug deeper and deeper into that volume. Great men had studied it in bygone days and found nothing except that it referred to some abstruse mythology. They didn't have the scientific knowledge of Rodney St. George. They didn't have the faith, despite their great names and reputations.

CHAPTER XV

The Tau Cross

IT WAS still early evening when St. George finally closed the Osiris book after having read the last page. Experimentally, he raised one hand and drew a straight line in the air. Then he crossed this with a curved line, as the letter 'T' is sometimes written.

This was a second sacred symbol, like the staff and entwining serpent with which he could convert men's psyche into cats. St. George loosened his collar and patted his fat little face with a handkerchief. If anything went wrong now, there'd be no telling what would happen, yet he had to go through with the experiment. He'd just gained knowledge and power beyond belief. Associated with what he already knew—why, he might even reach a peak to which a mortal's imagination couldn't even touch.

The final test was at hand. "If I am right," he said aloud, "I can transport myself to any point I so desire. Just as Hermes traveled. We shall see."

He pushed back his chair and sat very erect in it. He raised his hand and carefully drew the Tau cross in midair. At the same moment he mentally concentrated on being in the next room.

The world spun madly, everything became blurred. He had the sensation of moving through space at a terrific rate of speed. Then things cleared. He heard the mewling of his cats. He was in the next room!

Fear or no fear, his astounding appearance brought the three cats into the middle of the floor and they looked up at him with almost human consternation in their eyes. St. George paid no attention to them. He deliberately kicked his shin against the leg of a table and felt pain. That meant he was literally and actually here, in the flesh. There was nothing left in that other room.

Holding his breath, he went back to the living room. There was no evidence that he'd just been there. St. George's elation was something to behold then. He pranced about the room, pausing to pat his latest book lovingly. He offered up mental thanks to the so-called mythical gods of ancient times.

"The bank," he said aloud. "Could I go there? That far?"

He drew the cross, willed that he be inside the great vault. Once more, he had that eerie feeling of being whisked through space, merging with the jumble of noise and flashes of light he'd already experienced.

He felt cold suddenly. He was hemmed in. Then he smiled, for it was the steel vault that hemmed him in. He'd materialized perfectly within the bank vault. Orienting himself rapidly, he pawed through currency that ran into the hundreds of thousands. St. George smiled and began helping himself.

Then he paused. This wasn't quite the thing to do. Not yet. Too many things had happened at the bank. One more might make people wonder if Downing hadn't been right after all. St. George deliberately replaced the money.

He glanced at his watch and realized it was almost time for Pamela to arrive at his home. Then he broke out in a cold sweat. He used this power twice. What if he hadn't taken enough of those amplifying rays from the machine in the cellar? What if his Tau cross wouldn't work this time and they found him suffocated and locked in the vault the next morning?

St. George took a firm grip on his nerves and made the Tau cross. He chose to be transported to his living room at home.

There he was, too. He heaved a long sigh of relief that turned into a gurgle. A powerful arm was suddenly curled around his neck from behind and another arm held his hands at his sides so he couldn't make any signs.

The choking continued until things blurred. At no time could St. George see his assailant, nor did he have the slightest chance to use either hand and make the sign. The blurred sensation deepened and then became jet black.

WHEN he awakened, he was seated in a chair in his secret basement room, his arms lashed to it. He was as helpless as if he never possessed any power at all. To make matters worse he was inside his own laboratory and the man who stood grinning down at him was a comparative stranger. St. George had seen him only once or twice before. It was the same man who had trailed him home.

"Feeling better, St. George?" the man asked.

"Who are you?" St. George moaned. "What is the meaning of this?"

The man grinned. "All I'll say now is that my name is Jamison. St. George, you and I have worked on the same problem, but you discovered the secret first. I think I am entitled to share in it."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," St. George gasped.

"Don't be silly. Of course you do. Now while you were recovering, I took time to examine this neat instrument of yours. It's an X-ray machine except for one thing. The tubes are different. They are distinctly unique in design. You are a clever man, St. George. How does this operate?"

"I'll show you if you cut me loose," St. George said with astonishing calmness.

Jamison laughed. "Oh, no, you don't. If I release even one hand, you'll make a sign and I'll become a cat or a dog or a frog or something like that. I know you have to make that sign, St. George. It is the method of releasing the power stored up inside yourself. The trigger, if you prefer, which enables that power to flow from you into any victim you select.

Without making the sign, you are quite impotent."

St. George realized his secret was all but out. This man knew almost as much as he did. There was no use bluffing. Not now.

"What do you wish with me?" he asked.

"A partnership. A knowledge of this strange tube and just how it stores up your powers. In fact, I want everything, but we shall work together, eh?"

"I think not," St. George answered. "What I have developed is mine alone. I shall use it as I see fit."

"Look here," Jamison said tensely, "together we could practically rule the world. Who could stop us? We'd have money, anything else we wished. Those who got in our way could be turned into animals. We'd be supreme. Can't you realize that?"

"I have realized it for quite some time," St. George stated coldly. "Yes, my powers will enable me to be supreme. But I shall share my knowledge with no one. That is final."

Jamison shrugged, reached into his pocket and drew out a flat kit. He took a hypodermic needle from it. The syringe was loaded. He squirted a small portion of the contents experimentally. Then he approached St. George, and the diminutive bank clerk felt complete terror surging through him.

"You will explain the machine," Jamison said curtly. "Either that or I'll inject a fluid into your veins which will cause you to die in agony. Once injected there is no antidote. You'd better talk, St. George. I'm not to be trifled with when I have something as great as this almost within my grasp."

"Wait!" St. George cried. "Wait—I'll tell you about the machine. I'll bargain with you. Yes, we can work together."

Jamison laid down the needle and smiled. "That's much better. Go ahead. While you describe it, I'll check on the machine itself."

ST. GEORGE uttered a long sigh of despair. He had no remedy for getting free, no way of whittling Jamison

down. All he could do was stall and in so doing he had to admit some of the truth. Jamison couldn't be fooled.

"It began years ago," St. George said in resignation. "I accidentally stumbled upon an ancient volume having to do with sorcery. I realized the people of those times believed in it. So did the sorcerers because they felt they were on the right track and might really develop the powers they were supposed to have. Then I found books about the ancient gods who actually did have those powers. They were not myths. I discovered they performed their miracles by certain powers stored within themselves."

"Granted them by Zeus, the chief god—in reality, something pertaining to enhanced electro-magnetism," Dr. Jamison grunted. "I read that book, too, but I couldn't find the clue to amplify this mental sort of electricity. Go on."

St. George looked at Jamison with a woebegone expression that belied the intense activity of his brain.

"I might have suspected as much," he said quietly. "The ancient sorcerers and the witches of more modern times, used incantations to overpower their victims. Sometimes these worked. Certainly, enough to provide the history that has developed from their actions. Legends may be based on hearsay, but hearsay must have some foundation, don't you think?"

"You're a cool customer," Jamison acknowledged. "Yes, I do agree. My theory is that the sorcerers and witches incorporated into their brews and philtres, certain narcotic agents which caused the minds of their victims to become susceptible. Their brains were no longer able to resist the will power of the sorcerers. There is logic in that."

"Indeed," St. George acknowledged. "The idea of numbing the victim's brain with a drug possibly transmitted from the fumes of the brewing pots, is very good. Whatever methods the ancients used have been lost forever, yet we know they certainly existed."

Jamison eyed his prisoner sharply. "I can't get over it," he said. "I figured you'd become frantic. Yet you sit there

and talk to me as if I were your student."

"You are—in a way." St. George smiled slightly and kept trying to think of a way to get free. "I fear you will never grasp the full significance of my work, however. You will never discover what I use in place of the incantations and the dark brews with their possible narcotic effects. I have superseded those people of fairly recent times and re-discovered the scientific secret of the ancients."

"That remains to be seen," said Dr. Jamison coldly. "I understand more of astro- and electro-physics than you realize. Get on with your explanation of this machine. How did you come to stumble on the right wave-lengths? How did you invent this machine?"

Jamison was scrutinizing the huge glass tube from which the rays were developed.

"I realized I must find a way of concentrating that same power within myself, but it would take modern science to do it. So I studied all sorts of rays, from the cosmic to certain X-rays. These latter alone have the proper ability of penetrating the human body and acting upon it. If I could manufacture a new tube, incorporating certain phases of Sir William Crookes' unfinished work, I might be able to transmit the power via those rays, to my own brain."

"So you finally rigged this tube," Jamison said, nodding. "Splendid bit of work, my friend. Really splendid. You transmit matter in a fourth state into your mind with this tube."

"Yes," St. George admitted ruefully. "It is radiant matter. So long as I am impregnated with the rays I can, by sheer force of will, convert anyone into anything. There is no mind, no material substance which can defy me."

Jamison snapped on the switch. The huge tube glowed a purple color and began a steady singing noise. The light grew brighter and a hissing sound developed. Jamison turned off the switch.

"All right," he said. "You can explain the mechanical details later. Now about this knowledge you derived from the an-

cient books. What of that, St. George? What of—"

The sudden howling of the cats upstairs gave Jamison a bad taste of annoyance.

"I should have killed them," he remarked dispassionately. "St. George, I don't trust you. Especially in this laboratory. You may have some tricks up your sleeve, so I think we shall go somewhere else."

Jamison picked up the hypo and advanced. St. George yelled in alarm as the needle pricked his flesh and sank in. The room began to fade. Vainly, he tried to raise his hand and make that sign. The arm was pinioned helplessly to his chair. Then Rodney St. George lapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XVI

Jamison's Ambition

PAMELA BROOKE neared Rodney St. George's house just in time to see a man step out on the porch and look around. That wasn't St. George, although the figure did look somewhat familiar. Pamela drew back into the shadows and stayed there even after the man hurried off the porch and ran lightly up the street.

She heard a car motor start and a moment later, a sedan stopped in front of St. George's home. The same slender man climbed out, entered the house and when he emerged again, he carried a limp form in his arms.

Pam edged closer until she could make out the marker plate. It carried an M.D. before the numbers. Then she knew. This was Dr. Jamison from the asylum. Somehow he'd conquered St. George and was now taking him away.

Pamela watched him stow St. George onto the floor of the tonneau and then hurry back to the house. Jamison kicked out at three excited cats who blocked the doorway. They retreated and he slammed the door. A moment later the car pulled away.

Pamela didn't wait longer. She began running as fast as she could on high-heeled shoes. She hailed a taxi upon reaching a busier section and was driven straight to the asylum. It required considerable talking before they admitted her to Downing's room.

He recognized the horror in her eyes and sat up in bed.

"Jim!" Pamela cried. "I was right about Dr. Jamison. He just took St. George away in his car. St. George was unconscious."

Downing uttered a curse word with fervor. He swung both feet off the side of the bed.

"Listen, darling, Jamison is in this up to his filthy neck. If anything, he is worse than St. George, because Jamison is ambitious and has more brains. Maybe St. George is ambitious enough, but he is biding his time for the present. Jamison won't."

"I couldn't trail him, Jim. There was no chance. What must I do?"

"The chances are that Jamison will bring St. George right here to this asylum. Why not? If St. George yowled, nobody would think anything of it, and Jamison has a suite on the ground floor with a rear entrance to which his car can easily be driven. I wonder how he got the best of the little runt?"

Pamela glanced at the closed door as if fearful St. George might be standing there.

"Jim," she said slowly, "I've been leading him on, as you suggested. I've a good start on building up his ego. The man is already crawling out of that shell. Why, Jim, did you want me to instill him with ambition when it could be so dangerous?"

"Pam, dear, we can't fight St. George with ordinary weapons. He's immune. Therefore, we must make him think he is supreme, that nothing can break him. Destroy his fear complex, elevate him to a position where he would be able to jeer at someone like me. That's when I can strike. When he is so certain nothing could harm him. But now Jamison has to enter the picture and complicate things."

"What are you going to do?" Pamela asked.

Downing shrugged. "Ten minutes ago, I would have given anyone every penny I own to kill St. George. Now I've got to rescue the little rat. I must, because if Jamison tortures those secrets out of him, Jamison will be even harder to handle."

"But, Jim, you're practically a prisoner here."

"I've got a key. Swiped it from Jamison. Go home, Pam, and stay there. Come back tomorrow if you can. I'll do my best to save St. George unless—" He broke off grimly.

"Yes, Jim? Unless what?"

"Unless I can figure out some way to kill both of them without implicating myself. Call the attendant and run along, Pam. If St. George gets away, your job has only begun."

DOWNING waited twenty minutes before he went into action. Unlocking the door, he opened it an inch and peered out. There was nobody in the corridor. He closed the door behind him, locked it again and then walked on slippered feet toward a stairway. He descended this unmolested. Few guards were on duty at night. The patients were too securely locked up to cause any worry.

Downing knew just where Jamison's suite was. He listened outside the door, heard nothing and tried the knob. The door opened. He stepped into a small hallway and now he could hear voices. Jamison's and Rodney St. George's!

Downing crept forward inch by inch. He picked up a heavy vase as a weapon and rested more or less securely in the fact that St. George would not be able to make that cursed sign. If he could, Jamison would have been converted into a mewling cat long ago.

Downing headed toward a lighted room and the source of Jamison's voice. Pressed against the wall, he risked a quick look inside. St. George was seated in a chair and held there by ropes. Wide leather straps pinned his hands to the arms of the chair so he couldn't

make that ominous sign. St. George sat quietly, tiny eyes glaring at Dr. Jamison.

The psychiatrist had made himself comfortable in another chair and was grinning triumphantly at his prisoner.

"I suppose you wonder who I am," he said. "My name is really Jamison. I'm a doctor—a psychiatrist. I conduct this asylum. I have Downing here. Downing told me all about you—and I believed him. Want to know why, St. George?"

"Naturally, I am interested," St. George said. "What-what happened back there at my home? How did you get in? How did I get here?"

Jamison lit a cigarette and smiled contentedly.

"I'll tell you that much, of course," he said. "I merely broke the lock of a window and entered. You were not in the house, so I waited. Looked around too—and discovered your laboratory. By the way, just how did you appear so suddenly?"

"That is my business," St. George answered testily. "What next?"

"I knew that Jim Downing had rendered you harmless by holding your arms, so I did the same thing. Then, after our little conversation I injected a drug into your neck and you went off to sleep. It was just a soporific. Now suppose we get on with your explanations."

"What if I say no?" St. George queried cautiously.

Jamison shrugged. "I'm a doctor. I know how to make a man suffer beyond anything he has ever dreamed of. I tried to steal that book of Chandler's myself. Did you know that?"

St. George nodded. "Ah, so you broke the cellar window of my home to draw me down there. Then you entered through the door, but my cats stopped you."

"Blasted cats," Jamison snarled. "They all but ate me alive. All right, it was I who sneaked in. When I go back, I'll kill them all. I'll get that book, too."

St. George laughed sarcastically. "You could read every book on the whole subject and it would do you no

good. The real secret lies within my brain. You shall never have it."

Jamison edged his chair closer to St. George and suddenly stuck out the lighted cigarette until it almost touched St. George's eye.

"That's a crude way to make a man talk," Jamison laughed. "Wait until I use a scalpel. Come now, better see this my way. I've studied this, too. That X-ray tube stores into your mind certain rays. You have the power of transmitting these same rays to another person and with them, your command which changes these people into another form. It isn't hypnotism nor mind suggestion, but an actual transmission of orders which are taken up by the body of your victim and with any result you may so command. It's radiant matter. Matter in a fourth state, St. George."

"Madness," St. George muttered. "Stark madness."

"No, it isn't," Jamison snapped angrily. "You have a device to build up those thought waves, to build up the matter in fourth state. You know how to transmit it. Making those signs is just a gesture, but necessary to make the power within you work."

"Madness," St. George repeated, but with less firmness this time.

"Electrical discharge through a rarefied gas produces a dark space, named after Crookes, but never really understood. In this so called 'dark' space you are able to store up mental energy. This, combined with the secrets you learned from ancient books, enables you to assume this power. I'm not crazy, St. George. I mean to have your secret no matter what I have to do. Govern your decision accordingly."

"Let me go free and then we shall discuss it," St. George asked craftily.

JAMISON laughed. "One second after your hands were free, I'd become a cat or something worse. I told you that before."

"Ah, yes," St. George breathed. "Something worse. What, Doctor, is the worst thing a human form could be turned into?"

"Willing to talk about it now, are you?" Jamison said with heavy satisfaction. "Well, as far as I'm concerned, a snake would be about the most vicious thing you could turn a man into. A black snake, perhaps. Personally, I hate serpents."

"Thank you." St. George inclined his head just the slightest. "I shall convert you into a coiling, hissing black snake some day. A very old snake so that you will not live long. Perhaps I shall choose to trample you to death. There will be no poison fangs, Doctor. A black snake is quite harmless."

"All right." Jamison showed a trace of fear now. "I'll admit you could do it—if your hands were free. And if that built up fourth-space matter was strong enough to affect me. You have to absorb that matter now and then, St. George. I mean to find out how you do it. Talk—talk, or, by heavens, I'll go to work with a scalpel!"

Jim Downing took a firmer grip on the vase. It rankled within him that he had to rescue a man he hated. A man as dangerous as anyone who ever came down the ages, but with this power, Jamison would be even worse. Jim Downing sidestepped close to the door.

CHAPTER XVII

The Fourth Space

"**W**AIT," St. George said quickly. "Let's talk it over first."

Downing drew back. He wanted to hear more, to learn as much of the little bank teller's secret as possible so he might destroy the whole thing and be sure of his job.

"Start talking," Jamison snapped.

"In a way," St. George admitted, "I do store up energy. Matter in a fourth state, as you say. I am able to transmit this matter by thought waves to another person. Even to an animal. Carried with these waves are the secrets of ancient gods. Combined with radiant matter, I can put their theories into use—

into actuality."

"Yes, yes," Jamison agreed breathlessly. "Go on."

"I am now on the track of something even bigger," St. George said. "The ability to convert an old man into a young man. There is power beyond any dreams."

"You're right," Jamison agreed, his eyes gleaming. "I must know the secret. Together, we can do anything we choose."

"No," St. George said. "No, Doctor. You use the wrong pronoun. It should be I. Meaning, of course, Rodney St. George."

Jamison jumped up, opened a drawer of a desk and took out a gun. He placed the muzzle of it directly against St. George's temple. The little man blanched and began to shake, but there was defiance in his eyes. And in his voice.

"Shoot," he dared. "Go ahead. Pull the trigger and the secret you want will die with me."

Jamison lowered the gun. With a savage imprecation, he threw it onto a chair slightly behind St. George.

"All right," he said bitterly, "I can't just kill you. But I can make you talk or die the most miserable death in medical history."

"Don't forget what kind of a life an aged black snake lives," St. George reminded.

Jamison shuddered. He opened a kit of surgical instruments and took out a very small scalpel. He lightly drew a line just behind St. George's ear.

"If I cut into you there, the pain will almost drive you mad. There are other places, too. I'm tired of stalling, St. George. Are you going to get down to brass tacks?"

Downing, peering around the edge of the doorway, realized that St. George was weakening. His ego had been punctuated badly and he was for the time being a meek and very frightened little bank teller.

Jamison stood with his back to the door. Downing, the metal vase held high, padded noiselessly forward. He

brought down the vase in a blow calculated to knock Jamison cold for several minutes, but not kill him.

Jamison gave a quiet sob, fell forward and was draped across the chair which St. George occupied. Downing darted toward the chair where the gun lay and scooped it up.

"Downing" St. George cried. "Downing, untie me."

"Do you really think I will?" Downing barked. "See this gun, St. George? I'm debating whether or not to put a bullet through your head right now."

"That's murder." St. George yelled in horror. "You can't do it, Downing. Give me a chance. I swear I'll never forget it. I'll make them let you out of here. I'll—"

"Getting me out of here doesn't make much difference now," Downing interrupted. "I'll always have the stigma of having been locked up in an asylum upon me. And you've stolen Pamela away from me. I still have friends. I know what's going on."

"Downing," St. George pleaded, "I'll forget about your girl. I'll do anything. Just give me a chance."

"No," Downing said curtly. "You don't deserve it. That knowledge tucked away in your mind is dangerous. No man has a right to possess it. Certainly no man like you."

SUDDENLY, St. George gave himself an upward heave. Only the form of Dr. Jamison weighting him down probably saved Downing from being turned into a cat before he knew it. St. George had to push Jamison's body out of the way before he could stand. By the time he stood erect, Downing was close behind him, the gun muzzle pressed tightly against the nape of St. George's neck.

"That was a close call," Downing panted. "So the scalpel Jamison dropped fell where you could reach it and saw yourself free. One move to turn and raise your hand against me, St. George, and you are a dead man."

The little bank teller became rigid in his anxiety to comply. Only his eyes

rolled down to gaze in malice at the body of the unconscious psychiatrist at his feet.

"Downing," St. George said earnestly, "let's sign a truce between you and me. I hold you no anger or hate. I swear I won't raise my hand against you. But this man Jamison—this asylum doctor—is a madman. He is terribly dangerous. He wants my secret and power so he can dominate the whole world. He already knows enough to discover the rest in time if he is allowed to live. He has studied for years as I have.

"We've got to destroy him, Downing. If you are squeamish about killing, just let me turn him into an impotent little animal of some kind. Let me turn him into a snake. You've got to believe me, Downing, or we are both lost."

Jim Downing thought rapidly. Just how was he going to handle this incredible situation? He had overheard enough to realize that St. George was doubtless speaking the truth. Instead of one meek little man who was slowly turning into a maniac, he now had two deadly antagonists to overcome. And it was no longer just a matter of personal safety. The fate of the entire world might well be hanging in the balance.

Downing had not had a clear idea of what he intended doing upon crashing into this party. He had simply acted. But in the back of his subconscious mind had lain the knowledge of what he had to do. Things clarified for him now, like mists rolling back from a matter which had heretofore been obscured.

"No," he grated out. "I am sorry, St. George, but you and Jamison both must die. God forgive me—I must be your executioner!"

The ring of his tones had the finality of death. St. George realized that—and did the only thing he dared do. He bent his wrist slightly upward and with his stiffened index finger made the sign of a tiny Tau cross at his side, concentrating terrifically on his newly acquired power of teleportation.

His body simply evaporated, winking out of existence even as Downing pressed the trigger of his gun again and

again. The bullets sped through empty space to thud into the far wall.

Downing stared open-mouthed at the spot where St. George had stood—just five inches away from him. He had not been prepared for this new trick of the amazing bank teller. St. George had vanished in thin air.

Completely shaken and baffled, Downing lowered the smoking gun and looked blankly around the room. But St. George simply wasn't. He was—just gone.

Dr. Jamison groaned and stirred. Sick from his reaction, Downing had no thought for shooting the psychiatrist now. He thrust the gun into his pajama belt and bent over the unconscious man. He came to a quick decision.

Somehow, St. George was beyond his reach. But Jamison would remain a constant threat to St. George now, and there was no doubt that to kill doctor would only be doing the bank teller a service. Thus, Jamison must continue to live. He must become the lure to draw St. George into a trap from which there must be no escape. But what? And how?

HE HELPED Jamison into a chair. The doctor opened his eyes, saw Downing and groaned.

"You! I might have known. What happened to St. George?"

"I wish I knew," Downing said. "I had him at the point of a gun and was trying to screw up enough courage to put a slug through his head when he just vanished."

"Apport!" Jamison massaged his head. "That's the answer—apport. So he has discovered that secret, too."

"And just what is 'apport'?" Downing asked.

Jamison gave him a stabbing glance. "I don't know that I should tell you anything. St. George was about to talk when you whanged me on the head and let him get away."

"He wanted to turn you into a black snake," Downing said tersely. "I didn't let him. That should prove I must be on your side. Now what is 'apport'?"

"It is a scientific term for the pass-

age of a solid body into or out of a closed cavity—like this room we're in. Some spiritualists can do it, but not as cleverly. Scientists say good faith in the medium helps them put over the trick, but that in itself isn't enough. Ordinarily, we'd have to allow for a hypnotic influence, but with St. George we know it isn't hypnotism."

"This is sheer madness," Downing grunted.

"Are you mad then? Didn't you see St. George vanish before your eyes? Right now he is back at home or anywhere he chose to be, laughing at us. St. George has discovered the disintegration and reconstitution of matter. He disappeared into a fourth dimension of space."

"Like the fourth state of matter you referred to?" Downing asked rather incredulously.

Jamison nodded. "So you know everything, eh? That makes you dangerous, Downing. I mean to have St. George's secret eventually and you can't stop me. I'll have you adjudged incurably insane and put away for life. Nobody will listen to your ravings."

Downing grinned. "I don't think so, Doctor. You see, we have reached a point where we need each other's help. St. George won't rest until you're a crawling, squirming snake. You can't hide from him now. He'll seek you out—"

"Stop!" Jamison clamped his head between both hands and shuddered. "Downing, is there any way to help me? Any way at all?"

Downing sat down in the chair which St. George had occupied.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I know a place where he would never look. You'd be quite safe there so long as I wanted you to be safe. Now I didn't overhear the entire conversation between you two. Suppose St. George was done away with and you had his power. What would you do with it?"

Jamison gave Downing a sly glance. "I am a doctor," he said. "A scientist. Whatever I discovered would be held as a scientific secret. It is too big to be released upon the world. People aren't

ready for it yet. St. George is a few hundred years ahead of his time. His knowledge belongs far in the future, and no man has the right to know that."

"Then I can take your word that this secret would remain a secret to be used for experimental purposes by scientists only?"

"That is my solemn promise. All you have to do is hide me until we can trick St. George. Then I'll make him talk. To use this power he must store up certain rays within his system. Without them he is impotent to do any harm. If we can get him when he hasn't had a chance to absorb the rays, we will have him."

Downing nodded slowly. "That's it. Meanwhile, you must hide. I've got a cabin up at Lake Greenwald. I'll mark it for you on a map. You can reach it quickly and on a small amount of gasoline. Stay there until you hear from me. Don't leave under any circumstances."

"Give me the directions. For heaven's sake, hurry," Jamison said. "He may transport himself back here again at any moment. Help yourself to one of my suits. Anything you wish. I'll even sign a release for you."

"No," Downing said. "I'll remain here because St. George won't pull any of his fancy tricks. There is a certain amount of suspicion attached to him now and if I turn into a cat, the whole thing might blow up in his face. If the law should start hunting him down with riot guns—well, he's not invulnerable, you know, and he can't be on guard constantly."

CHAPTER XVIII

Without Fear

RODNEY St. George sank into a chair when he found himself safe once more in the privacy of his own living room. He saw the hypo which Jamison had used on him and shivered. He was vulnerable under certain conditions and so long as Jamison and Downing lived, he was in mortal danger.

St. George scowled and cursed the fact

that he had been unable to mete out vengeance to that pair. That had been a very narrow escape from the fanatical Downing. He shuddered to think what would have happened had he not had sufficient power for that last teleportation.

He didn't rush to his basement laboratory to absorb more of the ray. That was useless, for both Downing and St. George would have disappeared by now. He would have to wait, bide his time and plan carefully. When the opportune moment came he would strike.

There was still work to be done. He must learn that one last secret. The missing scroll held it and he knew now where that scroll was. Pamela Brooke could get it for him. He had the money and it was better to handle the deal honestly.

The buzzing of his telephone gave St. George the jitters for a few seconds. He answered, and Pamela's voice came over the wire.

"Rodney," she said with a mild degree of exasperation in her voice. "I came to visit you, but there was nobody home. Don't tell me you forgot so soon?"

"Indeed I didn't," St. George declared stoutly. "I was unavoidably detained this evening. I promise it will never happen again, Pamela. And I must see you. It's vitally important."

"Not tonight," Pamela answered. "It's late, and besides you deserve to be punished for standing me up."

"Tomorrow night will do," St. George said. "Or better yet—how about luncheon at the usual place and then another appointment for the evening? There is something you can do for me."

"I'll be at the regular table, Rodney. Good night—dear."

St. George basked in that 'dear' for a few moments. Then the howling of his hungry cats aroused him. For a moment he toyed with the idea of killing them all but rejected it. They had been of slight service against both Downing and Jamison. Perhaps he could use them again.

He went out, therefore, and bought food and milk for them. They stayed out of sight until the food was on the

floor and he had withdrawn. St. George laughed elatedly. Soon he would have the entire world crawling like that.

For the next two hours he tried to concentrate upon his books and failed. Dr. Jamison was too prominent in his mind. And Downing, too, loomed as a menace. St. George suddenly felt weak as he thought again just how close to death he'd been.

That puzzle of what to do about Jamison without Rodney St. George being implicated kept him awake half the night. Perhaps Downing would bargain. That would be all right. He could dispose of him at any time. St. George decided to pay Downing a visit if he was still at the asylum. He'd learn whether Jamison was still alive, too.

The next morning Rodney St. George did something he'd never done before in twenty-eight years. He phoned the bank and said that he would not be in all day. It was rather nice to give the orders instead of taking them. When he got possession of that last scroll and learned its secret, he'd never take orders again.

He also did something else unique in St. George's history. He went to a clothing store and purchased a complete outfit, dropped his usual meekness to insist it be ready by noon. He stayed there while the alterations were made.

Shortly after twelve o'clock Rocco came very close to hysterics. At first, he didn't recognize the dapper man who approached his restaurant. He yelled for Luigi and pointed. Luigi tried to talk, but words wouldn't come. All he could do was bow low to Rodney St. George and escort him to the table where Pamela waited.

ST. GEORGE ordered champagne and an elaborate dinner instead of lunch. Pamela looked him over, closed her eyes and looked again. The old Rodney St. George had vanished. The meek, inoffensive little teller was gone forever. In his place sat a carefully dressed man with a look of cold triumph in his eyes. His clothing was expensive, his manners suave.

"Why, Rodney!" she exclaimed.

"Like me?" St. George smiled. "It is a rather drastic change isn't it? But then I'm going up in the world. You can't even guess how far, Pamela."

"Why are you so sure?" she asked quietly. "I knew you could do big things."

"No other living person could grasp what I'm after. Pamela, I need your help. In just a few days I'll make you the leading woman of this country. Of the world. I will make you queen of the stars! No queen will ever have had so much respect. You know, of course, I'm in love with you."

She nodded. "I guessed that, Rodney. But it isn't so long since Jim was—put away, so let's not make any plans now. Please."

"Of course not." St. George held her hands openly. "It's necessary that I wait, too. Here's what I want you to do. Through the book store where you work, you may be able to purchase a scroll for me. One of the most ancient things in the world, and it is right here in town in the Fairbridge museum. I have written full particulars and here they are. Will you try to buy it for me? The museum will part with the thing for enough money."

"Certainly, Rodney. I'll even handle it on the side so you won't have to pay my firm a commission. How high can I bid?"

"Any amount, but do not give an inkling of how important this is. I'm not a poor man. Far from it."

Luigi served the dinner with flourishes. After the meal they sipped liqueurs and St. George gave his companion a peculiar glance.

"Pamela, you won't see Downing again?"

"Why should I?" she countered, and smiled over the rim of the tiny glass.

"Good. Very good, my dear. You won't be sorry. Mark my words. Shall I see you tonight then?"

"I'll call the moment I get home. Oh, Rodney, I forgot to tell you, my aunt went out to the coast, and I'm using her house. I'd like to have you see it. We'd

be alone tonight. I'll have the scroll if I can possibly get it. As agent for my firm I may be allowed to take it away on approval."

"Pamela," St. George said, "I'm really very grateful to Downing. If it hadn't been for his—ah—misfortune, I would never have met you. Tonight then. I'll be waiting for your call."

St. George stayed at the restaurant for another hour, sipping cocktails. Luigi proclaimed him his idol, his patron saint—and hoped St. George would break down and leave another dollar tip. Luigi wasn't disappointed. A five-dollar bill rested beside the plate when St. George finally arose.

He was almost at peace with the world. Only the menace of Dr. Jamison and the danger from Jim Downing remained.

St. George frowned as he walked along the street. Perhaps he ought to see what happened to Jamison and take care of the man. St. George smiled as he thought of a wriggling black snake. If that was what Jamison feared about all else—then that was what he'd become.

But that could wait a short time. There were more personal matters. Pamela had liked his suit so St. George decided to buy more. After twenty-eight years, a buying spree was novel and intriguing. He hailed a taxi and returned to the clothing store.

PAMELA, meanwhile, had left the restaurant, hurried around the corner and climbed into a roadster. She drove straight to the Jamison sanitarium, up the winding, half-mile drive to the entrance, and a few minutes later Downing held her tightly. She told him all.

"Jim," she finished frantically, "he's so hopped up with his own importance he is ready to burst wide open. From no one at all, he has developed the greatest ego I have ever seen. The man is a dangerous maniac."

"Even more than you think," Jim said. "And Dr. Jamison is almost as bad. I've hidden him at the cabin at the lake. Jamison knows too much about St. George's secrets. We must dispose of both men. Jamison is power mad."

"So is St. George. I prodded him a bit, told him he is an important man. Commented on the little changes he made in his attitude, but now he's gone the whole hog. He bought a new outfit. And there is an icy deadliness about him."

Downing look worried, "Things are ready to break, darling. If they go against us, heaven knows what will happen. Yet we must handle St. George alone. Jamison, too."

Pamela sat down slowly. "Jim, why did you ask me to inflate his ego that way?"

"For one reason. Men with high opinions of themselves fail to see their shortcomings. You find that out in the banking business. St. George will have so much on his mind he won't be able to think lucidly. He'll be confused and then we'll have him. Always remember, basically his nature is that of a rabbit. His egotistic form only hides the weakness of his character. We must play one man against the other—but it is true we are playing with fire"

"You will . . . kill him?" Pamela asked very softly.

"Even if it means you and I can never be together again, darling. Jamison has to go, too. He is close on the heels of St. George's secret and equally dangerous."

Pamela bit her lip, and her lovely eyes filled with tears.

"I know it may mean a sacrifice," she said. "But I'll be brave, Jim. St. George knows now there are few things he can't have. He is worse than any combination of world conquerors because he fights with strange and awful weapons. But I'm not afraid, Jim. I'll never be afraid again."

"Good girl!" murmured Downing, kissing her. "Now listen closely while I outline our battle plan."

CHAPTER XIX

Catastrophe

NOT more than two minutes after Pamela had departed and a guard

locked the door, Downing felt a strong current of air sweep through his room. It was like a miniature tornado, and Rodney St. George stood before him smiling suavely.

This was a new St. George. A man with fresh powers and horribly sure of himself. Downing shrank back. Not in fear for himself, but for Pamela. If St. George had seen her here, no telling what he might do.

"How did you get here?" Downing gasped. "Wh-what happened?"

St. George chuckled. "Just like I left here last night. Don't be alarmed. I am not here to harm you. Last night you really did save my life even though you later intended to take it. If you are calmer now, I want to talk to you. Where is Dr. Jamison?"

"But how did you get into this locked room?" Downing demanded, feigning ignorance of the phenomenon Jamison had called 'apport', which ranking scientists refused to recognize.

"Distance," St. George said, "means nothing to me any more. Neither do doors nor bolts nor walls. I've learned new things since you were locked up here."

Downing threw a swift glance out of the window. Pamela's car was still there. Why didn't she get away? Why didn't she hurry?

"Something worries you, Downing?" St. George asked.

"Worries me?" Downing grunted. "You turned me into a kitten, then into a mouse. You vanished before my eyes last night, reappeared today. Now you ask me if I'm worried about something. Yes, I am. Scared, too."

St. George nodded. "You heard more than was good for you last night. However, I'm inclined to forget and forgive—under certain conditions. It was through you I met Pamela. She isn't going to marry you, Downing."

"That isn't news," Downing said and broke out in a cold sweat as St. George moved toward the window and glanced out of it. "How could she, anyway? I'm supposed to be tainted with insanity. St. George, if I promise not to act against

you any further—"

"What do I care about your promises," St. George queried and kept looking out of the window. "Where is Jamison, I asked you. Did you kill him last night?"

"No," Downing answered. "When you disappeared so abruptly it unnerved me. I left the room before Jamison saw me. I don't know where he went. Perhaps I could find him for you."

"Trying to make a deal, Downing? Very well. Find him and you'll be permitted to stay here. Fail and I'll change you into something you intensely dislike. That, my dear fellow, is an ultimatum. Does it surprise you?"

"Nothing will ever surprise me any more," Downing groaned.

He heard the motor of a car start up and he closed his eyes slowly, like a man who hears the guillotine blade sliding down toward his neck.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours," St. George said. "No longer. If you have cooked up some scheme with Jamison, I—*Pamela!* What was she doing here at this place?"

He raised his hand, made the sign of the Tau cross, and where he had stood was blank space. Downing rushed to the window, but he couldn't see a thing. The roadster had vanished down the winding drive.

For a moment Downing wondered if he might help by trying to overtake the car. It was no use. Everything depended upon Pamela's ingenuity. She'd have to think fast. St. George was suspicious and angry about the whole thing. Downing sat shakily on the edge of the bed.

Now he had the greatest problem of his life to consider. First of all, though, he had to put out of his mind any thoughts that Pamela might fail to convince St. George of her loyalty to him. If she were converted into some other form, Downing's whole world would crumple.

MEANWHILE, Pamela drove away with her heart lighter than it had been for days. This weird case was coming to a close and she relied upon Down-

ing's ability to think faster and better than St. George.

There was momentary silence between shifting from first to second and during that split second, she heard her name called. Pamela glanced into the rear view mirror and almost screamed. Rodney St. George stood on the lowest step of the hospital entrance with his right hand raised. Pamela didn't stop. She stepped hard on the gas pedal and shot around the corner.

Her heart pounded as madly as the eight cylinders beneath the hood of the roadster. She thought frantically of some excuse for her presence at the hospital.

Then her foot banged down on the brake. Rodney St. George stood directly in the middle of the driveway ahead with one hand upraised. Pam switched her foot from the brake to the gas pedal. In a moment, St. George would gesture, and she'd turn into something. A cat, perhaps or some other form of animal life which St. George would will upon her. Pamela decided she'd rather be dead and hoped the speedy car would crash if she was no longer able to control it.

St. George made a sign in the air and vanished. As Pamela's car roared through the spot he occupied, there was no horrible impact. He'd just vanished. Pam held her breath, took the next corner and there he was again, imperiously trying to block her way. She knew she was going mad.

Pamela jerked the wheel to avoid hitting him this time. It was more a matter of instinct than of trying to save his life. And again he disappeared after making that strange sign. Pamela looked down at her arms on the wheel. They were still human. She glanced into the mirror. There'd been no conversation.

She breathed a bit easier then, but realized she was no longer safe from him. He was bound to find her if he could blink into and out of existence like an electric sign anywhere he chose.

Shortly afterward, she ran the car into the garage behind her home, rushed to

the house and let herself in. She removed her hat and coat, walked into the spacious living room and sat down weakly.

In her mind's eye she could see St. George commanding her to stop, see the grim, foreboding look on his face just before he vanished. Now he would find her. He'd ask questions, insist upon answers. Pamela shuddered. Her answers could only be built upon the shaky foundations of lies.

She was still seated there when the curtains in the room suddenly lifted almost straight out and she felt a cool breeze, although all windows were tightly closed. She saw him then, standing about ten feet away from her. And she screamed in terror.

"I would like to know what you were doing at the sanitarium, Pamela," he said in a curiously calm voice. "I would like an explanation of why you refused to recognize me when I tried to stop you. In fact, why you deliberately attempted to run me down."

"Rodney!" Pamela had eloquent fear shining in her eyes and all of it wasn't pretended. "How did you get here—like this? It is—you?"

"Yes, indeed. Don't be alarmed. I shall explain later how I managed to suddenly appear, but first you must answer my questions."

"Was it really you up there at the sanitarium?" she asked. "I—I thought I must have been dreaming when you stood in the middle of the driveway. Then you appeared again. Rodney, nothing makes sense. I—I just can't seem to understand."

"Didn't you hear me call to you as you started away?" St. George asked.

"Hear you call? No, Rodney. You just appeared and I—I became confused."

"Very well," St. George said and his voice was a bit less skeptical. "It is possible you did not hear me and I must say I do not blame you for not slowing down. I must have seemed like a ghost. But, first, why did you visit the sanitarium in the first place? I thought you were going to forget Downing."

"I am. But you practically asked me to marry you, Rodney. I am taking a big step and, after all, I did think I was in love with Jim Downing once. I wanted to see him again, just to make certain. I drove to the hospital, but it wasn't necessary to see him again. I knew then that it was—you."

ST. GEORGE smiled warmly, walked over and took her hands. They were ice cold. He led her to a divan and they both sat down, Pamela all but falling to the couch.

"Excuses would never have worked with me, Pamela. I would have seen right through them. But I know you are telling the truth because I knew you had not visited Downing. You see, I was in his room when I saw you leaving."

"Then you're not angry?" Pamela asked.

"Certainly not. I consider your act logical. I owe you a great deal, Pamela. You showed me how to enjoy life. You brought me out of a ghastly rut. You never made fun of me because I was small. Now you shall have a reward. Pamela, one second before I appeared in this room, I was at home."

"But how—"

"Don't ask questions now," he told her with another smile. He was so sure of himself, this under-sized Napoleon. "There is an explanation for everything and soon you shall know just what I am. You have probably sensed that I am not an ordinary man, Pamela. When I am certain of your faith in me, of your love, we shall begin to do great things."

"Would you be angry if I told you I've known for a long time?" Pam asked, inwardly trembling as she proceeded with the necessary next step of Downing's plan.

St. George's eyes flashed. "What do you mean?"

"I know you turned Foster into a cat. I know you changed Jim into a kitten and that he is no more insane than I. I believe every word of his story."

St. George jumped up and raised his hand angrily. "Then you have plotted

with him. You have led me on. I've been a fool. Foster warned me. He told me you were as untrustworthy as Downing himself. But I couldn't believe it. I-I felt that you really were in love with me even though I was nothing but an assistant cashier at the bank. I've been tricked!"

"No, Rodney," Pamela said quietly. "There are no tricks. Listen to what I have to say and if you do not believe me, then turn me into any form you choose. When Mr. Arnold at the bank phoned to establish your alibi when Dick Zarat was robbed, I lied to him. I knew then that you had robbed the boy. I also realized there must have been a great reason for your having done so."

"There was," St. George said. "I needed the money he was carrying. Also, that boy was becoming too suspicious of me. The police will hardly believe his story. He'll be fired from the bank and will no longer be in my way."

"There is something else, Rodney," Pamela said quietly.

"Well?" he demanded.

"The night you visited Chandler, I was there. I saw you turn him into a cat. I watched you throw his body out the window. I didn't blame you for it. That book didn't belong to him because he'd never have understood it. It was yours."

"Perhaps," St. George accused, "you are guessing. Perhaps Downing put you up to all of this."

PAMELA opened her purse. "I was talking to Mrs. Chandler when you arrived, Rodney. I cut the interview short. She only wanted to buy more sets of books for a second library room. I was in the next room when—it happened. After you left, I got this from Chandler's desk."

She held out the incriminating name card which had caused Rodney St. George to sweat blood for days. He took it in wonder, and the intense expression on his face softened into a happy smile.

"You might have got into serious

trouble by forgetting the card, Rodney," she said.

He sat down again.

"Pamela, I'm sorry. But I'm one man against the world now. There are some who wish to kill me. I felt that I could trust no one except you, and then when I saw you at the sanitarium, and when you just admitted how much you knew, I—well, forgive me, Pamela. Now I'm sure you are on my side."

"I'm glad," she said simply, and felt like fainting dead away.

"If there was time, I could tell you things that would show what I have really become," St. George beamed. "But there are many things to be done. Strenuous research and study and hard work placed me in the position I now occupy. I mustn't stop. Now until I have reached absolute perfection."

"You will," Pamela predicted. "It's fated, Rodney. These secrets have rested in those books for centuries. The wisest men passed over them blindly until the very wisest came along. You, Rodney. Tell me, what will you do with all this power?"

"Do!" he frowned. "I hadn't thought of that too much. There are certain people I don't like and they'll feel my wrath first. Others may dicker with me if I choose to let them. Oh, I'll whistle the tune. Now what about the scroll?"

"I may have it tonight. Possibly, I may have to wait until tomorrow or the next day, but the moment it is in my hands, I will phone."

"Excellent," St. George gloated. "You deserve to share with me all the glory I shall attain. Now I must go back. Please don't be startled when I leave."

St. George raised his hand, made the Tau cross sign and disappeared.

Pamela half arose and then fell limply back to lie on the divan. Through her mind flashed the thought that she and Jim Downing could never cope with such a man as this. Yet they must, or the consequences would affect every living being on the face of the earth.

Something cracked against the window pane. She gave a startled jump.

CHAPTER XX

Plans for Destruction

RAISING the shade, she saw Jim Downing. Pamela gave a happy cry and ran to the back door. He held her tightly for a moment.

She drew back. "Jim, it's dangerous coming here like this. He can appear in an instant."

"I know," Downing said. "He was in my room at the sanitarium, spotted you leaving and went off after you. I've been worried sick ever since. I slipped away. Did you convince him you are not working with me?"

"Yes, Jim. He is sure I am on his side. He wants me to get that scroll. I can't stall any longer. The Fairbridge museum will never surrender it for any price, but he could get it if he wished. I didn't dare tell him. What am I going to do?"

Downing paced the floor, running fingers through his hair.

"We've got to telescope our plans," he said. "It must be drastic, too. If St. George isn't stopped in his tracks, there is no telling what will happen. He's off the beam, filled with delusions of grandeur."

"They aren't all delusions," Pamela put in slowly. "Rodney St. George really does hold the whip hand and is probably one of the most powerful persons on the face of the earth right now. That power makes him."

Downing grunted and brought his fist down on the end of a table. "Pam, there is a way. I know enough about science and rays to realize that St. George's power comes from that machine of his. I don't know the details, naturally, but if this machine is destroyed, then St. George becomes impotent and we can handle him at our leisure. Perhaps we're wrong. He might become an asset to the world, but he has already committed murder and theft—and we don't dare take the chance."

Pamela gave Downing a frightened glance.

"Do you mean we must invade his house and destroy the machine? Jim, what if he finds us there?"

"We must arrange things so he won't. We'll go into the neighborhood. You telephone him from nearby, say he must come to your house at once. He'll be there in seconds, yes, but it will take him a few moments to orient himself and guess he was tricked. In that space of time, we must destroy his machine. Then we must trap and destroy him."

Pamela nodded very slowly. "It seems to be the only method, dangerous as it may be, Jim. I'll do my part. But what about Dr. Jamison?"

"We'll have to make new plans," Downing said slowly.

"My impression is that he has seen this ray device and perhaps knows a lot about it, but not all. If he did, St. George would have been more anxious to find him. Now tell me again about that scroll."

Pamela did, adding, "The object is, of course, not for sale to anyone. It's much too precious. In fact, they keep it locked in a case so no one can touch it."

"All of which means nothing to St. George," Downing grunted. "What are locks and steel doors to a man who can transport himself anywhere? Look, if the worse comes to the worst, we must use the scroll as a talking point. I'll be back in about an hour, darling. Then we'll wind this up—or turn into some other form of life."

Pamela shuddered and stepped closer to him. She looked up.

"Jim, I'm terribly frightened. If we make the slightest mistake—"

"I know. It means curtains, but, Pam, we must do it. We can't call in police or G-Men. Who'd believe us? Therefore, St. George and all his works must be destroyed. Dr. Jamison may have to be disposed of too, somehow. The danger involved mustn't stop us."

"It won't," Pamela said softly. "Take care, Jim, that he doesn't see you."

DOWNING left, using a taxicab to make the single call he had in mind. Then he was driven back to Pamela's

house. He approached it with some trepidation. There was no telling when St. George might whisk through space to surprise Pam. If he caught them together, there wouldn't be a chance of escaping his wrath.

Pamela was alone and safe. She admitted Downing hastily and closed and bolted the door behind him. Then she gave a short, mirthless laugh at the futility of locks against St. George.

"I think," Downing said, "we're about ready to start. It's very dark outside which will help. Ready?"

"Yes, Jim. I'm ready." Pamela's head was high, her eyes clear and unafraid.

They walked out together and got into Pamela's car. Downing drove it, choosing a rather roundabout route to reach St. George's home. There were lights burning in the windows and once they saw St. George's profile against drawn curtains.

Downing spoke softly. "Let me out here. Then drive to the corner, use the telephone in the drug store there and leave immediately. Drive back and I'll let you in if I can. From then on, we race against time and a man possessed of the greatest speed in history. Good luck, Pam."

She kissed him fiercely. "Good luck, darling. We can't fail."

He watched her drive down the street until he saw the tail light edge toward the curb. Then Downing trotted softly through a neighborhood yard and came at St. George's house from the rear. On his way, he picked up a large stone and held it firmly.

He guessed that St. George's telephone would be in the living room and made his way to a rear window. Raising himself slightly, he peeked through a narrow slit in the shade and saw St. George talking on the phone. He watched him hang up the instrument, give an expansive smile and then arise. St. George raised his hand, made the sign of the Tau cross and vanished.

Downing smashed the window pane with one blow. His hands were cut as he reached in to manipulate the catch, but **even** the pain of the cuts felt good.

It was stimulating. He raised the window, climbed through and headed toward the front door. Pam was just pulling up in front.

He sidestepped the howling cats, got the door open, and Pam entered. She drew back as the cats spat at her. Downing led her toward the cellar door. They descended quickly, locking the cats upstairs. Both could hear them scratching angrily on the panels.

Downing found the wall where the secret door led into the lab. He wasted no time searching for the device which tripped the lock. There were furnace tools handy and he seized the heaviest one. Raising it, he gauged a blow that would fall right above that spot where he'd noticed a footprint passing straight through the wall.

"Jim!" Pamela said it with a quick inhalation. "Jim—listen!"

Downing slowly let the iron tool sag in his grip. There were footsteps above. The mewling of the cats had stopped. The steps were quick and mincing. Rodney St. George was back.

Downing motioned to Pamela for silence. Gripping the iron tool firmly once more, he started to cross the floor toward the steps. The door above opened.

"Please don't be impatient," Rodney St. George said. "I'm coming as fast as possible. You practically scared my cats out of their wits, did you know that?"

They watched him descend, calmly and yet arrogantly. St. George smiled at Pamela.

"People like me," he said, "must learn early how to take disappointment along with success. I had great plans for us, Pamela. Very great plans, but after I left your home today, I know you were working on Downing's side. You see, I paid the sanitarium another visit. Downing was not in his room. So I knew he must have been in contact with you and therefore you had lied to me."

Downing still held the iron bar high.

"St. George," he said sharply, "whatever happens to me doesn't matter much. I'm willing to do anything you say, but Pam deserves a chance. She was acci-

dentally mixed up in this affair."

ST. GEORGE turned very slowly and when he spoke, his voice was full of scorn.

"You actually plead with me, Downing? A pleasant sensation, I must say, but it will get you nothing. Pamela is as dangerous to my work as you are. Put down that iron bar, Downing. Put it down instantly."

Downing took a long shot. He drew back to hurl the bar at St. George, but even before that movement began, he knew he was licked. St. George merely raised his hand, drew the invisible line, wound the vine around it and the iron bar clattered to the floor, narrowly missing a frightened kitten which had suddenly materialized.

Downing's human form was rigid as steel and just as lifeless. The kitten slowly backed away.

Pamela gave a scream, started forward and St. George seized her wrist. He flung her around until she struck the wall. Then he smiled very suavely at her.

"Calm yourself, my dear. It will do you no good to weep. We are going into my laboratory. Oh yes, Downing can come, too. As a kitten, of course. Remember—by raising my hand, I can convert you, also."

He walked up to the wall, removed the calendar and used his key. The door opened. He stepped to one side and bowed ironically for Pamela to enter first. The kitten darted between his legs and ran into the lab.

St. George closed the door behind him.

"You underestimated me, Pamela. Sadly so. Of course, the phone call tonight was obviously part of a trap. I pretended to fall for it. I reached your home in the space of a second or two. I felt of the telephone and found it quite cold. Your hands hadn't grasped it or the instrument would have been warm. Then I merely bided my time a moment and returned here. The window was smashed and I knew both of you were in the cellar."

"What are you going to do?" Pamela

found her voice and conquered the inertia of terror. She found herself thinking calmly. Thinking of what Downing had said. Her knowledge of the lost scroll was their ace-in-the-hole.

"Do?" St. George shrugged. "I really don't know. Of course, I shall compel Downing to tell me where Dr. Jamison is. I must find him."

"And then?"

"I shall have to attend to you, my dear. You shall be something quite lovely. It will take time to think of. I seem to notice a glint of determination in your eyes. Do you still think I am vulnerable?"

"Yes. St. George, I know where that scroll is. No one else does. It would take you months to re-locate it. If you do not change Jim Downing back to his human form and release both of us, you shall never know from me how to find the scroll."

"You would have made such a competent assistant," St. George sighed. "Pamela, I am growing impatient. Tell me where the scroll is or I shall take that weak little kitten upstairs and allow my cats to kill it. They are all quite eager to rip Downing into shreds."

"Killing Jim won't get you the scroll," Pamela said quietly. "In fact, if you do that, there can never be a bargain."

St. George scrutinized her carefully.

"You know," he said, "I think you mean that. Perhaps we can reach some agreement, but only if Downing tells me where to find Dr. Jamison. That comes first. Pamela, I'm going to ask your cooperation. Please sit down in that chair so I can tie you firmly. Then I shall convert myself into a cat and talk to Downing. I promise no harm will come to either of you—yet."

Pamela could do nothing but obey. St. George strapped her to the chair, stepped back and chuckled.

"Dr. Jamison did that to me. The fool, he was so close to outwitting me and then failed. Now I shall talk to Downing."

St. George lifted a hand, made the sign and his human form froze. The big black cat sat on the floor calmly licking

a paw. The kitten came from beneath a table slowly, not knowing just what to expect.

CHAPTER XXI

Black Serpents

"COME over here, Downing," the black cat said. "I won't hurt you. All I want is information about Dr. Jamison."

"I won't tell you a thing," Downing said curtly.

The black cat seemed to laugh. "Now be reasonable. Dr. Jamison is a menace. He knows too much. Let me take care of him and then I shall bargain with you and Pamela. She holds the cards at the moment—unless you know where the scroll is."

"I don't," Downing said. "I wouldn't let her tell me. All right, it's a deal. Dr. Jamison is hiding at my cabin near the lake. You know where it is. The personnel of the bank went there for an outing last year."

"Oh, yes," the black cat said. "Foolish of me not to think of it before. Has Dr. Jamison a car there?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. I cannot transport him through space as I can myself, but I'll be there in a moment, surprise him most unpleasantly and bring him back here. As I recall it, Jamison's greatest fear was being changed into a snake. I won't do that immediately. I'll turn him into a kitten like yourself, but when we get here, I want you to tell him he is fated to live the rest of his life as a snake. Thank you, Downing. Why not climb into Pamela's lap? You can sleep while I'm gone."

The black cat vanished. St. George's human body grew mobile and he smiled at Pamela.

"Downing shows great sense. I am going after Dr. Jamison. I hope you will not be too uncomfortable while I am gone."

He disappeared in a wink. Pamela

looked down at the kitten and she talked even though she knew the kitten wouldn't understand. At least she could make her voice comforting.

More than an hour went by. Then the door opened upstairs. Soon St. George was back and under his arm was a kitten that struggled futilely. St. George threw the animal to the floor.

"Jamison is an impossible creature," St. George shrugged. "I shall be well rid of him. Now, Pamela, the scroll. I must have that scroll."

"Turn Jim back. Untie me. Let him get far away from here and then I'll tell you. Not until then."

St. George frowned. Then he seemed to think of something important. He walked over to the table, lay down on it and pushed home the switch. The X-ray machine glowed. The giant tube turned purple and cast its weird light over the room.

On the floor, the kitten in whose form Dr. Jamison's brain and spirit had been incorporated, sat on its hind legs to see better. Downing ambled over beside him.

"Look at him, filling his brain with those rays," Jamison said. "That should be me on the table. You spoiled that, Downing. I wish I were big enough to rip you into shreds."

"Forget revenge, will you?" Downing said. "St. George has created a new type of X-ray tube, hasn't he? How does the thing work?"

"It generates a form of power at present unknown to science. This power is transmitted to St. George's brain and concentrated there. He can release it at will by merely making that gesture with his hand. The power stored up is so great that whoever is on the receiving end of it, turns into anything that St. George wills. It's a combination of modern science and sorcery."

"And St. George can store up only so much power?" Downing asked. "He has to be charged like a battery every now and then? I suppose everything depends upon that new tube."

"Everything. Why are you asking all those questions? Do you think he'll let you go? The man means to get rid of all

three of us."

"You're going to become a snake," Downing said softly. "That much he told me. Look at him—the machine is shut off now. Here come the fireworks."

ST. GEORGE swung off the table and walked over to Pamela.

"Changed your mind yet, my dear? I think I shall be compelled to show you what will happen to Downing. It won't be nice."

Pamela felt completely crushed. There was no use fighting this monster. He was indomitable. Perhaps Jim knew of something. If she could have him brought back to his human form for just a few moments.

"Rodney," she said, "I realize how helpless we are against you. Perhaps you should have the scroll. You who have accomplished so much. Let me see Jim again, in human form. Let me talk to him for a few moments. You surely can't deny me that. Then I shall tell you where the scroll now is."

St. George gave her a fishy stare. "This has all the earmarks of a trick. However, I warn you I can protect myself. Wait, while I bring Downing's human form in here."

St. George struggled with Downing's heavy body, but managed to get it into the lab, to bend the limbs and seat it in a chair similar to the one Pamela occupied. He applied stout ropes, smiled contentedly and called the kitten which was now Jim Downing's living form. He gestured. The kitten vanished and Downing strained at the bonds that held him firmly to the chair.

Then he suddenly seemed to have realized what happened and stopped struggling.

"Thanks," he said. "That was decent of you, St. George. I did as you requested. I told Dr. Jamison you promised to turn him into a snake. A black snake. He's frantic."

"Oh," St. George turned quickly. The kitten backed away in alarm. St. George gestured. The kitten vanished and a medium-sized serpent wriggled frantically on the floor. St. George laughed.

"Now, Pamela, you must keep your promise. Where is the scroll?"

She gave Downing a hopeless look.

"Tell him, Pam," Downing ordered. "He controls us like a puppet master runs his dolls. If we obey, we may be repaid somehow."

"It is in the third floor case from the door in the manuscript room at the Museum," Pamela said reluctantly.

St. George gave a happy cry, made the Tau cross sign and vanished. Neither Pamela nor Downing spoke while he was gone. The black snake continued wriggling angrily over the floor. Then St. George was back, and he held an ancient scroll in his hands. His face was flushed with elation.

Paying no attention to his prisoners, he sat down and opened the scroll. He read avidly and then his flushed face turned perfectly white with rage. Jumping up, he faced Pamela and Downing.

"This is not the scroll and you know it. You sent me on a useless chase. I warn you my temper is reaching the boiling point. In one moment you will join Dr. Jamison. I am in no mood to—"

"Hold it," Downing said. "We didn't trick you, but I know who did. Dr. Jamison talked to me while he was a kitten. I thought he'd gone crazy. Jamison was on the board of directors at that museum. He had access to the scroll and he switched it for another. He has the scroll and—he has the secret of your power, St. George."

"What do you mean? That is impossible!"

"No, it isn't," Downing answered steadily. "While you were treating yourself to those rays, Jamison crawled beneath the machine and absorbed some of them, too. All he wants is a chance to use his power on you, St. George. Listen—I'd rather you had those powers than he. The man is a maniac. Make him talk!"

"Yes, yes, of course." St. George raised his hand, but Downing's shout stopped him.

"Don't return him to human form! The serpent will merely vanish, and Jamison will return to his body at my cabin. He'll

have time to get set, and when you do find him, he may win. You've got to get down to him to make him talk!"

St. George almost sizzled with rage. He kicked at the black snake, cursed it and then raised his hand to make the sign of transformation. His body stiffened. On the floor a huge black serpent wriggled toward the smaller snake.

JAMISON'S voice hissed from the smaller serpent. "St. George, you idiot! We're trapped—both of us! Condemned to live out our lives as snakes. Oh, I should have known Downing meant to trick you!"

"What do you mean?" the black snake asked, suddenly horribly frightened.

"Stupid dolt. You must make the sign to convert yourself back into your human form. It takes an arm or a paw to do it. You've nothing but scales. Motioning with the body itself won't work. St. George, you defeated yourself. *You can't go back.*"

The black snake went mad. It reared up, its red tongue flicking furiously. It writhed toward a chair, climbed onto it and reared up again until it was twined around the machine. It kept moving until its thick, glistening body was lashed about the great tube. The coils began to constrict, tightening convulsively. Glass cracked. There was an explosion. Flame shot out. Purple flame that turned into a crimson jet. Smoke filled the room, fire started lapping at the furniture.

Downing braced himself. Mounting flames gushed toward him as he raised the chair from the floor and brought it down with all the strength he could muster. A dozen trials shattered the legs and the back, precipitating him to the floor. He wrenched himself free, dived headlong into the fury of flame and smoke.

There was little left of the giant serpent. He saw the smaller snake in a corner, facing the fire that crept toward it. Downing found a knife. In a moment, Pamela was free.

They opened the door and the resultant draft fanned the flames into horrible fury. They shot out like giant tongues

at everything within reach. The two humans fled to the stairs. Before they reached the first floor, the fire burst through. Curtains and rugs went up like so much tinder.

They raced to the front door, got it open somehow. Moments later, they stood well down the street. Pamela clung to Downing tightly, sobbing hysterically. They watched the evil house being consumed, before the fire department could get there.

"That's the end of St. George, of Dr. Jamison—and the cats," Downing said slowly. "I would have rescued the cats but it was impossible. Perhaps they are better off."

"Jim," Pamela said. "That scroll. How did St. George make such a mistake? It was the one he sent me to look for."

"No, darling. I contacted the museum curator and told him an attempt would be made to steal the scroll. I warned him to substitute another for it. The scroll still exists, but no one can learn its secret. That died with the two serpents in there. St. George wrecked his machine so no one else could use it. He played right into our hands. He and Jamison are dead—as snakes. What could be more fitting?"

Pamela shivered.

"Take me home, Jim. Please take me home."

COMING NEXT ISSUE

STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS

An Astounding Complete Novel

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

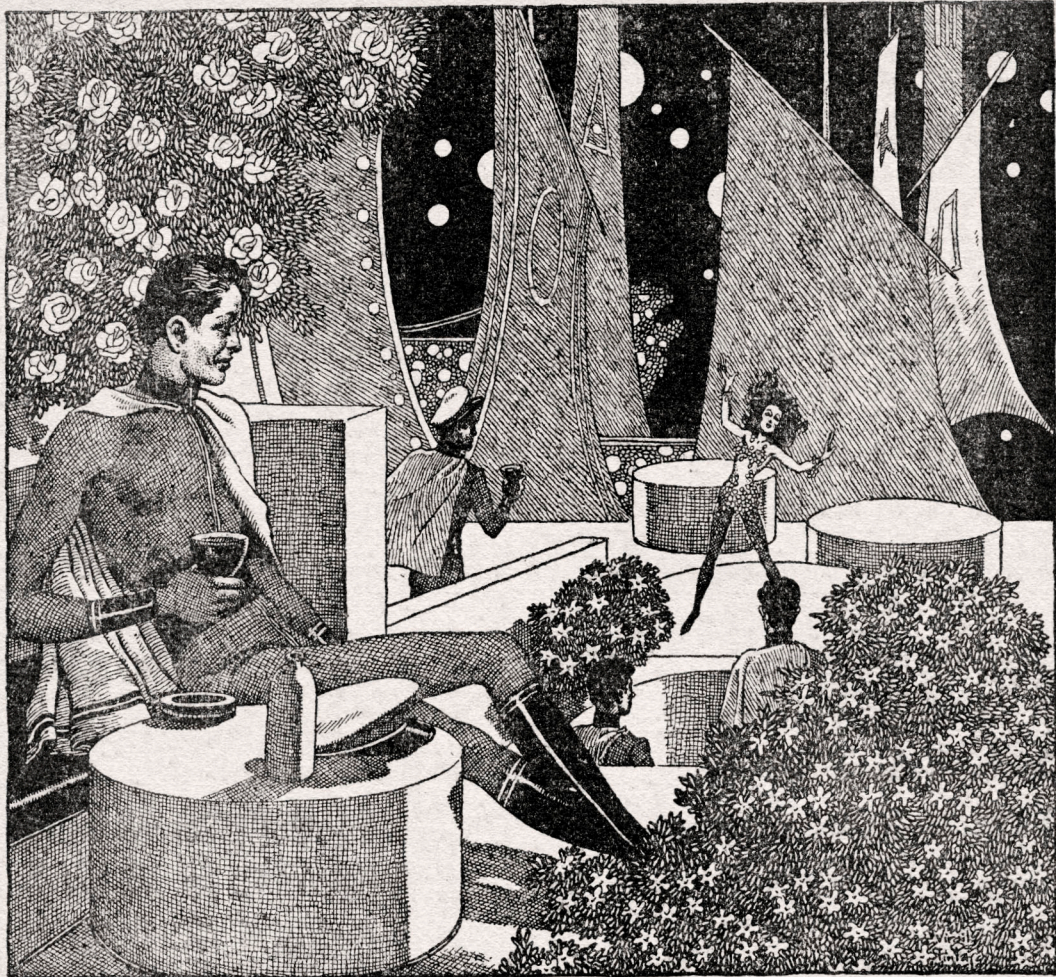
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He saw the canals as they were of old, as the Chronicles described them

CANAL

By **CARL JACOBI**

Ex-clerk Kramer Flees Along the Grand Canal on Mars, Dodging Deadly Dangers, in a Frantic Race for Fame and Wealth!

AT THE top of the stairs Kramer stood still a long moment, listening. The road behind him was empty and desolate, stretching off into the red-rimmed horizon like a crayon streak on a piece of cardboard. Up above in the dry motionless air a lone Kiloto wheeled and soared, searching for prey. There was no sign of pursuit.

Mentally Kramer checked over his equipment: canteen, food concentrate

envelope, sand mask, and most precious of all, the map. The official Martian Cartographic Folio 654, direct from its glass case in the FaGanda Bureau of Standards. The map still lay in its oilskin pouch, and the archaic printing thrilled him as he stared down upon it.

It was Monday morning, 11:14 Earth time; he checked with his watch. In exactly eleven days, assuming all went well, he should be entering Canal 28

Northwest and coming down the home-stretch. After that it would be easy. His forged passports would give him easy access to the Crater City port. The regular Earth Express would take off at high noon. Not even Blanchard would suspect him of escaping in this direction. Since Kramer had first conceived the plan a month ago, he had studied each detail, accounted for each contingency, and everything had worked like clock-work.

He began to descend the steps, absently counting them as he went down: fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-eight. Level One. Here the first sign, almost illegible from age, met his gaze:

IT IS ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN
TO ENTER THESE CANALS.
BY ORDER OF
ZARA

It seemed strange seeing that name, Zara, there out of a history book. The last Martian monarchy had passed on into the limbo ages ago. And Kramer remembered that even during the last three—or was it four?—dynasties the canals had been closed.

ONE twenty-eight, one twenty-nine. Third, fourth, fifth level. Kramer drew up before a massive door, fashioned of arelium steel. A second sign stood out mockingly in the light of his torch:

IT IS ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN . . .

Without hesitation he reached into his pocket and drew forth a key. He removed the royal seal with the utmost care, inserted the key in the lock and twisted. The door swung open slowly of its own accord.

Even then with virtual success just within his grasp, he did not forget himself. He replaced the seal in such a way that the closed door would show no signs of passage. Then he broke into a low laugh.

There it was—Canal Grand, the master artery that linked North Mars with South Mars, the single avenue that crossed the Void, and offered a possible

means of escape. No Earth men, no living Martian had ever penetrated the Void and returned. Planes, expeditions, rocket ships had taken off time and time again, only to disappear without trace. In their wake superstition had flowered, rumor had multiplied, until today the Void stood, a chasm of isolation, effectually slicing the red planet into two parts.

Kramer strode boldly forward, warm and comfortable in his space suit and hextar helmet. For the first twenty yards alluvial drift impeded his progress, and he swore to himself as he thought of his early schooling that had taught him there was no wind on Mars. Then he reached the hard-paced center of the canal, and the ground here was firm and level as a pavement.

The frowning walls, towering sheer on either side, were as oppressive as a tunnel at first. The geometric desolation fatigued the eye. But after he had gone a mile Kramer swung along rapidly, immune to these irritations.

Queer how things worked out in one's life. A month ago he had been an ordinary salvage ratio clerk at the Metropolitan Power Unit in FaGanda. His life had been routine, with only a few petty thieveries and unimportant swindlings to break the monotony. Then, quite by accident, he had hit upon the plan.

The plan had as its nucleus the secret of the Void which had baffled mankind for so many years. In 3091 the historian, Stola, had written:

I am convinced that the great catastrophe which caused the complete dehydration of the canals and began the rapid decline of the early Martians under the monarchy is linked in some unexplainable way with that corridor which we know today as the Void.

We know of a certainty that Canal Grand was unquestionably the only passage which crossed that corridor even in those early times, and we know by spectroscopic analysis that somewhere along that canal lies a deposit of retnite, now catalogued as Chemical X. Since Chemical X is the most desired thing by Earthmen today, there is no doubt in my mind but that eventually the lode will be tapped and the mysteries of the Void explored.

Stola had written that, and he had

been conservative. In the entire System, Kramer knew, there were but fourteen kilograms of retnite known to exist. That was reserved for the nine members of the Interplanetary Council and their elected successors.

But retnite was in reality nothing more than a drug, a mental stimulant which, when taken correctly, could amplify the thought processes of the brain a thousandfold.

A RETNITER carried with ease, not only the heritage of his ancestors but viewed the panorama of life intelligently. A retniter, in other words, was a super intellect.

Kramer wanted that elixir. He wanted it because it would open the door for him to success. No more petty swindlings then, no more trickster schemes with constant fear of the police. He could tell Blanchard and the law to go to blazes.

Inside his helmet he pressed his chin against a stud, and automatically a Martian cheroot dropped out of a rack and slipped between his lips. A tiny heat unit swung over to ignite it, and the exhaust valve behind his neck increased its pulsations to expel the smoke. He walked on . . .

Kramer's introduction to the plan had come about in an odd way. In a small curio shop in FaGanda he had purchased an old vase, marked with a mixture of curious hieroglyphics on one side and some doggerel Martian verse on the other. Now Kramer was no student of languages, but in order to quicken his wits he had frequently pored over early Martian.

He was astounded to discover that the hieroglyphics and the verse keyed the two languages and offered the first translation of the ancient parchments in the Bureau of Standards.

The rest was a matter of detail. Kramer had managed to hide in the gallery at night. Alone, behind locked doors, he had selected one folio of the hundred and twenty-six in the glass cases. It was that one, he knew, which held the secret of the Void.

There remained then but one thing to do. Hom Valla, the Martian philologist, must be removed. Hom Valla had announced only recently that, after years of study, he was finally on the verge of deciphering early Martian and the folios.

Kramer had taken his time. He waited until Hom Valla was known to be leaving on a trip up-country. Then he had entered his apartment, fired one shot with a heat gun and fed the body into the city's refuse tubes.

Blanchard? Yes, Blanchard would probably couple the three details: the stolen folio, the death of Hom Valla, and Kramer's disappearance. But it would take time, and during that time Kramer would be increasing the distance between himself and the law.

He began to study the canal as he paced along. Straight as a knife blade, it stretched before him to the vanishing point. The walls were sheer, dug out of the red rock by a means that so far had baffled archaeologists. Three-quarters of the way up he could see a series of darker serrated lines, and he knew these were the ancient water marks.

How many hundreds of explorers had started this way, hoping to penetrate the secret of the Void, only to disappear completely. And what was the Void? If it held retnite at its core, what power did it wield to entrap all trespassers?

The stolen folio in this respect had been oddly disappointing. It had charted the location of the lode, in such a way that only a person able to decipher ancient Martian could read it. It had mapped a route through the labyrinth of canals, but it had made no mention of the mystery that lay ahead.

At noon, by his Earth watch, Kramer halted for a rest. After a half hour he set off again, walking at that same mechanical pace that ate up the miles.

The red ditch faded out of his thoughts now. He saw the canals as they were of old, as the Chronicles had described them. Luxurious waterways clogged with commercial shipping, with tapestried gondolas and canopied barges. He saw the gigantic locks and the way

stations where swashbuckling pilots drank genith and watched South Martian girls writhe and sway to the rhythm of the Ucatel drums.

IT WAS at that moment that preceded the sudden advance of night that Kramer found himself rudely torn back to reality. He had kept his visa set turned on, and now a low magnetic hum told him that its finder was in operation. The vision plate above his eyes began to glow with a dull light.

Abruptly a violent shock swept through him!

In the plate he saw a section of red wall and the huge studded entrance door through which he had recently passed. As he watched, that door opened, and a man appeared clad in a space suit. Through the crystal helmet his features revealed themselves clearly. It was Blanchard!

The I.P. man was on his hands and knees, examining the sand on the floor of the canal. Presently he straightened and began to stride forward rapidly.

Kramer swore. Only a few hours had elapsed since he had dispatched Hom Valla. How could Blanchard possibly have picked up the trail so quickly? In some way he, Kramer, must have erred, must have left a clue.

For a moment panic swept over the former salvage ratio clerk. Then quickly he was in control of himself again. He lay down on the sand, swallowed a few food concentrate pellets and in a moment was asleep.

Awakening before dawn, he pushed on again in the darkness. But with the coming of the sun the first of the three quanthrowes swooped down to attack him.

The quanthrowes were far south for this time of year, but their ferocity was no less great. Strangely resembling sword fish, but with octagon-shaped heads and curious square wingspreads, they wheeled out of the saffron sky with rasping squawks that vibrated the ear-phones in Kramer's helmet.

He killed the first with a single shot,

managed to wound fatally the second with a double charge from his heat pistol. The third, a colossus of avian strength shot toward him, its steel-like proboscis thrust straight for his throat.

Kramer escaped the murderous attack by inches. Even so, before he could whip out his knife and jam it upward, the "sword" penetrated his suit and bit deep in his shoulder.

Breathing hard, he stood there looking down at the three lifeless bodies. And then, with that sudden clarity which physical action always brought him, Kra-thought of something.

If there were three quanthrowes, there must be ninety-seven more close by. It was one of the peculiarities of this creature to travel always in flocks of a hundred. Also—and here in spite of the pain in his shoulder, Kramer permitted himself to indulge in a broad smile, the one thing which would attract a quanthrow was salt.

In an instant he was ripping open his haversack, pouring the white crystals on the three dead bodies.

With their strange clannishness, the quanthrowes would miss these members of their flock shortly and would return to investigate their absence. When they found the salt they would linger there for hours. And Blanchard . . . !

"That damned sneak will find out he bit off more than he can chew this time," Kramer muttered. He walked on again with new vigor.

The sword cut in his suit was easily repaired. Duoresilient tape fixed that. To his dismay, however, Kramer found that the attack by the quanthrowes had damaged the delicate wiring of his visa set. Several times he switched it on, expecting to see the oncoming Blanchard. But the vision plate remained blurred.

At nightfall of the second day he reached the first way station. Stumbling in the doorless cubicle, Kramer threw himself prone on the debris-covered floor, panting with exhaustion.

Here at least he could rest a while, free from the incredible dangers of this world.

THE cubicle ages ago had housed the air filtration apparatus and heat control units of the way station. This machinery had weathered to a pile of oxidized metal. But in a hermetically sealed cabinet mounted on one wall Kramer found a spanner glass still in usable operation.

He pursed his lips in satisfaction, quickly transferred the battery connections of his suit to the device and tripped over the vernier.

For a long moment the cracked screen showed a blank surface. Then, with an oath, Kramer drove his clenched fist into the panel, shattering pintax tubes in a shower of fragments.

He had seen enough. Clearly outlined in the screen the figure of Blanchard could be seen, plodding doggedly through the sand.

Kramer dropped into a ruined settee and chinned the stud feeding a lighted cheroot to his lips. He inhaled the rank smoke savagely.

"The dirty, miserable hound. How in the name of all eternal did he get by those quanthrows?"

He spat the cigarette out the exhaust valve trap. "Okay, wise guy. You asked for it. Now you're goin' to get it."

He stood up and began a careful survey of the cubicle's interior. Nothing at all which might serve to entrap the oncoming I.P. man. Kramer went outside and began to pace along the short narrow street.

On the right was the matrilated dome where canaleers passed the night so long ago. On the left stood the remnants of the harthode tower where first, second and third Monarchy Martian dispatchers had poured over their charts and lock controls, guiding the network of traffic in and out of Canal Grand.

The last structure was still in fairly good preservation. It was a canalserai, and Kramer's heart leaped as his gaze took it in. Even pilots in those days had not lacked for entertainment. This was their pleasure palace where gambling and dancing had taken place.

The door to this building had long since vanished and five feet over the

threshold was a small mound of drifted sand. Inside, however, Kramer found the rarified air had kept things in fairly good trim.

The long demdem bar still stood before one wall. Farther on he saw the little alcoves where incoming polits had drowsed under the effect of the forbidden electro-hypnotic machines.

The dismantled parts of one of these machines still stood in a corner, and he paused to examine it. Self applied hypnosis was one of the accomplishments of the early Martians. This device was simple. It consisted of two prism-shaped pieces of translucent metal, mounted on brackets in front of a many-side panel of refracto-glass. Seated before the instrument, under a powerful ato-light, the imbibor found his gaze drawn toward a single perspective, where the reflection of his own eyes was transmitted back to him.

Abruptly Kramer seized the instrument and carried it to the doorway of the room, scooped the drifted sand into a higher mound, and placed the machine upon it.

Directly above a stone girder hung precariously, balanced by the jammed key stone in the archway. Kramer dug toe holes in the crumbling masonry, mounted to that key stone and loosened it with his knife blade. An instant later only a few chips of stone kept the massive girder from plunging downward.

Back on the floor level again, he whipped out his electric stylus and wrote the following words across the refracto-glass panel:

Blanchard: I know you're after me, but our trails part here. If you want to know which canal I've taken, the secret lies in the glass.

HE SIGNED his name and smiled quietly. It was a rather complicated trap, but if he knew the I.P. man, it was a good one. Blanchard would enter here, searching for clues. He would see the hypnosis machine, and he would read the message.

From the moment he looked into the refracto glass, the machine would begin its spell. Blanchard would be lulled into

a quick, deep sleep, and as he slumped backward against the wall, the dislodged girder above would complete the story.

Five minor canals angled off Canal Grand at this way station. But Kramer's original plan of taking one of these to throw his pursuer off the track was gone now. Sure of himself, he continued almost light-heartedly down Canal Grand.

As he went on, he worked at the wiring of his visa set. Once he got it in partial operation, but then it blurred again, and refused to respond to the controls. The pain in his shoulder was a dull throb now; his whole arm felt numb and feverish, and there was a growing lump in the gland under his armpit.

By noon he was aware of a subtle change in the scene about him. The canal's walls seemed to draw closer together and become deeper. The sides of the great ditch took on a deeper brownish red hue that caught the glare of the sun and refracted it back into his eyeballs.

Abruptly Kramer halted, staring with wide-open eyes. A quarter mile ahead a large black mound barred his path.

Rocks! As he drew nearer he could see the outlines of gargantuan boulders piled high in a grotesque cairn. But how had they come here? They had not rolled down from the top of the canal, for no whim of nature could have constructed such a regular formation.

Kramer approached with caution. Twenty yards away he stopped again, and a wave of fear swept over him. There was something curiously life-like about those stones. He received the impression they were watching him with unseen eyes.

Then suppressing the scream which arose in his throat, he turned and ran. Simultaneously he looked over his shoulder, and an incredible sight met his eyes.

The "stones" had left their mound and were now deploying over the hard-packed ground and slowly, but unmistakably, pursuing him.

Not until that moment did Kramer realize what he had blundered into. They were the horrors of the canals—the

kanal-bras, Mars' link between organic and inorganic life.

At first he outdistanced them easily. Then, as they increased their locomotion, he seemed to be running on a treadmill with painted scenery unrolling on either side. The kanal-bras came on with no apparent effort, gliding across the surface of the sand as if they weighed nothing at all. Looking back, Kramer thought he could see cavernous mouths and multiple eyes.

He understood their purpose. They were inorganic, yes, but they were also omnivorous. That is, feeding on organic matter, they permitted that matter to adhere to their surfaces and slowly petrify like a coal deposit.

They were close upon him now. Kramer's breath was searing his lungs, and he could hear the exhaust valve in the back of his helmet rattle open and shut like a shuttlecock.

And then once again his reading background came to the aid of the former salvage ratio clerk. Somewhere he remembered that a kanal-bra reacted to sub-sonic vibrations. They alone could penetrate their metal-stone bodies.

He had no vibrator, but he did have his heat pistol. Frantically he clawed the weapon out of its holster and twisted the control stud to its farthest marking. From a heat ray to an infra-red ray to a sub-sonic ray was but a step. He turned and fired.

EVEN then he was not prepared for the results. As the single blast pulsed out of the barrel, the kanal-bras lost their forward momentum and halted. Like a slow motion camera turned backward, they slowly retreated across the sand. Reaching their former position, they mounted one upon the other, until they formed the identical mound Kramer had seen before.

He stood still a long moment, staring in amazement. Then boldly he tried an experiment. The heat pistol was of the latest Gan-Larkington type, and the tiny rheostat was capable of controlling vibrations almost the entire breadth of the vibratory scale. Super-sonic charges,

though rare with most weapons, were included in the Gan-Larkington.

If a sub-sonic charge would thus stultify the kanal-bras would not a super-sonic or ultra-sonic wave tend to release them?

Kramer tried it. He adjusted the weapon, fired a shot and saw the stony creatures immediately erupt into life. A sub-sonic blast sent them returning in that curious retrogressive action to their former position.

He smoked a cigarette over the discovery. A quarter of an hour later he had set his third trap. Beyond a doubt there wasn't the slightest need for it. But with the stakes he had, there was no use taking chances.

He buried the heat gun in the sand, leaving only the barrel and the trigger exposed. He stretched a cord tightly for twenty yards across the canal floor, connecting one end to the trigger. The barrel he aimed directly at the motionless kanal-bras.

"Now," he muttered, "if that snoopy Blanchard does get by the way station, he'll get a surprise. All you need, these days, is brains."

With a quick step he skirted the living rock cairn and headed down the canal.

Within a quarter mile he found it necessary to consult the stolen map. And a mile farther on found him clutching the folio in one hand, gazing at it constantly as he walked.

At intervals of every few hundred yards other tributary canals branched off the main stem. Some of these were equally as large and impressive as Canal Grand, and shortly it dawned upon Kramer that he might be—probably was—lost.

The map was clearly enough marked, but apparently new waterways had been dug since those ancient cartographers had penned the manuscript. Kramer swore but did not slow his pace. He still had his magno compass. He might wander off the main artery, but sooner or later he should be able to place his position and swing back into it.

Faded hieroglyphics began to make

their appearance now, stenciled deeply in colossal letters above the water marks on the canal's sides. Some of them were undecipherable. Others, Kramer tried to ease his growing tension, by translating.

"Praise to Zara," one of them read. Another: "Calthedra five hundred legaros." There was one in larger marking that caused Kramer to knit his brows in puzzlement. Translated freely, it read: "Beware of the Echo."

He forgot the hieroglyphics abruptly when he tripped over a heavier mound of sand and fell sprawling. The sudden shock did something to his visa set. It crackled, hummed, began operation, then went dead again.

But that momentary glimpse in the vision plate was enough. Kramer had seen Blanchard plodding forward relentlessly through the drifted sand. He had safely passed both traps.

Was there no stopping the man?

"Blast his rotten soul!" Kramer lurched to his feet and began to walk at a faster pace, though the pain in his shoulder had increased a hundredfold.

HE NOTICED now that the red banks of the canal had given way to a kind of lustreless, metallic wall. Slate gray in color, they towered even higher than before, and they seemed to converge at the top like a tunnel. Simultaneously he felt a cloud of mental uneasiness sweep over him, accompanied by an overpowering desire to break the brooding oppressive silence.

Twenty yards forward, and that desire had become maddening. The utter quiet pressed against his ears. It seemed he would scream if he could not make some sound. Against his will he found his steps drawn toward the nearer wall. And here, like a crazed man, he seized a heavy rock fragment and began dashing it again and again against the metallic bank.

He could feel the snapping recoil as the blow traveled up his arm. The hum in his headset told him there was nothing wrong with his audiphone.

But the blows produced no sound.

It was as if he had struck a mallet into a pile of cotton. And then he went rigid. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen something leap up from the rock fragment even as he hit it and race outward across the canal with incredible speed. A shadow, it seemed to be, and yet a shadow that possessed a certain miniature form with moving ghost legs and arms and a tiny button knob that might have been a head.

Again he struck the rock and again a shadow leaped up and sped away. An instant later Kramer threw himself flat upon the sand, groveling in agony. The shadows, a dozen of them, had formed a phalanx at the opposite wall of the canal, an elliptic cordon, and had raced back upon him.

As they came, they carried the delayed sounds of Kramer's blows upon the stone.

Delayed, but multiplied and amplified a thousand times. The concentrated roar was agonizing. Vainly he thumbed the switch, disconnecting the headset. But the vibration pulsed relentlessly through the space suit and hextar helmet. He thought he felt the shadow bodies leaping upon him, striking his skull with tiny invisible hammers.

Were they sound shadows, some mixture of light and sound waves possessing the ability to travel through space and time, a mutant echo that had the dominant characteristics of living matter?

Or was the whole thing a vagary of his brain, the result of a mounting fever from his infected arm? He did not know.

Kramer sat there a long time, mulling over the situation, as the vibration finally ceased. He wondered if there were any possibility of using the phenomena as a trap. A last and final trap that would forestall Blanchard for once and for all.

But he had no time for further thought. His gaze had turned idly to that length of canal down which he had just passed. And far off, almost at the limit of his vision, he saw something which made his mouth suddenly fall slack.

A man was toiling through the sand,

slowly advancing toward him. Blanchard!

Leaping to his feet, he raced away, fleeing madly at top speed, to the limit of his powers. Nor, thereafter, did he relax for an instant his frenzied efforts to escape.

Six days later Kramer entered the last lap of his trek. He knew it was the last lap because the way station at the confluence of the two mighty canals was clearly marked and described on the map. Any moment now he should be sighting the cavern mouth that led to the retnite deposit.

After that his worries would be over. He would extract a quantity of the deposit—the folio gave a detailed account of the method to obtain and purify it. He would swing into Canal 28 Northwest and manage somehow to reach Crater City. Blanchard was close on his heels, yes. But in some way he would take care of Blanchard.

GIVE him a year then—six months, and success would be his. The mental doors that would be flung open to him would eliminate all necessity of subsistence worry, and the law would be a trivial thing which he could dispense with as a cat does a mouse.

Remained only one item unanswered—the Void. Since he had entered Canal Grand, Kramer had tried to put that mystery out of his thoughts. It had persisted, however, and now that he was nearing his goal, he thought about it more and more.

It lay ahead somewhere, a gulf which he must cross. Not until he had reached it would he know the answer.

He began to study the canal sides now with care. The hieroglyphics had long since disappeared, and there was utterly no sign of life.

All that long Martian day he walked steadily onward. His throat was dry; his arm and shoulder felt strange and numb like alien parts of his body; at intervals reddish spots danced before his eyes.

At three o'clock by his Earth watch Kramer was startled to see the left canal

wall swing outward on a tangent, forming a vast ellipse before him. Simultaneously the sand floor began to descend, deeper and deeper, until he could no longer discern the tops of the banks.

An hour later a cry of amazement escaped his lips.

Scattered across the canal floor a quarter mile ahead was an array of incredible objects. He saw modern rocket ships; he saw thirtieth century stepto planes with their curious elongated wing exhaust jets. All of them lay there in the oppressive silence, conning doors open as if their crews had left only a moment before and would shortly return.

But as he passed them at closer range, he saw, too, that they had been there a long time. The bulls were half buried in the sand. The glassite ports were yellowish and opaque with the peculiar dull hue brought about by long exposure to the Martaian atmosphere.

There were some twenty ships of types and manufacture he recognized. One of them was the ill-fated *Goliath*, whose disappearance, he vaguely remembered, had caused a furore when he was a child. Older vessels loomed as he walked on, some of them antedating the ancient models he had seen in his history books.

Kramer did not have to be told that this was the end of the trail for these ships. They too had come this far, hoping to probe the Void. But what had become of their crews? Why had they not returned?

He passed the last vessel at length and reached a point where the view before him was unrestricted. Here he halted, oppressed by an inner sense of unease. He drew out the oil skin pouch and began a close survey of the folio.

Almost at once a cry of triumph came to his lips. It seemed queer he had not noticed it before, but this widening point of the canal was marked on the map. More than that, the map also showed the retnite deposit to lay in the center of the huge bowl.

Two trails leading to the lode were shown. One of them a narrow, round-about route was marked with a dotted line. The other trail, larger, shorter

bore two words in early Martian at its entrance. A-krey menarga, it read.

Kramer stood up and walked a hundred yards east. He saw no trail. Nothing but trackless sand. And then abruptly, as he turned his eyes slightly upward, he did see it.

Extending before him was a narrow corridor where the sand floor somehow seemed tilted at a different angle and where the atmosphere bore a curious glazed effect, as if he were looking through a double thickness of glass. Also, he thought he saw a row of black spots, like a dotted line, stretching into space before him.

BUT even at that moment with success at his finger tips, Kramer did not forget himself—or Blanchard. Two trails were marked on the map, this one and another farther on. He threw the map to the sand, grinding it under his heel to give the impression it had been dropped there accidentally.

Then he continued walking east. And shortly afterward his efforts were rewarded. The second trail was larger, more inviting. A stone floor stretched out before him across the sand. But here, too, he received the impression he was looking at it through imperfect plates of glass.

Without hesitation Kramer swung into it. Almost at once he had a feeling of exhilaration, of mental buoyancy. Mingled with it was a feeling that the way behind him was closing up.

The stone floorway led up. And that was odd. For Kramer could have sworn that the sand bowl was flat as a vast die. As he went on, however, he thought less about his surroundings and more about the stolen folio.

A-krey menarga? What did those words mean? Menar he knew, was an early Martian prefix, meaning bent or twisted. And the only logical definition of krey was space.

Kramer stopped while an icy chill crawled up his spine. Into the space warp! . . . Of course, that was what the secret of the Void was. A space warp would account for everything: the eter-

nal division of North and South Mars, the disappearance of the various expeditions, the dehydration of the canals. It meant that another world—another dimension—was impinged at this point and whoever blundered into it would be lost forever!

Quite slowly Kramer began to walk again.

He forced his eyes ahead where the usual perspective was supplanted by a jumble of angles, tilted ellipses and quadrants. But at length he could stand it no longer, and he turned.

Nothing! There was nothing behind him at all. Only the way ahead, stretching like a forsaken causeway into measureless distances.



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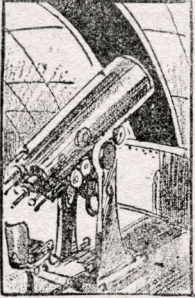


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THE POINT OF VIEW

A Scientifiction Hall of Fame Story Featuring Hasket Van Manderpootz, Scientist Extraordinary!



"I AM too modest!" I snapped the great Hasket van Manderpootz, pacing irritably about the limited area of his private laboratory, glaring at me the while. "That is the trouble. I undervalue my own achievements, and therefore permit petty imitators like Corveille to influence the committee and win the Morell prize."

"But," I said soothingly, "you've won the Morell physics award half a dozen times, Professor. They can't very well give it to you every year."

"Why not, since it is plain that I deserve it?" bristled the professor. "Understand, Dixon, that I do not regret my modesty, even though it permits conceited fools like Corveille, who have infinitely less reason than I for conceit, to win awards that mean nothing save prizes for successful bragging. Bah! To grant an award for research along such obvious lines that I neglected to mention them, thinking that even a Morell judge would appreciate their obviousness! Research on the psychon, eh! Who discovered the psychon? Who but van Manderpootz?"

"Wasn't that what you got last year's award for?" I asked consolingly. "And after all, isn't this modesty, this lack of jealousy on your part, a symbol of greatness of character?"

"True—true!" said the great van Manderpootz, mollified. "Had such an affront been committed against a lesser man than myself, he would doubtless have entered a bitter complaint against the judges. But not I. Anyway, I know from experience that it wouldn't do any good. And besides, despite his greatness, van Manderpootz is as modest and shrinking as a violet." At this point he paused, and his broad red face tried to look violet-like.

I suppressed a smile. I knew the eccentric genius of old, from the days when I had been Dixon Wells, undergraduate student of engineering, and had taken a course in Newer Physics—that is, in Relativity—under the famous professor. For some unguessable reason, he had taken a fancy to me, and as a result I had been involved in several of his experiments since graduation.

THERE was the affair of the subjunctivator, for instance, and also that of the idealizator. In the first of these episodes I had suffered the indignity of falling in love with a girl two weeks after she was apparently dead, and in the second, the equal or greater indignity of falling in love with a

girl who didn't exist, never had existed, and never would exist—in other words, with an ideal.

Perhaps I'm a little susceptible to feminine charms, or rather, perhaps I used to be. For since the disaster of the idealizator, I had sworn grimly to relegate such follies to the past, much to the disgust of various 'vision entertainers, singers, dancers, and the like.

So of late I had been spending my days seriously, trying wholeheartedly to get to the office on time just once, so that I could refer to it next time my father accused me of never getting anywhere on time. I hadn't succeeded yet, but fortunately the N. J. Wells Corporation was wealthy enough to survive even without the full-time services of Dixon Wells. Or should I say even with them?

Anyway, I'm sure my father preferred to have me late in the morning after an evening with van Manderpootz than after one with "Tips" Alva or "Whimsy" White, or one of the numerous others of the ladies of the 'vision screen. Even in the late twenty-first century, he retained a lot of old-fashioned ideas.

Van Manderpootz had ceased to remember that he was as modest and shrinking as a violet.

"It has just occurred to me," he announced

EDITOR'S NOTE



MOST science-fiction fans will agree that van Manderpootz is the greatest scientist that ever lived, that is living, and that ever could live. If you are ac-

quainted with Stanley G. Weinbaum's famous stories, "The Worlds of If" and "The Ideal" you are familiar with van Manderpootz's unique forms of experimentation.

We find him here again with another brainstorm, the "attitudinizer," and what it does and how it works will astound you. Only van Manderpootz could have thought up such a thing!

Because this story, "The Point of View," by the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, has stood the test of time, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFUNCTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

Nominate your own favorites! Send your vote to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.



I was completely dazed and bewildered

impressively, "that years have character much as humans have. This year, Two Thousand Fifteen, will be remembered in history as a stupid year, in which the Morell prize was given to a nincompoop. Last year, on the other hand, was an intelligent year, a jewel in the crown of civilization. Not only was the Morell prize given to van Manderpootz, but I announced my discrete field theory in that year, and the University unveiled Gogli's statue of me as well." He

sighed. "Yes, a very intelligent year! What do you think?"

"It depends on how you look at it." I responded glumly. "I didn't enjoy it so much, what with Joanna Caldwell and Denise d'Agrión, and your infernal experiments. It's all in the point of view."

The professor snorted. "Infernal experiments, eh! Point of view! Of course it's all in the point of view. Even Einstein's simple little synthesis was enough to prove that. If

the whole world could adopt an intelligent and admirable point of view—that of van Manderpootz, for instance—all troubles would be over. If it were possible—” He paused, and an expression of amazed wonder spread over his ruddy face.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Matter? I am astonished! The astounding depths of genius awe me. I am overwhelmed with admiration at the incalculable mysteries of a great mind.”

“I don’t get the drift.”

“Dixon,” he said impressively, “you have been privileged to look upon an example of the workings of genius. More than that, you have planted the seed from which perhaps shall grow the towering tree of thought. Incredible as it seems, you, Dixon Wells, have given van Manderpootz an idea! It is thus that genius seizes upon the small, the unimportant, the negligible, and turns it to its own grand purposes. I stand awe-struck!”

“But what—?”

“Wait,” said van Manderpootz, still in rapt admiration of the majesty of his own mind. “When the tree bears fruit, you shall see it. Until then, be satisfied that you have played a part in its planting.”

IT WAS perhaps a month before I saw van Manderpootz again, but one bright spring evening his broad, rubicund face looked out of the phone-screen at me.

“It’s ready,” he announced impressively.

“What is?”

The professor looked pained at the thought that I could have forgotten.

“The tree has borne fruit,” he explained. “If you wish to drop over to my quarters, we’ll proceed to the laboratory and try it out. I do not set a time, so that it will be utterly impossible for you to be late.”

I ignored that last dig, but had a time been set, I would doubtless have been even later than usual, for it was with some misgivings that I induced myself to go at all. I still remembered the unpleasantness of my last two experiences with the inventions of van Manderpootz.

However, at last we were seated in the small laboratory, while out in the larger one the professor’s technical assistant, Carter, pattered over some device. In the far corner his secretary, the plain and unattractive Miss Fitch, transcribed lecture notes, for van Manderpootz abhorred the thought that his golden utterances might be lost to posterity. On the table between the professor and myself lay a curious device, something that looked like a cross between a pair of nose-glasses and a miner’s lamp.

“There it is,” said van Manderpootz proudly. “There lies my attitudinizer, which may well become an epoch-making device.”

“How? What does it do?”

“I will explain. The germ of the idea traces back to that remark of yours about everything depending on the point of view. A very obvious statement, of course, but genius seizes are the obvious and draws from it the obscure. Thus the thoughts of even the simplest mind can suggest to the man of genius his sublime conceptions, as is evident

from the fact that I got this idea from you.”

“What idea?”

“Be patient. There is much you must understand first. You must realize just how true is the statement that everything depends on the point of view. Einstein proved that motion, space, and time depend on the particular point of view of the observer, or as he expressed it, on the scale of reference used. I go farther than that, infinitely farther. I propound the theory that the observer *is* the point of view. I go even beyond that. I maintain that the world itself is merely the point of view!”

“Huh?”

“Look here,” proceeded van Manderpootz. “It is obvious the world I see is entirely different from the one in which you live. It is equally obvious that a strictly religious man occupies a different world than that of a materialist. The fortunate man lives in a happy world; the unfortunate man sees a world of misery. One man is happy with little, another is miserable with much. Each sees the world from his own point of view, which is the same as saying that each lives in his own world. Therefore there are as many worlds as there are points of view.”

“But,” I objected, “that theory is to disregard reality. Out of all the different points of view, there must be one that is right, and all the rest are wrong.”

“One would think so,” agreed the professor. “One would think that between the point of view of you, for instance, as contrasted with that of, say van Manderpootz, there would be small doubt as to which was correct. However, early in the Twentieth Century, Heisenber enunciated his Principle of Uncertainty, which proved beyond argument that a completely accurate scientific picture of the world is quite impossible, that the law of cause and effect is merely a phase of the law of chance, that no infallible predictions can ever be made, and that what science used to call natural laws are really only descriptions of the way in which the human mind perceives nature. In other words, the character of the world depends entirely on the mind observing it, or, to return to my earlier statement, the point of view.”

“But no one can ever really understand another person’s point of view,” I said. “It isn’t fair to undermine the whole basis of science because you can’t be sure that the color we both call red wouldn’t look green to you if you could see it through my eyes.”

“Ah!” said van Manderpootz triumphantly. “So we come now to my attitudinizer. Suppose that it were possible for me to see through your eyes, or you through mine. Do you see what a boon such an ability would be to humanity? Not only from the standpoint of science, but also because it would obviate all troubles due to misunderstandings. And even more.” Shaking his finger, the professor recited oracularly, “‘Oh, wad some pow’r the giftie gie us to see oursel’s as ithers see us.’ Van manderpootz is that power, Dixon. Through my attitudinizer, one may at last adopt the viewpoint of another. The poet’s plaint of more than two centuries ago is answered at last.”

PUZZLEMENT came to me.

"Now how the devil do you see through somebody else's eyes?"

"Very simply. You will recall the idealizator. Now it is obvious that when I peered over your shoulder and perceived in the mirror your conception of the ideal woman, I was, to a certain extent, adopting your point of view. In that case the psychons given off by your mind were converted into quanta of visible light, which could be seen. In the case of my attitudinizer, the process is exactly reversed. One flashes the beam of this light on the subject whose point of view is desired; the visible light is reflected back with a certain accompaniment of psychons, which are here intensified to a degree which will permit them to be, so to speak, appreciated."

"Psychons?"

"Have you already forgotten my discovery of the unit particle of thought? Must I explain again how the cosmons, chronons, spations, psychons, and all other particles are interchangeable? And that," he continued abstractedly, "leads to certain interesting speculations. Suppose I were to convert, say a ton of material protons and electrons into spations—that is, convert matter into space. I calculate that a ton of matter will produce approximately a cubic mile of space. Now the question is, where would we put it, since all the space we have is already occupied by space? Or if I manufactured an hour or two of time? It is obvious that we have no time to fit in an extra couple of hours, since all our time is already accounted for. Doubtless it will take a certain amount of thought for even van Manderpootz to solve these problems, but at the moment I am curious to watch the workings of the attitudinizer. Suppose you put it on, Dixon."

"I? Haven't you tried it out yet?"

"Of course not. In the first place, what has van Manderpootz to gain by studying the viewpoints of other people? The object of the device is to permit people to study nobler viewpoints than their own. And in the second place, I have asked myself whether it is fair to the world for van Manderpootz to be the first to try out a new and possibly untrustworthy device, and I reply, 'No!'"

"But I should try it out, eh? Well, every time I try out any of your inventions I find myself in some kind of trouble. I'd be a fool to go around looking for more difficulty, wouldn't I?"

"I assure you that my viewpoint will be much less apt to get you into trouble than your own," said van Manderpootz with dignity. "There will be no question of your becoming involved in some impossible love affair as long as you stick to that."

Nevertheless, despite the assurance of the great scientist, I was more than a little reluctant to don the device. Yet I was curious as well. It seemed a fascinating prospect to be able to look at the world through other eyes, as fascinating as visiting a new world—which it was, according to the professor. So, after a few moments of hesitation, I picked up the instrument, slipped it over my head so that the eye-glasses were in the proper position, and looked inquiringly at van Mander-

pootz.

"You must turn it on," he said, reaching over and clicking a switch on the frame. "Now. Now flash the light to my face. That's the way; just center the circle of light on my face. And now what do you see?"

I DIDN'T answer. What I saw was, for the moment, quite indescribable. I was completely dazed and bewildered, and it was only when some involuntary movement of my head at last flashed the light from the professor's face to the table top that a measure of sanity returned, which proves at least that tables do not possess any point of view.

"O-o-o-h!" I gasped.

Van Manderpootz beamed. "Of course you are overwhelmed. One could hardly expect to adopt the view of Van Manderpootz without some difficulties of adjustment. A second time will be easier."

I reached up and switched off the light. "A second time will be not only easier, but also impossible," I said crossly. "I'm not going to experience another dizzy spell like that for anybody."

"But of course you will, Dixon. I am certain that the dizziness will be negligible on the second trial. Naturally the unexpected heights affected you, much as if you were to come without warning to the brink of a colossal precipice. But this time you will be prepared, and the effect will be much less."

Well, it was. After a few moments I was able to give my full attention to the phenomena of the attitudinizer, and queer phenomena they were, too. I scarcely know how to describe the sensation of looking at the world through the filter of another's mind. It is almost an indescribable experience, but so, in the ultimate analysis, is any other experience.

What I saw first was a kaleidoscopic array of colors and shapes, but the amazing, astounding, inconceivable thing about the scene was that there was no single color I could recognize! The eyes of van Manderpootz, or perhaps his brain, interpreted color in a fashion utterly alien to the way in which my own functioned, and the resultant spectrum was so bizarre that there is simply no way of describing any single tint in words. To say, as I did to the professor, that his conception of red looked to me like a shade between purple and green conveys absolutely no meaning, and the only way a third person could appreciate the meaning would be to examine my point of view through an attitudinizer while I was examining that of van Manderpootz. Thus he could apprehend my conception of van Manderpootz's reaction to the color red.

And shapes! It took me several minutes to identify the weird, angular, twisted, distorted appearance in the center of the room as the plain laboratory table. The room itself, aside from its queer form, looked smaller, perhaps because van Manderpootz is somewhat larger than I.

But by far the strangest part of his point of view had nothing to do with the outlook upon the physical world, but with the more fundamental elements—with his attitudes. Most of his thoughts, on that first occasion,

were beyond me, because I had not yet learned to interpret the personal symbolism in which he thought. But I did understand his attitudes.

There was Carter, for instance, toiling away out in the large laboratory. I saw at once that a plodding, unintelligent drudge he seemed to van Manderpootz. And there was Miss Fitch. I confess that she had always seemed unattractive to me, but my impression of her was Venus herself beside that of the professor! She hardly seemed human to him, and I am sure that he never thought of her as a woman, but merely as a piece of convenient but unimportant laboratory equipment.

AT THIS point I caught a glimpse of myself through the eyes of van Manderpootz. Ouch! Perhaps I'm not a genius, but I'm dead certain that I'm not the grinning ape I appeared to be in his eyes. And perhaps I'm not exactly the handsomest man in the world either, but if I thought I looked like that! And then, to cap the climax, I apprehended van Manderpootz's conception of himself!

"That's enough!" I yelled. "I won't stay around here just to be insulted. I'm through!"

I tore the attitudinizer from my head and tossed it to the table, feeling suddenly a little foolish at the sight of the grin on the face of the professor.

"That is hardly the spirit which has led science to its great achievements, Dixon," he observed amiably. "Suppose you describe the nature of the insults, and if possible, something about the working of the attitudinizer as well. After all, that is what you were supposed to be observing."

I flushed, grumbled a little, and complied. Van Manderpootz listened with great interest to my description of the differences in our physical worlds, especially the variations in our perceptions of form and color.

"What a field for an artist!" he ejaculated at last. "Unfortunately, it is a field that must remain forever untapped, because even though an artist examined a thousand viewpoints and learned innumerable new colors, his pigments would continue to impress his audience with the same old colors each of them had always known." He sighed thoughtfully, and then proceeded. "However, the device is apparently quite safe to use. I shall therefore try it briefly, bringing to the investigation a calm, scientific mind which refuses to be troubled by the sort of trifles that seem to bother you."

He donned the attitudinizer, and I must confess that he stood the shock of the first trial somewhat better than I did. After a surprised "Oof!" he settled down to a complacent analysis of my point of view, while I sat somewhat self-consciously under his calm appraisal. Calm, that is, for about three minutes.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, tearing the device from a face whose normal ruddiness had deepened to a choleric angry color.

"Get out!" he roared. "So that's the way van Manderpootz looks to you! Moron! Idiot! Imbecile! Get out!"

It was a week or ten days later that I hap-

pened to be passing the University on my way from somewhere to somewhere else, and I fell to wondering whether the professor had yet forgiven me. There was a light in the window of his laboratory over in the Physics Building, so I dropped in, making my way past the desk where Carter labored, and the corner where Miss Fitch sat in dull primness at her endless task of transcribing lecture notes.

Van Manderpootz greeted me cordially enough, but with a curious assumption of melancholy in his manner.

"Ah, Dixon," he began, "I am glad to see you. Since our last meeting I have learned much of the stupidity of the world, and it appears to me now that you are actually one of the more intelligent contemporary minds."

THIS from van Manderpootz!

"Why—thank you," I said.

"It is true," for some days I have sat at the window overlooking the street there, and have observed the viewpoints of the passers-by. Would you believe"—his voice lowered—"would you believe that only seven and four-tenths per cent are even aware of the existence of van Manderpootz? And doubtless many of the few who are, come from among the students in the neighborhood. I knew that the average level of intelligence was low, but it had not occurred to me that it was as low as that."

"After all," I said consolingly, "you must remember that the achievements of van Manderpootz are such as to attract the attention of the intelligent few rather than of the many."

"A very silly paradox!" he snapped. "On the basis of that theory, since the higher one goes in the scale of intelligence, the fewer individuals one finds, the greatest achievement of all is one that *nobody* has heard of. By that test you would be greater than van Manderpootz, an obvious *reductio ad absurdum*."

He glared his reproof that I should even have thought of the point, then something in the outer laboratory caught his ever-observant eye.

"Carter!" he roared. "Is that a synobasical interphasometer in the positronic flow? Fool! What sort of measurements do you expect to make when your measuring instrument itself is part of the experiment? Take it out and start over!"

He rushed away toward the unfortunate technician. I settled idly back in my chair and stared about the small laboratory, whose walls had seen so many marvels. The latest, the attitudinizer, lay carelessly on the table, dropped there by the professor after his analysis of the mass viewpoint of the pedestrians in the street below.

I picked up the device and fell to examining its construction. Of course this was utterly beyond me, for no ordinary engineer can hope to grasp the intricacies of a van Manderpootz concept. So, after a puzzled but admiring survey of its infinitely delicate wires and grids and lenses, I made the obvious move. I put it on.

My first thought was the street, but since

the evening was well along, the walk below the window was deserted. Back in my chair again, I sat musing idly when a faint sound that was not the rumbling of the professor's voice attracted my attention. I identified it shortly as the buzzing of a heavy fly, butting its head stupidly against the pane of glass that separated the small laboratory from the large room beyond. I wondered casually what the viewpoint of a fly was like, and ended by flashing the light on the creature.

For some moments I saw nothing other than I had been seeing right along from my own personal point of view, because, as van Manderpootz explained later, the psychons from the miserable brain of a fly are too few to produce any but the vaguest of impressions. But gradually I became aware of a picture, a queer and indescribable scene.

Flies are color-blind. That was my first impression, for the world was a dull panorama of grays and whites and blacks. Flies are extremely near-sighted; when I had finally identified the scene as the interior of the familiar room, I discovered that it seemed enormous to the insect, whose vision did not extend more than six feet, though it did take in almost a complete sphere, so that the creature could see practically in all directions at once.

BUT perhaps the most astonishing thing, though I did not think of it until later, was that the compound eye of the insect did not convey to it the impressions of a vast number of separate pictures, such as the eye produces when a microphotograph is taken through it. The fly sees one picture just as we do; in the same way as our brain rights the upside-down image cast on our retina, the fly's brain reduces the compound image to one. And beyond these impressions were a wild hodge-podge of smell-sensations, and a strange desire to burst through the invisible glass barrier into the brighter light beyond. But I had not time to analyze these sensations, for suddenly there was a flash of something infinitely clearer than the dim cerebrations of a fly.

For half a minute or longer I was unable to guess what that momentary flash had been. I knew that I had seen something incredibly lovely, that I had tapped a viewpoint that looked upon something whose very presence caused ecstasy, but whose viewpoint it was, or what that flicker of beauty had been, were questions beyond my ability to answer.

I slipped off the attitudinizer and sat staring perplexedly at the buzzing fly on the pane of glass. Out in the other room van Manderpootz continued his harangue to the repentant Carter, and off in a corner invisible from my position I could hear the rustle of papers as Miss Fitch transcribed endless notes. I puzzled vainly over the problem of what had happened, and then the solution dawned on me.

The fly must have buzzed between me and one of the occupants of the outer laboratory. I had been following its flight with the faintly visible beam of the attitudinizer's light, and that beam must have been either the professor or Carter, since the secretary was

quite beyond range of the light.

It seemed improbable that the cold and brilliant mind of van Manderpootz could be the agency of the sort of emotional ecstasy I had sensed. It must, therefore, have been the head of the mild and inoffensive little Carter that the beam had tapped. With a feeling of curiosity I slipped the device back of my own head and sent the beam sweeping dimly into the larger room.

It did not at the time occur to me that such a procedure was quite as discreditable as eavesdropping, or even more dishonorable, if you come right down to it, because it meant the theft of far more personal information than one could ever convey by the spoken word. But all I considered at the moment was my own curiosity. I wanted to learn what sort of viewpoint could produce that strange, instantaneous flash of beauty. If the proceeding was unethical—well, heaven knows I was punished for it.

So I turned the attitudinizer on Carter. At the moment, he was listening respectfully to van Manderpootz, and I sensed clearly his respect for the great man, a respect that had in it a distinct element of fear. I could hear Carter's impression of the booming voice of the professor, sounding somewhat like the modulated thunder of a god, which was not far from the little man's actual opinion of his master. I perceived Carter's opinion of himself, and his self-picture was an even more mouselike portrayal than my own impression of him. When, for an instant, he glanced my way, I sensed his impression of me, and while I'm sure that Dixon Wells is not the imbecile he appears to van Manderpootz, I'm equally sure that he's not the debonaire man of the world he seemed to Carter. All in all, Carter's point of view seemed that of a timid, inoffensive, retiring, servile little man, and I wondered all the more what could have caused that vanished flash of beauty in a mind like his.

THERE was no trace of it now. His attention was completely taken up by the voice of van Manderpootz, who had passed from a personal appraisal of Carter's stupidity to a general lecture on the fallacies of the unified field theory as presented by his rivals Corveille and Shrimski. Carter was listening with an almost worshipful regard, and I could feel his surges of indignation against the villains who dared to disagree with the authority of van Manderpootz.

I sat there intent on the strange double vision of the attitudinizer, which was in some respects like a Horsten psychomat—that is, one is able to see both through his own eyes and through the eyes of his subject. Thus I could see van Manderpootz and Carter quite clearly, but at the same time I could see or sense what Carter saw and sensed. Thus I perceived suddenly through my own eyes that the professor had ceased talking to Carter, and had turned at the approach of somebody as yet invisible to me, while at the same time, through Carter's eyes, I saw that vision of ecstasy which had flashed for a moment in his mind. I saw—description is utterly impossible, but I saw a woman who, ex-

cept possibly for the woman of the idealization screen, was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen!

I say description is impossible. That is the literal truth, for her coloring, her expression, her figure, as seen through Carter's eyes, were completely unlike anything expressible by words. I was fascinated. I could do nothing but watch, and I felt a wild surge of jealousy as I caught the adoration in the attitude of the humble Carter. She was glorious, magnificent, indescribable. It was with an effort that I untangled myself from the web of fascination enough to catch Carter's thought of her name.

"Lisa," he was thinking. "Lisa."

What she said to van Manderpootz was in tones too low for me to hear, and apparently too low for Carter's ears as well, else I should have heard her words through the attitudinizer. Both of us heard van Manderpootz's bellow in answer.

"I don't care how the dictionary pronounces the word!" he roared. "The way van Manderpootz pronounces a word is right!"

The glorious Lisa turned silently and vanished. For a few moments I watched her through Carter's eyes, but as she neared the laboratory door, he turned his attention again to van Manderpootz, and she was lost to my view. And as I saw the professor close his dissertation and approach me, I slipped the attitudinizer from my head and forced myself to a measure of calm. "Who is she?" I demanded. "I've got to meet her!"

He looked blankly at me. "Who's who?"

"Lisa! Who's Lisa?"

There was not a flicker in the cool blue eyes of van Manderpootz.

"I don't know any Lisa," he said indifferently.

"But you were just talking to her! Right out there!"

Van Manderpootz stared curiously at me. Then little by little a shrewd suspicion seemed to dawn in his broad, intelligent features.

"Hah!" he said. "Have you, by any chance, been using the attitudinizer?"

I nodded, chill apprehension gripping me.

"And is it also true that you chose to investigate the viewpoint of Carter out there?" At my nod, he stepped to the door that joined the two rooms, and closed it. When he faced me again, it was with features working into lines of amusement that suddenly found utterance in booming laughter. "Haw!" he roared. "Do you know who the beautiful Lisa is? She's Fitch!"

"Fitch? You're mad! She's glorious, and Fitch is plain and scrawny and ugly. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"You ask an embarrassing question," chuckled the professor. "Listen to me, Dixon. The woman you saw was my secretary, Miss Fitch, seen through the eyes of Carter. Don't you understand? The idiot Carter's in love with her!"

I SUPPOSE I walked the upper levels half the night, oblivious alike of the narrow strip of stars that showed between the towering walls of Twenty-first Century New York,

and the intermittent roar of traffic from the freight levels. Certainly this was the worst predicament of all those into which the fiendish contraptions of the great van Manderpootz had thrust me.

In love with a point of view! In love with a woman who had no existence apart from the beglammoured eyes of Carter. It wasn't Lisa Fitch I loved; indeed, I rather hated her angular ugliness. What I had fallen in love with was the way she looked to Carter, for there is nothing in the world quite as beautiful as a lover's conception of his sweetheart.

This predicament was far worse than my former ones. When I had fallen in love with a girl already dead, I could console myself with the thought of what might have been. When I had fallen in love with my own ideal—well, at least she was *mine*, even if I couldn't have her. But to fall in love with another man's conception! The only way that conception could even continue to exist was for Carter to remain in love with Lisa Fitch, which rather effectually left me outside the picture altogether. She was absolutely unattainable to me, for heaven knows I didn't want the real Lisa Fitch—"real" meaning, of course, the one who was real to me. I suppose in the end Carter's Lisa Fitch was as real as the skinny scarecrow my eyes saw.

She was unattainable—or was she? Suddenly an echo of a long-forgotten psychology course recurred to me. Attitudes are habits. Viewpoints are attitudes. Therefore viewpoints are habits. And—habits can be learned!

There was the solution! All I had to do was to learn, or to acquire by practice, the viewpoint of Carter. What I had to do was literally to put myself in his place to look at things his way, to see his viewpoint. For, once I learned to do that, I could see in Lisa Fitch the very things he saw, and the vision would become reality to me as well as to him.

So I planned carefully. I did not care to face the sarcasm of the great van Manderpootz; therefore I would work in secret. I would visit his laboratory at such times as he had classes or lectures, and I would use the attitudinizer to study the viewpoint of Carter, and to, as it were, practise that viewpoint. Thus I would have the means at hand of testing my progress, for all I had to do was glance at Miss Fitch without the attitudinizer. As soon as I began to perceive in her what Carter saw, I would know that success was imminent.

Those next two weeks were a strange interval of time. I haunted the laboratory of van Manderpootz at off hours, having learned from the University office what period she devoted to his courses. When one day I found the attitudinizer missing, I prevailed on Carter to show me where it was kept, and he, influenced doubtless by my friendship for the man he practically worshiped, indicated the place without question.

But later I suspect that he began to doubt his wisdom in this, for I know he thought it strange for me to sit for long periods staring at him. I caught all sorts of puzzled questions in his mind, though as I have said,

these were hard for me to decipher until I began to learn Carter's personal system of symbolism by which he thought. But at least one man was pleased—my father, who took my absences from the office and neglect of business as signs of good health and spirits, and congratulated me warmly on the improvement.

BUT the experiment was beginning to work. I found myself sympathizing with Carter's viewpoint, and little by little the mad world in which he lived was becoming as logical as my own. I learned to recognize colors through his eyes; I learned to understand form and shape; most fundamental of all, I learned his values, his attitudes, his tastes. And these last were a little inconvenient at times, for on the several occasions when I supplemented my daily calls with visits to van Manderpootz in the evening, I found some difficulty in separating my own respectful regard for the great man from Carter's unreasoning worship, with the result that I was on the verge of blurting out the whole thing to him several times. And perhaps it was a guilty conscience, but I kept thinking that the shrewd blue eyes of the professor rested on me with a curiously suspicious expression all evening.

The thing was approaching its culmination. Now and then, when I looked at the angular ugliness of Miss Fitch, I began to catch glimpses of the same miraculous beauty that Carter found in her—glimpses only, but harbingers of success. Each day I arrived at the laboratory with increasing eagerness, for each day brought me nearer to the achievement I sought. That is, my eagerness increased until one day I arrived to find neither Carter nor Miss Fitch present, but van Manderpootz, who should have been delivering a lecture on indeterminism, very much in evidence.

"Uh—hello," I said weakly.

"Umph!" he responded, glaring at me. "So Carter was right, I see. Dixon, the abysmal stupidity of the human race continually astounds me with new evidence of its astronomical depths, but I believe this escapade of yours plumbs the uttermost regions of imbecility."

"M—my escape?"

"Do you think you can escape the piercing eye of van Manderpootz? As soon as Carter told me you had been here in my absence, my mind leaped nimbly to the truth. But Carter's information was not even necessary, for half an eye was enough to detect the change in your attitude on these last few evening visits. So you've been trying to adopt Carter's viewpoint, eh? No doubt with the idea of ultimately depriving him of the charming Miss Fitch!"

"W—why—"

"Listen to me, Dixon. We will disregard the ethics of the thing and look at it from a purely rational viewpoint, if a rational viewpoint is possible to anybody but van Manderpootz. Don't you realize that in order to attain Carter's attitude toward Fitch, you would have to adopt his entire viewpoint? Not," he added tersely, "that I think his point of view is greatly inferior to yours, but I happen to prefer the viewpoint of a donkey to that of a mouse. Your particular brand of stupidity is more agreeable to me than Carter's timid, weak, and subservient nature, and some day you will thank me for this. Was his impression of Fitch worth the sacrifice of your own personality?"

"I—I don't know."

"Well, whether it was or not, van Manderpootz has decided the matter in the wisest way. For it's too late now, Dixon. I have given them both a month's leave and sent them away—on a honeymoon. They left this morning."

Next Issue's Hall of Fame Selection

BEYOND THE SINGING FLAME

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Now She Shops

"Cash and Carry"

Without Painful Backache

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get **Doan's Pills**. (Adv.)

Thrills in SCIENCE

Thumbnail Sketches of Great Men and Achievements

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

SMOOTH AS SILK

The Story of Count de Chardonnet, Father of Rayon

BACK in 1664 an English naturalist named Robert Hooke studied the silkworm—which sericulture had been slowly spreading around the world from China—and said, in essence:

"There should be a way to make an artificial glutinous compound as good as or better than whatever substance it is from which the silkworm wire-draws his clew."

Hooke wrote at greater length on the subject, pointing out the fame and fortune

to the business of making artificial silk thread.

Thus the matter rested until there came out of Besancon, France, a young man named Hilaire de Chardonnet who went to Paris to complete his education.

Just what this young man's future might have been had he not crossed the path of Louis Pasteur, no one can say. But he became a pupil and then an assistant of the great research scientist, about the time that the French silkworm industry was in despair over a terrible silkworm disease called pebrine.

What Louis Pasteur did to save the silk industry of southern France is another story, but the result to Hilaire de Chardonnet was to launch him into his life's work . . . the manufacture of artificial silk!

Born in 1839, Count de Chardonnet lived until 1924, a long and fruitful life in which he saw the synthetic silk industry become one of the largest and strongest in the world.

"You see," de Chardonnet went about telling everybody he could interest in the subject, "Audemars had the right idea. Cellulose is the base of all silk. But he failed to turn the liquid stuff into thread. He dipped needles into the solution and drew them out to get short strings of the stuff. What we need is an unbroken strand such as is reeled from the cocoon."

It wasn't quite as simple as this. First, de Chardonnet had to experiment for years to find the best form of cellulose. This proved to come from cotton instead of the mulberry tree. Then there was the proper way of treating it with chemicals to get the best product and then to remove the unwanted chemicals later.

This meant years of patient research, trial and error, study and application. And when it was done, there remained the fact that the stuff wasn't properly spun into thread. It was a vat of viscous solution which would harden on contact with the air.

"Why don't you simply dip people in the stuff?" suggested his wife one day, with a laugh. "That will give you a perfectly fitting silk garment."

"That isn't funny," said the inventor sadly. "You know we want to spin thread and weave cloth out of which to tailor garments and



COUNT HILAIRE DE CHARDONNET

awaiting the man who succeeded in creating synthetic silk. Down through the years other men thought and spoke upon this subject, but nothing practical came of these dreams until a Swiss chemist named Audemars completed his experiments in London in 1855.

Audemars, knowing that the silkworm derived its cellulose from feeding on mulberry leaves, proceeded to take the mulberry tree as his source for cellulose.

He succeeded finally in treating the inner bark of the tree with nitric acid to form cellulose nitrate, which is still used as gun-cotton. He dissolved it in alcohol and ether to make collodion. But he never got down

make clothing—out of which thread we want to weave stockings.”

“I thought you said Audemars dipped needles and made short threads.”

“He did, but what was he working for?” snorted de Chardonnet. “Filaments for electric light bulbs! That’s all they are all trying to make—filaments for Edison’s bulb. I want to make silk!”

“Then,” suggested his wife, “why don’t you spin your cellulose like the silkworm does?”

Hilaire de Chardonnet stopped his restless pacing and stared angrily at his wife.

“That is precisely what I have been trying to tell—”

He broke off and continued to stare at her, his eyes going wide with speculation.

Then he uttered a cry of delight, snatched his spouse up from her chair and kissed her. “My dear, you have said nothing new to me, but you have given me an idea!”

Like a madman he rushed back to his laboratory and his batch of silkworms. That was it! Nobody had given any practical thought to the matter of how to get the cellulose solution into long and continuous threads. Everybody had simply toyed with the business, had just dabbled in the field in a hesitant manner.

Study of the silkworm now brought de Chardonnet to close examination of the natural construction of the silkworm’s spinning apparatus. In company with Pasteur he had

studied many a worm under the microscope, but he had never thought of trying to duplicate the grub’s spinneret.

Now he applied his mechanical mind to the problem. The result was many a headache and many a sleepless night as he sought to reconcile the mechanical job with the properties of his cellulose compound. And at last, after nearly thirty years of constant work and research, he came up with a force-feed spinneret which was so simple that he could have kicked himself for not having figured it out the first year. This was nothing more than a disc with fine holes drilled through it.

Upon installation with other spinning and weaving machinery, he got together the first apparatus to force his cellulose compound through the spinneret in fine threads into a water bath where it hardened and had the excess alcohol and ether washed away as the threads were drawn on to a gathering reel.

The result was the “wet” spinning process and the creation of de Chardonnet silk. In 1891 Hilaire de Chardonnet established the first artificial silk mill in his own home town for the commercial production of yarn by the nitro-cellulose process.

Today there are four successful processes of making this synthetic silk, but to Count Hilaire de Chardonnet goes the distinction of being the father of the rayon industry.

SELF-MADE SCIENCE

Thales Had No Tools or Equipment—Only His Brain!

IN THIS series about great discoveries and inventions in science we have heretofore dealt with men who have had tools and implements with which to work—or at least have made their own tools—and have had the brilliant minds of predecessors to guide them. In this sketch we will tell the story of the man who has been called the “father of science” and who had nothing to work with but his own mind and the fallacious theories of his contemporaries.

Just as Copernicus studied the heavens without benefit of telescope and other astronomical instruments in the early part of the sixteenth century, the father of science studied and weighed everything that came under his observation some twenty-two hundred years earlier.

Who was this phenomenal man?

His name was Thales and he was born in ancient Attica about 640 B. C. Herodotus tells us he was a Phoenician, although it is likely Thales was a Greek of Asia Minor extraction. That really doesn’t matter. No one today can tell us what Thales looked like, what his tastes and habits were, or how he died and where he was buried. Too little is known about this great man except that certain fundamental truths he discovered have been given to the world, laying the foundation for the building of the temple of science.

His father, one Examyus, was a wealthy noble and he deemed it fitting that his son be given as thorough an education as was possible in those times. Thus it was that Thales

came to sit at the feet of Egyptian wisdom.

Thales was an ardent individualist. He was original in thought. He could accept no man’s word as final, but insisted on reasoning out things for himself. The answers to the myriad riddles of the earth and the universe as propounded by philosophers did not satisfy him. As he could not endure living in a world that bristled with question marks, he set out to find the answers for himself.

Nearly everybody remembers Mark Twain’s “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court” and how this hero won fame for himself by predicting an eclipse of the sun. Most of you know that Mark Twain deliberately borrowed this incident from genuine history, saying so in the story. But from whom did he borrow it? The answer is Thales.

In the year 585 B. C., having already studied the movements of the heavenly bodies he could see with the naked eye and having already made the heretical and incredible statement that when the sun or the moon was blotted out by dark shadow that was because the earth intervened, he predicted that the sun would be darkened on the twenty-eighth of May.

Everybody sneered at him and nobody believed him. Certainly not the Medes and the Lydians who proceeded to put on one of their best battles on that day. Thales proved correct, and the skeptics were convinced. But Thales didn’t stop at this.

He could not agree with the theory that the sun was a midget thing the size of a dinner plate that swung around the earth much

in the manner of a marble tied to the end of a string.

He set out to measure the sun, figuring on perspective and distance by comparison with earthly things. Of course, he was considerably afield in his computation, but he said that the sun was at least one 720th part of the zodiac in diameter—which was a much larger sun than anyone before Thales had dared to think.

Astronomy, however, was not one of Thales' major subjects. He considered everything that came under his powers of observation. Principally the Egyptian science of geometry, then in a very elementary stage. Thales it was who thought out and then proceeded to prove certain fundamental laws about this science. He it was who first said:

"A circle is bisected by its diameter. The angle in a semicircle is a right angle. When two straight lines cut each other the opposing angles thus formed are equal. The angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal."

Simple and self-evident things to a school-boy of today, eh? But when Thales dug these facts up and proved them, they were amazing to the people of the ancient world in which he lived.

He soon outstripped his Egyptian mentors, lifting the crude science of plane geometry into the realm of exact science and fathering the growth of solid geometry. But the amazing thing about all that Thales discovered was the fact that he did it all by the power of thought alone. He had absolutely no scientific instruments with which to work to establish his facts, many of which were so accurate that there has been no change to the present day.

He aroused a certain amount of enmity among the Egyptian priesthood, for the priests thought themselves well-versed in the mysteries of mathematics. They employed plane geometry to lay out the fields for the farmers of the Nile. They were the workers of mental magic, and Thales was stealing their thunder.

"If you are so gifted in this learning," said one of them to him one day in great anger, "suppose you tell us how to compute the height of the Great Pyramid of Cheops. How can we accurately measure its height by your system of mathematics?"

"Yes," shouted another. "Tell us that, Thales! Not even the high priest of Memphis or of Thebes can do this. Can you?"

Thales considered this question for a long moment. He knew that he stood in danger of disgrace and ridicule if not actual danger. The tricky priests had crowded him into a corner. But his friend the sun, whom he had spent so much time observing, now came to his aid. His powers of observation and his greater power of reasoning thought saw him safely through this dilemma.

"Yes," he finally made answer, "I can tell you. To know the height of the pyramid, measure the length of the pyramid's shadow when your own shadow exactly equals your own height."

Idiotically simple, as were many of the truths and facts and laws that Thales propounded, but nobody before Thales had had the vision and concentration to put together the right association of ideas. Thus, to Thales do we owe the first correct steps in laying the accurate foundations for many of the sciences.

WAVES OF GENIUS

How Rudolf Hertz Drew Scientific Secrets from the Air

IT WAS a severely cold day in Hamburg on Sunday, February 22, 1857. The Hertz household was in a commotion. An heir to the family was born, and the doctor and the nurse and members of the family were busily engaged in fussing and fluttering around.

Far away across hundreds of miles of land and sea, in the university at Aberdeen, Scotland, a professor of natural philosophy was having his Sunday morning breakfast of oatmeal and hot milk, utterly unaware of the birth of that fat little German baby, much less that the laboratory proofs of his brilliant theories lay in that tiny infant hand.

James Clerk Maxwell, following in the footsteps of Faraday, a famous scientist in his own right at the age of twenty-six, had taken Faraday's discoveries and gone further in the realm of theoretical science upon them.

He had reduced to equations and formulae a magnificent theory about electricity. He had propounded the amazing theory that electro-magnetic disturbances are propagated as waves. He was trying to identify light and electrical energy. He had a very fine set of theories, based on Faraday's work—but he couldn't prove it by practical application.

Rudolf Hertz, that newly born Hamburg baby, seemed to have been born old. He was

studying works of mathematics when other boys were still playing marbles. He was only twenty when he went to Munich in 1877 to study engineering.

Less than a year of study showed him that he didn't want to become an engineer. It showed him precisely what he did want to do—master physical science—and he at once set about doing so.

In 1880 he won a prize with a paper on "Kinetic Energy of Electricity in Motion." That was the kind of serious-minded young chap he was when he first listened to the lectures of the great von Helmholtz. Such an electrical wizard was he when he first had his attention called to Maxwell's electric-magnetic theory.

Von Helmholtz tried to persuade Hertz to start laboratory work upon this brilliant theory, but Hertz declined to do this for the very good reason that he could think of no approach to make on the Scot's theory. Nevertheless, the idea lay fallow in his mind until one day at Kiel in 1883.

It was a queer sort of set-up. From Faraday's researches Maxwell had evolved a brilliant theory of electro-magnetic waves of energy and had reduced his theory to cold mathematical formula—but he had made not the slightest attempt to put his theory to

laboratory proof. Perhaps he did not know just how to do it.

That was Rudolph Hertz' trouble until that day at Kiel. Here he saw two captive balloons aloft in a thunderstorm. A flash of lightning narrowly missed one of the balloons, and a discharge of sparks seemed to leap from one balloon to the other.

"Like a chain of light gold between a pair of huge pearl earrings," said an awed spectator nearby. "Just what was that? A wave of electric force?"



RUDOLF HERTZ

This remark struck Hertz forcibly and he mused over it for nearly two years.

Then in 1885 he became professor of physics in the Karlsruhe Polytechnic. Here he found time to think more deeply about the Maxwell theory so neatly reduced to paper formulae and so impractical of laboratory proof.

But was it really a tenable theory? Would it stand up under test? Was it possible to test it? How could the possibility of electromagnetic waves be checked upon?

And into Hertz' mind leaped that remark he had overheard two years previously at

Kiel. "A chain of light gold between a pair of huge pearl earrings." Nothing new about static electricity, of course, but the metaphor that unnamed citizen had employed now stuck out in Hertz' mind. He decided to tackle the Maxwell theory and prove or disprove it.

Thanks to his own heavy grounding in mathematics and electricity, it did not take Hertz long to devise a working instrument. His final paraphernalia was relatively simple. He took a pair of zinc plates to which he attached rods, ending in brass balls which he highly polished. The rods he put in contact with the poles of an induction coil.

Thus, when the plates were charged and Hertz brought the two balls close together a spark would leap across the gap.

It was this leaping of the current back and forth that Maxwell had said would send electric waves into the air. Thus, Hertz' job now was to detect these waves and prove that they were actually escaping.

To do this he made a detector of copper wire bent into a circle, with balls at the ends and a set-screw sort of gadget so that the space between these balls could be regulated exactly. Then he held this queer sort of divining rod near the zinc plates and the sparking brass balls.

At once tiny sparks appeared at the ends of his circular wire. What were they, and where did they come from? Hertz nearly dropped his crude detector in his excitement. They were electric waves released by the vibrator. They were waves of electric force!

Maxwell's theory was now thoroughly vindicated in Hertz' mind. All he had to do was measure the force and prove beyond all doubt that it originated from a designated point and traveled in wireless space to a suitable receiver.

Hertz had followed Maxwell's theory and had discovered first what has since been named Hertzian waves in his honor.

And what are Hertzian waves? As you sit in comfort at home and listen to programs of song or music or talks over your radio, bear in mind that your enjoyment is being supplied by the work of Hertzian waves, without the existence of which radio tubes and broadcasting stations and receivers would be useless.

Marconi, Armstrong, de Forest—and all others have had to work with the waves that Hertz discovered. Without Maxwell and Hertz, or a pair of men like them, there would be neither wireless or radio or television in the world today.

BE A PAID-UP PATRIOT!

BY March 15th fifty million Americans will have had to file income reports and make payments, many of them paying taxes for the first time. All single persons earning more than \$500 and every husband and wife either of whose individual income was \$624 or more and everybody who paid or owes a tax on 1942 income must file a return.

This year taxpayers must compute income tax, Victory tax, and possible percentage of the partially forgiven 1942 tax—as well as make an estimate return on the current 1944 income! Salary and wage withholding taxes have not relieved us of the obligation of filing returns.

Don't delay, patriots! File your returns early to help Uncle Sam. Don't wait until the last minute, discovering too late that you need expert advice, or making a bottleneck jam for the Bureau of Internal Revenue. To help you, there are accountants and lawyers in tax offices and banks throughout the country who will advise you free of charge. There are simplified tax forms and explanatory booklets.

War is expensive. Remember that ninety-five cents of every tax dollar goes directly into the war effort. The sooner the war is won, the sooner taxes will fall to normal levels. We all know the job must be done. So be a Paid-up Patriot!



Like a piston Hilton's fist drove forward into the lizard's stomach

SPAWN OF THE FURTHER DARK

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

When the Honeymoon Rocket-Ship of Bill Hilton and His Bride Goes Dead at the Edge of the Orbits, They Thumb a Ride from a Mysterious Visitor Who Leads Them to Fearsome Adventure!

THOUGH the meteor had swerved dangerously close, Hilton ignored the protests of the slender, green-eyed girl by his side. He sat hunched above the controls, his handsome profile bisecting the *Morning Star's* glowing viewport. Not only was he having atomotor trouble again, but the thrusts of lopsided power which kept shuddering through the little space craft had carried

it to the wrong side of the travel zone.

To add to his torment, his bride of two weeks was reproaching him for something he could not help. "Back seat driving" it had been called, long ago on Earth.

"Bill, please be careful. We're wobbling. Oh-h-h, Bill!"

An archaeologist in the ancient American field, Hilton could escape into a

past teeming with historical parallels when the worst aspects of space-travel tore at his nerves. He was returning now to Earth from the little white Jupiter moon Callisto—returning with the memory of his honeymoon just a hazy glow in the depths of his mind. Rolling over the glow were dark tides of despair, and little whirlpools of murky rebellion.

Everything had gone wrong. The j-valves were off-timing, the seepage fumes were getting worse, and the units of the control board were displaying a personal animosity which was anything but reassuring. He was afraid to tell his wife that the ship was succumbing to "instrument fatigue." There were certain things which couldn't be explained to a woman this side of Eternity.

"Instrument fatigue" was an intangible thing, a hysteria gripping the inanimate, a jumpiness which could somehow be sensed every time he touched a unit. Could cold metal feel and think? Probably not, but "instrument fatigue" was a reality notwithstanding. Ask any old hard-bitten skydog, any master of an over-aged freighter.

Blown out j-valves and leaking atomotor fumes lowered a ship's morale, and made it jittery all over. Ships could have nervous breakdowns, just like human beings—

"Why can't you be more careful?" Janet Hilton complained.

WITHDRAWING his gaze from the void, Hilton swung about in his seat and regarded his wife with somber compassion.

"Long ago on Earth," he said, "when there were automobiles in every garage, a pretty woman could travel from New York to the Golden Gate just by standing still. She'd stand by the roadside and point her thumb in the direction of, say, Los Angeles. And like as not a car would stop, and pick her up. It was called 'hitch hiking.'"

Janet returned his stare unflinchingly. "Is that what you're suggesting we do now?"

Hilton nodded grimly. "It's the only thing we can do. The seepage fumes

are getting worse, and you can see how she keeps wobbling. If we don't take a leaf from the past we'll be sticking out our necks."

"I'll bet fat and dowdy girls didn't get far," Janet demurred, cynically. "I'll bet the drivers of those ancient jalopies liked to glance sideways at pretty faces. Could—could your pride stand having me parade my good looks as a lure?"

"Janet, let's try to be realistic about this," retorted Hilton, slapping his hip-holstered blast-stick. "A man can be gallant without overstepping himself. I guess you know what I'd do to any lad who tried to be more than just gallant."

Janet had begun to tremble, but when she saw the look of anguish on her husband's face her manner underwent a change. Crossing to his knees she ruffled his hair and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Okay, darling," she capitulated. "Let's pick a ship."

On both sides of them—they were traveling in the center of the zone now—the blackness kept erupting pyrotechnically. For seven or eight minutes the viewport would frame an ebon patch of firmament studded with stars and misty nebulae, and then—*swosh*. A little white burst in the darkness like a rabbit's tail, and they would be one more ship ahead, one less behind.

"This is what we'll do," Hilton said. "I'll visigraph your image in three dimensions when we see a ship coming steadily toward us. You'll look like a pretty girl pilot in distress when you swim into view on some lonely lad's visiplat. When he discovers you have a husband who stands six feet three in his stockings he won't have the nerve to back down. While I'm tuning up the transmitter you'd better get set."

In utter silence Janet descended from her husband's knee, and crossed the control room to the visual sending apparatus. Slowly, courageously, she drew herself up.

The minutes which followed brought the bitterest humiliation to Hilton. He stared in blank consternation when two

ships roared past without giving Janet's image a chance to register distress. Another slowed, wobbled indecisively, and went shooting off at right angles to the zone.

"My image ditched him," Janet groaned.

"Quick, darling, wave," Hilton urged. "I think this one is stopping."

IT WAS. As they stared anxiously through the viewport a cigar-shaped glowing became a stationary ovoid agleam with winking lights. The *Morning Star* was the opposite of stationary, but before the distance which separated the two ships could widen astronomically, Hilton was backing her up. Her retardation disks thrumming she came abreast of the ovoid, skidded about on her underjets, and ceased to wobble.

Crossing to the ovoid in a translucent gang-cylinder Janet clung tightly to her husband's arm, her spine cold with nervousness.

"Dearest, I'm frightened," she choked. "That voice in the audiodisk sounded as though—"

She hesitated, gnawed at her underlip.

"Yes, darling?" Hilton prodded.

"Well, as though the sender had taken elocution lessons from a snake!"

Hilton laughed. "Some people just naturally stress their sibilants," he pointed out. "Why, I went to school once with a boy who couldn't open his mouth without making hissing sounds."

"But why didn't he visigraph his image when he spoke to us," Janet whispered hoarsely. "Why didn't he?"

"We'll know in a minute," Hilton said, cupping his wife's elbow and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

It was not a happy prediction, for when they reached the extremity of the gang-cylinder, and passed into the ovoid through a yawning gravity lock, a ghostly silence greeted them. No sooner were they inside than the lock wavered shut and they found themselves in a small chamber filled with swirling wisps of fog.

Glancing uneasily about him Hilton noticed that the bulkheads were mottled

and eroded looking, the overhead studded with cold light bulbs which emitted a wan and sickly radiance.

"What interesting minds you have," said a not unfriendly voice which seemed to come from deep inside Hilton's skull.

Hilton jumped as though he had sat inadvertently on a pin cooled by liquid helium. A few feet from where he was standing a shadowy shape was hovering. As Hilton stared a hazy outer something, which may have been merely a thickish patch of fog, seemed to fall from it, exposing a scaly lizard shape with tiny, dangling forelimbs and kangaroo-like lower extremities.

"Tyrannosaurus Rex," was the thought which wavered through Hilton's mind, to be instantly dispelled by the telepathic voice of the creature.

"Ugh, no. You're the fifth Third Planet biped has made that mistake. A carnivorous dinosaur, wasn't it? A monstrous engine of destruction, thirty feet in height? Brain the size of a walnut, I believe. Fortunately we're not at all like that."

The telepathic voice seemed to clear its throat. "It's curious, isn't it, how the same biological patterns recur again and again—everywhere in space? On thousands of habitable worlds? Even your ships are inferiorly similar to ours, if I may be pardoned a slight distortion of speech."

"Who are you?" asked Hilton.

"My name is Sib Niguth. But you may call me Sib. You Third Planet bipeds shorten the names of your—yes, cronies. I've noticed you do, and I think it a charming custom."

There was utter silence in the lock chamber as Janet crumpled to the deck. Hilton uttered an exclamation and took a backward step.

"Dear me," telepathized Sib Niguth sympathetically. "She's fainted, hasn't she?"

Bong, bong, bong. Bong, bong, bong.

As though from an immeasurable distance there came a ghastly tolling, chilling Hilton to the core of his being. Appalled, shaken, he struggled to a sitting position, and stared about him. Al-

though his thoughts were confused he was sharply aware that he had fallen through blackness as though from an immense height.

A split second after hearing the lizard say: "She's fainted, hasn't she?" he had felt himself falling, his arms flailing the air, his long legs jerking. He had seemed to skid a little before coming to an abrupt halt with his limbs doubled up under him.

NOW he was in another place. It was smaller than the lock chamber, and twice as dismal. An odor as of tainted shellfish assailed his nostrils, and the bulkhead opposite was so close to his face that his breath tarnished it. A smudge like an interrogation point formed on the corrugated metal, and swelled to a whorl studded with gleaming pinpoints of moisture—an island universe formed by his breath.

In sudden terror he stared upward. The overhead was faintly luminous, but it was not the wan illumination which drove the blood in torrents from his heart. It was something infinitely more terrifying. Embedded in the metal directly above his head were the outlines of an enormous coffin.

For a moment he was so distraught that his vision blurred. The object was faintly rimmed with light, but a full minute passed before he realized that it was simply a grooved panel shaped like a mummy case.

Slowly as he stared it slid open to reveal another coffin-shaped panel rimmed with radiance, another faintly glowing overhead. A shudder of apprehension gripped hold of him when he realized that he was gazing up into an even smaller chamber.

Deliberately, although his heart was thumping wildly, he gripped both edges of the panel aperture and heaved himself up through it. The second chamber proved to be even smaller than he had imagined. He could stand against one bulkhead and touch the other by simply extending his hands. There was scarcely room for his elbows.

Sweat came out on his palms, ran

down his face. Gazing upward, he perceived with horror that the panel in the overhead was opening on four bulkheads set so close together they seemed almost to touch. From the coffin-shaped aperture a mistiness swirled down over him.

He climbed into the third chamber by gripping the rim of the opening with both hands, and using his knees for leverage. When he heaved, and struggled erect he found himself in a chamber so narrow that its dripping walls brought a sensation of wetness to his flesh.

Immovable in darkness he stood with his heart fluttering like a captive bird, watching something that looked like a gargantuan roach crawling back and forth over the moist surface in front of him. Looking up, he saw only a dark surface, and looking down—

He sucked in his breath sharply. The panel aperture had closed and he was standing on the outlines of a coffin in Stygian darkness. He was also standing inside a coffin. The air was stifling, and when he attempted to struggle cold sweat drenched him. He was imprisoned—entrapped! Try as he might he could not escape from the narrow confines of the vault, for the bulkheads imprisoned his distorted limbs like a vise.

Bong, bong, bong. Bong, bong, bong.

The ghastly tolling seemed to be coming from directly above his head now. A dim, dreadful thought began to take shape in his mind. Had the lizard planned this? Was he caught in a kind of hideous Chinese puzzle box from which there could be no escape?

He had owned such a box as a child, or rather a series of boxes. He recalled, with horror, that the toy looked simple enough. Three boxes set end to end, neatly stacked. You opened the largest and things began to happen. If you were lucky you could open the middle box, but you had to be in on the secret to open the smallest box.

A cold chill gripped his every nerve. In a frenzy of desperation he drove his shoulders upward, again and again.

"Don't give up," he thought to him-

self. "Keep trying. Use your knees and your elbows, never mind the pain. Never mind cramped limbs, the agony lancing through you. Heave with your shoulders, struggle, put up a fight."

The overhead gave all at once. One minute he was bruising his shoulders on a corrugated metal surface that would not budge an inch. The next he was lifting himself up into a blaze of purple light.

Pulling himself up over a jagged surface he emerged into an enormous bright chamber filled with scaly lizard shapes. A sickening stench assailed his nostrils, and his eyes were dazzled by blinding shafts of light. Groaning, swaying from his efforts he dragged himself forward on his stomach over a deck that seemed to flow out from under him.

He stopped crawling a yard from the opening through which he had emerged, and arose swayingly to his feet. A dozen lizard shapes were standing in a circle about him, hemming him in. The instant he arose their savage jaws swept toward him, and clashed a foot from his face.

WITH a cry of terror he leapt backward against something soggy, wet. At once a soggy shape embraced him with shrunken forelimbs, and embedded its jaws in his leather provision pack, ripping it from his back.

"We eat now—enjoy long sleep," a voice seemed to snarl in his brain.

"White, hairless Earth animal bitter and stick in teeth," came the telepathic reply. "You want to go into punishment chute?"

"Other one—taste like laparou," a third snarling voice complained.

"Stop," a fourth voice seemed to scream through the ship. "Do not touch him."

Promptly the loathsome reptile shapes fell back. Shuddering convulsively, they moved to right and left, leaving a cleared space down the center of the chamber which filled suddenly with mist.

Out of the mist stepped Sib Niguth, his withered forelegs quivering.

"Lamentable, lamentable," he telepathized. "A most unfortunate mishap. When your wife fainted you stepped backward into our discipline chute. You see, we punish unruly members of the crew by confining them in cramped quarters. Disobedient crew member steps into chute, and finds himself in lower chamber. He struggles to escape. In upper chamber his miseries increase. Psychological torment, you understand? A most effective means of preserving discipline."

Sib Niguth flicked moisture from his jaw with the tip of his tongue. "Fortunately you climbed back out. Did you hear the bell? It was a summons for them to come and get it. Grog, you understand? Chow. You are now in the crew quarters. The lads are emotionally upset. We've been serving them wormy concentrates. I must think of my officers, you understand? They wanted to—eh, eat you."

"I've had enough of this puzzle," groaned Hilton. "Just who and what are you? Where did you come from? Pluto? I don't recognize your species at all."

"Of course, you don't, old chap," was Sib Niguth's surprising answer. "We are not of your Solar System—not even of your galaxy. This is an inter-dimensional spatial expedition. We are from—let me put it so you will understand—our home universe is about five hundred thousand of your light years away. Just relax and let my thoughts sink into your retentive memory cells."

Hilton did so, and the gist of the information he absorbed was so staggering in concept that he felt as though his brain had been dropped into a celestial vortex and spun in a spatial centrifuge.

The lizard man cocked his head.

"What you need now is a sedative. Yes, something to quiet your nerves. I hope, by the way, that the crew did not penetrate your flesh with their teeth."

With a shudder Hilton perceived that the lizard was squinting at him down its tapering snout, its small eyes glistening.

(Turn to page 106)

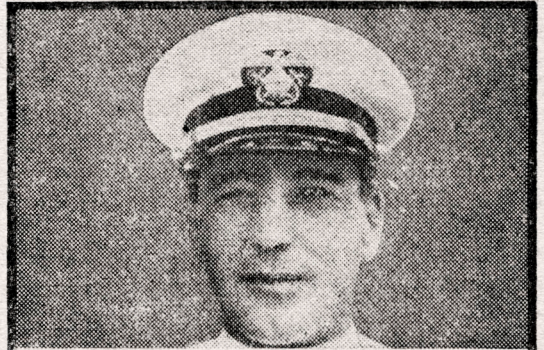
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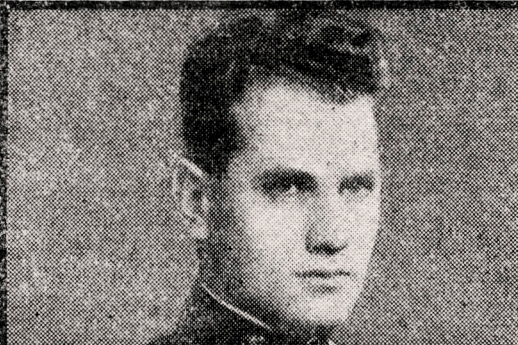
Don't say you can't afford it even though you may wonder how you're going to get that money.

If you think that getting the money is going to be hard, why, before the door bell rings, look at the faces of these dead countrymen of yours. Read their stories.

Then think how hard it would be to have to tell Americans like these that *other* Americans can't afford to lend *at least* an extra \$100!



Captain Albert H. Rooks was commanding officer of U.S.S. Houston. Engaging an overwhelming Jap force, the Houston smashed into them and went down, guns blazing. Rooks went down with his ship.



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"I've arranged quarters for you," it telepathized. "Directly opposite the officer's cuddy. Your wife is resting peaceably."

Apprehension filled Hilton's heart.

"Oh, how unfortunate," the lizard telepathized, as though aware of his thoughts. "'Resting peaceably' is an expression which you only use when—yes, yes, I understand. My dear fellow, your wife is quite all right. I gave her a sedative, and she is sleeping in a comfortable berth. I've prepared—eh, twin berths for you."

"Thank heavens," Hilton almost sobbed.

"Come," the lizard prodded gently. "I'll take you to your quarters."

Across the lurching mess room between swaying reptile shapes Hilton stumbled, a cold, guiding claw on his arm. Out through a sliding door panel, and into a corridor which filled him with such a complexity of emotions that he stood staring at Sib Niguth in stunned incomprehension, as though he had been caught doing something wrong, and was about to be punished for something he had not done at all.

The corridor wasn't bare and corrugated like the between-deck passageways of the *Morning Star*, for something had decorated the bulkheads and polished them till they glowed. The decorations were spine-chilling in some respects, but undeniably works of art. Murals so eerily powerful in conception that for an instant Sib Niguth seemed to recede, and Hilton saw only bas-relief lizard shapes performing unbelievable tasks in a world alien to humanity.

ETCHED on the glowing metal were the outlines of hexangular hills, and rugged, crater-pitted plains. But what gave Hilton the worst start were the shapes in the foreground. One of the bas-relief lizards was pushing a geometrically insane wheelbarrow over the plain, its scaly jaws agape. Another was thumping the ground with its tail, and shaking a tree which zigzagged upward from the rugose soil like a frozen

lightning bolt.

Still another was clinging at an impossible angle to a denuded limb, its forked tongue protruding, and a repulsive voracity in its stare. A fourth was squatting on its haunches directly beneath the tree, slicing what appeared to be a fat, hairy worm into sections with its razor-sharp claws.

"That one is dissecting a crawl-vine," Sib Niguth whispered in Hilton's brain.

"Dissecting what?"

"A crawl-vine. Our food supply, you understand? Crawl-vines drop from the trees and have to be harvested. But first we dissect out the poisonous rinds."

"I see," Hilton groaned.

"These are simple pastoral murals," Sib Niguth explained. "In the officer's cuddy the bulkheads are covered with more skillfully executed designs. It may seem foolish to you, but we like to surround ourselves with familiar scenes. These were etched by one of the scullery lads. Artistic abilities crop out in the most unexpected places. But come, you must be weary."

Hilton nodded dazedly, and stumbled along at the lizard's side, his heart a dull, pulsating ache in the depths of his chest.

Another bulkhead panel swung open, and Sib Niguth stepped aside so that Hilton might enter a dimly lit chamber containing two metal berths, and something that looked like a gigantic saucepan with two handles balancing itself on a ten-foot saw.

"An automatic attendant," Sib Niguth explained. "Unfortunately it cannot serve you, for your needs are quite different from ours. I suggest you simply let it stand there."

Hilton felt his knees tremble beneath him. One of the berths was unoccupied, but on the other lay Janet, her cornsilk hair pillowing her small, unmoving head.

"Do not be alarmed," telepathized Sib Niguth. "You will awake together, and she will gravitate into your arms. You Third Planet bipeds are so emotional."

As he spoke the lizard reached into his belly-pouch, and produced a small crystal phial.

"Come now. You'd better drink this."

Almost automatically Hilton found himself accepting the sedative which the lizard was forcing upon him. He did not want to swallow the draught but the lizard's stare was as compelling as a nightmare.

"Come now, take this. You'll wake up feeling fit as a fiddle."

On and on the lizard's telepathic voice droned, mesmerizing Hilton more and more as he relaxed at full length on the metal berth opposite Janet. On and on, with mounting candor and a kind of wistful urgency, as though the lizard really wanted to put Hilton at his ease.

"We're going to be shipmates, so we may as well let down our hair. I'm not at all sure I'm the kind of commander my officers deserve. But I do what I can."

On and on, until Hilton felt a deep drowsiness creeping over him. Slowly Sib Niguth's features receded, and Hilton heard only the lizard's voice deep in his mind, talking about the ship and the crew, and the mission which had been carried out.

Sleep took possession of Hilton's mind in the middle of a sentence, so that the voice faded out on a rising note.

A popular song drifted into Hilton's consciousness from the crew quarters, jolting the mists from his brain. He had no way of knowing how long he had slept, under the influence of the sedative which his scaly host had forced upon him. The fact that the scaly crew had dredged a "blues" melody from the depths of his mind, and were singing it now because it harmonized with their mood, added a final nightmare touch to his confusion.

HIS head trembled with the impact of telepathic rhythms impinging from a dozen despairing reptilian brains. Reptiles the creatures unmistakably were, and the fact that they had been spawned on the dingy satellite of a far-off sun could not lessen the revulsion which he felt when they drew near to him.

From the berth opposite there came

an agitated stirring. Turning his head, he perceived that Janet's eyes were boring holes in the darkness.

"It was your idea," she flung at him. "You got us into this."

"Janet, I'm sorry."

"When you disappeared I nearly went off the deep end," Janet choked. "That hideous creature forced me to drink a bitter, horrible drug. Oh, where are we? Why did they pick us up?"

Hilton crooked his fingers, and plucked at his scalp in the darkness. "Janet, if I tell you, will you take it in your stride like a real he-guy?" he asked.

"I—I'll try."

"Well, they're from another galaxy. Functionally this ship resembles a small Saturn-run jeep, but there's something you didn't know. It's also a dimension-traveler. They've reached the Solar System by traveling through buckling folds of space-time, across billions of light years."

"Bill, they're hostile, aren't they? They've come to injure mankind?"

He shook his head. "They bear us no ill-will. They are on a mission of exploration and discovery. The one who has been so decent to us is a scientific big shot. The crew are—well, the reptilian equivalent of able-bodied skymen."

"All they do is sway and hiss," Janet groaned.

"That's because they're panic-stricken. Something went wrong when they emerged from subspace close to Pluto's orbit and made some navigational readjustments. In converting the ship from a space-time into a straight space traveler they blew what they thought was a foolproof gadget, the equivalent of a tube. Now they can't get back to their universe."

Hilton stared into the darkness, appalled by the mounting fear in his wife's eyes.

"Bill," she whispered hoarsely. "You're keeping something from me."

Hilton cleared his throat. "Janet, motivation is a funny thing. If we were going to die we wouldn't care a hang about improving our minds. But these

creatures are reptiles, cold and impersonal. Our logic is tinged with emotionalism."

"What—what are you trying to say, Bill?"

"The crew is in a blue funk, but the leaders of this expedition want to know more about our Sun. They're heading straight into it."

Janet's eyes widened. When she spoke her voice was shrilly hysterical.

"But what good would scientific knowledge be to them? They'll never see their world again, or be able to discuss our world with other lizard scientists. It's utterly illogical to want to acquire knowledge which will perish when the brain which contains it is a roasted pulp."

"Knowledge for its own sake, Janet," Hilton elaborated. "The satisfaction of doing an appointed job well, of carrying on despite all obstacles. They intend to die in a blaze of glory. They intend to take observations until the ship is too hot to hold them. They have a sort of scientific martyr complex."

Almost soundlessly a panel in the bulkhead swung open, and a voice whispered in Hilton's brain.

"I hope I am not intruding," it said. "I need your assistance. Your wife will pardon us, I'm sure."

Ignoring Janet's protests Hilton rose and accompanied Sib Niguth out of the chamber.

"Your wife is upset?" queried the lizard sympathetically.

Hilton dug his nails into his palms. "What do you think?"

The lizard spread its claws. "But my dear chap, I picked you up because I thought you might be of some assistance to us. The others were not very helpful."

HILTON stared at him.

"I see. We're just beetles in amber to you!"

"My dear fellow, how droll! Beetles are insects, I believe. Amber is a hard, pale yellow fossil resin found upon certain beaches. I picked that up from our last passenger. He was an English en-

gineer with a first-rate mind, but he cracked up. Had to blast him out through a stern rocket tube."

"You mean you murdered him," Hilton bridled.

"Oh, come now! Murder is an ugly word in your language. Haven't I assured you we bear you no ill will? It's just that you Third Planet bipeds are so different from us that killing you doesn't go against the grain. You kill ants without hating them. I understand you admire ants, their social patterns, their complete selflessness. And yet you trample on them."

"Sometimes, when they become pests," Hilton admitted.

The lizard shrugged. "We never do anything that gives us an emotional wrench. But when it doesn't? After all, my dear chap, why not? Wouldn't you?"

"No."

"Then why do you trample on ants?"

"They're not intelligent," Hilton protested. "Instinct and intelligence are as far apart as the poles."

"That's where you're wrong. Instinct is frozen intelligence. When intelligence is fluid it gets one into no end of ridiculous scrapes. If that engineer chap wasn't romancing, ants have streamlined their intelligence in a remarkable way. No waste effort, no idleness. I regret I shall never have the privilege of conversing with an ant."

"You wouldn't get far," Hilton thought bitterly, entering the control room by the lizard's side. There was a padded-cell feeling at the back of his mind, and his nerves were close to the breaking point.

The control room smelled like a crocodile pool, but when the viewport spiraled open Hilton felt a giddiness go through him.

The spectacle before him was stupefying in its magnificence. Through the smoky viewport the sun blazed with a thousand unsuspected splendors. The lines of light which sprouted from its equator were rainbow hued, and the chromosphere bubbled and seethed till the entire void seemed to catch fire and

glow with an unearthly refulgence.

Against his scaly breast Sib Niguth was bracing a gleaming metal tablet which he had lifted from a circular rack beside the control board. His scrawny left arm was crooked about it, and as he telepathized he moved a glowing stylograph slowly back and forth with his right claw.

"It's your sun," the lizard said. "You know more about it than we do. Do the naked-eye phenomena before you square with the observations of your astronomers?"

"I—I'm not sure," Hilton stammered. "Of course I'm no astronomer, but those sunspots don't look right. They're almost as bright as the surrounding luminosity. They should be quite dark, you know. And the chromosphere should absorb colors more. We get Fraunhofer lines because it is supposed to absorb colors."

"Oh?"

"The—the corona shouldn't be visible now because of the stupendous brightness."

Sib Niguth seemed taken aback. "You have remarkable powers of observation, I must say. I can perceive no corona."

"Those banners of light are it," Hilton explained. "When you have only a few sunspots you don't get a circular corona."

"H-h-m-mm! Well, suppose you look back at the Earth now. You've never observed the Third Planet from this side, have you?"

His temples thudding, Hilton crossed the control room to the stern magnificationscope and stared through the eyepiece.

The planet which appeared amidst a wavering backdrop of stars and misty nebulae was splotched and soggy looking, and bore a disgusting resemblance to an overripe toadstool.

"Well?" the lizard prodded.

"Those dark patches could be seas," Hilton choked. "But where are the continents?"

"Where are what?"

"What has become of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas?"

THE lizard seemed puzzled.

"You wouldn't see them all at once," he said at last.

"No-o-o. No, of course not. But it's most peculiar all the same. I can make out several large craters, but no familiar land masses. That corkscrew mottling could be—yes, it's just possible—no, hold on—on second thought, no."

"No, what?"

"Australia wouldn't look like that."

The lizard shrugged and returned the writing tablet to its rack.

"I'm afraid we're getting nowhere," he telepathized resentfully. "Why should you be puzzled by the appearance of your own sun, your own planet? Rudimentary sciences you must have."

"But I am puzzled," Hilton stammered. "I don't understand."

"It's most regrettable. I thought I could draw upon your knowledge to advantage. I risked—well, too much. I allowed myself to forget that you and your wife weigh nearly as much as I do."

Hilton turned pale. "What has our weight to do with you?"

"My dear fellow, we don't want to go into a circular orbit about your sun. We want to drive straight into it. We may have to—well, dispose of a little ballast." As the lizard spoke he raised his claw and sent a jet of green spray spurting toward Hilton. The man's head was enveloped by it and his brain whirled.

Hilton had only the vaguest recollection of being helped back across the mural-decorated passageway to his berth. As though in a glass darkly he saw Janet's white face, and felt his legs being elevated, and Sib Niguth's breath hot and acrid on his brow.

When his faculties steadied he was lying stretched out at full length, and Janet was bending over him.

"Darling, are you all right?" she choked.

Groaning, he sat up. His brow was wet with perspiration and he again trembled with dread as to their fate.

"Darling, what happened to you? That hideous creature had to help you to your bunk."

"I almost passed out."

"But why, Bill?"

In utter silence he drew her into his arms. Lingeringly he kissed her.

"We did have a honeymoon," he whispered. "Nothing can take Callisto Falls away from us."

"No, Bill."

"It was my fault, darling. Suggesting we hitch-hike. You ought to hate me."

"I don't at all."

"You're a generous, loyal, brave little wife. Janet, I'll ask him to blast us out through one tube into the void. We'll be like those two lovers in Dante's Inferno, drifting around forever together, while the stars look down."

The bulkhead panel slid slowly open, and into the chamber stepped Sib Niguth, his withered forelimbs quivering.

"I owe you an apology," he telepathized. "We've just made a startling discovery. We—"

Something seemed to snap in Hilton's brain. Before the lizard could finish he was on his feet, his eyes blazing.

"You win, funny face. But before you blast us through a rocket tube I've a little present for you."

"No wait, we—s-s-il-ush!"

Like a piston Hilton's fist drove forward into the lizard's stomach, sending him staggering backward.

"Something to remember us by," Hilton snarled.

"No, wait!" Sib Niguth telepathized, and—disappeared.

"Here I am," the lizard said, reappearing on the opposite side of the chamber. "A nasty temper you have, I must say."

Hilton wheeled in amazement.

"Bill, look out!" Janet screamed. "He can make himself invisible."

"Dematerialization," the lizard explained, "is a simple mechanical process. Our race mastered it when your ancestors were living in caves."

As he spoke Sib Niguth sprang into the air, and launched himself straight at the terrified Earthling, his kangaroo-like extremities drawn back in a most hideous fashion.

Hilton never knew what struck him.

One minute he saw the creature's webbed feet descending toward him, the next his skull seemed to burst asunder, and he sank down into blackness, felled by a terrific kick between the eyes and ending in a sideward blow to the stomach.

SOMEONE was tugging at his sleeve. "Bill, oh Bill. We're in our own little ship again. Wake up, dearest."

Groaning, he struggled to a sitting position. Thank goodness he was not reclining in darkness any more. He was sitting before the control panel of the *Morning Star*, and Janet was perched opposite him.

She was leaning toward him, eyes shining. "Darling, he left this message for you."

"Huh?"

"He left a message, Bill. It's etched out in English on metal. You'd better read it, darling."

Somewhat dazed Hilton took the metal tablet from his wife's hand. It read:

My dear fellow: The joke's on us. It wasn't your sun. It was our sun. And the "Earth" was one of our planets—Salashun. The dazzle was so intense I failed to recognize my own sun. Ironic, what? That tube I told you about wasn't burned out. It was just acting up. When I converted the ship into a space traveler I forgot to unscrew it, you see?

Old chap, it started sputtering, then lighted up. We see-sawed back and forth between your system and ours, across billions of light years. And every time we returned to your system your ship was right beside us in the void. Most of the time we were in our system, you understand? We didn't travel spatially in yours after you hailed us.

Old fellow, one doesn't always trample on ants. Sometimes one picks them up and puts them back into their mounds. Yes, I think you would call it an irrational impulse. You've had bacon and eggs for breakfast, and are smoking a pipe. You feel—well, mellow. Live and let live, eh?

I felt mellow myself, old chap. Knowing I could jolly well stop the see-sawing—knowing I could make readjustments which would keep us on our side of the cosmic fence.

Incidentally, one of the engine room lads is a technical wizard. He repaired your ship before he rolled up his sleeves, as you would say, and went to work on the tube. He assures me you won't be troubled by leaking fumes or defective j-valves.

You see, the lads feel mellow, too. They're grateful to you for the "Blues"—singing it kept them from coming a cropper. Old chap, we've put you back, and now we're going home. Good luck, and—free wheeling.

Sib Niguth.

THE BARD OF CERES

By JOSEPH FARRELL

Johnny Bates, Space Guard on Ceres, Was Bored with His Job, But a Space Pirate and Shakespeare Soon Livened Things Up!

HENRY TREVOR was chuckling softly. He looked up from the close-printed pages of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" at his restlessly pacing young assistant, Johnny Bates.

"You should learn to appreciate Shakespeare, Johnny," he advised. "He's the greatest humorist of them all. Listen to the way Falstaff—"

Johnny Bates swung around and glared at him.

"Shakespeare! I'm sick of him. And I'm tired of this infernal planetoid, and I hate those slimy natives—"

His lean jaw thrust out beneath the bored youthful features. "Join the Space Guard!" he quoted mockingly. "Adventure, travel, romance—the thrill of far-off planets. And here I am, assigned to guarding a third rate asteroid." He broke off, ran a hand through long black hair. "I'm sorry, Henry. No need to take it out on you. But I'm bored."

He turned and stared out the window of the government post. The familiar barren landscape disappeared abruptly at the short horizon. It was hard, jagged rock, the only level ground being the thousand-yard-long landing strip at his right.

Above him space was black and bright-starred. He stared wistfully. Out there the Space Guard were doing men's work. Roth Haggar, terror of the spaceways, was being hunted. And here was he, Johnny Bates, tied down to this government post and landing strip on tiny Ceres.



The natives came to life, and started swelling their bodies

Trevor had come up behind him. The older man's eyes were concerned as he put a hand on the boy's shoulders.

"You'll get your chance, Johnny. You're young and romantic, but you'll have to wait for an opening." He gestured toward the volumes in the bookcase. "You could spend many pleasant hours until you're called for more active service."

They both knew it was untrue. A man stationed at such an outpost could be forgotten, spend his life there. Johnny nodded, trying not to look too glum. He wished he were like Trevor. The older man had asked for this post, and had spent twenty years studying the works of Shakespeare. But Johnny knew he could never be that type.

HE LOOKED on in mild interest as a weird figure wriggled over the near horizon, coming toward the post. Another followed, and then more. Six of the creatures appeared.

"See, we have company," said Trevor pleasantly.

Johnny managed a smile, watching the gruesome shapes of sickly gray cowhide writhing toward them. The natives were friendly, even sociable, and best of all, they had vocal chords. They even knew a little pidgin-English.

Trevor snapped the lever that controlled the airlock. When the half dozen Cereans were packed between the doors he pushed it to the position that closed the outer and opened the inner door. The amorphous creatures waddled into the room.

Trevor grunted a welcome and broke out the sugar supply. He passed out lumps, which disappeared swiftly into the digestive systems of the natives.

Hroxl, the leader of the Cereans, grunted back. Like the others, he was dressed in his Sunday best, which involved a strip of rope about his middle and a short ceremonial spear that he held proudly.

"Ceres fellas come see Earth fellas," he announced. "Bye-'n-bye much Earth fellas this place."

The two men looked at each other. Guessing what the natives meant was often a game.

"He thinks you're my wife," hazarded Trevor. "He's been listening to the Earth radio and heard about the septuplets that were born back on Earth."

Johnny suppressed a grin. "If there were seven of you," he growled, "there'd be seven corpses here. But as usual you're wrong. He's seen a space-ship coming, for two platins."

"It's a bet." Trevor dug into his pocket. "Ante up!"

"What the devil!" Johnny demanded.

He stared at the natives. They were trying hard to stand on their heads, and not succeeding very well, because most of their weight was in their lower parts. A slow grin of understanding broke on Johnny's face.

"No, no," he explained. "Henry didn't say 'ends up.' He said 'ante up!'"

The Cereans returned to their normal postures. "Cerean fellas make mistake," said Hroxl, seriously.

"I wonder," said Johnny. His voice was doubtful. "Sometimes I think you white lobsters have a sense of humor. But a pun is the lowest form, especially the way you do it."

Trevor stopped chuckling and addressed the natives. "Ceres fella make talk much Earth fellas by this place very fast. My word! What Earth fella this?"

The chief waved toward the sharp horizon. "Earth fellas that place. Make this place. My word, yes!"

Johnny looked narrowly. "Maybe you owe me two platins, Henry. If somebody's coming—"

A human figure surrounded by a bulging space-suit broke into view. The man seemed injured, then they saw him fall to one knee. He picked himself up and staggered toward the shack.

"A wounded man!" Trevor exclaimed. "Possibly a space-ship crashed on Ceres! Johnny, get the first-aid equipment out—I'll go for him."

Johnny quickly reached for the medical supplies while Trevor put himself into a space-suit. He opened the lock, and let Henry out. In their corner the natives watched with incurious eyes.

JOHNNY watched Trevor reach the injured man and lift him by the belt of his bulger—no effort in the feeble gravity of Ceres. In a few minutes, the two men were back through the airlock, inside the shack. The man had his hands over his vision plate, as if shielding his eyes.

Trevor started stripping off his space-suit. "We'll get the things off him, and —"

He stopped short. The man had worked off his helmet and stood facing them with a deadly UV gun in his hand. They stared at the thin-lipped, evil face, with its scar that ran from one corner of his mouth to the ear, giving the look of a diabolical grin.

"Roth Haggar!" they exclaimed together.

The outlaw's cold eyes studied them mockingly.

"In person." The voice was an ominous purr that fitted the graceful, catlike motions of the lean outlaw. "Roth Haggar is a leader in the full sense of the word. When I want something done properly, I do it myself."

"I'll never eat ham again," said Trevor. "What do you want here?"

Haggar's grin disappeared. "When I'm through with you— But first of all, I have a man coming. He's been listening in on helmet radio."

He waved his gun. "Go stand in that corner for now. I may need you later."

The outlaw stepped to the lever that controlled the airlock. Johnny glanced outside and saw a space-suited figure approaching. When the man entered, he studied him, and recognized him from the reward posters.

It was a squat, barrel-chested gorilla, one of Roth Haggar's worst cutthroats. The man had a bald head, and a patch over one eye gave him the name of Ganymede Joe, since he had lost his eye on that moon. The hairy suitcase he used for a jaw dropped when he came through the airlock and found himself face to face with the Cereans. He stared at them, his gun leveled.

"Boss! What's those things?" He tore off his helmet for a better look. "Are they alive?"

Haggar glanced disdainfully at the natives. "They don't count. I checked them in the Interplanet Encyc—I believe in being thorough. One human is the same as another to them, so just act as if they aren't there. They won't bother us."

"They give me the shivers," Ganymede Joe complained. He moved closer to Haggar's side. "They're obnoxious and pestiferous, that's what they are!"

"Forget them," Haggar ordered. "Get to that radio and start signaling the boys. Tell them it's all right to land."

"They ain't human," Ganymede Joe insisted. He moved cautiously toward the radio, keeping his good eye on the

Cereans. "They're Frankensteinish! They're—uh—" he fumbled for a good word. "Gruesome!"

The natives came to life. They started swelling their bodies, pumping what air they could into their almost vestigial lungs, and their tentacles spread out. Ganymede Joe yipped, almost dropped his gun. Haggar looked suspiciously at Bates and Trevor.

"What's this?" he demanded.

Johnny shrugged unhappily. "They're punsters," he explained. "Your ape said 'gruesome,' and it sounded like 'Grow some.' They're just being obliging."

"Well, stop it!" Haggar ordered. "Get back to your right sizes, you animated gargoyles, or I'll give you a dose of UV that'll make you stop growing—permanent!"

The Cereans deflated. "Ceres fellas make wrong idea," said Hroxl, looking as sheepish as it is possible for a native of Ceres to look.

"Let's get rid of them, chief," Ganymede Joe begged.

"No. Let them stay, and see how Roth Haggar works. I remember reading about these puns. Nobody knows whether it's really naïveté, or whether they're being kittenish. But they won't hurt us."

"I still insist they're superfluous, chief."

Haggar scowled at his henchman "Get at that radio, and contact the others!"

THE gorilla grumbled and started playing with the transmitter. Bates and Trevor stared unhappily at each other. Henry leaned against the bookcase. In an automatic gesture, he picked up one of his volumes of Shakespeare.

Roth Haggar strutted thoughtfully.

"A nice layout. I've always liked the idea of taking over one of these government posts. From here we can raid ships outbound from Mars and Earth. You've got detectors here to warn us of any approaching danger. You've got a Choney field to guard the only strip of land on the whole asteroid where a space-ship could be set down. Yes—an

excellent layout."

Bates knew the outlaw was right. They had been tricked. No space-ship could have landed on Ceres against their wishes, for the Choney field was a barrier of force that would wreck any vessel that attempted to land without their permission. But now the field would be released to let the pirate vessel land.

"Erricson!" Ganymede Joe had contacted the waiting space-ship. "You can come in now. We got everything under control here—The boss sure put it over big." Neanderthal features in the teleplate spat to one side. "How about the Choney? Make darn sure you cut out the Choney. That field would cut us into pieces so small we'd have to dodge atoms."

Ganymede Joe nodded. He reached out and spun to its farthest notch the heavy wheel that controlled the Choney field.

"The field is now disestablished," he announced. "Come on in."

"Coming," said Erricson.

The screen blacked out. Through the window, Johnny saw the distant lights of the approaching ship. In a minute he could make out details, and his jaw hardened a little.

"Like it?" Roth Hagggar asked, with a touch of pride. "The toughest ship in the system. Tops for offense or defense. Nothing the Space Guard has can stand up to it. Notice those gun turrets in the waist. My own personal invention."

Johnny looked it over, his thoughts as dark as the deadly prow that was nosing toward the landing strip. Black and grim that vessel was, its cargo death and its crew the scrapings of the planets.

His eyes met Trevor's. The older man's gaze was troubled too, as he unconsciously fingered the volume in his hands.

"What's that book you have there?" Roth Hagggar demanded suddenly.

Trevor looked in surprise at the outlaw, then at the book. "I didn't even know I was holding it," he said. "It's a habit."

"What is it!" Hangar snapped.

Johnny's eyes lighted momentarily. "Two platins this'll work," he murmured.

"Stop whispering!" Hagggar roared. "What's that book?"

"Shakespeare!" Johnny roared back.

Hagggar flinched suddenly as the natives started waving their short spears. Ganymede Joe howled in instinctive terror. From the weapons of both outlaws murderous blasts of highly concentrated ultra-violet rays pounded the natives.

The natives screamed in sudden agony. But they did not die. Hagggar stared unbelievably over the warm UV gun.

"It's impossible!" he shouted. "These are the deadliest weapons made—my own invention."

He backed away a step, eyes widening. The Cereans were moving in on him. "Ceres fellas mad! Darn, my word, much mad. Kill! Kill!"

Roth Hagggar's voice went shrill. He threw an arm over his face as a shower of spears crashed into him. Ganymede Joe clubbed his gun and struck out at the natives who swarmed at him. Then he was down.

"No kill!" Johnny's voice bellowed, over the uproar. "Earth fellas dead no good. Earth fellas live make much sugar Cerean fellas! My word!"

Trevor's gun covered the battered criminals as the Cereans retreated gravely to their corner.

"That sugar," said Johnny, grinning widely, "will be the 'green, folding kind!"

HE SWUNG the heavy wheel of the Choney field just as the outlaw vessel touched the landing strip. The ship started slowing to a stop. Then—in a fraction of a second it sprinkled silently to the ground in a nauseating mess.

If the ship had been made of wood, the pieces could have been used for matchsticks.

Johnny eyed the remains thoughtfully. "Better call the front office, Henry," he suggested. "Tell them to bring a ton of sugar for the boys, and a ton of chains for these two apes."

"I can't understand it," Roth Hagggar was groaning. "Our UV guns are the deadliest weapons in existence. But all

(Concluded on page 129)



This STARTLING WAR

News and Notes from the
Science Front



CANADIAN NAVY LICKS MAL DE MER—If the war has done nothing else for humanity, it promises, thanks to the work of Surgeon Captain C. H. Best, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, co-discoverer of insulin, and Dr. Wiler Penfield of Montreal, to vanquish the dreaded *mal de mer*—seasickness to you—forever.

Already, three out of four cases are cured by the use of pink pills of undisclosed ingredients which have a gyroscopic steadying effect on stomachs afflicted by the roll and pitch of a ship's deck. The capsules are now being manufactured in quantity and will be available for civilian use after the war.

* * *

SUPER BOMBER ALMOST READY FOR COMBAT

—The immense Martin B-29, the Army's new super bomber, which will reduce the Fortress and Liberator to the status of medium planes, is now in quantity production and almost ready to release its vast load of "eggs" on the Axis. Specific details as to its speed and bomb load are still unreleased, but enough has seeped out to give a fair picture of the monster.

It is a six-motor job, its Wright Cyclone 18 engines giving it a total of 12,000 horse power with speed approximating that of present day fighters. It is armed with weapons ranging up to 75 mm cannon, will carry a greater bomb load than any existing plane and will be able to bomb Tokyo and return from present American Pacific bases. Somebody had better run for cover when this baby gets into operation.

* * *

U. S. ARMY DOCTORS PERFORM MEDICAL MIRACLE

—Fifty-one per cent of United States war wounded have been returned to active duty after hospitalization! This startling figure does not include wounded treated at first-aid stations near the fronts who rejoin their units in a few days. According to the Hospital Administrative Section of the Medical Department, only ten per cent of total casualties are hospitalized at all. Of almost 20,000 hospitalized casualties in all theatres up to last August 15, more than 9,000 are already back in active service with more of the same total on the way back to the front.

* * *

ARMY CORPORALS TURN STUMPS INTO MACHINE-GUN MOUNTS

—Two Army non-coms, Corporals D. L. Hover and V. Ciaccaroni, have come up with a gadget that converts any fencepost or tree stump into an anti-aircraft mount for the .50-calibre machine-gun, the weapon most feared by strafing planes. It can be secured in less than

thirty seconds and is based on a one-foot piece of four-inch angle iron with two short pieces of chain attached near either end so that they can be snugged up tight by turning a pair of wing nuts. These clamp the mount to the post. Flanges and a pair of circular plates complete the gadget, which is only 18 inches long and weighs less than 25 pounds.

* * *

NOVEL BOMB AS "TERROR" WEAPON

—A new high in grisly war weapons is offered by inventor S. L. Conrad of Columbus, Ohio, in the form of a bomb built in spherical shape with projecting spikes to give it a better grip on the ground. Within it is a gasoline engine. The idea is to drop it by parachute and let it run wild among enemy troops under its own power, rolling erratically and exploding God knows where. It sounds swell as long as it doesn't roll back among our own boys.

* * *

ROCKET JETS "PUSH" BOMB DOWNWARD

—To give a bomb greater downward velocity than it receives from gravity, W. F. Rouse of Havelock, Iowa, proposes a series of rocket jets in its tail to be ignited after the missile has fallen well clear of the launching aircraft. "Upside down" rocket bombs of this type were reported in use by the Germans some time ago, but this is the first emergence of such a weapon as an American invention.

* * *

GARAND GETS GUNSIGHT PATENT

—John C. Garand, Springfield Arsenal employee and inventor of the M-1 rifle now in use by our armed forces, has patented a new type of rear peepsight for firearms. It consists of an L-shaped member mounted on the barrel by means of a transverse hinge. Each arm of the L is pierced by a peepsight aperture near its upper end. The two arms are of unequal length, so that two quickly adjusted elevations are possible on the weapon. Royalty-free rights for manufacture and use are assigned to the U. S. Government.

* * *

NEW INVENTION MAKES WHISTLE PUFFS VISIBLE

—Famed inventor John Hays Hammond Jr. has come up with a powder puff for whistles on diesel-propelled vessels which will make their blasts visible to mariners.

Ships' captains, accustomed to reading signals by the puff of steam on steam whistles rather than by their sound, particularly in congested waterway, have been having trouble understanding puffless diesel whistles. Mr. Hammond adds a tight powder-packed cylinder to the whistles along with a supplementary blast of air which does the trick, thus aiding convoy maneuvers considerably.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 9)

GIANT ATOM IS SURPRISE

By George Ebey

Dear Sarge: The winter **STARTLING STORIES** is a distinct improvement over the last two issues. Bergey does a good commercial job on the cover here that is definitely attention-attracting, if nothing else. However—it might be well to remind Earle that this business of a man and woman glancing over their shoulders at something exploding, or glowing, or glittering can be run into the ground. Way, way down.

Jameson's novel, *The Giant Atom* was a complete surprise. It started off in the usual inane manner and seemed destined to end that way. Then came chapter three and the fun began. Interesting technical talk, and later on—of all things—humor! I laid down my copy of the mag and roared with laughter over such items as the headlines on page 44: "Vengeful Maniac Sets World Afire"; "Ben-nion's Moll Defies Court"; "Helped Her Boy Friend Fan Blaze But Won't Talk." And the lovely episode where the army decides to "blow up" the atom! O joy! Bet Jameson had a lot of fun writing this story.

The shorts were excellent except for the Coblentz yarn which was at least innocuous. Kuttner's was a well carried out problem piece and Rocklyne turned out a space tale with a novel twist.

Some of the interior art-work wasn't too bad. *The Ether Vibrates* pleases with some nicely thought-out letters—notably those of Ramsay and Stoy. I add my voice to the general plea for less "war corn"—take a bow, Chad—and badly done propaganda. If the authors can't logically and intelligently work the war into their fiction then let them leave the subject alone. Otherwise, the stories suffer.

I almost forgot the Hall of Fame reprint—which should really be unforgettable. Here is writing of a sort that has almost disappeared from fiction. Not that I would rate this story as a "classic," yet "The Last Woman" contained simple emotions and humaneness without once being mawkish or melodramatic.

Thanks for the pleasant comments on *Sappho* in the fan mag reviews. However, you might have mentioned that the mag is an all-poetry effort. Incidentally, I suggest that you read some of those poems. It won't take long: they're all pretty short. You might even enjoy them—who knows?—4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland, Calif.

Glad you liked **THE GIANT ATOM**, Pee-lot Ebey. The junior astrogator just before you didn't seem to think so much of it. I thought the yarn grew on you, too—like the atom did. Oh, well. . . .

SMOOTH SAILING

By James Russell Gray

Dear Space-Warp: The latest **STARTLING STORIES** (Winter Issue) was a nice mess of turnip greens. Since I'm a country boy, this is intended for a compliment. I've read many a copy of the old mag, and while you've done better in five or six issues during its lifetime, this one is way above average. "Sojarr of Titan" was better, and "The Water World." Still, "The Giant Atom" is the best story you've printed in a long time, the best thing Jameson has done since he wrote "Quicksands To Youthwardness."

I consider the shorts all good this time. And, mind you, I usually don't care for shorts. As many of the fans have already said, the novel-length stories are usually best; there is more room for the author to develop his background and whatnot. Or something.

Anyway, I place the Hall of Fame story first. It is a powerful piece, and well deserves to be called a classic. I can't make up my mind, if any, whether to place "Beyond The Boiling Zone" or "Music Hath Charms" next. I enjoyed them both immensely. So make it a tie. Coblentz's offering rates last, and it's a swell story. Before I pass on, I want to say that Rocklyne had a nice idea there in "Beyond The Boiling Zone." Incidentally, I liked "Exile to Centauri" in TWS which some of the fans panned so emphatically.

The cover is much better than usual. I miss the BEM (sigh) and the horrified look on the girl's pan, but I guess I mustn't be selfish. And besides, I know they'll both be back next issue.

I place the picture on page 41 in first place, and that probably doesn't really count as it illustrates the blurb advertising "The Great Ego" which is promised for the next issue. There's something about his work. . . . Place the Paul on page 73 in second place, and say that the other illustrations are adequate. And that takes care of the art.

Your letter section is getting better and better. That goes for TWS and **CAPTAIN FUTURE** also. Want my opinion as to why? It's because you have toned down the sarcasm in your comments on the readers' offerings. Not that you weren't right, understand. But you scare off a lot of letter writers that way. A science-fiction editor once said, ". . . the editor always has the last word. He can say what he thinks with such finality that the reader, instead of opening a good controversy, finds himself squelched whether or not the editor intends to be final in his reactions." Name of editor, and where printed, on request.

I always read the letter section first. It can be, and often is, the best thing in a magazine. I look forward to Bill Stoy's missives, and I can just see him crying bitterly into tankards of Xeno. The guy can certainly turn a neat phrase. Raym Washington intimates he has sent in a story to the Amateur Contest that didn't click. So'd my wife. I know how to get even with 'em, Raym. Let's send 'em a poem.

Well, Sarge, that about takes care of everything but the rent, and I have troubles enough of my own, so you can worry about that. My pet BEM, which I keep chained in my back yard, has doubled his weight in two months. Gruesome, what?—Box 204, Hartshorne, Okla.

Nice ethergram, Pee-lot Gray, and the old Sarge is not going to pin your ears back for no reason at all. Say, what's the name of that BEM in your back yard? In these days of meat rationing and point purchasing, a good BEM that will grow in such fashion is worth looking into.

YEAR'S REPORT

By Gene Hunter

Dear Sarge: Since this issue is the final one of this year, it is time to give out with a list of the ten best stories that have adorned **STARTLING** in the past year. Sadly, there can be only five worth mentioning.

Robert Moore Williams, who usually isn't so good, turned out the best story in the magazine for 1943 with *World Beyond the Sky*. Number two story was a short one by Dennis and Tucker, two fellows whom I have never encountered before nor since, called *The Gladiators*. Third place goes to Rocklyne for *Pirates of the Time Trail*, fourth to Gallun for *Hell-Stuff For Planet X*, and fifth to William Morrison for what I consider his best short story, *Forgotten Past*.

Best cover of the year (and the only good one) was Bergey's for Fall. Best interior artist was Finlay with 4.25, worst was Marchioni with 1.38. **STARTLING'S** average for the year was 2.234.

And so with deep loathing we file away **STARTLING STORIES** for 1943, and if I may say so, it was a helluva year. God only knows what 1944 will bring.

Through the medium of this column I have a couple of things to make public. First let me apologize to my several correspondents for my eternal moving about, but circumstances have required it. As far as I know, this address will be permanent for the duration or until Uncle Sam sees fit to want me.

Secondly, I now have a large file of back issue magazines. Anyone interested drop me a line with a list of magazines you need, and I'll do what I can. Guess that's about all for now, Sarge.—6665 Long Beach Blvd., Long Beach, Calif.

Anyway, Kiwi Hunter, the old Sarge is happy that you survived the disastrous year with only a mild case of mal de mer. Let's hope 1944 will be brighter for you. Perhaps we can get the artists to use more vivid colors, no? Now, climb back into the nut and bolt locker, and we will get on with the grousing.

(Continued on page 118)



*Your
Contribution
to Victory*
By
NORMAN ANGELL

*Famous Author of "Let the People
Know" and other books*

ARGUMENTS about who won the last war and who is doing most to win this, are usually very much to be deprecated. But a friendly competition as to which people is managing to make the best monetary contribution might have its uses as a stimulant to the War Bond and Stamp Campaign.

Britain has pushed her income tax in the higher brackets up to as much as 97½% and has introduced a system of deferred payment of salaries and wages. Payment of both in certain cases is withheld and will be made available as savings at the end of the war.

The American campaign for bonds and stamps is an attempt to do in a voluntary way what has been done partly by law in Britain. It would be a fine testimony to the capacity of the American people for that voluntary cooperation which is of the essence of democ-

racy if this campaign succeeded so well that no compulsory savings were necessary.

Furthermore, we are all discussing these days the post-war settlement; but one of the chief features of the post-war settlement should be provision against a post-war depression.

The War Bond Campaign is not merely a war measure; it is a measure of post-war settlement, a means of holding back purchasing power until that moment of time when it will be most needed, the time of post-war reconstruction spending then of the money saved—and increased—by bonds, will be a first class means of giving a stimulant to business and preventing depression to Bond buyers, or a means both of beating the enemy and of seeing that his onslaught does as little damage as possible to our societies in the difficult and dangerous post-war period.

PREPARE TO MEET POST-WAR PROBLEMS!

THE ETHER VIBRATES (Continued from page 116)

FROM COVER TO COVER

By Guy Trucano, Jr.

Dear Sarge: I should be different and start talking about next issue. It sounds slightly more interesting than the present one. Anyway, I have missed at least one issue. And it is definitely not my fault. After a train load of soldiers goes through you couldn't buy a magazine with a gas coupon. Oh, well.

As I walked into the newsstand, I spotted the pack of wolves drooling around an obscure corner. Realizing immediately it was either Esquire or a sciencefiction gal, I tried a football rush. That night when they swept out they discovered my body in the corner. Three days later, they brought the magazine to me at the hospital.

Starting with the shorter ones first, I went through the book. Two were definitely good stories, and the others were hovering between good and fair. Then I turned my attention to the main battle.

At first I admit I was thrilled, held speechless, etc. It was either wonderful writing or I'm prejudiced in favor of Jameson. Probably both. Anyway, I still think the writing was swell, and there were several new twists to the plot, but as time went on it fell more and more into the same old "lost-world, saved-world" pattern. Even so, Jameson dressed this up into a swell story.—*Dickinson, N. Dakota.*

Nice work, Kiwi Trucano. Sounds like a quiet evening in the Spacemen's Cafe at Aphro City on Venus. We will now hear a hoot from the Hoosier State.

BACK INTO THE GROOVE

By Joe Reincke

Dear Sarge: Well what do you know! SS is getting back in the old swing again. The stories are getting to be worth reading. The cover drawing is not half as good as the last issue. Was that an atom or a hunk of cheese that Bergey was trying to depict? Well, now to get down to business:

"The Giant Atom"—4 orchids.

"The Last Woman"—1,002,031 onions.
You could have left the 7 pages that that tripe wasted blank, and I would have enjoyed it more.

"Beyond The Boiling Zone"—2 orchids.
And more if Rocklynnne wouldn't have written it down as it came to him. (Easy, Rocklynnne.)

"Music Hath Charms"—10 onions.

"The Sidereal Time-Bomb"—10 plus orchids.
One of the best scientification shorts I ever read. A hand for Mr. Coblentz.

The departments aren't even worth mentioning. The pics looked like they were scribbled by a guy (a relative of yours, Sarge) at the local nut factory. Don't drown yourself in Xeno, Sarge, or they may have to start rationing it. (And that would kill you.)—*3922 Smith St., Fort Wayne, Ind.*

Getting fresh with the senior astrogator, eh? Stick your head between the jaws of that spare vise yonder, and I'll have your fellow space monkeys go to work on you. They'll show you whether this department is worth mentioning.

ONE-MAN POLL

By Chad Oliver

Dear Sarge: Don't look now, but the One-man Gallup Poll has once more crept stealthily onto your editorial desk, replete with an amazing collection of compliments, vice-versas and other trivia. I have a faint inkling of the enthusiasm with which you receive my missives. Remember, though—suicide is a coward's way out!

I shall now dissect the Winter SS. Best story this time, by a wide margin, was the Hall of Fame selection. It is rather difficult to grasp the exact theme of this yarn. Was the author trying to show that the scientific civilization was right or, by arousing reader sympathy for "The Last Woman" and her lover, wrong? Personally, I think such a one-sexed scientific group would tend to defeat its purpose, for it is an acknowledged fact that behind most great men there is a woman; they stimulate ambition, so to speak. Could be that I'm somewhat biased, tho—never having won much of a reputation as a woman-hater. But we digress. No

matter what the theme, Gardner can write, and he produced a sad gem that really makes one think. "The Last Woman," to my mind, really deserves a place in the Hall of Fame; which is more than I can say for certain other "enduring scientification classics."

Second place goes to Kuttner's interesting little short, "Music Hath Charms." Don't feed us too much of this type of story, but a little dose now and then is most welcome.

In "The Giant Atom," Jameson had a really brilliant idea, and then ruined it by stereotyped, unenthusiastic writing that would doubtless appeal greatly to a six-year-old. It's a shame, because the idea of ejecting the flaming atom into space was superb; it really could have been something. And Jameson could have made it something, for he is an excellent writer on occasion. Anyway, the novel stands as the worst of the year, and is on an equal level with the two remaining shorts.

"Beyond the Boiling Zone" was a bit too conventional for my tastes—the writing, I mean. And Rocklynnne brought in the good touch of a two dimensional world, and then promptly forgot about it. His science sounded weak as dishwater. Not bad, on the whole, tho.

Coblentz is one of my favorites, and his effort should, I think, rank somewhat above the Rocklynnne and Jameson epics. But "The Sidereal Time-Bomb" is not one of Stanton's better efforts; it was too coincidental and verged on the ridiculous. How about a novel from Coblentz? It's been a long time—much too long—since the fans have seen the real Stanton A. Coblentz.

The cover is fairly good, although Bergey's wax-like figures impress me as being about to melt under that flaming sun. But the gal seems to enjoy it; her suit consists mainly of entrances for the everlasting ultra-violet rays.

Paul had the only acceptable interior pic. Marchioni draws with all the charm and grace of Gargantua heaving rocks through a greenhouse. Sherman was right.

Departments are generally good, except for "This Startling War" which is just so much wasted space. If you can't fill the space any other way, print a big Buy-War-Bonds ad.—*3956 Ledgewood, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Without cluttering up the chart table with a lot of reply to your ethergram, Pee-lot Oliver, I'll tell you that a short novel by Stanton Coblentz is coming up soon in THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Watch for it. Thanks for your kind words about the cover. This next kiwi doesn't quite agree.

GENERAL COMMENT

By Ray Karden

Dear Xeno-hound: A few comments upon your latest "Complete Novel of the Future."

The Cover: A satisfactory amount of feminine appeal, more than satisfactory composition, colors generally toned down to seeable proportions, readable blurbs—in short, it's terrible! I do wish your artists would stop representing the feminine population of the future as being eternally clad in such recognized derivatives of our present day bathing suits—or do I?

The Novel: A good sound writer in Jameson; a good, sound, heavy-science idea, though slightly hackneyed, in the theme, combine to make a somewhat better opus than has been gracing your pages in several issues. The motivation is actually recognizable, the characterization is there, which is something at least; the science is fascinatingly injected; indeed, the main fault seems to be the superficial background apparent in all of your novels. Background is the one reason why novels make better literature; please try to keep this in mind, science-fiction writers.

The Reprint: Immensely amusing, crudely written, a fascinating satire; a good example of old time "classicism." By all means, take Paul Carter's idea of reprinting longer examples of this genre. Mayhap after the war a new publication, "Classics of Wonder."

You managed to put plenty of corn in the fanzine reviews, as usual. I, by the way, am a proud editor of *Cluster*. You might be interested in the next issue, containing, "A Defense of Captain Future," by Chad Oliver. Very. Anyhoo, I'll send you my issues after this, and you will, I hope, review them. (But if the Sarge doesn't, any smart pros-

pective investors in good sound publications may write me.)

I see next issue you will have a novel by Daniels. With my usual sceptical glint of the eyebrows, I give no hint of my anxiety. He may have something there; I sure hope he has.—409 Twelfth Street, Cloquet, Minn.

Kiwi Karden, your ethergram was amusing. And the rest of you pee-lots be advised that Ray did *not* send a copy of *Cluster* for review, which is the only reason it is not in the fanzine parade this issue.

APOLOGIES OFFERED

By Ronald Maddox

Dear Sarge: I have something terrible to say. I would almost rather die than say it, but it must be said. Sarge, I apologize. (Don't hit me again.) I apologize for denouncing the Hall of Fame story for the Winter issue. I found out that all along I had been confused by another story by the same lid. After reading it, I have to denounce myself. This was the best Hall of Fame story I've ever read (meaning "The Last Woman").

Let's go on with the present issue of **STARTLING STORIES**.

I think when I look over a rating that it's about the corniest thing I've ever seen, so all I have to say is that you have a good issue. "The Giant Atom" is the best s-f story I've read in many a day. The cover was fair, and the inside illustrations were fair.

On the subject of trimmed edges, I don't see why readers continue to write to ask for trimmed edges when they know they won't get them. Not enough people want them, and even if they did they still wouldn't get them. So why don't you trimmed-edge seekers shut your (censored) mouths.

I agree with Laney about SS being better than TWS. I like long novels myself.

Another thing: I seemed to hold a grudge against Ray Cummings, and I was wrong about that. My only reason was that every letter section in every mag had a grudge against Cummings, and that is poison for a new reader. I, for one, have now made up my own mind. I like Cummings, and I don't care what anyone else says.

And finally—SS now rates second in my choice of science-fiction books. At one time I rated it tenth. So you see your magazine has improved, and all the

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others have gone down. But part of the reason SS has jumped was that I didn't know enough about science fiction at first to judge well, so I rated some of the corniest mags on the newsstands ahead of **STARTLING STORIES**. I've learned better now. That's all for this time, so put all this in your Xeno jug and drink it.—87 *Utica Street, Hamilton, N. Y.*

This is about as handsome a letter as the old Sarge has seen in half a dozen moons, Pee-lot Maddox, and you've got the senior astrogator sort of hanging on the control panel. You know, speaking generally, there is a lot more to any magazine (even the corny ones) than meets the casual eye. You have to learn just what type of publication a given mag is, what sort of reader audience it is trying to reach—and then you have to read the publication carefully for several issues in order to get familiar with it and feel in the swim of things. On top of that, if you haven't been reading science fiction, you have to cultivate a taste for that before you can go ahead at full acceleration.

So, don't castigate yourself too much, Ronald, for your former snap judgments. Just carry out your present "second thought" attitude in everything you come against during all the rest of your life, and you'll gain the reputation of being a tolerant and wise man.

HELP! HELP! S.O.S.

By Claude Held

Dear Sarge: Just a line to tell you how much I enjoy your big three—**THRILLING WONDER STORIES, CAPTAIN FUTURE and STARTLING STORIES**. Can you supply me with a copy of **STARTLING STORIES** for January, 1939, and of **TWS** for October, 1936? If you can't, will you put a notice in one of your reader departments?—494 *Carlton St., Buffalo 11, N. Y.*

Here you are, Kiwi Held—in the first department to be printed since receiving your appeal. Sorry that we can't help you ourselves, but we have no back copies of any of our magazines for sale. Perhaps a fellow fan will be able to help you out.

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A NEW KIWI

By Billie Carter

Dear Sarge: You gay old rascal, leave that Jovian Pepsi-Cola, Xeno, alone long enough to welcome a new kiwi to your fold. After reading science-fiction for the past five years and composing millions of letters in my mind I have at last put one on paper.

I could be an exception and say that I was 98 years old and probably your oldest reader. Also that I had one of the smallest collections of science-fiction in the world, only one volume. But as usual I am only 17 and have quite a collection.

The Winter issue was a very pleasant surprise, since the novels of the past few issues have been rather low in quality. "The Giant Atom" by Malcolm Jameson ranks as one of the best novels S. S. has published. For once the short stories were not just fillers. I'll not attempt to rank them for they were all excellent. "The Sidereal Time-Bomb" was very amusing. Marchioni's illustrations for the novel were good but were too few.

I see some criticisms of the illustrations used for the Hall of Fame stories. These old drawings have a convincing atmosphere and their crudeness only adds to the effect.—105 College St., Trenton, Tenn.

Welcome to the good ship **STARTLING STORIES**, Kiwi Carter, and write in whenever the urge becomes so overpowering that you can't resist. But don't forget to complain about something. All kiwis complain. If you don't, I'll know that you are ill and will have to put you on the sick list.

GOING TO THE DOGS

By Gerry de la Ree, Jr.

Dear Sarge: It's too much for me! I just can't sit silently by and watch what was once my favorite science fiction magazine go completely to the dogs. Ever since **STARTLING STORIES** first saw the light of day back in those far, far better days of 1939, I have purchased and usually read each issue as it appeared. And, year by year, issue by issue, I have watched that magazine slowly fall from the top of the list until it is bouncing near the bottom.

Faults? The present issues have plenty. First, the stories themselves. You haven't published a decent

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novel in so long that it isn't even funny. The short stories for the most part are of the inferior type, and even your reprint "Hall of Fame" tales are only mediocre. I'll mention no specific stories, but all of your readers certainly will have no trouble in sorting the poorer stories from the better ones.

The second fault, obvious to anyone with eyesight, is the art work. Mr. Bergey's so-called covers are no more than lurid dabs of gaudy paint. The interior illustrations are the most childish group of drawings anyone could conceive. This not only goes for **STARTLING STORIES** but **CAPTAIN FUTURE** and **TWS** as well.

Perhaps I could make a suggestion that would help clear up this second lapse. Use some of Hannes Bok's work on the cover and inside your magazines. He is one of the better stf artists, but I fail to recollect any of his illustrations ever appearing in any of your magazines. Can you tell the readers why? I think they would like to know, for it is a fact that a majority would prefer Bok to anything you are now offering.

The departments: Plentiful and in most places pretty good. "The Ether Vibrates" was nice and long in the Winter Issue, but all this interplanetary double talk is becoming a trifle senile, but evidently you prefer it that way.

Please, try and improve the stories and art work. With only four issues a year, it shouldn't be too difficult to cut out the corn that by now must be ready for harvest. I'll back up Paul Carter's request for longer "Hall of Fame" stories, for maybe that is the only solution.—9 Bogert Place, Westwood, N. J.

Pee-lot Gerry, the old Sarge has mentioned Bok to the art editor. The quality of stories waxes and wanes—anywhere, with any sort of story. Also, a person's own tastes fluctuate, you know. There are a thousand reasons and causes which affect a reader's reactions. However, we are trying hard all the time to get the best science fiction we can buy for you scientifiction fans to gobble up. If you know any writers—amateur or professional—who can write better stories than we are publishing, tell them to send yarns in to us.

But everybody doesn't agree with you. So, tie your ears back and take a peek at this ethergram!

WASN'T GOING TO REPORT

By Kent Bone

Dear Sarge: I wasn't going to write about this issue of SS, but that was before I read it. Malcolm Jameson's "The Giant Atom" was to me, a classic. It surpasses Ray Cummings masterpiece "Wings of Icarus." It is the best stf. story this year in SS and TWS, surpassing all but the three CF novels.

The shorts were all good. In first place is the story "The Last Woman" by Gardner. Number two was "The Sidereal Time-Bomb" by Coblentz. Third "Music Hath Charms" by Kuttner. Ross Rocklyne's short "Beyond the Boiling Zone" cops fourth place. Speaking of Rocklyne, it seems that nobody agreed with me on Rocklyne's novel of last issue, but who cares?

Art: the best was by Paul on page 73.

All Special Features were good.

That concludes my missive for this ish.—2577 Ferris Ave., Detroit 9, Mich.

Thanks, Kiwi Bone. And there you are, Pee-lot Gerry de la Ree.

Comes now an ether flash from an old reader who makes herewith his initial voyage as a junior astrologator. He refers to the Fall issue.

CAUSTIC CRITICISM

By Frank Holby

Dear Editor: This is the first letter that I ever have written to **STARTLING STORIES**. I have been reading the publication on and off since the first issue. I would like to offer, if I may, a bit of, perhaps, caustic criticism.

First of all, the horrible cognomen, the awful appellation of "Sergeant Saturn." I feel certain that, as a lover of scientifiction and an intelligent man,

you literally abhor the inane comment that you are forced to dribble out in the readers' column.

If you could write out a serious column for readers, it would bolster the magazine tremendously. Your "Fanzine Review" and "Thrills In Science," are two of the finest departments in existence in any publication. They are "tops."

As to the stories, if your lead story is bad, the whole issue, perforce, is also bad. And vice versa.

I didn't like "Pirates of the Time Trail." Ross Rocklyne has written many great stories. All of his stories that appear in a competing magazine are marvels of intricate plot construction. But this was the poorest excuse for a story that he ever has written. In "Meet the Author" he tries to pile the blame upon poor old Ray Cummings. Ross should have mentioned Jack Williamson's "Legion of Time." The plots are remarkably similar.

I greatly enjoyed "The Space Dwellers." "The Monkey and The Typewriter" was not good. "Secret Weapon" would have been a bit of all right, if the blurb didn't give the plot away! Incidentally, this happened in a recent Book-of-the-Month Club selection—"Winter Tales"—when the plots of several short stories therein were outlined and revealed on the inside cover, where the blurbs were written. It is very annoying!

Half of the readers have had the temerity to dislike "The Ideal." How any reader can dislike a single story written by the late, great Stanley G. Weinbaum is more than I can see. But those same readers are, in all probability, the ones who dote on that Sergeant Saturn terminology.—133 Noe St., San Francisco 14, California.

Insubordination, eh? Pee-lot Holby goes over the old Sarge's head and complains to the Commander. All right, the old space dog is tolerant. So we let him do it. But what sort of drivel, Kiwi Holby, would you have Saturn print in this department? This is the reader department, you know, and in here are printed the letters from readers. That's how your ethergram got in here. The old Sarge

[Turn page]

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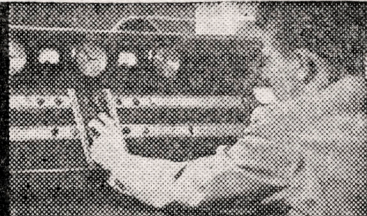
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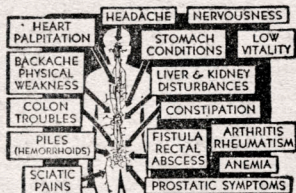
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doesn't make all this stuff up. As I have pointed out before, I just hold up the mirror for you junior pee-lots. You dizzy space birds make your own department.

Sorry you didn't like **PIRATES OF THE TIME TRAIL**. Maybe you liked **THE GIANT ATOM** better. Or **THE GREAT EGO** in this issue. Ormaybenothuh?

PAGE ICHABOD CRANE

By Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: Well cut off my head and call me Shorty! The Winter number of **STARTLING** is an all-star treat! The cover was neither good nor bad—just uninspired. But the letter department was the best it's been in many moons: Laney, Carter, Oliver, Blackburn, Chidsey, Washington, Stoy—the cream of the letter hacks. Fermented juice of a dozen orchids to Saturn for his able handling of the fanzine reviews.

Of course you're dying to know what I think of the stories. Very well. Here goes:

"The Giant Atom" was one of the finest novels yet to appear in **SS**. What realism! What suspense! Stiff handling in some parts, yes, but not enough to mar the excellent quality of the yarn. More, I beg of you, more!

Kuttner let me down a bit, but Rocklynnne and Coblentz came through with a couple of as fine stories as could be desired. "The Last Woman" was a lot like Wallace West's "Last Man," but I liked the Gardner tale best. Probably because of the fine dramatic ending.

Dust off my zoot suit! Do I detect *five talk* scattered through the Sarge's comments? Gather round, cats! The Sergeant will now lead us in a peckin' contest with solid jam, yeah man! Eight beats to the bar! Send me, Jack, send me!—84 Baker Ave., Dover, N. J.

So now the old Sarge is accused of jive talk. Well, I've heard everything now. Don't tell me that space slingo is in the same groove with 1944 hep cats. Or maybe you mean you want to learn more of the patois of the spacemen cafes? Ah, I see. But not in these columns, Joe. See me next Tuesday.

RETURN OF THE NATIVE

By Cpl. Lynn H. Benham

Dear Sarge: I don't know whether the other guys in the STF family will remember me or not, for I've not written to any of the mags for almost a year. In that time, I've been pretty busy, especially since last January second, when I was inducted.

That brings to mind another thing, I'm wondering why it is that so few service men write in: the only ones that I can think of right now are Mace and Bell. Maybe the reason is that so many of us have so little time for stuff such as this.

"Pirates of the Time Trail" I thought was excellent, rating five units (you can fill in there with Xeno jugs, or stars, or what have you). "The Monkey and the Typewriter" and the Hall of Fame classic, "The Space Dwellers," tying for two units (fair), and last and pulling one-half unit, the story by Joe Farrell, "Secret Weapon." I don't say that **STARTLING STORIES** is the best magazine on the stands, but it is one of the best, which is very good.

I always like your little science skits by Friend, and the corresponding department in **TWS**. Incidentally, I don't like the word "Thrilling" in the title of the other mag.

(Turn to page 126)

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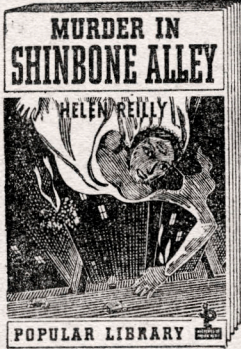
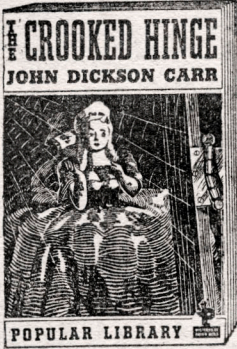
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Ken Bell of Pendleton Field almost exactly airs my opinions on the things he speaks of in the Fall issue, so I need say no more except that Fall issue quality up.—*Squadron F, Tyndall Field, Fla.*

I don't know if the cageful of junior astrologators remember you or not, Kiwi Benham, but the old Sarge certainly does, and am I glad to hear from you again! And you are slightly space-warped about service men not writing in. I think you will find a fair sprinkling of communiques from them in the departments of all three of our scientification group. The current issue of **CAPTAIN FUTURE** has three or four letters from men in the Armed Service, and you are not alone in this issue.

Anyway, best of luck to you Corporal Benham, and write to **THE ETHER VIBRATES** again. Things are going to be cleaned up before too long in our global trouble, but *this reader war* bids fair to be like Tennyson's brook.

Before we close the cages and start the ventilator fans to clear the fog out of the astrogation chamber, here is a final explosion from down New England way.

THRILLS IN SCIENCE THRILL

By Glyndon T. Genne

Dear Sarge: The article on Tom Davenport in Thrills In Science came so close to home that I have decided to break my silence and write to you. I am a STF fan of long standing and have read nearly all the mags at one time or another for several years. I have often chuckled over your Xeno-inspired nonsense and hereby sentence your derogatory critics to a year on the bright side of Mercury. (No Xeno allowed.) Your chatter is amusing, as it is intended to be, and certainly sounds like a space-happy old-timer retired from active duty and somewhat irritably talking to a bunch of raw recruits.

To get down to the contents of SS, I must say that I am no authority on art and will not criticize any story in SS. They are all fine. I do prefer the type of pic used for the Fall issue cover over the BEM type. Rocklyne is consistently good and "Pirates of the Time Trail" is no exception.

I don't wonder "Space Dwellers" made the Hall of Fame. I do wonder if "Xato" bears any resemblance to "Xeno." I'd suggest that you have an analysis made before you take another sip. And watch your temperature, too, Sarge. If you begin to get cold chills or if you don't feel it when the boys give you a hot foot, you'd better go on the wagon for good.

The shorts and articles were fine. I like Thrills In Science. We are too prone to forget the origin of our everyday conveniences which were miracles of science in their day. Strange to say, I had never heard of Tom Davenport or his electric train, but I'll bet the story is in our State Library here at Montpelier.

Now who gives an empty Xeno jug whether SS has trimmed edges or not? Give us a good load inside and what does it matter if the hall gathers space barracks and gets all dinted up from meteor collisions.

In closing, I warn you to check your Xeno supply to see that no one has slipped in a jug of Xato as a practical joke. Remember Xato is black. Best regards and good navigation.—*64 Northfield St., Montpelier, Vt.*

The trouble with this junior astrologator is that he is too well satisfied. No kick in his ethergrams, and therefore no kick to it—according to the most of you little ogres.

Okay, Snaggle-tooth, you may jetison all this stuff through the garbage chute and then stuff the old Sarge's pillow with fresh aspirin. All the rest of you kiwis get busy gnawing this issue to pieces. And, Pee-lot Genne, you come to Saturn's private quarters and have a shot of Xeno with me.

Happy spacings, all you little monsters!
—SERGEANT SATURN.

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By
SERGEANT SATURN

NOW if you space birds think the old Sarge is going to sit down in his padded chair and read every word in this pile of fanziness and then give you a thousand-word review on each publication, you're nuts! But there are some very in-



triguing numbers here on the desk, so let's start shuffling through them, hunting for the pretty pin-up pictures. Hope I find a couple suitable for framing.

Snaggle-tooth has carefully arranged them in alphabetical order. By the way, Snaggle-tooth is a maniac on system. He went with the old Sarge to a restaurant one day last week and ordered alphabet soup. Right away he started eating the little noodlets in proper sequence, beginning with all the A letters before touching a B or a C.

By the time the old space dog got down to pie and coffee Snaggle-tooth was just starting on the F series in his soup. He must have found four F's, because the draft board rejected him this week.

But to get along. We'll start the present hearing with A.

THE ACOLYTE, 720 Tenth Street, Clarks-ton, Washington. Editor, Francis T. Laney. Quarterly. 35c for four issues.

Holy sun imps!—to crib a Futuremen phrase. Thirty-four pages of single-spaced black type (set solid) on standard white paper, relieved by only three full-page illustrations. Looks formidable. You fans had better read the text for yourselves. The old Sarge can't even understand the pictures. But neat! The issue is neat and sharp and clean. Nicely arranged contents page. I'll comment on the cover. A very good drawing by Howard Wandrei. Subject: nightmare in a Venusian forest with All Baba's grandmother playing tag with an overstuffed seahorse. A fanzine with a lot of hard work in it.

APOLLO, 411 S. Fess Street, Bloomington, Indiana. Editor, Joe Hensley. 5c per issue.

Eight white pages, foolscap size, in this first issue. Blue and pink type. Full-page drawing on the back cover. Subject: Death in a monk's cowl and robe dodging a space ship somewhere in the somewhere. Subject matter of the issue: pomes an' stories an' hand-drawn ads. Good luck with the new venture, Editor Hensley.

COSMIC CIRCLE COMMENTATOR, 214 N. 20th, Newcastle, Indiana. Editor, Don Rogers. Published semi-monthly. 5c per copy.

Commentator seems a good title for this one. Foolscap size white paper with single-spaced, solid-set black type. Too tough for the Sarge's eyes, but seems to be full of interesting dope on fan organiza-

[Turn page]

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tions. These boys are out for business. No fancy artwork in the first two issues. Ho-hum, says the Sarge.

FAN SLANTS, 637½ S. Bixel, Los Angeles, Calif. Editor, Mol Brown. Published quarterly, no price given.

Thirty-six pages of single-spaced copy again. (All you fanzine operators are conserving paper like nobody's business these days.) Covers look like serious political cartoons, done by Ronald Clyne. Excellent artwork. The mag itself looks good. The contents page in my copy was bound upside down, so I can't read you what's on it. But the whole fanzine looks good. And the two cover drawings are worth the priceless price. Hope Ronald is wrong about his prognostication for the pulp magazines.

THE FANTASITE, 1710 Arizona Ave., Santa Monica, Calif. Editors, Phil Bronson and Walter J. Daugherty. Published bimonthly. 10c per copy, three issues for 25c.

Another professional looking fanzine. Yellow, white, tan and green sheets—38 of them between thin bristol board covers. Single-spaced stuff again. (Pass me the powdered aspirin, Snaggle-tooth.) But neatly arranged and clearly stencilled. Nice headings, and a few snapshots of the authors of articles at the head of said articles. Cover seems to be a montage photograph showing Gargantua giving a soapbox oration to a bunch of duck hunters practically lost in the shadows in the foreground. Or maybe it's Hitler haranguing the Heinies. Good work throughout. You space-dizzies read it; the Sarge will carry on with his ABC building blocks.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD, 6401 24th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y. Editor, Julius Unger. Published weekly. 5c per copy, 6 for 25c.

The old Sarge has reviewed this faithful fanzine so often that he has run out of things to say. It is still the same faithful little yellow-sheet journal which carries a lot of news and an occasional gloss print of the cover of some forthcoming pro mag. Where Unger digs up all his info I don't know, but he must work prodigiously. Good for those who want to keep abreast of news and events.

FANTASY NEWS, Box 7316, Baltimore 27, Md. Editor, William S. Sykora. Published weekly. 3 issues for 10c; 8 issues for 25c.

This publication follows the general set-up of FANTASY FICTION FIELD. Different text matter, of course. Nice job, but needs more body. More power to you, Editor Sykora.

MARS, 915½ West 8th, Coffeyville, Kansas. Editor, Van H. Splawn. Published—if and when. 5c per copy; 6 for 25c.

Eighteen pages of standard white printed in purple ink. This fanzine is for the old Sarge. Full of pictures. No! Of course, I can't understand 'em. Am I supposed to know what they mean? I understand the one on the back cover all right enough. A cutie fugitive from a strip-tease chorus riding an animated arrow with the head of a game cock. Nice ish, Editor Splawn.

NUZ FRUM HOME, 1443 4th Ave., South, Fargo, N. D. Editors, Walter and Lorraine Dunkelberger. Price, a letter requesting a copy.

Cheap, eh? But it sure does make you write. NUZ FRUM HOME is not strictly a scientification fanzine. It is just all around good fanzine fun, a sort of junior ESQUIRE, as it were. The Sarge recommends. Nuf Sed.

SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRES, 637½ So. Bixel, Los Angeles, Calif. Editor, Walter J. Daugherty. Published monthly, no price listed.

Nice stuff, but more of that single-spaced matter between colored covers. Standard white paper and black type. Neat light Gothic-style headings and occasional neat drawing for spot cuts. This organ is really a bulletin of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and it gives you the California low-down and stuff. No weather reports, however. Okay.

VISION, R. R. 1, Box 175, Toledo, Oregon. Editor, Rosco E. Wright. Published quarterly. 10c per copy.

Thirteen sheets—twenty-six pages to you, Junior—of standard white paper with pale (dim) purple

inking. But plumb full of pictures. Nice to show the housemaid on her day off. Don't get too excited. I said it was scenery to show the housemaid; not pictures to look at yourself. Nice assortment of scapes for them as like that highbrow stuff. Put more girlies in for the old Sarge, Rosco.

VOM, Box 6475, Metro Station, Los Angeles 14, Calif. Editors, Jack Erman and Morojo. Published as often as possible. Price 10c per copy.

Usual good job on white paper of foolscap size. Neat spot drawings and gorgeous black and white covers. Right down the old Sarge's alley. Can't get used to all that phonetic spelling and abbreviations, though. Note to cover artist: You forgot to put the gals' telephone numbers down. Good work, California!

VULCAN, Route One, Ripley, Tenn. Editor, Lionel Innman. Published—frequency not given. Price 10c.

Thirty-four pages of white standard stock with purple inking. Whoops! Contents page set with type and printed on a press. Rest mimeographed. Several full-page drawings in pastel colors. Seems okay.

Now for a general survey, and no punches pulled. In the main, boys, the artwork is fearful. Spend more time on the subject matter and the actual labor itself if you're going to clutter up your magazines with pictures.

Sure, the old Sarge loves pictures—and they don't all have to be of undraped femmes, either. But they've got to be better and half-way comprehensible. Too many of the fanzines we review look as though they had been illustrated by the kindergarten class. Snap it up, gents.

Otherwise, the old Sarge is proud of you fanziners. Carry on. And send me a batch of publications that I can view with delight next issue through my Xeno-colored glasses.

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THE BARD OF CERES

(Concluded from page 114)

they did to those blasted natives was make them mad!"

Trevor reverently put down the copy of Macbeth and started signaling Guard headquarters.

"You should have used old-fashioned bullets," he explained. "These creatures live on a planet without an atmosphere. They're used to ultra-violet rays in heavy doses."

A chuckle escaped his throat. He motioned toward the natives.

All eyes turned to the flabby beings. They were squirming uncomfortably. A pink glow covered their fish-belly skins. The criminals began to understand.

"By Ceres, boss!" Ganymede Joe said in amazement. "I told you they wasn't human! Our ray guns only give 'em a sunburn!"

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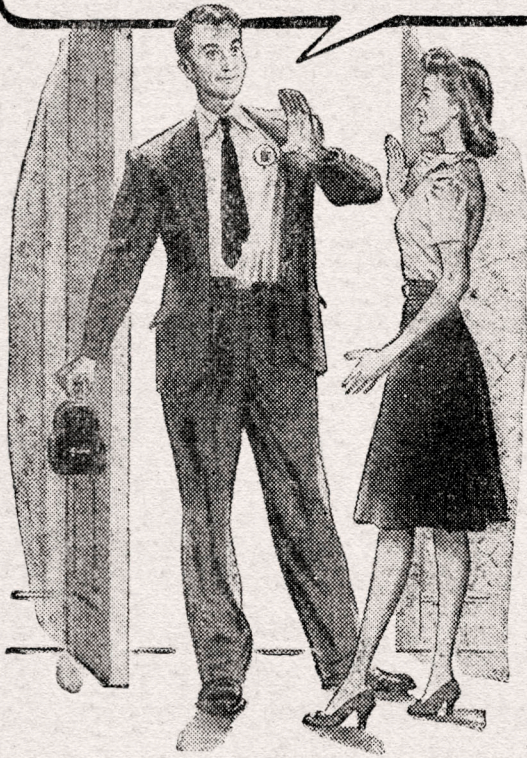
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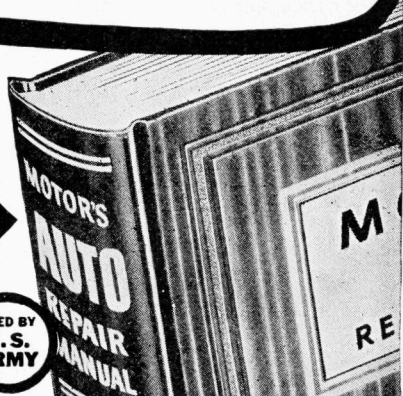
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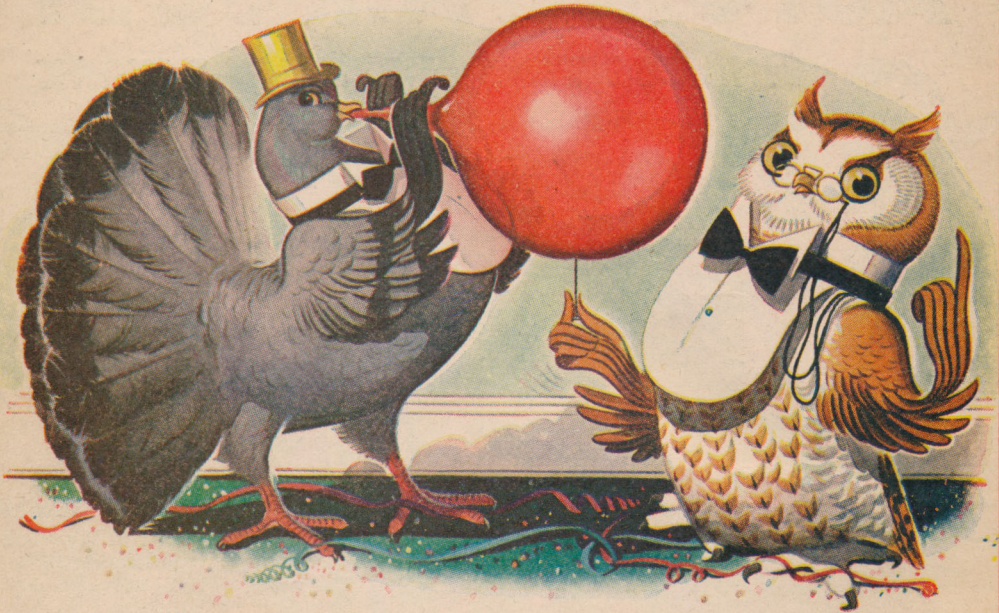
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