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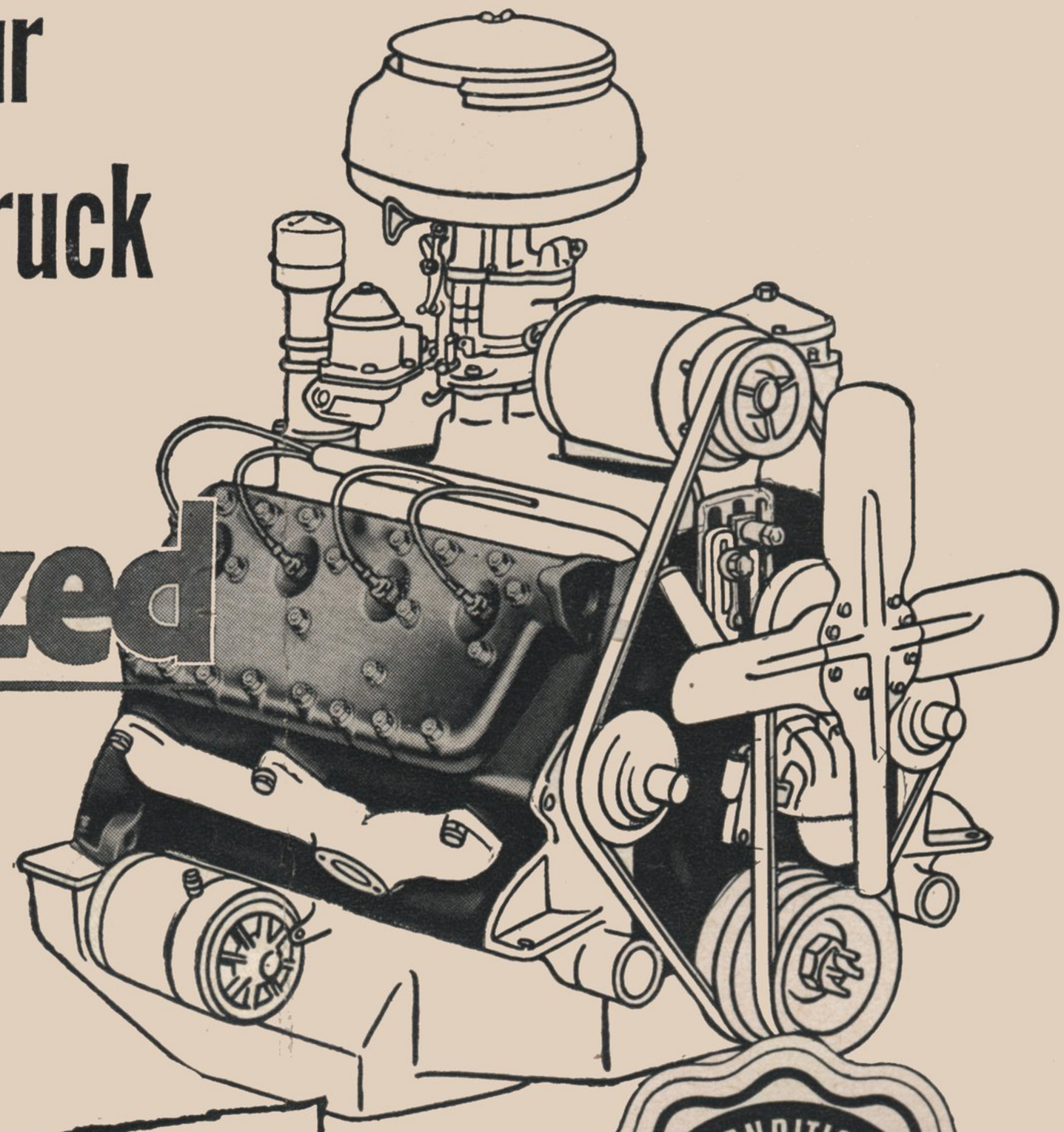

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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 21, No. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION May, 1950

A Complete Novel

WINE OF THE DREAMERS
By JOHN D. MacDONALD
Scientist Bard Lane and psychiatrist Sharan Inly struggle for their lives against an alien force that is dedicated to keeping Man out of space! 11

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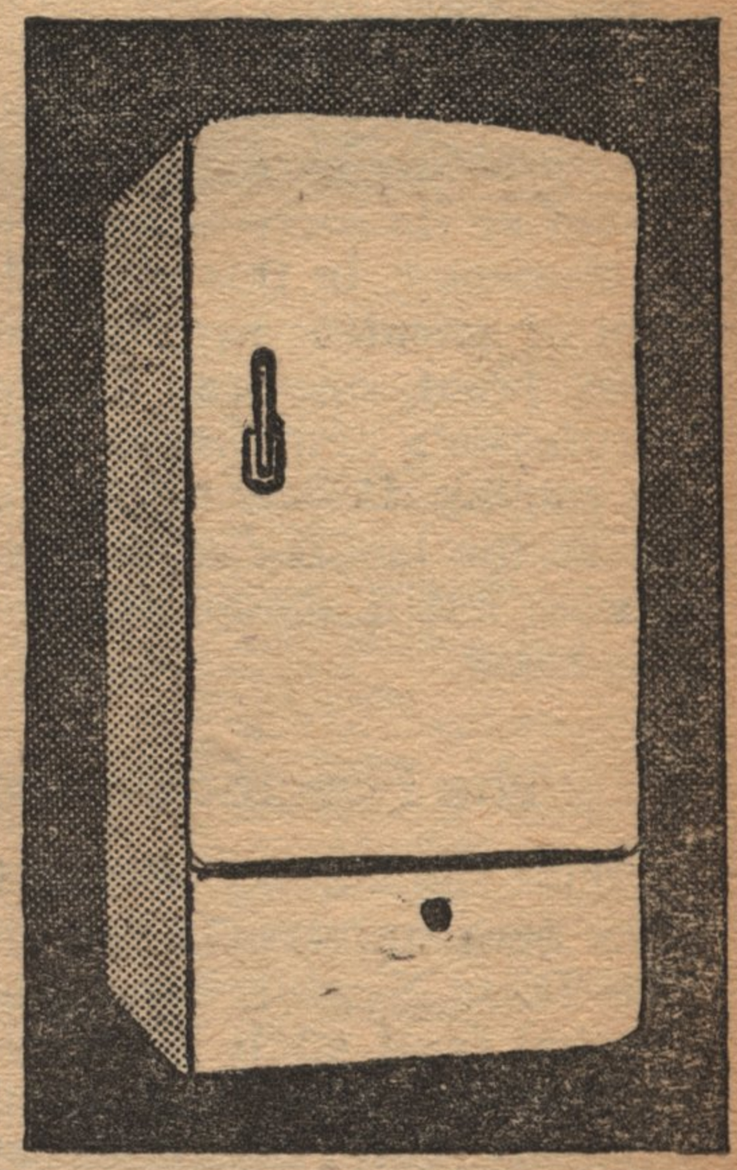

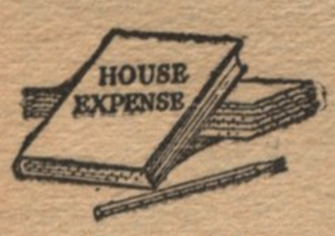

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1850—ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ICE PROGRESS—1950

BY the time you read this Dr. Albert Einstein, who was for decades regarded with good-humored derision as something between a human instant calculator and a sad-eyed non-French poodle by those who today accept his every word as law, will doubtless be generally held to have solved the little problem of gravitation.

Actually, of course, this is far from the case. The greatest creative scientific mind of our era has himself admitted to "mathematical difficulties" in the working out of some of his four formulae and to complete lack of experimental proof. Furthermore, his tying together of the laws of molecular and sub-molecular attraction with the larger laws of interstellar attraction is far from "solving" the matter of gravitation.

But if the great man's theories hold up only fractionally as well as did his theories on relativity, humanity may well have been shown the road to a far more complete understanding of his cosmos and therefore a road toward more complete mastery of same. Remember, it was fourteen years after Dr. Einstein first proposed his theory of relativity before an eclipse of the sun provided proof of its correctness.

Somehow, in this stepped-up snowballing era of scientific progress, we have an idea that proof, one way or the other, of the Professor's new theory will not be so long in coming. It may not be reached as quickly as the landing of the first manned true rocket but it should not be too long before we know.

The Fascination of Gravity

The fascination of the idea of gravity has been universally intriguing ever since Sir Isaac Newton was beaned by the apocryphal fruit while lying under the equally apocryphal tree back in the Seventeenth Century. Until then scientists generally and people in toto had simply taken it for granted and gone on about their business.

But once the idea got around imaginative folk began to toy with the possibility of gravity becoming non-existent or of going into reverse. Jonathan Swift came up with one such dream when he took Gulliver to the flying island of Laputa, which seemingly defied Newton's law.

For generations one of the most crowd-drawing of carnival and vaudeville acts was that in which a clown or two donned rubber suction-cap shoes and walked up walls and across ceilings, head-down, without falling. It is this same defiance of gravity which has made steeplejacks, human flies, flagpole sitters and even Harold Lloyd so successful.

Certainly the idea has long been accepted by writers and readers of science fiction. So familiar has it become in this field that no longer do authors trouble to offer or readers demand explanations. Degravitation plates or "anti-gravs" are simply written in when needed and taken for granted all around.

The Menace of Gravity

Currently, in his A-bomb-proof laboratory somewhere in the Middle West, Economist Roger Babson is, by his own announcement, spending some of his vast profits as a business consultant and prophet in search of some workable system for nullifying gravity. He is, it is said, convinced that only in this direction lies the salvation of sorely-battered humanity.

During the most recent war one of America's veteran pioneer pilots, while attending an Air Transport Command refresher school in Atlanta, was asked what was the chief problem in flying. To which he replied, with succinct profanity, "Hell, it ain't practical."

He was thinking, of course, of gravity, the ever-present menace which every good pilot must consider every moment that he is in the air. And gravity is virtually our

(Continued on page 8)

I. C. S. training was his

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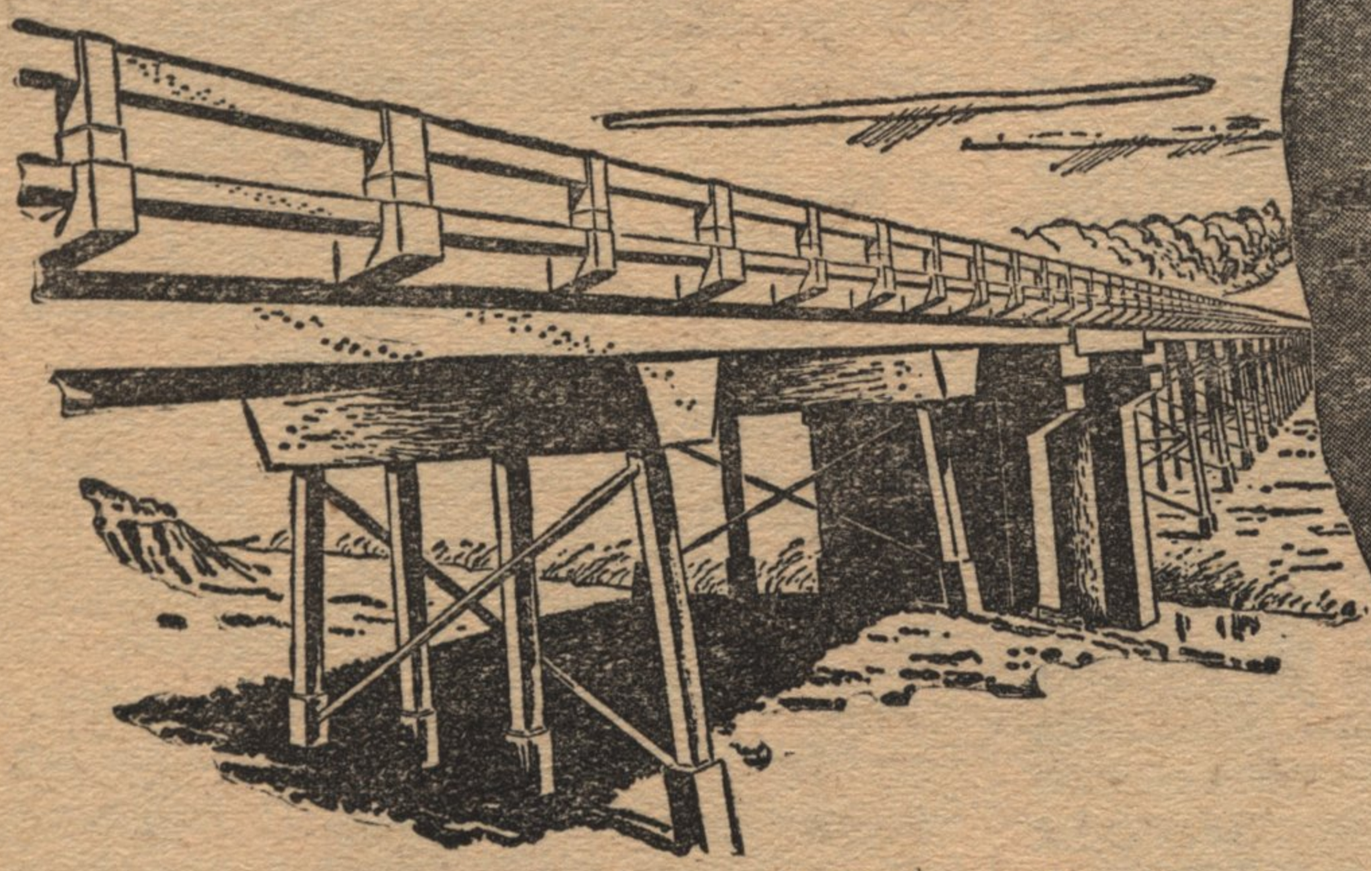

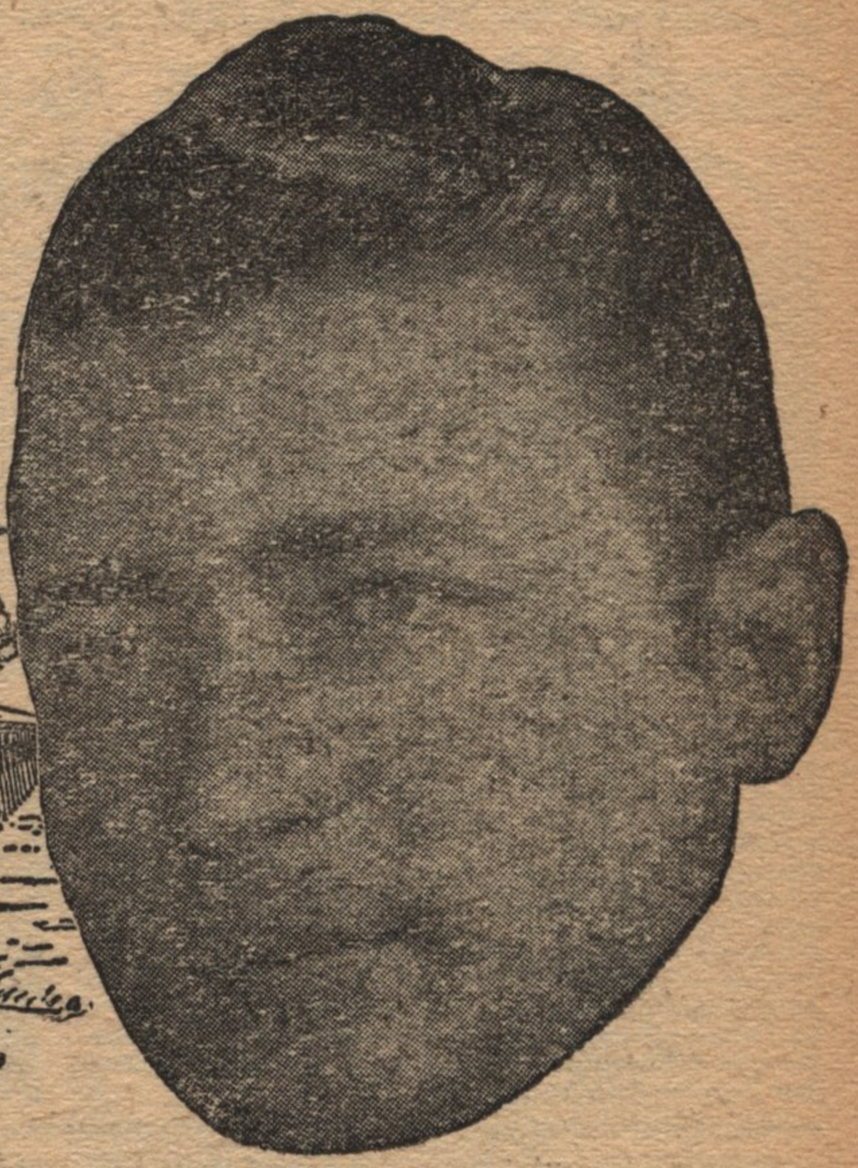

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

greatest enemy and greatest killer, whether in the air, on the sea or on the ground.

No one would fall on sidewalk or in bathtub if it weren't for gravity. An untold number of our bodily ailments stem from gravity, which has a nasty way, given time, of pulling bones out of line and organs out of place. It is probably a more widespread crippler and killer than all of the diseases listed in those nasty little insurance company life-probability charts.

If Einstein and Babson and the others can do nothing about it somebody certainly should.

Furthermore, it is gravity which dictates that rugged seven-mile-a-second velocity which, it is claimed, must be attained by any man-propelled vessel before we can hope to leave Earth for space. It is gravity, on our own and other planets and satellites, which raises those appalling fuel problems that have our White Sands scientists scratching their hair out in patches.

Supposing that Dr. Einstein's theories work out and that the gravitational qualities of molecules could be polarized either for attraction or repulsion. In the former instance footgear attuned to the lighter gravities of Mars and the Moon (though why anyone wants to go *there* we have never quite been able to figure) might make the problems of such lesser attractions negligible.

Negatived completely they might send a huge space-ship flying from the face of this or any other terrestrial planet without any need of impelling fuel whatever. It could be a matter of merely turning a switch or pressing a button and away we go—with plenty of fuel for planetary exploration or other travel upon arrival at our destination. It could even mean light speeds in time.

Dreams Come True

However, such dreaming is exactly that—dreaming. But dreams of us mere mortals, as long as they are not Utopian, have a way of coming true. And with control of gravity in hand it should certainly not be too difficult to *get* somewhere in this universe, to say nothing of making rivers run uphill without a downhill start.

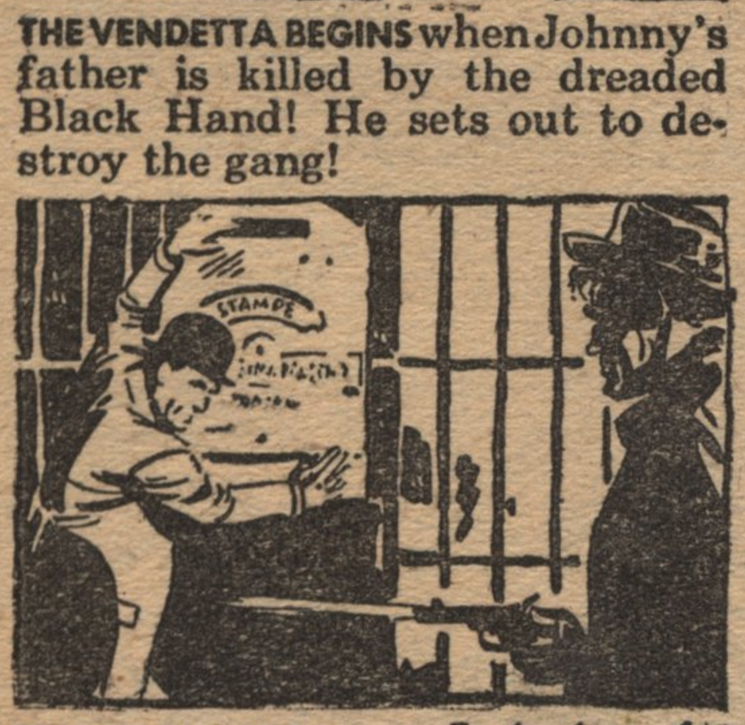
(Continued on page 139)

ONE MAN AGAINST THE Black Hand

THIS IS
JOHNNY COLUMBO...,
handsome, hot-blooded
...vengeance in his heart!

THE VENDETTA BEGINS when Johnny's father is killed by the dreaded Black Hand! He sets out to destroy the gang!

IN THE LAIR of the Black Hand Johnny is held captive and tortured because he knows too much!



THE TRAIL LEADS to Italy but the Black Hand brings death again . . . this time to the cop who is Johnny's best pal and secret partner!

A LOVELY GIRL fears for Johnny's life but her pleas and kisses can't sway him from his purpose!

Does Johnny escape from the clutches of the BLACK HAND? Can he, alone destroy the evil band? See M-G-M's suspense thriller.

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AFTER A DAY-LONG SEARCH FOR A LOST SKIER, RANGER JIM NELSON SPOTS A TINY FIGURE FROM THE "SANTA CLAUS CHIMNEY" OF A SNOW-BURIED FIELD CABIN.

WINE of the DREAMERS

Raul fled, hoping he had not been recognized (Chap. III)

CHAPTER I

Mystery of Brain

Neither the sweet dreams of tousled children, nor the harshness of wanting and needing in the dreams of adults, nor yet the dreams of the very old—wherein memory is a slow unfocused drifting. No, these are dreams that leap with manic vigor from star to star, that bridge the suns, that subtend the arcs of space —to bring weeping to women, and blood to the sand of an arena.

IN New Mexico the sun acquires a new personality. Step out of the barracks in the morning, out of the cool shadows, and the sun is a vast white blow between the eyes. It seizes on

A Novel by

JOHN D. MacDONALD

Scientist Bard Lane and psychiatrist Sharan Inly struggle for their lives against an alien force dedicated to keeping Man out of space!

liquids, sucking with frightening energy. A man lost for a day on the snow-white sands, will be found in the blue dusk, curled in foetal position, lips black, body withered and mummified. Try to talk while riding in one of the open OD cars. The sun-parched air sucks dry the mouth. It gaunts the men, the sun does. Pinches the eyes, drabs the clothes—and the women. At night in the blue desert dusk, the jukes sing out the mournful old songs and the young girls dance too warmly, too closely, for the sun makes short work of youth, and juices are soon gone. The flat bronze Indian faces look in at the doorways, unwinking black eyes making discomfort in their knowledge that they alone are bred for the desert and the sun—that they will remain when at last these others have given up and gone back to the gray overcast skies, the swamp air of the far cities.

A gray sedan droned down the long stretch of straight highway, headlights cutting whiteness into the night. Bard Lane drove with his big hands resting lightly on the wheel. The long stretch down through the flatlands was hypnotic. For the past half hour it had seemed as though the sedan stood still while the road rushed toward him and was swept under the wheels. The speedometer needle hovered at ninety. He glanced at the girl beside him. She was asleep, her head, against the back of the seat, lolling with the tiny sway of the car, her long legs stretched out under the dash, her hands on the seat on either side of her, palms up. She looked very young and very helpless. But he knew there was nothing helpless about Sharan Inly.

Ahead, blazing like a Christmas tree, a truck loomed up. He swung competently out, noting, as he flashed by, signaling with his lights, that it was a truck-train with heavy trailers. Once by the truck he sat higher so that he could see, in the rear vision mirror, the sleeping form of their prisoner in the back seat.

He slowed for a lonesome town, then brought it back up to cruising speed. The weariness of the past months of driving labor was heavy in his bones. He shook his head, reached out and turned on the radio.

"—and remember, when you're bored, drink Wilkins' Mead. Spelled em ee aye dee. Non-alcoholic, non-habitforming. This miracle of medical science cures boredom by a simple process if intensifying your receptivity to all stimuli. You have never seen a sunset until you have first enjoyed a bottle of Wilkins' Mead. And now for news of the day from the Wilkins' Mead reporter, Melvin Lynn:

"This is Melvin Lynn, reporting the news for Wilkins' Laboratories. This has been a quiet day on the international front. The Paris Conference continues and an informed source states that the delegates have every hope of reaching agreement on the many knotty problems that confront them. The Russians have agreed to postpone launching of their snooper satellite from the Siberian launching station until orbits have been assigned to each major power. The South American Coalition remains adamant in their claims to the estimated five thousand square miles of their moon base, even though it is admitted that since the last weak signals were received, all hope has been given up that anyone remains alive at the base. Tomorrow the delegates will spend two minutes in silent prayer to honor the anniversary of the loss of the first manned rocket to Mars."

THE announcer took a deep breath, and then continued his broadcast.

"And now for the national news front. Bliss Bailey, spokesman for the Republican Party, stated today that national headquarters is not going to relax merely because the three national polls show that the GOP will maintain majority control of both houses during the coming election.

"Larry Roy, national video favorite, today jumped from the forty-fifth story of a New York City hotel. His fiancée stated to the police that she could think

of no reason for his action, unless it might be a breakdown due to overwork.

"Martha Needis, the Jersey city landlady who, last Tuesday, murdered her six roomers in their beds, is still at large.

"In Memphis, debutante Gayla Dennison was today acquitted of the charge of murdering her guardian. She wept tears of joy.

"At Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, government psychiatrists to-

day disagreed on the diagnosis in the case of Corporal Brandt Reilly, the enlisted man who, ten days ago, turned an aircraft cannon on a company formation, killing sixteen and wounding twenty-one.

"Pierre Brevet, French artist, told New York City reporters today that, from an aesthetic standpoint, the new ordinance for public beaches permitting the wearing of trunks only for both men and women bathers—long a custom at Newport, Cannes and Miami—turns the beaches of America into a picture that he would not care to paint. Brevet was recently a judge at the Jones Beach Beauty Contest.

"You have just heard Melvin Lynn. And now, do you hear that? Know what that is? It is you—pouring your first full golden glass of Wilkins' Mead. Tonight you have that big date with the 'one and only.' Take her a bottle too. And then enjoy one of the—"

Bard Lane grunted and turned the radio off. Sharan Inly said wryly, "No mead for me. But a beer would go good, if the man can arrange it."

"I didn't mean to wake you up, Sharan."

"You didn't. Melvin did. Melvin and his creamy little voice. Notice how he seems to lick his chops at sudden death?"

"Hey, you're not working now. Save the psychiatry for payroll hours."

He felt her looking at him. "You always seem to shy away from psychiatry, Bard. Why?"

"If I start telling you, it'll turn into an argument. Looks like a beer spot ahead. How's our boy?"

SHE knelt on the front seat and reached into the back. He slowed down for the neon far ahead. She turned and sat down again. "He'll keep for another three hours without a booster shot. Better park away from the lights to discourage the curious."

There were a few new shining cars in the large parking lot, a larger number of dusty jaloppies, a few pickups and a few big trans-state trucks. Bard parked near a weary-looking clump of live oaks, carefully locked the car while Sharan stood waiting, a night breeze gently whipping the hem of her light skirt. With a bitter twang in his voice, a jukebox cowhand sang of how "—she never really tole me that she loved meeee . . ."

There were metal tables on the patio, the stones underfoot still warm from the sun of the day. He held the chair for Sharan and then went inside, walking the cramps out of his long legs, stifling a yawn. There were booths and dancers and girl-laughter and glasses of soft drinks held under the edge of the table for a jolt from the package store. He stood, a tall tanned man, with blunt bones in his face, with a look of authority in spite of the crumpled khaki

hunting jacket, the deep blue cotton shirt, open at the neck.

He took the two frosted bottles of Bud and one glass and carried them out to the metal table. Sharan was making up her lips, turning to catch the light from the neon in the mirror from her big white purse.

She smiled over at him as he sat down. "*Mmm.* Looks good. How are we running—on time?"

"We can kill a half hour and still have an hour left before the conference."

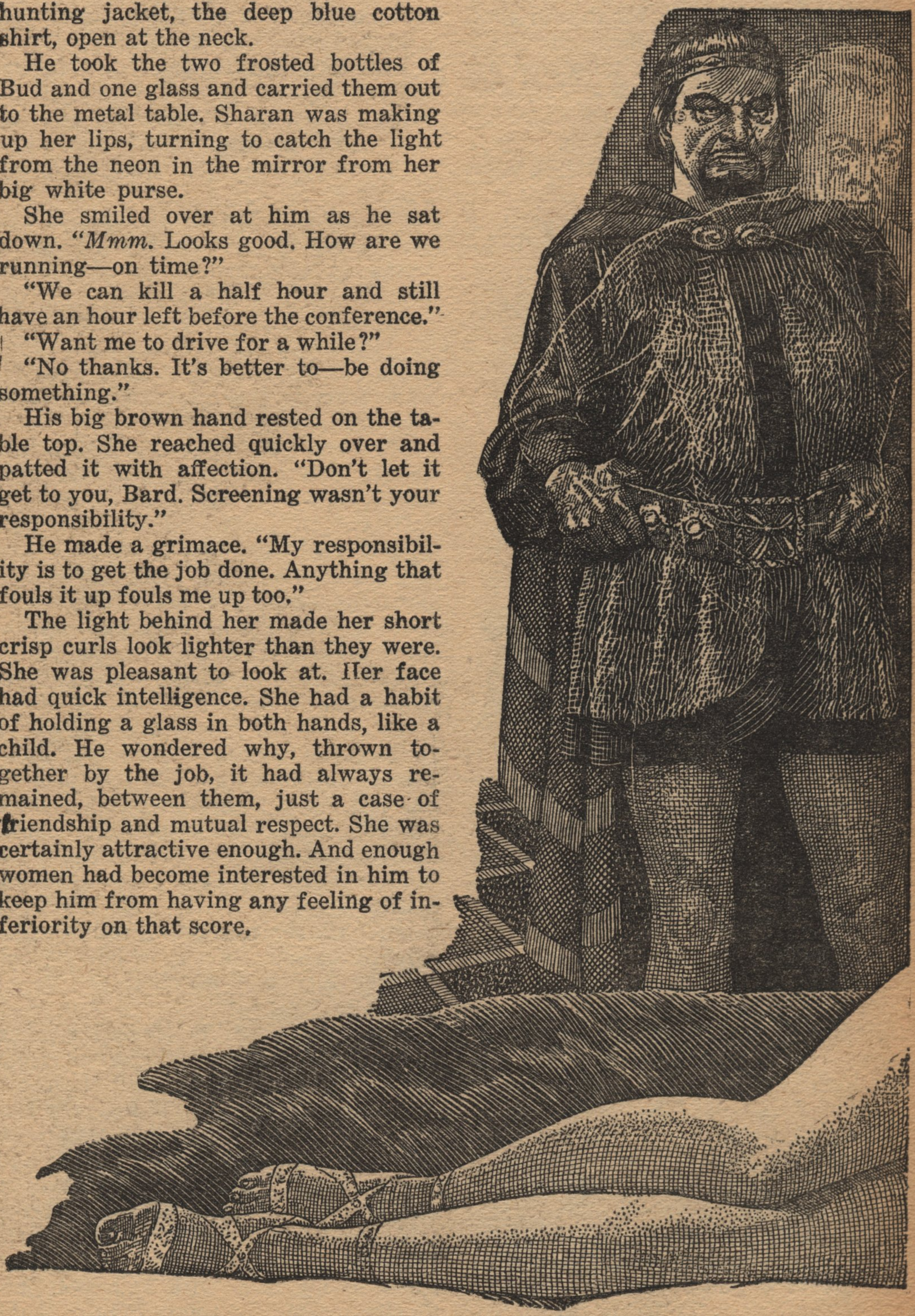
"Want me to drive for a while?"

"No thanks. It's better to—be doing something."

His big brown hand rested on the table top. She reached quickly over and patted it with affection. "Don't let it get to you, Bard. Screening wasn't your responsibility."

He made a grimace. "My responsibility is to get the job done. Anything that fouls it up fouls me up too."

The light behind her made her short crisp curls look lighter than they were. She was pleasant to look at. Her face had quick intelligence. She had a habit of holding a glass in both hands, like a child. He wondered why, thrown together by the job, it had always remained, between them, just a case of friendship and mutual respect. She was certainly attractive enough. And enough women had become interested in him to keep him from having any feeling of inferiority on that score.



POSSIBLY it was the job. Capital J. The all-pervading, all-important job. Too much dedication to the work that had to be done. But right here and right now it was pleasant to look across at her and think of her as a woman, instead of as Project Assistant in Charge of Psycho-Adjustment.

"The General," she said softly, "is going to be *muy irritado.*"

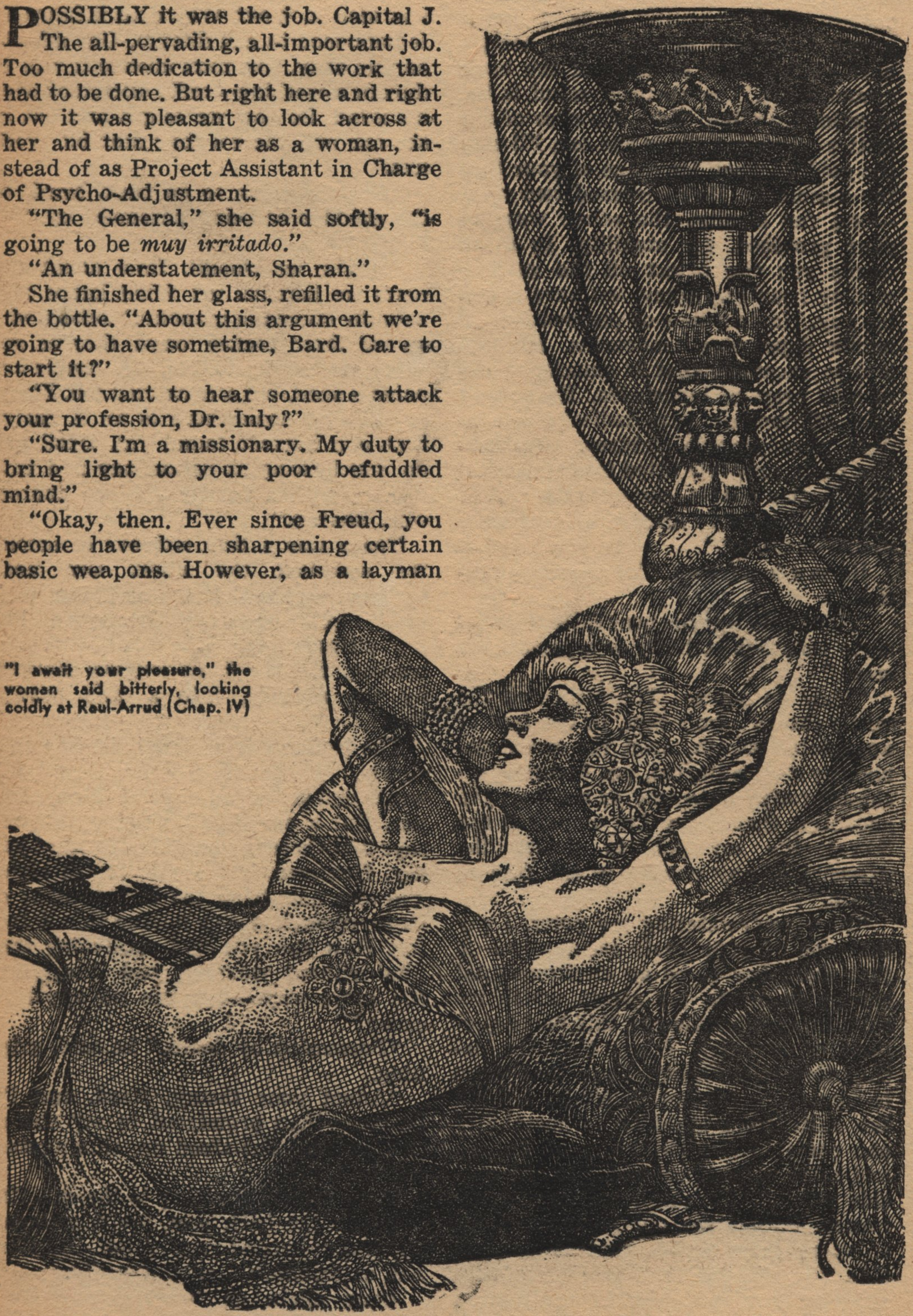
"An understatement, Sharan."

She finished her glass, refilled it from the bottle. "About this argument we're going to have sometime, Bard. Care to start it?"

"You want to hear someone attack your profession, Dr. Inly?"

"Sure. I'm a missionary. My duty to bring light to your poor befuddled mind."

"Okay, then. Ever since Freud, you people have been sharpening certain basic weapons. However, as a layman



"I await your pleasure," the woman said bitterly, looking coldly at Raul-Arrud (Chap. IV)

in psychiatry, and as a professional in certain other scientific fields, I find a vague discomfort in your blithe acceptance of the truth of some of the basic assumptions. The scientific mind is the questioning mind. Take the case of the critter we've got out in the car. I'll skip the gobbledegook language of your field for a moment. He's screened two ways —one for loyalty, the other way, in your province, for stability. In other words you can detect all the garden-variety neuroses. Okay, we have a stable guy. No delusions of persecution, no manic depressive tendencies, no control so excessive that it smacks of dementia praecox tendencies. He doesn't miss his mother, save ladies' shoes or draw pornographic pictures. Your ink-blot tests, properly fitted into statistical distribution charts, show that Mr. X is a nice clean-living ambivert, ideal technician material."

He saw her frown. "You quarrel with that?"

"Not at all. But the neat little tests assume that this stability is a permanent state."

"They do not so! The tests and the whole theory admit that, in the face of unexpected strain, even the most stable, the most adjusted, can become psycho-neurotic in one way or another. My goodness, that's why I'm employed out there! It's my job to detect the presence of any change in the face of strain."

"Now you're stating my point. I say that one of your basic assumptions is that there has to be an environmental change to create the strain which results in an alteration of this basic quotient of stability. I say that the assumption is too hasty. I say that there is something further to study. I think the shift from stability to instability can come in the twinkling of an eye and come without reference to any outside stimuli. Forget hereditary weaknesses. Forget the old business about escaping from a life that is unbearable. I say that you can take a perfectly adjusted guy, put him in a situation where his life is satisfying—and boom, he can go off like that. You've seen it. I've seen it. Why? Why does it happen? It happened to Bill Kornal. One minute he was okay. The next minute it was as though something—quite alien took over his mind. So now we've got him out in the car and there's four months' work lost."

"Are we going to go back, Bard, to the old idea of being possessed by devils?"

"Maybe we should. How about the news we listened to? What keeps perpetually stymying mankind? Jokers who go off their rocker when they've got every reason not to. No, you people are doing a good, but a restricted job. Floating around somewhere is an X factor that you haven't found yet. Until you do, I'm looking at psychology and psychiatry with a faintly dubious expression, Sharan."

There was a tiny whisper of sound. He searched the night sky until he saw, against the stars, the running lights of a jet transport, losing altitude for the Albuquerque landing, the six flame-tongues merged, by the altitude, into a thin orange line.

The breeze stirred her hair. She said slowly, "I should rise up in mighty wrath and smite you hip and thigh, partner. But a still small voice within me says that there is something in what you say. However, if I admit you're right, I'm also admitting the impossibility of us psychologists ever finding this X factor. How can you find something that hits without warning and disappears the same way—that has no apparent cause?"

"Possession by devils," he said, grinning.

"Adopt your theory, Bard, and I'll be more than prominent in my chosen profession." She stood up, slim against the light.

They walked together to the car. She got into the back seat for a moment, checked pulse and respiration. Bill Kornal, ex-technician, snored softly.

Once again on the highway Bard picked up the fast rhythm of the night.

He dreaded the interview with General Sachson, and he knew that Sharan must dread it even more. Yet not once had she expressed the fear she must be feeling.

When he glanced over at her again, he saw that she had gone back to sleep. A big desert jack bounded from the shoulder, startling him, and he felt the tiny thud in his wrists as the right front wheel hit it. The stars seemed low in the night sky and he looked at them with the odd mixture of anger, frustration and determination that had obsessed him now for four years.

CHAPTER II

Devil Haunted Man

GENERAL SACHSON was a man of minimum stature for army requirements, with a face like a dried butternut, with a reputation of changing his clothes four times a day, with energy that was like the crack of a bull whip.

Dawn threatened gray in the east. The five of them sat at the conference table waiting for General Sachson. Gray, shaggy Colonel Powys, Projects Coordinator, rolled a yellow octagonal pencil against the polished top of the conference table, pressing hard with his palm so that the pencil made an irritating clacking noise. Major Leeber, Sachson's aide, sleek and demurely pompous, nibbled at one edge of his mustache. The enlisted stenotype clerk turned a glass ashtray around and around and around.

As the minute hand of the clock touched the hour, the door was thrust open and Sachson came in, small blue eyes full of electric crackle, neat heels thudding on the green rug. Leeber called for attention. Only Sharan remained seated.

"At ease, at ease, at ease," said Sachson, rounding the corner of the table and dropping into his chair at the head. He made a series of little grunting sounds in his throat as his eyes flicked to each of the faces in turn.

"Meeting to order," he said. "And for heaven's sake, get the names right this time, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said in a bored tone.

"Well, Dr. Lane," said Sachson. "Spare us the technical details. How serious is the damage?"

"Kornal broke down the door of the lab where the control panels were being assembled. He was alone in there for ten minutes. Adamson estimates that in four months he can fix what Kornal did in ten minutes."

"Guards, man! Weren't there guards posted by that door?"

"Two of them. Kornal had done some late work. He wasn't due to work that night. They had no reason to suspect him. He got close enough to slug them, both of them. One is all right. The other is in danger. Fractured skull."

Bright flash of blue eyes toward Sharan Inly. A faint touch of scorn in the sharp tone. Scorn that says that women have no business in this sort of affair. "Well, Dr. Inly. You have the usual excuses, of course."

Bard Lane looked at her and saw the slight increase of pallor. "No excuses," she answered. "Kornal had access to the most vulnerable part of the project. He was a double A risk on a psychological basis and, I assume, equally high on a security basis. It so happened that he received a routine check three days ago."

"Enlighten me, my dear Doctor. What do you c o n s i d e r a routine check?"

"A hypnotic drug is administered and the patient is asked a series of questions about his work. His answers are compared with the results of all previous routine checks not only on the same patient but also on the project as a whole. I found no indication of unreliability."

One of Sachson's gray eyebrows lift-

ed a millimeter. "Maybe tests on personnel with access to control devices should be more than routine, Dr. Inly."

"They could be, General, if the psychiatric staff is tripled and persons to be tested are relieved of all duties on the project for the necessary three-day period."

Sachson stared down at his thin brown little hands. His calm was deceptive. "Sergeant, stop tapping on that thing for a minute. This is off the record. In all of my military career I have consistently attempted to avoid situations where I am given responsibility without the commensurate authority to protect myself. Project Tempo is the first time I have been so trapped. I cannot say that I like it. On all past extra-terrestrial projects the armed forces have been in complete control, with civilian specialists concerned in a technical and advisory capacity. Our appropriations for such work have been a part of general military appropriations. Project Tempo is not of that category.

"You are in charge, Dr. Lane. You have the authority. But I, unfortunately, have the responsibility for the schedule. It is a damnable situation and I don't like it." He looked directly at Bard Lane. "I don't like any part of it. I know too little of what is going on up there in your hidden valley in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. There is a chance that a properly run guard detail might have prevented this thing. Therefore, Dr. Lane, I am going to ask you to suggest to me, as soon as we're talking for the minutes again, that I detail Major Leeber to Project Tempo in an advisory capacity, with permission to report directly to me all matters which he feels might endanger the promtness of completion of the project."

Bard felt the hidden threat. "And if I object?"

Sachson smiled with his lips. "Then, of course, I shall ask to be relieved of all responsibility. It will make a bit of a smell. The odor will reach the nostrils of some of the senators who will start investigating this vast and endless appropriation which Project Tempo seems to require. And they may kill you dead, halt you in your tracks, Dr. Lane. And I know how much this means to you." He leaned back and laced thin fingers over his flat stomach. "Of course, if you object to Leeber, my action will only hasten the inevitable, as I am certain that Project Tempo will never be completed. The only path to deep space navigation, my scientific friend, is through the utilization of some strong physical propulsion unit, such as our current A-Six tube. All this Einsteinian space fold stuff is so much dreaming. And when your project fails, we'll find a use for the hull on something a bit more feasible."

BARD LANE had endured many conferences with General Sachson. He knew that the man was baiting him, trying to arouse anger, trying to throw up a smoke screen over his own movement to put Major Leeber in the project area.

So he forced himself to be calm. There would be time enough to give Sachson all proof when the *Beatty I* made its maiden flight.

"General, I want to take just a moment to refresh your memory. Ever since the initial work at White Sands on the old German V-Two, well over twenty years ago, the history of space travel has been a long record of failure. That failure can be divided into three categories. Failures due to technical deficiencies in the staff and in the ships. Failures due to espionage and sabotage. Failures due to the weakness of the human factor. On Project Tempo the placing of full authority in the technician staff is the answer to the first category of failure. The secret location of the project and the careful loyalty screening is the answer to category two. The presence in the project area of Dr. Inly and her staff is the answer to category three. I will take Leeber on certain conditions. One—that he make no attempt to discuss with any technician any aspect of the technical problems we are

facing and licking. Two—that he wear civilian clothes and conform to all local regulations, even in his communications with you. Three—that he submit to a class A security test and also to one of Dr. Inly's tests for mental balance given to all project personnel."

Leeber flushed and stared hard at Lane. General Sachson's lips were thin and taut. "Very well. We'll meet you half way. Though I must say that the imputation of possible disloyalty to a member of my personal staff is outrageous."

"Remember Captain Sangerson?" Bard asked gently.

Sachson nodded at Leeber. "Go get the prisoner, Major."

"The patient, General—not the prisoner," Sharan reminded him. Her voice was soft.

Leeber opened the conference room door. He spoke to the guard. Within a few moments Bill Kornal was brought in.

Sharan Inly hurried to him, examined the purplish bruise under his left eye, turned to General Sachson. Her brown eyes held a hard light. "Just what is the meaning of this, General? This man has been beaten!"

Bill grinned. "Skip it, Doc. I don't blame the guy."

"Strike that off the record, Sergeant," Sachson said. "Sit down over there, Kornal. You are—or were—a technician. What is your background?"

Bard Lane said, "Kornal is more than a technician, sir. He's a competent physicist with three years at Brookhaven."

"I'll accept that," Sachson said. His eyes were cold. "Though I would prefer the prisoner—rather, the patient—to answer, if you don't mind. Now then, Kornal, you are accused of deliberately smashing delicate apparatus. You know, I suppose, the penalties for destruction of government property?"

"That isn't important," Bill Kornal said. His gray eyes were bleak.

"Would you care to explain that rather curious statement?"

"General, the *Beatty I* means more to me than I could explain to you. I've never worked harder or cared more in my life. And I was never happier. You couldn't make me feel worse if the punishment was death by boiling in oil."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I don't know."

"You seem, Kornal, to make a specialty of curious statements. How can you do something without knowing why?"

"I've told this to Bard—to Doctor Lane and to Doctor Inly, General. I woke up and I couldn't sleep. I put my clothes on and went out and got myself a breath of air. I was standing smoking a cigarette. I was about to take another drag when the cigarette dropped out of my hand. It was like—somebody else had control and I was pushed back into a corner of my mind. Like somebody had moved in on me."

"Oh, you were hypnotized!" Sachson said with obvious sarcasm.

"No—not exactly. They'd been putting up a new bunkhouse and the plumbers had left some ends of pipe around. I picked up a short hunk—maybe fourteen inches long and shoved it down inside my pants. My belt kept it from slipping down all the way. Then I walked all the way over to the lab where we've been assembling the control panels. The two guards were there. I had a funny thought in my head that it wasn't right to be building the *Beatty I*. Like it wasn't decent. I can't explain it. Everybody else, sleeping in the other buildings, they were enemies all of a sudden. Enemies and also—well, not too bright. You know what I mean?"

"Not exactly, Kornal. But go on."

"Suppose you put a guy down in the middle of an African village at night. He's going to feel superior to a bunch of savages, but he's going to be careful, because if he wakes them up, they can gang him. This—this thing in my mind was thinking that way, General. And it was sort of laughing, as though it was getting a big kick out of the whole deal. I went up to the guards and talked for a minute and when I got the right chance I hit one forehand and the other backhand across the mouth. They dropped and I broke the door

down. Now here's another funny thing. I know the inside of that lab like the palm of my hand. But suddenly I didn't seem to know my way around. And I didn't understand the panels. Just a mass of funny equipment that I had to batter with the piece of pipe. I guess I did a good job. Adamson cried when he saw it. Like a baby. By the time they stopped me, it was all over. The thing in my mind was gone. I didn't put up a scrap or anything. I can't help thinking of what took over my brain as another person. A—some sort of devil."

STARTLED, Bart intercepted Sharan's quick look.

"So the devils had you," Sachson sneered.

"Something had me," Bill admitted. "Something walked in and took over and there wasn't a single thing I could do to stop it. Afterwards my will, I guess you'd call it, took over again. It was a little time after that that I tried to kill myself. But I couldn't do it. Guess I'm not a suicide type. I wanted to do it, though."

Sachson turned to Colonel Powys. "What's standard procedure on these cases?"

Powys had a rusty-sounding voice. "Can't bring it to trial, sir, if the suspect knows too much about any top secret project in the works. When that fella named McBride tried to blow up the *Gettysburg III* he had the same sort of story this fella has. We had the head doctors put a name on it and we stowed him away in the booby-hatch until the *Gettysburg III* took off. Of course she was unstable at five hundred miles up and crashed off Hawaii."

"I didn't ask for a history of the Mars flights, Colonel. What happened to McBride?"

"Well, sir, when *Gettysburg III* was done for, the head doctors said McBride was okay and then we brought him to trial. Because he was under military jurisdiction we were able to get him five years in Leavenworth, but as I see it, this Kornal doesn't come under us."

"Thank you for wasting a good five minutes," Sachson said, and smiled.

Bard turned to Bill Kornal. "I think you'd better come back to the project, Bill. That is, if you want to work."

General Sachson gasped. Bill's eyes glowed. "Want to work? Don't kid me, Bard. Take me back and I'll show you what work is. Adamson is a conservative type guy. We can get those panels up to snuff again in three months. You watch and see."

Bard turned to Dr. Inly. "Will this meet with your approval?"

"Yes, provided Bill can pass again the original psycho-screening tests." She smiled. "He and Major Leeber can take them at the same time."

"I protest," Sachson said firmly.

"Sorry, General. Kornal's a highly trained man. We need him. I'm convinced that it was a temporary aberration. The least he can do is help undo the harm. I haven't time for deciding what punishment will fit the crime. Bill will punish himself more than you or I could. So far as I'm concerned, the matter is closed."

Sachson stood up. "It seems to be your baby. But the minutes show that your decision was to take him back. When he loses another four months for you, someone else will be heading Project Tempo. Sergeant, Dr. Lane will give you the exact wording on the request for Leeber. Meeting adjourned. Take Leeber with you when you drive back."

They stood, all but Sharan, as the little General walked briskly to the door. He gave them all one last look, a curt nod, and left.

As soon as the door was shut, Major Leeber said, unctiously, "I know I'm going to be behind the eight ball with you folks, the way the old man has pushed me down your throat, but I'll try to stay out of your way. Tommy Leeber can be a real happy guy. All he needs is that five o'clock jolt of firewater and a few shell-pink ears around to whisper into. Couple times a week I'll send the old man one of those double-talk reports and then we can all live together, happy ever after." He had a lazy grin on his lips under the black line of military

mustache, but his eyes were as expressionless as polished anthracite.

"Happy to have you with us," Bard said curtly.

As Sharan stood up, Tom Leeber smiled with sudden appreciation. "And how about you, Doc? Glad to have me aboard?"

"Of course. If you'll excuse me, Major, I'm going off in search of sleep. What time do we start back, Bard?"

"I'm going to grab a nap. Call it ten-thirty or eleven. That should give us three hours of sleep at least."

The others left. The sergeant looked expectantly at Dr. Lane. Bard grinned at him. "I suspect you know your boss. Write it in in a way that will make him happy. Can you remember the conditions I set up?"

"I got them down. Want 'em read back?"

"No, Sergeant. Just make certain I'm listed on the final distribution."

He walked toward the door. The sergeant said, "Uh—Doctor Lane!"

He turned. "Yes?"

"Major Leeber. Thought you might like to know that he's a pretty ambitious boy. Wants to be general of all the armies some day, I think."

"Worthy ambition."

"Oh, sure. He likes to make a—good impression. You know what I mean. Where it counts."

"Thanks, Sergeant."

"Mention it not."

CHAPTER III

World of Dreamers

RAUL KINSON had found it when he was ten years old, and from the ancient microbooks that no one read any more he had found the word for it. It was a "window." That had been, of course, before he was old enough to be permitted to dream. Now he knew that, in the dreams, there were many windows. But they were not like this one. True, they could be touched, could be opened and closed, could be looked through. But this window could be touched with his own hands and seen with his own eyes, which was another way of saying that it was a real and actual window.

The word had a good feel on his lips. Lips drawn back for the first syllable, then thrust forward for the other syllable.

He remembered the day he had found it. He had been angered at the other children. He had never cared for the games they played. To them, he was a freak because there was no frailness in him. The games he wanted to play, the games to stretch growing muscles, hurt them. On this day they had let him play. It was the old game of statue-dance, in

[*Turn page*]

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one of the huge rooms on the lowest level. One frail girl held the two white blocks and they danced and the girl would then suddenly clap the blocks together. At that signal, everyone stopped as though turned to stone. But the third time he had been awkwardly off balance and unable to stop. He had crashed heavily into two of the boys, older than himself, but as frail as the girls. The three of them had fallen onto the translucent floor which filled the room with the soft amber glow.

"You cannot play, Raul Kinson. You are rough. Go away, Raul. We won't let you play."

"I didn't want to play in the first place. The game is silly."

And so he had gone out and down the long hall that led through the maze of the power rooms, where the very air seemed to vibrate. He liked walking there as it gave him an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach. Now of course, he knew what the power rooms contained, and the name of that soft gray metal, ponderously thick, that formed the corridor walls. Lead it was called. But knowing what was in the power rooms did not decrease the sensation he felt, fourteen years after that day, when walking by the deep hum below the range of audibility.

For a time on that day, fourteen years ago, he had wandered aimlessly. Everything seemed lacklustre. The rooms where music played softly and endlessly, where music had played forever and would play until the very end of time itself, had lost their charm.

The grownups he saw ignored him. And that was expected.

The moving track carried him up through twenty levels to the place of the dreamers. It was forbidden for a child to go there. He waited and did not see anyone, and so he tiptoed down the corridor until he came to them where they reposed in the thick glass cases set into the wall.

The first one was a woman. She lay on softness and her body was cat-slack. She was curled, with one hand under her cheek, the other hand touching her breast. The fitted metal plate between her teeth made her mouth ugly and the shining cables that coiled up from the plate to disappear into the wall behind her shoulder were like the snakes he had seen in one of the old pictures. He stood and felt an odd tiny throb. It was much like that near the power rooms, but much fainter.

As he watched her, she stirred. He stood, transfixed with sudden terror. She took the plate from between her teeth, laid it aside and reached down for her loose-woven robe of soft dull metal that was wadded by her feet. Her movements were slow and dreamy.

As she shouldered into the robe and reached to thrust open the door of the glass case, she saw him, and her face twisted with sudden anger. He fled, knowing what the punishment would be, hoping that, in the dimness, she hadn't recognized him. Behind him he heard her call, "Boy! Stop!"

He ran, panting, realizing suddenly that, should he take the track that moved slowly downward, her shouts might alarm someone on a lower level who would intercept him.

And so he dodged and ran up the stationary track that lead to the twenty-first level. Once he had explored up there. The silence of the rooms had awed him, had frightened him so that he had hurried back down. But on this day the silent rooms were refuge.

Higher and higher. The twenty-first level did not seem safe enough. He continued on up to the next level above that and collapsed, his mouth dry, a great pain in his side, his heart thudding. He listened above the sound of his heart and the stillness settled around him.

It was then, he remembered, that he had noticed, close to his left hand, the edge of the great wheel that moved the track. It was like the wheels at the lower levels, with the one astounding difference—it was stilled.

Raul touched it gently. An odd new thought began to form itself in his mind. This might be a thing that was —broken, that had ceased to run. The thought dizzied him because it was out-

side his experience. All things ran—that is—all things designed to run, did so quietly, perfectly and forever. He had known of the tracks that were stilled above the twentieth level, and had thought that it was meant that they should be that way. And now he was confounded by this new conception of "brokenness." One of the women had broken an arm. She was shunned because it was now a crooked misshapen thing. He knew that he dared not talk of this new concept as it applied to the tracks above the twentieth level. Such a thought when expressed would be heresy, pure and simple.

IT was hard to think in such a fashion. It made an ache deep in his head. If this track had ceased, for some reason, to run—then it followed that these upper levels were to be used by all the Watchers, and were shunned now merely because of the physical difficulty of walking up the steep slopes. He knew of no one, adult or child, who went up higher than the twentieth level. There was no need for it. On the lower levels were the warm perfumed baths, the places of wine and of sleep and of the taste of honey. On the lower levels were the food rooms and the rooms that healed pain.

He suddenly wondered how high the levels stretched above him. Would it be possible to go to the top? But was there a top? Was there an end to it? Or did the levels go on and on, higher and higher, without ever an end to them? The strength of his desire for an answer to this question shocked him. He could taste the shrillness of fear in his throat, but at the same time excitement fluttered inside him like soft frantic wings.

He was dressed, as were all the children, in the single long strip of soft metal fabric. It was wound around the waist, with the trailing end brought between the legs and tucked firmly inside the waistband. When one was old enough to be permitted to dream, one was given either the toga and thongs of a man, or the robe of a woman. When death came, when the dead one was slipped, naked, into the mouth of the oval tube to speed down into the unknown blackness, the clothing was saved. He had seen the room where it was stored in shining piles that reached to the highest point a man could touch.

He stood up, took a deep breath, tightened the band at his waist and walked solemnly and with a certain dedication up the next motionless track. And the next, and the next. He tired of the steep climb and rested, realizing that he had lost count. The corridors down which he glanced had a sameness about them, and a silence.

At last he same to a track which moved upward, its neighboring track moving downward, silently and perfectly. He stepped onto the track which carried him up, wondering how long it had been since other bare feet had stepped there.

Up and up and up. The familiar things were a frightening distance below him. But fears were lulled by the familiar silent motion of the track which created a wind against his face.

And with the sudden shock of a blow, he found that at last there was no track to carry him higher, and thus no level above the one which he had reached. The corridor was smaller than the others. He fought against the fear that wanted him to turn quickly and descend. The silence was the worst. No pad of feet against the body-warm floors. No distant voices. No sound of children. Just silence and the glow of the walls.

This, then, was the top of the world, the top of eternity, the summit of all. Fear faded into exaltation and he felt larger than life itself. He, Raul Kinson, had gone, alone, to the top of the world. The sneer at the others formed in his mind. He stuck his chest out and carried his chin high. The old ones said that there was no limit to the world—that the silent levels went upward into infinity, that those who slid down the tube of death fell forever, turning slowly through the blackness, until the end of time.

He walked down the corridor. It

curved slightly. He stopped. There was a picture, a large picture, at the end of the corridor. He knew of pictures. There were thousands of them on the eighteenth level and no one really understood them.

He walked to the picture with the contempt of familiarity. He walked close to its oddly shining surface. A low sound bubbled in his throat and the darkness rushed over him and he had no feeling of impact as he fell.

He struggled up to consciousness and knelt and looked at the picture again. And he knew that it was no picture. It was a revelation. It was a truth so fantastic that he heard, on his lips, the meaningless sounds that infants make. And he knew, that from this day forward, he would be apart from all the others who had not seen this, who did not share his concept.

Outside of the levels, beyond the walls that glowed, everyone was taught that there was nothingness. Often he had gone to sleep trying to visualize "nothingness." And it was all a lie!

All of the levels were located in an enormous and frightening room. The ceiling, impossibly high, was a deep purple color, with hard shining dots of light in it, and one enormous round deep red light that hurt his eyes when he looked directly at it. The floor of the room was tan and brown and gray. The most horrible aspect of the enormous room was his inability to see the walls. They were beyond vision, in itself a new concept. It dizzied him to stare down at the remote floor.

Far off, to the right, the floor was humped up into a jagged series of mounds much higher than the level of his eye. And, in the foreground six objects towered, standing neatly in a row. The glow of the round red light made them look silvery. The longer he stared, the more accustomed he became to perspective and the more accurately he could assess the height of those six cylindrical featureless objects with the blunt snouts and the flared portion that rested against the tan of the floor.

As he watched he saw movement. A bit of the floor came alive, lifted up into a tall whirling column. He could not understand why it did this thing. He watched it move, still whirling, toward the high rough mounds. And soon he could see it no more. He leaned his mouth against the hard surface of the transparent substance and drew back with startled speed. In a world where everything was warmed, the surface had a strange chill.

THE gnawing of hunger at last took him away from the picture which he later found was called a "window." He went all the way back down to the deep familiar levels. He spoke to no one of what he had seen. He walked in a daze—feeling shrunken and small against the enormities of what lay outside the known world. He ate and slept and bathed and walked alone, seeking always the chance to slip away, to return to his window that looked out on another world which dwarfed his own.

Once, full of the importance of new knowledge, he had tried to tell one of the old ones about what he had seen. Wrath exploded and Raul Kinson picked himself up off the floor, with bleeding mouth, determined to speak no more.

With Leesa, of course, it was a different thing. As his sister, she shared, to some extent, the wry biological joke which had given him a deep chest, broad shoulders, strong column of neck, muscle bulge of thigh and calf in a world where physical strength was useless.

He remembered that he was twelve and she was ten when he took her up to the window. At ten she was taller and stronger than the other girl children of the same age. Like Raul, her hair was blue-black and abundant. It was a thing that set them apart in a world where hair was thin and dry and brown, lasting usually until the age of twenty, seldom beyond.

They had talked and he knew that Leesa shared his vague feeling of disquiet, his aimless discontent, but her releases took a different form. Whereas he strove constantly to learn more, to understand more, she made a fetish of

wildness and childish abandon.

He was proud of the way she refused to show her fear. They stood at the window. He said, proud of his new words, "That is 'outside.' All of our world and all the levels are inside of what was called a 'building.' It is cold out there. That red round light is a sun. It moves across the ceiling, but never goes completely out of sight. I have watched it. It travels in a circle."

Leesa looked at it, calmly enough. "It is better inside."

"Of course. But it is a good thing to know—that there is an outside."

"Is it? Why is it good merely to know things? I would say it is good to dance and sing and be warm, to take the long baths and find the foods that taste best."

"You won't tell anyone about this?"

"And be punished? I am not that stupid, Raul."

"Come, then. And I will show you other things."

He took her down several levels, to a series of rather small rooms. He took her to one room where ten chairs faced the end of the room. He made her sit in one while he went to the machine which had taken him so many months to fathom. He had broken four such before he at last found out the purpose.

Leesa gasped as the light dimmed and the pictures appeared, by magic, on the wall at the end of the room, the end that she faced.

Raul said quietly, "I believe it was intended that all children should be brought to these rooms to watch the images. But somehow, a long time ago, it was given up. Those marks under each picture mean nothing to you, Leesa. But I have learned that they are writing. Each thing has a word, as you know. But those marks can mean the word. With those marks, if you could read, I could tell you something without talking."

"Why would you want to do that?" Her tone was full of wonder.

"I could leave a message for you. I can read the writing under the pictures. There is an uncountable number of these spools to put in the machines. Each room holds ones more complicated than in the previous room. I think that this room was for the very small children, because the words are simple."

"You are clever, Raul, to understand those marks. But it seems like a hard thing to do. And I don't know why you do it."

The wonder had changed to boredom. He frowned. He wanted someone to share this new world with him.

He remembered a place that would interest her. He took her down several levels to a much larger room. This time the pictures moved and they seemed to have real dimensions and the persons, oddly dressed, talked, using strange words, scattered among those more familiar.

Raul said, "That is a story. I can understand it because I have learned the strange words—at least some of them." In the dim light he saw her leaning forward, lips parted. The people in peculiar dress moved in strange rooms.

He turned it off. "Raul! It's—beautiful. Make it appear again."

"No. You don't understand it."

"It is like I imagine the dreams must be, like they will be when we're old enough to be allowed to dream. And I thought I could never wait. Please, Raul. Show me how to make it happen again."

"No. You have no interest in these things. In women that wear strange colors and men that fight. Go on back down to your games, Leesa."

She tried to strike him and then she wept. Finally he pretended to relent. "All right, Leesa. But you must start like I did. With the simple pictures. With the simple writing. And when you learn, then you can see all this again and you'll understand it."

"I'll learn today!"

"In a hundred days—if you are quick and if you spend many hours here."

He took her back to the first room and tried to help her. She wept again with frustration. At last the corridors dimned and they knew that the time to sleep had come. Time had gone too quickly. They hurried back down to the others, hiding until the way was clear, then strolling in with exaggerated calmness.

CHAPTER IV

First Dreams

AT sixteen Raul Kinson towered above every man in the world. He knew that it was time, and that the day was coming. He knew it from the way the women looked at him, from a new light in their eyes, a light that troubled him. They could not speak to him because, until he was empowered to dream, he was still a child.

There were those who had certain duties. And, in each case, they instructed a young one of their choice in these duties in preparation for the time of death. There was a woman in charge of the rooms of childbirth, and another who cared for the young children. A man, fatter than others, organized the games of the adults. But of all those with special duties, Jord Orlan was the most powerful. He was aloof and quiet. He was in charge of dreams and the dreamers. He had wise, kind eyes and a face with sadness of power in it.

And Jord Orlan touched Raul Kinson lightly on the shoulder and led him to the far end of the tenth level, to the chambers where Jord Orlan lived alone, apart from the community life.

Raul felt a trembling excitement within him. He sat where Jord Orlan directed him to sit. He waited.

"After today, my son, you cease to be a child. All who are no longer children must dream. It is the privilege of being an adult. Those of you who come to me come with many wrong ideas of the dreams. That is because it is forbidden to discuss the dreams with children. Many of our people take the dreams too lightly. That is regrettable. They feel that the dreams are pure and undiluted pleasures, and they forget the primary responsibility of all those who dream. I do not wish you, my son, ever to forget that primary responsibility. In good time I shall explain it to you. In our dreams we are all-powerful. I shall take you to a glass case of dreams. This case shall be yours until the time of death. And I will show you how to operate the mechanism which controls the dreams. But first we shall talk of other matters. You have remained apart from the other children. Why?"

"I am different."

"In body, yes."

"And in mind. Their pleasures have never interested me."

Orlan looked beyond him. "When I was small I was the same."

"May I ask questions? This is the first time I have been permitted to talk to an adult in this way."

"Of course, my son."

"Why are we called the Watchers?"

"I have been puzzled about that. I believe that it is because of the dreams. The source of the world is lost in antiquity. Possibly it is because of the fantastic creatures that we watch in our dreams."

"You say that those creatures are fantastic. They are men?"

"Of course."

"Which, then, is the reality? This constricted place or the open worlds of the dreams?" In his intense interest Raul had forgotten to use only the familiar words.

Jord Orlan looked at him sharply. "You have strange language, my son. Where did you obtain it? And who told you of the 'open worlds'?"

Raul stammered, "I—I made up the words. I guessed about open worlds."

"You must understand that it is heresy ever to consider the creatures of the dreams as reality. The machines for dreaming have a simple principal, I believe. You are familiar with the vague cluttered dreams of childhood. The machines merely clarify and make logical these dreams through some application of power. They are limited in that there are only three areas, or worlds, in which we can dream. In time you will become familiar with each world. But never, never delude yourself by believing that these worlds exist. The only possible world is here, on these levels. It is the only conceivable sort of surroundings

which will permit life to exist. We become wiser men through dreaming."

Raul hesitated. "How long has this world of ours existed?"

"Since the beginning of time."

"Who made it? Who built these walls and the dream machines?"

"Again, my son, you come close to heresy in your questions. All this has always existed. And man has always existed here. There is no beginning and no end."

"Has anyone ever thought that a larger world might exist outside the levels?"

"I must ask you to cease this line of questioning. This life is good and it is right for all of the nine hundreds of mankind. Nothing exists beyond the walls."

"May I ask just one more question?"

"Of course. Provided it has more sense than your previous questions."

"I have seen that this world is large, as though many more men once lived in it than do now. Are our numbers smaller than in times past?"

Orlan abruptly turned his back. His voice came softly to Raul's ears. "That question has bothered me. I have not thought of it for a long time. When I was very small, there were over a thousand of us. I have wondered about this thing. Each year there are one or two togas or robes for which no children are born to inherit." His voice strengthened. "But it will be of no importance in our lifetime. And I cannot believe that man will dwindle and die out of the world. I cannot believe that this world will one day be empty when the last person lies dead with no one to assist him into the tube."

Orlan took Raul's hand. "Come and I will take you to the case assigned to you for all of your life."

ORLAN did not speak until they stood, on the twentieth level, before the empty case. Orlan said, "At your head, as you lie therein, you will touch that small knurled knob. It has three stations for the three dream worlds. The first station is marked by a line which is straight. That is the most beautiful world of all. The second station is marked by a curved line which stands on a base. You will find that world frightening at first. It is noisy. The third station, marked with a line with a double curve, is to direct the machine to create the third world, the one we find of least interest. You will be free to dream at any time you desire. You will shut yourself inside, set the knob for whichever world you desire, then disrobe and take the metal plate between your teeth and bite down on it firmly. The dream will come quickly.

"In your dream you will have a new body and new, odd, pointless skills. I cannot instruct you how to acquire change and mobility in the worlds of dreams. That is something you must learn by doing. Everyone learns quickly, but the actual procedure does not lend itself to words. You will dream for ten hours at a time and at the end of that time the machine will awaken you. Then it is best to wait for a new day before dreaming again."

Raul could not resist the chance to say, "When the lights are bright in the walls and floors, we call it day, and when they are dim, we call it night. Is there any particular reason for that?"

Jord Orlan's hand slid quickly down from Raul's naked shoulder. "You talk insanely. Why do we have heads? Why are we called men? Day is day and night is night."

"I had a childhood dream where we lived on the outside of a great globe and there was nothing over us but space," Raul said. "The other globe, which we called the sun, circled us, giving light and heat. Day was when it was overhead. Night was when it was on the opposite side of the globe."

Orlan gave him a queer look. "Indeed?" he said politely. "And men lived on all sides of this globe?" Raul nodded. Orlan said triumphantly, "The absurdity is apparent! Those on the underside would fall off!" His voice became husky. "I wish to warn you, my son. If you persist in absurdities and in heresies, you will be taken to a secret place that

only I know of. It has been used in times past. There is a door and beyond it is an empty coldness. You will be thrust out of the world. Is that quite clear?"

Sobered, Raul nodded.

"And now you must dream of each world in turn," went on Orlan. "And at the end of three dreams you will return to me and you will be told the Law."

Jord Orlan walked away. Raul stood by the case, trembling a bit. He lifted the glass door, slid quickly in and lay on his back on the softness. He unwound the band of fabric and thrust it from him. The soft throb of power surrounded him, tingling against his naked limbs. He set the knob at the figure 1 which Orlan had not known as a figure, as a mathematical symbol.

The metal plate was cool in his fingertips. He stretched his lips and put it between his teeth. Putting his head back, he shut his teeth firmly against the metal—and fell down into the dream as though he fell from the great red sun to the brown dusty plains near the ragged mountains.

He fell, remote and detached in the blackness, limbless, faceless. . . .

All motion stopped. This then, was the precious dream. Absolute nothingness, absolute blankness, with only the sense of existence. He waited and slowly there came to him an awareness of dimension and direction. He hung, motionless and then detected, at what felt like a great distance, another entity. He felt it with a sense that was not sight, or touch or hearing. He could only think of it as an awareness. And with the power of his mind he thrust out toward it. The awareness heightened. He thrust again and again and it was a sudden merging. The thing he merged with fought him. He could feel it twist and try to turn away. He held it without hands, pulled it toward him without arms. He pulled it in and merged it with himself and pushed it back and down and away from him so that it was shrunken into a far small corner.

And Raul Kinson found himself walking on a dusty road. His arm hurt. He looked down at it and he was shocked to see the stringy leanness of the arm, the harsh metal enclosing the withered wrist, the dried blood where the metal had cut him. He was dressed in soft rags and he smelled the stench of his body. He limped on a bruised foot. The metal band on his wrist was in turn connected to a chain affixed to a long heavy pole. He was one of many men fastened to one side of the pole, with an equal number attached to the other side. Ahead of him, bare strong shoulders, oddly dark, were crisscrossed with wounds, some fresh, some very old.

The thing which he held pressed down writhed, and he released the pressure, a pure mental pressure which he could not understand. It seemed to flow up into his mind, bringing with it strong fear and hate and the strange words of a strange tongue which oddly had meaning to him. These others were his comrades. Yes, they had fought together against the soldiers of Arrud, the Elder, seven days' march away. Death was better than captivity. Now there was nothing to look forward to but hunger, a life of slavery and savage punishment, a ceaseless hopeless desire to escape and return to the far green fields of Raeme, to the cottage where the woman would wait for a time, where the children played by the mud sill of the door.

VISION and other senses began to fade. Raul found that he had released the mind of this man too far, that he had given the man the power to thrust him back into the nothingness. So once again he exerted control. In a short time he found the necessary delicate balance—with the captured mind thrust down, but not so far that language and circumstances became meaningless, yet with a sufficiently strong control so that his own will would not be thrust out. With the maintainence of a proper balance, it was as though he existed on two levels. Through the mind of this man, this person who called himself Laron, he felt the hate and the hopeless anger, and also, through the alien invasion of his mind, a secondary fear of madness.

He trudged along in the dust. The soldiers guarding them carried long pikes with metal tips and walked lightly, joking among themselves, calling the prisoners foul names.

Raul gasped with pain as the pike point stabbed his upper arm. "Scrawny old one," the soldier said. "You'll be lion meat tomorrow, if you live that long."

Ahead the dusty road wound back and forth up the flank of a hill. Beyond the hill he could see the white towers of the city where Arrud, the Elder, ruled his kingdom with traditional ferocity. It appeared to be a march of many hours. What had Jord Orlan said about change and mobility? A knack to be acquired. This helplessness and the pain of walking did not seem to promise much.

He let the captive mind flow back up through secret channels, once again taking over will and volition. Senses faded, and as the nothingness once again enfolded him, he tried to thrust out toward the side, toward the soldiers. Again the feeling of grappling with a strange thing which resisted. The moment of control, of pushing the other entity down into a corner of his mind, and vision came.

He lay on his stomach in a patch of brush, staring down at a distant dusty road far below, at a clot of figures walking along the road. He let the captive mind expand until he could feel its thoughts and emotions. Once again—hate and fear. This one had escaped from the city. He was huge and strong. He carried a stout club and he had killed three men in making his escape. Contempt and pity for the captives. Hate for their captors. Fear of discovery. This was a simpler, more brutal mind, than the first one. Easier to control. He watched for a time, then slid out of the mind and thrust his way toward the remembered direction of the road.

The new entity was more elusive and control was a shade more difficult. He found that he had taken over the body of a young soldier. He walked a bit apart from the others. The captives were at his right, laboring under the weight of the pole that kept them joined, like one large many-legged insect. Raul fingered the spirit of this young soldier and found there revulsion for this task, contempt for the calloused sensibilities of his comrades in arms, pity for the dirty prisoners. He regretted the choice of occupation that he had made and he wished with all his heart that this duty was over. It would be better in the city at dusk when he could wander among the bazaars, a soldier returned from the wars, stopping at the booths to buy the spiced foods he loved.

Raul forced a turn of the head and looked back at the line. After several moments he found the thin man with the pike wound in his upper arm. He had been in that man's mind. Inside his own mind he felt the flutter of panic of the young soldier who had made a motion without apparent purpose. "Why do I turn and stare at the thin old one? Why is he of more importance than the others? Is the sun too hot on this helmet?"

Raul turned and looked up into the hills, trying to locate the brush where the fugitive hid. This seemed to alarm the captive mind even more.

"Why am I acting so strangely?"

The haft of the pike was comforting in Raul's hand. He lifted it a trifle, realizing that the habit-action patterns of the young soldier would serve him well should he wish to use the pike. For a time he contented himself with looking about at the landscape, picking out of the soldier's mind the names of the objects he saw. A bird, a quick blue flash against the sky. An ox cart loaded with the husks of corn. They passed stone ruins of an unguessed antiquity.

He turned when he heard the harsh scream. The thin one, whose mind he had inhabited, had fallen. A heavy-set soldier, his face angry and shiny with sweat jabbed again and again with the pike, making the red blood flow.

Raul thrust out with the ease of long practise, the tip of his pike tearing through the profiled throat of the heavy-set soldier. He turned, his eyes bulging. He clawed at his throat with both hands,

dropped to his knees, then toppled, face down, into the yellow dust of the road.

In his mind he felt the panic-thoughts of the young soldier. "I killed him! I must be mad! Now I'll be killed!"

The soldier in charge swaggered back, scowling. He took in the situation at a glance and drew the short broadsword that only he wore. The others, grinning in anticipation, kept the young soldier from fleeing by making a half circle of leveled pikes.

Raul, infected by the panic in his mind, thrust again with the pike. The broadsword flickered and lopped off a two foot section of the end of the pike, stinging his hands. He looked down and saw the thrust as the broadsword went deep into his abdomen. The soldier twisted the blade and withdrew it. The spasm and cramp dropped Raul to his hands and knees. He gagged as his arms weakened and his face sank slowly toward the dust. From the corner of his eye he saw the broadsword flash up again. The bright pain across the back of his neck drove him out into the nothingness where there was neither sight, nor sound, nor sense of touch. . . .

AT dusk he was in the city, with life and motion brawling and clashing around him. He led a heavily-laden burro and at intervals he cried out that he had water, cool water for dry throats. In the mind of the water vendor he found the location of the palace itself. More and more he was gaining control of the directional thrusts, gaining confidence in gauging the distance from mind to mind. He was a guard at the castle gates, then a man who carried a heavy load up endless stone steps.

And at last he became Arrud, the Elder, the man of power. To his astonishment, as he gained control of the king's mind, he found that it was as simple and brutal as the mind of the fugitive. And he found hate and fear there. Hate of the distant kings who drained the manpower and wealth in unending wars. Fear of treachery within the palace walls. Fear of assassination.

Raul relaxed to Arrud's action-habit patterns. Arrud buckled the heavy belt around his thick waist. It was of soft leather, studded with bits of precious metal. He flung the cape over his wide shoulders, tucked his thumbs under the belt and swaggered down the stone hallway, thrusting open the door at the end of the corridor. The woman had long hair, the color of flame. She lay back on the divan and looked at Raul-Arrud coldly. She had a harsh, cruel mouth.

"I await your pleasure," she said bitterly.

"Tonight we look at the prisoners. The first ones have arrived."

"This time, Arrud, pick some strong ones for the beasts, strong ones who will fight and make the game last."

"We need the strong ones for work on the walls," he said sulkily.

Her tone grew wheedling. "Please. For me, Arrud. For Nara."

Raul relinquished his hold and faded into the grayness. Only the gentlest of motions was necessary. He seeped slowly and relentlessly into the mind of the woman and found that there was an elusive subtlety about it that defied his initial attempts at control. At last he had her mind trapped. Her thoughts were hard to filter through his own mind. They were fragmentary, full of flashes of brilliance and color. Her hate for Arrud was clear and shining.

Arrud stood and held his hand to his forehead. "I felt odd for a time," Arrud said slowly, "as though there were a stranger's thoughts in my mind, as though someone were calling me from a great distance."

Raul sensed the words she would say and he forced her to be still. The control, suddenly exerted, frightened her. He kept fright from her face and her manner.

"I was calling you," he forced her to say.

In her mind he found the secret of the dagger, the dagger with the white jade hilt, buried under the cushions beside her. He made her hand reach out and grasp it.

Arrud smiled wearily as he came closer. "I guess it was nothing."

He sat on the divan, his broad back half turned to the woman. Raul forced her to slip the dagger out slowly—poise it high—and then—

He awakened in the glass case of dreams, and there was a deep slow lethargy about him, a sort of exhaustion more of the spirit than of the mind or the body. He removed the metal plate from his mouth and massaged his cramped jaw.

Slowly he turned to push the panel up so that he could step out. One of the women stood watching him and smiling. He reached quickly for his garment, but she pulled the door open and thrust a toga in to him.

"It is time for that, now," she said, still smiling. He recognized her as one of the ones who had watched him of late.

He pulled the toga on, tied the belt, tossed the loose end of the metal cloth over his left shoulder. Not quite wanting to look her in the face, he stepped out and stood up. She held the silver thongs in her hand. He took them from her, bent and tried to fasten them properly.

She took them from his awkward hands. "This is something I have done many times," she said, with laughter. She knelt and fastened a loop around his ankle, then circled the two ends of the thong in opposite direcions around the sturdy calf of his leg, each turn higher so that it formed a diamond pattern. She tied it snugly just below his knee. At her gesture he put the other foot closer to her. He looked down at her. The luminescent corridor walls made a shining gleam on her hairless skull. He thought of the flame hair of the woman called Nara. He thought of the blue-black hair of Leesa, his sister, and distaste was thick in his mouth.

She finished and stood up. Her fingers, like talons, dug into his shoulder. "You are tall," she whispered, her face close to his. "Come and we will talk about dreams."

Of course, that was the first dream and it was a long time ago. Eight years ago now! [*Turn page*]

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

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CHAPTER V

Alien Possession

SHARAN INLY came into Bard Lane's office wearing the jeans and white man's shirt, sleeves rolled, that was her usual uniform on the project area. She looked with distaste at the mounds of paper on his desk. "Dr. Lane. Clerk or scientist. Which is it?"

"I wish I knew. And I also wish I could be twins. One of me would be out there helping Adamson lick some of his problems and the other one would be in here moving papers from the in basket to the hold basket or the out basket. I've signed my name so many times today the cramp runs right up to the back of my neck. Sit down, Sharan."

She dropped into a heavy oak chair near the office window. He walked over and stood by her chair and looked out the window, following her glance. He smiled in a tired way. "Even if it never gets off the ground, they can't ever say we didn't build a big one."

Four enormous steel towers of varying height had been built in the form of an irregular square. A full square mile of tough fabric, painted with all the arts of camouflage, was suspended, like a grotesque circus tent, over the towers. From the air it would appear to be another hill of rock and sage and sand.

Bard Lane's office was constructed where he, from the windows, could look under the cavelike lip of the tent. The *Beatty I* stood in the middle of the square. Light filtered through the fabric, and around the base of the *Beatty I* was the constant ant-hill activity that had been going on for over a year. Some of the labs were set in the solid rock of the surrounding hills. The others were so grouped as to resemble one of the little villages lost in the silences of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

They could see the dull metal base of the *Beatty I*, seventy feet in diameter. They knew that the snout of the monster almost touched the hard painted fabric that formed the artificial hill. The platform elevator had been built on heavy steel circular tracks so that it could be raised, by the operator, to any point on the outside skin of the hull of the *Beatty I*.

"Will it fly, bub?" Sharan asked.

"I personally guarantee to get it at least twelve inches off the ground."

She smiled up at him. "I came with good news—and bad."

"The good news is about Bill Kornal?"

"Right. We've taken him down, one reflex and one inhibition at a time. And then we put him back together again. Outside of an incident case of anxiety neurosis as a result of his going off the handle, we can't find a thing. Bill is as sound as that mountain over there."

"That's good to hear. Put him on. I'll sign the confirmation in the morning."

"And the bad news is about Tommy, the Major. Friend Leeber. I can't honestly wash him out. I don't have to like him, but I can't wash him out. That little man has a mind like a brass hinge. Perfectly uncomplicated. It only works in one direction. What is the best thing for Major Leeber. That's all he has to know. How about loyalty?"

"Washington sent the confirmation this morning. Grade A risk."

"Oh, happy little project! Tommy, the Major, awaits without, hoping for a guided tour from the boss."

Bard glanced at his watch. "Time enough, I guess. I'll take him around now. See you at dinner."

Major Leeber showed the same satisfying shock at his first look at the *Beatty I* as did every other newcomer to the area. He walked all the way around it, smiled his lazy grin and said, "Doc, I *still* don't believe it."

Bard signaled to the operator. He brought the elevator down, banging the warning bell. "The nose," Bard said.

He stood and leaned against a stanchion and saw Leeber move to the exact middle of the platform. Above them the inside of the skin of the artificial hill loomed close. At the ogive

curve the elevator tipped toward the ship and followed the curve up to the last port. Leeber looked pale as he leaned away from the direction of the tilt.

"Come on in," Bard said. He stepped inside, lowered himself to the floor.

He had delivered the lecture many times. "This will be the entrance port for the crew. The *Beatty I* is designed to carry a crew of six. No passengers. The forward ten percent of the overall length consists of living quarters for the crew, food, oxygenation apparatus and the main control panels. This is the control room. Note the three chairs. They are mounted on pedestals and are, in effect, hydraulic cylinders to take up the shock of more Gs than an unprotected man can stand. This is the same as in the A-Four, Five and Six army types. You will see that the impulse screen has already been mounted, even though it isn't yet hooked up. The crew will have no actual visual contact with the outside once the ship is locked for flight. But the delicacy of the impulse screen will be sufficient for any sort of astrogation."

"How do you steer it?" Leeber asked.

"Same as the A-Six. In the waist of the ship is a twenty-ton flywheel, set so that it can be turned through a ten degree arc. In free space it will point the ship in any desired direction once tail-blast is off."

LEEBER'S eyes were hard. "So you just got yourself a king-size A-Six, eh?"

"Not exactly, Major. The bulk of the ship is, of course, taken up by the same sort of atomic drive as used in the A-Six with the exception that controls have been refined down to the point where we don't have to depend on chemical fuels for the initial impulse. The back-flash will be short-life stuff that will be easily absorbed. Then the ships acts like an A-Six until we're free of the system. That means, under CA, probably eighty days."

"CA?"

"Constant acceleration. Once free of the system we then switch to the drive which is original with the *Beatty I*. In fact, it is a misnomer to call it a drive. Beatty died two years ago and I helped complete his formulae."

Tommy Leeber's smooth oval face wore a friendly expression. "Can a dope like me understand what it's all about?"

"Depends on just how much background in theoretical physics you happen to have."

"A course in physics at the Point."

"Ever hear any talk about different frames of reference?"

"You mean like sitting here on earth we compute the sun's velocity in our galaxy, but somewhere else the speed would be something else again?"

"That's an oversimplification, but it's the general idea. A few years back they talked about frames of reference purely from the viewpoint of relative velocities. The paradox, of course, is that there is no such thing as remaining motionless in space. You are always at the focal point of a whole series of velocities. You may be motionless in reference to one star and traveling at fifty miles per second in relation to another one equidistant with the first. We have no mathematics that enable us to find a dead point in space. We know the theoretical computation—merely an average of all the velocities of all the stars in all the galaxies, and then computing your speed so that the entire average comes out to a zero figure. But it gives you an equation with several billion unknowns, due to the limits of observation. Follow me?"

"I think so."

"Now listen carefully. Beatty made the assumption that since there are space frames, there are also time frames. He pictured a universe, curved in upon itself in the Einstein manner, but composed of varying velocities and varying temporal relationships to this one semi-mythical central point in time. To find absolute time, you would have to take the average of the 'time velocity' of the entire universe. Once Beatty had formulated his theory, he applied it to the paradox of the expanding universe. Instead of becoming meaningless, his theory did what theories of 'tired light'

failed to do. His theory showed that the universe was not expanding, that the apparent expansion was more probably the effect of the interrelationship of the velocity of light and the varying time warped throughout the observable universe, particularly noticeable in the more distant galaxies."

"I think I fell off at the first curve, but go ahead," Leeber said.

"We know that the maximum velocity limit is the speed of light, or rather once inch per second below the speed of light. Because, at the speed of light, the Fitzgerald Contraction is infinite. What Beatty did was to give us a way to bypass that outer limit of speed by thrusting the ship into another frame of time."

"I don't get it."

"Here's the analogy we use for laymen, Major. You are driving from El Paso to New York. It takes you four days. You leave on Monday and expect to get to New York Thursday night. However, you have a little button on your dashboard that is labeled Thursday. Once you clear the El Paso city limits, you push that button. It is Thursday and there is the skyline of New York, dead ahead."

"I'll buy one of those."

"Our buttons are labeled in units of a hundred years, however. But don't think that a hundred years passes in a flash. That's where the analogy breaks down. Once you push the button, you actually arrive in New York the same moment that you leave El Paso. Here's another analogy. We have time bands. You are driving in Central time and you cross the time band to Rocky Mountain time. You have been driving an hour since six o'clock. Suddenly it is six o'clock again. Beatty showed that the time gradient between systems can be capsuled into one abrupt time shift, much as when you cross a time band in your car."

"Okay, Doc. I can't go any farther in that direction. How do you know where you're going when you jump into tomorrow?"

Lane smiled. "That's what took three of the most complicated integral calculators in the country seven solid months of work to find out. Their computations were used for the construction of the panels."

"The ones that that Kornal smashed up?"

"That's right."

"Are you certain you should have taken him back on, Doc?"

"Are you certain you aren't stepping over the line, Major? Until I'm relieved here, my decisions stand."

"Sorry," Major Leeber said. "What do we look at next?"

"I suggest we look at dinner, Major. In the morning we can make a quick tour of the labs. Are your quarters satisfactory?"

"Fine, fine. And the food's good. How about relaxation though?"

"We walk by the club on the way to dinner. I'll point it out to you."

THAT night Bard Lane sat for a long time on the edge of his bed. His hands rested on his knees and he pushed down firmly to still their trembling. The night was cool and the breeze that came in his open window touched his chest and shoulders. But there was an oily sheen of perspiration on his face. The decision facing him was the most difficult one he had ever faced. It was as though he had climbed a long straight path through the years, eyes fixed on the shining slope ahead—and suddenly the path ended at the brink of a deep crevasse. What would it mean to turn back?

He stood up with resolution and put his shirt back on. He snatched his leather jacket from the back of the chair as he went out the door. From the slope he looked down on the project buildings, on the lights that made it seem to be a village. A thin moon rode high and the insubstantial tent that covered the *Beatty I* looked to be of the most solid rock.

Sharan Inly had a room in the women's barracks. He walked down the slope and across the street. The girl at the switchboard was reading a magazine. She glanced up and smiled. "Oh, hello,

Dr. Lane."

"Good evening, Miss Fry. Dr. Inly, please. Connect the call in the booth."

He shut himself in. "Hello, Bard," she said.

"Sharan, have you been asleep?"

"You caught me on the verge. What's up?"

He looked through the glass door of the booth. The girl had returned to her magazine. "Could you possibly get dressed and come down? I want to talk to you."

"Officially?"

"Call it that."

He was grateful for the short time it took her to dress and come down to meet him. Together they walked out into the night. She asked no questions. He took her around to the porch of the club. It was after hours and the chairs had been stacked on the porch tables. He pulled two of them down. A dog howled in the hills and, over in the labor barracks, someone laughed loudly.

"I want to consult you, Sharan. As a psychiatrist, and also as a friend."

She was receptive to the hidden alarm in his voice. "Go ahead, Bard."

"Tonight I had dinner with Major Leeber. I went back to my office to finish up some of the paperwork. I finished it and sat there for a few minutes. I was going to go to bed. Slowly and almost imperceptibly at first, I felt an alien influence—something pushing at my mind. That's the only way I can describe it. As though something was exerting a very calm and very confident pressure. Have you ever fainted, Sharan?"

"Yes, of course."

"I sat absolutely still and the thought was running through my mind that this pressure might be something from within—the result of overwork, the result of too much worry and too much anxiety. I fought it, Sharan, with every device I could use. I snatched up familiar papers from my desk and tried to read them. The words blurred. The thing, whatever it was, increased its pressure—inexorably. I lost the ability to control my own actions. It was as though my will were being pushed down into a tiny corner of my mind.

"I can't tell you how frightening it was. I've always felt completely in control of myself. Maybe a bit too confident. Without willing it, I turned and stared out the window at the place where the *Beatty I* stands. And it was as though I were looking at it for the first time. Unfamiliarity. Wonder. Perplexity. Sharan, in that state, I could have done—anything, and I would have been judged responsible for any actions which would not have been the result of my own will and my own desires." His voice had risen a half octave.

She touched his arm. "Take it slow and easy, Bard."

He took a deep breath. "Is there such a thing as a waking nightmare?"

"There are delusions, phantasies of the mind."

"I felt—possessed. The odd thing is that something seemed to be trying to tell me that the influence was not inimical. When the pressure was strongest, the room seemed to fade and darken, as though the current had gone low. And then, as the pressure was released, my thoughts and memories were being—handled. That's the only word I can use to describe it. And now for the nightmare part. The thing, whatever it was, put thoughts in my mind, like memories, vision. I looked down a long wide corridor. The floors and walls had a muted glow. The people had an almost sexless look—neuter, frail blue-white people. It was very clear. Inbred. They walked with a tired timelessness, a semi-hypnotic sort of dedication. And then I looked through a huge thick window, startlingly clear. Six space ships stood under an oversized red sun that filled a good quarter of a purple sky. A dying world and the people in it. And slowly the pressure on my mind relaxed and it was gone. I could move again of my own will and think my own thoughts. I went back and sat on my bed and then I came here."

SHARAN said slowly, "We talked of the X factor in mental illness. In

psychiatry we notice an odd thing. A mind, slightly out of focus, will create delusions out of a situation in the immediate past. The same way our dreams are usually based on what happened the day before. We talked of being possessed by devils. Silly phrase. Bill told us his symptoms. To a man as free of superstitions as yourself, the devils you create become certain all-powerful beings from a distant super-race. No, Bard. This is something you have brought upon yourself. Part of it is due to the lost four months. Part to the pressure General Sachson put on you. Go to bed and get a good night's sleep."

"I haven't made you understand, have I?"

"Maybe you have."

"Tomorrow I'll report to you for the usual tests. If you find the slightest thing out of line, I'll wire my resignation immediately. It is the least I can do."

"Don't be a child! Who else could carry this thing on their back? Who else could keep fifteen hundred people working like demons in this God-forsaken spot on something that not one out of five hundred of them can understand?"

"But suppose, in this next visitation, if it comes again, I get as destructive as Kornal did?"

"You won't, believe me, Bard."

He smiled bitterly. "Part of your job is to reassure."

"And to wash out those who show signs of incipient mental incompetence, Bard. Don't forget that. I've been watching you closely. I'll tell you that now. Look at yourself objectively. You're what? Thirty-four? I've got your personal history in the files. Born in a small Ohio town. Orphaned at eight, raised by an uncle. Public school. At twelve you had your own idea of the way to solve the problems in the geometry texts. You were skeptical of the Euclidian solutions. A science scholarship based on the originality of your thought processes. You still had to work your way through. Then Cal Tech, then M.I.T. Helped design the first practical application for industrial power of the atomic pile. Government service. Years of exhaustive work on the A-Four, A-Five and A-Six. And now this. What's missing?"

"I don't understand."

"The blessed ability to relax is missing, Bard. You've never had time for women, never tied on a large alcoholic load, never fallen asleep under a tree or caught a trout. When you read for amusement, you read scientific papers and new texts. Your idea of a happy evening is to cover fifteen sheets of paper with little Greek symbols. I—I wish I—"

"What do you wish?"

"That I felt something toward you beside friendship and respect. I wish I could fall in love with you. It is something that you need. Badly."

He said softly, "Would we make a good couple?"

She stood up and laughed. "Let's not try to sell ourselves a deal, Bard. Dr. Inly will now prescribe for the patient. After your test in the morning, which I am certain will be okay, you are going off into the hills with a scope rifle a friend of mine has and take pot shots at varmints. The project can spare you for one day."

CHAPTER VI

World of Adepts

EIGHT years ago. The first dream and the toga of a man. And then the second dream. The second world.

And this time Raul found that in the groping search for the other mind there was no fumbling. He had gained a certainty of contact. He grasped and thrust with the full power of his intellect. And he found himself writhing on a hard surface in bright sunshine. He tried to let the captive mind regain a measure of control, and was puzzled to find that the mind was shattered, irrational, sending spasm impulses to the writhing limbs. And in that moment he learned that con-

tact could not be made with his full and practised mind-force without damaging the host. He attempted to stand, but the convulsive motor-nerve twists of the broken mind defeated him. He slid out of the mind, impelling himself toward the others who had crowded around.

He slid with much more restraint into the new mind, never taking over control, merely waiting and listening and watching, intent on absorbing the facets of this new world. The new host was a big man in a dark blue uniform. He was saying, "Move back, there. Give him air. Give him a chance, folks."

A second uniformed man came over. "What you got, Al?"

"Guy with a fit. I sent a fella to phone from the drug store. Come on, folks. Move back. Oh, you're a doc? Good. He seems to be chewing his tongue, Doc."

The man in gray got a yellow pencil between the teeth of the man who writhed on the sidewalk. He looked up at the policeman and said, "Epileptic, I think. Better send for an ambulance."

"Already did."

Raul looked curiously through the eyes of the man who called himself Al, who thought of himself as a policeman, as the metal machine on four wheels came down the street making a harsh screaming noise. It pulled in, backed up over the curbstone and a man in a white coat opened the doors in the rear of it as the other man knelt beside the figure on the sidewalk.

As soon as the man had been taken away, Al went to a metal box on a post. He spoke into a black mouthpiece and finally said, "I don't feel so good. Sort of like a headache. Okay, if it gets worse, I'll call back. Yeah."

Raul Kinson, looking out through the man's eyes, saw that this was a city with many people. They were similar in form and coloring to the people he had seen on the first world. He searched the minds of Al for words and found that this was the city of Syracuse in a place called New York. The street was called South Salina. Among other things he found that Al's feet hurt, that he was thirsty, that his wife was visiting in some other place. He had trouble deciphering the meaning of the word "wife." Al's thoughts on this score were elusive.

Finally Raul received the impression of two lives shared, male and female, in a specific non-community structure of small size called a "home." Once again there came the thought of money. The idea of money had baffled him completely when, in the city of Arrud, pieces of metal had been placed in the hand of the water vendor and Raul had sensed the greed in the water vendor's mind at the feeling of possessing these apparently useless bits of metal. In the mind of Al, the policeman, he found that "money" was something to be exchanged for food and for clothing and for the "home." At regular intervals Al was given "money" in exchange for his duties of maintaining order. Raul speculated on what would happen should Al refuse to undertake his duties. He gently insinuated into Al's mind the concept of a moneyless future and he was appalled by the wave of fear that followed the thought.

The store windows were full of strange articles of which, in spite of Raul's years in the rooms of learning, he was unable to guess probable uses. Al, exercising his own will, stopped by one window. There were long slim sticks of wood in the window, with shining spools affixed to them. In Al's mind Raul found a fleeting retinal picture of a boat, an expanse of water, a creature that tugged at the end of a long cord attached to the slim wooden pole. The word for the creature was "bass." Through the action-habit patterns and their relationship to the mind pictures, Raul, inhabiting Al's mind, was able to think in the language of his host, and even speak in that language if necessary. However, should he submerge the action-habit patterns too deeply with his own will, the abilities faded and were lost and the only words that could come from the lips would then be in his own softer, more liquid language.

This, then, was a society considerably more mechanistic than that of the first world. There was, possibly, less brutal-

ity, but more nervous strain. In the place of lions, the men seemed to be devoured by the machines which surrounded them. The tyranny of "money" seemed as cruel as the oppression by a man named Arrud, to Raul, but more pointless.

Back in his own world the essential services were all performed, almost all, with silent, automatic devotion, with the changeless efficiency that led the Watchers to believe that things had always been that way, that there were no builders behind it all.

He spent ten hours in the city. He rode in the machines. Once, careful to leave the host full control, he drove one of them in the rushing, frightening traffic. One host stood at a dim bar and drank a liquid which, even filtered through the sensory equipment of the host, gave Raul a feeling of nausea. He observed how, in the mind, the liquid induced mental images, clouded reactions, obscured the logic of thought patterns.

ONE host went into a dim place called a "movie." Raul watched the screen, following the infantile story through the mind of the host. The picture had a flat colorless look brought on by the use of only two dimensions rather than three, and the monotony of the colors. He found it a poor use of time, valid only because it gave him a greater insight into the motivations of these people of the second world, motivations born out of lust and fear and insecurity. He saw that they, in a sense, dreamed, and in the long sweet dreams the world was, for a time, the way they would have it.

During the ten hours he perfected, even further, the ability to slip into the mind of the host and extend cautious tendrils of perception into the sensory centers of the brain. He became more skilled at the knack of thrusting a thought into the brain of the host in order to gauge the reaction and thus learn more about the mores and folkways of this second world.

Once he moved delicately into the mind of a child, moving slowly as though he were in a small room filled with fragile things. There he found the world that the adult hosts sought. A world of imagery, where nothing bored and nothing frightened. A world of great battles fought in the twinkling of an eye, with the brave hero winning, the maiden awarding him the prize of valor. A world where the righteous and the honest came out best, where all crimes were punished, where the home was sacred and love lasted as long as life itself. The tears were all of happiness and the days were bright and long.

And the dream ended and he was back once more in the quiet world of known things. As he descended from the twentieth level, he passed Leesa and knew that she was on her way up to the rooms of learning. He could not speak to her where others might hear.

She stood, taller than the others, ripening more quickly than the others, still dressed, at fourteen, in the metallic sash of a child.

He ate with the fierce hunger that the dreams brought. He tried to find in memory the traces of the words he had learned, the words he had spoken. But they had fled from him.

He slid the eating tray back into the wall slot, hearing the sound of the rush of steam that would cleanse it, for the next one to sit before it. Two women and one man came to him and the man said, "Come and tell us of your dream, Raul."

He went and sat with them and he was shy of his new knowledge. The women saw how it was with him, and one of them told of her dream.

"This time," she said, "I wanted beauty and I wanted pain. I found it on the first world and I searched for half the time of the dream before I found her. She was in a stone prison cell and she was weak, but very beautiful. But in her mind she had pride and passion. I could not understand exactly what it was that she believed in so blindly. The jailors knew that she had not many hours left to her and one watched while the others went to her. Nothing that was done to

her could break her pride. Then, as I was afraid the dream would end, she was taken through the narrow places of the town and tied to a heavy post. I knew the words in the dream, but I cannot remember them now. Substance was piled around her and then the redness came leaping up. I remained with her in her torment until she died. It was full and delicious pain. Her mind broke in the last few moments of consciousness. I went into the mind of a watcher and looked at the blackened thing which had been beauty. The dream ended."

Raul looked at the woman, looked at the pink sharp tip of her tongue as she ran it along her lips—looked at the glowing eyes, the light on the polished scalp.

One of the men laughed. "What sport is there in just enduring? The second world is the better place for me. I dream of that world and I don't care to feel things the way the dream creatures do. I take their minds and I push them aside. I don't want to gobble in their tongues. In my last dream I found a strong young man's body. It was dark, with tiny lights way overhead. There were people about. I crouched in the brush and when two young girls went by I killed one of them quickly with my hands and ran with the other one. She screamed. I like to hear them scream. The machines are clever. The screams always seem real to me. They ran after me and I threw the girl aside and hid. When, at last, a man found me, I killed him too. Then more of them came and they tied me. I talked to them in our language and I laughed at them. They tied me into a white garment. A man came up and hit me in the face with his fist. They pushed him away and he wept. Ah, it was a good and exciting dream."

The man kneaded his fingers together and beamed at the others.

They all looked at Raul. A woman said, "The first dreams are sometimes the best. What did you dream?"

Raul stood up. He said, "I dreamed of the second world. I found people who were good. I wanted to help them and I didn't know how. At this moment, remembering them, they seem more admirable than—some of us."

THE women exploded into shrill laughter. "Oh, oh, oh," they cried weakly. The man stood up and his hand was cool on Raul's bare right shoulder. He smiled in a condescending way. "You forget that you have just ceased to be a child, Raul. While you are dreaming the creatures seem quite real. When you awaken, you know that they existed only inside your dreaming mind. When you awaken they cease to exist—like that." He snapped his fingers. "The machines make them and when you awaken, they cease to exist."

Raul frowned. "But can't you go back to the same place and find the same individual again?

"And when you find him, hasn't he lived during the time you were not dreaming of him?"

"That is the magic of the machines. They take our disordered dreams and clarify them into fantastic worlds where there appears to be a chain of strange logic. But the fantastic surroundings of the dreams are proof enough to any intelligent man that they are only dreams."

A woman stood, laughter still bubbling softly inside of her. She stood in front of Raul and plucked at the metal of the fold of toga. Her lips looked swollen and her voice was soft-slurred.

"Raul, this is the only world," she said. "This is the place where all things are right for us. Don't let the machines delude you. Their magic is clever. Some of our people have gone mad through believing that the dream worlds are real. At last, when they begin to believe that this, the real world, is a dream, they have to be thrust out of this world. I have many reasons why I don't want that to happen to you." She tugged at his arm. "Come with me to one of the small game rooms and alone I will play for you some of the parts that I have known in dreams. Come. You'll find it interesting."

He pulled roughly away from her. He shouldered the man aside and walked

away. At the twentieth level he looked down the row of cases. On the twentieth level the corridor walls and the floors were always dim. The brightest lights shone inside the cases themselves. Either way he looked, the cases stretched off, lining both sides of the corridor, diminishing into the distance.

He walked slowly between the cases. Many were empty. In many were dreamers. He saw Jord Orlan, hands crossed on his blue-white chest. Some were on their backs. Some curled. One woman dreamed with her arms clasped around her knees, her knees against her chest. He walked until at last he saw nothing but empty cases, on either side of the corridor, mouth plates unused, cables coiled and waiting. The corridor turned sharply and he stared down another vista of the machines for dreaming. He walked slowly onward.

An inhabited case startled him. And then he saw that its occupant was long dead, cheeks and closed eyes shrunken into the skull, skin dark and withered. The lips were stretched back away from yellowed teeth, and the teeth still loosely held the plate. One who died while dreaming, forgotten among the machines too far from the moving track to be used. When finally someone noticed that he was gone, it was believed that he had been properly inserted in the oval tube to speed down into the darkness.

Raul stood for a long time and looked into the case. He thought of telling Orlan, but that would entail explaining why he found it necessary to wander back in the unused places. This one had been dead a long time. Possibly he never would be found. He never would be inserted, head first, into the oval tube. Women were placed in the tube feet first. It was the Law. It symbolized the sexual difference.

Above his head was the soft sigh of one of the grilled apertures through which the warm air rushed. He turned and walked back to the broken track and went up it in search of Leesa.

Leesa ran to him, her eyes bright. "Tell me, Raul! Tell me what it is like!"

He sat down, scowling. "Somehow," he said, "I know they are wrong. All of them. The dreams have more meaning than what—they say."

"Don't be silly! They're only dreams. It is our *right* to dream. And I have to wait two more years."

He looked at her for a moment. "The dreams are reality." He said it again, more firmly.

She was shocked. "Don't say that! Don't say it, even to me! They could send you away. And then there wouldn't be anyone left like me, with this hateful hair and these hideous heavy arms and legs."

He grinned. "You will like the dreams because, in them, the women who look like you promise to look are considered very beautiful."

"Really! Like—like in these pictures that are stories?"

"Exactly."

She knelt beside his chair, sat back on her heels and smiled up at him. "Now tell me about the dreams. I can't wait."

"On one condition."

"You're always making conditions," she pouted.

"First you must promise to help me search through all of these rooms. Through all the rooms on every level above the twentieth. It may take us years. I don't know. But somewhere, somehow, we will find answers to all of this." He waved his hand to include all of the levels. "It all started somewhere. Everything has to have a beginning. I want the story of creation. Why are we called Watchers? Who made the machines that dream."

"No one made them. They've always been there."

"Will you help me search?"

"Of course. Now tell me about the dreams. Quickly."

AND on the following day he told her of the third world. He saw her after he had reported back to Jord Orlan and had been instructed in the single law of those who dream. He was still shaken by the significance of Jord Orlan's instruction.

"The third one," he told Leesa, "is

different. The first one is all blood and cruelty. The second one is nervous fear and mechanisms. This third one . . . I am going to return there again. Many times. Their minds are full of power and subtlety. And I know that they know of us."

"But that sounds silly, Raul! It's only a dream. How can the creatures in a dream know of the dreamers. The other ones didn't."

"With the first mind I invaded, I was too cautious. There was a moment of resistance, then none. I went in confidently. While I was still moving softly, the mind thrust me away with such a gout of power that I was forced to leave it. It took some time before I could find it again. This time I entered more firmly. The pressure was enormous. At last, when I took over sensory control, I saw that I was sitting in front of a small structure. The landscape was pleasant. Woods, trees, fields and flowers. There was no crudeness about the structure.

"The inner walls, which I could see, glowed the way these corridor walls glow. The fixtures in the house appeared to be automatic, much like the lower levels here. When I tried to sift the captive mind, to find out what sort of world this might be, I found nothingness. At first I thought the thing might be brainless, and then I remembered the astonishing power of the mind. I had full control of the body, but the mind itself seemed able to erect a barrier that shielded its thoughts. I looked in all directions and saw men and women, simply dressed, standing at a respectful distance and staring toward me. I stood up.

"My host let one thought seep into my mind. He told me to attempt no violence or those who watched would kill him immediately. The thoughts he transmitted to me came slowly and clearly and I gained the impression that he was speaking to an inferior, simplifying his thoughts for the sake of contacting a less acute mind. He told me that it would be best to return to the place I came from. If I attempted to move to another mind, the new host would immediately be placed in the same position in which he found himself. I formed, with his lips, our word for 'why.' He said that they could read each other's thoughts and found it relatively simple to detect an alien presence. I could discern a shade of grim humor. The others stood and watched and I began to feel that in some odd way he was still in communication with them through a channel which I could not tap. I also felt that he knew all about the dreams and the dreamers. I tried to make it forcefully clear that I was only curious about his world, that I intended no violence. I sat down again and he asked, again with that touch of humor, what I wanted to know."

"It sounds so dull!" Leesa said.

"I didn't find it so. We spent the whole of the ten hours in discussion. They call the third world Ormazd. It seems to be named after some principal of goodness. They all live like that, simply, and at considerable distances from each other. Great care is given to the training of their young. All the way through I had the impression he felt as though he were talking to a child. They live for the development of pure thought. Thousands of years ago their society began to develop on the basis of the strengthening of the human intelligence, the struggle for independence of thought, uncomplicated by secretions by the glands. Now they are immune to hate, anger, fear. I found it hard to follow him. Telepathic communication came as a by-product of this intensive development. And with telepathic communication he said that they had eliminated the final stumbling-block to learning, the awkwardness and arbitrary meanings and connotations of words. Communication by thought alone is always accurate, he said. Their world has no crime, no violence and no warfare."

"It still sounds dull," Leesa said defiantly.

"Now here is the part that puzzled me the most. He knows about us. I know he does. I tried to question him and got nothing but mental laughter. He told me to dream about other worlds. But dream wasn't the exact meaning of the

thought he used. More like scan, or watch, or survey. He let me know that we had interfered greatly in the past and had obstructed much of their progress until rules had finally been set up to cope with us. He told me that we are now powerless to disturb their world. I told him I was seeking knowledge. He told me it was too late for us. He told me to stay away from their world and that, in another thousand years, there would be no need to warn us away as by then we would find it impossible to take over even as much of their mind as was now available to us. There was one moment of sadness in him when his thought seemed to be that the Plan had failed. I felt his pity. I was glad to wake up."

"I like the other two dreams better," she said. "The first one best, I guess."

"Now I am free to dream of any world I please," he said. "I went to Jord Orlan. He told me the Law."

"What is it?"

"The creatures of the dream world must be forever prevented from building any device that will enable them to leave their world, to fly up into their skies away from their world. It this ever happens, there will be no more dreams. Each dreamer, whenever he finds the creatures of any world planning such a thing, must ruthlessly destroy the work in progress. I asked him why. He said it was the Law, a Law as old as the world. He said that there was no danger at the moment on the first world, though, long, long ago, there had been that danger. He said that world three did not seem interested in such things. The second world is the danger point. They have been building such devices. Some have been destroyed only by a narrow margin. I asked him a question. I said, 'Why then, if there is no reality in the dreams, is this step necessary?' He told me again that it is the Law, that it has always been and always would be the Law. It is the one responsibility that keeps the dreams from being pure pleasure."

His hands clenched into fists. "They can't write. They can't read. And the real reasons have been lost. Jord Orlan is kind, yes. But he is blind. He questioned things when he was young. Now he is through with questions. But I must *know*"

Eight years of the dreams. Eight years of learning and growing and seeking. Eight years of filling in the gaps in the past. Eight years of taking over the minds of those who sat in the libraries of the second world and reading, through their minds, the texts on astronomy, on physics. Eight years of groping—and then the answer, as blinding as a flash of light, as simple as an education, and as unanswerable as death itself.

CHAPTER VII

Betrayal

HE stood in the doorway and watched Leesa with the group. Her mouth was bitter and her laughter was harsh. Discontent, he knew, had driven her down the obscure pathways of the dreams, had made her vie with the others in the excesses of the dreams. No one could match the diabolical inventiveness of her mind once she had taken over the spirit of some hapless citizen of world one or two.

He had listened, with sadness and revulsion, to some of her dreams. A gay little account of the reactions of the passengers on an air liner after she, as hostess, had clubbed the pilot and returned to stand with her back against the door of the pilot's compartment to watch them. The look on the face of the statesman when he realized that his docile mistress had poisoned him. Driven by despair, haunted by some of Raul's own doubts, she had conceived and executed plans which made even the most hardened look faintly ill.

Raul thought of the lives she had broken in trying to prove that the dreams were in no way real, and the twist of her mouth betrayed her own

hidden fear that there was reality in the world of dreams. In the life she led apart from dreams, she remained rigidly alone in all personal senses, aided in this by her appearance which, though it matched standards of beauty in worlds one and two, appealed in the waking world only to those who sought to stimulate jaded tastes with the unusual.

She at last glanced over and saw him and, for a moment, he thought she looked a bit ashamed. She hurriedly finished her tale and came toward him, tall, with her head held high. He walked with her into the corridor.

He made himself be calm. "I want to talk to you, Leesa. We'll go up to one of the rooms of learning."

She stopped. "I haven't been up there in two years and I don't intend to go up there now. You can tell me here."

"This isn't a good place. I want to be alone with you."

She frowned. "The second world? We talked there once before."

"It would be appropriate for what I have to tell you." It was the second world that he knew best after the long eight years. He arranged the place with her, the signal of recognition. . . .

He had grown accustomed to the clamor of the traffic, the pushing, hurrying throngs on the streets of this, the greatest city of the second world. He was late. Four hours of the ten had passed and it had taken him four hours to cover more than half a continent. Possibly Leesa had grown weary of waiting. She had little patience. He took the lean young captive body into the hotel. A half score of young women waited near the clock. The host-mind had been forced far down inside him. Even in panic, the struggles were weak and far away—a faint fluttering that did not interest him. He took a handful of objects from his pocket, dropped them clumsily. Silver lighter, change, a small knife. They clattered on the tile. He bent and picked them up. When he straightened up, a tall girl in gray stood before him. He looked deeply into her eyes and said softly, in his own tongue, "Hello, Leesa."

"You're very late, Raul."

"You waited. I'm glad."

To the bystander it appeared that a nervous young man had just arrived to meet his date. They walked out of the hotel together. She said something in the tongue of this city. Through use he had learned a great deal of it, but it was easier to relax the pressure on the host-brain, to allow it to flow up to a point where its language became his. She smiled and repeated, "Now where?"

He turned down a quieter street. He looked up across the street, saw a man and a woman standing together looking out the window of another hotel, looking down at the street. "If they're alone in that room," he said, "it should be a good place."

As the gray nothingness closed around him, he made the practised movement,

[*Turn page*]

Message from Garcia

Texas Artist Tells Why It's Smart to Switch to Calvert

SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Tony R. Garcia, San Antonio artist and illustrator, knows that it's *taste* that counts in a whiskey. "Tell everybody," he says, "that I switched to Calvert because of its *mild, and smooth taste.*"

CALVERT RESERVE BLENDED WHISKEY—86.8 PROOF—65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS. CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., N.Y.C.

slanting upward, reaching out ahead. Tendril-tips of prescience brushed another mind, tasted the blade-quick reaction of woman-mind, veered, found the other resistance point, flowed softly in.

He was standing, looking down five stories at the street. A young couple stood on the opposite side, talking excitedly. Leesa stood beside him, and she laughed. "Let them try to explain that to each other," she said.

He looked at the small room. He pushed the captive mind down to the very thin edge of the breaking point, holidng it there by an effort of will that had become almost unconscious. This body was older than the previous one. And he sensed that it was not a healthy body. It carried too much soft weight. The woman, however, inhabited by Leesa, was beautiful in a clear-lined way.

Leesa sat on the bed. "Now be interesting, Raul."

"I intend to be. Listen closely. For six months I have had almost all of the answers, almost all of our history. Now I have the last pieces. I have gotten some of it from the rooms of learning, some of it through constant questioning of the best minds on world three. And the remainder from the science of this world. A very long time ago, Leesa, a longer time than you can visualize, our world was much like this one."

"Nonsense!" she gasped.

BUT Raul ignored her interruption. He was talking excitedly, eyes alight. "I can prove every part of this. Our race had vast numbers. We found the secrets of travel through space. Our home planet circles a dying red sun very near a star these people call Alpha Centauri. Twelve thousand years ago the Leaders, realizing that life could only be sustained on our home planet through a constant adjustment to the dwindling moisture and sinking temperature, directed a search for younger planets, planets suitable for migration. Three were found. This planet, also planet one, circling what these people call Delta Canis Minoris near Procyron, ten and a half light years from here, and planet three, in the system of Beta Aquilae near Altair, sixteen light years from this place, were found to be suitable."

"Those are just words, without meaning."

"Listen to me. For two thousand years the Great Migrations were the incredible task of our ancestors. They built ships that would cover the enormous distances in very short times, and with those ships they ferried all the people of our own planet to these three far places. The Leaders were wise. They saw that the conquering of raw planets, each one posing different problems, would result in a divergence of culture trends. They knew that each planet should be insulated from the other two colonies until finally communication could safely be reestablished without fear of conflict. And so they created the Watchers. A vast structure was built and all of the science at their command was used to make it as completely automatic, as immune to time, as possible. Mankind was screened to find those with the most emotional stability, the most freedom from hereditary disorders, the highest potentials of intelligence. They were indoctrinated with the importance of their duties, their debt to the future of the race, and they were left in the structure which now the Watchers think is the entire world of reality."

"You are quite mad, Raul," she said softly.

He stood and looked down at her. "Madness is a word I will use, Leesa. The leaders created the Watchers. They thought they had builded safely for five thousand years. All of the great ships were destroyed, and six ships were left to the Watchers. With those ships, for three thousand years, constant patrols were made. But the Watchers were discontented. The vast tower on the dying world was built too well. It was too changeless and too comfortable. Patrols were unpopular, as they took the Watchers out of the comfort and the quietness and the peace and exposed them to the rawness of the world outside. On the three planets the struggle

for life went on, and in the struggle the scientific advances were lost, forgotten when men died, destroyed in bitter little wars. The colonists moved downward toward a common denominator of savagery before the slow ascent could begin again.

"On this planet, Earth, manlike creatures had existed before the migrations. There was an assimilation of the races. The Watchers, genetically screened to preserve vigor in the blood line, did not lose the knowledge of their ancestors. They built upward from the base of science, and for a thousand years they strove to eliminate the necessity of the patrols and still carry out the responsibility which had been given them—to keep the three planets isolated until at last they would be ready for contact. The Leaders had hoped that when at last the three divergent culture streams were merged, the new era would come, with mankind as a whole borrowing the best from each of the three cultures.

"At last the Watchers, experimenting with the phenomenon of hypnotic control, with thought transference, with the mystery of communication between minds on the level of pure thought—a thing regarded almost as superstitition on Earth, yet practised to the extent of near-atrophy of speech on Ormazd—devised a method of mechanically amplifying this latent ability in the human mind. The things we call dream machines are nothing more than devices to hook the massive power sources of our contrived world to the projection of thought. Enough of the machines were built to accomodate the Watchers, and the physical patrols were given up. You saw the six ships which stand idle outside our tower."

"No," she said softly. "I saw the things you call ships. But you can't make me believe that all of this is—reality."

Raul turned away from her and spoke softly. "The Leaders planned for five thousand years. They planned well. The structure they built has lasted twice that time. But the Watchers have failed in their purpose. They failed, I suppose, partly because of the long-delayed stagnation of inbreeding, partly because the world in which we have lived is too comfortable. But the main reason was the dream machines. Once the science behind any device is lost, the device itself acquires a mystic significance. Our original dedication has become a primitive religion. What is not understood is called the Law.

"Our original purpose was to insulate the three planet colonies from each other until the time was right to permit a merging. Instead we have become a little colony, shrunken in number, blind to the true purpose of our existence, degenerate in our constant search for sensation through the dreams. At first the machines were properly used. I have no doubt of that. But it has gone on too long. The patrol ships visited this world, this Earth, as recently as eight thousand years ago. They came at a time when mankind on Earth had not yet lost all the science of the home planet.

"A great culture was on the downward path. It disappeared. Now the written records of mankind on Earth only go back a trifle more than two thousand years. Yet, in mythology, there are references to the great creatures that came out of the sky, to the strangers that walked the earth and departed in the bellies of the monstrous things that landed bathed in flame. On world one, called Marith, there are religions based on the ships that last appeared eight thousand years ago. It is only on Ormazd that they know us, remember us, know our purposes, and know how we have deviated from those original aims."

LEESA'S eyes were cold, and she listened with disapproval on her face.

"Original aims indeed!" she said with acid voice.

"In the original Plan we were to help the three colonies. For the past five thousand years we have been an enormous burden. Here on Earth we are known by many different names. Temporary insanity. Epilepsy. Frenzy. Trance. How many are there of us now who are

old enough to be permitted to dream? Over seven hundred. Seven hundred feckless children who can commit acts without fear of consequences. Children holding back the race. Marith is our favorite playground. We've kept them in primitive barbarism by fomenting wars, demanding blood sacrifice, rolling in all manner of excesses. There we are known as devils, as demons, as possession by spirits. Ormazd, alone, is relatively free of our influence because, having understood us, they have been able to defend against us in the only way possible. They would all be well rid of us, Leesa."

In halting voice, she said, "But can't you see, Raul—if I believe what you say, I have to accept moral responsibility for the things I've done. I've done those things because—all of this is too impossible to be real. Everyone knows that." Her voice strengthened. "No, this is a world that doesn't exist. I know that I am on the twentieth level, Raul, and that the glass case of dreams is warm and that I went to sleep with my hand under my cheek. My eyes are closed and I think I am in another world. But I'm there, Raul. There in the case."

"But when we awake we both know of this conversation. You can break that mirror and I can return here tomorrow and find it broken. You can plunge out of that window and come back in two days and find the funeral of the woman whose body you are using."

"That is because the dream machines are always logical in their own way. If they weren't the dreams would not be good. Tomorrow I can be a naked savage girl in a jungle, or a woman leading a burro down a mountain path. Or I can plan to meet with my friends on Marith and we can play the game of identification, or the game of killing, or the game of the chase. No, Raul. No."

Her voice faded. The woman on the bed put her hand to her forehead, looked at him oddly and spoke slowly enough so that even without releasing the host-mind, he understood her. "George, I feel so strange."

Leesa had gone. He knew not in what direction. She had ended the talk in such a way that he could not find her. He let the host-mind take over the maximum amount of control, right on the edge of the fading of vision and hearing which would mean a full release of the host.

"Something wrong with those drinks, maybe. That bartender had a funny look. Maybe it was a mickey. I feel funny too."

The woman lay back on the bed. Raul felt the slow beginning of desire in the host body. The woman smiled up at him. As the man moved toward the bed Raul released the last of his control, faded off into the familiar area where there was no color, no light. Nothing but the strange consciousness of direction.

He slanted downward with a gentle impulse, drifting until he felt the nearby entity, orienting himself to it, gathering it in slowly. Vision came. He was in a taxi. He was late. The host-mind was fogged with alcohol, but the emotions were particularly vivid. Raul read the mind as one might turn the pages of a book. Despair and torment and the desire for death. Hate, fear and envy. But most of all an enormous longing for a sleep that would be endless.

The man paid the driver, walked slowly into a lobby, took the small self-service elevator up to the eighth floor. He unlocked the door and went in. The woman came out of the bedroom with the shining weapon in her hand. She pointed it and shut her eyes. The little hot bits of lead bit warm liquid channels into the host-body—not pain. Just shock and warmness and a sort of melting. The host-brain faded quickly, and as Raul slid away, he caught the last impulse of consciousness. Not satisfaction with the surprise gift of the death that had been desired, but panic and fear and longing for the things of life as yet untasted.

Raul did not find ease of spirit until at last he entered the mind of a man, an old man, who sat in the park, half dozing in the sun. In that mind he waited for the dream to end. . . .

Jord Orlan looked at the girl who sat facing him. He found no pleasure in

looking at her. This Leesa Kinson was too—alive. The heavy mop of black hair was strange—like the dream people, like her brother, Raul. The planes of her face had strength and her lips were too red. He preferred the quieter ones, the smaller, slimmer ones. He did not wonder that it had been necessary to have her brought to him.

"Leesa, the women report to me that you have no children."

"They are right."

"I have found that there is no one you favor."

She smiled. "Or no one who finds me acceptable. Is that what you mean?"

He frowned. "It is not a thing to joke about. It is the Law. Women who are old enough for children will have them if it is at all possible. Too many of the women are barren. It is the duty of all to keep our world populated, Leesa."

"You talk about the Law. Where is the Law? Can I look at it? Can I read it?"

"Reading is a habit in the second world. Not here."

"I can read here. Maybe you should know that. I can read our own language and I can write it."

ORLAN detected the vein of contempt in her tone. "How would you know that?" he asked.

"Raul, my brother, and I can both read. We learned on the high levels a long time ago. He learned first and taught me. Is that against your Law?"

"My Law and yours also, Leesa. Not just mine. No, it is not against the Law. It is just something that is not done because there is no purpose in it. What is the reason for reading? There are the dreams and the food and sleep and the rooms for games. Why read?"

"It is good to know something that others don't, Orlan."

"I find you impertinent."

She shrugged and regarded him steadily. Her gray eyes made him uncomfortable. He said, "The old ways are the best ways. We are more content when we do not diverge from the old ways. You are not happy, Leesa."

"Who is?"

"Most of us are. I am. Life is full. You and Raul are the discontented ones—the strange ones. When I was small there was one like you two. He was contemptuous of the Law. He had a different appearance. And one day he was no longer with us. A woman saw him climb into the oval tube that leads down into blackness. She could not stop him. You must learn more tolerance, Leesa."

She yawned and he knew that it was forced. It made him angry, an emotion he had not experienced in a long time.

An idea began to shape itself. He considered it carefully. "May I go?" she asked.

"No. I am curious about your brother. I have attempted to talk to him many times. No one knows of his dreams. He does not enter into any of the games. I suspect him of neglect of the prime responsibility of the dream. Has he talked to you of—of any matters which could be considered heresy?"

"Would I tell you?"

"I think you might be glad to. I am not vindictive. If his ideas are incorrect I shall attempt to change them. If you refuse to give me any information, I shall order you to favor a man of my own choosing, one who will follow orders. It is within my power to do that. And it is the Law that you shall bear children."

Her lips were compressed. "Orders can be disobeyed."

"And you can be taken to a place on the lowest level and thrust out of this world for failure to disobey an order. I would not care to do that. So tell me what Raul has said to you."

She moved a bit in the chair, not meeting his glance. "He—he has said things that are not right."

"Go on."

"He has said that the three worlds of the dreams actually exist and that what we call dreams are just—a method for us to visit the three real worlds. He says that this world is just a big structure and that it rests on a planet that is like the other three, but colder and older."

Jord Orlan stood up quickly and be-

gan to pace back and forth. "Ah, it is worse than I thought. The boy needs help. Badly. He must be made to see the Truth."

"The Truth as you see it?" she asked gently.

"Do not scoff. What did you say when Raul told you his absurd theories?"

"I told him that I didn't believe him."

"Very good, my child. But now you must go to him and you must pretend to believe what he says. You must encourage him to say more. You must find out what he does, in his dreams. And you must report everything back to me immediately. When we know the full extent of his heresy we will be in a better position to take his hand and lead him to the truth." His voice grew more resonant. He faced her, his arms spread, his face glowing. "Once, when I was young, I doubted too. But as I grew wiser, I found the truth. The entire universe is encompassed within these familiar walls. Outside is the end of all, an unthinkable emptiness. Our minds cannot comprehend utter emptiness. It is a thousand times less than the floating just before you enter the mind of a dream creature. In this universe, this totality, there are nearly one thousand souls. We are the static nub of the universe, the only small place of reality. It has been thus forever, and forever shall be. Now go and do my bidding, Leesa.

As she went to the doorway she remembered what Raul had told her the day before she was first permitted to dream. "If a small living creature is put in a white box before its eyes are open, if it lives out its life in that box, if food and warmth are provided, and if it dies in that box—then, in the moment of death, the little creature can stare at the walls of the box and say 'This is the world.'"

His words had come back to her an uncomfortable number of times.

SHE found Raul on one of the highest levels. The micro-book page at which he stared was incomprehensible to her. He heard the soft sound of her bare feet against the floor and turned, startled.

He smiled. "A long time since you've come up here, Leesa. I haven't seen you since you interrupted our talk."

He clicked off the projector. "What were you looking at?" she asked.

He stood up and stretched cramped limbs. His expression was sour. "At something I'll never understand, I'm afraid. This box contains all of the texts used by the technicians who piloted the Migration ships. I only found them by accident. I could look for the rest of my life and not find the intermediary texts. The science is beyond me. In the old days it was beyond any individual man too. They were organized into work teams and research teams. Each man handled one facet of a particular problem and all of the work was coordinated through the use of integral calculators. But maybe I can—" He stopped suddenly.

She sat in one of the other chairs. "Maybe I can find out enough so that I can handle one of the patrol ships. I know the interior details of the ships now."

"What good would that be?"

"I could go to one of the three worlds. I could take some of them onto the ship and bring them back here and bring them into this tower and show them to Orlan and the others. Then they'd stop this childish babbling about the Law, and about this being the only true reality. There are men on Earth who could look at a patrol ship, one man in particular who could learn much from one, so that even if I were unable to return, he would be able to . . . I talk too much."

"Maybe I find it interesting."

"You didn't a short time ago."

"Couldn't I have thought it over?" she said, pouting.

There was excitement in his tone. "Leesa! Are you beginning to see what I've seen for so long?"

"Why not? Maybe I could help you."

He frowned. "You might, at that. I'd about given up hope of ever converting you. Never mind. I guess I should trust you." He looked directly into her eyes.

"Do you understand now that you've spent six years smashing the lives of people who actually exist, who exist and go about their affairs while we're talking here? Do you believe that?"

She held the chair arms tightly. "Yes," she said, as calmly as she could.

"I told you that we've outlived our purpose. If nothing were done we'd eventually disappear, but we'd go on and on, striking like random lightning into the lives of men until the very end, making public figures do dangerous and incomprehensible things, making obscure little men and women commit acts that baffle the courts, confound their friends and ruin their lives. I am going to put an end to it."

"How, Raul?"

"Marith is too primitive for space travel—Ormazd too concerned with the human mind to be mechanistic. Earth is my hope. There is a man there who is in charge of a project to build a space ship which is oddly like those I showed you from the window. Since so many odd accidents—which we can explain and they can't—have happened to all previous attempts, this one is being handled with the greatest secrecy. With eleven billion host minds to choose from, roughly, the less than eight hundred Watchers are unlikely to uncover this project, even though it is in an area where we have ruined previous projects.

"I am trying to protect that project and I am trying to get into more direct contact with a man named Bard Lane who is in charge. I want to explain what has happened to previous projects and assure him of my desire to help, and warn him against what one of us might do while dreaming.

"Not long ago someone stumbled across the project, possessed one of the technicians and spoiled months of work. I haven't been able to find out who it was. They haven't been back, but they may come back. I can't go and talk to the others. It would arouse suspicion, because it would be something I haven't done in years. But you might be able to find out."

"And if I should find out?"

"Tell him that the project has been utterly destroyed, that you did it, so he or she won't come back. In order to do that convincingly, you should take a look at the situation. But before I tell you exactly how to get there, you must promise me that you won't do anything to interfere. Do you promise?"

"I do." But in her thoughts she said, "Not the first visit, Raul."

CHAPTER VIII

Into Two Minds

WEARILY Sharan Inly sat with her elbows on her desk, her hands palmed across her eyes, her fingernails digging into her forehead at the scalp line. She wished with all her heart that she had become a stenographer, or a happy little housewife or a—a welder. Anything but this damnable, thankless, revolting job.

"I hope you've got an explanation," Bard Lane said. His voice was angry. She looked up as he came into her office.

"Shut the door and sit down, Dr. Lane," she said with a tired smile.

He sat down. His face had a drawn look. "Hang it, Sharan, my desk is piled high. Adamson wants to see me. People are waiting in the conference room. I know that the operating regulations give you the right to get anybody over here at any time, but up until now you've been pretty considerate. Please get this over quickly, whatever it is."

"How did you sleep last night?"

He stood up. His voice was dangerously calm. "Now look! If you think that I came dashing over here for a health questionnaire, Dr. Inly, you're wrong."

Her voice sharpened. "I'm hired to do a job and I'm doing it. The quicker you cooperate, Bard, the sooner it will be over. Sit down and answer the question."

Lane sat down slowly. "You sound

like you have a good reason for all this mystery. Last night I slept all right. I woke up this morning feeling bushed. The sleep didn't seem to do much good."

"What time did you get to bed?"

"A little before midnight. I got up at seven."

"Thomas Bellinger, on the twelve to four trick, saw you go into your office at two o'clock in the morning."

Lane gasped. "The man's mad! No! Wait a minute. Somebody could plant here a man who looks like me. Have you alerted all guards?"

She slowly shook her head. Her eyes were sad. "No, Bard. That won't work. You passed the full test series with flying colors just this week, but it still won't work. You noticed that Bess Reilly wasn't in your office this morning?"

He frowned. "She's sick today. She phoned from her quarters."

"She phoned from here, Bard. I asked her to. Bess was a little behind in her work. She went in early this morning. She went into your office and took yesterday's tape off the dictation machine and took it out to her desk to transcribe it. When she started to listen to it, she thought you were playing some sort of a joke. She listened some more and it frightened her. She very properly brought it directly to me. I've been over it twice. Would you care to hear it?"

He said softly, "Dictation! A funny nightmare is coming back to me, Sharan. Silly thing, like most of them are. It seems I had something that I had to get down before it went out of my mind. So I dreamed!"

"Then you walked in your sleep, Bard. Listen to what you said."

She moved the small speaker closer to his chair, depressed the switch on the playback machine.

It was unmistakably Bard Lane's voice. "Dr. Lane. I am taking this method of communicating with you. Do not be alarmed and do not doubt me. I am physically nearly four and a half light years from you at this moment. But I have projected my thoughts into your mind and I have taken over your body to serve the purpose of the moment. My name is Raul Kinson and I have been watching your project for some time. I am anxious for it to succeed, as it is your world's only chance to free itself from those of us whose visitations are unprincipled, who only want to destroy. I do not want to destroy. I want to help you create.

"But there are dangers that I can warn you about, dangers which you do not, as yet, understand. Take warning from what happened when your technician, Kornal, was seized by one of us. We are the survivors on your parent planet. I do not wish to tell you too much at this moment. Be assured that my intentions are friendly. Do not be alarmed. Do not fall into the logical error of assuming that this is an indication of mental unbalance. I will attempt to communicate with you in a more direct manner a bit later. Hear me out when I do."

Sharan clicked the switch to the off position. "You see?" she said softly. "The same delusion as before. This is just a further refinement of it. I'm both glad and sorry that Miss Reilly brought it to me. But there it is, Bard. Now do you think I should have sent for you?"

"Of course," he whispered. "Of course."

"What am I to do?" Sharan asked.

"Do your job," he said. His mouth was a hard, bloodless line.

Her voice was dispassionate, but her hand trembled as she handed him the note previously prepared. "This will admit you for observation. I see no need to assign an orderly to you while you pack what you'll need. I'll advise Adamson that he's acting chief until you're replaced."

He took the note and left her office without a word. After he closed the door softly behind him, she buried her face in the crook of her arm, her shoulders hunched over the desk. She pounded gently on the desk top with her clenched left fist. . . .

BARD LANE walked from the lounge into his room at the end of the cor-

ridor. He wore the beltless bathrobe they had issued to him, the soft plastic slippers. He lay on the bed and tried to read the magazine he had carried in from the lounge. It was a news digest, and seemed to contain nothing except hollow-sounding absurdities.

New Navy sub successfully withstands the pressure at the deepest point of the Pacific. Mello Noonan, creamy-tressed star of video, lands her heli-cycle on the observation deck of the new Stanson Building, smilingly pays the forty-dollar fine. Russians, through careful research, prove that man first walked erect at a spot fourteen miles east of present-day Stalingrad. 'Teen age girls in Houston set new fad by shaving their heads and painting them green. When they meet on the street they doff shoes and "shake hands" with their feet.

Memphis musician brains girl friend with tuba. Widow in Victoria, Texas, claims to be receiving messages from long-dead Valentino. Georgia ax killer claims, at trial, that he was "possessed," accusing mother-in-law of putting the evil eye on him. Injunctions issued against further use of new Reno slot machines which provide divorce papers for a three-dollar fee. Doctors unable to bring nine-year-old twins in Daytona out of trance caused by forty-one hours spent in front of their home video screen. Vote fraud in North Dakota . . . dope ring indicted . . . gambling ship sunk . . . bride leaves third grade . . . multiple murder . . . drives car into shoppers . . . jumps from eighty-third floor . . . minister fires church . . . dresses four inches shorter next year . . . curb service vice . . . hate . . . fear . . . anger . . . envy . . . lust . . .

He lay back on the bed. The magazine slipped to the floor, landing with the dry sound of a dead winged thing. Madness in the world. Madness tolling in his mind like a huge cracked bell in a forgotten tower, a bell swayed by the unknown winds. He shut his hands hard, squeezed his eyes shut and felt his soul as a fading focal point of certainty in this alien body, in this body of webbed nerves, muscle fibre, convoluted brain.

He knew that any idea of plan or order in this mad world was pure delusion, that man was a tiny creature, knotted with the most deadly instincts, that he could look at the stars, but never attain them. In the back of his mind he stood at the edge of a distorted cliff, leaning toward the darkness. So easy to fall, to drop downward with a scream so vast and so solid that it would be as a smooth silver column inserted slickly in his throat. He would fall with his head tilted back, his lips drawn wide, with white-rimmed irises, with long tortured spasms that—

The bed moved. He opened his eyes. The little blonde nurse from the lounge sat on the end of his bed. The stiff starched uniform had a bold life of its own, as though, inside it, tender body recoiled from any touch against its harshness. The temple veins were violet tracery against the luminescent skin. Her large eyes were blue-purple glass beads from a costume jewelry counter.

"As bad as that, Bard Lane?" she said.

He frowned. Nurses were not supposed to sit on patients' beds. Nurses did not speak with such casual informality. Possibly in the psych ward the nurses had special leniency from the rigid rules applying to those who nursed more obvious wounds.

"Maybe I can do a soft-shoe dance to show how gay I am," he said.

"He didn't tell me about you. I thought I'd take a look while he's getting you out of here. Of course, he might not approve."

"Who are you talking about, Nurse? And what didn't he tell you, whoever he is?"

"Nurse is so formal. My name is Leesa."

"Very odd name. And you seem like an odd girl. I don't follow you very well, Leesa."

"I don't imagine that you'll be able to, Bard Lane. Actually I was talking about Raul, my brother, if that means anything. Raul Kinson."

Lane sat up, his face flushed with anger. "Nurse, I'm not so far gone that I'm going to stand still for any half-

baked experiments. Go on back to Sharan and tell her that it didn't work. I'm still rational."

The nurse tilted her blond head to one side and smiled. "I like you when you're angry, Bard Lane. So fierce! Anyway, Raul is sorry that he got you into this mess by being too anxious to get into communication with you. Now he's trying to straighten things out for you. Poor Raul! He thinks that you actually exist. All of you people are so obsessed with the idea of your own reality. It gets tiresome."

Bard stared at her. He said slowly, "Nurse, this is just friendly advice from a patient. Why don't you go to Dr. Inly and ask to have the standard series? You know, when a person works around mental imbalance for a long time, it sometimes affects them."

HER laugh was raw gold, and oddly sane. "Goodness! So solemn and so kindly! In a minute you'll be patting me on top of the head and kissing my forehead."

"Is this approach of yours supposed to help me, Nurse?"

She became serious. "Listen to me. You're just part of an unpleasant and rather dull dream as far as I'm concerned. Raul seems to get a certain amount of amusement out of fooling himself about you. I wanted to see what you looked like. He seems very impressed with you. But I don't have to be. I—"

A stocky woman in white appeared in the open doorway. She scowled. "Anderson! What is the meaning of this? Number Seventeen has been signaling for the last ten minutes. I've been trying to find you. And you know better than to sit on a patient's bed. I'm sorry this happened, Dr. Lane."

The little blond nurse gave the supervisor a solemn wink. She slid up toward the head of the bed, curled a soft arm around Lane's neck and kissed him firmly and warmly on the lips. The supervisor gasped.

The little blond nurse straightened up. Slowly a look of horror came over her face. She jumped to her feet, holding her hands at her breast, twisting and straining her fingers until her knuckles cracked.

"I demand an explanation, Anderson," the supervisor said ominously.

"I—I—" Two tears spilled over her lower eyelids and ran down her cheeks. She backed away from the bed.

"I think Leesa is a little upset," Bard said.

His tone was placating.

"Her name is Elinor," the supervisor said crisply.

The nurse turned and fled. The supervisor sighed. "More trouble. I'm shorthanded, and now I'll have to send her up for tests."

She plodded dejectedly out of the room . . . .

* * * * *

Sharan Inly was staring at Major Tommy Leeber. His smooth, jocular voice was just the same, his oval face kindly, his eyes jet-hard. But his words made Sharan feel a distant thunder in her ears, a weakness that was like the lethargy that came over one before a dead faint.

"Is this some sort of stupid joke, Major?"

"I'll start from the beginning again, Dr. Inly. I made a mistake. But you made one also. My name is Raul Kinson. For the moment I am using the body of this man named Leeber. That shouldn't be too difficult to accept as a basic premise. I used Lane's body and sent him a message. Both you and Lane apparently jumped to the conclusion that he is mentally unsound."

"I think General Sachson would like to have Lane and myself off the project, Major Leeber. I don't care for your way of trying to eliminate me."

"Please, Dr. Inly. There must be some test we can make. Perhaps I could repeat the message that I left for Lane to find?"

"Bess Reilly could have told you the message."

"I don't know who she is, but please have her come in and ask her," he requested earnestly.

They waited. Bess Reilly arrived within a few moments. She was a very tall girl, angular and without beauty, except for her eyes, sea-green, long-lashed, expressive.

"Bess, have you spoken to anyone about that dictation tape on Dr. Lane's machine?"

Bess lifted her chin a fraction of an inch. "Dr. Inly, you told me not to tell anyone. And I didn't! I'm not that sort."

"Have you talked to Major Leeber today?"

"I saw him once yesterday for the first time. I've never spoken to him."

Sharan gave the girl a long, steady look. "Thank you, Bess. You may go."

The door closed behind her. She turned to Major Leeber. "Now tell me what the tape said."

Leeber repeated it. In two places he made minor changes in sentence structure, but the rest of it was completely accurate. There was a calmness and a confidence about him that disturbed her.

She said, "Major, or Raul Kinson, or whoever you are—I—this is something that I can't bring myself to believe. This idea of taking over other people. This idea of coming from some alien planet. There are cases on record where persons have repeated the contents of sealed envelopes. You'll have to do better."

"Bard Lane has to be put back in charge," Raul said. "I am going to have to frighten you, Dr. Inly. But it will be the best proof I can give you. Without attempting to explain how, I am going to vacate this host brain and enter your brain. In the process, Major Leeber will revert to complete consciousness. But he won't remember very much of what has gone on. I will use your voice to get rid of him."

SHARAN'S smile felt as though it had been painted across her lips with a stiff brush. "Oh, come now!"

She sat with her palms pressed flat and hard against the cool desk top. The idea, in spite of its preposterousness, gave her an odd feeling of shame, as though an alien invasion of her mind would be a violation more basic than any physical relationship could ever be. Her mind had been a temple, a place of refuge, a place of secret thoughts, some of them so abandoned as to cause, in someone without her knowledge of psychiatry, a sense of guilt. To have these secret places laid bare would be—like walking naked through the streets of a city.

She saw the shock on Leeber's face, his confused look around the office, the way he rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth. And then she had no more time to watch Leeber. She felt the probe of unseen tendrils. She felt their softness. She tried to resist. Memory fled back to a time years before. A slushy day in a northern city. She had been playing in the gutter with the boy from next door. The water from the melting snow ran swiftly down the slope. They had built dams out of snow to contain it. But it would not be contained. It snaked around the dams, ate through them, thrusting always forward with gentle inevitability.

She moved back and back, seeking a last defensive point. And suddenly there was the sensation of the entire entity within her brain, adjusting itself to the familiar neutral pattern, settling itself in a way that was oddly like the manner in which a dog, before sleeping, will turn around and around.

Words had always been planned a few seconds in advance. Her lips parted and the knowledge of the meaning of her words was simultaneous with the utterance of the words themselves.

"The sun is bad here, Major. It has made you a little dizzy. Drink a lot of water today and take salt tablets. You can get them at the dispensary. Stay out of the sun and you'll be all right by morning."

Leeber stood up. "Uh—thanks," he said. He paused at the door, looked back at her with a puzzled expression, shook his head and went out.

The thought came to her. It was not written out inside her mind. It was not expressed in words, and yet the words formed to match the thought. "Now

you understand? Now you believe? I will relax controls. To communicate with me, speak aloud."

"I've gone mad!"

"That is what the others think. No. No, you're not insane, Sharan. Watch your hand."

She looked down. Her hand reached out and took a pencil. It moved over toward the scratch pad. Without volition, she wrote her own name. "Sharan." And then the room dimmed and faded and she knew nothing. As sight came back she saw that she had written another word under her own name. At least she imagined that it was a word.

"Yes, a word, Sharan. Your name in my own writing. I had to force you far back away from the threshold of consciousness in order to write it."

It was written with bolder strokes than her own handwriting. It looked as Arabic might look if written with cursive rather than individual word signs.

"Mad, mad, mad," she said aloud.

Anger in her mind. Alien anger. "No. Don't be a fool! Believe! Wait, Sharan. I'll find your thoughts and your beliefs. I'll learn all there is to know of you, Sharan."

"No," she said.

She sat rigid, and tiny soft combs moved through all parts of her mind. Memory came to her, days long passed, hopelessly cluttered and out of sequence. The music at her mother's funeral. A passage from her doctor's thesis. A man's insistent lips. The song she wrote once. Discontent. Pride in her profession. Endless minutes and she felt as though she were pinned flat on a specimen board.

"Now I know you, Sharan. I know you well. Now do you believe?"

"Mad."

No more anger. Resignation. Fading. Gone—dwindling slowly away, a song half heard in the far sweet dusk of summer.

She sat alone. She pulled open a drawer, took out one of the slips like the one she had given to Bard Lane. She started to fill it in. Name. Symptom. Partial diagnosis. Prognosis.

The door opened and Jerry Delane, the young dispensary doctor, came in. She frowned at him and said, "Isn't it customary to knock, Dr. Delane?"

He sat down facing her across the desk. He said, "I told you that I would leave Leeber's mind and enter yours, and I did. Of course you can call me a phantasy your sick mind has dreamed up, so I'll give you physical proof." He pulled her dictating machine toward him, set the switch, smiled at her and spoke into it. "Phantasies cannot record their words, Sharan."

To Sharan, all light seemed to fade in the room with the exception of the light around his smiling mouth. It seemed to grow larger, rushing toward her, overpoweringly large. And then it was as though she were moving swiftly toward the smile—roaring down a tunnel toward the white even teeth, the murderous redness of the lips!

CHAPTER IX

Raul Speaks

NEXT she was on the leather couch and he was kneeling beside her. He held a cold wet compress against the left side of her forehead. His eyes were tender.

"What happened?"

"You fainted and fell. You toppled against the edge of the file cabinet."

She frowned. "I—I think I'm ill, Jerry. I had odd thoughts—delusions."

He stilled her words with a gentle finger against her lips. "Sharan, please. I want you to believe me. I am Raul Kinson. You must believe me."

She stared at him. Slowly she pushed the hand away from her forehead. She walked to the desk, wavering slightly. She switched the dictation machine to play back, set it a fraction ahead. The voice, thin and metallic, said, 'Phantasies cannot record their words, Sharan."

She turned and faced him. In a dead voice she said, "I believe you now. There

is no choice, is there? No choice at all."

"No choice. Release Bard Lane. Get him over here. The three of us will talk."

They sat and waited for Bard Lane. Raul said softly, "Odd, odd."

"You can use that word?"

"I was thinking of your mind, Sharan. I have avoided the minds of women. They have all had a shifting, unfocused, intuitive pattern. Not your mind, Sharan. Every facet and phase seemed—familiar to me. As though I have always known you. As though your every emotional response to any situation would be the feminine parallel of my own reaction."

She looked away from him. "You haven't left me much privacy, you know."

"Is privacy necessary? I know of a world where words are not used. Where a man and a woman, mated, can dwell within each other's minds at will. They have true closeness, Sharan. In your mind I found—another reason for making certain that this project succeeds."

She felt annoyance as the flush made her cheeks feel warm. "This is a brand new approach," she said with acid tone. "Maybe you'd like to fingerprint me too."

Bess Reilly came in. She slammed the door, yawned, hitched her bony hips onto the edge of the desk. She grinned at Jerry and said lazily, "Time's running short, Raul. And I can't say I'm sorry. You don't have much fun in your dreams, do you? I've had to change hosts forty times to find you again."

"I felt you near a few moments ago," Raul said. He turned to Sharan. "I present my sister, Leesa Kinson."

Sharan looked blankly at Bess Reilly's familiar face. Bess stared at her. She said, "Does she believe you, Raul?"

"Yes, she does."

"It gives me a funny feeling to have one of them understand how it is with us. I never had it happen before. Once, for a gag, I tried to make a man understand who I was when I invaded the body of his bride. It took him just about an hour and a half to go crazy. I haven't tried since. That is, until today. I took over a little blond nurse and tried to introduce myself to your friend, Bard Lane. He got a bit confused. Are you in any danger of going crazy, girl?"

"Yes," Sharan said. "If this keeps up."

Bess laughed. "Don't take yourself too seriously."

Bard Lane came in slowly and shut the door behind him. He glanced curiously at Jerry Delane and Bess Reilly. He addressed himself to Sharan. "You sent for me."

"This is your old friend, Leesa," Bess said. "How did the little nurse act after I moved away from her?"

Sharan saw the color leave Bard's face. She spoke hurriedly. "Bard, we were wrong. Just believe me. They've proved it to me. It is impossible, I know. But it's true. Some sort of long range hypnosis, I guess. But there is a Raul Kinson. He had—he is using Jerry Delane's body. He wants to talk to us. And his sister, Leesa, is—Bess is Leesa. Jerry and Bess won't remember what has happened. That recording you made. Everything is true, Bard. I think one moment I've gone mad and the next moment I know it's the truth."

Bard Lane dropped heavily into a chair and held his hand across his eyes. No one spoke. When at last he looked up, his expression was bleak. He stared at Jerry. "What is this that you have to say to me?"

Speaking slowly, pausing at times, Raul Kinson told of the Watchers, the Leaders, the Migrations, the Dream Machines, and of the perversion, over fifty centuries, of what had once been a logical Plan. He told of the one Law which governed all of those who dreamed.

BESS sat on the edge of the desk, a bored look on her face.

Bard looked down at the knuckles of his clenched fist. "And so," he said softly, "if we can believe you, you give us the answer to why, with most of the techniques under control, every attempt to conquer space has been a miserable failure."

There was no answer. He looked up. Jerry Delane stood with an odd expres-

sion on his face. "What am I doing in here? How did I get in here?"

Bess slid quickly off the desk. "Did you call me, Dr. Inly?" she asked in a shrill frightened voice.

Sharan forced a smile. "The conference is over, kids. You can go. You will stay, Bard?"

Jerry and Bess left the office.

"Have we gone mad?" Bard asked.

"There is no such thing as shared delusion, mutual phantasy, Bard," Sharan said in a tired voice. "And either you are still in the ward and all this is taking place in your mind or else I have gone off completely and I only magine you are here. Or, what seems the most difficult of all—it is all true." She stood up. "Think, Bard! If I close my mind to this thing, it means that my mind is too little and too petty to encompass it. But try—just try—to swallow this tale of alien worlds, Leaders, Migrations. No, it won't wash. I have a better idea."

"Which I will be delighted to hear."

"Sabotage. A new and very clever variety. Some of our friends on the other side of this world have managed to develop hypnotic technique to a new level of efficiency. Maybe they use some form of mechanical amplification. They are trying to discredit us if they can't drive us mad. That has to be it."

Lane frowned. "If their technique is that good, why do it the hard way? Why not just take over Adamson and Bill Kornal and a few other key men and have them spend a few hours damaging the *Beatty I?*"

"You forget. They already have taken over Kornal. It gave them a few months of grace. Now they're experimenting. Maybe they will try to talk us into leaving here and going to another country. You can't tell what they have in mind. Bard, the one who calls himself Raul Kinson warned me that he was going to enter my mind. And then he did. It was —degrading and horrible. We've got to get in touch with our own people who might know something about this. Maybe some of the ESP men. And then there's Lurdorff. He's done some amazing things with hypnosis. Hemorrhage control. That sort of thing. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I'm trying to picture just how you'd state the problem without ending up on the receiving end of some fancy shock therapy, Sharan."

She sat down slowly. "You're right," she said. "There's no way we can warn them. No way in the world."

* * * * *

Jord Orlan met Leesa in the corridor as he was returning from the nearest depilatory room. He looked away from her quickly. She said, shortening her stride to match his, "It's perfectly all right. He's gone up to one of the higher levels."

He stepped aside and let her precede him into his quarters. She sat down immediately. He frowned. The respectful ones waited to be asked.

"I have been expecting a report."

"And I expect to give you one. It worked the way you thought it might. I almost wish Raul were more suspicious. He trusts me too much. He believed right away that I'd had a change of heart. I've had to pretend to be very contrite for all the damage I've caused his precious little dream people he thinks are actually alive."

Orlan forgot his annoyance. "Good, my child. Very good! And have you shared his dreams?"

"Yes. He explained how he managed to find a space ship project by searching the mind of a certain colonel. I went to the project with him. He seems proud of what they're doing. He wants to protect the project against—us."

"Once upon a time I thought that after I was finished here, Raul might be the one to succeed me. . . . But no matter. Continue."

"The project has been delayed because one of us stumbled on it and caused a technician to smash a great deal of equipment. Raul wants to prevent that happening again."

"He does, eh? Tell me the location. Some of our people will be familiar with the area. We will finish the project for good."

Leesa smiled. "And spoil my game? No, Orlan. Leesa reserves that pleasure for herself. Believe me, I can do all that is necessary. I've met the man in charge."

HER face changed and she reached up and touched her lips with her fingertips. She looked faintly startled.

"What is it, my child?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. I—I don't believe I want to talk about it any more. I'll report back when the project is smashed."

"You remember the Law. Keep it in mind. If we fail, it will mean an end to the dreams."

As she reached the doorway he called to her. She turned and looked at him. He said, "I would consider it a personal favor, Leesa, if you would seek out Ryd Talleth. Be pleasant to him. I have asked among the men. He is the one most inclined to favor you—but he will need encouragement."

"He is a fool!" Her mouth had an angry twist. "And you promised that if I did as you asked, you would not force me into any union."

"No one is forcing you. It is merely a suggestion," he said.

She walked away without answering him. She was restless. She walked down to the corridor lined with the small rooms for games. She stood in the doorway of one of them. Three women, so young that their heads still bore the thinning shadow of their dusty hair, pursued a squat and agile old man who dodged with catlike reflexes. They shrieked with laughter. He wore a wide grin. She saw his game. He favored one and it was his purpose to allow her to make the capture, even though the others were quicker. At last she caught him, her hands fast on the shoulder-piece of the toga. The others were disconsolate. As they filed out of the room, leaving the two alone, Leesa turned away also. Once again she touched her lips and she thought of a man's heavy hands, square and bronzed against the whiteness of a hospital bed.

The next few rooms were empty. The following room was one with light controls. A mixed group were performing a stylized dance. They had turned the lights to blood red. It was a slow dance, with measured pauses. She thought of joining, but she knew that in some inexplicable way, her entrance would set up a tension that would remove some of their pleasure.

Restlessness was in her like a slow spreading rot. On the next level she heard the sound of the small ones crying. She went and looked at them. Always, before, she had found a small, odd pleasure in watching their unformed movements. She looked at them and their faces were like so many identical ciphers—circles of emptiness, signifying nothing.

She rode up to where the tracks no longer moved. She went halfway up to the twenty-first level, then dropped and curled like a child. She covered her face with her hands and wept. She did not know why she was weeping.

CHAPTER X

Disaster

MAJOR LEEBER cut diagonally across the street to intercept Bard Lane outside the mess hall. Leeber's smile sat stiffly on his lips and his eyes were narrowed. "Got a minute, Doc?"

Bard turned calmly and waited for him. "What is it?"

"According to the records, Dr. Lane, my loyalty check was okay and my brain passed all Sharan's witch doctor tests. How about these two shadows I've picked up?"

A guard stood respectfully a few paces behind Bard Lane. Two more stood the same distance behind Major Leeber.

"New operating instructions," Bard said. His face was impassive.

"These guys bother me. How about taking them off?"

"I can't do it, Leeber."

Leeber pursed his lips. He seemed to be holding himself under control by great effort. "Then be so kind as to tell me why I'm so honored."

"If you'd look around, Major, you'd find that everybody who has access to fabrication zones has the same problem. You will notice that I have a guard too. We're in a critical phase. If you start acting irrational, you'll be grabbed and held until you can be examined. Me too. As a matter of fact, you have it easier with two. Part of my job is to watch the guard while he watches me. We're using this method as a defense against temporary insanity that might not have been a part of Dr. Inly's prognosis."

"How do I get rid of these guys?"

"Leave the project area. More guards are reporting as fast as they can be recruited and checked. That's why the new barracks were started yesterday. They'll be ready for occupancy this afternoon. Just rest assured, Major, that no exception is being made in your case. You aren't being singled out."

"It seems like overdoing it, to me."

Bard shrugged. "If you care to make a formal complaint to Sachson and if he directs me to take off the guards and if a situation like the Kornal one should happen again, both you and the general will have to share the blame, Major."

Leeber scuffed the dust with the edge of his shoe. He grinned. "I had it all set to take a walk tonight with a little dolly who works a computor in the chem. lab. Guess I better take her out of the area, eh?"

"Either that or there'll be four of you. Five, when you count the guard assigned to her. A female guard."

Leeber shrugged, gave a mock salute, and sauntered away.

Bard Lane went into the mess hall. He took one of the small tables against the wall where he could be alone. He was lifting the glass of tomato juice to his lips when he felt the familiar pressure against his mind. He made no attempt to fight it. He held the glass poised in mid-air, then raised it to his lips. The sensation in his mind made him remember the first science courses he had taken in college. A hot afternoon, when he stared into the microscope, delicately adjusted the binocular vision until the tiny creatures in the droplet of swamp water had seemed to leap at him. There had been one with a fringe of long cilia. It had slowly enfolded a smaller, more globular organism, merging with it, digesting it as he watched. He had long remembered the silent, microscopic ferocity, the instinctive ruthlessness of that struggle.

And now his mind was slowly devoured while he sat calmly drinking the juice. He replaced the glass in the saucer. To the onlooker he was Dr. Bard Lane—the boss—the chief—the "old man." But he knew that as far as free will was concerned he had ceased to be Bard Lane.

The alien prescience was quickly interlaced through his engram structure, much as a bobbin might shuttle back and forth in a textile machine. He sensed the fingering of his thoughts.

His new familiarity with the reception of the thoughts of the alien made those thoughts as clear as though they had been softly whispered in his ear.

"No, Bard Lane. No. You and Sharan Inly have come to the wrong conclusion. We are not of this planet. This is not a clever device to trick you. We are friendly to your purpose. I am glad to see that you have taken the precautions that were suggested wherever there is the slightest doubt. Any faint peculiarity—any unexpected word or movement—will be the basis on which to move. Delay may be fatal."

BARD made his thought as clear as he could by mentally thinking each word, mentally underlining each syllable. "How do we know you're friendly?"

"You can't know. There's no way of proving it to you. All I can say is that our ancestors of twelve thousand years ago are mutual. I told you about the Plan. The Plan is failing because the people here in my world have forgotten the original purpose. One world—Mar-

ith—lives in barbaric savagery. Another—Ormazd—has found the key to the search for happiness on your planet. We are inbred and decadent. Your project is hope for mankind."

"What are your motives?"

There was a silence in his mind. "If I am to be honest with you, Bard Lane, I must mention boredom, the desire for change, the wish to do important things. And now there is another reason."

"What?"

Their sympathetic emotional structure had been so carefully interleafed that Bard Lane was disconcerted to feel the hot blush on his cheeks and neck. "I want to be able to meet Sharan face to face. I want to touch her hand with mine, not with the hand of someone whom I could inhabit."

The thought broke hurriedly to other matters. "I have wondered if there is any way that I can give you technical help. I do not understand the formulae behind the operation of your ship. All I know is that propulsion is dependent on alternating frames of temporal reference. That is the same formula that was used for our ships long, long ago. As I told you, six of them stand outside our world. I have discovered micro-book operation manuals, but they are beyond me. I could memorize wiring charts and control panels and then, using your hand, draw them for you."

"There are problems we haven't licked yet. You could try to do that."

"What should I look for?"

"The manner in which astrogation charts were coordinated with the time jump. Our astronomers and mathematical physicists believe, at this point, that once the jump is made, it will take weeks to make observations and re-orient the ship. They are working on some method which will extend the time jump as a hypothetical line through space from the starting point to the new time frame. Then the coordinates of that hypothetical line, using opposed galaxies as reference points, would eliminate starting from scratch on orientation in the new position. Do you follow that?"

"Yes. I will see if I can find out how it was done in the past."

The guard took a firm grasp of Bard Lane's arm just above the elbow. His expression was respectful, but his hand was like iron. "Sir, you were talking to yourself."

The alien prescience slid off to a spectator's corner of Bard's mind.

Dr. Lane smiled up at the guard. "I'm glad you're alert, Robinson. I am doing some practise dictation on an important letter I have to write after lunch."

The guard looked uncertain. Bard put his napkin beside his plate. "I'll be glad to go along to Dr. Inly's office, Robinson."

"Okay, sir. I—I guess it isn't necessary, but the order you issued was pretty strict, you know. I think you'd better come along."

Heads turned as they walked out of the mess hall together. Bard heard the buzz of conversation as the doors swung shut behind them.

The sunlight was like the blow of a golden fist. They went down the street toward Sharan's office.

They heard the sound then.

Distant thunder. Muted thunder, rolling softly. The glare hit in at the corner of Dr. Lane's eyes. He twisted away from the guard. He stood, and as the noise of thunder grew louder, he screamed. The guard standing at his elbow couldn't hear him. The *Beatty I* thrust up against its harsh tent. The white glare licked out, brighter than the sun, and the tent curled and dissolved at the edges, orange flame colorless.

It lifted slowly higher, the blunt snout shaping the tent, lifting it free of the four steel towers. The base of one tower, softened by the heat-lick, settled and the tower leaned slowly toward the north, not gathering speed, just slowly bending over to lie gently against the ground. The steel of the elevator frame was puddled at the base, but it stood erect. As the lift flame crept higher, a tiny figure jumped from the high elevator, dropping down into the flame, crisping even before it touched the flame itself.

The white gouting base of the *Beatty I* was as high as the tips of the three towers still standing. The thunder was lifting up through octave after octave as the speed of the *Beatty I* increased. A great flap of burning fabric fluttered down. The rest of the fabric slid off and the silvery length of the ship, a mirror in the sun, was revealed. Even with the dispair that filled his heart, the horror and the great shock of failure, Bard Lane felt and recognized the strong sense of awe at the sheer beauty of the ship.

A TINY figure toppled from the high open port. The ship had moved just enough off the perpendicular so that the top figure came down, not spinning, motionless in the sun-hot air, toward the street of the village. It hit in the dust, bursting work clothes, rebounding eighteen inches to lie still, a jellied, grotesque thing.

The hard roar changed to shrillness and the *Beatty I* winked high in the sun. High and higher. Vapor trail. And higher. Then slowly canting over, as he knew it would do without the 20 mohs stability plates which had not yet been installed in the A-6 jet flow. It made a bright white line against the impossible blue of the sky, an arc, a parabola, as neat as any inscribed on graph paper. A line up to a peak and a line down.

The shrillness was a scream that tore at the inner ear. A line down to the earth. He saw the flare and guessed the distance at fifteen to twenty miles, due south. The scream still continued after the explosion flare had filled half the sky, then stopped abruptly. The air pushed hard against them, then the earth shook as though a truck were going by. At last came the guttural crack boom of the explosion. And silence. Brown cloud lifting in mushroom shape toward the blue sky. A bit of the vapor trail was still high in the sky, wavering off in the prevailing wind.

Bard Lane took two steps to the curb, and sat down and held his face in his hands. Nearby a wooden building crackled as the flames bit into it. The project fire engine screamed to a stop, its siren sound ridiculous in comparison to the memory of the scream of the dying *Beatty I*—a mosquito trying to outshout an eagle. Somebody rested a steady hand on Bard Lane's shoulder. He looked up and saw the stolid, seamed face of Adamson. Tears had cut channels in the dust on his cheeks.

"Nick, it's awful!"

Adamson's voice was gruff. "I'll take an emergency crew down and see what she did when she hit. If we're lucky, she'll be five miles from the village. Better go get on the radio, Bard, and give the word. Then I think you ought to make an announcement over the PA." Adamson walked solidly off.

Bard Lane walked to his office. The guard had voluntarily given up his assignment. The project personnel stood in the street. Not large groups. Two or three or four. Low voices. Long silences. They glanced quickly at him and then away. He went through the outer office. Bess Reilly sat at her desk. She sat with her forehead against the top of her typewriter. Her bony shoulders shook and she made no sound.

After he advised Sachson and Washington by coded wire, he obtained a clear circuit over the PA for every amplifier in the area.

He spoke slowly, "This is Lane. We don't know what happened. We may never know who or what was responsible. You will be wondering about your jobs. I doubt very much whether we will be given a second chance. By the day after tomorrow we'll have the checks ready for termination pay for most of you. Certain clerical, stock record and lab employees will be retained for a time. A list of those who will be needed will be posted on the bulletin board tomorrow afternoon. One thing. Don't ever feel that because of what just happened, all of what we have done is wasted. We learned things. If we're not given a chance to use them, someone else will, sooner or later. They will learn from the mistakes we made.

"All employees will please proceed immediately to the time clocks and remove

their time cards. Turn them in to Mr. Nolan. Mr. Nolan, after there has been time for all cards to be picked up, send someone to gather up the unclaimed ones. That's the only way, I'm afraid, that we'll ever learn who made the—first and last trip on the *Beatty I.* Dr. Inly, please report to my office. Benton, rope off the take-off area, and advise me when the count is down to a one hour safety period.

"Those of you who lost personal possessions in the barracks fire, prepare the standard claim form. You can get forms and instructions from Miss Mees in the Accounting Office. Brainard, start your labor crews to work torch-cutting, for scrap, the tower that fell outside the radiation area. The club will be closed tonight. And I don't know how to say this properly, but I want to thank every single individual for devotion and loyalty beyond anything I ever experienced before. Thank you."

He released the switch and looked up. Sharan Inly was standing in the doorway. She walked to his desk. "You wanted to see me."

He grinned, in a very tired way. "Thanks, Sharan."

"For what?"

"For being bright enough not to start commiserating with me, telling me how sorry you are and how it wasn't my fault and all that."

She sat down, hung one denimed leg over the arm of the chair. "There isn't anything to say. Our good pal who calls himself Raul got to one of the group and fixed us. On the other side of the world somebody feels very, very good, I imagine."

"What are you going to do, Sharon?"

"They'll find another slot to put me in. Maybe I'll be back in the Pentagon, testing the Oedipus complexes of Quartermaster second lieutenants. Something frightfully thrilling along that line. But now I have a hobby."

"Hobby?"

"Finding out how they worked that long range hypnosis. There are a few people I can trust not to think I've lost my mind when I give them the story."

"But you won't be taking off immediately, I'm afraid. There'll be an investigation. We'll have the star parts. You and I and Adamson and Leeber and Kornal and a few of the others. Stick around, Dr. Inly. See the big three-ring circus. Hear the tigers howl for meat. Pay your money and see the seven wonders of the world."

CHAPTER XI

Scapegoat to Politics

DARK, threatening, a storm front was moving in from the north. The day was unexpectedly and unusually muggy. Extra chairs had been brought into General Sachson's conference room. Two bored girls sat at a small table near the windows, supplementing the recording device with the aid of two stenotype machines. They had covered several yards of the white tape with the staggered letters. The door was closed against the reporters and photographers who waited in the corridor.

Bard Lane sat at the witness table. His armpits were sodden and he had a dry, stained taste in his mouth.

Senator Leedry was a dry wisp of a man, tiny and withered, but with a plump and surprising little paunch. He smiled as he spoke. His baritone voice was alternately scalpel, cutting torch and caress.

"I appreciate, Dr. Lane, your attempts to explain technical data in a manner that we poor laymen can understand. Believe me, we appreciate it. But I guess we're not as bright as you imagine. At least, I'm not. Now, if it isn't too much trouble, would you explain once again to us, your *theory* about the accident."

"The A-Six uses what they call, in Army slang, 'soft' radiation. The shielding also acts as an inhibitor. When actuated, the pellets are fed down to the CM chamber for combustion. The CM chamber utilizes the principles of the old shaped charge to achieve thrust. The

controls had not been installed for the A-Six drive. There is no possibility of an accidental transfer of pellets to the drive chamber."

The Secretary of War, Logan Brightling, cleared his throat to interrupt. Cartoons depicted him perfectly as a hairless Kodiak bear wearing a wing collar. "Why was the *Beatty I* equipped with the hot stuff for the A-Six drive before the controls were installed?"

"In spite of the inhibitors, the pellets generate appreciable heat. The *Beatty I* had an efficient method of utilizing this heat for self-contained power. To use that power for the necessary welding and structural work was more efficient than attempting to bring outside power to the ship. You could say that once we had the internal power source working, the *Beatty I* was helping to build herself.

"To continue, I have explained that I do not feel that it could have been an accident. The wall chart shows a schematic cross-section."

Bard Lane walked over to the chart. "A man could enter here. It is the normal inspection procedure to check the shielding at regular intervals and take a careful count of all escaping radiation to determine whether or not it is well within safety limits. From this passage a man can work his way completely around the shielding and the drive chamber. At this point is a port that can only be used when the storage section contains no pellets. Beyond the port the radiation will kill a man in approximately twelve minutes. Once through that port it would take a person not more than three minutes manually to dislodge the pellets from their niches in the conveyor and drop them down onto the plate above the drive chamber. In a few minutes more the person could clamber down there, activate the motor on the plate and let the pellets drop into the drive chamber itself. Without the required inhibition, the CM would be instantaneously achieved and the ship would take off.

"Inspection of the area where the *Beatty I* stood has shown us that there is more residual radiation than would normally be expected. Thus we assume that the drive chamber was fed more pellets than would normally have been carried there at one time by the conveyer. Thus we can assume that it was not an accidental actuation of the conveyor itself."

Leedry pursed his dry lips. "Then, Dr. Lane, you would have us believe that someone went into that—that searing hell of radiation and sabotaged the ship?"

Bard returned to his chair. "I can see no other answer. After five seconds by the open port to the storage section, there would be not the slightest hope of living more than twenty minutes no matter what medical attention was given. The person sacrificed his life. There were twelve technicians on the ship at the time, along with twelve guards watching them under a new security bulletin I issued four days before the accident. Evidently the saboteur overpowered his guard. The elevator operator and two laborers too close to the ship perished, bringing the total death toll in the take-off to twenty-seven. A large section of the burning camouflage cover fell on a typist from the accounting office. She died yesterday of her burns. So the total is twenty-eight."

General Sachson went over to Leedry, bent down and whispered in his ear. Leedry did not change expression. He said "Dr. Lane, would you please move over to the other table for a few minutes. Dr. Inly, will you please come forward."

Leedry let the seconds mount up. Sharan concealed the thud of her pulse, the sick nervousness that gave her mouth a metallic taste.

"Dr. Inly, you have previously testified as to your duties and the operating regulations which have covered those duties. As I understand your regulations, once you have committed any project employee for detailed observation, the minimum length of time in hospital is seven days. Yet, according to your records, we find that Dr. Lane was sent in for observation and released aft-

er only three days. I trust you have some explanation for this deviation from your stated regulations."

THERE was a buzz of conversation in the room. The chairman of the Investigating Committe rapped for order.

Sharan bit her lip.

"Come, Dr. Inly. Surely you know why you ordered Dr. Lane's release?"

"I discovered that the evidence on which I had committed Dr. Lane was not what—I had first thought."

"Is it not true that you have been very friendly with Dr. Lane? Is it not true that you have often been alone together? Is it not true that there was a very strong rumor among the project employees that your relationship was—shall we say—a bit closer than a normal professional relationship would indicate?" Leedry leaned forward in his chair, as intent as a questing hawk.

"I resent your implication, Senator."

"Merely answer the questions, Dr. Inly."

"Dr. Lane is my very good friend. Nothing more. We were often together and we often discussed what courses of action would be best for the project."

"Indeed?" Leedry asked.

Bard stood up. "Senator, I consider this line of investigation as wholesome as scribbling on a lavatory wall."

"You're out of order!" the chairman snapped. "Sit down, please."

"Take the stand again, Dr. Lane," Leedry said. "We will need you again in a few moments, Dr. Inly."

Bard took the stand. Leedry again waited for his fellow committee members to stop their whispers. "Dr. Inly is quite attractive, don't you think?" he asked Bard in a jovial manner.

"She is a competent psychologist," Bard said.

"Ah, undoubtedly. Now then, Dr. Lane. Yesterday we took testimony from one one of the hospital supervisors. Can you explain how it was that you were seen in the hospital making love to a young nurse named Anderson?"

"May I ask what you are trying to prove?" Bard asked. His voice was low.

"I'll be glad to tell you, Dr. Lane. I can best tell you by asking you one more question. Dr. Lane, you are quite a famous man, you know. You are quite young for the enormous responsibilities which were given you. You have spent a trifle more than one billion dollars of the taxpayers' money. Money that came from a great number of little people who work hard for a living. Surely you felt the weight of that responsibility. Now answer this question, Dr. Lane. During the period of time since you permitted one William Kornal to return to his duties after having smashed key control equipment. have you at any time sincerely felt that you are and have been unsuited for the responsibilities which were given you?"

Bard Lane doubled his big brown fists. He glanced at Sharan Inly and saw that her eyes were misty. "Yes, I have."

"And yet you did not asked to be relieved?"

"No, sir."

"Dismissed. Wait in the anteroom. Please take the stand, Major Leeber. I understand that you have been in the position of an observer ever since the Kornal incident."

"That is correct." Major Leeber sat very straight in his chair. Each bit of brass on his uniform was a tiny golden mirror. His voice had lost the lazy tone. It was crisp. His mouth was a firm line.

"Will you give us your opinion of the quality of Dr. Lane's management?"

"I can best do that by giving the committee a verbatim quote from a report I send to General Sachson, my commanding officer, three days before the 'accident' occurred. I am quoting paragraph three of my report. 'It appears that Dr. Lane is best suited to supervised technical work in the research field and that he has neither the temperament nor the training for administrative work that is required of the head of a project such as this one. The informality here is indicative of a lack of discipline. Dr. Lane goes to ridiculous lengths in his new security regulations, detailed above, yet permits fraternization between high-level personnel and

CAF-Two typists on the clerical staff. The undersigned officer strongly recommends that every attempt be made to bring this situation to the attention of those persons in Washington who are in a position to direct a full scale investigation of the project.' "

Leedry turned to Sachson. "General, don't bother taking the stand. Just tell us what you did with the major's report."

"I endorsed it, stating my approval of Leeber's conclusions and sent it by courier officer through the Chief of Ordnance to the Commanding General, Armed Forces. I assumed that it would be taken up with Secretary of War."

FROWNING, the Secretary of War rumbled, "It was on my desk for my personal attention when the flash came that the *Beatty I* had taken off prematurely. I compliment the General and Major Leeber on their handling of this matter. I shall see that it is made a matter of record for their Two-Hundred-and-One files."

Sharan Inly laughed. The sound was out of place in the room. The laugh was as chill as the tinkling of crystal. "Gentlemen, you amuse me. The Army has resented Project Tempo from the beginning. The Army feels that space travel attempts are absurd unless carried on in an atmosphere of company formations, service ribbons and seventh endorsements. Dr. Lane is merely caught in the middle and he'll be disgraced. The sad truth is that he has more integrity in his little finger than Major Leeber is even capable of visualizing."

She turned to Leeber and said mildly. "You really are a rather despicable little man, you know. Gentlemen, this whole affair makes me sick at heart and rather close to being ill in quite another manner. I am leaving and you can cite me for contempt or restrain me physically. I imagine restraint will be more your style. So nice to have known you."

She brushed by the Sergeant at Arms at the door. It closed gently behind her.

"Let her go," Leedry said. "I rather imagine that she'll have a long, long wait before Civil Service is able to place her in another government position. And she just told us all we need to know. Her infatuation with Lane, and the effect of that infatuation on her judgment are now a matter of record. I suggest that we consider arriving at a conclusion. My personal opinion is that Project Tempo failed due to the gross negligence and mental instability of Dr. Lane. We should clear out the witnesses and poll the committee."

Fifteen minutes later the two stenotype operators carried their tapes down the hall to a room where they could begin the transcription.

The tall one said, "And mah responsibility to mah constituents in mah state in this gurr-ate country!"

"Bettty, we oughta get extra pay for chronic nausea. But, hey, I did like the shoulders on Lane. How about him?"

"I'll take Leeber, chum. He's got a nice nasty glint in his eyes."

"What did he say to you outside the room there?"

"That would be telling. I'll give you a hint. How about letting me borrow that jade clip for tonight?"

"In return for a full and detailed report, sure." She sighed. "Poor Dr. Lane."

"Yeah," the tall one said. "But they won't jail him. They'll just fix him so that he'd rather be in jail."

CHAPTER XII

Another Attempt

FROWNING anxiously, Raul hurried by the throb of the power rooms. He glanced often over his shoulder. Once he flattened his shoulders against the wall and stood, waiting. Then he continued on, down the corridor where no one ever went. The rooms contained things that were no longer understood. Odd garments. Tools. Undisturbed for centuries.

And at last he came to the door he

sought. The top sill was on a level with his eyes. Two spoked wheels projected from the door itself. He touched one. It turned easily and he spun it hard. It spun without sound, stopping with a soft click. He spun the other one. He glanced back up the corridor, then grasped both wheels, one in each hand. His breath came deep and hard and excitement fluttered along his spine. He pulled slowly. The door opened. He knew of wind and of coldness, but always he had felt them in an alien body, and now he knew that the sensations had been muted. The wind was a dull knife against his flesh and the sand, heaped against the door, trickled in onto the corridor floor. He knew that he could not stand such cold. The sand prevented him from closing the door. He dropped to his knees and shoveled the sand back out with his hands. He got the door closed and leaned against it for a moment. Warmth returned and he was once again in the familiar environment in which he had spent all of his days. It seemed impossible that beyond the door there was not another corridor, equally warm. Suddenly he felt an enormous reluctance to open the door again. He shut his eyes and thought of the six ships under the red sun, of another ship and another world—of flame arcing up against the blueness, and the shattering horror of explosion.

In the third room he found the garments. They were metallic, but of a dark green shade. The inner lining was soft. He put a large one on, awkwardly. It felt strange covering his legs. Strange, heavy. The fastening eluded him for a time until he discovered that the two strips of metal down the front, if pressed firmly together, clung tightly.

Oddly clad, it was only as he reached the door the second time that he thought of a more obvious danger. Shut, the door would remain closed until he pushed against it from the outside. But if Orlan should come and spin the wheels, he'd be lost.

"Raul," she said, close behind him.

He turned abruptly. He stared into her face a moment, then looked away.

"Please talk to me, Raul."

He made no answer.

"I know what you think of me. I betrayed you, Raul. But I didn't know what I was doing. I pretended to believe you. And . . . after I smashed the ship they were building, then I began to believe. Please, Raul."

He stood with his back to her.

"I can't find him, Raul. They don't know where he is. The woman named Inly doesn't know. No one knows. I've spent every dream searching for him. I have to find him, I have to."

SHE made a strange sound. He turned and saw that Leesa had dropped to her knees. She sat on her heels, her shoulders slumped, her palms hard against her eyes. She wept.

"I—I've never seen you cry before, Leesa."

"Help me, Raul. Please help me."

"You know what you did."

Her voice was muffled. "I always laughed at them. They never meant anything. And then I saw him. I thought he would be the same. Just a dream thing, as silly as all the others."

"You don't believe that any of them actually exist, Leesa."

She lifted her stained face. "He exists, Raul. I can't go on living in a world where he's only a dream thing, made by the machine. And if he exists, all the others do too. And that means that you are right and I have been wrong. Desperately wrong."

He looked into her eyes.

She said quickly, "You can't believe me now. You believed me before. Now you can't trust me. Ever, ever again."

He took her by the arms and lifted her to her feet. He smiled crookedly. "I can trust you twice, Leesa. And if you help me—it is the slimmest of chances you know—maybe you can see him again. We don't belong here, either of us. We're misfits in this neat little universe. And so both of us have fallen in love with dreams. And even a billion to one chance seems like generous odds."

"The Inly girl?"

HE nodded. His jaw tightened grimly as he thought of the obstacles before them.

"How can I help?"

"I'm going out to the ships. I'm going to try to board one. I know some of the operating instructions. Most of our lifetime will be gone before they build another ship on earth that uses the principle in the patrol ships out there." His voice grew stronger. "Think, Leesa! Think of going to an alien planet. Think of what it will do to the dreamers should they see me in one of the dreams. Think how it will be if once again we can go out from this place to the stars like our ancestors did when our world began to die."

"But—suppose you can't even live out there?"

"I've had the door open. I think I can. And that's how you can help. Wait for me here. I must be able to get back inside. If anyone should come, you must keep them from touching those wheels on the door. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

He went to the door and pulled it open. He saw her shrink away from the shrill wind. He lowered his head and plunged out. She pushed the door shut. He stood for a moment, turning his back to the wind, finding out if he could breathe the air. He had to breathe fast and deep. The cold bit into his bones and the sand scoured the naked backs of his hands and his cheeks. He turned and squinted across the dim plain toward the six ships. With the position determined, he walked toward them, bending into the wind, shielding his eyes with his hand, holding the other hand in his armpit for warmth. As the unprotected hand began to grow numb, he changed hands.

He looked again and saw that his hundred steps had carried him off to the left. He corrected his direction and continued on. A hundred steps more. The ships seemed no closer. The next time he looked they were closer. And then, panting with the exertion, he saw new details of their construction. He turned his back to the wind and cried out as he saw his known world far behind him. Taller than the ships, yet dwarfed by the ragged hills behind it, it reached white levels up toward the purpled sky. Blank featureless walls, each level recessed a bit, reaching up to a dizzzy height above him.

He fought the desire to return. He went on. Behind him, the wind erased his tracks. The ships grew larger. Their fluted sterns rested on the sand. One of them was canted at a slight angle. Never had he realized their true size, nor their distance from each other. The last hundred feet was the easiest because the nearest ship cut the force of the harsh steady wind. The sand was piled high in long sharp ridges extending out on either side of the ship. Above him, the bulge of the ship was a dizzy overhang. The surface, though still of shining metal, was pitted and scarred and worn. And there was no way to get into the ship. No way at all. He circled it, almost weeping in frustration. Shining and unclimbable metal. He steadied himself with one hand against it as he clambered awkwardly over the drifts. Both hands were so numb that he could not feel the texture of the metal against his fingers. He made two complete circuits of the ship. Across the plain the tall white world seemed to watch with silent amusement.

He tripped and fell heavily. His face struck against the side of the ship, half stunning him. He lay, summoning up the energy to get back to his feet. The ship was inches from his eye. He tensed. An angular crack showed in the metal, too straight to be accidental. He sat with his legs spread and dug with both senseless hands, scooping the sand aside. The crack grew, turned into the right angle corner of what could be a doorway. He laughed shrilly as he dug, talking to the ship, calling it affectionate names. He grew weary of digging. He felt much warmer. How pleasant just to lie back on the soft sand! He thought he heard music. Pipes in the wind. Sigh of the wind. He was warm and luxuriously comfortable. Why dig any more? Too much trouble. The sand piled slowly

up against his left side and a rivulet spilled across his throat.

* * * * *

The agency man pulled in close to the curb and cut the motor. With a laconic jerk of his thumb he indicated the building across the street. Sharan stared at it. Old buildings have a strange habit of acquiring the personality of the average resident over the too-many years. There are old frame houses behind ragged yards, full of narrow, virginal spinster dignity—and empty factories, as stolid and sullen as a muscular crippled lathe hand. The agency man had indicated a building that sat quietly in evil, as though, in introspection, it tried tiredly to gloat over half-forgotten orgy.

"You want I should go up with you?" he said. "Second floor front."

"No. And don't wait. You know where to send the bill."

"Sometimes they aren't so good in the head, miss. Watch yourself."

She got out and the car drove away. She stood for a moment, then walked with crisp stride diagonally across the street. The hall was sour and dim. The stairs creaked. His door was closed. She turned the knob and it opened. She looked through the widening crack. Bard Lane lay heavy across the bed, dressed in trousers and undershirt. She saw at once that he was thinner. His bare ankles were grubby, his hair long at the back of his neck. His shoes were on the floor beside the bed. Shapeless, cracked. They could have been dug out of a trash barrel.

She stood by the bed and spoke his name. Louder and louder. He moaned and nestled closer into sleep. She turned and left the room. She was back in an hour, carrying the large bundle. She set it on the bureau, took off her hat and began to clean up the litter, putting the room in order. The bath was across the hall. No shower. Just a tub. She found his shaving things, laid them out in the bathroom. She took the bundle in, unwrapped it, laid out the new underclothing, shirt, suit, shoes and tie.

And then the nightmare of waking him. Of seeing the vague eyes set in the gray-blue stubbled face, of half supporting his stumbling weight. He sat on the bathroom stool and went half to sleep. She got him undressed and into the tub. He moaned at the feel of the chill water. When she was certain that he would not drown, she went down and brought back coffee, black coffee, a lot of it.

She waited for him. From time to time, she went and listened at the bathroom door. She heard him moving about inside.

When, dressed in the new clothes, he came into the room, she smiled as though nothing had happened. "Nice to see you, Bard. Coffee?"

"Sharan—Sharan!"

"Drink your coffee."

His hands shook so that even with the paper cup cradled in both of them, some spilled onto the back of his wrist.

"It wasn't a very good answer, was it?"

"Suppose I wasn't looking for a good answer, Sharan."

"You gave up, didn't you?"

"Let us not speak of garden type virtues. I didn't give up. I was thrown away. A person has to act the part."

"And it feels good to be a martyr? To be sodden with self pity?"

"Not really good."

"You haven't been in the news for a month. They've forgotten you."

She refilled his cup. He looked up at her. "Why don't you just get the devil out, Dr. Inly? Go give somebody some tests. Go remove some pre-frontal lobes, eh?"

"I didn't know you could be childish. Finish the coffee. We're going to get you a haircut and a steak, in that order."

His smile was a mild acid. "And why do I merit all this attention?"

"Because you are needed. Don't be defensive, Bard. Just do as I say. I'll explain later."

DUSK was over the city and they were in an oak booth at the back of a quiet restaurant. His eyes were

brighter and some of the shakiness had gone out of his hands. He pushed his coffee cup aside, lit her cigarette and his own. "Now it's time to talk, Sharan."

"We'll talk about a mistaken promise, Bard. We assumed that a hypnotic device operated from the other side of this world destroyed the *Beatty I*. After they delicately told me that I was all through and that I'd be called if there was a vacancy for anyone with my rating, I was—contacted again. With the *Beatty I* gone, there didn't seem to be much point in it. I jeered at their fantasy of an alien world. I jeered at our friend, Raul, and at his sister. It took them a long time. I brought Lurdorff in on it. He's too egocentric ever to doubt his own sanity. And now he believes, too. They're what they say they are."

He stared at her without expression. "Go on."

"Everything he told us appeared to be true. It was the girl who destroyed the ship. She took over the A-Six technician named Machielson. She had him overpower the guard. The rest of it went just the way you guessed. Bard, do you remember the time I told you that I wished I could fall in love with you?"

"I remember."

"Someone else did. The sister. She found out too late. She thought we were figments of her dreams. Now she, like Raul, is convinced that we are reality. The logical processes of most women are rather odd. She and her brother have been helping me look for you. I explained about investigation agencies and how expensive they were. The next day a man stopped me in the street and gave me all of the money out of his wallet and walked on. A second and a third man did the same. That's the way Raul fixed the money angle. And now we've found you."

Bard stubbed out his cigarette. He laughed softly. "Sort of a long range affair, isn't it? Raul identified their planet as being near Alpha Centauri. If he gave me a picture of what is actually their world, my lady love has a bald and gleaming skull, the body of a twelve-year-old child. I can hardly wait."

"Don't make a joke out of it, Bard!" she said with some heat. "We need you. If we're ever going to live up to the promise that we had in the *Beatty I*, you have to help us."

"I see. Raul gets one billion people to each hand us a dollar and then we start from scratch."

She stood up quickly and stubbed out her cigarette. "All right, Bard. I thought you might want to help. I'm sorry. I was wrong. It was good to see you again. Good luck." She turned away.

"Come back and sit down, Sharan. I'm sorry."

She hesitated, came back. "Then listen. Of all men on this planet, you have the best over-all grasp of the problems involved in the actual utilization of Beatty's formulae. Some forgotten man on Raul's planet perfected those formulae roughly thirteen thousand years before Beatty did. Raul has gotten to the ships he told you about. He nearly died in the attempt. When he was gone too long, the first time, Leesa went out after him and managed to get him back before he froze to death. He has been in one of the ships a dozen times. He thinks that it is still in working condition. He has activated certain parts of it—the air supply, internal heating. But as far as the controls are concerned, you are the only one who can help. He is baffled."

"How can I help?"

"We discussed that. He can use your hand to draw, from memory, the exact position of every knob and switch, along with a translation of the symbols that appear on them. If the principle is the same, which he is almost certain that it is, then you should be able to figure out the most logical purpose of each control."

"But look, Sharan, the odds against my being right—they're tremendous. And the smallest mistake will leave him lost in space, or aflame on the takeoff. Or suppose he does find us. Suppose he barrels into our atmosphere at ten thousand miles per second and makes his landing in Central Park or the Chicago Loop district?"

"He's willing to take the chance."

She let him think without interruption. He drew aimless lines on the tablecloth with his thumbnail. "What would be gained?"

"What would the *Beatty I* have gained? And you do read the papers, don't you? Mysterious crash of stratoliner. Father slays family of six. Bank embezzler throws two millions into Lake Erie. Novelist's girl friend buried alive. Auto charges noon crowds on busy street corner. We've always considered that sort of thing inexplicable, Bard. We've made big talk about irrational spells, about temporary insanity, about the way the human mind is prone to go off balance without warning. Isn't that sort of thing worth stopping, even at a billion to one chance? Religions have been born out of the phantasies the Watchers have planted in the minds of men. Wars have been started for the sake of amusing those who have considered us to be merely unreal images given the appearance of reality by a strange machine."

Again the silence. He smiled. "How do we start?"

"We've worked out a coordinated time system. Their 'days' are longer than ours. We'll have to go to my place. They expect me to bring you there so that a meeting can be made. It is quicker than searching each time. We have an hour before we have to get there."

CHAPTER XIII

More Heresies

ON the fifth floor she had a hotel suite, bedroom and sitting room. Physically there were two people in the room. Mentally there were four. Bard sat in a deep chair, the floor lamp shining down on the pad he held against his knee. Sharan stood by the window.

Through Bard's lips, Raul said, "We'll have to make this a four-way discussion. All thoughts will have to be vocalized. How will we make identification?"

Sharan said, "This is Leesa speaking. Raul, when you or I speak, we'll hold up the right hand. That should serve."

It was agreed. Bard felt the uncanny lifting of his right hand without his own conscious volition. "In Dr. Lane's mind, Sharan and Leesa, I still find considerable doubt. He seems willing to go along with us, but he is still skeptical." The hand dropped.

Bard said, "I can't help it. And I admit to certain animosity, too. Leesa, as I understand it, ruined Project Tempo."

Sharan lifted her right hand. "Only because I didn't understand, then. Believe me, Bard. Please. You have to believe me. You see, I—"

Bard's right hand lifted and Raul said, "Leesa, we haven't time for that sort of thing. Don't interrupt for a moment. I want to draw the instrument panel for Dr. Lane."

Bard Lane felt the pressure that forced him further back from the threshold of volition. His hand grasped the pencil. Quickly a drawing of an odd instrument panel began to take shape. Across the top were what appeared to be ten square dials. Each one was calibrated vertically, with a zero at the middle, plus values above, minus values below, the zero point. The indicator was a straight line across the dial resting on the zero point. Below each dial were what appeared to be two push buttons, one above the other.

Raul murmured, "This is the part I cannot understand. I have figured out the rest of the controls. The simplest one is directional. A tiny replica of the ship is mounted on a rod at the end of a universal joint. The ship can be turned manually. From what I have gathered from the instruction manuals, the replica is turned to the desired position. The ship itself follows suit, and as it does so, the replica slowly moves back to the neutral position. Above the ten dials is a three dimensional screen. Once a planet is approached, both planet and ship show on the screen.

"As the ship gets closer to the surface, the scale becomes smaller so that actual terrain details appear. Landing

consists of setting the ship image gently against the image of the planet surface. Such maneuvering is apparently on the same basis as the *Beatty I.* But there is no hand control for it. There are diaphragms to strap on either side of the larynx and velocity is achieved through the intensity with which a certain vowel sound is uttered. I tested that portion of the ship by making the vowel sound as softly as I could. The ship trembled. I imagine that the purpose is to enable the pilot to control the ship even when pressure keeps him from lifting a finger. I feel capable of taking the ship up and landing it again. But unless I can understand the ten dials below the three dimensional screen, it is obvious that no extended voyage can be made."

The pressure faded. Bard said, "Have you tried to discover the wiring details behind the dials?"

"Yes. I cannot understand it. And it is so complicated that by memorizing one portion at a time and transmitting that portion to you, I feel that it would take at least one of your years before it would be complete, and then I would have no real assurance that it was entirely accurate."

"Plus and minus values, eh? How good is your translation of the figures? Is your math equivalent to ours?"

"No. Your interval is ten. Our is nine. The roughest possible comparison would be to say that your value for twenty is the second digit in our third series."

"Then the nine plus and nine minus values above and below the zero covers a full simple series. I am always wary of snap judgments, but those dials remind me, unmistakably, of the answer column in any computing device. With ten dials and only plus values alone, you could arrive at our equivalent of one billion. Adding in the minus values, you can achieve a really tremendous series of values. The available numbers could be computed as one billion multiplied by nine hundred and ninety-nine million, nine hundred and ninety nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine. Navigation always assumes known coordinates.

"Assume, for a moment, that the basic future-past relationship is expressed as plus and minus. Assume further that, utilizing the varying frames of temporal reference, it is necessary to cross, at the very most, ten time lines to arrive at the most distant star—the star that, from your position, is equidistant no matter in which direction you start out. Now, for any nearer star, there will be a preferred route. There will be an assumed direction. You will intersect the frames of reference at an assumed point.

"Thus, your controls should be so set as to take advantage, at the proper fractional parts of a second, of your plus-minus, or, more accurately, your future-past distortions. This would mean an index number, starting from your position, for each star—not a fixed index number, but a number which, adjusted by a formula to allow for orbital movement and galactic movement, will give you the setting for the controls. One of the unknowns to fit into the equation before using it is your present value for time on your planet. No. Wait a minute! If I were designing the controls I would use a radiation timing device for accuracy, and have the controls themselves work the formula so that the standard star reference number could always be used."

RAUL had listened carefully. Now he nodded. "It will have to be that way. It has been centuries since we have maintained any record of elapsed time."

"The buttons under the dials should be the setting device. The upper button should, each time you push it, lift your indicator one plus notch. The lower button should drop it, one notch at a time, into the minus values. The known number, placed on the dials, should take you across space to the star for that specific setting. It would be the simplest possible type of control which could be used with the Beatty formulae—far simpler than the one on which we were working. But to use it, you must find somewhere, probably on the ship, a manual which will give you a listing of the values for the stars."

Bard Lane felt the excitement in

Raul Kinson's thoughts. "A long time ago—three of your years, possibly more —I found books printed on thin metallic plates. They did not mean anything to me. Long bi-colored numbers. They were awkward to read compared with the micro-books. I remember the cover design—a stylized pattern of a star and planet system."

"That could be what you need. But let me make one thing clear. If I'm correct about the controls, and if you should use the wrong setting, you will, in all probability, never be able to find either Earth or your home planet again. You could spend forty lifetimes searching, with the same chance of finding either as of finding two specific motes of dust in the atmosphere of this planet. Make certain that you are quite willing to take the risk."

Leesa said softly, "Quite willing, Bard."

"Then find those books again. Study the numbers. See if they will fit the dials. See if you can determine our index number beyond doubt. And then get into contact with me again."

Pressure on his mind faded quickly. Before it was entirely gone, Bard caught the faint thought. "This dream is ending."

And then the two of them were alone in the room. Sharan said softly, "Can he do it? Can he come here?"

Bard stood up and walked over to the windows. Across the street a couple walked hand in hand under the lights. A line had formed, waiting to get into the video studio.

"What is she like? What are her thoughts like?"

"Like a woman's."

"When will they be back?"

"Midnight tomorrow."

"I'll be here."

* * * * *

Ten of the older men were gathered in Jord Orlan's quarters. They sat stiffly and their eyes glowed. It had taken a long time for Jord Orlan to bring them up to the proper pitch.

"Our world is good," he chanted.

"Our world is good," they responded in unison, the half-forgotten instincts rising up within them, hoarsening voices.

"The dreams are good."

"The dreams are good."

"And we are the Watchers and we know the Law."

"Yes, we know the Law."

Orlan held his arms straight out, his fists clenched. "And they would put an end to the dreams."

"An end to the dreams." The words had a sad sound.

"But they will be stopped. The two of them. The two of them. The black-haired ones who are strange."

"They will be stopped."

"I have tried, my brothers, to show them the error of their ways. I have tried to lead them into the ways of truth. But they claim the three worlds are reality."

"Orlan has tried."

"I am not a vindictive man. I am a just man. I know the Law and the Truth. They have gone out into the nothingness, out into the emptiness that surrounds us, to look for the worlds of which we dream. Death will be a kindness."

"A kindness."

"Seek them out, my brothers. Put them in the tube of death. Let them slide down into the darkness and fall forever through the blackness. I have tried and I have failed. There is nothing else we can do."

"Nothing else."

They moved slowly toward the door, then faster. Faster. Jord Orlan stood and heard the pad of their feet against the warm floor, the growling in their throats. And they were gone. He sat down heavily. He was very tired. And he did not know if he had done the right thing. It was too late for doubts. And yet— He frowned. There was a basic flaw in the entire thought process. If outside was a nothingness, how could the two of them go outside and return? To have them do so would indicate that the nothingness was a "somethingness." And if that were true, then Raul Kinson's fantastic beliefs had to be given certain credence.

But once Raul Kinson was credited with any correctness, the entire structure of his own beliefs faded and dimmed. Jord Orlan's head hurt. It was a sad thing to have lived so long in perfect comfort with one's thoughts and then have this tiny bitter arrow of doubt festering in his soul. He yearned to pluck it out.

Possibly the spy had been mistaken. Possibly they did not go out into the nothingness.

He found himself descending toward the lowest level in great haste. He found the door. It did not take him long to remember the secrets of the twin wheels. He pulled the door open. The wind whipped his cheeks. He squinted into it. The six ships stood tall against the huge red sun. Sand drifted in at his feet. He picked up a handful of it. He closed the door against the wind and leaned his forehead against the metal. He did not move for a long time. He turned and hurried back the way he had come.

Six of them were holding Raul. Raul's face was twisted with fury and, above the grunting of the captors, Jord Orlan heard the popping and crackling of Raul's shoulder muscles as he struggled, sometimes lifting his captors off their feet. Four of them were having an equally difficult time with the girl. They held her horizontally, two at her feet and two at her head. Her robe had been flung aside. As Jord Orlan neared them, they rushed with her toward the tube, toward the black oval mouth of it. But she twisted one foot free, planted it against the wall near the mouth of the tube and thrust with all her strength. They staggered and fell with her.

"Stop!" Orlan shouted.

"No!" the captors cried.

"Do you want their death to be easy? The tube is an easy death. Their sin is enormous. They should be thrust out into the emptiness outside to die there."

He saw doubt on their faces. "I order it!" he said firmly.

And, with Orlan leading, with the two captives no longer struggling, clad once more in robe and toga, the procession left the silent bystanders and went down to the door.

Orlan stopped the captors at the angle in the corridor. "Let them go on to the doorway alone. I shall go with them. If you look on nothingness it will forever blast your eyes and your mind. I will rejoin you when they have left."

They held fear and anger, but fear was the stronger. They waited out of sight. Jord Orlan walked with Raul and Leesa.

He said, in a low tone, "I saw the old garments. You need them to venture outside."

"What are you trying to tell us?" Raul demanded.

"That—there are things in our world that I do not understand. And before I die, I want to understand—everything. I did not believe the ships were there until I saw them with my own eyes. Now I share your sin. My belief has grown weak. If you could reach another world, then—" He turned away. "Please hurry."

"Come with us," Leesa said.

"No. I'm needed here. If your heresies turn out to be true, my people will need someone to explain it to them. My place is here."

They left and he closed the door, retaining for a moment the image of the two figures leaning against the wind, the six ships in the background. He went back to those who waited and told them calmly that it was all over.

CHAPTER XIV

The Big Jump

THE light plates set into the control room walls made a soft glow. Air came through the tiny grills in a sound like an endless sigh.

The entire control room was mounted on a shining piston that went straight down through the heart of the ship. The partitioned space along one wall, forty feet by ten, held the row of beds. Beyond the opposite partition were food stores,

water tanks, sanitary equipment.

Leesa lay on the bunk and Raul folded the web straps across her body, drawing them tight. The last strap circled her forehead.

She looked up into his eyes. "Are we really ready?"

"We have to be. And I'll make a confession. If all this hadn't happened, I was going to try it alone, without you. That would have been a mistake."

"Maybe," she said softly, "this is all just another dream, Raul. A more clever dream. Can you find Earth?"

"I know the number for their sun. I'll set it the way Bard Lane explained. And then, quite soon, we'll know."

"Promise me one thing."

He looked down at her. "What is it?"

"If we are wrong, if there are no worlds out there, or if we lose our way, I want to die. Quickly. Promise?"

"I promise."

He slid the partition shut and went to the control panel. His pilot's couch was on rails so that, once he was in place, he could slide it forward under the vertical panel and lock himself in place. He strapped his ankles and his waist and pushed himself under to lie looking up at the controls. He activated the three-dimensional screen. There were the six ships, the tall white world, the sandy plain and the hills. He opened the book and took a last look at the reference number for Earth even though it had long since been memorized. He set the ten digit number, six plus values and four minus ones, on the dials, checked it again. The replica ship was in neutral position. Only then did he strap the diaphragms firmly to his throat. He pulled the headband up and tightened it, slid his arms down into the straps.

As softly as he could; he made the vowel sound. The ships shuddered, trembled. On the screen the tiny image moved slowly upward, upward. Now the stern was as high as the bows of the other ships. He strengthened the vowel tone and the replica ship remained in the middle of the screen, the planet moving away below it, the curvature beginning to show, the white tower world dwindling.

He rashly strengthened his tone once more. A vast weight pressed his jaw open, punched down on his belly, blinded him by pressing his eyes back into his head. He heard, from a great distance, Leesa's scream of pain. He ceased all sound. The pressure slowly left him. He was dizzy with weightlessness. His home planet had shrunk to the size of a fist. It appeared in the lower right hand corner of the screen and the image of the ship had dwindled until it was a bright mote against the darkening screen.

He took a weightless arm out of the strap, thumbed the knurled knob at the side of the screen. His planet slid off the screen and, by experimentation, he made the ship image grow larger. He moved close to it. The opposite knob seemed to rotate the ship itself end for end, but he realized that it merely shifted the point of vision. He adjusted it until he was looking forward from dead astern of the ship. The vast disc of the sun was straight ahead. He moved his hand to the replica ship and turned it through a ninety degree arc to the right. As the sun slid off the screen the replica ship moved slowly back to neutral. The screen showed distant spots of light against the utter blackness. He began to make the vowel sound again, cautiously at first, running it each time up to the limits of endurance, then resting in silence as the ship rushed, without noise, through the void. He understood that each time he made the sound he gave it another increment of speed. At last, no matter how loudly he made the sound, he could feel no answering downward thrust and he knew that the top limit had been reached.

Somewhere, ahead, the time setting would take effect. He did not know where—nor how long it would be.

After the fourth night of waiting, Bard Lane and Sharan gave up.

"Something stopped them," Sharan said.

"Or they got tired of the game," he answered.

"I can't believe they'd do that. No, I know they wouldn't."

"Touching faith, you have."

SHE smiled at his irony. But the worried expression did not leave her eyes. "Suppose they started the trip?"

"He wasn't certain enough of himself to take that chance, Sharan."

"He could have found more instructions. Maybe something happened on their world so that they had to do it quickly. He said it was a dying planet."

"We won't ever know. You suspect that too, but you won't admit it, even to yourself, will you?"

"I don't want to."

"Do you want to keep busy?"

"Of course, Bard."

"Then imagine what would happen if a ship like the one they described started to land anywhere in this country. Shoot first, ask questions later. Same thing in every other part of the world. The interceptor rockets would whoosh up out of the hidden launching points and our friends would be a nice blue-white flash and a rain of radioactives. Have you thought of that?"

"They couldn't," she gasped.

"Think of one good reason why they wouldn't. Trying to think of such a reason is what kept me awake all last night."

"What can we do?"

"Use every blessed means of propaganda that we can think of. Use every dime we have to spread it around. Magazines, newspapers, radio, video. They'll call us crackpots. They may try to lock us up. But even if we can get the whole world laughing at us, it may keep somebody's finger off the proper button when the time arrives."

"But to do that, Bard, we'll have to tell everyone!"

"Exactly. We'll have to give the true story about Project Tempo. But of course, no one will believe it."

* * * * *

General Sachson pulled his lips back and tapped on his front teeth with the side of a yellow pencil. "Can't say as I like it, Leeber. Sit down while I think."

"Thank you, sir."

"They're waiting?"

"Yes sir. They got clearance from Public Relations in Washington to interview you for a statement. Washington doesn't seem to be—uh—averse to playing along with the zany story."

Sachson laid the pencil down, rubbed his red nose, and glanced at his finger with mild satisfaction.

He said, "There is an alarming correlation between generals who have press interviews and generals who fail to get further promotions. No matter what I say, I have no assurance that some pointy headed reporter won't make me sound ridiculous. So you take it, Leeber. Represent me. And stay on your toes, lad."

Leeber quickly adjusted his frown of annoyance. He stood up and saluted. "Yes, sir."

He left the office. Sachson groped for his pencil. He grinned and then suddenly, alone in his office, he giggled. It was a high old-man sound. He understood Major Thomas Leeber.

Leeber led the grumbling reporters and photographers into the conference room. A round, bald reporter said, "Don't we rate the old man?"

"He's got throat trouble—can't talk above a whisper today," Leeber said, taking the chair at the head of the table. Technicians adjusted the video camera for a spool to be transmitted at a news broadcast later in the day.

"Okay, Major. You'll have to do. Now how about this story that Dr. Lane and Dr. Inly and Dr. Lurdorff have broken, backed up by a guy named Kornal?"

"What do you mean—how about it?"

"Why do you think they've come out with the wildest yarn these tired old ears have ever heard?"

"I don't know about Lurdorff, but for the other three, the answer is obvious. Their bungling smashed Project Tempo. The case against them is so clear, that they haven't been able to land jobs. This is just a big smoke-screen. There isn't any living person they can pass the buck to, so they're passing it to some

mysterious set of supermen from Alpha Centauri. Sharan Inly is psychologist enough to know that there's almost no limit to what the public will swallow. That's why so many stupid fools are actually running around believing that some space ship is going to land here some time in the near future."

"Can you give us some of your reasoning, Major?"

THE army officer looked at the reporters, and then leaned back in his chair.

"Of course. In the first place I find it very peculiar that Dr. Lane insists that his mythical space ship is based on the same Beatty Principle that turned out to be such a flop. And, also, it has been proved time and time again that if there is sentient life on other planets, the chance of it developing along the same line as life here is a mathematical chance where the odds are so infinitely large that they can't even be calculated. No, gentlemen, if I were to say the kindest possible thing about this farce, I'd say that it is an example of group hypnosis. I assure you that I am not looking out the window, searching the sky for any space ship."

"You know of course that they are running a magazine series, that their articles are syndicated in nearly two hundred newspapers, that they have appeared as guests on video and radio?"

Leeber smiled. "And it is probably selling more newspapers and magazines, and keeping more people watching and listening. Also, I imagine, it isn't exactly impoverishing Lane and Inly. I don't have any hard feelings. They have their way to make a living. I have mine. But don't ask me, or any intelligent person, to believe the yarn. I think it was about twenty-five years ago that Orson Welles had everybody in New Jersey out, running from the Martians. Invaluable publicity, gentlemen. On the day when, with these two eyes, I look at Raul Kinson and Leesa Kinson, I promise to drink the proverbial hemlock."

"When you were associated with the two of them, Major, did you think they acted a little—well, a little—"

"Crazy? I really couldn't say. I've never met a man with a string of letters after his name that didn't act as if he'd mislaid his little red wagon."

The reporters laughed. There were a few more questions before the meeting ended. Leeber reported back to Sachson.

"Did it come in clear, sir?"

"Every word. Well done, Major. Very well done. Very positive and definite. So definite, however, that I got the odd feeling that you didn't leave yourself any loophole."

"Loophole, sir? In case of what?"

"In case—just in case—they're right."

"Surely you're joking, sir?"

"No, I'm not. I've been doing some reading lately. Very interesting reading. If they're right, we'd have the answer to a lot of problems that have been bothering us for the past two thousand years."

"Then you admit that there's a small possibility that they could be right?"

"Truth is the most incredible thing on earth, Leeber."

Leeber coughed. "I have to meet a few of them down at the Inn, sir. For a drink. They'll ask me some more questions. Do you think I should tell them that you sort of half believe Dr. Lane?"

"Of course not!" Sachson roared.

"Then, sir, I hope you won't think the two thoughts are connected in any way, but I was thinking just the other day that I've spent considerable time in grade. A personal request by you for a promotion for me, sir, might just do the trick."

Sachson's rage melted away. He was suddenly a tired little old man. "It'll go out in the morning, Leeber."

"Thank you very much, sir."

Leeber left. Out in the hall he fingered the gold oak leaf. A silver one would be considerably more attractive. And then eagles, single star, two stars, three, four. Five linked stars in circular pattern. Poor old Sachson. He'd never get any further. Retirement in two more years.

* * * * *

As near as Raul could guess, it happened on the tenth day out. A shrill bell

sounded in the control room. They had been eating. Leesa, startled, lost her grip on the wall railing and floated up, helpless. She writhed, but could not change her position. Raul reached out, grasped her ankle and pulled her back to where she could reach the railing. After he had strapped her in, he made a slanting dive toward his own position. He hit with painful force, arranged the straps, slid into the proper position.

Five minutes later the twist from one frame of temporal reference to the next one occurred. Twist was the best word for it. The pain left him gasping. It was as though every bone in his body had suddenly been rotated in its socket. Through aching eyes he saw the indicator on the first dial slip back to zero value. While he was getting his breath, the second wrench came, and the second dial returned to zero. Then, in rapid succession, the third, fourth, fifth, sixth—and he fainted.

When he opened his eyes again, all of the dials were at zero value. Full in the three dimensional screen was a white sun that stung his eyes. He turned the replica ship until the sun slid off the screen. After-images blurred his vision.

A tiny distant planet was ghostly in the reflected sun-glow. His heart gave a great leap of joy. He aimed the replica ship carefully, strapped on the throat diaphragms, started the steady sound that took away the weightlessness, replaced it with an ever-increasing heaviness and lethargy. He imagined that the tiny planet seemed to grow in the screen.

CHAPTER XV

Friends from Afar

BARD LANE picked up the letter. "This is the last one, Miss Reilly," he said.

"What is it, Bard?" Sharan asked. "Another crank?"

"No. Crysta Video. They want permission to use the names of Raul Kinson and Leesa Kinson, as well as our names, in a series of space adventure programs for kids. They promise that they will keep it dignified."

"What's the offer?"

"Fifty a week while it's on sustaining, and two hundred fifty a week when they get a sponsor. In addition, they'll give a five hundred bonus for signing the contract and for the two of us to spend an hour or so with the writers and actors getting them straight on the technical details. What do you think?"

"I say go ahead. We certainly don't need any more money, but it will be another publicity outlet."

"It builds the average weekly take up to about two thousand. The government takes a healthy slice of that, but not as much as it did before we incorporated. I woke up last night and laughed at the name of the corporation. Space Watchers, Inc. Hello, VP."

But Sharan didn't smile. "They'll never come, Raul and Leesa. Never."

Bard dictated the letter to Bess Reilly. Sharan left the room.

Bess slapped her notebook shut. "Boss, have we all gone wacky?"

"Completely."

"Anybody who pays me a hundred a week definitely needs psycho-analysis."

There was a knock at the door of the office. A heavy official knock.

Bess opened the door. Two policemen and a stocky man in civilian dress, a bit in need of a shave, shouldered their way in.

"What do you want?" Bess asked.

They ignored her. "That's Lane—grab him," the stocky man said.

The two policemen advanced on Bard. One grabbed his arm and he wrested himself free, pushing the policeman away. "Who are you?"

The stocky man smiled with satisfaction. "I'm Hemstrait, the Health Officer. I saw you attack Patrolman Quinn. It lies within my powers to commit you to the state hospital for sixty days of observation."

"Who sent you here?"

"Does it matter?"

Sharan came in. She saw the two po-

licemen holding Bard. "Let go of him," she demanded. The stocky man grabbed her from behind. She bent over and bit the back of his hand. He yelped.

"You must be Inly. I got the call to get you too. Make a fuss, folks, and you may not arrive in such good shape. Come on."

* * * * *

Raul brought Leesa to where she could see the screen. In a dull voice he said, "It didn't work. I thought it would work, but it didn't. Earth has one moon. This one has nine."

She stared for long seconds. "Why, it's getting bigger!"

"Look at the image of our ship and you'll understand. We're falling into it. It has strong gravitational attraction. Remember the promise I made you?"

"Yes, but not now!"

"What good can we do thinking about how everything has gone wrong? If we leave the controls alone, it will be over in the smallest fraction of a second when we hit."

"You're giving up?"

He smiled tiredly. "I've given up, Leesa."

"Turn us around, Raul! Quickly!"

"Why?"

She reached out and turned the tiny ship image. He had no time to stop her. He felt the slow swing of the ship on its axis. She held the diaphragm against her soft throat and imitated the sound she had heard him make. Too loudly. Even as he reached for her, the acceleration smashed him into darkness.

* * * * *

The doctor looked at her, then said, "In the case of persistent delusion such as this one, Dr. Inly, I am forced to prescribe deep shock."

"Don't be a fool! You know what deep shock will do. It will destroy all learning and all memory pattern. It will produce incontinence. We'll be as mindless as infants!"

"Ah, but then we can guide your re-education. Teach the two of you useful trades—make you competent members of society."

Sharan Inly felt the full effects of helpless fear. She forced herself to smile. "All right, then. I'll confess for both of us. We thought up this Watcher business to—to get publicity and make money."

The young state psychiatrist shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid that won't work, Dr. Inly. You forget the drugs we gave you. In the induced hypnosis you both clung to every single phase of this unusual delusion. We—uh—realize that in cases like this there are certain details that the less violent patients like to arrange. Letters to friends and relatives. Censored, of course. You'll have three days to take care of those personal details and to make a will. We've been most successful when we've provided deep shock patients with entirely new identities. New names, some simple plastic surgery."

Sharan covered her face. "It's . . . horrible."

He patted her shoulder. "My dear, we want to help you. Believe me, we do. Once the re-education process has begun, your new talents will be tested. Just think, it might be that you would show a talent for mathematics. We'll train you in, say, bookkeeping, and, to go with your new name and appearance, we provide, through post-hypnotic suggestion, an entire past for you. And then, say, in Seattle, there'll be a new attractive bookkeeper with a pleasant name, entirely free of this delusion and of all memories of your true past. I assure you that you'll be happy. Besides, we make a special point of providing jobs for our —ah—graduates."

"No, no, no, no, no," she said, softly, monotonously.

"Please take Dr. Inly to her room and bring in Dr. Lane."

* * * * *

The pain in his wrist helped Raul regain consciousness. He saw at once that it was broken. Leesa floated a bit above him. She had bled from the nose and mouth. The blood had formed into globes that floated freely. They had begun to darken and wither. It took a long time to reach her. He floated her to the bunk and strapped her in.

He manned the controls. They were

speeding into an empty blackness where distant stars were hard, unwinking points of brutal white light.

He turned the replica ship, saw the stars move across the screen. A tiny spot, misty and dim, appeared. Undoubtedly the nine-mooned planet again. He looked more closely at it. His breath began to come more rapidly.

* * * * *

A morning in May. A little before ten. Seven hundred girls at Fonda Electric are about to take a ten minute cigarette break. An Atlanta hostess finds her guests in a stupor and begins the preparation of benzedrine cocktails. A bemused broker shivers in the saddle of his heli-cycle as he laboriously forces it above its operational ceiling, hoping that Air Police won't notice him until time for the long, long drop down into the corduroy canyons of the city. Kitch Mulloy, originator of the discordant musical style called bee-leep, hauls his Five Aces through a new tape album, confident that at last he has found the right proportion between "tea" and Wilkins' Mead.

Bard Lane sits on the edge of his bunk, grinding the heels of his hands against his temples, leafing through the slow store of memories soon to be removed from him. Major Leeber huffs on a silver leaf and polishes it on his sleeve. He smiles. General Sachson yawns as he methodically clips his toenails. Sharan Inly, too close to the breaking point, stands with one hand across her mouth, the other at her throat.

Twelve miles from Omaha, a radar-radak technician frowns as he studies the pip on his screen. He tries a new focus, then checks the list of EXP flights. He shuts his eyes hard for a moment, then widens them and looks at the screen again. The time lag, giving distance, compared to size, as shown on the calibrated screen, coordinated with speed, makes no sense. The pesky thing is three hundred miles up, traveling almost due south at a slant which loses a mile a second.

He snaps out of his daze and opens the transmitter switch which gives him instantaneous communication with twelve interceptor points.

QUICKLY the nurse lays out the salve to be applied to electrodes and temples. The technician checks the shock equipment. The young state psychoanalyst is still in his room.

The alert is flashed to the interception points. Stand by for orders. A lieutenant holds his breath as the computers click, as he hears the oily hum of the hundred foot tubes, coordinated with the computers. The firing button is under the lieutenant's finger. The sergeant at the screen says, "Maybe it's that comic book Kinson mob."

"We can skip the humor, Sergeant."

"Hey, sir! A change of pattern. It turned end for end and now it's going straight up, but not fast!"

"It can be a bomb with a defective control device."

"Bombs would be closer to big cities, wouldn't they, Lieutenant?"

"Please stop babbling, Sergeant."

Minute by slow minute. "Why doesn't the order come through?" the lieutenant mutters. The thing is getting south, close to the outer limits of his max range. . . .

Video in the lounge at Fonda Electric. Radio in the room where benzedrine is working its familiar magic in Atlanta, reviving the party. Soft music from the pocket pack radio in the broker's pocket. Kitch Mulloy taking a breather, tuning in hoping to hear one of his own records. Bedside radio singing softly in Grosse Point. Young psychoanalyst, ready for the deep shock treatment, walking toward his radio to turn it off. The patients will be ready by now.

WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM TO INFORM AMERICA THAT, AT THIS MOMENT, A SPACE SHIP OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN IS ATTEMPTING A LANDING ON THE FLATS NEAR SALT LAKE CITY. THE SHIP ANSWERS THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN BY DR. BARD LANE IN WHAT WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST BLATANT HOAXES OF THIS OR ANY OTHER ERA. WORD HAS BEEN RECEIVED THAT THE SHIP IS HAVING DIFFICULTY LANDING.

WITHIN FIVE MINUTES WE EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO BRING YOU AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT FROM OUR OBSERVER WHO HAS REACHED THE SCENE. UNTIL THEN WE WILL RETURN YOU TO THE PROGRAM TO WHICH YOU WERE LISTENING.

Jord Orlan left the glass case and returned to his chambers. He had bitten his lower lip and he walked with the taste of blood in his mouth. He sat alone and tried to build something in which he could believe. A structure had collapsed in his mind, and the shards of it were useless. He saw, in memory, the great ship, its ancient hide pocked by space fragments, standing on an alien world, a solid refutation of all the dreams. He had seen that where there were six, there were now only five.

He had seen Raul, haggard, confused, surrounded by the mob, speaking a strange mixture of his own language and fragmentary English into the banked microphones—Leesa, as pale as death, but glowing with a great upward joy, oddly shy as the man they called Lane took her hand.

What was left to believe? The Plan that Raul, in his heresy, had spoken of? Nonsense about mankind, on three planets, merging at last?

Slowly the Law grew in his mind. The Law said that this thing, which had happened, would mean an end to the dreams. He saw ahead of him the long empty years. For him and for others.

At last he went up to the dream machines. Many of them were occupied. By the time he had torn free the cables that held the mouth plates on a dozen of the idle ones, his hands were bleeding.

And then he opened the occupied cases, one at a time, gently disengaging the plates, ripping loose the cables.

He stood with the tears running down his face, the blood dripping from the tips of his fingers, as they gathered around him, confused, uncertain.

* * * * *

Summers leaned against the copy desk in the newsroom, picking his teeth with a thumbnail, speculatively watching the provocative walk of the copy girl as she crossed toward the darkroom. The day editor came over, reached into Summers' shirt pocket and plucked one cigarette out of the open pack. His name was Wrinn and he was fat and tired.

Wrinn said, "The future is within our grasp. The stars in the palm of our hand. Mankind united again after twelve thousand years."

"Okay, we've been putting that in the paper for two months. What next?"

"Easy question, my boy. We wait until Lane and his crew work out the equations and put the *Beatty II* back together, and then we cover the trip to Ormazd the same way this rag covered Lindbergh—before you were born."

SUMMERS spat out a fleck of tobacco. He said softly, "You know, Al, we're still getting a few murders—the cold and calculating variety. And a few suicides where the reasons seem to be good. And we still smell a few international power plays—but don't you have a feeling things are—a little dull?"

"I know what you mean. No juicy ax murders. No screwball violence."

"I'd almost give a week's pay to run over to Brooklyn and cover another nude torso case."

"You have the dirty little mind of all purveyors of the news."

"Granted."

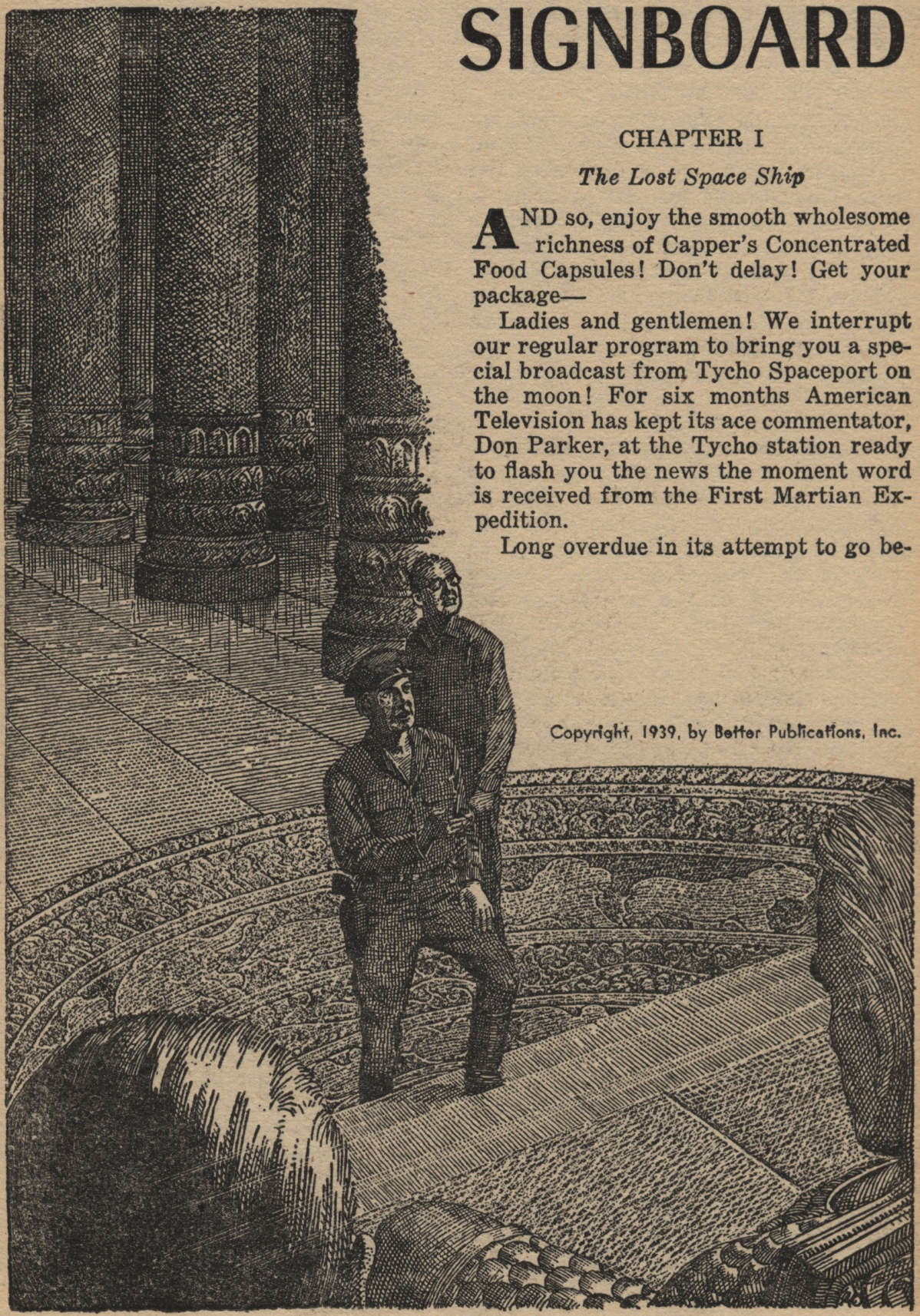
"I've got to recommend a few boys to the managing editor. He has a hunch that soon they'll invite the press on a jaunt across a few dozen light years. You won't find it dull around there."

Summers dropped his cigarette and rotated his shoesole on it. He grunted as though he had caught an elbow in the stomach. Then he grinned. "It will be better than writing drool about that first interplanetary double wedding. I think you got yourself a boy, Al."

The copy girl came out of the darkroom. Summers favored her with a long solemn wink. She blushed prettily, but once by the copy desk, she smiled back over her shoulder. Swinging her hat in her hand, she went down the stairs.

Summers followed her out into the warm moist breath of the July streets of Manhattan.

SIGNBOARD



CHAPTER I

The Lost Space Ship

AND so, enjoy the smooth wholesome richness of Capper's Concentrated Food Capsules! Don't delay! Get your package—

Ladies and gentlemen! We interrupt our regular program to bring you a special broadcast from Tycho Spaceport on the moon! For six months American Television has kept its ace commentator, Don Parker, at the Tycho station ready to flash you the news the moment word is received from the First Martian Expedition.

Long overdue in its attempt to go be-

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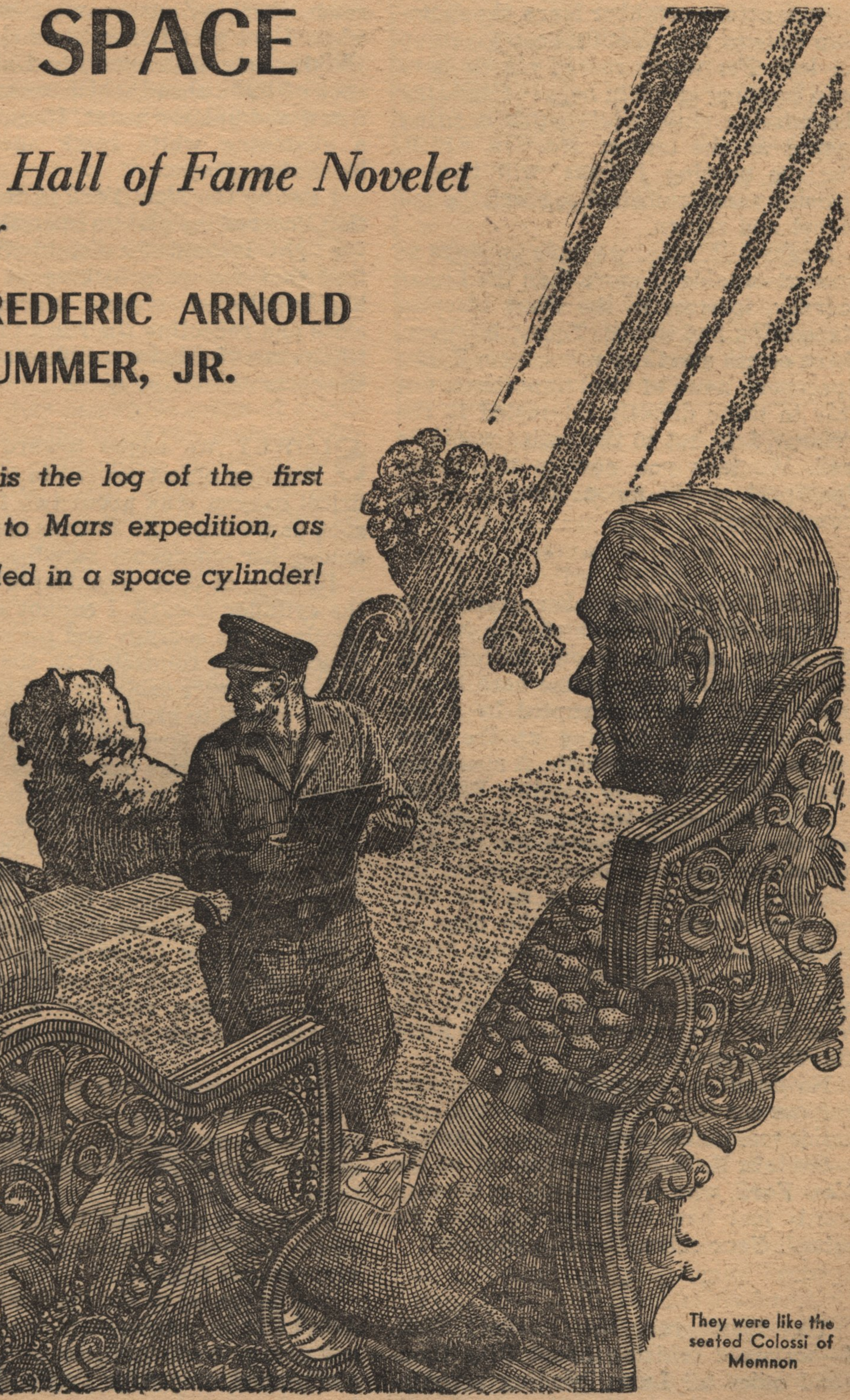
OF SPACE

A Hall of Fame Novelet
by

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Here is the log of the first Earth to Mars expedition, as recorded in a space cylinder!



They were like the seated Colossi of Memnon

yond Luna, to establish contact with our interplanetary neighbor Mars, the spaceship *Primus* has recently been given up for lost. For weeks rescue vessels have been combing space in hopes of sighting the missing ship, while work is being rushed on the cruiser *Martian* which, like the missing *Primus*, will have a cruising range sufficient to reach the red planet and return.

Meanwhile, since we have no ships at present capable of more than the Lunar journey, interest in the First Martian Expedition has waned. Today, however, there comes startling news from Tycho Spaceport, news of vital importance not only to those directly interested in the *Primus'* fate but to the entire world as well. We take you now to the Tycho Spaceport on the moon. Take it away, Don Parker!

* * * * *

Hello, Earth! Don Parker speaking to you from this cold chunk of rock we call the moon. At exactly one fifteen this afternoon our bridge game here in the radio shack was interrupted by a red flare of rockets, lighting up the livid pockmarked terrain outside. A spaceship was settling down over Landing Pit One.

As it slanted in we could see that it was the *New York*, which for the last two weeks had been cruising along the Martian route as far out as her fuel capacity would allow, in the hope of finding some news of the missing *Primus*. And by luck, Providence, what you will, they had succeeded! Aboard the *New York* was a message from the First Martian Expedition!

No doubt on your television screens you can see the tall weather-beaten man beside me. He is—step right up, Captain—Captain R. E. Stryker, master of the *New York*, who will tell you in his own words just how that message was received. Your mike, Captain Stryker!

* * * * *

Uh—thank you, Mr. Parker! Well, I—we were cruising about fifty thousand miles off Luna, heading seventy-two degrees, lunar lineation, in the direction of Mars. I was in the navigation room, checking our gravitational drift, when I got a call from the bridge. Mr. Halkins, my first mate, had sighted a spot of light ahead which seemed to be a new and unknown star. It appeared as a glistening white speck against the blackness of space.

I swung the *New York* in that direction, focused my glasses upon the gleaming light. Instead of a distant star I realized that we were looking at a small highly-polished object, comparatively close and reflecting the sun's rays. Such things are visible incredible distances in the clear vacuum of space.

SLOWLY we edged toward it. The drifting object proved to be a cylindrical oxygen tank about two feet long, such as we knew the *Primus* had carried among her emergency supplies.

Halkins at once volunteered to bring the cylinder aboard. I cannot speak too highly of his courage and perseverance. Space-suited, connected to the ship by only a thin wire cable, he managed after many efforts to grasp the polished cylinder, to drag it through the airlock.

You can imagine our excitement when Halkins stepped from the airlock carrying the cylinder. Particularly when we saw the words "First Martian Expedition" painted upon it. We thought, of course, that it was a bit of wreckage, that the *Primus* had been blown up or hit by a meteor. Closer inspection, however, revealed that the cylinder's escape valve had been removed and its cap clumsily, though securely, welded into place.

At once our curiosity was aroused and I sent for Mr. Gillis, our chief engineer, to open the oxygen tank. Electric torches did the trick and we glanced into the cylinder.

At first it appeared to be empty but when Halkins turned it upside down a vivavox roll fell out.

It was the log of the *Primus!* Well, we didn't like to tamper with the roll without proper equipment, so we put about and headed at once for Tycho. We landed here some two hours ago. . . .

All right! Thank you very much Captain Stryker! This is Don Parker again, ladies and gentlemen. You have just heard Captain R. E. Stryker of the rescue ship *New York* tell of finding the message from the *Primus*. Here it is, this battered vivavox roll I hold in my hand.

As you can see the outer portion of the spaceship's log, consisting of the first month and a half's record of the *Primus'* flight, is hopelessly defaced. The heat of the welding operation which sealed the cylinder was unfortunately responsible for that.

As for what remains of the recording —well for me to attempt to describe such an absolutely incredible series of events would be futile. Upon this strip of cellotos is an explanation of the doom of Mars, of the great "canals" which mark its surface, of a stupendous, almost unbelievable effort on the part of an old dying civilization to bridge the gap of space and convey an awful warning to a new dawning world. It tells of the First Martian Expedition's strange fate, of the implacable stone images that drift forever in space, of inspiring courage and heroic sacrifice.

Here beside me you can see a vivavox speaker. I shall place in it what remains of the log-recording and you will hear the commander of the *Primus* tell in his own words the history of the First Martian Expedition. Just a minute please! All right! Ladies and gentlemen, the log of the *Primus!* The next voice to reach your ears will be that of Captain Howard Markland!

* * * * *

April twelfth. Sleep was again difficult last night. Without exercise, without mental stimulation of any sort, rest is scarcely required. Yet of all things we cherish sleep the most, since it is escape from the maddening, nerve-shattering monotony. The silence too is terrifying. We have had a full month of it since we shut off our rockets.

The slightest noises, footfalls, voices, the clatter of dishes, echo loudly in our metal prison, yet that is preferable to the usual utter lack of sound. Up until a few weeks ago we were able to receive music and television shows from Tycho but the distance now is too great for radio reception.

The other three of our crew look like spectres, as indeed I do myself. They have a grayish pallor and their nerves are shot. Keppler has grown a beard and looks like a half-starved Viking. As rocket engineer he managed to keep occupied until several days ago. After the rockets had been shut off he commenced to overhaul the motors, cleaning, polishing, adjusting every piece of mechanism. Now that's finished and he wanders about like a lost soul.

Dr. Varian has been in that state for weeks. As our physicist and chemist he'll have plenty to do when we reach Mars—analyzing everything we touch, eat or breathe. But right now he has the jitters bad.

Little Braybrook bears up surprisingly well. Spends most of his time working at a treatise on the Lunar ice bugs—grylloblatta campodeiformes, he calls them—and speculating on the various forms of flora and fauna likely to be encountered on Mars.

As for me I thank heaven that the job of navigator and astronomer keeps one busy. Even so the eternal blackness, dotted by great brilliant stars, fills me with a terrible sense of our insignificance. Earth has faded to merely another point

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "Signboard of Space," by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!

of light in the heavens and I keep my telescope turned on Mars.

It is like a big red balloon now, twice the size of our own moon when seen from Earth, and its markings are most amazingly clear.

Well, so much for today. Keppler has concocted another of his famous mathematically accurate meals and is calling for us to come and get it. I suspect he puts a bit of benzedrine in them, for I notice that we usually feel cheerful and companionable after eating.

Markland closing this day's entry. Our position at noon, approximately 32 degrees, 14 minutes, 3.4812 seconds, Earth-solar triangulation.

APRIL thirteenth. With Keppler occupied in taking inventory of our supplies and Braybrook busy at his treatise, Dr. Varian and I spent the day in the control room studying Mars through the telescope. It makes a wonderful sight at present. The Schiaparelli canals are amazingly clear and many new ones, invisible from Earth, are evident. Also many more dark dots, the so-called oases.

Today the Lacus Phoenicis was turned toward us, a tangle of geometrically straight lines at the joinings of which were dark spots of varying size. I am impressed by the similarity of certain curiously regular designs, formed by the canals, to other designs which I have previously noticed upon the Fastigium Aryn.

More peculiar than anything else perhaps is the queer—well, you might say pattern—that unfolds as the planet turns before our gaze. Seen from Earth the canals are no more than a meaningless series of lines connecting black dots. Seen from here they are quite different.

The presence of those lines and dots which are invisible from Terra seems to tie the whole complex jumble into a regular pattern, orderly, mathematical, unquestionably the work of intelligent beings.

But what possible use, other than as canals or immense roads, could such a queer many-angled design have? Even among super-beings such mighty works, sweeping across continents, girdling an entire globe, seem incredible.

Nor does it seem likely that such canals or great roads could have been planned or built all at one time. One would normally suppose that they had been constructed bit by bit, added to as the years passed.

Yet in such a case this queer design would hardly have been followed. Perhaps the silence, the monotony are beginning to get my nerves too—but I cannot drive this old pattern from my mind. Complex, bewildering, yet built according to some preconceived idea. The riddle of these strangely connected figures haunts me. They hold, I am somehow positive, the secret of Mars.

Position 30°17′ 4.3206″. Very close now. What does the future hold for us?

April Fourteenth. Everything okay. All machinery, air-purifier, lighting units and so on functioning perfectly. No solution to pattern of canals. 28° 2′ 31″.

April Fifteenth. Everything going like clockwork. Mars below us now. An interesting phenomenon to watch it drop from in front of us to its present position below. Light clouds hinder observation of markings.

Everyone excited over prospect of landing. Plan to switch on forward rockets tomorrow. Little Braybrook created a laugh by inadvertently snagging Keppler while trying out one of his butterfly nets. In another day or two we will know the secret of the canals. 26° 2′ .004″.

April sixteenth. This has been the most solemn, the saddest day since we left Luna. After little sleep and a hasty breakfast the others crowded up here to the navigation room. Clouds still prevented telescopic observation.

The planet's gravitational pull, however, showed strongly on our instruments. I was afraid my calculations were off—we seemed so near—but at last I realized that gravity had increased our speed tremendously.

At ten a.m. Keppler switched on our forward rockets. The nose of the *Primus* was immediately enveloped in

red flames and the familiar roar of the exhausts broke the silence. We were all speculating on our probable landing time when suddenly Keppler ran down the companionway to the engine room.

When he returned, he was frowning, chewing his lip.

"Rocket Number Two isn't firing," he said slowly. "The ignition system seems to be all right. Must be a stoppage in the firing jet. Impurities in the fuel."

None of us answered him. The *Primus* has four large rocket tubes, two feet in diameter. At the rear of each tube is a firing chamber into which a fuel jet and a spark-gap protrude, not unlike the cylinder of an old-fashioned internal combustion motor. If a bit of waste had clogged the jet it would be an almost impossible task to dislodge it.

I reproached myself bitterly for not having tried our rockets from time to time during the trip. Still, even the shortest test of our landing rockets would have slowed us considerably, costing us precious fuel.

"Any chance of making repairs?" Hansen demanded.

Keppler shook his head. "A two-day job to remove the recoil block behind the firing chamber," he muttered. "And by that time we'll have landed or crashed.

CHAPTER II

Braybrook's Sacrifice

KEPPLER'S words killed any joy we might have felt over the prospect of reaching our destination. A landing on three rockets was ninety-percent luck. Even assuming they might overcome the gravitational pull, the repulsion force would be uneven, would tend to make the ship come in at a bad angle.

We would be like an autocar trying to run on three wheels—almost sure to slip off center, to crash. Still there was no turning back. We were already under the influence of Mars' gravity.

Hardly a dozen words were spoken all day. We spent hours in the control room, eyes glued to the instrument panel. Keppler opened the three remaining rockets wide but even so we were coming in at a rate far in excess of normal landing speed. It became merely a question of how bad the crash would be.

I figured we would hit somewhere near Sabaeus Sinus but the location seemed unimportant now. Keppler estimated tomorrow at noon for the approximate time of our landing. Even benzedrine couldn't cheer us up this evening.

For the first time since leaving Luna I divided the night into watches. We were in too desperate a situation to take chances. Braybrook drew the first, Keppler the second, myself the third, Varian the fourth. I went directly to my bunk, worn out by worry, and fell into a troubled sleep.

Around midnight I was awakened by the sound of an excited voice calling Braybrook's name. I immediately sprang from my bunk, as did Dr. Varian, who slept across the cabin from me. Keppler, his face pale, was shouting for Braybrook.

"What's wrong?" Varian demanded sleepily.

"Can't find him." Keppler tugged nervously at his beard. "I woke up to take my watch, to relieve him—and he's gone!"

"Gone?" I said, a trifle sharply. "Don't be a fool! Where could he go? Must be aboard somewhere!"

"That's what I thought," Keppler muttered. "But—" He shook his head hopelessly.

Dr. Varian and I at once set out to search the ship. It did not take long to discover that Braybrook was missing. Absolutely mystified, we left the engine room, the supply hold, went up to the control room. Keppler was standing there like a run-down robot, his eyes on the instrument panel.

"Look!" he said, without turning.

I peered over his shoulder, gasped. According to the gravitational indicator we were slowly going away from Mars!

"What's it all about?" Varian muttered.

"Don't you see?" Keppler said impa-

tiently. "Lord! The courage of that little man! Listen, Varian, three rockets on full power weren't sufficient to keep us from crashing. But four, on full, have started pushing us back!"

"Four rockets!" Dr. Varian repeated, confused. "Then Number Two has been fixed?"

Keppler nodded sombrely. He was thinking about Braybrook.

"Yes," he whispered. "Fixed. We didn't have time to take out the recoil block, remove the stoppage from the fuel jet. But a man in a space suit could, using a magnetic grapple, go out through an airlock, enter the rocket tubes by the exhaust end. Could clean out the clogged jet—

"Of course!" Varian nodded, beaming. "Funny we never thought of that before. No trouble landing now. Guess Braybrook'll be back through the lock in a minute."

Keppler did not say anything. Dr. Varian, as chemist, was not familiar with the details of the rocket motors. He did not realize that they were all operated by one switch, like the cylinders of a Twentieth Century airplane. Impossible to shut one off while the others were in operation. And to have shut them all off would have meant a nose-dive to Mars, death to everyone aboard.

Braybrook had gone out there, crawled into the tube, removed the bit of waste from the fuel jet—knowing that the moment he did so the rocket would roar into action! A few charred rags, bits of metal, blown by the burst of flame from the rocket tube, like a shot from an ancient cannon.

"No, Varian," I said slowly. "Braybrook won't be back."

April seventeenth. Two hours ago we landed on Mars—safely, thanks to Braybrook's gallant sacrifice. As luck would have it, we came down toward that part of the planet which was plunged in darkness. At first I had determined to swing over to the day side of the globe, or at least hover until morning.

But both these operations involved an expenditure of fuel, of which we had used more than our estimates called for, and seemed an unnecessary waste of the precious trioxine. The flare of the rockets lit up the ground fairly well, so after consulting the others. I headed for land —or rather Mars.

WE were all in the control room, so tense, so keyed-up that the gentle bump of our landing seemed an anti-climax.

"Made it!" Keppler said excitedly. "The first men to reach Mars!" And we shook hands solemnly all around.

Impossible to sleep the remainder of this night. In the light that streams from our observation ports only a flat dusty plain is visible. Once I fancied I could see something large, indistinct, bulking against the skyline off to our left. But it might have been my imagination.

Meanwhile Keppler is shaving in case, as he puts it, there are any good-looking women on Mars. Varian has admitted samples of the planet's atmosphere into the airlock, is analyzing it. I hope.

The interruption just now was caused by the appearance of Dr. Varian with good news. The air, though thin, has a high oxygen content. Moreover, he claims, the exceedingly light gravitational pull will reduce our consumption of oxygen.

Every movement, every action, will be practically effortless and as a result less air will be needed, just as a man sleeping requires less than a man engaged in violent physical exercise. If, as Dr. Varian claims, we will not be confined to clumsy space-suits, exploration should be considerably earlier.

I have just seen the faint gray light of dawn through the porthole beside me. Within a few minutes we will have left our metal prison for the first time in nearly two months to find—what? Intelligent life? The secret of the canals? Who can tell?

I must go now to check over the arms and equipment we will take with us. The light grows stronger and the great adventure lies ahead.

April eighteenth. We have just returned from our first inspection of this mysterious planet. The secret of the canals is in a sense solved. Yet on the other hand it is more inexplicable than before. I cannot shake off the feeling that there is something stupendous, unbelievable about them.

To return to our expedition—as soon as it was light we loaded up with cameras, heat-guns, equipment of every sort, and stepped into the airlock. A moment later the outer door swung open and we jumped down to the ground. We were on a level plain, gray-red in the cold cheerless dawn.

The air was crisp, exhilarating, rather like that of some terrestrial mountaintop. Apart from a curious sensation of being eternally out of breath we were not affected by it. The plain upon which we stood was covered with a fine powdery dust, half the grains red, half gray. The movement of our feet kicked it up in choking clouds.

Off to our left the shadowy shapes I had seen the night before were revealed as a line of vegetation, sweeping off to the horizon on either side, straight as a die.

"Look," Keppler exclaimed. "It must be one of the 'canals!' "

We stared at the row of trees, of grass. I'm afraid I felt rather disappointed at sight of it. I had expected something big, something unknown.

Then Dr. Varian spoke; his voice sounded puzzled.

"Funny," he muttered. "This dust"—he stirred up a cloud of it with his foot—"seems to be a mixture of ferric oxide and some strange metallic substance. Impossible to grow anything in it. Worse than the Sahara. I don't see how that strip of green—"

"Let's go have a look at it," Keppler suggested. "Come on!"

I nodded and we set out across the plain. In almost no time we had reached the vegetated strip. So light was the planet's gravity that each step—or more correctly leap—carried us several yards.

Upon approaching the edge of the canal we were impressed by the strange appearance of the trees and growths. Alien flora, utterly different from that of Earth. Spiny, cactuslike plants, as tall as our highest oaks, curious fungoid shrubs, bushes laden with impossibly beautiful blooms resembling terrestrial orchids and reeking with an odor of decay vile beyond imagining.

Creepers and vines, leprous-white, leafless, twined about the taller growths while long hairlike moss deadened all sound underfoot. There was, I noticed, a considerably quantity of resin oozing from the trees and plants, some of it dried hard as stone.

"Amazing! Darnedest looking vegetation I've ever seen!" Keppler leveled his camera. "No signs of animal life, either!"

While he was snapping shots Dr. Varian dropped to his knees and dug up a square of the earth at the base of the trees.

"Rich and black," he announced. "Must have been artificially fertilized. The straightness of the line proves that. Which in turn proves the existence, past or present, of intelligent life on Mars. Queer, isn't it? Why should they have worked in long narrow strips?"

That stopped all of us. If the idea was to make farmland, then squares or even circles would have been more convenient surely than strips hundreds of miles long and only a few miles across. Besides, a civilization that thought nothing of fertilizing beyond agriculture. Now that I knew what the great pattern on Mars' surface was composed of I wanted to find out why it had been made.

We spent the remainder of the day examining the wooded stretch, taking pictures, collecting specimens of vegetation, of soil. Not until nearly sundown did we return to the *Primus*.

Tomorrow, despite our shortage of fuel, I am determined to take the ship up again, to cruise about very low, to examine this strange silent world. Odd that there are no forms of animal life to be found. Not even worms or insects in the woods. Again I have that feeling of some weird and terrible secret—and somehow I am afraid.

CHAPTER III

The Fairy City

APRIL nineteenth. This must necessarily be a lengthy recording. And I must force myself to speak calmly, to record these events in clear logical sequence. Even now, back aboard ship, I cannot shake off the impression that it is all a dream.

We turned out early this morning. The weather was clear as a bell. No change was visible on the interminable red desert, the long strip of green. After a hasty breakfast we started the *Primus'* motors, rose to a height of approximately one mile and headed south in the direction of Protei Regio.

Below us Mars presented a strange bewildering p i c t u r e. Stretch after stretch of red-gray desert, strip after strip of green vegetated area. The strips, we observed, were from fifteen to thirty miles wide, and hundreds, thousands of miles long. Nor were there any waterways evident within them, which destroys the popular conception of irrigation canals. What the purpose of these strips can be we still cannot imagine.

Around eleven o'clock—if our chronometors have not been disturbed by the gravitational changes—Dr. Varian and I were in the control room when we heard a shout from Keppler. We ran at once to join him. He was standing by an observation port, literally sputtering with excitement. Dr. Varian and I peered over his shoulder and gasped. Below us was a city!

I can recall as a child the pictures in the story books I read. And always in such books there was the great castle in which the prince lived or the princess was imprisoned. Dream castles they were, all slender spires, graceful minarets, sweeping towers, things of sheer unreal beauty against the picture-book sky.

So this city was, somehow ethereal, breath-taking. A small fertilized area surrounded it, like green velvet about a fragile piece of carved ivory. Yet in spite of its beauty there was a bizarre unearthly quality to the city that no terrestrial artist could have conceived. Dr. Varian and I were stunned at sight of it—stunned and awe-struck. Keppler, grinning exultantly, ran toward the control room to nose the *Primus* down.

Very cautiously we circled the strange city. No signs of life greeted us. On the alert for any hostile move we settled the ship on the red plain just beyond the circle of green that surrounded the cluster of tall spires.

"Queer!" Keppler muttered. "Unless it's a trap."

I stared at the gardens before us. Overrun with a riot of vegetation they seemed to have been untended for centuries. Indeed only an occasional bench or crumbling fountain showed them to have been gardens.

"We'll take our guns, of course," I said, "but I don't think we'll need them. "Let's go!"

Awed by this white fairy city we hacked our way through the tangled mass of vines and growths, emerging at last upon a circular ramp that swept upward to the streets of an upper level.

Viewed at close range the city was staggering. Buildings of Cyclopean proportions thrust upward on every hand in a bewildering series of terraces, parapets, flying arches. The work of master builders—Titans it seemed—and as silent and empty as a tomb.

Every step we took stirred up clouds of gray dust, yet the white stone of the massive buildings appeared to have defied time. Proud, majestic, implacable, they towered about us, somehow terrifying, awe-inspiring. We felt strangely insignificant, like tiny terrestrial ants desecrating by our very presence some mighty mausoleum. Keppler, toiling up the huge ramp in advance of us, paused panting.

"Creepy," he called back to us. "A place of the dead!"

At once a thousand echoes took up his voice, sent it flying back and forth among the vast piles of masonry. "Dead —dead—dead." The word echoed and re-

echoed like a ghostly dirge through the empty streets, endlessly, until at last it faded away into a vague whisper. Dr. Varian wiped the sweat from his forehead and shuddered. I knew how he felt.

After a few moments' climb we at last reached the top of the ramp, the streets of the upper levels. Here there were doors, windows, cut in the white gleaming walls, through which we could catch glimpses of curious machinery, a glint of burnished metal, splotches of color that must once have been brilliant murals. And everywhere was a feeling of tremendous age of a civilization that was old when Earth was new.

"What builders they were!" Keppler muttered. "The city might have been finished yesterday."

I GLANCED along the dark forbidding canyon between the streets. Directly before us was a large, dome-shaped building, towering high above the others. Silently, for memory of those ghostly echoes somehow discouraged conversation, I pointed toward it. The others nodded, headed for the great domed structure.

Doors fully twenty feet tall and made of curiously carved bronze closed the vast entrance of the building. As we approached them, however, some hidden electric eye sent its message and the portals silently swung open.

For just a moment we hesitated on the threshold. Keppler's scarred weather-beaten face was grim. Varian was breathing heavily. We could feel the terrible oppression of the place, the weight of countless unanswered questions.

Who were the people that had occupied this mighty city? How many years has passed since the hum of voices, the clatter of feet had echoed through its streets? Above all, what had caused them to abandon this magnificent place and where had they gone?

The movement of the big doors, swinging back into place again, broke the spell that had gripped us. Keppler laughed, whistling in the dark.

"Let's go on in and pay a call!" he said. "Come on!"

We followed him through the entrance. A shadowy pillared hall lay before us, its ceiling lost in the gloom far above. A place of huge proportions, like the dwelling of giants, the dull glint of gold here and there, vague spots of color on the walls, showed it to have been richly furnished.

At one end of the dim hall stood a raised dais, ornate, richly carved. And twelve figures—twelve human figures! Venerable bearded men, they were, grave, erect, dignified, yet with a terrible sadness upon their solemn countenances. They were like the seated Colossi of Memnon that stare with such austere melancholy across the sands of the Sahara.

Well above terrestrial proportions were these figures, fully ten feet tall and of muscular build. Their hands rested upon the arms of the straight thronelike chairs in which they sat. Metal tunics hung from their shoulders and their sightless eyes seemed to peer into infinity. The nobility, the majesty of their expressions filled me with a strange desire to bow before them. They were godlike, sublime.

Standing there before the dais I heard Dr. Varian draw a hard breath. Then Keppler ran across the hall, kicking up clouds of the omni-present dust and tore open one of the windows. A beam of sunlight, alive with dancing motes, shot through the gloom, poured over the tall, sombre forms.

"Look!" Dr. Varian exclaimed. "They are transparent!"

I stared at the seated figures, incredulous. Yellow light was playing upon those withered hands, was passing through them! The mighty shapes were vaguely translucent!

"It—they can't be statues!" I muttered. "Figures so perfect, so absolutely clear in every detail! No sculptor could duplicate each wrinkle, each strand of hair! Some form of embalming, perhaps."

"What!" Dr. Varian exclaimed. "You believe them to be mummies? Terrestrial figures ten feet high—and on Mars? How could they be?"

"There's one way to find out what they are!" Keppler said. "Wait a moment!"

He ran up the stairs of the dais, tapped with the butt of his gun upon the lips of one of the figures. The metal clicked sharply upon them, as though striking stone. Perfectly carved, the work, apparently, of some master artist, these twelve statues were of a translucent amberlike substance, hard as granite.

"You see?" Dr. Varian said slowly. "Stone! Is it possible that men, terrestrials, could have come to Mars before us and their statues been set up as gods? If not we can only believe that the builders of the city, of the canals, were of human form! Either assumption is incredible when—"

He broke off abruptly, staring. In the lap of the central figure were several squares of thin metal, covered with queer engraved markings.

"Tablets!" Keppler cried, snatching one up. "A message, perhaps."

He blew the layer of dust from it, held the piece of metal in the light. Curious symbols covered it—symbols strange, yet somehow familiar. Lines, all straight, meeting, crossing, intersecting at round dots—some double, some single—a geometrician's nightmare.

For a moment I stared at them, puzzled. Then all at once the astounding truth flashed through my brain. These symbols were letters similar to those formed by the great fertilized strips, the canals on the surface of Mars! The intricate markings were the written symbols of a lost race! Could the so-called canals be a Gargantuan message for Earth?

APRIL twenty-second. I have been too busy to keep up this log the past three days. By the time we return from the city at night we are ready only for sleep. This is due to some extent to the keen, crisp air which also increases our oppetites tremendously. In the ship during the voyage we ate little.

We have gathered so much information during the past few days that I could use up this entire vivavox roll recording it.

The more important features, however, I shall try to enter.

Mars is a still silent tomb—little rain, little wind, little change of temperature. We have yet to find life of any sort other than vegetable. Everywhere we turn we are greeted by an intangible feeling of hoary antiquity, of incalculable changeless centuries.

The city is an enigma. We have discovered in it everything for the support of life. Machines, powered I suspect by some atomic method, are to be found in great numbers for heating, for lighting, for manufacturing, for even the synthetic production of food. Surely, with everything done mechanically, the only problem of the lost race must have been boredom.

In hangarlike buildings we have discovered great planes and surface vehicles of queer design, all utilizing the same atomic power. Keppler spends his days trying to find out what its theory is but so far has had no success. He gave us the surprise of our lives yesterday by rolling up to the *Primus* in one of these three-wheeled globular surface vehicles. It ran perfectly but he still cannot solve the secret of its propulsion.

The city must have been a paradise of beauty and pleasure. At first we wondered why, with so advanced a science, the lost race had made no attempt to reach Earth. But after viewing their home here I begin to realize why they had no desire to go elsewhere.

In spite of all this superficial information, however, the questions which meet us at every turn are still unanswered. The twelve strangely lifelike images, with sad silent eyes fixed on the dim reaches of eternity, are symbolic of the whole city. Even now we find it difficult to believe they are statues.

Dr. Varian, having scraped off a sliver of the hard material of which they are made, pronounces it to be a resinous compound like amber. It must have been a favorite of theirs for artwork since yesterday Keppler picked up a cunningly carved amber beetle, not unlike an Egyptian scarab, which must have fallen from a ring.

The problem of what happened to this mighty race puzzles us. War, degeneration, mass migration—none of these seems plausible. Is it our own sense of the dramatic that leads us to suspect some more terrifying more unbelievable explanation?

Yet while we speculate about these vanished people the solution must lie in our grasp. If Dr. Varian can decipher the markings on these tablets and the other inscriptions we have uncovered here and there about the city the secret will, I am sure, be revealed.

Above all, we want to read the great message that sprawls in thousand-mile-long letters upon the surface of this planet. The vastness of that endeavor still stuns me. An interplanetary communication—for it must be that—written upon a world! Written in belts of living vegetation which renews itself every year by the growth and decay of new plants and trees!

But why? What message could be so important that a planet was made a blackboard? And for whom was it meant? Earth, Venus—even Mercury?

Dr. Varian claims that many of the symbols and letter forms resemble some of Earth's earliest prehistoric ideographs. If he is correct this is a tremendous discovery. Could it be possible that at some early date communication existed between Terra and Mars? Such a theory seems incredible and yet those heroic statues are unquestionably replicas of terrestrials. How otherwise . . . ?

Will continue later. Keppler calling from supply hold. Seems excited.

CHAPTER IV

Written on a World

IT is two hours since I interrupted this recording to answer Keppler's shouts. Once again misfortune has struck at us. Varian, who had been examining the amber scarab, met me as I ran from the control room and together we raced along the companionway toward the supply hold. It was full of smoke and Keppler, his face gray, was wielding a fire extinguisher.

"Fire!" He flung at us. "Shorted wires!"

We plunged in. Within half an hour the blaze was out but the damage it had done was irreparable. The sputtering wires had touched off our sacks of rice and flour, ruined them. Which leaves us only the canned goods for the trip home.

As soon as we had taken stock of the damage I held a council to determine our course. The loss of the wheat and rice meant half rations all the way back, assuming we left at once. To linger on Mars for even a few more days might bring us close to starvation before we reached Luna.

Of course there were the Martian synthetic food machines but without further knowledge of their artificial products it seemed unwise to depend upon them. And so, reluctantly, we have decided to take off for Luna tomorrow morning. It is with great regret that we leave this mysterious fascinating world with its many problems, yet our safe return will prove that the void can be bridged.

Other wiser men will come here to learn the secrets that we could not. A new era will dawn for Earth when it solves the science of the lost race. We of the *Primus*, forerunners of the great terrestrial fleets that will soon follow, have reason to feel proud.

April twenty-third. As I make this entry Mars is receding beneath us and the deserted city is already all but lost from view. Keppler is below, tinkering with his beloved engines, while Dr. Varian is already at work on the greatest problem of all—the translation of the queer Martian script.

Those tablets, the huge message emblazoned upon the planet, will, I feel sure, reveal the secret of Mars—the secret of the vanished race, the ancient silent city, the sad faraway look on the faces of those twelve amber statues. And that secret I am determined to solve.

At times I feel that some inexorable

will other than my own is driving me on to fathom the dim ancient mystery of the red planet.

The motors of the *Primus* are running like clockwork. Already we have passed Diemos, outermost of Mars' two satellites. Nothing lies before us except long days in the star-specked blackness of space. May our trip home be as successful as our first crossing!

Markland closing this day's entry. Position approximately twenty thousand miles above Mars.

April thirtieth. First entry in six days. Dr. Varian hard at work on tablets but it is a tremendous job. Fortunately he had made considerable progress before leaving the city, being aided by the marking upon hot and cold water taps, the symbols upon the switches of the many machines, the crisscross lettering beneath such pictures as had resisted decay. These have given him an excellent start. Keppler and I have been kept busy cataloguing specimens, etc. Position 36° 17′ 5.8135″.

June fifth. Shut off rockets this morning. Half rations are beginning to tell a little. We seem to have developed tremendous appetites since leaving Mars. Dr. Varian claims to be making great progress in deciphering Martian script. Troubled with writer's cramp from my long hours of cataloguing. A few more weeks and we will be in radio communication with Tycho. Position 40° 17′ 36.0132″.

June Sixth. Dr. Varian has solved the secret of the Martian script! One problem, that of spacing, the separation of words, has been puzzling him. Suddenly, only an hour ago, he says, the correct answer flashed through his mind. Once that had been discovered, the peculiar lettering was astoundingly easy.

The symbols, Varian claims, are simplicity itself. He feels certain the great message on the planet's surface might have been read long ago, despite the fact that so many of the lines are invisible from Earth, had the staggering conception of visual interplanetary communication been dreamed of by our scientists. So intent has mankind been in its efforts to determine what the canals were that no one thought they might have a meaning.

The use of vegetated strips indicates that Mars wanted its message to remain permanently. But why? Well, we shall soon know. Already Dr. Varian is commencing to translate the tablets we found on the lap of the amber image.

AS I sit here, dictating into this vivavox receiver, I can see him across the cabin, bent over the navigator's desk. The tablets, of some silvery metallic substance, lie before him and he is working furiously, his grayish hair rumpled, his face drawn into a frown of concentration. Through the open doorway I can hear a splashing sound as Keppler develops some photographs.

More even than the tablets I am interested in the huge markings on the planet's surface. It will take another day or so until we are far enough away from Mars to make them out comprehensibly. And even then it will require an entire day to read them, for Mars revolves in twenty-four hours, forty minutes, nearly the same as a terrestrial day.

I am eager, violently nervous, from anticipation. What will that incredible message reveal? What brought about the downfall of Mars—what great thought did its people wish to convey to the rest of space?

Above all we want to find out what this strange connection is between Earth and Mars. The terrestrial forms of the big statues, the curious similarity between this Martian script and certain prehistoric ideographs—these point to an incredible link between the two planets.

Dr. Varian is making rather slow progress at his translation lately. He, like myself, has been troubled with what I first believed to be writer's cramp. It seems to be a numbness of the fingertips, making one's hands rather clumsy. Fortunately there is no pain. Keppler says his toes also feel numb.

Possibly we are experiencing a touch of arthritis induced by the damp cold of the space ship. This slight ailment,

like everything else, is unimportant. Within a few days the greatest secret of all will be ours. Markland closing this entry. Position 42° 12′ 4.0135″.

June Seventh. Something—something fantastic, unbelievable, is taking place aboard this ship! I hardly dare believe the thought that keeps hammering so insistently at my brain. Those twelve statues. . . .

Last night I fell asleep early. Toward midnight I awoke with a feeling of cold numbness about my feet. Determined to get another blanket, I threw back my covers, swung my legs over the side of the bunk. A moment later when I stood up, I experienced the curious feeling of walking on air. That is, my bare feet were absolutely without sensation nor could I move my toes.

All feeling ceased at my ankles as though I had been paralyzed.

Frightened, I took a step forward, and as I did so, a curious clanging sound echoed through the cabin. For a moment I was puzzled, stunned. The sound was like rock being pounded upon steel plates. Then, as I took another step, the clanging sound was repeated. All at once the sheer horrifying truth gripped me. The sound was being made by my feet —my bare feet, striking the metal floor.

Stunned, I reached down and with numbed stiff fingers touched my toes. They were cold, cold as stone!

I think I must have screamed then for the others came running. And their feet, like mine, clanged upon the floor-plates! The gray terror of their faces in the wan illumination of the astralux lamps is something I can never forget.

There was no more sleep that night. We managed to dress somehow, to force shoes over our "frozen" feet. Every movement is difficult now with our hands so clumsy. Keppler tries to make light of it, claims it is some small disorder that will soon pass away. But beneath his joking exterior I feel certain that he is thinking of the same thing I am—of those twelve big statues, so utterly life-like, of brownish amber.

Is it possible that they—but the very thought frightens me. I must work, now while I may still hold a pencil, help Dr. Varian decode the huge letters that stretch across the ominous red surface of Mars. Perhaps they may furnish some clue, some aid.

OUR voracious appetites since leaving Mars tend to bear out the theory that keeps returning to my mind. The message—I must keep my thoughts on that! Markland closing this day's entry. Position 50° 18′ 18.0034″.

June eighth. Keppler has lost use of both arms. They swing heavily from his shoulders, completely helpless. The sound of them as they clash against tables, walls, sickens me. Varian has curious numb hard spots all over his body.

They are dark, brownish, horny. My legs are like stiff artificial ones. I do not feel sorry for Braybrook now.

Dr. Varian works incessantly at the tablets, hoping they may provide some clue as to this disease. It seems hopeless now but we must keep at it. To think of those statues, the deadly thing that creeps through our bodies—that way lies madness.

June ninth. Keppler is dead. This morning when I crawled from my bunk. I called to him but he did not answer. Through the open doorway I could see Varian in the control room, still bent over the desk, hard at work on the tablets.

I dragged myself across the cabin, palsied with dread. As soon as I touched Keppler's body, I knew. It was as hard as stone, vaguely translucent. Hard, brown, stiff. My nails clicked against his skin as I touched it. The expression on his face—

"Varian!" I quavered. "Keppler's turned—to—to stone!"

Like a man awakening from a dream Varian arose, lurched into the cabin. He was a terrifying spectacle, his skin blotched with dark stony spots, his eyes red, blood-shot from long hours of study.

"Quick!" he muttered. "Give him liquor! Alcohol dissolves resin."

But when I stumbled from the gallery with a bottle of brandy, Dr. Varian had

covered Keppler's face.

"Too late for that now," he said and turned once more toward the desk.

"Wait!" I clutched clumsily at his arm. "You said something about resins. Does that mean you know what this thing is?"

"I've deciphered the first tablet," Varian admitted. "There's no hope. We're full of the dust. Breathed it in while on Mars. And there's plenty of it that's blown into this ship while our airlocks were open."

"Dust?" I repeated stupidly. "What's —what do you mean?"

"Don't you see?" Varian exclaimed impatiently. "That gray metallic dust mixed with the red ferric oxide covered all Mars. It's a catalyst. Causes certain organic compounds in the body of small molecular weight to come together, to form large molecules, resins. The reaction is called polymerization—just such a process as causes the saligenin in the bark of trees to turn to resin.

"Resins are mainly carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, all of which, along with certain necessary fatty acids, are present in the human body. United by the catalyst they create a hard translucent variety of resin such as shellac is made from. Hard, tough, strong—like amber, which is also a resinous compound, or bakelite or other plastic compounds."

"Resin," I whispered. "A catalyst! But how did it reach Mars?"

"According to the tablets a small comet, its tail a blaze of fiery gases, passed close to Mars millenniums ago. The gases, composed mainly of iron, of this catalyst metal, were drawn from the comet's tail by Mars' gravity. They fell, cooled into minute particles of iron and this strange metal to blanket the planet's surface. Buried all vegetation."

"Yet the strips—the canals—"

"Canals?" Varian passed a hand over his forehead. "They came later when Mars realized that it was doomed. The whole race working madly against time, using planes, surface vehicles to spread a fertilizing agent over the dust in strips to create the great message on their planet's surface. Vegetation won't grow on the dusty deserts, so they knew the shrubs, the trees, wouldn't spread and ruin the huge letters. That's as far as I've gotten on the translation."

He lurched toward his desk once more. "Must finish work. Find out what message is. Now, while I can."

CHAPTER V

Children of Earth

HOW I have spent the past few hours I do not know exactly. It is like a terrible dream. Varian sits at his desk working, working, muttering to himself. He will not answer my questions. Perhaps he is mad.

My legs have turned to the queer hard substance as far as my hips. Little chance now. Unless message on red planet's surface—a chance it may save us.

I realize now what the twelve amber-like "statues" were—the last men on Mars! Meeting their death in solemn dignity, seated erect, immovable, awaiting the end. How strange to think that the lost race was of terrestrial mold even though so much larger. Ten feet tall, yet the same as we. Perhaps the lighter gravity accounted for that.

And poor Keppler's s c a r a b—that must have been a real beetle, petrified.

As I glance from the porthole beside me I can see Mars, bulking huge, red, menacing, against the sombre eternal blackness of space. If only Varian can translate the stupendous message that marches across its flat surface! So much to be learned, so little time.

Perhaps if we can remain alive until we are in radio range of Earth we can warn them of this horror. No chance of that. No chance of anything. Must go to bed, try to rest.

June ninth. I know everything now. Understand why Martians made canals. Poor devils! B r a v e—so very brave. Thought only of life, human life, regardless of planet it was on. I must think as they thought. Keep life in the Solar Sys-

tem. Someday, perhaps when our science is more developed, Mars will regain its glory.

I was sleeping when Varian called me. His voice, hoarse, inhuman, echoing through our metal prison, awoke me. Dragging my stiff, petrified legs behind me, I crept into the control room. Varian was slumped down in his chair. There was scarcely any white showing between the dark spots that covered his face. He seemed able to move only with an effort.

"Markland!" he whispered. "Know all, now. Incredible! Our forefathers—"

His voice trailed off, weakly. I reached out, shook him. Varian stirred, raised himself to one elbow, began to speak.

"Listen!" he muttered. "They—they

NEXT ISSUE'S HALL OF FAME CLASSIC

ROBOT NEMESIS

A Novelet by DR. EDWARD E. SMITH

—in the year fifty thousand, one hundred and twenty-six of their era the comet struck, showering Mars with the catalyst. In their food, in their water, in the air—every living thing absorbed some of the particles and was therefore doomed to the stony death. But the men of Mars, by use of drugs, diet, rays, managed to check the reaction, retard its spread throughout their bodies for ten years. An entire race, slowly petrifying, with ten years to live!"

"But couldn't they have—" I began. Varian brushed my objections aside.

"There was no escape. Even to build space ships, to flee to other planets was hopeless. The dust was within their lungs and they had to die. They, the only intelligent life in the Solar System!" Varian's brown-mottled hand touched the gleaming tablets.

"Their observations p r o v e d that. Venus, no oxygen. Mercury, too hot. Outer planets, too cold. Earth alone was suitable to bear human life, yet they had seen no forests cleared, no canals built, no evidence of human life.

"Lower animals, ape-men, alone inhabited Terra, they decided. Yet if a true species of man were introduced the lost race thought he must rise, progress in time to heights equal to their own."

I stared at Varian curiously. There was a grayish foam on his lips and his eyes shone like polished ebony. Was he, I wondered, insane?

"The theory of evolution proves—" I muttered.

"It proves that Mars was right!" Varian cried. "Has anyone ever discovered the so-called missing link? The first true man? Ape-men—then true homo sapiens. As different, as distinct, as humming birds and dragonflies. Moreover there is evidence that true man and the ape-man existed simultaneously, were enemies. Is that possible if man evolved from the ape-man?"

Varian's eyes swung to the window, to the great planet beyond—a ruby set in the dark onyx of space.

"Two mighty works the Marsmen planned," he mumbled, "when they learned they were doomed. Two breathtaking works to be accomplished within ten years! Works not for themselves but for the future of life in the Solar System!

"The first of these was a spaceship, embodying all of their great science—a spaceship kept free of the deadly catalyst dust. Two children, a male and a female, kept under glass from the moment of birth, were allowed to reach the age of eight, shielded from the dust which was already within the bodies of their elders, slowly turning them to stony amber.

"When the ship had been completed the children were sealed within it. Think of the labor to create such a ship, Markland! Everything automatic for the children, shut off from all contact since birth, had not even learned speech. It

was a ship operated by robots, by strange machinery. It was built to go very slowly, so that the children might attain maturity by the time they reached Earth."

"Earth!" I gasped. "Then those children—"

"Their names according to the tablets," Varian whispered, "were Admi and Ehv! You see? The Bible says, "There were giants in those days." Giants! Taller because of the lesser gravity on Mars! Like those twelve bodies we found."

A RATTLING cough shook Varian's frame and his stony fingers clattered noisily upon the floor.

"Ship landed automatically," he wheezed. "Young man and woman, first true Homo Sapiens, stepped out into a new world! Hardly less savage than the ape-men, since they had been cut off from all contact on Mars, had spent years in the void. Can't you visualize it, Markland?

"At first remaining near ship, retreating within it in time of danger. Then, as the race multiplied, became strong, they began to spread, push out, and the spaceship rusted away. Very primitive to begin with, the true man, mentally far superior to the lower terrestrial forms of life, rose to—to what they are today?"

"Good Lord!" I stared bewildered at the metal tablets. The vastness of the concept stunned me. "Then it explains so much! So many of man's dim atavistic dreams! Why he imagines a paradise, a heaven in the sky! His amazingly swift progress, his desire to advance scientifically! A thousand longings, instincts, at last explainable!"

Once again my eyes turned to the porthole, to the brilliant red planet. "What of the 'canals', the great message written upon Mars' surface? Were they—"

"The 'canals' were the second great work the Martians undertook in that ten years of grace." Varian's voice was faint now, barely audible. He seemed near death.

"A fertilizing agent, manufactured by atomic machines, sprayed in immense strips from planes, surface vehicles. Seeds planted. Herculean labor. Never quite finished. Some 'canals' were never widened sufficiently to be seen from Earth. But they hoped, with powerful enough telescopes, we of Earth might read message.

"They knew man, transplanted to Earth, must some day rise, build spaceships. Figured these strange markings on the planet, unknown on any other heavenly body, must draw our attention until constant study solved the symbols. Man—read message—learn. . ."

Dr. Varian groaned, toppled from his chair to the floor, stiff, almost completely transformed into the hard brown resinous compound. The *Primus* was silent as some great coffin. Laboriously I dragged myself over to Varian, raised his head.

"The markings!" I cried. "Varian! What does the message mean?"

For a moment he did not reply. Then feebly, his stony lips parted and a faint whisper echoed through the cabin.

"Warning!" he muttered. "Afraid man might come to Mars, bring catalyst back to Earth. Wanted symbols that would remain forever, keep terrestrial civilization from the fate of Mars! Wanted life to go on!"

Varian's voice rose to a shrill, gasping scream and he fell back, inert, lifeless. As he did so his hand relaxed and a slip of paper fell to the floor. On it were the strange crisscross markings of Mars and beneath them these words, written in Varian's crabbed script. It read:

People of Earth! Avoid the red planet! Be warned by our fate! Mars is death!

That is the message formed by the canals of Mars as Varian translated it. Standing here at the porthole of the *Primus* I can see the red planet behind us, its rusty surface cross-hatched with innumerable lines—the Titanic work of a race who, dying, gave their last years that their descendants on Earth might be spared the stony death!

There are no words to describe the courage of our mighty ancestors, whose only thought was that life must go on in the Solar System! Such a valiant effort to save their Earth-born children —and such a magnificent failure! For whether or not the *Primus* returns other terrestrial ships will head for Mars.

I, who like all men of Earth have the blood of this race in my veins, must carry on their brave traditions! I alone, now that the others are dead, must see that this ship, with the dust that has drifted into its cracks and crannies, does not reach Earth! Must see that this log, this warning, is read by the men of Terra. Must, to prevent other vessels from going to Mars.

From the waist down my body is hard, like amber. Perhaps God has directed the full force of the reaction to my lower limbs, thus sparing my hands except for the slight numbness first noticeable. Without the use of my hands I would be helpless to act.

I must work quickly. This vivavox roll to be sealed in an empty oxygen tank—a tank free of the smallest grain of the deadly dust. I can drop the container through the airlock and by swinging the *Primus* about, blast it with the backlash of our rockets toward Earth. Maybe, falling into the terrestrial gravitational field, it may be discovered.

The *Primus* I shall point toward outer space, its rockets on full. I will amuse myself during my last hours in speculating as to what strange beings, centuries from now, will open this bit of metal, stare in bewilderment at the three stony amber-hard images within.

I must stop now, get ready the oxygen tank that is to contain this vivavox roll. Soon the petrification will creep up, reach my lungs, my heart—and I will be like Keppler, like Varian, like those twelve seated figures who were the last men on Mars. I shall have to hurry.

So ends the First Martian Expedition on its eighty-third day. Markland closing this entry and the log. Position 57° 44′ 43.0163″. On behalf of Braybrook, Keppler, Varian and myself, let me say—goodbye, Earth! Hail and farewell!

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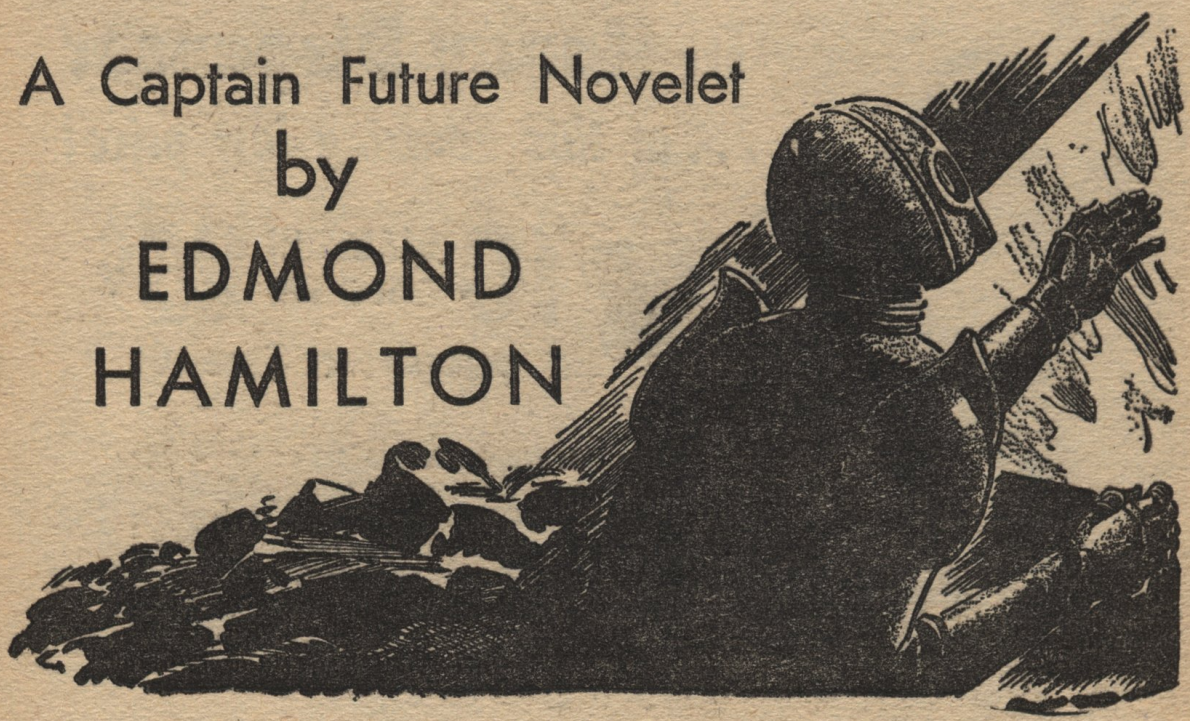
Children of the Sun

Curt Newton, in quest of a friend lost inside Vulcan, faces the most insidious dangers he has ever known in his entire galactic career!

A Captain Future Novelet

by

EDMOND HAMILTON



CHAPTER I

Quest of the Futuremen

THE ship was small and dark and unobtrusive, speeding across the Solar System. It had a worn battered look, its plates roughened by strange radiation, dented by tiny meteors, tarnished by alien atmospheres.

It had been far, this ship. In its time it had voyaged to the farthest shores of infinity, carrying its little crew of four on an odyssey unmatched in human annals. It had borne them to perils far around the universe—and back again.

But not even the man who sat at its controls could dream that now, here inside the familiar System, it was bearing him toward the most strange and soul-shaking experience of all. . . .

Curt Newton was oppressed, not by premonitions but by a self-accusing regret. The deep worry that he felt showed in the tautness of his face, in the set of his lean body. His red head was bent forward, his gray eyes anxiously searching the sunbeaten reaches of space ahead.

The little ship was inside the orbit of Mercury. The whole sky ahead was dominated by the monster bulk of the Sun. It glared like a universe of flame, crowned by the awful radiance of its

Into the light Curt flashed, and upward

corona, reaching out blind mighty tentacles of fire.

Newton scanned the region near the great orb's limb. The impatience that had spurred him across half the System grew to an intolerable tension.

He said almost angrily, "Why couldn't Carlin let well enough alone? Why did he have to go to Vulcan?"

"For the same reason," answered a precise metallic voice from behind his shoulder, "that you went out to Andromeda. He is driven by the need to learn."

"He wouldn't have gone if I hadn't told him all about Vulcan. It's my fault, Simon."

Curt Newton looked at his companion. He saw nothing strange in the small square case hovering on its traction beams—the incredibly intricate serum-case that housed the living brain of him who had been Simon Wright, a man. That artificial voice had taught him his first words, the lens-like artificial eyes that watched him now had watched his first stumbling attempts to walk, the microphonic ears had heard his infant wails.

"Simon—do you think Carlin is dead?"

"Speculation is quite useless, Curtis. We can only try to find him."

"We've *got* to find him," Newton said, with somber determination. "He helped us when we needed help. And he was our friend."

Friend. He had had so few close human friends, this man whom the System called Captain Future. Always he had stood in the shadow of a loneliness that was the inescapable heritage of his strange childhood.

Orphaned almost at birth he had grown to manhood on the lonely Moon, knowing no living creature but the three unhuman Futuremen. They had been his playmates, his teachers, his inseparable companions. Inevitably by that upbringing he was forever set apart from his own kind.

Few people had ever penetrated that barrier of reserve. Philip Carlin had been one of them. And now Carlin was gone into mystery.

"If I had been here," Newton brooded, "I'd never have let him go."

A BRILLIANT scientist Carlin had set out to study the mysteries of that strange world inside Vulcan which the Futuremen had discovered. He had hired a work-ship with heavy anti-heat equipment to take him to Vulcan, arranging for it to come back there for him in six months.

But when the ship returned it had found no trace of Carlin in the ruined city that had been his base of operations. It had, after a futile search, come back with the news of his disappearance.

All this had happened before the return of the Futuremen from their epoch-making voyage to Andromeda. And now Curt Newton was driving sunward, toward Vulcan, to solve the mystery of Carlin's fate.

Abruptly, from beyond the bulkhead door of the bridge-room, two voices, one deep and booming, the other lighter and touched with an odd sibilance, were raised in an outburst of argument.

Newton turned sharply. "Stop that wrangling! You'd better get those anti-heaters going or we'll all fry."

The door slid open and the remaining members of the unique quartet came in. One of them, at first glance, appeared wholly human—with a lithe lean figure and finely-cut features. And yet in his pointed white face and bright ironic eyes there lurked a disturbing strangeness.

A man but no kin to the sons of Adam. An android, the perfect creation of scientific craft and wisdom—humanity carried to its highest power, and yet not human. He carried his difference with an air but Curt Newton was aware that Otho was burdened with a loneliness far more keen than any he could know himself.

The android said quietly, "Take it easy, Curt. The unit's already functioning."

He glanced through the window at the glaring vista of space and shivered. "I get edgy myself, playing around the Sun this close."

Newton nodded. Otho was right. It was one thing to come and go between the planets, even between the stars. It was a wholly different thing to dare approach the Sun.

The orbit of Mercury was a boundary, a limit. Any ship that went inside it was challenging the awful power of the great solar orb. Only ships equipped with the anti-heat apparatus dared enter that zone of terrible force—and then only at great peril.

"You'll burn out your circuits and we've better things to do than trying to cram your carcass out through the disposal lock."

The android turned to Captain Future. "You haven't raised Vulcan yet?"

Newton shook his head. "Not yet."

Presently a faint aura of hazy force surrounded the little ship as it sped on—the anti-heater unit building up full power. The terrible heat of the Sun could reach through space only as radi-

CAPTAIN FUTURE

Only the fourth of the Futuremen seemed unworried. He crossed to the window, his towering metal bulk looming over them all. The same scientific genius that had created the android had shaped also this manlike metal giant, endowing him with intelligence equal to the human and with a strength far beyond anything human.

Grag's photoelectric eyes gazed steadily from his strange metal face, into the wild shaking glare. "I don't know what you're jumpy about," he said. "The Sun doesn't bother me a bit." He flexed his great gleaming arms. "It feels good."

"Stop showing off," said Otho sourly.

ant vibrations. The aura generated by the anti-heaters acted as a shield to refract and deflect most of that radiant heat.

Newton touched a button. Still another filter-screen, this one the heaviest of all, slid across the window. Yet even through all the screens the Sun poured dazzling radiance.

The temperature inside the ship was steadily rising. The anti-heaters could not deflect all the Sun's radiant heat. Only a fraction got through but that was enough to make the bridge-room an oven.

An awed silence came upon the Fu-

turemen as they looked at the mighty star that filled almost all the firmament ahead. They had been this close to the Sun before but no previous experience could lessen the impact of it.

You never saw the Sun until you got this close, Newton thought. Ordinary planet-dwellers thought of it as a beneficent golden thing in the sky, giving them heat and light and life. But here you saw the Sun as it really was, a throbbing seething core of cosmic force, utterly indifferent to the bits of ash that were its planets and to the motes that lived upon those ashes.

They could, at this distance, clearly see gigantic cyclones of flame raging across the surface of the mighty orb. Into those vortices of fire all Earth could have been dropped and from around them exploded burning geysers that could have shriveled worlds.

Sweat was running down Curt Newton's face now and he gasped a little for each breath. "Temperature, Otho?" he asked without turning his head.

"Only fifty degrees under the safety limit and the anti-heaters running full load," said the android. "If we've miscalculated course—"

"We haven't," said Captain Future. "There's Vulcan ahead."

The planetoid, the strange lonely little solar satellite, had come into view as a dark dot closely pendant to the sky-filling Sun.

Newton drove the *Comet* forward unrelentingly now. Every moment this close to the Sun there was peril. Let the anti-heaters stop one minute and metal would soften and fuse, flesh would blacken and die.

Otho suddenly raised his hand to point, crying out, "Look! Sun-children!"

They had heard of the legendary "sun-children" from the Vulcanian natives, had once glimpsed one far off. But these two were nearer. Newton, straining his eyes against the solar glare, could barely see the things—two whirling little wisps of flame, moving fast through the blinding radiance of the corona.

Then the two will-o-wisps of fire had disappeared in the vast glare. The eye searched for them in vain.

"I still think," Simon was saying, "that they're just wisps of flaming hydrogen that are flung off the Sun and then fall back again."

"But the Vulcanians told of them coming down into Vulcan," Otho objected. "How could bits of flaming gas do that?"

CURT NEWTON hardly listened. He was already whipping the ship in around Vulcan in a tight spiral few spacemen would have risked. Its brake rockets thundering, it scudded low around the surface of the little world.

The whole surface was semi-molten rock. The heat of the planetoid's stupendous neighbor kept its outer skin half-melted. Lava sweltered in great pools, infernal lagoons framed by smoking rock hills. Fire burst up from the rocks, as though called forth by the nearby Sun.

Grag first saw what they were looking for—a gaping round pit in the sunward side of the planetoid. Presently Captain Future had the *Comet* hovering on keel-jets above the yawning shaft. He eased on the power-pedal and the little ship dropped straight down into the pit.

This shaft was the one way inside the hollow solar satellite. At the planetoid's birth gases trapped within it had caused it to form as a hollow shell. Those gases, finally bursting out as pressure increased, had torn open this way to the outer surface.

The ship sank steadily down the shaft. Light was around them for this side of Vulcan was toward the Sun now and a great beam entered.

Then, finally, the shaft debouched into a vast space vaguely lighted by that beam—the interior of the hollow world.

"Whew, I'm glad to be in here out of that solar radiance," breathed Otho. "Now where?"

Newton asked, "The ruins near Yellow Lake, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered the Brain's metallic voice. "It was where the ship left Car-

lin and where it was to pick him up."

The Futuremen had been here inside Vulcan once before. Yet they felt again the wonder of this strangest world in the System as the *Comet* flew low over its inner surface.

Beneath their flying ship stretched a weird landscape of fern jungles. It extended into a shrouding haze ahead, the horizon fading away in an *upward* curve. Over their heads now was the hazy "sky" of the planetoid's central hollow, cut across by the tremendous, glittering sword of the giant beam of sunlight that gave light to this world.

As their ship slanted down over the fern jungle toward their destination a feeling of gray futility came upon Curt Newton. Months had passed since Philip Carlin had disappeared here. Could the scientist have survived alone so long in this wild world?

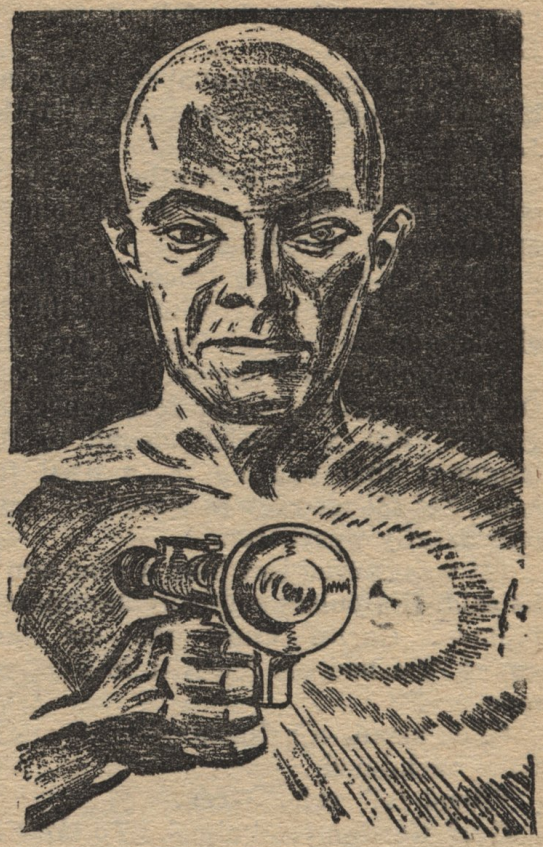
A city wrecked by time lay beneath them, almost swallowed by the giant ferns. Only scattered crumbling stones of massive dimensions had survived the ravages of unthinkable ages. It was like the flotsam of a lost ship, floating up out of the past.

The *Comet* came to rest upon cracked paving surrounded by towering shattered monoliths. The Futuremen went out into the steamy air.

"It was here that Carlin was to meet the ship when it came," said Captain Future. "And he wasn't here." He spoke in a lowered voice. The brooding silence of this memorial of lost greatness laid a cold spell upon them all.

These broken mighty stones were all that remained of a city of the Old Empire, that mighty galactic civilization mankind had attained to long ago. On worlds of every star its cities and monuments had risen, then had passed—had passed so completely that men had had no memory of it until the Futuremen probed back into cosmic history.

Long ago the mighty ships of the star-conquering Empire had come to colonize even hollow Vulcan. Men and women with the powers of a brilliant science and with proud legends of victorious cosmic conquest had lived and loved and



OTHO

died here. But the Empire had fallen and its cities had died and the descendants of its people here were barbarians now.

"The first thing," Newton was saying, "is to get in touch with the Vulcanians and find out what they know about Carlin."

Grag stood, his metal head swivelling as he stared around the ruins. "No sign of them here. But those primitives always are shy."

"We'll look around first for some trace of Carlin here then," Newton decided.

The quartet started through the ruins —the man and the mighty clanking robot, the lithe android and the gliding Brain.

Newton felt more strongly the oppressive somberness of this place of vanished glory, as he looked up at the inscriptions in the old language that were carved deep into the great stones. He could read that ancient writing and as he read those proud legends of triumphs long sunken into oblivion he felt the crushing sadness of that greatest of

galactic tragedies, the fall of the Old Empire.

Simon's sharp, metallic voice roused him from his preoccupation. "Curtis! Look *here!*"

Captain Future instantly strode to where the Brain hovered beside one of the towering monoliths.

"Did you find some trace, Simon?"

"Look at that inscription! It's in the old language—but it's *newly carved!*"

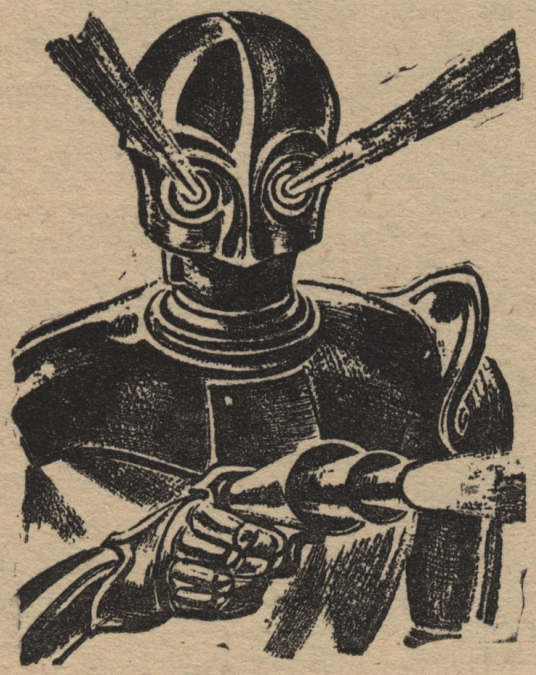
Newton's eyes widened. It was true. On that monolith, a few feet above the ground, was a chiseled legend in the language that had not been used for ages. Yet the characters were raw, new, only faintly weathered.

"It was carved less than a year ago!" he said. His pulses suddenly hammered. "Simon, Carlin knew the old language! He had me teach it to him, remember!"

"You mean—Carlin carved this one?" Otho exclaimed.

"Read it!" cried Grag.

Curt Newton read aloud, *"To the Futuremen, if they ever come—I have discovered an incredible secret, the strangest form of life ever dreamed. The implications of that secret are so tremendous that I am going to investigate them first hand. If I do not return be warned that the old citadel beyond the Belt holds the key to a staggering power."*



GRAG

CHAPTER II

Citadel of Mystery

As the echoes of Curt Newton's voice died away the four looked at each other in troubled wonder. The rank ferns drooped unstirring in the weird half-light over the broken arches and falling colonnades. Somewhere in the jungle a beast screamed harshly with a sound like laughter.

Otho finally broke the silence. "What could Carlin have found?"

"Something big," Captain Future said slowly. "So big that he was afraid of anyone else finding it. That's why he wrote this in the language of the Old Empire that no one but Simon and I could read."

Simon said practically, "The Belt is what the natives call the strip burned out by the Beam, isn't it? Well—we can soon find out."

"Shall we take the ship?"

Newton shook his head. "Too tricky navigating in here. The Belt isn't far away."

Grag flexed mighty metal limbs. "What are we waiting for?"

Presently the quartet was moving through the jungle of giant ferns. All about them was silence in the heavy gathering twilight. The bright sword of the Beam was fading, angling away as the opening in the crust was rotated away from the Sun.

Newton knew the direction of the Belt, that seared blackened strip in which the terrible heat of the Sun's single shaft permitted nothing to live. He steered their course to head around the end of the Belt.

Again a beast-scream came from far away. There seemed no other sound in the fern jungle. But presently the Brain spoke softly. "We are being followed," he said.

Curt Newton nodded. Simon's microphonic ears, far more acute than any human auditory system, had picked up faint rustlings of movement among the ferns. Now that he was listening for it Newton could hear the stealthy padding of many naked feet, moving with infinite caution.

"I don't understand it," he murmured. "These Vulcanian natives were friendly before. This furtiveness—"

"Shall we stop and have it out with them?" Otho demanded.

"No, let's go on. We have to find that citadel before dark. But keep alert—a thrown spear can be just as final as a blaster."

"Not to me it can't," rumbled Grag.

"Curt didn't mean you—he meant us humans," gibed Otho.

"Listen, plastic-puss," Grag began wrathfully. "I'm twice as human as you and—"

"That's enough," Newton rapped. "You can carry on that old argument some other time."

They went on and the unseen escort went with them. Soon they encountered the end of the Belt.

Black calcined soil, smoking rocks, a wave of dull heat from the ground itself attested to the awful heat of the Sun whose single great ray once each day traveled across this strip of Vulcan's interior.

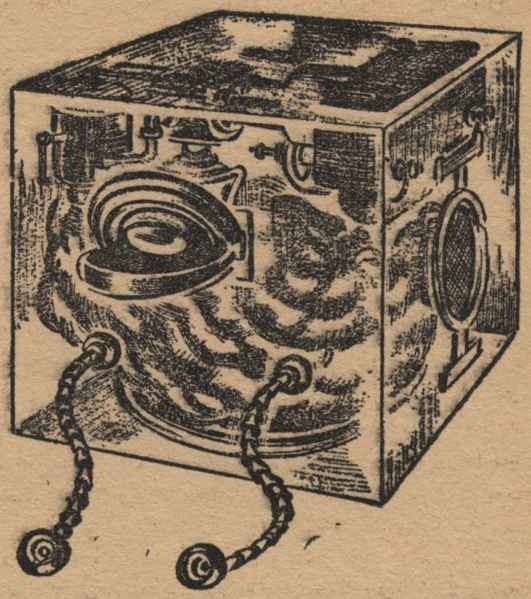
They made Captain Future feel again the terrible power of the gigantic solar orb so close by that could reach in through a single loophole and wreak this flaming devastation where it touched.

They crossed the end of that blackened strip, Curt and Otho hastening over the hot rocks, Grag plodding stolidly, Simon gliding ahead.

Before them the fern jungle rose into barren olive-colored hills, growing dark as the dusk deepened. Almost at once Newton noticed something on the slope of the nearest hill. It was a raw lumpy scar where a landslide had recently occurred.

"Simon, look at that landslide! Notice anything?"

The Brain hovered, his lens-eyes surveying the dusky hillside. "Yes, the outline. Definitely unnatural."



THE BRAIN

Otho and Grag were staring now, too. "*I* don't see anything unnatural about it," boomed the metal giant.

"It covers a building that stood on that hillside," Newton informed him. "Look at the symmetry of it, even masked by soil—the central cupola, the two wings."

Otho's bright eyes flashed. "The citadel Carlin mentioned?"

"Perhaps. Let's have a look."

They moved on. In a brief time they were climbing the slope to that great lumpy scar of new soil.

Newton looked back down at the jungle. No one had followed them out of it onto the bare slope. The giant ferns stretched far away and he could catch the tawny gleam of Yellow Lake in the distant dusk.

THROUGH the twilight jungle, the Belt stretched like a stygian river of deepest black. He could see no building or ruin of any kind on his side of the ebon strip.

"This *must* be the citadel Carlin meant," he said. "Apparently a landslide has covered it since he was here. We'll have to dig a way in."

They found flat stones in the loose soil of the slide. Using them as hand-

spades Newton and the android and robot began pushing aside the ocher soil above the cupola of the buried building.

Something flashed and hissed in the dusk. Curt Newton whirled. A long quivering spear stuck in the slope some distance below them.

"I *thought* the Vulcanians were still with us!" Otho muttered.

Newton said quietly, "Just stand still. Let me talk to them."

He faced down the slope toward the fern jungle. He called out in the language he had learned on his first visit to this lost world—a debased form of the once-beautiful language of the Old Empire, sunk now into barbarism like the men who spoke it.

"Show us your faces, my brothers! We come as friends and our hands are empty of death!"

There was utter silence. In the distance the fading shaft of sunlight lay like a tarnished sword across the dusk. The dense jungle below was untouched by wind or motion of any kind. Even the beasts were stilled by that strong human voice, speaking out across the desolation.

Newton did not speak again. He waited. He seemed to have endless patience, and complete assurance. After a time, half furtively and yet with a curious and touching pride, a man came out of the jungle and looked up at them.

He was clad in garments of white leather and his skin was white and the falling mane of his hair was white and his eyes were pale as mist. His only weapons were a knife and a spear.

In his carriage, in the fine modeling of his head, Newton could still see lingering traces of the heritage that had given the men of the Old Empire supremacy over two galaxies. And it seemed sad that this man should look up at him with the shy feral untrusting eyes of a wild thing.

Simon Wright said quietly, "Do you not know him, Curtis?"

"Of course." In the Vulcanian dialect Newton said, "Is the memory of Kah so short that he does not know his brothers?"

They had had dealings with Kah before. He was lord over a third of the tribes of Vulcan and had proved a man of his word, aiding the Futuremen in many ways. But now the suspicious catlike eyes studied them, utterly without warmth or welcome.

"Kah remembers," said the man softly. "The name of the great one is Grag—and you are the flame-haired one who leads."

Behind him, by twos and threes, his men gathered silently at the foot of the slope. They were all the same tall snow-haired stock, wearing the white leather, bearing the sharp spears. They watched, and Newton saw that their eyes dwelt in wonder upon the towering Grag. He remembered that they had been much impressed by Grag before.

Kah said abruptly, "We have been friends and brothers, and therefore I have stayed my hand. This place is sacred and forbidden. Leave it while you still live."

Newton answered steadily, "We cannot leave. We seek a friend who came here and was lost."

The Vulcanian chieftain voiced a long, harsh *Ah-h!* and every man with him lifted his spear and shook it.

"He entered the forbidden place," said Kah, "and he is gone."

"Gone? You mean he's dead?"

Kah's hands shaped an age-old ritual gesture. Newton saw that they trembled. The Vulcanian turned and pointed to the fading Beam, which was to him a symbol of godhead.

"He has gone *there*," Kah whispered, "along the path of light. He has followed the Bright Ones, who do not return."

"I do not understand you, Kah!" said Newton sharply. "Is the body of my friend in this buried place? What happened? Speak more clearly."

"No, I have talked too much of forbidden things." Kah raised up his spear. "Go now! Go—for I have no wish to slay!"

"You cannot slay, Kah, for your spears will not fly this far. And the great one called Grag will be as a wall against your coming."

Rapidly, under his breath, Newton spoke to the robot. "Keep them back, Grag! They can't harm you, and it'll leave us free to dig."

CLANKING ponderously down the slope, a terrifying gigantic form in the dusk, Grag advanced on the Vulcanians. And Newton cried aloud to Kah, "We will not leave this place until we have found our friend!"

Kah flung his spear. It fell short by no more than two paces but Newton did not stir. The Vulcanian drew back slowly before the oncoming Grag, who spread out his mighty arms and roared and made the ground tremble under his feet.

"The big ham!" whispered Otho. "He's enjoying it."

There was a wavering among the ranks of the natives. A ragged flight of spears pelted up the slope and some of the obsidian points splintered with a sharp ringing sound on Grag's metallic body. Grag laughed a booming laugh. He picked up a slab of stone and broke it in his hands and flung the pieces at them.

"That does it," said Otho disgustedly. "I'm going to be sick."

Kah screamed suddenly, "The curse will fall on you as it fell on the other who entered there! You too will go out along the Beam, lost forever from the sight of men!"

He turned then and vanished into the jungle.

"I have been studying this landslide," said Simon Wright irrevelantly. "I believe that it was artificially caused by the natives to seal this place after Carlin entered it."

"Very likely," Captain Future answered. He stood for a moment in deep thought. "I wonder what Kah meant by the 'Bright Ones who do not return'?"

"Probably a euphemism for the dead," said Otho pessimistically. "We'll know better when we've found a way inside."

They turned to and began to dig again. The citadel stood on a sort of promontory, partly blocked now by the slide, so that the natives could only come at them up the slope, and Grag effectively barred the way. Now and again a spear whistled harmlessly into the dirt but there was no attack.

The last glowing thread of the Beam narrowed into nothingness and was gone. Utter darkness descended on the hidden world of Vulcan. Newton and Otho worked on by the light of belt-lamps.

They struck the solid stone of the building, and the work went faster. After a few minutes Otho cried, "There's an opening here!"

They discarded their improvised spades. The loose dirt flew under their hands and presently they had uncovered the upper arches of a triple window. From there the way was easy.

Curt Newton was the first one inside. A great quantity of dirt had poured in through the open arches but most of this upper level was clear. Otho slid agilely after him, and then the Brain.

The lamps showed them a circular gallery, high up in the central cupola. Below was a round and empty shaft. Newton leaned out over the low carved railing. Far down in the pit he could see a soft and curdled luminescence, like spectral sunlight veiled in mist. The source was hidden from him by the overhang of other galleries lower down.

The silence of age-long death was in the place and the mingled smell of centuries and of the raw new soil. Newton led the way around the gallery, his footsteps ringing hollow against the vault of stone.

He found a narrow stairway, going down.

They descended, passing the other galleries, and came at last into a small chamber. It had had a door to the outside, a massive, age-tarnished metal door that had buckled somewhat with pressure and had let dirt sift through the cracks.

Opposite the door was a low, square opening in the stone wall. Above it was an inscription. Holding his lamp high, Curt Newton read slowly, "Here is the birthplace of the Children of the Sun."

CHAPTER III

Dread Metamorphosis

WONDERINGLY they went through into the central chamber of the citadel. Dirt had spilled down from above, covering a good part of the floor. Newton realized that only the upper gallery, serving as a stop for the soil to dam itself against, had saved the interior of the citadel from being heavily inundated.

He scrambled up onto that heap of rock and soil, and then stood still, gazing in puzzled wonder. He saw now the sources of that dim, eerie light. Set in deep niches on opposite faces of the curving wall were two seeming identical sets of apparatus, like nothing he had ever seen before.

The bases were of some dark metal, untouched by the passage of time. They were wide and low, separated so that their centers formed a dais. Each base bore two soaring coils of what seemed to be crystal tubing, as high as a tall man, braced in frames of platinum.

The coils pulsed and glowed with misty light—one set giving forth a gleam of purest gold, the other a darker hue of bluish green. Opposite the arch through which they had entered was a third niche, much smaller, having within it a complicated bank of instruments that might have been a control panel.

"Birthplace of the Children of the Sun," said Otho softly. "Look, Curt—there above the niches."

Again Captain Future read aloud, the warning messages cut deep in the ageless stone. Above the apparatus of the golden coils it said, "Let him beware who steps beyond this portal. For death is the price of eternal life!"

Above the one of somber hue, the inscription read "Death is a double doorway. On which side of it is the true life?"

Simon Wright had approached the niche that held the strange glow of sunlight and was hovering over the edge of the fallen soil there. "Curtis," he said, "I think we have found what we sought."

Newton joined him. He bent and picked something up, shaking it free from the dirt that half buried it. Mutely he nodded and showed the thing to Otho. It was a coverall of tough synthetic cloth, much stained and worn. On the label inside the collar was woven the name, *Philip Carlin.*

"He was here then, Otho. "But what happened to him? Why would he strip —*wait!*"

The android's sharp eyes had perceived a mound in the soil, vaguely manlike in shape. Together he and Newton uncovered it and then looked at each other in vast relief.

"It's only his knapsack and bedroll," said Newton thankfully.

"And his boots." Otho shook his head. "I don't get it at all. There's no sign of blood on his clothes—"

Newton was looking now at the yel-crystal coils, the suggestive dais-like space between them. The thing was close to him, almost close enough to touch.

"He stripped here," said Newton slowly. "He left his clothing and his kit behind and—" His eyes lifted to the inscription and he added very softly, "Phil Carlin went through the portal, whatever it is and wherever it leads."

"I agree with your assumptions, Curtis," said Simon Wright. "I suggest that you search Carlin's effects for any data he may have left relative to this apparatus and its uses. It is obvious that he spent months in study and such a record seems inevitable."

Simon's lens-eyes turned toward the small niche with the cryptic bank of controls.

"See, there are many close-packed inscriptions on those walls, presumably instructions for the operation of these machines. He would surely have written down his translations for reference."

Captain Future was already going through Carlin's pack. "Here it is!" he said and held up a thick notebook. "Hold your light closer, Otho."

He thumbed rapidly through the

pages until he found what he was hoping and praying for—a section headed, in Carlin's meticulous script, TRANSLATION OF FORMULAE, CONTROL NICHE.

"Long, complicated and heavily annotated by Carlin," he said. "It will take us the rest of the night to puzzle this out, but it's a godsend all the same."

He sat down in the dirt, the book open on his knees. Simon hovered close over his shoulder. The two were already absorbed in those all-important pages.

"Otho," said Newton, "will you go up and give Grag a hand in? The natives won't dare to follow us in here on forbidden ground."

AND that was the last thing he said that night, except to exchange a few terse remarks with Simon on the intricacies of some formulae or equation.

Grag and Otho waited. They did not speak. From beyond the high windows came a distant sound of voices that was like a bitter dirge.

Curt Newton read on and on in Carlin's record. And as he read the terrible suspicion that had been born in his mind took form and shape and crystallized at last into a truth as horrifying as it was inescapable.

There was more in that record than mere scientific data. There were history and hope and terror and a great dream and a conclusion so staggering that the mind reeled before it—a conclusion that brought in itself a dreadful punishment.

Or was it, after all, a punishment?

Curt Newton flung the book from him. He leaped up and found that he was trembling in every limb, his body bathed in sweat. "It's ghastly, Simon!" he cried. "Why would they have let such an experiment go forward?"

Simon's lens-like eyes regarded him calmly. "No knowledge can be wrong in itself—only in its application. And the men of the Old Empire did forbid the use of this apparatus when they learned its effect. Carlin quotes here the inscription he found in the ruined city that so states. Also he mentions that he himself broke the seals on the great door."

"The fool," whispered Newton. "The crazy fool!" He glanced at the twin sets of glowing coils and then upward at the dome.

"He changed and went out along the Beam. And the natives, horrified by what he had done, caused the landslide to seal this place."

"But Carlin did not come back," said the Brain.

"No," said Newton, broodingly. "No, he didn't. Perhaps for some reason he couldn't."

The android's bright eyes were watching him. "What was it that Carlin changed into, Curt?"

Curt Newton turned and said slowly, "It's an almost unbelievable story. Yet Carlin notes every source, here and in the ruined city."

He paused as though trying to shape what he had learned into simpler terms.

"In the days of the Old Empire the Vulcanian scientists had a predominant interest in the Sun. In fact it appears that Vulcan was first settled as an outpost for the study of solar physics. And somewhere, in the course of those centuries-long researches into the life of the Sun, one man discovered a method of converting the ordinary matter of the human body into something resembling solar energy—a cohesive pattern of *living* force able to come and go at will into the very heart of the Sun.

"This was not destruction, you understand—merely conversion of a matter-pattern into an analgous functioning energy-pattern. By reversing the field the changed matter could be returned to its original form. And, since the mental and sensory centers remained functioning in the altered pattern, thought and perception remained intact though different.

"Never before had there been such a possibility of uncovering the inmost secrets of solar life—and the study of suns was vital to a transgalactic civilization. The scientists entered the conversion field and became—Children of the Sun."

Otho caught his breath with a sharp hissing sound.

"So that's the meaning of the inscription—and the legend! Do you mean that those little wisps of flames we saw were once *men?*"

Newton did not answer, looking away at the tall golden coils that seemed to pulse with the Sun's own light. But the Brain spoke dryly.

"Curtis did not tell you quite all. The lure of the strange life in the Sun proved too much for many of the men who were changed. They did not come back. And therefore the use of the converters was forbidden and this laboratory was sealed—until Carlin came and opened it again."

"And now he's out there," said Captain Future as though to himself. "Carlin changed and went out there, and then couldn't get back." He swung around suddenly to face them. His tanned face was set. "And I'm going after him," he said. "I'm going to bring him back."

OTHO cried out, "No! Curt, you're mad! You can't do such a thing!"

"Carlin did."

"Yes, and maybe he's dead or worse!" The android caught Newton's arm. He pleaded, "Even if you went after him how could you find him? And if you did suppose you found that *you* couldn't get back either? These machines are ancient and might fail."

"For once," said Grag emphatically, "Otho is right. Every word of it!"

"And I must agree with both of them," said Simon Wright. "Curtis, this course of action is both madness and folly."

Newton's gray eyes had grown cold with a remoteness that made Otho step back away from him. His face was now flint-like in its stubborn resolution. "Carlin was our friend," he said quietly. "He stood by us when we needed him. I have to go after him."

"Very well, Curtis," Simon answered. "But you are not going for friendship nor to save Philip Carlin. You are going because you yourself want to."

NEWTON turned a sharp and startled glance upon the Brain.

"And remember," Simon added, "if you do not return none of us can go after you."

The stone vault was silent then. High above through the triple windows a gleam of light came dancing in, cruel and bright as a golden spear. Vulcan had turned her face sunward and the Beam was come again.

Newton said softly, "I'll come back. I promise you. Now come here and study these controls."

In somber surrender Simon Wright said, "Your eagerness for the unknown was bound to bring disaster some time. I think this may be the time."

But he came to the controls. These were simple and the careful translation of the inscriptions made their operation quite clear. They found that Carlin had adjusted them with great delicacy.

He had meant to return. Yet he had not returned. Why not? Newton could not believe that a landslide of soil could be barrier to a shape of living energy that could penetrate the depths of the Sun.

Why then had Carlin not come back? What was there out in the blazing thundering fury of that Sun-world that held and trapped those who went there? Captain Future remembered the inscriptions above the niches and the somber words of Simon Wright and shuddered, somewhere deep within him.

Almost in that moment he wavered. But over his head the light of the Beam burned and brightened and he could not have stopped then, even if he had so wished.

"You understand now?" he asked his comrades. "The machines draw their power from the magnetic field of Vulcan itself, which is tremendous—cutting as it does across the magnetic field of the Sun. So there is a never-failing power source. The controls are properly set. Your job will be to see that they aren't touched."

Grag and Otho nodded silently. Simon Wright said nothing. He was watching Curt with a bitter concentration.

Newton walked toward the converter. He stood where Carlin had stood and stripped himself naked. Then he paused, looking at the tall coils of crystal that were full of golden fire. The corded muscles of his body quivered and his eyes were strange. He stepped up onto the dais between the coils.

A blaze of golden light enveloped him. He could see the others through it as through a burning veil, Otho's pointed face full of fear and sadness and a kind of rage, huge Grag looking almost pathetically puzzled and worried in the way he leaned forward with outstretched arms, Simon hovering and watching broodingly.

Then the light curdled and thickened and they were gone. Newton felt the awful subtle strength that sprang from the glowing coils, the intricate force-fields that centered their focus in his flesh. He wanted to scream.

He had no voice. There was a moment —an eternity—of vertigo, of panic, of a dreadful change and dissolution.

And then he was free.

Blurred and strangely he could perceive the interior of the citadel, the three silent Futuremen watching, above the bright insistent shaft of light that drew him like a calling voice. He wished to rise toward it and he did, soaring upward with a marvelous swiftness that was a thing of joy and wonder even in that first confusion of the change.

He heard a name cried out and knew it for his own. He did not answer. He could not. Sight and hearing he still had though in a different way. He seemed now to absorb impressions through his whole being rather than through the limited organs of the human body.

And he was no longer human. He was a flame, a core of brilliant force, infinitely strong, infinitely free. Free! Free of all the clumsy shackles of the flesh, light and swift—eternal!

He flew upward toward the triple arch that meant delivery from the confining stone. Into the light he flashed and upward. Neither space nor time had any meaning for him now. With the strange perceptive sense that he still thought of as sight he looked toward the Beam, stabbing its searing length along the blackened land. He rushed toward it, a small bright star against the tented gloom of Vulcan's inner sky.

As a swimmer plunges into a long-sought stream the Sun-Child that had been Curt Newton plunged into the path of the Beam. The blinding glare, the deadly heat had no terrors for him now. The alien pattern of his new being seemed to gather strength from them, to take in the surging energy and grow upon it.

Far away he saw the gap in the planet's surface that let in the mighty Beam. He willed himself toward it, consumed with a strange hunger to be quit of the planetary walls that hid the universe.

He was part of all that now, the vastness of elemental creation. Child of the Sun, brother to the stars—he wanted to be free in open space, to look upon the naked glory to which he himself was kin.

Out along the Beam he sped, eager, joyous, and faintly as an echo out of some forgotten past he remembered the words of Kah. "He has followed the Bright Ones who do not return!"

CHAPTER IV

The Bright Ones

THE firmament was filled with fire. All else was blotted out, forgotten —the farther stars, the little worlds of men. There was nothing else anywhere but the raging storming beauty of the Sun.

The little wisp of flame that had been a man hung motionless in space, absorbing through every sentient atom of his being the overmastering wonder. He had come up out of shadowed Vulcan into the full destroying light, the unmasked splendor of the burning star that was lord of all the planets.

He had risen toward it, rapidly at

first, then more and more slowly as his new and untried perceptions brought home to him the magnitude of the scene. Awe overcame him and he remained poised in mid-flight, struggling with sensations not given to any creature of corporeal form.

He could *feel* the pressure of light. It came in a headlong rush from out of the boiling cauldron of atomic dissolution, reaching away to unguessed limits of space, and he that had been Curt Newton felt its strength pushing against him.

Particles of raw energy struck the tenuous fires of his new body, with a myriad of bright and tingling shocks. They pleased him and he fed upon them. And he found that he could hear the Sun. It was not hearing as he had known it. There was no medium here to carry sound waves. It was a more subtle thing, an inner pulsation of his own new being.

Yet he heard—the vast solemn savage roar of the never-ending tumult of destruction and rebirth, the hissing scream of world-high tongues of flame, the deep booming thunder of solar continents and seas of fire, shaped eternally out of the maelstrom and eternally sundered, only to be shaped again in different form.

He watched the wheeling of the Sun upon its axis. With a perception that sensed intensely every color of the spectrum he saw the heaving mountains, the seas and plains and storming clouds of fire, as spectral shapes of amethyst and crimson, emerald and gold, barred and streaked with every conceivable shading from palest violet to deepest angry red.

Gradually, lost in the wonder of his new life, his sense of awe abated. He began to feel a sort of power as though the last of his human fetters had fallen away, leaving him completely free. The void was his, the Sun was his. He was beyond harm or fear or death. He was alive and eternal as the stars.

He shot inward toward the Sun and the shimmering veils of the corona wrapped him in a mist of glory.

He was in no hurry. Time had ceased for him. The delicate diamond fires of these upper mists were inexpressibly beautiful. He played among them, a fleck of living golden flame, darting and wheeling like some fabled bird. He saw how the veils of the corona were whipped and shaken as though by great winds, now curling upon themselves in dense amethystine folds, now torn wide to show the sullen chromosphere below.

He dropped down through one of those sudden chasms, countless miles, with the speed of a shaft of light, and plunged into the red obscurity of the chromosphere.

It seemed to him that here was concentrated all the anger of the Sun. Torrents of raging scarlet gases swept by, twisted here and there into blood-red whirlpools the size of a continent, their edges whipped to a burning froth where they chafed against other currents, meeting sometimes head-on in a spout of savage flame as dark as cinnabar.

Elemental rage, the fury of life—the new-born Child of the Sun scudded along on the crimson tides, whirling, dancing, tossing high on the crests, probing the darkest ruby of the whirlpools. Below him still, a vague rolling sphere of fire, lay the photosphere.

He dropped down lower still, and looked upon the surface of the sun.

Upheaval, chaos, beauty unimaginable, strangeness beyond belief. An immensity of golden flame, denser than those outer layers, writhing, surging, lifting up huge molten ranges that clawed at the crimson sky and then slid down in titanic cataclysm to be lost in a weltering plain of fire.

Cresting waves that could have swallowed worlds raced and ravaged across the face of the Sun, crashing down in wild thundering avalanches, spouting, spuming, unutterably brilliant, majestic beyond any sight given to human eyes.

He watched, and felt the pattern of his new being tremble. His humanity was still too recent for him to look upon that unthinkable Sun-world without awe and fear.

Two great waves, thousands of miles

in height, reared up and rushed together across a hollow trough wider than all of Earth. They met and out of that sundering collision was born a prominence that burst upward in a pouring river of flame.

CURT NEWTON felt himself caught in that titanic current. He fought it, finding that he could stand against it, finding a glory in his own new strength. A kind of ecstasy shot through him. He let himself go and the current took him and whirled him up, swift almost as light, past the chromosphere, past the corona, sheer into empty space. He rode it out, wild with exhilaration.

He emerged from the prominence, swooping in a great circle, catching a fleeting glimpse of distant worlds spangled with light, and a memory came to him of his mission here and why he had left his human form to make this pilgrimage into the Sun.

More soberly now he plunged again through the pale mists and the crimson tides and hovered over the photosphere, seeking others of his kind.

Across unthinkable distances he searched and found no one. A terrible loneliness came upon him. He entered an area of storm, where the gerat vortices of the sun-spots whirled and thundered in a maelstrom of electronic currents.

He fled from them, deafened, shaken, and found himself crying out desperately, "Carlin! *Carlin!* Where are you?"

Crying not with tongue or voice but with the power of his mind. And when he understood that he could speak that way he called again and again, darting this way and that across the burning oceans, heading the vast funnels of the solar storms.

"Carlin! *Carlin!*"

And someone answered. He heard the voice quite clearly in his mind or the part of his new being that was sensitive to the reception of thought.

"Who calls, little brother?"

Golden bright against the crimson chromosphere above, he saw winging toward him another of the Children of the Sun.

He went to meet the stranger. Wheeling and dancing like two incredible butterflies of flame they hovered above a burning river that ran across the face of the Sun. And they talked.

"Are you—were you Philip Carlin?"

"Philip Carlin? No. In human I was Thardis, chief physicist to Fer Roga, Lord of Vulcan. That was long ago."

Silence, except for the booming thunders of the Sun.

"Tell me, little brother. You are new here?"

"Yes."

"Do they still come then, the Bright Ones? Is the portal open still?"

"It has been lost and forgotten for many ages. And then he found it, who was my friend—and he came through. Do you know him, Thardis? Do you know of Philip Carlin?"

"No. My studies keep me much alone. Do you know, little brother, that I have almost attained the boundaries of pure thought? The greatest minds of the Empire said that was impossible. But I shall do it!"

Two flecks of living fire, whirling, tossing on the solar winds above the flaming river. And Thardis said, "What of the Empire? What of Vulcan? Was the portal forbidden and did our scientists forget?"

"It was forbidden," Newton answered. "And then . . ." He told Thardis slowly how the Old Empire had crashed and died, how its far-flung peoples had sunk into barbarism, how only yesterday as time goes in the universe they had climbed back part way up the ladder of knowledge.

He told Thardis many things and most of them were bitter and sad. But even as he told them he knew that to the other they were less than dreams. He had gone too far away into some strange distance of his own.

"So it is all gone," mused Thardis. "The star-worlds, the captains, the many-throned kings. It is the law. You will learn it here, little brother. You will watch the cycle—birth and death and eternity—repeated forever in the heart of the Sun."

His tenuous body rippled, poised for flight. "Farewell, little brother. Perhaps we shall meet again."

"Wait! *Wait!*" cried Newton. "You do not understand. I can't remain here. I must find my friend and then go back with him."

"Go back?" repeated Thardis. "Ah, you are new! Once, I remember, I started to go back."

His thought was silent for a long while and then it came again with a kind of sad amusement. "The little Sun Child, who is so very new! Come then, I shall help you find your friend."

He led off across the tortured moving mountains of the Sun, across the lashing burning seas. Newton followed and as Thardis went he called and presently from out of the veils and clouds of fire came two others who joined them.

Thardis asked, "Do you know of one called Carlin? He is new."

One did not but the other answered, "I know him. He has gone deep into the inner fires to study the Sun's life."

"I will take you to him," Thardis said to Newton. "Come."

He dropped swiftly downward into the raging wilderness of flame. And Newton was afraid to follow.

Then he was ashamed. If Carlin had gone that way he could go. He plunged down after the fleeting Thardis.

THE crested waves of holocaust reached up and received them and buried them in depths of smoky gold, shot through with gouts and shafts of blazing color. They entered a region of denser matter and to Newton it was like swimming under troubled waters, sensible of the pressure and the awful turmoil, blending his own substance with the medium that held him.

He clung close to Thardis. Gradually as they sank deeper and deeper beneath the surface the golden depths grew quieter, the flashing colors softer. Buried currents ran fiercely like rivers under the sea. Thardis entered one of these, breasting the mighty flowing force as a man walks against the wind, finding exhilaration in the battle.

Newton joined him, and felt his own strength surge in joyous pleasure.

The gold began to fade, gathering the diamond shards of color into itself, lightening, paling. Newton became aware of a glow ahead, more terrible than all the fires he had yet seen—a supernal whiteness so searing in its intensity that even his new senses found it hard to bear.

The patterned energy of his flame-like body was shaken by waves of awful force. He had been afraid before. Now he was beyond fear. He crept after Thardis like a child creeping to the feet of Creation. He would have stopped but Thardis led him on into the inmost solar furnace, into the living heart of the Sun.

And he who had been Philip Carlin was there, wrapped in a silent awe, watching the mystic terrible forges beating out the unthinkable energies of the death and renascence of matter.

Newton had no thought for Carlin now. The awful voices of creation were hammering against his senses, dazing them, numbing them. He shuddered beneath that godlike fury of sound. The stripped and fleeing atoms burst through him, filling him with an exalted pain. He too watched, lost utterly in a cosmic awe of his own.

Atomic change exploded ceaselessly here, thundering, throbbing—hydrogen flashing through all the shifting transformations of the carbon-nitrogen cycle to final helium, the residual energy bursting blindly outward in raving power.

Newton began to be aware of his own danger. He knew that if he stayed too long he would never go again. He was a scientist and this was the ultimate core of learning. He would remain, drunk and fascinated with the lure of knowledge, with the incredible life that could exist in this crucible of energy. He would remain forever, with the other Children of the Sun.

Temptation whispered, "Why go back? Why not remain, a clean, eternal flame, free to learn, free to live?"

He remembered the three who waited for him in the citadel and the promise he had made. And he forced himself with

a bitter effort to speak. "Carlin! Philip Carlin!"

The other Sun Child stirred, and asked, "Who calls?"

And when he heard his rapt mind woke to emotion. "Curt Newton? You here? I had almost forgotten."

Strange meeting of two friends no longer human, in the thundering solar fires! Newton forced himself to think only of his purpose. "I've come after you, Carlin! I followed you to bring you back!"

The other's response was a fierce, instinctive recoil. "No! I will not go back!"

And Carlin's thought raced eagerly. "Look—look about you! How could I leave? A million years from now, two million, when I have learned all I can . . . No, Curt. No scientist could leave this!"

Newton felt the fatal force of that argument. He too felt the irresistible attraction of the undying life that had trapped men here for a million years.

He felt it—too strongly! He knew desperately that he must succumb to it unless he left quickly. The knowledge nerved him to clutch at the one persuasion that might still sway Carlin.

"But if you stay here all the knowledge you have gathered here will be lost forever! The secrets of the Sun, the key to the mysteries of the universe, prisoned here with you, never to be known!"

He had been right. It was the one argument that could move this man whose life had been spent in the gathering and interchange of knowledge. He felt the doubt, the turmoil, in Carlin's shaken mind. The unwillingness and yet the strong tug of lifetime habits of mind.

The thunders of the Sun's heart roared about them as Newton poised waiting. And at last, reluctantly, Carlin said, "Yes. Yes, I must take back what I have learned. And yet . . ."

He burst out, bitter, passionate. "And yet to leave all this!"

"You must, Carlin!"

Another pause. And then, "If I must go let us go at once, Curt!"

Newton became aware then that Thardis still hovered beside them. And Thardis told them, "Come, I will guide you."

They three went winging upward from the depths of the Sun—swiftly up through the golden many-tinted photosphere, past the angry crimson tides above, high, high, through the whipping veils of the corona into empty space.

DAZED, his shaken senses reeling, Newton perceived across the gulf the tiny semi-molten ball of Vulcan. He fixed upon it, knowing that if he faltered now he was lost.

Thardis said, "Go quickly, little brothers. I know. I too once started back."

"Come!" cried Newton desperately.

He plunged out across the gulf, swift as a shooting star, and by the very force of his mind he dragged the wavering Carlin with him.

Too much had happened, too much to bear. Newton's mind was clouded, torn between exaltation and pain of loss, dazed with sights and sounds beyond human power to endure. It was as in a dream that they rushed toward Vulcan.

Down the Beam into the hollow world they flashed and he perceived only vaguely the jungle and hills and the citadel. They passed together through the triple arch and sank down into the dimness where the Futuremen waited.

Carlin went first into the space between the somber coils. Newton saw him enter the force-field, a tenuous thing of flame, and step forth from it a man—a dazed and reeling man. Otho caught him as he fell.

Curt Newton followed him, into the blue-green light. And all consciousness left him.

He found himself standing upright with Grag's great arm around him. It was as though his body was encased in lead now, his senses muffled, the very life in him dimmed.

Otho was shouting at him. Grag's voice boomed in his ear. "Curt, you got back! And you brought him—"

Simon Wright's metallic cry cut across their excited babble. *"Carlin!"*

Newton swung around. Philip Carlin had recovered consciousness. He stood, swaying, in the center of the chamber. He was not looking at them. He was looking down at his own body, slowly raising his own arms and staring at them.

And in his face was such white misery as Newton had seen on no man's face before.

"I can't," whispered Carlin, his voice rusty, croaking. "I can't be like this again, prisoned in leaden flesh. *No!*" With the word he moved with clumsy reeling swiftness toward the tall golden-shining coils of the other converter.

Newton sprang shakily to intercept him but his own legs buckled and he went to his knee.

"Carlin, wait!"

The scientist turned a face transfigured by agony of resolve. "You weren't there as long as I, Curt. You don't know why I have to go back to that other life, that *real* life.

"But you'll understand at least. You'll remember and maybe you too some day—"

He hurled himself forward onto the dais and was lost in a flare of yellow light.

A small bright star flashed upward toward the triple arch—a living star, swift and free and joyous, seeking the Beam, the pathway to the Sun.

And below, on the dark floor of the citadel, Curt Newton bent his head and hid his face between his hands.

* * * * *

The *Comet* rose on blasting keel-jets, gathered speed and roared out above the blackened Belt toward the gap in Vulcan's crust. Curt Newton sat at the controls. He who had ridden the Beam before, free and unfettered, now maneuvered the man-made ship along that pathway. His face was harsh with strain and in his eyes was something strange and haunted.

The three who were with him in the bridge-room kept silent as by tacit agreement while the little ship sped swiftly through the opening into the naked glare of the Sun.

Newton's eyes were dazzled but he could not turn them away from that mighty orb of flame.

And he remembered.

Would he always remember how he had looked upon the Sun unveiled and seen the beating of its heart? Would he always feel the tearing pang he felt now, remembering the freedom and the strength? Would he some day return alone to that buried citadel that held the secret of life and death?

In fierce denial he pressed down the firing-keys. The *Comet* leaped forward and behind it Vulcan dwindled and was lost, a tiny mote swallowed in the eternal fires of the Sun.

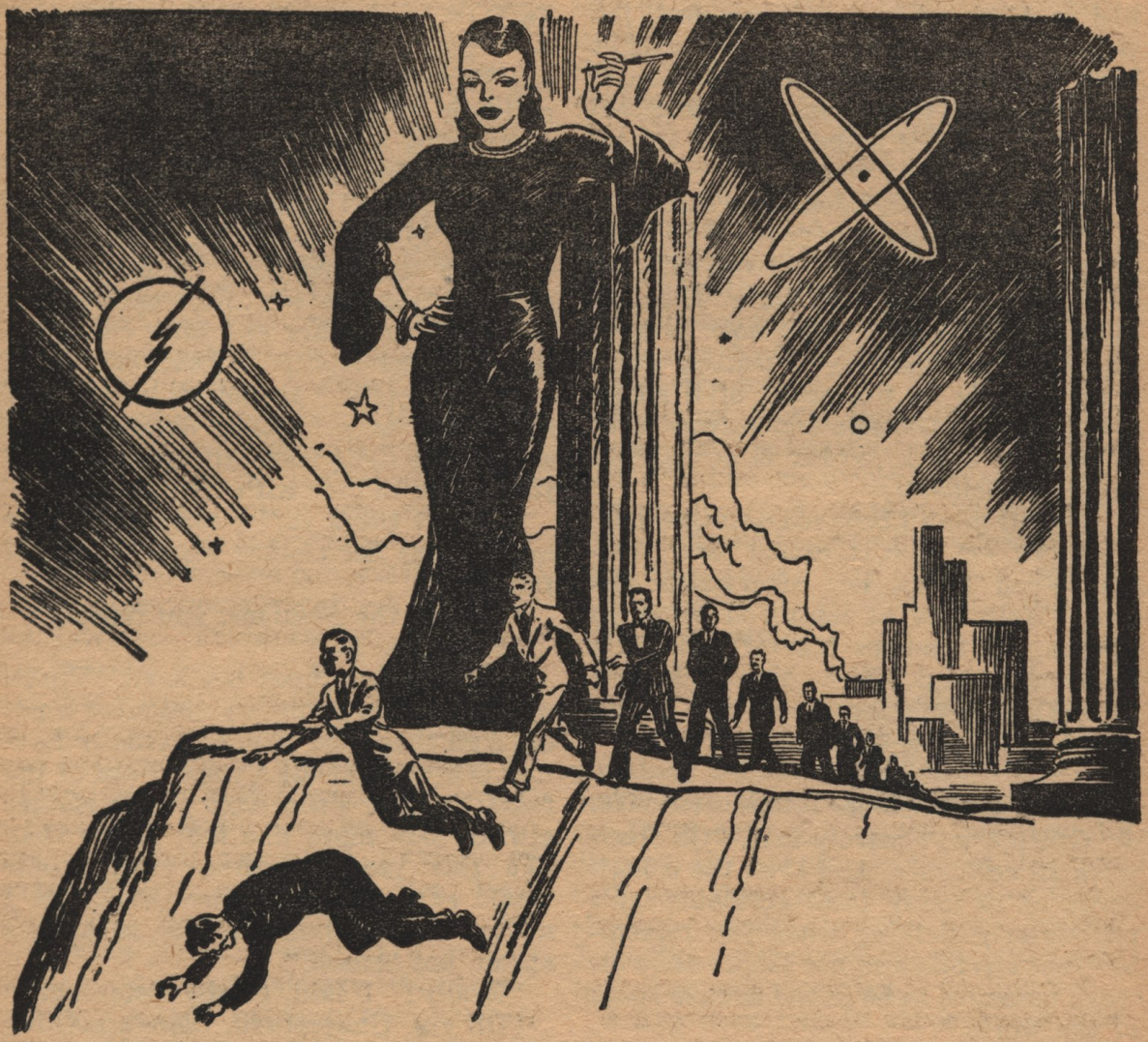
The Inhabitants of Middletown Battle for Survival When the First Sneak Punch of the Atomic War Is Delivered in—

THE CITY AT WORLD'S END

A NOVEL OF CONFLICT AND SUSPENSE

By EDMOND HAMILTON

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE!



The Black Ewe

By FRITZ LEIBER, Jr.

VERY well, I'll tell you why I broke off my engagement to Lavinia Simes —though I'm not the sort of person who likes to go around broadcasting the facts of his private life. There's altogether too much broadcasting going on these days, by wave, newsprint and heaven knows what subtler avenues of approach to the human mind.

I could sum it all up in the one word *horror*. But that doesn't mean much by itself. Besides, it would let you explain it away as a neurotic delusion, aftermath of the near nervous breakdown I

She Brought Death to All Who Walked Behind Her!

had in 1946, when I quit my desk job with OSS. Though why anyone shouldn't have a nervous breakdown these days, with the whole world rushing hypnotized into the mouth of doom, is more than I can see.

At any rate "ridiculous neurotic delusion" is the explanation favored by most of the friends of the Simes—one syllable, you know, rhymes with limes. They delight in telling each other how without any word of warning I walked away from Lavinia in the midst of a sightseeing tour of Chicago and refused ever to see her again. Which is completely accurate incidently.

They all think I behaved outrageously.

All of them, that is, except Mrs. Grotius. When I met her afterwards she said, "Well, Ken, at least you won't go the way of Conners Maytal and Fritz Nordenfelt and Clive Maybrick and René Coulet and the other nice young men Lavinia was engaged to."

I DIDN'T want to go into it with Mrs. Grotius, so I merely said, "Oh those were all accidents. And even the coincidence of so many fatal accidents isn't particularly striking when you remember that Lavinia and her father have always managed to be in the danger spots of the world."

"Yes, accidents do seem to cluster around Lavinia," Mrs. Grotius agreed in that dry voice of hers. "I wonder if that's why she always wears black, Ken?"

She always does, you know. It's a regular fetish with her. Lavinia once explained it, with a stab at psychoanalysis, as being an unconscious guilt-reaction to the fact that her mother had died bringing her into the world.

The mothers of monsters generally die giving them birth, so perhaps it's fair enough that the monsters should wear mourning.

Then another time Lavinia suggested, with hush-voiced Midwestern idealism, that perhaps she wore black because she was so conscious of the miserable state of the world. Which may be a lot more to the point.

NOW I have a third explanation that's much more convincing to me. I'll tell it when I get around to explaining why I left Lavinia on that sightseeing tour.

I think Mrs. Grotius saw pretty deeply into Lavinia. Underneath her faddish interest in the occult Mrs. Grotius is quite an acute old lady. Come to think of it, it was she who first pointed out to me, in an earlier and idler conversation, another oddity in Lavinia's dress.

"Ever notice anything else queer about the way Lavinia dresses?" she asked me a little teasingly because I had just fallen in love with Lavinia.

"I don't think so," I replied, "except maybe that her clothes are a bit out of fashion."

"Behind the fashions, you mean?"

"I suppose so."

Mrs. Grotius shook her head. "That's what any man would say and most women. And they'd be wrong. Actually Lavinia is always about a year *ahead* of the fashions. But since next year's clothes always look more like *last* year's than like *this* year's clothes, most people would explain it the other way. But I notice details and Lavinia is always ahead, not behind."

"Really?" I said, hardly listening.

"Oh yes. Understand, there's nothing particularly clever or striking about her dresses—ugh, that awful black! In fact, they're what you'd call conservative models. Still, they're six months to a year ahead."

"How do you explain it?" I asked, still not much interested.

Mrs. Grotius shrugged lightly. "Perhaps she picks it up when she's off with her father in foreign parts. Though I never knew that Casablanca and Teheran were nerve-centers for the world of *haut couture*. Or perhaps," she added, with a whimsical smile, "Lavinia peeks into the future."

That remark of Mrs. Grotius may not have been pure whimsy. She may have been remembering the thing that happened at a still earlier date. And that takes me back to 1937 and the real beginning of the story of Lavinia and my-

self. She was about seventeen then and engaged to my friend Conners Maytal.

I didn't have a flicker of conscious interest in Lavinia at the time. I just thought of her as another of those precocious but proper Midwestern girls, brought up in a world of politically-active, internationally-minded adults but never losing that trace of Bible-Belt coldness and gaucherie, that "fresh from the prairie" look. Slim, tall, dark-haired, dreamy-eyed, not at all sexy, at least not in any exciting way. I wasn't aware of the excitement of coldness in those days.

We were all gathered in Mrs. Grotius' apartment with its restful pearlgray furnishings and mildly arty feel. Conners Maytal, a curly-haired, dashing young man with some hush-hush, vaguely dangerous government job. The nubile Lavinia. Theodore her father, a thin-cheeked beaming man with manners that a lifetime in the Foreign Service had made the easiest and jolliest, most unimpeachable you could imagine.

He'd just got back from a legation job in Spain and would soon be off to some other corner of the world. Lavinia, of course, always went with him. He'd raised her from a baby, despite his world-wide jaunts. I imagine it was on her account that he always tried to get back to Chicago between assignments, though Mrs. Grotius claimed it was to "stock up on some sensible Midwestern isolationism, after t h o s e foreigners drain it out of him."

Besides those three there was myself, Mrs. Grotius, of course, and four or five others. Mrs. Grotius had just heard about Professor Rhine's telepathy experiments at Duke and insisted that we try our luck at them.

She had the stuff you need—a deck of cards with the different symbols—square, circle, star and so on. The way we did it was that one person went slowly through the deck, concentrating on each symbol as it came up, while the other person, who of course couldn't look at the cards, drew a picture of whatever symbol he thought was up at the time.

It turned out to be pretty boring. None of us had anything unusual in the way of scores until it came to Lavinia's turn. She was a whiz at it. Her score was well beyond anything you could reasonably expect—and that in spite of the fact that she drew two or three symbols that weren't on the original cards.

One was just a circle with a jagged line through it—a little like a cartoonist's diagram of the world cracking in two. The other was a bit more complicated. It consisted of two ellipses overlapping each other crosswise with a dot in the very center.

We puzzled over that latter diagram a good while without recognizing it. The fact is that no one would have recognized it then except a chemist or physicist. Now everyone knows what it means. It's been blazoned all over magazine covers and advertisements—the simplest symbol for the atom.

MAYBE that's not beyond the bounds of chance—a girl back in 1937 straining her mind to make it telepathic and repeatedly drawing the symbol of the thing that eight years later was to disrupt the whole course of history. Still, especially with the world of today striding blindly toward some atomic doom like a somnambulist under the control of an evil magician, I don't know.

I like even less to think about that other symbol—the circle split by a jagged line. You see, we don't know yet what that symbol is going to mean. That is, if it's going to mean anything. Still, I don't like to think about it.

As soon as Lavinia found out that she had drawn some symbols that weren't on the original cards she became very upset and insisted on tearing up all her drawings. I think most of us put it down to some sophomoric passion for conformity on her part. As I said, she seemed a most proper girl, very easily embarassed.

The next day I received a puzzling visit from Conners Maytal. He wouldn't tell me exactly what was on his mind but he kept pacing up and down and peering out of the window, every now and then letting drop something about a "great danger" overshadowing him.

"I've got on to something, Ken," he

said, impressively. "A piece of information has dropped into my hands. It's big, Ken. So big I'm frightened—so big I don't know where to take it or what to do with it. And the worst thing is that I think certain people know I have this information."

Of course I was curious and very much concerned. Conners was a hero of mine and I tried my best to get him to tell me about it. But the most he would say was, "It's something that would never occur to you in your wildest fancies, Ken. Something utterly strange."

It never entered my mind that there might be any connection between the Conner's "something" and his engagement to Lavinia. Though I did get the impression that someone at Mrs. Grotius' party might be concerned. But the world situation being what it was at the time, my guesses ran almost entirely in the direction of foreign agents and American fascists. Perhaps, I thought, Conners had uncovered evidence of serious disloyalty in high government circles.

He left me without telling me any more.

The next day Conners was knocked down by a hit-and-run driver and his brains bashed out on the curb.

Naturally I didn't rest until I was able to secure a private interview with Conners' superior. He listened rather skeptically to my story, and as I told it I became painfully aware that it didn't contain an ounce of concrete fact. Then too, I found that Conners' job hadn't been nearly as undercover or dangerous as some people—not Conners—had made it out to be.

When I finished my story Conners' superior promised me there'd be a thorough investigation. However, he strongly implied that he didn't think anything would be turned up. He was inclined to write the whole business off as nerves on poor Conners' part.

As time passed I was inclined to agree with him. The more so, since I have myself at times experienced some of those same nerves. Often, when you wake up with a start to the terrifying predicament of the world, you wonder for a moment if there isn't something you can do about it.

Something that will avert the horrible dangers mankind is brewing for itself with all the compulsiveness of a drugged savage responding to the tom-tom beat. And you find you can't or that no one will listen. It is enough to drive a man into neurosis.

Back in the years just before the war such feelings were pretty common. We have become a little less sensitive since then, a little tougher-skinned—though that isn't going to help us when the atom bombs start to fall.

Meanwhile the Simes were off to Austria. There was talk of Theodore having hurried their departure on Lavinia's account. She was pictured as a tragic figure—young love cut short and all that.

However, as it happened the Simes were in for an unguessably exciting junket. It was more than five years before they got back to the States. In rapid succession came assignments in Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, London, Leningrad and London again, where they spent a good deal of the war.

From what I've heard of Theodore, it was as much his social as his diplomatic abilities that made him valuable to our government and there must have been endless parties and functions, even in war's shadow, that both he and Lavinia attended.

I get frightened now, when I think of the *number* of people, the world's most prominent folk among them, who must have met that colorless-seeming Midwestern girl and listened idly to her chatter and then, later on— But I mustn't get ahead of my story.

DOUBTLESS you noticed something striking about that list of assignments, coming in the order they did—it was like a road map of catastrophe for World War II. Oddly enough, that sort of thing had already given Theodore a peculiar reputation in the Service.

He'd been in Barcelona in '35, just before the Spanish Civil War, and again in '36. In Naples in '33 and '34, the year

before the invasion of Ethiopia. As you'll remember, Hitler came to power in Germany early in '32.

Well, a year or so previously Theodore had a post in Nuremburg. He always seemed to keep ahead of the big events, as Lavinia did with her fashions. In some cases, as with Casablanca and Teheran and Shanghai, several years intervened.

Among his colleagues Theodore was jokingly referred to as a black bird of disaster. As soon as he arrived at a legation or consulate, superstitious tongues would start to wag—something would happen there in a year or two. Of course such talk was trifling stuff. Still, there was that feeling. Where Theodore Simes went, there went destiny.

Of course they might just as well have said—where Lavinia Simes went, there went destiny. But people didn't think of Lavinia that way. They just accepted her as "that delightful man's daughter."

However, with their arrival in Vienna late in '37, Lavinia ceased to play quite such a passive part. She began to get her share of the spotlight in a most unhappy way—her singular series of ill-starred courtships, tragically reproducing the pattern of the Conners Maytal episode.

First, it seems, there was Fritz Nordenfelt, a young Austrian official. They had not announced a formal engagement but there was no doubt of the degree to which he was enchanted by his Corn Belt siren. He disappeared shortly after the Anschlusz.

Then there was Elliot Davies, an American attache at Prague. He died unromantically of a blood infection.

Next came a young Englishman named Clive Maybrick, a Londoner. He fell into an unguarded bomb crater during the blackout, cut his throat on some torn ironwork and bled to death.

Then there was René Coulet, Vichy, killed in a train wreck. And then—oh, there were a couple of others, both of them Americans. One of them, serving in the army in Italy, was run over by a truck miles behind the lines.

Accidents, all. No hints of a "mysterious danger" as with Conners Maytal—at least none that I heard about.

Except perhaps in the case of Davies. I spoke with someone who visited him before he died. Tossing on his Prague hospital bed, he kept talking about something "weird and horrible" that had come into his life, something that made the world seem like a "madhouse at the mercy of an insane doctor." But with Hitler striding up and down the boundaries of the Sudetenland, snarling and lashing his arms, that wasn't an unreasonable remark.

So much I got from Mrs. Grotius and my other gossips. The Simes eventually came home and I bumped into Lavinia in the Loop in October, '47, and five days later we were engaged to be married.

Sudden? Of course. But there were reasons for that. I'd just quit my government job. I was sick to death for a breath of old times, when we had been dreamy and fresh-spirited and at least thought ourselves honorable.

I felt that there wasn't a solitary person whose feelings hadn't been shriveled and coarsened by the enlightening horrors of war. I agree, we're probably more honest today and maybe even a bit more considerate in a rough and ready way—but we have lost something.

WELL, Lavinia was a breath of the old times and a lot more besides. It sounds silly when you say a person hasn't changed a bit, because of course they always have. But applied to Lavinia it really meant something.

In the hustling, stop-light-ignoring Boul Mich crowd, a black sleeve brushed my elbow and a clear voice said, "Why, hello, Ken!" and I turned and got that fresh-from-the-prairie smile and was looking into those misty eyes.

A moment later we were talking about the last thing we'd discussed at the Grotius party in '37, which was Elizabethan music, and moments after that were walking arm in arm, with Lavinia taking those long strides that are faintly ungainly but graceful—you see what I mean?

Not that ten years of globe-circling hadn't left their mark on Lavinia. You felt that she had become a very wise person with all sorts of unknown mystical depths. You felt, possibly because you'd heard of those ill-starred courtships, an aura of romantic melancholy around her. You felt, almost, a touch of something dark and frightening.

But the important thing was that her inmost self seemed unchanged. Her experiences were like some gorgeous garment she wore, enhancing her glamour, some beautifully embroidered and bediamonded black cloak that she could wrap around her or throw off at will. Inside she would still be fresh, innocent, untouched.

I believe that's true in a very literal sense. I mean, I think that Lavinia was and still is a virgin, though it hasn't made her sharp or antagonistic or given her a peaked look and a host of vague ailments or had any of the other common side effects.

I don't say that solely because of the touch of Midwestern puritanism clinging to her or because she always put a stop to our petting before it had advanced beyond a mild stage. No, there was more to it than that. I think she stayed a virgin, not only because it was the safe and proper thing but because she *needed* to be a virgin.

You know, there were pagan priestesses who stayed virgins, not because of any notion that sex is sinful but solely because they believed that sex weakens the special spiritual powers needed by anyone in communication with those awful influences beyond the world.

To be frank I think a lot more than that. I think that underneath Lavinia liked to tease men. I think she fed on their unsatisfied desire. I think she *got something* out of Conners Maytal and Fritz Nordenfelt and then after she had fed— But I mustn't let my emotions get out of hand.

Well, as I said, after five days we became engaged. And right away the incidents began—the slips—leading up to the frightening affair of the spiked punch at the Grotius party and its horrifying aftermath the next day.

The early slips didn't amount to much. I think the first occurred about two days after we became engaged.

We were alone in the living room of the Simes apartment. We'd been talking about our own future but the conversation had drifted around to politics—Lavinia is a liberal and she was going on at a great rate. I was a darn sight more interested in Lavinia than in any political theory ever conceived and there came a point where I stopped listening very hard to what those desirable lips were saying.

Suddenly the words, "March 1952," hit my ear.

I must have reacted visibly for she broke off at once. She looked at me frightenedly. Then, "Oh Ken, I shouldn't have said that."

"Said what?" I asked.

"Didn't you hear?"

"I heard you say, 'March 1952.' What did you mean?"

"Yes but what I said right before that —you heard, didn't you?"

"I'm afraid I didn't," I admitted a little embarrassedly. "I was looking at you and thinking how nice it would be to kiss you and— What was it anyhow?"

"Oh, I'm so glad," she said, putting her hands on my shoulders and granting my desire.

I forgot all about March 1952.

BUT now I remember it. When that month rolls around I'll be watching the headlines and the undercurrents. Though I don't know how I'll be able to be certain it was her doing. Still, there may be a sign.

The other slips were mostly like that one. None of them made much conscious impression on me. Not even enough to make me think back to the telepathy test and the atom symbol and the other one. But just the same the slips were getting in their subconscious work. Deep in my mind an uneasiness was building, building—toward the night of the Grotius party.

How Lavinia and I were spending our time those days has an important bear-

ing on what happened. I was carrying out a long-postponed project of mine—to really see Chicago. Not the nightclubs and theatres, not even especially the parks and museums, but the solider stuff.

I have a positive passion for the inner workings of cities. I like to see with my own eyes how the vast supplies of food and fuel come in, where the work comes from, where the brain is, how things are moved around—the railroad yards, the warehouses, the wholesale markets, the grubby side-tentacles of the transportation systems, the courts and jails, things like that.

I like to be able to picture a city as a huge steel and stone creature, with people for blood, a creature that breathes and feeds, digests the useful, rejects the useless, builds up protections against foreign bodies.

LAVINIA took to my project enthusiastically and of course having her along made it a delightful adventure.

This particular afternoon we'd spent doing Maxwell Street, where the hawkers' stands fill the space normally reserved for parked automobiles. For the next morning we had a somewhat different expedition planned, a little farther south. In between them came the Grotius party.

Let me say at the beginning that it was never discovered who spiked the punch and I don't think it matters. Except that they did an expert job, probably with vodka and orange curacoa and extra fruit juice. What matters is that it was the first time in her life Lavinia got drunk.

It was a big party.

Everyone of consequence in Mrs. Grotius' circle was there except Lavinia's father. The arts, journalism and bureaucracy were particularly well represented. You could find all shades and degrees of political opinion, for Mrs. Grotius' contacts cut across ordinary lines of demarcation.

For instance, there were the prominent fellow-traveler Harry Parks and also Howard Fitch, editorial writer for our well-known isolationist paper. There were Bella McCluskey, the sculptress with the "live by the instincts" theories and also Leslie Vail Packard, whose novels are among the more artistic bulwarks of capitalism and propriety.

At first it was a very good party. The unchanging but ever-renewed pearlgray of the furnishings brought me memories of less nervous years. The inevitable political discussions got underway but due to the unsuspected effects of the punch, they were more exciting than usual and, at first, very good-tempered. For instance Fitch and Parks staged a genial and heart-to-heart talk which everyone appreciated hugely.

Lavinia was her usual well-poised unobtrusive self—I suppose a diplomat's daughter learns early to act that way. She wore a black satin evening gown that was attractive but, as always, subtly "wrong." And that rarity—black silk stockings.

But gradually I became aware of a change in her behavior. She was talking a lot more, to a lot more people than usual, and in an oddly confidential way. She'd link onto someone and draw him aside.

You'd see her eager, intent face and the bobbing head of her companion as they nodded agreement.

I'd give a good deal to know what she said at those times. I asked Leslie Packard about it afterwards. I can't ask most of the others because I don't know them well enough or else they've cut me on account of my behavior toward Lavinia.

Leslie was puzzled at first but then he said, "By George, I believe you're right. I seem to remember that she did say something to me, something that exploded in my brain and left me with the nasty feeling of having been cut loose from my moorings. But I can't remember what it was. I just can't recall." And for a moment he looked at me with an expression of genuine fear.

I wish he *could* recall because it might give me the clue to things Lavinia said to me that night, things that I too have forgotten. But it's probably safer as it is.

WHATEVER the things were they had their effect. For the party suddenly turned nasty. Of course it was the political arguments, become personal and carried to unwise lengths, that were responsible. But it was more than that, for *they weren't the political arguments of 1949.*

You've read stories of time-travel? Well, this was as if our minds and emotions were time-traveling into the future, living over in one night all the strife and turmoil and suffering of the next ten years. We were adjusting ourselves in instants to new ideas and loyalties that ordinarily we'd have spent months assimilating.

It was as if there were a "wine of life" that is doled out to mankind drop by drop and we had somehow broken open the barrels and were swilling down great bumpers of it.

We acted as if we were choosing sides for some bitter social conflict that is to come. I'll have to call the two sides "reactionary" and "radical" but they weren't reactionary or radical in exactly the sense of those terms today. Because, you see, we were reacting to events that haven't happened yet, to ideas unborn.

This was frighteningly apparent in the way we lined up, for few of us picked the side you'd have expected. I, for instance, found myself among the "reactionaries." Bella McCluskey, looking blank and frightened, joined us.

Leslie Packard, his face suddenly losing its bland expression and setting in sardonic lines, was against us. So, amazingly, was Mrs. Grotius. Red-faced and shouting, her gray silk dress flapping, she looked like an enraged lovebird.

We were only vaguely aware of where we were heading. Actually, and incredible as it may seem, we were preparing, then and there in that pearl-cool apartment, to fight the great war or revolution or counter-revolution or whatever it is that is to come in—Lord, if I could name the year!

I hate to think of that conflict because it isn't going to be nice. Yet I can't tell you a solitary thing about the grounds on which it's going to be fought except —yes—I think it will have something to do with that split-earth symbol.

Of course we were all of us getting drunk without knowing it, but that isn't enough to explain what was happening, not nearly enough.

We were no longer arguing, we were spitting personalities and accusations and threats. Harry Park's face was grim, his eyes were glassy. Howard Fitch's underlip jutted out with sulky viciousness. Along with the incessant shouldering and back-turning and snatching of drinks, there was an ominous feeling of gathering forces.

It seems to me that the lights grew dim and there was a reddish glow from somewhere but that must have been an illusion. And everywhere went Lavinia, slipping from one person to another, whispering, hinting, inciting—I think.

At last the fighting started—yes, actual fighting, though it was hushed up afterwards. The punchbowl was overset and smashed, the strangely dimmed chandelier was swinging—something must have hit it—and Parks had his fingers around Fitch's throat and Fitch was beating at Park's face with ineffectual fists. A minute more—

But then, in an instant, the atmosphere broke. Rage fled. The cloud of the future vanished as if it had never been. We were left staring at each other, dumbfounded.

And then, before Fitch's giggle broke the silence, I became aware of another noise, a muffled gasping that came in gargling rushes of sound. I ran down the hall. Lavinia was on her knees in the bathroom, being sick. Mrs. Grotius had her by the shoulders and was shaking her and saying in a low, intense voice, "You little—*witch!* You little—*witch!*"

I think that Mrs. Grotius, who could never possibly lose the last shreds of her propriety, was using the word as a substitute for another stronger word. Involuntarily she probably used the right one.

I pulled Mrs. Grotius away and held Lavinia's head. As soon as she realized who it was she began to gasp, "Oh Ken, take me home, take me home!"

Before the others had begun to recover from their stupefaction we were outside. I still have a vivid picture of those little broken groups, eyeing each other incredulously, trying to talk.

DRIVING home, Lavinia leaned on my shoulder and kept babbling, "Oh Ken, what happened? Oh Ken, I was drunk. What did I say, Ken? What did I do? Oh, I'm frightened. I mustn't ever let that happen again, Ken, I mustn't.

"I let myself go and I'm frightened. I said things I shouldn't have said. What did I say, Ken, what did I say? Whom did I talk to? What did I tell them? What did they say I'd said? What did I say, Ken, what did I say?"

About that time it occurred to me what must have been done to the punch. When I got Lavinia home and Theodore answered the door I explained to him what had happened and how he could check my story. He seemed startled but his usual poise asserted itself as he took charge of the business of getting Lavinia to bed.

Next morning I drove around reluctantly to their apartment, very doubtful as to whether Lavinia and I would go on any expedition at all, certainly not the inappropriate one we had scheduled. But to my surprise Lavinia was dressed and waiting when I came. She looked hardly the worse for the night before and wouldn't hear of any change in our plans. I yielded to her, though I didn't have much stomach for the business myself.

Of course, as you'll understand, it was a great deal more than a hangover I was feeling. A lot of things had been fitting themselves together in my subconscious mind and last night had provided the keystone. I was aware of a mounting feeling of distaste and fear, was almost aware that the distaste and fear were directed at Lavinia.

My war nerves had come back and with them my gloomiest ideas about mankind's mindless stampede toward doom. Last night's scene had been such a terrifying hope-shattering allegory. And below the surface of my conscious mind was a black theory or rather a dark philosophy of life that deals an almost permanently crushing blow to any notion of freedom or joy or good in the universe.

As if to provide the sharpest possible contrast to my mood the weather was wonderful. It was one of those matchless balmy days that come once or twice a year in Chicago. Despite her black linen dress Lavinia managed to look very cool and airy. Her skin was creamy, her hair was sleek, her eyes were bright.

We arrived at our destination. I parked the car and soon we had joined a small group making the tour. With my queasy stomach I found it rough going, particularly the omnipresent sweetish odor. I would have liked very much to turn back.

But not Lavinia. She looked in the best sort of humor, fairly blooming, as if what we were seeing were giving her the finest sort of appetite for lunch. I'd never seen her drink in everything with such eager schoolgirlish eyes. Her fresh-from-the-prairie look was particularly noticeable this morning, which in a way was highly appropriate.

We finally halted on a raised platform and the guide started an explanation. I felt a wave of nausea and gripped the rail, looking down.

Some distance below and beyond us a narrow, wooden-walled runway led up toward a dark door. The guide's voice droned in my ear. Then a low thundering sound began, like a lot of people crossing a wooden bridge.

The guide was saying, ". . . and then they're struck on the head. It's painless. They drop through a trap door onto a moving belt. Before they regain consciousness, the spinal cord has been pierced. Then the belt takes them . . ."

I swayed dizzily, gripping the railing. But now, instead of physical sickness it was a spiritual nausea that gripped me. It seemed to me, as I stared down unwillingly, that the wooden-walled runway was life and that the creatures pressing up it were mankind, that the dark door was war, destruction and death. They were all white, those crea-

tures, but my swimming eyes seemed to make out a black shadow ahead of them.

I couldn't get things straight. I kept looking beside me at Lavinia as she peered down with interest, so fresh in her black linen dress, her skin so creamy-cool, just the tiniest beads of perspiration dewing the powder on her upper lip.

And as I looked at her an unbearable horror would seize me and I would look down at the runway again and another kind of horror would catch hold of me. In my confused mental state it seemed to me unendurable that such a thing as I was witnessing should be—that mankind should go crowding up to the dark door and no man sane enough to call a halt, but everyone mindlessly following, following.

And because of this feeling I asked the guide a question. And because of his answer I turned and walked away from Lavinia Simes without any explanation and have refused to see her ever again.

They say she's gone away with her father once more. The Simes are always on the move, you know. Maybe to Buenos Aires, maybe to Moscow, to Calcutta, Tel Aviv or some less likely place. I don't know nor do I want to know. It would just give me one more thing to worry about.

I don't really think I'm safe, you see. I broke off the engagement but still I know too much. No one is safe, who suspects as much as I do.

I wonder how it will come to me when it comes. Will it be the earth rushing up through the fog to crush me—I travel quite a bit by plane—or will it just be a slip on the stairs—and will I see it before I see what's waiting in the dark for all mankind?

As I said, I'd just mumbled a question to the guide and his reply came to my buzzing ears indistinctly, as if from a great distance.

"Oh no, sir, they wouldn't go so easily if we just herded 'em along. In fact, there'd be quite a to-do. Sheep have more brains than most people think and I bet some of them would guess pretty well what was coming.

"But we have a little trick that makes 'em trot along as nice as pie. We have one animal that we've trained to walk up that runway. It's taken out of line at the last second and given a reward, so there's never any doubt of *it* going up the runway. And then, of course, all the rest follow.

"There, you can see it there, sir, just going through the door.

"We have it a different color so there won't be any chance of it getting destroyed by mistake. Most other slaughter houses do the same. They use a black ewe."

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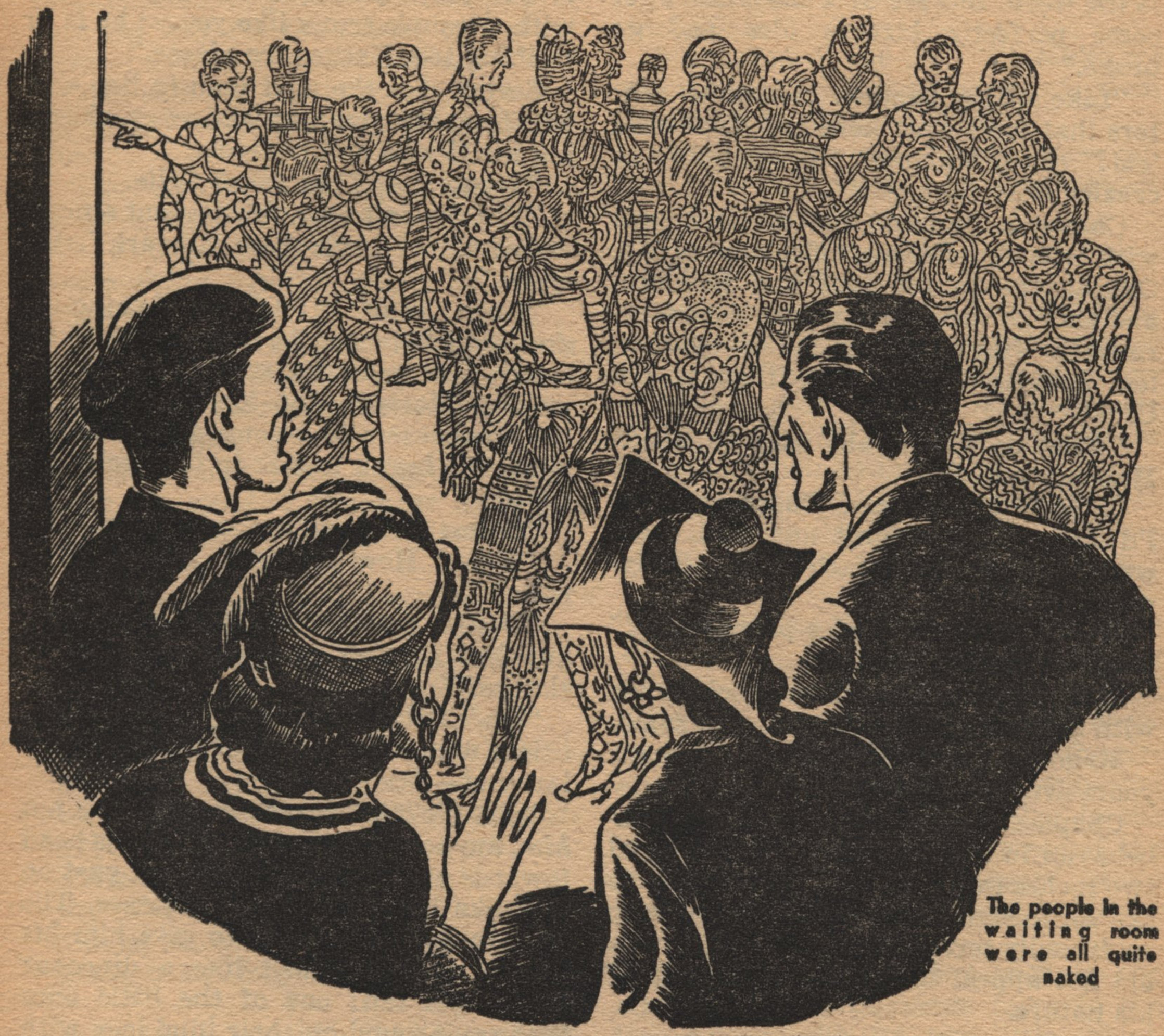


The people in the waiting room were all quite naked

SUMMER WEAR

It was quite an idea, selling clothes to Osiris reptile men, but the big lizards had other ideas up their sleeveless arms!

By L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

CATO CHAPMAN and Celia Zorn, the model, were waiting for the Moon ship to take off from Mohave Spaceport. Chapman was a brisk young man who sometimes reminded people of a chipmunk.

To his young cousin Mahoney he said, "If you can take enough time off from your precious paint, Ed, keep an eye on Miss Nettie. Don't want to come back in twenty-two years and find she's forgotten us."

"Sure," said Mahoney. "I like the old dame. She buys our paint. Tough customer, though, isn't she?"

Celia Zorn said: "I think formidable

is the word. But see to it she doesn't get some perfectly bizarre idea and go broke."

"Like selling summer clothes to critters that don't wear none and don't need 'em?" asked Mahoney. "If she gets any crazier ones than that . . ."

Chapman punched his cousin's arm with friendly violence. "Not so nuts, Ed. Osirians go in for fads and fashions, and they're the only civilized extra-terrestrials with a real capitalistic system; less socialized even than that of the U. S."

"What do I do if she does go loco?" Mahoney asked.

"I don't know," said Chapman, "but I'd hate to come back and find there wasn't any Greenfarb's of Hollywood. . . ."

"All passengers! *Todos passageiros!*" bellowed the loudspeaker.

Chapman and Miss Zorn shook hands with Mahoney and walked up the ramp.

Mahoney yelled after them: "Behave yourselves! Or if you can't . . ."

Chapman thought that if he had misbehavior in mind, he wouldn't pick a girl two inches taller than he. He forebore to say so, though, since he wanted to keep on friendly terms with Celia even if she did not appeal to the romantic side of his nature.

SEVEN hours later they alighted at Tycho station for the usual wrestle with red-tape b e f o r e boarding the *Camoes* for Osiris, otherwise Procyon XIV. The passenger *fiscal* said:

"You have a berth reserved for your trunk, senhor?"

"That's right," said Chapman.

"I do not understand. Contains this trunk a live creature?"

"Not at all. It is my sample trunk."

"Samples of what?"

"Clothes. I am the sales agent for Greenfarb's of Hollywood, s u m m e r wear, and Miss Greenfarb insists I sleep with that trunk until I've done my business."

The *fiscal* shrugged. "It is no business of mine, if your employer wishes to pay a couple of thousand dollars extra. There is another passenger on the *Camoes* with a sample trunk like yours; he is in clothing too. Excuse me please."

Seeing that the next man in line was fidgeting, Chapman walked away, checking his tickets and passport.

"Yours okay?" he asked Celia.

"Yes. Wasn't that ticket-agent simply divine, Cato? I love these tall dark Latin types."

"Keep your m i n d on business," growled Chapman. As he was small and sandy, her remarks stung his *amour-propre*. Moreover he knew enough of her weaknesses to become apprehensive when she began to talk in that vein. He added:

"Seems we've got a rival aboard."

"What? How perfectly horrid! Who is he?"

"Dunno yet, but the *fiscal* said some guy has another sample trunk full of clothes."

"Oh." Celia's face took on that lugubrious expression. "One of the big Parisian cout—"

"Sh! We'll know soon enough. It's not *him*, anyhow." Chapman jerked his head towards an Osirian who stalked past on bird-like legs, carrying a suitcase. The Osirian (or Sha'akhfa, to give him his proper name) looked like a dinosaur seven feet tall: one of the little ones that ran around on their hind legs with a tail sticking out behind to balance. The creature's scaly hide was decorated with an elaborate painted pattern in many colors.

"Excuce me, pleass," said this being in a barely intelligible accent, "put what iss the correct moon time?"

Chapman told the Osirian (a male from his wattle) who set his wrist-watch and asked: "Are you too koink py the *Camoes?*"

"Yes," said Chapman.

"So am I. Let uss introtuce ourselfs. I am Businessman-second-rank-Fiasakhe."

Chapman introduced himself and the model and asked: "I wonder you don't wait for an Osirian ship, Mr. Fiasakhe?"

"I woult, sir, put an urchent messich from home . . . I came in with that cul-

tural mission, you know, that iss to prepare the way for the export of the designs of Osirian arts and crafts."

Celia said: "I should think you'd find one of our ships frightfully uncomfortable."

"I tu! Alwayss I am bumpink my het on tor-frames or catchink my tail in tors! Put then . . ." The creature managed a shrug with his negligible shoulders.

The steward showed Chapman his cabin. "Where shall we put this trunk you have a passenger-ticket for, senhor?" he asked.

"Middle bunk," said Chapman, picking up the printed passenger list from the tiny dresser. He read:

BARROS, M. C., Rio de Janeiro.
BERGERAT, J.-J. M., Paris.
CHAPMAN, C. H., Hollywood.
CHISHOLM, W. J., Minneapolis.
FIASAKHE, 3*, Cefef Aqh, Osiris.
KAMIMURA, A., Kobe.
KICHIK*, Dzidziga, Thoth.
MPANDE, S., Molopololi, Bechuanaland.
POPOVICH, I. I., Sofia.
SAVINKOV, A. P., Paris.
SZ, T.-E., Tientsin.
VARGA, M., Szolnok, Hungary.
ZORN, C. E., Hollywood.

A footnote told him that the names with asterisks were those of extra-terrestrials.

"Cato!" said Celia's voice outside.

"Come in, Cee."

The tall dark girl did so. "I'm in with Senhora Barros and Anya Savinkov. Anya is a model for Tomaselli's of Paris!"

"Ah," said Chapman. "Say who her boss was?"

"No, I've only just met her. She's the redhead."

"Hm. Our rival must be this Bergerat. I seem to remember that guy: the agent for Tomaselli's at the New York fair three years ago. A tall dark type, the kind you slobber over."

"I do *not!* The nerve of you!"

"Okay, consider it unsaid. A slick operator, as I remember; pulled some fast ones on the New York department stores."

She looked at the list. "Fiasakhe we know. This Kichik must be an e. t. from Thoth. What are they like?"

"Monkey-rats, they sometimes call them; about a meter high, with seven fingers on each hand."

"How perfectly horrid!"

"They're harmless."

The door opened again and the steward ushered in a black man who turned out to be S. Mpande. After introductions Chapman said: "How about giving me the top bunk, Mr. Mpande? I'm better fitted for climbing into it."

Mpande patted his paunch and chuckled. "Right-o, old chap."

"See you later, Cee," said Chapman.

AFTER the first few high-g hours following takeoff, Chapman got up from his bunk and went out to explore. On the opposite side of the narrow curving corridor, a little way around the circumference of the nose of the ship, was a door behind which, according to the legend in the Brazilo-Portuguese of the spaceways, lay the passengers' heavy baggage. The door was closed by a simple cylinder-lock.

Following the corridor back in the other direction, Chapman came to the tiny saloon with its two little tables. Around one a game of sunburst was already under way among three human passengers and the Thothian, whose many fingers flipped the cards with ominous dexterity.

A tall dark young man unfolded himself and came over to extend a hand that was ornamented with a large and gaudy ring.

"'Ello, Meester Shapman! Remembair me from the New York Fair?"

"Hello, Jean-Jacques," said Chapman. "On your way to Osiris to drum up business?"

"Well, yes, maybe. I suspect that you and I, we are after the same thing."

"Got a line of summer wear?"

"*Pour le sport,* that is it. This is droll, no? What is this about keeping your sample trunk in your cabin?"

Chapman grinned. "Thought some sharp operator like you might be along, so . . ."

"I see, ha-ha. Me, I think Captain Almeida's locks will keep unwanted ones away. And I can imagine more amusing things to keep in my cabin than a trunk."

"No doubt," said Chapman. "But as there are only three females aboard . . ."

"*Exactement.* When the number does not come out even, the results are sometimes of the most amusing. Unless you count Kichik, who is neither one thing nor the other."

"Both," s q u e a k e d the Thothian. "Don't you envy me? Three spades."

It was hard to get Celia aside for private conversation because of the lack of space. He met the other passengers, including Bergerat's luscious redhead, who seemed a nice straightforward girl. At least she didn't tower over him as Celia did.

Since Mpande turned out to be a sunburst enthusiast, Chapman finally got a moment with his model in his cabin.

"I'm going to get a look at that trunk of Bergerat's," he told her.

"How, if it's locked up?"

"Didn't you know I once worked for a locksmith?"

"Now, look, Cato, don't start something like *that* again. You remember what happened to you in the case of that Argentine polo-player."

"You leave this to me! I didn't say I was going to do anything to his trunk?"

"No, but I know you—"

"And I know Jean-Jacques; the only way to treat that nogoodnik is to beat him to the punch."

"I think he's perfectly nice!"

"Ha ha. You'll see."

Chapman went back down the corridor and studied the baggage-room door. Then he took life easy until chance introduced him to Zuloaga, the chief engineer of the *Camoes.*

"Could I have a look around?" he asked after the amenities.

"I much regret, but it is a strict rule of the *Viagens Inter-planetarias* that no passengers are allowed in the power-compartments."

"Then how about the machine-shop? I couldn't do any harm there."

Zuloaga wagged a forefinger. "Oh, you *Americanos do Norte* all want to get your hands greasy as soon as you come aboard. It must give you a feeling of virility, *pois nao?* But come, you shall see our little shop."

In the shop Chapman cultivated the acquaintance of Chief Machinist Gustafson. Zuloaga left them puttering among the tools. When Chapman departed, a quarter-hour later, he took with him a lump of beeswax and a length of wire which he had slipped into his pockets unseen.

WHEN he was sure nobody was coming along the corridor, Chapman made an impression of the cross-section of the slot of the lock on the baggage-room door, and poked his wire into the slot until he knew how deep it was.

As the hours passed, some passengers took short-trance pills while others continued to play sunburst. Fiasakhe, whose claws were ill-shaped for holding playing-cards, sat folded in a corner of the saloon with his tail curled up against the wall, reading through a pile of slushy sentimental Earth novels he had brought with him.

Chapman, after letting a decent interval elapse, found an excuse to get back into the machine-shop. Here he wheedled a couple of pieces of titanium brass out of Gustafson and began hammering and filing them into the shape he wanted. Gustafson appeared to believe the unlikely story that they were for Chapman's portable radio.

The two pieces of metal finally took the form of a couple of very slender cylinder-lock keys, one without any of the usual saw-toothed projections and the other with a single such projection. The two keys had handles offset in opposite directions.

"For adjusting my germanium crystals," said Chapman.

"You must show me how to fix mine some time," said Gustafson.

"Sure. *Obrigado.*"

Chapman's next step was to walk off

from the dinner-table with the pepper-shaker in his pocket. When Mpande was absent from the cabin, Chapman emptied the pepper into an ordinary envelope and put the envelope in his pocket.

Then he waited until nearly all the passengers were asleep, and Mpande was playing sunburst in the saloon. (On a space-ship there were always some individualists who preferred not to keep to the a r b i t r a r y waking-and-sleeping schedule of the majority.)

He slipped out of his cabin with the brass gadgets in his pockets and went to the baggage-room. After looking nervously over his shoulders he slipped the plain brass finger into the lock and twisted hard. Then he slid the one with the projection into the remaining space in the slot and worked it in and out until all the little split pins inside caught at their opening levels. Click! Chapman opened the door.

First making sure that he would not be locking himself in, he closed the door behind him. He was in complete darkness except for the beam of his little pocket flashlight. The compartment was so jammed with baggage that there was little room to move. However, Chapman grinned when his light picked out Bergerat's big sample trunk in plain sight, with the legend: J.-J. M. B.—TOMASELLI OF PARIS. He had to move only one suitcase to get at it.

He grinned wickedly at the thought that Monsieur Tomaselli, a notorious pinchfranc, had been unwilling to lay out a couple of grand more to assure a private berth for his samples; how nice!

But what now? The trunk had a combination lock: a Kleinwasser, the peculiarity of which was that it had to be locked as well as unlocked by twirling the knob in a certain combination. The idea had been to discourage people from locking the combination into the trunk.

That knowledge, however, did him no good without the combination. Of course there were the tried and true methods of prying, drilling, or blasting. But even the unbrilliant Gustafson would get suspicious if he tried to borrow a jimmy or a drill, and blasting was quite out of the question. What then? Too bad he didn't have a hypnoscope to pry the combination out of Bergerat.

What other possibilities? The luscious redhead, Anya Savinkov, might prove pliable. In fact he wouldn't mind cultivating her on general principles. Although he knew many beauties in Hollywood, they'd all be middle-aged matrons by the time he returned. That was why only people like Celia and himself, without family ties, went off on jaunts of this sort. In the five months' subjective time of their voyage, eleven years would be passing on the planets.

He whirled at a sound, snapping off his light. Somebody moved and breathed in the corridor outside. Then the door opened and an arm came through the opening, to grope about the inside of the bulkhead for the light-switch.

Chapman saw enough of a shoulder and part of a head, silhouetted against the lighted corridor, to recognize Jean-Jacques Bergerat. In another second the lights would go on, and the trunks were too closely packed for him to hide among them on such short notice.

With one hand Chapman reached into his blouse pocket and brought out a small fistful of pepper. With the other, having stowed his flashlight, he seized the wrist groping for the switch. He threw the pepper in Bergerat's face and pulled hard on the wrist, jerking the man forward into the baggage-room. Chapman let go his victim and slipped past him out the door, which he closed behind him just as the air was rent by the first of a series of crashing sneezes.

HALF an hour later a fist knocked on Chapman's door.

"Let me in, Cato! A thing of the most strange has 'appened to me!"

Chapman looked around the room and took the water-carafe out of its bracket on the wall. In a pinch it would do.

Bergerat, however, seemed entirely friendly, though afflicted with a red face and bloodshot eyes.

"My friend! It is something of incredible! I am walking along the corridor when I hear a noise coming from the

baggage-room. Aha, I say, what is it that is there? Is somebody after my beautiful samples? I push the door. *Achoo!* It opens, though it should at all times be locked except when the steward or one of the officers is there. I reach inside to put on the lights. What happens? I am seized and drawn in, and pepper is thrown in my face. The intruder, he rushes past me and out. Fortunately the door cannot be locked from the inside or I should be there yet. *Achoo!*"

"Who was it?" said Chapman.

"I don't know, so quickly did the *fripon* move. For a moment I suspected even you. But that would be absurd; one agent of a great couturière to play such a trick on another? Then I thought maybe our friend Fiasakhe might have some fanatical idea that the custom of wearing clothes was indecent, and wished to prevent us from introducing it to his planet. But no, I am sure the hand that grasped my arm was that of a man, not an Osirian. Have you any ideas?"

Chapman asked innocently: "Is your model, Mademoiselle Savinkov, trustworthy?"

"That little one? I think that yes. Here, let us repair the ravages of time and misfortune."

Bergerat brought out a silver flask with two small cups screwed over the outlet. "Good cognac."

Chapman sniffed suspiciously at his thimbleful of brandy and held it in his hand until Bergerat drank his. Then Chapman drank too.

"Let us go over the passenger-list," said Bergerat. "This Madams Barros, now, she is enroute to join her husband, so I think she is kosher. Mr. William Chisholm: do you know anything of him?"

"Only what he's told us. He's some kind of professor . . ."

Chapman, sitting on the edge of Mpande's bunk, swayed. Then, before he even realized what was happening, he lost consciousness. . . .

Cato Chapman awakened with a headache and a foul taste in his mouth. He moved a little experimentally, groaned, and sat up to hold his head.

"I say, are you all right, old thing?" said Mpande, sticking his head out from the bottom bunk. "I came in some hours ago, and found you stretched out on your bunk with your togs on."

"Guess I'll live, thanks," muttered Chapman. His watch told him it was nearly breakfast-time.

He got up and shaved. Then, as soon as Mpande left, Chapman leaped to his trunk. Finding it still locked, he hoped for a moment it had not been tampered with. When he got it open, however, he found the gorgeous raiment within a slimy mess. Some of the garments were full of holes; others were partly dissolved into a kind of slush; others were whole but violently discolored.

He pulled himself together and pressed the intercom button in the bulkhead.

"Miss Zorn, please . . . Celia, this is Cato. Will you step over to my cabin, quick?"

When she saw the mess she clutched her head and moaned: "Cato! How perfectly ghastly! How did that happen?"

Chapman poked among the ruins and came up with a couple of slivers of thin glass.

"See this cut on the outside?" He pointed to a semicircular gash that had been cut or burned in the metal of the trunk, and the resulting flap lifted up and pushed down again.

"It's Bergerat, of course. I thought that ring of his looked too big to be just an ornament. It's an energy-cutter. He knocked me out with that drink, cut the trunk open, and stuck in an acid-bomb. They're cute little things, used in strikes in the cleaning-business. There's a plastic covering about the size of an egg, and inside that a thin glass container with the acid and a sliding weight. You tap them hard on something and the weight breaks the glass and the acid dissolves the plastic."

WHILE they examined the ruined samples he told her of his earlier encounter with Bergerat in the baggage-room.

She said: "He knew it was you, and

decided to get even."

"For what? I hadn't hurt his trunk . . ."

"You mean not yet. You did fill his face with pepper, though. Why didn't you have the sense to leave him be, instead of going in for this perfectly ridiculous amateur burglary?"

"What do you mean, sense? Darn it, woman, I'm in charge and I won't be yelled at!"

"Who's yelling at whom?"

"You are!" he shouted.

"I AM NOT YELLING!"

"YOU ARE TOO!" Chapman took a firm grip on himself and laughed. "So'm I. Let's not fight; at least, not each other."

"But what'll we do? There's nothing usable except this one pair of swim-trunks, and we can't give a showing with that."

"We could give a sensational showing," he said, "but the Osirians wouldn't appreciate it."

"There's no way of turning back, say by being transferred to another ship, is there?"

"Certainly not. We've got enough energy stored in us, just from the speed we're going, to—to—"

They both held their heads. Celia Zorn finally said: "I knew nothing would come of letting you and Miss Nettie talk me into this crazy expedition. Even if we live to get back, the old hell-cat will fire us."

Chapman looked up. "There's one chance left." He took out his wallet and stuffed it up his sleeve.

"Cato! Are you planning something more reckless?"

"You'll see. Anyway, what have we got to lose?"

In the saloon the first shift had just finished breakfast and were making way for the second. Chapman pushed towards Bergerat.

"All right, you . . ." he said, adding several fruity epithets, and punched Bergerat's nose.

Instantly the saloon was filled with yells, silverware, and confusion. Bergerat got back one good right to Chapman's mouth before they clinched and fell, threshing about in the little space between the two tables.

"Stop this at once!" shouted an authoritative voice in Brazilo-Portuguese, and Chapman felt himself plucked from his antagonist. Captain Almeida was roaring at him: "Are you mad, man? What is the meaning of this outrage?"

"This twerp," said Chapman, blood trickling down his chin, "dopes me with a knockout drop, picks my pocket, and puts an acid-bomb in my sample trunk to ruin my stock! And you call it an outrage when I poke him one?"

"Liar!" said Bergerat. "I gave him a swallow of cognac and he passed out. Can I help it if he has no head for good liquor? I know nothing about his trunk and I never picked his pocket. Let me at the cheap chiseler. . . ."

"Look in his pockets," said Chapman.

Zuloaga ran his hands over Bergerat's body and found Chapman's wallet.

"You see?" said Chapman.

"But—but I have no idea how that got there," said Bergerat. "He must have planted it while we were fighting!"

By now, however, Chapman had obviously captured the sympathy of the officers.

"Let me show you my trunk," he said.

He showed them the remains of the samples, Bergerat denying his guilt all the while. Chapman thought with an inward chuckle that he could never have proved that Bergerat had done the crime he *had* committed if he hadn't first convinced the authorities that Bergerat had done another he *hadn't*.

Bergerat yelped: "I came to see Mr. Chapman because I had just had another encounter with him in the baggage-room!" He went on with an account of his peppery experience.

"He's making that up," said Chapman. "He has to have something to say, I suppose. Let's look at that trunk of his; maybe it's full of stolen goods."

They went down the hall, where the captain opened the baggage-room door. Chapman had a moment of panic lest somebody think to ask Gustafson what Mr. Chapman had been doing all that

time in the machine-shop. But nobody did, and Bergerat's trunk proved undisturbed.

"Open it," said the captain.

Bergerat complied. Inside was a mass of neatly hung summer wear, mostly female: sun-suits, bathing-suits, tennis-clothes, and the like. None of the other passengers claimed any of these items as stolen property.

"You see," said Chapman. "Nobody's tried to break into his trunk."

"I see," said Captain Almeida. He slammed the trunk closed, spun the knob, and turned on Bergerat. "You, *amigo*, are under arrest for assault, burglary, theft, and any others I think up later. You will remain in Compartment K until we arrive, when formal charges will be preferred. Take him away."

Anya Savinkov protested: "But—but that is wrong—you should at least put them both in the cell. What will become of me? I am desolated!"

Chapman patted her arm. "That's all right, little one. I'll take care of you."

"Huh?" said Celia Zorn. "Watch out for him, Anya, when he starts talking that way. . . ."

CHAPMAN laughed at them and went back to his cabin, where he swabbed out the inside of his trunk. At the next sleeping-period he made sure Mpande was engrossed in a game in the saloon, dug his lock-pickers out of their hiding-place, and entered the baggage-compartment again. Captain Almeida, not knowing the peculiarity of the Kleinwasser lock, had simply given the knob a twirl, so that Bergerat's trunk was not really locked at all.

Half an hour later all Miss Greenfarb's ruined summer wear had been transferred to Bergerat's trunk, while Monsieur Tomaselli's assortment of similar garments reposed snugly in Chapman's trunk in Chapman's cabin.

Then he relaxed in the saloon by dragging Fiasakhe away from his sentimental novels for a bout of checkers.

After the *Camoes* had landed and all the passengers had been through passport, health, and customs inspection, Chapman said: "Come along, girls. I think those birds in the waiting-room are our Osirian capitalists."

"What good will it do?" wailed Celia. "We haven't got any stock and we can't make any!"

"Leave it to me," said Chapman. "Oh, Fiasakhe!"

"Yess?"

"Will you act as interpreter for me for a few minutes? I don't know much of your language yet."

"Klatly."

They went up to the little herd of dinosaurs and Chapman told Fiasakhe: "Ask them if one of them is Thafahiya the curtain-maker."

After some hissing in the Sha'akhfi tongue, Fiasakhe reported:

"The pik one, that iss he." He indicated a tall Osirian whose scales were decorated with a peculiarly gorgeous pattern of blue-and-gold paint. "Say he ket Miss Greenfarp's letter. Think it iss a fine itea. You sell them the designs, they make the clothes. Naturally their answer will not haff reached Earth for many yearss yet. Will you come with them to their office to arranche the showink?"

"Come, girls," said Chapman, starting to follow his new associates.

Through the glass doors he could see an Osirian automobile—a wheeled platform with handrails but no seats. With those tails a sedan body wouldn't have been practical.

"Senhor Chapman!" It was one of the *Viagens* officials. "Just a minute, *por favor!*"

"What is it?" said Chapman in some annoyance.

"You must sign the complaint against the Senhor Bergerat. Otherwise we cannot try him."

"Don't want to press that complaint," said Chapman, feeling magnanimous. "Four months in Compartment K was enough punishment."

"But then we must let him go!"

"Okay, let him go."

The assembled Osirians hissed like a leaky boiler as Celia and Anya paraded in front of them in one outfit after an-

other. Chapman, whose command of Sha'akhfi was yet meager, read his patter from a script in phonetic symbols.

". . . Here, ladies and gentlemen, is an outfit for window-shopping on the boulevard. Notice the flare of the skirt . . ." He knew his accent was terrible, since some Sha'akhfi sounds simply could not be made by human vocal organs and vice versa. Naturally he did not tell them they were looking at the line of Tomaselli of Paris.

The female Osirians, he was gratified to see, were putting pressure on their males to buy them everything in sight. When it was over the males lined up and signed checks, using their claws as pens, as fast as Chapman could quote them prices. Although these prices were fantastically high they did not, of course, cover the cost of bringing the sample-trunk to Osiris, but there was no point either in giving the things away or in blowing a few grand more hauling them back to Earth.

After all the samples had been sold, the female Osirians wanted to buy the girls' personal clothes—all of them. It took all Chapman's persuasion to get rid of them.

"Whew!" he said as the last Osirian belle stalked out, a beret perched on her cockscomb and a halter around her breastless torso. "That—uh—that show you, eh, Thafahiya?"

"Magnificent!" said the Osirian. "We shall sign the contract forthwith. What a pity that with our bodily temperature-control, we have never felt the need of this charming custom of wearing clothes. Come, I shall give you your contract and your first payment. When may we expect our first portfolio of designs?"

"They—they on way," said Chapman in his stumbling Sha'akhfi. "Are being sent here by ship, for deposit with *Viagens*, and released to you if contract has been closed. Let us hurry, for we not want to miss *Camoes's* return trip."

"No great matter; one of our own ships leaves for your star a few days later."

Chapman hurried nevertheless. Osirians slept on the floor, did not use chairs, and subsisted on the meat of other reptiles which they domesticated. While he'd heard their space-ships made special provisions for human passengers, as those of the *Viagens* did for e. t.'s, he did not care to test their sleeping-accommodations and cuisine himself.

WHEN he had stowed his copy of the contract between Greenfarb's and Thafahiya's syndicate safely in Captain Almeida's safe, Cato Chapman relaxed.

"Well, girls, guess our fortunes are made." Then he yelped as he saw Bergerat's name on the passenger-list.

"Well," said Celia, "what did you expect the poor man to do?"

"This may be embarrassing," Chapman said.

It did not, however, prove so. Bergerat grinned at him.

"Where can we talk, my old? I have a proposition to make."

Later he said: "Look I cannot go back to Tomaselli. He will not only fire me but will try to get me blacklisted in Paris. A very vengeful man, my little Tomaselli.

"Now you and I, we have fought with what you call the bare knuckles—or is it brass knuckles?—and you have won. *Bien.* I congratulate you. But why can I not go back to Hollywood with you? It is the world's other great style center. Perhaps you could put in a good word for me with your Miss Greenfarb."

"Hm," said Chapman. "An idea. Can't promise anything. Nettie'll probably think Tomaselli is trying to plant you in her shop as a spy. Are you sure he isn't?" Chapman looked hard at his friendly enemy.

"No, no! That is easily proved. True, there is another motive in the case."

"Huh?"

"A sentimental motive. Your Miss Zorn—ahum—ah—"

"Oh. Well, I'll do what I can. By the way, how'd you work that Mickey Finn trick on me? I carefully watched you drink the same stuff."

"That was simple," said Bergerat. "I used a barbiturate that is counteracted

by caffein, and I filled myself with coffee before I visited your cabin. But we are all done with these games now, no?"

Five months later, subjective time, the shuttle-rocket from Pluto landed at Mohave Spaceport. Chapman, with Anya clinging to his arm, walked down the ramp. There would be changes in 22 years. Fortunately, because of the great lengthening of the human lifespan in the last century, most of his old acquaintances would still be around. Including Miss Nettie.

He puffed furiously on his pipe, the first smoke he'd been allowed since boarding the *Camoes*. Behind him came Bergerat and Celia. As they passed through the inspection-rooms and into the waiting-room, Chapman stopped short. His pipe bounced from the floor unheeded.

Except for those who had come in on the ship, the people swarming in the waiting-room were all quite naked except for sandals. Moreover their hides were decorated with the fantastically interwoven designs in iridescent colors that the Osirians used for personal adornment.

As the four stood gawking, a man came up.

"Cato Chapman?"

"Y-yes. Who are you?"

"Don't you know me?"

"By all the gods, you're my cousin Ed Mahoney! This is my wife Anya, and these are Mr. and Mrs. Bergerat. Remember Celia? She always wanted a tall dark type. The captain hitched us on the way back from Osiris."

Mahoney nodded.

"I thought something like that might happen."

"But—but—where the devil are your clothes? And why is everybody going around looking like the tattooed woman in the circus?"

"Oh, that. That's the new Osirian style; it came in a couple of years ago. We don't wear clothes in hot weather any more."

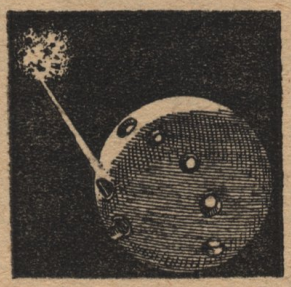
"Yuk," said Chapman. "How come?"

"It seems more smart Osirians who came here on that so-called cultural mission started a syndicate to exploit the Osirian body-paint designs on Earth. That reminds me, you haven't got a job any more."

"What?"

"That's right. Nettie Greenfarb and all the other summerwear specialty-shops went broke. Last I heard of Nettie she had some government job. But maybe you'd like to try the paint business. It's doing swell, as you can imagine, and maybe I can find openings for your friends. Like me to fly you in to L. A.?"

Dumbly they followed him.



Pursued by implacable aliens from a saffron star, a quartet of earth folk finds a haven of hope upon a strange world whose contrasts defy logic in PLANET OF SMALL MEN, by Murray Leinster, featured complete novelet in the April issue of—

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

THE HISTORIAN

by

CARL JACOBI

It was the year 12,000,
and Lak Dhrow
was completing his
monumental account of
the Solar System. . . .

IT was the year 12,000 according to the System's calendar and Lak Dhrow sat at his desk in the royal library, writing. Outside spring had come once again to Mars; the canal trees were in bloom, and the air was filled with sweet scents and sounds. But Lak Dhrow continued with his work, unheeding.

His labor of thirty years was nearing completion. A few more details to add in the pre-space Earth period, a few more touches to the introduction and he could write finis to his history of the Solar System. It had been a herculean undertaking. Even now, though he alone had written and stylized every one of its millions of words and designed and charted each of its thousands of graphs and figures he could remember little beyond the chapter on Venus.

A chime sounded at the door, and the Oligarch entered, a tall patrician with youthful eyes and a brisk step. There was a look of anticipation on his face.

"Lak Dhrow," said the Oligarch, "I have heard your work is done."

The historian nodded and smiled. "I had hoped to surprise you," he said. "Yes, it is all but finished. Twelve thousand years of the activities of intelligent life in the Solar System from the first papyrus of the Martian red desert to this month's development of the light-year probascope. Everything has been recorded."

The Oligarch wet his lips. "May I see it?" he said.

FOR answer Lak Dhrow touched a stud. A light flashed and an undersized native Venusian entered the room. He seemed to understand what was wanted of him at once. Together the two rolled a huge screen forward and removed its protective cover. The Oligarch took his position in a gilded settee.

"You must remember there are still some rough passages," Lak Dhrow said. "There are also one or two years of prespace Earth that are still somewhat dark. To be exact, the period around the middle of the twentieth century. Ho Garth has declared that it was the time of first stage atomics, but then Ho Garth

is notoriously unreliable. This period . . ."

"No excuses," said the Oligarch, not unkindly. "Turn on the screen."

So for the next hour they sat watching the moving panorama of the past. The screen was three dimensional. In the foreground slowly unrolled the explanatory script, carefully styled in Upper Case Martian. Back of this were animated three-dimensional drawings in color, illustrating in authenticated costume, highlights of events described in the script. And finally, all of this was set against a background of maps and astronomical charts that were as perfect as the Martian Academy of Cosmography could make them.

They saw the first development of animal life on Pluto, the result of light transporting seed across space. Pre-space-travel history flowed by rapidly in a confusing array of tribal and national conflicts, wars and rebellions. They saw a likeness of the ill-fated *Colossus*, the first ship to reach Mars from Earth, and a reenactment of the Battle of the Canals. They saw Igor's legendary Death Brigade as it raced down Canal Grande, and the rise and fall of city-state Mars, feudal Venus, communal Io and Ganymede. Men and women crowded upon each other: Empress Carzia, "the man who made a satellite," "the Brotherhood of Space," Immortal Juxton Kabe who was finally destroyed in 4012, the first and second Councils of Nine, the Plutonian Wars. Life and developments, major and minor, the record of twelve thousand years of life in the Solar System, ending with the present outer-galactic expedition—which as yet was only in the formulative stage. The historical screen was a tremendous accomplishment for one man.

When he had finally seen enough, the Oligarch signaled that it be turned off and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Lak Dhrow," he said, "you have done well. This history will be a lasting memorial for our people and our age. I—"

His words were interrupted as the doors slid back and two attaches entered. Before each of them rolled an ato-cart piled high with documents.

"What is it?" demanded Lak Dhrow, annoyed at this interruption.

"The Director's compliments," one of the attaches said. "These documents were sent over by *Research*. The Director said they were middle-twentieth century Earthian, discovered only last week in the northwestern hemisphere. They were found in a sealed tomb along with various other artifacts and may reveal a great deal heretofore unknown about the period."

Lak Dhrow nodded.

"Put them there," he said, indicating a smaller alcove to the side. "I will inspect them later."

* * * * *

But Lak Dhrow had no opportunity to do more work on the historical screen. Exactly six days after his interview with the Oligarch, the historian went completely mad. So sudden and so all-encompassing was his madness that the Oligarch delayed for some time calling in the court psychiatrists. Eventually he received his report, but that report proved to be a series of contradictions. The Oligarch tore it up and sent for Lafcardio, the greatest authority on mental diseases on Mars.

That was on Greenday, the sixth of Canalber, according to the Martian calendar. For a week Lafcardio continued his consultations and finally quitted Lak Dhrow's chambers to report sadly that the historian's case was hopeless.

"But have you determined the cause of his madness?" asked the Oligarch. "Have you utilized the electro-hypnotic machine and the psychograph? Have you?"

"I have tried everything," replied Lafcardio, "and it is my opinion that it was the last collection of documents from Earth which was the sole cause of his derangement. Up to the time of their reception, his work of thirty years was a complete and well-ordered thing in which he could take pride of accomplishment. But those documents changed all that. They undermined everything

he had done, cast doubts on all his efforts of the past. All the facts he had collected and organized for his history, dates of inventions, names of planetary places and cities, events of the past, types of space ships—everything, which he had recorded—and especially the allocation of those details to their proper historical period, were wrong—entirely wrong!"

The Oligarch leaned back to frown reflectively.

"And these documents?" he said. "What were they?"

Lafcardio consulted a notebook. "They were of a peculiar type made in twentieth-century Earth with bright colored covers. They were known as magazines . . . *science-fiction magazines.*

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

At any rate, Dr. Einstein's new theories look like another step in the coordination of what have been until recently highly specialized fields—just as two scientists in England recently announced that a definite relationship between electronic movements and those of the stars and planets has been established.

They mark the vitally needed arterial cross-highways of learning which are beginning to appear just when it looked as if humanity were condemned to an age of ever-increasing and increasingly-separated specialization. We think the learned Doctor once again rates a salaam and a salute from his species.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

EDMOND HAMILTON takes over the lead-novel spot come July with his first full-length job since VALLEY OF CREATION a couple of years ago. This time, in THE CITY AT WORLD'S END, he tees off on a really brilliant theme which finds the pleasant little American city of Middletown unexpectedly victim to the first sneak punch of the atomic war.

Unexpected, that is, except to Kenniston and his chief, Hubble, and a few others who alone knew that the city, despite its deceptively peaceful appearance, was one of this nation's secretly vital links in the chain of atomic production. Somebody slipped, letting the enemy know too, and the result was a super-atomic bomb which exploded a thousand yards or more in the air above Middletown.

In Mr. Hamilton's own words, following the sudden flash in the sky, the blaze of the new and awful sun above the town, Kenniston "looked down Mill Street." He expected to see pulverized buildings, smoking craters, fire and steam and destruction. But what he saw was more stunning and in a strange way more awful.

"He saw Middletown lying unchanged and peaceful in the sunlight."

However, changes were soon noticeable. First there was the new thin coldness of the air, the blazing corona and dullness of the sun, the visibility of the stars in high daylight. No, things were very definitely not unchanged.

And then came the terrifying discovery—that Middletown was no longer on Earth as its inhabitants had known it but lay, a twentieth-century oasis of paved streets and houses and shops and trees and gardens, in a desolate brown world without trees, without water, apparently without life.

Not until a jeep-equipped expedition discovered the magic abandoned city beyond the hills did the truth begin to sink in. In some way the super-atomic bomb had blasted Middletown right out of its place in time into an Earth of an unimaginably far-distant future—an Earth which, if not dead, lay abandoned and dying.

As soon as possible a migration was organized to the city beyond the hills. There, wrestling with long-abandoned and incredibly advanced machinery, life of a sort was reestablished and an attempt made to find some means of communication with any humans who might remain alive.

Miraculously such communication was established—but not with Earthfolk. Instead it was with representatives of their descendants of the Galactic Empire, who had long since evacuated Earth as untenable for humans and were under orders to see that it was not repopulated.

Hence the greater conflict—between the folk of today, lost in the far future, and those who wished them to desert their home planet. Tradition, speech, semantics, ways

of thought—all were different. And it was up to Kenniston and a few others to see to it that the people of Middletown won their just dues.

THE CITY AT WORLD'S END is an inspiringly human story of the reactions of men and women and boys and girl, people like you or me, suddenly thrust into an unprecedented situation. In its suspense, its intense humanity, its unexpected denouement, it is perhaps Mr. Hamilton's finest novel to date. We hope you agree.

For our Hall of Fame Classic we have selected one of the most cosmic novelets ever produced by that master of the galactic sweep, Dr. Edward E. Smith—ROBOT NEMESIS. This is the story of the War of the Planets, or rather of the cold-war stalemate that followed it—although it was written long before Mr. Walter Lippmann coined that memorable phrase.

It is the story of a robot revolt to end all robot revolts and of the little band of human beings who, in a last-ditch struggle, were able to checkmate the efforts of the non-men to take over the universe. It is conceived and written in the Smith grand manner—alive with action, with battle, with near-defeat turned into victory. It is a fine example of the science fiction story as it was being written eleven years ago.

There will, of course, be other novelets and short stories—which we fondly believe will be up to our recent standards. And our feature departments will be out in force. Also the semi-annual fan club listing.

ETHERGRAMS

WHILE the poets and carpers and controversialists are out in full flower this issue, the girls seem to have lost interest with a scant few notable exceptions. What have we done? Somebody (not our best friend, we hope) please tell us. And there is only one postcard which we reprint as follows—

MISTAKE OR THREE
by Shelby Vick

Dear Jack: I don't have time etc. for a full report on the Jan SS but I have a limerick about the most important part;

There is a mag called SS
One surely bound for success
They brought back Captain Future
And you know that he'll suture
(That pun makes this lim'rick a mess.)

Might be a mistake or three that I made as far as limerick writing is concerned but there is no mistake in the sentiments.—Box No. 493, Lynn Haven, Florida.

Oh, well, we might as well treat it in kind (or unkind). After all, it's all in fun. So, taking deep breath—

There is a young fellow named Vick
Who wrote the above limerick
But somewhere he lost track
For our name is not Jack
Nor is "suture" an stf trick.

We have a horrible feeling that, as far as poetry (?) is concerned the worst is yet to come. However, let's at more serious matters, first with—

PRONE TO FALLACY
by Poul Anderson

Dear Editor: Thanks for a good issue. I was especially pleased to see Pete Manx back and hope you can manage to reprint all his old adventures. We might even get some new ones—or is that a daydream?

The main purpose of this letter is to comment on the Coles' epistle, which definitely calls for argument. Interesting as their concept of biopolitics is it seems to be another one of these systems which seek to explain all human history in terms of some one set of postulates.

German philosophers are especially prone to this fallacy, and of that group the most notorious is of course Karl Marx. Such theories have value, and often seem to have elements of truth but they are never the whole truth. In fact a good historian can knock any theory of history to pieces by finding exceptions to all its rules and predictions.

True, that may be a case of not seeing the forest for the trees—but leave us not forget that a forest is made up of individual trees and that a theory of forests must account for every tree. (Or nearly every one—every science has data for which the current theories can't account but the idea is to explain those rebel facts as soon as possible. That's how new and more comprehensive theories come into existence.)

Unfortunately the Coles did not explain their theory in sufficient detail to make any exact criticism possible. I may find myself attacking straw men—in which case forgive me. But to work.

First we hear of a "death trauma," the "ever-present all-pervading fear of death in H. Saps" which is somehow supposed to leave us in a state of "racial immaturity." May I point out that throughout history most people have not been afraid of death as extinction because they didn't believe in it.

They were convinced of some sort of personal survival (or spiritual survival without memory in some Oriental faiths) after death. Of course there was the usual fear-reaction to danger but that can hardly be called immature. Someone who did not react that way would be a poor prospect for survival. Is it immature to be careful when crossing a busy intersection?

To be sure plenty of such believers have still been afraid to die. But necrophobia is only one of many morbid terrors to which man is subject and should not be singled out as unique in any way.

Perhaps my worthy opponents will maintain that this belief in survival is an ostrichism which a race that did not fear death would not show. Leaving the pros and cons of that aside may I mention the many unbelievers I've known who are not afraid to die.

If the Coles wish to maintain that fear (except as a normal physiological reaction to immediate danger) in general has been a bugbear to humanity, then I'll have to agree. But fear of all types, please, not just fear of death.

Well, let's go on to this classification of evolutionary stages. Just what is the basis for claiming that aggregates of polymorphic zooids such as the social insects are a higher step in evolution? To my mind they represent a divergent line of evolution, a blind alley such as has been common enough in paleontology.

Contrary to popular opinion the social insects are not very highly developed. Certainly they are completely unintelligent. Mark Twain's essay on ants says it far better than I could hope to do. Of course there is no reason to suppose that intelligence is the goal of evolution in general but it seems to be the goal of human development. At least the whole history of our species points that way.

It's true that a more centralized, anti-individualistic form of society seems to be in the cards but that's more of a historical than a biological trend. Indeed history looks like a sort of pendulum as far as individualism is concerned.

From the Athenian republic to the Roman Empire to the free peasantry of the early Middle Ages to the autocratic state of the later medieval period to the liberalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the reaction of the early nineteenth to the individualism of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the fascism, communism and (here at home) slowly evolving socialism of our time.

Shaddap, you historians! I know I'm oversimplifying. But it does go to show that there is no biological inevitability about any form of government. They've all been tried and they've all worked after a fashion but never as well as they could have done were humans perfect.

Politics is a comparatively recent creation of man and it would take an immense period of time, say half a million years, for it to affect him biologically (unless some fantastic eugenics program were adopted—and even its effects have been overrated). By that time, let us hope, society will have been established on a sufficiently sane basis to render politics obsolete.

If you're looking for a human invention that is really affecting evolution try medical science—but I digress.

I'd also like to air one of my pet peeves by taking a sideswipe at the old notion—Neanderthal man has been in Europe an indefinite time, a low-browed creature with no cultural capacity at all. In comes the godlike Cro-Magnon, wipes out the lowly Neanderthal (in another version poor old Neanderthal simply curls up and dies of an acute inferiority complex) and becomes the ancestor of our noble selves.

Please! Without going into archeological detail, may I simply state that Neanderthal was not stupid. He may not have been as bright as Homo Sapiens (then again there's no evidence that he wasn't. The brain had a different form but it was no smaller) but he was no moron. He couldn't have survived the glacial period if he had been.

The earliest Cro-Magnons exhibit about the same cultural level as the latest Neanderthals. Actually the European Neanderthals were only the conservative branch of a widespread stock which seems to have led to Homo Sapiens in other parts of the world. As the glaciers retreated Cro-Magnon came into Europe and found his cousins there.

It looks as if they interbred at least to some extent. In fact Hrdlicka maintained that Neanderthal was our own direct ancestor, period, and Gray has an intriguing theory that blondness is a trait we get from a partially Neanderthal ancestry. Be that as it may Cro-Magnon man was only in small part ancestral to the modern European. Other races came in and assimilated, perhaps even wiped out, the earlier Homo Sapiens.

Enough. This is becoming a small treatise.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Les and Es for introducing a controversial topic. Who cares what somebody else thinks of the stories? Let's have some good arguments instead. All debaters will please line up to the right. Have at ye!—3423 Aldrich Avenue North, Minneapolis 12, Minnesota.

Okay—and we'll put in our six cents (inflationary value, of course) for whatever they're worth (no comment, please). We tackled the limitations of all "systems" as applied to humanity in a recent editorial in either this magazine or its companion, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, and came to very similar conclusions.

As for this "death trauma" business it has always seemed to us the most pathetic aspect of our species that he insist, in theory at any rate, upon the survival of his pitiful little ego (no exceptions) after the change known as death. Or, conversely, that he should need the whip of hell and the hope of heaven to make him decent here on Earth. Why not take death as we come to it (we all do) and do what we can about our lives with as little hindrance to others as possible? It doesn't seem especially hard to be reasonably good.

After all, everybody dies—the only difference is in belief as to what happens afterward and that's something we all find out, too.

As for your Neanderthal—Cro-Magnon business, we like the one where the good old Neanderthals simply curled up and died of an acute inferiority complex. It sounds so darned silly and laboratory-treatise-ish. But you have mentioned something much more provocative in Gray's theory that blondness is a Neanderthal heritage.

SLITHY COVES
by Les & Es Cole

Dear Jabberwocky: All this furor over nothing. We're surprised—and muchly so. Can we add our two cents' worth to the "Ph.D. controversy"? Firstly, we wish to state that the Ph.D. now-a-days carries no more inference to it than merely signifying that the holder is a trained specialist. No more—and anyone who believes that the Ph.D.'s opinion (in fields other than his own specialization) is any more qualified than the next guy's, obviously needs a new set of semantic reactions.

We'll grant that the Ph.D. has been exposed to more education than most people but in our experience we've found that that means nothing. Fully half the number we've known we do not consider "intelligent" or even "well-educated." It ain't watcha do, it's the way thatcha do it, that counts. Probably the most "intelligent" and "well-educated" man we know has no formal education past high school.

We don't mean this to sound like sour grapes—but our opinion of the intellectual snob who is so insecure as to add his title to a letter to a magazine is rather low. Give us instead (God forbid!) Margaret St. Clair. We'll close the discussion with a fervent desire to know why the initials are necessary.

While we're giving the back of our hands, let us turn with pleasure to Jonathin Saville's attack. From Jon's remarks, we gather that he missed the point of that "PIE-ayes" business. That in turn implies that he missed the point concerning the extra-terrestrial geomorphology and the extra-terrestrial lithology. We won't stoop to mud-slinging and say that he didn't understand the letter—we'll be charitable and assume that he just didn't read it.

Does bring up a point, though. Poor old anonymous is about as stubborn as you can get. (See his remarks on what constitutes "science fiction".) So we've tried to take things into our own hands. 'Fraid our deep dark plot must now be revealed. We've been hoping for a "science discussions" section of TEV. It'd be sort of a little corner where those of us that wanted to could bat things around. Then the Shawl school wouldn't be after our scalps. Thus we've tossed out little tid-bits over the past two years for discussion. So far we've been highly unsuccessful due to a general lethargy in TEV, but we're hopeful that things are picking up.

Did we say the editor was stubborn? We're collecting a mass of facts to support our contention. It's pretty obvious that the fans actually have no voice in the magazine. Look at the record:

1. Sergeant Saturn.
They ran that one for eight years before they let the majority of fans even vote on the question.
2. Bergey
Bergey covers have now run for some nine years straight. Before 1940 they used to alternate Bergey with Brown and Paul. Now all we get is Bergey. We personally think he is terrible. But will they let us vote on the question? Hah!!
3. Ratings
Why won't they give us a department for story ratings, or at least let us vote on it?
4. TEV
We don't want to see TEV dropped, but if the majority of fans want it that way, then why not?
5. Etc.

And so we turn to the "science fiction" controversy. We would say, old snark, that you are being stubborn. Nous accusons (or something). Y'know, we can't remember ever seeing you publicly admit you were wrong (except in typographical errors: approbrius vs. opprobrius etc.), but we think we've got you now. You drew us a parallel to the "detective story," claiming that it, as in "science fiction" covers a multitude of sins. Only the "detective story" is not a major division but a subdivision of the "mystery story." The "mystery story" may be divided into the (1) detective story, (2) murder story, (3) crime story, and (4) miscellany. Incidentally, this classification was given us by one Charles G. Higgins, Jr., who will soon—heh, heh—bear the title of Ph.D.!

One more query this trip: Have you given up allowing us to italicize? Some of our remarks came up nonsense because of the lack thereof in the last letter.—1204 Nogales Street, Del Paso Heights, California.

Curiously enough, you wretches, you are

right about the detective-mystery story business. And ourselves a battle-scarred veteran in the field, far ante-dating our stf experience. Consider us "got"—but good. Hereafter we'll call them whodunits and play it safe, omitting the so-called "suspense" novel from the field entirely.

So we're stubborn, are we? Okay, okay. But when these stf magazines landed in our lap back in midsummer of 1944 we found the Sergeant Saturn horror had been in being through two previous editors. As soon as we began to get hep to the field we dropped the Sarge—space-lingo, Frog-eyes, Snaggletooth, Wartears, Xeno, et al.—as far from Earth as we could throw him.

We welcome all opinions on our covers, pro and con. We are not quite prepared to handle decently a story-rating department. As for TEV, if enough of you want it drastically cut or dropped it's quite all right with us. Along with THE READER SPEAKS in TWS it has become something of a Frankenstein monster to us—but don't get us wrong, we love it.

Incidentally, fellow glass-igloo dwellers, don't we detect a certain boomerang quality in your last two sentences? Hasn't it occurred to you that, in omitting the italics, we were simply trying to commit a kindness? And what do you mean—"*some* of our remarks . . ." Watch it, Coles.

LONG TIME NO—
by William E. Stocks

Hello Ed: After a lapse of many years—since about '35 or '36—I'm again taking pen in hand to write an stf editor. Usually I'm complacent enough just to read the mags and say nothing. But after perusing some 10 or 12 issues (in the past two weeks) of SS and TWS I felt it necessary to send along a few words.

You won't find any new, constructive or creative ideas—that isn't my purpose this time. Perhaps later. I would like to get the following off my sparsely-haired chest—

First of all—I can't see myself how you can expect to find a character—one, that is—in stf who will create a sensation as did any other fictional character, like Holmes, Perry Mason, H. Poirot, the Saint, etc. The field of stf is a very wide one—too wide thus to be synthesized in a single character.

I've been reading stf since '27. I was then but eight years old, which was when I also began the study (and I say that with tongue in cheek) of astronomy. So I feel qualified, after 22 years of stf, to say that it has changed and for the better. Both your 'zines are fine—and provide many hours of enjoyment. Somehow, though, I can't say that all of your stories appeal to me. I read my first Oona & Jick tale today (I missed some issues) and I am thankful for having missed 'em. If HIMALAYCHALET was an example, then the previous ones must have been very foul indeed.

Keep the HoF but get some better stories. A few were good—most of them were buried too long. What's happened to Fearn—Zagat — Williamson — Gallun — Schachner — Cummings? They were all good.

I read the reader's pages first—most of them (the letters, that is) are good. Some are strictly infantile. But don't do away with it. It puts a certain something into the mag that most others don't have. Sort of makes you feel at home. And your replies at the end of each, okay—but too short. Sometimes you ignore too many questions—and so I often feel left hanging at the end of a rope. (Probably a fate much too good for you.—Ed.)

About a year ago the American Weekly ran an article by Win Brooks (Who is he, you ask—I don't know). The piece in question was titled "Life on Mars Impossible." It was a silly stupid story (I still have the article). I wrote a masterpiece (no applause, please) in answer, showing up the stupidity of said Brooks—but the revered editor wouldn't print my article. Guess I don't have enough prestige!

What I want to know is how does one go about breaking into print? One can't build up a presentable rep if someone doesn't thaw out a bit and give the novice a break. Could you reprint Brooks' article and run my piece along with it? Futile thought! But no harm in asking—oh, well, someday . . .?—1427 Spring Garden Avenue, Pittsburgh 12, Pa.

Glad you saw fit to write after so long and, in general, like our mag. If you hadn't been reading old issues you would be aware that we have long since tossed the "Sherlock" theory out the proverbial window. Stf has snowballed too rapidly in the past eighteen months to have either need or room for such an editorial phenomenon.

As for poor Oona & Jick—you did catch one of the weaker ones. ALEPH SUB ONE was fine as were THE SOMA RACKS and others. But the series is currently moribund, so worry not thy little head anent it. Sorry we sometimes fail to answer all questions but space *is* limited and we figure most of the column belongs to the epistoleers.

Your request about the Win Brooks piece is, of course, impossible, but it is odd you should pick on poor Win. We happen to have known him for years. He was star rewrite man on the Hearst paper on which *we* first broke into print back in 1932 as a cub reporter and is currently managing editor of same. He is also the most naturally talented writer we have ever met. As a youngster, before we knew him, he had written five stories, sold all to *Collier's*.

He quit for many years, began writing slick fiction during the war and hit the SEP and other top markets with terrifying regularity, even receiving from the SEP a double-spread for a poem (something almost unheard of) about a lost submarine. So you want to know how to break into print? The answer is simple—be good and you can't miss if you keep pitching.

REX SHORTCAKE
by Rex E. Ward

Dear Editor: THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE in the January issue was wonderful; it was the only good story STARTLING STORIES has published in its long life with the exception of the Cap Future stories and a few others.

So publish these novelets as often as you can. I find the new abbreviated length excellent.

I am sorry to cause you any excess amount of puzzlement over my statement that you should definitely drop your letter sections. My letter was not intended to be interpreted as diminishing my appreciation of the space you have allotted me in the past.

It is for the sake of intelligent readers that I suggest this move. Too many of the letters are too childish and inane. That is the whole reason.

I find myself wondering why people read STARTLING STORIES. The stories are on a definitely low level and are in everyday words no good.

You see, I liked Joe Hawkins. If you do not know what I mean, ask Chad Oliver. He will tell you.

And remember—more Captain Future.—305 East Maple Avenue, El Segundo, California.

Does Macy's ask Oliver? Does Gimbel's ask Oliver? Well—really, Rex! On the whole we're glad you kept this one short. You'll be getting more CF, however.

ANOTHER QUICKIE
by Doug Stitch

Dear Editor: Thanks for bringing back Captain Future in the January issue. It was a real treat. How about having a quarterly of him with a reprint as we had before? For the Hall of Fame I nominate SIGNBOARD OF SPACE by Kummer, Jr.—11 George Street, St. Catherine's, Ontario.

Oddly enough, as you have doubtless already noticed, Doug, we had already scheduled SIGNBOARD OF SPACE for our present issue. But we're afraid the CF quarterly is out. You'll have to take him in smaller doses, for the present at least. Sorry.

DIMENTION REGREATS
by Rick Sneary

Dear Ed: Well it has been a year since I wrote and there are acouple other things to comment on. But want to give my impression of SS, 1949.

Oh the whole it better than the past years. . You lack any outstanding classics, but then no great flops eather. . Your short stories were and are good, though as general run, they were better toward the first of the year. Your Hof stories are better, but still not equal to the shorts.

The Conquest of Space series is well worth extry mention. L. Ron LaFayette has long been one of my favorite writters, and while he seems to iet a rather bitter opinion of the world seep into his stories, they still remain of the best. It is regreated that they are not extended into longer stories. For while being space-opera, they are ploted and writen with infinite care. It is like comparing a Finley drawing done in his hay-days, to one by Astarita.

I wish to make a complaint on the sameness of plot of your lead stories. Of six, four were time or dimention travel stories. While each were good onto themself, , tomuch of a good thing . . ." While willing to except the premice of time travel, I still don't find it the best means of getting the hero into the future. Why can't he start on Galaxic Hub and work out. Why not try to save a financial empire, reather than world.

Your editoral policy shows improvement, but still shows signs of "treat the little jerks nice, they mean well" attatude of a few years back. Your editorals show the general last-minute rush of writting, usually seen in fanzines. The last few though have been about the best since you took over. If you always gave a desent answer to critasim, you would be almost OS.

It is amussing to note the edtoral in the Jan. (49) issue, and then to see you return to C.F. The prize example of all things laughable about past space opera.

Next, I'd like you, if you haven't already, to correct the impression the the OUTLANDER SOCIETY, and our mag, THE OUTLANDER, are in oppossion to the LASFS. This is, for us, a reather importen point, as there is another miner local group that does try to run the LASFS down. And while we have no personal feeling against this group, we do not want confused with them. —The reference to us as Sophomoric, as our aver age is 29.

I would also like to answer William Knapheide's points why the NFFF should not be allowed to aid in salecting Convention sights. (1) It is quite ture that the NFFF makes up only a small section of fandom, tho usually the most active. But consider, The NFFF has a membership of 350, Convention societies run around 175-250; and actual attendence at con has neaver been over 200, ofwich a majority are always from with-in 100 miles. Which group is the most repasentive?

(2) It would, in a since bar other clubs for salecting the sight. BUT, no other club is as large, and their members are not bared. There is no reason a FAPA member can't be a NFFF member. I personally belong to five groups.

(3) I do not see way it is a monoply. That, to me implys that it would limit the salection of sights to a few people. Were as anyone may join the NFFF, and thus have as much chance to vote as anyone else. Much more than under the present sit up. The next Convention will be in Portland, and under the NFFF plan, Maine fans would have just as much chance to vote as Don Day.

Ed: Your two ideas are full of holds. The first shows your compleet lack of knowalage on how long it takes to get anything done by mail. And besides, as I pointed out, any number of fans belong to a number of groups, and therefore would be able to vote anumber of times. . — And why should a non-affiliated committee be sit up? the NFFF is national, and has no ax to grind.

Your second idea, though my untrained mind fails to grasp all the meanings, is better, and possably workable. But still, why a privet group? The best they could do is poll the last Convention Society, which as I pointed out, is smaller in number than the NFFF. Also the NFFF is all sit up to handel such an operation. And Public Relations would sound better under a old and established Federation, than under a Mule-like Society.

Guess that's it. You still have a swell mag, that while not up to TWS is tops in my reading. And while the readers speeks are nor so filled with old friends as of yor (excepting for L. C. Sherlock) I still get a lot of fun out of reading them.

Best wishes for another good year.—2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif.

It's good to hear from you again, Rick. We'll try to keep picking up the editorials and story content as best we can. We have, we believe, already corrected the Outlander erratum. As for that convention-voting business, we should have known better than to stick our dirty little oar in. Ouch!

Also, we're trying to answer more questions. Sometimes, in these long epistles, they get away from us. Some of you might put a summary list of the matters you most want answered at the end of your missiles. For the rest, write us again without so long a lapse, Richard.

TIN WOODMAN
by Robert Weiss

Dear Ed: When you were guest at an E.S.F.A. meeting about six weeks ago you highly recommended the January issue of STARTLING STORIES and "THE SHADOW MEN" in particular. As a special favor to you (of course the fact that van Vogt wrote it has nothing to do with it) I decided to make it my first copy of Startling.

Bravely I approached the drug store, opened the door and slunk in. I shuddered when I saw the terrified semi-clad girl, clutched in the evil arms of the Tin Woodman. When I got home, clutching the magazine close to me for fear of someone seeing what I had, I knew that the only thing that assured me I had a science-fiction magazine were the two partially read issues of T.W.S. which I had bought for the Bradbury and de Camp shorts.

It looks as if, in the first half of "THE SHADOW MEN" van Vogt tried to write down to the level of your letter column The result was poor. About the middle of the story either the story began to write itself or van Vogt started to write like van Vogt. The result was great. All in all it is the best van Vogt this year, which isn't really saying much when one thinks of last year's mighty "PLAYERS OF A."

Startling and T.W.S. have been improved immensely in the last couple of years but there is still room for a lot more. Your magazines have a flavor all their own.—444 Central Park West, New York 25, New York.

Personally we have always had great affection for the Tin Woodman (from Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz). We especially enjoyed the manner in which the mighty Ray Bolger played him in the movie of some eleven years ago. We caught a recent revival of same and enjoyed it mightily.

TRULY WONDERFUL—THAT'S US
by Robert Hoskins

Dear Editor: The latest SS is out at last and it is a truly wonderful issue. No complaints about any of the stories. That should be the standard for your magazine every month.

You have performed two services for your readers. The first was the bringing back of Captain Future. Why not put him in his own mag? Even if you have to hire another ed to take some of the responsibilities off your hands.

The second was the HofF for the issue. Although it was

the first Pete Manx story that I have ever read I know that if there are any other stories that good you used to have a terrific series.

vV has turned out another masterpiece in "Shadow Men." It is as good as I understand the "Weapon Shops of Isher" to have been. If any fan has a copy of TWS with "Weapon Shops" in it and wants to get rid of it I hope he will drop me a line.

I have just one small complaint to voice against the shorts. "The First One" could have been a lot better although it was good as it stood. Bannister sounds like a character that could be developed into a fairly regular feature.

Will Magnus Rudolph be back no longer to brighten this sad world? Although popular opinion seems against me there I kinda liked the old guy. I'll admit that some of his stories were no good but he did produce a few minor classics. Jar a little life into Vance.

Nelson Bond used to be one of the best pulp writers in the field. Too bad he graduated from the ranks. It might not be a bad idea to at least attempt to get him back. Many of his stories and especially his series were classics. Take the Lancelot Biggs saga he did for a competitor. He plans to bring that out in book form in about six months.

You brought out a Hall of Fame collection of short stories. Rather a publisher did. Why not take some of your series like Pete Manx, Captain Future, The Hogbens and others of that ilk. Some of them have had enough tales to fill a dozen books.

I am going to close this with an ardent plea for pen pals, from everywhere and anywhere.—Lyons Falls, New York.

Taking your queries in reverse, Robert, we are keeping our alleged nose clean as far as book publishing is concerned for the present. We agree about Nelson Bond and only wish we could lure him back to the ranks.

Magnus Ridolph will be back in at least two more episodes—both of his best—if he hasn't appeared in them already. Furthermore, Jack Vance has come to life with a vengeance of late and needs no prodding from us. His TWS lead novel, NEW BODIES FOR OLD, soon to appear in our companion, should be close to an all-timer on several counts. And we have an as-yet-untitled novel for this magazine already on our books. Nineteen fifty should be Vance's first big stf year.

Pete Manx was a lot of fun in his day. Two of his sagas which we especially liked were the one in which he went back to clean up on the Wall Street crash and caused same and the time he went back to Elizabethan times and found himself writing all of Shakespeare's play for him (his name, it developed, was Bacon). We wish he were still going too but apparently Messrs. Barnes and Kuttner (Kelvin Kent) have decided not to return to him.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE
by Rickey Slavin

Dear Editor: Van Vogt's new novel has all the earmarks of the usual incomprehensible vV stuff but that doesn't mean a thing. I never could understand his insane science anyhow.

The HoF story was a good one, for a change, and brought back some old memories. I remember the first time I read it and how much I liked it then, so I like it even more now.

Hamilton is back at the same old stand with all the tricks of the trade. The only trouble is that the story seems to be unfinished or at least there wasn't enough of it. Why the indiscreet change almost immediately from suspense to conclusion? It seems to me that Ed couldn't think of anything to end it with and so ended it very abruptly.

"Stars Over Santa Claus" wasn't up to your standards, I am sorry to say.

"The Last Admiral" was pretty nifty and Hubbard, or if you prefer, LaFayette, is back in the old groove. I like the idea of the entire series and it is shaping up very nicely. Some of the characters almost approach the greatness of Heinlein's Rhysling. I have yet to meet another stf character that I like quite as much as Rhysling.

"Hathor's Pets" was one of the better shorts in the ish. Maggie St. Clair gets better with time, now that she has written Oona and Jick out of her system.

"Regrowth" had a cute twist at the end.

"The First One" brings promise of more like it to come. The guy in it was human, believable and entirely likeable. Thanks.

TEV is again devoid of something I can argue about. Every now and then I try to start an argument but nothing comes of it. Either it is of immediate interest and by the time letters go back and forth—it has lost its interest—or else it is of interest to only a few. Poor me. No feuds.—1626 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn 30, New York.

If you could sing like Dorothy Shay you could make your own feuds and cash in on same, Rickey. So the van Vogt double inverted time paradoxes of THE SHADOW MEN threw you? Well, you should have read the first draft if you think the published one was tough. However, once understood it held not only suspense but cleverness that verged on brilliance.

Alas, poor Oona! She seems to have irritated more darned people!

MEXICAN HAT DANCE
by Grady Dynes

Dear Editor: I've read a mort of letters lately evaluating the magazine and now I'm throwing my own sombrero in the ring.

I like it just as it is. "The Ether Vibrates" gives me a taste of things to come. "The Ethergrams" represent free speech, the composite voice of those who buy "Startling Stories." Every magazine needs such a section. A magazine without one is only half articulate. I am certain that the writers welcome it as a sort of Hooper rating for their stories and I strongly suspect that occasionally it has served as a teething ring for new writers.

I like the stories too. In some issues they are better than in others, but that is life. You have to learn to take your cards the way they fall. I know that I couldn't do without "Startling Stories." Beginning with the first of each month I buy them all, science fiction and fantasy, and my mind constantly drools in anticipation of the next issue as a cat slobbers at the prospect of a new dish of catnip.

Why? Well, we who like this kind of writing are a group apart. We realize more clearly than do others that man stands in the mire and looks at the stars, and we concentrate on the stars. We seek momentary release from duties, debts, the roar of traffic and the dirty little game of buying and selling. We like to raise our noses briefly from the grindstone of reality to soar among the stars or enter another dimension or go back in time. And we return refreshed and healthy minded.

Drivel? Sure. I've seen drivel in "The Ethergrams." But drivel is no respecter of persons. You can hear its rhythmic drip drip in high places, too, yea even in the councils of scholars!

Comes now a poem:

ENVY

Health and wealth are mighty fine,
And so is shining fame ;
But Lord, Lord, just make mine
Some letters after my name!

Honor is a wondrous thing
And peace man's highest aim,
But oh how my poor heart would sing
With letters after my name!

I've roamed the earth from pole to pole
And loved each willing dame,
But I think I'd sell my very soul
For some letters after my name!

So beat me, Buster
With a Phi Bete Key,
For I wish to hell
I was a Ph D!

There were other things that I intended to say about my reactions to the various stories and writers, how I find little nuggets of remembrance even in mediocre stories, and file them away in a little museum in my mind, and how reading

science fiction stories enlarges and develops my own imagination. But I'll save these items for future letters.—1620 Fourth Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California.

Very nice of you to have thought of us, we're sure—absolutely sure. But among the welter of clichés we detect the word *mort*, which has sent us scurrying in lepidopteran fashion to our lexicon. The following meanings, definitions, etc., are listed—

MORT—dead; also fatal, deadly; also death.
2. a The note sounding on the hunting horn at the kill. b A dead stag. c The kill.
3. The skin or fleece of a "morkin" (a beast dead by disease or mischance).
4. A dead body or skeleton.
MORT—A salmon in its third year.
MORT—A woman; female.
2. A loose woman.
MORT—Lard; pig's grease.
MORT—A great quantity or number; a great deal or man; an abundance.
MORT—A variety of dummy whist for three players; the dummy hand in this game.

Alas, we presume you mean the "great quantity, etc., definition of the word. But with such a lovely and variegated selection, we feel you might have selected one more interesting. And now, having stalled as long as we dare, to verse—

GREEN APPLES

Early to bed and early to rise
And angels could do no more
Heaven helps those who gather no moss
At the five-and-ten-cent store

There's more than one way to skin a mule
And our bark is worse than our wood
But sure as the Lord little green clichés
made
We'd rather be sorry than good.

Let's have some more soon out of that "little museum" of your mind, Grady. And here's mort in your eye.

PFUI-N D'S
by Bill Calabrese, D.D.T.

Dear Editor: Up to now the Ph.D.'s in your sterling letter section have informed Gus Fan (if I may be so trite as to use this term) that he is a goon, an egotist, a feeble-minded slob, an employer of meaningless jargon, an unbalanced monomaniac, a wife beater, a husband beater, a peddler of hashish to six-year-olds and just about every other dirty name that pops into their knowledge-clogged minds.

Darn it! I have a good mind to call the Ph.D.'s some names too but unluckily I've misplaced my copy of the Dictionary. It seems to me that said gentlemen are waxing rather egotistical themselves when they deny the sweet sanctuary of the TEV to anything but creatures with I Q's of plus 200, who are too busy talking about themselves to be very interesting anyway. As much as I admire your learned Ph.D.'s, may I respectfully ask them to turn blue?

As for me tho, I guess I like your letter section just as it stands, Ph.D.'s included.

Ed Cox seems to share my views on our brainy friends. Bless you Ed!!

May I say that SS & TWS are growing (in literary value as well as in format) right along with Science Fiction. Your mag has improved greatly in the year and a half that I have been reading it. The addition of names such as van Vogt and de Camp have helped greatly as the general improvement of material of some of your older contributors. Congrats. A big batch of Solar Pansies to you!

Cap Future? Thank the powers that may or may not be that we have vV and "Rene LaFayette" to neutralize this foul blow! I like Hamilton—but . . . . !

Enough torture for you this time, dear misused Editor. 'Tis blast-off time and my super-moon shuttle is waiting.—52 Pacific Street, Stamford, Conn.

We are beginning to suspect more than somewhat that this whole Ph.D. thing is a gag, carefully weighed, assayed and calculated to put the fans on their nettle—yes, we said and mean *nettle!* Certainly a number of you have reacted like a bunch of same.

Gag or otherwise, however, it has been good fun and now let's let the whole thing lie down and turn over for a bit. We announce herewith that the only post-nominal letters we shall recognize and/or print hereafter shall be L.L.D. or nothing. As someone has already pointed out all Ph.D. actually means is that someone has somewhere and somewhen written a thesis which has passed a board of examiners. Which, in most cases, is a lot easier and requires less talent and training than selling a fiction story to even the humblest of national magazines. Selah!

THOUGHTS WHILE DROOLING
by Rodney Palmer

Dear Editor: Sudden thoughts of an science-fiction addict. (And do I mean addict. It's like dope—really—after awhile. You stand around for days, watching for issues to come out.)

Hall of Fame: Ever notice how the authors considered tops ten and fifteen years ago are accepted heartily by fans today? Successful HF yarns were by Kuttner, Binder, Barnes (didn't Henry Kuttner and Arthur K. Barnes switch back and forth with Pete Manx?) And remember Hamilton et al. Could be time has sifted out authors rather than styles here. Consider deeply. Let me nominate in passing WHITE BARRIER, by Frank Belknap Long, or some from the Via Jupiter series. . . .

The Ether Vibrates: A fan publication suggests investigating just how many new real active fans have come into the field lately. Current letters (in general—there are definite distinguished exceptions) seem to lack perspicuity or something. Everybody's afraid to slap the mag, so eager do they seem to be to get printed. One or two letters a month speak up, wrong or right. Most have got somewhat reserved in attitude.

Culture in Science-fiction. A moot point, with the main issues consistently overlooked. What is science-fiction, anyway? In my opinion it satisfies in the reader an almost maniacal desire or interest in—travel, with all the adventure and romance the word implies. What is culture? One is reminded of the arts and gracious living, of the social amenities.

Strength and force and the hard work that create beautiful things—these things are, it appears, not considered cultural. The author in his shorts at his typewriter pounding out what might be a masterpiece might be termed rather vulgar. Sometimes beauty springs from the most mundane circumstances!

But to pass over what should be the obvious—if a reader likes hard-hitting stuff he's juvenile in taste. Men never hate each other without reason or apparent reason and they never tear into each other in a rage, even when drunk and contentious. A battle between ships is "space-opera," "blood and thunder" and so on. A man can't be true to himself and be cultural these days. Yet I like to be entertained—and if the cultural is not entertaining—maybe it's not culture.

Many thanks for this Captain Future novelet. Good reading. And since young readers are continually coming in Future might find a good audience if he started riding the space-ways again. I don't expect A. E. van Vogt to surpass himself with SHADOW MEN. WEAPON SHOPS (not a story of the future, I insist) won't be equaled. If the pattern continues, new genius should be moving up about now.

As for Science-fiction being generally accepted soon, character or author set aside, I'm beginning to wonder. The nature of science-fiction is to be so far ahead of things it's almost non-acceptable, except to those excruciatingly interested. When it ceases being incredible to the point of causing indifference on the part of almost everybody, then it's weakening. I could most certainly be wrong, couldn't I? But as I say—I'm wondering.—226 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Illinois.

Some food for thought there, Rodney. Incidentally, your nominations for the HoF duly noted. We don't mind being slammed if the reader is expressing honest opinion and not merely seeking to stir up a row. At any rate we never have. We hope the recent lessening of acrimonious comments is due in part at least to an improvement in the caliber of our magazines.

As for culture—well, you're only partly correct. It is a lot more than sipping 1850 Armagnac from cloisonné teacups while chattering about the comparative virtues of Henry Ford and Jean Paul Sartre on contemporaneous thought. It *does* include the author sweating in his skivvies while trying to keep his characters not only in focus with themselves but with his basic theme.

It also implies the ability to appreciate work whose intent and meaning is not always evident to the untrained intellect. There seems to be a current misapprehension in circulation that if something is not so simple an unlettered laborer can understand it at a glance it is not worthy of the name of culture.

Actually culture (in the sense in which you employ that highly amorphous word and in the sense we are using it for this reply) has nothing whatever to do with imperialism, royalty, democracy, socialism, syndicalism, communism or any other political form. It demands a certain level of intellectual discernment that has nothing to do with the so-called classes, masses or what-have-you. It is open to all who have the brains and the desire to go after it.

We seriously question whether the current profit-and-politics based trend to produce "culture for the masses" can produce culture at all. This is the easy and ultimately the sterile way. It would be far better to let the educational opportunities be offered to all and leave "culture" up where it belongs. As it is our so-called cultural leaders are both pedantic and insultingly patronizing of their fellows in all too many cases—with the noblest of motives, naturally.

A PLACE IN HEAVEN
by Bob Farnham

Dear Editor: Because of failing health in about another year I will be forced out of work and compelled to retire on my pension and for that reason I am not reading any more stories in STARTLING STORIES or THRILLING WONDER STORIES, but instead, am putting them away in cellophane so that I may have them to read when time will hang heavy on my hands. But I did want to write you about the cover and the contents.

First, I like that cover! The Bim is, as usual, threatened with Influenza with her scanty attire, but I hope that it was warm weather when she was cradled in the arms of her lover, as depicted in the cover picture.

From the Table of Contents, I can see at once that when I finally settle down with the Jan., 1950, SS, I'm in for some real reading treats. Captain Future (Edmond Hamilton) and THE SHADOW MEN (van Vogt) both in the same issue. OH BROTHER-R-RI You ought to rate a place in Heaven for giving us both in one issue!

In The Ether Vibrates, William D. Knapheide brings up a point that is important to every fan in Fandom, the proposal of the National Fantasy Fan Federation for fans to select convention sites by mail instead of from the convention floor. That the proposal is every bit monopolistic and undemocratic, I, as a member of NFFF am in full agreement, and stand against it. Not every fan who goes to conventions belongs to NFFF, and this, as Knapheide says, would bar them from a voice in selecting convention sites.

My own club, among others, would be unable to seek a convention site, and this is obviously discriminatory. The members of THE CENTAURIANS are nearly all members of NFFF and as the Centaurians are against all forms of discrimination, I, as the Acting Correspondence Secretary, protest against such a proposal. I have already written to Secretary-Treasurer Hudson of NFFF in protest. I ask every thinking fan, NFFF members and non-members to protest against it.—1139 East 44th Street, Chicago 15, Ill.

We're extremely sorry to hear about your impending forced retirement, Bob, and only hope that you will find it full of pleasant leisure and surprises therefrom. We also hope the January issue and those to come will live up to your expectations.

As for that convention-selection business—again, ouch! Write us when you have resettled yourself in that house you wrote us of privately. Best of luck all the way.

MORE MANX TALES (HUH?)
by W. Paul Ganley

Greetings again from the land of Merry-Go-Rounds and Me: Again the HoF novelet placed last in my poor opinion of the current SS—not because it was bad but because the others were all so extraordinarily superb. Come to think of it though, of late that latter condition is no longer quite so extraordinary. Anyhow it was very entertaining, which is all one can demand from a story of this type—in fact it was actually humorous.

Edde, this time may I venture to say, "Great Ghu! another Kuttner nom de plume" without bringing down upon my huddling form your unholy wrath? Originally I was but jesting. Being serious for a moment (yes, sometimes fen can actually manage that stupendous feat), I really do concur most wholeheartedly with you in that respect.

If—or more optimistically when—I were someday to observe a product of this typer appearing under a Finlay or Stevens heading (or more nightmarishly, a Napoli illo), I would doubtless commence a one-man hair-removing spree or a single-handed tearing, if not of my hair, then of TEV, should I discern an epistle making slight mention of it as "Eghu—another Kuttner story!"

So if I may offer a belated apology to him who conceals his identity behind "Edwin James" I do so most freely and voluntarily (all right, Edde, I said it—now put down that empty xeno jug).

Let's see—some time ago I began this missive with intentions to comment on the stories appearing within the January, 1950, SS, but seem to have got lost in a maze of time-planes. To return from my digression the HoF story, though last, was excellent and tied Taine's entry last issue. More Manx tales if you please, sir, more of them!

I was prepared to dislike Captain Future, until a fan correspondent of mine mentioned in a recent letter that he too had entertained similar apprehensions, which were dispelled immediately when he read some back issues containing the Captain's adventures. So instead I entered the story with a calm, open mind—and left it about fifteen minutes later with an excited and very prejudiced one—prejudiced in favor of the Futuremen and of the Futurewoman too.

H-mm, let's see—we have weird tales, straight stf, pure fantasy, science articles, future history, indefinable stories, HoFamers, exotic stories—and now galactic adventure in SS. Truly a completely rounded issue, one to satisfy all kinds of devotees. I sit back weakly in slight wonderment as to how R. P. F. "Pure-Science" Bailey will take the Captain's inclusion.

It's difficult, really, to judge the stories this issue, since all were so wonderful—but I'll take 'em one at a time, rate 'em where I can and ignore any rating where I can't. The best story in the issue, barring none, was J. W. Groves'

REGROWTH. I will make no rash statements but will humbly ask—is he or she a new author? (Probably "She," judging from the comments on women scattered throughout the story, which were wholly unnecessary, and at which I chuckled long and loud.)

One thing especially I like about your authors—their plots are new. Of late I've gotten rather fed up with some lesser stfmags, because I'm able to predict the ending of the stories after reading about two pages of them. May the Dr. and Susan Walkers—all umpteen of them—live happily ever after and Ghu prevent that they wind up in an auto accident—egad, if all of those mashed pieces would. . . . But again I digress.

THE SHADOW MEN was worthy of van Vogt—need more be said? But I still liked Groves' entry better. St. Clair is improving, she was rather cute this time, but she seems also to be growing slightly morbid. Maybe if she writes another JickanOona opus, she'll kill 'em off (happy thought)!

MacDonald had a new variation on an old theme that was interesting enough to hold attention; STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS was—well, this was the "indefinable story" of the issue and may it remain so. Last but not least is the only fellow to be up in the "elite" of the stf authors twice (and for my money he deserves it!), Rene Lafayette. No Bradbury this issue but he wasn't missed.

Back to TEV—Felice Perew probably has her answer to the time-honored query of neophytes—what is stf? I just pray that some scientific genius didn't get ahold of that question in the sense that a veteran fen would ask it because, if so, I pity the Perew.

I have but a few things to say to Ph.D. Goins and here they are. Before I commenced writing to prozines I always used to read the letter sections—doubtless many others do likewise right now. Some day I'll probably quit writing but that doesn't mean I'll stop reading. It's true that some of the theories set forth herein are laughable—but instead of chuckling in your sleeve at the fanhacks' stupidity why not explode the theories with thine own great store of knowledge?

We can't all get a Ph.D. Some of us (myself included) aren't through high school or college. It is my suggestion that you either take up less space with your letters, don't write any at all or make an attempt of your own at our type of humor. Maybe you'll find it's harder than ridiculing it. But if you really want the type of TEV you mention, then why not gloat over the letter sections of fantasy prozines that do have them?

I think you'll soon tire of opinions about stories and revert to this. Gad, I wonder what you'd think if ole Sergeant Saturn were to return, xeno jugs and vocabulary (and odor). Thank your own Ghuz that you live in this enlightened era.

Your editorial, Edde, was as good as usual—and the book review of THE WORLD BELOW could not have expressed my own opinion any more aptly. It took me two weeks to wade through the thing. I had more fun reading "1, 2, 3. . . "!

I do have one suggestion concerning future policies—how about one long Cap Future lead novel each year and five novelets during the remainder of the year? This would give Hamilton opportunity to make the novels excellent instead of the usual hackwork which ensues in a series of this kind that continues indefinitely. Or, another thought—you might have two long novels in one ish. You've the space to do it? But then, I guess that latter is too much of a renovation. Nevertheless, ponder upon the first suggestion. The same goes for the other fen.

Where, oh where, is that long-promised Bradbury novel? Yea, where?—119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York.

Take up less space, he says—of Goins. Ghad, Ganley, you're a trifle long in the old wind yourself. You'd better write Bradbury about the novel. We've given up. So you wanna see Cap Future back full length . . . 'Tis unlikely for the nonce. Remember, we *tried* that for a long time.

Don't know much about author Groves—but REGROWTH was a nice job at that. Unfortunately nothing that hot has come from *his* typewriter since. Our prediction for the big SS and TWS names for 1950 are Jack Vance and Raymond F. Jones—among the newer writers now practising, that is. Keep your eyes on both. Such comparative old masters as Hamilton, Brackett, Kuttner, et al., also have a neat trick or two up their sleeves.

HIS MOTHER NO BEM
by Eugene DeWeese

Dear Editor: Now, first let me clear up a little matter brought about by the publication of my letter. That relation of mine so happens to be my mother and the place is the local newspaper. And she is definitely no BEM. Although I have several other relatives distributed about the country, some of which I am not so positive of.

And the Kuttner novel. Well, you might not actually call it making fun of, but I am a rather ardent fan of Burroughs. May I refer to one of the more prominent of such, page 20, last paragraph, 2nd column.

Now, down to the current issue. "The Shadow Men" was good up to the last few chapters and there I was lost completely. I never could understand that van Vogt.

Oh, have you lost Bergey? The cover on the November ish certainly didn't look right nor did the January. And I can't find his signature anywhere. That portrayal of Grag on the cover was exceptionally good. (That was Grag?) And I suppose the gal was Joan.

Which brings up the subject of Captain Future, whose story was the best by far. But I was rather disappointed in the illo for "The Return of Captain Future," especially Grag. To mention a few of the errors, I don't believe he should have such bulging eyes nor a chin and I don't recall any such ears as he has there. And doesn't he have fingers, rather than the mittenlike affair there pictured. Otho surely shouldn't be wearing that shirt. I see you still have the same cuts of Otho and Grag that you used in the CF mag but a new one for Curt, himself. But where was Simon?

Now isn't it possible that you could revive the Captain Future mag? It was undoubtedly the best stf publication out. Incidentally, if this little thing gets printed, I would like to say that if anyone has any CF's that they would be willing to part with, I am more than slightly interested.

So, how about Ye edde and Ye Ed getting together and coming up with more and longer Curt Newton stories, novels if possible. Not better, for I really don't see how they could be any better.

"Stars Over Santa Claus" was very good but I don't see much of a plot to it. The HoF was the poorest yet and the worst in the issue. In regard to the illo for that story, I thought that Manx was supposed to be inhabiting a rather pudgy individual's body, but yet he was pictured as a tall, quite musclebound sort of person. And that seems to be a sort of complex of Astarita, everybody has very evident muscles.

"The Last Admiral" was not quite as good as the preceding "Emperor of the Universe," which was the best of the series, but was still excellent. The pic for that on 112-13 was the best in the ish.

Hathor's Pets: Good for St. Clair but such an ending!

Regrowth: That ending I liked.

The First One: Didn't see much to it. Where did you get Orban for the pic? And just who is the artist for H's Pets and Regrowth? Ugh!

Keep The Ether Vibrates just as is. I like the "inane" comments of the fans. Just where is Joe Kennedy, and the entire tribe of Kennedys? I seem to remember three. There have been several stories in your and other, mags that I have read solely because of the many comments it received in one of the following issues.

If anyone has any of the Tarzan books, or Mars-Venus series, I would like to hear from you. I have a few of them, but not nearly a complete set.—R. R. I, Rochester, Indiana.

Stop worrying about the illos, Eugene. Seriously, we're sorry about what we called your mother—but how were we to know? The Kennedys seem to have evaporated or something. Anyway, they simply ain't of late. As for the long CF, previous comment still holds.

NORWESCON PRELIM
by Donald B. Day

Dear Editor: I hate A. E. van Vogt! For a couple of days I felt lousy and van Vogt is to blame. Why? His SHADOW MEN in the January STARTLING STORIES was so intriguing that I lost most of a night's sleep finishing it. My intentions were good but should never have started it so late at night.

THE SHADOW MEN has all of the features that have put "Van" in the position of popularity he now enjoys—the hero you enjoy identifying yourself with, the multiplicity of mysteries which cry for solution, the luscious women and finally the super-abilities which the hero develops and throws around. All in all a fannish smorgasbord. How could it miss?

STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS is by far the best I can recall from the pen of William Morrison. Many of his stories are too reminiscent of the unlamented heyday of Sgt. Saturn but this shows a new quality that I hope will continue. The Pete Manx stories were not among my favorites when they first appeared but ROMAN HOLIDAY was one of the best of the series.

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE brings up mixed emotions. Joy at his return and disappointment because after his long absence, so many words were used up re-establishing the background that there was very little space left for story. CAPTAIN FUTURE has been much maligned, often held up as a horrible example of "juvenile" fantasy. The fact remains that while Ed Hamilton was writing it there was never a bad Captain Future story. What happened to him while the various "Brett Sterlings" were beating him around shouldn't happen to a Linid.

THE LAST ADMIRAL is an excellent addition to one of the best series you have run for some time. HATHOR'S PETS shows St. Clair in a type of story I much prefer to the Oona and Jick opera. REGROWTH and THE FIRST ONE were each highly satisfactory shorts, each in its own way. All in all a highly satisfactory issue, well up to the standard we have come to expect of late.

And now another matter. Doubtless many of your readers have heard some rumors of the annual World Science-Fiction Conventions. The 1949 convention, The CINVENTION, was held at Cincinnati last Labor Day weekend and was attended by fans, authors and editors from as far away as England as well as all parts of the United States and Canada. At the CINVENTION, Portland, Oregon, was chosen as the site of the 1950 Convention.

This year's convention, to be known as the NORWESCON will be again held on Labor Day weekend. Your host is the Portland Science-Fantasy Society which has been meeting regularly for the past three years and has produced a number of worthwhile contributions to fantasy fandom including a number of regional get-togethers and the publishing of The FANSCIENT, voted top fanzine for 1948.

Under the chairmanship of fantasy author John de Courcy, plans are going forward which point to the NORWESCON being a truly memorable event. On the program will be things to appeal to every lover of fantasy and science-fiction —talks by authors, editors and fans—entertainment of various types and above all the opportunity for glorious gab-fests with your favorite authors and a host of people who share your interests.

The convention is financed by memberships in the NORWESCON COMMITTEE. Those joining will receive periodic bulletins telling of developments, who will be there, what is planned for the program and all the details. In addition they will receive a Membership Card, a supply of NORWESCON gummed stickers and a copy of the Souvenir NORWESCON Program Booklet.

The NORWESCON is THE fan event of 1950. It is NOT just for "insiders." Many of your favorite authors will be there—many of the top fans will be there—but mostly there'll be just ordinary readers who enjoy science-fiction and fantasy. Plan now to come if you can. If not, do your part to support fantasy-fandom's No. 1 event. Memberships are only $1.00. Send them to Ruth Newbury, Treasurer, The NORWESCON, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.—3435 N.E. 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon.

Well, Don, all success to you and the de Courcys and the rest come this Labor Day —to say nothing of continued success to your Fanscient and other estimable fanactivities out Portland way. And may we give you many more miserable days and joyous nights a la the van Vogt yarn.

We hope your subscriptions, attendance, etc., result in an all-time high for stf conventions. We even hope we can get there. We'll try.

THREE-WAY STRETCH
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Old Thing: About two weeks ago I bought a copy of STARTLING (Jan., 1950) read your editorial on "hobby-horse heroes," became wroth at your knocking-down of my pet theory (that stf is simply escape) and almost instantly dashed off a hasty and rather ill-considered letter deriding your remarks and making several snide comments on the nature of one Margaret St. Clair and her fiction. I made the remark that you were turning SS into a Ladies Household Companion of 2,000 A.D., and that if we cared to read such trash we could find our "basic human conflicts" equally well in any magazine currently on the market.

Yes, I'm afraid I was pretty vitriolic. I was pretty rabid in my defense of space-stories (Note I do NOT say Space-opera) and adventure fiction.

Permit me to humbly apologize. (Oh, golly, golly, I split that infinitive! Quick, Snaggletooth, the Xeno—I mean the pastel. Maybe we can patch it up before he notices!)

The reason for this apology is your reply to the Coles. Permit me to quote this scintillating piece of wit. It should be framed and hung in the den of every fan. (Hey—fans don't have dens—only BEMS have dens.) Anyway, the following statement strikes me as being perfect, the one final and absolute be-all and end-all of all controversies as to whether or not such superb fantasies as THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE, and THE STAR OF LIFE and LANDS OF THE EARTHQUAKE and SEA KINGS OF MARS belong in STARTLING STORIES. The piece of wit to which I refer, sir, is this:

"EVEN IN ITS PUREST SENSE, SCIENCE FICTION IS ONLY FANTASY WEARING A TIGHT GIRDLE!"

Well, I'm for the girdles—all the way. I like the gal inside (Fantasy, I mean) but I like the girdle too. However, in this case STARTLING STORIES is like the inevitable Bergey-dame on the cover—reduced to bra'n'scanties. Sometimes she's girdled, sometimes she ain't.

The difference in readers is the reason for the difference in the girdles your fantasies wear. Some need a tight whalebone-and-steel structure. Such writers as Leinster, McDonald, etc., put nice tight firmly-controlling girdles of scientific jargon around their brain-children—this being the case mostly when the story is a heavyweight.

When the story is a fragile little fantasy, fluffy and without too much beef, only the slimmest of garterbelts is needed—just something to hold up the sheer nylon of the reader's expectations of "Science Fiction." Of this type are Leigh Brackett and Keith Hammond. And some stories can be referred to as having a two-way stretch—plenty of room for Fantasy's ample curves but still keeping it within the bounds of credibility by a scientific or pseudo-scientific explanation.

Personally I'd like to see the old label of "pseudo-science" brought back. Nowadays, when we call it plain science-fiction, these fans demand straight science. If we brought back the pseudo-science label they wouldn't have any kicks coming—because the stories would be exactly as represented on label. Then no one could accuse you of false and misleading information!

Incidentally, are there any Texas fans? Levelland is quite a distance from the big fan centers but perhaps the Lone Star State could get some fen together, if only by mail. I'm new in Texas but I intend to live here quite awhile, so I'd like to get in touch with some fans around the South Plains region—or anyplace in the country for that matter—but especially in and around Texas and New Mexico.

Just in case story-ratings mean anything to you, I thought that THE LAST ADMIRAL, by Rene Lafayette, was the finest story you have printed in many and many a day! THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE was a finely done tale, more like the average Hamilton than his slam-bang forbears of Cap-future. As for REGROWTH—well! I must say! I must say! I never read anything quite so wackily gruesome in my life! Guess thassall, and about enough too, huh? Mebbe I better send this letter in a lingerie box, re my comments on girdles. Could be?

Incidentally, when do we get another Hogben story?

Your covers are getting better. Does Bergey still draw 'em?

Have I smoothed down your ruffled tentacles?—Box 1296, Levelland, Texas.

If only BEMS have dens what *do* fans have, Marion—or do they? Just to politely put you at your ease we'll fracture an infinitive too, see? And you wish us to return to pseudo-science. Well, no matter what you call it, how you slice it, etc.—pseudo-science it remains.

Here's hoping you find some fellow subscribers down Levelland way, Marion. And let us know how you come out. We have a story or two coming along that should appeal to your perver—er—sensitive stf tastes.

LINID—HOW COULD YOU?
by Lin Carter

Dear Suh: The man known to the System as Captain Moocher, Man of Tomorrow, bent low over the rheostats, his bronzed fingers trembling on the dials. Great globs of sweat formed on his tanned forehead, and rolled down his lean features. He was faintly aware of his taut body, quivering with strain. Shudders of fear and revulsion ran over him

as he looked at the awesome Thing prisoned before him in the crystal cage. His heart throbbed and his breath came fast.

Captain Moocher, his hand trembling with strain, touched the rheostat. Two notches. Three. Four. A high, thin whine rose from behind the machine, adding a sinister note to the taut atmosphere.

The tension mounted. All eyes were held on the dark Figure in the cage. Slowly the misty capes and veils that mercifully hid the Creature's true features . . . stirred . . . began to move—

The Linid was awakening!

One of the observers suddenly cracked beneath the strain. His giant metal body clanked as he strode forward and plucked fearfully at Moocher's sleeve.

"No, No, Chief!" boomed Slag the Robot, "I can't stand it!"

The Man of Tomorrow flung the whining robot back with a lithe motion. "Quiet, Slag!" he hissed.

Again his fingers probed at the dials. A gasp of horror shuddered from the fearful group. Before their eyes, the misty cowls were lifting . . . the Creature's ghastly features could be glimpsed through the dim veils . . .

It was Linid! Linid Carter!

Ahem. I'm sorry folks, I can hold it in just so long, and then I've just gotta do one of those things. But now, to wax serious for a moment, as you may have gathered, I thoroughly and completely enjoyed the Edmond Hamilton novelette. It took first honors in the issue, for me anyway. I know space opera is passe and some fans rather look down on the Captain Future stories as fit for only juvenile consumption but I cut my teeth in the pulps on Cap Future and I still get a kick out of his stories.

Hamilton is a talented and versatile author, his sneering critics to the contrary, and his yarns all have a touch about them that I enjoy immensely. THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE was a smooth-paced, well-written and colorfully plausible story, with Hamilton's customary polish and superb characterization. You can run one each ish, and keep the series going for a year or two or six, as far as I'm concerned.

Welcome back, Cap!

As for the lead novel, it was by van Vogt. Which automatically places it above much of the stuff you regularly run. His second novel for you was not as interesting or imaginative as his first but still darn good reading. I liked it even better, since I could actually understand it. Usually his tortuous maze of plots and sub-plots confuses me and I get lost in the semantics. Keep Van steered away from the philosophy and non-Aristotelian logic for a while.

ROMAN HOLIDAY and the LaFayette yarn were both above the average. Shorts were so-so. THE ETHER VIBRATES was entertaining and uneven as always. Was amused by Paul Ganley's letter. Paul sez: "Cap. Slater's letter began: 'The time has come, the Walrus said Etc, Etc.,' Matter of fact, we started one of our letters that way."

Matter of fact, so did I.

Line up looks good next ish. Till then, Happy St. Swithin's Day!—1734 Newark Street, South, St. Petersburg, Florida.

This, you recent fans and readers, is a typical example of the so-called "old" type of stfanletter—complete with slithy opening and vast buildup for a faint peep of a gag. It reminds us of the blunderbuss of Robinson Crusoe in Davy and the Goblin—which was loaded with toothpowder and, when fired, emitted a faint squeak after which an orange rolled from its large muzzle to plop gently on the sands. Don't remember at this late date whether Davy ate the orange or not.

Actually, we still retain a sneaking liking for this letter form—don't ask us why—and will run an occasional horrid example when, as and if they turn up in the mail. This, however, is no invitation to the deluge. Should it come there would be no letter department at all.

HOIST WITH OUR OWN PETARD
by Morton D. Paley

Dear Editor: How good can a magazine get? I say this, not because of any desire to get my letter printed through flattery (oh no? Ed.) but as a simple statement of fact. Both of your mags have been improving steadily for quite awhile but the January issue of Startling is the best yet. Despite a strictly pulp construction and Bergey's "facts-of-life" covers the content is slick in quality.

The cover was better than usual but the story doesn't call for a scantily-clad femme, so why have one? In this respect I agree with Jonathan Saville. The covers give a wrong impression of the stories. Since there is usually nothing sexy in the stories you can't hope to compete with some of the trash on the market. And the cover drives away many s-f fans and casual readers. How about some astronomical covers or rockets by Bonestell? Surely after a decade of Bergey it wouldn't hurt to try.

The editorial was interesting, but why not practice what you preach? "The Other World" (S.S. Nov.-49) was just that type of Hero-Defeats-Villains-With-Bare-Hands story which you object to.

HoF nominee: The first Cap. Future story. Some of us younger fans would like to know what it's all about.

Some comments on the stories—

1. "The Shadow Men"—van Vogt at his best. I never thought anything could beat out the Cap Future yarn (always read the shorter stuff first) but vV's story did.

2. "The Return of Captain Future"—more!

"Stars Over Santa Claus"—well done.

"Hathor's Pets"—that swell short by the writer of (ugh!) Oona & Jick?

"Regrowth"—good fiction, poor science.

"The First One"—usual fine MacDonald story, usual weak MacDonald ending. It would have been a fine finish if I (and everyone else, no doubt) hadn't guessed it in the middle. Mac would be one of the best authors in science-fiction, if not for his poor finales.

"Roman Holiday"—just shows how much s-f has progressed since 1939. I've seen better stuff in some fanzines. And is that magnificent specimen with the torches in Astarita's picture supposed to be fat Prof. Aker (Horatio, no less!), who also wears pince-nez?

"The Last Admiral"—poor story, based on false ideas, and with a tired plot. Rene (Hubbard?) Lafayette had better think of a variation on his One-Man-Against-The-World theme, or else drop the series.

Illustrations were especially good, especially Napoli's. I take back all the bad things I've said about him. Weren't the cuts of the Futuremen from the old Cap Future?

No doubt you will receive many protests from fans about your statement that science-fiction is fantasy "wearing a tight girdle." For 99% of it 'tis the truth. Another thing you said in "Ethergrams" about s-f and stf, that is. We've always thought of scientifiction as being fiction with a scientific angle and science-fiction as being a 50/50 proposition.

"Ethergrams" was enjoyable, even if you didn't print my letter. Ed Cox's letter was particularly interesting. Please turn a deaf ear to those who would kick out the letters and fanzine reviews. What's that? Which deaf ear? (Only kidding.)

In case this letter should get printed I would like to broadcast an urgent appeal for my fanzine "Transgalactic." WE NEED MATERIAL!! Come on, fan authors and artists. Send your stuff to me as soon as possible. Anything not needed will be returned.—1455 Townsend Avenue, New York 52, New York.

For some reason we drew an oversupply of Xmas cookies—want a few dozen of those, Morton—for you fanzine, of course? Yes, those were old cuts in TROCF. And we knew very well we were cutting our own editorial throat with that editorial. We shall perforce continue to run those barefoot-hero yarns when nothing else worth while offers. Heck, we may even write them. But what we said still goes in our not-too-humble estimation. Luck with your 'zine.

PREDISSECTION
by James E. Hamilton, Jr.

Dear Editor: The January SS arrived last evening and after reading it I decided to write one of my infrequent letters.

Before dismembering the magazine, however, I would like to thank you, albeit somewhat belatedly, for assuring your readers, some months back, that I am not your niece. If you have forgotten the incident, it was in reply to some reader's inquiry if the reason my name appeared all in capital letters in a previous issue was that I was your nephew. You replied that I was neither your nephew nor your niece and that the capitalization was merely an oversight. For my part I never noticed it until that incident directed my attention to it. To quote a certain authority whom you doubtless know—Selah!

It seems to be general practice to knock the stories before the letters, so I will reverse the procedure. Concerning the letters, or rather the nitwits that urge their elimination from the magazine, thereby abandoning their last hope for immortality, I have but this to say—there are saner people in straitjackets and padded cells.

On to the stories. Now we seem to be getting somewhere.

THE SHADOW MEN by A. E. van Vogt. If this is representative of van Vogt's best work, he can keep it. I don't care for his style, possibly because I can't make sense of his twisted time trials. And as for his characterization, there doesn't appear to be any.

STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS by William Morrison. Not bad. This is by no means the first matter-transmitter story I have read but I cannot recall another that envisioned the possibility that the transmitter would have to work both ways. Those dilapidated turkeys were a laugh.

ROMAN HOLIDAY by Kelvin Kent. I assume that this was not one of Kuttner's contributions to that by-line. I read one of his Pete Manx stories once, and it was much better than this. Enough said.

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE by Edmond Hamilton. Great! I seem to recall that someone once called Ed an Old Master. That genius is an anonymous immortal. This story is a cinch for the Hall of Fame ten years hence. And let Wigodsky or another dare cry plagiarism. Men have been shot at sunrise for lesser sacrilege.

I have read but few of the CF stories but here we have not only great characterization but a fine, though not extremely complex plot coupled with the great writing that was so much in evidence in such stories as DAY OF JUDGMENT, FORGOTTEN WORLD, STAR OF LIFE, COME HOME FROM EARTH, VALLEY OF CREATION, TWILIGHT OF THE GODS and WATCHER OF THE AGES and at places in THE STAR KINGS. There is a delicately wistful poetic quality about the Old World-Saver's work that sets it apart from all the rest.

Actually the story was not new—no story ever is, really. There are new twists, new styles, yes. But new stories? No.

The Linid was vaguely reminiscent of Gardner F. Fox's LAST MONSTER. Both traded a commanding situation, the Linid his utter control of Curt, Irgi his immortality for the greater immortality of death and the companionship of their vanished race. But the treatment was different. Fox's monster sought a monument. The Linid wanted peace.

HATHOR'S PETS by St. Clair. REGROWTH by Groves. THE FIRST ONE by MacDonald. Why waste words on the subject? In my opinion the best of the three was awful.—Hartwick, New York.

You're a rough citizen, Otho Hamilton. Are you a relation or what—knocking down the rest of the mag to make your cousin's work shine by comparison! Better watch yourself, Grag. We do hope you'll find our non-CF aspects less nauseating in the future.

JAMBALAYA
by Robert Silverberg

Dear Editor: THE LAST ADMIRAL met THE FIRST ONE, HATHOR'S PETS underwent a REGROWTH and THE SHADOW MEN went on a ROMAN HOLIDAY to celebrate the RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE. Thuswisely I sum up the January issue of your mag, which STARTLED me. Enough of that sort of horrendous punning! I thought the latest ish was one of the best in recent months and is unquestionably the best 1950 issue so far (oops, there I go again!). The stories were good, the art fair, the typo legible.

Bergey's cover (it was Earle's work, wasn't it?) was good (for EKB, that is). Is that gun in Grag's hand part of the hand, as it appears? Bergey's Girl was, well—luscious. No Eternal Triangle this month. A story idea just came to me about those words—a story called "The Eternal Triangle" about a triangular-shaped immortal Martian that had come to Earth for some reason—details to be developed by author. Color-scheme on cover was pleasing to the eye, mainly because it was chiefly white.

Knapheide's letter was very interesting. The fan convention is one of the most important facets of fandom and belongs to ALL the fans, not just the 300-odd members of NFFF. I for one am a member of FAPA and naturally feel that we should have some choice in selection of a site. Your editorial comments on the subjects were good. I look back in my collection of promags. Do I see a logical suggestion about solving the problem of convention preferences? No. The unlamented Sarge would probably say:

"Look here, Kiwi Knapheide, don't bother me with such spacerefuse. Go bother Snaggletooth while I go to sleep. More Xeno, Wartears. . . ."

I think that your editorials of the last few years are the most important of any published in the promags. If you revealed your identity officially it would make for a closer connection between editor and reader in the editorial.

Felice Perew's letter was "cute"—to use a much-hated adjective. I was interested in the list of authors for STRANGE STORIES. Kuttner was inclined under three or four of his alter egos. I'd like to add to a plea for STRANGE's resuscitation just to read something different.

I like the larger typeface for the fanzine A-list. I would like it even better next month if I should find my SPACESHIP (the best little nickel 'zine in fandom) listed in that larger type. It's all right to knock a zine occasionally but don't RUIN it altogether by saying it's horrible or illegible.

Do you really read all the book-review books? 'Fess up now, Ed. You didn't say anything about the BIG EYE except that it was a doom story and that it was put out by a "big" publisher. I gathered that from the newspaper ads without even seeing the book. Why don't you let Willy Ley handle the book reviews? He's just about the best.

About the stories—I rate them all very good. Captain Future, with all the space-hack, is still very very welcome—it's sort of an original Hall of Fame. Mrs. St. Clair slipped a bit and MacDonald was awful! That thing of his had a very unique idea—first man to go the moon! We should see more of this new plot in stf. I don't think "The First One" would be accepted by a fanmag, even one of your illegible B-listers.

Van Vogt had some really new ideas and "Pete Manx" was very funny—even more so to me, for I take a Latin course in high school. It hasn't been more than six years since the last of the Manx yarns was originally printed, has it? I wish you wouldn't break up the HoF stories into "chapters" that never existed in the original story. Though the Hall occasionally (usually) publishes a rotten story it is still a fine service and should never be discontinued. These classics naturally must become antedated and corny to us moderns but they give a slant on old-time stf. Keep it up!

Rex Ward, what hath happened! How can an actifan such as you brazenly demand the decapitation of SS with the loss of its letter column! Well, maybe Rex was just a little bored and wanted a good fannish argument to pick his teeth on.

Right now we get 6½ SS pages per cent. How about a 650-page monthly to sell at $1?—760 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn 13, New York.

Okay, Robert, why don't you publish it? Yes, we do read all the books we review—and we're not kidding. Sometimes there are reasons for keeping the old zip lipped—or vice versa.

Sorry but STRANGE is deader than dead at present. The strangest thing happened to it—it didn't sell!

QUERIES AND RATINGS
by William N. Austin

Dear Editor: Having just completed a reading of the January STARTLING STORIES, an analysis of the stories and the comparative policies of this and TWS causes some wonder as to the necessity for issuing two bi-monthly magazines of this nature having so little difference in quality, quantity and editorial policy. The only difference that I can see is the inclusion of reprint stories in STARTLING—hardly of sufficient importance to warrant the publishing of two bi-monthlies instead of a single monthly.

Now, as I see it, you are forced, with your present policy, to sell each magazine issue of both magazines—INDIVIDUALLY! They hit the market cold, each being self-inclusive, self-conclusive. There is no suspense carried through from one issue to the next if only because of the fact that, as bi-monthlies, the inclusion of serials is out of the question.

Certainly there are beefs about serials in other magazines. Some of my mildest friends curse at the very thought of having to wait a month to conclude, let alone continue, a long story butchered into episodes. It never worries me, however. I read an issue complete, and by the time the next issue comes around, I find it takes very little time to get back into the swing of things again.

Not that there is anything wrong with either of the magazines individually or collectively. As a matter of fact this issue of STARTLING matched the high standards topping off 1949 in TWS. The average of both magazine issues was virtually the same—good-plus.

Surprisingly enough it was not van Vogt's tricky but often synthetically-involved novel that climaxed the issue for me; rather, it was Ol' Pop Hubb—pardon, Mr. Lafayette's—THE LAST ADMIRAL that impressed me most of all. Sure, it's sentimental. It's a little too pat in its slickness—too much like a triple revision of an original a la hollywood.

But on the other hand the emotional quality strikes me as being genuine, every trifling facade having been polished smooth as if by a jeweler, the whole thing being developed

with a symmetrical precision that pleases both the senses and the intellect. As a matter of fact it is this very perfection architecturally that reminds me of Johannes Brahms, particularly in his First and Fourth Symphonies—and I enjoy Brahms a great deal. Congratulations, Mr.—uh—Lafayette!

Solidly in second place, and certainly one of the better novels in STARTLING or TWS in recent months is van Vogt's THE SHADOW MEN. Except for the stock characters (they lacked personality or any sort of individuality), and for the somehow unsatisfactory manner of presentation, this one had plenty to be said for it. Fundamentally strong, it develops nicely with a wealth of complications to a strong climax that packs a punch and a certain amount of pseudo conviction. Certainly one of the more successful of the recent van Vogt yarns. . . .

Not far behind, in third place, is Margaret St. Clair's HATHOR'S PETS. She has attained a high standard of consistency and quality recently in dealing with the outre elements in science-fiction, strongly reminiscent of Poe in treatment, and with considerable success methinks.

The rest of the stories I liked too in varying degrees. The issue stacks up thus, including ratings::

1. Lafayette. THE LAST ADMIRAL	+1.88
2. van Vogt. THE SHADOW MEN	+1.75
3. St. Clair. HATHOR'S PETS	+1.71
4. Morrison. STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS	+1.41
5. MacDonald. THE FIRST ONE	+1.38
6. Hamilton RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE	+1.29
7. Groves. REGROWTH	+1.29
8. Kent. ROMAN HOLIDAY	+1.05

Ratings:
+5.00=Perfect — Issue: +1.47
+4.00=Extraordinary
+3.00=Excellent
+2.00=Very Good
+1.00=Good
0.00=Fairly Good
—1.00=Fair
—2.00=Rather Poor
—3.00=Poor
—4.00=Very Poor
—5.00=Worthless

Despite the low rating of the Hall of Fame story, I enjoyed reading it. There's a lot of local color peculiar to the years from which it stems, color of a different hue than today's, true and perhaps time-faded. And yet they're colors that retrospect restores to a considerable degree, definitely deserving the small portion of tolerance necessary for their enjoyment. So keep them coming: C. A. Smith, Hamilton, Cummings, Kuttner, Williamson and all the rest that belong to those colorful Thirties!—3317 W. 67th Street, Seattle 7, Washington.

What we would like to know, Bill, is just how you work this rating. Do you toss a deck of cards at a hat for each story and count those on the floor against it? Do you use Dr. Rhine's famous specially-marked cards? Or do you throw darts, while blindfolded, at a picture of a donkey on the wall?

Come on, man, tell us—our curiosity is virtually flaying us alive.

HAMMER GUY
by Calvin Thomas Beck

Dear Ye Edde: Migosh & Egad!! I looks over Moe's newsstand, spies a lurid mag with blazing cover and I jumps over assorted Lovely Love, Western and Gruesome Mystery stories yelling, "Gadzooks! Are the Unpopular Periodicals people publishing another parsimonious phantastic pamphlet?"

But perceiving carefully with shrewd and practiced eye, I noted with sudden gayety that the mag was STARTLING STORIES. Believe it or disbelieve it, the cover on the Jan. 1950 ish of S.S. was about the best you have published since STARTLING was first printed about 11 years ago. What the cover seems to depict is that one of the Futuremen, Grag, is trying to save some lovely heroine.

But it seems as if the gal is more afraid of Grag than she's afraid of what he's shooting at. Aside of these little discrepancies the background of the picture, which was mostly white, and the coloring of the robot's body plus the gorgeous creature held in his arms was some of the finest layout work I've seen on any S-F mag. So let's give a rousing shout of approval for one of Erle K. Bergey's finest masterpieces.

As I move further on thru the Jan. S.S., I note that the interior illos, I am sorry to inform you, were far below par. Stevens' pics for the novel lacked his "Master's Touch." His only picture that may have been well portrayed was on page 112, with the exception that the ink evidently did not adhere to the paper and thus gave an over-light effect that spoiled it.

I've never cared for Astarita nor the artists' obviously phoney name. I'd rather have Marchioni instead. . . . Egad, NO! Wot am I saying!!! But seriously, you could stand better illustrations for both S.S. and T.W.S. and more pictures as well. My advice: Hold Stevens—try and keep Finlay steady for a change—also have Bok and Paul as often as possible.

The stories were okay in the Jan. ish. But nothing unusual for the reason that all of your stories in S.S. and T.W.S. have fallen into a pattern for the past eight to twelve issues that is by now very easy to recognize. Now don't get me wrong! They're good stories, fine entertainment and, no doubt, wonderful to the neophytes and young fans.

But the fault with them lies in the fact that they don't vary or change from general formula and I'll be blunt enough to declare that issue after issue of S.S. and T.W.S. is growing stereotyped. In my not so humble opinion, if you don't change your story-picking system, S.S. & T.W.S. may drop down to the mediocre level if not worse.

The letters in "Ethergrams" this ish were grand, just grand. Until recently of course, I would have been quite eager to agree with those dissertating Ph.D.'s and various skeptical critics on their points that the majority of letters printed were pure unmitigated tripe. But since I'm not a P., H. nor even a D., I shall not try to argue with those eminent and sagacious viewpoints and can only agree that they were mostly correct in their assumptions.

But whatever past letter columns have been, whether good or lousy, the one in the Jan. ish was the best I've seen since the demise of Sarge Saturn. One reason why past columns have been so dull was that there existed a lack of variety or spontaniety in the letters. Either they would be all criticizing all the stories at one time or most of them would be poetic, satirical or comical.

Now, a letter column with a blending of critical, poetic, amusing and hypercritical letters, as the one in the Jan. issue, would be most appreciated by regular as well as irregular readers and buyers as well. So try and keep a variety of mail at hand (that goes for stories as well) and I doubt if you'll ever regret it. Remember? "Variety is the spice of Life. . . ."

Before ending, I'd like to make an important announcement: The S.F.C.T.C. is in need of STFantasy mags and books. I happen to have several hundred science-fantasy mags and books by Merritt, Haggard, Kline, Burroughs, Dunsany, Collier for swap, plus hundreds of other authors of STFantasy, and many scientifiction mags running back to the 20's. If there are those who would prefer to sell I'd be interested in purchasing small or large collections of STFantasy mags and books at reasonable prices and I would be interested in hearing from any swappers or sellers. All letters will be promptly answered.

Would anyone knowing the whereabouts of DUNCAN MACALISTER EYRE please contact me. If Mr. EYRE happens to read this I'd be grateful for having him write me immediately.—Hotel Flanders, 135 West 47th Street, New York 19, N. Y.

Let's see, Calvin—as to story similarity. In March Norman Daniels' THE LADY IS A WITCH dealt with just what you think. In January van Vogt dealt with time travel and predetermination. In November Leinster dealt with tangential worlds. That would seem to offer a certain variety of theme—and all four authors are as day from night to one another.

We do our best with the letters as they come in. It seems to us that the fact they do not constitute this "blend" you seem so to fancy says a great deal for the genuineness of this column. We have never introduced a "plant" yet and don't intend to. We'd rather just drop the whole business. Incidentally Astarita's name is not phony—so don't blame the poor chap for it. The very idea of Paul gives us the shudders and Bok doesn't seem to come around here with artwork.

We hope you locate the eerie Mr. Eyre—in his airy aery perhaps.

NEAR MISS
by David M. Campbell

Dear Sir: I almost missed the January issue of Startling Stories. At first glance I thought it was a copy of THRILLING SEX STORIES, and I only buy that every three months. That cover was undignified. Admittedly it was Grag and Joan (guess which was which) but what did it illustrate?

The short stories this trip were average; easily read, easily forgotten; "Regrowth," by J. W. Groves was outstanding because of its idea, which struck me as being very clever. Lafayette's series is becoming steadily more enjoyable.

I never thought I'd see the day when I preferred Captain Future to a van Vogt novel but here it is. Hamilton, despite definitely typed characters, has an exclusive knack for arousing the emotions of awe and pity that is definitely all his own. Also, he is just about the top man in the handling of an action sf novel. Good to see Curt Newton et al. back, especially in such excellent form.

"Roman Holiday" was readable, making it one of the best HoFers in a long time.

"The Shadow Men," by Mr. van Vogt (always call a man mister before tearing him apart) would have been considered super if published in '44. Now it's readable but incomprehensible. For once I did understand his handling of time but the darn story had more characters than a telephone book.

What I did like about the story was van Vogt's sensible and adult way of handling Morton Cargill and Ann Reece when it came time for them to do a little loving. Most authors either get sensational or have the hero behave like a monk while the heroine acts like Mae West.

All in all an average issue. The absence of Finlay is sadly noticeable and your printers aren't treating any of your artists too well. However, with a "keep up the good work" I shall now put an end to what I consider a very dull letter; Valete.—418 High Street, Closter, New Jersey.

Well, it's nice to know we're one man who is a hero to his valets. That Thrilling Sex Stories thought of yours give us what might be termed an idea. Or is it? We'll leave it up to you-all. *Ave atque vale.*

RAGING TIRADE?
by Bill Venable

Dear Ed: Before I go into a raging tirade against a certain fan whose letter you printed in the TEV of the January ish, I'd better give my insignificant evaluation of the stories and cool off a bit. One thing I have noticed is that most fans separate the stories nicely, with each one numbered and double-spaced between. Because I am a reactionary and hate convention, I am going to institute a new policy; I shall run all the criticisms together and let you try to figure out which one is which. So here goes::

THE SHADOW MEN: This was very good and one of van Vogt's best it seems to me but the ending was kind of weak and as for being pulled into your own future from someone already there I think that's a lotta bunk he'd better read 1, 2, 3, Infinity again or check with Al (Einstein, that is) ROMAN HOLIDAY was cute story but bum stf THE RETURN OF CAPT. FUTURE was naturally a good story that is I have never read any Capt. Fut. tales before but from what I have heard they were all of high quality; anyway this one was top-notch why not make a series of 'em every ish? STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS was mediocre stf but readable THE LAST ADMIRAL was a dismal tale overdone with a dismal ending, such frustration, such courage HATHOR'S PETS was good, very good for St. Clair I like the idea of the matter canker REGROWTH, oh yes another good story, in fact this ish had only one bad one and that was THE FIRST ONE I don't know why but this nauseated me it was disgusting from the point of science and fiction phooey MacDonald can do better. The cover was very good and so was TEV (exceptions) and Rosco knows what-all else.

Now for my gripe. Al Wickham stated that Kuttner had earned his reputation. I agree with him. He further stated that Ray Bradbury had not. For this piece of unspeakable blasphemy he deserves to be consigned by Rosco to the lowest pit of Hell, that in which Bergey sits amid sulphurous fumes painting horrible Boms which come to life to harry the poor fen assigned there, and scantily dressed fems who place themselves just out of reach of the delirious fans, resigning them to a torture a thousand times worse than the rack.

Be it hereby known that while Kuttner is good, by the very merit of his stories, Bradbury is THE BEST of stf authors, getting a suspense of taut emotion in his stories that Kuttner has never quite reached. Al: Read Bradbury's PILLAR OF FIRE; read AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT; read ZERO HOUR; OCTOBER GAME. . . . . any of those, and you must either change your mind or give yourself up to Bellevue.

Did you know that Ray won second in the O. Henry Memorial Prize Award for 1948? When did Kuttner, or for that matter, any other stf author, ever do that? Of course you are entitled to your own opinion, but to say that Bradbury hasn't earned his reputation. . . . sacrilege!! Do you want to be excommunicated?

Hold it! I've just found the ravings of another lunatic. Bill Searles: "Complicated, dull, and formula-ridden FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY. . . ." I think I declaimed on this in another of my letters (one that you didn't publish, you crumb). Bill, Bill, you mean to say when at last the author gets just a little science into his fiction, you must rise and say "get the formulas out, put some hack-plot in instead"?

For shame! FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY was a masterpiece.

All this bickering is contingent on the Coles' discussion of "What is science-fiction?" Here I am about to contradict myself; first, I would say that science-fiction is not just any old hack-plot with a super-pseudo-scientific background to lend it color. What a lot of writers seem to do, and, enigmatically enough, a lot of fans praise, is to take an old, old plot, concerning love, or heroism, or something like that . . . a plot which is as old as the ODYSSEY (viz. Rene Lafayette), give it a new background and setting (not by the use of any logical scientific facts or premises either, but by the use of queer-sounding terms such as "atomator," "esevatiate," and unscientific-sounding jargon) and set it down as a new type of story.

This is merely warmed-over hack-fiction and has no literary merit as far as I can see. A science-fiction story should be based upon logical scientific premises and really new types of plots. The mere expanding on the consequences of a now well-known discovery or invention, such as relativity or the atomic bomb is permissible if well-written because it is an escape from the known, the familiar, into the realm of speculation and imagination. Harness' novel was good because it had a sound foundation, a basis of perhaps slightly exaggerated possibilities of future trends and discoveries and application, as well as an intriguing, well written and planned and fast-moving plot which kept you in suspense from the start.

You boys with fast minds are by now saying to yourselves, "Aha, but he likes Bradbury and Bradbury is anything but what you describe!" This I cannot deny . . . but with reservations; Bradbury, it is true, is merely a plot with a scientific background. But all the plots are fairly new, unique in their field. And the main attraction about Bradbury is that his style, his method of writing is packed with emotion and drama.

Where some authors use paragraphs of adjectives and descriptive, with the use of a few well-chosen words, a studied use of italics, spacing, paragraphing, and punctuation, Bradbury can portray a situation so realistically that he outclasses by far the wordy and dull writers, who use more words and say less. Bradbury's writing is life itself, incarnate and stirring, as real as though the fantastic situations he portrays were real.

And so, Ed. old toot, having used up 8c worth of typewriter paper, I shall sign off. Oh, yes, put some more robots on the covers. They're very effective.—32 Park Place, R. D. No. 4, Pittsburgh 9, Pa.

We set out to edit the above effusion, readers but, after shattering a number of editorial lances in the effort, gave up and let it run on au natural (or a la Sneary). And somewhere along the way we got lost in the gorgeous lack of logic to say nothing of legible punctuation.

But one thing we must say—and don't get us wrong, we love Bradbury—Ray is one of the most effectively plotless authors currently functioning in this or any other field. All we know is that guy can write his own peculiar kind of stuff and we shall continue to buy same as long as he chooses to send it to us—which we hope will be for some long time to come.

Willy Venable, you come up with a "few well-chosen words" about as economically and deftly as Thomas Wolfe lost in memories of his adolescent miseries or Henry James lost in his own subordinate classes. Economize, lad, get out and get Hemingway or something.

THE EYES OF GRAG
by Jack Marsh

Dear Yed: Bergey? On the Jan. SS cover, I mean. Doesn't look much like his style. While on the cover, what scene in the story does it illustrate? Ed Hamilton didn't describe it. Wot's more, Joan is supposed to wear police clothes, not gold-lined evening gowns. "The Return of Captain Future" was better than the old series, though it COULD have been better.

In TEV, why don't somebody shoot guys like Max M. Goins who side with that fiendish Zeiger. Well, well. Seems this guy Whit Taylor likes the old zing, bang, boom type of story. That's his business and I won't say wot I think about his ideas, but I don't like to have people telling me wot to like and wot not to. But really, Whit, this new CF series is starting out good. But, Yed, take Astarita out of CF. He's an excellent artist for regular yarns but (ugh)! Grag looks like he's a metal baboon instead of a metal man!

To Les & Es Cole go my thanx for the name of the book in which I can find info on dimensions.

To Johnny Wasso, I suggest that you say what you THINK about your reaction to stf. Don't try to pin a beautiful piece of prose using fancy words & phrases. If you use the same words with which you speak in every-day life, and use them seriously and sincerely, you can express yourself quite well.

THE LAST ADMIRAL was an excellent novelet. I hope to see the series continued as long as possible.

HATHOR'S PETS was a little weak in plot but the skillful writing and swell ending made up for it.

REGROWTH was good but why did Napoli make Sutgen look like Ming the Merciless? Sutgen was a scientist, yet Napoli dresses him like the Emperor of Mongo. Napoli does draw better now, however, than when he first appeared in stf mags.

THE FIRST ONE fooled me. In reading the story I forgot that that kind of ending might be expected in a stf story.

Haven't gotten to THE SHADOW MEN, ROMAN HOLIDAY or STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS yet. I hope that they turn as good as the rest of the mag.

THE COVER

The eyes of Grag are gleaming green,
The dress of Joan—a sight unseen!
Terror painted on Joan's face,
Somehow all this is out of place.
SS, a mag of scientifiction,
Ultrascience, atomic friction,
Adorned with space opera scenes
Don't look right t'us human beans.
So, how 'bout a pic of cities on Mars
Or space fleets flying 'mong the stars;
With pix like these, it would be better,
So now it's time to stop my letter.

Yours till Grag gives Otho the hotfoot.—505 Vine St., Jonesboro, Ark.

Very well, Jack, we'll reply more or less in (or un-) kind, to wit—

Let's look at life through Bergey's eyes
Upon his maidens bra'ed in brass
Upon his heroes' majesties
Upon his BEMs of flame-spun glass
And let's remember while we're free
At painting other planets' life bucolic
That cover jobs may not just be
Illustrative—may be symbolic.

Sure you haven't a dash of Ming the Merciless in yourself, Jack?

WE'RE COMING FOR YOU
by A. Hayes

To: "Garbage Disposal Squad."

Please take care, in the normal manner, 1. Ether Vibrates; 2. Return of Captain Future; 3. Stars Over Santa Claus & 4. Hathor's Pets. Thank you.

To: "Education Department."

Please see that the following return to some form of educational institution the following:

1. John D. MacDonald for his "The First One."
2. Kelvin Kent for his "Roman Holiday."

To: Ye Ed:.

Someone should get some congratulations for "The Shadow Men" and for "Regrowth." Maybe Sometree should get those congrats. A. E. van Vogt and J. W. Groves and of course the Ed for those two author's appearance in these two stories. But no buttons should fly off your shirt in view of the memos to Garbage Disposal Squad and to Education Department.

Perhaps another word on the Ether Vibrates would be in place. Maybe I'm the only one who objects to it, I don't know, because I rarely read it. I finish the stories and then I see dozens of pages left which in the few attempts to read left me disgusted in that I just couldn't get through them and I hate to leave a mag unfinished.

With the novel "The Shadow Men" I won't give a reason for its high placing in the issue under question (Jan. Vol. 20 No. 3) except that I liked it and it not because it's van Vogt who had his name to it. I've seen and read some of his other efforts and some pleased me and others disgusted me.

With "Regrowth" I must place first over even "The Shadow Men" because I haven't seen very many with the type of plot he used. It seems more original, possibly because it's not used, overused like the others I've seen.

In closing I must congratulate those who did the illustrations throughout the book. Even the cover was good though I cannot find any place in the "The Return of Captain Future" (Ordinarily I do like the Captain Future stories) where Grag holds Joan and fights anyone with those blasters or whatever Capt. Future calls them. The point where Capt. Future found the Linid alien was not really evil, was a point that is becoming more common in stories and I'm in favor of that point. After all if we ever contact alien creatures, are we to consider that we are good, and that they are evil just because they are alien. The same point was also taken up in Hathor's Pets although I will admit that the less I would have to do with Hathor the better I would like it.—Box 135, Matachewan, Ontario.

We agree on Hathor, A. Hayes, but advise you to brush up on your own grammatical construction or we'll have that Garbage Disposal Unit coming up for you. Seriously, thanks for the letter, complete mit opinions, and write us again when the spirits so move you.

PUT AND TAKE
by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: Your editorial was very good, this issue. The war theme has always been strong in science-fiction and especially in the novel form. You say you have no control over your authors. You do but it's in a negative form. You can only reject this or that story.

Well, Bergey's cover was pretty good this ish. The robot looks rather realistic. The scantily clad gals wouldn't be so bad on the cover if you could manage to also get in a little science like this issue.

THE SHADOW MEN was fair. Van Vogt is getting a little more color in his stories. When you consider the utterly dry and emotionless writing of this author's earlier novels and stories it becomes apparent that he got his fame from broad scientific concepts instead of good writing. THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE is very well written. Captain Future can stay if he's going to keep up the quality and I guess he will.

Do you realize you're overdoing this Lafayette series? In my humble opinion a series should be handled like the Kuttner Hogbens. This series is getting monotonous (the contrary can be contrary).

Sherlock had an intelligent letter. Let us be reasonable: Time travel is impossible. Suppose someone from the future did come back to the past? Know what would happen? Well, if you believe in solid probability streams, the stream would be changed—the future would be changed and they wouldn't exist. And if they didn't exist how could they go into the past? So, they'd vanish. Now, on the other hand, if you believe in multiple Time-Tracks, time travel is still more impossible. Even though time travel is impossible in real life, I see no need for tears. In fiction we can still do anything we want. Even split the universe as HanK did.

I stumbled across Knapheide's statement: ". . . J. D. MacDonald. A very promising author." In my book, MacDonald is already on top. When I was studying the detective pulps he used to have a story in almost every mag on the market, in almost every issue. That lad can produce! And now he's still hacking away at the detective pulps (I think) and hitting the stf pulps at the same time.

Personally, I have more respect for John D. than Bradbury, van Vogt and a lot of others because I think he works a lot harder. MacDonald is really Fredric Brown, isn't he? Writing is similar and they contribute to the same mags. Any relation to Ray Cummings too, maybe?

Believe it or not, I'm actually going to have a story published. Yep. In SCIENTIFANTASY, a fanzine. Anyone wishing to subscribe to this superb fanzine, contact Bill Kroll, 1031 W. 18th St., Des Moines, Iowa.

Thanks for the lenient reply to my letter. When I saw your

first sentence: "And are you asking for it . . ." I was afraid you were going to give it to me. Quite a relief. Briefly, your champagne dream was a repression of a desire. Ah, champagne! Two in one. Drink water the next day and you're drunk again.

If anyone has the ishes that SWORD OF TOMORROW by Kuttner and AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT are in and want to trade or sell them, please contact me. Heard a lot about those two stories but that was before my day and I haven't yet read them.

You're playing it smart, Ed, by not going monthly right now. Even if you could get the paper, there probably wouldn't be enough pro writers to handle the increase in published material without a decrease in quality. There are two monthly magazines being published now (by the same company) that have such poor story quality that one gets the impression they hire a few writers to grind out stories wholesale to be published under pen-names.

Luckily TWS and SS are improving all the time.—6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Delaware.

We neglected to mention in answer to an earlier letter that there are a number of sound reasons for keeping SS and TWS bi-monthly. You have just given one of them, Richard, for which thanks.

The only trouble with champagne is that one must really keep on drinking it day after day to maintain both the glow and a reasonable state of efficiency. Which is a mighty expensive process. Which is why only kings, capitalists and commissars know what wonderful stuff it is.

Don't confuse MacDonald with Brown or either with Cummings even in fun. You'll spoil our lunch. All—and especially the first two of recent years—are far too good to merit such muddling. Both John and Fred are currently tremendous producers—but production is not the only answer to fine authorship. It's great while you can do it, that's all. Bradbury, van Vogt, et al., are no slouches in any respect.

DERE EDITOR
by Dave Hammond

Dear Editor: For once, when I say "Dear Editor", I mean DEAR Editor. I eagerly snatched up the January 1950 STARTLING with great hope, because I knew that I should have a letter in the Ether Vibrates. My pudgy little fingers turned the elusive pages searching, ever searching, for my letter. I found the readers' section. I searched all through it. Tears were beginning to brim in my eyes that are blue as Lake Louis, and a lump began to form in my throat. THEN, I turned to the last page of letters, and there it was! I forgive you, Ed—you and I are buddies from now on!

Look at all the letters hopping on the Ph.D. By the way, editor, I am working to get one. I count exactly—short pause for mental calisthenics—seven! It serves him right.

Hey! You've got a new artist. I thought Orban drew only for (censored), a competitor. However, even though you do have Orban (who is very good) it still doesn't make up for the absence of Virgil Finlay! Remember that, SEE? ("See" is pronounced in the very best Edward G. Robinson style.) ALL RIGHT, don't cry on my shoulder! I will forgive you if all next issue's illos are by Finlay. Does comprehension of this ultimate fact occur in your lamentably sub-conscious mind? I sincerely hope so.

There is no doubt in my mind but that A. E. van Vogt's THE SHADOW MEN is a true classic of science-fiction and also a great time-travel epic. It was a very nice story. Let us have more, oh much more, of Mister van Vogt's novels. I still remember his great "Weapon Shops of Isher."

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE also was good. If it had been novel length I might have rated it over THE SHADOW MEN. I am a great admirer of Edmond Hamilton. One of my favorite stories by "world-wrecker" Hamilton is one that he wrote away back in 1929 entitled THE STAR-STEALERS. If all the Cap Future tales are as good as this initial return. I am all for Senor el Kapitan Future. Why not get Hamilton to write another novel as good as THE STAR KINGS?

I enjoyed a ROMAN HOLIDAY but I can't understand why the college students acted so blase about a real, genuine, honest-to-goodness way of traveling in time.

"Rene Lafayette" is as fine as ever, which is pretty darn good. Do you suppose these stories will be published someday between hard covers?

Felice Perew wrote a very interesting letter, did she not? That is just about the way I reacted to science-fiction when I first began reading but I didn't have the nerve to write to any prozine. That is all I can spare now, Mr. Editor, except that I hope you'll be nice to the fanzine I'm starting when it strikes your editorial desk (I hope it strikes your fancy too).—806 Oak Street, Runnemede, New Jersey.

Bribery will get you mohair, David. Seriously, hope we like your fanzine half as well as you seem to have liked SHADOW MEN and CF's return. Didn't mean to put you in the caboose again, pal, but we'll try to make some changes in that if you'll try to write us a letter or six. Luck all around.

And so, as the sun sets over the magic island of Fatu Liva, with its sole feather duster silhouetted against the large round orb of light, we bid you fond adieu—at least until the June TWS hits the stands next month. Thanks for wading through with us and write us, you who feel in the mood. We'll be here.

—THE EDITOR.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

THE CITY AT WORLD'S END
An Amazing Novelet
By EDMOND HAMILTON

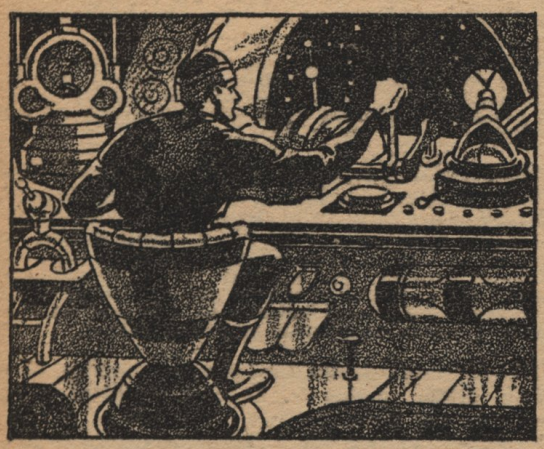
ROBOT NEMESIS
A Hall of Fame Novelet
By DR. EDWARD E. SMITH

PLUS MANY OTHER NOVELETS AND STORIES

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

A NUMBER of matters seem to demand preliminary attention this time out before we get to the actual listing of recent fanzines. First is a note from Robert C. Peterson, 1308 South Vine Street, Denver 10, Colorado, justly and gently chiding us for not reviewing his Science Fiction Index before.

Our only excuse is that, after Mr. Peterson kindly donated us those portions of his



index which deal directly with our magazines, we put them right to work for us and so ceased entirely to think of them as in anyway amateur. They have proved helpful in preparation of our two new chiefly-reprint magazines, FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY and WONDER STORY ANNUAL.

All we can say is that Mr. Peterson's project is the most prodigious fan job we have heard of since the FANCYCLOPEDIA and Mr. Peterson seems to be going it alone. Not only does he list every story published in every issue, but he gives its author, illustrator, length and, by a complex but effective code, its nature.

This is something every stf collector should have close at hand. All we can do beyond this is thank Mr. Peterson and offer apologies for being so remiss in return for his generosity. You several thousand collectors had better get in touch with him

[*Turn page*]

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right away. The Science Fiction Index fills a long-felt need—but beautifully.

A Titanic Achievement

Forrest J. Ackerman, over the years the most active and assiduous of stfans, has come up with another titanic achievement in THE FANTASY ANNUAL, 1948, published at Box No. 6151 Metro Station, Los Angeles 55, California, and retailing at $1.00 per copy.

This monster volume, consisting of no less than 120 pages exclusive of covers, was compiled by Mr. Ackerman, Redd Boggs, Don Wilson, Howard Miller, Rick Sneary, Arthur Rapp, Sam Moskowitz, A. Langley Searles, and a group of contributors too numerous for mention here.

It literally blankets the field of stfan doings for 1948. Sectionally it includes *Events of the Year, Fans and Fanzines, Fan Organizations, Fantasy Books,* and *Fantasy Magazines.* Its listings, sub-departments and detailed information on virtually every conceivable item of interest to stficionados that took place two years ago are fascinatingly and amazingly complete. It is planned to make this a yearly deal, if public support warrants—and we sincerely hope it does. Another big fanbook no one should miss.

Also worthy of note is a Spanish-language edition of James Taurasi's Fantasy Times —*Tempo de Fantasia* to you—edited by Carmela Marceau. Still published at the same old stand, 137-05 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York.

Clyde T. Hanback, National Director and Editorial Committee Chairman of the American Rocketry Association, announces that this society, with headquarters at 621 3rd Street, NW, Washington 1, D. C., is short of funds and will require five cents for postage from all fans who wish to receive their first big fanzine. As it contains articles by Harrison Smith, John W. Campbell, Jr., Milton Cronenberg and others, it might be worth the small expense.

The A-List

And so—to dirty work. As seems to be usual of late, the A-list far outnumbers its B-brother, which is all to the good all around. Can this be a trend? If so it is certainly worthy of fanzine comment. But let's at it . . .

BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. Editor, Bob Tucker. Published bimonthly. No price listed.

Continues to run well ahead of the newzine field, especially in the matter of literary gossip and information where stf matters are concerned, to say nothing of being far and away the best printed and decorated in its group. Our old favorite, Fred Brown's "What Mad Universe," draws a deservedly nice review for its hard-cover appearance.

ETAOIN SHRDLU, 40 West 77th Street, New York 24, New York. Editor, Sigurd Larsen. Published bimonthly(?). 5c per copy.

There had to be a 'zine with this title, we sighingly presume, but somewhat to our surprise and despite a fouled-up cover, Etty isn't bad at all. Although the apparently noncomic title on page 17 is appallingly sophomoric, book reviews and the Alfred Bester interview hold interest and the Stanley Nathenson story, while definitely fanziny, is pretty good fanzine.

THE FANSCIENT, 3435 NE 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon. Editor, Donald B. Day. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, 6 copies $1.00.

The all-around best in current fanzines continues its minuscular (in size), well-groomed progress with the Winter, 1950 issue, although its two bits of fiction, by Lin Carter and Kingsborough Reedley, are pretty weak tea. However, artwork, features, reviews and the author profile (this time by and about George O. Smith) more than make up for the fiction weakness. Another good issue.

FANTASY ADVERTISER, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. Editor, Gus Willmorth. Published bimonthly. 50c per year.

Editor Willmorth is hanging up his spiked shoes in this issue of what has been of recent years the standout 'zine for stf collectors, swap-artists and the like. We hope his successor, Roy Squires, can keep things rolling as well as has Gus the Goat.

FANTASY COMMENTATOR, 7 East 235th Street, New York 66, New York. Editor, Dr. A. Langley Searles. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, five copies $1.00.

Moskowitz rides again—or rather he has yet to dismount as he comes up with the sixteenth installment of his exhaustive history of stfandom, The Immortal Storm, in this most scholarly and erudite of all fanzines. Samuel Sackett's article on Cahaucer and Science-Fiction is far and away the most interesting item in the uniformly good issue at hand.

FANTASY TIMES, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published twice monthly. 10c per copy.

We seem to be hung with a flock of superlatives thus far but this has been for many moons and continues to be the top fannewzine as far as general and specific information in the field is concerned. The Spanish edition already mentioned is but one of many enlargements undertaken by the ambitious and indefatigable Taurasi. A must for hepfans.

THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT & THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER, 10630 South Saint Louis Avenue, Chicago 43, Illinois. Editor, Wayne Proell. Published monthly. 25c per copy.

The space flight angle is more and more taking over this veteran among rocket magazines, which seems to follow current trends in stf as well as rocketry. Honestly devoted to the technical aspects of getting off Earth and out into the realm of the stars. A solid publishing job.

ORB, 811 9th Street, Greeley, Colorado. Editor, Bob Johnson. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy.

Good artwork by Gaughan, Grossman and Editor Johnson feature this fast-developing newcomer, whose poetry and letters run well ahead of its prose. One which, to judge by its second issue, will bear a lot of watching in months to come. It has a certain flair. . . .

PEON, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California. Editor, Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Squadron VF-191. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy, 6 copies 50c.

Michael Varady has an interesting note on the "Science of Fantascience"—which he insists is a branch of learning all by itself (and who are we to say him nay?). But best items in the issue are by A. Boucher and J. F. McComas, borrowed from the Rhodomagnetic Digest. Poetry a trifle iambic.

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, California. Editor, George Blumenson. Published monthly (?). 20c per copy.

Editor Blumenson's editorial anent stf and the moviemakers, along with the Holmes-Boucher report on the Wandrei-Bond "Monster from Nowhere" mixup constituted the high spots for us of the second issue of this extremely literate and well-handled 'zine. We hope there are more issues to come, although they are long overdue. If not it will leave a gap which it had only begun to fill.

SHANGRI-LA, 1305 West Ingraham Street, Los Angeles 13, California. Editor, Forrest J. Ackerman. Published eight times per annum. 15c per copy.

On the whole we believe Ackerman has improved this hoary veteran among 'zines—and it was plenty good already. It records the views, feuds and doings of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society with few punches pulled and no holds barred. For laughs and some solid kicks, a nice hunk of job all the way.

SHIVERS, 230 Prince Street, Bridgeport 8, Connecticut. Editor, H. S. Weatherby, HM1. Published quarterly. 10c per copy.

A newcomer with accents on the weird and occult, devoted chiefly to fanfiction. Will have to show a trifle more stuff in the future to maintain its A-rating but promising withal.

SPACEWARP, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly. 15c per copy.

This lively 'zine, now in its sixth volume, shows maturity by blossoming out with a special supplement, The Spacewarp Index, neatly tabulating just about everything that has gone into its career up to last December. The magazine itself continues to be packed with fanfiction, poetry, features and artwork (poor) by some of the sharpest currently loose. On

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the whole its last two issues continue to show a steady upward climb.

SPEARHEAD, 817 Starling Avenue, Martinsville, Virginia. Editor, Tom Carter. Published quarterly. 25c per copy.

A very superior 'zine all the way. Fiction by Joe Kennedy, Art Rapp and Dr. Keller is unexpectedly good (not for Keller, of course, who is a pro), poetry, especially by Don Hutchison, and articles by August Derleth, Norman Ashfield (on stf books in Britain), Ed Cox and Herman King, combine with a stellar book review to make this quite a deal for the fam. King's piece on Immortality caught our eye especially. Congratulations, all of you.

THE TALISMAN, P.O. Box 3224, Columbia Heights Station, Washington 10, D. C. Editor, Roy W. Loan, Jr. Published bi-monthly. 20c per copy, 6 copies $1.00.

A welcome newcomer, somewhat similar in format if not in content to Dr. Searles' Fantasy Commentator. Philip N. Bridges, M.A., takes over the lead spot with a lengthy and well-researched article on the advisability, with spaceflight near, of having us all get together on what we shall call the inhabitants, if any, of our Solarian neighbors. Laudable—but we doubt its success. D. R. Smith's installment of Road to Fame left us shivering but we liked W. H. Evans' Fantasy in Russian Opera, Le Coq d'Or having long been one of our favorites.

The B-List

And that, dear hearts, is the more-or-less current A-listing, one which we find on the whole commendable as an example of active fandom. We only hope you and you can maintain the pace. With which the orchestra will go into minor key as we slowly descend the grand staircase to the B's.

THE ALEMBIC, 27 Woodland Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, England. Editor, Norman Ashfield. Published irregularly. Forwarded on exchange basis. Fanzine chatter, here and abroad, wrapped up in an amiably unpretentious (that means horrible, bub) package. We like its tone if not its looks, however.

DAWN, 2050 Midland, Louisville 4, Kentucky. Editors, Lester Fried, Russell Watkins and Bill Wentworth. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy. For some reason the current king among letterzines has slipped. Too much hammering at the same old gongs, we fear. Fresh feuds—or something—sorely needed.

THE EXPLORER, Girard, Pennsylvania. Editor, Ed Noble, Jr. First issue. No price listed. The first edition of an "official" mag by something called the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club. We didn't know the fans needed a club to fly to pen and paper.

FLORIDA FANTASY FAN, 775 West 13th Avenue, Miami 35, Florida. Editor, W. H. Entrekin Jr. Published bi-monthly. 20c per copy. Another newcomer and what looks like a very good one. Trouble is, in this issue, there simply isn't enough to tell.

NEBULA, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Warren Baldwin. Published monthly. 10c per copy. Sort of a second-string Spacewarp but not up to its varsity number in any field.

PORTLAND NEWS BULLETIN, 1219 NE Roselawn, Portland 11, Oregon. Editor, . . . no statistics will be copied here on fear of our editorial life. A howlingly funny gagged up fanzine of which more in our next FRYING PAN in the June TWS.

SPACESHIP, 760 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn 13, New York. Editors, Robert Silverberg & Saul Diskin. Published quarterly. 5c per copy. Shouldn't have reviewed this as the editors forgot their address but they're nice kids and we're for them. Unfortunately their mag still has a long way to go.

STF TRADER, 1028 3rd Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. Editor, K. Martin Carlson. Published bi-monthly. No price listed. Good collector's item with plenty of dealer and trade

information. But not up to the Willmorth job by a long shot.

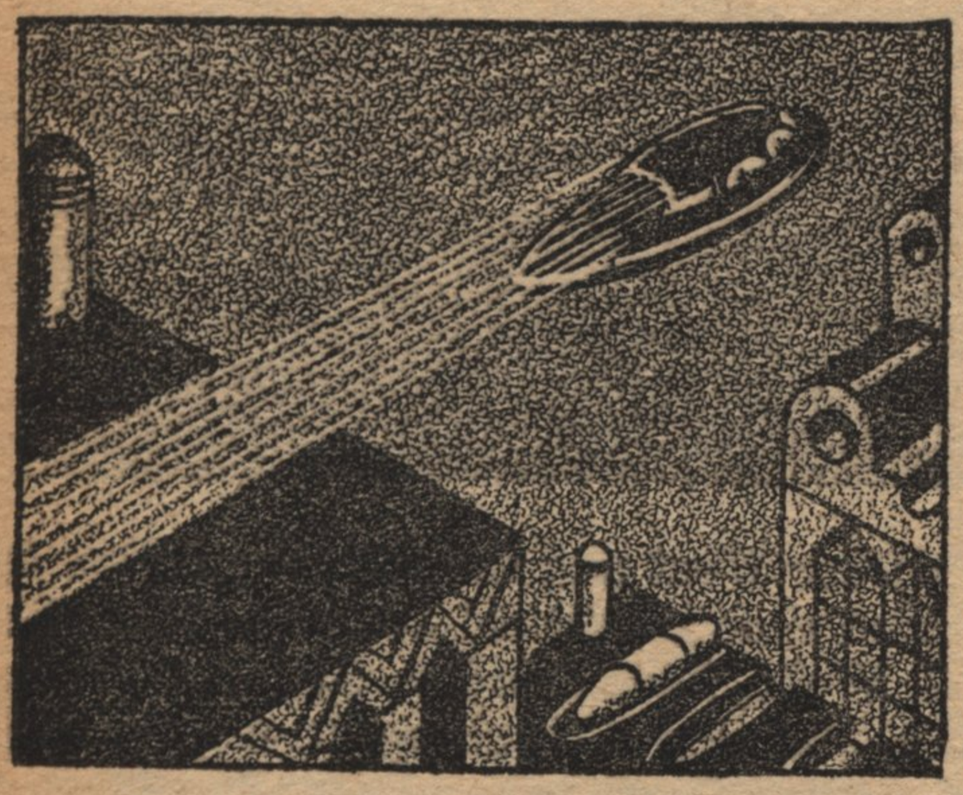
VALHALLA, 4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine. Editor, Ed Cox. Published bi-monthly. No price listed. Listed as "'Official Organ of Young Fandom." So young, in fact, that it has yet to reach puberty.

WASHINGTON NEWS LETTER, 6604 Allegheny Avenue, Takoma Park, Maryland. Editor, Chick Derry. Published twice a month. No price listed. Competent one-sheet anent fandoings in and about the national Capital.

THE X-RAY, 1980 East 8th Street, Brooklyn, New York. Editor, Donald Friedman. Published quarterly. No price listed. Another "official organ"—this time of something called "The Universal Musketeers." That's all, brother!

Well, that does it. We only hope, as already stated, that the level will remain as high. Also note no real crackpot jobs—perhaps they aren't being printed but more likely they have grown wary. Some very good, a little very bad and a lot of Mr. In-between. See you in the Frying Pan in TWS next month.

—THE EDITOR.



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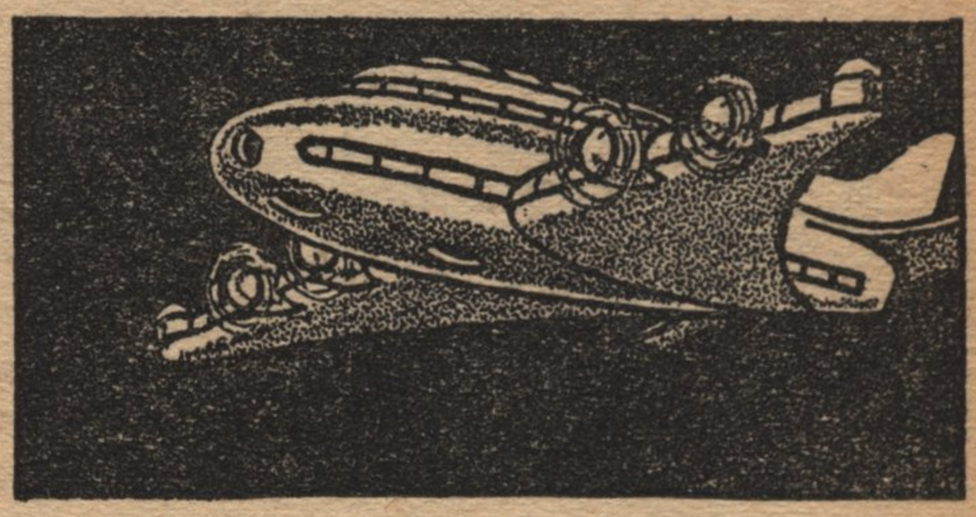
SCIENCE FICTION BOOKSHELF

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

SHOT IN THE DARK, science fantasy anthology by Judith Merril. Bantam Books (25c).

Miss Merril, in compiling one of the most ambitious efforts for stf in the 25c-reprint field has, it seems to us, selected her stories wisely. There is plenty here, not only for the science fiction connoisseur but for the groping neophyte, who has strayed in, perhaps to get out of the rain, and is hesitantly poking his way around among the to him exotic wares offered.

To allay initial impulses toward flight to the more familiar fields of love, mystery,



the wilder West and the like, the editor has included such household names as E. A. Poe, H. G. Wells, Jack London, Stephen Vincent Benét, Margery Allingham, R. Austin Freeman, James Thurber and Philip Wylie.

Incidentally, in case such a plethora of domestic nomenclature should prove frightening to the stf gourmet, let us go on the record here and now as saying that not only are all of these selections from the tried-and-true at least umbilically connected with modern stf—but a number of them are among the little-known works of their august creators.

Certainly Poe's *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, Wells' *The Star* and Benét's *Nightmare Number Three* so qualify with this reviewer. And we found all of them arresting to read.

However, there is plenty for the modern afficionado, with authors like Theodore Sturgeon, Leigh Brackett, Fredric Brown, Gerald Kersh, James MacCreigh, Robert Heinlein, Lewis Padgett, Anthony Boucher, Murray Leinster, Isaac Asimov, William Tenn, Ray Bradbury, Alexander Samalman,

Hugh Raymond and Edison Tesla Marshall stepping up to the plate and connecting for solid wallops.

In short, we liked *Shot in the Dark*—and best of all we liked James Thurber's brief but immortal *Interview with a Lemming*. We hope this small but well-packed volume is the prelude to many more of its kind. Readers of this magazine and its companion, TWS, will recognize at least five of the tales it contains.

●

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT by Dennis Wheatley. Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., London (4/6d).

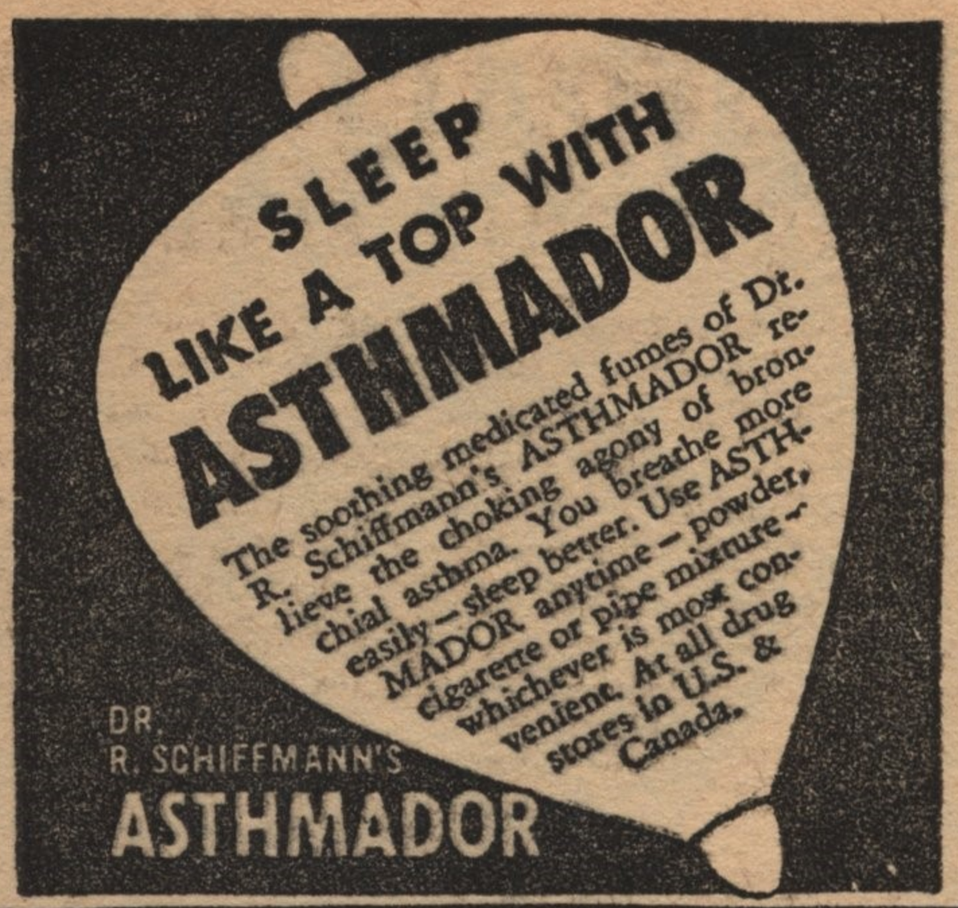
This English edition of a mad gallop through the occult by the prolific Mr. Wheatley is, according to its publishers, in its 132,000th copy—or was when this review copy was mailed to us. Frankly it is pure adventure—fantasy rather than science fiction—with a collection of well-bred stock models, including the inevitable exiled French duke and the equally inevitable rugged young American millionaire, going through the swift paces of an Edgar Wallace plot.

Just as frankly it is good fun, carrying plenty of excitement as our little band of heroes combat the dark influences of the ages in modern dress, rescue the lovely and mysterious Tanith from a fate worse (but far more enticing) than death, ride roughshod over a Southdown witches' sabbath in a high-powered automobile and struggle with the evil Mr. Mocata for the Talisman of Set (which turns out to be a very naughty relic indeed).

Whoever owns this talisman is supposed to be able to start World Wars at will—and has done so from the times of Ancient Egypt, through those of Attila, to the present day. And while we couldn't quite believe this we accepted it for the sake of the high-pressure shenanigans with which its pursuit is surrounded.

Author Wheatley has also managed to attach to his theme about as catholic and exhaustive a superficial mass of information on witchcraft, from the death of Osiris, through Stonehenge, the Druids and the Manichean Dualism, to the latter-day rites of postwar Europe as we have ever read.

If you go for this sort of thing and can get it, do so. If not, stick to your reports on the "thing" that flew over North Carolina late last December.



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