

TODAY'S SCIENCE FICTION — TOMORROW'S FACT •

AUG. 25c

STARTLING *stories*

A THRILLING PUBLICATION



featuring **THE LOVERS** a novel by Philip José Farmer

and **THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS**

a novelet by Kendell Foster Crossen



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stories

Vol. 27, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION

AUGUST, 1952

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Samuel Mines, Editor

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EARLE K. BERGEY

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

JUST this once we suggest you might read the lead novel first and then come back here.

These editorial remarks should mean more to you as a result, for much of what we have to say was touched off by *THE LOVERS* in a chain reaction which has led hither and yon but made a point of sorts, we hope. It has also acted as a catalyst to solidify many of our own growing ideas about science fiction.

Editorially and otherwise, we have long contended that science fiction must be more than hopeful science; it must be *good* fiction as well. It must contain the basic requirements of drama, it must be well told, it must depict real people, it must be as sincere in its emotional values as in calculating the speed of a space ship operating on ultra-galactic drive. Until this is achieved, *Time* book-reviewers will continue to make disparaging comparisons with westerns.

To date not many stories have approached these requirements. Which is why we have permitted ourselves a certain amount of hoopla about *THE LOVERS*. It is a fresh note in science fiction.

People and Gadgets

What's fresh about it? Well, it is a warm, emotional story about people first and gadgets second, as opposed to a cold, objective story about gadgets first and people second. Yet it is unmistakably science fiction, not romance, because if you took the science out of it you would have no story. (There, incidentally, you have at least one definition of science fiction, though there are others as good.)

There will be squawks about this novel—we predict it with serenity. It is a story which some people will hate to pieces. For this we are sorry in advance. We are sorry, not because our own opinion will be shaken, but because we think *THE LOVERS* is an important

story. Important not necessarily because it is great literature, but because it will make a lot of fine writers sit up and be quoted as blurting: "My gosh, I didn't know we could do anything like that in science fiction!" or words to that effect.

This is exactly the point. It is our contention that anything can be done in science fiction—and should be done. It is actually the broadest of all mediums, because it is imagination unlimited. A lot of stf authors writing today are good as can be in their own type of story, but the type has turned into a rut. They are writing the same basic story they wrote fifteen years ago. Some readers still like this kind of story—but not exclusively. They recognize the need for other kinds and the fact that this need broadens as a wider and wider circle of readers becomes acquainted with science fiction.

Furthermore, with familiarity, most readers progress in sophistication beyond the simple space or gadget story to something involving a tentative nibble at the larger issues beyond. Some of the old-time writers, like Ed Hamilton, have grown with this enlargement of the theme, are boldly tackling subjects undreamed of ten years ago. For our sister mag, *TWS*, we have just bought a story by Ed Hamilton titled *WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE?* which is so far removed from his *Captain Future* stories as to convince anyone that it is the work of a totally different writer.

New Frontiers

Some of the boys, like Ted Sturgeon and Ray Bradbury, have always been conscious of the larger issues, and an awareness of it showed even in their earliest stories. And now comes a whole new school of writers, men like Philip Farmer and R. J. McGregor and Ken Crossen, who are hewing out entire new frontiers in the business. These are the writers who are work-

(Continued on page 8)



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ing to achieve a synthesis between the heavy, powerful old saga and the new, warm, human story. They have had support for a long time from able artists like St. Clair and Brackett and Frank Belknap Long, who have always used science as only a magic carpet to transport their characters and to whom human values were paramount.

A synthesis between the light satire and the saga, the human story and the epic, is likely to produce something very much like literature. It makes for big, important stories, big writers.

Ten years from now, *THE LOVERS* will not seem remarkable at all. We hope so. For if it did, it would mean the field had stood still all that time. It must continue to move; it must make its own best works obsolete if it is to survive.

There are fans (whose only fault is loyalty) who have taken us to task for failing to enthuse about certain old sf classics which are dear to their hearts. Our best answer to that is that we hope *THE LOVERS* will seem as creaky and ancient ten years from now; and we say this because, not in spite of the fact that we think *THE LOVERS* is one of the best stories we have ever seen anywhere—in science-fiction magazine or book.

We consider it a high-water-mark today; but it would mean the stagnation and death of science fiction if it were not superseded by new works and new writers, and by the author's newer works themselves, since he is learning and growing as he works.

The theme of *THE LOVERS* is unimportant, though some readers will like it and some will not. But it is a story which digs deep. It is a story which came from a man's urgent need to say something—not merely to write a story for money.

ETHERGRAMS

SO UP comes another batch of young hopefuls, critics, enthusiasts, men with a mission, men with a gripe, optimists, pessimists, cynics, misogynists and angels. The gr-r-eatest show on earth.

THE FOLLOWING REASONS

by D. Y. Cummins

Dear Sir: In your excellent editorial of the May issue of *Startling Stories*, you quoted another

feminine reader as saying, "Let's be grown up and admit we still like fairy tales and that's why we read science fiction. They're fairy tales . . ."

If they are, all those connected with this type of literature are to be congratulated, for, according to Joseph Campbell ("The Hero With a Thousand Faces"), and Harold Bayley ("The Lost Language of Symbolism"), fairy tales are the repositories of an ancient wisdom. Should the lady classify myths with fairy tales, she might try Kerényi's "The Science of Mythology," which will lead her to Dr. Jung's "The Integration of the Personality."

I make so bold as to take exception to her statement, as well as yours, that science fiction is escape literature. Speaking personally, I have no need to escape. True, that "modern life is too full of pressures, paced too fast, too full of jitters," but the pressures can be relieved by the exercise of a little uncommon sense, one can learn to "make haste slowly," and by an inward probing, discover and remove the cause of which jitters are the result. It isn't easy, but it can be done.

It is at least fifteen years since I have read a novel. And I did not know science fiction existed until some three years ago, when a slight accident put me in bed for a week. My husband, seeking to amuse me, brought an armful of science fiction magazines. I looked at the lurid cover on one, held it out between thumb and forefinger as though it were a dead mouse, and demanded, "What is *this*?" But as he had taken my other books away, I began to read.

I have been reading them ever since—all that are published. I admit that I have had to do some heavy wading through stories badly written and plotted, concerning planetary and interstellar Robin Hoods, Captain Morgans, and Hopalong Cassidys, but I don't dare skip a story or an article, lest I miss that sentence, or paragraph which is so provocative that it makes up for all the rest of the—shall we come right out and say 'tripe?'

Frankly, I read science fiction for the following reasons:

(1) It is a window upon the scientific-mechanized future—distorted at points, but astoundingly clear at others. It may be that in departing from the norm, the authors are forced to clear their minds of old habit patterns. In so doing, they unconsciously find themselves en rapport with what in general rather than particular may be called "the shape of things to come."

(2) Through the stories as a whole, one gains a glimpse of the view the public takes of the future. For a while it was decidedly pessimistic. Of late it has been brightening. One is also impressed by the repeated hostility to aliens. It seems that as a nation we have the same attitude toward "furriners" as the Ozark or Kentucky mountaineer. And the effort of the human race to maintain superiority by any device is pathetic. Fear of a greater intelligence than ours is obvious through nearly all science-fiction stories as well as fear of the unfamiliar, the unknown—facts which in themselves are significant.

In short, by reading the magazines from cover to cover one gains unexpected glimpses of the public psyche. The desperate need of a scapegoat was never more clearly shown than in the

(Continued on page 130)

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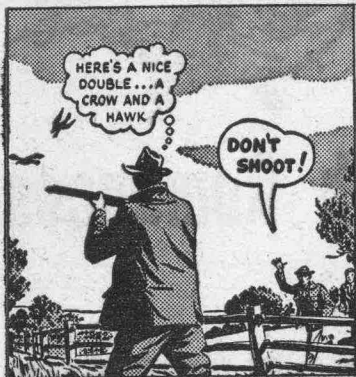
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HUNTING HAWK MISSES HIS KILL BUT THEN...



GET HIM, SATAN!

FALCONRY, AN ANCIENT SPORT, STILL SURVIVES AND BEN DAIL IS SHOWING HIS SISTER HOW IT'S DONE



HERE'S A NICE DOUBLE... A CROW AND A HAWK.

DON'T SHOOT!



SATAN MISSED!



DICK BRENT! I THOUGHT YOU STAYED IN ENGLAND, FLYBOY!

GOT BACK LAST WEEK, BEN. CAME UP HERE FOR A REST

WE LIVE HERE



NO ARGUMENTS, DICK. YOU'RE COMING HOME WITH US. WE'LL GET YOUR BAGS AFTER DINNER

THROW IN A SHAVE AND SHOWER AND I'M SOLD

AND SO AFTER A DAY-LONG CROW HUNT WITH HAWK AND GUN...



TRY A THIN GILLETTE BLADE ON THAT STUBBLE



THIS BLADE'S GREAT STUFF! SLICKEST SHAVE I'VE HAD IN YEARS!

I'M SOLD ON THIN GILLETTES. THERE'RE PLENTY KEEN



SO IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO'S LOOKING FOR A TURBO-JET EXPERT

WHY, BEN! UNCLE BOB HAS BEEN COMBING THE COUNTRY FOR MEN LIKE DICK

HE'S HANDSOME

MEN, WHEN IT COMES TO EXTRA SHAVING COMFORT, PLUS ECONOMY, YOU CAN'T BEAT THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LAST LONGER THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICE BLADES. YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION, TOO, FOR THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE



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Hey, Ma . . .

There Goes a Spaceman!



AT AN Army Separation Center, not long ago, staff psychiatrists made the experiment of trying to guess the civilian occupations of a randomly-selected bunch of GI's from appearance alone. The soldiers were dressed exactly alike; they were lined up in absolute silence; the guesses were written down

before anyone spoke a single word. Waste of time, you say? Well . . . the doctors' guesses averaged so high that in one instance they named the correct occupations of twenty-six men in succession!

The reverse of this experiment was recently conducted at Harvard University. Harvard scientists broadcast the voices of eighteen speakers . . . and the listeners not only guessed the speakers' ages, usually to within a year, but also made astonishingly good guesses as to their occupations. The highest scores were made in judging personality characteristics—91% of the guesses were entirely correct!

Doctors are old hands at guessing the occupations of their patients. Over a hundred years ago Tardieu, a French physician, wrote a book on the subject that is still a standard work. Many occupations cause minute physical changes which are readily apparent to the trained eye: a dry-cleaner may have pale blue fingers; a violinist may have a callous under his jaw; a science fiction editor's face may bear a look of perpetual horror, from reading fan-mail. . . .

Which brings us, sort of, to the question: what will be the occupational stigmas of a spaceman?

The first spaceships won't be perfect. Not half the bugs will be ironed out before the impatient

Earthmen blast off for the moon, and Mars, and Venus. Although our Air Force now has a Department of Space Medicine, and work is progressing in that direction at a rate calculated to gladden the heart of any science-fiction fan, the experts still differ radically in their opinions as to what will be the effects of space conditions on the human body. Certainly there *will* be effects—foreseen or unforeseen.

Some of you reading this may possibly be, in later years, spacemen of one sort or another . . . satellite men, at least, if the longer hops seem farther off. So . . . what would the doctors look for in judging your future occupation?

Will the pressure and humidity of spacesuits bleach you, shrivel and emaciate you, like a Turkish bath? Or will you be burned dark brown by ultra-violet rays? Or will spacesuits be developed that will protect you well enough from these and other space conditions to leave no lasting effects?

What will be the effect of cosmic rays—the nuclear bullets now partially filtered by Earth's atmosphere? Will they cause you to become hairless; will your face show a network of tiny red lines, from hemorrhages? These are only *minor* effects of such radiation.

And what will be the effect of life in free-fall on the spaceman's posture and walk? Even the sailor has a rolling gait when on shore . . . and adjustment to conditions in space will be radically different than from land to sea, or indeed, from anything man has ever known before. Living under no-gravity conditions may result in dysfunction of certain glands and organs, leading to the appearance of distinctive physiological changes and skin blemishes; while new and strange psychological factors may brand the spaceman just as distinctively.

Our own prediction is that, in times to come, every four-year-old child will be able at first glance to recognize a spaceman!

WHAT WILL THEY LOOK LIKE—AND WHY?

*Amid the deceit, the intrigue, the treachery marking
the Earthmen's scheme to conquer the world of Ozagen,
Hal Yarrow broke every taboo to love his Jeannette. . . .*

The LOVERS

A Novel by PHILIP JOSE FARMER





Foreword

DURING the day, the dreadnaught *Gabriel* squatted in a park in the center of the city of Siddo, on the planet Ozagen. From sunrise to sunset the *Gabriel's* personnel ventured out among the Ozagenians—or wogglebugs, as they were familiarly and contemptuously called—learning all they could of Ozagen's history, customs, language and other things.

The "other things," though the Earthmen did not mention this to the wogglebugs, were Ozagen's technologies. As far as could be seen, the wogs had progressed, roughly speaking, to the level of Earth's early 20th-century science. Logically, there should be nothing to fear from them. But the

men of Earth's Haijac Union trusted no one. What if the wogs were hiding terrible weapons, waiting to catch the men unawares?

At nightfall, the spaceship rose to a height of fifty feet and poised there until the sun rose again. Then it sank back into the deep depression made by its own weight. Always a radar gig hovered in the stratosphere and probed for other spacecraft. Presumably, neither Earth's Israeli Republics nor its Bantu-Malay Federation knew of Ozagen . . . but if they found out!

Meanwhile the Terrans searched, studied, prowled and planned. Before they attacked the natives, before they began their decimation project to make room for the hordes that would follow, they must learn the wogs' potentialities.

And so it was that, a month after the appearance of the *Gabriel* above Siddo, two presumably friendly (to wogs) Terrans set out with two presumably friendly (to Terrans) wogglebugs on a trip. They were going to investigate the ruins of a city left by a dead humanoid race. They rode a vehicle fantastic to the men. . . .

I

THE MOTOR hiccoughed and jerked. The Ozagenian sitting on the right side of the rear seat leaned over and shouted something. Hal Yarrow twisted his head and yelled, "*Quoi?*"

Fobo, sitting directly behind Hal, stuck his mouth against the Earthman's ear. He translated the gibberish into French:

"Zugu says and emphasizes that you should pump the throttle. That little rod to your right. It gives the carburetor more alcohol. *Où quelque chose.*"

Fobo's antennae tickled Hal's ears. Hal said, "*Merci,*" and worked the throttle. To do so, he had to lean across the gapt, sitting at his right. "*Pardon-*

nez-moi, monsieur Pornsen!" he bel-lowed.

The gapt did not look at Yarrow; his hands, lying on his lap, were locked together. The knuckles showed white. Like his ward, he was having his first experience with an internal combustion motor. Unlike Hal, he was scared by the loud noise, the fumes, the bumps and bangs, and just the idea of riding in a manually controlled vehicle.

Hal grinned. He loved this quaint car, so reminiscent of Earth's early twentieth-century autos. It thrilled him to be able to twist the stiff-acting wheel and feel the heavy body obey his muscles. The four cylinders' banging and the alcohol's reek excited him. As for the bouncing, that was fun. It was romantic, like putting out to sea in a sailboat—something else he hoped to do before they left Ozagen.

Also, anything that scared his gapt pleased Yarrow.

His pleasure ended. The cylinders popped, off-key. The car jerked and then rolled to a stop. At once, the two wogglebugs hopped over the side and raised the hood. Hal followed. Pornsen sat. He pulled a package of Merciful Seraphim from his uniform pocket, took one out and lit up.

Hal noted that it was the fourth he'd seen Pornsen smoking since morning prayers. If Pornsen wasn't careful, he'd be going over his quota. That meant that the next time Hal got in trouble, he could blackmail the gapt into helping him. Judging by his troubles so far on this expedition, it wouldn't be long before he would have to.

Hal bent over the motor and watched. Zugu seemed to know what the matter was. He should, since he was the inventor and builder of the only—as far as the Terrans knew—native-made self-propelling vehicle on this planet.

Zugu used a wrench to unscrew a long narrow pipe from a round glass case. Yarrow remembered that this was a gravity feed system. The fuel ran from the tank into the glass case, which was

a sediment chamber. From there it ran into the feed pipe, which in turn passed on to the carburetor.

PORNSSEN called harshly, "Well, Yar-row, are we going to be stuck here all day?"

Though he still wore the hood and goggles the Ozagenians had equipped him with as windbreaks, the gapt's expression was clear enough. He would take out his annoyance in a report that would not be favorable to Hal. Unless, that is, his ward came across something so important in the humanoid ruins that it would justify this long trip.

The gapt—G.A.P.T., or Guardian Angel Pro Tempore—had wanted to

Hal of the sacredness of the human self by telling him to slow down. Hal would nod and would ease his foot off the accelerator. But after a while he would slowly press down. Once again they would roar and leap down the dirt road.

Zugu unscrewed both ends of the pipe, stuck one in his V-shaped mouth, and blew. Nothing came out the other end. Zugu shut his big blue eyes and blew again. Nothing happened, except that his already green-tinged face turned a dark green. Then he rapped the copper tubing against the hood and blew once more. No reaction.

Fobo reached into a large leather pouch slung from a belt around his big belly. His finger and thumb came out

Entrance Cue

THE LOVERS is a story we would like to introduce with trumpets and fanfare—maybe even a parade. We feel that way about it. We are restrained with difficulty from raving only because we know our dignity would suffer.

We think this story is a delicate and beautiful, yet powerful and shocking piece of work. We are amazed that so strong and sure a drama could come from a new young writer. We believe we are here launching the career of a man who will shortly be ranked with the few at the very top. We think Philip José Farmer is the find of the year. After you've read it, the verdict will be with you.

—The Editor

wait the two days that would be needed until they could get a gig. The trip to the ruins could then have been made in fifteen minutes, a soundless and comfortable ride through the air. But Hal had argued that driving through the countryside would be as valuable—if not more so, in detecting any possible hidden large industries—as reconnoitering by air. That his superiors had agreed was another thing that had exasperated Pornsen. Where his ward went, he had to go.

So he had sulked all day while the young Terran, coached by Zugu, wheeled the jalopy down the forest roads. The only times the gapt spoke was to remind

holding a tiny blue insect. Gently, he pushed the creature into one end of the pipe. In about five seconds a small red insect dropped out of the other end. Behind it, evidently in pursuit, came the blue. Fobo picked up his pet and put it back in the pouch. Zugu squashed the red thing beneath his bare heel.

"Voilà. C'est un mangeur de l'alcool, monsieur," said Fobo. "It lives in the tank and imbibes freely and unmolested. It extracts the carbohydrates therein. A swimmer upon the golden seas of alcohol. What a life! But now and then it goes into the sediment chamber; eats and devours the filter, and passes into the feedpipe. *Voyez!* Zugu is even now

replacing the filter. In a moment we will be on our way and road."

Fobo's breath had a strange and sickening odor. Hal wondered if the wog had been drinking liquor. He had never smelled alcohol on anybody's breath before, so he had no experience to go on. But even the thought of it made Hal nervous. If his gapt knew a bottle was being passed back and forth in the rear seat, he would not for a minute let Hal out of his sight.

The wogs climbed into the back seat. "Allons!"

Pornsen pursed his thin lips. He had meant to ask Zugu to drive, but he realized the wogs might think he lacked confidence in Yarrow. He did, but he could not admit that in front of an Ozagenian.

THOUGH Hall started slowly enough, he soon found his foot heavy. The trees began whizzing by. He glanced at Pornsen. The gapt's rigid back and set teeth showed that he was thinking of the report he would make to the chief Uzzite back in the spaceship. He looked mad enough to demand the 'Meter for his ward.

Yarrow breathed deeply the wind battering his face-mask. To H with Pornsen! To H with the 'Meter! The blood lurched in his veins. This planet's air was not stuffy Earth's. His lungs sucked it in like a happy bellows. At that moment he felt as if he could have snapped his fingers under the nose of the Sandalphon himself.

"Look out!" screamed Pornsen.

Hal glimpsed out of the corners of his eyes the large antelope-like beast that leaped from the forest onto the road. A half-second later, he twisted the wheel away from it. The jalopy skidded on the dirt. Its rear end swung around. Hal was not well enough grounded in the physics of driving to know that he should have turned the wheels in the direction of the skid to straighten the car out.

His lack of knowledge was not fatal, except to the beast, for its bulk struck

the vehicle's side. Checked, the car quit trying to circle. Instead, it angled off the road and ran up a sloping ridge of earth. From there it leaped high into the air and landed with an all-at-once bang of four tires blowing.

Even that did not halt it. A big bush loomed. Hal jerked on the wheel. Too late.

His chest pushed hard against the wheel as if it were trying to telescope the steering shaft against the dashboard. Fobo slammed into Yarrow's back. Both cried, out, and the wog fell off.

Then, except for a sharp hissing, there was silence. A pillar of steam from the broken radiator shot through the branches that held Hal's face in a rough barkly embrace.

Yarrow stared through steamshapes into big brown eyes. He shook his head. Was he stunned? Eyes. And arms like branches. Or branches like arms. He thought he was in the grip of a brown-eyed nymph. Or were they called dryads? He couldn't ask anybody. He wasn't supposed to know about such creatures. *Nymph* and *dryad* had even been cut out of such books as Hack's edition of the Revised and Moral Milton. Only an unexpurgated *Paradise Lost*, booklegged from Israel, had enabled Hal to learn of Greek mythology.

Thoughts flashed off and on like lights on a spaceship's pilotboard. Nymphs sometimes turned into trees to escape their pursuers. Was this one of the fabled forest women staring at him with large and beautiful eyes through the longest lashes he had ever seen?

He shut his lids and wondered if a head injury were responsible for the vision and if it were permanent. If it were, so what? Hallucinations like that were worth keeping.

He opened his eyes. The illusion was gone.

He thought, *It was that antelope looking at me. It got away after all. It ran around the bush and looked back. Antelope eyes.*

II

HE FORGOT about the eyes. He was choking. A heavy nauseating odor hung around the car. The crash must have frightened the wogs very much, else they would not have released the sphincter muscles which controlled the neck of their "madbags." This organ, a bladder located near the small of their backs, had once been used by the pre-humanoid ancestors of the Ozagenians as a powerful weapon of defense in much the same way as a bombardier beetle thwarts attackers. Now an almost vestigial structure, the madbag served as a means of relieving extreme nervous tension. Its function was effective, but is presented problems such as that of the wog psychiatrists, who either had to keep their windows open or else wear gasmasks during therapy.

Hal pushed aside the branches and struggled over the side. Why didn't wogs build doors in their vehicles?

Wong Af Pornsen, assisted by Zugu, crawled out from under the foliage. His big paunch, the color of his uniform, and the white nylon angel's wings sewed on the back of his jacket made him resemble a fat blue bug. When he stood up and took off his windmask, he showed a bloodless face. His shaking fingers fumbled over the crossed hour-glass and sword, symbol of the Haijac Union, before they found the button he was searching for. He pulled out a pack of Merciful Cherubim. Once the cigarette was in his lips, he had a hard time holding the lighter to it.

Hal took out his own and held the glowing coil to the tobacco. It didn't waver.

Only thirty years of discipline could have shoved back the grin he felt deep inside his face muscles.

Pornsen accepted the light. A second later, a tremor of skin around his lips and eyes revealed that he knew he had lost much of his advantage over Yarrow. Trained in psychology, he realized you don't let a man do you a service—

even one as slight as his ward's and then crack the whip on him.

He began formally, "Hal Shamshiel Yarrow . . ."

"Shib, *abba*, I hear."

"You're—uh—much too reckless."

Considering the offense, his voice was milder than it should have been. Now and then he stopped to draw in or puff out smoke.

"The hierarchy has had its eye (puff) upon you for a long time. Though you have not been suspected of any moral turpitude—as regards sex or liquor, that is—you have shown signs of a certain pride and independence. That is not shib, Yarrow. That is not real. It smacks of behavior that does not conform to the structure of the universe as we know it, as it has been revealed to mankind by the Forerunner, real be his name.

"I have (puff)—may the Forerunner forgive them!—sent two dozen men to H. I didn't like it, for I am a tender-hearted man, but it is the duty of the Guardian Angels Pro Tempore to watch out for the diseases of the self that may spread and infect the followers of Isaac Sigmen. Unreality must not be tolerated; the self is too weak and precious to be subjected to temptation.

"I have been your gapt since you were (puff) born. You always were a disobedient child, but you could be whipped into submissiveness, into seeing reality. Not until you were eighteen did you become hard to handle. That was when you decided to become a joat. I thought you'd make a very good specialist, and I warned you that as a joat you'd only get so high in our society. But you persisted. And since we have need of joats, and since I was overridden by my superior, I allowed you to become one.

"That wasn't too (puff) unshib, but when I picked out the woman most suitable to be your wife, I saw just how proud and rebellious you were. She was a woman whom the Urielites, selfdocs, and Sandalphons agreed was the ideal

mate as set forth in the Western Talmud. And yet you argued and held out for a year before you consented to marry her. In that year of unreal behavior, you cost the Sturch one self. . . ."

Hal's face had paled, and in so doing had revealed seven thin red marks that rayed out fanwise from the left corner of his lips and across his cheek to his ear. They were scars left by Pornsen's lash years before.

"I cost it nothing," blazed Hal. "Mary and I were married ten years, and she proved barren. And it was her fault, not mine, as the tests proved. When that came out, why didn't you insist on our divorce, as your duty required, instead of pigeonholing my petition?"

PORNSEN blew out smoke slowly enough, but his voice tensed. He dropped one shoulder lower than the other, a characteristic when he forgot himself, and said, "That's another thing. I was sure when you applied for this expedition that it was not out of desire to serve the Sturch in its quest for new lands for our overcrowded planets. (Puff) I was sure you signed up for one reason. To get away from your wife. Since barrenness, adultery, and space travel are the only legal grounds for divorce, and adultery means going to H, you took the only way out. You became legally dead. You—"

"You can't prove it!" Hal was shaking, and loathed himself because he could not hide his rage.

"Oh, I could have, if I had recommended you for the Elohimeter. But we needed scientists very much, and my superiors thought it best to overlook your possible motives. Besides, you had an excuse in that sterility report, which was lost through the inefficiency of my secretaries.

"However, the hierarchy has been slowly and regretfully, but surely, coming to the conclusion that you do not have a high enough regard for your self. Or that of others.

"The self, as defined by Isaac Sig-

men, is sacred, sacred to God, to the angels both high and low, to the pre-Torah prophets. . . ."

Hal listened with only a half-ear. Pornsen was repeating Moral Lecture PT19, which his ward knew by heart. Hal was looking at the beast's body crumpled on the road. Now he remembered the thump the jalopy had made when it struck it. But if it were dead, whose eyes had he seen through the bush?

Fobo, the empathist, was bending over it. He straightened up; large tears filled his blue eyes and ran down the long tubular nose. The antennae rising from his bald forehead waved. He made a circular sign with his index finger over the carcass.

Hal said to Pornsen, "Shut up!"

The gapt stiffened. The lower left shoulder drew level with the other. The cigarette fell from his slack thin lips. Red swarmed up his bull-neck and sagging jowls. His right hand shot to his belt and grabbed the crux ansata on the handle of his whip. He jerked it out and cracked it in the air.

The marks on Yarrow's cheek tingled in remembrance of that other time when the lashes, one for each of the Seven Deadly Unrealities, had cut the flesh.

The gapt said, "How dare you?"

HAL said in a low voice, swiftly, "A moment ago you said something in English. You know French is the only tongue we're allowed to speak under any circumstances."

The whip dropped.

"When—when was that?"

"When you screamed at me just before we struck that animal. Remember? And when you were yelling for help under the bush."

Pornsen stuck the whip back in his belt and lit up another Merciful Seraphim. His fifth that day. Another, and he'd be over his quota.

"You say nothing to the chief," he muttered. "And I'll keep quiet about your sibboleth recklessness."



HAL YARROW

JEANNETTE

FOBO

"Shib," agreed Hal.

He tried to keep the contempt and elation out of his voice. Once a gapt cracked. . . .

Pornsen rolled his small green eyes at the approaching Fobo. "Think he heard me?"

"I wouldn't know."

Fobo stopped and looked at them. His antennae became rigid. He said, "*Un argument, messieurs?*"

Fobo had wept as the dying beast's nervous discharges of grief and pain struck his overtrained, too receptive antennae. Now he smiled the ghastly V-in-V smile of a wogglebug. Though supersensitive, his nervous system was a hit and run one. Charge and discharge came easily.

"Non!" replied Hal. "No disagree-

ment. We were just wondering how far we'd have to walk to get to the humanoid ruins. Your jalopy's wrecked. Tell Zugu I'm sorry."

"*Ca ne fait rien.* The walk will be pleasant and stimulating. It is only a mile. Or thereabouts."

"*Bien. Allons.*"

The ward turned away and threw his mask and goggles in the rear seat of the car, where the Ozagenians had laid theirs.

He picked up his suitcase, but left the gapt's on the floor. Let him carry his own.

He said, "Fobo, aren't you afraid the driving-clothes will be stolen?"

"Pardon? What does that mean?"

"*Voler. Voler.* To take an article of property from someone without their

permission, and keep it for yourself. It is a crime, punishable by law."

"*Un crime?*"

Hal gave up. He shrugged and moved his long legs fast. Behind him the gapt, afraid of losing dignity if he trailed behind Hal, and angry because his ward was breaking etiquette by forcing him to carry his own case, shouted, "You'll pay for this, you—you joat!"

With which outburst he lost face.

Hal didn't turn. He plunged on ahead. The angry retort he was phrasing beneath his breath fizzed away. Out of the corner of his eye he had caught a flash of white skin in the green summer foliage.

But when he turned to look for it, it was gone. Nor did he see it or its owner the rest of the day.

III

SOO Yarrow. *Soo Yarrow. B'swa. L'fvayfvoo, soo Yarrow.*"

Hal woke up. For a moment, he didn't remember where he was. Then he recalled that he was sleeping in one of the marble rooms of the mammal-humanoid ruins. The moonlight, brighter than Earth's, poured in through the doorway. It shone on a small shape on the floor near the entrance, and on a flying insect that passed above the shape. Something long and thin flickered up and wrapped itself around the flier and pulled it into a suddenly gaping mouth.

The lizard loaned by the ruins custodian was doing a fine job of keeping out pests.

Hal turned his head to look at the open window a foot above him. The bugcatcher there was busily sweeping the area clean of mosquitoes. From beyond that moonwashed square the voice had seemed to come. He listened. Silence. Then a snuffling and rattling jerked him upright. A thing the size of a raccoon stood by the doorway. It was one of the quasi-insects, the so-called lungbugs, that prowled the for-

est at night. It represented a development of arthropod not found on Earth. Unlike its Terran cousins, it no longer depended solely on tracheae, or breathing tubes, for oxygen. A pair of distensible sacs, like a frog's, swelled out and fell in behind its mouth, and enabled it to make the heavy breathing sound.

Though it was shaped like a preying mantis, Hal wasn't worried. Fobo had told him it would not attack without provocation.

A shrilling like that of an alarm clock suddenly filled the room. Pornsen, on the cot across the room, sat up. He saw the insect and yelled. It scurried off. The shrilling, which had come from the mechanism on Pornsen's wrist, stopped.

Pornsen lay down and groaned. "That makes the sixth time those bugs have woke me up."

"Turn off the wristbox," said Hal.

Pornsen did not answer. For about ten minutes he was restless and then he began snoring. Hal's lids felt heavy. He must have dreamed the soft low voice speaking in a tongue neither Terran nor Ozagenian. He must have, because it had been human; and he and the gapt were the only specimens of homo sapiens for at least two hundred miles.

It had been a woman's voice. God! To hear one again. Almost two years now!

And he knew it would probably be five years before he would hear another. That is, if he returned. . . .

"*Soo Yarrow. L'fvayfvoo. Say mwa, zh'net w'stinvak.*"

Hal stood up. His neck was cased in ice. The whisper was coming from the window. He turned his head. The outline of a woman's head leaned into the solid box of moonlight that was the window. Moonwash fell off white shoulders. A pale finger crossed the black of mouth.

"*Poo lamoo d'b'tyu, soo. Seelahs. F'nay. Feet, seel-fvoooplay.*"

NUMBED, but obeying as if shot full of hypno-lipno, he threw aside the sheet over his legs. Slowly, he turned on his buttocks and moved his feet until they touched the stone floor. With a look to make sure Pornsen was still asleep, he rose.

For a second his training almost overcame him and forced him to wake the gapt up. But it was evident the woman was addressing him alone. Her urgency and suppressed fear decided him to take a chance. It also made him wonder if she might not be a member of one of the unreal sects that had fled the Haijac Union two hundred or more years ago—

No. That couldn't be. She spoke in no tongue he knew. For that same reason, it was improbable that she was a party to an expedition from one of the other Earth nations.

Her words had seemed to click something familiar, however—as if he ought to know the language. But he didn't. It wasn't the English or Icelandic or Caucasian of the Haijac Union, or the Hebrew of the Israeli Republics, or the Bazaar or Swahili of the Bantu-Malay Federation. Yet it had sounded like something he'd heard before. And recently.

He picked up his suitcase and shoved it under the sheet. He rolled up a blanket and packed it next to the case. His jacket he folded and laid on the pillow. If Pornsen woke up and took a quick look at the cot, he might be fooled into thinking the bulk under the sheet was Hal's.

Softly, on bare feet, he walked to the doorway. A cylinder the size of a tin can squatted on guard. If any object larger than a mouse came within two feet of the field radiating from the cylinder, it would set up a disturbance which would cause a signal to be transmitted to the small box mounted on a silver bracelet around the gapt's wrist. The box would shrill—as it had at the appearance of the lungbug—and up would come Pornsen from the bottom

of his ever-watchful sleep.

The watchcan was not only there to insure against trespassers. Its primary purpose was to make certain that Hal would not leave the room without Pornsen's knowledge. As the ruins had no working plumbing, the only permissible excuse to step outside would be to relieve bowel or bladder. The gapt would go along to see that that was what he intended.

Two things Pornsen was watching for. One was unsupervised contact with the wogs. The other was that unreal conduct, punishable by exile to H and cataloged in the *Sefer shel ha Chetim*, or the Book of Sins, as Onanism. The long space voyage had resulted in the arrest of five men for that very unreality.

Hal picked up one of the flyswatters given them by the ruins custodian. It had a three-foot-long handle made of some flexible wood. Its mass would not be enough to touch off the field. Though his hand trembled, he grasped the swatter-end and very gently pushed the cylinder to one side with the handle. He had to be careful not to upset it, for that, too, would trigger the alarm. Fortunately, the stone floor was smooth.

When he had stepped outside, he reached back in and slid the cylinder back to its former spot. Then, with his heart pounding under the double burden of tampering with the guard and of meeting a strange woman, he walked around the corner.

She had moved from the window into the shadow of a kneeling goddess' statue about sixty yards away. When Hal began striding toward her, he saw the reason for her hiding. Fobo was strolling towards him. Hal walked faster. He wanted to intercept the wog before he noticed the girl and also before he came so close that their voices might wake up Pornsen.

"*Bon soir*," greeted Fobo. His antennae described little circles. "You seem nervous. Is it that incident of the forenoon?"

"*Non*. I am just restless."

Hal looked at the empathist. Ozagen! What was the story? That the discoverer of this planet, upon first seeing the natives, had exclaimed, "Oz again!" because the aborigines had so much resembled Frank Baum's Professor Wogglebug? Their bodies were rather round, and their limbs were skinny in proportion. Their mouths were shaped like two broad and shallow V's, one set inside the other. The lips were thick and lobular. Actually, a wogglebug had four lips, each leg of the two V's separated by a deep seam at the connection. Once, far back on the evolutionary path, those lips had been modified arms. Now they were rudimentary limbs, so disguised as true labial parts that no one who did not know their history would have guessed their origin. When the wide V-in-V mouths opened in a laugh, they startled the Terrans. The teeth were quite human, true, but a fold of skin hung from the roof of the mouth. Once the epipharynx, it was now a vestigial upper tongue, of no use at all except to tell of the wogs' arthropodal ancestry.

Their skins were as unpigmented as Hal's redhead complexion, but where the Earthman's epidermis was pink, theirs was a very faint green. Copper, not iron, carried oxygen in their blood cells.

They had antennae, their forepates were bald, but a stiff corkscrew fuzz rose from their backpates to form a corona. To complete the Oz parallel, their noses were bridgeless and shot straight out from their faces in projectile fashion.

The Terran who first saw them might have been justified by his remark. However, the story wasn't true. Ozagen was the native name for "Mother Earth."

IV

WOGGLEBUG they were called, yet they were no more insects than the

Earthmen. It was true that millions of years ago their ancestors had been a primitive unspecialized wormlike arthropod. But evolution follows parallel paths when aiming at intelligent beings. Realizing the limitations of the anatomy, she had split Fobo's Nth-great-grandfather from the arthropod phylum. When the crustacea, arachnida, and insecta had formed exoskeletons and ventral nervous systems, Grandpa the Nth had declined to go along with his cousins. He had refused to harden his delicate cuticle-skin into chitin and had begun shifting the central nerves from chest and belly to the back and had also erected a skeleton inside the flesh. Both of the latter feats were equal to lifting oneself by the bootstraps.

As the price for that action, by the time the true arthropods were very developed, highly specialized creatures creeping, hopping, and flying by the billions over the hot new globe, Fobo's ancestors were still ugly, flatwormish things hiding from their beautiful, fully rounded-out relatives.

Becoming chordate arthropods—a contradiction in terms, by the way—was a deed that took many millions of years and much humility and self-denial.

Yet it had been worth it. The wogs' fathers had finally made the ventral to dorsal shift and sheathed their bones in muscle. Their cold blood became warm; they developed airsacs and then lungs. Their nerves ramified and grew intricate. The strata-shot eye of the epoch winked, and a monkeylike creature appeared. Another wink, and it was an ape. After a very long while, as years go, it came down from the trees. Once brachiate, it began walking on two feet. It passed through australopithecoid, pithecanthropoid, and neanderthaloid stages. It became Fobo.

One of the few arthropodal heritages left was the pair of antennae. Eras ago they might have been used, as some insects are supposed to use theirs, for communication. Now their function was rudimentary, but effective. They were

so sensitive they could pick up nervous discharges from the skin of other beings. That gift, thought Hal, probably helped make the Ozagen society what it was. No wogglebug could fool another about his emotions. If he pretended friendliness, he would be betrayed. Hate, fear, rage, affection and love were easily read. A wog had to express what he felt, because he could not hide it. And once he had expressed, he had discharged his emotions, rebalanced his organism, and opened himself to rational talk and conduct.

At least, that was the theory. In actual practice, as Fobo said, it was not so easy.

Hal became aware that Fobo was talking to him:

"— this *joat* that *monsieur* Pornsen called you when he was so angry and furious. What does that mean?"

THE Terran could not tell Fobo that the word was an initial combination, formed from the first letters of jack-of-all-trades. The wog would wonder how they deduced that combination from French.

"It means," he said carefully, "that I am not a specialist in any of the sciences, but one who knows, or is supposed to know, a great deal about all of them. Actually, I am a liaison officer between various scientists and the government. It is my business to summarize and integrate what is going on in science and then report to the hierarchy."

He glanced at the statue. The woman was not in sight.

"Science has become so specialized that intelligible communication even between scientists in the same field is very difficult. Each has a deep vertical knowledge of his own little field, but not much horizontal. The more he knows about his own subject, the less aware he is of what others are doing. It is so bad that a physicist, for instance, who deals in mercury anti-ions will find it hard to talk the same language as one whose

study is radioactive isotopes. Or two doctors who specialize in nose dysfunctions. One treats the left nostril; the other, the right. Believe me, that's not exaggerated."

Fobo shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands. He might have been French.

"But . . . science would come to a standstill!"

"Exactly."

Hal saw a head stick out from the base of the statue. It withdrew. Hal began sweating.

Fobo questioned the joat about the religion of the Forerunner. Hal was as taciturn as possible and replied to some questions not at all. The wog was nothing if not logical, and logic was the light that Hal had never turned upon what he had been taught by the Urielites.

Finally the empathist said, "I feel that this conversation is making you nervous. Perhaps we can pursue it some other time. Tell me, what do you think of these ruins?"

"Very interesting. What I cannot imagine is how these people, who you say once covered this huge continent, could entirely die out."

"Oh, there may be a few in the backwoods or jungles. But most died in the wars with us about five hundred years ago. Since then there's been peace on this planet. It's true we wiped them out, but they were very decadent, quarrelsome and greedy, and forced my ancestors to fight them."

Human, all right, thought Hal.

"I'll tell you later about their decline and fall," Fobo said. "In some ways it is a fantastic story. Right now, I think I'll go to bed."

"I'm restless. If you don't mind, I'll poke around. These ruins are fascinating in the moonlight."

"Reminds me of a poem by our great bard, Shamero. If I could remember it, I'd quote it." Fobo's V-in-V lips yawned. "*Bonne nuit.*"

Hal watched him until he'd disap-

peared, then turned and walked toward the statue of the Great Mother. When he got to the shadows in its base, he saw the girl slipping into the darkness cast by a mountainous heap of rubble. He followed, only to see her thirty yards ahead, leaning against a monolith. Beyond was the lake, silvery and black in the moonpaint.

"*B'swa, soo Yarrow.*" Her voice was low and throaty.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle,*" he said mechanically . . . and then paused, struck.

OF COURSE! Now he knew why it had had a familiar ring. *B'swa* was *bon soir*! Even though her words were a degraded form, they could not disguise their essential Latinity. *B'swa!* And *V'vayfvo* was *levez-vous*, which was French for "get up." How could he have missed it? It must have been because his mind wasn't expecting the familiar, and therefore had not recognized it. *Say mwa. C'est moi.* It's I. And *soo Yarrow*. Could that be *monsieur* Yarrow? The initial m dropped. Final r also. Abandonment of nasalization plus vowel and consonant shifts in other words. Different, but still subtly Gallic.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle.*"

How inadequate those words were. Here were two human beings meeting a thousand light-years from Earth, one a man who had not seen a woman for two years, the other a woman obviously hiding; perhaps the only woman left on the planet. And all he could say was "Good evening, miss."

He stepped closer. Suddenly he was flushed with heat. Her white skin was relieved only by two black, narrow strips of cloth, one across her breasts, the other diapered around the hips. In all his life he had seen only one woman who was not clad from neck to floor in thick cloth, and that had been in a semidarkness. She had been his wife.

The heat of his embarrassment was followed by a gasp of astonishment. She was lipsticked! Her lips were scar-

let in the moonlight with the forbidden rouge.

His mind gave that problem a quick flip in the air and considered its other side. Cosmetics had gone out with the coming of the Forerunner. They were unreal, immoral. No woman dared . . . well, that wasn't true . . . it was just in the Haijac Union that they were not used. Israeli and Bantu women wore rouge; but then everybody knew what kind of women they were.

Another step, and Hal breathed hard again. He was close enough to see that the scarlet was natural. That meant that she was not Earthborn but was an Ozagen human being. The murals in the ruins showed red-lipped women, and Fobo had told him they were born with the flaming labile pigment.

But how could that be? She spoke a Terran dialect.

The next moment he forgot about his doubts and paradoxes. She was clinging to him, and he had his arms around her, clumsily trying to comfort her. She was pouring out words, one so fast after the other that even though he knew they came from the French he could only make out a word here and a phrase there.

Hal asked her to slow down and go over what she had said. She paused, her head cocked slightly to the left, while he enunciated clearly his request. When he was through, she brushed back the hair over one ear, a gesture he was to find characteristic of her when she was thinking.

Then she repeated.

She began slowly enough. But as she progressed she speeded up, her full lips working like two bright-red things independent of her, packed with their own life and purpose.

Fascinated, Hal watched them. As they worked, they seemed to send stabs of desire into him, almost as if they were heliographing erotic messages.

With an effort he lifted his gaze from them and listened, trying to grasp her whole story.

SHE told it disconnectedly and with repetition and backtracking. But he could understand that her name was Jeannette, that she came from a plateau in the tropics of Ozagen, that she was

in the ruins and the nearby forest, that she was frightened because of the things that prowled the forest at night, that she lived on wild fruit and berries or on food stolen from wog farmhouses,



The hideous insectal face was pointed at him

one of the few human beings left on the planet, that she had been captured by an exploring party of wogs and taken to Siddo, that she had only recently escaped, that she had been hiding

that she had seen Hal when he crashed the jalopy, that she had followed him and listened to his conversations with the two wogs and with the gapt, that she could tell by her instincts—here she

used a word that he did not understand but which he translated as "instincts"—that he was a man she could trust, that he had to do something for her.

That he had to save her.

Tears filled her big dark eyes, and her voice broke. She leaned against him; her shoulders were soft and smooth; her full breasts pressed against his ribs. What her words did not say, her body did.

Yarrow thought swiftly. He had to get back to the room in the ruins before Pornsen woke up. And he couldn't see her tomorrow, because a gig from the ship was picking the two Haijacs up in the morning. Whatever he was going to do would have to be told to her in the next few minutes.

Suddenly he had a plan; it unfolded in an instant from another idea, one he had long carried around buried in the fertile soil of his brain. Its seeds had been in him even before the ship had left Earth. But he hadn't had the courage to carry it out. Now, with the sudden appearance of this girl as a catalyst, he was thrown into action. She was what he needed to spark his guts and make him step onto a path that, once taken, could not be retraced.

"Jeannette," he said rapidly and fiercely, "listen to me! You'll have to wait here every night. No matter what things haunt the dark, you'll have to be here. I can't tell you just when I'll be able to get a gig and fly here. Sometime in the next three weeks, I think. If I'm not here by then, keep waiting. *Keep waiting!* I'll be here! And when I am, we'll be safe. Safe for a while, at least. Can you do that? Can you hide here? And wait?"

She nodded her head and said, "Vi."

V

TWO weeks later, Yarrow flew from the spaceship *Gabriel* to the ruins. His needle-shaped gig gleamed in the big moon as it floated over the white marble buildings and settled to a stop. The city

lay silent and bleached, great stone cubes and hexagons and cylinders and pyramids and statues like toys left scattered while the giant child went to bed and slept forever.

The Terran stepped out, glanced to left and right, and then strode to an enormous arch. His flashlight probed its darkness; his voice echoed from the faraway roof and walls.

"*Jeannette. C'est moi. Votre ami, Hal Yarrow. Jeannette. Ou êtes vous?*"

He walked down the fifty-yard-broad staircase that led to the crypts of the kings. The beam bounced up and down the steps and suddenly splashed against the black and white figure of the girl.

"Hal!" she cried, looking up at him. "Thank the Great Stone Mother! I've waited every night! But I knew you'd come!"

Tears trembled on the long lashes; her scarlet mouth was screwed up as if she were doing her best to keep from sobbing. He wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, but a lifetime of "you-must-nots" stiffened his arms. It was a terrible thing even to look at a woman as unclothed as she was. To embrace her would be unthinkable. Nevertheless, that was exactly what he was thinking of.

The next minute, as if divining his paralysis, she moved to him and put her head on his chest. Her own shoulders hunched forward as she tried to burrow into him. He found his arms going around her. His muscles tightened, and heat stabbed from his stomach down into his loins.

He released her and looked away. "We'll talk later. We've no time to lose. Come."

She followed him, silently, until they came to the gig. Then she hesitated by the door. He gestured impatiently for her to climb in and sit down beside him.

"You will think I'm a coward," she said. "But I have never been in a flying machine. To leave this solid earth. . . ."

Surprised, he could only stare at her.

It was hard for him to understand the mental attitude of a person totally unaccustomed to airtravel. Such reactions did not fit into his culture.

"Get in!" he barked.

Obediently enough, she got in and sat down in the co-pilot's seat. She could not keep from trembling, however, or looking with huge brown eyes at the instruments before and around her.

Deciding the best thing to do was to ignore her fear, Hal glanced at his watchphone.

"Ten minutes to get to my apartment in the city. One minute to drop you off there. A half-minute to return to the ship. Fifteen minutes to report on my espionage among the wogs. Thirty seconds to return to the apartment. Not quite half an hour in all. Not bad."

He laughed. "I would have been here two days ago, but I had to wait until all the gigs that were on automatic were in use. Then I pretended that I was in a hurry, that I had forgotten some notes, and that I had to go back to my apartment to pick them up. So I borrowed one of the manually controlled gigs used for exploration outside the city. I never could have gotten permission from the O.D. for that, but he was overwhelmed by this."

Hal touched a large golden badge on his left chest. It bore a Hebrew L.

"That means I'm one of the Chosen. I've passed the 'Meter."

Jeannette had seemingly forgotten her terror and had been looking at Hal's face in the glow from the panel-light. She gave a little cry. "Hal Yarrow! What have they done to you?" Her fingers touched his face.

HE LOOKED at her. A deep purple ringed his eyes; his cheeks were sunken, and in one a muscle twitched; a rash spread over his forehead; and the seven whipmarks stood out against a pale skin.

"Anybody would say I was crazy to do it," he said. "I stuck my head in the lion's mouth. And he didn't bite my

head off. Instead, I bit his tongue."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen. Didn't you think it was strange that Pornsen wasn't with me tonight, breathing his sanctimonious breath down my neck? No? Well, you don't know our setup. There was only one way I could get permission to move out of my quarters in the ship and get an apartment in Siddo. That is, without having a gapt living with me to watch my every move. And without having to leave you out here in the forest. And I couldn't do *that*."

He shook his head. She ran her finger down the line from his nose to the corner of his lip. Ordinarily he would have shrunk from the touch, because he hated close contact with anybody. Now, he didn't shrink.

"Hal," she said softly. "*M' sheh.*"

"*Mon cher,*" he corrected

"*Mon cher,*" she repeated.

He felt a glow. *My dear.* Well, why not?

To stave off the headiness her touch gave, he said, "There was only one thing to do. Volunteer for the 'Meter."

"*Le Mètre? Keskasekasah?*"

"It's the only thing that can free you from the constant shadow of a gapt. Once you've passed it, you're pure, above suspicion—theoretically, at least.

"My petition caught the hierarchy off guard. They never expected any of the scientists—let alone me—to volunteer. Urielites and Uzzites have to take it if they hope to advance in the hierarchy—"

"Urielites? Uzzites?"

"To put it in ancient terminology, priests and cops. The Forerunner adopted those terms—the names of angels—for religious-governmental use—from the Talmud. See?"

"*Non.*"

"You'll be clearer about that later. Anyway, only the most zealous ask to face the 'Meter. It's true that many people do, but the majority do it because they are compelled to. The Urielites were gloomy about my chances be-

fore it, but they were forced by law to let me try my chances. Besides, they were bored, and they wanted to be entertained—in their grim fashion.

HE SCOWLED a little at the memory. "So it was that a day later I was told to report to the psych lab at 2300 S.T.—Ship's Time, that is. I went into my cabin — Pornsen was out — opened my labcase, and took out a bottle labeled 'Prophetsfood.' It was supposed to contain a powder whose base was peyote. That's a drug that was once used by American Indian medicine-men."

"Quoi?"

"Just listen. You'll get the main points. Prophetsfood is taken by everybody during Purification Period. That's two days of locking yourself in a cell, fasting, praying, being flagellated by electric whips, and seeing visions induced by hunger and Prophetsfood. Also subjective time-traveling."

"Quoi?"

"Don't keep saying 'What?' I haven't got time to explain dunnology . . . It took me ten years of hard study to understand it and its mathematics. Even then, there were a lot of questions I had. But it's not wise to ask them. You might be thought to be doubting.

"Anyway, my bottle did not hold Prophetsfood. Instead it contained a substitute I'd secretly prepared just before the ship left Earth. That powder was the reason why I dared face the 'Meter. And why I was not as terrified as I should have been . . . though I was scared enough. Believe me."

"I do believe you. You were brave. You overcame your fear."

Hot blood crept beneath his face-skin. It was the first time in his life he had ever been complimented.

"A month before the expedition took off for Ozagen, I had noticed in one of the many scientific journals that passed under my nose an announcement that a certain drug had been synthesized. Its efficacy was in destroying the virus of the so-called Sirian 'rash.'

What interested me was a footnote. It was in small print and in Hebrew, which showed that the biochemist must have realized its importance."

"Poow kwa?"

"Why? Well, I imagine it was in Hebrew in order to keep any layman from understanding it. If a secret like that became generally known. . . .

"The note commented briefly that it had been found that a man suffering from the 'rash' was temporarily immune to the effects of hypno-lipno. And that the Urielites should take care during any sessions with the 'Meter that their subject was healthy."

"I have trouble understanding you," she said.

"I'll go slower. Hypno-lipno is the most widely used truth-drug. I saw at once the implications in the note. The beginning of the article had described how the Sirian 'rash' was narcotically induced for experimental purposes. The drug used was not named, but it did not take me long to look it and its processing up in other journals. I thought: if the true 'rash' would make a man immune to hypno-lipno, why wouldn't the artificial?

"No sooner said than done. I prepared a batch, inserted a tape of questions about my personal life in a psychotester, injected the 'rash' drug, injected the truth drug, and swore that I would lie to the tester about my life. And I *could* lie, even though shot full of hypno-lipno!"

"You're so intelligent," she murmured.

SHE squeezed his biceps. He hardened them. It was a vain thing to do, but he wanted her to think he was strong.

"Nonsense!" he clipped. "A blind man would have seen what to do. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the Uzzites had arrested the chemist and put out orders for some other truth drug to be used. If they did, they were too late. Our ship left before any such news reached us.

"Anyway, the first day with the 'Meter was nothing to worry about. I took a twelve-hour written and oral test in serialism. That's Dunne's theories of time and Sigmen's amplifications on it. I've been taking that same test for years. Easy but tiring.

"The next day I rose early, bathed, injected what was supposed to be Prophetsfood, and, breakfastless, went into the Purification Cell. Alone, I lay two days on a cot. From time to time I took a drink of water or a shot of the false drug. Now and then I pressed the button that sent the mechanical scourge lashing against me. The more flagellations, you know, the higher your credit.

"I didn't see any visions. I did break out with the 'rash.' That didn't worry me. If anybody got suspicious, I could explain that I had an allergy to Prophetsfood. Some people do."

He looked below. Moonfrosted forest and an occasional square or hexagonal light from a farmhouse. Ahead was

the high range of hills that shielded Siddo.

"So," he continued, unconsciously talking faster as the hills loomed closer, "at the end of my purification I rose, dressed, and ate the ceremonial dinner of locusts and honey."

"Ugh!"

"Locusts aren't so bad if you've been eating them since childhood."

"Locusts are delicious," she said. "I've eaten them many times. It's the combination with honey that sickens me."

He shrugged and said, "I'm turning out the cabin lights. Get down on the floor. And put on that cloak and night-mask. You can pass for a wog."

OBEDIENTLY she slid off the seat. Before he flicked the lights off, he glanced down. She was leaning over while picking up the cloak, and he could not help getting a full glimpse of her

[Turn page]



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superb breasts. Though he jerked his head away, he kept the image in his head. He felt both deeply aroused and ashamed.

He continued uncomfortably: "Then the hierarch came in. Macneff the Sandalphon, that is, the Archurielite, the theologians, and the dunnological specialists: the psychoneural parallelists, the interventionists, the substratumists, the chronotropists, the pseudotemporalists, the cosmobservists.

"I was seated on a chair. Wires were taped to my body. Needles were stuck in my arms and back. Hypno-lipno was injected. The lights were turned out. Prayers were said; readings from the Western Talmud and the Revised Scriptures were intoned. Then a spotlight shone down from the ceiling upon the Elohimeter. . . ."

"*Keskasekasah?*"

"Elohim is Hebrew for God. Meter is Greek for—well, for those." He pointed at the instrument panel. "The Elohimeter is round and enormous, and its needle, as long as my arm, is straight up and down. The circumference of the dial's face is marked with Hebraic letters that are supposed to mean something to those giving the test.

"Most people are ignorant of what the dipping and rising needle shows. But I'm a joat. I've access to the books that describe the test."

"Then you knew the answers, *nespa?*"

"*Oui.* Though that means nothing, because hypno-lipno brings out the truth, the reality . . . unless, of course, you are suffering from Sirian 'rash,' natural or artificial."

His sudden laugh was a mirthless bark.

"Under the drug, Jeannette, all the dirty and foul things you've done and thought, all the hates you've had for your superiors, all the doubts about the realness of the Forerunner's doctrines—these rise up from your lower-level minds like soap released at the bottom of a dirty bathtub. Up it comes, slick and irresistibly buoyant and covered

with all the layers of scum.

"But I sat there, and I watched the needle—it's just like watching the face of God, Jeannette—you can't understand that, can you?—and I lied. Oh, I didn't overplay it. I didn't pretend to be incredibly pure and faithful. I confessed to minor unrealities. Then the needle would flicker and go back around the circumference a few square letters. But on the big issues, I answered as if my life depended on them. Which it did.

"And I told them my dreams—my subjective time-traveling."

"*Subjectif?*"

"*Oui.* Everybody travels in time subjectively. But the Forerunner is the only man, except his first disciples and a few of the scriptural prophets, who has traveled objectively.

"Anyway, my dreams were beauties—architecturally speaking. Just what they liked to hear. My last, and crowning, creation—or lie—was one in which the Forerunner himself appeared on Ozagen and spoke to the Sandalphon, Macneff. That event is supposed to take place a year from now."

"Oh, Hal!" she breathed. "Why did you tell them that?"

"Because now, *ma chère*, the expedition will not leave Ozagen until that year is up. They couldn't go without giving up the chance of seeing Sigmen in the flesh as he voyages up and down the stream of time. Nor without making a liar of him. And of me. So, you see, that colossal lie will make sure that we have at least a year together. . . ."

"And then?"

"We'll think of something else then."

Her throaty voice murmured in the darkness by the seat: "And you would do all that for me. . . ."

HAL did not reply. He was too busy keeping the gig close to the rooftop level. Clumps of buildings, widely separated by woods, flashed by. So fast was he going that he almost overshot

Fobo's castlelike house. Three stories high, medieval-seeming with its crenelated towers and gargoyle heads of stone beasts and insects leering out from many niches, it was not nearer than a hundred yards to any other building. Wogs built their cities with plenty of elbow-room in mind.

Jeanette put on the long-snouted nightmask; the gig's door swung open; they ran across the sidewalk and into the building. After they dashed through the lobby and up on the steps to the second floor, they had to stop while Hal fumbled for the key. He had had a wog smith make the lock and a wog carpenter install it. He hadn't trusted the carpenter's mate from the ship, because there was too much chance of duplicate keys being made.

He finally found the key, had trouble inserting it. When the door opened, he was breathing hard. He almost pushed Jeannette through. She had taken her mask off.

"Wait, Hal," she said, leaning her weight against his. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"Oh, *Forerunner!* What could it be? Something serious?"

"No. I only thought," and she smiled and then lowered her lids, "that it was the Terran custom for men to carry their brides across the threshold."

His jaw dropped. Bride! She was certainly taking a lot for granted!

He couldn't take time to argue. Without a word, he swept her up in his arms and carried her into the apartment. There he put her down and said, "Back as soon as possible. If anybody knocks or tries to get in, hide in that special closet I told you about. Don't make a sound or come out until you're sure it's me."

She suddenly put her arms around him and kissed him.

"*M'sheh, m'gwa, foh.*"

Things were going too fast. He didn't say a word or even return her kiss. Vaguely he felt that her words, applied to him, were somewhat ridiculous. If

he translated her degenerate French right, she had called him her dear, her strong man.

Turning, he closed the door; but not so quickly that he did not see the hall-light shine on a white face haloed blackly by a hood. A red red mouth stained the whiteness.

He shook. He had a feeling that Jeannette was not going to be the frigid mate so much admired, officially, by the Sturch.

VI

HAL was an hour late returning home from the *Gabriel*, because the Sandalphon asked for more details about the prophecy he'd made concerning Sigmen. Then Hal had to dictate his report on the day's espionage to a stenoservo. Afterwards, he ordered a sailor to pilot his gig back to the apartment. While he was walking toward the launching-rack, he met Pornsen.

"*Shalom, abba,*" greeted Hal.

He smiled and rubbed his knuckles against the raised lamech on the shield.

The gapt's left shoulder, always low, sagged even more, as if it were a flag dipping in surrender. His ward was now out of his reach. More, if there were any whipcuts to be given, they would be struck by Yarrow.

The goat puffed out his chest and started to walk on, but Pornsen said, "Just a minute, son. Are you going back to the city?"

"Shib."

"Shib. I'll ride back with you. I have an apartment in the same building. On the third floor, right next door to Fobo's.

Hal opened his mouth to protest, then closed it. It was Pornsen's turn to smile. He knew he had nettled the goat. He turned and led the way. Hal followed with tight lips. Had the gapt perhaps trailed him and seen his meeting with Jeannette? No. If he had, he would have had Hal arrested at once.

The thing was that the gapt was small-minded. He knew his presence would annoy Hal.

Under his breath Hal quoted an old proverb, "A gapt's teeth never let loose."

The sailor was waiting by the gig. They all got in and dropped silently into the night.

At the apartment-building Hal strode into the doorway ahead of Pornsen. He felt a slight glow of satisfaction at thus breaking etiquette and expressing his contempt for the man.

Before opening his door, he paused. The guardian angel passed silently behind him. Hal, struck with a devilish thought, called out in French, "*Père!*"

Pornsen turned.

"What?"

"Would you care to inspect my rooms and see if I'm hiding a woman in there?"

The little man purpled. He closed his eyes and swayed, dizzy with sheer fury. When he opened them he shouted, "Yarrow! If ever I saw an unreal personality, you're it! I don't care how you stand with the hierarchy! I think you're—you're—just not simply shib!"

Hal looked blank. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Pornsen. I'm pure. I've proven there isn't an evil thought in my head."

His voice became strident, harsh. "Pornsen, you've just been talking in English! I'm sorry, but I have to report that in the morning. You know what that means!"

Pornsen's red face was suddenly drained of its blood. He opened his mouth, closed it, looked at Yarrow's merciless face, spun on his bootheels and walked away.

Hal leaned against the doorway. He felt both weak and triumphant. When he had recovered from the reaction of baiting his guardian, he turned the key in his lock. Around and around in his head flew the thought that it had taken this girl only a few hours to fill him with enough courage to overcome thirty

years of fear and submissiveness.

He clicked on the front room lights. Looking beyond into the dining room, he could see the closed kitchen door. The rattling of pots came through it. He sniffed deeply.

Steak!

The pleasure was replaced by a frown. He'd told her to hide until he returned. What if he had been a wog or an Uzzite?

When he swung the door open, the hinges squeaked. Jeannette's back was to him. At the first protest of un-oiled iron, she whirled. The spatula in her hand dropped; the other hand flew to her open mouth.

The angry words on his lips died. If he were to scold her now, she would probably break out in embarrassing tears.

"*M'tyuh!* You startled me!"

He grunted and went by her to lift the lids on the pots.

"You see," she said, her voice trembling as if she divined his anger and were defending herself, "I have lived such a life, being afraid of getting caught, that anything sudden scares me. I am always ready to run."

"How those wogs fooled me!" Hal said sourly. "I thought they were so kind and gentle, and now I find they've kept you prisoner for two years."

She glanced at him out of the side of her large eyes. Her color had come back; her red lips smiled.

"Oh, they weren't so bad. They really were kind. They gave me everything I wanted, except my freedom. They were afraid I'd make my way back to my aunts and sisters."

"What did they care?"

"Oh, they thought there might be some males of my race left in the jungle and that I might give them children. They are terribly frightened of my race becoming numerous and strong again and making war on them. They do not like war."

"Hm! Well, let's eat."

When they had finished, he sighed,

patted his stomach, and said, "Ah, Jeannette, the soup was the best I ever tasted. The bread was fresh and hot. The salad was superb. The steak was perfect."

"My aunts gave me very good training. Among my people the female is taught at an early age all that will please a man. All. By the time we've grown up, we do it almost instinctively."

Hal leaned back and lit a cigarette. She tried one, coughed, then drew in and blew out smoke like a veteran. She seemed to have an amazing facility for imitation. Show or tell her something once, and she never forgot it.

They smoked awhile, looking at each other. During the meal she had chattered lightly and amusingly about her life with her father and her relatives. She had the trick of raising her eyebrows as she laughed; he was fascinated by them. They were almost bracket-shaped. A thin line rose from the bridge of the nose, turned at right angles, curved slightly while going above the eyesockets, and then made a little hook downwards. He asked her if the shape was a trait of her mother's people. She laughed and said No, she got them from her father. Her laughter was low and musical. It did not get on his nerves, as his ex-wife's had. Lulled by it, he felt pleasant. She seemed to have a sixth sense that guessed his moods and thoughts and exactly what he needed to blunt any gloominess or sharpen any gaiety.

Finally he said, "We'll have to wash the dishes. It would never do for a visitor to see a table set for two. And another thing: we'll have to hide the cigarettes, and air out the rooms frequently. Now that I've been 'Metered, I'm supposed to have renounced such vices as smoking."

Jeannette would not let him help her do the dishes. He smoked and speculated about the chances of getting tobacco. She so enjoyed the cigarettes that he could not stand the idea of her missing out on them. One of the crewmen he

knew did not smoke, but instead sold his ration to his mates. Maybe a go could act as middleman; buy the stuff from the sailor, and pass it on to Hal. He'd have to be careful . . . maybe it wasn't worth it. . . .

Hal sighed. Having Jeannette was wonderful, but she was beginning to complicate his life. Here he was, contemplating a criminal action as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

She was standing before him, hands on her hips, eyes shining.

"Now, Hal, *mon cher*, if we only had something to drink . . . it would make a perfect evening."

He got to his feet. "Sorry. I forgot you wouldn't know how to make coffee."

"*Non. Non.* It is the liquor I am thinking of. *L'alcool. Pas le café.*"

"Alcohol? Good God, girl, we don't *drink!* That'd be the most disgust—"

He stopped. She was hurt. He mastered himself. After all, she couldn't help it. She came from a different culture. She wasn't even, strictly speaking, all human.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's a religious matter. Forbidden."

Tears filled her eyes. Her shoulders began to shake. She put her face into her hands and began to sob. "You don't understand. I have to have it. I have to."

"But why?"

She spoke from behind her fingers. "Because during my imprisonment I had little to do but entertain myself. My captors gave me liquor; it helped to pass the time and make me forget how utterly homesick I was. Before I knew it, I was an—an alcoholic."

Hal clenched his fists and growled, "Those sons of bugs!"

"So you see, I have to have a drink. It would make me feel better, just for the time being. And later, maybe later, I can try to overcome it. I know I can, if you'll help me."

He gestured emptily. "But—but where can I get you any?" His stomach

revolted at the idea of trafficking in alcohol, but if she needed it, he'd try his best to get it.

Swiftly she said, "Fobo lives on the third floor. Perhaps he could give you some."

"But Fobo was one of your captors! Won't he suspect something if I come asking for alcohol?"

"He'll think it's for you."

"All right," he said, somewhat sullenly, and at the same time guiltily because he was sullen. "But I hate for anybody to think I drink. Even if he is just a wog."

She came up to him and seemed to flow against him. Her lips pressed softly and hotly. Her body tried to pass through his. He held her for a minute and then took his mouth away.

"Do I have to leave you?" he whispered. "Couldn't you pass up the liquor? Just for tonight? Tomorrow I'll get you some."

Her voice broke. "Oh, *m'namoow*, I wish I could. How I wish I could. But I can't. I just can't. Believe me. . . ."

"I believe you."

He released her and walked into the front room, where he took a hood, cloak, and nightmask out of the closet. His head was bent; his shoulders sagged. Everything would be spoiled. He would not be able to get near her, not with her breath stinking with alcohol. And she'd probably wonder why he was cold, and he wouldn't have the nerve to tell how revolting she was, because that would hurt her feelings. To make it worse, she'd be hurt anyway, if he offered no explanation.

Before he left, she kissed him again on his now frozen lips.

"Hurry! I'll be waiting."

"Yeah."

VII

YARROW knocked lightly. Fobo's apartment was next door to Pornsen's. Tonight was not a good time for the gont to see him visiting the empathist.

When the door opened, he stepped in and shut it quickly. Noise bounced off the walls of the room, large as a basketball court. Screaming, twelve wog children raced around. Abasa, Fobo's wife, was sitting in one corner and chattering with three female visitors. The empathist himself was at a table by the door, reading.

Hal shouted, "How can you concentrate?"

Fobo looked up. "Why, can't you cut out all unwanted noises with an effort of will? That is, turn off certain nerve paths? No? Well, we wogs can, though how, we don't know. That is one of the subjects for research at the nearby College of Empathology. And now, won't you sit down? I'd offer you a drink, but I'm fresh out."

Hal was sure that his dismay didn't show on his face, but Fobo's antennae must have picked it up.

"Anything wrong?"

Hal decided not to waste time. "Yes. Where can I get a quart of liquor?"

The wog took his night garments down from a hook, put them on, and then buckled on a broad leather belt with sheath and short rapier.

"I was just thinking of going out and getting some. You see, this empathology is very trying on the nerves. I run into so many people who need help; and since I must put myself into their shoes, feel their emotions as they feel them, and then must wrench myself out of their shoes and take an objective look at their problems, I am exhausted and shaken at the end of the day. I find that a drink or two relaxes me. You understand?"

The Terran didn't, but he shook his head yes. He wondered how he was going to explain that he was breaking the law by drinking. He'd have to stress the necessity of saying nothing to Pornsen.

Outside, Hal said, "Why the sword?"

"Oh, there isn't much danger, but it's best to be careful. You see, this is a world of insects whose development and specialization go even beyond that of

your planet. You know the parasites and mimics that infest ant colonies, don't you? The beetles that look like ants and make an easy living from that resemblance? The pygmy ants and other tiny creatures that live in the walls and prey on the eggs and the young? Well, we have things analogous to them. Things that hide in sewers or basements or hollow trees and creep around the city at night. Our streets are well-lighted and patrolled, but they are often separated by wooded stretches. . . ."

By the time Fobo had finished talking, they had passed through a park, zigzagged down a dozen blocks of a shopping district, now closed, and stopped before a building in front of which a big electric sign blazed.

"Duroku's Tavern," translated Fobo.

IT WAS in the basement. Hal, after stopping to shudder at the blast of liquor that came up the steps, followed the wog. In the entrance he paused to blink.

Loud odors of alcohol mingled with loud bars of a strange music and even louder talk. Wogs crowded the hexagonal-topped tables and leaned across big pewter steins to shout in each other's face. Antennae wiggled with drunken emotion. Somebody waved his hands uncoordinatedly and sent a stein crashing. A waitress, looking much like her Terran counterpart with her white apron and peaked cap, hurried up with a towel to mop up the mess. When she

bent over, she was slapped resoundingly on the rump by a jovial, greenfaced, and very fat wogglebug. His tablemates howled with laughter, their broad V-in-V lips wide open. The waitress laughed, too, and said something to the fat one that must have been witty, for the tables roundabout guffawed.

On a platform at one end of the room a five-piece band slammed out fast and weird notes. Hal saw three instruments that looked Terranlike: a harp, a trumpet, and a drum. A fourth musician, however, was not himself producing any music, but was now and then prodding with a long stick a rabbit-sized locustoid insect in a cage. When so urged, the creature rubbed its hind wings over its back legs and gave four loud chirps followed by a long, nerve-scratching screech.

The fifth player was pumping away at a bellows connected to a bag and three short and narrow pipes. A thin squealing came out.

Fobo shouted, "You mustn't judge Ozagen by this place. It's a lowerclass hangout. Especially, don't think that noise is typical of our music. It's cheap popular stuff. I'll take you to a symphony concert one of these days, and you'll hear what great music is like."

The wog led the man to one of the curtained-off booths scattered along the walls. They sat down. A waitress came to them. Sweat ran off her forehead and down her tubular nose.

[Turn page]

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"Keep your mask on until we've gotten our drinks," said Fobo. "Then we can close the curtains."

The waitress said something in Wog. Fobo repeated in French, "Beer, wine, or alcohol à la beetle. Myself, I wouldn't touch the first two. They're for women and children."

The Terran didn't want to lose face. He said with a bravado he didn't feel, "The latter, of course."

"Double shot?"

Hal didn't know what that meant, but he nodded.

Fobo held up two fingers. The waitress returned quickly with two big steins. The wog leaned his nose into the fumes and breathed deeply. He closed his eyes in ecstasy, lifted the stein, and drank a long time. When he put the container down, he belched loudly and then smacked his lips.

"Tastes as good coming up as going down!" he bellowed.

The man felt queasy. Eructation was very frowned upon in the Haijac Union.

"*Mais, monsieur!* You are not drinking."

Yarrow said weakly, "*Damifaino,*" the Ozagen equivalent of mud-in-your-eye, and drank.

Fire ran down his throat like lava down a volcano's slope. And, like a volcano, Hal erupted. He coughed and wheezed; liquor spurted out of his mouth; his eyes shut and squeezed out big tears.

"*Tres bonne, n'est-ce pas?*" said Fobo calmly.

"Yes, very good," croaked Yarrow from a throat that seemed to be permanently scarred. Though he had spat most of the stuff out, some of it must have dropped straight through his intestines and into his legs, for he felt a hot tide down there swinging back and forth as if pulled by some invisible moon circling around and around in his head, a big moon that bulged and brushed against the inside of his skull.

"Have another."

The second drink he managed better

—outwardly, at least, for he did not cough or sputter. But inwardly he was not so unconcerned. His belly writhed, and he was sure he would disgrace himself. After a few deep breaths, he thought he would keep the liquor down. Then he belched. The lava got as far as his throat before he managed to stop it.

"Pardon me," he said, blushing.

"Why?" said Fobo.

Hal thought that was one of the funniest retorts he had ever heard. He laughed loudly and sipped at the stein. If he could empty it swiftly and then buy a quart for Jeannette, he could get back before the night was completely wasted.

WHEN the liquor had receded halfway down the stein, Hal heard Fobo, dimly and faroff as if he were at the end of a long tunnel, ask him if he cared to see where the alcohol was made.

"Shib," Hal agreed.

He rose, but had to put a hand on the table to steady himself. The wog told him to put his mask back on. "Earthmen are still objects of curiosity. We don't want to waste all evening answering questions. Or drinking drinks that'll be forced on us."

They threaded through the noisy crowd to a backroom. There Fobo gestured and said, "*Voilà. L'escarbot.*"

Hal looked. If he had not had some of his inhibitions washed away in the liquorish flood, he might have been overwhelmingly repulsed. As it was, he was curious.

The thing sitting on a chair by the table might at first glance have been taken for a wogglebug. It had the antennae, the blond fuzz, the bald pate, the nose, and the V-shaped mouth. It also had the round body and enormous paunch of some of the Ozagens.

But a second look in the bright light from the unshaded bulb overhead showed a creature whose body was sheathed in a hard and lightly green-

tinted chitin. And though it wore a long cloak, the legs and arms were naked. They were not smooth-skinned but were ringed, segmented with the edges of armor-sections, like stovepipes.

Fobo spoke to it in Wog. Yarrow understood some of the words; the others he was able to fill in.

"Ducko, this is Mr. Yarrow. Say hello to Mr. Yarrow, Ducko."

The big blue eyes looked at Hal. There was nothing about them to distinguish them from a wog's, yet they seemed inhuman, thoroughly arthropodal.

"Hello, Mr. Yarrow," Ducko said in a parrot's voice.

"Tell Mr. Yarrow what a fine night it is."

"It's a fine night, Mr. Yarrow."

"Tell him Ducko is happy to see him."

"Ducko is happy to see you."

"And serve him."

"And serve you."

"Show Mr. Yarrow how you make beetlejuice."

A wog standing by the table glanced at his wristwatch. He spoke in rapid Ozagen. Fobo translated.

"He says Ducko ate a half hour ago. He should be ready to serve. These creatures eat a big meal every half hour and then they—watch!"

Duroku hurried up with a huge earthenware bowl and set it on the table. Ducko leaned over it until a half-inch long tube, probably a modified tracheal opening, was poised above the edge. From the tube he shot a clear liquid into the bowl until it was filled to the brim. Duroku grabbed the bowl and carried it off. An Ozagen came from the kitchen with a plate of highly-sugared spaghetti. He set it down, and Ducko began eating from it with a big spoon.

HAL'S brain was by then not working very fast, but he began to see what was going on. Frantically, he looked around for a place to throw up. Fobo shoved a drink under his nose. For lack of anything better to do, he swallowed some. Whole hog or none. Surprising-

ly, the fiery stuff settled his stomach. Or else burned away the rising tide.

"Exactly," replied Fobo to Hal's strangled question. "These creatures are a superb example of parasitical mimicry. Though quasi-insectal, they look much like us. They live among us and earn their board and room by furnishing us with a cheap and smooth alcoholic drink. You noticed its enormous belly, no? *Eh bien*, it is there that they so rapidly manufacture the alcohol and so easily upchuck it. Simple and natural, *oui*? Duroku has two others working for him, but it is their night off, and doubtless they are in some neighborhood tavern, getting drunk. A sailor's holiday. . . ."

Hal burst out, "Can't we buy a quart and get out? I feel sick. It must be the closeness of the air. Or something."

"Something, probably," murmured Fobo.

He sent a waitress after two quarts. While they were waiting for her, they saw a short wog in a mask and blue cloak enter. The newcomer stood in the doorway, black boots widespread and the long tubular projection of the mask pointing this way and that like a sub's periscope peering for prey.

Hal gasped and said, "Pornsens!"

"*Oui*," replied Fobo. "That drooping shoulder and the black boots and the lack of antennae give him away. Who does he think he's fooling?"

The joat looked wildly around. "I've got to get out of here!"

The waitress returned with the bottles. Fobo paid her and gave one to Hal, who automatically put it in the inside pocket of his cloak.

The gapt saw them through the doorway, but he must not have recognized them. Yarrow still wore his mask, while the empathist probably still looked to Pornsen like any other wog. Methodical as always, Pornsen evidently determined to make a thorough search. He brought up his sloping shoulder in a sudden gesture and began parting the curtains of the booths along the walls.

Whenever he saw a wog with his or her mask on, he lifted the grotesque covering and looked behind.

Fobo chuckled. "He won't keep that up long. What does he think we Ozagens are? A bunch of rabbits?"

What he had been waiting for happened. A burly wog suddenly stood up as Pornsen reached for his mask and instead lifted the gapt's. Surprised at seeing a non-Ozagenian's features, the wog dropped his jaw and stared for a second. Then he gave a screech, yelled something, and punched the Earthman in the nose.

At once there was bedlam. Pornsen staggered back into a table, knocking it and its steins over, and fell to the floor. Two wogs jumped him. Another hit a fourth. The fourth struck back. Duroku, carrying a short club, hurried up and began thumping his fighting customers on the back and legs. Somebody threw beetlejuice in his face.

And at that moment Fobo threw the switch that plunged the tavern into darkness.

VIII

HAL stood bewildered. A hand seized his. "Follow me!" The hand tugged. Hal turned and allowed himself to be led, stumbling, toward what he thought was the backdoor.

Any number of others must have had the same idea. Hal was knocked down and trampled upon. Fobo's hand was torn from his. Yarrow cried out for the wog, but any possible answer was drowned out in a chorus of *Beat it! Get off my back, you dumb son-of-a-bug! Great Larva, we're piled up in the doorway!*

Sharp reports added to the noise. A foul stench choked Hal as the wogs, under nervous stress, released the gas in their madbags. Gasping, he fought his way through the door. A few seconds later his mad scrambling over twisting bodies got him his freedom. He lurched down an alleyway. Once on the street,

he ran as fast as he could. He didn't know where he was going. His one thought was to put as much distance as possible between himself and Pornsen.

Arc-lights on top of tall slender iron poles flashed by. He ran with his shoulder almost scraping the buildings. He wanted to stay in the shadows thrown by the many balconies jutting out from the second stories. Presently, he slowed down at a narrow passageway. A glance showed him it wasn't a blind alley. He darted down it until he came to a large square can, one that by its odor must have been used for garbage. Squatting behind it, he tried to lessen his gaspings. After a minute his lungs regained their balance; he no longer had to sob for air. Then he could listen without having his heart thudding in his ears.

He heard no pursuer. After a while he decided it was safe to rise. He felt the bottle in his cloakpocket. Miraculously, it had not been broken. Jeanette would get her liquor. What a story he would have to tell her! After all he had gone through for her, he would surely get a just reward. . . .

He shivered with goose-pimples at the thought and began to walk briskly down the alley. Where he was he had no idea, but he carried a map of the city in his pocket. It had been printed in the ship and bore street names in Ozagen with French translations beneath. All he had to do was read the street-signs under one of the many lamps, orient himself with the map, and return home. As for Pornsen, the fellow had no real evidence against him, and would not be able to accuse him until he got some. Hal's possession of the golden lamech made him above suspicion. Pornsen. . . .

PORNSEN! No sooner had he muttered the name than the flesh appeared. There was a click of hard boot-heels behind him. He turned. A short, cloaked figure was coming down the alley. A lamp's glow outlined the droop of a shoulder and shone on black leather boots. His mask was off.

"Yarrow!" shrilled the gapt. "No use running! Wait!" Triumph was in the voice. "I saw you go in that tavern!"

He clickclacked up to his ward's tall rigid form. "Drinking! I know you were drinking!"

"Yeah?" Hal croaked. "What else?"

"Isn't that enough?" screamed the gapt. "Or are you hiding something in your apartment? Maybe you are! Maybe you've got the place filled with bottles. Come on. Come on. Let's get back to your apartment. We'll go over it and see what we see. I wouldn't be surprised to find all sorts of evidence of your unreal thinking."

Hal hunched his shoulders and clenched his fists, but he said nothing. When the gapt told him to precede him back to Fobo's building, he walked without a sign of resistance. Like conqueror and conquered, they marched from the alley into the street. Yarrow, however, spoiled the picture by reeling a little and having to put his hand to the wall to steady himself.

Pornsen sneered, "You drunken joat! You make me sick to my stomach!"

Hal pointed ahead. "I'm not the only one who's sick. Look at that fellow."

He was not really interested, but he had a wild hope that anything he said or did, however trivial, might put off the final and fatal moment when they would return to his apartment. What he indicated was a large and evidently intoxicated wogglebug hanging onto a lamp post to keep from falling on his tube-shaped nose. The picture might have been one of a nineteenth of twentieth century drunk, complete to top hat, cloak and lamp post. Now and then the creature groaned as if he were deeply disturbed.

"Perhaps we'd better stop and see if he's hurt?" said Hal.

He had to say anything, anything, to delay Pornsen. Before his captor could protest, he went up to the wog. He put his hand on the free arm—the other was wrapped around the post—and spoke in Ozagen.

"Can we help you?"

The big wog looked as if he, too, had been in a brawl. His cloak, besides being ripped down the back, was spotted with dried green blood. He kept his face away from Hal, so that the Earthman had a hard time understanding his muttering.

Pornsen jerked at his arm. "Come on, Yarrow. He'll get by all right. What's one sick bug more or less?"

"Shib," agreed Hal, tonelessly. He let his hand drop and started to walk on. Pornsen, behind, took one step . . . and then bumped into Hal as Hal stopped.

"What are you stopping for, Yarrow?" The gapt's voice was suddenly apprehensive.

And then the voice was screaming in agony.

HAL whirled . . . to see in grim actuality what had flashed across his mind and caused him to stop in his tracks. When he had put his hand on the wog's arm, he had felt, not warm skin, but hard and cool chitin. For a few seconds the meaning of that had not cleared the brain's switchboard. Then it had come through, and he had remembered the talk he and Fobo had had on the way to the tavern, and why Fobo wore a sword. Too late, he had wheeled to warn Pornsen.

Now the gapt was holding both hands to his eyes and shrieking. The big thing that had been leaning against the lamp post was advancing towards Hal. Its body seemed to grow huger with every step. A sac across its chest was swelled until it looked like a palpitating grey balloon; the hideous insectal face, with two vestigial arms waving on each side of its mouth and the funnel-shaped proboscis below the mouth, was pointed at him. It was that proboscis which Hal had mistakenly thought was a wog's nose. In reality, the thing must breathe through tracheae and two slits below the enormous eyes.

Hal yelled with fury and as a means

of discharging his fear. At the same time he grabbed his cloak and threw it up before his face. His mask might have saved him, but he did not care to take the chance.

Something burned the back of his hand. He yelped with pain, but leaped forward. Before the thing could breath in air to bloat the sac again and expell the acid through the funnel, Hal rammed his head against its paunch.

The thing said, "Oof!" and fell backward where it lay on its back and thrashed its legs and arms like a giant poisonous bug—which it was. Then, as it recovered from the shock and rolled over and tried to get back on its feet, Hal kicked hard. His leather toe drove with a crunching sound through the thin chitin.

The toe withdrew; a greenish blood oozed out; Hal kicked again in the open place. The thing screamed and tried to crawl away on all fours. The Terran leaped upon it with both feet and bore it sprawling to the cement. He pressed his heel against its thin neck and shoved with all the strength of his leg. The neck cracked. The thing lay still. Its lower jaw dropped open and exposed two rows of tiny needle-teeth. The mouth's rudimentary arms wigwagged feebly for a while and then drooped.

Hal's chest heaved in agony. He couldn't get enough air. His guts quivered and threatened to force their way through his throat. Then they did, and Hal bent over, retching.

All at once, he was sober. By that time Pornsen had quit screaming. He was lying huddled on his side in the gutter. Hal turned him over and shuddered at what he saw. The eyes were partly burned out, and the lips were grey with large blisters. The tongue, too, sticking from the mouth, was swollen and lumpy. Evidently Pornsen had swallowed some of the venom. According to Fobo, even a small part was fatal.

Hal straightened up and walked away. A wog patrol would find the gapt's body and turn it over to the Earthmen. Let

the hierarchy figure out what had happened. Pornsen was dead, and now that he was, Yarrow admitted to himself what he had never allowed himself to admit before this time. He had hated Pornsen. And he was glad that he was dead. If Pornsen had suffered horribly, so what? His pains were brief, but the pain and grief he had caused Hal had lasted for almost thirty years.

In all that time Hal had kept unconscious his desire to kill the man. Now his feelings, anti-climactically, exploded. Tears ran down his cheeks; his shoulders shook with sobs; he staggered like a drunk. Something was reaching down into his intestines and tearing them apart. It wasn't grief. It was hate, working out like a poison, a swift poison leaving his body but boiling him alive. Still, it was coming out, and though he felt that he was dying while it lasted, by the time he arrived at home he felt much better. Fatigue held his arms and legs down, and he could hardly make it up the steps. But inside, where the heart was, he was stronger than he had ever been in his life.

IX

A TALL ghost in a light blue shroud was waiting for the Terran in the false dawn. It was the empathist, standing in the hexagonal-shaped arch that led into his building. When Hal came close, Fobo threw back the hood and exposed a face that was scratched on one cheek and blacked around the right eye.

He chuckled and said, "Some son of a bug pulled my mask off and plowed me good. But it was fun. It helps if you blow off steam that way now and then. How did you come out? I was afraid you might have been picked up by the police. Normally that wouldn't worry me, but I know your colleagues at the ship would frown upon such activities."

Hal smiled wanly. "Frown misses it by a mile."

He wondered how Fobo knew what the hierarch's reactions would be. How

much did these wogs know about the Terrestrials? Were they onto the Haijac game, and waiting to pounce? If so, with what? Their technology, as far as could be determined, was way behind Earth's. True, they seemed to know more of psychic functions than the Terrans did, but that was understandable. The Sturch had long ago decreed that the proper psychology had been perfected and that further research was unnecessary. The result had been a standstill in the psychical sciences.

He shrugged mentally. He was too tired to think of such things. All he wanted was to go to bed.

"I'll tell you later what happened," he said.

Fobo replied, "I can guess. Your hand. You'd better let me fix that burn. Nightlifer venom is nasty."

Like a little child, Hal followed to the wog's apartment and let him put a cooling salve on it.

"*Voilà*," said Fobo. "Go to bed. Tomorrow you can tell me all about it."

Hal thanked him and walked down to his floor. His hand fumbled with the key. Finally, after using Sigmen's name in vain, he inserted the key. When he had shut and locked the door, he called Jeannette. She must have been hiding in the closet-within-a-closet in the bedroom, for he heard two doors bang. In a moment she was running to him. She threw her arms around him.

"Oh, *mon homme, mon homme!* Hal, *mon amour*, what has happened? I was so worried. I thought I would scream when the night went by, and you didn't return."

Though he was sorry he had caused her pain, he could not help a prickling of pleasure because someone cared enough about him to worry. Nobody ever had before.

"There was a brawl," he said. He had decided not to say anything about the gap or the nightlifer. Later, when the strain had passed, he'd talk.

She untied his cloak and hood and took off his mask. While she hung them

up in the frontroom closet, he sank into a chair and closed his eyes. A moment later they were pulled open by the sound of liquid pouring into a glass. She was standing in front of him and filling a large glass from the quart. The odor of beetlejuice began to turn his stomach, and the picture of a beautiful girl about to drink the nauseating stuff spun it all the way around.

She looked at him. The delicate brackets of her brows rose. "*Qu'y a-t-il?*"

"Nothing's the matter!" he groaned. "I'm all right."

SHE put down the glass, picked up his hand, and led him into the bedroom. There she gently sat him down, pressed on his shoulder until he laid down, and then took off his shoes. He didn't resist. After she unbuttoned his shirt, she stroked his hair.

"You're sure you're all right?"

"Shib. I could lick the world with one hand tied behind my back."

"Good."

The bed creaked as she got up and walked out of the room. Before he could fall asleep, she returned. Again, he opened his eyes. Again, she was standing with a glass in her hand.

She said, "Would you like a sip now, Hal?"

"Great Mind, girl, don't you understand?" he barked. Fury poured adrenalin into his tired blood. He sat up. "Why do you think I got sick? I can't stand the stuff! I can't stand to see you drink it. It makes me sick. You make me sick. What's the matter with you? Are you stupid?"

Jeannette's eyes widened. Blood drained from her face and left the pigment of her lips a crimson moon in a white lake. Her hand shook so that the liquor spilled.

"Why — why —" she gasped — "I thought you said you felt fine. I thought you were all right. I thought you wanted to go to bed with me."

Yarrow groaned. He shut his eyes and laid back down. Sarcasm was lost

on her. She insisted on taking everything literally. She would have to be re-educated, not only in irony, but in other things. If he weren't so exhausted, he would have been shocked by her open proposal—so much like that of the Scarlet Woman in the Western Talmud when she had tried to seduce the Forerunner.

But he was past being shocked. Moreover, a voice on the edge of his conscience said that she had merely put into hard and unrecallable words what he had planned in his heart all this time. But when you spoke them!

A crash of glass shattered his thoughts. He jerked upright. She was standing there, face twisted, lovely red mouth quivering and tears flowing. Her hand was empty. A large wet patch against the wall, still dripping, showed what had become of the glass.

"I thought you loved me!" she yelled.

Unable to think of anything to say, he stared. She spun and walked away. He heard her go into the front room. Loud sobs forced him to jump out of bed and walk swiftly after her. These rooms were supposed to be soundproof, but one never knew. What if she were overheard?

Anyway, she was twisting something inside him, and he had to straighten it out.

WHEN he entered the front room, she didn't look up. For a while he stood silent, wanting to say something but utterly unable to because he had never been forced to solve such a problem before. Haijac women didn't cry often, or if they did, they wept alone in privacy.

He sat down by her and put his hand on her soft shoulder.

"Jeannette."

She turned quickly and laid her dark hair against his chest and said, between sobs, "I thought maybe you didn't love me. And I couldn't stand it. Not after all I've been through!"

"Well, Jeannette, I didn't . . . I mean . . . I wasn't. . ."

He paused. He had had no intention of saying he loved her. He'd never told any girl he loved her. Nor had any girl ever told him. And here was this girl on a faraway planet, only half-human at that, taking it for granted that he was hers, body and self.

He began speaking in a soft voice. Words came easily, because he was quoting Moral Lecture AT-16:

" . . . all beings with their hearts in the right place are brothers . . . Man and woman are brother and sister . . . Love is everywhere . . . but love . . . should be on a higher plane . . . Man and woman should rightly loath the beastly act as something the Great Mind, the Cosmic Observer, has not yet eliminated in man's evolutionary development . . . The time will come when children will be produced otherwise. Meanwhile we must recognize sex as outmoded, and necessary for only one reason: children . . ."

Slap! His head rang, and points of fire whirled off into the blackness before his eyes.

It was a moment before he could realize that Jeannette had leaped to her feet and slammed him hard with the palm of her hand. He saw her standing above him with her eyes slitted and her red mouth open and drawn back in a snarl.

Then she whirled and ran into the bedroom. He got up and followed her. She was lying on the bed, sobbing.

"Jeannette, you don't understand."

"Va t'feh fut!"

When he understood that, he blushed. Then he got mad. He grabbed her by the shoulder and turned her over so that she faced him.

Suddenly he was saying, "But I do love you, Jeannette. I do."

He sounded strange, even to himself. The concept of love, as she meant it, was alien to him—rusty, perhaps, if it could be put that way. It would need a lot of polishing. But it would, he knew, be polished. Here in his arms was one whose very nature and instinct

and education were pointed toward love.

He had thought he had drained himself of grief earlier that night, but now, as he forgot his resolve not to tell her what had happened, and as he recounted, step by step, the long and terrible night, tears ran down his face. Thirty years makes a deep well; it takes a long time to pump out all the weeping.

Jeannette, too, cried, and said that she was sorry that she had gotten angry at him. She promised never again to do so. He said it was all right. They kissed again and again until, like two babies who have wept themselves and loved themselves out of frustration and fury, they passed gently into sleep.

X

AT DAWN the Haijac ship, which had been suspended fifty feet high, settled to earth. All day long it would rest there in the middle of a big glade. At nightfall it would rise again. Even though the Terrans had so far seen no evidence of wog aerial flight, except for a few balloons, they took no chances of sudden attack. The sinking sun always saw the *Gabriel* poised above the tree-tops, radar probing, ready on the instant to accelerate into Ozagen's stratosphere, or, if necessary, into the safety of space.

At 0900 Ship's Time, Yarrow walked into the *Gabriel*, the smell of morning dew on grass in his nostrils. As he had a little time before the conference, he looked up Turnboy, the historian joat. Casually, he asked if Turnboy knew anything of a spaceflight emigration from France during the Forerunner's early days. Turnboy was delighted to show off his knowledge. Yes, the remnants of the Gallic nation had gathered in the Loire country after the Apocalyptic War and had formed the nucleus of what might have become a new France.

But the fastgrowing colonies sent from Iceland to the northern part of France, and from Israel to the southern part, had surrounded the Loire. New

France found itself squeezed economically and religiously. Sigmen's disciples invaded the Catholic territory in waves of missionaries. High tariffs had strangled the little state's trade. Finally a group of Frenchmen, seeing the inevitable absorption or conquest of their state, religion, and tongue, had left in six spaceships, three thousand strong, to find another Gaul rotating about some faroff star. Where they had landed, nobody knew.

Hal thanked Turnboy and walked to the conference room. He spoke to many; two years of flight had enabled him to recognize most of the personnel. Half of them, like him, had a Mongolian tinge to their features. They were the English-speaking descendants of Hawaiian and Australian survivors of the same war which had decimated France. Their manytimes great-grandfathers had repopulated Australia, the Americas, and Japan.

Almost half of the crew spoke Icelandic. Their ancestors had sailed from the grim island to spread across northern Europe and Siberia and Manchuria.

About a sixteenth of the crew spoke Georgian when among their fellows from home. Their fathers had moved down from the Caucasus Mountains and resettled the depopulated plains of southern Russia. A minority in the Haijac Union, they were gradually abandoning their native tongue in favor of that of their closest neighbors—the Icelanders.

At 1200 Hal left the conference room. He felt wonderful. First, he had been moved from twentieth place to the Archurielite's left to sixth from his right. The lamech on his chest made the difference. Second, there was little difficulty about Pornsen's death. The gapt was considered as a casualty of war. Everyone was warned about the night-lifers and other things that sometimes prowled Siddo after dusk. It was not, however, suggested that the Haijacs quit their moonlit espionage.

Macneff, the Achurielite, ordered Hal,

as the dead gapt's spiritual son, to arrange for the funeral the following day. Then he pulled down a huge map from a long roller on the wall. This was the representation of Earth that would be given to the wogs.

It was a good example of the Haijacs' subtlety and Chinese box-within-a-box thinking. The sheet bore two hemispheres of Earth with colored political boundaries. It was correct as far as the Bantu and Malay states were concerned. But the positions of the Israeli and Haijac nations had been reversed. The legend beneath the map said that green was the color of the Forerunner states and yellow was the Hebrews'. The green portion, however, was a ring around the Mediterranean, covering Palestine, Turkey, the Balkans, Italy, Austria, south Germany, lower France, Spain and northern Africa; it included the Sahara Sea, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and eastern Persia.

In other words, said Macneff, if by any inconceivable chance the Ozagenians were concealing spaceships, or captured the *Gabriel* and built ships with it as a model, and if they managed to find Sol, they would still attack the wrong country. They would think the Israeli Republic was the Union. Unless, that is, they took time to capture and question Terrans and thus found out the truth. But that was unlikely, for the essence of modern war was the surprise attack. The wogs would not want to give their enemies a chance to prepare.

As everyone knew, Macneff added, the deception might have been furthered by having the *Gabriel's* members speak Hebrew. But since that was the holy tongue, not to be used by the lower classes except in religious rituals nor to be used at all in profane matters such as carrying on a war, it was forbidden.

However—due to the excellent suggestion of Yarrow, the linguistic joat—French was being spoken. If the wogs pierced the deception, they would think it was a ruse of the Israeli.

After the conference, still glowing

from the Achurielite's compliment, Hal gave orders for the funeral arrangements. Other duties kept him till dark, when he returned home.

XI

WHEN YARROW locked the door behind him, he heard the shower running. He hung his coat up in the closet; the water quit splashing. As he went toward his bedroom door, Jeannette stepped out from the bathroom. She was drying her hair with a big towel, and she was naked.

She said, "*Bon jour, Hal,*" and walked on unselfconsciously into the bedroom.

Hal replied feebly. He turned and went back into the front room. He felt foolish, because of his timorousness, and at the same time vaguely wicked, unreal, because of the pounding of his heart, his heavy breathing, the hot and fluid fingers that wrapped themselves, half-pain, half-delight, around his loins.

She came out dressed in a pale green robe which he had purchased for her and which she had re-cut and re-sewed to fit her figure. Her heavy black hair was piled on her head in a Psyche knot. She kissed him and asked if he wanted to come into the kitchen while she cooked. He said that would be fine.

She began making a sort of spaghetti. He asked her to tell him about her life. Once started, she was not hard to keep going.

"... and so my father's people found a planet like Earth and settled there. It was a beautiful planet; that is why they called it *Luhbawpfey*."

"Huh?"

"*Le Beau Pays,*" she enunciated more carefully. "The beautiful land. According to my father, there are about thirty million living there on one continent. My father was not content to live the life his grandfathers had—tilling the soil or running a shop and raising many children. He and some other young men like him took the only spaceship left of the original six that had come there,

and they sailed off to the stars. They came to Ozagen. And crashed. No wonder. It was two hundred and fifty years old."

"The obsolete ion-beam drive. Is the wreck still around?"

"*Vi*. I mean *oui*. Close to where my sisters and aunts and cousins live."

"Your mother is dead?"

SHE hesitated, then nodded. "Yes. She died giving birth to me. And my sisters. Father died later. Or rather, we think he did. He went on a hunting-party and never came back."

Hal frowned. "Wait a minute. You told me that your mother and aunts were the last of the native human beings on Ozagen. And you said once before that Rastignac was the only Earthman to get out alive from the wreck. He was your mother's husband, naturally . . . and incredible as it sounds, their union—one of a terrestrial and an extraterrestrial—was fertile! That alone would rock my colleagues on their heels. Amazing! Completely contrary to accepted science, that their body chemistry and chromosomes should match! But—what I'm getting at is that your mother's *sister* had children, too. If the last Ozagenian human male died years before Rastignac crashed, who was their father?"

"Jean Rastignac. He was the husband of my mother and my four aunts. They all say that he was a superb and very virile lover."

Hal said, "Oh."

Until she had the spaghetti and salad ready, he watched her in silence. By then he had regained some of his perspective. After all, the Frenchman was not too much worse than he himself was. Maybe not as bad. He chuckled. How easy it was to condemn somebody else for giving way to temptation until you yourself faced the same situation. He wondered what Pornsen would have done if Jeannette had contacted him.

" . . . and so it was easy to escape from the wogs," she was saying. "They did

not watch me closely, and they were through examining me. *Mon Dieu*, the tests. Questions, questions! That Fobo asked me all sorts of things. Wanted to find out my intelligence, my personality, my etcetera. Put me under all kinds of machines. He and his fellows turned me inside out. Literally, my dear. They took pictures of my insides. Showed me my skeleton and organs and just simply everything. They said it was most interesting. Imagine that! I am exposed as no woman has ever been exposed, and to them I am just most interesting. Indeed!"

"Well," laughed Hal. "You can't expect arthropods to take the viewpoint of a mammal towards a female . . . that is. . . ."

She looked archly at him. "And am I a mammal?"

"Obviously, unmistakably, indisputably, and enthusiastically."

"For that you get a kiss."

"Hmmm. I'll bet that was almost as good as the spaghetti is going to be."

"You eat your food, and then I will show you something that is much better than almost as good."

He was learning fast. He didn't even flush.

AFTER the meal she cut a pitcher of beetlejuice with water, poured in a purplish liquid which made the drink smell like grapes, and dropped sprigs of an orange plant on the surface. Poured into a glass of ice cubes, it was cool and even tasted like grapes. It did not gag him at all.

"Why did you pick me, instead of Pornsen?" he asked.

She sat on his lap, one arm around his neck, the other on the table, drink in hand. "Oh, you were so goodlooking, and he was so ugly. Besides, I eavesdropped, and he sounded mean. You were nice. And I knew I had to be careful. My father had told me about Earthmen. He said they couldn't be trusted."

"How true. But you must have an instinct for doing the right thing, Jean-

nette. If you had antennae, I'd say you could detect nervous emanations. Here, let's see!" He went to run his fingers through her hair, but she ducked her head and laughed.

He laughed with her and dropped the hand to her shoulder, rubbing the smooth skin. "I was probably the only person on the ship who wouldn't have betrayed you. But I'm in a quandary now. You see, your presence here raises the devil. Here we Haijacs are, speaking French as a sort of camouflage for our real nationality, and all the time the wogs knew our language from the beginning. When we first came here, we were careless of what we said before them, because we figured it would take some time for them to learn French.

"Now our expedition may be in danger. And I can't tell Macneff that, because he would want to know how I knew. That'd give you away. And there's something else. You told me they have x-ray machines. So far we've seen none. Are the wogs hiding them? And if they are, what else are they concealing? And why? It's important that we know; but I can't tell Macneff they're got a hidden technology. So I'm on the horns of a dilemma."

"A dilemma? A beast I never heard of."

He hugged her. "I hope you never do. Listen, Jeannette, this is serious. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, we'll have to make up our minds to leave. Our specialists are working night and day on samples of wogglebug blood. They hope to make an artificial semivirus that will attach itself to the copper in the green blood-cells and change their electrophoretic properties."

"Comment?"

"Don't look so blank. Or giggle. It's deadly serious. It's what killed seven-eighths of Earth's people. Guided missiles by the tens of thousands circling high over the surface. Dropping little knots of protein molecules that locked onto the hemoglobin in the red blood cells and gave them a positive charge

so that one end of a globin molecule would bind with the end of another. Which would make the molecules go into a sort of crystallization. Which would twist the doughnut shaped red cells into a scimitar, and cause an artificial sickle cell anemia.

"The lab-created anemia was much swifter and more certain than the natural kind, because every red cell would be affected, not just a small percentage. Every cell would soon break down. The blood would have no carriers of oxygen to various parts of the body. The body would die.

"The body did die, Jeannette—the body of humanity. Almost a planetful of human beings perished from lack of oxygen. Only by accident did any organized governments survive. Most of those were islands that weren't attacked because they were felt to be too small to bother with. Hawaii, and Iceland, and a city in Australia and Bali.

"Palestine got scotfree by sheer coincidence. An experiment with short radiowaves interfered with the missiles' guiding beams. None got to the Holy Land. By the time the enemy found out why, they were dead. All over the world—not only in the civilized parts, but in the arctic, the jungles, the mountains—they died. Everywhere the missiles circled; everywhere was the invisible rain of death, the skulls, the bones—"

"Hush!" Jeannette put her finger on his quivering lips. "I don't know what you mean by proteins and molecules and those—those electrofrenetic charges! They're way above my head. But I do know that the longer you've been talking, the more scared you've been getting. Your voice was getting higher, and your eyes were growing wider.

"Somebody has frightened you in the past. No! Don't interrupt! They've scared you, and you've been man enough to hide most of your fear, but they've done such a horribly efficient job that you haven't been able to get over it.

"Well—" and she put her soft lips to his ears and whispered—"I'm going to

wipe that fear out. I'm going to lead you out of that valley of fright. No! Don't protest! I know it hurts your ego to think that a woman could know you're afraid. But I don't think any the less of you. I admire you all the more because you've conquered so much of it. I know what courage it took to face the 'Meter. I know you did it because of me. I'm proud that you did. I love you for it. And I know what courage it takes to keep me here, when any time a slip would send you to certain disgrace and death. I know what it all means. It's my nature and instinct and business and love to know.

"Now! Drink with me. We're not outside these walls where we have to worry ourselves about such things and be scared. We're in here. Away from everything except ourselves. Drink. And love me. I'll love you, Hal, and we'll not see the world outside nor need to. For the time being. Forget in my arms."

They drank the purplish liquor. After a while he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. There he forgot. The only disconcerting item was that she insisted upon keeping her eyes open, even during the climax, as if she were trying to photograph his features upon her mind.

XII

ON EARTH, the alcoholics were not cured but were sent to H. Therefore no psychological or narcotic therapies had been worked out for addicts. Hal, dead-ended by this fact in his desire to wipe out Jeannette's alcoholism, went for medicine to the very people who had given her the disease. Only he pretended that the cure was for himself.

Fobo said, "There is widespread drinking on Ozagen, but it is light. Our few alcoholics are quickly empathized into normality. Why don't you let me empathize you?"

"Sorry. My government forbids that."

He had given Fobo the same excuse for not inviting the wog home.

"You have the most forbidding government," said Fobo, and went into one of his long, howling laughs. When he recovered, he said, "You're forbidden to touch liquor, too, but that doesn't hold you back. Well, there's no accounting for inconsistency. Seriously, though, I have just the thing for you. It's called Easyglow. It's a stimulant which has an effect similar to alcohol's, but which is, in reality, however, depressing. We put it into the daily ration of liquor, increasing slowly the Easyglow and diminishing the alcohol. In two or three weeks the patient is drinking from a fluid 96 per cent Easyglow. The taste is much the same; the drinker seldom suspects. Continued treatment eases the patient from his dependence on the alcohol. There is only one drawback."

He paused and said. "The drinker is now addicted to Easyglow!"

He whooped and slapped his thigh and wiggled his antennae and laughed until the tears came.

"Really, though, the peculiar effect of Easyglow is that it opens the patient for discharge of the strains that have driven him to drink. He may then be empathized and at the same time weaned from the stimulant. Since I have no opportunity to slip the stuff to you secretly, I'm taking the chance that you are seriously interested in curing yourself. When you're ready for therapy, tell me."

Hal took the bottle to his apartment. Every day its contents went quietly and carefully into the beetlejuice he got for Jeannette. He hoped that he was psychologist enough to cure her once the Easyglow took effect.

Although he didn't know it, he was himself being "cured" by Fobo. His almost daily talks with the empathist instilled doubts about the religion and science of the Haijacs—or, as their enemies termed them, the Highjackers. Fobo read the biographies of Isaac Sigmen and the Works: the Pre-Torah, the Western Talmud, the Revised Scriptures, the Foundations of Serialism,

Time and Theology, The Self and the World-Line. Calmly sitting at his table with a glass of juice in his hand, the wog challenged the mathematics of the dunnologists. Hal proved; Fobo disproved. He pointed out that the math was mainly based on false-to-fact assumptions; that Dunne's and Sigmen's reasoning was buttressed by too many analogs, metaphors and strained interpretations. Remove the buttresses, and the structure fell.

AND worse, far worse, he said that the Forerunner's biographies and theological writings revealed him, even through the censor's veil, as a sexually frigid and woman-hating man with a messiah complex and paranoid and schizophrenic tendencies which burst through his icy shell from time to time in religious-scientific frenzies and fantasies.

"Other men," Fobo said, "have stamped their personality and ideas upon their times. But Sigmen had an advantage over those great leaders who came before him. Because of Earth's rejuvenation serums he lived long enough, not only to set up his kind of society, but to consolidate it and weed out its weaknesses. He didn't die until the cement of his social form had hardened."

"But the Forerunner didn't die," protested Yarrow. "He left in time. He is still with us, traveling down the fields of presentation, skipping here and there, now to the past, now to the future. Always, wherever he is needed to turn pseudo-time into real time, he is there."

"Ah, yes," smiled Fobo. "That was the reason you went to the ruins, was it not? To check up on a mural which hinted that the Ozagen humans had once been visited by a man from outer space. You thought it might have been the Forerunner, didn't you?"

"Macneff did," said Hal, annoyed. "But my report showed that, though the man resembled Sigmen somewhat, the evidence was too inconclusive. The

Forerunner may or may not have visited this planet a thousand years ago."

"Be that as it may, I maintain your theses are meaningless. You claim that his prophecies came true. I say, first, that they were couched ambiguously. Second, if they have been realized, it is because your powerful state-church—you may call it the Sturch—has made strenuous efforts to fulfill them.

"Furthermore, this pyramidal society of yours—this guardian-angel administration—where every ten families have a gapt to supervise their most intimate and minute details, and every ten family-gapts have a block-gapt at their head, and every fifty block-gapts are directed by a supervisor-gapt, and so on—this society is based on fear and ignorance and suppression."

Hal, shaken, angered, shocked, would get up to leave. Fobo would call him back and ask him to disprove what he'd said. Hal would let loose a flood of wrath. Sometimes, when he had finished, he would be asked to sit down and continue the discussion. Sometimes, Fobo would lose his temper; they would shout and scream insults; twice, they fought with fists; Hal got a bloody nose once and Fobo a black eye. Then the wog, weeping, would embrace Hal and ask for his forgiveness, and they would sit down and drink some more until their nerves were calmed.

YARROW told Jeannette of these incidents. She encouraged him to tell them over and over again until he had talked away the stress and strain of grief and hate and doubt. Afterwards, there was always love such as he had never thought possible. For the first time he knew that man and woman could become one flesh. His wife and he had remained outside the circle of each other, but Jeannette knew the geometry that would take him in and the chemistry that would mix his substance with hers.

Always, too, there was the light and the drink. But they did not bother him.

Unknown to her, she was now drinking a liquor almost entirely Easyglow. And he had gotten used to the light above their bed. It was one of her quirks. Fear of the dark wasn't behind it, because it was only while making love that she required a bulb be left on. He didn't understand it. Perhaps she wanted to impress his image on her memory, always to have it if she ever lost him. If so, let her keep the light.

By its glow he explored her body with an interest that was part sexual and part anthropological. He was delighted and astonished at the many small differences between her and Terran women. There was a small appendage of skin on the roof of her mouth that might have been the rudiment of some organ whose function was long ago cast aside by evolution. There were two bumps of cartilage on the top of her head, hidden by her thick black hair. She had thirty teeth; the wisdom teeth were missing. That might or might not have been a characteristic of her mother's people.

He suspected that she either had an extra set of pectoral muscles or else an extraordinarily well-developed normal set. Her large and cone-shaped breasts did not sag. They were high and firm and pointed slightly upwards: the ideal of feminine beauty so often portrayed through the ages by male sculptors and painters and so seldom existing in nature.

She was not only a pleasure to look at; she was pleasing to be with. At least once a week she would greet him with a new garment. She loved to sew; out of the materials he gave her she fashioned slips, blouses, skirts and even gowns. Along with the change in dress went new hairdos. She was ever-new and ever-beautiful, and she made Hal realize for the first time that a thing of beauty was a joy, if not for forever, then for at least as long as it lasted.

Her imitativeness was another thing that delighted him. She had switched from her brand of French to his almost

overnight. Within a week she was speaking it faster and more expressively than he. As she also knew Ozagen thoroughly, he decided the best way for him to learn it was to have her read wog books to him. He'd lie on the divan while she sat on a chair. Her accent and pronunciation were correct, and trained his ear. Where she saved him time was in his not having to look up each new word in a dictionary—she translated for him.

JEANNETTE loved to read to him, but she wearied of the dry and technical books he gave her. When he saw that she was tired, he softened and let her stop. He never did, for example, finish Weenai's monumental *Rise and Fall of Man on Ozagen*. That evening Jeannette began, as usual, bravely enough. Her low, throaty voice tried to simulate interest in what her eyes saw. She went through the first chapter, which described the formation of the planet and the beginnings of life. In the second she yawned quite openly and looked at Hal, but he closed his eyes and pretended not to notice. So she read of the rise of the wogs from an arthropod that had changed its mind and decided to become a chordate. Weenai made some heavy jests about the contrariness of the wogglebugs since that fateful day, and then took up, in the third chapter, the story of mammalian evolution on the other large continent of Ozagen. It climaxed in man.

She quoted: "But homo sapiens, like us, had its mimical parasites. One was a different species of the so-called tavern beetle. It, instead of resembling a wog, looked like a man. Like its counterpart, it could fool no intelligent person, but its gift of alcohol made it very acceptable to man. It, too, accompanied its host from primitive times, became an integral part of his civilization, and, finally, a large cause of man's downfall.

"Humanity's disappearance from the face of Ozagen is due not only to the tavern beetle. That creature can be con-

trolled, and has been by us. Like most things, it has benefits to confer. Like most things, it can be abused or its purpose distorted so that it becomes a menace.

"That is what man did with it.

"He had, it must be noted, an ally to help him in the misuse of the insect. This was another parasite, one of a somewhat different kind; one that was, indeed, our cousin. That is, it is a so-called chordate arthropod.

"One thing, however, distinguishes it from us, and from man, and from any other animal on this planet with the exception of some very low species. That is, that from the very first fossil evidence we have of it, it was wholly—"

Jeannette put the book down. "I don't know the next word. Hal, do I have to read this? It's so boring."

"No. Forget it. Read me one of those comics that you and the crew like so much."

She smiled, a beautiful sight, and began Vol. 1037, Book 56, of the *Adventures of Leif Magnus, Beloved Disciple of the Forerunner, When He Met the Horror From Arcturus*.

He listened to her translation of the French into vernacular Wog until he grew tired of the banalities and pulled her down to him.

Always, there was the light left on above them.

XIV

IT WAS the following day that Yarrow, returning from the market with a large box, said, "You've sure been putting away the groceries lately. You're not eating for two? Or maybe three?"

She paled. "*Mon Dieu!* Do you know what you're saying?"

He put the box on a table and grabbed her shoulders.

"Shib. I do. Jeannette, I've been thinking about that very thing for a long time, but I haven't said anything. I didn't want to worry you. Tell me, are you?"

She looked him straight in the eye, but her body was shaking. "Oh, no. It is impossible!"

"Why should it be? We've used no preventives."

"*Oui*. But I know—don't ask me how—call it instinct, if you wish—that it cannot be. But you must never say things like that. Not even joking. I can't stand it."

He pulled her close and said over her shoulder, "Is it because you can't? Because you know you'll never bear my children?"

Her thick, faintly perfumed hair nodded. "I know. Don't ask me how I know."

He held her at arm's length again. "Listen, Jeannette. I'll tell you what's been troubling you. You and I are really of different species. Your mother and father were, too. Yet they had issue. But you're thinking that the ass and the mare have young, too, but the mule is sterile. The lion and the tigress may breed, but the liger or tigon can't. Isn't that right? You're afraid you're a mule!"

She put her head on his chest and sobbed.

He said, "Let's be real about this, honey. Maybe you are. So what? My God, our situation is bad enough without a baby to complicate it. We'll be lucky if you are . . . uh . . . well, we have each other, haven't we? That's all I want. You."

He couldn't keep from being reflective as he dried her tears and kissed her and helped her put the food in the refrigerator.

The quantities of groceries and milk she had been consuming were more than a normal amount, especially the milk. There had been no telltale change in her superb figure, true. But the stuff was going somewhere.

A month passed. He watched her closely. She ate enormously. Nothing happened.

Yarrow put it down to his ignorance of her alien metabolism.

XV

ANOTHER month. Hal was just leaving the ship's library when Turnboy stopped him.

"The rumor is that the techs have finally made the globinlocking molecule," the historian said. "I think that this time the grapevine's right. A conference is called for 1500."

"Shib." Hal kept his despair out of his voice.

When the meeting broke up at 1650, it left him with sagging shoulders. The virus was already in production. In a week a large enough supply would be made to fill the disseminators of six prowler-torpedoes. The plan was to release them to wipe out the city of Siddo. A beachhead would be established there. While the *Gabriel* flew back to Earth, the beachhead would keep making the virus and would send prowlers out in spirals whose range would expand until a large territory would be covered. By the time a huge fleet returned, millions of wogs would be slain. The fleet would then deal with the rest of the planet.

When he got home, he found Jeanette lying in bed. She smiled weakly. Her hair was loose in a black corona on the pillow.

He forgot his mood in a thrill of concern.

"What's the matter, baby?"

He laid his hand on her forehead. The skin was dry and hot and rough.

"I don't know. I haven't been feeling really well for two weeks, but I didn't complain. I thought I'd get over it. Today I felt so bad I just had to go back to bed after breakfast."

"We'll get you well."

He sounded confident. Inside himself, he was lost. If she had contracted a serious disease, she could get no doctor, no medicine—

For the next few days she continued to lie in bed. Her temperature fluctuated from 99.5 in the morning to 100.2 at night. Hal attended her as well as he could. He put wet towels and ice-bags

on her head and gave her aspirin. She had quit eating so much food; all she wanted was liquid. She seemed to be always asking for milk. Even the beetle-juice and the cigarettes were turned down.

Her illness was bad enough, but her silences stung Yarrow into a frenzy. As long as he had known her, she had chattered lightly, merrily, amusingly. She could be quiet, but it was with an interested wordlessness. Now she let him talk, and when he quit, she did not fill his silence with questions or comments.

In an effort to arouse her, he told her of his plan to steal a gig and take her back to her jungle home. A light came into her dulled eyes; the brown looked shiny for the first time. She even sat up while he put a map of the continent on her lap. She indicated the general area where she had lived, and then described the mountain range that rose from the green tropics, and the tableland on its top where her aunts and sisters lived in the ruins of a metropolis.

Hal sat down at the little octagonal-shaped table by the bed and worked out the coordinates from the maps. Now and then he glanced up. She was lying on her side, her white and delicate shoulder rising from her nightgown, her eyes large in the shadows that were beginning to stain rings around them.

"All I have to do is steal a little key," he said. "You see, the milometer on a gig is set at 0 before every flight from the field. The boat will run fifty miles on manual. That gives us leeway to go any place in Siddo and return. But once the tape passes fifty, the gig automatically stops and sends out a location signal. That's to keep anybody from running away. However, the autos can be unlocked and the signal turned off. A little key will do it. I can get it. Don't worry."

"You must love me very much."

"You bet I do!"

He rose and kissed her. Her mouth, once so soft and dewy, felt dry and hard.

It was almost as if the skin were turning to horn.

HE RETURNED to his calculations. An hour later, a sigh from her made him look up. Her eyes were closed, and her lips were slightly open. Sweat ran down her face.

He hoped her fever had broken. No. The mercury stopped at 100.3.

She said something.

He bent down. "What?"

She was muttering in an unknown language. Delirious. Hal swore. He had to act. No matter what the consequences. He ran into the bathroom, shook from a bottle a ten grain rockabye tablet, went back and propped Jeannette up and got her to wash the pill down with a glass of water.

After he locked her bedroom door, he put on a hood and cloak and walked fast to the nearest pharmacy. There he purchased three 20-gauge needles, three syringes, and some anti-coagulant. Back in his apartment, he tried to insert the needle in an arm vein. The point refused to go in until the fourth attempt when, in a fit of exasperation, he pressed hard.

During none of the jabbings did she open her eyes or jerk her arm.

When the first fluid crept into the glass tube, he gasped with relief. Though he hadn't known it, he had been biting his lower lip and holding his breath. Suddenly he knew that he had for the last month been pushing a horrible suspicion back to the outlands of his mind. Now, he realized the thought had been ridiculous.

The blood was red.

He tried to arouse her in order to get a specimen of urine. She twisted her mouth over strange syllables, then lapsed back into sleep or a coma—he didn't know which. In an anguish of despair he slapped her face, again and again, hoping he could bring her to. He swore once more, for he realized all at once that he should have gotten the specimen before giving her the rockabye Pill. How stupid could he get! He

wasn't thinking straight; he was too excited over her condition and what he had to do at the ship.

He perked some very strong coffee and managed to get part of it down her. The rest dribbled down her chin and soaked her gown.

Either the caffeine or his desperate tone awoke her, for she opened her eyes long enough to look at him while he explained what he wanted her to do and where he was going afterwards. Once he'd gotten the urine into a previously boiled jar, he wrapped the syringes and jar in a handkerchief and dropped them into the cloak-pocket.

He had already wristphoned the *Gabriel* for a gig. A horn beeped outside. He took another look at Jeannette, locked the bedroom door, locked the apartment door, and ran down the stairs. The gig hovered above the curb. He entered, sat down, and punched the *Go* button. The boat rose to a thousand feet and then flashed at an 11-degree angle toward the park where the ship squatted.

XVI

THE medical section was empty, except for one orderly. The fellow dropped his comic and jumped to his feet.

"Take it easy," said Hal. "I just want to use the Labtech. And I don't want to be bothered with making out triplicate forms. This is a little personal matter, see?"

Hal had taken off his cloak. The orderly looked at the bright golden lamech.

"Shib," he grunted.

Hal gave him two cigarettes.

"Geez, thanks." The orderly lit up, sat down, and picked up his *The Fore-runner and Delilah in the Wicked City of Gaza*.

Yarrow went around the corner of the Labtech, where the orderly couldn't see him, and set the proper dials. After he inserted his specimens, he sat down. Almost at once he jumped up and began pacing back and forth. Meanwhile, the

huge cube of the Labtech purred like a contented cat as it digested its strange food. A half-hour later, it rumbled once and then flashed a green light: ANALYSIS COMPLETE.

Hal pressed a button. Like a tongue out of a metal mouth, a long tape slid out. He read the code. Urine was normal. No infection there. Also normal was the pH and the blood count.

He hadn't been sure the "eye" would recognize the cells in her blood. However, the chances had been strong that her red cells would be Terranlike. Why not? Evolution follows parallel paths; the biconcave disk is the most efficient form for carrying the maximum of oxygen.

The machine chattered. More tape. Unknown hormone! Similar in molecular structure to the parathyroid hormone primarily concerned in the control of calcium metabolism.

What did that mean? Could the mysterious substance loosed in her bloodstream be the cause of her trouble?

More clicks. The calcium content of the blood was 40 mg. per cent.

Strange. Such an abnormally high percentage should mean that the renal threshold was passed and that an excess of calcium should be "spilling" into the urine. Where was it going?

The Labtech flashed a red light: FINISHED.

He took a Hematology book down from the shelf and opened it to the Ca section. When he quit reading, he straightened his shoulders. New hope? Perhaps. Her case sounded as if she had a form of hypercalcemia, which was manifested by any number of diseases ranging from rickets and steomalacia to chronic hypertrophic arthritis. Whatever she had, she was suffering from a malfunction of the parathyroid glands.

The next move was to the Pharm machine. He punched three buttons, dialed a number, stood for two minutes, and then lifted a little door at waist-level. A tray slid out. On it was a cellophane sheath containing a hypodermic needle

and a tube holding 30 c.c. of a pale blue fluid. It was Jesper's serum, a "one-shot" readjustor of the parathyroid.

Hal put on his cloak, stuck the package in the inside pocket, and strode out. The orderly didn't even look up.

THE next step was the weapons room. There he gave the storekeeper an order—made out in triplicate—for one .1 mm. automatic and a clip of one hundred cartridges. The keeper only glanced over the forged signatures—he, too, was awed by the lamech—and unlocked the door. Hal took the gun, which he could easily hide in the palm of his hand, and stuck it in his pants pocket.

At the key room, two corridors away, he repeated the crime. Or rather, he tried to.

Moto, the officer on duty, looked at the papers, hesitated, and said, "I'm sorry. My orders are to check on any requests with the Chief Uzzite. That won't be possible for about an hour, though. He's in conference with the Archurilite."

Hal picked up his papers. "Never mind. My business'll hold. Be back in the morning."

On the way home, he planned what he'd do. After injecting Jesper's serum in Jeannette, he'd move her into the gig. The floor beneath the gig's control-panel would have to be ripped up, two wires would be unhooked, and one connected to another lead. That would remove the fifty-mile limit. Unfortunately, it would also set off an alarm back in the *Gabriel*. His hope was that he could take off straight up, level off, and dive behind the range of hills to the west of Siddo. The hills would deflect the radar. The autopilot could be set long enough for him to demolish the box that would be sending out the signal by which the *Gabriel* might track him down.

After that, with the gig hedgehopping, he could hope to be free until daybreak. Then he'd submerge in the nearest deep-enough lake or river until

nightfall. During the darkness he could rise and speed towards the tropics; and if his radar showed any signs of pursuit, he could plunge again into a body of water.

HE LEFT the long needle-shaped parked by the curb. His feet pounded the stairs. The key missed the hole the first two tries. He slammed the door without bothering to lock it again.

"Jeannette!" he shouted. Suddenly he was afraid that she might have gotten up while delirious and somehow opened the doors and wandered out.

A low moan answered him. He unlocked the bedroom door and shoved it open. She was lying with her eyes wide.

"Jeannette. Do you feel better?"

"No. Worse. Much worse."

"Don't worry, baby. I've got just the medicine that'll put new life in you. In a couple of hours you'll be sitting up and yelling for steaks. And you won't even want to touch that milk. You'll be drinking Easyglow by the gallon. And then—"

He faltered as he saw her face. It was a stony mask of distress, like the grotesque and twisted wooden faces of the Greek tragedians.

"Oh, no . . . no! My God," she moaned. "What did you say? Easyglow?" Her voice rose. "Is *that* what you've been giving me?"

"Shib, Jeannette. Take it easy. You liked it. What's the difference? The point is that we're going—"

"Oh, Hal, Hal! What have you done?"

Her pitiful face tore at him. Tears were falling; if ever stone could weep, it was weeping now.

He turned and ran into the kitchen where he took out the sheath, removed the contents, and inserted the needle in the tube. He went back into the bedroom. She said nothing as he thrust the point into her vein. For a moment he was afraid the needle would break. The skin was almost brittle.

"This stuff cures Earth people in a jiffy," he said, with what he hoped was

a cheery bedside manner.

"Oh, Hal, come here. It's—it's too late now."

He withdrew the needle, rubbed alcohol on the break and put a pad on it. Then he dropped to his knees by the bed and kissed her. Her lips were hard.

"Hal, do you love me?"

"Won't you ever believe me? How many times must I tell you?"

"No matter what you'll find out about me?"

"I know all about you."

"No, you don't. You can't. Oh, Great Mother, if only I'd told you, Hal! Maybe you'd have loved me just as much, anyway. Maybe . . ."

"Jeannette! What's the matter?"

Her lids had closed. Her body shook in a spasm. When the violent trembling passed, she whispered with stiff lips. He bent his head to hear her.

"What did you say? Jeannette! Speak!"

He shook her. The fever must have died, for her shoulder was cold. And hard.

The words came low and slurring.

"Take me to my aunts and sisters. They'll know what to do. Not for me . . . but for the . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Hal, will you always love . . ."

"Yes, yes. You know that! We've got more important things to do now than talk about that."

If she heard him she gave no sign. Her head was tilted far back with her exquisite nose pointed at the ceiling. Her lids and mouth were closed, and her hands were by her side, palms up. The breasts were motionless. Whatever breath she might have was too feeble to stir them.

XVII

HAL ran upstairs to the third floor and pounded on Fobo's door until it opened.

The empathist's wife said, "Bugs, alive, Hal, you startled me!"

"Where's Fobo?"

"He's at a college board meeting."

"I've got to see him at once."

Abasa yelled after him, "If it's important, go ahead. Those meetings bore him, anyway."

By the time Yarrow had taken the steps three at a time and bee-lined across the nearby campus, his lungs were on fire. He didn't slacken his pace; he hurtled up the steps of the administration building and burst into the board room.

When he tried to speak, he had to stop and suck in deep breaths.

Fobo jumped out of his chair.

"What's up?"

"You—gasp—you've—got to come. Matter—life—death!"

"Excuse me, gent'lemen," said Fobo.

The ten wogs nodded their antennae and resumed the conference. The empathist put on his cloak and high-crowned, plumed hat and led Hal out.

"Now, what is it?"

"Listen. I've got to trust you. I know you can't promise me anything. But I think you won't turn me in to my people. You're a real person, Fobo. Not like the Haijac men."

"Get to the point, my friend."

"Listen. You wogs are as advanced as we are in endocrinology. And you've got an advantage. You know Jeannette inside out. You've examined her."

"Jeannette? Oh, Rastignac! The *lalitha*."

"Yes. I've been hiding her in my apartment."

"I know."

"You . . . know! How?"

"Never mind." The wog put his hand on Hal's shoulder. "Something bad has happened, or you'd not have come to me about her."

By the time Hal had told him, they were at their apartments. Fobo stopped him at the door.

"I may as well tell you. Your countrymen know you're up to something. For the last eight days a man has been living in that building down the street and

spying on you. His name is Art Hunah Fedtof."

"An Uzzite!"

"*Oui*. He lives in the front room on the ground floor. His windows are darkened, but he is probably watching you right now."

"Forget about him!" Yarrow snarled.

He bounded up the stairs. Fobo followed him into his rooms. The wog felt Jeannette's forehead and tried to lift her lid to look at her eye. It would not bend.

"Hmm! Calcification of the outer skin layer is far advanced."

With one hand he threw the sheet from her figure and with the other he grabbed her gown by the neckline and ripped the thin cloth down the middle. The two parts fell to either side. She lay nude, as silent and pale and beautiful as a sculptor's masterpiece.

Her lover gave a little cry at what seemed like a violation. But he shut up at once, because he knew that Fobo's move was medical. In any case, the wog would not have been sexually interested.

Puzzled, he watched. Fobo had tapped his fingertips against her flat belly and then put his ear against it. When he stood up, he shook his head.

"I won't deceive you, Hal. Though we'll do the best we can, we may not be good enough. She'll have to go to a surgeon. If we can cut her eggs out before they hatch, that, plus the serum you gave her, may reverse the effect and pull her out."

"Eggs?"

"I'll tell you later. Wrap her up. I'll run upstairs and phone Dr. Kuto."

Yarrow folded a blanket around her. When he rolled her over, she was as stiff as a show-window dummy. He covered her face. The stony look was too much for him.

His wristphone shrilled. Automatically he reached to flick the stud and just in time drew his hand back. It shrilled loudly, insistently. Finally he decided that if he didn't answer, he would stir up their suspicion far faster.

"Yarrow!"

"Shib!"

"Report to the Archurielite. You will be given fifteen minutes."

"Shib."

Fobo came back in and said, "What're you going to do?"

Hal squared his mouth and said, "You take her by the shoulders, and I'll carry her feet. Rigid as she is, we won't need a stretcher."

As they carried her down the steps, he said, "Can you hide us after the operation, Fobo? We won't be able to use the gig now."

"Don't worry," the wog said enigmatically over his shoulder. "The Earthmen are going to be too busy to run after you."

It took sixty seconds to get her in the gig, hop to the hospital, and get her out.

Hal said, "Let's put her on the ground for a minute. I've got to set the gig on auto and send her back to the *Gabriel*. That way, at least, they won't know where I'm at."

"No. Leave it here. You may be able to use it afterward."

"After what?"

"Later. Ah, there's Kuto."

IN THE waiting room the joat paced back and forth and puffed Merciful Seraphim out in smoke. The empathist sat on a chair and rubbed his bald pate and the thick golden corkscrew fuzz on the back of his head.

"All this could have been avoided," he said unhappily. "But I didn't know until a week ago that the *lalitha* was living with you. I didn't think there was any hurry to tell you that I knew. Anyway, I was busy working on Project Earthman."

"What was that?" barked Yarrow.

"Oh, for some time we've had our electroencephalographs on you. You Terrans are far ahead of us in most of the physical sciences, but in the psychological sciences we've got you beaten. For instance, you haven't yet found out

that below the level of the general brain-waves, which might be likened to 'static,' lie very weak but definite impulses.

"These we call the 'semantic' waves. Our instruments, built with our antennae and nervous system as a model, are so sensitive that they can pick them up at quite a distance and amplify them. The various heights of the semantic waves are then correlated with the spoken syllables of the language. In other words, we have a more or less efficient mind-reader.

"We trained them on you Terrans from the beginning. We thought we would have quite an advantage, because we had learned a type of French from the *lalitha*. To our consternation, however, we found that you talked to us in one language but tended to do your thinking in, not one, but four different tongues."

"Those were Hebrew for the theological thinking of the Urielites and technical thinking of some of the scientists," snapped Hal. "English, Icelandic and Georgian for the everyday thoughts. Any other time I'd be interested in this thinkpicker. But for Fore-runner's sake, I want to hear about Jeannette!"

"Believe me, Hal, I can feel for and with you." He wiggled his antennae to indicate he was receiving grief and anxiety emanations. "It's necessary and justifiable that I take my explanation in order. Otherwise, I'll be confused and backtracking all the time, which I detest. As I was saying, we were stumped for a while because the semantic waves' fluctuations did not match those of the spoken word. However, we kept picking up stray thoughts here and there in French. As well grounded as you all seem to have been in that language, it was inevitable that you would do a certain amount of private thinking in it, regardless of your native tongue. About two weeks ago we managed to work out the complete synchronization in the artificial tongue

and also bind up a great many impulses with the other languages' words by comparing them with the French."

"Then you know we have perfected the globinlocker?"

Fobo smiled. "Yes, but we were suspicious of that from the beginning. When you asked us for samples of blood, your request was accompanied by too heavy a charge of what we call 'furtive' emanations. We gave you the blood, all right, but it was that of a barnyard creature which uses copper in its blood cells. We wogs use magnesium as the oxygen-carrying element in our cells."

"Our virus is useless!"

"Naturally. Now to get to the personal. My colleagues had their e.c.g.'s turned on you whenever you came into my room. They didn't think it was any use tapping your waves when you were in your room. You'd be likely to be thinking in the vernacular. About a week ago they did, however, just for experiment, and they were amazed to find the *lalitha* there. They told me. I was too engrossed with this business with the ship to put two and two together. Otherwise, I'd have known why you were pretending to be an alcoholic. I—"

A nurse entered and said, "Phone, Doctor."

Yarrow paced, and smoked another cigarette. Fobo came back.

He said, "We're going to have company. One of my colleagues, who is watching the ship, tells me Macneff and two Uzzites left in a gig a minute ago. They should be arriving at the hospital any second now."

Yarrow stopped in midstride. His jaw dropped. "Here?"

"Don't be afraid."

Hal just stood there. The cigarette, unnoticed, burned until it seared his fingers. He dropped it and crushed it beneath his sole.

Bootheels clicked in the corridor.

THREE men entered. One was a tall and gaunt ghost—Macneff, the Arch-

urielite. The others were short and broad-shouldered and clad in black. Their meaty hands, though empty, were hooked, ready to dart into their pockets. Their heavy-lidded eyes stabbed at Fobo and then at Hal.

Macneff strode up to the joat. His pale blue eyes glared; his lipless mouth was drawn back in a skull's smile.

"You unspeakable degenerate!" he shouted.

His arm flashed, and the whip, jerked out of his belt, cracked. Thin red marks crawled out of Yarrow's white face and began oozing blood.

"You will be taken back to Earth in chains and there exhibited as an example of the worst pervert, traitor, and—and—!"

He drooled, unable to find words.

"You—who have passed the Elohimeter, who are supposed to be so pure—you have lusted after and lain with an insect!"

"What! What!"

"Yes. With a thing that is even lower than a beast of the field! What even Moses did not think of when he forbade union between man and beast, what even the Forerunner could not have guessed when he reaffirmed the law and set the death penalty for it, you have done. You, Hal Yarrow, the pure, the lamech wearer!"

Fobo rose and said in a deep voice, "Might I suggest and stress that you are not quite right in your zoological classification? It is not the class of insecta but the class of the chordata pseudarthropoda, or words to that effect."

The joat said, "What?" again. He could not think.

The wog growled, "Shut up, Hal. Let me talk."

He swung to face Macneff. "You know about her?"

"You are shib that I know her! Yarrow thought he was getting away with something. But no matter how clever these unrealists are, they're always tripped up. In this case, it was his asking Turnboy about those Frenchmen

that fled Earth two and a half centuries ago. Turnboy, who is very zealous in his attitude towards the Sturch, reported the conversation. It lay among my papers for quite a while. When I came across it, I turned it over to the psychologists. They told me that the joat's question was a deviation from the pattern expected of him; a thing totally irrelevant unless it was connected to something we didn't know about him.

"A man was put on his trail. He saw Yarrow buying twice the groceries he should have. And much cloth and sewing equipment and silk stockings and perfume and earrings. Moreover, when you wogs learned the tobacco habit from us and began making cigarettes too, he bought them from you. The conclusion was obvious. He had a female in his apartment.

"We didn't think it'd be a wog female, for she wouldn't have to stay hidden. Therefore she must be human. But we couldn't imagine how she got here on Ozagen. It was impossible for him to have stowed her away on the *Gabriel*. She must either have come here in a different ship, or be descended from people who had.

"It was Yarrow's talk with Turnboy that furnished the clue. Obviously, the French had landed here. She was a great-great-granddaughter. How the joat had found her, we didn't know. It wasn't important. We'll find out, anyhow."

"You're due to find out some other things, too," Fobo said calmly. "How did you discover she wasn't human?"

Yarrow muttered, "I've got to sit down."

XVIII

HE SWAYED to the wall and sank into a chair. One of the Uzzites started to move toward him. Macneff waved the man back and said, "Turnboy had been reading the history of man on Ozagen. He came across so many references to the *lalitha* that the suspicion

was bound to rise that the girl might be one.

"Last week one of the wog physicians, while talking to Turnboy, mentioned that he had once examined a *lalitha*. Later, he said, she had run away. It wasn't hard for us to guess where she had ended up!"

"My boy," said Fobo, turning to Hal, "didn't you read Weenai's book?"

Hal shook his head. "We started it, but Jeannette mislaid it."

"And doubtless saw to it that you had other things to think of . . . they are good at diverting a man's mind. Why not? That is their purpose in life.

"Well, Hal, I'll explain. The *lalitha* are the highest example of mimetic parasitism known. Also, they are unique among sentient beings. Unique in that all are female.

"You see, if you'd read on in Weenai, you'd have found that fossil evidence shows that about the time that Ozagenian man was still an insectivorous marmoset-like creature, he had in his family group not only his own females but the females of another class, perhaps another phylum. These animals looked and probably stank enough like the females of prehomo marmoset to be able to live and mate with them. They seemed mammalian, but dissection would have indicated very strongly their pseudoarthropodal ancestry.

"It's reasonable to suppose that these precursors of the *lalitha* were man's parasites long before the marmosetoid stage. They may have met him when he first crawled out of the sea, and promptly adapted their shape, through an evolutionary process, to that of the lungfish. And later to the amphibian's. And the reptile's and primitive mammal's. And so on.

"What we do know is that the *lalitha* were Nature's most amazing experiment in parasitism and parallel evolution. As man metamorphosed into higher forms, so she kept pace with him. All female, mind you, depending upon the male of another phylum for the con-

tinuance of the species.

"It is astonishing the way they became integrated into the prehuman cultures, the pithecanthropoid and neanderthaloid steps. Only when homo sapiens developed did their troubles begin. Some families and tribes accepted them; others killed them. So they resorted to artifice, and disguised themselves as human women. A thing not hard to do—unless they became pregnant.

"In which case they died."

HAL groaned and put his hands over his face.

"Painful but real, as our acquaintance Macneff would say," said Fobo. "Of course—such a condition required a secret sorority. In those societies where the *lalitha* was forced to camouflage, she would, once pregnant, have to leave. And perish in some hidden place among her kind, who would then take care of the nymphs—" here Hal shuddered—"until they were able to go into human cultures. Or else be introduced as foundlings or changelings.

"You'll find quite a tribal lore about them—fables and myths make them central or peripheral characters quite frequently. They were regarded as witches, demons, or worse.

"With the introduction of the alcohol beetle in primitive times, a change for the better came to the *lalitha*. Alcohol made them sterile. At the same time, barring accident, disease, or murder, it made them *immortal*."

Hal took his hands off his face. "You—you mean Jeannette would have lived—forever? That I cost her—that?"

"She could have lived a thousand years, at least. We know that some did. What's more, they remained young. Let me explain. In due order. Some of what I'm going to say will distress you, Hal, but it must be said.

"The long life of the pseudo-woman, sometimes so long that they survived tribes and nations they had joined when first founded, led to their being wor-

shipped as goddesses. They became the repositories of wisdom and wealth. Religions were established with *lalitha* as the focus and priests and beetles on the circumference as permanent marks of human civilizations. The priests and the kings were their lovers.

"Some cultures barred the *lalitha*. They could not, however, keep them out. The false women infiltrated. Being always very beautiful, they mated with the most powerful men—the leaders, the rich, the poets, the thinkers. They competed with women and beat them at their own game, hands down, because in the *lalitha* Nature wrought the complete female.

"You see, they had no male hormone, no male element. They were all woman, and they centered their lives on men. They were instinctively and consciously sensitive to their lovers' desires, whims and moods. Yet they were crafty enough not to be clinging vines. When the time demanded a quarrel, they produced it. They knew what few human females did: the time to speak and the time not to speak.

"You noticed that in Jeannette, didn't you, Hal? No wonder. As part of their arthropodal heritage they owned two rudimentary antennae—mere bumps on their heads, but still sensitive in detecting the grosser nervous emanations.

"And so they gained mastery over their lovers. Influenced unduly the governments. Caused widespread slavery and wholesale breeding of beetles and the resulting alcoholism which led to humankind's downfall.

"When we wogs came to this continent, half their cities were ruined. War, liquor, depraved religious rites, falling birth rate, graft, corruption—a hundred factors leveled once mighty man. Yet, though weakened, they fought us. The *lalitha* urged them to battle, for they saw in us their doom. We could not be influenced by them as their men were. War and disease slew half of them; the rest just seemed to lose interest in living. . . ."

A wog nurse with a white mask over her long nose came out of the operating room. Hal sprang up and watched her as she said something to the empathist in a low voice.

MACNEFF had been pacing back and forth with his hands clutched behind him. Hal wondered, in the back of his mind, why he, Hal, had not been dragged away at once; why the priest had waited to hear Fobo. Then a flash of insight told him that Macneff had wanted the joat to hear all about Jeanette and realize the full enormity of his deeds.

The nurse went back into the operating room. The Archurielite said loudly, "Is the beast of the fields dead yet?"

Fobo, ignoring him, spoke to Hal, who had shaken as if at a blow when he heard the word "dead."

"Your larv—that is, your children, have been removed. They are in an incubator. They are—" he hesitated—"eating well. They will live."

Yarrow could tell from his tone that it was no use asking about the mother.

The wog twitched his antennae. Big tears rolled from his round blue eyes. He did not, however, offer any sympathy. He kept on talking:

"You won't understand, Hal, what has happened unless you comprehend the *lalitha's* unique method of reproduction. To begin, their ovaries furnish the matrix for the bodies of the embryo, all beautiful bodies, the apex of art as practised by Nature. The male spermatozoa is in no way connected with the genes that lay out the pattern for the body.

"Two things the *lalitha* needs to reproduce. Those two things must occur simultaneously. They are, excitation from orgasm and the stimulation of the photokinetic nerve."

Fobo paused and seemed to cock an ear, as if he were listening for something outside. Hal, who had absorbed some of the empathy of the wog during his acquaintanceship, felt that he was

waiting for something big. Really big. And whatever it was, it involved the fate of the Earthmen.

Suddenly he thrilled to hot and cold tinglings . . . and the knowledge that he was on the wog's side!

"What is this nerve?" Fobo went on. "It is a property of the *lalitha*, and runs from the retina of the eye, along with the optic nerve, to the back of the brain. From there it descends the spinal column and leaves the base to enter the uterus. Or, as we term it, the *camera obscura uteri*. The dark room of the womb. Where the photographs of the father's features are developed. And attached to the daughters' faces.

"Yes, that is one of their unique anatomical marks. The photogenes. A *lalitha's* chromosomes are connected to the photokinetic nerve. During intercourse, at the moment of the climax, an electrochemical change takes place in that nerve. By the light that the *lalitha* always requires—an arc-reflex makes it impossible for her to close her eyes at that time—the face of the male is photographed.

"Photographed is an inadequate word, but it is the only one we have for the process. Anyway, if his hair is light brown, that information passes down a string of genes, each of which controls a specific hair color from jet-black down through the hair-spectrum to orange-red. The genes work on a cybernetic parallel. A yes-no binary system. If the gene's color does not correspond to the photokinetic nerve's request, it does not respond. It says no. If it approximates most closely the request, it says yes.

"The same thing happens with the shape and thickness of the hair, the size and shape of the nose and lips, the cheekbones, and jaw, and chin, and the color of the eyes. The shape of the nose, for instance, might have to be turned down a hundred and fifty times before the right combination of genes were struck—"

"You hear that?" exulted Macneff.

"You have begat larvae! Monsters of an unholy union. Insect children! And they will have your face as witness of this revolting carnality—"

"Of course, I am no connoisseur of human features," interrupted Fobo, "but the young man's strike me as vigorous and handsome. In a human way, you understand."

HE TURNED to Yarrow. "Now you see why Jeannette desired light. And why she pretended alcoholism. As long as she drank a sufficient amount of liquor before copulation, she was sure that the workings of the delicate photokinetic nerve would be interfered with. No pregnancy that way. No death. But when . . . you cut the beetlejuice with Easyglow . . . unknowing, of course. . ."

Macneff burst into a high-pitched laughter. "What irony! Truly it has been said that the wages of unrealism are death!"

Fobo spoke loudly. "Go ahead, son. Cry, if you like. You'll feel better. You can't, eh? I wish you would.

"*Eh, bien. Je continue.* The *lalitha*, no matter how human she looks, cannot escape her arthropod heritage. The nymphs that develop from the larvae can easily pass for babies, but it would pain you to see the larvae themselves. Though they are not any uglier than a five months' human embryo. Not to me, anyway.

"It is a sad thing that the *lalitha* mother must die. Hundreds of millions of years ago, when the primitive pseudo-arthropod was ready to hatch the eggs in her womb, a hormone was released in her body. It calcified the skin and turned her into a womb-tomb. She became a shell. Her larvae ate the organs and the bones, which were softened by the draining away of their calcium. When the young had fulfilled the function of the larva, which is to eat and grow, they rested and became nymphs. Then they broke the shell in its weak place in the belly.

"That weak point is the navel. It

alone does not calcify with the epidermis, but remains soft. By the time the nymphs are ready to come out, the soft flesh of the navel has decayed. Its dissolution lets loose a chemical which decalcifies an area that takes in most of the abdomen. The nymphs, though weak as human babies and much smaller, are activated by instinct to kick out the thin and brittle covering.

"You must understand, Hal, that the navel itself is both functional and mimetic. Since the larvae are not connected to the mother by an umbilical cord, they would have no navel. But they grow an excrescence which resembles one.

"The breasts of the adult also have two functions. Like the human female's, they are both sexual and reproductive. They never produce milk, of course, but they are glands. At the time the larvae are ready to hatch from the eggs, the breasts act as two powerful pumps of the hormone which carries out the hardening of the skin.

"Nothing wasted, you see—Nature's economy. The things that enable her to survive in human society also carry out the death process.

"It is a sad thing, but it has not changed in all these epochs. The mothers must give their lives for their young. Yet Nature, as a sort of recompense, has given them a gift. On the analogy of reptiles, which do not stop growing larger as long as they aren't killed, the *lalitha* will not die if they remain unpregnant. And so—"

Hal leaped to his feet and shouted, "Stop it!"

"I'm sorry," Fobo said softly. "I'm just trying to make you see why Jeannette felt that she couldn't tell you what she truly was. She loved you, Hal; she possessed the three factors that make love: a genuine passion, a deep affection, and the feeling of being one flesh with you, male and female so inseparable it would be hard to tell where one began and the other ended. I know she did, believe me, for we empathists can

put ourselves into somebody else's nervous system and think and feel as they do.

"And feel, despite all this, she must have had a bitter leaven in her love. The belief that if you knew she was of an utterly alien branch of the animal kingdom, separated by millions of years of evolution, barred by her ancestry and anatomy from the true completion of marriage—children—you would turn from her with horror. That belief must have shot with darkness even her brightest moments. . . ."

"No! I would have loved her, anyway! It might have been a shock. But I'd have gotten over it. Why, she was human; she was more human than most of the women I've known!"

Macneff sounded as if he were going to retch. When he had recovered himself, he howled, "You abysmal thing! How can you stand yourself, now you know what utterly filthy monster you have lain with! Why don't you try to tear out your eyes, which have seen that vile filth! Why don't you bite off your lips, which have kissed that insect mouth! Why don't you cut off your hands, which have pawed with loathsome lust that mockery of a body! Why don't you tear out by the roots those organs of carnal—"

Fobo spoke through the storm of wrath. "Macneff! Macneff!"

THE gaunt head swiveled towards the empathist. His eyes stared, and his lips had drawn back into what seemed to be an impossibly large smile; a smile of absolute fury.

"What? What?" he muttered, like a man waking from sleep.

"Macneff. Why don't you tell Yarrow what you were thinking about the other night? When you were alone in your cabin, and supposedly at your prayers. Why don't you tell him what you were planning to do if your agents brought in the *lalitha* alive? What were you thinking?"

The Sandalphon's jaw fell. Red

flooded his face and became purple. The violent color faded, and a corpselike white replaced it.

He screeched like an owl.

"Enough! Uzzites, take this—this thing that calls itself a man to the gig!"

The two men in black circled to come at the joat from front and back. Their approach was based on training, not real caution. Years of taking prisoners had taught them to expect no resistance. The arrested always stood cowed and numb before the representatives of the Sturch. Now, despite the unusual circumstances, and the knowledge that Hal carried a gun, they saw nothing different in him.

Normally, they would have been right. They could not guess that they had met a man whose basically rebellious character was on the point of bursting the lifelong cocoon of repression. He stood with bowed head and hunched shoulders and dangling arms, the typical arrestee.

That was one second; the next, he was a tiger striking.

The agent in front of him reeled back, blood flowing from his mouth and spilling on his black jacket. When he bumped into the wall, he paused to spit out three teeth.

By then Yarrow had whirled and rammed a fist into the big soft belly of the man behind him.

"Whoof!" went the Uzzite.

He folded. As he did so, Hal brought his knee up against the unguarded chin. There was a crack of bone breaking, and the agent fell to the floor.

"Watch him!" yelled Macneff. "He's got a gun!"

The Uzzite by the wall shoved his hand under his jacket, feeling for the weapon in his armpit holster. Simultaneously a heavy bronze bookend, thrown by Fobo, struck his temple. He crumpled.

Macneff screamed, "You are resisting, Yarrow! You are resisting!"

Hal bellowed, "You're damn shib I am!"

Head down like a mad bull's, he plunged at the Archurielite.

Macneff slashed with his whip at his attacker's skull. Hal rammed into the gray-clad form and knocked it to the floor. When Macneff got to his knees, Yarrow seized him by the throat and squeezed. Macneff turned purple and clutched at the terrible hands.

At that moment a tremendous boom! rattled the hospital windows. On its heels came another shock wave. Somewhere outside, the night became day for a second.

HAL unclenched his hands and let Macneff fall.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"I imagine it was the *Gabriel* falling from a height of fifty feet," Fobo said. "Not very far, of course, but the ship is tremendous. Something must have exploded. I hope the damage wasn't too serious, for we want to use the ship as a model to build some for ourselves."

Macneff groaned. Hal, standing over him and breathing hard, stared at the wog.

"We don't have mechanical flying missiles, Hal. But we do have hordes of winged and poisonous insects whose flight may be directed, within limits, by painful or pleasing super or subsonic waves. And who also may be conditioned by the sweat-impregnated clothing of Terrans to bite any Earthmen that come within their sense of smell.

"What happened a moment ago was that our fierce little fighters were sent through the open ports and ventilators of the *Gabriel*. Once inside, it is probable that they stung everybody on the ship, and that those stung collapsed with half-paralyzed nervous systems. Naturally, I don't know why the ship fell and then exploded. However, that makes it unnecessary for us to board the ship

from a balloon which Zugu had powered with a motor."

"You wogs think of everything, don't you?"

Fobo shrugged. "We are peaceful . . . but, unlike you Terrans, we are really 'realists.' If we have to take action against vermin, we exterminate them. On this insect-ridden planet we have had a long history of battling vermin."

He looked at Macneff, who was on all fours, eyes glazed, shaking his head like a wounded bear.

Fobo said, "I do not include you in that vermin, Hal. You are free to go where you want."

Hal sat down again and croaked, "What is there left for me?"

"Plenty, man." Tears ran down Fobo's nose and collected at the end. "You have your daughters to care for, to love. In a few days they will be through with their feeding in the incubator—they survived the Caesarean quite well—and will be beautiful babies. They will be yours as much as any human infants could be. After all, they look like you—in a modified feminine way, of course. Your genes are theirs. What's the difference whether genes act by cellular or photonic means? Genes are genes.

"And there will be women for you. You forget that she has aunts and sisters. All young and beautiful."

"Thanks, Fobo, but that's not for me." He buried his face in his hands.

A nurse stuck her head out of the door of the operating room.

"Doctor Fobo, we are bringing the body out. Does the man care to look?"

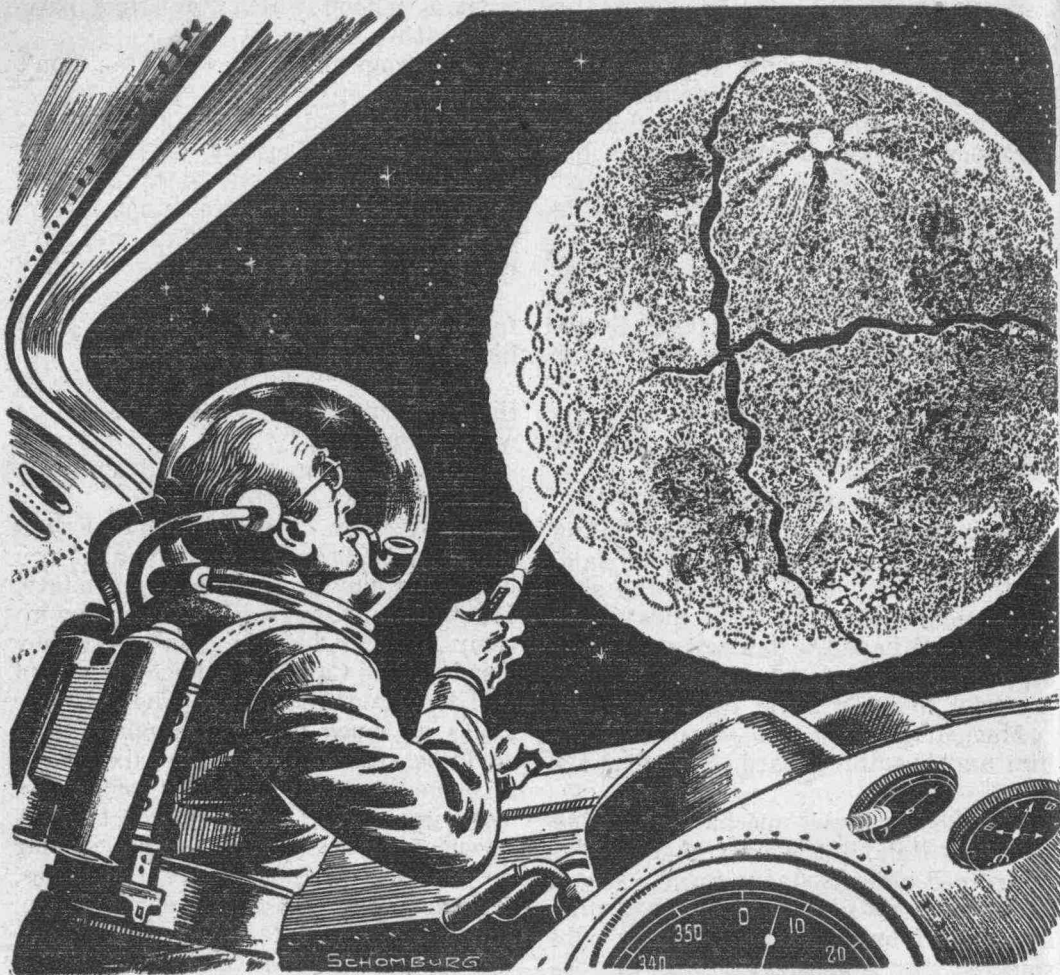
Without removing his hands, Hal shook his head.

Two nurses wheeled the carrier out. A white sheet was draped over the form. It clung to the superb curves of the shell beneath.

Hal did not look up.

He moaned, "Jeannette! Jeannette!"

Next Issue: **THE OBLIGATION**, a novelet by Roger Dee which proves that humans have no monopoly on conscience!



MAJOR VENTURE and

By CHARLES E. FRITCH

*All the world loves a hero, but when
everybody tried to get into the act, the hero
backed off to a world of his own!*

JOE STALLING relaxed behind the controls of his convertible space cruiser as it leaped through the space Earth and peered with a mild degree of interest through his horn-rimmed glasses at the white-grey surface of the Moon coming to meet him.

It was like a mass of thick, dirty dough, an unpalatable place for all but the four persons who lived there, and Joe Stalling sat watching it grow in the forward window and puffed contemplative clouds of smoke at it from the curved pipe he held firmly between tight, colorless lips.

An ordinary man might have been frightened, if not of the bleak desolation of the Moon itself, at least of the four who made it their home—of Sam Galileo and his three companions who were not entirely human. But Joe Stalling was not an ordinary man. He was a detective, a man used to facing danger, and he was confident that he could bluff his way out of the situation if the four were there.

But the four were not there. Joe Stalling knew that because he was a friend of Abner Burney, the Marshal of the Planet Patrol, who was a friend of Major Venture and the three non-human inhabitants of the satellite, and

hind the thick-lensed glasses, and he smiled through a cloud of smoke. With the four Venturemen away, it would be easy. All he'd have to do was avoid any traps they had left behind to embarrass intruders, and then he'd be set for life. No more detecting for him after that. He had always had a private eye bent in the direction of making money, and he had hit upon a stunt that was sure-fire. All it took was a little courage and a lot of brass, and Joe was convinced he had them in those proportions.

He made his landing with a predetermined insolence, stopping before the very doors of the citadel he was to invade. For a minute he sat there, puffing on his S-curved pipe, surveying the rusting, rectangular structure that leaned slightly to one side. It had tilted early in its life, and the defect had not been corrected by the Venturemen, who saved face by claiming they had intended it that way for their own secret purpose.

Joe flipped the fishbowl lid of his spacesuit into place, and immediate black clouds of smoke filled the inside of the plastic bubble. He quickly adjusted a knob on his suit, and the smoke cleared away. Joe Stalling breathed in the freshened air, satisfied that the smoke from the pipe still in his mouth

the MISSING SATELLITE

with a little patience and a few atomic beers most any secret could be pried from the good Marshal. Joe knew the four were away on some alien world, doing the good deeds for which they were famous and for which each had been awarded the honorary rank of Space Eagle, the highest award that could be made by the Boy Scouts of Sol.

Joe Stalling's small eyes sparkled be-

would be carried away quickly and efficiently and fresh air substituted. And now he was ready.

HE OPENED the door, and the air rushed out in a swift gush that blew white-powdered dust upward. He clambered from the spaceship, his movements clumsy from the bulky spacesuit and the light gravity. He was a detec-

tive, not a spaceman, and the forced clumsiness annoyed him to the extent that he puffed furiously at the curved pipe and felt doubly annoyed when the conditioning unit labored in its efforts to clear the helmet.

Joe Stalling went to the doorway of the tilted structure and found that the door was locked. He rang the doorbell, glancing in quiet amusement at the unworn Welcome mat at his feet. Of course no one answered, and he would have been greatly surprised if someone had; it was just a formality. He waited a moment and then he drew out his service blaster and knocked the door in with a bolt of energy. Replacing the blaster, he walked in and stumbled over the first of the Venturemen's traps. Joe didn't bother to replace the tin cans which had fallen from the string stretched across the doorway. He went on and encountered the second barrier, a wide band of flour spread before the inner door.

Joe Stalling paused for a moment in deep admiration for the ingenuity of the Venturemen. Ordinarily, one would expect electric eyes, recorders, electronic barriers. But this was something the average person would not be prepared for. Even the detective would not have known of it had he not pried the information from Abner Burney, who with Jane Crandall was one of Major Venture's few close friends.

His feet made deep impressions in the flour as he crossed it unhesitatingly. What did it matter if a record of his footprints were left? No one would ever find it. Laughing as if at a private joke, he went into the laboratory.

The laboratory took up most of the space in the structure, and machines and lab benches and bottled chemicals took up much of the space in the laboratory. Joe Stalling ignored the chemical part of the lab and turned his attention to the machines.

He knew just what he was looking for, but there were so many machines that the finding of it was not easy. At

last he pulled it from a cobwebbed corner, blew dust from it, and with a cry of exultation held it in the sunlight streaming through a window.

It looked like an ordinary two-celled flashlight, except there were hundreds of minute buttons imbedded in one side of the cylinder. His hands itched as his fingers brushed the buttons, but he forced himself to be cautious, to recall the operation of the machine as he had read it from the supposedly secret files in the Planet Patrol office—files from which even Marshal Burney was barred.

He pointed the thing at a huge lab bench in one corner of the room, pressed buttons with infinite precision. A shaft of light sliced out and cut the bench neatly in half. He pressed more buttons. The ray stabbed out again, but this time the two sections rejoined, welded into a solid piece as before.

Behind his thick-lensed glasses, Joe Stalling's eyes glistened in wild triumph, and clouds of exultant smoke poured from the pipe in his helmet.

He ran from the room. In a few minutes he was aloft in space, the top of his convertible space cruiser down. He banked sharply, and pointed the cylinder. A ray of light leaped out, and a long vertical crack appeared in the Moon's surface. He played the light horizontally, and another crack came.

Laughing between teeth firmly clenched on his pipe, Joe Stalling headed for Earth. Behind him, the Moon had split into four pieces.

SEVERAL days later the Orange Peel—the Venturemen's spaceship—returned to the Earth orbit. It was called the Orange Peel because it was painted a deep orange and resembled an orange peel.

"Hot ziggity," said Ergo the android, peering from a window at the green planet. "It'll be great to be home, to see Earth women again."

"Bah!" Crab the robot's heavy voice boomed into the stillness of the control room. "That's all you think about. And

you an android!" He glared at Ergo.

"Maybe if you were even a little human," Ergo accused, "you'd have some affection for such things."

To the uninitiated, it was a remarkable thing to watch Ergo talk, or even to watch him listen. When he was accidentally created in the Moon laboratory by Major Venture's father who was trying to mix a bromo seltzer but got hold of the wrong chemicals, several minor mistakes had been made in Ergo's construction. His vocal chords, for one thing, were located close to his ears,

Sam Galileo, known to the universe as Major Venture, turned to the brain, Simon Simple.

"Those veil dancers on Alpha Centauri were really hot stuff, weren't they?"

"Indeedy, they were, Samuel," Simon answered metallically. "Almost makes me wish I were human again."

SIMON SIMPLE had once been a human, like Sam. But that was a long time ago, before he had gotten his tie caught in that electronic glasswasher at

The Prodigal Son

EVER since Captain Future went to his reward on the special asteroids reserved for space rovers, there have been loud lamentations from faithful fans who wanted him resuscitated, or at least anthologized.

We have so far resisted these blandishments on the grounds that a revival of Cap Future would be a movement back toward the Ice Age of science fiction—don't throw that! But anyway have a look at Major Venture. You may detect certain resemblances, certain familiarities to someone you know. And we'll be disappointed if you don't get a chuckle or two out of his misadventures.

—The Editor

with the result that he used his ears for talking instead of listening, and they flapped like lips opening and closing when he talked. In order to hear, the android had to leave his mouth open to collect the sounds, and often his attentiveness was understandably mistaken for open-mouthed bewilderment.

"At least," wailed the robot, who resented any implication that he had not human feelings, "I wasn't born in a vat of messy, smelly chemicals."

"Aw, your mudder's a garbage can," Ergo retorted uncharitably.

Actually, Crab's mother was an erector set, but the dig hit home. "Sam," the robot's electronic eyes pleaded with the only human of the four. "Sam, make him stop."

"Okay, you two," the Earthman said, "shaddup!"

the saloon where he worked. The results might have been catastrophic had not Sam Galileo's father stopped by for a quick one. Almost without thinking, the elder Galileo had operated on Simon Simple, whom he had stretched out on the bar, and quickly removed the man's brain with a forked stirring stick from a Tom Collins. Not certain of what to do with the soggy mass, he had thrust it into a nearby cuspidor, which had been Simon's home ever since.

Refinements had been added during the years—things such as tentacle-eyes and retractor beams—but Simon Simple was still a bit self-conscious about his unsophisticated container. However, as Sam Galileo pointed out, it had been a handy disguise when they were tracking down the root beer runners in that Alpha Centauri saloon. Messy, but

handy, and Simon was consoled.

"Yes," Sam sighed, "it'll seem good to get back to the shack again." He shook his head decisively, and his red-tatched toupee wobbled precariously. The hair, once a blazing scarlet, had faded, and portions of the material beneath shone through in embarrassing patches. Only the Venturemen knew that Sam Galileo, Major Venture, wore a toupee, and they were sworn to an unalterable secrecy.

Crab the robot moaned. "These feet are killing me," he said. He sank into a chair and reached down with long metallic arms and detached both his feet. "I'll be glad to get into my comfortable pair back at the shack."

"You're getting old," Ergo's ears accused. "Another year and we'll have to sell you by the pound."

"Is that so!" the robot demanded angrily.

He made threatening gestures with his hands and, forgetting he had no feet, rose to grab the android. He missed and fell flat on his metal face. Ergo danced away, laughing, and raced into a wall. From the floor, Crab's laugh was last and best.

Sam Galileo peered into space, and his features took on a puzzled look. "Simon, where's the Moon? According to your figures it should be right ahead of us."

Simon Simple looked as sheepish as was possible for a cuspidor. "You know I was never much good at mathematics," he said by way of apology.

"Well," Sam said, impressed by his own logic, "it's got to be here somewhere. Let's go around to the other side of Earth."

The Orange Peel flipped through space, circling the planet.

"For Pete's sake, chief," Ergo said, looking through the window, "we must be in the wrong place. That's not Earth."

"Don't be a shmoe," Sam Galileo snapped. "Of course it's Earth."

"Look at it," insisted the android. "There's too much water."

They looked. There *was* too much water. In fact, the planet was almost flooded.

"Look." Crab's metal finger pointed to the tip of the planet, where a flare's glow shot skyward.

"The signal," Simon said, his voice hollow in the cuspidor. "Earth is in danger. We've got to see Abner Burney at once!"

"I can't," Sam protested. "Not in this ragged toupee."

"But, Sam, Earth may be—"

"We're going to the Moon first," the man returned stubbornly.

Simon shrugged, and the Orange Peel zoomed through space. But after a few minutes, Sam looked at his companions in bewilderment.

"Something's crazy here," he said in consternation. "It's not here. The Moon's gone!"

ABNER BURNEY, Marshal of the Planet Patrol, nervously paced the floor of his office on the eighty-sixth floor, just three floors above the water level in the city. He had hair like wisps of cotton, a face of burned, wrinkled leather, and a drooping, shaggy mustache beneath a long nose.

"Why doesn't he come," he complained. "He must have seen the signal, and flares cost money. I wish he'd get here."

"Hold your jets, Abe," Jane Crandall advised. She hoisted her chubby body onto a desk and carelessly crossed her legs. "I'm just as anxious for him to get here as you are."

"Don't call me Abe!" Burney dropped into a chair and morosely studied her plump legs. "If anybody can do anything about this Moon business and the water, Major Venture can."

Jane Crandall was always happy to hear praise for Sam Galileo, for the pedestal-raising served as a rationalization every time she asked herself why she hadn't trapped him by this time. After all, what girl wouldn't go for a man with such glorious curly red hair.

She wanted to give her best impression now when he did arrive. She had rowed all the way from her home to the Administration Building that housed the Planet Patrol Headquarters—rowed all the way despite a tight girdle and eye-brows that wouldn't stick in the dampness. But a man worth trapping, she reminded herself, is worth going through hell for.

"You have nice legs," Abner Burney noticed aloud.

"Really!" she said, blushing a little and pretending to be indignant. She tried to pull her skirt down, but accidentally raised it another inch.

It was about time the old fool noticed, she thought furiously. Sure she had nice legs. Wasn't she once voted by the Retired Spacemen and Old Age Survivors League as "the girl they'd most like to see stranded on Sagittarius?" The wording had always confused her, but she consoled herself that the old dears had meant well.

Abner Burney's grizzled face brightened. "I think I hear Crab's metal feet thumping on the floor outside. At last Major Venture's here."

Jane Crandall squirmed excitedly on the desktop. She patted a wayward strand of wiry hair into place and quickly surveyed her white-washed face in a pocket mirror. Then she put on her best smile and fluttered her eyelashes at the open doorway.

"Abner! Jane!" Major Venture said enthusiastically. "It's good to see you again."

Behind him trailed the heavy-footed Crab, the open-mouthed Ergo, and the cuspidored Simon who floated several feet off the floor.

"You came just in time," Abner Burney said, warmly clasping Sam Galileo's hand. "We were running out of dry flares."

SAM sat down, ignoring Jane Crandall's fluttering eyelashes. "Sorry we're late. We—" He grinned self-consciously. "It sounds crazy, but we

couldn't find the Moon."

Abner Burney's cottoned head nodded gravely. "It's gone, Sam. Disappeared."

"What?"

Major Venture half-rose in surprise; Crab had started to remove his aching feet, but had stopped, stunned by the news; Ergo's ears hung open in astonishment. Only the cuspidor seemed unmoved.

The Marshal nodded again. "Happened only a few days ago. The Moon cracked right down the middle, then across. Split into four pieces, and then it disappeared. Then the water started rising here on Earth."

Crab said in dismay, "My comfortable pair of feet are up there."

"And my best tou—" Sam Galileo began, but then he stopped and looked at Jane Crandall who was curiously studying his ragged hair. He got up and began pacing to present a moving target to her glances.

He said, "We've got to find the pieces. There are a lot of valuable things in the shack," and his three friends echoed the sentiment.

"We've got to do something about Earth first," Abner Burney said, "before it's all under water."

"We'll do all we can, Abner," Major Venture said, laying a fraternal hand on the Marshal's shoulder.

"First, though," Burney said, "there's someone I'd like you to meet." He pressed a button on his desk. "One of the best detectives in the Planet Patrol. He was anxious to help, and I figured he might come in handy."

They looked to the doorway as a short, thin man with a pale face and thick, horn-rimmed glasses entered. Between the tight lines of his lips he had a curved pipe upon which he puffed with casual and infinite regularity.

"Major Venture," Abner Burney said proudly, "I'd like you to meet Joe Stalling."

WITH Ergo at the controls, the Orange Peel skimmed the surface of

the raised water. The eight of them—Jane Crandall had insisted upon going along—cast about for theories to solve the problem.

"I think," Joe Stalling said through a thick cloud of smoke, "that the Moon just got so old that it cracked up, and the resulting disbalance of forces caused the water to rise. About the only thing we can do is to vacate the planet."

"Ninety percent of the people have already done that," Abner Burney said. "Gone to Mars and to Venus and the Asteroids. But that doesn't solve the problem here."

Sam nodded. "Anyway, for once we can forget about a personal villain behind this. It must be natural phenomena; no person could do that, unless—" His eyes narrowed at a strange thought.

Abner leaned forward. "Unless what?"

"I was going to say, unless he had the Thingamabob."

"Thingamabob?" Abner Burney scratched his head.

"A little device we didn't know what to name, so we called it the Thingamabob. It looks like a flashlight, but it can slice through, weld together, attract or repulse any mass at which it's pointed."

Abner Burney whistled. "You think—"

Sam shrugged. "I think it's possible. A man could've stolen it, sliced the moon into pieces and dragged the satellite off to some distant part of the universe."

"Except that it's too fantastic," Joe Stalling said. "Why should anyone want to do that?"

"Maybe for a souvenir," Abner suggested jokingly.

Joe Stalling silently puffed a furious smoke message into the air.

"What are you doing, Simon?" Major Venture asked the brain.

The cuspidor hovered over a silent calculating machine, and its retractor beams darted at intervals to the keys beneath. The machine made noiseless movements, presenting figures through

a small rectangular window.

"I'm figuring the amount of water that has risen, Samuel," came the cuspidor's metallic voice.

"Oh," Sam Galileo said thoughtfully, wondering what on Earth for.

Joe Stalling edged over to where the brain-filled cuspidor was busy with its calculations. While he was pretending interest in the procedure, he blew an apparently accidental cloud of smoke into the brain's lens-eyes and with a swift motion pressed several numbers on the calculating machine, which registered the digits with silent precision.

"A fine thing," Jane Crandall was pouring her troubles onto an unsympathetic Crab, "here I am young and beautiful, with a wonderful figure, all alone with a bunch of eligible men, and what happens?" Disgusted, she supplied the word herself: "Nothing."

Crab had no sympathy for her. His feet hurt. He had loosened them, but he was uncertain of the propriety of taking them off in the midst of so much company. He didn't want Ergo to taunt him for his lack of manners.

"Sam!" the brain's voice came from the calculating machine. "Sam, look at this!"

They crowded about him, wondering.

"The amount of water," Simon cried excitedly, "is exactly the amount that could be displaced by the Moon."

Major Venture's eyes lit with a wild light, as insight came. He said, "Do you realize what this means? The pieces of the Moon must have fallen into the ocean someplace and as a result raised the water!"

Behind his dark-rimmed glasses, Joe Stalling's eyes closed. His teeth clenched the pipe like a vise, and slowly he counted to ten. Simon wasn't too good at mathematics, and he must have made an error in his original figures. The detective groaned inwardly. In trying to throw the Ventureman off, Joe Stalling had depressed keys that had corrected the error!

THE ORANGE PEEL slid swiftly across the ocean bottom searching for a sunken fragment of Moon. Tension had mounted at Sam Galileo's revelation, and everyone crowded about portholes to gaze into the murky water lit by the rocket ship's sweeping beams.

Everyone, that is, except Joe Stalling. The detective sat brooding in one corner of the spaceship-turned-submarine and puffed into the atmosphere. Instinctively, he felt his plans going swiftly and certainly awry, for he knew they couldn't help but bump into something as large as a Moon-fragment.

Sam Galileo's triumphant cry, "There it is," stirred the detective to action. While the others were busy with the discovery, he swiftly donned a spacesuit and, with the Thingamabob clutched tightly in his hand, went through the airlock.

"You and Crab stay in here with the ship," Sam Galileo ordered Ergo. "The rest of you get into spacesuits."

Anxiously they complied. It was Jane who, being a woman, first noticed that a man was missing. "Where's that Joe—Joe whatsisname?"

Ergo's voice answered, puzzled, as the android peered through a porthole. "He's outside," he said, his voice-ears flapping frantically. The voice turned to panic. "Chief, he's got the Thingamabob!"

Sam Galileo's face turned pale. "What? Then he's the one who's behind it. He's been trying to throw us off all along." He added thoughtfully, "I wondered why Simon's calculations were right, all of a sudden."

"I never was very good at mathematics," Simon Simple apologized.

They were interrupted as a beam from the Thingamabob sliced through the hull of the Orange Peel, splitting it in two and pouring in a torrent of water which scattered the inhabitants about the ocean floor.

Crab landed on the feet he was suddenly glad he had only loosened and not taken off. The robot started forward,

but his movements were slow, then slower. With a shock he realized that he hadn't oiled himself in some time, and he knew why Major Venture had wanted him to stay in the ship: the water was beginning to rust his joints!

"Ergo, the oil can," he wailed.

"I'm having troubles of my own," the android complained, and bubbles flitted from his ears as he talked. "The chemicals in my body are dissolving in the water!"

Even as he said it, Ergo's body was thin, almost transparent. "Sam," he cried. "Sam, what'll I do?"

Sam Galileo's spacesuited figure came into sight. "Quick, Ergo, crawl into Crab's left ear. Don't argue now. Just do it."

Ergo thought the idea was idiotic, but he was too desperate to argue; he did it and surprised himself that a full-size android could have crawled into such a small place.

"What's left on your body is completely pliable from the water," Major Venture explained. "And now, Crab, put your index finger in your ear."

With much creaking, Crab did as he was told, trapping Ergo's chemicals safely in his ear where the water couldn't get at them.

"They'll be okay, Samuel," the brain said, floating a few feet away. "Let's get Stalling."

Sam nodded, but they didn't have to go far. A few yards away the detective was waiting for them, a glint in his eyes, an insolent curl of smoke drifting from the pipe in his bubble helmet, and the Thingamabob poised, ready in his hand.

"Samuel, watch out," Simon cried.

SAM GALILEO ducked as a beam of light stabbed through the water toward him; but he fell, and his toupee slipped down over his face. He couldn't reach it through the bubble headpiece, and the water churned as he shook his head violently in a vain effort to shove aside the hairpiece that blinded him.

"Simon," he said helplessly, "I can't see."

But the cuspidor hovered at bay with the Thingamabob now turned in its direction. He wondered where Abner Burney and Jane Crandall were.

"Crab," he shouted, "do something."

The robot was having a hard time moving at all, but with a desperate effort he kicked out with his right leg. A loosened foot detached itself and sailed through the water in a graceful arc that terminated upon meeting Joe Stalling's helmet.

"Good shot," Simon cried jubilantly.

The helmet cracked beneath the weight of the robot's metal foot. As the water rushed in, a surprised look came over Joe Stalling's face and his pipe went out.

With a tremendous sneeze and a shake of his head, Major Venture had managed to send his toupee flying to a more normal position within the bubble of his headpiece. With a quick motion, he grabbed Simon and shoved the cuspidor down over the head of the drowning detective.

Simon started to protest. "But, Samuel, I'm upside down—"

"We can't let him drown," Sam told the brain. "He'll be safe in there until we get him back in the Orange Peel."

"But it's cracked in half."

Sam stooped, picked up the Thingamabob, and patted it affectionately. "You forget. This can take care of that little difficulty."

And it did. A few brief flashes of light and the Orange Peel was as good as new. The rusty Crab, with Ergo still in his ear, was carried aboard, followed by Joe Stalling with Simon's cuspidor over his head.

Sam found Abner Burney and Jane Crandall a short distance away, incapacitated by a freak accident. The blast of the Thingamabob had thrown them together and fused their helmets into a single bubble, so that they resembled Siamese twins joined at the head. Sam took them aboard the Orange Peel,

relieved them of their predicament, and apologized for his tardiness.

"That's okay," Jane said, blushing and clinging to Abner's hand. "I didn't mind."

Abner Burney giggled hoarsely. "Wasn't bad at all," he said through a lipstick-covered mustache.

Poor fellow, Sam thought; he's got blood all over his mouth. He turned to the brain. "How about you, Simon; you okay?"

"Fine," the brain said. "Joe Stalling and I were talking while he had his head inside my cus—er—brain case. You know, his ideas aren't bad at all. After all, the Moon wasn't of much use to anybody anyway, and we could always build an artificial one. Be more sanitary, too."

Sam Galileo turned pale. His upside-down position must have unbalanced Simon.

Ergo had come out of Crab's ear, a hardened mold of chemicals. "You know, Sam," the mold said, "Crab and I never realized before what talents we've got. We thought up a terrific idea for a vaudeville act. Sounds like a great idea, doesn't it?"

Major Venture hardly heard the chemical mold that had the android's voice. He suddenly had the strangest desire to walk quietly to the nearest wall and bang his head against it to make certain that both were real.

"I'll wake up when I get home," he told himself.

Dazed, he settled in the control chair, mechanically pulled levers, and with a sickening rush the Orange Peel shot upward. . . .

YEARS passed.

The firm of Simple and Stalling prospered with sales made to all parts of this galaxy and others. The Moon was now a rare thing, a relic of the past, and watch fobs, bookends, and other souvenirs made from it sold easily.

The comedy team of Ergo and Crab became an immediate sensation, and for

many years the Palace in Venus City rocked with laughter at their antics. Crab became quite adept at kicking his feet through hoops held some distance away by a pretty Venusian girl clad in a brief costume, while Ergo's specialty was a disappearing act in a tank of water in full view of the audience; later, of course, he was filtered off and remolded.

The newlyweds, Abner Burney and Jane Crandall Burney, were quite satisfied with the Simple-Stalling artificial moon (model 3A), declaring that it had the same effects as the old, unsanitary one; they stated that on their honeymoon they didn't notice any difference in it. Or in anything.

As for Major Venture—he just disappeared, and the general notion is that

he's probably fighting right now on some alien planet many light-centuries away. But some people think differently.

They quote, for example, the instance of a beachcomber on Mercury whose red toupee, frizzled by long hours in the Mercurian sun, bears a remarkable resemblance to Major Venture's scarlet curls. He is a short, paunchy man whose teeth have long since been melted away by the radioactive liquors served in Mercurian saloons. He has no desire to hear news from any place in the solar system, especially of Earth and its anti-septic moon, and every time he sees an Earth woman or gazes at one of the saloon's cuspidors, he shudders at some nearly-forgotten memory. Some people say this is significant.

But of course it's merely speculation.



Here is the odyssey of a hardy group of shipwrecked Earthmen on a huge, alien planet—with danger on every hand. A lusty, gusty adventure—bold, colorful, exciting. . . .

B I G P L A N E T

By JACK VANCE

FEATURED IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE—PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES!



I

THE Honorable Lucien B. Fenimore, Minister of Sanity, completed his annual address to the new students of the World University and listened to the round of applause. After three hundred years of practical politics, his every action and tone were works of art; his smile, as he left the room, seemed to carry a personal intimacy to each of the students.

Outside the University, Lucien Fenimore climbed into his luxurious aircar and ordered the chauffeur back to the

Government Building. When they arrived there, the Minister went directly to his office on the two hundredth floor.

His secretary, a pretty little brunette from Crete, looked up as he entered.

"Vice-President Bonelli and Party Leader Eden are waiting in your private office," she said.

The schooled smile returned to Lucien's face as he went through the inner door.

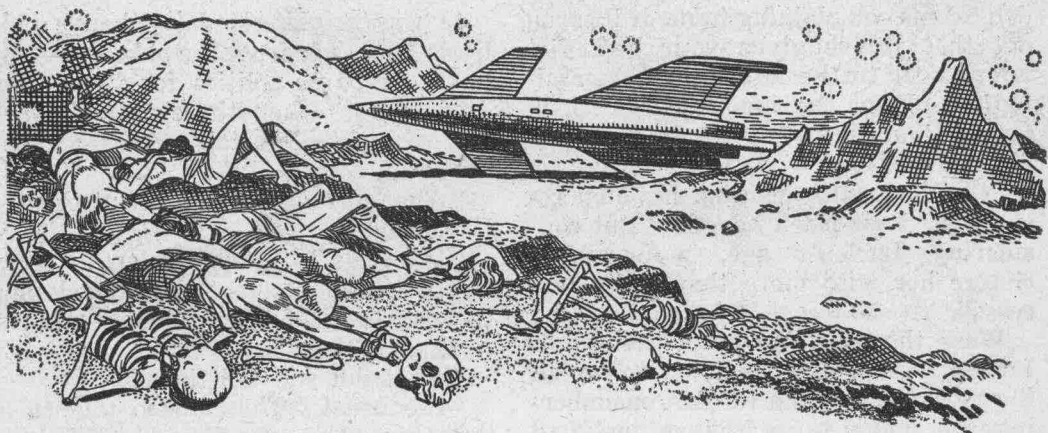
"Well," he said, his geniality perfected by three centuries of practice, "this is

Fenimore Signed His Own Death Warrant, but

The HOUR of the MORTALS

A Novelet by

KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN



a pleasant surprise. Sorry you had to wait, gentlemen, but this was my day at the university."

The two men waiting in the office were quite different in appearance. Vice-President Bonelli was the fashion-plate of the government, always giving the appearance of being ready to go before the video cameras on a world-wide hook-up. Ross Eden, on the other hand, was a man who might have been taken for a small merchant. His clothes were careless and rumpled, his features non-

descript. He took pride in the fact that he had never been seen on the video screens and could walk down any street in the world without being recognized.

"Hello, Lucien," Bonelli said. "How was it?"

"The usual group of wide-eyed innocents," Fenimore said, chuckling as he dropped into his own chair behind the desk. "Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?"

"I believe Ross is the harbinger of good news," the vice-president said, "but

Among the Immortals He'd Still Be Top Man!

I wanted to get a couple of matters cleared up first, since your vacation starts tomorrow." He put a sheaf of papers on the desk in front of Lucien. "Here are the latest Certificates of Unsanity—that group of petty financiers who didn't want to play ball with Ross, and a few minor individual grafters. If you'll sign them now, I won't have to hold them up until your return."

The Minister of Sanity stopped with his pen poised above the first sheet. There was a twinkle in his eye as he looked up.

"I suppose it's safe to sign without reading them," he said.

"Sure," Bonelli said promptly, "only don't come complaining to me if it turns out that you've given your best girl friend over to the Minister of Assassination. Even the immortals can look to their laurels. They can't die, but they can be murdered."

"Charged with draining national resources," Ross Eden added. "But considering Lucien's age, we couldn't charge her with more than petty larceny."

Were the jokes no more than that, Lucien wondered. He tried to weigh the tones back of the words, remembering the many times that a jest had masked a fatal blow.

"Well," he said, with a chuckle in which the others joined, "it's easier to get a new girl friend than it is to wade through all of these papers." He quickly flicked through the papers, signing each one. He resisted the impulse to go back and read the names on each Charge. "I guess everyone will have to stay sane until I get back."

"I hope so," the vice-president said. He picked up the papers and looked solemnly at Lucien. "Have a good rest, Lucien. You've earned it."

"Maybe *you* need the vacation. That's the first time I ever heard you say that anyone had earned a rest."

The vice-president grinned, waved to the Party Leader and left.

Lucine stared at the door after it

closed. "How long has Bonelli been in the government?" he asked idly.

"Ten years," Ross Eden said.

"Ten years," repeated Lucien. "The president five years—Lessing twenty years—Schwartz twenty-five years—" he broke off and looked at Eden with a smile. "There aren't many of us left—the original party leaders."

"No," Ross Eden said quietly. "There's only Williamson, you and me. Immortality didn't wear well with the others."

"Williamson, you and me," Lucien repeated. A vague smile hovered on his lips. "Just the three of us. Were you ever superstitious, Ross?"

"No. Why?"

"I was thinking today—there's only three of us left from the old days—who have stayed in politics for three hundred years. Then there's the Council of Three of the Mortals. And—and the Three Immortals."

"What made you think about them?" Eden asked.

"The class," Lucien answered. "They wanted to know about the Mortals and the Immortals. They'd heard rumors, read pamphlets."

"What did you tell them?"

"The usual. Then I also told them that throughout the history of Man the number three has had a sacred meaning—that people have often assigned a threeness to things whether it was true or not."

"That's good," Ross Eden said. "I'll tell the others to use it."

A SILENCE fell between them. *The memory of three hundred years is between us . . . That's why there's so little for us to say to each other.*

"Ross," Lucien said suddenly, "do you know how long the Mortals—the Council of Three—have been chipping away at us?"

"More than two hundred years," Ross Eden said easily. "That ought to prove something. They've made no progress in two hundred years."

"Haven't they?" Lucien said. "Most

of the time I've thought they haven't too, but sometimes I wonder."

"What can they do?" Ross Eden asked, a thin edge of contempt in his voice. "They can't stage a revolution. They have no way of getting weapons, unless they use kitchen knives. Even small groups can't get together without our knowing about it. We have too many police, too many spies, too many video taps into too many homes."

"I know," Lucien said heavily. "I read the latest report of the Minister of Political Crime. 'All public places and eighty-five per cent of all private

our replacements."

"You need your vacation, Lucien. You're tired."

"Maybe I am," Lucien said heavily. "After three hundred years anyone is apt to be tired—except Ross Eden. The questions from the class today reminded me how they keep chipping away, patiently knocking off a grain here and a grain there. Do you know how many Charges of Unsanity I've signed against people we thought were members of the Council of Three? About four hundred that I can remember. And it's never stopped them; we know no more about them now than we did two hundred years ago, in spite of our spies."

"We know one thing just from their methods," Eden said quietly. "Despite their calling themselves the Mortals, we know that the Council of Three have immortality. Only those of us who are not limited by death can afford the luxury of such slow methods. It's their advantage. And it's our advantage . . . I can name you at least two of the Council of Three."

Lucien looked in astonishment at the impassive face of his Party Leader. "Who?" he asked.

"George Fraya and Gary Polti."

"Why them?" Lucien asked. "They were the first ones to be charged with unsanity. Just before the third—no, it was the *second* election—anyway, that's all of two hundred and ninety-five years ago that we sentenced them to die because they still fought to grant immortality to everyone."

"They were the first ones condemned," Ross Eden said, "but they were also the first to escape. Somewhere along the line, they recruited another and that is the Council of Three. We haven't found them yet—because it's almost impossible to fine-tooth-comb twenty billion people—but I know them."

How can he be so sure of anything after three hundred years. . . .

"How can you be sure?" Lucien asked aloud. "There have been many escapes

Pattern of Murder

MAN, ever facing the enigma of Death, has long sought the secret of immortality. And it is conceivable that he may find it. But in doing so, will he raise more problems than he solves? The poor we have always with us; will we not then also have always the rich, the greedy, the avaricious and ambitious and cruel? If Death did not come naturally, might not murder become an institution? The nature of society would change in odd ways and the morals of today might be the sins of tomorrow. Here is a look at such a society, at a man trapped in a futuristic pattern of ritual murder.

—The Editor

homes are now tapped, either audeo or video or both, and monitored through cybernetic listening posts.' But there is another weapon, Ross—fear."

"Nonsense."

"Is it? I wonder. For one reason or another, we've gotten rid of most of the original members of our Party. Assassinations. Executions. Now only three of us are left. We got rid of them because we were afraid of them in some way. Maybe the Mortals caused us to be afraid of them—to whittle down our own political body, one cell at a time. They've been working on the students, you know—the place where we must get

since then. The politically-condemned and some who were obviously wealthy enough to buy escape . . . How many have escaped, Ross? Do you know?"

"Roughly three thousand," Ross Eden said promptly.

"Three thousand," Lucien repeated, and marveled at the figure although he'd already known it must be about that. "Three thousand who escaped assassination and how many have we killed, Ross?"

"Not enough," Eden said crisply.

"You're right, of course," Lucien said, nodding. "Not enough—or not the right ones . . . You know, Ross, another thought occurred to me today."

"What?" Eden asked a little impatiently. He was becoming tired of the conversation.

"With only you and Williamson and myself left alive of the original Enterprise Party—of the first who had immortality," Lucien said slowly, "how long do you suppose it will be before people start getting the idea that we are the Three Immortals? That we are the three men who want to own the world for ourselves, sharing neither power nor money with any others?"

ROSS EDEN'S face moved in a mirthless grin. "Perhaps," he said, "there are some who already suspect us—or part of us . . . But enough of this, Lucien. I'm not going on a vacation as you are, so I have to get to work. Here, by the way, is why I dropped in to see you." He placed a bulky package on the desk.

Lucien Fenimore slit the top of the package. Neat bundles of green paper were revealed.

"Vacation expenses?" he asked.

"If you're going on a long vacation," Eden answered. "There's a hundred thousand there, in small bills. Remember that monopoly bill you introduced in the cabinet? I told you that World-Wide Aluminum was interested in it. Well, this is how much they were interested."

"And to think my mother wanted me to be a dentist," Lucien said. He was

regaining his normal mood. He took a briefcase from the desk drawer and stuffed the money into it. "It was nice of World-Wide not to forget."

"I had to twist their arms a little," Eden said. "But that's my job—seeing that my boys are taken care of." He stood up.

"You know, Ross," Lucien said, looking up at him, "there's something else I sometimes wonder . . . Why do you even bother to divide these—shall we say *emoluments*?—with the rest of us? You could keep it all for yourself and get away with it."

Ross Eden grinned. "One way or another," he said, "it eventually comes back to me. I cast my bread upon the water and it comes back sugar . . . Well, Lucien, think of me hard at work tomorrow morning when your vacation starts." He waved a hand and was gone.

Lucien Fenimore called in his secretary and dictated a number of routine letters and interoffice memos. While these were being typed, he called various associates and took care of official good-byes. Then he signed the letters and memos and went home.

Home to Lucien B. Fenimore was a small house of some twenty rooms, perched on the edge of a large artificial lake. An old-fashioned iron-grille fence separated the well-landscaped lawn from the quiet residential street. Although invisible to the eye, there were a number of energy-beams sweeping the area above the house so that the minister's slumbers might not be disturbed by low-flying air-cars or liners.

After a luxurious dinner, served by his butler who was the soul of perfection, Lucien spent a leisurely hour sipping coffee and brandy and making notes in the journal which he faithfully kept. He retired early, read for a while and then went to sleep.

Promptly at nine the following morning, the butler entered his bedroom with juice, freshly flown that morning from the Mediterranean, marmalade delivered a moment before from the area once

known as Scotland, toast, coffee, and the morning newspaper. Lucien propped himself up in bed and watched the butler arranging the breakfast.

Does he look too young? Lucien wondered. . . . There it is again, the eternal suspicion. Does this one look too young? Is that one a spy? Does the other one mean what he says? This has been the price we paid for eternal life and eternal power.

"Your paper, sir," the butler said respectfully. With one finger he nudged the paper nearer on the tray.

He'd never done that before. Lucien looked quickly at the butler's face, but there was nothing to be seen there. He picked up the paper, feeling the beginning tremor in his fingers.

II

HE UNFOLDED the paper and his breakfast was forgotten. There in the center of the newspaper, carefully boxed in heavy black lines was the name of—*Lucien B. Fenimore*.

For an awful moment Lucien sat staring at the newspaper, refusing to believe what he saw. He'd known for a long time that he was inviting this—there had been too many private deals—only a fool could have hoped to get away with it indefinitely. He looked at the newspaper and blinked his eyes. It still looked the same. Blink as many times as he could, the name still stood there on the page, giving to the world the name of a man who bore the sign of assassination.

No matter what the circumstance, you cannot face death with equanimity after three hundred years of freedom from the fear of death. . . .

"Matson," he said. Despite his best efforts there was a slight quaver in his voice.

"Yes, sir?" the butler said.

"Matson," he tried again and was pleased that his voice sounded firmer, "have you read the morning paper?"

"Yes, sir," the butler said. "Begging

your pardon, sir, but as you're aware, the servants in this house are completely loyal to the government."

Lucien looked at the butler, seeing nothing relevant in the statement. It was true that the servants had been through every loyalty test known to Man. No servant was ever hired for an official without a complete cybernetic boiling.

Odd, he thought as his mind wandered again for a moment, that cybernetic machines can detect even the smallest psychological flaw in the mortals but cannot be adjusted to check us, who have immortality. Odd that we should have mortality. Odd that we should have learned so much about the mortals and so little about ourselves. . . . I wonder if I would have the discipline to pose as a mortal and fool the machines? It isn't impossible. . . .

He became aware that the butler was speaking again.

"The staff, sir, has asked me to tell you that they are proud to have been employed by you."

"Proud?" Lucien said tonelessly. *If they are loyal to the government, and the mark of assassination means that I am considered no longer useful to the government, why are they proud?*

"Yes, sir," the butler said. "Perhaps you hadn't noticed, sir, but they've printed the story on the inside pages. Most unusual, sir, but I presume it is due to your prominence and to the rather heroic precedent."

Glancing again at his name, Lucien saw for the first time that there was a line in small type directly below. It simply announced: *story on page 7*. He turned the pages and found the story. It was headed by his name, this time in slightly smaller type, but once more boxed in the black lines of death:

LUCIEN B. FENIMORE

Critics of the administration were effectively silenced late last night when it was learned that Lucien B.

Fenimore, Minister of Sanity, had signed his own Certificate of Unsanity. Members of the political opposition have often charged that the Ministry of Sanity and Ministry of Assassination were merely means of getting rid of persons no longer useful to the administration. The unselfish and patriotic act of the Honorable Lucien B. Fenimore in declaring himself mentally unfit for public office, and automatically condemned to assassination, comes as the best proof of administration honesty that could be offered the people. The Certificate of Unsanity for Lucien B. Fenimore, President Edward Leigh announced this morning, will become a permanent exhibition in the World History Museum.

As he finished reading, Lucien found himself possessed by a certain morbid admiration of Ross Eden. He remembered a time—many, many years before—when the cabinet had discussed the criticism of the administration. He remembered how Ross Eden had suggested that they could always answer it by having the Minister of Sanity declare himself insane. And everyone had laughed at the joke.

You have to listen carefully even to the jokes

FROM the direction of the doorway, a muffled cough brought him back to the present. He glanced up and saw the butler still standing there, expressionless. But Lucien thought he knew what he saw in the eyes.

"Bring me the phone, audio-instrument only," he said. Then he added, with only a touch of irony: "And thank the staff for me."

The butler left, but in a moment he returned with the phone and plugged it in. Lucien dismissed him then, turned the volume on the phone down low, and put in a call to the party headquarters.

"Enterprise guarantees honest government—good morning," came the answer of the girl at the political office. "Are you on video? My screen seems inactivated."

"No screen," snapped Lucien. "Let me talk to Ross Eden."

"Who's calling?"

"Lucien B. Fenimore."

"I'm sorry, Mister Fenimore," the girl said instantly, "but Party Leader Eden is not in. I will tell him you called."

Lucien disconnected. He had not missed the fact that the girl had called him *Mister* Fenimore instead of the usual title. He knew—he should know, he reflected wryly—that Ross Eden would not be in any time he called now.

He tried-calling President Leigh next, but the results were the same. Neither were Vice-Presidents Bonelli, Montague, and Ronsmann in. Finally, more out of curiosity than anything else, he called his own office.

"Office of the Honorable Howard Hayden, Minister of Sanity, good morning," answered a girl. "Are you on—"

Lucien hung up without speaking. He noticed that his hands were trembling and he glanced around at the walls of his room with a nervous smile.

Is my home tapped, he wondered—and knew that it was. *Will Ross look at the film and be pleased that I reacted like all the others? Am I frightened enough to please him?* He thought about it, and knew that he couldn't be more frightened than he actually was.

An hour later, Lucien was still seated on the edge of the bed, the untasted breakfast beside him. Now that it was too late to do otherwise, he wondered if he shouldn't have been more careful. It was impossible to think that a man who knew every political dodge in the book couldn't find a way of saving his own life. Yet, now that he was faced with the problem, he was not sure that he could.

Once more it was the butler who interrupted him by appearing in the doorway.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said. His face bore the proper amount of disapproval at finding his master still in pajamas.

"Who?" Lucien demanded. *Who would come to see a condemned man?*

"The Honorable Marlborough Williamson. I have taken the liberty, sir, of putting him in the Blue Room."

The Chief of the Assassins himself. Lucien stared at the butler, feeling the muscles of his stomach tighten. For a minute he thought, perhaps he was to be killed at once, in his own home, before he had the chance to think of a way of following the others who had escaped.

Then he remembered that it was never done that way.

"Tell him I'll be right out," he said.

Lucien dressed with trembling fingers which had difficulty in locating the zippers, and he cursed the betrayal of his fingers. He exposed his face to the Shav-Light and then used the Energy-Massager until his cheeks were glowing with color. When his mirror finally assured him that he looked almost as usual, he went to meet his guest.

I remember, he thought as he walked through the house, the spy-film that was taken of Anton Morris right after he read his name in the paper. He did the same things I've just done. The trembling fingers making dressing so difficult, the Shav-Light and Massager to bring the color of life to cheeks already as good as dead. Does it please someone that we all act alike?

As he passed through the hall to the Blue Room, he caught a glimpse of the butler staring from a doorway. *Does he know what it's like? . . . His steps quickened with irritation.*

Marlborough Williamson, Minister of Assassination, was a short man whose slender frame was well-padded with flesh. His cheeks were round and rosy, his eyes perpetually twinkled with good cheer. As Lucien entered the Blue Room, Williamson turned from examining a richly-bound set of world literature.

"Such a beautiful set of books," he said, one pudgy hand still caressing the binding. His voice was soft, almost like the brush of a warm hand. "I sometimes think there is nothing so lovely as an artistically-designed book."

"Yes," Lucien said evenly, "I've always been fond of that set myself. It was given to me a hundred years ago by the Party—for two hundred years of devoted service."

IF THE Minister of Assassinations was aware of the irony, it wasn't revealed in the smile he gave Lucien. "The Party always gives the best, doesn't it?" he said. He dropped into a nearby chair, being careful not to muss the crease in his trousers. "Have you seen today's paper, Lucien?"

To his surprise, Lucien realized that he had no longer to weigh every word, listen to the shading of tone in which the word was spoken; and with that realization, the uncertain feelings he'd always had for Williamson coalesced into loathing.

"I've seen it," he said. "Did you come here to kill me yourself?"

"In your own home?" exclaimed Marlborough Williamson. His fat face pinched up in disapproval. "You should know me better than that, Lucien. These things must be done with a certain air."

"Then why did you come?"

"To discuss the amenities of the situation, of course. Due to your government rank, and your long years of service to the Party, I am handling your case personally. It would be unseemly for a mere agent of my department to kill a man of your standing."

"Of course," Lucien said, with a calmness he didn't feel. "Then there are just one or two things you can tell me, Marlborough. Why has the Party decided to assassinate me?"

Williamson inspected the gloss of his fingernails. "The official records merely report that you are insane—as you should know," he said. "But—off the record, because we've been friends and

associates longer than men once lived—it seems to me that you've made a number of mistakes recently. The biggest mistake was in declaring Prentice Murray insane and ordering him assassinated. And, unfortunately, one of my men carried out the order before I became aware of the situation."

"I don't understand," Lucien said. "Do you mean because I failed to share with anyone else the bribe I received from Murray's nephew?"

"Must you put things so crudely?" Williamson murmured. "However . . . your biggest mistake, Lucien, was in forgetting that Party Leader Ross Eden is married to a Murray. The old man was his wife's uncle."

"Are we drawing the line at relatives now?" Lucien asked. He felt the desire to strike back, and with the sentence of death already upon him saw no reason to restrain himself. "I remember a brother who was declared insane so that an inheritance could be claimed. It was two hundred and fifty years ago, but I remember."

"Please," Williamson said, holding up one pudgy hand. "Let's not invade the field of personal sorrow. I have never ceased to grieve over the untimely death of my brother. He was always very close to me."

"Especially at the last," Lucien said.

"You sound bitter, Lucien—a man should not be bitter when he's facing death. And such a death, Lucien!" The fat little man sat up in his chair and his face glowed with pleasure. "We've arranged it so that you'll die a hero. The man who had the courage to declare himself insane. Think of it! There will be people crying behind your coffin as it's carried through the streets—something that hasn't happened at the funeral of a government official in centuries. Your body will be interred in a glass coffin on the Wall of Heroes. And I—I, Lucien, will assassinate you in such a fashion that the wound will be like a medal of honor!"

"That's kind of you," Lucien said, his voice heavy with irony. "When do you plan this artistic moment?"

"But that would be unfair!" The little Minister almost pouted. "If you knew, you might worry. No, Lucien, I have raised the standards of my craft. You are frightened now, but that will pass. You will begin to plan, to hope that you can escape, or that the Party will relent. You will begin to spend your money, to enjoy yourself—a little feverishly, perhaps, as though always aware that the moment of pleasure may be your last. Then, when you find something which gives you so much pleasure that you almost forget my presence—then I will strike. That moment may come soon—today—tomorrow—the next day—or it may take longer."

The two men stared at each other, the one grimly and the other with the eagerness of an artist about to attempt his masterpiece.

"Suppose," Lucien said slowly, "that I don't want to die—even artistically? Suppose I wanted to buy my freedom? I am a wealthy man—certainly among the top fifty men in wealth. Suppose I converted my wealth into cash and offered it—somewhere?"

WILLIAMSON shook his head sadly. "You wound me deeply, Lucien," he said. "Do you think I have no ethics? No integrity? That I'm interested only in money or power?"

"What are you interested in?" Lucien asked. *Besides murder . . .*

"In serving the State. There is no higher interest."

"Let's put it another way then," Lucien said harshly. "I have been in the inner circles of the Party for a long time—longer than anyone alive except you and Ross Eden—and I've always kept a rather extensive diary. You'd be surprised, Marlborough, how much information one can collect in three hundred years. Suppose I decide, since I'm about to die, that I want to make a present of my journals to—say—Leeds Burke, the

head of the Equalists? Of course, if I were sure that I was going to be able to continue making entries in my journals, I would want to keep them in my possession."

Marlborough Williamson looked at him as though he had used obscene words. Lucien remembered, in one of those odd flickering recalls he'd been having more frequently, that the fat face had worn the same expression once when someone had told a dirty joke in a cabinet meeting.

"I can't believe you'd do such a thing, Lucien," he said finally. "No—you must be joking. Even if you could bring yourself to perform such a dishonorable act, you must know that nothing could come of it. From now until the moment when you depart this life, Lucien, I or one of my men will be with you every minute. Such an action could only mean that you were completely unstable and I'd have to step in sooner." He shook his head, pursing his full red lips. "I'd simply detest it, but, under the circumstances, I'd have to carry out my duties prematurely. I just can't imagine that you'd do such a thing, Lucien."

Lucien B. Fenimore felt anger bubbling up in the crucible of his fear. He stood up and pointed toward the door.

"Get out," he said hoarsely.

It feels good, he thought, to order someone away from you when you dislike them. It feels good after three centuries of watching every word. Almost good enough to die for—almost.

"Don't be rude," Williamson said crossly. "After all, there is a certain tradition about this sort of thing, you know."

"Get out," Lucien repeated.

"Oh, very well." Williamson stood up and looked at Lucien. He smiled, a soft stretching of his lips that was almost a caress. "But if you change your mind—I'll always be near, Lucien." He walked across the room, stepped delicately through the doorway and was gone.

III

AFTER the door closed, Lucien stood in the room, his whole body shaking. It gave him comfort that for the moment he could not tell whether it was with anger or fear that his body shook. . . .

When he finally felt calmer, he wandered from room to room. There was no place to go, so he merely walked aimlessly, blindly, through the great empty house. Whenever he passed through one of the front rooms, he peered from the windows—always seeing the solitary figure who waited and watched.

I wonder, he thought, if anybody will come to see me? Or call me? Anybody. . . .

So passed the morning, while Lucien slowly overcame his fear. He refused lunch and went into his study. He looked once more through the window at the plump figure in front of his house, then resolutely drew the curtains. He seated himself at his desk and faced the problem of saving the life of Lucien B. Fenimore.

There were three thousand before him who had escaped. All he had to do was to find the doorway through which they had passed—or to permit the doorway to find him.

First, he began to remember what he knew of the methods of Marlborough Williamson, so that he might have a rough idea of the time in which he could safely work. He recalled the purging of Layton, Nadek, Slindermann, Manikov—all of them co-founders of the Party and all dead for at least two hundred years. Each of them had died almost eleven months after the sentence of assassination had been passed. Layton had been killed—he could even remember the jokes about it—while enjoying himself in an Asiatic Palace of Pleasure, the same bullet accidentally killing the girl who was with him. Nadek had been poisoned in a government-owned Drug Dreamery on Mars. Slindermann had

been knifed in a gambling palace on Venus, at the very moment that he broke the bank. Manikov, on the other hand, had been killed trying to escape. Lucien remembered that the report had stated that the assassin had waited until Manikov was passing Pluto's orbit before blasting the tiny ship, and Manikov in it, to cinders.

If he were careful, there should be plenty of time.

But can I be sure? Perhaps I'm considered a special case. . . .

He felt his fear surge up again, but he forced it back. He felt that he had to act on what seemed a logical assumption about the pattern in Williamson's work. Otherwise, he could waste all of his time worrying about his executioner's next move.

He turned to studying the known incidents related to those who had been condemned and had escaped. Many were mentioned in his journals, and when the information was incomplete he checked in other files he had. He'd gone through a great number before he realized that he was indiscriminately searching for clues, when in reality there were two types of men who had escaped assassination: political figures, like himself—and undergrounders, little people, nobodies. The methods of escape very probably had differed; there was little chance that the same kinds of opportunity, the same avenues of escape, had appeared to both. The little men, Lucien thought, had probably been just plain lucky—something Lucien could hardly count on for himself. So . . . his clue, if it existed, was among the men of wealth, the men who must have purchased their escape.

He'd gone through dozens without finding a single thread before he thought of Jassac. Gilbert Jassac, who had been the World's richest man—who had tried, five years before, to put the president and half the cabinet in his pocket through blackmail. He had almost succeeded, and Lucien remembered how he

had been routed out of bed at three in the morning to sign the Certificate of Unsanity. Despite the haste, however, Gilbert Jassac had never been assassinated.

Lucien found practically nothing about it in his journals, and no more in the other files. He sat down and concentrated on digging up his few memories.

The victim of an official assassination, like everyone else, was permitted to pass his wealth along to his heirs. There were only two exceptions to the law of inheritance. If a man were convicted of treason, the government confiscated his property. In the case of suicides, which was also a serious crime, the person who brought proof of the suicide could claim the property of the deceased.

In Jassac's case, Lucien vaguely remembered, some Worker had testified that he saw Jassac commit suicide. It seemed to Lucien that there had been some other interesting angles to the case which he couldn't recall. He decided it might be worth it to check further.

He went to the safe in his study and opened it. He took out a small packet of bills—but underneath the bills his fingers grasped a small electronic Vibrator which he'd had secretly made fifty years before. Attached to the wall it would serve to jam any spy-outlet which might have been tapped into his home. He'd never felt a need to use it until now.

CARRYING it concealed beneath the money, he went into his bedroom. Under the pretense of searching beneath his bed for a slipper, he attached the Vibrator to the wall. Then he picked up the phone and dialed the number of the Government Informat. It was the custom to let condemned officials still enjoy most of their official privileges while still alive, but he wasn't certain if this applied to him until he heard the robot voice plugged into his phone.

"Jassac, Gilbert," he said. "All information concerning his death in 2532."

He waited impatiently until the mechanical voice began its report.

"Jassac, Gilbert," the Informat robot said. "Age: three hundred and ten years at the time of death. Former vice-chairman of the Enterprise Party. Was the wealthiest man in the World. He was officially declared insane on March 11, 2532, the Certificate being signed by Lucien B. Fenimore, the Minister—*correction*: the former Minister of Sanity." Lucien winced at the evidence of the timeliness of the robot's information. "When agents of the Ministry of Assassination arrived at his home to carry out the execution order, Gilbert Jassac was gone. On March 13, 2532, a Worker named Roal Leaf appeared and testified that he had seen Gilbert Jassac commit suicide, by drowning. Ten days later, the High Court of the Republics admitted the Worker's testimony as proof of death, although the body was never recovered."

The mechanical voice seemed to hesitate, as though not sure it had included all information in the file. Lucien knew he'd have to ask specific questions to get the rest of it.

"Investigations or arrests in the matter?" he asked.

"No investigations or arrests after the declaration of suicide."

"What about immediately after his disappearance?"

"An agent of the Ministry of Political Crime," reported the robot, "claimed that he traced Jassac to the office of Leeds Burke, Chairman of the Equalist Party. The Minister immediately arrested Leeds Burke, but he was released twenty-four hours later without further investigation. The record of his questioning has been officially erased."

Lucien's pulse quickened. This might be the clue he was looking for.

"What happened to the Worker who testified that Jassac committed suicide?" he asked.

There was another short wait. Then: "Roal Leaf, the Worker, after testifying, left in a public air-car. Five minutes later, there was a head-on crash between it and another public air-car, in

which Leaf and one of the drivers were accidentally killed."

Lucien B. Fenimore, after three hundred years of politics, no longer believed in coincidence. He didn't believe in accidental accidents either. He began to feel surer of his ground.

"Who collected the estate of Gilbert Jassac then?" he asked.

"Howard, the son of Roal Leaf."

"And what happened to Howard Leaf?" persisted Lucien.

"Howard Leaf was murdered the night of June 3, 2532, in the old section of the city. The body was not found until the following day, a full thirty minutes after someone had presented a sight draft for the entire Jassac fortune at the World-Ways Bank where Howard Leaf had deposited it. The man who cashed the draft was never located and neither was the murderer of Howard Leaf."

"What was the amount of the draft?" Lucien asked.

"One million billion Ergs."

Lucien Fenimore whistled soundlessly as he replaced the receiver of the phone. *That must have been the price of life for Jassac—his entire fortune. But then a man with immortality could make another fortune.*

Lucien was thoughtful throughout dinner. His preoccupation passed for bravery, and there were many admiring glances exchanged between the servants. Only the butler continued to stare at him with impassioned eyes.

Somebody said it a long time ago, thought Lucien. A man is never a hero to his butler . . . He knows what I'm feeling inside, what I'm thinking . . .

When dinner was over, Lucien went back to his bedroom without even glancing through the window. He made sure that the Vibrator was in place and then went to the phone. He switched on the tight-beam circuit, permitted to all officials, which made it impossible for the call to be tapped on the outside. Then he dialed the number of Leeds Burke.

"Hello," said a voice which he recognized as Burke's. "Use the video circuit, whoever you are."

"No video," Lucien said. "Burke, this is Lucien B. Fenimore. You should be able to recognize my voice."

"I do," Burke said after a pause.

"You've seen the papers?"

"Yes."

"You don't have to be so cautious," Lucien said, controlling his irritation. "This call is on a tight beam and I have a Vibrator in my room. I want to see you, Burke."

"Why?"

"I think we could find things to talk about," Lucien said dryly. "For one thing, I'm thinking of selling my memoirs. For another—we might talk about Gilbert Jassac and one million billion Ergs."

"All right," Burke said in the same tone of voice. "I'll be in my office all morning tomorrow. Come in any time."

"Fine," Lucien said heartily. "I'll be there." He hung up and smiled to himself. A little later, he removed the Vibrator from the wall, being careful to mask it. The monitors would show two or three hours of distorted film and sound track from this one circuit, but that sometimes was the normal result of a temporary magnetic flaw.

LUCIEN FENIMORE slept well that night despite the threat which hung over him. Only once during the night did he dream of Marlborough Williamson, and even then the climax of the dream was a triumphant one in which the plump Minister of Assassination, complete with apple in mouth, was served to a group of festive cannibals.

He was up early the following morning, ate a large breakfast, ordered his air-car to pick him up at the front gate, and strode jauntily from the house. The Minister of Assassination was replacing one of his agents as Lucien arrived at the gate.

"Good morning, Marlborough," Lucien said.

"Good morning, Lucien," the Minister returned. "I'm glad to see that you are—shall we say—less hysterical this morning than you were yesterday. You look almost happy."

"Just full of plans," Lucien said hastily. He reminded himself not to look too confident—it might encourage the Minister to strike prematurely. "When a man is about to depart this life, he must make plans, you know."

"Ah, yes, plans," Marlborough Williamson said softly. There was a cherubic look on his face. "Plans to—escape, Lucien?"

"Escape?" Lucien asked, a touch of mockery in his voice. "But I thought you had learned so much from the first three thousand escapes that such a thing was no longer possible. Isn't that so, my dear Marlborough?"

"Yes, but so few seem to realize it. I hope, Lucine, you will not make me kill you while attempting to escape. It would lack dignity."

"Naturally, we must think of dignity," Lucien agreed.

"I'm glad you agree," Marlborough said. "Yesterday, I was very disappointed in you, Lucien . . . Now, what are your plans for today? It is perhaps best that you tell me. I shall follow more discreetly than is possible if I don't know."

Lucien looked at the beaming face with inward loathing, but managed to keep it from creeping into his expression. "I'm going to the Globe-Ways Department Store to do some shopping. After that, I shall see my attorney and then back home."

The Minister of Assassination smiled happily, but there was a worried expression back of his eyes. "Good," he said. "I'm glad you're being efficient about this. But I do hope that once the business details are out of the way, you'll begin enjoying yourself. If you'd like, I can even recommend a few pleasure spots which have just recently opened . . ."

"That's very kind of you," Lucien

murmured, managing a stiff smile, "but I think I can manage quite all right." He turned and entered his air-car. As the chauffeur sent the car spinning above the city, Lucien could see the other car following at a distance. Across its front it bore the broad crimson band which was the official emblem of the office of the Minister of Assassination.

A few minutes later, the air-car landed on the roof of the department store. Lucien stepped out and was already going down the glide-way as the crimson-marked car settled to the roof.

IV

THE Globe-Ways Department Store was one of Lucien Fenimore's secrets—one which he was sure he had kept. A few years earlier, he had managed another deal involving the unsanity of a man whose heirs were anxious to cease being heirs in name only. It had taken a bit of doing, as the man had been an important cog in the Enterprise Party machinery, but Lucien had managed it. His reward had been the stock of this department store. Knowing that the ownership of this particular store might be difficult to explain satisfactorily to his fellow solons, Lucien had arranged for the ownership to be legally invested in the man who was the manager of the business.

A short conversation with the manager arranged things nicely, long before Marlborough Williamson entered the store. A private showroom was set up, into which salesmen would continue to carry wares in which Lucien might be interested. But, in the meantime, Lucien stepped through a back door and into the rear of a delivery truck and was soon entering the nearby office building which housed the Equalist Party.

Lucien was immediately shown into the modest office of the head of the party. He had never seen Leeds Burke—nor could he remember ever having

seen a picture of any chairman of the Worker's party—so it was with considerable interest that he surveyed the man behind the desk. He saw a young man, perhaps no more than thirty-five, with solid plebian features, dressed in a rather cheap uniform. It seemed almost impossible to fit this young man into the role Lucien had assigned him until Lucien caught the look in his eyes. Then he was even more sure that he had come to the right man.

"I had expected an older man," Lucien said in explanation of his stare. "I guess one forgets that ability can go with youth."

"In our Party, ability has to go with youth," Leeds Burke said dryly.

As always, when the fact that so many in the world had such short life spans, Lucien felt the pangs of guilt. But he said nothing. He placed one hand in his coat pocket and then changed his mind. He had brought the Vibrator with him, intending to attach it to his chair during his visit, but the manner of the other made him feel that it was unnecessary.

"Well," Leeds Burke said, finally breaking the silence, "what can I do for the former Minister of Sanity?"

"I want to live," Lucien said bluntly. "I'm under sentence of Assassination and I want you to help me escape."

The Chairman of the Équalists stared at a spot just above Lucien's head. "What makes you think I can help you escape?" he asked. "Or that I would if I could?"

"You can," Lucien said flatly. "Among others, you helped Gilbert Jassac to escape. He was traced to your house, but then the investigation stopped when a *Worker* appeared to testify that Jassac was a suicide. You could easily arrange for a *Worker* to offer such testimony—you could arrange it more easily than anyone else. Then you also arranged for the *Worker* to have an accident so that he could never testify against you. And later you arranged for the *Worker's* son to

write a draft, after which he was murdered. Oh, I know that sort of deal."

"Having arranged enough of them yourself?" Leeds asked lightly. A smile flitted across his face, but vanished as he looked at Lucien. "If what you say were true, what makes you think I would help you? You're not a Gilbert Jassac."

"True," admitted Lucien. "But I am still one of the wealthy men of the World. If you'll check, you'll find that I'm listed among the top fifty. And I have something else that, if used properly, could be worth more than Jassac's billions to you."

"What?"

"I have always kept a journal," Lucien said carefully. "In it I have recorded *every* political act in which I took part during the past three hundred years. It makes a rather bulky journal, but even so, with the proper distribution, it should prove rather popular reading." He paused briefly. "The minute I am landed in a safe spot, I will turn that journal over to whoever has guided me to safety."

BURKE swung around in his chair and stared through the window. The silence stretched out so long that Lucien began to wonder if he had made a mistake. Then the young man swivelled back to face Lucien.

"All right," he said. "I helped Jassac and almost three thousand others to escape, as you call it. I'll help you on the following conditions. One, the journal, when I land you the same place I took the others. Two, I will arrange for you to be declared a suicide and collect your estate; I will return a small percentage of it to you."

"It's a deal," Lucien said promptly. For once in his life he did not feel like haggling. "Where is this safe place?"

"The less you know in advance, the better," Leeds Burke said. "Be at my home tonight at ten, ready to leave this planet. Be sure you're not followed. Where will you be leaving from?"

Lucien thought quickly. "I have to elude the Assassination agent," he said. "Do you know the House of Many Doors?"

"I know of it," Leeds Burke said. "Not being a member of the elite, however, I've never been there. You'll leave from there?"

Lucien nodded.

"I'll direct a beam there then," Burke said. "When you get into your air-car, set the robot controls on the twenty-three point eight frequency in channel two and your car will land you at my house."

Lucien nodded again and strode briskly from the office. Elation put a new spring in his step.

Lucien spent the rest of the morning with his attorney, making sure that there was nothing which needed immediate attention. He even complied with the rather discreet suggestion by the attorney that they check over the details of his will. When that was finished, he stopped by his bank and drew out some extra cash—about the right amount that might be expected of a man who was about to start his last fling.

At home, after a simple luncheon, he went into his study and rang for his butler. As he waited, he concealed the new confidence he felt, well aware that somewhere in the room there was probably a video tap.

"You rang, sir?" the butler asked, stepping into the room.

"Yes, Matson," Lucien said. He looked at the butler with something close to affection. "You've been with me a long time, Matson. I'd like you to know that I've enjoyed our—ah—association, if I may call it that."

The barest flicker of the butler's eyes indicated that he too was aware that the room might be tapped.

"Thank you, sir," he said gravely. "I believe it is permitted for me to say that I have enjoyed my position. There have been many times, sir, when I ad-

mired you."

"Thank you, Matson," Lucien said softly. "Tonight, I am going to a pleasure palace known as the House of Many Doors. From there, I may go on to other places—it is rather difficult at this stage in my life to plan my future in any detail. But I'll probably be rather late in getting home."

"I understand, sir," the butler said.

"Until I do get back then," Lucien continued, "you'll take care of everything here, won't you? In the event that I don't get back, Matson, may I say now that I wish you the best of luck."

"Thank you, sir."

Lucien dismissed the butler. He spent a few hours re-reading spots in his journals and in idly musing on events in the past. He felt no sadness at the prospect of the new life which he was about to bring into being, only a sort of wonder about what it might be like.

AFTER dinner, he took a short nap and awoke much refreshed. Glancing through the window, he noticed that Marlborough Williamson had been replaced by one of his agents. Then Lucien packed his brief case, adding bundles of bank notes at the last, and went out to his air-car. He ordered the chauffeur to the pleasure resort.

The House of Many Doors was another establishment which Lucien Fenimore had added quietly to his possessions many years before. It was recorded as belonging to George de Lacroze, who also managed it, and only de Lacroze and one other knew how Lucien had gotten control of it and passed it on.

When he reached the club, Lucien went first to the bar. He had a couple of cocktails, drinking them leisurely and trying to give the impression of feeling exactly like any other three hundred and seventy year old man out on the town. Now that there was the prospect of action, he lost the speculative mood which had gripped him twenty-four hours before. He was even amused by

the fact that the other customers, who would have rushed up to him a week before, were careful now to say hello quickly and to get away from him. Some of them, he realized, were probably afraid that the Assassin's bullet might go wild. Others were filled with the superstitious dread that the sentence of death might be contagious.

It was about nine-thirty when Lucien finally sought out the manager of the establishment. As was customary, the two men retired to de Lacroze's office to discuss the details privately over two glasses of Martian *Luguo*n brandy.

As he entered the office, Lucien stumbled and was forced to put his hand to the wall to steady himself. The Vibrator, which had been concealed in his hand, remained on the wall. Thereafter, the two men talked freely for the next twenty minutes.

"I'll make you a present of it," Lucien said, waving toward the Vibrator, as they left the office.

The manager grinned.

Outside, the two of them strolled into the Room of Immortals. With the manager standing beside him and giving the pedigree of each one, Lucien watched a number of beautifully-gowned girls walk around the room. Lucien finally indicated a sensuous-looking redhead with a careless wave of his hand. The girls left, the redhead going upstairs, the others back to their own lounge room to await another call.

In front of the Room of Immortals, Lucien and the manager shook hands, both having the air of having concluded a satisfactory transaction. The agent of the Minister of Assassination, standing not far away, had caught a glimpse of the redhead and was inclined to think that Lucien might have looked even more enthusiastic. He found a nearby table, ordered a drink, and settled down to wait.

Lucien B. Fenimore walked slowly up the broad stairs, conscious of the gazes which followed him. He knew that there

was admiration in most of the eyes as he seemed to be following the traditional reaction to a sentence of assassination.

Reaching the upper floors, he saw the redhead turning into a suite of rooms, but he kept straight ahead. Reaching the end of the hall, and seeing that he was unobserved, he mounted the stairs to the roof. There, he quickly found the air-car which the manager had described. It was an old model, weather-beaten and dented. Lucien checked the registration and saw that it belonged to the redhead—who, on the morrow, would have a new one. He climbed in and set the robot pilot. A moment later, the car was in the air.

V

SOME distance beyond the city, the air-car came down in what seemed to be a small wooded grove. Almost instantly a searchlight came on and beyond it Lucien could see the dim outlines of a house. He walked toward it, shielding his eyes from the glare of the light.

A door opened and Lucien stepped inside, adjusting his eyes to the softer light.

It was a large house, more luxurious than Lucien's. Everywhere he looked, there were spacious rooms leading off the hallway and he caught glimpses of the rich oriental rugs, the expensive modern furniture, the valuable paintings and statuettes. Lucien took it all in and lifted his gaze to meet the amused expression of the Chairman of the Equalists.

"You approve of a Worker's taste?" Burke asked quietly.

"Naturally," Lucien said with a smile. "And I'm not surprised. Out of curiosity, I checked up and learned that due to the number of wealthy men who have escaped assassination, close to sixty per cent of the world's wealth has apparently passed into your hands."

"But not all of it stayed there," Burke said.

"Of course," Lucien said mildly. "Not

all of it . . . But I was wondering if the Workers of the World realize how their foremost representative lives."

"Most of them do," Burke said carelessly. "In fact, it pleases them that at least one of their number can live this way. And I suppose it's a symbol of what they hope to have some day. . . . But enough of this. We'd better be on our way. You brought the journals?"

"Of course," Lucien said, tapping his brief case. "And you'll get it when you land me in a safe place. Did you doubt my word?"

Burke shook his head, smiling. "When men are frightened enough, they seldom lie," he said. "Come on."

He led the way through the house to another door and then outside. They walked through the grove of trees until they came to another building. Burke unlocked the door and they entered. There was a small, but fairly new, space ship. Burke pressed a button beside the door and the roof of the building rolled aside.

The two men climbed into the space ship and a moment later, with Burke at the controls, it took off.

Once they were high above the Earth, Burke motioned for Lucien to strap himself in his seat. He did so and felt the sickening lurch as Burke threw the ship into Hyper-Drive.

Lucien had traveled between the planets a few times, but always on the big space liners on which the passengers were largely protected from the change into Hyper-Drive, so he was hardly prepared for the terrible twisting of his stomach, the distortion of vision where everything went a misty gray. How long it lasted he couldn't tell—there was no way of judging time while in the grip of such vast contending forces. When they came out of it with another lurch, Lucien hung limply in his seat, feeling his heart pound as it brought him back to normal.

Burke looked at him and grinned. "It's rugged," he said, "but after a while you get used to it . . . We'll soon be there

and you'll have plenty of time to recover."

"Where is 'there'?" Lucien asked.

"A small, and little known, planet in the system of Rigil Kentaurus. Conditions are almost exactly as on Earth and you'll find it quite peaceful."

"The others—they are there too?"

"All of them," Burke said. His face darkened with anger for a minute. "That is, almost all of them. There were two that I missed—but I brought all the others here myself."

"You did?" Lucien asked softly. "But some of them escaped more than two hundred and fifty years ago."

"Exactly," Burke said, grinning. "I, too, have immortality. Does it shock you to find a mere Worker to be immortal?"

"No," Lucien said. His voice was gentle and thoughtful. "I haven't thought of you as a Worker, or even as a mere representative of Workers, since yesterday when I discovered the clue that connected you and Jassac." He paused for a moment and then went on in the same tone of voice. "You're the third of the Immortals, aren't you, Burke? Ross Eden—Marlborough Williamson—Leeds Burke—the three Immortals who would own the Earth, perhaps even dream of being worshipped as gods?"

BURKE looked at him sharply and then grinned. For he saw a man who still looked like the professional politician, hugging his portfolio on his knees, but in the small ship he did not look as impressive as he once had speaking in the Hall of the Republics.

"Why not?" Burke said, half to himself. "You're harmless enough now. If you had been armed the spy-ray would have registered the fact when you entered my house. And you're not going to talk to anyone. Yes, Lucien, I'm the third of the Immortals and our ownership of the Earth is almost completed."

Lucien nodded. "The others," he said. "They didn't escape, did they,

Burke? Up here—wherever we're going—you killed them, didn't you?"

Burke nodded. He was obviously enjoying himself.

"Of course," Lucien said. He shifted the briefcase on his knees as though it had suddenly grown heavy. "Tell me something, Burke. Was it because of this, more than anything else, that I was condemned to be assassinated? You wanted to get rid of me only because I possessed immortality, isn't that it?"

"Of course," Burke said. He was silent for a minute, but it was obvious that he intended to say more, that he was eager to say more. There was only pleasure on his face.

Of course, he's eager to talk, thought Lucien. For centuries he's had to keep quiet about his great role. There must be no pleasure in being a master of the world when no one knows that you are.

"Until we were almost ready," Burke said, "you were convenient for us, Lucien. You were a good party wheelhorse, so intent on your own little graft that you paid no attention to us. And we worked slowly, knowing that our immortality would have no meaning if others possessed it too. But it took time. Now the time is about up."

"What about the others who have immortality?" Lucien asked.

"There are no others," Burke said harshly. "We adjusted the treatment at the University a long time ago. The others who think they are immortal have had their lives extended, but that is about all. They'll soon start to age. If you'd checked, you would have discovered there are no immortals over the age of eighty. The older ones have been killed and the present ones will die. The only immortals in the World, Lucien, are Ross Eden, Marlborough Williamson, myself—and you for a short time yet."

"And two others," Lucien said softly. "You're forgetting George Fraya and Gary Polti, the two who escaped without your help."

Burke's face twisted with anger. "We'll get them," he said. "They can't

hold out against the whole world—not against us. We've got the time to hunt them down."

"They have time too," Lucien said, "although I suppose not as much, in one way. You have no worries but yourself. But they will always be conscious that the time they need means that other human beings will be dying—men and women who needn't die if it hadn't been for a selfish few."

"Idealist," sneered Burke. He seemed to have a sudden thought and twisted to face Lucien. "How did you know about Fraya and Polti?" he asked.

"I knew," Lucien said. "Then two days ago Ross Eden mentioned them again. He felt sure that he was talking to a dead man, so he was careless for the first time in the three hundred years I've known him. He revealed that he knew that Fraya and Polti had not escaped in the same fashion as the others. He could have known that only if he were one of the three Immortals. I had long suspected Ross, but that was the first time I was sure."

"I suppose you knew about Williamson too?"

"Yes," Lucien said, nodding. "I have known Marlborough a long time. I know how efficient his department is. I knew that three thousand Assassination victims would not have escaped if he didn't want them to. A few perhaps, but not three thousand. No, I knew that those who escaped were political figures that someone wanted to torture for information, or men who had wealth that someone wanted."

"But you didn't know about me," Burke said, laughing.

"Not until yesterday," Lucien said. "I confess I never even suspected you, Burke, although I should have. I should have realized that the head of the loyal opposition was the perfect addition. It was perfect from your point of view. A long time ago someone said, if you can't lick 'em, join 'em. But it was even more perfect from the viewpoint of Ross and Marlborough. Yes," he went on, nod-

ding, "you made a perfect trio. Ross Eden furnished the brains. Marlborough was the legal executioner and the planner. You, behind the smokescreen of the Equalists, did the dirty work. And more perfect for them, you were the stupid one."

"What do you mean?" Burke demanded angrily.

"Stupid," Lucien said, "because you still feel confident in the face of the things I've said. What do you think that Fraya and Polti will be doing now? What about the Council of the Three?"

"The Council of the Three," Burke said. He looked again at Lucien and there was hatred in his face. "Fraya and Polti—" He broke off and understanding came into his face. "You," he said. "You're part of the Council of the Three."

"I have that honor," Lucien said. He winced as he realized that in saying it he sounded like the former Minister of Sanity making a speech. *Can I ever unlearn the habits of three hundred years, he thought.* "In a way, he went on, "the Three Immortals and the Council of the Three have been like two inverted icebergs floating through the stream of the last three hundred years. Two-thirds of each were pretty well known; one-third of each was completely concealed. You and I, Burke, were the submerged points."

Burke laughed, but there was no humor in his voice. "But you've come to the end of the line, Lucien," he said. "Your two friends can't save your life now."

"They aren't even trying to," Lucien said. "They're too busy saving the lives of twenty billion other people. I wasn't talking of my own life, Burke. There hasn't been a day in the last three hundred years—since the time I helped Fraya and Polti escape and with them formed the Council of the Three—when my life wasn't forfeit if the occasion demanded."

There was a slight bump as the space ship settled to the ground. There was

a hiss of air as Burke threw the switch that controlled the airlocks. When he turned, there was a gun in his hand.

"Well," he said harshly, "the occasion demands it. Here is your final resting place, Lucien."

"I've wanted to see it," Lucien said simply. He got up from his seat and went forward to where he could see out through the doors.

VI

IT WAS a barren land, covered with what seemed to be a fine pink sand. Here and there were small, stunted shrubs, yellow in color and seemingly on the verge of dying. Scattered across the sand were hundreds of skeletons—some of them sprawled as though but an instant before the white bones had been trying to run.

"I wanted to see them," Lucien said, turning to face the man with the gun. "You wouldn't understand how many times in the past three hundred years I've thought about those people out there—and about the millions of others who died of old age and sickness—when there was no need for any of them to die. I've thought of them and remembered that first congress of Republics when only Fraya, Polti and myself were for granting immortality to all. The outcome was made obvious at once, but Fraya and Polti were too angry to notice it in time. I did, and changed my surface attitude in time to build toward this day."

You will never know, he thought—nobody will ever know what it was like to watch so many die while we inched forward through history—inched because there were no weapons and no army, only the three of us with our wits and our convictions.

"If you were so fond of them," Burke said harshly, "go on out and join them. No," he added quickly, "first give me those journals of yours. There may be some clue in them to where we can find Fraya and Polti." The gun was steady.

"There is," Lucien said quietly. He held the briefcase against his stomach and opened the clasp.

A thin stream of almost invisible gas shot from the end of the briefcase into Burke's face. There was a flash of awareness, a straining to send an order to his trigger finger, then he collapsed.

Lucien B. Fenimore continued to open the briefcase. He spilled the money to the floor of the ship, revealing a small video set. The sending key was open. With trembling fingers, Lucien flipped the receiving key too.

"George," he said. His voice trembled and the name held all that he was asking. "George, are you there?"

"Yes, Lucien." The other voice came strongly across the four light years. It could be recognized as the voice of the once perfect butler, Matson. "We made it, Lucien."

Lucien could think of nothing to say, but he felt the anxiety of three hundred years slip from his shoulder.

"We convinced the President that he should call an emergency meeting of the cabinet and a few important citizens," the voice continued. "They made it in time to sit here and watch Leeds Burke's face while they listened to him. Some of them were a little hysterical when they learned they weren't immortal, but that helped to make them fall in line. Come on home, Lucien."

Lucien B. Fenimore cut the contact with Earth and closed his briefcase. He moved Burke's body from the pilot seat and sat down. The airlocks hissed as they closed.

MUCH later when the tiny space ship once more landed on earth, Lucien stepped from the ship and was met by two men, one formerly a butler, the other the former manager of a pleasure palace.

"Ross Eden and Marlborough Williamson?" Lucien asked and he clasped hands with the two men at once.

"We went to them even before we called on the President." George Fraya

said. "Fortunately, they both made a break for it. They're dead."

"Everything is set, Lucien," Gary Polti said. He was still dressed as he had been as manager of the House of Many Doors and somehow it seemed out of place with the expression now on his face. "A representative group from the present officials are meeting tomorrow with a large group of Workers. It will not be a completely representative World group, but it'll have to do for our first New World Congress. Its first act will be to grant immortality to everyone—but everything the Congress discusses will have to be voted upon by the people."

"As soon as it was over," George Fraya said, picking up the thread, "we went on an emergency world-wide video broadcast. We briefly told the whole story, including the part that you played throughout."

"Messages have been pouring in since then," Polti said. "Lucien, they want you to be the new first president."

It would be nice, thought Lucien. After three hundred years of pretending to be something he loathed, it would be wonderful to stand at the head of the other side.

He shook his head. "No," he said.

"But Lucien—" began George Fraya.

"No," Lucien said firmly. "No office for me or for you two either. It wouldn't

do. We have come through too much. We have made too many compromises, played too many parts. We're cynical and over-wise, whether we know it or not. We would only cause more trouble. No, George and Gary, we made the revolution. That was our job. Now let others take over. That is their job.

"Perhaps, it might be a good idea to suggest to the Congress that the three of us will be willing to serve as a sort of advisory council for a while. But it must be a council which has no power of any sort. And, starting tomorrow, there must be no more publicity about the three of us. Let us make sure that this is one revolution which does not end up with any Little Fathers or Patron Saints."

Lucien B. Fenimore threw an arm around the shoulder of each of his friends.

"We only know how to make a revolution," he said with a smile, "and we made this one damn good. But let's be honest enough to admit that we don't know a damn thing about running a government the way it should be run. We only know the wrong ways. The people will find out how to run it. As for me," he added, with the smile finally spreading to his eyes, "I'd like nothing better than to sit outdoors for the next few hundred years and bake my feet of clay in the sun."



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The stranger pointed a bony finger as he spoke

FAMILY TREE

By **BOYD ELLANBY**

WE HAVE come to the conclusion," said Professor Raphael Gilbert, "that all existence, whether past, present, or future, is simply a matter of probability."

Mrs. Gilbert turned the page of her book, and kept on reading. With her

free hand she fluffed out the curls of her bleached hair, and then twirled at the rings on her plump fingers.

"Suppose I pick up this pencil," said her husband. "I may choose to break it into two halves, or I may not. Perhaps the chances that I may break it

*When scientists try their hands at altering the past,
they may find the old boys a little hard to handle. . . .*

are somewhat less than the chances of my leaving it intact. We may say, then, that the probability that an intact pencil will exist on this coffee table five minutes from now, is greater than the probability that two pieces of a broken pencil will exist. Each has a definite probability, and it is only in this sense that events exist in the future. We reasoned that the same principle might apply to the present as to the past. When our machine — Emmeline, what are you reading?"

His wife raised her eyes. "The *History of the Attelaths*." She turned another page.

Professor Gilbert threw the pencil onto the table, and clutched at his fringe of hair. He was a little man, short and thin. His voice was thin, too, but it was his habit to speak always with firmness and maximum volume.

"You know that book by heart," he said. "I am explaining to you the most tremendous discovery since nuclear fission, and you express no interest. Can't you forget the *Attelaths* for an hour?"

Emmeline shut the book, and picked up her knitting.

"It is not impossible that our new machine," her husband went on, "may be able to alter either the present or the past, as well as the future. When it is completed, in a day or two, I hope to have the evidence complete. The first trial won't be anything very ambitious; perhaps we'll just go back to yesterday and have a different horse win the Derby. If that is successful, we may try to probe a little into the future. To the dedicated student, my dear, all the mysteries of the universe will eventually reveal themselves."

Emmeline Attelath Gilbert held her knitting up to the lamp. "I'm afraid this wool is not exactly the right blue to match my eyes. But of course, the Attelath blue is such a *special* blue."

PROFESSOR GILBERT felt his pulse begin to race, and his voice wavered. "A prophet is only without honor—" he

said. He reached for the book and hurled it across the room, where it hit the bookcase.

"Don't be childish, Raphael," said Mrs. Gilbert, "just because I get tired of listening to the details of your laboratory work. You always sound as if you were giving a lecture, and I do wish you wouldn't speak in garbled proverbs. You know I don't understand science, and yet you never want to listen to my own troubles. Can your miracle-working machine tell me what the probability is that I'll ever be able to join The Sons and Daughters of William the Conqueror?"

Her husband picked up the pencil and broke it in two. "Oh, Emmeline! Not that again!"

She began to cry. "I'm the only woman in the entire project who isn't a member, Rafe! I feel like an alien!"

"Then why don't you join and have done with it? You can trace your ancestry right back—"

"Yes, but only that one way! How can I admit to our friends that my own great-grandfather, twenty-six times removed, was a notorious dealer in unicorn's horns? Everyone would laugh at me. Everybody knows that the unicorn was a mythical beast, but even if it had ever been real, how could I admit that Roderick Attelath was arrested and put in prison, and sentenced to death because he sold *imitation* unicorn's horns, with a fraudulent guarantee? Oh, why couldn't Roderick Attelath have been a respectable man?"

"My dear Emmeline," said the Professor, "what can't be cured has to be put up with. Life ought to be bearable, even without membership in the club. I heartily wish, for the thousandth time, that the first Norman king of England had never existed. I am sick of ancestors, and I am particularly sick of the Sons and Daughters of William the Conqueror."

"And I'm sick of your science, and your eternal lectures, and your crazy time machines. I do think you might

show me a little sympathy, when all I want is to be able to hold up my head in our own community."

For ten minutes there was silence. Emmeline wiped at her eyes, and her husband played with the broken pencil. Then he looked up.

"Well, my dear, I've always had a sneaking admiration for the old scoundrel, disreputable though he may have been. But in ten years I've grown tired of having him always preempt the conversation. Suppose we simply abolish your great-grandpappy, twenty-six times removed."

"Don't try to be funny."

"There's many a true word spoken as a joke," said Professor Gilbert. "We will simply take the time segment in which he cornered the unicorn market, and decrease its probability to zero. Then he will never have done anything disgraceful, and you will no longer be ashamed to exhibit your family tree. I ought to be able to change something that happened in the Thirteenth Century just as readily as something that happened yesterday."

"You mean—"

"You must realize, of course, that although I may be able to abolish Roderick Attelath, I can't guarantee to provide anyone in his place who is more admirable. You might find yourself being descended from a pirate or a horsethief, instead. Are you willing to take that chance?"

Her blue eyes were hopeful, and she smiled. "Pirates are romantic, and nobody minds horsethieves much, any more. I could always say he was really a sort of Robin Hood character, not really bad, just a rugged individualist. Yes, I'd take a chance. And if it's all a matter of chance, who knows? I might find myself descended from a baron, or at the very least some member of the British aristocracy. Nobody could be worse than a shady drug dealer. But are you serious, Raphael?"

"My dear Emmeline, in the ten years that you have lived with me, surely you

have learned that I do not make empty boasts. The proof of the pudding, you know, is in the baking. My abilities and my modesty are by-words at the laboratory. You remember, I'm sure, what I predicted about the hydrogen bomb. You must admit—"

"Yes. Yes, Raphael," said his wife.

"Very well. The question is a simple one of probability. You ask me to alter a certain probability in the past. And I tell you I will. What was the name of that horse that won the Derby yesterday?"

"*Futurity*, dear."

His smile was like a full moon. "Tomorrow night, *Futurity* will have come in last."

IT WAS a week later that Professor Gilbert came home very late for dinner. He hung up his hat on the hall stand, walked into the living-room, and slumped into his cushioned chair without a word. He did not even unfold the evening paper, waiting for him on the table. He only stared at the fireplace.

"What's the matter, Raphael?" said Mrs. Gilbert. "Did something go wrong at the laboratory?"

"Yes."

"Oh dear! And things have been going so well all this week! I was hoping that maybe today—"

He shook his head. "The best laid plans of mice and men, my dear, gang oft awry."

"But you were feeling so confident! You made *Futurity* come in last, and *Azimuth* won the Derby."

"I know. I was most hopeful. But today, I tried to go back to the year Twelve-sixty, which I had calculated as being about the time this grandpappy of yours began to take a particular interest in unicorn's horns."

"Well?"

"Well, I set the dials and turned on the juice, and then the machine blew out most of its tubes. It was only luck that I wasn't killed."

"But what in the world could have

happened? Did you make a miscalculation?"

"Your husband, Emmeline, does not make miscalculations."

"Well, then, the tubes must have been defective. It's only a problem of getting new tubes, isn't it?"

Professor Gilbert frowned. "It wasn't a matter of defective tubes, whatever it may have been. Those tubes had been properly checked before they were put in the machine. They were all good, and with the kind of circuit I designed, seventy-five per cent of the tubes just couldn't blow. It isn't possible. Too many protective relays. It was most peculiar."

"You look awfully worried."

"I'm not worried. It's purely a technical matter, I'm sure. Your grandpappy is just proving to be a more difficult problem than I had anticipated."

Mrs. Gilbert tightened her lips. "I wish you wouldn't use that vulgar expression 'grandpappy'. You know he's not that closely related to me. He's simply a very undesirable remote ancestor. But if you can't do anything about him with your machine, why not admit it, and not lay the blame on my family? I might have known you'd give up."

"A Gilbert never gives up! Tomorrow I'll begin again. I'll put in extra heavy tubes this time, designed to carry fifty per cent more current, and we'll see what happens. Don't worry, Emmeline. It's always darkest just before the daylight."

The telephone rang. Mrs. Gilbert answered it. "What's that you say? Signed who? Oh, I think that must be for my husband. Just a minute."

Professor Gilbert took up the receiver. "Yes, this is he. Would you read that again, please? Would you read those signatures again, please. . . . You'd better deliver that telegram. No, the mail would be too slow. Right away, please."

He was waiting at the door, and he snatched the yellow envelope and opened it, while the delivery boy lingered.

"Any reply, mister?"

"No. No reply."

HE DID NOT move a muscle until the hall door slammed, then he sank into his chair and read the message aloud:

"Professor Raphael Gilbert, Twenty-six Myrtle Street, New York, New York. You are hereby admonished to cease and desist from all further attempts to interfere in the life and pursuits of the honorable Roderick Attelath, our friend. Signed, Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus."

"I don't care what you tell people about your own family," said Mrs. Gilbert, "but I do wish you wouldn't discuss mine with outsiders, and allow them to make fun of me. Where do you meet people with names like that, anyhow?"

Raphael Gilbert spluttered, and his lips trembled. The sounds he made finally became distinguishable. "I didn't—I don't know any—I never heard of—Just a minute!"

He plunged into his study and rushed to the big bookcase. He scanned the shelves and threw books to the floor. "Where is it? Why can't I ever find a book when I want it?"

"Where is what?"

"Never mind. Here it is." He snatched it from the shelf and turned to the index, but his hand shook so violently that he could barely read the print.

"Holy hydrogen!" he said. "It is the same century! Did you send me this wire, Emmeline?"

"Me?"

"But who else would know?"

"Why are you so excited, Raphael? You look quite wild. Who have you told about my ancestors?"

"Quiet, and let me read! Roger Bacon . . . Albertus Magnus . . . The greatest alchemists of history . . . thirteenth century . . . They were contemporaries of your great-grandpappy Attelath!"

"Then they couldn't have sent you that telegram, Raphael. They're dead!"

He read on, mumbling the phrases.

"Experiment . . . They predicted ships without sails . . . chariots without horses . . . the elixir of life . . . flying machines . . . transmutation of gold . . . Oh, I'm losing my mind!"

"Rafe, Rafe!" She patted his shoulder. "Somebody's playing a joke on us. Those men have been dead for centuries."

He wiped his glistening forehead. "I need a drink."

She brought the brandy from the cupboard, and he poured and drank a good two inches.

"There. You're right, my dear. I mustn't let myself get so keyed up. Just for a minute there, those names— Alchemy is a powerful word, I guess. But as you say, the men are dead, and anyway, surely they never had the power . . . The telegram must be some sort of crazy joke."

"Perhaps, Rafe, you'd better stay at home tomorrow, and rest? You don't seem quite yourself."

Professor Gilbert straightened to his full height. "Rest? Tomorrow? You do not know your husband, Emmeline. Tomorrow I rebuild the machine!"

THE following night he was subdued. He ate very little dinner, and afterwards he sat silent for a long time. Emmeline was afraid to speak. After an hour, he poured himself a brandy, and roused himself from thought.

"Well, my dear, it didn't work."

"The machine?"

"Yes. Again, it didn't work. Several times we have set it for a chosen time sector, with complete success, just as we did in the case of *Futurity*. But whenever I set it for the time sector occupied by that drug-selling ancestor of yours, it simply blows its gaskets. I've never seen anything like it. But I've thought of another way to get around the difficulty. What we really need is a one-kilovolt tube on the output stage which will give it a boost sufficient to carry through any time sector in the surrounding thousand years, back-

wards, forwards, or sidewise, against any resistance."

"What do you mean, resistance? How could there be any resistance a thousand years ago? You're talking nonsense."

He jumped. "Out of the mouths of infants," he said. "Yes. Yes, of course I'm talking nonsense."

"Your friends at the lab may not mind, but I do wish that when you're talking with me you'd learn to separate fact and fantasy. I do not enjoy—"

She stopped. She knew, suddenly, that they were not alone. A bewhiskered old gentleman whom she had never seen before was standing with one elbow leaning on the television cabinet. A pill-box hat sat rakishly on his head, and the black robe over his wiry shoulders hung to the floor. His eyes, a peculiar, vivid blue, peered with intensity at Professor Gilbert.

The stranger pointed a bony finger and spoke, in a language which sounded to the astonished ears of the Professor like Latin, but a Latin which he could not understand at all. The shrewd eyes observed the gaping mouth of his host, and without a pause, he switched to English.

"My name is Roderick Attelath, the progenitor of the timid Emmeline," said the hoarse voice. "I am come to admonish you. Cease immediately your attempts to interfere with my life and my arts. You are playing with toys which you do not understand. I warn you, the unicorn is not a mythical beast! I perceive that you have some power to tamper with events in other time sectors, but I must inform you that I, too, have powers, and I have two friends whose powers are even greater than mine. Shoulder to shoulder, we three resist you. Does not the world still tremble at the names of Roger Bacon of Oxford, and Albertus Magnus of Cologne?"

For one chaotic moment, Professor Gilbert wondered if he had been drinking too much. He clutched at his fringe of hair, and tried to remember. No, he

had had only one glass of brandy. But he must be logical. He was not drunk. If he was not drunk, then he must be imagining the presence of the old gentleman in the black robe. If he was imagining such an impossible thing, he must be having a nervous breakdown. Had Emmeline heard the voice? He wondered. Could she see the stranger? He looked at her and knew she did see him.

"Well?" said Roderick Attelath.

Professor Gilbert managed to relax his paralyzed throat. "Sir," he said, "I do not believe that you are Roderick Attelath. I do not know who you are, or where you found your funny clothes, or how you got into my living-room. But in any case, you cannot intimidate me. I will not have my scientific work interfered with, and no Gilbert can be coerced by any person from the past, the present, or the future."

The figure in the corner fastened his fur cape more snugly around his neck, and straightened his bowed shoulders. "It is war, then. So be it. I must go."

HE WENT. That is, Professor Gilbert blinked, and in the thousandth of a second it took him to blink, the old man had disappeared.

Emmeline stood up. She swayed, and clutched at the back of the chair.

"Raphael, what— Should we— I'd never have believed—"

He put his arm around her shoulders. "Let's not get worked up, my dear. We've all heard about collective hallucinations. We've just been concentrating our thoughts too much on one subject, and whatever we think we saw, we didn't see at all."

"I suppose not. But I wish I hadn't seen it."

"I do not feel in the least intimidated. I shall have my machine ready for action again tomorrow, or the day after."

It was three days later that Professor Gilbert came home early for dinner. He tossed his hat at the hook on the hall stand, scored a hit, and strode with firm steps to his accustomed chair.

"Tomorrow, Emmeline, you may get ready to send in your revised family tree. I've found the trouble, and tomorrow at ten we'll turn on the juice. It was a silly thing—a flaw in the circuit, after all. Too much load on a single tube. Simplest thing in the world."

Mrs. Gilbert glowed. "Thank you, Raphael darling. I knew you could do it if you really tried, with a mind like yours. Won't it be wonderful? Just what will happen? When tomorrow night comes, will the genealogical record show that Roderick Attelath was a perfectly respectable man?"

"Perhaps. Or there may not be any Attelath on your chart at all. It's hard to be sure. Remember, he may be replaced, and you may find yourself tracing your descent from the Great William through a smuggler or a pirate."

"Or a baron, or a prince! However it works out, it's sure to be an improvement over a dishonest dealer in unicorn's horn." She kissed his cheek. "Until tomorrow, then!"

Suddenly she grabbed at the mantle, her knuckles tight and white, her fingernails digging into the wood. She stared across the room. She cried out.

"Rafe! Rafe! I never noticed— Rafe, look! I can see right through the bookcase!" She stretched out a trembling hand. "I can see the roses on the wallpaper behind it." Her voice swelled to a shriek. "And I can see through you!"

Raphael Gilbert turned towards the bookcase, and a look of pure wonder came into his face. But his scientist's mind did not falter.

"There were giants in those days," he murmured. "Yes, Emmeline, I can see through you, too, and I can see right through the wall of our house."

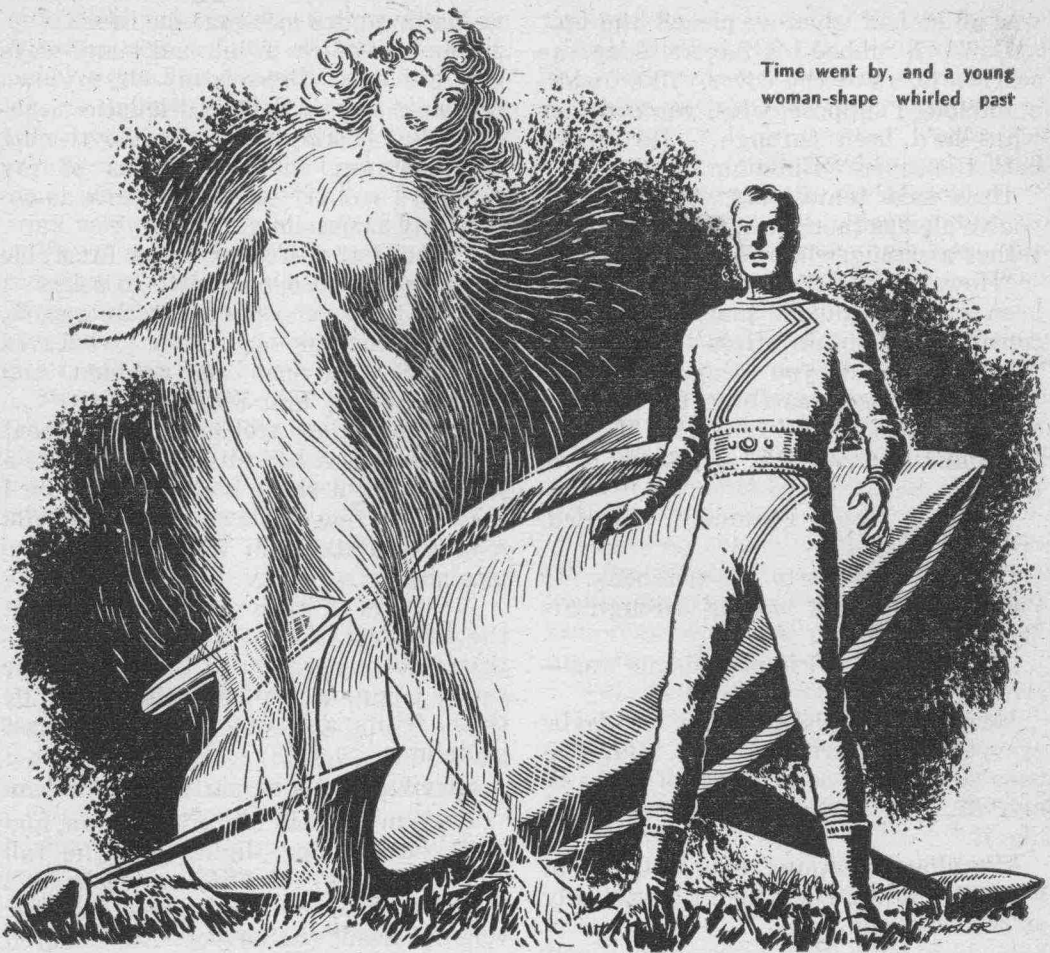
"But what's happening to us?"

"Your grandpappy Attelath is stronger than we thought. It looks to me as if our probability, here, is slipping."

His voice dwindled.

"In fact, the probability of our being here at all, now, is probably less than zero, point zero, zero, zero, ze—"

Time went by, and a young woman-shape whirled past



NOISE

By JACK VANCE

I

CAPTAIN HESS placed a notebook on the desk, and hauled a chair up under his sturdy buttocks. Pointing to the notebook, he said, "That's the property of your man Evans. He left it

aboard the ship."

Galispell said in faint surprise, "There was nothing else? No letter? We haven't heard a word from him."

"No, sir, not a thing. That notebook

"The noise," yelled Evans. "The horrible noise!" And then he disappeared. Was he insane . . . or the sanest man on the ship?

was all he had when we picked him up."

Galispell rubbed his fingers along the scarred fibers of the cover. "It's understandable, I suppose, when you consider what he'd been through." He flipped back the cover. "Hm-mm."

Hess said tentatively, "I suppose—you've always thought of Evans as, well, rather a strange chap?"

"Howard Evans? No, not at all. He's been a very valuable man to us." He considered Captain Hess reflectively. "Exactly how do you mean 'strange'?"

Hess frowned, searching for the precise picture of Evans' behavior. "I guess you might say erratic, or maybe emotional."

Galispell was genuinely startled. "Howard Evans?"

Hess' eyes went to the notebook. "I took the liberty of looking through his log, and—well—"

"And you got the impression he was—strange."

Hess flushed stubbornly. "Maybe everything he writes is true. But I've been poking into odd corners of space all my life, and I've never seen anything like it."

"Peculiar situation," said Galispell in a neutral voice. He looked thoughtfully at the notebook.

II

Journal of Howard Charles Evans

I COMMENCE this journal without pessimism but certainly without optimism. I feel as if I have already died once. My time in the lifeboat was at least a foretaste of death. I flew on and on through the dark, and a coffin could be only slightly more cramped. The stars were above, below, ahead, astern. I have no clock, and I can put no duration to my drifting. It was more than a week, it was less than a year.

So much for space, the lifeboat, the stars. There are not too many pages in this journal. I will need them all to chronicle my life on this world which,

rising up under me, gave me life.

There is much to tell and many ways in the telling. There is myself, my own response to this rather dramatic situation. But lacking the knack for tracing the contours and contortions of my psyche, I will try to detail events as objectively as possible.

I landed the lifeboat on as favorable a spot as I had opportunity to select. I tested the atmosphere, temperature, pressure and biology; then I ventured outside. I rigged an antenna and despatched my first SOS.

Shelter is no problem; the lifeboat serves me as a bed and, if necessary, a refuge. From sheer boredom later on I may fell a few of these trees and build a house. But I will wait; there is no urgency.

A stream of pure water trickles past the lifeboat; I have abundant concentrated food. As soon as the hydroponic tanks begin to produce, there will be fresh fruits and vegetables and yeast proteins—

Survival seems no particular problem.

The sun is a ball of dark crimson, and casts hardly more light than the full moon of Earth. The lifeboat rests on a meadow of thick black-green creeper, very pleasant underfoot. A hundred yards distant in the direction I shall call south lies a lake of inky water, and the meadow slopes smoothly down to the water's edge. Tall sprays of rather pallid vegetation—I had best use the word 'trees'—bound the meadow on either side.

Behind is a hillside, which possibly continues into a range of mountains; I can't be sure. This dim red light makes vision uncertain after the first few hundred feet.

The hotel effect is one of haunted desolation and peace. I would enjoy the beauty of the situation if it were not for the uncertainties of the future.

The breeze drifts across the lake, smelling pleasantly fragrant, and it carries a whisper of sound from off the waves.

I HAVE assembled the hydroponic tanks, and set out cultures of yeast. I shall never starve nor die of thirst. The lake is smooth and inviting; perhaps in time I will build a little boat. The water is warm, but I dare not swim. What could be more terrible than to be seized from below and dragged under?

There is probably no basis for my misgivings. I have seen no animal life of any kind: no birds, fish, insects, crustacea. The world is one of absolute quiet, except for the whispering breeze.

The scarlet sun hangs in the sky, remaining in place during many of my sleeps. I see it is slowly westering; after this long day how long and how monotonous will be the night!

I have sent off four SOS sequences; somewhere a monitor station must catch them.

A machete is my only weapon, and I have been reluctant to venture far from the lifeboat. Today (if I may use the word) I took my courage in my hands and started around the lake. The trees are rather like birches, tall and supple. I think the bark and leaves would shine a clear silver in light other than this wine-colored gloom. Along the lakeshore they stand in a line, almost as if long ago they had been planted by a wandering gardener. The tall branches sway in the breeze, glinting scarlet with purple overtones, a strange and wonderful picture which I am alone to see.

I have heard it said that enjoyment of beauty is magnified in the presence of others: that a mysterious rapport comes into play to reveal subtleties which a single mind is unable to grasp. Certainly as I walked along the avenue of trees with the lake and the scarlet sun behind, I would have been grateful for companionship—but I believe that something of peace, the sense of walking in an ancient abandoned garden, would be lost.

The lake is shaped like an hour-glass; at the narrow waist I could look across and see the squat shape of the lifeboat. I sat down under a bush, which continually nodded red and black flowers in

front of me.

Mist fibrils drifted across the lake and the wind made low musical sounds.

I rose to my feet continued around the lake.

I passed through forests and glades and came once more to my lifeboat.

I went to tend my hydroponic tanks, and I think the yeast had been disturbed, prodded at curiously.

THE dark red sun is sinking. Every day—it must be clear that I use 'day' as the interval between my sleeps—finds it lower in the sky. Night is almost upon me, long night. How shall I spend my time in the dark?

I have no gauge other than my mind, but the breeze seems colder. It brings long mournful chords to my ears, very sad, very sweet. Mist-wraiths go fleeting across the meadow.

Wan stars already show themselves, nameless ghost-lamps without significance.

I have been considering the slope behind my meadow; tomorrow I think I will make the ascent.

I have plotted the position of every article I possess. I will be gone some hours, and—if a visitor meddles with my goods, I will know his presence for certain.

The sun is low, the air pinches at my cheeks. I must hurry if I wish to return while light still shows me the landscape. I picture myself lost; I see myself wandering the face of this world, groping for my precious lifeboat, my tanks, my meadow.

ANXIETY, curiosity, obstinacy all spurring me, I set off up the slope at a half-trot.

Becoming winded almost at once, I slowed my pace. The turf of the lake shore had disappeared; I was walking on bare rock and lichen. Below me the meadow became a patch, my lifeboat a gleaming spindle. I watched for a mo-

ment. Nothing stirred anywhere in my range of vision.

I continued up the slope and finally breasted the ridge. A vast rolling valley fell off below me. Across, rose a range of great mountains, rearing above me into the dark sky. The wine-colored light slanting in from the west lit the prominences, the frontal sallies and bluffs, left the valleys in gloom, an alternate sequence of red and black beginning far in the west, continuing past, far to the east.

I looked down behind me, down to my own meadow, and was hard put to find it in the fading light. Ah, there it was! And there, the lake, a sprawling hour-glass. Beyond was dark forest, then a strip of old rose savannah, then a dark strip of woodland, then delicate laminae of colorings to the horizon.

The sun touched the edge of the mountains, and with what seemed almost a sudden lurch, fell half below the horizon. I turned down-slope; a terrible thing to be lost in the dark. My eye fell upon a white object, a hundred yards along the ridge. I stared, and walked nearer. Gradually it assumed form: a thimble, a cone, a pyramid—a cairn of white rocks. I walked forward with feet achingly heavy.

A cairn, certainly. I stood looking down on it.

I turned, looked swiftly over my shoulder. Nothing in view. I looked down to the meadow. Swift shapes? I strained through the gathering murk. Nothing.

I tore at the cairn, threw rocks aside. What was below?

Nothing.

In the ground a faintly-marked rectangle three feet long was perceptible. I stood back. No power I knew of could induce me to dig into that soil.

The sun was disappearing. Already at the south and north the afterglow began, lees of wine: the sun moved with astounding rapidity; what manner of sun was this, dawdling at the meridian, plunging below the horizon?

I turned down-slope, but darkness came faster. The scarlet sun was gone; in the west was the sad sketch of departed flame. I stumbled, I fell. I looked into the east. A marvellous zodiacal light was forming, a strengthening blue triangle.

I watched, from my hands and knees. A cusp of bright blue lifted into the sky. A moment later of flood of sapphire washed landscape. A new sun of intense indigo rose into the sky.

The world was the same and yet different; where my eyes had been accustomed to red, and the multitudinous red sub-colors, now I saw the intricate cycle of blue.

When I returned to my meadow, the breeze carried a new sound: bright allegro chords that my mind could almost form into melody. For a moment I so amused myself, and thought to see dance-motion in the wisps of vapor which for the last few days had been noticeable over my meadow.

In what I will call a peculiar frame of mind, I crawled into the lifeboat and went to sleep.

I CRAWLED blinking out of the lifeboat into an electric world. I listened Surely that was music—faint whispers drifting in on the wind like a fragrance.

I went down to the lake, as blue as a ball of that cobalt dye so aptly known as bluing.

The music came louder; I could catch snatches of melody—sprightly quick-step phrases carried on a flowing legato like colored tinsel on a flow of cream.

I put my hands to my ears; if I were experiencing auditory hallucinations, the music would continue. The sound—if it were music—diminished, but did not fade entirely; my test was not definitive. But I felt sure it was real. And where music was there must be musicians. . . . I ran forward, shouted, "Hello!"

"Hello!" came the echo from across the lake.

The music faded a moment, as a crick-

et chorus quiets when disturbed, then gradually I could hear it again—distant music, 'horns of elf-land faintly blowing'.

It went completely out of perception. I was left standing haggard in the blue light, alone on my meadow.

I washed my face, returned to the lifeboat, sent out another set of SOS signals.

POSSIBLY the blue day is shorter than the red day; with no clock I can't be sure. But with my new fascination, the music and its source, the blue day seems to pass swifter.

Never have I caught sight of the musicians. Is the sound generated by the trees, by diaphanous insects crouching out of my vision?

One day I glanced across the lake, and wonder of wonders! a gay town spread along the opposite shore. After a first dumbfounded gaze, I ran down to the water's edge, stared as if it were the most precious sight of my life.

Pale silk swayed and rippled: pavilions, tents, fantastic edifices. . . . Who inhabited these places? I waded knee-deep into the lake, the breath catching and creaking in my throat, and thought to see flitting shapes.

I ran like a madman around the shore. Plants with pale blue blossoms succumbed to my feet; I left the trail of an elephant through a patch of delicate reeds.

And when I came panting and exhausted to the shore opposite my meadow, what was there? Nothing.

The city had vanished like a dream, like spectres blown on a wind. I sat down on a rock. Music came clear for an instant, as if a door had momentarily opened.

I jumped to my feet. Nothing to be seen. I looked back across the lake. There—on my meadow—a host of gauzy shapes moved like May-flies over a still pond.

When I returned, my meadow was vacant. The shore across the lake was bare.

SO GOES the blue day; and now there is fascination to my life. Whence comes the music? Who and what are these flitting shapes; never quite real but never entirely out of mind? Four times an hour I press a hand to my forehead, fearing the symptoms of a mind turning in on itself. . . . If music actually exists on this world, actually vibrates the air, why should it come to my ears as Earth music? These chords I hear might be struck on familiar instruments; the progressions and harmonies are not at all alien. . . . And these pale plasmic wisps that I forever seem to catch from the corner of my eye: the semblance and style is that of gay and playful humanity. The tempo of their movement is the tempo of the music: tarantella, sara-bande, farandole. . . .

So goes the blue day. Blue air, blue-black turf, ultramarine water, and the bright blue star bent to the west. . . . How long have I lived on this planet? I have broadcast the SOS sequence until now the batteries hiss with exhaustion; soon there will be an end to power. Food, water are no problem to me, but what use is a lifetime of exile on a world of blue and red?

THE blue day is at its close. I would like to mount the slope and watch the glory of the blue suns' passing—but the remembrance of the red sunset still provokes a queasiness in my stomach. So I will watch from my meadow, and then, if there is darkness, I will crawl into the lifeboat like a bear into a cave, and await the coming of light.

The blue day goes. The sapphire sun wanders into the western forest, the sky glooms to blue-black, the stars show like unfamiliar home-places.

For some time now I have heard no music; perhaps it has been so all-present that I neglect it.

The blue star is gone, the air chills. I think that deep night is on me indeed. . . . I hear a throb of sound, plangent, plaintive; I turn my head. The east glows pale pearl. A silver globe floats

up into the night like a lotus drifting on a lake: a great ball like six of Earth's full moons. Is this a sun, a satellite, a burnt-out star? What a freak of cosmology I have chanced upon!

The silver sun—I must call it a sun, although it casts a cool satin light—moves in an aureole like oyster-shell. Once again the color of the planet changes. The lake glistens like quicksilver, the trees are hammered metal . . . The silver star passes over a high wrack of clouds, and the music seems to burst forth as if somewhere someone flung wide curtains: the music of moonlight, medieval marble, piazzas with slim fluted colonnades, soft sighing strains that Claude Debussy might have conceived.

I wander down to the lake. Across on the opposite shore once more I see the town. It seems clearer, more substantial; I note details that shimmered away to vagueness before—a wide terrace beside the lake, spiral pilasters, a row of decorative urns. The silhouette is, I think, the same as when I saw it under the blue sun: great silken tents, shimmering, reflecting cusps of light; pillars of carved stone, lucent as milk-glass; fantastic fixtures of no obvious purpose . . . Barges drift along the dark quicksilver lake like moths, great sails bellying idly, the rigging a mesh of cobweb. Nodules of light, like fairy lanterns, hang on the stays, along the masts . . . On sudden thought, I turn, look up to my own meadow. I see a row of booths as at an old-time fair, a circle of pale stone set in the turf, a host of filmy shapes.

Step by step I edge toward my lifeboat. The music waxes, chords and structures of wonderful sweetness. I peer at one of the shapes, but the outlines waver. It moves to the emotion of the music—or does the motion of the shape generate the music?

I run forward, shouting hoarsely. One of the shapes slips past me, and I look into a blur where a face might be. I come to a halt, panting hard; I stand on

the marble circle. I stamp; it rings solid. I walk toward the booths, they seem to display complex things of pale cloth and dimmetal—but as I look my eyes mist over as with tears. The music goes far far away, my meadow lies bare and quiet. My feet press into silver-black turf; in the sky hangs the silver-black star.

I AM sitting with my back to the lifeboat, staring across the lake, which is still as a mirror. I have arrived at a set of theories.

My primary proposition is that I am sane—a necessary article of faith; why bother even to speculate otherwise? So—events occurring outside my own mind cause everything I have seen and heard. But—note this!—these sights and sounds do not obey the laws of classical science; in many respects they seem particularly subjective.

It must be, I tell myself, that both objectivity and subjectivity enter into the situation. I receive impressions which my brain finds unfamiliar, and so translates to the concept most closely related. By this theory the inhabitants of this world are constantly close; I move unknowingly through their palaces and arcades; they dance incessantly around me. As my mind gains sensitivity, I verge upon rapport with their way of life and I see them. More exactly, I sense something which creates an image in the visual region of my brain. Their emotions, the pattern of their life sets up a kind of vibration which sounds in my brain as music . . . The reality of these creatures I am sure I will never know. They are diaphane, I am flesh; they live in a world of spirit, I plod the turf with my heavy feet.

THESE last days I have neglected to broadcast the SOS. Small lack; the batteries are about done.

The silver sun is at the zenith, and leans westward. What comes next? Back to the red sun? Or darkness? Certainly this is no ordinary planetary

system; the course of this world along its orbit must resemble one of the pre-Copernican epicycles.

I believe that my brain is gradually tuning into phase with this world, reaching a new high level of sensitivity. If my theory is correct, the *elán-vital* of the native beings expresses itself in my brain as music. On Earth we would perhaps use the word telepathy . . . So I am practicing, concentrating, opening my consciousness wide to these new perceptions. Ocean mariners know a trick of never looking directly at a far light lest it strike the eyes' blind spot. I am using a similar device of never staring directly at one of the gauzy beings. I allow the image to establish itself, build itself up, and by this technique they appear quite definitely human. I sometimes think I can glimpse the features. The women are like sylphs, achingly beautiful; the men—I have not seen one in detail, but their carriage, their form is hauntingly familiar.

The music is always part of the background, just as rustling of leaves is part of a forest. The mood of these creatures seems to change with their sun, so I hear interpretive music to suit. The red sun gave them passionate melancholy, the blue sun merriment. Under the silver star they are delicate, imaginative, wistful, and in my mind sounds Debussy's *La Mer* and *Les Sirènes*.

THE silver day is on the wane. Today I sat beside the lake with the trees before me like a screen of silver filigree, watching the moth-barges drift back and forth. What is their function, I wonder? Can life such as this be translated in terms of economies, ecology, sociology? I doubt it. The word intelligence may not even enter the picture; ~~is not our brain a peculiarly anthropoid characteristic, and is not intelligence a function of our peculiarly anthropoid brain?~~ . . . A portly barge sways near, with swamp-globes of orange and blue in the rigging, and I forget my hypothe-

ses. I can never know the truth, and it is perfectly possible that these creatures are no more aware of me than I originally was aware of them.

Time goes by; I return to the lifeboat. A young woman-shape whirls past. I pause, peer into her face; she tilts her head, her eyes burn into mine as she passes, mocking topaz, not unkindly . . . I try an SOS—listlessly, because I suspect the batteries to be dank and dead.

And indeed they are.

THE silver star is like an enormous Christmas tree bauble, round and glistening. It floats low, and once more I stand irresolute, half-expecting night.

The star falls; the forest receives it. The sky dulls, and night has come.

I face the east, my back pressed to the pragmatic hull of my lifeboat. Nothing.

I have no conception of the passage of time. Darkness, timelessness. Somewhere clocks turn minute hands, second hands, hour hands—I stand staring into the night, perhaps as slow as a sandstone statue, perhaps as feverish as a salamander.

In the darkness there is a peculiar cessation of sound. The music has dwindled, down through a series of wistful chords, a forlorn last cry . . .

A glow in the east, a green glow, spreading. Up rises a magnificent green sphere, the essence of all green, the tincture of emeralds, glowing as grass, fresh as mint, deep as the sea.

A throb of sound, music: rhythmical strong music, swinging and veering.

The green light floods the planet, and I prepare for the green day.

I am almost one with the native things. I wander among their pavilions; I pause by their booths to ponder their stuffs and wares: silken medallions, spangles and circlets of woven metal, cups of fluff and iridescent puff, puddles of color and wafts of light-shot gauze. There are chains of green glass, each link shaped like a horse-shoe; cap-

tive butterflies; spheres which seem to hold all the heavens, all the clouds, all the stars.

And to all sides of me goes the flicker and flit of the dream-people. The men are all vague, but familiar; the women turn me smiles of ineffable provocation. But I will drive myself mad with temptations; what I see is no more than the formulation of my own brain, an interpretation . . . And this is tragedy, for there is one creature so unutterably lovely that whenever I see the shape that is she, my throat aches and I run forward, to peer into her eyes that are not eyes . . .

Today I clasped my arms around her, expecting yielding wisp. Surprisingly there was the feel of supple flesh. I kissed her, cheek, chin, mouth. Such a look of perplexity on the sweet face as I have never seen; Heaven knows what strange act the creature thought me to be performing.

She went her way, but the music is strong and triumphant: the voice of cornets, the shoulder of resonant bass below.

A man comes past; something in his stride, his posture, plucks at my memory. I resolutely step forward; I will gaze into his face, I will plumb the vagueness.

He whirls past like a figure on a carousel; he wears flapping ribbons of silk and pompoms of spangled satin. I pound after him, I plant myself in his path. He strides past with a side-glance, and I stare into the rigid mask-like face.

It is my own face.

He wears my face, he walks with my stride. He is me.

Already is the green day gone?

THE green sun goes, and the music takes on depth. No cessation now; there is preparation, imminence . . . What is that other sound? A far spasm of something growling and clashing like a broken gear-box.

It fades out.

The green sun goes down in a sky like a peacock's tail. The music is slow, exalted.

The west fades, the east glows. The music goes toward the east, to the great bands of rose, yellow, orange, lavender. Cloud-flecks burst into flame. A golden glow consumes the sky, north and south.

The music takes on volume, a liturgical chanting.

Up rises the new sun—a gorgeous golden ball. The music swells into a paean of light, fulfillment, regeneration . . . Hark! a second time the harsh sound grates across the music.

Into the sky, across the sun, drifts the shape of a spaceship. It hovers over my meadow, the landing jets come down like plumes.

The ship lands.

I hear the mutter of voices—men's voices.

The music is vanished; the marble carvings, the tinsel booths, the wonderful silken cities are gone.

III

GALISPELL looked up, rubbed his chin.

Captain Hess asked anxiously, "What do you think of it?"

For a moment Galispell made no reply; then he said, "It's a strange document . . ." He looked for a long moment out the window. "What happened after you picked him up? Did you see any of these phenomena he talks about?"

"Not a thing." Captain Hess solemnly shook his big round head. "Sure, the system was a fantastic gaggle of dark stars and fluorescent planets and burnt-out old suns; maybe all these things played hob with his mind. He didn't seem too overjoyed to see us, that's a fact—just stood there, staring at us as if we were trespassers. 'We got your SOS,' I told him. 'Jump aboard, wrap yourself around a good meal!' He came walking forward as if his feet were dead.

"Well, to make a long story short, he finally came aboard. We loaded on his lifeboat and took off.

"During the voyage back, he had nothing to do with anybody—just kept to himself, walking up and down the promenade.

"He had a habit of putting his hands to his head; one time I asked him if he was sick, if he wanted the medic to look him over. He said no, there was nothing wrong with him. That's about all I know of the man.

"We made Sun, and came down toward Earth. Personally, I didn't see what happened, because I was on the bridge, but this is what they tell me:

"As Earth got bigger and bigger Evans began to act more restless than usual, wincing and turning his head back and forth. When we were about a

thousand miles out, he gave a kind of furious jump.

"The noise!" he yelled. "The horrible noise!" And with that he ran astern, jumped into his lifeboat, cast off, and they tell me disappeared back the way we came.

"And that's all I got to tell you, Mr. Galispell. It's too bad, after our taking all that trouble to get him, Evans decided to pull up stakes—but that's the way it goes."

"He took off back along your course?"

"That's right. If you're wanting to ask, could he have made the planet where we found him, the answer is, not likely."

"But there's a chance?" persisted Galispell.

"Oh, sure," said Captain Hess. "There's a chance."



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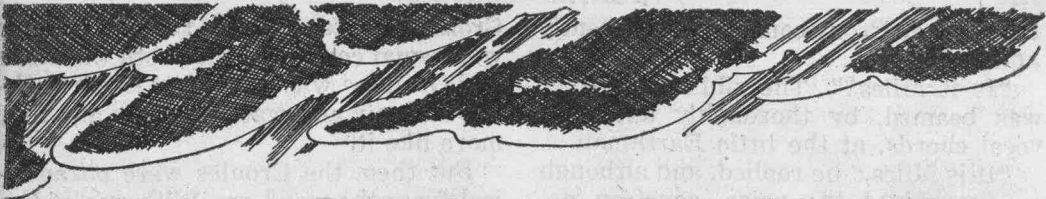


Blinded instantly, Jord turned and fled

PAGE AND PLAYER

A Novelet of Pioneer Worlds

By HARRY NEAL



The Cronies were harmless, incapable of violence . . . but they had their own strange ways of getting things done

I

MAX MILES did mysterious things to the battered, broken-dialed control panel, and Mary the stratocoupe promptly went into her act. The old one-man jet flipped a wing at zenith and lost three hundred feet of altitude in six seconds. Miles sparred with the panel, got upside up again, stared back at a cloud of dust they had whisked from a hilltop. He gave the panel a right to the jaw. Mary sighed heavily with her airfoils and circled in resignation toward the green and ochre valley below, grounding at last in the meadow with jolts and scrapings.

Miles kicked off the drive with one foot, shoved open the port with the other. He poised, a small healthy-looking man with blue eyes and more scalp than hair, his knees bent for the short drop to the ground; and—as usually happened—the scene outside caught him up and held him for several delicious moments. His thoughts sidestepped into well-worn and agreeable tracks as he looked upon the neatly furrowed fields that spread to the encircling hills; the stone-lined irrigation ditches; the long sprawling *kanl* racks; the shining sunmill that jutted above the yard by the cottage.

There goes the Babe, he thought, and watched the tiny sun as it seemed to hesitate, then withdraw suddenly—in a blink—behind the near horizon. The clouded sky immediately began changing its heaped-up, and fortunately high-

up, ammonia vapors from red to purple and then to neutral grey as the upthrust arc of sunlight narrowed and faded.

"Miles' Matchless Acres," this valley was, in his letters to his friends on Earth; the Agricultural Registry in Three Major listed it with less whoopedoo as: "Sections 764-5-6 Alcorn; product (s): *kanl*, *linla*; owner (s) Maxwell Julius Miles, age 41, vol. Earth July 2691."

But Max Miles was fired with the blooded pride of the pioneer—and the less unselfish pride of the landowner. This was his farm. Ipso facto it was the best farm on Goran Three.

He jumped, and Three's gravity—.5403 Earth—socked his feet gently into the tangled grass. Waves and eddies of stink—there's no other word for it—came at him from all directions; stink that was a level eight-foot blanket over the Alcon lowlands. Miles grinned and ducked under Mary's stubby wing, savoring the heavily-laden air with the peculiar gusto of one to whom an unpleasant thing has become pleasantly familiar. Sliding open the cargo hatch, he hoisted a box of supplies to his shoulder and started up the path for the cottage, squinting into the gloom of oncoming evening.

Several dark shapes seemed to materialize at the meadow's edge, vague and hulking against the backdrop of intertwined *kanl* trees. Miles wondered, as he often had, how any critter as big as

the average Crony could move so silently and so fast. . . .

"Is it Miles?" The sibilant whisper was beamed, by thoroughly unhuman vocal chords, at the little Earthman.

"It is Miles," he replied, and although he recognized the voice, courtesy demanded that he add: "Is it Fir?"

"It is Fir, with Tos. What is your wish?"

"None, save to retire. The farm is well?"

The answering whisper carried overtones of satisfaction. "It is well, Miles. You will find an account on your desk—" and the figures melted into the thick-hung blackness.

Miles grinned, trudged on up the path. Gone for half a day's shopping—and his workers had kept a record of the farm's happenings. That was Lin's work, he suspected. His big foreman enjoyed the assumption of tasks over and above those assigned him; such as his regular trips to the cottage, a few minutes before Grandpa, to make certain that Miles was awake and aware.

THE natives of Goran Three were certainly not the most beautiful to look upon—although reasonably humanoid and not at all disturbing to a human, if the human were forewarned—but he'd stack them for common decency against any blank sapiens in the catalogued systems. And work! They'd work their hands to the—well, no, not to the bone. At least so far as Miles or anyone else could know for sure. Couple of years ago some stiffnecked medicos from Mars General had come to Three with ideas about examining the Cronies and placing them in the exact black and white scheme of things. After a while they had gone back to Mars, disgruntled, carrying fogged X-ray plates and souvenir scalpels that had blunted on chitinous hides. One amiable Crony had signed a release, submitted to an atomic drill—and exited laughing.

Miles himself had often wondered about the physiological set-up of the

Cronies. After all, he thought, living with equal comfort under both the Babe and Grandpa was somewhat like breathing both air and water. Or air and fire, more like it.

But then, the Cronies were paradoxical from the word go. With one of the highest racial I. Q.'s known, so far as could be determined, considering the difficulty of establishing suitable criteria, they acted like kids, preferring to spend much of their time romping and singing in the sunlight and working gratis as farmhands for the Earth settlers.

Which, argued some scientists, along with the hints occasionally dropped and the gadgets often carried but never shared by the Cronies, was no small indication of their cultural status: highly advanced, with the arts and technology to produce anything and everything they could possibly want except exercise.

Other scientists argued decadence.

All the scientists would have loved to examine just *one* of those gadgets, to have entered just *one* of the great shining Hives that lay scattered across the face of Goran Three, and thereby see exactly what was what.

But after several decades of being neatly rebuffed in such attempts, Earth scientists knew the following and little else: the Cronies were tough, brilliant, amiable and—telepathic. They were not, however—and thank Heaven—able to read Earth minds. This the Cronies admitted.

The binary-meter on Miles' wrist suddenly began to agitate—buzzing wasp-like—and grew hot. The illuminated dial, controlled by the master-meter in Three Minor, told him that he could expect Grandpa in precisely an hour and a half from *now*.

"Damn crazy place to live," he confided to the meter. Then his blue eyes snapped half-shut with annoyance as the heat increased. "All right, all *right!* I'm not asleep this time—!"

He made whistling noises and thumped the box of supplies to the ground, grabbed at the meter to click it

off. Pain faded. Miles flipped the wrist around to cool it, cursing the meter—but without enthusiasm, for he remembered the time he *had* been asleep, lying in the grass at the far end of the meadow. Good Martian wine and a very bad book had eased him into a weighted slumber, and the brilliance of certain death had begun to silhouette the distant hills. The meter had all but fried his wrist in its effort to get him on his feet. He still had the scar—and the nightmare memory of that frantic race with Grandpa.

The box reshouldered, Miles cut away from the path and knelt. The racks

far as smells went, he was no peony himself—he had the horsy odor of a big man long unwashed; his tunic was rumpled and dirty, his face stubbled and sweat-shiny.

Miles lowered his gaze and had his first opportunity—if you didn't count the detective thrillers he followed on the screen of his telaudio—to study the triple nozzle of a hand-blast pointed at him with intent to do him dirt. It did indeed command attention, and Miles gave his to the stranger's next words.

"Is that food you're carrying?" Hopefully.

The Life and Times of Harry Neal

ONE of the things which enlivens an editor's life is the curious ways in which stories may come to him. Thus, when a promising young novelet titled PAGE AND PLAYER came in from an unknown author named Harry Neal, this editor made a few routine inquiries about Neal and bought the story with the joy of discovering a new talent. Imagine his disgust when Harry Neal turned out to be Jerry Bixby, now snickering back in the fan column!

Anyway, you read it and decide whether the joke is on us or on him.

—The Editor

were spread with neat rows of round, soggy *kaml* leaves, all ready for Grandpa. He straightened, took a deep breath. It was a good life. He let out the breath—if you could stand Grandpa and the unholy stink.

II

MILES rounded the corner of the cottage and came to a surprised halt. His cheery whistle turned atonal and perished.

The big man's voice was oddly soft, almost friendly in tone.

"Does it always smell like this?" he inquired.

He stood by the door, his back leaned against the tangled *jongar*. His round face might have been weak, almost child-like, with its shallow eyes and nubbin of a nose—but the small mouth beneath was tucked in at the corners, stamping an ugly determination over all. And as

"Some of it," Miles admitted.

The man moved backward through the doorway. "Come in, said the spider—although it's *your* parlor."

Max Miles followed, ducking to clear the trailing *jongar* vines, more puzzled than afraid. Strangers were uncommon on Goran Three. One of many pioneer worlds, it bore a purely functional population. Importing supplies was a headache, living conditions were flexible and still under critical analysis, and space visas were proportionately hard to get. There were only two cities on the tiny planet; one a shipping center, and the other a glorified department store. These, along with the farms and outlying districts, contained in aggregate exactly 964 humans, most of whom were known to one another and one of whom, Miles was sure, this stranger was not.

Habit brought Miles' hand to the house-board. He inserted his key,

turned the cottage on. Coming to electronic life, it detected their presence and spilled soft, diffuse light from the walls.

From the center of the room the big man murmured his surprise: "Pretty fancy for a farmer."

Miles blinked to adjust his sight. "What'd you expect—candles?"

The stranger's mouth tightened. "Kick the door shut."

Miles did so.

The stranger indicated the box of supplies with a wave of the hand-blast. "Set it."

Miles bit down on his anger and slid the box onto the table. He said mildly, "Okay, Mister—?"

"Jord. Henry Jo—" the stranger broke off with an appreciative grin. "Say, aren't you the smart one? I like a smart man." He took a step forward, the grin stiffening over his small, even teeth. "Now, put your hands in your pants pockets and turn around."

Miles pivoted slowly to face the wall. Henry Jord's free hand patted up and down his torso, removing his wallet, his pocket-talkie. A moment later he heard the tiny 'tronic shatter on the floor. Then Jord's steps retreated to the center of the room, his soft-steel voice said, "All right, farmer. At ease."

Miles wheeled, picked the wallet out of mid-air as it was tossed to him. Its thickness told him that his money was still there.

Jord put the hand-blast on the table. "Ten to one," he said casually, "that I can pick it up and shoot you before you get to me."

"Wouldn't buck those odds," Miles grunted. He leaned against the wall, watching silently as the big man unpacked the box of supplies, item by item. At one point Jord exclaimed happily and set aside a container of Venus-Blue Garol.

"I guess we'll have that for supper," Miles interpreted.

"I said you were smart, farmer—" Jord's hand explored the bottom of the

box. "I just wanted to make sure there wasn't a hand-blast mixed in here. No reason why there should be—but wouldn't I be a fool to take the chance?" He picked up the gun from the table and gave Miles his wide, meaningless smile.

The little farmer bared his teeth in a returning smile that meant a great deal—most of it nasty.

"As long as you're my guest," he said, "suppose you call me by name—you got it from the wallet—and tell me what in hell this is all about!"

Jord raised his eyebrows. "Isn't that obvious? Or don't you listen to the tel-audio?"

"No, it isn't obvious," Miles snapped, "and I listen to the tel-audio. But my set isn't any government I. P. pick-up. And you're not from Goran Three, mister!"

Something of surprise flickered in Jord's pale gaze.

"Maybe you're too damned smart," he said. "How did you figure that?"

"Three's like a small town—there's nobody on this clod I can't call by his first name."

Jord's face lost its wary tension. "Of course," he murmured, "I'd forgotten. That's very nice—my not being known here should expedite things." He sat down and stretched his long legs under the table, keeping the hand-blast targeted on Miles' chest. "Well . . . since you don't know who I am, I'll tell you. We all hope for notoriety, of course, but you must understand that I would have preferred a different sort. Henry Jord, galactic explorer, perhaps—or Henry Jord, famous author. I do write, you know. No, I suppose you don't. At any rate, these things are not in our hands, are they?" He flung out a casual hand, as if in demonstration. "So I am Henry Jord, embezzeler, murderer, fugitive."

MILES stared at the big man blankly, while a cold ball of horror gathered in his chest, dropped to his stomach and stuck there.

A murderer! A rare animal, these days—almost extinct. The little farmer

had been inclined to take the threat of the handblast only half seriously. Now he suddenly developed an intense respect for it, in inverse proportion to the respect he lost for its holder. And for the first time in his life he knew fear of another human being. It was an atavistic, somehow unclean, feeling, and it made him a little sick.

To keep the ball rolling while he considered his situation, he said, "Where'd all this murdering and embezzling take place?"

"Jason One—and in the opposite order. First, I embezzled from my firm. My partner discovered the loss and we had a disagreement. I disposed of the body, but you know how it is. One thing after another. Eventually questions were asked and although I lied magnificently I was booked on suspicion."

He tossed the can of Garol to Miles and the farmer turned, pressed it into the opener. Near his fingertips lay the inviting bulk of the short-wave cook-all and it occurred to him that with luck he might be able to brain the big man with it. The can opened with a hiss. Miles shoved it into the cook-all, wrapped his fingers around the grill to get a firm hold. He put his weight on his toes and bunched his arm muscles—

"That's fine!" The hand-blast bored cruelly into his back and twisted. "Now get back against the wall, little man, and think up something better to try!"

For one reckless moment Miles toyed with the idea of swinging around abruptly, wrestling for the weapon. Jord sensed this, however. He stepped back quickly to the center of the room and barked a single word, "Don't!"—underlining it with the *chat!* of the hand-blast. The charge whined past Miles' head and out of the window, raising small thunder and a sudden white plume near the base of the sun-mill. The farmer heard Jord's sarcastic laugh:

"You might as well find out right now that I'm an excellent shot, and that I'm not a careless man or a fool. Mind that,

and we'll get along."

Miles snapped on the cook-all, his face impassive. "I'll mind it." He moved to the wall, and sat down cross-legged. "I don't have to stand, do I?"

"No."

Miles forced himself to consider his position logically, screening out certain impulses that he recognized as neurotic in origin. Such reactions were dangerous, could very well result in his death. The attempt with the cooker, for example, had been quite foolish.

This train of thought gave him a minor inspiration. He turned it over in his mind, thinking moodily that every little bit helps. The old bar-rag stench of *jongar* filled the room, bringing its picture of the vines that crowded the cottage walls, lacing over the windows with a persistence that no amount of blasting could inhibit. Burn the vines, sear their roots—and *jongar* would regenerate from a cinder.

III

MAX MILES versus the vines had been a primary issue soon after his arrival from Earth, and he had tackled them with indignation. But, after ten or a dozen futile sessions with a handblast, he had shrugged his shoulders and saved his pellets. Whereupon *jongar* had, during a single night, regained and consolidated, twisting and matting so that from afar the cottage looked like a blue haystack; and there *jongar* stopped its growth, took a million bites of Mercury-steel with a million mouths and sat back to digest, perhaps also shrugging its shoulders.

Miles cleared his throat. "Got something to tell you—" he said.

Jord looked at him without much interest and Miles deliberately wet his lips uneasily, refusing to meet the big man's gaze.

"Those vines—" Miles pointed at the tendrils of *jongar* dangling outside the window— "their odor is toxic." He cleared his throat again, looking Jord

squarely between the eyes. "You—you have to get injections every week or you die. It's a horrible death. If you stay here much longer, you'll—I—it'll be too late—" he trailed his voice off into a hopeful silence.

Jord's irises were twin chips of polar ice as he studied Miles' face. Then, slowly, amused contempt dulled the hard glitter. He shook his head.

"You're lying," he said. "And very badly. I forgot to tell you that I'm also an excellent judge of men."

Miles shrugged philosophically . . . and mentally patted his back on a fair job of acting. When he told his next lie, minus the fidgets, Jord would probably believe it. His ego would want him to believe, and so he would. This gave the farmer a slight edge, a toehold. Men like Jord, who prided themselves on their caution, sometimes looked so hard for subtleties that they overlooked the Letter on the Mantle. Miles had no idea yet what his next lie was going to be, but he knew that it would be a dilly.

After a moment, he said: "What about the body?"

Jord frowned. "What about it?"

"No body—you say you disposed of it. No corpus delicti."

"Corpus delic—oh, Earth law. I'm afraid that doesn't throw much weight out here. If you've ever read western stories, you know what I mean. Men were men and all that, and the law was a—Holt, I believe the blaster was called? Here on the pioneer worlds, just as on the western frontier, we're beyond contemporary law. Will be for some years, I imagine—though never a fraction as lawless." Jord got up and crossed to adjust the cook-all, moving crab-wise to keep an eye on Miles. "It'll catch up to us in time," he went on, "but until then we won't have legalities to confound justice . . . Funny, isn't it?"

"What?"

"My concern for the blind lady Justice."

Miles answered inanely, his intelligence nowhere near the conversation. "I

hardly imagine that you're looking forward to your just punishment."

Jord laughed shortly. "Oh, Lord, you're right there! I plan to escape it! Obvious as hell that I killed Harry, you know. In an Earth court I might have wheedled and bribed my way out of it. Here—" he shrugged. "So I skipped my bail and got off-world."

Miles stood up and shouldered out from the wall, and the hand-blast snapped up to level on his midriff. He pointed at the supplies on the table. "Do you mind if I put some of that stuff away?" he growled. "That steak is soaking up these smells like a sponge."

Jord moved away from the cooker to a neutral corner and nodded. Miles slid open the deep-freeze and stacked in the perishables, slanting his attention at the big man. His covert glances didn't pass unnoticed.

"Don't try to throw anything at me," he was warned, "or this place will smell even worse. These hand-blasts really cook a man, you know!"

Hand-blast? Miles thought grimly. *Brother, you haven't met Grandpa!* And then he frowned, his hands pausing in their work. He'd almost forgotten about Grandpa. On Goran Three—or Two or One, for that matter—people didn't forget about Grandpa and live to tell about it. He glanced casually at his wrist-meter. An hour, a little over. He ground his teeth almost audibly. This was getting nastier by the minute.

HE'D have to get Jord out of here before Grandpa's arrival or take the big man underground; and he didn't favor the latter very much. First, because he didn't want to be cooped up with the killer for seven hours; second—and more important—if Jord got out of the lowlands he might possibly manage to escape from Three. Another killing, maybe two. A stolen visa. A quick interstellar jaunt through hyperspace and Henry Jord would vanish into the crowds of Earth or Mars. And this, Miles thought with naive logic, should

not be allowed to happen.

As if reading his mind, Jord said, "You'd like to stop me, wouldn't you?" He nodded, not waiting for an answer. "I've been tempted to stop *myself* several times since this thing began. At such times I forget that *I* am the criminal—the impulse to remove such a danger-potential to our society is almost overwhelming . . ." he rapped his knuckles lightly on the table top, then seemed to remember what he had been about to say. "But luckily, speaking as an individual rather than as a component of that society, my aberration has included a revival of the self-preservation 'instinct'. Otherwise I'm sure I would have offered myself for elimination."

Miles closed the deep-freeze and hipped himself onto it. *Keep him talking about himself*, he thought with controlled calm, *and look for an opening—because, brother, you're between the devil and the Saturnian Sea! Exactly half an hour left to do something—but what?*

He said aloud, "Jason One's a good week's spacing from here. Why come to Goran?"

"Oh, it wasn't intentional. I had some vague idea of heading for Sol—lose myself in a crowd, you know." Jord pulled a roll of cigarettes from a pocket and scratched one alight on the table. He flipped the roll to Miles. "But I never was much of an astrogator. Piled on the drive till I blew a tube. Barely managed to get into the life-shell before the whole business went *kaput*. I set the spectro for an Earth-type planet."

He shifted and made a face. "Beastly little things, those shells. Stuffy—no ports, you know—completely automatic. No place for a claustrophobe. So here I am—and you never did answer my first question. What the devil stinks so?"

"Plants, mister. *Jongar, linla, kanl, herck—*"

"And slithy toves. I wish I had a breath of fresh air!"

Miles grinned crookedly. "You get used to it after a while."

Jord went over to check on the Garol. It was bubbling heavily, like bright blue lava. He snapped off the cook-all and raised an eyebrow at the little farmer. "I won't be here that long—thanks to your stratocoupe."

"Now, wait a minute," Miles growled. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and glared at the big man.

Jord fell back a step, his grin taking on that peculiar stiffness again. "You can address your complaints to this hand-blast."

Miles shook his head angrily. "You'll have a real party flying Mary. It took me a month to get on to her bag of tricks!"

"I'll manage. Strength of desperation and all that. Suppose we eat?"

FOLLOWED closely by Jord, Miles made several trips to Mary to bring in the remaining supplies. Jord poked among the cans and containers, selecting the most expensive and exotic items.

Miles, in turn, busied himself at the cook-all under the careful guidance of his guest who, it seemed, liked his food just so. And without poison. They ate silently, Miles evolving and discarding schemes, Jord very carefully on guard against them.

Later, Jord switched on the telaudio and fiddled with the dials. To the farmer's surprise the old set picked up a bleared image from Leyville on Goran Two. A symphony orchestra, one of the many extrovert organizations springing from this lonely outer space existence, was struggling fiercely with *Verklärte Nacht*. It probably wasn't half bad at the point of origin, but forty million miles of space gave it a hell of a kicking around.

Jord grunted, "Plenty *verklärte—*" and turned the dial methodically until he located a newscast. There was the usual stuff: local news, polo scores, spaceship arrivals and departures, births and deaths. Nothing about fugitive killers.

Jord flashed a lop-sided smirk at

Miles as if to say, "Looks like I'm safe, eh?"

His assumption, it developed, was premature, for the newscaster was handed a slip of paper by some unseen associate and immediately registered professional agitation. He rolled his smooth voice, carefully raised to the "flash-big-news!" pitch, into the two cities and outlying farm districts of Goran Three:

"The wreckage of an interstellar has been detected off-world. It is thought to be that of Henry Jord, J-O-R-D, wanted by the authorities of Jason One for murder and unauthorized spacing—"

"In that order?" murmured Miles; but Jord didn't hear him, which was just as well. *So the story's finally gotten to Goran*, he thought. *Perfect timing! Maybe he was followed!*

Jord had bared his teeth and snapped them together. He leaned forward until his face almost touched the visiscreen and he moved his hands—twitched them—as if wishing he could strangle the distant throat and its unwelcome words.

"—assumed that Jord is dead, but until such is proven all Goranians are cautioned to watch for this man. Warning—he is probably armed. His description—"

Jord cut off the telaudio viciously. "So now what?" he grated, his shallow eyes looking through Miles, through walls and *jongar*, at the strange and suddenly inhospitable world of Goran Three.

"I'll tell you," offered the farmer. "They'll prowl the stratolanes, check all ships, clamp down on the spaceports and—" he grinned at the black scowl on the face of the other.

"You seem damned happy about it!"

"Sure. You'll have to try it on foot now—Mary won't get splashed all over the lowlands." Miles pushed back his chair and stifled a belch. "You're a gone gosling, mister!"

Jord looked at him steadily, then sighed. "I don't know why I shouldn't blast the sass out of you—" and he

stood up, juggling the gun speculatively. The newscast had knocked all the I've-got-the-gun-but-let's-be-chums out of him.

Miles jumped. To conceal the sudden movement he carried his hand to his breast pocket, got the cigarette Jord had given him, lit it. An idea was beginning to take form—

"I'll give you one good reason," he said, and he told his second lie easily, almost without thought: "You blast me and you'll have a crowd of Alcron natives on your neck!"

He saw that Jord was nodding, apparently weighing the menace of the Cronies, so he added a few more pounds of menace. "Seven feet up," he said, "and they'll walk miles to look at blood!"

IV

MAX MILES leaned back, dribbling smoke from his nostrils. He hoped to hell he'd made it good. There actually wasn't a more peace-loving race in the Galaxy. To his knowledge, none of them had ever raised a duke. They didn't have to. Nature had created the Cronies invulnerable, and had in the process, with perfect logic, omitted in them any capacity for offense—a fact which Miles regretted deeply under the present circumstances.

At any rate, he had Jord worried about the Cronies and it was a theme that should be worth developing. But not ostentatiously. It might even be a good idea to change the subject, before Jord got to thinking too hard and began to remember his biology lessons . . . the Cronies' peculiarity was no secret.

So Miles grinned and said loudly, "What're you going to do now? Not that I give a damn so long as you get out of here and stop messing up my routine." He saw the big man jump at the sound of his voice, and thought *Score one! Now, when Lin comes, maybe I can—*

Jord's face tightened at the cheeks.

"I'm going to think," he said, "and maybe slap a gag in that big mouth of

yours!" He walked over to Miles and showed him the muzzle of the hand-blast. "Now, shut up," he said evenly, "and get into the bedroom. I'm getting sick of by-play!"

Miles' grin soured. Jord stood back, his shallow eyes bright with anger. He gestured again with the gun.

"Move, farmer—the honeymoon's over."

Miles shrugged and went into the bedroom, the big man stepping carefully after him.

"What now?"

"Lie down on the bunk." Jord's eyes roved, settled. He gathered a handful of Miles' sashes from the dresser-top and tossed them to the farmer. "Tie your legs together. Tight!"

Miles did as he was directed. Then, under the alert nose of the hand-blast, he permitted his wrists to be tied one by one to the bunk-posts.

"Absurd things, sashes—" Jord grunted as he drew the knots tight—"but with at least *one* practical use, eh?"

Miles tried the knots and met Jord's amused stare. He growled disgustedly, "Yeah."

Jord went back into the other room and rummaged in the deep-freeze. After a while he returned with an opened space-tin and a spoon. "I hate to cheat a man out of his dessert, mine host," he said flatly, "or his deserts. I'm either going to feed you peaches with this spoon—or gouge out your eyes with it. I want some information."

"What information?"

"Do you have any maps?"

Miles shook his head. Jord ladled out some peaches and slid them into the farmer's mouth. He did this carefully, and seemed to be enjoying the situation.

"What's the nearest city?"

"Three Major—about thirty miles magnetic north." Miles licked at a dribble of syrup. "You'll have a tough time hiding out there—strangers aren't the custom. You'll stand out like a spotlight."

Jord's pleasant mien had definitely returned. It didn't make Miles feel any easier. "You sound almost as if you wanted to help me, Miles. Why don't you invite me to hide out here?"

"Sure. Stick around. It'll take the Patrol about ten minutes to compute the probable course of your life-shell. They're spotting the Alcron lowlands right now or I'm a monkey!"

Jord took a moment to consider one, or both, of these possibilities, then asked:

"How's the country between here and Three Major?"

"No problem."

"Can a man go it afoot?"

Miles didn't hesitate. "A man could," he admitted—a thundering half-truth if ever one was.

"Any natural barriers? Oceans, mountains?"

"No. Farm country, mostly."

JORD shoveled some more peaches into the farmer's mouth. "I really ought to kill you, natives or no natives," he explained. "I can rip out your visiphone, but there's nothing to prevent you from getting into that stratocoupe of yours and following me until you can contact a Patrol ship—" He looked at Miles expectantly.

There's plenty to prevent it, Miles thought uncomfortably. Brother, if you only knew! But you don't . . . you're a stranger to this system, and you came here in a life-shell without ports. You couldn't see, so you don't know! And that would make it just perfect—if only you weren't hanging around here!

"You can take out the C. L. Integrator," he said hastily. "She won't budge without it."

"Convince me."

"There's an instruction-book on Mosley stratocoupes in that case. Check with it."

Jord rose to get the book, and Miles began to sweat. What the devil had happened to Lin? The big fellow always

showed up about this time before Grandpa—not once in six years had he failed in his self-set task of warning the farmer. Had he met with an accident? Miles wondered glumly what sort of an accident it would take to incapacitate a Crony. A direct blow from a meteorite, maybe. No, there was that time when Fir's cousin had caught one right in the—

Jord grunted as he reached for the book. He sat on the edge of the bunk and riffled the pages. He studied several diagrams, turned to the index and back to the diagrams, reading under his breath. Finally he nodded in satisfaction.

"I'll have to leave you tied up, of course," he said. "You can get loose in a few hours. Peach?"

Miles chewed, thinking dully that if Grandpa's morning came and he were still tied, there wouldn't be anything but a blot on the bunk after those few hours. He might have been able to jump the big man when Lin showed up—

Damn it! Why had he yapped himself into getting tied up this way! And where was Lin?

Jord rose and went to Miles' closet, slid it open. He looked critically at the rough work clothes. "Haven't you any civilized—?"

"Over to your left. Couple of suits there."

"Oh, yes. Fine. We're just about the same distance around—but—" Jord stripped out of his rumpled and dirty clothing and got into one of Miles' best suits. He looked doubtfully in the mirror. "What do you think?" he asked.

"Up to you. If you like it, buy it."

Jord tugged at the bottoms of the tapered legs and adjusted the tunic. Choosing Miles' most colorful sash, he twisted it about his waist, eyed his reflection and nodded. "It'll do."

To be roasted in, thought Miles, and clamped down on his leaping fear. He wasn't a fighting man—with fists or guns. The more significant dangers of pioneering in space were his meat. Or measuring his prowess alongside that

of another man in some intelligent pastime—that was different. Empire, for instance, whose ancestor was the ancient game of chess. He'd played Lew Levin this last trip to Three Major and won an unusual victory. One insignificant little page, helpless, ringed by enemy men, had keystoneed the structure that had forced Lew's Black Emperor out into the open field. Miles' White Guardsman had swooped down for the kill.

His own situation, as Miles saw it, was very similar. He lay on the bunk, a helpless page. Jord was the Black Emperor. And the Guardsman—Miles glanced at the binary-chart stencilled on the wall—

The Guardsman was coming.

The helpless page pressed the only advantage he had at the moment: Jord's queasiness about the Cronies. The possible results of the move were not yet evident. But if Lin showed up, as he surely must, something might come of it.

Miles said casually: "What time do you plan to leave, Jord?"

Jord looked up, frowning. "I hadn't thought. About sun-up, I suppose. Why?"

"You'd better jet-off before then. My natives get up early, and the first thing they do is come up here for orders. I'm not worrying about what they'll do to you—which'll be plenty—but I don't want any of them to get—"

V

SPEAK OF the Devil, they said in the old days—and times haven't changed much. Miles spoke of the Cronies—and Lin poked his head through the window, blinked, and began, in his Crony whisper, the usual warning speech:

"Miles, it is nearly time to go under—" This much, and then he did a slow take at the scene before him. He made a little movement of astonishment; the armor of his elbow rasped against the sill.

Jord's hand-blast lay on the bunk beside Miles' legs. Instantly it was

snatched up to cover the Crony. Lin stared into the three little holes calmly and Miles felt a twitch of cynical amusement. God knows what Cronies have for itches, but whenever one of the farmhands had an itching back he would come to have it scratched with a handblast.

"What this, bwana?" enunciated Lin.

Miles winced, closed his eyes. This was one sweet hell of a time to start pulling that nonsense. Too many old novels—Maugham probably. Lin spoke perfect English, better even than his own.

Jord rose slowly, staring at the huge native, his face a loose, crudely-drawn question mark. "What is this ghoul?"

"One of my men."

"Men!" Jord gasped. "He looks like something from a roach city. Tell him to go away!"

"You tell him."

Lin threw a massive leg over the sill. He poised there, his eyes bright and curious.

"Get back," Jord flung at him shakily. "Go away and me no kill native!"

"You bet you won't," Lin replied. "Me heap savvy white boy!" He shoved his other leg into the room and stretched to his full height. Jord's considerable size seemed abruptly whittled down.

The Crony closed his fists and took an ominous step toward the killer.

Miles craned his neck from the bunk. Was his big foreman, unable to attack Jord, trying to frighten the man into dropping the gun?

If so, Jord didn't scare easily. He skinned his lips back over his teeth and squeezed at the trigger. The charge leaped at the Crony's body, spreading out over his barrel chest in eye-aching waves, jolting him back on his heels with its force. Lin's eyes met Miles', narrowing a little—

And Miles stiffened as if the charge had struck him, instead of Lin. The knowledge had come instantly, an icy-certain hunch—

Jord would fail to kill Lin—had failed already, although he didn't know it and

stood, face ugly, waiting for the Crony to drop. The killer's urbane mask had fallen, the silk was gone. He was giving way to the murderous hysteria that had probably led to the death of his partner.

All this Miles realized as the handblast made its sound, sent its crackling, futile energy at the big native. And it was grimly logical to suppose that Jord's next move, when Lin didn't fall, would be to swing the weapon toward the farmer, to pull the trigger in frustrated, unreasoning fear and fury.

"Lin!" Miles shouted in Alcronese. "Fall and play dead! Pretend that you are dead!"

Lin flashed him a puzzled look but did as directed. With a plausible assumption of pain and terror he let out a siren bleat and sank to the floor. Apparently overcome with enthusiasm, he continued to squirm and kick his legs and groan until Miles, again under guise of an outraged yell, told him to lie still.

Jord wheeled to confront the farmer. "You see!" His voice had risen an octave, was shrill. "That's how it happened. He asked for it. So did Harry. I'll kill you too if you act up!"

The helpless page continued his force-move. The end-game strategy had clicked into place; had come to him, in fact, just as Lin had flashed him that puzzled look and obediently dropped dead. Miles stared at Jord for a moment. Then:

"You killed Lin," he said coldly. "But you can't get two hundred of them!" Which was another whopper; there were only thirty-one Cronies in the local Hive.

"Two hundred!" Jord blinked uneasily.

Miles went on: "Unless your aberration includes a strong death-wish too, you'll get out of here fast. If they find you here—and that—" he nodded at the prone body. The body barely managed to close its eyes in time as Jord's troubled gaze followed the gesture. The big man frowned in thought, then wheeled nervously as Miles began to sing softly in Alcronese.

"What're you doing?" he demanded.

"Death chant. Custom here."

"Well, do *you* have to do it?"

Miles drew in his lips unhappily. "I wouldn't feel right, somehow, if I didn't. I—I really liked Lin—" and in Alcronese, "Lin, call your comrades. Tell them to approach the cottage. Tell them to converse in low tones, in your tongue. Tell them to hurry!"

LIN'S BROW contracted as he beamed the thought to his fellows, waiting expectantly outside the Hive on the hill. In his mind's ear he heard anxious exclamations and questions. The other Cronies had carefully kept their minds away from the cottage for the past few minutes—too many Presences would have been psychically detectable, would have added to Jord's jumpiness and instability.

To their questions, Lin replied that Miles was safe so far and that all had gone exactly as planned. . . .

It had been difficult for the Cronies to know what to do, with Grandpa coming inexorably closer. They were constitutionally unable to attack Jord and tie him up or knock him senseless. If Tos and Fir had detected the killer sooner they could have easily frightened him away. But they had been tired and preoccupied, and it was only after they'd casually sent their thoughts after Miles, seen him accosted in front of the cottage, that they became aware of Jord's unfamiliar, unpleasant vibrations.

From the Hive, Lin, by common consent, had watched the following events. It was futile to try to take over Jord's mind—they'd all tried, one by one. It was closed to them by its distortion. One by one they had withdrawn from the attempt, sickened.

Lin had read Miles' stubborn, ingrained unwillingness to do anything that would aid Jord in escaping—even at the risk of his own life. And he'd read Miles' anticipation of his, Lin's, diverting arrival at the cottage.

"He'll try to jump the man," the Cronies had decided, "and probably get

himself killed." So Lin, wincing at the contact, had managed to get Jord to tie Miles up—after first, through much easily established remote-control, carefully coloring Miles' behavior with a puppet cockiness that irritated the big man and put him in the right frame of mind.

Then had come the question of how to get Jord out of the cottage before the arrival of Grandpa. Without having him turn his gun on Miles as hostage. Approaching en masse, without first having taken the edge off Jord's latent viciousness, might have proven as fatal to the farmer as the coming of Grandpa. The problem of the itching trigger finger had needed to be taken up with delicacy.

Lin thought he'd handled it nicely. Now that he'd barged in and forced Jord to "kill" him, throwing the big man off balance into the reactive side of his killing impulse, Jord's fear of punishment—not yet entirely dead—should cause him to break and run under the proper stimulus. Namely, a present and immediate threat of retribution.

And Jord, not basically criminal, having reached his exhausting murderous peak for the second time, should decline away from a third murder—Miles' murder—if that fear were played upon.

This was the script that Lin wrote.

And Miles had called the cues—he thought.

Lin shuddered. It had been nauseating to ball his fists that way, to step forward as if in aggression—

MILES LAY on the bunk and hoped that this would do it. He pressed his eyelids shut and prayed that it would. Although it was only seven o'clock in the "evening," sunrise was so near that his flesh crawled.

A light flashed on the binary-chart. A red light. Simultaneously, a chime struck softly.

"What's that?" Jord said nervously, looking at the chart.

"Time signal," Miles said, glad that he had turned off his wrist-meter, the vio-

lent part of it—it would have been white hot by now. "I've got it fixed to announce my favorite teldudio programs. Do you ever listen to Sam Space, Detective? That should interest—"

"Shut up. Do you hear anything?"

Jord crossed to the window, peered out. His jaw dropped and he stepped back in dismay. "God in Heaven, there's a million of those beetle-men out there!"

Miles could hear them now. Lin had evidently improved upon his instructions, had told them to growl and snarl as menacingly as a Crony could. The effect was that of a horde of baritone kittens; but to Jord's horrified eyes, in the half light, they must have looked like a shiny-skinned legion of Hell. He raised the hand-blast, hesitated, turned from the window to point the gun at Miles.

Quickly, Lin gave Jord's Nemesis fears a solid boost and sent a thought to Miles.

"If you do," the farmer said levelly, "they'll hunt you down and use you for sacrifice. They know this country. You couldn't escape."

Not the wisest thing to say, Lin admitted to himself with superfluous logic, for it as much as stated that Jord had done nothing yet to warrant the Cronies' taking out after him. Granting that, it certainly didn't give the Cronies credit for much *esprit de corps*, since Jord thought Lin was dead.

But the killer was much too unsettled to follow up this discrepancy or even notice it. He made up his mind quickly. The after-a-mouse growlings were louder now. Slow, deliberate footsteps scuffed the metal of the path—another of Lin's improvements, for a Crony can move as silently as night.

Jord darted into the next room, collected a hasty pocketful of concentrated foods. Ludicrous in Miles' undersized suit, he threw a passing glance through the window and what he saw all but lifted his hair. For Lin had told his comrades to crouch and wave their arms like great apes.

"Thanks for your hospitality, farmer—" and Jord scuttled to the back door, flung through it and faded in the gloom.

Miles let out a long breath. "Hurrah for our side!"

Lin was bending over the bunk, working with the knots.

"Tell your comrades to give chase, Lin. A game, with he the quarry. And tell them to keep snarling!"

The Crony's fingers didn't pause as he beamed the message. The snarling rose in volume. Rapid footsteps rounded the cottage and diminished.

VI

WHEN LIN had released him, Miles stood stiffly, rubbing his deadened arms and hands.

The binary-chart gave a warning yellow flash and began to clang loudly. Outside, in the darkness of the yard, the door to the underground swung open and added its bell-clamor to the confusion.

Miles went to the wallcase, selected a book to while away Grandpa's visit—he felt anything but sleepy. Lin stood nearby, his green eyes placidly blank as he followed telepathically the events of the now distant chase.

"Him heap scared, bwana," he grinned.

Miles' voice was not quite steady, though whether because of relief, nervous reaction or gratitude it would be hard to say. A mixture of all, perhaps. "Thank you, Lin," he said. "Thanks for catching on so quickly!"

Lin's eyes hooded over their secret amusement. "Do you think you can make it underground unassisted?"

"I'm a little stiff, but I'll do." Miles gazed unseeingly through the open back door at the black hills which were even now receiving Jord and his "pursuers." A futile wolf hunt; the hunters incapable of the kill—the wolf fleeing toward a death more inevitable and horrible than the imaginary one from which he fled.

"Poor Jord—" and Miles' voice was without sarcasm. In these days, on these worlds, men were needed—many men, to work together for the good of themselves and of their culture. Jord, with his intelligence, had probably once been such a man. . . .

Miles shrugged. It was a problem for psychologists, not farmers. In his report of the incident he would suggest that Jord's children, if he had any, be checked. Although, on second thought, it was undoubtedly already being done.

The binary-chart let out its last warning, a chordal scream that rattled the metaglas windows in their grooves. Miles hurriedly shut it off.

"Better hurry, bwana," Lin grunted.

"Bwana, bwana—be damned if I'll ever lend you another book!" Miles grinned and started for the door. "I don't know why you Alcronians go around acting like a bunch of heathens. You've got a Utopian system wrapped up in those Hives—at least to hear *you* tell it, since you won't let us in to see for ourselves—and yet you work all day picking *kanl!*"

Lin laughed easily. "Perhaps those who live under double suns must live double lives." He trailed after the little Earthman.

"That's very pretty, but it doesn't make much sense."

"And I, frankly, don't understand polo." They halted by the door to the underground and Lin seemed to listen a moment, then went on:

"Jord—" whose name Lin had not been told, Miles thought—and then somehow forgot all about it—"is high in the hills. He will not escape Grandpa."

Miles dropped his legs onto the metal ladder, looked briefly at the sky, then grinned at the big Crony. "If you insist upon acting like a savage, Lin, go on out to your sunrise ceremony." He ducked down the shaft and his words echoed hollowly: "Poor Jord. He had about the chance of Eliza crossing the—"

The door clanged shut.

"Asteroids." Lin finished his employer's thought. He addressed the metal surface that shone dully in the approaching glow. "To the outsider, Miles, I suppose it does resemble a form of pagan worship. To be truthful, however, we find the Babe's day a little chilly."

THE EARTHMEN were all right—some of them. Lin was glad that he'd been able to help—and in a way that left Miles unaware that the helpless page had had a Player. Earthmen would, he was sure, resent the fact that their minds were accessible to Cronies. That was why they didn't know it.

Lin thought that maybe in another thousand years, or two or three, Earthmen could take that blow with unbowed ego. Along with certain other inevitable and well-deserved blows. Then—and again, maybe—they would be admitted into the Hives to study.

In the meantime it was probably best to let them colonize, let them stick around where they could be easily watched. The Cronies—and the natives of Hon, Lyra, Tabas, Jason, Oro and several thousand other systems many of which the Earthmen hadn't even discovered yet—had all agreed upon that. For the Earthmen might decide to develop into a menace, a rogue—they showed some of the signs.

The Cronies and the others knew how to deal with that. No violence, either.

The Galactic Council didn't like violence.

Lin heard Miles think:

"By golly, I bet I know why the Cronies group in the open for the rise of Grandpa—"

Smiling, he trotted off to join his fellow beings. . . .

Grandpa shoved his gigantic blue-white shoulder over the horizon and the sky seemed to explode into flame.

Blinded instantly, Jord turned and fled. He stumbled, crashed shrieking down a long slope to huddle slant-wise behind a boulder. And through the racing, churning clouds, through the uncar-

ing stone, Grandpa reached out, touched him. . . .

AFTER SEVEN hours the gong rang and the door rumbled open, awaking Miles. So he'd slept after all! He dog-eared the book to keep his place and walked up the long corridor, mounted the ladder.

The warm, tempestuous winds were dying down. The Babe was rising, shedding near-earthly light. Grandpa had disappeared to the south and there other Earthmen were retreating into their undergrounds and other Cronies stood almost at attention to drink in the infernal radiations of the big fellow.

Miles turned and made for the cottage, passing the lower entrance to the Hive and knocking cheerfully on the door. He received an answering knock—probably an infant, still sheltered against the cool of the Babe's day.

So the Cronies gathered in the valley every other morning to warm themselves. He was rather proud of having figured that out. Proud, too, of having gotten rid of Jord so neatly.

Both ideas had come to him in an identical manner. Out of the blue. Inspiration.

Farther on he left the path to finger the racked *kanl* leaves. With Grandpa, he thought in paraphrase, it was luckily "not the heat but the short radiations." The alien radiations. Otherwise the leaves would have been ashes. As it was, they were nicely toasted, ready to be shipped to Three Major.

Lin came down from the hills and around the sunmill with a large, bulky sack folded over a wide shoulder. Miles shuddered and told him to put it behind the *linla* crib.

That would have to be shipped to Three Major too.

ALL EYES ARE ON—



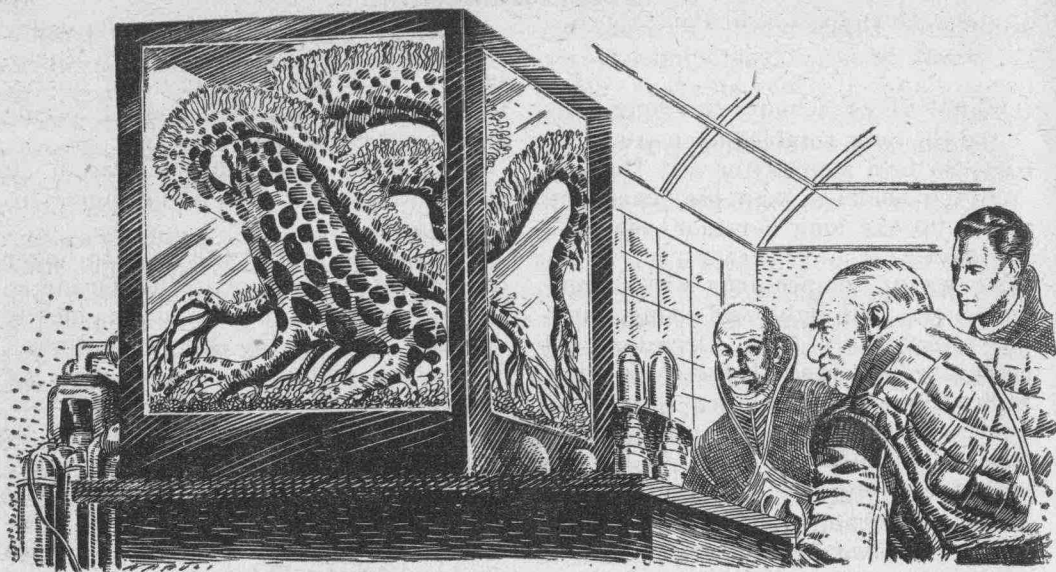
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HERE LIES BOTTLETHWAITE

By DAVE DRYFOOS

*He thought that he was saving his
neck, but he was testing a theory*

MOST people follow their noses. But Dr. Clarence Devington Kaar, A.B., A.M., Ph. D., Director-in-Chief of the First Mazdan Expedition, was different. He followed his belly into our lab.

Luckily, I'd seen it coming soon enough to get up off the table where I'd been dozing. You might say I was saved by a flingit. A flingit is the planet Mazda's equivalent of a house-fly, and one lit on my bald dome not five seconds be-

fore the Old Man's red face followed his belly through the door.

"Good afternoon, Bottlethwaite," he said to me. "Where is Dr. Heeny?"

Now, I happened to know that our young bio-dynamicist was in the sitting room of the Nurses' Quarters, holding hands with Miss Nellie Farrell. Art Heeny was supposed to be working, of course, but what's a fellow to do when his girl has the night shift?

"Dr. Heeny is out making a biological

study, sir," I said.

"I see," he said. "And what have you been doing in his absence, Bottlethwaite?"

"Preserving a specimen, sir," I said hastily.

"Ah, yes. That explains the odor of alcohol. But tell me, how is young Heeny coming along with his search for intelligent Mazdan life-forms? It's only a week, now, till the first Earthship is due, and I'd like to report that we are in actual communication with Mazdans. But that hardly seems possible, if there's any truth to the rumors I've heard about Heeny neglecting his job. Is this present biological study of his connected with Mazdans, Bottlethwaite?"

"Sir," I said, standing at attention, "thirty years in the Army taught me that rumors plague *any* outstanding young man. Dr. Heeny has developed absolute proof of intelligence in one of these gadgets you see here."

I pointed to the three-foot purple shrub-thing set in a glass case by the window. "Let me demonstrate," I said. I didn't tell him I'd trained that shrub myself.

But he wasn't interested anyhow. "Your military record got you assigned to our guard force," he said, "but I'm afraid bio-dynamic demonstrations are a little out of your line, even if non-existence of hostiles *did* result in your transfer from guard to janitor. So perhaps you'd better get hold of Dr. Heeny for me, some time in the next five minutes."

He didn't succeed in getting me mad enough to overlook his little time-trap. If Art was on a biological field-trip, like I'd said, he was more than five minutes away.

"May I ask for half an hour, sir?" I said. "If you'll just make yourself at home—"

"You'll find me quite at home, I think, in all departments of my expedition," the Old Man told me, parking himself in Art's chair. "So if you'll just find young Heeny . . ."

ART was startled when he answered my code-knock at the door of the Nurses' Quarters. When he asked me, "What's up, Sarge?" his voice showed he was still young enough to have a conscience.

I quickly told him what was up. I thought he'd be pleased that I'd claimed we'd found an intelligent plant. But I couldn't have been wronger.

"What did you go and lie for?" he yelled. "No results are o.k., but faked results . . ." He waved his hands hopelessly.

No use arguing. "All right," I said. "All right! I'll just go tell the Old Man I made a mistake. He's fixing to send me to Earth, anyhow—"

"Now, don't be hasty, Sarge," Art said. He put a hand on my shoulder and propelled me away from the Quarters. "If you do go to Earth, I'll go with you, probably. And Nellie's nursing contract still has a couple of years to run . . . Let's go put on space-suits, so we can greet Dr. Kaar in proper uniform, as your Army pals would say."

We went over to the locker-room and helped each other into our suits. Of course, I was still trying to figure an out. At my age, a fellow doesn't like losing a job, even when he has a pension coming in.

"Look, Art," I said. "The plant-thing I've trained does think! It counts to two, and I can prove it. Why don't we show that to the Old Man?"

"I guess we will," said Art. "But your plant-thing doesn't think enough. All it can do is call for another drink—and that doesn't take any brains, does it?"

He kind of smirked at me, but honest, I wasn't drunk. And the plant-thing didn't exactly call for drinks, anyhow. It played a game of signalling by beating its lowest branch on the rim of the container it was potted—canned—planted in, I mean.

I'd starved it for water and then trained it: first, I'd give it one shot-glass of water, and it would beat once; then I'd give it two shots close together,

and the plant would beat twice. Then one again. Its answers were slow in coming, but it knew what it was doing.

So I argued: "That plant-thing can count to two! That's something, isn't it?"

"Sure," Art said. "Real wisdom. It can tell when it's had one too many."

"Okay, okay," I said. "But what does the Old Man expect us to do?"

"We have to find some sort of Mazdan that thinks like a man, to help us develop a system of intercommunication. And I mean real communication, not just the kind of thing done with a sheepdog, for instance. It's rough, Sarge! We don't even know exactly what intelligence *is*, much less how to prove some alien life-form has it!"

"Well," I said, "intelligence is what we can claim to have if we get away with trying to outsmart the Old Man."

"Nevertheless," Art said firmly, "we've got to try it!"

So we did. To make a showing, we shuffled back to the lab in our space-suits.

We weren't so smart. "What is this?" the Old Man boomed, "a masquerade? Since when do you wear space-suits to the Nurses' Quarters, Dr. Heeny? . . . Surprised? You shouldn't be. As a bio-dynamicist, you ought to be aware of the fact that women are biologically constituted to produce two things: children, and talk! So please get out of that costume and show me what, if anything, there is to Bottlethwaite's boasting."

With his face even redder than the Old Man's, Art stood there while I unlaced his suit. The Old Man watched in silence for a few minutes.

Then he said, "Why not tell me the truth, Doctor? It's ridiculous of you to protect an old reprobate like Bottlethwaite, here. He falsified your results, didn't he?"

I opened my mouth and even began to nod a confession, but Art spoke up stoutly. "Sergeant Bottlethwaite is not a reprobate, sir. He's an enthusiastic

amateur. The demonstration of plant intelligence I am about to make is based entirely on his careful work."

The Old Man paced like a watchful cat while Art finished the last of his undressing. I hauled the shrub-thing to the table I kept bare for sleeping purposes. Like I said, this gadget was about three feet high, and purplish. The stem, though, was a deeper shade, almost blue. And the leaf-needles were lighter, reddish and silky.

Art called it a plant because it made its own food from the ground and air. It had three branches, and twisted roots that stayed on top of the ground. Ordinarily, in the field, these shrub-things moved slowly on their roots—searching for food, Art said. But of course the lab had an artificial atmosphere and all, so we kept the plant in a gas-proof glass case, and fed it water through a valve.

I FILLED a beaker now and set it where Art could pour—the shot-glass seemed out of place at this tea-party. And by then he was ready. Explaining as he worked, Art poured a one-ounce portion through the valve, and in about half a minute, which was right on schedule, the plant beat its bottom branch against the rim of its container.

Art waited a few minutes till the water was absorbed, and then poured two one-ounce splashes in quick succession. The plant gave two beats.

The Old Man was surprised, all right. I thought we were in. But I thought wrong.

"This is nonsense!" he snorted. "It proves nothing! And in view of Bottlethwaite's known attitude toward truthfulness, I fear he may be making a fool of you, Dr. Heeny. The whole demonstration may be faked."

"Dr. Kaar," said Art, stanchly, "you may try it yourself!"

And the Old Man did try, with a disdainful look that plainly said he only wanted to catch us off base so he could fire us then and there.

But of course nothing was faked. Try

as he would, the Old Man couldn't get that plant to vary its reactions. So he thought he'd foul us up another way.

"I think we should change the routine of this little experiment, Dr. Heeny," he said, "to see if it can be repeated in a variety of circumstances. Suppose we do it this way: we'll put a screen around your plant. I'll pour the water without letting you know whether I give it one ounce, or two. During the thirty seconds it takes the object to respond, I'll walk away. You privately record the response, and then pour accordingly. If it taps once, indicating I've given it one ounce, you give it two. If it taps twice, indicating I've given it two ounces, you give it one. Do you follow?"

Art nodded solemnly. He looked worried. Maybe I did, too. Because if the Old Man gave the plant half-a-dozen shots at once, say, then the water would collect in a puddle and the plant would act confused. Or if he just kept up my old routine long enough, the plant might get water-logged from even small doses, and the experiment would fail. The Old Man was playing cat and mouse.

But Art didn't rat. He made me get a screen, and then had me stand aside where I couldn't see either the feedings or the responses.

Art fed the plant, then walked away. The Old Man approached, waited for the knock or knocks, fed the plant, and stepped back.

Art came back, took the response, and looked puzzled. But he went through the motions without saying anything, and the Old Man took a turn again. He looked puzzled, too. But said nothing.

They ran through the routine half-a-dozen times before a word was spoken. Then the Old Man said, "You haven't been changing the order of performance, have you?"

And Art said, "No, sir. Have you?"

THE Old Man looked at Art's record of responses, and breathed hard through his nose. Then he turned to me.

"You originally trained this plant,

didn't you, Bottlethwaite? What would you make of it if I were to say your plant has been continuously responding to two-ounce portions with one knock?"

Well, for a minute he almost had me. At times I'd kept up the shot-glass routine for as long as an hour at a stretch, and never once, after I'd trained it, had that plant failed to respond to two ounces of water with two knocks. But then, I'd always quit after an hour, for fear too much water would be bad for the thing. Maybe I'd been wrong. . . .

"Dr. Kaar," I said slowly, "that plant-thing must want more water than it's been getting. If it had answered with two knocks, the next round would have been only one ounce of water. Apparently it can tell that the guy who gets the answer signal isn't the one who pours, according to your system. So by always answering with one knock, it gets two ounces of water every time.

"In other words," I said, drawing myself up proudly, "taking advantage of the changed routine, this gadget cheats!"

"*Something* around here is cheating!" the Old Man huffed. "Heeny, let's run through this some more."

They did. They gave that purple shrub so much water it's a wonder the thing didn't dissolve. And you know what? At the end of the afternoon, that plant was responding with two knocks every time—so it would only get one-ounce shots.

Finally the Old Man called a halt. But he wouldn't admit a thing.

"See here!" he said. "This shrub merely changes its response to fit its state of hydration. There's no point in going on. Its response is purely mechanistic, and *not* evidence of intelligence!" But Art wasn't letting him get away with that.

"No, sir," he contradicted. "This plant has in effect made statements it knew to be false, for the obvious purpose of deception. It suited its remarks to the hearer, so to speak.

"Now, we have machines that can

think, but they think straight or not at all. And there are deceptive animals on Earth—'possums, for instance—but they don't vary their responses. This plant-thing *does*, so it is *not* mechanistic. It thinks the same way *we* do!"

"Don't shout!" the Old Man said, moving slowly toward the door. "You *could* be right. But you and Bottlethwaite are going to have to work on this for a mighty long time before I make any an-

nouncement of it. Imagine telling the world that we've proved the existence of intelligent life on Mazda by discovering a species of cheater!"

With his hand on the doorknob, he paused and shook his head.

"I suppose Bottlethwaite will claim *Man's* readiness to lie is proof of *our* intelligence!"

"Well—" I said.

But he'd gone out the door.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

enthusiastic response to a story called WINE OF THE DREAMERS. Even the arguments concerning the illustrations are enlightening.

(3) A few theories, sometimes tossed off as an aside to the main plot, have led me to experiments which have produced astonishing results. Other theories have emphasized, corrected or clarified some of my own in the process of being tested.

(4) My sense—or rather sensation—of time-space has been radically altered.

(5) My interest in astrophysics has been stimulated.

(6) I have acquired a vocabulary which, if not scientifically accurate, is scientifically significant.

All this adds up to my idea of fun.

Many have spoken of the "wild imagination" of science-fiction authors and in many instances spoken correctly. But imagination, as Dr. Jung says, is image projection. And for good or ill, according to individual perspective, we live in a world of projected images, which includes ourselves. The images thrown upon the screen of science fiction are, to say the least, fascinating and their repetition—of which others complain—I find profoundly impressive.

Bad as some of this type of literature is, I trust that it will continue in its present form. I am even afraid of too much improvement, lest the authors consciously try to become "literary" or "scientific" according to present day standards—standards that will be changed tomorrow.

Instead, let them practise diligently until like the Red Queen (or was it the White one?) in "Alice", they can think of as many as five impossible things before breakfast; that this multifaceted window, not only upon the future, but upon the present, may grow increasingly clearer with the years.—3105 Castle Heights Ave., Los Angeles, 34, Cal.

Better evidence that science fiction is all things to all men could hardly have been fabricated. To Marion Bradley it is escape literature, to you it is a window on the psyche. But all literature is escapist in large measure and all

literature is likewise a window on the personality—of the author or of his times. The essential thing, of course, is to insist upon as much honesty and realism as can be tolerated, and all the rest of the benefits you list will automatically follow. You can then have fun psychoanalyzing the results, or enjoy them in all innocence on a surface level and you'll still be getting a great deal out of it. Have fun.

UNALLOYED JOY

by Gregg Calkins

Dear Sam: GOSHWOWGEEWHIZOBOY-OBOYOBOY! I just couldn't hold back any longer, Sam. In fact, I haven't even read the ish yet. For that matter, I just got home from the newsstand a few minutes ago. But, it couldn't wait!

The cover for the May ish was terrific! Man, oh, man, have you ever done us right! But, then, you promised us some pretty swell covers, didn't you? Well, you're sure following through with them, I'll tell you! This May cover makes the sixth cover you've given us—that was way above average out of the past eight issues of SS, TWS and FSM I have. For SS, the covers for November '51, and January, April & May '52 were the ones. Man, oh, man! Then, the cover for TWS for April was in that line, too. How you turn 'em out! And the latest FSM (Spring) had a wonderful job on the front cover, too. Sam, I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

But, you've got me going, here. Now I can't figure out whether Schomburg or Bergey is the best. A few months ago I wouldn't have hesitated in giving Alex the nod, but, now, . . . Well, I just don't know. With Earle perking up like he is, he makes a pretty masterful artist. All I can do to be on the safe side is to sit back and holler: MORE!

Jumping right into your editorial, I find you give me a mild shock. You say (in a meek and uncertain manner) that: "If you want a personal opinion, it is our hunch that we'll have space

travel." And that from a science-fiction editor. Really, Sam, you surprise me. As far as I'm concerned (and, as I always used to think every s-f reader and editor felt) space travel has been coming ever since the wheel, and it is just as inevitable as death. You, however, seem to have room for doubt in your mind. In fact, you don't sound at all sure that it will ever come, in some places. You indicate that you have room for skepticism about it, and even doubt, if it weren't for the atom and the talk about the artificial satellite in the news now. Faugh, Sam. I'm rather ashamed of you. And you a science-fiction editor, at that.

And, here's another point. "Escape Literature" he calls it, yet. In that case, *any* kind of literature is "escape" then, because s-f is no more faulty than other adventure stories, true or fiction. Just because we're a little ahead in our thinking doesn't make s-f any more impossible. Not at all. And, if some of these new developments we're having surprise you, Sam, just remember that "there is nothing new under the sun," and, also "more things in Heaven and-earth, Horatio, than dreamed of in your philosophy."

Wandering around in the letter column (naturally I've read that already—If I hadn't I wouldn't know what the magazine was for or about, yet) I come across poor Florence's letter. Ha! I remember way back when I was a neo and ran across *my* first letter column—all of two years ago. But, what a hectic two years those have been. And, how much fun! Stick around, Flo, and you'll catch on soon enough. (Of course, here is the place where I *could* stick my neck out and say: "to tell the truth, Sam and Flo, sometimes I don't understand the letters, *either*, so you aren't so bad off. After all, I write some of them!"

Doris Hopkins' letter asking about ODD should have an answer, so tell her the address is: 1302 Lester Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. I'm sure Duggie'll be glad to hear from her. And, just on off chance, I'm sending her a sample copy of my own zine, OOPSLA!

By the way, I want to thank you for printing my letter in the April ish of SS about OOPS. It netted me a sub or two, Sam, and I appreciate your part in it. I would like to ask Bix when he's going to review it, but I guess if I sit back and wait a bit he'll catch up. Only trouble there is that when he reviews #1, (which looked AWFUL!) he'll scare off all the fen from #4, and #4 doesn't look too bad, really. Oh, well . . .

I trust you people (?) will be wandering around at the CHICON II, won't you? Well, if some wild-eyed fan runs up and pounds you on the back while blubbering-all over you how good your covers are, that's me! (Before I forget—your stories are good, too.) See you there.—761 Oakley Street, Salt Lake City, 16, Utah.

Sorry I gave you a shock, but there was nothing particularly meek or mild about my feelings as I typed those immortal lines. Simply and dignifiedly restrained, as always, I merely offered a quiet conviction in contrast to the doubt expressed, that we would likely have space travel. What did you want me to

say, that I was positive we would? I'm not positive of anything.

As for your remarks on "escape literature" we've already answered that, I hope. Glad you wrote before reading the issue. Imagine the goshwowgeewhizoboyoboyoboyboys! if you'd read the stories!

THEME SONG

by Marvin Williams

Dear SMines: New Editor, you are, new cover theme you have, new publication schedule you're on, and apparently a new lead novel theme. All these things have happened since I last bought an issue of SS. (Not too long ago). I liked Merwin and his policies, and his STARTLING and THRILLING WONDER policies had become a solid standard with me. I'm not sure I'm going to like all the things the Sam Mines regime calls for, although he seems to be a real good Joe and an old time STFictioner (New word coined there).

I henceforth, having read a couple of your SS turnouts, am writing to offer an honest one fan's opinion of said turnouts.

Firstly—Bergey proves his worth as an artist through his efforts under your direction. The fabled BEM splatterer of SS & TWS was never, in my estimation, meant to paint the FEM—BEM—HERO scenes which have so many years spilled from his brush. His women, while supple and subtle and sexy, seldom looked natural. Their bodies were stiff, and their facial expressions completely abnormal and only once in a green cheese moon fitting to the jams they invariably found themselves in. (Poor English to end a sentence on a prep? I know . . . I know). So, anyway, in the analysis of the new cover theme, you come out on top. *But*. . . I am still fond of the old trilogy and I'll use that word if I want to so there. Yes. Liked the FEMBEMHEROES of old, I did. I like them very much even now, tho it is becoming hard to find a sincere one among the current mags out. Still, as I said before, this is Bergey's line and praise be to you for putting him to it.

Second—Who could gripe about the new pub schedule? But just wait, and I *am* being pessimistic, until Uncle Sam curtails the pulp on you again and you have to thin down and go back. Then listen for the reaction of the rabid fandom who so blandly praise you now. Nuff said there.

The third of the major changes seems to be in the mode of your lead novel. Don't like it. True, Sam Merwin's "start-in-the-present-and-spring-board - into - the - future - to - get - into - all - sorts-of-higgledeeboo" theme was wearing threadbare after a number of years, but what you prescribe verges too dangerously on the brink of—and I hesitate to use the word—(Checking the premises for eaves-droppers—F A N T A S Y. Contradict me if you will, that is the way it looks to me. This is for certain other unstable pulps. Not for STARTLING. I know that we may disagree completely and if you print this I shall expect to find below it a hacking commentary that will drive me straight down into the snow covered

ground. There won't be an awful lot of snow in July tho. Maybe I can survive. Eh?

I hope it doesn't look like I'm contradicting myself, now that I am about to say that I read and thoroughly enjoyed THE GLORY THAT WAS. I did. I liked it. De Camp has only recently become a favorite of mine.

Enough of this criticism. I must tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed, also, the Brackett tale. The lady of thud and blunder STF has unquestionably established herself. The first lady, I should have said. My compliments, Miss Brackett, if you happen to read this.

Am I over some kind of limit, now? If so, this will have to go unprinted, because I won't stop now. I reminisce (Haa! Another new word?) unforgivably.

Your small editorial squib on page 107, referring to Brackett's moods and abilities shows you understand the woman's greatness. Yes. Even in pulps, hack-writing, trash, and all that bosh they give about the quarter thrill mags,—greatness. Leigh Brackett is worthy of that term.

Keep her, Editor. If she stops sending stuff, beg for it!

I shall close this ill fated epistle now with a word of praise for the short stories and I really think I'm going to get to like your new ways and means after Merwin wears off.—2025 Franklin Ave. N. E. Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The last blurb on page 107 was written by Merwin. He'd bought this story (LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR) some time before and space problems crowded it out of several issues before it could be used. For a blurb by me on Brackett see page 107 of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE for Summer 1952.

Leigh Brackett is currently doing a novel for STARTLING STORIES, so there will be more blurbs.

Be glad to contradict you on your deduction that SS is heading straight for Fantasy. Have already explained until my arm is tired that when SS went monthly we were caught with our inventory down and there was a mad scramble for novels. Happened to get two or three fantasies in a row. But we've got it licked now and you're going to get variety until it comes out of your ears. (Dust off that snow-covered ground, here we go.) Besides, after admitting we'd run a few fantasies, we had several fen write in proving that JOURNEY TO BARKUT etc. were pure science fiction, not fantasy. This is confusing, but we figure as long as we keep ETHERGRAMS going we will be in a more or less permanent state of confusion, thus joining Gregg Calkins and Florence Tyndall in spiritual companionship.

Now on to the next letter—and it's in poetry!

FROM BAD TO VERSE

by Barrie Fletcher & Andy Anderson

We've been reading S.F. many years
And hope to read it many more
But we've never written letters
To an Editor before.
We've finished the New STARTLING
And perused the ETHERGRAMS
So we thought we'd write a letter
And become a friend of Sam's.
We will never become critics
'Cause we enjoy every ish.
We don't worry 'bout the covers
Be they dancing girls or fish.
There's some stories we don't like much
And some we think that smell;
Then we just remember other fans
With other tastes as well.
To try to please the mostest
When the leastest do the yelling
Must occasion many ulcers
And on the nerves be telling.
We know we speak for all the fans
Who don't have much to say.
You must be tired of critics
So from us a big bouquet.—R.C.N. Band,
H.M.C. S. Nada, Victoria, B. C.

Hey, Merwin, I need you!

*Now letters come in steady flood
To rate an issue good or dud.
Covers, tales, illos by Finlay,
Every fan has much to parlay
To all a patient ear a-bending,
Ye ed observes the straws a-trending.
He listens to the praise or curse
And only begs, PLEASE NOT IN VERSE!*

ASK A FOOLISH QUESTION

by Ray Capella, Jr.

Dear Mines: Take off yo' hat, boy, Ahm about to bust out with some public thanksgivings, here. All on 'count of one lil' scaper what goes by name of "Cap'n Future" (yeah, him again).

First off, I remove my head (no hat) to good ole SS itself, for publishing my previous letter (Nov. '51). It contained the description of a yarn whose whereabouts and name I was after. It was a CF yarn, of course. Said yarn is the first stf story I ever read—before even "discovering" stf.

Then, there's a bow to Eugene DeWeese, who wrote in answer to my plea, giving me the name of the story. Last, but certainly most important after my thanks to SS, is another tip of my head to Harold G. Henderson, who sent me the yarn I was looking for without further ado. Yep, through SS I met two great fellas, I *must* say. By the way, the name of that CF yarn was "Calling Captain Future"—Merwin headed my letter "Call for Capt. Future," though he didn't give me info on it. Hmm. . . .

That was short, though sincere (believe it or

not) and it leaves me some time and space to throw a question at you. Namely: Why don't you have Schomburg or Poulton illustrate the lead novel now and then?

As for your story—content: suffice it to say that some I like better than others, but that all stories in SS have so far satisfied me. I have no kicks. Keep up the good work. And that reminds me—now that you're a monthly, *can* you keep up the excellent work you've been having? Won't TWS suffer? I hope not. I'd rather buy an excellent bimonthly than a crippled monthly. SS is not the latter—I hope it'll never be.

On my first letter to SS, you will find (as if you were to look it up) I signed my name Raul Garcia Capella Jr. Now it goes Ray Capella Jr. Yep—they're both yours truly, and you can see why I prefer my nickname. I'm saying this to straighten out a few fans who have been asking questions—all in the hope this sees print. With that last staggering statement (says he modestly) I sign off—480 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn 16, New York, N. Y.

Can we keep up the high quality of the novels with SS a monthly? Take off yo' hat, boy, you should be ashamed of yourself, promulgating a silly question like that. If nobody's looking we'll admit that last summer we were wondering a bit about that there subject ourselves, but we got so many doggone good novels in the house right now we wish we could put out ole SS twice a month. Look you, after THE LOVERS, which you are going to read as soon as you can tear yourself away from this fascinating letter column, we've got BIG PLANET by Jack Vance, KINDERGARTEN by Bruce Elliott, THE STAR DICE by Roger Dee, THE LONG VIEW by Fletcher Pratt and DOUBLE MEANING by Damon Knight. Nearly finished is a big glittery space story by Leigh Brackett, and if I can pry it away from Bixby, I think there's a new Vance in the house for the far future.

Can we keep up—boy, go sit in the corner. And don't worry about TWS. On the whole it's easier to get the short novels than the long one for SS.

AUTHOR TO FAN

by Philip Farmer

Dear Sam: G. Smith's THE HELLFLOWER was, as you claim, good space opera. Fast-paced, well written, and with characterizations better than some of his previous works.

THE MURALIST was interesting but illogical. A race capable of the immense scientific technology depicted therein would not have as much trouble as St. Clair claims in getting rid of pests. If we laid eggs, would we allow mice and rats to wipe us out? I think not.

Also, as far as I know, only animals of very low nervous organization change sex. No present day reptiles do; there is no reason to think Cretaceous or Jurassic did. Tzzzu Tsssin's species would be given no notable advantage by changing their sex. And they'd have to backtrack along evolution's path to have that sort of structure. Moreover, why the third eye? How many reptiles had it? What advantage was it? Evolution wields a sort of Occam's razor on such basic organs as eyes, noses, ears, etc. Evolution lets herself go with many superfluous structures such as crests, very long tailfeathers, colors, etc. But not with third eyes and four ears or two brains.

Also, the hero of the story thought that the Szabor Szor might have auxiliary brains in their hips. And longer tails. Again, why? The primitively developed dinosaurs had a sort of brain that controlled their rear extremities in their hips: a knot of nerves necessary because the feeble head-brain seemingly wasn't powerful enough to manipulate the legs and tail. But Tzzzu was highly developed and nowhere that I remember was it stated that he was any larger than a man, which is about the size you would expect of a symbol-using creature. Another brain in the hips would result in a sort of schizophrenia.

That, by the way, is a story idea. Would you be interested in one based on that?

Furthermore, the hypothesis that egg-eating mammals might have wiped out the dinosaurs is passé and regarded with no respect by authorities. Not that the authorities haven't been wrong many times, but reason is on their side. Why haven't egg-eating mammals wiped out the crocodile, etc.?

THE GNOME'S GNEISS was very nice. As long as you keep the mag predominantly stf, I don't mind a fantasy like this or JOURNEY TO BAR-KUT. I enjoyed the "unstoned" Alviss and the dead pan and conscientious Kevan. More funny ones like this will be appreciated. One niggling point. Loki is, I believe, not a blond, but a red-head. That's the way I remember my Norse mythology. That seems, by the way, to have been the hair color of a lot of heroes and villains: Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, Byron, Judas, King David, and even Christ.

I was talking to Alviss' cousin the other day, and he told me he could clear up your perplexity as to how the Irish fairies got mixed up with the Norse gods. His explanation didn't sound very reasonable or coherent to me (we'd been draughting Old Overcoat and using Cemetery Club for a mix) so I suggested he drop by your office and tell you. It also seems he's always wanted to write, and he has a few manuscripts he'd like you to look at. No fantasy, though. All autobiographical. SECRET CONFESSIONS OF AN UNDERGROUND CHARACTER and stuff like that.

TAKE A SEAT reminded me of vVogt's PEN PAL, I think it was titled. Why the Greek-dialect comedian way of writing? His story is told in English, and no matter what the structure of his language, should be told in good English. Or if it isn't, let's have the reason why.

As to Zacks' FROM OUTER SPACE, why should the porcine people be so horrified because we eat pigs? Would we be horrified if we came to their planet and saw them eating monkeys or apes? If those oinkoids had a terrific cultural

taboo against meateating or if pigs were sacred, I could understand it. Were they?

All in all, the May issue was a good one, very enjoyable, though I thought the April issue surpassed it.—621 Barker, Peoria, Ill.

Thanks for warning me about Alviss' Cousin. Am locking the office and leaving immediately for Mexico to hunt catamounts and tortillas. A story involving a schizophrenic brain in the hips? Don't some human females—well, anyway, I ain't committing myself until I see it.

A SNARL IS BORN

by Ed (The Sly One) Seibel

Dear Mistake: The Ether Rattles when I arrive. . . . It appears to me you made one big mistake in interpretation, Old Hoof, and far from irritating me, you amused me with your reply because of it. Maybe you should take a course in Semantics so you'll not make the mistake of tagging just one meaning to something that may possibly have other actual meaning. On top of that you hyperexaggerated my position on matters—no doubt a deliberate move on your part. You make the mistake of assuming that I dislike fantasy, and that I have categorized myself by the statement "If I can't believe a story as possibly occurable, or it doesn't impress me as being realistic, then it's not science-fiction." You assumed that I like only realistic stories—not so. My objection was based on two facts, the first being that fantasy shouldn't be mixed with science-fiction (it comes out a horrible mess), and the second being that the fantasy you do run is nothing but second-hand copies of originals—for more elucidation on this matter, consult the letter sent you for the April issue of SS. You can then see more clearly my stand on the matter.

The hyperexaggeration of, and I quote: "Your ears are not attuned to the music of the spheres, they hear only the dull grind of clashing gears, the ponderous rhythm (Since when do they spell *rhythm*, *rhythmn*?) of the equations, the squeak of the slide rule" appears asinine in its exaggeration, a poor job of ridiculing. You know as well as I or anyone else that no such idea of killing literature exists in my opinions. As I recall, your predecessor (May he be warm!) gave the same feeble, weak-minded argument to the Coles when they were expostulating with him. If you must know, it's just merely a matter of more circulation on your part—you just want to pick up all the fantasy fans too. Which is well and good, because the magazine is in existence to make money, not lose it. But as it appears to my perhaps biased opinion, that is the wrong road to travel toward better circulation. You don't interest adults in fantasy, and poor fantasy at that. Also, did you read a certain interesting article in a certain other magazine about tossing marbles into the air and the most number of marbles will be concentrated near the top? An interesting analogy of intelligence, isn't it: And ye gods of space, you write your editorial and then give me an answer like that! But perhaps I too am mistaking content—such things do happen, you know. . . .

And you all of a sudden in this same issue

publish a story like (Hmmm, this is commentary on the May ish of SS.) THE HELLFLOWER while gurgling to me about fantasy! Sam, tell me, how do you walk in two or three directions at once? Aw come on! I know you know! (Baf-fannied Grulzak. . . . Boojum. . . .) Now there is something of a story; of course it had a few objectionable features, such as the weak mystery angle, but it's a story well on the road to what I like! I honestly enjoyed it! The first objection I had was the fact that Smith tried to introduce a misery angle, but any experienced fan would have figured out that the critters were Aliens, first by the fact that the HELLFLOWERS were new to the System, the voices, and all the other peculiar manifestations. I wasn't even trying and I had the whole outcome pegged on page 38! (I should write you a story. . . . I can see you now, your eyes glued to the manuscript—the glue a special invention of mine, designed for stubborn eddy-tears—your breath coming out in screaming pants, at last your tortured lungs crying, "Genius. Sheer, unadorned, matrixed Genius!") Smith in his medical workings had somewhat of a misextrapolated anomaly. The fact is that if they had a "serum" for cancer, they most assuredly would have plastic surgery capable of repairing a little damaged tissue—so why did the enemy agents give in? According to some information I received, during the war they rebuilt men's whole chins, the complete lower face where it had been shot away! The only thing was the fellows couldn't feel anything where all the grafting had been done, due to destroyed nerve ends. And today they're grafting bones in where it's been shot away, so by the time they reach that time they'll be able to rebuild a guy's whole arm, and give him the nerves to use it, too! But Smith, despite these mistakes and others more trivial, did a very good job, and deserves top congratulations from this department for a job well done! This is one issue I'll place on my shelf for keeping.

Then you put on the front a top-notch cover, painted to arouse the lust in men to possess the original, gasssp! I refer to what appear to be a scene on one of Saturn's moons, or is it Saturn as it appears from our Moon? It seems too close to be the latter. A picture like that puts hair on a man's chest (I've got one!) and makes him hanker for the wide open spaces where you can taste the deeps of space and take a deep breath of stardust, out where men are men! Where you can stamp your feet on earth and rock never before touched since time began, where everything is big and new and there are no corners to stop you. . . . (Oh-oh! I better stop before I carry myself away.)

And then I read a story like THE MURALIST and the very earth under me begins to sway and shake, the sky grows dark, mountains topple and thunder into ruin into the valleys, and I read on, absorbed. . . . Sam, how can you say such things to me and then publish stories like this? St. Clair, when you write a good story, you *really* write! Sometimes you batter out shaggy-shouldered things, sometimes mediocrity, but when you get an inspiration and put it on paper, you are absolutely unmatchable.

The other three are unmentionable, so I won't mention them, and anyhow you always cut me short, though after reading the rest of this month's

letter column I can't see why you do cut me off—that letter column, except for my wonderful letter and a couple other interesting ones just plain stank. Don't you have some readers that are faintly comparable to my wonderful letters that should send you letters? After reading that column you should beg for more guys more nearly like me! Of course, no one can match me or even come near it, so you'll just have to settle for faintly geniuses. Well, I'll stop before the blue lash descends.—*Box 445, Olivehurst, Calif.*

I see you finally got a typewriter. Now get a ribbon for it—or didn't anyone tell you? The printer has threatened to quit if he gets another letter from you in which he has to use the Braille system.

But getting back to you, stop yelling "foul!" for a second and listen to the referee. I'll try to pound this through your unyielding skull once more, though I despair of the outcome.

There is no contradiction whatever in my singing the praises of fantasy and then catching you off-guard with a gorgeous chunk of space opera like THE HELLFLOWER, or a morsel of social comment like St. Clair's MURALIST. None at all. They are all good science fiction and I keep telling you to take off the blinders which force you to stare only at the end of your nose. What is stf anyway? It is, among other things, a literature of ideas; of imagination. It is the broadest of all possible fields. So any arresting idea rates consideration. What appears to you like walking in three directions at once is only a result of your blinders cutting off the side vision—say, are you sure you understand this stuff you're reading?

THEY WENT THATAWAY

by Johnny Wasso

Dear Mr. Mines: The letter in the February STARTLING STORIES by Patrick-Martin Paul Kelly is one of the best that has ever appeared in this magazine since its inception! Its fine for you to be impartial instead of dictatorial BUT DON'T LET THE LUNATIC ATHEIST FRINGE AMONG YOUR READERS BE DICTATORIAL EITHER!!!—119 Jackson Ave., Pen Argyl, Pa.

The theology class is currently meeting in TWS, next door.

CHIP ON SHOULDER DEPT.

by Joe Gibson

Dear Sam: With some surprise, plus a strong magnifying glass and a blazing desk lamp, I found that you weren't spoofing about Bergey's cover signatures—they're actually there, right where you

said they was! But leave us not spoil a good fight, Mines; if they can't be seen with the naked eye, they *ain't* there.

Furthermore, this May SS is a good example of how a commendable piece of cover artwork can be loused up by an editorial lay-out of the magazine. Schomburg's cover is fine—but on it is "THE HELFLOWER Enslaves The Women Of Earth!" Obviously, one concludes, this is a story about the creatures in flying saucers, which are intelligent plant-life who look like animated tulips—or maybe chrysanthemums—and are grabbing off the gals, and Our Brave Heroes latch onto a saucer and go skimming off to the rescue, except a couple enemy saucers get on their tail just off Saturn.

Instead, we find Ol' GO-Devil Smith has written a space opera which certainly merited a cover illo, but didn't get it. HELFLOWER had some sparkles of the rollicking glow that made GO-Devil a hot firecracker back in the Venus Equilateral days. But here is an editorial blurb—I'm givin' you a hard time, ain't I?—which boasts "No blonde priestesses, no BEMS, no intelligent insects sending short waves from their antennae—"

Some of the nicest brunettes I know are blondes, but we'll skip that. The point is that priestesses oughta be where you find 'em, which is in pagan temples, and some of 'em are! As for BEMS, the only objection is the formulated Victorian attitude that BEMs are necessarily evil beasts on account of their eyes bug out and they got a profound fondness for blondes. But intelligent insects sending short-wave via antennae is something else again, depending on what type insect. Crickets would probably have more fun rubbing their legs together; fireflies seem to prefer the tail-light method. In fact, I suspect these chaps would enjoy conversation no end.

In short, neither the use of these things nor the lack of 'em determines good space opera. Neither the use of 'em nor the lack of 'em proves anything. Some nice blondes are brunettes, too.

Regarding Mrs. Tindall's plaintive remarks, I can only say that I've tolerated fans who insisted that everybody should learn to speak Esperanto (def. tolerate: to ignore) but when she comes around asking that I should learn English, it's the final straw. I absolutely refuse.—24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4 N. J.

Joe, you're beginning to sound like old curdled Seibel. "With a snarl and a song—" Egad, you're willing to fight about anything, aren't you? But I'll tell you. There's a tale about these covers. For a long time we tried to get covers which illustrated the lead novel. But sometimes one of two situations came up: (1) The novel (a masterpiece in every other respect, to be sure) just wouldn't turn up a scene which looked like a good cover. It happens frequently. (2) An artist will bring in a cover on an idea he happened to have which is so gorgeous that we couldn't turn it down. Such a cover was the Emsh on April TWS, and such a cover was this Schomburg on THE

HELLFLOWER. The June TWS of the babe carrying a little green Bem survivor of a crashed flying saucer was an idea I gave Bergey.

The point is, wouldn't you rather have a better cover even if it is an abstract idea, than a poorer one which just happens to illustrate a story? Heck, look what happened on the **WELL OF THE WORLDS** cover.

Spare me the priestesses, be they blonde or brunette. We disagree with you that neither the use of them—or lack of 'em—determines good space opera to this extent: You're not likely to have a good story if you make it up out of clichés. And nothing is more cliché than a couple of pagan temples cluttered up with priestesses. On paper, that is. If you happened to stumble on one personally it could be fun. Unless you wound up as a sacrifice to some new gods you'd never read about in Bullfinch.

WITHOUT NOVOCAINE

by Dr. L. W. Carpenter, D.D.S.

Dear Mr. Mines: After reading stf for 18 years, I have become somewhat "set in my ways", and cynical of some of the so-called stf which is a drug on the market at present. Having been a faithful fan (silent) for this length of time, I am sure you will indulge me in a few observations on SS in general; and the May Issue in particular.

Since SS became a monthly book, it seems to me that quality has been sacrificed for quantity. The last few issues, in fact, have been odoriferous to an extreme degree. Beginning with "Journey To Barkut," the overall picture has become one of "comic book stf" instead of the classic masterpieces of yore. "Journey To Barkut" read like the hybrid resulting from mating "The Arabian Nights" and the dream of a hashish addict. Leinster must of really scraped the barrel for that one. Did he slip you a shot of Pentothal, and escape with his check before you woke up? Seriously, I am at a loss to account for your being off the beam enough to buy and print that one. Or did he *give* it to you? A gift horse, and all that sort of thing.

Then I come to "The Hellflower" in the May issue. You lionized this hack-fruit by labelling it "space opera". So help me; it consumed every ounce of my patience to read this one through to the finish. What a puerile finish it was! I have read a lot of Smith's stuff, and found it good; but I am convinced that Smith banged "Hellflower" out whilst computing his income tax and simultaneously trying to be nice to his mother-in-law.

That's enough brickbats. After all, you make mistakes just like the rest of us. If the next issue compensates for these two boners, you are forgiven.

Years of reading SS have given it a roseate aura all its very own. Nothing can *entirely* displace it from the niche it occupies in my hall-of-fame. The previous paragraphs may give you the impression that I am condemning dear old SS. Nothing could

be farther from the truth. I have always found SS more than equal to similar mags of comparable price in the stf field. Lest you should become too smug, however, I hasten to remind you that we *expect* you to keep up the good work, and forbid you resting on the laurels won by your superlative mag in the past. I know SS can be depended upon to always carry a lead novel by one of the "giants" of stf.

Since this is my FIRST letter to SS, and since I have bought a "carload" of issues throughout the past years, I hope you will lend an ear to the pleas of an old reader; and spare me the humiliation of ever seeing tripe like "Hellflower" and "Journey to Barkut" printed in my old friend SS again.—42 East E Street Elizabethton, Tenn.

This puts us on the proverbial spot. We'll promise you this, however, we won't print **HELLFLOWER** and **JOURNEY TO BARKUT** in SS again. That okay? A lot of readers sure did like them.

DONE UP BROWNE

by Norman G. Browne

To those unknowing, the following is a conversational type letter, supposedly between myself and Sam Mines. It is not patented and may be used freely by anyone intrigued by its possibilities.

"Wow! Boyoboyoboy. . ." says Norman, drooling in ecstasy over the cover of the May **STARTLING**.

"What do you think of it?" asks Sam.

"Think of it? Why I. . . I. Words cannot describe its beauty," whispers Norman, reverently.

"I take it you like the cover then?" asks Sam smiling broadly.

"I think it's awful. . ."

"But. . . but. . ." mutters Sam very much puzzled and distraught.

"I don't like the cover, but I do like the scene on it. If you cut out printing blurbs, spaceships, and the characters dressed in spacesuits, what do you have?"

"Just a plain extra-terrestrial scene," mumbles Sam, completely lost by now.

"Exactly. Just an extra-terrestrial scene. But I defy Emsh, Coggins, or Bonestell to do better."

"What did you think of the rest of the magazine?" asks Sam, trying vainly to change the subject.

"The rest of the Magazine?" mimics Norman obviously puzzled.

"The inside; the novel, the shorts, the features, etc." mutters Sam in a patient father-to-son tone.

"Sorry. It's my policy never to criticize a professional magazine. I that I had explained that to you before. This is my sixth letter to you, and in none of them have I mentioned one word about your lousy stories."

"Why did you write me then if you have nothing to say?" asks Sam apprehensively.

"But I have something to say. . ."

"Well. . . .?"

"Congratulate me. I just figured out what ego-boob means!"

"You WHAT?"

"I just figured out what ego-boo means."

"You've been reading stf for five years and you just now figured it out? My, my. . . . Where have you been all your life?"

"I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that I might incriminate myself. So there."

"Listen, Norman; if you haven't anything intelligent to say, I won't print this letter. Now come on let's have it."

"Okay, you asked for it. The following information may be controversial but I hope it is of some interest to you."

1. Canada has the largest national fan club in the world.

2. Canada has more fan clubs per capita than any other country in the world.

3. Vancouver B. C. Canada has the most progressive fan club in the world.

4. Would the thousand or so fans in BRITISH COLUMBIA please write in to me and join the Vancouver S-F Society? If they do we would then have the largest local fan club in the world.

5. We are planning to bring out about eight or ten fanzines. If any one with any ideas or contribution would get in touch with me; thanks!

"Is that all. . . .?" Mutters Sam disgustedly.

"I figured out how ego-boo is derived. Zuit suiter, eager suitor, eager bo, ego-boo. Simple logic, aye?"

"Him we like."—1150 W. King Edward Ave., Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

If there is anybody in the house who can tell me what that was all about, I'll be more than glad to reward him with a free copy of OOPSLA.

WINSOME WILLIE

by Willie Miller

Dear Sam: Sniff! Sniff! a girl just went by with a crysant . . . a krisentam . . . a crisanthemoom. . . . a daisy in her hair 'n I'm checkin' up ta mek sure it isn't a Heckposy (thass a polite name for a Hellflower.) Good story, Sam. Looks like another feather in your bonnet, huh? At the rate you are going you'll have a heap heavy bonnet!

Hey, I can almost see what you will be saying next ish. It'll probably be "I told you so!" You were talking about having space travel "soon" and now did you see what *Collier's* (3-22-52) came up with? A big beautiful fifteen page spread entitled "Man Will Conquer Space Soon." I get kidded a lot at the hangar by my buddies for reading SF, but since showing them the article in *Collier's*, the laughter has somewhat diminished.—VR-1 N.A.S., Patuxent River, Md.

How does it feel to be respectable? That issue of *Collier's* was a sellout too. They were scarce in Manhattan on account of a news drivers' strike and I found every newsdealer on the north shore of Long Island sold out—which ought to indicate a lot of fresh new interest in your favorite litrachoer.

QUIZ BIZ

by J. Martin Graetz

Dear Samuel: Please don't tease pore old Joe Gibson so! He's got a legitimate beef when it comes to signatures. In your editorial answer to Joe's May letter, you said that the signature on the Feb cover was right after the word "publication". So I looked. And what did I see? Blinding deep blue-violet on a background of equally eye-catching dark brown. Modest? Bergey's a downright coward! Anyhoo, his covers are tremendous. Who did the April, Emsh? Looks like the same style as on the April TWS.

Well, leave us hie ourself to the May STARTLING.

Cover: At least Schomberg's no coward. Nice work.

TEV: Glad to see that we agree on something, Sam. A 100-page novel in a 146-page magazine like Ned Reece wants *would* be a trifle cramping. However, I think he was hinting at a larger mag, huh?

You said, "See book review column for our opinion re: Kuttner vs. Padgett." Not only did the book reviews have nothing, but neither did the fan reviews or the editorial. . . .?

HELLFLOWER was a graet story—(graet? I oughtta be ashamed of myself!)—as I was saying, a great story with a horribly weak ending. Planet Mender Smith is a fine writer, but I think he wrote himself into a corner this time, don't you? (Of course you don't. You wouldn't have printed it that way if you did.)

KENDALL FOSTER CROSSEN IS THE GREATEST SCIENCE-FICTION HUMORIST OF ALL TIME!!! There! I said it and I'm glad. THE GNOME'S GNEISS was another ace. Keep him writing at all costs!

THE MURALIST. I don't know whether I liked this story or not. It was unusual. (Whew! What an understatement!)

TAKE A SEAT I liked immensely. The idea is nothing new, but it is presented in a most striking manner. Russell is truly an artist. FROM OUTER SPACE was a hackneyed plot with a hackneyed title. Written nicely, though.

Gez whiz! Nobody wants to argue this month in TEV. Even erstwhile Joseph the Gibson is "fragmentary." Maybe what we need is a shot of Orvil Stien. (Heil Scully!)

Sam, a question. Who besides Fred Brown and Mack Reynolds make up the Taos crowd? Is Walt Sheldon one of them?—307 So. 52 St., Omaha 3, Nebraska.

With both you and Gibson losing artists all over the place, I reckon we'll have to do something about putting their names on the contents page or some place. That make you happy?

You kidding about the April SS? The lunar uranium machine? That was Schomberg, bub; can't you spot that air-brush technique? Up to that point Emsh hadn't worked with air brush,

but he has since—and more about that some other time.

Oh, about that book review. Apologies and stuff. It just plain old got crowded out. Appeared in the June issue of SS though. I trust you'll have spotted it long before this appears in print.

Walt Sheldon isn't one of the Taos crowd—at least now. He's in Japan, with the Army. Or was, the last I heard.

SLOW BURN

by Larry Ketcham

Dear Editor: Just finished the May SS. THE HELLFLOWER was the best I've read since THE STARMEN OF LLYRDIS which appeared some time ago in SS. THE GNOME'S GNEISS—pure (ugh!) fantasy. Ken F. Crossen's MERAKIAN MIRACLE and also his RIGEL RIGELLIAN were excellent, but this one—phew! THE MURALIST stank but the other shorts were pretty good, especially TAKE A SEAT. Why don't you remove your "fact feature" and put back "Looking Ahead." I read your answer on Captain Future in Henry Moskowitz's letter and went into a slow burn which finally burst into flame. If Ed Hamilton's turning in the material, or if you guys aren't publishing that Cap Future Annual because you think he's juvenile I think I'll have one of my many BEMS plant a time bomb under your desk. Incidentally, why didn't you review THE THING in your movie column? Too late?

Forgot to tell you how much I liked the cover of this issue. Schomberg is getting almost as good as Bonestell.—*Waterford, California.*

One man's meat is another's fantasy. More Crossen coming up—we'll hear from you again. PASSPORT TO PAX certainly wasn't pure (ugh) fantasy. We dumped "Looking Ahead" because flowery blurbs of forthcoming stories seemed pretty silly to me. We can make simple announcements of stuff ahead—I do it in this column all the time—and scatter spot ads throughout the mags.

Nobody's writing any Cap Future stuff now. Hank Moskowitz makes a trip in at least once a week to plead for Cap Future. In self-defense I promised to think about getting out an Annual.

Hold on now, I only said *think!*

SOLO

by Eugene D. Pushkin

Dear Sir: Please put this in your magazine. I don't want any money and I'm not doing this for money. I am eleven years old. I want to prove to my friends that I can do it. I am following in my ancestor's steps. His name was Alexandre Pushkin.

WHEN THE SUN MEETS THE EARTH

*People of Earth,
Your lives are not worth
Nothing, as I can see.
Because the sun
Is coming at us.
Soon now the Earth will be done.
Just in one minute we'll be slaves of the sun.
The sun is having fun,
But we aren't, so be ready my friends for our
doom.
It's like in a barred room
Too hot to stand,
Do you understand?
Well, goodbye.
Just in one second, we'll all be dead.
We're going to be blown to bits
toward the sky.*

1106 Orlando Ave., Okron, Ohio.

Okay, Eugene, there it is. And it's going to make a lot of fan eds turn green with envy. You'll make a writer.

FORWARD MOTION

by R. W. Durham

Dear Sir: It was just about 23 years ago that I picked up a magazine called, I believe "Wonder Stories." In it was the story titled "The Ark of The Covenant." Since then I can truthfully say that I have never deliberately missed a science fiction Magazine of any type that I could find. For Escape reading, I think it is the finest type of stories in the world.

Now not being a potential space pilot, nor having too much training in Celestial Mechanics, gravitational stresses, etc., I have long had a question that I would like answered. Let's see what you can do with it.

It seems to be common knowledge that combustion of certain fuels create an expansion of gases which, blasting out of a narrow tube creates a forward motion by pushing against the atmosphere. Now, in deep space which I understand is considered to be an absolute vacuum, wouldn't this forward motion be nullified by the sucking action of a complete vacuum which would tend to pull the gasses out of the tube as fast as the gas could expand and thereby leaving absolutely nothing to push against????

I have no doubt that I am wrong, but could you tell me why?—215 E. Colorado Str., St. Joseph, Mo.

PS. I really do think you have a wonderful Magazine.

This is an oldie—I'm surprised you haven't run across the answer before in your omnivorous reading of stf.

Mistake number one you make is to assume that expanding gases, blasting out of a tube, create a forward motion by pushing against

[Turn to page 140]

Reducing Specialist Says:
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PART OF
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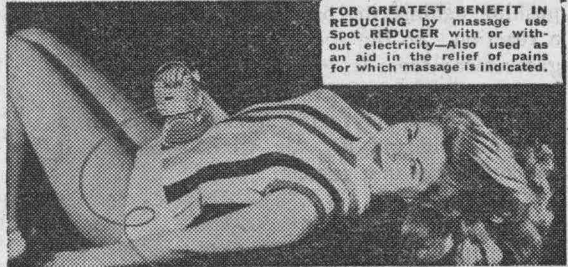


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he atmosphere. The forward motion is not created by a push against the atmosphere at all, but by a little gimmick known as Newton's Third Law. This Law states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus if you fire a gun, the gun kicks back against your shoulder with about as much force as the bullet needs to send it on its way. This recoil has nothing to do with the gases pushing against the breech block, it is simply a reaction. So the rocket, by hurling a lot of gases away from it, gets an equal push in the opposite direction. If this sounds fishy to you, the best proof is that a rocket works in a vacuum, whereas if air were necessary it wouldn't work in a vacuum.

SHADY STORIES

by John Huff

Dear Mr. Mines: I hope you don't mind being an "Answer Man" for me, but here are some questions I would like answered:

- 1) I have about five stores around my neighborhood that carry stf., but I can't get each and every issue of SS and any stf mags out. Can you tell me if there is any way I can get the mags when they come out, without subscribing?
- 2) HOW may I defend S-F and myself against my relatives and "friends"? When they see the untrimmed edges, half-nude (pardon me!) girls on covers, and sometimes 'shady' stories, they seem to leave me without words when they point that out and say that I should not read such trash (I don't agree).

Now Sam, don't get mad at me about those 'shady' stories—its the truth. Where else do you find girls committing so many acts of immoral nature in stories? (There, I said IT.)—1434 S. Harding Ave., Chicago, Ill.

P.S. You're doing a fine job with SS, Sam. Keep it up. I just bought the May issue on Apr. 8. I wonder if other readers are having trouble getting stf.

Newsstands in Chicago are supplied with our stf mags. If you're not getting them, they must sell out early. Raise he-- pardon—hob with your dealer and he'll get a few extra copies for you.

Now as to your troubles with the girls. You ask this blunt question: Where else do you find girls committing so many acts of immoral nature in stories?

Well, the answer to that is: In practically all great literature. You can begin with the Bible where, to take only two examples, you have Esther and Delilah. Moving up, you have Thais, Camille, Nana, Hawthorne's SCARLET LETTER, a lot of Thomas Wolfe's novels, practically all of de Maupassant, Balzac and Voltaire, and in the moderns,

Hemingway's FAREWELL TO ARMS, Steinbeck's OF MICE AND MEN—shucks we could go on forever, but it isn't really necessary.

The point is that these events occur in any good literature, for good literature purports to portray life.

WE NEVER GOT IT

by Ingram McCallum

Dear Mr. Mines: If this letter doesn't reach you, it's your own fault. I looked through the mag from stem to stern, but nowhere did I find any specific information on how to address a letter to The Ether Vibrates. When I did find the address I am using, it was in such fine print that I nearly had to use a microscope on it. Do you do this in self-defence?

This is the first letter I have ever written to the editor of any stf mag, although I have been reading the stuff for several years. I agree with many fans that TWS and SS are the best of the field. The covers lately have been real gone. I prefer spaceships, but I don't object to good-looking girls so long as they aren't wearing a futuristic Bikini bathing suit while the young man is muffled to the ears in a space suit. Either put a space suit on the gal, or give the guy a pair of trunks.

In TEV, May, 1952, I was extremely surprised to find letters from two fans (or is the correct form "fen") who did not like THE FIRST SPACEMAN, by Gene Henderson. Both Bill Crozier and Bill Rose seemed to take the story seriously, unaware that Mr. Henderson was writing "with tongue in cheek," figuratively speaking. (He was, wasn't he?) I agree with Neal Clark Reynolds—let's have more of this type of kidding.

In the current issue, I liked the lead novel, "THE HELLEFLOWER," best, although I got a lot of laughs from "THE GNOMES GNEISS." I wonder if Mr. Crossen also wrote "THE ODYSSEY OF YIGGAR THROLG"??? "TAKE A SEAT"—Much good . . . enjoying this . . . style of write much difference. "THE MURALIST" and "FROM OUTER SPACE"—Welllll—they were OK—I guess—

This issue was good, but that is only what we readers have come to expect of Startling. Keep up the good work, Mr. Mines.

If this ever gets printed, and any fans (fen??) anywhere feel like dropping me a line, please do so. There aren't many readers of stf in this neck of the woods. I will answer any letters I may receive.

Remember, Mr. Mines, if you don't receive this . . . —P.O. Box #29, Appin, Ont., Canada.

Startling Stories, 10 East 40th, New York 16, N. Y., is keerect. You will now be swamped with mail (prediction).

That tears it for another ish, friends and otherwise.

See you next month.

—The Editor.

REVIEW OF THE CURRENT
**SCIENCE
 FICTION**
 FAN PUBLICATIONS

YOU will probably remember the fanzine which we tackled first-off last month . . . the rather curious item entitled BEGINNING: THE FUTURE? Well, it has folded, and in its place has appeared a new one, CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION; and at the same time "Mr. U," erstwhile editor and publisher of B: TF and now of CSF, has shyly disclosed that he is none other than that old Universal Musketeer and super-organizer from Brooklyn, Ronald S. Friedman.

Golly gumdrops . . . we're glad *that's* over! The suspense was getting us down. Now that



Ron, apparently reassured that his reception back into the ranks of fandom will not be of the fatal variety, has bravely flung aside his mask, we're just a little happier; and the fewer "Mr. U's" there are skulking about fandom, the happier we'll get.

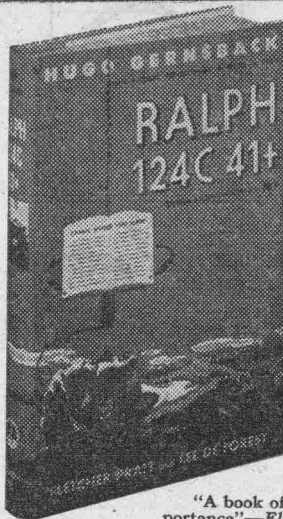
Luck with your long haul, Ron. . . .

Next, a letter from Dick Clarkson, President of the Baltimore Science-Fiction Forum, who is a fast man on the up-take. Anent our recent expression of willingness to publicize fan-clubs in our columns, he has written to say that the BSFF is looking for "good, fanatical S-F fans in profusion. Anyone in or around the Baltimore area is invited to attend, provided, naturally, that he is a dyed-in-the-wool fan."

M'm, isn't that a little exclusive, Dick? . . . no point in scaring off potential victims. We would venture to add that fans of as-yet-not-

[Turn page]

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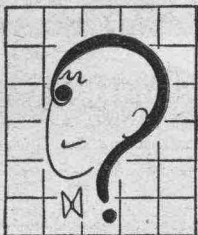
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quite-fanatical devotion to stf might be interested as well. Fanactivities are fun; they have a way of getting under your skin . . . to those not presently engaged in same, but possessed of curiosity, energy, sociability and spare time, we suggest that they taste and consider.

A few months ago we thought we might have to howl for more fanzines . . . we simply weren't getting enough to fill up a column. But such measures proved unnecessary. We are now in the black; in fact, we're swamped; for which we thank one and all.

OOPSLA (Calkins, are you there?), 761 Oakley Street, Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Editor: Gregg Calkins. Published every six weeks. 10c per copy; one year's subscription (nine issues; eight plus an annish) for \$1.00.

Nice job . . . mimeographing good, cover fair (Keasler can do, and has done, better), contents for the most part enjoyable. Stories by Shelby Vick and Red Boggs; columns by Wilkie Conner and Ken Beale; a plug for the coming 10th Annual World Science Fiction Convention; an autobiography of Lee Hoffman, who sounds like a nice gal; and many letters.

Regarding Beale's article, *The Jaundiced Eye* . . . it impressed us as being a little *too* bloody jaundiced. Relating that Paul Fairman, editor of IF, filled his first issue with stories bought "from the Ziff-Davis/Clark Publishing Co. coterie—Palmer, Brown, Shaver, Phillips, etc.," and that Fred Pohl, editor of BEYOND THE END OF TIME, included in that anthology "stories by himself ('James MacCreigh') and Judy Merrill, who is Mrs. Pohl," Beale proceeds to exercise his wit by crediting Fairman with having displayed "magnificent . . . impartiality" and further commenting that "such a truly, straight-forward way of lining up a contents page has not been seen in the field since anthologist Ken Crossen bought stories by three of his personal friends and one from himself for the fifteen selections in 'Adventures in Tomorrow.'" *Re* Pohl, Beale contents himself with the comment, "Lemons to him. . . ."

There is even a third example of this whing-diddle reasoning . . . we quote: "Fletcher Pratt knows where the body is buried down at Standard. He has had 7 stories in the last 13 issues of TWS/SS, 4 of them in the past five months . . . and the end is not yet . . . Considering the poor quality of most of this writing, it is rather amazing."

From which we may gather that Beale assumes that any story he doesn't like is automatically bad, and that the purchase of a number of such from the same author by the same editor is ipso facto evidence of that editor's lack of integrity and/or intelligence. And that an editor who buys a story from a writer who happens to be a friend or acquaintance, or who prefers a type of story produced notably by a certain group of writers, is practising favoritism. And that an anthologist who happens to include his own work or the work of a friend is applying to the process of selection a less savory yardstick than honest critical judgment.

And that this is about the doggonedest example

of fanaieté and running off at the head we've seen in a long time . . . pardon us while we chuckle.

Not that nepotism isn't sometimes practised in editorial offices, as anywhere else . . . but not a helluva lot of it, for obvious reasons: fill a magazine with buddies by buddies, and pretty soon your magazine falls flat on its press and you're out of a job . . . and we're in this for that weekly check, students, not for love. Beale is reading "nepotism" into perfectly ordinary and everyday editorial procedures, and he ought to know better . . . maybe he got grouch on? Or got bit by a pro? Or fell out of bed, like Silverberg?

Aside to Calkins: take yourself a drive out Kearns-way, if it's still there, and heave spit-balls at it, will you . . . just as a personal favor to us? Lordy, that winter of '43. . . .

SCIENCE-FICTION ADVERTISER, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California. Editor: Ronald Squire (or is it Roy Squires? . . . we've heard it both ways, and can't find it listed in the 'zine). Published bi-monthly. 20c per copy; eight issues for \$1.00.

Another nifty Morris Scott Dollens cover . . . the usual neat layout and crisp photo-offset reproduction. Outstanding in this issue is Arthur J. Cox's scholarly *DEUS EX MACHINA: A study of A. E. van Vogt* . . . a solid piece of fanalysis. Carolyn Gaybard takes typewriter in hand *In Defense of Space Opera*; the usual numerous book-and-mag advertisements wind up the issue. Tops, as we've hinted once or twice before, in its field.

Department of Added Attractions: announced on the back cover of this ish is a subscription-getting contest the first prize of which ranks high in the category of drool-makers . . . in other words, it's a dilly.

SPACESHIP, 760 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn 13, New York. Editor: Robert Silberberg. Published quarterly. 10c per copy; three issues for 25c.

Capable enough . . . we'd rate it middling to good.

Lilith Lorraine leads off with an article entitled *Science Fiction and Civilization*, which we thought a half-and-half mixture of good intentions and wishful thinking. Also included: predictions by Morton D. Paley regarding the science fiction of 1957; a story by Charles L. Morris; news from Down Under by Roger Dard; poetry by Isabelle Dinwiddie and Orma McCormick; letters, and a book review. All items moderately enjoyable. Artwork by Richard Z. Ward: fair.

BLACKLIST, 12095 Rosemary, Detroit 5, Michigan. Editor: Gordon L. Black.

A SAPSzine . . . one-man job. Ten rather light-hearted pages of chatter, gags and satire. Artwork by editor Black is above average.

[Turn page]

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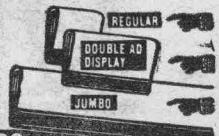
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CONFUSION, 937 Florida Avenue, Lynn Haven, Florida. Editor: Shelby Vick. 5c per copy; twelve issues for 50c.

In this one: a so-so story, a Walt Willis column (how that boy does get around!), a Vernon McCain column, a poem by Gregg Calkins, a fistful of letters, and the story of Dick 'n' Vick . . . i. e., how Shelby located, pondered upon, finally bought and heroically struggled with the A. B. Dick machine used in the production of this ish.

Vick's "China-boy and bemlet" cartoons help muchly.

Sorry to hear that Tommy Lee Tracy's personal difficulties have interrupted his fanactivities . . . only temporarily we hope?

INDIANA FANTASY, 1022 North Tuxedo Street, Indianapolis 1, Indiana. Co-editors: Ray Beam and Lee Tremper. Published quarterly. 20c per copy; three issues for 50c.

A first issue . . . in which four fan-fair stories by Eugene DeWeese, editor Beam, C. Childers and David H. Keller, and an article on "Martian Chess" by Robert E. Williams, are thoroughly skunked by appalling mimeography. An enclosed letter by editor Tremper admits that the IF staff is aware of this deficiency and is fervently planning to correct matters. Good enough . . . (we remember our first experience with a mimeo, years ago down at the Frank Munsey Company, and know what the back-biting critters can do to your beautiful stencils. Better luck next time.)

Besides the stories and article (as a part-time chess inexpert, the latter chilled our blood), there are an editorial by Beam and Tremper, a poem by Caroline (Childers?), and some cartoons by James R. Adams.

Tremper and Beam intend to feature both stf and fantasy in IF, but at present are strapped for fantasy yarns . . . how about you fan-authors giving the newcomers a hand?

FANTASIAS, 203 Robin Street, Dunkirk, New York. Editor: David English. Published quarterly. 10c per copy.

A sprightly item . . . we must confess that we generally prefer the gagzines and chatterzines to those which tackle Issues, Problems and Concepts, and nine times out of ten end up sounding like a high-school forum debating Trends in World Affairs.

In his editorial, Dave says he especially needs articles and cover drawings . . . so hop to it, you fan-authors, etc.

Bill Venable is present with an article entitled *The Hardest Job in Fandom*, which opens thusly: "It has been said that the hardest job in the world would be Wheeling West Virginia. . ."

How about Flushing Long Island, h'm?

Also in this ish: a cute dog-owns-man type yarn by J. T. Oliver; poems by Walt Klein, Jerry F. Cao and Alfred Machado, Jr.; an article by Bobby Pope on how to build a model rocket that will fly around and try to knock your head off; letters; and a story by Nanda McLeod in which

we find ourself, to our surprise, playing a role . . . we quote: "Eve had never forgotten the time that Mama had seen Jerome Bixby carrying her books home from school for her. Mama had promptly grabbed a broom, and knocked Jerome to the pavement. For a time Mama had father regretted it, because Mr. Bixby, Jerome's father, had sworn out a warrant for her arrest and she had been fined \$25.00 by the local Justice-of-Peace. That stopped Mama from beating up the local swains, etc, etc. . . ."

What Nanda neglected to mention is that we were never quite right in the head after that episode—compound concussion, and so forth—and as a result took up science fiction as our profession. . . .

Mama should've got the gas-chamber, by God!

ADOZINE, 2058 East Atlantic Street, Philadelphia 34, Pennsylvania. Editor: W. C. Butts. 10c per copy; 50c per year.

A pint-sized adzine that seems a little hard-up for material . . . about as many fanzine reviews in this one as advertisements. Anybody got anything to sell, hah?

THE VOYAGE OF THE SF52, Bordentown Military Institute, Bordentown, New Jersey. Editor: Richard Lupoff. Published irregularly. No price listed.

Shades of B: TF! . . . here's a fourteen-page, digest-size fanzine—*typewritten!* How dedicated can you get?

Passing swiftly from this staggering aspect of SF52, we find two short stories, a poem, an article, a review of TWS (favorable) and letters.

The article, *Great Inventions of Man*, contains a typo almost too good to be true . . . *re* the ball-point pen: "It writes under water—this makes it an exceptional value for deep-sea divers who like to take notes while on the job. It is also a boon to authors who like to work in the shower or bath. Of course, keeping the paper from drooping and falling apart is a problem, but if someone would invent a water-proof paper we could all work and wash at the same time."

In discussing the April TWS cover, Lupoff says that "Scientifically, of course, it's one big boner, because the scene it depicts is, apparently, the moon, and the men have spacesuits on, but the sun is distorted by the atmosphere." An examination of our office copy, however, reveals no distortion of the sun, by atmosphere or otherwise; only that it's oversized. Which is perfectly natural when you consider that the scene depicted was on Mercury, not Luna . . . no?

In the editorial: ". . . I could afford a mimeograph or a hectograph, but where would I keep it? So it looks like I'll do my work on good old Mr. Smith-Corona for a while, if at all."

We've no doubt that Mr. Smith-Corona would bear up . . . but we'll wager that Mr. Lupoff will poop off any issue now and buy that hectograph.

Well, that's it for this issue . . . you'll find us back on the same tenterhook next month. S'long till then.

—JEROME BIXBY.



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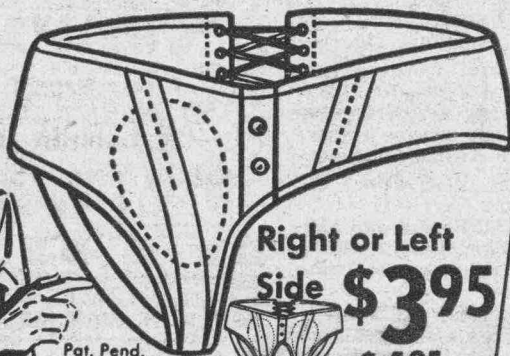
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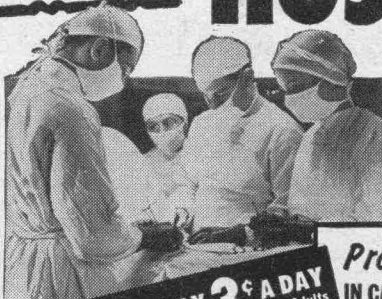
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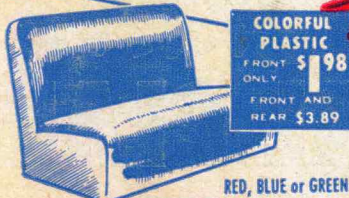
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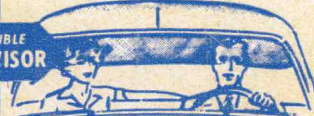


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