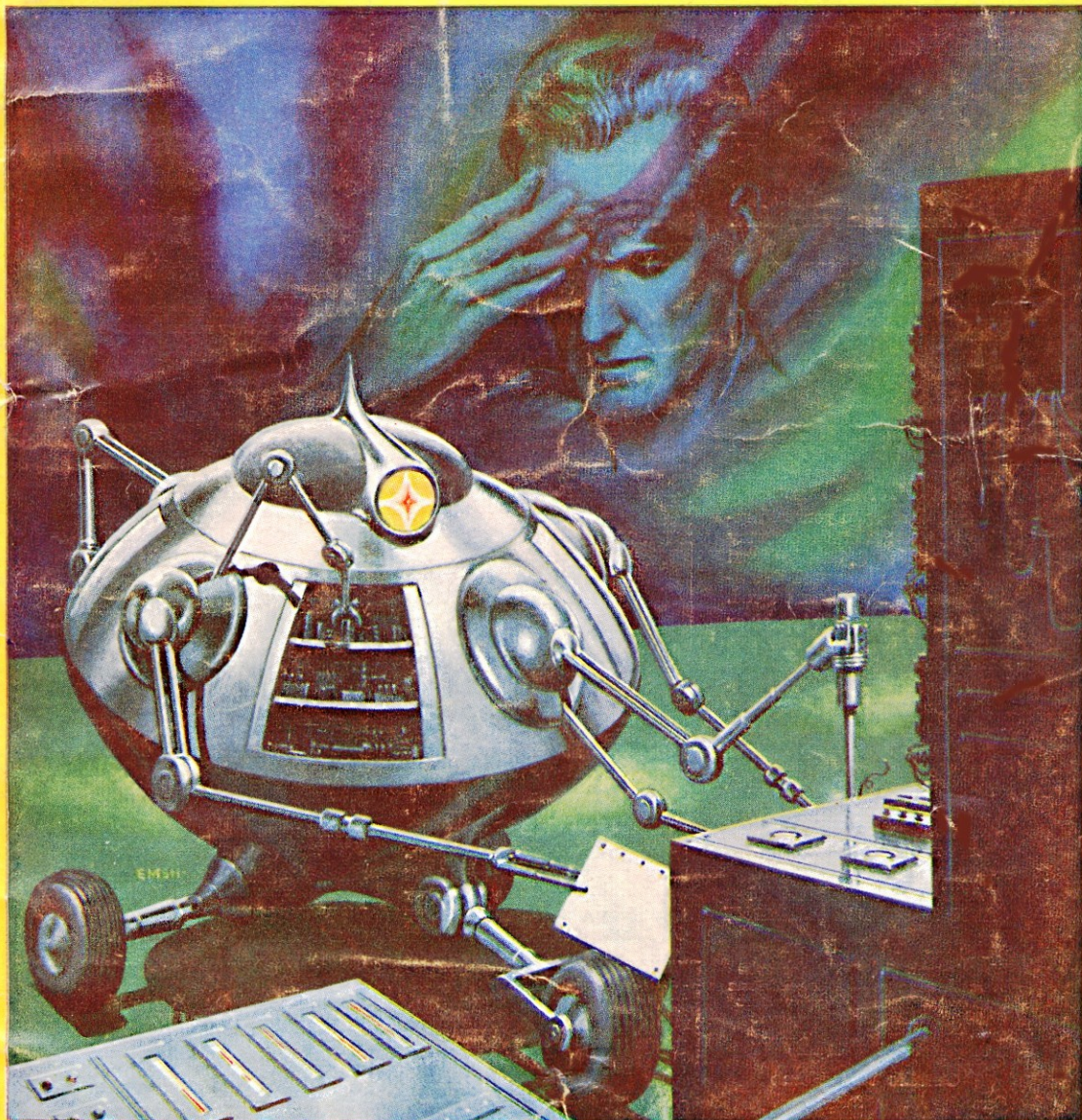


TODAY'S SCIENCE FICTION—TOMORROW'S FACT • JUNE 25c

STARTLING *stories*

A THRILLING PUBLICATION



featuring **MOTH AND RUST**—a sequel to *THE LOVERS*
by Philip José Farmer

Real Causes of TV Interference In This Area Revealed

A message to every TV set owner who is tired of paying \$5-\$10 for the same unnecessary service calls over and over again—and who is unfairly blaming his serviceman for something that is not his fault.

Have you ever wondered why your TV set can't be fixed—why your TV picture still gets aggravating wavy lines, streaks, distortions and zags—why high powered aerials, expensive new sets, even top flight servicemen often fail to stop this TV interference?

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR TV SET

It is a known fact that your TV antenna not only picks up the picture waves you see on your screen, but also picks up electric static waves that can ruin your picture.

THE REAL CAUSES OF TV INTERFERENCE

And the reason you or your repairman have never been able to block out this interference is because it does not come from within your TV set but from sources outside your TV set! These sources are the real cause of TV interference. These are what may cause your TV screen to flicker, flutter, streak or get hazy.

For instance, you yourself, realize that a doctor's diathermy machine up to 2½ miles from your home can ruin your TV viewing pleasure for hours on end.

But do you know that a car or truck passing your home can streak, distort your TV picture?

Do you know that nearby telephone lines or neon advertising signs, can make your screen flicker and flutter?

And do you know that any electrical appliance in your home—or your neighbor's home—can streak, distort and haze your TV picture for an entire evening?

ANY ONE OF THESE CAN CAUSE YOUR TV INTERFERENCE

Inside Your Home

Electric toasters	Phonographs
Vacuum cleaners	Electric razors
Sewing machines	Refrigerators
Electric broilers	Oil burners
Ring telephone	Door bells
	Radios

Outside Your Home

Cars	Streetscars
Busses	Trucks
Trains	Doctor's diathermy machine
Hospital machines	Subways
Electric cash register	FM Radio interference

WHICH OF THESE TV HEAD-ACHES DO YOU WANT TO STOP—IN JUST 45 SECONDS!



STREAKS caused by cars, trains, subways, cash registers, electrical appliances

can be **BLOCKED OUT** by TELERON before it reaches your set.

WEAK PICTURE—TELERON CLARIFIES weak signal. Helps to hold picture bright and steady.



WAVY LINES caused by "Hams," FM broadcast stations, other TV sets, antennas,

can be **BLOCKED OUT** by TELERON before it reaches your set.

FADDED PICTURE due to weak, static ridden signals can be **CLARIFIED** by TELERON before it reaches your set.



BORE EFFECT caused by doctor's diathermy machines, hospital machines,

can be **BLOCKED OUT** by TELERON before it reaches your set.

TV STATIC caused by telephone lines, neon signs, atmospheric conditions, can be **BLOCKED OUT** by TELERON, before it reaches your set.



HOW TO STOP TV INTERFERENCE IN JUST 45 SECONDS!

The only way to eliminate TV interference is to **BLOCK IT OUT**, before it reaches your set

—in exactly the same way sunlight glare is blocked out by sunglasses before it reaches your eyes.

1. You can install an antenna-filter to help reduce interference seeping through your antenna, **BUT IT CANNOT STOP** streaks, wavy lines or TV static due to interference pouring in through your wall socket.

2. Or you can fix your set yourself in just 45 seconds simply by clipping onto your set a new double protection filter circuit and power line plug that not only blocks out interference coming in through your antenna, but also blocks out interference coming through your wall socket. The name of this amazing invention is the **TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP** which actually blocks out these interference waves before they reach your set.

PRECISE-CLEAR RECEPTION IN JUST 45 SECONDS

Simply clip the **TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP** on to your set. It takes only 45 seconds—and fits every set made since 1947, regardless of make, model or year. See for yourself how this amazing invention gives you sharp, clear pictures; how it can add new life to your picture even in fringe areas—even in weak reception zones—even on channels you could hardly pick up before!

ORDER TODAY AND SAVE \$2

If you order your Teleron Interference Trap today, you do not pay the \$6 you'd expect, but only \$3.98 — on this amazing no-risk guarantee: If 45 seconds after you clip this amazing **TELERON INTERFERENCE TRAP** on your set, you are not getting perfect picture-clear reception—please return for full money back. You try it at our risk. So send today to: **Hastings Products, Inc., Teleron Div., Dept. T-742, 141 Fifth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.**

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STARTLING

stories

Vol. 30, No. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION

June, 1953

Featured Novel

- MOTH AND RUST** Philip José Farmer 10
The patient was society itself, and Doctor Leif Bark was the surgeon who had been hand-picked to cut to the rotten core!

A Complete Novelet

- HERE LIE WE** Fox B. Holden 112
When they started for the Planet Mars, they didn't expect to get there in time for the final curtain of a great show!

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- IMPERFECTION** Leslie Waltham 100
She had to be sure she was not getting married to a machine
- THE BLACK DEEP
THOU WINGEST** Robert F. Young 105
The haunting memory of his childhood came to rest on a star

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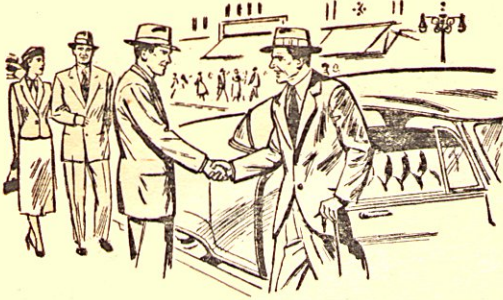
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EDWARD R. ROFHEART, Art Director SAMUEL MINES, Editor

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EMSH

the Fifty Thousand Dollar Minute

by Hillard Wilson



BILL RHODES was standing on the corner of 42nd and Fifth Avenue, a feeling of resentment rising within him.

"Why," he asked himself, "should I be forever struggling along on a small salary when so many other men have found wealth? They are only men, aren't they? What is the magic something that makes one man a success and the other a failure?"

Just then a car stopped in front of him and a strangely familiar voice called out —

"Bill Rhodes! Of all men! What are you doing here? Remember me? Jim Williams?"

Yes, Bill did remember him. Five years before they had worked together for the same company. They had been good pals. And here was Jim Williams in his own Cadillac! Had he found a gold mine? Had he struck oil?

Jim laughed. "Neither," he said, "but something a whole lot better. Step in the car and we'll ride about a bit."

Bill stepped in and eased back into the luxurious cushions. As they rode along, he told Jim with just a trace of sadness, how he was still working at the same old place and at almost the old salary.

Jim Williams listened attentively. "Bill," he said, suddenly, "I want to tell you something. Five years ago when we were working together, we used to wish we could get ahead.

"And then one night I happened to see an advertisement in a magazine. It told about International Correspondence Schools and how they help men to success through spare-time study. Right there I decided that I would be one of these trained men.

"I remember telling you about sending in the coupon. And I remember how you laughed and said I was just wasting my time and my money. But I wasn't, Bill! It was the best investment I ever made.

"I found that the minute I spent in marking and mailing that coupon has been worth \$50,000 to me. In other words, I have made just \$50,000 more in the last five years than if I had stayed at the old job. And I say very frankly that I owe my advancement to I.C.S."

How much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you advancement and more money?

The way is easy. Without cost, without obligation, mark and mail this coupon. It takes only a three-cent stamp and a \$50,000 minute of your time, but it is the most important thing you can do today.

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A Science-Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

IT HAS long been a suspicion of ours, if not a conviction, that the struggling science of psychology may yet turn out to be the most important of all to man's welfare. Psychology has come in for some very harsh criticism from those who feel it is too inexact to be classed as a science, or that it partakes too much of the voodoo and medicine man's bag of tricks. But, considering the complexity of the subject and the huge number of intangibles involved, it may be far too early to conclude that it can never become a science of some relative exactness. Even in its present primitive state it has certainly contributed to humanity's self-understanding and this is a gain, considering how baffled man seems to be by himself.

For these and many other reasons, we discovered and read, with the utmost interest, a small item buried casually in the news, which might be rather important in the matter of man's understanding himself. The item dealt with a new theory of neurosis, developed by Professor O. Hobart

Mowrer, a psychologist of the University of Illinois.

Are you neurotic? We-el-ll, maybe a little here or there. Certainly the pressures under which we insist upon living leave little hope that many of us can escape a touch of neurosis here and there, however balanced we may be in all other respects. The traditional Freudian concept, of course, is that the blame goes back to society or the individual's parents, or other causes buried deep in his experience. Neurosis is therefore classed as a kind of illness.

Professor Mowrer has taken a good long look at the Freudian theories and feels called upon to differ. Neurosis is not an illness.

Feel better already? You are not sick, says the Professor. You are not a hapless victim of society's bungling, or your parents' failure to understand you, or your rejection by your first sweetheart. You are not a pawn, and if you let yourself be-

(Continued on page 129)

ANNOUNCEMENT

WITH this, the June 1953 issue, **STARTLING STORIES** returns temporarily to an every-other-month schedule. The reason is one which some astute readers actually predicted. We cannot get enough good material to fill the book every month. To cling to the monthly schedule would have been to see the quality deteriorate and this we refuse to do. Publication sixty days apart instead of thirty gives us that much more time to read and select, removes the pressure of *having* to get a story, good, bad or indifferent.

It is a step we regretted to take, but we regret it a good deal less than we would to watch ourselves printing inferior stories. As soon as this condition changes, and we have reason to think it will, we hope to resume monthly publication. In the meantime, subscriptions will be extended. Our newsstand friends, we know, will be with us as before.

—The Editor

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



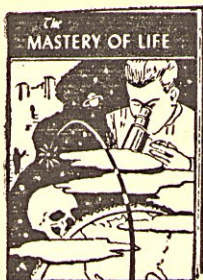
Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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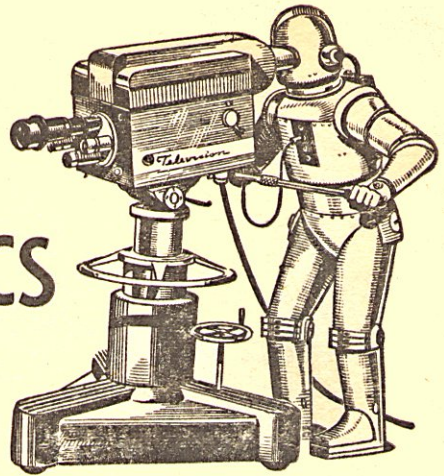
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Tee-Vee and Tri-Di

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



HOLLYWOOD, bidding fair to becoming a ghost town with the advent of tv, is now letting out its stags to breathe one hearty sigh of relief before settling down to the serious business of grinding out tri-di movies. Video, the villain of the piece, withdraws, twirling its mustache menacingly.

Variety, viewing the craze as "third dementia," is a little behind the science-fiction fans who can smile secretly and murmur, "We saw it first."

Tri-di is nothing new to the pages of science fiction, and depending on how long it takes for tv engineers to catch up with Hollywood and *Startling Stories*, the movie-makers can count on a few green years while the public sifts out its preferences in triple takes.

First on the recent scene was Cinerama, with pictures flashed on a cylindrical screen about six times normal size. Sound, originating from seven speakers, four of which are behind the screen, one at each side of the theatre and one in the rear, make it about as loud as it is realistic.

Cinerama uses a camera with three lenses, each with its own film magazine, and each photographing a third of the scene being shot. The three images, projected simultaneously, make the depth perception in Cinerama, as in life, a result of the wide-angle vision of the eye. Most serious drawback of the system is that, requiring three cameras to make ready, and

three to show, it involves scrapping much costly equipment.

Next to jump on the tri-di bandwagon was Arch Opler with his Natural Vision feature picture "Bwana Devil." While no artistic triumph, the fact hasn't detracted from the movie's fantastic box-office receipts, despite the inconvenience of polaroid glasses.

Out of the Victorian era's popular toy, the stereopticon, the British outfit called Stereo-Techniques has developed its tri-di technique. Two images, almost identical, but varying to the extent (and in the mathematical proportions) as do the two images seen by two eyes, are simultaneously projected upon a standard-sized screen.

Viewed through theatre-provided polaroid glasses, the images are filtered so that the eyes, as in life, transmit them as one. The systems that rely on special glasses are at a disadvantage, since the glasses detract from the comfort of the viewer and spoil the illusion of free observation.

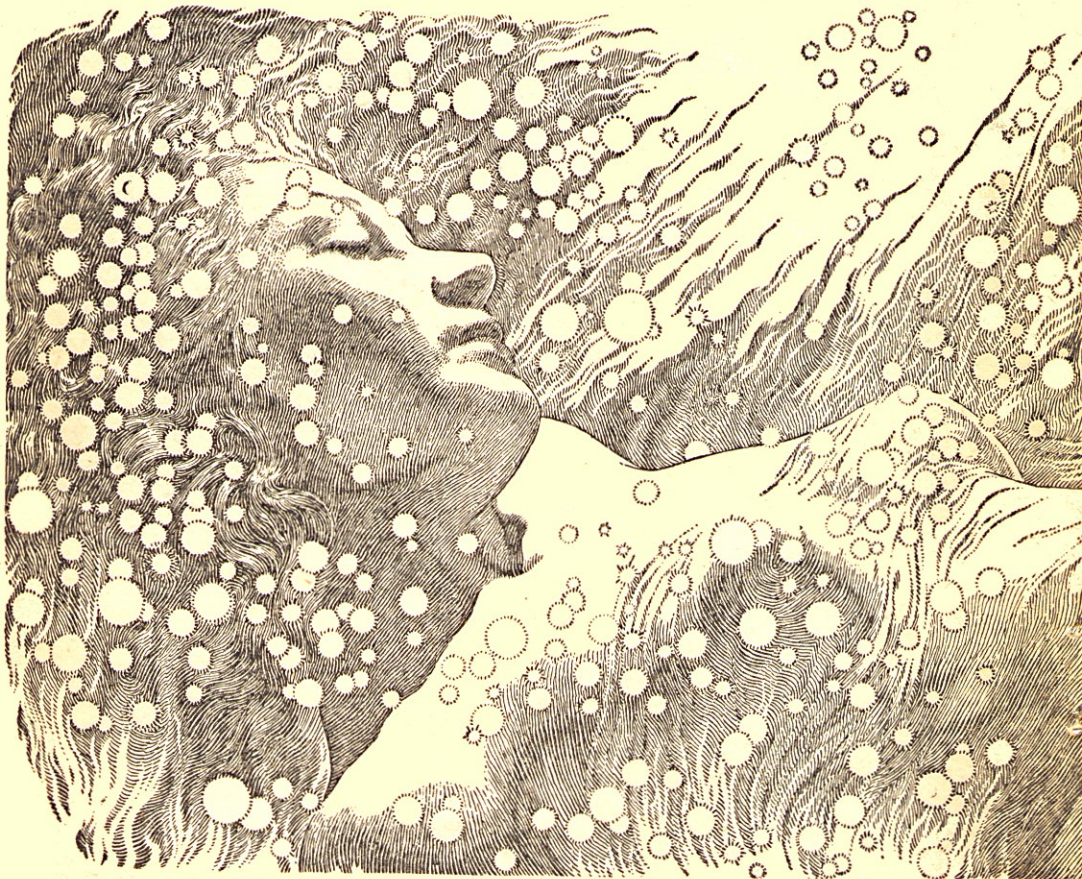
Cinemascope, the Twentieth Century-Fox entry in the tri-di derby, is a simple color film device which simulates third dimension on a concave screen giving a panoramic effect. It uses standard cameras and projection machines adapted through the addition of special lenses, and cuts production costs in this way.

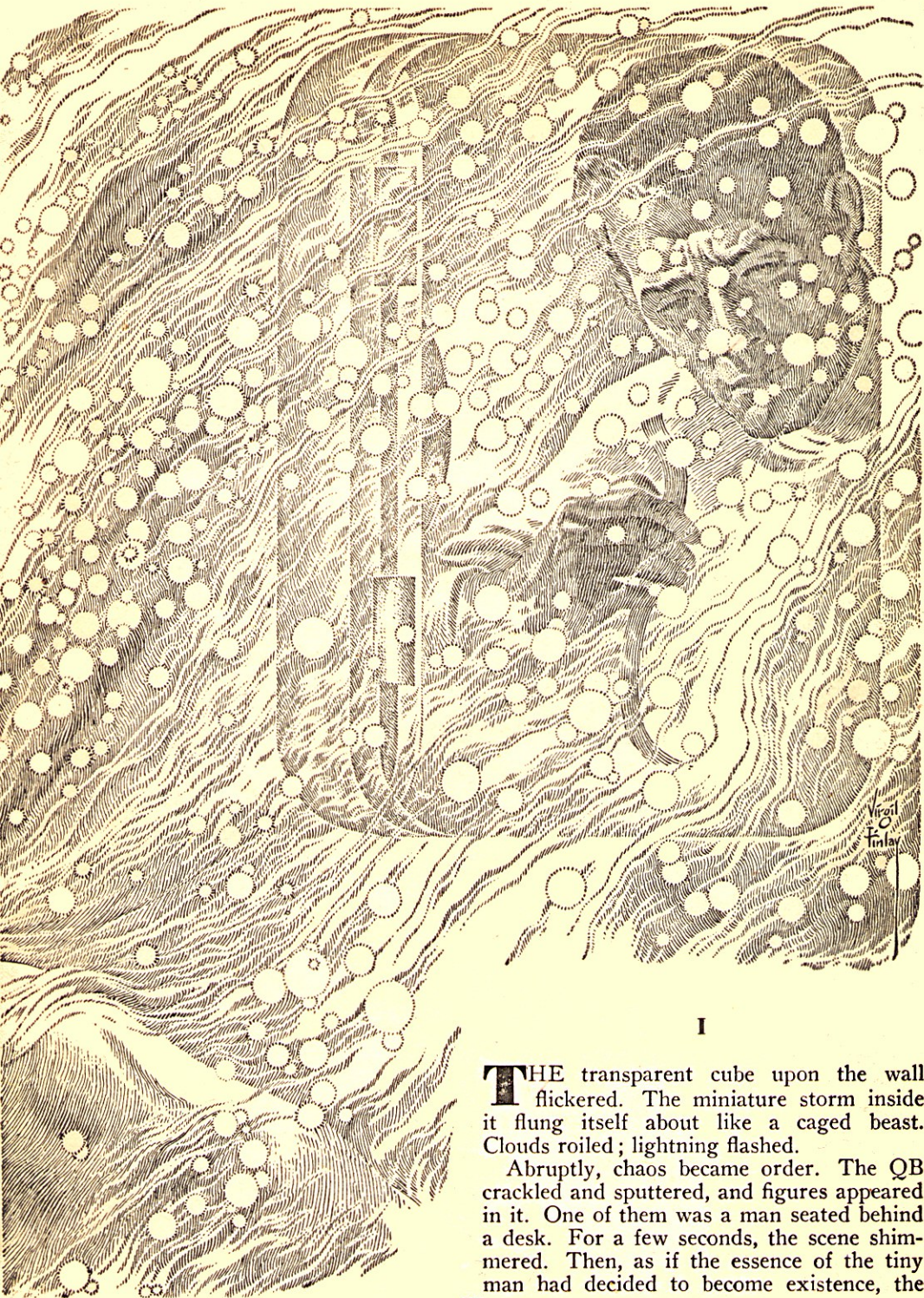
Who'll win the tri-di sweepstakes is anybody's guess. If you survive the eyestrain, what's yours?

*The patient was society itself, and Leif was
the surgeon who must cut to its rotten core*

Moth and Rust

A Novel by PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER





I

THE transparent cube upon the wall flickered. The miniature storm inside it flung itself about like a caged beast. Clouds roiled; lightning flashed.

Abruptly, chaos became order. The QB crackled and sputtered, and figures appeared in it. One of them was a man seated behind a desk. For a few seconds, the scene shimmered. Then, as if the essence of the tiny man had decided to become existence, the

figures became as hard and sharp-edged as fact itself.

The cube held the projection of a government gandy studio. The desk and the reporter behind it and the wall-sized portrait of Isaac Sigmen behind him were real as life. Even if only a sixth as large.

Dr. Leif Bark, sipping his breakfast coffee in his penthouse atop the Rigorous Mercy Hospital, sleepily watched the QB. The apparatus was daily becoming less efficient. He could call in the overworked techs. If they could requisition the needed materials—a big if—if they could have the QB working at ninety per cent efficiency. But the shoddy materials they would get could not keep it from slipping back to its normal seventy-eight per cent.

No, there was no use calling the techs. These out-of-focus happenings, these complete breakdowns, were signs of the times.

He sipped upon the skin-searing liquid.

Very good signs of the times, too.

He liked them. He was their prime mover, the spider who squatted in the center of the web and strummed the strands from time to time.

“. . . and it may or may not be real that Timestop will occur within a year,” the gandyman was honking. “But we’re authorized to say that events of the last six months seem to point to such a possibility. You all know what we’re referring to, the strange signs and portents that have been so numerous recently.”

Sleepily, Leif smiled. Yes, the Haijac Union’s government had itself started rumors of Timestop, the prophesied day that Sigmen would return from his travels through past and future to the present. That day would see the destruction of his enemies and the rewarding of his faithful. Every follower of reality would be given a universe of his own to play with; he’d have no more authority above him, no guardian-angels-pro-tempore to check on his every move.

The Haijac government had itself created events designed to take the citizens’ minds from long work and short pay.

But the Cold War Corps of the Israelis had caught the ball and was rolling it downhill, where it was causing an avalanche. They had a plan to make the rank-and-file Jack a fervent believer in the close arrival of Sigmen, the Fore-runner.

And when the citizenry was expecting Timestop every day, then watch out! For they’d not only get one Forerunner, they’d get a . . . and he drifted off into thoughts of the frantic efforts of the Jack bureaucracy to dam the flood they themselves had started. There would be nothing more upsetting, more revolutionary, than a man who sees his expected millennium proved to be a fraud.

That, plus one other important movement Leif was closely connected with, should wreck an empire.

HALFWAY through his second cup, the buzzer sounded. Disgusted, still blinking with sleep, he flicked the toggle. Immediately, the scene in the cube dissolved. The mist that replaced it flickered, was shot with quartz that ran the spectrum, and then cleared to a not-quite focus. The figure of his secretary, sitting behind her desk, ten stories down, was revealed.

Revealed, thought Leif Bark, wasn’t the right word. Not when a thick high-necked, floor-length dress covered the presumed figure. The virtues stamped upon her waxlike character by the Sturch had not been smoothed out in rubbing against her boss. Rachel was a *real* girl. You’d not catch her in any behavior that might possibly lead to a pseudo-future. She was *real*.

He stared at her. She blushed. That was the beauty of the QB. Color and everything.

“Yes?”

He felt like growling, but he smiled instead. If he could break his face into the desired joviality, he’d be all right the rest of the morning. By noon he’d be in high.

“Dr. Bark, there’s a Zack Roe who insists he’s to see you.”

Leif didn’t permit his smile to change. “His appointment is not until ten this

morning. Tell him he's made a mistake."

Another small figure entered the cube and looked at the little glass box upon Rachel's desk. Zack Roe was a tall and stooped man with grey hair and the OD's of a laborer. He spoke Icelandic with a slight accent that might be identified as Siberian.

He held his hat in his hand and ducked his head as he said, "Please, Doctor. I know I'm not here at the right time. But I forgot that today I start my purification rites."

"What're you doing here?"

ahead of everything else, and his role as a stupid shovelman would fit in with his apparent forgetfulness.

Leif strode through several rooms, furnished quite well for these drab and dismal days, and toward the elevator. His collie, Danger, leaped for him and was quite offended when his master only scratched his ears as he went by.

"Later," said Leif.

He pressed the button that would take the car down to the eegie rooms.

There was no reason to be alarmed at the unusual pattern of events, but still

~~~~~ a sequel to THE LOVERS ~~~~~

PUBLICATION of THE LOVERS, by Phil Farmer, in STARTLING STORIES for August, 1952, caused a small-scale revolution in science-fiction circles. Overnight the author leaped into national prominence; the story was discussed with animation and heat wherever science-fiction readers meet, including the letter columns of competing magazines; the author was immediately signed to a long-term contract by a book publisher; the frantic request for copies of the August issue began rolling in from people who missed it—and are still rolling in; and the editor of this magazine was threatened with bodily damage if he did not succeed in prying a sequel out of Mr. Farmer.

So, without further adieu, here is the sequel... How long will it be before we get screams for a sequel to the sequel?

—The Editor

"I thought maybe you could give me my tests now. That way we'd both be satisfied. I know these tests are important, doctor."

He ended with a giggle and bulging of his blue eyes.

Leif sighed and said, "Shib, I'll be right down. Rachel, tell Sigur to turn on the eegie, will you, please?"

Rachel said she would. Leif flicked the screen off, drank his coffee, though it scalded his tongue, and rapidly ate his seaham and eggs. Roe had given the key words—*that way*—which meant Leif was to contact him as fast as possible.

Something big was up. Otherwise, Zack would never have broken the pattern of his ways and thus given his gapt a reason for investigating him. He had a good excuse. Purification rites came

he felt uneasy. The Plan had been going well—almost too well, and now? But he must not allow an expression of anxiety to cross his face. What had he, a lamech-wearer, to be afraid of? He smiled, dismissed the thought from his mind and returned to the day's hospital routine.

He yearned for another coffee. And yawned. Yearn and yawn. He smiled to himself. He seemed to be doing a lot of both lately.

The door opened. He walked into Rachel's office. She said, "Good morning, doctor." He said, "Morning, any important mail?"

He didn't want to give the impression of haste. She, and others, might wonder about concern over a nonentity like Zack.

She said, "No letters, *abba*."

"Don't call me father," he said. "I'm only ten years older than you."

"It's to show how I respect you," she said, eyes downcast.

He lifted her chin and kissed her on the mouth. "Here's a fatherly buss. You get one every time you call me *abba*."

He chuckled and said, "And also as a reward for *not* doing so, you get a big paternal smackeroo every time you don't call me father."

"Doctor Bark! You mustn't do that!"

If she'd not been too prim to wear lipstick, her cheeks would have matched the flame of her mouth.

He grinned at her and said, "I'm taking unfair advantage of you because I'm a lamech-wearer. On the other hand, what's the use of being one, if you can't take advantage of it?"

Her mouth hung open. Leif, walking away, had no intention of closing it with another kiss. Beautiful, she was more cold candy than warm flesh. The man who broke down her defenses would find that he'd have done better to spend his time elsewhere. She wouldn't be good business; the overhead would be large; the basis for income would be chiefly frozen assets.

Ah, well, she was a human being and not responsible for all of what she was. He stepped into the elevator, turned, waved Rachel a cheery good-by, and dismissed her from his mind. Something big was brewing; probably his life was involved.

II

WHEN Leif entered the eegie room, he found that Sigur had seated Zack and had placed the tantalum helmet over the grey head. Zack exposed his buck-teeth and said, "Sigmen love you, doctor."

"A real future to you," replied Leif. He nodded, and Sigur pushed a button. The kymograph beneath the eegie began turning. From underneath it, a beep-beep noise sent a code.

"I'll ask the usual number of test questions," said Leif. "And you answer 'yes' or 'no.' I don't care whether or not

you tell me the truth. Later, I want you to indicate the true answers. Got it?"

"Yah," drawled Zack, "I ain't as dumb as you think, doc. We done that before, din't we?"

Leif glanced at Sigur. He was standing by the kymo, his back to the two, watching the stylos inking the alpha, beta, gamma, kappa and eta waves. The beeping continued; Sigur paid no attention to the noise which was there only to distract the subject and form part of the experiment.

"When were you born, Zack?"

"The third of Fertility, 1003," the horn bee-beeped.

Leif checked that in his notebook, then he winked at Zack.

"Answer the same question in English, Zack. We want to check any difference in the waves effected by using different tongues."

Zack complied.

At the same time, the beeps changed their pattern. Leif's ear picked it up at once.

"What took you so long, Leif? This is hot. You should have come running. Shib. Here's the message. Halla Dannto, the wife of the Archurielite, was hurt at 7300 in an auto collision. She was taken to the Rigorous Mercy Hospital. You're to get to her, fast. Fast. Get the doctor on call off the case. Call Ava.

"If Halla Dannto is dead, get her body without delay to the post-mortem room and cremate it. Don't let anybody besides Ava know you're burning it. Then go back to her room and act as if she's still alive.

"Get this, don't mention Halla's death to the woman who'll take her place.

"She'll be wearing an old-fashioned street veil when she comes in. Ask no questions besides the most necessary. Accept her as the real Halla Dannto. Got it?"

As if he were thinking of something, Leif nodded his head.

He said, "Now, Zack, next question."

Rachel rushed into the room.

"Doctor Bark!" she said breathlessly. "Doctor Trausti just called me and gave me a message for you. The QB didn't

seem to be working, so I brought it myself. You're to come down to room 113 at once. The wife of Archurielite Dannto has just been brought in, badly injured. Trausti wants you to take over."

Leif raised reddish eyebrows.

"Can't he handle it?"

"I suppose he thinks she's too important for him. Besides, she might die."

"And he wants me to take the responsibility for that?" said Leif, smiling. "Tell him I'll be right down. And, Rachel, get hold of my wife. Demand she drop everything, even if it's a baby, and get down to 113. Shib?"

He turned.

"Sigur, that cancels the experiments for the rest of the day. Tell the other subjects they can leave now."

HE STRODE from the room. Outside, he collided with a man who was standing just in front of the door. The fellow staggered backwards; Leif had a fleeting impression that the impact had not been that hard, that the man was exaggerating a little, acting.

"Pardon me," he said, and went to pass on. A strong hand upon his arm stopped him.

The stranger coughed and then said, "Doctor Bark?" His voice was high and slightly accented.

"I'm in a hurry. See you later," said Leif.

He absorbed the man with a glance. He liked to know who the people were around him, what they looked like, and what they were doing. Afterwards, he could give you the essential details.

Leif was struck. There was something *strange*, almost artificial about him. He was short and stocky with a very light skin and hair, light blue eyes. The lobeless ears were large, the nose a contradiction with its broad flaring nostrils and high arch. The lips were thick.

"What's your name?" demanded Leif. The fellow coughed.

"We . . . I mean I'm Jim Crew."

Leif caught the "we" and looked at the others sitting in the waiting room. A man and two women, all young, their faces looking enough like Jim Crew to

be his brothers and sisters.

"You're all here for the eegies?" he asked.

"No, *abba*," said Jim Crew. He looked at the others. Two of them closed their eyes. Their lashes were long and thick as spider's legs. Tension suddenly pulled up the slack in the air. Leif felt as if there were invisible threads drawing around him.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"*Abba*," said Jim Crew, "we've come to you because you're the only man in Paris who can help us."

Tall and slender, yet large bodied, one of the women rose to her feet. Her face leaped at Leif with a blonde and savage beauty. At the same time, her expression was strangely abstracted, a twisted peace, and, if you could picture flesh being such a thing, like a cubist painting of an ancient saint.

"Our child is dying," she crooned, low and throaty. Her thick lips trembled, slurring the words.

She held her hand out. Jim Crew took it. They said, together, "Our child has been struck by the same auto that killed Halla Dannto."

The third woman, still sitting on the divan, her eyes closed, moaned, "Our child is dying. Her skull is cracked open, and there is a splinter of bone pressing upon her brain."

The other man suddenly laughed. Following the evident distress of the others, it was shocking. Leif winced.

"It doesn't matter," the man said. "In one way, no. In another, yes. But if you don't come quick, our child will be dead."

Leif felt as if he were in a dream. He was impatient to get to Mrs. Dannto's room. Yet, he couldn't leave.

"What do you know about Mrs. Dannto?" he said. "How do you know she's dead?"

"We know," said Jim Crew. "We also know she lives again."

"I have to go to her," said Leif. "I'm sorry about your child, and I'll do all I can for her as soon as possible. What room is she in?"

"She's not here," replied the standing

woman. She opened her eyes. Bright and light blue, they shone with a glow that did not come from the bulbs overhead.

"Our child is in a room deep under the city."

"What is this all about?" barked Leif. "Tell me quickly. I've little time for nonsense."

The man on the divan said, "Nonsense such as we mean—" he saved his hand to take in the two women and Jim Crew—"is the only real sense."

Jim Crew smiled with big teeth and sad lips.

"She was struck by the auto that crashed into Halla Dannto's car. And we did not bring her here because that would have meant her death. And ours."

The tall savage beauty moaned, "And our child knew that she might be crushed, and that you might have to come to her and save her."

"I'm intrigued," said Leif in a deep voice, the cords on his muscular neck standing out. "But I don't know what you're talking about. And I'm beginning to wonder why you think I wouldn't call the Uzzites. You're evidently a case for them."

"You wouldn't do that," said Jim Crew.

"You couldn't," said the beauty. "We know. Our child knew."

"You'll come to the subways, to the sewers," said the second woman.

"Like H I will," said Leif. "If you want me to operate on your child, bring her here."

He strode away, brushing past Jim Crew.

AS HE went through the door, he halted in midstride, almost as if the air had jelled around him.

Out of the air had come an unsound, a voice that had no syllables borne on no air waves, yet unmistakably made itself heard.

"*Quo vadis?*"

He turned around.

"What are you doing?"

Jim Crew said, "Don't feel violated, Dr. Bark. We did it so you'd know we're

not . . . crackpots."

"Nor," added the savage beauty, "people to be slighted."

She looked at him, and he was suddenly filled with a grief that he could contain only by the most violent effort.

He didn't like it, and his face must have shown it, for in the next second it was gone, leaving him wondering if he had not been imagining it.

The man on the divan laughed loudly again. And Leif felt like laughing back.

He gripped the side of the door and squeezed. With the feel of strength came a summoning of rejection. They were looking at him now, all eight eyes blue with a glare that seemed to be a focus for something shining from inside them; a single light rayed through four pairs of peepholes. He wouldn't soak any of that light up. He was a mirror and was reflecting it back at them, unabsorbed. Master of himself, the way he wanted it, the way he *had* to have it.

"I truly would like to come," he said. "But if you know so much, you know I can't."

"Ah," breathed Jim Crew through that high-bridged, Gothic-nostriled nose, "but you can. Halla Dannto is dead. You can do her no good."

He felt as if the floor were slipping away from him. He was sure there should be only three who knew she had died; the interne, Zack and himself. And he and Zack weren't sure.

But he didn't have time to investigate them. Zack had been too insistent on the speed with which he got to room 113 and the secrecy he kept thereafter. Big things, dark things, were moving in the background, and he had no time to stop and talk.

He slammed the door and walked across the room to the QB. He dialed Rachel. The transparent cube projecting from the wall became cloudy, flickered, and solidified into a miniature of her office. And at once began flickering again.

"Rachel," he said, "did you get hold of Mrs. Bark?"

"Yes, sir," her voice said amidst the crackle of the machine. "She's coming right now."



Virgil
F. Tintal

From the moment she glanced at him, the air became charged

He twisted the dial and started to walk away when Rachel's voice called. "Dr. Bark. Wait! REK calling."

He turned and dialed her in again. This time, her image came in clearly.

"I'll tune you in with Archurielite Dannto," she said. He saw her press some buttons on her desk, and then her office faded away. It was replaced by another, a far larger and more luxuriously furnished one. The desk was huge and dwarfed the man standing behind it. Absalom Dannto was a big man with enormous shoulders, an even larger paunch, and a second chin quivering like the bag of a frightened cow. Leif smiled at the thought and then wiped it off, for the Archurielite was not a man to be trifled with.

His voice boomed, through lips distinguished by their absence, "Bark? I've just been told my wife was in an accident and that she's in your hospital. Is she hurt badly?"

Leif was surprised. The man seemed genuinely concerned.

"No, *abba*. I've just been told. You interrupted me on my way to her."

"Bark, there's nobody I'd rather have attending her. Get down there and save her."

Leif veiled his eyes. "I always do my best. No matter who the patient is."

"I know that. But for the sake of the Forerunner, do better than your best."

There was agony in his voice, and Leif could see through it to the man's naked concern.

"Whatever can be done, will be," said Leif.

He went to flick the switch that would cut them off, something nobody but himself would have dared do.

Dannto said, "Wait! I understand she was in an automatic taxi. I suspect unreal conduct on the part of the techs at the control center. So I've put Candleman, the chief Uzzite, on the case. He'll probably be down very shortly. Give him every aid so that we may track the culprits down. I'll be down in a few hours. Just as soon as I can get rocket-clearance. You've complete charge of Halla."

"Shib, *abba*," said Leif. "Does that include precedence over Candleman?"

"I said complete, Bark."

III

LEIF turned off the QB and strode through the halls, vaguely conscious that the nurses turned admiration towards him, that they liked his bigness, broad shoulders, curly yellow hair, easy smile. He talked and laughed without fear and did not try to catch them in some unreality or other. When he was around, you could unstring your muscles for a while and feel bright and human.

He stopped an elevator going up and stepped in. The nurse standing in it said, "Have you heard that Mrs. Dannto's been hurt?"

"That seems to be a very big secret," said Leif dryly. "I'm taking the car over because I'm on my way down there. You don't mind?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Would it make any difference?"

He pressed the button that sent it sliding downwards at emergency speed. "Not just now, Sarah. What else have you heard?"

"Dr. Trausti says she's dead."

Leif cursed inwardly, but he smiled.

"Mrs. Dannto can't die unless I give the official pronouncement, Sarah. And while I know it's unethical to question another doctor's judgment, it's possible that, being human, he's made a mistake. Also, being busy, he may not have learned of a new technique that has been very successful in ferreting out the dying spark of life in patients who have already been pronounced dead."

He lied, of course. But Sarah's mouth was as big as it looked. In a short time after he'd gone into room 113, she'd have spread it all through the hospital that that wonderful Dr. Bark was using a miraculous technique to bring Mrs. Dannto back from the dead. By the time the story got to the ends of Rigorous Mercy, it would have Halla Dannto hurrying out the front on her way to a tennis match.

Leif stepped from the car and sped

down the hall. He found 113 closed and knocked on the door. A group of nurses and orderlies were standing near. He shot a look like buckshot. They scattered.

Trausti opened the door. His long black hair fell down across his high, narrow forehead. He brushed it aside muttering, "There's something very strange here, Doctor."

Leif agreed with him. From the moment he'd gotten Rachel's call, events had been out of alignment.

"Here's what I mean."

He threw aside the sheet he'd draped over Halla Dannto's head. Leif sucked in his breath.

"Mrs. Palsson washed the patient's face when she was brought in. Her lipstick came off. *That* didn't."

Leif bent over the face, beautiful even with the mouth hanging open.

"Looks as if her lips were naturally pigmented," he said. "Scarlet, too, like a—well," he laughed and forebore for the sake of the modest young Trausti.

"What do you think it means?"

Leif thought fast. He had no more idea than the interne, but he had to satisfy him with something.

"Well, it may be a rare and perhaps harmless disease of extraterrestrial origin. Or maybe she's a native of the Hack colony on Matfef, a planet of Barnard's Star. I understand that the Jacks have had to adopt some strange customs there in order to satisfy the aborigines. Tattooed lips may be one. Have you any idea where Mrs. Dannto comes from?"

Trausti shook his head, his black hair falling across his face.

"Well," said Leif, "I would suggest that you and Mrs. Palsson keep this to yourselves. It might be that the Archurielite would not like it to get out. In fact, I *know* he wouldn't. He might even reward loose talk with a trip to H."

Trausti, naturally pale as a fish's belly, managed to whiten even more.

"I'll tell Mrs. Palsson."

"Do so at once," said Leif. "I'll take care of Mrs. Dannto from here on. You're through with the case."

"But she's dead, Doctor!"

"Perhaps. Close the door as you go out, please."

LEIF pulled the sheet back all the way to expose the naked and broken form of Halla Dannto. Trausti had left his X-ray strips on a chair. Holding them up to the light he saw that her left arm had been broken in two places, two left ribs snapped, compound fractures in her right thigh, and a broken pelvis. A jagged piece of metal must have stabbed into her solar plexus.

He turned and sank his index finger in the wound. It sank full length without resistance. That alone was enough to have killed her instantly.

Both Trausti and Palsson had seen her. What would they think, or, more important, what would they do, when they heard that Mrs. Dannto was convalescing from nothing more serious than a broken arm, slightly gashed solar plexus, and shock?

He cursed the Cold War Corps and its cell idea, where one man often hadn't the slightest hint of the overall plan and worked in the dark to carry out his particular segment. Here he was, a colonel of the Midi Republic CWC, originator of the plot that would probably send the Haijac Union to oblivion, and yet he wasn't allowed to catch more than a glimmering of the workings of his own campaign.

It was the price he must pay for working in the enemy's midst. If he'd allowed the brass to put him behind a desk down in Marseya, he could have seen the war as a whole; he'd been directing it. But since he'd insisted he wanted to work in Paris, where the danger was—youthful folly—he'd been sent there! That was twelve years ago when he'd been twenty-two and had just been handed his surgeon's license and a second lieutenant's buttons. Now eaglebeaked, big-bottomed fourstars with not half his brains were telling him what to do! Those modest thoughts raced through his head as he ran his hands over the once firm and vibrant flesh. Then he forgot them as the mystery of this wom-

an absorbed his attention. There were the deeply pigmented lips and something else he'd glimpsed when he'd looked into her gaping mouth. That was a fold of skin that hung laxly from her palate. Using a pocket flashlight, he lit the mouth up and then felt the fold. It was, he was sure, not a foreign growth.

He counted her teeth. Twenty-eight. Nor did there seem to be room for extracted wisdom teeth. Though the dentals were quite human, he wondered what shape the roots would be and what kind of pulp cavities they'd have. No sooner thought than done. He carried a scalpel and a pair of pliers in the inside pocket of his coat, not for emergency operations, though that was his excuse, but because he'd found in the past that scalpels were handy when attacked and pliers could be used for unwiring or rewiring alarm boxes and other machinery.

Defly he cut the gum away from a molar, seized it within the jaws of his pliers, and pulled hard. To his growing amazement and delight, for he had the true scientist's sense of wonder over new worlds, he saw it was not a modern, fang-rooted tooth, but a primitive plug rooted one.

He held it in the light and examined it attentively. Then he turned, intending to drop the tooth back into her mouth, when he was struck by her proportions. The legs were longer and the trunk shorter than in most women. And the breast was unusual—not hemispherical as most white women's, but conical, large and surprisingly firm. As he suspected, they were pigmented like the lips but were two shades lighter.

Two short knocks sounded at the door. A pause. Three raps.

Ava. . . .

HE OPENED the door. Ava came in. She was short and dark-haired and clad in a white uniform with a high collar and a hem that fell to her ankles. Her long, wavy hair was braided and coiled on top of her head. Her eyes were large and liquid and soft enough so that you would think a speck of dust lighting

on them would sink into their depths.

She said in a voice deep for a woman's, "What's going on, Leif?"

He told her what had happened. She said, "What are you doing with her body?"

"There's something strange about her. I think she's an extee from an unknown planet. Or one at least that our country hasn't told the general public—or even us—about," he said with a trace of bitterness.

"You misunderstand me," said Ava. "Should you be dissecting her now? You said the orders were to cremate her body as fast as possible, and no questions asked."

He shrugged.

"As a surgeon, I'd give my eye teeth to see the structure of the brain behind that lovely forehead."

"You'll give more than that if the Jacks find out who you are. Or, for that matter, if General Itskowitz finds out you're not following orders."

He laughed big and booming.

"Little watchdog, I do believe you'd turn me in to him. My own wife."

"Cut it," Ava said. "We're wasting time."

"You're right." He strode quickly into the hall, seizing a cart and wheeled it into the room. Without saying a word to Ava, he lifted the body and placed it on the cart. Then Leif took a sheet from the bed and covered her. But the cloth fell around her curves to reveal a shape obviously feminine. He was forced to turn her on her side and throw another sheet over her, crumpling it somewhat to hide the form beneath it as much as he could.

"Our problem is to get her down to the PM without anybody knowing whose corpse it is," he said. "Anybody died on this floor recently?"

Ava nodded and left the room. Leif "Don't turn that on. Use the commie only. No, wait. On second thought, you'd better go to the desk and look through the book yourself. If you call to ask about recent deaths, somebody might get suspicious."

Ava nodded and left the room. Leif

took out his pliers, which had a screw driver on one end, and unscrewed the QB box. It took his practised hand only a moment to loosen the wire making the box inoperative. He didn't want anybody to be able to look into the room and see what was going on.

IV

BY THE time he'd screwed the cube back on, Ava returned. "We're lucky," he said. "A certain Helgi Ingolf died ten minutes ago in 121."

"Does he go to PM?"

"Yes, he died raving and in a strait jacket. Shant is going to do a head-post. He suspects a brain tumor."

"Good. Strait jacket, huh? Listen, Ava, take that jacket off Ingolf. Bring it here. And while you're in Ingolf's room, call the floor above this and tell them our orderlies are busy and that you want two down here to wheel Ingolf's body to PM. Take Ingolf's tag from his toe—if there is a tag as yet—and bring it here. I'll tag Halla's body with his."

"You're still carrying that stiletto in your well-padded bra, aren't you? Carve a J. C. on Ingolf's chest, Ava. We're going to do a job of confusion again."

"J. C. again?" she said.

"Shib. Hurry."

While Ava was gone, Leif examined Dannto more closely. What he found this second time convinced him that he could not allow her body to go into the furnace without a thorough dissection.

Ava returned with the strait jacket concealed under a blanket.

"You're using this so you can conceal the fact she's a woman, yes?"

"You're so clever, honeypot," he murmured. "Though I doubt if we can really disguise her entirely. Would you be able to strap down the Himalayas?"

"Leif, sometimes you're revolting. Have you no respect for the dead?"

"No," he said. "If she were alive, she'd get every gram of respect—if any—that I've got. She's all woman. In fact, I don't think I've ever seen her equal, quick or not. Now, don't get

jealous, dear."

Ava sneered, and then both bent to their work.

They strapped Halla down and covered her again with the sheet.

"Still a woman. Well, turn her on her side again. And cover that foot so only the tag sticks out," ordered Leif.

"Listen, did you get the names of the two orderlies from 200? If they seem too curious, we'll have to find a basis for unreal thinking on their part and turn them in to the Uzzites. Or arrange an 'accident' through Zack."

"That reminds me. Trausti and Pals-son saw the wounds in her solar plexus. When her replacement gets here, they're going to wonder about that."

"*Tsavah!*"

"Ah, ah, Ava. No Hebrew. Especially no bad words."

"What I said goes for you, too," she said. "I'll say they're going to wonder. What'll we do? We can't accuse them of sabotage, for then they *will* talk. There've been too many *accidents*."

"What'll we do with the drunken sailor?" hummed Leif.

"Doesn't it worry you?" said Ava.

NEVER worry about me worrying," replied Leif. "I'm just big and happy-go-lucky. I don't think they'll talk; I put the fear of God in them; that is to say, of his earthly representative in Paris, Mrs. Dannto's husband himself. They know something's up, but they're afraid of offending his nibs."

"Will it work?"

"If it doesn't," he replied, "then—" and drew his rigid index finger across his throat.

"Here's what we do, Ava. Those two orderlies will wheel her body to the PM. I'll go along to make sure they note it's Ingolf's tag on the toe. I won't let them handle the body, because they'd be sure to know it's female. I'll tell them to leave the cart in the PM, that Shant wants it that way because he's got to move the body around for some unknown reasons of his own. They'll believe that; everybody thinks the pathologist's a little nuts, anyway. Then

I'll shove the body in the locker."

"Who's nuts now?" Ava cried. "Your orders are to cremate her as fast as possible. And why are you going along instead of me? Won't the orderlies think that's peculiar?"

"I'm going because I want to make sure she's not cremated," said Leif. "I couldn't trust you not to burn her. Listen, Ava, I'm going to take Halla Dann-to apart, and nobody's going to stop me.

"As for the orderlies, I'll tell them Ingolf died of a brain growth and I'm going to do a fast post. They'll not question that. I *am* a cerebral surgeon, remember."

"Good God," said Ava. "You're jeopardizing all the work of the CWC for twelve years just because of your damned curiosity."

"Possibly," he said, veiling his eyes with his heavy lids. "But I've always wormed our way out of jams in the past, haven't I? And you wouldn't turn your own husband in, would you?"

"Damn right, I would. I hate your guts."

"I love yours," said Leif, laughing and slapping her playfully at the same time.

Her dark face became filled with hate. "Your louse! You try that once again and I'll slug you."

"Temper, temper, little one. How well it becomes you! And how seductive you look. Well, let's go. Candleman might come here before we get rid of the body."

Ava forgot her anger.

"Candleman's coming?"

"Yes. If Halla's replacement doesn't get here soon, she may as well not show at all."

"They must have done a magnificent plastic job on her if she can fool her own husband," said Ava. "Or maybe she's a twin."

"Possible," said Leif. "What I'd like to know is how she could get here so fast. Do they have doubles on tap?"

"Who knows?" shrugged Ava. "You'd better get Halla out of here."

Leif opened the door and looked out. Nobody in the hall. "Wheel her out."

Just as Ava pushed the cart into the hall, two white-smocked men came around the corner. Leif beckoned to them.

"Take Ingolf's body to the PM," he said. "I'll be down in a second to do a head-post, so I don't want you to put him on the slab, just leave him on the cart."

He didn't think he should explain why. They were only orderlies; it would be acting out of his behavior pattern if he were to do so.

When the two had shoved the cart into the service elevator, Leif said, "Ava, you get Halla's replacement into bed as soon as she gets here. And if she comes while I'm still in the PM, call me. And tell the 100 orderlies to move Ingolf's body to the PM. I'll take the tag off Halla's toe so the 100 men won't get any funny ideas if they see it."

"We're quite the conspirators," said Ava. "We're getting so involved we're bound to be tripped up."

"Act like you're afraid of nobody," said Leif. "That'll get you out of anything in this country where everybody's scared."

"Yes, but these people can tell if you're afraid or not. They can't smell fear on you, because *you've* got the guts of an angel—or a devil. And I, to be frank, am always sweating with fear."

"Ava, you talk too much. But that's a common failing of women."

Ava looked furious. Leif laughed and walked down the hall to the elevator.

DOWN in the basement, he met the orderlies as they came from the PM. "Everything shib?" he asked.

"Shib, *abba*."

He said, "Wait a minute," and he pulled a pack of Fruitful Times from his pocket.

"I don't smoke, of course," he said, rubbing the lamech on his chest. "But I carry these for those who do."

They lit up, slightly ill-at-ease, yet pleased because he would take time out to talk with them. Leif discussed this and that with them, mainly the increasing rumors about the possibility of

Timestop and the Forerunner's return. Casually, he mentioned Ingolf and his interest in doing a head-post on him. He didn't have to ask them their names, for he knew everybody in the huge hospital who had worked there longer than a week. By the time they left, he'd convinced them that he was a *real* man in all the senses of the word and he'd left no doubt in their minds that the body was Ingolf's. If they were to be questioned later by the Uzzites, they'd swear to it.

As soon as they were out of sight, he entered the PM, checking first on the spy he'd installed inside a normal-looking switch box on the wall. It showed that three people had entered in the last half hour; two of course, were the orderlies. But who was the third? According to the coded information on the tape, the electrical discharge given off by the third one was very weak, almost undetectable. The time for the recording was the same as the others.

The conclusion was unavoidable. Halla was not, in the strict sense of the word, *dead*.

Leif admitted that he could be *wrong* about her death, but it just didn't seem possible. On the other hand, he couldn't doubt the spy. There must have been some sort of electrical emanation coming from beneath the sheet as they passed by.

Were Halla Dannto still living, she would pose an H of a problem—figuratively and literally. Her double should by now be installed in her bed; how would he and Ava explain two Mrs. Danntos?

They couldn't. The only course left was to extinguish the little spark still radiating from Halla's body.

Leif wondered if he could do it. When he'd gone into the CWC he'd sworn that he would, if the occasion demanded it, kill his own comrades. The Plan was above everything else.

Yet, he told himself, he was disrupting the Plan by his ideas for dissecting Halla. And if she should still be alive, he couldn't see himself not trying to fan that remaining spark.

He locked the PM door, took off the covering sheet, untied the strait jacket, and put it in the cremator. He went over her painstakingly with the stetho. No beat. When he passed the life-detector over her body, it was silent until he came to her abdomen. Suddenly, and startlingly in the chill silence of the PM, it buzzed.

He checked the voltage. Only the extremely delicate detector could have picked up the faint sound. Though Halla was beyond hope obviously some part of her still lived.

LEIF scowled. It was absolutely imperative that he put off the dissection until he'd seen Halla's replacement installed and Candleman taken care of. But once he'd done that, he would find the emanation had flickered out, and he wouldn't know where it had originated.

With quick decision he wheeled the cart to the slab. Putting on a smock, face-mask and rubber gloves, he selected several scalpels and a pair of Mayo scissors from the rack. With the ease of long practice he made the incision from the notch at the base of the neck to the pubic symphysis. The skin and muscles peeled away from the breastbone and ribs, and the latter clipped free, he swung the whole up like a drawbridge. With no apologies to Halla for so rudely covering her face with her ribs, he bypassed the pleural sac and opened the abdominal cavity.

He observed the position of the organs *in situ* so that later he could make a sketch from memory. He swung the detector over the various exposed members. When it buzzed furiously, he lowered it until he'd located the source of the emanation.

He was enraptured by what he saw. Outwardly human, the woman was anything but that internally. There were, of course, many organs easily identifiable, because similar functions often lead to analogous structures.

The organ that still radiated "bio-electricity"—a rapidly weakening force, as the detector's lessing buzz indicated—was just above the uterus, adjacent to

the bladder. It was a gray, roughly cylindrical organ, rounded at the ends, and mottled with reddish-black spots.

He removed his glove and felt the organ. It was rough, ridged with many knobs. It did not give him the shock he'd expected, even though blood was plentiful as a conductor. Experimenting, he held the nose of the detector to the cylinder with one hand and with the other he squeezed it rhythmically. As he'd suspected, the contractions and expansions generated a current.

The nerves from that body would conduct a very strong force. But for what purpose? What was its function? Reproductive, perhaps, but he couldn't be sure.

The thought flashed that he could find out. The girl who'd be taking her place would, or should, be of the same kind.

The thought galvanized him. He hosed off the body, wrapped it in the sheet, locked it in one of the drawers in the freezer and wheeled the empty cart back out into the hall. There he found another with Ingolf's body beneath a sheet. He moved it into the PM, lifted the sheet to satisfy himself that Ava had cut two deep and large initials upon its chest and had also left the stiletto stuck in his ribs.

Evidently she had given the orderlies instructions to leave the body outside in the hall. Supposedly, the men would think that Shant or some other doctor was busy inside and did not want to be bothered.

Leif didn't like the whole setup. It was too complicated. Only the simple plans allowed you to see all the details in one sweep. The complex were too hard to clean up; they left clues for the keen-nosed hounds of the Uzzites to sniff out.

A good thing General Itskowitz couldn't see him now, he thought. He'd be yanked out of Paris and back to Marseya before you could say Jude Changer.

V

WHEN he stepped out of the elevator onto the floor 100, he saw that

he'd delayed too long over Halla's body. A very tall man, half a head higher than Leif, was coming down the hall. He was stooped, and his neck was bent forward as if he were running to keep pace with the eager head. The face was long and narrow—hawk-nosed, and thin-lipped, shadow-eyed. He looked like a blond Dante.

The Uzzite's long and slender hand with its thin and transparent-skinned fingers was curled around the *crux ansata* handle of the whip stuck in his broad black belt. His eyes were grey beasts poised in the caverns beneath his tufted eyebrows. When they saw Leif, they did not lose any of their crouched-to-spring wariness.

"Candleman!" cried Leif.

The Uzzite dipped his beak in acknowledgment and walked on to the door of 113. When it would not open to his shove, he knocked on it.

Leif said, "You must make as little noise as possible. Mrs. Dannto is not to be disturbed."

Candleman's voice was deep. "She is still alive?"

Though his face did not change, he gave Leif the impression of surprise.

"Why not?" said Leif. "She's suffering from nothing more serious than a broken arm, a gash in the solar plexus, shock, and loss of considerable blood. Just now she's under a sedative."

"Strange," muttered Dante-face. "I was told she was dead or dying."

"Who told you that?" demanded Leif tartly. If Trausti or Palsson had been talking. . . .

"One of my men. He came to the scene of the accident shortly after it happened. And he was certain that Mrs. Dannto couldn't live."

"Your men are not medically trained," said Leif. His eyes clashed with Candleman's.

"I want to see her and satisfy myself that she's all right," said the Uzzite.

"You may take my word for it," said Leif.

"I insist."

"I am her physician," said Leif. "I have Dannto's word for it that I'm to be

in complete charge of her case."

"Dannto?"

"Yes."

CANDLEMAN took the seven-thonged whip from his belt and began to swish it with gentle menace through the air. He said, "Very well, then, but I can, at least, see her through the QB."

"It's not working," said Leif. He grinned. Candleman stared bleakly; it was probably the first time anybody had dared to mock him.

"Why?"

"Ask the tech responsible."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know," said Leif. "I can tell you the names of all the techs in this hospital. It's easy because we've only six. And we need four times that number."

Candleman said, "I know there's a shortage of techs. Everything seems to

be breaking down nowadays, and we haven't enough men for repair. We need new and larger schools for techs."

"Why should young men go into them when the tech professions are so hazardous?"

"What do you mean?"

"This," said Leif, heart pounding delightedly at this baiting. "If anything breaks down, the machinery is not suspected. No. The tech is. He is at once under the suspicion of sabotage. He is thought to be an enemy of reality, perhaps even a paid agent of the Izzies. He is hauled off and questioned. While he's being held, the additional burden of maintenance and repair falls on the shoulders of his already overburdened co-workers. If he can't answer the Uz-zites satisfactorily, and their questions are so phrased that even if he's innocent he's likely to get rattled and not give the correct ones, he's sent to H, wherever or whatever that is. [Turn page]

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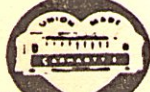
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"If he is released, and that happens about two-thirds of the time, he's still under surveillance. That puts him under a nervous strain. If more breakdowns occur, and they're bound to, because of the present shortage of techs and materials, he'll get blamed. Back he goes to the Uzzite rooms, and so on. The result is that many of the techs are quitting. Or trying to. The Sturch won't allow them to, of course, unless there's been a lowering in their efficiency or moral rating. The tech is caught. If he deliberately lowers his efficiency, he's accused of unreality. And so on. He can conduct himself so that his gapt gives him a lower moral rating, and he's dismissed to the ranks of the unskilled.

"But that means a harder life, smaller living quarters, less food, less prestige. He doesn't want to do that. He keeps on, but he's nervous now. His work suffers. He's investigated. Back he goes to the Uzzite questioning rooms."

Leif was talking as much as he could. He wanted to keep Candleman busy.

Candleman swished the thongs through the air.

"Am I to understand you are criticizing the Sturch?"

Leif rubbed his lamech. "When I'm wearing this? You know that that's impossible! No, I'm merely telling you why techs are hard to find."

Candleman turned and called, "Thorleifsson!"

A stocky young man stepped from around the corner.

"Yes, *abba*."

"Find out the tech responsible for the QB maintenance on this floor. Ask him a few questions about the QB in room 113, but make no arrests. We might want to detain him later, though."

The lieutenant saluted and left. Candleman wheeled on Leif.

"The Sandalphon asked me to investigate, Bark. I can't intrude upon your medical handling of this case, but I can demand that you at least allow me to satisfy myself that Mrs. Dannto is in that room."

The doctor's brows rose.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Bark, I'm a man who *never* takes anything for granted. I've only your word that she's in there. I trust no man's word. Only my own eyes."

"There are some things you've got to take on trust—or go insane," said Leif.

He called softly through the door. "Ava. Let me in."

HE HOPED Ava would have sense enough to realize why he wasn't using their code knocks. He didn't want to give that away to the human bloodhound whose eyes he could feel biting his back.

The door swung part way open. He grabbed the knob with a firm grip so it wouldn't open any further and let himself in, edgewise. Candleman stepped up close and peered over Leif's shoulder.

"There she is," said Leif. "Are you satisfied?"

He should have been. The woman in bed had the same mass of rich auburn hair that Halla Dannto had. And the face, in the dim light, looked exactly like the dead woman's.

Candleman said nothing but sucked in his breath. He was still staring when Leif shut the door in his face.

On the other side, the doctor breathed relief. "When did she get here?"

"About a minute after you left. I thought you were never coming back."

Leif walked over to the bed. The girl had opened her eyes and given him a half-smile. He smiled back, but inside he felt that this was the cap to all the shocks he'd gotten that day.

This girl was a live ringer for Halla in more than one way. She tolled bells; he'd never seen such a beauty.

"Have you any messages for us?" he asked.

"None except that you're to call me Halla all the time. Until my sister recovers from her accident and takes back her proper place."

Leif hoped he hid his surprise. So they hadn't told her the truth. Poor girl. It was what had to be done, though. If she had to struggle to hide her grief while carrying out this deception . . . he shrugged and hoped he wouldn't have to

be the one to tell her. He couldn't stand a woman's tears.

"Ava," he said, "I see you've put a splint on her arm. That was smart, but it might not be enough. We may have to carry this out to a realistic conclusion."

While Ava spoke over the commie, Leif picked up the sheet over Halla and laid it aside. Her large grey-blue eyes widened, and she opened her mouth.

He said, "Untie that gown, will you? It's necessary that I examine you."

"Why should it be?"

Her voice, even when alarmed, as now, was a creamy contralto. It had fingers that knew where his nerves were and plucked them like harp strings so that a delicious chill ran down his spine.

"Your sister was injured in certain places," he said. "Trausti saw her, and he knows where she was hurt. I've got to determine just how I can duplicate the appearance of those injuries without actually hurting you."

He hoped it sounded plausible. Whether it did or not, he was determined to check the resemblances between the impostor and her dead sister.

"But who besides you is going to check on those injuries," she asked. "Mrs. Bark and yourself will be the only ones."

"You're not acquainted with medical procedures," he said. "We've no time to argue. As your superior, I order you to disrobe. Believe me," he said, smiling to soften the effect, "I don't like to command you. But it's necessary."

Ava had turned from the commie and was watching him. She was probably wondering just what he was up to.

Halla showed no signs of obeying him.

He said, "Halla, I won't hurt you. I'm L. Bark and no bite."

She tried to stifle the giggle, but it came out anyway.

STILL smiling, Leif reached out to untie the cords of the unlovely hospital robe. The spurious Halla brought up her leg and kneeed him expertly in the chin. Half stunned, he reeled back.

Ava laughed and said, "You lecher-

ous goat. That's good enough for you."

Leif held his jaw and reflected that she was modest because of one of several factors. One: she knew that a doctor could tell by a close surface examination that she wasn't human and she didn't want him to know that because the CWC had ordered her to keep her origin secret, or, two: she was actually shy and didn't believe his story, or, three: both factors were behind the powerfully driven leg. Whatever it was, Leif had to admire her spirit.

"My first contact with you has impressed me very much, Mrs. Dannto," he mumbled. "I hope you didn't hurt your knee?"

She laughed again and the vocal fingers strummed something deep within him.

"I think I like you, Dr. Bark, even if you're up to no good and consider yourself something of a Don Juan. If I have to be examined like a fatted calf, let your wife do it. You see, doctor, I know *why* you want to scrutinize me."

"Then you know my reason is purely professional."

"Not purely," she answered.

Leif turned to Ava.

"Lucky girl."

Ava's black eyes sizzled.

He laughed as if at a secret joke, and when Ava scowled, he slapped her again with mock rebuke.

"For the sake of the Forerunner, be serious, Leif," said Ava.

"The only thing I'm serious about is not being serious," he replied. "Listen, dear, I'm going back to PM. I've some unfinished business there—" he gestured significantly at Halla—"and I'll be back as quickly as possible. Whatever happens, keep Candleman out."

"Why in H didn't you do it when you were down there?" Ava demanded.

Leif said, "I know I'm doing wrong, but I can't help myself. The scientist has triumphed over the soldier."

He turned to give his "patient" one last glance. She had sat up and thrown her hair back with a toss of her head. She looked proud as a queen is supposed to look. Leif opened the door and

slipped quietly out, knowing that never again would he be able to leave her without a sense of loss. He'd never felt that way before about any woman.

BEFORE he went to the PM, Leif stopped off at the pathologist's office. There was a chance that Shant might be wanting to do a post on Ingolf at once. Leif intended to tell him that he was going to open the man's skull himself. Shant was one of the few persons in the hospital he didn't like; he made no pretense otherwise. It wouldn't be the first time he'd cut the pathologist out of an interesting post.

He hadn't used the QB to call Shant because he imagined that Candleman had put a censor on. He didn't want anybody storming in on him while he was PM-ing the real Halla.

Shant was gone. Leif feigned a certain degree of displeasure because he wasn't there when wanted and then left. The secretary would tell Shant about it, and the pathologist would keep out of his way for a few days.

When he got to the PM door, he checked the spy-register. It showed nothing. That wasn't surprising, for someone had wiped the magnetic tape clean. A little dial in one corner of the box indicated that that had taken place less than three minutes ago.

Leif was glad he'd insisted on Ava's installing that device. Checking was good; double checking even better.

The door was locked. Either the person who'd entered had wiped the tape after he'd left the room, or else had obtained a key from one of the authorities. The latter was more probable, which meant that the stranger was an Uzzite. Candleman, or one of his lieutenants, was on the prowl.

Leif didn't hesitate. He inserted the key and pressed the little button at its end. The other end emitted a frequency of 1500, neutralizing the magnetic field that locked the metal edges of the door with the steel doorframe. Leif was taking a chance, for if the prowler within had taken the trouble, he could be warned of anyone entering. Uzzites

wore wristboxes with such warning devices. Set to the door's frequency, they would emit an alarm should another key of the same frequency be turned on nearby.

Knowing the Uzzite's arrogance, Leif doubted if the officer would bother. After all, they had the right to enter any place except a lamech-bearer's home.

He was right. As he silently swung the door shut behind him, he saw Thorleifsson's chunky form bending over the end of the drawer that held the body of the original Halla. His key had unlocked the box; he was just beginning to slide it out.

Ingolf's unsheeted form was lying beneath the harsh central lights. The stiletto projected from his ribs, and the deeply gashed initials could be seen across the room. Thorleifsson had made quite a discovery.

Uzzites carried minimatics whose supersonic bullets, though capable only of short range, would shatter the nervous system of any man they struck. Leif didn't give him a chance to use it. As he strode catfooted towards the bent back, he drew the long scalpel from his inside coatpocket.

Leif had gained a certain reputation for eccentricity, a highly calculated one. For one thing, he refused to wear the calf-length boots of the average doctor. He preferred sneakers and wore them. His fellow workers thought it was comfort he had in mind. He did, partly. Silence was what he mainly wanted, and what he got now as he approached the broad back.

Thorleifsson never suspected that a man could get close enough to drive sharp steel into his heart. He died without rising to his feet.

VI

WHILE Thorleifsson's flesh and bones dissolved under alternating electric shocks and sonic blasts, Leif removed all traces of blood and looked for anything else that might give away the Uzzite's presence. Then, with quiet stealth he took Mrs. Dannto's body from

the locker and placed it on the slab. As he worked he wondered about the lieutenant's appearance. Had Candleman sent him because he'd heard a report from Trausti? Or had one of the orderlies thought that Ingolf's body looked suspiciously curved beneath the sheet?

He didn't know. It might be anything. Whatever it was, Leif intended working until the last possible moment.

After he'd donned gown and mask and gloves, he prepared slides of blood and tissue. While the Labtech machine analyzed samples, Leif turned to the slab and began his head-post, cutting fast. His time was short; he wouldn't be able to do a half-decent job. But he had to find out *something* about this strange woman.

Leif tried to shake off all interfering thoughts and concentrated on his work. Neither a philosopher nor morbidly inclined, he found himself oppressed by the silence, the harsh light, the cold, and the unresponsiveness of this pathetic specimen. Even the passion of the quest for knowledge did not absorb him enough. Soundless voices spoke; chill tongues choked moribund syllables; the penetration of the steel evoked a fluttering of protest, a shapeless gainsaying.

He was reminded of the encounter early that morning with the pale-eyed and flare-nostriled four and the impact of the "*Quo vadis?*" that had stopped him in stride. At any other time he'd have bayed after those unique creatures with the relentlessness of the indefatigably curious. He was sure they held the key to something, but the maddening squirrel cage he was trapped in wouldn't allow him to reach for it.

He must be getting weary. Those last two thoughts were as mixed in metaphor as you could get. On the other hand, what was life but one mixed metaphor after another?

He bent to his work. The mass of rich auburn waves rolled back under his fingers and thumbs. Underneath the soft flames was a thick and fat layer much like an orange peeling. He'd barely folded back the scalp before he was stopped by two small bumps hidden under her

hair. When he'd sliced through those he found that two nerve cables ran from them into the very small holes in her skull.

Excited, forgetting the apprehension of the moment before, he finished stripping her cranium and applied the roaring edge of a circular saw to her skull. His unorthodox cutting pattern was intended to expose as much of the brain as possible for a hasty glance. The membrane of the dura water removed, the brain seemed similar in structure to a Terran's. But he was convinced that a closer examination would show many differences.

Fervently, he wished he had the chance to analyze it. He didn't. There was nothing else to do but go on and note the more radical departures. However, he wasn't so fast that he escaped seeing that the nerves from the two scalp bumps connected both to the forebrain and the middle. Would he ever know their function?

The Labtech clicked for attention. Leif ignored it. He would read its findings later, and all at once. He was determined now to know this woman as he'd never been determined to know a live woman.

She had been lovely as few women are, and now he, ruthless male, with the untiring and passionate knife, had deprived her of that loveliness in an even more shameful way than Death could have done.

"Forerunner," he muttered to himself in the room's cold silence, "what's the matter with me? I'm no damn sentimental anthropomorphist, but something tonight has sure gotten into me."

HE WONDERED if it could have been the reaction from killing the Uzzite. He doubted it, for he'd felt no revulsion at sinking the blade into that apelike back. The deed had been that of one soldier slaying another; both were acting in the line of duty. Besides, he'd deliberately murdered two high officials on the operating table. It had been his decision; he'd not done them on orders from Marseya. The two men had to be

put out of the way so that CWC agents could move up in the hierarchy to take their place. Inasmuch as the two were lamech-bearers, they could not be accused of unreal thinking and thus sent to H. So Leif had murdered them. It was an indication of his professional ethics that he used the verb *murdered* and not a military euphemism.

Whatever was bothering him, it had sliced into his skin as surely as his knife was dividing flesh from flesh.

He shrugged again and bent over his work. The ribs had been raised, like a drawbridge. He counted twelve pair, true and false, the human number—but they were darker than they should have been, so he deposited one in the Labtech.

The heart was extraordinary in that it had, not the expected four chambers, but five.

It was when he delved into the valley of the pelvis that he found his treasures.

There was a very large organ that he thought must be the only ovary. It was located centrally, and it had no oviducts, no Fallopian tubes, no genital canal. How then, the thought at once arose, did she become pregnant?

Or was this an abnormal structure? Was it his luck to be examining an atypical specimen. He was frustrated; he had no one to compare her with except the second Halla upstairs. And if she were a twin, she would probably have identical abnormalities.

Further examination showed a cloacal canal characteristic of primitive amphibians, birds, reptiles, and certain mammals. Yet she was a highly developed creature.

When he excised what he supposed was an ovary, he discovered that a thick cable of nerves ran from its posterior to the spinal ganglion. He would probably remain forever ignorant of its function.

The Labtech clicked again; a green light flashed. He turned and began reading the tape.

The red pigment, as he'd suspected, was a carotinoid substance. The formation of the hair was much like a human's

in its structure, but the horny material, keratin, that forms so much of the exoskeletal tissues of vertebrates, was composed of stuff similar in molecular make-up to chitin, the basis for the shells of invertebrates.

Leif's eyes widened at that, for he had had no doubt that the woman, though XT, belonged to the class of mammals. He had two excellent reasons for thinking so.

With mounting excitement he read the blood register.

The blood cells were regular in shape and normal in count, but the machine, which had been set to give as complete a report as possible, not just the routine, analyzed the oxygen carrying element in the red cells as magnesium.

Leif was Balboa. Wild surmises stampeded. All the intelligent XT's found so far—the neanderthaloids of Gemma, the avians of Albireo, the amphibians of Nusakan, the poltergeists of Barnard's Star—used iron in their red blood cells.

Another thing. The magnesium should have given the blood a green or bluish-green tinge. Where, then, did Halla's get its redness? Was there a red pigment flowing through the bloodstream? Why? Protective coloration? Or some other factor?

The only Terran animals he knew that had loose pigment flowing in their blood were certain arthropods. And that pigment was itself the oxygen carrier. Here he had found highly developed red cells.

He inserted samples of tissue and gland into the Labtech. Was the organ a mammary? He dialed for an answer.

And the answer came back in thirty seconds. *No.*

What is its closest equivalent?

It appeared to be a gland similar to that which produced the hormone controlling the calcium metabolism in humans.

Deeper and deeper.

Though the eyes looked normal, the close scanning of the electronic viewer inside the machine had shown that there was a tiny aperture, in the center of the pupil.

AS LEIF examined the eye, he couldn't make out the reported hole.

Probably, he mused, it was a vestigial organ—an evolutionary hangover—like the fold of skin on her palate, which was no longer functional. The only analogous structure he could recall among the animal world was the pinhole eye of the nautilus, which allowed light to fall upon the retina in the back of the eyeball. Perhaps at one time, the unorthodox ancestors of this woman had had such an optical organ.

And perhaps not.

There remained only one part he could afford time to consider. He deposited the cylindrical "battery" and the strange ganglion in the Labtech. Five minutes later, he seized the tape and read:

LD NDQ

Lack data. Need different questions.

That was too bad. He didn't know what to ask.

Death and the knife had analyzed Halla. The questions he would like to ask were not for machines to answer. Life . . . death . . . and the narrow margin between. Why . . . why . . . how?

Pausing only for a silent reflection on the transience of beauty, Leif paid his respects to the dead woman, and consigned her remains to the crematorium.

The body burned, the Labtech's tapes wiped, Leif stripped off his working clothes and put them in the furnace. Then he hosed down the walls and the floors. The only object he did not cleanse was Ingolf, still waiting upon the cart. When the sterilization was complete, he pushed the corpse back into the hall and from there took the elevator up to 100.

There he found Candleman, standing motionless outside 113.

"Where have you been?"

Leif raised his brows.

"I consider that question impertinent," he said, "but since I am anxious to contribute to clearing up the mystery of this accident, I'll answer you."

Leif stepped to the door, knocking softly.

Candleman said harshly, "Well, aren't you going to speak?"

Leif pretended to start. "Ah yes, I was preoccupied."

He watched the man for a sign of annoyance, but the face was as fixed as a gargoyle's.

"I've been dissecting a man who died of a brain tumor," he said. "Part of my work recently has been correlating changes in brain waves with injuries of certain parts of the brain. Most interesting."

Ava opened the door; at that moment a nurse, coming down the hall, called Leif. She held a slip of paper in her hand and a wrinkle on her brow.

Turning, his hand on the knob so Candleman couldn't get in, he said, "Yes?"

"Dr. Bark, the head nurse of 100 noticed a discrepancy here. Two orderlies from 200 were called down to remove a Mr. Ingolf's body to PM. But she knows that two of our men did that. She noticed the discrepancy when 200's head QB'd her to ask if she'd check the orderlies' movements. She suspects one of unreality."

Leif let his breath out softly. He'd lost this round. There was a ninety-to-one chance that it would never have been detected in the mass of quadruplicate reports. But one of the boys was thought to be unreal; a term that could cover anything from murder to laziness or stupidity. Probably the latter.

Candleman watched him closely. That might not mean anything. Those fierce grey eyes fastened their claws on everything. There was a chance, however, that the Uzzite had told the nurse to carry this news to him so that he might surprise Leif in some telltale word or gesture.

HE LOOKED her in the face. Her right profile was presented to the Uzzite; she must have felt safe, for her left eyelid winked. Candleman *had* put her up to it.

Leif's policy of making friends with the personnel had paid off. That she was willing to take a chance with the dreaded Uzzite's eyes on her warmed him. It

just was not true, as some of his associates swore, that none of these people were worth saving.

"Well," said Candleman.

Leif shrugged. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

They glared into each other's eyes.

Impasse.

But at that moment the click of angry heels echoed down the hall. A little bald-headed man with a big nose bounced before Leif.

"Dr. Bark, what's this I hear about you doing a post on Ingolf?"

"That's true, Dr. Shant."

Shant shrielled, "You're crowding me, Dr. Bark. I asked that I be allowed to do the post."

"He died of a cerebral tumor; I'd been eegieing him for several weeks," said Leif. "I was interested. Furthermore, as head gapt of this hospital, I don't have to get your permission."

Shant bounced up and down, tap-danced, heels clicking. "Nevertheless, you should have been ethical enough to ask me to assist."

"Shant, you weary me. Shuffle off, will you?"

Leif felt someone pushing the door from within. He stepped aside enough to let Ava by.

Her finger was on her lips; her big shimmering eyes, concerned.

"Gentlemen, I must ask you to be quiet. Mrs. Dannto needs all the sleep she can get."

Candleman flowed out of his crouch. Straightening his long back, he said, "You're right. The welfare of the Archurielite's wife comes first. I suggest, Dr. Bark, that you spend more time attending to her and less to dissections."

"I don't tell you how to conduct your profession. Please keep your long nose out of mine," snapped Leif.

Shant and the nurse gasped. You didn't talk to an Uzzite like that.

Candleman's face was passive as a wax dummy's.

"Anything that concerns the Archurielite is my business. And I'm beginning to think that some of your actions

are very much my concern."

"Think as you please," said Leif and propelled Ava into the room and then stepped in after.

When the door was shut, Ava said, "You fool."

"Do you want me to cringe?" said Leif. "How do you think I got where I am today? I tell you, if you act like you're not afraid, these people think you must be somebody, and they're scared of you."

"You go too far."

"Never mind. Remember, I'm your superior. Refrain from telling me off, even if you are—" he laughed—"my wife."

"Halla," he said to the girl as she sat up, "I want you to take a lotus pill."

"Why should I?"

"Are you or are you not under my orders?"

"I am, as long as they don't interfere with my prime directives. One of them is to keep my real identity secret. I think you're showing too much curiosity."

"Take this."

"It's not a truth drug?"

"Take it. Or I'll break your arm while you're still conscious."

Her eyes widened.

"You mean it."

"Shib, I do. Do you think that bloodhound outside isn't going to check the X-ray files and see if your arm really is broken?"

"Why can't you pick out somebody's from the files and show them to him?"

"We can't take that chance. He'll check on that angle. We're in too much of a jam now. What with two Ingolfs and the fact that Trausti or Palsson might talk."

"Two Ingolfs?"

"Never mind," he said, as he realized he'd almost exposed the fact that her sister was dead. "The less you know about that, the better. You're supposed to be Mrs. Dannto, remember? Even if Ava and I are tripped up over something else, you keep on acting as if you only know us professionally."

"Do I look that stupid?"

Ava moved around Leif and began undoing the splint.

Halla paid her no attention, but looked straight at him.

"Will the break spoil the symmetry of my arm?"

He was surprised, not because a woman would wonder about disfigurement instead of pain, but because she should voice her concern without false modesty, so matter-of-factly.

"They'll never be able to tell the difference. In fact," he added, smiling, "it'll probably be straighter than before. Art improves on life, you know."

"No, I don't."

VII

A MOMENT after Halla swallowed the pill and the water her lids drooped, and she began breathing softly. Except for the flush in her cheeks and that indefinable look of fullness which the quick have that the dead do not, she was an exact facsimile of her twin as she had first lain on the slab.

He shoved a chair by her bedside, picked up her arm, laid it across the chair's, grabbed wrist and elbow, and brought the lower part of her limb against the hard plastic.

The sharp snap of the bone made him wince.

Without pausing, he reset the broken radius and ulna.

Ava quickly splinted the forearm.

While she was doing that, Leif shot Jesper's serum into her upper arm. If the hormone activator worked as fast as it usually did, the bone would be knit within two or three days.

"You've got the blueprints?" he asked.

She shook her dark head. "Over there."

"Get it ready, will you?"

He took out his scalpel, dipped it in a bottle of sterilizer, and poured the liquid over a piece of cotton. Then he threw back the sheet and untied her gown so that her whole front was exposed. He

swabbed her solar plexus with the dripping cotton, laid it down, and expertly gashed the skin to simulate the wounds.

Ava smeared a handful of jelly on the raw cuts; if no infection occurred, the torn tissue would replace itself, stimulated by the jelly, within a few days. There would be no scars.

"Give me that camera," he said. Ava handed it to him; he set the dials and shot two external photos and two internal, a pair for the arm and a pair for the gashes.

A minute later he took the developments from the box and looked at them.

"Fine. This ought to satisfy Candleman. But Trausti's pictures will be in the file, or in his pocket."

Ava smiled. She had beautiful, even, white teeth.

"Oh, no. Not in his pockets," she said. "I picked them and deposited them in the sanctity of my bosom. See."

Her delicate fingers darted to a gap in her high-necked dress and pulled out two sheets of film.

"You darling," said Leif. "When did you do that?"

"I met him when I was on the way down here. He stopped me for a second to say that he was certain Mrs. Dannto was dead. His pictures proved it. He seemed quite proud to have caught you in a mistake."

She shook her head. "Now, he won't be so full of baseless vanity."

"Better destroy it."

"Naturally. Leif, sometimes you act as if you were the only one with brains."

"Temper, temper, baby. Come here and I'll reward you with a big, juicy kiss."

"You'd not look so good with all your teeth knocked out."

He laughed. Bending over Halla he resumed the examination she had once interrupted with a knee in his jaw.

"What's your interest in this babe?" asked Ava sourly.

"Jealous, honey?"

"Aargh," croaked Ava. She asked no more.

She knew him too well.

THIS Halla had twenty-eight teeth, and an epipharynx, small bumps hidden in the hair on top of her head, breasts with an unhuman anchorage of muscles—enough evidence so it wouldn't be necessary to take a blood sample.

That thought made him pause. Pals-son, of course, would have taken smears. What if she'd noted the magnesium in the "red" blood cells?

A second thought dismissed the chance. Pals-son would set the Labtech for a routine cell count, not a complete analysis. Moreover, if Trausti had pronounced her d.o.a., he wouldn't have requested blood smears.

He tied up her gown and replaced the sheet.

"She'll sleep for twelve hours. You stand guard, Ava. I have to go down to the PM again to clear up the Ingolf mess. Or make it worse. I'll relieve you later."

Abruptly, he wheeled.

"Oh, oh, fingerprints! I know I'm being overly cautious, but I wouldn't put it past Candleman to compare this Halla's prints with the other's."

"I'm ahead of you, Leif. You won't believe it. They're identical. She told me that while you were gone."

"The CWC has done a good job on her."

"My impression was that the two were born that way."

"Impossible."

"But true."

"What about retina-patterns?"

"The same, also."

Leif ran his hand through his thick yellow waves.

"Nothing that has happened since Rachel called me this morning has been believable. Well, ours not to question why, and you know the rest of that dismal line. I'm going, Ava."

"J.C.," said Ava, pointing her finger at him.

"J. C.," he replied, smiling and making a similar gesture.

When he walked into the PM, he wasn't surprised to see Candleman and Shant. They were examining the recent

records of the Labtech. Nearby, two sergeants were sprinkling powder over the walls and floors. Another was taking photos. A fourth had opened the cremator door and was vainly trying to scrape ashes from the thoroughly washed interior.

Seeing the doctor, the chief Uzzite straightened up and glared. He said in his monotone, "Why did you cremate Ingolf yourself, instead of leaving him for the assistants to burn?"

Leif smiled, safe in the assurance that he had several times previously done just that to other bodies and for the reason that he wanted it established as part of his behavior pattern in case such an emergency as the present arose.

"Candleman," he said, "I don't hold that a man in a post of authority loses face if he uses his hands for manual labor. We're short of help here in every way, and I like to save time. Check my efficiency ratings and my psych records, if you wish."

"I've a man doing that now," growled the chief.

"I thought two lamechians were above suspicion?"

"This is routine," said the chief.

Leif smiled.

He looked around and then decided he might as well drop his bomb now as later.

He called, in an imperious tone, to Shant.

"Doctor, whose body is that out in the hall?"

Shant's bald head crimsoned, and he said, "I—I—don't know. It was there when we came."

"Well, wheel it in. You know it's against our policy to leave it out where its sight may depress people and give them unreal thoughts."

SHANT clenched his fists and ground his teeth, and glanced at the Uzzites to see if they were watching his humiliation. But he walked stiff-legged into the hall and brought the cart and its burden into the PM. Idly, as if he weren't really interested, Shant picked up the

tag to examine it.

His jaw dropped; so did the tag.

Candleman said, "What's the matter?" His storklike legs carried him towards the runty pathologist.

Shant threw off the sheet and exposed his agitated chief and whispered to him.

"*Jacques Cuze!*" exclaimed the chief. He'd halted in midstride as if someone had struck him in the face.

For the first time since he'd known him, Leif saw the man's face crumble. It was like a glacier falling into the sea.

"Thorleifsson!" bellowed Candleman. "Where is he?"

One of the sergeants stepped up to his agitated chief and whispered in his ear.

Candleman listened and then said, "Very well. But put out a QB for him. He shouldn't be prowling around unless I authorized it. He'll pay for this dereliction of duty."

Candleman, thought Leif, must really be upset. He didn't give him a chance to regain his balance. He, too, strode to the body. And looking at it, gasped, "That's Ingolf. The man I dissected."

Shant blinked. "That's impossible. Obviously."

"So it is. But there he is. And less than an hour ago I saw him reduced to ashes."

Leif thought fast. He'd have to contact Zack Roe and tell him to order their agent in the Census Bureau to do some fast work. Candleman would undoubtedly take the finger-and-retina prints of the man on the cart and compare them with those in the files. The CWC agent could, before then, plant Ingolf's prints in the records of a man who'd been dead, say, a hundred years. Or better yet, a man who was the contemporary of the Forerunner. Six centuries ago.

The filer would then "accidentally" discover this. The announcement would create a consternation, add to the mystery and the tensely superstitious air everybody was breathing now that the Forerunner was expected to stop time and return from his temporal travels within the next twelve months.

Signs and wonders they wanted; let them have them.

The dunnologists would, of course, theorize that the dead man had two bodies in present time and one in the past because, he, too, was traveling in time. For years it'd been a near-dogma that if a man journeyed in time and then returned to a period where he'd once lived, he would find himself with a duplicate. Or with as many bodies as the time he returned.

Obviously, Ingolf had proved this beyond question.

But the case would be a hopeless paradox, one to be argued in the professional *Journal of Chronos and Fields of Presentation* and exploited by propagandists as adventure stories in the comics.

There would be the mystery. Who, really, was Ingolf? What did the gashed initials mean? Why the stiletto? For Shant would soon find that the mutilations had been committed after Ingolf's death.

If Ingolf had died once six hundred years ago and twice today, and seemingly as a result of the activities of the notorious and nefarious J. C., who, then, was he? A disciple of the Forerunner? Had the wicked Backrunner, Sigmen's half-brother and immortal enemy, Jude Changer, killed him? Not once, but thrice? And would he do it again?

Or was it the feared underground Frenchman, Jacques Cuze, that shadowy and insane figure who clung to the idea that he could rid his beloved and long-lost country of the Forerunner's disciples?

"*Yakes Kutse,*" said Candleman, echoing Leif's thought with his Icelandic pronunciation. "That man has been here under my nose. And I've allowed him to escape."

The grey shields of his eyes glared as if he thought the man were in the PM and waiting to stab him.

DR. BARK!" announced the QB. Leif strode to the wall and flicked the toggle.

"In the PM," he said.

"The Archurielite, Dr. Bark."

The girl's voice trembled.

"Don't get scared, sweetheart. He won't bite you."

Dannto's double chin appeared in the box, followed by the rest of him. Scowling, he said, "I heard that remark, Bark."

"It's true, isn't it?"

"You know what I mean!" bellowed Dannto. Face red, he struggled with himself and then said, "Never mind that. How's my wife?"

"The first reports of the accident were very much exaggerated. She's not badly hurt at all. She'll be up and out of bed tomorrow. But right now you can't see her. I gave her a sedative that'll put her under for twelve hours."

"Can't I look at her on QB?"

"It's not working. And we don't want anybody in the room to disturb her."

"Not working? By Sigmen, Bark, somebody'll pay for this." He looked over Lief's shoulder. "Candleman, have you investigated the tech responsible?"

"Shib, *abba*. But I can't find Lieutenant Thorleifsson. He was sent to question the fellow."

"Why can't you find him?"

"*Abba*, there is something very peculiar here." Candleman, grey eyes steady, explained in his deep monotone.

When the Uzzite stepped back so Dannto could see the initials on Ingolf's chest, the Archurielite breathed, "Jude Changer!"

Dannto made a quick recover.

"Where's the cordon you should have thrown up around the hospital?"

"I just now learned of Jacques Cuze's presence here," retorted Candleman. "And you've been monopolizing the QB since then."

"Jacques Cuze?" said Dannto. "This is clearly the work of Jude Changer."

"In that case," said Candleman, face rigid but voice tinged with anger, "a cordon would be useless. You can't pursue a man who slips in and out of time like a snake through the grass."

"It's your business to find out whether it is Jude or not," roared Dannto. "How do you know I'm right? You're an Uzzite; you take nobody's word."

Candleman blinked at the change of tactics, stepped up to the wall and cut off the priest's image. He dialed UHQ. "Captain, send forty men down to the Rigorous Mercy Hospital at once."

The captain tried to hide the comic he'd been reading and at the same time look calm and dignified.

"*Abba*, we haven't got that many men available."

"Get them down here in ten minutes."

"Shib, *abba*."

Ten minutes later, the Sandalphon Dannto entered the PM.

He waddled up to the Uzzite and put his treetrunk-thick arm around the bony shoulders.

"Jake, old man," he said. "I'm sorry I got angry with you. I know you're doing your best and that you're the most efficient of all Uzzites. But you must understand that I am very much concerned with Halla's welfare, and anything that affects her disturbs me very much. Moreover, this J. C. business is most upsetting. Those initials have been appearing with alarming frequency in the most unexpected and implausible places for the last three years. And, so far, we haven't found the person responsible for them."

CANDLEMAN stepped away so Dannto had to drop his arm. "I accept your apology," he said, "but you've got to understand that it's a very sore point with me. That man, Jacques Cuze, has been plaguing me so long and so persistently that I am about to let my other duties go and turn the attention of the whole department to the matter. I have something planned that will, I swear by Sigmen, catch him."

"I'm sure you will. If Jacques Cuze actually exists. Personally, I think he's a myth," replied Dannto. "I think Jude Changer is to blame for those initials."

"Perhaps you're both barking up the wrong tree," said Lief, smiling at his

own temerity and inability to resist a pun. "Gentlemen, if we get off into a theological discussion, we'll be lost. There are more immediate things that deserve our attention.

"For one thing, *abba*, I'd like to get your permission to move your wife to the penthouse. Inasmuch as my wife is taking care of yours, it will be more convenient for both of them. And, moreover, as Candleman has hinted that the accident might not be one after all, I think she'll be a lot safer in our place."

Dannto whirled. "Not an accident? Candlemann, you didn't tell me that!"

"Forgive me, *abba*. I didn't want to upset you."

"Who do you think is behind it?"

Candleman held out his big bony hands, palms up.

"Jacques Cuze. Who else?"

"But why should he try to kill Halla?"

"Because through her he can hurt you. Because he is a devil, an unreal person."

"It would be like Jude Changer to do something like that," said Dannto. "According to what I've heard, he will stop at nothing in order to change real time into pseudo-time. Candleman, we've got to stop him."

"You'll have to give me *carte blanche*."

"You've got it."

"What about my request?" said Leif.

"Oh, certainly. Excellent idea. She'll be much safer and get better care there."

"And I'll have two men stationed at the entrance to your penthouse," said Candleman. "I don't want any repetition of the accident."

Leif replied, stiffly, "I think she'll be safe. I'll be there at all times."

"Nevertheless, I insist."

Leif shrugged and said to Dannto, "Would you like to come along while we move your wife? Later, we can eat at my place. I'm rather hungry, and we can discuss further details."

Dannto's cavernous belly rumbled. He laughed, though somewhat embarrassedly, and said, "There's your answer."

VIII

WHILE they were moving Halla, Leif noted that Dannto accepted the woman as his wife. He'd thought he would, but he still breathed relief. Later, after Halla had been put in one of the bedrooms, and a nurse installed with her, Leif, Ava, Dannto and Candleman sat down to eat. The latter had been invited by the Archurielite.

Candleman's eyes were grey nets, scooping up every detail of the penthouse. As he bent over his locust soup with loud sucking noises, he cocked his head this way and that to hear better what each said.

Leif guessed that both the maid who served them their food and the nurse now attending Halla had been briefed by the Uzzite. They could watch the doctor and his wife and report their every move. All as a matter of routine, of course. You didn't suspect a lamech-bearer of unreality.

"Leif," said Dannto, in a good mood now that he was filling his belly, "you remember you once diagnosed a beneficent tumor that had to come out! Why not do it now? I could spend the night here."

"Very good idea," said Leif. "You'll be fit for work by morning, if you want to."

He thought, what kind of hold did the original Halla have over this Robin Redbreast? She must have had something. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, but he knew that it took more than that to make a man devoted.

He wondered if her sister had the same.

He intended to find out.

Candleman sucked in the last of his soup and reached out for the fungus-bread.

"I must insist on being allowed to watch the operation," he said.

Leif replied coldly, "I think you're making too many hints concerning my unreality."

"I'm sure Candleman didn't mean

that," said Dannto, "did you?"

"Of course not," he said in his deep monotone. "But how do I know that Jacques Cuze won't try something?"

"You'll have to watch the operation on the QB," said Leif. "It might make my assistants nervous to know the great Candleman's suspicious eye was on them. And nervous doctors and nurses are liable to make a fatal slip."

Candleman opened his mouth to protest, but Dannto stalled him.

"That's right. You'll do that, Jake."

The Uzzite's lips clamped.

"Shib. But I'll have men stationed outside the doors."

Leif made a mental note to have the QB go out of order during the operation. And wondered what good tech he'd frame for this job.

PPETER SORN was the victim. He'd been blamed for the breakdown in Halla's room. Let it happen again, the same day, and young Sorn would, as likely as not, go to H.

Which was too bad. Leif liked Peter Sorn. But he couldn't allow personal feelings to interfere. This was war, even if cold. Removing Sorn from the ranks of the techs would be one more step towards the realization of the Israelites' goal.

"How long will it take?" said Dannto. "About half an hour. Maybe less. Afterward, you should get a good night's rest. In the morning the blueprint jelly will have healed you enough so you may resume your ordinary duties. No exertion, of course. Perhaps you'd better not stay in the same room with your wife, tonight."

Dannto wheehahoed and slapped the table so the dishes and ware rattled.

Candleman dropped his spoon and glared at Leif. A flush crawled up from the high neck of his uniform.

"Your thoughts do not seem to be as pure as a Lamechian's should be," he said.

Dannto chuckled. He turned to Leif. "Jake's a little oldfashioned."

"If being oldfashioned means rigidly

and undeviatingly following the teachings of Sigmen, real be his name, then I plead guilty," said Candleman.

"Well, such remarks as Leif just made aren't specifically forbidden," replied Dannto, his smile disappearing into the fat on his face. "However, you may be right."

Candleman raised his eyebrows slightly and said, "I feel that I've failed because, so far, I've gotten no clue as to who Jacques Cuze is or the extent of his organization. But I think that when he made this attack upon Mrs. Dannto, he made a serious mistake. Why? Because she was riding in an auto-taxi, remotely controlled, and the crash came about through mechanical breakdown or through deliberate manipulations at Central-control. When we find out who's responsible, we'll have a lead to this mysterious Frenchman."

"Auto-taxi?" said Dannto, frowning. "That's funny, since she has a car and chauffeur of her own. The chauffeur is one of your men, Candleman. Why should she be in a taxi? Where was she going?"

"That is what I'd like to know. I can't ask Mrs. Dannto because Dr. Bark refused me admission. And then put her to sleep for twelve hours."

"I hope you're not doubting my professional ability," said Leif. His expression told plainly that it made no difference to him.

"Oh, no," said the Uzzite with a quick glance at Dannto. "I realize that Mrs. Dannto's health comes before anything."

"What about her escort?" asked Leif.

"He was called on the QB by an unknown person. While he was talking, Mrs. Dannto left the back way and got into a cruising auto-taxi."

"What do the machine's records show as to her destination?"

"Nothing. They were demolished in the crash. The taxi, as near as we can determine, left the road and crashed through a bridge railing. It fell thirty feet. However, Mrs. Dannto gave three different destinations during her ride. Each time she arrived, she directed the machine to another. Evidently, she was

working up to her final stop by stages in an attempt at shaking off any tracker, or with the idea of jumping out during one of the legs."

"Do you realize what you're saying?" demanded the Archurielite in a loud voice. "You're accusing my wife of conspiracy!"

"Not at all. Her behavior was mysterious, yes, but she will undoubtedly be able to explain it—as soon as she comes out of her sedation," he added.

"But that's not all. One of my men, who appeared at the scene of the crash shortly after it happened, told me that a little girl was run over by the taxi just before it broke the rail. My man thought she was dead, because her skull was smashed, and so he concentrated on getting Mrs. Dannto out of the taxi. When the ambulance came, he directed them to Mrs. Dannto first."

Leif said, "I suppose he had recognized her!"

"Yes, why?"

"And he didn't know the little girl?"

"No, what are you getting at?"

"Nothing important."

HE WAS aware of Candleman's speculative stare and guessed that the Uzzite was making a mental note to ask a selfdoc just what Leif meant. Also, whether it represented a deviation from Leif's recorded behavior pattern.

"When my man returned to the bridge," continued the Uzzite, "the girl was no longer there. And the ambulance men had not picked her up. Naturally,

he looked around, and he saw her being carried away by two men accompanied by two women. He called after them. They disappeared around a corner. He chased them into a subway and saw them stop behind a pillar. But when he got there, he could find no sign of them.

"He continued down the tunnel, for there was only one way they could go. At the end of the tunnel he met another of my men. This fellow swore that nobody had come through while he was there, and he'd been there for at least half an hour.

"Naturally, the latter is now being questioned. It's obvious that he must be an accomplice."

"Accomplice of what?" asked Leif.

Candleman shrugged shoulders like a coathanger.

"I don't know. But I strongly suspect they are followers of Jacques Cuze. There was a big J. C. scratched into the cement wall close by."

"You can find those many places in Paris," said Leif.

Candleman's eyes sparked like a grindstone sharpening knives in the dark.

"I am fully aware of that. But I promise you that before the year is up, Jacques Cuze will be dead or in H."

"Why would they carry the girl off?" asked Dannto. "She couldn't get the medical care underground that she could here."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Candleman, glancing at the doctor. Leif did not deign to reply.

[Turn page]

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

SENSATIONAL NEW TING
CREAM FOR
FOOT ITCH
(ATHLETE'S FOOT)
- REGULAR USE HELPS
RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES
BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED
PEELING TOES -
AIDS HEALING
AMAZINGLY!



FIRST
USED
IN HOSPITALS
NOW
RELEASED TO
DRUGGISTS
GUARANTEED

TING MUST
SATISFY YOU IN
A WEEK-OR
MONEY BACK!



IN LAB TESTS
TING CREAM
PROVED EFFECTIVE
IN KILLING SPECIFIC
TYPES OF
ATHLETE'S FOOT
FUNGI ON
60 SECOND
CONTACT!

EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS
HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING
TING CREAM TODAY!
GREASELESS, STAINLESS
ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE



"If she'd been brought here, there'd have been an investigation. And her parents would have been exposed. They preferred to let her die rather than take that chance. Anyway, she was probably dead."

"I'm surprised, Jake," said Dannto, "that you would admit that an unrealist had snatched away one of their own members from under the nose of the Uzzites."

"If there is one thing I pride myself on—one completely realist attitude,—it is honesty," said Candleman. For the first time at dinner his voice bore expression. "I try to conceal nothing, in accordance with the teachings of Sigmen, real be his name, through all time."

SOMETHING that had been hidden away in Leif's brain, far down and in the darkness, suddenly began to make sense.

He leaned forward and said, "Candleman, what did these four people look like?"

The Uzzite blinked. "What do you mean?"

"Did they look—foreign? Or strange?"

"Why do you ask?"

Leif leaned back.

"You answer me first."

"Shib. He said they were very blond and their faces seemed—out of proportion. The noses had huge flaring nostrils but were high-arched. Their lips were thick. He couldn't see the color of their eyes, of course, being too far off, but the girl had very light blue eyes."

"Ah, yes," said Leif non-committally. So it was the four who'd tried to detain him this morning!

"Yes, what?" asked Candleman.

"Well, if there really are Frenchmen living underground today—if this Cuze isn't entirely legendary—then they would look different from the modern Parisian, a descendant of Icelanders or Hawaiians."

"Perhaps. I've never seen a picture of one."

"Do you know anything of the French language?"

"No. I'm an Uzzite. If I want specialized knowledge, I go to a specialist."

"Let me tell you," continued Candleman, leaning forward, moving his thin hard lips like two lobster claws, "that Jacques Cuze is no legend or myth. He lives in the vast underground network of abandoned subways and the even deeper ancient sewers of Paris. From his hidden headquarters he directs his organization. Occasionally, I'm sure, he makes appearances above ground.

"I've hunted for him from time to time. A thousand men have been pulled from their regular duties and sent below with hound and light and gun. We've sealed off mile on mile of tunnel and filled them full of gas. And killed nothing but rats."

"Isn't it ridiculous to suppose that Frenchmen would live centuries in those holes, keep up their populations, retain their language and their hopes of regaining their country?" asked Leif.

"It may look that way," replied Candleman. "But the living presence of Jacques Cuze refutes your argument."

"When did you first lean of him?"

"Several years ago we captured a Cold War Corpsman from Midi. Before he could bite down on the poison tooth most of them seem to carry, one of my men shot his jaw off. When he recovered consciousness, he couldn't talk. No tongue.

"But he could write. We asked him for a confession. After a reasonable amount of resistance against questions, he agreed to write one out. He did so in Midian Phonetics, which at once justified my suspicions that he might be an Izzie. But he only wrote two words, and then stopped. He kept pointing at them; I finally found out he wanted them pronounced. What it meant, I didn't know, but I called in a linguistics joat. He took one look, seemed puzzled, and then pronounced, aloud, the two words.

"The next I knew, I was in a hospital bed. A splinter of the prisoner's skullbone was stuck in my temple; I'd been very lucky not to have been killed at once by it.

"Later, I pieced together various reports and found out what had happened. The fellow had not only carried poison in a tooth; he had had implanted under his skull a small but powerful bomb. And this could be set off by uttering these syllables.

"He'd tricked us. His head had blown apart and killed the three men closest to him, including the linguistics man. It had also destroyed the paper.

"Fortunately, I have a very good memory. You have to in my profession, you know. I remembered the fatal words had been Jacques Cuze. You'll note I pronounce it according to the Icelandic; you never know when the man you're talking to may be an Izzie and both of you will go up in one blast.

"It was after that that I began to tie up the ubiquitous J. C. with this Jacques Cuze. And then I found a paper in one of the deserted rooms in the sewers. This was brief, but it was in French. It was propaganda against the Haijac Union and a plea for the return of the country to those people to whom it rightfully belonged—and it named Jacques Cuze as the leader of the die-hard Frenchmen, living like rats under Paris."

Dannto laughed nervously.

Candleman said, "Deride me if you want to. But I think that J. C. has launched these attacks on Mrs. Dannto. And I'm convinced that your life is in danger unless he's captured."

IX

DANNTO listened to Candleman's revelations, then put his hand over his mouth to cover a belch before he replied, "It's a pleasure to be imperiled if, in so doing, I may advance the Sturch and prepare for the temporal arrival of the Forerunner."

He paused a moment to munch upon a sandwich of formicapaste and then said, "There is, of course, a certain amount of speculation among us Urielites about the meaning of the word 'temporal.'"

"Some of us think that it may not

necessarily mean the physical appearance of Sigmen, real be his name, upon this earthly scene. Temporal might possibly have an esoteric meaning. It might mean his appearance in some other sense. As far as that goes, he himself did not use the word 'appearance' in his *Time and the World Line*. Instead, if I remember correctly, he wrote 'arrival.' That, you'll have to concede, can mean many things, besides appearance.

"It might be intended that we should take Sigmen's voyagings, not as chronological, but as allegorical. Thus, these people who are getting hysterical, all wrought up, about the Timestop and the literal reappearance of Isaac Sigmen, may be disappointed when Timestop does come.

"The truth might be that Timestop means that the Haijac Union and its Sturch may triumph over all the nations of earth, that we may conquer them, destroy their false religions and states, and set up the true Sturch. Thus, in that sense, it might be said that Sigmen has returned and that time has stopped. It would, you see, for all, because then true stasis would arrive. There would be no more of this eternal change that is the mark of the other nations' barbarism and bestiality."

Candleman had been shifting uneasily, and, when Dannto paused, he broke in.

"*Abba*, I am faithful enough to you and to the Sturch you represent. There may be no doubt of that. Therefore, it hurts me when you talk like that. It seems to me to border on unreal thinking. This allegorical interpretation of the Forerunner's works was once a thing that would never have come to the lips of a Jack. If it had, he would have ended up in H.

"No, don't get angry. It's true. But now, during the last twenty years or so, we literalists have seen with increasing alarm that more and more Urielites are speaking of esoteric meanings, hinting that perhaps things may not exactly be as described. I want to make it plain, right here and now, that I, and other lit-

eralists, do not like to hear such talk. It seems to us to smack of unreality. It seems to be a sign of the degeneration of the times. It is, in fact, exactly what the Forerunner predicted. He said there would be strange doctrines and people trying to twist his words. He said to beware of them. He said such thinking would result in degenerate morals, in people turning away from reality.

"And he is right. For in the past few years we've seen the resurrection of dancing, of women wearing immodest clothes, of lipstick and rouge, of the discard of street veils for women. I see all these things, and I'm sick to my stomach."

"It doesn't seem to have affected your appetite," said Dannto dryly.

HE SPOKE easily, seemingly unaffected by the Uzzite's tirade. Leif was surprised he hadn't flared out, for his words were a direct criticism of Halla Dannto. He himself, he thought, should protest, for Ava also was being scourged. But he decided that a silent contempt would hurt the man worse.

"The issue," said Dannto, "is not at all as clear as you make it. Sigmen, real be his name, was rather ambiguous in his statements as to the manner of his Timestop. I suggest you read the Works again with that thought in mind. You'll find that both literalists and allegorists have good arguments, and both can quote chapter and verse and extra-scriptural authorities to support their contentions.

"I say there is only one way to tell. Wait and see. I am sure, however, that unflinching adherence to the Sturch is the way to be sure of being rewarded on Timestop. Whatever the manner of the Forerunner's arrival, he will repay his real believers for their faith."

"Reality be his and mine," murmured Candleman with bowed head. Then, lifting it suddenly and glaring about, he said, "But there are many people who are out to make pseudo-futures real. The Izzies are one; Jacques Cuze is another; and there is, I believe, still a third. For

instance, once, during an undercity hunt, we found a crypt full of bodies. Chiseled in the stone was a single figure, a fish. It wasn't until then that we connected this fish with others that had been reported on the walls of the surface city."

"What does this fish represent?" asked Dannto.

Leif was interested, too. It was the first time he'd heard of them.

"I'll tell you," said Candleman somewhat smugly. "It's my theory that Jacques Cuze. . . ."

"Oh, no, here we go again," murmured Dannto, so low that only Leif heard him.

". . . . is the religious leader of the few Christians left in Europe, all of whom are underground. The head of the Holy Timbuktu Church has promised Cuze that if he succeeds in his rebellion, he'll restore the ancient French religion there, perhaps move to Paris and make it his capital. Of course, such a cause and such a promise are hopeless, but Cuze and the Timbuktuians are unrealistic and think as such."

Leif blinked. This was new to him.

"On what facts do you base your theory?" he asked.

"On what is obvious," retorted Candleman with an irritated wave of his bony hand. "There can be no other interpretation."

"The Bantus, being Christians, still use Greek and Latin rootwords for their scientific and theological writings. The Greek word for fish is Ichthyos. The first two letters are nota and chi; I and X. These, if you are a linguistics expert, are the closest rendering to the Roman alphabet-letters of J. and C. I. and X equal J and C. Jacques Cuze's initials. I standing for Ioannos, which is Greek for John. X standing for chusis, the Hellenic word for stream. Stream recalls fish, naturally, and also stands for the underground, as chusis, by a stretch of meaning, may also be understood as a subterranean river.

"It's that simple. Fish stands for IX. Ioannos Chusis; John Stream; Jacques Cuze. Thus the fish symbol is the link between the underground French patri-

ot and the Timbuktuian church."

Leif was caught between laughter and admiration.

"My," marveled Dannto, "all this going on and the only reason I found out was that Halla became a victim of them. Perhaps. Tell me, Jake, what about the church to whom the majority of the Africans belong? The Primitives? After all, the Holy Timbuktu members reside in a comparatively small state; they don't have nearly the power or facilities for underground work that the Primitives do."

Candleman held his palms up.

"I don't really know. All I learned was from a one hour talk with a linguistic joat, one of these jack-of-all-trades. I've not had time to study as I should; my days and nights are taken up with an immense amount of administration work and my hunt for Cuze."

"You can tell the difference if you meet them," said Leif.

"The Timbuktuians will fight; the Primitives are absolute pacifists."

"I know they are," said Candleman.

"They make a continent ready for the plucking. If the Izzies didn't stand between them and us, we could have, over night, two-thirds of Africa. Once the Israeli Republics are overcome, and I'm confident that the return of Sigmen will see that, we'll just have to walk into the country south of the Sahara Sea to take it over."

"Passive resistance will take its toll," said Leif.

NOBODY asked him to elaborate; they were too eager to discuss their own theories.

Dannto didn't think the Bantus could be much of an underground force; their skin color prevented them from activity in Europe.

Candleman replied that they could hire their work done by Cuze and Jack traitors.

"Perhaps," said Leif brightly, "J. C. could stand for Jack Christians. There was a group once that tried to get legal recognition within the Haijac as a separate church from the Bantu ecclesias-

tical organizations, loyal to the Union and regarding the Africans as heretics."

"Nonsense," said Dannto. "That was several centuries ago, if I remember the history I was taught in college. They all went to H and were never heard of again."

"If the French could hide underground for six centuries, these people could for two."

Both the other men were scornful of the idea; it was sailing against the wind of their theories.

"No," said Dannto, "the Forerunner, in one sense or another, has traveled along the fields of presentation, backward and forward. He went into the future, came back, wrote books about it, established the Haijac and its buttress, the Sturch, and then went off into time again. He predicted the future; all events since then have verified his forecasts. The last days are upon us; Timestop will soon be here. Whether Sigmen's actual presence here will be necessary, I don't know.

"But I do know that in his *Time and the World Line* he mentioned, rather cryptically, the sinister Backrunner, his antagonist, the man who will try to undo all his good works, both in past, present and future. There is only that one mention, but since then a host of apocrypha have sprung up about this Backrunner. Many of them, investigated, have since been stamped as authentic and not to be doubted by the Sturch.

"Though Sigmen did not mention the Backrunner's name, we now know, through experience, that it is that of Jude Changer, Sigmen's contemporary and lefthanded traveler in time.

"It is my opinion, backed by the facts, that J. C. stands for Jude Changer."

He held up a fat hand to stall Candleman's protest.

"I will concede that this man may be the same as Jacques Cuze, that he is operating under that name in order to conceal his true identity. But egotist that he is, he has to let us know in a sinister manner who he really is."

The QB buzzed; and an Uzzite formed in the box. His message: Thor-

leifsson was still missing.

That broke up the party.

Candleman jumped up, his nostrils flared.

"Perhaps you'll believe me now," *abba*," he said to the Urielite. "The chances are that my lieutenant has been murdered while on Cuze's track. I must go at once. I'll never rest until I know what happened to him."

"Perhaps," said Leif, thinking of Thorleifsson's ashes being washed down the drains and into the sewers, "he's gone underground in pursuit of the Frenchman?"

"Nonsense, Doctor. Without notifying me?"

Candleman walked to the door of the room where Halla slept and before anybody could protest he had stepped inside. Leif jumped up and strode after him.

He found the Uzzite standing by her bedside, looking intently at her. The nurse was at the other side of the room; she had, it was obvious, made no attempt to stop him.

Leif could barely conceal his anger. "You have been told," he said in a strangled whisper, "that Mrs. Dannto was not to be disturbed. I do not want to repeat that again."

Candleman lingered over the beautiful head with its corona of flaming hair spread out on the white pillow. Then he straightened and walked out past Bark without a word. Leif felt his fists curling; he would have liked to drive them into that hard mouth.

When the Uzzite had stepped out, Leif turned to the nurse.

"You may go back to your floor," he said. "You won't be needed here."

The nurse, a dragon of eighty years, opened her mouth to protest, saw what his face meant and walked out. Leif suspected she was working for Candleman; this gave him a good excuse to dismiss her. It was irony that Candleman himself had furnished the reason.

X

NO SOONER had Leif returned to the dining room than the QB buzzed

again. A Urielite's form appeared in Dannto's office. He informed his superior that the Metratron wished him to be present at an important meeting of the inner council at Montreal tomorrow. Dannto hesitated and then replied he'd be there.

"As you can see," the fat man said to Leif, "I'm very busy. This noon an operation; tonight I leave on the coach for Canada. I just never get time to spend with my wife."

"We'll take care of her. She can follow you tomorrow evening. Provided there are no complications."

Dannto's chin quivered with delight. He slapped Leif on the back.

"You're the best there is, Doctor."

"That's true."

Bark then QB'd his assistant and told him to prepare for a removal of a tumor from Dannto's abdomen at 1500. Also, to send up a nurse to escort the Archurielite to a room on 800, surgical floor.

"You'll get a sedative and be bathed and dressed for the operation," said Leif.

"I was hoping I'd get to stay here longer," pouted Dannto.

"Mrs. Dannto won't be awake until 2100."

"Sigmen take it, I have to leave on the 2000 coach. Do you think I'll be able to go on it?"

"I sympathize with your predicament," said Leif, "but inasmuch as the coach doesn't accelerate fast enough to strain your incision, I can't honestly tell you to stay here overnight."

"Well, this conference is really important. I'd better go."

After he'd ushered Dannto out, Bark waited until the replacement nurse arrived for Halla. Once he'd given her her orders, he went into his bedroom. Ava was sprawled out on a chair in a lace dressing gown. A cigarette was in her lips.

"Give me one," said Leif. "I wanted one all morning."

"I'll give you nothing," retorted Ava, "except a kick in your big head. Why did you dissect that girl instead of cremating her at once? What's up, Leif? You're

not obeying the CWC's orders."

Leif put the glow-wire down and puffed on the Fruitful Times.

"Ava, I'll be frank with you. Have you thought much about the thought-picker?"

"What's that got to do with this?"

"Look. What happened when the picker went on the blink? Did we repair it?"

"No. It was carried away and another brought to replace it."

"Why?"

"I suppose because it's boobytrapped. If it's opened, it blows up. That, naturally, is to keep its secret from falling into the hands of the Jacks, if they should catch on that we're using one."

"Sure, and the trap is there to keep inquisitive Izzies out as well as Jacks. Want to know why? Because it's a loaned machine. The loaner wants its structure to remain a mystery. They're afraid that the Earthmen who can manufacture such things will get too much power."

"What do you mean, Earthmen?"

"Ava, I've looked the thoughtpicker over during many lonely evenings when I'd nothing else to do. There's not much to see, but from what I can make out, I'd say the thing is of alien construction and design."

Ava blinked long curling lashes.

"How did you arrive at such a startling conclusion?"

"Don't laugh. It's a feeling I get when I look at it. It just doesn't have that Terran look. I'll swear there's something non-human about it."

"Imagination!"

"No. Intuition. The machine is, from my viewpoint, warped."

"Is that all?"

"No. That girl, and the one I cut up, are not human."

Ava sat up.

"How do you know?"

Leif explained.

"We know that the Haijac morals have been, by their own admission, decadent for the past hundred years. But during the last fifteen years the immorality increased. It's almost as if a catalyst from outside has been accelerating it. But what?"

"For one thing, the CWC's been helped by this drug that enables our agents to be injected with truthdrug and yet continue to lie. Thus, they can survive the questions before the Elchimeter and earn their gold lamechs. We've used that advantage to pass off our own men among the Jacks, men who have the inestimable opportunity to work almost unquestioned in this society and do their damnedest damage. But, where did we get that drug? We didn't invent it, I know."

"Perhaps we got it from the Jacks themselves," suggested Ava.

"It wouldn't be the first time. Their sciences are so unintegrated that many inventions pass unnoticed and undeveloped."

"Yes, and that, ironically, is due to their suspicion of the giant integrating germanium 'brains' we use. Sigmen himself fostered that handicap when he warned them that the inordinate use of such machines might result in the machines' taking over.

"But here's the point they don't know about—we suddenly start using it about ten years ago. Know what I think? That it, like the thoughtpicker, is extra-terrestrial."

"And the girls are XT's who're helping us? But why should they get in the midst of it?"

"Ava, when did Jack women start using lipstick? When did the hierarchy begin drinking in private in their apartments? When did we learn that there were female Izzie agents who had an enormous influence upon the top Sturchmen?"

"I see what you mean."

"Sure. A woman with scarlet lips in the midst of a nation of unpainted mouths is going to attract attention. But if her lipstick covers up a pigmented mouth,

THE glowing cigarette in Ava's hands shook nervously. Leif thought Ava was more upset than necessary.

"There's something else," he said.

and the majority of the women use that, then she'll just be one of the mob."

"You mean that these XT females started the whole thing?"

"Shib. Of course, they couldn't have done it unless the Jack women were ripe for such a thing. That it was done so easily proves they were. And, Ava, who first called the council of Urielites to debate a scriptural passage? And who influenced the council to interpret it in such a way that women could use cosmetics?"

"Dannto. But what I don't see is why he and the others just didn't let them keep on wearing veils?"

"The custom was to take them off inside a house. So the lips would still be seen unless they locked these women up in their closets. Also, there's such a thing as pride, as exhibitionistic ownership. These birds wanted everybody to see what they had. And you must admit that if they're all like Halla you can't blame the big shots."

"There's one inconsistency," said Ava. "How did these girls come to influence them in the first place? Time was when they'd been hauled off to H without a second thought. Or even just killed, if they deviated too much from the Terran human norm."

"That," said Leif slowly, "is what I intend finding out. They must have something that is really powerful, almost magical. And I intend to find out what it is."

HE WENT to a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of alcohol, which he mixed with a purplish fluid.

Leif said, "By the way, not to get off the subject, I think Shant is in love with you. Those sheep eyes!"

Ava exploded, "Everytime he's alone with me, he makes a pass at me. Him and his big hypocritical mealymouth when others are around and then those sticky little paws of his when nobody's looking! The next time, I'm breaking his teeth, orders or no orders."

"Now look who's disobeying. You're a poor soldier. You know I told you to

string him along. He's a good source of information, and we might want to use his lust for you to get us out of a spot."

"Well, I can't let him get *too* close."

"*Heh, heh!*"

Leif threw a half-glass down his throat.

"Good thing this stuff smells like ether. Otherwise I'd shock the nurses. I'm not too sure it *isn't* ether."

He shuddered and then filled another glass.

"Here's the setup, Ava. I cut Dannto's tumor out at 1500, Candleman will be watching the operation through the QB. You set it to break down at 1515. Peter Sorn will get the blame. We'll send an anonymous accusation later. Whether that'll be enough to send him to H, I don't know. The tech shortage is getting so acute that the Uzzites, inflexible though they are, have not been nearly so eager to ship them off as they were when we first started this twelve years ago. However, a few more 'sabotages' like that, and they won't be able to overlook Sorn."

"Too bad about Peter," said Ava. "He's one of the few people in this hospital I can stand. Why can't we fix up sneaky old Gunnarsson?"

"You know why. Because he's not the tech Sorn is. The Jacks won't miss him as much."

"I'd like to send that little lecher Shant down. When are we going to start on him?"

"Ah, ah, let's leave personalities out of this."

"Do you know Leif, I still can't see why Jackasses haven't tumbled to our technique? Are they really that stupid?"

"No, you mustn't make that mistake. Their I.Q., I imagine, is about the same average as that of the Republics'. You see, Ava, you hear much about the high intelligence of the Izzies because they're partly descended from the citizens of Palestine, one of the few organized and undecimated countries left after the Apocalyptic War. The theory goes that those people then living represented a group whose history included so many

thousands of years of oppression, of persecution, of weeding out, that only the mentally alert survived. When the overcrowded little country was presented with lands where only a few unorganized, dazed survivors dwelt, it almost literally exploded. In an amazingly short time colonies ringed the Mediterranean; these grew, fed by families that normally included a dozen children. Mortality rates were low, and newly-invented rejuvenation techniques kept parents propagating far into their nineties.

"There were quite a few people living in the lands to which these colonists came. They were ineffective because widely separated and because they'd reverted to a primitive agricultural society. But they were treated well, because the Israeli constitutions guaranteed them full rights. Nevertheless, inevitably, they were absorbed; their genes, their languages, their customs. And their descendants were none the worse off. I'd say they benefited.

"Remarkably enough, the Icelanders could make the same claim. None but the strong and the clever survived their early voyages. And their descendants, like the Palestinians, were keen and independent.

"So, too, the Hawaiians, perhaps the most mixed in bloods of all people, a melting pot of Mongolian, Polynesian, Caucasian, and, in short, just about anything you cared to name. It was this heterosis, perhaps that accounted for the fact that the Hawaiians spread faster and further than any of the others, that they repopulated the Americas, Japan, parts of China and Siberia."

Ava spoke first. "Thank you, Professor Bark." After a pause laden with sarcasm Ava resumed. "Why then did the democratic and high-I.Q.'ed Icelanders and Hawaiians lose their fine qualities, and become what amounted to slaves?"

"Their present subservience should be a warning to all. We, who pride ourselves on our democratic traditions, might easily have gone the same way.

And would have, if it had not been for several great men among the early Israeli colonists who gave their lives that the constitutions might be preserved.

"Simply, what happened in the Haijac was that this man Sigmen came along when there was a great deal of strife about the various forms of government. Also, this was the age of religious revival, if you'll remember. Everywhere, all over the world, a spirit long thought dead, rose and strode across continents. Sigmen, the founder of an obscure and crackpot pseudo-Christian cult, rose to glory on the crest of the wave. He had what the other prophets lacked—a pseudo-scientific explanation for what had been considered spiritual phenomena. Now, he claimed, it was no longer a matter of faith; it was facing the facts. He presented his distortions of the theories of Dunne on time. He explained, to his disciples' satisfaction, anyway, all historical and religious events in the light of the neo-dunnology.

"Moreover, after he'd seized power, he kept it personally for several hundred years, a thing no other politician or conqueror had ever been able to do. Using the usual brutal means, he set up a state in which the citizens, for their own good, of course, underwent a constant and intimate security. The guardian-angel-protetempore system, plus systematic sublimation resulted in what you see today.

"In addition to that, he utilized the tremendous prestige of the Israeli Republics to add to his own. He took the admiration of his own subjects for the Mediterranean power and perverted it. He wrote his Western Talmud, adopted the Hebrew language as the theological and scientific, and, in short, made a mockery and a travesty of us for his own purposes. And, probably, all in good faith."

Ava deliberately yawned and said, "Thanks for the history lesson, Teacher. Why don't you tell me something I don't know?"

Annoyed, Leif said, "I will. I've a criticism, Ava, that might not seem much

to you, but it might be one of the little things that'll give us away. Please try to restrain your disgust when you're eating certain foods. I'm afraid it's going to be noticed."

"But Leif, mouse fricassee! And ant-jelly!"

"Those are thought to be rare delicacies. Only the upper classes can get them."

"Every time I sit down to eat, I see nothing but unclean food!"

"It's part of your duty."

"If I'd known that I'd never have volunteered for this. I don't mind skirting death, a dozen times a day. But the food!"

Leif guffawed.

Ava said, "Laugh, you *kelev*. You're a shame to your fathers and your grandfathers."

"They ate the same things I did. Do you know, it's hard to find an ortho in Midi, anymore. Why did your father leave Sephardia?"

"Love," said Ava. "Love of money. My father met my mother on a vacation trip to Khem. He wanted to marry her, but she wouldn't unless he came to Avinyaw to live with her and her aged father. Inasmuch as father was poor, and grandfather owned a flourishing business, and my mother had big dark eyes, Father surrendered. So had mother, I guess. I was born seven months later in Avinyaw."

"A very sordid tale," said Leif. "Well, you'll get no sympathy from me on the food. I respect religious beliefs. . . ."

"Sure you do," mocked Ava. . . .

". . . but this business about taboo dishes is beyond my comprehension. I think. . . ."

"Let's not get into that weary and fruitless discussion again," said Ava. "I'll stick to my beliefs; you're stuck with yours."

LEIF smiled and said, "So you got your big dark eyes from your mother? You charmer, you. Well, I think I'll look in on Halla. Oh, before I go, I'm putting the 'picker on Dannto

during the operation. Will you change the beeper to the kymo? I'll read it later."

Ava nodded; Leif hesitated and said, "I wish now I'd not kept Candleman out of surgery. His mind would be more profitable to pick than the Archurielite's, I think."

"I could train it on him," said Ava. "No, the walls are lined with stopray, aren't they?"

"Yes. Well, we'll get him soon as possible. He makes me uneasy. I think he's suspicious of me."

"It's your face, darling."

"Well, it's the one you married, honey. Come here, give me a kiss."

"You'd look much better with your front teeth missing," said Ava. Her black eyes glittered.

"Exit laughing," said Leif. And did.

He entered Halla's room.

"You may go to the kitchen and eat," he said to the nurse.

After she had left, he sat down by the bedside and began talking to the sleeping beauty. From the beginning, he'd had this session in mind, so he'd given her not an ordinary sleeping potion but a lotus pill. The semi-hypnotic drug would open the way for him to probe her subconscious.

He hadn't gotten far into his questions about her past when he found that a posthypnotic block had been installed. She simply would not answer anything that contradicted the fictitious personality of her sister.

If he had cared to or had available the time needed, he could have broken down the barrier. But as he did not have days on end or a host of drugs handy, he gave up.

Disgruntled, he went to surgery. There he put on a gown and mask, washed his arms, and then, as they dried, stood in a small cubicle while sonics theoretically pierced his body and shattered the cell-walls of any obnoxious germs. Entering the operating room, he saw Dannto lying upon a table. As the Archurielite had taken only a local, he

was looking around him with bright eyes at the various glass containers above him and the tubes that ran from them to the needles in his arms.

Though pale, he twisted his fat face into a smile. Leif held up curved thumb and forefinger in a gesture a thousand years old and then checked on the routine. Ava, he noticed, was busy in the corner unscrewing the leads to the picker's beeper and connecting them to the stylo. Nobody questioned what she was doing; Sigur, the eegie man, had gone home.

Dannto did not object when Leif asked him if it were all right if the eegie helmet were placed over his head during the operation. Leif explained that he had many records so far of the lower classes, but none of exceptionally intelligent men. Dannto tried to hide his pleasure. It would be quite all right. Anything in the interests of science.

Actually, it was not at all necessary that the helmet come in contact with the subject's head. It could pick up the brainwaves of a selected person at quite a distance on its tight beam. But Leif wanted to make things look as authentic as possible; there was no use taking a chance on anybody's recognizing its unorthodoxy.

While he cut, Leif talked to the Urielite, first taking the precaution of asking him to keep silent until told differently. The surgeon chattered amusingly of this and that inconsequence, like any good doctor trying to keep his patient's mind off his troubles.

NOW and then he inserted a statement that he hoped would send Dannto thinking along certain lines. He expected, if the train of thought continued, to extract valuable information from the waves inked upon the kymo slowly turning in the corner.

Meanwhile, he thought of the girl in the penthouse bedroom, asleep, her long, loose and wavy hair piling out gloriously upon the pillow. The head would be turned aside, the profile

against the auburn hair, a cameo of vibrant flesh against gleaming tresses.

And she, he thought, belonged to the mass of dough that he was now paring away. His hand shook. He steadied it; though he controlled himself, he could not help the desire that seized it. What if he were to slip? To make a wrong cut?

Well, what about it? Candleman would investigate. Routinely, of course. And there would be no telling what that bloodhound would sniff out. Perhaps enough to undo all the work of the CWC for the past ten years. No, he certainly couldn't do it. He'd allowed himself enough disobedience this morning when he'd dissected Mrs. Dannto. Moreover, Ava had left the picker and was watching him. Trained, her eye would grasp the deliberately false move; the premeditated, fatal slip. And, knowing, her duty would be to inform Marseya that he had disobeyed orders. That would mean his recall, or, more probably, a drum-head courtmartial and execution. It was too risky to smuggle a man like him across the border; he wouldn't be worth taking the chance. So somebody he didn't know was in the Corps would step up to him one day, or night, and stab him and carve J. C. across his forehead and thus kill two birds with one cut, inspiring terror among the Jacks and squelching any suspicion the Sturch might have had that he was an Izzie agent. Very clever and economical.

Thinking thus, the doctor made the correct motions and in due time removed a tumor which would never have grown there to begin with if Dannto had not taken a certain medicine prescribed by Leif. "This will do good," he'd said, not saying for whom. The Urielite had swallowed it in the faith that his stomach aches would vanish. So they had, but he had planted the seed of a larger one.

The good doctor now plucked the fruit, then filled the cavity with a quivering mass of jelly. The shapeless mass would at once lock its 'blueprint' electromagnetic field to the injured cells. The

amino-acid and CH contents would form new cells. In a surprisingly short time, the tissues would be as good as new.

This particular jelly was somewhat different, however. Part of it consisted of a substance whose ingredients, unmixed, were harmless. If a shortwave of a certain frequency, sent at certain close intervals, struck the substance, it mixed, formed a violent poison, and sent the owner thereof into a quick and fatal convulsion.

Leif stepped back while the nurses finished up the sterilizing and other lesser tasks. "How do you feel?"

Dannto, pale as a toadstool, said, "Never bothered me a bit." He pointed to the mirror overhead. "It's quite an experience, looking into yourself."

"Very few people do," said Leif without humor, and was not disappointed when Dannto failed to comprehend.

"You may dress in that room, *abba*," said a nurse.

Dannto waddled towards the indicated door, but before he reached it, he was halted by Candleman's voice. The Uzzite had burst in through another entrance.

"Timezen!" he swore. "Who's responsible for the QB here?" His monotone remained, but his eyes were narrowed.

"Peter Sorn is," said Leif. "Why?"

"That's the same fellow I had questioned about room 113, isn't he?"

He whirled and stalked off, leaving the others staring at him. When Dannto asked Bark what the matter was, Leif shrugged. Nevertheless, he felt slightly sick.

XI

AFTER the room had been cleaned up, and the nurses and Ava had left, Leif returned to the operating room. The thoughtpicker was a machine mounted upon a three wheeled carriage. Its bulk was enclosed in a shining seamless eternalloy sphere set upon the top of the rest of the machinery. No wires

ran from it; it controlled the kymograph below it by radio. Sigur, the assistant eegieman, had been, naturally, curious. It had taken only a word from his superior to make that curiosity voiceless; Leif had hinted that it was an invention of great importance; that the Sturch would frown upon any noising about of its presence. This followed the pattern; Sigur swore that he'd be as silent as expected.

Leif removed the kymographs, took them to a table, spread them out, and began studying. He paid no attention to the upper lines; those were the conventional waves. The bottom line, inked by the newly hooked-in style, took all his concentration for the next hour. He read the sharp peaks and plunging valleys fast, for his training in Carcasawn had been thorough, and his ten years' experience had given him vast familiarity with them. Dannto's thoughts were spread out before him; the things he expected no man would ever know.

At the end of the hour, Leif sighed. Thoughts were not what one expected. When Leif had been introduced to the thoughtpicker in the CWC's sanctum sanctorum, he'd been thrilled. Read a man's mind? Train a narrow beam on an unsuspecting skull, pick up and amplify the very weak 'semantic' waves, interpret their climbs and slides, and know all his secrets?

Be God?

Hah!

First, the young student had learned that beneath the well-known alpha, beta, gamma, eta, theta, and iota waves were the sigma or semantic. These almost undetectable eruptions could be correlated by the trained eye to the spoken word. With some training the learner could slide across the graph a bar with a rectangular hole in its center, and block off each unit and see it as such, not as just another continuation of the jagged lines.

Later, after hard study, the time came when the eye could run down the dales and leap over the hills inked upon the paper and know what it was reading.

Could it?

Not entirely. Leif had found out that if a man thought out a sentence you asked him to cerebrate, the 'picker could reproduce the words. But that was all. It couldn't give you the emotions or the thousand other events that went with the stylo-ized waves. It couldn't portray the inner sensations: the feelings of repulsion, annoyance, lust, love, or boredom. It couldn't tell you a man was hungry or describe his reactions to a beautiful woman walking down the street.

If a man thought, *Geeze, I could eat the hind end of a skunk, or Boy, what a classy chassis!*, and his tongue repeated sublingually those stirring words, the waves broadcast by his brain could be caught and kymoed.

What if he stood silent upon a peak in Darien?

You, the god with the mindreader, suddenly found yourself scanning a new tongue, the undecipherable hieroglyphics called, technically, static.

Leif had been taught at the CWC College that the waves could be correlated with the definite spoken syllables and that these were to be known as logikons or word-images.

Where, the young Dr. Bark had thought, were the other ikons?

There were none. None, at least, that could be picked up by the machine.

This was not true telepathy, the mind-reading conceived by science-fiction writers and scientists.

This brainskimming was a travesty on that concept, a mockery of man's hopes.

You read a sentence and then came to a blank. Or found a word cut off in half. You knew that these pauses were full of 'thinking.' But words were not all that were used in thinking. And, unfortunately, words were all you could interpret. Great seas of non-intelligibility surrounded little islands of knowableness.

Leif, after studying the 'picker for ten years, concluded that a new machine needed to be built.

It must be capable of detecting and interpreting all the impulses sent by the muscles, the nerves, the glands, and, in

short, the total of organs. Suppose you could get the wave-image of bodily posture and the internal sensations integrated thereto? What would you have? The kinesthetikon?

That, of course, would be changing from second to second. Image stepping on image's heels.

Then you'd have to add to that the feelings engendered by reception of beauty or ugliness from outside the skin or inside: the sight of a sunset, the taste of a thick and tender steak. These multiplex images would form a whole: the esthetikon.

Integrate all the incredibly complicated phenomena of signs and symbols and the reactions to them, the weaving of ikons, and what would you get?

That's right. The semantikon: the meaning-image.

And how would you know what this image looked like?

It wasn't as difficult to find as you might think.

Meaning, or another word for it, value, was *what you did*. Action and reaction made up the moving ikon. Idols rose and fell, and their birth, power, and toppling were you as you passed through frames of time and space and perhaps other frames that some do not recognize and others do, even if only faintly.

So, thought Leif, if that were true, where would you get a machine to show you the transient ikons and the one big image they formed? And if you had the machine, how would you present the semantikon to the reader so he might see that multitude of wave pictures in one *word*, in one *symbol*? How would you hurl that symbol long distances for instant communication? What could do that? What could receive it?

The question was, he suspected, wrongly phrased. It wasn't *what*. It was who.

The answer was obvious. He'd seen just such a machine that very morning. As a result of his busyness—or stupidity—he'd probably lost forever his chance to study one.

Sighing, he bent over Dannto's rec-

ord. As he'd expected, there was nothing unusual here. The Sandalphon was a man. A man didn't differ from his fellows as much as he liked to think. No matter how high his position or his deeds, his morals or his I.Q., he concerned himself with much the same things as the fellow next door and had much the same reactions.

Dannto was scared of dying on the table under Leif's knife, even though he had great confidence in his ability. There was one main suspicion; what if some of his inferiors had managed to bribe the doctor into slipping with the blade?

That was rejected as unworthy. Bark was a fine doctor and a pleasant fellow, even if his conversation did sometimes border on unreality. He was, in a way, a very modest person. Look how he'd snatched Halla from the hands of the angel of death. Yet he'd poohpooed her wounds in order to save him, Dannto, his temporal master, grief and worry.

Here Leif read snatches of thoughts, interspersed by stretches of 'static', the technical term for uninterpretable waves. The gist was that Dannto had first seen Halla ten years ago when she'd applied for a job. She had been the secretary of the Metatron of Northern Asia. When that man had been killed in an accident (ha, thought Leif, the good old murderous CWC again) she'd applied for transfer to Paris and, rare event, gotten it.

Here there were flashes of something; a partial phrase of 'the first time I saw her unveiled'; followed by a cavalry charge of lancelike peaks, interpreted by Leif as some sort of emotion. Then there was a sentence of approval on high heels, lipstick and discard of veils, although they'd been for some years a more or less established fact.

A pause; there were many pauses; for the brain, like other organs of the body, rested between beats; then, out of nowhere, speculations about Candleman; how he'd raved on hearing the pronouncements of the council of Rek; denounced the increasing degeneration of the Haijac as signified by the daring dresses of women and the increase of

use of alcohol and the unconcerns of those who ought to stamp such things out.

An interjected and irrelevant thought about asking Bark for a stronger laxative; then the tag end of a joke he'd heard the other day; then the recent offer of a bribe by the director of a space-ship construction department, and his hesitation over whether or not it might be a trap, devised by his inferiors to displace him and his final conclusion that he would denounce the would-be briber. He didn't need the money, anyway.

Here and there hopped his thoughts, a kangaroo going no place in particular, stopping to nibble at this and that tender bush.

Candleman entered again, like a draft in a haunted house, drifting in through a broken window and rippling one's neck with the thought that perhaps a ghost was behind one. The Uzzite's long hunt for Jacques Cuze was becoming a problem, interfering with his efficiency on other matters. Candleman's keen and hot pursuit of the underground character was almost metaphysical, he had so many complicated theories as to *who* Cuze was, *where* he was, *what* he was doing now and going to do next. More static: probably a picture of Candleman in some pose or other; then, verification, the sub-vocalized English phrase "axenosed bloodhound," applied to Candleman.

Static. A wonder if he should diet. Halla had made some teasing references to his paunch getting in the way. A dwelling on his past jealousies over this and that man who'd been interested in her; there were so many. Some he'd transferred; others demoted; about three of the most tiresome he'd sent to H. Not that he distrusted Halla, but then you never know. Remember Sigmen's warnings to believe only what you saw a woman doing and then check on that. Static. That old bastard Sigmen must have hated women for some good reason. Was he. . . static. . . forgive me, good Forerunner, for these unreal thoughts. I am weak and these awful. . . offal. . . heh, heh. . . ideas sometimes seize me

... Sent, no doubt, by the sinister Backrunner, who can implant unreality by telepathy. J. C.? J. C.? That fool, Candleman, and his Jacques Cuze, Jude Changer is the man behind that, you can bet. . . . static. . . . gap.

I forgot to get my fingernails cleaned must have that new manicurist Rahab. . . . significant name. . . . do them. Halla will be too weak for a while no, shameful. . . . shameful. . . . wonder how Leif's making out with his secretary? Rachael's pretty, but I'll bet cold, cold, an icicle on two legs. . . . like so many women. . . . Halla only *real* woman ever had. . . . what colleagues think if knew that. . . . Sigmen says sex ought to be repressed make more amenable citizens. . . . shib . . . shib. . . . but what about hierarchy. . . . should they be same as citizens? Better than. . . . Hállá only woman knows how give. . . . Sigmen, what if I die while thinking these unreal thoughts. . . . forgive. . . . the old Backrunner in me. . . .

So that's how I. . . . I I I I look inside me Nest of worms. . . . Leif good man. . . . won't make mistake. . . . hope. . . . hope. . . . ah, to die, never see Halla again. . . . she go to another man. . . . Sigmen! Rather she died. . . . static. . . .

And then a long and sustained vision of what would happen after the Time-stop. Leif could not see the images; he had to piece together from stray words. Sigmen would make the pseudo-worlds real and give each and every one of his faithful followers an entire universe to rule. Imagine your own Cosmos. . . . get it on a platter. . . . step through a door, leave this world. . . . all hail, Emperor of Infinity, Sovereign of Eternity. . . . what is your will? will? will? will? and so the echo bounced down the resonant chambers of the mind.

Leif could imagine the orgy burning through the forest of neurons, he'd seen enough into the minds of other men to guess that. He wasn't particularly disgusted; what did make him recoil a trifle was the hypocrisy.

Leif dutifully read the rest of the kymo. Most of it was the usual Augean

flood; he did smile when he came across more irrepressible doubts about the beliefs of the Sturch rising from the unconscious, and the thought that he might have been wasting his time so rigorously following a falsehood. Then more anguished cerebral bellows of repentance and demands for forgiveness; all quite stylized. Doubt here being put upon a formalistic religious basis, then the concluding prayer that he be given the zealous fanatical certainty and unswerving faith of a Candleman. But not, dear Sigmen, the one-dimensional mind that went with them.

"Amen," said Leif and dropped the graph into an incinerator.

XII

INSERTING fresh paper in the kymo, Leif turned to go. Startled, he paused, for a man in a white orderly's smock stood by the door. He had a pale skin, red hair, blue eyes and a high-arched, flare-nostriled nose.

"*Shalom*, Jim Crew," said Leif.

"*Shalom*," said Crew.

"Do you still want the same thing?"

"You know I do," Dr. Bark. We could have let our child die long ago. But we love her, and so we've been . . . holding her hand . . . because we know that there are some things we can't do."

"There are other surgeons in this city. Why come to me?"

He turned to the 'picker and flicked on the toggle. Then he turned the helmet until the dial registered impact with cerebral waves. He turned another dial so the helmet, whose inner surface was the receiver, would turn, following the source of radiation as a flower focuses upon the sun. Nor, if Leif's waves crossed the beam, would it be confused, for it was set for Crew's individual pattern.

Crew smiled.

"You need not do that, Doctor. Look at the graph."

Leif saw nothing but static. He turned to face Crew.

"You are deliberating creating that?"

"Yes. You can too, with instruction.

And the will."

"You still haven't answered my question. Why come to me?"

Crew stepped closer, walking upon his toes, turned slightly inward.

He looked earnestly into the surgeon's face.

"There are several other doctors who could help our child. But these would all inform the Uzzites. You will not."

"Why not?"

"Because, first, and least important, you would fear we would write a note to Candleman and tell him that you are not Leif Bark, but Lev Baruch; that you are the leader of the most important movement of the CWC; that many Israelites are wearing the lamech because of a drug that enables them to pass the Elohimeter; that you know what Jacques Cuze means.

"That alone would make you come with us.

"But we won't use such means, Dr. Bark. We would let our child die rather than use force, even mental force. Such violence could only recoil upon us. You will come because it is not your nature to allow a child to die."

"You're very sure of yourself," said Leif. "If you won't use coercion, why call on me at all? You must know that by doing so I'm not only exposing myself to the Jacks, but my own people as well. If they hear of it, they'll be gunning for me."

"I notice you said doing, not if you do. But I'll answer you. We're appealing to your humanity. Those other issues don't matter. They are based upon bloodshed, murder, treachery, hate."

"True—" said Leif—"but a man must defend himself."

"The best defense is none."

"We won't get far exchanging platitudes like two wise owls hooting at each other. What kind of surgical equipment do you have?"

Jim Crew gestured helplessly. "We don't use medicines. The little equipment we do have, we borrowed from our neighbors, the Timbuktumen."

"Very well. Describe the child's injury."

As Jim Crew closed his eyes and gave a very accurate word-picture, Leif ticked off what he would need. He couldn't carry too bulky a load; he would have to improvise.

He had rationalized that he was doing the CWC a service by contacting this unknown underground, by finding out what the Bantus were doing. Though the Africans were a negligible military power, they could have a certain effectiveness, and the Israeli Republics might like to use them at some time.

Bark knew he was rationalizing, that the service would consider his actions material for court-martial. But man must rationalize, even when he knows it.

WHILE he was collecting the materials from the Pharm in the connecting room, Leif said, "Where did you Banties get that depigmentizing technique?"

"Curiously enough, it's the invention of a Jack convert," said Jim Crew.

"The full details for extracting or depositing pigment have been lying for fifty years in the files of the professional journal for keratinologists. It, like many others that could be utilized, has sunk into the dust of libraries. The joat who read it never realized its possibilities. And the inventor himself escaped to Capetown."

Without asking permission, Leif tilted the man's head so the light fell on the desired angle on the nose. "You should have had me put in the artificial arch," he said. "I'd not have left any surgical signs there or on your lips."

"The scar appeared after we were depigmentized. The process seemed to bring them out."

Unimpressed, Leif grunted and said, "Let's go."

They took the service car and left separately, by the hospital's rear, through the personnel's door. The Uzzite on guard there flashed his light. Leif showed his lamech; Jim Crew, his ID.

"Where did you get the uniform and the card," asked Leif, as they climbed into his runabout.

"My brother used to work here," said the African. "We knew there would some day come a use for such things."

Leif started the motor and turned on the headlights. "How did you four get in here this morning? I know the Uzzites weren't watching then, but just the same, it's very difficult to pass the regular gapts."

"We have lovers."

"Ah! And why did all of you have to come! Why not one?"

"Together we are more than just four or just one."

"The whole is greater than the parts?"

"Something like that."

Jim Crew watched Leif drive for a while and then said, "How do you know where we are going?"

Leif blinked and said, "I don't know. Rather, I just *knew*."

He paused. "I had the *feeling* of my destination."

He struck the wheel with his left fist. "It's gone now!"

"I shouldn't have said anything," purred Jim Crew. "You are like a child who knows something until it is pointed out by an ignorant adult that he can't possibly know. Then, of course, he no longer knows."

"Well, where do we go?"

Crew pointed. Leif was silent, thinking partly about what he'd said and partly about Crew's need for a bath.

After a while, the Bantu said, "We are being followed."

"I might have known we couldn't get away with it," said Leif. He looked at the rear-view mirror but could not see any cars.

"Where are they?"

"Around the corner."

"Listen," said Leif. "If they catch us, I'm protecting myself. I'm claiming that you forced me at gun's point to go with you to operate on your daughter."

Jim Crew shivered and said, "I don't like being accused of violence. But, as you say. Only, I think you'd better kill me. Otherwise, they'll drug the truth from me."

"I will," said Leif. "But they haven't caught us yet."

He pressed the accelerator to the floor. The most it could do was forty; the Uzzite's car would be capable of three times that much.

"They can catch us, but they'll probably let us go to our destination," said Leif. "I'd like it if we could abandon this car and make our way on foot."

"Set the controls for auto," suggested Jim. "After we turn the next corner. We can get out and go down that subway entrance."

AS THEY rounded the huge block of a building, Leif slammed on the brakes; they slowed to ten, he set the dials, and then he and Crew jumped out. Neither fell. They struck the ground running and continued unchecked into the subway entrance.

"This won't fool them long," said Leif. "They'll be back shortly, and they may have radioed the Uzzites at the gates to watch for us."

Jim Crew ran down granite-looking plastic grey steps. He did not turn to the right, which led to the platforms, but the other way, which ran to a large room housing various concessions and comfort stations.

They had to force their way through crowds; this was not only the hour when many were on their way home from work; the stations were always thronged with Paris' overpopulation.

Naturally, there would be many gapts and Uzzites among them who would, if outcry arose, seize them, but Leif had thrown his coat back so his lamech showed. The sight of it was a trumpet blast; everybody stepped to one side.

When they went into the indicated lane, Leif appreciated the Jack modesty, which he'd mocked at once. Heirs of the long dead Parisians, the present occupants had rejected the Gallic earthiness and substituted their own code of bashfulness. This included many cubicles with swinging doors that reached from ceiling to floor to insure privacy.

As the gapt turned away at a secret signal, both men entered a cubicle. Leif noticed the J. C. scratched on the door.

He raised his brows, for it was his first indication that the Banties also had utilized that sign and symbol. It was, he thought, natural, for it could easily represent their Lord and Master and also helped to confound them with the legendary Frenchman, perhaps to disguise altogether their presence in Paris.

They were using the Izzies; could the Izzies use them?

When the two had crowded into the closet, Jim said, "Don't snap the lock. That would be the surest thing to lead the Uzzites to us."

"Give me credit for brains."

Jim didn't reply. Reaching up as far as he could, he pressed against a square in the pattern stamped into the plastic pseudo-marble.

"Left hand corner, seven down for the Seven Deadly Sins, three across for the Trinity that wipes them out," said Jim Crew. "It doesn't work unless you press rapidly seven times, pause three seconds, and then press three more."

The section slid backwards and then to one side. Jim Crew stepped in and turned around to beckon Leif. Smiling, he went through. The Bantie pushed the rectangle back into place.

DOWN they went on a spiral. The surgeon counted three hundred steps, easily enough to take them below the level of the present-day subways. They must be getting close to the ancient subways or the pre-Apocalyptic sewers.

Presently the Bantie warned his blind followers to stop; they were coming to a door. Leif couldn't see what moves the man was making, but his hand was seized and placed upon a lever.

"It's to the right, halfway down," said Crew.

"Thanks. But we surely won't be coming back the same way?"

"No. It's a good thing to know, though, if you have to take this route again."

"You're very open about these things."

"We trust you."

Leif wondered if the fellow ever

used anything but the editorial plural. He didn't seem to have an ego of his own.

They stepped out into what must have been a long tunnel with a high roof, for their whispers and the shuffle of their feet came back to them hollow and magnified.

"What about using a light?" asked Leif.

Jim Crew seemed surprised. "What? Oh yes, if it will make you feel any better. But you can trust that we won't fall—I *know* these places."

SOMEHOW, Leif felt reproached. His hand dropped from his coat pocket, his flashlight untouched. Nevertheless, he would have liked to get a glimpse of the legendary underground of Paris.

They stopped on the lip of a ledge of concrete. Crew let himself down over it and helped Leif. Before they'd gone a few steps, Leif halted to feel around on the floor.

"There used to be iron tracks here," he said.

"Yes, this was, at one time, the top-level track for the subway. But as years went by and the city kept on building up and up, it became one of the lowest. Then, when Paris was h-bombed, these tunnels became sealed off by a fused silicon sheet. A new Paris built upon it. But come. We've a long way to go. And Anadi is getting further away from her fathers and mothers; we know that the strength is draining from our hands faster and faster."

"It would be very sociable of you if you would explain what you're talking about."

"We. . . *sh!*"

Jim Crew dropped so suddenly that his disciple bumped into him. Instantly, Leif pulled his flash and automatic out, one in each hand. The Bantu grabbed his shoulder and ran his hand down the doctor's arm, feeling for his hand.

"Put those away," was his whispered rebuke.

A voice whispered from the darkness,

very near, very low, and yet so close that Leif could have sworn the breath fanned his cheek..

"Jim Crew. Leif Bark."

Chills raked down his back. He raised his flash to center it upon the owner of the voice. Before he could press the button to turn it on, he felt the tube snatched from his fingers.

"Damn it, Crew!" he bellowed, forgetting all caution. "Give that back!"

"May the Lord forgive you," whispered the Bantu. "I didn't do that."

"There's something funny about this," replied Leif, automatically dropping his volume. "What're you trying to pull on me? *That was the voice of Halla Dannto!*"

"Which one?" husked Crew.

"What do you mean? I've only heard the second . . ."

He trailed off into a sigh as the full significance seized his throat.

Hoarsely, he said, "Come on, give. *Who* is that?"

Jim Crew moved close to Leif. His shudders ran down his arm and shook Leif's. Suddenly a hand, presumably the Bantu's, reached out from the dark and traced two perpendicular lines across the surgeon's forehead.

"In that sign, save us," whispered the African.

Leif felt like echoing him. He opened his mouth to ask another question, and a long, thin, and hard object was thrust into it. He bit down on it, went to spit it out, and stopped, for it was his flashlight. At the same time, somebody tittered.

The next moment, disregarding Crew's warning cry, he turned it on.

He wished he hadn't.

It was Halla Dannto standing in the darkness.

Not the woman in the bed in 113.

The woman who had submitted to his knife. The woman upon the marble slab.

He cried out and then, trying to control himself, bit down upon his lower lip so hard that the blood flowed and left salt in his mouth.

The cone of light wavered as his hand

shook, but it showed distinctly the scalp rolled back like an orange peeling, the gaping chest and abdomen.

"What is that?" he snarled.

Fury was replacing panic.

The Bantu gripped his arm and said, "Try hard. Try hard to see *through* her, see who's *behind* her."

Leif didn't understand him. Nevertheless, he made an effort to stare the thing down, to look, as Crew suggested, through her. It was almost impossible to do. She frightened and nauseated him; facing her was like facing his own conscience.

The floodtide of anger helped him. He couldn't keep out the idea that perhaps the Bantu and an accomplice were playing a trick of some kind on him. Reason told him otherwise. Crew had not known beforehand that they were coming down this way. Besides, what could be the purpose of such a fraud?

That thing was no masquerade; it was real.

XIII

LEIF stepped forward, holding the beam steady as he did so. The figure wavered, became slightly out-of-focus, melted. For a second Leif could see through it and glimpsed the face of a man. It was one like Crew's: very pale, thick-lipped, with a nose with broad nostrils and high arch. The mouth was open and drooling; the eyes were closed tightly as if the light hurt them.

"That's far enough," said Jim Crew. "Don't make him mad! Leave him alone. He won't hurt us. That is, if you turn the light off, he won't."

The doctor hated to relinquish the beam, for he felt helpless in the dark with a *thing* like that close, a thing that obviously could move in the night of the tunnel as confidently as he could at high noon. So urgent was his companion's voice, so compelling, he obeyed.

Jim Crew sighed, "Ah!" and said, "Let's go. I don't think he'll follow."

His hand pulled Leif's. The latter, his

spine tingling at the idea of a knife sinking in from behind, let himself be guided down the crumbling tracks. When they'd traveled exactly five hundred steps, when he no longer felt that other feet were behind him, he said, "Crew, I'm going no further until you tell me what that was. This is getting me. For a moment I almost believed in the hereafter; I thought it was here after me."

"You're not too scared," said the Bantu, chuckling. "All right. I can guess what you saw from the few words you let drop. I won't tell you what I saw. Then you'd really be frightened."

"Do you remember this morning when you rejected our plea and turned to walk away? What thought came to you then?"

"*Quo Vadis?* Where are you going?"

"That's what we suspected," said the African, "though in things like that we can never be sure. What we did was not so much telepathy, in the sense you think of that power. We, the four of us, summoned up our group *feeling*, the sum total of us, all the patterns of our bodies, focused them, and hurled that pattern of patterns to you."

"You didn't have to receive it. You could have blandly rejected it, not even knowing it was being offered you. Your 'antenna' could have been withdrawn, as it is in so many. But it wasn't. It was out, even if only a little bit. And so you picked up what we'd sent—that feeling."

"Again, I repeat, we didn't project words: syllables clumped together to form individual meanings and these strung out in a false syntax. No, we gave you *us*, the concern that burned in all four. And, since it succeeded in stamping itself on you, you took it in, ferreted in your unconscious for the phrase or symbol that would most nearly match the *feeling*. Your memory came up with '*Quo Vadis.*'"

"See, we didn't directly speak to you. We dredged up your *response*. You, because you must explain events to yourself in terms of words, spoke to yourself in the most apt symbol. Had it been another man, one ignorant of that phrase

and the story connected with it, he would have found some other thing to say to himself. You see what I mean?"

Though Crew could not see him in the dark, (or could he?) Leif nodded and said, "That feeling of grief? You threw it at me?"

"Yes, though we couldn't sustain it long because you have so little experience of grief in your own being. Moreover, Mopa, the laughter, broke up our rapport."

"You're the machine!" the doctor broke out.

"What?"

Leif laughed and said, "I wondered where the machine was that could receive and interpret and project the semantikon: the total of all the ikons the body-mind builds, the meaning-image. I might have known it was all around me, in more senses than one. And that it had been in existence quite a few millennia."

"Your feeling gets through," said Jim Crew. His hand squeezed on Leif's. "We love you."

The Midian could overlook that. The *we* made it sound impersonal. Nevertheless, he flushed with embarrassment in the dark.

HE SAID, "If you don't explain about that horror we met a little while ago, I'm going to take this scalpel and do some fancy whittling on you."

"What his name was," said Crew, "is not known. We have a list of twelve; he could be any one of them. To tell briefly what he is, we have to go into our background. We Bantus in Africa, you know, are split up into two groups, both based originally on religious differences. Both, however, represent the only large bodies of Christendom left. The smaller nation, Chad, is dominated by the Holy Timbaktu Church, an organization that claims to have kept the teachings of our Founder uncorrupted."

"We, however, who hold central and southern Africa, believe that the Timbaktuians are an encrustation of super-

stition and oppressive authority."

Leif grinned to himself in the dark. The fellow was speaking out of character; his style showed that he, like many a missionary, was quoting from book. Crew's case was only slightly different. He couldn't be accused of having read his speech, for, ten to one, he was illiterate, the Bantus frowning upon print as a device that got in the way of natural communication.

"We Primitives have, as our name indicates, resolutely stripped off *all* such bindings and returned naked to the vital Truth. We have but the one or two fundamental teachings that matter; through these we have attained to our present state, that is, one in which religion, mysticism, economics, politics, our whole life becomes one. We haven't allowed petty morality to stand in our way: the only code we have is the Golden Rule which we regard as the reality . . ."

"That's enough," growled Leif. "Spare me the lecture. You're talking like a Jack-ass Urielite now. Reality! You know how *they* mouth that word. You should know better. In one syllable words, tell me about that man."

Crew squeezed Leif's hand again. "You're right. To be brief, we Primitives have utilized that gift once known as magic. The ancient Africans, you know, had a genius for magic. It seemed to be the one gift that distinguished them from other races. Actually, it was the misunderstood science of extra-sensory perception that those savages were using so wildly. They didn't have the controls or comprehension needed to develop it.

"And when the Christianity of that day came in, plus white imperialism, the gift was weakened. But after the Apocalyptic War, there was a religious revival among the few of my people left. A great man arose among us, just as Sigmen arose among the Haijanc nations. His name was Jikiza Chandu, and he was the first man to realize that we must fuse a vision of God with insight into our bodies. Fusion was his rally-

cry, and . . ."

"Fuse you did," Leif concluded for him. "And what has this got to do with my question?"

FOR the first time since he'd known him, he detected annoyance in Crew. The depigmented man said, "The person we just met was rejected from our society. He was a misfit, one who could not or would not, fit into the pattern of our group. He twisted the great gifts he obtained while living as one of us and used them for evil purposes. He tried to get control over our underground here, and during his efforts he allowed so much power to flow through him that he . . . to use a simile you could understand . . . blew out a fuse. In this case, the fuse was himself.

"He, like several others who tried to remain by force the focus of our group, now haunts the tunnels and sewers by day and roams the surface streets at night. They cannot hurt their own people, unless they catch us off guard, but they have done some terrible damage up there. Their victims either commit suicide or go to the insane asylums."

"Why don't you kill them? Or, at least, imprison them?"

"What? Violence on a fellow-creature?"

"You talked about reality. Isn't self-preservation real?"

"Use the sword, and you die by it. The meek shall inherit the earth. We know, because we've tested it through the centuries, that passive resistance means survival. Spill blood to save yourself for a little while, and in time you'll be drowned in the backwash."

"Indeed!"

"Pardon me, Doctor, but you saw what those 'Men In The Dark,' as we call them, can do. They use their twisted powers for the only use they can. They do not project; they reflect. That is, they can gather up the patterns of the energies broadcast by the victim, sum them up, and send them back to the originator. He feels the abstraction, if

I may call it that, absorbs it, and sees a specter that has risen from the depths of his own unconscious.

"You, if I may venture my intuition, were feeling both sad about Halla Dann-to's death and guilty because you had disobeyed the CWC's orders about cremating her immediately. Also, you knew that you were going to break more commandments, that you were in love with the living Halla, and that come what might, you were going to find means to see her. Even if it meant jeopardizing the entire Plan.

"You may not even have been aware that these things were affecting you so deeply. When the Man In The Dark caught what was really deepest in you at that time, he showed it to you.

"The extraordinary thing is that the Man does not see what you do. Not at all. He senses to some extent your feeling, but he never visualizes anything. He does not know what horror he is wreaking upon you. Just the same, being insane and sadistic, he apprehends your reactions. And feeds upon them. If the victim becomes too terrified, loses his head, the Man gains more power, the force of the vision becomes more powerful, and so on.

"A Timbuktu friend of man, versed in technical matters, explained once to me that it was an uncontrolled positive feedback. Whatever that means, the effect is terrible; J. C. save those poor souls."

"J. C. You, too? What does that mean?"

"Jikiza Chandu, our Lord and Master."

"I would have thought those initials stood for your Founder."

"Oh, they do. He is Jikiza Chandu. Jikiza Chandu is Him. We are all both. They are us."

NO WONDER, thought Leif, that the Church of Timbuktu thought these fellows were the blasphemers' blasphemers.

Yet, and here he shrugged with that

acceptance that so maddened his associates, they based their reasoning upon several literally taken statements, and in this they were doing no more than their bitterest opponents. Moreover, those who had been to Bantuland said that theirs was the first, and only, large human society in which one could tread the length and breadth of a continent and find no jails, no hospitals, no insane asylums, no weapons factories, (scarcely any industries, it must be admitted) no segregation. And also, no lust nor love murders, no orphans, no stealing, no rich, no poor.

You could find plenty to criticize, to deplore, but you didn't affect the disciples of that half-Zulu, half-Hindu prophet, Chandu.

He laughed, and when Jim Crew asked why, he replied, "Oh, I'm thinking about certain incredible coincidences—that when you admit there are certain unconscious rapports between minds, you see that coincidence is only a word to hide our ignorance."

"You are laughing about the J. C.'s?"

"Yes."

"Good, I laugh, too," and he did, squeezing Leif's hand again.

The doctor was about to protest when he was stopped by the Bantu.

"We're here."

XIV

THE world outside had been dark and somewhat dampish-chilly. Crew opened a door, and they stepped into a country bright and hot. Nobody was there to greet them, but the Bantu insisted that his people knew the two were coming.

"Steam heat," he said in reply to the doctor's unspoken question. He calmly removed his clothes and hung them upon one of the many hooks lining the walls of the large room. Almost all were festooned with garments.

"Would you care?" Jim Crew said, waving his hand at the hooks. Leif shook his head. The pale man said, "We

thought you might want to shower."

Leif growled impatiently at the man who had stepped into the shower. "I thought we were in such a hurry to look at your child."

The Bantu stepped out and, still naked and dripping, walked into another room. "Follow us, doctor. That shower took only a minute. And it was much more than you could see—it was a ceremony, one we Primitives always perform when we return home. It was also a prayer, a combination of physical and psychic cleansing and an asking of J. C. that Anadi might be saved. At the same time, we communicated with those who are holding hands and found out that Anadi will endure until you get to her."

He led the surgeon through several small rooms, some of which had bunks lining the walls. One had an altar with a man hanging from a crucifix. His skin was black, and the face was an abstraction, belonging to no race except that which has suffered but has seen a light to smooth out all lines of pain. If Leif had had more time, he would have stopped to discuss with Crew the sculptor and his technique. He had heard that the Bantus were the great artists of today, that they were doing things nobody had ever done before in painting, sculpture and music.

The first men and women they met were unclothed, like Crew. They crowded around the newcomer and swarmed over him, kissing and fondling him. He returned their caresses and then made swift introductions. One of the girls was a steatopygous Diana whose imperfect depigmentation had left her freckled with huge spots. She clung to Leif's neck and whispered that she loved him. "Brindled Beatrice, I love you, too," he replied and dismissed her with a slap.

"Someday you should examine that levity and see what it is hiding," remarked Crew.

Despite his joking, the sweat had popped out on his head in a profusion even the steam-heat couldn't account for. He was beginning to wonder what he'd let himself in for. His simple errand

of mercy was far from simple.

Jim Crew took his hand and led him through another series of rooms. As the walls were concrete and painted over with murals, many of which were peeling already, Leif could not tell what these chambers had once been used for. In some the floors and sides had split wide open to admit earth, oozing through like blood in a wound, or to show hard rock behind.

EVERY place held half a dozen or so people who greeted Jim demonstratively and then rose to follow the two. Once Leif looked over his shoulder. They had formed a long line, two abreast, male and female, each pair holding hands with each other between them and placing their outside hands on the shoulders of the person ahead of them. The sexes were staggered, so that each man had his outstretched fingers upon the skin of a woman in front, and the woman in her turn touched the back of a man.

A low mutter arose; man and woman chanting a whispering phone and anti-phone. Though he could not make out the individual words, which he was sure were in Swahili, he felt the hairs rise on his neck. Somehow, it sounded and *felt* like a thunderstorm gathering in the hills, ready to break, stretching the air with lightning-streaks in embryo.

He was glad when they finally stopped in the room where the little girl lay. Unconscious, she was stretched out upon a bed. A man and a woman crouched by her, her hands in theirs. Beside them stood a tall Negro, clothed in black and wearing a white collar turned backwards. He looked up at Leif through thick lenses and hornrimmed glasses.

"Ah, Doctor Bark," he said, stepping up and holding his hand out. Leif shook it while Crew said that this was the Reverend Anthony Djouba. A member of the Timbuktu underground, he was also a doctor. Crew's friends had not hesitated in contacting him for aid for Anadi. Apparently, the two sects did work together now and then.

Leif examined the framework of wire and sponge rubber and quickdrying plaster that held the girl's skull together.

"Very good," he said. "You did this, *abba*?"

Djouba replied in a high, thin voice, "Yes, I brought along all the materials I had. They're not much, but they'll help."

Leif examined his bag and agreed with him. Then he looked into the top of the cast around Anadi's head, whistling as he did so at what he saw. She should have died instantly. That she hadn't, and that she still lived was to him proof that she possessed something extraordinary. For the first time, he began to wonder if, actually, there was more than a sort of modified black magic to this talk about "holding hands."

Djouba, looking over his shoulder, "tsk-tsked" and said, "Pieces of bone in her brain. Even if we save her, doctor, I'm afraid she'll be an idiot."

Impersonally, the two discussed what they would do, then laid out their tools. The Midian began to sterilize his equipment. Crew insisted that it wasn't necessary. None of them feared germs; their bodies could handle the most virulent.

Bark silenced him. He was the doctor; he was doing this operation. Get busy and scrub down that table. As soon as that was done, he and his friends should put Anadi upon it.

LIFTING Anadi was easy, as she weighed no more than ninety pounds. Immediately afterwards, Leif began working. For six hours he bent over the incredibly shattered cranium and injured brain. Then, tired, hands on the verge of trembling, he extracted the last fragment of bone and deposited upon the gray mass a thick film of blueprint jelly. Djouba then capped the open skull with a plastic arch. At this point Crew protested again that the artificial top would not be needed. Anadi, he maintained, would in time regrow her own skull.

"In that case," replied Leif, making no attempt to hide his incredulity, "you may remove the cap whenever you want

to. But I'd like to see that when it happens."

Djouba removed his thick glasses and polished them.

"Much as I hate to give these people credit for anything," he said, "I'll have to admit that she may do just that. I saw some strange things while I was a missionary in Bantuland."

"But bone, doctor! I can conceive that a human being might, through advanced self-awareness, rediscover the lost faculty of regeneration of flesh. But bone!"

Djouba put his glasses back on. His eyes grew enormous behind the lenses.

"I didn't say she could. I said she might." Djouba smiled at Leif.

"A poor sort of miracle-working."

"I'd like to get going," said Leif, impatiently, not wishing to become too involved with these people.

"Wouldn't you two like to eat first?" asked one of the women. She was the Brindled Beatrice.

"I would," he said.

Djouba hesitated.

Crew said, "It is about the only way we can now pay you, *abba*. As for the future, who knows?"

"Anadi does," shrilled the Brindled Beatrice. "She always could tell the future."

"I'll stay," said Djouba. Then smiling, "If she could look ahead into time, why didn't she avoid getting her skull crushed?"

"She must have had a good reason. She'll tell us when she mends. As for now, let's eat."

THEY went into a very large room that Leif suspected had once been a waiting room for an ancient subway. There they sat down to hot locust soup, fresh, baked bread, candied yams, bananas and milk. Brindled Beatrice, who insisted upon sitting next to Leif, said that some of the food had been stolen or else contributed by Jack converts, but that most of it was shipped in through a secret method.

From the hints she dropped, he got the impression that the food came by

underwater, perhaps in an amphibious spaceship that crept under the surface of the Seine to Paris and discharged its cargo through a submerged lock. This surprised him, for he thought the Bantus had no complicated craft.

While they talked, the people in the background chanted softly. When the meal was over, and thanks had been given, all the Bantus sang the low hint-of-thunder song that had raised his hackles when he was being led to Anadi. As some cleared away the dishes, the others formed into the same pairings of male and female. This time, they made six concentric circles. Each circle linked to the next by a man and woman who kept their backs to each other and their palms against the breasts or back of a person in the human rings.

Djouba, on Leif's other side, shifted uneasily said, "They might at least have considered me and waited until I was gone. After all I did for them, too."

He put his spoon down and rose.

Leif said, "What's the matter?"

When he half rose, he was pulled back by his freckled companion.

"Lover, let him go," she crooned.

"Have some respect for my cloth!" shouted Djouba.

"We love you!" came the response.

"I don't want that kind of love!"

"We love you!" crashed the surf.

"God forgive you for that blasphemy."

Unhearing, the circles began to sway back and forth, to rotate in little hops and shuffles.

Jim Crew sprang upon the table that was the center of the six rims. Flinging up his arms, he yelled, "Who's our lover?"

The throats became one vast megaphone, bellowing in Leif's ears.

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And whom do we love?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who are we?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who is he?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who loves Dr. Djouba?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"No, no! screamed the Timbuktuian. "Stop this outrage! Let me out!"

"And who loves Dr. Bark?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who is Djouba?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who is Bark?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And who is the lover and the beloved, the god and the man, the creator and the created, the man and the woman?"

"Jikiza Chandu!"

"And what does Jikiza Chandu say?"

Now the circles were whirling faster, faster, the people which formed them kept from whirling away by linking hands together. Their faces were contorted. Their mouths were wide, lips drawn back. Their eyes were glowing blue ovals. Their nostrils flared and snorted. Teeth shone wetly; spittle flew.

There was a sudden stoppage of the shouts that had echoed and re-echoed from the far-off walls; there was only the stomp and slap of bare feet and the sound of their stertorous breathing. Torsos shook so that flesh looked like groundwaves. Hips rotated or stabbed so violently they looked as if they must dislocate pelves.

Then, following the audible sucking in of breath, the visible swelling of chests, a mighty word was hurled against the walls and against the ears of all doubters.

"Love."

"Love!" screamed the Brindled Beatrice.

Where he might in a different place and under different circumstances have enjoyed this ardent female, he now had but one idea, and that was the same as Djouba's—*get out!*

In about sixty seconds, he'd scrambled, jumped, pushed, crawled and run through the flailing bodies, waving arms and clutching hands. Once he reached haven, he turned and saw that the Chadian was close behind him. His tattered clothes, rent from him by the crowd, were held to his chest in clutching hands.

"God help me!" Djouba panted. "That is a new type of martyrdom!"

Leif had regained some of his detachment.

"You're a saint now?"

The Chadian adjusted his glasses. Recovered sight seemed to add to his assurance.

"Only a matter of speaking."

He looked at the room.

"Unspeakable!"

"They're just expressing their love. And you must admit that not only are they not hypocrites, but they seem to have affection enough for everybody."

"Gross carnality!"

Djouba shuddered and glanced down at his body.

"We can get clothes for you in the entrance," said Leif, not unkindly. "They're rags, but they'll keep the bold eyes and the chill off."

"I can't understand why they did this to me. After all, I kept their child from dying until you arrived."

"A matter of viewpoint. The whole affair was a thanksgiving because we helped to save her."

"I note you were just as eager as I to leave."

Leif shrugged and said, "I've been raised in a different culture from yours, but like yourself I failed to adjust to theirs. They must have something. Beside their development of psychosomatic powers, they've the most nearly perfect society on Earth. Compare theirs with yours, doctor . . . you deride their religion and deplore their social customs, yet you'll have to admit that your native land of Chad has many criminals, murderers, poor and crippled. And theirs have almost none."

Djouba began searching on the racks for the cleanest clothes he could find. Stiffly, he replied. "That has nothing to do with it. You saw what went on in that room. Do you think the Founder of our church, the One they also claim is theirs, would approve?"

"I don't know. Who does? Weigh his country and yours in the balance, who sinks, who rises? I say, judge an

action by its effect upon people. What they're doing is hurting nobody in their society. The same behavior in our lands would cause harm."

"I can see there's no use discussing this with you. There is an absolute, you know."

"No, I don't. Absolute what?"

The answer was an absolute silence that hung heavy until Jim Crew appeared. Contrary to what they expected, he did not look hangdog or exhausted. His step was brisk; his face, beaming.

"Ah, doctors, we hope you enjoyed yourselves. And if ever we can help you, call on us. Love knows no bounds; we must help our fellows. Your escort, Dr. Djouba, will be here in just a minute. And we'll take you back to the surface, Dr. Bark, by another route. Through the basement of a purification palace reserved for the hierarchy, The Abode of the Blest."

XV

IT WAS close to dawn when Lief walked into the Rigorous Mercy Hospital. The sleepy Uzzite on duty at the personnel door scanned the lamech with his flash and then told the doctor to pass.

Dwelling on the lack of precautions, Leif stepped into the elevator, and shot up to the penthouse. When he walked into the hall, he did not find, as he had expected, another guard before his door. After unlocking the door, he discovered why.

The house was empty; Halla and Ava were gone.

He didn't waste time but at once Q'B'ed Rachel. Hair in curlers, wrapped in a frayed white gown, she answered. When she saw him, her eyes threw out the sleep and widened into wakefulness.

"All right, Rachel!" he snapped. "Tell me quick what's supposed to have happened?"

He did not add that he wanted the information fast before Candleman could get to him. It was more than probable that an Uzzite was listening in on him at that moment.

Rachel gasped that she'd thought he'd been kidnaped; how in the name of Sigmen had he escaped? When he told her never mind, just give him the developments, she replied that crossly she didn't know what he wanted to know. He tore his hair and shouted that if she didn't tell him quick where Mrs. Dannto and Ava were, he would climb through the QB and tear her limb from limb.

Rachel replied that they were in Montreal. After Leif had supposedly been kidnaped by Jacques Cuze, Candleman had insisted that Dannto and his wife take the Canadian rocket. He'd also wanted Ava to go along as the woman's nurse. All three, he swore, were in danger. And though Ava had refused at first, she'd given in.

Leif thought that Ava must have had strong reasons for doing so. Something must have come up that necessitated her remaining with Halla.

At his request, Rachel left her little room and went into the office. She came back with a book that listed that day's business. After she'd read the records of the QB calls and the mail, he gleaned one item that interested him. That stupid Z. Roe, as Rachel termed him, had QB'ed to find out if he should appear for another eegie in the morning. And she'd denied him twice before.

So Zack was looking for him, eh? Probably with orders for everything from a complete report of what had happened to a request for his appearance at a drumhead courtmartial. Leif had long suspected that this grey-headed old man was anything but the cipher he seemed, that he was, actually, Leif's superior. Though the doctor had always thought of himself as the leader of the Parisian CWC, he had had evidence from time to time that his decisions were being countermanded, that someone was checking up on him. It had been, in a way, laughable that the Izzies should have absorbed so much of the suspicion of the very people they were fighting.

Now, Leif saw little humor in the situation.

"Any messages from Ava?" he asked.

"None, Doctor Bark."

He looked at Rachel's unrouged pale face and the curlers and wondered what he'd ever seen enticing in her. "Go back to bed, girl," he said gently. "I'll see you in the morning."

WHEN her image faded, he made himself some coffee and over the searing black decided to contact Zack Roe as soon as possible. Before he'd drained the cup, he heard somebody unlocking his door. It couldn't be Ava, so he was prepared when Candleman walked in.

The officer's face was as ever, the long, narrow skull and sweeping jaw forming a bedrock for the rigid flesh above. The thin figure moved a trifle jerkily, reminding Leif of a marionette. Candleman, he imagined, was both master and puppet, part of him poised above himself, carefully controlling the part on the stage, yet never able to conceal the strings nor move the limbs with life-like smoothness.

Leif, prepared for anything except what happened, was surprised when Candleman calmly monotoned a request for Bark's experiences with Jacques Cuze.

That put the doctor on a tightrope. He could cover up the existence of Jim Crew's comrades with a lie. On the other hand, Candleman might know more than he seemed to; he might be baiting him.

The data flashed; the decision came almost as soon as the Uzzite had quit talking and leaned forward, sharp nose eager, parrot-beak lips pressed, and grey eyes crouched.

"You are correct, Candleman," he said, and gave him what he wanted to hear.

The Uzzite stood up. His eyes, usually lusterless as mouse fur, shone, and his voice rose.

"So this fellow that forced you at gunpoint to operate on his daughter called himself Jim Crew? Can't you see what I see? No? Think, Doctor, think! The initials!"

Leif struck the table with his fist. Coffee sloshed over the plastic top.

"Time's end!" he swore. "So they are!"

"Absolutely. You say these fellows were foreign-looking and that they spoke in a tongue neither Haijac nor Hebrew. It must have been French! Sigmen, I wish I knew something of that language!"

I hope you never take the trouble to study it, thought the doctor.

Candleman began pacing back and forth. Lightly, he flicked the seven thonged whip back and forth.

"Doctor, my natural inclination would be to call together all my available men and conduct a manhunt on a scale never before done. But I'm not going to. Jacques Cuze is a cunning fox; he'll be hiding low for quite a while. And I've no doubt he's moved from the place you describe."

At that moment the QB glowed, and the operator's voice said, "Montreal calling, Dr. Bark."

Leif acknowledged and saw the cube become a room in which sat the Sandalphon, Halla and Ava. Dannto said, "Bark! Candleman called and told us you were back. Sigmen be praised. No, don't explain now. You two jump into a special and come here at once. I've authorized a rocket to be set aside for you. Your assistant will take over your duties. I want you to look Halla over. She complains of pains in her solar plexus. Also, we can hear your story face to face, and later we can go to Metatron Takshi's big estate in the forest for a little relaxation. That's all. May your future be real."

The cube flickered into transparency.

Leif rose to protest, for he wanted to find out about Halla and Ava through several guarded questions. Also, and he was surprised, his heart was tight with longing for the redhaired woman.

Candleman arose and said, "Since his wife's back, Dannto's his old self."

"Since she's back?"

"Yes, they were separated for a while. She, I presume, wanted something, and

he wouldn't let her have it. So she moved to another apartment. It's happened before. And always the Sandalphon gives in."

The Uzzite snorted. "I can remember when no woman would have dared. She'd either have been whipped or sent to H. But this woman has made him lose his senses."

"You're criticising the Sturch-head?" Leif asked gently.

"You've no record of my words," said Candleman. "Anyway, Dannto knows how I feel about this woman's influence on him."

He said nothing further while Leif packed. Presently, the two of them walked onto the roof of the hospital and waited for the special. When it sank beside them, they entered and sat down side by side. During the entire trip, Candleman was silent. Once he sat up, looking at Leif, and said, "Dr. Bark, you seem to be a very happy, free and easy fellow. Is it because you have a fine wife?"

Then, before the astonished doctor could reply, the Uzzite said, "I withdraw that. Please forgive me. I've no business asking." And he muttered, "Not in the line of duty, you know."

Bark wondered what was going on behind that blond Dante's face. He wished he could have put the 'picker upon him.

That wish led to another, which was his desire to know whether or not Trausti and Palsson had been questioned. If they had, they must have certified his suspicions about Leif's behavior. Possibly, Candleman was taking him away from Paris so that he might not be able to deal with the two informers. And he might have put Dannto up to inviting Leif to Montreal so he could watch him when he was with Ava and Halla.

He dwelt upon the redheaded beauty and just what she might be. He pondered her origins and during his speculations found himself abandoning all except one thought: he was fascinated by her as he'd never been by any other woman, and he had to be with her.

Much as he resented this irresistible attraction, he had to go to her. Perhaps the moth resented his passion for the flame; yet the moth flew headlong into it.

SHORTLY before they landed at the airport, one of Candleman's lieutenants got permission from the two lamechians to switch on the QB. The gandyman sprang into view in the middle of a sentence. He was describing a recent riot in Chicago in which a man had been torn apart by an infuriated crowd. It seemed the culprit had said that he didn't think Timestop was at all near. According to Sigmen, so he claimed, conditions in the Haijac would be perfect before he arrived from his time-voyagings. This man didn't think that the setup was near perfection.

"Immediately thereafter," honked the gandyman, "an enraged mob avenged this insult to the Union, to the Sturch and to Sigmen, real be his name. And now, good citizens, we take you . . ." and the scene in the cube dissolved. When it resolved, it showed a street empty of any but Uzzites. They surrounded a pool of blood and a leg lying on a curb.

Leif looked at it keenly before the vision blurred. When he sat back, he smiled. His professional eye had noticed at once that the limb had not been torn, but had been expertly severed. Undoubtedly this was some of the Sturch's propaganda-pressuring. Faked.

He doubted that any crowd in the Haijac would be able to whip up enough enthusiasm or organization to lynch a man. The ordinary citizen was too busy working night and day to clothe and feed himself and too scared of going to H to make a move without his gapt's sanctimonious nod of approval.

To keep from falling asleep, Leif asked Candleman what Mrs. Dannto had told him about her accident. Candleman said, "Her story is about what I guessed it to be."

He paused to smack his hardshelled lips and continued, "All she knows is that she received a call over the commie.

She didn't recognize the voice, and the man speaking said the QB on his end wasn't working. She believed him because that frequently happens. He said his name was Jarl Covers—"the Uzzite glanced significantly at Leif—"and that he was a lieutenant of mine. That, of course, was a lie. Mrs. Dannto should have checked to see if there was a Covers on my force.

"He said that he wanted to meet her to discuss a plot against her husband's life. Covers claimed he'd stumbled across it but couldn't go to his superiors about it because some of them were the instigators. I suppose the fellow was trying to throw suspicion on me. Since Dannto himself was in Montreal, he wanted to talk to his wife. She was terrified and didn't think straight and went out in a taxi to meet Covers. The man I'd detailed to guard her while her husband was gone was answering another call, presumably from Covers' accomplice. That was his story; he's being questioned very closely about it.

"That is all we know."

Leif had wondered what story Halla would give. It was a good one, for it aroused Candleman's suspicions about Jacques Cuze and threw a hot haze before his otherwise cold and clear thinking. Nor could the story be checked on, because calls to the Sandalphon's house were not monitored.

There remained one mystery. Who *had* called the original Halla to her death?

WONDERING, he fell asleep. Once he awoke when the ship landed. Candleman said they'd just received word to go on to the Metatron's estate in the big woods. Leif drifted back and did not come out of it until the door opened. Yawning, blinking, he walked into the hot Canadian noonshine. An open runabout picked them up and flew them in a minute to the summer mansion of the political head of North America.

It was quite a party that the men walked into. Most of the important men of the Haijac were gathered upon the

front lawn. Their wives and mistresses were with them; all were in hunting costume. Leif was met by Dannto and Halla and introduced. His reputation as a brain surgeon was widespread, and most of them knew of him.

Then he was given hunting clothes and rifle and ammo. While he dressed behind a screen, he gave to the Sandalphon and others who could crowd into the room the same story he'd told Candleman. At its end, Dannto said, "You were lucky they didn't kill you afterwards."

He turned to the Uzzite and said, "I suppose you still insist this Jim Crew is Jacques Cuze? No, don't talk. How ridiculous can you get? Anybody who wasn't a monomaniac could see his initials stand for Jude Changer."

There was a murmur of agreement, for the majority were Urielites. Candleman did not turn expression, but Leif got the feeling of resentment on his part.

The Midian examined the man and was struck.

Not too long ago, he thought, the governors of the Haijac were men built like Candleman, tall, bony, with long narrow faces and dour lips. They burned day and night with zeal for the Sturch, nor at any time could you have caught them in an unreal act.

Now they had been replaced with men like Dannto, the shorter, much stouter and more garrulous executive. Though they discussed abstract principles, they were more likely to be found dealing with the immediate and the knowable. And, as now, you could smell the aroma of very good liquor, and you could see they had chosen their women, not for the old fashioned virtues of frigidity and fertility and faithfulness to the Sturch, but for their red lips and full figures and devotion to their men.

Leif went back out onto the lawn. There he got a chance to talk for a moment with Ava and Halla. The only one near was the Uzzite, and he was out of earshot.

"Did Zack Roe or anybody else say

anything about my having gone underground with Crew?" he asked Ava.

Ava smiled strangely. "No. Nobody knew where you were."

"I couldn't contact you over the QB. You know that."

"Leif, I wouldn't be in your shoes. And all because of this."

He gestured at the woman.

She said, "You needn't look so contemptuous."

"What's this?"

"I wondered about her," replied Ava, "so, while you were gone and she was still sleeping, I examined her. That was enough to lead me to making X-rays of her. When she awoke, I made her tell me what she was."

"So I did," said Halla, speaking very low but very fast. "And Ava recoiled as if I were a poisonous spider. She acted as though she hated me and would like to see me dead. It was then that she told me my sister was dead."

"Why did you do that?" demanded Leif. He felt his face getting hot and his hands cold.

Ava shifted uneasily, but she looked him straight in the eye.

"I wanted to discharge her grief then. If she found out by accident about the real Halla, she might be overcome at a time when there'd be no explaining it. I gave her a grief-runner. She had no deeprooted anxieties holding in her sorrow, so she got rid of it in about half an hour. Now there's nothing to worry about."

"You lie in your teeth," snapped the redhead. "You loathe me because I'm a woman like no earth woman ever was. You told me about my sister so you could hurt me. You did. But I won't forget that."

"Watch it," said Leif. "Candleman's coming."

He whispered to Ava, "First chance you get, tell me all about it." Ava nodded and glanced at Halla and said, "You won't even want to touch her when I explain, Leif."

The woman turned away suddenly, but not before Leif saw the tears. . . .

His chance came after they'd been transported some hundred miles.

XVI

AFTER the hunting party had been informed that they must not string out too much, because the Neanderthals were clever and very dangerous, even if unarmed, its members did just that. Watching for a chance to query Ava, Leif pulled her to one side and demanded to know just what was going on.

"I'll give it to you," Ava said, "but you've got to be patient. Suppose there's a planet revolving around a star that the Israelis haven't visited yet. The Jacks have; they've sent a dreadnought with the idea of exterminating the natives so that they can drain off some of their surplus population. It's a crazy idea, for no nation has the facilities for hauling millions of citizens a hundred light-years and dumping them off. Even with the hyperspace drive, they can't build enough ships to do the work. As fast as vessels are made, babies are born. And then you've the enormous housing and feeding and administrative problems while you're pouring a helpless people on this conquered but still alien planet.

"A project of that size, even if it were practicable, couldn't be hidden from other Terran countries. And then the Haijac would have to admit it was violating the Extraterrestrial Peace Treaty it made with Israeli and Malaya; it would have to admit that it was killing off inhabitants and thus face immediate hot war, which nobody wants.

"Nevertheless, a Haijac explorer finds an earth-type planet and reports it. Years later, a dreadnought visits this planet, Ozagen.

It finds a peaceful aborigine population, one that seem to be no more technologically advanced than, say, Earth in the early twentieth century. The plum is ripe for the picking; a billion intelligent and lovable beings will be massacred for the further glory of the Sturch of the Haijac.

"These Ozagenians are humanoid but non-mammalian. At one time human beings also lived alongside them, but they were wiped out in a series of wars. But one of the Haijac men on this expedition, a certain Hal Yarrow, discovers what seems to be one of the few human survivors, a beautiful brunette who could pass for an earth woman except for one thing. She has scarlet-pigmented lips."

"Ah!" breathed Leif. "I begin to see."

"You think you do," grimly Ava replied. "Walk slower. We're catching up with the Dannots."

One of the guides ahead of the main party halted and held up his arm. Those behind stopped until he had searched the thick brush and satisfied himself that none of the recently released Gemman apemen were hiding there.

Ava spoke under breath, "This Hal Yarrow found out that the girl was one of a group of women living in the tropics. Her father, surprisingly, was not a native of Ozagen. He came from another solar system. His home globe was populated by the descendants of Frenchmen who'd migrated from Earth when their land was being squeezed between the Haijacs and the Midians. He'd fled his own planet and crashed on Ozagen. After wandering the jungles, he found these women and settled down to live with them. One of them gave him five daughters but died when she did so. And for a very good reason, as you will see."

The guides motioned the party on. They gestured that the rifles should be ready for firing.

"Watch out, everybody!" called Dannot. "These brutes like to spring from ambush!"

He laughed, and his chins and bellies quivered.

LEIF said, "What kind of a story was a Halla handing you? You know that a Terran and an XT can't have children. Their chromosomes couldn't possibly match. You've seen that girl's internal organs. She has no Homo Sapiens genes in her at all."

"All right, all-wise. Listen. This Hal Yarrow didn't think so, either. But there the girl was, in the flesh. And what flesh! So he, being a lamechian, and being allowed to live by himself in the natives' capital city while the Jacks were studying them, kept her secretly in his apartment.

"By the way, Leif, this Yarrow also discovered the drug that counteracts truth-drugs and enables our agents to pass the Elohimeter. He used it himself. It was indirectly through him that we're here today.

"The girl pretended, for reasons I'll explain by and by, to be an alcoholic. Her lover got the forbidden liquor for her. But he was perturbed by what he considered an addiction, and decided to cure her. So he took a native stimulant that was used locally for therapy on drunks and gradually introduced it into her drinks. Within a short time, she was taking a liquor with a highly diluted alcoholic content, but of course she didn't know that.

"And, because she did not tell her lover *what* she was, and because he did not tell her *what* he was doing, she died. Because they did not love each other quite enough to be entirely honest, they came to a tragic end."

"Cut out the garnish and give me the main dish," said Leif.

"You have to have this, or you won't fully understand. Now, I'll go back a few hundred million years."

Leif groaned and said, "Take your time. Give a full story. Start with the creation of the universe."

"Shut up. Millions of years ago, when the ancestor of man first crawled out upon the shores of an Ozagen continent, he met a creature that was to have a great influence upon his career during his entire evolutionary development. It was a peculiar animal, one that we don't know on Earth at all. It was descended from the wormlike ancestor of the arthropods: the insecta, arachnida, and crustacea. But, unlike them, it had rejected the exoskeleton and the ventral nervous system and the many legs and the subjec-

tion of individuality to group instinct.

"It split off from the arthropoda proper, grew inner bones, a soft skin, and moved the ventral nerves to the dorsal regions. It lost many of the features that distinguish our chitinous cousins, but it never managed to get rid of a number that made it sister to the insect. In a way, I suppose, that was nature's intent: combine the structural advantages of the chordate with the group-feeling and co-operation of the exoskeletoned."

"You were saying this creature met man's amphibious ancestor upon the seashore. What happened? One ate the other?"

"No. They mated!"

The doctor had been watching a clump of heavily-leaved bushes, some of whose branches were moving suspiciously. Intent as he was on hearing about Halla's kind, he did not want to be jumped upon by a Gemman. Ava's words made him take his eyes off the vegetation.

"Huh? Remember, you're talking to a biologist."

"One with a closed mind. Listen. According to theory, this phylum was a primitive one whose individuals still changed seasonally from male to female. It was an animal whose outstanding characteristic was, and is, adaptability and flexibility. Somewhere in the dim dawn of life, it made up its mind to abandon its fluid sex metamorphoses and remain forever female. Also, it decided to attach its destiny to that amphibian whose remote goal was humanhood. It would, if you follow me, do away with the male of its own species, *borrow* the male of another, and become a sort of parasite, a female that imitated the exterior of the amphibians' mate.

"Don't ask me in what metaphysical way it *knew* that it was climbing the highest peak of evolution hand in hand with man-to-be. Nobody knows. The fact remains, it did. As the amphibian became a reptile, so, to all outward appearances, did the female mimetic. And so on through the mammalian stages. As you have no doubt noticed, Halla, a typical representative of her kind, is the

mammal's mammal—or seems to be.”

“I've gone rather deeply into that subject,” said Leif.

“You'd make a joke of anything, even the most sacred,” sneered Ava. “Anyway, here's what Halla told me. Defiantly and tearfully at the same time. If I hadn't been so shocked and disgusted, I suppose I might have felt sorry for her.”

BARK wondered why Ava's reactions should be so strong. Her abhorrence seemed all out of proportion to the situation.

“Halla said that the *lalitha*, her term for her kind, do not depend upon the male for conception. They require coition and the orgasm, yes. And,” Ava paused to see the word hit Leif, “they need light.”

He did not give Ava the satisfaction of changing expression. Annoyed, Ava continued.

“The *lalitha* have one large ovary. The eggs contain the genes necessary for the building of the body of the larva, which is more or less standard and, naturally, always female. The face is a different matter. It, in a modified feminine way, resembles the father's. That is why Hal Yarrow's mistress, Jeannette, had the black hair and delicately aquiline nose of Jean-Jacques Rastignac. And that is why Halla has the red hair and blue eyes of her male parent.

“You see, Leif, the *lalitha*'s chromosomes contain all the factors needed to match any of the possible combinations of the father's features. They are linked with a nerve, the photokinetic, which runs to the retina of the *lalitha*'s eye. For conception the *lalitha* photographs the partner's face; the colors of hair, eyes, shape of nose, mouth, jaw, and so on run down the chromosomal scale until they pick out the corresponding genes. These govern the details of the larva's physiognomy.”

Leif watched the bush. He was sure it had moved. Ava's eyes follow his. She continued talking, but she clicked off the safety of her .38 rifle.

“When these pseudo-women conceive,

their eggs hatch out five or six larva. They resemble a cross between a human embryo of six months and a worm. They have eight tiny teeth, which they lose after leaving the inside of their mother's body, antennae, which dwindle to those bumps you know of, and several other nauseating features. The young are not carried around until born, for the moment the eggs inside the mother hatch, the mother dies.”

“The mother dies?”

“Always. You see, shortly before the larva come forth, those breasts that you so admire produce a hormone which, in effect, generates a long-hidden arthropodal characteristic. That is, the hard outer skin. This hormone calcifies the outer integument and at the same time softens the bones by withdrawing calcium from them for deposit.

“Also, the skeleton thus becomes food for the larva along with the organs of the mother.”

“Do you know what you're saying?”

“Yes, it follows with what I now know. When the larva have eaten all but the hard skin of their mother, they kick their way through the abdomen. The navel is not a true one; the *lalitha* have never had an umbilical cord; but their mimetic navel contains a chemical which, at death, spreads and softens the calcified shell around the stomach so the young may escape. After they've devoured their fill, the larva change into nymphs which perfectly resemble human newborn.

“They are as helpless and feeble as their human counterparts, except that they can live on prechewed meat. However, they have no trouble thriving on milk alone.”

“How could a species whose mother always died on giving birth survive? Especially in a human society?”

“In some societies the *lalitha* acknowledges her identity. She was the goddess who voluntarily gave up her life so that new goddesses might be worshipped. Except that they never conceived willingly, only accidentally.

“In other cultures a *lalitha* would con-

veal her true nature. If she became pregnant, she had resources. The group-feeling of the *lalitha* was high; they formed a secret sorority the like of which has never been seen on Earth. The false woman, foreseeing her inevitable death, would go off for a visit or run away. She'd be taken care of in some hidden place until the nymphs left the shell. The underground life is nothing new for *Halla*. Her kind have seldom known any other.

"Then the nymphs would be adopted by other *lalithae* posing as true wives. And, quite often, the place of the dead mother would be taken by one of her sisters, and the husband would never know the difference.

"Despite this disadvantage, they had a powerful gift counteracting it. As long as they could put off conception, they would not wither and grow old. Their tissues did not degenerate; somatically speaking, they never were older than twenty. Early in their history as part of the human culture they discovered that alcohol would so deaden the photokinetic nerve that they needn't fear pregnancy. So, as you can imagine, wherever the *lalithae* were, there was plenty of liquor."

"I can imagine," said Leif. He noticed that the groups ahead had stopped and that Candleman was casually strolling their way. The bush had stopped shaking.

"If they had to have light to conceive, why didn't they shut their eyes?"

"Too much instinct. They're not human, Leif. They're really half-arthropod. They are compelled by a reflex-arc to keep their eyes open."

"Why not turn off the light or use a blindfold?"

"Then there's no enjoyment of the act. And *Halla* seemed to take a delight in telling me that her kind *have* to have love, that it's as big a demand in their bodies as the lust for life itself. Their whole being is centered on men; they compete with true women for their love; and they always win. Their victory isn't fair, especially in a society like this."

"Hah!" said Leif. "But before we go on, *Ava*, there's one crucial point that has to be settled as quickly as possible. The CWC slipped up on it; they must not have figured on it. How is this *Halla* going to explain to *Dannto* her virginity?"

AVA veiled big black eyes and said, "I took care of that."

Leif grabbed the slender arm and squeezed so hard *Ava* cried with pain and dropped the rifle.

"You . . . you!" he choked. "How?"

"Surgically, of course. What did you think?"

"You know what I'm thinking."

"What's the matter, Leif? Were you planning—"

"Quiet. Here comes Candleman."

Ava stooped and picked up the rifle. The *Uzzite*, carrying his in the crook of his arm, walked up to them with his habitual crouch. He opened his mouth to say something, when he was interrupted by a scream.

All three whirled. The voice had been *Halla Dannto's*; now, she was speechless. Paralyzed, she held her throat with one hand and pointed with the other.

Leif took one look at the brutish, skinclad figure charging at her with a spear and brought his rifle up. Up to then he'd had no intention of shooting down the *Gemmans* imported for this sport of *Neros*. He'd hoped that some of the *Neanderthaloids* might maim or kill some of their Jack hunters; it would serve them right.

Now, he didn't hesitate, but in one fluid motion brought the barrel up, aiming it a trifle ahead of the gorilla chest, and squeezed the trigger. His was a .45 recoilless; he scarcely felt the jar; before he could place another shot, he heard Candleman's blast, only a trifle later than his, and he saw the *Gemman* fall sideways.

Dannto had stepped in front of *Halla*. Seeing the apeman jerking on the ground, he stood there, pale and quivering. Candleman, however, ran up and placed his muzzle against the upturned

face and blew it apart with dum-dum after dum-dum.

Leif could see that the woman was unhurt. He didn't waste time asking her if she were all right, as Dannto was doing. Instead, he bent over the corpse. Ava, following, said, "Where did he get that spear so fast, Leif? He wasn't released over an hour ago. Look at that flinthead. It'd take a long time to make one that sharp and then bind it with leather thongs to a seasoned stick."

Candleman came back in time to hear the last of his remarks.

"One of the Sandalphon's enemies undoubtedly did that," he said. "I'll order an immediate investigation of the servants who handle these Gemmans."

The Danntos walked up and looked at the corpse. Halla was white. Her lips were scarlet spatters.

Leif looked at the others. None of them seemed to see what he had. He decided to keep silent. However, to satisfy completely his curiosity, he knelt down and examined the body more carefully. He lifted the animal skin wrapped around the torso, saw something he'd not expected, and dropped it. When he arose, his lips were tightly pressed, as if he were having trouble containing himself.

Ava, sensitive to his actions, saw he was concerned, but she said nothing until they were again a little separate from the others.

REPLYING, he said, "Didn't you observe the proportions of the corpse's legs and arms? A Gemman's arms, compared to a man's, are short, as are the legs. The bones of the forearms are bowed out to serve as attachments for the mighty muscles. The neck-vertebrae are curved so that the Gemman, like the ape, can't bend his neck back to look upwards. There are other differences, but I won't go into detail.

"That fellow had longer arms and legs than he should have had. His radius and ulna were straight as a man's. His neck, though so thick it almost didn't exist, was quite capable of bending back.

In short, he was a man. I'll bet that if his face hadn't been destroyed, we'd have seen that pseudoskin had been built up on it to make it look neanderthal.

But that wasn't all. Somebody wanted to disguise his real purpose. A small J. C. had been tattooed on his belly."

Ava took it calmly.

"Obviously, if he were killed, Cuze or Changer would get the blame. But what if he'd not been?"

"Five gets you one he had the usual poison tooth."

"You'll notice he made for Halla. Does that tie in with the 'accident' her sister was in?"

"What do you think? The question is, why these attempts on her life? Why is Jacques Cuze being blamed?"

"Tune in on the next chapter and find out," said Leif.

"Be serious! Why didn't you tell the rest of them what you found out?"

"Listen, whoever put that man up to an assassination attempt on Halla must have been nearby. He wanted to be able to kill the man so that if he were caught, he could stop his mouth. Perhaps he planned on doing it anyway. Corpses don't talk. Whoever wanted Halla murdered was premeditatedly close."

"That would include only two dozen people. What about Candleman? He ran up and destroyed the man's face. It looks to me as if he was trying to hide the fellow's identity."

"Candleman shot almost the same time I did. If he were behind the affair, he would have waited until the spear was in Halla. And butchering the face wouldn't conceal anything. There's always the fingerprints. I'm planning on getting those later and doing some checking up from there. Besides—getting back to Candleman—though he doesn't like Halla, he is very devoted to Dannto."

"Leif, the man who killed the first Halla was in Paris. This is Canada. He'd have to come here when we did. Who came with Dannto? Who came with you?"

"There are at least twenty big brass

who came from Europe at the Metatron's invitation. Do you want me to question them all?"

"All we can do is wait for another attempt."

"That ought to make you happy. You hate Halla, anyway."

"Yes, but she's CWC."

"Don't forget that," said Leif. "You hang around and get those fingerprints, if you can. As for me, I've work to do."

Boldly, he walked up to where Halla sat upon a stump and Dannto stood by, holding her hand.

"Mrs. Dannto has had a shock," said Leif. "She shouldn't continue the hunt. I'm not really interested in this shooting, and since I'm her doctor, I'll take her back to the Metatron's. Would you care to come along, Sandalphon? If not, you really won't be needed."

Dannto obviously wanted to be with his wife. The doctor, however, had loudly stated before a dozen high officials that he didn't have to go with her. Malice aforethought had been Leif's. He knew that the Urielite would consider it a matter of face to continue the hunt. He would be afraid the others might think he'd been too unnerved by the surprise attack.

So, as Bark had guessed he would, Dannto bellowed that he, personally, wanted to kill every Gemman now hiding in the Canadian woods. The others standing around nodded their heads and slapped him on the shoulder and said by Sigmen they'd be glad to give him first shot.

Nevertheless, the Archurielite's mouth formed a pout of disappointment when he saw Leif hand his wife into a Hill runabout.

He waddled clumsily over at the last moment and kissed her pale cheek and said he'd bring her one or two heads.

Halla shuddered and didn't reply.

"Take good care of her, doctor," said Dannto as the Hill rose into the air.

Leif's reply didn't seem to erase the lines from his forehead.

"Abba, she'll get taken care of as never before."

TWO women had insisted that they would return to keep Halla company. As soon as the ship had traveled about ten miles, they both leaned forward, ignoring Bark, and began hugging and kissing the girl and making soft cooings.

After what seemed to him to be a flood of tears, they leaned back and wiped their eyes and allowed Halla to make the introductions.

Nanette Stinak, the black-haired beauty, was her aunt.

Graieemlya Ching, wife of the chief of the Comic Bureau, and a yellow-haired beauty, was her great-aunt.

"This is quite an aunt-hill," cracked Leif.

Nobody laughed. He got the impression that any reference to insects was highly unappreciated.

"How many more aunts and sisters do you have?" he asked.

"Three sisters, four aunts, four great-aunts. All married or closely attached to men of the hierarchy. For instance, Jacqueline, my sister, is governess of the children of the Metatron of South America. Aibulya, a great-aunt, is a Wave, secretary to Admiral Costello of the Jack space fleet.

"I begin to see the CWC pattern. The Corps must be very happy with you. You women really have something."

They giggled, and Halla said, becoming slightly morose, "I may have, but I don't see why I have to give it to that fat and ugly Dannto."

Nanette leaned forward and said, fiercely, "What made you come to Earth? Weren't you happy on Ozagen?"

"I love Uncle Fobo," she said, "and all the Wogs were very nice. But after all of you left, I become lonely for you. And, of course, the main reason I came here was yours also. Here you find men."

"It's a heavy price we had to pay for being allowed to come here," said the blonde. "I like the Israeli men, but most of these Jack males treat you like dirt. At first, anyway, until you learn how to

handle them."

"After the war is over," said Nanette, "we'll be allowed to go where we please, marry whom we please."

"If we live," replied Halla, softly but bitterly. The three of them wept some more for the dead Halla. Leif interrupted them, for he was afraid he'd learn nothing by the time they returned to the estate.

All began talking at once. He had to ask them to keep quiet while the youngest spoke. She had the information he wanted.

Halla answered that she had been, in a way, a retarded child. While her sisters grew apace and came into full maturity at the age of twelve, she had been raised, as an experiment, in the home of Fobo, an Ozagen native. He had fed her a special diet which slowed her physiological processes. He could do that with her because her body retained that property peculiar to arthropods and her kind, that of accelerating or decelerating cell growth by diet. His intent had been to study thoroughly the lalitha's structure and function with the hope of overcoming the fatal results of conception. By the time the girl had become an adult, ten years behind her sisters, Fobo concluded that there were four methods to be used. None were quite satisfactory.

FIRST, the lalitha could have the photokinetic nerve severed and make her temporarily sterile. Later, the nerve could be grown together again. That technique solved nothing if the women wished to bear children and still survive.

Second, and no better than the first; it wasn't necessary to get drunk to deaden the nerve. A special pill could be taken for the same effect. Unfortunately, if you swallowed that depressant, you might as well get drunk.

Third, the reflex-arc that forced the eyes open during intercourse could be overcome through psychological conditioning. But that method had the disadvantage of taking months of hard work to learn and of never being quite reliable.

Fourth, and the only method to be

used if the lalitha wished to perpetuate their almost extinct species, was a combination of endocrinology and surgery.

If, after the eggs became fertilized by bio-electrical stimulation, a careful watch were kept upon her, she might have the skin-calcification prevented with a specially prepared shot of Jesper's serum. Immediately after that, a Caesarean could be performed, and the larva could be fed soft bones and slightly decayed meat in an incubator. Once the change into nymphhood was made, the young would be raised like human babies.

When Leif had difficulty keeping down his disgust over the larval food, Nanette reminded him that the *homo* embryo fed upon its mother's blood while in the sac. And that larva and embryo were only terms, easily interchangeable. Neither member of the two phyla, while in the womb, was anything beautiful to behold.

"We," said Halla, "are unique. We're the only ones whose continuance depends upon modern science: the hypodermic and the scalpel."

"And that is the question," said Graieemlya. "Should we try to have children? Poise upon that tightwire between death and life every time we become pregnant? Doom our babies to the same fate?"

"And worse," said Nanette. "What kind of life is there for tus? Forever concealing our true nature because we are afraid that men would become repelled by us? Or, if attracted, only because of a perverted lust? Must we remain freaks? Must we always compete with man's true mate, woman, and win only by hiding the truth about ourselves?"

"You have no idea how lonely we get, how rejected we sometimes feel," said Graieemlya.

Leif shifted uncomfortably. She looked as if she were holding him responsible.

"We're Nature's experiment, a joke, a failure to be tossed aside and go down to oblivion, regardless of our feelings," said Halla.

"But we're as human as any woman.

We laugh, we cry, we love, we hate, we want to bear and raise our own."

"We make our men happy as few women can. But always we have that terrible hanging-on-an-abysse feeling. What if *he* finds out?"

"The beasts," Nanette burst through slow tears. "Who do they think they are?"

Though he felt uncomfortable, he couldn't help the grin tugging at the corners of his lips.

"Don't carry on so," he said. "Aside from the subject-matter, you sound no different from Terran females. Men are devils; men are angels. Men stink; men are precious. To hell with them; to heaven with them."

All three bent their lovely faces towards him, mouths twisted in scarlet anger.

He leaned to them and, one by one, kissed them full on the lips.

AFTERWARDS, sitting back and smacking loudly, he said, "See! I know what you are, and I couldn't tell the difference. Your mouths taste the same as the mouths of the mammals I've been pursuing for years. I didn't feel revolted."

Halla burst into tears again. Nanette gave him a long look from veiled eyes that spun his senses. Graieemlya, the oldest and most experienced, took out her vanity case and powdered her nose. Then she said, "You're one in a million, Leif. And, like most of them, you'd gladly experiment with us. But what about marrying one of us, till death do us part?"

"In our case it would more probably be old age that would separate us," he replied. "If you keep your youth as long as you don't conceive, and you must, for the evidence is before my eyes, the time would come when you would hate me, and I, you. It's true that rejuvenation techniques will keep me young for many more years than the normal span, but they can't stave off forever the relentless creep of degeneration. When I'd be ugly and impotent, what would happen?"

"That's too far off in the future," said Halla. She looked him straight in the eye. "The immediate question is, would you want to have children that would not, genetically speaking, be yours?"

"They'd look like me. And they'd be lovely little girls. What more could I ask?"

"I don't believe it," said the great-aunt, combing long and wavy golden hair. "You'd live with one of us and then, when you hankered for human children, you'd abandon us. And we wouldn't like that. When we love a man, we're his as long as he'll have us. Actually, we're much more faithful and trustworthy than the average Earth woman. And not because of any moral teachings, either. Our loyalty is deeper-rooted than that; it strikes into the instincts themselves; we're that way because our cells tell us to."

"There's only one road for finding out," he said. "That's the scientific. Experiment and see."

He gestured through the window.

"We'll be gliding into the Metatron's hangar in a minute. There are some things I have to know. For instance, how did you come to get next to the Jack brass?"

"It was arranged that we should be in a supposedly damaged spaceship that would fall into the hands of a Jack ship. From there, using our natural advantages, we ended where we are. We claimed to be human; we accounted for our pigmented lips by the story that we were from the Jack colony on Mattef of Barnard's Runaway. The humans that settled there found out they'd get along better with the aborigines if they tattooed their lips, you know. That was a cultural adjustment permitted by the Thing of Rek."

LEIF nodded. The Haijac had not been able to follow its unofficial policy of extermination because of the XT Peace Treaty and the watchful eyes of the Israeli fleets. Indeed, the Izzies themselves had a colony on one of the small continents of Mattef. Like the

Jacks, they had been forced to crimson their mouths to prevent conflict with the so-called poltergeists.

The lalitha now, he thought, wouldn't even have to resort to such stories, for they could use the depigmentation techniques of the Bantus.

The Hill dipped and scooted into the hangar. A green light on the dashboard flashed, and the doors opened. When the four had stepped out, the runabout turned and flew back to the far-off hunters.

"How do you feel now?" he asked Halla.

She smiled and said, "Much, much better. There's only one thing. . . ."

"Yes?"

Her glance at her aunts showed him she wished to tell him in private. Getting rid of them wasn't hard, for they seemed to sense how the two felt. Probably, he told himself, those two bumps upon the head, vestiges of antennae, biological psychogalvanometers, could detect emotional emanations.

He conducted her to the Sandalphon's suite and dismissed the maid who was cleaning it. Though she was undoubtedly bound to report it to the Uzzites, he did not care. His lamech and his surgeon's license gave him more freedom than the average Jack.

Halla closed the door and inserted in the lock a frequency-key.

"My aunts will QB Dannto that I'm all right," she said.

Her every movement and word stroked soft and warm fingers over his skin. Suddenly, his breath caught, and he felt a tightening within his chest. His hands and the back of his neck trembled.

She turned from the door and walked across the room towards a bureau. Whether consciously or unconsciously, her hips swayed just a trifle more than they normally did. Leif knew, for he'd watched her often enough that day. There was no doubt about it. From the moment she had glanced at him to say she wanted to be alone, the air had become charged. If the sudden feeling

grew more intense, he would, he was sure, explode. He seemed to be fighting an internal pressure; something was building up in him; it had been there for a long time, latent, waiting to be started by the glance, the movement.

"Halla!" he said, low and husky, almost unable to speak.

She stopped, her back turned partly to him, her spine stiffening, the abrupt rigidity raising the full breasts. A small toss of the head sent light rippling down the long red hair.

"Halla! Do I have to say anything?"

She whirled so fast she almost lost her balance. It was a movement that would at another time have made him grin. Now it was the spark that crackled through him and set him moving in strides towards her, arms outstretched, fire all over, a thundering in his head, moving forward, knowing with all his body that nothing, nothing at all in this world, nothing could stop them now.

He was dimly aware that as he pressed her back, back, she cried out, "Leif, Leif, don't ever let that Dannto touch me! I love you, and only you!"

XVIII

LATER, like conscience knocking, knuckles tapped the door to the suite. Halla sat upright, eyes wide, mouth a scarlet O, unconsciously pulling the sheet up to her neck. Leif put his finger to his lips and tiptoed to a closet. Reaching it, he turned and made signs for her to answer. Then he pulled out his .1 automatic.

He could, he reasoned, brazen his way out. It was his right as a lamechian doctor to examine a woman without a gapt being present. On the other hand, it would be better if it weren't known he'd been locked up so long with her. What he did depended upon the knocker's identity.

Halla called, "Who is it?"

The reply was a muffled man's voice. Halla repeated her question. Slightly louder, the words were still too low. Halla rose and put on her dressing gown

and went through two rooms to the door. Leif followed her and stood behind her. This time they both heard.

"Halla, this is Jake Candleman. Let me in."

The two raised their brows. Leif, swept by a flash of insight, nodded at her to do so. Then he went back into the closet. Halla, after asking the Uzzite to wait until she was back in bed, turned off some of the lights and crawled under the sheets.

As he'd purposefully left the closet door half-open, Leif could see between its inner edge and the wall. Candleman came into his view, long body bent forwards as if there were a weak spot in its middle, narrow face hard and cragged as a cliff. He strode up to the bed and stopped, looked keenly around, and then, to the consternation of both watchers, sank to his knees by her side.

"Halla!" Halla!" he crooned. "Forgive me, Halla!"

She shrank away from his reaching hands.

"What do you mean? Forgive you for what?"

"You know what, Halla, dear. Don't tease, like you used to do. I can't stand it. I won't. You know you can't trifle with me. You know."

Her voice trembled as much as his did. She said, "Are you crazy? I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about?"

He clutched one of her hands before she could get it away.

"Don't tell me that! That's what you used to say when I asked you where I could meet you again. You made a madman out of me. I couldn't touch you again, and yet I couldn't stand not to. I told you I'd kill you, and I almost did. Halla, darling, tell me you forgive me. I'll never do anything like that again. I almost died myself when they said you'd been killed at once in that wreck. When I found out you were only slightly hurt, I raged and smashed the furniture in my apartment and swore I'd see you were dead for sure the next time.

"And yet, I was glad because you'd not been killed. I couldn't stand the

thought. No more Halla. No Halla, no Halla, no Halla. My brain repeated over and over again, no Halla, no Halla."

The woman looked stupefied. Leif hoped she'd catch on to what was happening. Otherwise, she'd give herself away.

Candleman tried to pull her to him; she bent away, turning her face sideways.

"What's the matter with you?" he cried. "You're not so pure. You gave yourself to me once, remember? You betrayed your husband, a Sandalphon. I dishonored him and all he stands for. But I thought it worth it. Halla, there never was anybody like you. You and I. . . ."

Leif could not believe the man's incoherent babbling. Candleman's voice, always so dead, rose and plunged; his face, usually hard and expressionless as a closed fist, twisted and writhed like a deaf-mute's fingers.

THE doctor saw now that it had been Candleman who had gotten the original Halla into a taxi, perhaps for one last rendezvous, and then had arranged the 'accident.' No wonder the man had been so suspicious about the minor injuries reported by Leif. He must have thought that Halla had reported him. Or else he'd wanted to get into her hospital room to finish her off. The chances were that he'd not been too scared of her talking, for she'd implicate herself. Moreover, he was a lamechian; he could do no wrong.

His main reason for trying to kill her was revenge. That was evident.

As he listened to Candleman talk and at the same time try to embrace her, he saw the pattern. Evidently the dead woman had once felt sorry for him and had given in to him. Or perhaps she'd done it to find out something or to secure a favor she desperately needed. No one would ever know. Whatever the reason, she had refused to have any more to do with him after that one time. And he, finally convinced she loathed him, had tried to kill her. Not tried—he had done

it. And the woman he was talking to must realize that and must hate him.

"Listen to me," panted the Uzzite. "I told Dannto I was coming back to keep an eye on you, that I was still worried about assassins. It'll be hours before he and the other hunters return—"

"What about Dr. Bark?" said Halla, straining to keep his face from hers.

"That lecher. He wouldn't dare bother us. For the sake of Sigmen, Halla, don't fight me so! I can't help myself; I must have you. I know you really want me—otherwise, you'd never have acted the way you did that one time. You're just bothered by your unreal conduct. Halla, how do we know what is real and what is not?"

Leif hoped she could handle him, for he didn't want to be forced to reveal himself. If he hadn't been in love with her, he would have allowed Candleman to have his way. Halla was a CWC agent. That would only have been in line of duty. But he knew that he couldn't stand the Uzzite's pawing her much more.

"Please, Halla. I'll never try to kill you again."

"You beast," she said. "You were the one that loosed that Gemman at me."

"Forgive me, Halla. It won't happen again."

Suddenly, he stood up and seized her wrists and bent them back and leaned forward and placed his mouth against hers. Leif went to step out, but he paused when the man yelped with pain and jumped back from her. His lower lip was bleeding where she had clamped down upon it.

"You always did bite, Halla," he said. "But not too hard, the next time, please."

How blind could you get, wondered Leif? Another thought struck. Candleman had even covered up by using his favorite bugaboo: J. C. He'd had that pseudo-neanderthal tattooed with those initials to confuse anybody who might possibly read them. Everybody was getting in on the game.

Halla stood up and said, "If you don't leave at once, I'll scream, and I'll get a

gun and shoot you. Don't think I wouldn't."

Not a bad idea, thought Leif. That would solve many problems.

He raised his .1 and aimed at the high and narrow forehead, now covered with sweat.

Before he could pull the trigger, he heard a gentle tapping upon the suite-door.

Halla called out, "Who is it?"

Candleman brushed his hair back and wiped his face with a handkerchief and put his cap back on. Then he strode towards the door, bent forward more than ever, as if the hinge in the middle of his body had broken.

HE THRUST his frequency-finder key into the lock, pressed the button, and opened the door. Ava stepped in, said, "Pardon, me, Chief," and went on. The Uzzite did not look back but slammed the door behind him.

Leif came out from behind the closet door. "What're you doing back here?" he said to Ava.

"This!"

She handed him a comic, the latest issue of the *Adventures of the Forerunner*.

"Where'd you find it?"

"In my pocketbook. One of the guides must be CWC."

Leif opened it to the third page and read the words underlined in one of the balloons.

"All *get under* the bridge. Stand your *ground* if the evil *Backrunner* sees us. *Two* of you *repair* this gun as *fast* as you can."

"All hell must be breaking loose," said Leif. "What happened? Trausti talked? They caught Jim Crew? Zack Roe? Or something unexpected?"

Discussion was useless. There was nothing they could do about getting back unless they could find a reasonable excuse. At the moment, none was available. So they had to pass the next two days in Canada.

Ava fretted at the delay and became even more disturbed because Leif would not share her anxiety. He, on the con-

trary, hiked through the woods and fished. He wasn't going to sit around with tensed muscles and tight lips.

Much as he would have liked to take Halla along with him, he could not do so without exciting dangerous comment. He did find it possible to go fishing with her the second afternoon when he invited her and her aunts and a couple of other hierarchs' wives along. While the women were unpacking the picnic luncheon, Leif managed a few words with Nanette. His curiosity about certain things he'd discovered during the dissection of the original Halla was still driving him.

Black-haired Nanette answered his question calmly and entirely unself-consciously.

"Then that is why you lalitha make such good agents for the CWC in this particular society?" said Leif.

"Yes," she answered. "Fobo, an Oza-genian native, explained it to me. He said we lalitha were valued most highly in such cultures, even though we ourselves have a nature that makes us ill-at-ease there. He told me this. The repression of normal sex impulses, the deliberate creation of frigidity in men and women, results in psychic castration. Tyrants long ago found out that they could control their subjects much more easily if they set up a system, enforced by taboos instilled at an early age, that crushed the development of the human being as a whole. Quenching of wholesome relations between the sexes, Fobo told me, is an integral part of that system.

"Do I sound textbookish? I should; I'm repeating much of his lecture to me.

"To put it briefly, psychically impotent people, by which I mean perverted people of any kind, by which I mean those not normal. . . ."

SHE halted in confusion and laughed. "Actually, all I know is that the type of repression you find here fulfills the function of keeping men more easily in submissiveness. You can find your parallel in geldings. They make more willing beasts of burden.

"But if, say, one of these men were to find a woman whose responses did not go by the books he'd read or the lecture he'd heard, a woman who possessed an organ that would automatically release those inhibitions and make him for the first time in his unhappy and confused life a free man, then he'd value that woman and keep her, even if he had to do so secretly and in defiance of the mores. You follow me?"

"Pretty much so," he said, glancing around to see if any of the hierarchs' wives were in earshot. "Frigidity in a man results in what we call a muscular armor, a contraction of the pelvic floor. The armor is a result of the neurosis. The Psyche deliberately causes the soma to use muscular rigidity and squeezing to inhibit itself. But, curiously enough, if the muscular armor can be relaxed, then the neurosis quite often lessens or goes away. The man, freed in one part of his development as a complete human being, also gains liberty in other fields. That is, he laughs more, thinks more deeply, is more sincere and yet at the same time gayer, is even freer of psychosomatic diseases, and so on. You know what I mean."

"Yes. Take Halla's husband, Dannto, for instance. He used to be almost as gloomy and hostile as Candleman. Now, though he's a long way to go as a desirable individual, he's much jollier and broader-minded than before he met her. He doesn't realize it, consciously, but he wouldn't allow her to leave him for any reason."

"Correct me if I'm wrong," said Leif. "An electrical current flows from a highly charged body to a less charged if there is a conductor. The bio-electrical current from the organ we were talking about stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. This results in the uninhibiting of the muscular armor and the consequent momentary freedom from the anxiety feeling. The floodgates are opened; there is no damming up of emotion and its consequent stagnation into a cesspool. Am I right?"

"Yes. And the men are quite grateful. We lalitha profit. The only trouble is

that we ourselves would prefer to take as mates the kind of men who don't need us. Men like you, Leif. Those who aren't afraid to laugh or get angry or weep or love or hate if the occasion demands it. The whole men.

"But we couldn't be choosy. The Israelis offered us a chance to go to Earth where there were men. They said we could live in the Republics if we wanted to and do just as we pleased. But they pointed out that as long as the Haijac Union existed in its present form, nobody on Earth or Ozagen would be safe. If we'd help the CWC with our peculiar talents, we could pay them back for bringing us here. We are grateful; we said we would."

She paused, and then, as if she dreaded asking but was forced to, she said, "Leif, you seem to love Halla. I know she does you. But what about the future? Are you just going to have your fun and then leave her?"

"You mean because she's not, strictly speaking, human? Because we can't have children?"

"Yes."

Leif considered.

"I know there are many men who'd be revolted if they knew Halla's true nature. I'm not at all. My mating with her isn't going to affect the continuance of the human species. Billions of my kind will go on having enough children and more than enough. And she, I'm convinced, can perpetuate her kind without any more danger of dying than the average woman has in childbirth. A good surgeon, which I happen to be, can get her and the children through."

"You're sure it's not just a perverted attraction for her because she's not human?"

"That is the tragedy of you lalitha, isn't it?" said Leif. "You never feel secure, and you're always just a bit lonely."

He noticed one of the wives strolling towards them.

"Before we have to stop this talk," he said, "satisfy my curiosity. What does lalitha mean?"

"Lover."

XIX

IN THE following evening Dannto, Halla, Leif, Ava and several others got into a Paris-bound coach. Candleman was not with them; he had left two hours after the scene in the bedroom. Business was his plea for leaving, but Leif suspected he didn't want to ride with Halla. Their trip was quick and pleasant except for one puzzling event. Leif noticed that Ava had gone into the women's room for just a moment and that when she came out, she was very pale. Leif had no chance to ask her what the matter was, but he thought she must have received a message from a CWC-agent. That disturbed him. As her superior, he should have gotten it. However, it might have been that the setup was such that Ava could be reached easier than he. Or Ava might have, not a message, but a stomach-ache.

When the coach slid into the Paris field, Dannto reminded the others they were to come at 1900 to his house for a party. The occasion would be a celebration over his wife's quick recovery following the accident. Dannto seemed to be very happy. He laughed and waved his hands as he told jokes. Halla was not so radiant. She looked at Leif meaningfully and her eyes told him what kind of celebration Dannto was planning on later that night.

For the first time since he'd been a very young man, Leif was jealous. He felt sick; he also felt like getting up and hitting the Sandalphon in the nose.

The rest of the trip the red-haired beauty glanced now and then at him. Once he thought he saw the beginnings of tears in her eyes.

He was sure of it when she excused herself and went to the women's room, and stayed there a long time.

Later, after all had disembarked and gone their ways, Leif said to Ava, "Why so pale, pretty maiden?"

Ava snarled back at him, and he decided it was sickness, not a communication that had made her look so ill. Both were silent until the taxi brought them to the hospital.

Leif was looking for any notes from Rachel or Roe when Ava came in, paler than ever.

"Did you find anything on the kymos?" Leif asked.

Ava put her hand out. The graph it held shook. He took it from her and read the recordings of Zack Roe's semantic waves. Sigur, the assistant, had obeyed Leif's instructions and placed all the eegie work done during his absence in a special file. Ava had picked out the one with the message.

He read, and he paled. When he looked up, he saw the automatic in Ava's hand.

"You're the executioner?" he asked unbelievably.

Ava's voice trembled. "No, I'm only the escort."

"And very prettily armed, too," said Leif, recovering his poise. "Well, when does this drumhead take place?"

"Leif," Ava said, "I hate to do this. We've worked together so long. But orders are orders. And you shouldn't have let that . . . that insect-woman go to your head. How could you have put us all in jeopardy by deliberately disobeying the command to cremate that girl at once? And then making love to the other?"

"So you did inform on me?" he said, gritting his teeth.

"It was my duty."

"Hating Halla didn't have anything to do with it, eh? Or was it hate? Did you have designs on her, too?"

"That's neither here nor there," Ava replied. "Come on, Leif. If I put this gun away, will you promise not to try a break?"

"All right. You're still enough of a soldier I guess."

Ava went to a closet and pulled some garments from the false bottom of a dirty clothes hamper.

"Here. Put these on."

He examined them. "So it's that bad, is it? We're through here?"

"Yes. The thoughtpicker isn't in the eegie, Leif. Our men must have moved it away some time today when the word came."

AVA undressed and began putting on the blues of the unskilled laborer. "Lord, Leif, it'll be good looking like a man again! Ten years of pretending to be a female!"

"You gave up a lot for the Service," he answered. "Tell me, Ava, honey, was it worth it?"

"Any more of that, and I *will* shoot you," she—he—said.

Leif had become so accustomed to Avam Soski as a woman operative posing as his wife that he seldom thought of him in terms of his true sex. The little fellow was good, one of the greatest disguise-men in the CWC.

Dressed, Leif walked to the QB and flicked it on. Ava said, "None of that. Orders are that you communicate with nobody."

He ignored him and asked the autop-operator for Mrs. Dannto's room. She should be getting ready for the party. If the Sandalphon were with her his presence wouldn't matter. They had arranged a code word.

"Leif, I'll shoot!" cried Ava.

The cube showed Halla coming into the front room of her suite. She was in a robe.

"Halla, is there anybody else to hear?" he asked.

She shook her head and stared past him at Ava's leveled gun.

"Don't worry," he said. "Ava won't shoot. Listen, redmouth, the jig is up. I haven't time to go into detail. The gist is that we're getting out of here. I can't tell you how, because this line may be monitored. I don't think so; both you and I get automatic lamechian privileges; but you never know. Just meet me where we agreed to. Fast! Got it?"

She nodded her head again, and he cut them off. Swinging around on Ava, Leif said, "I'm not going with you, baby. I intend to contact Jim Crew and get him to ship Halla and me to Bantuland."

"Jim Crew is in H," said Ava flatly. He held his gun steady on Leif's chest.

"When did you learn that? In the women's room on the coach?"

"Yes. Roe told us to get under be-

cause he thinks the Uzzites will torture the truth from Crew. I think the 'picker has been moved close to H so Roe can listen in on the ordeal."

Leif hesitated and said, "Listen, Ava, I know you'll shoot me if I drive you too far. But what about giving me a break? What do you say you take both Halla and myself to the drumhead? I can make a plea that Roe let us go. I'm no use to the CWC any more; killing me won't help him."

"Do you think that after you've messed up the Halla replacement and gotten involved with the Bantus and talked Halla into abandoning her post that Roe'll pardon you? Leif, that girl has gone to your head!"

"I know it."

"But, Leif—betraying your country?"

"I didn't. I just forgot it for the moment."

They walked out of the hospital. Leif took his personal car and drove to the front of the National Library. Halla was waiting inside. She walked out and got into the seat behind the two men.

Before Ava could tell Leif where to go, Halla pulled a gun from her purse and stuck it against the little man's neck. Leif reached over and removed Ava's auto from his pocket.

"I could see what was coming," he said. "So Halla and I made our plans, too."

Ava seemed stunned. "Leif, this isn't . . . isn't. . . ."

"Like me? Perhaps not. But I took one wrong step and that led me to the next. Not that meeting Halla was wrong. I wouldn't pass that up for all the medals in the world. The thing is, the CWC would consider me disloyal from the first. I have no choice. Understand this—I'm not turning against Midi. After this is over, I'll volunteer for a trial there, when emotions have cooled down some. But right now I'd get shot."

Fighting the savage desire to race pell-mell through the streets and take corners on two wheels, Leif drove slowly and carefully to a subway entrance close to the square that had once en-

closed the Arc de Triomphe. They got out and Leif put the car on auto for the hospital.

He took one look at the two-hundred-foot statue of Sigmen, holding a sword and an hourglass, had a vagrant thought as to what successor to the Arc and the Forerunner would some day stand there, and then followed Ava and Halla down into a subway and from thence into the tunnels that would lead to the hideout of the Bantus.

THEY rode to a spot four blocks from their destination, and walked the rest of the way. The meeting-place was a room in a house for lower-class workers. It was on one side of a very large square. Far on the other side was a huge block-like building that was, supposedly, a college for psych techs.

Actually, it was H.

The three approached the rooming-house from the rear, walked up three flights of rickety steps, down a hall stinking of cabbage and sweat, and to a room that fronted the square. Ava tapped the code; the door opened; they stepped in.

"Where's Roe?" said Ava.

The man gestured at the empty room and said, "He's hiding. So is about half of the Corps. Candleman's found out what we're doing. He left me here so I could warn anybody who came to the drumhead."

Curiously, he looked at the guns Halla and Leif held in their hands, but he made no comment.

"What about Bark?" said Ava.

"He's to hide like the rest of us. Get away as best he can. Roe will deal with him later."

Halla sighed with relief. The doctor said, "Well, I did my best. From now on, if he wants me, he'll have to come and get me."

He walked up to the 'picker which was standing by a closed windowblind and said, "Is it set to explode?"

The man replied, "No. I was using it on Jim Crew. They're giving him a hell of a treatment over there."

Leif clucked and shook his head. He

knew that in every one of these buildings scattered through the Union, the "un-real" thinkers were reconverted to reality.

Here techs drugged the subjects, laid them on couches, and attached minute synapse-wires to various nerve-endings. Through these they fed a series of stimuli that created the sensations the techs desired. These, co-ordinated with words whispered by a recording, made the subject live a certain artificial situation that could not be told from an actual happening. The "story" was repeated over and over, until it was stamped unalterably for life upon the subject's being, until it had all the unconscious authority of a conditioned-reflex.

Released from H, the subject was convinced that he had gone through an experience that had shown him the error of his ways. Thereafter, he was an unquestioning citizen. No matter what his beliefs before his entrance into H, he was now a loyal disciple of Isaac Sigmen.

The one disadvantage was that he no longer could think creatively. He was as close to being an automaton as a person could be.

Leif knew this. Peering into Crew's mind would be distressing, but an impulse he couldn't fight made him turn on the picker and put on the ear phones. These latter gave him the auditory translations of the "semantic" waves radiating from the Bantu's cortex.

XX

LEIF took twenty minutes to find Jim Crew's brainwave pattern. His beam probed here and there, stabbed up and down corridors and into rooms where techs sat, metal helmets on heads, watching dials, running tapes and making records. Wires from their helmets and various instruments pierced the walls and ran to the bodies of the subjects. Each wire ended in an exceedingly fine network that connected with this or that nerve-plexus. Through these the techs were feeding the pre-set stimuli that gave the subjects their illusions.

Leif, of course, could not see anything

within the building, but he could visualize it because of what he'd been told about H and because of thoughts he caught from those techs whose heads weren't shielded by the impenetrable metal caps.

The men working on Jim Crew had a beautifully evil situation for him, one that followed the pattern of his own thinking. Leif tapped the Bantu's semantic-waves just as they were either beginning the story for the first time or the hundredth time. He was at a loss to understand it, but in a short time he began inserting his own interpretations in the inevitable gaps and static. He was helped by the fact that the man was subvocalizing much of what he was undergoing, just as a man talks in his sleep.

The subject had been awakened from a sound sleep by a gentle voice whispering over and over, "Jim Crew, open your eyes. Jim Crew, don't cry out."

And when he did so, or, rather, thought he did, he saw a man standing in the corner of his cell. The stranger was black-skinned and naked and had a face that was Jim Crew's own, though the features were somewhat etherealized. He looked as Jim Crew would have liked to look.

Jim wasn't too surprised at seeing this visitor; he had always known that sooner or later he would come. He calmly accepted the obviousness of his having walked through the wall. He was, however, thrilled to see a shimmering nimbus around the close-cut hair.

"Come, Jim Crew," the man said. "I have come to take you away, far from these people who know not what they do."

As if in a dream, Jim floated to his feet and seized the hand held out to him. It was large and strong and warm with a power Jim had never felt before, not even when he'd held hands in the big tribal dances and the whirling circles had created power for healing and for understanding and for love.

This was an energy that flowed to him as the higher potential flows to the lower. This was the source of that power that he'd dreamed about and sometimes seen

in his prayers when he was alone or glimpsed, oh so briefly, at the climax of a great dance.

Childlike, Jim took the hand and followed the man through the wall and felt not a tinge of fear when the brief darkness closed around him. Then he was through the cement, and he was rising in the air, borne upwards by the power of the hand. Below him, Paris spread out in night and in clusters and strings of glowpearls, and then it dwindled and grew small and the curve of the earth was far off and the air grew colder. A warmth spread out from the man like a robe, and though Jim Crew shivered at the first stroke of the fingers of space he quickly enough forgot about it.

They were poised between earth and moon with Jim Crew gazing curiously at the moon, for in this day where men rode to the stars, he had never left the atmosphere, thinking that this planet was big enough and beautiful enough for what he wanted to do in his life.

The man with the head like a saintly Jim Crew's said, "Look! You have been faithful to your Master, and so I reward you with this." And he gestured at all of Earth and the moon and the stars.

Jim Crew cried out, "But, Lord, this isn't what I want!"

His words fell out into dark space and froze and hurtled like cold iron towards the globe below, and when they struck the air they burned and sent out long tails of flame and released their content so that he heard his voice, fire-streaked and amplified in the vast bowl of Earth, coming back at him, mockingly and somehow distorted, "But, Lord, this isn't what I want!"

AND the man said, "But what do you want? What else is there but this?" And when Jim Crew turned to look at him, for the meaning and tones chilled him as space itself had not done, he saw that the man's face was as wise and kind and loving as before. But he also saw that the voice came from another's mouth, and when he looked into the eyes that went with that mouth, he felt for the first time in his life a Fear. This

head was his, too, and it was what Jim Crew had hoped he would never become, for there was evil stamped so deep into it that it would never come out.

And when the twisted mouth, wicked, yet his as much as was the mouth of the man who'd rescued him, repeated, "But what else is there?" Jim Crew squeezed upon the man's hand for all the power he could absorb. But the man had turned partly sidewise, and Jim could see that he had grown a long thick tail that stuck up behind him like the tail of a saucy monkey's. Upon its end, as if the tail were a neck, was the head of the twisted-mouth Jim Crew. When it saw that Jim understood, it laughed and said, "Did you really think there was anything beyond that, Jim Crew, beyond those hard hot and cold globes drifting aimlessly through infinity and eternity? Did you really believe in a Something else?"

Jim Crew cried out and tried to jerk away and run on the nothingness beneath his feet, for the hand holding his had grown icy and was sucking power from his body, and the head that had been what Jim wanted to be was melting like a hot candle and changing features.

But he could not run, for he was sprawled out on the bosom of space, great breasts that offered no sustenance and no love, and though he frantically rowed hands and kicked feet, he moved nowhere.

And then the two-headed man had placed a foot like a talon upon his back and sent him down with a shove that made the universe reel. He fell and left space and struck the air as if it were the surface of the sea and slowed and then fell faster again as the air whistled by and the earth came up as if thrown at him. His skin began burning because he was a meteor of flesh now and would go up in flames and smoke and agony long before he struck.

He shouted, "Lord, surely none of your martyrs ever burned before in such a manner!"

And no sooner had the words left him than he became aware of a hand that

gripped his shoulder and slowed him down so that the flaming air cooled and he drifted gently. When he looked up, he saw that the man who had saved him had the red hair and narrow bright-blue eyes and big vulture's beak of Isaac Sigmen, the Forerunner.

His voice was that of the dove's.

"Now that you have been betrayed by the one you thought was your master, and now you have seen that there is nothing beyond the palpable, and now you have been saved by the true prophet, the traveler in time, founder of the Sturch that will save all men, surely you must see what a lie you have been living in and how you must work with the followers of the Forerunner to remedy your misdirected labors to make reality into pseudo-time."

And though Jim Crew knew that what he was experiencing was that which *was*—for he could see and feel and hear—he still knew that he was being tempted in a subtle manner that none of his fellows had ever faced.

He turned and wrested himself from the Forerunner's grasp and breathed deeply and shouted, "Master, wherever you are, come now, or I am lost!"

The next moment Leif Bark's ears were filled with such a crackling of static he had to tear off his ear phones, but he found that it did no good, for something had reached him from the building across the street and plunged deep into him in a way that was shattering. A light, blinding, explosive, so filled him that he could see nothing else. He fell backwards upon the floor and did not hear Ava and Halla when they yelled, or feel them when they lifted him up.

Then, in the next second, the light was gone, and he was back in the world he knew.

Ignoring their questions or protests, Leif rose, shook his head, and put the ear phones back on. He found what he'd expected. Jim Crew's brainwaves no longer existed.

He switched to a searchbeam and centered upon the head of a tech who had taken his helmet off and had run into the room where the Bantu lay beneath

his cocoon of wires. As the tech was vocalizing, Leif had no trouble understanding.

THE man was saying, as reported by his semantic waves, "I don't know what happened! He was responding the way he should have. He'd just reached that part of the record where the Forerunner was telling him he'd been betrayed. Then, just like that, the needles on our dials shot over to full, stayed there a second, and then fell to zero! He must have been pouring out a superhuman amount of energy! Much more than I would have thought possible!"

Leif poked his beam around the room until he picked up another man.

"He's dead. What killed him? Heart attack?"

Another replied, "He doesn't look as if he died of a heart attack. Look at the smile on his face. What in Sigmen's name could he have been thinking of?"

That was enough for Leif. He removed the phones and said to the others in the room, "Let's get out of here. I'll tell you about it later."

The man who had admitted them to the room refused to go back with them into the subway. He had another place to hole up. After hesitating, Ava, however, said he would go with Leif and Halla. The three left at once. They didn't bother with the thoughtpicker. When the Uzzites tried to open it, it would explode.

Leif seemed preoccupied. As they went down the rickety steps of the board house, he was muttering, "I was the only one around who was in any kind of contact with Jim, even if it was just mental sympathy. The techs couldn't see what he was thinking. They were just feeding him a prepared story and watching his reactions on meters.

"But when that . . . vision . . . came to him, I saw part of it. Not through the 'picker but directly. Energy, mental or otherwise, flows from a higher charged body to a lesser if there is a conductor. Our first connection was the machine and our second was our sympathy. And of the two of us I was

the lesser charged."

He shook his head as if to throw out something that clung leechlike.

"Somehow, I saw what he saw. I'm sure, not real, not as this flesh and blood that surrounds my bones are real. The mind works in signs and symbols, and Jim Crew's whole being was summed up in that last flare of energy, that psychosomatic nova. What he, and I, witnessed was a symbol he projected to himself. It was . . . essence, not existence."

He shook his head again and mumbled, "But who was that dark and bearded man stepping through the light, holding out his hand to Jim? *Was* there a man, or did I just think I saw . . . ?"

And he ran his hand through his hair and tugged at the roots and knew that, though he could explain it away, he would never be sure.

XXI

IN THE hide-out of the Bantus, two watchers met them and conducted them through the darkness. Ava had started to protest that he didn't want to go along, but the doctor had told him that he was forcing him. If both disappeared, Roe might think they'd been arrested and sent to H. If Ava took the news to him of what had happened, Roe might put obstacles in Leif's path. Once the man and the woman were on the ship to Africa, Ava could go.

When they arrived, they greeted the Primitives and then were fed. A parley was held; its result was the agreement that an exodus to a new HQ would have to be set up. Meanwhile, Leif and several others would go to the ship. They were lucky, for in one more day the vessel would leave and another one wouldn't be in for a month.

Prayers were offered for Jim Crew after the meal. Leif and Halla chafed, though they appreciated the sentiment. And then, about three in the morning, just as they were to leave, a watcher came in. His face was twisted with alarm and with bad news. Candleman and Dannto knew now that Halla had run away with Bark. The Uzzite had

launched the biggest manhunt of them all, one he'd been preparing for a long time and that was ready to move when he was stung into action.

He was not only using all of his Parisian force, but had borrowed thousands from surrounding areas. They had dogs and firethrowers and poison gases.

Leif talked to some of the watchers. They said the Uzzite chief had tried to bring in his many men quietly and under cover of night, but it was impossible to conceal that number, especially from the supersensitive Bantus. It would be some time before it reached the vicinity of their hideout. Candleman had started from the periphery with a huge army that would close in towards the center. The idea was that the underground dwellers would be driven and caught like rabbits in a big beat.

Leif didn't think it would be that easy. Paris was tremendous, twice as large as the twentieth century city, and the labyrinth beneath was many-leveled and tortuous. It would be several days before the hunters even got close to the Bantus, and it would be possible for individuals to slip through the lines.

There was another council. The two agents took a prominent part, for the Bantus seemed to hope they would be able to think of some place to go above ground while the hunt was on. Leif killed that by telling them that Uzzites would also be prowling the streets and subways now in use for just such a maneuver. There were only two things to do. One, hope they'd not be found. Or, two, take the ship that rested in the mud at the bottom of the Seine. The first was rather hopeless; once found they'd have no chance to escape. The second was dangerous, for there was no way of knowing whether or not Candleman had tortured the truth from Jim Crew about the ship. It was probable that he had.

Leif's own advice was to take to the ship. He hoped he and Halla could live for a while in Bantuland, that perhaps he could begin negotiations for reinstatement. If that proved hopeless, the two of them could either remain in

Africa or find some way of going to Ozagen. Leif had a desire to visit that exotic planet for sentimental as well as scientific reasons.

The family members scanned each other for the general feeling. There was no question of a splitting up. They either stayed as a unit or left as one. Leif, watching them, could not help thinking that here was a democracy undreamed of. No votes had to be cast, no ballots written, no speeches, no bribing, no appeals to emotional issues. They held hands, though it wasn't necessary, and *felt* their way to a decision.

The whole thing took less than a minute. Unanimously, they agreed to go. If they were to stay, their martyrdom would mean nothing, for the people of the Haijac would not see and benefit by it. It was true that once they left Paris it would be very difficult to get back in. But it could be done. Besides, they had great confidence that the plans of the Izziys would eventually succeed and that the Haijac would fall.

Preparations got underway at once. Clothes were put on and food stored in baskets. Within twenty minutes, the whole group was ready.

Leif asked about the Timbuktu men and was told they had lost contact with them ever since they'd offended Dr. Djouba. Doubtless, unless they, too, had very good avenues of escape, they would be flushed out and killed or sent to H.

A WATCHER entered breathlessly, and said that a number of men had come underground through the entrance in the lavatory wall, the very place which Leif and Crew had used the first time. Another watcher came in after the first to say that a second party was coming from the opposite direction.

"Evidently they're going to grind us between them," said Bark. He strode through a door into the room whose wall concealed an exit. They planted their only bomb, and set it to detonate when the fourth person entered the room.

Leif, Ava, and Halla were the only ones of the hunted who were armed; the

Bantus would rather die than have the blood of others on their hands.

When the Midian walked by the others on his way back to the head of the line, he passed Anadi, the child he'd operated on. Pale but brighteyed, she was being carried in the arms of one of her fathers. Her face seemed small compared to the big white basketwork enclosing her skull. He slowed for a second to accompany her.

"Anadi, it's hard to believe you're alive."

"Yes," she answered, smiling feebly. "I stayed alive so I might die with all of us."

He didn't ask her what she meant; it was obvious.

He said, "I've been too busy to find out just why you happened to be at the scene of the first Halla's death. Tell me, what did Jim Crew mean when he said you knew she was going to be in an accident? And that you'd be hurt, and I'd save you?"

"Doctor, how can I explain? I knew Mrs. Dannto because I was the one who converted her to our faith. I loved her; I baptised her."

"Ah, if the CWC had known that, it'd have courtmartialled her, too."

"Yes. But that day she was killed, I had a *feeling* that she was making a move she shouldn't. I hurried to warn her, but I was too late. I was in the way; the taxi drove over me. As for you, we found out who you really were a long time ago."

He touched her hand and, for some reason, felt stronger.

"You're a strange little girl."

"Not half as strange as you are, Lev-Leif Baruch-Bark."

That was the last time he saw her. . . .

THEY threaded very narrow tunnels with low roofs. Leif had to help Halla at several places, for the ceilings or sides had caved in and partially blocked them.

At one of them, they paused as a low rumble came from behind and the ground shook.

"The bomb!" remarked Leif grimly. "They'll be along soon. But they'll be cautious."

Presently they came to a broad room, an excavation shored up in many places by timbers and stone pillars. There the Africans insisted the three agents take another tunnel. If the hunters caught up, they said, they could at least delay them while the three went on to the ship. As for the group, it would live or die as a unit.

Leif didn't argue. He wanted to live. He was surprised, however, when the girl he'd thought of as the Brindled Beatrice said she'd leave the others to guide. He was touched, for he knew it was because of her feeling for him that she was sundering herself from the group, a gesture which was almost like tearing off her flesh.

The girl kissed him and said, "I love you, Leif," and then she turned to Halla, who'd tightened her mouth and said, "Don't get jealous, baby, I love you, too --only in a slightly different way."

Halla seemed to sense it was all right, for she relaxed and said, "Thank you. This is a great sacrifice on your part."

"Not so much. We'll meet again at the ship."

It was then that Leif got the feeling that they would *not* meet the others, that the group had decided, with their soundless balloting, that the hunters would probably catch them and that they could, at least, give their lives for the two men and woman. Beatrice, doubtless, had been informed of this.

The four took the tunnel to the right. They had gone perhaps a hundred yards when they heard the distant barking of dogs and shouting of men. They hurried on, knowing that soon enough a part of the pursuers would be on their heels.

When they slowed down because Halla was reeling from the pace, they stopped for a second at the juncture of four tunnels. And heard, dimly, the firing of many guns.

Beatrice stiffened and cried out, "They're killing us! They're not giving

us a chance!"

She put her head on Leif's chest and wept. He patted her bare back and said, "There's nothing to be done. Let's go, or we'll be caught, too."

Sobbing, the girl turned and trotted on.

Halla, in the lead, suddenly fell. Before she could rise, she screamed. Leif leaped at the man lying on the ground, ready to shoot him, when he saw he was wounded and a Bantu. He put his automatic down and was going to help the man when he understood why she had been so frightened.

He was one of the Men In The Dark.

Injured as he was, with blood flowing from a shoulder-wound, he was still able to catch Halla's mindimages, amplify them, and hurl them back. As fear was uppermost in her, he'd probably shown her something that had really terrified her.

Beatrice bent over him and said, "Come along, brother. We'll help you."

Drizzling lips hanging open, blue eyes staring into the roots of Beatrice's mind, he staggered to his feet and followed her. Leif wanted to protest, for he thought the presence of a crazy and wounded man would hinder them. Moreover, the fellow's essence was evil. Let him die. Beatrice, however, had put her arm around him and was helping him along. Watching her, Leif felt ashamed that he'd allowed his fear to overcome him and tried to excuse himself by saying he was more worried about Halla than anything. But he had to admit to himself he was rationalizing. It had been the brutal panic of the beast in flight that had affected him.

The clamor behind them was getting louder. They came to another junction. Beatrice halted them. "From here on," she said, "take every other exit on the right. Got it? First left, then right. Then left, then right."

Leif said, "If you've some fantastic notion of staying here and luring them down another tunnel, forget it. We'll stick together."

"I'm half dead now," she replied.

"When my people died, I died. So it's only a little step to join them. You go on. You can't stop me."

Bark didn't hesitate. He embraced her and kissed her and said, "We'll never forget you, Beatrice—and—we love you."

"You'll find me a thousand times over in Bantuland," she said. "I'll live in all my people."

Leif didn't believe that, but he found himself overwhelmed. He turned and said, "Let's go."

Ava and Halla touched the splotched skin of the girl and then followed him. The Man In The Dark hung his head for a moment, muttered something in Swahili, and staggered off after the three.

Beatrice waited for the hounds. . . .

TEN minutes later, Leif knew that she must at least have split the party that was tracking them. He caught a glimpse of the comparatively small group as they came down a very long subway route. There was one dog, and twenty men. Candleman's thin bent-forward figure and Dannto's hogfat body were side by side in the lead. In the brief glimpse he got of them before he ducked through an archway, he saw that most of them carried the automatics which could spray hundreds of slugs without stopping to cool off. Each one of the bullets was lethal. Its merest touch would shatter the nervous system of its target.

Leif had his own auto, but he didn't want to let the trackers know they were close. He ran to join the others and found that Halla was limping. In reply to his alarmed question, she said she'd hurt her ankle when she tripped over the Man In The Dark. She was trying to hide her pain, but both men could see she would be reduced to a hobble.

Leif put his arm around her waist and let her lean on him. They found that the hopping hurt her almost as much as walking by herself did and that they could not go much faster.

He stopped and picked her up, despite her protests, and carried her in his arms. He was large and every strong, but she,

too, was tall and no lightweight and was bound to be a burden even to a Samson. Leif tried half-running, half-walking. He made good time. Not good enough, however, for the barking and shouting behind them increased in volume. Hampered as he was, he would inevitably be caught.

Ava said, "Stop, Leif."

He did, for he was beginning to pant.

"What do you want?" he asked. The question was a cover-up. He knew well enough what Ava was going to do.

"I'll hold them as long as I can," Ava said. "You get a good head start, and I'll come running later."

"Ava," said Leif, "you know there'll be no later."

Ava started to deny it, then shook his head and smiled tightly.

"You're right. But I look at it this way. I can't go to Africa. How would I prove I didn't desert my post and run with you? I'd be court-martialed and disgrace my wife and child and mother. If I die here, the CWC'll proclaim me a hero. I have to die, anyway. Better a dead hero than a dead traitor.

"You've something to live for, even though I wouldn't under any conditions touch that . . . that womanthing. So get going, Leif, and best of luck to you. I don't think you'll be happy with that Lilith, but she seems to be what you want."

Leif said, "I'm sorry you still persist in thinking Halla isn't human. But it can't be helped. *Shalom*, Ava."

"If you're ever admitted back to Midi, Leif, see my wife and son. He's eleven now. And," he paused, "human." Leif didn't answer. Ava said, "I'm sorry. *Shalom*."

The doctor began to take off his wrist-box to give to the little man. Ava refused it, saying Leif might have a better use for it. So the big man shrugged and picked Halla up and walked off without a backward look, though it hurt him to do so. The wounded Bantu lurched behind him.

Presently, somewhere far behind them, guns chattered. There was an almost

continuous noise and then a vast, shattering roar.

"That'll be Ava's work," said Leif. "He must have cached a bomb and blown himself up."

It was. After a while, lights and shouts came. And Leif, deciding he could not carry her any more, put her down behind a half-fallen wall of brick. The Bantu also flopped and seemed to expire. Leif was glad, because he'd been worrying about the fellow's mirrormind. So far, he'd had little effect, probably because he was too intent on his wound and partly because, as Leif had learned, those who had little to hide were not affected so much. Halla had very few inhibitions to bring up, very few unconscious hates. She laughed and wept and loved easily and openly. Such people did not have a dark rotten humus in their psyche.

Thinking thus, Leif aimed his .1 at the party as they rounded a corner about twenty yards away. Two men fell; the others jumped back. He was disappointed because neither Candleman nor Dannto were among them, but he'd not expected them to be. Made cautious by their experience with Ava, they would send their men ahead to draw fire. It was satisfying to know they only had one man left to precede.

The lights around the corner went out. That meant that the Jacks were either going to try a rush in the dark, which he doubted, or that they had Darklight beams and goggles. The latter were fine for lightless fighting, but their disadvantage was that if an enemy turned a flash on them while they were wearing the goggles, they couldn't see it.

Why should he wait for them? He and the other two could crawl away and take up another position. He gave the order; they did so, stopping around another corner about thirty yards down the tunnel.

Only a minute later, the tunnel was solid from one end to the other with a blinding light; a dazzlebomb. Had he stayed behind the wall, he would have been sightless.

FOOTSTEPS pounded as an Uzzite, holding a flash in one hand, ran to the wall, prepared to shoot down helpless victims. Leif waited until he was by the bricks, for he hoped the other two would follow. They didn't, so he killed the attacker, and, before the man collapsed, was up and running to him. His plan was to seize the flash, which was lying on the ground, and pretend he was the Uzzite himself. If he could get the two to step around the corner. . . .

One did. Candleman. He shot first, and though Leif threw himself behind the wall, he felt the automatic fly out of his hand, struck by the stream of tiny slugs. It lay in front of the flash, where the Chief could see that he'd disarmed the doctor.

Leif's hand was numb because the terrific force had communicated itself through the metal. He swore and held his wrist and felt helpless. He hoped Halla would shoot; no sooner the thought than the *brrrrrrrp* of her automatic followed. Then it ceased, and her voice came, shrill and urgent, "Leif, I didn't get him! He's on the other side of the wall!"

"If he sticks his head or hand out, shoot him!" he called back.

"Dannto!" yelled Candleman. "Bark has dropped his gun! Shoot out that flash so Halla can't see, and I'll get him!"

"When he does that," bellowed Leif, "turn on your light and pin him as he comes around the wall. Or over!"

DANNTO must have dared to stick his hand around the corner, for his gun hosed the tunnel, feeling for the flash. As was inevitable, he hit it. However, when the light shattered, he did not stop, but kept on shooting. Evidently he was trying to keep Halla from projecting her head from her corner. And he was being successful, for her beam did not flash on.

There was one consolation. Candleman did not dare jump over the wall for

fear of ricochets. They screeched over Leif's head by the hundreds.

He waited, knowing that the moment would come when even Dannto's seemingly inexhaustible clips would be empty. When that happened, the Uzzite would probably stick his arm over the bricks and hose the area where he'd seen Leif. Halla would flash the beam on; whatever happened then would be up to the faster of the two.

He inched up to the wall, keeping his head down to avoid the lethal swarm. When he reached it, he held the wristbox up to his mouth and spoke a code word. The ordered vibrations fractured a tiny disk inside the box. The disk had kept an equally tiny dial from being turned. Leif twisted the now free dial to the right and then flicked on the toggle that sent a predetermined frequency broadcasting from the box.

Dannto's gun stopped chattering. Silence, then a loud cry, full of fear and agony and despair.

"Halla!"

And silence again. Dannto was out of ammunition and out of breath—forever.

The coded word sent by Leif's box had stirred the ingredients left in Dannto's body during the operation for removal of his tumor. Mixed, the chemicals formed a poison that paralyzed him in one second and stopped his heart in another.

Leif had killed the Archurielite before the gun emptied because he knew that Candleman was very familiar with their capacity and would be counting the seconds until it stopped. Whereupon the Uzzite, thinking himself safe from the fire of the obviously hysterical Dannto, would attack. The doctor hoped to jump first and to catch the Chief off balance.

He rose and jumped to the top of the brick wall, close to the side of the tunnel. At the same time, Halla, inspired by some unlucky devil, turned her flash on and caught Leif dead center in it. If Candleman had asked for it, he couldn't have obtained a better target. He could have shot him off the wall as if he were a crow on a fence.

But Candleman had outfoxed himself and had rushed around the wall hoping to catch Leif offguard. He whirled to shoot the man on the wall; Leif kept on going and jumped down just as the Uzzite hosed at where he had been. Candleman was fast-thinking, for he kept on revolving and shooting. He must have known that when Halla saw Leif on the wall, she had held her fire for fear of hitting him. Aware also that the agent had no gun, he decided in that second that the girl was the one to be taken care of.

Leif looked around the side of the wall to see Candleman's bent back turned to him, outlined in Halla's beam. The Uzzite's uniform had been blown apart; his coat hung on him in rags; his boots were ripped; his pants hung in shreds. A dark spot showed on his back. Leif, seeing all those details in an instant, guessed that the spot was a burn.

Then, as the doctor launched himself at the man's back, he saw the flash jump out of Halla's hand and roll back around the corner where it turned in upon her. Though it had been struck, it still shone, but evidently it was not being picked up again, for the beam remained motionless. Nor was there any fire from the woman.

Leif bellowed with agony and fury. Halla must have been hit; she must be dead!

The next instant, something struck his head. It was the Uzzite's pistol butt, coming down out of the darkness and driving Leif into an even deeper night.

XXIII

HHE AWOKE feeling as if there were an axe buried in his skull. His hands were manacled in front of him; his back was against the cold damp wall. Halla sat across the tunnel. Her hands were cuffed also. A wing of dried blood across her face showed what had happened to knock her out. She'd been hit in the temple by a chip of brick knocked loose by a ricochet. That was bad, but he was happy that she had not been seriously hurt.

Candleman stood before Leif. He was shouting into a wristbox and obviously getting no answer. His flashlight was lying upon a shelf sticking out of the wall, its end propped up so it shone down upon them all.

Just inside the circle of light, a pair of naked and dirty feet pointed their toes to the roof. They belonged to the Man In The Dark. He must have been dead or close to it, for Leif could not discern any manacles restraining him.

Candleman quit giving impossible orders into the box and said to Leif, "So, Jacques Cuze, you've decided to come to life?"

Leif felt too sick to try to smile defiance. He said, "How did you find out who Jacques Cuze really was?"

The Uzzite said, "I'll admit I was stupid. I must have been to have been deceived so long. But no one need know it now that Dannto is dead. And you'll tell no one. Not as long as you're in H. And Halla here will never see anyone—except me."

Leif swallowed. Candleman could safely pretend she'd been killed during the raid and have her kept forever under lock and key.

He said, "What do you know?"

The Uzzite's face did not lose any of its frozenness, but a hint of triumph crept into his voice.

"If I'd studied the French language, I'd have understood at once. But how was I to know? In this day of vast knowledge, a man can know only a small fraction of his own specialty, let alone a tongue dead for centuries. Thus, when I first heard this name Jacques Cuze uttered by a CWC prisoner, I thought it actually must be the name of a Frenchman, one who lived in the Parisian underground. The frequency of the initials J. C. scratched here and there over the city convinced me.

"You know the inquiries I made about the initials, how I asked a linguistics man about them. His answers threw me off the track. I see now he must have been an Izzie. I ordered him arrested just before the raid tonight. But enough

of that. You know how I tried to connect the first two letters of the Greek word for fish, IX, with J. C. I thought maybe IX stood for Ioannos Chusis or John Stream. That was a real stretch of meaning, caused by my eagerness. I didn't know then that there were two African underground churches here: one, the Holy Timbuktu, which uses the fish for its symbol, and, two, the Primitives which use J. C. to stand both for their reputed Founder's name and for the real founder, Jikiza Chandu."

Leif looked around, desperate for anything that would give him hope of escape. There was nothing, as he'd known there would be. The Bantus' feet moved a trifle, perhaps in a death tremor. There'd be no aid from there.

AGAIN Candleman tried his wristbox and had no success. He lifted Halla's head to look at her; she spat in his face. Grimlipped, he turned away and began talking again to Leif. It was as if he had to prove that the Midian was the stupid one.

"I was suspicious of you for some time," he said. "You wore the lamech, true, but in these degenerate days that badge has been dishonored. Once only a strict conformist to the ideals of the Sturch could pass the Elohimeter but today the hierarchy uses that device to maintain a ruling class. Lamechian fathers, if you'll check up on it, quite often have lamechian sons. There are too many to be a coincidence.

"Moreover, I thought that Halla had surely been killed in that crash. When you told me she was only slightly injured, I almost broke down."

"Nobody would have known it," said Leif. He glanced at the Man In The Dark. The feet were definitely moving.

"I have superb control," said Candleman. "I was raised as an undeviating disciple of Sigmen, real be his name. Emotion is an abhorred thing. But to get back. I suspected you, especially when the case of the two Ingolfs came up. While I believe in the reality of time travel, of course, this was straining

my credulity. Nevertheless, it was possible.

"As for Trausti and Palsson, I questioned them, but they must have been overwhelmed by your lamech. They saw the mangled body of Halla, and yet, because you had said she wasn't badly hurt, they deliberately denied the evidence of their eyes."

"Typical Jackasses," sneered Leif. "What else do you expect in a state where authority is the last word, and authority changes its mind from moment to moment in an arbitrary fashion."

"You revile us now. When you come out of H, you'll be as firm a believer as anyone."

Leif shuddered and wondered if he were going to get sick. But he kept down the urge, for he saw the Bantu sit up. Perhaps, he would. . . no. . . the man was too far gone to put up a fight.

"Jacques Cuze was riding me day and night," continued the Uzzite. "He was in my mind when the sun was up, and when I slept he walked my dreams. I could not help thinking that there was something about him I was missing, some small clue that would enable me to catch him and his whole organization.

"Things went on as you know until I came back from Canada. I determined to drive deep to the foundation, not to rest until I found out all I could. So far a day and a night, I buried myself in the Library of Paris. I read a résumé of the history of France. I took a French dictionary, and, after learning the pronunciation of French, I looked for cuze and couze. I thought perhaps the name was an adopted one, symbolizing something. But there was no such word listed.

"I looked up the many meanings of Jacques. None were appropriate. I decided I was on the wrong trail. I was lost. The man was driving me crazy, and I did not like that, for I want to be unaffected by anything or anybody."

"Even by Halla?" said Leif.

"Keep your filthy mouth closed, Bark. Listen to me. You shall learn that you Izzies, no matter how clever you are, cannot escape us. Your unreal thinking

dooms you to failure.

"I sat down and thought. I said to myself that surely there must be some pattern in the general picture that I should be able to tie up with the man and his activities, something that would betray him. I tried to wrench myself from the frame of events, to stand off and criticize as I'd never done before. I asked myself, What is the greatest trouble the Union is having today?" I thought that if we were deeply concerned with something, it was likely the CWC agents would be behind it. So, the answer came. We are having the most trouble keeping our technology and production up. So many techs, doctors, scientists and administrators are going to H that we have difficulty keeping the Union together. Moreover, many bright young men refuse to go into the professional schools because of the great responsibility and vulnerability to accusation. I saw this, yet I didn't see the answer.

"In desperation, I imported another linguistics specialist and asked him if he could make anything at all out of the name. By then I'd captured Jim Crew. The similarity of his initials didn't escape me; I wanted to know if he could be Jacques under another name. However, I found out that Crew was merely the way he spelled the name of his tribe, the Kru, plus the fact that it indicated their way of living in a group and working together.

"And, of course, I got out of him that you operated willingly upon his daughter. When I learned that, I sent men to the hospital at once, but they were an hour late. And, immediately after, Dannto informed me that Halla was missing.

"Everything broke at once, for while I was giving orders to start the manhunt long-ago prepared for, the linguistics expert I'd ordered to Paris arrived.

"He was a specialist in the French tongue. He was the only one in the Union, and he didn't know much, but he did know that. Curiously enough, he'd been living in Haiti, because there

was an isolated mountain village there where they still spoke a degenerate form of his subject. I had to locate him and have him flown here."

IF LEIF hadn't felt so sick from his head wound, he'd have laughed. Gravely, he watched the man stride back and forth, a ridiculous figure with powderburns blacking his face, coat hanging by shreds, and his trousers reduced to a mere loincloth. Yet, he was frightening. His stiff-faced drive and single-mindedness made him a juggernaut.

Leif noticed that, though the Man In The Dark was sitting up, his head hung down and saliva dripped from his lips. The wound in his shoulder oozed steadily. Though Candleman had taken this in he was ignoring him.

"He listened to my problem and asked me to pronounce the name. I did so. He dared to laugh and then he told me the simple secret."

For the first time Candleman showed signs of emotion. His hard lips curled; his voice rose.

"There it was. The whole situation in one word, or, rather, in two. There was the reason why our techs were going in such great numbers to H that we couldn't handle them. That was why our industries and sciences were getting behind in production!"

Thank God, thought Leif, he still hadn't caught on to the fact that the day of Timestop is an artificial issue forced by the CWC agents! That will be the downfall of the Jacks. When a dozen rival Sigmens pop up on that day, each claiming to be the true one, civil war will rage. That, plus the breakdowns originated by Jacques Cuze, will bring the Sturch crashing into ruins. Or so he hoped.

Candleman screeched, "You thought you were getting away with something, didn't you, Bark? You were snickering up your sleeve all the time and conducting operations under our noses! And all the time escaping detection because of a miserable pun! By Sigmen, Bark, I should have known it was you!

If only I'd called in that specialist sooner! Why, the moment he told me the truth, I saw the whole thing and I knew who was behind it!"

He stood before the manacled man and leveled his finger at him and yelled, "*J'accuse! J'accuse!*"

He waved his hands, gesturing wildly with the automatic.

"You've laughed too much, Izzie! By the time we're through with you at H, you'll never laugh again. You'll think it's blasphemy to be happy as long as the Sturch doesn't reign supreme. You'll no longer laugh behind our backs. You'll cringe every time you hear the name of Jacques Cuze!"

The Bantu groaned. The Uzzite's shouting seemed to have brought him halfway to life.

Candleman whirled, walked over and kicked the man in the foot. "Dirty Primitive! There'll be no more of your kind skulking under the streets and creeping out to corrupt our minds!"

WATCHING the sitting man, Leif saw his body shimmer and begin to change into something unpleasant. Evidently the cycle between the Bantu and the Jack was not quite a closed one. There was a line through to Leif, or else there was a splash of energy that Lief was touching. Whatever it was, he had to turn his head for a moment to steady himself. He found himself, however, unable to keep it twisted away. Even if the glimpse were revolting, it was too fascinating.

During that second of 'hooking' into the cycle between the two, Leif had undergone what Candleman was undergoing. Now, when he did gaze again, he saw the shimmer gone, replaced by the steady lines of the physical man. The vision had gone. Nor was that surprising, for the fellow had concentrated all his force upon Candleman. There was no more 'splash.'

The Uzzite had dropped his automatic and stepped back to the wall. There he spread out his arms on each side as if groping for something solid in a dissolv-

ing world. His legs straddled an invisible horse, and his always bent-forward body was for the first time strained backwards in an agony. The face was shedding the old skin of control and was growing into knots of impossible shapes.

Leif was shaking. He had peered through a crack into hell. He was sure that if he had continued to be a part of the cycle, he, too, would have suffered.

Candleman had stiffened all his members. Blood had congested his skin and was driving under a terrible pressure into his protuberances. The buried repressions, urges, impulses, inhibitions and thoughts, hundreds of thousands of them, kept all his long life inside the cell of himself, were striving to leave at once. They could not do it because there was not room enough, and as fast as they did throng out, the Man In The Dark caught them and magnified them and flung them back.

And Candleman, not knowing how to discharge them, seldom having wept or laughed or sung or loved or even given reasonable vent to hate, always having clenched his fist around the valve, now poured out the accumulated pressure and rottenness of a lifetime.

Eyes, ears, nose, mouth, sweat pores, every avenue of exit in his body ran with poison boiling to get out.

Leif watched him until he could bear it no longer. Rising, he picked up the fallen automatic, and he shot Candleman through the head. Nor did he doubt that the man would have thanked him for that.

A short time later, he'd taken the key from the corpse's only remaining pocket and unlocked Halla's manacles. She, in turn, freed him. Together, they helped each other down the tunnel, wounded, yet knowing the ship waited for them and a land of love was theirs if they desired it.

A solitary figure crouched behind them. He had refused to go with them. He was dying, and he clung to the long damp labyrinth and the lack of light. He crouched by the dead man and contemplated his work.

He would always be The Man In The Dark.

XXIV

THEY walked two miles more and met nothing but two rats that scuttled into a hole. When they arrived at the spot that had been indicated by Beatrice, they tapped the signal upon a small red brick sticking from the wall. Presently a section swung back far enough for them to slip in sidewise. A tall, thin, brown-skinned man wearing a turban greeted them with a gun and a demand for the password. They gave it; he lowered his weapon. He was Socha Yarni, a Malay, native of Calcutta, and his job was to pilot the spaceship beneath the waters of the Seine and the Atlantic, ferrying men and materials.

As the craft was small, Leif and Halla were forced to squat upon a rug on the floor, their backs against the eternalloy wall. Bodies jammed them, for twenty Timbuktumen and a Primitive group from another colony under Paris's west end had also taken flight. Leif was surprised to see the former, as he had not known cooperation was so close between the two nations. Dr. Djouba, huddled near him, informed him that, though the churches differed widely in beliefs, they had an agreement to use the same means of getting into the city. Aside from that, they seldom mingled.

Leif and Halla were silent for a long while. The tension of their slow trip along the mud, the many halts, the sickening odors of human bodies packed closely in a poorly ventilated space, and, above all, the terrible tiredness left in them after the chase and battle, combined to make them ill-at-ease, irritated, and, though it was contrary to their disposition, sullen.

Halla put her head upon his shoulder and whispered, "I'm beginning to think you've regretted what you've done."

He mastered the impulse to snap at her, but she was too sensitive to miss the roughness beneath the pretended gentleness.

"I thought the world was well lost for you," he replied.

The next instant, he knew he shouldn't have said that, for he felt tears soaking his chest. He hugged her to him and said, "I'm sorry; I didn't mean it the way it sounded. What I meant was that I couldn't have done anything but what I did. Any other course would have made me lose you, and I just couldn't stand that. It's funny, too, for I never thought one woman could mean so much to me."

SHE sniffled and murmured, "Oh, I'm glad, Leif, glad you said that. Yet, because of me, you've become an exile to your native country, and you'll be called a traitor. What about your parents, your friends?"

"Let me explain myself," he said. "And then there'll be no more talk about this. It'll all be settled. From then on I won't have any regrets, sorrows, or self-pity coming from either you or me. I hate all three of those sentiments. They destroy you, eat you up. Have you got to that through your head?"

She didn't raise her head from his breast to look at him, but he felt it nod.

"Good. Now—my parents are dead, and my close friends are none. I've been gone twelve years from Midi; twelve years sacrificed for my nation. No, not for my country, for humanity. Because I don't believe in boundaries, and I hope that after this cold war is won, the lines that mark off man from man will melt away. I doubt it, though.

"Anyway, during those years, the only countrymen I've known well have been Zack Roe and Ava. The others have been fleeting shadows, faces and voices and hands that I met but once or twice. Ava was the only one I could call a friend, and our relationship was peculiar. For one thing, after our first year of living as supposed man and wife, I fell into the habit of thinking of him as her. Occasionally he did something that jarred me, and I would sharply remind myself that *he* wasn't a *she*. And I surmise that during the last five years Ava began

thinking of himself as female, too. I imagine that it was for that very reason he was so generally truculent with me. He *had* to assert his masculinity or lose it. He'd been somewhat feminine to begin with; that was why he could so well carry out his disguise. But he was in danger of losing his true identity, and I . . . well, I was always teasing him about his costume because I wanted to remind him of what he really was."

"Why'd he have to be a woman?"

"All because of the rigid morals of General Itskowitz of the Cold War Corps. He thought it was necessary that the hospital be controlled by both a man and a woman. The woman would oversee the nurses and the sick females and those bearing children. We could pick up a surprising amount of information and contacts from these. The logical candidate for the head nurse would be one of our women spies, but the good General didn't think so. It seemed to him that two people living as close as we would be doing would be bound to overlook the conventions and begin acting like man and wife. That'd never do. And since he couldn't induce me to marry anybody, he sent Ava as my spouse.

"When you think about it, you see how absurd his attitude was. Is it any more immoral to command a man to make love to a woman than it is to order him to kill a man?"

Halla didn't reply to that. She said instead, "I'll bet Ava suffered."

"He did. In the first place, he was a very devout man. It hurt him to eat the food the Jacks ate: In the second, he was married, and he did not get to see his wife for all those years. Six more months, and he would have gone home, for Timestop was due to arrive. When that came, he was scheduled to leave the Haijac. His work would have been over. He'd have been greatly rewarded when he got back to Carcasaw.

"Moreover, it irked him to see me making love to various women. He was as virile as any man, but he had to restrain himself because of his moral laws

and also because of the part he was playing. It made him even madder that most of the lovemaking was done on the orders of the CWC. I was to influence this man and that man through his wife or sister or mistress. Most deplorable. Yet, curiously enough, it was done at the command of the aforesaid and rigidly narrow General Itskowitz. As long as it was enemy women, fine. But not with one of my own countrywomen, No, sir! I was surprised, I'll have to admit, when Ava said he'd stand off the Uzzites in the tunnel and give us a chance to go ahead. It didn't seem like him. You'd think he'd cling fiercely to the last gasp. It was possible he'd get back to Midi and his wife and child."

Her voice was muffled because her mouth was next to his shirt. She said, "I know he did it because of me."

"You?"

"Yes. He was a man, as I sensed from the very first. I could tell the difference in his emanations."

She touched the two rudimentary antennae beneath her mass of red hair.

"He was a man. And being the type he was, he could not help falling in love with me. Or, at least, feeling passion."

He straightened, then forced himself to relax. "When was this?"

"When you were with Jim Crew, operating on Anadi, and we were waiting to go to Canada. It was then, you know, that he told me my sister was dead. I didn't tell you why he disobeyed Roe's orders not to inform me of that. He did it for revenge, a desire to hurt me.

"You see, he tried to kiss me I wouldn't let him. He was, in his way, as crazed about me as Candleman had been about my sister. He babbled that he had suffered too long, that he couldn't stand it, that I was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, that he couldn't help himself, and that it wouldn't hurt us. I don't think he knew what he was saying. In a sense, it was not *he* that was talking, it was his poor, frustrated body.

"I said I'd have nothing to do with

him. And he turned on me, and where he had been pleading, he raged, he threatened. Finally, he told me my sister was dead. I cried. To quiet me, he gave me a grief-runner drug and allowed me to discharge my sorrow. Afterwards, he hated me. Still, I know that it was because of me he sacrificed himself. I think, once he'd broken his own code, he could not go on living. His act was one of atonement. Poor fellow!"

"Yes," he said, stroking her hair, "and poor girl, too. You seem to inspire passion in every man who sees you. I'll have to watch and guard you every minute."

"It's the curse of our kind," she said. "But you won't have to watch me, Leif. I'm honest, and I love you."

"I'm not worried. Anyway, I'm taking you where there'll be no other men."

"Where?"

"Ozagen. After we get rested in Bantuland, we'll get in touch with the natives of your home planet. I know the Israelites are in some sort of contact with them. I suspect the Bantus are, also. The trip will take a long time. By then we should have some fine daughters. Which reminds me, we'll have to take along surgical equipment and enough Jesper's serum to halt the calcification."

HALLA kept her face buried against his chest and did not say anything for a moment. He could tell she was too happy to speak. Softly, because he knew they were very sensitive, he stroked the little bumps of her vestigial antennae. Finally, when he thought that perhaps she was falling asleep, she said, "There's no need for me to tell you how I feel about you, Leif. You know. I only wish my dead sister and my aunts could have been as fortunate. They should have loved a man like you."

She seemed to be thinking. He was about to ask her what she was brooding on, when she said, "And the Haijac Union? What about it?"

"I'll explain. You see, Halla, we Israelites have known for a long time

that only the extreme efficacy of the weapons both sides own has kept us from a hot war. So, both have resorted to a cold war. Both have hoped their CWC's could aggravate natural weaknesses existing in the other and so accelerate them that when the time came for all-out battle, the other would go down quickly.

"The Israelites' weakness is dissension between the conservative and liberal states. The Jacks know that, and their agents, I think, have been working fairly successfully. At this moment, the Republics are on the verge of canceling the centuries-old constitution of confederation and of becoming totally independent states. Midi is one of them. She and Sephardia don't get along so well.

"However, we have an advantage. We know and admit our faults, but the Union refuses to recognize it has any. That's good. For us. Because we utilized their blind suspicion and uncompromising adherence to the Sturch's principles to make them conquer themselves. You know I invented the technique: Jacques Cuze.

"Furthermore, their fanatical belief in their pseudo-scientific cosmology will bounce back and hit them in their faces. You know that when they detect unrest in the people they gandy-goose interest in Timestop, the Day of Reward. After the public's mind is taken off its troubles the hierarchy eases the pressure and lets things go back to normal. But that can be done only so long. Then the accumulated disappointment of the mob will backfire. Provided, that is, it is given weapons to use.

"That is what will happen. We CWC-ers did not allow the last Timestop furore to die down. We kept provoking incidents; we fed inciting literature, via the comics, to the people; we've whipped up such a frenzy that the Sturch has had to go along. It's a contagious fever that's so strong even some of the hierarchy are swallowing their own medicine. And soon you'll see Timestop officially announced. Many hierarchs will try to stop it, of course, but once

it's done, they can't halt it. Timestop will get nearer. The men on the top level will get more frantic. Some will lose their heads and arrest the lamechians who started the business. But when they do that, they discredit themselves. They'll be demonstrating that lamech-wearers aren't perfect.

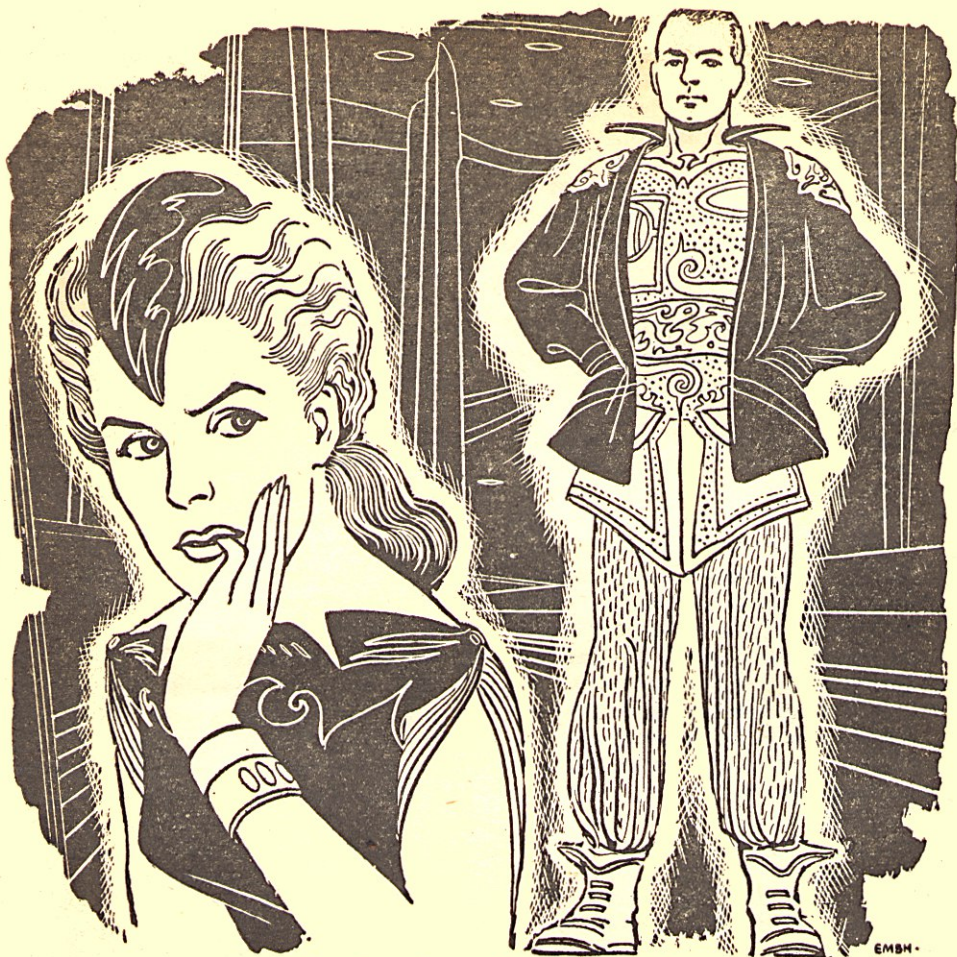
"There'll be dissension and paralysis in the Thing, the governing council. The Sturch will split. Many sincere men will follow the lead of our agents. Then, Timestop arrives. A dozen men will appear, claiming to be Isaac Sigmen sailing in from his last voyage on the stream of time. Some of these men will die, martyrs to the cause. They'll be commemorated as heroes in their home Republics.

"The Metatrons and Sandalphons of the various states of the Union will disagree. Secession will result and the Union will break.

"But we hope to avoid war, because it might be disastrous and because it might be the very thing to re-unite the Jacks. If possible, we'll remain at peace and allow them to disintegrate under their own weaknesses. Moth and rust will corrupt, for the Sturch has laid up no treasurers in heaven. Excuse that paraphrase.

"Its funny, but time will come to a stop for the Haijac; it will go static. And anything that remains static, rots. So, it may take a century, but the Sturch will die. We, through various means, will feed our democratic ideals to them. By then we, of course, may be much changed ourselves. I think the Primitives are going to influence us very much, and there will be contact with the Ozagenians and a reaction to them. It may be we'll find our own ideals are rather inadequate, that we'll profit from Africa and alien planets."

There was a lull as Leif paused for breath. During that moment, the Malay pilot, reassuring a passenger, said, loudly and distinctly, "Miss, don't worry. We get stuck in the mud every once in a while, but somehow we keep going forward." ● ● ●



"My, what a furrowed brow," he smiled

Imperfection

By **LESLIE WALTHAM**

She had to be sure that she wasn't marrying a machine

THE notice was on her desk when Lydamne arrived in the morning. It was one of the myriads sent by the Optimum Command—flurries of snowflakes—each in the same pattern, but with dif-

ferent points. Better look it over, she thought.

Concerning the infiltration of robots. Several of the new, highly specialized, male robots, Series 574, have escaped and

are currently posing as humans. They are faultless in every detail, and it is impossible to distinguish them from humans, barring two slight imperfections.

1. They are excessively heavy.

2. In close association, a slight ticking sound may be discerned emanating from the part of the mechanism where the heart would usually be located. If you have any information concerning these machines, please notify Circuit 859 immediately—

Lydamne tossed the notice to one side and, after arranging her desk for sound-off, wandered to the view dome. The city rose on all sides, beautiful and evil. As she watched, it began to spew forth tides of humanity from its underground labyrinths. The start of each day was the start of another panic—a panic that was not for her. She listened to the cacophony of its waking—the whirr of the traffic equalizers, the incessant hum of the food transporters, the groans of the dying, the endless clicking of hidden, impersonal levers. Well, it would not be for long. When Roger got his next elevation, they would apply for marital segregation, and it would be good-by to this—

“My, what a furrowed brow.” He stood at her side, smiling tidily.

“Oh,” she smiled back. “Good morning, dear.” Her hand touched his for a moment. “You’re cold.”

“Well, it’s cold out. Why the frown?”

“I wasn’t frowning. Aren’t you frozen?”

“No, I don’t feel the cold, and you most decidedly were.” He tilted her head up. “You look as if you disapproved of me and the day and the whole wild world.

“I don’t, you know.” She started walking back toward the desk in case any of the electric eyes were watching. “Maybe the day and the world might not be beautiful, but you are.”

A laugh bubbled up in him, and he worked to stifle it before it came to full burst.

“I haven’t had that said to me since the teachers—” he groped for the thought.

“Since the teachers what?”

“I can’t remember exactly,” he continued laughing. “Since I smeared pabulum on the cubicle walls, I suppose.”

“Oh.”

Hidden mechanisms shifted into low gear, and started the sound-off. A loud speaker sparked into being and its bodiless voice clarion-called the day. “Today is the fifth day of November, 3756. The temperature at ground level is twenty-three degrees. Counteraction units will be set at normal position for—”

Lydamne watched Roger’s receding back as he hurried to his position. It was very cold out. And he had no thermo-suit on. But *he* didn’t feel the cold. Yet he really ought to have worn a thermo-suit, and he really should feel the cold. Yes, he really should

She picked up the notice on her desk, tore it into eight pieces, and carefully put each piece in the disposal chute.

AT FIVE o’clock he was back again. He helped her into her thermo-suit, and piloted her expertly through the thronging masses. They caught a moving platform at Altitude Six, changing only once to a Right Angle Tube before disembarking at the corner near her cubicle.

“Let me,” he said in mock gallantry as they approached her pressure screen. She permitted him to move ahead of her and desensitize the screen. Then he swung around to face her.

“How about rehearsing?” he wanted to know.

“Rehearsing what?”

“The over-the-threshold business.”

She shrugged a tired shoulder and looked at him.

“Lydamne?”

She watched his face.

“Did you hear me, dear?”

“What?”

“Pay attention. I wanted to know if we should try that over-the-threshold custom you dug up the other day.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she faltered. “It sounded like such fun at the time.”

“And so it is now, too.” His arms swung her up in a movement as fluid as wind.

“Gosh, you’re tiny.”

“I’m not!” A hot flush colored her.

"I weigh one-hundred twenty-five pounds. That's not tiny."

"It's not big."

"I can't see that you are so much bigger. What do you weigh?"

He paused a moment.

"Haven't the vaguest idea, pet."

She struggled to get down. "Why don't you?"

He set her on her feet seeming puzzled.

"I just don't, that's all. It's been about a year or so since I weighed and I just don't know." He let out his breath.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

He studied her simmering eyes. "Well, there's bound to be something. Here you are madder than hops because I pick you up without rupturing something, and because I don't know how much I weigh. It doesn't make sense."

Suddenly she realized how silly it all sounded and shame swept over her.

"I'm sorry." She laid light fingers on his temple, and he lowered his head to whisper a soft forgiving.

They dined pleasantly on the food delivered to them by an automatic cooker, and after the remnants of their plates had been devoured by the disposal table, she settled back with a sigh and viewed the room and him with content. The sight of her familiar antiques comforted her. They were of a different time—a time of no hurrying, a time of long afternoons and violet dusks, a time when there was a place in the world for just talking. She loved the searching veinlets of the bleached woods, the old twentieth century lines, the way the furniture huddled deep and low on the floor like sleeping, contented animals.

"Drink your champagne," he urged.

"Oh no you don't."

"Don't what?"

"Ply me with liquor, and lead me to a fate worse than death."

"Would it be?" He looked amused.

"Marriage to me, I mean."

"I'll have to think about that." She noticed his cigarette as she stretched.

"Think then." The embers were getting too near his fingers.

JUST picture—" he painted it for her —"a little place somewhere with a pink pressure screen, a green plastic lawn, a silver transport boat on the roof, maybe, and some brown kids—piles of them that I could carry on my shoulder—"

"Like you carried me."

"Oh that again!" She thought he sounded annoyed.

"I was just thinking. You asked me to." The red eye of the scorched tobacco had reached his flesh.

"Think if you must, but your channel isn't right."

"Well, it did seem odd."

"Look, let's not ride the thing into the ground. I'll have myself weighed by the region doctor, get it framed, and give it to you as a wedding present."

"Why don't you do it here?" She wanted him to move his hand. Move, move, Roger. So that I know you can feel it.

"What do you mean—now?"

"Yes." She could feel the fire eating into her own flesh.

"I'm comfortable—why should I?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Lydamme, what has gotten into you?" Apparently he was becoming aggravated. "If you weren't so damned insistent, this thing would be funny."

"But it isn't."

"No, it isn't."

Finally she could stand it no longer. "Your fingers are burning." She slapped the cigarette from his hand, and scooping it up, ground it out.

Roger looked mildly surprised and rubbed the hurt members.

"That was a close one," he offered by way of explanation. "Happens every once in a while when I forget to watch."

"Watch?"

"Yes, they put me back together again pretty well when I got smashed up that time, but I still can't feel those fingers."

She didn't say anything.

"Doc says it will be all right though in time."

"Why didn't you ever tell me that before?"

"I never thought of it, I suppose, and even if I did, I didn't want you to think you were getting half a man." Blankness was all she could read in him.

"I see," she said.

They fidgeted for a while as silence stood tall between them.

"Well?" she finally asked.

"Well what?" His jawbone worked back and forth.

"Are you going to weigh?"

"No, I am not!" Roger reached over and got his helmet. "I've told you before, Lydamne—don't push me. That's one thing I won't have you do to me."

He had almost reached the pressure screen when she stopped him.

"Roger—" He waited. "Roger, if a man were just a robot—" she saw something come over his face and pause there. It confused her, and she started over. "I mean, if a man had no feeling—"

The strangeness sat uneasily on him. "Look—" he hesitated—"if you are trying to imply that just because I won't give in to you, I have no more feeling than a machine, you are way off base. You've harped and harped—"

She made a movement to stop him.

"No, I'm going to say it. You've harped until I'm about nuts, but I'm blasted if I'll give in to you or any other human living." He turned and left, eyes blazing defiantly.

She watched him from the dome as he stalked down the steel perambulation lanes. To the right—the left—the left again. Always on the lanes—never on the soft, turfy earth that held them close. A very very heavy object might sink into the ground. Yes, it would, wouldn't it?

SHE endured the agony of the next few days in alternating cycles of wracking despair and boundless confidence. Then she decided that it would have to be settled one way or the other—and she knew what she had to do . . .

"We'll make a celebration," he was saying. "No more quarrels, no more angry words."

Lydamne waited in her flowing toga—a sheep, she thought, a sheep dressed in

silks and stardust, ready for the slaughter.

"First we'll fly out to the plain beyond the city." He chuckled to himself, already half drunk in the triumph of having her back. "Just you and me and the moon—used to be an old buddy of mine, you know."

He helped her into the half-reclining, appeasing plush of the transport car. The dials responded to his deft fingers and he shut the overhead protection portal. The little car hummed into contented life, and taking heart as the fledgling robin, leaped up, straining away and far away toward the mirage she could never capture.

Stars drifted past, chips of a frozen heaven that God had put there to remind her. The city slipped away below them, slow breathing in its rest. A rosy glare from its myriad neons blossomed like a great, bloody flower-face from depths unknown, and she knew that in the core of the flower congregated the night creatures—the seekers after sleep, the gatherers about violence, the watchers of misery. Oh, watch me, she thought. "Look high, and watch me!"

"I am," he said. His shadow bulked large and black. The sudden closeness startled her, and she realized that she had spoken.

"Hush! Don't talk."

"No talk?"

"No. Don't spoil it." He gathered her into his arms.

She watched the moonlight play over the angles of the ship, quivering fragments of unanswered questions. It showered them in tears—lovely, crystal tears shed for them by the giant Niobe of the sky. And through it, and through it, the little craft rode the updraft of the wind.

She looked over her shoulder at the spire of the city.

"Don't," he said. "Don't look back."

"I wanted to see it once more," came the answer.

"The city?"

"No, what we left there."

"But we're not back there." He sounded triumphant. "We're up ahead."

"Yes, I know," she said. "Up ahead."

The tiny boat glissaded down as lightly as a gossamer scarf on the breast of a lovely plain.

He pushed back the protection portal and they rested, feeding on the beauty of the night.

She turned toward him when he started to speak.

"No—" she put her arms around him. "No more talk," and she kissed him with the shredded remnants of her love. Then she put her head down over his heart.

And quietly, as from across a great, still water, she heard the sound, pale and uncertain at first, but growing till

it filled every fissure of a crumbling universe.

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . .

Now, she thought. Now I know what the end of the world sounds like. . . .

Roger sat very still when they brought him the news that Lydamne was gone. A frost of horror damped his forehead. Why, he asked for the first time. Why, he would ask forever.

And putting his hand into the breast pocket of his tunic, he took out the little antique wrist watch that he had been planning to give her as a wedding present. It dangled from his fingers tick . . . tick . . . why?

OBSOLESCENCE, INC.

MAN'S own ingenuity has a way of outfoxing him. There is the story Murray Leinster likes to tell, of the mad race between the British and Germans for control of the sea lanes by use of magnetic mines. Invention and counter-invention followed each other so rapidly that the result was stalemate. And today the pace of invention is so rapid that many are obsolete before they have fairly been put to use.

Out of the last war came radar, the best method so far of detecting approaching aircraft, especially under conditions where natural methods would be hopeless. It was used briefly in the war, enormously expanded in the period since—and now seems on its way out. The reason: a new plastic for airplane bodies which is almost electronically *transparent*.

In plain language this means that radar waves pass through it as light waves pass through glass. A little is absorbed by the plastic, but none to speak of is reflected by it; and it is the reflected waves which count, since this is the method by which radar detects.

The new material is one we have heard of before in connection with automobile bodies, a woven Fiberglas cloth dunked in Bakelite plastic resins. When this material was first announced in connection with certain experimental models of sport cars, we tended to regard it with a jaundiced eye, having little faith in plastics. True, our cynicism was born of some disastrous experience with plastic toys which hardly lasted until brought home, or dime store kitchen articles, which worked once before giving up the ghost. These were simply molded plastics without the reinforcing core of Fiberglas cloth. And frequently, according to engineers queried on the subject, the wrong kind of plastics were used for many of these articles, so that the proper strength was not achieved. The present material, however, seems to have survived some very rough tests. It is non-corrosive in contact with salt air, water, gasoline, oil and humidity. It resists heat much better than aluminum alloys, is lighter, but stronger under bending loads and does not shatter.

Used for airplane bodies and wings, it would reduce the amount of radar-reflective surface to just the metal of the engines, and Lockheed's engineers think this is too little surface for reliable radar detection.

If further tests are successful, a huge retooling will commence in airplane plants. For the same size pay load, planes will be smaller, lighter and stronger and will cut construction time by 80%. And—you can bet on it, the military will come up with a new and more efficient detection process and then someone will invent a new detection-proof plane and so on all around the giddy circle.

—Dixon Wells

A haunting memory of his childhood came to rest on a star



The Black Deep Thou

Wingest

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

THE *Magellanic* had landed.

There was no tangible evidence to substantiate the fact; there had been no noticeable change in equilibrium, no detectable deviation in gravity. It was objectively impossible for a passenger in the sleeping compartments to know that the ship had paused in its rapier flight to the Greater Magellanic.

Yet Seldon did know it, and he knew it with a certainty beyond question.

He twisted on his pneumatic berth. *Milk run!* The bearded metaphor crystallized in his mind. An era of galactic

travel and there were still ships that broke trajectory for no apparent reason at all, that came out of transphotic to land on every backwater planet in the galaxy! And when your vacation was beginning, when every cherished hour counted, it was just your luck to get on one of them! And then he thought of where he was going and of all the wonderful things he was going to do, and his irritation ran away like a reprimanded child.

He thought of the blazing Magellanic suns, and the planets of happiness with their ancient love-goddess names; of *Lana* and *Ava* and *Rita* with their pure white cities, their idyllic valleys, their deep sapphire lakes; of *June* and *Joan* and *Jane* with their pleasure palaces, their love-gardens, their aphrodisiac fountains tinkling through long warm afternoons and soft evenings, through wild, starred nights. . . .

He sat up in his berth and swung his feet to the deck. Sleep was a distant star.

He stepped from his stateroom into the corridor and walked down the corridor to the mist-rooms. The aseptic air of the ship washed coolly around him. From far below came a deep purring of machinery. He stood for a long while in blue scented spray, letting cool drops coalesce upon his white body, then increasing the pressure until the mist disintegrated into sharp neutrons that bombarded him into sudden, vigorous awareness.

In his stateroom again, he dressed in the wan glow of his berth light. Then he returned to the corridor and went to the air-lift. Inside, he dialed "Lounge."

The lounge was deserted. At 0230 ship's time that was not surprising. He typed STD on the servo panel. While he waited for the steward he served himself a bourbon and water at the crystalline bar. Bourbon, he reflected, was a far cry from the rainbow nectar he was shortly going to be drinking on *Lana*, but it might serve to alleviate some of the tension still remaining from his six months bout with routine existence.

HE SHUDDERED when he drank it. It had a raw uncouth taste. He was not a drinking man, except on vacations; the complicated Hub society of which he was a micro-organism was not congenial to morning-afters; living in it at all demanded all the wiles and subterfuges even the clearest mind could improvise.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Seldon faced the correct young man in the neat white uniform. "Yes," he said. "You can tell me why we've interrupted trajectory."

"Nuclear storm, sir. We're laying over until it passes."

"How long will that be?"

"I don't know, sir, but the passenger deck is accessible."

Seldon swore. The passenger deck was never accessible unless planetfall exceeded an hour. Suddenly he hated the immaculate steward standing apathetically before him. He hated the ship. He hated space and time. He hated nuclear storms and all other things that perversely contrived to ruin a man's vacation. He sensed the precious minutes sifting through his fingers; the irretrievable minutes, the sweet vacation minutes.

He caught himself, forced the resentful thoughts back. "Suit?" he asked.

"No, sir. Atmosphere's up to specifications, and then some. You'll need a coat, though." The steward went over to the wardrobe and took down a lightweight parka. He helped Seldon into it. "I'm afraid there won't be much to see, sir. We're standing in the pre-dawn belt."

"Just so there's fresh air to breathe."

"There's plenty of that."

The locks were disengaged. Seldon pushed his way through them, breaking the safety circuit, making it impossible for the ship to space until he had re-entered it. He stepped out upon the narrow deck that girded the ship's bow.

Momentarily he was astonished. For there *was* fresh air. It was the freshest, sweetest air he had ever breathed. Permeating it was a damp planet smell—a smell compounded of forests and meadows, of brooks and rivers, of lakes and

seas. He filled his lungs hungrily. Above him, the *Magellanic's* dark prow tapered to a lofty pinnacle. Below him the bulk of the ship curved out of sight to its tripod cradle.

He was leaning on the rail, looking down upon a multi-shadowed mass that was probably the crest of a forest. He raised his eyes. Beyond the wooded shoulders of low hills he made out the tentative grayness of dawn. His throat tightened. He had not seen a sunrise since he was a small boy with time to spare for sunrises. He raised his eyes still higher and beheld an almost starless sky. For a moment he was frightened. He was conditioned to the star swarming firmaments of the Hub worlds. This world must be much farther out on the perimeter of the lens than he had thought.

And therefore closer to the Greater Magellanic, and the planets of happiness. He began to feel better. Perhaps morning would see him disembarking after all, in the flower scented port of *Lana*; the hostesses would be there waiting in long rows to seize his bags; the garlanded aircars would be hovering just above the tarmac, waiting to whisk him to the first gleaming city. The suns would be warm upon his back and he would be off in ecstatic pursuit of the pleasures he had found on his last holiday, only to lose when the locks of the returning liner had swung implacably shut behind him.

Suddenly an old, old memory stepped into his mind.

It concerned an incident so incongruous to his conscious train of thought that he was at a loss to understand what quirk of reasoning could have triggered it.

WHEN he was a young man an itinerant group of players had visited the village adjacent to the lyceum he was attending. They were members of a vanishing cult called Critens—or was it Christians? He could not remember. Anyway, the prospect of such an anachronistic form of entertainment (for

centuries the drama had been confined to the tridiscopes) must have beguiled his tutors, for they had attended the play and had taken him with them.

The performance took place in an unused field bordering the village. The profuse stars supplied the lighting, lending the players and the meagre props a peculiar unreality, giving the impression that the play was the mass dream of the spectators. He remembered all that well enough. What he could not remember with any degree of clarity was the play itself. Possibly because the essence of it had escaped him. But he did remember that it had been long and monotonous and had concerned the fanciful adventures of two peasant children looking for—of all things—a bluebird.

Now why in the galaxy had he thought of that? Here, now, on this backwater planet, on the eve of his vacation? I must be getting old, he thought. An old memory like that, walking across my mind, trampling on what I was thinking, and I could not even stop it, I did not even consciously recall it.

But forty-three wasn't old. Not in an era where average life expectancy was over a hundred.

He shrugged, returning his attention to the sunrise. The sky was brighter now: there was a tinge of pink permeating the gray. The stars were fading out, one by one. On the highest hill, black and gaunt against the nascent day, rose what appeared to be the ruins of a tall building. Seldon's interest quickened. Perhaps, once upon a time, this world had been inhabited. Millennia ago, probably. He knew that it could not be inhabited now. It was too remote from the spaceways, too far out on the thinning perimeter of the lens.

But the thought of life having once endured here was intriguing. What manner of life had it been? Human, probably, since that had always been the prevalent galactic life form. Human beings living in an ethnocentric society of towns and villages, maybe even cities. People like his remote ancestors, possibly, stumbling one day on space travel,

becoming star-crazy and migrating to the rich Hub worlds to become a part of the nucleus of the Galactic State.

Dawn was a pale curtain hanging in the east. Seldon could see his breath now, in the morning light. The rail of the passenger deck glistened with dew. The ship was standing in a great forest; the treetops formed a vast meadow that filled a valley and climbed a hundred hills, a meadow of a million branches each jeweled with countless emerald embryos of new leaves.

In the distance he could hear the singing of a thousand birds. With a start, he realized that it was spring.

Spring. He repeated the word in his mind. Spring on a backwater planet. It was winter where he had come from—it was summer where he was going. Unknowingly, he had almost missed a season. He was suddenly glad that he hadn't.

The hem of the dawn curtain reddened and burst into flame. The rim of the planet's star began to show above the highest hill. The ruin was a ragged charcoal mark made vertically on clean canvas, terminating in the charcoal smudges of its detritus.

Light poured over the land. It set the treetops ablaze with pale fire; it turned the dew-pearled *Magellanic* into a silver flame. Seldon looked up at the sky. He found it suddenly hard to breathe. His throat felt dry, there was a dull aching in his chest.

He had never before seen a blue sky. . . .

MIST began rising from the forest, softening the contours of the hills, making the morning light translucent. The ruin was less distinct now, and somehow less hideous. There was a tragic note about it. What had happened to its builders? Why had they left? Why in the galaxy would anyone ever want to leave a world like this? Oh, yes, he remembered. It was a backwater planet, too remote from the spaceways, too remote from the glittering Hub civilization. There were thousands

of others just like it, forsaken by man, wheeling their quiet ways about their suns, their forests on the march, rearing the new kingdoms, the green kingdoms; the kingdoms of trees. . . .

His ears were ringing. That shouldn't be, he thought. This atmosphere was far richer than any of the manufactured ones he had ever breathed. He shook his head. The ringing persisted. He came to with a start. Of course, the space bell!

Planetfall hadn't lasted an hour after all, or had it? He couldn't be sure. Anyway, he would arrive on *Lana* in the morning just as he had planned, and his vacation would be practically intact. He waited for the recrudescence of exultation to flood him; he waited for the heady vacation thoughts.

He waited in vain.

He gazed over the forest. He raised his eyes, then quickly dropped them before the proud yellow star ascending the dais of the highest hill.

He looked up at the blue sky.

He remembered the way champagne tastes after it has stood too long in the glass. Flat. Lifeless. That was the way his vacation tasted.

This is absurd, he told himself.

The bell rang insistently. It sounded angry, impatient. He was keeping the *Magellanic* grounded. He was holding up trajectory. A ship's officer appeared in the lock behind him. "Sir," he shouted, "you'll have to come aboard! We're spacing in two minutes."

Seldon looked up at the sky once more. Then he turned. "All right," he said. . . .

THE ship's clock said 0335. The lounge was still deserted. Seldon typed STD on the servo-panel and went over to the bar and served himself another bourbon and water. The *Magellanic* spaced just as he drank the bourbon. There was no way for him to know it; there was no sensation of motion, no increase in gravity—yet still he knew it. Hyper-technology went to fantastic lengths to conceal a physical

fact, as though it were an obscene thing, but hyper-technology failed to consider the subconscious mind. The subconscious mind had an awareness all of its own; it understood, in a jumbled sort of way, phenomena the conscious mind could only grope at.

He wondered what his subconscious knew now that his conscious didn't. He tried to black his thoughts, tried to trick it into yielding a clue, a fragment, a word. Something more than a blue sky had spoiled his vacation.

"Can I help you, sir?"

The same correct young man stood there before him. "Yes" Seldon said. Then he paused, embarrassed. He was about to ask an absurd question. An unconventional question. Properly adjusted galactic citizens did not ordinarily evince curiosity over such passé objects as perimeter planets. But he was determined. "What is the name of the planet we just left?"

"Perimeter planets no longer have names, sir," the steward said. "The Galactography Society considers it more practical to indicate them on the galactic chart simply by a letter appending their star's spectral classification and catalogue number. Thus, the one we are spacing from now will be recorded in the log as Go-219-CC. In this instance we have a double letter since the planet is part of a binary."

"I didn't know it was part of a binary."

"The second, smaller companion was in approximate opposition when we landed, sir. Naturally it was impossible for you to see it. However, we should be able to pick both of them up on the viewer now, if—"

"Maeterlinck," Seldon said suddenly.

"Pardon, sir?"

He could feel his face burning. The word had come from nowhere. It had materialized on his tongue and he had spoken it. What's the matter with me, he thought. The steward was regarding him oddly. Seldon gripped himself. "Let's see if we can pick it up," he said. "I've never seen a planetary binary before."

He followed the steward into the adjoining viewdeck and watched the man focus the great gleaming square of the viewer. "We're spacing perpendicular to the ecliptic," the steward explained. "Our perspective therefore corresponds to the perspective we would have were we looking straight out from the *Magellanic's* stern."

The planet lay millions of miles below them on a crazy quiltwork pattern of stars. It lay half in darkness, half in light. The bright silver of its companion was clearly visible far out on its dark side.

But Seldon had forgotten the companion.

He stared at the planet's light side. The color was not quite pure; there was a tinge of green paling it. But the predominant hue stood out, beautiful, revelatory, unforgettable.

"The bluebird," he said.

"Pardon, sir?"

"I've found the bluebird!"

"The *bluebird*?"

"Never mind. It got away."

The steward was staring at him. "Are you all right, sir?"

"Certainly, I'm all right," Seldon said. "Look, you can see it yourself! See! It's flying away now. . . ."

It dropped swiftly below them. The last Seldon saw of it was a blue wing tip disappearing into the awesome stygian immensities. . . .

JOURNEY TO MISENUM, a Novel by Sam Merwin, Jr.

THE WAGES OF SYNERGY, a Novelet by Theodore Sturgeon

Two Big Science-Fiction Headliners Next Issue!



King Donovan and Richard Carlson as A-men on the alert . . .

United Artists

S F O Movie Review:

ATRIO of men, more interesting than the motion picture they have produced, have finally taken the plunge. With "The Magnetic Monster," independently produced by A-Men Productions and released through United Artists, Ivan Tors, Curt Siodmak and Richard Carlson, long-time fans of science fiction, have organized to produce SFO—science fiction only—for movies and television.

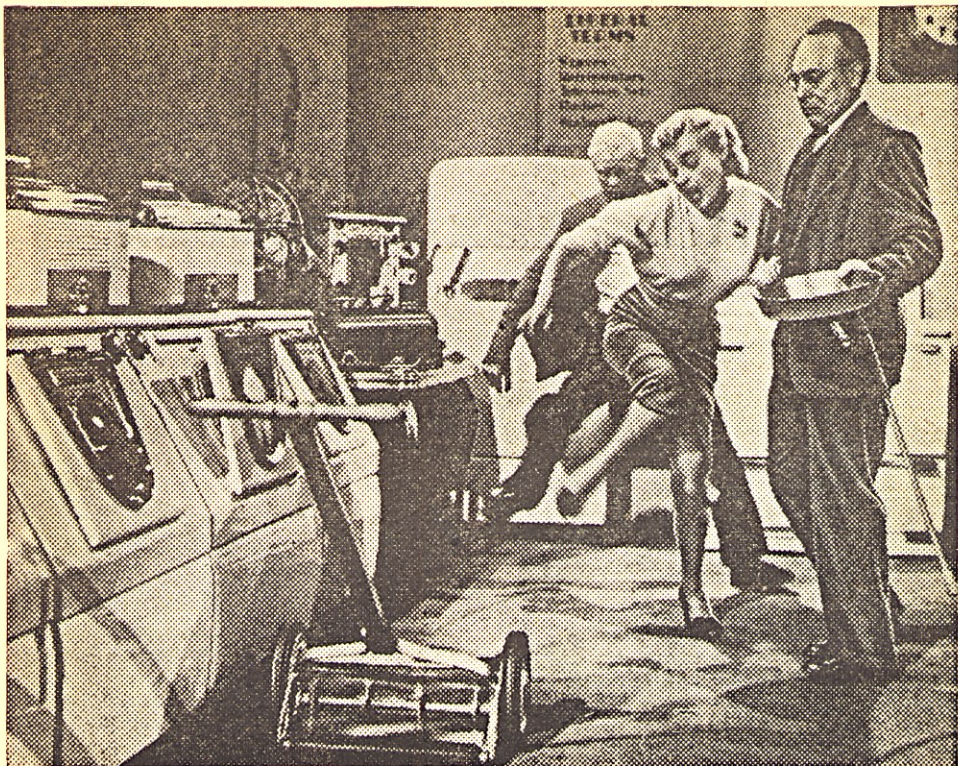
The villain of the piece is a magnet. Of itself, this is nothing new to movies. But this one, of the non-Monroe variety, is a novel element, less than an inch in diameter. The result of an unauthorized experiment in which a radio-active isotope has been bombarded by alpha particles, the element's peculiar property is unipolar magnetism

which feeds on the energy surrounding it.

Devouring the energy in surrounding matter, the element doubles its size and its appetite in eleven-hour cycles. At the rate it's going, the irresistible force of the element's magnetic field will dislodge earth from its orbit and send the planet willy-nilly into space.

First course on the element's menu is all the power in the City of Los Angeles. Next is all the power generated by Hoover Dam. Both are just the appetizer to the main dish—Earth!

Two members of the newly-created Office of Scientific Investigation, played by Richard Carlson and King Donovan, are charged with the responsibility of protecting the public from this enemy of society in



Electro-magnetism—unseen intruder in Simon's Hardware Store

The Magnetic Monster

the atomic age. Public Enemy Number One has certainly changed its character.

In between eleven-hour implosion cycles, our physicist heroes rush the element, via jet planes, to the largest deltatron in the world. They have hit on a novel theory whereby to lick the magnetic monster. And if there's any sus—(deep breath)—pense in the picture at all, we're not going to spoil it now.

Richard Carlson, who plays the leading rôle, might well be said to have been type cast. Possessor of a Phi Beta Kappa key, he handles his unique rôle with skill and understanding. It's certainly a test of an actor's ability to portray a cerebral, rather than a bare-chested hero, but we think Mr. Carlson could handle both.

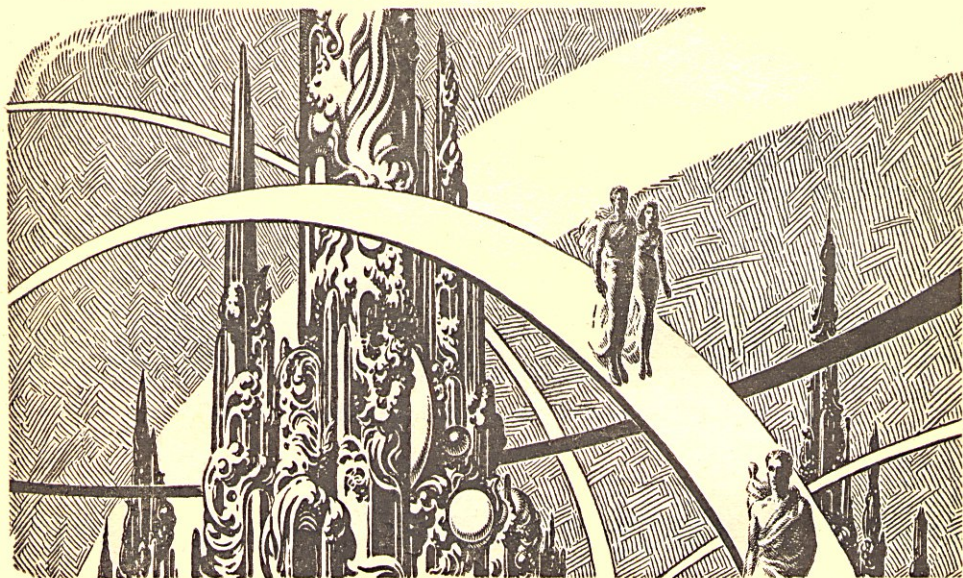
The supporting cast includes a motley assortment of Geiger counters and vacuum vaults, not to mention MANIAC, which we recommend for a special commendation. A newcomer to the screen, the cybernetic thespian refrained from overacting. We might add here that one of the best lines of the film is delivered by a Geiger counter. Its "click-click" in the presence of a curvaceous airport reservation clerk provides one of the film's lighter moments.

While this first venture of the Tors-Siodmak-Carlson producing enterprise may not win rave notices from critics, the producers deserve a pat on the back and a number of paid admissions for having so boldly brought science fiction to the screen.

—P.J.

HERE LIE WE

a novelet by **FOX B. HOLDEN**



I

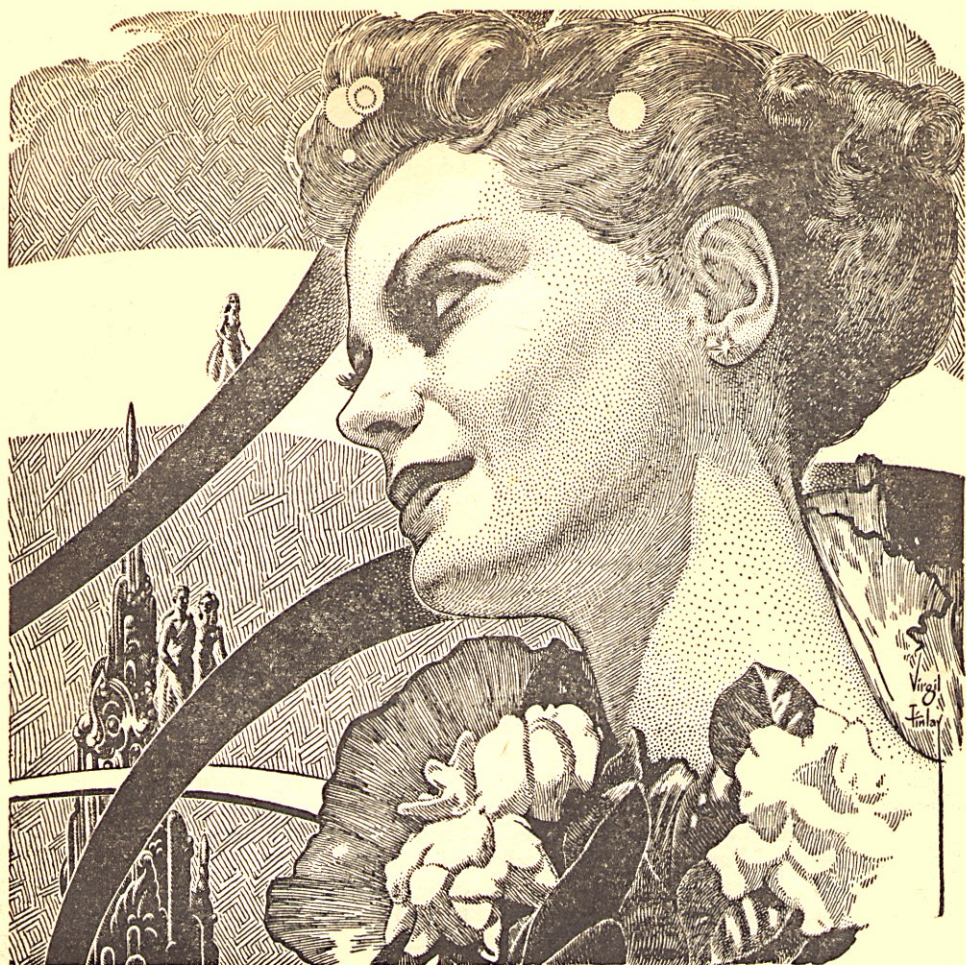
KRUGER was quiet, sitting there, watching the screen, and for a long time neither of us spoke. You could hear the soft hum of the ion drive and it got to be sort of a muted thunder. You wondered if maybe, somehow, in the awful silence of the Big Dark there were any other ears that heard it, and the wondering framed the question for you again.

The question was in Kruger's mind, too. Maybe in a harder, cooler, more

scientific sense than it was in mine, but I knew it was there. And in the silence between us we watched the orange-green sphere grow bigger by the second.

Kruger spoke, finally. "Wes," he said, "I'll even make it eight to five. Eight to five she's as dead as a doornail. So you lose, but think of being the first man in history to make a bet on life on Mars, knowing that in less than an hour it's bound to be paid off one way or another! How 'bout that!"

When they left for Mars, they didn't expect to



If he'd been anything but a government-commissioned scientist at the threshold of an historic achievement, the quipping might have been bravado. But two years of training and study were paying off, and we had he-man danger reduced to a pretty unromantic minimum. No, it wasn't bravado because there was no genuine fear within us. Something else; I can't name it.

I pulled a wadded-up five-dollar bill out of my pants-pocket and tossed it

onto the screen. It looked funny . . . a five-dollar bill sitting on Mars like that. And in a second it was joined by another fiver and three singles.

"Who'll hold the stakes?" Kruger said.

"You. You hold 'em—be more fun winning that way. How about a reading, huh? Better get ready to twist this barrel around—"

"Such a product of environment you are. Always in a hurry. . ." He picked

get there for the final curtain of a great show

the money up with an exaggerated slowness, pocketed it ceremoniously, and then looked for a second at the screen. Then the ready grin on his squarish, young-old face faded a little, and then it disappeared altogether. "But I suppose you're right. Got a cigarette?"

"On the comp-panel."

"Yeah." I waited for him to light it, lit one myself. "Ready, kid?"

He grunted.

We twisted her.

Tail-first, ion stream cutting the Big Dark like a white-hot rapier, we started—down. There was an up and a down, now, and Mars was at the bottom.

We bumped.

Then Kruger dumped out our drive potential, and it was all over. For a few seconds, anyway, it was all over.

Kruger started in with the Physical Check equipment then and I focused the screen. It was as though the whole business were a routine that we'd done for half our lives. And we had to keep it that way—not for the efficiency side of the book; hell, we had five years if we needed it. It was because Space Medicine said so—the whiz kids in Psychiatrics. "Keep it on a 'pass the salt basis' were the orders, "and you'll keep all your buttons. Otherwise, *pfut!*"

I guess they were right. The newspaper, radio and TV boys back home would be going *pfut* about the trip with habitual regularity—but we couldn't. Brother, the tons of newsprint and ink they'd be chucking around while we passed the salt!

I focused, and started a slow, full circle. I jacked in the ship's dicto and talked cryptic things onto its tape. Terse little things our confreres in science would later decipher into a complete picture of an infinite, rolling expanse of desert at twilight, with a sun the size of a shirt-button almost directly overhead, letting the far-off ridges of dull green vegetation get swallowed up in the darkling night.

And then I stopped the circle. I was about two-hundred degrees around, and I locked the screen in, and then hollered at Kruger.

He brought me the lens-plates I asked for, helped me mike them in over the screen. They played hell with the nice focus I had, but there wasn't any mistaking what they blew up for us.

"Pay me, kid!" I said.

They were domes—mile upon incredible mile of polished domes, each maybe a fifth high as wide. They skirted the edge of a long, gently-curving vegetation-line, and were probably less than twenty miles away. Our preoccupation in getting the E-M-1 down in one piece was the only excuse I could think of for not having spotted them on the way in.

"Not so fast, Gaylord . . . I still say dead as a doornail . . . help me break out the suits and get the track ready, huh?"

"Think we need 'em?"

"Almost pure CO-2 out there, just like the books all said in Astronomy 1. The P-C makes geniuses of us right down the line. You coming?"

"I want my money."

"Pass the salt and come on!"

THEY met us halfway. Their vehicle was essentially the same as our own; broad, flat tracks over bogies slung on an efficient torsion-bar suspension—wide, light-weight chassis fitted with a tear-drop canopy of crystal transparency. But traveling with a lot less noise, and with almost twice the speed. Kruger said, "I guess I owe you eight bucks."

"Maybe they're robots. Long-dead civilization. Only the machines remain to traverse the wind-whipped sands. . . ."

"Stop, you're chilling my marrow!"

"Want to try the radio?"

"Minute . . . hold on, looks as if they're stopping!"

"Obviously want us there. Truce-parley in the desert—look, getting out, I think. Come on, club this thing on the flanks, will you?"

Kruger had his boot flat to the floor as it was, and we were tossing up sand on both sides like a miniature tornado. Typically Earth-style—lots of noise, lots of splash, all show and no go.

It seemed as if we kept them waiting

for an hour, but it was actually less than ten minutes before Kruger had us up alongside.

"You think they know all about radio and such, I hope? Because brother, I'm not going to take this goldfish bowl off to hear them utter the Secret of the Universe itself. . . ."

"Hey, hey—they're wearing suits and helmets themselves. What the hell . . . you don't suppose you-know-who has us beat—"

"Nuts, you owe me eight bucks! Come on, let's get out of here."

We climbed down out of the track.

nous parlons anglais—

"Excellent! And we welcome you, men of Earth, United States of America, and trust you had a pleasant voyage! We must apologize for our inability to have distinguished your nationality at once. But our records have never been as complete as we might wish." And then the three of them made gracious little bows, and Kruger and I just stood there like a couple of clowns. "I am called Kell-III, and to my right and left respectively are Ghoro Elder and Juhr-IV." And then there was a little pause . . . Kruger and I got the drift that

Unpredictable Man

THERE is an unlovely footnote in the story of man's climb toward the stars—it deals with his merciless exploitation of weaker people or races. Science-fiction authors peering near-sightedly into the future may well be pardoned for taking a gloomy view of mankind's descent upon other worlds. But sometimes even the optimists may be right. And with man, the unpredictable, there is no real telling what may be. Homo-sapiens is capable of the most outrageously altruistic gestures as well as the most fiendishly selfish.

Here is a story of human idealism—a story touched with beauty and insight. If optimism be justified, there is hope for us yet.

—The Editor

And there we were, facing them, wondering a little foolishly what the intelligent thing was to do.

All three were taller than Max's six-one by several inches. Thinner, too. Their skin was whiter, and they looked smarter. Aside from that they might have been a welcoming committee from home. Except that there were no weapons at their sides, and as far as Kruger and I could see, none dangling from their vehicle.

There were three of them, and all at once I could see one of them move his mouth, and quite fantastically heard his deep-throated voice in my ear-plugs. Fantastically, that is, in German.

"*Wir—wir sind nicht Deutsch—*" I heard Max stammer. He was turning a pale shade of mauve.

"*Français, peut-être?*"

"*Non—*" I managed. "*Américaine—*

it was our turn after a while.

"Dr. Max Kruger, Washington, and my technician, Wesley Latham, gentlemen. We hope you forgive our—our awkwardness, but I think you will understand our amazement. To be frank, we had not expected to find life on the fourth planet. And I'm afraid even less, had we expected such intimate knowledge of ourselves to exist beyond our own sphere. We are—we are greatly appreciative of your cordiality, gentlemen."

AND that, for Kruger, was a speech. For me it would have been a major oration under the circumstances, but I felt a little better when I detected the hint of a smile at the corners of Kell-III's thin, sensitive-looking lips.

"Allow us to escort you to the Primary Enclosure, gentlemen. We wish

to see to your comfort, following which, if it is your pleasure, we shall be more than happy to summon a quorum of the Teachers to assist you in launching the preliminary stages of your research. If you will follow our vehicle, gentlemen."

They bowed again, and waited until we had clambered aboard our track before turning and re-entering their own.

Kruger fumbled around for the ignition-switch, mauled the gears and made a mess of getting us started up.

"I don't believe it," was all I could get out of him for a full two minutes.

"The University of California must have a new expansion program going," I said. "And you don't get your money back."

"I don't *believe* it."

"That's been our trouble all along, back home," I said. "We've got all the capacity anybody needs to believe anything. We just use it on the wrong stuff. Give this thing a boot, doc. We don't want them to think we're slow. . . ."

THE magnificent structure which Kell-III had called the Primary Enclosure was perhaps five full miles in diameter and little less than one at its maximum height. Inside it there was a city that only poets could have designed; men of practical science, perhaps never. Art and life had never been so exquisitely blended on Earth.

And about it all there was an aura of the perfect peace that the city itself bespoke—and a quietness. It was the quietude, I think, that kept Kruger and myself from taking deeper breaths. People thronged the deep green of the generous parks, the flaring sweep of the overhead ramps that twined fantastically between this towering spire and the next, the wide, immaculate thoroughfares. They were everywhere, clad in colorful toga-like garments, and each, it seemed, with a gentle manner. They would halt briefly as we walked among them behind Kell-III and his aides, but there were the same gentle, courteous bows that we'd met out on the desert; not stares, not shouts, not the mobbing so often bred by unbridled curiosity.

But even with the pleasant murmur of their low, soft voices there was the quietness, and I asked Kruger if he noticed it too. It was awkward, carrying our bulging helmets beneath our still-suited arms, but having them off at least gave us back the individuality of our voices, and that helped a little. We had to work to breathe; it was evident that the people here had adapted down to a bare minimum of oxygen before resorting to the Enclosures, but their artificial atmosphere had an invigorating tang, and that helped, too.

"They're just a little surprised, I guess," Kruger said in his best *sotto voce*. "Either that, or—well, hell, I guess we can allow for a few little differences from ourselves! They could as easily have been bug-eyed octopods with soul-tearing screams for normal voices, after all. I wouldn't worry about it."

"I wish we'd get to it, though. These—these Teachers, whoever they are. I've got questions—"

"You and the big rush! But I've got a few of my own. Better do it their way, though. It'll be good for your ulcers, Wes."

"Believe that when I see it," I answered him.

Our panorama of the city widened as we started up the gently-inclining ramp that circled the tower-like structure in which Kell-III and the others apparently intended to billet us. Here Kruger voiced a thought that had just started whipping around in my own head. "Not many vehicles," he said. "Either they're conserving power and fuel to beat the devil, or else they just don't gad about very much. . . ."

"Maybe they're not the type," I said. "Maybe that track of theirs is a special-occasions-only affair—you notice we didn't drive over here. Parked as soon as we got inside. It could answer a lot of my worries."

"About their quietness, is that what you mean?"

"Yeah. It gets me, Max."

"Relax—pass the salt or something. . . ."

BUT I couldn't relax, even after we'd been left to ourselves about five stories up in one of the most gracefully appointed suites I'd ever been in. I could only think of the way the ancient Britons must have felt in their first contact with the civilization of old Marco Polo's discovery—their first sight of fine glassware, their first touch of silk, first scent of delicate perfume. . . .

Kell-III told us he'd be back after we'd had food and sleep, and Max was saying if the sleeping period was as generous as the portions of food that had been sent in, we might come out of the whole thing alive after all. "But I didn't think it'd be anything like this," he sighed. He already was stripped to the waist and stretched out on one of the low, wide couches, rubbing his eyes.

"You liked it better when we were the only frogs in the pond!"

"Oh, go to sleep! And if you can't do that, think of me—at least pity a man who had his five bucks all counted. You don't snore, do you?"

"Softly, but not well."

"G'night, kid," he said, and I let it go at that. I told myself this was the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, and that everything would be put back together the way I'd left it four months ago when I woke up, and tried one of the couches for size. It fit, and if Max snored louder than I did, I didn't hear him for ten hours.

II

ACTUALLY, the Teachers would have made a complete area of study in themselves. The civilization and culture they represented would have made a book of history for every page of Earth's, and would have been a lifetime's work without the kind of co-operation they gave Kruger and myself. Without their help, we'd have had to stick out our full five-year limit before leaving it to the others who would follow us in the successive voyages of the E-M-1.

But as it was, the Teachers were more than ready for us. It was almost as

though they had been ready for a long time.

The quorum summoned to help us numbered eleven, and each had a full research staff ready and waiting to go to work on any of our more involved questions that required more than a series of simple statements for accurate answer.

They were continually with us—in the conference chambers to which we had been assigned, in the laboratories, in the libraries, and there was never so much as an indulgent smile whenever Max or myself had trouble keeping our poise upon initial entry into one of their institutions. Believe me, you couldn't take it all in a single swallow. In the laboratories, especially, Max just stood and looked around for a solid quarter of an hour without saying a word; he couldn't have said a word for the life of him anymore than I could. But to Max it was a different sight—it all was, I think, as I look back—than it was to me. To Max their laboratories were all the dreams of science come true at once. And to me. . . .

That's too hard to explain. Sort of an extension in all directions, I think, of the first feelings I'd had about Kell-III, and then more intensely, about the Teachers themselves. They were men and women who had achieved full maturity, like the culture and heritage they represented. They were, I liked to think, what my great-great-grandchildren might one day be.

In short, they were mature human adults.

And, as the Teachers—that group of men and women whose collective specialty was detailed knowledge in all the known sciences for the express purpose of its continuous promulgation among their fellow creatures—they enjoyed the highest respect their civilization could pay them. They were workers on Mars as there were anywhere else. And there were the students, the technicians, the professionals, the government administrators, the men of art and science, and the mentors of the spirit. And then there were the Teachers themselves.

I don't know what it meant to Kruger

beyond the fact of pure accomplishment in itself; and at first, it had meant an annoying little feeling of suspicion to me—I'll admit that. To me, a pretty representative product of a way of life that took a certain pleasure in resisting any inclination to give the benefit of the doubt to the good and the simple, things semed at first too pat—and like the not-born-yesterday creature that I was, I was looking for the joker, the strings.

Whatever it was that kept me from making a damn fool of myself—what it was in me that finally got me awake to the reality that among such people as these there could be no joker, could be no strings, I don't know. Read a little hope into it for me and for the rest of my kind if you want to. It's pleasantest that way.

But it was the quietness about them—a sad kind of quietness—that had me; I wasn't built for that, and it kept needling me in spite of Kruger's objective speculations. I wanted to ask them to what they attributed that almost-haunting quality. It was information they had not offered, and I decided to leave my questions unasked. Max had given me an answer, anyway.

But it made me wonder if Max had noticed something else, and I asked him about that. We'd been there almost two months, and I had talked him into a day's holiday in one of the resort Enclosures. We were both tired, and the cool, carefully-nutured beach of green grass felt good beneath our bared backs. There was a wide, artificial lake—shallow, of course, but in every respect representative of Martian adeptness at bringing beauty to places where before there had been no beauty—and it was one of a scant half-dozen which served the few who yet lived beneath the life-sustaining Enclosures; there were less than five million, the Teachers had said.

"Max," I asked, "how about a snappy answer to this one . . . yes or no. How've they been supplying the information you've wanted? Have they ever volunteered anything?"

"Look, when are you going to begin leaving well enough alone? It's a good

thing you weren't a cop, or your grandmother wouldn't have known a day out of jail in her life. . . ."

"Yes or no, Max. Humor me."

"Hell, I don't know. The last sixty days have just been one big quiz program—have been for you, too, if you haven't been goldbricking over in the art galleries again! But if it means anything to your counterspy mind, as far as I can think back, no. No, they just wait until you ask something, and then they break their backs to give you an answer down to the last little detail."

HE ROLLED over on his stomach and said something else into the grass and I only half caught it.

"Naturally, it's good enough for me," I answered. "I'd say too good if—they weren't what they are. But I want to know more about them *now*—the way things are this minute. My dicto's got about three tons of tape on their early socio-technological history, its check-and-balance development, and how they worked out space travel and began watching us from the time we started hammering tools out of flint—but damnit, they've got so much *history*."

"Always in a hurry, that's my boy! Six months and we'll have the works at the rate we're going, then you'll be happy. Better than five years, isn't it? And who was the guy hollering about taking a day to catch our breaths? Roll over, will you?"

"First things first, I suppose."

"Figures, doesn't it?"

"That's a naughty word. Got to keep our minds on the job, remember?"

Max grunted, didn't move a muscle. "Though you liked redheads, anyway. . . ."

"Don't let a guy get thinking about it, will you?" I must have let the words come out a little too hard, a little too sharply.

"Sorry, kiddo."

"Oh, it's okay." But it wasn't okay, and I guess Max knew it better than I did. It didn't make sense, of course—a Martian, and a Teacher to boot. All Martian women weren't beautiful, you

see, any more than all Earth women are—but when one is, it makes you wish, if you're not a Martian, that none of them were.

Don't think I'm a complete fool. I hadn't given Lya-Younger more than ten words other than questioning since she'd been assigned to work with me and the other four Teachers I had borrowed from Max. She didn't know what had happened inside me, and she wouldn't ever know, either. It was just something not to think about, and if that, then immediately forgotten.

IT WOULDN'T have been so tough if it had been just the physical beauty of her; her hair, like a dark coronet of silk framing her thin-oval face with its china-doll delicacy of feature and the porcelain whiteness. Her almost too-large eyes were the color of one of the emerald lakes at its deepest part . . . a young, supple body of vibrant life held in restraint by the graceful quietness that typified her people. All of her, so gently beautiful a thing; it seemed that no second glance could ever measure up to the first, yet each second glance by some miracle transcended the first. . . .

And if that had been all—and I say "all" with full knowledge of the epitome Martian beauty can reach—it wouldn't have been so tough. Even with the additional fact that she was of another race and of a higher order of being than myself.

But for Lya-Younger, the daughter of a race so far removed from its adolescence, beauty only began with her physical being. It was in all the others, this inner thing that Earth's poets and her singers of songs had for so long seen, however obscurely, as the true measure of human fulfillment—it was in them all, but in Lya-Younger, it was at its height.

Yet these people were not gods—they were not to Kruger nor were they to me—nor was Lya a goddess; among gods, there is no humility, and gods' eyes reflect omnipotence, not the deep warmth and joy of living that can only generate in the human heart.

"Let's go," I said to Kruger. "I got questions."

"You got ulcers."

"You were the guy who hated to leave that twenty-volume analysis on wave propagation, son." I got up. "And I've got trouble with first things first. There is a dusky Martian in the woodpile. I got a feeling, Max, one of those eight-to-five feelings—"

"And it has convinced you beyond all scientific doubt that—?"

"These people—they're in some sort of jam. They've got bad trouble, and they aren't telling us, for some reason. Pride or something maybe. With them that's how it would be—pride, wouldn't it? If they ever cry, it would be on their own shoulders. . . ."

"You, Mr. Latham, are beginning to read like the Great American Novel. Spare me."

"I should pass the salt."

"You should."

From then on when I talked to Kruger I kept it the way he wanted it, to help him as much as myself. More interested, maybe, in what we had come for than I, he was making the "detached, scientific" approach as prescribed by Space Medicine work out fine. But I wasn't. The quietness, Lya-Younger, the given-but-never-proffered information . . . somehow it all tied up together. In an inexplicable knot that wasn't meant for us to untie.

But it was there. It was there. . . .

The Teachers had retired for the day, and I was cleaning up a couple of odds and ends on my dicto and getting ready to leave the conference chamber when the messenger came. I was beat, wondering how many more months of this I could take, and a little less gracious than I might have been.

The young Martian had a message from Max. It was short and to the point, very Kruger-like.

"I'm busy," the thing read. "Know it's my turn to track back to ship for contact home, but wish you'd do it. They'll be sore if we miss one. Tell them we're about half finished, be home in eight months. Thanks."

"Why that damn—"

"Any reply, sir?"

I turned, feeling the sudden color at the back of my neck. I got out a weak little smile. "No—no, and thank you very much for your trouble." The messenger bowed and left, and I fumed inside for a few minutes at Kruger's scientific tenacity and then got up and left, myself.

III

I KNEW my way to the track, and as

I approached it a couple of service engineers hopped into it and had it started up and warming for me by the time I reached it. They helped me into my suit, and with pretty abrupt thanks I clambered in behind the wheel, revved her up like a noise-happy hot-rod and tore out into the desert.

I was tired, and even with my suit-heaters going full tilt it was a cold, long ride; sometimes I wondered if Kruger had a heart at all. Then I kicked myself for thinking like a kid, because I knew he was knocking himself out to get us both home as soon as he could, and with all the information we had tape for. But I still couldn't help thinking that the guy had been born with a molybdenum slide-rule in his mouth, both guaranteed never to wear out.

The star-shine on the long, rolling dunes, and the quick, silent transit of Phobos and Deimos across the sharp blackness of the sky cooled my temper as I pushed the track toward the E-M-1, and by the time I could make out her stubby, torpedo-nose silhouette against the pale glow of the larger moon, my thoughts were off Kruger and on what I was going to tell the eager-beavers back home. We're doing swell—big success—hurry up and build more ships, it's a gold-mine up here . . . sure, we'll be able to rejuvenate the atmosphere, sell Mars the most wonderful industrial technology it's ever seen—do 'em a big favor, revitalize the deserts . . . at the new, low, bargain rate of . . .

The joker again, and all of a sudden, clearly, this time. And part of the

"now" that I was itching so badly to get at. The Martians themselves had the science. And the ability, and certainly the desire . . . why were they so damned content inside the Enclosures? Necessary respite at one time, of course—but as they'd advanced, surely they could look forward to the time when they could bring their tired planet back to the bloom of its youth. And space-travel; even now, Kruger was going over one of their best ships with a fine-tooth comb. Why—why did they stay here, cooped up, a mere fraction of their former number? I felt I could *see* them dwindling. . . .

Those were the questions I'd been wanting to ask, and why in hell I hadn't after four months of asking everything else conceivable I didn't know. Why Kruger hadn't I couldn't guess. Unless they were that much smarter. Unless my questions were things guided completely beyond my awareness, and it was something they didn't want us to know. But I would ask tomorrow, first things first go to hell . . . I damn well would ask tomorrow. . . .

I hauled up within ten feet of the E-M-1's stern, my tracks spurting a small sand-storm, and almost hit the Martian track broadside.

Something flipped over in my stomach, and a little of the fifty-below-zero Martian night started crawling up my spine. Kruger wouldn't have come out here anyway—and if he had decided to, he'd have taken our own track and left a second message for me with the service engineers.

And suddenly I was the not-born-yesterday guy all over again, and reached for the gun-belt that hung behind the driver's seat. I got it strapped on, got the long-barreled ion-G out of its holster and then rammed it back in again. If this was the way it was going to be, I'd let whoever it was sweat me to the draw. And they wouldn't win, either.

MY ENGINE had been heard, so I made a slow, deliberate business of getting out of the track, and started walking toward the E-M-1's stern port.

The Martian track was empty and I kept going. It was quiet—an electric, awful sort of quiet, with just the moan of the slow, cold desert winds playing an invisible blind-man's buff with the shadowy dunes.

I got to the port, then switched on the suit's com-unit.

"This is Latham. Who else is here?" There was an edge on my voice and I didn't try to take it off.

No answer. So I was going to give 'em the business in the next sentence, and that was when the port swung open, starlight streaming through the glassite helmet of the space-suited figure that walked through it.

"I—I do not know how to ask your forgiveness, Mr. Latham. I—I'm deeply ashamed."

There was a catch in her voice, and the star-shine was doing funny things with her eyes.

"Lya-Younger," I murmured. "Please—I am certain you could have meant no harm." I wasn't certain of anything, but what the hell could I say? I dropped my arms to my sides, anyway, and tried to cover up the ion-G that should've been hanging back in the track where it belonged. "I am surprised, of course. You need only have asked, and either Dr. Kruger or myself would have been glad to give you and your colleagues an extensive tour of our ship. You'll understand if we thought—"

"You are very kind, Mr. Latham. Very kind." And she turned her head away, her voice a tight, little thing, suddenly silent.

"We can talk in the ship if you'd like," I said. Everything I said then was automatic, because I was suddenly mixed up, balled up, and wondering what kind of game Kruger and I had stumbled into, and just how far over our heads it was.

"I owe you a tremendous debt of explanation, I know. . . ." she was saying with apologetic overtones.

"Well, it's pretty-cold out here, even in a well-insulated suit. And I can get the UHF room warmed up in a jiffy. You certainly don't have to stay, of

course. . . ." I tried a smile, and it didn't come too hard.

She didn't look at me, but turned and went back through the port, like a child caught with her hand stuck in the cookie-jar. And suddenly, I was glad Kruger had been busy. I didn't know how I was going to handle the situation, but I didn't think I'd have been too happy about how Kruger might have handled it, however that might've been. Besides which—

Besides which, I was suddenly getting new respect for the "detached, scientific" approach.

Brother, I needed it. . . .

WHEN I got the UHF cubicle warmed up and had helped Lya out of her suit she was still silent, but even though the ship's cold-cathodes had replaced the star-shine, the look was still in her eyes, as though a torrent of words was dammed up behind them, and the dam was near breaking.

I got a cigarette lit, and felt awkward as hell. She knew it, of course, and as was so typical of her people, took the immediate initiative regardless of the difficulty involved to save a stranger his embarrassment. And for Lya, it must have been the most difficult thing she'd ever tackled.

"Mr. Latham, I cannot of course ask you or Dr. Kruger to forgive me. I have behaved—I have behaved as we would not permit our children to behave, and I know that to say that I am sorry is infinitely far from adequate. I want to explain, I think you know that. I wish I knew how I could. . . ."

And then I really went overboard. Picture me, Earthman, gun at my hip—

"No explanation is necessary, Learned One," I said. It was the first time I'd ever used the Martian title of respect for a Teacher, but somehow I thought, under the circumstances, it might help.

She did smile, and the smile said "thank you" better than any words she might have used. I felt better right then.

"You are not of Mars," she began softly, "and to you—to you there should be little reason to regard me as anything

more than a strange being, in a strange place, a long way from your own kind. Dr. Kruger thinks of us all as just such, I know, and it is hardly to be expected that he would regard us otherwise. But I want to tell you why I came here, why I came the way I did—if I can—if you want to hear. . . .”

The words tumbled out, slurred a little with their rapidity, hushed almost to inaudibility with the acute sense of shame from which they welled.

“Please go on,” I said. “And you are to know that you’re to say only those things you wish to say. Any single word will be more than sufficient, believe me.”

No, I’d never talked that way to a woman—to anyone, in all my life. In fact, I didn’t know I could.

“I came because—because in this ship of yours, here, in this radio set, in your control-room, in the parts of your ship where your books and records are—they’re all part of a great well of abundant life, of energy, of warmth and strength that soon will be gone for us, Mr. Latham—”

Her voice broke, and she kept her lips tightly together. I didn’t understand, and I kept my big mouth shut. I wanted to do something, I wanted to do anything to take the agony out of her eyes. All I could do was sit there. Teacher, yes—Learned One, of a truly great race—yes, all that—and at the same time a young girl, scared. Awfully scared of something, and scared helpless. . . .

“Mr. Latham, it’s—it’s so odd that you came when you did, here, to Mars. If it had been a hundred, or even fifty, ten years ago—or one or a hundred years from now—

“Just—coincidence, that’s all it can be called. Or irony, perhaps . . . that now, out of all the hundreds of years of development and progress of both our civilizations—now, of all times, it’s so—” she hesitated a long moment. And then, “We’re dying, Mr. Latham. Dying before your eyes—” her face was a small, tight thing—“and in three to six more months—perhaps less, but certainly no more—we shall all be dead on this planet. . . .”

“You weren’t supposed to know. It is an inhospitable thing, to inflict one’s own hardships on a guest.”

Hardships, she called it. I just stayed sitting, trying to let it sink in. Trying to make it something I could understand, could comprehend. Yes, they were an ancient race, had been forced to great lengths for self-preservation—had, nonetheless, been reduced through the years to hardly a hundredth of their former number, which had at its height been small by Earth standards. Yes, all that made sense. But dying, in a matter of *months*. . . .

No, no! Five million people just didn’t die like that. Not so calmly, so—

Yes. Yes, perhaps so quietly.

I LOOKED at her face, and it struggled to be a mask, fought for the composure that was the hallmark of the exquisite mind behind it. But the large, green eyes were wet, and the red, delicate lips were almost of the whiteness of the smooth flesh around them, and taut in a hard little controlled line.

And that was when I learned that Martians, like anyone else, could cry.

“Lya—”

“Please, Mr. Latham, please hear me out . . . I realize that your mind is the quick inventive mind of a civilization in youth, and that perhaps already you have a thousand questions and as many answers at the tip of your tongue. But what is before us is not so simple a thing as the problem of survival that once beset our ancestors. When our forebears realized that we were or soon would be at the limit of our physical adaptability to our steadily deteriorating environment, the Enclosures were at once designed and begun.

“I mean to detract nothing from their great achievement; it was a thing of inspired genius, and a thing of which our race has rightfully been proud for centuries. It took five hundred years to build and equip the Enclosures—there are, in all, three hundred of them—and as they were built, new cities were simultaneously constructed within them. . . .”

For a moment, she was a Teacher again, patiently explaining to a somewhat less-than-apt pupil.

"It was a monumental step—bordering on the fantastic as it did—but after the Enclosures were occupied, one by one, the race was safe.

"Impossible—yes, it is easy enough to say 'impossible' until life begins to run out. And then—then all there is in you fights. And if there is *enough* in you, you win. . . .

"They would not let go, Mr. Latham. They would not let go, not slip for an inch, for even then they knew that theirs was *not* the time of dying, that theirs was *not* the ultimate defeat—for *they were, but part-way expended; fulfillment and death for us of Mars was yet a long, long way off. . . .*"

IV

SOMEHOW I knew I was not understanding, not grasping something, but there would be time for my questions later. My questions, if I could phrase the questions that would bring the answers I wanted. Somehow I suddenly felt a lack in me somewhere—a lack that would make my questions awkward, groping things.

Her eyes were dry, now, and she faced me as she spoke. Beyond that I cannot describe it. Unreal beyond all reality. And as real as today, as living, as sweating to earn to live is real.

"As you know, we developed space-flight, and we used it to the utmost of what advantage it could give us. There were—are—twelve solar systems within the reach of our best ships, Mr. Latham. They are capable of one-third the speed of light—faster, as you know, and the artificial entropy created within them as a result of their immense energy-consumption would make their use impracticable. A crew gone for one year even at half-light speed would return to find two of its own centuries passed. . . ." She paused, then said, "In a way, we are like our ships. . . . there is a limit, beyond which *all there is must be used up.*"

"At any rate, all those things we have. Our Enclosures, which were built to house and sustain us until the planet itself had reverted to dust. Our science, which has indeed helped us to perhaps more than our share of physical security. Our ships of space, which could take us to almost countless places of our choosing, but are, as we have always been aware, no escape. . . ."

There was a wan smile playing on her lips. Words jumped to my own.

"What—what is this thing that afflicts you, Lya? A—a plague, a—"

"No. No, not as a plague can be generally conceived, although there is a certain—a certain biological effect, a corrosion, a—a *breakdown*, if you will, for which no remedy is possible. It cannot be halted, any more than entropy—the gradual running-down of the Universe—can be halted.

"We have known of it for many generations. We have timed it exactly. We of my generation were born with the irrefutable knowledge that there would be only fourteen trips around the Sun to our lives. Acceptance of the fact has been a part of our living. So that if we laugh, if we smile—if we are gay, as once all Mars was gay, it is a rare—it is a very rare and difficult thing. And you must understand that it is not that we are weak. . . ."

Her voice trailed into silence, and I made another, more determined effort to make my question, although still far from sure that I fully understood what I was asking. But I let fly anyway.

"Good Lord, woman, we've been right next door all the time! You've visited us, you've learned at least three of our languages, you know us and our planet perhaps even better than we do! There's room—five million people? At the rate we multiply we're used to finding room for five million more!" And then without letting her stop me I really got into the feel of it. I began making promises all over the place for my people. For you and you—I made promises for all of you. Yes, I flattered you to the point of lying. "We'd get along—somehow, we'd get along," I said. The words had a hollow

ring. We, who cannot get along with our own! I felt the hollowness and it hurt, but I rushed headlong despite it, for if humans do not have much to offer, there is a thing about them, sometimes . . . there are some who will offer whatever they have, however little. And so I made the promises; I am of you, I am human, I am a man. And in my way, proud.

"Look, Lya," I said. "Max and I—we'll escort the biggest fleet you've got to Earth. Take you to our great oceans, our tall mountains, our broad fields. If we're not the best there is in the Universe, at least . . . well, at least—"

BUT I let the words trail off. There was still the hollowness to them, but it was not that. For I saw the pain coming back into the whiteness of her face, and knew that somehow I'd missed, had overlooked something . . . and I had no more words, hollow or otherwise, that I could think of to say. Somehow, I just hadn't made it at all.

And then, as though it grew from somewhere deep inside her, the small smile was pushing the strained whiteness of her face aside, and there was a softness in it that had not been there before.

"You are kind. But so forgetful, Mr. Latham. For have I not said that the best of our ships can offer us no escape? Do you not understand what it is from which we have no turning, no shrinking back or away?"

"Not a—plague, or disease, you said. Nothing that your own medical science can halt—you said it could not be halted. You likened it to a kind of entropy . . . I don't understand, Lya. I—"

"There is a thing that blesses us all with Life, Mr. Latham. You call it God. We have our own term. But throughout the Universe, it is the same, and the term is but a matter of semantics, of concept.

"There is a force to this Life—a complex of forces—that is beyond our knowledge. Beyond yours, as Earthmen, and beyond ours, as Martians who have reached the epitome of scientific learn-

ing. We know of it, and that is the extent of our knowledge, save that in knowing of it, we have been able to understand its effects, and, in a sense, to measure it. It is common throughout the Universe, Mr. Latham; each race, as each individual, has its share, as each has his share of Life itself.

"There is no word in your language for it. You have come close—you have said 'soul,' and that is a part of it. You have said 'spirit' and 'being' too, and you have known of 'mind' and 'heart.' They are all a part of it.

"You have written of love and of hatred, of courage and weakness, of cruelty and compassion . . . they are a part of it.

"But all added together they still do not finish for us the complete sum that is Life, for there is more that is not given us to know. Yet we recognize these forces, this half-understood complex of—of Life-stuff, and we know that as it sustains our drive for survival, as it makes us perpetuate ourselves through so many countless today's and tomorrow's—as it makes us rise from the primal state to the very apex of our being, it is being *used*. *Not limitless, not infinite—God-given, but not God-like!*

"When we are young, it makes of us aggressive, competitive, social cannibals. As we grow older—as we use it—it helps us to perpetuate ourselves into the full blossom of our being; matured, full-grown, truly civilized. And it is then that we are near our limit, have used up our share of this force with which our race was born, and must prepare to die.

"Do you understand, Mr. Latham? Perhaps you see. Neither beings—no, I shall say men!—neither men nor their races are immortal! For to be immortal is to be—the Almighty."

She was silent, then, looking at me, and there was a deep, almost a longing hope in her eyes, and I felt like a stumbling schoolboy, wanting to grasp the all-important things she was telling me, and half-afraid that I could not. We of Earth have never seen a race die. . . .

"But you said something of a biological effect, a breakdown—"

"In the very real sense, Mr. Latham, that there cannot be rise from the bottom of life to its top—beast to civilized being—without change, without *price*. The primate loses his hair; his limbs straighten, his cranial volume alters, certain organs become vestigial, others develop—and *he grows older, wears out at length, and at length, dies*. The Life-force is spent! It has wrought its changes, gone its course, and is used up!

"What is it that is not in a corpse that is in a living body? What change is there to measure? Something, yes, but what has gone? What has been exhausted? A purely biological quantity that has eluded our science? Some unguessed, undefinable energy-form beyond the ability of our most sensitive instruments to detect?

"You of Earth—you, who are at that terrifying point just between adolescence and adulthood—you have not grasped this thing. We, who have lived through a long and fruitful maturity and into our old age as a race—neither have we grasped it; we have but become aware of its presence in the Universe, common to all, at work in differing ways in differing places, each race with its share, unique unto itself.

"We have succeeded in measuring. We have determined the limit of our racial life-span quite precisely. But beyond that, the secret is not ours.

"I am a Teacher, Mr. Latham. I have done my best to explain. It is all I know of the reason that we of Mars have no escape; that we must die. You, unfortunately, have found us in our last hours."

L YA'S smile was a tired, pitiful thing, and yet there was a courage in it that a thousand shouting men could not emulate.

My throat was dry, and there was a thing of red heat stirring deep inside me, searing in my vitals for release, and finding my hands, my brain quite numb, quite helpless, and itself trapped and futile.

And suddenly I was on my feet, and almost roughly, I grasped her slender shoulders and turned her to face me. I

had to say something. Anything at all.

"Lya, we won't let this thing—this whatever-it-is—we won't let it win!" I could feel the muscles of my throat straining, my voice hurting my throat. "Perhaps our scientists at home—they will not be the equal of yours for centuries, of course—but there may be some thing, some small, seemingly insignificant thing they know that yours have somehow by some odd chance overlooked. Let us try! If, somehow, this Life-force of which you speak—if in some way we might trap it, analyze, isolate it, transfer some of what we have—"

"No, Mr. Latham," Lya said softly. And it was "no" beyond all doubting, but there was a gratefulness in it that was felt more than heard. "You must understand that science is not the beginning and end of all things.

"Through some physical miracle to be kept walking, talking—yes, even thinking, perhaps—no, for we would not be *ourselves* . . . as robots, as . . . living-dead. A retrogression of a sort we could not endure, even for a kind of life!

"You must forgive us for that. Our pride. We are a very proud race in our way, Mr. Latham. If, somehow, there were a way and it had been ours to find, or yours to give, it would afford us only the past to live and re-live—there would be no *future* for us. None, you see, because we have come to our flower, and are about to go our way. We have lived our life. What else there might be would be but a mockery of the Universal scheme of things—and our great life has never been one of mockery, or of pretense, Mr. Latham. For us, to pretend is not to live at all."

There was a long silence. And at length, I had understood.

And still was about to speak my protest of the way of the Universe once more, for it is too painful a thing for youth to admit to the unyielding certitude of death.

And gently, she placed a finger on my lips.

"Thank you, Wes," she said. "From our hearts, thank you."

V

THE trip back to the Enclosures was with the coldness of the desert filling my insides, and I tried to think about how mad Kruger would be when he found out I hadn't called home.

But it didn't help. I kept thinking of the girl beside me, and of her desperate little adventure to reach out and touch, if she could, if for just a moment, a breath of the seething ocean of life from which the E-M-1 had come, and to which it would return.

I tried to think about Kruger, but it didn't help. . . .

The next day I told Max all about it; I shouldn't have, but I knew that whatever reaction it brought, at least there would be no deception between us. And you take a different slant on deception when there are only two of you, over forty million miles from home. A team can't go haywire. When it does, you can count on death to be quick at taking advantage of the weaknesses that follow organizational breakdown.

We were in our quarters, dressing and getting ready for the day's work ahead.

"You're a sucker for a line, Wes."

"I am? Tell me, Doc, what've we got on that ship that they haven't, and ten times better? And these aren't the kind of people who carve their initials on things for posterity. Their children don't even do that."

He turned to face me, and I could see then that despite himself, he believed the story I had told him.

"All right. They're dying. It's up to them what they do, not us. We aren't dying. We've got a job to do—to complete, and we've got to step on it because without their help we'll be set back half a century. So let's do it."

He turned, pulled his khaki shirt on, cinched the broad belt at his waist.

"Doc, it's time to bow out." I said it quietly, and I tried to make it hard and level.

He didn't even turn around. "It's time to bow out when I say so. We've been working eight hours at a stretch, eight for sleep, and eight more for work

again. Starting today it's nine, six and nine. And it'll be ten, four and ten if I think it's necessary." He turned to me. "Got it?" He could have said "That's an order," but he didn't have to. His face was still friendly, but his eyes were hard, and it meant that Dr. Max Kruger was still running the show.

"Yeah, all right," I said. "Sure."

"I'm sorry about what's happening to them, naturally. But in our own interests we've got to get as much as we can while we can. And if they want to stick with us up to their last ten minutes, that's up to them, and we'll be happy for their services—period."

YES, it was logic. The government hadn't spent almost a billion bucks on us to throw away what few breaks we might get. We had to squeeze out every nickel's worth of information we could. It wasn't our dough. The money had bought us the equipment to do a grade-A job the first time out—money that the scientists back home had wrangled with Congress for God-knows-how-long to get. They had bought us a little over five years in Space; five years of food, of air to breathe, of fuel to burn. If we could complete the job in five months instead of five years, then we were expected to bring back the change. Men at their first time at bat in Space weren't in a position to waste as much as a flashlight battery. Whatever we saved, the next expedition in the E-M-1 would have.

And that included wear and tear on the ship itself. Jobs like the E-M-1 took five years to build, and right now, pending the outcome of its maiden voyage, it was the only one Earth owned.

I added it all up in my head, fast, and added it up again. And the way it's done on Earth, two and two always come out to four.

"You'd give 'em ten minutes. I like that—that's generous."

"Listen, Latham—"

"Sorry, Max. Forget it and let's go."

He looked at me that hard way again, started to say something, and didn't. I picked up my dicto and started to go.

"Don't go away mad, kid!" The smile was back on his face, but it looked as if it had been pasted there.

"No," I said. "No. Wouldn't think of it. Kid. But let's just be sure, since we're going to be on this new hopped-up schedule, that we don't miss anything. Let's be sure to get it *all* down. All the things there are to know about these people that aren't in their books, aren't on their recording tapes . . . I hope you know where to look, Max. See you in nine hours." I went out, my staff was waiting for me, and we went to work.

DURING the last three months I tried to find one Martian, as I walked among their ever-thinning numbers on the broad thoroughfares and in the great, wide parks, and worked with them in closer proximity—I tried to find one who might come up to me and say, "Earthman, we are dying. Go home, that we might do it in peace, and by ourselves. Leave us; we are not hosts to strangers who can return to homes abounding with life, while we ourselves daily enter our graves. Go home, Earthman!"

I tried to find one, and I could not, and I thought of the situation reversed. . . .

And when we did at length go, on a day of their last days, it would be only for eight months—four for the trip home, four for the next expedition with its Development Survey experts, planning their carnival of buy and sell, stake and claim before the dead of Mars were cold in their great tombs.

It made me sick inside, and I could not look Lya squarely in the face; I could not look Kell-III in the face and say something traditional and noble like "We will carry on, be at rest." For I knew my people would be dancing over his sandswept sepulchre, with comic-books for sale. . . .

And at length, as it had to, the day came.

Kell-III had told Kruger, and thank God Kruger had had enough presence of mind to act as though it were a terrible shock, and to profess that we had had

no idea, or we should certainly not have imposed on such gracious hospitality. But he had the right words, and all the words Earthmen know so well how to use when their minds think one thing and their tongues are quite sincerely saying another.

It was all transparent enough to Kell-III of course—hadn't he and his people studied us to the point where our shortcomings were painfully obvious? Quite typically, he accepted Kruger's moving sympathies as though they were genuine. Even to that, Kell-III and his people remained the flawless hosts.

The winding ramps, the broad streets, the soft parks were silent with their ever-dwindling throngs as the people of Mars who still lived sought their temples.

The shallow lakes were still, and the green beaches had long since been empty; the time of living was nearly over.

Somehow, after the Teachers and their aides had made their apologies—oh yes, apologies—had come to us one by one during the last weeks to wish us good luck with our new venture in quest of the stars, had said good-by and then melted, one by one, day by day, into the silent processions, I managed to see Lya for a final time.

There was not much. There was no way to say all the words I'd planned so carefully, for I was not a Martian, and my skill to say such words was inadequate.

"I am sorry, Learned One," I said.

And there was again a smile on her face; once more, a smile of some inner gratitude, and, I like to think, of understanding of my inadequacy, and of forgiveness for it.

"Do not be, Wesley Latham," she said. And for a moment, it was hard for me to see her. "Know that much of your share is left; that the next five hundred thousand years are yours, and that we are glad for you. *A happy future, Mr. Latham.*"

Her smile was radiant as she said it, and she was smiling still as she left to follow the others.

Then I found Kruger, and together

we made our way to the track.

I tried not to hear the blast of our engine as it started, succeeded in not looking back as we left the Enclosures and headed for the E-M-1.

It took us less than an hour to reach her, and an hour was just gone by the time we had the track aboard and were ready to blast off.

There was the low moaning of the cold wind among the dunes as it raced to play its invisible game of blind-man's-buff among them, and little clouds of sand whirled with it to make the Enclosures dimly-veiled things seven-hundred-thousand years and twenty miles behind us.

"Let's get aboard," I said. "Let's get out of here."

"Wes," I heard Max say, "I can't watch a people die any easier than you. . . ."

We didn't say anything more, but just clambered in and blasted clear.

I hoped that back in the Enclosures, Martian hymns drowned us out as though we'd never existed.

THE visiscreen was a black velvet tapestry studded with all the jewelry Nature wore for men to see, and I was thankful that Kruger wasn't trying to make small talk. I wouldn't have answered him and I think he knew it. It went on that way for a week or so.

After that I guess he couldn't take it, or maybe he'd been thinking thoughts of his own, but finally he opened up, and I found my own voice. "Underneath you think I'm quite a louse," he said.

"When you're dead I hope somebody builds a hot-dog stand on your grave."

"Or a branch of the stock-exchange, I know. Probably somebody will. And I won't be able to stop it, Wes."

He turned his face a little from the computer panels, helped himself to one of my cigarettes. The hardness I'd expected to see wasn't there, and I started feeling mixed up again.

"You'd like me to ditch the ship night-side, square in the middle of the Pacific, wouldn't you, laddie?"

"The thought's occurred to me! That way at least it'd be five years before they

could get back up there, before the leeches could get their claws in—"

"It would be romantic, anyway," Max said, almost as though he were actually considering the idea. "Romantic as hell. But life goes on. It goes on, and we've got to bring her in, Wes."

"And be heroes."

"And be heroes."

I got a little bit profane. But Max wasn't getting sore, because I guess he knew how close I was to going *pfut*. "All right," I said finally. "Okay. So it's not *our* fault they're dying—dead . . . but the one time in our lives we're in a position to do something decent for that mob back home, whether they like it or not, and we're still going to do the thing their way. Take your logic and your damn budget and your Development Survey ghouls and go to hell. Step right up ladies and gentlemen, genu-ine Martian real-estate, just vacated. *And* in addition, a roller-coaster in the back yard, every home should have one—"

He let me go on like that for I don't know how long. We were just loafing through the Big Dark, and I finally yelled at him to boot the thing in the rear and get us home and get it over with. And he just gave me that grin.

"Always in a hurry," he said.

"Me? I'm the guy who wants them to have the privacy of their own—death, for a while . . . remember? But I guess that's one of those romantic ideas."

"Kind of. Kind of. It won't be very romantic cooped up in here with me for the next five years, though."

I looked at him, and that damn grin was still there. I noted that our speed indicator hadn't climbed a centimeter.

"Speed control got jammed, somehow," Max said seriously. "Going to take us a hell of a while to get back, all right. Better get 'em on the UHF, kid. Tell them five years. Tell them we're both lousy mechanics, and we're sorry as hell." And now the grin was a smile.

. . . *Much of your share is left—a happy future, Mr. Latham. . . .*

I opened my mouth but nothing came out. "Shut up and pass the salt," said Max.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

lieve you are, you are simply indulging in the spurious feeling of virtue, which your neurosis fosters, that it isn't your fault. If you are neurotic, it is because you want to be that way. Neurosis is a pattern of behavior, not an illness. You do it because you like it, subconsciously or consciously. Or because you get your way, or hold the limelight, or any of a dozen related reasons.

What causes it then? Professor Mowrer thinks that the neurotic cannot stand self-criticism and so forces away from him any sense of guilt or shame over what he may have done. This is the opposite of Freud's corollary that guilt causes neurosis, Mowrer holding that the neurotic doesn't feel enough guilt, that he acts irresponsibly. His sense of guilt, says this new Spartan of behavior, should be allowed to enter his consciousness and be considered as a factor in making his decisions and influencing his habit patterns.

Obviously this kind of thinking goes back to the old-fashioned concept that man is master of his fate and responsible for his own character. Professor Mowrer will have trouble selling it to neurotics, who will not be pleased at being told they are acting like babies, that they should brace up and cut it out. Of course he doesn't imply that a neurotic can simply decide he isn't going to be one any more and change. But the therapy, he thinks, should be a kind of guidance which will gradually make the patient aware of his responsibilities to himself and the need for assuming the captaincy of his own character. He should be prepared to assume more responsibility rather than try to evade it by the thought that things aren't his fault. He should be willing to face the consequences of his actions and begin to accept reality instead of retreating into the world of wishful thinking.

All this is going to make a lot of people sore, but then so did the original Freudian precepts. The thing which is new—and attractive—here, is the idea that neurotics are not sick people, as has been generally

agreed. If supported by further investigation, this should be a factor of great importance in dealing with neurotic people and may change our ideas on therapy. Apart from professional workers in psychiatry, it alters the viewpoint of the layman as well, in handling people with whom he comes into daily contact.

In line with our ambition to bring you the latest trends in science, we promise to keep an eye on this development as soon as more developments develop.



LES FEMMES

by Vieve Masterson

Dear Mr. Mines: I have a bone to pick with you, one of your own. Now Mr. Mines I have always more or less liked you. What you have to say is usually amusing and interesting. But sir, you cur, this once you have gone too far. In the March issue of STAR-TLING, Marion Cox asked you a civil question, what did you think of her fan club. And you said a girl was maladjusted, and ill at ease if she liked to join in "hen parties." How wrong can you get, Sam? You've given the impression you have to be a little "odd" to enjoy the company of other women. Now Sam, the good Lord knows that I'm certainly not "odd" by any manner of means. And I resent you saying something like that. What about the boys getting "out for an evening with the boys," what's the difference? You're wrong, Sam, and I hope I'm not the only one to tell you so, and in much stronger language than I've used.

Then some - - - yankee comes along and says that women's letters have no place in s-f mags. He's nuts too. Has it ever occurred to you why women even bother with s-f anyway? Most of us aren't especially scientific-minded, then why? Well I'll give you my opinion on the subject. We get something we don't get in real life; excitement, romance, and real honest to gosh *men*. Sam, I tell you there ain't no such critters any more, there used to be, but there isn't any more. I'm not asking anyone to go out and fight dragons for me, I'm just asking for a real man. Males are a dime a dozen, but real men? impossible to find except in s-f stories.

A month or so ago, an obvious young girl wrote to you asking for some of those "cute boys" to write to her. Well that's just what they are—boys, some of them not very cute. That includes your pet Sabertooth, too. For all his big talk, he'd probably curl up and purr for his head to be petted, just like any tame pussy cat, if a girl used the right technique on him. Mature or not. I know, Sam, because I have the same effect on males that he has on women. Like tabby cat Seibel, I haven't much ego either.

So I'll stop for now, that is, until you make me mad again.

Are you mad at me, Sam, hummmmmmmmm. Not very truly yours—2201 *Arlington Ave. So., Birmingham, Ala.*

There's a new pitch if I ever saw one. You mean to say the only place you can find real men are in science-fiction magazines? This comes close to leaving us speechless. Fortunately, just close, not entirely. Had no idea things were getting as tough as that. Of course, this throws an entirely different light on the all-female fan club. If the reason is that men are hard to get I can understand it. What I couldn't understand is the possibility of anyone actually preferring female conversation—all right, we didn't mean it.

What we did mean is that you're exaggerating our position in saying we consider a girl odd if she enjoys the company of other girls. Certainly she's entitled to a night out with the girls if she wants it, but in something like a science-fiction fan club where viewpoint, taste and intelligence are the important factors, not to mention social contacts, what would be the point of excluding the opposite sex? Men don't. Once these letter columns were practically all male; now I think the gals are beginning to outnumber the men. Don't hear any objections from me, do you?

And stop calling Sabertooth my friend. He'd be the first to resent it.

LITTLE DUMPLING

by (Miss) Teddi Marsh

Dear Sam: I am writing this in February, and having a typical feminine mind, am already worrying about what to wear to the masquerade ball at the convention in Philadelphia this coming fall.

Thank you for printing my letter and believe it or not, having a letter printed in TEV is more than just having something you've

written appear in a letter column. It means an avalanche of friendly letters, fanzines and invitations from a group of enthusiastic people. It also means a bad case of writers' cramp.

When I wrote that first letter I was very angry because someone had described American women as being "dumpy" (Me—Ed.) But now, after that gor-geous Space Racketeer—oops—I mean Rocketeer, wrote me and called me his little "dumpling," I confess. Maybe I am a little dumpy at that.

I'm still waiting for someone to do something about these fan clubs for men only—or girls only. If this keeps up we will wind up with only one kind of fan club—ALL DOGS! (and I hereby submit application for my personal BEM, a terrier named Buttons who got that way watching me eat.)

Would some kind fans send me your ideas as to what I should wear to the Phillycon? (Tsk, tsk, moral turpitude!) So I can be with that gor-geous hunk of rock—I mean man. Your favorite atomic gasp.—223 *So. Rhode Island Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.*

It's always nice to see how the other half lives. As to what to wear to the Phillycon, that's easy. Why not wear a copy of STARTLING STORIES and go as Miss Science Fiction? If you get that fan club for dogs started let me know and I'll enroll our mutt—his hobby is eating too.

FOLLOW UP

by Larry Maddock

Dear Sam: Tilting at windmills, am I, when I bemoan the fact that there are prudes and fanatics in this troubled universe? Maybe you're right. People like that don't actually count, or shouldn't, but it is sometimes difficult to adopt a Pollyannaish attitude and refuse to admit that they exist. Otherwise, why should there be congressional investigations of literature?

Thank you for the outlook you offered me—"the mere pleasure of frankness." It works. Think I'll send you a story, so I can add to my rejection slip collection. Yellow, yet. I've got 'em blue, pink, green and white. One was even two pages long, comforting me with the information that even if my writing wasn't suited to the needs of that particular magazine, I could still subscribe. . . .

As yet I haven't read the bulk of the March issue, so will decline to comment.

Note to James Gove III: Willard W. (Woody) Ayers—(not Aiers)—probably would not "stoop" to reading a Thrilling publication. The last I saw of him was at the Chicon, where he was earnestly trying to get JWC to write an intro to a semantics magazine he was interested in launching. And thank you, Marion Zimmer Bradley, for giv-

ing me an idea. Instead of your Utopia with no church spreading propaganda, no blue laws, no hypocrisy, no crucifixion of those who want to live as they see fit—why not carry it to the opposite extreme, a la Bradbury, Ward Moore and others who write with barbed tongue, and make The Church (interpret as you please) all-powerful, laws almost supremely ridiculous, and independent thought a crime? Sam, I realize this may take quite a bit of doing to keep it in good taste, but let's see what happens. In fact, I think I have the right gimmick to pacify the "righteous." Who knows, maybe someday I'll grow up and forget my ersatz battle with organized religion.—315 Canal St., Eaton Rapids, Mich.

A most temperate letter, we are proud to observe. And as usual, our area of disagreement narrows down. We don't want to leave you with the impression that we are being Pollyanna about the bigots and the prudes. We meant only that you were dashing madly at windmills we thought had already been conquered although it is true that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance and all that. Still, you might fight some new battles instead of the old ones over again.

SOMETHING GRABS

by Wilkie Conner

Dear Sam: Once in a very great while, in a life time of stf reading, one sits down and picks up a magazine and begins reading a yarn with only medium interest. Then, suddenly, some darn fool something grabs hold. There is a certain charm, a certain force that impels one to continue reading with ever increasing rapidity. "Here is artistry and beauty! Here is imagination and reality working hand-in-hand! Here is freshness of thought and expression. Here is a writer with something to say and who says it well. Here is youth—here is vitality—here is greatness." Such a story is Chad Oliver's THE SHORE OF TOMORROW in the March STARTLING. This magnificent offering by a brilliant young author takes its place in the Stf hall-of-fame along side SLAN, UNIVERSE, THE LOVERS and other fine yarns. Yes, Chad Oliver may go to the head of his class—THE SHORE OF TOMORROW will definitely carve a niche for him in world of science fiction, and he will become as well thought of as Bradbury, Heinlein, Kuttner, de Camp, or any of the present-day greats.

Though I never was a crusader for trimmed edges, they have added greatly to the appearance of your magazine. They add the finishing touch to the high-toned look that SS has been in the process of acquiring. Con-

gratulations on their adaption.

Especially enjoyed R. Bretnor's delightful, THE SOUL OF THE OISUTA.—1514 Poston Circle, Gastonia, North Carolina.

When honest emotional praise is practically startled out of an unwilling soul, it is a rare tribute to the author. Something in Chad's story struck an emotional response in you, that's obvious. Nevertheless, I am sure he is warmed by your ungrudging appreciation—and it's never made us mad yet either.

CIVIL WAR

by Mary Corby

Dear Sam: The bland assumption by Helen Huber and Marion Bradley that parents practice birth-control solely to have luxuries amazes me. Among all the married couples I have personally known, only one couple limited their family for that reason. This group comprises low-income and middle-income families, manual workers and white-collar workers. The couple mentioned belong to the middle-income group. The others I know who have limited their families have done so not to get new cars or summer homes or run up fantastic liquor bills, but to give their children what Mrs. Huber and Mrs. Bradley both agree all children should have—good food, adequate clothing and a decent education.

Mrs. Huber, I stated an opinion—that ignorance and religion were the enemies of birth-control. The great majority of families all over the world are ignorant of birth-control methods. This information is one of the things that money has always managed to buy (birth-control information, I mean.) It is only comparatively recently that the Catholic church has sanctioned any method of contraception other than complete abstinence. Sam said, "To a non-Catholic the difference between natural and artificial birth-control is a quibble." To the woman depending on the unreliable "natural" methods, the difference can mean tragedy.

I am not trying to start another futile discussion on religion, nor am I trying to make Catholics go against the dictates of their church or their own consciences. I am asking for the right to my own opinion.

Mrs. Bradley's woman with six children may be happy and emotionally fulfilled, but has Marion thought of looking at it from the children's viewpoint? It is not very fulfilling emotionally to be one of a large family, where the father is worn-out trying to provide for the brood, and the children must resort to subterfuge to hide their poverty in a world that judges success by material things. Seen in this light, the happy mother-of-six is a

pretty selfish female. It is easy for her to say, "One more makes no difference," when it is the older children who have to take care of the younger ones. Grandma was not the paragon we have been led to believe.

There is another assumption in Mrs. Bradley's letter, one that is very common. This is that high-level incomes somehow automatically insure high-level intelligence. Ergo, it is desirable for high-income families to have lots of children, but the moronic (presumably) low-income families should practice birth-control. Income is no criterion of intelligence yet it is surprising how many people act as if it were.

I am a little bewildered as to just how Mrs. Bradley would expect to "breed out" feeble-mindedness and disease. The only hereditary disease I know of is hemophilia. Feeble-minded children are born to parents in all strata of society. Most of them are born to normal parents. No one knows why, or how. Cancer and tuberculosis are not hereditary. They also occur in all income-groups. Heart disease is not hereditary. Neither are muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy and poliomyelitis. A tendency to diabetes may be inherited but this disease, among others, can be controlled. Mental disorders cannot be inherited. How, then, would you breed out these diseases from the race? Most of the other "ills that flesh is heir to" such as bad teeth, poor eyesight, typhoid, etc., are matters of nutritional deficiency or bad hygiene. A little education plus more money in the pocket-book would eventually take care of them. Of course you might try it from the other angle—mating only the best physical and mental specimens, but you've read enough science-fiction to know where that will take you.

When children are a social asset instead of a liability, then maybe your high-income women will have more of them. The way I feel, the world is probably better off without the offspring of such frivolous, non-female women.—55 Taylor Ave., East Keansburg, N. J.

The temptation to get into a good fight is almost irresistible, but every once in a while we are reminded that we are supposed to serve mostly as referee, and discretion whispers that perhaps we had better keep our own moth-eaten opinions out of this. We will admit, however, to being delighted at seeing so many vigorously expressed opinions which are clear evidence that women are thinking original thoughts about matters which they accepted for so long as out of bounds. We're for that. Despite certain misleading evidence to the contrary, we have always believed women can think.

THE INDISPENSABLE STORIES

by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: All the gals who've been griping lately about no men on the covers ought to be real happy now after seeing the March ish. Our Hero—2 dark and brooding eyes surrounded by a tin suit. A Hand—half-clutching nothing. And, prominently displayed: The Gun (the more advanced design of course.) Would someone please tell me just what story this illustrates? (You, Sam, huh?) Personally, I wouldn't care if you just painted the whole outside a morbid red, I'd still read the contents, BUT, since we obviously must have a cover, please try to get one that illustrates some story inside, huh?

One of the most delightful fantasies you've ever printed is "The Gingerbread House." Had to think about it overnight before I came to a decision—it was good! Who is Joe Slotkin?

Really, Sam, you did pretty good this time—no bad tales at all—and most downright good! Looks like Chad Oliver has arrived. His novelet was ok.

Sam Merwin went overboard to get away from the tired plots and sagging characterization fen have been complaining about! In a big way he combines time travel, space opera, the other-world civilization, and high adventure in general, for a very readable novel, CENTAURUS. The hero is *not* a fair-haired boy without faults or invincible defenses. The heroine is *not* a fair young thing not yet exposed to the evil world. Sure glad you took over, Sam! (What do I mean?? Ha! *You* guess.) Let Merwin stick to his writing—you're still the best editor!

Dear Sam—you don't really mean that we should discuss everything in TEV except the (indispensable or otherwise) stories? Even if you can't help raving about them? Even if some make you space-sick? What if some make you tearing mad? Are you then hoping we'll go off on a rabid tangent and bring in new material for you to referee for a few ish? Great Ghu!

The pacifists have raked over the war horrors, the prudes profess to be shocked about all the bare skin hanging out on the covers, birth control, THE LOVERS, other natural functions. Unscientific and un-stfc quiz kids wondering what a rocket pushes against in space, everybody accusing you of getting ulcers (well, are you?), gripes and accusations in general and often in particular. So we've had all them and more, now what shall we talk about? Anybody got any suggestions? How about the best way to persuade the right editor to increase SS by at least 100 pages? (No? Sam, I didn't hear you say no?)

Still can't get *any* of your 4 mags in this burg, Mr. Mines. I've descended to the level of asking the boys who supply the mags to the stores about them. Their answers? "We

can't get 'em." How in %& (** does Better Publications, Inc., ever expect to make any money if they don't do something about situations like this? This *can't* be the only town in the U. S. where that's the case! Please—anybody want to trade mags with me by mail? I still have around 200 back ishs so there ought to be something you want! Send me your lists! I'm getting so many for the amount of space I'll also sell any if you're interested.

Thassall for tonight, Sam. Keep that ether vibrating!—385 North 8th East St., Provo, Utah.

Don't mind your discussing a story or stories if there is something you want to say. What we were objecting to is the kind of letter which is merely a rating of the issue, story by story and nothing else. As editor we personally find this interesting and enlightening, but too many readers have maintained that it makes a dull letter column, and we can see that from the reader's standpoint they are right. A solid column of that stuff wouldn't be very exciting. So, the invitation to spread out.

Do we have ulcers? Nope. Ulcers come from bad or inadequate eating habits and nobody ever accused us of eating inadequately. There is a family legend that at the ripe age of eighteen, we once polished off two ducks single-handed, but we regard this apocryphal tale as deliberately slanderous and regard it with contempt. It was one duck and one turkey.

TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE

by Claudius Raye

Dear Sam: What do you mean by lowering the boom on Bixby? Who told you that you could do that? Here I turn my back for a minute or so and you go and mess things up. I thought when I left TWS and SS in your hands that you would still follow the same old policy and keep putting in good stories.

Well, the army wanted my services for a while and I missed a couple of issues of SS. Today I plunked down a large percentage of my army pay for a copy. Naturally I turned the muzzy pages over to the Fan Publication Section—that's always the best part of SS. Bixby's column was a little brief and to the point and down at the end of it I discovered why. That was the last fan review!

Hell, Sam! You can't stop that column now. I had a fanzine to be reviewed in it this coming issue.

Now—I'll never know what Bixby's cunning and cutting remarks were to be.

Fate—have you left the roost?

It's fanzines that keep the older fans going, Sam. Fanzines are the foundation of fandom. It's those beaten mimeoed copies of wasted paper that liven up a fan's afternoon.

And yet, you see fit to drop the column. Ach!

Go soak your head Sam. In ACID!

P. S. (Not boric acid—hydrofluoric!)
604 E. Belton, Brady, Texas.

VERY funny. (Aside to the youngsters: hydrofluoric acid is the only acid which will dissolve glass.) If we have a glass head, YOU can't see through it.

Bixby is free-lancing, boomless. At the moment there are no plans about the fan column, over which Bixby died a thousand deaths every month anyway. What, you thought he enjoyed it? Back to Fort Bliss, boy.

VOICE OF THE TURTLE

by Vernon L. McCain

Dear Mr. Mines: Only four letters criticizing THE LOVERS? Oh, no, no, no! Something's got to be done about this.

My letter hacking days are far behind me and it has been over two years since I've written a letter of any sort to Standard. And of course, since then, there's been a change in the management. Now it takes really something to blast me loose from my other activities to write a letter to an editor, but my dear Mr. Mines, you have just blasted!

I have been getting more and more restive as the issues rolled by and you consumed uncountable rolls of newsprint reprinting the praises of this story, ranging from incoherent goos of delight from the infantile set all the way to the more restrained plaudits you seem to have dragged from the professional writers via the complimentary copy route.

So this is to let you know that one of your hitherto silent readers refuses to join the procession.

Odd as it may seem (you seem to have decided in advance why people should dislike the story) I wasn't shocked by the sexual element nor even, like Verna Jeans, by scientific inaccuracies. My beef is very simple. The story was atrociously written. Well, perhaps atrocious is a bit too strong a word. If it weren't for all the ballyhoo surrounding this story I'd merely have written it off as an uncommonly poor effort to come from Standard, about on the level with Jack Vance's Magnus Ridolph series.

However, the fact remains that I found the story unreadable. The writing was so extremely uninteresting that I found it im-

possible to read all the way through (this has only happened with two other of your 1952 novels—BIG PLANET and HELLFLOWER). Since you had made such a fuss about it in advance I did skim through in order to get the plot and find out what it was all about.

I figured you'd let yourself get carried away with enthusiasm by the unconventional plot and the daring of printing it in a pulp periodical. This happens to all editors sooner or later and I assumed all would be forgotten and forgiven in a few months. I certainly didn't foresee this mass hysteria.

As I said above, I'm not anti-sex. On the contrary I admire you for daring to print a story with this plot. It's just a pity you couldn't have gotten someone to write it. And when you do run well-written stories of this nature I'll applaud. (Your NO LAND OF NOD, printed a few months later was even more of a taboo-breaker, *but* it was one of the most beautifully written stories of the year and I still get dreamy-eyed when I think of it. Why does everybody ignore this story so superior to THE LOVERS? Because it was a short?)

I commented in a fanzine at the time THE LOVERS first appeared that it was a good plot but a pretty poor story and that you deserved great praise for printing it. You may find this surprising but no one bothered to disagree with me. Those who did comment seemed wholly in accord with my view of it. Of course, I'll admit this saw rather limited circulation and among the sort of fan who seldom writes to prozines any more, like me.

I'll also admit that my objections to this story are, of course, personal viewpoints and I could be wrong. It could be that I simply haven't the mentality to appreciate this type of fine literary writing and my own favorites are the sheerest hacks. Could be. As I said, it's all personal opinion. But, so you can judge, I might mention who those favorites are. For some years now the unchallenged leader in my list of favorites has been Theodore Sturgeon.

Yes, that's right, that poor hack who can't write anything but space opera, who has so little facility with words that he has to have a fistfight or shooting on every page to keep his stories moving, and whose stories sell so poorly that he'd doubtless starve if Henry Luce hadn't taken pity on him and given him a job; also the guy you claim fulsomely praised THE LOVERS despite the seemingly unobserved fact that about a month later another magazine ran a story by Sturgeon using almost the same identical plot (I think it was called "The Sex Opposite") and handled far more skillfully.

Who else do I like? Next to Sturgeon my favorite is Bradbury . . . another hack who'll never be able to work his way out of the pulps.

But my personal opinion remains that *every*-one was so stunned and pleased by the revolutionary plot matter in THE LOVERS that they've been steadfastly ignoring the writing involved and persuading themselves (via a sort of mass self-hypnosis) that it's a classic or something.

My opinion that Farmer was the most untalented discovery of the year received ample confirmation from that horrible piece of tripe about Columbus. This is easily the worst thing any of your magazines have printed this year with the possible exception of the reprint, A YANK AT VALHALLA. This is the sort of depth to which Standard formerly stooped when one of its editors had a particularly foul smelling piece of merchandise to unload. Remember Ford Smith?

However, while I'm writing you I might make a confession. I'm a mixture of emotions when it comes to you as an editor. I find your editorials extremely poor (you sound like you are trying to write just like Sam Merwin—only he invented that style and knew how to use it), the letter column is too coyly handled, lacks the gusto of SM #1, and the book reviews are dull. The only things I like about your editing are the stories you pick. And much as I hate to admit it (Merwin was, and is, one of my favorite editors) you are proceeding to run rings around him where that is concerned. Merwin worked prodigious feats during his tenure. But not only have you not backslid (except in the features) but you've erected *quite* a superstructure atop his achievements.

In fact, I was recently prepared to start a mild sensation by publicly coming out and plumping for that unspeakable thing, a *pulp* as the best current magazine on the stands. My choice was THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Despite its lack of novels and monthly publication (or perhaps because of it) this mag has not only maintained its lead over STARTLING, but in the last year has increased it greatly.

Many sf fans no longer read the pulps (you're now in the minority, you know) and those who do are rather shamefaced about it. It's taken for granted the pocket-sized mags must lead. They've never failed to in the past. But during 1952 THRILLING WONDER STORIES was consistently printing more good, readable, *stories* than any other sf magazine (and I'm specifically *including* Galaxy, asf, and mof in that statement) even though the writing was as a general rule cruder and less polished than in your tonier competitors. In the recent admirable attempts to raise the literary standards of sf, too many editors are concentrating too hard on trying to print Truman Capote (one doing so literally) and forgetting the basic important virtues of plotting and story values.

And you are the (both) lucky and smart inheritor of this situation who has moved in

and grabbed the outstanding *stories* in this unbelievably competitive market. In one case you even printed a story by one of the top editors which was superior to any of the stories of his own which he himself printed this year.

As I said I *was* going to write such an article, calling TWS the top current mag together with a list of recent stories to prove my point. I *was*, but that was before a new mag called Fantasy. Sorry, Sam, you're hopelessly outclassed . . . in *my* favor, anyway.

But keep up the good work, anyway. More taboo busters like NO LAND OF NOD please; less like THE LOVERS.—R.F.D. No. 3, *Nampa, Ida.*

Some perceptive reader has elsewhere remarked that we are immune to insults and praise—we must be or we could hardly have read this letter with so much enjoyment that we could hardly wait to get it into print. Of course nothing pleases us more than the discovery that Mr. McCain, who thought so little of THE LOVERS, considers Ted Sturgeon a particularly fine writer, and it is Ted Sturgeon who has gone out of his way both by letter and in person to label THE LOVERS as outstanding and who is so interested in Farmer as a writer that he asked for advance proofs on MOTHER (TWS April 1953) so that he could read it before the magazine came out. One of our memories of the Chicon is of Ted and Judy Merrill both demanding to be introduced to Farmer, backing him into a corner up in the penthouse where the Gnomes, Elves and Little Men were wrecking the Morrison Hotel, and holding forth, oblivious of everything around them.

And re that crack about "restrained plaudits from professional writers via the complimentary copy route," you may as well know the full story about that.

We had gone to a publisher's luncheon at the Advertising Club in New York. The speakers were Alfred Bestor and Ted Sturgeon—Hans Santesson presiding. Bestor gave a very funny history of science fiction, a la Little Abner. Ted got up to speak, saw us sitting there, remarked that he had just read a story in STARTLING which had roused him to a degree of enthusiasm he hadn't expected to feel and apparently threw away his prepared speech

to talk about THE LOVERS for twenty minutes.

After the luncheon we met Bestor for the first time. He admitted to being unfamiliar with the new STARTLING, but remarked that after hearing this from Sturgeon he recognized that there must have been quite a change and that he would very much like to see a copy containing THE LOVERS. We naturally promised to send him one. We didn't honestly expect a letter from him. But you've seen what he wrote.

As for NO LAND OF NOD, I wouldn't say it has been *ignored*. It's drawn raves too—not as many as THE LOVERS because novels always seem to get more attention than the shorts, one of the things we have before now complained about, but the raves have been just as heartfelt.

We are vastly entertained by your conclusion that we are trying to write like Sam Merwin. Of course this is only a personal opinion, but for what it is worth, Merwin and we both seem to believe that there is practically no single point of similarity in our writing. We are good friends and shared an office for eight years, but neither was ever tempted to imitate the other. However, nobody is going to deprive you of your opinion.

Obviously, we wouldn't have run your letter in its entirety if we didn't think it was wonderful, even though we disagree with practically everything you say. Maybe that's some kind of a record. (Your letter gives fine ammunition for inter-office argument between SM and the m.e., who is frequently outdistanced by SM's eloquence. Think he'll ever forgive you?—FE, m.e.)

Anyway, this seems a good place to print a letter which falls somewhere between you and us. . .

GLANDULAR CASES

by Juanita Wellons

Dear Sam: Now look here . . . enough is enough—there was absolutely no call for that kind of reply to Marian Cox in the March *Startling*; between you and Marion Bradley all us poor little Fanettes will have inferiority complexes, ingrown ulcers, and complications of neofanitis—if we don't speak up and protest at being tromped on. Why, pray tell, is it perfectly normal and average for a male to

have a night out with the boys (with possibly a little feminine entertainment of a sort that his wife or female interest doesn't provide to his satisfaction) . . . WHEN, if some *gals* happen to feel like a get-together once in a while, regardless of having a whole-hearted interest in males the Rest of the time, they, the gals, become . . . maladjusted hens . . . Hmmm? Equality demand?

No, I think there are certain obvious and often rehased reasons why that is going to be impossible in view of the totally different roles of the sexes . . . but there is such a thing as fairness, you know. Just what is maladjusted? The perfectly adjusted person would be a horrible bore, full of status quo and complacent satisfaction. I would think the *complete* male or female who had absolutely no interest in anything BUT the opposite sex would be rather maladjusted in a society like ours that requires getting along with all kinds and sexes of people . . . there ought to be a balance somewhere along the line. Sam, are girls who get together in a powder room to discuss new ways of trapping males maladjusted . . . ? . . . what do you want them to trap? Are girls' dorm discussions on males, homemaking (which you males keep insisting fems should stay in and make pleasant for the breadwinner and yet walk out in boredom or disgust the minute same fem begins talking about said home or its running. . .) and other related topics that we practically HAVE to take or be considered abnormal, (thanks to glandular causes and the environmental habits that are pounded into human females from the time we're able to hold a doll) . . . abnormal? maladjusted? improper and hennish? . . .

After all, there has to be a breather in this mad chase between the sexes *some time* . . . both sides like to pause and discuss strategy and other topics of interest to their side . . . (you would hardly take up these subjects with the "enemy" . . .). I trust I have thoroughly confused and exhausted the issue? Good. If in the process I have also succeeded in conveying a sense of frustrated anger . . . also . . . GOOD. Sam, you are my favorite editor, but sometimes you should stick your head in the reaction mass.

Now . . . THE LOVERS. Your reply to Miss Jeans was also a little harsh and uncalled for. Perhaps she was a little strong and a little wrong—not being a biology expert, I wouldn't know about *that*. But . . . you say Jeanette wouldn't have enjoyed her love-making with the light off . . . why? I got the impression the light was connected with conception . . . with the effecting (*affecting*?) of Jeanette's chromosomes . . . where did the enjoyment angle creep in? If you'd said (or Farmer had said . . . as I think he implied) that it was an involuntary action, a reflex of sorts, I woulda kept my big mouth shut . . . however. . . THE LOVERS, I suppose was very good

and all that . . . was I supposed to be shocked or something? I don't consider myself a sophisticate, here in good old isolationist-and-everything-else-conservative Indian' . . . but I wasn't shocked, surprised or unduly impressed. The biological theme was interesting . . . just that . . . the writing was okay . . . if you go in for writing style analysis . . . as for the sociological theme . . . well, Sam, as far as a theme setting up a really *interesting* problem (miscellaneous has ceased to be interesting to me . . . and let us hope it soon ceases to be a problem . . . live and let live, etc. . .) NO LAND OF NOD was your most impressive contribution; there you got down to a point that the average citizen could comprehend, really get into the situation and appreciate the struggle . . .

For my money, the best thing about THE LOVERS was the illustrating. . . . so I'm crazy . . . so I have a dirty little mind horribly blasé about affairs of sex which are supposed to shock the placid stfan. . . . Stfen should have, by the very nature of the literature they read, such completely open minds that they may be *Startled*, but Never *Shocked*. Thank heavens that's over . . . now I can relax, until you say something else either too wonderful or terrible to take sitting down.—*224 South College, Muncie, Indiana.*

Haven't you gone and given the show away? I mean, admitted that the whole purpose of the girls' club is to discuss strategy and new methods of trapping the elusive male? Better watch out for sneak night raids, is all. Yes, you've succeeded in confusing everybody. Us, anyway.

In re: Miss Jeans, didn't think I was being harsh. Just trying to be explicit. Yes, the light was concerned with Jeanette's conception, but the whole thing was so inter-related with the reflexes of the climax that it would obviously have been incomplete and without satisfaction for her in the dark. She needed both light and contraception. You know, we're beginning to get a little tired of this subject ourselves. That noise you hear is McCain applauding like mad in the wings.

A LITTLE MEN

by Nancy Moore

Dear Ed: Methinks it is time to poke out my swan-like neck and write to SS. Judging from the current run of letters, the old and perpetual "fems on the covers yes-or-no" controversy is still raging.

I never liked Bergey's females because—well, they didn't look like human females. Most of

them either looked as if they needed plastic surgery or a new brassiere. They were caricatures of a normal femalebody (human, that is).

But I like EMSH's girls and I'm all for having them on the covers. Looking at it frankly, the female form is more artistically appealing than the male, and how many males have bodies like Adonis anyway? How do you look in bathing trunks, Ed? See what I mean?

Now to Marion and Marian—Boy, am I glad by name is Nancy.

TROUBLED STAR was magnificent! Used to was I'd pass up a Geo. O'Smith tale, but Geo. you have redeemed yourself in my eyes! I can imagine a bunch of aliens contacting Captain Video to prepare the human race for something!

As to this birth-control malarky, why in hades discuss it at all in SS? I'm sure that most of us know the how and why anyway, and have probably already decided whether we will have ten, two or no children and have our own reasons for it. If sister Marion has twelve—well and good, maybe they'll all grow up and read STARTLING. But if I have only one—well, that's one reader for SS anyway. Hmmm . . . should never have gone into this, I can see whose side you're going to be on!

Ahgreeswitchoo, Sam, about the all femfan-club. Why segregate the sexes? Anyway, I'm quite broadminded and think that men should have a little voice in things once in a while. They have their uses.

Looking back over this letter I come to the starting conclusion that I have said mostly absolutely nothing. Maybe it'll rate honorable mention, anyhow. May I put in a plug and remind all you little midwesterners that the annual affair will be at Beatley's again this year and don't forget to bring your own hot water, there wasn't any last year.

You really ought to print this letter Ed, after all—its exceptional. No comments on THE LOVERS.—8383 Roland St., Cincinnati 16, Ohio.

You think the female form is more artistically appealing than the male? Sheer conditioning. In fact, the average female form is dum—hold it, we went through that routine once before. And the shots are still echoing. We even got a Marilyn Monroe calendar for Christmas from a gal. If that isn't unselfishness. . . .

A POSSUM FRIEND

by Tom Pace

Dear Ed: Like that February cover! Symbolic? Maybe the two great drives . . . Or is the ship to represent Adventure, the seeking

outward and all that, and the woman to represent Sanctuary (let us say), the complement of adventure?

Or is it just a picture of three guys lost on a desert, seeing mirages?

Maybe those two great drives I'm thinking about are only two faces of one drive. To get Freudian, after all, just what sort of symbol is a spaceship? Enough of this.

About the only thing I can say about TROUBLED STAR is that it is good space opera, and good entertainment. About all space opera ever needed was characters remotely like real people. Now we're getting them, and I can take the galaxy-hopping in stride.

I wonder what the people of the future will think of these stories, published back while Man was still crawling around on or near the surface of our one planet, which depicted heroes nonchalantly shuffling stars around to open channels through the galaxy. *Channels!* To one who has always felt that the primary value of spaceflight will be elbowroom — and thinking-room — this is a trifle aback-taking. Or something.

THE MONKEY'S FINGERS was entertaining, but it suffered from a serious basic flaw. I refuse to believe that any writer ever won an argument with any editor . . .

That's a slick, if unexplained, method of thought control used in POTEMKIN VIL-LAGE. And I like that ending. Expansion is a good antidote for stagnation, for doctrinaire thought. Back to the spreading-out value of spaceflight; few men, comparatively, will actually make space voyages for a great many years after spaceflight first becomes possible. But the effect of the expansion of Man's horizons will be valid, for those of us still on Earth, almost immediately. New horizons, new ideas from the new perspectives. Perhaps new philosophies as a result of the new ideas. Good, I think.

Which, of course, brings us to DEFINITION . . . the power of an idea. Look how much Ghandi did with the principle of passive resistance . . . which at this time, in this world, seems about the most ineffectual concept imaginable. But is it?

Now if someone would come up with a philosophy based on, say, Donne's "No man is an island . . ." theme . . . and manage to make it appeal to a majority of us rambunctious human critters . . . What sort of world could we have in a couple of generations? As long as I'm dreaming, I might as well have happy dreams!

The article on whether calculators *think* or not is highly interesting, but I haven't read it thoroughly enough to comment, yet. I doubt if anyone with any knowledge of computing machines will seriously hold that they are capable of consciousness, any more than a slide rule, which is an analogue computer. To build consciousness, and therefore (all right, so

I'm guilty of anthropomorphic thinking!) recognition-of-self (or ego) into a machine, we first have to know what consciousness *is*; to be able to design true thinking-circuits, we should have to know how the "mechanisms" of ego are set up in our own thinking-machines, the built-in ones. And by the time we know that, maybe we won't need acres of electronic equipment to do our calculating! Every man his own UNIVAC, eh? Or his own MANIAC, perhaps . . .

Personally, I'm more interested in making the things add, subtract, multiply, divide, and compare solutions on a strictly mathematical basis, than in making them think. And in making them do these things so that they can control automatic machinery to do automatic jobs . . . thereby perhaps leaving Man and Woman-kind free to devote more time to strictly human pursuits . . . such as philosophy, jazz music, reading and writing, and . . . well, one or two other things that go to make conscious life entertaining! Matter of taste, I guess . . . chess, Boolean algebra, redheads . . .

And yes, I realize some of the social problems that will be raised by our dawning Cybernetic Age. It could be the beginning of a golden age, as I prefer to hope. (Hope comes before Beliefs; sometimes *'way* before!) It could be the beginning of some rather unpleasant social trends, too. Either way, it's going to be quite a social revolution.

The letters. Um. I agree with Thelma White in my reaction to ASYLUM EARTH. I cursed a trifle and went back to rereading THE LOVERS.

You know, Deppe's idea, for Bob Cummings to play in one of de Camp's yarns, might well be the best stf-movie idea since DM . . . Sam, were you kidding about Hope and Crosby and a Road To The Moon? Oh, no! Lamour in a cellophane space-suit! I've seen a rumor about a planned Metro stf movie, with, I think Barry Sullivan and Elaine Stewart. Anyone know anything about it? Stewart I'll approve of in *any* sort of spacesuit.

The covers . . . the covers. People *keep* witching about unclad gals on the covers. I suppose my reaction can be taken for granted . . . well, why not have nudes on the covers? I can think of nothing against them, as long as they are well drawn, and they have the positive virtue of being good to look at. The human female form, for obvious reasons, is about the most pleasing design possible. Talk with any architect about the esthetic virtues of form related to function . . . all right, Sam!

Agree with Brunner on THE LOVERS (ah, safe in the arms of the majority, and all that) . . . also on Bradbury. He writes beautiful mood. But so does Ted Sturgeon. And Bradbury's stuff too often misses the narrow edge between hamminess and conscious cuteness. Neither of which is appealing. When

he's good, he's wonderful. The mood in AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT, for instance. Any time the physiology of a story becomes more gland than bone and muscle, the story winds up mighty limited in appeal. Bradbury's good. But Farmer is going to be, is now, *very* good indeed.

Charles F. Wells . . . hmmm. Wells, are you a Georgia Tech student? No offense, no offense, I just *asked*. !

Miss Teddy Marsh . . . don't worry. Without a fairish amount of "boy meets girl" going on (and how come people never put it "girl meets boy"? Isn't this the age of equal opportunity and rights and so forth?), I doubt if any of us will get to the stars . . . and Sam Mines, being the very model of a modern emancipated-type stf editor, will likely not let us down. Hoo Boy! as a possum friend of mine occasionally says.

A. McHugh . . . don't worry about people who scorn your favorite literature . . . just remember that the biggest difference between stf readers and non-readers is likely to be in the amount of intellectual curiosity the individual possesses . . . and let every slam boost your ego accordingly!

Sam, much as I've liked several of your editorials, I must say I think Crossen's is the best I've seen in a long time. In not much space, he says a great deal about writing in general . . . not *just* science fiction. And I liked his defense of subjectivity particularly. Angry men we want, eh? Where'd I throw that editorial page . . . it isn't difficult to work up constructive anger! And now is a good time for it.

To the barricades, Citizens! In defense of Individualism; the concept of compatibility between Individualism and the Social Good; Intellectual freedom; and the right to enjoy beer, stf, Hemingway, Pogo, Biederbeck, Django Reinhardt, Connell, zither music, and the opposite sex . . . Good Heavens! That's more a Manifesto nor a Slogan. I'd better quit this before it gets *too* involved. Good night all.—*Apt. 2, 109 N. Thayer St., Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

Short of writing an answer as long as your letter, we cannot comment on all the things we'd like to comment on—chess, Boolean algebra, redheads and pileated woodpeckers. But we weren't kidding about the Hope and Crosby road to the moon, unless someone was kidding us. However, we do get advance notice on movies and bids to previews (well, an editor's life has got to have *some* compensations!) so we'll be able to let you know fairly soon. Elaine Stewart was MISS SEE a couple of years back. We missed her, but we met her kid sister not long ago—Tom, you'd

be making tracks for New York if you knew. Blonde. Her father's chief of police of Montclair, N. J.

A FAN'S WORK

by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: With your requested bugle-notes not bothering me in the least, I salute thee. I do have a bugler for you, tho'—in the person of my little bother (not a typo—the "r" isn't there on purpose), who, when I am home, takes great pleasure in torturing me for hours by blasting madly away on his horn. There's only one way to shut him up, so I have to play the piano . . . boogie-woogie, yet! Anyhow, since Dr. Clark lacks a bugler, send him to my Baltimore address—I'm sure he would no longer be quite so desirous of one.

What? Now you *are* asking for it! Not only do you let yourself in for a new religious argument, but sex (shhhhhh) as well! And you're sure you don't have ulcers on ulcers as you say? That'll give 'em to you . . . we fans never desist! Big bems have little bems have little bems upon their backs to bite 'em, and little bems have lesser bems, and so ad infinitum . . . so with ulcers. Well, at least we know what's giving you that dark brown taste in your mouth, and I *don't* mean the Russian Army (Marching Morons?—Ouch!) either! But there is a cure for having ulcers on top of ulcers, and it's very alimentary (Sam, if you throw that! . . .), too. Simple—just don't get ulcers. See how easy it all is?

Ah, Sam—*when* are you gonna trim your edges? You and your mags are like me and my typer ribbons—I always intend to change them, but never quite get around to it. We just have to have uniformity . . . you can't go around the place with SS showing up your other mags, uow, can you? To paraphrase Churchill, untrimmed TWS, FSM, and SpS are things up with which we shall not put. (I'm better'n you—I don't end my sentences with prepositions . . . or try not to.) Anyhow, how about it? I shall never relent!

How did you do it? You pub four mags, and I have an exam period right in the middle of the month . . . and yet, you managed to schedule it so that your mags wouldn't come out to distract me which I was studying. Very considerate of you, Sam . . . I'll dedicate my first A to you. Instead of wishing I were reading SS instead of Flaubert's short stories (which he only wrote three of, thank God), I could devote *all* my time to Flaubert. Maybe it would have been better if you *had* come out with one during exams—better than wading through Weber's Theory of Sociology and Authority, or Flaubert's incomprehensible French.

What? Why'm I talking about French? A reason? Do I have to have one of those, too? Oh, I see . . .

Merwin is still good. I was wondering if he could keep it up after "The House of Many Worlds" and he did. Which didn't surprise me ay-tall. I see Merwin is still with us, though Bix isn't—and there, I *demand* an explanation! What gives? Suddenly, out of the blue, The Bix calmly says he's leaving, and that's all. Maybe I'm out of the news or something, but where's he going? Why?

Speaking of Bix going, I'd better, too. Maybe exams are over, but a fan's work never is. Oh, well . . . maybe someday when I'm rich.—*Harvard Univ., Lionel B-12, Cambridge 38, Mass.*

Did you say bugler or bungler? And will you leave our ulcers alone already? Trying to talk us into a case. We refuse to acquire ulcers just to satisfy your morbid curiosity. You've been reading them crazy science-fiction stories, that's what.

THE LARGE ECONOMY SIZE

by Peggy Lindemann

Dear Mr. Mines: If your reader who wants a copy of STARTLING with THE LOVERS received more than one, I'd be happy to bum one, C. O. D. of course—before you publish its sequel—missed that issue, sold out why don't I subscribe? You know.

No one has ever commented on an article in Mercury about all space mining's being apt to be done by machines, no manned space ships.

I think likely the Roman Catholic attitude that artificial means to promote birth control are sinful stems from the fact that the Church's attitude toward the sex act stemmed from St. Augustine, who believed it one of the punishments for the sin of Adam and Eve; who was a reformed roue; who seems to have hated his own mother. Something of a necessary evil, although the Catholic Church does not teach that sensual gratification in itself is evil, condemning drunk:kenness but not drinking, and so on. This comment stems in with MariOn Bradley's remarks about sexual experimentation before marriage.

People seem to be all for promiscuity; or all against it. This makes no sense to me. I doubt that, even in a society which did not frown on pre-marital experiences, that all such experience would be beneficial—I think it may be reaction to another extreme from Puritanism, as the early Christians connected dirt with saintliness, because the Romans were so fond of baths. I have never read any opinion, any definition, on non-authoritarian goodness or evil in sex. So I shall try to express one. Such a union could be said to be beneficial when its result is that both the people concerned like each other better, and themselves no less—whether they are married to each other, or not. It would be harmful, whether

or not within marriage, if it left either one liking himself less. People are, and also about sex, different from other animals. Men are always more willing—and less particular about with whom. How, then, could a girl keep from feeling that she had been simply used, if she saw afterward that the man did not wish any lasting friendship with her? I cannot see that, even though she did not feel socially degraded by an experience with a man who did not like her much, she still would not feel lessened. And I think it probable that many men would feel the same loss-of-self from an experience with a girl who simply used him. If the feeling were mutual, then the alliance should be on a more lasting basis.

There is another question to be raised about casual sexual affairs; whether people are very well matched in that way is less important than whether they have alike attitudes toward how to live, how to train children, where to live, even what to eat. Would not there be a tendency to neglect the consideration of day-to-day living in the choosing of a mate? Who would have the time and the ambition to hunt up someone who was all ways suited?

In your answer to MariOn's letter, you slipped into (what I regard as) an error in reasoning about people as is. Greater intelligence does not mean the exercise of reason; the intelligence is often used to justify the intelligent people's unreasonable attitudes, beliefs, actions. I shall stop to define reasonable as promoting personal and universal survival—for lack of a better one. Now the Catholic Church's endeavor is, not survival, but salvation of individual souls, so to those people who have not that underlying motive, some of the church's decisions may seem morally wrong—or non-temporal-survival.

Before one sets up Intelligence to admire, one should darn well find out what that Intelligence is aimed at. The most haywire part of the populace is aimed at death, the individual's own death, and death for those around him—but he is not necessarily unintelligent. Many rather intelligent people have fallen for Communism, which is not reasonable, and which, like other religions, twists facts to suit its theories. By calling communism a religion, I do not wish to imply that I think other religions have a degrading effect, as I think it does. But that it boxes the intelligence, and aims it differently from how the non-orthodox in reasoning might approve, without any compensating system of ethics.

Now I'd like to quote a remark on paternalism in government. People should have freedom TO; not freedom FROM. Freedom from is rather apt to wind up to be freedom from thinking, freedom to, even freedom to kill one-self experimenting seems to me much preferable. Of course, freedom To will never be attained so long as people believe that people are evil. That "freedom FROM" is the danger in socialism. Why hasn't anyone

conceived a future in which everyone, as soon as he feels old enough, works his share of time at producing food, shelter, clothing, transportation, other public services; and then is on his own in a semi-capitalistic society?

I read, some years ago, an article in the Saturday Evening Post which remarked on our oversupply of two-bedroom houses for our larger families. The writer said that the architects and contractors had overlooked the statistical fact that women who were college graduates had begun having larger families; that such women always fore-shadowed a trend, so they shoulda known better. Was this wrong, or an incorrect reading of the facts, or what?

I'll bite on your answer to MariOn now. Are these males whom we should so prefer, to any communication with our own sex, the science fiction fans, writers, and editors? These males we would not be without, even long enough to talk about them? Mr. Mines, with you there, how come the s-f conventions don't draw the larger half of the population?

I met a woman, once, from the low-income—medium low, her husband was a skilled laborer. She had a baby on her lap, twins about eighteen months old, and was expecting another. She also had seven other children, none over ten—nice, clean, well-behaved children, as almost all in large families seem to be. She was looking forward with great anticipation to the birth of the next one, because then the doctor had promised to prevent the next eleven. No doubt a selfish, or was she?

One happy trait of morons is that they have not enough perception to realize that they are less intelligent than other people. Who is to judge who is fit to have children? On what basis? Should the diseased be sterilized, only to discover next week that the means to overcome their disease has been discovered? Are the morons a danger to the population? But rarely, to individuals. The men who think are the dangerous ones. And I don't mean the men who discovered how to split the atom. The men who think, for example, "Capitalism is taking too long to die. What can we do next to throw the United States economy into a tailspin?"—*Box 206, Gearhart, Oregon.*

Correction, please. We did not commit the error of assuming that greater intelligence means the exercise of reason—although frequently it does. However, we didn't say that in our answer to MariOn. We were using the Socratic approach, asking questions designed to lead her into pitfalls, but not making any statement of our own. Real subtle, that's us.

As to what to admire, we happen to

admire intelligence. But in your criticism of intelligence you have forgotten that it is divided into two parts: the learning ability and sagacity, or the faculty of applying what is learned. People with high learning capacity appear to be intelligent, but are not. These are the kind who fall for Communism and other neurotic panaceas because they are low in sagacity. The intelligent person is one who *can* reason from learned facts and who *can* apply what he has learned to his life.

Otherwise, we're for you. We don't even mind you monopolizing the soapbox and not letting *us* talk.

WIDE OPEN

by Joe Keogh

Salutations, Sam: I smell another controversy in the air, and as always, I'm going to put my two bits worth in and shut up, (at least till next issue). The tempest in the proverbial tea-pot now is that ticklish subject, birth control.

As a Catholic, I naturally hold Helen Huber's point of view that it is wrong in any case, but will try to prove my point logically. The primary purpose of marriage was the propagation of children first, with the pleasures involved only as a come on to the responsibility of bringing up a family. (Right?) Therefore, people can't have their cake, and eat it too. If they "can't afford to have children", they either shouldn't have gotten married, or take advantage of "natural" means, such as rhythm, etc.

This also goes for any young ladies who have, at times, been "indiscreet". At this point, I wish to say that I disagree violently with MariOn Cox, however a good writer and critic she is. By the way, Sam, turning to you, I notice you said something re. this subject that left yourself *WIDE* open . . . that one shouldn't quibble about "artificial" and "natural" means, since the end result is the same. This is tantamount to decreeing that there's no difference between murder and self-defense, because "the end result is the same," or that we needn't distinguish between assault and battery and legalized boxing. But let's not get carried away on this thing. You *do* have the advantage of last say at the end of these letters. (But this doesn't stop me from liking stf, Pogo, or (with tongue-in-cheek) Kendell Foster Crossen). I notice to my *surprise* that you spelt the surname wrong. But I won't kick up a fuss like those two *Marcians* (aaah! now I've incurred the wrath of *both* of 'em). Just look at the signature—63 *Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont. Canada.*

Joe, we are completely baffled by such statements as "The primary purpose of marriage was—" and so on, regardless of what follows. The only possible answer to this is who says so? Who decided what the primary purpose of marriage is? Every religion and every philosophy says it is something else. So the only thing you can do is believe what you want to believe. And that you will do in the end anyway. As for your second point, that we committed an error of logic in the quibble about artificial and natural means, we are even now sitting here and staring at your analogy about murder, and we confess that we can't see the connection at all. To you "artificial" birth control is murder and "natural" birth control is self-defense? We are going to get our eyes examined.

Sorry I cut out your poem, Joe, but space was getting very short and I'd have had to answer it in kind and you know what that means. More letters left. Gregg Calkins says our letter columns have a certain tang. Tang you too, Gregg. He also nominates us best stf editor in the field. Spare the blushes. Hank Moskowitz says he'd rather be a critic than a writer. Fewer ulcers. Jerry Hopkins, 15 Friends Ave., Haddonfield, N. J., says phooey on SAIL ON SAIL ON but if he doesn't get a copy of THE LOVERS he will go nuts.

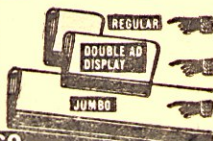
Mrs. Noreen Kane Falasca sends us her picture to prove there's nothing wrong with her (we corroborate) and yet she still likes the Fanettes and where do we get that "maladjusted" stuff? Where indeed? Her address is 11610 Detroit Ave., Cleveland 2, Ohio. Burton K. Beerman, Grove School, Madison, Conn., is relieved that Dr. Clark finally got his credit for the silicone world. Lyle Kessler plugs the Philcon, Box 2019, Phila. 3, Pa. Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis St., Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire, England reviews a year's novels—likes Crossen and Farmer, thinks we are tops for pure entertainment. (Not intellectual, huh?)

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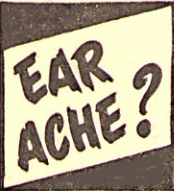
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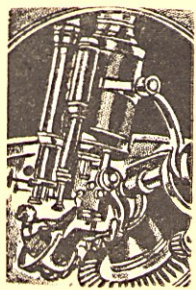
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can get to Cal., write the Coles at 614 Norvell Street, El Cerrito 8, Cal. Allen Glasser (FLYING SAUCERS, WSA) 71 Tehama St., Brooklyn, 18, N.Y. wants copies of his old fanzine THE TIME TRAVELER. J. Martin Graetz, 307 So. 52 St., Omaha, Nebraska, chuckles out of forecasting three-and-one-half of the stories in WSA, also thinks BIG PLANET was the best novel of '52. Framp. Donald O. Cantin 214 Bremer St., Manchester, N.H. admits he publishes a fanzine but is too smart to include its name; costs a dime.

Ken Beale, 115 E. Mosholu Parkway, Bronx 67, N.Y., thinks the letter column is too long (is this any way for a fan to talk?) Noah McLeod, Christine, North Dakota, applauds Marion Bradley's letter, says a girl to be complete needs both sex and religion and it is too bad that one so often excludes the other. Tom Condit, Redding, Calif., still disputes us about the official status of Historian Luke Nudnick, growls that the famous Orange Peel case was based on false evidence planted by Martians and that anyway, Nudnick was shortly after that eaten by a two-headed Grulzak. Izzat so? We happen to have evidence that the story of Nudnick's demise was a complete phony planted by the California Orange Growers' Trust, and that Nudnick is not only alive, but hard at work compiling a history of bargaining on the Martian Canals.

Vernon Hough, Rimbey, Alberta, wants to know why stf movies haven't been so

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good. Harry Calnek, 516 West Mary Street, Fort William, Ont., is baffled by the objections to a bit of very mild profanity in the stories. Can you imagine, he asks, a tough spaceman hitting his thumb with a hammer and saying "gracious me!" Richard Lane, 2101 Cheyenne Place, Cheyenne, Wyoming, says he was so excited about the trimmed edges that he bought three copies. That's a fan to have!

Jim Harmon, still at 427 E. 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill., is going into the Army. Well, don't act like it was Mars, Jim, they still got mail in the Army. Good luck. And good luck to the Washington D.C. Science Fiction Conclave, held March 22 at the Statler Hotel in Washington. Sid Sullivan, 761 N. Holmes, Memphis, Tenn., sends a check for a subscription so (he—she?) won't miss any of the feuds. Loves to see the sparks. Russel L. Brown, 811 West 2nd St., McCook, Nebraska, wants to join a fan club. Val Walker, 6438 E. 4th Pl. Tulsa, Okla., applauds Marion Bradley, was about to answer Verna Jeans himself, only we beat him to it. Paul Mittelbuscher, Sweet Springs, Missouri, says he can't get in on the sex argument, being a broken down senile wreck of 19, he's just lost interest. Robert Hart, Main Street, So. Chatham, Mass. likes us, even though the editorials st—uh, smell, but TEV is hilarious and the stories excellent—There are more, but we're out of space. Keep pitching!

—THE EDITOR

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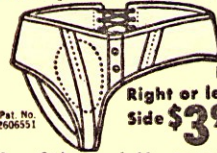


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Science-Fiction BOOKSHELF

FUTURE TENSE, an anthology edited by Kendall Foster Crossen, Greenberg Publisher, New York, 364 pp. \$3.50

LET it be said at the outset that there are four stories from the Terrible Twins in this anthology, which naturally would make it good even if there were nothing else between its covers. They include **THINGS OF DISTINCTION** which we, editorially speaking, and our readers seem to agree ranks close to the top of Crossen's own writing, plus two



incisive bits of satire: **THROWBACK** by Miriam Allen de Ford and **THE AMBASSADORS** by Anthony Boucher and the classic **DREAMS END** by Henry Kuttner. This is the story we'd hoped some one would anthologize. It is not only one of the best of the psychological school, but one of the most terrifying trips into the dark subconscious of the mind we have ever seen.

In addition to these you have stories by C. L. Moore, Peter Phillips and Ward Moore for reprints and then a whole section of new stories which have never before appeared anywhere. Authors include H. F. Heard, Bruce Elliott, Martin Gardner, Rose Bedrick Elliott, James Blish, John D. MacDonald and Christopher Monig. All in all, a nice volume.

AWAY AND BEYOND by A. E. van Vogt, Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 309 pp., \$3.50

HARDLY a science-fiction fan alive needs to be told about van Vogt, but just in case a few new ones have blundered onto this column all unsuspecting we might preface our remarks with the opinion that van Vogt specializes in razzle-dazzle. This is warning that you may, on first contact, quite expect to be overwhelmed by the man's monstrous cleverness. Eventually the astute reader will realize that this is largely intentional obfuscation has been perpetuated. Van Vogt oscillates, however, between the complicated story of ideas, in which logic is frequently carried on a mad dance, and the starkest, simplest tale. It is a tribute to the man's talent that each is extremely effective in its own way.

The stories in this book vary, as is natural. VAULT OF THE BEAST is a pulpy, but effective tale of the monsters from Mars out to do the humans a little dirt. THE GREAT ENGINE is a straightforward tale of men whose idealism outweighed all personal considerations. SECRET UNATTAINABLE is a thriller about a matter-transmitter in der dritte Reich, told in the form of letters; telegrams, memos and interviews. Very effective, too.

You may be slightly surprised to find that van Vogt wrote so many short stories. They're worth looking into.



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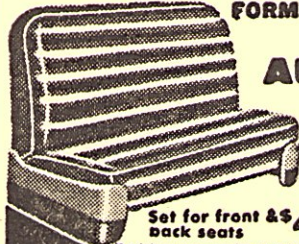
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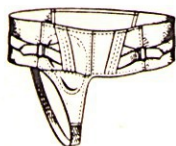
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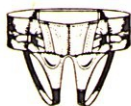
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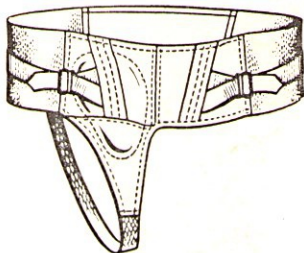
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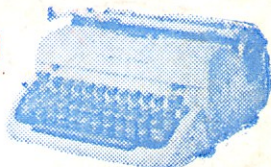


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