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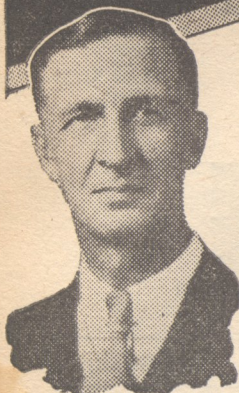
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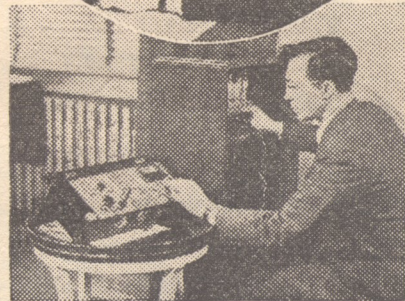
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# STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES

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# THE PIONEER

by Arthur J. Burks

(Author of "Survival," "Earth the Marauder," etc.)

Is there really a Music of the Spheres? Peter Carson never expected to answer that riddle when he landed on Saturn.

**T**HE FIRST ROCKET ship from earth ever to land on Saturn, as far as anyone knew, struck a hard stretch of level ground, and bounced. Peter Carson, the pilot and sole passenger, was jarred to his toes. And he saw, as the ship bounced, that it was going to strike into some weird formation that might destroy or swallow it. The first contact had been at the very edge of what appeared to be a wilderness of monstrous toadstools that made him think somehow of stream-lined banyan trees, except for the coloring, which was a brilliant orange. The ship struck again, the blow cushioned as the shining projectile which had brought Peter Carson, sole earthman to have confidence in the noisy contraption, from New York City into the unknown.

He had already donned the suit he had laboriously prepared for possible life on Saturn, though, while making preparations for the flight, and during the journey, he fully expected to die on landing. But by the mere fact of landing he would have justified his existence.

Ruefully he studied the result of the landing of his ship. That it would ever travel again, even provided he could make repairs, he knew to be out of the question. That his laboratory could be repaired, and his

oxygen-generating system, he felt reasonably sure. But meantime, he must investigate the place where he had landed.

If worst came to worst he might fix up the *Estrella* and occupy it until he died. That he must find some way to communicate with the earth he realized, if his research were ever to be of any value to future explorers. For the last three days his interplanetary radio had failed him.

He opened the door of the *Estrella*, noted that its weight had half buried it in the soft, spongy substance on which it had landed, and felt sure that it would bear his weight. He stepped out upon the material, which still resembled a monster toadstool, and his feet flew out from under him. He began to slide, with ever-increasing speed, down the slant of the toadstool's roof. The *Estrella*, by some freak of landing, or because it had all but buried itself, rested motionless on an even keel.

Faster and faster Peter Carson's six feet of supple manhood sped down the increasing slant of the toadstool. Below him, as he lifted his helmeted head, and tried to stay his slide by digging in his heels and his elbows—which gave him no purchase at all—he saw countless rounded ravines, which met in hollows that were as varied and plentiful as the convolu-



tions of the human brain. That the whole wilderness might be a tremendous brain might be possible, but . . .

He slid into the bottom of the first depression, and to his horror his feet were swallowed by it. Then his legs, his hips, his torso. Then the soft, sticky stuff was about his face, and he seemed to be falling into a bed of feathers. He felt his feet slide through. Then, he was falling indeed, into a strange sort of gloom tinged with the color of orange.

His feet struck without jarring him. He staggered a bit, trying to maintain his footing. Even as he did so, he tilted his head back and looked up, like Lucifer, to see how far he had fallen. In that instant such despair as he had never known engulfed him. He had been separated from the *Estrella* forever! That he could ever hope to shinny up the twenty feet or so of the tremendous boll of the toadstool, he did not for a moment believe. He had, then, thirty-six hours to live.

But, to give himself every chance, in the event that his keen brain evolved some plan by which he might regain contact with the *Estrella*, and be able to extend his life indefinitely, he made a cross in the ground on which he stood, with the side of his foot.

"Well," he told himself, his voice sounding strange, almost terrifying, within the helmet, "I'm here, wherever here is. Robinson Crusoe had an island to himself. I seem to have an entire world."

**B**UT IN THE NEXT instant he knew better, for it was then that denizens of the wilderness approached him. At first he could not believe the evidence of his own senses, felt that he must be suffering from some hideous nightmare. For the

first creature made him think of a string of cars. Except that they were not nearly as large. A worm, then, a tremendous worm, with a multitude of legs with feet like lily-pads, and the undulating method of locomotion of the centipede. A rippling motion that was somehow a joy to watch, like listening to beautiful music.

The first creature, which had ears about half the size, and approximately the shape, of the Indian elephant, slowed down as it approached him. He could see soft orange eyes below the ears, or what he took to be eyes, and they were slitted of pupil, like those of a cat. He studied those eyes with grim fascination. They all but hypnotized him. But in spite of senses keenly attuned to possible danger, he could sense no menace to himself in the undulating approach.

The creature stopped before him, the head was placed against his knees, and the ear-like appendages began to run over his suit, like the caresses of soft hands. And from the mouth, shaped like a frightened O, came a strange, startled musical sound. That was as closely as Peter himself could describe the sound. It permeated the atmosphere. It filled him with a sense of security that was utterly without reason. And he knew, as the sound continued, that it was a signal to more of the creatures, for they began to converge on him from all sides. Until fully a score of them were around him, as like as so many peas in a pod. But the late comers did not touch him, were content with the musical report of the first to arrive. Now and again, as that one paused in his description, the others answered in musical tones which he could not even begin to understand.

But that he had contacted, or been contacted by, sentient beings, he was



positive. Now, if he could but find some means of communicating with them, he might possibly make survival for himself a reasonable certainty.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "if I dare move? Will movement be a signal for attack?"

He couldn't stand there forever. He must do something. He reached out his gloved hands, caught the creature by the ears, which felt soft and smooth almost as the toadstools, and pushed the head gently down, until the eyes could see the mark he had made on the ground. Then he moved his right foot again through the postures with which he had executed the cross below his *Estrella*. Then he leaned back, as the creature allowed him to move its queer head with his hands, and pointed upward.

"My ship," he said, "is up there somewhere. If I could get it down, and make myself comfortable, we might arrive eventually at some basis of cooperation."

He had to laugh at himself, because the situation was so absurd. Yet it was easier to talk than merely to make gestures, which probably would not be understood, either. To his amazement the creatures seemed to understand. The "spokesman" reared half its length, like a cobra poisoning to strike, and the head atop the pile undulated. The musical sounds came from the "speaker," which Peter now noticed differed slightly from the others, in that it had a black mark atop its middle, and down the sides, which looked like a saddle-blanket, painted on. None of the other creatures had this deviation from the orange color. That the "spokesman" was the ruler of the strangers he now felt sure.

The music continued. And hope began to grow in the heart of Peter

Carson. For the undulating creatures, to which he gave the name of *Milpied*, were rising until their heads were against the lofty undersides of the toadstool tops, and questing with their feelers—what he had taken to be ears—for a way through. Eventually, aided by his subjects, the Master forced his way through, crawled half his length out of sight, boosted from below by the hand-legs of the other *Milpieds*. The Master began to crawl back. Peter Carson could see evidence of strain all through the body of the master, as he might have seen strain in the body of a snake trying to swallow something too large for it to handle easily.

The *Milpied* came back through, gripping the *Estrella* firmly in a score of hand-legs. Carefully the creature placed the *Estrella* on the ground. Then the *Milpieds* went silent, drawing back a little, to see what Peter Carson would do.

He had regained contact with his ship, and thus with all the material help he could wrest from it. One worry had been disposed of. That these creatures could bring him back to the *Estrella* at any time he felt sure. Now, then, he stepped to the one which had first appeared, placed his hands alongside the "face" below the "ears," and gently tugged until he had pointed the head in the direction whence the creature had come. Then, he pushed gently, and the *Milpied* began to move, gathering speed. Peter Carson knew instantly that he would never be able to keep pace with such speed. So he took another chance. He vaulted, finding it surprisingly easy to make the leap, atop the Master *Milpied*. The black "saddle-blanket" had inspired him to this.

For a moment the Master *Milpied*



stood stockstill, as though amazed. Then, from all the others, came a literal diapason of sound. For a moment it hammered against the artificial tympana which Carson had built in the helmet over his ears, like the fluttering of wings. And still there was no menace in the sound.

"Good heavens!" he thought. "The *Milpieds* have burst into Saturnian laughter!"

The Master *Milpied* quivered for a moment, perhaps with resentment. Then, gathering speed slowly, and undulating as it sped, until Peter Carson was almost dizzy with the motion, it hurtled back through the forest of toadstools into the further unknown. Carson looked back. Back of the leader a seemingly endless parade of *Milpieds* followed. Their trace was determined by the thick, smooth bolls of the toadstools. As the *Milpieds* reached a speed that Carson estimated to be at least fifty miles an hour, the experience became dreamlike. The movement of the speeding *Milpieds* somehow resembled their speech, he thought, gave the impression of dreamy music, a kind of traveling lullaby. It was an experience which riding on the forward platform of a subway train had given him, but in a vaster, more amazing degree, for a subway train traveled in a comparatively straight line, opened up no new vistas, while the *Milpieds* oozed to the right, then to the left, around the bolls of toadstools, and the way ahead was an orange phantasmagoria, mottled with spots of sunlight where it came through broken places in the convolutions which roofed the forest.

Behind, the effect was a fantastic adaptation of the view one might have by looking out a train window, back along the train as it rounded a sharp curve—amplified beyond all

reason, because the *Milpied* train curved back upon itself, and back again, each curve visible to the rider of the Master.

THE MASTER halted slowly, by sections, like an accordion collapsing, when the strange parade reached the clearing in which the labyrinth was located. Carson could find no other name by which to identify the city of the *Milpieds*. A vast series of uncovered culverts, with openings like mouths, going into darkness, joining somewhere beyond in a single vast dwelling.

Peter Carson hurriedly slid from the back of the Master and stood still. The *Milpieds* stood for a moment, humming in their strange method of communication. The Master "spoke" more loudly, with a note of command, and the *Milpieds* hurried into the mouths of those tunnels, vanishing from sight. Out, to Carson's ears, came an increasing hum of sound.

Then the tunnels began to spout *Milpieds*. By scores and hundreds they came. The families—the females had purple spots on their backs, and smaller ears than the males—of the *Milpieds* were coming out to have a look at the Earthman.

In the midst of seething excitement, while women and children examined him closely, the Master must have spoken to inferiors, for some of the women sped away through the forest—which here had disappeared to let in the daylight—to return in an incredibly short space of time, bearing the *Estrella* with them.

They placed it carefully in the middle of the clearing, so that, from its windows, Carson could see the openings into the labyrinth. He gathered, since no effort had been made to take him into one of those open-



ings, that he was not, at least, now, to have the full confidence of the *Milpieds*.

They simply remained motionless, but endlessly humming, to watch what he did with the *Estrella*. And a great nostalgia for regaining some contact with the earth, if only through contact with the *Estrella*, possessed Peter Carson. The insulated compartment in which he had lived, undamaged by the crash-landing, had windows from which he could observe the city of the *Milpieds*, and he could take off the cumbersome suit.

He moved to the door, went in.

He doffed his suit. Under it he wore a plain tweed, somewhat wrinkled. The cool sweet air inside the compartment was a comfort and a delight. While trying to think what to do next, Peter Carson nibbled on the fruits and nuts which had served him as food—he had an ample store of concentrated foods in the lazaret to last him for a year—on the trip.

Thus eating, he walked to the window and looked out, to find the eyes of *Milpedia* upon him. Instantly, as his face appeared at the window, a great humming rose from the creatures, which seemed to be urging the Master to some course of action. The Master hesitated, allowed himself to be persuaded.

Then Peter Carson noted something that would only have happened in nightmares. The head of the Master detached itself, and became a creature that was oddly a caricature of an earthman! Amazed, his mouth hanging open, Peter Carson stared at the rest of the Master *Milpied's* body—to discover that it had instantly grown another head!

But as the first, detached, head, approached the door, he realized the astounding truth. The *Milpied* as

such, was not a single entity, but as many entities as there were pairs of hand-legs! Here was organization beyond anything he had ever dreamed of.

And there came a rustling sound at the door, which indicated that the Master *Milpied* was seeking entrance. Carson donned his helmet, passed through the compartment door, closed it, opened the outer door. The Master *Milpied* came diffidently in, resembling nothing so much as a caricature come to life. The head, with the huge ears, tilted back, and the humming sound came from the rounded orifice that was the mouth.

Curious as to how the creature would endure the atmosphere in the compartment, which was approximately the same as that in New York City in early May, Carson led the creature back through the door, closed it. The *Milpied* began to stagger drunkenly, but did not go down, as Carson half expected.

Gradually the creature became accustomed to the difference in atmosphere, which proved to Carson that he could probably survive, at least for a little time, outside, without his helmet. The Master *Milpied* ambled to the window, looked out. A shouting chant rose from *Milpedia*. Then the Master, orange eyes shining with excitement, turned back to Carson.

Carson could read those eyes as though they had spoken—by the use of ordinary logic. They said,

"Show me what all this is about?"

"First," said Carson in his everyday voice, "let's introduce ourselves. My name is *Peter*. *Peter*, understand? *Peter!*"

As Peter spoke he tapped himself repeatedly on the chest. The Master *Milpied* merely stared questioningly at him. Then intelligence crept into his eyes, like the lowering of a cloud,



or the lifting of a curtain. And out of the orifice came a sound, a musical sound. Only by the widest stretch of the imagination could the sound be interpreted as "Peter." But though the Master *Milpied* repeated the sound, over and over again, he could approximate the sound no closer. A bar of weird music was Peter's name.

Now Peter merely looked at the Master *Milpied*, and understanding came to the Saturnian. The sound it uttered changed a little, and there was in it something so vaguely familiar that Peter Carson could have shouted with delight. It could easily have been part of the musical scale. And so, to Peter, the Master *Milpied* became Fa-So.

AND THROUGH all his being rushed a feeling of exaltation, a sudden revived belief in something he had always held close to his heart, because it was so strange that he had scarcely ever dared discuss it, even with his closest friends.

That belief had been, briefly, that great music, inspired music, came from somewhere *Outside*. That inspirations which produced great paintings came from outside, from somewhere beyond human reach, save through inspiration. Once he had heard a very old and learned scientist say of a great piece of writing:

"It proves what I have always believed. That all *great* writers, though their names be signed to their productions, are really *anonymous*!"

"You mean," Peter had said, awe in his voice, "that when someone refers to the *Livine Afflatus*, he means that, literally?"

"Yes, without knowing what he actually means. Classic composers, who stir our souls, Old Masters whose work stirs us to our depths, make

each of us see something in them individual, that is neither of the Master himself, nor of us as we know ourselves, but partakes of the Divine. Man, in his ceaseless investigation of the unknown, may one day find the answer. But Peter, he will never find it on this earth, because it comes from Outside. Some day, when man has pierced the veil of the Unknowable, ever so little, he may find a bit of the answer."

Had Peter Carson found some of the answer now?

There was no way of telling. But he had reached a simple basis of communication with the *Milpieds* far more swiftly than he had had any right to hope. *They* had not reached him, but he had reached them, which proved to him now, as he studied the strange caricature which was Fa-So, that their intelligence was far beyond that of himself.

Now, if he were right, he had something beyond conception, something new beyond words to express, to give to the world. But how could he reach the world? His radio had been silent for days. That, now he had landed, it would work again, he scarcely dared hope.

But he could try. According to his best calculations, he should have been able to contact his home station in New York City, at any time during the trip, and even after landing. But he had not been able to do so.

HE MOTIONED to Fa-So, and moved to the Planetary Communications panel. Fa-So moved beside him. Carson could sense the curiosity in him—like the impact of small blows of soft fists. That mental communication between himself and the *Milpieds* was possible, once he found the key, he felt reasonably



sure. But where was the key? How did he hope to find it?

He switched on the power. The system began to hum.

*A thin, wailing cry burst from the orifice which was the mouth of Fa-So!*

Carson whirled and looked at Fa-So. Without noting the details by which he knew, he understood that Fa-So was suffering agonies. The creature rolled and staggered about the compartment, as though his sufferings were unbearable. His face was a writhing maelstrom of pain. His eyes were stark with hurt. The pupils had dilated until they were large and round and dark—as deeply dark as bottomless pits.

The wailing cry was echoed from outside the *Estrella*. Carson rushed to the window to observe a terrible thing. The *Milpieds* were breaking into their component parts, as though torn asunder by their own painful struggles.

Each great "worm" was becoming a hundred caricatures. Each caricature was writhing and twisting on the ground.

Keeping his eyes glued to the window of the *Estrella*, until he was sure that the sundered *Milpieds* could stand no more, he watched their mad, fearful contortions, like thousands of men, women and children, dying in agony before the thrust of some invisible poison gas. If he allowed the Radio to continue, he realized, he would destroy them.

He rushed to the Spatial Radio, cut the switch. Then he studied Fa-So, who gradually recovered his composure. The little caricature's eyes gradually became slits again. Fa-So seemed to have shrunk to three quarters of his normal size.

He stared at Carson for a long moment. Then he looked about the com-

partment, his eyes finally focussing on a stellar map on one wall. He moved toward it, and his interest in the map filled Carson with such an urge to see what really might be encountered within those tunnels of the labyrinth that he could scarcely contain himself for excitement.

Fa-So stared at the map, then looked at Carson. Carson, guessing the question Fa-So would ask if direct communication were possible, put his forefinger on the disc which represented the earth.

"That's the Earth, Fa-So," he said. "The *Earth*, understand? The *Earth*!"

Fa-So made no attempt to repeat the name. But he was fearfully excited, that was obvious. That he was eager to rise to the level of the map was obvious. Carson, understanding, pulled a stool under the map, and Fa-So climbed upon it. He stared at the map for a long moment. Then, the tip of one of his ears moved over the map, as though seeking something of vast importance. At last the tip of one of the "ears"—now identified as one of two antennae instead—touched another disc on the map.

And that disc could not be mistaken! Fa-So had identified Saturn! Moreover, it was plain now that he understood that Peter Carson had come here from the Earth, by whatever name that planet might be known on whatever Saturn was known to her strange inhabitants! Carson understood, but how could he make Fa-So understand that he grasped the significance of what had just happened?

He nodded, grinned, did everything he could think of to indicate agreement. Fa-So jumped down from the stool, his lily-pad feet making a soft sound on the floor of the *Estrella*, and sped to the window. From his



orifice of a mouth, while his antennae quivered with excitement, came a strident, ever-changing humming. Carson stood beside Fa-So at the window, looking out.

Swiftly, as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened—though what had happened must have been cataclysmic to the Saturnians—the *Milpieds* beyond the window were becoming *Milpieds* again. But it seemed to Carson that they were reforming in new groups, in different variations. That a given hundred which had hitherto formed a given *Milpied*, was no longer the same hundred which formed a new given *Milpied*. On instructions from Fa-So, the *Milpieds* were deliberately forming into different combinations!

The *Milpieds*, whole again, but in new combinations, stood beyond the window, as though bracing themselves for some new ordeal.

Fa-So looked quietly at Carson, then ambled back to stand quietly below the Spatial Radio panel!

Carson, his hands shaking as though he had the ague, started the thing again. Fa-So suffered this time, but not nearly as much as before. His agony was endurable, obviously. Glancing at him, to make sure of this, Carson went back to the window.

Outside, the *Milpieds* had gone into a strange sort of dance, in which they swayed back and forth, and around, without moving their feet. Their heads were lifted, and their antennae were vibrating so swiftly that the edges of them were like the blur of an airplane propeller gathering speed.

Scarcely realizing what he did, Carson darted back to the Spatial Radio, and began to talk into the transmitter.

"This is Peter Carson, calling WNZ

from Saturn. This is Peter Carson, calling WNZ from Saturn. Landed safely an hour or two ago, in the midst of a vast wilderness of monstrous toadstools. A veritable forest of them, the denizens of which are jointed centipedes of great sizes. I use these words only because they are understandable, and they are not to be taken literally. The denizens are brilliantly intelligent entities, and have a city into which I have not yet been invited. But I judge from its gates that it resembles the Labyrinth of the Minotaur . . ."

**I**N NEW YORK CITY, at that moment, in the Town Hall, the greatest of young composers, Iduan Murol, was seated at the piano. Thousands had turned out to hear him improvise. As advertised, he was to play no set music, but was to play as he felt, after he had gone through certain request numbers of his own music. He began to play little runs on the piano, when he suddenly came to a full stop, and sat there, like a pianist turned to stone, in an attitude of listening. Then he began to play. And not even his instructor, in the wings, had ever heard such improvising as now poured from the speedily moving fingers of the young Iduan Murol.

And scarcely had he begun playing when, up in one of the boxes, Jacques Renoir, brilliant French caricaturist, snatched paper from the pocket of his evening jacket, and began to draw lines upon it with unbelievable speed and surety.

The music played on, as figures, bizarre, strange, like nothing seen on this earth, appeared on the paper under the hands of Jacques Renoir.

By a strangely *other* coincidence, the drawing was finished as Iduan Murol crashed to the close of his



improvisation. Iduan Murol came to the front of the great rostrum, his face working, his eyes bulging, his hands lifted for silence, though no sound whatever came from the vast audience.

"Friends," said Murol quietly, "I have no explanation for what has happened tonight, for the improvisation which I just played. But I will try to tell you what I saw as my improvisation grew and expanded—for whatever it may mean. I saw an Earthman on another planet. Its name was Saturn. He was surrounded by a vast group of gigantic creatures like gargantuan earthworms—earthworms which swayed in time to my music. Or perhaps I played in time to their swaying. Distinctly, during my playing, I heard the sound of a voice saying: 'This is Peter Carson, calling WNZ from Saturn!' It means nothing to me, is even a little mad. I give it to you for what it is worth. But mad or not, I have never been so inspired!"

There was more of it, but Jacques Renoir, his face a study in amazement, touched his sweetheart's arm, showed her the drawing he had made.

*Iduan Murol had just described that very drawing as accurately as though he had been looking at it as he spoke!*

Jacques Renoir jumped to his feet, spoke to the audience, explaining what he had done. There were many newspapermen in the audience, and the great hall was instantly in turmoil. A reporter who had won prizes for his acumen as a gatherer of news no one else ever got, jumped to the rostrum. He had just written something on a piece of paper, which he now read to the stunned audience.

"Repeat everything you have just radioed, Peter Carson. The earth is listening, is astounded by what has

just been heard from you—but not yet certain that it is not some sort of a hoax . . . ."

There was more of that, too, but the reporter turned to Iduan Murol.

"These words, any words, Murol," he shouted, "must make some sort of an impression on the brain of a man like yourself. Let this message seep into your consciousness. Force it to do so. Then, sit down and improvise, painting the picture etched on your brain!"

Iduan Murol read the paper, then dropped on the bench, began to play. Music poured from him, growing in speed.

Emptied of hope, Peter Carson sat before the panel of his Spatial Radio. Apparently he had sent a message into space, to have it lost among the stars, beyond all reception. But no! What was this, happening now?

Into the compartment, clear as a bell, came music, and an eerie voice,

*"Repeat everything you have just radioed, Peter Carson . . ." clear through to the end of the Earth reporter's inspired message. Amazed, delighted, Peter Carson jumped to obey. But when he came to the end of his original message, he added to it,*

*"If I have found a small part of the source of human inspiration, I shall not mind spending the rest of my life on Saturn, for I shall have touched the hems of the robes of the gods! Stand by regularly for more!"*

Every word, a few minutes later, was repeated to his audience by Iduan Murol—and pandemonium knew no simile. Nobody understood, yet, but everybody would when all the story was in.

Needless to say, the appearance of Iduan Murol, that night in Town Hall, was covered, by remote control, by radio station WNZ!



# MARTIAN FANTASY

by Henry Andrew Achermann

(Author of "Europa Enchantment," "Phantom From Neptune," etc.)



Claude Frederick was told to come back in a year and he would meet the dorf. But many things were to happen within that year.

**E**VERYBODY on Mars had seemed to know someone else, who knew a man, who knew a genuine *dorf*. There had been credible tales, and incredible ones. There had also been false

*dorfs*. . . fairly easy to detect because, sooner or later, they either boasted or demanded money. Claude Frederick visited so many caves and temples that he could not remember the names or whereabouts of half of



them, and he had almost given up the hunt when at last, as if by accident, he was sent for.

A Martian of the *klar* caste came to Claude as he sat on a red-streaked rock of Cinnabar, by a footpath along the bank of the Tharsis Canal, considering the problem of a lame Iguana, the Martians' beast of burden. The Martian spoke agreeably good English in a soft voice, and his manner was neither over-confident nor too respectful. . . in fact, a very gentlemanly manner, although fifty cents would have easily refinanced his wardrobe.

"He will see you, *matoul*."

"Who will?"

"He whom you seek, and whose *cai* I am."

Then Claude remembered that *cais* are seldom permitted to name their *dorfs*, supposing even that they know their real names, the reason being that a *dorf* does not advertise and does object to being mobbed and asked to show his familiarity with unknown forces. No genuine *dorf* cares whether or not other people believe in his existence or his powers. So it looked like the possible end of the trail.

"I have a lame lizard."

"Then the three of us will walk as slowly as is necessary. He shall be attended to," the *cai* answered.

So they followed the canal through a meadow where the blood-red cinnabar sparkled through the spring grass, brown against an azure sky. And they came, amid blossomy trees, to a farmstead that looked orderly and prosperous. There was a one-story dwelling of the type the Martians preferred, a barn, several teams of Iguanas plowing. Spring water splashed from a cleft in the rock, and birds sang blithely, which is rare on Mars.

"This is a good place," said Claude. "Does the *dorf* live here?"

"Sometimes he is here. If you will tie up your lizard in that barn, some one shall care for him."

So Claude unsaddled the Iguana and left him basking in the warm sun; then he washed himself at the spring and let the wind and sun serve for towel. After that he fastened and unfastened his tie two or three times and wished he had a comb.

"I am ready," he said, turning to the *cai*.

**T**HERE WAS a man who might not be a Martian, although he was dressed as one, who sat cross legged on a mat, at the foot of an umbrella tree on a slight rise that faced the farmhouse. He was whit- tling a big peg with a small knife, smiling to himself and humming an old Martian chant as he shaped the peg to his satisfaction. It was he whom they approached, and Claude wondered whether this might be another *cai*, it being his understanding that a *dorf* has as many of them as he feels able to instruct. Or it might be the farmer himself, although he looked too clean for that, and not worried enough. As they drew near the man spoke to the *cai*.

"Take this peg and fit it to that lizard's yoke; the one they are using galls the poor beast. Then attend to this *matoul's* animal. It is only a little matter, but it is painful, so be gentle with him."

The *cai* turned away without a word and Claude approached nearer to the man, surprised not only by his speaking English but by the ease with which he used it and by the resonance of his deep voice. The man wore a flowing dust-robe of white and on his head reposed a



skull cap of the same shade. His forehead, wide and broad, his narrow yellow eyes, with their purple pupils, proclaimed him to be a member of the highest caste. Claude bowed to him.

"Excuse me, I am looking for a *dorf*."

"You could have gone on looking until you were dead," the man answered, "if you had not passed a wayside test or two."

"Do you mean it was known I was looking?" Claude asked him.

"How not? If a bird flies through the air, the farthest stars must ultimately feel its movement. How should a *dorf* not know when a pilgrim sets forth on the Middle Way? Is not a man more than a bird? And is a *dorf* not nearer to him than the stars are? Many set forth. Few attain the object of their search, because few are fitted for it. Nevertheless, the search will do those failures no harm."

"I was told just now," said Claude, "that the *dorf* whom I seek will see me."

"He has seen you for a long time," said the other. "Perhaps now he will let you see him."

"Will you lead me to him?"

"That may not be necessary. He may wish to sit here; he enjoys this tree and often sits here teaching. I should offer you a seat on this mat, but I know your Earthly sinews yield uncomfortably to our Martian way of sitting. Will you try that chair instead?"

Claude had not noticed a chair until that moment; however, there was one, so he sat on it.

"What do you want with the *dorf*?" the man asked him. "If you care to tell me, I will listen."

"I would rather tell him," Claude answered.

"Doubtless."

"Well," said Claude, "to put it briefly, I need teaching and I wish to be a *cai*. I have heard. . . and I know there are *dorfs* who understand life, although, I have never met one."

"Why should this one teach you?"

"I can't think of any reason, except that I ask it. I have been told that really great *dorfs* never turn down applicants whose character bears investigation. I am hoping mine will bear it. There is nothing else in the world that I want to do."

"Why not?"

"Since the last spacial war," said Claude, "life, for me, has been a wilderness. I had a wife, my work. . . I am, or rather was, an inventor. . . and we were happy. When the Space Legion asked for volunteers, I signed up. I went through the struggle unscathed. . . did well, in fact; I was promoted and received some decorations. But I found my wife, had, owing to the malicious lies of a life-time enemy of mine, deserted me; had run away with my worst enemy. I believe I nearly lost my reason. I am sure I would have lost it but for the same half philosophy, half intuition, that I think preserved me through the fighting on Venus and at the Battle of Luna."

"That must be a very positive philosophy, I should say."

"No, I believe it's negative," said Claude. "It amounts to this: That all experience is hypnotic. . . an illusion. Even war is an illusion. I stuck to that thought, every hour, every minute, until it was all over. Proton-beams, ether bombs, heat-rays. . . it was all mass hypnotism. And when I returned and found my young wife had run away, I had nothing else than that half philos-



ophy to preserve me from losing my mind. If that, too, was not an illusion I should have to kill myself; the grief and loneliness were too much."

"What reality did you put in place of the illusion?"

"Nothing. I could think of nothing to put in place of it. I was forced to concede my own existence, because otherwise what is it that has experience and suffers? But at that point I was baffled. That is why I am here."

"You propose," said the Martian, "to take advantage of a *dorf's* wisdom without putting yourself to the necessity of working for it?"

"Not at all," Claude answered. "I am willing to work. All I ask is instruction. I have attended lectures, read books and studied every scrap of philosophy that I could find in my own country. I have been like Jason hunting for the Golden Fleece. But I don't know what the Golden Fleece is, so how can I find it unless someone tells me?"

"And you think *he* will tell you? What if he should tell you wrong?"

"I don't fear that."

"Why?"

"Because I have learned how to detect illusion, which is the result of hypnotism. No one can be made to believe a lie without first being hypnotized in one way or another; and I know how to protect myself against that."

"Do you?"

"Yes," said Claude.

"That is a lot to have learned in one lifetime," the Martian remarked. "Why should a *dorf* give his time to you, when there are so many who need to learn what you say you already know? You yourself should take *cais* and teach them."

"Don't you see that I am hungry to know something positive?" said Claude. "I am willing to leave behind me all the past . . . everything that once seemed important. I am willing to submit to any test whatever, and to undergo any amount of humiliation if that is needed. I am in deadly earnest. Life is nothing to me if I can't find someone who will show me what it all means."

The Martian shook his head.

"What does it matter that you know or don't know? Will your ignorance or knowledge change life's meaning or its purpose?"

"Kindly introduce me to the *dorf*," Claude answered. "I will explain my need to him and he will understand."

But again the Martian shook his head. He picked up the knife and began whittling another yoke pin. "If you are still anxious to meet the *dorf*, then return in one year. Meanwhile, use what you already know."

"But I have told you. I only know how to protect myself from hypnotism."

"Use that knowledge."

"Then you won't introduce me?"

"Not for one year."

Claude recognized finality and glanced at his watch from force of habit. It was exactly one o'clock. Sadly, because his heart was set on spiritual information and he had thrown his whole integrity into the search for it, Claude withdrew. He supposed this fellow was a sort of Cerberus appointed to protect his *dorf* from unnecessary interruption; possibly a near initiate . . . a *cai* far enough advanced to be entrusted with such duty of discrimination.

Now life held nothing. How should he employ himself for one year? Should he stay near this place? He was sure he had come within reach of a *dorf*, and at that a



great one; only a great one could have known by intuition that a stranger sought him. And he was all the more sure when he saw his Iguana being led to him, healed of the lameness. Claude was philosopher enough to understand that any one who actually knows what life is should be able to heal dumb animals without much effort; it is not knowing what life is that makes us helpless. One year? He would try to endure it. Self-examination and self-discipline might make him more acceptable. But it hurt to be turned down. . .

**C**LAUDE FREDERICK sat thinking; his taut, sphinx-like face gave no hint of the seething thoughts that agitated his mind. His body was invisible against the background of phantom gray, that dismal curtain of light waves that were thrown off by the shining stars. He sat, stiff and tense, in the little metal seat that was situated in the control blister of the experimental time-ship *Futurania*. But his thoughts were not concerned with the amazing journey on which he was already launched. Instead, his mind reviewed the events of his life for the year just past.

He had gone far in that year, to strange and mysterious places of the Earth, striving to forget his inner gloom. But it was not in some far-forgotten corner of the globe that he had come upon the ultimate adventure. No, not at all. It was in modern Manhattan that he had come upon Charles Blair. And a lurking devil had awakened in him.

Blair was an old school mate of his. But there was no friendship between the two. Claude remembered that ever since his early school days Charles Blair had always gotten the

credit for what he, Claude, had really accomplished. Because of his unassuming nature, Claude had let the other reap the harvest of his own labors, planning to do something even better next time and claim his just honors. Only once had he vehemently remonstrated. That was when Blair had taken steps to garner monetary gains from another of Claude's ingenuities. Claude had rightfully claimed inventorship and had been laughed out of court by the authorities who had been influenced by the imposter's bribes and his sly flattery.

And so, when Claude ran across Blair's path, accidentally in New York, he had been considerably surprised at the other's friendly advances. Blair told him about his latest creation, the time-ship. He artfully and very gradually outlined his proposition to Claude, who perfectly understood what he was being angled for. Blair wanted him to come along, on the *Futurania's* maiden voyage, and Claude knew there was something other than the desire to bury the hatchet in his mind . . . something sinister. But then, Claude had no objection. The slumbering devil within him was aroused and two could play at *that* game.

**R**ED LIGHTS flashed in winking succession on the instrument panel before Claude. They signified the necessity of changing the matrix-energy set-up, that which anchored the ship to Ultimate Inertia. This held the *Futurania* motionless in the Time-stream high above the Earth, while decades of Time and volumes of Space ran their course.

The ship would stop at certain periods of Time in order to observe conditions in the future. When finished at each stopping point, the



craft would return to the Ultimate Inertia and wait until a few more years went by when it would again enter the world of reality.

Claude arose and stretched his legs. He would have to tell Blair that it was time for him to make the necessary adjustment on the controls. He clambered down the ladder that led to the combined living and sleeping quarters. There his hated enemy was seated at the small metal dining table.

Charles Blair's cruel face looked up from the remains of the meal he had just finished eating. He rose and his attitude was strange. As Claude approached to tell him about the necessity of changing the controls, he calmly said, "Don't come a step closer, Frederick! I have you covered." The blue-steel gun that had suddenly appeared in his hand looked very menacing.

With an exclamation of surprise and dismay, Claude raised his hands; his enemy chortled at the sight.

"What's the idea, man?" asked Claude, stalling for time.

"You know that well enough," grated Blair. "You didn't think I invited you to travel to the future with me just for your company, did you? You know I have no reason to love you."

"Well, what are you going to do?" Claude knew that his stalling for time was working. Soon. . .

"Do?" The other's lips twisted in a nasty sneer. "I am going to kill you."

Blair's speech failed to cause Claude to cringe as he had expected; instead, there came a low laugh of derision and mockery from the thin lips of Claude Frederick. "A very good jest, indeed . . . *you kill me!*" And Claude gave vent to a spasm of

wild, unrestrained laughter. Blair could not stand it.

"What have you to laugh about? In a minute you will be dead."

"You are wrong, my scheming 'friend.' It is *you* who will be dead . . . stone dead . . . for that meal you just ate so ravenously I poisoned. It is a slow, paralyzing poison for which there is no antidote . . ."

Unbelieving, Blair started to ridicule Claude's statement, but a change came over him even as he opened his mouth. He swayed to and fro; suddenly, he went down like one pierced with an arrow. There he lay upon his back, his eyes staring up at the exultant Frederick.

"Now, who has the last laugh?" Claude gloated.

The fallen man cursed. "You haven't won yet! I will die but you . . . you are doomed to a slow, lingering death. You never thought about it, but now I'll remind you. You do not know how to run this ship without me. . ."

Claude interrupted him. "But I can learn!"

"You won't have time. The oxygen . . . it will not last another twenty-four hours."

Claude was startled by this. It was true. They were to have stopped soon at some time-period to refill their oxygen tanks, but now . . .

He perked up as a thought occurred to him. "Don't forget, I can go back to my own time. The Time-drift must flow in two directions."

"No, you can't even do that, though the Time-stream does flow in two directions. Time is not a *constant* flow and ebb that can be calculated but an irregular, erratic one that can't be measured. *There is no return to our time . . .* no possible way of retracing our course. And you," here he chuckled feebly, "are the



loser . . ." A horrible rattle emanated from his set lips. With a weak, convulsive movement of his hands he tried to rise, but failed. He rolled over and was still.

Claude knew that he was dead.

Even as the last breath waivered forth from Blair's throat, Claude grew sick. God! It couldn't be true, but all the time he realized numbly that it was. He could not deny his scientific reasoning. What Blair had said was cold fact . . . horrible to contemplate. He went up the ladder to the control blister and tried the instruments. The effort was useless. No matter what he did, the ship just wouldn't reverse. The Time-current was too strong. And he couldn't guide the ship to some future time period because, as Blair had told him, he didn't know the secret of release from Ultimate Inertia. Claude's face was ashen. The thoughts that fled screaming insanely through the corridors of his mind gave him no peace.

**T**HEN A QUEER thought came to him. His whole theory of illusion and mass hypnotism seemed to him to have destroyed itself. It was too late now ever to go back to far-away Mars and seek out that *cai* who was to have introduced him to the *dorf*. No, now he would die.

He stood, contemplating the face of the dead man. Then something happened that was very odd. The face of Charles Blair was changing, but it was still the face of someone

Claude knew. Perhaps he was losing his mind, cracking under the strain. The face grew more and more familiar. It was no longer the face of Charles Blair.

Suddenly, there began a singing in Claude's ears and his eyes swam. The dead man seemed far off. His eyes looked larger, the pupils expanded . . . his forehead broader . . . and he seemed taller, as if someone had stretched him.

"Now I know I'm crazy. I must be suffocating, though I thought Blair said I had twenty-four hours' supply yet." Claude had a queer feeling, as though the words he had just uttered were not his own.

"Now? What time is it?"

Claude glanced down at his wrist watch. He was seated on the chair under the tree before the Martian on the mat. The birds were singing. And the man's face was that of Charles Blair, only its harshness was gone and it looked more humorous.

"It is one minute past one o'clock," Claude answered, and then checked himself, bewildered, "Am I dead?"

"Does it seem so?" the other asked him.

"How did I get here? Are you not the *dorf*?"

"I am he whom you were seeking," said the other.

"And it's a year to the day, since . . ."

"A year! Nay, one minute. Did you not say that you can protect yourself against hypnotism?"

## New, Unusual Magazine—MOVIE LOVE STORIES

Romantic fiction and fact about Hollywood and the whole world of glamor. Illustrated with pictures from your favorite movies.

OUT APRIL 15



# FORGOTTEN TONGUE

by *Walter C. Davies*

(Author of "New Directions,"  
"Infinite Sequence," etc.)

It was a plot, a plot to set up a dictatorship by means of a book. A book which would make Mein Kampf a mere primer!

"**H**ANDS UP, SCUM,"  
grated a voice.  
"You're going for a  
jump."

Pepper raised his hands and coughed dryly. "Forget it," he said. "You can't get away with this." He felt a knee jolt the small of his back in answer.

"Walk," said the voice.

The street was narrow; no more than a hundred meters in width, and the buildings flanking it had no lights. This was the Industrial, one of the three great divisions of New York Sector. Plants were resting their machinery for two hours out of the twenty-four, Pepper realized. As he walked along, as slowly as he dared, the clapping of metal soles against the pavement sounding behind him, he cursed himself for an imbecile, coming alone and unarmed through this bleak part of town.

"How long," he asked tentatively, "have you been gunning for me?" He wanted to find out how many of them there were.

"Keep moving," said the voice. "You don't get news out of us, scum."

He kept moving, knowing with a sort of grim desperation that they were headed for the Industrial Airport, that he'd be crated like a gross



of drills and accidentally dropped from a mile or so in the air. Protests. Threatened recriminations. Then the customary jeering retort from the Optimus Press: "If a Lower wishes to disguise himself for purposes of his own and is damaged in the process we fail to see how this is any reflection on the present able administration. *Honi soit*—"

He assured himself that he wasn't a brave man nor was he a coward. Pepper assured himself that any man, Lower or Optimus, would be sweating big, grey drops at what he was going through. Not daring to give way to panic, knowing that it would mean an ugly and direct death, a hole blown through his back and metal fragments distributed through his insides, he walked on and tried to keep his knees from buckling.

"Look," he began again. "We can make a deal—"



"Shut up!" snarled someone. "And stay shut. I'd like to—"

"Let him talk, captain," said another voice. Pepper stiffened as he heard it, for the dialect was unmistakably the throaty whine affected by the Optimus as the "pure" speech.

"Never mind," Pepper said. The sound of that voice was his death-warrant, he knew. Loyalists had been known to take bribes and deliver, their masters never. "How do you like this part of town, Cedric?" demanded the Lower. "How does it strike you?"

"Why Cedric?" the voice of the Optimus asked one of the Loyalists, ignoring Pepper.

"Supposed to be funny, Mr. Fersen," said the Loyalist. Then Pepper heard a blow and cry. "I'm sorry, Mr.—sir—please—"

"Let that be a lesson," said Pepper. "Never tell the name. But don't worry, Mr. Fersen—I never heard of you."

"I'm just in," said the voice of the Optimus with a note of strain and disgust. "I'm just in from Scandinavia."

"In that case," said Pepper, "you'd do well to get back there. Because here comes a gang of Lovers that mean you ill."

Approaching them were people he knew, faces that leaped out of the gloom with startling clarity. There was Marty, who worked in a glass plant, Pedro who managed an auto-kafe; hard faces gleaming under the wide-spread street lights.

Like magic, bats and clubs appeared in their hands. "Hello!" yelled Marty. The distance was about twice the width of the street.

"Dash it!" whined the voice of the Optimus behind Pepper. "Dash the luck! You'll have to fire into the thick of them."

**P**EPPER COULD NEVER remember just how or what he did, but the next thing he recalled was that he was dashing in a mad spring for the knot of Lovers down the street, zig-zagging wildly as projectiles buzzed about his ears. Even then he did not forget the rules he had been taught in Training School; he ran with a calculated, staggering gait that would unsettle any marksman.

His friends met him half way; drawing great breaths he was taken into their midst, lost in the little crowd of a dozen or so.

"They won't attack," he gasped. "It's too near the shift. They'd be mobbed—torn to pieces."

"Easy," soothed Marty. "Take it easy. They're breaking—going back. Jupiter—if I only had a camera to get those faces! Who are they?"

Pepper grinned feebly. "I never got a look at one of them," he said. "There was an Optimus with them by the name of Fersen. Do you know him?"

"Yes," said Marty. "I know him. He's a scientist. He's so thoroughly damned brilliant that even the Lovers' technical journals reprint his articles. He's a psychologist—experimental."

"Let it go," said Pepper. He shook his head doggedly. "What happened? How come you came to meet me—armed?"

"Something new of mine," said Marty. "We were trying it out. You can call it a psychological eaves-dropper. We call it a modified Geiger-Muller counter reset for cerebrum-surface potential composition. It's thoroughly impractical, but we were waiting for you and I turned it on you for a demonstration. Before it blew out the thing showed that something had upset you terribly."

"Pedro thought it must have been



a babe walking down the street. That's the Latin mind. When you didn't come we put two and two together and found a slight case of Optimus."

"Yes," said Pepper absently. "It's usually that."

It usually was. The Fusionists were nominally in power throughout the whole hemisphere, but the hand of the Optimus tended to grow clumsier and clumsier, showing through the thin veil of the Continental Congress. The Fusionists had been elected generally on the most immense wave of enthusiasm ever to sweep a new party into office. Their appeal had been almost irresistible—to combine the best features of both classes and work for harmony.

The Old Malarky, it soon developed. The Fusion officials—"Fightin' Bob" Howard, Oscar Stoop, "Iron Man" Morris—had been bought and paid for. Things were growing bad, worse than they had ever been before. The Lowers were arming. Every issue of their newspapers contained inflammatory statements, direct slurs against the government and the Optimus Party.

Money was being spent like water by the Optimus; whole factories had been turned "Loyalist" by promises of tripled wages and security. The Loyal Lowers League was growing slowly, very slowly. There was a basically prejudiced attitude among the factory workers against turn-coats of that stamp. This, of course, only widened the gulf between authentic Lowers and those who had joined the League. Things were in a very bad way indeed. Literally everybody on the continent was waiting for the next election. There was much wild talk about revolution and gutters running with blood.

PEPPER WAS EXAMINING the psychological eavesdropper that had saved him some unpleasantness a while ago, tinkering with it and attempting to set it right.

"Well?" grunted Marty.

"Can't be done," said Pepper. "Let's turn to more constructive lines of thought. What did you say Fersen did?"

"Psychology, like us. He experiments. Last thing he did was a study of engramatic impulses."

"Do tell. What are they?"

"It's really the old 'group unconscious' idea in false face. Engrams are memories of previous lives stamped into the chromosomes. They carry compulsive force sometimes. If you hear a low-pitched, growling musical note your tendency is to shudder and draw away. If you're drunk you'll try to run like hell, because that note, if rightly delivered, means feline carnivores in misty Tertiary jungle."

"I see," mumbled Pepper. "When did Fersen publish this, and from where?"

"Oslo, eight years ago," said Marty.

"And what I've done then and up to now would sorely tax your limited understanding," said a full-throated whine.

Pepper slowly swiveled his chair around. The face that he saw was thin and keen, the hair an ashy blonde. But more to the point than hair and face was the blued steel tube that was in the speaker's hands.

"If I read your gaze aright," said the aristocrat, "you're wondering about this thing. Wonder no more, for it is a new development on the old-style chiller. It will congeal the blood of a turtle. What's more it is absolutely noiseless. I could kill you two where you sit and walk out and away to my very comfortable flat in



Residential. My name is Fersen and I got here by bribing your janitor. Does that answer all your questions?"

"Doesn't even begin to," grunted Pepper sourly. "What now?"

"Now you are coming with me." He herded them from the room at the point of his weapon. As they came out into the open of the street he ducked it under his cloak. But they could still see its outlines, and never once did it swerve from their ribs.

"Stroll casually," said Fersen. "Be gay and lightsome. You're going to Residential to watch the beautiful women walk down the beautiful streets. Sorry I bungled that attempt last night, Pepper. It must have been irritating to both of us. You weren't going to be killed at all."

Quickly, nervously, Fersen was still talking. "You'll be interested to know that I was summoned to this continent by a grand conclave of Aristocrats. They propose to settle the unhappy question of the coming election once and for all time."

"By committing mass suicide?" suggested Marty.

Fersen was pleased to laugh briefly, like the snapping of a lock in a death-cell's door. "By no means," he chuckled. "By that gentlest of all arts, psychology. Whereat, enter Fersen. Get in, please." He gestured at the open door of a car that had pulled up beside them, silent and grim.

"C'EST BON, children," smiled Fersen. "Romp if you wish." The two Lowers were staring in awe at the incredible battery of instruments racked on the walls, piled on the floors, hanging from the ceiling—everywhere.

"For a lab, not bad," finally admitted Pepper. "All psychological?"

He stared hard at some electronic equipment—ikonoscopes, tubes and coils—that was sparking quietly away in a corner.

"All," said Fersen proudly. "Now be seated, please."

The two were shoved into chairs by bruisers, then buckled in securely with plastic straps. The bruisers saluted Fersen and left.

"Now," said the psychologist, carefully locking the door, "you poor scum think you know things about the human brain?" He paced to their chairs and stared contemptuously into their faces.

"You think," he spat, "that the incredible, contorted caverns of the mind can be unravelled by base-born apes of your calibre? Forget it. I'm going to show you things about behavior you won't believe even after you see them. I'm going to make you say that you love the Optimus Party and that you'll fight to the death anybody who doesn't."

"I'm going to leave you in such a state of cringing, gibbering bestiality that you're going to betray your friends and cut your childrens' throats and know that you're doing a noble thing."

"Hypnotism won't work that far," said Pepper matter-of-factly.

"I don't use hypnotism," grunted Fersen. "I'm turning to the classics. What good would an isolated case or two like you do? We've got to have a massive movement, a movement that will spread like wildfire. Look at that!" He held up a book.

"Odes of Anacreon," read Pepper from the title-page. "So what?"

Fersen grinned slowly. "I know," he said irrelevantly, "an arrangement of lines that would make you beat your brains out in despair. I know a sound that will make you so angry that you'll tear your own flesh if



there's nobody else around. I know of a certain juxtaposition of colored masses that would turn you into a satyr—drive you mad with insatiable lust."

"I see," said Marty slowly. "I see that you weren't quite finished with the engram in Oslo."

"I had barely begun. I am now able—once I've sized up the psyche of the subject—to deliver complex commands in a compulsion-language that bears relation to old Hamitic."

"Go on," snapped Pepper catching Fersen with his eye. He had seen something out of the tail of his vision that made him want to breathe quicker. Forcibly he restrained himself. "Go on!"

"This book," said Fersen, smiling again, "will be released to the general public very shortly—as soon as I've completed copy for a final definite edition. Picture this scene:

"A bookseller receives a shipment of the *Odes*. 'How now!' says bookseller. He is amazed. He is distressed. He did not order the *Odes*. He does not want to pay for them; they look like a slow-moving item. He picks up a copy from the crate so as to get a better idea of what they are. 'What's this?' demands bookseller excitedly. For it seems to be a foreign tongue which he does not understand. Printed plainly on every page in large type is a brief message. Always the same, always legible.

"Bookseller then scans one page, very briefly. Some strange compulsion holds him; he reads further and the mysterious language is as plain as day. The message says: 'You are loyal to the Optimus Party. You will always be loyal to the Optimus Party. You will show the *Odes* to everybody you see. *Everybody must read the Odes. You will always be loyal to the Optimus Party.*'

"'How now!' says bookseller again. 'Uncanny!' And he sees a woman on the street. He seizes her. She screams. He twists her arm and shoves her into his shop. She sits quietly while the *Odes* are shoved under her nose. She reads, lest this madman damage her. They then join forces and distribute copies of the book far and wide. It's like a prairie fire—people read and make others read and the others in turn do the same.

"Pepper, there are twelve thousand booksellers in New York Sector. As soon as I've probed somewhat into your minds to determine whether a vowel or a diphthong would serve better to break down the resistance of a determined spirit opposed to the Optimus, I shall give orders to the printers, who've been immunized by a temporary hypnosis.

"**P**EPPER, TWO HOURS after I have sent in copy the crates of books will arrive simultaneously in every one of the twelve thousand shops. Now relax. You're going to be investigated."

He broke his eyes away from the Lower's and turned to select instruments from a board as cluttered as any Dr. Ghoul ever used. With a faint intake of breath Marty slid from the chair in which he had been strapped, from which he had been working himself free with desperate speed while Pepper held the psychologist's gaze.

Marty launched himself at the back of Fersen, snapping an arm about his throat. The psychologist snatched a scalpel from the board before the two reeled away into the center of the cluttered room. With his other hand Marty grabbed frantically at the wrist that held the blade, closed with crushing force about it. The



knife dropped, tinkling, to the floor. The two of them fell; Marty, shoving a knee into the small of Fersen's back, wrenched with his arm.

The psychologist collapsed shuddering in a heap. Marty warily broke away from him and picked up a casting, then clubbed Fersen carefully on the side of the head.

As he unbuckled Pepper he snapped: "Thank God that door's locked. Thank God he didn't make enough noise to get the guard. Thank God for so damned many things, Pepper. This is the chance of a lifetime!"

"I don't understand," said Pepper.

"You will," smiled Marty airily. "You probably will. Now where in the bloody dithering hell does he keep his notes—?"

**J**AY MORNINGSIDE, bookseller, wearily said: "I'm sorry ma'am; I'm in trade. I can't afford to have any political opinions."

"Please," said the girl appealingly. "This election petition will help turn out the Fusionist gang and put in Lowers who know how people like you feel and think—"

"I'm sorry," said Morningside. He turned her out of his shop and closed the door. The nerve of that babe! Coming right into his shop in the middle of a high-class Optimus neighborhood! Ruin his trade, he thought darkly. He could sue.

"Books!" yelled a hoarse voice at his delivery entrance. "Optimus Press delivery!"

"Thanks," he said, taking the crate. He broke off the plastic top and stared in amazement. "Two gross," he whispered. "And who the hell wants to buy the *Odes of Anacreon*?" He opened a copy and squinted at the weird words on the pages.

"How now!" said Morningside. He started at the strange words, and suddenly their meaning became plain as day.

"YOU WILL BE LOYAL TO THE LOWERS," it said. He smacked a fist on his plump knee. "So I shall!" he snapped.

"YOU WILL TURN THE FUSIONIST PAWNS OUT OF OFFICE." Bravo!

"YOU WILL SAFEGUARD YOUR LIBERTIES AGAINST THE CONSPIRACIES OF THE OPTIMUS PARTY AND THEIR TOOLS." About time somebody spoke out like this!

"YOU WILL SHOW THE *ODES* TO EVERYBODY YOU SEE." No time like the present, he decided. Passing his shopwindow was a stately, plump dowager, aglitter with diamonds.

"Hey, babe!" he yelled.

She turned aghast as he came through the door. "Got something to show you," he explained, taking her by the arm.

"Unhand me!" she shrilled. "You scum! You vermin!"

"Don't get tough, lady," he pleaded. Finally he had to carry her over his shoulder into the shop and shove the book under her nose. She read and looked again.

"Great stuff," she said. "What everybody ought to know. It's about time those bloodsuckers got fired. Come on!" She took up an armful of the *Odes*.

"Come on!" she called to Mr. Morningside as she was piling a score of the *Odes* up to his shoulders. "We'll tell the world!"

They went together rollicking down the street, stopping passersby, handing out copies of the *Odes*.

They were telling the world, and the world was listening.



# SPOKESMAN FOR TERRA

by *Hugh Raymond*

(Author of "Rebirth of Tomorrow," "Power," etc.)

The Martians were willing to sign the treaty but with whom?

**T**HE MARTIAN DELEGATE with the unpronounceable name raised one of his six prehensile arms for silence. Immediately, the hubbub filling the interior of the great hall subsided. All eyes—including the three or four hundred possessed by the twelve Martians—turned toward the dais.

"My friends," he began, lisping in a thin voice that taxed the powerful amplifiers straining to carry it more than a few feet beyond the edge of the platform, "today is a highly significant one in the history of both the Earth and Mars. After long discussion, a trade agreement is to be signed, on the one hand by us representatives of the All-Martian Directorate, on the other by the delegates of the United States of Earth. Too long have our planets been separated from each other. Too long has bickering about profits, tariffs, and trade-rates kept our two races apart. Today begins the Epoch of Plenty, wherein Earth and Mars shall contribute to each other of their best, both economic and cultural. In return for our ancient art, you of Earth will give us music; for our architectural heritage, your greatest works of literature; for our synthetic food and liquors, your natural grains, fruits and meats. Together our planets shall live and work in harmony."

With a flourish of his upraised tentacle, the Martian finished his talk and, amidst thunderous applause, stalked majestically to the council table, where he poised a solid gold

fountain pen above the elaborately engraved trade treaty.

**S**CARCELY had he bent forward, preparatory to inscribing his mark when a commotion at the back of the hall interrupted the proceedings. An usher came running down the center aisle.

"Your Excellencies!" he shouted. "There's a horrible-looking creature outside in a fish-bowl who demands representation at this Council!"

As if to punctuate this explosion of words, the great doors burst open and a weird-looking structure rolled into the room, carried on the backs of four gigantic sea-turtles. It was indeed much as the usher had described. Within a large fish-bowl-like tank floated a huge squid who pompously raised itself out of the water with the aid of several slimy, ropy arms and gazed fishily out of its two gigantic eyes at the amazed delegates at the further end of the hall.

"Who's in command here?" it oozed noisily, in a voice that sounded like a crocodile singing Wagner.

A tall Earthman stepped forth from the group behind the table, advanced as far as he could without fainting from the awful stench and bowed.

"No one is in command here. This is the Interplanetary Conference for the Adjustment of Trade. Who are you?"

The great eyes roved boredly about.

"Democracy, huh?" the creature



turned round abruptly and said something uncomplimentary to the attendants behind it, furiously busy mopping up the sloshing residue that poured down the sides of the tank.

"I'm here to prevent a great miscarriage of justice. I understand," it continued, leaning forward aggressively, "that some of you things are prepared to sign away the rights to certain resources of this planet. I have no particular bone to pick with *that* funny lookin' contraption," he said, pointing with complete disregard of etiquette at the chief Martian delegate, "because he's the party of the second part. But, as an Earth-creature, I protest against the signing of this treaty on the grounds that confiscation without representation is tyranny!"

The Earthman put one hand to his throat.

"You're an Earth-creature?" he asked squeakily. "But who are you and whom do you represent?"

The squid dipped back into its tank for a noggin of water before replying. It resumed its belligerent attitude and cocked one of its eyes.

"We won't bother as to *who* I am, but I represent the United Undersea Kingdoms and Peoples. Our territory stretches from the South to the North Poles under all seas and oceans. We also have jurisdiction over the interior of the Earth wherever water has accumulated and we claim by right of prior occupancy all creeks, ponds, lakes and rivers over 40 feet in depth. We under-sea people haven't bothered getting in touch with you—you," it paused and chuckled softly with a hideous slapping noise, "surface things, until now because you don't interest us. But we got wind of this deal you're trying to put through and we want to put

a stop to it or at least come to some agreement."

"Just what do you want?"

The squid wrapped an arm around the lower part of its body like a man clutching his chin with one hand and considered a moment.

"We'll be satisfied," it replied finally, "if you'll let us in on some trade in return for the large quantities of water you've planned to export to Mars. I know that this sort of puts a crimp into you surface things' plans. But justice is justice. We demand our rights."

The group on the platform conferred excitedly. Legal books were brought out and long minutes consumed in bitter wrangling. Finally the Martian delegate nudged the chief Earth representative under the ribs.

"Better let him have his way," he lisped and winked about twenty of his eyes. "Let him sign the treaty. 'There's more than one way to hook a squid' as our long-dead ancestors used to say when Mars had oceans."

Blandly the Earthman stepped forward once more and again bowed.

"If you will be so kind as to step—uh—uh—come—up to the platform, I am sure that we can adjust all differences. It merely requires adding a subclause to the definition of the party of the first part." He paused and smiled genially, rubbing his hands. "Business is business."

With a satisfied smirk, the squid settled back into its tank with a dolorous splash and braced itself for the journey. Abruptly its motive power began to move forward. Splashing slimy and odorous seawater over the expensive red-plush carpets, the turtles managed to haul the Plenipotentiary Representative of the United Undersea Kingdoms and Peoples to the platform.



The Earthman delegate took out his fountain pen. "Sign on the dotted line," he said, handing it gingerly to the squid and gestured toward the table. The squid raised itself once more and posed, pompously.

Harmony reigned within the hall and the faces of the delegates present were wreathed in smiles. The prospects of a golden flood rolling in from the hitherto - thought - to - be - worthless depths expanded their souls and filled them with liquid happiness.

"Ahem!" coughed the Plenipotentiary Representative and bent forward to sign the treaty, holding on to the sides of his tank with a few extra arms.

**S**UDDENLY, just as the point of the pen touched the paper, a

great wind blew up within the hall and whirled delegates, papers, red-plush carpet, P.R.U.U.K.P. and motive power into a tangled heap. Howling mournfully, the tornado rushed madly from wall to wall and quickly reduced the dignified gathering to a tattered, writhing mess. Windows blew outwards on all sides.

Frightened eyes stared upward, as directly in the center of the great room, a misty mass began to coalesce in great, whirling streams of vapor and grey cloud.

"So sorry to have inconvenienced you solid things," whispered a ghostly, icy cold voice that cut the air like a knife, "but as Accredited Delegate of the Amalgamated Atmospheric Association of Earth's Attenuated Entities, I really must insist...."

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## ***MONKEY LANGUAGE***

The late Dr. R. L. Garner spent his life studying simians and came to the conclusion that monkeys were able to communicate with each other. He made seven trips to African jungles and spent twenty-seven years in complete solitude and study within the habitat of the monkeys in an attempt to prove his theory, taking countless notes and making an equal number of sound recordings. It is believed by many scientists that he was correct in his belief and would have been able to give absolute proof of his theories had not death cut short his investigations. His experiments gained him some publicity in the newspapers and magazines of the early twenties, but research into monkey speech has not been carried on to any extent since his death.

Below are a few words of monkey language with Dr. Garner's interpretation of their meaning. It is impossible, however, to convey more than a vague idea of the actual sounds of the word.

*Weuh* means "What's that?" *Ki-uh*, "I want." *Kri-i*, "Where." *Ahr-r-r-r-r*, "Danger." *Quui*, "Want." *Our-h*, "Where are you?" *Eu-nh*, "Here." *Khi-iu*, "Look out!" *Khi-iu-hou*, "Retreat." *Chu-uh*, "Listen."

If monkeys do possess a language of their own, it is probably fortunate that mankind cannot understand it. Some of their observations in the zoos of our nation might be damaging to the ego of the human race.

*Joseph Gilbert*







# HUMAN MICE OF KORDAR

by Basil Wells

(Author of "New Moon," "Rebirth of Man," etc.)

Thom Egan was one among many of the men who scuttled like vermin in the walls of the giant city. But his red hair was to lead him to a throne and a chair of shining light.

## CHAPTER I

"**R**EADY?" hissed the burdened old slave as he staggered, sandals shuffling softly, along the narrow ledge.

"You bet," agreed the low voice of the red-headed young giant directly ahead of him in the line of slaves, "but I wish you were coming along."

"Nonsense!" came the ancient one's whispered snort. "Now remember, when I give the sign, drop . . ."

"Silence," came the savage undertones of an armored *urrar's* command. "Conversation is forbidden on raid. The bite of a lash will freshen your memories, I promise you."

The young slave's lips tightened into a grim smile. The little man had spoken to him in the sacred tongue of The Place Of The Scarlet Skull, the language from Beyond, known only to the priests and rulers of upland NARTH. Consequently the *urrar* had no inkling of their impending break for freedom.

There was indeed need for caution. A keen-eared, gigantic *kruka*, the reptilian house-pet of the ponderous eight-limbed city dwellers, lurked in some shadowy corridor or dark corner not far distant. Aroused by the slightest sound, he would launch himself upon the human marauders plundering his master's food cupboard. Few indeed of the raiders

would return to their dismal inner catacombs in that event.

Silent as velvet-footed beasts of prey the line of half-naked slaves and their armed guards, the leather armored *urrars*, moved out through the ragged hole in the looted Toban food cabinet. Along a narrow rough ledge of stone, forty feet above the worn floor slabs of dressed rock, they marched until they reached the twin knotted ends of a dangling rope ladder. Two wooden pegs, driven into crevices between the poorly-matched stone blocks, supported the narrow ladder's burden of men and their bulky packages of plunder.

Once they reached the floor, a short march of but a hundred feet would bring them to a wide crevice between the rocky boulders at the wall's base. Beyond that opening, the devious intricate maze of hollow walls and the great cracks between the vast blocks of stone made a tangled network of snaking corridors throughout the city of Tobe.

**W**ITHIN the gloomy depths of the deeper catacombs a great number of human beings lived, thousands of them, stunted and sun-starved, in story upon story of chill stone dwellings. Smoking great lamps of clay and soft stone burned eternally in the thickly populated area at the city's heart, the smoke rising murkily through the chimney-



like upper reaches of the massive honeycombed walls.

The wan-faced men of Tobe lived like scurrying rodents in the musty, tunneled walls. They raided the storehouses and larders of the gigantic hairy Tobans and traded part of their more precious loot to the savage tribes that roamed the Stod Plains and the grim wild valleys of the Dron Hills, for skins and gold.

In all the island continent of Kor-dar there lived less than a million of the elephantine Toban giants; but about them, within their thick walls and beneath their floors, swarmed unnumbered hordes of tiny human mice. Poison, cunning, spike-studded dead-falls, and the reptilian krukass served to check, but not to halt, their depredations. Nothing remained long secure from the rodent-things that walked upright on two legs.

Tobe, capitol city of all South Kor-dar, sprawled for a hundred miles along the low banks of the Ulzan River. Tobe was also the chief city of the human parasites, and so the wealth of the outer world flowed steadily into the city within a city. Slaves did all the work—slaves stolen from distant North; slaves from the western Iya Plains; slaves from the tropical islands of the Omul Sea. Fierce raiders from the Desert of the Dead to the east kept them well supplied with servants.

Thom Egan, the red-haired slave, knew no other life. His mother had been captured—along with the others of her party—as she journeyed from her father's city in the Iya Plains back to the North Plateau and her husband, son of North's *nuran*. She had died shortly after his birth and old Andor Thid, a captive priest of North, had taught Thom Egan much of the sacred lore, and the sacred tongue, of the priests of The Place.

ANDOR THID and Thom prepared to descend the swaying ladder of braided leather and wooden strips. Two slaves and an armored urrar had already reached the floor while the third slave had almost reached their side. Andor Thid nudged Thom and the younger man's muscles tensed. This was it!

"Urrgh!" he grunted suddenly, and his legs seemed to trip over some unseen obstacle.

He stumbled to his knees and as he did so the bundle of food on his back slid free and rolled over the edge of the rocky ledge. Down it plunged into a battered dish, an eight-foot disc of concave metal, where table scraps were left for the hideous krukass. Gnawed splinters of bone rattled like thunderclaps of doom against the metal sides.

An urrar stood beyond the ladder and now his long slim sword snapped from its sheath.

"For this you die!" he cried, and lunged.

Thom moved a second quicker. He dove for the ankles of the soldier and his broad shoulder snapped against the man's knees. The urrar crashed backward—and over the ledge. A shrill cry, and then a sodden thud drifted up from the depths.

Thom swarmed monkey-like over the edge and down the ladder. Andor Thid, behind him, stumbled clumsily and sprawled helplessly across the narrow way, effectively blocking for the instant any pursuit. Two of the urrars hurled their short javelins but their aim was hasty and Thom escaped harm.

Then, from a shadowy corner, two or three hundred feet distant across the vast room, a giant eight-legged lizard-shape raced toward the four men below—the three slaves and the urrar—and the men scattered, but



not before the guard and a slave fell before those flailing sharp-clawed forelegs.

The monster bent his spiny-crested head over his broken prey. Bones crunched horribly between fang-studded jaws as he fed.

The bony-plated back and broad flat tail of the kruka were beneath Thom's feet, a scant five feet. He shoved hard against the wall and launched himself outward. Then his feet thudded squarely upon that wide back; the kruka whistled a screaming startled blast of rage, and his twenty foot bulk lashed into smashing violence. He leaped and jolted across the dimness of the enormous moonlit chamber, striving vainly to shake that clinging man-creature from his back.

The cavorting mad progress of the lizard monster brought him opposite the narrow opening in the room's wall. Thom suddenly released his grip on the serrated bony ridges along the kruka's back and slid down off the broad, flipper-like tail. Wildly he dashed for the safety of that slim crevice even as the *spat* of the creature's heavy tail came close beside his heels.

The kruka spun about with catlike speed for so giant a creature, and his broad-snouted, serrated jaws split hideously wide above Thom's retreating back. Then Thom was inside the room's hollow wall. The kruka shrieked and moaned in frustrated rage, while his huge razor-edged toenails ripped and scraped at unyielding stone.

Thom raced away down the uneven blackness of the corridor. Like a blind man he knew every inch of this familiar unlighted way. At times he hurried along a narrow passage a hundred feet above the floor level, and again, he advanced through a

dipping wide tunnel that narrowed and expanded weirdly in a series of connected rocky chambers.

Later, when he had passed the gates and entered the outer, little-known ways, where outlaws and escaped slaves lurked, he would move with greater caution.

"THE OBSTINATE *dron*!" muttered Thom. "Why does he not fall asleep?"

Thom crouched in the shallow shelter of a projecting shoulder of grayish cut stone. Beyond that narrowing of the corridor a large cavern opened—a great sunken cup of stone some hundred feet in diameter, with a domed ceiling of stained rock high overhead—and there flickering torches illuminated the rusty red bars of the double metal gates at the further end of the cave. Only that gate, one of twenty that guarded the inner domain of the human mice, barred him from freedom.

A sleepy sentry nodded before the thick wooden door of the guard-cave. Beyond that door a half-dozen other urrars might be sleeping or playing jakka with the five, colored triangles of bone, but of them all only the guard was of interest to Tom. If he would only fall asleep . . .

"Why am I in this situation?" mused Thom. "Is it because Andor Thid told me that I must return to North before The Time, or is it because I wanted freedom? By The Flame, I believe it was the latter!"

"The Time and the Seat From Beyond, that Andor Thid speaks so reverently of, sound like some priestly mummary to me."

Andor Thid had revealed to him that he was a *nuran*, a prince, in far-off North. His flaming red hair; his freckled skin, and his great height marked him as a being set apart from



the other men of Kordar. In all Kordar none but an Egan bore the blazing mark of The Flame in his hair.

The old priest had told him how, a century before, his great-grandfather, the first red-haired Egan in Kordar, had arrived from The Beyond in a strange glass-roofed seat. He had landed atop the barren red slope of a rounded solitary hill, and in after years he had built a Place, Temple Of The Scarlet Skull, upon that very spot. He had declared that The Seat was sacred and none but an Egan might ever touch it.

That first Egan had united the warring tribes of the North Plateau into a peaceful prosperous nation. He had not taught them all of his knowledge from The Beyond, for they were not ready for it. Little by little he had revealed to them the wisdom of The Flame.

Every twenty-five years Egan, the nuran, and later his son, also a red-haired Egan, had come to sit in The Seat and await the coming of The Flame from the heavens. But the strange power from the sky had never come to bathe The Seat with a radiance unearthly.

Now the fourth twenty-five year period was drawing to a close. The Time drew near. Recently, captured slaves from North told of the assassination of Thom's father, the nuran, shortly after the sudden death of his father. An ambitious priest in The Place Of The Scarlet Skull was blamed for the assassination but there was no proof. Thom's grandmother, Unina, from distant Llol, now ruled all North. But she was not an Egan. Her hair was dark and she knew not the sacred tongue of The Beyond. There was no red-headed Egan to sit in The Seat and listen to the voice of The Flame when The Time was come.

"May The Flame blast you!" growled the young man as he saw the guard lift his drowsy head and grind knotted fists into his eyes.

The urrar's mouth split wide in a prodigious yawn and then he was on his feet. Thom cursed the sentinel's restlessness. He must reach that gate, unbar it, and slip through. To be recaptured meant the loss of both his eyes.

He heaved a sigh of relief and his clenched fists unknotted. The urrar was shambling slowly away from the guard-cave's entrance toward the tunnel and Thom. Thom's fingers flexed expectantly. This was a welcome, though unexpected, turn of events.

As the warrior came opposite, the weight of Thom's hurtling body drove the breath from his lungs and then the slave's sinewy fingers choked off any feeble outcry he might have made. Three times Thom's clenched right fist thudded against the sentry's exposed jaw, all the pent-up hatred of his years of slavery in the blow; then the man's body went limp and senseless beneath him.

Hurriedly Thom stripped the many-layered tunic of stiff leather and the metal-scaled shirt off the body of the urrar. He took the long, needle-like sword and the plain crossed belts that supported the blade and its matching dagger. Then he wrenched the heavy leather helmet from the sentry's head and pulled it down over his own skull.

He had turned to cross the lighted stretch of corridor when the faint sound of footsteps approaching along the passage behind him reached his ears. He spun about again, sword lifted and steady, as a man limped slowly out of the grayness of the tunnel.



“ANDOR THID!” he exclaimed softly, dropping his sword-tip and rushing to the old man’s side. “You too escaped!”

“Yes,” the exhausted old priest said, “I escaped. A Toban giant, aroused by the clamor of the *kruka*, came into the room with a plank in one of his hands. We were forced to escape as best we could. I hid beneath the table until the beast and the Toban went away. Then I came after you.”

“I am glad you are with me,” said Thom. “The outside world is as much of a mystery to me as the secrets of The Beyond. But come, let us escape through the gates before we talk more.”

“An excellent idea, my Nuran,” agreed the wrinkled oldster.

A moment later the rusty gates swung protestingly open and the two slaves dashed through to the second barrier. Before the urrs within their snug cave-barracks realized what had happened they were racing away down the debris-littered passage beyond and then the Stygian gloom swallowed them up.

## CHAPTER II

HOW LONG they journeyed through the abysmal blackness of dusty vacant corridors and tortuous ragged passages, squeezing through narrow crevices left between the walls and often being turned back by blind alleys, they could never have told.

But at last they came into a passage where the dust was not so thick underfoot and the smell of human-kind was growing stronger in the stale air. Where the way narrowed Thom could feel the greasy smoothness of the wall where naked flesh of men had rubbed in passing.

Thom proceeded cautiously now, for the outlaw bands of Tobe were the only inhabitants of these dismal outer ways. Somehow he must come upon one of them and convince him that they were really escaped slaves trying to leave the city.

His groping fingers found a stiff leather curtain, the thick hide of a wild *kruka*, and carefully he shoved it aside.

Beyond the curtain opened a dimly lighted chamber, roughly oval in shape and high of ceiling. Across the room, thirty feet away, a second curtain of *kruka* hide was outlined by a flood of yellow light from another room.

Silent as prowling *drons*, the leopard-spotted apes of the hills, they crossed the room and came close to the doorway. Andor Thid luxuriated in the vagrant heat that leaked through the imperfect door of hide, his chilled ancient bones soaking up that welcome warmth gratefully. Meanwhile Thom applied his eye to a shoulder-high slit in the curtain.

For a moment the unaccustomed brilliance of the three giant candles burning on pedestals of stone within the room blinded him. Then he could see.

“A warrior,” he whispered to Andor Thid, “lying on a narrow bed. Bandaged about the head and body. The stub of his right arm sticks upright from his body. Badly wounded.

“A woman—beautiful as all the beautiful women of Kordar rolled into one—kneels before the sooty fire of coal in the fireplace. She is lovely above . . .”

“Any others in the room?” interrupted the old priest testily.

“None,” snapped Thom.

The girl turned toward the bed, smiling sadly down at the wounded outlaw. Now Thom could see that



ornaments of gold and snowy white *uzal* were about her white neck and upon her rounded arms. A net of linked golden strands confined her high-piled hair and thin golden discs cupped her full firm breasts. Even her kilted skirt, extending modestly almost to her knees, was embroidered with intricate designs in gold, and her high-thonged grayish sandals were richly ornamented with that same yellow metal and with tiny precious stones.

Thom pushed aside the hanging curtain and stepped into the lighted rocky chamber. The girl turned as the draft of chill air struck her body and she shrank back fearfully against the wounded man's bed. Thom pried the leather helmet from his head and bowed.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I am an escaped slave. My comrade and myself seek only to leave the city and go to distant *Narth*."

"*Narth*!" exclaimed the girl throatily, and she took an impulsive step forward.

"*Lyan*," the husky voice of the man on the rude bed commanded, "step aside. Let me see this escaped slave before I summon my men."

"I am Thom Egan," said the young man, "and this is Andor Thid, sometime priest of The Place of The Scarlet Skull. Both of us are fugitives from the men of *Tobe*."

"You," cried the wounded man, new life flaring momentarily in his sunken eyes, "are indeed Thom Egan, my prince! I am Thun Tuga, outlaw and renegade, but I am also a true son of *Narth*. I salute you and The Flame that burns in your hair!"

"Thun Tuga," murmured old Andor Thid. "I remember you. A leader of *urrars* from the city of *Therak*."

The outlaw smiled bitterly as though the very name of *Therak*

evoked unpleasant memories.

Thom came closer to the side of the outlaw. The girl moved aside, her great sad eyes shining with a steady fire far down in their limpid depths.

"You see, Father," she whispered to Thun Tuga, "The Flame has heard your call, and answered."

"**I** AM TO DIE, my *Nuran*," Thun Tuga said. "I have feared to leave—*Lyan*—alone among the members of my band. They are rough, uncouth men of violence and *Lyan* is, as you see, a lovely woman."

"You are right," agreed Thom, "she is out of place here."

"Once I was leader of *urrars*," the outlaw continued, "and bore the name of a proud family. I was rich and respected. Then . . . but why continue. My strength fails me. Andor Thid can tell you the rest."

"One last request I make of you as my ruler. Take what you desire or require of my treasures—they are many and rich—but with you, when you return to *Narth*, take my daughter *Lyan*. Guard her tenderly, my *Nuran*, for she is my all."

"And may you win again the throne of *Narth* from the usurper priests of The Place."

"Thun Tuga!" cried Andor Thid, his seamed features working convulsively, "what say you? Usurper priests?"

"They have exiled—the *Ranu*—*Unina*—from *Narth*," the fading voice gasped out weakly.

Suddenly the dying bulk of the man lifted free from the blankets beneath him and he sat upright. His eyes blazed savagely and the stub of his arm upraised.

"For The Flame and Egan!" he roared proudly—and died.

After a long moment of silence,



broken only when Lyan buried her tearful face in the blankets beside her father's body, Thom turned away from that triumphant, peaceful dead face—and was confronted by three grim-faced warriors, their keen swords menacing his middle.

One of them, a squat, one-eyed scarred man, nodded sharply toward the further corner of the room. Thom and the priest followed the outlaws as they backed away before them. Then the one-eyed man's sword dropped and he regarded Thom quizzically.

"I don't know where you dropped from, stranger," he said, "but you're a nice set-up young fellow. I'd hate to have to jab a sliver of steel between your ribs. Maybe you're what you claim to be. We heard your talk and it sounded straight.

"But here's what we wanted to say—Dunja, Tholar, and myself, Tolab by name—we'll stand for no shady dealings with the lass.

"If she goes with you to NARTH, we go along. We tended her since she was a little girl of two or three; so we go on protecting her until we die."

His two comrades nodded their agreement.

"Good," said Thom gravely. "We will be glad to have you along. The way is dangerous. Every additional sword is welcome."

"Thought you'd appreciate our offer," grinned Tolab. "Put up your blood-needles, lads."

**THEY CARRIED** all that was mortal of the outlaw chieftain away to a distant rocky gallery where many another disintegrating outlaw body lay. Upon their return Tolab drew the two men from NARTH aside and spoke with them.

"Kral Gant, the second in com-

mand," he said, "raids a distant caravan route on the other side of Tobe. He will probably not return for several hours, possibly a day or so. But when he does—we had best be gone."

"Why?" Andor Thid wanted to know.

"He has long desired the lass for his own," Tolab growled, "and now he will take her. Also he will claim the loot of Thun Tuga for his own. Already I have sent two loyal men to the river wall to make ready one of the sailing craft hidden there."

"If Lyan agrees," Thom told him, "we will leave at once. I, too, am anxious to leave Tobe behind."

"Then it is settled," said Tolab. "I have already spoken to Lyan and she is prepared to go at a moment's notice. We'll gather up a bit of jewelry and other equipment and get moving."

### CHAPTER III

**THE FIVE** leather-armored men and the girl emerged from the lightless depths of the inner walls of Tobe into the pale glow of river-reflected moonlight. The massive wall that held back the flooding waters of the Ulzan loomed high above them; its base, undercut by the persistent gnawing of the river, made a low roof overhead. A dozen feet inward the water-worn cavity extended and the outlaws had cut a narrow channel yet farther beneath the wall. In this narrow berth, three low open boats, their slender masts dropped horizontally along the seats, were moored.

Two outlaws sprang from the craft furthest out and saluted the one-eyed man.

"All is ready, Tolab," they announced.

"Good," grunted the squat outlaw.



"Now drive your swords through the bottoms of the other boats. Smash their oars. Wreck them."

The two men hurried to the other boats and set to work. The crashing of thin planking and the snapping of breaking oars attested to their relish for such vandal tasks. In a few moments the shattered wrecks sank below the water's surface.

The girl and old Andor Thid had already found seats in the bow below the high, carved figurehead.

"Hurry!" cried Tolab. "I hear the sound of racing feet in the corridors behind us. Kral Gant and his men must be following. Climb aboard men!"

A hail of javelins slashed out of the gloom behind them and a compact mass of armored fighting-men followed. They were upon the six men in an instant and swords struck sparks of fire from one another. Slim blades flicked in and out and blood reddened many a keen point.

Thom and Tolab fought shoulder to shoulder beside the boat, their swords piercing the vitals of many an enemy. Dunja went down with a sword in his throat, and a hurled javelin had torn the leather helmet from Tholar's old bald head. The two loyal outlaws were down, their bodies pierced with a dozen sword-thrusts.

The three men retreated to the rocky pier's edge. A slim, hawk-nosed fellow, a heavy shirt of gold-inlaid metal strips over his layered leather tunic, engaged Tholar in combat. An instant later the helmetless oldster lunged backward into the water, three inches of steel protruding from his back. The hawk-faced outlaw snatched up another sword from the limp clutch of a dead outlaw.

"Here, Kral Gant," challenged To-

lab even as a sword penetrated his guard and spitted his shoulder.

Then Thom was left standing alone to face the attacking outlaws. Well had old Andor Thid instructed him in the use of swords, using heavy sticks a foils, and well now did that training stand the test. Not many of the attackers were on their feet—three or four in all—they advanced half-heartedly led by hawkish Kral Gant.

Thom's sword swept aside the leader's slim blade, flickered inward, and the bold beak of Kral Gant vanished in a welter of spouting blood.

"Thom!" cried the clear voice of Lyan, "Jump into the boat!"

Thom darted a quick glance about. Only Tolab yet lived of all his allies. His fingers hooked under the crossed belts of Tolab's trappings and he sprang across a widening stretch of water into the boat.

Andor Thid swung his sword down, slashing the last rope that bound them to the shore. Then they were drifting out from the shadows of the great wall into the weird light of the hurtling triple moons of Kordar's night.

**A** GENTLE breeze drifted up the mile-wide reaches of the Ulzan from the distant Sea of Omul. The three of them raised the stout mast and spread the craft's dark, triangular sail. Thom took over the tiller while the others curled up in the boat's bottom to sleep, or, as Tolab did, to curse the pain of his shoulder-wound.

Slowly the little craft drove upstream against the sluggish current.

Morning came all too soon. The outer walls of Tobe, grim gray ramparts a thousand feet in height, lay a scant mile behind them when they glided between two huge, water-



carved boulders into the narrow watery cove formed by two tree-clad islands.

The men cut bushy limbs from the smaller trees and bushes and laid a leafy roof over the boat. After they had eaten a few cold chunks of meat and some flinty cakes of ground yellow cereal, Lyan insisted that they let her keep watch while they slept.

It was afternoon when Thom came awake with the pressure of Lyan's soft fingers on his lips. He sat up and stretched his cramped limbs. She gestured toward the river.

"Giants," whispered the girl. "Many of them have passed, all of them floating on rafts like that one."

Thom saw a long narrow island of logs, logs twenty or thirty feet in diameter, drifting past the twin islets. Atop the logs, his four massive legs braced against the pitching of the raft, balanced the coarse-haired, shoulderless bulk of a Toban riverman.

A great log, perhaps two hundred feet in length, he gripped in two of his upper double-jointed limbs to ward off any encroaching spit of land. His other two arms gripped the massive tiller of a ponderous rudder at the raft's rear.

Eighty feet tall he was, his peaked hairy skull all but buried in his broad elephantine bulk. He was without covering, save for the several belts and straps that supported huge leather pouches and a wide-bladed hatchet. A gigantic apish monster of nightmare he seemed to the two human mice huddled in their fragile toy-boat.

After he had drifted from sight the two young people talked together of everything under the sun of Kordar, and of everything under her triple moons. They said nothing original or of lasting worth; yet when

night came and they again shoved off into the Ulzan they were the best of friends.

As they sailed slowly upstream they met more and more tiny boats like their own, fishing craft and traders. Once a boatload of river pirates attacked a fishing boat far off to their right and they heard the clash of weapons and the dying screams of men.

After that for eight nights they journeyed up the broad stream until it narrowed and a great waterfall halted further progress by water. Then old Andor Thid traced out a map on a smooth bit of rock showing the Llol Hills, where they were camped, the northward extension of the Stod Plains just beyond, and the Dron Hills. Beyond the chill rocky ramparts of the Dron Hills stretched the plateau of Narth, and there, less than a day's journey within Narth's borders, loomed the ominous round red bulk of the Scarlet Skull.

**T**HEY LEFT the river behind and marched northward across the Stod Plains. Through a tangled forest of tall grass, thirty or forty feet in height, they made their way. Bushy upper blades of grass formed a patchwork emerald roof overhead, and a level floor of waist-high grass surrounded them . . . Strange world, this Kordar, the normal and the gigantic madly intermingled.

Giant *stods*, vast trampling herds of the white-haired, bison-like beasts, many of them a hundred and twenty feet long and towering sixty feet above the ground on their eight massive legs, ranged the grass-forests. And beneath the concealing shadows of those same forests moved and fed herds of pygmy *stods*, none of them more than a tenth as large as their giant brothers.



From the herds of great stods the Tobans obtain their domestic livestock, and likewise, from the pygmy herds do the human beings of Kordar draw their beasts of burden.

Lyan, Tolab, the old priest, and Thom slept on piles of grass beneath a crude lean-to of felled grass trunks. For three days they had followed the sunken game-trails that criss-crossed the grasslands and they were tired. A stinking fire of dry stod chips burned in a carefully cleared spot beside the trail.

The three moons trailed one another swiftly across the western sky in their second circuit of the night. A bat-winged *thul* drifted silently overhead, and the harsh call of some prowling beast sounded far off to the east.

"Wake up," cried Tolab suddenly, springing to his feet with the words. "Listen! The stods come!"

A faint rhythmic drumming vibrated the soil beneath their feet. The very roots of the towering grass-stems seemed to be trembling with that swelling beat.

"Stampede!" shouted Tolab. "Scatter fire. Dried grass. Fire will stop the charge. Turn them."

In a moment they had flung the embers into the grass about them and a ring of fire raced outward through the accumulated dead grass of other seasons. Quickly they beat out the backward-licking threads of flame and then flung themselves close to the ground where the heat was less oppressive. The flames grew and raged outward, blackening and burning the towering grass-trees with ever-increasing fury.

Lyan Tuga lay between Tolab and Thom, their bodies protecting her from the direct heat of the fire. Her hand found Thom's and clung. He pressed her fingers reassuringly. Nor

did he release them until the wall of flame split the black charging mass of giant stods apart.

"Again," whispered Lyan, "has The Flame protected us."

After that for two more days they crossed a dead, burnt-over world of drifting gray ashes and blackened smoking debris that ended abruptly against the sheer rocky cliffs that lined the lower reaches of the Dron Hills.

As they penetrated deeper into the rocky splintered hell of the hills, the air grew chill and the wind never ceased to blow. They circled around barren valleys where smoking volcanic pits opened and the scattered clumps of vegetation were stunted and grotesquely twisted.

"See those openings in the walls of the pits?" Tolab asked Thom.

"Sure," the young man nodded.

"Spotted drons live there near the fire from below," the outlaw said. "Huge ten-foot beasts that look like men. Fangs on them a foot long and no nose to speak of. Four arms they have and four legs. They can run on all eight of them faster than a *kru-ka*."

"How about the lizard people?" Thom wanted to know.

"They're here in the hills all right," Tolab told him, "only they don't like sunlight. That's why every night we hunt a cave and stay there until morning. They prowl only at night and return to their underground caverns with the coming of dawn."

"Glad of that," said Thom.

Less than an hour later they rounded a sharp turn in a cliffside trail and came full upon a solitary apish dron. He was as startled as they and before his four apish limbs could reach them Thom and Tolab in the lead, had driven their swords



deep into his vitals. The monster flopped backward, tearing convulsively at the spurting wounds in his spotted hide, and toppled from the narrow ledge.

That was but the first of many encounters with the great apes of the uplands. Fortunately, they never encountered more than two or three of the shambling hairy beasts at one time, and their four swords proved to be more than enough to vanquish them. Lyan could wield a sword as skillfully as any man, and the wrinkled priest had been an urrar in his youth.

Battles with hissing, bat-winged *thuls* and encounters with hairy, skin-clad savages made every day's journey a bloody nightmare. They ate the scorched meat of sluggish lizard creatures that hid in the crevices about the ever-steaming springs, as they huddled about a meager cave-fire at night, and shivered until morning in their tattered rags when the flames died.

At last they came upon a party of traders, bound for Narth with goods from Tobe, as they battled a group of club-armed, hairy natives. Their four swords had turned the tide of battle; the savages were driven off, and the grateful traders invited them to join their party.

#### CHAPTER IV

**T**HOM'S CHEST filled with the cold sweet air of Narth. He was home at last. Scarce a mile distant, soaring high above the rolling brown and green of the other hills, rose the barren, rounded, red bulk of the Scarlet Skull. Great splotches of black roughly duplicated the empty eye-sockets and the nasal cavity of a skull, and a gaping long cavern-mouth opened where the grinning jaws should have been.

The dusty caravan route, along which the colorful party of traders drove their snow-white stods, wound close up to the Scarlet Skull before it entered the wide stone streets and dark alleys of high-walled Narth at the hill's foot.

"The Holy Place!" breathed Andor Thid as he plodded wearily along at Thom's side. "Pray to The Flame that we be not too late."

Thom regarded the half-healed wounds that scarred his body and the tattered remnants of his leather armor. Up ahead Lyan and squat Tolab trudged slowly along through swirling reddish dust clouds. It had been a weary, bloody trail.

"Andor Thid," said Thom, "do you think we can enter The Place? If the priests have somehow exiled my grandmother, as Thun Tuga told us, I will not be allowed to reach The Seat."

"We may have to fight," admitted the wrinkled priest grimly, "but when you reveal yourself before the people of Narth they will all rally to your support. Until we have reached The Place, however, you had best wear your helmet and take another name. When the time is ripe your flaming torch of hair will let the people know you."

Thom settled his claw-and-club-battered helmet tighter upon his head as the great metal gates swung wide to admit the little caravan. Through the cobbled streets the party wended its way. Knots of laughing, brown-skinned children raced alongside and from the unshuttered windows dark-haired women and men stared curiously down at these strangely garbed men from the distant southlands.

They came at last to the central plaza and set about looking for lodging and food.

Two bits of jewelled gold purchased



fresh garments for them all; paid for rooms in a squalid alley hostel, and left a heaping handful of oval reddish coins as well.

Andor Thid slipped out to find his friends of twenty years before, warning the others to keep close to their rooms until his return.

“**I**T IS AS I feared,” the little priest said on his return late that evening. “Dugar Kon, the high priest, has indeed seized the throne of NARTH by treachery—to say nothing of murdering your father and poisoning your grandfather. A treacherous, slippery snake of a man he is. Unina, your grandmother, was exiled because the sign of The Flame was not in her hair.

“But he knows nothing of your existence, even as a slave. He believes that he destroyed the last of the nurans when your father was slain.

“I have told my friends to bring armed men to The Place tomorrow. We are not too late. The Time has not yet come. You will make yourself known to the whole assemblage in The Place and be acclaimed our prince. Then let Dugar Kon try to explain his seizure of your throne!”

**A** VAST stream of NARTHians, devout men, women and children from the distant cities and grasslands of the far-flung country, wound up the narrow road before the grinning gigantic Skull the following day. For more than half a score of days had they made their pilgrimage to the heights to await the coming of The Flame—and with nightfall returned to the city of NARTH.

Into the gaping cavern maw of the hill the way led and climbed a thousand steps, hewn from the living rock, to the summit and The Place.

Among those slow-moving worshippers, armed men mingled, obedient to the command of Andor Thid's friends. And with them too climbed the four from the distant gloomy corridors of mighty Tobe.

The steps ended atop the sloping red dome of the great red hill. The glaring scarlet walls of The Place spread before them. The pilgrims crowded into the vast inner courtyard and pressed close about the central area where The Seat From Beyond rested beneath the clear skies opening overhead.

The four from Tobe slowly made their way into the front ranks of the assemblage. Andor Thid hissed angrily and pointed toward the great, glass-enclosed Seat. A scarlet-robed priest sat stiffly erect upon its ancient leather cushions.

“Dugar Kon!” he whispered, “awaiting the flood of wisdom and power that The Flame will bestow upon him.”

Fires burned on great altars about The Seat, and scarlet-robed priests ringed them about, their voices chanting a weird hymn imploring The Flame to come. The Time must indeed be very near, thought Thom, for their eyes were fixed intently upon The Seat.

“Come,” said Andor Thid, and proudly he stepped out from the concealment of the crowd.

As he moved forward his dull black cloak of dyed *stod*-hair fell from his bowed old shoulders and he stood revealed in the red robes of a priest. Thom came to stand beside him.

The eyes of the encircling throng swung away from The Seat toward these two bold figures who dared profane the sacred inner area. Then Thom flung off his own cloak and slipped the battered leather helmet from his head.



A ray of sunlight slanted from the central open courtyard full upon his fiery shock of hair—Andor Thid had craftily planned it so—and he raised his hand for silence.

A great sigh of pent-up emotion rippled through the massed ranks. Many of them flung themselves upon their faces and cried out loudly that The Flame had come in the person of Thom Egan. The priests turned from their contemplation of The Seat and their swords dragged uncertainly from the harnesses beneath their long scarlet robes.

Then Dugar Kon, the high priest, sensing the imminent collapse of many years of crafty scheming in a moment, flung himself from the cushioned seat within The Seat, and his long bony finger pointed at Thom.

"He is not an Egan!" he screeched above the swelling tumult of the frenzied throng. "He is an imposter! His hair is false—dyed! Destroy these profaners of the sacred Place!"

**T**HOM EGAN and the old priest strode swiftly through the milling dazed ranks of the priests toward The Seat. Behind them came Tolab and Lyan and the grim ranks of armed men from the city of North. Some few of the priests joined the inpouring forces and formed a protective ring of steel about their nuran and The Seat. Unarmed Northians poured inward between the smoking altars to ally themselves with that thin inner line.

The high priest raced to a lever set in the side of one of the altars and a great slab of stone, ten feet square and pivoted in its middle, upreared from the floor. A deep pit opened on the outer side and wide stone steps opened on the inner side of the slab. In an instant his fellows had followed his example and the

twin circles of men about The Seat were walled in by a thick barrier of stone.

More priests came pouring up from the depths below, up the stone steps beside the altars, until they greatly outnumbered Thom's little group. They closed in. Swords began to bite and human blood dyed the scarlet stones of the courtyard a deeper red. Unarmed men snatched weapons from the lax fingers of dying men. Needle-blades shattered beneath the impact of other swords.

The fighting surged backward and forward across the slippery stones. No more priests climbed from the underground tunnels beneath the place; and now Thom saw that the odds were slowly evening. The priests were not skilled in the use of weapons as were his men. If the Northians outside the barrier could procure weapons and hasten to their aid The Place would soon be theirs.

Thom's sword snapped off at the hilt as two flailing blades hammered across it. He tore another from its sheath in a priest's ribs and drove its slim point through one foe's heart. The other priest sprang backward as Thom came at him, slipped on the floor, and his neck gashed open upon the edge of a sword wedged in a dead man's body.

He saw Lyan gamely warding off the swords of two scarlet-robed priests and sprang to her side. In a moment he had run one of them through and turned to engage her other foe.

He was too late. Already Lyan's slim sword had pierced that priestly throat. She flashed a tight-lipped smile at him and Thom grinned in response. Then they were both attacked by two new enemies . . .

"The Flame!" roared the bull voice of Tolab. "It has come!"



"The Flame! The Flame!" old Andor Thid and all the loyal men cried.

Abruptly the fighting was at an end. Sudden awe gripped them all. The priests' weapons clattered to the floor and they slunk backward toward the stone steps from below.

A NARROWING beam of brilliant white flame stabbed down, centering full upon The Seat, turning it into a radiantly gleaming jewel of white living flame. Dugar Kon plunged toward The Seat across the huddled bodies of the dead and through the dazed defenders of Thom. Then Tolab, the outlaw, swung his hairy arm in a mighty arc; his sword flashed end over end, and Dugar Kon went down, the sword-hilt projecting squarely from between his shoulder-blades.

"Sit in The Seat, Thom Egan!" cried Andor Thid.

"Sit in The Seat, Nuran of Narth!" shouted the bloody warriors and loyal priests.

Thom Egan looked at Lyan, straight, slim and proud beside him. Here was fit mate for Thom Egan the prince, or Thom Egan the slave. He took her hand in his and opened the rounded transparent door of The Seat. Turning he lifted his reddened blade in salute to his subjects.

"I have chosen my *ranu*," he said simply. "Where I go, she goes too."

Then they stepped inside the narrow compartment and Thom carefully latched the door. Fearfully Lyan crept into Thom's arms and hid her eyes against his chest. Thom's lips thinned and whitened. Blood pounded at his temples and a strange sense of unreality engulfed his senses.

Throbbing vibration wracked The Seat with ever-increasing intensity. Strange fire seemed to crackle and

snap throughout the little compartment and the hair of their bodies rose stiffly erect with the waxing electric power that pervaded The Seat. The blaze of white flame grew until they could no longer see the inner courtyard of The Place about them. Then The Seat and all the world about them seemed to be expanding, bursting outward with the violence of an exploding bubble.

Lyan clung close to Thom, little frightened sobs choking in her throat. And Thom stared grimly ahead into nothingness, into The Beyond, until blackness clamped down upon his brain . . .

The Seat flashed upward along the funnel-shaped Flame, expanding into a vastness incomprehensible to the awed men of Narth. Then it was gone.

## CHAPTER V

"**Q**UITE the Casanova, our friend Tom," a gruff voice was saying in the sacred tongue of The Beyond. "He's gone less than five minutes and returns with a charming, barbarically clad young woman. Knocked about a bit too, I see."

"The wretch!" snapped another indignant voice. "If our engagement had not already been announced I—I'd . . ."

"I wonder," the first voice was puzzled, "how he received these wounds, some of them half-healed already? Can there really be a speeding-up of time in the atomic universe to which he was flashed?"

"He looks different, somehow," a third voice, a deep pleasant man's voice said. "Good Lord, Sterret, did you see these extra limbs beneath his arm-pits and above his hips? Atrophied arms and legs! Tom had noth-



ing of that sort on his body! This is not Tom Egan!"

"The girl, too!" cried the feminine voice from a distance, "has extra limbs. That means that Tommy is trapped somewhere down inside that nasty little chunk of rock! Father, do something quick!"

Thom's eyes opened slowly. He was lying on a couch in a brilliantly lighted room. An elderly gray-haired man—he of the gruff voice—a yellow-haired pretty young woman, and a homely, broad-shouldered young man, all of them clad in strange ugly garments, bent over him. Across the room he could see The Seat, hedged about by a gleaming array of strange equipment, and sitting dazedly in a deep chair beside it was Lyan.

"Lyan!" he cried as he came to his feet and started across the room.

The homely young man hurried to his side and held him upright.

"Lean on me," he said.

**T**HAT EVENING the girl and the homely young man sat together in the garden. A wan half-moon, a single moon, skidded behind a cloud and darkness claimed Earth. The girl snuggled closer in the gloom.

"A hundred years," the young man was saying reflectively, "passed during those four minutes. Tom married, had children, built cities, won an empire, and died. He taught his people to treasure the diminishing cell—The Seat as Thom calls it—and permit none but an Egan to enter it. Somehow he discovered that a minute of Earthly time equalled twenty-

five years of Kordarian time, and every Time, as he called it, awaited the arrival of the expanding rays. His sons and grandsons were instructed as to the true origin of The Seat and The Flame that was to come.

"But by some inexplicable quirk of fate his great-grandson never learned the truth. Blindly, he entered the cell with Lyan, his queen, and was flashed back here to our laboratory. Had Tom not placed a record of his experiences and discoveries in Kordar within the compartment we would know almost nothing about that invisible atomic world."

"I suppose the two freaks will want to go back," yawned the girl.

"They're going back tonight," the homely young man said shortly. "This world would hold no interest for them. Almost I wish I were going back with them . . . The changes that hundreds of years will make in Kordar!"

"Let's not talk about such dull things," the girl pouted. "Let's enjoy the moon. See, it's coming out again." She cuddled closer to his shoulder.

"I never did like Tommy much. Always spouting outlandish gibberish about science, and atoms. I'm glad he's dead . . . Tiss me, bid, bad mans!"

The homely young man shoved her angrily away. "There are no empty-headed, baby-talking, fickle blondes in NARTH. Nothing but brunettes. I'm going back with Thom and Lyan!"





# JITTERBUG

by R. R. Winterbotham

(Author of "Procession of Suns," "Cepheid Planet," etc.)



There is usually truth behind every legend. The Pied Piper of Hamelin was one which the space-ship from Venus verified.

**A** SAD-EYED individual, whose nose seemed to have forsaken him, trudged slowly down the street. He wore a heavy overcoat, although it was a warm spring day. His head was half

covered with a parka that bulged on each side, suggesting ear-muffs beneath it.

He was a queer looking duck, but no one seemed to mind, for Utropolis was a blase city, where the wise guys



were utterly devoid of curiosity. Sad eyes were nothing new, and maybe no nose was a distinct advantage. Besides, who gave a whoop how somebody dressed?

On the corner a newsboy tested the sonic effects of his voice with the tall buildings as a sounding board.

"Huxtra, final, four-star papuh ye-ha. Huxtra papuh. Readall abowtit. Huxtra. Venus space ship lands! Huxtra-ah! Readall abowtit."

The tall buildings gave a beautiful, uncanny, delicious ring to the catchy little chant. The sad-eyed person halted and seemed to listen. He raised his arm with a rather peculiar motion. Had anyone been watching, he might have noted that human joints do not permit one to lift an arm behind his shoulder to take off a hat, or even a parka. But no one watched. The sad-eyed one might have undressed without attracting a crowd.

The left side of the parka was lifted exposing, not ear-muffs, but an ear as large as an old-fashioned stove lid.

"Huxtra, final, four-star . . ."

The enormous ear wriggled with delight. Big Ears sauntered forward and touched the newsboy on the shoulder.

"Papah?"

The newsboy turned as he asked the question. He blinked his eyes. His mouth gaped, in what Hollywood calls a delayed take, at the sight of a huge ear dangling on one side of a noseless, sad-eyed head.

"Oh!"

The bundle of papers sailed high into the ear. The newsboy scrambled like a frightened hare.

The saucer-eyes grew sadder for an instant. Then with an agile flip of his arms, Big Ears caught the

papers as they fell toward the pavement. He placed them in a neat pile beside the curb and sat on them.

From the pocket of his heavy overcoat—which on close examination appeared to be a rather unusual style, without buttons, more like a cape—he drew a small metal tripod. The apex of the tripod he inserted in his small, round mouth. His fingers sought small holes in the sides of the legs. It was a musical instrument.

A drone issued from the pipes. Suddenly, from the sides of the tall building, echoed an eerie chant:

"Huxtra, final, four-star papuh ye-ha! Readall abowtit!"

The sad eyes rolled as the chant continued. A busy Utropolitan, his thoughts on stocks and bonds, was hieing hither. The businessman's hand darted into his pocket, brought out three pennies and dropped them on the pavement beside Big Ears.

"Gimme paper," said the man.

Suddenly he realized things were not quite right.

"Huh?" he said. "Say — what is this?"

He started to laugh. Decided that the large pink ear that wiggled was too real to be laughed at. He stood speechless and watched.

"Huxtra, final, four-star . . ."

"Why it's a tune he's playin' on that flute!" The busy man turned and caught a passer-by by the arm. "Looky! Jeez! It's a Whatzis!"

"Leggo my arm, buddy!" The passer-by was a burly individual with a crimson face. "Who yuh grabbin' anyhow?"

"Look! Look!" gulped the businessman.

"Oh!" said Red Face. "Oh. Oh!"

"Venus space ship lands . . ."

"I got it," said the businessman. "He's one of them Venusians."

Red Face nodded dreamily. There



was something about that chant that made him want to listen.

Others were beginning to notice it, too. From across the street, a small, timid-looking gentleman was making his way through the traffic. He moved like a man in a trance.

A pretty little stenographer, who had been adjusting her makeup through her reflection in a store window, turned and moved closer to Big Ears.

These late arrivals did not seem astonished at the sight of the large, sad eyes, the big ear, and the non-existent nose. They watched the snake-like fingers—there were seven of them on each hand—dance over the stops in the pipes.

"Huxtra! Readall abowtit . . ."

A blue uniform appeared in the background.

"Hey! Move on there! You can't block traffic like this—oh!"

The police officer joined the throng of entranced listeners.

**T**HE RHYTHM seemed to change. The small, timid man turned and swung his fist to the jaw of Red Face, who crumpled in a heap on the sidewalk and lay there, shivering in fear.

The police officer turned and beckoned for pedestrians on the opposite side of the street to come across and join the throng. The businessman picked the pocket of the timid man and a pickpocket, who was one of the late comers, returned the stenographer's purse. The stenographer was rubbing off her makeup.

"Titwoba lladaer! Artxuh . . ."

The words were no longer intelligible, but they seemed to command the throng to do things utterly alien to each individual's nature.

The antics of his audience seemed to please Big Ear, but he presently

ceased blowing the pipes, arose from the curb and began strolling down the street.

One by one the listeners returned to their normal selves. The stenographer dodged into a doorway to restore her makeup. The thief picked the businessman's pocket of the timid man's purse. The policeman began to blow his whistle furiously to clear the traffic jam. The timid man, realizing that he had knocked Red Face down, began to retreat in the direction Big Ear had taken. Red Face rose to his feet, and began to pursue.

Out of the tangled throng darted a cherub-faced young man with large horn-rimmed glasses. He looked knowingly at the jam of traffic, spied the officer and made his way to the place where the policeman stood, alternately blowing his whistle and shouting invective at the human herd that was trying to rationalize its recent actions and unjam the traffic simultaneously.

"Pardon me, officer," began the newcomer, "but which way did he go?"

The policeman arched his back like an angry cat.

"Which way did *who* go? Get back outa the street! Look where you're going! Who do yuh think yuh are?" The explosive sentences were punctuated with blasts from the whistle.

"I mean the Venusian," the newcomer held a copy of the newspaper in front of the policeman's eyes and pointed to the headline. The officer tore the paper away from his field of vision and cut loose with some very unmannerly remarks about truck drivers. "You see," the newcomer went on, "I'm Professor Dominicus Erkle of Delvaney College. I'm supposed to be Swix's escort. Swix, of course, is the Venusian—he un-



doubtedly caused this traffic jam. It's the seventh he's caused since he got away from me an hour ago."

The officer jerked his thumb.

"He went that way," he said, plopping the whistle into his mouth. "Get outa the street! Beat it! Quit bothering me."

Professor Dominicus Erkle of Delvaney College hurried off with a swish of his coattails. What could Swix be doing? Swix, rather oddly built perhaps, was hardly a big enough freak to tie up traffic for blocks. There were many human beings who walked the streets every day that might do a better job. There was a woman just ahead of Professor Erkle who was pigeon-toed and who had a body like a figure 5, and was certainly far funnier than Swix.

Erkle rounded a corner. Bobbing along toward a fountain in a park across the street was a parka and a cape-like overcoat. The professor heaved a sigh of relief. There was Swix.

Close behind the Venusian trotted a pale-faced, slender man, who glanced apprehensively over his shoulder at a third figure, a man with a beefy red face, who shook a clenched fist at the smaller figure.

"Sock me when I wasn't lookin', will ya!" the red-faced man shouted. "Why, yuh little shrimp! I'll moider yuh!"

The roar of rage echoed from the row of tall buildings flanking the park.

Swix whirled. With a graceful, circling motion, his arm rose and lifted the parka from the huge, pie-sized ear. The other hand dropped into the pocket of the cape and brought forth the pipes.

"I'll moider yuh!" sang the pipes.

The slender man ran around behind Swix.

"Save me!" he pleaded.

Swix suddenly caught sight of Professor Erkle. From the pipes came a long, eerie note.

The world turned topsy-turvy for Professor Erkle. His conscious mind seemed to disconnect itself from the rest of his body. He could think, analyze; his senses were intact; yet he seemed to have no control over himself.

He looked at his legs and found himself walking across the street toward Swix.

On all sides of him the world suddenly ceased motion. Brakes of motor cars, trucks and busses screamed to a halt. Pedestrians stood dead in their tracks.

Beefy-face had stopped his charge and stood with hating eyes fixed on the slender man behind Swix.

Only Professor Erkle moved. But his movement was not his own. The professor suddenly realized that the men of Venus who had come by space ship to the earth might appear goofy as a radio comedian, but they were endowed with a power that could not be matched by anything man had developed.

Could it be mass hypnotism? Professor Erkle rejected the idea. Perhaps there was a hypnotic principle at the base of this power, but it was something more.

The pipes had something to do with this funny business. It was an eerie sort of music that Swix was playing now. There was a recognizable melody that might be written out, but that was not all. It was the overtones and undertones that seemed to control the professor's movements.

A sudden thought flashed across the professor's mind. *Supersonics!* That was it.

Swix took the pipes from his mouth



and ducked his head with a grin, like a bashful child.

**P**ROFESSOR Erkle became himself again.

"You certainly had me worried, Swix," he said. "Where on earth have you been?"

Swix raised the pipes to his mouth. They seemed to speak!

"There . . . and there . . . and there . . ."

As the words shrilled from the instrument, Professor Erkle visualized the places and traffic jams.

The process was cut short by a roar from behind as Beefy-face charged toward the timid man.

"He did it!" cried the timid man, pointing at Swix. "He made me hit you."

Beefy-face skidded to a stop, directly in front of Swix.

"Lissen, Strange-as-it-Seems! What yuh tryin' to pull off around here?"

The pipes shrilled again:

"Pull in your ears, Wise Guy!"

Beefy-face's ears suddenly curled into rolls on each side of his head. Beefy-face roared and drew up his fist for a swing at Swix. The pipes gave a faint little *tweep*. Beefy-face froze into rigidity.

Swix played a little tune on the pipes and started walking toward the street. Professor Erkle found that he and the timid man were following.

It was reminiscent of the Pied Piper, this little procession led by the noseless man with big ears, and the professor wondered if there might be a basis of truth in this folk tale. Perhaps there had been a previous visit of Venusians to the earth—but of course this was pure fancy with no evidence to support it.

"Don't you think you've disrupted things about enough for today?" the professor asked Swix. "Couldn't we

go someplace where we can talk things over, quietly?"

"A good idea, my friend," Swix played on his pipes. He stopped at the street. A taxi swerved to the curb and the three boarded. Professor Erkle had not expected the timid man to come along and the timid man revealed by his expression that he had not expected to come along either.

"Really," he said, "I hate to leave you, but I must. I live in the suburbs—in Wyland Park—and I've already missed my regular train—" He reached into his hip pocket. An expression of horror swept his face as he found his billfold missing. "Goodness! I've been robbed."

"Forget it!" Swix commanded on his pipes.

The worried look disappeared.

The taxi driver turned. "Where youse want to go?" he asked.

"We might go to my place," Professor Erkle suggested. "I can accommodate us all."

"Okay," tweeped Swix.

Professor Erkle gave the address. As the taxi leaped forward the professor noticed that the flag on the taxi meter was still up.

"We ought to tell him about it," he said to Swix. The Venusian nodded and the professor spoke to the driver. "Of course, we'd like a free ride, but the fare means more to you than it does to us."

"All right, buddy, if you insist," the driver said, slamming down the flag.

Swix nodded. The sad eyes closed and he seemed to doze. The professor watched him. When he was certain Swix was asleep, he turned to the timid man.

"I think introductions are in order," he said. "As long as we are in the same boat."



"Oh! I forgot you did not know me, Professor Erkle," said the timid man. "I've heard you speak so often at educational meetings that I feel acquainted with you. My name is Smytlewaite—Herbert Smytlewaite. I'm a teacher at Brookings school."

"M-m-m!" The name of the school sounded familiar and the professor did not wish to offend the man by asking what sort of a school it was.

**"DO YOU REALIZE, Mr. Smytlewaite, that we, perhaps, stand between civilization and chaos?"**

Smytlewaite started. "Is it really as bad as this? I thought Swix was just playful."

"If he were only playful, we'd have nothing to fear," the professor said. "But I sense something wrong. Things are getting out of control. Swix is playful like a lion—he's all right until he gets hungry."

"Perhaps we'd better feed him," Smytlewaite suggested.

"No, I was speaking figuratively. This Venusian expedition to the earth probably was attempted with a profit motive. While Swix and his people resemble human beings—"

"Hardly!" Smytlewaite glanced at the huge ear protruding from beneath the parka, the saucer-like eyes, and the absent nose.

"—Well more human than anything else," the professor went on. "Anyhow, we can expect them to have human faults. With his pipes he can bring the world to his feet. He has a weapon mightier than the sword, mightier than the pen, mightier than anything ever invented. He can make man more of a fool than he is already!"

"You seem to know more about this creature than I," Smytlewaite said.

"I was sent to the space ship by my college this afternoon to investigate the Venusians," the professor explained. "I invited Swix, the leader of the expedition, to visit the college. There are three other Venusians, all technicians, on the ship. Swix eluded me in the city and caused considerable havoc. If the other three Venusians can rule man with a flute, and if they're loose, mankind will be a race of slaves tomorrow morning."

Smytlewaite shook his head sadly. "Why is it that every time someone mentions an interplanetary trip to the earth, one thinks about the invader as trying to make slaves of humanity. Couldn't a visitor come here for purely scientific purposes?"

"Swix has shown absolutely no interest in anything scientific."

"What is the basis of the power Swix has?" Smytlewaite said.

"I've concluded that there's some supersonic overtones behind the audible sounds made by the pipes," Professor Erkle said. "The Venusian atmosphere probably is different from ours and naturally the aural development of the Venusians would be different. We can expect them to be able to hear and to produce overtones and sounds that man can't hear."

"Now, we know that music has powers that are not completely known. Take that song—I forget the name of it—that caused so many suicides in Hungary a few years back. We know that music can 'pep you up' or let you down; thrill you or bore you. Music can affect a man's mood, change his disposition—do a lot of things. We know that Caruso could break a glass with vibration from his voice. Rhythm can destroy buildings and wreck bridges. It can cure special types of insanity."

"In addition to the music we hear, there is music we cannot hear. There



are notes too low and too high for the human ear to pick up, but those notes exist. Man has used this kind of music—supersonic music—to kill disease germs, to detect submarines in wartime, to fight and control certain blood diseases, and to break down chemicals. We know such music exists because we have detected it and manufactured it with electrical devices.”

“How?” asked Smytlewaite.

“Well, the most usual method is to run an electric current through a crystal. The crystal changes length under influence of the current. By interrupting the current at regular intervals it can be made to vibrate. By making the crystal vibrate many thousand times a second a supersonic note is produced. Swix probably produces the supersonics in a different manner—bats can make supersonic cries here on earth and there’s no reason why Swix couldn’t do it here and on Venus.”

The taxi suddenly came to a halt in front of Professor Erkle’s home. Swix awakened and got out of the car. So did Smytlewaite. Professor Erkle waited while the cab driver looked at the meter.

**I**N THE professor’s apartment, Swix grew wide awake. Professor Erkle opened a can of beans and warmed them, and prepared coffee for the group. When the three had eaten, the professor lit his pipe. He turned accusingly on Swix, who had put away his pipes.

“You came here for a purpose,” Swix!” the professor said. “You came to earth on a mission of conquest! You want to make humanity your slaves! It’s a war of the worlds!”

Swix blinked. He reached into his pocket and brought out the pipes. His answer didn’t come in English words,

but the thought seemed to thread through the music, perfectly clear to the listeners.

“Then the record of our previous visit still exists?” Swix asked.

“Your previous visit?”

“Thousands of years ago one of our expeditions landed on earth—near a place called Hamlin—”

“The Pied Piper!” chorused Erkle and Smytlewaite.

“Ah! You know the story? We did make a few slaves that time, but we regretted it. It was a cruel thing to do.”

“What are you going to do this time?”

“You misjudge the Venusians, professor. We are a peaceful race and our motive of visiting you is to trade. We wish to trade some of our sounds for some of yours.”

“Sounds?”

“Sounds are a commodity on Venus. We use our music to heal. We have brought about remarkable physical transitions through the use of sounds. Many of the sounds made by the captives of our first expedition have been preserved in records and we have discovered some remarkable healing properties in the class of sounds you call *music*. We came for more of your sounds. In exchange, we will give you some of ours.”

“Heaven forbid!” muttered Smytlewaite.

“We’d gladly give you any of our sounds,” Professor Erkle said, “but it so happens that most of our modern music is copyright. We’d have to deal with the copyright owners for the Venusian rights. I don’t know if they’d exchange their songs for yours or not. And how would you take the music to Venus without taking the instruments that play the music?”

“We have a recording machine,” Swix tootled.



"Of course! No doubt like our phonograph!"

"Ahem," interrupted Smytlewaite. "May I suggest that the exchange of sounds be made at my school, Brookings, for obvious reasons?"

Professor Erkle stared at Smytlewaite. Of course, why hadn't he thought of it before? Brookings school was a school for the deaf. If Swix had any ulterior motive behind his visit, it would fail if his music could not be heard.

**T**HERE was little difficulty in finding a music publisher willing to exchange his latest copyrights for unpublished Venusian music.

"This Swix claims his people supplied the original Pied Piper," the professor said. "You know the old saying: 'Invent a better mouse trap and the world will beat a bath to your door.' It's a short-cut to riches, sir!"

The idea seemed to impress the publisher.

"Of course, if his music can really catch rodents—"

"It might even catch bed-bugs, and lice, and cockroaches!"

"M-m-. Maybe we could trade him a little Stephen Foster—it's in the public domain and maybe Swix wouldn't know the difference—"

"But wouldn't that be dishonest?" the professor asked.

"Oh, no. That's only good business. After all, he doesn't know any Stephen Foster music, does he? We're giving him something."

The argument didn't seem just right, but the professor had never been in the publishing business and so he couldn't tell whether the proposition was good business or bad ethics.

**S**WIX appeared for the recording at Brookings college after a

week of trying experiences. Frequently the Venusian had managed to escape from Professor Erkle's apartment and wander through town, causing people to do utterly ridiculous things. But now Swix was perfectly quiet and agreeable.

The Venusian seemed impressed by the students, smiling, congenial and young. But he did not know they could not hear the compliments he played on his pipes. Later when he tried some of his supersonics he grew angry because the students refused to obey the musical commands.

Professor Erkle and Mr. Smytlewaite, their ears stuffed with cotton, addressed the Venusian.

"Now you understand, Mr. Swix," said the professor, "we want music to catch mice—and rats. You don't need to give us fancy stuff at first, but just a good old rodent-catching swing. That is the bread and butter load that the publisher wants. After that you can fill up the records with something of scientific value."

"I seem to have lost my touch," Swix sang on his pipes. "My music doesn't have any effect on these young people. Maybe we'd better call off the deal?"

"Oh, no! These young people are especially trained. They are unaffected by tonal disturbances. I'm sure your music will work on the rats."

"Um. I'll make it good and strong," Swix said.

Swix stood before the microphone. The mutes adjusted the recording machinery and the professor and Smytlewaite took up posts behind a glass panel outside the room.

Strange chords of supersonic melody rattled the walls of the building. Rats crawled from their holes and died horribly.

Swix's fingers flew with lightning



rapidity over his pipes. The watchers felt the molecules of their blood bubble against the walls of their veins and their hair stood on end and swayed with the rhythm.

Swix's wide eyes grew wider. His face turned red as he puffed his cheeks. The expression was one of amazement and later of anger as he watched the students go methodically about their tasks, undisturbed by the beat of the pipes.

All about insects, disease germs, rats, mice, bacteria and even grass outside the building died. But the human beings remained intact. The students did not understand the Venusian's anger, and they paid no attention to it. They did not know the strangeness of the music, for none had ever heard music.

Swix played on until he dropped into a chair from exhaustion. He gave up. He fell asleep. An ambulance carried him back to the space ship.

As Venusian technicians dragged their leader into the craft, Swix placed the pipes to his lips and voiced a strange, wordless command:

"Get away from this damned place!"

**"H**EAVENS! What do you suppose is the matter with Swix?" asked the professor, as a taxi sped them back to the music publisher's.

"He probably was angry because his audience was unappreciative," said Smytlewaite. "I've heard that artists are that way. But I really feel that Swix intended some harm to my pupils. Since we've figured out that he was of the race that bred the Pied Piper, I haven't trusted him."

"I should like to hear his music."

"Do you think it's safe?" Smytlewaite asked timidly.

The discs were taken into a soundproof room in the music publisher's headquarters. Professor Erkle adjusted a phonograph and started the record.

There was a scratching noise and then a chant began:

"Huxtra, final, four-star. . . ."

A strange feeling came over Smytlewaite. He felt as though the cells of his body were churning over and over. Quickly he withdrew and closed the door, leaving Professor Erkle alone in the room.

An hour later, the professor had not emerged. Two hours passed. Still the door did not open. Smytlewaite grew uneasy and spoke to the publisher.

"Perhaps we'd better see—"

"Oh, he's all right. You know these crazy scientists."

But Smytlewaite noticed the publisher was nervous.

More minutes sped by. On the street below came the cry of a newsboy:

"Huxtra, final, four star. Hiya! Venusian ship crashes on moon! Readall abowtit! Huxtra."

"Frustration! The Venusians wanted to do something and failed. They lost control of themselves and their ship!" Smytlewaite said. He dashed toward the soundproof room to tell the professor.

There was a scraping noise inside the room. The place was a mass of wreckage.

Seated on top of a pile of broken discs, chewing the wax pieces, sat a big brown rat, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I wanna go to Venus," said the rat. "They've got men on Venus, but there aren't any rats. Not even a little mouse."

The voice sounded strangely like Professor Erkle's.



# TRAIL'S END

by Walter Kubitius

Blok! Blok!" said the Quinto bird and pointed the way down the trail.

**B**EAVER NEVER thought that a man could be so thirsty and live. His lips were parched and his throat dry and hoarse, but he did not dare open his tank to see if there was water. There was none.

Sixteen days ago—or was it sixteen years ago? Beaver could not tell the difference. It was only yesterday that their rocket ship crashed and an almost perfect crime had backfired, leaving him in the middle of nowhere.

No, he was muddled. The crash did not happen yesterday but sixteen days ago. Yesterday was the day he ran out of water. Today was the day he would find the oasis that the footprints led to.

Or was there water at the end of the footprints? Was there any water at all on this blasted hell-hole of a planet! A spasm of pain shook him and he thought his head was cracking. In a moment the attack passed and he remembered who he was and where he was. Stanton Adams, of Carboni 58 Mining Corporation, incorporated on Mars seven years ago. He was somewhere in the middle of the Martian desert, lost and alone. Alone, that is, but for the strange Quinto bird that waddled along next to him. Its single never-blinking eye looked mournfully up at him whenever he spoke.

In spite of himself and the agony that was searing his throat, Beaver smiled. One sight of the Quinto bird



and a man had to smile. There just couldn't be any such animal! Part-bird, part-duck and part-frog, it combined the most ridiculous elements of each into a ludicrous, deformed body that excited laughter rather than interest.

Beaver wondered idly what it ate or drank. In the past two weeks while he was dying of thirst and hunger he had not seen it partake of anything.

"Quinto," he mumbled once, many days ago.

**"B**LOK!" the bird said, waddling up closer to him and looking at him.

"I killed Benton."

"Blok! Blok!"

"It was so easy," Beaver said, walking and listening to the crunching of Martian sand under his feet. "The idea came to me suddenly after we crashed. I stabbed him in the back with a splinter of quillium metal. Do you know what quillium metal is, Quinto?"

"Blok!" the bird said, shaking its head as if despairingly.



"It's a metal, Quinto, stronger than steel, far more durable and only one-tenth as light. When the rescue party finds him they'll say that the crash drove the shaft of metal into his back and killed him. But it was I who did it, Quinto, only they'll never know. It was I."

"Blok! Blok!" the bird said, jumping up and down a few times and flapping his wings excitedly before him. It stopped and nodded its head sagely and then looked up at Beaver with its one eye. Its head was turned slightly, questioningly.

"You think I was very clever and you want to know why I did it?" Beaver asked and then gasped for air.

Quickly he put the tube from the oxygen tank to his mouth and breathed. In a few moments the fit passed and he went on. The bird watched him concernedly.

"Benton was my partner," he said, "I had to get him out of the way."

He stopped and with his arm waved a wide gesture that included the entire horizon.

"What do you see, Quinto?" he asked.

The bird looked around him at the plain of red sand that surrounded them as far as the eye could see.

"Blok!" he said sadly, lifting his wings up and down in a motion of futility.

"Nothing?" Beaver said grimly. "That's because you are a Martian. I don't see a desert. I see five years from now the richest quillium mines in the universe. I see rockets from Earth and from Venus landing here for the metal which makes atomic industry and power possible. The man who first lays claim to this desert will own the greatest industry, Quinto. That is why I killed Benton."

"Blok!"

"Do you know why I am telling you this?" he asked quietly through thick swollen lips.

"Blok!"

Beaver's knees buckled under him and he fell upon the sand. Weakly, he tried to push himself up but only fell backward to a sitting position.

He leaned forward, hands covering his face and convulsive sobs shook his frail body.

"Because I'm lost!" he sobbed brokenly, "Lost! Lost! In this damned Martian desert with nothing but a crazy bird around me! I'm lost! I'll die of thirst! I don't know where I am! I don't know what to do!"

He fell forward again, rolling on the ground and crying upon the hot desert sand. Finally, weak and exhausted, he lay still and gasped for air. Quinto, saying nothing, sat a few feet away and watched him silently.

When the fit of desperation had passed and he had regained control of himself, Beaver sat up. His eyes immediately fell upon Quinto, the only thing that moved, lived or could be seen in the desert.

"Well?" he asked sullenly, "What do you want? Why do you sit like that? Why don't you say something?"

"Blok!"

"Damn you!" he shouted. Angrily he picked up a handful of sand and flung it at the bird. Quinto jumped back a few feet and sat down again, looking at Beaver. Its expression was one of such sadness and pity that Beaver shamefacedly and nervously got to his feet once more.

"Must get a grip on myself," he mumbled as he brushed the dust from him, "Can't afford to get hysterical. Too much sun, I guess. Have to get going."



He adjusted the tanks upon his back and moved on. The Martian desert was still as red. The sun was still as bright. The horizon was still as empty of anything that promised hope. Everything was as it was the day before. Only there was less food. Less water.

"Mustn't think of that," he said.

**T**HAT HAD happened on the eleventh day. He had lost his compass on the fourth day following the crash of the Minotaur.

With his compass had gone all his hopes. Somewhere along his trek he had deflected from his course. All that was necessary was the deflection of one single degree. Even half a degree! And he was lost. Hopelessly lost.

This was the twelfth day.

So dazed was he by the glare of the sun and so dulled by his thirst and hunger that Beaver stood standing still for a full minute before he had realized what he saw.

He was walking along as hopelessly and uselessly as before when he came across them on the sands of the Martian desert.

There—before him—on the sand—footprints!

Yes! He shouted to himself, footprints of human beings like himself! Possibly explorers in search of old ruins. Perhaps a rescue party for him, perhaps miners. But whoever it was, they were the footprints of human beings. And human beings meant food and water.

There were three sets of footprints in the sand. Three people. They crossed his path at an oblique angle. They came from one end of the desert and stretched limitlessly to the other.

"Blok! Blok!" Quinto said, standing by the footprints and pointing with one wing in the direction towards which they went.

"These are human footprints!" Beaver said excitedly, "They're the footprints of Earth men! Do you know anything about them? Nod your head if you understand me."

"Blok!" Quinto said, nodding his head.

"Where do they go? To the City of Muria?"

"Blok! Blok!" The bird shook its head negatively.

"To a mining town on the edge of the desert?"

"Blok! Blok!" No.

"To an oasis?" he asked, holding his breath.

"Blok!" Quinto's beak went up and down in the universal symbol for assent. Yes!

"How many days from here? Two?"

No.

"Three?"

No.

"Four?"

Yes! Beaver almost fainted from joy. He would find water and men and help. He would be saved!

"I only hope you know what I am saying," he said nervously, a flicker of fear passing through him, "Nod your head twice if there is water—drinking water—in an oasis four days walk from here."

Quinto's head went up and down twice.

"Blok!" he said as if that settled all matters and lifted a wing in the direction towards which the footprints led.

For three days they had been following the footprints and for three days Beaver peered anxiously at the horizon but saw nothing. The Quinto bird walked faster and faster each day as if anxious to be there as soon as possible. Many times Beaver had to cry out for him to stop.

On the third day they came across



two other sets of footprints in the sand that joined the main stream of footprints as one river joins another.

"The first set of footprints," Beaver said, "the one you and I came into, were made by three men."

"Blok!" the bird said, nodding its head.

"The two sets we saw today were of two men each. But each set had the prints of a Quinto bird with them. Were those footprints yours?"

"Blok!"

"Were those footprints yours? Nod your head for yes and shake it for no."

"Blok!" Quinto said and waddled on, its head motionless.

Either the Quinto bird did not understand or did not choose to answer. Whichever it was, Beaver did not have the strength or energy to try to find out. When evening came he slept soundly, Quinto standing by him.

**I**N THE MORNING of the fourth day Beaver awoke to find Quinto's eyes upon him as usual. Mechanically Beaver reached for the tank and put it to his lips, when nothing came he threw it away in disgust. A cold chill went up and down his spine as he remembered.

There was no water.

Wearily, unable to open his parched mouth, he got to his feet. Dulled by the pain that wracked his body he stood dazedly, not knowing what to do and wondering if this was death.

Quinto jumped up and down in sudden excitement, his claws tearing at the red sand till a cloud of dust enveloped him.

"Blok! Blok!" he said until Beaver noticed him. Then the bird stepped to one side and dramatically pointed

with his wing toward a spot on the rim of the horizon.

Clearly and distinctly Beaver saw it. The spot on the horizon was a group of trees. It was an oasis in the red desert! Quinto had not lied!

Staring at it until his eyes were almost blinded by the brilliant red of the sand around him, he staggered on to the oasis, Quinto leading the way. By noon they reached it.

**T**HE OASIS was the usual one encountered occasionally in the midst of Martian deserts. It was a large clump of trees that fought a losing battle against the encroaching red sand that blighted the face of the planet. In time the battle would be lost, but while it was there it meant hope and salvation for Beaver.

Beaver painfully made his way to the oasis, stumbling, falling and crawling as he did. In his mind's eye there was thought only of the pool of water he would find in the center.

When he fell the sharp acid sand cut into his flesh and bit sharply. Beaver did not feel the pain nor care for the red blood that dripped from his elbows and knees to the sand underneath. There was only one thought in his mind as he made his way to the oasis. There was water there. Good Martian water to drink. Water!

When he entered the oasis he felt immediately its cooling effect as the branches of the trees protected him from the sun's rays. He stumbled over many rocks and through thick heavy bushes as he made his way to the center, Quinto always leading him and croaking loudly.

Beaver broke through a bush and stopped abruptly on the edge of the clearing that was the center.

There not far before him like a blue mirror set upon the ground, a



touch of color in a red world, was a pool of water. Dying of thirst as he was, it was not towards this that his gaze wandered. Directly before him on the other side of the clearing, past the pool, was a giant black statue whose single-eyed head was barely covered by the tops of the trees. The statue was as old as Mars itself, he felt, and it was looking at Beaver.

Quinto left his side and flew to the foot of the statue. Here it stood in silence, wings taut before it as if in prayer. It was then that Beaver realized the statue was of Quinto himself or of Quinto's God.

Beaver weakly leaned against a tree for support and then saw something else that was before him.

Directly around the pool of water were, not seven laughing prospectors or explorers as he had thought he would find, but seven bare white skeletons. Without clothes. Without weapons. Without flesh.

A glint of sunlight fell from the tree tops to the pool. It danced for a moment upon the edge of a tiny wave and then vanished. Sobbing, Beaver made his way from the edge of the clearing to the pool itself. He fell a few feet before it and crawled desperately past the white skeletons between him and the water. When he reached the side of the pool he cupped his hands for water.

"Blok! Blok! Blok!" the Quinto bird screeched and flew upon Beaver's prostrate body, its taloned claws digging into his back.

Before Beaver died his hands felt the clean soothing coolness of Martian water—a coolness that only a man who crossed the Martian desert can know. His hands were wet to the wrists.

"Blok! Blok! Blok!" the Quinto bird screamed savagely as it tore the flesh off the body and deposited it at the feet of its God.

## **EARTHLIGHT ON THE MOON**

*by Lilith Lorraine*

Yes, we shall see them, men against the stars,  
A federated planet, proud and free;  
When grown weary of their pygmy wars,  
They hurl their legions through eternity.

Yes, we shall see their silver star-ships daring  
Wherever worlds are waiting to be won,  
Against the battlements of darkness faring,  
Against the flaming fortress of the sun.

And when at last their gods of greed they leaven,  
And glorify the man of simple worth,  
Then we shall see them pluck the stars from heaven,  
And set them in the diadem of earth.

Yes, poets at last shall sing and lovers croon  
Beneath the emerald earth-light on the moon.





**W**E ARE TRYING to catch up with the great number of letters that have come in commenting on our April issue (and some on our February number) and are going to try to squeeze as many in *The Vortex* as we can. But if we fail to get your letter in, don't get angry. We're certainly doing our best and we are grateful to all our readers for their comments. We hope that you will all write in to let us know how we made out with this number.

Without any further ado, we pick up a letter from **Charles Hidley** of New York City who says:—

Being a relative old-timer in this field, you realize with what affection the readers hold an editor who sends out his book ahead of the obvious date of publication; so here are the extreme thanks for the three weeks cut off the waiting time.

Oddly enough, the fantasy section is better this time and the stf-section is a little worse. The Bok cover was magnificent and proves that yellow is the best back-drop color so far used. You mention in the *Vortex* a title, *Stirring Fantasy*; could this be the new name of SSS? If so, it is better—although I prefer Science-Fantasy. The pix were poorer this time and there were much too many shorts.

"Rebirth of Tomorrow" and "White Worm" were first in their in-

dividual sections. I have never read such a graphically romantic description of the Ice Age as portrayed by Smith. Bok's art was good, but I prefer actual depiction to symbolism. Hugh Raymond has told a tight, compact and human story in his novel-ette; it is the best of the three stories that I have read authored by him. Forte was inaccurate and bad. When he started illustrating his work was constantly good—now 2-dimensional.

"Castle on Outerplanet" and "Black Flames" are next. In comparison to previous efforts both authors slipped terribly here. But they were good on their own.

Keller exonerated himself with the very weird "Calypso's Island," which was illustrated superbly by Mr. B.—after that dud of last issue. Also in third place was a brief tale that was smashing satire with the almost disgusting casualness in which the human frailties were so horribly exposed. Corwin's "Rocket of 1955" has the honor of being so selected and will prove to be the most compelling short of the year. Another thrilling short, "The Brontosaurus," was fourth in stf section, and Bellin's clever "Touching Point" the same in the weirds. "Cosmophobia" and "Swing Low"—the idiomatic madness of the latter alone would make it outre—were fifth. In the sixth spot, two grand shorts "!!!" and "The Doll Master".

Best pics: Bok, Hunt, Kyle and Forte's weird. Dep'ts swell; thanks for explanations for the story-less cover and the Bok character studies.



No, we are not changing the title of our magazine. *Stirring Fantasy* is the inner title for the fantasy half of *Stirring Science Stories*. See the running title on page tops after this department. We were pleased at your response to Hugh Raymond's "Rebirth of Tomorrow." We were not certain ourselves how that Well-sian type of story would go over but it did, and how! Proof of that seems to be forthcoming from **Forrest J Ackerman** of Hollywood, California who air-mails:—

I have liked every story I read in the first 2 issues of SSS and number 1 of its companion, *Cosmic*! And when I can read tale after tale—21, all told—without hitting a stale one (and this after a steady diet of scien-tifantasy for 15 years) it appears "U've got something there!" I particularly enjoyed "Strange Return," "Man From the Future," (most "fannish" story I ever remember in a promag) and the idea behind "!!!" "Resilience" had me baffled—in fact, I could find no fan who understood it—till I learned of the tricky typographical error in the 2nd line that entirely altered the view-point, clearing up the confusion. So Little People should have read Brittle People! "Rocket of 1955" carried wording in its concluding sentence that's classic.

Good stories I will recommend to friends; on rare occasions I retell a tale, so well did I like it, to some particular person or group; but highest tribute I personally can pay a story is to read it to someone I believe would appreciate it. I found two persons to listen to "Rebirth of Tomorrow" and they expressed most favorable opinions at the conclusion. Applause for a truly stirring science story! This is the sort of story we meant when, in the first issue, Mor-jo and I asked for fiction of dynam-ic concept. . .humanitarianism. . .grip. I got grip, all right, in Raymond's story. First-class proscientific inspiration! I hope this spells the rebirth of an author, for I certainly should like to request more manuscripts

from him of this socially aware, psy-chologically significant, anational nature. In a word—*futurian*!

Plenty of topnotch pix packed into your mags, and I've no objections to the new-type covers. Bok's "Snake-Father," in fact, seems especially effective, as presented in the black-&-white medium. Well, here's wishing you all the luck in the *whirl*!

We hope Hugh Raymond reads this letter. Praise of that sort from the world's number one expert on science-fiction is rare praise indeed. We are glad you brought up the subject of Damon Knight's story "Resilience"; it has been preying on our mind for some time now—ever since that ghastly day when a friend pointed out the typographical error in the finished magazine. We looked up our last proofs and we find that the mistake wasn't ours; the last proofs read "Brittle People" in the second line of the story—a word that makes all the difference in the world, a key word, *the* key word. But somehow, somewhere and for some utterly and absolutely inexplicable reason, that was changed by the printers to "Little People". We hereby call to the attention of the public:—

IN THE STORY "RESILIENCE" IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE, THE FIRST WORD ON THE SECOND LINE SHOULD READ "BRITTLE" AND NOT "LITTLE".

Next a short note from **Leonard Smith** of Jersey City, N. J.:—

Your April issue of *Stirring Science Stories* is the first I've read and I think it's great. Hannes Bok is a top fantasy artist and the others: Dave Kyle, John Forte, Hunt, Coe, will each respectively receive their share of honors.

The only change I could think of is to lengthen the stories, they're much too brief. Here's how I line them up: First, Edward Bellin's "Touching Point," closely pursued by S. D. Gottesman's "The Castle on Outer-planet" and Paul Lavond's "The Doll



Master." "Black Flames," "Rebirth of Tomorrow," "The Brontosaurus" come next in any order you wish.

Don't mind my filibustering; on the level, the magazine is a headliner and I will give my regular patronage for some good stories like these. So here's wishing you luck and prosperity during the steps of progress.

Thank you. We're getting our heads turned by the constant barrage of praise and applause we seem to be getting. So we search our letters for some negative opinion. Sincerely, we find it difficult to locate any, but here is a postcard from David Glazer of Dorchester, Mass.:—

Quote page 128 in the Feb. *Stirring Science Stories*—"Mort Weisinger and Ray Palmer, who edit a couple of our feeble contemporaries," end quote.

Ye Gods, you have no contemporaries! Your magazine is in a class by itself. It stinks! Snap out of it! I may be caustic, but that is my honest opinion. Now, how about a *good* cover, and a couple of "big names." I'll be waiting.

You know, it is quite difficult to judge what to do to satisfy a note like that. Just what, for example, is considered a "good" cover? Or "big names"? Do you read names or do you read stories? Answer me that and I'll be able to get my bearings. But Joseph Gilbert of Columbia, South Carolina starts his letter by taking up that problem:—

I'm sure I don't know how you're doing it. Perhaps it's due to your apparent lack of any sort of policy, or perhaps again, it's because you're using so many excellent newcomers who can really write, and a few pros capable of the same—not "names" acquired by weary hacks simply for their rather weird ability to turn out sickening tripe by the bushel load without ever varying once from a threadbare "master" plot. Maybe it's both. At any rate, the fact remains that you're getting some of the very finest stf and fantasy published in

the field today. It's more than an accomplishment—it's a feat!

But specifically—"Rebirth of Tomorrow"; Not good, not bad. One of those things. "Blueprint": Excellent. Much better than "Bones," I thought. "The Castle on Outerplanet": S. D. Gottesman on the serious side. Unusual enough to be pleasant for a change, but I prefer old hot-foot swinging a slapstick. "!!!": Clever! Maybe I'd better forget the darn thing before it's too late! Blish seems determined to make a hack out of himself, which is more than disgusting since the guy really has what it takes. "Cabal" better than "Citadel of Thought" though that sure isn't saying much. Corwin satisfactory. I'm looking forward with immense anticipation to seeing more of him. Thompson surprisingly good. "Cosmophobia" quite passable.

The Vortex very interesting and straight-from-the-shoulder. Being an editor must agree with you—you certainly sound very happy!

"Black Flames": Woods is another of those competent but wholly unexceptional writers who never impress you the way they should. "Calypso's Island": Doctor Keller does not write pulp fiction; he writes literature. The gentleman is an artist. Even if SSS degenerates and starts printing the sort of slop the other stf mags are—and I don't believe it will—if you keep Keller, I'll still continue to buy it faithfully.

Lowndes much better than usual. Incidentally that certain something that Lowndes consistently lacks has been puzzling me for some time. Reader Kent's keen deductive prowess finally solved the problem. Lowndes hasn't, as Kent says, an individual style of his own. It's a mixture, a conglomeration of a half-hundred different styles, all of them adding up to a soulless, colorless, robot thing that is no more Lowndes than a puppet is the man who pulls the strings.

But to continue—"The Touching Point" is an old idea nicely worked out. I'm pleased to see you printing C. A. Smith, and hope you continue to regularly. He's a splendid writer,



and his stuff is so carefully and painstakingly worked out that most pulp magazines are afraid to handle it these days when overworked heroes must save overworked heroines from overworked monsters every paragraph with their overworked bare hands.

The general makeup of the magazine is quiet, dignified and neat; the illustrations uniformly excellent—with the exception of those done by Forte. Bok is superb, of course, and Hunt is doing very nicely. The black and white cover arrangement suits me, but I would like to see a Bok cover in color. The cover on the April issue was, incidentally, simply snazzy, as we lowbrows say.

Pip, pip, old artiste, and the very heartiest congratulations on the fine job you're doing. I mean it. SSS is now my 3rd favorite magazine, with only Campbell's twins ahead of it.

These long letters are getting us down. Let's see if we can find some shorter ones. Ah, here's a postcard from Eugene Francis of New York City:—

Orchids to you for the issuance of a new and novel type of science mag! There is so much to say in favor of *Stirring Science Stories* that I would be hogging space if I told it in detail. Suffice to say that it was the two types of stories under one cover and the fact that it was the very first number, that kept me reading from the first paragraph of story one to the last period on the last page. "Strange Return" was tops in the Science Fiction dept., "Thirteen O'Clock" first in Fantasy Fiction. I have been a science fiction reader since 1929. I know a good mag, by now. Yours is going places!

Short and sweet. And a letter by Bert Morgan of Detroit, Mich:—

May I make a few comments on *Stirring Science Stories* for April

1940... First I am not your youngest reader, this is not my first letter to a s.f. magazine, and I don't think your magazine is the best in the world. However, it is excellent and rates among the four best in the field of science and fantasy fiction. *Cosmic Stories*, by the way, is one of the other three top raters.

General layout good, but cover not so good. Stories... best story—"Rebirth of Tomorrow" excellent. Good stories—"Cosmophobia," "Castle on Outerplanet," "The Other." Lousy stories—"The Rocket of 1955" and "The Brontosaurus"; even I could write better stories and if ye Ed will read one I will send it in just to prove my point. "Black Flames," by the way, was very intriguing.

Now—more space for letters requested—longer stories—less fantasy shorts—and more novels by Raymond would add zest to a magazine which even now is good in spots. Better in some and lousy in a few. Cheer up, Ed, if we didn't like it, we wouldn't bother to write you complaining, complimentary, and just plain old grouching. As there are millions of better letter writers than I, I don't imagine this will be printed, but if ye Ed has a kindly heart and does print this idiotic thing, I'll be glad to write again sometime.

Never hesitate to write to the editor. We read every letter that comes in and keep track of everyone's opinions. And if you think you can write a good story, you're certainly all invited to do so and send it in. Whenever possible, we'll give you an opinion on it even if we can't accept it. And where we can accept it, we will.

The next issue of *Stirring Science Stories* will be on sale June 1st. We'll see you all then.

Donald A. Wollheim, Editor.









# Mr. Packer Goes to Hell

FANTASY NOVELETTE

by Cecil Corwin

(Author of "Thirteen O'Clock," "The Reversible Revolutions," etc.)

Almarish Packer found himself in a peck of trouble when he lost his kingdom. A dizzier sequel to the dizzy yarn of "Thirteen O'Clock." A sequel the readers demanded.

## CHAPTER I

"**D**RAT IT!" cursed Almarish, enchanter supreme and master of all Ellil. "Drat the sizzling dingus!" Lifting his stiffly embroidered robes of imperial purple, he was dashing to right and left about his bedroom, stooping low, snatching with his jewelled hands at an elusive something that skidded about the floor with little, chuckling snickers.

Outside, beyond the oaken door, there was a sinister thud of footsteps, alternately firm and normal slaps of bare sole against pavement with sinister tappings of bone. "Slap-click. Slap-click. Slap-click," was the beat. Almarish shot a glance over his shoulder at the door, his bearded face pale with strain.

"Young 'un," he snapped to an empty room, "this ain't the silly season. Come out or when I find you I'll jest take your pointed ears and twist them till they come off in my hands."

Again there was the chuckling snicker, this time from under the bed. Almarish, his beard streaming, dove headlong, his hands snapping shut. The snicker turned into a pathetic wail.

"Leggo!" shrilled a small voice. "You're crushing me, you ox!"

Outside the alternating footsteps had stopped before his door. A horny hand pounded on the solid oak.

"Be with ye in a minute," called the bearded enchanter. Sweat had broken out on his brow. He drew out his clenched fists from under the bed.

"Now, young lady!" he said grimly, addressing his prize.

The remarkable creature in his hands appeared to be young; at least she was not senile. But if ever a creature looked less like a lady it was she. From tiny feet, shod in rhinestone, high-heeled pumps to softly-waved chestnut hair at her very crown, she was an efficient engine of seduction and disaster. And to omit what came between were a sin: her voluptuous nine inches were cased in a *lame* that glittered with the fire of burnished silver, cut and fitted in the guise of an evening gown. Pouting and sullen as she was in Almarish's grasp, she hadn't noticed that the hem was scarcely below her ankles, as was intended by the unknown *courturier* who had spared no pains on her. That hem, or the maladjustment of it, revealed, in fact, that she had a pretty, though miniature, taste in silks and lacework.

"Ox!" she stormed at the bearded sorcerer. "**B**eastly oaf — you'll



squeeze me out of shape with your great, clumsy hands!"

"That would be a pity," said Almarish. "It's *quite* a shape, as you seem to know."

The pounding on the door redoubled. "Lord Almarish!" shouted a voice, clumsily feigning anxiety. "Are you all right?"

"Sure, Pike," called the sorcerer. "Don't bother me now. I have a lady with me. We're looking at my potted plants."

"Oh," said the voice of Pike. "All right—my business can wait."

"That stalled him," grunted Almarish. "But not for long. You, what's your name?"

She stuck a tiny tongue out at him.

"Look here," said Almarish gently. He contracted his fist a little and the creature let out an agonized squawk on a small scale. "What's your name?" he repeated.

"Moir," she snapped tartly. "And if your throat weren't behind all that hay I'd cut it."

"**F**ORGET THAT, Kid," he said. "Let me give you a brief *resumé* of pertinent facts:

"My name is Packer and I'm from Braintree, Mass., which you never heard of. I came to Ellil by means of a clock with thirteen hours. Unusual, eh? Once here I sized things up and began to organize on a business basis with the assistance of a gang of half-breed demons. I had three wishes, but they're all used up now. I had to send back to Braintree my grandson Peter, who got here the same way I did, and with him a sweet young witch he picked up.

"Before leaving he read me a little lecture on business reform and the New Deal. What I thought was commercial commonsense—little things

like bribes, subornation of perjury, arson, assassination and the like—he claimed was criminal. So I, like a conscientious Packer, began to set things right. This my gang didn't like. The best testimony of that fact is that the gentleman outside my door is Balthazar Pike, my trusted lieutenant, who has determined to take over.

"I learned that from Count Hacza, the Vampire, when he called yesterday, and he said that I was to be wiped out today. He wrung my hand with real tears in his eyes—an affectionate chap—as he said good-bye."

"And," snarled the creature, "ain't that too damn' bad?"

"No," said Almarish mildly. "No, because you're going to get me out of this. I knew you were good luck the moment you poked your nose through the wall and began to snicker."

Moir eyed him keenly. "What's in it for me?" she finally demanded.

There was again the pounding on the door. "Lord Almarish," yelled Balthazar Pike, "aren't you through with those potted plants yet?"

"No," called the sorcerer. "We've just barely got to the gladioli."

"Pretty slow working," grumbled the trusted lieutenant. "Get some snap into it."

"Sure, Pike. Sure. Only a few minutes more." He turned on the little creature. "What do you want?" he asked.

There was a curious catch in her voice as she answered: "A vial of tears from *le Bete Joyeux*."

"Cut out the bunk," snapped Almarish impatiently. "Gold, jewels—anything at all. Name it."

"Look, whiskers," snarled the little creature. "I told you my price and I'll stick to it. What's more I'll take you to the right place."

"And on the strength of that,"



grinned the sorcerer, "I'm supposed to let you out of my hands?"

"That's the idea," snapped Moira. "You have to trust somebody in this lousy world—why not me? After all, mister, I'm taking your word—if you'll give it."

"Done," said Almarish with great decision. "I hereby pledge myself to do everything I can to get you that whatever-it-was's tears, up to and including risk and loss of life."

"Okay, whiskers," she said. "Put me down." He obliged, and saw her begin to pace out pentacles and figures on the mosaic floor. As she began muttering to herself with great concentration he leaned his head against the door. There were agitated murmurs without.

"Don't be silly," Pike was saying. "He told me with his own mouth he had a woman—"

"Look, Bally," said another voice, one that Almarish recognized as that of a gatekeeper, "I ain't sayin' you're wacked up, but they ain't even no mice in his room. I ain't let no one in and the ectoplasmeter don't show nothin' on the grounds of the castle."

"Then," said Pike, "he must be stalling. Rourke, you get the rest of the 'breeds and we'll break down the door and settle Lord Almarish's hash for good. The lousy weakling!"

Lord Almarish began to sweat afresh and cast a glance at Moira, who was standing stock-still to one side of the mosaic design in the floor. He noted abruptly a series of black tiles in the center that he had never seen before. Then others surrounding them turned black and he saw that they were not coloring but ceasing to exist.

Apparently something of a bottomless pit was opening up beneath his palace.

**O**UTSIDE the padding and clicking of feet sounded. "Okay, boys," yelled Pike. "Get in line!" They would be swinging up a battering-ram, Almarish surmised. The shivering crash of the first blow against the oaken door made his ears ring. Futilely he braced his own brawny body against the planking and felt the next two blows run through his bones.

"One more!" yelled his trusted lieutenant. And with that one more the door would give way, he knew, and what they would do to him would be no picnic. He had schooled them well, though crudely, in the techniques of strikebreaking affected by employers of the 1880's.

"Hurry it up!" he snapped at Moira. She didn't answer, being wholly intent, it seemed, on the enlargement of the pit which was growing in the floor. It would now admit the passage of a slimmer man than the sorcerer, but his own big bones would never make it.

With agonizing slowness the pit grew, tile by tile, as the tiny creature frowned into it till her face was white and bloodless. Almarish fancied he could hear through the door the labored breathing of the half-breed demons as they made ready to swing again.

*Crash!* It came again, and only his own body kept the door from falling in fragments.

"Right—*dive!*" shrilled the little voice of Moira as the battering-ram poked through into the room. He caught her up in one hand and squeezed through into the blackness of the pit. He looked up and could see a circle of faces snarling with rage as he slid down a kind of infinitely smooth inclined tunnel. Abruptly the patch of light above



him was blotted out and there was absolutely nothing to be seen.

All Almarish knew was that he was gliding in utter blackness at some terrifying speed in excess of anything sane down to a place he knew nothing of in the company of a vicious little creature whose sole desire seemed to be to cut his throat and drink his blood with glee.

## CHAPTER II

**“W**HERE,” asked Almarish, “does this end?”

“You’ll find out,” snarled the little creature. “Maybe you’re yellow already?”

“Don’t say that,” he warned. “Not unless you want to get playfully pinched—in half.”

“Cold-blooded,” she marvelled. “Like a snake or lizard. Heart’s probably three-ventricled, too.”

“Our verbal contract,” said the sorcerer, delicately emphasizing *verbal*, “didn’t include an exchange of insults.”

“Yeah,” she said abstractedly. And though they were in the dark he could sense that she was worried. “Yeah, that’s right.”

“What’s the matter?” he demanded.

“It’s your fault,” she shrilled. “It’s your own damned fault hurrying me up so I did this!” The man knew that she was near distraction with alarm. And he could feel the reason why. They were slowing down, and this deceleration, presumably, was not on Moira’s schedule.

“We on the wrong line?” he asked coolly.

“Yes. That’s about it. And don’t ask me what happens now, because I don’t know, you stupid cow!” Then she was sniffing quietly in his hand

and the sorcerer was wondering how he could comfort her without breaking her in two.

“There now,” he soothed tentatively, stroking her hair carefully with the tip of a finger. “There, now, don’t get all upset—”

It occurred to him to worry on his own account. They had slowed to a mere snail’s pace, and at the dramatically, psychologically correct moment a light appeared ahead. A dull chanting resounded through the tube:

*“Slimy flesh,  
Clotted blood,  
Fat, white worms,  
These are food.”*

From Moira there was a little, strangled wail. “Ghouls!”

“Grave-robbers?” asked the sorcerer. “I can take care of them—knock a few heads together.”

“No,” she said in thin, hopeless tones. “You don’t understand. These are the real thing. You’ll see.”

As they slid from the tube onto a sort of receiving table Almarish hastily pocketed the little creature. Then, staring about him in bewilderment, he dropped his jaw and let it hang.

The amiable dietary ditty was being ground out by a phonograph tending which there was a heavy-eyed person dressed all in grey. He seemed shapeless, lumpy, like a half-burned tallow candle on whose sides the drops of wax have congealed in half-teardrops and cancerous clusters. He had four limbs and, on the upper two, hands of a sort and wore what could be roughly described as a face.

“You,” said Almarish. “What’s—where—?” He broke off in confusion as a lacklustre eye turned on him.

From a stack beside him the crea-



ture handed him a pamphlet. The sorcerer studied the title: "Workers! Fight to preserve and extend the glorious revolution which has befallen you!"

He read further: "There are those among you who still can remember the haphazard days of individual enterprise and communal wealth. Those days were bad; many starved for lack of nutritious corpses. And yet people died Above; why this poverty in the midst of plenty?"

"There were Above as usual your scouts who cast about for likely members of your elite circle, those who wished to live forever on the traditional banquets of the Immortal Eaters. Fortunate indeed was the scout who enrolled Ingvar Hemming. For it was he who, descending to the Halls of the Eaters, saw the pitiful confusion which existed.

"Even as he had brought order into the vast holdings which had been his when Above he brought order to the Halls. A ratio was established between production and consumption and civilized habits of life-in-death were publicized. Nowadays no Immortal Eater would be seen barbarously clawing the flesh from a corpse as in the bad old days; in these times your Safety-Tasty cans are the warrant of cleanliness and flavor."

Bug-eyed, Almarish turned to the back of the booklet and scanned advertisements:

For Those Guests Tonight!

*Why Not*

A Bottle of SAFETY-TASTY  
EYES

10 per bottle—Hemming-Pakt

"5 blue, 5 brown—remember?"

There's STRENGTH

s-p-e-e-d

*grace*

In A HEMMING HEARSE

"To serve we strive

The dead-alive."

He tore his eyes from the repulsive pages. "Chum," he demanded hoarsely of the phonograph attendant, "what the hell goes on here?"

"Hell?" asked the ghoul in a creaky, slushy voice. "You're way off. You'll never get there now. I buzzed the receiving desk—they'll come soon."

"I mean this thing—" gingerly he held it up between thumb and forefinger.

"Oh—that. I'm supposed to give it to each new arrival. It's full of bunk. If you could possibly get out of here, you'd do it. This ain't no paradise, not by a long shot."

"I thought," said Almarish, "that you all had enough to eat now. And if you can afford hearses you must be well off."

"**YOU THINK SO?**" asked the attendant. "I can remember back when things was different. We ate plain and liked it. And then this Hemming man—he comes down from Above, corners the supply, hires men to can it and don't pay them enough to buy it in cans. I don't understand it, but I know it ain't right."

"But who buys the—the eyes and hearses?"

"Foremen an' ex-ex-ekky-tives. And whut they are I don't know. It jest ain't jolly down here no more."

"Where you from?" asked Almarish.



"Kentucky. Met a scout 1794. Liked it and been here ever since. You change—cain't git back. It's a sad thing naow." He dummied up abruptly as a squad of ghouls approached. They were much less far gone—"changed"—than the attendant. One snapped out a notebook.

"Name?" he demanded.

"Packer, Almarish — what you will," he said, fingering an invincible dagger in his sleeve.

"Almarish—the Almarish?"

"Overlord of Ellil," he modestly confessed, assuming, and rightly, that the news of his recent deposition had not yet reached the Halls of the Eternal Eaters. "Come on a tour of inspection. I was wondering if I ought to take over this glorified cafeteria."

"I assume," said one of the reception committee — for into such it had hastily resolved itself—"you'll want to see our Vice President in charge of Inspection and Regulation?"

"You assume wrongly," said the sorcerer coldly. "I want to see the president."

"Mr. Hemming?" demanded the spokesman. All heads save that of Almarish bowed solemnly. "You—you haven't an appointment, you know."

"Lead on," ordered the sorcerer grimly. "To Mr. Hemming." Again the heads bowed.

**A**LMARISH strode majestically through the frosted-glass door simply lettered with the name and title of the man who owned the nation of ghouls body and soul.

"Hello, Hemming," said he to the man behind the desk, sitting down unbidden.

The president was scarcely "changed" at all. It was possible

that he had been eating food that he had been used to when Above. What Almarish saw was an ordinary man in a business suit, white-haired, with a pair of burning eyes and a stoop forward that gave him the aspect of a cougar about to pounce.

"Almarish," he said, "I welcome you to my—corporation."

"Yes—thank you," said the sorcerer. He was vaguely worried. Superior businessman that he was, he could tell with infallible instinct that something was wrong—that his stupendous bluff was working none too well.

"I've just received an interesting communication," said Hemming casually. "A report via rock signals that there was some sort of disturbance in your Ellil. A sort of—palace revolution. Successful, too, I believe."

Almarish was about to spring at his throat and bring down guards about his head when he felt a stirring in his pocket. Over the top of one peeked the head of Moira.

"Won't you," she said, "introduce me to the handsome man?"

Almarish, grinning quietly, brought her out into full view. With a little purr she gloriously stretched her lithe body. Hemming was staring like an old goat. "This," said the sorcerer, "is Moira."

"For sale?" demanded the president, clenching his hands till the knuckles whitened on the top of his desk.

"Of course," she drawled amiably. "At the moment a free agent. Right?" She tipped Almarish a wink.

"Of course," he managed to say regretfully, "you know your own mind, Moira, but I wish you'd stay with me a little longer."

"I'm tired of you," she said. "A lively girl like me needs them young



and handsome to keep my interest alive. There are some men—" she cast a sidelong, slumbrous glance at Hemming—"some men I'd never grow tired of."

"Bring her over," said the president, trying to control his voice. Almarish realized that there was something in the combination of endemic desirability and smallness that made an irresistible combination. He didn't know it, but that fact was being demonstrated in his own Braintree, Mass., at that very time by a shop which had abandoned full size window dummies and was using gorgeous things a little taller than Moira but scarcely as sexy. In the crowds around their windows there were four men to every woman.

His Moira pirouetted on the desk top, displaying herself.

"And," she said, "for *some men* I'll do a really extraordinary favor."

"What's that?" asked Hemming, fighting with himself to keep his hands off her. He was plainly terrified of squashing this gorgeous creature.

"I could make you," she said, "my size. Only a little taller, of course. Women like that."

"You can?" he asked, his voice breaking. "Then go ahead!"

"I have your full consent?"

"Yes," he said. "Full consent."

"Then—" a smile curved her lips as she swept her hands through the air in juggling little patterns.

A lizard about ten inches long reared up on its hind legs, then frantically skittered across the table-top. Almarish looked for Hemming, could not see him anywhere. He picked up Moira. In a sleepy, contented voice she was saying:—

"My size. Only a little taller, of course."

## CHAPTER III

**B**ACK IN THE tube from which they had been shunted into the Halls of the Eternal Eaters, as the Ghouls fancied calling themselves, Almarish couldn't get sense out of Moira. She had fallen asleep in his pocket and was snoring quietly, like a kitten that purred in its sleep.

And more than ever he marvelled at this cold-blooded little creature. She had had the routine of seduction and transformation down so pat that he was sure she had done it a hundred times—or a thousand. You couldn't tell ages in any of these unreal places; he, who should be a hundred and eight looked just thirty-five and felt fifteen years younger than that.

All the same, it would be a good thing not to give Moira full and clear consent to anything at all. That must be an important part of the ceremony.

He hoped that the ghouls would straighten themselves out now that their president was a ten-inch lizard. But there were probably twenty villainous vice-presidents assorted as to size, shape and duties to fill his place. Maybe they'd get to fighting over it, and the ghouls-in-ordinary would be able to toss them all over.

Not that he liked this way of traveling, he assured himself. It couldn't be anything half so honest as it seemed—a smooth-lined tube slanting down through solid rock. It was actually, of course, God-knew-what tricky path between the planes of existence. That thirteen-hour clock was one way, this was another, but more versatile.

Lights ahead again—red lights. He took Moira from his pocket and shook her with incredible delicacy.



"You ox!" she snapped. "Trying to break my back?"

"Sorry," he said. "Lights—red ones. What about them?"

"That's it," she said grimly. "Do you feel like a demi-god—particularly?"

"No," he admitted. "Not—particularly."

"Then that's too damn bad," she snapped. "Remember you have a job to do. When you get past the first trials and things wake me up."

"Trials?" he demanded.

"Yes. Always—Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Norse—they all have a Weigher of Souls. It's always the same place, of course, but they like the formality. Now let me sleep."

He put her back into his pocket and tried to brake with his hands and feet. No go. But soon he began to decelerate. Calling up what little he knew of such things, he tried to draw a desperate analogy between molecules standing radially instead of in line and whatever phenomenon this was which made him—who was actually, he knew, not moving at all—not move more slowly than before, when he had been standing still at an inconceivably rapid pace.

The lights flared ahead into a bloody brilliance, and he skidded onto another of the delivery tables of sardonix.

A thing with a hawk face took his arm.

"Stwm stm!" it said irritably.

"VELLY SOLLY," said the sorcerer. "Me no spik—whatever in Hades you're speaking."

"R khrt sr tf mtht," it said with a clash of its beak. Almarish drew his invincible dirk and the thing shrugged disarmingly. "Chdl nfr," it grinned, sauntering off.

A Chinese approached, surveying

him. "Sholom aleichim," he greeted Almarish, apparently fooled by the beard.

"Aleichim sholom," replied the enchanter, "But you've made a mistake."

"Sorry," said the Chinese. "We'll put you on the calendar at General Sessions. Take him away!" he called sharply.

Almarish was hustled into a building and up a flight of stairs by two men in shiny blue uniforms before he had a chance to ask what the charge was. He was hustled through a pen, through innumerable corridors, through a sort of chicken-wire cage, and finally into a court-room.

"Hurrah!" yelled thousands of voices. Dazedly he looked over a sea of faces, mostly blood-thirsty.

"Tough crowd," one of the attendants muttered. "We better stick around to take care of you. They like to collect souvenirs. Arms... scalps..."

"See him?" demanded the other attendant pointing at the judge. "Used to be a Neminant Divine. This is his punishment. This and dyspepsia. Chronic."

Almarish could read the sour lines in the judge's face like a book. And the book looked as though it had an unhappy ending.

"Prisoner to the bar," wheezed the justice.

THE COURT: Prisoner, give your name and occupation.

PRISONER: Which ones, your honor? There are so many.

(Laughter and hisses)

A VOICE: Heretic—burn him!

THE COURT: Order! Prisoner, give the ones you like best. And remember—We Know All.

PRISONER: Yes, your honor, Packer, ex-overlord of Ellil.



THE COURT: Read the accusation, clerk.

CLERK: (Several words lost) did willfully conspire to transform said Hemming into a lizard ten inches long.

(Laughter in the court)

THE COURT: Poppycock!

RECORDING CLERK: How do you spell that, your honor?

THE COURT: Silence! I said Poppycock!

RECORDING CLERK: Thank you, your honor.

PRISONER'S COUNSEL: Your honor (several words lost) known (several words lost) childhood (several words lost).

THE COURT: Prisoner's counsel is very vague.

PRISONER: My God—is *he* my lawyer?

THE COURT: So it would appear.

PRISONER: But I never saw the man before, and he's obviously drunk, your honor!

THE COURT: *Hic!* What of it, prisoner?

PRISONER: Nothing. Nothing at all. Move to proceed.

PROSECUTING ATT'Y: I object! Your honor, I object!

THE COURT: Sustained.

(A long silence. Hisses and groans.)

THE COURT: Mr. Prosecutor, you got us into this—what have you to say for yourself?

PROSECUTING ATT'Y: Your honor, I—I—I move to proceed.

PRISONER: It's my turn, your honor. I object.

THE COURT: Overruled.

(Cheers and whistles)

VOICES: Hang him by the thumbs!

Cut his face off!

Heretic—burn him!

THE COURT: I wish it to go on record that I am much gratified by

the intelligent interest which the public is taking in this trial.

(Cheers and whistles)

PROSECUTING ATT'Y: Your honor, I see no need further to dilly-dally. This is a clear-cut case and the state feels no hesitation in demanding that the court impose maximum penalty under law—which, if I remember aright, is death per flagitacionem extremam, peine forte et dure, crucifictio ultima and inundatio sub aqua regia—in that order.

(Cheers and screams. Wild demonstration)

THE COURT: I so—

A VOICE: Hey, blue-eyes!

THE COURT: I so—

A VOICE (*the same*): Hey, you cutie-pants!

THE COURT: Prisoner.

PRISONER: Yes, your honor?

THE COURT: Prisoner, are you aware of what you have in your pocket?

PRISONER: Oh—*her*. Cute, isn't she?

THE COURT: Bring it closer. I shall make it Exhibit A.

A VOICE (*the same*): Hey—that tickles!

THE COURT: Exhibit A, have you any testimony to give?

(Demonstration, mostly whistles)

EXHIBIT A: Yes, your honor. Take me away from this horrible man! The things he's done to me—

THE COURT: Yes? Yes?

EXHIBIT A: You can't imagine. But your honor, you're not like him. You know, your honor, there are *some men* (rest of testimony lost).

THE COURT: (Comments lost)

EXHIBIT A: (Testimony lost)

THE COURT: Really! You don't mean it! Well go ahead!

EXHIBIT A: Have I your full consent?



THE COURT: You have—free, clear and legal.

EXHIBIT A: (Gestures with both hands).

THE COURT: (Turns into lizard approx. 10 in. long).

EXHIBIT A: Come on, whiskers—let's beat it!

PRISONER: I hear you talkin'!

PROSECUTING ATT'Y: Go after them, you damfools!

COURT ATTACHES: Not us, bud. What kind of dopes do we look like to you?

(Screams, howls, whistles, yells, demonstration, complete pandemonium)

## CHAPTER IV

“**H**OW WILL I KNOW,” demanded Almarish, “when I'm supposed to turn left?”

“When the three moons show up as an equilateral triangle,” said Moira, “will be high time. Now, damn you, let me go to sleep.”

“Why are you always so tired after these little transformation acts of yours?”

“You, not being a real sorcerer, wouldn't understand. But suffice it to say that any magic-worker would have to do as much. Watch out for ghosts. Good night.”

She was in his pocket again, either purring or snoring. He never could decide which was the right word. And Almarish realized that this little lady had somehow become very dear to him.

He was walking along a narrow, sullen strip of desert bordered on either side by devil-trees that lashed out with poisonous, thorny branches. The things must have had sharp ears, for they would regularly lie in wait for him and lash up as he

stepped past. Fortunately, they could not make the extra yard or two leeway he had.

Above, the three moons of the present night were shifting in a stately drill, more like dancers than celestial bodies, sometimes drawing near to an equilateral triangle but never quite achieving it. And she had been most specific about it.

There was still *le Bete Joyeux* to face, from whose eyes had to be wrung a vial of tears for purpose or purposes unknown to the sorcerer. His French was a little weak, but he surmised that the thing was a happy beast, and that to make it weep would bear looking into. He made a mental note to ask her about it. He was always asking her about things.

The devil-trees were at it again, this time with a new twist. They would snap their tentacles at him like whips, so that one or more of the darts would fly off and whizz past his face. And it was just as well that they did. One of those things would drop a rhino in full charge, Moira had told him. Odd name, Moira. Sounded Irish.

He looked up and drew his breath in sharply. The moons had formed their triangle and held it for a long, long five minutes. Time to turn left. The way was blocked, of course, by ill-tempered trees. He drew the invincible dirk, hoping that the trees did not know enough magic to render the thing just an innocent little brand, and deliberately stepped within reach of one of the trees.

It lashed out beautifully; Almarish did not have to cut at it. The tentacle struck against the blade and lopped itself clean off. The tree uttered a mournful squeal and tried to find and haul in the severed tentacle with the others. They had a way of sticking them back on again.



He slashed away heartily, counting them as they fell. With each fresh gush of pussy sap the tree wailed weaker and weaker. Finally it drooped, seemingly completely done in. Treachery, of course. He flung a lump of sandstone into the nest of arms and saw them close, slowly and with little crushing-power, around it. Were it he instead of the stone he could have hacked himself free before the thing burst into sand.

Quite boldly, therefore, he picked his way among the oozing tendrils, now and then cutting at one from the wrist. He gum-shoed past the trunk itself and saw the pulsing membranes quiver malevolently at his step. They had things like this back in Ellil; he felt more than competent to deal with them.

**B**UT GHOSTS, now—ghosts were something else again. He had never seen a ghost, though the rumors did go about. And if ever ghosts were to be seen it was in this spot.

Here the moons did not send their light—he didn't know why—and the grass underfoot was fatty, round rods. From shrubs shone a vague, reddish light that frayed on a man's nerves. There was the suggestion of a sound in the air, like the ghost itself of a noise dispersed.

"Moira," he said softly. "Snap out of it. I'm scared."

A tiny head peeked over the top of his pocket. "Yellow already?" she insultingly asked. "The master of all Ellil's turning green?"

"Look," he said. "Just you tell me what we're up against and I'll go ahead. Otherwise, no."

"Ghosts," she said. "This place is a den of them. I suppose you've heard all the stories about them and don't quite believe. Well, the stories

are true. Just forget about the whimsy *a la* John Kendrick Bangs. Ghosts aren't funny; they're the most frightening things that ever were. There's nothing you can do about them; none of the magical formulae work because they aren't even magical. They are distilled essence of terror in tactile form. There's absolutely nothing you can do with, to or about them. I can't give you a word of advice. You know what you have to do, whiskers. We're after that vial of tears."

"Right," he said. "Keep your head out—here we go."

He—they—walked into a vast glob of darkness that saturated their minds, seeped between their molecules and into their lungs and hearts.

"**O**H, MY GOD!" wailed a voice. "Oh, my God!"

Almarish didn't turn his head; kept walking straight on.

"Stranger—help me—here they come—" the voice shrilled. There was a sickening sound of crackling, then a mushy voice that spoke a few indistinguishable words.

"They're at it," said Moira tremulously. "Don't let it get you down."

"A big man like you," said the sweet voice of a young girl, "consorting with that evil little creature! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'm *ever* so much nicer..."

In the gooey blackness appeared a figure, wispy, luminous, of a charming maiden whose head was a skull and whose hair was a convolution of pinkly writhing worms. Gently they hissed in chorus:—

*"Bold, big master,  
Come to terms;  
Feed the dainty  
Maid of Worms."*

The last line of the ditty echoed from all sides in a variety of voices,



ranging from a new-born wail to the hoarseness of a death-rattle.

Almarish shut his eyes and walked ahead as the Maid reached out arms. He walked into her and felt a clammy, gelid coldness, the tightness of arms about him and ropy things fumbling on his face. Repressing a shriek, breathing heavily, he strode on, finally opening his eyes. Again he—they—were in the blackness, without a sound or light. Fumbling for a handkerchief he swabbed at his brow and cheeks, dripping with cold sweat. As he thought of the Maid again his back rose into little prickles of ice.

"It was me," he said, trembling violently, "that never could stand mice and roaches, Moira."

"Keep going," she snapped coldly. "This isn't a picnic." The little creature was upset again. Almarish walked on, missed his footing and fell, sprawling grotesquely. Slowly he drifted down through unimaginable depths of blackness, reaching out frantically for holds, and there were none.

"Stop it!" shrilled Moira. "Stop struggling!" Obediently he relaxed. His fall ended with a bump, on a twilight road sloping gently downward as far as the eye could see. There was a vague, rumbling noise underfoot, as if there were heavy carts on the road.

He looked up along the road. Something was coming, and it was brutally big. Legless, it rolled along on iron wheels, coming at him. The thing was a flattened ovoid of dark, sharkish grey, and like a shark it had a gruesome, toothy slit of mouth. Growing bigger and bigger, it thundered down the road as he watched, petrified, his own mouth open in childish alarm.

A shrill scream from his pocket

brought him to. "Jump, you dummy!" shrieked Moira. "*Jump!*" He leaped into the air as the thing, its triangular mouth snapping savagely, teeth clashing, thundered beneath him.

He watched it go on down the road, still cold with terror.

"Can it come back?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Moira. "Could you roll up-hill?"

"You're right," he said. "Quite right. But what do we do now?" He mopped his brow again.

"Look," said the little creature kindly. "I know how you feel, but don't worry. You're doing a lot better than you think you are. We'll be out of this in a minute, if you don't break down." She looked sharply into his face.

"Maybe I won't," he said. "I'm not making promises, the way I feel. "What—what in Hades—?"

He—they—were snatched up by a gigantic wind and were sucked through the air like flies in an air-conditioning plant.

"Close your eyes," said Moira. "Close them tight and think of something—anything—except what's going to happen to you. Because if you think of something else it won't happen."

Almarish squeezed his eyes tight shut as a thunderous droning noise filled his ears. "Ex sub one sub two," he gabbled, "equals ei square plus two ei plus the square root of bee plus and minus ei square minus two ei bee over two ei." The droning roar was louder; he jammed his thumbs into his ears.

He felt a hideous impuse to open his eyes. Little, stinging particles of dusk struck against his neck.

Flying through the air, turning over and over, the droning roar became one continual crash that battered against his body with physical



force. There was one indescribable, utterly, incomparably violent noise that nearly blew his brain out like an overload of electricity. Then things became more or less quiet, and he tumbled to a marshy sort of ground.

"All clear?" he asked, without opening his eyes.

"Yes," said Moira. "You were magnificent."

He lifted his lids warily and saw that he sat on a stretch of forest sward. Looking behind him—

"My God!" he screamed. "Did we go through *that*?"

"Yes," said Moira. "It's a ghost—unless you're afraid of it, it can't hurt you."

Behind them the thousand-foot blades of a monstrous electric fan swirled brilliantly at several hundred r.p.s. The noise reached them in a softening blur of sound. Gently it faded away.

Almarish of Ellil leaned back quietly.

"The big calf!" muttered Moira. "Now he faints on me!"

## CHAPTER V

"**N**OW," said Almarish, "what about this happy animal?"

"*Le Bete Joyeux*?" asked the little creature.

"If that's what its name is. Why this damned nonsense about tears?"

"It's a curse," said Moira grimly. "A very terrible curse."

"Then it'll keep. Who's in there?"

He pointed to a stony hut that blocked the barely defined trail they were following. Moira shaded her tiny eyes and wrinkled her brow as she stared. "I don't know," she admitted at last. "It's something new."

Almarish prepared to detour. The

stone door slid open. Out looked a wrinkled, weazened face, iron-rimmed spectacles slid down over the nose. It was whiskered, but not as resplendently as Almarish, whose imposing mattress spread from his chin to his waist. And the beard straggling from the face was not the rich mahogany hue of the sorcerer but a dirty white, streaked with grey and soup-stains.

"Hello," said Almarish amiably, getting his fingers around the invincible dirk.

"Beaver!" shrilled the old man, pointing a dirty-yellow, quavering, derisive finger at Almarish. Then he lit a cigarette with a big, apparently home-made match and puffed nervously.

"Is there anything," inquired the sorcerer, "we can do for you? Otherwise we'd like to be on our way."

"We?" shrilled the old man.

Almarish realized that Moira had retreated into his pocket again. "I mean I," he said hastily. "I was a king once—you get in the habit."

"Come in," said the old man quaveringly. By dint of extraordinarily hard puffing he had already smoked down the cigarette to his yellowed teeth. Carefully he lit another from its butt.

Almarish did not want to come in. At least he had not wanted to, but there was growing in his mind the conviction that this was a very nice old man, and that it would be a right and proper thing to go in. That happy animal nonsense could wait. Hospitality was hospitality.

He went in and saw an utterly revolting interior, littered with the big, clumsy matches and cigarette butts smoked down to eighth-inches and stamped out. The reek of nicotine filled the air; ash-trays deep as water-buckets overflowed everywhere onto the floor.



"Perhaps," said the sorcerer, "we'd better introduce ourselves. I'm Almarish, formerly of Ellil."

"Pleased to meet you," shrilled the ancient. Already he was chain-smoking his third cigarette. "My name's Hopper. I'm a geasan."

"What?"

"Geasan—layer-on of geases. A geas is an injunction which can't be disobeyed. Sit down."

Almarish felt suddenly that it was about time he took a little rest. His feet were tired. "Thanks," he said, sitting in a pile of ashes and burned matches. "But I don't believe that business about you being able to command people."

The geasan started his sixth cigarette and cackled shrilly. "You'll see. Young man, I want that beard of yours. My mattress needs restuffing. You'll let me have it, of course."

"Of course," said Almarish. Anything at all for a nice old man like this, he thought. But that business about geases was too silly for words.

"And I may take your head with it. You won't object."

"Why, no," said the sorcerer. What in Hades was the point of living anyway?

Lighting his tenth cigarette from the butt of the ninth, the geasan took down from the wall a gigantic razor.

A tiny head peeked over the top of the sorcerer's pocket.

"Won't you," said a little voice, "introduce me, Almarish, to your handsome friend?"

The eleventh cigarette dropped from the lips of the ancient as Almarish brought out Moira and she pirouetted on his palm. She cast a meaningful glance at the geasan. "Almarish is *such* a boor," she declared. "Not one bit like *some men* . . ."

"IT WAS THE cigarettes that gave him his power, of course," decided the sorcerer as he climbed the rocky bluff.

"My size," purred Moira, "only a little taller, of course. Women like that." She began to snore daintily in his pocket.

Almarish heaved himself over the top of the bluff, found himself on a stony plane or plateau scattered with tumbled rocks.

"Vials, sir?" demanded a voice next to his ear.

"Ugh!" he grunted, rapidly sidestepping. "Where are you?"

"Right here." Almarish stared. "No—*here*." Still he could see nothing.

"What was that about vials?" he asked, fingering the dirk.

Something took shape in the air, before his eyes. He picked it out of space and inspected the thing. It was a delicate bottle holding only a few drops, now empty. Golden wires ran through the glass to form a pattern suggestive of murder and sudden death.

"How much?" he asked.

"That ring?" suggested the voice. Almarish felt his hand being taken and one of his rings being twisted off.

"Okay," he said. "It's yours."

"Thanks ever so much," replied the voice gratefully. "Miss Megaera will *love* it."

"Keep away from those Eumenides, boy," Almarish warned. "They're tricky sluts."

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, sir," snapped the voice. It began to whistle an air, which trailed away into the distance.

From behind one of the great, tumbled cairns of rock slid, with a colossal clashing of scales, a monster.



“**A**H, THERE,” said the monster. Almarish surveyed it carefully. The thing was a metallic cross amongst the octopus, scorpion, flying dragon, tortoise, ape and toad families. Its middle face smiled amiably, almost condescendingly, down on the sorcerer.

“You the *Bete Joyeux*?” asked Almarish.

“See here,” said the monster, snorting a bit, and dribbling lava from a corner of its mouth. “See here—I’ve been called many things, some unprintable, but that’s a new one. What’s it mean?”

“Happy animal, I think,” said Almarish.

“Then I probably am,” said the monster. It chuckled. “Now what do you want?”

“See this vial? It has to be filled with your tears.”

“So what?” asked the monster, scratching itself.

“Will you weep for me?”

“Out of sheer perversity, no. Shall we fight now?”

“I suppose so,” said Almarish, heavy-hearted. “There’s only one other way to get your tears that I can think of. Put up your dukes, chum.”

The monster squared off slowly. It didn’t move like a fighter; it seemed to rely on static fire-power, like a battletank. It reached out a tentacle whose end opened slowly into a steaming nozzle. Almarish snapped away as a squirt of sulfurous matter gushed from the tip.

With a lively blow the sorcerer slashed off the tentacle, which scuttled for shelter. The monster proper let out a yell of pain. One of its lion-like paws slapped down and sidewise at Almarish; he stood his ground and

let the thing run into the dirk its full length, then jumped inside the thing’s guard and scaled its shoulder.

“No fair!” squalled the monster.

He replied with a slash that took off an ear. The creature scratched frantically for him, but he easily eluded the clumsy nails that raked past its hide. As he danced over the skin, stabbing and slashing more like a plowman than a warrior, the nails did fully as much damage as he did. Suddenly, treacherously, the monster rolled over.

Almarish birlled it like a log in a pond, harrowing up its exposed belly as it lay on its back.

Back on its feet again the thing was still suddenly. The sorcerer, catching his breath, began to worry. The squawking pants that had been its inhale and exhale had stopped. But it wasn’t dead, he knew. The thing was holding its breath. But why was it doing that?

The temperature of the skin began to rise, sharply. So, thought Almarish, it was trying to smoke him off by containing all its heat! He scrambled down over its forehead. The nostril-flaps were tight shut. Seemingly it breathed only by its middle head, the one he was exploring.

His heels were smoking, and the air was growing superheated. Something had to be done, but good and quick.

With a muttered prayer Almarish balanced the dirk in his hand and flung it with every ounce of his amazing brawn. Then, not waiting to see, he jumped down and ran frantically to the nearest rock. He dodged behind it and watched.

The dirk had struck home. The nostril-flaps of the monster had been *pinned shut*. He chuckled richly to



himself as the thing clumsily pawed at its nose. The metallic skin was beginning to glow red-hot, then white.

He ducked behind the rock, huddled close to it as he saw the first faint hair-line of weakness on the creature's glowing hide.

*Crash!* It exploded like a thunder-clap. Parts whizzed past the rock like bullets, bounced and skidded along the ground fusing rocks as they momentarily touched.

Almarish looked up at last. *Le Bete Joyeux* was scattered over most of the plateau.

ALMARISH found the head at last. It had cooled down considerably; he fervently hoped that it had not dried out. With the handle of his dirk he pried up the eyelid and began a delicate operation.

Finally the dead-white sac was in his hands. Unstoppering the vial, he carefully milked the tear-gland into it.

"Moira," he said gently, shaking her.

"You ox!" she was awake in a moment, ill-tempered as ever. "What is it now?"

"Your vial," he said, placing it on his palm beside her.

"Well, set it down on the ground. Me too." He watched as she tugged off the stopper and plunged her face into the crystal-clear liquid.

Then, abruptly, he gasped. "Here," he said, averting his eyes. "Take my cloak."

"Thanks," said the tall young lady with a smile. "I didn't think, for the moment, that my clothes wouldn't grow when I did."

"Now—would you care to begin at the beginning?"

"Certainly. Moira O'Donnel's my name. Born in Dublin. Located in Antrim at the age of twenty-five,

when I had the ill-luck to antagonize a warlock named McGinty. He shrank me and gave me a beastly temper, then, because I kept plaguing him, banished me to these unreal parts.

"He was hipped on the Irish literary renaissance—Yeats, AE, Joyce, Shaw and the rest. So he put a tag on the curse that he found in one of Lord Dunsany's stories, about the tears of *le Bete Joyeux*. In the story it was 'the gladsome beast', and Mac's French was always weak.

"What magic I know I picked up by eavesdropping. You can't help learning things knocking around the planes, I guess. There were lots of bits that I filed away because I couldn't use them until I achieved full stature again. And now, Almarish, they're all yours. I'm very grateful to you."

He stared into her level green eyes. "Think you could get us back to Ellil?"

"Like *that!*" she snapped her fingers.

"Good. Those rats—Pike and the rest—caught me unawares, but I can raise an army anywhere on a week's notice and take over again."

"I knew you could do it. I'm with you Almarish, Packer, or whatever your name is."

Diffidently he said: "Moira, you grew very dear to me as you used to snore away in my pocket."

"I don't snore!" she declared.

"Anyway—you can pick whichever name you like. It's yours if you'll have it."

After a little while she said, smiling into his eyes, "My size. Only a little taller, of course."

Arm-in-arm they walked across the grim, rocky plateau under the three pale moons that shifted in their stately drill.



# The Grey One

by Robert W. Lowndes

(Author of "The Other," "The Abyss," etc.)

The little man was in a dreadful hurry to get to the water. There were those who had plans for a terrible weapon.

**M**ASON'S FIRST thought was that a little grey child was sitting there on the stairs waiting for a playmate. But, of course, the figure was too large for a child. He would have hesitated to mention the sense of greyness because it was much too fragile a thing for analysis; cold thought shivered it into non-being.

The man arose as Mason stepped out of his car, came forward with an easy gait. A mousy little man, about five feet tall, pleasant enough in appearance.

"Are you Lawrence Mason?"

Upon confirmation, the man smiled relievedly and went on. "I wanted to ask if you could drive me to the dock; I can pay you well for your trouble."

Mason scratched his head. "You could get a taxi, you know—"

The grey little man shook his head. "No, no good. When I saw the taxi-drivers, I realized the impossibility of it. And I must get there on time; a very great deal depends upon it."

He reached into his pocket, drew out a new leather wallet from which he extracted a thickness of bills. "Will this plead my case more eloquently? They're perfectly good; I obtained them from a bank only a short time ago." He laid his hand on Mason's arm. "Please," he pleaded, "do not delay any longer. Many



lives depend upon whether or not I get to the dock on time!"

Mason stared at him, an odd sensation rippling up and down his spine. Lives in the hands of a little grey man with a soft voice?

"Okay," said Mason quietly. "Get in the car and wait for me; just going to tell the wife."

**M**ASON EASED himself behind the wheel. "Which dock is it?" he asked.

"I'm not quite sure what it's called. I'll know the place when I see it, but the name escapes me."

"Any idea what's near it?"

"Does that matter?"

Mason turned in astonishment. "It matters a lot if you're in a hurry; is this dock in Manhattan or Brooklyn?"

The little man seemed nonplussed; his face quivered and, for an instant, Mason thought he was going to turn



into a five-foot mouse and scamper away. "Dear me," he fretted, "this is more complicated than I thought. How many docks are there?"

"Plenty. If you're going on a passenger boat, you want a pier, not a dock."

The other smiled. "Perhaps that is the trouble; I had the wrong word. Take me to the pier, then."

"I *have* studied geography," insisted the little man as they rolled over the bridge. "In fact, I was more or less noted for my comprehensive knowledge on the subject, for I could give very exact information without recourse to the scrolls or minics."

"Minics?"

"They're an instrument you use in determining geographical location." The little man fell silent for awhile. Then, "I recall an address by one of my colleagues dealing with the shift in land-outlines over the course of centuries. It seemed a bit extreme to me then, but now—"

Mason filled the air with invective as a sedan cut in front of them suddenly. His passenger leaned forward excitedly. "That," he confided, "is the type of thing I am up against. I'm sure the driver of that vehicle meant us no harm. He merely wanted to get somewhere quickly and thus did not regard those about him."

"There is an experiment being planned," he whispered. "If it is successful, it will enable certain powerful ones to fulfill their ambitions. It will also mean the death of many thousands, whether or not the new weapon is used against innocent civilians later. That is what we must stop—this premature, careless experiment."

"Aren't you in danger?"

"Yes. I must take the chance. Do not be alarmed, however; there is no danger to you; I assure you that. If

we can obtain a scroll somewhere to find out the location—"

"Map?" asked Mason.

"Yes, that is what you call it, isn't it?"

Mason could hear the little man murmuring to himself, but couldn't make out any words. Which was surprising, because he knew enough of the most-used words in half a dozen languages to recognize them. There were odd squeaks and sibilants which played an important part in the little man's tongue.

"Excuse me," he said suddenly. "It was rude to talk to myself in my own language. But we shall have to stop while I use my minic."

Mason pulled up to the curb. The other emerged, looked around, then glanced up at the sky. Frowning, he took something out of his pocket that had the appearance of a combination slide-rule, telescope, with a couple of armatures thrown in for good measure. He fiddled with it for awhile, then sat down and opened the map.

"It's not on here," he said. "It's way to the east."

"That's Connecticut," observed Mason, handing him another map. He opened it, took out a pencil, and began to scribble. At length he arose, smiling.

"I have it," he whispered. "It was very foolish of me to try to rely entirely on my memory when the minic could have saved all the trouble."

"Come!" he cried. "There is so little time and we have a long journey ahead. A long journey and a terrible thing to prevent. Now do you see why I couldn't trust one of those—taxi drivers? They would have had me detained as one insane."

**T**HE MOON was swelling above the horizon as Mason eased on the brakes, brought the car to a stop.



Spring night wisped in through the windows outlining the scene before them in delicate pastel shades. Mason shook himself, trying to snap out of the feeling of unreality that filled him.

It was more than just a sense of strangeness. A veritable aura of faery hung about the night, stealing upon him so slowly that only now that the spell was nearly complete had he become aware of it. Fragments of ethereal poetry filled his mind; he thought of all the strange and wonderful stories he had read as a child.

"This is the place," came the voice of the little man. Silently the two emerged from the car, started toward the empty beach before them. It did not seem strange to Mason that, instead of a New York pier, they had come to a lonely beach in Connecticut on this mission.

The little man fumbled in his pocket, brought out a ring. "Here," he declared, "put this on; it will protect you."

It was large, Mason noted, but it would stay. A strange ring, made of jet black and topped with a blood-red triangular stone, that gleamed in the moonlight.

They trod the pavement-smooth sands in silence until they came to water's edge.

Clouds across the moon. Something stirring in the brush behind them. Mason turned to look, when the notes first came to his ear. Faint and very far away they seemed, and he couldn't make out the direction of them. Nor could he be sure whether they were bells or gongs, for they seemed to have both the clear liquidness of tiny bells and the deep shivering timbre of Chinese gongs.

He turned to ask the little man about this, gasped as his eyes fell

upon the scene before him. For there, not far out from shore, rode a ship.

The heart in him leaped partly with delight and partly with terror when he saw it, for no ship of which he had ever heard looked like this. He had seen Hollywood's production of "Cleopatra" and "Ben Hur," so had a fair idea of what old Roman galleys looked like, and he'd seen pictures of Viking ships in books and magazines, but this, though reminiscent of both, was neither.

Great banks of oars projected from the sides of it, but its form was streamlined, everything about it built to give the least resistance to air. The oars gleamed like silver in the moonlight, and red were the sails of it, covered with emblems he knew not. Fire was depicted in them and great birds seemingly rising out of the flames.

Now, as it glided closer, letting the breakers carry it forward easily, the oars used to brake slightly, he heard the notes again. But that was not the primal wonder of it, for he saw now the figures which stood around the decks of it. They were not human. Upright they stood, about the height of the little man, and even from this distance he could see that they were grey, furry things. Their heads were something like those of rats, only more fully developed, less rodent-like in appearance, and a little more pleasant to look at. They wore trappings and belts for weapons and some were wearing fantastic plumes for head-dress. The ship turned slowly until at last it was parallel to the beach and he saw the creatures throwing anchors overboard so that at length it was made fast, rising and falling but slightly in the waves.

Again came the deep crash of the gong, undertoned with a tinkling of bells. Note after note of it swept



out over the beach, and, as the sound of it fell about him like a hail of frozen moonlight, he heard another subtle undertone. A reedy wail that seeped in beneath the skin of him and felt for his soul with filamentine fingers.

Stock still he stood, niobic, until the cry from the little man at his side dulled the spell of it. The other was pointing at the hillocks behind them.

For an instant he saw nothing, but there came to his ears a scurrying and a rustling, then, as if the veils of space were suddenly burst, there emerged from the underbrush a swarm of little grey furry things, running. Ratlike they were, only they ran upright, their whitish bellies looking strangely penguin-like. In height they were some three feet, and, as they skipped forward, he could hear tiny, ecstatic-sounding squeals coming from them.

**A** PRESSURE on his arm, then the little man shouted something in his ear and darted forward, running out across the sands until he stood directly in the path of the oncoming horde. He waved something that gleamed phosphorescently in the moonlight, and cried out to the tiny creatures in piping accents, very much like those he had been murmuring to himself during the journey.

And the tiny ones paused.

Now the notes from the ship became louder, more insistent, and Mason felt an answering ring in his head so that he felt dizzy and the scene rippled before him.

A cloud across the moon dimmed the scene for an instant, then it passed and all was clear again. Except—

*There was no man on the beach ad-*

*ressing the little ones; there was a great rodentlike creature, a duplicate of the grey ones in the ship.*

And the tiny things had stopped now, were gathering in a great semi-circle about the grey one, listening, occasional squeals coming from them. They paid no heed to the luring melody from the ship.

Something struck the hard-packed sand behind the grey one, stood there quivering. It was a long, arrow-like thing, Mason saw. He glanced at the ship. Several of the creatures now bore cross-bow like weapons, were aiming at the grey one.

Mason ran forward, yelled a warning. An instant later, he saw that he was too late. As if by magic, a slender shaft suddenly appeared, sticking out of the grey one's back, and the creature sank forward slowly, then fell prone on the sands.

And a torrent of sound poured forth from the ship.

The little ones hesitated no longer. Squealing in a sort of frenzied delight they skipped forward, running over the body of the fallen grey one, and rushed into the sea. For endless moments the procession lasted until the last one had disappeared into the waves. No tiny heads bobbed above the waters, no swarm of little swimming bodies. They were gone, engulfed in the arms of the sea. And a sort of sick horror filled Mason; weakly he leaned against the rock, eyes fixed upon the ship.

A small boat was being lowered over one side. As he watched, it came in to shore, beached upon the firm sands. Quickly the grey ones within leaped out, picked up the body of the fallen one and bore it to the skiff. Then, without a glance in Mason's direction, they returned to the waiting ship.

He saw the anchors being drawn



up, saw the flashing oars dip and the ship turn slowly against the insistent tide and pull away. Again the reedy wail lanced out and the bell-like undertone tinkled, and the gong crashed.

*Bong!*

The night was a fragile thing that trembled before the concussion of gong-notes. Quiveringly it stood, then fell in a thousand fragments about him; the sands rippled and flowed away in a molten torrent; one by one the stars fell hissing into the sea.

*Bong!*

The sea was a monstrous throat swallowing up the moon and stars and fleecy clouds. Into its maw ran the silvery sands and the fallen stars, and still it roared its hunger and desire. It was yawning for him, too, and he grasped the slithering rock more firmly, desperately.

*Bong!*

Out of the ruin of worlds came the sweetness of a song he knew he had heard when time was young. Lightly it caressed his face and hands and whispered immortal promises in his ears. No longer was the sea a thing of horror, for had not the demons beneath the void sought to warp his vision with their evil deceit. Fair and warm and breathtakingly lovely was the sea, and it called him with the soft voice of fantasy.

Out of the sea rose strange and beautiful creatures and they danced atop the shimmering waves and sang songs older than the wheeling stars above them. Out of the sea rose the beasts of monsters of legend, but no horror was in them and a voice murmured in his ear that these were his brothers and sisters born from the same womb as he. And a yearning and a bright desire filled him so that

he no longer clutched the rock for support but danced down the path of moonlight to the sound of revelry and the call of nereids. And a fear came upon him that he would be too late so that he must run until his breath came in great gasps after the now retreating waves.

*Bong!*

The sea entwined him with its velvet arms, and glad were the shouts of the happy beasts as they swarmed about him. Sweet on his lips was the breath of the nereids as their lips touched his, and gentle were the caresses of the sealy ones.

His foot slipped, and he sank beneath the waves. He opened his mouth to drink the nectar of the glistening foam; something dragged at his ankles. Playfully he broke free, surged upward to clasp the nereids again . . .

**S**OMETHING dragged at his finger; he was conscious of a light weight being withdrawn . . .

And what was he doing in water up to his waist, the breakers buffeting him, his clothing drenched and his lung choking with salt?

Slowly he plunged in to shore, looking about him dazedly, wondering what had happened to the little man. There was no ring on his finger and his clothes were a soggy mass.

Leaning against the rock, he stared about him wildly, unbelieving. No tracks were visible on the beach save his own; no marks where myriad little furry things had been, no arrows sticking in the hard-packed sands. The shrubs and hillocks were undisturbed.

He turned and made his way back to the waiting car as the moon dipped below the far horizon.



# The Words of Guru

by **Kenneth Falconer**



"Teach me the word," I said, "the Word that will give me power." A strikingly different weird tale.

**Y**ESTERDAY, WHEN I was going to meet Guru in the woods a man stopped me and said: "Child, what are you doing out at one in the morning? Does your mother know where you are? How old are you, walking around this late?"

I looked at him, and saw that he was white-haired, so I laughed. Old men never see; in fact men hardly see at all. Sometimes young women see part, but men rarely ever see at all. "I'm twelve on my next birthday," I said. And then, because I would not let him live to tell people,



I said, "and I'm out this late to see Guru."

"Guru?" he asked. "Who is Guru? Some foreigner, I suppose? Bad business mixing with foreigners, young fellow. Who is Guru?"

So I told him who Guru was, and just as he began talking about cheap magazines and fairy-tales I said one of the words that Guru taught me and he stopped talking. Because he was an old man and his joints were stiff he didn't crumple up but fell in one piece, hitting his head on the stone. Then I went on.

**E**VEN THOUGH I'm going to be only twelve in my next birthday I know many things that old people don't. And I remember things that other boys can't. I remember being born out of darkness, and I remember the noises that people made about me. Then when I was two months old I began to understand that the noises meant things like the things that were going on inside my head. I found out that I could make the noises too, and everybody was very much surprised. "Talking!" they said, again and again. "And so very young! Clara, what do you make of it?" Clara was my mother.

And Clara would say: "I'm sure I don't know. There never was any genius in my family, and I'm sure there was none in Joe's." Joe was my father.

Once Clara showed me a man I had never seen before, and told me that he was a reporter—that he wrote things in newspapers. The reporter tried to talk to me as if I were an ordinary baby, I didn't even answer him, but just kept looking at him until his eyes fell and he went away. Later Clara scolded me and read me a little piece in the reporter's newspaper that was supposed to

be funny—about the reporter asking me very complicated questions and me answering with baby-noises. It was not true, of course. I didn't say a word to the reporter, and he didn't ask me even one of the questions.

I heard her read the little piece, but while I listened I was watching the slug crawling on the wall. When Clara was finished I asked her: "What is that grey thing?"

She looked where I pointed, but couldn't see it. "What grey thing, Peter?" she asked. I had her call me by my whole name, Peter, instead of anything silly like Petey. "What grey thing?"

"It's as big as your hand, Clara, but soft. I don't think it has any bones at all. It's crawling up, but I don't see any face on the topwards side. And there aren't any legs."

I think she was worried, but she tried to baby me by putting her hand on the wall and trying to find out where it was. I called out whether she was right or left of the thing. Finally she put her hand right through the slug. And then I realized that she really couldn't see it, and didn't believe it was there. I stopped talking about it then and only asked her a few days later: "Clara, what do you call a thing which one person can see and another person can't?"

"An illusion, Peter," she said. "If that's what you mean." I said nothing, but let her put me to bed as usual, but when she turned out the light and went away I waited a little while and then called out softly: "Illusion! Illusion!"

At once Guru came for the first time. He bowed, the way he always has since, and said: "I have been waiting."

"I didn't know that was the way to call you," I said.

"Whenever you want me I will be



ready. I will teach you, Peter—if you want to learn. Do you know what I will teach you?"

"If you will teach me about the grey thing on the wall," I said, "I will listen. And if you will teach me about real things and unreal things I will listen."

"These things," he said thoughtfully, "very few wish to learn. And there are some things that nobody ever wished to learn. And there are some things that I will not teach."

Then I said: "The things nobody has ever wished to learn I will learn. And I will even learn the things you do not wish to teach."

He smiled mockingly. "A master has come," he said, half-laughing. "A master of Guru."

That was how I learned his name. And that night he taught me a word which would do little things, like spoiling food.

From that day, to the time I saw him last night he has not changed at all, though now I am as tall as he is. His skin is still as dry and shiny as ever it was, and his face is still bony, crowned by a head of very coarse, black hair.

**W**HEN I WAS ten years old I went to bed one night only long enough to make Joe and Clara suppose that I was fast asleep. I left in my place something which appears when you say one of the words of Guru and went down the drain-pipe outside my window. It always was easy to climb down and up, ever since I was eight years old.

I met Guru in Inwood Hill Park. "You're late," he said.

"Not too late," I answered. "I know it's never too late for one of these things."

"How do you know?" he asked sharply. "This is your first."

"And maybe my last," I replied. "I don't like the idea of it. If I have nothing more to learn from my second than my first I shan't go to another."

"You don't know," he said. "You don't know what it's like—the voices, and the bodies slick with unguent, leaping flames, mind-filling ritual! You can have no idea at all until you've taken part."

"We'll see," I said. "Can we leave from here?"

"Yes," he said. Then he taught me the word I would need to know, and we both said it together.

The place we were in next was lit with red lights, and I think that the walls were of rock. Though of course there was no real seeing there, and so the lights only seemed to be red, and it was not real rock.

As we were going to the fire one of them stopped us. "Who's with you?" she asked, calling Guru by another name. I did not know that he was also the person bearing that name, for it was a very powerful one.

He cast a hasty, sidewise glance at me and then said: "This is Peter of whom I have often told you."

She looked at me then and smiled, stretching out her oily arms. "Ah," she said, softly, like the cats when they talk at night to me. "Ah, this is Peter. Will you come to me when I call you, Peter? And sometimes call for me—in the dark, when you are alone?"

"Don't do that!" said Guru, angrily pushing past her. "He's very young—you might spoil him for his work."

She screeched at our backs: "Guru and his pupil—fine pair! Boy, he's no more real than I am—you're the only real thing here!"

"Don't listen to her," said Guru.



"She's wild and raving. They're always tight-strung when this time comes around."

We came near the fires then, and sat down on rocks. They were killing animals and birds and doing things with their bodies. The blood was being collected in a basin of stone, which passed through the crowd. The one to my left handed it to me. "Drink," she said, grinning to show me her fine, white teeth. I swallowed twice from it and passed it to Guru.

When the bowl had passed all around we took off our clothes. Some, like Guru, did not wear them, but many did. The one to my left sat closer to me, breathing heavily at my face. I moved away. "Tell her to stop, Guru," I said. "This isn't part of it, I know."

Guru spoke to her sharply in their own language, and she changed her seat, snarling.

Then we all began to chant, clapping our hands and beating our thighs. One of them rose slowly and circled about the fires in a slow pace, her eyes rolling wildly. She worked her jaws and flung her arms about so sharply that I could hear the elbows crack. Still shuffling her feet against the rock floor she bent her body backwards down to her feet. Her belly-muscles were bands standing out from her skin, nearly, and the oil rolled down her body and legs. As the palms of her hands touched the ground she collapsed in a twitching heap and began to set up a thin wailing noise against the steady chant and hand-beat that the rest of us were keeping up.

Another of them did the same as the first, and we chanted louder for her and still louder for the third. Then, while we still beat our hands and thighs, one of them took up the

third, laid her across the altar and made her ready with a stone knife. The fires' light gleamed off the chipped edge of obsidian. As her blood drained down the groove cut as a gutter into the rock of the altar, we stopped our chant and the fires were snuffed out.

But still we could see what was going on, for these things were, of course, not happening at all—only seeming to happen, really, just as all the people and things there only seemed to be what they were. Only I was real. That must be why they desired me so.

As the last of the fires died Guru excitedly whispered: "The Presence!" He was very deeply moved.

From the pool of blood from the third dancer's body there issued the Presence. It was the tallest one there, and when it spoke its voice was deeper, and when it commanded its commands were obeyed.

"Let blood!" it commanded, and we gashed ourselves with flints. It smiled and showed teeth bigger and sharper and whiter than any of the others.

"Make water!" it commanded, and we all spat on each other. It flapped its wings and rolled its eyes, that were bigger and redder than any of the others.

"Pass flame!" it commanded, and we breathed smoke and fire on our limbs. It stamped its feet, let blue flames roar from its mouth, and they were bigger and wilder than any of the others.

Then it returned to the pool of blood and we lit the fires again. Guru was staring straight before him; I tugged his arm. He bowed as though we were meeting for the first time that night.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked. "We shall go now."



"Yes," he said heavily. "Now we shall go." Then we said the word that had brought us there.

**T**HE FIRST MAN I killed was Brother Paul, at the school where I went to learn the things that Guru did not teach me.

It was less than a year ago, but it seems like a very long time. I have killed so many times since then.

"You're a very bright boy, Peter," said the brother.

"Thank you, brother."

"But there are things about you that I don't understand. Normally I'd ask your parents but—I feel that they don't understand either. You were an infant prodigy, weren't you?"

"Yes, brother."

"There's nothing very unusual about that—glands, I'm told. You know what glands are?"

Then I was alarmed. I had heard of them, but I was not certain whether they were the short, thick green men who wear only metal or the things with many legs with whom I talked in the woods.

"How did you find out?" I asked him.

"But Peter! You look positively frightened, lad! I don't know a thing about them myself, but Father Frederick does. He has whole books about them, though I sometimes doubt whether he believes them himself."

"They aren't good books, brother," I said. "They ought to be burned."

"That's a savage thought, my son. But to return to your own problem—"

I could not let him go any further knowing what he did about me. I said one of the words Guru taught me and he looked at first very surprised and then seemed to be in great

pain. He dropped across his desk and I felt his wrist to make sure, for I had not used that word before. But he was dead.

There was a heavy step outside, and I made myself invisible. Stout Father Frederick entered, and I nearly killed him too with the word, but I knew that that would be very curious. I decided to wait, and went through the door as Father Frederick bent over the dead monk. He thought he was asleep.

I went down the corridor to the book-lined office of the stout priest and, working quickly, piled all his books in the center of the room and lit them with my breath. Then I went down to the school-yard and made myself visible again when there was nobody looking. It was very easy. I killed a man I passed on the street the next day.

**T**HERE WAS a girl named Mary who lived near us. She was fourteen then, and I desired her as those in the Cavern out of Time and Space had desired me.

So when I saw Guru and he had bowed, I told him of it, and he looked at me in great surprise. "You are growing older, Peter," he said.

"I am, Guru. And there will come a time when your words will not be strong enough for me."

He laughed. "Come, Peter," he said. "Follow me if you wish. There is something that is going to be done—" He licked his thin, purple lips and said: "I have told you what it will be like."

"I shall come," I said. "Teach me the word." So he taught me the word and we said it together.

The place we were in next was not like any of the other places I had been to before with Guru. It was No-place. Always before there had



been the seeming of passage of time and matter, but here there was not even that. Here Guru and the others cast off their forms and were what they were, and No-place was the only place where they could do this.

It was not like the Cavern, for the Cavern had been out of time and space, and this place was not enough of a place even for that. It was No-place.

What happened there does not bear telling, but I was made known to certain ones who never departed from there. All came to them as they existed. They had not color or the seeming of color, or any seeming of shape.

There I learned that eventually I would join with them; that I had been selected as the one of my planet who was to dwell without being forever in that No-place.

Guru and I left, having said the word.

"Well?" demanded Guru, staring me in the eye.

"I am willing," I said. "But teach me one word now—"

"Ah," he said, grinning. "The girl?"

"Yes," I said. "The word that will mean much to her."

Still grinning, he taught me the word.

Mary, who had been fourteen, is now fifteen and what they call incurably mad.

**L**AST NIGHT I saw Guru again, and for the last time. He bowed as I approached him. "Peter," he said warmly.

"Teach me the word," said I.

"It is not too late."

"Teach me the word."

"You can withdraw—with what you master you can master also this world. Gold without reckoning; sardonyx and gems, Peter! Rich, crushed velvet—stiff, scraping, embroidered tapestries!"

"Teach me the word."

"Think, Peter, of the house you could build. It could be of white marble, and every slab centered by a winking ruby. Its gate could be of beaten gold within and without and it could be built about one slender tower of carven ivory, rising mile after mile into the turquoise sky. You could see the clouds float underneath your eyes."

"Teach me the word."

"Your tongue could crush the grapes that taste like melted silver. You could hear always the song of the bulbul and the lark that sounds like the dawnstar made musical. Spikenard that will bloom a thousand thousand years could be ever in your nostrils. Your hands could feel the down of purple Himalayan swans that is softer than a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

"You could have women whose skin would be from the black of ebony to the white of snow. You could have women who would be as hard as flints or as soft as a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

Guru grinned and said the word.

Now, I do not know whether I will say that word, which was the last that Guru taught me, today or tomorrow or until a year has passed.

It is the word that will explode this planet like a stick of dynamite in a rotten apple.





# The Silence

by Venard McLaughlin



An utterly unusual story about The Silence, The Truce, and The Man Who Made the Whistles. A tale that will be remembered.

**T**HREE DAYS before The Silence came the old man touched Luciffe's hand and fell over dead. That was on May 3, 1974.

Sorkt saw it and he heard what the old man said. It was the old

man's 110th birthday anniversary and the people of Lum were gathered to honor him. They filed by, shaking hands. Only Luciffe the blacksmith stood back.

Sorkt remembered that. All the others had passed by. Then Luciffe



came forward. He reached out a hand.

"But you made the whistles!" cried the old man. Then he touched Luciffe's hand and fell over dead. That was all.

But Sorkt remembered it. And because he did, he blamed himself. He said he should have known.

But how could he? That was three days before The Silence! No man could know.

Yet Sorkt said he should have; that he almost did. I will leave that to you gentlemen. These are the facts.

Already it is hard for you to remember Earth as it was. Or even Lum Village. Yet you all remember Luciffe. You remember the smithy south of town. You remember him standing in the door, spread-legged, before his flaming forge. Always red-flaming. Remember?

Yes, that's right, he did. He made whistles of willow shoots for you when you were boys—whenever you had the courage to go ask him . . . Yes, you remember Luciffe, all of you.

On the old man's birthday, Sorkt said, Luciffe came to the celebration in his long black apron, black beard and hair well brushed. Sorkt couldn't remember ever before seeing him away from the smithy.

Do any of you? Ah—you see?

Sorkt watched Luciffe. He watched him stand back from the crowd. He saw him come forward, touch the old man, and when the old man fell dead, go quietly away. And seeing that, Sorkt said, he knew instinctively a dread had come.

He thought about it, worried over it. The rest of the day back at his Palm on the local level he couldn't work. He kept feeling a dread.

At sundown he took the ground-

beam and went out toward his home, walking. He said it was still. Just at sundown, no one in the streets, no wind. He walked slower and slower and once he stopped, listening to the silence.

The trees didn't move. Black iron against the sky, no wind. He walked on and he didn't go home. He went to Luciffe's.

You remember the gravel road running through brambles? The smithy standing alone in a patch of thorns and weeds?

He walked out there. Just before he came opposite the smithy he stopped. He felt the silence grow deeper. He stopped and stood still, even holding his breath. Right then, he was near knowing.

He looked up and Luciffe was watching him from the smithy door. For a moment they looked at each other. Then Sorkt said, "Good evening."

Luciffe stood silently. "What are you doing?"

Sorkt gave a little laugh as a man does caught at something foolish. He didn't like to admit that he was listening to silence. "Trying to see what bird that was," he pretended, and craned his neck as though he was trying to see a bird.

It was the wrong thing. Sorkt said even then—three days before—the birds were gone. Did any of you notice? Three days before?

"You were hearing The Silence," Luciffe said.

"Well—"

"Come in," Luciffe said. "I've been expecting you."

"Expecting me?"

"I chose you," Luciffe said.

**SORKT SAID** he crossed the brambles to the door scarcely knowing what he was doing. He couldn't



see anything but Luciffe's eyes, and The Silence was starting to press.

Did any of you notice that three days before?

He did. In that moment the hot smell of the smithy, the fiery forge, The Silence, and Luciffe were all together in his mind. He was very near knowing, you see.

He went inside and sat on a long bench against the wall. The Silence wasn't so painful in there. There was a spit of sound from the forge. Luciffe followed him and stood before him with his back to the forge.

There was no bellows, Sorkt said.

He felt better sitting down and the spit of sound helped. He wasn't frightened exactly, but he felt funny. He felt as you all did the day before it came, or maybe not until that morning.

"You were listening to The Silence," Luciffe said. His eyes were glowing.

"It *was* mighty quiet," Sorkt said with a little laugh.

"Yes. Don't you remember?"

"Remember?"

"Yes. Don't you—a little? Think!"

Sorkt looked hard at those eyes. He said for that instant everything seemed like a repetition. Everything was familiar. It seemed all to have happened before. It was like that dream all men have of falling which is remembered before it comes. A race-memory.

"Remember?"

"Silence," Sorkt said. He took a deep breath and looked all around, but he could see only the eyes. "The Silence—" but he couldn't get any farther.

"You don't remember," Luciffe said, and his shoulders seemed to sag a little. They straightened right away and he rubbed his beard. "You

will, one time. When you do, I can go back."

Sorkt looked up blankly. Luciffe was staring over his head, sighing. He seemed to be seeing a long way off.

It got dark outside. It was dark inside except for the forge. For a long while Sorkt just sat there and Luciffe stood in front of him staring over his head.

Finally Luciffe sighed again and looked down at Sorkt. "Well—so it is. Come with me. I'll show you the place."

"The—place?"

"Come on."

Sorkt followed him toward the end of the shop. It was a long way. He got tired. Dark all around. He could hear footsteps ahead of him, and his own. It took a long time.

At last Luciffe stopped. There was a sound of chains, a sudden burst of light from the floor. Sorkt blinked.

When he could see again, Luciffe was already half way down a ladder calling him to follow. He had lifted a trapdoor and light rushed up from below.

Dazed, Sorkt followed. He couldn't see around him much. The ladder was slippery and kept twisting around in his hands. He had to watch it. He had an impression of sunlight and breezes and brooks flowing, but he wasn't sure. The trapdoor closed over his head. The Silence let up and he breathed easier.

He felt ground under his feet and started to look around but there were those eyes again.

"Come on," Luciffe said, and they walked.

They walked a long time. Sorkt began to have a feeling of simultaneousness, as though he'd been walking forever and would go on walking forever, but that he'd done and



would do millions of other things at the same time, and forever, too. And that anyhow it didn't make any difference, that there wasn't any Forever—only an eternal Now. But that that was a Forever too.

It was like being a separate person for every act and thought. He lifted an arm and knew that the arm went on lifting eternally, and that it always had been lifting eternally. He felt as though his life in Lum had been looking through a microscope at an amoeba, and down here he was lifting his head and seeing the whole world for the first time.

He grew tired and he couldn't see much but he kept having impressions. There seemed to be a lot going on. Everything that had ever happened or ever was going to happen seemed to be taking place right then and there. When Luciffe stopped again everything was quiet and fresh-smelling.

**T**HEY WERE in a park of some kind, blossoming trees, flowers, birds, soft sunlight. They sat down and someone brought Sorkt a frosted mug of something thick and sweet like a honey malted milk.

He drank it with Luciffe watching him with a sad or discouraged expression.

"Here we are again," Luciffe said, sighing. He smoothed his hands on the black leather apron, looking about. "See if you can't do better this time."

Sorkt wiped his mouth wishing for more of the honey malted. He frowned. "Just what am I supposed to do?"

Luciffe stared at him. He stood up suddenly. He sat again. "Don't you even know that?"

"Well—" Sorkt began. He glanced suddenly at his hand and saw it was

holding a fresh mug of honey malted. It was good stuff. He drank.

"The Struggle—" Luciffe suggested. "Remember? — the Struggle—?"

Sorkt became suddenly full and sleepy. He shook his head. "I'm afraid not."

"The Struggle," Luciffe said, more loudly. Then he bowed his head and rubbed his hand all over his face and beard. He drew in a big breath. "Well, then—listen again—"

Sorkt yawned. He felt fine. He liked it in that park.

"The Struggle," Luciffe said. "There is but one supreme struggle and that is between The Silence and The Truce—" He looked at Sorkt. "Remember? The Silence — The Truce? What are the earth, the sun—the planets, the stars—?"

"The Truce," Sorkt said sleepily.

"And what surrounds The Truce, pressing always, always drawing closer?"

"The Silence," Sorkt said through a yawn.

"And before The Truce there was only The Silence, and after The Truce there is only The Silence—"

"Yes," Sorkt said.

"And each time you fail The Silence must draw in and cleanse the worlds and go back again—"

"Yes."

"—until finally you succeed. Then The Silence comes and it does not go back, and there is only The Silence. The Truce is destroyed and I can return—"

"Yes."

Sorkt went to sleep. All those words and his own answers meant nothing to him then. They came, he supposed later, from the race-memory. It was too late, he said, when he understood. By that time The Silence had come.



When he awoke Luciffe had gone. He was alone in that park and everything was fresh-smelling and fine. He felt good lying there, but the minute he moved there was a twinge in his side. He put his hand over the pain, and then he sat up straight.

Still holding his side he stared through the trees. He stood up. The most beautiful woman he'd ever seen was coming toward him. She was smiling and when she saw him staring at her she laughed a little and waved.

"Hello there," she said.

Sorkt just stared. She was improperly dressed, he said. She came toward him and stood smiling and friendly looking up at him.

"Now you won't be alone," she said.

Sorkt was pretty much embarrassed and he tried not to look at her, but he couldn't just look away. That wouldn't be polite. You can not ignore a beautiful woman, he said.

So he sat down and closed his eyes and remarked about the pain in his side.

"But of course!" she said gaily. She got some fragrant herbs and bandaged his side and he felt one hundred per cent better right away. It hadn't been bad anyhow.

As soon as he thought politeness demanded it he opened his eyes to look at her again. He was much relieved. She had made herself a garment of flowers, he said, and she looked fine.

They got to talking and Sorkt got a big kick out of it. She was about the smartest girl he'd ever seen, he said, and in some ways, the dumbest. Every time he asked her name she said she didn't have any yet. When he asked her radiophone wave-number she just smiled at him.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean," she'd say.

She didn't seem to have the faintest idea about politics or athletics or current events, either, Sorkt said. For instance she didn't even know who was chairman of the Executive Council. She acted as though she'd never even heard of the Second Empire or the Stvatt, or who won the Inter-Pole this year.

But she was smart too, and her smartness was practical. She'd go away and come back a few minutes later with all the fruit and honey malteds she could carry. Oranges sweeter than sugar, he said. Grapes big as your fist.

It wasn't until he made a joke of naming her that he caught on, and then it was too late.

They were sitting around talking, watching the sun go down back of the trees and he said, "Well, baby, you've got to have a name. If you won't tell me, I'll give you one."

"Please-do," she said. "It's about time."

They both laughed.

The sun went down. It was nice and quiet and fine. "Tell you what," Sorkt said. "We'll just call you for right now. We'll call you Evening."

"Oh, how nice!" Evening said. "And for short you can call me . . ."

AND THAT'S when it hit Sorkt that Luciffe had made a mistake. He jumped up and got out of there running, he said, like a bat. He tore through the park and out into the simultaneous region running for all he was worth. All the way he kept remembering what Luciffe and he had talked about and he remembered the dread he had felt when the old man dropped dead, and he put his head down and made tracks.

He got up the ladder. It kept



hissing and twisting and it was slippery but he reached the trapdoor, stumbled across Luciffe's floor and sat down on that bench gasping for breath.

"You!" Luciffe cried and he stood spread-legged staring. Behind him the forge glowed. The Silence was bad, but it wasn't too deep in the smithy yet.

"Look, it's this way," Sorkt panted out, trying to get his breath and easing along that bench toward the front door at the same time, "I ain't him. I'm Sorkt. You got the wrong guy!"

He planned to say that, and make a run for the door. Even then he felt he might get through to Lum in time to give warning. But he didn't have a chance.

Before he could move Luciffe sprang to the door and let out a shout, Sorkt said, like a couple of planets smacking together. It knocked Sorkt out cold and the next thing he knew he was lying under the smoking wreckage of the smithy, screaming with the pain of The Silence. And the cold was coming then, too, and he began burrowing into the earth by sheer instinct.

That's how he got here, gentlemen. He burrowed right through to this cavern, more dead than alive. None of you was in this part of the Underground at the moment, gentlemen. No one but the young man from East Lum, who pulled him from the burrow and gave him artificial respiration.

While Sorkt was getting his breath the young man from East Lum told him of the coming of The Silence, how it had pushed the rivers and the mountains into the earth, dried out the seas and killed all but a few hundred people around Lum who took to the Underground in time.

When he had finished Sorkt gasped out his story. It was then he admitted he should have known what was to happen the instant he saw the old man fall dead, crying, "But you made the whistles!" Sorkt said it was shock that killed him.

The shock of suddenly realizing that Luciffe had made whistles for him as a boy a hundred years or so ago, and for his father and his father's father before him. It came on the old man—seeing Luciffe away from the smithy for the first time like that—that the blacksmith should have died long ago, that no mortal could live as long as Luciffe was living. Yet here he was just as he had always been. It was too much for the old man on his 110th birthday anniversary. He just keeled over dead.

Sorkt said he should have known then, or at least it should have been clear to him when he saw that forge flaming and no bellows. He should have known then, he said, that Luciffe was no man at all but the Fallen Angel and that the fire in the forge was not earth-fire by a long shot.

But what threw him off was Luciffe himself. He was such a decent sort. Just like anyone else with an unpleasant job to do, eager to get it done and get back home, unhappy over delay.

**S**ORKT SAID he could understand a good many things now. How, for example, when men knew the world had been going on for eons there was only about 7000 years of recorded history. He said that indicated that The Silence had come before—sometime before that 7000 year mark (and he had no idea how many thousands or millions of times before that), cleansed the earth of people, pushed in the mountains and



rivers, dried up the seas, and given the race of man a fresh start in a clean new world.

Evidences of man before the historical period, he contended, being in the earth itself, in rock strata, proved the fact, just as the future race beginning after this Silence would find evidences of the men of 1974 crushed deep into the face of the earth.

"I see it all," Sorkt said. "Because he got too ambitious up there poor old Luciffe got exiled to earth to ride range on the Human Experiment, and he is having quite a time. It seems," Sorkt said sadly, shaking his head, "that our race always gets off to a flying start and then just naturally sinks down into civilization and gets so bad it has to be Silenced out and started all over again." He sighed. "And this time we might have had a chance to prepare against The Silence if I hadn't fallen down. . . . I should have known when I saw that bellowless forge!"

Or, he said, if not then, he should by any judgment have caught on when he woke up in that park with the pain in his ribs and saw the beautiful woman.

As he said that, the young man from East Lum started. His head came up and he frowned, staring hard at Sorkt. "There seems to be something mighty familiar to me about that affair," he said slowly. "Pain in the ribs, did you say?"

"Yes," Sorkt said, and pulled up his shirt to show his operation.

The young man from East Lum stared harder and his face began to change. He stepped closer to Sorkt. "And what did you say the lady's name was?" His voice had gotten low and tense.

"You mean that torrid little spark in the park?" Sorkt said with a rem-

iniscent smile. "Why, she said she didn't have any."

"But you gave her one?"

"Well, for a joke," Sorkt said. "She wasn't handing out a name and radiophone number—you could see she'd been around—I just called her Eve—" He broke off and his face went white. He stared at the young man and took a quick step backward. "S—Say—! Aren't you—?"

"You bet your socks I am," the young man said. He was very close to Sorkt then. "You know who I am."

"B—But it wasn't my fault!" Sorkt stuttered, backing to the wall. "Anyhow — we — we just — just talked!"

"Oh, yeah?" the young man said. He moved nearer to Sorkt.

"Now—now Mr. Adams!" Sorkt cried. "Now be reasonable—!"

But quite calmly young Mr. Adams from East Lum reached out, grabbed Sorkt's neck and shook him to death. He shook the dead body a few times muttering to himself. He was upset.

"Just talked!" he muttered. "The devil you say!"

He dropped the corpse and stared at it a moment. "A devil of a big mistake," he gritted, "getting him for me!" A light came into his eye. "But just wait until she pulls that old apple gag *this time!*"

And with that he turned and disappeared into the burrow Sorkt had made, which closed up immediately after him.

**A**ND NOW, gentlemen, if you will continue your inventory of supplies brought down here at the start of The Silence. . . .

Those are the canned beans, I believe. Pulped from The Silence, of course, but edible. . .



Jones is about to have another spell. If you will kindly crack him across the base of the skull—thank you. He can't bear The Silence even down here in the Underground, it seems. The darkness, too. . . . It's The Silence, of course, that blots out all your lamps, even down here. . . .

I? Who am I, did you ask? Pardon me while I laugh hollowly.

I? Why I am the ghost of the deceased Sorkt, waiting to represent

the dead of **This Silence** at the Garden of Eden. I go as a serpent, you know.

What am I waiting for? Why, I must represent *all* the dead of The Silence, gentlemen. I am waiting for you.

Yes, The Silence will come even here, gentlemen. Meanwhile I choose to be helpful.

Now, how many cans did you say, of baked beans?

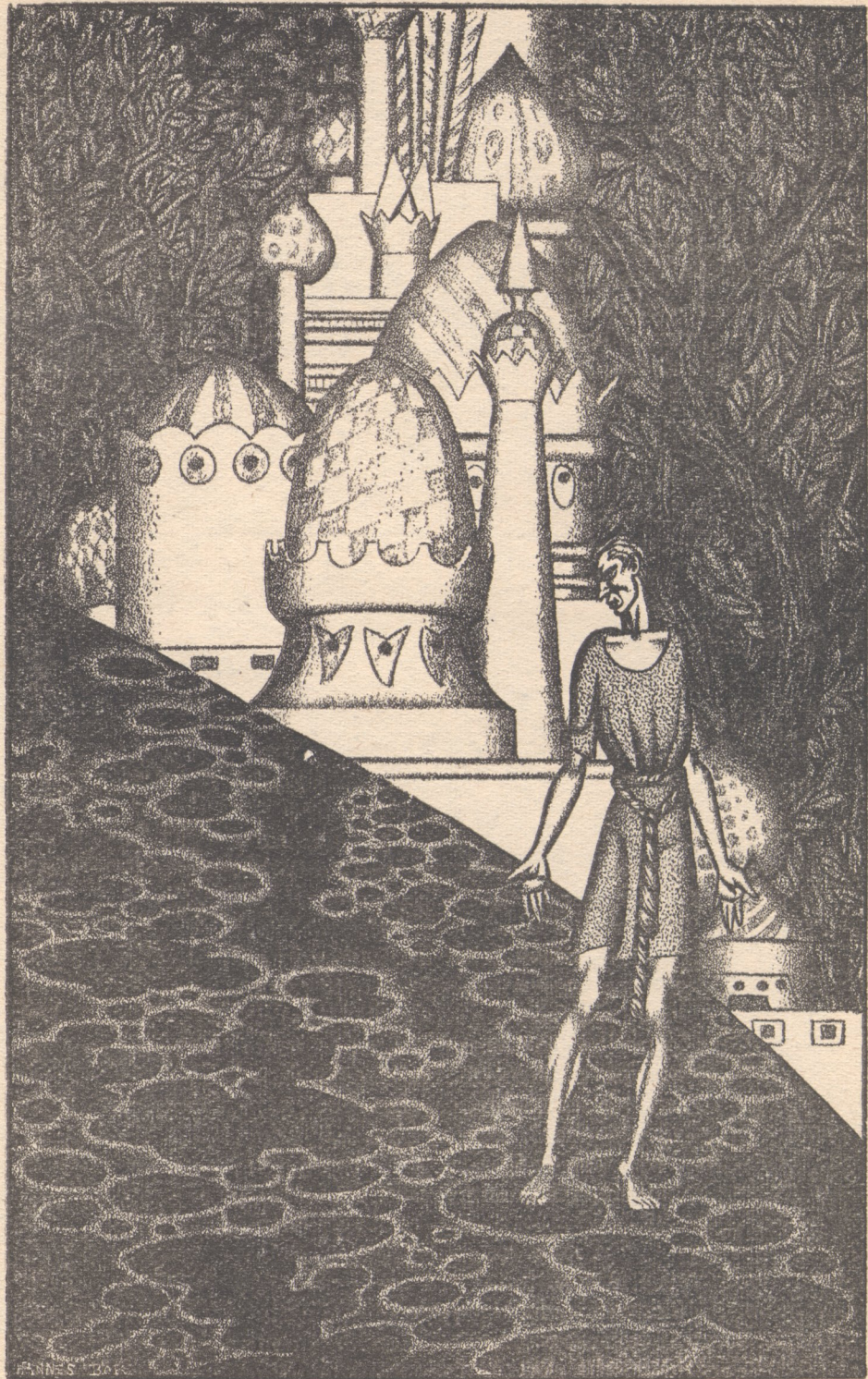


## *Forbidden Books*

*by Wilfred Owen Morley*

No earthly metal, this, that clasps these ancient tomes,  
That crawls and writhes beneath the gloved hands that seek  
Their pages to disclose. Unlocked, the noxious reek  
Of alien corruption, glyphs in multichromes  
Upon the curious pages, faint with human scent  
Of some once-lovely skin, blood-drawn caricatures  
Of things that just evade the grasp, whose sight conjures  
Malefic wonderings, and strange, dark passions blent  
With memories (grown dim), of blasphemies which sleep  
Within, or drawn apart, and that which never dies,  
Assail the senses of the reader. . . . There was one  
Who found the cursed volumes, hidden from the sun,  
And read therein. . . . He flung them back into the deep  
Sea's self and evermore mad horror filled his eyes.







# Kazam Collects

by S. D. Gottesman

(Author of "Dimension of Darkness," "Dead Center," etc.)

Kazam ran a nut cult. Kazam was a Kaidar. Detective Fitzgerald investigated the nut cult and learned what a Kaidar was.

"HAIL, JEWEL in the lotus," half whispered the stringy, brown person. His eyes were shut in holy ecstasy, his mouth pursed as though he were tasting the sweetest fruit that ever grew.

"Hail, jewel in the lotus," mumbled back a hundred voices in a confused backwash of sound. The stringy, brown person turned and faced his congregation. He folded his hands.

"Children of Hagar," he intoned. His voice was smooth as old ivory, had a mellow sheen about it.

"Children of Hagar, you who have found delight and peace in the bosom of the Elemental, the Eternal, the Un-knowingness that is without bounds, make Peace with me." You could tell by his very voice that the words were capitalized.

"Let our Word," intoned the stringy, brown person, "be spread. Let our Will be brought about. Let us destroy, let us mould, let us build. Speak low and make your spirits white as Hagar's beard." With a reverent gesture he held before them two handfuls of an unattached beard that hung from the altar.

"Children of Hagar, unite your Wills into One." The congregation kneeled as he gestured at them, gestured as one would at a puppy one was training to play dead.

The meeting hall—or rather, temple—of the Cult of Hagar was on the third floor of a little building on East 59th Street, otherwise almost wholly unused. The hall had been fitted out to suit the sometimes peculiar requirements of the Unguessable Will-Mind-Urge of Hagar Inscrutable; that meant that there was gilded wood everywhere there could be, and strips of scarlet cloth hanging from the ceiling in circles of five. There was, you see, a Sanctified Ineffability about the unequal lengths of the cloth strips.

The faces of the congregation were varying studies in rapture. As the stringy, brown person tinkled a bell they rose and blinked absently at him as he waved a benediction and vanished behind a door covered with chunks of gilded wood.

The congregation began to buzz quietly.

"Well?" demanded one of another. "What did you think of it?"

"I dunno. Who's *he*, anyway?" A respectful gesture at the door covered with gilded wood.

"Kazam's his name. They say he hasn't touched food since he saw the Ineluctable Modality."

"What's *that*?"

Pitying smile. "You couldn't understand it just yet. Wait till you've come around a few more times. Then maybe you'll be able to read *his* book



—“The Unravelling.” After that you can tackle the ‘Isba Kazhlunk’ that he found in the Siberian ice. It opened the way to the Ineluctable Modality, but it’s pretty deep stuff—even for me.”

They filed from the hall buzzing quietly, dropping coins into a bowl that stood casually by the exit. Above the bowl hung from the ceiling strips of red cloth in a circle of five. The bowl, of course, was covered with chunks of gilded wood.

**B**EYOND THE DOOR the stringy brown man was having a little trouble. Detective Fitzgerald would not be convinced.

“In the first place,” said the detective, “you aren’t licensed to collect charities. In the second place this whole thing looks like fraud and escheatment. In the third place this building isn’t a dwelling and you’ll have to move that cot out of here.” He gestured disdainfully at an army collapsible that stood by the battered rolltop desk. Detective Fitzgerald was a big, florid man who dressed with exquisite neatness.

“I am sorry,” said the stringy, brown man. “What must I do?”

“Let’s begin at the beginning. The Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, but I don’t know if they meant something like this. Are you a citizen?”

“No. Here are my registration papers.” The stringy, brown man took them from a cheap, new wallet.

“Born in Persia. Name’s Joseph Kazam. Occupation, scholar. How do you make that out?”

“It’s a good word,” said Joseph Kazam with a hopeless little gesture. “Are you going to send me away—deport me?”

“I don’t know,” said the detective thoughtfully. “If you register your

religion at City Hall before we get any more complaints, it’ll be all right.”

“Ah,” breathed Kazam. “Complaints?”

Fitzgerald looked at him quizzically. “We got one from a man named Rooney,” he said. “Do you know him?”

“Yes. Runi Sarif is his real name. He has hounded me out of Norway, Ireland and Canada—wherever I try to reestablish the Cult of Hagar.”

Fitzgerald looked away. “I suppose,” he said matter-of-factly, “you have lots of secret enemies plotting against you.”

Kazam surprised him with a burst of rich laughter. “I have been investigated too often,” grinned the Persian, “not to recognize that one. You think I’m mad.”

“No,” mumbled the detective, crestfallen. “I just wanted to find out. Anybody running a nut cult’s automatically reserved a place in Bellevue.”

“Forget it, sir. I spit on the Cult of Hagar. It is my livelihood, but I know better than any man that it is a mockery. Do you know what our highest mystery is? The Ineluctable Modality.” Kazam sneered.

“That’s Joyce,” said Fitzgerald with a grin. “You have a sense of humor, Mr. Kazam. That’s a rare thing in the religious.”

“Please,” said Joseph Kazam. “Don’t call me that. I am not worthy—the noble, sincere men who work for their various faiths are my envy. I have seen too much to be one of them.”

“Go on,” said Fitzgerald, leaning forward. He read books, this detective, and dearly loved an abstract discussion.

The Persian hesitated. “I,” he said



at length, "am an occult engineer. I am a man who can make the hidden forces work."

"Like staring a leprechaun in the eye till he finds you a pot of gold?" suggested the detective with a chuckle.

"One manifestation," said Kazam calmly. "Only one."

"Look," said Fitzgerald. "They still have that room in Bellevue. Don't say that in public—stick to the Ineluctable Modality if you know what's good for you."

"Tut," said the Persian regretfully. "He's working on you."

The detective looked around the room. "Meaning who?" he demanded.

"Runi Sarif. He's trying to reach your mind and turn you against me."

"Balony," said Fitzgerald coarsely. "You get yourself registered as a religion in twenty-four hours, then find yourself a place to live. I'll hold off any charges of fraud for a while. Just watch your step." He jammed a natty Homburg down over his sandy hair and strode pugnaciously from the office.

Joseph Kazam sighed. Obviously the detective had been disappointed.

**T**HAT NIGHT, IN his bachelor's flat, Fitzgerald tossed and turned uneasily on his modern bed. Being blessed with a sound digestion able to cope even with a steady diet of chain-restaurant food and the soundest of consciences, the detective was agitated profoundly by his wakefulness.

Being, like all bachelors, a cautious man, he hesitated to dose himself with the veronal he kept for occasions like this, few and far between though they were. Finally, as he heard the locals pass one by one on the El a few blocks away and then heard the first express of the morn-

ing, with its higher-pitched bickering of wheels and quicker vibration against the track, he stumbled from bed and walked dazedly into his bathroom, fumbled open the medicine chest.

Only when he had the bottle and had shaken two pills into his hand did he think to turn on the light. He pulled the cord and dropped the pills in horror. They weren't the veronal at all but an old prescription which he had thriftily kept till they might be of use again.

Two would have been a fatal overdose. Shakily Fitzgerald filled a glass of water and drank it down, spilling about a third on his pajamas. He replaced the pills and threw away the entire bottle. You never know when a thing like that might happen again, he thought—too late to mend.

Now thoroughly sure that he needed the sedative, he swallowed a dose. By the time he had replaced the bottle he could scarcely find his way back to the bed, so sleepy was he.

He dreamed then. Detective Fitzgerald was standing on a plain, a white plain, that was very hot. His feet were bare. In the middle distance was a stone tower above which circled winged skulls—bat-winged skulls, whose rattling and flapping he could plainly hear.

From the plain—he realized then that it was a desert of fine, white sand—spouted up little funnels or vortices of fog in a circle around him. He began to run very slowly, much slower than he wanted to. He thought he was running away from the tower and the vortices, but somehow they continued to stay in his field of vision. No matter where he swerved the tower was always in front and the little twisters around him. The circle was growing smaller



around him, and he redoubled his efforts to escape.

Finally he tried flying, leaping into the air. Though he drifted for yards at a time, slowly and easily, he could not land where he wanted to. From the air the vortices looked like petals of a flower, and when he came drifting down to the desert he would land in the very center of the strange blossom.

Again he ran, the circle of foggy cones following still, the tower still before him. He felt with his bare feet something tinglingly clammy. The circle had contracted to the point of coalescence, had gripped his two feet like a trap.

He shot into the air and headed straight for the tower. The creaking, flapping noise of the bat-winged skulls was very much louder now. He cast his eyes to the side and was just able to see the tips of his own black, flapping membranes.

**A**S THOUGH REGULAR nightmares—always the same, and increasingly repulsive to the detective—were not enough woe for one man to bear, he was troubled with a sudden, appalling sharpness of hearing. This was strange, for Fitzgerald had always been a little deaf in one ear.

The noises he heard were distressing things, things like the ticking of a wristwatch two floors beneath his flat, the gurgle of water in sewers as he walked the streets, humming of underground telephone wires. Headquarters was a bedlam with its stentorian breathing, the machine-gun fire of a telephone being dialed, the howitzer crash of a cigarette case snapping shut.

He had his bedroom soundproofed and tried to bear it. The inches of fibreboard helped a little; he found

that he could focus his attention on a book and practically exclude from his mind the regular swish of air in his bronchial tubes, the thudding at his wrists and temples, the slushing noise of food passing through his transverse colon.

Fitzgerald did not go mad for he was a man with ideals. He believed in clean government and total extirpation of what he fondly believed was a criminal class which could be detected by the ear-lobes and other distinguishing physical characteristics.

He did not go to a doctor because he knew that the word would get back to headquarters that Fitzgerald heard things and would probably begin to see things pretty soon and that it wasn't good policy to have a man like that on the force.

The detective read up on the later Freudians, trying to interpret the recurrent dream. The book said that it meant he had been secretly in love with a third cousin on his mother's side and that he was ashamed of it now and wanted to die, but that he was afraid of heavenly judgment. He knew that wasn't so; his mother had had no relations and detective Fitzgerald wasn't afraid of anything under the sun.

After two weeks of increasing horror he was walking around like a corpse, moving by instinct and wearily doing his best to dodge the accidents that seemed to trail him. It was then that he was assigned to check on the Cult of Hagar. The records showed that they had registered at City Hall, but records don't show everything.

He walked in on the cult during a service and dully noted that its members were more prosperous in appearance than they had been, and that there were more women present. Joseph Kazam was going through pre-



cisely the same ritual that the detective had last seen.

When the last bill had fallen into the pot covered with gilded wood and the last dowager had left Kazam emerged and greeted the detective.

"Fitzgerald," he said, "you damned fool, why didn't you come to me in the first place?"

"For what?" asked the detective, loosening the waxed cotton plugs in his ears.

The stringy, brown man chuckled. "Your friend Rooney's been at work on you. You hear things. You can't sleep and when you do—"

"That's plenty," interjected Fitzgerald. "Can you help me out of this mess I'm in?"

"Nothing to it. Nothing at all. Come into the office."

Dully the detective followed, wondering if the cot had been removed.

**T**HE RITUAL THAT Kazam performed was simple in the extreme, but a little revolting. The mucky aspects of it Fitzgerald completely excused when he suddenly realized that he no longer heard his own blood pumping through his veins, and that the asthmatic wheeze of the janitor in the basement was now private to the janitor again.

"How does it feel?" asked Kazam concernedly.

"Magnificent," breathed the detective, throwing away his cotton plugs. "Too wonderfu for words."

"I'm sorry about what I had to do," said the other man, "but that was to get your attention principally. The real cure was mental projection." He then dismissed the bedevilment of Fitzgerald with an airy wave of the hand. "Look at this," he said.

"My God!" breathed the detective. "Is it real?"

Joseph Kazam was holding out an

enormous diamond cut into a thousand glittering facets that shattered the light from his desk-lamp into a glorious blaze of color.

"This," said the stringy, brown man, "is the Charity Diamond."

"You mean," sputtered the detective, "you got it from—"

"The very woman," said Kazam hastily. "And of her own free will. I have a receipt: 'For the sum of one dollar in payment for the Charity Diamond. Signed, Mrs.—'"

"Yes," said the detective. "Happy days for the Sons of Hagar. Is this what you've been waiting for?"

"This," said Kazam curiously turning the stone in his hand, "is what I've been hunting over all the world for years. And only by starting a nut cult could I get it. Thank God it's legal."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the detective.

"Use the diamond for a little trip. You will want to come along, I think. You'll have a chance to meet your Mr. Rooney."

"Lead on," said Fitzgerald. "After the past two weeks I can stand anything."

"Very well." Kazam turned out the desk lamp.

"It glows," whispered Fitzgerald. He was referring to the diamond, over whose surface was passing an eerie blue light, like the invisible flame of anthracite.

"I'd like you to pray for success, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Kazam. The detective began silently to go over his brief stock of prayers. He was barely conscious of the fact that the other man was mumbling to himself and caressing the diamond with long, wiry fingers.

The shine of the stone grew brighter yet; strangely, though, it did not



pick out any of the details of the room.

Then Kazam let out an ear-splitting howl. Fitzgerald winced, closing his eyes for just a moment. When he opened them he began to curse in real earnest.

"You damned rotter!" he cried. "Taking me here—"

The Persian looked at him coldly and snapped: "Easy, man! This is real—look around you!"

The detective looked around and saw that the tower of stone was rather far in the distance, farther than in his dreams, usually. He stooped and picked up a handful of the fine white desert sand, let it run through his fingers.

"How did you get us here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Same way I cured you of Runi Sarif's curse. The diamond has rare powers to draw the attention. Ask any jewel-thief. This one, being enormously expensive, is so completely engrossing that unsuspected powers of concentration are released. That, combined with my own sound knowledge of a particular traditional branch of psychology, was enough to break the walls down which held us pent to East 59th Street."

The detective was beginning to laugh, flatly and hysterically. "I come to you hag-ridden, you first cure me and then plunge me twice as deep into Hell, Kazam! What's the good of it?"

"This isn't Hell," said the Persian matter-of-factly. It isn't Hell, but it isn't Heaven either. Sit down and let me explain." Obediently Fitzgerald squatted on the sand. He noticed that Kazam cast an apprehensive glance at the horizon before beginning.

"I was born in Persia," said Kazam, "but I am not Persian by blood,

religion or culture. My life began in a little mountain village where I soon saw that I was treated not as the other children were. My slightest wish could command the elders of the village and if I gave an order it would be carried out.

"The reasons for all this were explained to me on my thirteenth birthday by an old man—a very old man whose beard reached to his knees. He said that he had in him only a small part of the blood of Kaidar, but that I was almost full of it, that there was little human blood in me.

"I cried and screamed and said that I didn't want to be Kaidar, that I just wanted to be a person. I ran away from the village after another year, before they had begun to teach me their twisted, ritualistic versions of occult principles. It was this flight which saved me from the usual fate of the Kaidar; had I stayed I would have become a celebrated miracle man, known for all of two hundred miles or so, curing the sick and cursing the well. My highest flight would be to create a new Islamic faction—number three hundred and eighty-two, I suppose.

"Instead I knocked around the world. And Lord, got knocked around too. Tramp steamers, maritime strike in Frisco, the Bela Kun regime in Hungary—I wound up in North Africa when I was about thirty years old.

**"I WAS BROKE**, as broke as any person could be and stay alive. A Scotswoman picked me up, hired me, taught me mathematics. I plunged into it, algebra, conics, analytics, calculus, relativity. Before I was done, I'd worked out wave-mechanics three years before that Frenchman had even begun to think about it.



"When I showed her the set of differential equations for the carbon molecule, all solved, she damned me for an unnatural monster and threw me out. But she'd given me the beginnings of mental discipline, and done it many thousands of times better than they could have in that Persian village. I began to realize what I was.

"It was then that I drifted into the nut cult business. I found out that all you need for capital is a stock of capitalized abstract qualities, like All-Knowingness, Will-Mind-Urge, Planetude and Excitation. With that to work on I can make my living almost anywhere on the globe.

"I met Runi Sarif, who was running an older-established sect, the Pan-European Astral Confederation of Healers. He was a Hindu from the Punjab plains in the North of India. Lord, what a mind he had! He worked me over quietly for three months before I realized what was up.

"Then there was a little interview with him. He began with the complicated salute of the Astral Confederation and got down to business. 'Brother Kazam,' he said, 'I wish to show you an ancient sacred book I have just discovered.' I laughed, of course. By that time I'd already discovered seven ancient books by myself, all ready-translated into the language of the country I would be working at the time. The 'Isba Kazh-lunk' was the most successful; that's the one I found preserved in the hide of a mammoth in a Siberian glacier.

"Runi looked sour. 'Brother Kazam,' said he, 'do not scoff. Does the word *Kaidar* mean anything to you?' I played dumb and asked whether it was something out of the third chapter of the Lost Lore of

Atlantis, but I remembered ever so faintly that I had been called that once.

" 'A Kaidar,' said Runi, 'is an atavism to an older, stronger people who once visited this plane and left their seed. They can be detected by—' He squinted at me sharply—'by a natural aptitude for occult pursuits. They carry in their minds learning undreamable by mortals. Now, Brother Kazam, if we could only find a Kaidar . . .'

" 'Don't carry yourself away,' I said. 'What good would that be to us?'

"Silently he produced what I'll swear was actually an ancient sacred book. And I wouldn't be surprised if he'd just discovered it, moreover. It was the psalter of a small, very ancient sect of Edomites who had migrated beyond the Euphrates and died out. When I'd got around the rock-Hebrew it was written in I was very greatly impressed. They had some noble religious poems, one simply blistering exorcism and anathema, a lot of tedious genealogy in verse form. And they had a didactic poem on the Kaidar, based on one who had turned up in their tribe.

"They had treated him horribly—chained him to a cave wall and used him for a sort of male Sybil. They found out that the best way to get him to prophesy was to show him a diamond. Then, one sad day, they let him touch it. Blam! He vanished, taking two of the rabbis with him. The rabbis came back later; appeared in broad daylight raving about visions of Paradise they had seen.

"**I** QUITE FORGOT about the whole affair. At that time I was obsessed with the idea that I would become the Rockefeller of occultism—get disciples, train them



carefully and spread my cult. If Mohammed could do it, why not I? To this day I don't know the answer.

"While I was occupying myself with grandiose daydreams, Runi was busily picking over my mind. To a natural cunning and a fantastic ability to concentrate he added what I unconsciously knew, finally achieving adequate control of many factors.

"Then he stole a diamond, I don't know where, and vanished. One presumes he wanted to have that Paradise that the rabbis told of for his very own. Since then he has been trying to destroy me, sending out messages, dominating other minds on the Earthly plane—if you will excuse the jargon—to that end. He reached you, Fitzgerald, through a letter he got someone else to write and post, then when you were located and itemized he could work on you directly.

"You failed him, and he, fearing I would use you, tried to destroy you by heightening your sense of hearing and sending you visions nightly of this plane. It would destroy any common man; we are very fortunate that you are extraordinarily tough in your psychological fibre.

"Since then I have been dodging Runi Sarif, trying to get a diamond big enough to send me here through all the barriers he has prepared against my coming. You helped me very greatly." Again Kazam cast an apprehensive look at the horizon.

The detective looked around slowly. "Is this a paradise?" he asked. "If so I've been seriously misled by my Sunday School teachers." He tried weakly to smile.

"That is one of the things I don't understand—yet," said the Persian. "And this is another unpleasantness which approaches."

Fitzgerald stared in horror at the little spills of fog which were up-

ending themselves from the sand. He had the ghastly, futile dream sensation again.

"Don't try to get away from them," snapped Kazam. "Walk *at* the things." He strode directly and pugnaciously at one of the little puffs, and it gave way before him and they were out of the circle.

"That was easy," said the detective weakly.

Suddenly before them loomed the stone tower. The winged skulls were nowhere to be seen.

Sheer into the sky reared the shaft, solid and horribly hewn from grey granite, rough-finished on the outside. The top was shingled to a shallow cone, and embrasures were black slots in the wall.

Then, Fitzgerald never knew how, they were inside the tower, in the great round room at its top. The winged skulls were perched on little straggling legs along a golden rail. Aside from the flat blackness of their wings all was crimson and gold in that room. There was a sickly feeling of decay and corruption about it, a thing that sickened the detective.

Hectic blotches of purple marked the tapestries that hung that circular wall, blotches that seemed like the high spots in rotten meat. The tapestries themselves the detective could not look at again after one glance. The thing he saw, sprawling over a horde of men and women, drooling flame on them, a naked figure still between its jaws, colossal, slimy paws on a little heap of human beings, was not a pretty sight.

Light came from flambeaux in the wall, and the torches cast a sickly, reddish-orange light over the scene. Thin curls of smoke from the sockets indicated an incense.



AND LASTLY THERE was to be seen a sort of divan, heaped with cushions in fantastic shapes. Reclining easily on them was the most grotesque, abominable figure Fitzgerald had ever seen. It was a man, had been once. But incredible incontinence had made the creature gross and bloated with what must have been four hundred pounds of fat. Fat swelled out the cummerbund that spanned the enormous belly, fat welted out the cheeks so that the ears of the creature could not be seen beneath the embroidered turban, gouts of fat rolled in a blubbery mass about the neck like the wattles of a dead cockerel.

"Ah," hissed Joseph Kazam. "Runi Sarif . . ." He drew from his shirt a little sword or big knife from whose triangular blade glinted the light of the flambeaux.

The suety monster quivered as though maggots were beneath his skin. In a voice that was like the sound a butcher makes when he tears the fat belly from a hog's carcass, Runi Sarif said: "Go—go back. Go back—where you came from—" There was no beginning or ending to the speech. It came out between short, grunting gasps for breath.

Kazam advanced, running a thumb down the knife-blade. The monster on the divan lifted a hand that was like a bunch of sausages. The nails were a full half-inch below the level of the skin. Afterwards Fitzgerald assured himself that the hand was the most repellant aspect of the entire affair.

With creaking, flapping wing-strokes the skulls launched themselves at the Persian, their jaws clicking stonily. Kazam and the detective were in the middle of a cloud of flying jaws that were going for their throats.

Insanely Fitzgerald beat at the things, his eyes shut. When he looked they were lying on the floor. He was surprised to see that there were just four of them. He would have sworn to a dozen at least. And they all four bore the same skillfully delivered slash mark of Kazam's knife.

There was a low, choking noise from the monster on the divan. As the detective stared Kazam stepped up the first of the three shallow steps leading to it.

What followed, detective Fitzgerald could never disentangle. The lights went out, yet he could plainly see. He saw that the monstrous Runi Sarif had turned into a creature such as he had seen on the tapestry, and he saw that so had Kazam, save that the thing which was the Persian carried in one paw a blade.

They were no longer in the tower room, it seemed, nor were they on the white desert below. They were hovering in a roaring, squalling tumult, in a confusion of spheres which gently collided and caromed off each other without noise.

As the detective watched, the Runi monster changed into one of the spheres, and so, promptly did Kazam. On the side of the Kazam sphere was the image of the knife. Tearing at a furious rate through the jostling confusion and blackness Fitzgerald followed, and he never knew how.

The Kazam sphere caught the other and spun dizzily around it, with a screaming noise which rose higher and higher. As it passed the top threshold of hearing, both spheres softened and spread into black, crawling clouds. Suspended in the middle of one was the knife.

The other cloud knotted itself into a furious, tight lump and charged the one which carried the blade. It



hurtled into and through it, impaling itself.

**F**ITZGERALD SHOOK HIS head dizzily. They were in the tower room, and Runi Sarif lay on the divan with a cut throat. The Persian had dropped the knife, and was staring with grim satisfaction at the bleeding figure.

"Where were we?" stuttered the detective. "Where—?" At the look in Kazam's eyes he broke off and did not ask again.

The Persian said: "He stole my rights. It is fitting that I should recover them, even thus. In one plane—there is no room for two in contest."

Jovially he clapped the detective on the shoulder. "I'll send you back now. From this moment I shall be a card in your Bureau of Missing Persons. Tell whatever you wish—it won't be believed."

"It was supposed to be a paradise," said the detective.

"It is," said Kazam. "Look."

They were no longer in the tower, but on a mossy bank above a river whose water ran a gamut of pastels, changing hues without end. It tinkled out something like a Mozart sonata and was fragrant with a score of scents.

The detective looked at one of the

flowers on the bank. It was swaying of itself and talking quietly in a very small voice, like a child.

"They aren't clever," said Kazam, "but they're lovely."

Fitzgerald drew in his breath sharply as a flight of butterfly things passed above. "Send me away," he gasped. "Send me away now or I'll never be able to go. I'd kill you to stay here in another minute."

Kazam laughed. "Folly," he said. "Just as the dreary world of sand and a tower that—a certain unhappy person—created was his and him so this paradise is me and mine. My bones are its rock, my flesh is its earth, my blood is its waters, my mind is its living things."

As an unimaginably glowing drift of crystalline, chiming creatures loped across the whispering grass of the bank Kazam waved one hand in a gesture of farewell.

Fitzgerald felt himself receding with incredible velocity, and for a brief moment saw an entire panorama of the world that was Kazam. Three suns were rising from three points of the horizon, and their slanting rays lit a paradise whose only inglorious speck was a stringy, brown man on a riverbank. Then the man vanished as though he had been absorbed into the ground.

READ

## THE FATAL VISHNU

*The Man in the Red Mask encounters a Hindu God!*

IN THE MAY

RED MASK

*detective stories*



# The Moon Artist

## by David H. Keller

(Author of "Calypso's Island,"  
"The Yeast Men," etc.)

The twenty-first picture of Harold James was his last. A "Kelleryarn" to rank among the best.

**L**IFE WAS DULL. For twenty-four hours nothing startling had happened in my hospital, a private one for the care of abnormals. I mentally reviewed some of the interesting cases of the past. Johnson, who thought he was a horse and every fine day tied himself to a post. Mrs. Carlwig, who for six years had been thought hopelessly insane and then was cured by her husband. Mrs. Anderson, who washed her hands thirty times a day, thinking she had committed the unpardonable sin.

But these were all cases past and gone; even the memory of them left life dull this afternoon. But I felt something would happen and it did. My stenographer brought a visitor's card to me. The name, Johan Ludwig, the address simply Vienna, the word "Neuro-psychiatrist" in the lower left hand corner was enough to make me walk hastily to the door of my office and welcome the man. It is not every day that an American is visited by Ludwig of Vienna. He was a short, little man in every way except his intelligence. Strangely enough he carried a portfolio in one hand and a large artist's easel in the other. I relieved him of both, took care of his hat, and seated him in my most comfortable chair.

"This is most kind of you," he remarked in beautiful but halting English. "Have you time to spare me?"



"All the time you need and more," I replied.

"Then let us talk of Harold James, the artist. I understand that you knew him."

"I did. For several years I cared for him in this hospital. In fact he died here."

"That is what I was told. That is why I am here. Did you know that he was an artist?"

"Yes," I replied. "I have seen some of his paintings. There is one at the Metropolitan. Perhaps you have seen it?"

"I saw it and have a copy of it. In fact I have in this portfolio a copy of everything he painted. Only twenty in all. He died young."

"I know," I assented, "but that does not explain the small number. He painted and destroyed. Only a few of the oils he created pleased him and he was merciless in his de-



struction. His mother was a severe critic."

"You knew her?"

"Very well. She visited him often. He was a bitter disappointment to her. She wanted him to become a great artist and he died insane."

"At least twenty pictures were saved," insisted Ludwig, "and after all he was a great artist. Perhaps it is necessary for an artist to be abnormal. I want to show you these pictures. May I?"

"I will be delighted."

He set up the easel and very slowly placed picture after picture on it. I moved my chair and studied them. After the twenty were shown he took them down and, selecting two, placed them side by side on the easel.

"What do you notice about all these pictures?" he asked and it sounded like a professor interrogating a student. I knew the answer.

"Every picture contains three things: a moon, a man and a woman."

"Correct."

"And in every picture the moon is in a different phase."

"Fine! I am so glad you noticed that point. Now look at these two. Observe the first one. A crescent moon, apple trees in blossom. It is springtime. Two lovers lean against a fence. The girl has bare arms; one is around her lover's body. She is kissing him on the neck. I studied that picture carefully in Vienna. The muscles of her arm are tense. She is holding him; he cannot get away. He cannot remove himself from that arm."

"Perhaps he did not want to."

"I suppose not. Now we will look at the other. Winter time, pines and hemlocks drooping with wet snow. A moon in the last quarter. The man is dead on the ground. The woman, very beautiful, kneels above him. Her

lips are red. The man is dead with arms outstretched as though he were crucified. On his neck there are marks of teeth but there is no blood. The woman is smiling as though she were satisfied. Do you know what it means?"

I pretended to be dumb as I answered "No."

"He was your patient and you do not know what it means?"

**I** DELIBERATELY changed the subject by asking, "You say there were only twenty pictures?"

"Yes. I have searched carefully."

"May I tell you that there were twenty-one?"

"Where is it? Have you seen it? Could I have a copy? Does it explain the rest?"

"It was painted here in the hospital. I saw it. You cannot have a copy and I think that it explains everything."

"This alone was worth my visit to America. I am thrilled with anticipation. But I am writing a psycho-analytical biography of Harold James and I must have that picture; at least a copy of it. You cannot refuse me!"

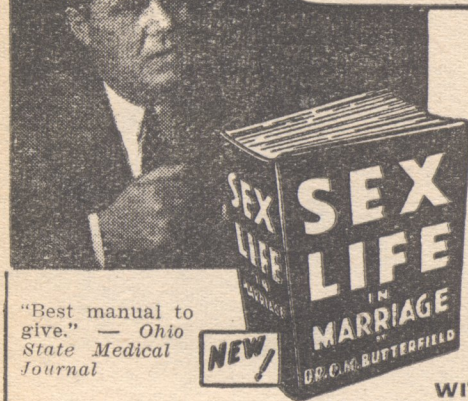
"I have to. Make yourself comfortable and let me tell you what I know of James, the man and the artist."

"He was an only child. His father died when he was very young. For some reason his mother wanted her son to be a great artist. She gave him every possible help and seems to have been for years his greatest inspiration and his most severe critic. If he painted something she liked she sold it; if she did not like it, she destroyed it. He travelled all over the world but always with her. The cultural world appreciated him, but she was by his side when they gave their praise. Then he fell in love. The

(Continued On Page 117)



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The Pleasure Func-  
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course

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Releasing Sexual  
Tension

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nancy

Signs of Pregnancy;  
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of Men

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(Continued From Page 114)

mother forced a separation and the son became definitely insane. I cared for him from then on.

"His mother always hoped that he would recover. She came very often to visit him; had a rocking chair placed in his bedroom and that was where she sat. She talked to him a great deal but he would not answer; simply lay on his bed with his arms at right angles to his body, eyes wide open, unblinking, a typical catonic praecox.

"When she was not there, he would either sit curled up in her chair or stay in his bed, resisting any effort to move him. Here is one interesting fact. He used the chair when the moon was crescent and growing full. But always the bed when it was full or waning. He seemed to have a terrible fear of the chair when the moon was old. Perhaps that will help you.

"One day his mother brought a large painting, framed, and had me hang it on the wall. It was Whistler's "The Mother." The wall I hung it on was 9 feet wide and 6 feet high and calcimined white. Then she brought a complete set of oils and brushes and had them set on a table with several pieces of canvas, so he could start painting when he recovered. He paid no attention to them, or her, or anything for that matter. And then one day a telegram told me that she was dead. I went into his room and whispered the news into his ear. To my surprise he closed his eyes, relaxed, and went to sleep. He actually slept for over thirty hours, then woke and asked for his clothes. Is this interesting to you?"

"Very. Please go on with the story."

"I gave orders that no one was to disturb him or interfere in any way with what he was doing so long as

(Continued On Page 118)

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(Continued From Page 117)

he did not try to kill himself. But I kept him under very close observation. The first thing he did was to put his bed over so he could have free access to that wall; then he took the picture out of the frame. We took the glass and the empty frame from the room. He asked for a knife but we did not trust him so he used his thumb nail and cut away all of the picture, leaving only the mother in her chair. Then he wanted some paste; when he had it, he pasted what was left of the picture on the lower left hand corner of that blank wall. After that he started to paint picture twenty-one on the wall."

"And the picture is there now? Why did you say that I could not see it? Could not have it copied?"

"I will explain that later on. I watched him paint from day to day. Starting from the picture of the mother he left an empty triangle with the base upward. On each side of this triangle he painted trees lightly covered with snow, mostly spruce, pine, and hemlock, but here and there an oak with a few leaves hanging on through the winter. At the top of the triangle he had a moon in the last quarter. What sky he painted was a deep blue and there were a few stars. Even then the picture gave the impression of extreme cold. I chilled just to look at it. There is no doubt that James was an artist and I think that this picture, painted on the wall of a hospital, was the greatest thing he ever did.

"He left a bare space of about two feet at the point of the triangle and then he started to paint a procession of women. Two in the first row in evening dresses of the seventies; then four in hoop-skirts; eight of a previous generation, then sixteen of

the next. As he went backward the women were smaller and the arithmetical progression ceased. Finally there were women with bear skins and then several female apes and back of them wolves. Near the moon were female monstrosities of prehistoric times tinted with insane hallucinations.

"He painted snow on the ground. The women trod on it in their shoes, sandals, pantofles, bare feet, and finally their paws. Here and there were flakes of blood where the ice had cut their feet. These women were all lovely, aristocratic ladies, but on their beautiful faces there was a shadow of hate. Their cold callousness chilled the already intense cold of the landscape. The only one that was in any way loving and kind was the mother that Whistler had painted.

"**I**T TOOK DAYS to paint the picture thus far. James did not talk any but he ate well and slept normally. At times I wondered if he was not, after all, going to recover. Did I tell you that he had placed his mother's chair out in the hall? I left it there and used to sit on it as I watched him paint.

"And now there was only a white space left on the wall at the lower end of the triangle where it ended at the Whistler Mother. And now James started to fill in that white space. Just in front of the first two women he painted the body of a man, face down, arms outstretched, on the snow. The skin of the man was torn in a hundred places but there was no blood. You could tell that the man was dead. He finished it late one afternoon, refused to eat, undressed and went to bed. He was asleep when I visited him at five that evening and took his pulse and respira-



tion. He seemed to be rather well as far as they were concerned.

"That night in the office I looked at the calendar and saw that the moon was in the last quarter. Outside it was snowing and growing colder every minute. Something—I do not try to explain what—made me feel that I should keep James under personal observation that night. Somehow this idea was connected with the fact that now the picture was finished anything might happen. I recall that I thought it would be an ideal time for a praecox to kill himself. So I walked to his room, dismissed the night nurse and said that I would stay in the hall way, on the rocking chair, till daybreak. James seemed to be peacefully asleep. I wrapped a blanket around me, turned on my flashlight, saw that everything was all right in the room and sat down in the chair. I must have dozed for when I next looked at my watch it was after two. The room was flooded with a dull, pale yellow moonlight but it seemed to come from the moon in the picture and not from the moon in the sky."

"This is all very interesting," murmured Ludwig, bending forward with an odd gleam in his eye. "Of course you expect me to believe what happened after that?"

"You can do as you please. I would not blame you if you bluntly said I was drunk, or hallucinating, or dreaming. You can react any way you wish if you listen to the rest of it, or I can stop here and leave the rest to your imagination."

"No. Positively no! You must finish."

"I suppose that I must. There was more moonlight in the room; anyone could see now that it came from the wall.

"James sat up in bed, then left it and stood on the floor. I could see

(Continued On Page 120)



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(Continued From Page 119)

his face plainly; it had the blank expression of a somnambulist. He took off the coat of his pajamas, folded it neatly and placed it at the foot of the bed. Suddenly his expression changed to one of fear. And just then it seemed that the painted picture of the mother stood up and the other women in the painted picture on the wall started to walk off the wall. I waited a few seconds, a few fatal seconds, thinking I would awaken any moment from the dream. Then a soft, warm hand closed over my mouth and I could not call for help. I raised my hand to find the wrist and pull it away and there was no wrist there. But other hands held my arms and pressed against my body and two wolves caught me at the ankles with their teeth."

"How do you know they were wolves?"

"By the smell. Wet fur tainted with carrion. And it seemed I could hear them snarl. Anyway I was held there; I could not move. It was a woman who held her hand over my mouth; I could feel her hair and smell its perfume as she pressed against me. I could still see. James started to struggle; every muscle became tense and his face showed fear, terrible, devastating fear. And it seemed to me that in spite of his struggles he was picked up and placed on the floor at the bottom of the picture, face down. His arms were pulled away from his body. He never made a sound, but all the time the women in the picture were leaving the wall and I could hear the wolves howling.

"The room became dark. The hands left my body, and I reached for and turned on the flash light..."

Ludwig interrupted me, "And James was dead?"

"James was dead. I ran in, dragged his body out into the hall, shut and locked the door, and rang the bell for help. I counted the wounds; none were large but all were deep and the neck on the right side was torn. But there was no blood!"

Ludwig smiled. I wondered if he believed me. He simply said in a whisper, "We have gone back to the necromancy of the Middle Ages."

"Believe it or not. Do as you please, but there was no blood. We took the body to the mortuary and I was able to put a broken knife into the right hand before the coroner came. Now there is one thing more I want to show you. When the wolves held my ankles they closed too hard. I cauterized the marks the next morning. Do you want to see them?"

"No," exclaimed Ludwig sharply. "If I believe part I will have to believe it all." He left his chair and leaned over my desk. "Please, doctor, do not make me wait in suspense. Please let me see the picture. I must have a copy of it made by an artist for my book."

I held out my hands in a gesture of despairing futility. "It is impossible. No doubt you will not believe me but the next day, when I had time, I unlocked the door of that room and went in by myself. And there was no picture on the wall. It was just a white calcimined wall except for Whistler's Mother in the lower left hand corner."

"Nothing but that?"

"Nothing. Perhaps I was nervous. It may have been an optical illusion, but to me the woman seemed to be smiling and there was a red smear around her mouth."

"Blood?"

"I do not know. Perhaps it was paint. I burned the picture."



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F-102





**I**N THE COVER is depicted an idea that occurred to us while attending a recent show at the famous Hayden Planetarium in New York City. The special demonstration at this artificial star-maker concerned the end of the earth. It was a remarkable performance. The big weird machine projecting the heavens accurately against the vast pseudo-sky, meteors flashing, clouds and rumbling of thunder, lightning and flashing comets. The sun rose and set, the planets rushed upon their orbits and the moon went through its phases.

It was explained that the moon is slowly moving away from the earth today. Its orbit around our world is expanding slowly. In the course of many hundreds of thousands of years it would finally reach its farthest point from the earth and circle out there for a long while. Then, with the passage of still more time, it would begin to lose its velocity and sink slowly back towards the earth again. Gradually the distance between the two bodies would decrease; then as the moon came closer and closer, it would begin to speed up in its rush towards its parent planet. Closer and closer it would come, looming up gigantic in the heavens.

Its gravital attraction would cause tremendous tides to sweep over the continents; its pull would shake and shatter the crust of the earth, quakes would have inconceivably terrible dimensions, veritable waves of land would sweep around the planet following the course of the moon.

The satellite in turn would be shaken and torn. The pull of the earth upon one side of its sphere would be so much greater than that on the other that the tiny planet could no longer stand the strain. It would rip asunder, burst into fragments. Giant lunar meteors would rain down upon the earth and other great swarms of moonlets would roar about the planet in orbits of their own. Gradually they would stabilize their courses and then the third planet from the sun would be a ringed world. Instead of a single solid satellite circling, there would be a belt of countless little satellites eternally whirling together about the third planet—a minor Saturn where Earth had been.

The idea struck us so that when we were thinking of a possible scene for our cover, we were unable to visualize one more striking than that. So we instructed Hannes Bok to do as he has done. On the cover we see



the moon breaking up. The figure of the future man runs in panic while the very ground beneath his feet shatters like a cake of ice. The sky rains meteors. Not a fantastic vision but, according to science, a probable actuality.

**I**N SPITE OF this probability, we have never regarded the future of man as a finite one. We are unable to think that man can ever be defeated by the forces of nature or that we will not be able to cope with some future contingency.

Several hundred years ago we might have thought otherwise. Today, looking over the giant strides of science and the tremendous scopes of imagination already shown by man, we are unable to see any event coming up which man cannot successfully meet.

We are not going to say we couldn't be wiped out in the next hundred years. We could. For we do need still more time to develop our control over the universe to such an extent as to be able to outwit anything. We are only on the threshold of mastering atomic power. Until we do so, we are still more or less at the mercy of the elements. But we are almost certain today that complete mastery of the atom will come definitely within this century.

With mastery of the atom will also come transmutation of elements. That alone will almost guarantee eternal existence for our race. Those who speculate on the end of man look for many possibilities. One of them is loss of oxygen (as some say happened on Mars); a worse contingency is loss of the entire atmosphere (which happened on the moon). The answer to that question is in another one:—Can we today visualize any possible means of con-

(Continued On Page 124)

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(Continued From Page 123)

tinuing human life if we had to move to the moon?

Of course we can. It's been done so often in science-fiction stories that it isn't even original any more. Old readers of fantasy take it with a yawn. We refer to the hermetically enclosed city, its air and temperature regulated scientifically and exactly, screened from harmful sun rays and armored against meteors. It is perfectly true that we couldn't completely build such a city today but we can visualize it. What we can visualize, we can build, given the power. The power we are rapidly acquiring. Once it is acquired, loss of earthly atmosphere will not mean the end of humanity in the slightest.

If oxygen or some vital element runs out, transmutation will supply it. If natural food runs low, we are already beginning to manufacture our own foods from chemical equivalents in laboratories. As it is, scientific agriculture is such that it would be possible for a region the size of Kansas to feed the entire planet if it were cultivated to the very limit of our present ability.

If the very earth explodes, there are space-ships. That is another scientific probable conception which is now taken as so certain that it is not regarded as fantastic in science-fiction. If the sun explodes or dies, we can make artificial suns or we can move to another.

True, all this is extraordinarily speculative. True, modern day science can't do it. But modern day science refuses to deny its possibility. And it is entirely conceivable to us of the first half of the twentieth century. And if it is conceivable to us, and if we can successfully navigate civilization through the rest of this critical century, then certainly it will

be more than conceivable to the man of the two-hundredth century. It will be elemental. It will *be*.

**S**PEAKING OF navigating through a period of world crisis, we are reminded of L. Sprague de Camp's "*Lest Darkness Fall*," which has just been published in book form. Many of our readers will recall it for it appeared in a slightly abridged form a couple of years ago in a contemporary magazine.

The problem posed by Mr. de Camp is the question of whether or not the world could have been saved the period of ignorance and backwardness that was marked by the Dark Ages. The period of almost a thousand years between the fall of the Roman civilization and the rise of the Renaissance civilization that became our own.

Martin Padway, a modern American, is thrown back to the Rome of the Gothic conquest, the Rome of the year 536. This was the very last days of the Rome the ancients knew. The Goths ruled it, yet still the thread of civilization had not been broken. It was to be broken by the period of warfare that was about to be set in by the invasion of Italy by Justinian. That war, which raged throughout all Italy for decades, reduced the Roman civilization to memory and finally definitely precipitated the Dark Ages.

Padway's problem was to stall off this disaster, to prevent the long war which he knew would cause the darkness to fall. He solved the crisis in a manner reminiscent of Mark Twain's "Connecticut Yankee." He introduced the printing press, the semaphore telegraph, modern military maneuvers and defeated the Byzantine invaders.

(Continued On Page 127)



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(Continued From Page 124)

It is an exciting book and we recommend it to those who like to toy with historical might-have-beens of this sort. The publishers are Henry Holt & Co. The price \$2.50.

**C**ECIL CORWIN is an author who is being acclaimed today as the find of 1941. We are rather proud of him for he is our own discovery, and so far we've succeeded in monopolizing his output. Fans are raving over his mastery of slapstick fantasy and humor.

Corwin is a young man, about twenty-three we would say, with an amazing erudition. His sense of humor is just as one would imagine. He seems equipped with an endless stock of yarns and can spin them out for hours. We were regaled one evening with a most amazing version of Cinderella which went on for about an hour or so. We're sorry we can't tell it here, suffice it to say that it compared with Corwin's famous "Thirteen O'Clock" or the current "Mr. Packer Goes to Hell." When you consider that Cinderella is a Martienne with about seventy legs (and seventy glass slippers!) and the "fairy godmother" is a mad scientist who lost his way among the editorial offices in New York, you can appreciate the tale. Or his story of the "Boy Who Cried Werewolf!" which is another story that has to be heard to be appreciated.

Corwin, like many others interested in fantasy, is planning on making his way out to Denver, July 4th, to attend the science-fiction convention that is being held there. We may be able to persuade him to spin one of his yarns there and if you want to hear it, you'd better get in touch with Olon F. Wiggins, 3214 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado, and ask him about the convention.

(Continued On Page 128)

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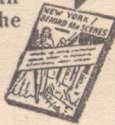
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**WE** ATTENDED a meeting of the Stranger Club in Boston recently at which the foundation of the National Fantasy Fan Federation was discussed. The Federation is designed to be an independent organization of fantasy fans, readers, collectors and writers. There have been such organizations in the past and they usually have not been too successful. This present attempt is being guided by leading fans all over the country and is carefully trying to steer a course that will lead it to success.

The pitfalls of an independent fantasy organization are many. We've seen a lot of them come and go—the International Scientific Association, the Independent League for Science Fiction, the Phantasy Legion, etc. Yet there is a need for such an organization just as there is also a need for a sponsored society such as the *Cosmian League* and the Science-Fictioneers. We were impressed with the way the problem is being handled.

Those who are interested in the National Fantasy Fan Federation would be advised to write to Mr. Art Widner, Jr., Box 122, Bryantville,

(Continued On Page 129)

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(Continued From Page 128)

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The next issue of *Stirring Science Stories* will be due on the stands June 1st. Watch for it. Though we can't tell you now what's going to be in it, by this time you must be aware that each issue is better than those preceding. It'll have to go some to beat this current number—of which we're very proud—but you can bet it will.

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