VARGO STATTEN

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In This Issue

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New Worlds to Conquer

VARGO STATTEN
SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

ALL NEW STORIES • NO REPRINTS

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FICTION

FEATURES

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Editorially Yours

AT long last we are able to assess reader reaction to the first two numbers of the Magazine. We now have ample confirmation that our efforts are along the right lines, at least in the opinion of the particular section of Science Fiction enthusiasm towards which our policy is fundamentally aimed. Inevitable minor criticisms apart, we find 82 per cent. of readers approve of our overall editorial activity, and all emphasise the very real enjoyment they have derived from at last having a magazine that is not wholly directed at the older and more mature reader. A further 10 per cent. find at least two-thirds of the contents meet with their approval. The remaining eight per cent. are numbered among the apostles of what Carlyle once described as "divine discontent", although the criticisms of this minority are both stimulating and constructive enough to make us feel we have justified their attention. And this minority would never have fired in their criticisms unless they had felt we were doing some real service to Science Fiction.

DISSUADE your minds that the foregoing is a sign of smug editorial satisfaction. Anything savouring of such a viewpoint is very far indeed from our thoughts, because it is an editorial department's primary duty to strive constantly at all round improvements. Meanwhile we want YOUR help towards fulfilling this ambition. Write in and tell us the order of merit in which you place the stories and articles contained in this issue. The more letters we receive on the subject, then the more grateful we shall be. It is only on this evidence we can further develop our future plans. And don't omit to let us know your likes and dislikes in the way of illustrations. It was quite obvious that the cover to our first issue met with a very mixed reception, but we feel sure this current issue's effort is a big step towards satisfying these earlier criticisms. The artist is John Richards.

OUR SIZE: AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: By far the greatest avalanche of censure was aimed at the crown 4to size, in which generous proportions we have launched these first three issues. The main grumble is that a "flat" publication is automatically debarred from inclusion on the readers' bookshelves where they accumulate these particular S.F. books and periodicals they consider worthwhile adding to their permanent collection—and it is gratifying to know that the V.S. Magazine is unreservedly nominated to the ranks of journals worth collecting. It is YOUR MAGAZINE and so your majority wishes have received the consideration they deserve. COMMENCING WITH THE APRIL ISSUE the Vargo Statten Magazine will be published in demy 8vo size with double the present number of pages, and containing an equal amount of reading matter as the current number. Look out for the April issue on your bookstall or at your newsagent's. The publication date is April 19th.

AN analysis of author popularity has placed E. C. Tubb's three-part serial at the top of the poll, with Vargo Statten following a close length behind. We are pleased to announce that, with the April issue, you will be able to start a new serial by "Ted" Tubb and to read a complete-in-the-issue novel by Vargo Statten. Both of these will be supported by some outstanding fiction contributions from new and old favourites, together with the usual feature articles that are already widely popular institutions among our readers.

ONCE again we are impressed with the absolute change of newspaperdom's attitude towards Science Fiction, Flying Saucers and what were alleged "impossibilities" only yesterday. As we go to press the *Daily Mail* is running a four-day series on the existence or otherwise of Flying Saucers. Their stable-companion, the *Evening News*, are simultaneously printing a fast action S.F. serial by Chapman. Times are certainly changing!

OUR invitation to new S.F. writers has started a flow of submissions, many of them showing real promise, a few already accepted by the Selection Board of three readers—readers who are genuinely in search of fresh talent, and who give sincerely sympathetic consideration to every story sent in. Even if your first efforts do not produce the break you are looking for, don't forget that many prominent authors have reached their current success via the hard path that is paved with rejection slips. No worthwhile future author will allow himself to be discouraged by first failure. We seem to remember a generation-old formula for writers: "90 per cent. Perspiration plus 10 per cent. Inspiration". While on the subject of contributors we notice one contemporary journal's claim to pay higher rates than any other British magazine. The V.S. Magazine bases payments on a sliding scale, according to the quality of the manuscript submitted, quality being very often a mirror to reflect the time an author takes to write and polish a story. This policy already seems to be attracting authors of quite considerable reputations.

VARGO STATTEN,
London.

THE MASTER

By VARGO

IT WAS at the Fantasy Club where the notion was born. Old Doctor Landhurst, retired professor of science, far more wealthy than any one man had any right to be, shocked his fellow members one morning with a typical observation.

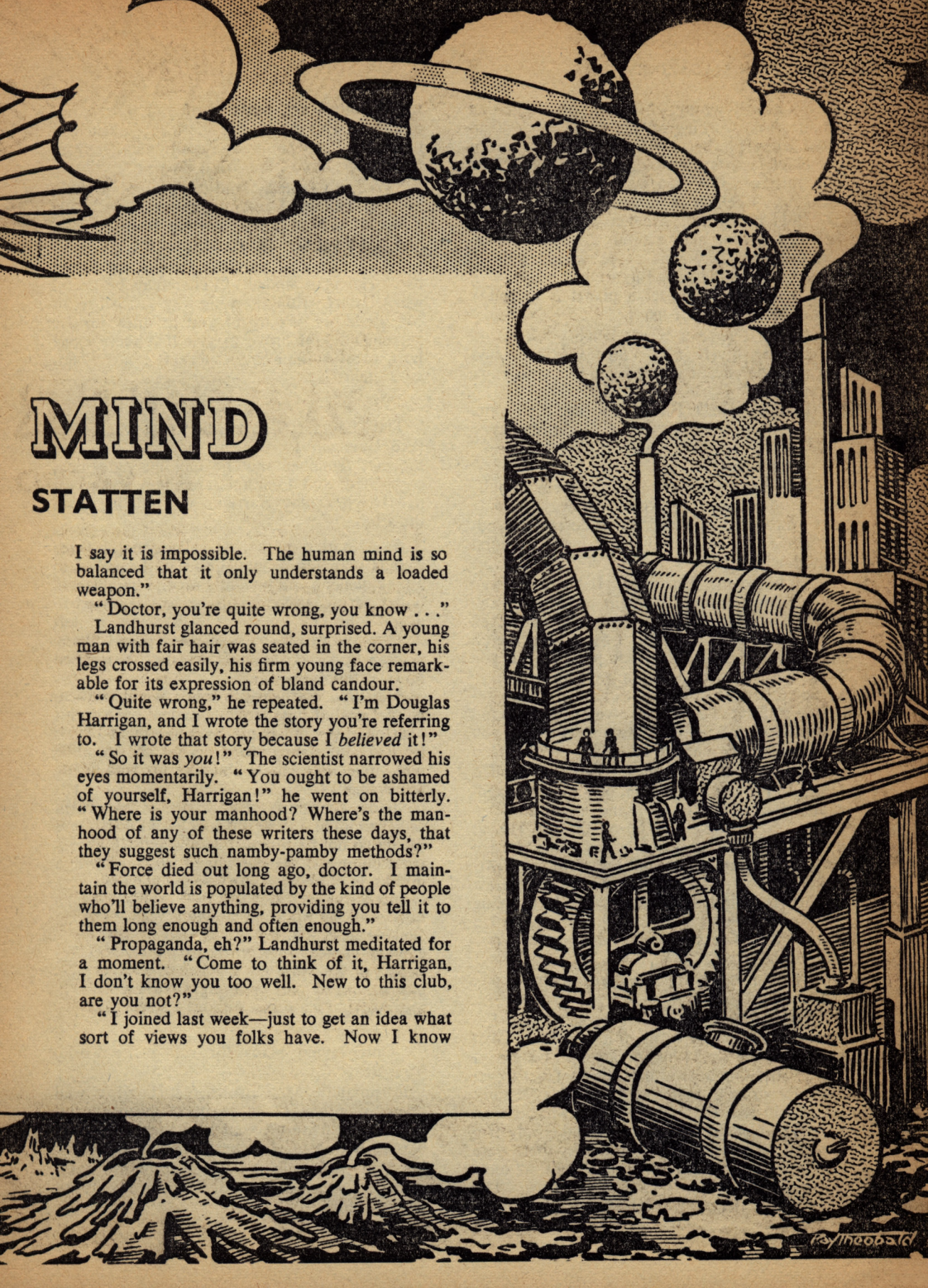
"They're all alike! Every one of them! Dress the stories up any way you please, but it boils down to the same thing . . . . Nobody will ever convince me that you can rule a world without guns, force, and menace."

He slammed down the magazine he had been reading and glared round on the others. His white hair was nearly standing up with inner annoyance.

"Here are we, gentlemen, in the year 1970, members of a club devoted to the pursuance of all things fantastic and scientific—literature in particular—and yet what do we find? We find dozens of authors, known and unknown, still churning out the same old stuff. They suggest control of the world by kindness, logic, negotiation—control by everything except the right medium—force! One writer here even says the people of the world are a bunch of suckers who can be forced into believing anything without any resort to force and without a single raygun!

MIND

STATTEN



I say it is impossible. The human mind is so balanced that it only understands a loaded weapon."

"Doctor, you're quite wrong, you know . . ."

Landhurst glanced round, surprised. A young man with fair hair was seated in the corner, his legs crossed easily, his firm young face remarkable for its expression of bland candour.

"Quite wrong," he repeated. "I'm Douglas Harrigan, and I wrote the story you're referring to. I wrote that story because I *believed* it!"

"So it was *you*!" The scientist narrowed his eyes momentarily. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Harrigan!" he went on bitterly. "Where is your manhood? Where's the manhood of any of these writers these days, that they suggest such namby-pamby methods?"

"Force died out long ago, doctor. I maintain the world is populated by the kind of people who'll believe anything, providing you tell it to them long enough and often enough."

"Propaganda, eh?" Landhurst meditated for a moment. "Come to think of it, Harrigan, I don't know you too well. New to this club, are you not?"

"I joined last week—just to get an idea what sort of views you folks have. Now I know

they're mostly wrong. Most of you are getting on in years, working on the policy of 1940 to 1960 when power and force were considered the chief factors for progress. We know now how mistaken that idea was: but old ideas die hard . . . . I believe in modern ideas. I believe, as I told in my story, that a whole world can be ruled by one man without a single application to force. Ray guns, space machines, death beams, and all the rest of it, are just props. All that is needed to master a planet is ingenuity and absolute calm of manner."

Landhurst gave a harsh laugh. "You are very young, my friend. You would soon find out the difference if you tried to live your story in real life!"

"I don't agree." Harrigan lighted a cigarette calmly and gazed back with his light blue eyes.

"Good Lord, boy, you seriously mean—?"

"Absolutely!"

There was a silence among the members, the silence of stunned surprise. Anyway, nobody had ever dared to stand up to despotic Landhurst like this before. Then at last Landhurst said slowly:

"Listen to me, Harrigan. It has long been a moot point amongst us members whether any of the fantastic stories printed today are even remotely possible in truth. I assert they are all impossible, and *your* theory in particular. If you could master a world within, say, six months—as you do in this story—without a single recourse to force, I'd—I'd give you fifty thousand pounds! And willingly! Because I know you cannot possibly manage it."

Harrigan smiled. "A decidedly sporting offer, Doctor. I'm not a rich man, being just a magazine writer, and fifty thousand might come in useful . . . I'll take you up on that!" He sat up with sudden decision in his chair, turned to a grey-haired man on his right. "Mr. Beddows, you're a lawyer. I want you to draw up this wager in legal terms. When I am ruling the world I don't want any hitch . . . All a matter of business, Doctor Landhurst. You understand?"

"Of course, but— Dammit, man, you're not serious?"

"I said I believed what I wrote — and I'm going to prove it. I wrote of a man from Tibet who ruled the world by application of logic. I had to study up a good deal about Tibet to get my facts straight, therefore I shall play a similar role in real life. I know just what a man from Tibet ought to do . . . I make only two stipulations, gentlemen. In the story there were three assistants. I reserve the right to have three—friends whom I know I can trust. The other clause is that, while I am building up my world-control act, not one of you must communicate with me or give me away. You will find how I am going on rapidly enough from the newspapers . . . . What do you say?"

"Well, it's fantastic and can't possibly work, but I'm willing," Landhurst chuckled. "Rule a world without force, starting from scratch, and you'll get fifty thousand from me."

"And plenty of publicity besides for future use," Harrigan smiled. "That may be useful when I start writing in a big way . . . All right, Mr. Beddows, it's up to you to draw up the agreement. I'll prove to you that there's one born every minute . . . suckers, I mean, not agreements."

THE Fantasy Club hardly knew whether to take Harrigan seriously or not. In any case the fact remained that he had the agreement completed, and Landhurst retained a copy of it. The next day Harrigan was missing from the Club.

As a matter of fact he called on his three friends scattered around London, then went to a junk dealer's and bought a second-hand steam boiler very cheaply. This he had removed to a small firm of engineers with whom he left definite and rather unusual instructions. Being a small firm and anxious for orders they raised no objections.

After that, for nearly a week, Harrigan spent a great deal of time in the basement beneath his apartment — much to the amazement of his landlady, dabbling with chemicals, printing film, reading thick textbooks, and producing weird smells from gluey looking chemicals. His landlady, peering once down the steps, caught sight of him like some ultra-modern Faust. Once she could not be sure if it was him at all. Catching a glimpse of a dead-white face, lined with a multitude of creases, she fled for her life . . .

Just the same it was still the normal Harrigan who came up the steps from the cellar with an amused grin on his calmly impudent face.

"Mr. Harrigan . . . ." The landlady emerged from the rear regions, wrapped up in a huge apron and a good deal of wrath. "Mr. Harrigan, what have you been doing down in my nice clean basement?"

"Only laying plans for ruling the world, Mrs. Brown."

Fortunately, Mrs. Brown, as Harrigan well knew, was one of those beings whose orbit centred exclusively round a kitchen. She was blessed with a total absence of imagination.

"You can't rule the world from my basement, young man!" she declared firmly. "And what is more—"

"Mrs. Brown—*please*!" Harrigan held up his hand solemnly. "My mind is full of four dimensional ideas: I beg of you not to disturb them. Like this . . . see." He held out his handkerchief four square and showed the doubting woman both sides. Finally he gave it to her to hold tautly. She obeyed, watched as he drove his fist through the linen and took the shreds from her.

"Deliberate waste!" she sniffed. "I never saw—"

"Shake it out," Harrigan suggested, beaming on her.

She snatched the shreds from him and shook hard, stared incredulously as a perfect handkerchief came into view.

"Fourth dimension," Harrigan explained solemnly. "Now you know!"

Whistling, he turned to the door of his room . . .

EXACTLY a fortnight after Harrigan had made his wager with Landhurst, Londoners were distinctly surprised to behold one morning, on their way to business, a gathering of people in Hyde Park. They were congregated round a battered cylinder of metal, sealed at both ends, with portholes of densely thick opaque glass on each side. The mass of metal lay unpicturesquely in the midst of trees and flowerbeds, had smashed down the railings leading to the road and to all appearances had dropped with considerable force.

At eight in the morning the crowd numbered about two hundred: by noon there were thousands. Despite the efforts of the police, traffic was held up in the main street and the park swarmed with the ordinary folk as well as newshounds, press photographers, television and movie experts. Then there were warnings to keep away from the cylinder as at 12.30 weird clankings came from inside it. At 12.45 the clankings ceased and a sealed operculum opened in the top. A deathlike hush fell on the massed watchers.

Through the opening in the top a head began to emerge slowly—a head of flowing white hair. Then beneath it there became visible an even whiter face, chiseled by a myriad of wrinkles and giving the impression of unguessable antiquity. The eyes, pale blue and inscrutable, gave the impression of keen intelligence and still youthful reasoning . . . . By degrees the whole figure emerged, attired in a long white garment with backflung cowl, rather reminiscent of a monk's cassock . . . .

At last Douglas Harrigan extracted himself completely and stood up on the old steam boiler —brought hither during the night by truck and rolled from the roadway through the railings—surveying the crowd.

"Peace!" he said gravely, raising his arm.

A murmur passed round the people.

"Say, who in blazes *is* he?"

"Looks like a Druid to me . . . *You* know those fellers in nightshirts."

Harrigan rubbed his ear gently, the better to adjust the minute electrical pick-up therein. Then he said:

"There are among you those who believe I am a Druid . . . No, I am not a Druid. I am a Tibetan, most high scientist of the Lamas of Tibet. Unhappily, by a mistake in judgment, my space machine dropped here instead of in the Himalayas; a mistake caused by a miscalculation as I returned from Mars . . . ."

"Mars!" went up a gasp.

"Yes; Mars . . ." Harrigan's ghastly white face wrinkled in sudden contemplation. "I learned so much . . . the power of a race with whom we have yet to reckon . . . I had intended returning to Tibet with warnings of what I saw on Mars—but the fates willed me here. I am prepared to believe that they did so in order that I might show you of the western world what lies before you . . ."

"Say, that was nice of the fates!" observed a laconic voice. Hodder, chief feature writer to the *Clarion*, was standing immediately below the cylinder. "How is it that you talk English so well, Mr. Tibetan?"

"What is mere language when you have mastery of thought?" Harrigan sighed.

Hodder was not convinced. His ratlike eyes searched the cylinder with ruthless care.

"For a man with the mastery of thought you made a horrible mess of your landing!" he shouted up. "Mistook England for the Himalayas! Don't hand me that! Anyway, this thing here is a *steam boiler*!"

Harrigan's eyes narrowed a little. The hatchet face of the journalist was irritating beyond measure. He looked like—and was—the world's prize snooper.

"I have yet to see a steam boiler with portholes, young man," Harrigan said at last, with due gravity—and earned himself a laugh. "This ship is battered and scarred from cosmic brickbats," he went on. "If, as I understand is often the case with Westerners, you doubt my veracity, please come up and look through the ship for yourself . . . . All of you come and look! We of Tibet are natural masters of science and occultism, there is sometimes the necessity to convince the doubters of the west. Pray come up . . ."

Ladders were produced. The newspapermen and cameramen came first and the bulk of the

people afterwards, together with one or two rather baffled police officers. One by one they lowered themselves into the cylinder's peculiar inside. There was nothing visible save a small bed rivetted to the floor and one lead packing case. The porthole glasses were of the variety which permit a view from inside while none can be obtained from outside.

Hodder swung round with a malicious grin, notebook in hand, to find Harrigan behind him, a smile on his wrinkled, ancient face.

"This is a trick!" Hodder said bluntly, writing briefly on his pad. "This piece of old iron couldn't fly anywhere—let alone Mars! No rocket tubes, no machinery, no control board, not even a map! What's the big idea?" He thrust his book back in his pocket aggressively.

Harrigan gave a patient sigh. "You poor, ignorant western people! Have you not heard of how we of Tibet sit in the glaciers and by mind force alone cause the ice to melt around us? This ship was driven through the cosmos by mind power. Matter is subservient to mind."

"You mean you lay on that bed and concentrated?" Hodder snapped.

"I do. I could even have gone without a ship if necessary—I could have hurled myself through the void like a petrified image—but I realised I might need to carry evidence back with me from Mars. Besides, I needed such a mundane thing as a camera to reveal the truth of my assertions. In that packing case there is the film and equipment. I could hardly have carried those without a ship."

"No gravity in space," Hodder observed acidly. "So I'm told."

"Truly—but there is gravity on Earth and Mars to be overcome at the initial levitation . . ."

Hodder cocked his eye on the cases, scraped his jaw with a forefinger.

"I don't understand why you came here instead of Tibet, even now," he said. "Why don't you move on to Tibet right now and prove you're okay?"

Harrigan shrugged. "If you wish it . . . ." He closed his eyes and said quietly. "We will go at this very moment. Prepare . . ."

"Hey, wait a minute—!" somebody shouted in sudden alarm. "We're here too, don't forget! We can't go to Tibet. We've got businesses to look after!"

"Why, of course!" Harrigan opened his eyes with a sudden start. "I had overlooked that . . . . Perhaps—some other time. Besides, now I am here I feel that you are entitled to explanations since I have upset the normal routine of your city."

"Don't worry—you'll get plenty of publicity," Hodder said crytically. "In fact maybe more than you bargained for! I've got it all down in this notebook of mine." He patted his pocket wherein lay the book. "Everything you have said; everything I have seen. I'm going to reason things out for myself."

"So? You match your mind against mine?" Harrigan stood looking at the reporter steadily for a moment, then he said briefly, "My friend, if you probe too far you will find yourself in the same condition as your notes! Just look what you have written . . . ."

"Huh? Meaning what?" Hodder tugged his book out of his pocket, flipped it open—then he started violently. When he had thrust it away it had been half full of observations, both relating to Harrigan and other matters long past, but now the book was completely blank. Not a single page had a note on it. Yet it was still his book, with the *Clarion* stamped clearly across the front.

"How the heck—?" He stared blankly as the others crowded round him.

"Such a pity," Harrigan sighed. "Mind over matter, of course. I did it just as a warning, my friend. Do not probe into a science you can never hope to understand . . . ."

"Perhaps," Hodder said slowly, his lips tightening, "I *do* understand! In any event I'll go to any lengths to prove what I'm thinking . . ."

But nobody was taking any notice of him. They were too busy following the "Mystic" to the airlock again . . . .

CHAPTER II

HARRIGAN the Tibetan hit the headlines to no uncertain effect that evening. So far, his peculiar manner and dispassionate calmness, together with an inherent ability to twist conversation to his own advantage, had made quite an impression on the body of people at large. The papers gave the reactions of the masses exactly, complete with photographs of the Druid-like visitor in his long white cassock. Some said he was three hundred years old — a master scientist, an exponent of the occult, cleverer than anything the western world had ever known. Hodder got into a row with his editor through taking the opposite view to the the rest of the papers. Hodder summed up his conclusions in a leader article, which, after a statement of the main facts, concluded with this:

"This being claims he comes from Tibet, has visited Mars, and hurled a cylinder of metal across space by the force of mind alone. This represents a kind of mind power utterly foreign to us. Are we supposed to credit it?

Are we, rational beings of 1970, expected to credit that even a Tibetan can do such a thing?

"Why did he arrive here? It was no accident! He came for a purpose—and a man with such knowledge as he claims will not be content with purely enlightening us. No; he will try to dominate us instead. He had spoken of a warning he brings us. What is this warning? If, on the other hand, he is a fake — as this writer fully believes — then he is treating the great British public as a bunch of fools and ought to be locked up! He has spoken of films. We demand to see them! This writer is firmly convinced that this so-called man from Tibet is a fake and will go to endless trouble to prove it. Watch this column from now on!"

Most of the readers were offended at the idea that they were a bunch of fools. It is a man's or woman's personal right to be proud of his or her own judgment . . . Harrigan himself, reading the notice in the privacy of his hotel—whither an admiring but uncertain body of civic authorities had whirled him—only smiled tautly and wondered what they were thinking at the Fantasy Club. After pondering for a while he started on the second stage of his scheme and demanded that in view of Hodder's insulting suggestions, a cinema should be appropriated for the exclusive purpose of permitting him to show his film of Martian life, and issuing at the same time a grave personal warning to the world.

The authorities arranged for his request to be granted the following night at the largest cinema in the metropolis, summarily cutting short the current hit. Not that the public minded. A first hand film of life on another world, personally commentated by a mystic from Tibet, would be infinitely better than the droolings of a Hollywood blonde.

Mob law reigned in the Strand the following night. Searchlights swept the sky; skysigns blazed out the one word of the film's title — "Mars!" Men and women, rich and poor, trampled on one another in street and gilded foyer. No premiere had ever given the authorities so much trouble . . . . In the best seats secured at fabulous prices, were all the members of the Fantasy Club. In the front row downstairs, travelling case on his knee, was Bob Shepherd, Harrigan's closest friend and associate. A big blond fellow, he sat with a satisfied and rather mysterious grin on his face watching the house filling up around him.

In another part of the house was the Press, Hodder to the forefront with a cold, cynical grin on his vinegary features. His grin vanished and he became intent when at last the hubbub died down and the time arrived to commence. The curtains swept aside to reveal Harrigan, in his usual queer monklike disguise, standing full in the spotlight, a microphone before him on its stand.

"Ladies and gentlemen . . ." Harrigan paused as a deathlike hush descended. "Ladies and gentlemen, because my real name is practically unpronounceable, it is better perhaps that you continue to refer to me through your press and among yourselves as 'The Tibetan.' I have been subjected to a great deal of criticism since I accidentally arrived here instead of my homeland. At home I would be understood and be acknowledged for what I am—the first man to conquer the void, a master of science and the occult, and one worthy to become the ultimate high Lama of my sect. To become that demands powers of the supernatural and scientific which you of the west cannot even guess at . . . . Later, I will show you what I mean. First there are other things of import — my experiences on Mars, for instance . . . ."

The lights dimmed and Harrigan moved aside, taking the microphone with him. Upon the screen there appeared a colour picture of a vast desert, stretching as far as the eyes could behold. Slowly the view changed revealing a vision of dead canal bottom strewn with vegetation along its banks.

"That," said Harrigan slowly, "is quite a representative example of what all Mars' surface is like. Now here are some samples of the life that Mars possesses on its surface. Mars is not, as some believe, totally dead. It has air of sorts, thin—but sufficient for some forms of life. Like these . . . . I was enabled to photograph without difficulty since I can either live in air or master the conditions to live without it—Observe!"

The scene faded into an astounding picture of monstrous sluglike beings crawling along a rocky defile, backed by a sandy cliff to the rear. Suddenly the white garbed figure of Harrigan appeared beside them, incredibly dwarfed.

"From that you may see the comparison in sizes," he observed. "The camera was automatic and went on turning . . . ."

A woman screamed somewhere in the audience as the stalked eyes of one of the slugs turned to look at the unseen camera. Harrigan's minute figure turned and ran for safety.

"That particular creature caught my scent," Harrigan said, as the scene faded. "I found the visible surface of Mars populated by these queer creatures who apparently live on the canal products — on the vegetation, that is. They

have only one abysmal intellect. Because of their profusion, however, I fancied that if there were any intelligent scientists on Mars they had probably moved themselves either underground or into another dimension out of reach of the creatures and of course hidden from prying eyes. I found nothing below surface—but in the fourth dimension, into which I can pass with ease, I found *this*! And here there lies menace in plenty!"

Even the hard boiled and suspicious Hodder gasped a little at what followed. The scenes were weird and unearthly. The picture showed a city shimmering with unearthly yet beautiful living colours—a city that was somehow *within* a city, and the whole mass of leaning edifices with vast bases and foreshortened summits. It was the kind of scene to make a trick camera turn handsprings. At the base of the buildings were people, but they came and went magically —stepping out of a demarcation of nothing into visibility, then walked back into nothing!

"This, my friends, is what I saw in Mars' fourth dimension," Harrigan said calmly. "The camera was set at the foci of three and four dimensions. As photographic experts have already testified, examination of my camera has revealed things about it which cannot be explained by normal photographic law. That is because it is designed for dimensional use. Through its lenses you see people walk in the fourth dimension then veer out of it as it crosses our own space. I saw other things too—such as this . . . ."

Through eye-blurring, foreshortened angles there appeared power engines, dwarfing anything ever known on Earth, before which tiny beings worked and toiled. In shape they appeared almost earthly, and for that reason the vast scale of the engines they worked could be imagined. View upon view showed visions of power beyond the wildest imagination, and finally a whole mass of some thousand objects which, even to the uninitiated, were plainly space ships.

The twisting angles began to fade . . . . The lights came up. It had been thirty minutes in wonderland.

"Before we continue with more normal, orthodox views of my adventures, there is something I must say," Harrigan said gravely. "You are fortunate indeed in that circumstance led me to arrive here on my way home, otherwise you would probably not have known of the

menace threatening your civilization—indeed every civilization. You talk of world war, of nation against nation, and yet never give a thought to the possible preparation by other beings on other worlds against you . . . . You have seen vast engines of power being constructed on another world, in a dimension hidden from your eyes. With my superior scientific knowledge I probed the deepest secrets of these beings. They too are preparing for war—for onslaught upon this planet! Let there be no mistake about that. It is only a matter of months and against them you stand no chance because your science is not accurate enough."

"But yours is!" shouted somebody.

"Quite true, but—" Harrigan shrugged. "I am disbelieved by certain people. I cannot place my powers at the disposal of unbelievers."

Hodder stood up suddenly in the Press box. "I know quite well that your remarks are directed against me, Tibetan — but I have reasons for my disbelief. How do we know that these film scenes are genuine? How do we know *you* are genuine? Beyond making my notes vanish—which probably has an explanation far more mundane than mind force —you have done nothing. I assume that the master minds of Tibet can do better things than make writing vanish from a reporter's notebook?"

"Aw, sit down!" bellowed a voice from the cheaper seats.

"Why should I sit down?" Hodder demanded. "This man here, a self-confessed mystic, warns us of approaching war from Mars —though he omits to mention exactly why the Martians should desire our world so suddenly —and our only proof of it is a collection of pictures which any skilled cameraman could fake."

"Experts pronounce my camera totally unlike any they have ever seen," Harrigan answered imperturbably. "It was made in Tibet—by me."

"So what? Suppose you start putting yourself in the fourth dimension, like you did on Mars? Without machinery! Do it — now! That's a challenge, Tibetan and one you can't refuse if you're all you claim."

"And if I do this?" Harrigan asked gravely. "Will you believe?"

"I'm not promising anything because I know you can't do it . . ."

Harrigan creased his aged, wrinkled face into a smile. Then he closed his eyes, folded his arms, and became motionless. From somewhere in the packed house a shriek went up as he slowly began to fade from sight. In sixty seconds he had disappeared, and the stage in front of the screen was totally empty!

Hodder looked nonplussed for a moment, then he vaulted over the gangway and finally gained the stage. He started searching hurriedly, ignoring the derisive cries of the audience. As he searched the draperies Harrigan slowly reappeared on the opposite side of the stage.

"Did you lose something, my friend?" he enquired politely.

There was a roar of laughter as Hodder swung round. He glared for a moment, then searched the Tibetan's cassock hurriedly. Harrigan did not stop him; he only continued to smile blandly.

"I have nothing up my sleeve, young man," he said solemnly. "But while you are about it you might like to witness something else, in case—in a sudden fit of impulse you should feel like killing me. Give me a match, will you?"

Hodder complied dubiously, then watched with his eyes narrowed as Harrigan took the flame and held it against his pale cheek, each in turn. Finally he held his fingers in it, then at last, threw the dead match away.

"If red hot bars were handy I could do the same with those," he observed. "Like the rest of my race I am indestructible by ordinary means. I am a scientist and master of the supernatural . . . . Now go and sit down."

"I don't see—"

"Sit down!" Harrigan thundered, his eyes blazing suddenly.

Hodder turned away and resumed his seat in the press box. He was certainly baffled, but by no means quelled. The excited muttering died away as Harrigan took up the microphone again.

"Mainly to satisfy this young unbeliever I have exerted mental strain to get in and out of the fourth dimension," he said gravely. "That at least ought to prove to you that I am in earnest when I speak of an invasion from Mars . . . . I can save you, yes—but only if you all believe . . . Now let the performance resume!"

It did resume, but the films were merely photographed records of a space flight, and as such, of not over-impressive interest after what had been done. Most of the audience was thinking of that mystical demonstration on the stage and of the grim warning of approaching invasion. . . .

In a few short hours Harrigan of Tibet had hit the mind of the world with more force than a cataclysm.

HARRIGAN returned to his hotel surrounded by a clamouring mob, from which he only succeeded in escaping after a speech from the balcony of his hotel room. Then he closed the windows, threw himself into a chair, and relaxed. Finally, making sure the doors and window were locked and the shades down, he peeled off his fireproof synthetic flesh make-up and threw himself gratefully on the bed. He went to sleep fully assured of the conviction that there is one born every minute. . . .

The next morning the papers handed him his biggest laugh for years as, with his make-up on again, he received the newspapers from an awestruck bell hop.

"IS TIBETAN A FAKE?" asked the *Clarion*. That was Hodder's doing. Nasty piece of work, Hodder. The other papers took the thing seriously, and they were the papers which really dominated public viewpoint . The headlines were varied—

MYSTIC'S GRAVE WARNING. TIBETAN DOES A VANISH! IS MARS PREPARING WAR? And so on. . . .

Harrington had hardly finished his breakfast —it had been rather hard to convince the management that he ate as normal people do when in the west—before there came a knock on the door. Immediately he assumed his trancelike pose and said gravely, "Enter, my friend!"

It was a complete deputation which came in, mainly middle-aged men with thoughtful faces, headed by no less a personality than the Mayor of London himself.

"Your—er—Excellency," the Mayor said, bowing uncertainly. "I have come in person at the request of various high officials who wish to know more about your alarming prediction of last night."

"So?" Harrigan said softly. "You mean my warning of war with Mars?"

"Exactly." The Mayor looked relieved at finding elaboration unnecesary. "Such a thing, you must realise, cannot be taken lightly. The whole world knows about it this morning—and naturally the whole world is alarmed. The hardest thing is to understand how this can be true—your prediction I mean—particularly as our astronomers, these gentlemen here, can find no trace of anything unusual on Mars' dead surface. Not even with the new Mount Wilson reflector."

Harrigan smiled wearily. "Gentlemen, did I not make it impressive enough that these Martian beings exist on Mars' surface in

another dimension? They cannot be seen: therein lies the subtlety of their plan. Only the slugs inhabit the normal surface, but they are far too small for telescopic observation in any case."

"The facts," said one of the astronomers rather uncomfortably, "were not given to us very clearly, Your Excellency. You must forgive us for doubting you. . . ."

"Of course."

It is possible," the Mayor went on, "that the Prime Minister may wish to see you in regard to your warning. We must take all possible precautions."

Harrigan frowned very slightly. He felt he was getting into deeper waters.

"Whatever precautions you take will avail you nothing," he said. "Only science such as mine—*mind* science—can conquer these Martians when they come."

"But you would be willing to aid us? I may convey that promise to the Prime Minister?"

"Providing there is nothing but unswerving adherence to my wishes, yes," Harrigan assented, thinking. Not otherwise. Mind force cannot operate successfully against adverse elements."

The Mayor nodded hurriedly. "Of course—of course. You may rest assured that all unwanted elements will be suppresed by the law. . . . I will communicate your observations to the Prime Minister. Thank you, Your Excellency. . . ."

Harrigan bowed them out, then stood pondering. This was hardly the move he had expected. Unless he was very careful he was likely to force a world wide rush to arms and cripple all industrial pursutis. The Prime Minister! That would take some tackling. . . . It gave even his sublime nerve a jolt. However, the thing was done now: only thing to do was to tighten things up a little.

He spent both morning and afternoon delivering speeches from the top of his "space ship" in Hyde Park, speeches in which he stressed the necessity for misguided western civilization to take this chance of heeding a supermind from the East. He was not quite sure how much of his talking went over—but from the expressions of those who watched him he judged he had cashed in again on the strength of his mystic feats at the cinema the previous night.

The evening papers said in the main—MYSTIC SPEAKS AGAIN, and all save the *Clarion* avowed allegiance to his warnings and predictions.

Hodder still maintained his obstinate stand, but even he began to see he would have to change his views, not because of personal conversion but because of the fury of his editor and the public. Everybody had reared up Harrigan as a prophetic, scientific god. On every occasion he had proved his powers. It was not befitting that the *Clarion* should be the one dissenting voice. . . .

But Hodder, scenting a scoop one day, kept on with private investigations just the same.

CHAPTER III

A SPECIAL train plentifully sprinkled with guards in plain clothes whirled Harrigan from London to the Prime Minister's south country home the following day. He was deeply uneasy, but the synthetic make-up on his face prevented any apparent worry from showing itself. To the onlookers, and the authorities grouped about him, he was the same imperturbable mystic of yore.

When at last he was shown into the Prime Minister's library his courage nearly deserted him. The calm figure standing with his back to the window, hands behind him, stirred Harrigan to the realisation of the monstrous hoax he had perpetrated. He only went on for one reason now—because retreat was impossible.

Then he was alone with the man who was the leader of the nation.

"I understand," the Prime Minister said quietly, "that your name is too unpronounceable for us; therefore I will designate you as others have done. Won't you sit down, Excellency?"

Harrigan obeyed, waited, wondering when he would be discovered. But evidently his disguise was without flaw for presently the Prime Minister said:

"From various sources I am given to understand that you have definite first hand information concerning an intended attack upon this world from Mars. However fantastic that may seem, these days of scientific progress demand that every possible contingency, earthly or unearthly, be taken into consideration. You yourself have so proven your powers that one must at least pay heed to your warning. You are absolutely convinced that this attack will come?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Prime Minister," Harrigan said quietly.

"You have referred to the highly devised scientific powers of these invaders, which you alone can combat. How do you propose to go about such a combat?"

"Your armaments, vast though they are, are useless, Mr. Prime Minister. There is only one way to defeat these invaders, and that is by mass-hypnotism, such as my own people use to master every physical difficulty and every material barrier. . . ." Harrigan felt himself perspiring as a silence followed.

"You believe we should not alter our existing armaments or army personnel in the least, but should practice this—this mass hypnosis system?" The Prime Minister sounded vaguely incredulous.

"I do, yes. You see it is simply a matter of concentration. Thousands of minds, pooled to one particular thought wave, can produce a mental force sufficient to upset the finely balanced minds of the Martian invaders. . . . I say frankly that I would be willing to help the world follow out this system because, of course, we of Tibet will be as much at the mercy of the invaders as anybody else—and we alone are not sufficient in number to offset so many Martians. It will take vast masses of people—millions, all concentrating on one thing, to produce the right effect."

"I think I understand, Excellency," the Prime Minister mused. "But tell me, is it not possible for the heads of nations—or at least their representatives—to visit Mars in this machine of yours and see for themselves what *you* saw? It would serve as a better basis for conviction. After all, I have to convince others —many others. . . ."

For one moment Harrigan thought he was lost: he thought furiously. Then at length he said calmly, "It would produce conviction, certainly, but to even project *myself* to Mars demanded a vast expenditure of mental effort. I could not possibly accomplish it with several people. Besides, none of you are trained to mastering space strain and lack of air by mind control, as I am. . . ."

"I had overlooked that," the Prime Minister admitted ruefully. "For myself I do not doubt your veracity—but there are many others, even in my own House of Commons, who may. If, to defeat these invaders, it demands the resources of a whole world's minds, the heads of other Governments as well as my own must be convinced of your authority."

"I have proved my ability to enter a fourth dimension: I have brought film records of the actual preparations being made. . . . What more can I do?"

"There is one thing which I think will provide satisfaction all round. You must demonstrate the full range of your power. Professor Meredith, for instance, one of the greatest living authorities on Tibetan lore, would set a few recognised tests for you at a public demonstration. If you responded to each test perfectly your undoubted ability would be proven. You understand, Excellency? Not for a moment do I doubt you, but for other countries to co-operate demands proof beyond a shadow of doubt. The verification of Professor Meredith would be accepted without question. Then we can discuss with other nations whatever plans you have. . . ."

Harrigan nodded as calmly as he could. "Of course, Mr. Prime Minister. Any time you wish. . . . Anywhere. I shall stay in London until I hear from you."

"I rather think, Excellency," the Prime Minister said gravely, as he shook hands, "that the world will owe you a great deal in the long run. Let me assure you of the gratitude of the British for your co-operation."

Harrigan bowed with dignity, but he walked out of the room on legs that felt like jelly. . . .

BACK IN London, studiously avoiding all pleas to address the army of adherents who had sprung up in the city, Harrigan spent an uncomfortable day or two pondering on approaching events. He made the excuse that he was "meditating." His bluff had assumed proportions of alarming size. Between him and the possible nominal control of the world—control enough at least to permit of him winning Landhurst's bet—was Meredith, expert on Tibetan lore. That was the very devil.

At last Harrigan made moves, the only ones he could. Having left orders that he was not to be disturbed on any account for forty-eight hours—while he communed with higher planes —he removed his disguise, left the hotel during the night through the window and down the fire escape, thereafter proceeding to move about the city as an ordinary individual.

Immediately the day arrived he spent the time revising his notes on Tibetan miracles from the public library, crammed knowledge by the ton; then he made several purchases from different chemists and purveyors of magical equipment. Finally he rang up his friend Bob Shepherd and gave him implicit instructions, which he was to relay to his other two friends in different parts of the city.

Again by night, Harrigan returned to his hotel, somewhat easier in mind but by no means sure of the future even now. . . In the morning the Prime Minister forwarded his instructions, through the Mayor once again. 'Would His Excellency of Tibet be good enough to respond

to the tests of Professor Meredith at a public demonstration at the Albert Hall at 8 p.m. in three days' time?'

Inside a building? Not bad, Harrigan reflected. He accepted the challenge calmly—and again he slipped out at night and rang Bob Shepherd from a public call box. He chuckled to himself as he returned to his hotel through the night. That fifty thousand pounds was not far off now; he could see that quite clearly.

What he did *not* see was a man with a hatchet face and soft hat standing in an abysmally dark doorway, watching him sedulously.

IF THE London film performance had brought a crowd it was as nothing compared with the invasion which attacked the Albert Hall on the appointed night. Spurred on by the terrific build-up of the press, realising that the Prime Minister himself had convened this demonstration to test the real powers of the 'Man from Tibet,' the public rolled up in myriads.

There were free fights, near-riots, tripled police guards. If this thing went through successfully, the man from Tibet would become a virtual ruler—in essence if not in fact—of the policy of every country in the world. That was what the vast majority of people hoped for. A man with natural occult gifts ought to have plenty of sense—and would that be something! Besides, if there *was* anything in this Martian war possibility, he was the only man with brains enough to stop it. The papers had already hinted at that.

At 8.00 precisely, Harrigan walked calmly onto the dais in the centre of the vast amphitheatre, attired as usual in his cassock, his white hair flowing onto his shoulders. He looked like some ancient patriarch. . . Then came the Mayor, and lastly a bearded, blue-eyed, immaculate individual with a very incisive manner, carrying a small travelling case which he placed very resolutely beside him. The crowd did not need to be told he was Professor Meredith—that bearded face was familiar enough from newspapers.

The crowd hushed. Television transmitters went into action; floodlights came up, drenching that solitary square. The Mayor went through the preliminaries. Cameras ground in silence. Microphones swung into position under the blazing spots. The Press watched. Professor Meredith stepped forward at last as the Mayor retired.

"Excellency," Meredith said, and his voice was as sharp as a razor, "of the three stages of learning ascribed to Tibetans—namely, investigation, meditation, and understanding—I gather that you are the master of the third state, that you are complete controller of matter. In other words you have reached the point where matter of any kind is subservient to you? Where the minds of others are open books?"

Harrigan inclined his head gravely.

"The three supreme tests of Tibetan science are levitation, dimensional control and conquest of matter," Meredith went on, flicking off the points on his fingers. "No matter what particular Tibetan sect you belong to, your control will be the same. Now let us commence. . . First, mind reading. I am thinking of three multiple numbers. What are they?"

"Two four six, seven four two and five four nine," Harrigan replied instantly.

"Correct. . ." Meredith looked surprised. "Now— you placed yourself in the fourth dimension recently. Will you kindly do so again? I understand that in a fourth dimension you cannot be touched by anything in this plane? I want your word that when you have vanished you will remain inside this chalk circle. . " Stooping Meredith drew a circle on the floor round Harrigan.

"You have my word," he said quietly. "But to make doubly sure it would be as well to fasten me with rope and have it held at both ends."

Meredith nodded and removed a length of rope from his case. Two volunteers from the front row fastened the rope in position round Harrigan's waist and held both ends. Then he closed his eyes, folded his arms, and faded slowly from view. The rope trailed into nothing on both sides of the empty chalk circle.

Meredith, frowning heavily, moved his arms inside the space—first above then below. Finally he withdrew and stood pondering as Harrigan slowly merged back into sight again. With a calm smile he nodded to the knots and presently dropped free.

"Excellent—excellent indeed!" Meredith observed. "Now here—" He pulled forth an ordinary piece of wood from his case. "Here is a plain piece of timber. By the power of concentration I want you to make it burst into flames. I believe it is a feat much favoured by you mystics."

"Hold it up so everybody can see it," Harrigan ordered briefly.

Meredith obeyed, a rather sceptical smile on his face. Then there was a long silence as Harrigan stood motionless, concentrating. It was positively startling when the whole mass of wood burst into smoke and flame, causing Meredith to drop it hastily and stamp on it. He gave a rather sheepish smile through his beard.

"I confess I came here to trip you up, Excel-

lency," he said quietly. "But I am afraid the tables are being turned. *I* am being made to look the fool . . One more test, then I shall be satisfied. The most difficult feat even for an advanced Tibetan is the art of levitation by sheer will power opposing gravitation. It is hard enough for the mystic to force himself to rise from the ground but to make another rise from the ground is even harder! I challenge you to do that. If you succeed, I shall probe no further. It would be obviously futile. . ."

"You require me to raise myself into the air?" Harrigan asked.

"Not yourself. Raise *me*!" Meredith grinned cunningly.

"Very well—but I warn you I shall use hypnotism. Like this!" Harrigan shot out his fingers suddenly. In defiance of gravitation Meredith leaned backwards slowly, as stiff as a poker, gradualy lowered to the floor and lay motionless. For a moment or two Harrigan stood pondering and the audience waited breathlessly.

Then he waved his hands at the head and feet of the obviously tranced expert. Slowly, gradually, Meredith began to rise, floating horizontally in mid-air. There he remained, two feet from the floor, with Harrigan's hands poised over him compellingly.

For perhaps six seconds there was dead silence; then Harrigan made another gentle pass and in response the expert slowly went back to the floor again. A snap of the fingers before his eyes and he began to get dazedly to his feet.

"What did I—?" he began, then the rest of his words was drowned out by applause, reverberating from roof and walls.

Here, in glaring lights, without any apparatus —for the whole place had been searched not five minutes before the demonstration had begun—somthing had been done that made stage illusionists look like amateurs. And the cream of it was that the master mind of Tibetan lore had been the victim. Meredith had been made to float. He was standing now looking incredibly bewildered.

Then at last, as the din died away, he held out his hand frankly.

"There can be no further doubt of your Excellency's abilities," he said quietly, his words relaying to everybody by the microphone. "This world-wide telecast, convened for the purpose, has proved to the world that we have in our midst a natural controller of material forces—one who has come to warn us of impending danger and upon whose undeniable ability and resource we now cast our allegiance. Excellency, I bow to your genius!"

Harrigan smiled faintly, but he said nothing. Inwardly, his chief anxiety was to get clear of the surging, admiring mob of people who looked perilously likely to assail him. He made a quick motion to the police guard round the dais and they closed in immediately.

Even at that he had a rough and tumble journey back to his hotel. Not until he was at last back in his room did he breathe freely again, and turned to look at the Mayor and group of officials around him.

"It is more than likely that the Prime Minister will himself have seen your efforts over the televisor, Excellency," the Mayor observed. "In any case a full film and sound record will be dispatched to him tonight, together with my personal reports. . . There can be little doubt as to the outcome," he added smiling.

"I am entirely at the Prime Minister's disposal," Harrigan answered. "And now, gentlemen, if you please. . .? The strain tonight. . ."

"Of course." The Mayor nodded to the officials and they bowed themselves out of the room. Harrigan gave a faint, troubled smile when the door had closed. He waited around his room until long after midnight, smoking and pondering. Finally, shedding his diguise, he turned to the writing table and penned a brief note—

> "You did magnificently. Tomorrow I should get the okay from the Prime Minister himself. That will constitute the winning of my wager because it will make me virtual ruler of the world. I cannot go further than that. I shall simply vanish and become Harrigan again. Then, and only then can you release Professor Meredith. You'll hear from me further. Thanks a lot. DH."

Harrigan smiled, sealed the note in an envelope and tied it to a small paperweight. At one in the morning he saw what he was waiting for—the momentary flash of a torchlight way down in the deserted street outside. Immediately he opened the window and dropped the letter outside. The figure stooped and picked it up, moved silently away into the night. . .

NEXT MORNING brought an official of the Government to the hotel, surrounded by the usual horde of eager newspaper men. The envoy refused to speak, was admitted to Harrigan's room, gave a slight bow, then handed over a long. heavily sealed envelope.

Harrigan extracted the authoritative notepaper of the House of Commons and read the communiqué rapidly. His heart gave an extra beat. The note was signed by the Prime Minister in person. It commended the vindication of the previous night's test and requested

the co-operation of 'His Excellency' at a conference of world heads, to be shortly convened —at which 'His Excellency' would perhaps be good enough to suggest ways and means of defeating the approaching Martian menace.

In essence, despite legal and technical phrasing, the letter was an admission of Harrigan's mystical powers and was a request for him to become the shadow power behind the thrones of the world. It was the fulfilment of a fifty thousand pound wager.

Harrigan nodded and smiled, walked over to the door and handed the note to the nearest pressman.

"Publish this—facsimile," he requested briefly. "It is not my policy to keep requests secret. I consider it in the public interest that they should know what is to be done. . . I am to be ruler of the world, my friends—and I assure you my one wish is to help you all to overcome this approaching invasion."

He withdrew without further observations, turned to the envoy.

"I will communicate with the Prime Minister within the hour," he said quietly. "I have other matters to attend to first. . ."

"Very good, Excellency." The envoy departed with brisk tread.

Harrigan smiled rather ruefully as he was left alone. He began to think out loud.

"If I retire now I'm safe. I have not taken a cent from anybody; I have proved that there is one born every minute; and the press will advertise to Landhurst that I have become ruler of the world without any resort to force. . . Well, it was good while it lasted." He began to peel off his disguise. "A brief note can say I was recalled to my ancestors in Tibet, or something. Then—"

He broke off and glanced round sharply at a sudden hubbub in the corridor, followed by a pounding on his room door. Frantically he tried to put his disguise back in place but it just would not stick.

"One moment—!" he called out anxiously; but to his horror a duplicate key grated in the lock. The door flew open suddenly.

It was Hodder of the *Clarion* who came stalking in first, his face sour with triumph. Around him were police officers and behind them the hotel manager and an inquisitive crowd.

"Douglas Harrigan," the inspector said curtly. "I have here a warant for your arrest on charges of fraud, kidnapping, and false representation. I must warn you that anything you say—"

"All right, skip that," Harrigan interrupted, with a little sigh. He stripped off the rest of his diguise, then glanced at Hodder. "Nice going, Hodder," he commented dryly. "But you're just a shade too late. I've done all I need to do. . . Now gentlemen, I am at your service."

CHAPTER NINE

POSSIBLY no trial in the history of British justice had such sensational angles as that of the 'Tibetan Mystic.'

Throughout it all Harrigan remained perfectly at ease, answered every question truthfully, gave the details of his wager and of his intentions to step out before he did any real harm. The only thing he refused to say was his method of performing his feats. He had reasons for that: newspapers were bidding fantastic prices against each other for his personal revelations. All he had to do was sit back and wait for the highest bidder.

Hodder's revelations were surprising. Suspicious from the very first, he had watched every move Harrigan had made. He had seen him leave and return to his hotel. He had seen him telephone. He had traced the call to Bob Shepherd, sorted out the details from the Fantasy Club—by joining as a member—and had gradually built up the evidence that had led him to see the actual kidnapping of the real Professor Meredith by Harrigan's two friends, on his way to the Albert Hall demonstration. It had been simply accomplished by switching taxis.

For Shepherd to apply whiskers and resemble Meredith had been the easiest thing in the world. After the demonstration Hodder had taken it on himself to corner Shepherd and get the whole story out of him. Hence it had been Hodder himself and not Shepherd who had taken the note dropped by Harrigan from the hotel window. It gave the complete low-down —but it did something else too: it proved that Harrigan had really intended to step out before he got too involved.

Had Hodder had his way Harrigan would have been arrested the moment he had got the truth out of Shepherd—but it had taken time to get the law to believe him, even longer to arrange the legal details of the warrant; time in which Harrigan had got what he wanted—the admission from the head of the nation that he was to become the shadow ruler of the world. The thing was void now, of course—but that was not the point. Harrigan had achieved his object, to which Landhurst willingly testified on the stand, and further substantiated it by paying in fifty thousand pounds to Harrigan's bank account.

One by one the witnesses were grilled. The case dragged on. The judge was forced to

exercise a solomon-like wisdom to appraise the matter in its true light. In the annals of hoaxes there had never been one quite like this. No actual harm had been done beyond the 'detention' of Meredith and the absolute gullibility of people at large. It was a profoundly difficult problem to deal with. Harrigan had stolen nothing, hurt nobody, had even paid his hotel bill, and had intended to withdraw before precipitating a crisis.

The only clause the judge could work on was that of kidnapping—but here Meredith himself stepped in the gap with a self confessed admiration for Harrigan's cheek. The result of it all was that Harrigan got one year's imprisonment. He took it with a calm smile and advised the newspaper whose figure he had finally accepted—the *Clarion* as it happened—that he would forward a personal confession from jail. So Hodder got his scoop too and Harrigan's fifty thousand pounds jumped by another half.

In jail, out of sight, he was not forgotten by those whose faces were still red at the thought of their gullibility. The *Clarion's* circulation soared vastly as his confessions were published with perfect frankness. Skipping the main personal angles of the trial, readers read the 'Secrets' department with avid eyes. . .

". . . and I have no doubt that reporter Hodder was much surprised when his notes vanished. He need not have been. Dimonitrine ethyl, if concentrated into a pill or tablet, dissolves rapidly into the air but gives off odourless fumes which loosen the ingredients of ink, or graphite (pencil) and evaporate it. It is the basis of many liquid erasers on the market today. I dropped a tablet in Hodder's notebook pocket, with results that astounded him a good deal. The fumes, in the confined space, went up between the book leaves and eliminated everything written therein. . .

". . . my disguise was of course synthetic flesh, such as is used by modern beauty parlours to patch up defects in my lady's face. The only difference was that mine was fireproof, simple enough by adding one chemical, whereby I could burn matches on hands and face without trouble. Again, synthetic flesh fits with such elastic tightness it is impossible to tell where it joins, ends or begins. . .

". . . my films were perfectly normal but taken over a long period of time in preparation for such an event as this, and also to satisfy myself in regard to details of certain stories I have written. They were taken on a small camera and then enlarged to standard size in my own dark room: nobody save me ever saw them before. Microphotography of slugs on a stretch of sand and superimposition of myself by what is called the 'Dunning' process, gave disparity in sizes. The four dimensional effects were done with prisms and mirrors. The Martian 'City' was New York done in this wise, and the giant power engines were photographed in an ordinary power house and human beings were superimposed afterwards in such a style as to look after them. The colour effects were, once again, entirely prismatic and 3-D.

". . . my own apparent disappearance into a fourth dimension was purely the work of polarising light vibrations. Since these scientific machines are usually confined to side shows or military headquarters, they are little known to the general public even though invented and proved as far back as 1937. I had long known the principle of these polarising machines. A professional one is rather large: I made a smaller one capable of fitting into a small travelling case.

"On the occasion of the premiere, Shepherd was seated with the case in the front row. He had merely to operate the mechanism at the desired time by buttons on the side disguised as a handle, and I came into the range of the beam. He did the same when in the disguise of Meredith he asked me to disappear. By ducking my head as he waved his hand over me, and by raising my feet one after the other as he waved his hand below, the impression was conveyed that I was not there. The invisibility machine was in his travelling case. Since he was virtually in the know with everything I did, it made matters profoundly simple. . .

". . . in the case of the burning wood, the wood was of course prepared with chemical beforehand Shepherd had merely to press a concealed switch at the required time. Shops for magical apparatus sell these anywhere. . .

". . . the system by which I levitated 'Meredith' was an ordinary illusionist's trick. I had wire ready fixed in my hands. He had small invisible hooks on his shoes and the shoulders of his coat. All I had to do when making the passes was slip the wires on to the hooks, then cause him to rise slowly, first one end and then the other, until at last he floated in apparent contra to gravity. The trick lies in the angle at which you raise the victim, as any magic-

ian will tell you. Ju-jitsu relies on the same principle. It is possible by absolute accuracy to raise a man half as heavy again as yourself with perfect ease. That was all I did. Naturally 'Meredith' and I took good care that nobody else came near us while the trick was done. It was the total absence of any visible apparatus that swung the thing . . . ."

In plain truth, the readers of the world did not know whether to be offended, or whether to admire the ingenuity of a young man who by nerve, a little magic, and a knowledge of Tibet and science—and above all a masterly conception of mass psychology—had hoodwinked an entire world into believing him. He was a showman, par excellence.

That was why, when he came out of jail a year later to use his fifty thousand, he wrote the best selling book ever and called it "There's One Born Every Minute". At the Fantasy Club he was a being enshrined because he was the one man who had written a story and then *proved* it—word for word!

THE END

SCIENCE

Facts and Forecasts

TO THE legion of S. F. readers who are interested in atom development we recommend REPORT ON THE ATOM by Gordon Dean (Eyre and Spottiswood, 16s.). The fact that Britain, at least, places the industrial use of atomic power high on their agenda is a logical consequence of this country's trading position. Both America and Russia have ten times as much untapped coal and power as we possess, and each is also rich in raw materials. For two hundred years Britain has successfully competed against these giants' progress, with no greater resources than the power we derived from our own coal. Industrial scientists estimate that in ten years' time this country will require fifteen million tons of coal a year more than now used. In twenty years' time thirty million tons may well be required.

* * *

With the best will in the world, our coal mines could not hope to keep up with this speed of development. It is all a matter of the mathematics of the future. The world's coal reserves are not comparable to the uranium and thorium that can be derived from the Belgian Congo, Canada, South Africa and now Australia. To any country without raw materials, but with a fair share of craftsman skill, this is their one hope of economic survival. An atomic pile of the latest kind,

(Continued overleaf)

SCIENCE FACTS & FORECASTS

which also produces its own atomic fuel, might need only one ton of uranium to produce the power derived from 1,000,000 tons of coal. Certainly this is a fascinating book for the more seriously minded.

* * *

So robots are human after all, as our moron office boy said on reading that Manchester University's electronic brain had suffered a breakdown. Its memory, a magnetic drum in which half a million facts are stored, has failed. For months it has been working twenty-four hours a day solving complex mathematical problems for Britain's atomic, aeronautical, financial and defence chiefs. The present "nervous breakdown" doesn't mean that it has forgotten anything; only that the bearings of the drum are worn out, and to replace them much of the brain has to be taken to pieces. This is the brain that helped Sir William Penney to press ahead with Britain's atomic research progress.

* * *

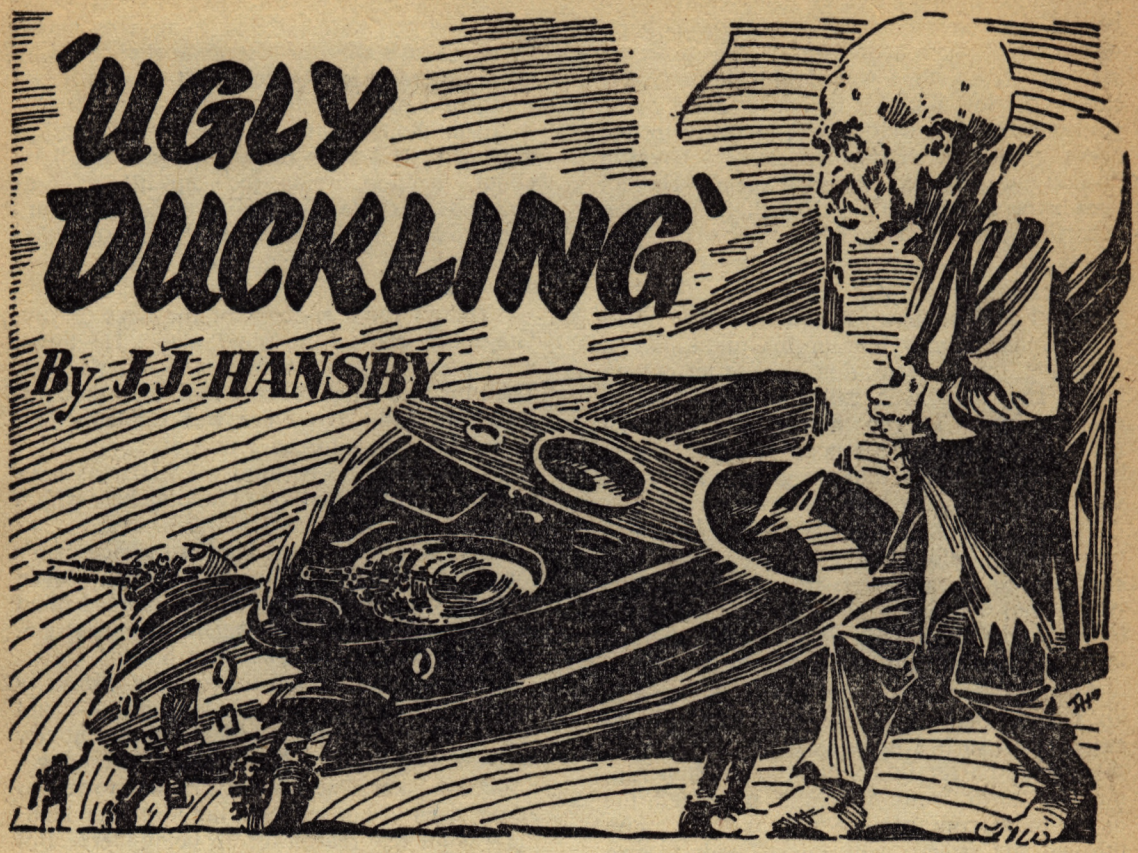
Weidenfeld and Nicolson are fast justifying their claim to real notice as publishers in the Science Fiction market. For Science Fiction with a difference, AHEAD OF TIME (9s. 6d. net) represents an imaginative avoidance of the more familiar subjects of space travel or atomic physics. Henry Kuttner, the author, believes that the science of the human mind is as rich a source as any for the Science Fiction author, and in these ten stories old themes are developed from a new viewpoint that makes Kuttner one of today's most original S.F. writers. There are inevitable weaknesses here and there, but the old, old story of the man who sold his soul to the devil, as told by THESE PRESENTS, has a touch of the real greatness that puts an author on the pedestal of "The Must Be Read." In DEADLOCK, the strange account of why the Robots went mad, but with one intriguing exception, is a story that would have made even O. Henry envious of its truly masterly denouement.

* * *

From the same publishers comes THE TITAN, by P. Schmyler Miller, a story of romance and adventure on Mars. The servant race of Bloodgivers plan to overthrow their increasingly degenerate Masters, but the situation becomes involved when Thorana, the beautiful daughter of the First Master, falls in love with Koral, the leader of the Bloodgivers, whose duty is to head the rebellion. They find an ally in the strange bearded star-beast in the Martian Zoo, who turns out to be a man from Earth. This is an unusual story of revolution on the Red Planet, in which man appears as the exotic alien. Six other of Miller's short stories are also included, but not all of them quite living up to the skilful handling of THE TITAN.

'UGLY DUCKLING'

By J.J. HANSBY



EXCEPT for the dull flicking of pale violet haze, the northern horizon was as clear as the night sky above it. Alvan Gregson stood quite still on the top of the low rise overlooking the twisted narrowness of the valley, pulled his thin coat still tighter across his humped shoulders, and stared out over the swaying branches of the trees.

Less than half a mile away, their tall, straight sides straining upwards towards the foaming stars, were the massive walls of the City. The moon was low, throwing the dark crevasses into sharp relief, limning the vast buildings, turning the midnight darkness into a parody of day.

It was a perfect night. *Just too bad*, he thought inwardly, *that there was no-one out in the open to enjoy it*. But it was no longer safe to be out in the open at night. Once, there had been nothing to fear. There had been wide roads, lit with a cold brilliance that burned without fire. And moving vehicles that swarmed in the air like birds.

But that was all before Man attempted to destroy himself. Before the nightmare bombs had come riding down on wings of searing flame and destruction, striking fear and terror into the heart of the planet, scattering the invisible radiation that ate into the body, and shaking down the tall cities into heaps of silence and purple-hazed rubble.

Deliberately, he pushed the dark thoughts out of his mind and tried hard to forget them. They were things he didn't want to dwell on: not now, anyway. He stood in silence for a moment longer, then drew his stumpy, warped body up to its full height and without a backward glance, stalked purposefully forwards, towards the dark, forbidding walls that loomed up against the flooding whiteness of the moon.

Feet slipping and sliding beneath him in the soft, upchurned earth, he made his way instinctively towards the rough highway that ran along between the towering cliffs and turned abruptly right into the City, through the high, metal gates.

A couple of hazy figures rose silently from behind the concealment of an overhead balustrade as he approached, threw him a sharp, piercing glance, then waved him inside. He caught the low mumble of conversation as he passed them, followed almost instantly by the harsh ripple of coarse laughter. Gregson flushed inwardly, but remained silent. He had been expecting something like that; had been expecting and receiving it for the greater part of his life.

Something to do with radioactives, the doctors had said at first. A *mutant*. The word had remained with him in his mind, like a sickening, leprous sensation akin to terror and fear. They had even called in specialists to examine him. To run their cold, impersonal measuring rods over his poor, scarred, twisted body, shrunken legs, and the great, monstrous, bald head where no hair had ever grown.

They had probed into his mouth, examined with obvious reluctance, the gaping fangs that stuck out at a crazy angle from his lower jaw. And stared with incredulous amazement at the bulge in the centre of his forehead where a third eye was already beginning to develop.

Alvan Gregson felt angry blood pounding in his veins. Why under the stars had he been cursed with such a body as this? A thing of shuddering horror that sent little children running in terror from him, and prompted the older, more courageous, ones to follow him through the streets with sticks and thrown stones, and shouts of:

"Hunchback! Mutie!"

"Look at the way his feet drag along the ground."

"See to it that he doesn't stay in our village. Chase him out!"

That was the way it had always been, as long as he could remember. Village after village. Township after township. He regarded it as inevitable now. He was an outcast. Something to be mocked at.

He swayed on his feet and realised for the first time how utterly tired he was. Nervously, he clutched at a nearby wall for support, and shivered a little as the coldness seeped out of the flat, smooth bricks into the raw skin of his bare hands. He began to hurry, then halted suddenly.

Two men stood there, blocking his way. Their faces were half hidden beneath the dark hoods of their heavy cloaks. They each held a lantern balanced on the top of a tall wooden pole. The taller of the two eyed him with a mocking smile on his hard, handsome features. His lips were drawn tightly back, revealing twin rows of even, very white teeth.

"We heard you were heading this way, Gregson. But we were puzzled as to your intentions. That's why the guards at the gate were given orders to let you in. Just what is it you want, mutant?"

Alvan thought fast. He licked his dry lips nervously. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, trying to keep his voice as steady as possible. The feeling of personal danger increased inside his mind. "Why shouldn't I come here? There's nowhere to stay out in the valleys."

"There's room enough for the likes of you, Gregson," snarled the other man. He thrust his lantern close up against the other's eyes. Then his face hardened and took on a thoughtful expression. His voice was suddenly taut as he said with a forced gentleness:

"It wouldn't be because the Martians have announced their intention of landing here within the next few hours, would it?"

There was a touch of hidden menace in his tone that Gregson was quick to notice. Alvan fingered his mouth. He felt his numbed mind reel beneath the sudden weight of realisation. They knew. *They knew*. But how?

Under his feet, he felt the shaking instability that had been with him as long as he could remember. He felt suddenly alone, utterly helpless, and afraid. Not because, deep down inside his innermost thoughts, he was forced to admit, even to himself, that the Martians' landing was the real reason for his being there. But because, somehow, he wasn't quite sure by what means, these people knew it also.

"Why shouldn't I come?" he asked again. "I've done no harm. In the villages, they say that the Martians will come down from the heavens like Gods. That they are so far ahead of us, they have more knowledge even than the Old Ones of our own race, who built the great metal cities on the edge of the plain. Is all that true?"

The smaller man nodded his head slowly. "Aye. It's all true, right enough," he muttered. Excitement suffused his face for a brief moment. "We got their message three days ago. Seems they've even taken the trouble to learn our language. At the moment, their ship is standing off the Earth about a thousand miles away. So far, that we can't even see it."

"Then how do you know that it's there?" asked Gregson.

"Because they *said* so, fool!" snapped the second man. "Don't you believe anything, unless you see it?"

Alvan Gregson nodded his head, only half understanding, dimly wondering whether all this was really happening, or whether it was just some huge hoax put up for his benefit by

the people of the City. It would have been such an easy thing to do. It didn't seem likely, these men appeared to be sincere in that respect, but—

"And they're actually going to land here within the next hour or so?"

"They'll come," said the taller man confidently. He was firm about that. "There are strange tales written in the old books about Mars, I'll admit. Another world like our own, forty million miles from Earth. It seems incredible to me, but there it is. And they say that because it's further from the sun, and smaller than Earth, that it cooled first.

"And the Martians are at least a million years ahead of us as far as science is concerned. Probably in other things too. Whether the old books tell the truth I don't know. But that ship up there is proof enough for me."

"Then maybe, if they do come, I might be able to see them for a few moments. It wouldn't cause any trouble, I'm sure. And if they're as advanced as you say they are, they may be able to give me a new body so that I would be like other men, instead of something horrible for people to laugh at."

"What!" The tall man threw back his head and laughed loudly. "You!" This time, there was naked scorn in his voice. "Why should the Martians be bothered with the likes of you? If they catch sight of *you* when they land, they'll probably shoot you down on sight. And that would be a pity, wouldn't it?"

He laughed again, and this time there was a definite beat of sarcasm in his tone. The other man joined in.

Gregson shivered involuntarily and fingered the hem of his coat. He looked across at the two men and felt slightly surprised.

"So that's the way it is," he muttered softly. "I see. I suppose I should have known it would be like this."

He turned on his heel and began to walk silently away, back along the road he had come. His only hope now, lay in remaining outside the City until the Martians landed and trust to luck to reach the ship before the people from the City could stop him.

Possibly the man was right. Maybe the Martians would kill him without giving him a chance to explain. But somehow, he didn't think so. It was a risk he would have to take and—

He felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, gripping him tightly. He twisted desperately and tried to roll away, bringing his hand up at the same time. The two men fell on top of him. Aiming blindly, he clenched his fists and tried to use them as clubs.

But it was no use. The tall man pinned him to the ground with his weight while the smaller of the pair began to beat him up, silently and systematically.

"Sorry about all this, Gregson," panted the tall man. "But you asked for it. We can't afford to take any chances. And if you go out there, balling up the works, the people will tear you to pieces. And you wouldn't want that to happen, would you?"

Alvan Gregson shook his head feebly. He tried to get up, but they held him down. Blood was pounding in his head and it was becoming difficult to see properly. Darkness seemed to be hovering like a red-edged flame, just out of focus.

There was a sharp throbbing pain at the back of his temples and it felt as if his whole body was on fire. There was a long band of glittering stars sliding in front of his aching eyes and blackness kept edging closer as the small man battered at his face with his fists.

Madly, he tried to hold on to his failing senses. Brilliance seemed to flash into sudden being in front of his startled gaze. For a moment, his dulled mind refused to take it in. There was a sudden shattering roar, an explosion, a screaming of inferno wind. The two men stopped beating him up. Instead, they got to their feet and stood staring, only half believing, at the night sky.

The noise shook and thundered along the silent streets, shaking the tall buildings to their very foundations. For a moment, it was as if the mid-day sun had come out above the City. Brightness glared down, eye-searing, intolerable, blotting out the splashing of stars. The moonlight dimmed.

"It's the ship," yelled the tall man. He pointed. "They've come. I saw it go down just outside the walls. Come on."

"But what about the mutant?" rasped his companion. The other stared down at the sprawled figure in the gutter with an impassive stare. He thought for a moment, then screwed up his handsome features in a grin.

"Leave him there," he said shortly. "I don't think he'll be giving us any more trouble."

They went away and left him.

With an effort, Alvan Gregson moved his head and tried to sit up. Pain stabbed redly at his neck and shoulders. He gritted his teeth, lay back until the pain had subsided into a dull ache, then tried again. This time, in spite of the gnawing sickness in the pit of his

stomach, and the raw cuts along his cheeks, he remained upright long enough to see that he wsa not alone.

The long wide streets were full of people, men and women, old and young, tall and short, thin and fat, all running in the same direction. No one paused to look at him. Carefully, feeling along the dirt with his hands, he pulled himself to his feet.

"Say, are you all right, friend?" Gregson turned. A grey-gowned, balding man of moderate build, stood at his side.

"Sure. I'm all right," he answered hoarsely. "An accident, that's all, nothing serious."

"Better not wait too long. The Martians are here, like they promised. Their ship landed a few minutes ago just outside—" The other's voice trailed off as he caught sight of Gregson's twisted, scarred face in the yellow lantern-light. "Sorry .... I didn't know .... I thought ...."

He spun quickly on his heel and ran off into the dark shadows towards the metal gateway. Alvan's gaze flickered round. It looked as though most of the population of the City had already gone. Only the stragglers were left now. The crippled, the lame, the infirm, the aged. Those who couldn't walk so fast and had been left behind by the mass of people who could.

Cautiously, he approached the gate. But the guards had disappeared also and the way was open. Very slowly, he made his way forward. His whole body ached. There were bruises along his twisted legs and an unpleasant feeling of red slickness on his arms. Nervously, he licked his dry lips and floundered ahead, only half conscious from the beating up he had received earlier.

On the edge of the plain, towering above the dark, probing fingers of the rocks, was something huge and glowing. A vast shape, bigger by far than anything he had ever seen before. A long, cylindrical monster of gleaming metal, all glitter and starshine, glimmering with a faint, overall glaze of energy that formed a pale cocoon of light around it.

Undoubtedly, it was some kind of metal. But nothing like he had imagined. But then, he wasn't very sure what he had imagined it would be like. Everything was so mixed up inside his mind that he couldn't think properly.

Dark tendrils of smoke billowed from the base of it and drifted in tiny spirals along the low trees. Immensely far above the ground, huge flat turrets moved silently, swinging back and forth with an ominous purpose.

The bright tubes of metal weapons were lifted out of their protective housings, ready. Already Gregson's imagination was busy enough, marshalling the turbulent thoughts that whirled madly in his mind. For the first time, he could think clearly, The stress of everything was moved aside, all the excitement calmed. Everything was logical now. Before, it had all been emotion, nothing else.

Now, something of the utter tremendousness of this landing struck him. This meeting between the civilisations of different worlds. Just what would they be like, these Martians? How would they look upon such people as himself, the bottom-most dregs of humanity?

Pushing his body forward, he thrust his way between the scattered groups of men and women standing around in a wide circle at a respectful distance from the ship. For the most part, they ignored him. Some threw him a cursory glance, but said nothing. It wasn't until he had almost reached the empty level space in front of the ship, that he felt a hand grip his wrist.

"Just where do you think you're going, Gregson?" hissed a hard voice. "I thought I told you that you weren't wanted here. Seems to me that you can't take a warning."

Alvan stared round in the darkness. Dimly, he made out the harsh, determined features of the small man who had stopped him in the City. Angrily, he tried to pull himself free, but the other held on.

"No you don't. You've caused enough trouble. The Martians came here for a purpose. This is the only City of any size still standing on Earth. That's why they chose this place to land. Apparently, they wish to contact our Government. Something about interplanetary trading agreements and an exchange of knowledge.

"But first, we've got to prove that we're ready for such a big advancement in our civilisation. That's why we've got to keep you and your kind out of the way. Fortunately, there are very few mutants left in the world now. Most of them have been weeded out and destroyed. But you could cause trouble if we allowed you to go out there and show yourself. Do you understand?"

His hand tightened on Gregson's wrist, biting into the flesh with a steel-like strength. Desperately, Alvan choked back a cry of pain. He forced himself to nod his head.

"That's better," said the man, but he did not relax his grip. "I'm glad to see that you've decided to act sensibly. Believe me, it's the best way for all of us. Just keep well out of sight, otherwise it'll be just too bad for you. Mutant!"

He spat out the final word as if it made an unpleasant taste in his mouth. It sent a little

current of anger trembling along Alvan's nerves. A desperate, insane plan was beginning to form in the back of his brain. There was only one chance left to him now. He would have to make a dash for it.

It was doubtful whether these people would dare attack him openly, in full view of the Martians. Anything they had in mind for him would be done discreetly, in the darkness of the thronging crowd.

Once he was in the open, he was reasonably safe. Then he threw a second glance upwards, towards the huge, multi-barrelled weapons halfway up the sheer side of the vessel, and wondered. Still, it was his only chance.

With a sudden, vicious movement, he chopped downwards with the edge of his free hand on the upturned wrist of his captor. The man gave a sudden yelp of pain and released his hold. In a flash, Gregson leapt forward, galvanising his tired muscles into violent action. There was a sudden frenzied shouting behind him, a babble of upraised voices. Madly, he tore himself free from outstretched hands, and forced his bent body forward, keeping his legs moving all the time.

The pain in his heaving lungs was growing steadily worse and there was a low buzzing inside his head. Movement became mechanical. An almost unbearable rhythm that kept on and on and on. Never ceasing.

The ship was in front of him now. A glaring, monstrous shape that towered up as far as the eye could see. The blaze in his eyes grew worse. Needle-sharp rocks tore at his feet, threatening to trip him at every step. Voices were shouting unintelligible commands behind him, coming closer.

Something hard and heavy skimmed past his cheek and clattered to the rocky ground a few feet in front of him. Another stone struck his left shoulder, sending a twinge of pain searing along his arm. His breath was coming in hard, racking gasps now.

The next moment, he tottered over a pile of low rocks and fell headlong, scarcely fifty yards from the alien ship. Everything was finished now. The people would come and drag his broken, mutilated body away—and kill him as they had killed every mutant.

He was a misfit, and the world had no place for such as him. Probably, it was just as well. All the others with their fine, upstanding bodies and handsome features. What right had he to exist beside them? Why should he think that he—

Strong hands clasped him round the middle and hauled him roughly to his feet. "So you thought you could get away with it, did you? This time we're going to see to it that you never try anything like this again. We're going to—"

"*Stop!*"

There was a deep sense of understanding in the calm, unhurried voice, but nothing of humility. There was a voiceless breath of tension in the air.

"Let him come here," went on the voice. Silence swam for a brief moment in Alvan Gregson's mind. The men fell back and moved away into the tight little circle of onlookers.

Slowly, Gregson walked forward, hesitantly, towards the base of the towering ship. His heart had jumped, madly hammering, into his chest and there was something wrong with his vision. It was as if the whole landscape were flowing away into something else, like smoke on a summer breeze. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped. Everything was normal again. But the thought that the beings on the ship had intervened to save him was mind-staggering. He felt his brain reel beneath its own weight, as if the entire fabric of his being had been torn apart and was being reassembled in a different mould.

His mind reached out blindly. Behind him, there was a deep silence, until, after a moment, the voice went on again, booming out from the hidden interior of the ship.

"The second part of our plan for Earth will be put into operation almost immediately. It seems that you take us for fools." The voice pulsed quietly with aloof amusement. "But so be it. That suited our purpose also. We noted the purple atomic fires of the radioactive areas before we landed here. This planet has been under constant observation for almost a century now.

"The weapons of destruction belong to us now. And they are more powerful than anything ever dreamed up by the minds of Men. The reason behind our visit here, was not to trade with such a basically immature and unstable race as this, but to complete the first phase of our operation."

In spite of the implication behind these words, Alvan Gregson felt the terrifying abyss of chaos that had loomed in front of his feet throughout the whole of his life, begin to close. There was something infintely tender and protective and gentle about the voice. Surely, he thought inwardly, they *must* be Gods that were on the ship.

There was a pause. Then a dark opening appeared halfway up the side of the vessel. A tiny figure, rendered smaller by distance, clambered out and drifted slowly down towards the rocky ground. An instant later, it came out into the moonlight, and for the first time, he saw a Martian face to face.

His eyes widened. The breath caught in his throat. But that was impossibly, completely insane. Unbelievable. So that was why they had intervened.

The other came forward, walking upright on stumpy, twisted legs. The hunched shoulders moved awkwardy, as though bowed down by a gravity greater than that to which it was accustomed. The face was pitted and scarred and there were long white fangs sticking out from the lower jaw. A third eye regarded him steadily from the centre of the other's forehead.

"That's right, Alvan Gregson. You too are *martio superior*. It is time you knew the truth again. And you haven't even suspected it until now. Take back your memories, so that you will be ready to return."

Silence followed that. Then, slowly, as though seeing the truth little by little, Gregson said: "I came here, thirty-four years ago . . . . to investigate the possibility of bringing these people into the Union. Then . . . I was someone else." He pulled himself proudly upright. His face was set in an expression of deep concern.

"I regret to report," he went on, "that these people are not ready to be brought into the Union of Interplanetary Nations. Their warlike tendencies are still with them. Dormant at the moment, perhaps, but they can never be trusted. They have forgotten the ancient laws. They kill and mutilate, merely for the pleasure they gain from such actions. We cannot allow them to—"

"It's a lie!" shouted one of the men, standing in the crowd. He took a hesitant step forward. There was an expression of utter consternation written all over his face. His mouth twisted for a moment before any words came out. "The mutant lies! How were we to know that he was one of you in disguise?" The handsomeness dropped like a mask from his face, and for a brief moment, a blaze of feral hatred shone forth. Then, it was gone as though it had never existed.

The Martian stopped him with a sharp movement of his right hand. He turned to face Alvan Gregson. "We know all about them, my son," he said gently. "The second phase is already beginning. You are probably the first of our kind to know the entire truth about their breed, but there was no way of reaching you sooner. Now we must go. There is nothing more we can do here."

Alvan Gregson followed the other into the shining metalwork of the ship. No longer was he ashamed of his twisted body. In the smooth, mirrored walls of the corridor, his image looked back at him proudly, with head held high. On Earth, it was true, he had been the ugliest of Earthmen. Here, he was counted as one of the handsomest of the Martians.

There was a sudden rumble of machinery in the depths of the ship. Doors were slammed shut and made fast. Everything was ready. The motors made a shrill whine and sent a whisper of sheer energy trembling through the entire length of the massive vessel. The noise grew louder until it hurt his ears, then subsided with a suddenness that was shocking in its abruptness.

He walked slowly across to a small side window and stared out, surprised a little by what he saw. Far below them, the planet was a dazzle-white plain of sun-lit mountains and seas. The round window was full of it.

Two days later, a menace to the future peace and safety of the entire Solar System was removed. Utterly and completely. The planet Earth was totally destroyed.

"The Balmoral Hotel,"
33 Princes Square,
London, W.2.

9th February, 1954.

Dear Editor,

I am writing on behalf of the committee of the Manchester Science-Fiction Convention in order to kill any suspicions which might have arisen over the reply to a letter, published in Authentic Science Fiction for February, 1954. It might be politic at this point to explain the reason why I have written to you in preference to Mr. Campbell of Authentic. Apparently Authentic goes to press at least three months ahead of publication which would mean that any reply I might make would not be published until May, by which time the damage to our reputation would have been done. On the other hand the fact that this letter should reach you in time for the March issue means that a reply to Mr. Campbell can be made while the comment is still fresh in the minds of the readers.

I will now quote Mr. Campbell's foot-note in full in order that I may prove each statement incorrect.

"This kind of thing seems to be happening quite a lot up North. We've been told that the organisation behind the Supermancon, that was to have been held next Whitsun, has fallen to pieces in effect. Certainly, Eric Bentcliffe, one of the leading lights, resigned from the committee owing to personal differences. And certainly this office has had no word about the convention for many months. Apparently the northerners, unable to comprehend the unity of London fandom, have now fallen out among themselves. This is a great pity, is quite avoidable and is something of a disgrace to British fandom. We only hope the northerners will give us the lie by forming a thriving club and coming to life again over the convention. Pull your socks up, Birmingham and environs! And put away your water pistols! (If that doesn't shock them, Mr. Egan, nothing will!)"

The first point is that Eric Bentcliffe resigned from the Convention Committee well over six months ago. This occurred only a few weeks after the first meeting called to form a committee and thus had no ill-effect upon efficiency. There was ample time to re-organise before the main pressure of work fell upon us. The re-constituted committee has been working as a team for a long time—and no dissenters!

Secondly I object to the implication in the use of the past tense, to wit "... was to have been held ...." This gives the impression that there is no longer going to be a convention; this is precisely the reverse of the truth. At the time of writing the convention hall has been booked. With our first announcement only three weeks old we have over one hundred subscriptions, including remittances from such countries as Belgium, Greece, Malta, Egypt, Canada and the United States. A programme is being devised and already such people as your own two editors, author E. C. Tubb not to mention Mr. Campbell himself, will be taking an active part in the proceedings. I reiterate "was" Mr. Campbell? The only thing which could prevent this convention from being a success is people like yourself making irresponsible statements and dissuading readers from attending.

As for "and certainly this office has had no word about the convention for many months." Ignoring the deplorable grammar we will proceed to baffle Mr. Campbell with facts. In the first place I told him several details one night at "The Globe" prior to Christmas, this was followed up by a lengthy letter at the beginning of January detailing several of the features which would be in the programme. Sufficient?

Maybe, however, Mr. Campbell has an excuse. On reading the indictment of the Committee I tried to call him at his office, I was unfortunate. Apparently Mr. Campbell does not usually attend his office but conducts his business from his home. Small wonder that information goes astray and Mr. Campbell is left in ignorance. This is as equally ridiculous as it would be to expect Parliament to conduct its business of governing the country from the respective firesides of our M.P.s.

BRIAN H. VARLEY,
Treasurer "The Supermancon."

EDITOR'S NOTE: While professional etiquette demands that we remain aloof from such controversial material, we still feel justified in printing this letter, both in the interests of S.F. and in fairness to the organisers, who have already expended so much energetic effort and stationery towards making the June Supermancon a real success. Elsewhere in this issue the Supermancon is advertised, and the learned scrivener who conducts "Fanfare and Suchlike" has also given it his benediction.

173 Windham Road,
Bournemouth.

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your new magazine. Being an ardent follower of yours, and also Gridban, I did not hesitate to buy. Having now read it, I

have not been disappointed, it is good, very good.

One thing I would like to see, that is, the mag. printed in pocket edition size, and two novels in place of two shorts.

The reason for this is that myself and my friends would rather sit down and read a story which takes say an hour and a half than two or three stories in the same time. With short stories you have no sooner started and then you are at the end. A short story is too fresh in your mind to read another directly and there are too many short story mags. about.

Hope you understand what I mean, it seems a little muddled I know, but here's hoping.

One thing I should like to see, that is your other publications for Scion brought out on a yearly subscription basis.

A favour I have to ask is, have you a copy of your second Scion publication "ANNIHILATION"? I have all your others, but not that one to bring completion of my collection to date.

Hoping you have one.

P. SHEARING.

Your criticisms and praise are much appreciated. A magazine without short stories or a serial is rather like a meal without sauce and the other stimulants to appetite. Your remarks on the subject of size are interesting because, as you will see, we have raised this point elsewhere. It would seem that the balance of opinion is in favour of the smaller format. Our production department has been alerted to look into this matter, and so conform to the majority of opinion. Vargo Statten in person is attending to your request for "ANNIHILATION" which he expects to find somewhere in his "dusty archives."

Capt. K. F. Slater, B.A.O.R. 42.

Dear Vargo and/or Alistair,

Many thanks for your letter and the copy of Vol. 1, No. 1 of the VARGO STATTEN SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE (hereafter known as the VSSFM). Let me go on record saying that I think you have scored a "bull"—and there is no "bull" about that! Your aim, as stated in your letter, was at the junior section of science fiction enthusiasm. Apart from a relatively few "junior" readers who are able to read—and appreciate the meaning of—the works of Einstein, Lorenz, and such esoteric authors, your target should be reached. The genius-type may pick some holes in the "science," but the vast majority will be quite happy with the fast-moving, fairly logical plotting, of the yarns contained in your first issue. With a deep bow in the direction of Forry Ackerman I think we can coin a new term—"Scientactification". That describes what you are giving the customers. . . .

The appearance of the magazine I very much like. Format departs from the norm of the "digest," on the stands it sticks out boldly, proud of itself, instead of hiding behind a multitude of similar-sized magazines. The offered 64 pages count as 64 pages to read . . . you don't use Nos. 1, 2, 63 and 64 to cover the covers. That cover, by the way, is—er—striking. I don't think any other term fits as well. It attracts the eye, yes, but you'd hardly call it "attractive" in the current use of the word! There's a lot going on, on that cover. . . . I only wish it told us all about it inside. It is a point you might take a reader-vote over. "Do you like covers to illustrate stories? Or couldn't you care less"?

For fannish activity, you certainly gave us our 10 per cent. If one counts in the editorial, science news features, etc., I make it something like eight pages—12½ per cent. Very very fair! I hope all your readers appreciate it!

All in all, without being wildly enthusiastic, I am impressed. I like. Keep it up . . . and a bit later, when your readers have moved out of the "junior" class, maybe you can bring out another mag. to keep pace with 'em!

Thanks for your understanding. Letters elsewhere indicate that our statement of policy has not registered in the minds of all the critics. We are trying very hard—and subsequent issues will mirror our endeavours.

3 Arkle Street,
Gateshead, 8.

Dear Editor,

At long last we have another British Science Fiction zine amongst us. What with the deluge of American zines, ours were becoming lost in the crowd, now we have the VSM to carry the British s.f. banner high. A zine such as yours can do this, you have some of Britain's top authors in your pages and the name, Vargo Statten, has a high place in s.f. What about a Vargo Statten fan club?

The first ish went over well with me. I enjoyed all of it from cover to cover. By the way, who did the cover? It had every darn s.f. thing on it, a bem, she-male, spaceman with a zzap-gun, a robot and others. Very attractive. Only one gripe. I wish you hadn't put the title block on the back cover. Without it, the cover would look nice in a frame. Best story was "Beyond Zero" by ye ed. The first part of the serial is off on a good start, hope it doesn't turn bad. There's no need to note each story one by one, they were all good. As for the articles, well I sure enjoyed them too, specially "fan fare and suchlike." A good idea having the scientific facts, keep us backward fen up front.

When I first received news of VSM I didn't know what sort of zine to expect. When I received my copy it was better than expected. I flicked thru the pages and hip hip hooray a department for fans' letters. No zine is complete without that dept. "Rocket Mail" you call it, well here is my first "rocket" to VSM. Make every ish as good as the first, then you'll get no gripes from me.

So till I write again, thanks for a real good new magazine.

DON ALLEN.

Grand to feel you so enthusiastically liked our first issue. We have moulded this magazine for the readership of just such people as you. Should we go off the rails, then don't hesitate to tell us.

Your further suggestion of a series of Vargo Statten fan clubs throughout the country is vastly intriguing. Editorially we do not want to apply undue pressure towards this ambition, although we sympathise with it 100 per cent. What we can do is to offer a quarter column monthly to others who think the same. In this space we could nominate those enthusiasts who would be willing to act as local organisers. From that starting point it would be up to you and your colleagues in other parts of Britain. We should personally help on the physical side but this can be discussed when we have measured potential support.

59 Cardigan Road,
Bournemouth.

Dear Editor,

Oh ! what have you done ? Or should I say what have we done to deserve it. By it I mean the Vargo Statten S.F. magazine. In the past we have managed to ignore the jeers, and slightly sarcastic smirks, afforded to British S.F. by the Americans but now they will, with just cause, begin to pity us, and we do not like it. We being the quite numerous fans that exist in Britain, who like to read S.F. when something is printed under that heading. No Space Opera.

The one redeeming feature is the 10 per cent. donated to fandom in your mag. If it is meant to be a juvenile publication, why not say so? The only two people I have found who actually enjoy the stories are 9 and 11 years old, or are you underestimating just slightly the average mentality of the British S.F. fan? If this is so, it can be remedied. Try raising the level of the stories, and I do not think you will lose any customers, in fact you might gain some.

At the moment however there are many more things unlikeable than likeable in it. If in the near future you do improve, which I sincerely hope will happen, I shall be the first to tell you.

SHIRLEY P. MARRIOTT.

P.S. We do not think you will print so much damnation of yourselves but you must admit that it is the truth.

There was once a man who set out to buy a picture. His mind was so jaundiced by an ambition to become the super critic of all time that he lost for England one of the greatest of art classics. We do not pretend to produce a classic, we do claim to produce a magazine with a genuine appeal for that very large section of science readers who enjoy the novels of Vargo Statten and such like, and thereby receive an introduction into the general pleasures of science fiction reading. Your P.S. in particular does make us wonder whether 30,000 *readers can all be wrong — an enthusiasm epitomised in the two ensuing letters.*

2 Caird Drive, Glasgow.

Dear Editor,

It is grand to see a new British Science Fiction Magazine on the market. I finished reading it yesterday. Now to tell you my likes and dislikes about it. First my likes. I like the name of it. Vargo Statten is one of my favourite authors. The covers are good. I enjoyed the following stories "Beyond Zero," by Vargo Statten, "March of the Robots," by Volsted Gridban, "The Super Disintegrator," by Simpson Stokes and the first instalment of the "Inevitable Conflict," by E. C. Tubb, "The Copper Bullet," by John Wernheim, and "The Pendulum of Power," by Armstrong Alexander. Now my dislikes. I didn't think much of "Breathing Space," by D. Richard Hughes. I dislike having to wait another month to read the next part of a story. So please drop the serial stories in future issues. I would like to see better interior illustrations. Also about another sixty-four. So that we can have a longer novel. Otherwise you have a good magazine. I am one of those who will become a regular reader of the Vargo Statten Science Fiction Magazine. Keep the features you have in your first issue. The best of luck to your magazine.

ARCHIE HUMES.

We feel very much like blushing after such praise of our first effort and feel sure we will be able to please you in the future. The matter of serials is always a moot point, but there is a way round it. Keep all the issues until you have the serial complete, and then read it. Remember we have to consider reader-attraction and very often the serial is the way to retain it. The matter of illustrations and a longer novel will of course have our consideration in shaping future policy.

53 Bromley Street,
Sheffield.

Dear Editor,

I think the Vargo Statten Magazine is something that every S.F. fan has been looking for.

In it they get stories from the greatest S.F. author, there is also one from the next best author, Volsted Gridban. And getting stories from those two S.F. authors in one magazine, and only for one and sixpence, I think is good value.

The "Flying Saucer Club" is not a bad idea, but why not start a Vargo Statten S.F. Club ?

It would not be a bad idea, and I think Vargo Statten fans would welcome it. In fact I have always wanted to see Vargo Statten and I expect his fans (or should I say readers) have felt the same.

So why not start a Vargo Statten S.F. Club and see what kind of response you get ? If I am not mistaken you will get plenty.

Always a Vargo Statten fan,

P REANEY.

Your reception to No. 1 of the V.S. Magazine is much appreciated. In regard to a Vargo Statten Club, this of course, is an idea worth considering, but its development depends entirely on you and the universal reception to the magazine. See our reply to Don Allen, and thanks for good wishes.

THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT

By E. C. Tubb

PART THREE

What has gone before:

Curt Harris, recently returned from Venus, is called to an urgent appointment with Director Harris of the Interplanet organisation. He learns that of the thirty-seven men who so far have returned from Venus, he is the sole survivor. All the rest have died by accident or suicide. He goes with Medway, a strange man with seemingly telepathic powers, to an upper storey and learns from the huge cybernetic machine in the building that his death is predicted with the maximum highest probability factor to take place within six hours.

Leaving the building he is almost killed, and goes to the public library as the safest place to wait until the danger period is over. While there he reads a book on Accident Prones, is interested, and sends for the author, a Doctor Fenshaw. Fenshaw tells him that he could just possibly be an accident prone in "reverse," and suggests that they both go to his laboratory where he can run several tests to determine whether or not Curt is different from normal men. It is essential for Curt both to solve the reason why the other men have died and to save his own life. For until he can solve the problem, no one can be recalled from Venus.

Leaving the library Curt is almost killed, and, to both fulfil the prediction and save his own life, he enters Deep Freeze and thus technically "dies" within the danger period.

CHAPTER NINE

PAIN and the slow return of awareness. Pain and the brittle scintillation of light, the droning impact of sound, the stir and ebb of returning life. Curt groaned, moved his arms, his legs, his fingers. He opened his eyes, squinting against the glare, then, with a feeble slowness, sat upright and stared around.

He was in a room of green. The walls were a soft pastel, the ceiling a lighter shade, the floor a deep emerald. Machines lined the walls, and ranks and stands of tubes and bottles, phials and ampoules. An artificial lung loomed in one corner, and the violet eyes of ultra violet lamps stared down at him from above.

"How do you feel?"

Curt stared at the solitary occupant of the room. Like the walls he was dressed all in green, gloves, smock, shoes. He smiled and Curt grinned back.

"At least I'm alive." He sucked in a deep breath and flexed his muscles. "How long?"

"Ten days."

"What? I ordered the minimum!"

"That is the minimum. We couldn't attempt to revive you until your processes had slowed to a minimum level. If we had tried to fight the drugs present in your body you would have died."

"I see." Curt shrugged. "It doesn't matter that much anyway. The main thing is that I'm alive!" He stretched again. "How soon before I can leave?"

"About an hour. Stay where you are and rest. The electronic currents are keeping your temperature at optimum, but after an hour you should have totally recovered."

"Right. Any chance of coffee?"

"Sorry, no. Not yet anyway."

"Cigarettes then?"

"Better not." The attendant hesitated. "There is a man outside, a fat man, he's been waiting for you for two days now."

"Fenshaw." Curt smiled. "Good. You can let him know that I'm alive and well and tell him that I'll see him as soon as you let me get up."

The attendant nodded and left the room. Curt stared after him, trying to ignore his craving for tobacco, then, yielding to a sudden fatigue, lay back on the pneumatic mattress and closed his eyes.

He was alive!

The predicted period had passed and he was still alive. The machine hadn't been wrong, he had "died," but his human ingenuity had beaten the mechanical brain.

Or had it?

The machine had predicted that he would die within six hours. He had died within that time. The fact that it was only a temporary death didn't matter, he still had died. Then? Had he proved the machine right by his action?

Curt felt his mind begin to twist as he struggled to unravel the paradox. The machine had said that he would die. He had accepted temporary death to escape the prediction of the machine. By so doing he had made the prediction come true. *Which came first, the chicken or the egg?*

He gave it up and wished that he could smoke.

Two hours later he grinned as Fenshaw heaved his bulk out of a chair and waddled towards him. The fat man wiped his florid features and glared at the too handsome receptionist.

"Hello, Curt. How do you feel?"

"Well enough, Fenshaw. Quite well really for a man who is supposed to be dead."

"Still worried about that?" The fat man shrugged. "Well, it is natural I suppose. I want to get you over to my laboratory as soon as possible and run some tests on you. Are you read?"

"Steady, Fenshaw. You forget that I haven't eaten for ten days. I'm hungry."

"Then we'll get something to eat," said Fenshaw ungraciously, and led the way to a nearby restaurant.

"I've been working on your problem," he said as he sipped a cup of coffee while Curt ate a large meal. "I've seen your Director Carter, Medway too, he's a queer chap that, and they told me about the other men."

"Did you tell them about me?"

"No. I didn't mention you." The fat man stirred his coffee. "I didn't think it wise."

"Good. Well?"

"I examined the records and as you suspected, there does seem to be a definite trace of some influence directed against them. The incidence of suicide is far too high for normality, and the accidents . . . ." Fenshaw shook his head and lifted his cup.

"Did you discover what it was that caused the deaths?"

"No. The common factor is still missing. Obviously it is something that you each must have done but as you are the only man alive who could tell us, and as you don't seem to know, then it's pretty hopeless to find out. That part of the problem doesn't interest me however. What does intrigue me is your conten-

tion of 'reverse accident proneness.' I really do believe that you are on the right trail there."

"You do?"

"Yes. Look at it this way. We now know that an accident prone does have an ESP factor different from the norm. Now. We know that Earth has an energy layer surrounding the planet, it used to be called the Heavyside layer, Venus has one too. Does it strike you as logical that a living person, subject to two different regions of electronic energy, might somehow be affected by it?"

"You mean that the mere fact of landing on Venus could alter a man's ESP factor and make him an accident prone?"

"Yes."

"Your theory doesn't work, Fenshaw. I've been on Venus and you can take it from me that the accident rate there is almost non-existent. I say almost because I was only there six months, but I'd go so far as to say that there are no accidents of any kind on Venus at all."

"I see, I had forgotten that." Fenshaw frowned down at the table. "Well then, suppose that it took a double dose of the energy to alter the ESP factor?"

Curt shook his head.

"Sorry, Fenshaw, but you're grabbing at straws. Mars also has a Heavyside layer, all planets have, it is a direct result of Solar radiation. Even if the one on Venus did have the power you claim, yet to stipulate a double exposure is straining your theory too far."

"Maybe it is, but I'm convinced that somehow the Venus-returns were affected by their stay on the second planet, and have, by some means been turned into accident prones. Or perhaps I shouldn't say that. Let me put it a different way. Most of those men committed suicide. They died as you almost died, by sheer, unthinking carelessness. Now what could have caused that?"

Curt shrugged, pushing away his empty plate and fumbling in his pockets for cigarettes.

"Depression? A psychologist told me once that every man secretly desires to die. Sometimes, when the death-wish gets too strong for him, he will deliberately do silly things hoping that he will die. Things like stepping into a busy street, balancing on the edge of a high roof, even taking a chance on whether or not a cartridge will detonate if he pulls the trigger. Could that be it?"

"Do you desire to die?"

Curt smiled, shaking his head and pulling a crumpled package of cigaretes from his pocket. He squinted at it, opening the creased paper and tilting it over his palm, shaking it to empty it of the last cigarette.

A battered white cylinder fell into his palm. crumpled cigarette—and something else.

"What?" Curt stared down at it, his grey eyes widening with shocked disbelief. "How did that get there?"

"What is it?" Fenshaw leaned across the table, his huge body quivering as he squinted down at Curt's palm. "It looks like a bead."

"It's no bead," said Curt grimly. He tilted his hand, letting the small object roll on to the tablecloth, then, after lighting his cigarette, stared down at it with narrowed eyes.

"Not a bead? Then what is it?"

"That," said Curt quietly, "Is a Venusian tri-polaroid crystal—and I've never owned one in my life!"

CHAPTER TEN

IT lay before them, a tiny thing, no larger than a pea, oddly irregular and with a strange and compelling beauty. Light writhed within it, a scintillant, ever-changing medley of hues, something like a fire opal, and yet with the sheen of a pearl. It was beautiful, and yet. . . .

Somehow there was menace as well. It seemed to glow like the feral eye of some alien beast, and the pulsing inner radiance had a strange, almost hypnotic fascination.

"It's beautiful." Fenshaw leaned even closer to the tiny gem. "A Venusian crystal you say?"

"Yes. They used them in the cybernetic machine. They are capable of holding a tremendous amount of "yes-no" information. Really they are a million tiny crystals bonded into one with a tri-polar axis. They are quite valuable."

"Are they rare then?"

"Not on Venus. The natives wear them as jewels. They claim that the crystals are alive, or rather in rapport with the person who wears them. Something like that, I never took much notice."

"So? Why not?"

"I had a job to do and was pressed for time. Anyway, anthropology isn't my line. I'm not interested in the superstitions of a native culture, only in their technological advancement."

"Then where did you get it?"

"I don't know," said Curt slowly. "It is a valuable thing, as you can see it would make a

fine jewel for a woman, with two of them for earrings a man could ask and get fairly high price. They are contraband however. Interplanet has barred their importation except for essential purposes."

"Why did they do that?"

"Afraid of upsetting the natives. My mission was to parley with them for a supply of the crystals. They regard them with an almost insane reverence, and if their import wasn't restricted, exploiters would cause a native war by stealing them for sale here."

"I see." Fenshaw stirred the glittering thing with the tip of his finger. "I've heard about these crystals. They have peculiar properties. I wonder. . . ." He paused and stared at the young man.

"Yes?"

"I wonder if you'd let me keep this for a while? There are some tests I'd like to make on it. I've heard that these crystals have an almost fantastic 'memory,' and I'd like to see what effect divergent energy flows has on its radiation frequency."

"Take it."

"It's only a loan," insisted the fat man. "I'll give it back to you as soon as I've finished."

"Keep it if you like. I don't want it."

"You mean that?"

"Yes. I don't like them. They send shivers up my spine. I suppose they affect me in exactly the same way as opals affect some people here on Earth. They look—slimy."

"No." Fenshaw picked up the tiny crystal and rolled it between his fat palms. "It is a beautiful thing. If you don't want it I'll have it made into a ring." He stared at Curt. "What's the matter?"

"Something you just said." The young man frowned, then, with an irritable shake of his head, grinned. "Forget it. The natives would never allow it anyway."

"Which natives? The Venusians?"

"Yes."

"What are they like anyway? I've seen the tri-di pictures of course, but they are deceptive. Do they really look like men?"

"Yes. They are quite humanoid. Some authorities are convinced that at one time the Venusians and us must have sprung from the same stock. Either through Terrestial colonisation of Venus, or the other way round. They are white skinned of course, there is no direct sunlight to cause pigmentation. Their hair is white, their eyes albino pink. In fact they look just as you would expect ordinary men to look after living beneath thick clouds for the past ten thousand years or so."

"Primitive of course?"

Curt hesitated.

"I'm not so sure," he said slowly. "I'm not an anthropologist as I told you, and the natives certainly live simple lives, but not as you'd expect a primitive people to live. They are exceptionally clean for one thing. They do not have internecine wars, have a surprisingly efficient language, and a strong system of moral behaviour. One of the culture experts on Venus told me that he suspected that they were even more advanced than we were. That their apparent primitiveness wasn't due to lack of culture, but rather an over-development of it. That they didn't use machines as we did because they had grown past them, not because they hadn't discovered them."

"Do you think that he was right?"

"It's too early to tell yet. After all we've only established our base there for ten years now. Aside from myself, only thirty-six men have worked out their contract time and returned home. Within the next year about two hundred will be due to return. That is what is worrying Carter."

"Yes. I can understand that. He doesn't want those two hundred men to all commit suicide or to die by accident. It wouldn't be long before the public learned of it and that would cause trouble."

"It would," admitted Curt grimly. "The tax payers are already screaming about the fantastic cost of interplanetary flight. If all the men who reach Venus were to die on their return, it would create a panic. Not only that. How many men do you think would be willing to go there if they knew that they could never return?"

"I see what you mean." Fenshaw stirred the crystal again, drinking in its beauty, then, with an obvious reluctance, he slipped it into his pocket. "Well, Curt? Are you ready for your tests?"

"I'm not sure." Curt thinned his lips as he stared at the fat man. "I'm not feeling happy about it."

"Why not? It can't hurt you."

"I don't know. I had the same feeling when Carter tried to make me don the communication helmet to the cybernetic machine. Call it a hunch if you like. Call it anything you please, but somehow I just don't want to be examined."

"As you please." Strangely enough Fenshaw didn't seem to be annoyed. "My investigations into the paraphysical sciences have taught me that the so-called 'hunches' are something more than an old wives tale. Unless a subject is willing to co-operate, his very re-

luctance will create conditions in which only negative results are possible."

He grinned at Curt.

"That is why dice players always try to convince themselves that the dice they throw will turn up the number they want. They don't know why they do it of course, but I have proved that a positive condition is able to affect the paraphysical result. In other words, if a dice player believes hard enough that he will throw a seven, then he will throw it. The ancients used to call it 'faith,' and they were quite correct when they stated that it was the strongest force known to man."

"So I haven't any faith?"

"Have you, Curt? The way you are feeling now tells me that you don't really expect me to discover anything that will help you. While you feel that way you are right. I cannot fight against your own conviction. If you should change your mind contact me. Contact me, anyway, I'd like to see more of you."

He rose and held out his hand. Curt took it, feeling ashamed of his own doubts, and yet despite his shame, knowing that he wouldn't alter his mind.

He sat at the cluttered table, staring through the windows, idly watching as the fat man paid the bill and left the restaurant.

For a moment Fenshaw hesitated on the pavement, as if undecided what to do, then, as if making up his mind, he stepped forward and lifted his arm to signal to a passing hire car.

The machine slowed with a whine from its turbine, swept towards the edge of the road, and halted before the gross bulk of the fat man. Curt could almost imagine him giving the driver directions, and he watched, not really interested, as Fenshaw opened the rear door and began to squeeze his bulk into the passenger compartment.

Something like a pistol shot echoed down the street.

A car, a huge, yellow painted thing, jerked and careened towards the kerb, rubber hanging in tattered ribbons around its front wheel. It slewed, seemed to hesitate, then, with a screaming of metal on metal, plunged directly into the rear of the halted car.

Fenshaw didn't stand a chance.

Curt swallowed as he saw the wreckage, the blood, the smashed body of what had once been a man.

That could have been him!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ambulance had come and gone. The police had taken notes and left. The crumpled ruin of the two cars had been towed away and the street was clear and clean before Curt left the restaurant.

He strode along the street, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his compressed mouth, and within his skull thoughts churned and twisted in wild confusion.

Fenshaw was dead. Fact number one.

He had carried a Venusian crystal. Fact number two.

Curt had given it to him. Fact number three.

Where had it come from?

He didn't like the Venusian gems, never had done, and, in a way, he had been glad to get rid of it. But how had it come into his possession? It had been at the bottom of a package of cigarettes. A tiny thing he would never have noticed it. No one would have noticed it. It couldn't have been there when he bought the package. Someone must have placed it there since he had opened it.

He frowned, trying to recall the events of the past few days.

He had landed. He had deposited his baggage. He had bought a fresh pack of cigarettes. Then he had gone to the Interplanet Building and had his appointment with Carter.

Someone in that building must have slipped the crystal into his pocket. It had worked into the cigarette package, a thin container of metal foil, and there it had stayed until he had finished the cigarettes and found the crystal. He had given it to Fenshaw, and the fat man had held it, almost caressed it, then slipped it into an inner pocket—and walked to his death.

Would he have died if he had not possessed the crystal?

Curt frowned with sudden suspicion, and halted, oblivious to the stares of the passing crowd. The thing that must have been common to all the Venus-returns. The connecting link between all of them—and he hadn't even guessed. Why should he? He hadn't shared that link, but it was there, it must be there.

The crystals!

What more natural for a man to have one made into a ring? Fenshaw had said it, but it hadn't registered at the time. The tiny gems were objects of rare beauty. It was only his personal dislike which made him regard them with suspicion. Other men would admire

them, want them to wear, to remind them of the planet where they had spent so many years. Souvenirs of Venus.

Souvenirs which had caused their death?

Curt didn't know.

Jerkily he signalled to a passing cab, tugging at the door with a savage impatience, snapping orders at the driver.

"Interplanet Building. Hurry!"

Acceleration surge threw him hard against the back cushions, and the turbine whined as the driver trod on the acceleration pedal. Curt sighed, feeling his nerves relax at the prospect of action.

Strangely enough he no longer felt afraid.

The receptionist stared at him as he swung from the elevator, her almost white hair glinting in the brilliant light streaming through the high windows, her painted features wearing an expression of shocked dismay.

"Carter," he snapped. "Where is he?"

"Mr. Harris," she gasped. "I thought. . ."

"Never mind what you thought." Impatience made his voice savage. "Where is Carter?"

"Inside. But. . ."

He lost the rest of her sentence in the speed of his progress towards the inner office.

Carter stared at him as if he were seeing a ghost.

"Harris! But you are dead!"

"Am I?" Curt grinned a little as he stared at the old man. "For a dead man I'm pretty active, don't you think? Anyway, you've got it wrong. The machine predicted that I would die within six hours. Well, I did die. Luckily nothing was said about that death being permanent. I went into deep freeze for ten days and here I am."

"I'm glad to hear it." Carter's expression seemed genuine. "Medway! You heard that?"

"I heard it," said the thin man, and coughed. "Are you ready to be examined now?"

"No." Curt stared at the thin man, and widened his eyes as he saw Medway's physical state.

The man seemed to be dying.

His gaunt cheeks had sunken until his head looked like a skull. His thin fingers trembled and he breathed with a horrible rasping sound. Sweat shone on his clammy skin and he moved with a painful feebleness almost painful to watch. He smiled, and the expression on his face made Curt wince.

"Why not, Harris?" Carter gestured towards a chair. "You know our problem. We have two hundred men ready for recall. Are you going to return them to their deaths?"

"No."

"Then?"

"I have solved the problem, that part of it at least. I know what caused the deaths of those thirty-six men. I know what almost caused my own death, and killed one of the finest men I have ever met."

"You do?" Carter thumbed a recording machine on his desk and leaned across the polished wood. "Tell us, Harris. I've switched on the recorder so that if anything should happen to us your discovery won't be lost. Well?"

"The way to save those men," said Curt deliberately. "Is to strip them naked before they leave and to issue them with fresh clothing."

"Are you serious?" Carter slumped back with an expression of disgust. "Is that all you have to say?"

"No. You will find, and I state this as a certainty, that each of those men will have a tri-polar crystal somewhere on his person. They will intend to smuggle the crystals back home to be made into a ring or something. Perhaps they are already in rings, but whether they are or not, those men must not be allowed to retain them."

"Of course not. The crystals are contraband."

Curt smiled at the shocked expression on the old man's wrinkled features.

"You should learn something of human nature," he said quietly. "I'll stake my life on the fact that, contraband or not, every man due to return will have one of those crystals in his possession."

"And you think that the tri-polaroid crystals are responsible for the deaths of the Venus-returns?" Medway didn't trouble to hide his sneer. "How can you be so sure? Have you one? Are you dead?"

"No, Medway. I am not dead, but I did have a crystal." He smiled at the old Director. "No. I didn't smuggle it through. I don't like the slimy things and anyway, I wasn't on Venus long enough for me to be given one. But I had one all the same. I got it here."

"Impossible!"

"I had one," repeated Curt grimly. "It almost killed me. Perhaps it would have killed me but for a lucky chance. It slipped into a package of cigarettes, a tinfoil package, and there it stayed until I found it and gave it to Fenshaw."

"You know Fenshaw? Where is he?"

"Fenshaw is dead, Carter. He was killed within a few minutes of my giving him the Venusian crystal."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the old man quietly. "He was a great man."

"Yes, and it is my belief that he was murdered." Curt stared at the two men. "Someone put that crystal in my pocket while I was here last. It could only have been one of you two. Whoever it was knew just what the crystals are capable of, what they can do, what must happen to any man with one in his possession."

He stared at the startled face of the old Director, then at the pain-wracked features of the thin man.

"Which of you was it? Which of you put that thing into my pocket while we struggled at the edge of the elevator shaft? Well?"

"You must be insane," gritted Medway. "Where would I get a crystal from?"

"Did I say that it was you, Medway?" Curt looked at the old Director. "Of all men you are the one with the most opportunity of obtaining one of the crystals. Tell me, Carter. Did you know that the tri-polaroid gems had the power to alter the probability factor? To make the highly improbable into the extremely likely? Did you, Carter?"

"No! No I never dreamed of such a thing. Harris! Surely you don't think that I'm responsible for killing my own men?"

"No," admitted the young man. "I don't think it was you." He stared at Medway. "Well? Are you going to confess? Or do we have to get the truth the hard way?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"No? Then perhaps you have no objection to my washing your face and putting you beneath an ultra violet lamp? Shall I do that?"

"Damn you, Harris! How did you know?"

Curt stiffened, then slowly relaxed, a thin smile on his features as he stared at the gun in the thin man's hand.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"MEDWAY!" Carter half rose from his chair, a shocked expression on his old features. "What are you doing?"

"Sit down!" The little weapon in the thin man's hand jerked as he snapped the command. He coughed, almost doubling with inner agony, then, just as Curt was about to spring from his chair, recovered himself with a tremendous effort of will.

"You're dying, Medway." Curt stared at the ghastly emaciation of the thin man. "You know that don't you?"

"I know it."

"Then why not give up? What do you hope to gain?"

"Isn't it obvious?" For some reason Medway seemed pleased to talk. "With you out of the way our secret is safe. Who is going to suspect the crystals? Innocent little things aren't they? Pretty, too, so pretty that no one could resist them, especially men who want to impress their women, or women who want to attract men."

"Yes. Pretty, as pretty as a snake, and just as deadly." Curt stared at the thin man. "I should have guessed. You have stained your skin, dyed your hair, and of course contact lenses would hide the pink of your eyes. How did you get here, Medway?"

"That's my business."

"Never mind. Now that we know it can never happen again. Are there any more of you on Earth?"

"Find out!"

"We will," said Curt calmly. "You can't live here can you? The unshielded sun is too strong for you, and there are other things. Viruses for example. Disease germs to which we have acquired a tolerance, but which to you are fatal. We can protect ourselves, Medway. Can you?"

"What is all this?" Carter stared at the young man. "Harris! What are you talking about? Medway! Put down that gun at once! Ill or not you have no right to act like this."

"Shut up you old fool!" The thin man gestured with the glinting barrel of his weapon. "To think that an ignorant animal like you could dare to sit there and give me orders. Me!"

"Proud aren't you?" Curt smiled and slowly tensed his muscles for a sudden lunge. "Proud? Or would it be that you are merely decadent? Perhaps you've grown to rely on your toys a little too much. Those crystals, synthetic aren't they, have shielded you too long. You have forgotten how to rely on your own efforts."

"Please." Carter slumped weakly into his chair. "Won't you please explain what all this is about?"

"Haven't you guessed?" Curt didn't take his eyes off the pain-wracked figure of the thin man. "Medway is a Venusian. Here in disguise. We can find out how he managed to get here later, probably he killed the original Medway and took over his identity. He is dying, our bacteria have proved too strong for his metabolism. He knows now that his people can't live on Earth."

"Who wants to live here?" Contempt rang nakedly in the thin man's tones. "That isn't the reason I came. We don't want your stinking planet. All we want is for you to stay away from ours."

"Why, Medway? What harm can we do to your people?"

"You ask that?" Bitterness lined the Venusian's thin features as he stared at Curt. "We have made our own world, made it to suit ourselves. We no longer need your clumsy machines. The crystals with their stores of paraphysical energy are able to supply us with all we need. We were happy, contented, satisfied to live our own lives in our own way. And then the Earthmen came."

He coughed again, doubling with pain, and Curt stared at him with something like sympathy.

"You came," continued Medway. "You arrived in your ships and immediately you took the planet for your own. You cut down our trees, ripped up our soil, delved for minerals and weighed the planet for exploitation. What did it matter to you that Venus already had its own peoples? What did you care that you weren't wanted? You had arrived, and you intended to stay."

"So you pretended that you were an uncultured people, primitive, simple, and all the time you were making your plans for war."

"No. We are a simple people. We have no need for machines. We have passed that stage and with the discovery of the paraphysical energy we are free for ever from bodily want. The crystals guard us, protect us, supply transportation and communication. Short distances it is true, but we are satisfied. You came. For a time we hesitated, trying to decide whether or not to welcome you, to share our discoveries with you, to give you the benefit of the crystals."

"Why didn't you?"

"You wouldn't let us. You investigated us. You ignored the fact that we had our pride. You treated us like simple primitives, and so, since that was how you wanted it, we decided to fight."

"Yes," said Curt. "You gave some of your tri-polar crystals to the Venus-returns. You knew that they would keep them. You knew also that the paraphysical energy contained in the gems would disrupt the probability factor, make lethal accidents occur as a normal thing rather than as a rarity. Tell me, Medway. Are you able to gauge the power of your crystals?"

"Naturally. Those we have for personal use have the power to extend the probability factor. On Venus accidents never happen. With the Venus-returns however we reversed the polar energy."

He stared at Curt with something like admiration.

"You are an unusual man. You instinctively mistrusted the crystals, but I had hopes when I slipped one into your pocket that you would die before you could learn the truth." He frowned. "I still cannot understand how it is that you are still alive."

"Luck," said Curt grimly. "Luck and the fact that your crystal slipped into a package of cigarettes, a package made of metal foil. It must have hampered the working of the crystal a little, not much, but just enough to give me a chance." He sucked in a deep breath. "I'm sorry for you in a way, Medway, but. . . "

Abruptly he was lunging towards the thin man.

Pain burned his shoulder as the weapon spat fire. Pain seared his side and something whined past his ear, then, with a savage desperation, he had wrenched the pistol from the other's hand.

And immediately was fighting for his life.

A knee swung towards his groin and pain stabbed through his every nerve. Fingers thrust at his eyes and a thumb stabbed at a vital nerve. He twisted, jerking his head to avoid the stiffened fingers which threatened to blind him and gulped air as he forced his pain-numbed body to answer his mental commands.

A face loomed before him and he drove his fist towards it, feeling cartilage yield beneath his knuckles. He struck again. Again. Pounding at a body which seemed made of steel and rubber, feeling the pain of the answering blows as though through a red mist.

Suddenly the pain ceased and he staggered for a moment, not realising that the fight was over.

Medway stood beside one of the high windows.

"You've beaten me, damn you! Even if I killed you both you still have the record of our conversation. You've beaten me. This filthy disease. . ." He coughed and blood stained his chin with a bright red film.

"Medway!" Curt stepped forward. "Come away from that window. We have medicines, drugs, we can save your life. Medway!"

He gulped, staring at the spot where the Venusian had stood, then, as if moved by the same set of muscles, both he and the old man stepped towards the empty parapet.

Far below something stained the pavement with broken flesh and spilled blood.

"He's gone!" Carter stared at the young man. "Why, Harris? Why did he do it?"

"Pride. The knowledge that he was doomed anyway. The desire for a quick death." Curt shrugged. "Who knows?"

"We could have been friends," whispered the old man brokenly. "He didn't have to try and kill us all."

"That is something we shall always have to face. That is a burden we shall always have

to bear. Whenever we contact a new people, an alien race, a strange world. Always there must be a time of conflict. It is inevitable."

"Is it?" Carter shook his head. "No, Harris, I can't agree. We can be friends with the Venusians now. We can help them and they can help us. It took this to make us realise that we are two peoples, two equally advanced peoples. Intelligence must win in the end, Carter, and intelligent men do not waste their strength in useless combat."

"I hope that you're right," said Curt quietly. "I hope that things will always work out that way—but somehow, I can't imagine they will. We of Earth are too impetuous, too impatient, too eager to press on. Our culture is exploding outward toward the stars, and inevitably we shall contact a new race. Perhaps they will be as aggressive as we are. I hope not, for if they are, then conflict is inevitable. I can only hope that it won't be utterly final."

"You are wrong," said the old man firmly. "I know that you are wrong."

Curt shrugged, staring down to the street two thousand feet below. He hoped he was wrong too.

But somehow he didn't think so.

THE END

WALT WILLIS

WHO'S WHO

in Fandom

(Or The Four Stages of Fandom)

☆

WALT WILLIS

I noticed in the last VSM that doddering 36-year-old Ken Slater referred to me as a "grey-bearded oldster" like himself. This is absurd. Why as recently as 1935 I was a starry-eyed schoolboy who might have been seen most afternoons trudging home with a hungry expression on my face and a load of lurid magazines under my arm. I used to spend not only my lunch money but my tram fare on them, but at least they spared me from completing my self-imposed project of examining every book in the public library to see if anyone else had written stories like the scientific romances of H. G. Wells. (Not however before I had acquired an unrivalled knowledge of all authors whose names begin with S, T, U and V.) I found something in those magazines nearly as fascinating as the stories—and *they* were by intellectual giants like E. E. ("Skylark of Valeron") Smith, Jack Williamson, John Russell Fearn (whatever became of him, I wonder?), and Clifford Simak. That was . . . no, not even the sexy book advertisements . . . but the readers' letters. Particularly those from a character called Bob Tucker.

But for some reason it never occurred to me to write a letter myself. Probably, I suppose, because these magazines, which as Ken mentions were sold in Woolworths for 3d. each, were always months out of date. (They were, I understand, shipped over as ballast.) So it wasn't until 1948 that I more or less accidentally discovered that these readers' letters had been just manifestations of a strange exciting world known as science fiction fandom. Four years after that discovery I was being met at Chicago bus station by that same Bob Tucker, E. E. Smith was asking for my autograph, and I was a guest of honour at a banquet along with him, Simak, Williamson and Hugo Gernsback. How all this came about is a long story, and I still don't believe half of it myself. It started with my editing a magazine called SLANT, in collaboration with my friend James White. It was pretty successful. Several of its stories were reprinted in professional magazines and anthologies and we "discovered" some promising authors like Ted Tubb. Then being far too modest . . . or lazy . . . to set up my own stuff in type I began to inflict articles and columns on other editors, mainly in America. Before I knew it a fund was being raised to bring me to an American Convention and to my never-failing amazement it succeeded.

Nowadays, having realised every ambition I had and a few I'd never imagined, I still hang around fandom. Partly because it's the most rewarding hobby I've ever come across and partly because of a real affection I have for many of the wonderful characters it seems to draw together. I correspond with them, write articles occasionally, and publish an unpretentious magazine called HYPHEN for my own and others' amusement. About the only really serious purpose I have is to help others to have some of the fun I've had out of fandom and thus pay off part of my debt to it. By, for instance, running the Two-way Transatlantic Fund which I hope "Inquisitor" will tell you all about, and some of you will contribute towards.

Fanfare

AND SUCHLIKE

By "INQUISITOR"

"I'M worried," I said to my friend, the Bibliophile. "The author of *The Super Disintegrator* in THE VARGO STATTEN MAGAZINE No. 1, Simpson Stokes; I'm sure I know that name, but . . ."

The Bibliophile, who was collecting s-f when it was being carved on stone tablets, smiled in a superior fashion and led the way to his study. This looked like a full-scale model of the British Museum Reading Room, but he went directly to a shelf and took down a small volume.

"Listen," he said. "'As they marched they had become gradually conscious of a strange, vibrant note in the upper air . . . it was like no known aircraft drone, and the shuffling column halted, as one man, and gazed upwards. . . . The sky was clear of clouds—a watery blue. Almost vertically above them, strung out in a line, were three strange cigar shapes, which appeared to be wingless. They were travelling fast—too fast to be airships. . . .

"'Then, one after another, the three cigar shapes in the vault of the sky slowed down. A puff of black smoke emerged lazily from each . . . they stopped moving . . . then they began to tilt, nose forward, and to drop, spreading fanwise away from each other. The vibrant noise ceased, and the three shapes sped silently down. . . .'"

"Easy," I said. "V1's, Hitler's robot bombs."

"Quite," said my friend drily, putting the book away. "That was *Air-Gods Parade*, by Simpson Stokes. It was published," he added, "in *1935*."

He was right, too. Mr. Stokes gave an accurate picture of the things nine years before they were stuttering explosively overhead. I'm just as glad that the rest of the book wasn't that accurate, though, for it forecast a poison-gas war on England; period . . . early 1945.

From there the talk drifted to other s-f prophecies; the famous occasion when American editor John W. Campbell was closely questioned by the F.B.I. for publishing a story concerning the A-bomb U235, etc., months before Hiroshima hit the headlines, and managed to convince them that it wasn't a security leak; Hugo Gernsback, publisher of the first s-f magazine and his oddly titled *Ralph 124C 41+*, published in 1911, which forecast television, radar, etc.; *The Great Pacific War*, written by Hector C. Bywater in 1925, which forecast the Japanese conquest of the Pacific islands in minute details. . . .

There are scores of near-correct prophecies; by themselves they add up to an impressive total. Taken against the thousands of non-correct forecasts, they are not so significant. You have to know what to pick. Now, if those electronically-minded fans down on the Medway could construct a Science Fiction Probability Analyser. . . .

One way to junk a number of prophecies would be for the world's leaders to act and think like sane, mature human beings. That would take care of these future Atomic War stories. There's also the probability, as Gordon Dean, former chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission points out in his *Report on the Atom* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 16s.), that mutual fear of retaliation would keep the A-bombs grounded. Mr. Dean has some interesting speculations in this book on the peaceful uses of atomic power, including the possibilities of A-powered *airships*!

★ ★ ★

There are already robots amongst us; not the ten-foot character with red-gleaming eyes, the strictly non-mechanistic desire for the heroine and the ability to get drunk by inserting his steel index finger into a light-socket . . . the fairly standardised s-f robot . . . but very prosaic commercial machines. The automatic telephone exchange; the weighing machines that "speak your weight"; linotypes; beer-bottling machines. It depends upon what you mean by robot, of course, and what you expect when you press a button and stand clear (. . . and in certain philosophies, human beings work in exactly the same way; press a conditioned reflex and stand clear.)

These solemn thoughts are occasioned by the appearance of two desk-top robots which should interest fan-magazine editors in particular, the Model A20 Varityper Office Composing Machine and the Coxhead DSJ Office Composing Machine. These don't exactly write your stuff for you, but they do practically everything else. Both come from Gestetner.

The principle of both machines is that of a typewriter, but whereas in the ordinary model typer each type is permanently fixed into the machine, one type-face to a type-bar, in this pair the type faces are quite separate. The type fount, the complete 90 characters comprising letters and figures, is cast on a semi-circular metal plate. This plate is fixed to a horizontal wheel on top of the machine, and every time you press the typewriter key, this wheel moves around to bring the desired character opposite the paper in the machine. At almost the same time a small hammer pushes the paper in the machine towards the wheel. As there is a typewriter ribbon between type and paper, the paper is printed.

You'll notice that the type-plate is *semi*-circular. That means that another plate, with an entirely different type-face, can be fitted to the other half of the central wheel, and put into operation with no more effort than is needed to lift the wheel into a different position. You can therefore, at any one time, have two different type-faces, say, ordinary and italic, on your machine. Moreover, the semi-circular plates are inter-changeable with very little effort; literally *hundreds* of type-faces are available!

This isn't of course the end of these machines' resources. There is variable line spacing, variable *letter* spacing, and automatic justification of lines. The latter means that each line has an even right-handed edge, as in all printing, and in fact Varityping is practicaly indistinguishable from ordinary printed matter. As a final touch, the machines mentioned are electric; a flick with the finger and a perfectly even impression appears on the paper.

Does any composing machine manufacturer want to buy a soul?

★ ★ ★

CLUBS AND FAN MAGAZINES. Active fan Peter Campbell's correspondents and local friends formed the basis of the Lakeland Science-Fiction Organisation, which now has a flourishing library and members in all parts of the British Isles and in the U.S. Information on the L.S.F.O. can be had from Peter at 60 Calgarth Road, Windermere, Westmorland. The first issue of the club magazine, ORION, was published in December by Paul Enever, 9 Churchill Avenue, Hillingdon, Middlesex. (4d. per issue, 6 for 1s. 9d.). It contained fiction, news, a column and a neat editorial outlining future policy. Quote "Granted that not every fan can write well—assuming that every fan can write period—there are obviously many, like the Irishman, who have never tried. Now is their opportunity." Unquote.

First fanzine to recover from the surfeit of S-F Xmas cards, Special Christmas Issues and 1954 Fantasy Calendars was HYPHEN (W. A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, N.I.) for Jan. '54. Well up to its humorous reputation, although sometimes a combined glossary of s-f slang and a *Who's Who In S-F* is needed to keep track of all the allusions. Quote "The Poo is Mightier Than the Yobber." Unquote. Beg pardon?

Kettering (Northants) S-F Society meets alternate Monday evenings at "The Vine," Rockingham Road, Kettering. Members have a library and are thinking of issuing a magazine.

Fee 5s. per year; contact D. Cowen, 42 Silverwood Road, Kettering, for further details.

Bradford S-F Association also meets at fortnightly intervals (at the homes of members), is also proposing to publish. The fee is 2s. 6d., the source for further details Secretary Derek Pickles, 197 Cutler Heights Lane, Bradford, 4.

★ ★ ★

The range of fantasy. . . . Competition to name a planet for U.S.A. TV s-f serial was won by a boy whose prize was a 30-foot long model rocket-ship, delivered on a 3-ton lorry. . . . Chess master C. H. O'D. Alexander startled interviewers at recent Hastings Chess Tournament by saying that he relaxed by reading science-fiction and was very interested in it. Odd; visitors to the London Circle have seen s-f fans relaxing by playing chess. . . .

★ ★ ★

Publishers Grayson & Grayson continue their excellent series of s-f titles with *Strange Travels in S-F*, an anthology edited by Groff Conklin, and *The Twenty Second Century*, which brings together a number of the fine stories written for British and U.S. magazines by British author John Christopher. *Travels* is a first selection from the mammoth American *Omnibus of S-F* and contains tales by Jack London, H. P. Lovecraft, Bradbury, Boucher, Brown, Fyfe and other famous names. Both books are well up to standard.

The Wishful Thinker by Bernard Newman (Robert Hale, 9s. 6d.) is a near-future fantasy concerning an Englishman able to read the thoughts of a leading Communist in Russia; interesting to admirers of political fantasy . . . and wishful thinkers.

Tomorrow Is Already Here by Robert Jungk (Rupert Hart-Davis, 16s.) is non-fictional; the author reviews atomic developments, electronic-brain building, rocket experiments and other factual but fantastic scientific advances, speculates on their effect on human culture; an interesting, provocative book for those who like to look beyond the purely mechanical wonders.

Forthcoming books include Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (Rupert Hart-Davis), three from Weidenfeld & Nicholson and an anthology, *Beachheads in Space*: *Space Travel* by British s-f author William F. Temple is a non-fictional account for younger readers, and *The Robot Era* will be by P. E. Cleator, one of the founders of the British Interplanetary Society.

★ ★ ★

New British pseudo-science film *Devil Girl From Mars* is reported to have been made in twelve days, features man-hunting woman from Mars who lands here in a flying saucer.

★ ★ ★

THE SITE: Grosvenor Hotel, Deansgate, Manchester. THE TIME: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. THE DATES: 5th and 6th June (Whitsun week-end). THE EVENT: The Supermancon, this year's national s-f Convention. Over 40 items have been listed for the Convention programme, including a talk by author John Russell Fearn and a "trial" of editor H. J. Campbell. Details from Dave Cohen, 32 Larch Street, Hightown, Manchester, 8. Everyone who is anyone in British s-f will be there . . . don't be left out!

★ ★ ★

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Sparing an inward smile of self-derision for any man who can so enjoy such blatantly incredible stuff, this reviewer has to confess that THE WEAPON MAKERS, by A. E. Van Vogt (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 15/6) is one book he couldn't lay down until the last page was reached. Here, certainly, is a book that makes Science Fiction reading take on a new significance, and all this despite the author's bombast and his gay essays into the world of utter impossibilities. In this book the founder of the Weapon Shops turns out to be the world's only immortal. As Robert Hedrock he steers the Isher civilisation through its severest crisis, first by marrying the Empress Innelda, and then by manipulating affairs in such a manner that her greatest enemies, the people of the Weapon Shops, are able to take the secret of interstellar travel away from her and give it to the people. How he dared pit himself against the greatest powers of his universe as well as against the aliens of outer space contribute to making this a really "big" book by whatever standard a critic might care to measure it.

CITY, by Clifford D. Simak (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 9/6) when first published in America was voted to be the finest science fiction work to be put out in hard covers during 1952 and thereby won the International Fantasy award. It is a curiously compelling story, containing a strange and intriguing programme for Man's future. It begins with a portrayal of the final end of the Cities, arising from decentralisation and far-reaching developments in chemical husbandry. It finally ends with a series of parallel worlds. One of these worlds is a kingdom of the ants, the second is controlled by a very lovable dog civilisation, while the third is the planet Jupiter—where the human race has jettisoned all the faults of humanity as they had known it, and embarked on a new type of life. The story is told from a new angle, from the point of view of the Dogs who have supplanted Man as the rulers. A remarkably compelling story, made all the more unique and delightful because the author has so patently enjoyed writing every word.

THE inter-phone buzzed insistently for the fifth time in an hour. Douglas Milton, resident surgeon of the Karoneth Hospital for Nervous Diseases, reached out a claw of a hand and snapped the switch.

"Well?" His voice was brusque; his dark eyes tired. He had been so overworked recently he felt as though he could do with a course of treatment himself.

"Have you a moment, Douglas?" It was the voice of Dr. Meadows in the loudspeaker, and Meadows was one of the specialists in neuronic ganglia.

"No," Milton answered briefly. "Not even for you, Harry. I'm up to the eyes in this case of Joseph Baxter. I think that he's—"

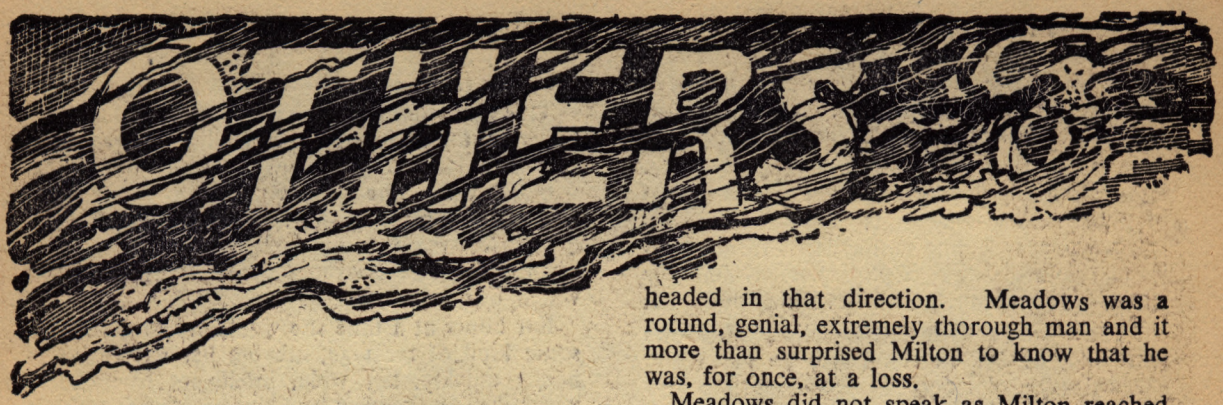
"Joseph Baxter has nothing on this, Douglas! It's the most amazing thing that ever happened. A woman totally different from all the women I've ever seen."

"Oh?" Milton neither sounded nor looked impressed. "What's so unique about her?"

"Well, her blue hair for one thing."

"That isn't unique. Women will do anything these days."

"But it isn't dyed! She has *genuine* blue hair—and there is something odd about her eyes too. Just as though she's wearing contact lenses. She isn't, though. Frankly I'm out of my depth. All my specialised knowledge doesn't apply."



Milton reflected, his interest becoming slowly aroused. After a moment he asked a question: "Where does she hail from?"

"No idea. She doesn't talk English. A passer-by found her fainting in the gutter and sent for an ambulance. General Hospital couldn't make head nor tail of the business and decided she might be a nervous sufferer, so sent her here. I think you should have a look—as resident surgeon."

"All right," Milton sighed. "I'll come."

"Ward Four. You'll find me there."

Milton switched off, surveyed the notes upon which he had been immersed, then murmuring things about women in general and this blue-haired one in particular, he left his sanctum, to arrive a few moments later in the spacious cleanliness of Ward Four. Here and there a patient acknowledged his tall, spare frame as he strode actively down the main aisle-way between the beds. His response to the acknowledgments was brief—as usual. He knew his job but his bedside manner had never been very remarkable.

Observing Harry Meadows' white-coated figure standing beside a distant bed, Milton headed in that direction. Meadows was a rotund, genial, extremely thorough man and it more than surprised Milton to know that he was, for once, at a loss.

Meadows did not speak as Milton reached him. He merely pointed to the young woman lying motionless in the bed. Milton eyed her fixedly, unable to avoid staring at that mass of blue hair; then he lifted the graph at the bed-end and studied it.

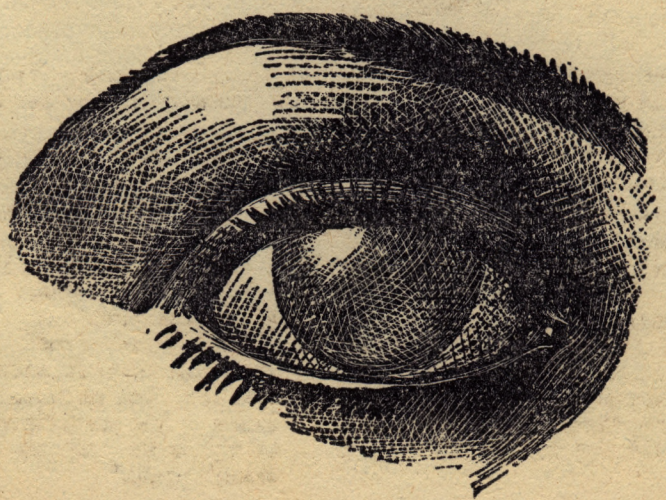
"Nervous exhaustion; partial blindness," he murmured, half aloud, then slurred the professional references into a jumbled undertone. "Mmmm—unique enough, Harry."

"No doubt of it!"

Moving forward, Milton leaned over the young woman, studying her. He was not given to emotion; it rarely found expression on his cold, sardonic face—but this time there was certainly a light of profound amazement in his eyes as he scrutinised the extraordinary sky-blueness of that bushy hair, startlingly contrasted by the white pillow.

The girl's eyebrows and long lashes were the same shade. The face in itself was heart-shaped with a sensitive mouth and well-bred nose. Unusual too was her skin — the colour of dull bronze, as though she had been exposed continuously to ultra-violet or else intense sunlight.

"Very peculiar," Milton confessed, puzzled; then he stood erect as the girl seemed suddenly



to become aware of his presence and opened her eyes. Now here *was* a shock, and it sent all Milton's medical knowledge into jeopardy—for here was the unexplained. The girl's eyes were not those of a normal human being.

In colour they were aluminium-grey, surprisingly beautiful somehow and yet utterly devoid of pupils! The effect was of huge, diamond-bright irises, reflecting multicolours from infinitesimal points, just as if they were prismatic or else made up of finely powdered diamond-dust.

"I told you her eyes were peculiar," Meadows remarked, as Milton stood like an eagle and gazed fixedly. "I don't think she can see very well. At first I thought she had some queer form of cataract, but now I— Well, I don't know *what* to think!"

"No; I shouldn't think you do! She's without parallel in medical history— What about the rest of her? How does she check up on female anatomy?"

"Normal, except for the bronze skin. I think it may be that shade because of her low ebb of health. Her height is five feet four and her weight seven stone six. Her language is foreign, as I told you."

"What country?"

"None I can place and I speak twelve languages."

Milton frowned, then looked back at the girl and spoke in his peremptory voice.

"What is your name, young woman? Where have you come from?"

Her response, though weak, was extremely quick—so much so it seemed hardly possible that her tongue could form the words so rapidly. Her strangely beautiful face changed in expression with sensitive quickness as she talked, passing through all the stages from complete bewilderment to hopeless despair. Milton kept thinking all the time that her speech sounded exactly like spoken shorthand.

"I don't understand you," he said at length; and then he tried vainly to look professionally unconcerned as he turned to Meadows. "She'd better be removed to a private room until she is completely recovered. I'll make her my own special charge. Ask Sister to step over here, will you?"

Meadows nodded and raised a finger to the night-Sister two beds distant . . . .

WITH care and attention the blue-haired girl returned gradually to normal health. After several weeks she was able to be left almost to her own devices in the quiet, sunny room which had been assigned to her. Her only companion was the poker-faced Nurse Dixon, who privately regarded her as a painted hussy.

This viewpoint was probably born of jealousy, however, for in returning to health the beauty of the unknown girl became something to wonder at. The dull copper of her skin changed to a satiny yellow. This, coupled with her perfect features and well brushed hair—to say nothing of the strange eyes—lent an effect which was breath-taking.

For hours at a time she would try to convey some kind of message, moving her expressive hands quickly, her wide, intelligent forehead wrinkling in despair as Nurse Dixon only shook her white-capped head and stared with level blue eyes.

This went on until Milton, by now at his wits' end to know what to do with his queer charge, hit upon the idea of taking her to his friend Hugh Nelson, scientist and mathematician. The razor-brained Nelson might be able to throw some light on the situation since most of his life was spent in dabbling in scientific matters off the beaten track. Since money was no object with him he could spend his time doing exactly as he liked.

So one morning the girl found herself led into the untidy laboratory at the rear of Nelson's London home, Douglas Milton towering up beside her. Whether she could see or not was still a moot point, but she certainly appeared to be watching the figure of a young man in shirtsleeves as he slid from before a paper-littered desk and came quickly forward.

As he beheld the blue-haired girl he stopped abruptly, then with an effort at composure he glanced towards Dr. Milton. The girl watched him with her extraordinary eyes.

"Mr. Nelson will be with you in a minute, Doctor . . . . Have a chair . . . ."

The young man produced two chairs from amidst the general untidiness and pushed them forward. Milton nodded an aloof thanks. He had little patience with this blonde young man. He seemed altogether too self-assured to be a good assistant to a scientist.

"I'm Eric Temple," the young man volunteered, looking at the girl. "I've heard plenty about you, through the papers and on radio and television. So I—"

"I am afraid," Milton put in coldly, "that you are wasting your time, Mr. Temple. This girl cannot understand your language. Maybe you'd better confine yourself to your work. . . . I assume Nelson knows we're here?"

"Certainly, and he'll be here at any moment." With which Eric Temple muttered something

about "frozen sawbones" under his breath and then returned to his task at the desk.

Several times he glanced up in thought and found the girl's eerie eyes fixed immovably upon him from under the brim of her big hat. He found his mind straying away from his mathematics to the far pleasanter contemplation of her beauty. Girls like this did not drop into the rather drab Nelson laboratory every day! He did his best to look casual as he noted the perfect symmetry of her young body, the golden hue of her face and slender hands. . . . Then catching the sardonic eyes of Milton fixed upon him he coughed slightly and continued with his work, only to pause presently in irritation.

"Definitely it matches up to forty-five degrees," he muttered, scratching his head. "That makes it—" He broke off with a snort of disgust, bunched the paper up and hurled it on the floor. Then he went on again, executing quick mathematics.

"Something wrong," he told himself out loud. "That figure can't fit there because—"

His sentence trailed off and he jerked up his head in astonishment at the sudden sound of crisply rustling paper. The girl had risen from her chair and was studying the creased figuring closely. If it did not prove anything else it at least showed that her eyesight was normal enough—in this respect anyhow.

Dr. Milton sat watching in interested silence. Eric Temple himself drew back sharply as the girl suddenly came towards him. She took the pencil from his hand and began to figure rapidly on the half blank sheet in front of him.

"What the—" He watched in amazement, then his eyes really began to goggle as he saw figures and mathematical symbols piling up on the paper before his gaze, the pencil held firmly in the girl's golden fingers. She was figuring and computing with the speed and skill of a mathematical genius. In two short minutes she had not only worked out the angle which had been bothering him, but also the entire construction of a machine about which she could not have had the least advance knowledge. The design was there, sure enough, in figures: the only thing was that the figures were peculiar in their manner of totalling.

"Great heavens!" Milton ejaculated, gazing over the girl's shoulder as she tossed the pencil down. "This is positively uncanny! She may not be able to talk our language, but she certainly knows what figures stand for."

"Uh-uh." Eric nodded weakly and glanced at her exquisite smiling face so close to his own. "Hell's bells, you're beautiful," he blurted out, and was rewarded by a puzzled frown and a quick shrug.

Milton glanced at his watch impatiently. "How much longer is Nelson going to be, do you suppose? It's about—"

"Still as short-tempered as ever, eh Milton?" enquired a chesty, good-humoured voice—and Milton turned to see a short, stumpy figure advancing from the laboratory's exterior door. It was Hugh Nelson, attired as ever in an untidy navy suit, a row of different-coloured pens clipped to his breast pocket.

His podgy little hand endeavoured to flatten a stray wisp of hair on his semi-bald head as he advanced. His round, good-tempered face tried to look unconcerned as the girl turned from Eric Temple to study him.

"Well, you old buzzard, what's on your mind?" Nelson asked haltingly. "You sounded pretty worried over the 'phone."

"Kindly do not refer to me as a buzzard!" Milton retorted. "I have a reputation to maintain, even if you haven't. I wish to consult you professionally concerning this young lady here. In a way she's my—er—ward. I'm providing everything for her at the moment, purely out of interest in her case."

"Don't blame you," Nelson said, studying her thoughtfully. "Where does she come from?"

"That's what I want you to find out. In my capacity as resident surgeon—"

"Oh, stop being high-hat, man! One would think we'd never been college mates. I'm a busy man, Milly . . . ." And, as Milton winced, "What do you want me to *do*?"

"Find out all about her," Milton replied. "You can see for yourself that she isn't a normal girl. She doesn't even look Earthly—not about the eyes and hair anyway. And in these days of flying saucers and space-travel-just-around-the-corner she might have come unnoticed from another planet—"

"If she's a sample of the people on another planet, count me in for the first journey!" Eric Temple enthused, only to cool off again at Milton's stony look.

"With your many accomplishments, Nelson," Milton presently continued, "you might find out something. You're a mathematician, linguist, general scientist."

"True, but I'm not a detective—"

"Look here," Eric Temple interrupted, thrusting the sheet of calculations into his employer's hand. "She worked this lot out in two minutes! That's faster than an adding machine!"

"She did, eh?" Nelson frowned and shrugged. "Well, maybe she is a good mathe-

matician in her own land, wherever that is, but she is all wrong here. These figures are not the same in meaning as ours, though the principle is similar."

"But she's worked out every detail of that air pressure machine we're working on!" Eric insisted. "All from a waste sheet of figures which I threw on the floor!"

"Yes, I suppose that does represent supreme mathematical skill," Nelson admitted, musing. "At least we know we have something in common to commence with, anyhow."

He turned to look at her and found her smiling.

"Figures? You understand them?" he asked slowly, jabbing a fat index finger to the crumpled paper—but she only raised and lowered her slim shoulders.

"Her language and ours are completely different," Milton said. "I told you that over the 'phone. What suggestions have you?"

"The only obvious ones. Leave her with me: she can stay with my housekeeper. I'll diagnose her thoroughly, test her mental power in every way I can, and try to get to the bottom of her origin. She obviously is highly intelligent, and certainly very beautiful. Soon as I get an angle I'll 'phone you. How's that?"

Milton nodded. "Do splendidly; but take care you keep a close watch on her. Colour movie men and theatre scouts have been trying to grab her for weeks."

"Can you wonder!" Eric exclaimed, gazing at her. "She's got all the film beauties laid out deader than mutton. . . ."

HUGH NELSON, absorbed by the unusual problem entrusted to him, promptly abandoned all other scientific dabblings in the days which followed and subjected the strange girl to all the tests he could conceive. Also he examined her physically with the numerous ordinary and extraordinary instruments he had in the laboratory.

X-ray plates revealed that her physical formation was the same as any woman's. Eye tests showed that she could see with perfect clearness in some lights, but hardly at all in others. Also, she seemed to mistake various objects for something totally different, as though she were suffering from some curious visual refraction.

Most difficult of all was the language problem. Nelson, despite being a capable linguist, found himself stumped when it came to understanding her swift, fluid speech. The only thing he discovered was that her name was Onia. Finally he adopted the only course and taught her English, becoming gradually amazed at the speed with which she mastered it. Her memory was uncannily retentive and accurate. Once she made a mistake—which was rare—she never repeated it.

In a week she had mastered small sentences; in a fortnight she could talk haltingly and intelligently in a clear, bell-like tone, always to the accompaniment of pretty gestures. Highly satisfied with his progress to date, Nelson 'phoned Milton to come over and hear for the first time whatever story of origin the girl might have to tell.

The girl herself sat coiled up on the library chesterfield as Nelson, Milton, and Eric Temple sat quietly about her. She studied them for awhile, and then began—

"You have all been very kind to me, and for that I want to thank you. I find myself faced with so many difficulties that I perhaps appear vague at times. I assure you that is only because of my surroundings. They are so different from my own."

"Do you know where you are, Onia?" Nelson questioned, and her head, with that amazing blue hair, nodded quickly.

"Yes. From what you tell me I am in a city called London, in Great Britain." Her face clouded a little. "I cannot properly remember how I got here, but I think it was my own folly which caused it. I did something wrong: I was too venturesome. My father was experimenting with atoms and molecules, converging them on to a mosaic screen. I remember that there was a misty gap in that screen and I walked through it. My father tried to call me back, but . . . . Well, I was too self-willed and disobeyed him. Next thing I knew I was wandering around in a strange land—half buildings and half trees. I think I must have wandered for many hours, then fatigue overcame me and I collapsed, waking up in the hospital."

"I gather that you know what atoms and molecules are?" Nelson asked quickly.

"Only from the language you have taught me. We have other names for them—"

"This is getting us nowhere!" Milton interrupted, glancing at his watch. "I've a major operation to perform tonight and I want to hear everything before I go. . . . Where is this place you came from, Onia? Is there a race of people like you?"

"Why, naturally!" She looked surprised. "Tens of millions of them! And it is on this planet, too. There was no spacial projection: that I *do* know. One moment I was in my father's laboratory, and then I was here. Just as though I'd. . . . I'd fainted," she finished vaguely.


"One moment I was in my father's laboratory, and then I was here."

"Fourth dimension?" Eric volunteered, thinking—but Nelson shook his head.

"No; Onia isn't a fourth-dimensional being. If that were the case only part of her would be visible. Besides she conforms in anatomy to any other woman on Earth, except for the eyes. Tell us, Onia, what do you see?"

"That's hard to explain! You build in such a queer fashion. You have walls where there should be emptiness; you have nothing hardly anywhere to block the lavender glare of ultra-violet rays. I can see those—*and* infra red. And they're painful! Then again you have many forests in this city where ought to be buildings. . . . To me it's all such a hopeless confusion!"

"Forests?" Nelson repeated, astounded. "*Forests*?"

Onia nodded slowly and Milton gave a snort of disgust.

"This gets ridiculous! The girl's a practical joker!"

"Don't be too sure of that," Nelson told him. "There are more things in heaven and earth, my friend. . . ."

Apparently struck by a sudden thought, he got to his feet and from a table nearby raised a dried shrub in its art pot. Taking it over to the girl, he allowed her to study it.

"What," Nelson asked seriously "is *this*?"

"A piece of queerly fashioned stone. And that is something I can't understand. Why do you people have so many stones inside your homes, and in places of prominence, too? I've even seen them inside big buildings, but with the plant underneath and the stone on top, mysteriously defying the pull of gravity."

"Inverted vision," Milton decided brusquely. "Not uncommon by any means."

"Inverted nothing, Milly," Nelson told him. "She is describing exactly what she sees. She describes this shrub as a queerly fashioned stone. Also she fully believes that the palms and things we have in public buildings have the pot on top and the plant underneath. We've got to find out *why*!"

Nelson returned the shrub to the table and then wandered back to the girl. He asked a question very deliberately:

"Onia, what do we look like to you?"

A merry smile curved her lips. "Very funny! Your blue hair and animal skin clothes are most unusual!"

"What!" Milton gasped, shaken. "You—you mean to say our hair looks like yours? That we dress in *pelts*?"

"Hair like *mine*!" Onia echoed. "Why, that's absurd! I—"

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" Nelson waved his podgy hands fiercely. "Let's get some order. What colour are our skins, Onia?"

She hesitated a little. "I—I don't know the word for it, but I should say like—*that*!" Her hand swung and pointed to a massive brass shield hanging on the panelled wall.

"Golden—like hers!" Eric cried in amazement. "Has she got a looking-glass mind, or what?"

"Nothing like that." Nelson shook his head slowly. "The first thing we have got to realize is that she belongs to a different space from ours, yet for some reason we look like her—*to* her, that is—and vice versa. One last thing, Onia; do cities and buildings and furniture and clothes look *like* those things to you?"

"Sometimes," she replied uncertainly. "At first I had a terrible task to accommodate myself. For instance, in the hospital you covered me with hide instead of cloth. You never used sheets. And that nurse in her vivid pink animal skin—"

"This," Milton broke in sourly, "is a cheap hoax! Pink animal skin indeed! Hide sheets! Young woman, what sort of a joke do you think you're perpetrating?"

"It's anything but a joke!" she declared passionately. "Just look at this skin you have made me dress in!" And her slender hand pulled at the soft silken gown she was wearing.

"This is an affront!" Milton shouted. "That gown is of the finest silk money can buy. I ought to know!" He relapsed into simmering silence for a moment, then suddenly started. "By Jove, I wonder! That passer-by who found her referred vaguely in his statement to the animal skin this girl was wearing—"

"I know," Nelson said calmly. "I've had that pedestrian under cross examination, and I also have the skin in which Onia made her debut. Meadows obtained it for me."

"Oh, he did!" Milton looked ominous.

"Don't start flying off the handle, Milly. You're a busy man and so I didn't bother you."

"All right—and don't call me *Milly*!"

"That skin," Nelson proceeded, "belongs to some animal quite unknown to us, but to Onia it probably represented the finest fabric. Am I right, Onia?"

She nodded quickly, her face brightening with dawning understanding.

"Quite right. It was similar in texture to all the garments worn by the younger women of my race. And it was *not skin*!" Onia finished indignantly, pouting at Milton.

"I give up," Milton growled. "She must be insane. Perhaps a severe case of reversed conception—a kind of egocentrical belief that everything is different from what it really is. Really

most interesting. She must be examined by the greatest brain specialists in the land. Amnesia producing contrary conception! Never been anything like it!"

"Amnesia be damned," Nelson said politely. "Whoever heard of amnesia producing supreme mathematical ability, even if the figures *are* queer? For instance, Onia, what is the fourth dimension?"

"A property that is to volume what volume is to area," she replied promptly. "It is entirely theoretical, cannot be mastered, and cannot be travelled. Nor is it Time."

"It isn't?" Nelson asked quickly.

"Time is a state or condition of thought — nothing more. My father is a master mathematician and he has definitely proved that fact. Since Time is a mental concept it cannot be travelled physically; that is obvious. If you are thinking that I perhaps have come from some other Time-state you are quite wrong. The date in my world corresponds exactly with the one I discovered here when I arrived, so the two Time-states were—and are—in existence synchronically. The only thing that *can* be travelled is the space existing between atoms. That, I think, is how I came here. It's all very strange," Onia finished wearily, relaxing amidst the cushions. "I wish I could find the way back."

"You will," Nelson promised, smiling. "We'll help all we can . . ."

With that he turned aside and looked at the puzzled Milton and thoughtful Eric Temple.

"I believe I have it, Milly!" he exclaimed. "And you listen to this as well, Onia: it's right up your street. You, my dear girl, are the living proof of Positivism!"

"What the devil's that?" Milton growled. "Talk English, man! And time's getting on!"

"Positivism," Nelson said slowly, "was discovered and explained by August Comte in eighteen-twenty-four. It is probably the most important and yet the most neglected ramification of the pure scientific thinker. It asserts that there is no other source of knowledge except within the range of our limited senses. It even states that the external world does not exist at all — except through sensory impression."

"Far fetched!" Milton decided brusquely.

"On the contrary! Take one Positivist example as laid down by the famous scientist Max Planck: It asserts that a tree is nothing but a complex series of sense impressions. We see it grow; we hear the rustle of its leaves; we inhale the perfume of its blossom. Take away all those sensory impressions which flow together to suggest a tree and what is there? Nothing! *There is no tree*!"

"In the same fashion," Eric put in, "as a blind man builds up a world of his own impressions and sometimes gets the shock of his life if sight is regained?"

"A good simile, Eric. You have it exactly. Further, the Positivist outlook cannot be accused of logical inconsistency because when we come to apply it as the exclusive foundation on which scientific research is built, we find that all science is nothing more than an inference from sensory experience. Our entire creation, our entire world, is built up of certain lines of sensory impression which have endured since the dawn of Time. We have learned to call a stone a stone—and we do. Our very brains have been moulded that way through interminable generations. Here and there one goes wrong and we call him—perhaps unjustly — a lunatic. Others do not interpret colour wavelengths correctly and are called colour blind. Definite proof of Positivism!"

"Then — this girl — ?" Milton hesitated and looked at her as she leaned forward interestedly.

"I think," Nelson said, "that she comes from a place fairly identical to our own, only with a Positivist outlook which is totally different. She proves that an external world *is* only sensory impression. Her race has schooled itself into believing that a certain aggregate of atoms and molecules represent a stone instead of a plant, a skin instead of a fabric. To them it is real: to us it is false. Onia's conceptions of colour are different from ours. She has an added advantage of being able to see beyond the limits of the spectrum . . . In other words, a different evolution entirely but, in its own way, just as accurate as ours."

"But where *is* this place?" Milton insisted. "Never mind the Positivist conception! Let's have facts!"

Nelson shook his head dubiously. "We can't get at that all in a few minutes, Milton. It may take a long time—may even mean opening up fields of science hardly suspected. You can take it for granted, though, that I'll find Onia's world if it's the last thing I ever do. With her knowledge of mathematics it may be an easier job than it looks."

"Which means another delay," Milton sighed, rising to his feet. "Still, I appreciate the circumstances. Let me know the moment you discover anything . . . And now I must be getting along."

He bowed formally to the thoughtful girl and took his departure, leaving three independent minds wrestling with a most complex problem.

IT was one thing to attempt to mathematically trace the origin of Onia and distinctly another to do it practically. Though her

mathematics were without flaw, evidencing the high scientific knowledge of her race, she was constantly at a disadvantage because her outlook was so completely different.

Distances, colours, aspects of time, underwent variations which placed them hopelessly out of true with normal conception—or at least so-called normal conception. She toiled with a tireless energy, spurring both Nelson and Eric to achievements in figures which surprised even themselves.

Even a line of self-analysis was tried, tracing back in the true Positivist fashion into the girl's own history, determining which particular incidents in her life had led her to certain convictions and actions—but none of them led anywhere. Her world was too much at variance to provide a convincing basis.

At the end of a fortnight of feverish endeavour, with nothing to show for it except a mass of brilliant but useless calculations, Nelson was decidedly irritated. He paced his laboratory, abstractedly fingering the row of pencils in his breast pocket and scowling at the floor.

Eric and the girl were both seated in thought, all lines of reasoning temporarily exhausted.

"You are sure your father used some sort of mosaic?" Nelson demanded at length, halting. "It really *was* a device that somehow altered the paths of atoms and molecules?"

"Of course," the girl replied quietly. "That is why I cannot understand why my figures do not work out correctly. I know most of the metals he used and all their specific atomic weights—yet all we get out of it is a mathematical jigsaw! It's all so completely—"

"Say, wait a minute!" Eric exclaimed suddenly, his face brightening. "Suppose you are right, Onia, and we are wrong? Suppose you have been working on the figures of *your* atoms and molecules—not ours. The figurative basis is different in our respective worlds."

"What are you driving at?" Nelson asked curtly.

"I'm suggesting that the Positivist outlook has been letting us down. Onia has tried to work from her viewpoint in *this* world. That's all wrong. She's not been educated to understand our atomic bases. We've got to undergo a complete reconstruction of figures and find the corresponding ones. Translate her figure conceptions into our meanings."

"I believe you're right," the girl herself said. "I also begin to think that my world and this one exist in the same place."

"That's impossible!" Eric protested. "Two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time."

"Why not?" Onia asked. "Between the atoms of apparent solids there are spaces as comparably vast as those between this world and the nearest galaxy. How do we know that my world or your world are the only ones? Suppose Nature has ordained it that the atoms of countless worlds fit exactly into the spaces which are left between? A great interlocking process."

Nelson's face was beaming with delight. "Indeed, why not! Rutherford and Nils Bohr have both proved that solids are, paradoxically, all space! If we assume that other atoms fit into the spaces in flawless mathematical symmetry it means that there is no space at all in the Universe—only one vast composite of solids."

"But oughtn't we to be able to see the aggregate effect of those other atoms?" Eric asked, puzzled.

"Anything but it!" Onia exclaimed, taking up the scientific thread with sudden eagerness. "The very fact that your world seems insane to me—that I look incredible to you—is because our outlooks are so utterly at variance. That very fact proves that we are limited to the fundamental conceptions of our particular worlds. We only see that which sensory impression directs: beyond that we cannot go. I could no more see this world from my own than you can see mine from here. The whole outlook is changed; that's why . . . If we do start to work by transposing my figures into your own mathematical principle we may be able to get somewhere."

"No question about it!" Nelson declared, and snatching out a green pencil from his pocket he began to compute rapidly, to be presently joined by Eric with the girl herself as exponent of the examples . . .

From that moment onwards the former difficulties were entirely absent. Equations began to balance, though Nelson and Eric could only guess at their ultimate meaning. Their task was solely to transcribe the girl's calculations into normal meaning. Once this was done she continued her own activities, ultimately producing the basis of a machine which she averred was identical with the one her father had constructed.

The actual assembly of the strange machine took two months' time in which Dr. Milton bobbed fitfully in and out, usually snorting impatiently and demanding to know how much longer. He could see neither sense nor object in the oddly fashioned metal apparatus growing in the laboratory, nor did a gigantic oval of composite metals—a flawless mosaic—convey anything to him. Not that Eric or Nelson were much the wiser either until the machine was

finally finished and linked up to the control panel. Then Onia took it upon herself to explain.

Milton, taking a morning off from the hospital in order to be present, stood in critical silence, too independent to admit he was completely at sea. Nelson was dusty and sceptical; Eric thoughtfully interested. He was perfectly satisfied in his own mind that Onia could not do anything wrong.

"Through this mosaic we can, I think, gain entrance to my world," the girl explained slowly, walking round it. "It is a replica, as far as my memory serves me, of the device my father made. If we accept the theory of our worlds being interlocked it is obvious that we can only cross from one to the other by repatterning the atomic configurations existing between. This mosaic is made up of the basic elements of my world, all of which exist here but under different mathematical meanings. A field of force passed through the mosaic will cause the various metal atoms to change their configurations into the order existing in my world."

"Why?" Milton asked bluntly. "How do you know that will happen?"

"Because the force will be mathematically predetermined in both effect and efficiency to duplicate the force used by my father. Force is the same in any space; only the method of using it is different. Now we have our figuring straightened out the matter presents no complexity. These mosaic atoms will be compelled to undergo great changes."

"Then what?" Nelson questioned.

"Then, unless I'm tremendously out in my reckonings, we shall be able to step from one plane to the other. The barrier between will be temporarily broken down."

"Sounds rather too good to be true to me," Eric commented. "Besides, if that really be the case, how is it that your own particular mosaic wasn't visible to you when you came through it? Surely it ought to have been? Like a doorway in the air?"

Onia's face clouded a little. "That is the part I cannot quite understand," she confessed, her voice troubled. "Of course, I got here through an accident of my own making. The machine might have been destroyed. On the other hand . . ." She stopped and shrugged, as though afraid to say what she really thought. "I have often considered it rather strange that my father did not build another mosaic and try to find me."

There was an awkward silence; then Milton coughed himself into being noticed.

"This — mosaic," he said, wandering round the skilfully constructed oval, suspended by shining metal brackets to the main framework of the contrivance. "When exactly do you intend to use it?"

"Now," Nelson replied promptly. "Why else do you think we summoned you so urgently? Onia's mind is made up and everything is set to go. Isn't it?" He glanced at her enquiringly.

"Everything," she agreed, hovering before the switchboard, and she indicated a haversack of provisions, water flask, and revolver on a nearby chair. "I'm all prepared, you see. There is no knowing how far I may have to travel when I get to the other side. Granting I ever do, that is."

"You are quite sure you wouldn't prefer us to come with you?" Nelson urged.

"Not until I have proved that my figures are right, otherwise I might plunge you into some kind of atomic chaos from which there would be no escape. Once it is definitely established that we can pass between worlds without trouble—or at least between planes—the great step will have been made . . . Now let us see how things are."

Her hand closed the switch which started the generators. The massive gauge tubes on top of the switchboard suffused with a curious multicoloured energy, predominated by twisting streaks of vermillion. With a dull crackling roar the intricate wiring of the amazing mosaic came into life, setting each little facet glowing with different colours as the atomic construction underwent sudden and extreme changes.

In complete silence the four watched, their gaze fixed to the amazing display as colour interwove with colour in a fashion both beautiful and incredible. The heavy smell of ozone began to permeate the electrically-charged air.

"It's melting!" Milton ejaculated suddenly, his bony face outthrust.

"Not melting," Onia corrected him. "Just changing its composition."

Again silence fell. Nelson stood tightly clutching the pencils in his pocket, perspiration glistening on his bald head. Eric was all eyes, half crouching.

The multicolours swirled and twisted off into apparent vapours. From the extreme diamond-pointed centre of the mosaic the queer effect spread in a rippling circle through every facet, leaving finally a misty oval with a perfectly solid frame around it. And beyond that oval there was no sign of the laboratory fittings — only a blank, incomprehensible grey, uninviting and mysterious.

"Is *that* your plane?" Milton jerked out at last, glancing towards the girl.

"My world — my plane — lies beyond that

mist," Onia replied soberly. "Or at least I *hope* it does. Beyond the mist should be the daylight of my own plane. Since it is morning here it will be morning there. The times correspond."

She turned about suddenly and slipped the haversack and flask over her shoulder. Then she took up the revolver into her right hand.

"Well, I'm going to try it!" She said the words quite simply, as though she were trying to disguise a certain deep-felt regret. "I can only repeat my eternal thanks to you for the help you have been to me. You won't go unrewarded if this works out right, believe me . . ."

With a faint smile she turned and moved towards the oval, only to pause as Eric jumped forward and gripped her arm. She turned in surprise.

"Listen, Onia, I can't let you walk out just like this!" Eric's voice was quiet but determined. "It's meant something so different to me to have you around and — Well, I can't picture myself going on working once you have gone!"

"Silly!" she chided, colouring a little.

"I mean it, Onia! I want to come with you . . . Suppose you should walk into a world which isn't your own? Just think what you might be up against! You might need a man beside you who can tackle things."

"I had never thought of the possibility of *not* finding my own plane, Eric, but now you mention it—"

"Look, Eric, I don't agree with this at all!" Nelson strode forward, his face concerned. "There's a lot of work to be done once Onia's gone. You just can't walk out on me."

"I'm afraid I can, even though I apologize for it. Laboratory assistants are ten a penny, sir, and there's only one Onia. That's how I look at it. If there are dangers I want to share them with her. If there are not—well, all the better for both of us."

Milton laughed shortly. "Great heavens, the man's in love! Better let him go, Nelson. The scientist who lets romance upset his emotions won't be a scrap of use."

Nelson said nothing. He thrust his hands in his jacket pockets and looked at the two young people moodily. They looked back at him, then at the sardonically smiling Milton.

"Ready?" Eric asked finally, taking the gun from the girl's hand. Her response was to step forward into the oval, and instantly she disappeared. Eric did not hesitate a moment. He strode forward into the unknown—following her, and at that same moment he found himself punched and pummelled with unknown forces. They sent him staggering helplessly forward, to

finally pull up short and discover the girl was only a yard or so away.

Her beautiful face was distraught, pale with worry, as she surveyed the rocky, unfamiliar wilderness into which they had come. The sky was green, to Eric anyway, and the morning sun bluish.

Eric turned stupidly. To the rear there was no sign of the mosaic through which they had come. They had irrevocably burned their bridges behind them.

"Is — is this your plane?" Eric whispered at last, his arm about the girl's shoulders.

She shook her head in dismay. "No! No such wilderness as this is in my plane. Somewhere there must have been an error — It means," she continued, thinking, "that there must be others!! Maybe tens of millions of planes all parallel in the spaces between the atomic aggregates, and to find one amidst them all would perhaps take a lifetime. Perhaps, even, it can *never* be accomplished!"

Eric was silent. Then he tried to smile. Onia gave him a hopeless look.

"No way back, Eric. Only forward! No chance of trying again for my own plane unless we find mathematicians in this plane."

"We have no choice but to try," he murmured, holding her against him. "We're in this together, Onia. We'd better see what we can find."

They began moving and overhead the blue sun blazed down in impartial brilliance. . . .

FANDOM AND THE FUTURE

By STUART MACKENZIE

Stuart Mackenzie has been a reader of science-fiction on and off for the last 22 years. However, he only became an active fan after the London Convention in May, 1953. He is currently the Publishing Editor of SPACE-TIMES, *still considers that he is wet behind the ears as far as fandom is concerned, but thinks he knows more now than when he started.*

THE other day someone who had better remain nameless, rang me up. "Look here, Mac," he said, "this fandom business is all very well for you people who are in it. But what about the people who are interested in becoming fans? What do the present fans do to encourage them? And what are you doing to ensure that there will be a future generation of fans—what about the youngsters, in fact?"

I changed the subject—because I just didn't know the answers. But those apparently simple questions made me think, so when I went home I put a wet towel on my aching head and thought some more. This article is the result.

Taking the first thing, what are present fans doing to encourage others to become fans? This is a tricky business. Some fen (plural of fans) argue that if anyone *is* sufficiently interested he or she will find a way to meet other fen, join a fan organisation. If they aren't sufficiently interested, then they don't matter, because they don't have the necessary enthusiasm to be fans. Others say that as opportunities for meeting other fen are not so common outside big cities, and that only a small fraction of the total population lives in a large city, then something should be done to gather in the more scattered potential fans.

Perhaps the easiest way to examine this problem is to consider how one gets to be a fan at the present time. Naturally, you start by reading science-fiction or fantasy. You like it, read more, and inevitably in the magazines you buy or borrow you read about fan activities of one kind or another. Perhaps there is a meeting near where you live, or a convention, or a fanzine advertises (a fanzine is fan jargon for a fan magazine, as opposed to a prozine, which is a professional magazine, like the Vargo Statten Science Fiction Magazine) or you see an Operation Fantast announcement. At any rate, you either go, or write off for details, or something, get involved either by personal contact or by correspondence, and find yourself caught up in the vortex. You are a fan. You are then a member of a lower hierarchy, because there are two types of fan: the fan simple and the active fan. This latter variety of the species is one who writes for fanzines, takes part in their production, is an active member of a club or in some other way does some sort of work in fandom. Naturally these people consider themselves to be a little superior to the ordinary common or garden fan: this is a good thing

as it makes the lower order work in order to achieve the higher status: this in turn ensures that there is a continuity of sorts in fandom and that fandom does not die out for lack of people to do things. Sort of "House that Jack built" stuff: but it is the way that all organisations work, really.

Having got that part to some extent straightened out, let's take the question "What are fans doing to encourage other people to be fen?" In this country I can only name off-hand two organisations which actively try to "recruit" people: the first is Operation Fantast, and the second the Nor'-West Science-Fantasy Club. Last month you read about Captain Ken Slater, who heads O.F., as Operation Fantast is usually called. O.F. publishes a very useful Handbook each year, and operates a world-wide trading service for books, magazines, etc. There is no central headquarters, and it is all done by post. They advertise in one or two s-f publications. The Nor'-West Club, usually known as the Manchester Club, is a somewhat different thing. This is primarily a club, which holds meetings twice a week in Manchester. However, like Operation Fantast, its membership is world-wide and there are many members who have never been to Manchester. Some, indeed, from America, had never even heard of the place! They are members largely because of the Club Magazine, Space-Times, which advertises each month in two British professional magazines. Apart from that, there is the London Circle—which meets in a London pub every week. This is an informal sort of affair, and for a very good reason. There is no club as such. No President, Secretary, Treasurer and so on . . . . no dues, either. Merely a meeting of people, without any sort of prior arrangement, who like to talk about science-fiction. Now and again you will see an advertisement by the pub where they meet . . . and finally, the commonest sort of publicity for any fan organisation is the "editorial mention" in a magazine, and the "Readers' Letters" section.

Not really a very impressive line-up. So it seems that the general attitude of fen is that if you want to join in, you'll find a way to do so. Most fen, like everybody else these days, are perpetually hard-up. Their magazines usually run at a loss, which the editor makes good out of his own pocket, and they don't have the money to pay for advertising. Perhaps if they were a little wealthier they would advertise—who knows?

It is rather a pity. Being a fan can be a lot of fun. Mind you, it begins to cost something in postage after a while: currently I correspond with at least ten people every week . . . . but it is fun, and in fact a fairly cheap hobby.

Now what about the other awkward question? What are we doing to bring up the younger generation in the ways of fandom? Well, the answer is much the same as before, only more so. Until recently there existed a Junior Fanatics Club for the younger fans: this went out of existence throuh lack of support (or so one member told me).

So right now there is no organisation which caters for the younger fan, and no attempt is being made to bring these youngsters into the s-f field.

I am going to anticipate the next question—what are we going to do about this deplorable state of affairs? Having admitted that there is something missing I now find myself in a spot. You can't criticise fairly unless your criticism is constructive. A pity! It is perhaps unfortunate that I have to some extent an interest in this business, as I am an associate editor of SPACE TIMES, which does already advertise: so in a way I am one of the smug people who can say "But *I* do do something." But it isn't enough, it seems.

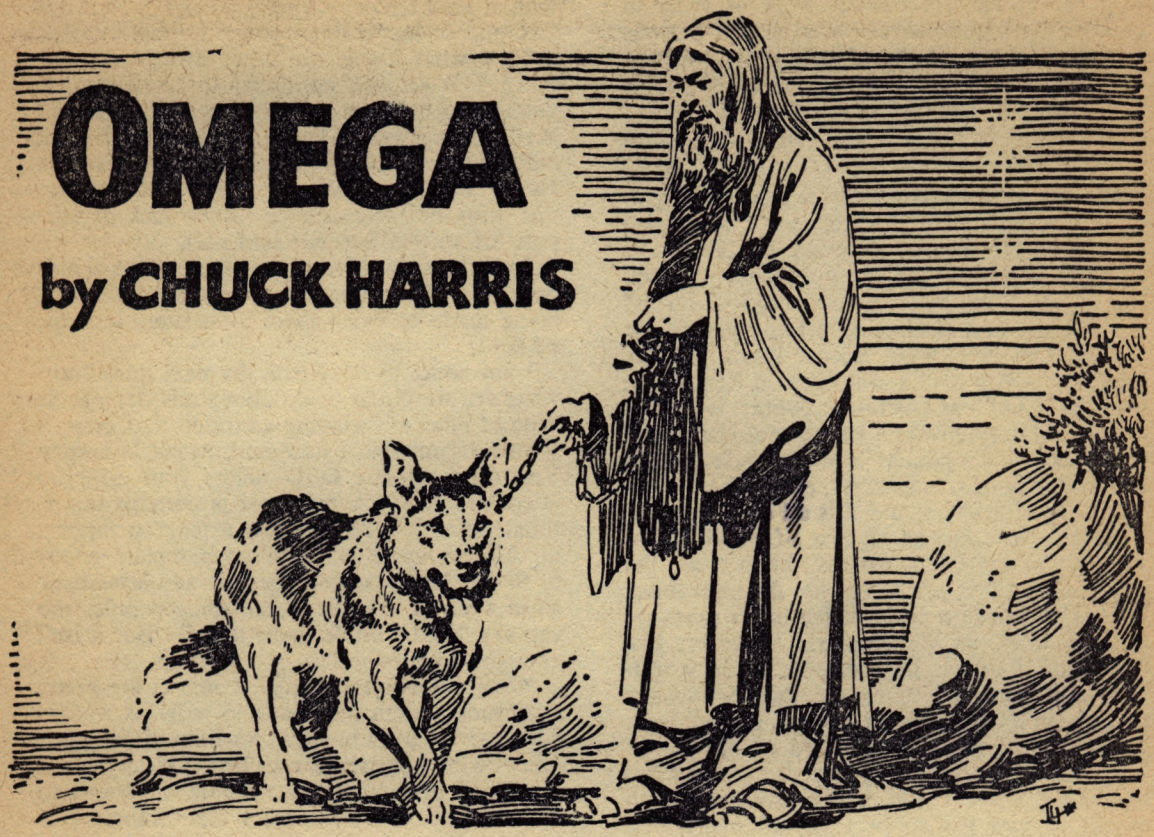
Now professional magazine editors are pretty busy men: when they have to write as well as edit they are even busier. So I am making this offer—with no strings attached. If anyone is interested in fandom as a whole, or wants to know where he can contact other fans, or in fact anything at all to do with fandom, I suggest that he writes to me, care of the Vargo Statten Science Fiction Magazine, 6 Avonmore Road, London, W.14 (and don't forget the stamped addressed envelope), I will do my best to answer any question put to me about current fan doings and events. If I don't know, I will pass the question on to somebody else who does know: because there is a wonderful "grape-vine" in fandom it is quite easy to find the person with the answers to even the most awkward questions. Now this service is designed to help people who are interested in becoming fans. So I'd appreciate if only those people would write—people who are already fans don't need to be told how to become a fan!

Those of you who live in the Manchester area can perhaps best see fandom for yourselves this year by attending the "Supermancon"—the Second Manchester Science Fiction convention, which will be held over Whit week-end.

Well, there is my personal contribution to the recruiting drive. If there are any fans who have other ideas, probably better than mine, I'd be glad to hear of them—perhaps we could get together and devise something for the benefit of fandom as a whole.

OMEGA

by CHUCK HARRIS



"WELL," said God, "Let's finish it all off." Cities tumbled, and melted into nothing at all. Planets dissolved, suns flicked out, and even Space itself was folded tidily away and placed in a heavenly cupboard. The circle had been completed. Nothing, but *nothing*, was left.

Except for souls, of course. There were an awful lot of these. If I put a figure nine, and then typed three 0s and a comma for the rest of my life, I wouldn't even succeed in enumerating the planets that the souls originated on. You'll just have to try to imagine it, ... and, since that is impossible too, you'll just have to be content with the fact that there *were* an awful lot of souls.

Naturally, they weren't all *good* souls, but they were all dressed alike in an ectoplasmic body and a long white shroud. And, every single one of them was frightened out of his wits.

Especially Cyril. He was solitary by nature, he hadn't had any breakfast, and his feet hurt him after the long long climb up the Glory Road.

This was Judgment Day. St. Peter had run himself ragged trying to total up the count of a million Pearly Turnstiles that he'd used to supplement the Gates, and had grown quite hoarse through bellowing, "Form an *orderly* queue, please," and, "Kindly stand on the right of the escalator." His feet hurt, too, and on top of all this, half the new entries seemed to be illiterate and just ignored the placards directing the various cultures to their Reception Centre. He'd mislaid three Cardinals and an Irish saint, and was beginning to think that they had gone along with the Eddorians, ... and *everyone* knew what was going to happen to that lot.

Inside the auditorium on the ground floor of Heaven, all the Terran souls were being formed up into groups by St. Michael and his angels. Cyril escaped from the deafening "Allelulias" of the Salem Baptists that he'd come in with, walked a little way down the hall, and mingled inconspicuously with a group of Quakers. It was quieter there . . . . and there was nobody urging him to repent before it was too late.

Like all auditoriums, this was a vast one, but even more so than usual. The floor was of beaten gold, and very chilly to the feet; the roof, supported by immense columns of Lapis lazuli, was studded with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and amethysts, which sparkled and glittered as they reflected the light from the multitude of saintly haloes.

Right down at the far end, there was a sort of brilliant mint of fiery radiance. This was Glory. Here God sat in judgment. On both sides there were choirs of cherubims, and in front, rank upon rank of Saints.

Judgment wasn't a very difficult business, Matthew and Mark, and a horde of seraphim, were running all the records, which had been transcribed to punched cards, through blocks of ENIACS and MANIACS. As the cards were approved or rejected, souls were taken from the body of the hall to everlasting happiness or eternal remorse.

First, all the immature souls whose bodies had died before reaching the age of reason, were taken away to a special heaven of their own. This was an Oz-like place with whole ranges of Big Rock Candy Mountains, where the tiny souls lived like Peter Pan and never grew up.

In the auditorium, Judgment began in earnest. This was completely final, with no court of appeal, and inexorably just. Either Heaven or Hell.

By now, Cyril had forgotten how his feet hurt and how hungry he was. He was just as panic-stricken as the rest of them, and instead of wishing he had a steak, he was wishing he had a rosary.

The cards had been filed in chronological order, and the first million or so had whizzed through the machines into the REJECT tray. Adam, Eve, a host of Neanderthals and cannibals, were all marshalled together by a chap who looked like a used-car salesman, and were taken off to Hell.

That was downstairs. Instead of being happy like the people in Heaven, all these souls would have to spend eternity, . . . for ever and ever, . . . in sorrowful remorse. Hell was quite a nasty place, and a large part of the punishment was the company. After all, it's not very nice to be classed with Iscariot and Himmler, . . . and especially so when you know that you deserve to be, *and are sorry about it.*

The crowd was soon whittled away. Sometimes a murmur went through it as a notable name was called, or a decision seemed surprising. Several eminent Presbyterians looked shocked when Horatio Nelson was sent off to get his harp and his halo. Almost simultaneously, St. Vincent de Parras, a smile on his cafe-au-lait face, led away to Heaven a great crowd of coloured people, . . . whilst the Klan and a whole raft of Boer churchmen were taken downstairs. Gandhi, Jones, and Pasteur were chosen for canonisation, along with Mendel and William Penn. A Wisconsin politician was hustled downstairs, protesting that it was All A Mistake. Plutocrats, tycoons, millionaires, and big-business men discovered that it was all perfectly true about camels and needles' eyes. The cards whizzed through the machines, the sheep were separated from the goats; the souls made their last exit through one of the two portals.

The machines gradually slowed and stopped. There was a hint of a Celestial Yawn from behind the shimmerial curtains. St. Matthew pushed his halo further back on his tonsure, and looked around the hall.

There, all alone, nervously crossing one foot with the other, stood Cyril.

To say that St. Matthew was surprised would be an understatement. He would not have been more astounded if Pilate had been beatified. His machines were infallible, his cards recorded even the smallest venial sin committed in 560,384 galaxies. He *couldn't* be wrong.

But, ... there was Cyril.

St. Matthew flew down the line of computers, scanning every feed-tray to make certain they were empty. They were. He looked under the machines in case the seraphim had dropped a card. They hadn't. He read the totals from each individual machine, and compared it with his master card total. They tallied. Somehow, there was one solitary soul unaccounted for.

Cyril walked quietly down the hall until he stood just behind the saint.

"I say," he said.

St. Matthew turned around and looked sourly at him. He was fairly certain that Cyril was genuine enough. . . . "Are you *sure* you're a soul?" he said, "or is this another gag by the boys downstairs?"

"I . . . I don't really know," said Cyril. "You see, I'm not certain if I'm entitled to one." He began to cry.

"Rubbish," said the Saint. "Every man has a soul. If you didn't you would never have got here. You *are* a man, aren't you?"

"Sometimes," Cyril sobbed, "but usually I'm a wolf." Between gulps and sniffles the whole story poured out of him. He told how his parents were both perfectly normal werewolves, but how he happened to be a mutant. He was a wereman. It was something to do with radioactivity or cosmic rays. For most of the time he went around happily on four legs, but at every new moon he became a man, and he

hated it. He *hated* it. It was nice to be more intelligent than the rest of the pack, but none of the females ever took any interest in him, and he spent every new moon perched in a tree, whilst all his friends sat around below hoping to have him for lunch. It was always cold, and usually raining, he had nothing to eat, and once he was slow getting up the tree, and his best friend took part of his rump for hors d'oeuvre. And it wasn't his fault that there was a new moon on Judgment Day. He didn't want to be an angel, and please could he go back where he came from.

"O my God," said St. Matthew.

"Yes," He said.

The Saint dropped to his knees a split second in front of Cyril.

"Lord . . . . "

"I know," said God. "We'll have to do something about it. It's not his fault he was born a cub, but became a man, but it's all rather difficult. He couldn't get up to much sinning perched in a tree, so we can't dispose of him downstairs. But, on the other hand, we can't have wolves, . . . no matter how virtuous they are, . . . just roaming about Heaven scaring people out of their wits." He paused thoughtfully.

"Cyril," He said, "Listen to me a moment, and do stop snivelling." Cyril sniffed twice, and wiped his nose on his sleeve as God went on.

"You can't go back now, ... there is nothing to go back to. You're up here for keeps, and you'll just have to make the best of it."

"But I don't *want* to be an angel," said Cyril. "You promise eternal happiness, and then turn round and tell me that I have to run around in a draughty shroud, swotting Gregorian chants, and being nice to a lot of people that I don't care for. Well, I don't want to ! It was *much* more fun being a wolf!"

St. Matthew was frantically nudging him to shut up. Cyril stopped, more than a little aghast at his own temerity.

"I see," said God. "There's no precedent for were-anythings in Heaven. But . . . " there was another pause, and through the Heavenly Portal came a rather scruffy looking saint with a ragged tonsure and a patched brown cassock.

"St. Francis," said God, "How would you like to be the holder of the only dog licence in Heaven?"

There was no answer. St. Francis was busily scratching the ears of the gorgeous silver-grey wolf that was trying to lick the skin from his face.

THE END

Each month, always provided that suitable material is available, the Vargo Statten Magazine hopes to print a first story by a hitherto unpublished author.

Hollister and Me

THE ENDING

By Alfred Hind

I SUPPOSE you could say that Hollister had a perfect right to take a pass-out that way. But then, if he hadn't taken that way out we should have had to force him to do something of the sort—so where do rights of any kind come in, I ask you ?

I'll remember that trip on the Lunar rocket as long as I have conscious thought.

Hollister and me, we were two "ragtime" mechs—as the maintenance men were known on the spaceways. In other words, we sort of worked a job for two or three months—got tired of it—bullrushed the foreman (or whoever was in charge). Either he got tired of it first, or we got tired and looked for some other form of fun. In the first event, the foreman fired us. In the second event, we fired ourselves —amounted to the same thing really.

All good clean fun, mind you!

Nothing dirty or underhanded about our methods—Oh, no! Unless the other fellow started it first, of course. In which case, Hollister and me considered ourselves presented with a passport to Valhalla.

And by the left, when Hollister and me start to kick up the dust you *really* see somethin'.

We weren't fired from over a hundred jobs for nothing. The reputation we take along with us, gathers like a snowball. There wasn't a breakdown crew between Venusport and Asteroid City that hadn't a special tale of their own to tell about us.

That's Hollister and me . . . "Bum" engineers —"ragtimers"—and proud of it.

Anyway, I'm getting away from the thread of my story.

As I was saying, we were on the ship bound from the Moon to Earth. We left the big glass-domed city of Lunaport about six hours behind, when it started . . . !

We weren't sorry to leave Lunaport. Just about every maintenance shop in the city had had enough of us, Hollister and me. After five months there our credit was right out. There wasn't another workshop that would employ us. Still, we had a lot of fun. Anyway the place was getting a bit stale. . .

So Hollister says, with that perpetual crooked grin on his big slack mouth.

"Cummins," he says, "we're bound for Earth!"

"Oh, *are* we?" I says, just casual like—you know.

"Yes," Hollister says, "I've got me a notion for new pastures. This one's played out."

"But we can't go to Earth," I pointed out, very patiently, "we played that pasture out long since."

"Ah, that's the point," Hollister says, slapping me on the shoulder, "just look how *long* it is since we played it out. Now we've got to start the second time round. And what better place to start than Old Mother Earth, where we began our roaming in the first place?"

I had to admit he was right. There just wasn't any other place we could go and get a job. Earth offered the best chance, since people would surely have forgotten us by now. Another point was that we finally managed to get Certificates of Good Character—forged, of course !

So the next day, we set about selling all our surplus goods—the stuff we couldn't take with us. To me this was always the saddest moment of our departure. In only a month or two, it's surprising what you can pick up and come to

have sentimental regard for. But they just had to go.

Ha!—I remember, there was a little clock that a Lunar maid gave me for keepsake. Didn't have no works in it! Just an assorted mass of crystals, or jewels, or somethin', that kept it going. Never varied a split fraction in a year. I'd've liked to keep that—but it had to go. There were more important things.

Hollister had quite a tussle with himself deciding whether to keep a piece of Jovian silica moss. Picked it up in Venusport for the price of a drink. Hawked it all the way to Lunaport in spite of its massiveness.

It was pretty stuff, I had to admit. With the same delicate, miniature tracery that you find in normal green Earth moss—only this Jovian silica moss consisted of living jewels. All the colours of the rainbow, and in patterns that bested anything Jack Frost ever produced.

It was really beautiful stuff. Only drawback was the food it required—it had to be silica of some kind. We couldn't keep the stuff under glass, because this Jovian silica moss just ate it up—just like you and me might relish an ice-cream sundae. We solved that problem by keeping the moss in a "Perspex" jar. That stuff has a carbon basis, and is just plain indigestible to the Jovian plant.

Hollister used to feed it mainly with quartz dust that he either bought or else stole from whatever engineering works he was in at the time.

Sometimes, when we were out of work and short of cash, Hollister would chop up a milk bottle and feed the moss with that—though it didn't seem to digest too well. I think maybe some drops of milk got mixed up in the ground glass and was poisoning the poor critter.

"Anyway" I said to Hollister, "you've got to get rid of that."

And it was no use him arguing. When I'm dead set on a point, Hollister usually notices, and knuckles under pretty quickly. He pays a great deal of respect to our partnership, and wouldn't have it broken up for anything.

Though—mind you—I'm not suggesting I resorted to blackmail. I wouldn't stoop so low with a comrade.

"Yes—you've hawked that thing around long enough" I said, "there's got to be a partin' somewhere—and I'd like it to be that there plant. Besides, I've seen enough of it."

So he agreed to get rid of it the next day.

He didn't say what he had done. But when we took our packs along to the ship, I didn't see a sign of it. So I concluded he'd dumped it after all.

Anyhow, eventually we gets on board this long, sleek, metal ship at Lunaport. And as I was saying before, we were about six hours out when it started!

Oh!—before I go any further—there was a funny thing happened at the spaceport.

I was checking our baggage through the Customs, when I noticed Hollister had disappeared—! It was real queer, because he'd been standing there right at the side of me, not one second before.

Anyway, I check through the baggage for both Hollister and me. And just as I'm wondering how I'm going to get the blasted stuff inside all on my ownsome—Hollister reappears from round the stern of the ship.

He looks round furtively—wipes his nose thoughtfully with the back of a finger—then straightens up—give his coat lapels a jerk, and his pants a hitch—and strides towards me.

"Well," I says, smiling sweetly, "would the great man condescend to carry his bags inside now—or has he to return for another inspection of the ship's hull?"

Apparently the sarcasm didn't go home. Hollister just threw me a thoughtful look, picked up his bags, and stalked inside.

I followed without another word. In a partnership you've just got to realize that there are certain moments set aside when the other fellow just doesn't *want* to confide in you.

If you think anything of the partnership at all you've got to respect little things like that.

So, I just——followed along. . . .

Well, as I was saying before, we were about six hours out when it started.

We were walking down a narrow passageway towards the saloon at the time.

First thing we knew about it was when the nearby bulkhead slid over and slapped us vigorously in the teeth.

Even before we had picked ourselves up, I knew what had happened.

"Steering jet failed" I said.

Main drive on these Lunar clippers is a gigantic tube running right through the centre of the ship, from nose to tail. Around it, evenly spaced, are the four, smaller steering jets. All five are running when in flight of course; and, naturally, when one of the outside jets fails, the ship swerves off course. Just as a motor-car will swerve off course if one of its wheels fails.

"Steering jet must have failed . . . ?" I repeated, not having got any answer from my companion.

I looked at him, and he averted his eyes. Now that was odd! Because I had never known Hollister's gaze to falter before, not for any man nor beast in the Solar System.

It's little things like that, makes you feel proud of a pal. . . . !

I hadn't time to speak again, before the floor

disappeared from under our feet. The ceiling came down and gave us a damn awful smack on the head.

"*Another jet failed,*" I heard myself squeaking. I was still pretty dizzy from that smack on the head, so I reckon that can excuse my squeaky voice.

Irrespective of my physical condition, the important fact stuck in my mind—*two jets failing.* An unheard of set of circumstances. One jet had been known to break down before —very rarely—but *two* failing.

In a distant sort of way we heard the dull rumble of the rocket drives suddenly hesitate—and fade away. Obviously the captain had cut all tubes. It was the only alternative to either running round in tight little circles pushed by the lopsided steering jets; or driving dead straight for Earth without any steering jets at all—which was just plain suicide.

As we had turned hard to port when the jets failed, I concluded that we must still be facing that way, and were now circling Earth in a tight orbit.

Naturally, in a case like this, Hollister and me ambled along to the control room and offered our services—as maintenance men.

Now, here comes a funny thing again—Hollister lets *me* do all the talking. When you think how that feller always pushes his way to the front, in any conversation . . . well . . . it sort of strikes you as peculiar when he don't do it.

Only other time I remember Hollister letting me do all the talking was on that run from Ganymede to Port Martian—and that was only so he could get up some pranks behind the captain's back.

Anyway, as I was saying, Hollister was once again letting me do all the talking to the captain of the Lunar ship.

But Hollister wasn't doing any clowning now. He was standing quietly there and looking awful serious about something. For a fraction of a second it crossed my mind that he had lost his nerve.

The captain—a big, smart, clean shaven feller,—was thanking me for our offer but declining the help——

"Thanks very much, Mr. Cummins" he was saying in that fine, deep voice of his, "but I'm convinced our engineers are equal to the job and will soon have us under way again. Thanks again for your offer, however."

Then a voice said:

"They won't mend that in a hurry . . ."

The captain and I stood speechless with astonishment as this loud, clear remark issued from Hollister.

Like a thundercloud, a frown gathered under the skipper's peaked cap.

"You don't make yourself very clear, sir" he said, in a voice that would have sent shivers through a refrigerator.

Hollister looked confused—"Sorry, I didn't mean to . . ." Turning suddenly, he blundered his way out of the room. Murmuring some sort of apology, I began to edge towards the door, after him. Coldly, the captain turned his back on me.

Back in our cabin I tackled Hollister.

I don't mean I blustered or yelled—or anything like that. Hollister ain't the kind of chap you tackle that way.

"Well?" I said.

Just that—"Well?" . . . nothing more. Hollister looks up at me——

"I've been a blasted fool, Jack," he says, sort of wearily.

Now, when Hollister uses my first name like that, I know he's worried. Normally, we use each other's last names because we got into a habit, and because it doesn't sound so affectionate.

"So . . . !" I encouraged him.

He turned towards me——

"It's eating up the lining of the rocket tubes" he said, and he sounded a little desperate when he said it, "don't you see, Jack, it's eating up all the vitrified lining from the tubes. And it'll go on eating it up until there's no lining left on any rocket tube—not even the lifeboat jets."

He clutched my arm fiercely.

"Now, now, mate" I soothed him, "what's eating up the tube lining, tell me that?"

"And it won't stop at that" Hollister went on—he didn't seem to have heard my question, ". . . it won't stop at that."

"Jack" he said, clutching my arm again "D'you remember that old prospector we pulled out of his space-buggy when it was nearly sliding into the rings of Saturn?"

"Yes, yes . . . I remember him. Died shortly afterwards. Grown too feeble to handle the space-bug's controls and the shock of Saturn's rings proved too much for him."

"That's the one, Jack. Remember what he said about it just before he died? 'Like great masses of rainbow-jewelled pack-ice' he said, 'miles and hundreds of miles of it'—'And if you sat your ship down amongst it, the stuff ate up the linings of your rockets tubes. So you never could get off Jupiter again. And then, after a while, you were dead."

"Jupiter!" I said, horrible realization slowly dawning, "eating up the rocket tube silica linings . . . the *Jovian Silica Moss.*"

I could almost imagine it, then and there—great masses of glittering many-coloured

crystals, slowly rising and falling in likelike manner as the stuff expanded in its growth.

"And that's not all" Hollister's voice broke in, just as if he had been following the exact line of my thoughts, "that stuff's growth has been speeded up by the heat from the rocket tubes. Heat will speed up any chemical reaction, you know? It's something I never thought of when I stowed the silica moss away under the lining of that port tube. Before long it'll eat up the glass wool in the hull lining, and then . . ."

I hadn't realised this!

There was a kind of nasty little black dread beginning to form inside of me as I imagined what would happen when the hull lining went.

Between the inner and the outer hulls of the spaceship is a thick layer of glass wool that acts as an insulation against the searing cold of deep space. Glass is a form of silica, as you know. If the hull insulation was eaten up by the Jovian moss, then the deadly cold fingers of outer space would come probing into the ship and freeze the very breath in the lungs of everyone there.

It was a horrible thought, I don't mind telling you.

I reckoned that Jovian silica moss, speeded up as it was by the heat, should accomplish the death of the ship in about two hours at the outside. The stuff was transparent to heat, and therefore would not replace the glass wool as insulation.

No rescue ship could be expected in less than ten hours, even if our radio-calls had been picked up on their very first transmission.

"There's got to be a way of stopping it," I said. "It's our only hope of life."

"Maybe there is a way" Hollister replied, in a faraway voice.

I'm afraid my patience snapped at that point——

"Oh, damn you and your melodramatic stuff" I flung at him, "I'm going to see the captain."

Before I closed the door, I paused to look back at him.

Hollister was just sitting there, looking at me. Wide-eyed, serious-faced, and a curious attitude of . . . of *expectancy*—I think I should call it —about him.

The exchange lasted only for a brief moment, the door closed rather sharply—and I never saw him again.

In the following interview with the captain, I had to suffer some raging and ranting for a while. But gradually, the skipper calmed down as he realized that the situation was in urgent need of a solution rather than abuse.

"You say we have no more than two hours at the outside?" he snapped at me.

He was pacing majestically up and down the control room all this time, his hands clasped behind him.

"At the very most—two hours" I answered.

"And I estimate that a Patrol cruiser cannot reach us in less than six hours" the captain added.

This was better than the ten hours that Hollister and me had estimated, but it was still four hours too many. I said as much to the captain.

"But what else can we do, tell me that?" he said, snapping his fingers as he spoke. That little gesture admitted to me the amount of frustration the captain was feeling.

I had to admit I knew of nothing else we could do.

The captain suddenly barked out an order, and a steward came over at the double.

"Tell Mr. Hollister I wish to see him at once."

"Aye, aye, sir." The steward saluted and was gone.

"I don't see what you hope to accomplish by that?" I observed.

"Doubtless, you do not" answered the captain, curtly, "but I had the idea that as Mr. Hollister was so *very* familiar with this Jovian silica moss"—uttered in a very sarcastic tone, this—"he *might* also be familiar with methods of destroying it."

I remained silent. There wasn't any answer I could think of.

The door to the control room burst open suddenly and one of the senior engineers hurried up to the captain. His sweated and oil-blackened features betrayed that something else was amiss.

"Begging your pardon, captain" he said, rather breathlessly, "I have to report trouble in the engine-room."

"Trouble—!" the captain roared, "damme, I *know* there's trouble. You and your gang are supposed to be clearing it up?"

"This is different, captain," the engineer explained, "one of the passengers—a big fellow —has ordered the whole crew out of the engine-room at the point of a heat-ray gun. He's locked himself in now."

"A big fellow . . ." I started up from my seat.

Just then the door burst open again and the steward came in at the double.

"Mr. Hollister seems to have disappeared, sir," he said, saluting the captain, "one of the stewardesses reports that she last saw him going down towards the engine-room."

It all added up. Hollister was up to something again. The captain seemed on the verge

of apoplexy. But I knew my course of action—

"I'll go get him," I said, grimly, and lunged forward. I intended to reach that engine-room at all possible speed.

I didn't reach the control-room door, for the simple reason that the floor suddenly shot from under me as a dull rumble shook the entire ship.

Even as the dazed, cut and bruised mass of humanity—me amongst them—sorted itself out from the bottom of the far wall, where they had been flung, I could think of nothing else but one glaring fact—the rocket motors had blasted off, and just as suddenly ceased.

Hurriedly, we all piled out of the door and ran down to the engine-room. There we found the rest of the engineers clustered round the globular combustion chamber in the centre of this vast, tiled floor. Great pipes led off from this giant metal sphere, they fed the atomic power from the chamber to the rocket tubes.

"What's happened?" demanded the big captain, thrusting his way through the packed mass of men.

"That passenger, sir," one of the men pointed, "he set the combustion off with that heat-gun of his."

"Don't be ridiculous, man," the captain barked, "he'd have to be inside the combustion chamber before he could do that?"

"He *was* inside . . . " the man remarked, simply.

A dead silence fell over the engine-room.

I had a sudden clutching feeling at my throat, my eyes smarted, and I turned away.

Hollister was gone—forever! He had gone in a flare of exploding atoms—the atoms of his own body mingling with those of the fuel supply.

But why? . . . why?

I kept asking myself that question, over and over again.

Pretty soon, however, we got the answer. The engineers were aware of the parasitic silica moss now, and suddenly they began sending reports in—*the moss was dying.*

"It appears to have been poisoned, somehow or other," one engineer told me, "starting from near the engine-room it began crumbling away into a kind of fine carborundum dust—quite dead."

"Starting from near the engine-room . . ." I moved off before the man could do more than look puzzled.

Back in the little cabin I had shared with Hollister, I listened to the rumble of the cleared jets starting up. Felt the swing of the ship as she turned back on course for Earth again. If Hollister's shade were hovering anywhere nearby, I'm sure it was smiling with satisfaction.

"Maybe there *is* a way," Hollister had said, in a faraway voice.

I knew now, he had been thinking of what I was thinking at the present moment. Of when he used to feed the silica moss on chopped up milk bottles—and the residual drops of milk used to poison the stuff a little.

Milk is an organic compound, it has a chemistry based on carbon—and so has the human body!

Hollister knew that the first blast along the rocket tubes would disperse the carbon atoms of his own body in immeasurably fine dust amongst the crystals of the Jovian silica moss.

That had been his revenge upon a pet that had betrayed him. I suppose he could have used some other sort of carbon compounds to poison the moss with—but that isn't Hollister's way. He doesn't look at events like that.

You noticed that I used the present tense—? Just as if Hollister was still here! Well, that's no accident, I still don't feel as if he's gone.

I've been retired these ten years now. Didn't feel like roamin' the spaceways on my own. It would be sort of dead after havin' a comrade like Hollister.

But, someday, I'm convinced we'll meet again. Along some distant star-trail, we'll shoulder our packs an' go roamin' again—Hollister and me.

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