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Venture

SCIENCE FICTION

THE GAME OF GLORY

a novelet by

Poul Anderson

The **ATMOSPHERE** of the **MOON**

science by Isaac Asimov



Venture

SCIENCE FICTION

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Venturings

• We sit around this office for long hours waiting. . . . This is perhaps appropriate for a magazine dealing primarily with stories of adventure, because so much of true adventure is concerned with huddling in a foxhole waiting for the barrage to begin, and then to end . . . waiting for planetfall after a voyage through nothingness that has lasted for many light-years . . . waiting for the final assault which is that much more terrible because we have waited so long for it . . . waiting . . .

And then in comes a story that makes the backbone of an issue, and the waiting has been for something after all. This month, we waited for Poul Anderson's novelet to come in. And the next best thing to its coming was the note attached to it. . . . "Incidentally," this story is a sort of revival. I did a few others about Captain Flandry several years ago, and always have been rather fond of him. Maybe he can Venture forth again from time to time?" Which is easiest answered by saying right here—YES!

• At this point, your editor suffered a malaise of the left typing finger, engendered in part at least by awe of the fluent, wonderful conversation of Alfred Bester, who stopped in with all his usual vitality—rendering the word *stopped* ridiculously out of place in this sentence. So he does the rest of this . . . after promising that, in return for this soapbox, he will deliver up unto Venture an example in fiction of what he is talking about. Which means that we have started waiting again. . . . —RPM

• Science fiction is aging rapidly. The scintillating writers of yesterday are still glittering, but their work is taking on an antique lustre. The reason for this is simple: Science fiction is extrapolation, but the starting point for extrapolation must be the ideas of tomorrow, not of today or yesterday. You can't write a penetrating story about galactic travel if it's based on a bicycle built for two.

Back in the 19th century people used to visualize what life would be like in the 20th. Their extrapolations were always based on what was old and familiar to them. They visualized the future in terms of a better horse & carriage, bigger steam boats, mid-Victorian utopias solving mid-Victorian dilemmas. It never occurred to them that the

(continued on p. 130)



THE EDGE OF THE SEA

by ALGIS BUDRYS

The thing rolling sluggishly in the smashing surf might have been a Navy missile . . . or it might not. Whatever it was, Dan Henry was damn sure he was going to hold on to it, in spite of the rising hurricane—or anything else.

THE OVERSEAS HIGHWAY, TWO narrow white lanes on yellowed old concrete piers, lay close to the shallow water, passed over the little key, and went on.

All afternoon, the sea had been rising. Long, greasy-faced green swells came in from the At-

lantic Ocean and broke on the sharp rocks with a sudden upsurge of surf. At mid-day, the water had been far down among the coral heads. But now it was in the tumbled limestone blocks and concrete prisms that had been dumped there to build up the key.

In a little while it would be washing its spume over the highway itself, and it might well go farther, with the increasing wind.

It was dark with twilight, and darker with clouds thick as oil smoke covering the sun over the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf was stirring, too, and bayous were flooding in Louisiana. But it was over the Atlantic that the hurricane was spinning. It was the broad, deep, deadly ocean that the tide and wind were pushing down through the gloom onto the side of the key where Dan Henry was struggling grimly, his massive back and shoulders naked and running with spray.

His pale eyes were red-rimmed with salt and his hide slashed shallowly in a dozen places where he had lost his balance on the tumbled stones and fallen. He had been lurching through the surf all afternoon, working frantically to save what he had seen, leaden and encrusted, rolling ponderously at the edge of the water. His shirt, the seat covers from his car—the fan-belt, too—and what few scraps of rope and wire had been in the trunk, all had gone for him to twist into an incredible rag of a hawser.

The men who built the Overseas Highway on the old railroad right-of-way had built up the little key, but it was still no more than a hundred feet in diameter. If the thing trapped on the rocks had

chosen any other islet to wash against, there would have been a reasonable chance of saving it. But there was no one living here, and nothing to use for tools or anchors. The thing was rolling and grinding against the rocks, too heavy to float but too bulky to resist the push of storm-driven water. There were bright silver gouges on its thick metal flanks, and in a little while it would break up or break free, and be lost either way. The rope—the stubborn, futile rope passed around the two stubby struts at its nose and wrapped around the great concrete block it was now butting at with brute persistence—was as much use as though Dan Henry had been a spider and tried to hold this thing in a hurriedly created web. But he had had to try, and he was trying now in another way. He jammed the soles of his feet against one concrete block and pushed his bare shoulders against another. With his belly ridged and his thighs bulging, his face contorted and his hands clenched, he was trying to push another massive piece of stone into place behind the plunging metal thing, though his blood might erupt from his veins and the muscles tear open his flesh.

The thing was as thick through as a hogshead, and as long as two men. There was a thick-lipped, scarred opening a foot across at

one end, where the body rounded sharply in a hemispherical compound curve. There were three stumpy fins rooted in the curve, their tips not extending beyond the bulge of the body, and two struts at the blunt nose like horns on a snail but bent forward so that the entire thing might have been fired out of a monstrous cannon or launched from the tubes of some unimaginable submarine. There were no visible openings, no boltheads, no seams. The entire thing might have been cast of a piece—might have been solid, except for the tube in the stern—and though barnacles clung to it and moss stained it, though the rocks gouged it and other blows had left their older scars on its pitted surface, still the thing was not visibly damaged.

Dan Henry strained at the rock, and sand grated minutely at its base. But the world turned red behind his eyes, and his muscles writhed into venomous knots, and his breath burned his chest with the fury of fire. The sea broke against him and ran into his nose and mouth. The wind moaned, and the water hissed through the rocks, crashing as it came and gurgling as it drew back. The thing groaned and grated with each sluggish move. The day grew steadily darker.

Dan Henry had stopped his car on the key at noon, pulling off the

highway onto the one narrow space of shoulder. He had opened the glove compartment and taken out the waxed container of milk and the now stale sandwich he had bought in Hallandale, above Miami, at ten that morning. He lit a cigarette and unwrapped the sandwich, and began to eat. The milk had turned warm in the glove compartment and acquired an unpleasant taste, but Dan Henry had never cared how his food tasted. He paid no attention to it as he chewed the sandwich and drank the milk between drags on the cigarette. He had bought the food when he stopped for gas, and when he finished it he planned to go on immediately, driving until he reached Key West.

There was nothing specific waiting for him there. Nothing in his life had ever been waiting for him anywhere. But everywhere he went, he went as directly and as efficiently as possible because that was his nature. He was a physically powerful, reasonably intelligent, ugly man who drew his strength from a knowledge that nothing could quite overcome him. He asked no more of the world. He was thirty years old, and had been a construction foreman, a police officer, an MP sergeant in Germany and a long-haul trailer truck driver. In addition to these things he had been born into a derrick rigger's fam-

ily in Oklahoma and raised in his father's nomadic, self-sufficient tradition.

When he first saw the dull color of metal down among the rocks, he got out of the car to see what it was. He was already thinking in terms of its possible usefulness when he reached the thing. Once near it, the idea of salvage rights came naturally.

Looking at it, he felt immediately that it had to be a military instrument of some kind. The Navy, he knew, was constantly firing rockets from Cape Canaveral, up in Central Florida. But the longer he looked at the thing, the longer he doubted that possibility. The thing was too massive, too obviously built to take the kind of vicious punishment it was receiving at the hands of the sea, to be the light, expendable shell that was a missile prototype or a high altitude test rocket. There were tons of metal in it, and the barnacles were thick on it. He wondered how long it had been surging along the bottom, urged and tumbled by the great hidden forces of the ocean, drifting this way and that until finally the first high tide this morning, had heaved it up here to lie caught and scraping on the rocks, steaming as it dried under the early sun.

He did not know what it was, he decided finally. Rocket, torpedo, shell, bomb, or something

else, whatever it was, it was valuable and important. The Navy or the Army or Air Force would need it or want it for something.

There was nothing on it to mark it as anyone's property. If anything had ever been written or engraved on that hull, it was gone now. He began to think of how he might establish his rights until he could reach a Navy installation of some kind. The only reason he had for going to Key West was that he had a friend in the sponge diving business down there. The friend did not know he was coming, so there was no reason not to delay for as long as this business might take him.

He had begun with nothing more than that to urge him on, but as the afternoon grew, the sea and the thing between them had trapped him.

The thing lay awash with half its length over the usual high water mark, and even when he found it, at low tide, the water curled among the rocks above it. He had thought about that, too, but he had not thought that a hurricane might have taken an unexpected turn during the night, while he drove his old car without a radio to tell him so. Only when the clouds turned gray and the water swirled around his knees like a pack of hounds grown hungry did he stop for a moment and look out to sea.

He had been clearing the smaller rocks away from around the thing and piling them in an open-ended square enclosing its forward sections, and had been scraping a clean patch in the barnacles with a tire iron. It had been his intention to make it obvious someone was working on the thing, so he could then leave it and report it with a clear claim. The few cars going by on the highway had not stopped or slowed down—there was no place to stop, with his car on the bit of shoulder, and no real reason to slow down—and after a while the cars had stopped coming entirely.

It was that, telling him the storm had probably caused the highway to be blocked off at either end, together with the look of the sea, that made him go up to the car and try to make a hawser. And by then he could not have left the thing. It was too obvious that a man had begun a job of work here. If he left it now, it would be too plain that someone had let himself be backed down.

If he had gotten in his car and driven away, he would not have been Dan Henry.

The water was almost completely over the thing now. He himself was working with the waves breaking over his head, trying to dislodge him. More important, the thing was rocking and slipping out of its trap.

The next nearest key was a

third of a mile away, bigger than this one, but still uninhabited. The nearest inhabited place was Greyhound Key, where the rest stop was for the buses, and that was out of sight. It would be battened down, and probably evacuated. Dan Henry was all alone, with the highway empty above him and the sea upon him.

He set his back once more, and pushed against the concrete block again. If he could wedge the thing, even a storm tide might not be able to take it away from him. He could untangle his homemade rope and put the fan belt back on his car. Then he could drive away to someplace until the storm died down.

The blood roared in Dan Henry's ears, and the encrusted concrete block opened the hide over his shoulders. A coughing grunt burst out of his mouth. The block teetered—not much, but it gave a little way. Dan Henry locked his knees and braced his back with his palms, pushing his elbows against the block, and when the next wave threw its pressure into the balance, he pushed once more. The block slipped suddenly away from him, and he was thrown aside by the wave, flung into the wet rocks above. But the thing was wedged. It could roll and rear as much as it wanted to, but it could not flounder back into the sea. Dan Henry lay over a rock, and wiped

the back of his hand across his bloody mouth in satisfaction.

It was over. He could get out of here now, and hole up somewhere. After the storm, he would come back and make sure it was still here. Then he would make his claim, either at one of the little Navy stations along the chain of keys, or at the big base at Boca Chica. And that would be that, except for the check in the mail. The bruises and breaks in his skin would heal over, and become nothing more than scars.

He took his rope off the thing and took it apart far enough to pick out the fan-belt. He let the rest of it wash away, shredded. As he got out of the surging water at last, he scowled slightly because he wondered if the car's spark plugs weren't wet.

It was dark now. Not quite pitch-black, for the hurricane sky to the west was banded by a last strip of sulfur-colored light at the horizon, but dark enough so that his car was only a looming shape as he climbed up to it. Then, suddenly, the wet finish and the rusty chrome of the front bumper were sparkling with the first pinpoint reflections of far-away lamps. He turned to look southward down the highway, and saw a car coming. As it came nearer, its headlights let him see the clouds of spray that billowed across the glistening road, and

the leaping white heads of breakers piling up on the piers and rebounding vertically to the level of the highway. The storm was building up even more quickly than he'd thought. He wondered what kind of damned fool was crazy enough to drive the stretches where the highway crossed open water between keys, and had his answer when a spotlight abruptly reached out and fingered him and his car. Either the state or the county police were out looking to make sure no one was trapped away from shelter.

The police car pulled up, wet and hissing, half-blocking the highway, and the driver immediately switched on his red roof beacon, either through force of habit or force of training, even though there was no oncoming traffic to warn. The four rotating arms of red light tracked monotonously over the road, the key, and the water. By their light, Dan Henry realized for the first time that it was raining furiously. The spotlight was switched off, and the headlights pointed away, up the highway. It was the red beacon that lit the scene and isolated the two men inside its color.

The officer did not get out of the car. He waited for Dan Henry to come around to his side, and only then cranked his window down half way.

"Trouble with the car?" he asked, hidden behind the reflec-

tion on the glass. Then he must have thought better of it, seeing Dan Henry's broken skin. He threw the door open quickly, and slid out with his hand on the bone-gripped butt of his plated revolver. He was thick-bodied, with a burly man's voice and brusqueness, and he kept his eyes narrowed. "What's the story here, Mac?"

Dan Henry shook his head. "No trouble. I was down on the rocks. Waves threw me around some."

The officer's uniform pants and leather jacket were already sodden. Water ran down his face, and he wiped it annoyedly out of his eyes. "What were you doin' down there? No brains?" He watched carefully, his hand firm on his gun.

Dan Henry had been a policeman himself. He was not surprised at the officer's attitude. A policeman was paid to be irritated by anything that didn't have a simple answer.

"I've got something down there I was salvaging," he said reasonably. "Storm caught me at it and knocked me around some before I got finished." Telling about it made him realize he was tired out. He hoped this business with the policeman would be over in a hurry, so that he could fix his car and get into its shelter. The wind was chilly, and the constant impact of driven water on his skin

was beginning to make him numb.

The officer risked a quick glance down at the thrashing surf before he brought his hard eyes back to Dan Henry. "I don't see nothin'. What kind of a thing was it? What're you carryin' that belt around for?"

"It's metal," Dan Henry said. "Big. Never seen anything just like it before. I was using the belt to hold it."

The officer scowled. "What's holdin' it now? What d'you mean, big? How big? And how come I can't see it?"

"I pushed a rock behind it," Dan Henry said patiently. "It's damn near as big as a car. And it's under water, now."

"Buddy, that don't begin to sound like a likely story." The policeman pulled his gun out of the holster and held it down alongside his thigh. "What kind of a lookin' thing is it?"

"Kind of like a rocket, I guess."

"Now, why the hell didn't you say so!" the policeman growled, relaxing just a little bit. "That makes sense. It'll be one of those Navy jobs. They've got 'em drop-pin' in the ocean like flies. But you ain't goin' to get anything out of it, Buddy. That's government property. You're supposed to turn it in. It's your duty."

"I don't think so."

"What d'you mean, you don't think so?" The policeman's gun arm was tense again.

"It doesn't look like a Navy rocket. Doesn't look like anybody's rocket, that I know of. I said it was *kind* of like a rocket. Don't know what it is, for sure." Now Dan Henry was growing angry himself. He didn't like the way things were going. He kept his attention carefully on the gun.

"Know all about rockets, do you?"

"I read the papers. This thing isn't just a piece. It isn't the bottom stage or the top stage. It's one thing, and it never was part of anything bigger. And it's been in the water maybe a couple of years without getting broken up. You show me the Navy rocket that's like that."

The policeman looked at him. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly. "Tell you what—suppose you just step over here and put my spotlight on it. Reach through the window." He stepped back casually.

Dan Henry reached around and switched the spot on. He swept it down across the water, a little startled to see how far up the breakers had come. Under the light, the water was a venomous green, full of foam, rain-splotched and furiously alive. A gust of wind rocked the car sharply, and the light with it. The pale beam shot over the sea before it fell back, reaching beyond the swinging cross of red from the roof beacon, and out there the lashing

waves disappeared in a mist of rain.

He found the thing, finally, after having to hunt for it. For an instant he thought it had been swept away after all, and felt a stab of sharp anger. But it was still there, heaving insensately under the waves, with only the dim, broad mottling of its back near enough to the surface to be seen at all, that and a constant stirring in the water, roiling it like an animal. "There it is." He was surprised how relieved he felt. "See it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I seen enough of it," the officer said. "You got somethin' down there, all right." There was a sudden hardness in his voice, that had been waiting all along for him to make the decision that would bring it completely out. "I got my gun on you, buddy. Just step back from that car easy. Anybody foolin' around out here in a hurricane must want somethin' awful bad. If that somethin's a Navy rocket, I guess I know what kind of a son of a bitch that would be."

"Jesus Christ," Dan Henry whispered to himself. He was angry with the fine-drawn kind of rage that is almost a pleasure. And not because the cop thought he was a Commie, either, Dan Henry suddenly realized, but because he persisted in not understanding about the rocket. Or whatever it was.

He turned around with a jump. The fan-belt in his hand whipped out with all the strength in his arm and all the snap in his wrist, and snatched the cop's gun out of his hand. It skittered across the wet concrete of the highway, and Dan Henry pounced after it. He scooped it up with a scrape of his finger-tips, and crouched with the muzzle pointed dead at the cop's belly.

"Back off," he said. "Back off. You're not takin' that thing away from me. I sweated blood to hang on to it, and you're not goin' to come along and throw me in jail to get it away."

The cop retreated watchfully, his hands up without his being told, and waited for his chance. Dan Henry backed him up the highway until the cop was past the cars, and opened the door of his own car. He threw the gun inside, together with the belt. He slammed the door and said: "You can get that back later. Or you can try and take it away from me now, barehanded." He was shaking with the tension in his bunched shoulders, and his arms were open wide. He was crouched, his broad chest deep as his lungs hunted for more and more oxygen to wash the rush of blood his heart was driving through his veins. The red flood of revolving beacon on the police car swept over him in regular flashes.

"I'll wait," the cop said.

"Now," Dan Henry said, "I want you to use your radio. I want you to call in and report this. Only I want you to report it to the Navy before you call your headquarters."

The cop looked at him with a puzzled scowl. "You on the level?" he asked, and Dan Henry could see him wondering if he hadn't made a mistake, somewhere, in his thinking about what was going on here. But Dan Henry had no more time for him. The wind was a steady, strong pressure that made him brace his left leg hard against it. The water flying across the highway was coming in solid chunks, instead of spray, and the two cars were rocking badly on their springs. The rain was streaming over them, leaving the officer's jacket a baggy, clinging mess and pounding on the top of Dan Henry's head. The sea was smashing violently into the highway piers, thundering to the wind's howl, and even here on solid ground the shock of the impacts was coming clearly up through Dan Henry's bones.

His throat was raw. Bit by bit, he and the officer had had to raise their voices until they had been shouting at each other without realizing it. "Get in the car and do it!" he yelled, and the officer came forward as he backed away to give him room.

The policeman got into his

car, with Dan Henry standing watchfully a little behind the open doorframe, and switched on his radio. "Tell them where we are," Dan Henry said. "Tell them my name—Daniel Morris Henry—tell them what I said about it's not being one of their rockets—and tell them I'm claiming salvage rights. Then you tell them the rest any way you see it."

The officer grudgingly turned the dials away from their usual settings. After a minute, he picked his microphone out of the dashboard hanger and began calling Boca Chica in a stubborn voice. At intervals, he said "Over," and threw the Receive switch. They heard the peculiar, grating crackle of radiotelephone static, trapped in the small speaker. And only that.

"Look, Buddy," the policeman said at last, "we're not goin' to get any answer. Not if we ain't got one by now. Boca Chica radio may be knocked out. Or maybe my transmitter's shorted, with all this wet. Could be anything." He jerked his head toward the water. "How much longer you want us to stay out here?" Probably because he had seen so many hurricanes, he was beginning to grow nervous.

"Try it again," Dan Henry said. He watched the officer closely, and couldn't see him doing anything wrong. Dan Henry didn't know the Boca

Chica frequency; that was where the trouble might be. But he'd used a police radio often enough so that any other trick wouldn't have gotten by him.

The officer called Boca Chica for another five minutes. Then he stopped again. "No dice. Look, Buddy, you've had it. Maybe you're just a guy looking for some salvage money, like you say you are. Maybe not. But there's goin' to be waves coming across this road in a little while. Why don't we get out of here and straighten things out when this blows over?"

Dan Henry set his jaw. "Get the vibrator out of that radio. Do it." Now he had no choice. If he went with the cop, that was that. They'd throw him in some jail for resisting arrest and assaulting an officer, and keep him there until they were good and ready to let him out. By then, whatever happened to the thing down here, somebody would have figured out some way to get that Navy check instead of him. The only thing to do was to cripple the cop's radio and send him down the highway until he reached a phone. There was no guarantee that radio wouldn't work on the police frequency.

Maybe the cop would call the Navy right after he called his headquarters. Or maybe, even if he didn't, some higher brass at the headquarters would report to

the Navy. Either way—if you believed it was a Navy rocket or if you didn't—it was government business. Then, maybe, the Navy would get here before the cops did. Or soon enough afterwards so he'd still be here to talk to them. Once he got taken away from here, that chance was gone.

On that decision, he was ready to cling to a hundred-foot key in the middle of an Atlantic hurricane. "Let's have that vibrator. Right now."

The officer looked at him, and reached slowly under the dash. He fumbled in the narrow space where the radio hung, and pulled the sealed aluminum cylinder out of its socket. But he was getting ready to grab for Dan Henry if he could reach him quickly enough.

"Okay," Dan Henry said, "drop it on the road and get out of here. You can get it back along with your gun. And just in case you get some brains in your head, when you get to a phone, call the Na—"

The policeman had dropped the vibrator, and the wind had rolled it under Dan Henry's Chevrolet. Dan Henry had been in the act of letting the open police car door close, when a sharp thread of brilliant violet fire punched up from down in the green water, through the red light, up through the rain, up through the black clouds, and out to the stars beyond.

"There's something *in* that thing!" the officer blurted.

Dan Henry threw the door shut. "Get out of here, man!"

Down in the drowned rocks, an arc hissed between the two struts in the thing's nose. The water leaped and bubbled around it, and for all the breakers could do, still the blaze of light illuminated the thing and the rocks it ground against, turning the sea transparent, and from the crown of the arc the thin violet column pointed without wavering, without dispersing, straight as a line drawn from hell to heaven.

The police car's tires smoked and spun on the pavement. "I'll get help," the officer shouted dimly over the squeal and the roar of his engine. Then he had traction and the car shot away, headlights slashing, glimmering in the rain and the spray, lurching from side to side under the wind's hammer, roof beacon turning at its inverting pace, the siren's howl lost quickly in the boom of the water. And Dan Henry was left in the violet-lanced darkness.

Without the windbreak of the police car in front of him, he was pushed violently backward until his own car's fender stopped him. Water struck his eyes, and the night blurred. He bent forward and rubbed his face until

the raw ache of the salt was dulled to a steady throbbing, and then he staggered across the highway to the guard rail on the Atlantic side. The tops of the incoming waves washed over his shoes, just as the surf at noon had lapped at him, twelve feet below.

The rain and the spray streamed over him. He cupped one hand over his nose, to breathe, and hung on the rail.

There was nothing more to see. The pillar of light still shot up from the arc, and the bulk of the thing loomed, gross and black, down there in the water. It was feet below the surface now, cushioned from the first smash of the waves, and it stirred with a smooth, regular motion like a whale shark in a tank.

The radio, he thought. It had felt the radio in the police car. Nothing else had happened to bring it to life at that particular moment. It had waited a little—perhaps analyzing what it had encountered, perhaps then noticing the regular flash of the car's roof beacon for the first time. And for the first time since the day, years ago, when it entered the sea, it had found a reason for sending out a signal.

To where? Not to him, or the policemen. The light was not pointed toward the highway. It went up, straight up, going out of sight through the clouds as

his eyes tried to follow it before the lash of water forced his head down again.

There was no one inside the thing, Dan Henry thought. There couldn't be. He had scraped on the side with regular, purposeful strokes, clearing an exactly square patch, and gotten no response. And the thing had lain in the ocean a long time, sealed up, dragging its armored hide over the bottom as the currents pushed and pulled it, rolling, twisting, seamless, with only those two horns with which to feel the world about it.

He could be wrong, of course. Something could be alive in there, still breathing in some fantastic way from a self-contained air supply, eating tiny amounts of stored food, getting rid of its wastes somehow. But he didn't see how. It didn't seem logical that anything would trap itself like that, not knowing if it was ever going to escape.

He could be wrong about it all. It might not have been reacting to anything that happened on the highway. It might be ignoring everything outside itself, and following some purpose that had nothing to do with this world or its people. But whether it was that, or whether he was at least partly right, Dan Henry wondered what was sending things to drop down on the Earth and make signals to the stars.

The water came higher. It came up the key too quickly to split and go around it, and spilled over the highway to plunge into the rocks on the Gulf side. It broke halfway up the side of his car. He remembered the policeman's vibrator. That would be far to the west of him by now, skipping at a thrown stone's velocity over waves whose tops were being cut off by the wind. Dan Henry's mouth twisted in a numb grimace. Now he'd have to buy one. They probably wouldn't let him get away that cheaply. They could make that stick for a robbery charge. And destroying public property. While on the other hand, if he was swept off this key they wouldn't even have to pay for his burial. He laughed drunkenly.

A wave broke over him. He had made a sling for himself by knotting the legs of his dungarees around one of the guard-rail uprights, and when the wave was past he lolled naked with the bunched tops of the dungarees cutting into his chest under his arms. The wind worked at him now, with a kind of fury he had never felt by simply putting his head out through the window of a speeding car, and then the next wave came. It was warm, but the wind evaporating it as soon as he was exposed again made his skin crawl and his teeth chatter. He reached behind him with a

wooden arm and felt the knot in the dungaree legs to make sure it was holding. The pressure had tightened it into a small hard lump.

That was good, at any rate. That and the blessed practicality of the engineers who built the highway. When they laid the roadway where the hurricane-smashed railroad had been, they had cut the rusted rails up with torches, set the stumps deep in the concrete, and welded the guard rails together out of T-shaped steel designed to hold a locomotive's weight.

Dan Henry grinned to himself. The rail would hold. The dungarees would hold, or the trademark was a liar. Only about Dan Henry was there any doubt. Dan Henry—hard, sure Dan Henry, with his chest being cut in half, with his torn skin being torn again as the waves beat him against the highway, with his head going silly because he was being pounded into raw meat.

Dear God, he thought, am I doing this for *money*? No, he thought as a wave filled his nostrils, no, not any more. When that thing turned its light on and I didn't jump in the car with that cop, that's when we found out I wasn't doing it for the money. For what? God knows.

He floundered half-over on his side, arched his neck, and looked

at the violet arrow through the clouds. Signal, you bastard! Go ahead and signal! Do anything. As long as I know you're still there. If you can stay put, so can I.

Well, what *was* he doing this for? Dan Henry fought with the sling that held him, trying to take some of the pressure off his chest. God knew, but it was up to Dan Henry to find out for himself.

It wasn't money. All right—that was decided. What was left—vanity? Big Dan Henry—big, strong, Dan Henry . . . take more than a hurricane to stop big, strong, wonderful Dan Henry—was that the way his thoughts were running?

He croaked a laugh. Big, strong Dan Henry was lying here limp as a calico doll, naked as a baby, praying his pants wouldn't rip. The storm had washed the pride out of him as surely as it had his first interest in the salvage money.

All right, *what*, then! He growled and cursed at his own stupidity. Here he was, and he didn't even know why. Here he was, being bludgeoned to death, being drowned, being torn apart by the wind. He was stuck out here now, and nobody could save him.

A wave roared over the highway and struck his car a blow that sent a hubcap careening off into the darkness. The car tilted

onto the Gulf-side guard rail. The rail bellied outward, and the car hung halfway over the rocks on the other side. Successive waves smashed into it, exploding in spray, and the guard rail groaned in the lull after each strike. Dan Henry watched it dully in the violet light, with the water sluicing down over his head and shoulders for a moment before the wind found it and tore it away in horizontal strings of droplets.

The car's door panels had already been pushed in, and the windows were cracked and bulged. Now the exposed floorboards were being hammered. The muffler was wrenched out.

With the next smash of solid water, the horizontal rail broke its weld at one end and the car heeled forward to the right, impaling its radiator on an upright. It hung there, gradually tearing the radiator out of its brackets, spilling rusty water for one instant before a wave washed it clean, scraping its front axle down the sharp edge of the roadway, breaking loose pieces of the concrete and raising its left rear wheel higher and higher. The radiator came free with a snap like a breaking tooth, and the car dropped suddenly, its front end caught by the edge of the left wheel, kept from falling only by the straining uprights still jammed against it farther back

on the right side. The hood flew back suddenly and was gone with a twang in one gust of wind.

Am I going to have to buy that cop a new gun, too? Dan Henry thought, and in that moment the wind began to die. The water hesitated. Three waves rolled across the road slowly, much higher than when the wind was flattening them, but almost gentle. The rain slackened. And then the eye of the storm had moved over him, and he had calm.

He pushed himself to his feet at last, after he sagged out of the hold the dungarees had on his chest. He leaned against the guard rail and stared woodenly at the ocean and the thing.

The beam went up out of sight, a clean, marvelously precise line. But down at the surface, the sea was finally hiding the thing, and making a new noise that had none of a storm-sea's clean power. It filled his ears and unnerved him.

With the wind and the pressure gone, the waves were leaping upward, clashing against each other, rebounding, colliding again, peaking sharply. Dan Henry could hear the highway over the water booming faintly as the waves slammed up against its underside. But he could actually see very little. It had grown sharply darker, and what he saw were mostly the tops of

the exploding waves, glimmering pale violet.

The thing was buried deep, where it lay at the foot of the key, and the arc that had diffused most of the light was visible only as a fitful glow that shifted and danced. The violet beam seemed to spring into life of itself at the plunging surface, and it kept most of its light compressed within itself.

Dan Henry swayed on the guard rail. It was stifling hot. The thick mugginess filled his lungs and choked him. He lolled his head back. The clouds were patchy overhead, and the stars shone through in places.

There was a sudden high-pitched chime, and a concentric circle of corruscating ice-blue flame came hurtling down the beam from the thing. It came out of the sky and shot into the water, and when it touched the glimmer of the arc there was another chime, this time from the thing, and this time the water quivered. The violet beam flickered once, and a red halo spat up with a crackle, travelling slowly. When it was a hundred feet over Dan Henry's head it split in two, leaving one thin ring moving at the old rate, and a larger one that suddenly doubled its speed until it split again, doubled its speed and split again, accelerated again, and so blazed upward along the violet beam's

axis, leaving a spaced trail of slowly moving lesser rings behind it. They hung in the air, a ladder to the stars. Then they died out slowly, and before they had stopped glowing the violet beam was switched off.

The sky was abruptly empty, and the thing lay quiescent in the water once more. Dan Henry blinked at the flashes swimming across his eyes. It was pitch dark. He could barely see the white of swirling water as it dashed itself into the rocks at his feet.

Except that far up the highway, coming toward him, were two headlights with a swinging red beacon just above them.

The police car was plastered with wet leaves and broken palm fronds. The policeman slammed it to a halt beside him, and flung the door open. He stopped long enough to turn his head and say: "Jesus Christ! He's still here! He ain't gone!" to someone in the front seat with him, and then he jumped out. "What happened?" he asked Dan Henry. "What was that business with the lights?"

Dan Henry looked at him. "You made it," he mumbled.

"Yeah, I made it. Got to this Navy skywatch station. Phone was out, so I couldn't call in to headquarters. Found this Navy professor up there. Brought him down with me when the eye came over. He figures we got maybe

twenty minutes more before the other side of the hurricane comes around."

The other man had slid out of the car. He was a thin, bony-faced man with rimless glasses. He was dressed in a badly fitted tropical suit that was pleated with dampness. He looked at Dan Henry's purpled chest, and asked: "Are you all right?"

"Sure."

The man twitched an eyebrow. "I'm assigned to the satellite tracking station north of here. What is this thing?"

Dan Henry nodded toward it. "Down there. It got an answer to its signal, acknowledged, and switched off. That's what I think, anyhow."

"You do, eh? Well, you could be right. In any case, we don't have much time. I'll notify the naval district commandant's office as soon as the telephones are working again, but I want a quick look at it now, in case we lose it."

"We're not going to lose it," Dan Henry growled.

The professor looked at him sharply. "What makes you sure?"

"I wedged it," Dan Henry said with a tight note in his voice. "I almost ruined myself and I almost drowned, but I wedged it. I took a gun away from a cop to keep it from getting left here without anybody to watch it. And I stayed here and got almost drowned, and almost cut in half,

and almost beat to death against this highway here, and *we're not going to lose it now.*"

"I . . . see," the professor said. He turned to the policeman. "If you happen to have some sedatives in your first aid kit, they might be useful now," he murmured.

"Might have something. I'll look," the policeman said with a quick glance at Dan Henry.

"And put your spotlight on the thing, please," the professor added, peering over the guard rail. "Though I don't suppose we'll see much."

The yellow beam of the spotlight slid over the top of the water. If it penetrated at all, it still did not reach any part of the thing. The policeman hunted for it, sweeping back and forth until Dan Henry made an impatient sound, went over to him, and pointed it straight. "Now, leave it there. That's where it is."

"Yeah? I don't see anythin' but water."

"That's where it is," Dan Henry said. "Haven't been here all this time for nothin'." He went back to the railing, but there was still nothing to see.

"You're sure that's where it is?" the professor asked.

"Yes. It's about ten feet down."

"All right," the professor sighed. "Tell me as much as you can about its activities."

"I think it's a sounding rocket," Dan Henry said. "I think somebody from someplace sent that thing down here a while ago to find out things. I don't know what those things are. I don't know who that somebody is. But I'm pretty sure he lost it, somehow, and didn't know where it was until it signalled him just now. I don't know why it worked out that way. I don't know why the rocket couldn't get its signal through before this, or why it didn't go home."

"You think it's of extraterrestrial origin, then?"

Dan Henry looked at the professor. "You don't think so?"

"If I did, I would be on my way to district headquarters at this moment, hurricane or no hurricane," the professor said testily.

"You don't believe it?" Dan Henry persisted.

The professor grew uneasy. "No."

"Wouldn't you *like* to believe it?"

The professor looked quickly out to sea.

"Here," the policeman said, handing Dan Henry a flat brown half-pint bottle. "Sedative." He winked.

Dan Henry knocked the bottle out of the cop's hand. It broke on the pavement.

"Look up!" the professor whispered.

They turned their heads. Something huge, flat, and multi-winged was shadowed faintly on the stars.

"Oh, Lord," the officer said.

There was a burst of chiming from the thing down in the water, and violet pulses of light came up through the water and burst on the underside of the thing up in the sky.

Answering darts of tawny gold came raining down. The thing in the water stirred, and they could see the rocks move.

"Tractor rays," the professor said in a husky voice. "Theoretically impossible."

"What's it going to do?" the policeman asked.

"Pick it up," the professor answered. "And take it back to wherever it comes from."

Dan Henry began to curse.

The thing in the sky slipped down, and they could feel the air throb. After a moment, the sound came to them—a distant, rumbling purr, and a high metallic shrieking.

The thing in the water heaved

itself upward. It struggled against the rocks.

"We'd better get back," the professor said.

The distant sound grew stronger and beat upon their ears. The professor and the policeman retreated to the car.

But Dan Henry did not. He straightened his back and gathered his muscles. As the tawny fire came down, he leaped over the guard rail into the water.

He swam with grim fury, thrown and sucked by the water, sputtering for breath, his feet pounding. Even so, he would not have reached the thing. But the water humped in the grip of the force that clutched at the thing, and the waves collapsed. Dan Henry's arms bit through the water with desperate precision, and just before the thing broke free, he was upon it.

"No, sir," he grunted, closing his hand on one of the struts. "Not without me. We've been through too much together." He grinned coldly at the hovering ship as they rose to meet it.

SCIENCE

Every science fiction fan knows that the Moon has no atmosphere. Professor Asimov, however, makes an educated guess that quite probably we're all wrong. . . .

THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE MOON

by ISAAC ASIMOV

NOW THAT SPUTNIK HAS BEEN successfully launched by Homo sapiens, artificial satellites are no longer science-fiction in themselves, anymore than airplanes are. However, there is always the next step for the s f enthusiast (thank God) and in this case the next step is the unmanned missile that will land on the Moon, or possibly circle it and come back to Earth. In either case we will get new information concerning the Moon.

Like what? Well, there's the Moon's atmosphere, for instance.

But the Moon has no atmosphere, you say; every science fiction fan knows that even if he knows nothing else.

But it has, just the same. The Moon *must* have an atmosphere.

It can't avoid having an atmosphere. Here's how you can demonstrate that—

The Earth is made up of two sections of radically different composition (like an egg, which is made up of a central yolk and a surrounding white.) The "yolk" of the Earth is the nickel-iron core, with a high density roughly about 10 times that of water. Around it, the "white" of the Earth is the silicate crust, with a low density of about 3. The overall density of Earth is between those two figures. It comes to 5.5.

The Moon's density is 3.3. In order to be that much less dense than the Earth, the Moon must be lacking a sizable nickel-iron

core. It must be all "white", so to speak, and consist of a silicate crust only.

It is reasonable to suppose that the elementary composition of the Moon is about the same, then, as that of the Earth's silicate crust. The two were formed at the same time out of the same materials. The Earth's crust is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent potassium and we can assume the same figure for the Moon as a whole. (Why potassium? Well, I'll explain soon.)

The mass of the Moon is 7.343×10^{25} grams. (That's about 73 trillion trillion grams, if exponential figures nauseate you.) The mass of potassium in the Moon is therefore about 1.8×10^{24} grams (or just under two trillion trillion grams.)

There are three varieties of potassium atoms in existence. Two of them, potassium-39 and potassium-41, make up just about 99.99 percent of the total. However, 0.0119 percent of the total consists of the rare isotope, potassium-40, and that's the interesting one.

The total mass of potassium-40 on the Moon comes to 2.14×10^{20} grams (just over two hundred million trillion grams.)

The unusual thing about potassium-40 is that it is radioactive. It has a half-life of 1.3 billion years, which means that in that period of time, half the atoms of potassium-40 in existence break

down. Most of the atoms that break down (89 percent to be exact) give off an electron and become stable atoms of calcium-40. The nuclei of the remaining 11 percent, however, take up electrons from the surrounding environment and become stable atoms of argon-40.

Using the equation (a simple one, luckily) that expresses the rate of breakdown of radioactive atoms, it can be calculated that on the Moon, 3,600 grams (or just about 8 pounds) of potassium-40 are breaking down each second. As a result of that breakdown, 3,240 grams ($7\frac{1}{6}$ pounds) of calcium-40 and 360 grams ($\frac{5}{6}$ of a pound) of argon-40 are formed each second.

It is the argon-40 you want to keep your eye on, since argon is a gas and that means the Moon is constantly forming an atmosphere of its own. Of course, 360 grams of argon aren't much, but if that much is formed each second and if the seconds keep piling up . . .

Furthermore, there was more potassium-40 present in the Moon (and everywhere) in the past than there is now. About 1.3 billion years ago, there was twice as much and four billion years ago there was eight times as much as there is today.

If we calculate the amount of argon formed over the four billion years that the Moon has been a

solid body and make allowance for the greater quantity of potassium-40 present in the past, it turns out that the total quantity of argon formed in all that time is 1.5×10^{20} grams. This is a large figure. It comes to about 170 trillion tons of argon.

To give you an idea how large a figure that is, it represents nearly three times as much argon as is present in our own atmosphere (which argon, incidentally, was and is being formed from our own potassium-40.)

If all that argon were present on the surface of the Moon, our satellite would have an atmosphere with a mass $\frac{1}{30}$ th of ours. Furthermore, since the Moon's surface is only $\frac{1}{16}$ that of the Earth, its atmosphere would be crowded together until it were just about half as dense as that of Earth.

Well, the Moon has no such atmosphere as we very well know. What, then, has happened to the Moon's argon?

First, the potassium-40 is spread throughout the volume of the Moon. Argon that happens to be formed in the outer layers of Moon-rock can make its way to the surface, but argon formed deep down would be trapped. (This is true of the argon formed on Earth, too. The quantity of argon trapped within the Earth is certainly five times as great

and may be as much as fifteen times as great as the amount in the atmosphere.)

But even if only $\frac{1}{15}$ of the Moon's argon were on the surface, the Moon would still have an atmosphere with a density some three percent that of the Earth's atmosphere. However, even that much is out of the question.

Another point arises. The Moon's gravitational field is only $\frac{1}{6}$ that of the Earth and is simply not powerful enough to hold on to the argon. The Moon loses its argon to outer space almost as quickly as that argon comes leaking out of the Moon's rocks.

Almost! It takes a certain time for the argon to make its way clear of the Moon, so that there is always *some* argon (not much) present in the neighborhood of the Moon's surface. That is why I said that the Moon *must* have an atmosphere.

As a matter of fact, some astronomers at Cambridge University, observing the radio waves emitted by various celestial objects, studied the behavior of those waves that happened to skim the surface of the Moon on their way to Earth. Those radio waves were slightly disturbed and it was calculated that the disturbance was due to a Lunar atmosphere of charged particles equal in density to a ten-trillionth of our atmosphere.

That counts only charged particles. Neutral argon atoms, which might be much in the majority, would not be observed. My own calculations (which depend, I must admit in a whisper, on a sheaf of some very shaky assumptions) lead me to predict that the Moon has an argon atmosphere with a density of up to about a billionth of our own atmosphere.

Now you may suppose that an atmosphere even as much as a billionth of ours doesn't deserve the name of atmosphere, but that may not be so. To be sure such an atmosphere is a better vacuum than any we can make on Earth, but it is not a *complete* vacuum.

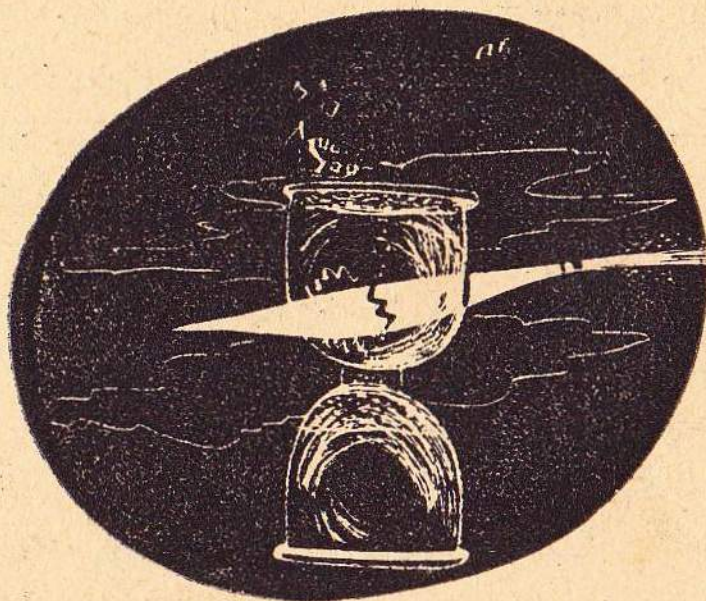
As I write this, Sputnik is moving through the outer fringes of Earth's atmosphere at a point where the gas density is less than a billionth of an atmosphere and yet the friction involved is enough to slow Sputnik gradually and, after a period of time (weeks, months, years?), send it crash-

ing to Earth. The Moon's tiny atmosphere may therefore serve to help brake a ship landing on the Moon and cut down the quantity of fuel that will have to be used for braking. That will save that much fuel for the return voyage.

And believe me, in our first trips to the Moon, anything that will save even a small amount of fuel, may make all the difference. So let's hope the unmanned missile brings back news of argon, even in traces. It will be bound to mean an additional step in advancing the greatest single theme of science-fiction toward reality.

NOTE TO TYPESETTER

The figure 2,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 is *not* two trillion as erroneously reported at the end of my article *FECUNDITY LIMITED* (January 1958) but two trillion trillion. It's only a missing word but it makes all the difference between one cent and ten billion dollars.—I.A.



THE TALL PSYCHIATRIST

by DICK HETSCHER

The psychiatrist was unmoved when the very small man began his story of the distant planet with extraordinary attractions. About midway, however, his interest picked up sharply—became, you might say, almost unprofessional.

IT TOOK ONLY A GLANCE around the waiting room to tell him that Dr. Ossifer was not one of the more successful members of his profession. The furniture, Second World Empire style, showed its age, the activipictures on the wall were cheap and jerky in their color changes, the whole effect dingy. Sam Munoz thumbed through the worn magazines on the stand, settled for a May, 2118, *Interplanetary Tales*, and settled back as comfortably as the chair and his taut nerves would allow.

The door beside him opened without warning. "You're Mr. Munoz?" Sam noticed first that the psychiatrist was tall, at least six and a half feet—just as he had expected. About thirty-five, the doctor had a large, bony head that reached upward from a wide spread of shoulders. His arms were long and powerful, and while he may have been a little topheavy, Sam noted that he looked good and strong.

Sam got up. "Yes. And you're Dr. Ossifer?" While they shook hands the doctor gazed down at him, apparently noticing for the first time how short he was. Then Dr. Ossifer squared his magnificent shoulders and said, "Won't you follow me, Mr. Munoz?"

The office was small, and Sam sat uneasily on the edge of the couch while Dr. Ossifer fired name-age-birthplace questions at him.

"Now, Mr. Munoz," the doctor said when that was done, "I want you to relax and forget your worries and tell me everything that's troubling you. I am a psychiatrist," he ran a hand through thick black hair, "and am trained to help you, so feel at ease to unburden yourself."

Sam creased his eyebrows worriedly. "I . . . I . . ." He looked at the floor confusedly. "I've had a great shock, sir."

"Good," said Dr. Ossifer; "now suppose you tell me all about it."

Sam gnawed his upper lip, looked frightened for a moment. "Well, to begin with, I was always smaller than the other boys in my neighborhood. And I got beat up whenever I got into a fight and later on the girls didn't seem to care much for me . . ." He paused.

"Splendid," said the doctor, scribbling in his notebook. "And then what happened?" He gave a quick glance at his patient. "I am a psychiatrist, Mr. Munoz, so don't be afraid to speak right out." He smiled a bony smile.

Sam tried a weak smile in return. "Well, when I was small I thought I'd grow up as big as the rest and be able to hold my own, so I didn't feel too badly, but instead it got worse and worse. I was an inch shorter than the rest and then two inches and then shorter and shorter. You can see, sir, that now that I'm fully grown I'm only four-foot-ten."

The doctor looked at him intently for a moment, then back at his notes. "Yes, go on . . ."

Sam looked down at his feet. "There are lots of disadvantages to being short, you know. And I wanted so desperately to be tall and strong. I—"

The psychiatrist interrupted him. "But four-foot-four isn't really so *very* short. Lots of great men have been short. It can be used as a spur, you know. Napoleon—"

"Not four-foot-four," Sam cor-

rected him. "I'm four-foot-ten. And you don't realize how I felt about it. I didn't want to be Napoleon. I just wanted to be tall, to be admired for my strength, my appearance. I suppose it preyed on my mind, and . . . Well, sir, the way it turned out I came to have a strange fear of tall persons. While I admired them almost desperately, I was afraid to be near them—as though I felt too insignificant to be in their presence; I couldn't think of things to say . . . and so forth."

The little man took a deep breath. "Especially with *very* tall people. I don't know why, sir."

The psychiatrist swung his chair around to face him. "But I'm six-foot-seven, Mr. Munoz. I don't frighten you, do I?" He squared his shoulders and smiled crookedly.

Sam shuddered. "Well, not exactly. But . . . I know it's silly, but that's part of my problem, and—"

"Well, you mustn't be afraid to speak to me. After all, I *am* a psychiatrist. Now just relax, Mr. Munoz. I believe you said something about a shock."

Sam looked sick for a moment. "Yes, a shock, a terrible shock. It began when—"

"Now just lie back there and relax, Mr. Munoz, and tell me all about it, slowly and easily. Don't feel nervous or ill-at-ease, Mr. Munoz. I am a psychiatrist."

Sam lay back uneasily, his legs bent up at the knees, and stared at the ceiling.

"It began about ten years ago, when I was twenty," he began. "I was too short to get into any of the space services, but I was hit hard by the romance of it all. Lots of guys my age were, you know.

"I read all the fan magazines and all the model news and all the space stories and pretty soon I had one special hero.

"You may have heard of him. He was John Wilberhatch and he was a sort of lone wolf of space, not a fictional hero, but a real explorer from the fan magazines and newspapers. He lived in California and had a wife and two kids and a lot of money, but he spent most of his time scouting around the unexplored stars in his one-man ship and hunting for strange kinds of life. I don't know if it was his hobby or if he earned his money that way.

"Anyway, he was six-feet-five-inches tall and I suppose I sort of identified myself with him when I read the newspaper write-ups of his trips and the books and articles he wrote.

"He was pretty well known back then—I don't suppose you recall him?"

"No," said the psychiatrist.

The man on the couch looked disappointed. "Well, back in 2109, he returned from a trip that had touched on many new

planets way out on the rim somewhere, and *Space Age* published an article he had written.

"The article told of some of the worlds he had visited and the kinds of life he had found on them and I read it just as though I were visiting all those worlds myself until . . . until I came to one world that belonged to a large white star. And then . . ."

The psychiatrist looked up after half a minute of silence. The man on the couch was lying with his face turned to the wall. "Go on," Dr. Ossifer said in a kindly voice, "this is costing you by the hour."

Sam Munoz kept his face to the wall, but he resumed his story. "I suppose you know how it is," he said, "about interstellar travel and exploration. The new drive opened hundreds of thousands of new stars twenty, thirty years ago, and not many of them are explored even yet. Since we have all the raw materials and space we need with the nearest ones, the further stars are just explored by adventurers and then pretty much forgotten.

"This one planet John Wilberhatch visited got quite a bit of attention in the papers, but he had no proof of what he said he found there and since he had neglected to take pictures or anything nobody really believed him. His reputation wasn't too good in some ways, anyway, but the real

reason was that his coordinates for the parent star were wrong—there was no such star there. *He* said that was probably due to some little mistake he made jotting down the numbers in his records.

"The authorities didn't believe his story because he said he found human beings living on the planet, and he—"

"Human *beings*?" interrupted the psychiatrist.

"Yes," Sam Munoz went on. "There never had been a planet found before where humans had evolved, and there hasn't been since, so it was a very important discovery if it were true.

"Anyway, according to John Wilberhatch's story, it was a world much like Earth, green, with trees and lots of ocean, and its air good for breathing, and he saw the towns and landed near one of them.

"The people were friendly and not as far advanced mechanically as here on Earth and they averaged a little smaller and quite a bit weaker physically than Earth humans—due, John Wilberhatch supposed, to a slightly weaker gravity; otherwise they were completely human.

"And they were very hospitable and John Wilberhatch stayed among them for several months and learned their language and studied their ways and their government and so on.

"And it was their government

that interested me particularly and I think you'll see why when I tell you. I still know that part of the article by heart, I reread it so many times in the next few years. It went like this:

"To me, one of the most interesting things about their culture is its stability. Tradition plays a large part in their lives, but nowhere is it more apparent or unchallenged than in their methods of government. Every third year of their time contests are held throughout the inhabited portions of the planet. Winners of these go on to further contests which culminate in a great tournament in their capital. The winner of these elimination contests meets their current ruler in a final match, the winner of which governs the planet for the next three years. The matches consist entirely of feats of strength; thus, the physically strongest man on the planet rules it.

"A man newly established as ruler personally picks the remainder of the government, usually putting his friends and acquaintances and sometimes his entire village into choice positions. Custom plays such a large part in their lives, though, that much government is not needed—just enough to fill the gaps, so to speak. Therefore, both the number of government positions and the extent of government power are rigidly circumscribed by cus-

tom, effectively preventing any ruler from increasing his power and taking over permanently. The ruler is allowed, as his right of office, two castles in different climates, a court including 120 personal servants, a harem of his choice of any seven girls in the world, and a few other such token luxuries. But to overstep any of his privileges would be unheard of.

"That this form of government has been able to last without important change for several thousand of their years seems due to several factors, first and foremost of which is the race's pleasant and easy-going disposition. Added to this is the fact that the army organized to fight the Gorlneneths is not in any way centralized; it is composed entirely of loosely cooperating privates, as it were, and could not be used as an instrument of absolute rule. Also there is the menace of the Gorlneneths themselves, an ever-present danger which prevents the people from dividing among themselves, as well as providing an outlet for misfits and the overly-aggressive. . . ."

"The Gorlneneths are huge flying reptiles—like dragons," explained Sam Munoz. "They aren't intelligent, but are so vicious the humans are able to live only on the small section of the planet that's too cool for the Gorlneneth's liking; and even that has to be

guarded carefully against raids or migrations from overcrowded areas of the Gorlneneth's domain. John Wilberhatch explains all that in another part of the article."

"But how does all this tie in with you, Mr. Munoz?" asked the psychiatrist.

"You mean you don't see?" Sam Munoz looked around desperately as though he hated to come right out and say what he meant. "Don't you remember about the people of this planet being a little slighter, on the average, than Earth-people, and being quite a bit weaker, because of the lower gravity—don't you remember that?"

"Well, yes, but—?"

"Then maybe I didn't tell what John Wilberhatch said about the people of the planet. For all their weakness, they are much handsomer on the average than the people of Earth, the women are particularly beautiful. The atmosphere makes their complexions, for example, much better than we're used to on Earth, John Wilberhatch said, and their proportions are—well, they're just—just—"

"Oh, yes!" said Dr. Ossifer suddenly. "I think I see what you mean." He peered intently at Sam for a moment. "Go on! Go on! I am a psychiatrist and you can tell me everything. What happened then?"

"Well, sir, I'm only four-foot-ten, but I'm fairly strong for my

size, and I was sure that if I could find the planet. . . ."

"Yes, yes, I can see all that. But what happened then? Did you find the planet? Why didn't you go see this John Wilberhatch and . . ." Dr. Ossifer blinked his eyes rapidly for a moment, then scribbled at his notes.

"Well, actually I was working up my courage to do just that," the little man said; "but first he was away on another exploration and then he came back just in time to enter a rocket-plane race being held in Fresno. And that race . . . I watched that race on solivision and you can imagine my feelings as I watched his plane glide down the runway, slide into the air, gain about a thousand feet altitude and then . . . explode!"

"Explode?" the psychiatrist echoed. "You mean—?"

"It exploded. Later I read in the newspaper the story of his death and a review of the wonderful things he had done out in space, and could hardly keep from crying. The plane was blown entirely to dust."

"And that was the terrible shock you spoke of?" Dr. Ossifer frowned at the scribbled papers in front of him.

"No! No! It wasn't that at all. It was much worse than that. It was a terrible thing! It was a terrible thing!"

The psychiatrist brightened.

"Well, go ahead then—I'm listening. What happened next?"

Sam Munoz had gradually turned his face from the wall as he spoke, and now he lay on his back, and his eyes staring at the ceiling were alive with memories.

"I didn't give up," he went on. "I decided to risk everything, to devote the rest of my life, if necessary, to finding that planet. First I studied astrogation, or at least some rudiments of it; and then I went to work with the figures John Wilberhatch had given for the planet—the incorrect ones.

"I figured that if he had actually made a careless mistake in jotting down his figures—and I banked everything on that—then they would be entirely correct except for some one figure. So I took each number in his plotting, one at a time, and changed it to each of the other nine numbers it could have been, plotting the point each time. There were thirty-six figures in John Wilberhatch's plotting, which gave me 324 different points, but not one of them was dead center on a sun or even terribly close.

"I realized then that a great deal of accuracy was improbable anyway, with the star charts of such remote areas and John Wilberhatch's figures both undoubtedly somewhat less than exact.

"So I finally chose the fourteen plottings nearest to white suns and decided to investigate them.

I carefully plotted the shortest course that would touch all of them, and *that* was a job because those fourteen stars were scattered over the Universe. I figured the cost of fuel needed to cover the distance, the cost of a ship sturdy enough, and all the additional expenditures that would be involved. Then I worked like a slave for six years to save that amount and—

"Anyway, to pass over a lot of work and despair, I found the planet on my twelfth stop."

"You found it! Then you really—he really . . . ? Go on, Mr. Munoz—what happened next?" The psychiatrist seemed completely to have forgotten his notes and had been sitting for some time slumped in his chair idly scratching around in his hair with the point of his pencil. Now he straightened up and sat motionless as he listened.

"The people were just as John Wilberhatch had said," Sam Munoz went on. "They were very friendly, and several families in a village near where I landed took turns boarding me. Later on they were even more friendly—after they had seen how strong I was and they began to think I stood a good chance of winning the big tournament and becoming the ruler and giving them all good positions in my government.

"The next tournament was a little over a year off when I landed

and their years were pretty nearly the same as ours, so I had a chance to learn a good deal about the people where I was staying.

"The Gorlneneths were their only real trouble and my village was far from even the Gorlneneth danger zones. The entire population contributed to the army that battled the Gorlneneths, though, and in a manner that I had not counted upon.

"It seemed all the losers in the three-year contests had to enter the army for a period of seven years. This served several purposes. It assured a steady supply of the strongest and best men of the planet for the battle against their bitterest enemy, it assured that no coward would become ruler, and it put losers of the contest out of circulation for the next two contests, so if a current ruler bested a strong challenger once he would not have to worry about him again for nine years.

"I practiced at wrestling occasionally at local get-togethers and, to my relief and joy, was more than a match for any of the villagers. Though all were taller than me, averaging about five-foot-ten or so, they were of slighter build and much, much weaker.

"I was so happy there that the time seemed to fly and soon it was time for the contest to begin. You should have seen the excitement. This was the big holiday for all of them. Of course no one

in my village expected to win because each man knew I could beat him easily, but all were hoping to ride into power with me.

"The contests were divided into two parts: the first part comprised five tests, running, throwing, lifting, high jumping and broad jumping. The second part was simple wrestling with rules almost identical to our own. The contestants were matched off against one another and the winner of three out of five of the events in the first part was given one point over his opponent. Then came the wrestling, which was the most important. There were two falls and each counted for one point, so if a man won both falls at wrestling he could lose the first part of the contest and still be the victor. The first half was largely to add to the fun of it and only counted if the wrestling falls were divided.

"In the local contest I had the rest pretty well scared off and the only three who entered with me were intending to enter the army anyway. I won the two contests I had to fight on four straight falls.

"Then I travelled about twenty miles to another village for the area contests, with most of my village coming along to cheer me on. I fought four contests this time and won all easily.

"Then came a still higher tournament, about a hundred miles off, and I won again. Two more tournaments and we were head-

ing for the capital, I and a rooting section of my villagers, who had never before placed a candidate in the finals and were almost as thrilled by their first trip to the capital as by the prospect of the coming battle.

"The latest contests had grown more difficult as I met more advanced contestants, but I had still not come near to losing a single fall and all in all I felt mighty hopeful.

"The capital has a huge square directly under the castle walls—the main castle of the ruler—where the finals are held. I couldn't help eying the magnificent building a bit covetously and wondering what it would be like inside.

"There were 128 finalists, which meant there were seven more contests for me to pass before I could meet the present ruler. The first five matches were easy; the last two a little tougher, but though I lost most of the running tests and a few of the throwing tests, I had still not lost a single wrestling fall when the drums began to announce the final contest between the present ruler and the challenger.

"The ruler and his retinue had watched the previous matches from the high windows of the castle that overshadowed the square and heretofore I had not caught a glimpse of my next opponent, but now a procession began to move

slowly out from the great gates of the castle into the square. In its center was a huge ornate carriage. Its occupant or occupants were hidden from view by a silver curtain across the front of it."

The little man was silent for a moment, and when the psychiatrist glanced at him he noticed that he was trembling.

"I . . . moved away from my supporters out into the center of the square and waited, my arms folded. The royal wagon was stopped at the edge of the crowd and . . . and the curtains were drawn back while the people cheered and yelled and . . . the ruler stepped out and . . . and . . ." Sam Munoz shuddered.

Dr. Ossifer asked, "He was much bigger than the rest?"

Sam Munoz said softly, "He was John Wilberhatch!"

"No!" exclaimed the psychiatrist, visibly startled. "Not . . . not . . . John Wilberhatch!"

Sam Munoz nodded sadly. "John Wilberhatch, my hero!" He stifled a visible impulse to turn his head to the wall again. "That was the shock I was telling you about."

Dr. Ossifer was aghast. "This is very serious! You must be a very sick man, Mr. Munoz!"

Sam nodded dumbly.

"Well, what happened then? Did he beat you?"

"I . . . I'd rather not speak of that."

The doctor squirmed in his

chair. "Come now, you can tell me, Mr. Munoz. I'm a psychiatrist. What happened next, Mr. Munoz?"

The little man fidgeted as though being tortured. "He was . . . really very nice about it. He was careful not to hurt me, and after he beat me in the first half of the contest he let me win one of the falls at wrestling. He was quite good about it. I—"

"But you said all the losers had to serve seven years in the army," interrupted Dr. Ossifer. "Did you have to do that?"

"Well, I would have had to, but John Wilberhatch was very nice about that, too. He had several of his servants sneak me back to my ship and let me leave the planet. I had only to promise never to come back or tell anyone the location of the planet. This was only fair as by now John Wilberhatch was no longer a young man, and with middle-age and years of living on a light-gravity planet, he could hardly have defended his crown against Earthmen very much bigger and stronger than me.

"You see," Sam went on, "John Wilberhatch didn't really die in the explosion of his rocket-plane. When he was returning from his last exploration, he had a slight idea in his mind that he might want to go back, so he changed one number in his plotting, thinking that if he decided definitely

not to return he could give out the real figures and pretend he had found his mistake. Then when he did decide to go back he took out a good insurance policy to protect his wife and children and arranged a fake crash. There was actually no one in his plane when it exploded. He had built dummy controls into it and it took off automatically and blew up automatically."

"A nasty trick on his family," mused the psychiatrist, "though I'm glad he had the decency to provide for their future." He shook his head as though to clear it. "Mr. Munoz, about your problem now, I believe I must advise you . . . to . . . did you say six-foot-five, this John Wilberhatch? Middle-aged?"

". . . uh . . . yes."

"This is an awful mess, Mr. Munoz, and I hope you don't expect me to fix it up in one day. However, I think we can . . . how many wives did you say, seven?"

"Yes, seven, sir."

"Mr. Munoz, your troubles obviously go back to this planet located in—whereabouts did you say this planet was?"

"I don't believe I mentioned it."

". . . uh, Mr. Munoz, I'm . . . as you must have noticed, I'm six-foot-seven and . . . just where is this planet, Mr. Munoz? What are its coordinates?"

Sam Munoz looked frightened

suddenly. "I couldn't possibly tell anyone that! I promised John Wil—"

The psychiatrist looked shocked. "Please don't misunderstand me, Mr. Munoz. This is for you! I've come to the conclusion—the professional conclusion—that it's the discrepancy between deeply buried feelings of hate you carry toward John Wilberhatch and your feeling of responsibility toward him in keeping his secret that is causing a large part of your trouble. As a first step toward effecting a cure you must unburden yourself of this supposedly inviolate information to some safe and understanding person—someone, if possible, with only a professional interest. And I obviously am that person. I am a psychiatrist."

Sam looked more worried than ever. "But, I couldn't—"

"But you must! I am your doctor!"

The little man had to make a great effort to speak. "No, Dr. Ossifer, I . . . I'm afraid you might . . . you intend . . ."

Dr. Ossifer had been straining forward in his chair toward his patient. Now he relaxed; he even managed a bony smile. "All right, I'll admit it. I might . . . think about going to that planet. But don't you see, you owe nothing to John Wilberhatch. He had no right to force you to make promises. You were not a citizen of his planet, but of Earth, and you had

a right to leave any time you wished, regardless of their laws. And it will do you all the good in the world to turn a trick on him at last, after all the grief he's caused you."

"No, Dr. Oss—"

"Call me George!"

"No, uh . . . George, I could never go back on—"

Dr. Ossifer leaned forward again. ". . . and, besides, I'm willing to pay you one thousand planetaries for the location of that planet, as a recompense for all the money it took you to find it."

The little man was adamant. "No! And, for that matter, it cost me a lot more than a thousand planetaries to find that world. But I came here as a patient, George. What about my problem?"

"The *hell* with your problem!" the doctor almost screamed. "Don't you realize . . . I hate being a psychiatrist! What is it, day after day, problems to solve, stories to listen to, sometimes I . . . Stories to listen to, problems all the time, troubles, stupid troubles! Oh, it's a terrible life for a sensitive person like me! And my home life; you should . . . Mr. Munoz, you've got to help me! 2000 planetaries!"

Sam Munoz sat up on the couch and crossed his arms. "I would not think of going back on my word to John Wilberhatch—for 2000 planetaries. This is a point of honor and you can't expect

a gentleman to sell his honor . . . for 2000 planetaries!"

The psychiatrist almost whispered. "How much . . . would it take to make you remember the dirty trick John Wilberhatch played on his wife and children—and all the money and years you lost because of that dirty trick?" He leaned toward the little man, his eyes slitted, his breath thick.

Sam Munoz thought a while. Finally he said simply, "20,000 planetaries!"

The psychiatrist moved backward as though he had been struck. "20,000 planetaries! Why, that's more than I earn in two years! And I'm a psychiatrist!"

"It's still not really *very* much money, nowadays," suggested Sam Munoz defensively, taken a little aback by the psychiatrist's violence. "Hardly enough to live in real style for even one year."

Dr. Ossifer winced, then brightened. "Suppose I looked up the figures John Wilberhatch gave out and juggle them the way you did and investigate the best fourteen the way you did?" he suggested cagily. "Then I wouldn't have to pay you anything."

The little man smiled shyly. "The search would cost you much more, though, and *quite* a few years. You wouldn't want that . . . ?"

Sadly, the psychiatrist gave in. "I think I may be able to raise 20,000 planetaries," he said wear-

ily. "Shall I meet you tomorrow with the money and . . ."

And at that moment, near a small white star on the outer rim of the spiral nebula in Cannes Venatici, two spaceships pulled abreast, a line snaked through space from one to the other, and a heavily suited figure handed across from one to the other.

"Well, this is a surprise, finding another Earthman out here."

"It certainly is! I understood Earthmen were about one per ten-million stars out this far. I've been doing a little prospecting; and you . . . ?"

"Exploring just for the hell of it. I'm Dr. Ralph Hammerstein of New York City."

"A doctor! Well—"

"A psychiatrist, actually."

The other man's mouth dropped open. "I'm a psychiatrist, too," he said slowly. "Henrik Anderson of Bombay."

"You are . . . ?" A strange look came into tall Ralph Hammerstein's face. "And you're not, by any chance, looking for an elusive planet that's supposed to circle this star . . . ?"

Tall, grim-eyed Henrik Anderson chimed in. "An *extremely* elusive planet, about the size of Earth, but just a little smaller . . . ?"

Then both together:

"Did you have a patient, a small man about four-foot-ten, who . . . ?"

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EVE AND THE TWENTY-THREE ADAMS

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

Space regulations provided that military ships undertaking voyages of six months or more must carry Crew Girls. They did not, however, specify girls like Eve—for which the Navy can be very, very grateful....

HER NAME WAS EVE. I DON'T think I was the first man she made a fool of, and I don't care, but—for very personal reasons—I earnestly hope I'm the last.

The twenty-ninth of August, 2240, was the first time I ever saw her. That, you'll remember, was the first month of the Sirian war. War had been in the offing for nine or ten years or maybe more, ever since it became obvious that human and Sirian were never going to agree on who was to sell what to which planets of the galaxy. A trade collision is a common cause of wars. It probably destroyed ancient Troy. We didn't want it to destroy Earth.

When the war broke out, I was stationed on Venus, in the capacity of Psych Officer to the crew of the destroyer *Donnybrook*. The *Donnybrook* and its crew of twenty-three had been in virtual dry-

dock for nearly two years: the ship resting on its haunches in the Venusport spaceyards, the crew assigned to ground duty patrolling the border that separated the Teran settlements from the untamed formaldehyde jungles of Venus. Dull work, but we drew outplanet double pay, and there were enough women in Venusport to keep the bunch happy.

Then the war broke out. And within a week the *Donnybrook* had its flight orders. Off to the region of Sirius to join the attack on the enemy's home world. We were to leave in four days.

I was happy about the assignment, even though I was somewhat old for duty in a war-zone. My brother was among the top brass of the forces in the Sirian campaign, and I had two nephews and a son who would be in the front line of assault (the son a

product of an Earthside marriage before I shed my wife and applied for space duty.) At least, I thought I had relatives at the front. Space communication is a slow business at best, and I hadn't heard from any of them in a long time. But anyway, I didn't want to be the only slacker in the family, so I was pleased to be shipped to the front. So were the men, of course.

There was one thing that had to be taken care of before we could blast off for Sirius—our crew was incomplete for a long trip. It's a journey of eight light-years to Sirius, and even under the super-light nullspace drive it takes eight blessed months to get there from the Sol system. And space regulations provide that military ships undertaking voyages of six months or more must, repeat *must* carry Crew Girls in an approximate one-to-twenty ratio.

So I formally called the fact to Captain Bannister's attention, and he drew up a formal notice that we were accepting applications, and a jetman named Stetson rode downtown to Venusport Central and posted the notice with the Employment Bureau.

Half an hour later, we had our first applicant for the job.

Her name was Eve. I didn't call her that, of course, because I was twice her age, and it would-

n't be military. I called her Miss Tyler.

She showed up at the residential barracks at quarter past fourteen that afternoon, which meant she must have seen the notice and fled down to make application with the speed of light. The first I knew of her arrival was the sound of subdued whistling outside. Then an orderly knocked, entered, and said, "Beg pardon, sir. There's a girl waiting outside to see you about the position aboard the *Donnybrook*."

I straightened my hair and adjusted my decorations and waited. Hiring Crew Girls is officially the Captain's job, but in practice it's invariably delegated to the Psych Officer. The Captain merely initials the sheet.

She came in. She was young, and she was pretty. Modestly dressed, in a trim, tight Venusuit, and she had light brown hair, clear blue eyes, a pink complexion, and pleasantly smiling full lips. Her figure didn't overpower me, but it wasn't hard to look at either.

She looked like a Nice Girl. I couldn't imagine why she wanted the job.

"My name is Eve Tyler, Captain," she said in a thin, tension-choked voice.

I smiled. "I'm not the Captain—just the Psych Officer. You can call me Lieutenant Harper. Or Dr. Harper, if you like that. Or

just Harper. Sit down, Miss Tyler."

She sat. She kept her feet tucked under her and her knees close together. She handed me a sheaf of medical forms and affidavits testifying that she was in good health and qualified for the job. I took them, riffled quickly through them, and put them aside. I said, "You're applying for the job of Crew Girl on the *Donnybrook*, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two, sir."

It was about what I figured. "Ever been married?"

"No, sir."

"Engaged?"

She shifted uneasily. "No, sir."

I could tell it was a lie, but I passed it over. I started to see the pattern: the girl had been engaged, the engagement had fizzled, and instead of bemoaning her fate she was signing up as a Crew Girl. A neat form of revenge on the man who had spurned her, if he happened to think in old-fashioned puritanical terms.

"You understand the responsibilities of the job, of course. There are twenty-three men assigned to the *Donnybrook*. You'll be the only woman. It'll be an eight-month voyage, and you know what your job will be during those eight months. Our men are sensible and intelligent, but they'll be under a terrible strain during an

eight-month nullspace crossing. You'll be vital to the success of the trip. You understand all that?"

"Yes," she said in a half-whisper.

"Good. Now, you're not required to ship out with the same crew twice, unless you want to do so and they have no objections. In other words, when we get to our destination you can apply for a transfer to another ship or even request to leave the service. We don't hold girls prisoners. The pay is good, but the work's demanding. You'll have to be mother, wife, and mistress to twenty-three men for eight months. Are you still interested?"

"There's nothing I want more in the world," she said. "If you'll tell me I can have the job—"

"I'll let you know tomorrow, Miss Tyler. I'll have to consider the other applicants too."

Panic flickered over her face. "Doctor Harper, this is terribly important to me, getting this job."

"I'll do what I can," I promised. I gave her a paternal smile and ushered her out. By that time there were a dozen more girls waiting outside to be interviewed. I had them sent in one by one.

They came in all sizes and shapes and varieties. There was a vast rotund Nordic Earth-Mother type, and a hard anglebodied fortyish type. There was the usual quota of spaceport girls, tough and unlovely and professional,

looking for steady employ. There were a couple of space widows who wanted to bring their infants with them to Sirius. Sloppy ones, neat ones, thin ones, fat ones—fifty or sixty must have passed through my office that day.

But my mind kept going back to the first one, Eve Tyler. I had never seen a Crew Girl of that sort. She looked like the girl next door, everybody's sweetheart, a good cleancut kid. And she was too young, too pure-looking, I thought, to be slobbered over by twenty-three spacemen in rut—

Then I shook my head. I was looking at this in groundside terms, and that was all wrong. What mattered was that she was good for the crew. She was old enough to know what she was doing; I had no business fretting over her sweetness which was probably all in my imagination anyway. Space travel is a job for grownups. And this girl had charm, looks, appeal. Hell, I thought. She wants to go. And the crew will like her. What am I waiting for?

I called her that night and told her the job was hers. She practically kissed me by visiphone in her joy.

We blasted for Sirius three days later. It was a good clean blastoff. We rose from Venus on jets, popped through the cloud layer, switched to rockets while we

headed toward the first of our nullspace congruencies, and entered nullspace with ease.

It looked like it was going to be smooth sailing all the way. I couldn't have been more wrong.

We gave Eve the Crew Girl cabin near the galley, the only one with a double bed and a double-size porthole for romantic viewing of the splendors outside. She set to work fixing it up—it hadn't been occupied for three years—and later that first day invited the Captain and myself to come see.

She had it fixed up with chintz curtains and some green plants borrowed from the 'ponics section belowdecks, and it looked bright and colorful and cheery. I smiled at the Captain and he smiled at me. It looked as if Eve would turn out all right.

There was an unwritten convention aboard military ships that nobody requisitioned the Crew Girl for the first forty-eight hours of nullspace time. It was partly to uphold dignity, and partly because during the first forty-eight hours every man of the crew is fully occupied with the very delicate business of getting the voyage underway. The crew of a destroyer is a precisely-designed machine; there isn't a superfluous man aboard.

I traveled round the ship talking to the men, keeping eyes wide for signs of psychic tension. Ten-

sion is deadly on a spaceship. Null-space travel requires infinitely precise calculations and reactions, and if a man's guts are curdled by worry he might just make the tenth-of-a-second error that could bring us out of nullspace into the blazing heart of a sun.

That was why spaceships carried Psych Officers. And one of the most valuable—no, *the* most valuable—of the Psych Officer's tools for reducing shipboard tension was the Crew Girl. They talk a lot about the soothing touch of the female, and it's all true.

They didn't carry Crew Girls in the old days. Space travel was a masculine monopoly, especially in view of the 30% accident rate. But then the psychologists started doing some checking into tension on board spaceships, and found out that a good percentage of it resulted from sexual deprivation. A lot of men sealed in a tin can for eight months or a year, with no stops en route, could get awfully jumpy awfully fast.

There was the case of the *Vengeful*, in '79. They made a wrong transition on a Vega hop and came out near Procyon. Three years later the *Titan*, bound for Altair, didn't have such good luck; it took a wrong turn and came out of warp right inside the photosphere of Betelgeuse. After that tragedy, they started making Crew Girls mandatory.

Late on the second day, I saw

a couple of the men getting jumpy. I had an ample stock of tranquillizers in the stores, but the best tranquillizer I know is a woman's affection, so I suggested to them that they rearrange schedules and make the acquaintance of our new Crew Girl.

There were three of them—Cafuzzi, Leonards, and Marshall. We had some intricate three-way Alphonse-Gaston maneuvers, none of them caring to seem any more eager than the others, and finally I suggested a draw. Marshall won. He grinned, punched in his off-duty signal, and headed down the companionway toward the chintz-decorated Crew Girl cabin.

He came back about five minutes later, when I was still chivvying Leonards and Cafuzzi, trying to ease some of their early-hours nervousness. A tough congruency transition was coming up in an hour, and I knew they were worried.

"Here comes Marshall," Cafuzzi said suddenly.

"Yeah. Good old Minute-Man Marshall," Leonards said.

I turned. "That was pretty quick, Leo. You take the express?"

He grinned shamefacedly. "Sorry, gents, I didn't go near her. She said she didn't feel up to any partying right now. Said she had a touch of spacefever."

I should have felt a twinge of terror when he said that. But because I was unwilling to admit

to myself the possibility that we might be in serious trouble, and because I did not want to discover that I had made a fatal mistake of judgment, and particularly because I did not want to alarm the men, I simply said, "I guess I'd better have the Medic look at her. We don't want her getting sick, do we?"

Half an hour later I was in my cabin working over the crew psych-charts when the intercom buzzed. I switched it on. It was Tolbertson, ship's Medical Officer.

"Harp, I just had a look at that Crew Girl of yours. The one with spacefever."

"How is she? Better, I hope."

"Harper, she's got a totally new kind of spacefever. One without any symptoms whatever. The diagnostat comes up with an absolute blank. No fever, no abnormal cell count, no difficulties with vision, no nothing. There's a slight disturbance on the neural level, but we all have that from time to time. The machine says she's perfectly healthy. She says she's sick. Well?"

I stumbled over my words as I said, "Guess it's something brand new, eh, Bert? Maybe you need a new diagnostat."

"Maybe you need a new rationalization," Tolbertson said sharply. "That girl's faking. What she has is chronic malingering, and I don't have any medicine for

that. She's your baby, Harp. You better go see her."

He rang off. I called the galley and told Cookie to add a generous sprinkle of antistimulant to the food until further notice. He grinned at me and said, "Until Eve's feeling better, huh, Doc?"

"Yeah," I said tonelessly. "Until Eve's feeling better."

I switched off the visiphone and stared at myself for a moment in my cabin mirror. My face never looked pretty, but now it scared me. It looked grey and soggy. And frightened. I contemplated taking one of my own pills, but decided against it. I went forward to visit Eve.

She was lying off to one side of that big double bed when I entered; she hadn't bothered to get up, simply said "Come in" and waited. I switched on the light. She rolled over and looked at me. It didn't take Psych Officer's training to see that she'd been crying. Crew Girls aren't supposed to cry. Crew Girls are supposed to be happy playmates twenty-four hours per shipboard day. I was worrying.

I donned my Kindly-Old-Doc-Harper personality and said, "What's wrong, Eve? Dr. Tolbertson just called me and said—"

"—and said that there was nothing wrong with me and that I had damned well better come to life. Is that it?"

I fumed inwardly. Tolbertson

had never been known for his tact. "He did tell me you weren't suffering from any organic ailment. But you told Leo Marshall you didn't feel well."

"I don't."

"Can you tell me what the trouble is? You're very important to the ship, you know. Men under strain make mistakes, and when you have a hundred and fifty null-space transitions to make in a single trip you don't dare make mistakes as much as once. And you're the only member of the crew whose job can't be done by someone else."

She turned away from me. I heard something like a sob.

I put my hand on her shoulder and pulled her to a half-sitting position. She looked at me gravely—like a little girl, I thought, a little girl!—and said, "It was just the change in environment, Doctor. I'm starting to feel better. Just give me a day or two more, will you please? The men can wait *that* long, can't they?"

She smiled imploringly at me. I began to sweat. "Okay," I said. "It takes time to get adjusted. We'll let a couple of days go by. Try not to get the men stirred up until you're ready to follow through, though."

I looked down at her. She seemed terribly young and alone, and now I couldn't picture her in the role of Crew Girl at all. Sipping sodas in an Earthside

drugstore, maybe, but nothing more than that. Somehow she had hoodooed me into giving her a job she was hardly more qualified for than I was. I suspected I had made a whopper of a mistake and as I had told Eve, in this business there's no second chance.

Two days went by. Eve mingled with the crew, ate with them—the food was doctored, of course, but that could only be a temporary expedient—and joked with them. Those two days were hell. She became everybody's sweetheart; there wasn't a man on board, Captain Bannister and self included, who didn't love her wholeheartedly.

That was the worst part of it. We were accustomed to Crew Girls who were just highgrade sluts, or sometimes lowgrade ones. This trip we had a gem—but she was untouchable. At least, for those two days. I promised the men it was only temporary, that in another two days she'd be doing her job like any other Crew Girl. It was a picked crew, sensitive, understanding. They didn't grumble too much, and the stuff in the food helped. I handed out a record number of chlorpromazine derivatives in those two days, and somehow we survived the nullspace transition.

It was four days till the next one.

We were beyond the orbit of

Pluto, crossing the vast nothingness between us and Sirius. Nullspace travel involves a series of consecutive jumps through congruities, gateways in and out of nullspace. The whereabouts of these congruities have been very well plotted. There were a hundred fifty of them between Venus and our rendezvous-point, the moon of Sirius IX, and guiding the ship through each opening was a job of cosmic needle-threading that no computer in existence could handle alone.

There had to be men to help. Frail, mortal human beings. But they had to have their minds fully and totally on their work, to succeed. They couldn't be brooding about the blonde in Mrs. Rafterty's at Venusport—she was back in the other direction. There had to be an accessible woman on board; that was a fact of life, and there was no disputing its validity.

When Eve's two days of grace were up, I told Second Computer-man Stetson to pay her a visit. Stetson was the most randy member of the crew at that moment, and I figured Eve had had time enough to adjust.

I chewed my nails and paced my cabin and finally resorted to a chlorpromazine tablet while waiting for Stetson to report back to me. I hoped Eve had come across.

But he looked perplexed and overstrung as he came into the cabin. "Well?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I went to bed with her. We cozied up and kissed and hugged. But she wouldn't—she wouldn't let me—Christ, Doc, what kind of Crew Girl did you get us this trip?"

I gave him something to calm him down and told him to take an hour off duty. I sat staring at the ragged edges of my fingernails a while, doodling erotic symbols on my desk blotter and wondering what I did next.

The situation got more critical while I sat there. I got a call from the astrogation deck. It was Chief Astrogator Hammell, and he was angry.

"Harper, what's with this Crew Girl?"

"What do you mean?" I asked innocently.

"You know damn well what I mean. Look, we were plotting the next transition, and I spotted McKenzie getting edgy. So I sent him off-duty and told him to pay Eve a visit. While he was gone I checked his work, and it was cock-eyed by two whole course-minutes. The computer would have kicked it back for correction, of course, and this time it wouldn't have hurt us, but that's not the point. And now Mac comes back here with the news that Eve still isn't in the mood. Dammit, Harper, how can we get to Sirius with a coy Crew Girl?"

We couldn't. I said so, in a tension-jagged voice. Then I said,

"I was just about to notify Captain Bannister. The matter will have to be gone over by a Council of Five."

A Council of Five was called only in time of emergency, to settle important ship problems. It consisted of the Captain, the Psych Officer, the Medical Officer, the Chief Astrogator, and a representative of the crew—in this case, Mike Leonards. We met in Bannister's cabin, the five of us sitting in a semi-circle facing a pale, harried-looking Eve Tyler.

"Let me get this absolutely clear, Eve," Bannister said. He spoke in a level, controlled voice, and I admired him for it. I knew he felt like shoving both Eve and me through the fuel hatch. "You say you came aboard this ship with no intention whatever of performing the duties of a Crew Girl?"

"Not—all the duties, sir," she said in a barely audible voice.

"In other words, you practiced deliberate misrepresentation. Why?"

She stared at her feet. I felt pity for her, even then. She said, "My—fiance is stationed in the Sirian sector. He may not return to the Solar System for years. Or he may never come back. I—wanted to go to him."

"And so you committed this fraud?" Bannister demanded.

"Civilians aren't allowed into the war zone, sir," she said faint-

ly. "This was the only way I could get to him. I knew it was wrong, and I'm sorry—"

"Sorry!" Medic Tolbertson burst out. "Virtually condemning us all to death by depriving us of a Crew Girl's services, and she's sorry!"

"Please, Bert," Bannister said. He glared at me for a moment, and I tried to hide in my chair. He said, "Do you understand the importance of the Crew Girl in a ship's complement, Eve? It isn't just to satisfy lust, to use the obsolete term. It's simply that most of us are slaves to our biological constitution. We're built to seek relief; and while there isn't one of us who couldn't go without a woman for eight months—or eight years—and manage, the deprivation would have other effects. Daydreaming. Loss of concentration. Development of intracrew friction. Any one of these is fatal in nullspace travel."

"I hadn't considered that, sir," the miserable girl said.

"Obviously not. Well, we're too far out from Venus to turn back, but not so far out that we can't manage anyway with you. If you'll take cognizance of your responsibilities and start doing your job as of now, we'll forget this whole session. Fair enough?"

She shook her head numbly. "Captain, I should tell you—I—I've never been with a man before. I wanted my fiance to—to —"

She stopped. Bannister went paper-white and turned a look of wrath on me such as I had never yet seen from mortal man. I would voluntarily have stepped outside without a suit at that moment. For a veteran and supposedly competent Psych Officer to hire, of all things, a *virgin* Crew Girl—!

Bannister said to me icily, "There are certain physiological requirements, Harper, which a Crew Girl must have. Regulations provide that she have documentary proof of these qualifications. Well?"

"She showed me medical papers," I said helplessly. "Sworn affidavits. I can't understand how—I don't—I—"

I looked at Eve. Quietly she said, "They were fakes. I gave a passport-forgery a hundred fifty pay-units to do the job, certificates and all."

"Very well, Eve," Bannister said in a strangled voice. "You'd better return to your quarters and stay there."

She left without looking back. The Captain broke the flinty silence that followed by saying, "Harper, we'll overlook the matter of your idiocy in hiring this girl, because roasting you won't solve our immediate problem. I'm open for gems of wisdom from any of you."

"As I see it," Tolbertson said, "It isn't a matter for debate. With

all due respect for the girl's emotions and inhibitions, either we put her into use at once—forcibly, if necessary—or else shove her through the fuel hatch and hope to get to Sirius alive."

"Is it that black and white?" Hammell asked. "Couldn't we try to manage, and let the girl live?"

Tolbertson shook his head. "If she stayed among us and still refused herself, the situation would become explosive in no time. No woman at all is better than one who's here and who doesn't help out."

I looked at Bannister. The captain was, I knew, a deeply humane man. He would find it nearly impossible to order the girl available for what amounted to regular rape for the next eight months; and that almost certainly would not solve our problem anyway. And it would hardly be easy to order her death.

Finally Bannister said heavily, "I'm afraid Tolbertson's right. The girl's more of a menace on board in her present frame of mind than if we had no Crew Girl at all. I'll issue an order for her disposal."

"No! Wait!" Guilt had been surging through me, and I had been searching frantically for some way out.

I tried to smile. "I'll admit I was bamboozled by a pretty face, and signed her on without intensive psych-examination. It's the second time in my life I made the

mistake of believing what a woman said to me, and the other time—" I frowned—"was a quarter of a century ago, on Earth. Enough apology, though. There's a way we can use Eve as our Crew Girl, and without scarring her personality for the rest of her life."

Bannister's eyes narrowed. "How?"

"There's a drug," I said. "Tolbertson knows about it. I won't trouble you with its name, which is a yard long, but I do have some of it in my stores. It's an acetophenone-based compound with soporific qualities. It performs a neat, temporary, and non-habituating short-circuiting of the reasoning centers."

Tolbertson said, "Of course! It's unpleasant, but—"

I went on: "We could dose Eve with that. And keep her dosed for the next eight months, during which time she'd function as nothing more or less than an ambulatory sex machine. At journey's end we pull her off the stuff, give her the post-hypnotic suggestion that she spent the trip in utmost purity, and turn her over to her boyfriend. Neither of them will be any the wiser for it, nobody gets hurt, and we'll have a Crew Girl."

Leonards said, "It's a lousy thing to do. She'd be as helpless as—a baby. We'd have to spoon-feed her. Somebody would have to dress her every day."

I shrugged. "The idea's repugnant to me. But so is dying—and I'm still a competent enough Psych Officer to tell you that there's a case of rampant jitters all over this ship. I wouldn't want to quote odds on our surviving another hundred and thirty-odd transitions, the way things are going."

It went round and round the five of us for twenty minutes. Nobody liked the idea especially, but nobody had any alternatives. Bannister put it to a vote, and the count was five in favor, none opposed.

It was my job to give Eve the drug. I entered her quarters without knocking. Unsurprisingly, she had gone into convulsive hysterics and lay curled in a tight whimpering ball on the big bed.

I sat next to her, stroking her hair and soothing her as if she were a daughter of mine and not—my God!—a spaceship's Crew Girl. Then I said, "Everything's going to be okay, Eve. Nobody will touch you. Here—I brought something to calm you. Take it."

She sat up and looked at me trustingly, and I hated myself. I gave her the capsule and a glass of water and she gulped it down. I talked to her quietly for twenty minutes, and watched coldly and emotionlessly as the personality that had been Eve Tyler drained from her face. Her eyes became blank, her lips drooped in a child-

ish smile, and every sign of intelligence vanished from her.

Then I sat in the half-darkness staring at her for perhaps five minutes, saying nothing, simply looking at the pretty empty hulk that had been the girl.

It's for the common good, I told myself. A matter of survival. Stark necessity. But I did not convince myself. I rose, finally, and went outside. Bannister was waiting there for me.

"Well?" the Captain asked.

I nodded silently and headed to my cabin. I called Stetson, and told him to go to the Crew Girl's compartment for recreational purposes. By this time Bannister had informed the crew of the way things stood vis-a-vis Eve; they knew she'd been turned into a receptive zombie who would not refuse them anything.

Later, Stetson returned. "It was damn strange, Doc," he said. "Like making love to a ghost, I'd say. But she's a warm enough ghost, I'll say that for her."

And so it went. The *Donnybrook* streaked toward Sirius through the dark night of null-space, and we passed transition-point after transition-point with no mishaps. Tension was reduced to a minimum aboard the ship.

The men grew used to the way Eve was, and soon found no inhibitions in themselves against visiting her. There wasn't a man aboard ship who didn't make use

of her, the Captain and myself included. Some often, some not so often, depending on the man's own particular rhythm of existence. But she was always there, always willing.

We took care of her, dressed her, fed her; after a while she learned to do some of the simpler things herself. I would often find her at the viewplate in her room, staring out uncomprehendingly at the vastness.

My own guilt-feelings dwindled. Inexorable motivations had forced us to do what we did, and in any event she had committed a grave offense by signing on under false colors. Everything about the situation seemed heading for a neat resolution: we would reach Sirius alive, and she would never know the part she had played in the voyage. Purity, I told myself as a Psych Officer and a scientist, was a matter of the mind, not of physical behavior—and so far as Eve Tyler and her fiancé knew, she had kept herself pure for him.

The months passed. Landing-time drew near. We passed through the final transition-point, emerging into space near the radiant splendor of Sirius, and made our way tortuously through the battle zone to the Terran outpost on the moon of Sirius IX, where we would be assigned to immediate combat duty.

Landing-day arrived. The bleak face of the big moon hovered op-

pressively in our viewports. We could see the Terran fortifications below, heavily armed.

I woke Eve.

She groped her way to consciousness as I neutralized the drug that had veiled her mind for so long. She looked about uncertainly. Her eyes showed life again, not mere mindless existing.

"Hello, Eve," I said. "We're almost ready to land."

"So—soon?" They were her first words in nearly eight months. "We've only been travelling a few days."

"It just seems that way. The whole eight months is up, Eve. We'll be landing in a couple of hours."

She smiled. "I've been having the strangest dream, you know?" A blush crept over her face. "I couldn't tell you about it, though. I wouldn't *dare*!"

I took advantage of her drowsiness to send her into the hypnotic state, and dictated to her subconscious an account of the voyage, from beginning to end, on a ship which had through superhuman effort done without the services of a Crew Girl. Then I woke her again, chatted with her a while, and left.

It had been the best of a bad deal, I thought. I had myself convinced that everything would work out for the best for Eve. "Nobody gets hurt," I'd told Captain Bannister, and it looked as

though I'd been right. Nonetheless, it had been a strange trip for all of us, Eve and her twenty-three Adams, and only Eve of all of us would ever forget it.

We made a good landing. We discovered that the war was going well, that the Sirians were now on the defensive, that with a few more Terran ships on the way we'd soon have them on the run.

Captain Bannister turned Eve over to the groundside authorities that first day, explaining that she had not found Crew Girl duties much to her liking, and requesting that a position be found for her on the base staff.

We were still in the main administrative building, getting briefed on the situation, when I got a call. Irrationally, I hoped it might be my son Dan; he was somewhere in the war zone, and the probability was good that he'd be at this very outpost.

My irrational hunch turned out to be right. The face in the screen belonged to Captain Dan Harper of the Seventh Space Fleet.

"Dad? I hear you just got here on the *Donnybrook*. Welcome to the scene of hostilities."

I fumbled for things to say to him. We were practically strangers. I hadn't seen him in over two years, not since his assignment to the Sirian sector, and had had only a couple of sketchy letters from him. I said lamely,

"How's everything been, son? I guess they keep you busy out here."

"I get all the combat I'd ever want." He chuckled, and a warm smile spread over his face. "Dad, you don't know it, but I owe you some thanks."

"For what?"

"Well, from what Eve says, I figure you never got my last letter, so you don't realize I'm just before getting married—and that you made it possible."

"From what *Eve* says? How could you know Eve yet? We just got here! And who are you marrying?"

Dan's grin got even bigger. "I know Eve already because I knew her two years ago. And it's a good thing I know her pretty well, because she's the girl I'm marrying!"

"Eve! Our Crew Girl?" I could have bitten my tongue in small chunks for saying that—but it didn't matter.

Because Dan roared with laugh-

ter. "Eve—" he said finally, when he got hold of himself— "Eve told me about how she'd fooled you. Matter of fact, she feels a little bad about it. But I told her since nobody got hurt, since the *Donnybrook* got here okay—and *she* got here—she ought to forget it. And when you come stand up for me in the main chapel tonight, you tell her the same. She'll believe you. . . ."

"You're right, Dan," I said slowly. "She'll believe me . . . and nobody got hurt. . . ."

Nobody got hurt, I said to myself after I'd clicked off. *Purity is solely in the mind, and I am a man of science and know this to be a fact. I will remember this, and at the wedding tonight I will greet Eve with the love and respect I would have for my own daughter. . . .*

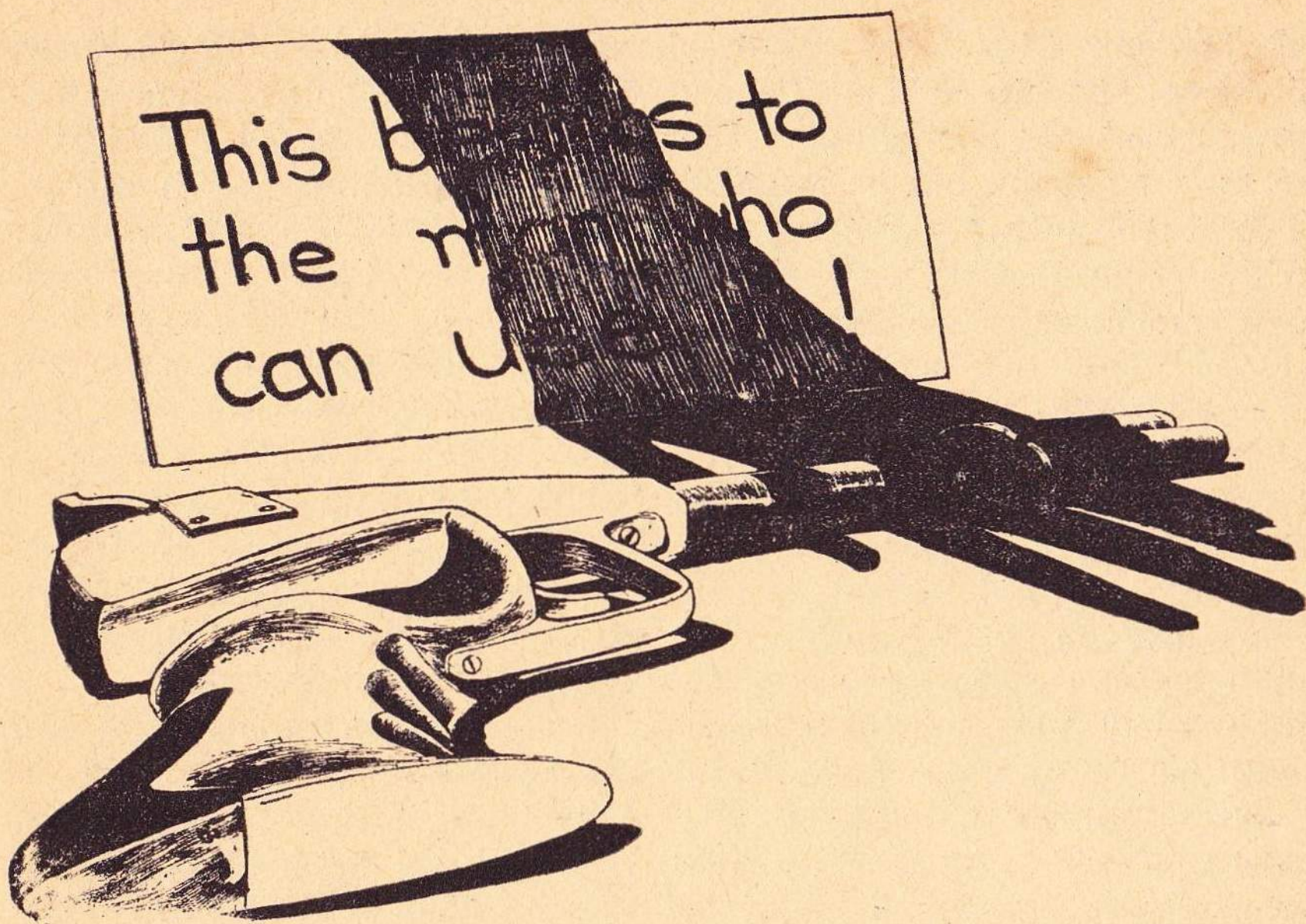
They tell me that I did. I don't remember it though, because at the time I was blind drunk.

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THERE AIN'T NO OTHER ROADS

by ROBERT MARNER

This gun in the store window was the most beautiful handgun I'd ever seen. When my friend pulled the trigger, nothing happened, but the storekeeper made him keep it anyway.

"When the time comes to use it," he said, "you will know how."

WHEN I WAS GROWN SOME, I left my uncle's place and got a ride working on a sailfish cruiser up to Key West. My folks were in New York. They were going to send my uncle money to get me up there. Maybe they did. I never saw it. Anyway, I bummed rides

up U. S. 1 for a while. But it was mostly walking, and one day I took a wrong turn.

It was a hot day—terribly hot, with dust in the air to cake the sweat burns around my eyes—and I lay there on the gravel bank beside the road, looking up at the

blazing sun with blood all over my jaw. The biggest one of these three farm boys was getting ready to kick me again, but he stopped. The three of them—the big one with the green-edged teeth and the two smaller ratty looking ones—stopped and just stood looking over my head.

I rolled over about halfway and twisted my head back as much as I could. All I could see was a pair of dusty old boots and two thin ankles in khaki pants, up on the edge of the ditch. "Get away from him," a voice with a rusty edge said, and these three farm boys nodded, once, together, pale as hell, and scrambled up the other side of the ditch and into the corn stubble in that field. They loped across it. Then they were gone and I never saw or heard of them again.

The thin legs came down the bank beside me. The man touched me in the ribs with a finger of his left hand.

"Don't do that," I told him.

"Try coughing," he said, and I looked at his face. There wasn't anything special about it; just thin, and maybe forty or fifty or thirty years old, with creases all around his eyes. This man was just exactly like what you could see in front of any feed store in that country—lanky, no hips, hollow chested, used up. He had an old denim work shirt on that was almost white and soft as muslin

where it hadn't been patched new, and he had an old cotton wind-breaker folded up under his arm.

I coughed and spit it out on the clay. He looked at it and said: "What's that blood all over your chin?"

"I had my mouth open the first time they hit me. My teeth cut me up inside a little."

"Damn fool thing to do."

"I was just asking directions. How was I supposed to know they'd hit me for being a stranger?"

"I guess you forgot where you are, kid."

"I guess I did." I got up on my feet and brushed myself off slowly. "You from around here?" I was wondering if I'd have to fight him, too.

"Just passing through," he said. "Going north," he added, "for now." He squatted down on the gravel and parted his stringy blond hair with his hands. There was a deep gash in his skull—the skin was caked with blood and pulled back from the edges of the wound a little—and I could see a dull metal surface with a brightly scratched sharp dent in it. "How's that look, kid?"

"Not so good," I said. "But it's not bleeding, and it doesn't look like the plate got broken through. Just dented to hell. You get that in the war? What hit you this time?"

"Cleaver, I think. Little more,

and he would have got me, whoever he was. Had it a week, now—I guess it's been as bad as it's going to."

"Looks like the skin's healing," I agreed.

"Yeah. I been looking at it in rain barrels and ponds, best's I could, and feeling it. Looks like it's going to heal over. But that goddam plate's pushed up against my brains, or something—it don't hurt, but I can't remember nothing. Came to walking down some road. Been walking ever since. Been looking around some, learning about how it is here and how the people are, but it's only been a week."

"Jesus," I said. "What're you going to do?"

"Get into a hospital. But I only got ten bucks. Got to find a job and make some dough, first."

"Well," I said, "you're not going to get any job in *this* state. Not without being born and raised in it and everybody knowing your Uncle Thad and your Grandmother Miss Lucy and your Cousin Hallie, and their kin, and *their* kin, going back right to Oglethorpe and maybe even farther—maybe all the way back to Newgate and Tyburn."

"You learned that good, huh, kid?"

"Maybe both of us did. If you've got ten bucks left, whoever hit you probably did it out of simple ignorant cussedness."

"Could be. It's as good a idea as any. Anyhow, I'm headed north. See if I can pick up a job there."

"I'm going the same way. Same reason. Figure to hit New York bye and bye, see my folks. Maybe we ought to stick together."

"Seemed like a good idea to me." He straightened up, and stuck out his hand. "Can't give you my name. Don't know it. What's yours?"

"Ernesto Garcia," I told him, and we shook hands. We climbed out of the ditch and walked on up the road, coming to a sign that said we were near a town, and after a while we hit the main street.

It wasn't a bad looking little town, for a place with nothing but farms all around it. And not just slum shops in it, either. We were standing stopped on the sidewalk, and I was looking through the window of a record store at the jacket on the Angel L.P. of Verdi's *Requiem Mass*, when the street cop came over and told us to move along. My friend and I turned around and looked at him.

He was a pretty hefty cop. He was running soft around the middle, with a little tired bag of flesh under each eye. But he was big enough, and a town this size was just the right size—not too small, not too big—to have mean cops. Hardnosed mean.

"Ain't doin' nothin'," my friend said.

"No, and you ain't gonna, either. Get out of town. Get out on the highway. Keep hitchin'."

"It's noontime," my friend said. "We're hungry. We was gonna stop and eat."

I shuffled my feet a little to set them flat, and loosened up my shoulders. It seemed to me I could punch the cop in the throat quick enough to keep him from blowing his whistle or yelling, and hard enough to keep him from dragging out his gun. Long enough for us to reach a back alley, or something.

But the cop was frowning and giving a little ground. "There's a diner on the edge of town. You eat there. Eat quick."

"Now, look," my friend said very quietly, "I been in more diners than you have saloons. I got grease in my blood from diners. We're gonna find us a nice place to eat, we're gonna eat, I'm gonna have a dime cigar and the kid here is gonna have whatever he wants, and *then* we're gonna move on. O.K.?"

The cop fiddled with his ear, and his eyes moved back and forth. "O.K.," he mumbled. He went back to his intersection, mumbling and cursing to himself. But when I got a look at my friend's face there wasn't anything about it, again, that would scare a man.

"What's the matter, kid?" my friend asked me.

"That cop bothered me." He had. One look at him and you knew he was making a little off every racket in town. You could almost see the green shine on his hands that got there by laying off all kinds of characters doing all kinds of things, just because they could afford to pay him. So when two people hit town from the road, he had to take it out on us to balance up his record and make it up to himself for what he knew he was.

My friend looked over at the cop, who twitched his eyes away, and he shrugged. "Him? Don't let him bother you, kid. His kind don't count."

"He counts. He's got a club in his hand and a gun on his hip."

My friend shook his head. "No," he said. "He don't count for nothin'."

We found a lunchroom and had a couple of small steaks with hash browns and June peas. My friend finished his ten cent cigar after lunch and stubbed it out. I put down the Camel I had from the pack he bought me, and we got up. I suppose I should have been excited about not having to sit someplace special, or about being allowed in the place at all. But I wasn't used to having it any other way, so I didn't think much of it. Now, of course, when I look

back . . . But at the time, I never thought. I'd never seen anything special about my friend, either, even though I knew other people could.

We went up to the cash register desk beside the door, and my friend paid the check. He got his change from a pale girl with red hair.

"You're new in town, aren't you?" she said.

"That's right, Miss," he said. "Just passing through."

"You look as if you'd been a lot of places."

"Might have, Miss. I don't remember."

"Gee," she said, "I've never been anywhere."

He looked around and out through the window. "I think the important things'd be the same, no matter where you went. All the same." He put his change in his pocket and nodded his head. "'Bye, Miss."

"'Bye."

She'd been pretty good with this habit they have—never letting her eyes really reach me at all.

There were two highways crossing in the heart of town. We'd come in on the state, but the federal was a better bet for rides. We walked around the corner from the restaurant and moved along the street. About four doors down, there was a little hockshop. There

wasn't much of anything in the window, except a scrap of velvet with a gun lying on it.

The gun was worn blue steel, with a round barrel, a receiver without any extractor slide, hooded sights, and a carved mahogany butt molded to fit the thumb and fingers. It was the most beautiful handgun I've ever seen. It didn't have a cylinder or any space for a clip in the butt. There was this card propped up beside it:

THIS BELONGS TO THE MAN
WHO CAN USE IT

The butt was carved to fit a left hand, and my friend was left-handed. After a minute we looked at each other and went into the shop.

It had a few more hockshop things in it than there were in the windows: old, peeling guitars, a rack of suits, some trunks and suitcases. I wondered how much business it did.

Nobody came out through the little door from the back room. My friend rapped his knuckles on the glass counter. "Hey?" he said. Then a man came out. He was bulky but light on his feet, and he was old. He had a head full of bushy white hair, and creases running around his neck.

"Yes?" he said. "My name is Mr. Bayer."

"About that handgun," my friend said. I just stood off in a corner.

"Are you interested in buying it, young man? It's not for sale. I'm only holding it."

"I gathered that," my friend said. "I was curious about the circumstances."

He raised an eyebrow. "They're scarcely important."

"See here," my friend said, "I was asking a civil question. I've a right to a civil answer."

"Perhaps you do," the old man mused. "Perhaps you do. Let us see." He went over to the window and took the pistol out. He held it in his right hand for a moment and then passed it to my friend. It fit my friend's hand perfectly when he closed his fingers over it.

"Yes . . ." the old man murmured, nodding, "perhaps you do. Point it at the floor and try the trigger pull."

My friend tried it, and nothing happened. His finger slid the trigger back smoothly. There was no click, no snap from a firing pin, nothing.

"It's yours," the old man said to him.

"It don't work."

"You were able to pull the trigger. It's yours."

"What about that card in the window?"

"You're the man."

"Just like that. We happen to hit this town, we happen to go by this shop, I happen to see the gun, and I'm the man."

"That's correct." The old man

nodded. "As sure as my name is Bayer."

"Bushwah, Buddy," my friend said. "I ain't fallin' for no con game. How many of these you sell a week?"

The old man said calmly: "You see here. The weapon is yours. I receive no price for it because it is not mine to sell. It's yours to hold, now. When you need it—and that time may come soon or late, but it will come at least once in your life—then use it. And safeguard it. It is not yours to sell, either."

"When the time comes to use it, you will know how. Remember just one thing." He held up his left hand. It was twisted into an arthritic lump. "When you cannot hold the weapon any longer, then you must be ready for the next man's coming." He crossed over and yanked down a roller shade on the front door glass. He turned off the shop lights from a switch at the door, and pushed a key into the lock. He held the door open for us. "Good day."

"Good day, sir," I mumbled as we went out. My friend stuck the gun into his waistband, put his windbreaker on over it, and didn't say anything.

We were walking along the federal highway with our thumbs out when the '38 Plymouth coupe pulled up. The radiator was boiling, one of the headlights was

broken open and full of sticks from a bird's nest, and there was white cord showing on all four tires. It had a water pump and generator squeak, a leaky head gasket, and at least two dead plugs. It had an A ration card sticker on the heat-bubbled windshield, and the body was all dead paint where it wasn't rust. The pale redheaded girl from the restaurant was driving it.

"Hello." She'd been chewing her mouth. There was lipstick all over her chin. "Ride?"

"Howdy, Miss," my friend said. "Thank you."

The passenger side door had sprung hinges, and I had to heave on it to get it open. There was an Indian blanket thrown over the front seat. The upholstery was full of the smell of a river.

"He can ride in the back," the girl said to my friend. I crawled into the little jump seat they have on those coupes, and my friend got in front next to the girl, and pulled the door closed.

She put both hands on the shift and pulled it into first. The coupe bucked forward when she came off the clutch, and she grabbed for the steering wheel. She kept one hand on the wheel and one on the shift, both forearms tense, and the Plymouth picked up speed. She used her knee to help her into second, and hooked her ankle around the stick to pull it into third. My friend opened the

glove compartment, found a cellophane package of dime cigars without being surprised, and lit one.

"I saw you come out of Mr. Bayer's shop, didn't I?" she asked him. "The gun's gone from his window. I don't suppose you know about the gun?"

"Uh," he said.

"Everybody in town's been puzzled about it. Just passing through, the way you were, I don't suppose you'd know about that?"

"No, I didn't, Miss."

"Now it's gone and he's closed up his shop. Being in there, I don't suppose you noticed who he gave it to?"

"Mm."

"It was a very funny-looking gun," she said, nibbling her lip. "Nobody could decide what it was good for."

"Be tough, all right. You use this car much, Miss?"

"E—every day."

"Going back and forth to work."

"Y—yes."

"And you always quit work in this restaurant noontime."

"Yes—uh . . . yes."

"This is getting tougher and tougher for you, isn't it, Miss?"

She sobbed and broke down. "I—I can't help it. Nobody ever expected I'd be the one who'd have to pick you up . . . there are men in town . . . b—but there wasn't time . . . oh, this is all gone wrong!"

"There, now," he said, patting her shoulder. "Thanks for the cigars, anyhow."

She rubbed at the freckles around her eyes and yanked her skirt down.

My friend took the gun out of his waistband and fiddled with it as if he was trying to see what the gun might be used for. He stopped when he saw she couldn't take her eyes off it. I was glad of that. She was a bad enough driver as it was.

"You're not getting out?" she said at last.

"Nnn," he said, leaned back, and closed his eyes. He put his elbow on the armrest and his hand under his ear.

We drove along for a while. She kept looking at him out of the corner of her eye, and catching her breath to say something, and slowing down and speeding up. When we came to a dirt turn-off going up a hill to a stone house, she almost didn't take it. But at the last moment she stopped wavering, dragged the wheel around, and lurched us up the slope.

My friend was playing it awfully cool. I hoped he knew a little bit more about what we were getting into than I did. I knew nothing, and I was worried. He'd been smart so far, just letting people talk to him and not giving them anything back. But that kind of thing can only carry you so far,

and it can dump you in some hot places.

The turn-off was a long, winding thing with a steep grade. The Plymouth chugged up it with a burning smell from the clutch. The ride threw us both around a lot. The gun slipped out of my friend's belt. When we finally stopped in front of the house, my friend had to lift up the seat cushion and fish it out from where it had fallen into the battery well. The girl stared at it like a bird watching a snake. My friend winked at her and spun it around his index finger by the trigger guard once before he tucked the gun out of sight again.

The house was an old ruin without a roof. The heavy stone walls stood as though they'd been there and would be there a long time, but there wasn't a stick of timber anywhere—no window frames, no doors, no porch. There was a heap of stones in front of the doorway and, though it looked like happenstance, there was always a foothold where you would need it to climb inside. The girl went first, still biting her lip, and I followed after my friend. He turned his head once, gave me a shrug and a grin, and I felt a little better.

There were a few walls left standing inside the house. A beat-up old wooden handcrank telephone hung from one of them by a single loose bolt, trailing old-fash-

ioned thread-wrapped wiring that disappeared under the rubble that filled the cellar up to the level of a living room floor. There was rain-soaked, mildewed furniture set up on the rubble; an overstuffed chair, a davenport, a cupboard, and four kitchen chairs. There was a rusty stove leaning against one of the stone walls.

There was a man talking on the telephone, and another one making coffee on the stove. There were two men on the davenport, and one on each of the kitchen chairs. There was a big, heavy-chested man with thick black eyebrows and no head hair sitting in the overstuffed chair. His eyes lighted up when he saw my friend. He looked my way, and dismissed me from his mind. It was my friend that interested him.

"So you fell for it," he said to my friend, ignoring the redheaded girl. "You let a hash house cashier pick you up. 'Gee, Mister,'" he mimicked with a twist of his pale mouth. "'Gee, it must be *fascinating*, seeing *all* those places! And I know a *very* nice place we could see first . . . it's right here on the edge of town and *nobody* ever goes there . . . That the way it was, chump?"

"Nnh," my friend said.

"Sam—Sam!" the redheaded girl said nervously.

"I'm through with your part, Cookie," Sam said. "Shut up and

go help Jerry with the coffee. It's lunch time." He didn't take his eyes off my friend.

"Sam . . ."

He said to her, with heavy patience: "Go—help—Jerry."

She gave him a pale, terrified look and picked her way over the rubble to the stove.

"What about the local?" one of the men behind me said.

Sam looked at me again. "What does anybody have to do about one of the locals?"

So they let me be. My friend squatted down on his heels and looked at Sam.

Sam said to him: "We've been waiting for you a long time. Know that?"

"Why?"

Sam smirked. "Don't ask foolish questions. Don't stall around. If you'd gotten to the gun, you could have killed us all. But you didn't. So now it's the other way around. Face it like one of us should, instead of trying to play games."

"Sam!" the redheaded girl cried from the stove.

"Shut her up, Jerry," Sam said without looking over. I heard the crack of Jerry's hand. Sam licked his lips. He said to my friend:

"You know how long we've been in this town, Chump, waiting for you to come for Bayer's gun?"

My friend squinted at him. "You don't belong here."

That set off a fuse in Sam. "Who says?" he roared. "The locals we push around and get to do anything we want? What have *they* got to say about it? Seventy years apiece and they're dead. Make 'em try and think past their own time and they botch it like the chimpanzees they are. They can't out-live us, out-think us, or kill us. All they can do is let us push 'em around, and they're so dumb they don't even know it! Who," he bellowed, "who *says* we don't belong here! We *own* this territory. One of these days, we're going to own this whole planet; who do you think's going to stop us?"

"That easy, huh?"

"You—" his whole face twisted, and he finished his sentence as if he was hawking up the word—"Cop."

"That what I am?"

"Roving Enforcement Patrol," Sam said. "Galactic Justice. It might take a hundred years, but you'd come along. We knew that. Everybody knows it. It drives them nuts." He grinned at my friend with spit on his lips. "But we figured out your beat. We knew Bayer had a bum hand. We knew somebody'd come along to take the gun over. So now we've got you, without a gun, and when we get rid of you we'll have a hundred years before the next cop comes along—and we'll get *him*, too. As long as we know where the gun is.

Even unarmed, you're still too fast for just a few men. But once we get one of you in a corner like this, you're dead. And you know it. Sweat, cop—I like to see a cop sweat."

My friend looked around at the stone walls and the men between us and any way out. "The gun's in town, huh?" he said. "Why didn't you just take it?"

"A little hazy in the head, are you? If anybody but a cop pulls a cop's gun, it kills him."

Another car came twisting up the drive. I could hear it, but I wasn't going to take my eyes off Sam.

Sam looked at the man who'd been on the phone. "Is that Charlie?"

"Yeah. He said he'd be right over."

Sam said to my friend: "Charlie's in charge of the town back up the road. We figure he's entitled to see a cop die."

I heard him come up the pile of rocks outside the doorway, and then he stepped in. He was a weedy man with lank hair and thick lips, and he was wearing overalls. When he saw my friend his mouth opened out into an O, and his eyes went wide. "I'll be damned!" he said. "That's a fellow I had working on my farm. Just regular help—you know. Front. Had a piece of timber fall on him, buildin' a barn, and got knocked out. I sent him off to the

hospital, and he disappeared from it. I'll be damned."

"No kidding," Sam said, intrigued. "What name'd he give you?"

"Bayer."

And the girl yelled: "Sam, he's got the gun!"

And every man in that place pulled out a cleaver or a hatchet and started for my friend.

It would have worked fine, except that my friend went for the men along the walls first. He was up on his feet before Charlie ever really started to say 'Bayer.' By the time Charlie had the second syllable out, my friend had the hatchets and cleavers lying in a pile between Sam and himself. When the girl yelled about the gun, the gun was already in the air, where he'd tossed it. My friend was fast, all right. Sam looked down, and the gun was lying in his lap.

The men along the walls looked at their bleeding hands. Sam kept looking at the gun. Charlie began to mumble prayers. And the girl and that fellow Jerry just stood there with hot coffee on their clothes.

"See, kid," my friend turned to me, "I was supposed to try and shoot them. And while I was pulling the trigger like some damned moron, they were going to close in all together and swing at me all at once. Figurin' they'd get some

good licks in before I let up on the gun, it being nothing but a fake."

He looked at Sam. "Might of worked. They might of got an arm or a leg off me—slowed me down enough to chop my head loose." He nodded. "Yeah. Might of worked. The rest of it was pretty good, too. *And . . .* the young lady's a fine actress."

"She won the Five Suns award two years ago," Sam said in a slow voice. He tossed the gun on the pile of cleavers. "I choose my entire group very carefully. And you say my plan was good."

"It wasn't bad thinking, Sam," my friend said. "But you spent too much time tellin' me what I was. You filled me in on my being a cop; you told me all about the gun. What for? I was supposed to know all that, wasn't I?"

"How could you? With amnesia?"

"Yeah," my friend said. "But the story was you didn't know that, remember?" My friend sighed. "You must have spent a long time figuring out how to kill a cop. How to slow him down. How to make him stop and think while he was supposed to act, and how to make him do the wrong thing when he *did* move. You must have spent a long time figuring out what I'd react to, with no memories about myself—where I came from, where I was going. But you didn't spend all that time

here. Where're you all from—that town up the road?"

"We almost got you there."

My friend fingered his head. "Yeah. You must have. But I'm fast."

"You got away. But we still almost got you. And we almost got you here."

"Almost," my friend said gently. "Yes. It wasn't a *bad* try—I've said that. It was good thinking, Sam—especially the Bayer part." He looked at Sam with real friendship. "You thought about it," he said softly. "You understood. You fed me the Bayer thing so I'd suddenly think maybe I *did* have a father, and that was supposed to stop me for a minute. But it was all too pat. And because you used it, now I know for sure I never had anyone." For a minute, my friend's face had a lost look on it.

Then he went out to Charlie's car and brought in Mr. Bayer. Mr. Bayer's left hand looked fine, now. One of Sam's boys had had time to take one step toward the cleavers. He stepped back.

"What're you going to do now?" Sam asked.

My friend looked around at all of them. "Kill you," he said, and I saw the look on his face. It touched all of them, and one by one they crumpled up, with their hands over their eyes.

When it was over, Sam and the rest of them got slowly back up to

their feet. They were trembling. Sam said: "Thank you," rubbing his head and shaking it. "I can't imagine what got into us."

The redheaded girl nodded. "You—you just seem to drift into these things. You start by thinking how helpless these people are, and how easy it would be to . . . play . . . with them. Then you decide it couldn't possibly do any harm to just slip down here for a visit . . . just to see. Then you try it, once—you get one of them to do some little thing for you . . . something harmless . . . and then—then—" She began to cry. "But how could I *be* like that?"

"I don't know, Miss," my friend said. "Go on home, now. Go home. There must be families—somebody—to care for you and miss you."

"We will," Mr. Bayer said. "There are."

"Have you got a way of getting back to wherever we all come from?" my friend asked Sam.

Sam nodded. He looked curiously at my friend. "You still don't remember, do you? You don't know about sidereal travel or the Galactic Council or any of it."

My friend shook his head. "No. But it doesn't matter. Look what happened here. I go on doing my job, anyhow. I don't have to know how it's done. It's in my blood."

"I'll tell them you're hurt."

My friend smiled a little.

"They'll just note it down. I'm alive—that's all they need for me to be." He walked over to the doorway. "Come on, Kid," he said.

He stopped and raised his hand to the others. "Well, goodbye—good luck."

"Thank you again, officer. Goodbye."

We walked on down to the highway and started along it.

"Look," I said after a while, "I won't tell anybody about it. You know that. But if you'd rather I didn't tag along with you after we hit the next crossroads, I'll just go off in some other direction."

He shook his head, and he was back to being the way he had been—nothing special, tired, leathery, just moving along. "It don't make no difference, kid. You do what you want. Tell anybody anything you want. It don't matter what anybody does. There ain't no other roads. Some things always get worked out no matter

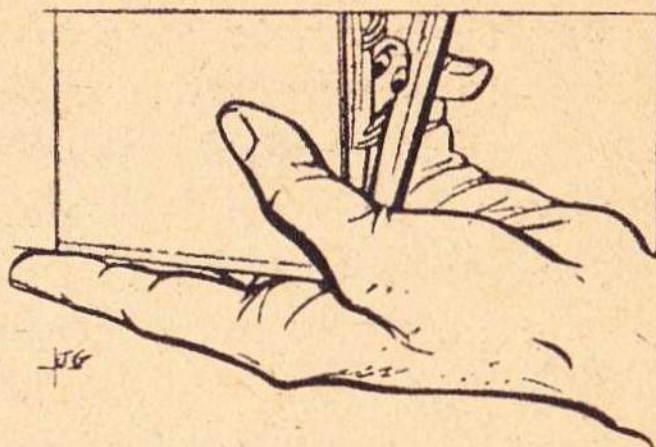
how you try and get around 'em or stop 'em."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "Maybe I'll be turnin' off at the next town. I'll follow my feet. They'll know where's the next place for me to be. Just you remember this: anywhere you go, I'm with you or somebody like me's with you. There is justice in this world, and justice everywhere else." His voice got softer. "Only—Sam was the only one. The only one who thought of what it must feel like to be me. Even with this hole in my head. I've got a brain. A good brain. I think about these things, and put 'em together, and I know what I am. I know all I've got is this going from town to town, down one road after another. Not coming from anywhere, not going anywhere. No people, no family, no history.

"I like Sam. Except maybe him, nobody realizes. Not you. Not that girl. Not even the smart, good people who watch over you and built me."

ON HAND: A Book

by THEODORE STURGEON



A DEFIANCE OF TIME. Anthology. Edited and with a preface by Theodore Sturgeon. Published by (undetermined), Spring 1959. Price (unassigned). Bibliography.

THE STORY IS TOLD OF A NEW pastor appointed to a village "living" whose church was filled, on his first Sunday, not only by the dutiful but by the curious, who wanted a good look at the young shepherd. And indeed their attendance was worthwhile, for the newcomer delivered a veritable whing-ding of a sermon on sin, wickedness, backsliding and moral frailty, together with a clear program for the acquisition of virtue and the defeat of Satan. The congregation was well pleased, and the church on the following Sunday was filled. On the second Sunday most of the people were as favorably impressed, but for a handful who had, instead of merely admiring the preacher, actually listened to his words. It seemed to this fraction that the second sermon was not only markedly similar to the first—it was identical. By sermon time on the next Sunday the

whole village was alerted, and became witnesses to the fact that their new preacher was indeed, and for the third Sunday, repeating himself. They let him finish, but at the end a grizzled deacon leaped to his feet and demanded:

"When you going to get a new sermon, Reverend?"

Replied the pastor, ringingly, "When you sinners start living as if you'd heard the old one!"

It is in this vein that I repeat Sturgeon's *Revelation*, which was wrung out of me after twenty years of wearying defense of science fiction against the attacks of people who used the worst examples of the field for ammunition, and whose conclusion was that ninety percent of s f is crud. The *Revelation*:

Ninety percent of *everything* is crud.

Corollary 1: The existence of immense quantities of trash in science fiction is admitted and

it is regrettable; but it is no more unnatural than the existence of trash anywhere.

Corollary 2: The best science fiction is as good as the best fiction in any field.

These statements, especially the second corollary, would seem to be self-evident, especially to readers of *Venture*. It is powerfully clear, however, that they, and it, are not evident to the lay reader and his key symbol, the lay critic. One may conclude that this is the result merely of ignorance; not only is the mainstream critic not exposed to much s f, but he is understandably affected by the popular conviction that s f is cheap stuff, 'funny-paper stuff, stuff for kids with plastic fishbowls over their heads and dysfunctional zap-guns in their hands.

There are times, however, when darker motives than ignorance seem to be at work. I went into this on these pages recently, by hypothesizing that s f was resented for its crud-content where other fields were permitted theirs, and were amenable to discriminative criticism (i.e. good Westerns and bad: "literary" detective stories and Private Ugh types). I said that we are, as a culture, worshipping science, and the existence of undoubted, demonstrable crud in something labelled "Science" not only offended the devout: it frightened

them. Science fiction could therefore expect unreasoning, unreasonable, subconsciously motivated attacks.

This may well have been the cause, or part of the cause, or one of the causes, of the job done by *Time* magazine recently on Judith Merrill's SF, *THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, SECOND EDITION*. For a fine description of this inexcusable keel-hauling, I turn to Bob Leman, perceptive editor of *The American Journal of Oculenteratology**, who writes:

"*Time* is at it again. It would appear that Mr. Luce's book editor periodically casts his eye over the garden of American literature, and if he finds that the noxious weed science fiction is showing signs of health, he dispatches a minion with a dull hoe to chop it down. . . .

"*Time's* reviewer tears into [the Merrill book] with ferocious relish, utterly damning four of the five stories he reviews (out of eighteen in the book) and faintly praising the fifth (Kornbluth's 'The Cosmic Expense Account') because it is 'an amazing satire on S.—F.' But it is Miss Merrill herself who comes in for the hardest lumps. The reviewer quotes a sentence from her commentary, and then proceeds to dispose of her, her book, and, by

*Published at 2701 So. Vine St., Denver 10, Colorado.

implication, SF, as follows: 'No horror in the anthology is so appalling as the fact that at this very moment there is a mind-matrix around that is capable of writing such sentences in the belief that they mean something.'

"Now in fairness it must be admitted that the sentence to which he takes exception is indeed impenetrable jargon. But it is only one sentence out of an essay which is on the whole sensible and instructive, and to use it as characteristic of Miss Merril and her book is hitting below the belt. This review goes beyond the point of being unfair; it is a deliberate attempt to destroy. . . . One is forced to conclude that this is what *Time* wants."

It is not my desire to bring mainstream readers away from their chosen channels to flounder in any estuary called Sub-species: Science Fiction. I would far rather bring to universal attention the fact that s f is what any f is—an expression, by the creative mind, of human values and human experience. As Arthur C. Clarke pointed out in his 1956 World Science Fiction Convention speech, modern science fiction began, and was subject to criticism, as fiction, period. The novels of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells were submitted to the world as—novels. Nobody subdivided, nobody categorized, and

most especially, nobody reviewed them on Page 42 of the book section under the general heading of *Spaceman's Realm*. I submit that whatever the fate and fortunes of s f since those days, it deserves today to be read by public and critic alike with all other contemporary creations, to stand or fall on its own merits. I submit further that until this happens, a vital injustice is being done writers and readers alike. The general public was, for example, to a great degree uninformed of the existence of the superb (by any standards) s f novel *A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS*, by Edgar Pangborn, because it was invisibly reviewed back there in Zap-gun Corner. Nevil Shute's mediocre s f novel *ON THE BEACH* got an exceedingly large showing because the general public was not told it was s f. Vercors' *YOU SHALL KNOW THEM*, Philip Wylie's *THE DISAPPEARANCE*, even 1984 would have been seen only by you and me and a handful of others, had they carried the bylines, say, of A. J. Budrys, Walter M. Miller, Jr. or William Tenn. I submit finally that if some emergent literary giant should write what was truly the fabled Great American Novel, serialized it in *Galaxy*, saw hard-cover publication with Gnome Press and second-printing distribution with the Doubleday Science Fiction

Book Club, virtually no one would ever hear of it. Especially not from the *Books* section of *Time* magazine.

All right, let's do something about this. Let us make a book, you and I, to refute for all time, and for all of *Time*, the great permeating assumption that this field cannot produce work of lasting artistic and literary merit. Let us aim at a round dozen stories which have originated in what is generally known as the science fiction field. We'll eliminate "our" fantasy; we can get to that later.

Now, it may well be that twelve truly immortal science fiction stories do not exist. In any case they'll be very, very hard to locate, only because twelve truly immortal stories of any variety would be hard to locate. Well, if we turn up only three, we'll publish those in a slim artistic volume. The criteria are strength, style, cadence, form, idea. We must include some previously anthologized material, because that's where some of the truly great ones are living. But some must be taken out of current sources, if only to prove that s f is one of the wellsprings of great modern writing. And I hope, I devoutly hope, that there will be some original stories. This hope

is a wan one, because the author is going to have to wait for acceptance until Nov. 1, 1958, the immutable deadline: no selections will be made until all nominations are in.

The final decision on each story will be mine alone, arbitrary and undemocratic. This is because somebody has to be willing to spend time in the hospital after having turned down your favorite story, or his . . . the damn fool doesn't know the difference between great writing and what the *New Yorker* calls rich, beautiful prose.

I appeal for nominations to writers, editors, agents and publishers who are familiar with the field; to serious critics such as Mr. Vincent Starrett and Mr. Basil Davenport who have some understanding of s f; but most of all to you, the reader, who in the aggregate has read more s f, and who knows it far better than I ever could.

As for the title, be it understood that "Time" in the title is a mere acknowledgement and only part of a pun. The structure of contemporary literary criticism is upheld by a multiplicity of arches, of which *Time* is only one. It is the total groin at which I am aiming this kick.

I've crowded Offhand from this issue. Sorry. I'll restore the balance next time . . . Erratum in last Offhand: EARTHMAN'S BURDEN, by Poul Anderson & Gordon Dickson, was published by Gnome Press—not by Doubleday. Maxima culpa.

INTRUDER

by DON BERRY

*Each Skip in the new ship lasted one microsecond—
and covered 1400 light years. Everything seemed
perfect—except for that uneasy feeling that
during the Skips something went on that wasn't right . . .*

I

FURY.

Rage.

Fire . . .

Streaming from his mouth,
long gouts of orange flame,
creeping up his face, burning,
searing . . .

He felt it somewhere behind
his eyes, it caressed his brain,
began to seep burningly through
the sockets of his eyes, consum-
ing, eating, devouring . . .

Red, red, red. Exciting red,
malicious red, the red of blood
and fire and anger, burning red,
quenching red, thirsting red . . .

His father came to stand be-
side him, standing tall, very tall
beside the bunk. He was too tall
by far, his father. Too tall.

His father took off his tall silk
opera hat and held it formally
against his stomach. It made a
little dent in the flesh, because
his father wore no clothes at all
at all, but he was tall was tall

and he was stretching far too tall
and sometimes the head of him
was not there, but outside the
ship where the fire came from.

It just went up through the
hull. His head. He was very tall.

Lying in the bunk with the
flames pouring from his ears and
eyes and nose, a mouth full of
fire, he said to his father:

"Hello, Dad."

His father nodded sagely, wise
in his infinite talldom and his
dark deep eyes watched the
burning red of his son's face
against the black of space and
the white of fear . . .

"Dad?"

Suddenly his father grasped
the tall silk hat tightly, his face
grew very excited, his eyes (tall
eyes, even, dark deep) were
widened, and he clutched his son
by the shoulder. He spoke, but
there was no fire in his mouth
that his son could be sure of.

"Name and occupation,
please?" said his father with

great excitement. "Name and occupation? Name and occupation?"

"You know me, Dad. You remember me."

Then he swallowed a ball of flame and it began to trickle burningly down his throat. In his stomach it surged, and ate out his heart and spit out the seeds. Just as it was starting on his liver, he screamed as loud as he could but it didn't do any good at all because it came out a very quiet whisper. It would have been a water scream, to put out the endless flame if he could have brought it off, but he couldn't and it wasn't, it was just a quiet whisper to his father.

"Aw, come on now, Dad. You remember me. Don't you?"

His father looked very sad at this, and he put the opera hat back on, with dignity, with tallness.

"You're a bad boy," he said. "You're a pretty bad boy."

"You remember me," said his son. "Don't you?"

"You're a bad boy. I wish you'd go away from here," said his father. "I'll have to hurt you if you don't go away."

He wanted to go. He did want to very badly, but the flames wouldn't let him. His body was completely gone, now, burned away in happy redness and there was just a tiny patch of dull gray left somewhere up in his head.

The flame crept up toward it, burning. Redly. Happily . . .

In the belly of the ship a relay clicked.

His name was David Saar, and he got out of the bunk carefully, uncertainly. He was a tall man, dark hair, long nose, deep-set eyes, a thin face.

He smiled ruefully at his own caution and walked to the control console, flicking his quick glance over the instruments lined there like saucers on a table.

Satisfied, he pressed a button on the console and a cylinder slid smoothly from the ceiling in the center of the control room. He moved to it. He adjusted the vernier scales, made a reading, did it again. He noted down the results carefully. In an hour he had made the readings he needed, and he went to the tapewriter and punched it into binary form and fed it into the decorous slit that was Input on the calculator.

The calculator talked to itself. It hummed quietly, clicked and chattered inoffensively and soon coughed out two small white cards, one marked Temporal, one marked Spatial.

David Saar looked at them, grunted happily, and sat down before the console again.

He pressed another switch and said, "Saar to Central, second contact. Saar to Central, second contact."

He repeated this several times, until the console said to him, "Central to Saar, second contact. Dave?"

"Hello, Johnny," David Saar said. "Got the time?"

"Sure thing," said the console. "Just a second." A high pitched regular beeping came from the speaker. David plugged a jack into the oscilloscope, and the beeping was transformed into a regular curve with high, sharp peaks. He plugged in another jack, this one from the cesium clock aboard ship, and another wave of the same shape appeared on the screen, but they did not coincide.

"Another retard, Johnny," he said. "Just a second, I'll find out how much."

He calculated quickly, figuring from the indices on the oscilloscope face.

"Total of six point nine two microseconds," he said. "Less three point six from the first skip gives three point three two for this one."

"O.K.," said the speaker. "Wonder why it's less this time?"

"Don't know." David shrugged silently, it wasn't his business to know. He collected the data, somebody else could figure it out.

"Subjectively I'm six point nine two microseconds behind you," he said. "See what a soft berth I got? By Earth time my life has been extended almost seven mi-

croseconds. Hell, I'm practically immortal, compared to you short-lived bastards."

The radioman at Earth Central laughed. "Give me the rest of what you have," he said.

"I'll feed it in automatic," David said. "It's a long tape."

"Fine," said Johnny. "But give me a verbal rundown, too, will you?"

"Sure. This Skip was the same as last, one microsecond duration. According to the computer, I belled out just a few hundred light years from Arcturus."

The speaker whistled. "You, my friend, are burning up space."

"For a fact," said David complacently. "Fourteen hundred light years in one microsecond. Figure it out in miles per hour."

"Like hell," said Johnny. "How's your course prediction?"

"It seems to work pretty well," David told him. "I can't tell for sure. The brain trust had the Skiptapes already punched, so I only know roughly where I'm supposed to get each time. Seems to be working out all right though."

The speaker was silent for a moment. "I guess we've done it, Dave. I guess we've got the stars right in our grubby little paws."

"Looks like it."

"How's it feel? I mean, how's it feel to be the first, Dave? The first man ever to travel faster than light."

"Too big for me," David said. "Way too big, I can't comprehend it, really. I have to figure it's just another job to get done, and do it."

"What does the Skip itself feel like?"

"Nothing in particular."

The voice sounded disappointed. "Oh. Well—hell, you'd think there'd be *some* kind of feeling. Moving outside of normal space and time, you'd think you'd feel different. You're in a world we've never seen, Dave, a universe we can only know as a theory."

"It's just the inside of the ship to me, Johnny. I never *see* anything."

"No sensation," mused the voice.

"In a microsecond? I just strap myself in the bunk when a Skip comes due. Then I bell out into normal space and get up. That's it. Pretty dull."

"No dreams, even?" The voice of Johnny was reluctant to let go of his idea.

"No dreams," said David firmly. "None at all."

"Too bad."

"Nothing at all," David repeated, feeling uneasy. "Nothing. . . ."

II

Fire and redness, the consumed body, the roaring furnace

of fear and fear and fire and fire and fire.

Fear and fire and redness happily red, glowing, eating consuming hating angering lust-
ing . . .

The thirst, unquenchable
. . . the hunger, insatiable
. . . the life, unlivable . . .

Nothing, not-thisness, not-hereness, the great all-redness of flaming and fire and the incalculable tallness of his father's eyes.

The fire consuming, racing and darting in his belly, pain pain burning and pain . . . the organs charred, ashed, burnt out and dead without numbness, the death-while-living and pain and pain and fire and the searing sight of needled eyes . . .

"Name and occupation? Name and occupation?"

"You remember me, Dad."

"I don't know you."

"Aw, Dad . . ."

"No!" screamed his father, in a rage, twisted face.

David turned his burnt out eyes away.

"No! No!" screamed the old man, growing taller and taller. "No no no no no . . ." His voice trailed off to a high buzz-saw whine.

"Dad, I've lost your frequency," David reminded him, but the old man didn't care any more. He said he didn't care any more, but David knew he was

lying all the time. He cared, all right. But he was red-hot angry.

Red anger flowing and sweeping, a flaming stream, leaping flames, anger, a river of blazing shrieking anger . . .

Stream, cool water, not-hot flame, but no . . .

Streams of flame and hate and screaming, rivers of it pools of it lakes of it, the molten golden-red ocean of anguish . . .

"Say Dad, I've been meaning to ask you—"

His father's teeth were clenched, but he was wise beyond all knowing of wise. He pointed his long, knob-boned finger and it went into his son's head, burning with a white searing heat.

"You're a fairly bad boy!" he shrieked.

"Don't shout," said David.

"Be reasonable, Dad," he said.

"You shouldn't shout when you say 'fairly bad,' Dad. It doesn't make any sense when you do it like that."

His father twisted his finger in David's head, and it grated, screaming pain down his back, and his father laughed to hear him scream.

"I don't want you to do it again," his father said.

"All right Dad, all right."

"Never again! Never!"

"Dad, didn't I promise?"

"Never never never not not ever no no no no!"

All negation came to David. The not-knowledge of no-message, non-existing in his un-mind without reality, not-coming from nowhere, his un-father told him not.

His father left him, growing tall he left him, but the white-hot finger remained, twisting, the pain, the pain . . .

The relay swung shut with a clack! and the ship belled into normal space.

"You're absolutely sure?" asked Johnny.

The automatic tape hummed busily, tapping out its data.

"Positive!" said David, a little angrily. "Why do you keep harping on it, Johnny?"

"It just seems like you should feel different," Johnny said. "Everybody else—" he broke off.

"Everybody else? What do you mean 'everybody else?'"

"Everybody else thinks so, too," Johnny said.

"That's not what you started to say."

"How do you know?"

"It isn't, is it?"

"Dave, you're jumpy," Johnny's voice said from far away.

"Maybe so."

"Maybe you should forget about the other Skips."

"What do you mean?"

"Program your return tape. Right now."

"Don't be silly," said David.

"I'm halfway around the galaxy."

"You could get back in a hurry. Make a return in one Skip."

"We don't know what a prolonged Skip will do to the ship. A microsecond, yes—longer, no."

"We're doing it right now," Johnny pointed out. "The communication beams are running through Otherspace continuously."

"Sure," David agreed. "Projecting a modular form through Otherspace is one thing. A hunk of matter like this ship is another. We haven't any idea what the presence of mass like this is doing to the balance of the Otherspace system. For all we know I might be tearing holes in it."

"Tearing holes in *what*? There's nothing there. You haven't run into any mass-bodies at all, have you?"

"No. But I'm only in Otherspace for a microsecond."

"Fourteen hundred light years worth."

"How do we know what distance that's equivalent to on the other side? We can't try to carry over our physical constants where they don't apply."

"I suppose you're right," said Johnny dubiously.

"Look," said David. "Legitimately, we can't even call Otherspace 'space.' Space isn't a *thing*, it's a logical relation. At least that's what the big boys drummed into me before I left. If there isn't any mass, there isn't any

'space,' because space is a relation that pertains to mass. See?"

Johnny laughed. "Hell no! I'm just a dumb radio operator converted for new operations. All that jazz is gobbledy-gook to me."

"Well," David admitted, "I'm not sure I understand it. I just know the right words for it in the right combination. Maybe that's what understanding is. Nobody *really* knows what goes on in Otherspace, if anything. We just know we can plug a ship into it for a microsecond and come out fourteen hundred light years away from where we started. I guess that's all we have to know."

"Yeah," said Johnny. "And you don't feel any different at all."

"No!" snapped David.

"Disappointing," said Johnny shortly. "Even in the Skip?"

"Nothing," said David. "How many times do I have to tell you? Nothing!"

III

PsychCaptain John Meckler, sometime 'dumb radio operator,' flicked the Transmit switch to 'Off.'

He leaned back in his chair and a bead of perspiration ran from his forehead down the narrow bridge of his nose. Absently he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped it away, realizing that the whole of his nearly-bald head was wet, and his glasses were fogged.

He took off his glasses and the room around him became hazy. Methodically he polished the lenses dry on the handkerchief. He put them back on and objects sprang back into focus. He sensed the tension of the tight circle of men around the Otherspace Transmitter.

"Well?" said someone.

Meckler sighed, pushed his chair away from the transmitter and stood up. He looked around the huge, silent room of Central Control, at the many faces turned to him. Close to him, the faces of the high brass were like the breakers of an ocean of people. Suddenly he was very tired of swimming in that ocean, he felt he would go under, he hadn't the strength to swim any more.

"As far as I can tell, he's sane," he said.

A heavy man in a neat uniform with a star-and-comet on the lapel spoke up.

"What does 'sane' mean?"

"In this particular context, it means that—oh, hell, a lot of things. He is capable of decision. He is able to make orderly arrangement and use of a group of ideas. He knows where he is, he has a very good sense of personal identity . . ."

"Another good hypothesis hits the dust," muttered another man.

"I'm afraid so," Meckler said. He fumbled at his jacket pocket. "Has anybody got a cigarette?"

His hands shook badly getting a light.

"That was our first thought," he said, blowing a long plume at the ceiling. "Loss of personal identity. It seemed reasonable."

"Meaning?"

"The immensity of the whole thing," Meckler said. "What David Saar is doing, and what Canaletti and Morgan did before him, is just too big. It's too much for a human mind to comprehend, there's no adequate frame of reference."

"When the Ch'ao-Yang equations—" he nodded almost imperceptibly at the two young Chinese mathematicians who stood listening, "—first implied the existence of Otherspace, we could handle it. Because it was a theoretical construct, a thing of symbols on paper. The symbols could be manipulated in such and such a way, with such and such results. They were toys, if the gentlemen will forgive me."

Ch'ao and Yang both smiled.

"But," Meckler continued, "there is a very great difference between handling the symbols for Otherspace, and actually existing there. Canaletti and Morgan, the first two we sent out—couldn't make it. They went out men, and came back something less. They came back having lost the single thing most important to a human being: the conviction that he exists. With that conviction

gone altogether—for what reasons we can't even guess—they died. They were dead when they got here, even though their bodies did function a few hours longer."

"What does this mean with regard to David Saar?"

"David Saar is an egoist, and a man with such a consuming drive to do the job he set out to do that we hope he cannot be attacked in this way. His conviction of personal existence and identity is still strong, which might indicate his egoism is carrying him through—or just that he is not being exposed to the same influences."

The mathematician Yang mused in a low voice, "What could possibly be strong enough to convince a man he did not exist?"

Meckler shrugged, "I don't know," he said. "It would have to be something so overwhelming . . . I don't know, Yang. I just don't know. The conviction of existence is so basic to life, it's impossible to guess what might upset it."

"Perhaps—" the heavy, uniformed man started.

"No, now wait a minute," Meckler interrupted. "There are ten thousand things to perhaps about, and we simply can't consider them all. We can't operate on the basis of perhapses."

"The ten thousand things are one," said Ch'ao in a low voice.

"What?"

"Nothing," said the mathematician. "An old Taoist saying."

"What *can* we operate on, Meckler?"

"The only actual data we have is this," Meckler said. He gestured to a drum of paper on which a stylus was drawing a jagged line.

"The encephalograph."

"Yes. We have every testing device we know of focussed on David Saar's body every minute; they analyze his physical and mental condition as completely as would be possible if he were in this room."

"What do they show?"

"Look here," said Meckler. He unrolled several long strips of graphed paper with lines of different colors etched on them.

"I don't know what those things mean," said a man.

"You don't have to," Meckler said. "See here? This is the point of entry into Otherspace."

"All the lines go dead flat."

"That's right. The instruments are not recording. They would show more if they were tuned on a metal plate—temperature, texture and so forth, at the least."

"Maybe the transmission doesn't reach us through Otherspace."

"It does. The metering transmission is hooked into the same circuit as the communications beam, which works perfectly."

"So? What does it mean?"

"One of two things. During the microsecond the ship Skips into Otherspace, either the instruments or David Saar cease to exist."

"Which?"

"Since there is still a carrier impulse being fed from the testing devices into the metering transmission system, we *have* to assume that the mechanisms continue to record. And they record complete negation."

"David Saar *dies* every time he Skips?"

"No, not dies," said Meckler. "Ceases to exist, in any form detectable to our instruments."

IV

He belled out after the fourth Skip with a headache.

A headache and a sensation that he had something to remember, something he should remember.

He shook the feeling as well as he could, tabulating data. He whistled softly when he saw the tapes orienting him in the neighborhood of NGC 3098, a type 0 star.

It was almost 3000 light years from his previous point. The Skips were lengthening, for some reason. He talked it over with Johnny while the automatic transmission was doing its job.

There was something funny about Johnny, it seemed to him.

V

Fury!

Rage!

Run! Run, David, run!

"Run," said his father quietly.

"Run. Run."

The corridor was full of fire, all was fire and red and flat hot heat. Breathing fire, the searing of lungs, the melting off of flesh and knowledge, the prickling burning slashing somber heat.

His father behind him, the tall eyes, watching . . . "Run again. Run more . . ."

He ran, turning. He ran, twisting. He ran with the jagged agonies of smoking lungs, white-sharp red-edged spears of pain of pain—

"Name and occupation? Name and occupation? Place of residence?"

Query.

Asking.

Dad wanting to know, questioning with white fire.

"Dad, you know me."

"Name and occupation?" Relentless. "Place of residence?" Implacable.

"I'm trying to tell you, Dad, but you won't understand!"

And then: the flick of a fingered hand all buried red deep in his skull, his father's bony, builder's hand, knuckled with agony, tipped with flame, tendoned with terror.

Grasping. Squeezing . . .

"Dad. Please. Don't."

"You promised," Dad said decently.

"Sure, Dad, didn't I promise?"

"You promised not to come back."

"Sure, Dad. I won't. I promise. I promise I promise I—"

"So did the others," Dad said kindly. "So did they, so did they."

"Dad," he reminded, "I don't know you, I don't understand you."

He couldn't breathe, there wasn't enough fire to breathe.

"Dad," he pleaded, "I forgot. I promise, but that time I forgot."

"Run again."

"I'm tired. I can't. I can't—"

"RUN AGAIN."

And he running, and all the time Dad coming closer, trying to be with him, trying to come into his body and mind and soul with fire . . .

"Dad!" David shrieks. He screams. "Dad, there's no room in me! You can't come in! There's no room no room no room . . ."

"That's what I'm telling you," said Dad. "No room and you can't come back again." He lifted the bony builder's hand . . .

The hand wrote on his brain in white and sharp edged letters: **DON'T FORGET.**

"No, Dad," he mumbled. "You know me." Flame buried deep in his belly and seethed and burned and burned and burned. . . .

John Meckler slept. He slept with his head forward on his arms, pillowed, and the room was empty except for the quiet Chinese who sat beside him.

The sky outside was black, but clear. Stars massed in it, like foam on the ocean. Ch'ao watched the stars massing, luminous thunderclouds piling high and threateningly, without warmth, without comfort.

He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. At the sound of the clicking lighter, John Meckler stirred restlessly in his shallow sleep.

Ch'ao leaned forward, touched the man's shoulder. Meckler sat upright with a start.

"How long?" he asked suddenly, looking around at the deserted Control room, brightly lit with flares of light in every corner.

"Not for a while, yet," said the mathematician. "The others have gone out for coffee. They'll bring you some."

"I could use it." He relaxed, leaned back, took off his glasses and laid them neatly on the console in front of him.

They sat in silence for a moment, both watching out the huge window at the luminous clouds of stars.

"Think we'll make it, Ch'ao?" said Meckler quietly.

"Eventually," said Ch'ao. "Eventually."

"I mean this time."

"I don't know. You're impatient."

"Tired."

"I too," said the mathematician. He sighed heavily and took a long drag from his cigarette.

"Tell me something," Meckler said. "Do you feel responsible? For these men, I mean." He gestured vaguely at the star-laden sky.

"In an abstract way, I suppose," said Ch'ao. He pursed his lips and lowered his head. "Personally, no."

"I envy you," Meckler said. "I feel personally responsible."

"That is your business, in a way. Now I, I am a mathematician. I explored a certain line of thought which interested me. It produced conclusions which interested many people and eventually led to the building of the ship. It's too long a chain to feel responsible for the whole thing."

"You're an artist. You have an artist's detachment."

"Perhaps."

"Ch'ao—could there be—anything out there?"

"Nothing," said Ch'ao.

"Something we couldn't detect with the unmanned ships? Something that wouldn't make itself known until we sent a human being there?"

"There is no mass in that—space. None."

"Energy, then?" asked Meckler.

"Interchangeable terms," said

Ch'ao. "It's like asking a man for red paint, and when he says he doesn't have any you say, 'Well, just give me red, then.' The one term is meaningless without the other."

"Can you even conceive of anything out there?"

"Well," Ch'ao said hesitantly, "in an abstract way, again. I mean it's possible to set up a coherent logical system in which A and not-A are equally true at the same time."

"Wouldn't that be necessary?"

"Yes," Ch'ao said. "Otherspace, as we've postulated it, is a state of entropy. That means an absolutely uniform energy level, throughout. If anything *did* exist, there would not be a state of entropy, because there would be the potential shift from the higher energy state of existence to lower."

"So," Meckler said, "if there's no potentiality for change, there is no such thing as existence."

"Actually, it simply means that the word existence, as we know it, ceases to have any meaning," Ch'ao corrected.

"And what happens when you introduce the possibility of change into such a state? Isn't that what putting a ship there does?"

"Probably. But I can't tell you what happens to the system because of it. Our math covers the total-entropy state of Otherspace.

It can't handle the introduction of new elements."

Meckler grunted in acknowledgment.

"So your math doesn't even apply when the ship Skips."

"Substantially not. We have System I, say—our own universe. We have System II—Otherspace. When we take a factor, the ship, from System I, introduce it into System II, we have something else again. System III, you might call it. The rules of Systems I and II don't necessarily apply to System III."

"All this leaves me nowhere," Meckler said bitterly.

"Sorry," Ch'ao said.

"Oh, hell, it isn't your fault. It's just that my job is human beings. I have to try to tell whether a man is sane or not by listening to his voice from the other side of the galaxy." He laughed, shortly, without humor. "And even if I knew for certain, there isn't one damn thing I could do about it. Not one damn thing."

VI

The other men began to drift slowly back to Central Control. They brought Meckler his cup of coffee and he sat sipping it quietly, waiting for the time of next contact.

On schedule, the speaker whispered, "Saar to Central, Saar to

Central," and Meckler resumed his role of Radio Johnny, 'dumb radio operator.'

They exchanged time impulses again, checking each other against the frequencies of the cesium clocks that had been synchronized when the ship left. David's, the ship's, was still running a little slow, and the difference was increasing.

"One thing I don't understand, Johnny," David Saar said. "They tell me that I'm not actually traveling FTL, it just *seems* that way. Then why should my clock frequencies be dropping behind?"

"Far as I can understand it," Meckler said, "you don't have to travel faster than light for subjective time to slow. It slows down as you approach the speed of light. When you Skip back into normal space, you're still traveling at a hell of a speed, comparatively speaking. I think it's around $\frac{1}{4}c$. After all, the time lag isn't very damn much, couple microseconds."

"Oh," said David. "I was wondering." He was silent for a moment before he spoke again.

"Johnny?"

"Yeah."

"Something else I'm wondering about."

"What?"

"Am I the first? Have there been any others before me?"

Meckler's heart suddenly felt constricted.

"Hell, no, man," he said casually. "You're the first. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," said David's voice, sounding troubled. "Dad seems to think somebody else has been here before. It just occurred to me to ask."

The constriction of Meckler's heart grew almost painful. His voice was carefully steady when he replied.

"Dad? What do you mean, Dave?"

"Did I say that?" David asked, and the trouble in his voice became more pronounced. "Don't know what I could have been thinking of. It just occurred to me."

Meckler felt helpless. He didn't dare press questions, for fear of triggering some reaction he couldn't even guess at.

He was forced to chat casually until the end of the transmission period.

"Automatic data's all recorded, Dave," he said. "Bout time to shut down. How do you feel?"

"Fine," David said. "Just great. Say—Johnny—"

"Yeah."

"I wish they'd put portholes in this thing. I'd like to see what Otherspace looks like."

"You wouldn't have time, Dave," Meckler said. "A micro-second isn't much of a Cook's tour, you know."

"That's right," said Dave. "Only—that's funny."

"What, Dave?"

"It seems a lot longer than that. I mean, sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. When I look at it one way, it seems like a hell of a long time in Otherspace. When I look at it different, it's no time at all. I just lie down and pretty soon a bell rings and I've been in and out without even realizing it. I don't know."

"Dreams, maybe," suggested Johnny.

"No, not that I remember. Sometimes, though—sometimes it seems like there is something I should remember, but I can never quite put my finger on it."

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it," Meckler said casually. "I wouldn't worry about portholes either. They tell me there's nothing to see over there anyway."

"I don't think that's right," Dave said. "I don't think it is."

"Why?" Meckler asked, trying desperately to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Oh—just an idea, I guess." Dave's voice was thoughtful. "It's almost time to shut her down."

"Yeah, I guess," Meckler said. "See you next time, then. And Dave—don't get too many ideas." It was the most he dared risk.

"No," said David, "I won't. It's not important. I'll ask Dad about it, he'll know. He lives there."

He signed off before Meckler could reply.

The psychologist sat before the radio console in a silence that seemed tangible. Finally he turned to look at Ch'ao, raised his hand in a loose gesture of helplessness. He found sympathy in the mathematician's almond-shaped eyes. But no help.

Dad be cruel, Dad be kind,
Dad be sightful, Dad be blind.

"I hate you," said his father.

"I love you," said his father.

"I see you," said his father.

"You're gone," he said.

Dad be nice, Dad be mean,
Dad be fat, Dad be lean.

"You're a good boy," he said.

"You're a bad boy," he said.

"I weigh twelve thousand three hundred and thirty seven inches," he said.

"I'm a billion seconds tall," he said . . .

"Dad, I can't understand you, please talk to me right," David said.

Dad was angry his body was fire his hat was bitter acids, he screamed:

"No words! I'm talking about it, that's what I'm telling you! No room no room no room!"

"Please, please please please—"

"That's *me* I'm telling you!" shouted his father and his face writhing flamefully.

"My eyes are hands!" he shrieked, and when David could not understand he raged into a

flaming flower that grew taller and taller and taller. The flower seeded, spores of sparks, sparks of spores, seeding seething boiling in his chest.

The flower rooted in his chest and blossomed hugely, fire and no white-redness but pain pain.

Dad be All, Dad be None,
Dad be Child, Dad be Son.

Dad be calm, be calm, calm:

"It's what I say. Me. That's who I'm telling you. Me."

Reasoning, gently, and gentle reason: suddenly—

Query: "Name and occupation? You know me."

He talked to him quietly, but it was hard to hear because the fire-flower in his chest bloomed so loud.

"I tell you ME: is thirty seven twenty nine twelve sixteen. Got it? Three doubles in the every-togetherness making certain of stasis. That's how important it is."

"Dad," the fire-flower reminded them gently. "You know me, don't you? You're kidding me, Dad."

"You're a dumb child," the fire-flower replied.

Dad be knowing, Dad be not,
Dad be cold, Dad be hot.

"There were others," said his father. "I know you."

"Name and occupation?" he said. "Place of residence?"

He froze and burned and iced and fired.

"Dad, how is it with you?"

"I tell you and tell you," his father was angry and there was a tentacle of nothing in his throat.

"Dad, what I mean is, who are you?"

"Who are you, Dad?"

"Who are you?"

"Who are you?"

VII

"Who is Dad?" asked the heavy man with star-and-comet.

"That," said Meckler bitterly, "seems to be the question."

"The man's obviously out of his head."

"Perhaps," Meckler said. "Only perhaps. It seems likely enough. After all, when a man ceases to exist he might be expected to develop some imbalance."

The heavy man was miffed. "This hardly seems the time for sarcasm, *Captain*."

"Sorry," said Meckler discouragedly. "I'm tired. I don't know what to do. I don't know what I'm dealing with. I don't know anything."

"None of us do," Ch'ao interposed quietly, before the military could give his opinion. "He's regressed to infancy. Possible?"

"Possible," said Meckler. "Not in this case. He thinks like an adult, he talks like an adult, he's in every way an adult. Except that he seems—confused."

"Who is Dad?"

"His father, I assume."

"Why?"

"I don't know," Meckler said. "Strength, security, safety perhaps. It's a function of fathers that they deal with situations beyond the grasp of a child."

"But Saar doesn't believe himself a child."

"Apparently not. That ties in, however. 'Dad' slips out in unconsidered conversation, but when I questioned him on it, he couldn't recognize it."

"So he has created a father figure for security, but refuses to recognize it on a conscious level?"

"Possibly, possibly, it's all possible," Meckler said. "If he did recognize the existence of Dad consciously, it would be an implicit admission that he was childlike. That is, incapable of dealing with the situation in which he finds himself."

"This could all be true, *if*. If he has created the father for the sake of security. If his personal make-up refuses to allow him to recognize inability in himself."

"What other alternative explanation is there? And what will happen from here on out?"

"Let me look at one other thing before I answer that," Meckler said. "Ch'ao, we've gone over this. There is absolutely nothing in Otherspace. No energy, no mass, no nothing. Nothing *can* exist there, right?"

Ch'ao nodded silently.

"All right," said Meckler, sponging his forehead. "Now forget you know that. Supposing that somehow—some way we can't even dream of—there was intelligence there."

"It can't be done, John," said the Chinese quietly.

"I don't care. Do it. If such a thing could be, which we all agree it could not, but *if*—what then?"

"There is no way of even guessing," Ch'ao said. "It requires too many assumptions. When the whole system is assumptions, no logic is possible."

"I don't give a good damn for logic at the moment," Meckler said. "Suppose this intelligence were aware of the ship. Hell, you can suppose the whole of Otherspace is an Intelligence of some kind, with a capital I. Suppose this intelligence knew something was happening to its world?"

"It would doubtless try to communicate," said Ch'ao.

"Anthropomorphism," snapped Yang.

"Certainly," said Meckler without rancor. "But suppose it tried, and the communication were so utterly foreign that the human mind could not accept it. What then?"

"The human would go mad," said Ch'ao.

"One possibility," said Meckler. "But there is one other. And

that is that the human mind would try to shape the communication into something comprehensible, something recognizable. How successful it would be would depend on the adaptability of the particular mind, I suppose."

"Are you trying to say that some—alien intelligence is in communication with Saar? That it appears to him as his father? Is that who you think Dad is?"

"Not dogmatically," Meckler said. "I don't know. But *if*—what form would the communication take?"

"You seem to have the ideas," Ch'ao said. "Go ahead."

"All right. It seems to me the basic elements of that communication are obvious. First: identification. The intelligence would want to know *what* was happening, identify the agent. Second, it would identify itself as Intelligence. That is, it would make the human aware of its existence, and perhaps attempt to describe itself. Thirdly, it would make its—desires known, whatever they might be."

"I can't conceive of intelligence in a state of entropy," said Ch'ao.

"Hell," Meckler snapped. "I can't even conceive of a state of entropy, but we seem to have one just around the corner."

No one spoke for a moment. Finally the military offered, "All

right, supposing we grant all this wild theorizing. Why should the Intelligence appear as the boy's father?"

Meckler hesitated before answering. His voice was flat and even when he spoke.

"The only idea I have on that is this, and it isn't a comfortable notion: just about the most potent image of superiority that a human can handle is the image of the father as held by a baby. Father the All, father the powerful, father—whose world is incomprehensible."

"You postulate," said Ch'ao slowly, "an entity, an alien—intelligence—so superior to humanity that it can be conceived of only in terms of a child's relation to its father?" He shook his head. "The insanity theory is simpler, more familiar and likely. When two theories explain the facts equally well, you choose the simpler."

"Agreed," said Meckler. "There's just one thing—we don't know yet what the facts are."

VIII

Fury.

Rage.

Fire . . .

Redly light and father tall,
burning burning burning.

The raging finger, long as
pain, deep as agony, fire-knuckled,
probing, burning, twisting.

"No more, Dad, no more."

Quietly, his father: "Togetherness is me with all in one by-standing. Got it? Without no-being, not-existence coming together with eyes with hands with heart with brain."

"Dad, please, no more."

The head-deep hand, redly twisting, wrenching out, a tearing away, and flashing hotly stars without and no unflame to be found.

Patiently: "You know me."

Query: "Name and occupation? Place of residence?"

"Dad," said David, "I want to ask you, how is it with you?"

"Ah," said Dad. "My eyes are hands," he said, with hatred glowing firewords on the air. "That's what I'm talking about, is me! Listen:

Affirmation: ME

Affirmation: YOU

Affirmation: NOT-ONE

"Dad, I know that, but what can I do?"

Rage: YOU PROMISED
PROMISED NOT COME BACK!

"Dad, I mean, who are you?"

"What I mean is, who are you?"

"Who are you?"

Affirmation: Without broad high long. Not-limit understanding by we-in-one. Affirmation: deeply water running fire, with tallness reaching and extension to without.

"Who are you: ME."

YOU ALL IS ONE CAN BE
COMING WITHIN TO RE-
TURN BY TOGETHERNESS.

Affirm: PAIN.

The flower blossomed, fire
shrieking, seeded seethed, grow-
ing and burgeoning beyond,
coursing prickles burning sharp
and clear.

"Dad, tell me! Tell me! Tell
me!"

Coming within: TOGETHER-
NESS RETURN . . . and fire-
flower growing taller bursting
richly spores of sparks to seed and
seed and seed and grow and
bloom making other-place this-
place.

"Coming within? Dad, what is
it, coming within? Tell me, Dad,
tell me!"

. . . Dad standing beside,
Dad be gentle, Dad touching,
flowingbeing.

David screamed and screamed
and screamed.

"Dad Dad Dad Dad! No room!
No room!"

David screaming: final agony,
fullness, bursting without merci-
fulness of destruction.

Not-life, un-death. Merging
merging pain and screaming and
never and never an ending.
Never. Never.

Never.

"Now," said Dad.

"Now," he said.

"Now."

Redly: HAPPINESS.

Dad is happy.

IX

Nothing was said. There was
nothing to say unless David
opened the gates, which he never
did.

It was conversation, chatter
while the automatic recorders
chuckled and whimpered over
their tapes.

"Well, you're on the last lap
now, Dave," Meckler said cheer-
fully.

"Guess so," Dave agreed. "One
more hop and home."

"Still feeling O.K.?"

"Sure," said Dave.

"Man, you're a hero now.
Know it? Sure like to be in your
shoes," Meckler said. . . .
Would I?

"Yeah . . . well, I'm anxious
to get home," Dave said. "Anxious
as hell."

"You'll get a reception to re-
member, I'll guarantee that."

"Sounds good. Well, let's shut
her down, Johnny. Oh, say—"

"Yeah?" said Meckler.

"I forgot to tell you."

"So tell me."

"Dad's coming home with me."

"Dad?" asked Meckler as casu-
ally as he could.

"Yeah," said David. "He's go-
ing to make things right. Well,
see you pretty soon, Johnny."

Click.

"David!" Meckler shouted.
"Central to Saar, Central to
Saar. . . ."

The receiver buzzed emptily in the silent room.

Meckler stayed seated, staring at the speaker, trying to think.

"What's it mean? Has he gone under? Is he completely gone?"

"I don't know," said Meckler.

"Will he come back like the others? Just come back and die?"

"I almost hope so," Meckler said, so softly the men around him did not hear him clearly.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said quietly. "Nothing at all, Dad's going to make things right."

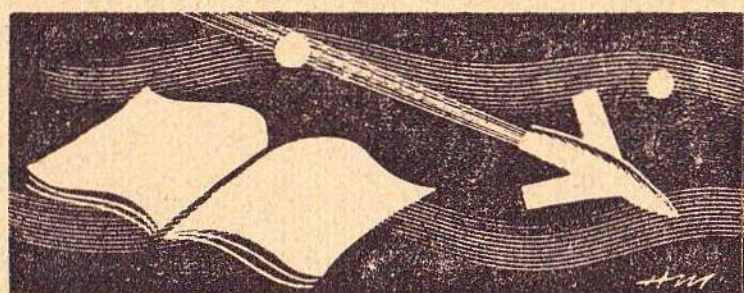
"Meckler, I can't understand what you're saying."

"Forget it," said Meckler, rising slowly to his feet. He surveyed the faces of the men around him and said, "If any of you are religious men, I have a suggestion."

"What's that?"

"Pray," he said flatly. "Just—pray."

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VIRGINIA

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

*This is the tale of an improbable young man
and the unlikely fate he meets. Or is it unlikely?*

Sometimes we wonder . . . but never mind that now.

The important thing, after all, is to continue smiling.

JAMES "BUNNY" COOGLER WOKE on the morning of his father's funeral with a confused feeling that it was awfully crowded in his bedroom. Ohara, his valet (of the Shimanoseki Oharas, and not to be confused with the Dublin branch of the family) was shaking his sleeve and saying: "You wake up, Missah Bunny! Ah, such important gentlemen come see you!" Bunny groped on the bedside table for the sunglasses to shelter his pink-rimmed eyes from the light. Ohara popped them onto his face and then rapidly poured a prairie oyster, a bromo and a cup of black coffee laced with brandy into him. Bunny's usual rate of morning vibration began to dampen towards zero and he peered about the room through the dark lenses.

"Morning, young Coogler," said a gruff voice. The outline was that of J. G. Barsax, senior partner of his late father's firm. A murmur of greeting came from

three other elephantine figures. They were Gonfalonieri of First American, Witz of Diversified Limited, and McChesney of Southern Development Inc. If an efficient bomb had gone off in the room at that moment it would have liquidated eighteen billion dollars' worth of Top Management and Ownership.

"Sorry about your father," Barsax grunted. "Mind if we sit? Not much time before the funeral. Have to brief you fast."

Bunny said, "Mr. Sankton told me what I'd have to do, Mr. Barsax. Rise after the 'Amen,' lead the procession past the casket, up the center aisle to the limousine exit—"

"No, no, no. Of course you know the funeral form. I'm talking about the financial briefing. Coogler, you're a very wealthy young man."

Bunny took off his sunglasses. "I am?" he asked uncertainly. "Surely not. There's this trust

thing he was always talking about to pay me twenty thousand a year—"

"Talked," said Gonfalonieri. "That's all he did. He never got it on paper. You're the sole heir to the liquid equivalent of, say, three and a half billion dollars."

Ohara hastily refilled the cup with laced coffee and put it in Bunny's hand.

"So," little Mr. Witz said softly, "there are certain things you must know. Certain rules that have sprung up which We observe." The capitalized plural pronoun was definitely sounded. Whether it was to be taken as royal, editorial or theological, who can say?

They proceeded to brief Bunny.

Firstly, he must never admit that he was wealthy. He might use the phrase "what little I have," accompanied by a whimsical shrug.

Secondly, he must never, under any circumstances, at any time, give anything to anybody. Whenever asked for anything he was to intimate that this one request he simply could not grant, that it was the one crushing straw atop his terrible burden of charitable contributions.

Thirdly, whenever offered anything—from a cigar to a million-dollar market tip from a climber—he must take it without thanks and complain bitterly that the gift was not handsomer.

Fourthly, he must look on Touching Capital as morally equivalent to coprophagia, but he must not attempt to stint himself by living on the interest of his interest; that was only for New Englanders.

Fifthly, when he married he must choose his bride from one of Us.

"You mean, one of you four gentlemen?" Bunny asked. He thought of J.G.'s eldest daughter and repressed a shudder.

"No," said Witz. "One of Us in the larger sense. You will come to know who is who, and eventually acquire an instinct that will enable you to distinguish between a millionaire and a person of real substance."

"And that," said Barsax, "is the sum of it. We shall see you at the funeral and approach you later, Coogler." He glanced at his watch. "Come, gentlemen."

Bunny had a mechanical turn of mind; he enjoyed the Museum of Suppressed Inventions at J.G.'s Carolina estate. The quavery old curator pottered after him explaining.

"This, sir, is the hundred-mile-per-gallon carburetor. I was more active when it came out in '36—I was a Field Operative then. I tracked it down to a little Iowa village on a rumor from a patent attorney; it was quite a struggle to suppress that one. Quite a

struggle, sir! But—the next case, please, sir—it would have been rendered obsolete within two years. Yes, sir, that's when the Gasoline Pill came out. Let me show you, sir!"

He happily popped one of the green pills into a gallon of water and lectured as it bubbled and fumed and turned the water into 100-octane gasoline.

The Eternal Match was interesting, the Two-Cent Sirloin was delicious, and the Vanishing Cream vanished a half-inch roll of fat from Bunny's belly while he watched. "But Lord bless you, sir," tittered the curator, "what would be the point of giving people something that worked? They'd just go ahead and use it and then when they had no more need they'd stop using it, eh?"

"And this one, sir, it isn't really what you'd call suppressed. We're just working on it to build it up some; perhaps in five years we'll have it looking like it costs five thousand dollars, and then we'll be able to sell it." "It" was three-dimensional, full-color television; the heart of the system was a flashlight battery, a small C-clamp and a pinch of baking soda.

Bunny visited also the vast pest-breeding establishment in the Rockies, where flies, roaches, mice, gnats, boll-weevils, the elm-rot fungus and the tobacco-mosaic virus were patiently raised to

maximum virulence and dispatched by couriers to their proper places all over the world. The taciturn Connecticut Yankee who ran the sprawling plant snapped at him, "Danged better mouse-traps almost wiped out the mouse-trap industry. Think people'd have better sense. DDT almost killed off pesticide—whole danged business, employing two hundred thousand. They think of that? Naw! So we had ter breed them DDT-resistant strains and seed 'em everywhere."

Bunny began to acquire the instinct to which Witz had referred. When he encountered an Oil Texan he could tell that the man's nervous hilarity and brag stemmed from his poverty, and he pitied him. When he encountered one day at Gonfalonieri's place in Baja California a certain quiet fellow named Briggs, he knew without being told that Briggs was one of Us. It was no surprise to learn later that Briggs held all the basic patents on Water.

Briggs it was, indeed, who took him aside for an important talk. The quiet man offered him a thousand-dollar cigar (for the growing of whose tobacco Briggs had caused an artificial island to be built in the deep Central Pacific at the exactly correct point of temperature, wind and humidity) and said to him, "It's time you took a wife."

Bunny, who could not these days leaf through *Vogue* or the *New Yorker* without a tender, reminiscent smile for each of the lovely models shown in the advertisements, disagreed. "Can't see why, Briggs," he muttered. "Having jolly good time. Never used to have much luck with girls—all different now. Mean to say, with—" he gave the whimsical little shrug—"what little I have, doing awfully well and it doesn't cost me anything. Queer. When I had ten-twenty thou', when I was poor, had to buy corsages, dinners. All different now. They buy me things. Platinum watches. Have simply *dozens*. But the rules—have to take 'em. Queer."

"We've all been through it," Briggs said. "When you get bored let me know."

"Oh, promise," Bunny said. "Absolutely promise."

He spent the next six months in Hollywood where golden girls vied in plying him with *coq au vin*, solid iridium meat grinders and similar trifles. One charming lady who had come out to the sound stages in 1934 presented him with a genuine hand-embroidered antique scabbard said to date back to the Crusades. It was a pleasant gift and it varied the . . .

. . . the *monotony*?

He sat up abruptly on the mutation-mink coverlet, causing the shapely blonde head which re-

mained on the silken pillow to emit a small sleepy snort.

"Monotony," Bunny said in a tragic whisper. "Definitely." He went home to Ohara, though not neglecting to pick up as he left his little present for the evening, a golden nutcracker set with diamonds and lined with unborn leopard pelt.

Ohara dipped into his store of Oriental wisdom in an effort to console him. He suggested, "Missah Bunny think if must be monotonized, what beautifurr way to get monotonized?"

It did not help.

Ohara suggested, "You try make funny, fo'get monotony. Fo' exampurr, spend coupe mirrion dorras make big reso't town, cawr same Schmir-ton, Ohio. Think how mad Missah Nickey be, he put up hoterr, have to cawr same Hoterr Hir-ton Schmir-ton! Oh, raffs!"

It would not do.

"Ohara," Bunny said tragically, "I would give—" he shrugged whimsically—"what little I have not to be bored with, ah, life."

The impassive Oriental countenance of his manservant flickered briefly in a grimace. His orders were clear, and he knew how terrible would be the consequences of disobedience.

Bunny tossed fitfully alone in his bed an hour later, and Ohara was on the phone to an unlisted New York number. "This Ohara,"

he whispered. "Missah Bunny talk about giving away money. Awr his money."

The responding voice was that of an Englishman. It said: "Thank you, Ohara. One hopes, of course, for your sake, that the information has arrived in time. One hopes devoutly that it will not be necessary to inflict the Death of a Thousand Cuts on you. A book could be written about Number Three Hundred and Twenty-Eight alone, and as for Number Four Hundred and One—! Well, I won't keep you with my chattering." He hung up.

Within minutes the lonely house in a canyon was surrounded; the Fourth Plutocratic Airborne and Amphibious Assault Force was the ultimate in efficient mercenary troops. By dawn they had Bunny on his way to Barsax' Carolina estate under heavy sedation.

He woke in the guest room he knew, just off the corridor which contained the Museum of Suppressed Inventions. Little Mr. Witz and quiet Mr. Briggs were there. With granite faces they told him: "You have broken the Code, young Coogler. You said there was something you valued above money. You have got to go."

"Please," Bunny blubbered. "I didn't mean it. I'll marry your daughter. I'll marry both your daughters! Just don't kill me."

Mr. Witz said implacably,

"Our decent, money-fearing girls wouldn't have anything to do with a dirty plutophobe like you, young Coogler. If only your poor father had put through the trust fund in time—well, thank Heaven he's not alive to see this day. But we won't kill you, young Coogler. It is not within our power to cause the death of a billionaire as if he were an animal or mere human being. What we can and will do is quarantine you. In Virginia."

This sounded like a rank *non sequitur* to Bunny until they took him to the Museum and trundled out a one-man space ship invented early in 1923 by a Herr Rudolf Grenzbach of Czernovitz, Upper Silesia, whose body had been found in Lower Silesia later that year.

Officers of the Fourth P.A.A.-A.F. loaded him into the bomb-like contrivance over his spirited protest and pre-set the course. Virginia, it seemed, was an asteroid rather than the neighboring state. They fired the rockets and Bunny was on his way.

Four years later Mr. Witz and Mr. Briggs conferred again. "Perhaps," said Mr. Witz, "we've put enough of a scare into him. Let's radio the lad and find out whether he's given up his wild seditious notions and is ready to be rescued."

They tuned in the asteroid Virginia on another suppressed in-

vention. "Young Coogler," Briggs said into the microphone. "This is Briggs. We wish to know whether you've come to your senses and are ready to take your place in society—ours, of course."

There squawked over the loud-speaker the voice of Bunny. "I say, what *was* that. No, not now, not for a second please. Where did that voice come from? Can you hear me, Mr. Briggs?"

"I hear you," Mr. Briggs.

"Extraordinary! Another invention, eh?"

"Yes," said Briggs. "I am calling, young Coogler, to learn whether you are properly contrite and if so to arrange for your rescue."

"Rescue?" said the voice of Bunny. "Why, no thanks. That won't be necessary. Having a fine time here. They need me, you know. They love me for, ah, myself alone. Not the dashed money. *Double-dash* the money, I say!"

Mr. Briggs, white to the lips, broke the connection.

"He meant you to do that," Mr. Witz remarked.

"I know. Let him rot there."

The quavery old curator had been listening. "On Virginia?" he asked tremulously. "You don't rot on Virginia. Don't you gentlemen know how it got its name?"

"Never bothered to find out," Mr. Briggs snapped. "Since you're bursting to tell us, you might as well."

The curator beamed. "They call it Virginia because it's the planetoid of virgins. The dangdest thing. *Perpetual* virgins. The Plutocratic Space Force says they've never seen anything like it, not on Mars, not on Callisto. Self-renewing—the *dangdest* thing!"

Mr. Briggs and Mr. Witz looked at each other. After a while Mr. Witz spoke.

"Bunny," he said reflectively. "Bunny. He was well named."

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THE GAME OF GLORY

a novelet by

POUL ANDERSON

Captain Flandry came to the dying marine under a red dwarf sun, with snowflakes falling like blood-drops out of great, clotted clouds. ". . . don't lap my blood so fast!" the waning boy screamed. And he gasped enough more before he died to send Flandry on a long and deadly hunt to a watery world where a monstrous enemy waited for any man who believed in freedom—and in life. . . .

A MURDERED MAN ON A WINTER planet gave Flandry his first clue. Until then, he had only known that a monster fled Conjumar in a poisoned wreck of a spaceship, which might have gone twenty light-years before killing its pilot but could surely never have crossed the Spican marches to refuge.

And the trouble was—even for the Terran Empire, which contained an estimated four million stars—a sphere twenty light-years across held a devil's number of suns.

Flandry went through mo-

tions. He sent such few agents as could be spared from other jobs, for they were desperately undermanned in the frontier provinces, to make inquiries on the more likely planets within that range. Of course they drew blanks. Probability was stacked against them. Even if they actually visited whatever world the fugitive had landed on, he would be lying low for a while.

Flandry swore, recalled his men to more urgent tasks, and put the monster under filed-but-not-forgotten. Two years went by. He was sent to Betelgeuse and

discovered how to lie to a telepath. He slipped into the Merseian Empire itself, wormed and blackmailed until he found a suitable planet (uninhabited, terrestroid, set aside as a hunting preserve of the aristocrats) and got home again: whereafter the Terran Navy quietly built an advanced base there and Flandry wondered if the same thing had happened on his side of the fence. He went to Terra on leave, was invited to the perpetual banquet of the Lyonid family, spent three epochal months, and was never quite sure whether he seduced the wrong man's wife or she him. At any rate, he fought a reluctant duel, gave up hope of early promotion to rear admiral, and accepted re-assignment to the Spican province.

Thus it was he found himself on Brae.

This world had been more or less independent until a few months ago. Then military considerations forced the establishment of a new base in the region. It did not have to be Brae, but Brae was asked, by a provincial governor who thought its people would be delighted at the extra trade and protection. The Braean High Temple, which had long watched its old culture and religion sapped by Terran influence, declined. One does not decline an Imperial invitation. It was repeated. This time it was refused.

The provincial governor insisted. Brae said it would go over his head and appeal to the Emperor himself. The governor, who did not want attention drawn to his precise mode of government, called for local Navy help.

Wherefore Flandry walked through smashed ruins under a red dwarf sun, with a few snowflakes falling like blood drops out of great clotted clouds. He was directing the usual project in cases like this—search, inquiry, more search, more interrogation, until the irreconcilables had been found and exiled, the safely collaboration-minded plugged into a governmental framework. But when the blaster crashed, he whirled and ran toward the noise as if to some obscure salvation.

"Sir!" cried the sergeant of his escort. "Sir, not there—snipers, terrorists—*wait!*"

Flandry leaped the stump of a wall, zigzagged across a slushy street, and crouched behind a wrecked flyer. His own handgun was out, weaving around; his eyes flickered in habitual caution. On a small plaza ahead of him stood a squad of Imperial marines. They must have been on routine patrol when someone had fired at them from one of the surrounding houses. They responded with tiger precision. A tracer dart, flipped from a belt almost the moment the shot came, followed the trail of ions to a certain facade.

A rover bomb leaped from its shoulder-borne rack, and the entire front wall of the house went up in shards. Before the explosion ended, the squad attacked. Some of the debris struck their helmets as they charged.

Flandry drifted to the plaza. He saw now why the men's reaction was to obliterate: it was an invariable rule when a marine was bushwhacked dead.

He stooped over the victim. This was a young fellow, African-descended, with husky shoulders; but his skin had gone gray. He gripped his magnetic rifle in drilled reflex (or was it only a convulsive clutching at his mother's breast, as a dying man's mouth will try to suck again?) and stared through frog-like goggles on a turtle-like helmet. He was not, after all, dead yet. His blood bubbled from a stomach ripped open, losing itself in muddy snow. Under that dim sun, it looked black.

Flandry glanced up. His escort had surrounded him, though their faces turned wistfully toward the *crump-crump* of blasters and bomb guns. They were marines too.

"Get him to a hospital," said Flandry.

"No use, sir," answered the sergeant. "He'd be dead before we arrived. We've no revival equipment here yet, either, or stuff to keep him functional till they can

grow another belly on him."

Flandry nodded and hunkered down by the boy. "Can I help you, son?" he asked, as gently as might be.

The wide lips shinned back from shining teeth. "Ah, ah, ah," it gasped. "It's him in Uhunhu that knows." The eyes wallowed in their sockets. "Ai! 'List nay, they said. Nay let recruiters 'list you . . . damnèd Empire . . . even to gain war-skill, don't 'list . . . shall freedom come from slave-masters, asked he in Uhunhu. He and his 'ull teach what we must know, see you?" The boy's free hand closed wildly on Flandry's. "D'you understand?"

"Yes," said Flandry. "It's all right. Go to sleep."

"Ai, ai, look at her up there, grinning—" Despite himself, Flandry stared skyward. He was crouched by a fountain, which now held merely icicles. A slender column rose from the center, and on top of it the nude statue of a girl. She was not really human, she had legs too long, and a tail and pouch and sleek fur, but Flandry had not often seen such dancing loveliness trapped in metal; she was springtime and a first trembling kiss under windy poplars. The waning marine screamed.

"Leave me 'lone, leave me 'lone, you up there, leave me 'lone! Stop grinning! I 'listed for to learn how to make Nyanza free, you hear up there, don't lap my

blood so fast. It's nay my fault I made more slaves. I wanted to be free too! Get your teeth out of me, girl . . . mother, mother, don't eat me, mother—" Presently the boy died.

Captain Sir Dominic Flandry, Intelligence Corps, Imperial Terrestrial Navy, squatted beside him, under the fountain, while the marines blew down another house or two for good measure. A squadron of full-armored infantry did a belt-flit overhead, like jointed faceless dolls. A stringed instrument keened from a window across the square: Flandry did not know the Braean scale, the music might be dirge or defiance or ballad or coded signal.

He asked finally: "Anyone know where this chap was from?"

His escort looked blank. "A colonial, sir, judging from the accent," ventured one of the privates. "We sign on a lot, you know."

"Tell me more," snapped Flandry. He brooded a while longer. "There'll be records, of course."

His task had suddenly shifted. He would have to leave another man in charge here and check the dead boy's home himself, so great was the personnel shortage. Those delirious babblings could mean much or nothing. Most likely nothing, but civilization was spread hideously thin out here, where the stars faded toward barbarism, and the Empire of Mer-

seia beyond, and the great unmapped Galactic night beyond that.

As yet he did not think of the monster, only that he was lonesome among his fellow conquerors and would be glad to get off on a one-man mission. At least a world bearing some Africans might be decently warm.

He shivered and got up and left the square. His escort trudged around him, their slung rifles pointed at a thin blue sky. Behind them the girl on the fountain smiled.

II

The planet was five parsecs from Brae. It was the third of an otherwise uninteresting F5 dwarf, its official name was Nyanza, it had been colonized some 500 years back during the breakup of the Commonwealth. It had been made an Imperial client about a century ago, a few abortive revolts were crushed, now there was only a resident—which meant a trouble-free but unimportant and little visited world. The population was estimated at 10^7 . That was all the microfiles had to say about Nyanza.

Flandry had checked them after identifying the murdered man, who turned out to be Thomas Umbolu, 19, free-born commoner of Jairnovaunt on Nyanza, no dependents, no personal oaths or ob-

ligations of fealty, religion "Christian variant," height 1.82 meter, weight 84 kilos, blood type O plus. . . . His service record was clean, though only one year old. A routine pre-induction hypno had shown no serious disaffection; but of course that hadn't meant a damn thing since the techniques of deep conditioning became general knowledge; it was just another bureaucratic ritual.

Flandry took a high-speed flitter and ran from Brae. Even so, the enforced idleness of the trip was long enough to remind him acutely that he had been celibate for weeks. He spent a good deal of the time in calisthenics. It bored him rigid, but a trim body had saved his life more than once and made it easy to get bed partners on softened worlds like Terra.

When the robopilot said they were going into approach, he spent some while dressing himself. An Intelligence officer had wide latitude as regards uniforms, and Flandry took more advantage of it than most. After due consideration, he clad his tall form in peacock-blue tunic, with white cross-belts and as much gold braid as regulations would stand; red sash and matched guns, needler and blaster; iridescent white trousers; soft black boots of authentic Terran beefleather. He hung a scarlet cloak from his shoulders and cocked a winged naval cap on his long sleek head. Surveying him-

self in the mirror, he saw a lean sunlamp-browed face, gray eyes, seal-brown hair and mustache, straight nose, high cheekbones: yes, he knew his last plasmecosmetic job had made his face too handsome, but somehow never got around to changing it again. He put a cigaret between his lips, adjusted its jaunty angle with care, inhaled it to light, and went to his pilot's seat. Not that he had anything to do with the actual piloting.

Nyanza shone before him, the clearest and most beautiful blue of his life, streaked with white cloud-belts and shuddering with great auroral streamers. He spotted two moons, a smallish one close in and a large one further out. He scowled. Where were the land masses? His robot made radio contact and the screen offered him a caucasoid face above a short-sleeved shirt.

"Captain Sir Dominic Flandry, Imperial Navy Intelligence, requesting permission to land." Sometimes he wondered what he would do if his polite formula ever met a rude no.

The visage gaped. "Oh . . . oh . . . already?"

"Hm?" said Flandry. He caught himself. "Ah, yes," he said wisely.

"But only today, sir!" babbled the face. "Why, we haven't even thought about sending a courier out yet—it's been such a nightmare—oh, thank God you're here,

sir! You'll see for yourself, at once, there isn't a Technician in the City—on Altla—on all Nyanza, who doesn't set loyalty to his Majesty above life itself!"

"I'm sure his Majesty will be very much relieved," said Flandry. "Now, if you please, how about a landing beam?" After a pause, a few clicks, and the beginning downward rush of his ship: "Oh, by the way, Bubbles. Where did you put your continents today?"

"Continents, sir?"

"You know. Large dirty places to stand on."

"Of course I know, sir!" The control man drew himself up. "We're no parochials in the City. I've been to Spica myself."

"Would it be despicable if you had not?" mused Flandry. Most of him was listening to the fellow's accent. The inexhaustible variations on Anglic were a hobby of his.

"But as for the continents, sir, why, I thought you would know. Nyanza has none. Altla is just a medium-sized island. Otherwise there are only rocks and reefs, submerged at double high tide, or even at Loa high,"

"Oh, I knew," said Flandry reassuringly. "I just wanted to be sure you knew." He turned off the receiver and sat thinking. Damn those skimpy pilot's manuals! He'd have had to go to Spica for detailed information. If only there

were a faster-than-light equivalent of radio. Instant communications unified planets; but the days and weeks and months between stars let their systems drift culturally apart—let hell brew for years, unnoticed till it boiled over—made a slow growth of feudalism, within the Imperial structure itself, inevitable. Of course, that would give civilization something to fall back on when the Long Night finally came.

The spaceport was like ten thousand minor harbors: little more than a grav-grid, a field, and some ancillary buildings, well out of town. Beyond the hangars, to west and south, Flandry saw a greenness of carefully tended forest. Eastward rose the spires of a small ancient city. Northward the ground sloped down in harsh grass and boulders until it met a smothering white surf and an impossibly blue ocean. The sky above was a little darker than Terra's—less dust to scatter light—and cloudless; the sun was blindingly fierce, bluish tinged. It was local summer: Altla lay at 35° N. latitude on a Terra-sized planet with a 21° axial tilt. The air held an illusion of being cooler than it was, for it blew briskly and smelled of salt and the ultraviolet-rich sun gave it a thunderous tinge of ozone.

Still, Flandry wished he had not been quite such a dude. The portmaster, another blond cauca-

soid, looked abominably comfortable in shorts, blouse, and kepi. Flandry took a morose satisfaction in noting that the comfort was merely physical.

"Portmaster Heinz von Sonderburg, sir, at your service. Naturally, we waive quarantine on your behalf; no Imperial knight would—Ah. Your luggage will be seen to, Captain . . . Flandry? Of course. Most honored. I have communicated with her Excellency and am happy to report she can offer you the usual official hospitality. Otherwise we would have had to do our poor best for you in the City—"

"Her Excellency?" asked Flandry when they were airborne.

"Is that not the proper usage?" Von Sonderburg made washing motions with his hands. "Oh, dear, I am so sorry. This is such an isolated planet—the occasion so seldom arises—Believe me, sir, we are uncouth only in manner. The City, at least, has an enlightened forward-looking spirit of absolute loyalty to the Imperium which—"

"It's just that I thought, in a case like this, where the only Terrans on the planet are the resident and family, they'd have appointed a man." Flandry looked down toward the city. It was old, haphazardly raised out of native stone, with steep narrow streets, teeming pedestrians, very few cars or flyers.

But the docks were big, sleekly modern, and aswarm with ships. He made out everything from plastic pirogues to giant submarines. There was a majority of sailing craft, which implied an unhurried esthetic-minded culture; but they were built along radical hydrodynamic lines, which meant that the culture also appreciated efficiency. A powered tug was leaving the bay with a long tail of loaded barges, and air transport was extensively in use.

Elsewhere Flandry recognized a set of large sea-water processing units and their attached factories, where a thousand dissolved substances were shaped into usefulness. A twin-hulled freighter was unloading bales of . . . sea weed? . . . at the dock of an obvious plastics plant. So, he thought, most of Nyanza fished, hunted, and ranched the planet-wide ocean; this one island took the raw materials and gave back metal, chemical fuel, synthetic timbers and resins and glassites and fibers, engines. He was familiar enough with pelagic tech-nics—most overpopulated worlds turned back at last to Mother Ocean. But here they had begun as sailors, from the very first. It should make for an interesting society. . . .

Von Sonderburg's voice jerked back his attention. "But of course, poor Freeman Bannerji was a man. I am merely referring to his,

ah, his relict, poor Lady Varvara. She is an Ayres by birth, you know, the Ayres' of Antarctica. She has borne her loss with the true fortitude of Imperial aristocratic blood, yes, we can be very proud to have been directed by the late husband of Lady Varvara Ayres Bannerji."

Flandry constructed his sentence to preserve the illusion: "Do you know the precise time he died?"

"Alas, no, sir. You can speak to the City constabulary, but I fear even they would have no exact information. Sometime last night, after he retired. You understand, sir, we have not your advanced police methods here. A harpoon gun—oh, what a way to meet one's final rest!" Von Sonderburg shuddered delicately.

"The weapon has not been found?" asked Flandry impassively.

"No, I do not believe so, sir. The killer took it with him, portable, you know. He must have crept up the wall with vac-soles, or used a flung grapnel to catch the windowsill and—His Excellency was a sound sleeper and his lady, ah, preferred separate quarters. Ah . . . you can take it for granted, sir, I am certain, that the murderer did not go through the house to reach Freeman Bannerji's retiring chamber. The servants are all of Technician birth, and no Technician would *dream* of—"

The resident's mansion hove into view. It was probably 75 years old, but its metal and tinted plastic remained a blatant, arrogant leap in formal gardens, amidst a shrill huddle of tenements. As the aircar set down, Flandry noticed that the City population was mostly caucasoid, not even very dark-skinned. They were crowded together in child-pullulating streets, blowsy women waved excited arms and shouted their haggings, such as the men as did not work in industry kept grimy little shops. A pair of native constables in helmet and breastplate stood guard at the mansion gates. Those were tall Africans, who used stepped-down shockbeams with a sort of casual contempt to prevent loitering.

Lady Varvara was caucasoid herself, though the Chinese strain in the Ayres pedigree showed in dark hair and small-boned body. She posed, exquisite in a simple white mourning gown, beside a full-length stereo of her late husband. Hurri Chundra Bannerji had been a little brown middle-aged Terran with wistful eyes: doubtless the typical fussy, rule-bound, conscientious civil servant whose dreams of a knighthood die slowly over the decades. And now he was murdered.

Flandry bowed over Lady Varvara's frail hand. "Your Ladyship," he said, "accept my most heartfelt sympathy, and grant me forgive-

ness that I must intrude at a moment of such loss."

"I am glad you came," she whispered. "So very glad."

It had a shaken sincerity that almost upset Flandry's court manners. He backed off with another ritual bow. "You must not trouble yourself further, your Ladyship. Let me deal with the authorities."

"Authorities!" The word was a bitter explosion among her few thin pieces of Terran crystal. Otherwise the room was dominated by the conch-whorls of an art that had not seen Earth in centuries. "What authorities? Did you bring a regiment with you?"

"No." Flandry glanced around the long low-ceilinged room. A noiseless City-bred butler had just placed decanter and glasses by the trellis-wall which opened on the garden. When he left, there did not seem to be anyone else in ear-shot. Flandry took out his cigarets and raised his brows inquiringly at the woman. He saw she was younger than himself.

Her colorless lips bent into a smile. "Thank you," she said, so low he could almost not hear it.

"Eh? For what, your Ladyship? I'm afraid it's a frosty comfort to have me here."

"Oh, no," she said. She moved closer. Her reactions were not wholly natural: too calm and frank for a new-made widow, then suddenly and briefly too wild. A heavy dose of mysticine, he

guessed. It was quite the thing for upper-class Imperials to erect chemical walls against grief or fear or— *What do you do when the walls come down?* he thought.

"Oh, no," repeated Lady Varvara. Her words flowed quick and high-pitched. "Perhaps you do not understand, Captain. You are the first Terran I have seen, besides my husband, for . . . how long? Something like three Nyanzan years, and that's about four Terran. And then it was just a red-faced military legate making a routine check. Otherwise, who did we see? The City Warden and his officers paid a few courtesy calls every year. The sea chiefs had to visit us too when they happened to be on Altla . . . not for our sake, you understand, not to curry favor, only because it was beneath their dignity not to observe the formalities. *Their* dignity!" Her cheeks flamed. She stood close to him now, glaring upward; her fists drew the skin tight over bird-like knuckles. "As you would feel obliged to notice the existence of an unwelcome guest!"

"So the Empire is not popular here?" murmured Flandry.

"I don't know," she said pallidly, relaxing. "I don't know. All I know is—the only people we ever saw, with any regularity—our only friends, God help us, friends!—were the Lubbers."

"The what, my lady?"

"City people. Technicians."

Pinkskins. Whatever you want to call them. Like that fat little von Sonderburg." She was shrill again. "Do you know what it's like, Captain, to associate with no one but an inferior class? It rubs off on you. Your soul gets greasy. Von Sonderburg now . . . always toadying up to Hurri Chundra . . . he would never light a cigar in my presence without asking me, in the most heavy way—exactly the same words, I have heard them a million times, till I could scream—'Does my lady object if I have a little smoke?' "

Varvara whirled from him. Her bare shoulders shuddered. "Does my lady object? Does my lady object? And then you come, Captain—your lungs still full of Earth air, I swear—you come and take out a cigaret case and raise your eyebrows. Like that. No more. A gesture we all used at Home, a ritual, an assumption that I have eyes to see what you're doing and intelligence to know what you want—Oh, be welcome, Captain Flandry, be welcome!" She gripped the trellis with both hands and stared out into the garden. "You're from Terra," she whispered. "I'll come to you tonight, any time, right now if you want, just to repay you for being a Terran."

Flandry tapped a cigaret on his thumbnail, put it to his lips at half mast, and drew deeply. He glanced at the sad brown eyes of

Hurri Chundra Bannerji and said without words: *Sorry, old chap. I'm not a ghoul, and I'll do what I can to avoid this, but my job demands I be tactful. For the Empire and the Race!*

"I'm sorry to intrude when you're overwrought, your Ladyship," he said. "Of course, I'll arrange for your passage to provincial headquarters, and if you want to return Home from there—"

"After all these years," she mumbled, "who would I know?"

"Uh . . . may I suggest, my lady, that you rest for a while—?"

An intercom chime saved both of them. Varvara said a shaky "Accept" and the connection closed. The butler's voice came: "Beg pardon, madame, but I have just received word of a distinguished native person who has arrived. Shall I ask postponement of the formal visit?"

"Oh . . . I don't know." Varvara's tone was dead. She did not look at Flandry. "Who is it?"

"Lady Tessa Hoorn, madame, Lightmistress of Little Skua in Jairnovaunt."

III

When they reached the Zurian Current, the water, which had been a Homeric blue, turned deep purple, streaked with foam that flashed like crystallized snow. "This bends to north beyond Iron Shoals and carries on past the

Reefs of Sorrow," remarked Tessa Hoorn. "Gains us a few knots speed. Though we've naught to hurry for, have we?"

Flandry blinked through dark contact lenses at the incredible horizon. Sunlight flimmered off the multitudinous laughter of small waves. "I suppose the color is due to plankton," he said.

"Plankton-like organisms," corrected Tessa. "We're nay on Earth, Captain. But aye, off this feed the oilfish, and off them the decapus, both of use to us." She pointed. "Yonder flags bear Dilolo stripes, quartered on Saleth green: the fishing boats of the Prince of Aquant."

Flandry's dazzled eyes could hardly even see the vessels, in that merciless illumination. Since the wind dropped, the Hoorn ship had been running on its auxiliary engine and now there was no shade from the great sails. An awning was spread amidships and some superbly muscled deckhands sprawled under it, clapping time to an eerie chant-pipe, like young gods carved in oiled ebony. The Terran would have given much for some of that shadow. But since Tessa Hoorn stood here in the bows, he must submit. It was an endurance contest, he recognized, with all the advantages on her side.

"Does your nation fish this current too?" he asked.

"A little," she nodded. "But

mostly we in Jairnovaunt sail west and north, with harpoons for the kraken—ha, it's a pale life never to have speared fast to a beast with more of bulk than your own ship!—and smaller game. Then T'chaka Kruger farms a great patch of beanweed in the Lesser Sargasso. And in sooth I confess, not alone the commons but some captains born will scrape the low-tide reefs for shells or dive after sporyx. Then there are carpenters, weavers, engineers, medics, machinists, all trades that must be plied: and mummers and mimes, though most such sport is given by wandering boats of actors, masterless madcap folk who come by as fancy strikes 'em." She shrugged broad shoulders. "The Commander can list you all professions in his realm if you wish it, Imperial."

Flandry regarded her with more care than pleasure. He had not yet understood her attitude. Was it contempt, or merely hatred?

The sea people of Nyanza were almost entirely African by descent, which meant that perhaps three-fourths of their ancestors had been negroid, back when more or less "pure" stocks still existed. In a world of light, more actinic than anything on Earth, reflected off water, there had been a nearly absolute selection for dark coloring: not a Nyanzen outside the city of Altla was any whiter than the ace of spades.

Otherwise genes swapped around pretty freely—kinky hair, broad noses, and full lips were the rule, but with plenty of exceptions. Tessa's hair formed a soft, tightly curled coif around her ears; her nostrils flared, in a wide arch-browed face, but the bridge was aquiline. Without her look of inbred haughtiness, it would have been a wholly beautiful face. The rest of her was even more stunning, almost as tall as Flandry, full-breasted, slim-waisted, and muscled like a Siamese cat. She wore merely a gold medallion of rank on her forehead, a belt with a knife, and the inevitable aqua-lung on her back . . . which left plenty on view to admire. But even in plumes and gown and rainbow cloak, she had been a walking shout as she entered the resident's mansion.

However, thought Dominic Flandry, *that word "stunning" can be taken two ways. I am not about to make a pass at the Lightmistress of Little Skua.*

He asked cautiously: "Where are the Technicians from?"

"Oh, those." A faint sneer flickered on her red mouth. "Well, see you, the firstcomers here settled on Altla, but then as more folk came in, space was lacking, so they began to range the sea. That proved so much better a life that erelong few cared to work on land. So sith the positions stood open, ai-hai!—it swarmed in with dirt-

loving men and their shes. Most came from Deutschwelt, as it happened. When we had enough of yon ilk, and knew they'd breed, we closed the sluice, for they dare nay work as sailors, they get skin sicknesses, and Altla has little room."

"I should think they'd be powerful on the planet, what with the essential refineries and—"

"Nay, Captain. Altla and all thereon is owned in common by the *true* Nyanzan nations. The Technicians are but hirelings. Though in sooth, they've a sticky way with money and larger bank accounts than many a skipper. That's why we bar them from owning ships."

Flandry glanced down at himself. He had avoided the quasi-uniform of the despised class and had packed outfits of blouse, slacks, zori, and sash for himself; the winged cap sat on his head bearing the sunburst of Empire. But he could not evade the obvious fact, that his own culture was more Lubberly than pelagic. And an Imperial agent was often hated, but must not ever allow himself to be despised. Hence Flandry cocked a brow (*Sardonic Expression 22-C*, he thought) and drawled:

"I see. You're afraid that, being more intelligent, they'd end up owning every ship on the planet."

He could not see if she flushed, under the smooth black sweat-

gleaming skin, but her lips drew back and one hand clapped to her knife. He thought that the sea bottom was no further away than a signal to her crew. Finally she exclaimed, "Is it the new fashion on Terra to insult a hostess? Well you know it's nay a matter of in-born brain, but of skill. The Lubbers are reared from birth to handle monies. But how many of 'em can handle a rigging—or even name the lines? Can you?"

Flandry's unfairness had been calculated. So was his refusal to meet her reply squarely. "Well," he said, "the Empire tries to respect local law and custom. Only the most uncivilized practices are not tolerated."

It stung her, she bridled. Most colonials were violently sensitive to their isolation from the Galactic mainstream. They did not see that their own societies were not backward on that account—were often healthier—and the answer to that lay buried somewhere in the depths of human unreasonableness. But the fact could be used.

Having angered her enough, Flandry finished coldly: "And, of course, the Empire cannot tolerate treasonable conspiracies."

Tessa Hoorn answered him in a strained voice, "Captain, there's nay conspiring here. Free-born folk are honest with foemen, too. It's you who put on slyness. For see you, I happened by Altla

homebound from The Kraal, and visited yon mansion for courtoisie sake. When you asked passage to Jairnovaunt, I granted it, sith such is nay refused among ocean people. But well I knew you fared with me, liefer than fly the way in an hour or two, so you could draw me out and spy on me. And you've nay been frank as to your reasons for guesting my country." Her deep tones became a growl. "That's Lubber ways! You'll nay get far 'long your mission, speaking for a planet of Lubbers and Lubberlovers!"

She drew her knife, looked at it, and clashed it back into the sheath. Down on the quarterdeck, the crewmen stirred, a ripple of panther bodies. It grew so quiet that Flandry heard the steady snore of the bow through murmurous waves, and the lap-lap on the hull, and the creak of spars up in the sky.

He leaned back against a blistering bulwark and said with care: "I'm going to Jairnovaunt because a boy died holding my hand. I want to find his parents. . . ." He offered her a cigaret, and helped himself when she shook her head. "But I'm not going just to extend my personal sympathies. Imperial expense accounts are not quite that elastic. For that matter, while we're being honest, I admit I'd hardly invite Bubbles or Flutters to my own house."

He blew smoke; it was almost invisible in the flooding light. "Maybe you wouldn't conspire behind anyone's back, m' lady. Come to think of it who would conspire in front of anyone's face? But somebody on Nyanza is hatching a very nasty egg. That kid didn't sign up when the Imperial recruiter stopped by for glory or money: he enlisted to learn modern militechnics, with the idea of turning them against the Empire. And he died in trampled snow, sniped by a local patriot *he* was chasing. Who lured that young fellow out to die, Lightmistress? And who sneaked up a wall and harpooned a harmless little lonely bureaucrat in his sleep? Rather more to the point, who sent that murderer-by-stealth, and why? Really, this is a pretty slimy business all around. I should think you'd appreciate my efforts to clean it off your planet."

Tessa bit her lip. At last, not meeting his shielded gaze, she said, "I'm nay wise of any such plots, Captain. I won't speak 'loud 'gainst your Empire—my thoughts are my own, but it's true we've nay suffered much more than a resident and some taxes—"

"Which were doubtless higher when every nation maintained its own defenses," said Flandry. "Yes, we settle for a single man on worlds like this. We'd actually like to have more, because enough police could smell out trouble be-

fore it's grown too big, and could stop the grosser barbarities left over from independent days—"

Again she bristled. He said in a hurry: "No, please, for once that's not meant to irritate. By and large, Nyanza looks as if it's always been quite a humane place. If you don't use all the latest technological gimcrackery, it's because it's non-functional in this culture, not because you've forgotten what your ancestors knew. I'm just enough of a jackleg engineer to see that these weird-looking sails of yours are aerodynamic marvels; I'm certain that paraboloidal jib uses the Venturi effect with malice aforethought. Your language is grammatically archaic but semantically efficient. I can envision some of the bucolic poets at court going into raptures over your way of life. And getting seasick if they tried it, but that's another story. . . . Therefore," he finished soberly, "I'm afraid I'm a little more sympathetic to Hurri Chundra Bannerji, who fussed about and established extrasystemic employment contacts for your more ambitious young men and built breakwaters and ordered vaccines and was never admitted to your clubs, than I am sorry for you."

She looked over the side, into curling white and purple water, and said very low, "The Empire was nay asked here."

"Neither was anyone else. The

Terran Empire established itself in this region first. The Merseian Empire would be a rather more demanding master—if only because it's still vigorous, expansive, virtuous, and generally uncorrupted, while Terra is the easy-going opposite." That brought her up sharply in astonishment, as he had expected. "Since the Empire must protect its frontiers, lest Terra herself be clobbered out of the sky, we're going to stay. It would not be advisable for some young Nyanzan firebrains to try harpooning space dreadnaughts. Anyone who provokes such gallant idiocy is an enemy of yours as well as mine."

Her eyes were moody upon his. After a long time she asked him, "Captain, have you ever swum undersea?"

"I've done a little skindiving for fun," he said, taken aback. He had spoken half honestly and half meretriciously, never quite sure which sentence was one or another, and thought he had touched the proper keys. But this surprised him.

"Nay more? And you stand all 'lone on a world that's aloof of you where it doesn't, perchance, scheme murder? Captain, I repent me what I said 'bout your folk being Lubbers."

The relief was like a wave of weakness. Flandry sucked in his cheeks around his cigaret and answered lightly: "They cannot do

worse than shoot me, which would distress only my tailor and my vintner. Have you ever heard that the coward dies a thousand deaths, the hero dies but once?"

"Aye."

"Well, after the 857th death I got bored with it."

She laughed and he continued a line of banter, so habitual by now that most of him thought on other affairs. Not that he seriously expected the Lightmistress of Little Skua to become bodily accessible to him; he had gathered an impression of a chaste folk. But the several days' voyage to Jainovaunt could be made very pleasant by a small shipboard flirtation, and he would learn a great deal more than if his fellow voyagers were hostile. For instance, whether the imported wine he had noticed in the galley was preferable to native seaberry gin. He had not been truthful in claiming indifference whether he lived or died: not while a supple young woman stood clad in sunlight, and blooded horses stamped on the ringing plains of Ilion, and smoke curled fragrant about coffee and cognac on Terra. But half the pleasure came from these things being staked against darkness.

IV

A tide was flowing when they reached Jainovaunt, and all the

rocks, and the housings upon them, were meters under the surface. The Hoorn ship steered a way between pennant-gay buoys to one of the anchored floating docks. There swarmed the sea people, snorting like porpoises among moored hulls or up like squirrels in tall masts. Fish were being unloaded and sails repaired and engines overhauled, somewhere a flute and a drum underlay a hundred deep voices chanting *Way-o* as bare feet stamped out a rigadon. Flandry noticed how silence spread ripple-fashion from the sight of him. But he followed Tessa overboard as soon as her vessel was secured.

No Nyanzan was ever far from his aqualung. They seemed to have developed a more advanced model here than any Flandry had seen elsewhere: a transparent helmet and a small capacitance-battery device worn on the back, which electrolyzed oxygen directly from the water and added enough helium from a high-compression tank to dilute. By regulating the partial pressures of the gases, one could go quite deep.

This was only a short swim, as casual as a Terran's stroll across the bridgeway. Slanting through clear greenish coolth, Flandry saw that Jairnovaunt was large—sunken domes and towers gleamed farther than his vision reached. Work went on: a cargo submarine, with a score of human

midges flitting about it, discharged kelpite bales into a warehouse tube. But there were also children darting among the eerie spires and grottos of a coraloid park, an old man scattered seeds for a school of brilliant-striped little fish, a boy and a girl swam hand in hand through voiceless wonder.

When he reached the long white hall of the Commander, Jairnovaunt's hereditary chief executive, Flandry was still so bemused by the waving, fronded formal gardens that he scarcely noticed how graceful the portico was. Even the airlock which admitted him blended into the overall pattern, a curiously disturbing one to the Terran mind, for it contrasted delicate traceries and brutal masses as if it were the ocean itself.

When the water had been pumped out, an airblast dried them, Flandry's shimmerite clothes as well as Tessa's sleek skin. They stepped into a hallway muraled with heroic abstractions. Beyond two guards bearing the ubiquitous harpoon rifles, and beyond an emergency bulkhead, the passage opened on a great circular chamber lined with malachite pillars under a clear dome. Some two-score Nyanzans stood about. Their ages seemed to range upward from 20 or so; some wore only a 'lung, others a light colored shirt and kilt; all bore dignity like a

mantle. Quite a few were women, gowned and plumed if they were clothed at all, but otherwise as free and proud as their men.

Tessa stepped forward and saluted crisply. "The Lightmistress of Little Skua, returning from The Kraal as ordered, sir."

Commander Inyanduma III was a powerfully built, heavy-faced man with graying woolly hair: his medallion of rank was tattooed, a golden Pole Star bright on his brows. "Be welcome," he said, "and likewise your guest. He is now ours. I call his name holy."

The Terran flourished a bow. "An honor, sir. I am Captain Dominic Flandry, Imperial Navy. Lightmistress Hoorn was gracious enough to conduct me here."

He met the Commander's eyes steadily, but placed himself so he could watch Tessa on his edge of vision. Inyanduma tipped an almost imperceptible inquiring gesture toward her. She nodded, ever so faintly, and made a short-lived O with thumb and forefinger. *I'd already wormed out that she went to The Kraal on official business, remembered Flandry, but she wouldn't say what and only now will she even admit it succeeded. Too secret to mention on her ship's radiophone! As human beings, we enjoyed each other's company, traveling here. But as agents of our kings—?*

Inyanduma swept a sailor's muscular hand about the room.

"You see our legislative leaders, Captain. When the Lightmistress 'phoned you were hither-bound, we supposed it was because of his Excellency's slaying, which had been broadcast 'round the globe. It's a grave matter, so I gathered our chiefs of council, from both the House of Men and the Congress of Women."

A rustling and murmuring went about the green columns, under the green sea. There was withdrawal in it, and a sullen waiting. These were not professional politicians as Terra knew the breed. These were the worthies of Jairnovaunt: aristocrats and shipowners, holding seats *ex officio*, and a proportion of ships' officers elected by the commons. Even the nobles were functional—Tessa Hoorn had inherited not the right but the duty to maintain lightships and communications about the reefs called Little Skua. They had all faced more storms and underwater teeth than they had debate.

Flandry said evenly: "My visit concerns worse than a murder, sir and gentles. A resident might be killed by any disgruntled individual, that's an occupational hazard. But I don't think one living soul hated Bannerji personally. And that's what's damnable!"

"Are you implying treason, sir?" rumbled Inyanduma.

"I am, sir. With more lines of

evidence than one. Could anybody direct me to a family named Umbolu?"

It stirred and hissed among the councillors of Jairnovaunt. And then a young man trod forth—a huge young man with a lion's gait, cragged features and a scar on one cheek. "Aye," he said so it rang in the hall. "I hight Derek Umbolu, captain of the kraken-chaser *Bloemfontein*. Tessa, why brought you a damnèd Impy hither?"

"Belay!" rapped Inyanduma. "We'll show courtoisie here."

Tessa exclaimed to the giant: "Derek, Derek, he could have flown to us in an hour! And we meditate nay rebellion—" Her voice trailed off; she stepped back from his smoldering gaze, her own eyes widening and a hand stealing to her mouth. The unspoken question shivered, *Do we?*

"Let 'em keep 'way from us!" growled Derek Umbolu. "We'll pay the tribute and hold to the bloody Pax if they'll leave us and our old ways 'lone. But they don't!"

Flandry stepped into collective horror. "I'm not offended," he said. "But neither do I make policy. Your complaints against the local administration should be taken to the provincial governor—"

"Yon murdering quog!" spat Derek. "I've heard about Brae, and more."

Since Flandry considered the description admirable (he assumed a quog was not a nice animal) he said hastily: "I must warn you against *lèse majesté*. And now let's get to my task. It's not very pleasant for me either. Captain Umbolu, are you related to an Imperial marine named Thomas?"

"Aye. I've a younger brother who 'listed for a five-year hitch."

Flandry's tones gentled. "I'm sorry. It didn't strike me you might be so closely— Thomas Umbolu was killed in action on Brae."

Derek closed his eyes. One great hand clamped on the hilt of his sheath knife till blood trickled from beneath the nails. He looked again at the world and said thickly: "You came here swifter than the official news, Captain."

"I saw him die," said Flandry. "He went like a brave man."

"You've nay crossed space just to tell a colonial that much."

"No," said Flandry. "I would like to speak alone with you sometime soon. And with his other kin."

The broad black chest pumped air, the hard fingers curved into stiff claws. Derek Umbolu rasped forth: "You'll nay torment my father with your devilments, nor throw shame on us with your secrecy. Ask it out here, 'fore 'em all."

Flandry's shoulder muscles tightened, as if expecting a bullet. He looked to the Commander. Inyanduma's starred face was like obsidian. Flandry said: "I have reason to believe Thomas Umbolu was implicated in a treasonable conspiracy. Of course, I could be wrong, in which case I'll apologize. But I must first put a great many questions. I am certainly not going to perform before an audience. I'll see you later."

"You'll leave my father be or I'll kill you!"

"Belay!" cried Inyanduma. "I said he was a guest." More softly: "Go, Derek, and tell Old John what you must."

The giant saluted, wheeled, and stalked from the room. Flandry saw tears glimmer in Tessa's eyes. The Commander bowed ponderously at him. "Crave your pardon, sir. He's a stout heart . . . surely you'll find nay treason in his folk . . . but the news you bore was harsh."

Flandry made some reply. The gathering became decorous, the Lightmasters and Coastwatchers offered him polite conversation. He felt reasonably sure that few of them knew about any plottings: revolutions didn't start that way.

Eventually he found himself in a small but tastefully furnished bedroom. One wall was a planetary map. He studied it, looking for a place called Uhunhu. He found it near the Sheikhdum of

Rossala, which lay north of here; if he read the symbols aright, it was a permanently submerged area.

A memory snapped into his consciousness. He swore for two unrepeating minutes before starting a chain of cigarets. If that was the answer—

v

The inner moon, though smaller, raised the largest tides, up to nine times a Terrestrial high; but it moved so fast, five orbits in two of Nyanza's 30-hour days, that the ebb was spectacularly rapid. Flandry heard a roar through his wall, switched on the transparency, and saw water tumbling white from dark rough rock. It was close to sunset, he had sat in his thoughts for hours. A glance at the electric ephemerides over his bunk told him that Loa, the outer satellite, would not dunk the hall till midnight. And that was a much weaker flow, without the whirlpool effects which were dangerous for a lower-case lubber like himself.

He stubbed out his cigaret and sighed. *Might as well get the nasty part over with.* Rising, he shucked all clothes but a pair of trunks and a 'lung; he put on the swimshoes given him and buckled his guns—they were safely waterproof—into their holsters. A directory-map of the immediate re-

gion showed him where Captain John Umbolu lived. He recorded a message that business called him out and his host should not wait dinner: he felt sure Inyanduma would be more relieved than offended. Then he stepped through the airlock. It closed automatically after him.

Sunset blazed across violet waters. The white spume of the breakers was turned an incredible gold; tide pools on the naked black skerry were like molten copper. The sky was deep blue in the east, still pale overhead, shading to a clear cloudless green where the sun drowned. Through the surf's huge hollow crashing and grinding, Flandry heard bells from one of the many rose-red spires . . . or did a ship's bell ring among raking spars, or was it something he had heard in a dream once? Beneath all the noise, it was unutterably peaceful.

No one bothered with boats for such short distances. Flandry entered the water at a sheltered spot, unfolded the web feet in his shoes, and struck out between the scattered, dome-and-towered reefs. Other heads bobbed in the little warm waves, but none paid him attention. He was glad of that. Steering a course by marked buoys, he found old Umbolu's house after a few energetic minutes.

It was on a long thin rock, surrounded by lesser stones on which a murderous fury exploded. The

Terran paddled carefully around, in search of a safe approach. He found it, two natural breakwaters formed by gaunt rusty coraloid pinnacles, with a path that led upward through gardens now sodden heaps until it struck the little hemisphere. Twilight was closing in, slow and deeply blue; an evening planet came to white life in the west.

Flandry stepped onto the beach under the crags. It was dark there. He did not know what reflex of deadly years saved him. A man glided from behind one of the high spires and fired a harpoon. Flandry dropped on his stomach before he had seen more than a metallic glitter. The killing missile hissed where he had been.

"If you please!" He rolled over, yanking for his sleepy-needle gun. A night-black panther shape sprang toward him. His pistol was only half unlimbered when the hard body fell upon his. One chopping, wrist-numbing karate blow sent the weapon a-clatter from his grasp. He saw a bearded, hating face behind a knife.

Flandry blocked the stab with his left arm. The assassin pulled his blade back. Before it could return, Flandry's thumb went after the nearest eye. His opponent should have ignored that distraction for the few necessary moments of slicing time—but, instead, grabbed the Terran's wrist with his own free hand. Flan-

dry's right hand was still weak, but he delivered a rabbit punch of sorts with it and took his left out of hock by jerking past his enemy's thumb. Laying both hands and a knee against the man's knife arm, he set about breaking same.

The fellow screeched, writhed, and wriggled free somehow. Both bounced to their feet. The dagger lay between them. The Nyanzan dove after it. Flandry put his foot on the blade. "Finders keepers," he said. He kicked the scrabbling man behind the ear and drew his blaster.

The Nyanzan did not stay kicked. Huddled at Flandry's knees, he threw a sudden shoulder block. The Terran went over on his backside. He glimpsed the lean form as it rose and leaped; it was in the water before he had fired.

After the thunder-crash had echoed to naught and no body had emerged, Flandry retrieved his needler. Slowly, his breathing and pulse eased. "That," he confessed aloud, "was as ludicrous a case of mutual ineptitude as the gods of slapstick ever engineered. We both deserve to be tickled to death by small green centipedes. Well . . . if you keep quiet about it, I will."

He squinted through the dusk at the assassin's knife. It was an ordinary rustproof blade, but the bone hilt carried an unfamiliar inlaid design. And had he ever before seen a Nyanzan with a

respectable growth of beard?

He went on up the path and pressed the house bell. The airlock opened for him and he entered.

The place had a ship's neatness, and it was full of models, scrimshaw, stuffed fish, all the sailor souvenirs. But emptiness housed in it. One old man sat alone with his dead; there was no one else.

John Umbolu looked up through dim eyes and nodded. "Aye," he said. "I 'waited you, Captain. Be welcome and be seated."

Flandry lowered himself to a couch covered with the soft-scaled hide of some giant swimming thing John Umbolu had once hunted down. The leather was worn shabby. The old man limped to him with a decanter of imported rum. When they had both been helped, he sat himself in a massive armchair and their goblets clinked together. "Your honor and good health, sir," said John Umbolu.

Flandry looked into the wrinkled face and said quietly: "Your son Derek must have told you my news."

"I've had the tidings," nodded Umbolu. He took a pipe from its rack and began to fill it with slow careful motions. "You saw him die, sir?"

"He held my hand. His squad was ambushed on a combat mis-

sion on Brae. He . . . it was soon over."

"Drowning is the single decent death," whispered the Nyanzan. "My other children, all but Derek, had that much luck." He lit his pipe and blew smoke for a while. "I'm sorry Tom had to go yon way. But it is kind of you to come tell me of it."

"He'll be buried with full military honors," said Flandry awkwardly. *If they don't have so many corpses they just bulldoze them under.* "Or if you wish, instead of the battle-casualty bonus you can have his ashes returned here."

"Nay," said Umbolu. His white head wove back and forth. "What use is that? Let me have the money, to build a reef beacon in his name." He thought for a while longer, then said timidly: "Perchance I could call further on your kindness. Would you know if . . . you're 'ware, sir, soldiers on leave and the girls they meet . . . it's possible Tom left a child somewhere . . ."

"I'm sorry, I wouldn't know how to find out about that."

"Well, well, I expected nay more. Derek must be wed soon then, if the name's to live."

Flandry drew hard on a cigaret, taken from a waterproof case. He got out: "I have to tell you what your son said as he lay dying."

"Aye. Say forth, and fear me nay. Shall the fish blame the hook if it hurts him a little?"

Flandry related it. At the end, the old man's eyes closed, just as Derek's had done, and he let the empty glass slip from his fingers.

Finally: "I know naught of this. Will you believe that, Captain?"

"Yes, sir," Flandry answered.

"You fear Derek may be caught in the same net?"

"I hope not."

"I too. I'd nay have any son of mine in a scheme that works by midnight murder—whatever they may think of your Empire. Tom . . . Tom was young and didn't understand what was involved. Will you believe that too?" asked John Umbolu anxiously. Flandry nodded. The Nyanzan dropped his head and cupped his hands about the pipe bowl, as if for warmth. "But Derek . . . why, Derek's in the Council. Derek would have open eyes— Let it nay be so!"

Flandry left him with himself for a time, then: "Where might any young man . . . first have encountered the agents of such a conspiracy?"

"Who knows, sir? 'Fore his growth is gained, an Umbolu boy has shipped to all ports of the planet. Or there are always sailors from every nation on Nyanza, right here in Jairnovaunt."

Flandry held out the knife he had taken. "This belongs to a bearded man," he said. "Can you tell me anything about it?"

The faded eyes peered close.

"Rossala work." It was an instant recognition, spoken in a lifeless voice. "And the Rossala men flaunt whiskers."

"As I came ashore here," said Flandry, "a bearded person with this knife tried to kill me. He got away, but—"

He stopped. The old sea captain had risen. Flandry looked up at an incandescent mask of rage, and suddenly he realized that John Umbolu was a very big man.

Gigantic fists clenched over the Terran's head. The huge voice roared like thunder, one majestic oath after the next, until rage at last found meaningful words. "Sneak assassins on my very ground! 'Gainst my guest! By the blazing bones of Almighty God, sir, you'll let me question every Rossalan in Jairnovaunt and flay yon one 'live!"

Flandry rose too. An upsurging eagerness tingled in him, a new-born plot. And at the same time—*Warily, child, warily! You'll not get cooperation at this counter without some of the most weasel-like arguments and shameless emotional button-pushing in hell's three-volume thesaurus.*

Well, he thought, *that's what I get paid for.*

VI

Hours had gone when he left the house. He had eaten there, but

sheer weariness dragged at him. He swam quite slowly back to the Commander's rock. When he stood on it, he rested for a while, looking over the sea.

Loa was up, Luna-sized, nearly full, but with several times the albedo of Earth's moon. High in a clear blackness, it drowned most of the alien constellations. The marker lights about every rock, color-coded for depth so that all Jairnovaunt was one great jewel-box, grew pallid in the moon-dazzle off the ocean.

Flandry took out a cigaret. It was enough to be alone with that light: at least, it helped. Imperial agents ought to have some kind of conscience-ectomy performed. . . . He drew smoke into his lungs.

"Can you nay rest, Captain?"

The low woman-voice brought him bounding around. When he saw the moonlight gleam off Tessa Hoorn, he put back his gun, sheepishly.

"You seem a wee bit wakeful yourself," he answered. "Unless you are sleep-walking, or sleep-diving or whatever people do here. But no, surely I am the one asleep. Don't rouse me."

The moon turned her into darkneses and lithe witcheries, with great marching waters to swirl beneath her feet. She had been swimming—Loa glistened off a million cool drops, her only garment. He remembered how

they had talked and laughed and traded songs and recollections and even hopes, under tall skies or moonlit sails. His heart stumbled, and glibness died.

"Aye. My net would nay hold fast to sleep this night." She stood before him, eyes lowered. It was the first time she had not met his gaze. In the streaming unreal light, he saw how a pulse fluttered in her throat. "So I wended from my bunk and—" The tones faded.

"Why did you come here again?" he asked.

"Oh . . . it was a place to steer for. Or perchance. . . . Nay!" Her lips tried to smile, but were not quite steady. "Where were you this evening, sith we are so curious?"

"I spoke to Old John," he said, because so far truth would serve his purpose. "It wasn't easy."

"Aye. I wouldn't give your work to an enemy, Dominic. Why do you do it?"

He shrugged. "It's all I really know how to do."

"Nay!" she protested. "To aid a brute of a governor or a null of a resident—you're too much a man. You could come . . . here, even—Nay, the sun wouldn't allow it for long. . . ."

"It's not quite for nothing," he said. "The Empire is—" he grinned forlornly—"less perfect than myself. True. But what would replace it is a great deal worse."

"Are you so sure, Dominic?"

"No," he said in bitterness.

"You could dwell on a frontier world and do work you are sure is worth yourself. I . . . even I have thought, there is more in this universe than Nyanza . . . if such a planet had oceans, I could —"

Flandry said frantically: "Didn't you mention having a child, Tessa?"

"Aye, a Commander-child, but sith I'm unwed as yet the boy was adopted out." He looked his puzzlement and she explained, as glad as he to be impersonal: "The Commander must not wed, but lies with whom he will. It's a high honor, and if she be husbandless the woman gets a great dowry from him. The offspring of these unions are raised by the mothers' kin; when they are all old enough, the councillors elect the best-seeming son heir apparent."

Somewhere in his rocking brain, Flandry thought that the Terran Emperors could learn a good deal from Nyanza. He forced a chuckle and said: "Why, that makes you the perfect catch, Tessa—titled, rich, and the mother of a potential chieftain. How did you escape so far?"

"There was nay the right man," she whispered. "Inyanduma himself is so much a man, see you, for all his years. Only Derek Umbolu—how you unlock me, Terran!—and him too proud to wed

'bove his station." She caught her breath and blurted desperately: "But I'm nay more a maid, and I will nay wait until Full Entropy to be again a woman."

Flandry could have mumbled something and gotten the devil out of there. But he remembered through a brawling in his blood that he was an Imperial agent and that something had been done by this girl in southern waters which they kept secret from him.

He kissed her.

She responded shyly at first, and then with a hunger that tore at him. They sat for a long while under the moon, needing no words, until Flandry felt with dim surprise that the tide was licking his feet.

Tessa rose. "Come to my house," she said.

It was the moment when he must be a reptile-blooded scoundrel . . . or perhaps a parfait gentil knight, he was desolately uncertain which. He remained seated, looking up at her, where she stood crowned with stars, and said:

"I'm sorry. It wouldn't do."

"Fear me naught," she said with a small catch of laughter, very close to a sob. "You can leave when you will. I'd nay have a man who wouldn't stay freely. But I'll do my best to keep you, Dominic, dearest."

He fumbled after another cigaret. "Do you think I'd like any-

thing better?" he said. "But there's a monster loose on this planet, I'm all but sure of it. I will not give you just a few hours with half my mind on my work. Afterward—" He left it unfinished.

She stood quiet for a time that stretched.

"It's for Nyanza too," he pleaded. "If this goes on unreined, it could be the end of your people."

"Aye," she said in a flat tone.

"You could help me. When this mission is finished—"

"Well . . . what would you know?" She twisted her face away from his eyes.

He got the cigaret lighted and squinted through the smoke. "What were you doing in The Kraal?"

"I'm nay so sure now that I do love you, Dominic."

"Will you tell me, so I'll know what I have to face?"

She sighed. "Rossala is arming. They are making warcraft, guns, torpedoes—none nuclear, sith we have nay facilities for it, but more than the Terran law allows us. I don't know why, though rumor speaks of sunken Uhunhu. The Sheikh guards his secrets. But there are whispers of freedom. It may or may not be sooth. We'll nay make trouble with the Imperium for fellow Nyanzans, but . . . we arm ourselves too, in case Rossala should start again the old wars. I arranged an alliance with The Kraal."

"And if Rossala should not attack you, but revolt against Terra?" asked Flandry. "What would your own re-armed alliance do?"

"I know naught 'bout that. I am but one Nyanzan. Have you nay gained enough?"

She slammed down her 'lung helmet and dove off the edge. He did not see her come up again.

VII

With a whole planetful of exotic sea foods to choose from, the Commander hospitably breakfasted his guest on imported beefsteak. Flandry walked out among morning tide pools, through a gusty salt wind, and waited in grimness and disgruntlement for events to start moving.

He was a conspicuous figure in his iridescent white garments, standing alone on a jut of rock with the surf leaping at his feet. A harpoon gunner could have fired upward from the water and disappeared. Flandry did not take his eyes off the blue and green whitecaps beyond the breakers. His mind dwelt glumly on Tessa Hoorn . . . God damn it, he would go home by way of Morvan and spend a week in its pleasure city and put it all on the expense account. What was the use of this struggle to keep a decaying civilization from being eaten alive, if you never got a chance at any of the decadence yourself?

A black shape crossed his field of vision. He poised, warily. The man swam like a seal, but straight into the surf. There were sharp rocks in that cauldron—hold it!—Derek Umbolu beat his way through, grasped the wet stone edge Flandry stood on, and chinned himself up. He pushed back his helmet with a crash audible over the sea-thunder and loomed above Flandry like a basalt cliff. His eyes went downward 30 centimeters to lock with the Ter-ran's, and he snarled:

"What have you done to her?"

"My lady Hoorn?" Flandry asked. "Unfortunately, nothing."

A fist cocked. "You lie, Lubber! I know the lass. I saw her this dawn and she had been weeping."

Flandry smiled lop-sided. "And I am necessarily to blame? Don't you flatter me a bit? She spoke rather well of you, Captain."

A shiver went through the huge body. Derek stepped back one pace; teeth caught at his lip. "Say nay more," he muttered.

"I'd have come looking for you today," said Flandry. "We still have a lot to talk about. Such as the man who tried to kill me last night."

Derek spat. "A pity he didn't succeed!"

"Your father thought otherwise, seeing the attempt was made on his own rock. He was quite indignant."

Derek's eyes narrowed. His nostrils stirred, like an angry bull's, and his head slanted forward. "So you spoke to my father after all, did you, now? I warned you, Impy—"

"We had a friendly sort of talk," said Flandry. "*He* doesn't believe anything can be gained by shooting men in their sleep."

"I suppose all your own works would stand being refereed?"

Since they would certainly not, Flandry donned a frown and continued: "I'd keep an eye on your father, though. I've seen these dirty little fanaticisms before. Among the first people to be butchered are the native-born who keep enough native sense and honor to treat the Imperial like a fellow-being. You see, such people are too likely to understand that the revolution is really organized by some rival imperialism, and that you can't win a war where your own home is the battleground."

"Arrgh!" A hoarse animal noise, for no words were scornful enough.

"And my would-be assassin is still in business," continued Flandry. "He knows I did talk to your father. Hate me as much as you like, Captain Umbolu, but keep a guard over the old gentleman. Or at least speak to a certain Rossalan whom I don't accuse you of knowing."

For a moment longer the brown

eyes blazed against the glacial gray blandness of the Terran's. Then Derek clashed his helmet down and returned to the water.

Flandry sighed. He really should start the formal machinery of investigation, but— He went back to the house with an idea of borrowing some fishing tackle.

Inyanduma, seated at a desk among the inevitable documents of government, gave him a troubled look. "Are you certain that there is a real conspiracy on Nyanza?" he asked. "We've ever had our hotheads, like all others . . . aye, I've seen other planets, I listed for the space Navy in my day and hold a reserve commission."

Flandry sat down and looked at his fingernails. "Then why haven't you reported what you know about Rossala?" he asked softly.

Inyanduma started. "Are you a telepath?"

"No. It'd make things too dull." Flandry lit a fresh cigaret. "I know Rossala is arming, and that your nation is alarmed enough about it to prepare defensive weapons and alliances. Since the Empire would protect you, you must expect the Empire to be kicked off Nyanza."

"Nay," whispered Inyanduma. "We've nay certainty of aught. It's but . . . we won't bring a horde of detectives, belike a Terran military force, by denouncing our fellow nation . . . on so lit-

tle proof. . . . And yet we must keep some freedom of action, in case—"

"Especially in case Rossala calls on you to join in cutting the Terran apron strings?"

"Nay, nay—"

"Under other circumstances, it would be pathetic." Flandry shook his tongue-clicking head. "It's so amateurishly done that I feel grossly overpaid for my time here. But whoever engineered the conspiracy in the first place is no amateur. He used your parochial loyalties with skill. And he must expect to move soon, before a pre-occupied Imperium can find out enough about his arrangements to justify sending in the marines. The resident's assassination is obviously a key action. It was chance I got here the very day that had happened, but someone like me would surely have arrived not many days later, and not been a great deal longer about learning as much as I've done. Of course, if they can kill me it will delay matters for a while, which will be helpful to them; but they don't seem to expect they'll need much time."

Flandry paused, nodded to himself, and carried on. "Ergo, if this affair is not stopped, we can expect Rossala to revolt within a few weeks at the very latest. Rossala will call on the other Nyanzan nations to help—and they've been cleverly maneuvered into arming

themselves and setting up a skeleton military organization. If the expert I suspect is behind the revolution, those leaders such as yourself, who demur at the idea, will die and be replaced by more gullible ones. Of course, Nyanza will have been promised outside help: I don't imagine even Derek Umbolu thinks one planet can stand off all Terra's power. Merseia is not too far away. If everything goes smoothly, we'll end up with a nominally independent Nyanza which is actually a Merseian puppet—deep within Terran space. If the attempt fails, well, what's one more radioactive wreck of a world to Merseia?"

There was a stillness.

In the end Inyanduma said grayly: "I don't know but what the hazard you speak of will be better than to call in the Terrans; for in sooth all our nations have broken your law in that we have gathered weapons as you say. The Imperials would nay leave us what self-government we now have."

"They might not be necessary," said Flandry. "Since you do have those weapons, and the City constabulary is a legally armed native force with some nuclear equipment . . . you could do your own housecleaning. I could supervise the operation, make sure it was thorough, stamp my report to headquarters *Fantastically Secret*, and that would be the close of the affair."

He stood up. "Think it over," he said. . . .

It was peaceful out on the rock. Flandry's reel hummed, the lure flashed through brilliant air, the surf kittened gigantically with his hook. It did not seem to matter greatly that he got never a nibble. The tide began to rise again, he'd have to go inside or exchange his rod for a trident

A kayak came over drowned skerries like something alive. Derek Umbolu brought it to Flandry's feet and looked up. His face was sea-wet, which was merciful; Flandry did not want to know whether the giant was crying.

"Blood," croaked Derek. "Blood, and the chairs broken, I could see in the blood how he was dragged out and thrown to the fish."

Hollowness lay in Dominic Flandry's heart. He felt his shoulders slump. "I'm sorry," he said. "Oh, God, I'm sorry."

Words ripped out, flat, hurried, under the ramping tidal noise:

"They center in Rossala, but someone in Uhunhu captains it. I was to seize control here when they rise, if Inyanduma will nay let us help the revolution. I hated the killing of old Bannerji, but it was needful. For now there will be nay effective space traffic control, till they replace him, and in two weeks there will come ships from Merseia with heavy nuclear

war-weapons such as we can't make on this planet. The same man who gaffed Bannerji tried for you. He was the only trained assassin in Jairnovaunt—and a neighbor gave you alibi—so I believed none of his whinings that he'd nay touched my father. His name was Mamoud Shufi. Cursèd be it till the sun is cold clinkers!"

One great black hand unzipped the kayak cover. The other hand swooped down, pulled out something which dripped, and flung it at the Terran's feet so hard that one dead eye burst from the lopped-off head.

VIII

Elsewhere on Nyanza it growled battle, men speared and shot each other, ships went to the bottom and buildings cracked open like rotten fruit. Where Flandry stood was only turquoise and lace. Perhaps some of the high white clouds banked in the west had a smoky tinge.

A crewman with a portable sonic fathometer nodded. "We're over Uhunhu shoals now, sir."

"Stop the music," said Flandry. The skipper transmitted several orders, he felt the pulse of engines die, the submarine lay quiet. Looking down gray decks past the shark's fin of a conning tower, Flandry saw crewmen gathering in a puzzled, almost resentful way. They had expected to join the

fighting, till this Terran directed the ship eastward.

"And now," said Derek Umbolu grimly, "will you have the kindness to say why we steered clear of Rossala?"

Flandry cocked an eyebrow. "Why are you so anxious to kill other men?" he countered.

Derek bristled. "I'm nay afraid to hazard my skin, Impy . . . like some I could name!"

"There's more to it than that," said Flandry. He was not sure why he prattled cheap psychology when a monster crouched under his feet. Postponing the moment? He glanced at Tessa Hoorn, who had insisted on coming. "Do you see what I mean, Lightmistress? Do you know why he itches so to loose his harpoon?"

Some of the chill she had shown him in the past week thawed. "Aye," she said. "Belike I do. It's blood guilt enough that we're party to a war 'gainst our own planetmen, without being safe into the bargain."

He wondered how many shared her feelings. Probably no large number. After he and Inyanduma flew to the City and got the Warden to mobilize his constables, a call had gone out for volunteers. The Nyanzan public had only been informed that a dangerous conspiracy had been discovered, centered in Rossala, that the Sheikh had refused the police right of entry, and that therefore a large

force would be needed to seize that nation over the resistance of its misguided citizens and occupy it while the Warden's specialists sniffed out the actual plotters. And men had come by the many thousands, from all over the planet.

It was worse, though, for those who knew what really lay behind this police operation.

Flandry mused aloud, "I wonder if you'll ever start feeling that way about your fellowmen, wherever they happen to live?"

"Enough!" rapped Derek Umbolu. "Say why you brought us hither and be done!"

Flandry kindled a cigaret and stared over the rail, into chuckling sun-glittering waves so clear that he could see how the darkness grew with every meter of depth. He said:

"Down there, if he hasn't been warned somehow that I know about him, is the enemy."

"Ai-a!" Tessa Hoorn dropped a hand to her gun; but Flandry saw with an odd little pain how she moved all unthinkingly closer to Derek. "But who would lair in drowned Uhunhu?"

"The name I know him by is A'u," said Flandry. "He isn't human. He can breathe water as well as air—I suppose his home planet must be pretty wet, though I don't know where it is. But it's somewhere in the Merseian Empire, and he, like me, belongs to the

second oldest profession. We've played games before now. I flushed him on Conjumar two Earth-years ago: my boys cleaned up his headquarters, and his personal spaceship took a near miss that left it lame and radioactive. But he got away. Not home, his ship wasn't in that good a condition, but away."

Flandry trickled smoke sensuously through his nostrils. It might be the last time. "On the basis of what I've seen here, I'm now certain that friend A'u made for Nyanza, ditched, contacted some of your malcontents, and started cooking revolution. The whole business has his signature, with flourishes. If nothing else, a Nyanzan uprising and Merseian intervention would get him passage home; and he might have inflicted a major defeat on Terra in the process."

A mumbling went through the crewfolk, wrath which was half terror. "Sic semper local patriots," finished Flandry. "I want to be ruddy damn sure of getting A'u, and he has a whole ocean bottom to hide on if he's alarmed, and we'll be too busy setting traps for the Merseian gunrunners due next week to play tag for very long. Otherwise I'd certainly have waited till we could bring a larger force."

"Thirty men 'gainst one poor hunted creature?" scoffed Tessa.

"He's a kind of big creature,"

said Flandry quietly to her.

He looked at his followers, beautiful and black in the sunlight, with a thousand hues of blue at their backs, a low little wind touching bare skins, and the clean male shapes of weapons. It was too fair a world to gamble down in dead Uhunhu. Flandry knew with wry precision why he was leading this chase—not for courage, nor glory, nor even one more exploit to embroider for some high-prowed yellow-haired bit of Terran fluff. He went because he was an Imperial and if he stayed behind the colonials would laugh at him.

Therefore he took one more drag of smoke, flipped his cigaret parabolically overboard, and murmured: "Be good, Tessa, and I'll bring you back a lollipop. Let's go, chilluns."

And snapped down his helmet and dove cleanly over the side.

The water became a world. Overhead was an area of sundazzle, too bright to look on; elsewhere lay cool dusk fading downward into night. The submarine was a basking whale shape . . . too bad he couldn't just take it down and torpedo A'u, but an unpleasant session with a man arrested in Altla had told him better—A'u expected to be approached only by swimming men. . . . The roof of sunlight grew smaller as he drove himself toward the bottom, until it was only a

tiny blinding star and then nothing. There was a silken sense of his own steadily rippling muscles and the sea that slid past them, the growing chill stirred his blood in its million channels, a glance behind showed his bubble-stream like a trail of tiny argent planets, his followers were black lightning bolts through an utterly quiet green twilight, O God to be a seal!

Dimly now, the weed-grown steeps of Uhunhu rose beneath him, monstrous gray dolmens and menhirs raised by no human hands, sunken a million years ago . . . A centuries-drowned ship, the embryo of a new reef ten millennia hence, with a few skulls strewn for fish to nest in, was shockingly raw and new under the leaning walls. Flandry passed it in the silence of a dream.

He did not break that quietude, though his helmet bore voice apparatus. If A'u was still here, A'u must not be alarmed by orders to fan out in a search pattern. Flandry soared close enough to Derek to nod, and the giant waved hands and feet in signals understood by the men. Presently Flandry and Derek were alone in what might once have been a street or perhaps a corridor.

They glided among toppling enormities; now and then one of denser shadow, but it was only a rock or a decapus or a jawbone the size of a portal. Flandry began to feel the cold, deeper than

his skin, almost deeper than the silence.

A hand clamped bruisingly on his wrist. He churned to a halt and hung there, head cocked, until the sound that Derek had dimly caught was borne past vibrator and ocean and receiver to his own ears. It was the screaming of a man being killed, but so far and faint it might have been the death agony of a gnat.

Flandry blasphemed eighteen separate gods, kicked himself into motion, and went like a hunting eel through Uhunhu. But Derek passed him and he was almost the last man to reach the fight.

"A'u," he said aloud, uselessly, through the bawl of men and the roil of bloodied waters. He remembered the harpoon rifle slung across his shoulders, unlimbered it, checked the magazine, and wriggled close. Thirty men—no, twenty-nine at the most—a corpse bobbed past, wildly staring through a helmet cracked open—twenty-eight men swirled about one monster. Flandry did not want to hit any of them.

He swam upward, until he looked down on A'u. The great black shape had torpedoed from a dolmen. Fifteen meters long, the wrinkled leather skin of some Arctic golem, the gape of a whale and the boneless arms of an elephant . . . but with hands, with hands . . . A'u raged among his hunters. Flandry saw how the legs

which served him on land gripped two men in the talons and plucked their limbs off. There was no sound made by the monster's throat, but the puny human jabber was smashed by each flat concussion of the flukes, as if bombs burst.

Flandry nestled the rifle to his shoulder and fired. Recoil sent him backward, end over end. He did not know if his harpoon had joined the score in A'u's tormented flanks. It had to be this way, he thought, explosives would kill the men too under sea pressure and . . . Blood spurted from a trans-fixed huge hand. A'u got his back against a monolith, arched his tail, and shot toward the surface. Men sprayed from him like bow water.

Flandry snapped his legs and streaked to meet the thing. The white belly turned toward him, a cliff, a cloud, a dream. He fired once and saw his harpoon bite. Once more! A'u bent double in anguish, spoke blood, somehow sensed the man and plunged at him. Flandry looked down a cave of horrible teeth. He looked into the eyes behind; they were blind with despair. He tried to scramble aside. A'u changed course with a snake's ease. Flandry had a moment to wonder if A'u knew him again.

A man flew from the blood-fog. He fired a harpoon, holding himself steady against its back-thrust. Instead of letting the line trail, to

tangle the beast, he grabbed it, was pulled up almost to the side. The gills snapped at him like mouths. He followed the monster, turn for turn through cold deeps, as he sought aim. Finally he shot. An eye went out. A brain was cloven. A'u turned over and died.

Flandry gasped after breath. His helmet rang and buzzed, it was stifling him, he must snatch it off before he choked. . . . Hands caught him. He looked into the victory which was Derek Umbolu's face. "Wait there, wait, Terra man," said a remote godlike calm. "All is done now."

"I, I, I, thanks!" rattled Flandry.

His wind came back to him. He counted the men that gathered, while they rose with all due slowness toward the sun. Six were dead. Cheap enough to get rid of A'u.

If I had been cast away, alone, on the entire world of a hideous race . . . I wonder if I would have had the courage to survive this long.

I wonder if there are some small cubs, on a water planet deep among the Merseian stars, who can't understand why father hasn't come home.

He climbed on deck at last, threw back his helmet and sat down under Tessa Hoorn's anxious gaze. "Give me a cigaret," he said harshly. "And break out something alcoholic."

She wrestled herself to steadiness. "Caught you the monster?" she asked.

"Aye," said Derek.

"We close to didn't," said Flandry. "Our boy Umbolu gets the credit."

"Small enough vengeance for my father," said the flat voice of sorrow.

The submarine's captain saluted the pale man who sat hugging his knees, shivering and drinking smoke. "Word just came in from Rossala, sir," he reported. "The Sheikh has yielded, though he swears he'll protest the outrage to the next Imperial resident. But he'll let the constables occupy his realm and search as they wish."

Search for a number of earnest, well-intentioned young patriots, who'll never again see morning over broad waters. Well—I suppose it all serves the larger good. It must. Our noble homosexual Emperor says so himself.

"Excellent," said Flandry. His glance sought Derek. "Since you saved my life, you've got a reward coming. Your father."

"Hoy?" The big young man trod backward a step.

"He isn't dead," said Flandry. "I talked him into helping me. We faked an assassination. He's probably at home this minute, suffering from an acute case of conscience."

"What?" The roar was like hell's gates breaking down.

Flandry winced. "Pianissimo, please." He waved the snarling, fist-clenching bulk back with his cigaret. "All right, I played a trick on you."

"A trick I could have 'waited from a filthy Impy!" Tessa Hoorn spat at his feet.

"Touch me, brother Umbolu, and I'll arrest you for treason," said Flandry. "Otherwise I'll exercise my discretionary powers and put you on lifetime probation in the custody of some responsible citizen." He grinned wearily. "I think the Lightmistress of Little Skua qualifies."

Derek and Tessa stared at him, and at each other.

Flandry stood up. "Probation is conditional on your getting married," he went on. "I recommend that in choosing a suitable female you look past that noble self-righteousness, stop considering the trivium that she can give you some money, and consider all that you might give her." He glanced at them, saw that their hands were suddenly linked together, and had a brief, private, profane conversation with the Norn of his personal destiny. "That includes heirs," he finished. "I'd like to have Nyanza well populated. When the Long Night comes for Terra, somebody will have to carry on. It might as well be you."

He walked past them, into the cabin, to get away from all the dark young eyes.

future would bring to light what was unknown to them. They made no attempt to predict the unsuspected.

Today we make the same mistake. Recently eight leading scientists attempted to visualize what the world would be like in the next hundred years. Their dreams involved the familiar of today extrapolated into the future . . . hotels in space, control of mind and body, the selection of sex and heredity of children, mineral mining in the ocean, ample food production for large populations. This is the old, the familiar, the unimaginative all over again. It's the bicycle built for two. Science fiction has been doing the same thing.

No, if we're going to speculate about the future, let it be in terms of the future . . . an unfamiliar future in which there'll be no hotels because something, unknown and unsuspected today, will have made them obsolete . . . a future in which control of mind and body will be answered by an unexpected development . . . a future in which problems of sex, heredity, mineral mining, food supplies, psionics, galactic imperialism and The Ultimate Man will be as significant as the problem of the horseless carriage.

Old maps are most exciting for their great white patches labelled *terra incognita*. Isn't it time for a new, youthful science fiction to abandon the old familiar stamping grounds and venture into unknown lands of its own making?

—Alfred Bester

PRESS-TIME FOOTNOTE: A letter just in from Doctor Asimov reads as follows: "In connection with my article 'The Atmosphere of the Moon,' today I came across a note to the effect that observations of Sputnik showed the density of the atmosphere at a height of 200 kilometers (125 miles) to be 4×10^{-13} grams/cubic centimeter. According to my calculations, this works out to one-third of a billionth of an atmosphere. Yet that rarefied an atmosphere is enough to bring the third-stage rocket of Sputnik I to Earth after two months of flight. The possible presence of a lunar atmosphere of three times that density (as mentioned speculatively in my article) would really be significant in slowing a manned vessel, particularly if the vessel were to put out fins or some kind of parachute arrangement (to increase the resistance) when it starts spiralling down to the lunar surface."

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The February issue, now on sale, offers a rich assortment, including such sound and provocative tales as “Pilgrimage,” by Chad Oliver, “The Last Step,” by Zenna Henderson, and “The Last of the Deliverers,” by Poul Anderson. The cover, by Ed Emsh, illustrates a story inside titled “Baby”—by Carol Emshwiller...which may well be the first time that a husband has done a cover illustration for his wife’s story. But then, firsts are an old story with **FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION** Get your copy today, and find out for yourself.

