VENTURE
SCIENCE FICTION

THEODORE STURGEON
EDMOND HAMILTON

ARTHUR C. CLARKE
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Cover by M. S. Dollens (“Night on Titan”) from “The Comedian’s Children”

Interior illustrations by Giunta and Schoenherr
Secrets entrusted to a few

The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—things you ought to know. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for personal power and accomplishment in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature’s laws—their amazing discoveries of the hidden processes of man’s mind, and the mastery of life’s problems. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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---SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.---
Venturings

- This issue contains, among other rare items, four contributions from two writers: a science column and a short-short from Isaac Asimov, and a book column and a novelet from Theodore Sturgeon. Such localized proximity might give the impression that Venture is absorbing the total output of the two distinguished gentlemen (the distinguishing beard of the one is very nearly equalled by the doctorate of the other); and we feel we should disabuse you of such an idea. We must admit, grudgingly, that we can’t actually use all of the results of their seemingly limitless talents, and that you can find their science fiction elsewhere.

- Poul Anderson’s “The Game of Glory,” in our last issue, has brought numerous enthusiastic letters, and we’ve asked Mr. Anderson for another Captain Flandry novelet. In this connection, Mr. Anderson’s special talent for the high-quality adventure story will shortly be on display in another field—look for his story “The Trader and the Vikings” in the first issue of Jack London’s Adventure Magazine, on sale soon. Among other authors in the issue will be Ernest Hemingway, James M. Cain, and C. S. Forester. Don’t miss it! (Advt.)

- In last issue’s “Venturings,” we carried a few paragraphs by Alfred Bester which began, “Science fiction is aging rapidly.” Reaction has been varied, comments ranging from “shrewd and illuminating” to “what’s he talking about?”, and including the following communication from Judith Merril, prolific anthologist and able writer:

  Science fiction, according to Alfred Bester, is “aging rapidly.” “If we’re going to speculate about the future,” he says, “let it be in terms of the future . . . an unfamiliar future. Isn’t it time,” he asks, “for a new, youthful science-fiction to abandon the old stamping grounds and venture into unknown lands of its own making?”

  Science fiction, sez I, is maturing . . . slowly. Over the past fifteen years, it has gradually developed from “scientifiction,” that cubbyhole of the dramatized essay, into speculative fiction. And just because I underlined the fiction part, don’t think for a minute that I’m underplaying the speculative. Nor do I believe that s-f writers today are underplaying it.

  What they are doing—what the good ones are doing—is learning to write. If in the course of learning the disciplines of the literary trade, the better writers are more frequently than before also disciplining their imaginations to some degree, I cannot honestly see it as A Bad Thing.

  In the past three years, I have probably read more published science

(continued on p. 129)
THE DARK BACKWARD

by EDMOND HAMILTON

In winter, on an island
off the New England coast,
you get used to wind-lashed
surf, to hardship and struggle,
to the cold, lonely life.
Maybe you get so used to it
that you don’t want to hear
when the bright future calls . . .

IT SEEMED TO ME THAT IN MY
sleep a clear voice kept crying
desperately to me, over and over.
“Try to remember, Val! You
must remember!”
The frantic insistence of the
voice bothered me. I didn’t want
to hear it . . . to remember.
“Val, don’t forget!”
Don’t forget what? No, I
mustn’t think about that. Voice,
go away. Go away and let me
sleep, get the hell out of here or—
I awoke.
For a moment I lay still, shaken
and unsure of myself. Then as the
dream and the voice faded out of my mind, I looked soggily around the familiar little bedroom.

Clothes thrown on the floor, and wind-driven rain streaming on the panes, and a gray light sickly on everything. And Mary was gone, and what was the use of anything?

The clock said I had forty minutes to get to my job at the island’s electric generating station. I dressed, trying not to look at Mary’s picture on the bureau, but that did no good. The room was Mary—she had put her own sweetness and happiness into it, and everywhere I looked I saw her, slim and blonde and smiling fondly at me, just as when she was living.

I went to the kitchen and cooked scrambled eggs and listened to the volleys of rain and wind kicking up the surf down on the beach. No one, I thought, would get to the mainland today or maybe all week. But in winter time, in a New England offshore island town, you get used to that.

That queer dream still bothered me, somehow. A fading voice frantically trying to make me remember something, something important. I thought, the hell with remembering.

I turned on the radio for the early news, while I drank my coffee. The brisk voice did nothing to cheer me up. It was the first winter of the Korean war, and the bulletins only made me think of the war before that, of the stink and mud of the Italian campaign, of all the campaigns before that I’d gone through. And when the war news was done, Brisk-voice went on with cheery items on how the hydrogen bomb was coming, and bloody riots in Europe and Africa, until I turned it off.

They can always think up trouble for us, I thought, but they can’t think up any answer to things like a sickness nobody can cure. Then I told myself that I was getting warped. Plenty of people were trying hard to find answers to things like that, and someday they would. But that wouldn’t bring Mary back.

The rain hit me like small-shot when I locked the door and went down the boardwalk. My cottage was one of the newest in town, and was out at the edge of town with nothing but the big sand-dunes beyond it. The dunes ran for miles, but you couldn’t see them with this smother of rain coming down. I turned my back on them and on the house, and clumped along into town.

The sea was gray and angry under the heavy sky, and the white houses and narrow streets of the little town looked deserted. I met young Doc Haring and he looked at me through his rain-spotted glasses as though he was not happy with the weather.
"A real southwester, Val. Bet it goes on all week."
"Let it," I said. "I'm not going any place."
"Old man Bartlett is worse," he told me. "Got to get along."
When I got to the little generating station that made electricity for Botts' Island, I found Joe Klimmer, the night man, dozing. "Worst blow so far this winter," he said, and yawned, and went home.
I checked the gas-engine and the dynamo, and lighted a cigarette, and listened to the wind and the rain.
"Val, don't forget!"
I wished I could get that dream, that voice, out of my mind. If it had been Mary's voice, I could have understood it, but it hadn't been. Her voice had been low and husky and sweet, and this voice wasn't like that at all.
I wondered again what it was I mustn't forget. I had a lot of things I wanted to forget—the times I couldn't get a job, and the war that yanked me out of the job I did get, and the good friends I'd seen smeared by mortar-fire, and—
I got up and checked everything over again, even though I knew it wasn't necessary. I kept myself busy all day, doing things that didn't need to be done.
Late that afternoon it seemed to me that the rain might be letting up a little, and I stepped out of the little brick building to look. I was wrong, it was raining and blowing as hard as ever.
That was when I saw it.
It was just barely visible through the driving murk, away off in the distance over the sea. It looked like a silver fish, flying fast and low. It had no wings, and it was shaped like a tear-drop.
The gray smother drove down thicker, and it was gone.
I stood and stared, but I didn't see it again.
A plane? I knew damned well that that sleek shape hadn't been any plane ever heard of. But what?
I watched and watched, but saw nothing more. Then it got dark and Vernon, the second-trick man, came to relieve me.
As I walked back through town, I was still wondering about what I'd seen. I wanted to keep thinking about it—I didn't want to go back to the dark, quiet cottage. So I went looking for Bodie Wilkes, our mayor.
He was locking up his hardware store, the wind whipping his topcoat up around his legs. He said:
"Any trouble at the station, Val?"
"No, not that," I said. "But I'm wondering if a plane got caught in the storm. I saw one—only it didn't look like any plane I ever saw before."
He whipped around to face me. I'd known Bodie Wilkes all my life, and yet there was something about his big, ruddy, fleshy face that startled me. It was his eyes. All of a sudden, it seemed to me that they were as bright and big as moons.

"A plane? What kind of a plane?"

I told him, and he seemed to hang on my every word. But then he began shaking his head.

"Never heard of anything like that, Val. Maybe some new experimental model. Which way was it heading?"

"Northeast, I thought."

He continued to shake his head, as the wind threw stinging rain into the doorway where we stood.

"Well, if there's somebody in trouble out there, nothing we can do about it. Can't send a small boat out in this. But I'll call Coast Guard on the mainland, by the radio."

He seemed to have gotten over his momentary start, and now was buttoning up his topcoat. I left him and went on through town. But when a gust of rain made me turn my head, I saw Bodie Wilkes still standing there in front of his store, staring after me.

I wondered why my story had upset him so. And what was it I'd seen, anyway? That flying teardrop thing hadn't been a plane, experimental or otherwise. But what, then? I was still wonder-
dering when I reached my house.

This was the worst moment of my day, this coming home in the dark to a dark little house with no one in it. I unlocked the door and went in and closed the door on its spring-latch, and was reaching for the switch when I stopped.

There was someone here in the dark. I had heard the sigh that spring cushions make when someone in a chair gets up.

I snapped the light on fast. Then I got my second big surprise.

There were a young man and a girl here in my living-room. They wore clothes such as I'd never seen before—one-piece coverall garments, not made of cloth but of some fabric that shone and shimmered as though it had been woven out of moonlight.

The man had a wary, distrustful look on his black-browed, aquiline face, as he looked at me. I saw his hand come out of a pocket, holding a thing like a little metal prism.

The girl said to him fast, "No, Jere! Put it away!"

The man answered her, without taking his eyes off me. "Look at his face. He doesn't know us. We can't take chances."

The girl stepped closer to me. She was not pretty as Mary had been, but she was dark and handsome, and her black eyes were brilliant with excitement and tension as she looked at me.
She said, "Val, don't you know me? I'm Laryl."

I stared at her and at the man—at their queer clothes and at the thing the man held in his hand.

"I never saw you before," I said. Rainwater was dripping off my slicker and making little puddles around me on the living-room rug. I asked, "Who are you two, anyway? How did you get in here?"

The girl who called herself Laryl had a look of pain in her eyes now. She said, "After what we were to each other, you still forgot."

"Listen," I said. "What is this you're trying to pull? I don't know you. And no woman was ever anything to me, except Mary."

Her hand flashed out and slapped my face. There were furious tears in her eyes. "Damn your Mary!" she said. "You—"

"Laryl, wait," said the man Jere, and caught her arm. "You can't tell him, not that way. I warned you. Be careful."

"Tell me what?" I said.

The whole thing was crazy. Me in my wet slicker standing there in my own house, facing these two who wore clothes such as I'd never seen before, and who were trying to make me believe I knew them. There was something about them so strange, so different, that suddenly I had a cold, scared feeling.

"Whoever you are, get out of here," I said. "I don't know what you're up to or how you got here but—"

I was interrupted by a pounding outside my front door. A voice called through the door, the voice of Bodie Wilkes.

"Val! Val Adams!"

The man called Jere moved quickly and silently. He swept the girl to one side and pointed the little prism at me, and his face was tight and dangerous.

"Don't unlock that door!" he whispered to me. "And keep your voice down."

Laryl, the girl, said in a low voice, "It's Carvallo, out there."

Jere nodded grimly. "I know. He suspects."

"Are you two nuts?" I asked, and in spite of myself my voice rose a little. "It's Bodie Wilkes, our mayor. I've known him all my life."

Bodie was still pounding on the locked door, and shouting.

"Who's in there with you, Val? I can hear you talking. You open up!"

Jere looked at the girl in a strained, tense way, and whispered, "There's no time to do it the slow way, Laryl."

She made a gesture of appeal, of protest, "Jere, we can't—"

I'd had enough of them and their veiled talk and their incomprehensible references. Something about their strangeness scared me
more and more, and of a sudden I remembered that alien tear-drop craft I had glimpsed in the storm.

I said, "The hell with you, I'm letting Bodie in," and turned toward the door.

There was a little buzzing sound and something exploded quietly in my head. I went numb, and tried to turn, and started falling, and I saw Jere holding that prism toward me.

I didn't quite fall, for Laryl darted forward and supported me. And I didn't lose consciousness. It was just that my whole body lost feeling and I couldn't make my arms and legs work and my head wasn't quite clear.

Bodie Wilkes quit hammering on the door, and I heard his footsteps as he ran down off the little porch.

The girl Laryl, with her arm around me, was amazingly strong. She looked at me, and there was some strong, strained emotion on her dark face.

"Trust us, Val," she said. "We can't explain now—"

Trust them? I thought foggily that that was really funny. Two people come out of nowhere dressed like no one ever dressed, and talk crazy talk and hit me with some kind of a weapon I never heard of before, and then want me to trust them.

Jere had sprung to the door and was listening. "Carvallo's gone," he told the girl. "To get the others. This island is a trap, and we've got to get off it fast."

He came and put one arm around me, with Laryl supporting me from the other side.

He said, "Out the back way. We'd better get to the flitter quickly."

I sagged between them, feeling helpless and wooden and like a rag man stuffed with sawdust. Whatever that damn prism had done to me, the effects were lasting.

They started walking me back through the house, between them. My heels dragged on the floor. If I could have fought them I would have, for underneath my numbness I was more scared than before.

Botts' Island was a quiet place. And I'd lived here all my life, except for my war years. First with my parents, and later, after they died, with Mary for the year I'd had with her. And now, of a sudden, all this.

They took me through the kitchen, half carrying and half dragging me, and out the back door. The wind and the rain hit us like a fist, and in the darkness I could hear the surf groaning along the shore. The little white houses along East Road, of which my own cottage was the last, showed a vague glimmer of lighted windows.

Laryl whispered in my ear as she helped carry me along.
“We’re doing this for you, Val. You’ll be glad later—”

She and Jere dragged me between them out of my back yard, and headed inland. I wondered vaguely where they were taking me. There was nothing inland but dunes and more dunes.

They got me up onto a little ridge covered with salt-grass, and turned around to look. They had to turn me around with them, so I saw too.

Lights were bobbing and flashing around my little house, portable spotlights that threw long bright beams through the darkness and rain. There were four of the lights.

Jere muttered an oath. “Carvallo didn’t waste any time.”

If that was Bodie Wilkes down there, I couldn’t understand why he would come with others hunting for me, just because I hadn’t let him into the house. And why did they call him Carvallo?

The four lights back there separated, stringing out in a line and advancing in our direction.

Jere spoke quickly, and he and Laryl dropped down, carrying me down with them, onto the wet grass behind the ridge.

I knew I had to yell. I tried to get the yell out, but my half-paralyzed muscles wouldn’t work fast, and then Jere’s hand closed firmly over my mouth.

Laryl whispered, “They mustn’t catch us, Val. You’ll understand soon.” And then she added, her lips warm against my ear, “I’ll tell you something. It was me you loved, not Mary.”

The men down there were coming fast, half-running, flashing their lights this way and that. The angling beams showed me their wet slickers and their faces. Bodie Wilkes was one of them, and Doc Haring another, and the other two were Johnny Gilson, who ran the boat-livery in summer, and Joel Vare, the drugstore owner.

I’d known them all since I was a boy. But I’d never seen their faces as tense and worried as they looked now in the brief glimpses I got of them as they hurried along.

“. . . could have landed on East or North Beach, or inland,” Bodie was saying. “We’d better split up.”

I saw Doc Haring run back toward the road, and after a moment his car went racing back toward town. The other three kept going on diverging courses, and my head was pressed right into the wet grass as Jere and Laryl crouched lower behind the ridge.

I began to feel just a little less numb, a little less foggy. But I still could hardly move a muscle, and I didn’t think I could put up any fight yet.

After a moment I heard Jere say, “We can’t drag him all the
way to the flitter, one of those Keepers is bound to find us before we get there. I'll bring the flitter here and we'll make a fast jump.”

As I slowly straightened my head, I saw Jere handing Laryl the little prism. Then he darted away into the gusty darkness, heading into the dunes.

Three lights were snarking around some distance along Shore Road, strung out between the dunes and the sea. They were receding now, but I thought a yell might still reach them.

“Don't, Val,” said Laryl. The prism glinted in her hand. "Don’t make me do it."

I stared at the glimmer of her face in the dark, and all of a sudden I thought I knew what this was all about. I had cracked up.

I'd seen it happen in the war, to plenty of guys. You take just so much and then you can’t take any more, and you start dreaming up things and people that aren’t there.

Like everybody else, I'd had my troubles. The death of my parents in a needless auto crash, the long, grim war years, and then, after the year with Mary, the sickness that had killed her. Sure, we all have a grim time of it, sooner or later. Mine was sooner, and now I'd cracked up.

I sat on the wet, cold grass in the rain and night, with a girl who couldn’t be there holding an impossible weapon on me, and watched the lights that I imagined were carried by Bodie and Vare and Johnny. It was so ridiculous that I laughed, or tried to.

“Val,” said Laryl, “I know what you’re going through, how uncanny it all must seem to you. But you'll be all right soon.”

I managed to speak, my tongue thick in my mouth. “I’m all right now. I’m fine. Except I keep hearing and seeing you, and I know you don’t exist.”

She answered with sudden passion, “You think so, do you? You’re wrong. It was your Mary who never existed.”

I laughed again, and it seemed to sting her for she came closer to me and said fiercely:

“It's true! If you'd only remember, you'd know it's true. Try to remember. Remember Project Freewill.”

Project Freewill.

It didn’t mean a thing to me, that name. It was perfectly meaningless. And yet when I heard it, something happened.

It seemed, for a moment, that the whole world, the universe, was crumbling around me. It was as though I’d been snatched right out of the world and was falling through empty space that went on forever, and voices roared and jibbered in my brain as I fell. I made a frantic effort to climb back to reality, to the world I knew . . . and I succeeded.
Revulsion from that unearthly shock made me lash out wildly, with feeble blows. I knocked Laryl away from me and saw the prism-thing fly out of her hand. Shaking from the uncanny plunge into unreality, I struggled to my feet, and swayed drunkenly, and yelled hoarsely into the windy night.

"Bodie! Bodie Wilkes! I'm here—here!"

I saw the nearest of the three lights swing around suddenly and start back toward me. Then there was a whistling rush behind me, and I stumbled around to see a dark bulk flash down out of the darkness.

It hit the ground and a door in it opened, and there was soft light inside it—enough to show that it was the long teardrop metal craft I had glimpsed over the sea hours before. Then against the lighted door I saw Jere plunging out toward me, his broad shoulders hunched low.

Laryl had picked herself up and was shouting to him as she ran toward the place where the prism had dropped. I tried to reach it before her, but Jere came between us and his fist knocked me sprawling.

"Laryl!" he cried, and as I tried to scramble up I saw Bodie Wilkes come up over the ridge, his spotlight flashing from one hand. And in his other hand was another prism.

He held it out, pointing it at Jere, not at me. But there was a rattlesnake-buzzing close behind me, and Bodie's slicker-clad figure sagged and collapsed.

"You got him, Laryl—out of here fast!" exclaimed Jere. "The others are coming!"

He jumped at me, and when I flailed with my leaden arms he ignored them and hit me on the chin. The next thing I knew he and Laryl were dragging me into the teardrop craft, and then there was a whistling screech and I felt as though I lay on the floor of an elevator going up fast.

After a moment I rolled over and with a struggle, sat up. I was inside a simple metal cabin. Jere sat in front, holding an odd T-shaped lever in his hands, peering through a curved, transparent window. Laryl was there with him, but was watching me and holding the prism ready. There was an aching pity in her face as she looked at me.

"They'll call the mainland—but we may still slip by," said Jere, without turning his head.

The whistling rose to a shriek.

I looked at Laryl and I said, "You killed Bodie Wilkes."

"No, Val," she said. "He's only stunned. And he isn't Bodie Wilkes, your mayor. Nothing is what you think it is."

Jere said, still without turning, "Don't tell him, Laryl, you know it's dangerous."
"He’s going to see it in a few moments!" she said. "The shock would be worse, that way. I have to tell him now."

She said to me, "Look down through that window, Val."

I turned my head and looked down. And on the sea below I saw a cluster of lights.

We were flying at such speed that I saw them for only a moment. But I glimpsed a huddle of great barges floating there on the sea, and from them big nozzles stuck skyward.

"A weather-control unit," said Laryl. "Anchored there, just to create the localized storm that isolated your island."

The lights and the half-glimpsed looming nozzles flashed back and were gone.

"What year do you think it is, Val?" she asked.

I stared at her. "It’s 1951."

She shook her head and now her dark face and her dark eyes had pity in them, deeper than ever, and a fear.

"It’s 2188, Val. Over two hundred years from the time you think you live in."

It didn’t make any sense to me at all, but again I got that unearthly feeling that things were crumpling around me, that the whole universe was just a painted picture that was being torn to shreds, and that I was falling out of it into an abyss.

Laryl rushed on. "It’s true, Val. The world you thought you lived in was long ago. Things have changed, since then. We’ve conquered war and nationalism. We’ve conquered the planets. The old parliamentary governments are gone and we have the interlocking Managerial Boards that run the world by careful plan. And when any intelligent person defies the Boards, he’s not punished in the crude old ways of prison penalties. He’s given an object lesson."

I could only stare at her, and say stupidly, "An object lesson?"

"Correction, they call it," said Laryl bitterly. "He’s made to live for a while in the old anarchic 20th Century—by making him think he lives in 1951."

"No," I said, not believing her but feeling that every word she spoke was shattering my universe to smaller fragments. "Oh, no!"

"It’s true, Vall It’s easy for the psychological science of today. They numb all your real memories of your real life. Then, from prepared encephalographic recordings, they feed a false set of memories into your brain. And you wake up on Correction Island, you and the others undergoing correction. You have false, clear memories of them, and they have false memories of you, and you’re isolated there by storm. You think you live in 1951, you get fake radio news and newspapers, and you have all the
heartaches that people had in those old days, all the unnecessary grief from war and sickness and misgovernment. The Keepers, like Carvallo, see that the illusion is kept up and you never suspect them because you have false memories of them too."

"But," I said numbly, "beside Bodie Wilkes there were Doc Haring and Johnny Gilson and Joel Vare too—"

"Carvallo's assistant Keepers," said Laryl. "They must have been, he'd never let other prisoners on the island learn the truth—not till correction is over. Then they give back your real memories, and you're cured of rebellious thinking by the terrible experience of 'living' in 1951."

I whispered, "You're telling me that my whole life—that Mary—never existed. It's a lie. It's a filthy lie."

"Try to remember, Vall!" she cried. "You were one of us—a group of young scientists who hated the way our work is arbitrarily assigned to us. You helped us form the secret resistance movement we called Project Freewill. You were the one they caught and sentenced to Correction Island."

She added, "Before they sent you out, I got to you and tried to make you remember your real life—to give you a mental block to their process."

And that, I thought, was where that voice in my dream had come from.

Laryl was saying, "And when that failed, my brother Jere and I came to get you out!"

Jere said, in a dull, flat voice, "And we failed. Look out there."

I looked out, mechanically. I saw four glittering tear-drop flitters racing along near us, closing in on us.

A metallic voice spoke from a panel in this cabin. "Detention order. You will follow us in."

Jere said heavily, "I'll follow."

I looked ahead, for there was light there. And then I saw the mainland coast. There was no storm here, and I could see it clearly.

And it was not the dark New England coast of farms and scattered towns that I had known for what seemed a lifetime. It was like nothing I had ever seen before.

North and south, as far as I could see, marched great lighted pylons, symmetrically arranged, the glittering towers of a city that went on forever. Over them flashed tear-drop flitters like ours and our grim escort, and there were lights and gliding vehicles in the streets.

"It's not true," I said. "I don't remember this. No—I can't—"

Falling, plunging, into unreality with the whole fabric of the universe ripped asunder and my mind screaming for something
tangible to cling to, something real...

Laryl, watching me with tears on her cheeks, cried, "Jere, you were right. He can’t stand it this way. Forgive me, Val—"

The prism in her hand buzzed loudly and I went down into a peaceful darkness.

I came out of that darkness in the Psycho-Mechanics laboratories, and I was my own self again. The skilled men there had reawakened the memories they had previously numbed, and I remembered my life, the real life of Val Adams in this year 2188.

Childhood, boyhood, the schools and universities and family and friends—I remembered all. And I remembered Project Freewill and the resentment that had driven us younger scientists into forming that small protest against the Boards. The false memories of the life of Val Adams of 1951—I still had those too, but I knew them now for phantoms that had never existed.

They took me to an office, and I sat across a desk from a thin, middle-aged and overworked man who represented, for my minor case, the majesty of the Boards.

“No such premature interruption of Correction has ever happened before,” he commented worriedly. “It makes things a little awkward. It’s impossible psycho-logically to give you Correction again, or to give it to your two friends now that they’ve seen the island and the Keepers.”

He put down the papers he’d been looking over and glanced at me, speaking in that detached yet earnestly anxious way that has come to be the mark of a government man.

“Has the small amount of Correction you experienced made any change in your ideas, Adams?”

“In some ways,” I said. “But not the way you mean. I still protest the arbitrary assignment of scientists by the Boards. Scientific inquiry should be free.”

He shook his head. “Free is a fine word. An animal skulking in the forest is free. But we came out of the forests a long time ago. And every advance we’ve made has meant giving up a little of that freedom for the common good.”

He paused, then said, “You lived, for a little while, in the days two centuries ago when there were no Managerial Boards, when nations were free to smash each other, when scientists were set to making weapons instead of fighting the real enemies of man. War, sickness, stunted lives—you were for a time one of the people who lived in that kind of world, and you should know better now.”

I thought of the Val Adams who had never been, and all his heartaches, and I shook my head.
I said, "They had painful lives, those people, yes. Yet out of their pain they built our world. I keep wondering what we're building."

He looked a little unhappy, and began neatly stacking together the papers he had been examining.

"I was afraid it would be so," he sighed. "Your Correction was interrupted by your well-meaning friends, and it's not our fault if you came out of it with your memories and emotions muddled."

He wrote carefully on each one of the three sets of papers, and said without looking up:

"I am sending you three back to your regular type of work, but at Ganymede Colony this time. It's not a comfortable place yet, and we shall hope that the less-organized state of things there will more nearly suit your temperaments."

He added, as I rose, "In the grim old days that you seem to think a little admirable, you'd have been sent to a prison. They even killed people as punishment, then. You might think about that."

My little case was disposed of, and I went out. Laryl and her brother were waiting in the corridor, and I wondered how I could ever have forgotten them.

"Ganymede," I said, and Jere nodded.

"I know. Well, it'll be different. And we'll keep Project Freewill going."

"Yes," I said.

He went away, and Laryl came up to me, her eyes anxiously searching my face.

"You are yourself again, Val?"

I took her in my arms, and she felt right there. The old love for her welled up in me, and I kissed her long and hard. "Just the same," I said to her softly. "Just the same."

But even as I said it, I wondered. Was I really the same? She was the Laryl I'd loved, dark and passionate and strong, and I remembered and loved her still. But now there was someone else in my memory, someone who had not been there before. A smiling girl with yellow hair and happy eyes who had never existed for the rest of the world, but who still did for me.

I told myself that the corner of my mind that kept crying "Mary, Mary!" would not yearn for a phantom forever.

But an old poet said that he who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die... And I wondered.
Neutonium, as everybody knows, is heavier than anything... and doesn’t exist.

Dr. Asimov here gives details of what it would be—and what it might actually have been!

THE BIG BANG

by ISAAC ASIMOV

One of the best-loved (if now somewhat old-fashioned) gimmicks in science fiction has been that of "neutonium," a hypothetical substance made up of neutrons squished together into contact. Such a material would be so terrifically dense that ordinary matter would seem a vacuum in comparison. Globs of neutonium would sink (and have sunk, in stories) right through the Earth to come to rest in its center; living beings composed of neutonium could walk (and have walked, in stories) through ordinary matter without concern.

In ordinary matter, the atomic nuclei are actual tiny patches of this super-dense neutonium (albeit they are made up of protons as well as of neutrons.) These nuclei, however, are kept apart by comparatively voluminous clouds of comparatively weightless electrons. It is the nuclei plus the electronic froth that make up ordinary atoms, and the froth keeps ordinary matter down to low levels of density. In gases, in fact, the atoms themselves are separated by stretches of nothingness, so that density is cut down still further and 1 cubic centimeter of air, for instance, under standard conditions of temperature and pressure, weighs only 0.0012 grams. (We put this in shorthand by saying the density of air is 0.0012 gm/cm³.) To carry matters to the extremist extreme, the atoms of gas in intergalactic space are so far apart that the density of intergalactic gas is 0.00-
In liquids and solids, the atoms are in contact and the density depends partly upon the mass of the individual atoms and partly upon the type of packing. (Oranges may be stacked in more than one way and some systems of stacking leave more empty space between oranges—and hence a lower over-all density—than other systems do. The same is true of atoms.)

Water has a density of 1 gm/cm³, for instance, and iron, with heavier constituent atoms, a density of 7.86 gm/cm³. Some of the small residual space between the atoms can be squeezed out by placing substances under inordinate pressure, but so little space is left that not much is accomplished. For instance, the iron atoms at the center of the Earth are squashed together by the mass of all the thousands of miles of matter pressing in upon it under the force of gravitation, but the density of the iron there is increased to only about 12 gm/cm³.

The densest matter that exists on Earth is the element osmium, which has a density of 22.48 gm/cm³. (Its atoms are heavy but not the heaviest known. It is its more economical packing that makes it 20 percent denser than uranium metal, though the uranium atoms are individually 25 percent heavier than the osmium atoms.)

But so far all we have been considering are atoms that have been packed closer and closer together. There still exist the electron clouds between atomic nuclei. Under conditions of really great pressures, combined with tremendously high temperatures, such as exist in the central regions of the Sun, the atoms themselves are broken up. The electron clouds are stripped away and the bare nuclei may then move far closer together than they ever could anywhere on or in the Earth.

Thus, although the Sun, as an overall average, has a density of 1.5 gm/cm³ (just about one quarter the overall density of the Earth) its central regions have an estimated density of about 100,000 gm/cm³.

There are stars in which this breakdown of normal matter has progressed much further. The so-called "white dwarfs" combine the gigantic mass of a star like the Sun, with the comparatively tiny volume of a planet like the Earth. Such a white dwarf would have an overall density of about 1,800,000 gm/cm³; less than that at its surface, of course, and considerably more than that at its center.

A white dwarf, then, might seem to be pretty close to the science fiction creation, neutronium. Actually, it is still far from it. Even a white dwarf, with its atoms so compressed, is—if you ignore the electron froth—some-
thing like 99.99999 percent empty space.

The atomic nucleus, you see, has a density of 100,000,000,000,-
000 gm/cm³.

If a mass the size of the Sun were sque-e-e-e-e-e-e-ezed all the way
down to complete nuclear contact, the result would be a globe
of matter 25 miles in diameter—with all the Sun’s mass. The
Earth, similarly treated, would make a globe ⅛ of a mile in di-
meter. (If put down in Manhattan, it wouldn’t rise much higher
than the Empire State Building, but it would still have all the mass
of the Earth, of course.)

To look at it another way, an object the size of a child’s marble
(say half an inch in diameter) would, if it were made of neu-
tronium, have a mass of about a hundred billion tons.

As a matter of fact, there is one place where neutronium leaves
science fiction and becomes involved in legitimate scientific
speculation. The Belgian astro-
nomer, Abbé Georges Lemaître,
was the first to suggest that the
Universe may have started as a
single mass of super-dense ma-
terial (i.e., what we have been
talking about as neutronium,
more or less) and that the explo-
sion of this “primeval atom” set
in motion the train of events that
led to the structure of the Uni-
verse as we now know it. As a
remnant of that tremendous ex-
plosion—that biggest of all big
bangs—the Universe, 6,000,000,-
000 (?) years later, is still ex-
anding, its nebulae hastening
away from one another.

George Gamow has taken up
that notion and extended it. He
suggests that the original mass of
squashed neutrons broke up largely
into protons, electrons and unin-
imaginable quantities of radiation.
Within thirty minutes of the big
bang, the atoms as we know them
today would be in existence. For
two hundred and fifty million
years thereafter, however, the
density of the mass of radiation
(radiation has mass, as Einstein
showed) was higher than the
density of the mass of matter.
The intense radiation would, by
its pressure in all directions, keep
atoms from coming together.
After two hundred and fifty mil-
lion years, though, when the radi-
ation had spread outward and
thinned to the point where it was
less dense than was matter, the
Galaxies started to coalesce out
of the original cloud of atoms.

Now, then, how large do you
suppose Abbé Lemaître’s prime-
val atom would have been, if it
represented all the mass of the
Universe in the form of neu-
tronium?

Assuming the mass of the Uni-
verse to be 10²⁸ times that of the
Sun (a reasonable estimate) and
doubling that to allow for the
possible simultaneous formation of an equally massive "anti-Universe" made up of anti-protons and positrons, it turns out that the primeval atom would be a globe with a diameter of some 1,700,000,000 miles. This is just about the diameter of Saturn's orbit, so that such a primeval atom, containing all the mass in existence would fit quite comfortably within the Solar System.

It seems interesting to me to consider the Lemaitre-Gamow hypothesis in connection with Chapter 1 of Genesis, which recounts the Biblical creation story.

Verse 1 reads, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

If this is interpreted as meaning that He created all the matter and energy that now exists in the Universe, it could refer to the creation of Abbé Lemaître's primeval atom.

Having created matter and energy, God's first command (Verse 3) was, "Let there be light".

If we suppose, then, that at the word of command, the primeval atom exploded, and if we interpret light as meaning what is meant by the more general term "radiation"—then with what unbelievable éclat and glory and splendor that first command must have been fulfilled!

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1 Dr. Asimov will expand on the "anti-Universe" in the next issue of Venture.

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COSMIC CASANOVA

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

I was two months out on a solo galaxy scouting trip, and I was... restless. And then I contacted an unknown planet that might be one of Earth's lost colonies.... Could be a date was closer than I had thought.

This time I was five weeks out from Base Planet before the symptoms became acute. On the last trip it had taken only a month; I was not certain whether the difference was due to advancing age, or to anything the dieticians had put into my food capsules. Or it could merely have been that I was busier; the arm of the Galaxy I was scouting was heavily populated, with stars only a couple of light-years apart, so I had little time to brood over the girls I'd left behind me. As soon as one star had been classified, and the automatic search for planets had been completed, it was time to head for the next sun. And when, as happened in about one case out of ten, planets did turn up, I'd be furiously busy for several days seeing that Max, the ship's electronic computer, got all the information down on his tapes.

However, I was through the densely packed region, and now it sometimes took as much as three days to get from sun to sun. That was time enough for Sex to come tiptoeing aboard the ship, and for the memories of my last leave to make the months ahead look very empty indeed.

Perhaps I had overdone it, back on Diadene V, while my ship was being reprovisioned and I was supposed to be resting between missions. But a Survey Scout spends eighty percent of his time alone in space, and human nature being what it is, he must be expected to make up for lost time. I had not merely done that; I'd built up considerable credit for the future—though not, it seemed, enough to last me through this trip.

First, I recalled wistfully, there had been Helene. She was blonde, cuddly and compliant, though rather unimaginative. We had a fine time together until her husband came back from his mission; he was extremely decent, but...
pointed out, reasonably enough, that Helene would now have very little time for other engagements. Fortunately, I had already made contact with Iris, so the hiatus was negligible.

Iris was really something. Even now, it makes me squirm to think of her. When that affair broke up—for the simple reason that a man has to get a little sleep sometime—I swore off women for a whole week. Then I came across a touching poem by an old Earth writer named John Donne—he's worth looking up, if you can read Primitive English—which pointed out that time lost could never be regained.

How true, I thought. So I put on my spaceman's uniform and wandered down to the beach of Diadne V's only sea. There was no need to walk more than a few hundred metres before I'd spotted a dozen possibles, brushed off several volunteers, and signed up Natalie.

That worked out pretty well at first, until Natalie started objecting to Ruth (or was it Kay?). I can't stand girls who think they own a man, so I blasted off after a rather difficult scene that was quite expensive in crockery. This left me at a loose end for a couple of days; then Cynthia came to the rescue and—but by now you'll have gotten the general idea, so I won't bore you with details.

These, then, were the fond memories I started to work back through while one star dwindled behind me and the next flared up ahead. On this trip I'd deliberately left my pin-ups behind, having decided that they only made matters worse. This was a mistake; being quite a good artist in a rather specialized way, I started to draw my own and it wasn't long before I had a collection it would be hard to match on any respectable planet.

I would hate you to think that this preoccupation affected my efficiency as a unit of the Galactic Survey. It was only on the long, dull runs between the stars, when I had no-one to talk to but the computer, that I found my glands getting the better of me. Max, the electronic colleague, was good enough company in the ordinary course of events, but there are some things that a machine can't be expected to understand. I often hurt his feelings when I lost my temper for no apparent reason. "What's the matter, Joe?" Max would say plaintively. "Surely you're not mad with me because I beat you at chess again? Remember, I warned you I would."

"Oh, go to hell!" I'd snarl back—and then I'd have an anxious five minutes while I straightened things out with the disconcertingly literal-minded Navigation Robot.
Two months out from Base, with thirty suns and four solar systems logged, something happened that wiped all my personal problems from my mind. The long-range monitor began to beep; a faint signal was coming from somewhere in the section of space ahead of me. I got the most accurate bearing that I could; the transmission was unmodulated, very narrow-band—clearly a beacon of some kind. Yet no ship of ours, to the best of my knowledge, had ever entered this remote neck of the universe; I was supposed to be scouting completely unexplored territory.

This, I told myself, is IT—my big moment, the pay-off for all the lonely years I'd spent in space. At some unknown distance ahead of me was another civilization—a race sufficiently advanced to possess hyper-radio.

I knew exactly what I had to do. As soon as Max had confirmed my readings and made his analysis, I launched a message carrier back to Base. If anything happened to me, the Survey would know where and could guess why. It was some consolation to think that if I didn't come home on schedule, my friends would be out here in force to pick up the pieces.

Soon there was no doubt where the signal was coming from, and I changed course for the small yellow star that was dead in line with the beacon. No one, I told myself, could put out a wave running this strong unless they had space-travel themselves; I might be running into a culture as advanced as my own—with all that that implied.

I was still a long way off when I started calling, not very hopefully, with my own transmitter. To my surprise, there was a prompt reaction. The continuous wave immediately broke up into a string of pulses, repeated over and over again. Even Max couldn't make anything of the message; it probably meant "Who the heck are you?", which was not a big enough sample for even the most intelligent of translating machines to get its teeth into.

Hour by hour the signal grew in strength; just to let them know I was still around and was reading them loud and clear, I occasionally shot the same message back along the way it had come. And then I had my second big surprise.

I had expected them—whomever or whatever they might be—to switch to speech transmission as soon as I was near enough for good reception. This was precisely what they did; what I had not expected was that their voices would be human, the language they spoke an unmistakable but to me unintelligible brand of English. I could identify about one word in ten; the others were
either quite unknown, or else distorted so badly that I could not recognize them.

When the first words came over the loudspeaker, I guessed the truth. This was no alien, non-human race, but something almost as exciting and perhaps a good deal safer as far as a solitary scout was concerned. I had established contact with one of the lost colonies of the First Empire—the pioneers who had set out from Earth in the early days of interstellar exploration, five thousand years ago. When the Empire collapsed, most of these isolated groups had perished or had sunk back to barbarism. Here, it seemed, was one that had survived.

I talked back to them in the slowest and simplest English I could muster, but five thousand years is a long time in the life of any language and no real communication was possible. They were clearly excited at the contact—pleasurably, as far as I could judge. This is not always the case; some of the isolated cultures left over from the First Empire have become violently xenophobic and react almost with hysteria to the knowledge that they are not alone in space.

Our attempts to communicate were not making much progress when a new factor appeared—one that changed my outlook abruptly. A woman’s voice started to come from the speaker.

It was the most beautiful voice I’d ever heard, and even without the lonely weeks in space that lay behind me I think I would have fallen in love with it at once. Very deep, yet still completely feminine, it had a warm, caressing quality that seemed to ravish all my senses. I was so stunned, in fact, that it was several minutes before I realized that I could understand what my invisible enchantress was saying. She was speaking English which was almost fifty percent comprehensible.

It did not take me very long to learn that her name was Liala, and that she was the only philologist on her planet to specialize in Primitive English. As soon as contact had been made with my ship, she had been called in to do the translating. Luck, it seemed, was very much on my side; the interpreter could so easily have been some ancient, white-bearded fossil.

As the hours ticked away and her sun grew ever larger in the sky ahead of me, Liala and I became the best of friends. Because time was short, I had to operate faster than I’d ever done before. The fact that no one else could understand exactly what we were saying to each other insured our privacy. Indeed, Liala’s own knowledge of English was sufficiently imperfect for me to get
away with some outrageous remarks; there's no danger of going too far with a girl who'll give you the benefit of the doubt by deciding you couldn't possibly have meant what she thought you said. . . .

Need I say that I felt very, very happy? It looked as if my official and personal interests were neatly coinciding. There was, however, just one slight worry. So far, I had not seen Liala. What if she turned out to be absolutely hideous?

My first chance of settling that important question came six hours from planet-fall. Now I was near enough to pick up video transmissions and it took Max only a few seconds to analyze the incoming signals and adjust the ship's receiver accordingly. At last I could have my first close-ups of the approaching planet—and of Liala.

She was almost as beautiful as her voice. I stared at the screen, unable to speak, for timeless seconds. Presently she broke the silence. "What's the matter?" she asked. "Haven't you ever seen a girl before?"

I had to admit that I'd seen two or even three, but never one like her. It was a great relief to find that her reaction to me was quite favorable, so it seemed that nothing stood in the way of our future happiness—if we could evade the army of scientists and politicians who would surround me as soon as I landed. Our hopes of privacy were very slender; so much so, in fact, that I felt tempted to break one of my most iron-clad rules. I'd even consider marrying Liala if that was the only way we could arrange matters. (Yes, that two months in space had really put a strain on my system. . . .)

Five thousand years of history—ten thousand, if you count mine as well—can't be condensed easily into a few hours. But with such a delightful tutor, I absorbed knowledge fast, and everything I missed, Max got down in his infallible memory circuits.

Arcady, as their planet was charmingly called, had been at the very frontier of interstellar colonization; when the tide of empire had retreated, it had been left high and dry. In the struggle to survive, the Arcadians had lost much of their original scientific knowledge, including the secret of the Star Drive. They could not escape from their own Solar System, but they had little incentive to do so. Arcady was a fertile world and the low gravity—only a quarter of Earth's—had given the colonists the physical strength they needed to make it live up to its name. Even allowing for any natural bias on Liala's part, it sounded a very attractive place.
Arcady's little yellow sun was already showing a visible disc when I had my brilliant idea. That reception committee had been worrying me, and I suddenly realized how I could keep it at bay. The plan would need Liala's cooperation, but by this time that was assured. If I may say so without sounding too immodest, I have always had a way with women, and this was not my first courtship by T.V.

So the Arcadians learned, about two hours before I was due to land, that Survey Scouts were very shy and suspicious creatures. Owing to previous sad experience with unfriendly cultures, I politely refused to walk like a fly into their parlor. As there was only one of me, I preferred to meet only one of them, in some isolated spot to be mutually selected. If that meeting went well, I would then fly to the capital city; if not—I'd head back the way I came. I hoped that they would not think this behaviour discourteous, but I was a lonely traveler a long way from home, and as reasonable people, I was sure they'd see my point of view. . . .

They did. The choice of the emissary was obvious, and Liala promptly became a world heroine by bravely volunteering to meet the monster from space. She'd radio back, she told her anxious friends, within an hour of com-

ing aboard my ship. I tried to make it two hours, but she said that might be overdoing it, and nasty-minded people might start to talk.

The ship was coming down through the Arcadian atmosphere when I suddenly remembered my compromising pin-ups, and had to make a rapid spring-cleaning. (Even so, one rather explicit masterpiece slipped down behind a chart rack and caused me acute embarrassment when it was discovered by the maintenance crew months later.) When I got back to the control room, the vision screen showed the empty, open plain at the very center of which Liala was waiting for me; in two minutes, I would hold her in my arms, be able to drink the fragrance of her hair, feel her body yield in all the right places—

I didn't bother to watch the landing, for I could rely on Max to do his usual flawless job. Instead, I hurried down to the airlock and waited with what patience I could muster for the opening of the doors that barred me from Liala.

It seemed an age before Max completed the routine air-check and gave the "Outer Door Opening" signal. I was through the exit before the metal disc had finished moving, and stood at last on the rich soil of Arcady.

I remembered that I weighed
only forty pounds here, so I moved with caution despite my eagerness.

Yet I'd forgotten, living in my fool's paradise, what a fractional gravity could do to the human body in the course of two hundred generations. On a small planet, Evolution can do a lot in five thousand years.

Liala was waiting for me, and she was as lovely as her picture. There was, however, one trifling matter that the T.V. screen hadn't told me.

I've never liked big girls, and I like them even less now. If I'd still wanted to, I suppose I could have embraced Liala. But I'd have looked such a fool, standing there on tip-toe with my arms wrapped around her knees.
GROUND LEAVE INCIDENT

a short novelet

by ROG PHILLIPS

To a young country couple on an isolated, hardship planet,

a spaceship visit is a special event. There is the trip
to town, new clothes, the smell of fresh food and spices....

There are also the hot, demanding eyes of the woman-hungry crew.

THE SOUND CAME TO MARVIN down the tortuous twists of the pipestem, faint but unmistakable. Behind the transparency of his faceplate his lean face broke into a delighted smile.

Dropping his shovel, he hesitated for a brief second over the almost full bucket of diamond clay, then grabbed the hook and slipped it into the eye on his belt. He caught the small control box swinging on its short flexible cord from the cable, squeezed his thumb down on the black Go button, and started walking up the vertical side of the pipestem, pulled along by the hoist cable.

A spaceship was coming!

He was so excited he stumbled a couple of times on the two hundred foot ascent and was dragged along until he could shove out and regain his footing. When he emerged from the pipestem he could see the vapor trail in the blue tinted methane atmosphere. There was no question, the ship was landing.

Marvin skirted the small pile of unsorted clay and ran to his truck. In the ordinary course of things he would have brought up two more buckets of clay, then had his lunch. After that he would have gone through the clay, handful by handful, feeling out the diamonds and sifting the clay into the bucket for dumping.

The phone was ringing in the truck cab. He picked up the mike in the middle of a ring.

"Marv—"

"Thelma!" He drowned out her voice. "Be ready, we're going to town! I'm starting down the mountain this minute."

"I'll be ready, Marvin!" she said excitedly.

Marvin dropped the mike on
the hook, and reached under the dashboard to a secret button. A square section of the dash dropped down, revealing a viewscreen and a row of buttons underneath.

He pushed one, and the view of the kitchen sprang onto the screen, with Thelma just disappearing through the door to the hallway. He pushed another. The view of the bedroom appeared, and as he stepped down on the damper rod control and the truck began to move, Thelma came onto the screen, headed toward the clothes closet.

Thelma didn’t know he could watch her like this. They had been married just a little over a year, had gotten married as soon as he had put up the prefab bubble. He hadn’t liked the idea of her being all alone there. He had pictured her fainting, or being hurt somehow, and lying there suffering until he came home at supper time. So he had put in the spy kits, a couple of electronic eyes to a room, and the screen hidden in the truck. He didn’t snoop, he just looked in on her several times a day to be sure she was okay. But he didn’t let her know about it because she might not like it.

Marvin sent the truck recklessly down the mountain trail and risked a quick glance at the screen now and then, grinning at Thelma’s indecision over what dress to put on.

Filled with excitement, Thelma, having decided on her blue dress with the white bodice, fastened to get ready. There were all sorts of things she wanted to buy, and she and Marvin had quite a bit of money accumulated now. There had been several big diamonds in the past few months. When Marvin arrived she was ready to go, neatly encased in her voluminous transparent plastic sheath that wouldn’t muss her dress, and large plastic helmet that wouldn’t muss her hair.

It was sixty miles to town, around Paxton Hill. On their weekly trips to town, Marvin usually closed up the cab and turned on the air supply, and they took their time. But not now. A space ship was down. The speedometer needle pushed up to eighty and the big tires molded to the rocks and bumps with no time for jarring bouncing.

Overhead the twin suns floated, brownish red, in a purple sky. And soon, around the curve of the hill, the city moved into view, from a distance looking like a cardboard box with a mirror lying on top, with a toy ship near it.

City and ship grew in size until the roof of the city was hidden and only the hundred-foot-high walls loomed into the purple haze.

They parked near the wall, went inside, and checked in their gas-tight suits.
They didn’t talk much on the expresswalk to the dock area—they were too excited. The platforms at the dock area were already stacked high with goods, and more were being wheeled from the subway elevators. They eagerly sniffed the strange and delightful assortment of spice odors salted with an ozone tang, their eyes trying not to miss anything. They moved slowly, holding hands so as not to become separated, drifting along with the crowd, now and then disengaging themselves from the tide of humanity to make their purchases, checking off their list, making sure their packages were addressed to the right willcall station at the city wall for loading onto the truck.

Thelma was unaware of Claude Mathews for a long time. Marvin was never aware of him.

He was tall, dark-haired, with black eyes and a round face that made him seem a bit fat despite the muscular leanness of his short body and long legs. He was a spaceman.

“Two days. Two lousy days, that’s all we’ve got,” he grumbled to his companions as they lifted ten-pound boxes of tea off the conveyor belt. “Six months in space and we get two days. How you gonna get next to a babe in that time?”

“Do like the rest of us, Claude,” a short, heavy-set man said without pausing in his work, “Line up at one of the local pro houses or forget it.”

“Not me,” Claude growled. “None of that grasshopper stuff for me. I’ll make out. But two days doesn’t give me much time.” His eyes roved over the slowly moving crowd as he worked, pausing hungrily here and there.

“You could get shot, you know,” the blond man said.

“Not when you size up the right situation,” Claude said. About to set down a box of tea, he paused, his eyes on a girl in a blue dress with white bodice that accentuated her slim waist and full hips and breasts. Her hair was a rich golden color, her face pretty, with pale skin and full red lips. Her eyes were large, wideset, and deep blue. His pulse quickened, just looking at her.

The man with her—undoubtedly her husband—was a nothing. The dime-a-dozen solid young citizen type, medium height and build, angular face—an unimaginative worker type.

The couple disentangled themselves from the slowly moving crowd and pushed toward the hawker. Claude slowly set the box of tea down and moved within hearing.

The couple were buying twenty pounds of tea. The girl was taking a pencil out of her purse and crossing off something on her list,
Claude grinned to himself. That kind was a pushover.

He listened while she gave her name to the hawker for the will-call ticket. Mrs. Thelma Lake, willcall station five. Address, bubble seven, Tedrow Valley. He fixed it in his mind.

He leaned against the stacked tea and studied her hungrily. She sensed his stare and turned startled eyes on him. He grinned slowly into her eyes. She tried to look away, her white face slowly growing flushed, her nostrils flaring as her breathing became more rapid.

Suddenly she turned away. He continued staring at the back of her neck, and knew that she felt his stare.

"Me," he said softly to himself, "I’ve got it made."

Marvin brought the truck in through the big airlock when they got home—an extravagant procedure using up three pounds of oxygen. But, he pointed out, it would take almost two pounds to get everything in through the smaller lock anyway, and this way he could drive the truck right up to the storeroom and unload.

The twin suns were setting when they finished unloading. Thelma and Marvin stood arm in arm beside the truck, watching. It was one of those rare sunsets, with a clear purple sky changing to the indigo of night, Alpha plunging down below the horizon as though in free fall while Beta hung suspended on a sawtooth of the distant Minor Range. It happened that way just once every three years, and it was supposed to bring good luck to see it.

It was an anniversary for Thelma and Marvin. Three years ago they had been standing arm in arm watching Beta rest on the mountains, when Marvin had told her he now had enough money for them to be married and live by themselves....

Marvin put an arm around Thelma’s shoulders and squeezed lightly.

“Maybe next time, three years from now, there will be three of us standing here.”

“I hope so,” Thelma said, snuggling closer....

Claude Mathews parked at a lookout point on Paxton Hill overlooking Tedrow Valley, and studied his newly bought map for landmarks. After a while he got out of the rented car and studied the valley through his fieldscope, turning the light amplifier on full to get a sharp image on the screen. Here and there through the blue, early morning mist were glossy inkblots that he knew must be petroleum pools.

He found bubble seven almost at once, but he also located the other glass domes in the valley,
and studied them, to be familiar with their location in relation to number seven. There were ten altogether, scattered out, and the main road took an erratic course that carried it within a mile or two of each of them.

Finally, satisfied that he knew the details of the valley, he settled down to watch bubble seven. There were lights on in the house, and a small truck inside the bubble parked near one wing of the house.

He had learned that most of the men in Tedrow Valley worked diamond mines. Pipestem clay deposits that assayed about five hundred karats a ton, most of it very small diamond grains suitable only for industrial uses.

If Marvin Lake worked such a mine, he should be leaving soon, and if no one else lived with the Lakes, then Mrs. Thelma Lake would be alone....

His round face broke into a smile as he saw a man come out of the house and get into the truck. He watched the truck move into a short extension from the bubble and stop. A truck airlock.

A few minutes later the truck moved away from the bubble. He watched it creep along the valley floor, ignoring the vaguely defined road, and head toward the hills on the other side of the valley.

Claude kept the truck on the viewscreen until it left the valley and vanished part way up a distant hill. Then he got back in the rented car and started down into the valley, driving fast.

The memory of Thelma Lake’s face rose in his mind. Wide set large blue eyes, slightly parted full lips—

He jerked the wheel, bringing the car away from the edge of the sheer drop on the right side of the road. His heart was pounding violently, but not from his narrow escape.

In the valley he cut off from the road, and parked the rented car in a spot he had picked out where it couldn’t be seen.

He continued on foot, checking the landmarks he had picked out from the lookout point. There were ten hours of oxygen left in his rented, lightweight, landside suit. He could not afford to get lost.

He would have preferred his spacesuit. He was used to it and it was more functional. But it would have marked him a mile off as a spaceman to anyone who happened to see him.

After he had walked a mile he stopped at a small pool, dipped a plastic-gloved finger in the black oil, and smeared it over his faceplate, thin enough so he could see out, but thick enough so that it would be difficult for anyone to make out his features.

When he came within sight of his destination he began stagger-
ing and stumbling, stopping often to rest. He knew that somewhere, a few hundred yards out from the bubble, he would trip an alarm signal. He had to get into the bubble, and he hoped that Thelma Lake would open up for a stranger apparently in trouble.

Of course, she might call her husband before she let him in. The truck certainly would have a radiophone. If she did call, however, there was a good chance Marvin Lake would be down in his mine and not hear the phone.

When he was thirty yards from the smaller airlock he saw her come out of the house and look toward him. He staggered and went to one knee, then picked himself up and staggered on toward the airlock.

He saw her half turn, as though to go back into the house. Then she came running toward the airlock. She was wearing a long blue housecoat, and under it, hanging below the housecoat, a sheer pink nightgown.

Claude Mathews grinned. Probably, like many married women left alone, she went back to bed for a while after the old man left in the morning.

He staggered into the airlock and collapsed. He saw her fumbling with the controls, smiling encouragingly at him, and knew that she had not been able to see his face behind the oil on his faceplate.

When Marvin reached the mine he swung the truck around and parked it as usual. Today he felt lazy. He would bring up three more buckets of clay and take things easy.

Before going down he went back to the truck and switched on the secret viewscreen. Thelma wasn’t in the kitchen. He looked at the kitchen for a moment. It was very empty without her in it.

He switched to the bedroom, and he saw her back in bed, asleep. A tender smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. Thelma had had an exciting time in town, and they hadn’t gotten to sleep until after midnight. He hoped she would sleep until noon.

Switching off the screen, Marvin went back to the mine and hooked the cable to his belt. Down at the bottom of the pipe-stem he took the pick and broke loose enough of the whitish clay to fill the bucket twice, his experienced eyes watching for large pebbles that, under their rough opaque surface, would be diamonds of several karats. The hope of finding one of those was the thrilling part of mining.

He had one—he had found it a year ago—that assayed a possible nine karats. He was keeping it as a surprise for Thelma. One of these days he was going to have it cut. It would cost quite a bit to do that, but the finished stone would be worth a small fortune.
He shoveled the bucket full, hooked it onto the cable and sent it up. When it reached the surface the automatic trip would take over and dump it, and send it back down.

While he waited he sifted around in the clay, putting the two or three small stones he found in the pouch at his belt.

The trouble with him, he decided, was that he was lonesome for Thelma. Or maybe he was just lazy this morning.

The bucket came back down. He shoveled clay into it, resisting the desire to go up above.

He would have liked to have stayed home today, but he and Thelma had thrashed that out long ago. Work was work. It would be too easy, when you're your own boss, to goof off once in a while, then oftener and oftener, until you were shiftless like Roul in bubble four.

Of course, if he went home at noon she probably wouldn't make him come back, but she wouldn't like it, and would point out that he had lost most of yesterday.

He finished filling the bucket. He looked at it, wanting to get on it and ride it up. He shook his head, inside his helmet, and firmly pressed the Go button, and watched the bucket climb up the pipestem, its rider wheels keeping it away from the walls.

He wished now he had gone up with it.

Suddenly he was impatient. It seemed an eternity until the bucket came into view again.

When it came to rest on the bottom he didn't even bother to unhook it, but stepped into it and pressed the Go button. His impatience increased.

As the bucket neared the top, Marvin stood on its rim, holding the taut cable, and leaped off. The bucket kept going, clanging emptily through the tripping setup.

He half ran to the truck, the impatience a driving force in him now. He didn’t stop to analyze it or even be curious about it. He just wanted to turn on the screen and see Thelma.

It was still tuned to one of the bedroom eyes, and after a moment the picture of the bedroom flashed into the screen. The bed was empty.

He switched to the other bedroom eye to make sure she wasn't at her dresser. She wasn't.

He switched to one of the kitchen eyes. She wasn't in the kitchen. Probably she was in the bathroom taking a shower or something. He touched the bathroom button, then shook his head.

When he had installed the secret eyes he had hesitated a long time over putting any in the bathrooms. Only the realization that lots of accidents happen in bathrooms had decided him. And, even so, he had never used it.
He wasn't worried. Just impatient. Nervously impatient. He passed over the bathroom eyes and punched in one room after another, without finding Thelma.

Finally his finger was back to the bathroom button again. He hesitated. One quick, half a second glance wouldn't do any harm.

He pushed the button and pushed the kitchen button a half second afterwards. The bathroom flashed into the screen and was replaced by the kitchen.

She wasn't in the bathroom.

Wait a minute—she would be in the storeroom working on the load of stuff they had bought in town!

"Why didn't I think of that before?" he said aloud.

He slid over and put one foot to the ground, then changed his mind. He would have part of his lunch now, and a cup of hot tea.

He pulled his leg back in and closed the cab door, and started the air purifier. When the green light flashed on he unclamped his faceplate.

He reached to shut off the view of the kitchen on the screen, then decided to leave it on.

The lunch was especially good today. Thelma had bought a lot of new spices and little tidbits from a dozen different planets.

He selected a small sandwich made from a canned bread that he vaguely remembered was made from a flour that was mostly

the ground-up roots of a tree from some planet that was lightyears distant.

He bit into the sandwich, chewed thoughtfully, then glanced idly at the viewscreen.

He saw the back door open and Thelma come in. The expression on her face arrested him. She was worried—

He saw the man, suddenly. The round face had a mask of dark stubble—darker than the normal blondness of native born people.

A spaceman? But what would he be doing in Tedrow Valley? Maybe out sightseeing and something had gone wrong with his car.

"I must phone my husband," Thelma said.

The sound of her voice startled Marvin. It was utterly strange for someone to be there, at home with Thelma, when he wasn't.

The man reached out and took Thelma's arm, saying, "Why bother the old man?"

"He's expecting me to call him," Thelma said. "If I don't, he'll be worried and come right home."

At this outright lie Marvin suddenly sat up, feeling icy fear racing through him.

"Forget that guy!" the man said, jerking Thelma around and gripping both sides of her head. He ignored her beating fists, pulling her face toward his.

Marvin was trembling so violently he fumbled several times
ineffectively before getting the truck in motion. He slammed down on the damper rod control throttle and was pushed back against the seat.

He risked a glance at the view-screen. Thelma was struggling desperately.

Marvin forced his eyes to the road. It would take twenty minutes to get down the mountain, get home. Twenty minutes!

“That’s better,” the man’s voice erupted in Marvin’s ears. “Just relax so I can get this suit off. We’re going to have a real good time, baby. A real good time.”

“Get out!” Thelma’s voice shuddered. “Get out! My husband will kill you.”

Marvin risked a glance at the screen. Thelma was on the floor, inching toward the phone. The man, peeling off his suit, was a symbol of nightmare etching into Marvin’s mind.

“Kill me?” the man was saying. “I don’t think so, baby. And do you know why? Because you won’t tell him. Not afterwards. You want this as much as I do, but you won’t admit it to yourself. I could see it in your eyes when you looked at me yesterday at the docks, baby.”

The gloating words seared into Marvin’s ears.

At the docks? Absurd!

“That’s not true!” Thelma’s voice sounded.

Marvin risked another quick glance. Thelma had inched closer to the wall where the phone was. Suddenly she leaped to her feet and darted toward it.

The man leaped after her, the protective suit still hanging to one leg. “Oh no you don’t, baby,” he said. He seized both her wrists and twisted them behind her, forcing her body to arch against his.

Marvin jerked back to his surroundings with the truck climbing off the road. It nearly overturned as he fought the wheel. Then he was back on the road.

“No!” Thelma screamed.

Marvin risked a look at the screen, and jerked his eyes away from what he saw, sick to the core of his being.

He looked through the wind-shield. Everything was blurred. He tried to connect his mind to his vision, to see the road. The truck tilted over at a crazy angle again. He was off the road. It should have been the other side, with its two-hundred-foot drop that would mercifully kill him.

He braked to a stop, unable even to see where he was stopping. He wanted to go on. He had to go on. It would take another full ten minutes at maximum speed to reach home.

Ten minutes... The enormity of time...

Like a disembodied spirit, he heard himself crying. Crying... lost...
It might have been hours that passed, or days. Time had no meaning any more. Maybe Thelma was dead. It would be better for her to be dead, to escape the horror of being still alive.

What insane sounds had come from the speaker? He wasn’t sure. He thought Thelma had laughed once, but that couldn’t be so. Laughed, and that maddeningly calm male voice had said, “That’s it, baby, let yourself go, enjoy it.” And the strange, wild, demented laughter spilling into Marvin’s ears had changed to sobbing, that became laughter again, then sobbing that drifted into whimpers, and silence.

Silence. The silence had lasted for ages.

Marvin opened his eyes and looked out the windshield. He could see clearly. The road, the haze of the valley below, the twin suns high in the purple sky.

He turned suddenly and looked into the viewscreen. The man stood in the middle of the kitchen, stretching his long lean arms, his long legs widespread, his round face gaping in a huge yawn.

Thelma lay on the floor, on her stomach, her head buried in her arms, unmoving, except for her shoulders which shook with her spasmodic, silent sobs.

“You see, baby,” the insanely calm male voice broke the silence. “It wasn’t so bad after all, was it? Your old man ever give you such a good time? You know he didn’t. And you liked it. You responded. You really wanted it all the time, didn’t you? I guessed it when you blushed down at the docks. I could read your mind when you looked at me. You blushed at what you were thinking, didn’t you? ‘There’s a real hunk of man. Wish I could get in bed with him.’ That’s what you thought, wasn’t it? Now admit it to yourself. It was. So I came out and gave you your wish.”

The little black eyes in the round face stared down at the back of Thelma’s head shrewdly.

“So now what are you going to do?” the man went on, while Marvin listened, unable not to listen.

“Are you going to tell that husband of yours? Don’t be foolish. What’s done is done, and you liked it. You’ll dream about it, baby, believe me. So why ruin things for yourself? What would your husband do if he found out? Kill me? I might have something to say about that if he tried.

“And suppose he did kill me? Then everyone would know. Can’t you hear the prosecutor saying, ‘Now tell the court once more how the deceased took you on the kitchen floor. Why didn’t you struggle harder?’ And all your friends—and your husband—will be sitting there, listening to you.”

The round face smiled at the back of Thelma’s head. “On the
other hand, if you keep your mouth shut, he need never know. No one will ever know... And suppose you told him, and I was already gone off the planet? Every time he looked at you he would remember. You would know what he was thinking..."

Marvin tried to shut his ears. He wanted to shut off the sound and sight, and couldn’t. He tried to shut off his thoughts, and couldn’t.

If he rushed down now, he couldn’t stop what had already happened. But—something he hadn’t thought of until now—Thelma would then learn of the electronic eyes in all the rooms, know he had been spying on her ever since they were married.

He hadn’t thought of it as spying. Certainly he had never even thought of anything but being close to her in secret, watching over her in case she slipped and hurt herself, or fainted, or any one of the many things that could happen...

But would she know that?

“Look,” the man was saying, “I’ve got a rented car parked about a mile from here. I’m walking to it now and going back to town. Think it over. I’m a funny kind of a guy. Once, and I’ve had it. Something goes out of it for me, after I’ve had a girl the first time. So think of your life ahead, and hold onto it. Keep your mouth shut. After I go, get your-

self prettied up for your hubby, and when you’re in bed together, think of me, huh?”

A car! Parked about a mile from the bubble! It would take the man half an hour, at least, to get to it. Then he would be going up around Paxton Hill.

Had Thelma heard what the man said to her? What would she do? A lump rose in Marvin’s throat. Poor Thelma...

He was calm now. He saw the man’s back turned to the screen as the man slipped into his gas tight suit again.

Marvin inched the truck down onto the road. When he looked at the screen again the man was gone. Thelma was slowly turning over. Marvin hastily shut off the viewscreen. He couldn’t bring himself to see Thelma’s face. Not just yet.

He closed up the dashboard and concentrated on driving. Mile after mile, as the mountain fled behind him and he raced toward Paxton Hill, not daring to turn his head to look toward his home.

He had never driven across the valley before without turning to look at his home...

Marvin knew exactly what he was going to do. There was a lookout point on Paxton Hill from which he could watch the valley. He would wait there until he saw the car. When he was sure it was coming he would start down the
hill at full speed and run head-on into it.

That would solve everything, for him.

For him? The implication of selfishness and self pity in the thought struck him. But Thelma wouldn’t have to face him with her shame. She might wonder what he had been doing coming from the direction of town, but she would never suspect that he knew.

The atom-driven turbine whined higher and higher as the speedometer needle passed over into the nineties, but he was unaware of his speed.

What other course was there than to kill the monster and be killed? What was there to live for now?

Suddenly it welled up in him. All that he and Thelma had together, all the future they had looked forward to with such confidence. Was it to be thrown away?

Think of your life ahead, and hold onto it.

What of Thelma. If she wanted to try to hold on to what she had, face life and wait for forgetfulness, didn’t she have that right?

Up ahead was the lookout point. Marvin took his foot off the foot control, slammed on the brakes, and made a tight U turn. Below, Tedrow Valley spread out into the blue haze that lay over it.

Marvin looked at it, then closed his eyes, fighting to still his thoughts.

How selfish he was! Thelma had been raped, her happy life and happy future shattered by an inhuman beast. And he, Marvin Lake, had been about to add to that final blow, an accident which took away the only reason she could have left for wanting to live....

There was another way. Turn around, drive slowly, and when that car passes, speed up and drive it over the side of the road up where there’s a three-hundred-foot drop.

And what if he did kill the man? It would be on all the telecasts and Thelma—would she guess, and know that he knew?

Marvin groaned. If only he had not listened to the terrible reasoning of that monster from hell.

And the horrible doubts he sowed, capitalizing on any guilt feelings his victims might have. Girls naturally admired men other than their husbands, just as men admired girls other than their wives.

In town he found pleasure in seeing all the attractive girls, and Thelma probably found pleasure in seeing tall, manly men walking along—

He was going to kill that space-man. He wouldn’t be able to live with himself if he didn’t.

He started to turn the car to
head the other way so that he could run the man off the road.

But if he killed the man, Thelma would know he knew...

He stopped the car in a torment of indecision.

It was up to Thelma.

That spaceship wouldn't leave until tomorrow morning. Later he could go into town with a knife, find the man, and kill him. Maybe that would be a better way anyway.

A knife. He nodded grimly. There were things he could do with a knife without killing the man. Better things than killing.

He took his foot off the brakes and started slowly back the way he had come, into the valley. When he was almost down to the valley floor he saw the smaller car coming toward him.

He caught a glimpse of the round face with its dark mask of short stubble. Then the car had shot past him.

He continued on another hundred yards, and suddenly he was shaking uncontrollably. He had to stop the truck. He had to put on the handbrake because he was too weak to keep pressure on the foot pedal.

Why was he shaking? Reaction, now that the crisis of his opportunity to kill the man in a crash was past?

Possibly. But it was something else, too. He had seen that face again. It was a symbol to him—the incarnation of everything evil.

But now—He would have to come home at his regular time, be smiling and cheerful as though nothing had happened, and—

Give Thelma a chance for life. That was it. Give Thelma a chance. Everything, no matter what, must be secondary to that.

Suddenly he saw his lunch, spilled out of the lunchbox on the floormat. And the thermos. He picked up the thermos and shook it, hearing the rattle of broken glass. Damn! He'd have to tell Thelma he dropped it and broke it. Good thing they had half a dozen replacements in the store room.

He got out of the cab and went around to the right hand side, and picked up all the little tidbits of his lunch and tossed them over the cliff. He took a whisk broom and swept the floormat carefully.

It was still three hours until his regular time to go home. He would go back to the mine and work. That was the thing to do.

When he reached his mine it looked strange to him—like something familiar he had not seen for years. He began working on the pile of clay, breaking it down a handful at a time, picking out the small diamond granules.

The seconds passed like hours, but slowly the familiar work comforted him. And eventually it was time to go home.
Now that the time had come, he was afraid. As he started the truck he found he was trembling again. He fought it, and it increased.

He slowed down and began to think of that future, the nice things about it, the things worth living for. After a while he wasn't trembling any more.

She would be waiting for him now. How would she be waiting? With a firm grip on herself? Still overcome by shock and horror?

Maybe it would be better if he looked in and found out, so he could know what he had to face. He hesitated, then stopped the truck and turned on the viewscreen. The kitchen scene came onto the screen.

She was not there.

The nightmare gnawed at the edge of his mind again. He jabbed the bedroom button in a panic of anxiety. She wasn't there.

He shut off the screen and slammed the panel closed, and sat there, his fists clenched, fighting for control. Thelma was all right. She had to be all right. The whole future depended on it.

Had that—that—come back? What a fool he had been for not keeping the viewscreen on. He had been interested only in his own selfish feelings. God! All afternoon, all he had been interested in was how he felt! Not a thought for Thelma. Not once looking in on her to see how she was making out! Not even a thought for the possible danger of that fiend coming back again.

Calm now. Nothing is wrong—Thelma was either in the bathroom or out in the yard at the airlock.

Of course! She was going to be out at the airlock. She was going to wave, force herself to smile! He mustn't be late, force her to stand there longer than necessary.

He started the truck again, and held the vision of Thelma waiting for him, ready to smile and wave to him. It would be a good world. It was a good world. Together, he and Thelma would hang onto it.

He speeded up, cutting across the valley floor without paying the regard to roads that he usually did. Bubble seven—home—came into view. His heart started to pound painfully. His eyes ached from straining for the first sight of Thelma standing inside the transparent wall of the bubble....

She wasn't there, or if she was he couldn't see her. The truck lurched violently and he brought his eyes back to his driving. Lucky he had only run over a large rock. He could have gone into one of the oil puddles and had a few hours' work cleaning off the sticky stuff.

He pulled up in front of the airlock, leaped out of the truck cab, and ran to the airlock. He punched the button that would
close the outer panel and start the air purifier to get rid of the methane. That was always the longest part, that sixty-second wait in the airlock. Usually Thelma was there, scant inches away, smiling at him happily.

Today, he thought, she had remembered that sixty-second wait and realized she couldn’t keep smiling as if nothing were wrong. That was why she wasn’t here to meet him.

The sixty seconds were up. The inner panel swung open. Marvin started to run toward the house.

At the kitchen door he leaned against the wall, collected himself, and called, “Thelma…”

He waited a couple of seconds, then pushed the door open and called again.

When she didn’t come he went on in. The kitchen was empty.

The house was empty.

How much later it was, he didn’t know. He had run from room to room, shouting her name, searching, searching. In the store room he had run up and down the aisles of canned goods.

Twice hope flared in him—when he thought of the hydroponic house, and when he thought of the emergency underground vault. But she had been in neither place.

There was only one other place she could be. He tried not to think of it.

Against his will he straightened stiffly and looked out through the transparent walls of the bubble to the truck… and beyond the truck.

Out there.

People did that. Just a few months ago the telecasts had told about some fellow who had simply walked out into it without a gas tight suit on. And a year ago a woman had run into it and dived into an oil pool. It had taken the police two days to get her body out.

Marvin went into the airlock and on through. There was no sixty second wait going out; you just shut the inner panel and opened the outer one and let the good air out with you. Some alarmists predicted that eventually there would be enough oxygen released in this manner to bring the atmosphere of Jeffries’ Planet to an explosive concentration; but that wasn’t possible—the oxygen was burned up by ionization produced by the rays from the twin suns.

Funny, to think of a thing like that when Thelma—

Marvin began his search. Somewhere there would be a huddled bundle of clothing, an arm in view above a concealing rise.

How far could she have gone before she dropped? A hundred yards? Not that far. Not even if she ran.

He had never realized before
that there were three large oil ponds within running distance of the airlock. Who would ever have a crazy thought like that?

He didn’t find her.

He searched the shores of the three ponds for some sign of a footprint in the rough, baked ground...or a slight scraping where Thelma’s shoe might have dragged or slipped.

He found a few faint marks—but how could he tell which scratch, if any, had been made by Thelma?

He stared at the gleaming black surfaces of the ponds, trying to sense whether Thelma’s body was in this one or that one. It would take a week of dragging operations to get her out.

Meanwhile—

He went back to the bubble. He went into the kitchen, into its terrible emptiness. He opened the drawer containing the forks, knives, and spoons.

There were lots of knives. Carving knives, paring knives, steak knives. He selected two. One was a carving knife, long and razor sharp, with a haft. The other was small, a paring knife. He sharpened it until it was razor sharp too. A doctor could perform an operation with it.

Anyone could.

At the doorway he paused and looked back. He would never see the kitchen again, perhaps. It didn’t matter.

He went out to the truck and began the drive around Paxton Hill to the city.

The twin suns had sunk below the horizon by the time he came within view of the city. The spaceship was still there, with sharp points of light on it here and there. Red, yellow, and green lights from outside, white discs of light from portholes.

Marvin drove into his accustomed parking spot, went through the nearest airlock, and checked his suit. He stuck the tag in his pocket, aware that he would never redeem the suit. Thelma had chosen her way, now he had chosen his. If there were a hereafter they would soon be together.

He noticed the rent-a-car booth. On impulse he stopped and went in.

"Hello, Marvin," the girl behind the counter said.

"Hello—Joyce." She had been in one of his classes in school and he had to think a minute before remembering her name.

"What can I do for you?" she said, smiling.

"I’ll tell you," Marvin said, trying to be casual. "Did you rent a car to a fellow today, probably off that ship that’s in? Tall, dark, sort of round face?"

"Why, yes." She consulted a list. "Claude Mathews. He was out five hours."

"Thanks." Marvin strode out.
Claude Mathews. Knowing the man's name would simplify finding him. For one thing—
He had been about to jump onto a moving walk. He changed his mind and went to a sidewalk phone booth. After a few tries he was connected to the spaceship.
"Is Claude Mathews back on board yet?" he asked.
"Just a minute," a male voice said. Then, "No. And, knowing him, I would say he's probably in a poker game somewhere and the L.P.'s will have to bring him aboard at the last minute."
"Thanks," Marvin said.
He left the phone booth, and headed toward the moving walk.
"Hey, Marvin!" a vaguely familiar voice shouted. "Where you going? Long time no see!"
He ignored it and hopped on the walk, skipping over to the successively faster ones. He recalled the owner of the voice after a bit. A casual acquaintance in his single days. A three dimensional chess player with a weakness on Knight defenses and a nasty mind.
Nasty? What had before seemed nasty to Marvin now seemed only a mildly noticeable peculiarity of a decent man. Now Marvin knew about evil, and his values had changed. . . .
Once, and I've had it.
The supremely casual evilness of it. . . . The rather pleasant, deep voice that had said those words would echo horribly in his ears as long as he lived.
Easy now. It would be so easy to let the dam break. He had to keep control. . . . Just a little while longer.
He rode the express walk toward the dock area. In that neighborhood were the card rooms, the pro houses, the alcohol joints and the dope cellars—wide open lures to keep the degenerate and the conscienceless clumped together where they could be controlled.
But one had ignored the honey-baited trap and had gone out into the countryside where decent people lived. . . .
Where was he now?
"Want a good time, honey?"
Marvin looked without emotion at the ravaged face of the pro girl and moved on, feeling her clutching fingers slide off his sleeve. Had she once. . . .? What had brought her to this—instead of the dark pool of oil in the valley that would have given her eternal peace. . . .
He turned into another card room. Not there. The street again.
"You want happy dream?"
Marvin looked down at the short man, his butterball figure, his shiny, jaundiced, fat face and multiple chins, his thick glasses.
"You look sad," the grotesque lips said. "You come with me. I show you a happy land where all is lovely."
Yes, Marvin thought, that is a way...
To sink into the arms of dope-induced unreality—he could understand that need...
“No,” he said gently. “Not yet.”
He pushed on.
Man had spread out to the stars, driven on by a dream. Mankind was a mighty ocean washing against the cliffs of eternity, wearing them away.

But here and there were the tideflats, with distorted shapes crawling under the rocks.
And somewhere near was a thing named Claude Mathews—
A few feet ahead was a sign... another card room. It would be the eighth... or the eighteenth. Marvin had lost track—he had almost begun to lose hope. This would be like the other places he had entered; there would be no round face on broad lean shoulders, no end to his search.

But he pushed through the swinging doors. And almost immediately he saw the man.

It had once been some kind of store. Shelves still lined the walls, coated with dust. Perhaps thirty by a hundred feet, its asphalt floor was streaked with filth, and a sour smell hung in the smoke-grey air.

There were perhaps two dozen card tables, regularly spaced, all of them filled, eight men to a table. Marvin recognized some of the games. Poker, pan, whiskey... Here and there among the players was a young face that reminded him of himself when he was young and didn’t know the meaning of horror. But three fourths of the faces were unmistakably those of spacemen, black men, yellow men, red men, white men—from a dozen parts of the galaxy.

Marvin moved toward the table where Claude Mathews sat. He went unnoticed in the thin crowd.
Would Claude Mathews recognize him? Did the man even know what he looked like?
“I’ll take two,” the horribly familiar voice said.
Marvin moved closer, until he was so close he could have reached out and touched the man on the shoulder.
The dealer was a yellow-skinned man on the other side of the table. Claude Mathews scooped up his cards, in high good humor. He had plenty of chips in front of him.
He won the pot with two pair.
“You know how it is,” he gloated. “Lucky. That’s me. Lucky at cards, lucky at love, lucky at everything.”
“Deal ’em,” a red man said laconically.
“But none of this grasshopper stuff for me,” Claude Mathews went on, sticking up his cards as they were dealt. “Nine out of ten
nice women want it, are waiting for it."

When the red man opened, he tossed his cards in and said, "It’s that way everywhere. How many husbands give their wife a real good time? None. They don’t have what it takes. Nine out of ten married women are just waiting for a guy to walk in the door and give them a thrill they’ll never forget."

Marvin clamped a hand on Claude Mathews’ shoulder.

The round face turned up, the dark eyes staring at Marvin. No flicker of recognition showed.

"Move on, pal," Claude Mathews said. "No handouts from me. Try someone else."

"I don’t want a handout," Marvin said.

"No?" Claude Mathews shoved out his chair and half turned. All movement at the table stopped. "What do you want?"

"Those nice women," Marvin said. "One of them was my wife."

"Oh?" Claude Mathews said, glancing up and down Marvin’s slight frame with amusement.

"Cut it out," a voice whined. "Let’s play cards. The ship lifts at dawn, you know." But no one listened.

"Yes," Marvin said. He was calm now. He was remembering when he was a little boy, with his magic kit and book of instructions that said the secret of magic was to keep them interested in what one hand was doing and they wouldn’t notice what the other did.

He pulled out the little paring knife, holding it in his left hand, half raised but not too threatening. All eyes, he knew, were on that little knife. Claude Mathews glanced at it. Marvin could see the gloating confidence in the little black eyes. One threatening move of the little knife and the long armed spaceman could grab the wrist that held it.

"You raped my wife," Marvin said coldly.

"Well now, wait a minute," Claude Mathews said. "Who says so? I don’t know who you are, pal, but unless I’m invited—"

Marvin lifted the little paring knife as a left-handed man might draw back to stab downward. Claude Mathews reached to intercept it. He was unaware of the long, broad-bladed carving knife that was thrust point first into his groin, thrust in a twisting slicing motion that stopped only when the point was buried deeply in the upholstery of the chair seat.

The round face was only inches from Marvin’s eyes, every pore and whisker magnified. Marvin saw the eyes glaze with shock and knew his thrust had gone where he intended.

He let go the carving knife and stepped back, the little paring knife still in his left hand.

He turned away and walked
toward the entrance. Ahead of him, men stepped quickly aside. Behind him, abruptly, Claude Mathews screamed—and screamed again.

Marvin didn’t look back. It was over now. Nothing made any difference. If the knife he had just used struck him in the back it would bring him happy oblivion. If Claude Mathews died, and they arrested him for the murder, it didn’t matter.

He was not stopped. He walked calmly out the door, unaware even that he had dropped the paring knife.

“Want a good time, darling?” a rather pretty girl asked. She looked into his eyes, then shrank away.

Marvin watched her move on. A man was coming up the street, a bit unsteadily. She hesitated, then moved toward him. The man stopped. They exchanged a few words. Then the man slipped his arm around the girl’s waist. Together they walked back toward Marvin.

When they passed, the girl was looking up at the man, smiling. She didn’t glance toward Marvin.

It had been one of the space-men. He had been crooning something to the girl ... “We lift at dawn.”

The song, old as space.

We lift at dawn. Soon we’ll be gone. Good bye, my lover, good bye.

“Gods of Space!” a voice said behind Marvin. “He’s standing right outside!”

He started to turn. Men in L.P. uniforms and crash helmets moved swiftly to surround him.

His only reaction was a wave of gratitude.

When he had emerged from that door he had had no idea what to do, where to go. There was nothing, anywhere, to draw him.

Now there was purpose. Maybe not his purpose, but something to carry him along so he wouldn’t have to think of anything.

“What’re we gonna do with him?” one of them said. “He’s a hot potato. Why didn’t he have sense enough to lam?”

“Let’s get him out of here before the police get here,” another said urgently. “Gil, go back in and pass the word around that nobody saw nothin’.”

“Let’s get him on the ship,” someone said. “The cops can’t find him there. Last place they’d think of, on the ship.”

Marvin let himself be moved along.

He caught a fleeting glimpse of the little fat man looking at him owlishly through his thick lensed glasses. The happy dreams man.

He was pushed into a car that jerked into motion a moment later. In the distance he heard the moan of sirens. After a few blocks one passed by, rising to a peak of
deafening sound and dwindling away.

He felt the car make several turns, then lurch up onto something and stop. He felt the car dropping swiftly and knew he was on an elevator. He knew where he was—in the dock area, dropping down into the underground tubes leading out into the spaceport.

He had never been on a spaceship but he knew that they settled with exact precision so that their elevator shafts could connect to the subway elevator shafts.

In a few moments the car got into motion again. Then there was a fast lift upward. Up up up, higher than he had ever gone in an elevator.

Suddenly the very atmosphere around him seemed different, alien.

The car stopped rising. The car doors opened. He was pushed out gently but firmly.

“Let’s stick him in J room,” one of the L.P.’s said.

Marvin went along without protest.

He lifted his feet over a hatchway and was in a room with four of the strange, bulky forms that he had seen in pictures, and which were called crash boxes. There were also several conventional chairs, welded to the floor.

“Sit down,” he was told.

He sat down.

Two of the landside policemen stayed with Marvin. The others went away. Marvin closed his eyes and leaned back. His body tingled with fatigue. His mind floated in pools of darkness where the past and the future did not intrude.

After a while he was listening to the conversation of the two L.P.’s. Not what they talked about, but the words, their voices. Their accent was subtly different, the tempo of speech more rapid than he was used to.

Twice during the long wait the phone on the wall shrilled and one of the L.P.’s answered it. Marvin opened his eyes and watched, and knew the conversation was about him.

At last the wait was over. A man in the uniform of a space officer came in. Marvin knew nothing about the meanings of the insignia on the uniform, whether the man was the ship’s captain or some minor officer. He dismissed the L.P.’s and closed the door.

He was lean faced with a strong chin. His hair was iron gray. Marvin felt a liking for him.

“I’m Dr. Cavendish,” the man said abruptly.

“I’m Marvin Lake.”

“One name is as good as another,” Dr. Cavendish said with a twisted smile.

“Oh, but it is!” Marvin said.

“If you say so,” Dr. Cavendish said. “Have you ever been in space?”
“No. I’ve never even been on a ship until now.”
Dr. Cavendish smiled. “It probably seems as strange to you then as Jeffries’ Planet seems to me. What do you do for a living?”
“Oh? How many work with you in the mine?”
“I work it by myself. You see, the clay deposits are like long fingers sticking deep in the ground. We call them pipesheds. They go down at very steep angles and are never more than six or eight feet in diameter, and usually about four feet. One man is all that can work comfortably. Besides, it’s against the law to make a crew operation out of a mine. Inspectors make regular visits to make sure we clean the pipesheds as we go down and don’t let the cheap stuff go to waste.”
“Cheap stuff?”
“The grains that assay under a tenth of a karat.”
Dr. Cavendish nodded. “I see,” he said. “You work alone then, day after day.”
“That’s right.”
“What do you think about while you’re working alone, day after day?”
“Oh, I don’t know,” Marvin said. “I have a lot of interests. But mainly, when you’re working, you have to concentrate on what you’re doing.”
“But you do think about things, at times?” Dr. Cavendish said.

“Oh, sure.”
“Like your wife being home alone, and a spaceship in, with the crew on ground leave?”
“So that’s your line,” Marvin said. “Look.” He took a deep breath. “Let’s get something straight. I did something. I don’t regret it. I’m ready to take my punishment. Is that good enough for you?”
“But you haven’t done anything,” Dr. Cavendish said quietly. “That’s the point. You haven’t done anything.”

Marvin blinked at the ship’s officer. “What do you mean?” he asked with a sinking feeling. “Are you trying to tell me I missed?” He leaped to his feet. “Where is he?” he said. “I’ll get him—”

“Listen to me,” Dr. Cavendish said firmly. “Two members of our crew had a knife fight in a land-side card room. You, as one of the hundred or so spectators of that fight, saw it. You projected yourself into the fight, in your imagination, and imagined you were one of the two men.”
Marvin stared at the man unbelievingly.

“It’s not a serious mental condition,” Dr. Cavendish went on. “It’s well known that for every crime there are usually two or three people who come in and confess to it. It has to do with the urge to be somebody. Such confessions have to be checked
against the facts. ... We have witnesses, several dozen of them in fact, willing to swear to the fact that the fight occurred between two members of our crew."

Dr. Cavendish leaned forward. "Don't you see what your story, if told to the police, could do to us? You would charge that one of our crew went out into the countryside and attacked a citizen of Jeffries' Planet. Our ship would be grounded for weeks. If the courts of this planet believed your testimony—and I doubt that they would without your wife's testimony and a doctor's examination, and probably not even then—the most Claude Mathews could get would be two years in your local jail. That would be mild punishment compared to the damage that has already been done to him. On the other hand, it would cost us a lot of money and wreck our schedule. Other planets on our route—"

"Did I cut him, then?" Marvin interrupted.

"The crew member who knifed him did a very thorough job. He will live, but he would be much better off dead. I am not the one to say if he deserved what he got—there have been reports that he talked a pretty dirty game, only no one believed it was more than talk. However, that's beside the point. We intend to lift on schedule at dawn and deal with the matter in our own way in space. I would suggest you forget the whole thing. What could you do? Do you want your wife on the witness stand?"

"My wife is dead," Marvin said quietly.

"I'm sorry," Dr. Cavendish said. He looked away, uncomfortably. "But that still doesn't change the picture." He stood up. "I understand now. I wish there were something I could do for you. All I can do is say, go home. Let time bring forgetfulness, as it will."

The doctor went to the door and opened it.

"Take this man groundside," he said, "Escort him to wherever his car is. See that he starts for home. And hurry back—We're at zero minus two hours right now."

Marvin fished in his pocket for the claimcheck—the check he had been sure he would never be using. The L.P.'s helped him get into his suit, shook hands with him, and watched while he went to the airlock.

He could, he knew, wait outside until they had gone, then come back in. But what was there for him inside the city? What was there anywhere, for that matter?

But yes, there was something. Out across Paxton Hill, down in Tedrow Valley, fifty yards from bubble seven. A dark pool was waiting for him, and he was ready for it now.

A dark pool, little different than
the surrounding darkness except that it reflected the stars. And when it had welcomed him it would ripple sluggishly, then become smooth again.

When he was well up Paxton Hill he stopped the truck and looked back. The city at night captured a strange sort of beauty, its transparent flat ceiling and dark outer wall making it appear to be a cauldron of molten fire in the night, as the lights of the city escaped upward into the darkness.

And the ship. There were lights on it. Red, blue, and green riding lights. Luminous discs of white that were portholes. Behind which ones was the room he had been in?

He felt a tinge of regret that his life was over. Some day he would have liked to have taken a trip somewhere out among the stars. With Thelma.

He started the truck again, and went on around Paxton Hill without looking back again, and down the long grade into Tedrow Valley.

Overhead in the indigo night sky stars shone feebly. In the close confines of the truck cab the high pitched whine of the turbines was lulling, peaceful.

Strange, how peaceful it was when life was over.

Bubble seven loomed in the light from the headlights all too soon.

He glanced at his watch. Zero minus forty-five minutes for the ship. Should he wait? Should he watch it soar into the morning sky, as he and Thelma had watched similar ships before?

No.

That was for the living.

He opened the cab door and stepped out onto the ground. Unconsciously, he had parked where he always parked. The airlock was only a few feet away.

The house was dark. Marvin turned away from it with a sob of torment. He should not have looked at it. He would not look at it again.

He walked out into the darkness toward the pool, the largest and deepest of the three. It would be the one Thelma had chosen.

He reached up and fumbled at the release clamp of his faceplate.

He was calm now. He would open up his faceplate. He would take several deep breaths of the natural atmosphere of Jeffries' Planet. It was supposed to have an opiate effect that would deaden the pain to come later.

He stilled the panic within him and stiffened his fingers for the final act.

And a sound broke into his consciousness.

The shrill, strident ringing of the phone in his truck.

His first reaction was anger.
Who would be calling at a time like this? To release his faceplate, to breathe in the lethal atmosphere of the planet, to dive into the depths of the dark pool, with the sound of a phone ringing...!

He made a strange sound, a mixture of a sob and a snort. Then he ran to the truck, stumbling and sprawling halfway there, and picking himself up again and running on.

He jerked the hand mike off its hook and said, "Hello!"

"Is that you, Marvin? My lands, where have you been? I've been trying to reach you for hours!"

It was the voice of his mother-in-law.

"What do you want?" he said dully.

"What do I want?" she said. "That's a fine question for you to ask. Don't you even care about your wife? I suppose when you got home and found out she was over here you went into town and got in a card game or something. A lot you care that she's sick, and going to have a baby."

"What?" Marvin croaked.

"Sure," Thelma's mother said smugly. "She got sick this afternoon and called me, and we came over there and got her and brought her home with us, and then called the doctor."

Marvin sagged against the seat. "What have you been doing?" the voice went on. "Didn't you get her note? I saw her tape it to the inner door of the airlock myself. Maybe it fell off."

"The baby—" Marvin croaked. "Two months along, and doing fine. Thelma slipped and fell this noon, and felt dizzy afterwards. It made her afraid..."

The words droned on and on, but Marvin was no longer listening.

Thelma had decided to live. She was going to have a baby.

And for the baby, for him, for herself, Thelma had decided to live, to fight for what she held dear, to protect him from the knowledge of what had happened.

"... and she can't sleep. If you don't get over here right away, you no good fool..."

Dear, wonderful mother-in-law.

"Okay," Marvin said, laughing and crying. "Okay, I'll come right away. You're right. I'm a fool. I was in town—gambling. I'll be right there. And mother-in-law..."

"What is it, you addle-pated son-in-law?"

"Did I ever tell you I love you?"

"Go on, now," the shrill voice snorted.

The carrier tone ended. She had hung up.

Marvin started to get into the truck, glanced toward the airlock, hesitated, then went over to it. There was no note stuck to the inner door, but after a moment he saw it inside the bubble on the
ground, vague in the semi-darkness.

He stepped into the airlock and closed the door. He waited impatiently for the air to clear, then opened the inner door and picked up the envelope. It was grimy with oily dirt where he had stepped on it again and again in his blind torment an eternity ago. He opened it with great tenderness.

"Darling," it read, "Mama and papa have come to get me. I took sick and didn't want to worry you. Fix your dinner and I will call you or have mama call you later. Love, Thelma."

Cautiously worded. He could see her as she wrote it. Brave, protecting him, not sure whether the baby would live or die after what had happened . . .

He could do nothing but be equally brave. She would never know that he knew, never know what he had done.

He went back outside.

Suddenly Paxton Hill took on faint detail, and with it the valley around Marvin. One of the twin suns was shooting into sight. Alpha, from its color.

And then came the thunder. It grew deeper, more steady.

Marvin looked up over Paxton Hill into the purpling morning sky. In a moment the ship rose into sight.

A needle shape gleaming in the rays of the suns, riding upward with gathering momentum on a tail of fire.

It grew smaller and smaller, and then he lost it.

Out into the void. Out among the stars. Keeping to its schedule. Connecting the worlds of man, itself a small world, peopled with men who had found their souls—or lost them.

Marvin turned. A few feet away was his truck, the door standing open.

Without hesitation, he went to it and got in.

HELP . . .

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ON HAND: A Book

by THEODORE STURGEON

As I reported in the last issue, the ramifications of the anthology A Defiance of Time, its purpose and its reasons for being, crowded the tabular Offhand from the issue. I restore the balance herewith, adding joyfully that something on the anthology is already "on hand." It happens that the gap between the appearance of one issue of Venture and the closing date for the next one is a small one indeed; yet already nominations are coming in, and I couldn't be more pleased. Come on in: send me the titles of sf stories which, in your most carefully considered opinion, are deserving of a permanent place in English literature, judged by the highest standards which can be applied to any fiction. I want particularly those stories which are uniquely the product of what is called the science fiction field, preferably by authors who have produced in and for that field. We are going to prove that the greatest science fiction is as great as the greatest anywhere.

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... a Warm nod to Avalon. These uniformly bound, low-priced hard-covers are aimed at library shelves and as such are undoubtedly the first s f encountered by many readers. Time was when we shuddered to think of some of their earlier titles representing the field to anyone. But with recent releases such as WASP and SPACEWAYS SATELLITE and TROUBLED STAR, we feel much better. ... I notice Signet, in endpaper ads, listing Orwell’s 1984 as science fiction. Well it’s high dammit time. ... Don’t let satellites’ red glare blind you to scientific developments that will really change the face of the earth.

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FLEEGL OF FLEEGL

by GORDON R. DICKSON

Fleegl was a rabbity-looking sort, with four arms,
a force field, and a conviction that people were demented.

He also had an extraordinary space tube, a missionary's zeal,
and a regrettable resistance to fission bombs and reason. . . .

JAMES GODOW WOKE UP JUST IN time to see it happen. His alarm clock had just gone off in the bedroom of the small house he had inherited from his aunt Martha. The four blue-and-green flowered wallpapered walls were all about him—and then suddenly they weren't. That is to say, two of them still were, but the other two had been cut off by what appeared to be a wall of thick, misty glass extending through both floor and ceiling.

Jim did not react immediately. Instead, he lay cautiously still, gazing at the misty wall and turning over in his mind all the things that could cause him to experience such an hallucination. Nerves? Incipient insanity? Degeneration of the optic nerve? After several minutes had passed and the wall was still there, he stretched out a slow hand and touched it where it passed close to his bed. It was quite solid. Solid as steel.

After thinking this over, he got out of bed and looked out the one window that had been left to him. What he saw was a continuation of the white wall, reaching up into a dome to enclose the unfenced back yards of three other houses at his end of the block and portions of the houses themselves.

As he watched, a bedroom window of the amputated house-portion directly opposite was pushed up, and the oval-shaped face of a girl with somewhat rumpled blond hair emerged to stare right, left and center, finally focusing on something which in the general excitement had escaped Jim's attention. It was a large, metallic-looking cube, some eight feet on a side, sitting in the center of the four yards. It gave no sign of life. From this, she looked around the enclosed area again, and spotted Jim, hanging out his window. Jim felt that it was time to enter into communication.
“What is it?” he yelled across at her.
“I don’t know!” she called back.
“Don’t you?”
“No!”
“It must be something!”
There was a slight pause.
“Tell you what!” shouted Jim.
“I’ll get dressed and meet you in the back yard in a few minutes. I’ll have to come out the window. I’m walled off in my bedroom here!”
“Me, too!” she answered. “It’s right across my bedroom door. I’ll get dressed, too, and—oh!” Apparently just realizing the implications of her last statement, her head popped back out of sight through her window. Jim pulled his own head in and went in search of clothes.

Half the dresser and all of his closet was available to him. He was equipped with everything but shirts, which he kept in the closet of the spare bedroom. He compromised on slacks and a clean t-shirt, and crawled out the window.

The girl was already out in the back yard by the metallic cube. She was dressed in slacks and a light summer blouse. With her was a neighbor boy of about twelve in a boy scout uniform; and a heavy man in his sixties, wearing pajamas and a purple-wool dressing gown, whom Jim recognized as Mr. Harvey Bolster of the segment of the large house the back of which was diagonally opposite his own.

“. . . get a pry-bar,” Bolster was saying excitedly, waving his arms in outrage. “Break it open. Smash the machine insidel”

“Maybe there isn’t any machine,” said the boy scout, happily. “Maybe the box just resonates a signal beamed in from somewhere else, and makes the force-field that way.”

“Resonates!” exploded Bolster, glaring at the boy. “Force-field!”
“Sure. Just like—”
“Be quiet, boy!”
“You’ll see,” said the boy scout. He went over to examine the surface of the cube closely.

“Uh—hello,” said Jim. The girl and Bolster looked over at him.
“I’m Jim Godow. I just moved into Mrs. Lee’s house last month. She was my aunt. . . . You’re Mr. Bolster, aren’t you?”

“How d’ya do. Harvey Bolster, yes.” The two men shook hands.
“You know Jennie Coram, here? Miss Coram, Mr.—uh.”

“Jim Godow.”

“Hi,” she said. “The neighborhood’s been talking about you. You write Christmas cards, don’t you?”

“All sorts of greeting card verse,” said Jim.

“That must be fascinating.”

“The point is,” broke in Harvey, “what’re we going to do? Here we are, cut off, in my case without even a pair of slippers—”
"It’s opening," said the boy scout.
They all went over to the cube, which was beginning to crack down on one side.
"Hi," said Jim to the boy scout. "I’m Jim Godow. Who’re you?"
"Rodney Wasla," said the boy scout. "We better stand back. The extra-terrestrial atmosphere from the interior of the ship may be poisonous to humans."
"Oh, nonsense!" snapped Harvey. "What I think is—"

The cube opened up suddenly, revealing what appeared to be a small, square room crammed with instruments. A large, rabbit-like creature with long drooping ears and four arms came out, waving its hands at them.
"All right, all right now," it said pettishly in a rather Vermont-like accent, "get back, don’t be in the way."

They retreated slightly.
"Welcome to Earth," said Rodney Wasla.
"What’s that?" said the creature, focusing on Rodney. "Oh, Welcome. Thank you." It patted Rodney on the head. "That’s a good boy." It produced something like a large turnip from what appeared to be a natural pouch in the front of its body, and rammed the vegetable into the turf of a back yard—Jim’s, as luck would have it.

"I declare this planet planted in the name of Fleegl," the creature said. "I, Nugwik, being a duly accredited planter of Fleegl on Fleegl. Good sproutings!" It went back into the ship.
"Well, of all the blasted nerve!" exploded Harvey. "Hey, you—Nugwik, or whatever your name is—come out here."

"Now, now," said Nugwik, emerging from the cube’s interior with his four arms full of miscellaneous gadgets of a metallic nature. "No time to gab. Particularly with criminal psychopaths. Stand back there while I get my space-tube started."

"Gab!" roared Harvey. "Psychopaths! What’re you talking about?"

"Come, come," said Nugwik, beginning to put his gadgets together. "Nothing to be ashamed of. You’re all paranoids here on Earth. But we’ll cure you, just as soon as I can get the necessary equipment here from Fleegl on Fleegl. Insanity’s completely unknown at Fleegl on Fleegl."

"What—" Harvey was beginning to pop and froth again. Jim took him by the arm and led him away, beckoning to Jennie Coram to follow. When they were out of earshot of Rodney and Nugwik, Jim spoke again.

"Let’s not go off half-cocked," he said. "This thing looks like it’s too big to be fiddled with. Let’s see if we can’t get together and decide what’s best to do."

"Oh, yes," said Jennie.
"Well," said Harvey, calming
down with an effort, “you may be right. It’s just the infernal nerve of that— What do you suggest?”

“Is there someplace we can talk?” asked Jim.

“Not in my bedroom,” said Harvey. “There’s less than a bed and an armchair left.”

“I’m in about the same condition,” said Jim. “Er—Jennie?”

“Oh, no!” she said quickly. “I haven’t much more than the rest of you and it’s all in a mess. But Rodney’s got all his bedroom, and a bathroom, too, he says. Why don’t we...?”

They adjourned to the segment of the Wasla house and compared notes.

There was little they could tell each other—they’d all been asleep when the wall came.

“We need help,” said Jim.

“Yes, but how do we get it?” demanded Harvey. “No blasted telephone. You can’t see through that wall, let alone hear through it. I tell you something’s got to be done! What’s wrong with the police—and the fire department? They should have been here an hour ago, cutting their way in.”

“They can’t,” said Rodney, appearing at the window. He proceeded to climb into the room. “No power on Earth can break that barrier.”

“Who says so?” demanded Harvey. “That rabbit?”


“I don’t care whether he fleegls or floozles!” snapped Harvey. “He can’t do this to us. Who does he think he is, anyway?”

“He’s a survey Fleegl,” said Rodney. “He happened to be passing by this solar system, and, luckily for us—”

“You’ve been talking to him,” said Jim.

“I just asked him where he came from.”

“Where?” asked Jim.

“Oh, he can’t make us understand, we’re too dumb,” said Rodney. “Besides, we’re all psychopath.”

“Psychopaths, Roddy,” corrected Jenny.

“Yes, and this place he comes from, it’s an island called Fleegl. It’s the only land on the planet Fleegl. He just happened to be passing by after many years on space duty and he saw at a glance that we were dangerous.”

“Why?” asked Jim.

“On account of we’re going to conquer Fleegl if he doesn’t cure us. We hate Fleegl and all it stands for.”

“Never heard such nonsense in my life!” barked Harvey. “Is that all it is?” He got to his feet. “Let’s go straighten him out.”

“Well, maybe . . .” said Jim, doubtfully. They all followed Harvey back out the window. He strode up to Nugwik. The Fleeglian had got his bits and pieces of equipment put together. From
somewhere inside them a shimmering cylinder rose up as they watched and passed through the top of the dome. Every so often Nugwik would do something to a control panel and the cylinder would appear to flow upward at an incredible rate. Then it would stop, and Nugwik would make another adjustment on his panel.

"Hey!" said Harvey, tapping Nugwik between the shoulder blades. "Hey, you! None of us here’s mad at Fleegl. Nobody ever heard of the place."

"Yes, yes," murmured Nugwik absently, his gaze on the panel. "Run along, now."

"Run along! Why, blast you—you run along!" Harvey purpled. "Pack up and get out. You’ve made a mistake."

Nugwik stiffened and turned.

"A mistake?" he said icily.

"You heard me!" cried Harvey.

"Barash!" exploded Nugwik, stabbing a finger suddenly at Harvey. He turned back to his panel, in an outraged tone muttering to himself something that, whatever it was, certainly was not English.

Harvey continued to stand there. After a second, Jim nudged him.

"Let’s go back and talk this over some more," he whispered. "Back at Rodney’s."

Harvey turned about like a clockwork soldier and marched off toward the boy’s house. He continued marching until he came to the wall of the house. There he stopped. The other humans hurried after him.

"Mr. Bolster!" said Jenny. "Are you all right?"

Harvey jerked his head around and looked at her glassily.

"All right?" he said. "Of course not. I’m wrong, all wrong."

Jim and Jenny looked at each other. After a second, Jim turned to Harvey again.

"Let’s all get back inside," he said. Harvey obediently scrambled over the sill into Rodney’s room, and the rest followed. Jim heard a continuous beeping sound coming from somewhere.

"Sit down on the bed, Harvey," he told the older man, and turned about. "What’s that noise?"

"Oh, boy!" yelped Rodney, diving for a card table cluttered with junk. He scratched most of this aside and revealed a telegraph key, a sounder, and a couple of dry-cell batteries, all hooked together.

Eagerly, Rodney began to manipulate the key. "It’s my line to Jerry Burr, down the block," he said, "We’re going to be ham operators—" he broke off suddenly, listening to a series of answering beeps. "Hey, that’s somebody else talking! That can’t be right."

"Wrong. Dead wrong," said Harvey to himself, on the bed. "How could I be so wrong?"

"He’s a general, a real general!" cried Rodney, jittering in excite-
ment. Busily, he began to send himself. The small telegraph buzzed back and forth and the minutes stretched on.

“What’s going on?” Jim asked finally.

“He’s asking all about Nugwik,” said Rodney, blissfully. “I’m telling him. He’s listening, too. He’s an Air Force general from the air base at Leesville.”

“Perhaps I was born to err,” Harvey told himself. “When I think how wrong I’ve been, day after day, year after year. . . .”

“Let me talk to him,” said Jim. “Always wrong,” muttered Harvey.

“Just a minute—he wants to talk to you, or somebody grownup—” Rodney turned for the first time from the key to look at Jim. “Do you know code?”

“Code? Oh—no, you’ll have to send for me,” said Jim. “Is the general listening? Ask him what we ought to do?”

Rodney tapped his key, paused and listened.

“He says,” said Rodney. “Observe the alien carefully. Take notes on everything he does.”

“But what about us?” said Jim. “We want to get out. Tell him to break through this wall here and let us out.”

“He says they’re working on it now. Meanwhile, he wants full data on the alien, and in particular on the space tube the alien is projecting. It’s already a number of miles high. This alien may be a threat to the very existence of the United States. It is imperative to discover his intentions and that of the government he represents. Repeat, it is imperative to discover his intentions.”

“How does he expect us to do that?” demanded Jim. “Am I supposed to just go ask him?” The set beeped.


The set ceased sounding. Rodney looked sadly up at Jim.

“Don’t you know that?” he said. “That’s the way they say yes in the Air Force.”

“Oh,” Jim looked at Harvey—he was shaking his head despairingly at his own reflection in a dresser mirror—and over at Jenny. “Well,” he said. “I suppose . . .”

Leaving the rest of them there, he climbed out over the window sill and went back out to Nugwik, who was still busily jackiug up his space tube.

The alien did not seem to be aware of Jim’s approach, so Jim coughed a couple of times. “Say,” he said, when this produced no response, “can I ask you a question?”

turned around toward Jim and produced what looked like a small bunch of flowers from his body pouch. He sniffed them. "Ah, that's better." He put the flowers away, "And now for your question."

"Why don't you just leave us alone?" said Jim.

"And give you the chance to conquer and enslave Fleeg! on Fleeg! Hahl!"

"But nobody here is mad at Fleeg! on Fleeg. We never even knew there was such a place."

"You would, shortly. What do you mean, not mad? You're all mad, here. If I ever saw a species so unethical, carnivorous, given to delusions of persecution, blood-thirsty, hysterical—"

"But—"

"No interruptions, please," said Nugwik sternly. "You are monsters -- fortunately, rather stupid monsters . . . but monsters. Now, have you any other questions to ask, before I knock off for a sniff of nourishment?"

"Yes," said Jim. "How come you speak English so well?"

"Come now!" said Nugwik stiffly. "As if there were any trick to learning your simple dialect."

"Well, look," said Jim. "If you'd just tell me something about this Fleeg! of yours—"

"Words," said Nugwik, "cannot possibly convey to you the essence, the grandeur of the island-wide Fleeg! City on Fleeg! Island on Fleeg. Why, if I were to attempt to describe to you just Fleeg! Hall on Fleeg! Boulevard —I doubt very much you'd be able to take it. It would be too much. You would collapse."

"Try me," offered Jim.

"No," said Nugwik, shaking his head. "It would be too cruel." He turned away and reentered his cube.

Jim went back to Rodney's room. Harvey was still on the bed and weeping softly as he explained to Jenny how he had been wrong-natured from the start. Rodney looked up from his telegraph set, as Jim climbed in over the window sill.

"General Farber has a message for you," he said. "You're to tell Nugwik if he does not emerge from this protection of his and enter personally into negotiation with United States authorities, serious steps will be taken. You are to tell him—" Rodney consulted a piece of paper— "that if he wishes to consider this as an ultimatum, he may do so. The deadline is two hours from now at 1300 hours. . . . And," wound up Rodney, "I'm hungry and my mother says you have to make Nugwik see that I have something to eat."

"Thanks," said Jim, dropping wearily down on a corner of the bed.

"Oh, that's all right," said Rodney, generously.

"However," said Jim, seeing
Jenny’s eyes, too, upon him, “Nugwik’s gone inside his box to have his own lunch; and I can’t get at him. As soon as he comes out I’ll talk to him again. How’s Harvey?”

“He’s not very happy,” said Jenny. She patted the older man consolingly on the shoulder. “There, there, Mr. Bolster. You never were that bad.”

“Oh, yes I was,” said Harvey. “I was worse, much worse. You don’t know me like I do.” He snuffled quietly into the pillow of Rodney’s bed.

“Can’t you get Nugwik to change him back?” asked Jenny, turning to Jim. “He’s such a problem this way.”

“Well,” said Jim, doubtfully. “I hate to ask him for too many things at once. Let’s just try out the food question first.”

“How long do you suppose before he comes out again?”

“No way of telling,” said Jim. He glanced again out the window. The cube was still closed up, looking as if it were cast out of one piece of solid metal, and Rodney had left them again for another examination of it. From the bed a gentle snore apprised them that Harvey, worn out by his self-recriminations, had dropped off to sleep. “We’ll just have to wait,” said Jim. He looked at Jenny and cleared his throat. “Funny situation, isn’t it? I mean, meeting this way.”

“I’ve seen you lots of times,” said Jenny. “Around your aunt’s house. But you didn’t seem to have too much to do with the neighbors.”

“Well, you see,” said Jim. “When you work at home the way I do, it’s awfully easy to get distracted from work you ought to get done. . . .”

They chatted in low voices while Harvey slumbered. Jenny, it turned out, was in her senior year at Dumbarton U. Her major was Education. She wanted to teach history. Jim had always liked history . . . some day he intended to write a historical novel. Their first names both began with J. . . .

“Nugwik’s back out at work now,” said Rodney, after an indeterminate time, appearing at the window. “And I’m hungry as heck.”

“Oh,” said Jim, coming back to the realities of their present situation. “All right, I’ll go ask him.”

“Be careful he doesn’t get mad,” said Jenny.

“Yes,” said Jim. He went out the window and approached Nugwik. The Fleeglian was happily at work, jacking up his space tube. “—er,” said Jim.

“Now what?” snapped Nugwik, his good nature vanishing in a flash. He turned about, his ears literally dragging on his shoulders.

“Well, you’ve got us cut off here without any food—” began Jim.
Nugwik winced, but turned back to his panel and made some adjustments on it.

"All right," he said. "Go get your—" he winced again, "sustenance."


"Uh—" he said, after a second. "Just where do I go to get it?"

Nugwik threw up all four hands and turned on him.

"Where do you usually go?" he snapped. "To a refrigerator."

"Refrigerator?"

"His refrigerator!" Nugwik jabbed a finger at Rodney, and turned back to work, muttering. Rodney turned and raced off toward his bedroom window.

Jim continued to stand around, peering at the panel at which the Fleeglian was working. There did not seem much to what Nugwik was doing. A twist of a rheostat, a glance at a dial, and the white column seemed to flow upward for a short period of time.

"Well, what are you staring at now?" demanded Nugwik, without turning.

"The—uh, space tube," said Jim. "Eighteen thousand miles out already," said Nugwik with satisfaction. "Propagation increases in ratio to the square of the established length. Won't take long now."

"Fleegl isn't Mars, is it?" asked Jim.

"Mars!" Nugwik snorted. "Are there any oceans on Mars?"

"Venus?"

"Certainly not. None of your scrubby little planets. For your information—much good it'll do you—Fleegl is light-years from here. Hundreds of light years." He waved a hand absent at Jim. "Now, go seek your sustenance and leave me to my work here."

Jim went back into Rodney's bedroom. There was nobody there. Going down the hall toward the bedroom, he discovered the wall had been extended in the form of a tunnel which led him to the kitchen of the Wasla house. Rodney, Jenny, and even Harvey were seated at the kitchen table, eating chicken sandwiches.

"Coffee?" asked Jenny, getting up as Jim came in.

"Thanks," said Jim. He looked around him. "Are we still walled in?"

"You can't open the kitchen door," said Rodney, with his mouth full. "It's all white outside it, and the windows, too."

Jim sat down at the table somewhat dispiritedly. Jenny brought him some coffee and a chicken sandwich.

"What did he say?" asked Jenny. "He just said to go to the refrigerator here."

"I mean," said Jenny, "to the general's ultimatum."

"Oh, Lord," Jim said, getting to his feet. "I forgot to tell him."
He went back out in the direction of the back yard; and returned in a few minutes, looking rather pale.

“What did he say?” Jenny asked again. Jim sat down heavily at the kitchen table.

“He said,” reported Jim, “to let them drop their silly little fission bombs.”

He looked at them. Jenny and Rodney stared back at him. Harvey remarked that that was all right, he, Harvey, deserved it.

“That does mean—atom bombs or H-bombs, doesn’t it?” faltered Jenny.

“I don’t know what else it could mean.” Jim perspired slightly. He cleared his throat and took a gulp of coffee. “Maybe I could find something to hit him over the head with. I thought of that. But how would I find out how to turn off the wall?”

“Couldn’t you just experiment with the controls—”

“If I could just get him out of the way for a while, I could try it.” Jim bit thoughtfully into his sandwich. “Wait a minute—Harvey!”

“I’m sorry,” whimpered Harvey. “I didn’t mean to do it—whatever it was.”

“No, no,” said Jim. “I was talking to Jenny. Jenny, you go tell Nugwik that Harvey’s in some kind of coma. Say it’s his fault. He won’t believe you, but he ought to come just to make sure you’re wrong. I’ll hide in the bathroom, and after he goes by, I’ll run out and see what I can manage to figure out with his controls.”

“But Harvey isn’t in a coma,” protested Jennie.

“He will be,” Jim said. He stood up, winced, murmured “Excuse me,” and hit Harvey squarely on the jaw. Harvey collapsed.

“Man!” said Rodney. “With one punch!”

“It’s not my muscles,” explained Jim, modestly, “it’s Harvey. He’s agreeable to anything now, even to being knocked out. I figured on that.” He turned to Jenny. “Hurry.”

Jenny went out hurriedly. Jim followed her and hid in the bathroom. After a minute or two he heard the sound of double footsteps pass his closed door, and the voice of Nugwik snorting—“Ridiculous!”

He opened the door and peered out into the kitchen. He saw Harvey still obligingly being unconscious and everybody else bending over him.

Jim hurried out through the bedroom into the backyard. The cube stood open before him. He entered it.

There were only two panels of controls visible. On top of one of them was a small something like a tv screen, in which a miniature cube stood open in the middle of some back yards.

“That’s for driving it, I sup-
pose,” muttered Jim. He turned to the other panel. This was sur-
mounted by a like screen, which was blank. Below it were a couple
of knobs like rheostats and a small keyboard, of which some of
the keys were depressed. Jim hastily punched other keys at random
and twiddled the knobs. A face like Nugwik’s appeared in the
screen.

“Koji?” it said, staring at Jim.
“Wun vark?”
Jim hastily stabbed other but-
tons. The face disappeared, but
blinked back on again a second
later.

“Woj!” barked the face.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to get
you. Wrong number!” stammered
Jim, frantically poking buttons.
The face in the screen flickered,
but stayed put.

“Lari, orri, Shkarri, sawri—
sorry. Enjefli nu. Paji? Poji. Sawri,
I dindt min tawgt oo. Ah, chi-
flen!” Who you? What you are
doing, calling from Fleegl num-
ber? Explain this, please;”

“Just a mistake,” said Jim, try-
ing wildly with the controls to
erase it.

“Kindly cease attempting to
alter your wavelength,” said the
face sharply. “You are connected
with Survey Headquarters, Aberra-
rations Tracer Unit One. How
does it come you are operating a
Fleeglian communication device?”

“Sorry, got to go now,” said Jim.
He slammed down both hands on
all the keys at once, succeeding
in blanking the screen, and
sprinted for Rodney’s house. He
was just in time to duck into the
bathroom before Nugwik passed,
muttering angrily to himself.

After Nugwik had gone, Jim
came out and went back to the
kitchen. The other three were
still there, Harvey sitting up and
looking something like his natural
self.

“’Lo,” he grunted as Jim came
in. “I’m fixed up now. How’d you
do?”

“No good,” said Jim. “All I
could make work was his radio,
or his telephone, or whatever it
was.” He told them what had hap-
pened. “How’d Nugwik fix you
up?” he wound up, looking at
Harvey.

“Must be hypnotism,” said Har-
vey. “It’s those eyes of his. He
looked at me and said something;”

“Did he find out why you were
unconscious? Uh—sorry about that
punch, by the way.”

“No,” said Harvey. “That’s all
right. Fortunes of war. Look,
what’ll we do now? If the Air
Force’s actually going to bomb us—”

“I think we better talk to that
general again,” said Jim.

They went back to the bedroom
and Rodney unlimbered the tele-
graph. As soon as he had the gen-
eral on the wire, Jim dictated an
account of the present situation
and recent happenings.
"... what do you advise us to do?" he wound up. There was a short period of silence from the far end of the wire.

"Sit tight for the moment," came back the answer. "You may hear from us in about fifteen minutes."

They sat tight. About a dozen minutes later there was a small jar, like a minor earthquake, that rattled the hunting prints on Rodney's walls.

"What happened?" asked Jenny, turning startled eyes on Jim.

"I don't know," said Jim. "Call them back, Rodney, and ask what's going on."

Rodney did. "They say, wait a minute," he reported.

They waited. About ten minutes later, the telegraph began a plaintive beeping. Rodney hurried to it.

"It's the general again," he said. "He says—we are finally in a position where our only hope is to appeal to you. Our most powerful weapon has been tried against the defense of the alien, with no effect. The alien's space tube now reaches hundreds of thousands of miles into space and continues to grow unchecked. Clearly the safety not only of the United States but the whole world is threatened. In this sad and fateful hour our only hope rests upon you four. We must appeal to you to make whatever effort lies within your power to put this creature or his apparatus out of commission. Whatever the cost or whatever the results may be, you must make this effort for the sake of every living creature upon the face of the globe. We can offer you no hope and no help, but our hearts are with you. Goodby."

The telegraph fell silent. They continued to sit in that same silence, for a long minute.

"Well," muttered Harvey, at last. "That's all very touching. But what can we do?"

"Take a chance at putting Nugwik out of action," said Jim. "That's all we can do."

"Easy enough to say it," said Harvey.

"Well, there's just a chance," said Jim. "If the Fleeglians are as advanced as it seems, Nugwik may not be used to physical violence. We could sneak up on him—"

"All he has to do is look us in the eye. And then what?" Harvey said.

"I thought of that," answered Jim. "We put something over his head, see, and—"

Shortly thereafter, armed with a couple of baseball bats, Rodney's lasso and a large brown paper shopping bag—all held out of sight behind their backs—the four of them emerged from the bedroom window and advanced on Nugwik, busy at his outside panel.

"Go away! Go away!" snapped
Nugwik as they came up behind him. He continued to work without turning his head. “I can’t get anything done when you’re constantly interrupting me—”

“Now!” yelled Jim. They all jumped him. Jenny jammed the shopping bag down over his head. Rodney hit the bag-enclosed head with a baseball bat. Jim and Harvey threw the lasso around him and began to wrap him up tight. Jenny, with the other baseball bat, dodged around making small attemptive swings that had to be checked at the final second for fear of disabling one of the men.

Jim, Harvey and Nugwik rolled around on the grass in a tangle of arms and legs that eventually resolved itself into three parts. Jim and Harvey got puffed to their feet. Nugwik, trussed and paper-sacked, lay still on the ground, emitting muffled noises that were not, whatever else they were, words in English.

“Whooppeel!” yelped Rodney, dancing on the grass.


“Little short—breath—that’s all,” wheezed Harvey. “Now what?”

“Well,” said Jim, drawing a deep breath, “now we try to figure the wall.”

“Oh, do you think we can?” said Jenny, gazing up into his eyes.

“Er—no,” said Jim, running an index finger around the inside collar of his t-shirt, which seemed to have shrunk somewhat. Jenny was a particularly pretty girl, he was realizing. “But we can try.”

“What if we don’t?” said Harvey.

“Then,” said Jim, “we can always starve quietly, all of us, including Nugwik. That way nobody outside, at least, is any worse off.”

“Ought to give him a hit on the head right now,” growled Harvey. “Settle his hash once and for—”

“Certainly not! That would be barbarous!” snapped a new voice over their heads. Looking up, they discovered a new visitor floating down through the beam of the space tube. This was a tall thin man dressed in a cutaway coat and striped trousers. His face was thin and sensitive, his ears were large and he wore an enormous top hat. He was carrying a pencil and a notepad, and was making notes of some sort as he gently floated down to stand on the grass, facing them.

“Shocking situation!” said the newcomer. “Shocking. You shouldn’t try to concentrate so hard.”

He gestured at Nugwik. “Ajash!” The rope and paper sack disappeared. Nugwik climbed to his feet somewhat glassy-eyed, and marched to the space tube. He rose up it out of sight.

“Professor Johnson-Fleegl, at your service,” said the top-hatted
man, bowing to them all. He turned to Jim and took him confidentially by the elbow. “Come with me, my boy.”

He led Jim off into the shadow cast by the eaves of Jenny’s house.

“Listen—” began Jim. Professor Johnson-Fleegl held up a hand.

“Not a word,” he said. “I insist. Let me be the first to congratulate you. I will be your best man—in fact, that’s why I’m here.”

“Best man?” Jim stared at him.

“Best man for what?”

“Best man in your upcoming marriage to Jenny, of course,” said Professor Johnson-Fleegl. “You young rascal, I know you’ve been secretly in love with her for some time. All those sonnets you wrote about her.”

“But I didn’t write any sonnets about her!”

“Come, come,” said Professor Johnson-Fleegl. “Jenny knows nothing about it, of course, but you can’t hide such things from a psychologist like myself. You were smitten with her the first time you saw her, but you didn’t dare hope until last Monday when you happened to see her turning into the Alhambra theater, downtown. You sat in a seat two rows behind her all through the Alice in Wonderland feature. I saw you. I was seated two rows behind you.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” cried Jim.

“Tut-tut,” said Professor Johnson-Fleegl. “Let me remind you again that you’re talking to a psychologist. It was in that show that you finally decided to let her know of your love, come what might. But you had no chance until all this happened. And now—” he clapped Jim on the back— “the prize is yours. And what a prize she is! Surely, the most wonderful, beautiful girl in the universe.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that,” said Jim. “After all, there’s Mar—”

“Of course she is. A gem without a flaw—except perhaps the fact that during experiments she will try to concentrate too hard.”

“Experiments? You know, Professor, this is all becoming more and more like a dream. What experiments?”

“Nothing that need concern you, my boy. Although she has a great talent, a very great talent.”

“Uh—I see,” said Jim. A very strange idea was burgeoning in his mind. He peered curiously at Professor Johnson-Fleegl. “Look,” he said. “You’re right. I admit it, being secretly in love with her. Now, I wonder if you’d do something for me.”

“Anything,” beamed the Professor. “Anything.”

“I haven’t bought her a ring yet, of course. I wonder if you’d go over and—kind of subtly, you know—try to find out just what she’d like in the way of an engagement ring. Would you?”
"Of course!" said Johnson-Fleegl, patting him on the back again. "Just leave it all to me." He went off.

Jim threw a quick glance at the others. They were all—Harvey Rodney, and Jenny—clustered around the open cube, peering inside it. Everyone’s back was turned.

He turned about quickly, went down along the side of Jenny’s house to her open window and hoisted himself inside, wriggling through and falling to the inner floor with something of a thump.

He sat up and looked about him. He was in the midst of the perfumey clutter of a young girl’s room. The footboard of the bed was just beside his head. He stood up and looked over it.

Jenny, hair spread out on the pillow, was peacefully slumbering there, a happy smile on her lips.

Jim glanced out the window. Jenny was also out there, engaged in earnest private conversation with the Professor.

Jim swallowed. He went up to the head of the bed and stood over the sleeping Jenny.

"Uh—" he said. "Jenny—er—wake up."

She did not stir. Uncertainly, he reached out and nudged her shoulder, gently. She slept on. He thought for a moment, and nodded wisely. He cleared his throat rather desperately, leaned over, and kissed Jenny on the lips.

She sighed ecstatically, stretched out slowly and happily under the blankets, and lazily opened her eyes. Slowly they focused on Jim, standing over her; and she smiled.

Then suddenly her eyes flew wide open. She shot upright in the bed, clutching the covers protectively to her. And screamed.

And that was the last Jim remembered for a while.

He opened his eyes rather woozily. Professor Johnson-Fleegl, minus the top hat, was bending over him where he lay in some sort of bed.

"How’re you feeling?" asked the Professor.

"Fine," said Jim. "Or am I?" He moved cautiously on the bed. Everything seemed to be working all right.

"That’s right," said the Professor. "There shouldn’t be any ill effects. By the way, I’m Professor Alan Johnson—"

"Johnson-Fleegl, isn’t it?" said Jim, then checked himself. "What am I talking about? Of course Fleegl was all in her dream."

"So you understand about that," said Johnson.

"Some of it, I guess," said Jim. "Was it really real—or did we all just imagine it?"

"It was real all right—the dome, the space tube and all," Johnson smiled down at him. "I’m a psychology research fellow at the
University Foundation across the river. Jenny was one of my subjects in psi research. We knew she was a strong talent—but never how strong until today. When she was awake, she had a slight block..."

"I know," said Jim, "she used to concentrate too hard."

Johnson looked slightly surprised.

"You and I are going to have to get together for some more talks," he said. "I'd like to hear more of what my dream counterpart told you about Jenny. Naturally, most of the dream was made up out of whole cloth."

"Where did she get the name Fleepl?"

"Fleepl Dry Cleaners," said Johnson. "It's the outfit her family sends laundry to. I don't know where she got the majority of her details about the place, but the effect of Alice in Wonderland was very apparent all the way through."

"You were a sort of mad hatter," said Jim.

"So I gathered. And a lot of the rest of it will undoubtedly turn out to be highly symbolic on a subconscious level." He paused and shook his head a little ruefully. "What a girl!"

"You can say that several dozen times," said Jim. "By the way, where's Jenny now?"

"Jenny?" Johnson shook his head again. "I don't think you'll be seeing her again. I may not even see her again, myself. The army's got her under lock and key, now. You can imagine what an impenetrable dome like she threw up would be worth to them—as well as the other possible uses of her talent, after they get that symbolism under control."

He looked down at Jim. "Why? You weren't actually in love with her, were you?"

"Heaven forbid," said Jim. "Then it's just as well you won't be seeing her any more."

"I'd say so," agreed Jim. He thought of the space tube probing thousands of miles into space, and he shivered again. "Somehow," he said reflectively, "I've got the feeling I never would have been able to live up to her dreams."
Bill and Mary found the planet, and it was beautiful.

Which pleased Mary, but didn't surprise her—she was accustomed to getting what she wanted. Then

Bill named the planet after her—and everything changed . . .

The planet was small, but the sky was blue, like Earth's. There were seas, forests, and very high mountains, snowcapped and beclouded. The plains were deep with gently stirring grass, and ran down to bayous at the coasts of a shallow sea fed by a twisting river that split the plains.

Bill and Mary's ship came whistling in out of the sky. It sailed on outstretched wings over the plains and across the amber-colored clarity of the river. It drifted lower past a stand of white-trunked trees, and touched down on a long level stretch of grass, coming in on lowered landing treads and rolling over the ground until Bill gave the forejets one last kick and it stopped.

Mary ran to the airlock and opened it. The green smell of the planet flooded away the oil and metal tang of the ship from their nostrils. Bill shut off all the switches, locked the controls, and came quickly over to Mary.

She was framed in the center of the open hatch, one hand on each side of the frame. She was a lithe girl in whipcord shorts and a jersey top, and her arched nostrils quivered as she looked out at the planet.

Bill squeezed in between Mary's right side and the hatch frame. He put his arm around her waist and nipped her earlobe between his teeth. He ran his hand up and down her outstretched right arm, and looked out over her shoulder.

"Here we are, Honey," he said. "I told you I'd find it."

"Yes, here we are," she echoed.

Bill ran his fingertips over the side of her neck. "It's beautiful."

"Yes. It's just the way Roy described it to me. . . . But he never landed," she added, "he just circled it long enough to get a navigational fix. Nobody's ever landed here. I'm going to be the first. We are, Bill."

"Yes, Honey," he breathed in her ear. "And it is beautiful. Just
like you. Are you glad you married me? I told you I had enough money saved up to buy a ship. Didn’t I? And didn’t I find this place?"

Mary smiled fondly. "Yes, dear, of course I’m glad." She patted his hand. She took a quick breath. "Let’s go down the ladder. Let’s go out."

Bill let down the ladder, and Mary climbed down quickly. She jumped from the last run and stood ankle-deep in the grass, her hands on her hips, her head raised, looking out over the tops of the trees that looked like birches and staring at the white-dotted sky. There was a gentle south wind coming from the sea, and it ruffled her hair.

Bill came down the ladder. He tried to put his arms around Mary, but she did not move her hands from her hips. She turned her head from side to side, looking at the plains, the river, and the distant mountains.

Bill looked around restlessly. "There’s nothing moving."

There had been no ships in the ocean, and no cities on the land. There were no game trails. There were no birds singing in the trees.

"Of course not, Dear," Mary said patiently. "Roy told me it was uninhabited. By anything, as far as he could see." Her eyes shone. "A paradise," he said, "An untouched paradise, in a solar system no one knows about—a para-

dise no one else may ever find, unless they get lost in hyperspace like Roy did, and happen to come out in just the right place."

Bill said: "It could happen, you know, Honey. Or Roy may tell somebody else about it."

"Some other girl?" she said quickly. "Is that what you mean?"

"Well . . . he’s a mail pilot—you know . . . I mean, they get around a lot. . . ."

"I wasn’t just any girl to Roy. Have you got that straight? I wasn’t just any girl." Mary had hold of Bill’s arm. "He would have come back for me and brought me here. If I’d wanted to wait for him."

Bill stroked her hand. "Yes, Dear. Of course," he apologized quickly. "I know that." He leaned forward to kiss her cheek. "I just happened to meet you before he had a chance to come back. And I was lucky enough to talk you into marrying me, instead of waiting for him." He rubbed his hand lightly across her shoulders. "I’m very happy with you. Are you very happy with me?"

Mary turned and moistened her lips. She enfolded Bill quickly in her arms and kissed him. "Didn’t you bring me here?" she murmured.

Then she stepped back and said: "It’s getting dark. I want a fire. I want to eat outside, here, on the grass."

They went back into the ship to
bring the food, and Bill made a fire with a broken packing case and some excelsior. They ate and sat watching the night fall. Bill listened for crickets, or the whirring of bats, as though it were twilight on Earth.

It was a beautiful sunset, over the blazing snow of the mountains, but there were no crickets. They sat for a long time. Finally there was nothing left of the twilight, and it was night. A huge star cluster began to rise in the sky behind the silhouetted trees. Bill reached into a pack and brought out a bottle of champagne. The cork popped. He turned to his bride.

"Mary," he said, "this is the best part of my promise. I’ve been saving this up." He smiled shyly. "I hope you like it." He spilled some of the champagne on the ground. It sank into the grass roots and disappeared. "World, I christen thee Mary," he said.

Mary got to her feet, her eyes shining. Bill filled a glass for each of them. "Mary, this is your world," he told her. "It’ll always bear your name." He smiled in the same way, again. "I don’t know if it’s really mine to give. But I thought you might like that."

"Oh, I do, Honey, I do," she breathed.

They went to sleep in the ship. Bill awoke once and looked at Mary. She slept quietly, smiling. She spoke a name, in a low, loving voice. It was her own.

They awoke again, together. The stars were like clouds of aluminum paint, here in the center of the galaxy. Though the planet had no moon, still the night was brighter than it had ever been on Earth. Bill got up and looked out through a viewport at the plain, which looked blue in the starlight, and the river, which was silvery with froth. The trees were bent toward the ship by the south wind, heaving the shoulders of their shadows. The grass was rippling like the river, flowing around the ship.

"Bill! The river’s too close." Mary stood beside him, clutching his shoulder.

He looked at the silver froth again. It was flowing toward them, extending long semicircles of water over the low bank, running into the pressed tracks of the landing gear, running over the grass, touching the foot of the ladder. It bulged into a long hump that ran toward them very rapidly, sending arm-like runners of silver ahead of it, flooding the grass and shooting out to close around the ship. Bill stared across the river at the other bank. It rose a foot above the water there, a line of blue-black unbroken by silver.

"The wind, Bill—listen to the wind!"
A cloud dashed across the sky. It crossed from his left hand to his right, rushing for the mountains. But the trees bent toward them. The landing gear and the ladder hummed. The ship rocked on its suspensions. A spray of water, like a veil, came in the airlock. The water was almost a foot deep around the ship, puddling for twenty yards all around them, bulging at the center, rounding out, but not spilling. The trees began to clash their branches, and bits of leaf hit the side of the ship.

The plain began to hum with the wind in the long grass. It combed straight north, trembling at the tips. A hundred yards beyond the ship, the combing was parted and the grass rippled gently toward the mountains, toward the west.

Mary drew in the ladder, and clamped the airlock shut. She was crying.

Bill started the ship's engines. They coughed fire that sent swirls of water dancing on the surface of the water. The ship quivered and began to roll, splashing through the water, squashing the grass into the mud, crunching the little branches that the wind was breaking from the trees. Outside, the water piled up in waves, moving much more swiftly, submerging the landing gear treads. The ship became hard to control as Bill pushed the throttles forward, running clear. A plume of silver turned to steam behind them in the starlight.

Bill pulled the ship up. He saw the trees blow over, the wood of their snapped trunks shining in the starlight. He looked down at the water flowing back into the river, and aimed the ship back up into the sky. Mary was sobbing behind him. He had never heard her cry that way before—but then, he had never broken her heart.

They hovered above the planet, the ship hanging on her burning jets, using up fuel. But Mary would not let them go on.

"We have to go back, Bill," she said, holding his hand and looking at him from her deep-sunk eyes.

"Mary, it doesn't want us," Bill said softly. "It wants to be left alone. Nothing's alive down there on its surface. It wants to keep its life to itself. There are only the seas and mountains, and the wind. Why do you want to go back?"

"Because it's mine!" she cried. "We named it, remember? We named it for me, and it was beautiful. Even the river was beautiful as it came up to us."

"Mary, we can't. We have to go on to someplace else."

"Are you going to name another planet Mary? Or Second Mary, or Mary II, or what? Well?"

"We didn't have any right to name this one."
“No right? What do you mean, no right? We found it, didn’t we?”
“I’ll find another planet,” Bill promised.
“That’s Mary, down there,” Mary said, “It’s mine, and we’re going back, and I’ll make it give itself up to me.”
“All right,” Bill sighed.

He aimed the ship at the plain and the river, feeding power into the brake jets for the landing, throwing the mud of last night in all directions. It was dawn again on the small world, and the grass lay pulpy among the shattered trees.

The wind began to blow again, but Mary opened the airlock and dropped the ladder into the soil of her planet. Bill didn’t shut the engines off, but kept both banks of jets idling, one cancelling the other. He sat at the controls, looking over his shoulder at Mary.

She ran down the ladder and out on the plain, the south wind flinging through her hair. Bill could hear her call.

“Hello, Mary!” she cried out to the planet.

The south wind rose, throwing leaves.

“Hello!”
A small branch hit the plating of the ship.

“Hello—”
The wind, screaming, picked up a branch and carried it against her scalp. She fell, then got up slowly and ran back to the airlock, the wind pushing her, pelting her with leaves. She tripped at the foot of the ladder and pulled herself up with her hands, the blood running down her cheek.

At the airlock, she turned and spat: “All right!” Then she pushed the switch on the ladder reel and slammed the hatch shut. Bill cut the power to the brake jets, and the ship began to roll forward.

“All right, Bill.” Her voice was calm and even. “Let’s go.”

“We need fuel,” Bill said. “We don’t have enough to approach another star. We wasted too much. We’ll have to fly up to the mountains and cut some rock for the converter.”

“All right, then, let’s go,” she said spitefully. “I wish you’d watched the gauges.”

“I did. You wanted to go back.”
“You might have said something.”

“It wouldn’t have stopped you.”
Mary stared at him. He looked at her stubbornly, his shoulders hunched.

Bill took the ship up over the mountains, searching for a level place, balancing the ship upright. Finally he found a deep ledge beside a waterfall that dropped to a valley. Bill lowered the ship, and casually as a gentle touch the south wind pushed them and sheared off a fin against an out-
crop of rock just before the jet bases touched ground. The ship tilted slightly and fell against the rock.

There was no way down off the ledge, even if they had dared go out on the plain.

"Can you fix the ship?"

"Maybe. But the wind'll still be here."

"Can you take off without putting it upright?"

"No."

They leaned against the angle of the deck and looked at each other. The spray of the waterfall ran down the viewport. It bathed the hull and hissed against the jets. Bill dropped a hand to the instrument board and turned off all the switches.

"It hates me," Mary said. "This place hates me. She hates me."

"Who?"

"Mary. Mary hates me. Mary hates Mary." Mary laughed bitterly. "She kept trying, and now she's got me where she wants me."

"The planet."

"Yes, the planet!" Mary said in a shrill voice. "She can't stand to share anything with anybody. You said it: she wants to keep her life to herself. She won't share it with birds, or with animals, or with people. It's hers, and she won't let go of it."

Bill was looking at her closely. "Do you think my giving her your name had anything to do with it?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Mary flared. "Don't get smart with me!" She swung around and faced the viewports, looking out. "She was always this way. No animals. No birds. No insects. Just grass and water and trees. Just what she needed. Nothing for anybody else. Maybe all planets have life inside them, somewhere, stored up, waiting to be given to the things that will need it, and live on it, and be happy. Other planets give it up. Not this one. This one hugs it to herself, and feeds on it, and turns sick." She turned back. "And don't you make any more cracks about me!"

"It was an accident," Bill said. "Just an accident, giving her your name. It didn't mean anything. It wasn't supposed to mean anything . . . except that I loved you."

"You did it all for me, didn't you?" Mary said. "You didn't want to leave Earth. You wanted a house. But you did it all for me, just to please me. You were the chump, and now I'm getting it in the neck and you're just along for the ride. Happy?"

"It's all right, Mary," Bill said awkwardly.

"It's all right. It's all right!" Mary mimicked viciously. "You're damned right, it's all right! All right for you. You're not the one she hates. You're not the one she's after. You're just fat, dumb and happy. What're you losing that's worth anything? What kind of
hunger have you got, that looked like it was going to be fed, and then wasn't? You—you'd still be sitting somewhere, piling up money and waiting for your pension. You'd still be dating that mousey little Alice from the same dusty office you were all set to rot in. I did you the biggest favor of your life, knocking you loose from that, and now I'm stuck!

"Thank you," Bill said. "Thank you for everything."

"Oh, you make me sick!"

Bill looked at her, and slumped his shoulders. He said in a soft voice:

"Mary..."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Mary—I'm sorry. Not... not about the landing. That wasn't my fault. And we're here, now, and there's no way back. We have to live together on this ledge for the rest of our lives. Mary—I'm sorry I was angry at you."

"Forget it. I never even noticed."

"I—I know. That's the way you are. I always knew it. But I think I hoped I was wrong. And that wasn't right. Nobody should try not to see other people's faults. They should understand them. They should learn to live with this other person, and see why they're like that, and... and love them."

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" Mary cried out, "I'm going outside."

Bill followed her out of the ship. Mary was pacing back and forth on the ledge. It was a hundred yards across, and a hundred feet deep.

"A cage," Mary muttered. "She put me in a cage. In a cage. With a boob."

"Mary—"

"Shut up! People like you are supposed to do things for people like me. You're no good for anything else. What good are you going to do me here? You deserve to be caught in a place like this. But not me! Not me!" She strode to the lip of the ledge, and stood framed against the valley, looking out over the plains to the distant river. "You'll see!" she cried suddenly. "I won't stay here! I'll get out! Roy'll come and find me! You won't keep me here! Roy'll take me away!"

Bill turned around suddenly, his face wet. He stared without seeing at the granite face of the mountain, his mouth quivering. "You don't have any mercy at all, do you? You're never going to change."

There was a sharp gust of wind, and a scrambling sound that ended suddenly.

Bill did not hear it. He was asking: "Mary, what makes you be like that? Why are you the way you are? Why, Mary?"

But his dead wife did not answer him from the rocks below the ledge.

Neither did the planet.
buy Jupiter!

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The aliens were strong enough simply to take Jupiter,

but for some reason they wanted it all legal.

And the price they offered was fine. Thing was—

why did they want the gassy old thing . . . ?

He was a simulacron, of course, but so cleverly contrived that the men dealing with him had long since given up thinking of the beings he represented—the energy-entities that waited in white-hot blaze in their field-enclosure "ship," miles from Earth.

The simulacron, with a majestic golden beard and deep-brown, wide-set eyes said gently, "We understand your hesitations and suspicions, and we can only continue to assure you we mean you no harm. We have, I think, presented you with proof that we inhabit the coronal haloes of O-spectra stars; that your own Sun is too weak for us, and your planets, being of solid matter, are completely and eternally alien to us."

The Terrestrial spokesman (who was Secretary of Science and, by common consent, had been placed in charge of negotiations with the aliens) said, "But you have admitted we are now on one of your chief trade routes."

"Now that our new world of Kimmonoshek has developed fields of protonic fluid, yes."

The Secretary said, "Well, here on Earth, positions on trade routes can gain military importance out of proportion to their intrinsic value. I can only repeat, then, that to gain our confidence you must tell us exactly why you need Jupiter."

And as always, when that question or a form of it was asked, the simulacron looked pained, "Secrecy is important. If the Lamberj people—"

"Exactly," said the Secretary. "To us it sounds like war. You and what you call the Lamberj people—"
The simulacron said hurriedly, "But we are offering you a most generous return. You have only colonized the inner planets of your System and we are not interested in those. We ask for the world you call Jupiter which, I understand, your people can never expect to live on, or even land on. Its size—" he smiled indulgently—"is too much for you."

The Secretary, who disliked the air of condescension, said stiffly, "The Jovian satellites are practical sites for colonization, however, and we intend to colonize them shortly."

"But the satellites will not be disturbed in any way. They are yours in every sense of the word—we ask only Jupiter itself, a completely useless world to you. And the return we offer is generous. Surely, you realize that we could take your Jupiter if we wished, without your permission. It is only that we prefer payment and a legal treaty. It will prevent disputes in the future. As you see, I'm being completely frank."

The Secretary said stubbornly, "Why do you need Jupiter?"

"The Lamberj—"

"Are you at war with the Lamberj?"

"It's not quite—"

"Because you see that if it is war and you establish some sort of fortified base on Jupiter, the Lamberj may, quite properly, resent that and retaliate against us for granting you permission. We cannot allow ourselves to be involved in such a situation."

"Nor would I ask you to be involved. My word that no harm will come to you. Surely," (he kept coming back to it) "the return is generous. Enough power boxes each year to supply your world with a full year of power requirement."

The Secretary said, "On the understanding that future increases in power consumption will be met."

"Up to a figure five times the present total. Yes."

"As I have said, I am a high official of the government and have been given considerable powers to deal with you—but not infinite powers. I, myself, am inclined to trust you, but I could not accept your terms without understanding exactly why you want Jupiter. If the explanation is plausible and convincing, I could perhaps persuade our government and, through them, our people, to make the agreement. If I tried to make an agreement without such an explanation, I would simply be forced out of office and Earth would refuse to honor the agreement. You could then, as you say, take Jupiter by force. But you would be in illegal possession, and you have said you don't wish that."

The simulacron clicked its tongue impatiently. "I cannot con-
tinue forever in this petty bicker-
ing. The Lamberj—" He stopped,
then said, "Have I your word of
honor that this is all not a device
inspired by the Lamberj people
to delay us until—"

"My word of honor," said the
Secretary.

The Secretary of Science
emerged, mopping his forehead
and looking ten years younger.
He said, softly, "I told him his
people could have it as soon as I
obtained the President's formal
approval. And I don't think the
President will object, or Congress,
either. Good Lord, gentlemen,
think of it; free power at our
fingertips in return for a planet
we could never use in any case."

The Secretary of Defense
growled, "I don't like it. No mat-
ter what their story is, only a
Mizzaret-Lamberj war can really
explain their need for Jupiter.
Under those circumstances, and
comparing their military potential
with ours, a strict neutrality is
essential."

"But there is no war, sir," said
the Secretary of Science. "The
simulacron presented an alternate
explanation of their need for Jup-
ter so rational and plausible that
I accepted it at once. I think the
President will agree with me, and
you gentlemen, too, when you un-
derstand. In fact, I have here their
plans for the new Jupiter, as it
will soon appear."

The others rose from their seats,
clamoring. "A new Jupiter?"
gasped the Secretary of Defense.
"Not so different from the old,
gentlemen," said the Secretary of
Science. "Here are the sketches
which they have provided in form
suitable for observation by matter
beings such as ourselves."

He laid them down. The fa-
miliar banded planet was there
before them on one of the
sketches: yellow, pale green and
light brown with curled white
streaks here and there and all
against the speckled velvet back-
ground of space. But across the
bands were curious streaks of
blackness, as velvet as the back-
ground and arranged in an un-
usual pattern.

"That," said the Secretary of
Science, "is what they plan for the
day side of the planet. The night
side is shown in this sketch." (There, Jupiter was a thin cres-
cent enclosing darkness, and
within that darkness were the
same thin streaks arranged in sim-
ilar pattern, but in a phosphores-
cent glowing orange this time.)

"The marks," said the Secretary
of Science, "are a purely optical
phenomenon, I am told, which
will not rotate with the planet,
but will remain static in its atmo-
spheric fringe."

"But what is it?" asked the Sec-
retary of Commerce.

"You see," said the Secretary of
Science, "Our Solar System is now
on one of their major trade routes. As many as seven of their ships pass within a few hundred million miles of the System in a single day, and each ship has the major planets under telescopic observation as they pass. Tourist curiosity, you know. Solid planets of any size are a marvel to them.”

“What has that to do with it?”

“This is one form of their writing. Translated, those marks read: USE MIZZARETT ERGONE VERTICES FOR HEALTH AND GLOWING HEAT.”

“You mean—you mean Jupiter is to be an advertising billboard?” exploded the Secretary of Defense.

“Right. The Lamberj people, it seems, produce a competing ergone tablet, which accounts for the Mizzaretty anxiety to establish full legal ownership of Jupiter. In case of Lamberj lawsuits....

And, gentlemen, I am happy to say that the Mizzaretts appear to be novices at the advertising game.”

“Why do you say that?” asked the Secretary of the Interior.

“Why, they neglected to set up a series of options on the other planets. The Jupiter billboard will be advertising our system, as well as their own product. And when the competing Lamberj people come storming in to check on the Mizzaretty title to Jupiter, we will have Saturn to sell to them. With its rings. As we will easily be able to explain to them, the rings will make Saturn much the better spectacle.”

“And therefore,” said the Secretary of the Treasury, suddenly beaming, “worth a much better price.”

And they all looked very cheerful.

FOR FANS ... AND NON-FANS

If you are the type of science fiction reader who prefers to enjoy his science fiction in quiet, who does not wish the field to intrude on his social life, you would be wise to avoid the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio, on the days of June 28th and 29th, 1958. By so doing, you’ll miss the 9th Annual Midwescon. If you are not anti-social about such things, you will quite possibly miss a good time.

The World Science Fiction Convention—even more vigorous—will be held at the Alexandria Hotel, Fifth at Spring, Los Angeles, Cal., from Aug. 29th through Sept. 1. At that meeting, if certain under-the-counter plans go through, you may have a chance to bid for one hour of the time of your favorite science fiction writer...among other divertissements.... You have been warned.
The Comedian's Children

a novelet

by Theodore Sturgeon

Everybody—almost everybody—loved unsmiling Heri Gonza, the world's funniest man. Look how he took over when that frightening children's disease was brought back from Iapetus. He gave wholly of himself, gave his money, his love, his talent...

The one thing he didn't give was a cure. That seemed to be locked in the mind of Gonza's most dedicated enemy—and on the frozen surface of Saturn's eighth satellite...

Prologue

The quiet third of the Twenty-First Century came to an end at ten o'clock on the morning of May 17, 2034, with the return to earth of a modified Fafnir space cruiser under the command of Capt. Avery Swope. Perhaps in an earlier or a later day, the visitation which began on the above date might have had less effect. But the earth was lulled and content with itself, and for good reason—international rivalries having reverted to the football fields and tennis courts, an intelligent balance of trade and redistribution of agriculture and industry having been achieved.

Captain Swope's mission was to accomplish the twelfth off-earth touchdown, and the body on which he touched was Iapetus (sometimes Japetus), the remarkable eighth satellite of Saturn. All Saturn's satellites are remarkable, each for a different reason. Iapetus' claim to fame is his fluctuating brilliance; he always swings brightly around the eastern limb of the ringed planet, and dwindles dimly behind the
western edge. Obviously the little moon is half bright and half dark, and keeps one face turned always to its parent; but why should a moon be half bright and half dark?

It was an intriguing mystery, and it had become the fashion to affect all sorts of decorations which mimicked the fluctuations of the inconstant moonlet: cufflinks and tunic clasps which dimmed and brightened, bread-speeders and book-jackets in dichotomous motley. Copies were reproduced of the midcentury master Pederson’s magnificent oil painting of a space ship aground on one of Saturn’s moons, with four suited figures alighting, and it became a sort of colophon for news stories about Swope’s achievement and window displays of bi-colored gimcrackery—with everyone marveling at the Twentieth Century artist’s unerring prediction of a Fafnir’s contours, and no one noticing that the painting could not possibly have been of Iapetus, which has no blue sky nor weathered rocks, but must certainly have been the meticulous Pederson’s visualization of Titan. Still, everyone thought it was Iapetus, and since it gave no evidence as to why Iapetus changed its brightness, the public embraced the painting as the portrait of a mystery. They told each other that Swope would find out.

Captain Swope found out, but Captain Swope did not tell. Something happened to his Fafnir on Iapetus. His signals were faintly heard through the roar of an electrical disturbance on the parent world, and they were unreadable, and they were the last. Then, voiceless, he returned, took up his braking orbit, and at last came screaming down out of the black into and through the springtime blue. His acquisition of the tail-down attitude so very high—over fifty miles—proved that something was badly wrong. The extreme deliberation with which he came in over White Sands, and the constant yawing, like that of a baseball bat balanced on a fingertip, gave final proof that he was attempting a landing under manual control, something never before attempted with anything the size of a Fafnir. It was superbly done, and may never be equalled, that roaring drift down and down through the miles, over forty-six of them, and never a yaw that the sensitive hands could not compensate, until that last one.

What happened? Did some devil-imp of wind, scampering runt of a hurricane, shoulder against the Fafnir? Or was the tension and strain at last too much for weary muscles which could not, even for a split second, relax and pass the controls to another pair of hands? Whatever it was, it happened at three and six-tenths miles, and she lay over bellowing as her pilot made a last desperate attempt to gain some altitude and perhaps another try.
She gained nothing, she lost a bit, hurtling like a dirigible gone mad, faster and faster, hoping to kick the curve of the earth down and away from her, until, over Arkansas, the forward section of the rocket liner—the one which is mostly inside the ship—disintegrated and she blew off her tail. She turned twice end over end and thundered into a buckwheat field.

Two days afterwards a photographer got a miraculous picture. It was darkly whispered later that he had unforgivably carried the child—the three-year-old Tresak girl from the farm two miles away—into the crash area and had inexcusably posed her there; but this could never be proved, and anyway, how could he have known? Nevertheless, the multiple miracles of a momentary absence of anything at all in the wide clear background, of the shadows which mantled her and of the glitter of the many-sharded metal scrap which reared up behind her to give her a crown—but most of all the miracle of the child herself, black-eyed, golden-haired, trusting, fearless, one tender hand resting on some jagged steel which would surely shred her flesh if she were less beautiful—these made one of the decade's most memorable pictures. In a day she was known to the nation, and warmly loved as a sort of infant phoenix rising from the disaster of the roaring bird; the death of the magnificent Swope could not cut the nation quite as painfully because of her, as that cruel ruin could not cut her hand.

The news, then, that on the third day after her contact with the wreck of the ship from Iapetus, the Tresak child had fallen ill of a disfiguring malady never before seen on earth, struck the nation and the world a dreadful and terrifying blow. At first there was only a numbness, but at the appearance of the second, and immediately the third cases of the disease, humanity sprang into action. The first thing it did was to pass seven Acts, an Executive Order and three Conventions against any further off-earth touchdowns; so, until the end of the iapetitis epidemic, there was an end to all but orbital space flight.

"YOU'RE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT," she whispered, and bent to kiss the solemn, comic little face. (They said it wasn't contagious; at least, adults didn't get it.) She straightened up and smiled at him, and Billy smiled his half-smile—it was the left half—in response. He said something to her, but by now his words were so blurred that she failed to catch them. She couldn't bear to have him repeat whatever it was; he seemed always so puzzled when
people did not understand him, as if he could hear himself quite plainly. So to spare herself the pathetic pucker which would worry the dark half of his face, she only smiled the more and said again, “You’re going to be all right,” and then she fled.

Outside in the corridor she leaned for a moment against the wall and got rid of the smile, the rigid difficult hypocrisy of that smile. There was someone standing there on the other side of the scalding blur which replaced the smile; she said, because she had to say it to someone just then: “How could I promise him that?”

“One does,” said the man, answering. She shook away the blur and saw that it was Dr. Otis. “I promised him the same thing myself. One just...does,” he shrugged. “Heri Gonza promises them, too.”

“I saw that,” she nodded. “He seems to wonder ‘How could I?’ too.”

“He does what he can,” said the doctor, indicating, with a motion of his head, the special hospital wing in which they stood, the row of doors behind and beyond, doors to laboratories, doors to research and computer rooms, store rooms, staff rooms, all donated by the comedian. “In a way he has more right to make a promise like that than Billy’s doctor.”

“Or Billy’s sister,” she agreed tremulously. She turned to walk down the corridor, and the doctor walked with her. “Any new cases?”

“Two.”

She shuddered. “Any—”

“No,” he said quickly, “no deaths.” And as if to change the subject, he said, “I understand you’re to be congratulated.”

“What? Oh,” she said, wrenching her mind away from the image of Billy’s face, half marble, half mobile mahogany. “Oh, the award. Yes, they called me this afternoon. Thank you. Somehow it...doesn’t mean very much right now.”

They stood before his office at the head of the corridor. “I think I understand how you feel,” he said. “You’d trade it in a minute for—” he nodded down the corridor toward the boy’s room.

“I’d even trade it for a reasonable hope,” she agreed. “Good night, Doctor. You’ll call me?”

“I’ll call you if anything happens. Including anything good. Don’t forget that, will you? I’d hate to have you afraid of the sound of my voice.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“Stay away from the trideo this once. You need some sleep.”

“Oh Lord. Tonight’s the big effort,” she remembered.

“Stay away from it,” he said with warm severity. “You don’t need to be reminded of jaundice, or be persuaded to help.”
"You sound like Dr. Horowitz."
His smile clicked off. She had meant it as a mild pleasantry; if she had been less tired, less distraught, she would have had better sense. Better taste. Horowitz' name echoed in these of all halls like a blasphemy. Once honored as among the greatest of medical researchers, he had inexplicably turned his back on Heri Gonza and his Foundation, had flatly refused research grants, and had publicly insulted the comedian and his great philanthropy. As a result he had lost his reappointment to the directorship of the Research Institute and a good deal of his professional standing. And like the sullen buffoon he was, he plunged into research—"real research," he inexcusably called it—on iapetitis, attempting single-handedly not only to duplicate the work of the Foundation, but to surpass it: "the only way I know," he had told a reporter, "to pull the pasture out from under that clod and his trained sheep." Heri Gonza's reply was typical: by deft sketches on his programs, he turned Horowitz into an improper noun, defining a horowitz as a sort of sad sack or poor soul, pathetic, mildly despicable, incompetent and always funny—the kind of subhuman who not only asks for, but justly deserves a pie in the face. He backed this up with a widely publicized stand-
ing offer to Dr. Horowitz of a no-strings-attached research grant of half a million; which Dr. Horowitz, after his first unprintable refusal (his instructions to the comedian as to what he could do with the money were preceded by the suggestion that he first change it into pennies), ignored.

Therefore the remark, even by a Nobel prizewinner, even by a reasonably handsome woman understandably weary and upset, even by one whose young brother lay helpless in the disfiguring grip of an incurable disease—such a remark could hardly be forgiven, especially when made to the head of the Iapetitis Wing of the Medical Center and local chairman of the Foundation. "I'm sorry, Dr. Otis," she said. "I . . . probably need sleep more than I realized."

"You probably do, Dr. Barran," he said evenly, and went into his office and closed the door.

"Damn," said Iris Barran, and went home.

No one knew precisely how Heri Gonza had run across the idea of an endurance contest cum public solicitation of funds, or when he decided to include it in his bag of tricks. He did not invent the idea; it was a phenomenon of early broadcasting, which erupted briefly on the marriage of video with audio in a primitive device known as television. The performances, consisting of up to
forty continuous hours of entertainment interspersed with pleas for aid in one charity or another, were headed by a single celebrity who acted as master of ceremonies and beggar-in-chief. The terminologically bastardized name for this production was telethon, from the Greek root tele, to carry, and the syllable thon, meaningless in itself but actually the last syllable of the word marathon. The telethon, sensational at first, had rapidly deteriorated, due to its use by numbers of greedy publicists who, for the price of a phone call, could get large helpings of publicity by pleading donations which, in many cases, they failed to make, and the large percentage of the citizenry whose impulse to give did not survive their telephoned promises. And besides, the novelty passed, the public no longer watched. So for nearly eighty years there were no telethons, and if there had been, a disease to hang one on would have been hard to find. Heart disease, cancer, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy—these, and certain other infirmities on which public appeals had been based, had long since disappeared or were negligibly present.

Now, however, there was iapetitis.

A disorder of the midbrain and central nervous system, it attacked children between the ages of three and seven, affecting only one hemisphere, with no statistical preference for either side. Its mental effects were slight (which in its way was one of the most tragic aspects of the disease) being limited to aphasia and sometimes a partial alexia. It had more drastic effects on the motor system, however, and on the entire cellular regeneration mechanisms of the affected side, which would gradually solidify and become inert, immobile. The most spectacular symptom was on the superficial pigmentation. The immobilized side turned white as bleached bone, the other increasingly dark, beginning with a reddening and slowly going through the red-brown to a chocolate in the later stages. The division was exactly on the median line, and the bicoloration proceeded the same way in all cases, regardless of the original pigmentation.

There was no known cure.

There was no known treatment.

There was only the Foundation—Heri Gonza’s Foundation—and all it could do was install expensive equipment and expensive people to operate it... and hope. There was nothing anyone else could do which would not merely duplicate Foundation efforts, and besides, with one exception the Foundation already had the top people in microbiology, neurology, virology, internal medicine, and virtually every other discipline which might have some
bearing on the disease. There were, so far, only 376 known cases, every one of which was in a Foundation hospital.

Heri Gonza had been associated with the disease since the very beginning, when he visited a children’s hospital and saw the appalling appearance of the first case, little Linda Tresak of Arkansas. When four more cases appeared in the Arkansas State Hospital after she was a patient there for some months, Heri Gonza moved with characteristic noise and velocity. Within forty-eight hours of his first knowledge of the new cases, all five were ensconced in a specially vacated wing of the Medical Center, and mobilization plans were distributed to centers all over the world, so that new clinics could be set up and duplicate facilities installed the instant the disease showed up. There were at present forty-two such clinics. Each child had been picked up within hours of the first appearance of symptoms, whisked to the hospital, pampered, petted, and... observed. No treatment. No cure. The white got whiter, the dark got darker, the white side slowly immobilized, the dark side grew darker but was otherwise unaffected; the speech difficulty grew steadily (but extremely slowly) worse; the prognosis was always negative. Negative by extrapolation: any organism in the throes of such deterioration might survive for a long time, but must ultimately succumb.

In a peaceful world, with economy stabilized, population growing but not running wild any longer, iapetitis was big news. The biggest.

The telethon was, unlike its forbears, not aimed at the public pocket. It was to serve rather as a whip to an already aware world, information to the informed, aimed at earlier and earlier discovery and diagnosis. It was one of the few directions left to medical research. The disease was obviously contagious, but its transmission method was unknown. Some child, somewhere, might be found early enough to display some signs of the point of entry of the disease, something like a fleabite in spotted fever, the mosquito puncture in malaria—some sign which might heal or disappear soon after its occurrence. A faint hope, but it was a hope, and there was little enough of that around.

So, before a wide grey backdrop bearing a forty-foot insigne in the center, the head and shoulders of a crying child vividly done in half silver, half mahogany, Heri Gonza opened his telethon.

Iris Barran got home well after it had started; she had rather overstayed her hospital visit. She
came in wearily and slumped on the divan, thinking detachedly of Billy, thinking of Dr. Otis. The thought of the doctor reminded her of her affront to him, and she felt a flash of annoyance, first at herself for having done it, and immediately another directed at him for being so touchy—and so unforgiving. At the same time she recalled his advice to get some sleep, not to watch the telethon; and in a sudden, almost childish burst of rebellion she slapped the arm of the divan and brought the trideo to life.

The opposite wall of the room, twelve feet high, thirty feet long, seemed to turn to smoke, which cleared to reveal an apparent extension of the floor of the room, back and further back, to Heri Gonzato’s great grey backdrop. All around were the sounds, the smells, the pressure of the presence of thousands of massed, rapt people. “...so I looked down and there the horse had caught its silly hoof in my silly stirrup. ‘Horse,’ I says, ‘if you’re gettin’ on, I’m gettin’ off!”

The laugh was a great soft booming explosion, as usual out of all proportion to the quality of the witticism. Heri Gonzato had that rarest of comic skills, the ability to pyramid his effects, so that the mildest of them seemed much funnier than it really was. It was mounted on a rapidly-stacked structure of previous quips and jokes, each with its little store of merriment and all merriment suppressed by the audience for fear of missing not only the next joke, but the entire continuity. When the pyramid was capped, the release was explosive. And yet in that split instant between capper and explosion, he always managed to slip in a clear three or four syllables, “On my way here—” or “When the president—” or “Like the horowitz who—” which, repeated and completed after the big laugh, turned out to be the base brick for the next pyramid.

Watching his face during the big laughs—yocks, the knowledgeable columnists and critics called them—had become a national pastime. Though the contagion of laughter was in his voice and choice of phrase, he played everything deadpan. A small, wiry man with swift nervous movements, he had a face-by-the-million: anybody’s face. Its notable characteristics were three: thin lips, masked eyes, impenetrable as onyx, and astonishing jug-handle ears. His voice was totally flexible, capable of almost any timbre, and with the falsetto he frequently affected, his range was slightly over four octaves. He was an accomplished ventriloquist, though he never used the talent with the conventional dummy, but rather to interrupt himself with strange voices. But it was
his ordinary, unremarkable, almost immobile face which was his audience’s preoccupation. His face never laughed, though in dialogue his voice might. His voice could smile, too, even weep, and his face did not. But at the yock, if it was a big yock, a long once, his frozen waiting face would twitch; the thin lips would fill out a trifle: he’s going to smile, he’s going to smile! Sometimes, when the yock was especially fulsome, his mouth actually would widen a trifle; but then it was always time to go on, and, deadpan, he would. What could it matter to anyone whether or not one man in the world smiled? On the face of it, nothing: yet millions of people, most of whom were unaware of it, bent close to their trideo walls and peered raptly, waiting, waiting to see him smile.

As a result, everyone who heard him, heard every word.

Iris found herself grateful, somehow—able to get right out of herself, sweep in with that vast unseen crowd and leave herself, her worrying self, her angry, weary, logical, Nobel-prizewinning self asprawl on the divan while she hung on and smiled, hung on and tittered, hung on and exploded with the world.

He built, and he built, and the trideo cameras crept in on him until, before she knew it, he was standing as close to the invisible wall as belief would permit; and still he came closer, so that he seemed in the room with her; and this was a pyramid higher than most, more swiftly and more deftly built, so that the ultimate explosion could contain itself not much longer, not a beat, not a second....

And he stopped in mid-sentence, mid-word, even, and, over at the left, fell to one knee and held out his arms to the right. “Come on, honey,” he said in a gentle, tear-checked purr.

From the right came a little girl, skipping. She was a beautiful little girl, a picture-book little girl, with old-fashioned bouncing curls, shiny black patent-leather shoes with straps, little white socks, a pale-blue dress with a very wide, very short skirt.

But she wasn’t skipping, she was limping. She almost fell, and Heri was there to catch her.

Holding her in his arms, while she looked trustingly up into his face, he walked to center stage, turned, faced the audience. His eyes were on her face; when he raised them abruptly to the audience, they were, by some trick of the light (or of Heri Gonza) unnaturally bright.

And he stood, that’s all he did, for a time, stood there with the child in his arms, while the pent-up laughter turned to frustrated annoyance, directed first at the comedian, and slowly, slowly,
with a rustle of sighs, at the audience itself by the audience. Ah, to see such a thing and be full of laughter: how awful I am.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

One little arm was white, one pink. Between the too-tiny socks and the too-short skirt, the long thin legs were one white, one pink.

"This is little Koska," he said after an age. The child smiled suddenly at the sound of her name. He shifted her in his elbow so he could stroke her hair. He said softly, "She's a little Estonian girl, from the far north. She doesn't speak very much English, so she won't mind if we talk about her." A huskiness crept into his voice. "She came to us only yesterday. Her mother is a good woman. She sent her to us the minute she noticed."

Silence again, then he turned the child so their faces were side by side, looking straight into the audience. It was hard to see at first, and then it became all too plain—the excessive pallor of the right side of her face, the too-even flush on the left, and the sharp division between them down the center.

"We'll make you better," he whispered. He said it again in a foreign language, and the child brightened, smiled trustingly into his face, kept her smile as she faced the audience again: and wasn't the smile a tiny bit wider on the pink side than on the white? You couldn't tell...

"Help me," said Heri Gonza. "Help her, and the others, help us. Find these children, wherever in the world they might be, and call us. Pick up any telephone in the world and say simply, I... F. That's IF, the Iapetitis Foundation. We treat them like little kings and queens. We never cause them any distress. By trideo they are in constant touch with their loved ones." Suddenly, his voice rang. "The call you make may find the child who teaches us what we need to know. Your call—yours!—may find the cure for us."

He knelt and set the child gently on her feet. He knelt holding her hands, looking into her face. He said, "And whoever you are, wherever you might be, you doctors, researchers, students, teachers... if anyone, anywhere, has an inkling, an idea, a way to help, any way at all—then call me. Call me now, call here—" He pointed upward and the block letters and figures of the local telephone floated over his head—"and tell me. I'll answer you now, I'll personally speak to anyone who can help. Help, oh, help."

The last word rang and rang in the air. The deep stage behind him slowly darkened, leaving the two figures, the kneeling man and the little golden girl, flooded with light. He released her hands and
she turned away from him, smiling timidly, and crossed the wide stage. It seemed to take forever, and as she walked, very slightly she dragged her left foot.

When she was gone, there was nothing left to look at but Heri Gonzza. He had not moved, but the lights had changed, making of him a luminous silhouette against the endless black behind him...one kneeling man, a light in the universal dark...hope...slowly fading, but there, still there...no? Oh, there...

A sound of singing, the palest of pale blue stains in deep center. The singing up, a powerful voice from the past, an ancient, all but forgotten tape of one of the most moving renditions the world has ever known, especially for such a moment as this: Mahalia Jackson singing The Lord's Prayer, with the benefit of such audio as had not been dreamed of in her day...with a cool fresh scent, with inaudible quasi-hypnotic emanations, with a whispering chorus a chorus of angels might learn from.

Heri Gonzza had not said "Let us pray." He would never do such a thing, not on a global network. There was just the kneeling dimness, and the blue glow far away in the black. And if at the very end the glow looked to some like the sign of the cross, it might have been only a shrouded figure raising its arms; and if this was benediction, surely it was in the eye of the beholder. Whatever it was, no one who saw it completely escaped its spell, or ever forgot it. Iris Barran, for one, exhausted to begin with, heart and mind full to bursting with the tragedy of iapetitis; Iris Barran was wrung out by the spectacle. All she could think of was the last spoken word: Help!

She sprang to her phone and waved it active. With trembling fingers she dialed the number which floated in her mind as it had on the trideo wall, and to the composed young lady who appeared in her solido cave, saying, "Trideo, C. A. O. Good evening," she gasped, "Heri Gonzza—quickly."

"One moment please," said the vision, and disappeared, to be replaced instantly by another, even more composed, even lovelier, who said, "I.F. Telethon."

"Heri Gonzza."

"Yes, of course. Your name?"

"I-Iris Barran. Dr. Iris Barran."

The girl looked up sharply. "Not the—"

"Yes, I won the Nobel prize. Please—let me speak to Heri Gonzza."

"One moment please."

The next one was a young man with curly hair, a bell-like baritone, and an intensely interested face. He was Burcke of the network. He passed her to a jovial little fat man with shrewd eyes...
who was with Continuity Acceptance. Iris could have screamed out loud. But a worldwide appeal for calls would jam lines and channels for hours, and obviously a thorough screening process was essential. She was dimly aware that her name and face, only today in all the news, had already carried her to the top. Consciously, she thought of none of this; she held on and drove, wanting only to help... help... A snatch of the conversation she had had with Dr. Otis drifted across her mind: I guess you’d trade it for... and then a heart-rending picture of Billy’s face, trying to smile with half a mouth. I’d trade it all for a reasonable hope... and suddenly she was staring into the face of Heri Gonza. Reflexively she glanced over her shoulder at the trideo wall; Heri Gonza was there too, with a solidophone pillar in center stage, its back to the audience so that only the comedian could see its cave. Light from it flickered on his face.

“I’d know that face anywhere!” he said raspingly.

“Oh,” she said faintly, “Mr.... uh....” and then remembered that one of his public affectations was never to permit anyone to call him Mister. She said, “Heri Gonza, I... I’m Iris B-barran, and I—” She realized that her voice could not be heard over the trideo. She was grateful for that.

He said, just as stridently, “I know who you are. I know the story of your life too.” Switching to a comic quack, he said, “So-o-o?”

“You know I just won the Nobel award. M—uh, Heri Gonza, I want to help, more than anything in the world, I want to help. My brother has it. W—would you like me to give the award money to you... I mean, to the Foundation?”

She did not know what she expected in exchange for this stunning offer. She had not thought that far ahead. What she did not expect was...

“You what?” he yelled, so loud she drew her head down, gracelessly, turtle-like. “Listen, you, I got along without you before and I can get along without you now. You’re getting from me, see, and I’m giving. What you got I don’t want. I’m not up here to do you no good. I tell you what you got, you got a wrong number, and you are, s-s-s-s-so,” he hissed in a hilarious flatulent stutter, “s-s-so long.” And before she could utter another sound he waved her off and her phone cave went black.

Numb with shock, she slowly turned to the trideo wall, where Heri Gonza was striding downstage to the audience. His expressionless face, his gait, his posture, the inclination of his head, and his tone of voice all added to an amused indignation, with
perhaps a shade more anger than
mirth. He tossed a thumb at the
phone and said, "Wits we got
calling, can you imagine? At a
time like this. We got dimwits,
half wits, and—" exactly the right
pause; there was one bleat of
laughter somewhere in the audi-
ence and then a thousand voices
to chorus with him—"horowitz!"

Iris sank back in the phone
chair and covered her face, press-
ing so hard against her tired eyes
that she saw red speckles. For a
time she was shocked completely
beyond thought, but at last she
was able to move. She rose heav-
ily and went to the divan, ar-
rested her hand as she was about
to click off the trideo. Heri Gonza
was back at the stage phone,
talking eagerly to someone, his
voice honey and gentleness. "Oh
bless you, brother, and thank you.
You may have an idea there, so
I tell you what you do. You call
the I.F. at Johannesburg and ar-
range a meeting with the doctors
there. They'll listen... No,
brother, collect of course. What's-
amatta, brother, you broke? I got
news for you, for you-ee are-ee a-
ee good-ee man-ee yes-ee indeedy-
dee: you ain'ta broka no mo. A
man like you? I got a boy on the
way this very minute with a bag
o' gold for the likes of you brother
... Oh now, don't say thanks, you
mak-a me mad. 'Bye."

He waved off, and turned to
the audience to intone, "A man
with an idea—little one, big one,
who knows? But it's to help... so
bless him."

Thunderous applause. Iris let
her hand finish the gesture and
switched off.

She went and washed her face,
and that gave her strength
enough to shower and change. After that
she could think almost normally.
How could he?
She turned over impossible al-
ternatives, explanations. His
phone was a dummy: he couldn't
see her, didn't know who was on
the phone. Or: it was his way of
being funny, and she was too
tired to understand. Or... or...
it was no use: it had really hap-
pened, he had known what he
was doing, he had a reason.

But what reason? Why? Why?
In her mind she again heard
that roar from the audience: Hor-
owitz. With difficulty, because it
still stung, she pieced together
the conversation and then, mov-
ing her forefinger toward her
phone and the trideo, back and
forth, puzzled out what had gone
out over the air and what had not.
Only then did she fully under-
stand that Heri Gonza had done
what he had done to make it
seem that his first call was from
Dr. Horowitz. But if he needed
that particular gag at that time,
why didn't he fake it to a dead
phone? Why actually converse
with her, cut her down like that?
And he hadn't let her help.
That was worse than any of the rudeness, the insult. He wouldn’t let her help.

What to do? Making the gesture she had made had not been hard; having it refused was more than she could bear. She must help; she would help. Now of all times, with all this useless money coming to her; she didn’t need it, and it might, it just might somehow help, and bring Billy back home.

Well then, expose Heri Gonza. Give him back some of his own humiliation. Call in the newsmen, make a statement. Tell them what she had offered, tell them just who was on the line. He’d have to take the money, and apologize to boot.

She stood up; she sat down again. No. He had known what he was doing. He had known who she was; he must have a telltale on his phone to get information on his callers from that screening committee. She knew a lot about Heri Gonza. He seemed so wild, so impulsive; he was not. He ran his many enterprises with a steel fist; he took care of his own money, his own bookings. He did not make mistakes nor take chances. He had refused her and the Foundation would refuse her: the Foundation was Heri Gonza. He had his reasons, and if she had any defense at all against what he had done, he would not have done it.

She wasn’t allowed to help. Unless—

She suddenly ran to the phone. She dialled 5, and the cave lit up with the floating word DIREC-
TORY. She dialled H, O, R, and touched the Slow button until she had the Horowitzes. There were pathetically few of them. Almost everyone named Horowitz had filed unlisted numbers: many had gone so far as to change their names.

George Rehoboth Horowitz, she remembered.

He wasn’t listed.

She dialled Information and asked. The girl gave her a pitying smile and told her the line was unlisted. And of course, it would be. If Dr. Horowitz wasn’t the most hated man on earth, he was the next thing to it. A listed phone would be useless to him, never silent.

"Has he screening service?" Iris asked suddenly.

"He has," said the girl, company-polite as always, but now utterly cold. Anyone who knew that creature to speak to... "Your name, please?"

Iris told her, and added, "Please tell him it’s very important."

The cave went dark but for the slowly rotating symbol of the phone company, indicating that the operator was doing her job. Then a man’s head appeared and looked her over for a moment, and then said, "Dr. Barran?"
"Dr. Horowitz."
She had not been aware of having formed any idea of the famous (infamous?) Horowitz; yet she must have. His face seemed too gentle to have issued those harsh rejoinders which the news attributed to him; yet perhaps it was gentle enough to be taken for the fumbler, the fool so many people thought he was. His eyes, in some inexplicable way, assured her that his could not be clumsy hands. He wore old-fashioned exterior spectacles; he was losing his hair; he was younger than she had thought, and he was ugly. Crags are ugly, tree-trunks, the hawk’s pounce, the bear’s foot, if beauty to you is all straight lines and silk. Iris Barron was not repulsed by this kind of ugliness.

She said, bluntly, "Are you doing any good with the disease?" She did not specify: today, there was only one disease.

He said, in an odd way as if he had known her for a long time and could judge how much she would understand, "I have it all from the top down to the middle, and from the bottom up to about a third. In between—nothing, and no way to get anything."

"Can you go any further?"
"I don’t know," he said candidly. "I can go on trying to find ways to go further, and if I find a way, I can try to move along on it."

"Would some money help?"
"It depends on whose it is."
"Mine."

He did not speak, but tilted his head a little to one side and looked at her.

She said, "I won... I have some money coming in. A good deal of it."

"I heard," he said, and smiled. He seemed to have very strong teeth, not white, not even, just spotless and perfect. "It’s a good deal out of my field, your theoretical physics, and I don’t understand it. I’m glad you got it. I really am. You earned it."

She shook her head, denying it, and said, "I was surprised."

"You shouldn’t have been. After ninety years of rather frightening confusion, you’ve restored the concept of parity to science—" he chuckled—"though hardly in the way anyone anticipated."

She had not known that this was her accomplishment; she had never thought of it in those terms. Her demonstration of gravitic flux was a subtle matter to be communicated with wordless symbols, quite past speech. Even to herself she had never made a conversational analog of it; this man had, though, not only easily, but quite accurately.

She thought, if this isn’t his field, and he grasps it like that—just how good must he be in his own? She said, "Can you use the money? Will it help?"
“God,” he said devoutly, “can I use it... As to whether it will help, Doctor, I can’t answer that. It would help me go on. It may not make me arrive. Why did you think of me?”

Would it hurt him to know? she asked herself, and answered, it would hurt him if I were not honest. She said, “I offered it—to the Foundation. They wouldn’t touch it. I don’t know why.”

“I do,” he said, and instantly held up his hand. “Not now,” he said, checking her question. He reached somewhere off-transmission and came up with a card, on which was lettered, AUDIO TAPPED.

“Who—”

“The world,” he overrode her, “is full of clever amateurs. Tell me, why are you willing to make such a sacrifice?”

“Oh—the money. It isn’t a sacrifice. I have enough: I don’t need it. And—my baby brother. He has it.”

“I didn’t know,” he said, with compassion. He made a motion with his hands. She did not understand. “What?”

He shook his head, touched his lips, and repeated the motion, beckoning, at himself and the room behind him. Oh. Come where I am.

She nodded, but said only, “It’s been a great pleasure talking with you. Perhaps I’ll see you soon.”

He turned over his card; obviously he had used it many times before. It was a map of a section of the city. She recognized it readily, followed his pointing finger, and nodded eagerly. He said, “I hope it is soon.”

She nodded again and rose, to indicate that she was on her way. He smiled and waved off.

It was like a deserted city, or a decimated one; almost everyone was off the streets, watching the telethon. The few people who were about all hurried, as if they were out against their wills and anxious to get back and miss as little as possible. It was known that he intended to go on for at least thirty-six hours, and still they didn’t want to miss a minute of him. Wonderful, wonderful, she thought, amazed (not for the first time) at people—just people. Someone had once told her that she was in mathematics because she was so apart from, amazed at, people. It was possible. She was, she knew, very unskilled with people, and she preferred the company of mathematics, which tried so hard to be reasonable, and to say what was really meant...

She easily found the sporting-goods store he had pointed out on his map, and stepped into the darkened entrance. She looked carefully around and saw no one, then tried the door. It was locked,
and she experienced a flash of disappointment of an intensity that surprised her. But even as she felt it, she heard a faint click, tried the door again, and felt it open. She slid inside and closed it, and was gratified to hear it lock again behind her.

Straight ahead a dim, concealed light flickered, enough to show her that there was a clear aisle straight back through the store. When she was almost to the rear wall, the light flickered again, to show her a door at her right, deep in an ell. It clicked as she approached, and opened without trouble. She mounted two flights of stairs, and on the top landing stood Horowitz, his hands out. She took them gladly, and for a wordless moment they stood like that, laughing silently, until he released one of her hands and drew her into his place. He closed the door carefully and then turned and leaned against it.

"Well!" he said. "I’m sorry about the cloak and dagger business."

"It was very exciting," she smiled. "Quite like a mystery story."

"Come in, sit down," he said, leading the way. "You’ll have to excuse the place. I have to do my own housekeeping, and I just don’t." He took a test-tube rack and a cracked bunsen tube from an easy chair and nodded her into it. He had to make two cir-

uits of the room before he found somewhere to put them down. "Price of fame," he said sardonically, and sat down on a roped-tied stack of papers bearing the flapping label Proceeding of the Pan-American Microbiological Society. "Where that clown makes a joke of Horowitz, other fashionable people make a game of Horowitz. A challenge. Track down Horowitz. Well, if they did, through tapping my phone or following me home, that would satisfy them. Then I would be another kind of challenge. Bother Horowitz. Break in and stir up his lab with a stick. You know."

She shuddered. "People are... are so..."

"Don’t say that, whatever it was," said Horowitz. "We’re living in a quiet time, Doctor, and we haven’t evolved too far away from our hunting and tracking appetites. It probably hasn’t occurred to you that your kind of math and my kind of biology are hunting and tracking too. Cut away our science bump and we’d probably hunt with the pack too. A big talent is only a means of hunting alone. A little skill is a means of hunting alone some of the time."

"But... why must they hunt you?"

"Why must you hunt gravitic phenomena?"

"To understand it."

"Which means to end it as a
mystery. Cut it down to your size. Conquer it. You happen to be equipped with a rather rarefied type of reason, so you call your conquest understanding. The next guy happens to be equipped with fourteen inches of iron pipe and achieves his conquest with it instead."

"You’re amazing," she said openly, "You love your enemies, like—"

"Love thine enemies as thyself. Don’t take any piece of that without taking it all. How much I love people is a function of how much I love Horowitz, and you haven’t asked me about that. Matter of fact, I haven’t asked me about that and I don’t intend to. My God it’s good to talk to somebody again. Do you want a drink?"

"No," she said. "How much do you love Heri Gonza?"

He rose and hit his palm with his fist and sat down again, all his gentleness folded away and put out of sight. "There’s the exception. You can understand anything humanity does if you try, but you can’t understand the inhumanity of a Heri Gonza. The difference is that he knows what is evil and what isn’t, and doesn’t care. I don’t mean any numb byrote moral knowledge learned at the mother’s knee, the kind that afflicts your pipe-wielder a little between blows and a lot when he gets his breath afterward. I mean a clear, analytical, extrapolative, brilliantly intelligent knowledge of each act and each consequence. Don’t underestimate that devil."

"He... seems to... I mean, he does love children," she said fatuously.

"Oh, come on now. He doesn’t spend a dime on his precious Foundation that he wouldn’t have to give to the government in taxes. Don’t you realize that? He doesn’t do a thing he doesn’t have to do, and he doesn’t have to love those kids. He’s using those kids. He’s using the filthiest affliction mankind has known for a long time just to keep himself front and center."

"But if the Foundation does find a cure, then he—"

"Now you’ve put your finger on the thing that nobody in the world but me seems to understand—why I won’t work with the Foundation. Two good reasons. First, I’m ‘way ahead of them. I don’t need the Foundation and all those fancy facilities. I’ve got closer to the nature of iapetitis than any of ’em. Second, for all my love for and understanding of people, I don’t want to find out what I’m afraid I would find out if I worked there and if a cure was found."

"You mean he’d—he’d withhold it?"

"Maybe not permanently. Maybe he’d sit on it until he’d milked it dry. Years. Some would die by
then. Some are pretty close as it is.”

She thought of Billy and bit her hand.

“I didn’t say he would do that,” Horowitz said, more gently. “I said I don’t want to be in a position to find out. I don’t want to know that any member of my species could do a thing like that. Now you see why I work by myself, whatever it costs. If I can cure iapetitis, I’ll say so. I’ll do it, I’ll prove it. That’s why I don’t mind his kind of cheap persecution. If I succeed, all that harrassment makes it impossible for him to take credit or profit in any way.”

“Who are you going to cure?”

“What?”

“He’s got them all. He’s on trideo right now, a telethon, the biggest show of the last ten years, hammering at people to send him every case the instant it’s established.” Her eyes were round.

“The logician,” he whispered, as round-eyed as she. “Oh my God, I never thought of that.” He took a turn around the room and sat down again. His face was white. “But we don’t know that. Surely he’d give me a patient. Just one.”

“It might cost you the cure. You’d have to, you’d just have to give it to him, or you’d be the one withholding it!”

“I won’t think about it now,” he said hoarsely. “I can’t think about it now. I’ll get the cure. That first.”

“Maybe my brother Billy—”

“Don’t even think about it!” he cried. “He’s already got it in for you. Don’t get in his way any more. He won’t let your Billy out of there and you know it. Try anything and he’ll squash you like a beetle.”

“What’s he got against me?”

“You don’t know? You’re a Nobel winner—one of the newsiest things there is. A girl, and not bad-looking at all. You’re in the public eye, or you will be by noon tomorrow when the reporters get to you. Do you think for a minute he’d let you or anybody climb on his publicity? Listen, iapetitis is his sole property, his monopoly, and he’s not going to share it. What’d you expect him to do, announce the gift on his lousy telethon?”

“I—I c-called him on his tele-

“You didn’t!”

“He pretended the call was from you. But . . . but at the same time he told me . . . oh yes, he said, ‘What you got I don’t want. I’m not up here to do you no good.’”

Horowitz spread his hands.

“Q.E.D.”

“Oh,” she said, “how awful.”

At that point somebody kicked the door open.

Horowitz sprang to his feet,
livid. A big man in an open, flapping topcoat shouldered his way in. He had a long horse-face and a blue jaw. His eyes were extremely sad. He said, "Now just relax. Relax and you'll be all right." His hands, as if they had a will of their own, busied themselves about pulling off a tight left-hand glove with wires attached to it and running into his side pocket.

"Flannel!" Horowitz barked. "How did you get in?" He stepped forward, knees slightly bent, head lowering. "You'll get out of here or so help me—"

"No!" Iris cried, clutching at Horowitz's forearm. The big man outreached and outweighed the biologist, and certainly would fight rougher and dirtier.

"Don't worry, lady," said the man called Flannel sleepily. He raised a lazy right hand and made a slight motion with it, and a cone-nosed needler glittered in his palm. "He'll be good—won't you, boy? Or I'll put you to bed for two weeks an' a month over."

He sidled past and, never taking his gaze from Horowitz for more than a flickering instant, opened the three doors which led from the laboratory—a bathroom, a bedroom, a storage closet.

"Who is he? You know him?" Iris whispered.

"I know him," growled Horowitz. "He's Heri Gonza's bodyguard."

"Nobody but the two of them," said Flannel.

"Good," said a new voice, and a second man walked in, throwing off a slouch hat and opening the twin to the long, loose topcoat Flannel wore. "Hi, chillun," said Heri Gonza.

There was a long silence, and then Horowitz plumped down on his pile of *Proceedings*, put his chin in his hands, and said in profound disgust, "Ah, for God's sake."

"Dr. Horowitz," said Heri Gonza pleasantly, nodding, and "Dr. Barran."

Iris said, shakily, "I th-thought you were doing a sh-show."

"Oh, I am, I am. All things are possible if you only know how. At the moment Chitsie Bombom is doing a monolog, and she's good for two encores. After that there's a solido of me sitting way up on the flats in the left rear, oh so whimsically announcing the Player's Pub Players. They have a long one-acter and a pantomime. I've even got a ballet company, in case this takes that long."

"Phoney to the eyeballs, even when you work," said Horowitz. "In case what takes that long?"

"We're going to talk."

"You talk," said Horowitz. "Quickly and quietly and get the hell out of here, 'scuse me, Dr. Barran."

"Oh, that's all right," she murmured.
“Please,” said the comedian softly, “I didn’t come here to quarrel with you. I want to end all that. Here and now, and for good.”

“We’ve got something he wants,” said Horowitz in a loud aside to Iris.

Heri Gonza closed his eyes and said, “You’re making this harder than it has to be. What can I do to make this a peaceful talk?”

“For one thing,” said Horowitz, “your simian friend is breathing and it bothers me. Make him stop.”

“Flannel,” said Heri Gonza, “get out.”

Glowering, the big man moved to the door, opened it, and stood on the sill. “All the way,” said the comedian. Flannel’s broad back was one silent mass of eloquent protest, but he went out and shut the door.

Deftly, with that surprising suddenness of nervous motion which was his stock in trade, Heri Gonza dropped to one knee to bring their faces on a level, and captured Iris’s startled hands.

“First of all, Dr. Barran, I came to apologize to you for the way I spoke on the telephone. I had to do it—there was no alternative, as you’ll soon understand. I tried to call you back, but you’d already gone.”

“You followed me here! Oh, Dr. Horowitz, I’m sorry!”

“I didn’t need to follow you. I’ve had this place spotted since two days before you moved into it, Horowitz. But I’m sorry I had to strongarm my way in.”

“I yield to curiosity,” said Horowitz. “Why didn’t my locks alarm when you opened them? I saw Flannel’s palm-print eliminator, but dammit, they should have alarmed.”

“The locks were here when you rented the place, right? Well, who do you think had them installed? I’ll show you where the cutoff switch is before I leave. Anyhow—grant me this point. Was there any other way I could have gotten in to talk with you?”

“I concede,” said Horowitz sourly.

“Now, Dr. Barran. You have my apology, and you’ll have the explanation to go with it. Believe me, I’m sorry. The other thing I want to do is to accept, with thanks from the bottom of my heart, your very kind offer of the prize money. I want it, I need it, and it will help more than you can possibly realize.”

“No,” said Iris flatly. “I’ve promised it to Dr. Horowitz.”

Heri Gonza sighed, got to his feet, and leaned back against the lab bench. He looked down at them sadly.

“Go on,” said Horowitz. “Tell us how you need money.”

“The only two things I have never expected from you are ignorance and stupidity,” said Heri
Gonza sharply, "and you're putting up a fine display of both. Do you really think, along with all my millions of ardent fans, that when I land a two-million-dollar contract I somehow put two million dollars in the bank? Don't be childish. My operation is literally too big to hide anything in. I have city, county, state and federal tax vultures picking through my whole operational framework. I'm a corporation and subject to outside accounting. I don't even have a salary; I draw what I need, and I damn well account for it, too. Now, if I'm going to finish what I started with the disease, I'm going to need a lot more money than I can whittle out a chip at a time."

"Then take it out of the Foundation money—that's what it's for."

"I want to do the one thing I'm not allowed to do with it. Which happens to be the one thing that'll break this horrible thing—it has to!"

"The only thing there is like that is a trip to Iapetus."

To this, Heri Gonza said nothing—absolutely nothing at all. He simply waited.

Iris Barran said, "He means it. I think he really means it."

"You're a big wheel," said Horowitz at last, "and there are a lot of corners you can cut, but not that one. There's one thing the government—all governments and all their armed forces—will rise up in wrath to prevent, and that's another landing and return from any place off earth—especially Iapetus. You've got close to four hundred dying kids on your hands right now, and the whole world is scared."

"Set that aside for a moment." The comedian was earnest, warm-voiced. "Just suppose it could be done. Horowitz, as I understand it you have everything you need on the iapetitis virus but one little link. Is that right?"

"That's right. I can synthesize a surrogate virus from nucleic acids and exactly duplicate the disease. But it dies out of its own accord. There's a difference between my synthetic virus and the natural one, and I don't know what it is. Give me ten hours on Iapetus and half a break, and I'll have the original virus under an electron mike. Then I can synthesize a duplicate, a real self-sustaining virus that can cause the disease. Once I have that, the antigen becomes a factory process, with the techniques we have today. We'll have shots for those kids by the barrel lot inside of a week."

Heri Gonza spread his hands. "There's the problem, then. The law won't allow the flight until we have the cure. We won't have the cure unless we make the flight."

Iris said, "A Nobel prize is an awful lot of money, but it won't buy the shell of a space ship."
“I’ve got the ship.”
For the first time Horowitz straightened up and spoke with something besides anger and hopelessness. “What kind of a ship? Where is it?”
“A Fafnir. You’ve seen it, or pictures of it. I use it for globe-trotting mostly, and VIP sight-seeing. It’s a deepspace craft, crew of twelve, and twelve passenger cabins. But it handles like a dream, and I’ve got the best pilot in the world. Kearsarge.”
“You don’t know what’s been done to that ship. She’ll sleep four now. I have a lab and a shop in her, and all the rest is nothing but power-plant, shielding and fuel. Hell, she’ll make Pluto!”
“You mean you’ve been working on this already?”
“Man, I’ve been chipping away at my resources for a year and a half now. You don’t know what kind of footsie I’ve been playing with my business managers and the banks and all. I can’t squeak out another dime without lighting up the whole project. Dr. Barran, now do you see why I had to treat you like that? You were the godsend, with your wonderful offer and your vested interest in Billy. Can you astrogate?”
“I—oh dear. I know the principles well enough. Yes, I could, with a little instruction.”
“You’ll get it. Now look, I don’t want to see that money. You two will go down and inspect the ship tomorrow morning, and then put in everything you’ll need beyond what’s already there. You’ve got food, fuel, water and air enough for two trips, let alone one.”
“God,” said Horowitz.
“I’ll arrange for your astrogation, Dr. Barran. You’ll have to dream up a story, secret project or long solitary vacation or some such. Horowitz, you can drop out of sight without trouble.”
“Oh sure, thanks to you.”
“Dammit, this time you’re welcome,” said the comedian, and very nearly smiled. “Now, you’ll want one more crew member: I’ll take care of that before flight time.”
“What about the ship? What will you say?”
“Flight test after overhaul. Breakdown in space, repair, return—some such. Leave that to Kearsarge.”
“I freely admit,” said Horowitz, “that I don’t get it. This is one frolic that isn’t coming out of taxes, and it’s costing you a packet. What’s in it, mountebank?”
“You could ask that,” said the comedian, sadly. “The kids, that’s all.”
“You’ll get the credit?”
“I won’t, I can’t, I don’t want it. I can’t tie in to this jaunt—it would ruin me. Off-earth land-
ings, risking the lives of all earth’s kids—you know how they’d talk. No sir: this is your cooky, Horowitz. You disappear, you show up one day with the answer. I eat crow like a hell of a good sport. You get back your directorship if you want it. Happy ending. All the kids get well.” He jumped into the air and clicked his heels four times on the way down. “The kids get well,” he breathed with sudden sobriety.

Horowitz said gently, “Heri Gonza, what’s with you and kids?”

“I like ’em.” He buttoned his coat. “Goodnight, Dr. Barran. Please accept my apologies again, and don’t think too badly of me.”

“I don’t,” she said smiling, and gave him her hand.

“But why do you like kids that much?” asked Horowitz.

Heri Gonza shrugged easily and laughed his deadpan laugh. “Never had none,” he chuckled. He went to the door and stopped facing it, suddenly immobile. His shoulders trembled. He whirled suddenly, and the famous carven face was wet, twisted, the mouth tortured and crooked. “Never can,” he whispered, and literally ran out of the room.

The weeks went by, the months. Iapetitis cases underwent some strange undulations, and a hope arose that the off-world virus was losing its strength. Some of the older cases actually improved, and a blessing that was, too; for although overall growth was arrested, there was a tendency for the mobile side to grow faster than the other, and during the improvement phase, the sides seemed to equalize. Then, tragically the improvement would slow; and stop.

Incidence of the disease seemed to be slackening as well. At the last, there had been only three new cases in a year, though they caused a bad flurry, occurring as they did simultaneously in a Belgian village which had had no hint of the disease before.

Heri Gonza still did his weekly stint (less vacation) and still amazed his gigantic audiences with his versatility, acting, singing, dancing, clowning. Sometimes he would make quiet appearances, opening and closing the show and turning it over to a theater or ballet group. During the Old Timer’s Celebration he learned to fly a perfect duplicate of a century-old light aircraft with an internal combustion engine, and daringly took his first solo during the show, with a trideo camera occupying the instructor’s seat.

At other times he might take up the entire time-segment alone, usually with orchestra and props, once—possibly his most successful show—dressed in sloppy practice clothes on a bare stage, without
so much as a chair, and with no assistance but lights and cameras and an occasional invisible touch from the hypnos and the scent generators. Single-handedly he was a parade, a primary schoolroom, a zoo in an earthquake, and an old lady telling three children, ages five, ten, and fifteen, about sex all at the same time.

And in between (and sometimes during) his shows, he faithfully maintained I. F. He visited his children regularly, every single one of the more than four hundred. He thrilled with their improvements, cheered them in their inevitable relapses. The only time he did not make one of his scheduled shows at all was the time the three cases appeared in Belgium, and then the slot was filled with news-items about the terrifying resurgence, and a world tour of I. F. clinics. He was a great man, a great comic, no question about it, right up to his very last show.

He didn’t know it was his last show, which in its way was a pity, because with that knowledge he would have been more than good; he’d have been great. He was that kind of performer.

However, he was good, and was in and out of a vastly amusing variety show, using his old trick of standing offstage and singing with perfect mimicry while top vocalists stood center stage and mouthed the words. He turned out to be one of the Japanese girls who built body-pyramids on their bicycles, and, powered by a spring device under the water, joined a succession of porpoises leaping to take fish out of a keeper’s hand.

He played, as he preferred to do, in a large studio without an audience, but playing to the audience-response sound supplied to him. He made his cues well, filled in smoothly with ad-libs when a girl singer ran a chorus short on her arrangement, and did his easy stand-up comedy monolog to close. A pity he didn’t smile on that show. When the on-the-airs went out and the worklights came on, he threw a sweatshirt around his shoulder and ambled into the wings, where, as usual, the network man, Burcke, waited for him.

“How’d it look, Burcke ol’ turkey?”

“Like never before,” said Burcke.

“Aw, you’re cute yourself,” said the comedian. “Let’s have a look.” One of his greatest delights—and one reason for his fantastic polish—was the relaxed run-through afterward, where he lounged in the projection-room and looked at the show he had just finished from beginning to end. He and Burcke and a few interested cast-members, backstage people, and privileged strangers got arranged in the projection room. Beer was passed around and the small-talk
used up. As usual they all deferred to Heri Gonza, and when he waved a negligent hand everybody shut up and the projectionist threw the switch.

Title and credits with moving cloud-blanket background. Credits fade, camera zooms toward clouds, which thin to show mountain range. Down through clouds, hover over huge misty lake. Water begins to heave, to be turbulent, suddenly shores rush together and water squirts high through the clouds in a thick column. Empty lake rises up out of clouds, is discovered to be Heri Gonza's open mouth. Pull back to show full face. Puzzled expression. Hand up, into mouth, extracts live goldfish.

GONZA: Welcome to the Heri Gonza show, this week 'As you lake it.' (beat) Which is all you can expect when you open with a purorama. What ho is (beat) What ho is yonder? A mountain. What ho is on the mountain? A mountain goat. What ho is the goat mountain? Why, another moun— Fellers, keep the lens on me, things are gettin' a little blue off camera. Now hear ye, Tom, now hear ye Dick, now hear ye hairy Harry, Heri's here. Hee hee, ho ho, here comes the show.

Soft focus and go to black. Long beat.

Heri took his beer away from his mouth and glared at the wall. "God's sake, you send all that black?"

"Sure did," said Burcke equably. "Man, you don't do that for anything but the second coming. What you think they expect with all that black? It sucks 'em in, but boy, you got to pay off."

"We paid off," said Burcke. "Here it comes."

"The horse act, right?"

"Wrong," said Burcke.

Dark stage. Desk, pool of light. Zoom in, Burcke, jaw clamped. In a face as sincere and interested as that, the clamped jaw is pretty grim.

BURCKE: Tonight the Heri Gonza show brings you a true story. Although the parts are played by professional actors, and certain scenes are shortened for reasons of time, you may be assured that these are real events and can be proved in every detail.

"What the hell is this?" roared Heri Gonza. "Did you air this? Is this what went out when I was knocking myself out with that horse act?"

"Sit down," said Burcke.

Heri Gonza sat down dazedly.

BURCKE at desk. Lifts book and raps it.

BURCKE: This is a ship's rough log, the log of the Fafnir 203. How it comes to be on this desk,
on your wall, is, I must warn you, a shocking story. The Fafnir is a twelve-cabin luxury cruiser with a crew of twelve, including stewards and the galley crew. So was the 203, before it was rebuilt. It was redesigned to sleep four with no room over, with two cabins rebuilt as a small-materials shop and a biological laboratory, and all the rest taken up with power-plant, fuel and stores. The ship’s complement was Dr. Iris Barran, mathematician—

Death in foredeck of Fafnir, girl standing by computer.

Dr. George Rehoboth Horowitz, microbiologist—
Bespectacled man enters, crosses to girl, who smiles.
Yeager Kearsarge, pilot first class—
Kearsarge is a midget with a long, bony, hardbitten face. He enters from black foreground and goes to control console.

Sam Flannel, supercargo.
Widen lighting to pass cabin bulkhead, discovering large man strapped in acceleration couch, asleep or unconscious.

“It isn’t a rib, Heri Gonza,” said Burcke. “Sit down, now.”
“It’s got to be a rib,” said Heri Gonza in a low voice. “Slip me a beer I should relax and enjoy the altogether funny joke.”

“Here. Now shush.”

Burcke: ... mission totally contrary to law and regulation. Destination: Iapetus. Purpose: collection of the virus, or spores, of the dreaded children’s affliction iapetitis, on the theory that examination of these in their natural habitat will reveal their exact internal structure and lead to a cure, or at the very least an immunization. Shipowner and director of mission: (long beat) Heri Gonza.

Fourteen hours out...
Fade Burcke and desk and take out. Dolly in to foredeck.
Horowitz crosses to side cabin, looks in on Flannel. Touches Flannel’s face. Returns to computer and Iris.

Horowitz: “He’s still out cold. The tough boy is no spaceman.”
Iris: “I can’t get over his being here at all. Why ever did Heri want him along?”

Horowitz: Maybe he’ll tell us.
Small explosion. High whine.
Kearsarge: A rock! a rock!
Iris: (frightened) What’s a rock?

Kearsarge waddles rapidly to friction hooks on bulkhead, snatchers off helmets, throws two to Horowitz and Iris, sprints with two more into cabin. Gets one on Flannel’s lolling head, adjusts oxygen valve. Puts on his own. Returns to assist Iris, then Moskowitz.
IRIS: What is it?
KEARSARGE: Nothing to worry you, lady. Meteorite. Just a little one. I'll get it patched.

From control console, sudden sharp hiss and cloud of vapor.
IRIS: Oh! And what's that?
KEARSARGE: Now you got me.
KEARSARGE goes to console, kneels, peers underneath. Grunts, fumbles.

HOROWITZ: What is it?
KEARSARGE: Ain't regulation, 'sall I know.

HOROWITZ kneels beside him and peers.

HOROWITZ: What's this?
KEARSARGE: Bottom of main firing lever. Wire tied to it, pulled that pin when we blasted off.

HOROWITZ: Started this timing mechanism... What time did it pop?
KEARSARGE: Just about 14:30 after blastoff.

HOROWITZ: Think you can get it off there? I'd like to test for what was in it.

KEARSARGE gets the device off, gives it to HOROWITZ, who takes it into lab.

Cut to cabin, closeup of Flannel's helmeted face. He opens his eyes, stares blankly. He is very sick, pale, insane with dormant fear. Suddenly fear no longer dormant. With great difficulty raises head, raises strapped-down wrist enough to see watch. Suddenly begins to scream and thrash around. The releases are right by his hands but he can't find them. Iris and Kearsarge run in. Kearsarge stops to take in the situation, then reaches out and pulls releases. Straps fall away; Flannel, howling, leaps for the door, knocking the midget flat and slamming Iris up against edge of door. She screams. Kearsarge scrambles to his feet, takes off after Flannel like a Boston terrier after a bull. Flannel skids to a stop by the lifeboat blister, starts tugging at it.

KEARSARGE: What the hell are you doing?

FLANNEL (blubbering): 14:30... 14:30... I gotta get out, gotta get out... (screams)

KEARSARGE: Don't pull on that, y'damn fool! That's not the hatch, it's the release! We got spin on for gravity—y'll pitch the boat a hundred miles off!

FLANNEL: Oh, lemme out, it's too late!

Kearsarge punches upwards with both hands so unexpectedly that Flannel's grip is broken and he pitches over backwards. Kearsarge leaps on him, twists his oxygen valve, and scuttles back out of the way. Flannel lumbers to his feet, staggers over to the boat blister, gets his hands on the wrong lever again, but his knees buckle. Inside the helmet, his face is purpling. Horowitz comes running out of the lab. Kearsarge puts out an arm and holds him back, and together they watch
Flannel sag down, fall, roll, writhe. He puts both hands on helmet, tugs at it weakly.

Horowitz: Don’t for God’s sakes let him take off that helmet!

Kearsarge: Don’t worry. He can’t.

Flannel slumps and lies still. Kearsarge goes to him and opens valve a little. He beckons Horowitz and together they drag him back to the cabin and with some difficulty get him on the couch and strapped down.

Horowitz: What happened? I had my hands full of reagents in there.

Kearsarge: Space nutty. They get like that sometimes after blackout. He wanted out. Tried to take the boat.

Horowitz: He say anything?

Kearsarge: Buncha junk. Said, 14:30, 14:30. Said it was too late, had to get out.

Horowitz: That snivvy under the console popped at 14:30. He knew about it.

Kearsarge: Did he now. What was it?

Horowitz: Cyanide gas. If we hadn’t been holed and forced to put the helmets on, we’d’ve had it.

Kearsarge: Except him. He figured to be up an’ around lookin’ at his watch, and when she popped, he’d be in the boat headed home and we’d keep blasting till the pile run dry, som’res out t’ords Algol.

Horowitz: Can you fix those releases so he can’t reach them?

Kearsarge: Oh sure.

Fade. Light pick up Burcke at the side.

Burcke: (as narrator) They got an explanation out of Flannel, and it satisfied none of them. He said he knew nothing of any cyanide. He said that Heri, knowing he was a bad spaceman, had told him that if it got so bad he couldn’t stand it, he could always come back in the lifeboat. But if he did that, he’d have to do it before 14:30 after blastoff or there wouldn’t be fuel enough to decelerate, start back, and maneuver a landing. He insisted that that was all there was to it. He would not say what he was doing aboard, except to state that Heri Gonza wanted him to look out for Heri’s interests.

No amount of discussion made anything clearer. Heri certainly could not have wanted the expedition to fail, nor his ship hurled away from the solar system. They reluctantly concluded that some enemy of Heri Gonza’s must have sabotaged them—someone they simply didn’t know.

The weeks went by—not easy ones, by any means, in those close quarters, without any event except Iris Barran’s puzzling discovery that the ship required no astrogator after all: what the veteran Kearsarge couldn’t handle in his head was easily treated in
stabilizing jacks extending widest. Ladder out. Two suited figures ride it down, the other two climb down.

Close-up, all four at tail-base.
Horowitz: (filter mike) Check your radios. Read me?
ALL: Check. Read you fine.
Horowitz: Each take a fin. Walk straight out with the fin as a guide, and when you’ve passed our scorch area, get a rock scraping every five feet or so until you’re far enough away that the horizon’s a third of the way up the hull. Got that? No further. (Beat) And I can almost tell you now, we aren’t going to find one blessed thing. No virus, no spore, no nothing. My God, it’s no more than twelve, thirteen degrees K in the shadows here. Anyway... let’s go.

Burcke: (off) Scratch and hop, scratch and hop. In this gravity, you don’t move fast or push hard, or you’ll soar away and take minutes to come down again. Shuffle and scratch, scratch and sweep, scratch and hop. It took them hours.

Close-up, Kearsarge, looking down.

Kearsarge: Here’s something. Closeups, each of the other three, looking up, turning head at the sound of Kearsarge’s voice.
Horowitz: What is it?
Kearsarge: Scorch. A regular mess of it. Hell, you know what? Swope toppled his ship. I can see
where he came down, then where he took off, scraping along to the big edge there.

FLANNEL: Wonder he didn’t wreck her.

KEARSARGE: He did. He couldn’t hurt the hull any in this gravity, but he sure as hell wiped off his antennae, because there they are: landing, range, transmission—every one, by God. No wonder he come barrelling in the way he did. You can’t land a Fafnir on manual, but you can try, and he tried. Poor ol’ Swopie.

HOROWITZ: Everybody over there by Kearsarge. Maybe Swope picked up something where he scraped.

Long shot of the four working around long scorch and scrape marks.

BURCKE: (off, narrating) They filled their specimen sacks and brought them aboard, and then for seventy-two hours they went through their dust and stones with every test Horowitz could devise... He had been quite right in his first guess. The moonlet Iapetus is as devoid of life as the inside of an autoclave.

Cut to foredeck set, but upended, the controls at highest point, the floor what was the after bulkhead. Iris moving around with slow shuffle, setting out magnetized plates on a steel table, each one hitting loudly. In background, Flannel fusses with small electron mike, watching screen and moving objective screws. Lifeboat blister open, Kearsarge inside, working.

Airlock cycles, opens, and Horowitz comes in, suited, with sack. He is weary. Iris helps with helmet.

HOROWITZ: I’ve had it. Let’s get home. We can get just so duty-bound.

IRIS: What’s this ‘home?’ I don’t remember.

HOROWITZ: You for home, Kearsarge?

KEARSARGE: Any time you’re through hoein’ this rock.

HOROWITZ: What are you doing in there?

KEARSARGE: Just routine. Figured you might want to buzz around the other side with the boat.

HOROWITZ: Nosir. I came close enough on foot. I say we’re done here. A man could sit home with a pencil and paper and figure out the density of sub-microscopic growth this place would have to have to bring any back on the hull. We’d be hip deep in it. The iapetitis virus didn’t come from Iapetus, and that, friends, is for sure and official.

KEARSARGE: (off) Oh my holy mother. (He pops out, putty-colored.) George, get over here.

IRIS: (curiously) What is it?

She goes over and disappears for a moment inside the boat, with Kearsarge and Horowitz. Off, she gasps. Then, one by one they
climb out and stand looking at Flannel. Sensing the silence, he looks up and meets their eyes.

Flannel: What I got, blue horns or something?

Horowitz: Show him, Kear-
sarge.

Kearsarge beckons. There is a strange pucker of grim amusement on his craggy face.

Kearsarge: Come look, little feller. Then you can join our club.

Reluctantly, the big man goes over to the blister and follows Kearsarge into the lifeboat. Dolly after them, swing in to the instrumen panel, under it and look up.

Lashed to the projecting lower end of the main thrust control is a silver can with a small cylinder at the near end.

Flannel: (pointing stupidly) Is that... that the same thing that--

Kearsarge: A little smaller, but then you don’t need as much cyanide for a boat.

Flannel: (angry) Who the hell put it there? You?

Kearsarge: Not me, feller. I just found it.

Horowitz: It’s been there all along, Flannel. Kearsarge is right: you belong to the club too. You sure it was Heri Gonza told you to take the boat?

Flannel: Sure it was. He couldn’t have nothing to do with this. (Suddenly it hits him) Jesus! I mighta--

Horowitz: We’ll have plenty of time to talk this over. Let’s pack up the testing stuff and haul out of here.

Flannel: (to no one) Jesus.

Heri Gonza lay back in the projection room and sipped his beer and watched the stock shot of a Fafnir taking off from a rock plain. “You really get all that glop out of that book, Burcke m’ boy?”

“Every bit of it,” said Burcke, watching the screen.

“You know how it is in space, a fellow’s got to do something with his time. Sometimes he writes, and sometimes it’s fairy tales, and sometimes you can get a pretty good show out of a fairy tale. But when you do that, you call it a fairy tale. Follow me?”

“Yup.”

“This was really what went out on the air tonight?”

“Sure is.”

Very, very softly, Heri Gonza said, “Poor Burcke, Poor, poor ol’ Burcke.”

Close-up, hands turning pages in rough logbook. Pull back to show Burcke with book. He looks up, and when he speaks his voice is solemn.

Burcke: Time to think, time to talk it over. Time to put all the pieces in the same place at the same time, and push them against each other to see what fits.

Fade to black; but it is not
black after all: instead, starry space. Pan across to pick up ship, a silver fish with a scarlet tail. Zoom in fast, dissolve through hull, discovering foredeck. The four lounge around, really relaxed, willing to think before speaking, and to speak carefully. Horowitz and Kearsarge sit at the table ignoring a chessboard. Iris is stretched on the deck with a rolled-up specimen sack under her head. Flannel kneels before a spread of Canfield solitaire. Horowitz is watching him.

Horowitz: I like to think about Flannel.

Flannel: Think what?

Horowitz: Oh... the alternatives. The 'ifs.' What would Flannel do if this had been different, or that?

Flannel: There's no sense in that kind of thinkin'—if this, if that. This happened, or that happened, and that's all there is to it. You got anything special in mind?

Horowitz: I have, as a matter of fact. Given that you had a job to do, namely to cut out and leave us with our cyanide bomb at the start of the trip—

Flannel: (aroused) I tol' you and tol' you that wasn't a job. I didn't know about the damn cyanide.

Horowitz: Suppose you had known about it. Would you have come? If you had come, would you have tipped us off about it? And here's the question I thought of: if the first bomb had failed—which it did—and there had been no second bomb to tell you that you were a member of the Exit Club, would you have tried to do the job on the way home?

Flannel: I was thinkin' about it, about what to do.

Horowitz: And what did you decide?

Flannel: Nothin'. You found the bomb in the boat so I just stopped thinkin'.

Iris: (suddenly) Why did that really make a difference?

Flannel: All the dif'nce in the world. Heri Gonza tol' me to get in the lifeboat before fourteen an' a half hours and come back and tell him how things went. Now if there was just your bomb, could be that Heri Gonza wanted you knocked off. There was an accident and it didn't knock you off, and here I am working for him and wonderin' if I shoon't take up where the bomb left off.

Iris: Then we found the second bomb, and you changed your mind. Why?

Flannel: (exasperated) whata ya all, simple or somepin'? Heri Gonza, he tol' me to come back and tell him how it went. If he tells me that an' then plants a bomb on me, how could I get back to tell him? A man's a fool to tell a guy to do somethin' an' then fix it so he can't. He's no fool, Heri Gonza I mean, an' you know it. Well then: if he din't plant my
bomb, he don’t plant your bomb, because anyone can see they was planted by the same guy. An’ if he don’t plant your bomb, he don’t want you knocked off, so I stopped thinkin’ about it. Is that simple enough for ya?

Iris: I don’t know that it’s simple, but it sure is beautiful.

Horowitz: Well, one of us is satisfied of Heri Gonza’s good intentions. Though I still don’t see what sense it made to go to all the trouble of putting you aboard just to have you get off and go back right at the start.

Flannel: Me neither. But do I have to understand everything he tells me to do? I done lots of things for him I didn’t know what they was about. You too, Kearsarge.

Kearsarge: That’s right. I drive this can from here to there, and from there to yonder, and I don’t notice anything else, but if I notice it I forget it, but if I don’t forget it I don’t talk about it. That’s the way he likes it and we get along fine.

Iris: (forcefully) I think Heri Gonza wanted us all killed.

Horowitz: What’s that—intuition? And ... shouldn’t that read “wants”?


Flannel: Ah, y’r out of y’r mind.

Kearsarge: Doubled.

Horowitz: (good naturally) Shut up, both of you. Go on with that, Iris. Maybe by you it formulates, but by me it intuits. Go on.

Iris: Well, let’s use as a working hypothesis that Heri Gonza wants us dead—us four. He wants more than that: he wants us to disappear from the cosmos—no bodies, no graves, no nothing.

Kearsarge: But why?

Horowitz: Just you listen. We start with the murders and finish with the why. You’ll see.

Iris: Well then, the ship will do the removal. The cyanide—both cyanides—do the actual killing, and it hits so fast that the ship keeps blasting, out and out until the fuel is gone, and forever after that. We three are on it; Flannel crashes in a small craft and if anybody wonders about it, they don’t wonder much. Is there any insignia on that boat, by the way, Kearsarge?

Kearsarge: Always.

Iris: Go look, will you? Thanks. Now, what about the traces we leave behind us? Well, we took off illegally so notified no one and filed no clearances. You, George, were already in hiding from Heri Gonza’s persecutions; Kearsarge here is so frequently away on indeterminate trips of varying lengths that he would soon be forgotten; Flannel here—no offense, Flannel—I don’t think anyone would notice that you’re
gone for good. As for me, Heri Gonzalz himself had me plant a story about going off secretly for some solitary research for a year or so. What’s the matter, Kearsarge?

KEARSARGE: I wouldn’t be believed it. No insignia. Filed off and sanded smooth and painted. Numbers off the thrust block. Trade-name off the dash, even. I... I wouldn’t have believed it.

HOROWITZ: Now you’d better listen to the lady.

IRIS: No insignia. So even poor Flannel’s little smashup is thoroughly covered. Speaking of Flannel, I say again that it was stretching credibility to put him aboard that way—unless you assume that he was put aboard like the rest of us, to be done away with. I certainly came under false pretenses: Heri Gonzalz not only told me he needed an astrogator for the trip, which he didn’t, but had me bone up on the subject.

Now we can take a quick look at motive. George Horowitz here is the most obvious. He has for a long time been a thorn in the flesh of that comedian. Not only has he concluded that Heri Gonzalz doesn’t really want to find a cure for iapetitis—he says so very loudly and as often as he can. In addition, George is always on the very verge of whipping the disease, something that frightens Heri Gonzalz so much that he’s actually hoarding patients so George can’t get to them. Also, he doesn’t like George.

Why kill Flannel? Is he tired of you, Flannel? Did you boggle something he asked you to do?

FLANNEL: He don’t have to kill me, Miss Iris. He could fire me any time. I’d feel real bad, but I wouldn’t bother him none. He knows that.

IRIS: Then you must know too much. You must know something about him so dangerous he won’t feel safe until you’re dead.

FLANNEL: So help me lady, there ain’t a single thing like that I know about him. Not one. Not that I know of.

HOROWITZ: There’s the key, Iris. He doesn’t know he knows it.

KEARSARGE: Then that’s me too, because if there’s a single thing I know that he’d have to kill me for then I don’t know what it is.

IRIS: You said ‘key.’ Lock and key. A combination of things. Like if you put what Flannel knows with what Kearsarge knows, they will be dangerous to Heri Gonzalz.

FLANNEL and KEARSARGE gape at each other blankly and simultaneously shrug.

HOROWITZ: I can give you one example of a piece of knowledge we all have that would be dangerous to him. We now know that the disease virus does not originate on Iapetus. Which means that poor Swope was not responsible for bringing it to earth, and, further, the conclu-
sion that the little Tresak girl—the first case—caught it from the wreckage of the space ship, was unwarranted.

FLANNEL: I brung that picture of that little girl standing in the wreck, I brung it to Heri Gonza. He liked it.

IRIS: What made you do that?

FLANNEL: I done it all the time. He told me to.

HOROWITZ: Bring him pictures of little girls?

FLANNEL: Girls, boys…but pretty ones. I got to know just the ones he would like. He liked to use 'em on his show.

IRIS and HOROWITZ lock glances for one horrified second, and then pounce all but bodily on FLANNEL.

IRIS: Did you ever show him a picture of any child who later contracted the disease?

FLANNEL: (startled) Wh... I dunno.

IRIS: (shouting) Think! Think! HOROWITZ: (also shouting) You did! You did! The Tresak girl—that photograph of her was taken before she had the disease!

FLANNEL: Well yeah, her. And that little blond one he had on the telethon that din't speak no English from Est'onia, but you're not lettin' me think.

HOROWITZ: (subsiding) And you didn't know what it was you had on him that he considered dangerous.

FLANNEL: What?

KEARSARGE: I remember that little blond girl. I flew her from Esthonia.

IRIS: Before or after she had the disease?

KEARSARGE: (shrugging) The kind of thing I never noticed. She...she looked all right to me. Real pretty little kid.

IRIS: How long before the telethon was that?

KEARSARGE: Week or so, Wait, I can tell you to the day. (He rises from the chess table and goes to a locker, from which he brings a notebook. He leafs.) Here it is. Nine days.

IRIS: (faintly) he said, on the telethon, three days...first symptoms.

HOROWITZ: (excitedly) May I see that? (Takes book, ruffles it, throws it on the table, runs to lab, comes back with cardboard file, fans through it, comes up with folder.) Iris, take Kearsarge's book. Right. Now did he fly to Belem on the ninth of May?

IRIS: The sixth.

HOROWITZ: Rome, around March twelfth.

IRIS: March twelfth, March—here it is. The eleventh.

HOROWITZ: One more. Indianapolis, middle of June.

IRIS: Exactly. The fifteenth. What is that you have there?

He throws it down in front of her.

HOROWITZ: Case files. Arranged chronologically by known or estimated date of first symptom, in
an effort to find some pattern of incidence. No wonder there was never any pattern. God in Heaven, if he wanted a clinic in Australia, cases would occur in Australia.

Flannel: *(bewildered)* I don’t know what you all are talkin’ about.

Kearsarge: *(grimly)* I think I do.

Iris: Now do you think you’re worth murdering—you who can actually place him on the map, at the time some child was stricken, every single time?

Kearsarge: *(huskily)* I’m worth murdering. I... didn’t know.

Flannel: *(poring over the case file)* Here’s that one I seen in Bellefontaine that time, she had on a red dress. And this little guy here, he got his picture in a magazine I found on the street in Little Rock and I had to go clear to St. Louis to find him.

*Kearsarge hops up on a chair and kicks Flannel in the head.*

Flannel: *(howling)* Hooo—wow! What you wanna hafta do that for? Ya little—

Horowitz: Cut it out, you two. *Cut it out!* That’s better. We don’t have room for that in here. Leave him alone, Kearsarge. His time will come. Heaven help me, Iris, it’s been in front of my nose right from the start, and I didn’t see it. I even told you once that I was so close because I could synthesize a virus which would actually cause the disease—but it wouldn’t maintain it? I had this ideé fixe that it was an extra-terrestrial disease. Why? Because it acted like a synthetic and no natural terran virus does. Serum from those kids always acted that way—it would cause a form of iapetitis which would fade out in three months or less. *All you have to do to cure the damn thing is to stop inject-ing it!*

Iris: Oh, the man, the lovely clever man and his family all over the world, the little darlings, the prettiest ones he could find, whom he never, never failed to visit regularly... *(Suddenly, she is crying)* I was so s-sorry for him! Remember the night he... tore himself open to tell us he couldn’t have k-kids of his own?

Kearsarge: Who you talking about—Heri Gonza? For Pete’s sake, he got an ex-wife and three kids he pays money to keep ’em in Spain, and another ex-wife in Paris France with five kids, three his, and that one in Pittsburgh—man, that comedian’s always in trouble. He *hates* kids—I mean really hates ’em.

*(Iris begins to laugh. Probably hysteria.)*

*Dissolve to black, then to starry space. To black again, bring up pool of light, resolve it into: Burcke, sitting at desk. He closes log book.*

Burcke: This is, I regret to say,
a true story. The Fafnir 203 came in at night six days ago at a small field some distance from here, and Dr. Horowitz phoned me. After considerable discussion it was decided to present this unhappy story to you in the form written up by the four people who actually experienced it. They are here with me now. And here is a much maligned man, surely one of the greatest medical researchers alive—Dr. Horowitz.

Horowitz: Thank you. First, I wish to assure everyone within reach of my voice that what has been said here aboutiapetitis is true: it is a synthetic disorder which is, by its very nature, harmless, and which, if contracted, will pass away spontaneously in from two to twelve weeks. Not a single child has died of it, and those who have been its victims the longest—some up to two years—have unquestionably been lavishly treated. A multiple murder was attempted upon my three companions and myself, of course, but it was our greatest desire to see to it that that charge is not pressed.

Burcke: I wish to express the most heartfelt apologies from myself and all my colleagues for whatever measure of distress this network and its affiliates may have unwittingly brought you, the public. It is as an earnest of this that we suffer, along with you, through the following film clip, taken just two days ago in the I. F. clinic in Montreal. What you see in my hand here is a thin rubber glove, almost invisible on the hand. Fixed to its fingertips is a microscopic forest of tiny sharp steel points, only a few thousandths of an inch long. And this metal box, just large enough to fit unobtrusively in a side pocket, contains a jellied preparation of the synthetic virus.

Fade to:

Wild hilarity in a hospital ward. Children in various stages of iapetitis, laughing hilariously at the capering, growling, gurgling, belching funny man as he moves from bed to bed, Peep! at you, peep-peep at you, and one by one ruffling the little heads at the nape, dipping the fingertips in the side jacket pocket between each bed.

Dissolve, and bring up Burcke.

Burcke: Good night, ladies, gentlemen, boys and girls... and... I'm sorry.

The lights came up in the projection room. There was nobody there with Heri Gonza but Burcke: all the others had quietly moved and watched the last few scenes from the doorway, and slipped away.

"You did air it?" asked the comedian, making absolutely sure.

"Yes."

Heri Gonza looked at him with-
out expression and walked toward the stage door. It opened as he approached, and four people came in. Flannel, Kearsarge, Horowitz, Iris Barran.

Without a word Flannel stepped up to the comedian and hit him in the stomach. Heri Gonzza sank slowly to the floor, gasping.

Horowitz said, "We've spent a lot of time deciding what to do about you, Heri Gonzza. Flannel wanted just one poke at you and wouldn't settle for anything else. The rest of us felt that killing was too good for you, but we wanted you dead. So we wrote you that script. Now you're dead."

Heri Gonzza rose after a moment and walked through the stage door and out to the middle of acres and acres of stage. He stood there alone all night, and in the morning was gone.

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fiction than any other living (human?) being—this in the course of editing the annual “S-F” collection of the year’s best stories. Of the thirty-four stories (out of a couple of thousand entries) that wound up in the first two volumes of “S-F,” there are, I think, two that might possibly qualify for Mr. Bester’s book—Damon Knight’s “Stranger Station,” and J. G. Ballard’s “Bella Primadonna.” Both of these are among the most memorable of the whole group; but so are, for instance, Avram Davidson’s “The Golem,” which is as old a notion in fantasy as you might wish to come across, and R. Bretnor’s “Doorstop,” a short and, indeed penetrating, piece about the fearful reactions of one ordinary man abruptly made aware in real life of the imminence of alien visitors. (“You can’t write a penetrating story about galactic travel if it’s based on a bicycle built for two,” says Mr. Bester. No?)

But perhaps the best arguing point would be Alfred Bester’s own already “classic” novel, “The Demolished Man,” which was as good a piece of science-fiction as I’d care to name—but not because of pyrotechnic spelling games or marvellous inventions, or the reorganization of the body politic to accommodate the “Esper League” (though all of these added to the pleasures of reading). It was good because, a) Mr. Bester is a first-rate fiction writer, whose characters come alive on the page; b) Mr. Bester is a thoughtful man, whose extrapolations are carried far enough in so that the backdrops and incidental properties of his stories are satisfyingly self-consistent.

This is what counts, for me: that the extrapolation—however close to what is known or far off into the wild black yonder—be internally consistent, thoughtfully sustained, and soundly built up on itself. Let a story commence with no more startling a notion than that man will reach the moon—or let it presume the evolution of humanity into attenuated ion streams, feeding on cosmic raylets—if the author can hang onto his own ideas for the duration (like remembering, for instance, that men in space suits must have some provision for their toilet needs—and that ion streams must not); then I am happy with both the nature and extent of his extrapolation. If he is also capable of convincing me that his characters are real—i.e., can evoke from inside them emotions with which I can empathize, be they men of today or tomorrow, space-suited or positronic-brained, protoplasmic or evanescent—then I am happy with his story.

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