
WORLDS BEYOND
January • 25 Cents
Science-Fantasy Fiction
HP
TREE OF WRATH by John Christopher
SURVIVAL SHIP by Judith Merril

Contributors . . .

Ford McCormack writes about himself: "I was born in Seattle, Wash.—a distinction shared with two or three million other people. . . . Have taken up residence in Southern California, along with a few million other out-of-staters. . . . I am or have been an amateur acrobat, pianist, hobo and several other things. In the last year or so, being fed up with this eternal amateur status, I have joined the sizable body of professional writers to whom editors have not yet begun to write pleading letters."

John Christopher is an English writer, aged 28, married. He became a science-fiction fan around the age of ten; at one stage ran a fan magazine called *Fantast*. Shortly after being demobilized by the Army, late in 1946, he was granted an Atlantic Award in Literature under a scheme to assist promising but indigent British writers, sponsored by the Rockefeller Institute of New York. He has had one novel published and two more are scheduled for 1951. He classes himself as a medievalist, believing that our civilization took the wrong turning at the Renaissance and is now, very probably, on the way out.

Bob Tucker, alias Wilson Tucker (under which name he is the author of such best-selling detective novels as *The Chinese Doll* and *To Keep Or Kill*) is an angular Midwestern type who looks a little like Hoagy Carmichael and has a similar relaxed attitude toward life and letters. He has been active in amateur fantasy publishing for many years, and at present edits and publishes an attractive lithographed information sheet, *Science Fiction News Letter*, which is universally acclaimed the best in its field. He lives in Bloomington, Illinois.

(Continued on inside back cover)

WORLDS BEYOND

JANUARY, 1951

VOLUME 1, NO. 2

Cover by Van Dongen; illustrations by Harrison, Jannace and Napoli

DAMON KNIGHT, Editor

WORLDS BEYOND is published monthly by Hillman Periodicals, Inc., at 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. Editorial office, 535 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Application for entry as second-class matter is pending at the post office at Chicago, Ill. Price, 25c a copy; subscriptions $3.00 a year in the United States and Canada. The publishers assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, which should be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes. All characters in stories are fictional, and any resemblance to a real person is coincidental. Printed in the United States of America.

by Ford McCormack

March Hare Mission

A brutally effective picture of the next war . . . and a neat, deadly problem in methodology: how do you execute an incredibly complex and dangerous mission, without arms, without aid — and without the simple ability to recall what you're doing for more than two minutes at a time?

A DISTANT roar sounded hollowly in the rock-walled corridor, and after a moment Lieutenant Gavin realized what it was—machine-gun fire, its familiar chatter dissipated in the maze between.

He swore fervently, drew his automatic, and stretched his wiry legs to a fast lope. The enemy must have broken through at the other stairway, since the one behind him was still being held. Only a low rumble from that direction told of the carnage beyond the huge emergency doors. The elevator shafts had, of course, been irreversibly sealed off long before, by steel slabs at every level.

Bitterly, Gavin regretted having lingered for a few pot shots before the doors were closed. Now he faced the prospect of being cut off from a much more important objective. And there was only one cartridge left in his automatic.

It had been fairly certain from the first that the enemy would reject a peaceful surrender of the hospital section. The massacre of helpless patients was part of what military propaganda called "severe retaliation"—against any and all resistance.

There had been plenty of resistance in and around Vancouver Combs. The top levels had been abandoned for a week because of radioactivity, while the mightiest battle of the war raged in the air over the disfigured terrain. Armament was about equal, but numbers

were with the enemy. In the actual storming of the Combs, each successive level had cost the invader heavily. But this last, bottom level, with its handful of defenders, would come cheaper.

Gavin's stride faltered momentarily, as two grey-uniformed soldiers appeared at the far end of the corridor; then he sprinted for the nearest cross-corridor twenty yards farther on. As he ducked into it, a bullet knocked chips from the wall over his head, and the sound of the shot clapped and echoed behind him.

There was no one in the cross-corridor—but he had to get out of it before the men who had seen him could reach it. The noise of battle —or slaughter—was louder now, and seemed to come from all directions. Behind some of the doors he passed, there was the babble of frightened voices.

At the next main corridor he paused for a quick glance both ways. It too was empty. He turned left and raced along, his hopes rising with every step. The destination was not far now. At the third cross-corridor, he turned right. Seconds later, he stood panting at the last turn, within sight of his goal—a door not fifty feet from the intersection. But in between, walking away from Gavin, was a soldier.

Perhaps a hundred yards farther down the corridor a group of five more soldiers was approaching. As yet, the group presented a minor hazard—in fact, it would fit in very well with Gavin's plan. But if he waited until the solitary soldier reached the others, they would all be too close.

He had no doubts about his ability to kill the soldier with his one remaining shot. And under the circumstances, he felt not the slightest compunction about shooting him in the back. But in case he couldn't reach the door—or it just happened to be locked—he would need that last bullet for another purpose.

Gavin hefted the automatic in his hand, and his dark, rather sharp face tightened with decision. On soundless feet, he darted out into the corridor, conscious of his conspicuous lieutenant's uniform. Still, with the soldier between himself and the group, there was a chance they might not see him too soon.

They did. The soldier was ten yards beyond the door and Gavin was passing it when a shout rang along the corridor. Both Gavin and the soldier stopped instantly—but the soldier had to turn around.

As he did so, Gavin's last bullet caught him high in the stomach and he dropped like an empty sack.

Gavin whirled and reached the door, marked: PHARMACY, in one bound. It was not locked. As he snatched it open, a bullet splintered through one of the panels, and another whipped the air close behind him. Inside, he pulled the door shut and turned the lock.

He was in a small medical storeroom with shelves and bottles from floor to ceiling. It adjoined a larger room by an archway, and the other room also had a door to the hall. But that door should be locked, and there was no time to make sure.

Gavin jerked a fold of papers from his breast pocket, loosened the separate sheets and made a wad, tossing it on the floor. He struck a match with fairly steady hands and, stooping, lighted the wad at several points. Shouts reverberated in the corridor outside, and the doorknob rattled loudly.

He stood up and turned to the shelves, running his eye along one of them to a bottle with a bright red label. Printed on it prominently was the word: POISON. Gavin took the bottle quickly, pulled the stopper, and raised it to his mouth.

He was briefly aware of a sour taste, which was obliterated by a strangling sensation of liquid fire. It took intense muscular effort to force several swallows past his burning throat.

Dizzily, he dropped the half-empty bottle on the floor, with a crash that seemed to shake the room. . . . No, the crash had been something hitting the door—the lock was bent out of shape. . . . The papers on the floor had burned to as many layers of black ash; Gavin lurched forward and stamped on them heavily, then dropped to his hands and knees as the floor began to rise in a mad spiral. . . .

His next impression, which he accepted matter-of-factly, was of having been stuffed into a coffin that was too small. But he had not yet been buried, for there was light. . . .

Gavin opened his eyes and saw the plain ceiling and walls of a small hospital room. It was no coffin that compressed his arms and torso, but a tightly wrapped straitjacket. A lieutenant with the enemy insignia of Intelligence on his sleek grey uniform stood by the cot. Behind him was a white-smocked attendant.

The stone-faced lieutenant spoke in over-articulated but passable English: "You are to come with us."

Gavin nodded wearily. His head ached, his throat was raw, and the snug jacket was doing nothing to alleviate the nausea he felt. He struggled awkwardly to a sitting position.

Walking along the corridor between the two men, Gavin noticed small variations of construction which indicated that these combs had been built, rather than captured, by the enemy. But as yet there was nothing to show their probable location.

He was led through double, sound-proofed doors into a large room suggesting a surgery at first glance. But there were noticeable differences: the operating table had too many clamps and adjustments; the glass case near it held an unorthodox array of instruments; there was other apparatus difficult to connect with the art of healing, some of which Gavin recognized from previous descriptions. This chamber was what the enemy euphemistically referred to as a "question room."

Gavin doubted that they would use torture on him—yet. It was effective enough for certain purposes, such as breaking up an underground movement by forcing the betrayal of one's fellow conspirators. But it was not so useful in extracting scientific information, where it might take weeks of experimentation to prove the data false. And in the case of military information, a major disaster could result from any great reliance on reports so obtained.

The most innocuous piece of equipment in evidence was a lie-detector setup—a chair surrounded by half a dozen physiological recording instruments attachable to the subject. Gavin was not surprised at being escorted to it. The attendant, an owlish little man who looked withered beyond his years, began removing the straitjacket.

There was a surge of relief as the canvas loosened about Gavin's midsection. The jacket showed evidence of much use. If they put it back on him, as was probable, they would not be likely to notice that the fastenings failed to pull up so far as they had when he was unconscious. Gavin knew a certain technique for enlarging the torso imperceptibly.

The tall lieutenant stood off watchfully, holding his automatic by its barrel, while the attendant strapped Gavin securely to the chair.

They were applying the various attachments of the lie-detector when the door opened and a squat, middle-aged officer entered. His tightly fitting uniform emphasized his hoglike physique, and his platinum hair and pale blue eyes contrasted icily with the heavy, florid cheeks.

This would be the official inquisitor, no doubt, and it was perhaps significant that his rank was that of colonel. He stared with cold contempt at Gavin while the wizened attendant made the final adjustments on the lie-detector and indicated that it was functioning. Then the colonel spoke in a metallic bass, his accent somewhat thicker than the lieutenant's had been:

"So this is the coward who lacked the nerve to put a bullet through his brain. I must compliment you on your choice of poison, however—we located a stomach-pump barely in time to save your life."

The fools, thought Gavin. There had been a stomach-pump across the hall, in the laboratory storeroom. It shouldn't have taken them two minutes to find it. And it was known that the enemy awarded a substantial bonus for officers and key men captured alive.

"Not that we have much use for you," the colonel went on casually. "We have already found out a great deal about the new super-weapon."

Gavin saw the colonel's gaze flicker past him toward the recorders, which were all strategically located in back of the chair. It had been a fairly clever remark—to be made by someone who was not even sure a super-weapon existed. A surprise reaction would be quite indicative. Gavin was reasonably sure he had not shown one: his long and rigorous schooling with every type of lie-detector had more than prepared him for such simple tests.

If the colonel was annoyed by the lack of response, he did not show it. He spoke again, in the same condescending tone—but in his own language:

"How long have you been a spy?"

The designation was pure bluster, of course, based on the arrogant and familiar view that opposition agents deserved no more honorable title. But it had been a direct question, and Gavin did not wish to antagonize the man by ignoring it completely. Those petulant lips and narrowed eyes bespoke a character that might easily be prompted to

an offhand but crippling act of cruelty. Gavin could not afford to have that happen. Nor did he wish to reveal his considerable fluency with the language of the enemy. He replied hesitantly, in English:

"How long—I didn't catch the question." The words rasped painfully in his sore throat.

The colonel sneered, reverting to the same language: "Never mind. Your lack of experience—and your ignorance—is very evident. Did you imagine, for instance, that burning those papers and stamping on them would put the information out of our reach? Even your own so-called experts could have recovered some of it; we were able to restore it completely. Every word! Every equation! What do you think of that?"

Privately, Gavin doubted it. But they had probably gotten enough to connect him with Dr. Middleton, as they were intended to. As for the rest of the data, it concerned a very interesting if unproductive line of research which had nothing to do with Dr. Middleton or any known weapon. But even if they got it all, they would need considerable time to make sure it was useless.

The colonel looked up at the tall lieutenant and nodded significantly toward the door. The solemn lieutenant wheeled stiffly and marched out. Hands on hips, the colonel stood facing Gavin for a moment, then spoke quietly:

"You know, of course, that we can break down your conditioning with nepenthal in a very short time."

Gavin waited, guessing what was coming. He knew the facts, all right. Full security-conditioning took months of intensive treatment to build up. It included a violent antipathy toward all hypnotic drugs or so-called truth serums. Even a moderate dosage of any of them would cause convulsions and unconsciousness, from which the subject would not recover to any useful extent while the effects lasted. But the peculiar action of nepenthal, a non-hypnotic drug which the enemy had synthesized within the last year, would break down that conditioning in a few weeks at most.

The colonel's tone grew deadly: "I wonder if you know how much difference it can make to you, whether you freely answer a few questions now, or wait until we drag it out of you."

He studied Gavin's face for a moment, then went on: "If you tell us now, the truth of your answers will of course be tested later. If you have not lied, you will be well treated. You can believe this, since it is obvious that such a policy works to our advantage. Otherwise—if you refuse to answer, or lie to me—well, you will die, eventually. But you will start dying long before that. What do you say?"

Gavin wondered how many times the same routine had been performed in this same room—and how many steadfast, heroic rejections had followed. As for himself, he had little choice. He could not answer those "few questions" if he wanted to—and it would be dangerous to leave any room for argument. He spoke flatly: "I say no."

The colonel's beefy hand delivered a jolting slap to Gavin's face.

Fast as the motion had been, Gavin had seen it coming. He could have jerked his head sideways at the last instant and greatly reduced the force of the blow, but a split-second decision had restrained him. It would be unwise to reveal his unusual, hair-trigger coördination to this man. Gavin's only hope was to keep that weapon secret as long as possible. Besides, the sadistic satisfaction of the act might allay the other's vindictiveness.

When the bells stopped ringing in Gavin's head and his vision cleared, he became aware that the colonel was chuckling.

"So! He is not a mechanical man, after all. He is made of flesh which quivers and blood whose pressure can be made to jump!"

He turned to the attendant, who wore a cadaverous grin of appreciation. "Give him a test dose of solanacin. He probably has the full conditioning, but we must make sure."

The door swung wide, and the tall lieutenant appeared, pushing before him a shambling figure wearing a straitjacket. The prisoner's head drooped low, showing only a dirty bandage and tousled grey hair. Gavin knew who it must be, even before the lieutenant shoved the head back with the butt of his hand, revealing a square, lined face and sunken eyes that stared as if with vague puzzlement.

Gavin deliberately stimulated in himself a slight momentary tension. The role he was playing called for considerable surprise at this juncture, and the colonel was watching him closely. It was just as well to jog the recorders a little.

He had studied too many photographs of the well-known physicist

standing there not to recognize him despite his altered appearance. It was Dr. Middleton—the man Gavin must kill, if the slightest opportunity presented itself.

Dr. Middleton had been captured two weeks ago at Juneau Combs, which had fallen so unexpectedly that the usual precaution of removing key men from danger points could not be taken. The scientist had good reason to be at Juneau, which had been the nearest position to the enemy at the time. He had been supervising installations for the only really revolutionary weapon to be developed since the war began.

Gavin had only the vaguest idea of its technical nature: it seemed to be a form of focusable radiation, and in the most basic sense, it was not even destructive. Quite the contrary. It *stabilized* things. Exposure to it somehow strengthened the electrical bonds between the constituent elements of any compound. In the laboratory, Gavin had personally seen trinitro-tenuin, that most sensitive of explosives, pounded harmlessly with a hammer under the inhibitory rays. But the wielder of the hammer had taken care not to expose himself for long. The stoppage of chemical change extended to life-processes.

A great and useful future was foreseen for the radiation. At low power output it would preserve food indefinitely, without refrigeration. At high power, it would extinguish fires from a considerable distance by making combustion impossible.

Just now, the prime purpose was to see how efficaciously a ring of large projectors could clear the air of jet-planes. Installations were being rushed to completion at Seattle, Portland and Spokane and should be in operation within a week. The new weapon had no effect on atomic bombs, of course—but it could do a wholesale job of crippling the planes that carried them. It was confidently expected to end the war—providing the enemy failed to duplicate it within the next few months. If they did, then the war would continue as of old on land and sea, and the advantage would inevitably revert to the side with the preponderance of manpower.

The enemy would not have been likely to arrive at the discovery soon enough by research alone. But now, the fiasco at Juneau had delivered into their hands a man who had been instrumental in the development of the new weapon from the laboratory stage. They got

no critical plans or equipment—those had been destroyed. But the information in Dr. Middleton's mind, once extracted, would be more than they needed. The last radio report from Juneau Combs said that Dr. Middleton had attempted suicide, but had either been restrained or bungled the job. The head-bandage and straitjacket he now wore seemed to bear out that report. Certainly, no one could have realized more keenly the disastrous implications of his capture than the doctor himself.

At home, officialdom had reacted with freshets of counter-accusations, some of which were true. Those who had ordered the installations at Juneau had certainly not allowed a sufficient margin of time—events proved that. On the other hand, if the fortunes of war had permitted only a few days more of respite, two cities and an estimated hundred thousand casualties might have been spared.

Amid the hubbub, the March Hare Project—so named for its utter foolhardiness—had been quietly born. The one-man mission had been conceived with Lieutenant Gavin's special talents in mind, and the Chief of Intelligence had personally and reluctantly outlined it to him. It was the Chief who had arranged the lab demonstration of the new weapon, so that Gavin could judge for himself what was at stake—though he was shown nothing that the enemy would not learn the first time it was used.

Gavin had not jumped at the chance—he was far from being a chauvinist—yet the very fact that no orders had been given influenced him strongly. If this war was about anything at all, it was about differences of policy at all levels. Those differences were worth preserving, even at the wildest of risks. And the war would have been lost long since if his side had been unable to muster its share of men who were willing to play for keeps. So Gavin had become the March Hare.

He was now as close to his objective as careful scheming could bring him. From now on, only luck—and the lightning synapses which had uniquely qualified him for this desperate job—could help.

"I see you know the good doctor." The colonel smirked at Gavin, and added slyly: "And he has probably recognized you several times already."

The wizened attendant cackled, and even the tall lieutenant permitted himself a twisted smile.

Gavin found the joke less than amusing, for the simple reason that it might have been literally true—except for the fact that Gavin had never before met Dr. Middleton. The latter was plainly under the influence of nepenthal. There were definite signs of the drug's main symptom: an odd disfunction of the memory.

While it had relatively little immediate effect on mental alertness, the drug nullified one's ability to store recollections of current happenings, usually on an almost instantaneous basis. However, the presymptomatic memory was unaffected. Thus, under its influence, the subject was unaware of any lapse of time between the onset of the drug's full effect and the present moment. And therefore it was quite possible to recognize the same person several times within a brief period. One had only to look away to forget completely.

Protracted use of the drug would eventually cause permanent damage to the brain. Yet the enemy used it indiscriminately on prisoners whether they had security-conditioning or not. Since the drug made them incapable of sustained or coherent action, it reduced the problem of guarding them to a minimum.

Gavin had seen some of the mindless wrecks the enemy had exchanged for human beings. Although the drug's formula was now known to both sides, there did not seem to be any recourse against this crime of war that would not be equally inhumane. So the shameful traffic continued.

The owlish attendant approached with a hypodermic syringe, jabbed it casually into Gavin's arm just above the rubber armlet of the sphygmomanometer, and pressed the plunger. The mere injection caused a slight hypertension which must have been plainly observable on the recorders. And in a few moments, the solanacin was kicking up a physiological disturbance out of all proportion to the minute dosage, and in contradistinction to its narcotic properties.

In spite of himself, Gavin fidgeted with acute discomfort. His breathing was becoming asthmatically difficult, and the feeling of nausea was returning with a vengeance. He was almost glad when the colonel spoke to the attendant with an air of boredom:

"There's no doubt about it. You can start the nepenthal now—

and give him plenty." He turned to the tall lieutenant. "You might as well wait and take them both with you. Have a guard stay with the little spy until he is completely under the influence."

He smiled sardonically at Gavin. "Farewell, amateur! When I see you in a few weeks, you will have cause to regret your stubbornness. In the meantime—just a few days from now, in fact—Dr. Middleton will have told us all you know and more. That is a pleasant little thought for you to turn over and over at your absent-minded leisure."

Obviously pleased with himself, the colonel sauntered out.

The nepenthal brought quick relief from the worst of the reactions occasioned by the narcotic, to which it was a partial antidote. But it also brought a strong sense of urgency.

From previous experience, Gavin knew that the effect would reach maximum in fifteen minutes at most. At any given moment during the next six to eight hours, his last recollections would be of the present interval. In that time he must formulate and fix in his mind the cues which would guide his subsequent behavior.

During his ten days at Vancouver Combs, while awaiting its inevitable downfall, Gavin had experimented with nepenthal several times, and had become painfully aware of his limitations. The directives had to be simple, or even his phenomenal associative powers were unable to reconstruct the pattern and retain it long enough to accomplish the most elementary purpose. If the purpose involved several steps, it was advisable to anticipate some characteristic of each one and select cues accordingly.

For this occasion, he had long since decided what the first and predominant directive must be, on which the separate cues would depend, in those isolated moments which lay ahead. . . .

Look around! Gavin's gaze swung quickly about the rough and pitted rock walls of his cell, whose single furnishing was the cot on which he was sitting. He was alone: the guard had left.

Simultaneously, the slight motion of his body made him aware of the confining straitjacket. That awareness was the cue which launched a cyclical writhing of his entire torso. He felt his outer arm slip slightly in its canvas sheath. This was a critical point, at which un-

trained individuals usually made the mistake of trying to loosen the inner arm as well; instead, Gavin preserved the small amount of slack between them with care, and set about the strenuous process of making more. . . .

Look around! But he could not. His head and shoulders were engulfed in suffocating folds of rough cloth. He was not immediately aware of the position of his arms: they were upraised and numb, and as a result, his efforts to disentangle them were rather feeble. . . .

Look around! As Gavin did so, he was conscious of an aching weariness in the muscles of his arms and shoulders. The straitjacket lay on the floor at his feet. He was free to attempt the plan whose initial steps he had visualized while sitting here before the drug had taken full effect—seemingly, seconds ago.

He had been well aware of the plan's inflexibility. Its failure could easily have the result of immobilizing him. But that was a risk he had already accepted, and he wasted no irreplaceable moments considering it now.

Instead, orientation congealed into stimulus; he twisted from his sitting position, clutched the cot pad by the near edge and slung it with some precision to the floor and against one wall. That wall contained the cell's only opening other than its metal-sheathed door—a heavy-grilled ventilator near the ceiling.

With a continuous motion, Gavin spun back to the bare cot and grasped it by the sides of its rusted steel frame. It was not anchored in any way—that had been the first thing he had checked on entering the room. The cell itself was too large—or too small—to have been intended as such. This part of the Combs had probably been converted from a hospital or residential section, and the usual precautions were no longer considered necessary since the enemy had adopted the practice of using the new drug to render its prisoners helpless.

But he made no attempt to lift the cot just then. There had been a warning protest from his tired muscles—he would be too slow. First he must rest. . . .

Look around! In the act of turning his head, Gavin stopped, then

returned his attention to the cot over which he was bending, as the plan took priority in his mind. With a heave, he swung the cot over his head, inverting it, stepped forward and placed its end against the wall under the ventilator grill.

Straining on tiptoe, he raised the cot so that one of its tubular steel legs passed between the closely meshed bars of the slightly protruding grill. A final thrust with his fingertips caused the crossbar of the cot's end-section to catch on the rough surface of the wall. It held—the cot hung straight out from the wall, its full length providing leverage in probable excess of its strength. But the legs were well braced, and there were four of them. . . .

The cot pad on the floor was not altogether successful in mitigating the noise of the crash. Gavin was unable to prevent the cot from scraping the wall on the way down, and the grill, joined to a foot-long section of heavy-gauge duct that had pulled out with it, bounced on the cot-springs with a disconcerting clamor. The incident would have been excellent cause for worry, if Gavin had not promptly forgotten it. . . .

Look around! The up-ended cot under him swayed dangerously, and Gavin oriented himself barely in time to hook his hand in the ventilator hole for stability. But the glance had informed him that there was no one else in the cell.

The weak spot of the ventilator had been where it had joined the main duct, and the torn bolt-holes made a hazard in squeezing his body through the narrow opening. There was also a baffle partly blocking the way, which he was able to bend sufficiently.

There was no doubt about which way to turn. Dr. Middleton's cell lay somewhere to the left. The lieutenant had taken him on down the corridor after leaving Gavin and the guard. The doctor's cell was most likely on the same side—there were only two doors on the other —but whether it was one or a dozen cells away, there had been no way of telling. Not that it mattered much. There was no practicable way of counting them, either. . . .

Gavin quite literally found himself in the near-blackness of a tube so flat in its cross-section that he could not raise his belly from the dust-

caked surface far enough to crawl normally. There was only room to squirm, which he promptly did. The cold air blowing around his body from behind carried the disturbed dust to his face in choking eddies as he inched forward.

It had been easy to deduce where he was, in a general way. But that in itself told him virtually nothing regarding the all-important question: Had he accomplished his mission? Fortunately, there was an indirect answer to that. There was no pain in his right earlobe.

A week ago, a small capsule had been inserted under the skin on the inner side of that lobe. The capsule could be ruptured by the firm pressure of a thumbnail, releasing an irritant into the tissues which would keep them inflamed for days. Only when and if he felt this soreness would Gavin be free to indulge in the frail hope of his own escape. . . .

He was looking down through a ventilator at a familiar bandaged head and mass of grey hair. The head was drooping so that the face was not visible. How many other cells Gavin had peered into—how long he had waited at this one for more certain identification to become possible—he would never know. But as he watched now, the man beneath heaved a sigh and the blunt, seamed features of Dr. Middleton came briefly but unmistakably into view.

Instantly, Gavin pressed his shoulder against the baffle which partly blocked the opening and bent it clear. Simultaneously, he plucked a button off the fly of his pants. They and his shirt were the only parts of his uniform that had been left on him. The buttons were of tough steel and had various potentialities in an emergency. He inserted the thin edge of this one into the slot of the nearest bolt securing the ventilator grill, and twisted with all the strength of fingers that could bend a twenty-penny nail held in one hand. . . .

The button itself provided an adequate clue as to what he was doing, and by convention he took the bolts in clockwise order around the grill. In each case, he applied the maximum force at the first approach. If the bolt would not turn, due to corrosion, or its slot disintegrated under the strain for the same reason, he went quickly to the next one. . . .

Two empty holes in succession—one would not have been conclusive—told him at a glance that he had done all he could to weaken the attachment. With one writhing twist of his torso he reversed position and jabbed both feet at the grill. It came free gratingly and disappeared from view. Its unrelieved clatter was still sounding from the floor below, as Gavin followed through with his legs and hips. At that point, his shirt caught on a ragged edge of metal, tore wide open, and caught again. . . .

In spite of the fact that his own body shut off most of the light, Gavin's mind leaped to the simplest explanation of his position. He was halfway into the air duct, through the only opening his memory had registered: the ventilator in his own cell. Then, as he started to work himself farther in, he became aware of the metal button he was holding in his fingers. After a slight hesitation, he projected himself outward with a strong thrust of his arms. . . .

Look around! As he picked himself up off the floor, Gavin's swinging gaze paused with a slight shock of recognition on the sitting figure of Dr. Middleton, then went on with sudden purpose. He could kill the doctor with his bare hands, quite easily—but not quickly enough, under the circumstances, to be sure of carrying through.

His eyes fell on the grill assembly, lying in the middle of the floor. At the same instant, there was the metallic rasp of a key being inserted in the lock of the cell door.

As he automatically lunged toward the grill, Gavin's racing mind weighed the situation.

There was a chance that he could kill Dr. Middleton before being apprehended—and complete his mission. His normal, deep-seated reluctance to kill a helpless person—one who was nominally a friend—would be no deterrent whatever. Dr. Middleton's continued existence was a threat to the lives of millions and, in all probability, to the freedom of mankind for generations. In this vital sense, the good doctor was an arch-enemy.

But the grill was bulky, and there was no assurance that he might not be defeated by the mental fog which was due to descend at any

instant. Also, the guards all wore side-arms and were trained, he knew, to use them fast. Whether he finished off the doctor or not, the outcome for himself would be certain death, within seconds at most. Yet he would not be here if fear of death had been a guiding factor.

The key was still turning noisily in the lock as Gavin paused, bending over the grill with his fingers clutching its crossbars. His thoughts had been scarcely more than unresolved flashes of insight. In the same over-all manner, he considered the alternative.

It was simple enough in its conception—as it had to be. Kill the guard and escape, taking the doctor along. In its execution, the plan's basic difficulties would be rendered fantastic by Gavin's condition. Yet there was the prospect of a certain amount of latitude beyond that first big step. With the guard out of the way, Dr. Middleton could possibly be disposed of any time the going got too tough.

Acting on the gravest decision of his career, Gavin released his hold on the grill and flung himself toward the corner of the room where the door was. The latch clicked and the door swung wide as he flattened himself against the wall behind it.

And forgot why he was there. . . .

A moment later he had partially reconstructed the situation. The door behind which he stood was located differently than in his own cell: this could be Dr. Middleton's. The heavy footsteps were undoubtedly those of a guard, who was muttering something in his own language about noise and twenty devils.

Without hesitation Gavin moved out from behind the door. There was simply no time to stalk the guard, and he could only hope for the advantage of surprise.

Luck was momentarily with him. The guard, a heavy-set six-footer, was turned partly away, looking up at the uncovered ventilator hole. But he must have caught a glimpse of Gavin's motion, for he whirled around, raising an automatic pistol. As he did so, Gavin lashed out with a well-gauged kick, connecting solidly with the guard's wrist, and the gun continued on up, spinning slowly. Before it hit the floor, Gavin had launched his body straight at the larger man, lowering his head at the last instant and butting it rather painfully but with brutal effect into the other's face. At the same time,

his crossed hands gripped the collar of the guard's uniform just above the lapels, and his knee came up sharply to the groin.

The disabled guard went down heavily, the beginnings of a scream cut off by the pressure of Gavin's forearms on his throat. From the feel of the initial kick, Gavin judged the guard's wrist was badly damaged, if not broken. Since the problem was not only to kill the man but to do it quickly and silently, that was so much the better. This particular strangle-hold was very hard to break with one hand. . . .

A loud groan from the barely conscious man beneath him brought Gavin's senses into focus, and he instantly tightened his grip. . . .

Look around! He was standing in a cell with a dead guard at his feet and with Dr. Middleton staring blankly at him from the cot. The door was open.

Gavin sprang quickly to close it, first removing the cluster of keys that hung from its lock, then returned to the body. Dropping to his knees, he began working at the buttons of the oversized uniform. . . .

It was not such a bad fit as might be expected, judging by the beefy, underwear-clad corpse on the floor. Gavin's shoulders were deceptively broad; the gunbelt gathered in the fullness at the waist acceptably; the roomy pants, worn over his own, pulled up high under the coat and turned under at the cuffs, merely made him look stouter. And the cap was actually a bit snug. Swiftly, he caught up the gun from the floor, slipped it into the holster at his side, and continued across the room toward Dr. Middleton. . . .

He was escorting Dr. Middleton by the arm along a corridor otherwise empty. Walking, he had long since discovered, was a sufficiently automatic process that its own momentum made it fairly continuous. This was not altogether advantageous. Gavin stopped them just in time to prevent their barging across the intersection of a larger corridor.

But a discreet glance showed that it, too, was empty. And it showed something else. A hundred feet to the right was the open door of a brightly lighted room, from which could be heard the mumble of men's voices. An equal distance farther on, a ten-foot iron

fence and gate spanned the corridor, marking an entrance to the prison. Beyond that, in the next cross-corridor, the recessed edge of an elevator door could be seen. Immediately, he was able to orient their position to the mental map of this part of the Combs that he had carefully formulated on his way here—seemingly minutes ago. The trouble with a map was that it could not tell you how to proceed unless you knew where you were. Here, the landmarks showed they were still on the wrong side of the fence.

It was unguarded—a degree of laxity compatible only with the enemy's methods of imprisonment. The gate itself, he recalled, had an old-style lock which conveniently narrowed down his choice to the two largest of the keys dangling from his belt. And Gavin was sure he could open it much less noisily than the guard who had originally admitted them—providing they could reach it undetected.

There was no choice but to walk past that open door and hope intensely to be unnoticed. To search for other egress from the section would even more decidedly invite disaster. Gripping Dr. Middleton's arm more firmly, he urged him to a fairly rapid walk. . . .

Approaching the doorway, Gavin became aware of a number of things simultaneously: the doorway itself, Dr. Middleton, the gate ahead, the jingling keys at his waist and the weight of an automatic at his side. The last called his attention to his ill-fitting clothes, which he identified wonderingly as the uniform of an enemy guard.

He quickly grasped the keys with his free hand to silence them, but the doctor's shuffling feet were making more noise on the stone floor than the murmur of voices in the room could be expected to drown out. Gavin held his breath as they came abreast of the doorway. If they were seen at all, they were lost. It would do no good to avert his head—no matter who they mistook him for, the circumstances would undoubtedly seem peculiar enough to investigate. He glanced in.

A group of men sat at a table not fifteen feet from the doorway playing cards. One of them was almost directly facing the doorway, with nothing in his line of sight. He was in the act of slapping a card triumphantly down on the table, after which he turned to grin at the man at his left. Then Gavin and the doctor were past the seemingly

wide doorway, safe for the moment. Gavin felt briefly grateful for the comparatively dim lighting of the corridor, and for the winning guard's luck. . . .

Look around! He and Dr. Middleton were standing before a row of elevators, and there was no one else in sight. As Gavin assessed the important factors of the situation, including his weapon and disguise, he felt a rising excitement, combined with a touch of awe at the incredible luck which must have brought him this far.

Yet there was still a tremendous—even hopeless—distance to go. The improbable achievement of reaching topside would leave the matter of at least a few thousand miles between them and safety. If —but the concern of the moment was that they were still on the same level as the prison where they had been confined. Painted in the recess at each end of the row of five doors was the same symbol he had noticed in coming down, a letter corresponding to the English "R". The enemy, he knew, followed the world-wide convention of alphabetical sequence for their underground levels, starting from the top so that levels could be added without confusion when the Combs expanded downward.

The indicator above one of the doors showed that an elevator was rising from the bottom of the shaft, only three levels below. Gavin was standing within reach of the signal buttons, which probably meant that he had already pushed one. Nevertheless, he pressed the upper one firmly, mentally approving the earlier choice implied by their presence here. Stairwells were usually widely separated from elevator shafts, for military reasons, and even if he had known where the nearest one was, the climb would be too time-consuming and strenuous, especially for the debilitated doctor. And it would greatly increase the chances of disastrous encounter. This way, with luck, there might be only the elevator operator to deal with. Gavin rested his free hand on his hip, in contact with the butt of the automatic, and hoped it would stay there as an instantaneous reminder. . . .

As the elevator door before him began to slide open, he identified the cold metal touching his hand, and oriented himself sufficiently to restrain an impulse to draw the weapon. There were two men in the

elevator: the operator, who was a soldier of the rank corresponding to corporal, and an officer. As the latter stepped from the car, Gavin saw that he was a captain of ordnance. The officer glanced at them with no more than mild curiosity and turned down the corridor. As quickly as possible, Gavin led the stumbling doctor into the elevator, and was aware of the doors gliding shut behind them. . . .

He was in an elevator with Dr. Middleton and the operator, a soldier, who was looking at him curiously. The car's motion was changing, yet because it was completely enclosed, there were no visual clues. Gavin's first impression was of coming to a stop in a downward direction. Then as the pressure of his shoe-soles eased off and the sighing sound of movement in the shaft continued, he realized the car had been accelerating upward. On the assumption that it had started from the prison level, there was a long way to go to the top one, and there would be time enough to—

Gavin drew his pistol and waved the astonished operator away from the controls. As the soldier released the lever and stepped aside with hands upraised, the car slowed sharply in its ascent. Quickly, Gavin grasped the lever, swung it hard over and half-sat on it, with his back against the panel. Gesturing toward Dr. Middleton, he curbed a growing sense of urgency well enough to speak distinctly to the soldier in his own language:

"The jacket—take it off him!"

Fortunately, the man turned submissively, almost without hesitation, and began to unfasten the doctor's straps. At that moment, a buzzer sounded within the car, in short, angry bursts. Someone had evidently been passed up, and didn't like it. . . .

There was an almost continual buzzing in the moving elevator, accompanied by a dull roaring from without which was increasing in volume. An enemy soldier stood with his back turned toward Gavin, who tensed, then relaxed as the situation explained itself in part. The soldier was in the act of unwrapping the straitjacket from Dr. Middleton.

The next instant, he whirled and lashed out with the jacket. It caught Gavin in the head and whipped his face, blinding him mo-

mentarily; then he was grappling with the soldier, grimly aware of the hampering effect of the studded panel against which his back was pressed.

The pistol was slowly being twisted from his grasp—not expertly, but irresistibly, because of superior leverage. Gavin took a chance and let go of the gun, which the soldier was holding by its barrel. It was then that the latter revealed his amateur status. He attempted to jump back and shift the gun to his other hand to reverse it.

Gavin jumped with him, knocked the man's gun arm upward and followed through with a swift hammerlock. Seconds later, he relieved the soldier of the excruciating pain of a broken arm by clubbing him unconscious with the gun-butt.

Gavin had identified the roaring sound. The elevator was stopped near one of the factory levels. He reached for the control lever. . . .

The insistent buzzing made it difficult to tell, but the car seemed to be moving very slowly, though the lever was all the way over, in the "up" position. It could mean they were approaching the top of the shaft. And this car would not be the only one doing that. Others would be coming to investigate—if they were not there already. Yet the cars which had been near the top level would have had to go down quite a way to place the source of trouble. And if those cars were also operated by common soldiers, no investigation would be undertaken without orders. There was a chance that the top level would still be clear.

The elevator stopped. As Gavin released the lever, the car settled slowly, evidently seeking alignment with the top level. When it stopped, both doors would open automatically.

Hastily, Gavin grasped the unconscious soldier by his collar and pulled him closer, then ripped open the man's coat and tugged it off him. It would be useful to Dr. Middleton, when and if there were time to put it on him.

With a heave, he propped the soldier in a sitting position under the control lever. Catching up the straitjacket from the floor, he passed it around the man's chest under his arms and tied the ends to the handle of the control lever, just as the elevator stopped again and the doors slid open.

Gavin grabbed Dr. Middleton's arm with one hand, the soldier's coat with the other, and hauled them both from the car. There was no time for caution—but a quick glance showed no one close by. Reaching into the elevator he clutched the soldier by his shirt-sleeve and toppled him over. At once, the doors started to shut, and a moment later the indicator showed the car on its way—to the bottom. . . .

Look around! The letter painted in the recess corresponded to the top level of the Combs, and stirred in Gavin a brief feeling of astonishment. It also posed a problem, being the only means yet apparent for distinguishing this level from any other.

Whether or not they had come up on one of these elevators, as was probable, it was obviously not safe to remain here. A quick glance at the indicators above the doors showed that two of the cars were only a few levels below and rising steadily.

And there were several people visible along the corridor, both civilians and soldiers. The former, from what Gavin knew of the enemy's martial caste system, would offer little hazard. In fact, the uniform he wore might very well get them past all save officers—until the alarm was sounded.

Making an automatic connection in his mind between the coat in his hand and Dr. Middleton's lack of one, he quickly stepped behind the doctor and caught his dangling hands in the sleeve-holes. The coat went on easily, being somewhat large, and Gavin noted with approval that the loss of its metal buttons made it look less military.

At that moment, Gavin heard the noise, faint with distance, and realized that it had existed for several seconds, at least. They were only a few steps from the intersection of another corridor. He led the doctor hastily around the corner—and kept on walking, past two men whose heavy clothing and ruddy faces suggested outdoor workers, and who glanced at them with weary indifference.

The sound was louder now, and unmistakable. It was the guttural roar of jet-engines, somewhere ahead. . . .

Look around! Several matters pressed for Gavin's attention all at once. He and Dr. Middleton were at an intersection of two corridors,

one of which ended twenty feet away at a big door. Over it was a sign which translated—amazingly enough—into: HANGAR 3. Built into the large door was a smaller one, which an armed guard was holding open to admit a worker into the corridor. The noise of jet-engines rolled loudly from the opening, yet did not quite drown out the insistent clangor of a bell—or bells, since it seemed to come from all directions. A general alarm, it must be, and there was little quesion as to its object.

Not too abruptly, for the guard had not yet noticed them, Gavin drew the automatic from its holster and released the safety. Whatever miracle had gotten them this far, no sort of pretense would get them any farther.

Suddenly, a new sound obtruded itself: the sharp reverberations of several shots along the corridor. If they had been aimed this way, the bullets had not come close enough to be audible above the general noise. Without taking his eyes off the guard, Gavin clutched the doctor's arm more tightly and moved quickly forward. At that moment the civilian stopped just inside the door, looking at them doubtfully, and the guard noticed them for the first time.

As Gavin had half-expected, the soldier reached for his gun, ignoring the one which was pointed at him—and which promptly shot him down. The guard had had no real choice. He was responsible for this gateway, and under the enemy system, the alternatives confronting him had been virtual suicide or—worse.

On the other hand, no such handicap to survival attached to the civilian, who had scuttled back through the doorway and disappeared before the soldier had hit the floor. Gavin might have winged him, but it was doubtful that the man would spread the alarm within the hangar—or, in fact, do anything but make himself scarce. Iron discipline the enemy had in abundance, but *esprit de corps,* even among its military, was known to be rare. . . .

The broad hangar-room, dim-lit and cluttered with a variety of small and medium-sized war planes, was like most chambers of its kind: thick columns supported the arched steel and concrete ceiling, which in turn supported a sizable part of the mountain, or of one of the hills, under which these Combs had undoubtedly been built.

Across the room, fifty yards away, some of the heavy steel doors stood open, admitting grey daylight, along with a chill wind and an ear-splitting noise. Yet within the hangar itself, the steady ringing of a bell was faintly audible. Here and there in the general gloom, bright portable lights showed mechanics at work on some of the planes. Gavin led Dr. Middleton toward the far doors in as fast a walk as possible, and with little regard for concealment. . . .

The deafening roar was coming from the twin jets of a black night-fighter on the runway just outside the hangar. Beyond it was the high, camouflaged wall of a revetment, and looming vaguely in the dusky background was a rugged, snow-covered landscape. Since the month was only October, these Combs must be situated quite far north. The deep twilight indicated that the day was either coming or going; Gavin hoped it was the latter.

The night-fighter was not being warmed up for a takeoff, as Gavin had supposed. He could now see that two mechanics were apparently testing its engines; that could mean there was something serious wrong with one, or even both. It could also mean the plane was not fully fueled—and in any case, the type did not begin to have the necessary range.

He paused in the partial shadow of one of the great steel doors, tensely clutching the arm of Dr. Middleton, who was shivering with cold. Directly beyond the night-fighter, but several hundred yards farther down the runway was a larger plane of a type familiar to Gavin as the "Osprey" fighter-bomber, although the enemy had gotten this version into production only recently. Differences of detail were not noticeable in the half-light, and the stubby fuselage and offset wings were characteristic. It was powered by an engine of radical design, without moving parts, which utilized fuel so efficiently as to provide truly global range. Its top speed approached that of rocket-planes, whose scope was much more restricted. Just now, it seemed hopelessly far away. . . .

Look around! Halfway across the hangar, two soldiers with drawn pistols were running toward them, and Gavin could see the legs of several others beneath intervening planes. The first soldier raised his gun and fired; the bullet screeched against the door beside them leav-

ing a bright furrow in the metal, but the sound of the shot was lost in the noise from outside. The next instant, Gavin had hustled Dr. Middleton out, and with the temporary protection of the door behind them, he started for the black fighter.

The two mechanics, who were lifting a section of housing from the near engine, looked up in surprise, then dropped the housing on the ground and moved aside as Gavin motioned with his gun. Since they were unarmed, he gave them no further thought. Half-dragging the stumbling doctor, Gavin ducked under the plane and heaved the other man sprawling on the wing.

Jumping on it himself, he stretched half his length down into the cockpit, pulled the throttle over to maximum and released the brakes. Immediately, the plane began to move forward. . . .

As he straightened up, puzzled, a hole appeared in the plastic canopy before his eyes, then another not far from it. A glance showed soldiers running out of the hangar nearby, the foremost of them trying to circle out far enough to get a direct shot at this side of the plane, which was beginning to outdistance them.

A sudden thrust against his feet nearly toppled him from the wing. Instinctively, he stepped clear—then bent and grabbed with one hand at the sliding, squirming form of Dr. Middleton, just in time. Shifting his grip to the man's coat-collar, Gavin lifted him high. With one knee under the other's buttocks, he was about to boost the doctor headlong into the cockpit, when he caught sight of another plane standing on the runway a few hundred yards ahead. It was the enemy equivalent of an "Osprey," and there seemed to be no one near it. If he could take that. . . .

Gavin hesitated the merest instant, then, with grim logic, he swung the doctor pickaback, between himself and the pursuing soldiers. Reaching precariously into the cockpit, he slacked off on the throttle —and waited. . . .

Look around! Through the viewports of the "Osprey's" small control cabin, throbbing bands of eerie light were visible, sweeping erratically across a starry sky. The plane was flying smoothly, high above a black and silver wasteland.

By the dim glow from the instrument panel, Gavin noticed with a start the limp form of a man in the seat beside him. The lined face was that of Dr. Middleton, and there was dried blood on his shirt, though he seemed to be sleeping normally. Gavin pulled the man's coat farther back and tore open his shirt, exposing the blood-caked flesh beneath. Somewhere along the line, the doctor had taken a bullet through the latissimal muscles under his right arm, but the wound had stopped bleeding and with caution would probably keep all right for a few hours—

Gavin's gaze flew to the instrument panel. The fuel-gauge showed almost one-half of capacity, which should be more than enough to take them home—though it would not be safe to take an enemy plane farther than the first friendly outpost that the radio could contact.

Altitude, seventeen thousand; speed, just over eight hundred; course—

Gavin grinned, suddenly aware that a considerable time had passed with no lapse of memory. He was now fairly sure one would not occur, for in order to be where they seemed to be, several hours must have passed. Also, while his vitals ached with a hunger that was making him a little light-headed, he did not feel overly tired, which could only mean that he had slept. In all probability, the effect of the drug had fallen below the neural-dissociative level. He relaxed systematically—and, as the tautness left his nerves, he realized that he was wearier than he had thought.

According to the somewhat demented magnetic compass, their course was approximately north. The plane had not been guided thus far by that venerable instrument, however, but by a gyroscopic grandson known as the ortho-compass, especially developed for trans-polar navigation. For once, Gavin was glad the enemy had contrived to steal it. Just now, the indicator under its calibrated bell-crystal was pointing straight up. More significant was the reading of its geared-in longitude-recorder, which was in the slow process of changing from 98° E to 82° W.

Actually, their course was due south. Since they were moving, it had to be. For there was little doubt that they were sitting on top of the world.

by John Christopher

TREE OF WRATH

For the first time, Man encountered an unmistakable deity. But this god happened to be a vegetable. . . .

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INTER-SECTION MEMO

Cartwright from Sotrenski 3-17-78

Assignment completed. Story herewith.

Appended note:

Dave:

It was a lot easier than we had thought. Larkin may be difficult to get at, but he's a friendly old cuss, garrulous in fact. It certainly was tricky getting to him. As you know, he practically owns southern Italy and within his sphere of influence he's managed to ban every form of transport more recent than railroads. TOURISTRADE and the Vatican support him in this.

I took stratoliner to Firenze, and went by rail from there. Less than three hundred miles and it took me all day! The train got into Naples around 1900, and a small branch line (electrified) took me out to Larkin's place at Castellammare. It's a small villa as they go in these parts, but the grounds are extensive. It squats on the lip of the cliff; there's the Bay of Naples in front and Vesuvius steaming away just behind. When I reached the inner sanctum it was dusk, following a bright spring day. The sea was all purple and glassy and

somehow from the height shadows seemed to fall squarely on it, making it look like some kind of diffraction grating. Further over there were the lights of the city, like nothing I remember seeing before. And out on the bay a single-masted ship with white sails—a beer boat, Larkin told me! There was some kind of big bird, too, a golden color, drifting down in wide circles to that purple-checked sea.

All right, I'll save the adjectives. It's only that I know you will be reading this in Detroit, and by God those March winds will be tearing your guts out, and I'm still in Castellammare, in the best guest room at the Villa Campanese. Larkin seems glad of the company, and I know I'm glad of the rest.

He's not the cocksure, arrogant type I'd half expected; he was pleased to hear we were including him in the "Makers of the Modern World" series and, I think, genuinely flattered. He made some very intelligent comments on the Hewison program of last December, and gave me some information on Hewison's part in the Tycho rebellion affair that I've never even heard rumored in Mick's place on a Saturday night. It's all sub rosa, of course, and even you won't get under this rose-bush.

In fact, his remarks were so intelligent that I more or less left it to him what story we should use. There were a lot of possibles. That first business on Venus, the de Passy case, the isotopes boom . . . I thought he might choose one of those, or even something more obscure still. But he didn't. He chose the obvious.

After all, as he confided to me over a liter of *Lacrimae Christi,* Orvieto, '54, it was the only time he could be said, categorically and with hardly any shadow of doubt, to have Saved the World.

Story follows.

When, by an act of justifiable homicide, Max Larkin removed de Passy's daughter and his solitary success in his attempt to create a *homo supremus,* Genetics Division went somewhat off balance. For twenty years the planning staff had been making their preparations for the day when Helen de Passy would put fathomless power into their hands; when, inevitably, the dynamic balance of the managerial society of the twenty-second century would be resolved into a dictatorship of one body, Genetics Division, and one small group of

men. The dissolution of this dream had, to put it mildly, an unsettling effect.

Genetics had always been one of the most severely disciplined of the major organizations; and their discipline, during the years of hopeful preparation for power, had reached fantastic limits. This was now, through a deliberate act of policy by the planning staff, reversed. De Passy had been a lone wolf, and de Passy had brought them within sight of the promised land. Lightning might just possibly strike twice. To encourage its chances their young men of promise were scattered wide and left to their own resources, oiled by frequent and generous applications of the necessary finance.

One of the young men was Harl Parrish.

It is interesting to remember that Parrish only just qualified for a share of the funds that Genetics were, at this stage, pouring around like water. He had a good, but not exceptional degree, and his post-graduate work had merited no more than a cautious—"Might do things: personality unpromising"—from the Director of the Cologne Lab. Anyway, he got the grant. He returned to his native Washington, to a small town between eighty and ninety miles north of Seattle. There, on wooded slopes overlooking the town, Genetics Division built him a small, one-man laboratory.

They didn't quite forget about him. The checks he cashed were entered in the usual files, and so were the laconic monthly reports he sent. It's doubtful if anyone, at that stage, bothered to read them. If they had it is difficult to imagine that even the laxness then current in Genetics Administration could have passed them without action. Max Larkin has a photostat of the first report Harl Parrish sent in. It's headed:

"Some Preliminary Notes on Work in the Evolution of Plant Intelligence."

There have been many sane and level-headed men who devoted their lives to the unraveling of what their contemporaries would certainly have regarded as fantastic lunacy; and who unraveled it. Parrish was not of that type. If the research worker of genius is a fifty-fifty blend of critic and dreamer, Parrish was more like ten-ninety. It's quite clear from his reports that he never got around to any detailed plan of work, or even to any clear view of what he was aim-

ing at and what obstacles lay in his path. Any practical observer would have put his chances of doing anything at all at very close to nil. He tried irradiation—with everything from ordinary light and sound to mesons—chemical impregnation, Lysenko grafting, controlled challenges and inhibitions, and something that reads perilously like an offshoot of Steiner's theosophy. He tackled a range of subjects from pansies to sequoias, without any kind of system. If there had even been a good accountant at Genetics H.Q.—a layman without any pretensions to understanding of the genetics field—Parrish would certainly have been stopped in his first year and put onto a safe, uneventful clerking job. Common sense would have stopped him. And common sense would have been wrong.

For Harl Parrish had one quality, developed to an extraordinary degree, that impregnated every wild scheme he followed with the possibility of success. He could see things when they happened.

That's a poor way of putting it, of course. You might call it, with a finer shade of understanding, the Eureka faculty. The bath water rises by an amount equivalent to the displacing volume. An apple falls, and someone sees why. A mold grows accidentally in a laboratory, and a man notices that around it there is sterility. The events are accidental, but the apprehension is not. Harl Parrish was grotesquely inferior, in almost every way, to Archimedes and Newton and Fleming, but in just this one respect he was their peer—in fact, their master. He muddled away in his small log-cabin laboratory and all he needed was a really fantastic stroke of luck. In due course he had it—and he knew what to do with it.

From his notes, which were sketchy, imprecise and generally woolly, the only thing that emerges clearly is that the plant concerned was originally a magnolia. It grew in a spot at once sheltered and sunny in the garden of the local priest, and Parrish brought a slip back with him one autumn evening after one of his usual strolls, which generally took in vespers, a few drinks in Hanna's Tavern, and a call to discuss gardening with Father Lucas. That is the point of departure, but subsequent events are less clear. Parrish took the green slip of magnolia with him. He possibly froze it, half roasted it, waterlogged it, deprived it of water, packed the roots with radium salts, lashed at it with his small cyclotron, subjected it to ultra-

violet, infra-red and supersonics, grafted a couple of dozen other things onto it—and it's impossible to guess what else. We can't dismiss the possibility that he chanted incantations at it under a waning and waxing moon. He gave it, you might say, his customary workout. Only the plant survived, and this time something worked.

When Parrish first noticed something the plant had been put on one side. It had been potted out in the normal way, and stacked, with a hundred other little pots holding various mutilated and misshapen twigs, in the outbuilding behind his small cottage. It was a lean-to shed, and the only natural light filtered in through a crack between the sloping roof and the walls. When Parrish went in one morning—to get a length of hose he had stacked away there—and switched the fluorescent lighting on, he noticed, of course, that the potted plants were kinked in the direction of the thin shaft of exterior illumination. Simple phototropism. But he stayed in the shed for three or four minutes, examining the hose for perishing, and at the end of that time, as he was on the point of leaving, he glanced at the array of discarded experiments again. And he noticed something else. One of the plants wasn't kinked at all. It was upright.

Put in this way, it seems obvious that Parrish should—as he actually did—have gone across to examine it. But it isn't obvious at all. Acuter, more methodical men than he would never even have noticed the minor deviation in stance of one small plant among more than a hundred. It would have been thrown with the rest into the furnace that periodically took in the deadwood of experiments that had not succeeded. But at this point Parrish's one talent intervened. His mind remembered the array of sloping plants; correlated it with the second vision of one plant standing out of the line of the rest—and the discrepancy clicked. Unusual mobility. He picked out the plant and took it with him back into the laboratory. When he got it there he made routine checks. Among other things he analyzed the soil in the pot. The local earth had a copper percentage around .0004. In this sample there wasn't any copper at all.

It isn't easy for a normal person to put himself inside the mind of a man like Harl Parrish, and it is quite impossible for anyone now to envisage the kind of results Parrish hoped for from his work. "Notes on the Evolution of Plant Intelligence." A lot of his prelimi-

nary work was on mimosas, those strange plants that wither into a tangle of dry spikes at the approach of an intruder but which can be *tamed* to accept the ministrations of one particular hand, of one particular man. Parrish apparently made quite a few mimosa pets during his early months. And he froze them and baked them and flooded them with hard x-rays, and all the rest—but without success. The mimosas died, or stayed just mimosas.

But he had had the experience; the essential experience of treating a plant as though it had an animal's sentience. And he applied that experience now to the strangely mutated magnolia twig. He watered it with a good solution of copper salts, he tried all kinds of fertilizers —tentatively and carefully—on its roots, and he applied a battery of impulses, light and sound and electricity, to its stimulation. The plant thrived. It thrived enormously. And after a time—after quite a short time—Parrish's treatment of it ceased to be a matter of trial and error. There were no more setbacks of the wrong fertilizer, the wrong concentration of copper salts solution, the excessive stimulus. Everything he did contributed positively to the magnolia's increasing luxuriance. It wasn't until much later that he understood why.

The record of his dawning apprehension is interesting. It's all there, in the scrappy monthly reports that no one ever bothered to read.

December 2163:

Concentrating entirely on the magnolia, X 35/7, now. Altogether astonishing degree of mobility in main stem and small branches, now budding well. Originally phototaxic, but recently undeniable responses to my own person. When I entered the laboratory two nights ago the lighting was on—and the magnolia swayed unmistakably in my direction.

This really is astonishing.

Continuing to apply heavy solutions of copper salts. Copper as a trace element obviously isn't enough. It flourishes in a soil with copper above 3,000 p.p.m.

New leaves burgeoning are glossy, vaguely ivy-shaped, deep blue-green in color.

January 2164:

Good leaf growth during month, stem thickened from 1.7 to 5.3 centimeters diameter.

Curious event on the 3rd. Was about to water with the usual copper-nitrates solution when I had the insistent idea of adding alum. Not unusual, but when I had done this and watered the plant there was a peculiar sensation of well-being. Difficult to account for.

Mobility continues.

February 2164:

Three new side branches, eight new leaves. Stem diameter 8.4 centimeters.

Decided to remove X 35/7 from pot in laboratory, and bed out in wood.

Or did I?

March 2164:

Stem diameter 37 centimeters. (!) Side branches over a hundred; leaves uncountable. Around the magnolia, for a matter of ten yards in all directions, every other tree and bush is displaying clear signs of withering.

The Tree explains that it is killing them, because it has to.

Parrish submitted no further reports. And he cashed no more checks. Under anything like normal conditions, even allowing for the laxness over his unusual progress reports, there would have been an investigating party along as soon as the reports stopped and the money began to pile up in Parrish's account. But the chaos at Genetics H.Q. didn't even flicker. And no one bothered to correlate a report from the town of Goldenrod, in the valley below Parrish's hideout, of a strange new vegetation sweeping at a fantastic rate along the hillside.

April was cold that year, after a reasonably bright March. May came in with bursting sunshine over the state of Washington. And on the second of May, Goldenrod broke off all its communications.

The world, of course, woke up with a bang. Telecommunications acted, tentatively at first—the usual junior reporter in a gyro, with-

out even a mobile telecaster. But his report, and the dozen stills he sent, brought full action.

From the air it was still possible to make out some vague outlines of the town—the church spire was lovingly entwined with foliage but its shape could still be discerned, soaring out of the tossing blue-green sea all around it. That sea extended a matter of more than a mile up the valley on either side of the town, and its peripheral expansion was a clearly visible growth of about ten yards an hour. The growth was by running suckers, both above and below ground.

The natural, automatic reaction was of counterattack. Flame throwers were brought up and blasted an avenue several yards into the tangled, burgeoning mass before their effect failed, and the large, glossy, ivy-shaped leaves began to float eagerly, hungrily forward into the very breath of the flame. Acids did not even have any temporary effect; their spray dripped off the smooth, oily foliage to wither the few small plants surviving in the shade of the monster. An experimental electrified fence was simultaneously vaulted and broken by the pushing, blue-green tentacles.

Atomics brought an atom bomb out of stock. When the foliage had advanced another three miles along the valley, they used it. The crater formed was overgrown in less than three hours.

As far as United Chemicals were concerned the prevailing feeling was still, even at this stage, rather one of pique than of serious alarm, an annoyance slightly modified by the fact that World Electrics and Atomics had had even less effect in stopping the plant growth than had their own initial efforts. Director Hewison explained this to Max Larkin, with his usual pompous agitation.

Max said, "Flame, acids, electrocution, and now atom bombs won't touch it. It overgrew the atom crater immediately. I take it we can rule out radioactive spraying as well, then."

Hewison paused in pacing up and down his well-appointed office to stare with bloodshot vision at a recently acquired Jan van Eyck.

He said, "I'll tell you how much that cost me some day, Max. Worth it, too. Worth every penny. Radioactive spraying? Of course it's a waste of time. Atomics are trying it all the same. Everybody's trying everything. Genetics are hopefully plastering the area with fungi. Fungi!"

Max said, "It isn't such a bad idea to try everything." He paused. "By the way, what makes people think it's lethal?"

"Lethal? The plant? Well, damn it, it kills off everything else bigger than a pansy. You've seen the telecasts."

"Yes, plants," Max said patiently. "I was thinking of animal life. Does it strangle rabbits?"

Hewison looked at him. "I don't know." He flicked a switch on his desk. "Telecommunications, Vienna. Get me Nachtvogel. Hans? Can you give us a view of that damned forest at some place where our people aren't bouncing chemicals and germs off it? The north side, perhaps? Thanks."

Movement spun into the screen. The leaves were advancing across rough scrub grass. They waited and saw a hare, its ears laid back, crouched in the path of the advancing tide of blue-shot green. The tide crept over it, and the animal did not move. At a word from Max the telecasting gyro swooped down, almost brushing with its undercarriage the brightly flickering leaves. Something dropped—an old box. There was catapulting movement at the tide's edge, as the hare, scared by the noise of the dropping object, bounded out beyond the compass of plant growth, visibly unharmed.

Max turned away from the screen.

"Well," he said to Hewison. "Well, that's interesting."

Hewison was twisting a small saint, an ivory paper weight, in moody preoccupation. He put it down with care and looked at Max blankly.

"So what? We're not rabbits. What do we live on when that stuff rolls across the wheat belts? How do we run our factories when they're twenty feet deep in those goddamn tendrils? How do we even keep communications open?—though thank God that's not our particular pigeon."

Max smiled. "We don't know, do we, yet? But we can go and have a look. If a hare can run in and out, perhaps a man can, too. It wouldn't do any harm to look at the seat of the trouble. At Parrish's laboratory."

Hewison took hold of the small, delicately carved figure again. His shoulders were hunched in nervousness.

"I'm scared now, Max," he said. "I wasn't before. Seeing pictures

of the stuff rolling on in the face of flame and acids and everything else we put in front of it—that didn't scare me. I don't know why, but it didn't. But seeing it roll across that empty field . . . Do what you think best, Max. Don't waste any time, though. You'll take the stratoliner from Graz. I'll see about it."

"A gyro," Max said firmly. "A small gyro, and I'll run it myself. I don't like any kind of air travel, but they aren't all equally detestable." He paused, on his way out of the elaborately furnished room. "By the way—that painting. It's not a van Eyck, you know. They sold you a pup. Seventeenth century imitation, for my guess."

Hewison shook his head sorrowfully after the retreating figure.

The tide of blue-green was still advancing, at about fifteen yards an hour now. The local U.C. men shepherding Max led him across a ploughed field towards it. A long way over to the left he could see the tiny figures of the fighting party, still futilely messing about with sprays and canisters. Spennythorpe, the local Manager, shook his head.

"You see, Director Larkin—if you'd only take some means of defense with you . . . it's a great responsibility."

"Mr.," Max said, "not Director. Look—can I carry an atom bomb with me? And they've tried atom bombs already. This is a case where there's no future in force. At present, anyway, diplomacy's the only hope. Don't worry, I'm confident enough."

But he wasn't entirely confident as he took the first steps on his own and ducked forward under the towering crest of leaves. It was like plunging into a surf of leaves; he pressed through them, feeling their glossy smoothness against his hands and face like a caress full of deadly warning. The going was very hard. Scrambling over branches that could not have been there a few hours before and were already as thick as his arm, he wondered whether there was any hope at all of getting through to the center. If it were like this all the way . . . He began calculating how far he could go in and still have a chance of getting back. The thought that behind him the sea was still relentlessly spreading outwards was no cheerful reflection.

The change was startling and almost clear-cut. The tangle thinned, thinned rapidly, and he broke through into a strange spaciousness. In front of him there was a glade, and beyond it others, to the very

limit of vision. Soft, blue-green light filtered through the tangle of leaves that hid the sky some thirty feet above his head. This spreading canopy was supported by more or less regularly spaced columnar trunks, between thirty and forty feet apart. He saw how the branches arched out from the main trunks to meet and support the high arches of leaves. It was like some underground limestone grotto, but here there was the warmth of life rather than the damp chill of stone. On the floor of the glades small plants apparently flourished, and he saw traces of animals, and heard the high fluting of birds.

From that point he went ahead easily enough. It was about six miles to the center, and it took him just over an hour and a half. He was looking for the town, but he found its inhabitants first.

A lot of them were resting in what he first thought were artificial hammocks, but later recognized as elaborately intertwined constructions of leaves and small branches growing out of the main stems of the tree-columns. It gave him a shock to realize that the men could not have constructed these; the tree itself had provided them.

Others of the townspeople were strolling about, or watching an energetic few who were playing a scratch game of baseball in one of the glades. They were mostly stripped down to shorts; some were naked. They didn't show much surprise, or even interest, at Max's appearance. One man called from a hammock:

"Hi, there. What's it like outside?"

"Nervous," Max said. "Everybody's nervous. But you don't look worried."

The man considered this for a moment before laughing.

"What have I got to worry about?" he said. "I callused my hands as a carpenter for twenty years. The big boys—the Managers and Directors—they may be nervous. It's different for ordinary joes. I never had any fancy uniform or office boys to kick around. I'm not losing anything."

"Are you still interested in eating?" Max asked gently.

"Eating!" The laughter was immediate this time. "I never ate so good. Second on the right for the canteen. This Tree provides more kinds of fruit than they used to bottle sauces. And drink, too. It's the life of Riley, brother, the life of Riley."

It was a typical reaction. He heard the same from others, especial-

ly the group clustered around the "canteen". Three or four columns together were thickly laden with a profuse variety of fruits of different shapes and colors. Max helped himself to some, and sampled them thoughtfully. The tastes were all new and, in their different ways, satisfying. One fruit was full of a clear, green liquid that quenched thirst remarkably well. He was throwing away the empty husk when he became aware of someone beside him who was as incongruous as he himself was in the half-naked throng. It was a tall, stooped man of about forty, wearing a priest's tunic.

Max said, "It tastes all right to me. What's your opinion, Father?"

Father Lucas pulled at his collar. It was very warm in here, Max reflected. Father Lucas said, "I thought at first it might be an improvement. From my point of view I mean, naturally. I've always felt that a lot of good time was wasted in work that could be used for worship. But now—well, look at them. They're good neither for man, beast, nor God. It's only been a week and already they are almost too idle even to play. And I don't notice any particular improvement in their characters. They remain quite humanly idle and dissolute and vicious."

Max said, "I'm glad I found you, Father. I think you're probably the man who can take me to find Harl Parrish."

On the way up the hill he explained to the priest that, from the evidence of his reports which had now at last been studied, Parrish was almost certainly the author of what was taking place. Father Lucas nodded, comprehending.

"It's very likely so. He hasn't been in town for a few weeks. I missed seeing him at Sunday vespers. I have been up to his shack a time or two. There aren't any bearings now, of course, apart from the lie of the land, but I think we should be close to it."

They were close to something and, set round by a thicker circle of soaring trunks, they found it. It lifted from the ground in the center of the circle, more than five feet across, its glorious, waxed whiteness pulsating to strange vibrations—a tremendous, leafless flower. It had no scent, but as they approached they were aware of its presence in more ways than by sight. Their heads seemed to beat in tune with the odd, rippling rhythms of the gigantic blossom. They

stared at it, bewildered. They were still staring when Parrish came from behind it and approached them.

In his face, Max noticed, there was a striking absence of the ordinary human quality of pride. He looked rather white and strained, but intensely humble and selfless. Here was the acolyte, attending the shrine.

He said, quite sanely: "Father Lucas! I'm very glad to see you." He looked inquiringly at Max.

Max showed him the small badge that was his passport.

"United Chemicals," Parrish said. "But why not my own outfit?"

"At present," Max said cheerfully, "they are more concerned with trying out their collection of bugs to see if one of them won't bite this tree of yours where it hurts."

Parrish nodded. "I know about that. And the flame throwers and acids and the rest. It's a waste of time, of course. But the Tree doesn't mind. It realizes that people can't be made to understand right away."

Max said gently, "Understand what?"

"That the world's great age begins anew," Parrish said triumphantly. He looked at Father Lucas. "That heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam like wrecks of a dissolving dream."

"Shelley . . ." murmured Father Lucas. "And leave, since naught so bright may live . . . What precisely is going to happen in our newer Athens?"

"The thing to realize," Parrish explained, "is that practically nothing is beyond the power of the Tree to achieve. And it is not hostile to men—quite the reverse. It wants to help them. Food and shelter—in abundance. It has a beautiful control of its own metabolism." His voice rose to enthusiasm as the scientist reinforced the disciple. "All that any other plant ever did by accident of growth and evolution, the Tree can perform by its conscious will. All that, and more. Misery and want are banished from the planet."

"Want, possibly," Father Lucas said. "Misery? . . . I suppose this green gloom is a necessary evil. This tree of yours can't spare the sunshine?"

"A very temporary necessary evil," Parrish said. "An umbrella while those fools toss their acids and lighted matches about. When

the Tree is world-wide, though . . . there will be open spaces for men. They'll have sunshine, too. Watch. It's about time."

Following his gesture, they looked up. As though at a command, the vast towering canopy of leafy branches swept outwards and the bright vertical shafts of the sun's rays plumbed down to the small group, and to the thirsty white petals of the great flower. For more than a minute it drank in the warmth and light, before the umbrella closed over them again.

"It generally lasts longer," Parrish said. "A gyro was coming."

They heard, reinforcing his words, the steady aerial hum, louder and then dying away as the patrol gyro passed over.

"Your communication?" Max said. "Telepathic?"

Parrish nodded. "A *rapport*. It takes time. But eventually everyone will have it. We will all live in communion with the Tree."

"That," Father Lucas said briskly, "is ordinary blasphemy, and I know how to deal with it."

Before the other two realized what he was about, he had walked across to the flower, and was tearing at the great, waxy petals with his hands. The white translucent substance shredded away as he savaged it. Harl Parrish cried out in grief and anger and started towards him, but before he could do anything they felt the deeper throb of para-sensory pain in the air about them, and saw the tentacular branches drop like snakes to tighten about the priest and lift him, struggling helplessly, into the air. And they saw the branches rip his limbs from his struggling body and toss the mutilated, bloody corpse to one side like a fly dropped from a swatter.

Max said evenly: "He was a good man, Parrish. He was a friend of yours once. He believed in man's independence and freedom and he's gone to his death for it. Well?"

He kept his eyes on the strained white mask of Parrish's face. Parrish said in a choked voice:

"Why did he do it? Why did he have to do it?"

Max said: "If the Tree rules this planet for fifty centuries men will still come and do the same thing. There always will be men who put the race's freedom first. Parrish, the Tree can never succeed in bribing men with free food and drink and never-ending leisure to barter away their independence. They will fight against it, and it will have

to fight back. You can't be on both sides in this business."

Harl Parrish said, "I only wanted people to be happy. The Tree . . . It all seemed simple enough."

"It is," Max said. "Simple enough, but not in the way you thought. Man or the Tree, Parrish—there's no middle way."

Parrish looked in agony at the flower.

"I'm human," he said. "You're right, I'm a human being."

"Quick!" Max said urgently. "Is there any way? You made it; you know how it thinks, what it needs, what it fears. What—"

As he was talking, Parrish had looked up. Thoughts were forming in his mind, but the Tree gave him no time to utter them. One branch came down like the crack of a whip and swiftly and efficiently broke his neck.

Max stayed gazing at the flower for some minutes before he left the glade. He left the two bodies lying there, and began the long walk back to the outer world. At the foot of the hill the townsmen called to him to stay and rest, but he walked on. He forced his way through the tangled branches at the periphery of the Tree's domain at last, and reached the open air. The tide had advanced another hundred yards by that time.

Soon after dusk the preparations began. All night the heavy equipment rolled into place. At dawn the air was heavy with the noise of gyro engines.

The thick black smoke belched out from the great circle around the limit of the Tree's advance, and from the circling gyros overhead. It lay like a deep, woolly blanket, hiding the glossy, blue-green leaves, stretching all over the too-symmetrical foliage, and beyond it, far beyond it. All day the smoke poured out, and all the next day, and the next day, for weeks and months. Until, at last, the smoke stopped, and as light seeped back to reveal the valley and the hillsides, it was clear that the Tree had long been dead.

End note appended:

Well, there it is, Dave.

I asked him how he knew—the Tree killed Parrish before he could say anything. That, he explained, was a good enough clue in itself.

There was a way, a simple and effective way, or the Tree would not have acted so swiftly. As for what it was—Parrish's instinctive glance towards the sky was sufficient. The magnolia twig originally, remember, had been notably phototaxic. Confirmation from the observers outside that the advance had invariably ceased by night was all that was needed. United Chemicals provided a never-ending night—locally.

It must have been a grim walk back, with Larkin trying not to think of the obvious, the essential clue, aware of the Tree's ability to communicate extrasensorily, and hoping it would not be able to establish sufficient *rapport* before he got out of its clutches. Had it had more experience of human psychology, of course, it would have guessed what Larkin might have made of Parrish's last gesture. But in its experience human beings communicated by speech. Parrish had not been allowed to speak; therefore everything was fine.

There was one more surprise for me. We had had a good dinner, with a Tokay like liquid gold and a Friuli aquavita afterwards. He told me he had something to show me. He led the way—he's a bit doddery now, of course—out through the garden at the back and into a kind of covered courtyard, about fifty feet square and some fifteen feet high. There were no windows, or any other break apart from the entrance door. It was lit artificially. It was like a box.

"It's safe enough here," he said. "Solid concrete for twenty feet all round the roots. I ration its nourishment, and its light. When I die the door will be locked, and it will die within a week without light or food."

At the center of the courtyard, from the white concrete, the Tree in miniature rose from a small oasis of earth. There was even a white, waxy blossom, but less than two inches across. It was very harmless and a little pathetic.

"I took a cutting," Larkin explained.

He went over and stroked the small blossom, as though it were a pet animal. He looked at me humorously.

"I come in here a lot," he said. "I bring a chair in. We get on well. We have some fine talks together."

Off the record, of course, Dave. Right off the record.

by Bob Tucker

The Tourist Trade

There were four of them, Judy told her parents — no, five, counting the woman stuck in the wall. . . .

JUDY HAD climbed to her place at the breakfast table that morning and announced the presence of a ghost in her room the previous night, a good-looking man ghost who had courteously asked if she were having a nice time.

And Judy's mother, being a sensible, sane American citizen, said nonsense child, there is no such thing as a ghost.

"Well, then," Judy demanded, "who was the man in my bedroom last night, huh?"

Mother looked up from the toast, startled.

"A man, baby?"

"Yes mama. A good-looking man, gooder-looking even than daddy, and he had on a brown uniform like, only it wasn't a soldier's uniform of course but just a uniform."

"A man—with a uniform?"

"Yes mama. A nice man, you know."

"No," Mama contradicted, "I don't know. Are you *sure* you saw a man in your room last night?"

"Sure mama. He was a ghost, a man ghost."

"*Oh,* Judy! Those ghosts again. . . . I've asked you time and again to stop that! There is no such thing as a ghost."

"Well, maybe not mama, but this man come riding in right through my wall on a motor scooter sort of, and he stood up and made a speech like that man said at the museum and he asked me if I was having a nice time."

"All that? Judy!"

"Yes mama. And I told him yes and he said, that's nice, and he set down again and rode the scooter right across my room and went right through my other wall."

"Judy, stop it! You were dreaming."

"Yes mama. The motor scooter didn't make any noise though and he had a uniform on."

"All right, baby. Forget it, darling."

Judy didn't forget it; she filed the matter away in whatever storage cabinet children have for accumulating knowledge and experiences temporarily unclassifiable. She filed the matter away, somewhat, until that evening and a new bedtime. Scarcely fifteen minutes after climbing the stairs to bed, she was back down again.

Daddy was hunched in a chair reading a mystery book, fighting off the interfering noise of the radio. Mama was listening to the radio and haphazardly working on a jigsaw puzzle. Judy paused in the doorway of the living room, her pajamas still unmussed, a robe trailing in one hand.

"*Now* what do you want, baby? You should have been asleep ten minutes ago. . . ."

"That man ghost is back again."

"Oh, now Judy! Don't start that again."

"Well mama, he is, and on top of that he's got some people with him this time, and they're all riding in—"

"Judy!"

"Yes mama?"

"Up to bed."

"Yes mama." The girl turned and slowly climbed the steps. The last of her trailing footsteps sounded on the stairs and presently the bedroom door slammed in its characteristic manner. Mother sighed and looked across the room for help.

"Donald, you've got to *do* something. That child has ghosts on her mind; all I hear is ghosts, ghosts, ghosts. I'm worried about it. Do you think she's been listening to the radio too much?"

Donald wearily raised his eyes from the book. "All kids go through that, forget about it. She's just imaginative, that's all."

"But *such* an imagination—it isn't healthy."

"Oh, bosh. Keep it up and she'll grow up to be an actress, or a writer or something. Listen—" He paused as the opening sound of Judy's bedroom door came to them. The approaching footsteps padded slowly down the stairs.

Judy paused timidly in the doorway, glancing from one parent to the other.

"It's getting late, Judy," daddy spoke up. "Those ghosts again?"

"Yes daddy."

"Won't let you sleep, I suppose?"

"No daddy."

"How many of them, do you think?"

Judy beamed. "Four of them, no five I guess, counting the woman stuck in the wall only she's kinda fuzzy and you can't see her very good. And the man in the uniform."

"Oh, a uniform, eh? And what's *he* doing?"

"He's showing my room to the rest of them and he drives the scooter everybody rides in and he's telling them about my furniture and my dolls and things. Daddy, he don't like it very much."

"Now, really!" Louise broke in.

"Wait a minute, Louise, I'll handle this." He turned his attention to his daughter. "He didn't like your furniture, eh Judy? How do you know that?"

"I could tell by the way he talked, daddy. He said it was Millerya or something and he waved his hand and looked down his nose like you do when you don't like something. Like it wasn't much good, you know. . . ."

"Sure, I know. Millerya, huh? Well, that's too bad. *We* like it, and if he doesn't, he can just lump it, isn't that what you say? What are they going to do next?"

"He wanted to know if there was anybody living in the house besides me."

"Oh, he did, eh? Well, you should have told him we were down here."

"I did daddy. And the man in the uniform said for me to come down and tell you they were here."

"I see." He nodded wisely and prepared to wrap it up. "Well, I hate to disappoint your ghost, Judy, but neither your mother or

myself feels like climbing the stairs to meet him right now. Will you tell him that for me?"

"Sure thing daddy."

"All right. Good night, Judy."

Judy climbed the stairs at a brisk trot and the bedroom door slammed in its usual fashion. It was opened again and Judy trotted back down just as briskly. She put her head into the living room.

"Daddy?"

"Uh . . . what?" He came up from the depths of the book.

"The ghost says you had better come up there or else."

"Indeed! Or else what?"

"Or else he'll report you."

Donald slammed the book to the floor. Judy jumped in alarm.

"Well daddy, he did, he did!" the girl cried.

"Judy—you get right back up those stairs and tell that ghost I'm *not* coming up to meet him. Not until he plays *Yankee Doodle* on a saxophone. Get that?"

"Yes daddy."

"All right then, get moving. And good night!"

"Good night daddy." The young feet retracing the path up the stairs and the young hands giving the bedroom door a thumping slam. After that the silence from the second floor was a welcome thing.

"There," Donald said in triumph. "I told you I'd handle her. Tact. That's all it takes, tact." He dropped into the overstuffed chair and sought his place in the mystery novel.

From Judy's bedroom came the loud, blaring sound of a saxophone tearing into *Yankee Doodle.*

Donald jumped from the chair and hurled the book across the room, narrowly missing a vase. Removing his belt from his trousers in one angry jerk, he sped for the stairs and bounded upward, two steps at a time. His wife shut her eyes and tried to shut her ears after the bedroom door opened and slammed shut again. The blaring of the saxophone ceased. Nervously, she twiddled a piece of the jigsaw puzzle in her fingers and waited for the blows to fall.

Instead, Donald came down the steps and paused in the doorway.

"Louise—"

"Yes, Donald?"

"The ghost wants you to come up there too."

"Donald!"

"But he insists. He said he wanted to exhibit the whole blamed family, and for you to get up there toot-sweet or he'd report us all. Better come along, Louise."

And he turned to mount the staircase.

"Ah, at last," the uniformed gentleman exclaimed. He turned to address the people waiting behind him, all seated in a low motor conveyance.

"This is a complete family unit of the twentieth century," he announced with evident satisfaction. "They spring from a race of aborigines inhabiting the North American continent from about the fifteenth century through the thirty-third. At the stage of their development you see here, they lived together as a closely-knit family unit in dwelling places they called *houses,* which is a type of building containing many small cells similar to this one. Usually each member of the unit sleeps in a separate cell but they live together in the remainder of those making up the *house.*

"Notice the male. At this early stage of history he has already assumed the place of head of his family unit and is fond of exhibiting various mental and physical characteristics to identify himself as the leader, or chief. Look closely at his face and you will see hair, or fuzz growing. This was known as a *beard* and was permitted to grow to assert independence. These early men were extremely stubborn, as you noted a moment ago when it was necessary to use a musical instrument of the twentieth century to summon him from his cell."

"Go away," Donald said to the uniformed man, "you're bothering us."

"Earlier in the rise of their race, as you will soon see when we move along to the next stop, the aborigines had not yet learned the use of tools and were of course unable to erect buildings such as this one. During that distant period they lived in natural caves, squatting over continual fires for protection from the elements, for warmth, and for cooking. During the present period you see here

they had found a means of moving the fires indoors for both warmth and cooking, and also developed a few primitive instruments to assist them in eating. Holding raw food in the fingers has almost vanished in the year before you."

"Well, I like that!" Louise exclaimed.

"G'wan, beat it," Donald chimed in. "It's the kid's bedtime. Shove off."

"This race," the smartly uniformed man continued, "were called Indians, or Americans, the two terms being interchangeable. Sections, or tribes, existed among them and each tribe adopted the name of some patron saint, protective god or robber baron to whom they paid monetary and honorary tribute. Their tribes sometimes bore colorful names like Ohio, Dogpatch, Jones, Republican, and so forth."

"You're a radical," Donald exclaimed. "Now get out of here or I'll put the dog on you!"

"Not too much is known of their social cultures because the various tribes were always warring upon each other, making historical surveys hazardous and the gathering of information extremely difficult. We will make one more stop in this era to observe a gathering of the wise men of the tribes, and there you will see laws and customs being enacted, taxes collected, and so forth. Afterwards, we shall move a bit further along for a quick glimpse of this family's forefathers, and perhaps if we are fortunate we shall see them hunting in the forests with primitive weapons. During that stage of the tour I must remind you to keep your protective shields closed at all times, for occasionally stray bolts from their weapons may drop among us." He paused, and turned to move a small lever.

The conveyance began to move across the room, drawing the misty lady from the confines of the wall to give her a solid, human appearance. The uniformed man cast a glance over his shoulder.

"And so we say good-by to the colorful, romantic twentieth century with its many tribes, its primitive peoples and its quaint customs." He turned to stare at Donald, directing a low-voiced order at the dumfounded man. "And see that you get here on time after this, chum. No more of that silly saxophone business."

The conveyance wheeled across the room and vanished into the

opposite wall, the lady in the rear seat turning for a last amused look at the quaint mill-era furniture. Her face faded and the visitors were gone.

"Donald—" his wife quavered.

"They can't do that to me," Donald roared. "I'm a taxpayer! I'll see my precinct committeeman about this!"

"Wasn't he a nice man, daddy?"

Daddy correctly reasoned that the nice, uniformed man and his strange conveyance of ghostly passengers would be back on the following night. He readied himself accordingly.

A few minutes before Judy's usual bedtime the nose of the vehicle appeared from one wall of the bedroom and the uniformed guide could be seen rising from his seat, preparatory to spouting his lecture on the twentieth-century family unit. He solidified and glanced about the room, noting the absence of Donald's wife and child.

"Come, come, now," he said with displeasure. "Bring in the remainder of your family. We have a nice crowd today."

"I've got a surprise for you," Donald replied softly.

"Indeed?" said the guide. "What?"

"This!" Donald cried, and brought from behind him a double-barreled shotgun. He raised the weapon and fired both barrels at the crowded car. Plaster fountained from the opposite wall and the bedroom window crashed down in shards.

The guide shook his head. "For shame! Please call the family—" he reached behind him to pick up a saxophone—"or must I perform another tune?

"This," he said to the watching tourists, "is a male of the twentieth century. You have just witnessed a primitive fireworks display used by these people to welcome visitors to their land or to celebrate special holidays dedicated to their gods. It would be a generous gesture on our part to show this man we appreciate the display he has prepared for us. Early peoples, you know, thrive on flattery and attention." He broke into a polite applause and the tourists seated behind him took it up. Someone pitched a few coins.

Donald hurled the gun to the floor and stamped on it.

"The twentieth-century man is now beginning his dance of wel-

come, a tribal ritual which has come down to him from the campfires of his ancestors who roamed the forests still hundreds of years away. I hold in my hand a musical instrument of this age called a saxophone, and presently I will blow a little tune which will summon his mate and child from the nether regions of the building in which they dwell. . . ."

Donald kept trying. On the following night he had laboriously strung a length of hose from the second-floor bathroom to the bedroom, and as the visitors emerged from the wall—a rather thin crowd this particular trip—he attempted to douse them with a strong stream of water. The water squirted through the visitors and splashed down the cracked wall on the opposite side of the room.

"This," said the guide, "is a twentieth-century male. He is welcoming us to his dwelling place with a water ritual designed to wash away the evil spirits which he fears may hamper our coming. When he has thoroughly cleansed the walls of his dwelling and made the unit safe for us, he will begin his dance of welcome and we will be expected to show our appreciation by applause or small gifts and coins. Afterward, by making notes on this instrument in my hand, the remainder of his family will approach. Now, note the quaint furniture of the—"

In an aside as he was leaving, the guide confided to Donald, "Keep it up, chum. You put on the best show on my entire run. We're getting good word-of-mouth advertising."

Donald kept it up. He tried stink bombs, which succeeded only in forcing him and his family out of the house; he brought in a radio, a phonograph, several automobile horns and a borrowed siren in an effort to drive away the tourists from the future by a sheer wall of noise, and succeeded only in blasting his own eardrums; he turned a swarm of bees loose in the room and wound up with numerous stings; he was forcefully prevented by his wife from piling the furniture and the bedding in the room's center and setting fire to it as the guide and his conveyance appeared through the wall.

"This is a man of the twentieth century. He is preparing to welcome us by setting fire to those numerous small red objects you see lying about the floor of the dwelling unit. Presently the red objects will explode with a tremendous repercussion, driving away evil spirits

lurking here—he believes—and making our visit a safe one. Now, please note—"

A red-eyed, haggard man stood on a street corner, leaning dazedly against the lamp post. His wife had left him and returned to her mother, declaring that she and their child would return to that horrible house when—and only when—he had rid Judy's room of those horrible visitations once and for all. He hadn't reported for work for over a week and his job was in danger; he hadn't slept for the same length of time and his health was in similar jeopardy. His friends avoided him, believing he had fallen into the clutches of the demon rum. All in all, he was a sad specimen of twentieth-century man. And he was on the mental verge of ending it all when the bus went by.

Someone babbling in a loud voice caught his attention and he glanced up, cringing instinctively at the sight of a rubberneck bus wheeling along the street. Sick at heart, he turned his back to discover passers-by gazing curiously back at the bus.

Donald opened his eyes wide.

The low-bodied motor conveyance began its nightly appearance through the wall, and Donald saw the guide rising from his seat to address the tourists behind him. Donald folded his arms and waited. The entire vehicle came into view, well-crowded, and stopped.

The uniformed guide looked at him inquiringly.

"Pretty quiet around here, chum. Can't you whip up something?"

"I certainly can, mister," Donald told him. "Just you wait right here." He crossed to the bedroom door and flung it open, jumping back to avoid the mob. "Here they are folks," he shouted, *"as* advertised." Holding out his hat, he admitted the crowd into the room, watching carefully to see that each dropped a coin into the receptacle.

"Real, genuine ghosts, folks, the only haunted house in Libertyville! Each night and every night on the hour this ghostly crew rides out of that wall yonder and parades across the room. Step right up to them folks, try to touch them, try to feel them. You can't! Come right in and meet my ghosts."

The small bedroom was suddenly filled with awed, milling people

crowding forward to gaze at the ghostly conveyance. Curious hands reached out to touch the future tourists, only to grasp the empty air. Flash guns popped as newspaper photographers snapped what they hoped would be pictures of the visitation. A representative of the American Ethereal Society pinched his glasses to his nose and held a lighted match to the ghostly guide's natty uniform, testing to see if flaming gauze netting would reveal a trickery. The guide stared at the flashbulbs, slightly taken aback.

"Come now," he said, "this will be reported."

"He talks, he walks, he plays a saxophone!" Donald shouted above the din. "A real, genuine ghost, folks, step right up and take a look at the real article!"

"Where in hell did they come from?" a reporter wanted to know, brazenly pushing two fingers into and through the disapproving face of the guide. "I'm damned if they scare me!"

"He's a legend connected with the house," Donald explained glibly. "According to the story, this fellow in the uniform was an eccentric inventor who used to live here but he finally killed himself. The story says he was a 4-F but he wore that uniform to ease his conscience; he always claimed to be inventing war machines for the government. See all those people behind him?"

Necks craned to look at the tourists.

"They were *murdered!*" Donald whispered hoarsely. "According to the legend, this crazy inventor murdered them all and sealed their bodies up in the wall. And now, every night, he lines up all the ghosts on this crazy machine he imagines he invented and rides them through the walls. . . ."

A fresh onslaught of people in the doorway drew his attention. Snatching up the hatful of jingling coins, Donald fought his way to the door.

"Step right in, folks, the ghosts are here! Come right in and meet genuine ghosts in the only haunted house in town! Each night and every night—"

Donald's wife and child returned home the following weekend. Judy was installed in a new bedroom, and in due time developed an intense interest in Hopalong Cassidy.

by Rumer Godden

GHOST OF MR. KITCAT

There is no explanation," said Eleanor.

NO ONE in the family ever spoke of it to Gil, though once or twice Lucille privately asked Eleanor, "What *was* it about Mr. Kitcat, Mother? How *can* you explain it?"

"There is no explanation," said Eleanor.

Gil Mulready was an author; he was a journalist as well, an untidy, irritable, irascible, highly nervous, blasphemous man of thirty-five; they called him Gil Blast. He was tall and thin, with dark curly hair, and horn-rimmed glasses and nervous, deep lines on his forehead.

His wife, Eleanor, was a calm young woman with pale red hair. She was the axis of Gil's world and at the same time remained his pole star. They had two children, Lucille who was nine, and little Gil who was six, and a fat black spaniel called Boly. They lived in the upper half of a pleasant house in Westminster.

Eleanor came down to breakfast one morning to find the other three already there. Gil was reading out of the paper. "Foster," read Gil. "Fothersgil. Formby. Friar."

"Too muffled," said Lucille.

"Geddes. Gillington-Tudor. Guys."

"Too posh," said little Gil.

"What in the world are you doing?" asked Eleanor as she sat down and picked up the coffee pot. "Wipe your mouth, Gilly. Gil dear, your tie is undone."

"We are looking for names," said Lucille. "For a name in Dad's

Reprinted by permission of the author.

story. It's for a little old man with tinted spectacles and a grey beard."

"Like a goat's," said little Gil.

"I look down the Deaths column," explained Gil, "and that's how I find my names."

"Down the Deaths column?" Eleanor paused with the coffee pot in her hand. "No, Gil," she said slowly, "I don't think you ought to do that."

"Why not?"

"It . . . doesn't seem . . . reverent."

"That's sheer superstition."

"All the same . . ."

"They have finished with their names, haven't they?" said Gil. "They don't need them any more."

"No . . . but . . ."

"Well then?"

"They still belong to them," said Eleanor. "I think they might object."

"How can they object? They are dead."

"Yes . . . but . . ." and she said calmly, but with a curious reality, "you don't know what you might start."

"Nonsense! What putrid damn nonsense!" shouted Gil. "Don't ever let me hear you talk like that again."

"You must do as you like," said Eleanor, passing him his cup. "I only know I wouldn't."

Her words seemed to float over the breakfast table. Gil glared and spilt his coffee as he put it down. He picked up the paper and went on reading it.

"Hetherington. Ingles. Jones. Jones. Judge. Kelly. Here's the very name," he said. "Listen, brats. Kitcat." He read it out again. "Kitcat. I think that's got him. Mr. Kitcat."

It was a day or two later when Gil was coming home in the tube that he noticed a little man sitting opposite him; he was a neat elderly little man with patent leather shoes, grey spats, speckled trousers, grey waistcoat, black coat, grey gloves and an old-fashioned, square-looking black hat. He carried an umbrella and a paper of

roses. He had rosy cheeks and cut whiskers, and he wore spectacles that, as he turned his head, seemed to Gil to be colored faintly in amber. He had a little beard combed into a point; as Gil looked at him he had a feeling he had seen that beard before.

The little man followed Gil out of the train and up the stairs and past the ticket collector. He followed Gil out of the station and walked behind him down the road swinging his umbrella and looking as if he enjoyed the sunny air. He turned behind Gil into Gil's own road and disappeared a few doors down.

Gil walked slowly back to look, impelled by some reason he could not explain. It was a small block of flats where a porter could be seen standing behind glass doors. There was a double notice board in the shape of an arrowhead outside. *"Edward's Chambers.* Odd!" said Gil. "I never noticed them before."

Next day the little man was there, sitting opposite Gil in the tube, following him out of the station, turning into his road and disappearing into Edward's Chambers. The day after, Gil left early. The little man was there in the tube. The whole week, at whatever time Gil came home, the little man was there. At the end of the week, he changed and came home by bus. The little man boarded the bus at the next stop, climbed upstairs and sat down on the seat behind Gil.

That evening Eleanor first had an inkling that something was wrong. Lucille knelt up on the hearthrug where she had been tickling Boly and asked, "Did you ever write that story, Dad? The one about Mr. Kitcat?"

"What in the name of blazes and thunder is that to do with you?" exploded Gil.

"Gil *dear!"*

"This house," shouted Gil, "is nothing but a blazing bear garden of children and dogs."

"Two children and one dog," said Lucille, her voice trembling. "And one child is in bed and the other's going there now. So there."

Gil sat with his head dropped in his hands, pushing his glasses up and down wretchedly. "It's nonsense. It's impossible," said Gil.

Presently he heaved himself out of his chair and went upstairs to Lucille.

The next day he dawdled behind the little man and followed him home. He waited outside the Chambers until the porter came out. "Who is that gentleman?" he asked the porter. "The little old gentleman who went in just now."

"A Mr. Kitcat," said the porter. "A nice gentleman."

Gil did not go home. He turned back to the station and presently found himself in a café sitting on a rush chair at a rush table picking flowers to pieces from a green pottery bowl.

"Yes, please?" the waitress in a green overall was saying. "Please don't do that to our flowers. Yes, please?"

"Some strong black coffee," said Gil.

That night Eleanor heard Gil in the bathroom.

"What is it, Gil?"

"Isn't there a damn blasted thing in this putrid medicine cupboard?"

"What do you want?"

"I can only find kids' muck."

"What do you want?"

"Aspirin. I can't sleep," said Gil.

It was the next day that Mr. Kitcat spoke to him. Gil tried now to get away quickly in the crowd but that evening he was held, pinned behind two women with two prams. Mr. Kitcat was on him before Gil saw.

"Good evening," said Mr. Kitcat. That was all he said, but Gil jumped as though a hornet had stung him.

"Excuse me, my dear sir," said Mr. Kitcat. He had the voice that Gil had given him, slight and careful and a little mincing. "My dear sir . . ."

"No. I can't. I won't," spluttered Gil. The woman in front of him turned her pram neatly to the wall, nearly bringing him down as he tried to edge past her.

"One moment," said Mr. Kitcat. "I feel I ought to say . . ."

"No!" cried Gil in panic. "No!"

"I only wanted to tell you," said Mr. Kitcat, ruffled, "I only wanted to tell you that I think you've forgotten, sir, to tie your tie."

That evening Lucille came to Gil's desk and knelt on the chair and looked at him solemnly. "Do you think it's *possible,*" she said, "for

a ghost to give you bulls' eyes?" And she held out a little paper bag.

"Who—gave you bulls' eyes?"

"Mr. Kitcat. It's not nonsense," said Lucille quickly before he could speak. "Gilly and I were selling Queen Alexandra roses. We had to do the right side of the road. The porter took us up and he, Mr. Kitcat, came to the door. He *is* Mr. Kitcat, a little old man with the spectacles and the beard. His card was on the door. 'Mr. Kitcat.' No initial. Gilly saw it and so did I. He gave us the bulls' eyes."

Gil went to Eleanor. He fidgeted round the room.

"Yes, Gil?"

"Why are the children allowed to go peddling things in the street?" he burst out.

Eleanor put down her sewing. "Why don't you sit down and tell me all about it," she suggested. "Well, you needn't really tell me, Gil. I know."

Two days later Mr. Kitcat disappeared. He was not in the tube. He was not on the stairs, nor in the street. He did not come behind Gil down the road and he did not disappear into the Chambers. The next night he was not there either. Gil bought a bunch of jonquils at the corner. He was not there the night after that, nor the night after that.

Gil stopped and asked the porter. "I—hope—Mr. Kitcat isn't ill?"

"Mr. Kitcat? Mr. Kitcat's gone."

"Gone?"

"Gone," said the porter. "Mr. Kitcat's gone."

Gil was watching Eleanor. "Eleanor," he said, "this is something to do with you."

"Where did you get him from, Gil?" said Eleanor.

"From the Deaths column of the *Times*. Eleanor, what did you do?"

"It cost four guineas," said Eleanor dreamily, "but I think it was worth it—for our peace of mind. I think that's worth almost anything, don't you? What did I do, Gil? I put him back among the Births."

Half a million people watched the great ship take off . . . and not one guessed the incredible secret of its crew!

SURVIVAL SHIP

by Judith Merril

HALF a million people actually made the round trip to Space Station One that day, to watch the takeoff in person. And back on Earth a hundred million video screens flashed the picture of Captain Melnick's gloved hand waving a dramatic farewell at the port, while the other hand slowly pressed down the lever that would fire the ship out beyond the orbit of the artificial satellite, past the Moon and the planets, into unknown space.

From Station, Earth and Moon, a hundred million winged wishes added their power to the surge of the jets, as a rising spiral of fire inside the greatest rocket tower ever built marked the departure of the thrice-blessed ship, *Survival.* In the great churches, from pole to pole, services were held all day, speeding the giant vessel on its way, calling on the aid of the Lord for the Twenty and Four who manned the ship.

At mountain-top telescopes a dozen cameras faithfully transmitted the messages of great unblinking glass eyes. Small home sets and massive pulpit screens alike looked to the sky to follow the flare dimming in the distance, to watch the man-made star falling away.

Inside the great ship, Melnick's hand left the firing lever, then began adjusting the chin-rest and the earphones of the acceleration couch. The indicator dashboard, designed for prone eye-level, leaped into focus. Securing the couch straps with the swift competence of habit, the Captain intently watched the sweep of the big second-hand around the takeoff-timer, aware at the same time that green lights were beginning to glow at the other end of the board. The indicator reached the first red mark.

"The show's over, everybody. We're in business!" The mike built into the chin-rest carried the Captain's taut voice all over the ship. "Report, all stations!"

"Number One, all secure!" Melnick mentally ticked off the first green light, glowing to prove the astrogator's couch was in use.

"Number two, all secure!"

"Number three" . . . "four" . . . "five." The rhythmic sing-song of pinpoint timing in takeoff was second nature by now to the whole crew. One after another, the green lights glowed for safety, punctuating the litany, and the gong from the timer put a period neatly in place after the final "All secure!"

"Eight seconds to blackout," the Captain's voice warned. "Seven . . . six . . . stand by." The first wave of acceleration shock reeled into twenty-four helmet-sheathed heads on twenty-four individually designed headrests. "Five . . ." *It's got to work,* Melnick was thinking, fighting off unconsciousness with fierce intensity. "Four . . ." *It's got to . . . got to . . .* "Three . . ." *got to . . . go to . . .* "Two . . ." *got to . . .*

At the Space Station, a half-million watchers were slowly cleared from the giant takeoff platform. They filed in long orderly lines down the ramps to the interior, and waited there for the smaller Earth-rockets that would take them home. Waiting, they were at once elated and disappointed. They had seen no more than could be seen at the same place on any other day. The entire rocket area had been fenced off, with a double cordon of guards to make sure that too-curious visitors stayed out of range. Official explanations mentioned the new engine, the new fuel, the danger of escaping gases—but nobody believed it. Every one of the half-million visitors

knew what the mystery was: the crew, and nothing else. Giant video screens all over the platform gave the crowd details and closeups, the same that they would have seen had they stayed comfortably at home. They saw the Captain's gloved hand, at the last, but not the Captain's face.

There was muttering and complaining . . . but there was something else, too. Each man, woman, and child who went to the Station that day would be able to say, years later, "I was there when the *Survival* took off. You never saw anything so big in your life."

Because it wasn't just another planet hop. It wasn't just like the hundreds of other takeoffs. It was the *Survival,* the greatest spaceship ever engineered. People didn't think of the *Survival* in terms of miles-per-second; they said, "Sirius in fifteen years!"

From Sunday supplements to dignified periodicals, nearly every medium of communication on Earth had carried the story. Brightly colored graphs made visibly simple the natural balance of life forces in which plants and animals could maintain a permanently fresh atmosphere, as well as a self-perpetuating food supply. Lecture-demonstrations and videocasts showed how centrifugal force would replace gravity.

For months before takeoff, the press and video followed the preparations with daily intimate accounts. The world over, people knew the nicknames of pigs, calves, chickens, and crew members—and even the proper botanical name of the latest minor masterpiece of the biochemists, a hybrid plant whose root, stems, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit were all edible, nourishing and delicious, and which had the added advantage of being the thirstiest CO_2 drinker ever found.

The public knew the nicknames of the crew, and the proper name of the plant. But they never found out, not even the half-million who went to the field to see for themselves, the real identity of the Twenty and Four who comprised the crew. They knew that thousands had applied; that it was necessary to be single, under twenty-five, and a graduate engineer in order to get as far as the physical exam; that the crew was mixed in sex, with the object of filling the specially-equipped nursery, and raising a second generation for the return trip, if, as was hoped, a lengthy stay on Sirius' planet proved pos-

sible. They knew, for that matter, all the small characteristics and personal idiosyncrasies of the crew members—what they ate, how they dressed, their favorite games, theaters, music, books, cigarettes, preachers, and political parties. There were only two things the public didn't know, and couldn't find out: the real names of the mysterious Twenty and Four; and the reason why those names were kept secret.

There were as many rumors as there were newsmen or radio-reporters, of course. Hundreds of explanations were offered at one time or another. But still nobody knew—nobody except the half-hundred Very Important Persons who had planned the project, and the Twenty and Four themselves.

And now, as the pinpoint of light faded out of the screens of televisors all over Earth, the linear and rotary acceleration of the great ship began to adjust to the needs of the human body. "Gravity" in the living quarters gradually approached Earth-normal. Tortured bodies relaxed in the acceleration couches, where the straps had held them securely positioned through the initial stage, so as to keep the blood and guts where they belonged, and to prevent the stomach from following its natural tendency to emerge through the backbone. Finally, stunned brain cells awoke to the recognition that danger signals were no longer coming through from shocked, excited tissues.

Captain Melnick was the first to awake. The row of lights on the board still glowed green. Fumbling a little with the straps, Melnick watched tensely to see if the indicator lights were functioning properly, sighing with relief as the one at the head of the board went dead, operated automatically by the removal of body weight from the couch.

It was right—it was essential—for the Captain to wake up first. If any of the men had showed superior recuperative powers, it could be bad. Melnick thought wearily of the years and years ahead during which this artificial dominance had to be maintained in defiance of all Earth conditioning. But of course it would not be that bad, really. The crew had been picked for ability to conform to the unusual circumstances; they were all without strong family ties or prejudices. Habit would establish the new castes soon enough, but the

beginning was crucial. Survival was more than a matter of plant-animal balance and automatic gravity.

While the Captain watched, another light went out, and then another. Officers, both of them: good. Three more lights died out together. Then men were beginning to awaken, and it was reassuring to know that their own couch panels would show them that the officers had revived first. In any case, there was no more time for worrying. There were things to be done.

A detail was sent off immediately to attend to the animals, release them from the confinement of the specially prepared acceleration pens, and check them for any possible damage incurred in spite of precautions. The proportions of human, animal and plant life had been worked out carefully beforehand for maximum efficiency, and for comfort. Now that the trip had started, the miniature world had to maintain its status quo or perish.

As soon as enough of the crew were awake, Lieutenant Johnson, the third officer, took a group of eight out to make an inspection of the hydroponic tanks that lined the hull. Nobody expected much trouble here. Being at the outermost part of the ship, the plants were exposed to high "gravity." The outward pull exerted on them by rotation should have held their roots in place, even through the tearing backward thrust of the acceleration. But there was certain to be a large amount of minor damage, to stems and leaves and buds, and whatever there was would need immediate repair. In the ship's economy, the plants had the most vital function of all—absorbing carbon dioxide from dead air already used by humans and animals, and deriving from it the nourishment that enabled their chlorophyl systems to release fresh oxygen for re-use in breathing.

There was a vast area to inspect. Row upon row of tanks marched solidly from stem to stern of the giant ship, all around the inner circumference of the hull. Johnson split the group of eight into four teams, each with a biochemist in charge to locate and make notes of the extent of the damage, and an unclassified man as helper, to do the actual dirty work, crawling out along the catwalks to mend each broken stalk.

Other squads were assigned to check the engines and control mechanisms, and the last two women to awake got stuck with the

booby prize—first shift in the galley. Melnick squashed their immediate protests with a stern reminder that they had hardly earned the right to complain; but privately the Captain was pleased at the way it had worked out. This first meal on board was going to have to be something of an occasion. A bit of ceremony always helped; and above all, social procedures would have to be established immediately. A speech was indicated—a speech Melnick did not want to have to make in the presence of all twenty-four crew members. As it worked out, the Four would almost certainly be kept busy longer than the others. If these women had not happened to wake up last. . . .

The buzzing of the intercom broke into the Captain's speculations. "Lieutenant Johnson reporting, sir." Behind the proper, crisp manner, the young lieutenant's voice was frightened. Johnson was third in command, supervising the inspection of the tanks.

"Having trouble down there?" Melnick was deliberately informal, knowing the men could hear over the intercom, and anxious to set up an immediate feeling of unity among the officers.

"One of the men complaining, sir." The young lieutenant sounded more confident already. "There seems to be some objection to the division of the work."

Melnick thought it over quickly and decided against any more public discussion on the intercom. "Stand by. I'll be right down."

All over the ship airducts and companionways led from the inner-level living quarters "down" to the outer level of tanks; Melnick took the steps three at a time and reached the trouble zone within seconds after the conversation ended.

"Who's the trouble-maker here?"

"Kennedy—on assignment with Petty Officer Giorgio for plant maintenance."

"You have a complaint?" Melnick asked the swarthy, dungareed man whose face bore a look of sullen dissatisfaction.

"Yeah." The man's voice was deliberately insolent. The others had never heard him speak that way before, and he seemed to gain confidence from the shocked surprise they displayed. "I thought I was supposed to be a pampered darling this trip. How come I do all the dirty work here, and Georgie gets to keep so clean?"

His humor was too heavy to be effective. "Captain's orders, that's why," Melnick snapped. "Everybody has to work double time till things are squared away. If you don't like the job here, I can fix you up fine in the brig. Don't worry about your soft quarters. You'll get 'em later and plenty of 'em. It's going to be a long trip, and don't forget it." The Captain pointed significantly to the chronometer built into the overhead. "But it's not much longer to dinner. You'd better get back to work if you want to hit the chow while it's hot. Mess call in thirty minutes."

Melnick took a chance and turned abruptly away, terminating the interview. It worked. Sullen but defeated, Kennedy hoisted himself back up on the catwalk, and then began crawling out to the spot Giorgio pointed out. Not daring to express their relief, lieutenant and captain exchanged one swift look of triumph, before Melnick walked wordlessly off.

In the big control room that would be mess hall, social hall, and general meeting place for all of them for fifteen years to come—or twice that time if Sirius' planet turned out to be uninhabitable—the Captain waited for the crew members to finish their checkup assignments. Slowly they gathered in the lounge, ignoring the upholstered benches around the sides and the waiting table in the center, standing instead in small awkward groups. An undercurrent of excitement ran through them all, evoking deadly silences and erupting in bursts of too-noisy conversation, destroying the joint attempt at an illusion of nonchalance. They all knew—or hoped they knew—what the subject of the Captain's first speech would be, and behind the façade of bronzed faces and trimly-muscled bodies they were all curious, even a little afraid.

Finally there were twenty of them in the room, and the Captain rose and rapped for order.

"I suppose," Melnick began, "you will all want to know our present position, and the results of the checkup." Nineteen heads turned as one, startled and disappointed at the opening. "However," the Captain continued, smiling at the change of expressions the single word brought, "I imagine you're all as hungry and . . . er . . . impatient as I am, so I shall put off the more routine portions of my report until our other comrades have joined us. There is only

one matter which should properly be discussed immediately."

Everyone in the room was acutely conscious of the Four. They had all known, of course, how it would be. But on Earth there had always been other, ordinary men around to make them less aware of it. Now the general effort to maintain an air of artificial ease and disinterest was entirely abandoned, as the Captain plunged into the subject most on everyone's mind.

"Our ship is called the *Survival.* You all know why. Back on Earth, people think they know why, too; they think it's because of our plants and artificial gravity, and the hundreds of other engineering miracles that keep us going. Of course, they also know that our crew is mixed, and that our population is therefore . . ." The Captain paused, letting an anticipatory titter circle the room. ". . . is therefore by no means fixed. What they don't know, naturally, is the division of sexes in the crew.

"You're all aware of the reason for the secrecy. You know that our organization is in direct opposition to the Ethical Principles on which the Peace was established after World War IV. And you know how the planners of this trip had to struggle with the authorities to get this project approved. When consent was granted, finally, it was only because the highest prelates clearly understood that the conditions of our small universe were in every way different from those on Earth . . . and that the division proposed was *necessary for survival."*

The Captain paused, waiting for the last words to sink in, and studying the attitudes of the group. Even now, after a year's conditioning to counteract Earthly mores, there were some present who listened to this public discussion of dangerous and intimate matters with flushed faces and embarrassed smiles.

"You all realize, of course, that this consent was based, finally, on the Basic Principle itself." Automatically, out of long habit unbroken by that year's intensive training, the Captain made the sign of the Olive Branch. *"Survival of the race is the first duty of every Ethical man and woman."* The command was intoned meaningfully, almost pontifically, and brought its reward as confusion cleared from some of the flushed faces. "What we are doing, our way of life now, has the full approval of the authorities. We must never forget that.

"On Earth, survival of the race is best served by the increasing strength of family ties. It was not thought wise to endanger those ties by letting the general public become aware of our—unorthodox —system here on board. A general understanding, on Earth, of the true meaning of the phrase, "The Twenty and the Four," could only have aroused a furor of discussion and argument that would, in the end, have impeded survival both there and here.

"The knowledge that there are twenty of one sex on board, and only four of the other—that children will be born outside of normal family groups, and raised jointly—I need not tell you how disastrous that would have been." Melnick paused, raising a hand to dispel the muttering in the room.

"I wanted to let you know, before the Four arrive, that I have made some plans which I hope will carry us through the initial period in which difficulties might well arise. Later, when the groups of six—five of us, and one of them in each—have been assigned their permanent quarters, I think it will be possible, in fact necessary, to allow a greater amount of autonomy within those groups. But for the time being, I have arranged a—shall we call it a dating schedule?" Again, the Captain paused, waiting for tension to relieve itself in laughter. "I have arranged dates for all of you with each of them during convenient free periods over the next month. Perhaps at the end of that time, we will be able to choose groups; perhaps it will take longer. Maternity schedules, of course, will not be started until I am certain that the grouping is satisfactory to all. For the time being, remember this—

"We are not only more numerous than they, but we are stronger and, in our social placement here, more fortunate. We must become accustomed to the fact that they are our responsibility. It is because we are hardier, longer-lived, less susceptible to pain and illness, better able to withstand, mentally, the difficulties of a life of monotony, that we were placed as we are—and not alone because we are the bearers of children."

Over the sober silence of the crew, the Captain's voice rang out. "Lieutenant Johnson," Melnick called to the golden-haired, suntanned woman near the door, "will you call the men in from the tank-rooms now? They can finish their work after dinner."

by
R. E. Morrough

"NAAM"

Morad was the best servant a man—or a demon—could want!

YES, HE'S a fine little chap, although I say it. That's a photo I took of him when I was home on leave. But we very nearly lost him before he was a year old, in a way I hate to think about.

In those days we had a most excellent fellah servant, named Morad, as good as a devoted servant can be. Before my marriage he had knocked about the desert with me for several years, cooking and "doing for" me under all sorts of difficult conditions. He was a sunny-natured fellow, always good-tempered, even with his natural antipathies, the Bedawin. I don't know whether it was that trait which endeared him to me most, or the alacrity with which he used to jump to any order I gave him. When I had need of him in camp I would stick my head out of the tent and bellow "Morad!" As he usually had a primus stove roaring in the little cooking tent downwind, I developed a shout like that of a boatswain brought up in an endless typhoon. He would as like as not be immersed in some delicate culinary operation which could not be left at that very instant, and to show that I had got his attention he would use the familiar Egyptian reply on such an occasion—"Naam." Its meaning is somewhere between "Aye, aye," and "Ready and willing," and "Sir, to you." Then as soon as he possibly could he would come tumbling out of his little tent, stand to attention at the door of mine, and repeat "Naam" with great gusto. It's a tremendously broad "a," a sound demanding a wide-open mouth for its full enunciation. Did I

say that Morad was a fine big chap, with the great strong heavy head you often get on a fellah? His complexion was decidedly dark for an Egyptian's—a dash of negro blood coming somewhere; he had an immense benevolent grin, and I tell you it was a real pleasure to see his cheery face opening to that "Naam" so that his glorious strong teeth and pink tongue showed up startlingly bright against his dusky skin.

When I married we settled down for a couple of years in a little bungalow on the edge of the desert near a village called Kafr el Azraq. I was running a paint factory, where we treated crude ocher brought down out of the hills. I should have the happiest memories of the place if it hadn't been for this business I am going to tell you about. Like every other house in Egypt, where it is possible, our house faced north. Sitting on the verandah you had on your right a long pinkish scarp which caught the most wonderful hues from the setting sun, and on your left the luscious green of the Nile Valley, backed by another line of austere desert hills.

Although keeping a house clean to the satisfaction of a woman was a very different affair from "doing for" a bachelor in the desert, Morad adapted himself admirably. He became cook-general, with a small boy to help him. He took a local bint to wife, and they lived in a little stone house in Kafr el Azraq. When our baby son was born —which meant more work for Morad one way or another—he went about radiating joy. "Mabrouk; el hamdilillah! Now, by God, there is no shame in the house!" he said again and again. He became almost fatuously devoted to that baby. He could hardly be deterred from picking him up and fondling him whenever he saw him. We used to shudder to think how Morad would spoil his own children.

Rather an unpleasant thing happened one morning not long before our baby was born. I was at the paint-works; Morad was away in the balad finding something for our dinner. My wife did not mind being alone. Not a soul for miles round would have hurt her. It is not difficult in Egypt to acquire a reputation for medical skill; success in a few cases of sore eyes and septic wounds had secured her the respect and immunity from petty annoyances with which the East endows a doctor. Both men and women used to come to her, and after a while used to tell her bits of village gossip. So when

she saw a decrepit figure wavering up the garden path she took it for another patient. He wore the salmon-colored head-band which over much of the East declares its wearer's preoccupation with religious matters. His bundle of ragged clothing stood out shaggily like the feathers of a kite. He leaned on an olive-wood staff. When he came near she saw that his face was long and foxy, not at all Egyptian. For his evident age his eyes were remarkably alive and piercing. He spoke an Arabic of which she could understand but little—I think now that it was probably Mesopotamian—but she made out that he was on a pilgrimage of some kind, and was hungry and thirsty. In the pleasant idiom of Egypt she invited him to -itfaddel—to "do a kindness"—by coming in to eat. She took him into the kitchen, which was a little shack separated from the bungalow, and got him bread and onions. He made grateful noises and squatted down in the kitchen while she returned to the house.

Shortly afterwards she heard a fearful explosion of curses from the kitchen, Morad's voice roaring objurgations and the old man screaming with fury. She rushed out in time to see Morad forcibly ejecting the pilgrim with contumely from his kitchen. She stopped the manhandling and began to remonstrate with Morad. For so genial a person he was in a state of anger altogether without precedent. Eventually, from the flood of indignant speech she was able to make out that Morad, on returning from market, had found the pilgrim spitting ritually after his meal on the spotless kitchen floor and declaring himself by signs patent to Morad as a dog of a Shiah. We had never suspected Morad of extreme piety, although he kept Ramadan, and it was a revelation to hear the virulence with which he denounced all the dirt-eating sons of pimps who belonged to the Shiah heresy. It was another example of the explosive potentialities of a Muslim where religion is concerned.

The old man did not take his remarks altogether lying down. He waited till he got outside the garden and then loosed off a fearful tirade. Apparently his heterodoxy supplied him with a number of curses quite strange to Morad. With malevolence shaking his entire body the old pilgrim pronounced a most complicated anathema. My wife understood hardly anything of it. She thought she caught the word "moon" once or twice, and "hyena" seemed to recur. Turning

to ask Morad what it all meant, she found to her surprise that he now seemed more frightened than angry. The old man brought his spirited remarks to a conclusion and stumped away up the desert edge. We never saw him again. Neither then nor afterwards would Morad interpret the tirade. All he could be induced to say was that it was kalam wihish (bad talk), and he hated having the subject mentioned.

I suppose it would be about a fortnight after this that we heard the laugh of a hyena not far away in the desert. It was nothing very surprising. We knew there were some in the hills, where the limestone formation provided plenty of suitable lairs. We had found a regular runway once, but I had not fancied following it into the depths of the black and evil-smelling caves. In the daytime the hyena would probably have been at home, and although they have the reputation of being quite as cowardly as jackals in the open, I had always heard that they were nasty customers in a corner. Anyway, the hunting instinct was not strong in us. We had no particular desire to kill a hyena. The Bedawin hate them because they snap up their stray goats. Round Kafr el Azraq they did not trouble the fellaheen much, beyond getting at any of their relatives who were not buried deep enough. Novelists are fond of talking about "mirthless laughter." That is a correct description of a hyena's. The sound goes "ho-ho-*ho*-ho," with a howl running through it. However, as I say, it was nothing strange to us, though we did remark that it was unusually close to the bungalow. It was practically full moon, which stimulates all nocturnal animals to noisiness beyond the ordinary. At that time the dogs of an Egyptian village are never silent all night through, and the jackals hold special choral festivals.

It might be about a month or two afterwards that we began to hear—my wife through her patients, and I through my workmen—that a hyena was making himself rather a nuisance in the village. Several losses of goats and sheep were attributed to him, but funnily enough they seemed to occur only when the moon was big. What is more, the depredator seemed to be an unusually bold and crafty beast. On one occasion the village people averred that he had taken a goat which had been shut up for the night in a mud-walled shed with the door properly latched. I asked them if they thought the

hyena was an afreet, who could move latches like a son of Adam. They took me quite seriously. They said they didn't know. He might very well be an afreet. So I went along to see the tracks for myself. Most of them had been obliterated by the feet of the inquisitive crowd which had pressed round the scene of the goat's disappearance. I did find one big round pug. I thought it might have been made by an exceptionally hefty pi-dog; but, pi-dog or hyena, the abstraction of that goat was equally mysterious—always provided that the door really had been latched.

It would be about this time that Morad's wife came to mine in some trouble. As she was the respectable wife of a respectable man I had never been privileged to see her face, only her rather pleasant girlish-looking form swathed from head to heels in her long black robe. The ostensible reason for her coming was to get dawa for her eyes. My wife thought her real object was to talk about Morad. She was deeply troubled by his absence from home at night. There would be spells of a week at a time when he would refuse to go to bed, and after a period of restless pacing in their little house he would go out and stay away till dawn. Returning dog-tired from these excursions he would sleep heavily for the short time which remained before his wife roused him to come to work at the bungalow. Talking it over together, my wife and I remembered that there had been occasions lately when Morad had seemed lackadaisical and overtired. He certainly wasn't so good at turning up in the mornings as in our desert days, but I had attributed that to the counter-attractions of married life. Next time he came in I took a good look at him. It was quite true; his eyes were tired and his solid self-confident face was almost drawn. His eyes didn't look quite that way, but I wondered if he had been getting into bad company and taking to hashish. His indignant denial when I mentioned it rang unmistakably true. I tried to make out if he had anything on his mind, but all he would say was: "Ma feesh haga. There is nothing."

Then something happened which converted the hyena from a mere annoyance into a menace. A ten-year-old boy who had stayed out after nightfall trying to find a strayed sheep never came home at all. The fellaheen are perfectly useless in a case like this, so I sent for an old Bedawi tracker. He found the small boy's trail coming along the

edge of the cultivation and parallel with it a hyena's. He showed me where the poor little devil had started running. Where the two trails met there was a spot of blood; and then the hyena's spoor turned up towards the hills, with the big pugs of his forefeet plainer and deeper than before. We lost the track in the end in a perfect maze of hyena runs at the entrance of a range of caves.

I decided that the best chance of getting the brute was to lie up for him in the village. I didn't tell a soul except the omda what I was going to do; I didn't want the whole population scuttling about and peeping round corners, and generally making the village as uninviting for the hyena as it could possibly be. The omda's house provided exactly what I wanted. It had a courtyard surrounded by a high mud wall and overlooked by an upper-floor verandah. The entrance from the village street could be closed by a good strong gate, with a bar dropping across it inside. My plan was to leave the gate open and tether a kid in the courtyard. Then I would have a man lying on the top of the wall by the entrance to slam the gate to with a string and then drop the bar into place while remaining in safety himself. I must emphasize that I wasn't an experienced shot and I didn't fancy my shooting by moonlight. I preferred to have more than one chance at that hyena. For my helper I got a lad I could trust from the factory. He was what is called a gadda, a bit of a sport. He certainly played his part all right, but the hyena didn't play his.

Somewhere about nine o'clock in the evening I walked across to the village and took up my post. It was broad, blazing moonlight, such as you get only in the sub-tropics. The courtyard was cut in two diagonally, half in the dense black shadow cast by the building and the other half so brightly lit that I could see the feet of a little owl on the opposite coping. When I started my vigil, people had not settled down properly for the night. There were still murmurs of talk; somewhere one of those little drums of hide and baked clay was being thumped in syncopated rhythm; over the wall the pungent, invisible smoke of dung fires came stealing. Gradually all human signs of life came to an end. Only the dogs barked interminably and the kid bleated dutifully for its mother. The moon turned the dingy mud walls to a semblance of fine stone. I was getting cold. It can be jolly cold on those brilliantly clear nights at the

beginning of the year. I was getting drowsy. I wondered if my gate-keeper had kept awake; he was lying perfectly still. It was ten past one. Any use waiting any more? Then I heard the hyena give tongue outside the village.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later a hideous flat head was pushed cautiously round the corner. I always think the hyena has the meanest, most lowering, most brutal face in the animal world. There is that great broad forehead that looks as hard as a paving-stone, and under it the avid, ugly features are crowded into as small a space as possible. Its heavy-shouldered, goose-rumped body followed quickly, and it began to slouch across to the terrified kid. At that instant my admirable gadda slammed the door and dropped the bar with a rattle. Of course I ought to have fired at once. But, as I said, I am no hunter. I was so interested in my first sight of a wild hyena that for a moment I forgot what I was there for. As it was, I never got a shot in. The hyena whirled round in its tracks. At once it found itself face to face with a shut and barred door. Moonlight plays strange tricks, but I could have sworn before any court that that hyena lifted the bar with its paw and opened the gate. Before I could pull myself together and get rifle to shoulder it was gone.

My gadda was a broken man. He was quite sure now that the hyena was an afreet and that it had bewitched me. Goggling with superstitious terror, he insisted on spending that night in a room in the omda's house with two other men. I don't know what he said in the village, but the hyena's stock went sky-high. A perfect reign of terror set in. People went into their houses at sunset and refused to unbar for anything. As a matter of fact, for the next three weeks nothing happened.

It was nearly full moon again when the moawin of police at the markaz headquarters had occasion to send a ghaffir on a donkey with a message to the omda of our village. If he had been a local man he would, I am sure, have been in too much of a funk to continue his journey after sunset. As it was, he rode along with his old snider on his shoulder, singing at intervals as a matter of habitual precaution to keep the afreets away. He told me afterwards that he first suspected he was being shadowed at a place where the path was flanked on both sides by fields of sugar-cane. The canes made a

thicket eight feet high, and something heavy was pushing through them pace by pace with him. At first he thought it might be a buffalo calf, which its owner had neglected to drive home for the night. But when the path came out on a naked canal bank he saw it was a hyena. Even then he wasn't frightened. Who ever heard of a hyena attacking an armed man on a donkey? The donkey had other views. He bolted; and then, to his horror, the ghaffir found that the hyena was chasing them. As he couldn't stop the terrified donkey he couldn't use his gun. The hyena is not fast, but his lope is as dogged as his bite. The end came quite close to our bungalow. Apparently the worn-out donkey put his foot in a hole and went down with a crash. Almost at once the hyena was upon them. Sitting in the bungalow we heard a sudden outburst of shouts and screams and a horrible snarling. I got my revolver and dashed out. As it happened, I was just in time to save the ghaffir's life; he was weeks in hospital as it was. The hyena made off when I started firing at him. Judging from the blood and hair on the gun-butt the beast had not had it all quite his own way, but the man's neck and chest were fearfully torn about.

That, happening practically at the bottom of our garden, made us feel rather apprehensive. We decided to do what we had never done before—lock up the bungalow at night. We arranged that Morad was to lock the door leading out towards the kitchen and take away the key with him, so that he could let himself in early in the morning. It was a couple of days before we could actually put that arrangement into force, because Morad did not turn up. His wife came to say that he was sick at home, but she was so miserable and disturbed in her manner that my wife was sure there was something very wrong. When Morad did appear, two days after the ghaffir business, his head was all swathed in bandages and he looked very rotten indeed. He said that on his way home that night he had been set upon and belabored with sticks by two men he did not know. We simply did not believe him. We were convinced that something was being concealed from us. Again the suspicion came to us that he must be mixed up in some nefarious business. The old bright Morad was almost unrecognizable. He seemed as anxious as ever to please us, but the alacrity had gone out of him. As of old, he still

gave us his wide-mouthed "Naam"; now no smile accompanied it. He looked and moved like a harassed and worn-out man. We both tried to make him tell us his troubles or go into Cairo to see a doctor. We offered to pay the expenses. But no, no, no.

Then full moon came round again. The village people were more terror-stricken than ever now, and I don't mind admitting that we ourselves were prepared to feel happier when the brightest moonlight, which always seemed to be the period of that beastly hyena's activity, should be past. We were locking up very carefully at night now. One of us always saw to it that Morad had locked the back door. We had the baby in a cot in our room. Perhaps our fears may seem unwarranted, but that hyena, which went out of its way to attack men and could open barred gates, was getting on our nerves. I slept with my revolver under my pillow. A candlestick with a shade stood on a little table by our bed.

After feeding the baby at ten o'clock and settling him down again we neither of us went to sleep very quickly. In fact I did not know I had gone off till I suddenly found myself awake and staring at a broad flood of moonlight which had spread silently into the room since my last look round. I wondered what had awakened me. Then I smelt a taint on the air. Familiar. Animal. Caves. Hell! Hyena!

Like a flash I turned and slipped the revolver from under my pillow. At the same moment something stirred in the black dark under the slant of moonlight and our baby uttered a sleepy cry. My heart gave a terrible jump and settled down to pound so that it shook my whole body. I could hear my wife breathing in hissing gasps. Perhaps that suspense lasted a couple of seconds. God, what seconds! Then the baby cried again. This time the sound did not come from the cot, and simultaneously something declared itself in the moonlight. In that white radiance the broad forehead showed up like a skull. In the hyena's jaws, gripped by a mouthful of clothing, was a bundle, which was our son. The hyena faced me full, so that with the baby across its chest its entire body was covered. I dared not fire. It knew. My flesh crept at the realization. It knew. It was backing slowly towards the open bedroom door behind it, facing me steadily, and I should never get a chance of an effective shot.

There ought to be a pause of about a century here, for that's what it seemed like. That cursed, crafty withdrawal held me powerless. If I had fired at the smooth, impenetrable forehead or leapt out of bed the brute might have shifted his grip, and that would have been the end of our son. As the hyena neared the door its head came in line with the candlestick. For an instant the conical candle-shade, dark against the patch of moonlight, appeared as if balanced on the brute's head, like a fantastic tarboush. Tarboush? Tarboush? A blinding inspiration struck me. I shouted "Morad!" sharply, as I had done ten thousand times before. The hyena stiffened, and opened its mouth so that I could see its teeth and tongue. The baby dropped onto the rug and in that instant I fired.

I found afterwards that one of the shots must have been immediately fatal; it had got him in the eye.

No, Morad did not turn up next morning; but we found the back door standing ajar, with the key in it. We were most awfully sorry for the wife, poor soul. Our baby was quite unhurt, thanks to his voluminous clothes.

Has it ever struck you as strange that the belief in were-animals should be so widespread? They've their were-wolf in Scandinavia, *loup-garou* in France, were-leopard in West Africa. I used to know what I thought about that fearsome fauna. Now I don't.

After the Atom, What?

» SCIENCE-FICTION accounts of the atomic destruction of the Earth may come true some day—but it would take a powerful lot of doing with atomic bombs available today. The latest estimate—an official one of the Atomic Energy Commission, which should know—says that the number of blasts necessary would be 775,000. Current world supply totals, by an insider's guess, 190, including 175 U.S., 15 U.S.S.R.

Probably a better possibility for total destruction is radioactive dust, being produced in large quantities as a by-product of atomic bomb production and research. Secrecy is rigid in this area, but a recent authoritative estimate runs like this—enough radioactive fission products are coming from the Hanford plant every month to contaminate 144 square miles.

by Cleve Cartmill

THE GREEN CAT

This warning will do you no good: if you meet her, it's already too late!

THE MAIN reason that Brad Lawrence knew almost nothing about cats was that his wife Leta had an allergy to cat fur. She came out all over bumps whenever she got near a cat.

But there was one fact Brad knew about cats: they are not green.

So when he saw this cat on the university parking lot, he stopped to stare. It was a large animal, as cats go, and was mostly an apple green in color, striped geometrically with a darker green. This darker color, a kind of willow-tree green, was repeated on its feet, so that it seemed to be wearing perfectly fitted boots, and on its ears.

Since he knew so little about cats, he didn't feel a sense of shock at the appearance of the cat's ears. The fact that they were leaf-shaped didn't register. For all he knew, all cats had ears shaped somewhat like eucalyptus leaves.

His scrutiny lasted perhaps ten seconds. Then the cat, which had been staring idly at a new Cadillac, turned her head and saw Brad. She had yellow-green eyes, and she fixed them on Brad's with an intensity that would have struck him as peculiar if he had had more experience with cats.

Then she walked daintily over to him and he picked her up. With his books under one arm and the cat cradled in the other, he carried her to his car. He set her on the running board, and when he opened his car door she leaped lightly inside and sat under the steering wheel.

Brad stood motionless for a few moments, vague confusion blurring his thoughts, and the cat put both front paws on the wheel.

"You'll have to move over," Brad said. The cat moved over.

Brad got in and drove out of the parking lot. The cat watched all his movements—pressing the starter button, shifting, turning the wheel—with rapt attention.

"It's sure funny," Brad remarked presently as he moved along in the center stream of traffic. "I wonder why I picked you up." He signaled a left turn. "I wonder why you let me." He made the turn; the cat watched. "I wonder what Leta will say. Sure is funny."

He stopped at a market to fill a grocery list that Leta had made for him in the morning, and was not surprised when the cat followed him inside. She stayed one pace behind and a little to one side as he cruised the aisles for baby food, flour, bread and so on.

He paused before a shelf of cat food, selected a brand with a liver base. Then he selected two more cans. "Better have plenty," he explained to the green cat, who watched him attentively with her chartreuse eyes.

"What a beautiful cat!" the pretty clerk said as she cash-registered Brad's items. "Follows you just like a dog. Did you train him to do that?"

"She learned it herself," Brad said.

"I never saw a green cat before."

"Very rare," Brad said vaguely.

"Gee. Why don't you put her in the cat show next week? I bet she'd win a prize."

"Might do that," Brad said. "I didn't know about it. Where is it and when?"

She got the information from the local paper, and Brad absently took the paper along. The green cat showed no interest now in Brad's driving. She looked at traffic, trees and people. She waited expectantly when he stopped in front of his home—a G.I.-loan bungalow—and gathered his parcels. She followed him to the pseudo-Spanish front door.

Brad looked down at her dubiously. "I don't know whether you better . . ." He frowned. "What with the baby and all . . . Oh, well, let's see what happens."

"That you?" his wife called from the baby's room.

"Yeah." Brad went into the tiled kitchen, trimmed in Spanish

reds and smelling deliciously of the chili which bubbled on the electric range. The cat followed, examining everything.

Brad returned to the living room and sat in the big chair beside the television set. He looked at the cat, sitting at his feet, with a feeling of slight uneasiness. He felt as if there were something sinister in the situation, but couldn't put a name to it. He realized that he had acted with almost no volition of his own ever since he had seen the cat. It was as if she had assumed command, but he couldn't see how that was possible.

Leta came down the hallway leading their year-old daughter, Candy, who was blue-eyed and blonde like her parents. Leta stopped when she saw the cat, her eyes widening in what Brad took for frightened amazement.

The cat turned her yellow-green eyes on Leta's for an intense five seconds, and Leta's expression returned to normal.

"I didn't know cats were ever green," she said. "It's beautiful. But—" She looked around in confusion, as if trying to recall what she had been about to say. "Maybe it'll be nice for Candy," she said finally.

The cat now came over to Candy and examined her. The cat's eyes were almost on a level with the child's. Candy pulled her pink fist out of her mother's hand and lurched against the cat. She put one arm around the cat's neck, and the two stared solemnly into each other's eyes.

"Boggle," Candy said. She went with the cat down the hallway to her playroom, and cat and child disappeared from view.

"Guess the cat has a name now," Brad said. "Boggle."

"I think it'll be nice," Leta said, "having someone to keep an eye on the baby. Where did you get her?"

Brad told about the encounter on the parking lot. "Sure is funny," he said.

"Gosh," Leta exclaimed. "No bumps." She exhibited her shapely arm, pulling the sleeve of her Spanish blouse up to her shoulder. "I always break out around cats."

Brad came over to look. "Sure is funny," he said. "Say, I wonder . . . Suppose it's all right for the baby in there alone with Boggle?"

"Oh, sure," said his wife. "But we can take a look."

They tiptoed along the hallway and peeked into the playroom. Candy was just adding the final piece to a complex Ferris wheel made from her Tinker Toy set. The box was open in the middle of the floor, and the illustrated book of instructions was beside the Ferris wheel. Candy put in the last piece, regarded the book briefly, nodded to Boggle and spun the wheel. It turned easily, and Candy made a sound of pleasure.

"Say, how did that get there?" Leta cried. "It was on the top shelf of the cupboard."

The top shelf was some six feet from the floor. A chair stood in the open cupboard door. Brad put these facts together in his mind and shook his head.

"You must be mistaken," he said. "She couldn't reach it, even if she could climb up on the chair. You must have got that set down and built that thing for her. She couldn't possibly build anything that complicated."

"But—I didn't," Leta protested.

Candy turned at the sound of voices, gurgled, grinned and then began to take the Ferris wheel apart and put the pieces in the box.

"I wish you could talk," Brad said to Candy. "This has got me worried."

"Pooh," Leta scoffed. "Let's go." She led the way.

Brad sat in the big chair again and scowled at the floor. He was now objective for the first time since he had seen the green cat. "Something's wrong," he said positively.

"How do you mean?"

"Nothing adds up. I bring a cat home. Cats are ruled out in the first place, on account of your allergy. But you don't have an allergy to this cat, which has a funny color, anyway. Then this cat . . . Candy—I don't know what I'm trying to say."

"Well, you're making no sense," Leta said. "Oh, the chili," she said, and went to the kitchen.

Brad continued to scowl, but didn't arrive at any conclusion. He only felt that something in the picture was out of focus.

How had Candy put that toy together? And why hadn't he investigated further? Why, for that matter, had he picked the cat up to begin with?

He got up. He went to the front door. He said: "Good-by, darling. I'm going to the library."

Leta appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes."

"Dinner," Brad said, dismissing it. "Dinner." He went out to his car.

He found a book about cats. He learned that there were Abyssinian, Burmese, Persian, Siamese and alley cats, ranging in color from red to blue-grey, but there wasn't a single, solitary green cat in the lot.

He went home. He found his wife unconscious on the living-room floor. He found his daughter and the—*his*—cat watching the wrestling matches on the television set.

He roused Leta. She prepared Candy for bed. She didn't say how she had become unconscious. They went to bed, leaving the green cat to roam the house.

The green cat left the house about midnight. She loped along side streets, dark streets, until she reached the hillside.

Her leaf-like ears were erect; her nostrils filled with the scents of night: eucalyptus, jacaranda and jasmine.

From one of her pouches that didn't show she took a small object shaped like a pencil. She pointed this at the hillside and moved it back and forth in a spraying motion.

Earth fell away, fell away from a long slim object, gleaming in the starlight. The green cat went inside through a port that fell open and crept into the nose of the ship.

On the floor was a green square. When the cat touched a button the square glowed. She took from one of her pouches the object shaped like a pencil and applied it to the glowing square.

She wrote diligently. She made several lines of queer marks. It was writing, but not as we know it. Then she added, in the written language of Southern California:

"It's okay. Come on in."

Next, she went back outside. She pointed the pencil-like object at the little spaceship. It rose into the night, headed away from Earth, and the green cat began to kick dirt into the hole.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

* Jack Vance returns with a brilliant short novelette, BRAIN OF THE GALAXY. It has an unusual gimmick: a device which tests a subject's capabilities by putting him—quite physically, as far as the subject can tell—into the bodies of men on many planets who are faced with difficult and dangerous situations. It's a drastic testing method; so drastic that you'll ask yourself what galactic need could possibly justify it. And Vance has the answer. . . .

* Lester del Rey makes his first appearance in these pages with THE DEADLIEST FEMALE. His premise is that the space-travel of the future is going to demand unusual human beings —human beings mutated and bred especially for the job, in fact. They're small and wiry, these spacemen, with no appendix, no sinuses . . . and the women among them have another lack, which makes for efficiency—and trouble!

* Richard Matheson, one of the brightest young men in the new crop of science-fantasy writers, contributes a tongue-in-cheek vignette, CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN.

* . . . and there are stories by Lord Dunsany, C. M. Kornbluth, H. B. Livingston and five others to complete the lineup.

* We still want your letters, by the way. We'd like to know what you think of the magazine as a whole, how you liked each story, and what you want to see in future issues. The address is—

Damon Knight, *Editor*
WORLDS BEYOND
Hillman Periodicals, Inc.
535 Fifth Avenue
New York 17, N. Y.

by E. B. White

THE SUPREMACY OF URUGUAY

A new weapon: quite bloodless, and completely irresistible!

FIFTEEN YEARS after the peace had been made at Versailles, Uruguay came into possession of a very fine military secret. It was an invention, in effect so simple, in construction so cheap, that there was not the slightest doubt that it would enable Uruguay to subdue any or all of the other nations of the earth. Naturally the two or three statesmen who knew about it saw visions of aggrandizement; and although there was nothing in history to indicate that a large country was any happier than a small one, they were very anxious to get going.

The inventor of the device was a Montevideo hotel clerk named Martin Casablanca. He had got the idea for the thing during the 1933 mayoralty campaign in New York City, where he was attending a hotel men's convention. One November evening, shortly before election, he was wandering in the Broadway district and came upon a street rally. A platform had been erected on the marquee of one of the theaters, and in an interval between speeches a cold young man

in an overcoat was singing into a microphone. "Thanks," he crooned, "for all the lovely dee-light I found in your embrace . . ." The inflection of the love words was that of a murmurous voice, but the volume of the amplified sound was enormous; it carried for blocks, deep into the ranks of the electorate. The Uruguayan paused. He was not unfamiliar with the delight of a love embrace, but in his experience it had been pitched lower—more intimate, concentrated. This sprawling, public sound had a curious effect on him. "And thanks for unforgettable nights I never can replace . . ." People swayed against him. In the so bright corner in the too crowded press of bodies, the dominant and searching booming of the love singer struck sharp into him and he became for a few seconds, as he later realized, a loony man. The faces, the mask-faces, the chill air, the advertising lights, the steam rising from the jumbo cup of A. & P. Coffee high over Forty-seventh Street, these added to his enchantment and his unbalance. At any rate, when he left and walked away from Times Square and the great slimy sounds of the love embrace, this was the thought that was in his head:

If it unhinged me to hear such a soft crooning sound slightly amplified, what might it not do to me to hear a far greater sound greatlier amplified?

Mr. Casablanca stopped. "Good Christ!" he whispered to himself; and his own whisper frightened him, as though it, too, had been amplified.

Chucking his convention, he sailed for Uruguay the following afternoon. Ten months later he had perfected and turned over to his government a war machine unique in military history—a radio-controlled plane carrying an electric phonograph with a retractable streamlined horn. Casablanca had got hold of Uruguay's loudest tenor, and had recorded the bar of music he had heard in Times Square. "Thanks," screamed the tenor, "for unforgettable nights I never can replace . . ." Casablanca prepared to step it up a hundred and fifty thousand times, and grooved the record so it would repeat the phrase endlessly. His theory was that a squadron of pilotless planes scattering this unendurable sound over foreign territories would immediately reduce the populace to insanity. Then Uruguay,

at her leisure, could send in her armies, subdue the idiots, and annex the land. It was a most engaging prospect.

The world at this time was drifting rapidly into a nationalistic phase. The incredible cancers of the World War had been forgotten, armaments were being rebuilt, hate and fear sat in every citadel. The Geneva gesture had been prolonged, but only by dint of removing the seat of disarmament to a walled city on a neutral island and quartering the delegates in the waiting destroyers of their respective countries. The Congress of the United States had appropriated another hundred million dollars for her naval program; Germany had expelled the Jews and recast the steel of her helmets in a firmer mold; and the world was re-living the 1914 prologue. Uruguay waited till she thought the moment was at hand, and then struck. Over the slumbering hemispheres by night sped swift gleaming planes, and there fell upon all the world, except Uruguay, a sound the equal of which had never been heard on land or sea.

The effect was as Casablanca had predicted. In forty-eight hours the peoples were hopelessly mad, ravaged by an ineradicable noise, ears shattered, minds unseated. No defence had been possible because the minute anyone came within range of the sound, he lost his sanity and, being daft, proved ineffectual in a military way. After the planes had passed over, life went on much as before, except that it was more secure, sanity being gone. No one could hear anything except the noise in his own head. At the actual moment when people had been smitten with the noise, there had been, of course, some rather amusing incidents. A lady in West Philadelphia happened to be talking to her butcher on the phone. "Thanks," she had just said, "for taking back that tough steak yesterday. And thanks," she added, as the plane passed over, "for unforgettable nights I never can replace." Linotype operators in composing-rooms chopped off in the middle of sentences, like the one who was setting a story about an admiral in San Pedro:

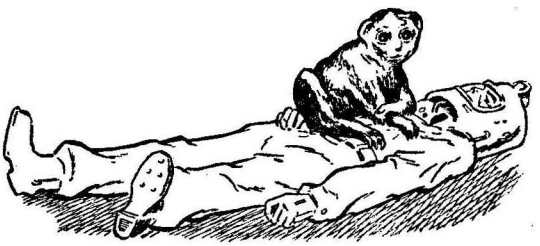
> I am tremendously grateful to all the ladies of San Pedro for the wonderful hospitality they have shown the men of the fleet during our recent maneuvers and thanks for unforgettable nights I never can replace and thanks for unforgettable nights I nev

To all appearances Uruguay's conquest of the earth was complete. There remained, of course, the formal occupation by her armed forces. That her troops, being in possession of all their faculties, could establish her supremacy among idiots, she never for a moment doubted. She assumed that with nothing but lunacy to combat, the occupation would be mildly stimulating and enjoyable. She supposed her crazy foes would do a few rather funny, grotesque things with their battleships and their tanks, and then surrender. What she failed to anticipate was that her foes, being mad, had no intention of making war at all. The occupation proved bloodless and singularly unimpressive. A detachment of her troops landed in New York, for example, and took up quarters in the RKO Building, which was fairly empty at the time; and they were no more conspicuous around town than the Knights of Pythias. One of her battleships steamed for England, and the commanding officer grew so enraged when no hostile ship came out to engage him that he sent a wireless (which of course nobody in England heard): "Come on out, you yellow-bellied rats!"

It was the same story everywhere. Uruguay's supremacy was never challenged by her silly subjects, and she was very little noticed. Territorially her conquest was magnificent; politically it was a fiasco. The peoples of the world paid slight attention to the Uruguayans, and the Uruguayans, for their part, were bored by many of their territorials—in particular by the Lithuanians, whom they couldn't stand. Everywhere crazy people lived happily as children, in their heads the old refrain: "And thanks for unforgettable nights . . ." Billions dwelt contentedly in a fool's paradise. The earth was bountiful and there was peace and plenty. Uruguay gazed at her vast domain and saw the whole incident lacked authenticity.

It wasn't till years later, when the descendants of some early American idiots grew up and regained their senses, that there was a wholesale return of sanity to the world, land and sea forces were restored to fighting strength, and the avenging struggle was begun which eventually involved all the races of the earth, crushed Uruguay, and destroyed mankind without a trace.

by Katherine MacLean



The FITTEST

Man is the most adaptable animal, the fittest to survive that we know; but there's one vital quality he lacks. . . .

AMONG the effects of Terry Shay was found a faded snapshot. It is a scene of desolation, a wasteland of sand and rock made vague by blowing dust, and to one side huddle some dim figures. They might be Eskimos with their hoods pulled close, or they might be small brown bears.

It is the only record left of the great event, the event which came into the hands of Terry Shay.

Like all great events it started with trivial things.

A tiny item in the Agriculture budget caught the hawklike eye of a senator. He stood up. "Item, $1,200 over estimate for automatic controls of space rocket, see appropriation estimate 108, Department of Extreme Conditions, Human-Plant ecology, cultural viability liaison to UNESCO and F.A.O. of U.N." He looked up, smiling a deadly smile. "I don't understand much of this gobbledegook, but I know what the word *rocket* means. Will somebody please explain to me what qualifies the Department of Agriculture to waste our money shooting off rockets?"

A Department of Agriculture man arose, riffled through folders and read aloud the statement of the director who had requested the rocket. This caused further difficulties, for the language was tech-

nical, and nobody understood it. On the second reading they managed to catch the word *Venus.*

Venus! Headlines in eight chains of papers carried the senator's unkind request that the committee of investigation include a psychiatrist. The ninth chain showed the initiative of a more alert reporter by carrying an interview with the director of the Department of Extreme Conditions.

It was a small, elaborate rocket, no more than twenty feet long. Doctor of Botany Ernest P. Crofts was somewhat impatient of laymen but he showed it to the reporter proudly, gesturing at it with a test tube of some odd greenish stuff in his hand. When asked what was in the tube he became indignant.

"But I told you already. Haven't you read any of my articles in the *Journal of Paleontology?* Or Jabson's letters in the *Survey of Botanical Sciences?* . . . NO? Well you must at least have heard of the new Smith-Ellington theory of atmospheric dynamics— No? My stars! What do people *read?* Doesn't anyone follow the debates? What do they think the rocket is *for?"*

The reporter informed him that they did not know what the rocket was for, and Crofts pulled himself together to explain.

There had been a long curiosity and debate among paleontologists and astronomers because spectroscopes had shown that the atmosphere of Venus was carbon dioxide, proving that there was no plant life on Venus, for plants convert carbon dioxide to oxygen. Venus was a desert. Yet it was supposed to be the sister planet of Earth, and the point of strangeness in the comparison was not the strangeness of Venus, for its atmosphere was chemically logical—it was the strangeness of Earth. Why did the Earth have air of free breathable oxygen? Why was there so much water? Could plants alone have worked the change, or did it require an initial oddity? The paleontologists argued bitterly.

Doctor Crofts believed that microörganisms and plants alone had changed Earth, and he was ready to prove his belief by sending a rocket to Venus, and spraying it with a collection of molds and slimes and lichens specially bred to the old conditions. If his test worked, then some day, when space liners were available for in-

expensive migration to Venus, that dry poisonous place would be green and moist with plants, and the air sweet and fit to breathe.

Congress cared little for paleontology, but it could see the advantage of transforming a million acres of wasteland into good salable real estate. The bill passed with little discussion.

Venus was slowly approaching its nearest point to Earth, and the finishing touches were being put on the rocket.

Terry Shay was the top reporter of the Humanist press, and he was always ready to catch the government in some bureaucratic injustice or inhumanity. Even high officials of the government, who usually had hard words for ignorant prying busybodies, feared and respected the byline of Terry Shay and knew that the public interest stood behind him.

For a crusader it is hard to distinguish between genuine concern for the welfare of the people, and the need to make the readers read and the circulation grow; and perhaps Terry Shay was beginning to forget that there was a difference.

When the letter came he opened it, and then sat for a while holding it in his hand and thinking of circulation figures and the rich white light of publicity.

The letter was from the A.S.P.C.A. and it pointed out that Venus might possibly have animal life adapted to its own conditions, and to change those conditions could therefore come under the heading of cruelty and slow torture and murder of animals.

He read it over and laughed.

"What is it?" asked Patty, his secretary.

"The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the British Humane Society want to take out an injunction against the Venus seed rocket. They want me to help." He laughed again. "I think I will."

She was puzzled. "But what have they against the Venus rocket? What harm could it do any animal?"

He explained, grinning. "There might be natives on Venus."

She was startled by the idea but still puzzled.

"On Venus? How could they breathe? What would they eat? That's not very likely, is it, Terry?"

He grinned more widely. "No, but nobody has been there to see. There is a reasonable doubt, enough to rock those bureaucrats back on their heels with an injunction. They should have thought of the possibility. They should be more careful of who their damned lumbering machine is likely to run over next."

He got his publicity. There was a great quarrel among experts, overflowing onto the radio, television, and all the public papers. While they were arguing the injunction went through, restraining Dr. Crofts from sending the seeds. . . .

Patty's motives are not known. They may have included some dream of a desert being grown over by trumpet vines and lilac bushes and birds and running streams. She may have been angry with Terry for some reason of her own.

He came in from a radio speech and found a clipping on his desk. It stated that Anton Gottlieb of the American and German Rocket Societies had finished a new spaceship to add to the fleet of five now prospecting the asteroid belt. Gottlieb stated that the new design was so economical of weight that it was theoretically capable even of landing and taking off again from a medium-sized planet without refueling. Under the clipping was a note from Patty.

"Why don't you go to Venus and see for yourself?" the note said. "Think of the publicity!" It is impossible to say what would have been the tone of her voice if she had said it, but it sounded like a dare to Terry Shay.

The next night he went on the air to tell the world that he was going to Venus.

The country was interested; they had argued enough, now they wanted an answer. They passed the hat to raise the fortune that was needed to buy the spaceship for him, and they placed side bets with each other on what he would find on Venus.

While the collection of money went on, Terry turned up at the proving grounds to consult the designer.

"Why not?" said Gottlieb, spreading his hands and shrugging. "If crazy people want to go to Venus, I will convert the ship for Venus. It will only need a little change in fins, there, and a stronger tripod, there, so, and—" He paused and considered the spaceship meditatively, a light of speculation growing in his eyes.

"This search, it will make the test more dangerous, yes?"

"Yes."

"You land, maybe, and take off again?" He was growing excited with some idea of his own.

"Yes."

"Good! Then I will go with you." He beamed.

Terry considered having "Papa" Gottlieb as a companion and stifled a grin. "But what of your responsibilities, Mr. Gottlieb?"

Gottlieb looked harassed. "That's what Minna says. Always she wants me to stay on the ground. Always she says, think of the children—I *think* of the children, their father a designer who has not the faith to test his own ships! No, this time I go!"

In the archives of the newspapers of the time one can find photographs of the Department of Agriculture man nervously shaking hands with the two before the takeoff, and wishing them well in a stilted memorized speech. In most of the photographs, Dr. Crofts and Anton Gustav Gottlieb seem embarrassed by the cameras and crowds, and Terry Shay is smiling and eager to go, but in one picture Terry Shay has already climbed into the ship and Dr. Crofts is handing Gottlieb a symbolic going-away present. It is a package of morning glory seeds, the caption says, and they are both smiling wryly.

After they had been through the first acceleration and picked up extra fuel at the moon, Gottlieb took time for Terry's instruction. Gottlieb was of the opinion that non-engineers were backward children and halfwits, but he kept to his task, sometimes despairing, but always inexhaustibly patient, and succeeded in drilling Terry in the care and handling of spaceships and giving him some rudiments of navigation. Terry came to know "Papa" Gottlieb very well, and tried to turn the tables on him by discussing politics. Gottlieb usually evaded the subject with a good natured *"Ach!"* of despair.

Once he said, "Did I ever tell you I did not like people?"

"No." Terry smiled; the statement was ludicrous. Gottlieb obviously liked everybody.

"I don't like people. They are very silly," said Gottlieb soberly. "I was in five concentration camps. They were all alike." He touched the scars on his neck. "What good is politics, Terry?"

When Terry began trying to explain, Gottlieb interrupted with a long interminable story about the baby sayings of his youngest daughter, and pulled out his wallet to show him her picture. He carried pictures of all his children and was always ready to talk about them, but this time it came to Terry that the round-faced little engineer had deliberately changed the subject, so he left it at that.

Venus was coming very close, a great dark globe showing a narrow ribbon of sunlight around one side.

"Maybe there is life," Gottlieb said. Terry was not prepared for what came next. "What puzzles me is why you want to save these Venusians. Why do you want to, Terry?"

The full ruthless implications of that sank in slowly. Terry turned from the viewplate with a feeling of shock. "If I don't, they will die," he pointed out carefully, as if to a child.

The chubby engineer laughed. "If the amoebas had worried about *that,* we would still be amoebas. Only the fittest should survive. Differential breeding. How else can we have a better race, eh? Progress is built on death."

"You talk like a fascist," Terry pointed out, quietly, as he would have pointed out that Anton Gustav Gottlieb had leprosy. The little engineer merely looked at him soberly and picked up a book.

Terry mastered himself and thereafter avoided political topics and the subject of saving Venusians, painfully aware of the danger of making the trip intolerable with quarrels. He mentioned it just once again as they watched Venus turning under its eternal blanket of dust storms. "Give them a break," he said. "They have as much right to live as we do."

Gottlieb said dreamingly, "Life belongs to the future." They looked at each other for a moment of pure antagonism.

"It belongs to nothing!" Terry snapped, and then they went into the dust cloud of Venus and were too busy to talk.

Dusty wind, rocks, high-piled flowing dust dunes, weirdly scoured

mountains, black vitreous chimneys of forgotten volcanoes, sudden torrential rains that condensed in the stratosphere and then evaporated again before they reached the ground, heavier rains that reached the ground and scoured gullies in the dust without wetting it, and left the gullies to be filled again with dust in one sweep of wind, and over it all *heat,* a dry constant heat of 120 degrees. They were the first humans on Venus.

Terry forgot his temper.

They flew back and forth over the weirdly beautiful, sterile landscape, combing for signs of life and arguing cheerfully on which formula for a locus of chemical imbalance should be used first. The temperature was too stable and the light too dim for a radiation imbalance. They decided on the geologic formula and began to take soundings at likely ridges.

At the end of the second day, when tempers were wearing thin and eyes were beginning to blur with the strain, they found a hollow section in a water-bearing ridge, found its open end, put on spacesuits to give them air and keep them cool, and went in.

It was there.

First it was merely a crevice with sand and fine dust drifted in to make a level floor, but there were footprints. Then there were furry cublike creatures who fled before them, leaving the sand heaps of play fortresses and tunnels, and a trail of small footprints. And there was an aura about the place—a mood.

They turned on their helmet lights and walked onward, listening to distant shrill squeaks at the edge of audibility. "They have a double sight system, maybe," Gottlieb said, stooping slightly as the cleft smoothed to a small rough corridor. "Light *and* sound. Sound is for seeing in the dark. They are smaller than people," he added absently, stooping lower as his helmet brushed the ceiling, but the deduction did not seem important, for they would see them soon and tell them all about Earth. Terry found himself thinking of astonishing tales to tell them about Earth.

"They are very friendly," he said gratefully. He had never felt this form of telepathy before, a communion of feeling instead of thoughts, but it was astonishing how *right* it seemed, like coming home to a family after being with strangers.

"Like relatives, thought sharing with one another," Gottlieb muttered. "Useful," then again, "Good!" as he passed an intersection of tunnels with bracing that showed a keen understanding of structural principles. The work was done in stone, with only a few touches of some soft metal, gold or silver, that needed no smelting.

Presently the two Earthmen came upon them working in the depth of the mine, channeling and conserving a faint trickle of water. The leader-one stopped work for a moment to come forward and greet them. His fur was not exactly fur, but something more like brown velvet, but otherwise he was very like a small brown bear. He looked at them with intelligent, interested brown eyes, and after hesitating a moment took their extended hands and shook them, and returned to work. They fell to and helped.

"Evolved from a water-digging animal," said Gottlieb. "Probably a water-fueled metabolism. Carbon from the air and energy from the temperature differential of evaporation. This air is *dry.*"

He paused, holding a long flat slab of rock. The leader-one spoke a few words of precise direction, interested by the clumsiness of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon," Gottlieb said gently, smiling. "I don't understand you, Mr. Teddy Bear." The native made a gesture of apology and pointed. Gottlieb placed the slab carefully where indicated. "They have a language," he said simply. It showed that the telepathy needed some supplement. It was as vague to the community of bears as it was to the Earthmen. Terry and Gottlieb worked on for a while, and then sat down and leaned against a wall to relax, with their lights off. They could hear the natives working steadily, tapping and grinding, and sometimes lighting the dark for themselves with a supersonic beep.

"We'll have to go back for more oxygen cylinders soon," Terry said.

"Yes," said Gottlieb.

They walked back up the long corridors to the outside and the ship. "Just like brown bears," Terry said warmly. "I always liked those brown bears that mooch candy bars and popcorn in the parks. I'd like to take some of these back and introduce them around to the guys."

"Oxygen would be death to them," warned Gottlieb. "They will need technology and spacesuits. Their science is backward because of the rock, not because of too little thinking. What use is thinking without fire, wood, or hard metal? What can intelligence do with nothing to work with but rock? One needs tools!"

"Let's take them some," said Terry. "This is one native minority in history that is going to get a fair break."

The first trip, they took with them a double armload of empty plastic food cans for the natives to use as water containers. Then Gottlieb stayed behind to watch their use and learn a few words of their language, his face beaming and excited behind his faceplate. Terry returned on the second trip with Gottlieb's tool kit and some plastic wall plates from the storeroom bulkhead. "It's cooling," he reported. "Pretty soon we can start."

The leader-native began to understand vaguely that the blowtorch was some sort of a tool. He touched and lifted the oddly shaped, beautifully worked object which was so strangely not stone, and not dust, and not gold, and he hooted at it supersonically to see it better, then looked up skeptically at the Earthmen. It could not be a tool. It was not a wedge, and not a hammer, but he hoped with great yearning that it would be a tool.

Amused, Terry watched his play of expressions. "Let's show him," he suggested.

They decided to build a cistern, with piped water.

Water dripped with tinkles and splashes into the carefully built inadequate rock of the natives' storage pool. Before turning the blowtorch on, Gottlieb warned the natives away with a gesture. "Different metabolism—heat radiation might be very dangerous to them."

The cluster of small brown bears felt his anxiety and obediently trotted off up the corridor to a safe distance, while the two Earthmen set to work in their heavy spacesuits to build an airtight cistern.

When they had finished the natives came and looked, and then as if by prearrangement drew off up the corridor again, leaving two behind.

One of the two who was left tugged at the blowtorch in Gottlieb's hand, looking up earnestly at his face.

"He wants me to show him how to use it," Gottlieb said, still worried.

"Go ahead," Terry said, amused. "He knows what he's doing."

The volunteer's motions seemed unsteady, but he mimicked Gottlieb's demonstration efficiently enough. The engineer handed him the blowtorch and showed him how to turn it on. The other native stood to one side making a steady supersonic note, and watching.

The volunteer turned on the blowtorch without clumsiness, started faintly as the thin blue flame tongued out, skillfully smoothed the rough unfinished plastic corner for three minutes while they watched, then died and fell into the storage pool.

The blowtorch clanged down and flared on the floor, and Gottlieb reached it and turned it off before it did any more damage.

The group of friendly sober little bears came forward again. First there was the next-most-expendable, who had stood close to the experiment and beeped to give a side lighting of sound to what happened and measure the range of the deadly effect by being close. Then there came the main group which had stood around the bend of a corridor and watched by the distorted reflection of sound, and last there was the leader who had gone some distance away up a side corridor, out of reach of any possible danger. The logical pattern of the arrangement was clear.

It was rather horrible to Terry, for he understood how ready they had been.

They were thumping the chest of the one who had stood close, and gabbling questions at him. Gottlieb and Terry drew together, watching silently.

"Why do they have to be so damned cheerful about it?" Terry demanded.

Gottlieb was calm. "It is a good death, dying for the future. They must have hoped they could use the blowtorch. They know they need tools. He would not have had such a chance usually."

"A chance to be killed, you mean?" Terry asked sarcastically, watching as two teddy bears picked the body up from the shallow water of the storage pool and casually carted it away. There was no doubt that he was dead. Even the two Earthmen had felt the flash of pain that preceded the dark. "Fine chance!"

"A chance to be useful," Gottlieb protested, hurt. "He was weak. Probably he was sick and that was why they chose him."

"Chose him!" Terry felt sick. The whole business began strangely to seem like an extension of his argument with Gottlieb, with the teddy bears unfairly taking Gottlieb's side. He stepped forward and gripped the shoulder of the leader, and turned him around, speaking directly at the large intelligent eyes.

"You're a sort of adviser to this bunch. Do you mean to say that you chose two who were sick to be killed, while you went and hid yourselves?"

The native's eyes widened in the universal sign of puzzlement, and he let out an involuntary supersonic beep, unconsciously trying to make out a dim meaning by sonic reflection. Terry felt the gulf of misunderstanding between them. He shook the furry body gently, trying to convey his meaning. "But that was murder," he said. "That was cowardice; sending someone else to take the danger!"

Gottlieb laid a hand on his arm. "Please, Terry. You are not fair to him. He is a superior type, with better genes. He must be careful of himself."

Terry felt the familiar rage rising in him and tried to check it in a mental pause, making his mind blank. In the brief silence came a feeling of peace. The natives were going back to work, but they were disturbed by the disturbance of his feelings and trying to soothe him as they would soothe a fretful child, wanting him to feel that— everything was all right, everything was all right, single deaths, individual hurts cannot matter to life in the long run, everything was the way it should be— It was like a lullaby, a song of reassurance and strength, the enfolding protecting arms of time and fate—

"They are hellish persuasive," said Terry. Gottlieb was tugging at his arm.

"We must go back now and make ready for the return. Come on, Terry."

They went back through the long corridors, leaving their heavy alien footprints in the fine overtracked sand, and the children scattered excitedly back from the entrance as they reached it, then drew in again to watch them work. After a time the leader and some of the other adults came shyly out of the caves to help.

"Remember what I told you," remonstrated Gottlieb's voice in Terry's earphones.

"You didn't waste those lessons." Terry grinned, looking around the storage compartment, and understanding its construction from remembered lessons. He had emptied it of the surplus emergency equipment, and now he began dismantling a fuel compartment, stripping its surplus weight from the spaceship for the return trip. He unbolted a heavy plate, slid it to a hatch door and looked down before throwing it out.

There was nothing in sight but the usual barren drifting sand and the comically foreshortened figure of Anton Gustav Gottlieb below and to one side, happily pow-wowing with a gang of small, square, interested teddy bears.

Terry grinned and released the wide metal plate. As it slid from his hands a sudden dusty gust of wind slewed it in the direction of the group. It looked as if it would fall too close.

"Look out!" he called. The plate sliced through the air, turning at an angle directly toward the leader-native.

"Look out!" Only Gottlieb could hear the call in his earphones, only Gottlieb looked up and saw the whole thing. There was no time for the engineer to do anything. It was too late to reach the native.

Very clearly, as in a nightmare, Terry saw the foreshortened spacesuited figure step deliberately into the path of the plate, and try to catch it with his hands. The sound of impact came clearly, first through his earphones, then like an echo a fractional instant later through the air, sounding very far away. Terry took a deep breath and went for a first aid kit.

As he reached the ground and passed through the ring of natives towards the still figure in the spacesuit he could hear Gottlieb whispering something.

Hoping for word of what to do, Terry bent closer, tuning up his earphones, listening.

"Survival of the fittest—the fittest—the fittest," whispered Anton Gustav Gottlieb, and died.

Terry touched his shoulder, but there was no sound of breathing, and a swirl of dust came and settled on the glass of the faceplate.

He understood suddenly.

"Papa" Gottlieb. He had not been very smart in some things. His table manners may not have been perfect, but he was a man. He had seen some hard things and he had not liked the way life was lived on Earth; he had wanted to have it done better, and he didn't care by whom . . . by men, or by calm, enduring, intelligent teddy bears. . . .

"You damned fool." Terry raised his face to the dusty sky and tried not to think for a while.

It was easy. Soothing thoughts came from somewhere . . . that there were many other people left on Earth, many to be friends if one only came to know them—many to spare—no great loss—we all die eventually—no matter—no reason for shock—everything normal—everything all right.

Terry choked and looked around at the concerned ring of small brown bears. "Everything is *not* all right, dammit!"

They said nothing, but they were contradicting him with their calm and strength and certainty of the future—the long future and the stars which he knew about and they could not yet foresee. . . .

"—the fittest—" he said wildly. The leader-one climbed up on Gottlieb's chest, and peered worriedly into Terry's face with brown intelligent eyes. His ears were flattened back to his head to keep out the dust, and he looked almost like a man.

"Oh no," Terry said determinedly, backing, seeing what Gottlieb had seen. "You don't fight, do you. You wouldn't have any wars—would you." His shoulders touched the ship's ladder and he reached into his knapsack and brought out something. It was the packet of morning glory seeds. Slowly he tore the envelope open and scattered the seeds into the dusty wind, then climbed up into the ship, sat at the controls and lifted her up for Earth.

Terry Shay never told.

You won't find it in the histories, but it is written among the great lost choices. . . . It could have been different. It might have been a partnership.

But it might not.

THE DISSECTING TABLE

Criticism of current science-fantasy books

THE VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE, by A. E. van Vogt; Simon & Schuster, $2.50. MASTERS OF TIME, by A. E. van Vogt; Fantasy Press, $3.00.

As those who read last issue's review of *The House That Stood Still* may have inferred, this department's thesis on van Vogt is (a) that the man has a very respectable talent as a writer, and (b) that he consistently misuses it.

The present two volumes offer valuable supporting evidence, for *Voyage of the Space Beagle* consists largely of van Vogt's earliest work, two novelettes originally titled *Black Destroyer* and *Discord In Scarlet*; while the two stories in *Masters of Time,* the title story, originally called *Recruiting Station,* and *Changeling,* represent his later period.

Both *Black Destroyer* and *Discord In Scarlet* deal with extra-terrestrial beings encountered by an exploratory spaceship from Earth. In each case, the beast concerned is highly intelligent and powerful, is the last of his race, and is motivated by the urgent necessity to capture the Earth ship and use it to reach a habitable planet where it can reproduce and eventually re-conquer the galaxy. As menaces, the black cat-creature and the four-armed red humanoid are vivid and convincing; the stories of their attacks on the ship and its crew are straightforward, logical, intensely exciting.

In contrast, the third episode written to fill out the book (it deals with a race of avian, asexual fellaheen who hypnotize all of the crew except the "Nexialist"-trained hero, making them fight among themselves) is disconnected and confused to such an extent that the reader will be lucky if he can follow the action from one step to the next, let alone organize them into a coherent whole. The fourth, dealing with an intelligent galaxy, is simply dull.

The contrast is even plainer in *Masters of Time. Changeling* deals with van Vogt's favorite theme: the superman who doesn't know

he's a superman. The plot is complex, involving two power groups, one of which is not identified until late in the story; the action expands wildly in all directions, and, as usual, is resolved abruptly in the last two pages by means of a rabbit previously contained in Mr. van Vogt's hat. *Recruiting Station* concerns two normal people caught up in the vast, cloudy machinations of two warring groups in the future; here again scenes shift abruptly, basic elements of the story are kept hidden till the end and then unsatisfactorily explained; and as an added attraction van Vogt has introduced a string of unresolved time paradoxes.

Van Vogt's method, according to himself, is to work in 800-word "blocks", *each of which introduces a new idea.* This packing technique is undeniably a major contribution to science-fantasy writing; in the hands of at least one other writer, Charles L. Harness, it produces scripts of unparalleled brilliance and impact. But in the innovator's own work the effect is simply that of a senseless bombardment, which might well be labeled "the Kitchen Sink Technique." The essential difference is that a Harness story, in spite of its internal complexity, has an over-all shape which is coherent and symmetrical; the typical van Vogt product is formless.

FIRST LENSMAN, by E. E. Smith; Fantasy Press, $3.00.

Dr. Smith, whose first story, *The Skylark of Space,* appeared twenty-odd years ago, is the leading figure of the now-extinct "bigness" school in science-fiction. His conflicts take place over interstellar distances at the least; he has never written a merely interplanetary story. He works on a big canvas; 300,000 words barely suffice him to complete a story to his own satisfaction. A reader new to this field will probably be appalled and overwhelmed by the multiplicity of world-shaking gadgets, and the casual treatment of incredible distances and speeds; and he may find the characterization and dialogue too old-fashioned for his taste. But for the genuine science-fiction fanatic, a Smith story is a feast.

Dr. Smith's men are bigger and more virile than life; his women are more womanly, his villains the perfect incarnation of villainy. There is absolutely no point in trying to describe his plot or its relation to other stories in the series; that's a job to grey the hair of

a synopsist with three pages to fill in eight-point type. If you're new to science-fantasy, don't bother with this book; if you're an old-time reader, don't miss it.

BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Groff Conklin; Crown Publishers, $3.00.

Groff Conklin's third anthology in this series is his best. For one thing, unlike the magazine which until recently bore the same title, it *is* a big book—545 pages, 32 stories, most of them first-rate science-fantasy. For another, Mr. Conklin has drawn heavily in this volume on recent magazine fiction, and the result is a polish which neither of the previous collections quite attains.

COSMIC ENGINEERS, by Clifford D. Simak; Gnome Press, $2.50.

Clifford Simak is an able craftsman who has been working in this field since the early '30s. He has produced many notable short stories and a few excellent longer works; his "City" series cries for hard-cover publication. But this pot-boiler, written for magazine publication more than ten years ago, should have been left interred. It follows the basic structure used at one time or another by every desperate commercial writer in the field: one or two normal Earthmen of the present day are recruited by a tremendously advanced civilization, either in the far future or across a great distance in space, to help repel some variety of invasion. So stated—and it is fairly stated—this proposition is patent idiocy, and Simak has been no more successful than most in his attempt to make it sound reasonable. The plot has the further handicap of an internal structure suspiciously reminiscent of a children's story: to get milk from Bossy Cow, you have to get her some tall grass from Dan Donkey's patch, and to get the grass you have to get him some water from Grouchy Grouper's personal pond, and to get the water . . .

To complete the slaughter, the story has been placed, for no evident reason, in the 70th century A.D.; yet all the characters talk, think and act exactly like middle-class, middle-intellect 1930 Americans—including one who is revived in the second chapter from a thousand-year sleep. D. K.

by Rudyard Kipling

A MATTER OF FACT

"Some six or seven feet above the port bulwarks hung a Face. It was not human, and it certainly was not animal, for it did not belong to this earth as known to man. . . ."

And if ye doubt the tale I tell,
Steer through the South Pacific swell;
Go where the branching coral hives
Unending strife of endless lives,
Where, leagued about the 'wildered boat,
The rainbow jellies fill and float;
And, lilting where the laver lingers,
The starfish trips on all her fingers;
Where, 'neath his myriad spines ashock,
The sea-egg ripples down the rock;
An orange wonder dimly guessed,
From darkness where the cuttles rest,
Moored o'er the darker deeps that hide
The blind white Sea-snake and his bride;
Who, drowsing, nose the long-lost ships
Let down through darkness to their lips.

—The Palms.

ONCE a priest always a priest; once a Mason always a Mason; but once a journalist always and forever a journalist.

There were three of us, all newspaper men, the only passengers on a little tramp steamer that ran where her owners told her to go. She had once been in the Bilbao iron ore business, had been lent to the Spanish Government for service at Manila; and was ending her days in the Cape Town coolie-trade, with occasional trips to Madagascar

and even as far as England. We found her going to Southampton in ballast, and shipped in her because the fares were nominal. There was Keller, of an American paper, on his way back to the States from palace executions in Madagascar; there was a burly half Dutchman, called Zuyland, who owned and edited a paper up country near Johannesburg; and there was myself, who had solemnly put away all journalism, vowing to forget that I had ever known the difference between an imprint and a stereo advertisement.

Three minutes after Keller spoke to me, as the *Rathmines* cleared Cape Town, I had forgotten the aloofness I desired to feign, and was in heated discussion on the immorality of expanding telegrams beyond a certain fixed point. Then Zuyland came out of his stateroom, and we were all at home instantly, because we were men of the same profession needing no introduction. We annexed the boat formally, broke open the passengers' bathroom door—on the Manila lines the Dons do not wash—cleaned out the orange-peel and cigar-ends at the bottom of the bath, hired a Lascar to shave us throughout the voyage, and then asked each other's names.

Three ordinary men would have quarreled through sheer boredom before they reached Southampton. We, by virtue of our craft, were anything but ordinary men. A large percentage of the tales of the world, the thirty-nine that cannot be told to ladies and the one that can, are common property coming of a common stock. We told them all, as a matter of form, with all their local and specific variants which are surprising. Then came, in the intervals of steady card-play, more personal histories of adventure and things seen and reported; panic among white folk, when the blind terror ran from man to man on the Brooklyn Bridge, and the people crushed each other to death they knew not why; fires, and faces that opened and shut their mouths horribly at red-hot window-frames; wrecks in frost and snow, reported from the sleet-sheathed rescue tug at the risk of frostbite; long rides after diamond thieves; skirmishes on the veldt and in municipal committees with the Boers; glimpses of lazy, tangled Cape politics and the mule-rule in the Transvaal; card-tales, horse-tales, woman-tales by the score and the half hundred; till the first mate, who had seen more than us all put together, but lacked words to clothe his tales with, sat open-mouthed far into the dawn.

When the tales were done we picked up cards till a curious hand or a chance remark made one or other of us say, "That reminds me of a man who—or a business which—" and the anecdotes would continue while the *Rathmines* kicked her way northward through the warm water.

In the morning of one specially warm night we three were sitting immediately in front of the wheelhouse where an old Swedish boatswain whom we called "Frithiof the Dane" was at the wheel pretending that he could not hear our stories. Once or twice Frithiof spun the spokes curiously, and Keller lifted his head from a long chair to ask, "What is it? Can't you get any pull on her?"

"There is a feel in the water," said Frithiof, "that I cannot understand. I think that we run downhills or somethings. She steers bad this morning."

Nobody seems to know the laws that govern the pulse of the big waters. Sometimes even a landsman can tell that the solid ocean is a-tilt, and that the ship is working herself up a long unseen slope; and sometimes the captain says, when neither full steam nor fair wind justify the length of a day's run, that the ship is sagging downhill; but how these ups and downs come about has not yet been settled authoritatively.

"No, it is a following sea," said Frithiof; "and with a following sea you shall not get good steerage way."

The sea was as smooth as a duck-pond, except for a regular oily swell. As I looked over the side to see where it might be following us from, the sun rose in a perfectly clear sky and struck the water with its light so sharply that it seemed as though the sea should clang like a burnished gong. The wake of the screw and the little white streak cut by the log-line hanging over the stern were the only marks on the water as far as eye could reach.

Keller rolled out of his chair and went aft to get a pineapple from the ripening stock that were hung inside the after awning.

"Frithiof, the log-line has got tired of swimming. It's coming home," he drawled.

"What?" said Frithiof, his voice jumping several octaves.

"Coming home," Keller repeated, leaning over the stern. I ran

to his side and saw the log-line, which till then had been drawn tense over the stern railing, slacken, loop, and come up off the port quarter. Frithiof called up the speaking-tube to the bridge, and the bridge answered, "Yes, nine knots." Then Frithiof spoke again, and the answer was, "What do you want of the skipper?" and Frithiof bellowed, "Call him up."

By this time Zuyland, Keller, and myself had caught something of Frithiof's excitement, for any emotion on shipboard is most contagious. The captain ran out of his cabin, spoke to Frithiof, looked at the log-line, jumped on the bridge, and in a minute we felt the steamer swing round as Frithiof turned her.

"Going back to Cape Town?" said Keller.

Frithiof did not answer, but tore away at the wheel. Then he beckoned us three to help, and we held the wheel down till the *Rathmines* answered it, and we found ourselves looking into the white of our own wake, with the still oily sea tearing past our bows, though we were not going more than half steam ahead.

The captain stretched out his arm from the bridge and shouted. A minute later I would have given a great deal to have shouted too, for one-half of the sea seemed to shoulder itself above the other half, and came on in the shape of a hill. There was neither crest, comb nor curl-over to it; nothing but black water with little waves chasing each other about the flanks. I saw it stream past and on a level with the *Rathmines'* bow-plates before the steamer made up her mind to rise, and I argued that this would be the last of all earthly voyages for me. Then we rose for ever and ever and ever, till I heard Keller saying in my ear, "The bowels of the deep, good Lord!" and the *Rathmines* stood poised, her screw racing and drumming on the slope of a hollow that stretched downwards for a good half-mile.

We went down that hollow, nose under for the most part, and the air smelt wet and muddy, like that of an emptied aquarium. There was a second hill to climb; I saw that much: but the water came aboard and carried me aft till it jammed me against the smoking-room door, and before I could catch breath or clear my eyes again we were rolling to and fro in torn water, with the scuppers pouring like eaves in a thunderstorm.

"There were three waves," said Keller; "and the stoke-hold's flooded."

The firemen were on deck waiting, apparently, to be drowned. The engineer came and dragged them below, and the crew, gasping, began to work the clumsy Board of Trade pump. That showed nothing serious, and when I understood that the *Rathmines* was really on the water, and not beneath it, I asked what had happened.

"The captain says it was a blow-up under the sea—a volcano," said Keller.

"It hasn't warmed anything," I said. I was feeling bitterly cold, and cold was almost unknown in those waters. I went below to change my clothes, and when I came up everything was wiped out by clinging white fog.

"Are there going to be any more surprises?" said Keller to the captain.

"I don't know. Be thankful you're alive, gentlemen. That's a tidal wave thrown up by a volcano. Probably the bottom of the sea has been lifted a few feet somewhere or other. I can't quite understand this cold spell. Our sea-thermometer says the surface water is 44°, and it should be 68° at least."

"It's abominable," said Keller, shivering. "But hadn't you better attend to the foghorn? It seems to me that I heard something."

"Heard! Good heavens!" said the captain from the bridge, "I should think you did." He pulled the string of our foghorn, which was a weak one. It sputtered and choked, because the stoke-hold was full of water and the fires were half-drowned, and at last gave out a moan. It was answered from the fog by one of the most appalling steam-sirens I have ever heard. Keller turned as white as I did, for the fog, the cold fog, was upon us, and any man may be forgiven for fearing the death he cannot see.

"Give her steam there!" said the captain to the engine-room. "Steam for the whistle, if we have to go dead slow."

We bellowed again, and the damp dripped off the awnings to the deck as we listened for the reply. It seemed to be astern this time, but much nearer than before.

"The *Pembroke Castle,* by gum!" said Keller, and then, viciously, "Well, thank God, we shall sink her too."

"It's a side-wheel steamer," I whispered. "Can't you hear the paddles?"

This time we whistled and roared till the steam gave out, and the answer nearly deafened us. There was a sound of frantic threshing in the water, apparently about fifty yards away, and something shot past in the whiteness that looked as though it were grey and red.

"The *Pembroke Castle* bottom up," said Keller, who, being a journalist, always sought for explanations. "That's the colors of a Castle liner. We're in for a big thing."

"The sea is bewitched," said Frithiof from the wheelhouse. "There are two steamers."

Another siren sounded on our bow, and the little steamer rolled in the wash of something that had passed unseen.

"We're evidently in the middle of a fleet," said Keller quietly. "If one doesn't run us down, the other will. Phew! What in creation is that?"

I sniffed for there was a poisonous rank smell in the cold air—a smell that I had smelt before.

"If I was on land I should say that it was an alligator. It smells like musk," I answered.

"Not ten thousand alligators could make that smell," said Zuyland; "I have smelt them."

"Bewitched! Bewitched!" said Frithiof. "The sea she is turned upside down, and we are walking along the bottom."

Again the *Rathmines* rolled in the wash of some unseen ship, and a silver-grey wave broke over the bow, leaving on the deck a sheet of sediment—the grey broth that has its place in the fathomless deeps of the sea. A sprinkling of the wave fell on my face, and it was so cold that it stung as boiling water stings. The dead and most untouched deep water of the sea had been heaved to the top by the submarine volcano—the chill, still water that kills all life and smells of desolation and emptiness. We did not need either the blinding fog or that indescribable smell of musk to make us unhappy—we were shivering with cold and wretchedness where we stood.

"The hot air on the cold water makes this fog," said the captain. "It ought to clear in a little time."

"Whistle, oh! whistle, and let's get out of it," said Keller.

The captain whistled again, and far and far astern the invisible twin steam-sirens answered us. Their blasting shriek grew louder, till at last it seemed to tear out of the fog just above our quarter, and I cowered while the *Rathmines* plunged bows-under on a double swell that crossed.

"No more," said Frithiof, "it is not good any more. Let us get away, in the name of God."

"Now if a torpedo-boat with a *City of Paris* siren went mad and broke her moorings and hired a friend to help her, it's just conceivable that we might be carried as we are now. Otherwise this thing is—"

The last words died on Keller's lips, his eyes began to start from his head, and his jaw fell. Some six or seven feet above the port bulwarks, framed in fog, and as utterly unsupported as the full moon, hung a Face. It was not human, and it certainly was not animal, for it did not belong to this earth as known to man. The mouth was open, revealing a ridiculously tiny tongue—as absurd as the tongue of an elephant; there were tense wrinkles of white skin at the angles of the drawn lips; white feelers like those of a barbel sprang from the lower jaw, and there was no sign of teeth within the mouth. But the horror of the face lay in the eyes, for those were sightless—white, in sockets as white as scraped bone, and blind. Yet for all this the face, wrinkled as the mask of a lion is drawn in Assyrian sculpture, was alive with rage and terror. One long white feeler touched our bulwarks. Then the face disappeared with the swiftness of a blind worm popping into its burrow, and the next thing that I remember is my own voice in my own ears, saying gravely to the mainmast, "But the air-bladder ought to have been forced out of its mouth, you know."

Keller came up to me, ashy white. He put his hand into his pocket, took a cigar, bit it, dropped it, thrust his shaking thumb into his mouth and mumbled, "The giant gooseberry and the raining frogs! Gimme a light—gimme a light! I say, gimme a light!" A little bead of blood dropped from his thumbnail.

I respected the motive, though the manifestation was absurd. "Stop, you'll bite your thumb off," I said, and Keller laughed brokenly as

he picked up his cigar. Only Zuyland, leaning over the port bulwarks, seemed self-possessed. He declared later that he was very sick.

"We've seen it," he said, turning around. "That is it."

"What?" said Keller, chewing the unlighted cigar.

As he spoke the fog was blown into shreds, and we saw the sea, grey with mud, rolling on every side of us and empty of all life. Then in one spot it bubbled and became like the pot of ointment that the Bible speaks of. From that wide-ringed trouble a Thing came up—a grey and red Thing with a neck—a Thing that bellowed and writhed in pain. Frithiof drew in his breath and held it till the red letters of the ship's name, woven across his jersey, straggled and opened out as though they had been type badly set. Then he said with a little cluck in his throat, "Ah, me! It is blind. *Hur illa!* That thing is blind," and a murmur of pity went through us all, for we could see that the thing on the water was blind and in pain. Something had gashed and cut the great sides cruelly and the blood was spurting out. The grey ooze of the under-most sea lay in the monstrous wrinkles of the back and poured away in sluices. The blind white head flung back and battered the wounds, and the body in its torment rose clear of the red and grey waves till we saw a pair of quivering shoulders streaked with weed and rough with shells, but as white in the clear spaces as the hairless, nameless, blind, toothless head. Afterwards came a dot on the horizon and the sound of a shrill scream, and it was as though a shuttle shot all across the sea in one breath, and a second head and neck tore through the levels, driving a whispering wall of water to right and left. The two Things met—the one untouched and the other in its death throe—male and female, we said, the female coming to the male. She circled round him bellowing, and laid her neck across the curve of his great turtle-back, and he disappeared under water for an instant, but flung up again, grunting in agony while the blood ran. Once the entire head and neck shot clear of the water and stiffened, and I heard Keller saying, as though he was watching a street accident, "Give him air. For God's sake give him air!" Then the death struggle began, with crampings and twistings and jerkings of the white bulk to and fro, till our little steamer rolled again, and each grey wave coated

her plates with the grey slime. The sun was clear, there was no wind, and we watched, the whole crew, stokers and all, in wonder and pity, but chiefly pity. The Thing was so helpless, and, save for his mate, so alone. No human eye should have beheld him; it was monstrous and indecent to exhibit him there in trade waters between atlas degrees of latitude. He had been spewed up, mangled and dying from his rest on the sea-floor, where he might have lived till the Judgment Day, and we saw the tides of his life go from him as an angry tide goes out across rocks in the teeth of a landward gale.

At last the battle for life ended, in a batter of colored seas. We saw the writhing neck fall like a flail, the carcase turned sideways, showing the glint of a white belly and the inset of a gigantic hind-leg or flapper. Then all sank, and sea boiled over it, while the mate swam round and round, darting her blind head in every direction. Though we might have feared that she would attack the steamer, no power on earth could have drawn any one of us from our places that hour. We watched, holding our breaths. The mate paused in her search; we could hear the wash beating along her sides; reared her neck as high as she could reach, blind and lonely in all that loneliness of the sea, and sent one desperate bellow booming across the swells, as an oyster shell skips across a pond. Then she made off to the westward, the sun shining on the white head and the wake behind it, till nothing was left to see but a little pinpoint of silver on the horizon. We stood on our course again, and the *Rathmines,* coated with sea-sediment, from bow to stern, looked like a ship made grey with terror.

"We must pool our notes," was the first coherent remark from Keller. "We're three trained journalists—we hold absolutely the biggest scoop on record. Start fair."

I objected to this. Nothing is gained by collaboration in journalism when all deal with the same facts, so we went to work each according to his own lights. Keller triple-headed his account, talked about our "gallant captain," and wound up with an allusion to American enterprise in that it was a citizen of Dayton, Ohio, that had seen the sea-serpent. This sort of thing would have discredited the Creation, much more a mere sea tale, but as a specimen of the picture-writing of a half-civilized people it was very interesting. Zuyland

took a heavy column and a half, giving approximate lengths and breadths and the whole list of the crew whom he had sworn on oath to testify to his facts. There was nothing fantastic or flamboyant in Zuyland. I wrote three-quarters of a leaded bourgeois column, roughly speaking, and refrained from putting any journalese into it for reasons that had begun to appear to me.

Keller was insolent with joy. He was going to cable from Southampton to the New York *World,* mail his account to America on the same day, paralyze London with his three columns of loosely knitted headlines, and generally efface the earth. "You'll see how I work a big scoop when I get it," he said.

"Is this your first visit to England?" I asked.

"Yes," said he. "You don't seem to appreciate the beauty of our scoop. It's pyramidal—the death of the sea-serpent! Good heavens alive man, it's the biggest thing ever vouchsafed to a paper!"

"Curious to think that it will never appear in any paper, isn't it?" I said.

Zuyland was near me, and he nodded quickly.

"What do you mean?" said Keller. "If you're enough of a Britisher to throw this thing away, I shan't. I thought you were a newspaper man."

"I am. That's why I know. Don't be an ass, Keller. Remember, I'm seven hundred years your senior, and what your grandchildren may learn five hundred years hence, I learned from my grandfathers about five hundred years ago. You won't do it, because you can't."

This conversation was held in open sea, where everything seems possible, some hundred miles from Southampton. We passed the Needles Light at dawn, and the lifting day showed the stucco villas on the green and the awful orderliness of England—line upon line, wall upon wall, solid stone dock and monolithic pier. We waited an hour in the Customs shed, and there was ample time for the effect to soak in.

"Now, Keller, you face the music. The *Havel* goes out today. Mail by her, and I'll take you to the telegraph office," I said.

I heard Keller gasp as the influence of the land closed about him, cowing him as they say Newmarket Heath cows a young horse unused to open country.

"I want to retouch my stuff. Suppose we wait till we get to London?" he said.

Zuyland, by the way, had torn up his account and thrown it overboard that morning early. His reasons were my reasons.

In the train Keller began to revise his copy, and every time that he looked at the trim little fields, the red villas, and the embankments of the line, the blue pencil plunged remorselessly through the slips. He appeared to have dredged the dictionary for adjectives. I could think of none that he had not used. Yet he was a perfectly sound poker player and never showed more cards than were sufficient to take the pool.

"Aren't you going to leave him a single bellow?" I asked sympathetically. "Remember, everything goes in the States, from a trouser-button to a double eagle."

"That's just the curse of it," said Keller below his breath. "We've played 'em for suckers so often that when it comes to the golden truth—I'd like to try this on a London paper. You have first call there, though."

"Not in the least. I'm not touching the thing in the papers. I shall be happy to leave 'em all to you; but surely you'll cable it home?"

"No. Not if I can make the scoop here and see the Britishers sit up."

"You won't do it with three columns of slushy headline, believe me. They don't sit up as quickly as some people."

"I'm beginning to think that too. Does *nothing* make any difference in this country?" he said, looking out of the window. "How old is that farmhouse?"

"New. It can't be more than two hundred years at the most."

"Um. Fields, too?"

"That hedge there must have been clipped for about eighty years."

"Labor cheap—eh?"

"Pretty much. Well, I suppose you'd like to try the *Times,* wouldn't you?"

"No," said Keller, looking at Winchester Cathedral. "Might as well try to electrify a hay-rick. And to think that the *World* would take three columns and ask for more—with illustrations too! It's sickening."

"But the *Times* might," I began.

Keller flung his paper across the carriage, and it opened in its austere majesty of solid type—opened with the crackle of an encyclopedia.

"Might! You *might* work your way through the bow-plates of a cruiser. Look at that first page!"

"It strikes you that way, does it?" I said. "Then I'd recommend you to try a light and frivolous journal."

"With a thing like this of mine—of ours? It's sacred history!"

I showed him a paper which I conceived would be after his own heart, in that it was modeled on American lines.

"That's homey," he said, "but it's not the real thing. Now, I should like one of these fat old *Times* columns. Probably there'd be a bishop in the office, though."

When we reached London Keller disappeared in the direction of the Strand. What his experiences may have been I cannot tell, but it seems that he invaded the office of an evening paper at 11:45 A.M. (I told him English editors were most idle at that hour), and mentioned my name as that of a witness to the truth of his story.

"I was nearly fired out," he said furiously at lunch. "As soon as I mentioned you, the old man said that I was to tell you that they didn't want any more of your practical jokes, and that you knew the hours to call if you had anything to sell, and that they'd see you condemned before they helped to puff one of your infernal yarns in advance. Say, what record do you hold for truth in this city, anyway?"

"A beauty. You ran up against it, that's all. Why don't you leave the English papers alone and cable to New York? Everything goes over there."

"Can't you see that's just why?" he repeated.

"I saw it a long time ago. You don't intend to cable, then?"

"Yes, I do," he answered, in the over-emphatic voice of one who does not know his own mind.

That afternoon I walked him abroad and about, over the streets that run between the pavements like channels of grooved and tongued lava, over the bridges that are made of enduring stone, through sub-

ways floored and sided with yard-thick concrete, between houses that are never rebuilt, and by river steps hewn to the eye from the living rock. A black fog chased us into Westminster Abbey, and, standing there in the darkness, I could hear the wings of the dead centuries circling round the head of Litchfield A. Keller, journalist, of Dayton, Ohio, U. S. A., whose mission it was to make the Britishers sit up.

He stumbled gasping into the thick gloom, and the roar of the traffic came to his bewildered ears.

"Let's go to the telegraph office and cable," I said. "Can't you hear the New York *World* crying for news of the great sea-serpent, blind, white, and smelling of musk, stricken to death by a submarine volcano, assisted by his loving wife to die in mid-ocean, as visualized by an independent American citizen, a breezy, newsy, brainy newspaper man of Dayton, Ohio? 'Rah for the Buckeye State. Step lively! Both gates! Szz! Boom-ah!"

Keller was a Princeton man, and he seemed to need encouragement.

"You've got me on your own ground," said he, tugging at his overcoat pocket. He pulled out his copy, with the cable forms—for he had written out his telegram—and put them all into my hand, groaning, "I pass. If I hadn't come to your cursed country—if I'd sent it off at Southampton—if I ever get you west of the Alleghanies, if—"

"Never mind, Keller. It isn't your fault. It's the fault of your country. If you had been seven hundred years older you'd have done what I'm going to do."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tell it as a lie."

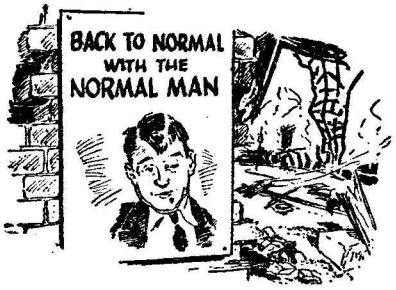
"Fiction?" This with the full-blooded disgust of a journalist for the illegitimate branch of the profession.

"You can call it that if you like. I shall call it a lie."

And a lie it has become, for Truth is a naked lady, and if by accident she is drawn up from the bottom of the sea, it behoves a gentleman either to give her a print petticoat or to turn his face to the wall, and vow that he did not see.

by William Tenn

NULL-P



Not for George Abnego was the piddling triumph of non-Aristotelian logic or non-Euclidean geometry. For him, the unsought and undreamed-of miracle: non-Platonic politics — the everlasting rule of the Average Man!

SEVERAL MONTHS after the Second Atomic War, when radioactivity still held one-third of the planet in desolation, Dr. Daniel Glurt of Fillmore Township, Wisc., stumbled upon a discovery which was to generate humanity's ultimate sociological advance.

Like Columbus, smug over his voyage to India, like Nobel, proud of the synthesis of dynamite which made combat between nations impossible, the doctor misinterpreted his discovery. Years later, he cackled to a visiting historian:

"Had no idea it would lead to this, no idea at all. You remember, the war had just ended: we were feeling mighty subdued what with the eastern and western coasts of the United States practically sizzled away. Well, word came down from the new capitol at Topeka in Kansas for us doctors to give all our patients a complete physical check. Sort of be on the lookout, you know, for radioactive burns and them fancy new diseases the armies had been tossing back and forth. Well, sir, that's absolutely all I set out to do. I'd known George Abnego for over thirty years—treated him for chicken-pox and pneumonia and ptomaine poisoning. I'd *never* suspected!" . . .

Having reported to Dr. Glurt's office immediately after work in accordance with the proclamation shouted through the streets by the

county clerk, and having waited patiently in line for an hour and a half, George Abnego was at last received into the small consulting room. Here he was thoroughly chest-thumped, X-rayed, blood-sampled and urinanalyzed. His skin was examined carefully, and he was made to answer the five hundred questions prepared by the Department of Health in a pathetic attempt to cover the symptoms of the new ailments.

George Abnego then dressed and went home to the cereal supper permitted for that day by the ration board. Dr. Glurt placed his folder in a drawer and called for the next patient. He had noticed nothing up to this point; yet already he had unwittingly begun the Abnegite Revolution.

Four days later, the health survey of Fillmore, Wisc., being complete, the doctor forwarded the examination reports to Topeka. Just before signing George Abnego's sheet, he glanced at it cursorily, raised his eyebrows and entered the following note: "Despite the tendency to dental caries and athlete's foot, I would consider this man to be of average health. Physically, he is the Fillmore Township norm."

It was this last sentence which caused the government medical official to chuckle and glance at the sheet once more. His smile was puzzled after this; it was even more puzzled after he had checked the figures and statements on the form against standard medical references.

He wrote a phrase in red ink in the right-hand corner and sent it along to Research.

His name is lost to history.

Research wondered why the report on George Abnego had been sent up—he had no unusual symptoms portending exotic innovations like cerebral measles or arterial trichinosis. Then it observed the phrase in red ink and Dr. Glurt's remark. Research shrugged its anonymous shoulders and assigned a crew of statisticians to go further into the matter.

A week later, as a result of their findings, another crew—nine medical specialists—left for Fillmore. They examined George Abnego with coördinated precision. Afterwards, they called on Dr.

Glurt briefly, leaving a copy of their examination report with him when he expressed interest.

Ironically, the government copies were destroyed in the Topeka Hard-Shelled Baptist Riots a month later, the same riots which stimulated Dr. Glurt to launch the Abnegite Revolution.

This Baptist denomination, because of population shrinkage due to atomic and bacteriological warfare, was now the largest single religious body in the nation. It was then controlled by a group pledged to the establishment of a Hard-Shelled Baptist theocracy in what was left of the United States. The rioters were quelled after much destruction and bloodshed; their leader, the Reverend Hemingway T. Gaunt—who had vowed that he would remove neither the pistol from his left hand nor the bible from his right until the Rule of God had been established and the Third Temple built—was sentenced to death by a jury composed of stern-faced fellow Baptists.

Commenting on the riots, the Fillmore, Wisc., *Bugle-Herald* drew a mournful parallel between the Topeka street battles and the destruction wreaked upon the world by atomic conflict.

"International communication and transportation having broken down," the editorial went on broodingly, "we now know little of the smashed world in which we live beyond such meager facts as the complete disappearance of Australia beneath the waves, and the contraction of Europe to the Pyrenees and Ural Mountains. We know that our planet's physical appearance has changed as much from what it was ten years ago, as the infant monstrosities and mutants being born everywhere as a result of radioactivity are unpleasantly different from their parents.

"Truly, in these days of mounting catastrophe and change, our faltering spirits beg the heavens for a sign, a portent, that all will be well again, that all will yet be as it once was, that the waters of disaster will subside and we shall once more walk upon the solid ground of normalcy."

It was this last word which attracted Dr. Glurt's attention. That night, he slid the report of the special government medical crew into the newspaper's mail slot. He had penciled a laconic note in the margin of the first page:

"Noticed your interest in the subject."

Next week's edition of the Fillmore *Bugle-Herald* flaunted a page one five-column headline.

FILLMORE CITIZEN THE SIGN?

Normal Man of Fillmore May Be Answer From Above

Local Doctor Reveals Government Medical Secret

The story that followed was liberally sprinkled with quotations taken equally from the government report and the Psalms of David. The startled residents of Fillmore learned that one George Abnego, a citizen unnoticed in their midst for almost forty years, was a living abstraction. Through a combination of circumstances no more remarkable than those producing a royal flush in stud poker, Abegno's physique, psyche and other miscellaneous attributes had resulted in that legendary creature—the statistical average.

According to the last census taken before the war, George Abnego's height and weight were identical with the mean of the American adult male. He had married at the exact age—year, month, day—when statisticians had estimated the marriage of the average man took place; he had married a woman the *average* number of years younger than himself; his income as declared on his last tax statement was the *average* income for that year. The very teeth in his mouth tallied in quantity and condition with those predicted by the American Dental Association to be found on a man extracted at random from the population. Abnego's metabolism and blood pressure, his bodily proportions and private neuroses, were all cross-sections of the latest available records. Subjected to every psychological and personality test available, his final, overall grade corrected out to show that he was both average and normal.

Finally, Mrs. Abnego had been recently delivered of their third child, a boy. This development had not only occurred at exactly the right time according to the population indices, but it had resulted in an entirely normal sample of humanity—unlike most babies being born throughout the land.

The *Bugle-Herald* blared its hymn to the new celebrity around a greasy photograph of the family in which the assembled Abnegos

stared glassily out at the reader, looking, as many put it, "Average—average as hell!"

Newspapers in other states were invited to copy.

They did, slowly at first, then with an accelerating, contagious enthusiasm. Indeed, as the intense public interest in this symbol of stability, this refugee from the extremes, became manifest, newspaper columns gushed fountains of purple prose about the "Normal Man of Fillmore."

At Nebraska State University, Professor Roderick Klingmeister noticed that many members of his biology class were wearing extra-large buttons decorated with pictures of George Abnego. "Before beginning my lecture," he chuckled, "I would like to tell you that this 'normal man' of yours is no Messiah. All he is, I am afraid, is a bell-shaped curve with ambitions, the median made flesh—"

He got no further. He was brained with his own demonstration microscope.

Even that early, a few watchful politicians noticed that no one was punished for this hasty act.

The incident could be related to many others which followed: the unfortunate and unknown citizen of Duluth, for example, who—at the high point of that city's *"Welcome, Average Old Abnego"* parade—was heard to remark in good-natured amazement, "Why, he's just an ordinary jerk like you and me," and was immediately torn into celebratory confetti by horrified neighbors in the crowd.

Developments such as these received careful consideration from men whose power was derived from the just, if well-directed, consent of the governed.

George Abnego, these gentry concluded, represented the maturation of a great national myth which, implicit in the culture for over a century, had been brought to garish fulfilment by the mass communication and entertainment media.

This was the myth that began with the juvenile appeal to be "A Normal Red-Blooded American Boy" and ended, on the highest political levels, with a shirt-sleeved, suspendered seeker after political office boasting, "Shucks, everybody knows who I am. I'm folks—just plain folks."

This was the myth from which were derived such superficially disparate practices as the rite of political baby-kissing, the cult of "keeping up with the Joneses," the foppish, foolish, forever-changing fads which went through the population with the monotonous regularity and sweep of a windshield wiper. The myth of styles and fraternal organizations. The myth of the "regular fellow."

There was a presidential election that year.

Since all that remained of the United States was the Middle West, the Democratic Party had disappeared. Its remnants had been absorbed by a group calling itself the Old Guard Republicans, the closest thing to an American Left. The party in power—the Conservative Republicans—so far right as to verge upon royalism, had acquired enough pledged theocratic votes to make them smug about the election.

Desperately, the Old Guard Republicans searched for a candidate. Having regretfully passed over the adolescent epileptic recently elected to the governorship of South Dakota in violation of the state constitution—and deciding against the psalm-singing grandmother from Oklahoma who punctuated her senatorial speeches with religious music upon the banjo—the party strategists arrived, one summer afternoon, in Fillmore, Wisconsin.

From the moment that Abnego was persuaded to accept the nomination and his last well-intentioned but flimsy objection was overcome (the fact that he was a registered member of the opposition party), it was obvious that the tide of battle had turned, that the fabled grass roots had caught fire.

Abnego ran for President on the slogan "Back to Normal with the Normal Man!"

By the time the Conservative Republicans met in conference assembled, the danger of loss by landslide was already apparent. They changed their tactics, tried to meet the attack head-on and imaginatively.

They nominated a hunchback for the presidency. This man suffered from the additional disability of being a distinguished professor of law in a leading university; he had married with no issue and divorced with much publicity; and finally, he had once admitted to a

congressional investigating committee that he had written and published surrealist poetry. Posters depicting him leering horribly, his hump twice life-size, were smeared across the country over the slogan: "An Abnormal Man for an Abnormal World!"

Despite this brilliant political stroke, the issue was never in doubt. On Election Day, the nostalgic slogan defeated its medicative adversary by three to one. Four years later, with the same opponents, it had risen to five and a half to one. And there was no organized opposition when Abnego ran for a third term. . . .

Not that he had crushed it. There was more casual liberty of political thought allowed during Abnego's administrations than in many previous ones. But less political thinking was done.

Whenever possible, Abnego avoided decision. When a decision was unavoidable, he made it entirely on the basis of precedent. He rarely spoke on a topic of current interest and never committed himself. He was garrulous and exhibitionistic only about his family.

"How can you lampoon a vacuum?" This had been the wail of many opposition newspaper writers and cartoonists during the early years of the Abnegite Revolution, when men still ran against Abnego at election time. They tried to draw him into ridiculous statements or admissions time and again without success. Abnego was simply incapable of saying anything that any major cross-section of the population would consider ridiculous.

Emergencies? "Well," Abnego had said, in the story every schoolchild knew, "I've noticed even the biggest forest fire will burn itself out. Main thing is not to get excited."

He made them lie down in low blood-pressure areas. And, after years of building and destruction, of stimulation and conflict, of accelerating anxieties and torments, they rested and were humbly grateful.

It seemed to many, from the day Abnego was sworn in, that chaos began to waver and everywhere a glorious, welcome stability flowered. In some respects, such as the decrease in the number of monstrous births, processes were under way which had nothing at all to do with the Normal Man of Fillmore; in others—the astonished announcement by lexicographers, for example, that slang expressions peculiar to teen-agers in Abnego's first term were used by their

children in exactly the same contexts eighteen years later in his fifth administration—the historical leveling-out and patting-down effects of the Abnegite trowel were obvious.

The verbal expression of this great calm was the Abnegism.

History's earliest record of these deftly phrased inadequacies relates to the administration in which Abnego, at last feeling secure enough to do so, appointed a cabinet without any regard to the wishes of his party hierarchy. A journalist, attempting to point up the absolute lack of color in the new official family, asked if any one of them —from Secretary of State to Postmaster-General—had ever committed himself publicly on any issue or, in previous positions, had been responsible for a single constructive step in any direction.

To which the President supposedly replied with a bland, unhesitating smile, "I always say there's no hard feelings if no one's defeated. Well, sir, no one's defeated in a fight where the referee can't make a decision."

Apocryphal though it may have been, this remark expressed the mood of Abnegite America perfectly. "As pleasant as a no-decision bout" became part of everyday language.

Certainly as apocryphal as the George Washington cherry-tree legend, but the most definite Abnegism of them all was the one attributed to the President after a performance of *Romeo and Juliet.* "It is better not to have loved at all, than to have loved and lost," he is reported to have remarked at the morbid end of the play.

At the inception of Abnego's sixth term—the first in which his oldest son served with him as vice-president—a group of Europeans re-opened trade with the United States by arriving in a cargo ship assembled from the salvaged parts of three sunken destroyers and one capsized aircraft carrier.

Received everywhere with undemonstrative cordiality, they traveled the country, amazed at the placidity—the almost total absence of political and military excitement on the one hand, and the rapid technological retrogression on the other. One of the emissaries sufficiently mislaid his diplomatic caution to comment before he left:

"We came to America, to these cathedrals of industrialism, in the hope that we would find solutions to many vexing problems of ap-

plied science. These problems—the development of atomic power for factory use, the application of nuclear fission to such small arms as pistols and hand grenades—stand in the way of our postwar recovery. But you, in what remains of the United States of America, don't even see what we, in what remains of Europe, consider so complex and pressing. Excuse me, but what you have here is a national trance!"

His American hosts were not offended: they received his expostulations with polite smiles and shrugs. The delegate returned to tell his countrymen that the Americans, always notorious for their madness, had finally specialized in cretinism.

But another delegate who had observed widely and asked many searching questions went back to his native Toulouse (French culture had once more coagulated in Provence) to define the philosophical foundations of the Abnegite Revolution.

In a book which was read by the world with enormous interest, Michel Gaston Fouffnique, sometime Professor of History at the Sorbonne, pointed out that while twentieth-century man had escaped from the narrow Greek formulations sufficiently to visualize a non-Aristotelian logic and a non-Euclidean geometry, he had not yet had the intellectual temerity to creat a non-Platonic system of politics. Not until Abnego.

"Since the time of Socrates," wrote Monsieur Fouffnique, "Man's political viewpoints have been in thrall to the conception that the best should govern. How to determine that 'best,' the scale of values to be used in order that the 'best' and not mere undifferentiated 'betters' should rule—these have been the basic issues around which have raged the fires of political controversy for almost three millennia. Whether an aristocracy of birth or intellect should prevail is an argument over values; whether rulers should be determined by the will of a god as determined by the entrails of a hog, or selected by the whole people on the basis of a ballot tally—these are alternatives in method. But hitherto no political system has ventured away from the implicit and unexamined assumption first embodied in the philosopher-state of Plato's *Republic*.

"Now, at last, America has turned and questioned the pragmatic validity of the axiom. The young democracy to the west, which in-

troduced the concept of the Rights of Man to jurisprudence, now gives a feverish world the Doctrine of the Lowest Common Denominator in government. According to this doctrine as I have come to understand it through prolonged observation, it is *not* the worst who should govern—as many of my prejudiced fellow-delegates insist—but the mean: what might be termed the 'unbest' or the 'non-élite.'"

Situated amid the still-radioactive rubbish of modern war, the people of Europe listened devoutly to readings from Fouffnique's monograph. They were enthralled by the peaceful monotonies said to exist in the United States and bored by the academician's reasons thereto: that a governing group who knew to begin with that they were "unbest" would be free of the myriad jealousies and conflicts arising from the need to prove individual superiority, and that such a group would tend to smooth any major quarrel very rapidly because of the dangerous opportunities created for imaginative and resourceful people by conditions of struggle and strain.

There were oligarchs here and bosses there; in one nation an ancient religious order still held sway, in another, calculating and brilliant men continued to lead the people. But the word was preached. Shamans appeared in the population, ordinary-looking folk who were called "abnegos." Tyrants found it impossible to destroy these shamans, since they were not chosen for any special abilities but simply because they represented the median of a given group: the middle of any population grouping, it was found, lasts as long as the group itself. Therefore, through bloodshed and much time, the abnegos spread their philosophy and flourished.

Oliver Abnego, who became the first President of the World, was President Abnego VI of the United States of America. His wife, Gertrude, presided—as vice-president—over a Senate composed mostly of his uncles and his cousins and his aunts. They and their numerous offspring lived in an economy which had deteriorated very, very slightly from the conditions experienced by the founder of their line.

As world president, Oliver Abnego approved only one measure—that granting preferential university scholarships to students whose grades were closest to their age-group median all over the planet. The President could hardly have been accused of originality and in-

novation unbecoming to his high office, however, since for some time now all reward systems—scholastic, athletic and even industrial—had been adjusted to recognition of the most average achievement while castigating equally the highest and lowest scores.

When the usable oil gave out shortly afterwards, men turned with perfect calmness to coal. The last turbines were placed in museums while still in operating condition: the people they served felt their isolated and individual use of electricity was too ostentatious for good Abnegism.

Outstanding cultural phenomena of this period were carefully rhymed and exactly metered poems addressed to the nondescript beauties and vague charms of a wife or sweetheart. Had not anthropology disappeared long ago, it would have become a matter of common knowledge that there was a startling tendency to uniformity everywhere in such qualities as bone structure, features and pigmentation, not to mention intelligence, musculature and personality. Humanity was breeding rapidly and unconsciously in towards its center.

Nonetheless, just before the exhaustion of coal, there was a brief sputter of intellect among a group who established themselves on a site northwest of Cairo. These Nilotics, as they were known, consisted mostly of unreconstructed dissidents expelled by their communities, with a leavening of the mentally ill and the physically handicapped; they had at their peak an immense number of technical gadgets and yellowing books culled from crumbling museums and libraries the world over.

Intensely ignored by their fellow-men, the Nilotics carried on shrill and interminable debates while plowing their muddy fields just enough to keep alive. They concluded that they were the only surviving heirs of *homo sapiens,* the bulk of the world's population now being composed of what they termed *homo abnegus.*

Man's evolutionary success, they concluded, had been due chiefly to his lack of specialization. While other creatures had been forced to standardize to a particular and limited environment, mankind had been free for a tremendous spurt, until ultimately it had struck an environmental factor which demanded the price all viable forms had to pay eventually—specialization.

Having come this far in discussion, the Nilotics determined to use the ancient weapons at their disposal to save *homo abnegus* from himself. However, violent disagreements over the methods of re-education to be employed, led them to a bloody internecine conflict with those same weapons in the course of which the entire colony was destroyed and its site made untenable for life. About this time, his coal used up, Man re-entered the broad, self-replenishing forests.

The reign of *homo abnegus* endured for a quarter of a million years. It was disputed finally—and successfully—by a group of Newfoundland retrievers who had been marooned on an island in Hudson Bay when the cargo vessel transporting them to new owners had sunk back in the twentieth century.

These sturdy and highly intelligent dogs, limited perforce to each other's growling society for several hundred millennia, learned to talk in much the same manner that mankind's simian ancestors had learned to walk when a sudden shift in botany destroyed their ancient arboreal homes—out of boredom. Their wits sharpened further by the hardships of their bleak island, their imaginations stimulated by the cold, the articulate retrievers built a most remarkable canine civilization in the Arctic before sweeping southward to enslave and eventually domesticate humanity.

Domestication took the form of breeding men solely for their ability to throw sticks and other objects, the retrieving of which was a sport still popular among the new masters of the planet, however sedentary certain erudite individuals might have become.

Highly prized as pets were a group of men with incredibly thin and long arms; another school of retrievers, however, favored a stocky breed whose arms were short, but extremely sinewy; while, occasionally, interesting results were obtained by inducing rickets for a few generations to produce a pet whose arms were sufficiently limber as to appear almost boneless. This last type, while intriguing both esthetically and scientifically, was generally decried as a sign of decadence in the owner as well as a functional insult to the animal.

Eventually, of course, the retriever civilization developed machines which could throw sticks farther, faster and with more frequency. Thereupon, except in the most backward canine communities, Man disappeared.

(Continued from inside front cover)

Judith Merril is an efficient and determined young woman who has made an enviable place for herself in the science-fantasy field from a standing start just five years ago. Her Bantam Books anthology, *Shot In the Dark*, sold half a million copies; her novel, *Shadow On the Hearth* (Doubleday, 1950), has been chosen for early distribution by the Fiction Book Club; and her short stories, among them the memorable *That Only a Mother . . .*, have appeared in most of the adult magazines in the field. Miss Merril (whose legal name is Mrs. Frederik Pohl) recently became the mother of a six-pound, fourteen-ounce baby girl.

R. E. Morrough, doubtless without intention, has become a man of mystery. *"Naam"* is from a collection of his short stories published under the title, *The Temple Servant,* by Longmans Green in 1930. Since then his agents have lost track of him, and no information about him will be forthcoming until they discover his present whereabouts.

William Tenn is a serious, bespectacled young man with a talent for high comedy. This warring nature has landed him in a series of occupations notably diverse even for a writer; he has been, among other things, a merchant marine purser, a waiter, a department store salesman, a technical editor, and an Army interpreter of Serbo-Croatian stationed in Germany. This last was the climax of his army career, during the course of which he took basic training under every command except the Military Police and the Judge Advocate General, was a bridge carpenter until he fell off his second bridge and a rigger until it was discovered that the only knot he could tie was a bow.

His major claim to immortality consists in having written his first science-fiction story, which dealt with a radarcast to the Moon, three months before the historic experiment was actually made.