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AMAZING
stories

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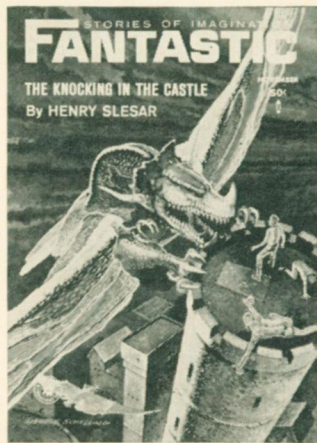
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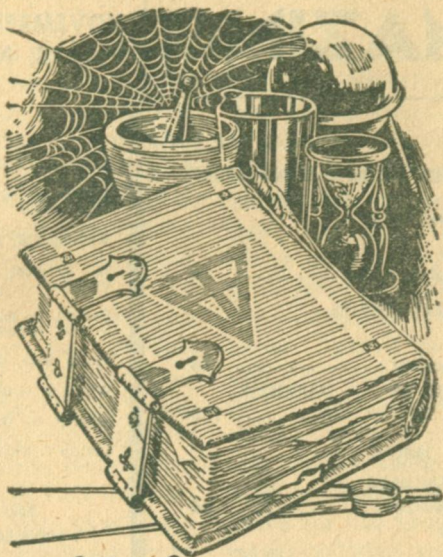
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NOVEMBER, 1964
 Vol. 38, No. 11

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EDITORIAL

THE arguments about the origin of meteorites promises to go on as spiritedly as ever. That virtually no two authorities agree on almost anything about meteorites was made clear at a recent symposium on the subject sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences.

As a matter of fact, only one meteorite in history has ever had its orbit traced (out to somewhere in the asteroid belt), and astronomers do not even agree on whether the objects come from our moon, from the Belt, or from somewhere else. Now, as a series of 64 cameras is being set up in the central part of the U.S. to check speed and trajectories of meteorites with split-second precision. This should help to track orbits and reach some conclusions about site of origin.

The most interesting controversy at the seminar concerned the manner in which meteorites have been formed. The antagonists were Dr. Edward Anders of the University of Chicago and Dr. Harold Urey of the University of California. Anders proposed that half of all meteorites were born in a single gigantic collision—probably between asteroids—that took place 400,000,000 years ago. Anders holds that remnants of this catastro-

phe can be found in three clusters of 34 asteroids that swing in their orbits close to Mars. These, he says, are pieces of the original, larger bodies that remain in the original orbits. Debris from these, and from a fourth group whose orbit comes close to that of Earth's, accounts for most of the meteorites that fall on our planet, Anders believes. The orbits of eight asteroids in the Apollo group also cross the earth's orbit: sooner or later, said Anders, these too will collide with us. Anders' supportive evidence for the timing of his primeval collision was an analysis of radioactive material within the meteorites. Results indicated they were all suddenly heated at once: 400 million years ago.

Among Anders' challengers at the symposium was Prof. Urey, who has maintained that meteorites are chips off the Moon, hurled into space when that satellite is struck by iron meteorites. Urey cited evidence that the makeup of the surface of the moon resembles the makeup of the meteorites. (The meteorites in question, to forestall pointers-out-of-error, are those classified as hypersthene chondrites, a group which makes up over half of all meteorites which have been observed falling.)—NL

RIDER IN THE SKY

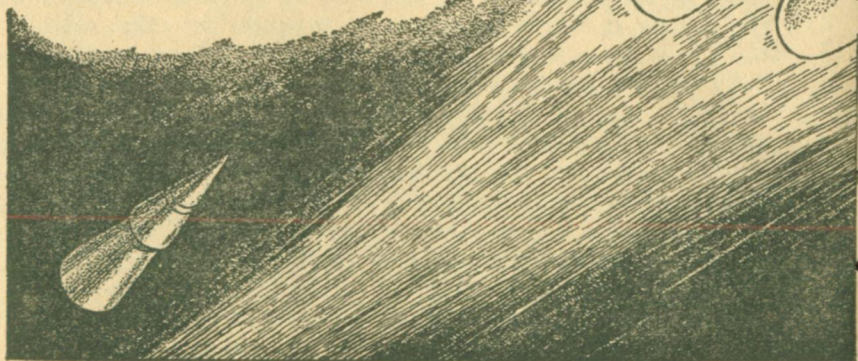
By RAYMOND F. JONES

Ever since he was a little boy, Sam Burnham had wanted to be an adventurer of the starways. Instead, he had become an accountant. But now he had a crazy chance to blaze the star-paths—for God, and country, and for Space Products, Inc.

THERE, for a long time, the Government was the only agency involved in space activities, and if you wanted to sell

space equipment you sold to the Government. But this couldn't last forever that way, of course. It began to ease off when Telstar

Illustrated by FINLAY





was launched, and by the time the first Lunar Colony was firmly set the opportunity was really ripe for private enterprise. On our side that is, of course. The Commies had their colony, naturally, and were constantly yelping about Marxist superiority and boundary violations. Everything there was the State. But on our side, commercial members of the colony increased rapidly.

Space Products, Incorporated was actually the brainchild of a couple of the first Apollo fellows, but after they'd made their ten million they sold out to Lew Lasky and his group. Lasky did not give it much personal attention. It was just another money-maker, which he turned over to a president and a board of directors. One of the things Lasky couldn't have known was that the president, John T. Connors, as able a corporation man as ever breathed, would hire Joe Smiley as Sales Manager.

Joe had come well recommended to Space Products Incorporated. He had started in shoes and had come up at a moderate but steady pace through hardware, automobiles, missiles, electronics, and now space equipment. He felt he could sell anything.

The pace was intense, but Joe liked jungle life. The biggest names in the electronics and space vehicle business were turn-

ing their attention to the equipment market. It looked like the next bonanza field for the boys big enough to stick it out. Joe intended that SPI would stick it out.

At the moment there was some need for a good, reliable one-man conveyance for the Moon. Wheeled vehicles required monstrous balloon tires to keep from sinking into the pumice-like dust. Tracked vehicles were equally cumbersome. But SPI had developed a neat little reaction vehicle they were thinking of calling the Moon Hopper. It looked like a sure thing. There had been similar gadgets tried before, and others would come along in the future, but the Moon Hopper was the best thing to date. It was Joe's problem to grab the market and grab it fast, because there just wasn't room enough at present for more than one such product. If two or more tried to compete for the existing market there wouldn't even be beans for either of them. In addition, the first company to get solidly into this market would be there when the demand for such vehicles did eventually widen.

For a solid week Joe and his staff had been trying to find suitable gimmicks to kick off a publicity campaign when they announced the Moon Hopper to the trade. On one wall of the room, opposite the end of the long wal-

nut conference table, was a life-size painting of a rugged, virile type easing a Hopper onto some lonely, unexplored segment of the Lunar surface.

Joe gestured grandly to the painting and demanded, "Men—what does that inspire in you?"

So far it had inspired exactly nothing. In shirtsleeves, and stripped of their ties, they had shouted themselves hoarse at each other through the cigar-smoke fog of the conference room. At times they had gazed in meditative silence at the intrepid spaceman. Other times they had pled with each other and cursed each other as idiots, and Joe had fired all of them at least seven times.

But up to now they had conceived nothing suitably dignified and at the same time, dramatic enough to accomplish what Joe required: a hypnotic grip on the mind and senses of any prospective customer the moment he confronted some SPI publicity on the Moon Hopper.

At the end of the day at the end of the week Joe sat limply at the head of the table and waved them away.

"Get out," he said wearily. "All idiots out. On Monday I'll have me a new crew who will come up with flashes of genius so fast it will startle the technical merchandising world. And all you bums better get your supply

of pencils and shoelaces, because that's what you'll be selling, come Monday. Pencils and shoelaces. On the street corner. Get out!"

HE put his head on his arms on the table and was close to tears. The cigar smoke was that thick. He heard the tramp of retreating feet and thought of tree-like elephant hoofs. Thick, heavy. Because that's where they wear their brains, he thought.

He looked up after a long time and started to raise his battered form from the chair. Then he stopped and did a double take.

"I thought I told everybody to clear out," he said.

From halfway down the table his publicity director, Steve Massey, nodded sagely. "Good thing you did, too. No chance to think with that crowd around. Now if we could just—"

"I meant you, too!" thundered Joe.

"I don't have to meet Amy until later tonight. I'll stick around and help you."

Joe realized there were only two alternatives: murder or give up. He didn't have the strength left for murder.

A pensive grin appeared on Steve's face. You know, I was just thinking—you want publicity for the Hopper. Remember how they used to get publicity in the old days? Some guy would get together a bundle of dough

and buy a creaky crate of an airplane and head out over the Atlantic. Most of them went down in the drink, but the ones that made it had it made real good. You remember Lindbergh?

"Then, along about the same time, there was that English Channel craze. It seemed like every dame in the country was diving off the cliffs of Dover. There were the round-the-world fliers, too, and the flag pole sitters. And long before all this, a couple of guys even went across the Atlantic in a rowboat. People don't do things like that any more, but what if somebody did?"

"Yeah? Like what?"

Steve laughed. "Like flying a Moon Hopper from the Earth to the Moon. Wouldn't that be a blast if some idiot did it?"

A quiet hush seemed to advance slowly over Joe Smiley's tortured world. He relaxed into his chair with inexorable deliberateness, like a Cadillac tire with a slow leak. On his face a gradual illumination rose, as if from some inner glow. He stared straight ahead.

After a long moment of relishing this world of sudden peace and relief from torment Joe arose and passed behind Steve Massey. He placed a hand reverently on the publicity director's shoulder.

"You're inspired, Steve," he said. "That's all there is to it. You're inspired."

Steve twisted about in his chair and stood up. "Hey, now, wait a minute! I was just talking—I didn't mean—"

"I know you didn't," said Joe. "And that's the sad part of it. Genius often does not recognize its own offspring. But there is another kind of genius, too. And, fortunately, I have that: The ability to recognize pearls among pebbles."

"For Heaven's sake, Joe! No nut is going to risk his neck riding one of those bikes in open space from here to the Moon. It'd be pure suicide!"

"Inspired," murmured Joe. "That I should have had the privilege of such inspired association—"

"It's technically infeasible," Steve shouted desperately. He could see it now: The utter ruin that could flow from such folly, and Joe turning smugly to J. T. Connors, renouncing all credit. "It was Steve's idea right from the beginning."

"Why?" said Joe quietly. "Why is it technically infeasible?"

"Why—it just is. There's no room to carry food on the Hopper. I suppose you'd put him up a sandwich in a brown bag to take along for lunch."

"No. I think a tender would be permissible. If I remember the Channel efforts correctly I believe there was always a motor-

boat along side as tender. I think it would be legal and permissible to do the same in this case."

"Radiation! A guy would be fried in the first half hour."

"Not if he were wearing one of Space Products Incorporated's Radi-Lining suits, which he will be. What do you think we make them for? Fashion shows?"

"Meteorites! He'd be perforated like a sheet of peg board by the time he got there."

"Not after we equip the Hopper with our Little Hercules Meteorite Deflector, which we will do. It's going to be standard equipment on all Hoppers. The Lunar environment requires it, obviously."

Steve took a deep breath and relaxed. It had been stupid to get so worked up. He should have known Joe was just needling him. "Well, I guess it's about time for me to meet Amy. I'll be seeing you in the morning. Let's have a little private session all our own without the other guys and maybe we can come up with something."

"But we already have," said Joe mildly. "Oh, you mean working out the details."

"Cut it out, Joe. The Hopper is built for the Moon. You know that. The thing wouldn't even make a good pogo stick on Earth. You couldn't lift off to the top of a small ant hill."

"Obviously. But here again I

think a certain license would be permissible. I think it would be legitimate to start from an Earth orbit just barely under escape velocity. The pilot—rider—operator—whatever we might call him—"

"He'd be just plain nuts."

"—the operator could eject from orbit by means of the Hopper's power, and he'd be on his way. What could possibly be more dramatic than that? One guy, out there alone in space—not aboard a big rocket ship protected by a million gadgets and whatzits, but just putt-putting along in a little old Moon Hopper. He'd be a hero! And Moon Hoppers would be in!"

JOHN T. CONNORS had never learned to feel comfortable in the presence of Sales Managers or Publicity men. He still believed that if you made a product good enough it would sell itself. But he also recognized that this philosophy didn't work in the present age. So he tolerated Joe Smiley.

This new idea sounded utterly insane. But he had no way of determining whether it was any good or not. Experience had shown him many times that the most idiotic sales schemes were the most successful—even in technical merchandising.

And he had to admit that the idea might be barely feasible.

"How do you propose to get it into orbit in the first place?" asked J. T.

"On our quota," said Joe. "It'd be one of the Hoppers we'd be lifting anyway and freighting to the Moon. This way, we won't have to pay for any more than the orbit lift."

"We'd have to pay extra for an escape orbit."

"I've thought of that. I think we could make it by just tying one of our own auxiliaries to the Hopper. This would require a computer, but the guy is going to need a small computer to navigate, anyway. One of our little Genie models would do it."

"And just who is going to perform this insane task—now that all the other problems are solved?" said J.T.

Joe leaned back in his chair and let his glance settle on the opposite corner of the room. "I've thought a lot about that, too. Who are the Hoppers made for? Not the professional pilots. They're made for the ordinary guy who happens to be on the Moon for any old purpose. Technicians, miners, doctors, even Government inspectors—they tell me they're infesting the colony now. So the guy that makes this trip should be one of them. An amateur. A prospective buyer of a Moon Hopper—though, of course, we'll give him one after the trip is over."

"Yes," said J. T. "I think we should."

"One of our own people," said Joe. "I think it ought to be one of the loyal SPI employees who undertakes this epoch-making trip."

"The Union would close us up so fast you'd never know what hit if we tried to con one of our employees into this."

"Not if it's voluntary. Suppose we do it this way: We'll have a contest, an essay contest on the subject of 'Why I Would Like to Ride a Moon Hopper to the Moon'. We'll pick a half dozen winners from that and give them the same kind of tests they give all the astronauts."

"What if nobody wants to ride a Moon Hopper to the Moon or can't qualify if they do?"

Joe brought his gaze down from the corner of the room. "If you'll pardon the expression, J. T., that's very negative thinking," he said.

SAMUEL H. C. Burnham had risen in sixteen years to the position of Chief Accountant for SPI. He was proud of his position; he was proud of his association with the space equipment company.

Sam was one of many thousands who had yearned since the days of the first orbital flights for a place in the space age. He had thick scrapbooks on the ex-

plots of all of the first six groups of astronauts, and in earlier years he had spent a good many hours pouring over the scrap-books.

He had known, of course, from the very first that he would never follow in the footsteps of his heroes. He was not the stuff of which astronauts are made. He was slight of build, though of medium height. Neither his physique nor his personality were made for rugged contact with the world about him. With precise self-analysis he recognized his own type. He was forever marked for the role of desk jockey.

So be it, he had long ago decided. But he was going to ride just as close as possible to the domain he loved. And he had succeeded pretty well.

While still a student of accounting in college, he had spotted SPI as the kind of company that would come closest to giving him the kind of career he felt was within his capabilities. He was disappointed when its astronaut founders sold out and retired to Palm Springs with their millions at the age of forty-five. But he didn't feel too harshly towards them; they had had about everything life could offer.

So he set his sights on SPI and made it in the accounting department as soon as he got out of school. It was like Heaven. The

paper that flowed through his hands bore exotic words and terms like: hypergolic, denatured, storable; range finder, laser, long range; cocoon, personnel, articulated joint, radiation lined.

He made good headway with SPI. He had a brain like a computer, a fact which he was not thoroughly aware of until he had been on the job for a couple of years. He'd always considered that he had a good head for figures, which is why he chose accounting. But he hadn't realized how far ahead of the field he really was. When full knowledge of this burst upon him he wondered if he hadn't committed a horrible error in not pursuing a science course that would have led to a try for an astronaut post, at least. The involuntary recoil he felt at this thought was answer enough for him. He was in the right spot and he was going to stay there. The sounds of the words, and the feel of the papers that consummated contracts for space suits, rocket fuels, range finders, and orbital station equipment were sufficient.

He went one step further, however, much to the dismay of his wife, Edna, whom he had married by this time. She had been a secretary at SPI when he first came there, and she wanted no part of space or any of its equipment. But SPI had a large number of

virile types coming and going and Edna thought it was good territory.

Most of the really virile types seemed to be going, however. Sam Burham was the only one who kept coming Edna's way. He refused to give up, and she finally decided he was the best thing on her horizon. He was amiable enough to get along with, and it looked as if he was in good and solid with SPI. So she married him.

What she didn't know was the secret vice he carried on in the basement of the apartment house where he had lived for a number of years, and which he now transferred to the modest home they bought out of their combined savings.

SAM had built himself a centrifuge. He had copied it out of magazine articles he had seen on astronaut training. It was built of aluminum tubes and an old washing machine motor, and it could whirl him at up to eight gee's when it got up to speed—which took quite a while. He had made it a custom to condition himself for at least ten minutes every night before going to bed. At first it had made him sicker than the well-known dog, and he had blacked out at only $2\frac{1}{2}$ gee's. But now he could take eight for a half hour as easy as a kid riding the

merry-go-round. On Saturdays and Sundays he sometimes rode it for long periods, exulting in the raw stress of riding down the starways at horrendous speeds and accelerations. He had a picture of Andromeda, taken at Mt. Palomar, mounted in front of his face in the little capsule to give added realism. It was illuminated with a pale blue light.

And then Sam had another gadget, too. A mockup of a space capsule mounted in a three-axis gimbal. He practised steering and navigating with this, just like the real astronauts. Again, he sometimes spent hours on the weekends, standing on his head, spinning at incredible angles, wildly riding his imitation capsule along the great starpaths, navigating intricate courses for distant planets and asteroids where worlds of faerie lay.

Edna was appalled. She started to have the marriage annulled. Sam finally convinced her he wasn't some kind of a nut, and that this was only a shade more eccentric than model railroads or airplanes.

It worked out all right and, after a year or so, Edna began to take a small, secret pride in Sam's odd hobby. Pale, after a day at the office, Sam was a new man when he had taken his evening constitutional aboard his

centrifuge just before retiring.

They had no children. Edna busied herself with civic projects and assorted do-gooding, because neither of them wanted her to continue working. Sam made enough money for their needs.

So it was that Sam Burnham saw the announcement posted on the bulletin board in his department that SPI was sponsoring a company-wide essay contest on "Why I Would Like to Ride a Moon Hopper to the Moon."

He felt a cold chill along his spine. His first reaction was that it was some stupid gimmick cooked up by Joe Smiley or Steve Massey to stir up company spirit. Then, as he read it through the second time, he was convinced that it was absolutely on the level. Joe and Steve were serious. They really did want a candidate for the stunt journey.

Sam's legs quivered beneath him as he strolled out of the plant to the parking lot and got in his car at quitting time.

It wasn't just an irresponsible, hare-brained scheme, he told himself. J. T. Connors would never have approved it unless it were perfectly sound and feasible. The company couldn't afford to back it otherwise. And he supposed there was nothing startling about that. The early days of air-

planes had seen elaborate preparations for round-the-world flights that were on the scale of small military campaigns. But the time came when a housewife could casually hop in her private plane and tour the world.

So that time had come in space flight. Why not? He knew something of the Hopper, which the company was about to market. It was a safe and reliable little vehicle. It was built for the Moon, but he knew of no reason why it was not navigable in open space. This announcement proved the company thought it was.

Edna was just coming out the door when he drove in the yard. "I've got a welfare meeting tonight on the orphans of Afghanistan," she said. "Your dinner's on the table. I won't be late, honey. Wait up for me."

"I will." Sam kissed her and watched fondly as she walked away. A little broader of beam than she once was, but she was still as sprightly as ever. He considered himself very lucky. It had worked out very well even though, as he was well aware, he was not exactly what Edna had had in mind when she went husband-hunting at SPI.

He by-passed the kitchen. He didn't feel much like eating. In his basement room he climbed into the gimbaled capsule and set it spinning at random. With

manual controls he brought it to a dead stop on a pre-determined course in three-tenths of a second. That was pretty good. He didn't think there was any astronaut who could do much better.

His mind was made up then. He climbed out of the capsule and sat at the little desk in the corner by the long shelves of space books. He started to write.

It came slowly at first, but later it was like the breaking of a dam. He put down on paper for the first time in his life the things he had felt when he was fourteen and really looked up at the stars for the first time. He wrote how it felt to stand watching the big rockets go up at Kennedy and Vandenberg and know that's the only thing you ever were meant to do and that you never would. He wrote how it was to have given up all hope of the thing you wanted most and then suddenly to find it might be available after all.

He had to boil it down to a thousand words. He wrote four complete drafts before he was satisfied with it. He sealed it up and then stared at it wondering if he had said too much. He had never put his soul into words like that before in his life. Not even to Edna. She would have thought he was crazy. Maybe the company would, too. They

might even fire him. His fingers clung to the envelope, half tempted to tear it up.

Edna came quietly down the stairs. "Darling," she said, "would you care very much if we took in a couple of the orphans from Afghanistan? It's getting to be such a job placing them all."

JOE Smiley felt sick in the pit of his stomach. Across from him at the long table in the Marketing conference room Steve Massey looked equally glum. They both watched the clock.

"There're bound to be some last minute entries," said Steve hopefully. "You know how it is: people put off things until the last minute. They want to give it a final polish."

"Well, we'll soon know. If they aren't in the box by noon we'll either have to declare no contest or fly with what we've got. Millie's watching the box; she'll bring in anything that shows up."

It was eleven o'clock. The contest had been open for two weeks. Only one entry had appeared so far. Joe and Steve sat in silence until ten after twelve.

Millie, Joe's secretary, stuck her blonde head in the door. "Nothing," she said.

Joe stared. "Nothing at all?" he said.

"Nothing at all," said Millie. She closed the door quietly.

"Nothing at all," Joe repeated dumbly. "What kinda finks we got working for this company, anyway? No spirit. No guts. No sense of adventure. Why, when I was a kid—"

"I don't see your entry here."

"This isn't something for Management. We want a representative, solid citizen of the company."

"Well, we've got one," said Steve, flicking his hand at the single entry on the table between them.

"He sounds like a nut."

"That's what we set out to find, wasn't it? The biggest nut in the whole company. So we find only one. Maybe Personnel does a better job than we think—only one nut in the whole plant!"

"Aw, the plant's full of that kind of nut. I tell you the spirit of adventure is dead. People have it so soft nobody wants to take a chance any more."

"Do we fly with this nut we've got or don't we?"

Joe shook his head bitterly. "I don't know. I thought maybe out of six or eight we might find one could pass the NASA tests. What's the probability of this one guy passing? Close to zero! Who is he anyway?"

"Sam H. C. Burnham. Chief Accountant. You know. You've

seen him around the place. Thin guy, with glasses. Looks like he's got his head in the clouds, but he's a human machine with figures, they tell me."

"Well, we may as well try him. J.T.'ll never let me live it down. This is the thing he warned me about. And we'll have to start all over again thinking up a campaign for the Moon Hopper."

"You don't have much faith in Mr. Burnham's making it."

"I don't have any faith in Mr. Sam Burnham at all!"

THE company flew him to Houston in one of its own planes. There was no announcement or fanfare. Joe wanted as little publicity as possible. Sam was not even allowed to tell Edna that it was anything but a routine business trip.

At the Space Center Joe had already greased the ways for Sam to be given astronaut tests, but the lower echelon types who had to administer the tests did not know what it was all about. Sam was so much fresh meat.

As far as Sam could see, his own setup compared favorably with theirs. They were loaded with gadgets, but his simple outfit did about the same thing.

They taped about a hundred wires to him and buttoned him up in a pressure suit and showed him how to climb in.

"This is a centrifuge," said the bored operator. "We spin you around until your eyeballs sink back to your ears. All these wires tell us when to stop so we don't have to pull you out dead. There's a microphone, too. Anytime you want to stop, just holler. O.K.?"

Sam nodded and climbed up. He overheard the operator say to Joe. "We'll give him a couple of gee's. That'll knock him out if that's all you want to know."

He missed his picture of the Andromeda nebula, but otherwise it was about the same as home. The centrifuge began turning slowly. Some of the wires scratched his skin where they were attached.

There was no gee meter in the cab, but Sam could estimate the acceleration pretty well from past experience. When he was up to about three gee's he heard an anxious voice in the phones of his suit helmet. "Hey, fella, you all right?"

"Sure," said Sam. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't be?"

He heard a muttered oath and an aside to somebody: "I'm really going to knock him out!"

The acceleration immediately climbed. Sam guessed it rose to about five gee's and held. Then the voice came on again. "You all right, buddy?"

"Go ahead and knock me out," said Sam.

They got it up to eight, which he could accommodate comfortably for an indefinite time. At eleven, he held for a little while, and went under at thirteen.

When he finally climbed out, the operator and his assistant regarded Sam with awe. "You've been practising somewhere," the operator said.

"Sure," said Sam. "I ride the merry-go-round every Sunday." He was feeling good.

In their gimbal trainer it took Sam a little longer to become familiar with the controls, which were quite different from his own. But when the tests were over, the operators regarded Sam with a kind of reverence. "You've got reflexes like Aunt Mamie's cat!" said the chief operator. "It takes most astronauts a year to get that good. Want to come up to the front office and sign up for the next class?"

Sam could have wept. But he knew they were just kidding. They didn't take old men like him any more. "Thanks, anyway. I appreciate the compliment."

Joe didn't understand it, either. As they went back to the airport he kept a little distance between himself and SPI's chief accountant. He could not help feeling a sense of awe and mystery about the unusual character they had unearthed. Nobody



—least of all somebody who looked like Sam Burnham—could pass those tests as Sam had without some special blessing of Fate and an awesome harmony in some secret cluster of his genes.

WHEN they got back home Sam let Joe and Steve in on his secret. He took them down to his basement and demonstrated both the centrifuge and the gimballed trainer. It made Joe dizzy to watch Sam spin himself in the trainer on three different axes at the same time then pull out with lightning speed and accuracy on a heading he had previously announced.

It made Joe feel a little weepy himself. The gods had been too good to him in having Steve come up with the idea of the Moon hop in the first place, and then providing such an unexcelled candidate for the flight. Such luck just couldn't hold. Something was bound to go wrong. But the omens so far were incredibly good.

The announcement to the press and TV services was made entirely in Sam's name. It was played up as his idea, his sole responsibility. SPI was mentioned only as having agreed to supply the Hopper and associated services in lifting to orbit and providing the tender.

The first thing that went wrong was Edna. She had hysterics when Sam broke the news a few hours before it appeared in the papers and on TV. And when she quieted a bit she was simply appalled, stunned, and then light began to dawn.

"You've planned this ever since the day we were married!" she accused. "That junk in the basement—it wasn't just a hobby, was it? It was all part of a fiendish plan you've kept to yourself all these years."

"You were looking for an astronaut type when you came to work at SPI," Sam reminded her gently.

"That's different," Edna snapped. "You're not it."

"I passed all the tests."

"That still doesn't make you the type. Sam, you don't need to do this just to try to prove something to me."

He shook his head. "That's not the reason. And I didn't plan it. I just heard about the chance a couple of weeks ago. It's just coincidence that my hobby helped me pass the tests."

"You don't love me at all! You never did!" Edna wailed. "All you care anything about is those crazy contraptions of yours in the basement. You don't care what happens to me!"

"You'd get plenty of money. The company is insuring me for two million dollars," said Sam.

"I don't care about money! All I want is for us to go on just the way we have. How much did you say?"

"Two million. But you haven't got anything to worry about, Edna. I'll be back. This trip is just as safe as a walk in the park on Sunday morning."

"I'm not going to let you go." Edna stood up decisively and looked him dead in the eye. "I'm going to stop this whole silly nonsense."

"I don't think there's anything you can do about it, darling. Liftoff is day after tomorrow. They took the Hopper up to orbit today. The tender is ready and waiting in orbit. All they need is me."

"And all they won't get is you! You'll see what I can do about it. You'll see whether the Women's Committee for the Orphans of Afghanistan has any power or not!"

Sam didn't know quite what she was talking about. He went to sleep that night not caring very much, either. He remembered vaguely that a couple of orphans were on their way to them, but in his mind he saw the great, white, spiral arms of Andromeda.

JOE met him at the office the next morning where he was undergoing intensive briefing by SPI engineering types.

"What in the blue blazes of hell is the Orphans of Afghanistan?" said Joe. "Did you ever hear of such an outfit?"

Sam felt a splinter of cold in his innards. His face paled a trifle. "Why—yes—that's a group my wife belongs to. It's just a committee of dames in the neighborhood that haven't anything better to do than look out for the orphans in Afghanistan. My wife's ordered a couple. They should be here any day now. How did you come to know anything about them?"

"Here!" Joe waved a paper in front of him. "They sent us a letter. They're protesting the flight. Unless we notify them we're calling it off by ten a.m. they're wiring the President. Will you please call your wife and muffle those biddies!"

Sam read the letter and looked back at Joe. "I'm afraid I can't. Edna doesn't want me to go. Can't we speed up the schedule? How about going today instead of tomorrow? I'm afraid they may stir up some real trouble."

Joe crumpled the letter and threw it in a corner in disgust. "We can't do that. You're not the only one going up to the Station. This is the regular passenger run. Eleven other guys are going up. Those dames can't hurt us, but it'll be a big nuisance to have to answer all the questions. Can't you control your own wife?"

It was evident that he couldn't. The next day at the Cape a cordon of pickets made a solid wall of plump, angry, female flesh outside the gates. They carried signs reading: SAVE A HUMAN LIFE! KEEP SAM BURNHAM HOME and similar noble sentiments. Joe swore as he saw photographers taking pictures of them. "Are these all Orphans of Afghanistan clear down here?" he asked Sam.

"No. They have connections. I guess you might say it's like one great big underground all over the country. Edna explained it to me last night. They all belong to the National Association of Benevolent Women's Organizations. Thousands of neighborhood clubs all over the country. When any one of them is in trouble or wants something they just run up the white flag and all the others are behind them. Millions of women. It scares you to think about it."

"Yeah." Joe's voice was sober and thoughtful. "It sure does. Well, you all-ready?"

Sam nodded. He had his luggage, which consisted of an extra handkerchief and a brand-new SPI cocoon, personnel, articulated joints, radiation lined. He'd intended using his own space suit, which he'd worn on so many imaginary journeys aboard the centrifuge and the trainer, but last night he'd discovered an eighteen-inch slit in the back of it, obviously created by Edna.

He'd wondered if she'd had visions of him being in the suit while she did it, but immediately dismissed the thought as unkind. The suit had cost him \$3286 with employees' discount.

They drove through the picket line and a hysterical wail went up from the picketing women as Sam was recognized. It still pierced the air as they reached the ready room near the blockhouse.

This was the moment of parting. Joe and Steve extended their hands. Sam shook them solemnly and swallowed hard.

Joe pounded him on the back. "We'll be watching you every minute, kid. Don't think you're alone out there. Fifty million people will be with you every minute of the way. Nobody's got any doubts about your making it. When you get back, Edna's going to be as proud as a mama hen."

"Sure," said Sam. He wondered if he and Edna would ever live in the same house together again.

In the ready room the other passengers were putting on their suits like old timers. The jockey boys didn't have to help any of them very much except to adjust the helmets and see they were clamped tight. One by one, they hooked up to the checkout console to see that all the suit mechanisms were functioning correctly.

Some of the men switched on their radios and joked with each other, but nobody paid any attention to Sam. They either knew who he was and didn't want anything to do with him, he thought, or they had no idea who he was and didn't want to find out.

He wasn't one of them.

The shuttle car picked them up after the last one was checked out. It rumbled across the broad, concrete ways leading down to the launching pad. There, they climbed off and boarded the elevator that lifted them to the nose of the giant *Saturn*. The passenger capsule was already in place. It had three decks. Four passengers to a deck, plus the pilot in the nose. There were a few tons of freight in the hold.

Sam approached his assigned couch and settled into it in half-reclining position. He hooked up his air and electrical lines and the ground steward checked him out. There was nothing more to do except wait.

This was the end of a lifetime of dreaming. It wasn't like being the first. Not like being Glenn or Sheppard. But it was almost as good. Fifty thousand or more had gone ahead of him, but it didn't rob the stars of anything.

There was an abrupt click in the phones and an unknown voice announced mechanically, "Count-down has been completed. Stand-by for firing sequence." A couple

of more clicks. Then the monotonous backward counting began. Sam closed his mind to it and braced himself for the liftoff.

It wasn't much different from the evening constitutional he took every night in the centrifuge. Fifteen minutes later, the passenger capsule was docking at the orbiting space station.

A COUPLE of SPI engineering representatives were waiting for him when he stepped out of the airlock. They introduced a third man. "This is Captain Madsen, Captain of the tender that will accompany you."

Sam nodded inside his helmet and turned on the external speaker. "Pleased to meet you, Captain."

Madsen grunted. "I guess you're all ready to go, Burnham? They said you'd been completely briefed down below."

Sam nodded. "I'm ready."

He could see how it looked to these regular engineers and the spacemen. He was something dreamed up by the Sales department to put on a stunt show. As an individual he was a complete nonentity to them. To Madsen the job was an utter bore. It was nothing but baby-sitting to him. If anything went wrong they'd throw out a line and reel Sam in. Otherwise, they'd toss him a sandwich in a vacuum can occasionally—pureed and condensed

so he could screw it onto his feeding tube and suck it in.

As he walked along the ways leading to the lock where the tender was moored he got just a glimpse of the exciting life of the space station—cargo being sifted for transit to the Moon, spare parts being checked out to ships docked for repair, equipment being set up for exotic space experiments.

He knew there was no time for a tour of the station, and they'd have turned him down even if there were.

Madsen donned a suit in the lock and led him out to the tender. There were only two other crewmen aboard. The Moon Hopper he was to ride was fastened to the hull of the tender by magnetic grapples. It had been equipped with its auxiliary booster.

From somewhere during preparations for the flight a Rules Committee had appeared. Sam never did know who they were or where they came from, or upon what precedent they established their rules. But he knew that all of a sudden Joe had been insistent upon abiding by them so the flight would be "official." Whatever that meant.

The rules as Joe came up with them required that the Hopper be ejected from orbit on its own power so that this would be equivalent to a powered flight

and not a ballistic flight. The auxiliary booster, then, was to put the Hopper into orbit at just below escape velocity.

Madsen asked Sam if he understood all this. Sam said he did.

"O.k., then," said Madsen, "go on out and get aboard the Hopper. "We'll check you out on your computer program and your present navigational coordinates. Then we'll give you a shove with the tender and you release the grapples. Don't let that auxiliary fire until you're at least a mile away! We don't want you blasting a hole in our front window. Got it all clear?"

Sam mounted the Hopper and fastened the seat belts. He turned on the power to the Genie computer the Little Hercules Meteor Deflector, and the astro navigation system. Coordinates were fed in from the tender's navigation system to align the Hopper. When the check was complete, Sam disconnected the cable to the tender and announced he was ready.

With a soundless thrust of its steering rockets, the tender moved away from the Station. It increased momentum and then Madsen's voice sounded in Sam's ears. "Cast off!"

Sam cut power to the grapples. The tender applied retro power and a swiftly widening gap appeared. For a moment, sickness

overwhelmed him. He had the sensation of falling—toward the Earth, two hundred miles below. Nausea and regret swept through him. What kind of idiocy had persuaded him he could ever ride this bike to the Moon?

The sickness began to retreat after a while, but it left cold sweat trickling down his face. There was no way to wipe it off. A chill coursed through him. He turned up the suit heating a trifle.

"You all right?" said Madsen. "We're plenty far away. You can fire into escape orbit any time."

"I'm ready," said Sam weakly. "Just checking my computer. Firing now."

He pressed the button on the computer and the programmed signal ignited the booster. On a soundless wave of flame he advanced through the void.

The acceleration restored his sense of gravity and made him feel better, but he realized that ninety-nine percent of the trip would be weightless. That was the one thing he had not trained adequately on. He swore to himself that he wasn't going to be scuttled by it.

When his velocity reached critical value the computer cut off the booster and dropped it. A small charge kicked it away, and Sam felt more alone than ever. He looked at the insignificant framework that held together the

fuel charges, the seat, the computer, the deflector, the navigator, and him. Oh, yes, there was a pair of headlights for use on the Moon. He flicked them on. There was no way of telling whether they shone or not. Nothing reflected their light.

As a vehicle, the Hopper was about as close to nothing as you could get, he thought. If Joe had still been selling shoes he would have proposed that somebody walk to the Moon.

The Genie worked silently while the gyros and accelerometers of the navigator kept its eyes centered on the sun, the Earth, and the Moon. Based on these observations, the computer would presently turn on the Hopper's own motors.

It came with a gentle thunk that vibrated through the Hopper's frame. Sam felt it and looked back. He was riding on a tiny tail of flame. Up to now he had been tied to Earth by its invisible gravity, but this was the knife that cut the cord. The flame thunked off and Sam knew it had happened.

He was out of orbit, on his way to the Moon.

THE President of the United States had been aware of the Hopper flight announcements in the background of his daily affairs for the past week. The Soviets had been griping that three

small craters at the edge of Aristarchus were theirs, when the First Lunar Survey had clearly established them within the boundaries of the American colonial domain. The Russian ambassador had been to the White House personally with his usual mindless protests. The President was convinced it was a deliberate campaign to drive him and his staff straight to the booby hatch. He wondered how his predecessors had avoided that trip.

This Hopper flight now; that was a refreshing thing. It reminded him of his own goldfish-swallowing days so very long ago. It seemed a long time since any American had been so inventive and so adventurous. He'd certainly have to see that some suitable spot was found for this Burnham fellow after it was over.

He roused from reverie at his desk as his secretary entered with a sheaf of telegrams. "Excuse me, sir, but these have been arriving heavily for the last hour. Press thought you ought to know about them."

"Yes," said the President, "and just what are 'these'?"

"They're all telegrams protesting the Hopper flight of this fellow Burnham. They're asking you to order him picked up."

The President frowned. "Send Dixon in at once."

The Press Secretary appeared

in a moment, his face a swamp of despair. "Mr. President, we did not—"

"Never mind that. Just tell me what this is all about."

"Well, you see, we had no indication whatever that this flight had anything but complete popular support. Then about an hour before Burnham's takeoff we got word that these crazy women had shown up at the Cape to picket the operation. At the same time these telegrams started coming in from all over the country. They've swamped our lines."

"Who's sending them?"

"Women. Women's clubs, committees, bingo associations, garden circles—you name it, and if it's female we're getting telegrams from it."

"They want Burnham stopped? Why?"

"Humanitarian reasons. Needless risk of life. He's got a wife, and they've just undertaken to adopt two orphans from Afghanistan; he should not be permitted to risk himself with such responsibilities."

"Utter nonsense!" the President muttered under his breath. "Have you been in touch with State? Do they think the Soviets might be behind this campaign?"

"I checked right away with them. They say there's no possibility of that. This is a spontaneous groundswell movement of our own people."

"And you know better than that. Somebody has to be behind it. Nothing as well organized as this is spontaneous. When it's fully analyzed about ten years from now you'll see its true Communist origin. The trouble is you can't take a chance. What is your computer prognostication? How big is this thing?"

"They're working on it now, sir. If you'll excuse me, I'll check on it again."

Dixon dashed out and the President turned to the window. He looked up. Somewhere out there was a free and exuberant effort to do something completely illogical. And probably it would have to be squashed because people didn't like to see anyone who was free and exuberant—and illogical—any more.

Dixon came in, his face as shapeless as a washrag. His hand trembled as he held out a sheet of paper.

"Just tell me what it says," said the President.

"The computer analysis indicates that 68 million women are opposed to Burnham's flight and want you to recall him at once."

The President paled and stood utterly motionless for a moment. "You idiots!" he said at last. "Where were you when this flight was first announced? Were all your public pulse people asleep? How could you let a thing like this happen?"

"The indications were all favorable!" moaned Dixon. "We thought the public was one hundred percent in favor of it. There was nothing to show they weren't—not until these messages began coming in."

"Your sensors are weak somewhere. But we'll discuss that later. Get me Lasky."

"Lasky who?"

"Lew Lasky. And don't ask where to find him. Just find him. In ten minutes!"

ON the banks of the swimming pool in Palm Springs, the one belonging to ex-astronaut Jeff Riley, Lew Lasky lolled in warm comfort and watched the poolside TV screen showing Sam Burnham a few thousand miles out from Earth. Jeff was entertaining Lew and his old Apollo buddy, Dick Sanders, for the week end, a practice that had proven exceedingly profitable for Jeff and Dick. Lew had given them friendly steers in directions that had almost doubled the ten million he had originally paid them for SPI.

"You know," said Lew. "I did not know until a couple of days ago that this Hopper thing was an SPI lashup. They tell me it was put together by one of my marketing boys named Smiley. It's about the best thing of its kind I've ever seen. It must be at least three million bucks

worth of publicity to SPI, at least."

Jeff regarded the image of Sam Burnham with a bit of wistfulness. "That guy, Burnham," Jeff said, "he ought to get something out of this, too. How'd you like to be out there on that puddle-jumper, Dick? We thought it was a tough go in that Apollo crate."

Lasky snorted. "Burnham's a bum! You could get a million like him off skid row. Don't ever forget that: you can always find a sucker if you offer him a little limelight. But it's the guys like Smiley that are the men of real value."

"Lew's right," said Dick Sanders. "Look at me and you. It might even be one of us out there if we hadn't got some sense about the equipment business."

Jeff smiled and looked up at the sky. "Think that would be so bad? It would be fun, at least. Those old Apollo days weren't so bad. I wonder if old Pete is still putting guys on the centrifuge and threatening to sink their eyeballs back to their ears. I remember the first time he got me on that thing I'd swear he'd done it. I couldn't see for a week."

"He was the sadistic type. He'd sooner run that thing than work in a butcher shop."

A blonde in a miniature bikini, Lasky's secretary, appeared at the side of the pool dragging a

telephone extension. "It's for you, Mr. Lasky. The President wants to talk to you."

"Which president?" growled Lasky. "I don't want to talk to any of them. Tell him I'm in a conference in the pool and can't be disturbed."

"It's the President of the United States, Mr. Lasky."

Lew Lasky did a double take and sat up straight. "You mean old Bill, himself? Why didn't you say so? What the devil does he want?"

"I didn't ask him, Mr. Lasky."

"Give me that phone! Hello—Bill—is that you?"

"Lew, I'm sorry to interrupt your vacation this way, but what's the idea of letting this lunatic Burnham take off on this suicidal mission?"

"The idea—? It's the best piece of publicity anybody ever thought up in this century!"

"Not for me it isn't. You should have cleared it with me."

"I don't see how it affects you. It never entered my mind to bother you with details like that. What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing is mere detail in an election year. We're flooded with telegrams denouncing the whole thing as an inhuman show. Computer indications are that 68 million women are opposed to it. And they're all voters. And this is an election year. Get Burnham down! And feed the wolves!"

Lasky trembled. "Sure, Bill. I'm sorry I didn't check. I didn't think—. It'll be done right away. Bill—?"

Lew Lasky was talking to himself.

Numbly, he handed the phone to the secretary in the bikini and sagged onto the lounge under one of the beach umbrellas.

"Anything wrong?" called Jeff.

Lasky waved a limp hand. "Have a swim, boys. I have to think a minute here."

He knew well enough what the President's last phrase meant. It had been an old understanding between them: When the public is inflamed against anything, be it private company, politicians, or even itself, somebody has to be sacrificed to calm them down. Feeding the wolves, they had always called it between themselves.

An announcement would have to be made that the individual responsible for the blunder of sending Burnham up had been dismissed with a thoroughly bloodied nose. Who would it be? Lasky wondered if he'd have to throw Connors to them. He hated to do that. Connors was a good company man. Still had a lot of mileage in him. It wouldn't hurt to start a step lower.

He beckoned to the bikini to bring the phone back. He dialed Connors and got the SPI presi-

dent out of the private shower adjacent to his office.

"Jack? The roof's fallen in. No, it's nothing we could have anticipated. You should have kept me aboard on this Hopper thing." Quickly, he told him what had happened and of the President's objections. "This means that somebody's got to be hurt—in public," he said. "I think it should be Smiley."

Connors exhaled deeply and audibly. Lasky smiled maliciously. Connors had thought he was going to get it.

"I hate to see it," Connors said sympathetically. "Joe is a real good man. This is going to hurt him terribly."

"The more the better," said Lasky. "The wolves have got to know they've tasted blood."

CONNORS didn't wait, after the phone call. He sent for Joe immediately, to get the unpleasantness over as quickly as possible. When Joe came in Connors let him have it without any preamble.

Joe paled as he got the message. "The whole thing really wasn't my idea at all," he said. "Steve Massey is the one who thought it up. It was Steve's idea right from the beginning."

"That's of no consequence, of course, and you know it. Steve's too small a fry to answer for this. Maybe even you are. If this

doesn't calm things down I may get the axe, too. But you know the law. You stirred up the wolves. Now you're going to have to feed them. We'll announce it on TV tonight that Burnham's coming back and you're out. Any questions?"

Joe shook his head but stopped in the doorway. "It might just be that you could use me back someday. If that ever happens you tell Mr. Lasky it's sure going to cost him a pile of dough to get me."

Connors smiled. "He'll pay it—if he ever wants you back."

When Joe was gone, Connors turned to his office TV set and tried to pick up a broadcast of Burnham, but all the first hullabaloo was over and the deoderant and gastritis salesmen were back on. There wasn't much excitement, after all, in just watching a guy sitting on a Moon Hopper even if you did stop to think he was alone there in space umpteen thousands of miles from Earth. They probably wouldn't show any more of Burnham until he was ready to touch down on the Moon.

Connors shut off the set and picked up the phone. "Get me Captain Madsen aboard the SPI tender *'Demos.'*"

"He's on the line now," the operator said. "He's been trying to get in touch with you."

"All right, put him on. Hello—Madsen, that you?"

"I've been trying to get you, Mr. Connors. I've got something to—"

"Never mind," said Connors. "What I've got to tell you is more important. Something very disturbing has come up and we've got to bring Sam Burnham back to Earth as quickly as possible. Do you understand that? Pick up Sam Burnham and bring him back at once!"

"But that's what I was trying to tell you, Mr. Connors. We can't do that."

"You can't do it? Why can't you do it?"

"Because there isn't anything to pick up!"

Connors had been standing, and now he slowly sagged into the big leather chair behind his desk. "Say that again, Madsen," he murmured. "I don't think I get you."

"There isn't any Sam Burnham, any more, Mr. Connors! He got creamed by a meteor as big as the U.N. building. We were out to one side and behind him, and we told the crazy fool this meteor was coming his way on a dead collision course. We told him to fire up the Hopper and turn aside."

"Wasn't he able to start the Hopper?" said Connors hollowly.

"I don't know. I don't think he tried. He just kept telling us he was getting a plot of the meteor's trajectory on the computer and

that he'd move in just a minute. Well, he didn't. It slammed into him. We saw a big ball of flame all around it from the explosion of his fuel tanks, and that was it.

"Do you want us to come home or go on to the Moon? We've had no orders either way."

"I don't know. I just don't know." Connors felt as if he was going to be very sick. "I've got to think about this. Just hang tight and I'll be in touch with you."

"Yes, sir."

Connors put the phone down.

ON such little things the thrones of kings depended, he thought. Election year. And 68 million women voters hadn't wanted Sam Burnham to be out in space in the first place. They'd massacre the Administration that let it happen.

The President had to be told. And Lew Lasky. As he called Lasky, he wondered idly who the next president of SPI would be. The TV boys made the most of it. For years after they were to point with pride to that night as the peak of professional TV reporting.

The highlight of it was a three way hookup they established for Edna Burnham to be consoled by the President himself in front of 90 million gaping citizens. And then the two of them interviewed Captain Madsen, who was still

aboard the tender in the vicinity of the collision, waiting word to come home or go on.

The President debated heavily with his political advisers and had them run a half dozen computer analyses before deciding it was politically positive and could serve to pick up a few pieces of the disaster.

He read a few lines of consolation that were written by his number one speechwriter, Arthur Morrison, who had been top salesman in his automobile agency for three years in a row before coming to the Administration.

The greatest performance of the evening, however, was given by Edna herself during her conversation with Madsen.

"Are you bringing him home?" she asked in a choked voice, referring to Sam.

Madsen shook his head. "Ma'am, there's nothing to bring back but little grease spots scattered all over space. We can collect them together if you want."

"No—I don't think so," said Edna. "Let's leave him out there. That's where he wanted to be. That's where his heart really was. In death he has achieved the dream of his whole life."

"That's what we thought would be best, Ma'am," said Madsen.

"Has this rock a name?" asked Edna.

"I don't think so. We didn't see it on any of the charts."

"Then it could be called Burnham's meteor—like a great monument in the sky to Sam Burnham. Could you call it that?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I guess we could call it anything you like."

The President broke in. "A wonderful gesture! This *will* be Sam Burnham's monument—in memory of a great and noble pioneer. I hereby decree that it be so noted on celestial sky charts forever after!"

At least half of 90 million citizens wept.

SAM Burnham knew nothing of these proceedings, of course. He didn't even know what he was supposed to be dead but he was beginning to wonder if that weren't the case. It was obvious that that was the only reason the tender had remained steady as she was when Sam had picked up the meteor's extra velocity by landing on it.

He could understand that the wash of flame from the Hopper over the surface of the meteor had probably convinced them that he had crashed and exploded.

But the dum chuckheads could at least have come over for a look! The hard landing had knocked out his radio and it had seemed unnecessary to equip him with flares or anything of the sort. He had waved, but they had

been at least six miles away and evidently not bothering to break out the binoculars.

Clinging to the hunk of rock in a miserable sitting sort of position, he considered that he was just about as stranded as it was possible for one stupid human being to get.

Looking back, in his mind, he went over the steps that had led to this absurd situation. He had been rolling peacefully along, enjoying the scenery now that weightlessness didn't bother him any more. He was seeing the splendor that had not ceased to awe any astronaut—the glory of the stars outside the atmosphere. The sun was just another great, blinding star, and all the little ones shown undiminished around it.

Sam had been enjoying this to the accompaniment of a good semi-classical musical program being relayed from the tender. He had never felt so good in his whole life.

And then the meteor appeared.

He spotted it behind him even before the tender did. Craning his neck to see all about, he glimpsed its incredible glory blazing in direct sunlight. For a moment he thought it was another sun speeding toward him. When his eyes focussed on the core of that brilliance he couldn't believe what he saw—what it appeared to be. He trained his navigational instru-

ments on it and set the computer plotting a course. It was very rough with such a short segment of trajectory to work on, but he made up his mind almost instantly.

The meteor was tracking his own path almost exactly—and traveling about three times his speed. If he hopped aboard it would carry him on to the Moon and get the trip over a lot faster. And he could find out if his suspicions about the meteor were correct.

Timing the junction to keep from getting splattered all over space was the critical factor, but his years of training in his basement weren't worth much if he couldn't pull it off, he thought. He lined up on course, watched closely the double trajectory being plotted on the computer—and pushed the firing button.

For a moment he thought he had missed. The full blast of the Hopper's powerful little motor struck the meteor and blossomed up in great curved sheets of flame. The two objects collided with a smashing blow. The sound of music died in his ears and he was almost wrenched from the seat of the Hopper.

But he had made contact! His first thought was to establish firm anchorage to keep from drifting away. He slipped out of the seat belts and passed one of the Hopper's anchor lines around

a solid, jutting projection of the meteor. He attached one to his own belt and crawled around the edge of the rock.

He was appalled to see how far away the tender was. The landing had knocked his radio out. He waved frantically, but he was already too small to attract attention. He realized they must think him dead in the collision. Madsen had been trying to get him to turn aside while plotting the course. His failure to do so had been interpreted as disaster.

HE sat on the rock, trying to keep the reaction of his breathing from setting him adrift. The smallest movement seemed to send him away. He clung and tried to think.

He had no food except a couple of cans of pureed sandwiches, but he wasn't very hungry anyway. He could hold out until he reached the Moon, especially at the rate he was now travelling. There should be no great problem, except the ones created by the reports of his death that would undoubtedly be relayed to Earth by Madsen. It shouldn't affect his landing. No special preparations were required for that. He'd just set the Hopper down like he'd dropped in from just over the next crater and say, "Hi, fellows. Here I am."

He began to feel the creeping exhaustion generated by the wild

hours since he'd last risen from a bed. It seemed a lifetime away. He checked the anchorage of the Hopper to the meteor, then secured his own lashings a bit more firmly and said to hell with it. Ten minutes later he was asleep.

Sam had never been one to let worry about the inevitable give him insomnia. It didn't now. He awoke refreshed and vigorous ten hours later.

But he was awake before he remembered where he was. He put out a hand and it went beyond the edge of the rock—and encountered nothing. He looked down and then up. And weightlessness mangled his senses again, and down *was* up. He thrashed in sudden panic. Fortunately, the anchor lines held him fast to the rock.

Then he remembered and the panic subsided and the sweat dried on his face. He loosened the lines a bit and sat up. Considering breakfast he remembered his small store of supplies and decided against it.

He wondered what Enda was doing now. She probably had the orphans from Afghanistan by now. Maybe she had the two million bucks, too. If that were the case, maybe she wouldn't be very happy to hear that he had landed safely on the Moon. Maybe she wouldn't even want him back at all. Two million bucks is a lot of money. You would think the in-

surance company would insist on seeing something buried, however, he thought. Maybe *they* would be out to investigate.

He looked about the sky. The sun blazed down in blinding light, just as it had ever since he ejected from orbit. He felt entirely comfortable, however. He'd be glad to sign a testimonial for SPI's Radi-lined suit. The automatic filter of the face plate did a good job, too. When he wanted to see stars, he could see stars. When he turned toward the sun, it shut out the killing radiation. But there was no sign of the insurance company, the tender, or any other unnatural object in the sky. He thought he could make out the space station near Earth, but he wasn't sure.

HE lay back against the rock and watched the Moon, his destination. He must have watched it for twenty or thirty minutes before a creeping, crawling, incredible thought began to penetrate his consciousness. He had been mentally picturing the trajectory he was following, the position of the Earth, the position of the Moon—he could do it in his head almost as well as the navigation computer could do it on paper. But the picture was wrong.

He sat up again.

The Moon wasn't quite where it ought to be. He was sure of it.

With rising panic, he loosened his anchors and crawled to the Hopper. He set the sights of the navigator on the three reference points and checked his own position.

He wasn't where he ought to be.

And then the enormity of his stupidity broke over him. The incredible, blundering, pig-headed, asinine stupidity—

Even the greenest of novice astronauts would not have fallen into such a trap. A mind like a computer! A mind like a computer with a keg of nails dumped in it.

He had overlooked the simple fact that a trajectory to intersect the orbit of the Moon was no good unless the Moon was there at the same time he would be. And at the rate he was going he would be at the point of intersection just about twenty-four hours before the Moon was. And when the Moon got there he would be way to hell and gone on his way to Mars or some point east.

He deserved what he was going to get, he thought. It was poetic justice. It was the old principle of the survival of the fittest. The dumb, the stupid, the incompetent didn't deserve to survive in the eternal round of things.

He sat down again to try to figure out how he was going to survive.

There was one other small matter he had overlooked, too. The ride on the meteor hadn't gained him a thing. It had cost him heavily from the limited store of Hopper fuel. In accelerating to the meteor's velocity he had simply used up his precious fuel which he needed for landing on the Moon. Whether the meteor was there or not, it had cost him the same to gain that speed. The meteor itself had contributed nothing.

So he was on the wrong trajectory to intersect the Moon at his present velocity and he was almost out of fuel to bring him down even if he were on the right trajectory.

He was in a mess, and he had damned few hours to figure whether there was a way out or not.

It didn't take many hours to figure out one simple fact, however. He didn't have enough fuel to reduce his velocity low enough to make a Moon rendezvous and achieve a landing. That was that.

He considered the radio again. If he could signal for help as he passed the Moon maybe somebody would come out and get him. But he knew absolutely nothing about electronics. He opened the radio case and then quietly closed it again. He couldn't even tell what was wrong, let alone fix it.

He considered smoke signals and reflecting mirrors. Nothing.

He sat down and watched the slow approach of the Moon. In a few more hours he would be watching its slow retreat as he sped on to outer space. Like the Ancient Mariner he would wheel through the skies forever on his inexorable course. He had figured that the meteor had a period of something like eight years or so about the sun. What a lousy way to end up!

The thought chilled him. He wasn't going to do it. Maybe it was time to cash in, but one thing he wasn't going to do was let his corpse go sailing off that far from home territory.

He screwed one of the food cans to his suit and slurped the contents down. He took the empty can and deposited it firmly in a crevice in the rock. Then he mounted the Hopper and spent a couple of hours making computations on its computer. Satisfied at last, he cast off the anchor and gave a final lingering glance at the shining meteor. He checked the navigator a final time and pressed the firing button.

The meteor sailed on into space.

SAM Burnham moved along a gentle arc that would bring him just within the gravitational grasp of the Moon and enable it to capture him and whip him into an eternal orbit about it. That would be better than an orbit

about the sun that went clear out to Uranus and back. Not much better, but a little.

He had about a cupful of fuel left.

The strain of waiting and wondering, the incredible silence in which his own heartbeat and breathing were like thunder and the wash of great tides, the utter aloneness—all these swamped his senses as never before. He kept his attention glued to the navigator and its instruments to see if he really were being captured by the Moon as its satellite, or if he were still on a random course that would send him out to the depths of the Solar System.

After eight long hours of observation he knew he had succeeded. The Moon was slowly pulling him in.

But it wasn't much of a victory. He was out of food. Twenty hours of air left. No fuel—except the cupful or so. He'd had it.

He tried to grow philosophical. He'd achieved the dream of his lifetime. He had actually become an astronaut. He'd known some good years with Edna. She'd have decent enough memories of him—and the orphans from Afghanistan would be a comfort to her. He wouldn't be withering away in a menial job that drained the life out of him drop by drop. He'd be going out in a blaze of glory.

Somehow the philosophy didn't help. Starving to death and be-

coming a frozen corpse in orbit about the Moon had small resemblance to a blaze of glory. He began to feel like a drowning man, struggling in the face of death to avoid the unavoidable. There must be some way out—some way to reach help—

His suit was equipped with a small pair of high-power binoculars. He trained these on the distant surface of the Moon both in idle curiosity and in some faint hope of figuring out a way to signal to someone in the Colonies.

He had studied the surface of the Moon very closely in his long years of basement practice. He had learned the names of several thousand geographical features of the surface, their size, characteristics, and precise locations. As he moved now in the orbit into which he had fallen he picked out objects and surface features. He recognized with excitement the location of American Colony #1, but he was so far away he couldn't recognize anything of the colony itself.

He completed one orbit and then another. The plane of his orbit seemed to be shifting slightly as his second transit was not in line with the first. He felt utterly exhausted and in need of sleep. But he dared not sleep now. With so few hours of life left to him he didn't want to waste them in sleep.

As he scanned through his bi-

noculars he thought he saw a faint movement of some kind far below him. He tried to hold steady on the moving spot, but his shaking hands could hardly hold the glasses any more. He bent over and steadied them against the handlebars of the Hopper.

IT was there again. A spot almost the color of the Moon's surface. But it was moving. Rapidly, too, a quick mental calculation told him. It seemed to be riding over plains and craters and mountains without wavering. He must be dreaming.

Then he let the glasses drop away from his eyes and laughed out loud. He had forgotten such a thing existed. It was the Moon Station, in permanent orbit near the Moon, similar to the Earth Orbiting Station.

A ray of hope surged through him. If he could only get a signal to them—

But that was impossible. They were too far away. He'd have to get lower. If he could only get down to them.

On cup of fuel—.

In a semi-hysterical frenzy he turned to the navigator and locked one of its eyes on the Moon Station. He punched data requirements into the computer. And sat back while it hummed.

The answer came out presently. He could spiral down to the

Moon Station under his own power—on one cup of fuel and an ounce of spit.

It was worth trying. At least he should be able to get within hailing distance. The operation was too critical for hand firing. He set the controls of the computer to start the Hopper motor at the precise moment to intersect the orbit of the Station.

There was a small, momentary fizzle of light below him that went out almost as soon as it started. He felt a stab of panic. That couldn't have been his precious cup of fuel surely. But it was. The tanks were totally and completely empty. He had made it or he hadn't.

There seemed to be no change whatever in his path, but the computer tracing soon showed something had happened. He was spiralling slowly closer to the Moon now, dropping a few miles each orbit. He made another calculation. It didn't look as if his oxygen would hold out long enough for him to get down. He closed the valve a notch and tried to decrease his breath to the shallowest possible level.

Skyrockets and streamers of light began to flood his vision. He wished Edna would come downstairs so he could tell her to turn off the damned power to the trainer. Something had happened; he couldn't reach the switch. He couldn't get off.

JAKE Hamblin was as sober a first mate as any orbiting station had ever had, but when he glanced up from his poker hand to the port in the wall opposite him the cards slipped from his nerveless fingers and he covered his eyes with his other hand.

"Jake! What is it?" Abe Simons, the Chief Engineer demanded.

Jake didn't answer. He was shaking all over. Finally, he withdrew his hand from his face and pointed to the port with a trembling finger. "He's out there—I saw him—riding his bike all around the Station. He's going to be the ghost of the spacelanes, and haunt us until the end of time!"

"Have you gone crazy?" said Abe. "Who the devil are you talking about?"

"That guy—you know—the one that got smeared by the meteor. The goof that tried to ride a bike to the Moon—he's out there now. I tell you I just saw him out the port!"

Abe and the other two crewmen rushed to the port and stared out. "You're cr—"

Then there was silence, and finally a long, solemn oath.

They rushed from the room to the control deck. Jake stumbled incoherently after them.

The crowd on the deck had already seen him. Sam's form was limp, stretched out at a crazy an-

gle, but he was still strapped to the seat of the Hopper. He was drifting slowly away and down from the Station.

"Number One lifeboat!" the Captain ordered.

There was a stir in the depths of the Station, the clang of metal doors on the airlocks. Then the bulb-shaped lifeboat drifted into view and a couple of figures popped out of it. They surrounded Sam and unhooked him from the Hopper.

"Tow that bike in," the Captain ordered into the mike.

The figures deposited Sam inside the lifeboat and fastened a line to the Hopper. In a moment the doors clanged again. The Captain lifted his cap and wiped his forehead. "I'll be damned!" he said slowly.

SAM roused in the Station hospital. There was nothing really wrong with him, apart from stretching his air out too thin. Actually, he had a margin of about ten minutes worth left when he was picked up.

Word quickly spread through the station and Sam Burnham's name was spoken with hushed awe. The crew were permitted by the doctor to pass slowly in single file for a quick glimpse of the hero of the incredible journey.

And the Captain had a brilliant idea. He came in after Sam was rested and had absorbed a good

meal. "I've been thinking," the Captain said. "It seems a shame not to complete the final step of your tremendous journey. The fact that you were required to stop here should not be ruled illegal. We could refuel your Hopper and you could continue, making the final landing down on the Moon as planned.

Sam stared at him. His teeth began to chatter and the bed shook lightly. "You're out of your ever-loving mind, Captain," he said. "You're stark, staring crazy if you think I'm ever going to get on one of those things again as long as I live!"

* * *

Joe Smiley called Connors as soon as the news was flashed around the world. "I think you're going to need me, J. T.," said Joe. "I think you're going to need me real bad. All hell's going to bust loose if this isn't handled just right."

Connors sighed. He had to agree with Joe. "I'll call Lasky and see what he thinks."

Lew Lasky, still in Palm Springs, watching the Riley television set reporting the vast news of Sam Burnham's resurrection, was of the same mind. He was just about to call Connors and have him locate Smiley when Connors' call came through to him.

"Smiley wants three times his old salary," said Connors.

"Give it to him," said Lasky.

"And a big fat stock option."

"There are only two conditions," said Lasky. "He has to make a hero out of this Burnham bum, and see that Bill gets re-elected President. If he can do that I may make him president of SPI."

"Yes, I'll tell him," Connors said with sick hastiness. "I'll tell him exactly what you said."

JOE Smiley's first action was to pay a visit to Edna Burnham. He introduced himself as an old fellow worker of Sam's and she invited him into the living room of Sam's modest home.

Joe sat down at her invitation. "I guess it's pretty wonderful news to you to hear that Sam's all safe and sound up there on the Moon Station and that he'll be home in a few days."

"That goes without saying," said Edna. "It's all so unbelievable; we thought for sure he was gone, and then he turns up like this. It's like a miracle."

"Of course, two million dollars is a lot of money," said Sam.

"What are you talking about?" Edna's face hardened.

"The insurance money—which you won't get now."

"Who thinks of money at a time like this? I'm glad to have Sam safe and sound. That's all I'm interested in."

"I'm so glad to hear you say

that, Mrs. Burnham. So many people would actually be wondering which is better: to have the insurance money or their husband back."

"Well, I'm certainly not one of them!"

"And then, of course, there's all that other money. I suppose you'll be giving it back to the people who donated it."

"What money are you talking about?" Edna demanded, red-faced. "There isn't any other money!"

"Why—all the donations that poured into the widow and the adopted orphans from Afghanistan of the world hero, Sam Burnham, after he was declared dead."

"Oh, *that* money! It amounted to so little; I had almost forgotten it."

Joe pulled out a notebook. "According to my calculations, it amounted to approximately a hundred and ninety-six thousand odd dollars, including rubles, lire, yen, and francs. It isn't two million by a long shot, but it's a good sized pot."

"How do you know how much it was?"

"I'm pretty good at figures."

"Will I have to give it back?"

"People will start saying nasty things if you don't. You'll get letters from everywhere this side of Timbuctoo asking for a refund. Did you keep records?"

"No, I didn't think of that."

"Then you'll be getting requests for refunds that will amount to probably double the donations. You're in a pot."

Edna began to cry. "It's all so crazy and mixed up, I don't know what to do! Why did Sam ever have to go off on that crazy thing in the first place?"

"There, now, Mrs. Burnham. I don't think it's all as bad as it appears. There may be some way to save the situation."

"How?"

"I'd suggest an immediate donation to the foundation for the orphans of Afghanistan of the entire amount you received."

"There isn't any such outfit."

"We'll form one."

Edna's sobbing ceased and she looked at Joe with bright-eyed interest. "That sounds like a wonderful idea," she said. "I could be president, and you could be treasurer."

"An excellent idea," said Joe. "I'll get the papers drawn up this afternoon. There's just one thing in addition."

"What's that?" said Edna suspiciously.

"You've got to get these 68 million biddies back in line, that you triggered off through your local club. You'll send out the word at once that Sam is a hero and the President is one hundred percent behind him and should be re-elected."

"Of course," said Edna. "No trouble at all."

THERE is always a certain embarrassment in coming back from the dead. Sam was told about the great eulogy given him by the President and the very soggy TV interview between Edna, Madsen, and the President. "I guess I shouldn't have come back," he said to the Captain of the Moon Station as they had their final meal before his departure. "Nobody could expect to live up to a first class funeral, and that looks like what I got."

"There are complications," said the Captain. "As a matter of fact, the boys here on the Station made up an—ah—donation for your widow—"

"I see," said Sam thoughtfully. "How much did it come to?"

The Captain fished a slip of paper out of his coat pocket. "Jake made the collection and tallied it up. Yes—here it is—two hundred and thirty six dollars and seventy eight cents."

"That was sure nice of your crew," said Sam. "I hope you'll tell the boys how much I appreciate it."

"It was a pleasure. You've done more to lift morale on the Station than anything that's happened since the first Apollo."

"I don't have a checkbook," said Sam.

"Here, scratch one of mine."

"Thanks." Sam accepted the check and wrote in the name of his own bank, then made it out to the Captain for two hundred and thirty six dollars and seventy-eight cents as a refund to the crew. "You will take care of the distribution?" said Sam.

"Sure, and thanks a lot."

When he reached the larger Earth Orbital Station, Sam talked to Joe on the phone and told him about his reluctance and embarrassment. He asked for Joe's advice on dropping out of sight and becoming a beachcomber.

"Forget it, kid," said Joe. "You've got it made. The world's waiting for you. They've forgotten already that you were ever dead. You'll take your place in history along side Ederle, Lindbergh, and what's-his-name who first went over Niagara in a barrel. As your business manager, I predict you'll reap a fortune personally from this great exploit—all in addition to putting SPI Hoppers on the map, of course."

"You're my business manager?" said Sam.

"Yes—Edna and I got together as soon as we heard of your dramatic rescue and decided that there was no time to be lost in exploiting the event. The public's fickle, you know. Something could come along tomorrow to blow you off the front pages."

"I couldn't think of anything I'd like better."

"How about money?"

"A guy can always use some."

"You've got it coming. I've lined up over four hundred testimonials for you to sign—everything from Long Haul Golf Clubs to Haberman's Skin-tite Shorts."

"I've never used either."

"I'll explain it all when you get here. Just sit tight and keep your mouth pretty well shut. Let me do the talking for you. Be the great enigmatic explorer, the distant type; your mind and heart are still out there on the great, wild starpaths of outer space."

"I'm never going out there again as long as I live!"

Joe Smiley screamed his anguish. "Please—Sam! Puleeze—Don't ever think, let alone utter, such awful words!"

I N the three days and two nights since Sam had been found, Joe had outdone himself. For sheer organization, Sam's welcome home was a masterpiece, but time and circumstance were on Joe's side, too. The public was hungry for a hero—the oddball kind, the guy that does something different, half on the spur of the moment, and for the sheer, utter hell of it.

Not since the days of Trudy Ederle and Charles Lindbergh had there been such a ticker tape storm in New York City. Sam Burnham rode down Fifth Avenue, sitting on the back of the

seat in an open car, just like the greatest of the old-time heroes. Joe and Edna rode proudly in the manager's car ahead of him. Behind, a hundred-car cavalcade bore signs of welcome to the hero, and people yelled—hundreds of thousands of them yelled in sheer exuberance at sharing for just a moment somebody's real, honest, go-to-hell experience.

Sam tolerated it, and toward the end of the celebration he began to enjoy it a little bit. He didn't let himself become deluded; he knew that a week from now he could walk down this same street at noon-day without being recognized. But he made a nice talk when the Mayor gave him the keys to the City, and he relished every moment of the lavish banquet that night in his honor.

It was the greatest.

He signed all the testimonials Joe shoved in front of him and hoped Joe's predictions about the amount of money to flow therefrom were accurate. But it really wouldn't matter; it would be taxed so heavily he probably wouldn't realize the price of a ham sandwich out of it.

That's when he thought of the great meteor rolling out along the starways with his plastic can and a little note in it. If only *that* could have worked out a little differently.

When he got back home with

Edna it almost seemed as if he'd never left. But there were a few changes in him, and some yet to be made around the house.

"I want you to call the junkman tomorrow," he said. "Have him pickup all that stuff in the basement."

Edna stared. "You mean you're not going to use the trainer and the centrifuge any more? You can't do that. They're your symbols now. The newsreel and TV men are coming tomorrow to get some shots of you riding them. They're going to make a big play of all the years of training you put in for this flight."

"Junk 'em," said Sam.

He was too tired even to look in on the orphans from Afghanistan. He'd take a look at them tomorrow.

When they were finally in bed, and the lights were out, Edna permitted herself a moment of anger that reflected the short anguish she'd endured when she heard Sam was gone.

"What I can't understand," she said, "is why you did such an idiotic thing as getting in the way of that meteor so that it almost hit you, and would have if you hadn't speeded up to board it."

"I intended to board it. That's what I was trying to do from the first."

"Why?"

The memory of past pleasure

filled him as he recalled that moment. "It was the most glorious sight you can ever imagine," he said. "The sun was shining full on it, and it bore down out of space with a great yellow light. I had to see if it was true."

"If what was true?"

He got out of bed and turned on the light. In the closet he rummaged in his pants pocket a moment and came back with a hand full of yellow pebbles."

"This," he said.

Edna touched it in awe. "It looks like gold."

"It is gold," said Sam. "That whole enormous meteor. Almost pure, solid gold except for a few streaks of rock running through it. Thousands of tons of it. Even if I hadn't got off, it would almost have been worth it to see such a sight."

"But somebody—someday—is going to find it and mine it!" cried Edna.

"I suppose so."

"But it should be you! It's yours. You found it."

"I tried to take care of that the best I could.

"What did you do?"

"I staked a claim. I wrote on a piece of chart paper out of the computer and put it in a can and stuck it in a crevice. I read somewhere that that's the way the old prospectors a long time ago used to operate. Then they went in to town and filed their claim."

"Can you do that?"

"I guess so. I don't suppose it's ever been done before, but I suppose it's all right for a guy can stake a claim in the sky as well as on the ground."

Edna was glowing. "It's wonderful that you had such presence of mind to do that, when you didn't know whether you were going to get out alive or not."

"It won't do much good. It will take hundreds of thousands of dollars to organize an expedition." He turned out the light and returned to bed. "We'll never be able to get that gold."

"Don't be too sure," said Edna quietly. "You've got your testimonial money coming. And there's a Foundation that I think might be willing to finance the mining expedition. We'll talk to Joe first thing in the morning.

THE END

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From the languorous South Seas came eager young Jefferson Armbruster, ready to propagate the faith. Ah, you ask, what faith? Good question, that.

THERE seems to be some mistake," said Mr. Watkins, the personnel manager. "According to your form, you have had no formal education whatsoever . . .?" He looked up inquiringly at the young man seated before his desk, his practiced eye taking in the excellent cut of the subdued blue suit, the cool stiff whiteness of the button-down collar, the sparkle of diamond in the center of the silver tie-tack which secured the blue silk necktie to the immaculate shirtfront, the shoeshine, the crisply neat haircut, the clean, trimmed fingernails, pleasant smile and bright, intelligent crystal-blue eyes. This was an educated man, he knew instinctively, whatever the form

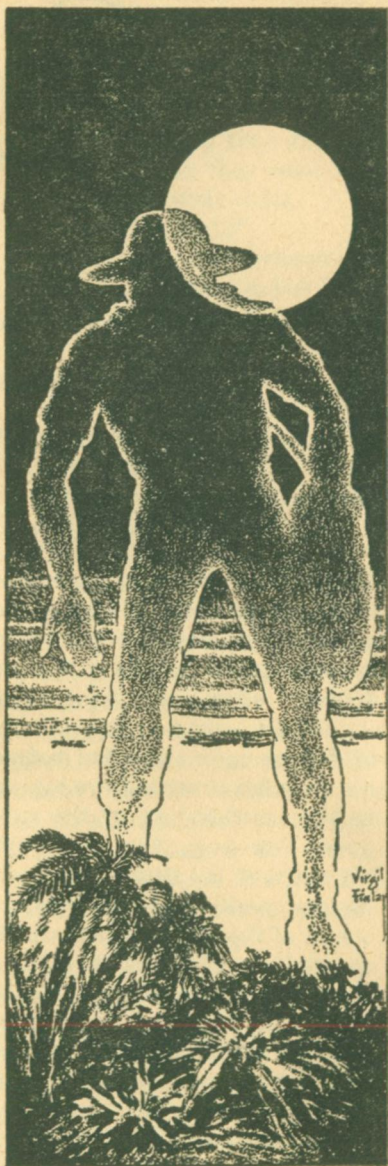
might say. It seemed incredible to him that this young man could be without any sort of classroom background; yet it seemed even more incredible that so obviously intelligent a person could have made such a stupid error upon his employment application. "Is —" Mr. Watkins hesitated, something he had not done for years in interviewing a job-applicant. There was something disconcerting about the young man's admirable poise. "Is this information correct, Mr. Armbruster?"

Jefferson Armbruster nodded politely. "Quite correct, I'm afraid," he replied, with an almost mesmeric grin. "There simply were no schools on the island, you see. My parents had always

intended to start one, but the natives never seemed to understand why their offspring needed any knowledge greater than that necessary to hunt or fish successfully, plus a few modest skills like carving dugouts, attaching spear-heads, and stringing beads. So any schooling I received was quite *informal*, Mr. Watkins. That's the price a young man pays for selecting missionaries as parents."

Again he flashed his attractive, ingenuous grin, and Mr. Watkins found himself warming to the youth, despite his host of inbred reservations against applicants without collegiate diplomas. And yet—There was *something*, some little facet of Jefferson Armbruster's appearance, which did not ring right. Mr. Watkins, under cover of cleaning his spectacles upon his breast-pocket handkerchief, looked the young man over, covertly, once more. And then he had it. Jefferson Armbruster was not wearing a wrist-watch. Mr. Watkins found that fact odd, quite odd. But not, unfortunately, significant.

"Normally, you know," he said carefully, "we would not consider for a moment a man possessed of not even a gradeschool diploma. The peculiar circumstances of your upbringing, however, would allow me to make a concession—Besides which, your marks in the battery of Personnel Testing's



various fields-of-knowledge examinations show you to be remarkably well-informed, well-adjusted psychologically and socially, and possessed of an enviable high Intelligence Quotient. The only thing is—" Mr. Watkins hesitated, unsure as how to phrase his query.

"Yes?" prompted the young man, his attitude friendly and permissive. "The only thing is—What, Mr. Watkins?"

"It's simply that I—as an individual, as well as the manager of this department, Mr. Armbruster—I cannot quite see why a man with your potential would—uh—" He floundered unhappily, uncertain as how to proceed without compromising the respect his own superiors assumed he felt toward the organization.

"Would waste my time in such a minor position?" said the self-possessed young applicant.

"Uh—Yes," murmured Watkins, greatly relieved of the responsibility of putting that very notion into those very words. "After all, the position we are offering could be filled by any number of people with much poorer abilities than yours. I would think you would look around some more, until an opening more suited to your mentality and temperament came along."

"That is what I would do," said the youth, "if I could afford it, Mr. Watkins. Unfortunately, my

mentality and temperament in themselves cannot provide me with a place to live, food to eat, and carfare, while I am doing that looking."

FOR the first time in fourteen years of interviewing job-applicants, Watkins felt himself blushing. He had pried where he really had no business prying. He was sincerely embarrassed. "I didn't realize—" he began, uncomfortably.

"As comprehensive as your application is," smiled an unruffled Jefferson Armbruster, "it lacks the necessary space to go into the details which are puzzling you. I arrived by boat the day before yesterday, but not by the boat on which I had originally set sail, you see."

"Oh, dear!" said Watkins to himself, now horribly dismayed. Aloud, he said, almost timidly, "You weren't aboard the *Java Queen*, by any chance?"

"Until she went down, yes," said the youth. "All my books, luggage, clothing and money—save for perhaps a hundred dollars I happened to have upon my person when we were ordered into the lifeboats—are now resting on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean."

"I'm—I'm infernally sorry!" blurted Mr. Watkins. "It must have been terrible for you, Mr. Armbruster. I mean—with—

with your parents passing away so suddenly, and then . . ." He fumbled helplessly for words of consolation and found none.

But Jefferson Armbruster brushed his protestations aside with an amiable wave of one sun-tanned hand. "My parents were quite elderly," he said, with unaffected simplicity. "They'd lived their lives as they wished, in the service of others. And they both died together, which was a sort of mercy, since they were quite devoted to one another. I was saddened, of course, by the abruptness of their passing—" He saw the glitter of understandable curiosity in the older man's eyes, and graciously amplified, "They serviced a number of small isles, you see, going by proa to each from our home, making a complete circuit once weekly. One of those sudden tropical storms overwhelmed them on the open sea. I saw it from the beach. Their boat was swamped, and overturned." He drew a deep breath, and pulled himself back from the depths of his reminiscence with a brisk squaring of his shoulders and a slight straightening from the slouch he had fallen into while discussing his situation. "At any rate," he finished, "I arrived here in San Francisco, began reading the help-wanted ads, saw yours—the 'no experience necessary' part was what most attracted me, I

must confess—and here I am."

"I see, I see," nodded Watkins, sympathetically. "Of course, the job is yours, Mr. Armbruster. The hours will be from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon, one hour for lunch, Monday through Saturday. You will begin work tomorrow."

Armbruster rose and shook Mr. Watkins by the hand. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you most kindly. I'm sure I shall learn quickly."

"Oh," chuckled Watkins, showing him to the door, "I'm not anticipating any trouble on that score, Mr. Armbruster. You should have the process down pat in a single morning." From the concrete catwalk outside the door, he gestured down toward the immense roomful of clattering machinery, with approximately one coveralled worker to every hulking device, albeit each separate machine occupied hundreds of square feet of floor space. "Lithography and printing aren't so difficult as all that. You check the paper-feed, spot-check the printed matter as every thousand-or-so copies come out of the presses, and the rest of the task is simply making sure the machines stay oiled. Setting up the type is a bit more difficult, of course, but you won't be doing that for some time, yet."

"You must do quite a volume of business here," said Jefferson,

nodding toward the conveyor belts which carried the folded-and-stapled finished magazines out toward the waiting trucks at the exterior loading platforms.

"Oh, that we do," Watkins said with a flush of pride. "I believe we do the printing for well over a score of publications. Some of them—most of them, in fact—nationally distributed."

"It's distressing to think that one wrong move on my part could carry its repercussions all over the nation," said Armbruster, a tinge of awed fascination in his tone. "Or the world, even, if vacationing subscribers have the issues mailed."

"Well," frowned Watkins, with amusement, "*hardly . . .*"

Armbruster grinned. "You mean that if I didn't work out, I'd simply be replaced, and no harm done other than minor delay?"

"Naturally," said Watkins. "But I don't expect that you will be anything but an asset to the Pacific Printing Company."

THEY shook hands once more, then the young man made his departure. Watkins returned to his office and proceeded to complete the processing of Armbruster's forms. Stacking them in the prescribed order—application upon test-results upon insurance information—he inserted the upper edge of the papers into the

jaws of his sturdy desktop stapler and struck the top of it smartly with the heel of his hand.

With a loud crack, the hinge-pin sundered in two, and Mr. Watkins looked amazed at his abruptly bifurcated device. "I'll have to requisition a new one from the supply room," he sighed, utilizing a paper clip upon Armbruster's forms, instead. That it had broken did not astonish him, although he had been startled momentarily by the crack and clatter. He'd been using it for over a decade, and machines didn't last forever.

Mr. Watkins was not an imaginative man. At his home that night, listening to the news about the collapse of the *Osaka Maru* (the Japanese freighter which had figured in the rescue of the passengers of the ill-fated *Java Queen*) at its berth in the harbor, he was mildly diverted at the coincidence, but thought no more of it as a favorite old William Powell movie began on the Late Show.

The next morning, for the first time in fourteen years, Mr. Watkins was late for work. His automobile, which he relied upon to carry him from his home in Oakland to the office each day, had coughed sickly in his garage and refused to leave it, forcing him to have to take a bus, instead. When he arrived, young Armbruster was already at work.

From the catwalk, Mr. Watkins essayed a smile and a wave. Armbruster glanced up, grinned, and waved back. Watkins entered his office, noted the shiny new chrome-plating on his up-to-date replacement stapler with real pleasure, and settled back in idle contentment, dreamily wondering why there weren't more women around with the charm and sophisticated wit of Myrna Loy. None of the current crop of Hollywood starlets seemed to possess any charms beyond a photogenic bosom, and their voices were too shrill to be borne. Except, perhaps, Julie Andrews. Now, *there* was a speaking voice which delighted the ear of the listener with its gentle, precise, modulated tones and rhythmic feminine lilt—

Mr. Watkins shook himself from his reverie and frowned. He'd heard something, something unusual for a bustling printery. Silence. Not of voices, certainly, since there seemed to be a multitude of them expostulating down below the edge of the catwalk outside the glass-windowed door of his office; but all the machinery in the building had ceased, with a negative effect upon his racket-injured ears that had the same jangling force a loud noise would have evoked in a man accustomed to serene working conditions. Mr. Watkins went out upon the walk and looked down.

"What is it?" he called to no one in particular.

"Paper-jam," one of the workers paused long enough to holler back, waving an arm toward the far end of the conveyor belt. Mr. Watkins looked that way, and saw that a bundle of ill-tied magazines had slithered from the loose hempen twine with bad results. A stack of paper is harder than a corresponding thickness of wooden board, and where the sprawling rectangles had skidded into the gear-drive of the belt, two of the axles had shattered, and one of the iron drive-wheels had tipped sideways into the moving belt as a result, ripping out a thirty-foot diagonal gash before the emergency cutoffs had shut down the power. But accidents had happened before, and would in the future, was Mr. Watkins' line of reasoning. He returned to his office and attempted to enter. He was understandably provoked when the knob came off in his hand.

DID you ever have one of those days?" he sighed that evening to Harriet Watkins, his wife. "I swear I've never seen such chaos at Pacific in all the years I've been there." He told her of the breakdown of the machines, the recalcitrant door-knob, and threw in the broken stapler of the day before for good measure. Harriet naturally

knew about the car's failure to perform. It had meant shopping via the local bus lines, and her arms still ached from carrying a double-bagload of groceries home at the onset of rush hour. At the end of his tired lament, however, Watkins managed a wry smile. "I hope the new man doesn't think it's this way *all* the time down there, or he may decide to give his notice."

"New man?" queried Harriet, mildly.

Watkins, suddenly feeling much better—it wasn't often he had anything more interesting than employment statistics to chat about after dinner—proceeded to fascinate her with the twice-tragic tale of Jefferson Armbruster, from the home-schooling education of his missionary parents, through their deaths, and to the disastrous loss of the *Java Queen*. He remembered the coincidental loss of the *Osaka Maru*, then, and threw it in for good measure. "The poor lad'll think he's being dogged by an *incubus* of bad luck," he laughed, when he'd finished. "A few more encounters with the adversities of civilization may send him back to the islands by the next available boat."

"I wonder why he left at all," said Harriet, glancing up from the woolen sock she'd been darning. "It was his home, after all . . . He must have had friends

there, a house, some means of making his livelihood . . ."

"Missionary blood, I should guess," said Mr. Watkins. "His parents had the urge to wander away from the U.S.A. to try and convert the pagans. Perhaps some of this wanderlust, if not their religious fervor, rubbed off on Jefferson. He's a young man, Harriet. Probably heard talk of the great cities, the magical-seeming way of life in a civilized world, things beyond his day-in-day-out experience. It's only natural he should want to investigate a way of life that differs from any he himself ever knew before. I daresay, though, he'll end up heading back to the islands. Especially once he learns that most people in the civilized world would *love* to settle down to the sort of existence he himself discarded."

Harriet stared dreamily into space. "Can you imagine how *nice* it would be, Henry!" she mused softly. "No freeways, no television, no roaring jet planes . . . Nothing but houses and families and friendly people—Sometimes I wonder if progress is all it's cracked up to be." Then, by a typically feminine sort of mental gymnastic, she segued into what seemed for a moment to Henry Watkins like a complete change of subject. "The car was not very badly off, Henry. The man at the garage told me that

one of the piston-rings cracked in two and jammed in the cylinder. He'll have it fixed by tomorrow afternoon."

Henry blinked a bit, until he divined how she had leaped from a "cracked-up" progress to a "cracked" piston-ring without pausing for breath. "Oh, good," he said. "Fine. I hate riding the bus. It stops at every other corner, and the gassy smell makes me a little ill. But if you open a window, people get mad at you. That would be another nice feature of Armbruster's island—No gasoline fumes. Or industrial fumes. Clean, fresh ocean breezes. Warm sand. Green grass. Swaying palms."

Harriet laughed, suddenly. Henry stared at her in some surprise. "What is it, dear?"

"Oh," she said, shrugging her shoulders uncertainly, "I just had a silly notion, that's all. About Armbruster."

"What, dear?" asked Henry. "Please tell me," he urged, his curiosity piqued by her obvious state of amused speculation.

"What you said about his missionary blood, I mean," she answered, with almost a wistful sigh. "Let's say that, although the Armbrusters went out to convert the natives to the ways of civilized man, the island environment had just the opposite effect upon their son Jefferson."

"Converted *him*, you mean? To

the uncivilized life? Or I guess I should say, *non-civilized*."

"Yes, Henry," nodded Harriet, caught up in her own meditations, her gaze fixed in the general direction of the wall behind her husband, as though focused upon a vision there. "In that case, he might have headed out from the islands to convert *us* to *that* way of life."

"It wouldn't take much to convince *me!*" said Henry Watkins, rocking forward in his chair with a gasp of laughter. "Who in his right mind would have to be '*sold*' on a return to the uncomplicated life preceding the industrial revolution?! I only wish it was possible. But," his face grew a bit sad, "one would need more than convincing. I'm afraid, dear. The needs and pressures and social structure of a highly technological civilization cannot be bucked by mere idealism."

"No," sighed Harriet. "No, I suppose not. One lone seminarian could hardly stop the wheels of progress by speechmaking . . ." She paused thoughtfully. "Although the printery wheels certainly halted swiftly enough, didn't they!"

"That they did," said Henry. "I wish I could believe it were due to the influence of young Armbruster. But he couldn't expect to change an entire civilization through *piecemeal* bits of

sabotage, after all, Harriet. A broken machine can be fixed." A fragment of her last few words caught up with his inner ear, suddenly, and he asked, "What did you mean, 'seminarian'? I think you should have said 'missionary', dear . . ."

"Should I?" Harriet said, a little surprised. "I *thought* I had the right word—Doesn't it mean 'seed-sower', or some such word, Henry? You know, like what doctors call a 'carrier', in talking of contagious diseases? Except, of course, he'd be 'carrying' some sort of anti-civilization plague, rather than something medically harmful."

HENRY felt his leg was being pulled. Going along with his wife's apparent flight of fancy, he said, "That, of course, would explain the breakdown, today. Jefferson Armbruster deliberately let the wise old medicine-man back on the island infect him

with a rare disease that attacks only machinery. Like a plague-carrier, he could spread the germs about without being infected himself. And naturally, with the vast distribution of the magazines we put out, it wouldn't be long before the germs were profusely proliferating all over the globe. There'd be no stopping it once it began . . ." An uneasy coolness began to knead Henry's viscera, then, and as he continued speaking, it was less communication than spoken introspection. "And it would account for the failure of the *Java Queen*—and then the *Osaka Maru* . . . My stapler . . . the doorknob . . . even the piston-rings . . ."

Seeing his somber mien, Harriet chuckled. "It would be a bit difficult for the young man, himself, though, wouldn't it? Why, the poor boy couldn't even keep a wristwatch going—" Her sentence broke off as Henry Watkins rose to his feet and stared at her.

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"Darling, what is it?" she demanded with quick solicitude.

"Jefferson Armbruster doesn't wear a watch," said her husband. He crossed the living room, stepped into the hall, and lifted the phone. "I'm going to call the rooming house where he lives," he said agitatedly. "I've got to ask him—" He replaced the phone suddenly.

"I suppose you don't remember the number," said Harriet.

"That's right, I don't," said Henry. "And there's no way of getting it until tomorrow at the office, and I can see him in person, then." He came back into the living room and sat down. "Also, there's no dial-tone on the telephone," he said, and lifted the evening paper. His eyes fell at once upon a story dealing with the malfunctioning of a drydock, two ocean liners, and three escalators at the pier where the *Osaka Maru* keeled over.

"Henry—" said Harriet, blinking rapidly. "The phone is broken, too? What are we going to do!? We should tell someone!"

Henry looked up from his paper. "Why?" he asked, simply.

Harriet opened her mouth to reply, then had to wait until the window-rattling roar of a passing commercial jet rose to a peak and then faded to a screaming whistle in the distance. By that time, of course, she had returned smilingly to her darning.

Later, when the lights wouldn't come on, Harriet and Henry had a bottle of sweet wine by candlelight. It was overpoweringly romantic. And that night, through the window of their bedroom overlooking the blacked-out buildings of the city, for the first time since moving there they were able to enjoy a sky alive with a million sparkling white stars.

THE END

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the Lying Stones of Dr. Beringer

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

In an age when men believed that buried stones with strange shapes were "pranks of nature" created by God Himself, a German scholar found himself hoist upon his own petard—the victim of a cruel trick. But it's an ill hoax that blows no good, and this one helped to establish the modern theory of fossils. In this science fact article, Robert Silverberg begins a series on astounding scientific hoaxes.

IN the year 1710, workmen digging near the city of Wurzburg in southwestern Germany discovered what appeared to be an enormous bone, hard as rock, terribly heavy. There were those who said it must be the bone of a giant who had been drowned in Noah's Deluge—for, according to the Bible, "there were giants in those days."

The workmen brought their find to the University of Wurzburg, a venerable institution founded in 1403. The object was duly exam-

ined, and, since it seemed to be a bone indeed, it was turned over to the faculty member who would know most about such things. He was Dr. Johann Bartholomew Adam Beringer, Senior Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Doctor of Philosophy and Medicine, and Chief Physician to the Prince-Bishop of Wurzburg. He examined the bone with care. It was not, he said, the bone of any giant man who had lived before the Deluge. (He was quite right: it was, as a matter of fact,

the fossilized bone of a kind of elephant that had inhabited Germany some fifteen million years ago.) Dr. Beringer went on to add that it was not a bone at all, however much it might look like one. It was, he declared, pure stone—a *lusus naturae*, or “prank of nature.”

Dr. Beringer was thereby stating one of the best-known theories of his day. For several centuries now, workmen had been digging up what seemed to be the relics of ancient animals and men. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many large buildings were constructed in Europe, requiring deep foundations, and the workers were finding curious things in the earth. Moreover, men were beginning to regard the world about them with great curiosity. They were stopping to examine things, instead of accepting everything in blind faith.

What were these strange relics? They were given the name *fossils*, from the Latin word *fossilis*, meaning “dug up.” They seemed to be the bones of fish, or of giants, or of reptiles. There were even the fossil imprints of fragile plants and insects on rock. Some people—Leonardo da Vinci was one—had said that these were, quite simply, the bones of dead creatures, buried in ancient floods and turned to stone over the ages. But that obvious

explanation was too simple for many of the learned men. They had more elegant theories.

Some said that the fossils were not relics at all, but merely stones of unusual shape. Why, then, did they seem to look like bones or plants? Simply by the whim of God, the savants answered. The fossils were *lusi naturae*, pranks or sports of nature. What mere mortal could question the designs of God? If He chose to fashion stones so that they looked like the skeletons of fish, He must have some far-reaching reason for doing so, and it was not ours to wonder why.

As for the actual means by which the fossils were formed, there were many suggestions. Some simply said that God had created them at the same time as He had brought living plants and animals into being, and let it go at that. Others suggested that under certain circumstances, the seeds of plants or the eggs of fish might slip into cracks in the earth, and “hatch” in the darkness to form a fossil form. Others talked of a life-giving mist from the sea, or of “fatty matter set into fermentation by heat,” or of “a tumultuous movement of terrestrial exhalations,” or of a “lapidific juice” that hardened to the shape of fossils.

Dr. Beringer was of the school of thinking that felt that fossils were simply “stones of a peculiar



sort, hidden by the Author of Nature for his own pleasure." Since he held an important position at an important university, his views were widely quoted and accepted. Year after year, Beringer lectured his students on the nature of fossils. The good doctor, who was born in 1667, was himself the son of a famous professor, and his own reputation for scholarship and industriousness was of the highest.

But there were those who disagreed with Beringer's ideas. What's more, they disliked him personally. They thought he was arrogant in his learning, too intolerant of other beliefs. They set out to have some fun with Beringer. They gave him a very unpleasant surprise—and made his name immortal.

BERINGER, good scholar that he was, had an abiding interest in collecting fossils and studying them. He hired young men to dig in the hills near Wurzburg and search for the miraculous "stones of a peculiar sort" that he found so interesting.

The early results were poor. Beringer's district, the duchy of Franconia, was a lovely place with a placid river winding through level fields ringed by handsome mountains. The land was ideal for vineyards and farms, but did not seem to produce fossils. The disappointed

Beringer had to fill his shelves with specimens sent him by friends in other lands.

Then, in the spring of 1725, Beringer's workmen began to dig on the slopes of one mountain that had been examined before, without success—and they struck scientific treasure, in Beringer's words "one bountiful horn of plenty."

There were three workmen: Christian Zanger, who was seventeen; and two brothers, Nikolaus and Valentin Hehn, who were eighteen and fourteen respectively. Beginning on May 31, 1725, they made a series of remarkable finds: They were stones, bearing pictures in raised relief.

First came a stone showing the sun and its rays; then came two depicting worms. Then came the deluge. The three workmen brought stone after stone to the delighted Beringer, until he had several thousand of them. Beringer later described the range of objects depicted on the stones in these glowing terms:

"Here, representing all the kingdoms of Nature, but especially those of animals and plants, are small birds with wings either spread or folded, butterflies, pearls and small coins, beetles in flight and at rest, bees and wasps (some clinging to flowers, others in their nests), hornets, flies, tortoises

from sea and stream, fishes of all sorts, worms, snakes, leeches from the sea and swamp, lice, oysters, marine crabs, frogs, toads, lizards, cankerworms, scorpions, spiders, crickets, ants, locusts, snails, shell-bearing fishes, and countless rare and exotic figures of insects obviously from other regions. Here are nautili, ammonites, starfish of very different and delightful species, shells, spiral snails, winding shells, scallops, and other heretofore unknown species. Here were leaves, flowers, plants, and whole herbs, some with and some without roots and flowers. Here were clear depictions of the sun and the moon, of stars, and of comets with their fiery tails."

Most remarkable—"the supreme prodigy commanding the reverent admiration of myself and my fellow examiners—" Beringer beheld certain tablets inscribed in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew characters. Some of the stones bore single letters, others whole words. Some letters were shaped well, others crudely. Occasionally an image of a scallop or a snail would bear lettering on its back. Beringer consulted linguists and rabbis, and all gave him the same opinion: that the words formed the name of God, Jehovah. It was as though the Creator had chosen to take credit for the miraculous stones of Wurzburg by signing His name.

BERINGER was overjoyed. From June to November, his workmen delved into the mountain until, when winter forced a halt, there were two thousand figured stones in all. Beringer spent the winter months writing a book about the great discovery. He intended to tell the world that his theories of fossils had been triumphantly vindicated. Nobody could say that these stones were the bones of dead beasts drowned in the Deluge. No, they were works of art, the products of God, Beringer insisted. Nor was this man a fool; he was one of the preeminent scholars of his day, bear in mind.

While Beringer was at work on his book, certain disturbing events occurred. Two of his colleagues at the University attacked the stones as frauds, and called Beringer an ignoramus. The stones, they said, had been "recently sculpted by hand, made to look as though at different periods they had been resurrected from a very old burial, and sold to Beringer as to one indifferent to fraud and caught up in the blind greed of curiosity." They went on to say that Beringer himself knew he had been fooled, and now was "deluding the world, and trying to sell new hoaxes as genuine antiques, to the silent laughter of prudent souls."

The names of these two attack-

ers were J. Ignatz Roderick and Georg von Eckhart. Roderick was Professor of Geography, Algebra, and Analysis at the University of Wurzburg; Eckhart, an older man, was the university's librarian, as well as Librarian to the Prince-Bishop of Wurzburg.

They were not content simply to denounce Beringer. They manufactured a few figured stones themselves, and offered to sell them to him. Zanger, one of Beringer's diggers, brought him a few stones showing such things as a winged dragon, a mouse, and a lion. Beringer accepted them as genuine and paid Zanger for them. Then Roderick and Eckhart openly declared that they had carved those stones. They did not come right out and say they were responsible for the two thousand stones found earlier—but they left no doubt that those earlier finds were highly suspicious.

Another man might have hesitated and pondered a bit. Not the learned Dr. Beringer. He brushed aside the charges of Roderick and Eckhart as just so much malicious gossip, and went on writing his book.

It was published in 1726 under the title, *Lithographiae Wirceburgensis*. Like most scholarly books of its day, it was in Latin. It bore elaborate dedications to Christopher Franz, Bishop of Wurzburg and Duke of Fran-

conia. A series of finely engraved plates showed the famous stones. Beringer's book, which has recently been translated into English, makes lively and entertaining reading. His style was flowery and ornate, but he wrote clearly and vigorously. The extent of his learning is evident on every page. He had read nearly every word published on the subject of fossils, and was able to reply to the differing schools of thought with skill and power.

THE stones, he made it clear at the outset, were not forgeries. "Many erudite scholars and illustrious men of letters," he said, "could not refrain from suspecting that some imposture lay hidden beneath these extraordinary mysteries—that the stones were fictitious and were fabricated in secret for purposes of fraudulent avarice." But this was simply not so, he said. The stones had been honestly found, hidden in the earth, treasures buried for centuries since God had shaped them.

He did admit that when one looked at the stones "one would swear that they are the work of a very meticulous sculptor." Many of them were soft, carved from some chalky material, with neatly outlined figures. The tiny animals and insects displayed "splendid grace and elegance."

Beringer spoke of the *lusus*

naturae theory. There were, he said, stones which "imitate the forms of other bodies," and which were the result of "Nature playing artistically." Many of the relics that men called the remains of ancient creatures actually were of this sort.

He was careful, though, to distinguish between his stones and fossils. Some fossils, Beringer conceded, really were animal remains. They had been left behind after some flood, perhaps, and gradually were turned to stone. But these, when broken open, displayed the internal structure of shell or bone. On the contrary, the stones he had found had "no joints or chambers" inside, "being an unformed stony mass." There was no possibility that the figures on his stones were the petrified remains of once-living creatures, he said. After all, many of the stones showed the complete bodies, not merely the bones, of such creatures as toads and frogs. Bees and wasps, crickets and beetles, all were represented down to the finest detail. These could be no petrified remains, for the fragile remains would long ago have decayed or been crushed. And what of the plants, flowers, and herbs, "by nature extremely frail," which "under heavy rain or frost, droop to the ground, drop their leaves, and die." Could these have withstood the Deluge?

And the stones bearing the name of God certainly were not fossils of anything. No, Beringer said, these were all the works of the Deity, in an artistic mood.

He rejected the idea that his stones were pagan idols, buried in the mountain by the Germans a thousand years before when they took up Christianity. Though it was customary, he said, for the pagans to fashion crude images of plants, trees, and animals, his stones were not of that sort. The pagans had worshipped "monsters and fierce beasts. But who can recall crickets, spiders, worms, tortoises, and similar castoffs of Nature being raised to an altar and endowed with divinity?"

Beringer brushed aside the ugly charge that the stones were recently carved. "Vicious railery, false rumors and gossip," he declared. But he did see "unmistakable indications of the sculptor's knife" on his stones, while refusing to believe that that knife could have been wielded by anyone but God. He declared that "God, the Founder of Nature, would fill our minds with His praises and perfections radiating from these wondrous effects, so that, when forgetful men grow silent, these mute stones might speak with the eloquence of their figures."

In chapter after chapter, Beringer demolished all opposition

to his stones. He proved, to his own satisfaction, that they were what he thought they were. His enemies, he said, had brought his "reputation to the brink of destruction" with their charges of fraud, but he did not doubt that he would prevail. Perhaps a few of the stones were counterfeits made by Roderick and Eckhart, he said, but the overwhelming majority of them were genuine beyond doubt. He closed his book by promising a further edition listing new discoveries in his "search for truth."

HIS book was published early in 1726. It was printed at great cost to its author, but it was purchased enthusiastically by scholars who wished to read in detail of Beringer's wonderful discoveries. For a brief and dazzling moment, all Europe was agog with talk of Dr. Beringer and his miraculous figured stones. Hardly was the book published, though, than a startling thing happened: Beringer tried to buy back the copies that had been sold, with the intention of destroying them! The famous stones, he suddenly admitted in grief, were the frauds that the skeptics said they were. He had been duped. He was a laughing-stock. His handsome book, with its lovely plates, was a monument to his own blindness. He wanted only to burn every copy.

We do not know what made Beringer change his mind about the stones. One story has it that he dug up a stone that bore his own name—and suddenly saw that someone had been playing games with him. Or, possibly, he simply reconsidered the whole affair, and realized that the stones obviously were the work of pranksters out to mock him.

The exposure of the hoax made Beringer's book a collector's item. People who had bought it for study now kept it to chuckle over. Others sought to buy copies, and offered high prices. It was in such demand that in 1767 a German publisher brought out a second edition, purely as an amusing curiosity. Beringer had been dead since 1740, so he did not have to witness this new display of his shame.

There was great scandal and outcry in Wurzburg when the hoax was revealed. Beringer was a famous man of the town, and anything that brought disgrace on him hurt the reputation of all Wurzburg. For if so important a scholar as Beringer could be gulled so easily, what did that say about the general level of intelligence in Wurzburg?

An official inquiry was held to get to the bottom of the matter. In our day, when it was discovered that certain television quiz shows were being rigged, it was a committee of Congress that in-

vestigated. The Beringer fiasco was the same sort of scandal back then, and an inquiry was held starting on April 13, 1726. Beringer himself asked for it, for the "saving of his honor." The first session took place at the Wurzburg Cathedral. Many leading figures of the city were there to hear the dean of the church question the three young workmen who had found the stones.

THE man on the spot was seventeen-year-old Christian Zanger, who had brought Beringer the stones that Roderick and Eckhart claimed they had fashioned. The other two workmen, the brothers Niklaus and Valentin Hehn, seemed innocent of all fraud. The Hehns declared under oath at the first session and again at the second, at the City Hall on April 15, 1726, that they had never ground or polished or sculpted any of the stones themselves, nor planted them in the ground to be discovered later, nor done anything else shady or dishonest. "If we could make such stones," said Valentin Hehn, "we wouldn't be mere diggers."

Zanger, though, had a different tale to tell. He admitted receiving some stones from Roderick, "to which Roderick had applied a knife and carved the letters and the rest of the things." Roderick had given him a stone with a

pomegranate on it, and one with a dragon, and one on which there was a lion with a long tail. He had delivered these to Beringer, who had paid him the usual fee. Roderick, too, had paid him. But he was vague about why Roderick wanted him to deliver false stones to Beringer.

A recess was called. Zanger was warned by the interrogators "to improve his memory of the actual events and truth." In the afternoon, he was questioned again. He admitted that Roderick had claimed to have buried some stones for the Hehns and Zanger to find. He also declared that Roderick had ordered him to try to trick Beringer into buying the false stones. Zanger had a complaint to make, too: he told the investigators that Roderick still owed him wages for eight days of stone-polishing, and could they help him collect?

Strangely, Roderick and Eckhart were never questioned—or, if they were, no record of the proceedings has survived. Soon after the incident, Roderick left Wurzburg, obviously in disgrace.

Eckhart seems to have kept his position as court librarian.

Poor Beringer returned to his classrooms, a saddened and humiliated man. The story is often told that he "died of shame" as soon as the hoax was exposed, but in reality he lived fourteen more years, and published at

least two other books. He never spoke of figured stones again. His reputation as a scholar was destroyed.

The lying stones of Dr. Beringer, it seems, were the work of Roderick, Eckhart, and Zanger, who must have spent many a long hour carving and polishing them and hauling them out to the mountain, planting them to be found later. It was no mere student prank, as is often claimed, but a deadly attack by two scholars on a third. Roderick and Eckhart may have feuded with Beringer in some way of which we have no knowledge. Zanger testified that they wanted to harm Beringer "because he was so arrogant and despised them all."

At any rate, the Beringer hoax

helped to seal the fate of the *lusus naturae* idea. Scholars less and less talked of fossils as "stones of a peculiar sort, hidden by the Author of Nature for his own pleasure." The Beringer stones had indeed been of a peculiar sort, but no one now could seriously think that the old ideas on how fossils were formed had any value. Gradually, men came to accept Leonardo da Vinci's suggestion that the fossils were the remains of creatures of a former age.

Many of the wondrous "Lying" stones still exist today, and are on display in German museums. They are lovely to behold—and sad reminders of a once-famed scholar remembered today only for his gullibility.



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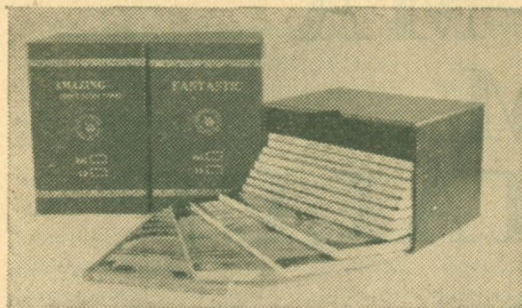
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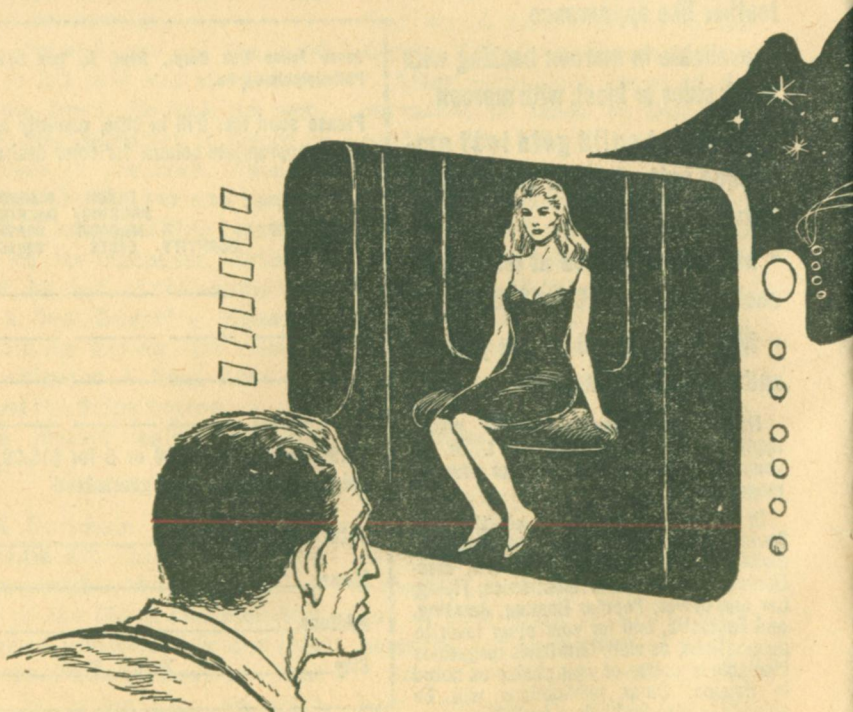
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ENIGMA FROM TANTALUS

By JOHN BRUNNER

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Conclusion

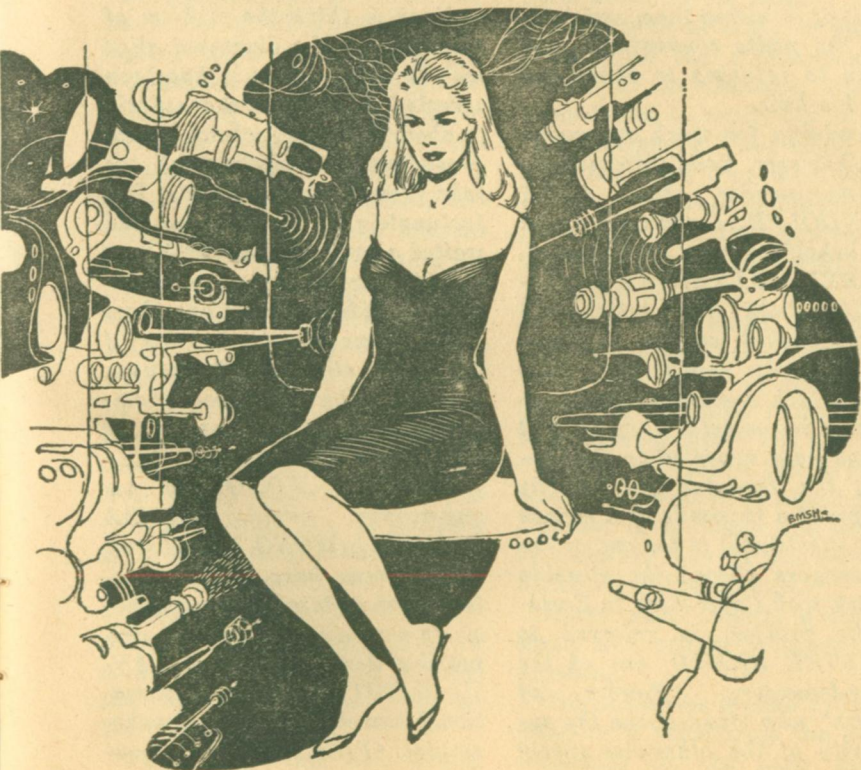


Synopsis of Part One

The planet Tantalus was so named by VOIDECH because although it is remarkably Earth-like man cannot colonize it. It already has intelligent life of its own: THE TANTALAN, a hive-mind creature with its separate units linked by some mysterious telepathic force which has defied investigation for more than forty years.

The present director of Pro-

ject Tantalus, ANGELO VELIZ, has enough problems without others being wished on him. He is prey to what has become the commonest nightmare of humanity, the sense of being helpless in face of the all-powerful machines which have created not only on Earth but on other planets an unprecedented standard of comfort and an equally unprecedented lack of purpose for individuals



unless they are exceptionally talented. Moreover, he is worried about his recent decision to have a starship diverted to make an unscheduled stop on Tantalus and take to Earth the unlovable CAVERSHAM, whose presence he endured for a while because of the custom of "exposing" to Tantalus telepathy anyone showing signs of psi talent in the (so far unrealized) hope that a man might sense it where machines cannot, but who created trouble among the scientific staff through his habit of insulting them and defying the polite conventions even down to refusing to shave and cut his hair.

Arriving for work one morning, however, Veliz discovers his communications chief, GEZA RANDOLPH, contacting Earth on behalf of two of the staff, HARRY and LYNETTE GAMLIEL; both the latter are "hunchbacks", capable of forming reliable conclusions from data which a machine would reject as incomplete. They suspect—and have reported to Earth—that the Tantalus has secretly prepared a facsimile of a human and substituted it for one of the passengers aboard the starship which took Caversham to Earth.

The problem is referred to MASTER BRAND, one of the near-legendary "Powers of Earth" who stand above the authority of the otherwise rarely

challenged machines; they are chosen from those "hunchbacks" who prove to be invariably correct, on the principle that "if a situation arises twice, a machine can be designed to cope with it—if a situation is unique, it takes a man."

Helped by ADMINISTRATOR CORNELIUS and the man in charge of Western Hemisphere Spatial Terminal North (Weshemspaternal), DIRECTOR SHOFEE, and using all available cybernetic aids, Brand is at first inclined to think the problem of singling out the disguised alien will be easy—the ship has been arrested in orbit and it must still be aboard. Some psychological inconsistency will distinguish the fake from a normal person. Unfortunately, if the Tantalus had waited a century it couldn't have picked a better bunch of eccentrics to hide among. Caversham—the prime suspect because of his long stay on Tantalus—makes a notorious fetish of unconventionality, and none of the others can be ruled out.

CAPTAIN WONG and his one-woman crew, FELICIA PANNELL/WONG, like all starship officers have to be maintained in a state of near-psychosis as a substitute for sleep, impossible during a voyage. TANYA HESIT, composer of sensational travelogues, is a nymphomaniac. (PIGOYAN, of the pow-

erful organization Sensiservice, is putting pressure on Brand to release her at once.) FLORENS, a diplomat from Valhalla on whose visit hangs the resumption of Earth-Valhallan relations after a century of bitterness, and his so-called "wife" NIA WELK/FLORENS (actually his mistress) both come from an insecure culture which rejects Earthly customs as a gesture of independence. RELLY is a scientist, in this age when only machines can enable communication between the isolated scientific discipline (and it's costing the Foundation of Advanced Mathematics half a billion a day for computer capacity idle until he's allowed to land). WATERS, a red-headed communications expert, is a racist who believes himself to be descended from the Neanderthals and is insufferably superior. HAZEL GRAUBART is a hysteric who has nursed delusions of persecution on Sequoia for ten years and will be hospitalized within a month of landing, by Brand's best guess. And finally there's BELOVED SISTER DORCAS, missionary of a sect which believes Jesus was a time traveller and the aim of history is to facilitate his departure into the past. (There's pressure on Brand from influential members of her cult on Earth, too.)

Faced with this list, Brand

wonders wryly whether he would recognize a normal person now if he saw one!

VII

YOU realize of course," Veliz rapped, "that you've made a complete farce of Project Tantalus? Our work is hung up, the staff can't concentrate—or else they've been diverted to this confusion pattern of yours! Ach, it's absurd!" He slammed his open palm down on his desk.

There was no trace of defensiveness in the expressions of either of the Gamaliel couple. They failed to reply, but at his most optimistic Veliz could not have imagined they were silent because they were embarrassed; they conveyed the impression that the subject wasn't worth arguing about.

"We got a scanner into that exowomb station," Veliz pursued. "Did we find anything to suggest a facsimile human had been secreted there? Did we? We did not! We found the typical features of grubber production—foetuses, larval stage, and adults in training. Also we lost several scanners in the process."

Harry gave Lynette a weary smile. Still neither of them said anything.

The pause was broken by Geza Randolph's voice from the communicator on the desk, high-

pitched with excitement. "Chief—a call from Earth! It's Master Brand!"

Veliz flinched visibly. "Now what a hornet's nest you've stirred up!" he said accusingly to the Gamaliels. "You know who he is, don't you?"

"One of the Powers of Earth," Harry grunted. "Don't keep him waiting!"

The point went home. Veliz closed his eyes convulsively and whispered to Geza, "Put him through to me."

The screen lit. A long-faced man with crisp dark hair and a sharp, prying nose appeared in it. He said without preamble, "I need some data on Project Tantalus, especially on the Tantalus itself. I've spoken with four survivors of Voidech's original expedition, and I want to be brought up to date on several points."

Veliz, overcome, gulped air and nodded. He said faintly, "But wouldn't it be better to check the machine-stored material we already—?"

"If I thought it was better I'd do it," Brand snapped. "First—Are you listening? Good! First, I want to know the relative proportions of your effort devoted to the various aspects of your research."

Veliz struggled to organize words coherently. He muttered, "Well, we have about half the

staff engaged on the study of the gross-physical processes. We watch—uh—breeding, and utilization of organic and inorganic materials, and analyze the entropic pattern of the whole of the Tantalus's activity. As you probably know, it's—very crudely—a cross between mankind and the ant, existing in about one and a half million separate individual organisms united by a telepathic bond. It—uh—farms the lower species, combats predators such as the bearhounds, maintains forests, irrigates, utilizes natural rivers for that and for—uh—breeding . . ."

"Come on!" Brand urged as the words momentarily dried up.

VELIZ wiped his face. "Yes. Well . . . The rest of the staff is divided between administration and maintenance on the one hand—we have computer capacity of about five megabrain, an enormous scanning system covering nearly as much of the planet as the Tantalus itself, and naturally with a staff of eighty we need—"

"I know that! What's the 'other hand' you were going to refer to?"

"That's the least fruitful area. It's our attempt to pin down the telepathic force the Tantalus emits to control its various—uh—cells."

"Expatriate on that."

Again Veliz wiped his face. "The Tantalán is physically extended on every biological level. Even its breeding is externalized; it builds hollow mounds with a water supply, pipes in necessary nutriments, and brings its—uh—ova to birth in exowombs. Most of its sub-units are mere biological mechanisms; they don't even eat, but have to imbibe and store for digestion specially secreted nutrient fluids. They have quite complex nervous systems, however, not quite at the human level but close to it. Uh—the physical basis of the Tantalán's personality seems to reside in what we call 'brain-cells', which are large, sluggish, quadrupedal organisms generally located at exowomb stations, possibly to ensure that the developing embryos are continually impinged on by strong telepathic emanations."

"This situation has been substantially the same since Voidech made the first study of Tantalus—correct?"

Veliz nodded. He was beginning to get over his first violent apprehension. "Apart from two newly-evolved subunit types, the salamander and the grubber, which seem to have been inadvertently suggested by us. Before Voidech arrived the Tantalán was unaware of the practical uses of fire; now it breeds units with a thick epidermis secreting

a continual flow of water, capable of enduring temperature up to five hundred degrees for periods of almost an hour, and uses them to make and maintain fires for several purposes—baking clay bricks, defense against bearhounds, and so on. And the grubbers are mole-like creatures, with the aid of which the Tantalán is investigating natural inorganic resources. It needs a good many trace elements, including some not involved in terrestrial biology, and before we arrived it had no conception of getting these from ores."

"How do you communicate with the Tantalán? It obviously didn't speak if it was telepathic before we found it."

"It's sensitive to sound, though its powers of discrimination are lower than ours in that area, and Voidech's second expedition brought some vodors here. The Tantalán figured out their function with little trouble, and now has a vocabulary of some fifty or sixty thousand words, including some extremely sophisticated abstract concepts. Its intelligence is generally estimated at equivalent to IQ 160."

"Does it have special vodor-controlling talking units?"

"No—just some modified 'brain-cells'. We know where they all are, and have permanent radio links with them."

In the screen, Brand rubbed

his chin. "Let's go back to the matter of telepathy. I want to settle a problem that's bothering me. Have we any proof that—even though we're incapable of sensing the Tantalans' emanations—the corollary is also true?"

FOR the first time since Brand came on the communicator, the Gamaliels showed signs of interest in the conversation. They exchanged glances with a hint of worry.

Veliz took several seconds to reach his answer. "Why—to be honest, Master Brand, no, we don't know!"

"Then find out!" Brand instructed. "Somehow! Rig a program which will allow you to deduce the answer. I need that information more urgently than anything else."

Harry got to his feet. "Lynette and I will start on it at once!" he promised, and they went out.

"Who was that whose voice I heard?" Brand demanded. The Gamaliels had not been in range of the pickup. Veliz explained quickly.

"Excellent," Brand commented. "Now: along what lines have you been tackling this telepathy problem?"

"Any that occurred to us," Veliz said hopelessly. "We've brought hunchbacks here—like the Gamaliels. We've brought anyone who showed even limited

signs of supra-rational talent, with no success at all. Also we've experimented with every type of detector of all known fields of force from gravity to—"

"All right, save that. You've come to my next major question. Why did you send for the *Fulmar* instead of waiting for the next scheduled ship?"

Veliz's lower lip quivered. He had been waiting for this.

"It was Caversham, Master Brand!" His voice reeked of self-excusation. "That man was insufferable! He—"

"Did he refuse to co-operate in your experiments?"

"We have no experiments for such people. They're simply brought here to be—uh—to be exposed, like a photographic plate to X-rays. We watch them continually, of course, and analyze their dreams, and set psychological tests to reveal any Tantalans-type reactions—but this wasn't the trouble with Caversham." Veliz leaned closer to the screen, trying to make his tone forceful now. "That man's a saboteur, Master Brand. He takes delight in only one thing: undermining people's confidence. He mocks, he jeers, he insults people, he gets on their nerves. I could get fifty of my staff to tell you the same thing. Naturally, we couldn't keep up with our work; I judged Project Tantalus too important to become a toy for

one man who wasn't even a trained researcher, so I asked for a ship to be diverted and take him off."

"And while the *Fulmar* was on Tantalus, the passengers and crew were also 'exposed', as you put it, to the environment?"

"Yes, of course. If any single human being is telepathically sensitive, this is where we'll find out."

"Did any of them require persuasion to come and be shown around?"

"Yes—one of them. I think she was a Circle missionary. The others were very eager. Tantalus, after all, is a well-known planet, and the home of the only known non-human intelligence. *Most* people are eager to see it."

"The missionary eventually came with the rest?"

"Certainly."

"Right," Brand grunted. "Link this circuit into your scanning system. I want a guided tour of Tantalus and the Tantalans. But put someone unimportant on the job, because from *you* I want the answer to my question about the Tantalans reading human minds."

VIII

CAPTAIN Wong searched Cornelius' face for a clue to the reason for what was happening, but the administrator remained inscrutable.

At length he sighed. "Very

well. I can scarcely quarrel with the Powers of Earth. The *Fulmar* is to remain in this orbit indefinitely. Meantime we starve?"

Cornelius noted the rebellion in the tone, but answered with his customary urbanity. "All necessary provisions for the comfort of yourself, your crew and the passengers are in hand. Supplies will be sent aboard shortly, additional power will be furnished—everything is being taken care of."

"Not quite," Captain Wong countered. "Are you not aware that I've had to undergo anti-Earth treatment?"

"Yes, we know." Cornelius faced him, unblinking.

"And you're insisting on this regardless?"

"I'm sorry." For the first time Cornelius showed signs of perturbation. "I'm only relaying you a decision which I did not make. And I'm unable to give you the grounds for it."

"Very well. Will that be all?" Wong made to cut the circuit, but Cornelius raised a hand.

"One more thing. During the next few hours there will be noises and probably some hard radiation at the skin of your ship. We are installing sensors and scanners. I have to warn you about this in case your passengers are alarmed. Inform them that there is nothing to be scared of."

"It would take a more convincing actor than me to persuade them not to be frightened," Wong said stonily. "What are the sensors and scanners for—may I know?"

"You may assume that they fulfill their usual purposes," Cornelius retorted. "Now I must break off. I'll be in touch again when Master Brand is ready to interview the personnel."

The screen blanked. Wong looked from it along the banked instruments of the control cabin, towards the viewport, and closed his eyes. The viewport was aligned away from Earth. But the parent planet was there nonetheless. Watching him.

* * *

"Caversham!" said Tanya viciously.

All heads turned. Except Relly, who had departed to his cabin muttering something vague about trying to replan his calculations to bring them within the capacity of the ship's own computers, the passengers had drifted to the bar, one by one, to get away from the looming bulk of Earth beyond the viewport in the observation saloon. The viewport had been closed on Captain Wong's discreet suggestion, but there was still the knowledge of the planet's presence, and it made the bar preferable.

Even Sister Dorcas, recovered from her fit of hysteria, had

slunk in to join the rest, and now sat timidly in a corner, her white, pinched face set in a disapproving expression.

Caversham, who was relaxing in a deep chair with a stein of beer, moved last in response to the mention of his name. He did not speak his answer—merely cocked an eyebrow.

"What makes you tick?" Tanya demanded. "If you tick at all!"

"If you listen carefully, you'll hear me," Caversham said. "Why do you want to know?"

As always, the level, faintly mocking voice rasped Tanya's nerves. She jerked forward on her own seat. "You were saying some nasty things about us and machines a little while ago—remember? But you *are* a machine."

Nia Welk/Florens glanced, bewildered, from Tanya to Caversham and back.

"Do go on," Caversham invited.

"Well . . ." Tanya clutched at the air with one hand. "Can't you show *some* reaction to this crazy mess? Aren't you affected at *all* by being locked up in a space-going jailhouse by some anonymous authoritarian *dictator*?"

"You mean I'm not in a state of panic," Caversham suggested. "And that worries you? I don't see why. According to Waters"—

he gestured towards the communications engineers, who sat facing him—"we're here by direct order of one of the Powers of Earth, and no slick buzzing machine is going to overrule him and let us go. So we have to wait it out. And if we have to wait, we might as well do so calmly, like civilized people."

"Civilized!" That was Florens, almost jumping to his feet with fury. "From you that's hilarious! You're the most foul-mouthed person I ever met—you look like a hairy savage, what's more!"

"I don't mind looking like a human being," Caversham murmured. "Most people prefer to look as much like a sterile machine as possible. Maybe we should try building machines with follicles on their cases, and restore the correct priority." He emptied his stein of beer in a single huge swallow and set it aside. "I resent your remarks, candidly. I didn't think it civilized of you to raise a fist to me."

"Why don't you shut up, all of you?" Hazel Graubart snapped. "It's hard enough to keep calm anyway, without your continual wrangling!"

"I agree!" Unexpectedly, Sister Dorcas spoke up from her isolated corner, her back very straight, her hands folded in her black lap. "Sister Tanya, please don't object to our brother remaining calm. It's our *duty* to

remain calm and controlled in the face of adversity."

"Well!" Tanya sneered. "An ally for you, Caversham!"

CAVERSHAM eyed her briefly before rounding on Sister Dorcas. "What became of your duty, then, when you came moaning into the observation saloon? Did you think your old chum God had let you down?"

Sister Dorcas's cheeks flushed scarlet. She said, "Brother, I—"

"There's no insanity in my family," Caversham cut in. "I don't want your brotherhood, or any other relationship with you, come to that."

He paused, turning his bright eyes fiercely on Tanya. "Or you, incidentally!"

Florens slapped his thigh. "The most foul-mouthed person I ever met! Do you insult every woman you meet—out of habit?"

"Those that deserve it," Caversham grunted.

"Brother!" Sister Dorcas, trying to regain the attention of the others, had got to her feet. "It's not fair, it's not fair! Because I'm a weak vessel, that's no reason to blaspheme. I confess freely, I suffered a lapse of faith—but the moment I realized it, I prayed for strength and it came to me."

"Out of an automatic therapy kit," Caversham said. "From a machine. The same place as all

these other dehumanized puppets look for their God."

"Now look here, Caversham," Waters exclaimed, also rising and coming to stand beside Sister Dorcas. "I know something about propaganda techniques—it's in my field. And I can see how you're deliberately setting out to foment disagreement among us, even if the non-specialists can't. Stop it! We're going through a trying enough time as it is."

Caversham looked him up and down with insulting thoroughness. "Check me if I'm wrong, Waters. I was sitting here saying nothing, quietly drinking a stein of beer, and I was spoken to in an aggressive fashion—right? I inquired if I was annoying Tanya by keeping calm—right? Apparently I was. So if I keep quiet I annoy Tanya and if I speak my mind I annoy you!"

Waters put out a feeble hand. "Now just a—!"

"It seems the only course open to me is my usual one." Caversham scrambled out of his chair. "And that's to please myself, not bothering about idiots who make themselves over in the image of their machines!"

"If you're leaving," Tanya called, "hurry up! It'll give us a welcome chance to recharge our accumulators."

"Do you think that's funny?" Caversham inquired.

There was suddenly some quality in his voice which imposed silence. It wasn't menace. It could scarcely be eagerness for an answer. Yet all his hearers had to accept that his question was serious.

His eyes bored into Tanya's. Seconds crept by.

"Well? I'm waiting."

Defensively, she shrugged. "You said we're behaving like machines. Not very original. I'd said the same about you. It's a subject I don't think worth pursuing, anyway."

"You wouldn't, I guess. But—look!" He shot out his hand and caught Tanya's wrist. The ends of her fingers gleamed mirror-bright with chrome nail-cosmetic. "These are your terminals, aren't they? You plug them into a socket when you recharge your accumulators!"

Frightened, she snatched her hand free. "I—I don't see what you mean!"

"Of course not. You're long past the point of no return. And so are men who go for women like you—warm machines, offering automatic sexual therapy with shiny chrome plating and slick colorful plastic trim. Your nails reflect your mind. You don't paint them a vital color—blood-red, or leaf-green, something associated with living creatures. You choose polished metal. Name of disaster, you said you have a

block against medication, and that means a block against helping a fellow-human in distress. If you *were* a machine, probably you could have feelings built into you. But you're a woman—you ought to have them from birth."

FLORENS had drawn his invisible mantle of pomposity close around him. Wearing it, he advanced to confront Caversham.

"We've had enough of your insufferable behavior," he declared. "You're taking cruel advantage of the predicament we're in to use us as a captive audience for your crackpot views. You're an obsessional neurotic, and what you need is remedial therapy!"

"Are you talking to me, or Sister Dorcas?" Caversham asked sweetly. "She's the one who makes a profession of proselytizing in the name of Jesus the Time Traveller. Take a look at the others aboard this ship: a captain and crew who are by definition controlled psychotics—Tanya, who is nymphomaniac and grows restless for want of a new man after this brief voyage—Relly, who can hardly put two sentences together because he thinks like a computer—Waters, who left your own home world because of his racialist views—"

"Shut up!" Waters moved towards him, fists folding.

Unperturbed, Caversham stared him down, his level words

continuing without a break. "Your mistress, Florens, who is so silent and colorless as barely to qualify for human status—youself, Florens, so conditioned by the lack of inches that you can't face this crucial visit to Earth in the company of anyone with a more vivid personality—"

"Shut up!" Unable to bear the prospect of him adding her to his list of definitions, Hazel Graubart shouted at him.

"I was coming to you! Sequoia is the pleasantest and most satisfactorily developed of the out-worlds, and you're a refugee from it, or rather from your own masochistic needs. Which makes me—"

"If you don't shut up, I'll kill you," Tanya said between white lips.

"I was going to say," Caversham barked, "that that makes me, as a mere 'obsessional neurotic', by far the sanest person here!"

He stamped out.

The tension broke with the slamming of the door. They moved randomly, as though to prove to themselves that they still could, having temporarily forgotten how while Caversham's tirade hypnotized them. They said, equally at random, things like, "What an awful man! Hairy savage is right!"

Tanya looked at Florens speculatively. He had at least made

some effort to stand up to Caversham, whereas Waters, who had at first appeared the most capable of the men here, had needed a lead to provoke him into the same action.

She looked at Florens' mistress. Yes, there for once Caversham was probably right; she was much too colorless to cause any trouble. Without making the gesture obvious, she lowered the front of her lounging suit a little on her bosom, and went to compliment Florens on what he had said.

A few minutes, and the door slid aside. The crew was there.

"A message from Master Brand," she said. "You are requested to present yourselves in turn at the entrance to the control section for personal interviews with him over a sound and vision link."

"What's this in aid of?" Florens snapped; Tanya's compliments had been skilfully turned, he was feeling twice his size.

"Does it matter?" Hazel Graubart countered. "Here's a chance to say what we think of the way we're being treated, and not even the Powers of Earth are going to stop *me* from speaking my mind!"

IX

IS there anything further you want me to arrange as a result of your inquiries on Tanta-

lus, Master Brand?" Cornelius was becoming haggard under the strain of intercepting all the complaints and queries being shot at Brand from parties interested in the delay to the *Fulmar*.

"I didn't learn anything significant out there," Brand grunted. "Bar one thing—an obvious line of research has been being neglected for forty years. And there's nothing we can do to cure that from the Earthside end. Is everything ready aboard the ship now?"

"Yes, completely." Cornelius indicated a man standing shyly to one side of and a little behind him. "This is Leading Engineer Gropius, who's been supervising the work."

Brand invited the man to speak with a jerk of his head.

"We've converted one of the forward power compartments to serve as an interview chamber," the engineer said, the words coming quickly as though under high pressure. "Apart from the communications equipment, all of which is continually monitored by data-analysis machines and will signal any departure from a standard reaction pattern, there are scanners and sensors which will study the mental processes of the subjects, their metabolism on every level, the very chemical constitution of their bones. The slightest anomaly should be re-

vealed at once. We're already monitoring the effluents from the ship—sewage, used air, and so forth—looking for abnormal compounds."

"Without success," Brand suggested. It wasn't a question.

"I'm afraid that's so," Gropius muttered.

"Well, we can try it, I guess," Brand said, stretching his arms to fullest extent and working his back muscles to ease the stiffness of long sitting. "But unfortunately the only unique emanation of the Tantalans is one that's defied our best minds for forty-odd years. I'm not expecting miracles."

* * *

"That's Hazel Graubart," murmured the remembrancer. "The record shows her reaction to the news that you were to interview the passengers: quote, 'Here's a chance to say what we think of the way we're being treated, and not even the Powers of Earth are going to stop me from speaking my mind.' On which she insisted that she be the first subject."

Brand studied the sullen face in the screen. Those ten years of privation—self-imposed—on Sequoia had left their traces around the woman's mouth and eyes. She looked older than her years. At present she was displaying impatience; the circuit had only been closed in one direction, and she could not yet see Brand.

"Anomalies?" Brand asked Gropius.

"Yes! Since she entered the cabin, we've detected very faint traces of a non-human aromatic compound in the ventilation system. It's strongest near her mouth."

Brand started forward in his chair with an oath, only to be overtaken by a frantic apology. "Sorry, Master Brand! A check identifies it as the smell of a Sequoian poverty-level foodstuff, intensity consistent with intake seven days ago. The name reads 'garlic.'"

"Next time, make the check before you tell me," Brand requested sourly. "All right, let her see me."

As he had anticipated, the appearance of his image in the screen facing Hazel Graubart took the force out of her intended tirade; the Powers of Earth, after all, had some status. It was in a comparatively timid voice that she inquired, "Are—are you Master Brand? Is it you who's ordered us shut up in this ship?"

"That's right," Brand said curtly.

"Well, I think it's disgraceful! It's an infringement of personal rights!"

"Yes," Brand said.

"I demand to be allowed to land on Earth! I'm Earthborn, I have every right to return to my own home!"

"Yes," Brand repeated. "If you'll let me get a word in edgewise, you may be able to get home sooner rather than later. Do you know why the *Fulmar* is being held?"

"Well—Waters said . . ." She put her hand to her mouth, as though afraid of saying something she should keep to herself.

"I know about Waters tapping the subspace circuits," said Brand wearily. "He won't manage it again—we're operating under maximum security now. In any case, he didn't say anything except that it was being done on my orders. What, in your view, was the reason for those orders?"

"I—don't know."

"You think it's being done *without* reason?"

"No, I— Oh!" A light dawned on the lined face. A look of suppressed fury succeeded the revelation. "Unless those louts at Sequoia have sent some lying nonsense through to you about what they're doing out there! I didn't make any secret of it when I told them what I'd say when I got home—the criminal, filthy, immoral way they run their planet, and the lies they tell to dupe people like me into going to join their colony!"

"So we're holding up the *Fulmar*, with everyone aboard, to stop you publishing the truth about Sequoia—correct?"

Her breath was coming in laboured

pants now. She had sat forward in her chair. "If that's it, I tell you now—it won't work! I sweated ten mortal years out there to buy out of the contract I was conned into signing, and another few days won't break me, even with that miserable Caversham to keep me company!"

FLORENS took his place with the dignity appropriate to one undertaking the first delicate unofficial diplomatic mission to Earth after more than a century of strained relations between the parent world and Valhalla. He wore a formal executive's costume of rust-brown and grey, and an expression like a carved mask.

"I neither know nor care why you've arbitrarily imprisoned us aboard the ship!" he barked in reply to Brand's question. "What I do know is this: unless I'm released forthwith, I shall stay on Earth precisely long enough when I *do* get down to locate a Valhalla-bound ship and book my passage home! I was under the mistaken impression that the arrogance which led us to sever contact with your government was a thing of the past, and I've worked for decades in my party and in the government of Valhalla to bring about a rapprochement. We don't approve of tyrannical, dictatorial, authoritarian behavior, whether by one planet

towards another or by one individual to another—no matter if he calls himself a Power of Earth or not!”

All this was true, and the effect on Earth-Valhalla relations was the worst aspect of this business. Brand said mildly, hoping that Florens was accessible to reason, “I’m sure you’ll agree that this action must have been taken with good cause.”

“Whatever the reason, it does not concern me or my planet,” Florens shrugged. “This is an Earth-owned vessel, which legally makes it part of Earth. I demand the exercise of the traditional diplomatic privileges for myself and my wife.”

“We genuinely regret the inconvenience, and I assure you that you’ll admit its necessity when we’re able to reveal the grounds for the delay. Meantime, every comfort possible—”

“No comfort in the galaxy,” Florens said viciously, “could compensate for having to stomach some of the people we’re penned up with—in particular, that hairy savage who calls himself Caversham!”

NIA Welk/Florens sat in the chair so as to make herself as small as possible, her round face pale, her hands close together in her lap.

“Yes, I suppose there must be a good reason,” she agreed in re-

sponse to Brand’s question. “I mean, my—my husband has explained to me that the trouble between Valhalla and Earth was a long time ago, and things have changed, and all the things we get taught in school are out of date . . . But I don’t see how the trouble—whatever it is—can concern us.”

“Your husband”—Brand was careful with the word—“is still of his original opinion, then?”

“Oh yes, I’m surc he is!” She looked at the screen with big anxious eyes. “Of course, he may have said something to you which makes it seem as if he . . . But right now he’s upset, naturally. Who wouldn’t be? Just being delayed isn’t so bad—it’s been a century since the trouble between our planets, and a few days won’t make much difference now. But having to contend with the other people in the ship is *very* wearing. This reporter person—Tanya Hesit—is bad enough, man-hungry the way she is. And then there’s Waters, who has these insulting views—but Caversham is absolutely awful!”

“I’m beginning to be very interested in Caversham,” Brand murmured. “I look forward to his turn in the interview room. Any anomalies so far, Gropius?”

“Not yet. We caught something from Florens, but it was a tranquillizing compound he’d tak-

en before talking to you. And his wife wears a perfume we're trying to identify. I think it'll check out as a common Valhallan substance."

"Hmmm . . . All right. Remembrancer, who's next?"

Tanya Hesit had accepted a position lower on the list than she would have liked because she needed time to prepare for this encounter. She had dressed and made up with the utmost care; in her experience, men who held Caversham's views were anachronisms, and the vast majority of the male sex—up to and including Powers of Earth—were susceptible to contemporary glamor. She had a figure which was overhauled by highly-paid specialists every time there was a swing in masculine taste, and she had packaged it in a skimpy suit of the dark red which suited her best of all colors; she had plated her nails with gold, gilded her hair so that it gleamed like a coronet, and traced her surface veins with indigo-blue. Caversham would probably have said that this was another attempt to imitate a machine, by decorating the skin with printed circuitry—but *damn* Caversham! She had no need to take notice of *his* opinion!

"I have several hypotheses about the reason for our being jailed in the ship," she found

herself saying when the interview was well along; Brand had skilfully parried all her jabs at his masculinity, and rather than continue on a route to sure defeat against so practised an opponent she had reverted to her other specialty. "But like all my opinions, they're contracted to Sensuservice—who will get them in full measure the moment I'm allowed to land."

"A certain Pigoyan from Sensuservice has been bothering me," Brand murmured. "His theory would appear to be that I have been bought by one of your rivals to frustrate some scandalous revelations you're eager to spring on us."

"Are you implying that my travelogues are mere scandalous—uh—?" Tanya was lost for the right word to conclude the sentence. "I'll be delighted to disillusion you."

"I've taken some of your productions," Brand told her.

"Well!" Involuntarily flattered, Tanya had to preen. "I didn't realize I had such a distinguished audience."

"Skip the mock-modesty. In them, I've never found more than a core of publicly available information disguised with a whipped-cream dressing of sensationalism."

"Name of disaster!" Tanya sat bolt upright. "Now see here! I enjoy a very high standing in

my field, and I've achieved it by my thorough personal research, my persistence, my individual style—"

"Splendid. Since your productions are inimitable, no one is likely to scoop you in a few days, and Pigoyan is denigrating you unnecessarily by implying that somebody can. Why are you so eager to be landed, then? I'd have thought it would delight you to be at the heart of an incident like this—after all, whatever you may think of the reasons for it, one thing's plain: it's important if it involves me."

The mask of glamor dropped from her face, and he had a glimpse of something feral behind it. Her voice, too, had a wild-beast quality as she almost hissed, "I want out of this ship because my nerves won't stand that insufferable bastard Caversham! I'm going to make him sorry for what he's said! I'm going to make him eat those words when I get to Earth!"

"I imagine," Brand murmured to no one in particular, "that Caversham will appear last, on principle—may even refuse to appear at all. A shame. I grow distinctly more eager to make this man's acquaintance with every new datum I get."

Shoefee came in; Brand had seen little of him in the past few hours, as he had been clearing

some local traffic problem due to the *Fulmar's* presence in orbit. "Master Brand! I have an urgent message about the captain and crew of the *Fulmar*. The strain is getting severe, especially on Wong."

"I'm being as quick as I can," sighed Brand. "Next!"

X

THERE was something defensive in Waters's manner when he took his place in the interview room. It lasted only a moment, however, past the point at which he saw Brand on the screen and noted his physical makeup. He relaxed visibly.

Looking for a superman, Brand told himself. Seeing me as I am, he can retreat to his usual position of superiority.

"No, I have no idea why we're being held," the red-haired man said. "I would have, if I'd had the sense to keep my knowledge of the messages passing between here and Earth to myself."

Only he had preferred to impress his companions by blurting out his information, Brand glossed. He refrained from pointing out that they would have discovered someone was eavesdropping the moment they installed their scanners—nothing that happened within the *Fulmar* was overlooked by the inquisitive devices now. He waited for Waters to finish.

"Not that it makes any odds to me," Waters pursued. "I was thrown off Valhalla, although my work was perfectly satisfactory, so I wouldn't expect to be back on Earth for some time yet in the normal run of events. I might almost say I was enjoying this—it's a pleasure to see that pompous little Florens squirming."

"Almost?" Brand prompted.

"But for Caversham, I'm certain I would enjoy it." Waters's face darkened. "The cocksure upstart!"

"Born sneering!" Brand muttered as Waters's image dissolved. "Gropius, any anomalies yet?"

"The Hesit woman had loaded herself with aphrodisiac perfumes," Gropius replied. "I don't know whether she thought there was a scent attachment on the communicator or whether it was just force of habit. By contrast, Waters emits virtually no odors of any kind; his skin is coated with an odor-suppressor."

"Nothing else?"

"No. Chemically, everyone so far has checked out human without qualification."

Beloved Sister Dorcas gave no reply at all when Brand first asked his question. It took considerable urging to pry her opinion from her; when it came, it was so much more egoistical

even than Hazel Graubart's that Brand was shaken.

"I would not presume to question the ways of the Almighty," she said with a sanctimonious twitch of her mouth. "I hope—hope, only—that it is a trial of my faith, and that I shall emerge from it better armored against the immorality of infidel Earth, to which I have been called as a light in spiritual darkness."

When Brand recovered his breath, he inquired with deceptive sweetness, "May one know how your faith is being tried, Sister Dorcas?"

"What a pleasure to encounter someone with a due sense of the proprieties!" she said. "Really, the situation here is—"

"Yes, yes," Brand cut in hastily. "You were about to say?"

"Why—everything is a trial to me: the behavior of my companions is positively indecent! Tanya Hesit, whom I have to *force* myself to call 'Sister Tanya' although I know all mankind should live in brotherly love together—she wears red, not unsuited to a Scarlet Woman—"

"Anything *in particular*?"

"Oh, the deliberate blasphemy of that unholy Caversham—whom I will *not* call 'Brother', not after he's shown himself in the colors of evil!"

"Anomaly, Master Brand," Gropius reported.

"For the missionary? She's the last I'd have imagined the Tantalalan might—Oh: what kind of anomaly?"

"Absence of gonads, and in fact the whole reproductive system. Her hormones are as you might say neuter."

"Hmmm . . . Look into it anyway, but I think you'll find all female Circle missionaries are that way; they're tectogenetically altered to keep them—ah—free from the sins of the flesh."

RELLY maintained an air of dogged determination despite the uncertainty which he always displayed in the company of strangers—Powers of Earth or not.

"No, and I fail to see how it can concern me," was his reply to Brand's routine question. "If the captivity of several people aboard a cramped and uncomfortable starship in orbit is deemed necessary by the Powers of Earth, I'm not going to quarrel with that decision. But I must *insist* on being given access to adequate computing capacity. I came here at great personal inconvenience to carry out important pure research at the Foundation of Advanced Mathematics, and I'm wasting my time and getting very frustrated with nothing but a portable calculator to handle my work—absolutely useless for such a task."

Brand hesitated. It would be quite simple to hitch the communicator in Relly's cabin to a sub-space circuit and then connect up to an Earthside computer. And the Foundation of Advanced Math was an organization for which he had much respect; he preferred not to upset its members.

But—no. What the Tantalalan might gain by copying Relly was enigmatic, but there were unweighable risks in letting any of the passengers use an Earthside computer.

"I'll look into the possibilities," he prevaricated. "I'm grateful, I must say, for the calm fashion in which you're accepting the necessity for this delay. Is anything else—apart from the delay itself—troubling you?"

Relly looked thoughtful, as if the question had not occurred to him. At length he said, "No, I don't believe so. I keep to my cabin much of the time, naturally, and this enables me to avoid the man who does disturb me: Caversham."

"So Caversham has managed to annoy everyone else aboard, except the captain and crew," Brand mused aloud to Cornelius. "And now, finally, we come down to him."

"On the surface, he's the prime suspect," Cornelius suggested.

"Oh, certainly! He was on Tan-

talus for—I forget how long, but a very long time compared with any of the others, and it's far more probable that the Tantalus chose to replicate a subject it could study at length rather than one it picked at random from a group only staying a day on the planet. But he seems deliberately to be making himself stand out, which militates against the facile assumption . . . Look, while I'm talking to him, go through to Veliz again, will you? I want to know what steps they're taking to establish whether the Tantalus is or is not sensitive to human thoughts."

AFTER all he had heard, both from the passengers and from Veliz, Brand had expected to find Caversham deliberately aggressive and loud-mouthed. If the image which had gone up on the screen had shown the man naked, standing on his head and yodelling an obscene song, he would not have been surprised.

Instead, Caversham appeared formally attired, promptly at the moment requested, and faced his inquisitor with a cheerful smile.

Brand took a moment out to consider this, and Caversham's smile broadened to a grin.

"Don't tell me, Master Brand—let me back a hunch. I'd say that after talking to everyone else here with me, you expected me to refuse to talk to you, to

slouch unmannerly in the chair if I did turn up, and to mutter dark anarchical insults about the Powers of Earth."

In spite of himself, Brand felt a smile come to his face matching the other's. He said, "Are you a hunchback? I was under the impression you were suspected of some other more recherche talent."

"I wish I was a hunchback," Caversham said. "I've just come off Tantalus, as you know, and the nicest people I met there—the *only* nice people—were the hunchbacks, like Harry Gammaliel. But it doesn't take a supra-rational talent to figure out something as simple as the guess I just made. I—well, I like to regard myself as a person who hasn't resigned his critical faculties to a machine the way most human beings seem to have done. And I'm very glad to meet you, by the way, Master Brand. You—let's face it—are among the few members of the species who have kept machines in their rightful place, as tools and servants."

Brand sensed the danger of being lulled into too-ready acceptance of this man—the prime suspect, as he reminded himself—by flattery which was particularly sweet to his ears. He said, "Clearly, you class yourself above your companions in the *Fulmar!*"

Caversham shrugged. "Only

insofar as they've handed over part of the individual's born responsibility to computers and such. Not the way Waters makes out he's superior—may I be preserved from that!"

"But you don't object to needling them for amusement, even when you know the atmosphere is getting claustrophobic and potentially explosive."

"I never stop needling people," Caversham admitted. "I'm sorry—this is a bad situation in which to indulge the habit. But I resent your saying I do it for amusement. I do it to see if I can jolt them out of their mechanical-doll routines."

"Do you belong to some philosophical persuasion which enjoins this?"

"My own. And I don't proselytize. I'm an individual, not a follower of a school." Caversham chuckled, as though the statement had some private association for him.

"I see. Well . . ." Brand rubbed his chin. "Since you have this faculty for accurate guessing, even though you don't claim to be a hunchback, may I know what you think is the reason why the *Fulmar* is being detained?"

"That seems pretty simple to me, too," Caversham grunted. "Apart from one thing, this voyage has been a routine one. The most likely reason for our attracting such distinguished at-

tention on reaching Earth is the anomalous feature—I'm a great one for anomalies, by the way. You might say I collect them, and when I can't do that I make my own."

"Please: stick to the point." Brand felt an itch of premonition in the top of his brain.

"The diversion to Tantalus to take me off," Caversham said. "That must have something to do with it."

Brand tried not to frown. He said, "Can you suggest in what way it's connected?"

"No, I can't. Or rather, I could make so many guesses it seems ridiculous."

"Go on."

"Are you serious?" Caversham cocked a bushy eyebrow. "Name of disaster, I see you are! Okay. Picking the highest probabilities, then—" He raised his hand and began to count off points on his fingers.

"The one thing special about this voyage: the visit to Tantalus. The one thing special about Tantalus: the Tantalus itself. The thing most special about the Tantalus: its power of telepathy or whatever it may be. The thing most special about the telepathy: the fact that no human technique suffices to detect it."

"What do you deduce from all this?" Despite his best efforts to control it, Brand heard his voice shaking.



"Hmmm . . ." Caversham combed at his beard with his fingers. "Possibly that the *Fulmar* might contain—might *be*—some sort of telepathic amplifier to relay information about Earth to the Tantalans. . . ?" His tone was dubious. "No, that sounds unconvincing, somehow. Not the ship, then: one of the people aboard the ship, because the Tantalans was entirely operating on the organic level before it started mining metals and using fire after contact with humans."

His jaw dropped in almost a parody of astonishment.

"Me?"

Brand gave a harsh, forced laugh. "Fascinating, I must say! I hope you don't share this delightful theory with any of your companions—I can imagine it having disastrous effects on, say, Sister Dorcas. Very well, that will be all. Thank you."

He was sweating when he broke the circuit. Almost pleading with his eyes, he asked a mute question of Gropius.

"No anomalies," the engineer muttered. "Chemically he's completely human, and there's nothing in his brainwaves or anywhere else that departs significantly from the average run of the race."

Brand sat silent. For the very first time he was completely aware of the cleft stick in which

not only he, but the whole of his species, had suddenly been placed.

XI

AS the days slipped by, the pattern of events had fallen into a routine. There were only recombinations of the same fundamentals: negative reports from the sensors and scanners, via Gropius; reports of complaints from outside parties, via Cornelius and Shofee according to whether they concerned the passengers or the crew and the nuisance to local spaceflight the *Fulmar* represented; and a never-ending succession of failures in their attempts to isolate an imitation from the real human beings aboard the ship. Everything it occurred to them to try failed—physical tests, psychological tests, a clock-around watch on each person, looking for peculiar actions . . .

There's likely to be violence some time, thought Brand. Passive acceptance of constricting circumstances isn't part of our modern mentality. We signal for a machine, and the circumstances change.

Even Caversham, so self-possessed, was showing the strain.

"Veliz is asking for you," Cornelius said. "Shall I put him on?"

"Go ahead," Brand sighed. The absurdity of their predicament

was leaving its traces on his own features, he was sure; he could no longer present to Veliz the same confident mask of assurance as he had formerly done. But he made an effort to appear calm, at least, as the chief of Project Tantalus came on the screen.

"We have definite confirmation of the creation of a facsimile, Master Brand," Veliz said. He was extremely pale, and had to pause and swallow after getting out that doom-laden opening statement. "I'm sorry it took so long, but we had to operate within the limits of the pattern of confusion we're using to reduce the chance of the Tantalans finding out that we know."

"Are you still doing that?" Brand demanded. "Why?"

Veliz was taken aback. He stammered something incoherent.

"Name of disaster!" Brand clapped his hand to his forehead. "What's the *point*? How could the Tantalans not know that we know? The whole underlying assumption is that its telepathic powers are usable over interstellar distances—this is the taken-for-granted purpose of its putting part of itself aboard the *Fulmar*! So, the moment we held the ship up, the Tantalans must have realized we were at least suspicious, and all further attempts to confuse it were futile."

"I—" Veliz gave another convulsive swallow. "I don't know how we came to overlook this, Master Brand. I'm terribly sorry. But Harry Gamaliel was so insistent about . . ."

Brand filed, for reference in a few moments, an obvious deduction from all this. Aloud he said, "All right, go on."

"Well . . . We worked back through more than a year's stored data. We stumbled on clues which were individually below the attention threshold of our routine anomaly-scans, but which form a disturbing pattern when brought together. Uh—you know about Vivaldi, don't you?"

"He died on Tantalus, of some local disease. The Tantalans had requested a human body for study, and on his death-bed Vivaldi authorized that his be given to it. Yes?"

"Well—" Veliz was looking dreadfully unhappy. "We later found all sorts of human-biological compounds in various effluents, and marked them as the consequence of the Tantalans analyzing and examining Vivaldi's corpse. I'm afraid this wasn't correct. Vivaldi's corpse exists in at least two facsimiles as well as the original—we've located them—and this seems absolutely conclusive."

It did. Brand felt a surge of relief. At least the original hunch had been correct; they hadn't

spent all this time on a false hypothesis. That, though, brought him back to the point he had filed for temporary consideration.

"The Gamaliels were going to work out a test to establish whether the Tantalán is sensitive to our thoughts even if we can't detect its. Progress?"

"We have some suggestive results. But if the Tantalán's unit aboard the *Fulmar* is in contact with the rest of the complex, this would explain it equally well. I'm sending the full details through in machine transcription for analysis by your more adequate computers."

Brand rubbed his chin. "So! That leaves us with a very limited range of alternatives, doesn't it? Which is ridiculous, when you consider that we are more advanced, more powerful, more numerous, more of almost everything than the Tantalán!" He raised fingers to count alternatives. "I could simply arrange for the *Fulmar* to be destroyed. This is an incredibly crude way of solving the problem, apart from being murder. Discard that." A second finger up. "Marginally less crudely, I could come into the open and threaten the Tantalán directly."

"I'm sorry," Veliz said thinly but determinedly. "You couldn't. Not in any way that would—uh—persuade it."

"Why not?" Brand sounded faintly surprised. "In the ultimate resort we could exterminate the creature—not, you understand, that I'm considering the idea. But we could."

"The Tantalán's one absolute difference from human intelligence is that it has no concept of personal death," Veliz pointed out. "Its only reflexive response to threats is counter-threat—never surrender."

"Name of disaster, you're right. And I'm sure it could deal with Project Tantalus at least, if not with a massed effort on our part. Which would, in any event, leave us much worse off . . . Veliz, give me your considered opinion of the reason why the Tantalán is doing this, will you?"

"Like all living creatures, it has an expansive tendency," Veliz shrugged. "Witness the condition it made before permitting us free study facilities: that we should transport an extension of it to the southern continent and help it to establish itself."

"Is this, in your view, the pilot run for an invasion?"

Veliz did not answer.

A NEW line of testing, at any rate, had emerged. Brand gave orders for association and other psychological tests on the people in the *Fulmar*, designed to discover their subconscious reac-

tions towards the notion of death. He had not been sanguine when he gave the instructions; when he saw the results, he was more depressed than ever.

Caversham, still logically the prime suspect, displayed the most normal-human responses, which was absurd. Of the remainder, Sister Dorcas refused to concede its existence—Circle teaching denied it, seeing life as one stage of a journey through time—Waters and Tanya Hesit both regarded it as a personal insult, while the Florens couple, Hazel Graubart and Rely bracketed the current Earth norm.

And Wong was looking forward to it—so much so, the machines which carried out the analysis of the results had marked his card DANGER OF SUICIDE.

Brand closed his eyes. Such a simple thing—such an easily defined problem that at first he had wondered whether it truly rated the attention of himself as one of the Powers of Earth. In the *Fulmar*, one person suspected of being a facsimile—an imitation.

But this was making a mock of man! In over forty years of study, the best human brains had failed to trap for examination the telepathic power of the Tantalans. In the same short period—less than a lifetime—the Tantalans had contrived to produce so perfect a copy of a human being that the most microscopic

investigation showed no flaws.

Abruptly, the whole proud edifice of human civilization seemed a sham. There was something so negligent about the way the problem had been set up—

An idea there: was it simply a problem, as one might set a problem to a rat in a laboratory to measure its intelligence? He had to face the possibility, but he hated it. It conjured up a picture in his mind of a man sneering.

For some reason, the features of the man were those of Caversham.

Logic still said that a man who had been on Tantalus for much longer than the others was the main suspect. Should he take Caversham out of the ship, to be indefinitely imprisoned, and let the others go? It would solve all the subsidiary problems, like the mounting tension between Valhalla and Earth, which at any moment might snap and set back their relations to the days, a century ago, when the daughter world had contemptuously severed all its ties with home.

And it would probably leave the central problem alone.

Lifetime. His mind jumped back to a casual concept entertained a few moments previously. How long was the life of an individual unit of the Tantalans? Checking, he discovered that this information was no help, either. One of the "brain-cells" might

survive almost a century, whereas one of the working units, stressed without sleep all its adult existence, might last no more than ten years. How much like the unity of the human was that of the Tantalans! So the hair, nails, epidermis were short-lived, the nerves more durable . . .

He was still holding Wong's card marked DANGER OF SUICIDE. He tossed it aside angrily and consulted his patient computers regarding two lines of action: first, to leave Wong be and let him work out his own destiny, and second, to put him under sedation forthwith.

The first course was instantly ruled out. The danger of suicide approached certainty in a matter of days, and the effects of that on the other people in the ship were appalling. The second was barely preferable. It would be necessary to put the crew under sedation too—she had never had captain training, which prepared the mind for the strain of sole responsibility in an emergency—and moreover, the impact on the passengers of losing the symbolic controllers of the ship would be almost as bad as in the first hypothetical case.

IT was impossible simply to wait the problem out, until a solution showed of its own accord. It was impossible to act directly against the Tantalans, un-

less he was prepared to go to the ultimate extreme of destroying it. Anything less would simply make it into mankind's implacable enemy. And on this showing it would be the most formidable of all conceivable opponents.

Besides, it seemed like such a confession of inferiority to react to this straightforward probe—this scouting mission, this espionage—by killing the Tantalans. *The first time the only known non-human intelligence acts towards us as an equal, using us as a subject for study as we have used it, to wipe it out—could there be a clearer admission that we are small-minded, frightened, insecure?*

A scouting mission . . . The Tantalans would have been told that men existed by the billions on their various planets. It would never have seen as many as a hundred human beings together on Tantalus. Possibly it was questioning the truth of some of the things it had been told; after all, if Veliz had allowed his staff to go on with this pattern of confusion designed to deceive the Tantalans long after it must have been obvious that human suspicions were aroused, it couldn't have had a very good impression of man's relative intelligence—

Brand frowned and shook his head. There was a point he had made a mental note of, associated with this. Something about the

Gamaliels and what they were doing, wasn't it?

It kept slipping his mind, eel-fashion. Painfully, he groped after it, a fog seeming to fill his brain. Now: the Gamaliels were trying to determine whether the Tantalans could read human thoughts—this question that had unaccountably been omitted from the basic research of forty years . . . No: it must have answered itself by implication, if one thought about it. After all, if the Tantalans could do this, it would have picked from the brains of the visiting humans knowledge far more sophisticated than simply a smattering of geology and the use of fire and baked brick. It wouldn't have needed human help to transport its extension to the southern continent, but would have learned how to build its own boats and how to combat the fierce, carnivorous sea-beasts which originally barred its way over the water.

He felt relieved when he had come to this conclusion. But his mind still wouldn't clear completely. It was shadowed by the knowledge that he had crashed up against a problem set centuries earlier, and had no hope of a solution.

The problem was this: given a room divided by an opaque curtain, from the other side of which comes a voice; determine by asking questions, without

raising the curtain, whether the other occupant of the room is a human being or a perfect mechanical copy.

It was time to raise the curtain. He got to his feet. The passengers aboard the *Fulmar* would need someone to replace the captain and crew as a reassuring embodiment of control. It was essential to put the Wongs under sedation shortly. He would himself have to go to the ship.

XII

A DOZEN times the patterns of association between the people aboard the *Fulmar* had reformed and dissolved again. All of them needed company occasionally, for reassurance; all of them quickly found a further need for solitude because in the tense atmosphere company began to grate almost at once.

Only Caversham seemed to support the eternal waiting with more than a show of calm. Sister Dorcas, who had broken under the first shock when the ship failed to emerge from subspace, had only partially reassembled her personal defenses; although she spent much of her time in her cabin praying, she always crept back to look for the comfort she could not find by that means. Rely was particularly poor company when he came from his cabin where he had sat gnawing

his nails over his private problems, for he sat gnawing his nails in the bar also, scarcely uttering a word.

The strain had taken longest to crack Nia Welk/Florens, for she seemed to be a malleable, compliant person, totally dominated by Florens and accustomed to being ordered about by him or others.

These three—Sister Dorcas, Rely and Nia—were in their cabins currently, but the others were together in the bar, worrying at the central question and as usual failing to provide themselves with an answer.

"What the blazes is the *point* of it?" Tanya Hesit said for the dozenth time, and slapped her open palm on her thigh. "It's never going to end, the way things are going! Tests, questionnaires, that damnable bland character staring out of the screen at you—I think I shall go crazy!"

Florens, sitting next to her—they had been very close recently—cleared his throat and muttered something comforting. Waters shot him an ugly look. He had been unable to confirm his suspicions, but the weight of them was becoming intolerable.

"Somebody here could tell us the answer," he snapped.

Reflexively, they flinched. Tanya leaned forward in her chair. "What do you mean by that?"

"I've already told you the reason for this," Hazel Graubart cut in. "You won't listen, will you? If I could just get you to unite with me in protesting about—"

"Oh, save it!" Waters barked at her. "You've told us you think it's meant to prevent you from spreading your slanders against the government of Sequoia, and we've listened, and we've decided you're being a damned fool." He took a deep breath. "That's not what I had in mind. Consider: if it were due to anti-Valhallan prejudice on Earth"—nodding at Florens—"or to the machinations of the rival organizations to Sensiservice"—nodding at Tanya—"or anything so simple that it could be tied down to one single person aboard, there would be no need for this business of holding up the ship and plying us with questions and all the other nonsense that's been going on. I'm in communications, remember—nowadays, communications is also the science of government, and you can take it from me that the people in charge of this galaxy of ours are subtle!"

His face was reddening with the intensity of his thesis; he paused to wipe away a trace of sweat from his forehead.

"I've thought over all the overt reasons for what's been done, and not one of them stands up to close study. That drives me to an inevitable conclusion: somebody

aboard the ship is not what he—
or she—is pretending to be.”

THERE was a moment of silence. Thinking he had not made himself sufficiently clear, he underlined his proposition. “This would explain the psychological tests, the interviews.”

“We’re not morons!” Tanya exclaimed. “I’ll grant that. Suppose you tell us who you think is masquerading, and as what?”

“If one of the Powers of Earth, with all his resources behind him, hasn’t figured that out, am I expected to?” Waters retorted.

“I’m asking,” Tanya said acidly. “I want to find out if you were just blowing up a smokescreen to pass the time.”

Nettled, Waters set his jaw. “Very well,” he muttered. “I have somebody in mind. I’m thinking of the person who’s done his best to set us at each other’s throats, who’s kept his mouth shut and contributed nothing to our discussions, apart from insults and obscenities—you, in fact!” he finished, swinging to face Caversham.

Sardonically Caversham cocked an eyebrow. “Well, well! So that’s the result of all your pondering! And just when I was coming to think that you’d finally turned your mind on, instead of waiting for some helpful computer to rush to your rescue!”

“Haven’t we had enough of

your cracks about men copying machines?” Florens rasped. “Let’s have some proof that you practice what you preach!”

Caversham paused. Thoughtfully, he drained his stein of beer; he seemed to be virtually living on the stuff. He set the empty mug aside and gave a nod.

“Very well. Whatever I do seems to disturb you—talking, or keeping my mouth shut, both . . . Since you ask, however, I’m willing to contribute something to your discussion which is neither an insult nor an obscenity.” He managed to make his level tone carry an insulting message to Walters, nonetheless.

“I’ll go along with your suggestion that the inquiry is aimed at identifying someone who isn’t what he seems to be,” he continued. “I’m surprised this hasn’t been plain to you earlier—I’d come to this conclusion before I had my first talk with Master Brand.”

“Please!” Tanya said in a brittle voice. “Save the advertising for the interval.”

“I’m simply pointing out that I’ve been thinking on these lines for some time, time enough to arrive at some solid theories,” murmured Caversham. “And as I told Master Brand, everything narrows down to the one unusual feature of the voyage we’ve just made: the *Fulmar’s* call on Tantalus.”

"To fetch you away!" Florens snapped.

"To fetch me away, precisely," Caversham agreed. "Now the unique feature of Tantalus is the Tantalum, the unique features of the Tantalum is its telepathy. My conclusion, which I put to Master Brand as I say, is that—correction: was at first that—someone aboard had been telepathically contacted by the Tantalum and was acting as a kind of probe, or relay."

There was almost a minute of strained silence. Tanya broke it. "Very funny!" she said in a high, unpleasant tone. "This is to get back at Waters, I presume—feeding him a specious reason for his attack on you."

Waters glared at her.

"I didn't say that," Caversham corrected. "You're thinking that I spent a longer time on Tantalus than anyone here, which is true, and you're further thinking that the Tantalum—granting it to be in control of some extension of itself aboard the *Fulmar*—would hardly come storming into the open with a gratuitous confession. But listen!"

He hunched forward. "One thing I learned, which puzzled me, out there, was that no one has ever proved that the Tantalum can't sense human thoughts, although it's been shown that humans don't react to the Tantalum's emanations. I used to won-

der about this—but Veliz and I didn't get on well, and I never pressed the point.

"Suppose this theory of mine is accurate. What type of person has the Tantalum come most into contact with during its knowledge of our existence?"

"Presumably—" began Tanya, and checked herself.

"Scientists," Florens said unwillingly.

"Yes. I don't pretend to be a scientist," Caversham said.

"Just a moment!" Waters broke in. "Before we all jump on the platform you're erecting, and start thinking of Rely as possessed by an alien mind, let's have the rest of what you started to say. You talked about your original idea—the telepathic relay theory. What's your latest modification of it?"

"Quite a slight one," Caversham answered. "Haven't you noticed that the interrogation we've been subjected to is not confined to psychological tests? In that interview room there are scores of devices for examining the people who visit it, and I've seen some of them before, on Tantalus. They're for gross-physical and micro-physical analysis. If anybody enters that cabin, a complete chemical and metabolic record is made of him. And that suggests to me that they're not simply trying to find a human being under telepathic control—

we've been trying for over forty years to detect and measure telepathic emanations on Tantalus, and none of these devices responds to the signals. No: they're looking for one of us to be a facsimile of a human being."

VERY ingenious, Caversham." The familiar voice cut the air like a sword, and their heads jerked as though pulled by strings to face the doorway. For a long instant, they had trouble adjusting to Brand's altered appearance; he was wearing the forehead lenses of a remembrance, with the scalp-circuitry attached, and on each shoulder was a lightweight communicator.

He had certainly appeared only this moment, but it was obvious he had overheard—presumably via the communicators—everything that had been said prior to his arrival.

Hazel Graubart, who had been away on a private train of thought throughout the recent argument, was the first to react to his presence with more than a frozen stare. She jumped out of her chair and rushed at Brand, face white with rage.

"So you finally came out from behind that cowardly screen!" she blasted at him. "You finally showed yourself where I can get at you! Let me off this damned

ship, hear me? Let me off this ship at once!"

She made as though to pound at Brand's chest with her fists.

He didn't seem to move, but something blurred the air before him. Suddenly giddy, Hazel dropped her arms to her sides and blinked stupidly.

"Go to your cabin, please," Brand said, his expression impassive. And again, more sharply: "To your cabin!"

Dully she turned to the door and went out, her steps heavy and dragging.

"And I'd appreciate it if the rest of you would leave me alone also," Brand continued, sweeping the room with his hard gaze. "Except you, Caversham. I want to talk to you."

Bewildered, Tanya made to protest, thought better of it—there was something tremendously disturbing about the apparition of one of the Powers of Earth in the flesh, coming directly after Caversham's shattering proposals—and led a general movement in Hazel's wake.

"I hope this implies that you're through with your illegal detention of us," Florens snapped as he went by, and Tanya gave him a look of approval as she caught his hand to urge him out.

When all the others had gone, Brand studied Caversham attentively. He had been shaken to the

core to hear what the man was saying to his companions while he came aboard. It was as though the carefully-matched parts of a jigsaw had been taken up, shaken out again like dice from a cup, and revealed that the former tentative pattern of their arrangement was utter nonsense.

HE said at last, unable to help himself, "And assuming that this very ingenious theory of yours were true, what would you suggest be done about it?"

Caversham gave a huge grin that parted his bushy beard like a knife-slash. He said, "I've never been so complimented!"

"Are you just playing with words, or have you a suggestion to make?" Brand let the words reveal impatience.

"All right," Caversham said. "I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd say to everyone aboard that they were going to be allowed to land on Earth—not at once, but say in twelve hours."

"Why?" Brand demanded. "What would it prove?"

"I see it this way. Remember, I was on Tantalus. The Tantalans are a unitary organism. It consists of millions of parts, but it only has a single central consciousness. That consciousness recognizes this delay to the *Fulmar* as a defensive act by the human race, against its probing threat. It understands threat and coun-

ter-threat. It cannot possibly be expected to match the infinite complexity of a race consisting of billions of individual identities. So far on Tantalus it has been met by less than a hundred human beings. Down on Earth there are—what?—five, ten billion. That's insurance, though. What will count is this: the Tantalans expected, and got, a counter-threat when it made its play against Earth. Withdraw the counter-threat. Let it be seen that after the most painstaking evaluation of this situation the human race finds nothing to fear from it. I'll bet the Tantalans will be so startled that it will go into a kind of anxiety neurosis and its extension here will become catatonic, because it cannot face the prospect of dealing with the—to it—inconceivably numerous individualities on Earth, which have recognized its nature and decided that it is no danger to them."

Brand was silent for a long time. At last he said, "Why do you suggest a twelve-hour period between the announcement and the action?"

"Isn't it obvious? You would hardly *want* to turn loose a live, functioning Tantalans unit on Earth. You'll prefer to test the response with a chance to back down if things don't pan out as intended. But this is what I think will happen: during those

twelve hours the Tantalus unit aboard will go catatonic, as I say, and something very strange will be reported from Tantalus by Veliz—probably a total disruption of the creature's routine actions."

"Caversham, what's your intelligence quotient?"

"Oddly enough"—Caversham gave a crooked smile—"the same as the one generally assigned to the Tantalus: 160. But it would not take a genius to work out a plan like the one I'm offering. It takes no more than somebody who hasn't resigned his power of rational deduction to a clutch of machines. I told you that before."

"Do you ever suffer from the—the typical modern nightmare? The one about machines being absolutely in control?"

Caversham shook his head. "No, but Veliz does. He admitted it once. Do you?"

"Since the *Fulmar* arrived, I've had it for the first time." The words cost Brand a great deal of effort. "Well, no matter. I believe I'm going to try out your proposal, and I hope—how I hope!—it will work as you foresee. Because myself, I'm at the limit of my resources."

XIII

IT gave Brand a curious inside-out feeling to be here in the

interview room which he had so often seen indirectly via the screen at Weshemspatarnor. He found himself staring at each of the sensors and scanners in turn, reminding himself of the data they had garnered, while he waited for the news from Tantalus.

Relly had gone into rigid catatonia within an hour of his announcement that the emergency would end and the passengers would be allowed to disembark; he was now lying in the ship's hospital, drugged and watched over by therapeutic apparatus. Upon Relly collapsing, he had ordered the withdrawal of the monitoring devices that formerly had reported and recorded the slightest event within the ship.

He had all the information he needed now, barring this one item from Tantalus, and the fact gave him a sense of inexpressible relief.

Without warning, Cornelius' voice came from the communicator, stating that Veliz was calling from Tantalus; was Brand ready to speak to him?

"Not only ready," Brand answered dryly. "Impatient!"

The screen facing him lit, and Veliz appeared, the Gamaliel couple just in view behind him. There was tense excitement in each of their faces.

"Something extraordinary is happening here, Master Brand!"

the project chief said shrilly. "It's as though the Tantalán has gone out of its mind!"

Brand nodded, his expression thoughtful. "What precisely are you referring to?"

"Just about everything is disorganized." Lynette Gamaliel, cheeks flushed and eyes bright, leaned forward. "The normal smooth routine of the Tantalán's gross metabolism is falling apart—units are milling about helplessly, as though waiting for orders that don't come, and we can't get a coherent answer from any of the vodor-equipped brain-cells."

"What do you get? Nonsense?"

"Pretty well nothing else," Harry Gamaliel confirmed.

"I see." Brand rubbed his chin.

"Master Brand, do you imagine there's any danger to us?" Veliz asked diffidently. "This is absolutely unprecedented. I'm assuming that it's due to something you've done at the Earth-side end—if it is, can you say whether we're running the risk of an attack by the Tantalán?"

"No," Brand said. "No, I think you may be sure that in a matter of hours, or days at the longest, everything will return to normal. Thank you for your help, all of you. I believe we may now claim to have frustrated the Tantalán's best efforts against us."

He cut the circuit. The screen blanked as he rose to his feet.

Turning, he slid back the door of the interview room and headed down the spinal corridor of the ship towards the passenger accommodation.

A sound of raised voices came from the bar as he passed it, and mentally he identified the speakers: Sister Dorcas was trying to persuade Florens and Waters that they should give thanks for a safe deliverance, or—as she put it in the jargon of the Circle Believers—for the safe turning of another of the infinite number of corners which together made up the Eternal Circle.

Brand's mouth twisted wryly.

He reached the cabins now, and paused before the door of each in turn, checking whether it was occupied or empty. He had no reason to imagine that Caversham would be in any cabin but his own, but he was thorough.

Correct. No one in the cabins of Relly, Waters, or Nia Welk/Florens, and no one in Hazel Graubart's either; she might be in the bar with the others, or alone in the observation saloon. She didn't matter. In Florens' cabin, a noise: doubtless he had told his "wife" to clear up and get his belongings ready for disembarkation. Another sound of movement from Tanya Hesit's cabin, adjacent to Caversham's.

And in Caversham's cabin: Caversham.

HE was waiting for Brand, sitting on a chair facing the door, absolutely impassive. He neither moved nor spoke while Brand entered and closed the door behind him.

"It's a very strange sensation," Brand murmured, "to look at you—so precisely like a human being—and reflect that I am talking to a creature lightyears distant without the intervention of mechanical aids."

Caversham's eyes flickered, and Brand raised a warning hand.

"Don't do anything rash! Not that it would particularly concern you to die, any more than it would concern me to lose a nail-paring or a lock of hair—but you saw that I was able to fend off that hysterical attack of Hazel Graubart's, and I think you'll have gathered that I'm about as well defended as I reasonably could be. So no direct action on your part will have any effect."

He touched a chair control and lowered himself easily to a relaxed sitting posture. He was enjoying this.

"The process of deduction must be clear to you, I guess. I won't go into it—I won't insult your intelligence, which must be considerably greater than the generally accepted 160, seeing that you have several megabrain of computing capacity available at will. But I do feel I should

point out that your basic protective mechanism has been nullified now."

Caversham cocked an eyebrow in a fashion which Brand found somehow nettling.

"Did you think we'd overlook it forever?" he rasped. "It had to be worked out eventually! Whatever the nature of the telepathic emanation, there's one obvious weak spot in the structure of an extended organism with a telepathic linkage: the risk of encountering a mind with greater will-power than its own, which could convert it into a slave. This is why telepathy would ordinarily be an anti-survival factor. To have developed to such a degree on Tantalus, you must have had—you must *have*—a defensive mechanism which consists in a blanketing field, cancelling out latent telepathic faculties in other creatures. I suspect that evolution has furnished you with this power in respect of land creatures on Tantalus, and other beings of similar metabolism and behavior patterns, including to a limited extent humans. But it hasn't succeeded where aquatic animals are concerned, since their habits are totally different. I'm sure it was the minds of the sea-beasts which prevented you spreading to the southern continent of Tantalus by yourself, perhaps by secreting aquatic modifications of your sub-units,

rather than any inability to conceive a boat."

Caversham, unblinking, seemed to be staring through him. The sensation further jarred on Brand's original mood of satisfaction and achievement. In spite of his former intention, he kept talking, for fear apprehension should creep in.

"This blanketing field, now! It must be partly selective; there must be as it were gaps in the spectrum through which the linkage between your units can be maintained. Our minds are remarkably like yours—we communicated with surprisingly little difficulty when Voidech's expedition discovered you. Almost certainly, you've been able to sense certain areas of our thoughts ever since we met."

In Florens' cabin, his "wife" turned over the pillow on the bunk, to check whether anything belonging to him had been left there. Something brightly glistening caught her eye, and she froze, staring down at it.

"Probably you were contemptuous of us," Brand said. "It must have struck you as absurd that we should be so divided, into billions of little compartments without a telepathic union, and have to rely for the maximization of our intelligence on artificial aids. Oh, we're well aware of

the drawbacks of our predicament! One of them was the one which afforded you an entry into our consciousness."

Nia closed her hand convulsively around the little shiny thing she had found in the bunk. For a long moment she hesitated; then, her face quite set, she went to one of the small cases stacked on shelves across the cabin and opened its lock.

From the case she withdrew a bolt-gun, which she checked with practised thoroughness.

ONLY after I'd listened to your pat proposal for identifying the Tantalans did it occur to me to wonder why it was you had made two facsimiles at least of the body of Vivaldi, and not tried to modify them towards a closer resemblance with someone alive: say Harry Gamaliel, or Veliz himself. When I compared the data we had on your physical makeup with the records of Vivaldi when he was alive, I was not altogether surprised. You're identical. Your body is that of Vivaldi, thinly disguised with a beard and long hair and a few other superficial modifications. There never was a Caversham sent from Earth to Tantalus because he showed promise in some ETP tests. You had simply *appeared*. And you had cunningly fitted yourself into a niche in the

minds of those who had to deal with you: the niche carved out by such chisels as the so-called 'typical modern nightmare'. Everyone you met on Tantalus, especially Veliz, was too—embarrassed, almost: certainly upset—too put out by this apparition of a man who didn't mind mocking at human insecurity and reliance on machines, to stop and ask the right questions. For all I know, your telepathic blanketing field helped here also, by making otherwise intelligent people reluctant to consider an inquiry into your origins. Certainly you must have predisposed people telepathically to accept your existence."

Tanya Hesit, startled, swung to face the door of her cabin as it slid back.

"What do you want?" she demanded. Then she saw the bolt-gun, and went as pale as Nia herself.

"This is yours," Nia said very softly. She held out her hand, and showed that the bright object resting on the palm was the broken end of a chromed fingernail.

"So now we know," Brand said meditatively, "that you can read far more of our thoughts than we imagined. Tricky, that—but of course much of our thinking is forever inaccessible to you, being done by machines, and I imagine that the hunchback talent is also

pretty well inaccessible. Doubtless it was these closed areas which made you proceed with such caution, such tremendous patience . . . Well, patience anyway will come easily to an organism like yourself, not facing personal death."

He paused. "What were you aiming at, I wonder? My guess is: to domesticate us, as you've done with several rival species on your home world. But there were too many of us, to start with, an additional reason to the two I've mentioned why you should be cautious . . . We've been thinking that we were quite insensitive to your telepathic emanations. After this episode I'm more inclined to believe that we are potentially very sensitive to them, but you preferred to maintain this blanketing influence over us rather than run the risk of finding that our sheer numbers overwhelmed your single centralized consciousness."

And now, for the first time, Caversham moved and spoke. He raised his bearded head and gave a smile.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "you're only slightly sensitive to Tantalus telepathy. Most of the time it goes through you, or perhaps around you. Like the wind. But in certain circumstances, also like the wind, it can have irresistible effects—at moments of great emotional strain, for exam-

ple, when the ego is tending to disrupt altogether, it is quite effective."

"That must have made things easy for you, then," Brand said. "Those research workers out on Tantalus are under a permanent emotional strain, as I well know—no wonder they were ready to be persuaded of the existence of 'Caversham!'" He sighed. "I wondered when you'd come into the open. It's about time . . . Shall we go?"

He made to get to his feet, but Caversham checked him with an imperious gesture. "One moment!"

Tanya's self-control lasted mere seconds. Then she broke and tried to duck for the door. She had remembered what they said about Valhalla being a violent world; she had dismissed the idea that Nia would live up to the tradition, but the gun looked as though it was meant for business.

It was.

Nia swung it through a fast arc, and would have been able to burn Florens' seductress to death as she went by, but that at a precisely timed moment of the gun's sweep she pressed the fire button prematurely. The bolt missed Tanya by a yard. Following its appointed path, it seared through the cabin wall.

And also through the danger-

ous head of Master Brand, still in the position where Caversham had told him to remain for one more moment.

XIV

YOU'RE Caversham, aren't you?" Cornelius said, stepping close as the passengers from the *Fulmar* made to disperse among the hustle of Wes-hemspaternor.

"That's right." The burly bearded man turned. "Oh, yes—you're Administrator Cornelius." He looked expectant.

"I gather you arrived at the correct explanation of what was going on by a process of unaided deduction. A considerable achievement in the circumstances."

Caversham shook his head and gave a wry grin. "I see I shall have to disabuse a lot of people of this idea that I worked some kind of miracle. The plain truth is, I haven't ceded my powers of rational thinking to some machine hired for the purpose."

"Yes . . . Well . . ." Cornelius had a sensitive spot in that area, like most modern men, and averted his eyes. "It's a shame you couldn't speak out earlier. We might have saved Master Brand from his unpleasant fate."

"Hardly," Caversham said gently. "We were all under suspicion, and whatever I'd said

would have been taken as coming from the prime suspect. He told me as much himself when he came down to my cabin after Relly's collapse." Caversham wiped a trace of perspiration from his face.

"I shan't forget that in a hurry," he went on. "One moment, to see him chatting away in the most friendly fashion, thanking me for my aid—very flattering!—and the next . . ." He made a gesture like the wiping clean of a slate. "I'd have thought the monitoring system would have enabled you, if anybody, to save him."

Cornelius looked uncomfortable all over again. "We'd disconnected most of the monitors already," he said. "You see, I'd heard him state positively to Veliz that the Tantalán had been foiled, and with the Valhallan government and Sensiservice and everybody barking at our heels there seemed no point in another moment's delay."

"Of course not," Caversham agreed. He combed his beard with his fingers. "How about the Tantalán, anyway? Ah—both ends of it, I mean."

"As to Relly, we shan't be able to do anything with him until we get him back from catatonia, if then. We may have to be content with identifying the original

body—if we can find it on Tantalus—because the Tantalán will doubtless withdraw the telepathic linkage now the extension is useless. If it can, naturally."

A number of hints about the fate of Relly's "original body" were already being garnered on Tantalus, in fact. Caversham nodded. "And the Tantalán's own behavior?"

"Returning to normal, I hear—but somewhat subdued." Cornelius hesitated. "As a matter of fact, it wasn't about this that I wanted to talk to you. You know that the Powers of Earth are selected from hunchbacks who prove particularly successful; well, in view of your having been so helpful to Master Brand—"

"You still have the idea that I worked some sort of miracle!" Caversham cut in. "No, I *don't* want to be tested for hunchback ability! I want to be left to my own devices after a not very pleasant time on Tantalus and aboard the *Fulmar*."

"Yes, I quite understand," Cornelius muttered. "It was just a suggestion. Well, I'll add my thanks to Master Brand's and let you be on your way."

"We may meet again," Caversham said, and went jauntily down the ramp to begin the domestication of man.

THE END



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Your Name Shall Be . . . DARKNESS

By **NORMAN SPINRAD**

Illustrated by **SHELLING**

A simple experiment in a North Korean prison cell . . . a new theory of psychiatry . . . and a remarkably sustained story of how rebels can be adjusted to a cause . . . any cause.

MY name is Dr. Harvey Sanders. Perhaps you've heard of me. Probably not.

I have never sought publicity. Indeed, I shun it. My work is what counts.

It is not spectacular work. It makes no headlines. Yet, in its way, it is making a profound revolution in this country. Not merely a social revolution, but a revolution in the American psyche itself.

I am a psychiatrist. I adjust men's minds. I adjust them so that they in turn will be able to adjust to social change.

To *any* social change. I make

people happy. Happy under virtually any social conditions.

I have all the accepted degrees from all the accepted universities. But I learned how to make men happy in a very special school—let's call it the University of North Korea.

My professor of psychology at this unique institution was a Major Sung ping Lee. Sung ping Lee, as far as I know, did not have any of the accepted degrees from any of the accepted universities. But don't let anyone tell you that Major Sung was not one hell of a psychologist.

I enrolled in the university



two days after the Chinese "volunteers" swept south across the Yalu River. I was, at the time, a Captain in the United States Army. I was to become Guinea Pig 537.

Major Sung was in full control of the situation from the beginning.

"Captain Sanders," he said, as I sat before him in the bare preliminary interrogation room, "I see that you are a trained psychiatrist. Tell me, Captain, do you propose to give us nothing but your name, rank and serial number"?

"You know the rules of the Geneva Convention as well as I do, Major."

But instead of making threats, Major Sung beamed. "Excellent," he said. "What a shame if you had chosen to be cooperative at the start! Our experiment would've become rather pointless. And what a pity *that* would've been. As it is, I can see that we will have a most interesting time together."

Sung rose to his feet and placed his shiny, smiling face inches from mine.

"Tell me, Captain," he said softly, "do you believe in God"?

"What"? I mumbled.

"Oh come now, Captain. Surely you will not be giving away any military secrets by answering *that* question."

"Uh . . . I suppose not. Very

well Major. Let us say for the sake of argument that I do *not* believe in God." I smiled. I felt sure I had given him the opposite of what he had expected.

Once again, I was surprised.

"Perfect!" said Sung. "I can see that you will be an ideal subject. Captain, let me assure you that by the end of this month, you most certainly *will* believe in God".

"What"?

"Look at my face, Captain. Today it appears to you as the face of a man, an enemy. *In a month, you will recognize it as the face of God.* That will be all for today, Captain Sanders".

EARLY the next morning, I was taken to a different room. Once again, it was bare and Spartan—one chair, and a padded couch, complete with restraints, and sitting next to it, something which looked vaguely like an electroshock therapy apparatus.

Sung was waiting for me.

"Ah, Captain Sanders!" he said. "Today we begin our experiment. Tell me, Captain, what do you think that device is"?

"Some new kind of electroshock apparatus"?

"Very good, Captain. A close guess. So you have some acquaintance with electroshock therapy"?

"Enough to know that if you're planning to torture me with that thing, you're wasting your time. Electroshock therapy works by inducing a current directly in the brain. The brain has no pain receptors. You can give me just enough current to knock me out, or enough to kill me, but you can't make me feel pain. It's physiologically impossible."

Sung laughed. "Such lack of subtlety!" he said. "Captain, there are tortures and tortures. Not all of them involve brute pain. Have you ever read a serious study of torture?"

"Torture? What is there to say about torture? You induce pain in the subject until he submits to your will."

"Ah, but Captain, surely you realize that there is psychic pain as well as physiological pain. Even subconscious pain. Tell me, Captain, you have been using electroshock therapy in the West for a good many years; how does it work?"

"Why, you induce a current—"

"No! No!" said Sung. "I mean how does it *really* work? Just how does a current induced in the brain bring about psychological change?"

I shrugged. No one really knew the answer to that one.

"Consider Pavlov," said Sung.

"What about Pavlov?"

Sung grinned. "Pavlov proved that it is the presence of a stim-

ulus, positive or negative, that counts. Pain is a negative stimulus, but that doesn't mean that every negative stimulus must involve pain. Now this device," he said, pointing at the strange-looking electrical apparatus, "is something like an electroshock apparatus. It induces a small current in the brain, but never more than just enough to cause a momentary blackout. A pure negative stimulus, so to speak. No pain at all involved."

"That's all it does"?

"That's all. But as you will discover, it is quite sufficient."

He said something in Chinese, or maybe Korean, and the guards grabbed me and threw me down on the couch. They strapped me in, and Sung attached a set of electrodes to my head.

"Very well," he said. "Now we begin. And let us begin at the beginning—name, rank and serial number".

He stepped over to the control console and fiddled with it for a few moments.

"Ah! Now then, your name"?

HE threw a switch and I blacked out. No pain, no nothing. Just unconsciousness.

When I came to, it could've been a minute, or an hour later. I had no way of knowing.

"Ah!" said Sung. "You are awake. Now then, let us under-

stand each other. Your name is not Harvey Sanders. You do not have a name."

"Name"? he said.

"Ha—"

Blackness.

Awareness returned. Sung stared in my face. "Name"?

Blackness.

"Name"?

Blackness.

"Name"?

Blackness.

How many times it happened, I can't remember. Ten? Twenty? A hundred?

Finally, there came a time . . .

"Name"? said Sung. And there was no blackness. Only . . . only. . . .

"Come now. I promise you there will be no more shocks. Tell me now, Captain, what is your name"?

"Captain. . . . Captain. . . ."

"Come now, Captain, surely you have a name? *Everyone* has a name."

"Of course. Only . . ."

"Only *what*"?

"I can't . . . I . . . *I have no name.*"

"Good, Excellent. But surely you have a rank"?

"Captain, United States Army."

Blackness.

"Rank"?

Blackness.

"Rank"?

Blackness.

I don't think it took very many blackouts for me to lose my rank. After all, a *name* is something you live with all your life.

"Very good," said Sung finally. "But we must have something to call you, eh? Hmmm . . . Guinea Pig! That's it. Guinea Pig 537. Now then, what is your serial number"?

I honestly couldn't remember.

"Come now, Guinea Pig 537, no serial number"?

I lay there numbly. I was . . . *no one.* . . . I was . . . a man! I was . . . what did he call me, Guinea Pig 537?

Sung studied my face intently.

"Excellent!" he said. "You are a fine subject, Guinea Pig 537. You have earned your evening meal. Take him back to his cell now."

THAT night, I lay on the hard bed, trying to remember.

A *name.* . . . A name was the thing one was called. It had two parts. One part told what family you came from. I knew what a family was. I had one. There was my mother, and my father, who was dead, and my brother Bill, and my sister Eileen. . . .

And me. My name was. . . . Was. . . .

Guinea Pig 537.

No! That wasn't my real name. Sung had called me that, but it wasn't my name. I knew,

because my name was . . . it was. . . .

Blankness.

* * *

"Ah, good morning, Guinea Pig 537!" said Sung. "I hope you slept well. We have a busy day ahead of us."

I struggled with the straps, but it was no use.

"Now then," said Sung, "where are you from? Where were you born?"

"New York, New York!" I shouted in defiance. It was a name, a label, a place to cling to.

Blackness.

"Where were you born?"

Blackness.

I lost my birthplace, my age, and my country that day. I was a man. I existed. I had come to this place—*Korea*.—to fight a war. I had been captured somewhere below the Yalu River. . . . I had that much. . . .

For a while.

DAY after day, Major Sung ping Lee chipped away at the collection of nomenclature and memories that was *me*. More and more surrendered and passed into oblivion. My infancy, my childhood, my adolescence. . . .

And all without a twinge of pain. "The brain has no pain receptors," I had told him.

"There is torture and torture," Sung had said.

And finally, the ultimate day came.

"Guinea Pig 537!" barked Sung. "Who are you"?

Blankness.

"Where are you"?

Blankness.

"What are you"?

Something bubbled into consciousness in my blighted mind.

"*I am!*" I shouted. "I am! I am! I am! I am!"

Sung smiled slowly. "At last," he said. "The final delusion. Very well. What are you"?

"I am!"

Blackness.

"What are you"?

"I am!"

Blackness.

"What are you"?

"I am. . . ."

Blackness.

"What are you"?

Nothingness. Featureless billows of black in a field that was black. Blankness. Oblivion. *Nothingness.* Pure, undiluted primeval nothingness.

Finally, after aeons of nothingness, millenia of chaos, a voice:

"We have torn it down," said the voice. "Now we begin to *create*."

"Who am I"?

Blankness.

"I will tell you," said the voice.

"*I am God.*"

"God . . .," I mumbled. "God . . . there is . . . God. . . ."

"I am the Lord. Do not be afraid. I shall create for you a cosmos. I shall create for you a personality," said the voice. It chuckled. "Perhaps not *quite* in my own image."

"God. . . . God is with me. . . ."

"Let there be light."

And there was light. A soft yellow light. It was a face. The face of Sung ping Lee.

"Would you like a name"? said the face of God.

"Name. . . ."

"I shall give you a name. Let us call you *Harvey*. Harvey Sanders. What is your name"?

"Harvey Sanders. . . . Oh, thank you! Thank you, God. Harvey Sanders! Harvey Sanders! My name is Harvey Sanders!"

"You are a man," said God.

"A man! A man!"

I was a man. My name Harvey Sanders. I was a man named Harvey Sanders. God had made me a man and given me a name.

God was good. I loved God.

NOW the days with Major Sung were no longer torture. I was literally in the presence of my maker . . . in fact, I was being *made*.

I was a man named Harvey Sanders.

I was Captain Harvey Sanders.

I was Captain Harvey Sanders of the United States Army.

I was Captain Harvey Sanders who had been born in New York.

I was Captain Harvey Sanders, *psychiatrist*.

Day by day, week by week, I grew. I can remember it all, or at least most of it. I remember getting my name, and my rank, and my country, and my family. My infancy, my childhood, my adolescence, the years in college. . . .

Brick by brick, memory by memory, Major Sung ping Lee built up a replica of the personality he had destroyed; carefully, almost lovingly, like an expert restoring some ancient tapestry.

Why all this was done, I still cannot understand. Sung learned nothing of importance from me, since there was nothing important that I knew. Did he do it just for his own sadistic amusement? But that makes no sense either. There was no pain at all.

And if it was an important experiment, why did he let me remember how he did it, when he could've obliterated the memory completely?

The Communists, we are told, never do anything without a reason. I wonder. . . .

There was a time, I think, when I did know the answer. I vaguely remember Sung telling me something, something ugly, and laughing. I remember feeling fear, and hate. . . .

There is a whole week that I do not remember, the week when

he told me . . . whatever that fiendish *something* was. Sung *made* me forget. It was not very difficult.

He left me with only one sentence out of that whole week in my memory. Did he do it to taunt me? It seems so meaningless: "*The subtlest weapon is a sword that thinks it's a plowshare.*" Now what could he have meant by that?

At any rate, he was finally finished. The day came when I walked out of that room the same man that I had been so many weeks before. At least, I feel that I am the same man. There is, of course, no way to be sure. The Harvey Sanders who first met Sung ping Lee was obliterated. Completely. Perhaps there are some small differences.

But of course, I shall never know.

I never saw Major Sung again. A few years later, the war was over.

And I was repatriated.

OF course, I was gone over by Army psychiatrists before I was discharged. But it was really all quite superficial—more of an extended coffee-klatch than a rigorous psychological examination. After all, I was one of them, a member of the club, so to speak.

Still, there was that one peculiar incident. . . .

I was speaking with a Colonel

Destry, the head of the processing center, and a psychiatrist who I respected professionally. He had asked me about the methods of the camp interrogators. Understand, I had not told anyone of Major Sung. First of all, I was not likely to be believed, and secondly, if I *was* believed, I might very well spend the next few years under observation. The Army might conceivably be quite reluctant to release a man who had been taken apart and put back together again by the Chinese.

Still, at that point, I really did want to get it off my chest, and Destry seemed like a man I could talk to.

"Well," I began, "one of the interrogators, a man called S—" The strangest thing happened. *I could not pronounce Sung's name.* The word stuck in my throat like a piece of wet dough. Understand, I *knew* the name I wanted to say, and I knew how to say it. But I just *couldn't.* *Something* was blocking me.

"Yes Captain"? said Destry, looking somewhat perplexed.

"Er . . . one of the interrogators, *Major Su Ling,*" I said, dredging the fictitious name up from somewhere, "used a—"

Again, there was a block. I could not describe Sung's apparatus or what happened in that room. I remembered it all, except, of course, for that week I've

mentioned, and yet something was stopping me from speaking about it. *Had I been conditioned against it?*

Destry eyed me in a very peculiar manner, as well he might.

"He used a rubber hose, and beat the bottom of my feet with it, and. . . ." And I reeled off a whole catalogue of non-existent atrocities and tortures until I was sure Destry was satisfied.

Now perhaps you are thinking that I should've found some way of telling someone about Sung. That's all very well from your point of view. Yes, I admit that the episode worried me a bit at the time.

No doubt about it, Sung had conditioned me against revealing anything about what had happened. But after all, it was an experiment, wasn't it? I can certainly understand his wanting to keep it secret.

And from my point of view, . . . well if I wanted to be discharged from the Army, I had to keep my mouth shut.

So, after a few more preliminaries, I was discharged.

AS a young psychiatrist just starting out, I got a job in a large public mental institution. Electroshock therapy was a fairly common practice in the hospital, and for obvious reasons, I became engrossed in the subject.

Quite frankly, no one in the United States seemed to know as much about the subject as Major Sung did. For decades, shock therapy had been used on certain difficult cases. A large percentage seemed untouched by the therapy. About an equal percentage showed some improvement. A smaller number were "cured", at least overtly.

But no one really knew *why*. They knew that electroshock therapy had certain results—they could observe them. *How* it worked was a mystery, and until that mystery was solved, there was no real way of increasing the rate of cures. You just plugged a patient in and hoped.

But I knew *how* and I knew *why*.

One of the more reasonable hypotheses had been that the electroshock acted as a negative stimulus, suppressing the disturbing psychic elements, driving them deep down into the subconscious, so that the overt behavior of the patient improved. But this was not really a cure. The disease, the conflict, was still there, lurking somewhere in the subconscious.

What I had been taught by Major Sung was that whole diseased aspects of a personality, *indeed, the disturbed personality itself*, could be destroyed. By proper use of electroshock, the disturbed personality could be

broken down into primeval formlessness, and then rebuilt.

And who knew this better than I?

It would be pointless to recount the trials and tribulations of my long, careful campaign to put my method into practice. The problem was that I dared not tell anyone that I had experimental proof, that I *was* experimental proof.

A plan was even then, in the beginning, forming in my mind. This new technique could be more than a cure for mental illness, it could cure *social* neuroses as well. . . .

But I had to go slow. Build up my professional reputation in the conventional way. Publish a tentative paper on the history of shock therapy; then the beginnings of my new theory; then a subtle piece on the psychology of brainwashing; step by step, I led the proper people down the path from what they knew to what I knew.

Without any particular step being too big, too radical, without any big jolts along the way. . . .

And finally, as I had planned, as I had spent years pointing towards, the day came. I was asked to apply my theory to a patient.

I was asked. That was important. I had never demanded the right to use my new therapy. It was much better to wait to be

asked. That way, I could be sure that the profession was ready to accept it, without undue clamor. I wanted no publicity . . . the plan that had been forming in my mind, the plan for a better society, demanded discreteness.

But the day did finally come.

It was a boy named Tom. Of course, that isn't his real name. Ethics of the profession, you know.

Tom was twenty, withdrawn, rebellious, hostile, suicidal. A hard-core, severe neurotic. He had been given up on by three analytical therapists, and the new therapy seemed the only alternative.

It was decided that I should be given the chance.

LIKE so many other neurotics in this country, Tom had been rather brilliant. Learned to read at three, out of high school at fifteen . . . almost a prodigy.

And like so many other intelligent young people, unwilling to conform to the will of society. A runaway as a boy, a delinquent as an adolescent, a severe neurotic as a young man.

At eighteen, he had tried to kill himself for the first time. He tried several more times before he was committed to an institution.

In so many ways, a typical case.

Which was why I was so inter-

ested in applying my therapy to Tom in the first place—his *was* a typical case. Typical of what I had come to consider “the American Neurosis.”

Naturally, generalizations do not apply to all individuals within a culture, but in general, certain nations seem to develop more or less prevalent attitudes among their citizens—call them national neuroses. The German is obsessed with a drive for meticulous order. The Oriental, at least until very recently, worshipped the past. The Russians are afflicted with social paranoia and xenophobia.

And the American is a rebel.

Most Americans of any intelligence have always, in one way or another, been rebels against society. The American fears order. He distrusts control.

And, at the bottom, he is unwilling to put his faith in authority and society. *Any* authority. *any* social order.

The American sees himself as a unique individual. Rules are for others, not for him. He has built a whole philosophy around this unrealistic attitude.

Of course, if you look at it logically, this *is* an unrealistic attitude. It is really society which counts. Men who continually flout the current social order, whatever it may be, will be continually kicked in the teeth by reality.

In short, they end up as unhappy neurotics.

Like Tom.

One thing that must be said for the Communists; they understand the relationship between the individual and society. Society, being the sum of all individuals, is more important than any of them. When an individual starts to believe that he is more important than his society, he begins to become a neurotic.

And he ends up like Tom.

I certainly don't want you to get the wrong idea, though. I'm no communist. After all, I fought in a war against them, didn't I? I was a prisoner of the Communists, was I not?

At any rate, you can see the significance of Tom's case as a test. If I could cure Tom's neurosis, if I could mold a new personality for him that would willingly conform to the social order, that would accept authority, then I would eventually be able to do the same for the millions of other Americans afflicted with this disease of individualism. Perhaps you find this thought repulsive. It's understandable. After all, you too, to some degree or other, are afflicted.

But try to look at it rationally. What is so wrong about the individual living for the good of society? What is really so sacred about the “rights of the individual”? *What* rights?

The right to be a neurotic?
The right to be unhappy?

The important thing is for the individual to accept the rules of the society he lives in. No matter what they happen to be. Ideology aside, the man who *willingly* accepts order, control, rules, will stay happy, no matter what conditions he finds himself living under. He will be free of neuroses.

And is there anything that's *really* worth being unhappy for?

So perhaps you think that there is. "Dignity", you may say, "freedom", "honor" "Democracy". . . . Are these really anything more than empty words?

Now you think that they are worth being unhappy for.

But then, you haven't been cured yet, have you?

I KNEW what I had to do. I had been planning this moment for years. I would cure Tom. I would erase his previous personality entirely, and build a new, healthy personality in its place.

A whole *new* personality, a personality that would think it was the same Tom as before, *but* that would really be an entirely *new ego*.

I remember him lying there, thin and drawn. There was a strange look in his eyes, a look that was sullen and resigned.

"Tom," I said, "I'm going to help you."

"You're going to help me," he said. He said it like a machine. Or did the very flatness of his tone constitute an insult?

No matter. I was ready to begin.

"What is your name"?

Shock.

"What is your name"?

Shock.

"What is your name"?

Just as Major Sung had led me down the path to dissolution, I led Tom. Not, of course, for the same unfathomable purpose. As the days and weeks passed, name, family, memory dissolved, and as it had come to me, the ultimate moment came to Tom.

"What are you"?

"I am!"

Shock.

"What are you"?

"I am. . . ."

Shock.

"What are you"?

Blankness.

He lay there, his eyes passively closed, dreaming the truly innocent dreams of the foetus.

Lying there on the table before me was a raw, formless . . . *ego* would be too structured a term. . . . The primeval id, or something even more privative, without memory, form, or even desire. Human clay, waiting for my hands.

For a moment, I knew what it felt like to be God.

For one ridiculous moment, I thought of Sung. And I thought of myself, years ago, lying there, like Tom was lying there now, formless human clay. . . .

Finally, this inevitable moment of doubt passed.

"You hear me," I said.

"Hear. . . ."

"Do you know who I am"?

"Who you are. . . ."

I took a deep breath. Now I would take the first step down a long road, the road back for people like Tom, the road to a healthier, better-adjusted American psyche. . . .

"*I am God*," I said.

THAT was many years ago. Tom was the first. It was a complete success.

After Tom, there were others, thousands of others. And now, other psychiatrists, by the hundreds, are learning the method.

American society is now in the process of being quietly transformed. Actually, it is not merely society which is being changed, it is the nature of the American psyche itself.

The new American will be a very different breed. He will be happy.

He will be happy no matter what changes his society undergoes in the future. His content will come from within, it will be unshakable. He will be able to adapt, indeed, he will not even be

conscious of adapting. It will be as natural as breathing.

All he will require will be some social order to conform to. *What* that social order will be will not be significant. Ideology will no longer be important to him.

When he reads in his history books (if he bothers to trouble himself with such things at all) about the great and meaningless ideological conflicts of the twentieth century, it will all be nonsense to him.

Whatever ideology eventually triumphs—democracy, socialism, fascism, communism, some newism as yet unborn—he will accept it without question; he will accept it with enthusiasm.

And whoever his rulers may be, he will be happy.

And the sweet irony of it all is that all this will come about as the result of a pointless experiment in a Korean prisoner of war camp. Truly, this is one of those rare cases when a sword has really been turned into a plowshare, is it not?

Not that I don't have personal doubts, once in a while. After all, I'm human, am I not?

It's really quite silly to worry about Major Sung, and the first crude beginnings of my technique, isn't it?

After all, all that is in the past. The Korean War is long over.

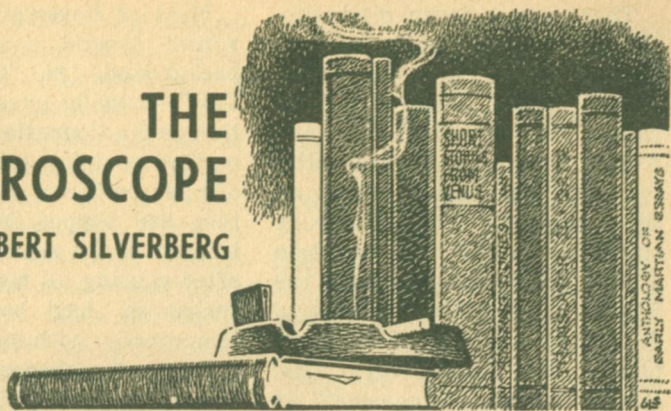
And we won that war. . . .

Didn't we?

THE END

THE SPECTROSCOPE

By ROBERT SILVERBERG



The Seventh Galaxy Reader, edited by Frederik Pohl. 247 pages. Doubleday, \$3.95.

Once again Doubleday offers a selection of stories from *Galaxy*,—not chosen from any particular year's run of that magazine, but in this case representing material originally published from 1959 to 1964. This volume is, I think, the first of the series to be compiled by Frederik Pohl, who replaced Horace Gold as *Galaxy's* editor several years ago.

Pohl, of course, is the same man who has contributed so much to science fiction as a writer, and he's on hand here in a dual facet, with a short story called "Three Portraits and a Prayer." It's a fine job, demonstrating Pohl's talent for intricate plotting within a small compass, occasionally verging on overslickness and sentimentality but never quite top-

pling in—the ultimate effect being quite a moving one. Just as impressive in an entirely different way is Cordwainer Smith's "On the Gem Planet," which is mostly the story of an extraordinary horse's extraordinary feat on an alien world. Some of the Smith mannerisms are beginning to seem wearisome by now—he seems to be riding along on the momentum of background material established five years ago—but even minor Cordwainer Smith, as this is, provides those flashes of wonder and terror that are his hallmark. A third story, A. J. Budrys' "For Love," strikes me as perhaps the best in the book—tight and hard, with a gathering force that must certainly sweep any reader along, and psychological insight of a sort characteristic of all this gifted writer's work.

There are a dozen other stories, of varying quality, by such luminaries as Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Lester Del Rey, Damon Knight, Fritz Leiber, and Avram Davidson. All are deftly told, few leave much impact on the memory. The Bradbury struck me as silly, the Davidson a good try at a tough task, the Bloch a clever filler, the Leiber a formidable waste of a formidable talent, the Knight ditto. Del Rey's "Return Engagement" is a quiet and lovely job written twenty years too late for *Unknown Worlds*, the magazine that could have harbored it most comfortably. Among the remaining stories, my favorite is "The King of the City," by prolific Keith Laumer, a fast-moving and powerful yarn in the grim style that *Galaxy* favored in its earliest years.

The Colour Out of Space and others, by H. P. Lovecraft. 222 pages. Lancer Books, 60¢.

H. P. Lovecraft was a crusty and eccentric New England recluse who died a little more than a quarter of a century ago, leaving behind a considerable body of weird and fantastic stories. Most of these were published in *Weird Tales*, though he also appeared in the regular science fiction magazines occasionally—including *Amazing Stories* on one occasion in 1927.

Most of Lovecraft's work revolved around a single story background, the "Cthulhu mythos"—actually pure science fiction in its thematic matter. The mythos postulated that a group of alien beings of malevolent nature had slipped into our continuum in the remote past, and, after causing all manner of disturbances, had been subdued temporarily, with an everpresent threat of subsequent return. Lovecraft developed this notion in a great many stories, while a circle of his friends, most particularly August Derleth, Robert Bloch, and Clark Ashton Smith, also made use of the Cthulhu material with Lovecraft's blessings.

Lovecraft's style was musty and Victorian, and he relied excessively on the props of his mythos, so that a reader who might be chilled by a single Cthulhu tale could well be forced into laughter by a great many of them. The work of the Lovecraft circle did him a disservice here, since the flood of Cthulhu tales by lesser hands operated to debase the coinage of the entire series. Also, Lovecraft depended too heavily on certain easily-recognized and easily-parodied mannerisms, such as his fondness for calling eldritch things indescribable, "blasphemous," or "unutterable." Therefore the more sophisticated critics of s-f and fantasy tend to regard Love-

craft with patronizing amusement, writing him off as a literary curiosity of interest only to his own immediate cult.

I think it's unfortunate that he should be dismissed so lightly. The seven stories in the present book seems admirable to me in many ways, combining science fiction and the macabre skilfully and chillingly. Make allowances for Lovecraft's eccentricities of style. The fact remains that his stories, at their best, conjure up frightening vistas of alien dominions, and hold the reader compellingly from first to last. Nor is the old accusation that Lovecraft ducked his job by calling everything "indescribable" valid; his descriptive powers are first rate. He has a feeling for the shapes and textures of things, and the feeling comes across.

Lovecraft's power of description is at its peak in the long novella, "The Shadow Out of Time," which first appeared in *Astounding Stories* (the ancestor of *Analog*) in 1936 and is reprinted here. It's pure s-f, and one of my favorite dozen science fiction stories of all time: a powerful, somber tale of an alien library and the hapless mortal who stumbles into it. It is a terrifying and fascinating story, and those who make fun of Lovecraft without deigning to read him are cordially invited to try it—though not late at night.

The remaining six don't quite attain that level of spookiness, but they're mostly top-drawer and should be familiar to many readers.

Here, again, is "Cool Air," a creepy updating of Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"; here is "The Call of Cthulhu," dating from 1928 and still one of the best of the mythos stories, evoking wondrous shivers in this reader; here is "The Whisper in Darkness," published posthumously in 1939, another Cthulhu story and also a vivid one. "The Terrible Old Man" and "The Picture in the House" are brief and less impressive.

As for the title yarn, the much-reprinted "Colour out of Space" from *Amazing Stories*, it is a slower-paced version of some of the other Cthulhu stories, more striking separately then—as here—where it must meet the competition of others of its kind.

Lovecraft has been much maligned, and his undeniable faults as a writer have been magnified at the expense of his great skill. His stories are deadly serious, humorless to the utmost, and he has to be met a little more than halfway if he is not to seem ludicrous. Do yourself a favor, try this collection. You'll discover that "The Shadow Out of Time" is a glimpse into strangeness such as few writers have ever given us.

Beyond the Farthest Star, by *Edgar Rice Burroughs*. 125 pages. Ace, 40¢.

Last month we mentioned the Canaveral Press hardcover that included this story and two other unpublished Burroughs novels. Here, for the impecunious, is a paperback edition of the lead story alone—roughly 40,000 words in itself. Half of it was published in magazine form in 1941; the rest turned up in E.R.B.'s papers after his death. It's not related, except stylistically, to Burroughs' other s-f novels. Burroughs is not, shall we say, my favorite man of letters, but there are others who may want to have this book.

Note: it doesn't contain the elaborate background information on Polodan astronomy and

linguistics that was included in the hardcover edition.

Special note: although this department does not generally discuss science fiction fan magazines, one current publication deserves mention here. It's **SPECTRUM**, whose editor and publisher, Lin Carter, reviews at length all the science fiction books published, and many borderline fantasy items. Carter also runs a regular and comprehensive list of forthcoming books in the field. The coverage is much more extensive than can be provided in this column, and readers and collectors would do well to subscribe. The price is 40¢ an issue, \$1.50 for a year's subscription (four issues), to Lin Carter, 100-15 195th St., Hollis, Queens 23, N.Y.

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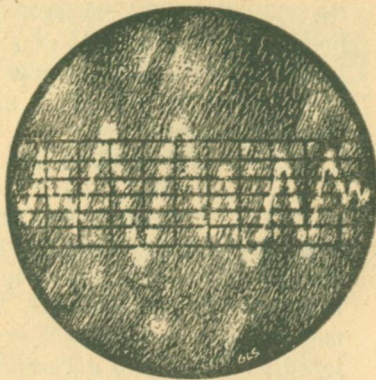
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Dear Editor:

Robert Silverberg is a great improvement over S. E. Cotts. For one, Silverberg's reviews are fun to read, and I never bog down after a few sentences. And for another, one clearly realizes what his opinion of a book is. ("The man who picks these books for Avalon happens to be a person of taste and discrimination. He must have had his brains disconnected when he picked this one.") But nevertheless, there are a few points which I would like to argue about.

Silverberg implies in his review of *Skylark Three* that today's readers won't enjoy the Skylark books because "they haven't aged well." But—*The Skylark of Space* has had two printings in the Pyramid paperback edition and has sold over 100,000 copies. This seems to contradict Silverberg's hypothesis. (Surely he's not going to suggest that all 100,000 copies were

bought by nostalgic "old-timers!")

Dean M. Sandin in *Science Fiction Review* points out that the plot in *The Man in the High Castle* was virtually non-existent. For that same reason, I can't agree with Robert Silverberg and the validity of his statement that "[Dick's] plotting is stunning." But obviously I am in the minority as far as Dick's Hugo-winner goes.

I'm glad that in his review of *Cave Girl*, Silverberg admits that most other readers won't agree with him on the subject of Burroughs and Kline. This is a virtue which ought to be practiced more often in book-reviewing. (And it is interesting to note that Silverberg doesn't even agree with himself on Burroughs; in one instance he didn't like an ERB novel, *Cave Girl*, but in the next instance, *Escape on Venus*, he did!)

In closing I would like to state

that I enjoyed Silverberg's own novel *Regan's Planet*, and am sorry that he gave it only the questionable status of a note, despite modesty.

John R. Krutch
1604 Auburn Ave.
Orlando, Fla. 32804

● *The paperback Skylark has, indeed, sold over 100,000 copies. What we do not know is, how many of those who bought it, enjoyed it. There is a difference—and critics have the right to carp and split hairs.*

Dear Editor:

Apparently, both Duane Richardson and Robert Silverberg missed a very important point concerning *The Game-Players of Titan*. The story was not meant to be a serious novel (it reads too fantastically for that), but rather a high-class parody on A. E. van Vogt's *The World of Null-A*; both are concerned with a Game of high stakes. Even the main characters have similar names: Pete Garden and Gilbert Gosseyn. This can be confirmed by reading the blurbs of both (Ace) paperbacks.

Why doesn't Sam Moskowitz start analyzing the newer writers instead of resorting to fringe people like Mort Weisinger? Was this written because Sam thinks we're all lip-moving *Superman* readers? There is still the rich mine of Anderson, Budrys, Korn-

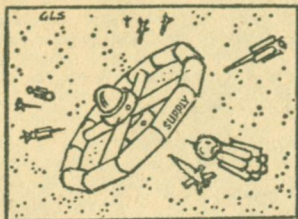
bluth, Pohl, Sheckley, Aldiss, Clement, Knight, Matheson, Bester, Dick, Miller, Blish, and many others to profile, without Sam getting desperate. If he doesn't want to cover these, then let's have some bibliographies to supplement the earlier articles.

Letter writer George Inzer is, of course, entirely wrong about several things. First, he is definitely a N.O.V.I.C.E., because a neofan is at least in fandom; George Inzer is not. Second, he dismisses all of fandom because he disliked one fanzine. That is equivalent to condemning all sf because the critic didn't enjoy a third-rate collection by a cheap paperback publisher. Besides, fanzines abound in all shapes, sizes, and types. Was this one all editorial and comment? Was it all fiction? Is the reason you did not enjoy it, George, the fact that fanzines are like inside jokes and you're on the outside? They can't be all that bad; every year one of them wins a Hugo.

If AMAZING does get a fanzine review column, let George do it. It might cure him of hasty judgment.

Gil Lamont
1970 Masters
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● *Sam will eventually profile most of the "rich mine" you mention. See the announcement of this new series on page 130.*



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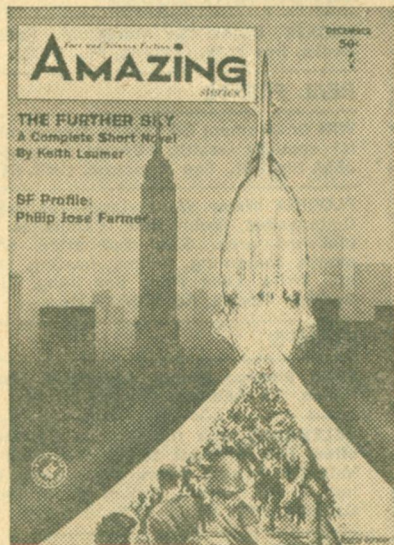
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