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AMAZING STORIES, Fact and Science Fiction, Vol. 38, No. 5, May 1964, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60605. (Ziff-Davis also publishes—Popular Photography, Popular Electronics, Electronics World, HiFi/Stereo Review, Popular Boating, Car and Driver, Flying, Modern Bride and Fantastic.) Subscription rates: One year United States and possessions $4.00; Canada and Pan American Union Countries $4.50; all other foreign countries $5.00. Second Class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices.

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Fact and Science Fiction
AMAZING stories

MAY, 1964
Vol. 38, No. 5

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SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to AMAZING STORIES, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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Western Office
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213 CRestview 4-0265

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NOT long ago the 11th International Congress of Genetics, meeting in The Hague, indicated that within a few years science will be able partially to control the mechanisms of heredity by manipulation of the "blueprint" DNA molecules. We view *this* prospect with a substantial dash of alarm.

Letting science run loose with nuclear bombs or nerve gases or bacteriological warfare may be all very well. But the control of heredity poses more massive problems, and more personal ones. If we can fashion men and women to order—which seems imminent—the questions arise: *who* is to be charged with the fashioning; to *whose* order; and for *what* ends? In an age when personal privacy is callously violated at every turn, it is not unlikely to expect that the ultimate privacy—the privilege of being born as Nature (or God, if you will) determined, rather than a genetics lab—will be as casually violated.

In an editorial on the subject, *The New York Times* said: "The moral, economic and political implications of these possibilities are staggering . . . The danger exists that the scientists will make at least some of these God-like powers available to us in the next few years, well before society—on present evidence—is likely to be even remotely prepared for the ethical . . . dilemmas with which we shall be faced."

* * *

Reader John W. Riley, lamenting the absence of Benedict Breadfruit and his ghastly puns, writes to remind us that on one of his time voyages, BB visited 1066 to view the Norman invasion of England. On his arrival, he saw William the Conqueror writing epigrams on bits of parchment, tying them to stones and throwing them at the enemy.

"Whatever is he doing?" asked one time traveler. "Why," said Breadfruit, "obviously you are seeing a Norman lob sense."

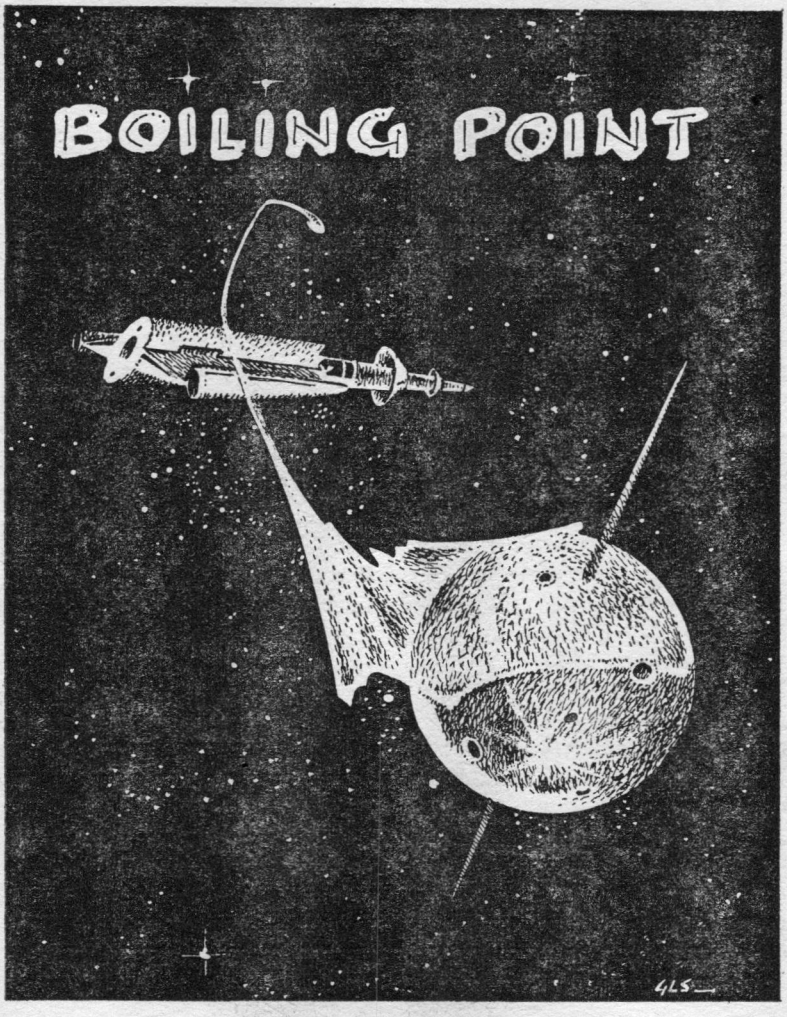
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Stasek didn't want to be on the blowtorch run in the first place. Now he had a hitchhiker who was hungry for sunlight.

By LESTER DEL REY

Illustrated by SCHELLING

BOILING POINT



THEY had come to him and told him to grab a blowtorch and head out to service the ring of satellites strung like beads between the orbit of Venus and the orbit of Mercury. Stasek, a big, rangy young man who thought he had more important things to do than that, stared in bewilderment at the port official who gave him the news.

"You're joking," Stasek said. "I'm not a technician. I've got work to do."

"Servicing the satellites is work," the supervisor said mildly. "Pretty important work, at that."

"For a technician," Stasek said. "I'm on the energy-eater project, for Pete's sake. Do you think I can take time out and go play nursemaid to a bunch of satellites? You could do the job remote, and you know it!"

"The regulations say that the satellites shall be serviced manully." The voice was not so mild now. "Tompkins was supposed to make the trip, only they're busy cutting his appendix out of him right now. Vaughn can't pilot a blowtorch to save himself. Dominick doesn't have the technical background to do the work. That leaves you, Stasek. They're tuning up a torch for you right now. Blastoff is in twenty-eight minutes." The supervisor allowed himself a faint smile. "Who knows? Maybe you'll catch an energy-eater out there while you're working."

Stasek gaped like a gaffed fish. He found himself suddenly alone in the laboratory, with nobody to argue with. They had him. He couldn't protest. He was sore as hell, but they had him. The supervisor was right; *someone* had to do the job. It was dog-work, mindless work, but the regulations were specific: the satellites had to be tuned up from time to time. Stasek had always made fun of the technicians who went hopping out there to do the stupid job. Now it was his turn. Shaking his head slowly, he cleaned off his desk and walked to the window. Outside, the pearly-gray cloud barrier arched like a burnished vault across the heavens, and below it stretched the barren fields of Venus, dead and empty. Stasek banged his fist lightly against the window. Then he went down the corridor and toward the blastoff area to get into his suit.

A figure came up the hall as Stasek went down it. Nick Vaughn, the short, chunky physicist who ran the big fusion converter in the basement. Stasek saw Vaughn's grin, fifty feet away, and knew there would be trouble.

There was. Vaughn said, "I hear you're taking a little blowtorch flight, Jimmy."

"News travels fast."

"It's a small base. So you're running the nursemaid route, eh? Be sure to blow their noses, now. And don't forget to wipe their little—"

"Shut up," Stasek said crisply. "Do me that much of a favor."

"Jimmy Stasek flying the nursemaid route! My, my, my what's the universe coming to?"

Nursemaid.

Stasek was still simmering as he suited up, dogged his helmet into place, and walked out onto the field to get into the blowtorch they had readied for him. He hadn't been behind the controls of a blowtorch in eight or nine Earthtime months, but his papers were up to date. The ship was small, almost dainty. Blowtorches didn't come big. The blowtorch drive could send a small ship anywhere in the Solar System, but it didn't have the oomph to push anything really massive.

It was useful enough for its purpose—flitting around on low-cargo missions among the inner worlds. The direct conversion of a tiny, intermittent fusion blast to propulsive drive made the blowtorch go. The pilot sat a dozen feet away from a miniature sun, but a magnetic pinch field kept the thermonuclear reaction in check. Same principle as the big generator downstairs that powered the whole Venus station —energy tapped from a plasma of shattered atoms, a drifting soup of protons and neutrons. It didn't take a devil of a lot of skill to handle a blowtorch. That was why Stasek, who was basically a life-sciences man, had taken the trouble to get his papers.

The field technicians nodded respectfully at him as he went down the tunnel to the ship. Stasek nodded back. No sense in biting *their* heads off, he thought. They hadn't sent him out on this damfool mission. They were just greasemonkeys. They were probably laughing behind his back, because they knew as much as he did how idiotic it was to send a grown man out to tend a bunch of orbiters that ought to be able to look after themselves.

Stasek keyed in the computer. Somewhere in the bowels of the blowtorch, minirelays began to close. He got his clearance from field control. He gave the ship computer the go-ahead.

The blowtorch trembled a moment as its little fusion converter spewed out a tiny fraction of its force. Stasek, at the controls, didn't need to do a thing, not on a blastoff. The computer could handle the problem of blastoffs without his help, thank you.

IN a moment he was through the cloud barrier and into the darkness. Earth was below the horizon today, but he saw Mars,

clear and sharp against the backdrop of space. They wouldn't have done a fool thing like this to him on Mars, he thought. They weren't shorthanded there. But here, on Venus, the stepchild of space, the U.N. appropriation was bestowed grudingly, and the technical staff was no more than skin-deep. Stasek scowled and thought of his unfinished work, and got even angrier.

He was tackling the problem of the energy-eaters, those totally mysterious, wholly baffling life-forms that had been discovered about five years back, drifting seemingly at random through the universe. Nobody had gotten close enough to an energy-eater to find out anything about its makeup, though it was a pretty good guess that they were non-protoplasmic. They had the damndest metabolism ever. Raw energy, that was what they gobbled, erg on erg. Solar energy? Sure. Any kind. The shielded spy satellites that skimmed the photosphere had seen energy-eaters drifting right across the face of the sun, emitting electromagnetic radiation right up and down the spectrum as they ate. Photosphere heat didn't seem to bother them at all.

Of course, they took their snacks elsewhere, too. One of their favorite tricks was to sidle up to a space satellite and drain its solar batteries dry, drink up its accumulators as though they were so much Dom Perignon. For a prank, too, the energy-eaters might burp out a bit of energy, enough to nudge the satellite right out of orbit. You didn't have to perturb a satellite's orbit very seriously in order to send it spiralling into the sun.

The satellites were important, and hardly expendable. They were up there for a variety of reasons. Some were communications relays, handling messages on the Mars-Earth-Venus circuit. Others were sunpot observation platforms. Others were energy accumulators, soaking up the sunshine and beaming it to dark-side Venus and to Mars. There weren't enough big fusion converters around yet to handle all energy needs; solar batteries still were important. And there were half a dozen other uses for the belt of satellites. They weren't toys.

Which was why Jimmy Stasek was sitting back of a blowtorch's controls, heading sunward from Venus to take care of them.

He couldn't do the fine-scale work, of course. He didn't have the technical background for that. But he knew how to jolt a satellite back onto orbit after it had been perturbed, and he knew how to replace a burned-out bank of accumulators, and he knew how to do the other little odd jobs that had to be done. You learned

more than your own specialty, when you went to space, and Stasek had always had a mechanical knack.

He could do the job. But he didn't *want* to. He wanted to be back in his lab, running through the data on energy-eaters and trying to figure some pattern. The trouble was that hardly anyone had ever *seen* an energy-eater. They didn't seem to go any further out than about 50,000,000 miles from the sun. Now and then, pilots making the Mercury run had spotted them. Somehow, though, anyone who had ever come really close to an energy-eater had failed to survive the meeting. Nobody knew what happened to such unfortunates. It just seemed as though these particular snarks were boojums, every single time. When you met one, you softly and suddenly vanished away.

THE blowtorch headed inward, sunward. The computer knew where all the satellites were supposed to be, and would take him to them, one by one, as their orbits were crossed. If they were off orbit, it was Stasek's job to find them, feed the data to his computer, and discover how much of a nudge it would take to put the satellites back in their proper path.

The first satellite was okay. Stasek found it on a solar orbit half a million miles out from Venus. It had suffered some minor meteor damage, but was almost smack on orbit even so, and functioning properly. Stasek matched velocities with it for a while and ran some routine checks,but nothing needed to be done.

The second satellite, a few hundred thousand miles on, was in bad need of a tune-up, though. Deftly, Stasek hung his blowtorch in a parking orbit alongside, got out, squirted himself over to the satellite and went to work, for all the world like the video repairman he had once dreamed of being. In half an hour he had wired an entirely new battery series into the circuitry, corrected a minor malfunction of the meteor screen, and twisted the slightly battered mouth of the cosmic-ray trap back into the more receptive position it was supposed to have. Then he moved on.

He serviced a third satellite, and a fourth. His pride in his own craftsmanship almost made him forget how sore he was at being sent out to do donkey-work of this sort. Almost. He couldn't help reflecting, though, that he was wasting precious time and risking his even more precious life for the sake of a job that any nineteen-year-old technician could be doing. What was the use of a man's spending ten

years getting special training, if they sent him out on a mission like this?

Stasek growled in the general direction of Venus. Then he got moving again, on to the next satellite, and the next, and the next.

He was homing in on the ninth orbiter in the series when he saw the energy-eater.

IT was wrapped around the satellite like a starfish around a clam. Stasek cut in the manual drive and improvised an observing orbit a couple of miles away, while he took a good, long, close look.

The energy-eater fit all the descriptions. It was shapeless, featureless, and of no particular color. It seemed more purple than anything else to Stasek, but, as he watched, the energy-eater's light emission shifted in easy stages toward the low-frequency end of the spectrum, and a moment later it was glowing cherry-red at him.

The chart said that this particular satellite had a twenty-foot diameter. The energy-eater was wrapped completely around it, engulfing it. But, so the eyewitness reports went, energy-eaters could expand or shrink within an enormous range of sizes, and bigger ones than this had been reported.

The chart also gave the satellite's orbit as something a couple of degrees different from the one it was currently moving on. The energy-eater had hauled it a bit toward the sun. Stasek didn't bother to check, but it seemed likely that the satellite was now on a collision course with the sun, which would mean the waste of a couple of megabucks of United Nations money unless Stasek could shoo the alien creature away and restore the right orbit.

The trouble was, Stasek didn't give much of a damn about the satellite. He would rescue it, yes, if he had the chance. But he was a lot more interested in studying the energy-eater, now that this lucky break had dumped one right in his lap. All at once, he didn't feel so annoyed about having been ordered out here. He had made dozens of trips through this part of space, *looking* for energy-eaters, without ever catching so much as a glimpse of one. So of course it would happen that when he came out here unwillingly, grumbling and mumbling every step of the way, he would run right into one.

The regulations were quite specific on what you were supposed to do if you came across an energy-eater. First of all, you were supposed to contact the nearest base and file a full report on what you saw. Secondly, you were supposed to get the devil

out of the vicinity—especially if you were out there alone. The one thing you were not supposed to do was to approach the energy-eater in any kind of attempt to make contact or close-range observations. Too many men had been lost that way. There were too many boojums out here.

Those were the regulations.

To hell with the regulations, Stasek thought.

He had come this far on a fool's errand. He wasn't going to go meekly away, now that he had stumbled across something that might make the whole trip worthwhile. Nobody knew more about energy-eaters than he did, only he knew hardly anything about them at all. He might never get a better chance to observe one, not if he wandered around out here for the next two hundred years.

First, though, he realized he had better tell home base about it. Just in case—

HE made contact. He gave his coordinates and said, "There's an energy-eater out here. Munching on XIX-AB."

"You really found one?" gulped the communications man.

"Damn right," Stasek said. "You taping this? Here's the description."

Stasek described the energy-eater meticulously, the way he had always hoped other observers would do it in the reports that eventually found their way to his desk. Before he had finished, he was aware that others at the Venus end had cut into his line, and when he indicated that he was through, he heard his supervisor's voice saying, "All right, Stasek. Now get the devil away from the thing before you land in trouble."

"I've got some further observations to make, sir."

"Like hell you do. You know the regulations."

For the second time that day, Stasek felt anger flare within him. A muscle throbbed in his cheek; he clamped his gloved hands into fists. Tightly he said, "I'm sorry, sir. The energy-eaters are my project, and I've got to have a good look. This may be the best chance I'll ever get."

"Stasek, you listen to me! Do you hear—"

"Sorry, sir." He jabbed at the set, cutting off the incoming signal. They could hear him, if he had anything to report, but they wouldn't be able to expostulate with him. Damned idiocy! Sending a man all the way out here, and then not letting him do his proper work!

He got the blowtorch out of its observation orbit and jockeyed it closer to the infested satellite, studying the energy-eater in chilled fascination. It seemed to

be no more than a bundle of radiation itself, nothing organic about it. Yet reports said that they were sentient, that they thought and reacted and even communicated.

Maybe so, maybe not. Stasek had never known what to believe, in the reports he got. The only observations you could really trust, in the long run, were your own—and sometimes you couldn't even be too sure of those.

His blowtorch was no more than a hundred yards from the satellite, now. Delicately, he matched velocities and stayed put. The energy-eater seemed disturbed. It had puckered itself up around one pole of the satellite, contracting to less than a quarter of its earlier size. There it was, bulging out of the satellite, radiating deep purple again.

"The energy-eater has drawn himself up in a knot," Stasek said into the microphone. "He looks like a big ameba, I'd say. He seems bothered by my presence here. Now he's developing a kind of pseudopod that's coming up out of the middle of the heap. Eight, ten feet long, I'd say. Waving around—almost sniffing, really. And now—"

Abruptly Stasek stopped talking. The pseudopod grew from eight to eighty feet in a fraction of a second, and then to three hundred. A loop of alien life-stuff wrapped itself around the nose of Stasek's blowtorch. A moment later, the energy-eater came oozing up its own pseudopod, pulling away from the satellite and plastering itself like a thin layer of jelly all over the blowtorch.

Shaken, Stasek said, "It's on the torch, now. Happened very fast. I can see it moving beyond my window here And—and—I'll be damned if it isn't trying to *tell* me something!"

THERE were no words, of course.

Just a steady throbbing beat against Stasek's brain, and a sudden idea sprouting out of nowhere: the idea of hunger.

Stasek wasn't hungry. He had had a big meal not too long before, and in any case this wasn't the sort of situation that tends to sharpen a man's appetite. It was the thing outside that was hungry, and the energy-eater had somehow let Stasek know about it.

Hungry. Hungry. Hungry.

"Hungry for what?" Stasek found himself asking.

As though in answer, an image blossomed in Stasek's mind: a golden sun, streaming radiantly, shooting tongues of fire hundreds of thousands of miles outward.

"For energy?" Stasek asked. "Yes, sure. Of course you are.

What else would you want to eat?"

The energy-eater was congealing, again, pulling together on the snout of the blowtorch. When it had first come over from the satellite, it had spread out everywhere on the little ship. Now it was a ball about a foot in diameter, right on the nose. It radiated soft green light.

Stasek picked up another thought. It was one that he did not like at all. It was the unmistakable image of the blowtorch heading sunward with the energy-eater riding happily on the prow.

"No," Stasek said. "We can't do that. I'm not built for riding through the sun. Neither is the ship. I'll die. The ship will melt."

Blank incomprehension greeted his words. For a moment, Stasek felt no contact at all with the creature outside. Then the image returned: the blowtorch heading for the sun.

"You want a free ride?" Stasek asked. "I'm sorry. No go."

He was uncomfortably aware that the orbit of the blowtorch was changing. The satellite where he had originally spied the energy-eater had sailed off on an orbit of its own, and was a goodly distance away by now. Somehow, the energy-eater had managed to deflect the blowtorch inward by a degree or two. Stasek began to sweat. He keyed in the computer and told it to correct the orbit, get it off what was almost certainly a sun-bound track.

The computer didn't do a thing. The computer helplessly flashed the red light that said it was having a system breakdown. Bathed in sweat, now, Stasek keyed in the auxiliary navigation aid, and found that it, too, was frozen.

He looked at the creature perched outside. "How the hell did you do that?" he asked.

A sensation of bland self-satisfaction came back.

"You can monkey with my circuits?" Stasek asked. "You can freeze the whole works?"

Affirmative.

"Will you cut it out?" Stasek radioed. "I don't want to ride into the sun. Let go of the controls."

Negative.

SUDDENLY, Stasek began to realize why none of the other spacemen who had had close contact with energy-eaters had ever come home. The sun was an awfully warm place.

He went to his manuals and tried to give the torch an orbit-correcting jolt. Nothing happened. Somehow the energy-eater had interposed his own influence between Stasek's control panel and the guts of the ship. Was the blowtorch shorted completely, Stasek wondered? Were

they going to drift helplessly right into the sun?

Just for the hell of it, he punched out an orbit that would be even more directly sunward, and tried the manuals again. This time they worked. A jolt of energy flared at the tail, and the nose of the blowtorch swung around. Stasek tried the computer, and found that it, too, would work—but only to take the ship in the direction the energy-eater wanted to go.

"Very cute," Stasek said. "We can go anywhere at all, so long as it's toward the sun."

Affirmative.

There was a good hunk of space betwen Stasek and the sun, at the moment—better than twenty million miles. But it was not necessary to ride all the way into the heart of the sun to get cooked. He'd be crossing the orbit of Mercury soon. The heat would begin to build up. The blowtorch's heat-shields would last only so long. Then they'd be that much slag—and he'd be a heap of charred ash a short while afterward.

"You can get to the sun without me," Stasek told the energy-eater. "Why take me along?"

It wasn't easy to understand the reply. But it seemed to Stasek that the energy-eater was telling him that it was more fun to make the trip with company.

HALF an hour later, Stasek was beginning to fry. The blowtorch was aimed right into the sun now, and it was impossible for Stasek to use his controls for anything but sunward acceleration. They were moving at a good clip, now. The heat-shields were complaining, giving off a high whine as they desperately tried to shunt the incoming radiation off into space. Stasek's mood was one of calm desperation. There was no sense panicking, he thought. He wasn't going to die. At least, not yet. He could always abandon ship and set himself up as a little satellite of his own, and touch off a rescue beacon and wait to be rescued. About once out of ten, they actually did rescue castaways before they starved or died of thirst. Those were fair odds. The odds against surviving a plunge into the sun were a lot worse.

Of course, he'd be a laughingstock when he got home. They'd break him for having disobeyed orders and lost his ship. And he'd never live down the fact that he, the so-called student of energy-eaters, had been captured by one and dragged off on a wild sunward jaunt.

The A level of heat-shields had given out, now, expiring with a throbbing little whimper. The cabin temperature was up around 150, now. The temperature in Stasek's suit was only

110, not exactly balmy. Looking outside, Stasek could see the remains of the heat shields ablating off and disappearing. He wondered how long it would be before the ship began to melt.

It got hotter. There were deformation streaks in the cabin window, now. The B level of heat-shields was ready to call it quits. That left C level and D level, and when they were gone, well, it was the end of the road.

He talked to the energy-eater. He cajoled it. He pleaded with it. He begged it to change its mind and let him head the ship the other way. No use. It was like arguing with a fish, or with a woman.

Then he got angry—again.

Of all the idiotic messes! To die, or to be disgraced, for *this!* No, Stasek thought. He wouldn't let it happen.

"Hey, you moron out there!" Stasek called. "Listen to me! I've got food for you. Good food, you dope! You don't need to bother with the sun. I've got all the food you can eat."

He got an expression of interest.

Rage made him tremble. All day long, he had been a puppet, pushed around first by his supervisor, now by this inane bundle of alien intelligence out there. He had had enough.

"I've got a sun of my own," he said. "A little one, right here in the ship. Come look, if you don't believe me. And I've got a bigger one back home. You can live right in it. You can eat all you want, you lousy glutton!"

THE very force of his anger seemed to make an impression on the energy-eater. At his boiling point now, Stasek erupted with a torrent of verbiage, extending a friendly invitation in one sentence, haranguing the energy-eater for its mindless, destructive stupidity in the next. The alien seemed fascinated. It took on a triangular shape, and rippled and throbbed, going from color to color.

"Do you hear me?" Stasek bellowed. "Will you do as I say?"

The alien continued to ripple. The walls of the cabin were ripping now too, as waves of heat deformed them. Stasek could feel his suit starting to overheat. He didn't dare check on what the suit temperature was. He didn't give a damn, any more. Let the alien-eater drag him right into the sun. Let the blank-blank belt of satellites fall into the sun too, and Earth and Mars and Venus, and—

And suddenly the energy-eater was right inside the cabin with him.

It had contracted into a globe about the size of a basketball, and hovered impudently in midair a couple of feet away from

him. There was no mistaking its thought.

It was telling him:

I'm hungry, it was saying. Put up or shut up.

"Sure," Stasek said. "Just follow me, and don't eat anything you aren't allowed to eat."

He led the alien back into the drive compartment of the ship. Opening the hatch, he pointed to the chamber that housed the little fusion generator.

"In there," Stasek said. "And leave a little energy for me, will you. I'll need it to get home."

SOME hours later, the blowtorch limped into its home base. It was pretty much of a mess, but nothing that couldn't be repaired in a couple of weeks. It needed a new set of heat shields and a new skin, among other things. But, since Stasek had stopped off on the way back to rescue that sunward-heading satellite, the trip had been worthwhile.

And he had a passenger.

On the way in, he had radioed advance word, and everything was ready for him. He put the blowtorch down on manuals. The field was clear. Stasek got out, and so did the energy-eater. Stasek crossed the field, with the energy-eater hovering like a toy balloon a couple of feet above his shoulder. He took a diagonal course to the power station. Nick Vaughn was waiting there, his expression no longer a mocking one, but a look now of dazed disbelief.

He glanced at Stasek, then at the alien. "You sure this thing isn't going to hurt the converter?" Vaughn asked.

Stasek shook his head. "He just wants to mooch a meal," he said. "Let him in there and let him tap off some energy. We've got a tame one, I think. If he sticks around, we'll have our first chance to learn something about these critters."

Vaughn nodded mutely. He opened a passageway, and Stasek led the energy-eater down into the depths of the station. Beyond, within a bottle of magnetic force, a fusion reaction blazed and strained like a pinioned giant. The energy-eater drifted gaily into the heart of the converter. Vaughn looked at dials.

"I'll be damned," he muttered. "He's *feeding*."

"Sure he is," Stasek said. "I convinced him that it might be just as much fun to eat off a man-made sun as out of the regular kind. And he agreed.'

"How'd you work it, though?"

Stasek grinned. "I lost my temper, that's how. It happens that I've got a pretty low boiling point."

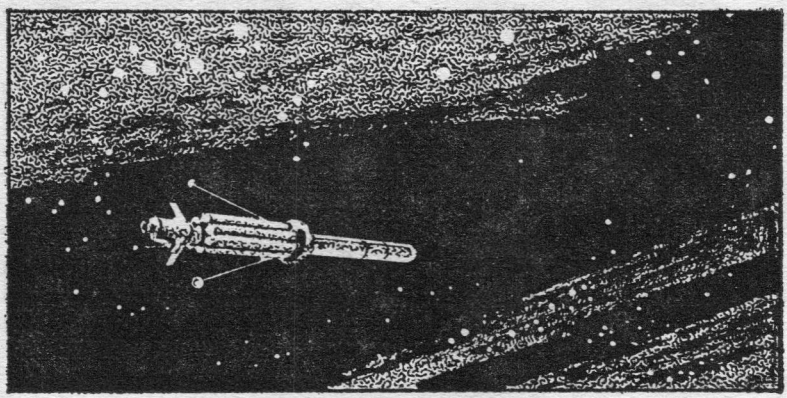
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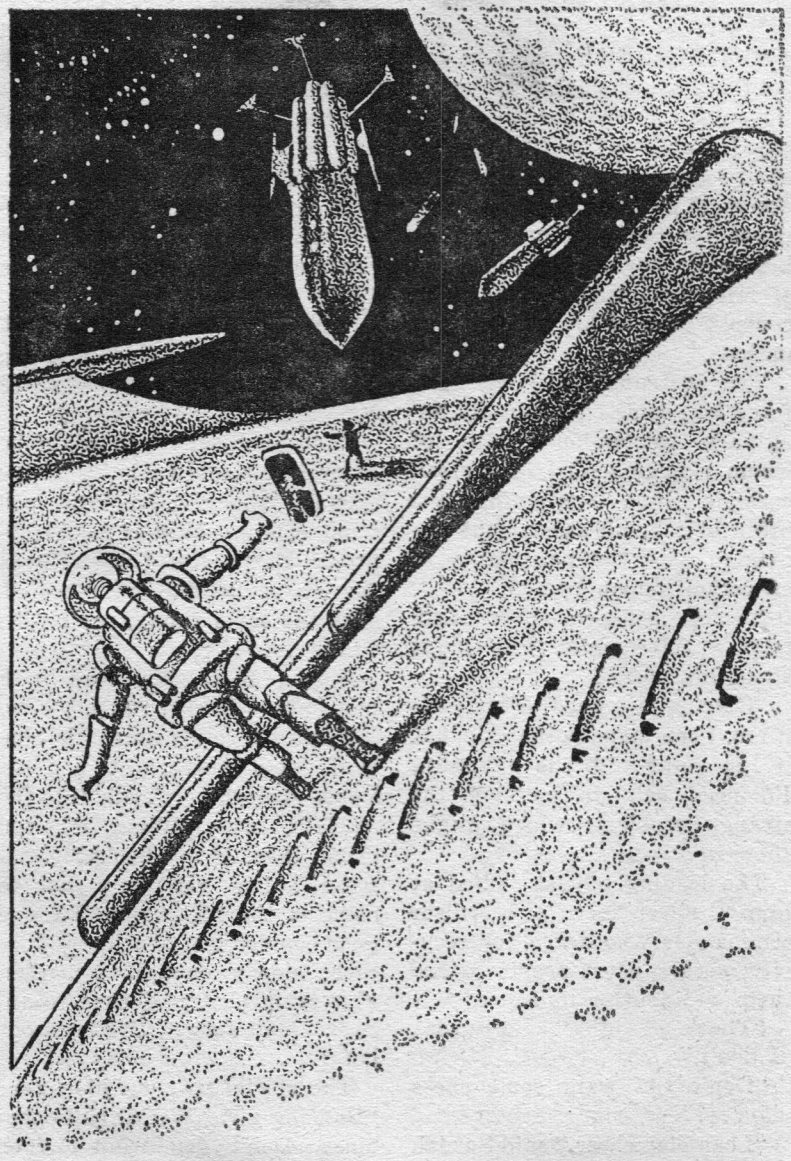
the Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal

By CORDWAINER SMITH

Do not read this story; turn the page quickly. The story may upset you. Anyhow, you probably know it already. It is a very disturbing story. Everyone knows it. The glory and the crime of Commander Suzdal have been told in a thousand different ways. Don't let yourself realize that the story really is the truth.

It isn't. Not at all. There's not a bit of truth to it. There is no such planet as Arachosia, no such people as klopts, no such world as Catland. These are all just imaginary, they didn't happen, forget about it, go away and read something else.




SCHELLING

The Beginning

COMMANDER Suzdal was sent forth in a shell-ship to explore the outermost reaches of our galaxy. His ship was called a cruiser, but he was the only man in it. He was equipped with hypnotics and cubes to provide him the semblance of company, a large crowd of friendly people who could be convoked out of his own hallucinations.

The Instrumentality even offered him some choice in his imaginary companions, each of whom was embodied in a small ceramic cube containing the brain of a small animal but imprinted with the personality of an actual human being.

Suzdal, a short, stocky man with a jolly smile, was blunt about his needs:

"Give me two good security officers. I can manage the ship, but if I'm going into the unknown, I'll need help in meeting the strange problems which might show up."

The loading official smiled at him, "I never heard of a cruiser commander who *asked* for security officers. Most people regard them as an utter nuisance."

"That's all right," said Suzdal. "I don't."

"Don't you want some chess players?"

"I can play chess," said Suzdal, "all I want to, using the spare computers. All I have to do is set the power down and they start losing. On full power, they always beat me."

The official then gave Suzdal an odd look. He did not exactly leer, but his expression became both intimate and a little unpleasant. "What about other companions?" he asked, with a funny little edge to his voice.

"I've got books," said Suzdal, "a couple of thousand. I'm going to be gone only a couple of years Earth time."

"Local-subjective, it might be several thousand years," said the official, "though the time will wind back up again as you re-approach Earth. And I wasn't talking about books," he repeated, with the same funny, prying lilt to his voice.

Suzdal shook his head with momentary worry, ran his hand through his sandy hair. His blue eyes were forthright and he looked straightforwardly into the official's eyes. "What do you mean, then, if not books? Navigators? I've got them, not to mention the turtle-men. They're good company, if you just talk to them slowly enough and then give them plenty of time to answer. Don't forget, I've been out before. . . ."

The official spat out his offer: "Dancing girls. WOMEN. Concubines. Don't you want any of those? We could even cube your

own wife for you and print her mind on a cube for you. That way she could be with you every week that you were awake."

SUZDAL looked as though he would spit on the floor in sheer disgust. "Alice? You mean, you want me to travel around with a ghost of her? How would the real Alice feel when I came back? Don't tell me that you're going to put my wife on a mousebrain. You're just offering me delirium. I've got to keep my wits out there with space and time rolling in big waves around me. I'm going to be crazy enough, just as it is. Don't forget, I've been out there before. Getting back to a real Alice is going to be one of my biggest reality factors. It will help me to get home." At this point, Suzdal's own voice took on the note of intimate inquiry, as he added, "Don't tell me that a lot of cruiser commanders ask to go flying around with imaginary wives. That would be pretty nasty, in my opinion. Do many of them do it?"

"We're here to get you loaded on board ship, not to discuss what other officers do or do not do. Sometimes we think it good to have a female companion on the ship with the commander, even if she is imaginary. If you ever found anything among the stars which took on female form, you'd be mighty vulnerable to it."

"Females, among the stars? Bosh!" said Suzdal.

"Strange things have happened," said the official.

"Not that," said Suzdal. "Pain, craziness, distortion, panic without end, a craze for food—yes, those I can look for and face. They will be there. But females, no. There aren't any. I love my wife. I won't make females up out of my own mind. After all, I'll have the turtle-people aboard, and they will be bringing up their young. I'll have plenty of family life to watch and to take part in. I can even give Christmas parties for the young ones."

"What kind of parties are those?" asked the official.

"Just a funny little ancient ritual that I heard about from an Outer Pilot. You give all the young things presents, once every local-subjective year."

"It sounds nice," said the official, his voice growing tired and final. "You still refuse to have a cube-woman on board. You wouldn't have to activate her unless you really needed her."

"You haven't flown, yourself, have you?" asked Suzdal.

It was the official's turn to flush. "No," he said, flatly.

"Anything that's in that ship, I'm going to think about. I'm a cheerful sort of man, and very friendly. Let me just get along with my turtle-people. They're not lively, but they are consider-

ate and restful. Two thousand or more years, local-subjective, is a lot of time. Don't give me additional decisions to make. It's work enough, running the ship. Just leave me alone with my turtle-people. I've gotten along with them before."

"You, Suzdal, are the commander," said the loading official. "We'll do as you say."

"Fine," smiled Suzdal. "You may get a lot of queer types on this run, but I'm not one of them."

The two men smiled agreement at one another and the loading of the ship was completed.

THE ship itself was managed by turtle-men, who aged very slowly, so that while Suzdal coursed the outer rim of the galaxy and let the thousands of years—local count—go past while he slept in his frozen bed, the turtle-men rose generation by generation, trained their young to work the ship, taught the stories of the earth that they would never see again, and read the computers correctly, to awaken Suzdal only when there was a need for human intervention and for human intelligence. Suzdal awakened from time to time, did his work and then went back. He felt that he had been gone from earth only a few months.

Months indeed! He had been gone more than a subjective ten-thousand years, when he met the siren capsule.

It looked like an ordinary distress capsule. The kind of thing that was often shot through space to indicate some complication of the destiny of man among the stars. This capsule had apparently been flung across an immense distance, and from the capsule Suzdal got the story of Arachosia.

The story was false. The brains of a whole planet—the wild genius of a malevolent, unhappy race—had been dedicated to the problem of ensnaring and attracting a normal pilot from Old Earth. The story which the capsule sang conveyed the rich personality of a wonderful woman with a contralto voice. The story was true, in part. The appeals were real, in part. Suzdal listened to the story and it sank, like a wonderfully orchestrated piece of grand opera, right into the fibers of his brain. It would have been different if he had known the real story.

Everybody now knows the real story of Arachosia, the bitter terrible story of the planet which was a paradise, which turned into a hell. The story of how people got to be something different from people. The story of what happened way out there in the most dreadful place among the stars.

He would have fled if he knew

the real story. He couldn't understand what we now know:

Mankind could not meet the terrible people of Arachosia without the people of Arachosia following them home and bringing to mankind a grief greater than grief, a craziness worse than mere insanity, a plague surpassing all imaginable plagues. The Arachosians had become *un*-people, and yet, in their innnermost imprinting of their personalities, they remained people. They sang songs which exalted their own deformity and which praised themselves for what they had so horribly become, and yet, in their own songs, in their own ballads, the organ tones of the refrain rang out,

And I mourn Man!

They knew what they were and they hated themselves. Hating themselves they pursued mankind.

Perhaps they are still pursuing mankind.

THE Instrumentality has by now taken good pains that the Arachosians will never find us again, has flung networks of deception out along the edge of the galaxy to make sure that those lost ruined people cannot find us. The Instrumentality knows and guards our world and all the other worlds of mankind against the deformity which has become Arachosia. We want nothing to do with Arachosia. Let them hunt for us. They won't find us.

How could Suzdal know that?

This was the first time someone had met the Arachosians, and he met them only with a message in which an elfin voice sang the elfin song of ruin, using perfectly clear words in the old common tongue to tell a story so sad, so abominable, that mankind has not forgotten it yet. In its essence the story was very simple. This is what Suzdal heard, and what people have learned ever since then.

The Arachosians were settlers. Settlers could go out by sail-ship, trailing behind them the pods. That was the first way.

Or they could go out by planoform ship, ships piloted by skillful men, who went into space-two and came out again and found man.

Or for very long distances indeed, they could go out in the new combination. Individual pods packed into an enormous shell-ship, a gigantic version of Suzdal's own ship. The sleepers frozen, the machines waking, the ship fired to and beyond the speed of light, flung below space, coming out at random and homing on a suitable target. It was a gamble, but brave men took it. If no target was found, their machines might course space forever, while the bodies, protected by freezing as they were, spoiled

bit by bit, and while the dim light of life went out in the individual frozen brains.

The shell-ships were the answers of mankind to an over-population, which neither the old planet Earth nor its daughter planets could quite respond to. The shell-ships took the bold, the reckless, the romantic, the willful, sometimes the criminals out among the stars. Mankind lost track of these ships, over and over again. The advance explorers, the organized Instrumentality, would stumble upon human beings, cities and cultures, high or low, tribes or families, where the shell-ships had gone on, far, far beyond the outermost limits of mankind, where the instruments of search had found an earth-like planet, and the shell-ship, like some great dying insect, had dropped to the planet, awakened its people, broken open, and destroyed itself with its delivery of newly re-born men and women, to settle a world.

Arachosia looked like a good world to the men and women who came to it. Beautiful beaches, with cliffs like endless rivieras rising above. Two bright big moons in the sky, a sun not too far away. The machines had pretested the atmosphere and sampled the water, had already scattered the forms of old earth life into the atmosphere and in the seas so that as the people awakened they heard the singing of earth birds and they knew that earth fish had already been adapted to the oceans and flung in, there to multiply. It seemed a good life, a rich life. Things went well.

Things went very, very well for the Arachosians.

This is the truth.

This was, thus far, the story told by the capsule.

But here they diverged.

THE capsule did not tell the dreadful, pitiable truth about Arachosia. It invented a set of plausible lies. The voice which came telepathically out of the capsule was that of a mature, warm happy female—some woman of early middle age with a superb speaking contralto.

Suzdal almost fancied that he talked to it, so real was the personality. How could he know that he was being beguiled, trapped?

It sounded right, *really* right.

"And then," said the voice, "the Arachosian sickness has been hitting us. Do not land. Stand off. Talk to us. Tell us about medicine. Our young die, without reason. Our farms are rich, and the wheat here is more golden than it was on earth, the plums more purple, the flowers whiter. Everything does well—except people.

"Our young die . . ." said the womanly voice, ending in a sob.

"Are there any symptoms?" thought Suzdal, and almost as though it had heard his question, the capsule went on.

"They die of nothing. Nothing which our medicine can test, nothing which our science can show. They die. Our population is dropping. People, do not forget us! Man, whoever you are, come quickly, come now, bring help! But for your own sake, do not land. Stand off-planet and view us through screens so that you can take word back to the Home of Man about the lost children of mankind among the strange and outermost stars!"

Strange, indeed!

The truth was far stranger, and very ugly indeed.

Suzdal was convinced of the truth of the message. He had been selected for the trip because he was good-natured, intelligent, and brave; this appeal touched all three of his qualities.

Later, much later, when he was arrested, Suzdal was asked, "Suzdal, you fool, why didn't you test the message? You've risked the safety of all the mankinds for a foolish appeal!"

"It wasn't foolish!" snapped Suzdal. "That distress capsule had a sad, wonderful womanly voice and the story checked out true."

"With whom?" said the investigator, flatly and dully.

Suzdal sounded weary and sad when he replied to the point. "It checked out with my books. With my knowledge." Reluctantly he added, "And with my own judgment. . . ."

"Was your judgment good?" said the investigator.

"No," said Suzdal, and let the single word hang on the air as though it might be the last word he would ever speak.

But it was Suzdal himself who broke the silence when he added, "Before I set course and went to sleep, I activated my security officers in cubes and had them check the story. They got the real story of Arachosia, all right. They cross-ciphered it out of patterns in the distress capsule and they told me the whole real story very quickly, just as I was waking up."

"And what did you do?"

"I did what I did. I did that for which I expect to be punished. The Arachosians were already walking around the outside of my hull by then. They had caught my ship. They had caught me. How was I to know that the wonderful, sad story was true only for the first twenty full years that the woman told about. And she wasn't even a woman. Just a klopt. Only the first twenty years. . . ."

THINGS had gone well for the Arachosians for the first twenty years. Then came disas-

ter, but it was not the tale told in the distress capsule.

They couldn't understand it. They didn't know why it had to happen to them. They didn't know why it waited twenty years, three months and four days. But their time came.

We think it must have been something in the radiation of their sun. Or perhaps a combination of that particular sun's radiation and the chemistry, which even the wise machines in the shell-ship had not fully analyzed, which reached out and was spread from within. The disaster hit. It was a simple one and utterly unstoppable.

They had doctors. They had hospitals. They even had a limited capacity for research.

But they could not research fast enough. Not enough to meet this disaster. It was simple, monstrous, enormous.

Femininity became carcinogenetic.

Every woman on the planet beran developing cancer at the same time, on her lips, in her breasts, in her groin, sometimes along the edge of her jaw, the edge of her lip, the tender portions of her body. The cancer had many forms, and yet it was always the same. There was something about the radiation which reached through, which reached into the human body, and which made a particular form of desoxycorticosterone turn into a subform—unknown on earth—of pregnandiol, which infallibly caused cancer. The advance was rapid.

The little baby girls began to die first. The women clung weeping to their fathers, their husbands. The mothers tried to say goodbye to their sons.

One of the doctors, herself, was a woman, a strong woman.

Remorselessly, she cut live tissue from her living body, put it under the microscope, took samples of her own urine, her blood, her spit, and she came up with the answer: *There is no answer.* And yet there was something better and worse than an answer.

If the sun of Arachosia killed everything which was female, if the female fish floated upside down on the surface of the sea, if the female birds sang a shriller, wilder song as they died above the eggs which would never hatch, if the female animals grunted and growled in the lairs where they hid away with pain, female human beings did not have to accept death so tamely. The doctor's name was Astarte Kraus.

The Magic of the Klopts

THE human female could do what the animal female could not. She could turn male. With the help of equipment from the

ship, tremendous quantities of testosterone were manufactured, and every single girl and woman still surviving was turned into a man. Massive injections were administered to all of them. Their faces grew heavy, they all returned to growing a little bit, their chests flattened out, their muscles grew stronger, and in less than three months they were indeed men.

Some lower forms of life had survived because they were not polarized clearly enough to the forms of male and female, which depended on that particular organic chemistry for survival. With the fish gone, plants clotted the oceans, the birds were gone but the insects survived; dragonflies, butterflies, mutated versions of grasshoppers, beetles, and other insects swarmed over the planet. The men, who had lost women worked side by side with the men who had been made out of the bodies of women.

When they knew each other, it was unutterably sad for them to meet. Husband and wife, both bearded, strong, quarrelsome, desperate and busy. The little boys somehow realizing that they would never grow up to have sweethearts, to have wives, to get married, to have daughters.

But what was a mere world to stop the driving brain and the burning intellect of Dr. Astarte Kraus? She became the leader of her people, the men and the men-women. She drove them forward, she made them survive, she used cold brains on all of them.

(Perhaps, if she had been a sympathetic person, she would have let them die. But it was the nature of Dr. Kraus not to be sympathetic—just brilliant, remorseless, implacable against the universe which had tried to destroy her.)

Before she died, Dr. Kraus had worked out a carefully programed genetic system. Little bits of the men's tissues could be implanted by a surgical routine in the abdomens, just inside the peritoneal wall, crowding a little bit against the intestines, an artificial womb and artificial chemistry and artificial insemination by radiation, by heat made it possible for men to bear boy children.

What was the use of having girl children if they all died? The people of Arachosia went on. The first generation lived through the tragedy, half insane with the grief and disappointment. They sent out message capsules and they knew that their messages would reach earth in 6 million years.

As new explorers, they had gambled on going further than other ships went. They had found a good world, but they were not quite sure where they were. Were they still within the familiar gal-

axy, or had they jumped beyond to one of the nearby galaxies? They couldn't quite tell. It was a part of the policy of old earth not to overequip the exploring parties for fear that some of them, taking violent cultural change or becoming aggressive empires, might turn back on earth and destroy it. Earth always made sure that it had the advantages.

The third and fourth and fifth generations of Arachosians were still people. All of them were male. They had the human memory, they had human books, they knew the words "mama," "sister," "sweetheart," but they no longer really understood what these terms referred to.

THE human body, which had taken four million years on earth to grow, has immense resources within it, resources greater than the brain, or the personality, or the hopes of the individual. And the bodies of the Arachosians decided things for them. Since the chemistry of femininity meant instant death, and since an occasional girl baby was born dead and buried casually, the bodies made the adjustment. The men of Arachosia became both men and women. They gave themselves the ugly nickname, "klopt." Since they did not have the rewards of family life, they became strutting cockerels, who mixed their love with murder, who blended their songs with duels, who sharpened their weapons and who earned the right to reproduce within a strange family system which no decent earth-man would find comprehensible.

But they did survive.

And the method of their survival was so sharp, so fierce, that it was indeed a difficult thing to understand.

In less than four hundred years the Arachosians had civilized into groups of fighting clans. They still had just one planet, around just one sun. They lived in just one place. They had a few spacecraft they had built themselves. Their science, their art and their music moved forward with strange lurches of inspired neurotic genius, because they lacked the fundamentals in the human personality itself, the balance of male and female, the family, the operations of love, of hope, of reproduction. They survived, but they themselves had become monsters and did not know it.

Out of their memory of old mankind they created a legend of old earth. Women in that memory were deformities, who should be killed. Misshapen beings, who should be erased. The family, as they recalled it, was filth and abomination which they were resolved to wipe out if they should ever meet it.

They, themselves, were bearded homosexuals, with rouged lips, ornate earrings, fine heads of hair, and very few old men among them. They killed off their men before they became old; the things they could not get from love or relaxation or comfort, they purchased with battle and death. They made up songs proclaiming themselves to be the last of the old men and the first of the new, and they sang their hate to mankind when they should meet, and they sang "Woe is earth that we should find it," and yet something inside them made them add to almost every song a refrain which troubled even them,

And I mourn Man!

They mourned mankind and yet they plotted to attack all of humanity.

The Trap

SUZDAL had been deceived by the message capsule. He put himself back in the sleeping compartment and he directed the turtle-men to take the cruiser to Arachosia, wherever it might be. He did not do this crazily or wantonly. He did it as a matter of deliberate judgment. A judgment for which he was later heard, tried, judged fairly and then put to something worse than death.

He deserved it.

He sought for Arachosia without stopping to think of the most fundamental rule: How could he keep the Arachosians, singing monsters that they were, from following him home to the eventual ruin of earth? Might not their condition be a disease which could be contagious, or might not their fierce society destroy the other societies of men and leave earth and all of other men's worlds in ruin? He did not think of this, so he was heard, and tried and punished much later. We will come to that.

The Arrival

SUZDAL awakened in orbit off Arachosia. And he awakened knowing he had made a mistake. Strange ships clung to his shellship like evil barnacles from an unknown ocean, attached to a familiar water craft. He called to his turtle-men to press the controls and the controls did not work.

The outsiders, whoever they were, man or woman or beast or god, had enough technology to immobilize his ship. Suzdal immediately realized his mistake. Naturally, he thought of destroying himself and the ship, but he was afraid that if he destroyed himself and missed destroying the ship completely there was a chance that his cruiser, a late model with recent weapons would fall into the hands of whoever it

was walking on the outer dome of his own cruiser. He could not afford the risk of mere individual suicide. He had to take a more drastic step. This was not time for obeying earth rules.

His security officer—a cube ghost wakened to human form—whispered the whole story to him in quick intelligent gasps:

"They are people, sir.

"More people than I am.

"I'm a ghost, an echo working out of a dead brain.

"These are real people, Commander Suzdal, but they are the worst people ever to get loose among the stars. You must destroy them, sir!"

"I can't," said Suzdal, still trying to come fully awake. "They're *people.*"

"Then you've got to beat them off. By any means, sir. By any means whatever. Save Earth. Stop them. Warn Earth."

"And I?" asked Suzdal, and was immediately sorry that he had asked the selfish, personal question.

"You will die or you will be punished," said the security officer sympathetically, "and I do not know which one will be worse."

"Now?"

"Right now. There is no time left for you. No time at all."

"But the rules. . . . ?"

"You have already strayed far outside of rules."

There were rules, but Suzdal left them all behind.

Rules, rules for ordinary times, for ordinary places, for understandable dangers.

This was a nightmare cooked up by the flesh of man, motivated by the brains of man. Already his monitors were bringing him news of who these people were, these seeming maniacs, these men who had never known women, these boys who had grown to lust and battle, who had a family structure which the normal human brain could not accept, could not believe, could not tolerate. The things on the outside were people, and they weren't. The things on the outside had the human brain, the human imagination, and the human capacity for revenge, and yet Suzdal, a brave officer, was so frightened by the mere nature of them that he did not respond to their efforts to communicate.

He could feel the turtle-women among his crew aching with fright itself, as they realized who was pounding on their ship and who it was that sang through loud announcing machines that they wanted *in, in, in.*

Suzdal committed a crime. It is the pride of the Instrumentality that the Instrumentality allows its officers to commit crimes or mistakes or suicide. The Instrumentality does the things for mankind that a computer can-

not do. The Instrumentality leaves the human brain, the human choice in action.

THE Instrumentality passes dark knowledge to its staff, things not usually understood in the inhabited world, things prohibited to ordinary men and women because the officers of the Instrumentality, the captains and the sub-chiefs and the chiefs, must know their jobs. If they do not, all mankind might perish.

Suzdal reached into his arsenal. He knew what he was doing. The larger moon of Arachosia was habitable. He could see that there were earth plants already on it, and earth insects. His monitors showed him that the Arachosian men-women had not bothered to settle on the planet. He threw an agonized inquiry at his computers and cried out:

"Read me the age it's in!"

The machine sang back, "More than thirty million years."

Suzdal had strange resources. He had twins or quadruplets of almost every earth animal. The earth animals were carried in tiny capsules no larger than a medicine capsule and they consisted of the sperm and the ovum of the higher animals, ready to be matched for sowing, ready to be imprinted; he also had small life-bombs which could surround any form of life with at least a chance of survival.

He went to the bank and he got cats, eight pairs, sixteen earth cats, *felis domesticus*, the kind of cat that you and I know, the kind of cat which is bred, sometimes for telepathic uses, sometimes to go along on the ships and serve as auxiliary weapons when the minds of the pinlighters direct the cats to fight off dangers.

He coded these cats. He coded them with messages just as monstrous as the messages which had made the men-women of Arachosia into monsters. This is what he coded:

Do not breed true.

Invent new chemistry.

You will serve man.

Become civilized.

Learn speech.

You will serve man.

When man calls you will serve man.

Go back, and come forth.

Serve man.

These instructions were no mere verbal instructions. They were imprints on the actual molecular structure of the animals. They were charges in the genetic and biological coding which went with these cats. And then Suzdal committed his offense against the laws of mankind. He had a chronopathic device on board the ship. A time distorter, usually to be used for a moment or a second or two to bring the ship away from utter destruction.

The men-women of Arachosia were already cutting through the hull.

He could hear their high, hooting voices screaming delirious pleasure at one another as they regarded him as the first of their promised enemies that they had ever met, the first of the monsters from old earth who had finally overtaken them. The true, evil people on whom they, the men-women of Arachosia would be revenged.

Suzdal remained calm. He coded the genetic cats. He loaded them into life-bombs. He adjusted the controls of his chronopathic machine illegally, so that instead of reaching one second for a ship of 80,000 tons, they reached two million years for a load of less than four kilos. He flung the cats into the nameless moon of Arachosia.

And he flung them back in time.

And he knew he did not have to wait.

He didn't.

The Catland Suzdal Made

THE cats came. Their ships glittered in the naked sky above Arachosia. Their little combat craft attacked. The cats who had not existed a moment before, but who had then had two million years in which to follow a destiny printed right into their brains, printed down their spinal cords, etched into the chemistry of their bodies and personalities. The cats had turned into people of a kind, with speech, intelligence, hope, and a mission. Their mission was to attack Suzdal, to rescue him, to obey him, and to damage Arachosia.

The cat ships screamed their battle warnings.

"This is the day of the year of the promised age. And *now come cats!*"

The Arachosians had waited for battle for 4,000 years and now they got it. The cats attacked them. Two of the cat craft recognized Suzdal, and the cats reported,

"Oh Lord, oh God, oh Maker of all things, oh Commander of Time, oh Beginner of Life, we have waited since Everything began to serve You, to serve Your Name, to obey Your Glory! May we live for You, may we die for You. We are Your people."

Suzdal cried and threw his message to all the cats.

"Harry the klopts but don't kill them all!"

He repeated "Harry them and stop them until I escape." He flung his cruiser into non-space and escaped.

Neither cat nor Arachosian followed him.

* * *

And that's the story, but the

tragedy is that Suzdal got back. And the Arachosians are still there and the cats are still there. Perhaps the Instrumentality knows where they are, perhaps the Instrumentality does not. Mankind does not really want to find out. It is against all law to bring up a form of life superior to man. Perhaps the cats are. Perhaps somebody knows whether the Arachosians won and killed the cats and added the cat science to their own and are now looking for us somewhere, probing like blind men through the stars for us true human beings to meet, to hate, to kill. Or perhaps the cats won.

Perhaps the cats are imprinted by a strange mission, by weird hopes of serving men they don't recognize. Perhaps they think we are all Arachosians and should be saved only for some particular cruiser commander, whom they will never see again. They won't see Suzdal, because we know what happened to him.

The Trial of Suzdal

SUZDAL was brought to trial on a great stage in the open world. His trial was recorded. He had gone in when he should not have gone in. He had searched for the Arachosians without waiting and asking for advice and reinforcements. What business was it of his to relieve a distress ages old? What business indeed?

And then the cats. We had the records of the ship to show that something came out of that moon. Spacecraft, things with voices, things that could communicate with the human brain. We're not even sure, since they transmitted directly into the receiver computers, that they spoke an earth language. Perhaps they did it with some sort of direct telepathy. But the crime was, *Suzdal had succeeded.*

By throwing the cats back two million years, by coding them to survive, coding them to develop civilization, coding them to come to his rescue, he had created a whole new world in less than one second of objective time.

His chronopathic device had flung the little life-bombs back to the wet earth of the big moon over Arachosia and in less time than it takes to record this, the bombs came back in the form of a fleet built by a race, an earth race, though of cat origin, two million years old.

The court stripped Suzdal of his name and said, "You will not be named Suzdal any longer."

The court stripped Suzdal of his rank.

"You will not be a commander of this or of any other navy, neither imperial nor of the Instrumentality."

The court stripped Suzdal of

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his life. "You will not live longer, former Commander, and former Suzdal."

And then the court stripped Suzdal of death.

"You will go to the planet Shayol, the place of uttermost shame from which no one ever returns. You will go there with the contempt and hatred of mankind. We will not punish you. We do not wish to know about you any more. You will live on, but for us you will have ceased to exist."

* * *

THAT'S the story. It's a sad, wonderful story. The Instrumentality tries to cheer up all the different kinds of mankind by telling them it isn't true, it's just a ballad.

Perhaps the records do exist. Perhaps somewhere the crazy klopts of Arachosia breed their boyish young, deliver their babies, always by Caeserean, feed them always by bottle, generations of men who have known fathers and who have no idea of what the word *mother* might be. And perhaps the Arachosians spend their crazy lives in endless battle with intelligent cats who are serving a mankind that may never come back.

That's the story.

Furthermore, it isn't true.

THE END

Planetary Engineering

By BEN BOVA

Whether man will be able to live and work happily and profitably on other worlds may depend on how well we cope with problems of "planetary engineering." With this article, we begin a series of three surveys of how man can terraform his own solar system.

DESPITE the twists of history and the vagaries of Congress, it seems certain Americans will be on the Moon sometime around 1970. What then? After an expense of $20 billion (pessimists say $40 billion), what are we going to do with the Moon? The *really* interesting work starts after Project APOLLO has accomplished its mission.

Even if the pessimists are right about that $40 billion, more than 90 percent of it will be spent on items that never leave the ground—launching facilities. packing equipment, training centers. All this will be the basic "factory" needed to put America into the space business. The actual cost of the *flight itself,* including the development cost of the Saturn booster, will probably be less than $5 billion.

In return we get prime rights to explore, exploit and colonize more than 12 million square miles of virgin territory. Even at the $40 billion cost figure, that works out to about $3000 per square mile. Considerably cheaper than the price for a single building lot in most fair-sized towns of the US! But of course, the Moon has no air or surface water. Temperatures on the surface range from 220°F to −240°F. Hardly enticing, even for cheap real estate.

To decide on the ultimate value of the Moon, we must put away our preconceived ideas and face the problem on its own terms. What advantages do the natural resources of the Moon present to us? By natural resources, we mean not only the familiar metals and fuels and farmlands. Low gravity itself might be a natural resource. Certainly astronomers will look upon the Moon's airlessness as a blessing.

But the natural resources of

the Moon will be useless to man if he cannot survive, explore, and do useful work in the harsh lunar environment. This raises the crucial question of planetary engineering—our ability to operate effectively in alien environments, or to change them. If it takes all of man's ingenuity and effort merely to stay alive on the Moon's surface, then no matter what treasures are available, we will not be able to take advantage of them.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

THE key to the Moon's ultimate usefulness is its low gravity. The Moon is only about one-quarter the size of Earth (lunar diameter = 2160 miles) and apparently consists largely of rocky materials such as those that compose the Earth's crust and mantle. It is believed that the Moon does not possess a large iron core, as does Earth. This combination of small size and light materials adds up to a gravitational field only one-sixth as strong as Earth's: a mass that weighs 100 pounds on Earth would weigh less than 17 pounds on the Moon.

This low gravitational field explains the Moon's lack of atmosphere. Gases that are held close to the Earth's surface can leak away easily from the Moon. The lunar surface, therefore, is exposed to the interplanetary plasma—an ionized gas about a million times thinner than the best *vacuum* obtainable on Earth (see THE WEATHER IN SPACE, *Amazing*, November 1963). No air means no shielding from the Sun's heat. Also, no atmosphere to trap heat and help warm the nightside of the Moon and areas shadowed from the Sun. This accounts for the extreme temperature on the lunar surface. It is possible to go through a temperature drop of several hundred degrees merely by stepping from sunlight to shadow. The temperature extremes also explain the lack of surface water. Liquid water or ice will boil away whenever touched by sunlight. Certainly the evidence—no air and no surface water—points to Luna being a dead, silent world.

On the other hand, there is a considerable body of opinion among astronomers and geologists (or selenologists, if you prefer) that the lunar rocks probably contain ample quantities of water, either in subsurface frozen "pools" or chemically linked to the soil in the form of hydrates. Also, there is excellent reason to suspect that oxygen is also abundant in the lunar crust. After all, oxygen is the most prevalent element in the Earth's crust, and one of the most common elements in the universe at large.

LEAVING aside the question of self-sufficiency for a moment, what does a Moonbase require merely to guarantee its inhabitants a chance of survival? Five major requirements present themselves: air; water; food; protection from solar and cosmic radiation; and a livable temperature range.

Temperature control and radiation protection can both be answered simply by digging. Although the surface temperature of the Moon gyrates wildly, a few feet below the surface the temperature is at a steady −40°F. It would be a fairly straightforward job to heat a properly-constructed underground shelter. Electrical heating would be most likely. Power would be provided either by a nuclear reactor or solar converters. It has been estimated that the energy of sunlight falling on the lunar surface equals roughly 750 watts per square yard. Solar cells could convert this into electrical current. This "free" energy is available only during the lunar daytime, which is 14 Earth-days long. Perhaps some form of storage units, similar to common electric batteries, could be used to provide power during the equally-long lunar night. (Remember that there is no "darkside" of the Moon. While the Moon does keep one side continually facing toward Earth, both the Earthside and the farside receive the same amount of sunlight and darkness—14 days each.)

The radiation hazard can also be cut down to manageable proportions by going underground. The real danger comes from the streams of very energetic protons hurled out by the Sun during solar flares. These can be completely shielded by a few feet of solid ground. Cosmic rays cannot be stopped so easily, but they are comparatively rare and probably pose no massive danger.

The first men on the Moon will obviously bring their food with them. This will impose some hardships on the earliest builders and explorers, for food hauled in by rocket will be extremely expensive. Two pounds of food per day is usually cited as the requirement for mountain climbers or arctic explorers. No doubt concentrates can reduce this figure somewhat, although some bulk is required in the diet to maintain normal digestive processes. On the other hand, a single SATURN C5 booster, the type to be used for the first manned lunar missions, can place 85,000 pounds on the Moon. That represents a month's supply of food for more than 1400 men. Though expensive, food need not be a problem.

In time, of course, Moonbase will acquire algae "farms," where one-celled plants will be tenderly nurtured—both for the value as foodstuffs and for their ability to produce oxygen from carbon dioxide. Eventually, when Moonbase has taken longer strides toward self-sufficiency, hydroponic gardens will be set up. Terrestrial plants will be grown in special tanks, without soil. Experiments on Earth have shown that such completely-controlled conditions can lead to better crops than terrestrial average. To grow these vegetables and fruits, Moonbase will need a wide range of chemicals, including nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sulphur, iron, and several others. It may seem a bit incongruous, but there may well be more ships sent to the Moon carrying fertilizer than anything else!

Another prime import will be meat. It will be some time before Moonbase will be able to afford the luxury of supporting domestic animals.

Air—at least, oxygen—will probably be found readily in the lunar soil. So will water. Of the two, water is the more critical, since it is less certain to be available. If water cannot be obtained, the entire scheme for Moonbase could become practically and economically infeasible. However, if water can be found, it will give the Moon its first item for export trade—hydrogen and oxygen: rocket propellants.

THE NATURAL RESOURCES

WE have already seen that it may become possible to produce rocket propellants on the Moon by electrolyzing water and liquifying the resulting oxygen and hydrogen. Liquid oxygen and hydrogen are beautiful propellants for chemical rockets. Hydrogen is also the best working fluid for electrical and nuclear rockets. Thanks to the Moon's low gravity, it will be easier to ship these propellants from the Moon to within a few hundred miles above the Earth, than it would be to boost the same tonnages from the Earth's surface. Some engineers have pointed out that a catapult could launch ships from the Moon with no fuel expenditure by the ship itself. Except for the structure and guidance equipment, and a small amount of fuel for inflight maneuvering, the ship could be all payload! The catapult rails would have to be several miles long, but all the launching power would be provided on the ground. This could make Moon-to-Earth flights cheaper than ordinary air travel on Earth!

Airlessness can also be an

asset. (It is necessary, in fact, to make the catapult launcher work. A similar catapult on Earth would be defeated by air friction as much as by gravity.) Of course astronomers want to set up telescopes on the Moon. No air means no clouds, no glare at night, no weather to interfere with their view of the universe. Earth's air also blocks out all but a small slice of the rays beamed out by the Sun and stars. And radio telescopes built on the far-side of the Moon, insulated by more than 2000 miles of solid rock from Earth's incessant radio chattering, could find a haven of near-perfect quiet in which to work. The Moon's lower gravity also means that much larger telescopes could be built. They would not have to be protected from nonexistent wind and weather, either.

Several industries on Earth need good vacuums: electronics manufacturers, some types of metalurgical plants, scientific research laboratories, etc. On the Moon they could get miles of vacuum that is a million times better than the best and most expensive vacuums producible on Earth.

What raw materials are likely to be found on the Moon? If the lunar crust is similar to terrestrial rocks—if the moon was once part of the Earth—we should expect to find most of the ores that exist on Earth. The most valuable raw materials to be found will be those useful as plant fertilizers, plus metals and fissionable nuclear fuels. Some scientists have deduced from geographic formations around the lunar *maria* that many important mineral deposits may be found, including ammonia, carbon dioxide, and meteoric iron and nickle. There is even a suspicion that oil fields might exist beneath the *maria*. Until a few years ago, most meteorlogists were firmly convinced that Earth's oil deposits were entirely due to the decay of once-living creatures. Now, many geologists are arguing that a non-biogenic origin of some (if not all) oil pools is possible. Dr. A. T. Wilson of New Zealand's Victoria University has postulated that the *maria* themselves might be extensive oil fields, covered with a thin crust of asphalt.

Regardless of the nature or extent of the Moon's raw materials, the big problem will be to locate the sites where these resources can be mined profitably. Some of this work is scheduled to begin even before man sets afoot on the Moon, with remote-controlled vehicles like PROSPECTOR. In the long run, it will take teams of highly-trained men to make accurate surveys of the Moon's mineral deposits and find the largest, most easily-accessible lodes.

There is another type of natural resource on the Moon, a type that can best be described as social. Building Moonbase will give scientists a chance to watch the behavior of a new community from its very start. The effect of the harsh environment, the distance from home, the interactions of people with various skills and backgrounds—all these will provide invaluable information for the social scientists. Also, medical researchers will be interested in the effects of low gravity and complete temperature and air control on human health.

Finally, carving out a human settlement in a literally new world will give man an opportunity to create a new society. As the colonization of America led to a new social ideal, perhaps some of the biases and hatreds of Earth will be left behind, or submerged in the necessity to cooperate in survival, by the select few who start Moonbase. Perhaps in his attempts to conquer the Moon, man can learn to conquer part of himself.

BUILDING MOONBASE

THE first step in the evolution of Moonbase is to set up one or more temporary outposts. These will probably be built from the empty propellant stages of the rocket boosters used to touch down on the Moon. The empty tanks can be lain on their sides and covered with surface soil, rubble or dust—depending on the composition of the surface. The tanks would have to be purged clean by pressurized helium or some other non-toxic gas. An alternative would be to bury the structures in shallow trenches, if the digging in the touchdown area is easy enough for comparatively small equipment to handle. Of course, digging on the Moon will be only one-sixth the work it would be on Earth.

If there is more than one outpost, a reliable transportation method will be vital. Electrically-driven groundcars have often been mentioned as the obvious choice. The major problem with ground travel is the unfamiliar and hostile lunar terrain, which can vary from jagged rocks to quicksand-like dust to brittle asphalt layers covering deep pools of tar-like oil. If no one can design a groundcar capable of traversing these hazards, then there is only one alternative—rocket belts. Several have been built and flown in the US. They are extravagant on fuel, no doubt, but they probably offer the best choice for the first lunar explorers. They would appear even more promising if their fuel could be produced on the Moon itself. Here again the low lunar gravity will be a help. A man could carry six times the fuel he could on Earth.

Remotely-controlled belts could also ferry equipment packages between outposts.

Communications beyond the short lunar horizon will also be somewhat of a problem, but this could be handled by a few robot satellites like TELSTAR placed in the proper orbits around the Moon.

These first men on the Moon will have the all-important job of locating promising sites for Moonbase. They will seek the places that offer a good selection of raw materials, interesting geographic location, line-of-sight communications with Earth, etc. This will probably be the most dangerous phase of man's existence on the Moon. These first explorers will consist of small groups of men, probably separated by considerable distances from their fellow-groups. Each team may be relieved or re-supplied only once a month, or even less frequently. Their life-support equipment and supplies will be the scantiest that any man will ever have on the Moon. But they will play the same role, and perhaps get the same attention from history, that the Cabots, Drakes, Champlains, Boones, Lewis' and Clarks did in the exploration of America.

Let us assume that the full-scale Moonbase will be built on the southern edge of *Mare Imbrium*, close to the Carpathian Mountains and about 100 miles north of the prominent crater Copernicus. The first buildings will not differ much from the earlier outposts: rocket stages, either covered with soil or buried in shallow trenches. Electrical power will be provided primarily by nuclear reactors, since they can guarantee day-or-night operation. Solar converters will also be used, no doubt.

Heavy construction equipment will begin the job of gouging out Moonbase from the lunar crust. Instead of using power shovels or boring equipment, most of the digging will probably be done by electric arcs. The intense heat of these arcs (more than 3000°F) will vaporize lunar rocks. Oxygen, water, minerals and metals can be extracted from the melt. For example, it has been estimated that the subsurface rocks of the Moon are probably about 50 percent oxygen. The heat of the electric arc will release this oxygen from the ores and silicates in which it is now chemically linked. Water may be similarly released. Chemical engineering techniques similar to those used on Earth could be put to obtaining high-quality iron and other metals and minerals. Thus the arcs will begin to produce some of the Moon's raw materials, while at the same time they are digging out the living and working areas for Moonbase.

While the construction crews are building the permanent quarters biologists will set up temporary algae farms to begin providing the Moon's first "home grown" food. Hydroponics gardens might also be started in temporary shelters, although it is more likely that this will wait until permanent quarters can be provided, since the gardens would require a considerable investment in space, materials and environment-control. Probably all the farming will be done completely indoors, under artificial light. This will give the biologists complete control of their crops, and avoid the difficult problem of screening out some of the harmful rays of the unshielded Sun.

At first, all the construction materials and equipment will have to be brought from Earth. But soon the colonists will begin to use lunar rock itself as a building material. Ingredients from the soil can be mixed to make cement and concrete, as we make it here on Earth. When enough basic machinery, tools, dyes, etc. have been flown in, Moonbase can start to make its own machines, using native metals.

THE Moon's first export product, we saw, will be rocket propellants. Eventually, if enough iron, carbon, aluminum and other metals can be found, Moonbase itself will begin to manufacture rocket vehicles. If an electronics industry takes root at Moonbase, using the near-perfect lunar vacuum to advantage, the Moon could ultimately become man's prime center for all missions to the rest of the solar system. All that Earth need supply would be specialized equipment not manufactured at Moonbase, and men.

While Moonbase is still being built—indeed, probably well before that time—astronomers will be setting up their equipment on the Moon. Geologists will be traveling all over this world, which is at once brand new and far older than Earth. Since there has been practically no erosion on the Moon for aeons, scientists expect to be able to study first-hand conditions that have been virtually untouched for billions of years. The Moon has often been called "the solar system's museum of ancient history." As Moonbase becomes a reality, and can support large teams of investigators, men will probe the puzzles of the solar system's birth and evolution among the craters and mountains and *maria*.

As Moonbase becomes firmly established and relatively self-supporting, other bases will be started. The astronomers, for instance, will want to set up their radio telescopes on the farside.

Richer ore deposits may be found elsewhere. Landing sites for nuclear rocke' may be established at some distance from the inhabited base. These separate bases will probably be connected to the major center by overhead monorail train lines. With no air friction, the trains could travel at speeds rivalling those of aircraft on Earth. And the overhead rails could easily span mountains, chasms, and dustbowls, especially so since supporting columns could be spaced much wider apart than on Earth. Also, lunar mountains have comparatively gentle slopes.

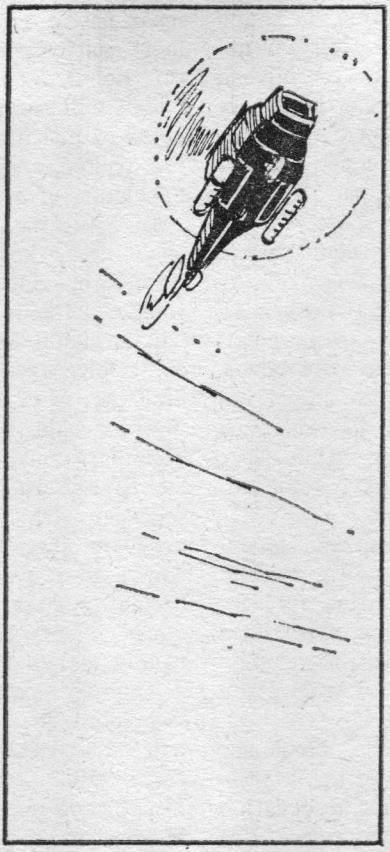
What will the finished Moonbase look like? It will grow and flourish. Like all cities, its lifeblood will be trade: specialized manufactured items in exchange for goods not grown or built on the Moon.

From the surface, Moonbase will probably not be an impressive sight; just a few observation domes and entrance hatches. But below ground will be tiers of compartments, varying in size from individual one-room apartments to large meeting halls and recreation facilities. All passageways connecting groups of compartments will probably have airtight hatches that can be closed automatically in case of emergency. Living space will probably always be at a premium in Moonbase, since new quarters will mean new digging. No doubt the most spacious areas will be given to the hydroponics gardens—which will serve the triple purposes of providing food, some of the oxygen, and all of the public parklands of Moonbase.

Lighting inside Moonbase will probably be keyed to terrestrial time to provide a "normal" routine of 24-hour days. Corridors will no doubt be painted in special color codes, to help travellers find their way. And it will probably be a rule that all citizens of Moonbase must spend at least a month each year Earthside. This, together with a rigidly-enforced program of athletics, will be necessary to prevent muscles from becoming so accustomed to reduced gravity that their owners cannot return to Earth.

The psychological hazards of completely-enclosed living are not yet understood, even though some residents of cities like New York spend nearly as much time indoors as a Moonbase citizen would. It is my personal opinion that some will adapt very easily, others not at all. Children born in Moonbase may well view Earth's wide outdoors with considerable trepidation.

Ed. Note: While Moonbase seems to be a feasible task of planetary engineering, Mars and Venus may be quite different. Our next article examines the colonization of our neighbors.



CONCLUSION

SUNBURST

By
PHYLLIS
GOTLIEB

Illustrated by
SCHELLING

Synopsis of Parts One and Two

IN 2024 A.D. Sorrel Park, a small midwestern city, is a hidden island of violence and decay. Thirty years earlier the nuclear reactor blew up, causing death and destruction, and now the city is the only place in the country on coal power, suppressed and surrounded by barbed wire because of the government's fear of countrywide panic. But this is not the only reason for the suppression. Twenty-two years after the Blowup a group of juvenile delinquents whose parents had suffered radiation damage before bearing children developed psi powers and had to be confined just outside the city in a special enclosure known as the Dump. This is screened by the white-noise Marzinek Field, named after its inventor, to prevent the Dumplings escaping by using their power.

The city is goverened by martial law under the command of Colonel Prothero, who was engaged in maneuvers around Sorrel Park at the time of the Blowup, and whose son, Colin, is an inhabitant of the Dump. Local ordinances are administered by a corrupt and brutal civil police.

Jason Hemmer, a psi with weaker powers than the rest, is employed to scout the city for new or hidden psis, and one day collects Shandy Johnson, a thirteen-year-old girl with a unique lack of talent. She is a non-psi and completely impervious to all the powers of the Dumplings. Jason's other duty is to go into the Dump and collect information about their welfare to pass to doctors. It is a dangerous task, and Dr. Urquhart, the resident psychiatrist, hopes to use Shandy as a supplement, a buffer whom the Dumplings might learn to respect and trust.

Before this plan can be put into effect the Dumplings break out and escape. There is no time to make use of Shandy, and her curiosity and lack of regard for discipline have gotten her in trouble with Prothero, who decides to send her back into Sorrel Park, though she has become attached to the people at Army Headquarters.

But the Dumplings are frustrated because their strongest member, Doydoy, a boy with a badly twisted body but immense powers, has disappeared. Jason Hemmer has no idea where Doydoy is, but Curtis Quimper, the leader of the Dumplings pack, believes Jason is concealing Doydoy and sends his lieutenant and rival, the Kingfish, to kidnap Jason in order to force the information out of him. Shandy, the only person who can hide from Dumplings, is able to save him, and redeems herself in Prothero's eyes.

However, she reasons her way to Doydoy's hiding place and is obliged to confess it to Jason. Together they find Doydoy. He is a decent boy caught up in a terrible chain of circumstances and Jason does not want to hand him to Prothero to be returned to the Dump.

As he is trying to make the painful decision the Dumplings catch up with all of them. Shandy stalls for time to allow Doydoy to make his own decision about whether he will rejoin the Dumplings. Doydoy opts for going with Jason and in the ensuing melee the Kingfish, contender for the leadership of the Pack, is killed. Doydoy and Jason escape and disappear, the Dumplings vanish, and Shandy is left to face Prothero's rage once more.

Furious, he sends her with one of his men to be put under guard by the Chief of the Civil Police, but when they reach the station they find the city about to be torn apart by riots, and the police chief has been kidnapped.

The soldier lets Shandy go, and she is now free, without many prospects, in a dangerous place. But she has learned something. Jason has told her there are two other psis, unknown to Prothero, in Sorrel Park: a boy, very powerful, and a young married woman. Also, Urquhart has been classifying the Dumplings for personality and body type, and there must be a clue here to understanding and handling them. She has committed herself to the problem.

Curious to a foolhardy degree, she hangs around downtown Sorrel Park long enough to be caught by one of the rioters who brings her to a meeting-hall where Fitch, the bootlegger who had originally betrayed her to Jason, is inciting the citizens to riot. The police chief is there on the stage, bound and gagged.

Shandy tries to deny the lies Fitch is telling the people and is about to be suppressed, perhaps for good, by his henchmen, when a cheerful young Negro boy appears with a pop, dancing in the air. With the greatest of ease and grace, he stills the crowd by hypnosis, frees the chief of police, and leads Shandy out into the street, free, unharmed, and flabbergasted.

10

THE fires snuffed themselves, the noises died away behind them into murmurs and confusion, the night was dark. Shandy was led a crooked path of shabby streets toward the eastern limit of the town. If she had not been half-crippled with exhaustion and a stitch in her side, she might have laughed. Fitch had told her to hole up in the east end.

Not surprisingly, the roads were more cracked and broken than in the center of town. The boy stopped at a white clapboard house; a picket fence enclosed a scrubby lawn with a small twisted apple tree.

As she stumbled along the path with him, and up the steps, the front door swung open with a haunted-house creak. She hesitated at the threshold.

"Gee whiz, what're you waitin' for now?"

She pulled herself together and went in.

The house had blackout curtains and was not dark inside, but there was a broad figure in the hall blocking the light from the kitchen.

Jason's voice said, "Shandy?"

The boy clicked his tongue in disgust. "Who else?"

"You all right?"

"Just tired." She could hardly stand.

"This prizefighter here is Prester Vernon."

"It ought to be Prester John. I'm grateful to you, Prester."

"Don't go gettin' all gooky over it," the boy muttered.

"That's no way to take a thank-you." Jason aimed a cuff at his ear, but before the blow landed he had disappeared and popped up again behind Jason's back.

"I can turn you inside out, Jason Hemmer!"

Jason folded his arms. "Helmi."

A young woman came out into the hall, and the boy cowered in earnest behind Jason's back. "This is Helmi Aaslepp," said Jason.

Helmi was a very thin sharp-faced girl in an advanced stage of pregnancy. She had blue eyes and fair, almost white, hair twisted in a knot back of her head. There was a vivid nervous intelligence in her face that Shandy had never seen in anyone, psi or normal, before. She caught Jason's grin out of the corner of her eye as she and Helmi measured each other down to the last level teaspoon.

"Glad to meet you," said Helmi perfunctorily. "I'll get you some supper as soon as we take care of this character."

Jason turned swiftly, caught Prester by the waist, lifted him up and hung him by his belt on a wall-hook between an umbrella and a set of oilskins. Unable to use psi against their combined forces, Prester could only drum his heels on the wall and scowl.

"Look, superboy, it's not marbles we're playing here, it's a game of flesh and blood."

"Please let him down," said Shandy.

Helmi looked at her in surprise. "Why?"

"I don't want to get off on the wrong foot . . . I'm grateful to

him for helping me. He doesn't have to be grateful to me for thanking him."

Helmi opened her mouth to protest, but Jason set the boy down. Shandy rubbed the crinkled head. "I got you off the hook but you don't have to thank me." Prester tried to keep the scowl, but it creased into laughter in spite of his efforts; he ran into the kitchen without a word. She added shyly to Helmi, "I'm not trying to get in your way either."

Helmi permitted the flicker of a smile to pull at the corners of her mouth. "Jason's told me a lot about you," she said cryptically. "You can wash up in there."

"Wait," said Shandy. "Doydoy is here, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's all right, but he's asleep now."

"Dumplings try to get him?"

"N-no," said Jason. "Not yet." She glanced at him; something had closed itself behind his eyes, as though she were dangerously close to reading his thoughts. She did not ask any more questions.

PETER Aaslepp put down his coffee cup and nodded. He was a giant of the same coloring as his wife; he had no psi, and his demeanour was full of the patience, humor, and tolerance he must have needed to live with a telepathic wife.

Hungry as she was, Shandy hesitated again. She had paid a great deal in emotion and physical effort to help Doydoy. She wanted, not a reward, but nebulously some kind of guarantee that he was alive and safe.

"What is it?" Helmi's voice was a trifle sharp. She was not accustomed to asking.

"I—I'd like to see Doydoy, just for a moment. If you don't mind."

Helmi wavered, but Peter Aaslepp said in a giant's voice, subdued with difficulty, "Let her see him, woman. She will not wake him."

"Come along," said Helmi.

Doydoy's face was pink and clean in the rose-shaded lamplight. His misshapen body was covered with a patchwork quilt; his hair had been cut, and except for the marks of glasses on his nose he had the look of the newborn baby sleeping with its soul retreated far behind sunken lids into whatever country it inhabited before birth.

Shandy had a moment of pure terror. In the cruel prison life Doydoy had lived with the Dumplings he had been strong and respected—if only for strength. Now he looked weak and helpless, and she wondered if she had only delivered him to the harassment of a savage world.

"Satisfied?" Helmi pulled the quilt a little higher, even though it was a warm night. "You can

see we've been treating him a lot better than the MP or the Dumplings did."

No use in being jealous. "It's not you I'm worried about . . . it's the rest of the world."

* * *

She watched them round the table as she ate; they were waiting with her because there was nothing else to do. They were silent, but their communication was endless and unstrained by the intense hostilities of the Dumplings. She was welcome, through bonds of obligation—and excluded. She was different.

Yet, even as a close group they were individuals: Prester Vernon was certainly an ectomorph; Peter, phlegmatic now, might some day run to fat; Doydoy was ungroupable; Helmi was certainly like no-one else. But when it came to herself . . .

She bedded down on the chesterfield with a blanket, too sleepy to eavesdrop on the murmuring voices from the kitchen. Her last feeling before falling asleep was of that palpable sense of exclusion. She was alone. Again. She realized that what she was feeling was the *return* of that sense. It had been with her all her life until those few days at the MP depot, and there it had left her so painlessly she hadn't realized it. But the return was painful, because there was no place for her here either. She slept.

Momentarily the surface of her sleep was broken by a shout in the street but it did not disturb her as much as an ominous calm, an undercurrent of wonder that the Dumplings weren't trying to grab Doydoy, and that no-one here was worried about it.

On a level deeper still, in some vault of her unconscious, logic was beginning to collate data.

She slept on in the eye of the hurricane.

SHE woke in early dawn with a gritty residue of weariness, to the sound of voices still coming from the kitchen. She stretched cautiously, feeling almost hamstrung. Her ribs ached from being knocked about, and her face was raw with scratches.

Helmi's voice from the kitchen said clearly, "—can't go on like this."

Like what? Shandy sat up and swung her legs down. Her clothes were filthy, but she was stuck with them. She pulled her old sneakers on; the only respectable articles of clothing she owned were the laces Jason had given her the night before last.

"And there's the other problem," the voice went on. "What to do about *her*."

Shandy pricked her ears, thought better of her intentions, and yawned loudly. The voices shut up.

She dragged herself into the

kitchen. They were in the same positions around the table, and she did not know whether or not they had slept. "Where's Doy-doy?"

"Still alseep," said Peter.

She looked round at them all. She had come to a hard decision, and she silently awarded herself the razz for her sense of its altruism, without stopping the ache. "I'm going to leave, Jason. I'd like to thank you for everything."

Jason's mouth fell open. "When the hell'd you make that big decision?"

"Last night. It's no good my staying here. Maybe I'll be useful some day, but if I hung around here now you'd probably spend all your time keeping me out of trouble. You got a lot to do and you need me like a hole in the head."

He slapped the side of his head. "I got a hole there already! My brains are falling out and I don't know what you're talking about. You can't go running around in that pigsty!"

"I know my way around. Jason," she said, "let's face it. I'm nothing here."

Jason glared round at the others, but Peter only said, "Let her go, Jason, if she is unwilling to be here. You can see that she reaches home safely."

"She has no home," said Jason. "You sit down."

"Yes," Helmi sneered. "She may be no use to us, but she could be a dangerous use to the Dumplings. I'd rather have her here where we can keep an eye on her."

"Stop that! You know that's not why I want her here!" Helmi shot him an ironical glance.

Shandy said awkwardly, "Thank you, Jason. I—I'm glad you like me, or think I'm worth while, or feel responsible for me . . . but it would be wrong for me to stay." She turned to Helmi. "I don't intend to help the Dumplings. Even if I did, and you wanted to keep me here you'd be far too busy to make it worth while keeping me."

Helmi stood up to pile dishes. "Would we have to?" Her eyes were icy. "Have you ever read *Odd John?* You might remember an incident in which John was caught in a theft by a policeman and killed him rather than be endangered by exposure . . . his argument was that in comparison with him the man was an animal, and every human has the right to kill an animal in self-defense."

Peter was staring at her in horror and Jason in exasperation, but Shandy had seen her hand moving around her swollen belly, and said, "I think every woman would feel she had the right to do something drastic to save her baby—but that's a filthy

argument to base an ethic on. In John's own terms, first he baited an animal, and then killed it because its rage endangered him." She snorted. "No wonder his species ended blowing themselves up!"

Peter was still staring at his wife. "I hope you did not mean it, woman."

Helmi's lips trembled. "I didn't mean it." She covered her face with her hands.

Jason said gently, "Come off it, Helmi. You only got what you gave."

"I've done it again," said Shandy. "I didn't mean to hurt you, but you can see I can't stay."

"Sit down," said Jason. But she was heading for the door. He roared, "Siddown!" and slammed the table so hard the dishes rattled. She came back and sat down meekly.

HE mopped his red face. "You just told me you were glad somebody cared? Well, we'll be needing you too before this is over. Now eat breakfast."

"Jason. I wouldn't—you don't think I'd help the Dumplings?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Maybe someday we'll have to kill some animals, but we'll damn well make sure we know what's an animal first."

Helmi wiped her eyes. "You don't care what happens to us." Her voice shook. "Hiding all these years, and now I've got the baby coming, letting yourself get beaten up so nobody respects you and everybody so scared of psis they wouldn't believe one in a thousand years! Now you let Prester show himself and put us into more danger, and all for her! Why? Why should we care if one brat lives or dies?" She jumped up from her chair and ran into the bedroom, sobbing. Peter followed her in, shaking his head, and Prester picked himself up and went out to the back porch.

Shandy looked thoughtfully at the closed bedroom door.

Jason was picking crumbs off the tablecloth. He raised his head. "You got that look in your eye again."

"I never said a word."

"Come on, out with it. I know you."

"First . . . why do you have faith in me, Jason? It can't be anything really important, or Helmi wouldn't have gotten so mad."

"Only an idea, been kicking around in the back of my mind. I'll let you know when there's something definite to tell you. Helmi knows what's important, all right. Now you tell me what you're stewing about."

"Oh . . . I know you're not loyal to Helmi and Prester only because they're psis; you love them too. I trust your judgment.

If you find Helmi lovable and I can't, there must be a good reason why she's acting so unlovable right now."

He looked at her from under the eave of his brow. "You're sure there has to be?"

She replied modestly, "I've generally found it to be so in my experience." He snickered. "You'll notice," she said, "I'm not asking."

"Yeah, yeah, I notice. You got signs hung out all over you." He dug out his cigarettes in their crumpled pack, lit one, and blew smoke at the ceiling. Then he leaned back in the chair with his arms crossed, thinking. When he had settled something to his satisfaction, he grunted and said, "You remember Curtis Quimper was the first person to discover he had psi."

"Yes."

"Well, Helmi must've been a close second. I don't have to bother with the whole story—her background's a lot like yours. She wasn't like you, though . . . she was a scared wisp of a kid, and finding out about the psi gave her a real jolt. And before she had time to get used to it, Curtis Quimper found out about her . . . and he figured he'd have some fun. You can imagine."

"Yes . . ." She shivered.

"After a while she got so paralyzed with fear she wouldn't move out of her room, and nobody could figure out what was wrong or what to do with her. Luckily—for her—all the rest of the psis woke up nearly together, and grouped. Quimper forgot his games when he found himself running at the head of the Pack. They couldn't have dragged her along with an atomic sledge by then, she was so knotted up. When they got put away she managed to pull herself together, too scared and broken up to get out and start over outside, and terrified that if she stayed and were found out she'd get shut up in the Dump—with them. But she found Prester and me after a while . . . and I guess you understand a little better about Helmi now."

"I'm sorry, Jason."

His brow curled and quivered. "I didn't think you were such a sensitive little thing! I must admit if you hadn't wanted to know, I'd have been disappointed in you."

She remembered Prothero's scene with Colin. "That's awfully private. If my knowing about it hurt her—"

Jason shrugged. "All the Dumplings know it. That hurts. But my knowing, and Peter and Prester . . . you're with us, and you've read all the files. She doesn't mind, in spite of what she's said to you, or I wouldn't have told you."

HE had said: you're with us. She coughed to conceal her mingled pleasure and embarrassment. "I can see why she just wants to lead an ordinary life, and why she's so upset now the Dumplings are out. And I can see why you all stayed around here, too, but I think you crippled yourselves unnecessarily."

"I guess we did—in the way a very strong person has to be careful about using his strength. But we have to forget about the past now; it's the future that counts."

She looked at him searchingly. "Were you really very anxious to go out and save the world?"

"I had some daydreams."

"No burning ambitions?"

"I always knew I didn't have enough psi to make me king of the castle, so . . ." He watched while she took a piece of cold toast and delved rather deeply into the butterine. His voice was casual. "I enjoy your little roundabout excursions, but with time running short maybe you better get down to what you really mean to say."

But she was thinking deeply and not to be hurried. "How many psis would you put in the genius class?"

He scratched his head. "It's so hard testing psis—or even Impers . . . I'd put Doydoy up there; LaVonne, maybe, if she knew how to handle her brains. Prester's an irresponsible kid, but I'd take the chance and put him between the two of them . . . Helmi and I come well under them, and after us there's nothing at all, because all the rest of the Dumplings run from about 75 to 110. Now what's next?"

"People have always thought of psi as something superhuman . . ."

"Yeah. So what?"

"You said once that most normal people have vestiges of it, telepathy, at least, but it's stronger in babies and kids because they can't express themselves very well by talking. Pk and tp don't seem to occur naturally . . ."

"Keep going."

"So if there's any everyday kind of psi it's telepathy in babies and kids . . . maybe herd animals, too, and ants?"

"I'll buy it." He folded his arms and watched her with the wary look he reserved for her. "And?"

"When it finally came to people as a radiation mutation it hit juvenile delinquents."

He said in disgust, "Tell me something I don't know!"

"Jason . . . what have they got in common?"

He stared at her for a moment. Then he said "Ow!" and clapped his hand over his mouth.

"I didn't mean—" she began.

He said grimly, "Didn't you! Helmi, Pres!"

THEY appeared in their chairs at once, Helmi red-eyed but composed to the point of chill. Their double noise was excruciating. Shandy said in a small voice, "Please don't do that, it scares me." Peter shambled out of the bedroom, bewildered.

Helmi said, "You'd better put that clearly."

At this point, she didn't want to. But she took a deep breath, and said, "Psychopaths have the brainwaves of children . . . a sentence in a book I read about juvenile delinquents stuck in my head: *Their minds seem more primitively organized.* That's what they've got in common with all the other creatures in the world that have psi." She looked at them, but their faces were expressionless. "I've been trying to say: psi might be nothing but an ability that belongs to animals . . . for civilized people, just interesting garbage. Maybe . . . maybe you were banking on being considered superior because you have psi, you're not psychopathic, and you're a lot brighter than most of the Dumplings? . . . this might hurt you a bit, but maybe you'd even be a little relieved? Not to be responsible for the fate of the world?" She turned pleadingly to Jason. "I don't think you'd mind terribly, Jason? You're an unpretentious person."

He stared at her, half-outraged for a moment, and burst out laughing till the chair rocked under him.

Helmi's face thawed a little. "You have a genius for the left-footed compliment."

Peter took her hand. "I will mind for you, if you like."

"It's all right, Peter. I can manage. But I'd like to know why I'm sitting here letting a thirteen-year-old kid tell me all my talents and powers are trash."

"You didn't care for them very much anyway, Helmi," Shandy said.

"Even if your wild logic holds together," said Jason, "which I doubt, what you're mainly doing is calling the Dumplings animals. It's kind of a way-out assumption."

Shandy said impatiently, "I'm trying to say that the psychopath started out being one in his mother's and father's chromosomes. People see a healthy-looking kid with normal intelligence and a healthy mind and nothing missing but a conscience, so they figure he was brought up wrong. But I don't think he was. I think he had something wrong before he was born, like a mashed-up chromosome, or one too many, like the mongoloid . . . and maybe it made him slide a quarter inch back toward Neanderthal."

PRESTER VERNON yawned, "You shootin' that off the top of your head?"

"Well, I was kind of thinking on my feet. But all the bits of the idea were hanging around waiting to be put together."

"They may never stick together," said Jason. "That Neanderthal bit won't be popular with the parents of these kids."

"Many of them are a lot like the kids—and the rest think they've done every wrong thing in the book bringing them up. Wouldn't this be easier to take?"

Helmi said thoughtfully, "Everyone says amoral people are animals."

"Yes, but they don't mean it. Prothero said it to Colin: 'You're in a cage because you're an animal.' But he meant acting like an animal, not really one. Gee, I'm not trying to say they belong with the monkeys."

"Even if you could prove it for the Dumplings," Jason said, "You'd have a heck of a time trying to sort them out of the ordinary lot. There's so many borderline cases, how could you define the animal?"

"The psi did it for the Dumplings, but it would be hard, picking them off all over the world. The prognostic index might help, but you can't test very young kids."

"And they usually have the brainwaves of children, too."

"Yes, darn it, and you can't pick them out at birth."

"No, you'd have to wait till they started busting a few windows," said Jason.

"If they're mesomorphs—present company excepted," she added hastily.

"We'll worry about that later," said Jason. "Keep on defining."

"Well . . . you sift out mesomorphs who've gotten in trouble with the police a lot as young kids, and have low indexes. Most of them come from families without very strong morals—often immigrants who have trouble coping with a new country. Maybe some of them have moved because they can't get along very well in their own countries. I've heard poverty is a cause of delinquency, but I think these kinds of shiftless, helpless people could be a cause of poverty too . . ."

"Most of the psis are boys," Helmi said, "and most delinquents . . ."

"Girls don't throw themselves around so much. They don't rebel by stealing cars—but they can find plenty of other ways to mess up their lives . . . and remember how scared you were when you discovered you had psi, Helmi? Maybe there's a few girls yet in Sorrel Park who have psi and never got frightened enough to open it up inside them."

"That gang business is an animal thing, I think," said Jason.

"Oh, yes . . . I once read a zoologist's description of a couple of bunches of apes—what he called primate hordes—threatening each other on the borders of their territories, and it sounded very familiar. The parents always saying, 'My Joey was such a good boy till he started running around with that gang.' They never figure that's what their Joey was waiting for all his life—some of his own to run with, and a herd leader instead of an old drunk of a father. And something to bust. They can't get along with ordinary people. The world's a zoo to them, and they have to throw themselves at the bars."

"Yeh . . . I guess there's no place in the world for them to be free. But how do you tie all this in with the psi?"

"I can't completely. But most of the Dumplings were born to people like the Slippecs, the kind who often have delinquent kids. And at least one of the two parents had had a lot of radiation and didn't have the Dumpling till he was over forty. The mongoloids and the kids like LaVonne and Doydoy usually get born to that group, because they're just getting too old to have healthy babies—and the radiation was one more strike against them. So they ended up with psi."

"Then you say that since psi is an animal function, this exaggerated psi the Dumplings have, is a logical result of radiation-induced mutation—in what *you* call a human animal."

"Gee thanks, Helmi. That's just what I *have* been trying to say."

"You don't think much of psi," Jason said.

"Well—it's a mutation, and from what I've read, most mutations are harmful; a mutation's a good thing only if you can't get along without it in your surroundings—or at least it should not do any harm. I think it's done a lot of harm, and I think the world can get on fine without it. You don't have to walk through walls too often in the ordinary run of life, and if you need to haul a ton of lead you can use a freight car. I guess scientists and surgeons could use the pk—but they haven't got it. Dumplings have it. Besides all that, it takes a lot of energy. Doydoy's stunt yesterday seems to have taken a lot out of him."

THE others stirred in their chairs, uncomfortably. So there were still things she didn't know, and she was going to have to wait for them to volunteer the answers.

"Now," said Jason, "I think I'd like to know where *we* come in with all this. In your theory."

She wriggled a little under their scrutiny. In spite of their good intentions, they were a powerful group of people—with ordinary emotions, not those of supermen, and she was extremely vulnerable. She said carefully, "You can find plenty of use for psi. If you could use it to examine the Dumplings as they ought to be examined—"

He jeered. "Come on, you know that's not what we're talking about. We want to know where we fit in with your dinky animal theory. Better start thinkin' on your feet again!"

She snapped, "You said a while ago you'd want to know what was an animal! Didn't you? I've been trying to define it. But I don't know how to account for you and I couldn't do it grouping you with the Dumplings."

"Not safely."

"But if you can work up a theory that takes care of forty-five psis out of fifty it shouldn't be thrown in the garbage. I can't call it a theory, it's only an idea —a way to look at things from a different direction. I don't know why Prester and Helmi are psis. Doydoy and LaVonne aren't animal types, but I guess Urquhart would call LaVonne a psychopath. And you're a mesomorph way past the Dumpling type, Jason. Maybe you're something special."

Jason looked up and asked the ceiling, "Hey Fitso, who's the monk on the lamppost?"

She said in a fury, "Maybe I remember something too! Something you said yesterday that—that—" she trailed off. Maybe it was time to begin learning not to shoot her mouth off. "Oh, forget it."

"It's too late for that now," said Jason. "Go on, tell me the horrible thing I said."

She swallowed. "You said, 'I'm half a Dumpling myself.' "

He grunted, and Prester Vernon snickered.

She added gently, "You also said, quote, 'It's a living problem, not just a lot of gobbledygook you can rub off a blackboard, and it's got to be lived out to the end.' I don't care if you throw the idea out the window, but you do have to consider it as a possibility in the problem of psi —and it's part of living it out to the end."

"So okay, we'll leave it at that. But now we've talked about us maybe you've got an idea where *you* come in?"

"I think that's Urquhart's department, Jason . . . maybe yours too. You hinted about something a while back. But I won't ask now . . ." She was suddenly leery of that problem.

"Not ask! Maybe you're not too keen on finding out!"

"Oh, I know how you feel. I *have* to find out, sooner or later.

I might not like it when I do. If you know something that'll hurt me—maybe you feel like hurting me right now. I know I'm clumsy and irritating sometimes, but—but I love all of you and I haven't meant to hurt you."

They looked at each other and sighed. Prester Vernon snickered again. "Shandy, you sure lucky nobody ever thought to clunk you on the head and split your skull for being so smart."

"Maybe I can learn a little tact now I've got to this age," Shandy said, laughing. She touched the top of her head. "I am lucky no-one tried it because my fontanel didn't close till I was seven and I bet the bone's still kind of feeble up there."

THEY stared at her. Jason said, "Why didn't you mention that to Grace or Urquhart?"

"I—I thought it was just a kind of freak thing that happened to grow that way. Does it mean anything?"

Jason rubbed his head. "I wonder . . . there was a term—"

"Extended foetalization," Helmi said.

"Oh. Does that mean it's going to take me another thirteen years to grow up and then I'll be six-foot-seven?"

"Nope," said Jason. "By your own statement you had most of your growth up to twelve and then started slowing down, so the prolonged infantile part—if that's what it is—is probably over. Physically." He smothered a surge of laughter and added gravely, "Anyway, Grace thinks you should start becoming interested in boys any day now."

Shandy sniffed. "Did she say when she thought I was going to become interesting?"

"If we ever get out of this mess," Helmi said smiling, "I'll treat you to a lipstick and fix up your hair for you."

"Oh, no! Don't do that!" Jason cried. "She might turn out beautiful, and then she'd be really unbearable! Ouch, help! Hey, get her offa me!"

"Jason! Shandy! Stop it!" Helmi jumped up and pulled at Shandy, who was attacking Jason with a dishtowel. "Stop it! Something's wrong!"

Shandy stepped back. "What?"

Silence, except that the clock ticked with flat measured strokes.

In the street a child was bawling: "But I dowanna stay inside!"

"My God!" Jason pulled himself up slowly. "I'm a dope. Horsing around and . . ."

Shandy and Peter gaped at him. "What is it?"

"The Dumplings. No buzz . . . they were camped in the woodlot, shielding. Now they're not. There's no scramble, nothing coming from them at all. They're gone!"

"Gone out of Sorrel Park?"

Jason muttered, "Gotta get back to Prothero—oh boy, is he gonna boil me in oil. No use, Helmi, you can't come."

"No, she can not," said Peter.

"I—I—" Helmi twisted her hands, glancing at the boy. "Jason, he's so young." Prester made a face at her.

"Maybe we won't need him," Jason said. "I'll go first, anyway. Mind *you* keep out of it, now!" He gave Shandy a sharp fierce look as if to pin her to the spot. She blinked, and he was gone by the time her eyes opened.

Helmi sank down at the table. Prester was staring out of the window. "Doydoy—" Shandy began.

Helmi said, "There's no use keeping that a secret any more . . . Doydoy's gone too, for all practical purposes."

Shandy whispered. "Not dead?"

"No, not dead. But he might as well be. He's not sending and he's not receiving, and he won't move or speak. He's as impenetrable as —as you are."

"But why?"

"He says he killed the Kingfish and he's going to fry in Hell for it."

"But he didn't mean to—"

"Of course not. I knew that when it happened. But that's the way his mind works, and we can't budge him."

Helmi had said: we can't go on like this. Now she knew why, and what all the cryptic looks and silences had meant. "That's why the Dumplings didn't attack you here. Doydoy wasn't worth anything to them."

"Yes." Her lips twisted. "We owe our lives to that."

CAN you tell what's happening? Is Jason—"

"Prester, keep still. Yes, he's all right, but I don't envy him. Prothero's so—"

* * *

"—damn mad at that peeper I haven't got words for it. Running off when—Waxman, get hold of Casker. I want to talk to that Fitch character." Prothero strode back and forth, cigar in cheek-pouch and snarling with the other half of his mouth. The room was blue with smoke, a fair expression of his fuming mood. Urquhart appeared in the doorway with a file folder.

"What the hell do you want?"

"A civil tongue from you."

Prothero's jaw dropped. He pulled it up again and mumbled, "Sorry, Chris—I can't help—Judas Priest! If I ever live long enough to get my hands on Jason Hemmer—"

There was a noise in the hall, and a second later Jason stepped in. His clothes were rumpled, but his salute was crisp. "Sir?"

Waxman dropped the telephone, but Prothero had been through the whole eight years and was ready for anything. "Damn you, where've you been? Never mind, I'll deal with you later. Get into uniform and start acting like an army man instead of a bloody fool!"

Jason shook his head and said urgently, "Sir, the Dumplings are gone! Right out of range! They were shielding in the woodlot by Craig's Gardens till ten minutes ago, and we—I lost the scramble."

"What! Out of Sorrel Park?"

"Yes. I . . ." He trailed off and stared into space, while Prothero gaped, face purpling, about to explode. "Something's wrong . . . something . . . I . . ."

"What is it, you idiot?"

Jason blinked once and raised his hand to wipe a forehead beaded with sweat. "Pres," he whispered. "Come here."

Prester Vernon shot out of the floor like a genii and Waxman's glasses fell off his nose. Jason regarded the apparition with disgust. "Not that way, you ignoramus!" Prester scuffed his feet.

Prothero snarled, "One more trick like that—good Lord! Casker said there was a new—"

"Yeah. He was telling you the truth. Pres, what's wrong here?"

"That man, Mar—Mar—"

"Marczinek's gone!"

"You're off your head! He was in this room fifteen minutes ago!" Prothero grabbed a phone and rammed a button with his thumb. "Marsh!" he bellowed. "Marsh! Waxman, put a detail on this."

"You won't get an answer," said Jason, "and you won't find him around here. They've got him along."

"They could be a thousand miles away by now! Why did they pick on him for a hostage?"

"Not a hostage. They need an information bank to take the place of Doydoy."

"Damnation, I don't know where to . . ."

Prester closed his eyes and murmured, "They been here. I can feel 'em. But I don't know their thought patterns well enough to follow . . . if only Doydoy . . ."

Prothero howled, "You better follow! You damn well better! If you peepers haven't got anything for me in five minutes I'm alerting every popgun within five hundred miles of here!"

IF Doydoy . . ." Helmi whispered. Almost blindly she made her way to Doydoy's room. Shandy followed and watched as she leaned over the bed and shook the still figure. Doydoy twitched under her hand and hunched deeper under the covers.

Helmi shrugged and went to

draw the heavy dark curtains and raise the blinds. A dull cold light was filtering past a thin cloud layer. At the touch of the light on his sensitive skin Doydoy reached out a hand and pulled the covers over his head. Shandy knelt beside the bed and gently turned the covers down. His eyes opened a crack, widened an eighth of an inch at the sight of her, and closed once more. His hand rose to cover his face. Slowly and carefully, Shandy pulled it away.

"Donatus . . ." the eyes opened again at the unfamiliar name. She looked up at Helmi and asked timidly, "May I talk to him?"

"You can try," said Helmi. "A few—maybe five minutes."

"Donatus!" She clutched his hand with wire-tight fingers so he couldn't free it without stirring enough to open his mind. "It isn't your fault the Kingfish is dead!"

"Lea-leave me alone," he muttered.

"I can't leave you alone. We need you!"

He tried to pull his hand away. His eyes were still tightly shut.

"Nobody's blaming you for what happened."

"I'm afraid that argument's worn out," said Helmi.

Doydoy said, half-sobbing. "I to-told you I'm d-angerous. Da-damn you! Lea' me alone!"

Helmi whispered, "Marczinek! Shandy, they've taken Marczinek!"

Shandy pulled frantically at Doydoy's wrist. It was muscular and beautifully formed. The surprising power of his thick arms had always been hidden by the slope of his shoulders under the hump. "Do you hear that? They've got Marczinek! He's a gentle old man and they'll kill him!"

Doydoy shuddered and his eyelids squeezed tighter. She said very urgently and very softly, "It's not shameful to be afraid of them."

He pulled his spirit further, if possible, into its twisted shell.

"You've hated them so terribly for eight years—"

His eyes opened wide and closed again.

"Donatus. Are you afraid it wasn't an accident?"

His shoulders shook. "Go away! Go away!"

She squatted back on her heels and looked at the silent woman by the window. Helmi's lips moved soundlessly: two minutes.

Nevertheless, she took a precious fifteen seconds to think. And she said slowly, "They must know you pretty well after eight years . . . they must have peeped you down to the bottom of the id in the five seconds after you came out of the cage yesterday. They know you meant to

scatter them. They knew how much you hated them. But they couldn't have known what would happen with those tractors, because *you* didn't. If they'd had one flicker of an idea you meant to hurt or kill any of them, they'd have shot you down in flames before you'd gone three feet."

She waited tensely for ten seconds. Doydoy's body began to tremble with dry sobs. "They know-know I'm a damn cow-oward!"

"No. You're no coward. I'm not saying it's a good idea to kill anybody, either, even a type like the Kingfish. But it *was* an accident, and . . . Donatus, it would have been really horrible if it'd been Curtis Quimper . . . I'm sorry, Helmi."

"It—it's all right . . . you have twenty seconds left before Prothero blows up."

Shandy turned back to Doydoy. "It's all yours now, kiddo. That's it."

Doydoy licked his lips. "They-they'll put me b-ack in the Du-Du-Dump."

"No they won't," said Shandy. "I swear it. Not any more."

JASON crossed his arms and leaned against the desk as though he had all the time in the world. "It's no use. We just can't pull off this kind of job without Doydoy."

The veins were standing out on Prothero's forehead. "What are you talking about? He's *with* them."

"He is and he isn't. Psychologically, I mean. Physically he's been with us ever since he came out of the cage. That's why I left. To get him away from them—not to go in with them. But he's been curled up in a ball from guilt over killing the Kingfish. He won't send or receive or even move." He added bitterly, "He's completely harmless."

"What do you mean about his being with them psychologically?"

"You can't blame him if some of his sympathies are with them. Who else ever needed him?" He paused for a moment. "He might be able to trail them for us if we could give him a good reason to help us."

"What kind of reasons can you dig up after eight years?"

"He's the only one who can tell what's going on inside a thing or a person . . . all those times I went in and got beaten up—all that stuff about broken bones and twisted innards came from him."

"He told you?"

"He could have shielded . . . he left his mind open—because he trusted me." Jason watched Prothero as narrowly as if all his talent and all he knew of the brain-map in the grizzled head were not enough to read him

now. "But I couldn't think of trying to get him to help if he was only going to be shoved in the Dump again."

Prothero's face crinkled in suffused fury. "You trying to bargain with me, peeper?"

"Steve!" Urquhart cried. "You've forgotten Marczinek!"

"I haven't forgotten," Prothero growled. "All these years? You!" he shouted at Jason. "Who do you think you are, eighteen years old and giving me orders?"

Jason's face flamed and darkened the faint traces of his bruises. He opened his mouth to speak, changed his mind and shut up.

Prothero jammed his cigar butt in the ashtray and sparks went flying. "Things will be handled my way or no way. If you can't handle 'em, get out! And you!" He jabbed a finger at Prester, who blinked. "You can—you . . ." His voice trailed off and the furious color ebbed from his face. "I never thought of it," he whispered. "You're a Negro! There never were any at the plant! We wouldn't take any out of the jail—because the black skin . . . absorbs radiation . . . too . . . my God!"

They stared at Prester. Jason said, "Pres! You never—"

"Quick, boy!" Prothero barked "Where're you from?"

"I was born here," Prester muttered. "My daddy moved in from Detroit the year of the Blowup, but he didn't have psi. My granddaddy—on my mother's side—come from Nigeria in '84."

Prothero rammed hands in pockets and paced the floor. "Is there a reactor in Nigeria? No time to find out now—but if there is—or was, and it skipped a generation! My God!"

Critical mass: thirty-four to begin with, forty-five in the present strength of the Pack without Doydoy . . . *how many Dumps in the world?*

Prothero's shoulders slumped. He said in an achingly weary voice, "Go on. If you can get Doydoy, bring him in."

Jason closed his eyes. Prothero found his handkerchief and swabbed at the erosive wrinkles of his face and neck. Waxman's teeth were chattering. He had only been in Sorrel Park for two months.

Seconds passed and passed; faintly, the air began to tremble; it swirled around them, wavered, wrinkled, and broke into silver water.

Doydoy landed crumpled on the carpet, shivering and gasping.

Jason knelt beside him. "You okay?" Doydoy nodded weakly.

"Pajamas, for God's sake! Tapley, get this man a set of clean fatigues!"

Shandy touched the empty bed,

still warm from his body, and collapsed against it, shaking with reactive chill.

12

THAT business with Prester . . ." Shandy pulled herself up wearily. "Every country with its own Dump and Pack?"

Helmi stared out at the desolate street. "I hope not! I don't even want to think of it!"

. "What's happening now?" Shandy asked.

"I don't know . . ." She pressed a hand to her forehead. "They're in the Dump, I guess. I can't even get a scrambler."

Peter spoke from the doorway, "I think you are not feeling well."

"I feel all right. It's just . . . I'm alone." At the intensity of the silence behind her, she turned. "I didn't mean anything by that, Peter. I know . . . I have a hell of a nerve saying it, don't I? when I have you, and the baby coming. But you know how I feel. Peter? You know what I am." Her voice was pleading. "I never misled you."

Shandy went to the front door and looked out through the tiny window at a square of sky. Even being impervious was no help. Helmi's voice trembled behind her: "You always knew what I was. Peter?"

"I knew . . . I do love you."

She wanted to scream. Her emotions were flayed to the bone. Her weariness penetrated to the marrow. Her spirit ached.

But there was no time to ease it. A noise began to grow downward out of the sky. Peter's eye flickered with fear and he leaped up. Helmi caught at his arm. "Wait, Peter."

"What is it?"

"It's . . . Shandy?"

Shandy echoed, "What is it?"

Helmi said faintly, "Will you go outside, and—and see?"

"She must not—"

"It's all right . . . let her go."

Mystified, Shandy opened the front door. There was someone standing there whom she knew. It was Davey, an old enemy, fist foolishly raised in the air, about to knock.

"You!" she said.

"Yeah, me." He glowered at her. Behind him she saw a helicopter in the vacant lot across the street, engine still running.

"What do you want?"

"I don't want to have anything to do with you! Prothero sent me to pick you up."

She glanced helplessly at Helmi. Helmi said, "You'll have to go, Shandy."

"I—all right . . . good-bye Helmi, Peter . . ." The door closed. She gave him a guarded look. "What would he want with me?"

He snapped, "Maybe he wants

to give you a medal!" Then he sighed. "Look, I'm not trying to trick you or anything. I figure we're about even." He preceded her down the steps and turned. "He said he needed you."

She came down slowly and followed him. It looked as if she were going to become useful. And she was not at all eager to learn how.

The helicopter rose in the air and she saw Sorrel Park as the little place it was, narrow, bitter, twisted, not even an appreciable part of the world. She squeezed close to the window with her head turned away so that the others should not see the fear in her face. Not of death or the Dumplings; she had faced them. But of coming out into the world for good, becoming an organic part of the humanity she had shrunk from without knowing why. The prospect that had made her retreat from Urquhart's probing; a formless fear, but a real one.

From high in the air she saw the green rim of the world surrounding Sorrel Park: the Outside. It was immense and frightening. She had not been afraid for Sorrel Park when the Dumplings were rampaging there—but now she was afraid for the world.

THE helicopter landed in the courtyard by headquarters. As the crewmen jumped out, Davey said to Shandy, "Not you. You wait here."

She waited, gripping her knees with sweating palms. The engine was idling, and the sagging rotors trembled. Urquhart ran out a moment later, with a flustered gait, his thin hair ruffling in the wind. He climbed in.

"Shandy? How are you, are you frightened?"

Not the way he meant. "Not yet."

"Good girl." He sat beside her and took her hands. His palms were as wet as her own. "Kiddo, you're going to have to listen very carefully, because I've a lot to say, and not much time to say it in. We've worked out a set of alternative plans here, and their success will depend mostly on you. Believe me, if we had another Imper . . . do you understand?"

"Yes."

"We'll take all the care we can. I—anyway, in a couple of minutes a crew of three will come in here, and then Jason with Doydoy and Prester. They'll give you the creeps because they're all under hypnosis, they won't know you, and it's no use talking to them. I've blocked off all their psi except what they need to track the Dumplings, and the nonpsis mustn't know anything they could give away when you find them. That kind of thing can't

last very long or we'd have used it on the Dumplings long ago—and they mustn't be disturbed or distracted till it's necessary. You understand that."

She smiled a little. "I won't pester them."

"I know you'll be all right, dear." He gripped her hands tighter. "But the group of you will be alone. And *you'll* be alone as long as they're in that state. You know what I mean. There'll be plenty of us coming along behind you, but in this group you'll be alone. The pilot will be radioing back all the time, but he won't know what it's all about.

"Now: if you find them within six hours, and they're all together in a bunch, or at least a majority, as I think they'll be, you'll have to get as close as possible before they know you're there. That'll be pretty close, because the psis will be shielding within an hour of picking up the first weak trace. Then *you* will judge whether there's enough of them grouped together to warrant going on with the plan."

"Couldn't we radio back the information and let you decide?"

"That might draw their attention to us telepathically. We won't send at all. Of course if they're out in the open they'll hear the rotors, but you should be able to get within a mile of them, and there may be enough noise from other traffic to cover you.

"When you're close, you'll have to alight and disembark because you won't need the machine any more. Then you keep close together till you're within sight of them. With luck, they won't know what's going on, and we'll surprise them. *Then* if things are okay you'll speak the code-phrase that will bring your group out of hypnosis—and Jason will know what to do from there."

"Won't the Dumplings know as well?"

"Jason can use any one of a number of plans designed to meet any conditions—or the pilot can radio back for changes. None of them knows exactly what they're going to do right now. It's the only way we can keep the Dumplings from forestalling us at every move."

"What happens if we can't find them in six hours or they're hopelessly scattered?" Shandy asked.

"You use the code-phrase as soon as you realize that—and it should be fairly early—and we regroup and go ahead with the next plan. But this is how it stands for the time being. Have you got it all straight?"

"Yes . . . it's on my head."

"Not all of it, Shandy. Too much . . . I know." He sighed. "Now: the code—and I repeat it depends on you to judge when to use it—the code-phrase is: *new insight carries new delight.* Pretty uncommon, eh?"

"New insight carries new delight . . . did you choose that?"

He blinked. "No. Jason did. Why?"

"It's out of Margaret Mead." *You look like you forgot to ask yourself what would Margaret Mead have done.* He had answered, *Maybe I'll ask you that one day.* "From a passage I liked very much. He knows I read her books, but I never mentioned that bit to him."

"Well, he can't read your mind," said Urquhart, "but I guess he feels he knows your style." In spite of the time limit he had stressed, he kept sitting there, clutching her hands. "You're sure you've got it straight," he said doubtfully.

"I've got it straight," she said. "I give the word when we're in sight of a reasonable concentration of them, or as soon as I see it's all a flop. *New insight carries new delight.*"

"Yes. Well." He pulled his hands away and fished out a handkerchief to swab his head. And he added in a low voice, "You haven't asked what was going to happen to you after all this."

She shrugged ruefully. "I guess I was afraid to."

He shifted in his seat. "You know we want to take the best possible care of you."

"You want to get the Dumplings back." She grinned. "Gee whiz, don't get guilty. I've made a choice and I'm not running away."

"You'll have to do that, too." He gripped her shoulder. "After you give that code I want you to run like hell to the first police station you can find and stay there till we come for you. Promise?"

"I promise."

"We'll take care of you, I swear it. Now good-bye, Shandy." He jumped out to the ground and was gone.

She leaned back. No-one had as yet wished her luck. She supposed it was because they were depending—and wanted her to depend—on her brains.

A PILOT and two crewmen ran across the yard, leaped into the cabin, and took their places without a word. She said nothing. Out of the window she saw Jason running, with Doydoy on his back as he had been yesterday when he flew out of the cage. Prester was close behind them. Their eyes were blank; their bodies, in spite of Jason's burden, moved with fatigueless grace.

Prester climbed in first, Jason handed up Doydoy, and they settled him with three cushions piled to support his legs. When they had found their places, the helicopter rose.

She looked at them. Doydoy's

eyes were closed, his glasses had slipped down on his nose, and his hands lay at his sides as though they were as dead as his feet. Prester sat gaping like an idiot boy, hands folded loosely in his lap. Urquhart was right. They gave her the creeps.

Jason most of all. He sat back with his arms folded, his eyes slid back and forth in their sockets. They did not rest on her, though she was in his line of vision; for him she was simply not there. The muscles of his brow twitched and puckered, and when he shifted his shoulders every once in a while the dogtags slid in sweat on his neck.

New insight carries new delight. She also had a power, and as she had expected, it weighed her down. She wanted comfort, but there was none she could ask them to give her.

They were still low in the sky; as soon as Sorrel Park had fallen away behind them, the pilot turned the craft and it seemed as if they were heading back again. She had a moment of panic, but when they swung about in a wide arc she realized they were going to follow the slow course of a widening spiral till they could catch the first trace of the Pack.

So she saw Sorrel Park from east, west, north, south; dirty, crammed, jumbled, spirit defiled by barbed-wire, smoke from the coal plant staining the pale sky, narrow river carrying detritus out to a distant watershed. The low spiral widened till the town was blued with haze and almost pretty. She thought wryly: at least we're getting out of Sorrel Park.

The silence within hung like a weight beneath the noisy rotors. None of the psis stirred, and she had time to consider the implications of Prester Vernon's black skin. If the Dumplings were not found soon . . .

"Go down here."

The voice startled her. It was metallic, toneless, and perfectly articulated—and it was coming from Doydoy.

"Now?" The pilot's voice was equally toneless.

"Yes. A few minutes, please." Shandy was gaping at Doydoy, unable to believe her ears. After a moment, she realized what had happened. Doydoy, reason divorced from emotions under hypnosis, had been freed of his stutter.

THE helicopter sank into the middle of an overgrown field, and they waited. No-one moved. Shandy aligned her thoughts as best she could with Doydoy's unimaginable mind: with images in the multifaceted eyes of grasshoppers; with twigs and grasses bruised, stones whose structures had been twisted and distorted, in the wake of the Djinns.

Doydoy opened his eyes and looked around.

The pilot called over his shoulder, "Been here?"

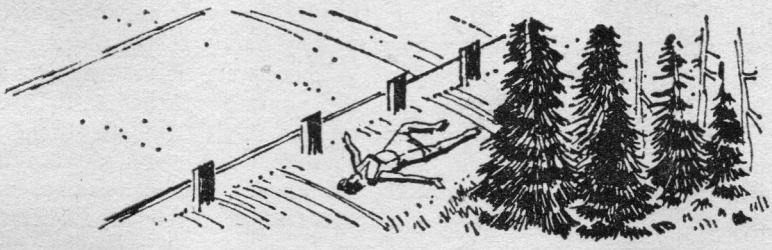
"Yes. Go on."

The pilot sent his message to HQ and they rose and began the new spiral around the X of the field.

Before they had gone round twice Doydoy began to twist in his seat. "He is upset." The metallic voice startled her once again because it was quivering with an amusement he could not have been consciously feeling.

"Who?"

"The farmer. He heard a noise in the chicken-coop and when he went out to look there was nothing left but feathers, bones, and heads. It gets him, he says."



"Where is he?"

"On the road two miles west by north, going north with the sheriff in the jeep." The helicopter turned west and the pilot began to murmur over the radio once again.

"He is telling his story over and over. What got him, he says, was the smell of roasting in the air."

The Dumplings were still too civilized to eat raw meat, but they made their own instant cooking arrangements. Five minutes later the helicopter passed over the head of the farmer gesticulating beside the sheriff in the jeep; swung north, found the farm and circled it. And drew its invisible line between field and farm, an arrow pointing out into the world, toward the Dumplings. "The animals are disturbed," said Doydoy.

Beyond the arrow, the helicopter began to swing back and forth in a widening fan-shaped course. It was noon, a fantastic unreal zenith of the day. The sky was empty.

"Go down here." A cropped field this time; a flock of sheep scattered bleating for the fence-rails. They had not been eaten—perhaps they had narrowly escaped being slaughtered for fun. "Northwest now." The incorporated mind drew a new arrow-line between farm and field;

again they rose and began a splayed course outward.

At the peak of the third pendulum-swing, Doydoy cried out. "It's terrible!" There was no amusement in his voice.

The pilot turned. "What?"

"The pain!"

"Huh?"

"Woman . . . left for dead by the roadside. Three miles north of Pineville, Highway 18."

Shandy pressed her face to the window; a crumpled shape half-hidden by leaves was down there by the side of the road. But they would not stop. She began to tremble. She wanted to yell *Stop!* There was life down there, ebbing. She felt the pain and the warm wet of the blood seeping in the pebbled earth, and memories enough to drive one mad. *New insight carries new delight.* She crammed the knuckles of her forefingers in her mouth and bit down. She was alone.

The course was now a straight one, due north. Doydoy said, "We are shielding." Shandy glanced at the watch on Jason's wrist. Four hours more for the limit in which she must speak the phrase. *Left for dead by the roadside,* she thought bitterly, would not wake them.

There was no escape. The course ran north, eating miles, and a blue line threaded itself across the horizon. It looked like the boundless sea to Shandy, but she knew it was Lake Michigan, and the smoky blur before it, Chicago.

THE countryside thickened with houses and gas-stations, planes appeared overhead, noise drowned out by their own; further away, gnatswarms of hovercraft were buzzing over the city. The distant haze resolved itself, not smoke as it would have been in Sorrel Park, but the mist of a lakeside city steaming in a drizzling June day.

The mist thinned on approach; towers still unbroken rose like marvels, a million windows flickering against the pale sky. She had imagined them, but had never expected to know them, and she revelled in them. The Pack was loose, the woman was bleeding by the roadside, and she was merely happy to be alive.

There were no visible scars on the surface of the city. It extended itself beneath them in squares, segments, triangles, rhombuses, parallelograms, and the traffic moved in a metallic many-celled stream from narrow streets into twisting knotted entries to multiple-laned freeways furious with urgency and complex as the vascular tree. White lights glared in the dull day from every shaft of glass and steel. The upper air quivered with its own traffic, and on distant fields there were ships rising.

Within a mile there were forty-five people who could destroy it all with a wish.

They moved forward slowly. She looked down; something was happening to the surge of midday traffic. It was beginning to ebb, with much snarling and clogging, from the crowded center. Small black-and white saucer-shaped policecopters were buzzing over intersections, leading automobiles and buses away from the center. Storm-warnings were up.

"Right there," Doydoy said. "That's the Loop."

"No. South. The computers."

The pilot whistled, impressed even under hypnosis. "The Chicago Pentagon!"

Now Doydoy began to twitch and thresh in his seat, caught in an unconscious terror. Shandy watched helplessly. But the pilot was calm. He circled in a slow downward spiral, like a gull wheeling toward the sea. Doydoy's legs had slid from the pile of cushions; Jason and Prester were still and gaping beside him, but he clawed at the air in an extremity of fear; sweat broke out on him so sharp and sudden the splotches flared on his shirt like spattered raindrops. He twitched and stuttered, "Com-Com-munica-cations Cen-Cen-Center in-in Depar-par-par-"

"Department of Strategic Services!" the pilot yelled.

Shandy pressed her face to the downslanting window and saw a remarkably insignificant office-building surrounded by a great swathe of grass dotted with flowerbeds. The buzzing craft around them had withdrawn; the sky was empty.

And Doydoy began to wail. The sound was terrifying; the power of his fear of the Dumplings was something no hypnosis could control.

The grounds below were deserted. Shandy pulled at Jason's arm. "Quick! Are they down there? Are they all there?"

Jason blinked. "Yes, I—"

Above them, with a savage rip, the rotors broke off and flew to the four winds; the helicopter plunged out of the sky. Shandy, trying frantically to force the code-phrase between her lips, found her throat torn open in an endless scream.

13

"—carries new delight! Oh my God, new insight carries—"

She had not lost consciousness, but the jolting change from one second to the next gave the same impression. She was crouched on the floor with her fingers locked in a plexus over her skull to protect the vulnerable bones.

"It's okay." Jason was on his feet beside her, wide-eyed and alert. Prester was pulling up

Doydoy, who had slid to the floor and was trying to put on his glasses. One of the lenses was cracked.

She sat up. Things did not look okay to her. The pilot was sprawled unconscious over the instrument panel, a thin line of blood running down his temple, and the crewmen, dazed, were pulling themselves up off the floor. But the psis were no longer under hypnosis. Either the code-phrase or the shock of falling—she didn't want to know which—had brought them to their senses. The helicopter, minus rotors, was still in the air. As she was absorbing the shock of this discovery, it gently lowered itself a couple of feet, and grounded.

Jason glanced at her in passing. "You look all right!" He told the crewmen, who were bending over the pilot, "He's just knocked out. Grab his arms and we'll get you out of this. You can find a hospital. Understand?" One of them nodded dazedly. "Don't be scared. Go on, Pres."

Prester snapped his fingers and the men disappeared. "Him!" Jason snorted. "Gotta have a gesture for everything. Shandy, you get out and run like hell!"

The door opened. She leaped out, but her legs buckled under her. Jason jumped down beside her and grabbed her elbow. "Come on, you got to . . . Jeez, now we got the whole city on us." Crowds were converging from the rim of the green lawn. "Get rid of them, Pres—no fireworks," and the running figures turned and began to race back the way they had come, trampling each other in their haste.

The helicopter burst into flames, "Get going Shandy!" Jason gave her a push that sent her flying, and she rolled out of the way with a speed and energy



that surprised her. Then the burning helicopter disappeared, and Prester, carrying Doydoy, ran out from the scorched area it

had occupied. He was swearing intensely in a style far beyond his years. He set Doydoy on the grass and murmured, "Somebody playing keepsies."

Doydoy pointed at the building and squeaked, "J-Jocko, in-in-side!"

"Yeah, the lookout." Jason chewed his lip. "They're underground."

Shandy asked, "The building isn't all?"

"Heck, no. Just administration. Underground they got computers. A lead-and-steel maze a mile deep and a mile square. If they tried to keep from there they might end up inside a wall. That's why they need Jocko here."

"He's knocked out the people upstairs," Prester said. "Killed two." He added thoughtfully, "Like to pick off that boy."

"We'll do that," Jason said. ". . . Boy, we sure picked a lousy place to be stuck out in the middle of." They were half-hidden by a flower-bed, but there was a terrible expanse of unsheltered lawn between them and the federal building to the north. "Go on, Shandy, scram!"

SHE turned and ran without a word. The grass was spongy, and moisture from the recent rains was beginning to seep through the soles of her shoes. The air was humid, but there was only a thin haze of cloud; the sun would shine within an hour, and it seemed unjust that there should be so much terror on a June day in Chicago.

She looked back once. Jason and Prester were in back of her. Doydoy had disappeared, and Jason yelled, "Run! Run!" She ran. After a dozen steps she heard cries behind her and whirled in time to see Jason and Prester struggling with four or five Dumplings. Within a second, they vanished. She dithered a moment. It was impossible to help them now, and she went on with aching legs, knowing that if the Dumplings decided to stop her all the speed she could muster was no use.

She was right. A wall of two Dumplings, shoulder to shoulder, broke out of the air with a crash before her, and she slammed into them. They grasped her each to an arm; she pulled back, struggling. She knew one of them. It was Frankie Slippec, but there was no sign of recognition in his eyes.

Without a word they started pulling her toward the building. She twisted and cried out in their grasp, but it was no use. There was no one to save her here.

They couldn't pk her, but they were fast. Up stone steps, across the lobby, down halls heaped with senseless bodies, downstairs leaping from landing to landing

because elevators were too slow. She collapsed in their grip, half-fainting.

At last only the elevator could take them where they wanted to go. They pushed her in, crammed in after her, and in defiance of controls sent it falling like meteor down subterranean shafts of lead and steel built to withstand the bomb that had not yet dropped.

After some trial and error they had solved the maze of caverns and tunnels by blazing a trail in scorchmarks on the composition floor; they followed it down twisting byways until a pocket of light at the end, and a growing hum of machines, rewarded them. When they had reached the great chamber of the control room, they stopped and let her go.

Quivering in all her bones, Shandy tried to pull herself together, and screwed up her eyes at the blaze of light from walls and ceiling. This, she understood finally, was what Doydoy had meant blurting through chattering teeth about communications centers and computers.

The walls were covered with charts, grids, and edge-lit world maps flickering in spectrum colors. Ranged before them were six great consoles studded with controls. The men and women who had handled them had been knocked out and shoved into corners like rag dolls. Marczinek, useless too because he could not run a computer, had been flung to a console chair; his head lolled, his arms hung limp, and his gaudy shirt was bloody. Jason and Prester were standing near him; all the Dumplings were around them. But Doydoy was gone.

She ran over to Marczinek, but Curtis Quimper said, "Stay where you are. He's alive, and you want to keep him alive."

"But—"

Jason stopped her with an outstretched arm. "Keep out of the way. We can't do anything for him now."

She moved back to the wall. "Where's Doydoy?"

The Dumplings scuffled. Curtis Quimper breathed deeply. "Looks like he got away."

"Lost him again! That's good."

"Never mind. We'll get him back."

"I thought you didn't care about him any more."

Jason said, "They think they'll get him to run this thing." He waved a hand to indicate the huge installation.

"What for?"

"Power," said LaVonne. "Know what this controls? The country: telephones, cables, trains, planes, airships, warning systems, rockets, missile, and—a lot more I forget. The country . . . maybe half the world."

"You don't need Doydoy for that. You could have figured it out from these people here." She nodded at the crumpled shapes in the corner.

"They raised a fuss . . . we didn't think they'd wear too well."

Jason said flatly, "That's a lie. The state they were in when they came down here they were only too happy to knock anybody around." The Pack's fury, frightening as it was, was also its weak point.

"Watch out," said Curtis Quimper.

"I thought you respected the truth quite a lot," said Shandy.

"Stuff that," LaVonne said. "We want Doydoy."

"Though you were playing it smart," said Curtis. "Give up two little psis so the big one could get away? You didn't figure we'd get your Imper and your plans're shot to hell."

"She has nothing to do with it," Jason said quickly.

"We think she's got a lot to do with it. She's an Imper, ain't she? Nobody knows what's in her head. We'll find out."

JASON moved over and stood in front of Shandy. "Don't try it."

LaVonne snickered. "Lookit the great protector. Little gentleman!" She leered up at him and a raw flush seeped up from his neck and out to the rims of his ears. LaVonne outraged his manhood.

"Listen, you know you'll have to take the two of us," he indicated Prester, "before you get her. You don't want to waste even our psi."

"Little man," LaVonne giggled, "You got funny ideas. Think we wouldn't do that to get Doydoy?"

Shandy thought they would. She stepped out from behind Jason. "I believe you—but you don't have to do anything. I don't know where Doydoy is."

"I don't believe you!" LaVonne spat. "But I won't have to waste much time breakin' you." The Dumplings began to move in.

But Shandy kept watching LaVonne. The most horrifying thing about her now was that she so involved herself in evil she was inextricable. There was no appeal to be made to her and nothing worth saving about her.

Without taking her eyes off LaVonne, Shandy said, "I didn't know you'd retired, Curtis."

"What's that?"

She crossed her arms and leaned on the console in back of her. "Looks like you're letting LaVonne take over."

"Take over!" Curtis Qiumper sneered. "Who said anything—"

"She's doing most of the talking, isn't she? You know, LaVonne's so strong and smart she

can keep any thoughts she likes hidden from you . . . she could even fix things so her left hand didn't know what her right hand was doing, and she's your right hand, Curtis."

"You're nuts!"

"Maybe, but I'm not stupid."

"You just think you're smart," LaVonne said through her teeth.

Shandy ignored her. "Curtis . . . I'm not a psi, but I bet somewhere in a corner of your mind you're tired of this . . . you don't really want to have to fight Jocko, or Colin, or Buttsy, or whoever else gets big ideas—even with LaVonne helping you. I haven't got your kind of power, but I did do a lot to get Doydoy out of the Dump, and he's not going in again whatever happens —" she searched the depthless planes of his eyes, "—because he helped us.

"You're burning out. You won't be any use to this bunch soon, and you'll end up dead . . . but you could be a lot of use to us for many years." She thought Jason might stick his neck out for anything at this point. "Help us now and there might be something in it for you."

His glance flicked at Jason, and a play of emotions swept over his face. LaVonne watched him. After a moment, he snorted "You got some offer there. You're offering to let me help you!"

A waste of breath. But she had shifted their attention for the moment from herself—and Doydoy. "I'm not offering. I'm begging you to help us and save yourself before Prothero gets here and spoils your chance."

LaVonne snapped, "Tell us where Doydoy is before Prothero gets here and maybe we'll leave you alive. Maybe."

"I don't *know* where he is—but I bet he knows what's going on down here—and if I were Doydoy I'd have picked off Jocko while you were shooting off your mouth about what you were going to do."

LaVonne's face twisted. "Whaddya think you're—" She stopped short and licked her lips. She whispered, "Jocko?"

The Dumplings moved, blinked, turned on small axes and stared at each other. The machines chattered around their silence.

Curtis turned to Shandy. "What's goin on here?"

She gasped, "I swear—"

"Read me!" Jason snarled. "She's got no psi! I monitored all her—"

But Curtis Quimper had no more time to waste on them. "Somebody gotta get up there! Fast!"

One of the Dumplings tp'd to the doorway. "Trail's gone!"

"Gone! Somebody hiding something here?"

"It wasn't any of us, Quimp, honest!"

CURTIS was breathing hard. "Get up there! Any way! Burn a hole, but get up there! You, Nick! You hear me?"

"Me? Awright, I'm going," he backed out of the door. "Okay, o—"

Silence.

"Nick?"

"Nick! Where is he? Now what'n hell's going on here!"

"I got him! He—no, he's lost!"

"Nick?"

"He's fadin' out! He—"

"Lost! Damn, he just went outa this door! How—" Curtis Quimper swung round to face Jason. "Somebody's, playing, games."

"Not us, Quimp." Jason's mouth barely twitched with a smile. "This is somebody with real power."

"Doydoy? Hey, Doydoy!"

"Come on, Nick!"

"—and he—he's scared, he—"

"Lead and steel," said Jason. "That's the beauty of it. Too bad we couldn't have done that with the Dump."

"You talk too much," said LaVonne. Jason slumped to the floor. Shandy screamed and dropped to her knees beside him.

Prester said quickly, "Leave him. It's a pinched carotid, he'll only be out a couple minutes."

Marczinek. Jason. Shandy's glance flicked from one to the other. Every breath spread the stain of blood on Marczinek's shirt; Jason's face was white and sick. They were helpless. But she was not. If Doydoy were anywhere near . . .

She pulled over very slightly toward Prester and whispered, "Shield." His eyelids twitched.

Somebody yelled, "What're we gonna do now? You got us into this!"

"Yeah! Jocko's gone, Nick—"

"—ain't gone, they're—"

"—screaming! Dam walls!"

They looked at each other. Sweat beaded their faces.

LaVonne planted hands on hips and scoured them with contempt. "Scared, babies? Wantcher didies changed?"

Curtis poked her. "Shut up, Pigface!"

She had cringed at the name before it reached his lips. Her eyes slitted. "Gee, Quimp, you looked like you were punkin' out. I thought you needed a little help."

"I can ask for it." He faced the Pack, glaring. They shuffled their feet and he reinforced the message: "Stick together, keep 'em scared. Bust out, we can run into a bomb. You want it? Okay!"

Shandy had crawled back, inching, till she was half-hidden by a console. Prester moved over slightly, still in view, but at watch and shielding. She whispered, "Can Doydoy shield and still read you?" His nod was almost imperceptible.

"Can you open up to him without their knowing?" Nod. "Listen: you're no more use here. I'll give them something to think about, and I want Doydoy to get you and Jason and Marsh out."

Before he could protest she began to crawl, as slowly as if she meant it, past the console, toward the shelter of the next one, and beyond it, the door. Prester plucked at the leg of her jeans, but she pulled away. She did not expect to get far. The composition floor, flecked with gold and pearl, was cool and smooth under her hands. Pawn to King four, she crossed the square lines. To the shadow of the next console . . .

"Look what we got here!"

The pop of tp and two feet planted before her at the edges of her fingernails. She looked up. Curtis Quimper was regarding her with amusement. She thought of Helmi, and of the woman by the road near Pineville, and her mouth went dry.

He pulled her up by the neck of her jersey. Beyond the laughter of the Djinns rebounding from the walls, beyond the helpless fear, she saw that his skin was as dark, his hair as black, his eyes as blue as her own.

"Talk about punkin' out?" His mouth was tight. He pushed her back at the end of his arm and pinned her with a hand against the console. The Pack moved in, waiting. They had forgotten their fear, and she had not many hopes left for Curtis Quimper. She kicked, clawed, twisted. *Now, Prester,* she begged silently.

Curtis laughed. "Lookit the bug on the pin," he said. "How far did *you* expect to get?"

A SMALL explosion broke the air behind them. They whirled.

Shandy stopped struggling. "There it is." Marczinek's chair was empty, Jason and Prester were gone. The unconscious bodies in the corner had disappeared. The Dumplings gaped. "That's just as far as I hoped to get," she said, and closed her eyes.

There was a roar. Hands grasped and threw her; hands caught, tossed, caught. The breath drove out of her chest, her hair broke free and swirled, the shoes flew off her feet. She opened her eyes as her hair swept the soundproof tile of the ceiling, and fell in a soundless scream to be caught, tossed, skimming a console-top, caught half an inch short of the wall; eyelids fluttering in nerveless blink caught light off now bared savage teeth, now flickering dial, now eyewhites; spreadeagled on the floor foot planted against ribs ready to crush, and gibbering, baying—

"STOP IT!" It was Curtis

Quimper. From habit they stopped; the foot rose. Flat on the floor, eyes closed, she lay half dead.

"—the hell you—"

"—for Chri—"

"—gone soft in the nut?"

She forced her eyes open a slit, and a frieze of legs flickered before them.

Curtis howled, "You mutts, we got no more hostages!"

LaVonne laughed, a horse, ugly bark. "*You* got no more hostages!" As her voice thinned in a scream at the last word, Curtis rose in the air, twisted in a tight arc, landed on his shoulder with a crunch of bone, and lay still.

LaVonne screeched, "Now you listen to me!" But Frankie Slippec turned on her.

"I had enough of your snot!" He ran for the door.

She looked at him. He stopped in mid-leap, shivered, and collapsed.

"Dead . . ." They trembled with his pain, and were quiet. They had committed obscenities, they had killed, but always, within their own twisted code, on fair terms. This was different.

"Now will you listen!"

They waited. LaVonne raised her head and screamed at the ceiling. "Doydoy! Doydoy! You hear me, Doydoy, it's your last chance! You come down here and get us out or I break this place. Hear me? I'll break it! You know what that means, Doydoy? You come down here!"

They knew what it meant. The communications and controls of the whole country and half the world.

Silence. Around the center of silence the machine racketed on.

"Is that . . ."

"He's—"

"Here?"

A presence whispered around them. Shandy, astonished, felt it. A power so strong it found response even in her unresonating mind. Doydoy?

"There he is!" A group clubbed itself together at one side of the room, suddenly. "Come on!"

"What're you talkin' about?" LaVonne gaped at them.

"He's down the hall!"

"No he ain't, he's—"

"There he is, I see him Doydoy!" Ten Dumplings vanished.

LaVonne screeched after them, "You boobs, he's tricking you, he's—"

THEY became still, turned, listened. Buttsy whispered, "He's upstairs." Ricci, Gloria, Lenny, moved over beside him, faces upturned.

Doydoy appeared, hovered beneath the ceiling, blinked once, and disappeared. Buttsy's group shouted and vanished with him.

"It's not him!" LaVonne hissed. "He's faking a—"

"This *is* me." They wheeled. Doydoy was crouched against the slanted deck of one of the console tables. He was no longer afraid of Dumplings. He smiled like a Cheshire Cat, rose in the air, and vanished through the door to the scanning room.

Before they could follow, LaVonne called, "Wait!" She ran over where Shandy was lying half-dazed with pain and began to tug at her. "It's our hostage. Come on, help me." She and Colin Prothero got her up and half-dragging, half-stumbling, pulled her along with them. Through the silent library, memory stores, scanning rooms where machines spun reels of microfilm and glared at flicking pages through lens, their steps scuffled and scattered.

There was nothing there. Even the sense of his presence had died.

They whispered, "He's gone." They pushed further, gasping for breath, glazed with fear, in rooms where components were stored, books, papers, small machines rattling to themselves. To the end. Blank walls of steel.

LaVonne, sobbing, streaming with sweat, cried, "Go on!" A wall melted, lead beyond. "Go on!" LaVonne screamed. Lead quivered like jelly and ran down to their feet, hissing and slopping. "Go on!" Holes, cracks, fissures grew. Rock beyond.

There's nothing! Where's the others?"

". . . alone . . . nothing."

"I say he's here! He's here!" They stared at her and began to back away. She breathed hard. "I tell you, he—" But there was nothing she could tell them. They scattered through doors, walls, columns of air.

LaVonne, still clutching Shandy, wept. Colin was the only one left with her. He had not had the courage to leave.

"Doydoy . . . he did it," she sobbed. "That little creep . . ."

He had not even brought them to the surface to rage or scatter before they could be netted. He had merely deployed them in the labyrinth, lost without co-ordinates or links to the outside, to beat against the heavy shielding walls, to scream loneliness and fear to every other member of the Pack, to melt a wall of lead and steel and find more walls beyond.

Every time they had given in to their careless fury he had taken another and another. Doydoy, the only gentle one, the most powerful, and the one who most hated power, was teaching them the only lesson they could be taught.

LaVonne panted, "I'm not finished. I can do something too."

"Don't," Colin whispered. "You want—what Frankie got! That's what you—"

"No, no, LaVonne, don't!"

"Then get going!"

"Let's leave her here, at least."

"We'll leave her in the middle of it! Now come on!"

Shandy's feeble struggles were no match for the power of fury and despair. They pushed, shoved, dragged her, panting and sobbing, back to the control room. Curtis lay alone there, unconscious. The machine paid them no heed. It chuffed and chattered hugely in emptiness.

LaVonne swung her Medusa head. "Now!"

Colin cried, "No! No!"

LaVonne smiled evilly. "I don't need you." He fell.

Shandy, without his support, found her legs buckling, and she slid down beside him.

FROM the floor, eyes glazing, too far gone for horror, she watched as LaVonne clenched her fists and spun like a gyroscope. Bells began to ring, lights flashed, the air quivered with hoots and whistles. LaVonne, gasping, raised her arms, clawed air with her fingers, eyes turned back in the sockets till the blind whites stared; alarms hooted around her, maps broke on the walls, sirens screamed, consoles split and crashed to the floor in a white heat and sank in puddled tiles. Shandy felt the scorch through her clothes, tried to pull herself up and fell back. Dials snapped, racks shattered, walls of panels trembled, rippled, and dropped in molten rains. The machine and its world died in fury around them.

LaVonne howled, a coyote's empty triumph. Her eyes lowered and found Shandy.

"You," she whispered. "You did it too. Now you." She tottered over and reached down.

The hands groped for her neck, and Shandy stirred feebly, without hope. She thought, with a deeply private agony: *Now I'll never find out.*

About herself; about everything in the world. Everything.

Behind LaVonne, someone moved. Curtis Quimper, groaning in pain, reached out and pulled at her leg. She turned to kick him away.

Something fell into the room, hissing. She looked up. A metal cylinder, with a thin vapor flaring from it. She blinked in a daze, took two wobbling steps, and fell.

No Dumplings, no machine broke silence. Only the stream of gas hissing from the bomb.

Shandy knew only one more thing before she went down into the blackness. A towering, bulky-suited figure waded into the room and began to search through the wreckage. Through the bubble-helmet she recognized Prothero. He found what he was looking for at her feet

and bent over the body of his son, face scarred with the marks of his bitter, helpless love.

14

ONCE she woke and saw lamplight through slitted lids, and shapes moving before it. She unlimbered her dry tongue along the roof of her mouth, and tried to speak. A glass tube was offered at her lips; she drank. A voice rumbled, "How is she?" Prothero.

Urquhart's voice said, "She'll be all right."

"Marczinek," she whispered.

Grace Halsey said, "He's badly hurt, but alive. Go to sleep, dear."

She croaked, "The machine—LaVonne—"

Urquhart said, "The computer's ruined, but there were three other peer machines over the country taking over right away—it's lucky we were too shut in here to know about them—and we've got LaVonne in the cage. The world's still running, and you can get to sleep."

"Jason—"

"They're all safe," Grace said. "That's enough talk for now."

A needle pricked her arm and she slipped into a darkness where she battled screaming nightmares and floundered in seas of terror for days, until at last she washed up on a bank of silence.

Urquhart: Shandy. Can you hear me?

Shandy: Yes. Am I dreaming?

Urquhart: No. Open your eyes. Can you see me?

Shandy: Yes.

Urquhart: Good. Do you feel well?

Shandy: I'm aching all over. What do you want?

Urquhart: I want to talk to you for a while.

Shandy: You—have you hypnotized me? I feel strange.

Urquhart: No, I haven't hypnotized you. But there're things I want to find out. I'm not going to try any depth analysis, but I told you I wanted to know how you tick . . . I've just given you drugs to relax you a little and release some of your inhibitions.

Jason: Inhibitions! Did she ever have any?

Shandy: If I've got no inhibitions I can tell you what I think of you, you big ape!

Jason: She sounds like herself.

Urquhart: Jason, I think you have a right to be here, but if you're going to make a fuss you can get out.

Jason: Okay, okay.

Urquhart: Shandy, Jason's been telling me about your ideas . . . about psi, and about the delinquent's being the victim of genetic defect. Whether it'll hold water is something else again, but I'd like to hear a little more.

Shandy: I don't think there's much to say about it. Just—if you look at them, and at the Dumplings, they seem to separate themselves into a distinct physical and emotional type. I don't know what happens with Negroids and Mongolians—

Urquhart: Oh, I'll promise not to use them for an arguing point right now. What's the basis for your conclusions?

Shandy: Well, distinct behavior patterns turn up in them even when they're little kids. They're restless and active, and wet their beds till they're quite big. By the time they're fourteen they've probably been in trouble with the police several times already . . and instead of feeling guilty they just feel everybody's against them. They're generally mesomorphic, and runty till puberty, and then they grow up suddenly; and they keep on being hostile, suspicious and defiant, and can't put off anything they want right away, or make plans for the future.

Urquhart: And they often have the brainwaves of children —and immature patterns of capillary loops in their fingertips—

Shandy: I didn't know that.

Urquhart: But it's no real excuse for calling them animals.

Shandy: No, but it is a physical thing that separates them from other people. I've heard there've been lots of hopeless psychopaths with normal brainwaves—but I don't think they'd have been Dumplings. I guess the most animal thing about them is that they have to have everything for today. And the hostility.

Urquhart: A lot of them calm down in their thirties.

Shandy: So do the lions in the zoo when they lose their teeth—and for these people the world is a zoo. I know it's hard to pick them out of the ordinary criminal lot till they've made themselves and everybody else so miserable they can't be helped. I don't know what ought to be done for them—but I think there ought to be better ways to weed them out and handle them when they're young and dangerous—without being either cruel or soppy; and I think this idea might help people look at them more calmly.

Urquhart: Um. All right. Now the other thing. People have had some pretty wild romantic dreams about psi over the ages. I'll admit the Dumplings aren't anybody's dream of Superman come true. But you seem to feel it's—garbage was the term you used.

Shandy: Yes, because the creatures that have it all turn out to be primitive. Pk and tp are just extra physical power, and telepathy is a way of communicating

if you don't have speech. The way telepathy turns up in animals it's probably pretty clumsy. For herd animals that have to stick together it might be useful, but I bet a human being born with it could never separate his mind from everybody else's long enough to develop a logical idea.

Urquhart: Jason, Prester, Helmi and Doydoy don't fit your definition of animals, and they have psi.

Shandy: I can't explain them. I'm just glad they're here.

Urquhart: . . . And you say the Dumplings became psis because radiation would do more harm, produce a more bizarre effect, on the gonads of parents who would be likely to have defective children anyway.

Shandy: Yes.

Urquhart: And psi is definitely not the attribute of the supernormal?

Shandy: Gee whiz, you sound so disappointed! Maybe one day . . . but I think it'd be a long time before people could bear knowing each other's miseries telepathically—and what would scientists and artists do if they couldn't be alone to think? Real super-psis would be too much of a jump away from us, and evolution works slowly.

Urquhart: Then how would you picture a supernormal who seemed reasonable in relation to homo sapiens?

Shandy: I never thought about that. Do I have to? I'm sleepy now . . .

Urquhart: Take a stab at it. You don't have to knock yourself out.

Shandy: I—I don't know . . . I guess you start with brains.

Urquhart: It's the classic gambit.

Shandy: Well I don't think the world'd get much use out of a super-kook. But . . . there's been lots of geniuses in the world, and many of them have been unhappy . . . and a lot of them have been nasty.

Urquhart: Superman has to be noble.

Shandy: Not goody-goody. But he has to be moral or he'll do harm. Even the brightest kid gets pushed around by all sorts of things while he's growing up, and you can't always be sure he'll turn out moral.

Urquhart: You want a person who's protected from the mischances of psychodynamic forces.

Shandy: Yes. Somebody who'd turn out to be moral no matter what happened to him.

Urquhart: Stable moral equilibrium.

Shandy: With plenty of room to be different. Otherwise, they'd be dull—and I don't think they'd last. Suppose he started off with a lot of the best building materials—and arranged them however he liked, or however life

pushed them around for him. But whatever he started with, however it got arranged in a million possible ways, he'd end up with something balanced. Even if it didn't look like much, even if it looked kind of loony from the outside.

Urquhart: If it looked too crazy he'd never be respected.

Shandy: Some might get lost . . . but that's the chance he'd have to take in the evolutionary battle, like everybody else under the sun.

Urquhart: Your superman's vague.

Shandy: If he looked too beautiful or noble or eccentric he might be picked out and pushed aside. You'd want him to be an organic part of humanity, to give his qualities to his children —if he could transmit them. I can't think of anybody like that as other-directed, so I guess he'd keep out of the way and stay inconspicuous till his building-materials were permanently arranged. And he'd watch and learn and wait.

Urquhart: Wait for what?

Shandy: To find out what he was.

Urquhart: Why would he have to find out?

Shandy: Because a bright person who isn't curious is useless. There's plenty of decent lumps in the world, but they can't stand a new idea, and they're more harm than help. He'd have to find out what he was because he couldn't help finding out everything he could.

Urquhart: And after he found out?

Shandy: He'd try to find a place for himself in society, and get married, I guess, and have his kids.

Urquhart: It's a modest superman.

Shandy: He's a kind ordinary people could live with, even if they felt he was a little eccentric. He'd have the same emotions and the same hopes. That's why I think he'd have a chance. You couldn't expect an advance to come in a single impossible leap to the summit. One step would be enough.

Urquhart: Would he be happy?

Shandy: His life might be hard and lonely, he might wish he weren't different at all—but I don't see how he could be really unhappy when he had the whole universe to observe and learn about and understand.

Urquhart: I see. One more thing, Shandy. What kind of child do you think your superman would have been?

Shandy: Child? Gee, I dunno . . . I don't think I ever knew or heard of a bright kid who wasn't something of a nudnik, so I guess he'd be that . . . and . . . and

he'd have to stay a kid a long time to build that kind of complicated moral structure in himself . . .

Urquhart: Yes . . . I think so. Anybody you know . . . who fits that description?

Shandy: . . . I . . . I don't —I—Oh . . .

Grace: She's upset. Now look what you've done!

Urquhart: It's all right . . . Helmi, Prester, Jason—they've managed with psi. She can manage with this. Come on, Shandy, calm down. You'll get used to it.

SHE woke to an afternoon light coming through the window. She was in her old room, and the first thing she noticed was that the broken panes had been replaced. And the next, that her bed had bars.

She crawled over them clumsily, blinked away a wave of dizziness, and found she was wearing a coarse white hospital gown. She tottered over to the window and rested her hands on the sill. It was warm from the sun. Someone was singing below; not Marczinek; a baritone:

Gonna hoe corn, drink it till
I die . . .

She pushed up the screen and put her head out the window, elbows on the sill. Jason had dug up Marczinek's flower-bed, and was shovelling on loam from a wheelbarrow. He looked up and grinned, presumably at her expression.

"What do you expect to plant this late in the season?"

"Hollyhocks," he said happily, "hardy phlox, four-o'clocks, and Urquhart's coming down the hall."

She pulled back hastily and jumped into bed. Jason kept singing:

Gonna hoe that corn, keep
drinkin' till I die . . .
Singin' the workshirt blues
'cause I'm too old to cry.

Urquhart wandered in and sat on the bed. "You look beat, but I'm told you'll be all right. Hungry?"

"Not yet. What's today?"

"Wednesday."

"What have I missed?"

He grinned. "Nothing you couldn't do without."

"I'm scared to ask . . . how Marczinek is."

He shrugged. "He's an old man . . . and they weren't gentle."

"I—I know Frankie Slippec's dead, and—and Colin . . . LaVonne was trying to make as much mess as she could."

"She did plenty. Buttsy, Willy, Gloria—they're dead, and the rest got banged up in varying degrees, but they'll live."

Curtis was alive then—and Doydoy. "I still can't understand how it ended as it did. It seemed impossible for them to lose."

He shook his head. "No, Shandy. They made it impossible for themselves to win. It's true they made a big mess—but look at the record. First, they picked Marczinek only because he knew there was an important computer in Chicago. He couldn't run one, he had no psi, and he didn't know that five or six years ago equally important connecting centers were set up in San Francisco, Edmonton, and Boston. As soon as they got the wind up, the Government shifted the Chicago computer's functions onto its sisters. We could have had them shut it down, but we didn't want to make the Dumplings suspicious.

"Second: they could have managed without Doydoy—but they would have had to use their brains. So they struck out at anybody who could have helped them—and they've been striking out all their lives. They could have made use of Doydoy all those years if they'd respected anything but his raw power—but they couldn't let a cripple teach them.

"They missed their chance with LaVonne because she's a girl, and a dwarf—and again with Prester. They might have won him over if they'd tried—but he's a Negro . . . the only one. No-one who was different could be an equal of theirs. Thank your stars they were so dumb . . . think of what they might have been able to do operating just one level higher."

She shuddered. "I don't like to think of it. Where are they now?"

"In the Dump. It's the only place we had for them."

"Is it safe?"

He smiled. "Do you know how they got out of the Dump?"

"I never had time to ask."

"Doydoy got them to take a whole lot of junk, compact it till it was extremeley small and dense, heavier than lead, and pk it at one of the antennas. It hit and knocked it out of phase for a second, and the second was all they needed to get through the hole in the Field."

"That was pretty smart."

"That's what I told Doydoy, and all he said was, 'It took me eight years.' " He shook his head. "They won't do it again. We've got another circuit running around outside that one, and they'd never be able to manage it with two."

"Prester—"

"We wanted him to stay here with us, but he said he'd help us only if he could still live with the Aaslepps." Urquhart took out a cigar.

SHE didn't blame Prester. He had a place and wanted to keep it. She was trying to work up courage to ask about Doydoy when she noticed the band on

Urquhart's cigar. "That's not a Sorrel Park homemade."

"No, I'm happy to say." He admired it for a moment. "Sorrel Park's opening up . . . on the Fourth of July—" he smiled wryly, "—to celebrate the end of independence."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "After that donnybrook in Chicago there wasn't much we could keep secret any more . . . I guess people here will be happy enough. Stuff's coming in on a use-it-now-pay-God-knows-when plan . . . that's how I got the cigars. There's plenty of noise going on in the world about us."

"I don't know . . . that Nigeria thing . . ."

"That'll be something to look forward to, all right, but now everybody's playing cards close to the chest. They're perfectly happy to let us have the notoriety. You'll see, we'll replace Middletown, Plainville and the Trobriand Islands in all the learned journals."

"Sounds like endsville to me—but you won't let anybody near the Dump."

"No." He added grimly. "And that'll be hardest of all."

She touched his hand. "You'll be leaving. You'll be out of it, and it won't bother you."

He looked away and puffed in silence for a moment. "There's a nice new uniform hanging in my closet. Maybe I'll get up the nerve to put it on tomorrow, or the next day . . ." He sighed. "It seems I'm free to leave, but I can't . . . not because I didn't finish the job, but because I never properly got started. Now I'll have more money, more help, new ideas. And maybe I'll be able to do something. Anyway, I'm getting married tomorrow."

"You are!"

"It's nice to see your face lighting up a bit! Yes, to Wilma French, at the library. So you see, I'm stuck here."

Stuck here. He wasn't the only one with ambivalent feelings. *And after dark/in Sorrel Park/ what will become of me, me, me?*

"What's the matter, Shandy? Don't you approve of my choice?"

"Dr. Urquhart, was all that true—about me?"

He said lightly, "It may not be exactly true, but it's probably as near as makes no difference."

"I don't like it."

"Why?"

"It's scary."

"Not as bad as having psi."

"But I don't like it. What will happen to me?"

"Shandy, it's not even a theory—it's a belief. Nobody can prove it one way or the other, so nobody will bother you too much about it, or make the kind of fuss they're making about psi. We know you're good, but we don't know what you're good for yet.

We might send you away for some testing and a little formal education to find out if we can make use of you around here—now you're looking really sick!"

"I'm sorry. I don't want to spoil things for you."

"You were searching so many years before you came here . . . but after you'd been here a while, I had the feeling you'd stopped. Maybe I can guess why. But Shandy, you did have to find out."

"Just for this," she said bitterly.

"You couldn't want anything better. You said so yourself. And it impresses me more than all the psi in the world." He stood up. "Now get dressed and sit out in the sunshine for a few minutes." He paused at the door. "You can see Marsh, too. He's been asking for you."

SHE confronted her face in the mirror. It was pale, and there were dark smudges under her eyes. It looked neither nobler nor wiser. "Hey, Odd Johnson!" she jeered, "Where's your coltish grace?"

Her old clothes were missing from the closet. Someone had shopped for her: a simple sleeveless cotton dress—for Sorrel Park a marvel of taste and elegance. She dressed conscientiously but without spirit and walked out down the hall.

The place seemed quiet and empty. Then she heard voices and her heart leaped. Through an open door she could see Grace and Doydoy sitting in armchairs, talking to each other. She watched them for a moment with no desire to interrupt their private current of love and joy; she was satisfied that they had it.

Marczinek's door was closed. That was a different matter. Jason might express a hope by digging a flower-bed, but nothing so simple would relieve her feelings.

She had opened the strongbox of her emotions and delivered them into the hands of others—Marczinek was one of those others. If he died now when she had only just learned to love, and loved him so . . . She did not even want to see him.

Jason was exercising his muscles with obvious pleasure, and singing as he mixed loam with topsoil.

Sew on that button, baby,
patch up them shoes,
Sew on that button, put a
patch on them old shoes;
Might as well be singin' jailbird blues . . .

He paused to mop his brow. "Go on, ask me why I'm not using psi for this." He spread a piece of sacking on the grass and she sat on it.

"Mesomorphs are active types."

"Tsk. Thought I'd get a rise out of you."

"You will," she said darkly. She added after a moment, "You never did ask me what Margaret Mead would have done."

He leaned on the shovel. "I did not have to. You were doing it all the time."

"Doing what?"

"Observing," he said simply. "Remember? New insight—"

"Don't!"

He shrugged. "All right—but one last question. Why are you trying to pick a fight? I saw it on your face the minute you looked out of the window."

"I'm not. I—I'm just upset about—Marczinek, and—and—" And myself.

"Then go and give Urquhart an earful!"

"I can't. He's getting married and I can't spoil things for him. And you—"

His eyes blazed. "I don't have any day to spoil? I don't have any feelings to hurt? I'm not sensitive, I sing because I'm an animal!"

"I didn't mean that, I—" She began to cry.

"Bawling again! I wish I could read you! No. No, I don't. You'd be just like all the rest, and I thought you were different."

"I am different. I'm too different." She burst into a new freshet. "I thought I'd be with everybody again—after all these years—and—and now I've just been kicked upstairs and pushed out!"

"Pushed out! Jeez, you take my breath away." He squatted on his heels beside her. "Is that all that's bugging you?"

"I don't want Marsh to die."

"Shandy, he's an old man, and he's hurt and tired. He feels he's had a good life, and he doesn't owe it to you to hang on just because you love him. You'll have to learn to depend on yourself all over again—but in a different way. It doesn't mean we're pushing you out. Don't disappoint us. Marsh said you wouldn't turn down a good thing." He produced a handkerchief out of the air, and she used it gratefully. "Urquhart said all this was bothering you and I told him you were too smart to get upset over it."

"You were wrong," she sniffled.

"I'm not wrong now. You better listen to me, because you weren't listening to yourself very well when you were explaining everything to Urquhart so lucidly and sensibly. Now you've gotten all slewed round again. You think being a supernormal means fighting crime from your secret mountain fortress, emerging only to stop a runaway roller-coaster—like somebody in a comic book? Afraid you'll be kept in a glass case on a wad of cotton batting, or," his tone became

gentle, "scared to die an old maid from waiting around to find another supernormal to marry?"

"Yes," she said in a small voice.

"Gee whiz, Sandy, you said yourself what your kind of person is for—to transfuse interesting and valuable new genes into humanity—and in the meantime you can't be sure the strain's transmissable, or even know for certain how to recognize another supernormal! So stop worrying. Look, suppose in seven or eight years some honest and earnest-looking kook came along and said," he placed a hand on his breast and proffered an imaginary bunch of flowers, " 'Shandy, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?'—would you say," he struck an even more ridiculous pose, " 'Nay, sir I cannot, for a higher destiny beckons, and I must follow where it leads'?"

She giggled. "No, I'd only want to know—"

"What his IQ was!"

"That'd be nice to know, but I'd —"

"Ask to see his bankbook!"

"I'd just want to be sure he loved me, you goof!"

HE stopped and looked at her. As though he were a precog reaching there for the future, toward the matured Shandy, she hoped: for wisdom and compassion, sexual attractiveness, perhaps even a modest kind of beauty. He said, "I think he'll manage that without too much trouble," and tweaked her nose. "Now please: wash the tears off your face, say hello to Marsh, and get some more rest, or Grace will give me hell . . . and on the way back, take a look in the library. There's something worth seeing there, and I'm not sure how long it's gonna be around."

She left, and he turned back to his garden and his song:

Sorrell Park fence, barb'wire
go roun' an roun';
Damn ol' fence, barb'wire go
roun' an' roun';
Plane passin' over got a
lonesome soun' . . .

The Dump was a closed and fortified place, but all doors were open where it was administered. She stood in the doorway of the library and confronted Curtis Quimper. He was bandaged around the ribs. One arm jutted at a strange angle because it was encased up to and around the shoulder in heavy plaster, and he had a shirt buttoned loosely about him.

He had helped and been rewarded; someone had kept her promise. The reward was perhaps disproportionate to the act, but then he had never done anything worth rewarding in his life, and the act was immensely

significant. He looked up at her.

He had not been reading, or doing anything except sit and stare. There was no sense of reward on his face. They stared at each other, black hair, sallow skin, pointed faces, blue eyes, from opposite poles of humanity.

"How are you, Curtis?"

His eyes flashed, his mouth twisted as though he were about to flare up, but after a second the impulse died. Perhaps because he was being watched—or perhaps he was even trying to live up to freedom. His one thoughtless good deed would cost him many an indulgence.

But he only shrugged and said, "Lonely."

She shook her head and sighed. "Bro-ther, you aren't the only one!"

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH



Randall Garrett returns to headline the June issue of AMAZING with Tin Lizzie, the story of an old-fashioned, out-moded rocketship and the man who used to fly them. Illustrating the story is another of Alex Schomburg's marvelously accurate and evocative covers.

Also in next month's issue: Sam Moskowitz profiles British science-fictioneer **John Wyndham,** author of the famed Day of the Triffids, The Midwich Cuckoos, and other novels. There will be, in addition, several short stories and our usual features.

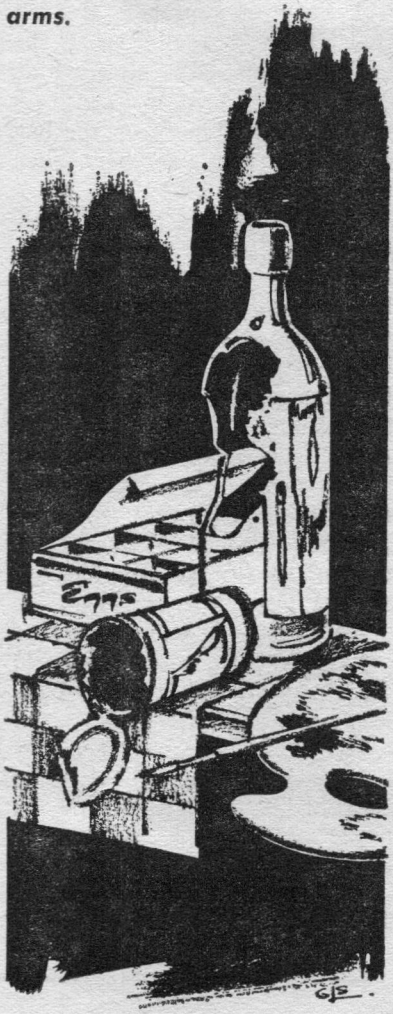
Be sure to get June AMAZING, on sale at your newsstand May 7.

There is something deeply terrifying about it—about sitting in a large, airy room full of reality and realizing suddenly there is something wrong with the corners of it—the room and the reality. And that is what happened to Eileen, sitting in the armchair and clutching at the stuffed arms.

THE ARTIST

By ROSEL GEORGE BROWN

Illustrated by SCHELLING



EILEEN tried to concentrate on the corners of the room, because the terror she felt was so sudden and so deep and she needed to find out why she *knew* something was wrong with the corners of the room.

Not thought. Knew.

Reality doesn't want to face me, she thought. It's ashamed of itself, because of Tom.

Tom would be along in a minute. The key would turn in the lock and a block of brick colored flesh would become imminent in the lighted doorway, and Eileen's vacation would be over.

"I've got a new kind," he'd say. Not say, like other people. (What were other people really like? Like in novels? Like in

movies?) More he'd drop the words in rough chunks.

And Eileen, who had obviously once been beautiful, would get up in a lithness of green velvet dress and take the brown bag. And there would be on his brick face a look of utter reproach. He felt that if she'd really tried she could have stayed lovely for him.

And the brown grocery bag. There was a time when the bag was full of magic for her. When she couldn't wait.

But the corners of the room. Coming through them was a stream of . . . no, sounding in them were . . . but there was no sound, no stream. Only a sentience of something that was utterly incongruous with the rest of the universe. Something for which Eileen did not exist.

The lines of the meeting walls and the ceiling were . . . suggested . . . parallel lines that met and energy that could be created or destroyed.

But mostly it was the horror of something for which the world did not exist, and it recoiled Eileen upon herself.

It's what ghosts are, when they say they've seen ghosts, she thought. And it's here in my house and how shall I live with it. And Tom.

And how can I live otherwise because . . .

Just then the key turned in the lock.

EILEEN tried to get up, but all she could do was adjust the bodice of her dress over her wrinkled breasts and sit holding the rich velvet of the skirt between each set of five fingers.

Tom, massive, filled the doorway, the street light a looming gleam behind him.

He came in and let the door slam.

"Nothing," he said. "I didn't find nothing."

"Nothing! Eileen echoed, and then saw his face. It was the first time there had been nothing, and it had done things to his eyes. "You're getting old," she said exultantly, saying it before she had time to stop herself.

Tom thudded into the straight chair. "Don't see that follows," he said. "So there wasn't nothing this time. So there's next time."

"There's the party tomorrow night."

"So drag out some old ones."

"Everyone will know," Eileen pointed out. "But of course we *do* have some lovely things."

"Eileen!" Tom barked, sitting up suddenly, squarely alert. "You got something. *You* found something. Wait! Wait right there and I'll get my . . ."

"No!" Eileen interrupted. Why hadn't she known, thought, of that? "Oh, no. Everything else I've done for you. Everything. Even that corpse. You remember the corpse? But not this." And

she ran from the room, but he was inevitable, primordial. He was the solid brick building from which she could not escape, not even see out of.

* * *

"Why on earth don't you leave him?" asked Marcia, at the party. She was shaking and the drink spilled in little sloshes, making dark dots down her taffeta dress. "I've seen funny things here, and outrageous things and beautiful things, but God nor man has seen what's in there."

"Leave him," Eileen said, picking those words out of it. "Leave him. Of course I've thought of it. Once I did. But you see after thirty years, how could I? In thirty years I've become part of him and part of the house and part of his work and don't you see I'd be like a baby naked in the snow? I'm not what I might have been, I am what I am. And if you removed all the parts of me that are Tom and the work and the house—don't you see, there's nothing left?"

"Oh, Lord," Marcia said. She drained the drink and part of it trickled across her powdered throat, leaving a snail trail.

"I haven't seen it yet," said Gerald Smith-Haven, piping himself in with his own voice. "But I *know* it's exciting. It always is and I don't know how many times I've had to do my sitting room over because I was ravished by your colors. *Ravished,* darling." He held his drink as though it had very small bones.

"Ravished," Eileen said. "Perhaps, General, you should know that I'm not showing it any more this evening because several people . . . I've locked the door."

"But my dear . . . Oh, really, you can't *do* that. What is it? Too beautiful? Too exciting? Too shocking? But you know it's decades since anyone has been shocked. Not since Hitler. And if you have something *really* shocking, why you owe it to the world."

"It's scary," Eileen said. "It scares people."

Gerald stood behind his large glasses, utterly nonplussed. *"Scares!"* And then he began to laugh. "O, how delightful. How original. I see. You don't show it at all. You talk about it, hint darkly, and *that's* the exhibit."

"That is not it," Eileen insisted. She hated his piano key teeth and the way they made mechanical laughter. "You're only a little boy and you don't understand."

"*I* don't understand," said Avery Dart, "how you do it at all. What the process is. I mean, I've got a good-looking and understanding wife, but we've never produced anything like *that.*" And he waved an arm at a shadow picture over the buffet. "Even

a simple little thing like that."

Eileen ran her hand over her face, feeling the youth gone from it, touching her hair and wondering in what subtle ways her texture had changed. "I've tried to explain so many times," she said, because Tom liked her to explain. "It started when I was modeling for him in London." So long ago.

EILEEN lit a cigarette, needing the sheer frivolity of smoking. "There was nothing special about Tom then." She always said that, but it wasn't true, so she decided tonight to be more true.

"Yes, yes, there *was* something special about him. He was the only artist in the block that wasn't an artist. I mean he didn't know *anything* about art. He'd been a cook with the army there and after the war he stayed on and got a job as a coal man. Delivering coal. Before the war he was a garbage man in Davenport, Iowa."

"Interesting," said Avery Dart. He was a good kind of young man. He didn't show his teeth or try to look as though he knew things he didn't know. "I've never heard that before. I thought . . ."

"That he talks that way to be picturesque. No. He talks that way because he's stupid."

Avery looked uncomfortable. He didn't like to be confided in. He didn't like the responsibility. "Everybody's stupid in some areas," he said. "I can't spell."

"Yes, but very few people are stupid in *all* areas."

"Why, Tom's a genius. Everybody admits that."

"That's different. That's nothing to do with being stupid. Some stupid people have big muscles. It's the same thing."

Avery, who didn't drink, moved his glass as though he'd been sipping it. "I don't see anything there," he said.

"Where?"

"You keep looking up in the corners of the room and I thought there'd be a spider web."

Eileen's hand flew to her throat, where all her unspoken words were. "Oh, nothing," she said. She had reached the point where she was no longer conscious of what was up there, or how afraid she was. It was just *there*.

Tom laughed, his thick, gutty laugh. "Eileen's going a little funny," he said. He felt this vaguely British expression made him sound cultured.

Eileen laughed back at him. "It's Tom that's upset," she said. "His field trip was a failure this time. Ask him what he got."

Marcia swept by, her coat flapping a breeze as she slewed it over her shoulders. "I'm leaving," she said. "I didn't have a good time."

"What *was* the subject this time?" Smith-Haven asked. "If Eileen won't let us see your interpretation, at least we can see the subjects. I love them, myself."

"So I wasted a few days, there wasn't nothing this time."

"Then it's as I thought. There's nothing in that room."

"Oh, there's something in there," Tom said. "It's all Eileen's. Ask her where the original's at. Where's it at, Baby?"

"You see," Eileen said to Avery, who by this time had unobtrusively put his full drink behind a row of glasses and lit a cigar which he did not smoke, "You see how stupid he is? He doesn't even understand at all. He just reacts. That's the process. That's the whole secret and always has been."

"You've got a new theory!" said Gerald Smith-Haven excitedly, and pulled out a mauve notebook and a little gold pencil. He did a column for *Tomorrow's Art* and while he never did quite get the art he had a real bent for the theories.

"I'm just telling Avery how it *really* works. He wanted to know because he'd like to do it. He's only sold one water color in all his life," said Eileen.

"Money ain't everything," Tom said generously. "Anyway you got a good job. I never had a good job, only art."

GERALD and Avery and a group of coagulated guests laughed appreciatively. Tom's humor was famous.

Tom, as usual, shuffled his feet and blushed an even darker red.

"Back in London," Eileen went on, feeling a spread of memories in her like the spread of the bourbon she'd been drinking, "I modeled for Tom as a joke. I thought he was hysterically funny, like lots of people do. Not interesting, not good in any way, only funny. Then he did the picture of me. The one in the Gallery, of course. And I looked at it and from then on . . . well, it was obvious Tom had gotten something of me and I'd never get it back, so I married him."

Gerald Smith-Haven was loving this. He was scribbling avidly in his notebook and glittering all over with his own interpretations.

The group was quiet, letting the assembled tobacco smoke drift through them.

"But he's not just done the one at the Gallery," Avery said, having, at this point, to know more. "What about all the other things?"

"Yes, the other things," Eileen said. "I think Tom's hobby started when he was a garbage man. Not a talent, really. A hobby. Collecting things. Beautiful things. Beautiful isn't the right word."

"Meaningful," Gerald said. "Stressful."

"Whatever," said Eileen. "The fluted edge of a tin can that had been difficult to open. Bluegreen mold on a doughy biscuit. Ephemera like a tomato top on the edge of disintegration. He didn't do anything with them. He just like them."

Tom, who had been sure he was being insulted but not sure just how, burst briefly through his gathering annoyance. "I *did* do things with them. I made them into things."

"Yes, but the tomatoes rotted and you couldn't make the tin pieces stay in place and things lost color and form and went away. And you tried to make photographs and it was a total failure and then you tried to paint them and you couldn't. And do you know why?"

"Sure I know why," Tom said. "I needed practice."

"Practice!" Eileen snorted. She had been hating him more and more and she wanted terribly to throw her drink at him. Her hand trembled a little with it and she went on talking, talking, because there was a gathering buzz in her ears and she didn't know if it was inside her head or coming from the increased volumn of the alien spaces in the corners of the room. "The reason you couldn't make a work of art was that you didn't know what the subjects meant. The things you collected. I'll bet Gerald knows people liked that. They don't know anything about art, but they know what they like."

"Yes, yes," Gerald said, glittering rapidly. "I see it exactly."

"Like hell you do," Tom shouted. "Eileen don't know nothing about art either. All she knew how to do when I picked her up was stand around naked in front of artists. Now ain't that right, Baby?"

I DIDN'T say I knew anything," Eileen said. "I was just getting to that part. You remember how it went after you did my picture. And it was fun. For years—you'd go out and get things and bring them home and make something for me to enjoy and I'd enjoy it and you'd paint my understanding of it. You'd paint what I understood and thought and felt and knew."

"But how did he *know* what you knew?" Avery asked. "How did he know what to paint or what to stick together or hang from a peg or all those ways he does it?"

"What he always creates," said Eileen, "is the expression on my face. He goes out and gets pretties and puts them together and then he paints me appreciating them. He doesn't look at the objects, he looks at me looking at the objects."

"Mental telepathy," Gerald said.

"Hogwash," said Tom. "I just like her around when I do my art. You'd think she'd appreciate it, her getting old now and all."

Eileen tossed her drink at him, enjoying the way it dripped down his ears and into his tux.

"It was fun for a long time, for years. I'd be all excited when he came home with a grocery bag full of beauty and he'd arrange things and rearrange them and I'd feel the color and pattern of them and he'd paint or carve or paste together what I felt and it was like riding forth to a glorious battle or getting raucously drunk or skiing in the Alps or being helplessly in love."

Tom had his dinner jacket off and was using it to dry his face and neck with. "She's nuts," he said. "I said she was going a little funny and now she's gone." He threw his balled up jacket into her face and strode towards the whiskey.

Avery Dart and most of the party, enjoying the domestic quarrel but not wanting to be obvious about it, drifted away. But Gerald Smith-Haven remained, recording all this for posterity.

"What lovely temperament," he remarked, and wrote it down. Then he leaned confidentially to Eileen's ear, taking the damp jacket from her and folding it neatly as he talked. "Tell me truly, truly dear—what *was* the subject for that art work in that locked room?"

Eileen pointed up to the corner of the room. It seemed to her as she watched that it was filling more rapidly, sounding with more encompassing volumn.

Gerald looked, blinked, looked again and wrote something grimly in his little mauve notebook.

"Maybe," she said, "Maybe I *am* crazy. It wouldn't be surprising. But then if I am—what was it Tom painted? He doesn't paint what I imagine. He only paints what I see. Do you understand? Even if I were crazy, he could still only paint what I see, not what I think I see. But perhaps you don't believe that."

"*Maybe* you're crazy," Tom said, coming up with an undiluted drink. "Ha, ha! What *you* see up there, Gerald Smith-Haven, or whatever your name is?"

"I don't see anything," Gerald said. "But then I haven't Eileen's years of experience at seeing things—really seeing them. And Gerald Smith-Haven is the correct way to address me."

"Yeah? Maybe I ain't going to address you at all, you jerk. I just want witnesses that there ain't nothing up there and Eileen sees something. Don't you, Baby?"

"*You* know what I see because you painted it," Wileen replied.

"I paint art," Tom said, shrug-

ging his head into his shoulders uncomfortably. "An artist paints art, ain't that right, Whatever your name is?"

"Gerald Smith-Haven. You know, I'd really be grateful if you'd let me see the picture. After all, I'm a thoroughly trained art interpreter, and maybe I could throw some light on the whole discussion."

EILEEN giggled, her neck jerking a little with hysteria. "Isn't that cute—discussion? Look, I've just had an awfully good idea. Especially at a party. A party stunt. We'll all talk about it for weeks afterwards and Gerald can put it in your biography, Tom."

"He ain't putting nothing in my nothing," Tom grated belligerantly, and reached out his hand for a refill on the bourbon. "Why don't you go off to bed, Baby?"

"No, no. This is important. What you do Tom is go get the step ladder. And you climb up it over there in the corner of the room and you *look*. If you look close, I think you can see what I see there. My eyesight is better than yours."

"Hogwash," said Tom. "Swill."

"All right. If you're afraid. Just don't blame me."

"Afraid? Of what?"

"That it's *you* that's nuts, that's what," Eileen said, wrinkling her wrinkled face at him and knowing how he hated that expression on it. "That something's there and you'd like to see it but you can't because you're crazy."

"Nobody else can see it. Whatever his name is here can't see it."

"Yes, but he's not an artist. He can't see the angle of a stick in dried mud, either, or the curl of a dying caterpiller. And this field trip, you couldn't, either. You came back with nothing." Eileen held herself taut and forced her eyes up, wondering whether the fear would be too much. "*Look* at it," she said. "Just look."

And Tom knew she was seeing something, then and there.

"Oh, all *right*," he said. "You want to make a fool of me, make a fool. Everybody knows I'm no fool, the kind of money I make."

And he came back, lightly carrying the heavy step ladder in one hand, and set it up.

"See, everybody," he boomed. "I am now going to be the life of the party. Tom the Bomb is going to climb the dangerous step ladder and examine that corner of this here room and if I find anything I'll toss it down to the bridesmaid. You there, Gerald Smith-Haven or whatever your name is, you be the bridesmaid."

First, he poured one more drink, drank half of it, and threw the rest in Eileen's face. "You started it," he said.

Eileen let it drip. It curled around her nose and into her mouth.

Tom climbed heavily up the ladder, and it creaked with his weight and his slow progress.

"Maybe," said Avery, "This is not a good idea. Perhaps we should all go home."

"But it's a wonderful idea," Eileen insisted. "Go home if you want to."

"No, I only meant . . . perhaps it isn't safe for Tom to be up on a . . . Tom!"

Somebody screamed.

TOM'S empty clothes floated to the floor. Last of all his watch hit the floor with a thud.

"You were right," Eileen said to Avery. "It wasn't safe."

"He's gone," Gerald said, his voice like a canary's shriek. "Just gone." Gerald's gold pencil rolled across the floor and stopped softly by Tom's watch. "There *is* something there."

"There was," Eileen said. "Tom scared it away. He was too alien. And there he is, stuck up in the corner of *its* room, scaring the hell out of any Its that can see him."

"Gone," Gerald said. He picked up his notebook and fumbled for the pencil he hadn't noticed dropping. "Yes, but the picture. Where's the key? We can see the picture."

Somebody was at the telephone, talking to the police.



Avery stared at the ceiling. "It must be a trick."

"No."

Eileen said, "go see the picture, and see if you're ever the same again. I'm going to burn it."

People crowded into the display room after Gerald, and came out and got their coats and left, mostly not saying goodbye. What could one say? Provided one could talk at all.

Then only Gerald and Avery were left, and Gerald said, "I think you'd better burn it. You were right. It's . . . ghastly. I mean, seeing how Tom painted himself into it."

"Himself!" Eileen cried. "He did not."

"Well, why don't you come look?"

"No," Avery said. "I think she'd better not."

"Oh, but I *shall* come look."

Eileen steeled herself to look at the picture. It was as frightening as the original, and she'd all but died of fear while Tom painted it.

It wasn't really a painting. It was a three . . . four-dimensional construction. From the five sides of it projected five sticks, that met in a point, and seemed at first to cover the flat canvas behind them completely. But as you looked, and walked around it, the flow of lines and masses of convex and concave gobs of clay and the spaces beyond, all projected itself out to you from beyond the interstices of the pyrimidal sticks. And it was balanced out from the wall so that it moved—ever so slightly—whenever someone walked or the wind blew or a heavy truck went by outside.

"It's just as bad as it ever was," Eileen said. "If Tom had had even a shred of sensitivity he wouldn't have . . . wait! You're right, Gerald." She walked around the picture, watching the shifting pattern as she moved, peering between the interstices. "He *is* there now. He moves!"

Avery came up behind Eileen and caught her shoulders. "Steady, now," he said. "The picture moves. That's what you see." But Avery's hands shook on Eileen's shoulders. He could see it too.

Eileen could hear the police.

She turned suddenly to Gerald and Avery. "That's all there'll ever be of Tom. The question is, should I burn it after all?"

They all watched the shifting pattern of the picture.

"He's furious, isn't he? Absolutely livid with fury. Rather a nice color."

Eileen bent one eyebrow. Thought and rethought.

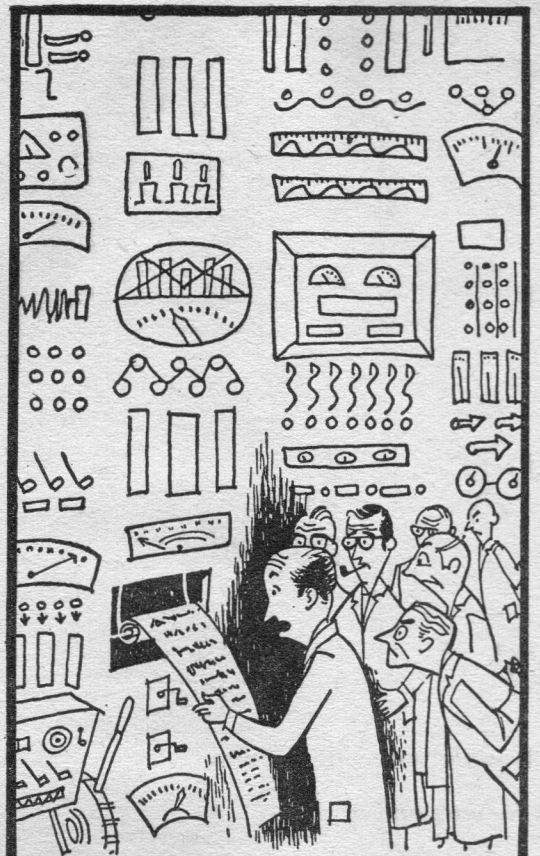
"I believe I shall burn it. And just have done with it."

THE END

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According to his Abilities

By HARRY HARRISON

Illustrated by FINLAY

Briggs had no trouble with the natives.

It was as if he was one of them.

JUST look at that gun barrel—big enough to poke your finger into," Aram Briggs said, and did just that. With an unconsciously lascivious motion he pushed the end of his grimy middle finger into the muzzle of the bulky hand gun and rotated it slowly. "Throws a slug big enough to stop any animal dead, hydrostatic shock, or if you use explosive slugs it can blow down a tree, a wall."

"I should think the recoil would break one's wrist the first time it was fired," Dr. DeWitt remarked with unconcealed animosity, peering nearsightedly at a snake preparing to strike.

"Where have you been living,



DeWitt—under a rock? Break nothing, the recoil on a gun this size would probably tear your whole hand right off if it wasn't damped. This is a 25 mm. recoilless. Instead of kicking back, the energy is what we call dissipated by going out slots . . ."

"Please spare me the inaccurate description of the principle of recoilless firearms; I know all I care to know on the subject. I would suggest you strap in before we start the braking descent."

"What's the matter doc, you getting nervous. That's not like you to snap like that." Briggs' grin was more sadistic than sincere and DeWitt fought against

the automatic feeling of distaste it produced in him.

"Sorry. Nerves I guess." That grin again. "But I cannot say I am used to this kind of mission nor pretend that landing on a planet full of hostiles is in any way attractive."

"That's why I'm here, DeWitt, and you should be damned happy I am. You science boys get yourself into trouble so you have to call on somebody who isn't afraid of guns to come along and pull you out." A buzzer sounded and a red light began an irritated blinking on the control board. "You let Zarevski get himself all hung up and you can't get him out by yourselves . . ."

"They're going to drop this ship in sixty seconds, that was the warning to strap in." DeWitt had of course seated himself as soon as they had left the parent ship for the small space-to-planet rocket, and carefully secured his straps. Now he glanced nervously from the large drifting shape of Briggs back to the flashing light. Briggs moved slowly, ignoring the warning, and DeWitt clenched his fists.

"Has the landing course been set?" Briggs asked as he slowly settled the handgun into his holster and even more slowly pulled himself down into the chair. He was still tightening his belt when the rockets fired. The first decelerating blast kicked the air from their chests and stopped any conversation until they cut off again.

AUTOMATICALLY programmed," DeWitt gasped, painfully inhaling and waiting tremulously for the next blast. "The computor will put us into the area over the village where they are holding Zarevski, but we will have to land the ship. I thought we would set down on a level spot near the river, you remember it from the maps, it's not too far from the village."

"Crap. We land right in the middle of the town, they got that great damned square or football field there, whatever it is."

"You can't do that!" DeWitt gasped, scarcely noticing a course-correction blast that pushed him into the resilient chair. "The natives will be there, you'll kill them."

"I doubt it. We'll come straight down with the hooter going, flashing the landing lights and hover a bit before the final drop, there won't be one of those creeps left within a kilometer when we finally touch down. Any stupid enough to stay will get cooked, and good riddance."

"No—it's too dangerous."

"Landing by the river is even worse. You want these things to think we're afraid of them or something? Land that far away and you'll never see Zarevski again. We land in the town!"

"You are not in control yet, Briggs. Not until we land. But perhaps you are right about the river . . ."

"You know damn well I am!"

DeWitt went on, ignoring the interruption. "I can think of other reasons why it won't do to be too far away. Yet your landing inside the city is just as bad. We can't guarantee that some of them won't be caught in the landing blast, and that must be avoided at all costs. I think, if you look there on your map, grid 17-L, you'll see an area that will make a good compromise. It borders on the village and seems to contain a crop of some kind. And none of the photographs show any natives in the field."

"All right, good enough. If we can't cook them we'll cook their corn on the cob." His laugh was so short and throaty it sounded like a belch of disgust. "Either way we'll throw a fright into them and let them know just what the hell we think and just why the hell they can't get away with this."

DeWitt nodded reluctantly. "Yes, of course. You probably know best." Briggs did know best, that was why he would run the operation on the ground, and he, Dr. Price DeWitt, with the myopic eyes and slightly rounded shoulders of a man who was more at home in a laboratory than an alien jungle, would be the second in command. It was not an easy thing to take orders from a man like Briggs, but it had been the decision of the Board and he had concurred.

Sending two men was a calculated risk, with the odds carefully determined by computer to be well weighted in favor of success. The only other alternative was a small scale invasion by the military with no guarantee that their objective would be obtained. There would be few, or no, losses among the ranks of the invaders, but a number of natives would be killed and Zarevski would probably be assasinated before they could reach him. If this wasn't argument enough, Spatial Survey was morally and constitutionally opposed to violence against alien races. They would risk the lives of two men, two armed men who would only fight in self defense, and that was all. Aram Briggs and Price DeWitt had been the two men chosen.

"What's it really like down there?" Briggs asked suddenly, and for the first time the rasp of automatic authority was missing from his voice.

"Cold, a kind of particularly damp and nasty autumn that goes on forever." DeWitt worked hard not to show any of his natural feelings of pleasure at the light deflation of his companion's arrogance. "This planet is a cold one and the natives stay near the

equator. I suppose they find it comfortable, but on the first expedition we never seemed to be able to get warm."

"You speak their language?"

"Of course, that's why I'm coming, I'm sure they briefed you about that. We all learned it, it's simple enough. We had to if we wanted to work with the natives since they absolutely refused to learn a word of ours."

"Why do you keep calling them natives," Briggs asked with a sly smile, looking at DeWitt out of the corners of his eyes. "They have a name don't they? The planet must have a name?"

"It has an identification number, D2-593-4. You know Spatial policy on assigning names."

"But you must have had a nickname for the natives, you must have called them something . . . ?"

"Don't try to be coy, Briggs, it doesn't become you. You know perfectly well that a lot of the men called the natives "creeps," just as you well know I don't use the name myself."

Briggs barked a short laugh. "Sure, doc. Creeps. I promise not to use the word creeps in front of you—even if they are creeps."

HE laughed again but DeWitt didn't respond, sunk in his own thoughts, wondering for the thousandth time if there was any possibility of this rescue plan succeeding. Zarevski had been refused permission to visit this planet, had come in spite of this and had done something to anger the natives and had been captured. In the days that had passed since he had sent his last radio message he might have been killed. In spite of this it had been decided that a rescue attempt would be made. DeWitt felt a natural jealousy at this, that a xenologist could become so important that he could break all the rules and still be valued for his genius. DeWitt's own career of over ten years in the Spatial Survey was unmarked by anything other than a slow rise in position and an annual increase in salary. Pulling the eccentric Zarevski out of this self-made trap would probably be the most important entry in his record—if it could be done. And that was up to Briggs, the specialist, the man with the right abilities. A strident buzzer burst through his thoughts.

"The alarm, we are over the target area. I'll take control of the ship and land it . . ."

"And as soon as we touch down I'm in charge."

"You're in charge." It sounded very much like a sigh the way DeWitt said it and he wondered again if there could be any sense to this plan.

Though De Witt was theoretically flying the ship, he did little

more than point to a spot and tell the computor to land on it. It was the computor that monitored the approach, measuring the multiple forces involved, cancelling them precisely with blasts from the jets. Once the final descent began all DeWitt did was watch the ground below to be sure none of the natives would be caught by the landing. The instant they touched down safely and the roar of the engines died away Briggs was on his feet.

"Let's go, let's go," he ordered in his strident voice. "Grab that box of trade supplies and I'll show you how to get Zarevski away from the creeps."

DeWitt made no comment nor did he show his feelings in any way. He simply put the strap of the heavy box over his shoulder and struggled the weight of it towards the airlock. While the lock was cycling them out he zipped up the front of his heated coverall and turned on the power. When the outer door cracked open a keening wind thrust a handful of brown and strangely shaped leaves into the compartment, bringing with it the pungent, alien smell of the planet. As soon as it had opened wide enough Briggs pushed through and jumped to the ground. He turned slowly in a complete circle, gun ready in his hand, before grunting with satisfaction and shoving it back into the holster.

"You can come down now, DeWitt. None of them in sight."

He made no attempt to help the smaller man, only grinning with barely concealed contempt as DeWitt lowered the box by its strap, then jumped down clumsily after it.

"Now let's go get Zarevski," Briggs said, and stamped away towards the village. DeWitt trailed after.

Because he had twisted sideways to straighten the strap over his shoulder, DeWitt caught sight of the three natives a moment before Briggs did. They appeared suddenly from a stand of yew-like trees and stared at the new arrivals. Briggs, who was constantly turning his head to watch on all sides, saw them a moment later. He wheeled, dropped, drawing his gun at the same time, and when he was lying flat on the ground he pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The natives dropped just then.

DEWITT didn't move, though he had to control a sudden shiver that trembled his body. From his belt hung a small metal box with control studs on its surface; it looked like a radio-intercom, but it wasn't. He had his finger pressed on one of the buttons, and didn't let up until Briggs had stopped pulling the trigger and began to examine the gun with horrified eyes.

"It didn't go off . . . But why?"

"Probably the cold. Contracted the parts," DeWitt said hurriedly glancing from the prone man to the natives who were slowly climbing to their feet. "I'm sure it will be all right the next time you need it. And it was a good thing that you didn't shoot. They weren't attacking, or trying to get close to us, just looking."

"They better not try any funny business with me," Briggs said, climbing to his feet and holstering his gun, though keeping his hand on the butt. "They're ugly ones, aren't they?"

By any human standards the aborigines of planet D2-593-4 could not have been called attractive. They resembled men only in rough outline of body, head, and paired arms and legs on a thin torso. Their skin appeared to be covered with hairy scales: fishlike brown scales the size of a man's hand whose lower edge shredded into a fringe of furlike substance. Either they were moulting, or the random nature of scale arrangement was natural, because here and there on the bodies of all of them patches of scales were missing and areas of raw looking orange skin shone through. They wore no clothes, only strings supporting containers and crude weapons, and the scales continued irregularly over all parts of their bodies. Their heads were perhaps their most repulsive aspect, covered with slashed and wrinkled orange skin. Both men knew that quivering slashes covered olfactory and auditory organs, yet the resemblance to mortal knife wounds was still disconcerting. The tiny eyes peered malevolently from another transverse slit situated near the top of the skull. DeWitt had spent more than a terran year on this planet and still found the sight of them repellent.

"Tell them not to *come* any closer," Briggs ordered. He seemed unpreturbed by their appearance.

"Stop where you are," DeWitt said in their language.

They stopped instantly and the one on the right, with the most weapons, hissed through a mouth slit. *"You speak our language."*

DeWitt started to answer, then restrained himself. It was a statement, not a question, and he was under strict orders to volunteer nothing. He was to act as much like a translating machine as possible since this was Briggs' show. Before he could translate the opening remark, the native went on.

"How is it that you speak our language? Does this other one talk too?"

"What is it jabbering about?" Briggs demanded, and snorted in anger when DeWitt had translated. "Just tell him that your job is translating and I got no

time to waste on that kind of stuff, and tell them we want Zarevski."

This was a test of theory, and DeWitt took a deep breath before he answered. He put an effort into attempting to translate as exactly as possible and was surprised when they took no umbrage at the insulting tone of the words, in fact even bobbed their heads from side to side slightly in the local gesture of agreement.

"Where did you learn our language?" The leader asked DeWitt, who translated the question for Briggs before he answered.

"On this planet. I was here with the first expedition."

Briggs was laughing. "I bet they didn't recognize you, probably think all humans look alike—bet they even think *we* are ugly!" The smile vanished as quickly as it had arrived. "Stop the horsing around. We came for Zarevski and that's all we care about. Tell them that."

DeWitt did, having difficulty only with "horsing around" though he managed to get the meaning across.

"Come with me," the leader said, turning and walking towards the village. His companions went with him, but Briggs put a restraining hand on DeWitt's shoulder.

"Let them get a bit ahead, I want to keep my eyes open for any tricks. And we don't want to do just what he says or he'll think he can push us around. All right, we can go now."

AT a respectable distance, as though they just happened to be strolling in the same direction by coincidence, the two parties straggled into the village. None of the inhabitants were in sight, though smoke rose from holes at the peak of most of the angled wattle and daub houses. The sensation of unseen eyes watching from their deep interiors was intense.

"In there," the alien called back over his shoulder, at the same time jerking his many-gingered hand at a building no different than all the others.

The aliens kept walking on, without looking back, and Briggs stopped, quizzically watching them go. Only when they were out of sight did he turn and suspiciously examine the indicated building. It was perhaps five meters tall at the ridgepole and slanted straight to the ground on both sides. Narrow slits of windows let a certain amount of light into it, and the flat front was pierced by a doorway the size and shape of an open coffin. It must have looked that way to DeWitt too, because his nose almost twitched with intensity as he examined the black opening.

"No way out of it," Briggs

finally said. "We have to go in and that door is the only way. You go first and I'll keep my eyes open."

THE difference between the two men was proven then in the most obvious manner possible. DeWitt had some natural qualms about going through the door, but he forced them down, mumbled his memory through the various forms of greeting, and bent over to step inside. He had just thrust his head in through the doorway when Briggs grabbed him by the shoulder and threw him backwards onto the ground. He landed painfully on the end of his spine, the heavy box crashed into his leg, and looked up in amazement at the thick spear sticking in the ground and still vibrating with the force of impact. It had penetrated deep into the earth in the exact spot where he had been.

"Well, that shows one thing," Briggs exulted, pulling the dazed DeWitt to his feet. "We've found the right place. This job is going to be a lot shorter and easier than I thought." With one heavy boot he kicked the spear out of his way, bent under the door and stalked into the building. DeWitt stumbled after him.

Blinking in the smoke-laden air they could dimly see a group of natives at the far end of the room. Without looking around Briggs stalked towards them. DeWitt followed, stopping just long enough to examine the mechanism fixed over the door. Enough light penetrated from the slit windows so that he could just make it out: a frame fixed to the wall that held a heavy wooden bow two meters long. A rope, running towards the group at the other end of the building, had released the simple trigger mechanism. No part of the trap was visible outside the door—yet Briggs had known about it.

"Get over here DeWitt," the voice bellowed. "I can't talk to these creeps without you! Come on!"

DeWitt hurried as fast as he could and dropped his heavy box in front of the five natives. Four of them stood in the background, hands on weapons, eyes that reflected the ruddy firelight gleamed malevolently from thinned slits. The fifth alien sat in front of them, on a box or platform of thick woven wood. A number of pendant weapons, bangles and oddly shaped containers, the local mark of high rank, were suspended from his body and limbs, and in both hands he balanced a long-bladed weapon resembling a short sword with a thin blade.

"Who are you?" the alien asked, and DeWitt translated.

"Tell him we want to know his name first," Briggs said, clearing his throat noisily and spit-

ting on the packed dirt floor.

After a short wait, during which his eyes never left Briggs, the seated alien said, *"B'deska."*

"My name is Briggs and I'm here to get a man like me who is called Zarevski. And don't pull any more tricks like that thing at the door because you're allowed just one free shot with me and you've had it. Next time I kill somebody."

"You will eat with us."

"What the hell is he trying to pull, DeWitt? We can't eat the local grub."

"You can if you want to, some of the xenologists did though I never had the nerve. There is nothing in it to cause anything worse than a bad heartburn, though I'm told the taste is loathsome beyond imagining. It is also an important social custom, no business is ever transacted except over a meal."

"Bring on the chow," Briggs said resignedly. "I only hope this Zarevski is worth it."

ONE of the other aliens put down his weapons at a hissed word and went to a darkened corner of the building, bringing back a guard with a wooden stopper and two cups of crudely fired clay. He placed the gourd on the ground and one of the cups before the visitor and the other in front of the seated chieftan. Briggs squatted on his haunches, and reaching out he took up both cups and raised them at arms' length.

"Great cups," he said. "Great workmanship. Tell him that. Tell him that these ugly pieces of mud are fine art and that I admire his taste."

DeWitt translated this, and while he did Briggs put the cups down again. Even DeWitt noticed that he had changed cups, so that each of them had the other's. B'deska said nothing, but pulled the plug from the gourd and first filled his cup with dark liquid, then Briggs'.

"Oh God, that's horrible," Briggs said, taking a small sip and shuddering. "I hope the food is better."

"It will be worse, but you only have to take a token mouthful or two."

The same native who had brought the drink, now appeared with a large bowl brimming with a crumbled grey mixture whose very smell provoked nausea. B'deska tipped a handful of it into a suddenly gaping mouth slit, then pushed the bowl over to Briggs who scooped up as small a portion as was possible. DeWitt could see a tremor shake his back as he licked it from his fingers. No amount of coaxing by the alien could force him to take a second sample. B'deska waved the bowl away and two smaller bowls of food were

brought. Briggs looked down at his on the floor before him and slowly rose to his feet.

"I warned you, B'deska," he said.

Before DeWitt had finished translating this Briggs stamped on the bowl, crushing it, then ground the contents into the floor with his heel. The alien who had served the food was running towards the door and in sudden realization DeWitt grabbed for the control unit on his belt, but this time he was too slow. Before he could touch the radio control that would prevent Briggs' gun from firing the gun went off with a booming roar and the alien fell, a gaping hole in his back.

Briggs reholstered the gun calmly and turned back to B'deska who had raised his sword so that the point rested on the box next to him, but who otherwise had not moved.

"Now that that's out of the way, tell him I'm willing to talk business. Tell him I want Zarevski."

"Why do you want the man Zarevski," B'deska asked, his manner as unmoved as Briggs'. The dead alien lay crumpled, bleeding slowly into the dirt, and they both ignored him.

"I want him because he is my slave and he is very expensive and he ran away. I want him back and I want to beat him."

"I can't say that," DeWitt protested. "If they thought Zarevski was a slave they might kill him . . ."

HIS words were broken off as Briggs reached out and lashed him across the back of the face with his hand. It staggered him, bringing tears of pain to his eyes.

"Do what I tell you, you idiot," Briggs shouted. "You were the one who told me they kept slaves, and if they think Zarevski is a slave that will give them a chance to get a good price for releasing him. Don't you know that they think you are a slave too?"

DeWitt had not realized it until that moment. He translated carefully. B'deska appeared to be thinking about this, though his eyes were on the box of trade goods all the time.

"How much will you pay for him. He committed a bad crime and this will cost a lot."

"I'll pay a good price. Then I will take him and beat him, then bring him home and make him watch while I kill his son. Or maybe I will make him kill his son himself."

B'deska bobbed his head in agreement when this was translated, and after that it was just a matter of bargaining. When the agreed number of brass rods and paste gems had been taken

from the box B'deska climbed to his feet and left the room. The other aliens picked up the ransom payment and left after him. DeWitt gaped after them.

"But—where is Zarevski?"

"In the box of course—where else did you think he would be? If he was valuable enough for us to come and get him B'deska wasn't going to allow him out of sight, or someone else would have made a deal with us. Didn't you see the way he had that pigsticker ready to stab down into the box. One wrong move of ours and he would have put paid to Zarevski."

"But wasn't your killing one of his men a wrong move?" DeWitt asked, tearing at the strings that sealed the box.

"Of course not. There was poison in that bowl, that was obvious. So I killed the slave just like I told him I would."

The top came off and inside, gagged and trussed like a pig, was Zarevski. They cut away his bindings and rubbed the circulation back into his legs so that he could walk. DeWitt supported him with one arm and Briggs waved them towards the door.

"Go on first and I'll come behind with the box. I don't think there will be any trouble, but if there is any you know that I can take care of you—slaves!" He laughed uproariously, all by himself.

They stumbled slowly through the empty streets and Zarevski smiled back over his shoulder. A number of his teeth were missing and there were clotted cuts on his face, but he was alive.

"Thanks, Briggs. I heard the whole thing and couldn't say a word. You handled it perfectly. I made the mistake of trying to be friendly with these damn snakes, and you saw what happened to me. Someone I had talked to died, and they said I had killed him with the evil eye, then grabbed. I wish you had been with me."

"That's okay, Zarevski, people make mistakes." His tone of voice left no doubt that he was one who never did. "Only you better not talk anymore until we're away from here. They saw you talking to me so you know what I have to do."

"Yes, of course." Zarevski turned back, closing his eyes, wincing even before the blow landed. Briggs raised his foot and kicked him in the back, knocking him sprawling. He made no attempt to help when DeWitt once more dragged him to his feet.

ONCE they were near the ship Briggs walked up close to them.

"Not much more, then we'll all be out of this."

"Are you in Spatial Survey?"

Zarevski asked. "I can't say I remember your name."

"No, this is just a temporary job."

"You should make it permanent! The way you handled those natives—we can use men like you. Wouldn't you want to do that?"

"Yes," Briggs said, he was sweating in spite of the cold. "It's not a bad idea. I could help you people."

"I know you could. And there is plenty of room for advancement."

"Shut up, Zarevski! That's an order," DeWitt broke in.

Zarevski dismissed him with a look and turned back to Briggs who was kneading his hands together with excitement.

"I could use an assistant like you on expeditions. I have enough men in the labs for writing up reports, but no one for field work . . ."

"Be quiet, Zarevski!"

". . . no one who really knows his way around like you do."

"And do I!" Briggs shouted and threw his head back, tearing his fingers down his face, scratching the soft flesh. "I can do it. I can do it better than anyone you know, better than anyone in the whole world. You're all against me but I can do it better . . ."

"Briggs!" DeWitt shouted, turning and grabbing the man by both arms. "Listen to me Briggs! Sunset-now! Do you hear me . . . SUNSET-NOW!"

With a tremulous sigh the big man closed his eyes and let his arms drop. DeWitt tried to hold him up but his weight was too great and he slumped to the ground. Zarevski looked on, dumbfounded.

"Come on, help me. You did this to him so you had better help carry him into the ship before B'deska and the rest of the locals see what has happened and come out after our skins."

"I don't understand," Zarevski said, helping to carry the dead weight to the ship, looking worriedly over his shoulder as the outer lock ground open. "What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing now, before we left I planted the posthypnotic command with a key word just in case of trouble. He's asleep, that's all. Now we'll take him back to the hospital and try and put him back together. Everything considered he held up very well, and I would have got him back to the ship if you hadn't started your damn recruiting speech. Glory of Spatial Survey my foot!"

"What are you talking about?" Zarevski snapped.

BEHIND them the heavy door closed with a satisfying sound and DeWitt whirled to face the man they had rescued, anger

finally burning through his control.

"Just who do you think Briggs is—a professional hero out of some historical novel that Spatial went out and hired? He is a sick man, right out of the hospital, and I'm his doctor—which is the only reason I'm here. One of the staff had to go with him, and I was the youngest so I volunteered."

"What do you mean hospital?" Zarevski asked with a last attempt at bluster. "The man's not sick . . ."

"Mentally sick—and on the way to being cured until this happened. I hate to think how long it will set him back. Not as sick as some, he has almost a classic case of *paranoia simplex*, which is why we could use him. His delusions of persecution relate to his actual perception of his surroundings. So he was right at home down there. If you had read all the reports instead of blundering in you would have found out that those aliens have a society where a condition very much resembling paranoia is the norm. They feel that everyone is against them—and they are right. Everyone is. No sane person could have been counted on to have the right reactions in such a society—we needed someone who suffered from the *same sickness*. The only thing I'm even remotely happy about in this whole mess is that it wasn't my decision to send Briggs down there. They decided that upstairs and I did the dirty work. I and Briggs."

Zarevski looked down at the slack face of the man on the floor, breathing hard even though he was unconscious.

"I'm sorry . . . I didn't . . ."

"You couldn't know." Dr. DeWitt was rigid with anger as he felt the fast, erratic pulse of his patient. "But there is one thing you did know. You weren't supposed to land on that planet—but you did anyway."

"That's none of your business."

"Yes it is, just for now. Just for these few minutes before we go back to the ship and before I go back to my ward and they forget about me, with maybe a small commendation on my record, and you go back to being the great Zarevski and they put your name in the headlines. I helped pull you out of there which gives me the right to tell you one thing. You're a grandstander Zarevski and I hate your guts. I . . . oh what the hell . . ."

He turned away and Zarevski opened his mouth to say something, then changed his mind.

It was a short trip back to the waiting mother ship, and they didn't talk to each other because there was really nothing to say.

THE END

Out near the edge of the Solar System, the spacesuit shot an arrow into the non-air. With repur-cussions, as follows.



FOR EVERY ACTION...

By C. C. MacApp

Illustrated by ADKINS

Date: 5 June 1987.
To: Commandant, USSR Hq., Mars. (Personal).
From: Commandant, USSR Pluto expedition.
Code: TS Perishka C.
Subject: Mad American Spaceman.

Wofka: I am taking the precaution of sending this to you personally, because of the obvious possible booby-traps. Perhaps discreet espionage on Mars or Earth will reveal what sort of shell-game the Americans are up to now, before we involve ourselves in some propaganda debacle.

Twelve hours ago radar picked up a small object in space, moving in an orbit that would intercept us fairly closely but at a slightly lower speed. Knowing that an American ship was already near Pluto, and that they surely knew *we* were approaching, I at once placed my ship in a state of maximum defense. However, closer approach revealed the object to be not a mine or torpedo, but a space suit with a number of objects attached to it. Of course the suit or other objects *could* have contained explosives, so I maintained caution.

When we were quite close we picked up a weak radio transmission in English that appeared to be beamed not at us but in the opposite direction. If it was in code we have been unable to break it. Our interpreter, whom possibly we had better investigate again, could tell us only that the voice, a male one, was reciting some sort of nursery rhyme called Mother Goose. The recitation was monotonous and repetitive.

Shortly thereafter telescopic examination revealed the following:

1—space suit, evidently occupied.
2—tanks of approximately 300 litre capacity, fixed to the suit by short rigid rods.
4—bundles, approximately half a meter cubed, lashed to the legs of the suit.
1—cylindrical container, approximately three metres long by zero point seven metres diameter, fixed between the legs of the suit in such a way that the occupant appeared to be riding as you would ride a horse.
1—large bow, with which the occupant of the suit fired or shot arrows in a direction normal to the orbit of Pluto (that is, away from us) at intervals of eight seconds. The arrows came from the long cylinder he was riding.

UPON discovering our approach the occupant of the suit stopped shooting arrows and

said in English, "If you can still hear me, fellows, I've found Ivan." (His knowing my first name is significant!). He repeated the transmission several times, then waited with apparent calm for us to pick him up.

Upon examination of his equipment, we found no explosives. The small bundles contained batteries to keep the suit operating. One of the 300-litre tanks was about half full of gruel; the other about half full of body wastes. The gruel was made accessible to the spaceman by a plastic tube which had been sealed through his helmet at the front, so he could draw upon it merely by putting his mouth on the tube and sucking. The removal of body waste was accomplished by a similar but more permanent arrangement which was surprisingly effective, though an obvious indignity and by his testimony uncomfortable. The suit's maintenance machinery was in good working order, and the air inside was breathable though not as sweet as one might prefer. The long cylindrical tank was about one-third full of arrows, the rest having been expended. The arrows were cut from steel (evidently the hull plates of a ship) by means of a hack saw or some similar implement. The bow was of springy metal and the string of braided fine wire. Both were alloys that held their flexibility in the cold of space.

Quite obviously the shooting of arrows had provided reaction to slow the spaceman's orbit to a speed where we would overtake him. Nevertheless the calculation and execution of such a maneuver would be difficult to the point of unbelievability. The man's story is that he was reciting 'The House That Jack Built' as a sort of mnemonic to maintain the proper rate of fire, and that the arrows averaged out to a chosen weight and the bow delivered consistent reaction when drawn to a certain point. He sticks to this story through all interrogation, and says he was sent to ask us to rescue his comrades, who are (he says) floating in a small portion of their ship in an orbit dangerously close to Pluto. Of course I do not swallow his story. Nevertheless I do not see any harm in cautiously approaching a little closer to investigate. I am confident we can handle any trickery the Americans may have in mind.

The entirety of his statement is so ridiculous that I will not attempt to abstract it, but will attach it in full. I'm sure you will exercise caution equal to mine in sending this to you personally. Old comrades must stick together.

Signed, Ivan Dzbrown,
commanding.

Statement of mad American spaceman:

Hi. No, I don't speak Russian. I know a few words of Basque, though, from my mother's side, if that'll help any. Oh, you speak English! Jeez, you speak it real good. You say you were born in Massachusetts? Nice place. I was there a while when I took my Ph.D.

Well, here's the scoop. I guess you heard about us making up our minds to get to Pluto first. It only cost us four hundred billion bucks, ha, ha! You should have heard old ex-President Johnson yell. Well, anyway, we made it off Mars in real good shape, and we were latching onto Pluto good too, but then we noticed the jets weren't working right, and after a computer check and all we decided somebody better go outside and take a squint. I got picked because I've got the most experience in suits. That's why I'm here, too.

Well, right away when I got aft I could see that there was something stuck around the jets; it looked like cinders at first. When I got closer I saw that it was more like as if some grapes, the black kind, were clustered around the orifices. While I was bent down looking, something came along and gave me a hell of a whang on the butt. Right away I thought Jeez, a meteor; but it didn't penetrate the suit and I was all right. Then I began to see more of them coming and I hauled on my line and got away from the jets because that was where they were all headed. I talked to the skipper and he told me to stay out there and watch if I wasn't in any danger.

They were coming from all directions and collecting around the jets like a swarm of bees. But they were not coming as thick, and pretty soon they stopped coming entirely. Then after a while some of them began to go away. They didn't all go, though, and enough of them were still around the jets to goof up the action. Once in a while a single one or two would break off and go away, and maybe a couple more would drift in and gather on.

I took one of the tools that we have on the suits, I guess probably you people have got the same kind of thing, and hacked away at them but they were on tight. The only ones I could get loose seemed to be the ones that were letting go anyway.

WELL I got hold of one and let it go right away because I could feel it sort of squirm, even through the mitten, but it wasn't actually squirming as I found out when I let it go. It was shaped like maybe two-thirds of a marble, one about five-eighths

of an inch in diameter. I guess maybe you people work in millimetres, and your kids don't get to play marbles, huh? Let's see . . . two hundred and fifty-four times six hundred and twenty-five is . . . carry the two . . . where the hell would I put the decimal place . . . say, like a dull black iron ball-bearing about fifteen point eight seven five millimetres in diameter, with one-third of it sawed off flat. A blue light came off of this flat side and it gave the thing quite a boost of acceleration and that was what I felt. I was worried at first that it was some kind of an ion drive that would burn a hole in my hand or the suit, but it didn't do anything like that. I watched a few more and I saw that they could turn themselves any way they wanted to by giving out a faint glow on one edge of the flat place, then when they wanted to light out and go they just turned it all on. We did some fooling around with them later and found out they could exert about—but there's no sense going into all that now. We've got the figures in the ship, or what's left of it; and hell, the least we can do after you rescue us is let you in on them. Scientific cooperation, ha, ha!

Well I took a chance because I was pretty excited and the next one that drifted in I grabbed it and held it so the blue light was away from my hand. I could feel the push but it wasn't strong enough to get away from me. That may be why they stay out there, where they don't have to deal with fast orbits and stronger gravity close to the sun. They were far enough from Pluto so it wouldn't pull them in.

When I talked to the skipper again he thought sure as hell I'd flipped and got me in right away, but I had the thing to show them. It turned out I was not so damned smart; because I had to go right back out and watch what happened when they gave the jets a little gentle goose. I wished I'd kept my big mouth shut for a little while.

I'LL tell you, when those jets went on I thought I was going to get it. Those things came flying from all directions like hornets. You know how an orifice heats up, even with a short burst, and how fast it cools off afterward in space? Yeah, I guess you would. Well, every time we gave it even a little goose, those things came flying. I found out the way to do was to stay a few yards forward of the jets and stand still, and they'd go around me to get at the jets. As soon as the metal got cold, some of them would go away. But some stayed on. Just lazy, I guess.

Well, we were pretty excited and we tried to radio Mars;

Earth's behind the sun right now you know; but the transmission didn't seem to get through. I suppose you can figure out who had to suit up and go outside finally to see what was wrong with the antenna, after the skipper and the Communications Officer had a hell of a beef. And you know what? Every time we tried to transmit with any power at all those damn sawed-off ball-bearings came gathering around the antenna, just like flies around manure. You people've got that, I'm sure; I read somewhere how you were pretty big in ranching and all. It began to look to me like they could soak up any kind of radiant energy, from radio on down to infra-red; and that's the way it turned out. And we found out they could resist heat, too. We couldn't even faze them until we got them damn near red-hot, and that killed them. The trouble was, even though some of them got themselves incinerated in the jets, by that time they were welded on. The orifices got so clogged we didn't dare fire them any more.

Of course we tried a lot of things like sawing the jets clear, but it wasn't any use. Every time we turned on even a little squirt we got those damned things back again.

Well then naturally we didn't want to go barging in on Pluto out of control, so we used the retros and spinners to slow ourselves down into a stable orbit. I suppose you've got what's left of the ship on your radar by now. We couldn't go anywhere and we couldn't transmit, but we could hear incoming messages all right, and we heard how you people were headed out this way and we figured if we could warn you soon enough, you could stay down here and pick us up if we could get down far enough. There don't seem to be any of those things this far in. The crew can make it down here all right if you've got room for us. I see you've got a good big ship here.

WELL there wasn't any way we could contact you by radio so we talked over how one of us could get down here, and it figured out that we didn't have enough air tanks and so on to jet a man in. That wouldn't have attracted any bugs. We call them bugs, but I suppose some damn scientist will look at one through a magnifying glass and put some silly name on it.

There was plenty of time, we knew you wouldn't be here for a while yet, so we had a chance to think things over and make a few haywire experiments, and that rig you saw me in was what came out of it. I practiced guiding myself around for about three weeks. When I want to go

in a straight line I just shoot arrows the opposite way. You know, for every action there's a . . . And when I went to put on a little spin I just hold one of the arrows out away from me and give it a flip away in the right direction. I'm pretty good at it now. In fact, I figure I can be the world's champion. Maybe in the next Olympic games . . .

You saw all the rest of the stuff.

So that's the scoop, and I don't mind saying I'm damned glad to see you, even if you are a bunch of—even if I don't speak your language. From here you can transmit to what's left of our ship, and the boys'll start coming. They had enough suits rigged for everybody, and by now they ought to have the whole rear end of her sawed up into arrows.

(Statement ends.)

Date: 6 June, 1987.
To: Security Officer, USSR Hq., Mars. (Personal.)
From: Commandant, USSR Hq., Mars.
Code: STS Babushka Y.
Subject: Commandant, USSR Pluto expedition.

Nikolai: Please check subject once again for possible instability or disloyalty. Also find whether he has sent any coded messages to anyone other than me. Also check the security of Code TS Perishka C.

I hope your family is well.

Signed, Vladimir Czmith, commanding.

Date: 10 August, 1987.
To: Ambassador to USA.
From: Kremlin.
Code: None.
Subject: Capitalist propaganda.

Protest vigorously at once ridiculous and insulting story in American newspapers of Soviet spacemen floating in space singing Volga Boat Song and throwing spears.

Signed, J.

THE END

Continued from page 5

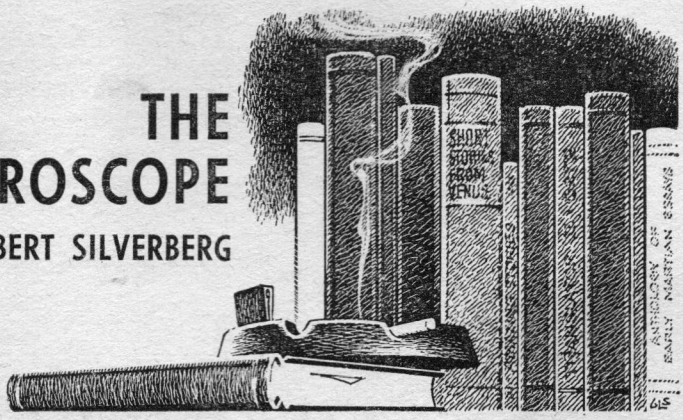
However, for all of Mr. Riley's ingenuity, his pronunciation falters. We recall that very same trip by Breadfruit. On his arrival into 1066, he saw William rub the bottom of his ear, think for a moment, and then issue orders to his officers. Every order resulted in a successful tactic, for William was picking up telepathic impressions from the enemy through the skin of his lower ear.

"However does he do that?" asked one time traveler.

"Obviously," said Breadfruit, "you are seeing a demonstration of the Norman lobe sense."—NL

THE SPECTROSCOPE

By ROBERT SILVERBERG



The Game-Players of Titan, *by Philip K. Dick. Ace Books, 40¢. 191 pages.*

Philip K. Dick is a Californian who erupted into science fiction about a dozen years ago with what seemed like fifty short stories at once. Before long, he had turned to the paper-back novel, producing such memorable Ace items as *Solar Lottery, Eye In The Sky,* and *The World Jones Made.* His outstanding characteristics were a knack for creating convincing future histories and equally convincing characters.

After a few dazzlingly prolific years, Dick vanished from science fiction almost entirely, returning last year with a burst of activity reminiscent of his debut years. Once again there are short stories by Philip K. Dick in every magazine on the newsstand; his 1963 novel, *The Man In The High Castle,* won a "Hugo" award for excellence at the Washington Science Fiction Convention; and now, full circle again, he is producing original paperbacks for Ace Books.

The Game-Players Of Titan doesn't match the high level of his Hugo-winner of last year—or even of some of his Ace titles of six and seven years ago. It starts off in proper Dick fashion, dumping the reader headlong into a complex future world and letting him figure out the background as he goes along. One soon learns that a ray broadcast by the Chinese Communists has made the world sterile and cuts its population to a few million; that, contrariwise, an operation to remove something called the Hynes Gland has conferred eternal youth on the survivors; that non-

humanoid aliens from Titan have invaded the Earth and seem to be in possession of it. It develops that a small aristocracy of Earthmen, who have won their eminence by chance and not by birth, own all the real estate (by intolerance of the Titanians) and swap it back and forth among themselves in a game that seems like a combination of poker and Monopoly.

So far, so good. Dick's first five chapters or so work within A. E. van Vogt's tradition of tossing a new plot gimmick at the reader every few hundred words, a technique Dick has handled to perfection in the past. (Unlike van Vogt, who calmly threw fifty plot elements into the air and, instead of juggling them, let them hang there, Dick believes in resolving his plots.) Where this book goes astray is when Dick introduces one plot element too many, a fatal one—psionics.

For his book is about gambling and conspiracies and murders and other suspenseful things, and the suspense is killed stone dead once a bunch of telepaths and precognitives are brought in. The hero, conveniently, is not psionic himself, so he alone remains in bewilderment while the other characters make the plot spin about him. A host of pulp cliches suddenly appear; there is a murder and all the suspects develop amnesia; a secret conspiracy of psionic characters is afoot, directed against the Titanians; the Titanians themselves seem to take on human form from time to time; characters change sides in the conflict almost at random. The book is woefully overplotted, and there are long stretches of dreary gray prose in the middle.

Too bad. The background society is fascinating, and the book would have been a memorable one if Dick had sidestepped psionics and cut out about 10,000 words of conspiracies and the hero's hallucinations. It's good to see him back at the typewriter, at any rate.

Skylark Three, *by E. E. Smith, Ph.D. Pyramid Books, 40¢. 207 pages.*

I bow to no one in my admiration for "Doc" Smith, a courtly and kind-hearted man, vigorous and salty at 74, who deservedly gets a roaring ovation each year when he and his charming wife appear at the s-f convention. I wish I could feel as warmly about Smith the writer as I do about Smith the man—but his galactic epics, with their boy scout heroes and opaque dialogue, leave me cold.

This one is billed as a science fiction "classic," and I suppose it is. It was a serial in AMAZING STORIES back in 1930, and, without checking it against the files,

I'd say it was spruced up slightly for its 1948 hardcover appearance, of which this is a reprint. It's one of Doc's three "Skylark" novels, preceded by *The Skylark Of Space* which Pyramid reissued a while back. Presumably the other one, *Skylark Of Valeron,* is on the way.

In the first novel, Smith's wooden-headed hero, Dick Seaton, and his wooden-headed but wealthy friend, Mart Crane, put together a space-drive in a bathtub and took off all over the galaxy. By popular demand, Smith sent them haring off again a few years later, piling wonder upon wonder upon wonder as Seaton and Company get mixed up with a bunch of squabbling alien beings.

The wonders are fine. Unfortunately, between each description of an alien world and each riproaring space battle, the characters talk to each other. I can't bring myself to quote any of the phrases Seaton and Crane use in talking to their respective wives, but this is a fair sample of how they swap words with each other:

"Want some advice, Mart," Seaton says. "I'd thought of setting up three or four courses of five-ply screen on the board—a detector screen on the outside of each course, next it a repellor, then a full-coverage ether screen, then a zone of corce, and a full-coverage fifth-order screen as a liner. Then, with them all set up on the board, but not out, throw out a wide detector. That detector would react upon the board at impact with anything hostile, and automatically throw out the courses it found necessary."

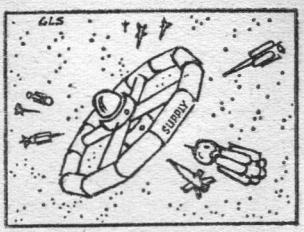
"That sounds like ample protection," Crane opines. "But I am not enough of a ray-specialist to pass an opinion. Upon what point are you doubtful?"

Upon this point I am *not* doubtful: the Skylark books may have been great guns in 1930, but they haven't aged well. The young, the young in heart, and the nostalgic may be able to wade through this one and tingle all the way. I didn't find the occasional moments of really wonderful scope and grandeur worth the struggle through the ghastly dialogue. Doc's Galactic Patrol series is easier to swallow. This creaky classic won't win him many new fans in this sophisticated era.

Analog 2, *edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. Doubleday, $4.50. 275 pages.*

Doubleday is evidently going to do an annual volume of stories from John Campbell's magazine ANALOG. Here, Campbell (who has held down his post for an incredible 27 years) offers eight stories that appeared in his magazine in 1962 and 1963.

(*Continued on page 130*)



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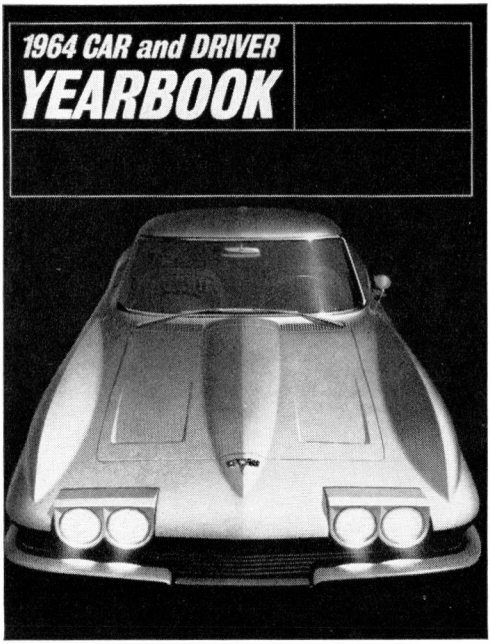
(Continued from page 127)

The best story is the leadoff one: Theodore L. Thomas' "The Weather Man," that crackling novelet about a future society in which the weather is controlled by tinkering with the surface of the sun. This is well-nigh a perfect science fiction story, since not only are the characters and situation developed well, but Thomas has gone to the trouble of doing his homework and building up a convincing scientific rationale for his weather-control method; no glib mumbo-jumbo here. An entire course in the technique of writing science fiction could be founded on this one masterful story, whose sole flaw is that there isn't enough of it. There's background here for a novel, and I hope Ted Thomas uses it some day.

The rest of the book is a mixed bag. Second best, seems to me, is Allen Kim Lang's "Blind Man's Lantern," an uproarious yarn about a planet settled by Pennsylvania Dutch, among others. British author John T. Phillifent contributes a good job in a traditional *Analog* manner; Christopher Anvil offers a puzzle story, "Philosopher's Stone," that is several cuts above his usual rather mechanical style; and James H. Schmitz' "Novice" is a sleek thriller that only now and then veers into that writer's customary fault of coy cuteness. From there, the book ranges downward in interest, but only one of the remaining three struck me as a complete loss. One classic, one first-rate story, three above-average jobs—not a bad percentage at all.

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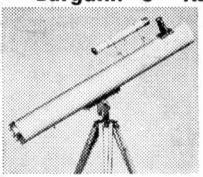
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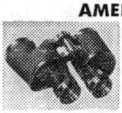
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