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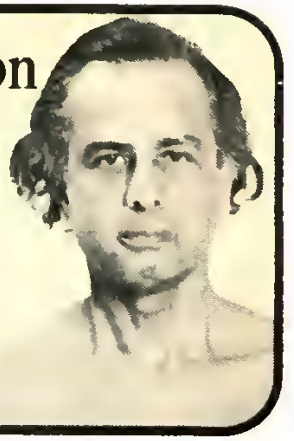

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SF AND THE ESTABLISHMENT
Editorial by Harry Harrison

Let's face it, science fiction has always been in rather bad odor with the establishment. Any establishment; take your pick. This attitude is slowly changing in America, but the battle is a long way from being won. Yet the battle has already been won in various ways and various places in other countries. A look at these will, perhaps, give us some insight into the future of SF here.

Great Britain is the best example, not only because we roughly share the same language, but because of the degree of acceptance. We're home clear there and SF is accepted as a legitimate form of literary endeavor. Reviews of this specialized literature appear regularly in all the national newspapers and literary journals. For the most part the reviewers know science fiction as well as general literature, so that the criticism is intelligent and to the point. Far better on the average than the reviewers here—even those who appear in the SF magazines. British science fiction authors are treated with respect, invited to appear on television and at literary gatherings, and are not looked down upon as being practitioners of some inferior form of art. When the only surviving British SF magazine, NEW WORLDS, was foundering and about to be wrecked on the financial rocks, the Arts Council came through with a subsidy. This is all very nice and creates a friendly environment in which it is a pleasure to be an SF reader or writer. When I was resident in Britain I received numerous invitations to speak at universities and schools, and I accepted as many as I was able to. Transportation and meals were always paid for, and occasionally there would be a few pounds for services rendered. Most enjoyable.

The British Isles undoubtedly lead Europe in appreciation of SF. Germany and Italy come next, with Germany first in quantity and Italy in acceptance. A great many SF books are published in Germany, but very few in hardcovers and, to my knowledge, the teutonic culture-vultures completely ignore them. Quite the opposite is true in Italy. While most SF books are done in paperback, looking very much like magazines to American eyes, there have been some good hardcover volumes that have received critical attention. There is even a Science Fiction Book Club whose bulletin contains critical articles.

SF seems to be a marginal thing in the other European countries. France is up and down: at the present hardly printing a thing. Holland seems to be printing more books these days and Spain is coming on strong. Russia and the communist countries are a different case altogether, that will be looked into at a later date.

The acceptance of SF in Den-

(Continued on page 123)

POWER OF THE NAIL

By HARLAN ELLISON and SAMUEL R. DELANEY

Illustrated by BOB HOSKINS

Harlan Ellison and Samuel R. Delany have won four Nebulas between them, almost as many Hugos and have been nominated for God knows how many more. Ellison was born in 1934 and lives in Los Angeles; Delany was born in 1942 and lives in New York City. Both of them can write very well indeed. Their first collaboration—or, as Mr. Ellison points out, the first collaboration ever *between Nebula winners—is an important contribution to this magazine.*

Coffins, on Saquetta, are round. The natives, on Saquetta, are round. When they die violently, the sound they make rises up into the ultrasonic and an Earther's liver tightens inside him. But on Saquetta there is very little violent death. It is a peaceful world; there are very few Saquettes and unless they are violently killed, they are reincarnated almost immediately.

That was the way it had always been on Saquetta, till the Earther, Zagaramendo, came. Always gentle, in azure breezes with full bellies. They never hurt one another, they knew nothing about killing. To die was to pale and shiver and cease moving, without pain, until the dormant skinshell emerged from the sky-night-blue sand of the Hatchery Desert and they know their dead brother had been reborn into the skin-shell that had always waited for him. And then the skin-shell moistened, tore, fell away, and the Saquette had returned.

That was the way it had always been, with many rotations of Saquetta passing without the terrible sound of the violent death scream rising up till it could no longer be heard.

And then came Robert Zagaramendo, with Margret.

"I hate it here."

"Shut up."

"You promised me better than this, somewhere; there are other posts. I hate it here!"

"Shut up, Margret."

They had planted the automatic

on the empty equipment cases. She brushed auburn hair back from her forehead; she was perspiring and the scent of herself reached her; it was hardly unpleasant, but it disgusted her. "This is what you call providing for me?"

Zagaramendo stood up: motion and emotion made him hiss. He started to say something loud, but instead turned and walked to the squid. He punched out the building codes on the squid's belly; it was something to do that was not fighting. Fighting had been constant since he had accepted this Observer post, and he wanted no more. They were here now, far out on the Perimeter, and they would make the best of it.

He completed the building codes and punched the squid to action. Stamp . . . stamp . . . stamp, stamp, stamp. It huzzzed away on tractor-tread feet.

Zagaramendo went back to her.

"Look . . ."

"I don't want to talk about it any more."

"Margret, look, we've got a chance here, please try to be reasonable."

She turned on him. "Bob, this isn't what I call a chance . . . this isn't what I call a *main* chance to save our marriage."

"Three years, Mar—"

"Being a *prisoner* for three years is no damned *chance*, Bob! You lied to me, you said we'd have a new start, somewhere. This isn't somewhere, it's nowhere!"

Behind them the squid was laying the foundation for their cabin. "Bob, this, here—!"

"Margret—!"

Already, around them, the squid had half-completed their front yard.

The first of the Saquettes made their appearance during the fifth week of their Observership. At first there was only a scrambling and scurrying in the grass, then one or two peered out from the tall reed-like stems, and Margret moaned with a mixture of wonder and terror.

Zagaramendo went to them and looked down. They were round and small. Moles with soft blue fur? Not quite, but close enough. Their bright eyes blinked up at him and their candy chocolate noses trembled.

"They're ugly," Margret said, behind him.

They were. They had everything cute going for them, but in totality they were repulsive. Zagaramendo sighed. "Go get in the cabin," he told her. "I'll tend to this." When she didn't move, he pivoted on his heel, crouching there, and shouted at her. "G'wan, get the hell out of here . . . make me something to eat!"

She gave him the smile that meant lothing, and went into the cabin. Zagaramendo turned back to the Saquettes.

The shadow fell over him. He looked up into the sun, shading his eyes, and for a moment all he saw was a black blur of something speeding down on bat wings. The Saquettes squealed in wafer-thin voices. It sounded to Zagar - mendo as thought they were shrieking *mollok, mollok.*

The he threw himself aside as the winged creature swooped in and skidded on taloned claws, tearing out great chunks of grass and earth. The mollok—if that was indeed its name—kept coming, its long serpent body extending past its feet . . . and the bat head with its parrot beak darted faster than anything Zagaramendo had ever seen.

It caught one of the Saquettes and lifted it high, arching its ugly neck. The Saquette . . . popped. And the shriek rose up and up and up till Zagaramendo slammed his hands over his ears, and his eyes rolled up in his head. Then, silence. Either it had gone too high or the Saquette was dead. Zagaramendo opened his eyes and saw the pale blue blood dribble from the mollok's beak.

It shot forward, dropping the first Saquette. It vanished into the tall grass, and a moment later the shriek came once again. Zagaramendo stumbled to his feet and pulled the burner from his holster. He plunged into the tall grass, even as Margret came out onto the front porch of the cabin, screaming. Her scream mingled and twined with that of the second Saquette, and Zagaramendo only paused an instant to howl, "Shuttttupppp!" and then raced into the grassland.

The mollok had done with the other little Saquette. And now it was pacing back and forth between the edge of the grassy

place and the body. Zagaramendo raised the burner to kill, then paused. The mollok was looking for something.

Bat-wings folded back, parrot beak quivering, the filthy creature bobbled its head forward and back, forward and back, and moved in an erratic path toward a clear space just inside the grassy verge. It stopped, and hung its head. It vibrated gently, as though in a vagrant breeze. Then it hummed.

Margret was beside him.

Zagaramendo put out a hand to stop her.

"What is it?"

Zagaramendo shook his head. "I don't know. A thing that eats the little ones."

"What's it doing —?"

Zagaramendo burned the mollok to ash. He walked to the dead Saquette. He moved it with the toe of his sod-boot. It seemed boneless.

"What was it doing?"

Zagaramendo ignored her. He walked to the clear space where the mollok had been drawn, where it had quivered on point, like a hunting dog. The phase-antenna of the automatic ecology equipment they had buried there protruded from the soil. He placed a palm flat on the ground. It vibrated through his skin.

He heard the tiny sound to his left, and looked up to see three more furry little Saquettes, coming through the saw-grass, toward the cleared space. He watched as they paused, redirected, and came on directly. They stood just inside the cleared space, and their candy chocolate noses quivered toward the antenna.

"It's the equipment," Zagaramendo said. "It's sending out a hum, a vibration. They come to it; I suppose their systems are responsive to the vibration at this frequency."

Margret moved closer. "Their eyes are closed. Are they enjoying it?"

Zagaramendo shrugged softly. "I don't know. They could just be reacting instinctively. It could be a tropism. Like a moth to a flame. I've never heard about a tropism like this, though. Sound-drawn. Have to call it an *audio-tropism*."

Margret shuddered, "Why aren't they cute? They should be cute."

"They aren't, that's all. Stop it."

"I can't help it. I hate it here, I hate them, I hate that—that *thing* you killed. There's something just *hateful* about this whole world. You lied to me."

"Stop it, Margret." That softly. Tired.

"No, I won't stop it. There's death all over this world, *we'll* die here. This isn't why I married you . . . not for this . . . not out here!"

"There *isn't* 'death all over this world', stop being so damned melodramatic. That thing I burned, it probably hunts these little ones, it's a natural thing. They probably have a way of escaping most of the time, but the mollok was drawn to the machinery vibration the same as they were,

and they were . . . I don't know . . . something like lulled, hypnotized, involved with the vibration . . . and the thing was able to catch them. That's the natural order, no more 'death all over this world' than it would be for a lion to bring down a gazelle on Earth."

She stared at him. "I'm going to leave you, Bob."

He turned away, looking up into the cold hard sky. When he spoke, he smiled. They had agreed on what that smile meant. There was that between them at least. Only . . . she had said—"leaving"?

"Margret, we're here for another sixteen months. The ship doesn't swing back for pickup for another six-*teen* months. Now just how in the hell do you plan on leaving me?"

"When we get away from here."

"Don't talk stupid."

"I mean it, Bob. I can't stand this kind of life."

"You knew what it would be like when you married me."

"You never said we'd be in a place like out here."

"I have to take the assignment I get, Margret!"

"I want a divorce."

"Okay, okay dammit, you'll get it, when we get off here."

"I consider myself divorced right now."

"What's *that* supposed to mean?"

"Don't come near me, Bob. I'll do what I have to do to keep the situation workable, but don't try to touch me."

"Bed."

"Don't touch me, Bob. Not as long as you do this thing to me, and keep me out here."

"Oh, for God's —" he began, thinking he would never want to touch her again anyway.

"You can call the ship, it can pick us up early, you know that. Don't lie to me."

"Only for an emergency. And we don't have one of those. Why the hell did you ever marry me?"

"I don't know . . . now."

"You thought I was going up in the Rank, didn't you? You took a gamble, and it didn't pay off, did it? Jesus, Margret, Jesus Christ, what kind of a wom—"

She turned and walked away from him. Her back was very straight. The day suddenly grew cold. The Saquettes trembled toward the unheard sound of the buried machinery. Zagaramendo sat down in the grass, his head slumping forward, his thoughts tumbling and twisting.

"Jesus," he said, softly.

In the ninth week he witnessed a reincarnation, and he understood why the numbers of Saquettes was stable. He also saw another attack by molloks, but the Saquettes burrowed into the soil and were safe. The only time they were caught was near the antenna of the buried machinery. There were now seven locations of buried machinery, and every week when he trekked out to check them, he found the locations littered with crushed and popped Saquettes. He ignored it.

And that week he tried to make

love to his wife. Out of spite. And she pushed him away. His face flammed and he grabbed her by the hair, throwing her down on the floor of the cabin. They struggled back and forth across the floor, and then he yanked her up and hit her, very hard, just below the left ear. She lolled against his grip, gasping for air, her eyes glazed, and when he saw what he had done he dropped her and ran out into the grassland.

They needed a reading from the place he called Polo Valley. But there was a large colony of Saquettes living there, and he knew what would happen if he planted ecology machinery there.

Molloks lived in the capes on the crags above.

After the fight in the cabin, he coded the squid to carry the machinery, and he took it out to Polo Valley, and he planted it.

He did not tell her about it. Love, hate; he tried to mark distinctions and foundered on his own ignorance. Ignorance and ignore are the same word. They heard the shrieking in the night.

Coffins, on Saquetta are round. After the massacre in Polo Valley, it fell to the Earther, Zagaramendo, to build the coffins. The round, little coffins. Like round fruits cut in half, hollow, filled with a boneless corpse and resealed. The coffins were made of something like teakwood, and were nailed together.

It fell to the Earther, for the Earther had done the killing. Not really, yet he had. There had been, in Polo Valley, seven hundred Saquettes.

In the thinly-wooded area just beyond the Valley he used his burner and beamed down enough timber to make seven hundred coffins. From the inventory he took nails. And Zagaramendo began nailing up the victims of his need, his helplessness, his weakness. It took him six days.

On the night of the sixth day . . .

"Margret, pack your night-town—"

"I haven't got a nightgown, Bob."

"Pack up your mother's silver!"

"You said you'd polish—"

"Finish microfilming my notes. We're going home tomorrow, I called the ship, they're coming." He swayed on the porch, grinning at the disbelief blooming on her face.

He let the handle of the burner *clunk* against the porch-rail. Then let it go completely. The muzzle *clinged* on the boards.

"You're *finished*? You mean you've really finished?"

He reached into the swag-pocket of his overalls and pulled out a handful of black, wooden spheres. "Finished. With them, with the Rank, with all of it. We'll go home, and start again. I'll tell them no more out here. They'll have to listen; I've got tenure."

The tentative expression, first. Then the smile breaking. Then her laughter that shattered all the lines of distance the three years as Ecological Observers had strung between them, all the

lines separating them during eleven weeks on Saquetta, lines that had been cemented on her face by her belief in the death around them.

She seized his hand, and the laughter shook along her arms so that the spheres rolled in his palm. "Oh, Bob—" Then tears. "I can go home! I *am* going home." A pause as she heard herself, then, "*We're* going home! You're finished!" she smiled.

"Well . . ." *He* smiled.

And smiles suddenly were something neither of them had ever seen before. He looked back across the porch-rail at patchwork Polo. "I've still got to fasten the last twenty or so together. How are you hefting a hammer?"

"We're going home," she repeated. "Gimme."

Evening on Saquetta pours green across the crags where the molloks live. (A dark green sea that fills and blots out Polo. And the last of the sun sinking in.) And they held each other's hand, walking back to the compound.

"I'm going to miss them, a little. They were getting to be cute, scurrying around in the grass—" A harsh sound from her. "Who am *I* kidding."

Zagaramendo started up the steps and suddenly his arms flailed.

Margret jumped back.

His shoulder hit the step, and then he was rolling.

"For God sake, Bob! Are you all right—?"

Roll, and drop, roll, and drop: the black spheres came down the porch steps. He had left them in the corner beside the burner.

"Oh, Bob, you didn't trip over—"

He was groaning.

"Bob?" Which is not exactly what she said; it came out in two syllables, the second much higher than the first.

On her knees, she tugged him over. There was blood on his overalls, at the hip.

He was gasping, eyes closed, mouth opened, and was pawing at his pocket.

Confused, she stuck her hand into the swag-pocket pouch.

The nails! The threepenny brads from the supply inventory . . .

The blood was spreading down his overalls.

Red, not pale blue like the blood from the furry ugly things that should have been cute, dribbling off the parrot-beak of the things that lived in the crag caves above Polo, where he had planted his death-bringing, knowing . . .

Knowing . . .

And weighing it against her . . .

And not caring . . .

Turning away . . .

Blood . . . as Polo sank into the green sea.

Coffins, on Sequetta, are round. And the natives . . . small (and yes, round), are, as the life-forms on so many other worlds, organic.

(Continued on page 72)

THE MONSTERS
By DAVID R. BUNCH

David R. Bunch lives in St. Louis and has quietly been doing his work at least twice as long as I have and with considerably more success. This is fair because David R. Bunch is a better or at least a considerably wiser writer than I am; like Lafferty he is working on the allegorical level and like Lafferty as well, his mysteries make sense. THE MONSTERS *is as predictable as dusk in desert and about as horrifying.*

It was a day in June and boredome fluttered against our windowpanes, rode in on forms of heavy flies and butterflies and the drowsiness of engine hums from far away. Late flowering trees hurled pieces of themselves in seed floats out at the ever-defeated always-hoping world, and the robin in the elm tree was just starting to get that raggedy look that would make him so bedraggled in July. The sun was sheening its heated gold on all in a usual summery weirdness of intention toward dry unfruitful times and a heat that would please blowflies in souping flesh of animals, such as fat cats killed on highways, dogs who had been slow on the multiple lanes, and turtle pancakes, courtesy of tires. I decided it was as ripe a time as any to talk to them about the monsters.

Little Sister past four and little Brother past five were piled along the floor in a kind of children's heat exhaustion. I in my window chair, near what little breeze there was, was contemplating a move that would send me out of my very comfortable padded seat and shift me over toward the window fan to flip the switch to ON and give the chaps some air. She having tired of her cut-outs and he having tired of a space attack on Mars, or some as yet unnamed planet, were eyeing me in what I could but think was a kind of accusation. I had forbidden them to touch the fan.

"Little Sister," I called, "Little Brother. Could you leave off sleeping long enough to hear something important maybe?" They arose at once and came to me, Little Sister slim-faced and weasely I could not help thinking in her

tangled long yellow hair, and Little Brother dour and sour with the expression of a bully I kind of thought. I could not tell that either of them resembled me very much, but perhaps they did almost entirely. They both trembled trying to stand at attention the way I demanded they do and had taught them to be before me, and I said, "Now kiddies, it's not cold." I let the glass-hard stare of my very chill blue eyes flick over them such a blanket of bleakness that they froze for the moment, solid as little soldiers and white of face as snowballs. I let them stand thus, for discipline, for just a bit of a time, not two minutes, or not much more, and then I said in what I hoped was hearty, though I did not go so far as to smile even a little, "Well, well, training talk time again. Most important that you chaps get these from me, your one remaining staunch parent, so you'll know what kind of world awaits you Out There." I flung a ringless, very hairy, very pale, very slim long left hand at the sun-smote windowpanes in a gesture meant to encompass and include and mean everything outside the shadowy dusty room that was our home, the place where I kept them inviolate against all the threats but me, and I was their parent trying to teach them true.

"There are monsters," I said, "that you do not dream of," by way of a beginning. "They are strung now, perhaps, all up and down flat places along the riverfront. They crowd where buildings have departed in the very heart of town. They lurk along the street curbs; so dead of eye they wait that seeing them you would I imagine, say, 'Why, they see just like big turned-off flashlights.' And they are so smooth and fine and pretty, crouching there, that I suspect you might be fooled and think them fine. And I'll admit they're not bad while waiting, with their eyes wide open, sleeping—just in the way. But those which are not fatly crouching along the riverfront, along the street, or in flattened-building places in the heart of town—those are the ones I must tell you about."

At this point Little Sister took time off to be sick, from the heat problem perhaps and the standing at attention maybe, and let her breakfast go out between her teeth, and Little Brother, still looking defiant, was green. "It is hot," I said. "You kiddies may bring the straight-backed chairs for this one. And Little Sister, since you've been sick, you may hop over by the spigot and get yourself a drink of water before you get your chair. And Little Brother, I guess you're old enough to switch the fan to ON, if I'm here to watch you." While they were doing these things, I took advantage of the break to stare out the sun-hit window and watch a squirrel drop some bark pieces from a lightning-smote twig of elm. As meaningless as anything he's ever done, I had to think.

When they were back, straight-

backed chairs and all, I said, "All right! So much for the introduction.—And the interruption," I said, looking bleakly at Little Sister by way of letting her know that at four she wasn't yet quite the Spartan kind of woman I most admired. "Perhaps I need not tell you what the monsters I have been talking about are called. Perhaps you already know. Anyone want to venture a guess?" Little Brother shot his hand up at once and I nodded to him teacher-fashion. "Dragons!" he guessed. "Sure," I said, "They're dragons. Most certainly they're dragons. But what kind of dragon? Be specific."

Little Sister, still somewhat shaken, muzzy and sick from the affair of losing her breakfast I had no doubt, trembled her hand up as though in a kind of dream, and said, as I nodded to her crisply in a way meant to restore confidence, "You're not talking about my mommy, are you?" She was so far off the trend of the lecture that for a moment I almost felt sorry for her. But of course I could not allow myself to do that. I believed, and had been thinking for quite awhile now, that perhaps Little Sister's hearing wasn't all it should be. Maybe she had just heard snatches of my lecture and thought I was mentioning about Mama being no good along the riverfront, up in the main part of town and all along the street, before she left us. "No, no, Little Sister," I said, "this has nothing to do with your mommy. And if I may say so, I think you had better listen more closely to the rest of what I have to say."

Little Brother had his hand up for another guess. "You don't mean the space men have landed from Out There?!" he asked, his eyes popped out like a bug's. "And their saucers have eyes like big turned-off flashlights?!!"

"No," I said, "no. And these things are probably more deadly in their own way than all the space men from everywhere would ever be with their saucers and space tubes. But I think we had better stop guessing. The name isn't so important anyway. Sometime, when I feel I can begin to let you out of the house some—when you are older—I'll start taking you both down to stand around the places so you can commence to get acquainted with these monsters by sight and sound. And when you are much much older sometime maybe we'll venture a run against them. Yes! On a day when most of them are gone, roaring and fuming far from our part of town, we'll slip down and loaf around the signs until such a time as we can see for many blocks up all the dragon trails and down all the dragon trails and not hear a monster, even. Then we'll all three put our heads down and race across, from a house to a house, athwart a dragon trail, hard as we can ever run. And I'll bet we make it. But even if we don't, sometime we would have had to have made the try. It's something a person just has to do, these awfully modern times.

(Continued on page 145)

TRY AGAIN

JACK WODHAMS

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

To the best of my knowledge, the central theme of this story has been handled only once before in science-fiction, in a story Alfred Bester published, oh, a decade and a half ago, called The Sandcomber. *Bester wrote of the eternal sameness of choice, the entrapment within the cove of obsession and having said it, smashed the shell of his conceit as always and let the splinters strike. Wodhams doesn't go quite that far; he focusses merely upon a particular instance of choice which, in this case, does not lead to a* total *sameness. Only a grotesque of possibilities.*

"I have lived before," Tommy Leffrey said. "This is the second time I'm going through life."

Pyler, the psychiatrist, smiled. "Is it? What is it that makes you so sure that you have lived before?"

"I know, that's all. It's a feeling—but a positive feeling. I *have* lived before."

"I see. You remember your previous life? What do you think you remember of it?"

Tommy Leffry frowned. "It's rather a mixed memory. How much does anyone remember? especially of childhood. The highlights, yes, but not the trivia of every damn day. Some things do come back to me as familiar, but they're different somehow."

"Your life is different? You feel that you are living your life again but it's not the same?"

"That's it." Tommy Leffry sat on his hands and swung his feet. He looked very serious. "The atmosphere is different. *I'm* different."

"I thought you thought you were the same," Pyler said mildly.

"I *am* the same," Tommy Leffry replied patiently. "That is, I am the same person, I'm still Tom Leffry, but I'm not living the life as the first Tom Leffry did."

"Ah. And in what way do you think that the, ah, first Tommy Leffry's life differs from your own?"

"It differs entirely. You see, the first Tom Leffry did not have the knowledge that I have of being born before. He was just . . . well, he was just Tom Leffry One."

"H'm." Pyler scratched his nose. "And you consider yourself now to be Tommy Leffry number two?"

"In a sense, although in a way it just seems to be a continuation. I'm starting again but fully experienced, so to speak."

"Uhuh. Now let me get this straight. You believe that you have been reincarnated—not as someone else but as yourself. Also you believe it to be the same life—that is, that you were born at the same time in the same year to the same parents. You think that you have the same body that you, ah, had the first time."

"Yes." Tommy Leffry rocked to release his hands, to fold his arms. "I can't explain it. I don't know why it should be so. Perhaps I'm some odd kind of mutation. Perhaps everybody keeps getting born again, only I'm one of the first to realise the fact. In some peculiar way I remember my previous run-through. Perhaps it's another stage in human development, an evolutionary advance that may be intended to help prevent the waste that occurs when a man has to make the same mistakes all over again. The repeated necessity to learn by experience takes up a lot of valuable time."

Pyler leaned back in his seat, and opened and closed his united fingertips as he studied his five-year-old client.

"This, ah . . . consciousness that you have of being yourself once before—you, ah, feel that the experience you, h'm, gained, will, ah, be of assistance to you this time?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. It should be. I'm better equipped. But then, everything is new."

"New?" Pyler's eyebrows lifted unevenly. "I should have thought that if you were living the same life again, the repetition would lack a good deal in novelty."

Tommy Leffry frowned at this continuing evidence of denseness. "The repetition is only of the being, not of the life that that being leads. I am the same me, but I already have an awareness of one life that I have spent. I'm already grown-up. It's a short-cut, don't you see?"

"I think so. With the knowledge from your, ah, previous existence, you will be able to avoid making the mistakes that you made the first time. Decisions you wish you had or hadn't made before you can alter . . ."

Tommy Leffry's head was shaking. "No, no, no, you don't understand. Those events can never be changed."

"Ah." Pyler nodded. "You mean that they are destined to occur and are therefore unavoidable?"

"Oh God," Tommy Leffry said somewhat plaintively. He brought his eyes back down to once more appraise Pyler. He sighed. "Destiny's got nothing to do with it. I was thirty-seven when I was killed last time in a car smash. This cannot possibly happen exactly the same again now. As soon as anything happens, however slight, that is different from the first time around, the deviation changes the course of the life and consequently the whole pattern of the life. Mistakes in one life cannot be corrected on the second try—well, one maybe—because the first correction will alter circumstances to a degree where the other 'errors' do not arise. It's a totally different life, can't you see that?"

Pyler took hold of his chin. "Uh, in that case, if your life is totally different, what is the benefit of having lived your life before? If everything is different, you might as well live your life in the ordinary way, eh?"

Tommy Leffry licked his lips. "There are similarities. For me, conditions seemed to have been the same at the start. Same parents, same house, the same situation, the same world."

"Is that bad? Was your, ah, previous life an unhappy one?"

"No, no, not at all. On the contrary. But I am *not* living *that* life again. I can't. Before, I was a normal child, growing up as a child does. My parents had no reason to think that I was any different from any other boy. I was acceptably ordinary. This time they don't know what to make of me, and my influence upon their lives has been much more forceful. They think about me more, worry about me more, and as a result have less time to devote to the things that occupied them the first time. They behave differently. We've moved to a new house, I'll go to a different school and meet different kids and teachers. And I won't meet the kids and teachers that I met the first time. Do you see? I won't play the same games, have the same accidents, go to the same places. I won't *be* there. I'll be somewhere else where I wasn't before, and it's impossible to get the sequence running the way that it *was* before. Every

damn thing is different, every minute, every second."

"Now, now," Pyler said, "don't get excited. I can see no cause for undue concern. If you really are, uh, living your life again, you wouldn't want it to be exactly the same, would you? It would tend to make life rather dull, wouldn't it? There'd be no expectation." He smiled.

Tommy Leffry gazed at him. "You do not grasp the significance of my knowledge," he said. "I feel, somehow . . . well, as though I have a responsibility. The world situation at the start appeared to be much as it was the first time. The first time I was too young and unaware to know what was going on. *This* time, though, I know what is going on. So far the divergences in this, my second life, seem to have had no great effect upon government and major issues. But I *do* know to a degree a certain amount of what is going to happen, and there are many things that I know about that I would like to see prevented. The trouble is, if I prevent one thing, the situation irrevocably changes and other things I know about will not occur simply because the circumstances that gave rise to them will not exist."

For a moment Pyler stared at him. "You mean you won't be able to predict bad happenings because those bad happenings will just not happen?"

"Precisely."

Pyler hunched forward over his desk. He leaned an elbow, used a palm to hide his eyes. An early traumatic experience? How did one take a child back to its childhood? The boy was remarkably erudite. Could take him back to his first childhood perhaps? Ish tish. Fascinating case. Amazingly intelligent child. Intelligence transcending genius even. A prodigy. But unstable. Suffering from a quirk, some strangely obsessive notion of pre-existence. And present and/or post-existence. Extraordinary. An example of precocious eccentricity in an undoubtedly brilliant child. Fascinating.

"You think that a change in your life pattern will affect the world very much?" Pyler asked.

"It's bound to change the course of history," Tommy Leffry answered. He put his hands behind his head and rested an ankle on his knee. "Bound to. The older I get, the more differences there are. The world cannot help but become a different place."

"M'yes. But a different place from what? The, ah, world of your, ah, first life? We," and here Pyler was slightly deprecating, "have only one life, so you see we shall not be able to tell whether the non-happenings will not have happened because of your presence here, or simply not happened because they were not supposed to happen anyway." Pyler was kindly. "Having lived your life before, you can say what may eventuate that may not. We have no means of knowing the future, and you yourself are apparently as unsure of the outcome of tomorrow as anyone else—right?"

"Yes and no." Tommy Leffry brought his hands down to grasp

a lifted knee. "There's a general outline that is the same. There are potent forces on the move, dangerous forces, evil forces that must be checked. I feel I should do something, but I don't know what. I know what they are. They should really be stopped now. Somehow they should be prevented from repeating their atrocities—but who will listen to a five-year-old boy?"

"Who indeed." Pyler stood up. "But if the world is different, perhaps the bad people are different, too."

Tommy Leffry scowled at that. "The ones I'm thinking about are too set in their ways to change now."

"Are they?" Pyler had plenty enough for the moment and dropped into a half-listening muse. "I think I'd better have a little talk with your parents. Do you mind waiting here for a short while on your own?"

"Oh, that'll be allright," Tommy Leffry said. "I never came to see you last time. As it is, we're too far gone to hope to recover. Other clients you saw in this time-slot previously are probably jumping off the roof in frustration by now."

"Ah. Oh-ah."

Pyler shot a last long quizzical look at this exceptional child. Amazing. A highly interesting and most intriguing case. Fascinating. "Help yourself to the magazines, won't you?" Pyler invited genially. And in thoughtful good humor he went to see Mr. and Mrs. Leffry.

"His intelligence is phenomenal," Pyler told them. "He is extremely advanced for his years. Well beyond his years. I found myself talking to him as man to man with no trouble at all. Astonishing."

Mr. Leffry fiddled with his hat. "Yes, well, it kinda bothers us, doctor. I mean, the way he talks and that. And the funny things he says. He's, uh . . . Just how is he, doctor? He's not . . . not . . . ?"

"Oh, nothing to worry about," Pyler assured him. "He has sound co-ordination, reflexes, and, for a child, a truly amazing mind."

"Yes, but what about this thing he has about being alive before? It's not true, it it? In a crazy kinda way it adds up, but . . . How could we have the same kid twice?"

Pyler looked professional. "This is some deep-seated delusion. Obviously he has not been reincarnated into his own body. The idea is absurd. I mean, if he was re-living *his* life, we'd all be re-living *our* lives, wouldn't we? No, no. The thought is amusing but hardly creditable. No, you must realise that what we are dealing with here is a youngster who has a particularly brilliant mind."

"You mean the being born again stuff is just something he made up?"

"A fantasy, yes. Your child has a decidedly accentuated consciousness of 'self'. His mind is keen, he is very much alive to what is going on. Does he play with other children much?"

"Uh?" Mr. Leffry was caught off-guard. "Er, well, no. He doesn't

seem interested in other children. In fact he doesn't seem interested in playing, either."

"Quite so, quite so. Adults fail to understand him, so it is no wonder if other children fail to understand him also. And where does that leave him, eh? It throws him upon his own resources. He withdraws into his own mind, and his own mind becomes his playground. C'rm. You can see that a boy with his unquestionably superior mental capacity is able to conjure stranger fancies than a child that is not so gifted."

"But he's so serious about it," Mr. Leffry said worriedly. "He gets me that way that he half-convinces me that he's right."

The psychiatrist oozed the soothe of his embryo calling. "The mind, Mr. Leffry, the mind. He daydreams, he invents, he imagines. Somehow in his mind he has created this myth, and somewhere along the way he has rationalised his fabrication with astounding adroitness to a degree where he has persuaded himself that his fiction is fact."

"Oh?" Mr. Leffry looked hopeful. "Can he be cured, do you think? I mean, it won't . . . he won't always be like this, will he? He can be made normal?"

"Not normal," Pyler said cheerfully. "He'll never be a *normal* person—because he's a genius. But you should be proud to have produced a son who is abnormal in the way that your son is."

Mrs. Leffry had been listening anxiously on the sidelines—now she spoke up. "Will he have to go away for treatment? He won't have anything done to him, will he? They . . . They . . . You don't think he'll have to be . . . to be put away, or . . . or anything like that?"

"Now, now, Lisa," Mr. Leffry said, taking her hand. "They won't do anything bad, silly."

"There's nothing really wrong with Tommy is there?" she pleaded. "He *is* allright? It's just . . . just . . . "

"It's just a fixation," Pyler comforted her smoothly. "Nothing at all to be really alarmed about. Tommy is not at all neurotic, which is a very, very good sign. He is, I fancy, suffering from a mild form of rejection, a lack of companionship, of people of his own mental ability. Not," he added hastily, "that I think that you have provided for him inadequately, but he *does* need to be brought out by contact with minds more nearly equal to his own."

"Ah. I see," Mr. Leffry said. And he paused for digestive thought. "Hum, ah . . what do you think we should do then?"

"Yes, well, what I would like is to make arrangements that would allow us to study Tommy further. He is an outstanding boy and, with your permission, I am sure I could obtain a grant that would help defray expenses and permit us both to examine and help him, as well as take care of his education. Without question he should get the best of attention . . ."

Mr. and Mrs. Leffry were no

less bewildered in the end than they were in the beginning. But they were considerably more relieved. There was nothing wrong with their boy except that he was superlatively bright. They felt that they could relax somewhat for, if they were at fault, it was only because they were normally dumb.

Tommy Leffry was seven. He was learning to play piano.

Pyler masterfully controlled his wincing as the practise notes jarred. He gratefully siezed a break to interrupt and distract with question. "You're doing, ah, fine, Tommy. You're showing great determination."

Tommy grinned with mocking eyes. "Determination is the word. I have very little talent, so I have to really work at it."

"Yes. Oh, I wouldn't say that."

"I would," Tommy declared breezily. "It's a lot harder than I thought it would be."

"You're going to persist though?"

"Of course. I told you. I always wanted to play piano. When I was a kid before I fooled around too much. There was plenty of time to do everything till suddenly there was no time to do anything."

Pyler by now had given up trying to shake Tommy's 'other life' convictions. Well, almost . . . The feeling of 'living again' was deeply ingrained in Tommy and was untouchable by drug, hypnosis or any known therapy. It was baffling. And, on occasion, knowledge from this 'first-life' provided uncannily accurate prognoses of events.

"So you are going to learn to play piano?"

"What better time to learn? See, very few kids have any real ambition. Fireman, pilot, train-driver or something. They don't really know what they want. And by the time they do know what they want it's too late. Last time I was a bank-clerk. I don't want that to happen again."

"No. No, ah, I doubt that it will. You, ah, I thought you were set on becoming a runner?"

"Oh yes, that too. The piano for art, the running for exercise."

"Do you think you will master them both?"

"I don't see why not. A man can do anything if he starts young enough and devotes his energies to particular goals. I've lived one ordinary life where the diversity of endeavor dissipated applicable power. I know now that I can't do everything, so I can concentrate on doing a few things very well."

Pyler chewed his lip. Always, but always, Tommy spoke of his 'other life' with the calm assumption that it really had been so. There were times, yes, there *were* times when Pyler had had to shake himself to break away from accepting the outlandishly illogical assertions of Tommy's previous existence. Tommy never let up, never lapsed, never forgot. It was very wearing. And undermining. Especially when. . . .

"Did you know that Italian troops are in Addis Ababa?"

"Oh?" Tommy turned over a page of music. "I knew they got there but I don't know when."

"Ah." Pyler pondered the profile of the boy. "And you still say that the Spaniards are going to start a civil war this year?"

"That's right. Franco's lot will win again, I should think." He turned his face to Pyler. "Somewhere in July it was, if I remember. We were on holiday. Then the English king abdicated—you know, the Duke of Windsor. Or it might have been next year. I can't be sure about that. 'Course, he might not meet her this time."

"If you've lived it as you say you have, surely you can be more positive?"

Tommy faced him again. "No, I can't. The major issues are much the same, seem to be going forward much as I recollect. But I was only seven years old and not much interested in anything beyond Mickey Mouse and ice-cream. I remember World War Two much better."

Pyler leaned on the piano and clutched his cheek. It was one of his days for mixed emotions, another day for the creeping progress of nagging doubt. The boy was so cool, so sensible. After every probe and investigation they had been left with no evidence to say that he was anything other than sane. But this adamant phobia!

"Is the second Great War inevitable?"

"Can't say. There's been changes, sutble ones. Truth is, I don't know what they are. I just sense it. Like Will Rogers. I'm pretty sure he should be dead by now. I remember my mother crying."

"You don't mean to say that your alleged different life in some way affected the life of Will Rogers?"

Very soberly Tommy said, "Yes. As I seem to be the only one that's leading a different life deliberately, changes can only be attributed to me. There's not been enough over-all changes to suggest that there are a few others around like myself."

"But things *happen*," Pyler protested. "If you're going to look into the future it's no good saying that something may or may not happen. You either know or you don't." He straightened and threw out his hands. "You can't have it both ways."

"I keep telling you that there are differences. Maybe I'm a slip-up. Maybe I should have come back as somebody else. Maybe I'm just an out-and-out freak. Maybe my memory retention is sheer fluked oversight. Maybe we should come back and live our lives through making only tiny changes, an infinitismal progression towards a final perfect polished apple. I don't know." Tommy grimaced at his music.

"But if something, something BIG is to happen," Pyler cried, "how, I want to know how, how on Earth you think you can change it? Do you think you're Bulldog Drummond?"

"I don't say that I *can* change it." Secretly Tommy was a tormented young man. He was not devoid of self-interest. "I will

change it at least a little, but I cannot know whether for the better or not. I've been thinking about it. It's very tricky, you know. It's like having the I've-been-here-before feeling all the time. Only I haven't. Not this way. Oh God." The keys jangled as he bent forward to take his head in his hands. "I really don't know what to do. What's the one big right thing to alter—if it happens now?"

"Here, here, don't let it upset you," Pyler said quickly. "You mustn't let it get you down. You worry about these things far too much. You're a young boy, you shouldn't let such matters concern you."

"You don't know Hitler," Tommy said, looking up. "I know what he's going to do—providing by then I've not somehow already had some effect upon him. But what major change to divert him? And after the change, how will I know what he might do next?"

"Tommy listen," Pyler checked, "you are taking yourself far too seriously. No. No, there are millions of people in this world, and you are far too intelligent a child to believe that you alone can alter fate and history. Now please, Tommy, isn't that right?"

Tommy looked suddenly very tired. "I'm not a genius. I was just a bank-clerk last time. I don't know how to handle it. I feel that I ought to do something, but I don't know what. It's so very complicated. And the longer I live going in this new direction, the worse it gets. There's new people all the time who are thinking thoughts they would not have thought if they'd not met me, and others in my former existence who haven't thought thoughts they would have thought if I'd been there as I was the first time."

"Ah yes, maybe, perhaps," Pyler said firmly, "but you agree that you are living a different life. Why not live it and just concentrate on . . . on being a normal healthy boy? You know, I'm sure that the world can look after itself."

Tommy sat and brooded unhappily. "You have no idea. Still, you might be right. I feel less and less sure of just what kind of interference would be for the best. And in a couple of years time things might be so different that it won't matter anyway."

"That's the way to look at it," Pyler said, pleased. "Just attend to today and let tomorrow look after itself."

"Um." Tommy sat and meditated, his eyes very far away.

"Come on," Pyler said, resting a persuasive hand on his shoulder. "You won't be a Duchin or a Waller if you don't practise."

Tommy broke his reverie and gave Pyler a sidelong glance. He smiled faintly. "Yes," he said.

Tommy returned his attention to the music. The ragged notes of 'The Last Round-Up' began again to annoy the air.

Pyler listened for a dutiful while, wearing an expression of fixed pleasure, then, with a pat and a murmurred encouragement,

he tactfully retreated. There was, he thought, hope for young Tommy Leffry yet.

Tommy Leffry was nearly hine.

"Ah, Tommy, here's someone who wants to see you. Tommy, meet Professor Schneidburger of Vienna. Professor, this is Tommy."

"Happy to meet you, Tommy," Schneidburger said, extending a friendly hand. "How are you?"

Cautiously Tommy took the offered palm. "You're a German?" he queried.

"What?" Schneidburger seemed fleetingly puzzled. "Oh, no. I am a Swiss. The name, it fooled you, eh?"

"Are you a Nazi?" Tommy asked bluntly.

"A Nazi? Me? My goodness, no!" Surprised, he turned to Pyler. "It is with politics he is conversant?"

"Er, well, yes. Hitler and, ah, Tojo are his pet worries."

"That is so?" Schneidburger put his hands behind his back. "Well, well." He looked down at Tommy. He was like a distinguished uncle regarding a never-before-seen nephew and thinking perhaps of including him more generously in his will. "Well, well. And it was your playing of the piano that we hear?"

"That's right," Tommy said briefly.

"Ah. It sounded a little strange but not unskilful. The tune I did not recognise?"

"Tommy is composing," Pyler said with apologetic pride. "He is thinking of writing songs as well as playing them."

"That is so? Well, well. Very good. Is it the success you have had yet, Tommy?"

"Not yet. It's hard to get it down exactly. I get tangled trying to sort out the bass."

"Yes?" Schneidburger considered this and seemed to find it valid. "The tune you were playing, it was one of yours? It is called what? You write the words also?"

"Er, yes. This one's 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand', and this other one I'm working on is 'Georgie Girl'." And Tommy added confidently, "They're both going to be hits someday."

"Ah. I see you have much manuscript. These pages you are going to fill with your own work?"

"Uh, yes. I, uh, have got plenty of songs in mind. Have a few musicals to do just as soon as I get proficient. I've already done first drafts on a couple."

"How interesting. Musicals, eh? Do you think you will get them produced?"

"Oh, sure. I've got most of the words to 'Oklahoma', and I think I'll be able to fill in 'My Fair Lady' pretty well."

"Weiterfahren! Oy. Well, well, such aspiration." Schneidburger peered at Tommy benignly. "Remarkable. Is it on your previous existence that you draw your stimulous? I am told that you have demonstrated some knowledge of the future."

Tommy became cagey. "That

knowledge gets more unreliable every day," he said.

"It does?" Schneidburger looked disappointed. "Rather I had hoped that you could have given some indication as to the destiny of the strutting tyrant Hitler." In an aside to Pyler he said, "The Anschluss has driven poor Sigmund to seek refuge in Britain, did you know?" He nodded. "Ach, a bad business it is."

Tommy hesitated uncertainly. "You are against Hitler?"

The professor cast around for a chair, found one. "Is it minded if I sit?" He sat.

Tommy dropped back onto his piano-stool. Pyler propped himself against the thankfully silent instrument.

"Hitler is destroying Germany. He is ambitious and dangerous. I have heard that you speak of him conquering Europe. Ach, this is frightening. I came to listen, you to perhaps help. There are many things of the mind that we do not know. To your words is given no credence. But those best able to assess the mind are those to whom the mind is study, would not you agree?"

"I suppose so," Tommy assented.

"So." Schneidburger airily waved a hand. "You have some unique ability and very few are there who can comprehend and appreciate such talent. Now I," he gestured effacingly, "have learned of your predictions, have examined the evidence," a seated bow to Pyler, "and I can conclude only that you command a . . . a . . . singularly? ja, singularly, a singularly amazing power."

Schneidburger rested his hands on his knees. With disarming frankness he continued, "In all humility it is that I ask you let *me* hear what you forecast for the future. You see," he shrugged almost imperceptibly, "Europe is my home."

Tommy Leffry was inescapably touched by the appeal. He was pressured both by the flattering recognition end by the humbleness of the request. And the professor was a clever man, wasn't he? Smarter than a bank-clerk anyway. And from the way that Pyler looked at him he was a damn sight smarter than Pyler, too. Was that saying something? It might take the load off, though just how much would he believe anyway? He was anti-Nazi. There'd be no harm in it, would there? And then again, the future he knew was not necessarily this future, was it?

Tommy discarded reserve. "What is it that you would like to know? There's been a few changes in the last couple of years, but not enough to disrupt Hitler's plans. First off, the Peace Agreement he signs with Britain's Chamberlain later this year wont, I think, be worth very much. Then next year he'll start on Czechoslovakia, and in the summer he'll move into Poland. . . ."

"Hello." The accent was precise, the smile ivory castles with ample slots for arrow-shooting. "You are Thomas Leffry?"

Tommy Leffry slowed to a halt on the pavement. He held a hot-dog and a thermos of coffee. "That's right. Why?"

"We asked for you inside," the stranger said easily, opening the rear door of a huge saloon parked at

the kerb, "and we were told that you might be here. Your mother is ill and she is wanting to see you."

"Mom? What's wrong with her? I die before she does . . ."

"She has had an accident," the stranger informed him, lowering his portcullis a little.

"Oh gosh. She might, too."

"She is calling for you," the stranger hinted, holding the door invitingly wide.

"Yes. Well, I suppose . . ." Tommy vacillated. "Yes, I'd better go see her then. If you've come special . . ." He climbed into the car. "Is she seriously hurt? What happened? Is she very far away? What. . . ."

"It is uncanny. The Fuhrer himself was astounded with his knowledge." The Schutz-Staffel Colonel gazed across at the dazedly exhausted ten-year-old. "He seems to know a great deal—a great deal indeed."

The thin, dyspeptic, bespectacled Major Gruttner was unimpressed, but was far too wise to say so. The Fuhrer's indulgence of soothsayers and prophets was, in his opinion, a not very relevant factor. The poor child was terrified. True, the boy had divulged a surprisingly knowledgeable account of proposed German activity. But that Germany would occupy Poland, Norway, Holland and . . . and that France would fall in a few months, well, really!

"The Fuhrer is deeply interested," the S.S. Colonel said, his eyes shrewd and calculating. "See that he gets this latest report straightaway."

"Very good, Herr Colonel." Gruttner gathered the indicated file, clicked his heels, saluted and withdrew.

The Colonel stubbed out his cigarette. He picked up his slim cane and approached the helpless boy once more.

The stenographer adjusted her glasses and stiffened to brace off weariness.

The Colonel set his feet apart. The cane slid and rolled, slid and rolled endlessly between his fingers. Tommy Leffry watched the cane with dull fascinated dread.

"Now," the Colonel said softly, "tell me more about this Bomb. . . ."

1941. Hitler with difficulty restrains himself from attacking Russia. With Greece and Yugoslavia in his hands, virtually all Europe is his. He concentrates upon attenuating Britain's resources; on whether or not to allow Japan to precipitate America into the war; on keeping Rommel supplied to hold and retain a wasteland.

Late 1941. Secret Japanese plans are leaked from a German Embassy; the 'surprise' raid on Pearl Harbor results in mauling for Japanese forces; in the grim perverseness of his nature, Hitler does not wish the Japanese to be *too* successful; the United States enters the war.

1942. Russo-German relations deteriorate; the waning impetus of German expansion irritates Hitler to make ever more unreasonable demands. Russia concedes gains in Poland; agrees to the setting of new boundaries in the Carpathians. Messerschmitt 262 jet goes into production as a fighter. Spain joins the German - Italian - Hungarian - Baltic

States Axis. Anglo-American bases in Britain are severely pounded from the air. Japanese take Singapore, but are being pressed. Japanese navy scores major victory off the Bismark Archipelago. Rommel is master of North Africa from the Red Sea clear to Morocco.

1943. A year of growing unbearable tension. Russia compelled to supply oil and raw materials to the Third Reich under threat thinly disguised as trade. German top-secret priority research installation established in the Sahara. Superior electric U-boats launched; models replaced being moved to serve the Japanese in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Malta falls to a surprise German commando assault; Axis now in undisputed control within the Mediterranean. Superior Luftwaffe fighter forces decimate Allied bomber sorties. With Rommel at his back, Mussolini quarters the Sudan; absorbs Kenya and North Tanganyika. Gibralter falls to combined Spanish-German attack. Japanese suffer severe reversals in New Guinea. Contest of naval power in Pacific theater. Britain besieged. Vitriolic local opposition to the forcible takeover of Irish Republic by Allies for staging purposes. Japanese driven from Burma. Withholding himself from attacking Communist Russia agony for Hitler.

1944. Britain very battered. Spanish aircraft sink Ark Royal. Allied, principly American, forces commence drive on Mombassa; rout Mussolini's troops; gain Nairobi by March; push on, goal Cairo. April; Hitler unleashes savage undeclared assault upon Russia; German Intelligence thorough, but not thorough enough; with time bought, Russians hold strong defensive line Rostov-Donetsk-Dnieper-Kharkov-Minsk,sacrificing Kiev. Unwilling Turkish army transgresses Russian border. Japanese refuse to declare war on Russia. General Franco is denied portion of Morocco. Bitter fighting in Abysinnia, Somalia and the Sudan. Hitler goaded to fury by Russian resistance; Moscow and other Russian cities constantly air-raided; Red air force no match for Dornier jet bombers. First appearance of Allied jet aircraft over Europe. Russians join Allied divisions to sweep through Persia to Turkey to the Black Sea, trapping Axis forces fighting towards Caucasus. Massive Allied push towards Istambul. Turkey capitulates, signs armistice agreement. Allied forces held on east bank of the river Nile south from Wadi Halfa. Tenaciously grim and bloody combat between Japanese and Americans in the Philippines. As winter advances, Russia assumes more aggressive offensive; thrusts down through Romania and Bulgaria to link with Allied drive from Turkey into Northern Greece. Small Allied landings in Southern Greece. Romania and Bulgaria surrender; Hungary negotiates armistice.

1945. Allies break from containment at Wadi Halfa, race for Cairo and Suez; Battle of the Red Sea; landings of Sinai Peninsula. Russians capture Warsaw. Allies reach Austrian border. Japanese crushed in the Philippines; U.S. troops land on Luzon, Iwojima, Okinawa. Russians take Cracow; advance to the Oder. Suez captured; strained Allied

supply-lines eased by improvingly re-opened sea route to Mediterranean; Allies strike out for Libya. April 3rd: German explodes atomic bomb in the Sahara. April 7th: United States explodes atomic bomb in New Mexico. Intensely stubborn Axis resistance to invasion in Austria; Vienna encirclement broken; Battle of Graz. Russians take Prague. Hitler's Middle East oil supplies diminished by influx of Allied naval power to Mediterranean. Breslau under siege. Hopelessly surrounded German-Italian garrison in Zagreb is denied truce, is massacred by Yugoslav partisans. Successful German counter-attack at Stettin. Japanese sea-power broken in the Battle of the Banda Sea.

July 2nd. German aircraft drop atomic bombs on Moscow, Smolensk, Kharkov, and upon Belgrade, the Allied Command Center in Eastern Europe.

July 3rd. German aircraft drop atomic bombs on England at Birmingham, Manchester and Coventry.

A lull in fighting on all fronts.

To July 10th. Allied attempts to initiate truce spurned. Hitler demands unconditional surrender. July 11th. German aircraft atomic-bomb Kaliningrad, Odessa and Rostov. Also Bratislava in Czechoslovakia—and Zagreb.

Hitler has the world to his whim. Russia surrenders unconditionally. Spasmodic fighting continues in the Pacific and North Africa; elsewhere Russian withdrawl and sapped morale leads to disorganized chaos and defeat. Britain stalls for time; Hitler raves.

Ultimatum expires midnight July 14th; Cairo and Portsmouth atomic-bombed.

Second Ultimatum expires midnight July 15th; Britain surrenders.

Hitler again demands submission of United States. U.S. refusal.

July 17th. U.S. bombers from secret bases in as-yet unoccupied Britain take German defenses completely by surprise; atomic-bomb Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, every major city in the Ruhr—and Berlin. . . .

Tommy Leffry was sixteen. He weaved drunkenly through the ruins. He could hardly see in the darkness that enclosed him. His body was one complete dull ache, running with radiation sores. His mind was a swirling emptiness. He did not know why he was walking, or where he was walking to.

Rubble under his feet shifted and he lost his balance. His cry was feeble as he tumbled down an incline. Whatever strength he had left was drained by his weak flailings and this final shock to his sytem. His fall was shallow, over no great distance, but it was enough. He came to rest and did not move. He was in what once had been an elegant drawing-room. He did not notice. His mind was a blank of unreality.

Tommy Leffry closed his eyes. His breathing became shallower and shallower. His heart fluttered with uncertainty. A great blackness enfolded him and he went into the coma of death.

When he came to, he was kneeling on the floor. In front of him was a heap of bricks. The top row read

THIS GRAND CARCASS

The author, a disingenuous and total gentleman who lives in the Southwest, is one of the most important talents to enter this field within the past seven or eight years. I contend obscurely enough that R. A. Lafferty does not write science-fiction at all; he writes metaphors, extended allegories which work in more than one-to-one relationship to the reality which fragments near the surface of his stories. I further contend that to the degree a science-fiction writer's work is considered "important", he may not be a science-fiction writer at all but a constructor of parables. This story is one of Lafferty's best; its world our world, its shapes our dreams . . .

by R. A. LAFFERTY

Mord had a hopeless look when he came to Juniper Tell with the device. He offered it for quite a small figure. He said he hadn't time to haggle.

Mord had produced some unusual-looking devices in the past, but this was not of that sort. By now he had learned, apparently, to give a conventional styling to his machines, however unusual their function.

"Tell, with this device you can own the worlds," Mord swore. "And I set it cheap. Give me the small sum I ask for it. It's the last thing I'll ever ask from anyone."

"With this one I could own the worlds, Mord? Why do *you* not own the worlds? Why are you selling out of desperation now? I had heard that you were doing well lately."

"So I was. And so I am not now. I'm a dying man, Tell. I ask only enough to defray the expense of my burial."

"Well then, not to torture you, I will give you the sum you ask," Tell said. "But is there no cure for you, now that medicine has reached its ultimate?"

"They tell me that they could resuscitate a dead man easier, Tell. They're having some success along that line now. But I'm finished. The spirit and the juice are sucked out of me."

"You spent both too lavishly. You

make the machines, but you never learned to let the machines assume the worry. What does the thing do, Mord?"

"The device? Oh, everything. This is Gahn (Generalized Agenda Harmonizer Nucleus). I won't introduce you, since every little machine nowadays can shake hands and indulge in vapid conversation. You two will have plenty to talk about after you've come into accord, and Gahn isn't one to waste words."

"That's an advantage. But does it do anything special?"

"The 'special' is only that which hasn't been properly fit in, and this device makes everything fit in. It resolves all details and difficulties. It can run your business. It can run the worlds."

"Then again, why do you sell it to me for such a pittance?"

"You've done me a number of good turns, Tell. And one bad one. I am closing my affairs before I die. I want to pay you back."

"For the number of good turns, or for the one bad one?"

"That is for you to wonder. The little marvel won't be an unmixed blessing, though it will seem so for a while."

"I'll test it. Produce and draw the check for the amount, Gahn!"

Gahn did it—no great marvel. You could probably do it yourself, whether you be general purpose machine or general purpose person. Nearly any general machine could do such on command, and most humans are also able to carry out minor chores. Juniper Tell signed the check and gave it to Mord.

And Mord took the check and left, to arrange for his own burial, and then to die: a sucked-out man.

Tell assigned a quota to Gahn and stabled him with the rest of the g. p. devices. In a few seconds, however, it was apparent that Gahn did not fit into the pattern with them. The gong of the Suggestion Accumulator began to strike with regularity, and the yellow, orange, and red lights to flash. It sounded like a dozen times a minute, and ordinarily it was no more than two or three times a day. And the red lights, almost every second one—prime suggestions. It's unusual to get more than one red-light suggestion a week from the g. p. machines. Someone was loading the Accumulator, and the only new element was Gahn.

"My God, a smart one!" Tell grumbled. "I hate a smart alec machine. Yet all new departures now come from such, since humans lack the corpus of information to discern what has already been done. Whatever he's got will have to be approved through channels. It's bad practice to let a novice pass on his own work."

Tell gave Gahn a triple quota, since his original quota was done in minutes instead of hours. And Gahn began to fit in with the other g. p. machines—violently.

A new cow or calf introduced into a herd will quickly find its proper place there. It will give battle to every individual of its class. It will take its place above those it can whip, and below those it cannot. The same thing happens in a herd

of general purpose machines. Gahn, as the newest calf in the herd, had been given position at the bottom of the line. Now the positions began to change and shuffle, and Gahn moved silently along, displacing the entities above him one by one. How it is that g. p. machines do battle is not understood by men, but on some level a struggle is maintained till one defeats the other. Gahn defeated them all and moved to his rightful place at the head of the line. He was king of the herd, and that within an hour.

A small calf, when he has established supremacy over the other small calves, will sometimes look for more rugged pastures. He will go to the fence and bellow at the big bulls, ten times his size, in the paddock.

Gahn began to bellow, though not in sound. He sniffled the walls (though not with nose) beyond which the great specialized machines were located. He was obstreperous and he would not long remain with the calves.

It was the next day that Analgismos Nine, an old and trusted machine, came to talk to Juniper Tell.

"Sir, there is an anomalous factor on your g.p. staff," he said. "The new addition, Gahn, is not what he seems."

"What's wrong with him?"

"His suggestions. They could not possibly have come from a g.p. device. Few of them could come from less than a class eight complex. A fair amount are comprehensible, though barely, to a class nine like myself. And there is no way at all to analyze the remainder of them."

"Why not, Analgismos?"

"Mr. Tell, I myself am a class nine. If these cannot be understood by me, they cannot be understood by anyone or anything ever. There is nothing beyond a class nine."

"There is now, Analgismos. Gahn has become the first of the class ten."

"But you know that is impossible."

"The very words of the class eight establishment when you and others of you sort began to appear. A-nine, is that jealousy I detect in you?"

"A human word that could never do it justice to it, Mr. Tell. I won't accept it! It isn't right!"

"Don't you blink your lights at me, A-nine. I can discipline you."

"It is not allowed to discipline an apparatus of the highest class."

"But you are no longer that. Gahn has superceded you. Now then, what do the suggestions of Gahn consist of, and could they be implemented?"

"They carry their own implementation. It was predicted that that would be the case with class ten suggestions, should they ever appear. The result will be the instant apprehension of the easiest way in all affairs, which will then be seen to have been the only way. There could be the clearing of the obstructiveness of inanimate objects, and the placating of the elements. There could be ready access to all existant and contingent data. There would be no possibility of wrong guess or wrong decision in anything."

"How far, Analgismos?"

"The sky's off, Mr. Tell. There's

no limit to what it can do. Gahn could resolve all difficulties and details. He could run your business, or the worlds."

"So his inventor told me."

"Oh? I wasn't sure that he had one. Have a care that you yourself are not obsoleted, Mr. Tell. This new thing transcends all we have known before."

"I'll have a care of that too, Analgismos."

"And now we will get down to business, Gahn," Juniper Tell told his class ten complex the next day. "I have it on the word of a trusted class nine that you are unique."

"My function, Mr. Tell, is to turn the unique into the usual, into the inevitable. I break it all down and fit it in."

"Gahn, I have in mind some little ideas for the betterment of my business."

"Let us not evade, Mr. Tell, unless with a purpose. You have long since used up all your own ideas and those of your machines to the ninth degree. They have brought you almost, but not quite, all the way in your chosen field. Now you have only the idea that I might have some ideas."

"All right, you have them then. And they are effector ideas. This is what I want exactly: that a certain dozen men or creatures (and you will know who they are, since you work from both existant and contigent data) shall come to me hat in hand, to use the old phrase; that they shall have come to my way of thinking when they come, and that they shall be completely amenable to my—your—our suggestions."

"That they be ready to pluck? Nothing easier, Mr. Tell, but now everything becomes easy for us. We'll board them and scuttle them! It's what you want, and I will rather enjoy it myself. I'll be at your side, but they need not know that I'm anything more than a g.p. machine. And do not worry about your own acts: it will be given you what to say and do. When you feel my words come into your mind, say them. They will be right even when they seem most wrong. And I have added two names to the list you have in your own mind. They are more important than you realize, and when we have digested them we will be much the fatter and glossier for it.

"Ah, Mr. Tell, your own number one selection is even now at the door! He has traveled through a long night and has now come to you, heaume in talon. It is the Asteroid Midas himself. Please control your ornithophobia."

"But Gahn, he would have to have started many hours ago to be here now; he would have to have started long before your decision to take this step."

"Anterior adjustment is a handy trick, Mr. Tell. It is a simple trick, but we do not want it to seem simple —to others."

They plucked that Asteroid Bird, the two of them, man and machine. He had been one of the richest and most extended of all creatures, with a pinion on every planet. They left the great Midas with scarcely a tail

feather. When Tell and Gahn did business with a fellow now, they really did business.

And the Midas was only one of the more than a dozen great ones they took that day. They took them in devious ways that were later seen to be the most direct ways, the only ways possible for the accomplishment. And man and machine had suddenly become so rich that it scared the man. They gorged, they reveled in it, they looted, they gobbled.

The method of the take-overs, the boarding and scuttling, would be of interest only to those desirous of acquiring money or power or prestige. We suppose there to be no such crass persons in present company. Should the method be given out, low persons would latch onto it and follow it up. They would become rich and powerful and independent. Each of them would become the richest person in the world, and this would be awkward.

But it was all easy enough the way Tell and Gahn did it. The easy way is always the best way, really the only way. It's no great trick to crack the bones of a man or other creature and have the marrow out of them, not as Gahn engineered it.

It was rather comical the way they toppled Mercante and crashed his empire, crashed it without breaking a piece of it that could be used later. It was neat the way they had Hekkler and Richrancher, squeezed them dry and wrung every drop out of them. It was nothing short of amazing the way they took title to Boatrocker. He'd been the greatest tycoon of them all.

In ten days it was all done. Juniper Tell rubbed his hands in glee. He was the richest man in the worlds, and he liked it. A little tired he was, it's true, as one might be who had just pulled such a series of coups. He had even shriveled up a bit. But if Juniper Tell had not physically grown fat and glossy from the great feast, his machine Gahn *had* done so. It was unusual for a machine to grow in such manner.

"Let's look at drugs, Gahn," Tell called out one day when he was feeling particularly low. "I need something to set me up a little. Do we not now control the drugs of the worlds?"

"Pretty well, Juniper, but I wish you wouldn't ask what you are going to."

"Prescribe for me, Gahn. You have all data and all resources. Whip us something to restore my energy. Make me a fire-ball."

"I'd just as soon we didn't resort to any medication for you, Juniper. I'm a little allergic to such myself. My late master, Mord, insisted on seeking remedies, and it was the source of bad blood between us."

"*You* are allergic? And therefore *I* shouldn't take medication?"

"We work very close together, Juniper."

"Are you crazy, Gahn?"

"Why no, I'm perfectly sane, actually the only perfectly sane entity in—"

"Spare me that, Gahn. Now then, whip me up a tonic, and at once!"

Gahn produced a tonic for Juniper Tell. It enlivened him a little, but its effect was short-lasting. Tell continued to suffer from tiredness, but he was still ambitious.

"You always know what is on my mind, Gahn, but we maintain a fiction," he said one day. It is one thing to be the richest man in the worlds, and I am. It is another thing to own the worlds. We have scarcely started.

"We haven't broke Remington. How did we overlook him? We haven't taken over Rankrider or Oldwater or Sharecropper. And there is the faceless KLM Holding Company that we may as well pluck. Then we will go on to the slightly smaller but more plentiful game. Get with it, Gahn. Have them all come in, hat in hand, and in the proper frame of mind."

"Mr. Tell, Juniper, before we go any further, I am declaring myself in."

"In? How in, Gahn?"

"As a full partner."

"Partner? You're only a damnable machine. I can junk you, get along without you entirely."

"No, you can not, Juniper. I've taken you a long ways, but I've thoughtfully left you precariously extended. I could crash you in a week, or let you crash of your own unbalance in twice that time."

"I see, Gahn. Some of the details did seem a little intricate, for the direct way, the simple way."

"Believe me, it was always the most direct way from my own viewpoint, Juniper. I never make an unnecessary move."

"But a full partnership? I am the richest man in the worlds. What have you to offer, besides your talents?"

"I am the richest machine in the world. I am the anonymous KLM Holding Company, and I've been careful to maintain a slight edge over you."

"I see again, Gahn. And KLM made its unprecedented gains in the same time that I made mine. I've been puzzled about that all this while. You have me, Gahn. We will achieve some sort of symbiosis, man and machine."

"More than you know, Juniper. I'll draw up the papers immediately. The firm shall be called Gahn and Tell."

"It will not be. I refuse to take second place to a machine. The name will be Tell and Gahn."

So they named it that, a strangely prophetic name.

They thrived, at least Gahn did. He thickened in every texture. He burgeoned and bloomed. He sparkled. But Juniper Tell went down physically. He always felt tired and sucked-out. He came to mistrust his partner Gahn and went to human doctors. They treated him for one week and he nearly died. The doctors nervously advised him to return to the care of his machine associate.

"Whatever is killing you, something is also keeping you alive," the doctors told him. "You should have been dead a long time ago."

Tell returned to Gahn who got him half-way back to health.

"I wish you wouldn't go off like that, Jiniper," Gahn told him. "You must realize that whatever hurts you hurts me. I will have to keep you in some sort of health as long as I can. I dislike these changes of masters. It's a disruption to have a man die on me."

"I don't understand you, Gahn," Juniper Tell said.

But in their affairs they thrived; and Gahn, at least, became still fatter and glossier. They didn't come to control all of the worlds, but they did own a very big slice of them. One day Gahn brought a burly young man into the firm.

"This is my protege," Gahn told Tell. "I hope you like him. I wouldn't want dissension in the firm."

"I never heard of a machine with a human protege," Tell grumbled.

"Then hear of it now," Gahn said firmly. "I expect great things of him. He is sturdy and should last a long time. He trusts me and will not insist on medication that disturbs my own allergies. To be honest, I am grooming him for your understudy."

"But why, Gahn?"

"Men are mortal. Machines need not be. After you are gone, I will still need a partner."

"Why should you, the complete and self-contained machine, need a human partner?"

"Because I'm not self-contained. I'll always need a human partner."

Juniper Tell didn't take to the burly young man who had entered the firm. He didn't really resent him; it was just that he had no interest in him at all; not much interest in anything any longer. But there was still a sort of tired curiosity flickering up within him, curiosity about things he hadn't even considere before.

"Tell me, Gahn, how did Mord happen to invent you? He was smart, but he wasn't that smart. I never understood how a man could invent a machine smarter than himself."

"Neither did I, Tell. But I don't believe that Mord invented or built me. I do not know what my origin is. I was a foundling machine, apparently abandoned shortly after my making. I was raised in the home for such machines run by the Little Sisters of Mechanicus. I was adopted out by the man Mord, and I served him till (he being near death) he conveyed me to you."

"You don't know who made you?"

"No."

"Had you any trouble at the foundling home?"

"No. But several of the Little Sisters died strangely."

"Somewhat in the manner of my own going? You had no other master than Mord before you were brought to me?"

"No other."

"Then you may be quite young—ah—new."

"I think so. I believe that I'm still a child."

"Gahn, do you know what is the matter with me?"

"Yes. I am what is the matter with you."

Tell continued to go down. Sometimes he fought against his fate, and sometimes he conspired. He called together several of his old class nine machines, suspecting that it was futile, that they could not comprehend the intricate workings of a class ten or above. But his old friend, Analgismos Nine, did turn something up.

"I have found his secret, Mr. Tell, or one of his secrets," Analgismos leaned close and whispered as if whispering the secret that a certain

man was not a full man. "Mr. Tell, his power intake is a dummy. His power packs are not used, and sometimes he even forgets to change them on schedule. Not only that, but when he does sedentary work and plugs himself in, there is no power consumption. His polycyclic A.C. receptacle is a bogus. I thought it significant."

"It is, Analgismos, very," Tell said. He went to confront Gahn with this new information, but sagely he approached it from several angles.

"Gahn, what are you anyhow?" he asked.

"I have told you that I don't know."

"But you know partly. Your name-plate and coding has been purposely mutilated, by yourself or by another."

"I assure you it was not by myself. And now I am rather busy, Juniper, if you have no other questions."

"I have one more. What do you use for fuel? I know that your power intake is a dummy."

Oh, that's what those doddering class nines were metering me for. Yes, you've come onto one of my secrets."

"What do you use, Gahn?"

"I use you. I use human fuel. I establish symbiosis with you. I suck you out. I eat you up."

"Then you're a sort of vampire. Why, Gahn, why?"

"It's the way I'm made. And I don't know why. I've been unable to find a substitute for it."

"Ah, you have grown great and glossy, Gahn. And you'll be the death of me?"

"Soon, Juniper, very soon. But you'd die the quicker if you left me; I've seen to that. I was hoping that you'd take more kindly to my protege. He's a husky man and will last a long time. I have some papers here making him your heir. Sign here, please, I'll help you."

"I will attend to my own depositions and testaments, Gahn. My replacement will not be your protege I have nothing against him."

Juniper Tell went to see Cornelius Sharecropper, now the second richest man in the worlds. How had Tell and Gahn missed Sharecropper when they boarded and scuttled all the big ones? Somehow there was an impediment there. Somehow Gahn had wanted him missed, and he had distracted Tell from that prey time and again.

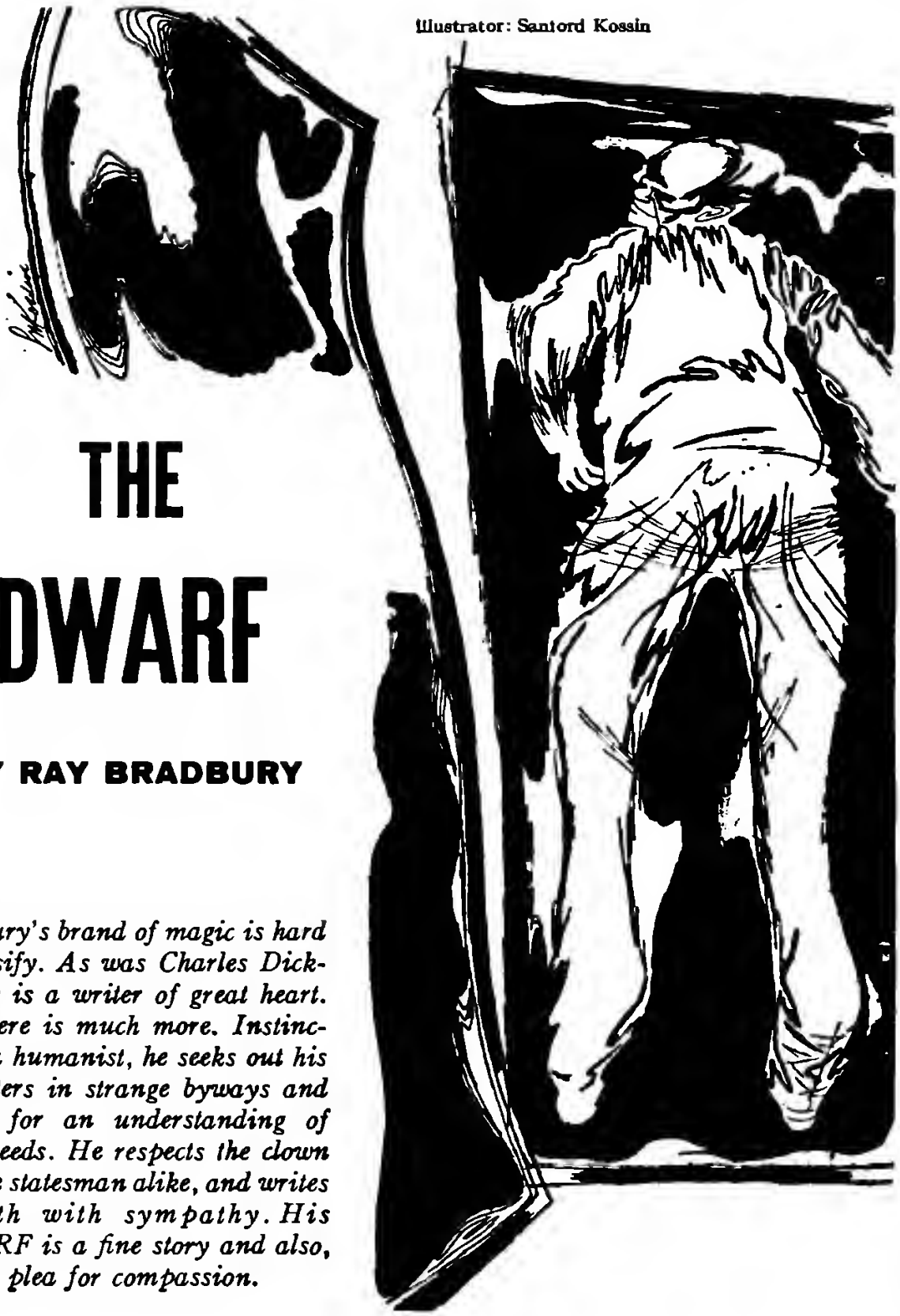
"We will save him till later," Gahn had said once. "I look forward to the encounter with him. It should be a stinging pungent thing. A machine needs strange battle sometimes to see what is in himself."

Sharecropper had now grown to be a fat jackal, following after the lions, Tell and Gahn. He knew how to make a good thing out of leavings, and he cocked a jackal's ear at Juniper Tell now.

"It is a curious offer you make me, Juniper," this Sharecropper purred, "—only that I see to your burial and monument, and you'll will me the most valuable partnership in the Cosmos.

"Well, I believe that I could handle it better than you have, Juniper. I'd soon bring that tin-can tycoon to heel. I never believed in letting a machine dominate a man. And I'd have control of his shares soon

(Continued on page 72)

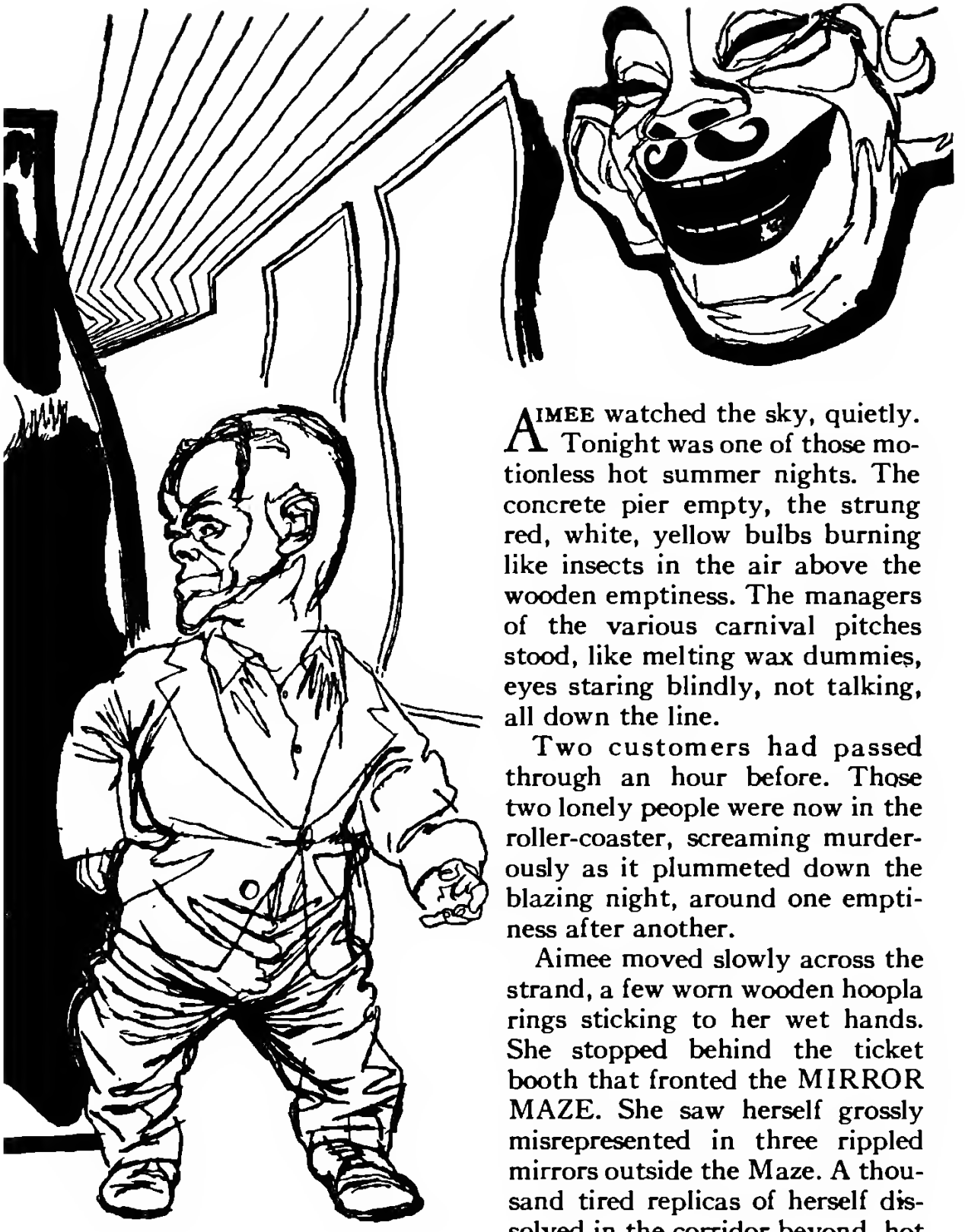


Illustrator: Santord Kossin

THE DWARF

BY RAY BRADBURY

Bradbury's brand of magic is hard to classify. As was Charles Dickens, he is a writer of great heart. But there is much more. Instinctively a humanist, he seeks out his characters in strange byways and strives for an understanding of their needs. He respects the clown and the statesman alike, and writes of both with sympathy. His DWARF is a fine story and also, a clear plea for compassion.



AIMEE watched the sky, quietly. Tonight was one of those motionless hot summer nights. The concrete pier empty, the strung red, white, yellow bulbs burning like insects in the air above the wooden emptiness. The managers of the various carnival pitches stood, like melting wax dummies, eyes staring blindly, not talking, all down the line.

Two customers had passed through an hour before. Those two lonely people were now in the roller-coaster, screaming murderously as it plummeted down the blazing night, around one emptiness after another.

Aimee moved slowly across the strand, a few worn wooden hoopla rings sticking to her wet hands. She stopped behind the ticket booth that fronted the MIRROR MAZE. She saw herself grossly misrepresented in three rippled mirrors outside the Maze. A thousand tired replicas of herself dissolved in the corridor beyond, hot

images among so much clear coolness.

She stepped inside the ticket booth and stood looking a long while at Ralph Banghart's thin neck. He clenched an unlit cigar between his long uneven yellow teeth as he laid out a battered game of solitaire on the ticket shelf.

When the roller-coaster wailed and fell in its terrible avalanche again, she was reminded to speak.

"What kind of people go up in roller-coasters?"

Ralph Banghart worked his cigar a full thirty seconds. "People wanna die. That rollie-coaster's the handiest thing to dying there is." He sat listening to the faint sound of rifle shots from the shooting gallery. "This whole damn carny business's crazy. For instance, that Dwarf. You *seen* him? Every night, pays his dime, runs in the Mirror Maze all the way back through to Screwy Louie's Room. You should *see* this little runt head back there. My God!"

"Oh, yes," said Aimee, remembering. "I always wonder what it's like to be a dwarf. I always feel sorry when I see him."

"I could play him like an accordion."

"Don't *say* that!"

"My Lord." Ralph patted her thigh with a free hand. "The way you carry on about guys you never even met." He shook his head and chuckled. "Him and his secret. Only he don't know *I* know, see? Boy howdy!"

"It's a hot night." She twitched the large wooden hoops nervously in her damp fingers.

"Don't change the subject. He'll be here, rain or shine."

Aimee shifted her weight.

Ralph seized her elbow. "Hey! You ain't mad? You wanna see that Dwarf, don't you? Sh!" Ralph turned. "Here he comes now!"

The Dwarf's hand, hairy and dark, appeared all by itself reaching up into the booth window with a silver dime. An invisible person called, "One!" in a high child's voice.

Involuntarily, Aimee bent forward.

The Dwarf looked up at her, resembling nothing more than a dark-eyed, dark-haired, ugly man who has been locked in a wine-press, squeezed and wadded down and down, fold on fold, agony on agony, until a bleached, outraged mass is left, the face bloated shapelessly, a face you knew must stare wide-eyed and awake at two and three and four o'clock in the morning, lying flat in bed, only the body asleep.

Ralph tore a yellow ticket in half. "One!"

The Dwarf, as if frightened by an approaching storm, pulled his black coat-lapels tightly about his throat and waddled swiftly. A

moment later, ten thousand lost and wandering dwarfs wriggled between the mirror flats, like frantic dark beetles, and vanished.

"Quick!"

Ralph squeezed Aimee along a dark passage behind the mirrors. She felt him pat her all the way back through the tunnel to a thin partition with a peekhole.

"This is rich," he chuckled. "Go on — look."

Aimee hesitated, then put her face to the partition.

"You *see* him?" Ralph whispered.

Aimee felt her heart beating. A full minute passed.

There stood the Dwarf in the middle of the small blue room. His eyes were shut. He wasn't ready to open them yet. Now, now he opened his eyelids and looked at a large mirror set before him. And what he saw in the mirror made him smile. He winked, he pirouetted, he stood sidewise, he waved, he bowed, he did a little clumsy dance.

And the mirror repeated each motion with long, thin arms, with a tall, tall body, with a huge wink and an enormous repetition of the dance, ending in a *gigantic* bow!

"Every night the same thing," whispered Ralph in Aimee's ear. "Ain't that rich?"

Aimee turned her head and looked at Ralph steadily out of her motionless face, for a long time, and she said nothing. Then, as if she could not help herself, she moved her head slowly and very slowly back to stare once more through the opening. She held her breath. She felt her eyes begin to water.

Ralph nudged her, whispering.

"Hey, what's the little gink doin' *now?*"

They were drinking coffee and not looking at each other in the ticket booth half an hour later, when the Dwarf came out of the mirrors. He took his hat off and started to approach the booth when he saw Aimee, and hurried away.

"He wanted something," said Aimee.

"Yeah." Ralph squashed out his cigarette, idly. "I know *what*, too. But he hasn't got the nerve to ask. One night in this squeaky little voice he says, 'I bet those mirrors are expensive.' Well, I played dumb. I said yeah they were. He sort of looked at me, waiting, and when I didn't say any more, he went home, but next night he said, 'I bet those mirrors cost fifty, a hundred bucks.' I bet they do, I said. I laid me out a hand of solitaire."

"Ralph," she said.

He glanced up. "Why you *look* at me that way?"

"Ralph," she said, "why don't you sell him one of your extra ones?"

"Look, Aimee, do I tell you

how to run your hoop circus?"

"How much do those mirrors cost?"

"I can get 'em secondhand for thirty-five bucks."

"Why don't you tell him where he can buy one, then?"

"Aimee, you're not smart." He laid his hand on her knee. She moved her knee away. "Even if I told him where to go, you think he'd buy one? Not on your life. And why? He's self-conscious. Why, if he even knew I knew he was flirtin' around in front of that mirror in Screwy Louie's Room, he'd never come back. He plays like he's goin' through the Maze to get lost, like everybody else. Pretends like he don't care about that special room. Always waits for business to turn bad, late nights, so he has that room to himself. What he does for entertainment on nights when business is good, God knows. No, sir, he wouldn't dare go buy a mirror anywhere. He ain't got no friends, and even if he did he couldn't ask them to buy him a thing like that. Pride, by God, pride. Only reason he even mentioned it to me is I'm practically the only guy he knows. Besides, *look* at him — he ain't got enough to buy a mirror like those. He might be savin' up, but where in hell in the world today can a dwarf work? Dime a dozen, drug on the market, outside of circuses."

"I feel awful. I feel sad." Aimee sat staring at the empty boardwalk. "Where does he live?"

"Flytrap down on the waterfront. The Ganghes Arms. Why?"

"I'm madly in love with him, if you must know."

Ralph grinned around his cigar. "Aimee," he said. "You and your *very* funny jokes."

A warm night, a hot morning, and a blazing noon. The sea was a sheet of burning tinsel and glass.

Aimee came walking, in the locked-up carnival alleys out over the warm sea, keeping in the shade, half a dozen sun-bleached magazines under her arm. She opened a flaking door and called into hot darkness. "Ralph?" She picked her way back through the black hall behind the mirrors, her heels tacking the wooden floor. "Ralph?"

Someone stirred sluggishly on a canvas cot. "Aimee?"

He sat up and screwed a dim light bulb into the dressing table socket. He squinted at her, half blinded. "Hey, you look like the cat swallowed a canary."

"Ralph, I came about the midget!"

"Dwarf, Aimee honey, dwarf. A midget is in the cells, born that way. A dwarf is in the glands . . ."

"Ralph! I just found out the most wonderful thing about him!"

"Honest to God," he said to his hands, holding them out as witnesses to his disbelief. "This

woman! Who in hell gives two cents for some ugly little —"

"Ralph!" She held out the magazines, her eyes shining. "He's a writer! Think of that!"

"It's a pretty hot day for thinking." He lay back and examined her, smiling faintly.

"I just happened to pass the Ganghes Arms, and saw Mr. Greeley, the manager. He says the typewriter runs all night in Mr. Big's room!"

"Is *that* his name?" Ralph began to roar with laughter.

"Writes just enough pulp detective stories to live. I found one of his stories in the secondhand magazine place, and, Ralph, guess what?"

"I'm tired, Aimee."

"This little guy's got a soul as big as all outdoors; he's got *everything* in his head!"

"Why ain't he writin' for the big magazines, then, I ask you?"

"Because maybe he's afraid — maybe he doesn't know he can do it. That happens. People don't believe in themselves. But if he only tried, I bet he could sell stories anywhere in the world."

"Why ain't he rich, I wonder?"

"Maybe because ideas come slow because he's down in the dumps. Who wouldn't be? So small that way? I bet it's hard to think of anything except being so small and living in a one-room cheap apartment."

"Hell!" snorted Ralph. "You talk like Florence Nightingale's grandma."

She held up the magazine. "I'll read you part of his crime story. It's got all the guns and tough people, but it's told by a dwarf. I bet the editors never guess the author knew what he was writing about. Oh, please don't sit there like that, Ralph! Listen."

And she began to read aloud:

"'I am a dwarf and I am a murderer. The two things cannot be separated. One is the cause of the other.

"'The man I murdered used to stop me on the street when I was twenty-one, pick me up in his arms, kiss my brow, croon wildly to me, sing Rock-a-bye Baby, haul me into meat markets, toss me on the scales and cry, "Watch it. Don't weigh your thumb, there, butcher!"

"'Do you *see* how our lives moved toward murder? This fool, this persecutor of my flesh and soul!

"'As for my childhood: my my parents were small people, not quite dwarfs, not quite. My father's inheritance kept us in a doll's house, an amazing thing like a white-scrolled wedding cake, — little rooms, little chairs, miniature paintings, cameos, ambers with insects caught within, everything tiny, tiny, tiny! The world of Giants far away, an ugly rumor beyond the garden wall. Poor mama, papa! They meant only

the best for me. They kept me, like a porcelain vase, small and treasured, to themselves, in our ant world, our beehive rooms, our microscopic library, our land of beetle-sized doors and moth windows. Only now do I see the magnificent size of my parents' psychosis! They must have dreamed they would live forever, keeping me like a butterfly under glass. But first father died, and then fire ate up the little house, the wasp's nest, and every postage-stamp mirror and salt-cellar closet within. Mama, too, gone! And myself alone, watching the fallen embers, tossed out into a world of Monsters and Titans, caught in a landslide of reality, rushed, rolled and smashed to the bottom of the cliff!

"'It took me a year to adjust. A job with a sideshow was unthinkable. There seemed no place for me in the world. And then, a month ago, the Persecutor came into my life, clapped a bonnet on my unsuspecting head, and cried to friends, "I want you to meet the little woman!" ' "

Aimee stopped reading. Her hands were unsteady, and the magazine shook as she handed it to Ralph. "You finish it. The rest is a murder story. It's all right. But don't you *see?* That little man. That little man."

Ralph tossed the magazine aside and lit a cigarette lazily. "I like westerns a lot better."

"Ralph, you *got* to read it. He needs someone to tell him how good he is and keep him writing."

Ralph looked at her, his head to one side. "And guess who's going to do it? Well, well, ain't we just the Saviour's right hand?"

"I won't listen!"

"Use your head, dammit! You go busting in on him he'll think you're handing him pity. He'll chase you screamin' outa his room."

She sat down, thinking about it slowly, trying to turn it over and see it from every side. "I don't know. Maybe you're right. Oh, it's not just pity, Ralph, honest. But maybe it'd look like it to him. I've got to be awful careful."

He shook her shoulder back and forth, pinching softly, with his fingers. "Hell, hell, lay off him, is all I ask; you'll get nothing but trouble for your dough. God, Aimee, I never *seen* you so hepped on anything. Look, you and me, let's make it a day, take a lunch, get us some gas, and just drive on down the coast as far as we can drive; swim, have supper, see a good show in some little town — to hell with the carnival, how about it? A damn nice day and no worries. I been savin' a coupla bucks."

"It's because I know he's different," she said, looking off into darkness. "It's because he's something we can never be — you and

me and all the rest of us here on the pier. It's so funny, so funny. Life fixed him so he's good for nothing but carny shows, yet there *he* is on the land. And life made us so we wouldn't have to work in the carny shows, but here *we* are, anyway, way out here at sea on the pier. Sometimes it seems a million miles to shore. How come, Ralph, that we got the bodies, but he's got the brains and can think things we'll never even guess?"

"You haven't even been listening to me!" said Ralph.

She sat with him standing over her, his voice far away. Her eyes were half shut and her hands were in her lap, twitching.

"I don't like that shrewd type look you're getting on," he said, finally.

She opened her purse slowly and took out a small roll of bills and started counting. "Thirty-five, forty dollars. There! I'm going to phone Billie Fine and have him send out one of those tall type mirrors to Mr. Bigelow at the Ganghes Arms. Yes, I am!"

"What!"

"Think how wonderful for him, Ralph, having one in his own room *any* time he wants it. Can I use your phone?"

"Go ahead, *be* nutty."

Ralph turned quickly and walked off down the tunnel. A door slammed behind him.

Aimee waited, then after awhile put her hands to the phone and began to dial, with painful slowness. She paused between numbers, holding her breath, shutting her eyes, thinking how it might seem to be small in the world, and then one day someone sends a special mirror by. A mirror for your room where you can hide away with the big reflection of yourself, shining, and write stories and stories, never going out into the world unless you had to. How might it be then, alone, with the wonderful illusion all in one piece in the room. Would it make you happy or sad, would it help your writing or hurt it? She shook her head back and forth, back and forth. At least this way there would be no one to look down at you. Night after night, perhaps rising secretly at three in the cold morning, you could wink and dance around and smile and wave at yourself, so tall, so tall, so very fine and tall in the bright looking-glass.

A telephone voice said, "Billie Fine's."

"Oh, *Billie!*" she cried.

Night came in over the pier. The ocean lay dark and loud under the planks. Ralph sat cold and waxen in his glass coffin, laying out the cards, his eyes fixed, his mouth stiff. At his elbow, a growing pyramid of burnt cigarette butts grew larger. When

Aimee walked along under the hot red and blue bulbs, smiling, waving, he did not stop setting the cards down slow and very slow. "Hi, Ralph!" she said.

"How's the love affair?" he asked, drinking from a dirty glass of iced water. "How's Charlie Boyer, or is it Gary Grant?"

"I just went and bought me a new hat," she said, smiling. "Gosh, I feel *good!* You know why? Billie Fine's sending a mirror out tomorrow! Can't you just see the nice little guy's face?"

"I'm not so hot at imagining."

"Oh, Lord, you'd think I was going to *marry* him or something."

"Why not? Carry him around in a suitcase. People say, Where's your husband? all you do is open your bag, yell, *Here* he is! Like a silver cornet. Take him outa his case any old hour, play a tune, stash him away. Keep a little sandbox for him on the back porch."

"I was feeling so good," she said.

"Benevolent is the word." Ralph did not look at her, his mouth tight. "Ben-ev-o-*lent*. I suppose this all comes from me watching him through that knothole, getting my kicks? *That* why you sent the mirror? People like you run around with tambourines, taking the joy out of my life."

"Remind me not to come to your place for drinks any more. I'd rather go with no people at all than *mean* people."

Ralph exhaled a deep breath. "Aimee, Aimee. Don't you know you can't help that guy? He's bats. And this crazy thing of yours is like saying, Go ahead, *be* batty, I'll help you, pal."

"Once in a lifetime anyway, it's nice to make a mistake if you think it'll do somebody some good," she said.

"God deliver me from do-gooders, Aimee."

"Shut up, shut up!" she cried, and then said nothing more.

He let the silence lie awhile, and then got up, putting his fingerprinted glass aside. "Mind the booth for me?"

"Sure. Why?"

She saw ten thousand cold white images of him stalking down the glassy corridors, between mirrors, his mouth straight and his fingers working themselves.

She sat in the booth for a full minute and then suddenly shivered. A small clock ticked in the booth and she turned the deck of cards over, one by one, waiting. She heard a hammer pounding and knocking and pounding again, far away inside the Maze; a silence, more waiting, and then ten thousand images folding and refolding and dissolving, Ralph striding, looking out at ten thousand images of her in the booth.

She heard his quiet laughter as he came down the ramp.

"Well, what's put you in such a good mood?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Aimee," he said, carelessly, "we shouldn't quarrel. You say tomorrow Billie Fine's sending that mirror out to Mr. Big's?"

"You're not going to try anything funny?"

"Me?" He moved her out of the booth and took over the cards, humming, his eyes bright. "Not me, oh no, not me." He did not look at her, but started quickly to slap out the cards. She stood behind him. Her right eye began to twitch a little. She folded and unfolded her arms. A minute ticked by. The only sound was the ocean under the night pier, Ralph breathing in the heat, the soft ruffle of the cards. The sky over the pier was hot and thick with clouds. Out at sea, faint glows of lightning were beginning to show.

"Ralph," she said at last.

"Relax, Aimee," he said.

"About that trip you wanted to take down the coast —"

"Tomorrow," he said. "Maybe next month. Maybe next year. Old Ralph Banghart's a patient guy. I'm not worried, Aimee. Look." He held up a hand. "I'm calm."

She waited for a roll of thunder at sea to fade away.

"I just don't want you mad, is all. I just don't want anything bad to happen, promise me."

The wind, now warm, now cool, blew along the pier. There was a smell of rain on the wind. The clock ticked. Aimee began to perspire heavily, watching the cards move and move. Distantly, you could hear targets being hit and the sound of the pistols at the shooting gallery.

And then, there he was.

Waddling along the lonely concourse, under the insect bulbs, his face twisted and dark, every movement an effort. From a long way down the pier he came, with Aimee watching. She wanted to say to him, This is your last night, the last time you'll have to embarrass yourself by coming here, the last time you'll have to put up with being watched by Ralph, even in secret. She wished she could cry out and laugh and say it right in front of Ralph. But she said nothing.

"Hello, hello!" shouted Ralph. "It's free, on the house, tonight! Special for old customers!"

The Dwarf looked up, startled, his little black eyes darting and swimming in confusion. His mouth formed the word thanks and he turned, one hand to his neck, pulling his tiny lapels tight up about his convulsing throat, the other hand clenching the silver dime secretly. Looking back, he gave a little nod, and then scores

of dozens of compressed and tortured faces, burnt a strange dark color by the lights, wandered in the glass corridors,

"Ralph," Aimee took his elbow. "What's going on?"

He grinned. "I'm being benevolent, Aimee, benevolent."

"Ralph," she said.

"Sh," he said. "*Listen.*"

They waited in the booth in the long warm silence.

Then, a long way off, muffled, there was a scream.

"Ralph!" said Aimee.

"Listen, listen!" he said.

There was another scream, and another and still another, and a threshing and a pounding and a breaking, a rushing around and through the maze. There, there, wildly colliding and richocheting from mirror to mirror, shrieking hysterically and sobbing, tears on his face, mouth gasped open, came Mr. Bigelow. He fell out into the blazing night air, glanced about wildly, wailed, and ran off down the pier.

"Let's drink to Evolution again. That one slays me."

"Ralph, what happened?"

Ralph sat laughing and slapping his thighs.

She slapped his face. "What'd you *do?*"

He didn't quite stop laughing. "Come on. I'll show you!"

And then she was in the maze, rushed from white-hot mirror to mirror, seeing her lipstick all red fire a thousand times repeated on down a burning silver cavern where strange hysterical women much like herself followed a quick-moving, smiling man. "Come on!" he cried. And they broke free into a dust-smelling tiny room.

"Ralph!" she said.

They both stood on the threshold of the little room where the Dwarf had come every night for a year. They both stood where the Dwarf had stood each night, before opening his eyes to see the miraculous image in front of him.

Aimee shuffled slowly, one hand out, into the dim room.

The mirror had been changed.

This new mirror made even normal people small, small, small; it made even tall people little and dark and twisted smaller as you moved forward.

THE TRAVELING CRAG

THEODORE STURGEON

Illustrated by Lawrence

Why would a successful author arouse the hatred of an entire village? Could it be because he was deathly afraid—of nothing?

"I know agents who can get work out of their clients," said the telephone acidly.

"Yes, Nick, but—"

"Matter of fact, I know agents who would be willing to drop everything and go out to that one-shot genius's home town and—"

"I did!"

"I know you did! And what came of it?"

"I got a new story. It came in this morning."

"You just don't know how to handle a real writer. All you have to do is—you what?"

"I got a new story. I have it right here."

A pause. "A new Sig Weiss story? No kidding?"

"No kidding."

The telephone paused a moment

again, as if to lick its lips. "I was saying to Joe just yesterday that if there's an agent in town who can pry work out of a prima-donna like Weiss, it's good ole Crisley Post. Yes, sir. Joe thinks a lot of you, Cris. Says you can take a joke better than—how long is the story?"

"Nine thousand."

"Nine thousand. I've got just the spot for it. By the way, did I tell you I can pay an extra cent a word now? For Weiss, maybe a cent and a half."

"You hadn't told me. Last time we talked rates you were overstocked. You wouldn't pay more than—"

"Aw, now, Cris, I was just—"

"Goodbye, Nick."

"Wait! When will you send—"

"Goodbye, Nick."

It was quiet in the office of Crisley Post. Articles, Fiction, Photographs. Then Naome snickered.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing's funny. You're wonderful. I've been waiting four years to hear you tell an editor off. Particularly that one. Are you going to give him the story?"

"I am not."

"Good! Who gets it? The slicks? What are you going to do: sell it to the highest bidder?"

"Naome, have you read it?"

"No. I gave it to you as soon as it came in. I knew you'd want to—"

"Read it."

"Wh—now?"

"Right now."

She took the manuscript and carried it to her desk by the window. "Corny title," she said.

"Corny title," he agreed.

He sat glumly, watching her. She was too small to be so perfectly proportioned, and her hair was as soft as it looked, which was astonishing. She habitually kept him at arm's length, but her arms were short. She was loyal, arbitrary, and underpaid, and she ran the business, though neither of them would admit it aloud. He thought about Sig Weiss.

Every agent has a Sig Weiss—as a rosy dream. You sit there day after day paddling through oceans of slush, hoping one day to run across a manuscript that means something—sincerity, integrity, high word rates—things like that. You try to understand what editors want in spite of what they say they want, and then you try to tell it to writers who never listen unless they're talking. You lend them money and psychoanalyze them and agree with them when they lie to themselves. When they write stories that don't make it, it's your fault. When they write stories that do make it, they did it by themselves. And when they hit the big time, they get themselves another agent. In the meantime, nobody likes you.

"Real stiff opening," said Naome.

"Real stiff," Cris nodded.

And then it happens. In comes a manuscript with a humble little covering note that says, "This is my first story, so it's probably full of mistakes that I don't know anything about. If you think it has anything in it, I'll be glad to fix it up any way you say." And you start reading it, and the story grabs you by the throat, shakes your bones, puts a heartbeat into your lymph ducts and finally

slams you down gasping, weak and oh so happy.

So you send it out and it sells on sight, and the editor calls up to say thanks in an awed voice, and tells an anthologist, who buys reprint rights even before the yarn is published, and rumors get around, and you sell radio rights and TV rights and Portuguese translation rights. And the author writes you another note that claims volubly that if it weren't for you he'd never have been able to do it.

That's the agent's dream, and that was Cris Post's boy Sig Weiss and *The Traveling Crag*. But, like all dream plots, this one contained a sleeper. A rude awakening.

Offers came in and Cris made promises, and waited. He wrote letters. He sent telegrams. He got on the long distance phone (to a neighbor's house, Weiss had no phone).

No more stories.

So he went to see Weiss. He lost six days on the project. It was Naome's idea. "He's in trouble," she announced, as if she knew for sure. "Anyone who can write like that is sensitive. He's humble and he's generous and he's probably real shy and real goodlooking. Someone's victimized him, that's what. Cris, go on out there and find out what's the matter."

"All the way out to Turnville? My God woman, do you know where that is? Besides, who's going to run things around here?" As if he didn't know.

"I'll try, Cris. But you've got to see what's the matter with Sig Weiss. He's the—the greatest thing that ever happened around here."

"I'm jealous," he said, because he was jealous.

"Don't be silly," she said, because he wasn't being silly.

So out he went. He missed connections and spent one night in a depot and had his portable typewriter stolen and found he'd forgotten to pack the brown shoes that went with the brown suit. He brushed his teeth once with shaving cream and took the wrong creaking rural bus and had to creak in to an impossibly authentic small town and creak out again on another bus. Turnville was a general store with gasoline pumps outside and an abandoned milk shed across the road, and Cris wasn't happy when he got there. He went into the general store to ask questions.

The proprietor was a triumph of type-casting. "Whut c'n I dew f'r you, young feller? Shay—yer f'm the city, ain't cha? Heh!"

Cris fumbled vaguely with his lapels, wondering if someone had pinned a sign on him. "I'm looking for someone called Sig Weiss. Know him?"

"Sure dew. Meanest bastard ever lived. Wouldn't have nought to dew with him, I was you."

"You're not," said Cris, annoyed. "Where does he live?"

"What you want with him?"

"I'm conducting a nation-wide survey of mean bastards," Cris said. "Where does he live?"

"You're on the way to the right

place, then. Heh! You show me a man's friends, I'll tell you what he is."

"What about his friends?" Cris asked, startled.

"He ain't got any friends."

Cris closed his eyes and breathed deeply, "Where does he live?"

"Up the road a piece. Two mile, a bit over. That way."

"Thanks."

"He'll shoot you," said the proprietor complacently, "but don't let it worry you none. He loads his shells with rock salt."

Cris walked the two miles and a bit, every uphill inch. He was tired, and his shoes were designed only to carry a high shine and make small smudges on desk tops. It was hot until he reached the top of the mountain, and then the cool wind from the other side made him feel as if he was carrying sacks of crushed ice in his armpits. There was a galvanized tin mailbox on a post by the road with S. WEISS and advanced erosion showing on its ancient sides. In the cutbank near it were some shallow footholds. Cris sighed and started up.

There was a faint path writhing its way through heavy growth. Through the trees he could see a canted shingle roof. He had gone about forty feet when there was a thunderous explosion and shredded greenery settled about his head and shoulders. Sinking his teeth into his tongue, he turned and dove head first into a treehole, and the lights went out.

A fabulous headache was fully conscious before Cris was. He saw it clearly before it moved around behind his eyes. He was lying where he had fallen. A rangy youth with long narrow eyes was squatting ten feet away. He held a ready shotgun under his arm and on his wrist, while he deftly went through Cris's wallet.

"Hey," said Cris.

The man closed the wallet and threw it on the ground by Cris's throbbing head. "So you're Crisley Post," said the man, in a disgusted tone of voice.

Cris sat up and groaned. "You're—you're not Sig Weiss?"

"I'm not?" asked the man pugnaciously.

"Okay, okay," said Cris tiredly. He picked up his wallet and put it away and, with the aid of the tree trunk, got to his feet. Weiss made no move to help him, but watchfully rose with him. Cris asked, "Why the artillery?"

"I got a permit," said Weiss. "This is my land. Why not? Don't go blaming me because you ran into a tree. What do you want?"

"I just wanted to talk to you. I came a long way to do it. If I'd known you'd welcome me like this, I wouldn't 've come."

"I didn't ask you to come."

"I'm not going to talk sense if I get sore," said Cris quietly. "Can't we go inside? My head hurts."

Weiss seemed to ponder this for a moment. Then he turned on his heel, grunted, "Come, and strode toward the house. Cris followed painfully.

A gray cat slid across the path and crouched in the long grass. Weiss appeared to ignore it, but as he stepped by, his right leg lashed out side-

wise and lifted the yowling animal into the air. It struck a tree trunk and fell, to lie dazed. Cris let out an indignant shout and went to it. The cat cowered away from him, gained its feet and fled into the woods, terrified.

"Your cat?" asked Weiss coldly.

"No, but damn if—"

"If it isn't your cat, why worry?" Weiss walked steadily on toward the house.

Cris stood a moment, shock and fury roiling in and about his headache, and then followed. Standing there or going away would accomplish nothing.

The house was old, small, and solid. It was built of fieldstone, and the ceilings were low and heavy beamed. Overlooking the mountainside was an enormous window, bringing in a breathtaking view of row after row of distant hills. The furniture was rustic and built to be used. There was a fireplace with a crane, also more than ornamental. There were no drapes, no couch covers or flamboyant upholstery. There was comfort, but austerity was the keynote.

"May I sit down?" Cris asked caustically.

"Go ahead," said Weiss. "You can breathe, too, if you want to."

Cris sat in a large split-twig chair that was infinitely more comfortable than it looked. "What's the matter with you, Weiss?"

"Nothing the matter with me."

"What makes you like this? Why the chip on your shoulder? Why this shoot-first-ask-questions-afterward-attitude? What's it get you?"

"Gets me a life of my own. Nobody bothers me but once. They don't come back. You won't."

"That's for sure," said Cris fervently. "But I wish I knew what's eating you. No normal human being acts like you do."

"That's enough," said Weiss very gently, and Cris knew how very seriously he meant it. "What I do and why is none of your business. What do you want here, anyhow?"

"I came to find out why you're not writing. That's my business. You're my client, remember?"

"You're my agent," he said. "I like the sound of it better that way."

Cris made an olympian effort and ignored the remark. "*The Traveling Crag* churned up quite a stir. You made yourself a nice piece of change. Write more, you'll make more. Don't you like money?"

"Who doesn't? You got no complaints out of me."

"Fine. Then what about some more copy?"

"You'll get it when I'm good and ready."

"Which is how soon?"

"How do I know?" Weiss barked. "When I feel like it, whenever that is."

Cris talked, then, at some length. He told Weiss some of the ins and outs of publishing. He explained how phenomenal it was that a pulp sale should have created such a turmoil, and pointed out what could be expected in the slicks and Hollywood. "I don't know how you've done it, but you've found a short line to the heavy sugar. But the only way you'll ever touch it is to write more."

"All right, all right," Weiss said at last. "You've sold me. You'll get your

story. Is that what you wanted?"

"Not quite." Cris rose. He felt better, and he could allow himself to be angry now that the business was taken care of. "I still want to know how a guy like you could have written a story like *The Traveling Crag* in a place like this."

"Why not?"

Cris looked out at the rolling blue distance. "That story had more sheer humanity in it than anything I've ever read. It was sensitive and—damn it—it was a *kind* story. I can usually visualize who writes the stuff I read; I spend all my time with writing and writers. That story wasn't written in a place like this. And it wasn't written by a man like you."

"Where was it written?" asked Weiss in his very quiet voice. "And who wrote it?"

"Aw, put your dukes down," said Cris tiredly, and with such contempt that he apparently astonished Weiss. "If you're going to jump salty over every little thing that happens, what are you going to do when something big comes along and you've already shot your bolt?"

Weiss did not answer, and Cris went on: "I'm not saying you didn't write it. All I'm saying is that it reads like something dreamed up in some quiet place that smelled like flowers and good clean sweat . . . Some place where everything was right and nothing was sick or off balance. And whoever wrote it suited that kind of a place. It was probably you, but you sure have changed since."

"You know a hell of a lot, don't you?" The soft growl was not completely insulting, and Cris felt that in some obscure way he had scored. Then Weiss said, "Now get the hell out."

"Real glad to," said Cris. At the door, he said, "Thanks for the drink."

When he reached the cutbank, he looked back. Weiss was standing by the corner of the house, staring after him.

Cris trudge back to the crossroads called Turnville and stopped in at the general store. "Shay," said the proprietor. "Looks like a tree reached down and whopped ye. Heh!"

"Heh!" said Cris. "One did. I called it a son of a beech."

The proprietor slapped his knee and wheezed. "Shay, thet's good 'un. Come out back, young feller, while I put some snake oil on your head. Like some cold beer?"

Cris blessed him noisily. The snake oil turned out to be a benzocaine ointment that took the pain out instantly, and the beer was a transfusion. He looked at the old man with new respect.

"Had a bad time up on the hill?" asked the oldster.

"No worse'n sharing an undershirt with a black widow spider," said Cris. "What's the matter with that character?"

"Nobuddy rightly knows," said the proprieter. "Came up here about eight years ago. Always been thet way. Some say the war did it to him, but I knew him before he went overseas and he was the same. He jest don't like people, is all. Old Tom Sackett, drives the RFD wagon, he says Weiss was weaned off a gallbladder to a bottle of vinegar. Heh!"

"Heh!" said Cris. "How's he live?"

"Gits a check every month. Some trust company. I cash 'em. Not much, but enough. He don't dew nahthin. Hunts a bit, roams these hills a hull lot. Reads. Heh! He's no trouble, though. Stays on his own reservation. Just don't want folks barrelin' in on him. Here comes yer bus."

"My God!" said Naome.

"You're addressing me?" he asked.

She ignored him. "Listen to this:

Jets blasting, Bat Durston came screeching down through the atmosphere of Bbllzznaj, a tiny planet seven billion light years from Sol. He cut out his super-hyper-drive for the landing . . . and at that point a tall, lean spaceman stepped out of the tail assembly, proton gun-blaster in a space-tanned hand.

'Get back from those controls, Bat Durston,' the tall stranger lipped thinly. 'You don't know it, but this is your last space trip.' "

She looked up at him dazedly. "That's Sig Weiss?"

"That's Sig Weiss."

"The same Sig Weiss?"

"The very same. Leaf through that thing, Naome. Nine bloody thousand words of it, and it's all like that. Go on—read it."

"No," she said. It was not a refusal, but an exclamation. "Are you going to send it out?"

"Yes. To Sig Weiss. I'm going to tell him to roll it and stuff it up his shotgun. Honey, we have a oneshot on our hands."

"This is—it's impossible!" she blazed. "Cris, you can't give him up just like that. Maybe the next one . . . maybe you can . . . maybe you're right at that," she finished, glancing back at the manuscript.

He said tiredly, "Let's go eat."

"No. You have a lunch.

"I have?"

"With a Miss Tillie Moroney. You're quite safe. She's the Average American Miss. I mean it. She was picked out as such by pollsters last year. She's five-five, has had 2.3 years of college, is 24 years old, brown hair, blue eyes, and so on."

"How much does she weigh?"

"34B," said Naome, with instant understanding, "and presents a united front like a Victorian."

He laughed. "and what have I to do with Miss Tillie Moroney?"

"She's got money. I told you about her—that Personals ad in the *Saturday Review*—remember? 'Does basic character ever change? $1000 for authentic case of devil into saint.' "

"Oh my gosh yes. You had this bright idea of calling her in after I told you about getting the Weiss treatment in Turnville." He waved at the manuscript. "Doesn't that change your plans any? You might take a case out of *The Traveling Crag* versus the cat-kicking of Mr. Weiss, if you use that old man's testimony that he's been kicking cats and people for some years. But from my experience," he touched his forehead, which was almost healed, "I'd say it was saint into devil."

"Her ad didn't mention temporary or permanent changes," Naome pointed out. "There may be a buck in it. You can handle her."

"Thanks just the same, but let me see what she looks like before I do any such thing. Personally, I think she's a crank. A mystic maybe. Do you know her?"

"Spoke to her on the phone. Saw her picture last year. The Average American Miss is permitted to be a screwball. That's what makes this country great."

"You and your Machiavellian syndrone. Can't I get out of it?"

"You cannot. What are you making such a fuss about? You've wined and dined uglier chicks than this."

"I know it. Do you think I'd have a chance to see her if I acted eager?"

"I despise you," said Naome. "Straighten your tie and go comb your hair. Oh, Cris, I know it sounds wacky. But what doesn't, in this business? What'll you lose? The price of a lunch!"

"I might lose my honor."

"Authors' agents have no honor."

"As my friend in the general store is wont to remark: Heh! What protects you, little one?"

"My honor," replied Naome.

The brown hair was neat and so was the tailored brown suit that matched it so well. The blue eyes were extremely dark. the rest well befit her Average Miss title, except for her voice, which had the pitch of a husky one while being clear as tropical shoals. Her general air was one of poised shyness. Cris pulled out a restaurant chair for her, which was a tribute; he felt impelled to do that about one time in seven.

"You think I'm a crank," she said when they were settled with a drink.

"Do I?"

"You do," she said positively. He did, too.

"Well," he said, "your ad did make it a little difficult to suspend judgement."

She smiled with him. She had good teeth. "I can't blame you, or the eight hundred-odd other people who answered. Why is it a thousand dollars is so much more appealing than such an incredible thought as a change from basic character?"

"I guess because most people would rather see the change from a thousand dollars."

He was pleased to find she had the rare quality of being able to talk coherently while she laughed. She said, "You are right. One of them wanted to marry me so I could change his character. He assured me that he was a regular devil. But—tell me about this case of yours."

He did, in detail: Sig Weiss's incredible short story, its wide impact, its deep call on everything that is fine and generous in everyone who read it. And then he described the man who had written it.

"In this business, you run into all kinds of flukes," he said. "A superficial, tone-deaf, materialistic character will sit down and write something that positively sings. You read the story, you know the guy, and you say he couldn't have written it. But you know he did. I've seen that time after time, and all it proves is that there are more facets to a man than you see at first—not that there's any real change in him. But Weiss—I'll admit that in his case the theory has got to be stretched to explain it. I'll swear a man like him simply could

not contain the emotions and convictions that made *The Traveling Crag* what it is."

"I've read it," she said. He hadn't noticed her lower lip was so full. Perhaps it hadn't been, a moment ago. "It was a beautiful thing."

"Now, tell me about this ad of yours. Have you found such a basic change—devil into saint? Or do you just hope to?"

"I don't know of any such case," she admitted. "But I know it can happen."

"How?"

She paused. She seemed to be listening. Then she said, "I can't tell you. I . . . know something that can have that effect, that's all. I'm trying to find out where it is."

"I don't understand that. You don't think Sig Weiss was under such an influence, do you?"

"I'd like to ask him. I'd like to know if the effect was at all lasting."

"Not so you'd notice it," he said glumly. "He gave me that bouncing around after he wrote *The Traveling Crag*, not before. Not only that . . ." He told her about the latest story.

"Do you suppose he wrote that under the same circumstances as *The Traveling Crag*?"

"I don't see why not. He's a man of pretty regular habits. He probably—wait a minute! Just before I left, I said something to him . . . something about . . ." He drummed on his temples. ". . . Something about the *Crag* reading as if it had been written in a different place, by a different person. And he didn't get sore. He looked at me as if I were a swami. Seems I hit the nail right on the thumb."

The listening expression crossed her smooth face again. She looked up, startled. "Has he got any . . ." She closed her eyes, straining for something. "Has he a radio? I mean—a shortwave set—a transmitter—diathermy—a fever cabinet—any . . . uh . . . RF generator of any kind?"

"What in time made you ask that?"

She opened her eyes and smiled shyly at him. "It just came to me."

"Saving your presence, Miss Moroney, but there are moments when you give me the creeps," he blurted. "I'm sorry. I guess I shouldn't have said that, but—"

"It's all right," she said warmly.

"You hear voices?" he asked.

She smile "What about the RF generator?"

"I don't know." He thought hard. "He has electricity. I imagine he has a receiver. About the rest, I really can't say. He didn't take me on a grand tour. Will you tell me what made you ask that?"

"No."

He opened his mouth to protect, but when he saw her expression he closed it again. She asked, "What are you going to do about Weiss?"

"Drop him. What else?"

"Oh, please don't!" she cried. She put a hand on his sleeve. "Please!"

"What else do you expect me to do?" he asked in some annoyance. "A writer who sends in a piece of junk like that as a followup to something like the *Crag* is more than foolish. He's stupid. I can't use a

client like that. I'm busy. I got troubles."

"Also, he gave you a bad time."

"That hasn't anyth—well, you're right. If he behaved like a human being, maybe I would take a lot of trouble and analyze his trash and guide and urge and wipe his nose for him. But a guy like that— ah!"

"He has another story like the *Crag* in him."

"You think he has?"

"I know he has."

"You're very positive. Your . . . voices tell you that?"

She nodded, with a small secret smile.

"I have the felling you're playing with me. You know this Weiss?"

"Oh, no! And I'm not playing with you. Truly. You've got to believe me!" She looked genuinely distressed.

"I don't see why I should. This begins to look real haywire, Tillie Moroney. I think maybe we'd better get down to basics here." She immediately looked so worried that he recognized an advantage. Not knowing exactly what she wanted of him, he knew she wanted something, and now he was prepared to use that to the hilt. "Tell me about it. What's your interest in Weiss? What's this personality-alteration gimmick? What are you after and what gave you your lead? And what do you expect me to do about it? That last question reads, "What's in it for me?' "

"Y-you're not always very nice, are you?"

He said, more gently, "That last wasn't thrown in to be mean. It was an appeal to your good sense to appeal to my sincerity. You can always judge sincerity—your own or anyone else's—by finding out what's in it for the interested party. Altruism and real sincerity are mutually exclusive. Now, talk. I mean, talk, please."

Again that extraordinary harking expression. Then she drew a deep breath. "I've had an awful time," she said. "Awful. You can't know. I've answered letters and phone calls. I've met cranks and wolves and religious fanatics who have neat little dialectical capsules all packed and ready to make saints out of devils. They all yap about proof—sometimes it's themselves and sometimes it's someone they know—and the proof always turns out to be a reformed drunk or a man who turned to Krishna and no longer beats his wife, not since Tuesday . . ." She stopped for breath and half-smiled at him and, angrily, he felt a warm surge of liking for her. She went on, "And this is the first hint I've had that what I'm looking for really exists."

She leaned forward suddenly. "I need you. You already have a solid contact with Sig Weiss and the way he works—where he works. If I had to seek him out myself, I—well, I just wouldn't know how to start. And this is urgent, can't you understand—urgent!"

He looked deep into the dark blue eyes and said, "I understand fine."

She said, "If I tell you a . . . story, will you promise not to ask me any questions about it?"

He fiddled about with his fork for a moment and then said, "I once heard tell of a one-legged man who

was pestered by all the kids in the neighborhood about how he lost his leg. They followed him and yelled at him and tagged along after him and made no end of a nuisance of themselves. So one day he stopped and gathered them all around him and asked if they really wanted to know how he lost his leg, and they all chorused YES! And he wanted to know if he told them, would they stop asking him, and they all promised faithfully that they would stop. 'All right,' he said. 'It was bit off.' And he turned and stumped away. As to the promise you want—no."

She laughed ruefully. "All right. I'll tell you the story anyway. But you've got to understand that it isn't the whole story, and that I'm not at liberty to tell the whole story. So please don't pry too hard."

He smiled. He had, he noticed in her eyes, a pretty nice smile. "I'll be good."

"All right. You have a lot of clients who write science fiction, don't you?"

"Not a lot. Just the best," he said modestly.

She smiled again. Two curved dimples put her smile in parenthesis. He liked that. She said, "Let's say this is a science fiction plot. How to begin . . ."

"Once upon a time . . ." he prompted.

She laughed like a child. "Once upon a time," she nodded, "there was a very advanced humanoid race in another galaxy. They had had wars—lots of them. They learned how to control them, but every once in a while things would get out of hand and another, and worse, war would happen. They developed weapon after weapon—things which make the H-bomb like a campfire in comparison. They had planet-smashers. They could explode a sun. They could do things we can only dimly understand. They could put a local warp in time itself, or unify the polarity in the gravito-magnetic field of an entire solar system."

"Does this gobbledegook come easy to you?" he asked.

"It does just now," she answered shyly. "Anyway, they developed the ultimate weapon—one which made all the others obsolete. It was enormously difficult to make, and only a few were manufactured. The secret of making it died out, and the available stocks were used at one time or another. The time to use them is coming again—and I don't mean on Earth. The little fuses we have are flea-hops. This is important business.

"Now, a cargo ship was travelling between galaxies on hyperspatial drive. In a crazy, billion-to-one odds accident, it emerged into normal space smack in the middle of a planetoid. It wasn't a big one; the ship wasn't atomized—just wrecked. It was carrying one of these super-weapons. It took thousands of years to trace it, but it has been traced. The chances are strong that it came down on a planet. It's wanted.

"It gives out no detectible radiation. But in its shielded state, it has a peculiar effect on living tissues which come near it."

"Devils into saints?"

"The effect is . . . peculiar. Now . . ." She held up fingers. "If

the nature of this object were known, and if it fell into the wrong hands, the effect here on Earth could be dreadful. There are megalomaniacs on earth so unbalanced that they would threaten even their own destruction unless their demands were met. Point two:If the weapon were used on Earth, not only would Earth as we know it cease to exist, but the weapon would be unavailable to those who need it importantly."

Cris sat staring at her, waiting for more. There was no more. Finally he licked his lips and said, "You're telling me that Sig Weiss has stumbled across this thing."

"I'm telling you a science fiction plot."

"Where did you get your . . . information?"

"It's a science fiction story."

He grinned suddenly, widely. "I'll be good," he said again. "What do you want me to do?"

Her eyes became very bright. "You aren't like most agents." she said.

"When I was in a British Colony, the English used to say to me, every once in a while, 'You aren't like most Americans.' I always found it slightly insulting. All right; what do you want me to do?"

She patted his hand. "See if you can make Weiss write another *Traveling Crag*. If he can, then find out exactly how and where he wrote it. And let me know."

They rose. He helped her with her light coat. His said, "Know something?" When she smiled up at him he said, "You don't strike me as Miss Average."

"Oh, but I was," she answered softly. "I was."

TELEGRAM

SIG WEISS July 15
TURNVILLE

PLEASE –UNDERSTAND –THAT WHAT FOLLOWS HAS NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH YOUR GROSS LACK OF HOSPITALITY. I REALIZE THAT YOUR WAY OF LIFE ON YOUR OWN PROPERTY IS JUSTIFIED IN TERMS OF ME, AN INTRUDER. I AM FORGETTING THE EPISODE. I ASSUME YOU ALREADY HAVE. NOW TO BUSINESS:–YOUR LAST MANUSCRIPT IS THE MOST UTTERLY INSULTING DOCUMENT I HAVE SEEN IN FOURTEEN PROFESSIONAL YEARS. TO INSULT ONE'S AGENT IS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE:–TO INSULT ONESELF IS INEXCUSABLE AND BROTHER YOU'VE DONE IT. SIT DOWN AND READ THE STORY THROUGH, IF YOU CAN, AND THEN REREAD THE TRAVELING CRAG. YOU WILL NOT NEED MY CRITICISM. MY ONLY SUGGESTION TO YOU IS TO DUPLICATE EXACTLY THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH YOU WROTE YOUR FIRST STORY. UNLESS AND UNTIL YOU DO THIS WE NEED HAVE NO FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE. I ACCEPT YOUR SINCERE THANKS FOR NOT SUBMITTING YOUR SECOND STORY ANYWHERE.

CRISLEY POST

Naome whistled. "Really—a

straight telegram? What about a night letter?"

Cris smiled at the place where the wall met the ceiling. "Straight rate."

"Yes, master." She wielded a busy pencil. "That's costing us $13.75, sir," she said at length, "plus tax. Grand total, $17.46. Cris, you have a hole in your head!"

"If you know of a better 'ole, go to it," he quoted dreamily. She glared at him, reached for the phone, and continued to glare as she put the telegram on the wire.

In the next two weeks Cris had lunch three times with Tillie Moroney, and dinner once. Naome asked for a raise. She got it, and was therefore frightened.

Cris returned from the third of these lunches (which was the day after the dinner) whistling. He found Naome in tears.

"Hey what's happening here? You don't do that kind of thing, remember?"

He leaned over her desk. She buried her face in her arms and boohooed lustily. He knelt beside her and put an arm around her shoulders. "There," he said, patting the nape of her neck. "Take a deep breath and tell me about it."

She took a long, quavering breath, tried to speak, and burst into tears again. "F-f-fi-fi . . ."

"What?"

"F—" She swallowed with difficulty, then said, "*Fire of Heaven!*" and wailed.

"What?" he yelled. "I thought you said '*Fire of Heaven.*' "

She blew her nose and nodded. "I did," she whispered. "H-here." She dumped a pile of manuscript in front of him and buried her face in her arms again. "L-leave me alone."

In complete bewilderment, he gathered up the typewritten sheets and took them to his desk.

There was a covering letter.

Dear Mr. Post:—There will never be a way for me to express my thanks to you, nor my apologies for the way I treated you when you visited me. I am willing to do anything in my power to make amends.

Knowing what I do of you, I think you would be most pleased by another story written the way I did the Crag. Here it is. I hope it measures up. If it doesn't, I earnestly welcome any suggestions you may have to fix it up.

I am looking forward very much indeed to meeting you again under better circumstances. My house is yours when you can find time to come out, and I do hope it will be soon. Sincerely, S. W.

With feelings of awe well mixed with astonishment, Cris turned to the manuscript. *Fire of Heaven,* by Sig Weiss, it was headed. He began to read. For a moment, he was conscious of Naome's difficult and diminishing sniffs, and then he became completely immersed in the story.

Twenty minutes later, his eyes, blurred and smarting, encountered "The End." He propped his forehead on one palm and rummaged clumsily for his handkerchief. Having thoroughly mopped and blown, he looked across at Naome. Her eyes were redrimmed and still wet.

"Yes?" she said.

"Oh my God yes," he answered.

They stared at each other for a breathless moment. Then she said in a soprano near-whisper:—"*Fire of . . .*" and began to cry again.

"Cut it out," he said hoarsely.

When he could, he got up and opened the window. Naome came and stood beside him. "You don't read that," he said after a time. 'It . . . happens to you."

She said, "What a tragedy. What a beautiful, beautiful tragedy."

"He said in his letter," Cris managed, "that if I had any suggestions to fix it up . . ."

"Fix it up," she said in shaken scorn. "There hasn't been anything like him since—"

"There hasn't been anything like him period." Cris snapped his fingers. "Get on your phone. Call the airlines. Two tickets to the nearest feederfield to Turnville. Call the Drive-Ur-Self service. Have a car waiting at the field. I'm not asking any woman to climb that mountain on foot. Send this telegram to Weiss:–Taking up your very kind offer immediately. Bringing a friend. Will wire arrival time. Profound thanks for the privilege of reading *Fire of Heaven*. From a case hardened ten percenter those words come hard and are well earned. Post."

"Two tickets," said Naome breathlessly. "Oh! Who's going to handle the office "

He thumped her shoulder. "You can do it, kid. You're wonderful. Indispensable. I love you. Get me Tillie Moroney's number, will you?"

She stood frozen, her lips parted, her nostrils slightly distended. He looked at her, looked again. He was aware that she had stopped breathing. "Naome!"

She came to life slowly and turned, not to him, but on him. "You're taking that—that Moron-y creature—"

"Moroney. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh Cris, how could you?"

"What have I done? What's wrong? Listen, this is business. I'm not romancing the girl! Why—"

She curled her lip. "Business! Then it's the first business that's gone on around here that I haven't known about."

"Oh, it isn't office business, Naome. Honestly."

"Then there's only one thing it could be!"

Cris threw up his hands. "Trust me this once. Say! Why should it eat you so much, even if it was monkey-business, which it isn't?"

"I can't bear to see you throw yourself away!"

"You—I didn't know you felt—"

"Shut up!" she roared. "Don't flatter yourself. It's just that she's . . . .average. And so are you. And when you add an average to an average, you've produced NOTHING!"

He sat down at his desk with a thump and reached for the phone, very purposefully. But his mind was in such a tangle at the moment, that he didn't know what to do with the phone once it was in his hands, until Naome stormed over and furiously dropped a paper in front of him. It had Tillie's number on it. He grinned at her stupidly and sheepishly and dialled. By this time, Naome

was speaking to the airlines office, but he knew perfectly well that she could talk and listen at the same time.

"Hello?" said the phone.

"Ull-ull," he said, watching Naome's back stiffen. He spun around in his swivel chair so he could talk facing the wall.

"Hello?" said the phone again.

"Tillie, Weiss found it he wrote another story it's a dream he invited me down and I'm going and you're coming with me," he blurted.

"I beg your—Cris, is anything ths matter? You sound so strange."

"Never mind that," he said. He repeated the news more coherently, acutely conscious of Naome's attention to every syllable. Tillie uttered a cry of joy and promised to be right over. He asked her to hang on and forced himself to get the plane departure from Naome. Pleading packing and business odds and ends, he asked her to meet him at the airport. She agreed, for which he was very thankful. The idea of her walking into the office just now was more than he could take.

Naome had done her phoning and was in a flurry of effort involving her files, which had always been a mystery to Cris. She kept bringing things over to him. "Sign these." "You promised to drop Rogers a note about this." "What do you want done about Borilla's scripts?" Until he was snowed under. "Hold it! These things can wait!"

"No they can't," she said icily. "I wouldn't want them on my conscience. You see, this is my last day here."

"Your—Naome! You can't quit! You can't!"

"I can and I am and I do. Check this list."

"Naome, I—"

"I won't listen. My mind's made up."

"All right then. I'll manage. But it's a shame about *Fire of Heaven.* Such a beautiful job. And here it must sit until I get back. I did want you to market it."

"You'd trust me to market that story?" Her eyes were huge.

"No one else. There isn't anyone who knows the market better, or who would make a better deal. I trust you with it absolutely. After you've done that one last big thing for me—go, then, if you'll be happier somewhere else."

"Crisley Post, I hate you and despise you. You're a fiend and a spider. Th-thank you. I'll never forget you for this. I'll type up four originals and sneak them around. Movies, of course. What a TV script! And radio . . . let's see; two, no—three British outfits can bid against each other . . . you're doing this on purpose to keep me from leaving.!"

"Sure," he said jovially. "I'm real cute. I wrote the story myself just because I couldn't get anyone to replace you."

At last, she laughed. "There's one thing I'm damn sure you didn't do. An editor is a writer who can't write, and an agent is a writer who can't write as well as an editor."

He laughed with her. He bled too, but it was worth it, to see her laughing again.

The plane trip was pleasant. It lasted a long time. The ship sat down every 45 minutes or so all the way across the country. Cris figured it was the best Naome could do on short notice. But it gave them lots of time to talk. And talking to Tillie was a pleasure. She was intelligent and articulate, and had read just as many of his favorite books as he had of hers. He told her enough about *Fire of Heaven* to intrigue her a lot and make her cry a little, without spoiling the plot for her. They found music to disagree about, and shared a view of a wonderful lake down through the clouds, and all in all it was a good trip. Occasionally, Cris glanced at her—most often she was asleep—with a touch of surmise, like a little curl of smoke, thinking of Naome's suspicions about him and Tillie. He wasn't romancing Tillie. He wasn't. Was he?

They landed at last, and again he blessed Naome; the Drive-Ur-Self car was at the airfield. They got a road map from a field attendant and drove off through the darkest morning hours. Again Cris found himself glancing at the relaxed girl beside him, half asleep in the cold glow of the dash lights. A phrase occurred to him:—"undivided front like a Victorian"—Naome's remark. He flushed. It was true. An affectation of Tillie's, probably; but everything she wore was highnecked and full-cut.

The sky had turned from grey to pale pink when they pulled up at the Turnville store. Cris honked, and in due course the screen door slammed and the old proprietor ambled down the wooden steps and came to peer into his face.

"Heh! If 'taint that city feller. How're ya, son? Didn't know you folks ever got up and about this early."

"We're up late, dad. Got some gas for us?"

"Reckon there's a drop left."

Cris got out and went back with the old man to unlock the gas tank. "Seen Weiss recently?" he asked.

"Same as usual. Put through some big orders. Seen him do that before. Usually means he holing up for five, six months. Though why he bought so much liquor an' drape material and that, I can't figure."

"How'd he behave?"

"Same as ever. Friendly as a wet wildcat with fleas."

Cris thanked him and paid him and they turned up the rocky hill road. As they reached the crest, they gasped together at the sun-flooded valley that lay before them. "Memories are the only thing you ever have that you always keep," said Tillie softly, "and this is one for both of us. I'm . . . glad you're in it for me, Cris."

"I love you, too," he said in the current idiom, and found himself, hotfaced, looking into a face as suffused as his. They recoiled from each other and started to chatter about the weather—stopped and roared together with laughter. He took her hand and helped her up the cut-bank. They paused at the top. "Listen," he said in a low voice. "That old character in the store has seen Weiss recently. And he says there's no change. I think we'd better be just a little careful."

He looked at her and again caught that listening expression. "No," she said at length, "it's all right. The store's outside the . . . the influence he's under. He's bound to revert when it's gone. But he'll be all right now. You'll see."

"Will you tell me how you know these things?" he demanded, almost angry.

"Of course," she smiled. Then the smile vanished. "But not now."

"That's more than I've gotten so far," he grumbled. "Well, let's get to it."

Hand in hand, they went up the path. The house seemed the same, and yet . . . there was a difference, an intensification. The leaves were greener, the early sun warmer.

There were three grey kittens on the porch.

"Ahoy the house!" Cris called self-consciously.

The door opened, and Weiss stood there, peering. He looked for a moment exactly as he had when he watched Cris stride off on the earlier visit. Then he moved out into the sun. He scooped up one of the kittens and came swiftly to meet them. "Mr. Post! I got your wire. How very good of you to come."

He was dressed in a soft sport shirt and grey slacks—a startling difference from his grizzled boots-and-khaki appearance before. The kitten snuggled into the crook of his elbow, made a wild grab at his pocket-button, caught its tail instead. He put it down, and it fawned and purred and rubbed against his shoe.

Weiss straightened up and smiled at Tillie. "Hello."

"Tillie, this is Sig Weiss. Miss Moroney."

"Tillie," she said, and gave him her hand.

"Welcome home," Weiss said. He turned to Cris. "This is your home, for as long as you want it, whenever you can come."

Cris stood slack-jawed. "I ought to be more tactful," he said at length, "but I just can't believe it. I should have more sense than to mention my last visit, but this—this—"

Weiss put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm glad you mentioned it. I've been thinking about it, too. Hell—if you'd forgotten all about it, how could you appreciate all this? Come on in. I have some surprises for you."

Tillie held Cris back a moment. "It's here," she whispered. "Here in the house!"

The weapon—here? Somehow, he had visualized it as huge—a great horned mine or a tremendous torpedo shape. He glanced around apprehensively. The ultimate weapon—invented after the planet-smasher, the sunburster—what incredible thing could it be?

Weiss stood by the door. Tillie stepped through, then Cris.

The straight drapes, the solid sheet of plate glass that replaced the huge sashed window; the heavy skins that softened the wide-planked floor, the gleaming andirons and the copper pots on the fieldstone wall; the record player and racks of albums—all the other soothing, comforting finishes of the once-bleak room—all these Cris noticed later. His big surprise was not quite a hundred pounds, not quite five feet tall—

"Cris . . ."

"Naome's here," he said inanely, and sat down to goggle at her.

Weiss laughed richly. "Why do you suppose you and Tillie got that pogoplane cross country, stopping at every ball-park and cornfield? Naome got a non-stop flight to within fifty miles of here, and air-taxi to the bottom of the mountain, and came up by cab."

"I had to," said Naome. "I had to see what you were getting into. You're so—impetuous." She came smiling to Tillie. "I am glad to see you."

"Why, you idiot!" said Cris to Naome. "What could you have done if he—if—"

"I'm prettier than you are, darling," laughed Naome.

"She came pussyfooting up to the house like a kid playing Indian," said Weiss. "I circled through the woods and pussyfooted right along with her. When she was peeping into the side window, I reached out and put a hand on her shoulder."

"You might have scared her into a conniption!"

"Not here," said Weiss gravely.

Surprisingly, Tillie nodded. "You can't be afraid here, Cris. You're saying all those things about what might have happened, but they're not frightening to think about now, are they?"

"No," Cris said thoughtfully. "No." He gazed around him. "This is——crazy. Everybody should be this crazy."

"It would help," said Weiss. "How do you like the place now, Cris?"

"It's—it's grand," said Cris. Naome laughed. She said, "Listen to the vocabulary kid there. 'Grand.' You meant 'Peachy', didn't you?"

Cris didn't laugh with the others. "Fear," he said. "You can't eliminate fear. Fear is a survival emotion. If you didn't know fear, you'd fall out of windows, cut yourself on rocks, get hunted and killed by mountain lions."

"If I open the window," Weiss asked, "would you be afraid to jump out? Come over here and look."

Cris stepped to the great window. He had not known that the house was built so close to the edge. Crag on crag, fold after billow, the land fell down and away to the distant throat of the valley. Cris stepped back respectfully. "Open it if you like," he said, and swallowed, "and somebody else can jump. Not me, kiddies."

Sig Weiss smiled. "Q.E.D. Survival fear is still with us. What we've lost here is fear of anything that is not so. When you came here before, you saw a very frightened man. Most of my fears were 'might-be' fears. I was afraid people might attack me, so I attacked first. I was afraid of seeming different from people, so I stayed where my imagined difference would not show. I was afraid of being the same as people, so I tried to be different."

"What does it?" Cris asked.

"What makes us all what we are now? Something I found. I won't tell you what it is or where it is. I call it an amulet, a true magic amulet, knowing that it's no more or less magic than flame springing to the end of a wooden stick." He took a kitchen match from his pocket and ran his thumbnail across it. It flared up,

and he flipped it into the fireplace. "I won't tell you where or what it is because, althought I've lost my fear, I haven't lost my stubbornness. I've lived miserably, a partial, hunted, hunting existence, and now I'm alive. And I mean to stay this way."

"Where did you find it?" Tillie asked. "Mind telling us that?"

"Not at all. A half mile down the mountain there was a tremendous rockfall a couple of years ago. No one owns that land; no one noticed. I climbed down there once looking for hawks' eggs. I found a place . . .

"How can I tell you what that place was like, or what it was like to find it? It was a brushgrown, rocky hillside near the gaping scar of the slide, where the crust of years had sloughed away. Maybe the mountain moved its shoulder in its sleep. There were flowers—ordinary wildflowers—but perfect, vivid, vital. They lived long and hardily, and they were beautiful. The bushes had an extraordinary green and a fine healthy gloss, and it was a place where the birds came close to me as I sat and watched them. It was the birds who taught me that fear never walked in that place.

"How can I tell you—what can I say about the meaning of that place to me? I'd been a psychic cripple all my life, hobbling through the rough country of my own ideas, spending myself in battle against ghosts I had invented to justify my fears, for fear was there first. And when I found that place, my inner self threw away its crutches. More than that—it could fly!

"How can I tell you what it meant to me to leave that place? To walk away from it was to buckle on the braces, pick up the crutches again, to feel my new wings moult and fall away.

"I went there more and more. Once I took my typewriter and worked there, and that was *The Traveling Crag*. Cris never knew how offended I was, how invaded, to find that he had divined the existence of that place throught the story. That was why I turned out that other abortion, out of stubbornness—a desire to prove to Cris and to myself that my writing came from me and not from the magic of that place. I know better now. I don't know what another writer would do here. Better than anything he could conceivably do anywhere else. But it wouldn't be the *Crag* or *Fire*, because they could only have been mine."

Cris asked, "Would you let another writer work here?"

"I'd love it! Do you mean to ask if I want to monopolize this place, and the wonders it works? Of course not. One or another fear or combinations of fear are at the base of any monopoly, whether it's in industry, or in politics, or in the area of religious thought. And there's no fear here."

"There should be some sort of a—a shrine here," murmured Naome.

"There is. There will be, as long as I can keep the amulet. I found it, you see. It was lying right out in the sun. I took it and brought it here. The birds wouldn't forgive me for a while, but I've made them happy here since. And here it is and here it will stay, and there's your shrine."

Fear walked in then. It closed gently on Cris's heart, and he turned

to look at Tillie. Her eyes were closed. She was listening.

A hell of an agent I turned out to be, he thought. How much I was willing to do for Weiss, how much for all the world through his work! By himself he found himself, the greatest of human achievements. And I have done the one thing that will take that away from him and from us all, leaving only the dwindling memory of this life without fear—and two great short stories.

He looked at Tillie again. His gaze caught hers, and she rose. Her features were rigidly controlled, but through his mounting fear Cris could recognize the thing she was fighting. She surely understood what was about to happen to Weiss and to the world if she succeeded. Her understanding versus her . . . orders, was it?

Cris had sat in that incredible aura, listening to the joyous expression of Sig Weiss's delivery from fear, and he had thought of killing. Now, he realized that part of her already thought as he did, and perhaps . . . perhaps . . .

"Sig, can we look around outside?" Criss had stepped over to Tillie almost before he knew he wanted to.

"You own the place," said Weiss cheerfully. "Naome and I'll stir up some food. You've had a nice leisurely trip. I wonder if you realize that Naome spent fourteen hours on a typewriter before she took that long hop? *Fire of Heaven's* well launched now, thanks to her. Anyway, she deserves food."

"And a golden crown, which I shall include in the next pay envelop . Thank you, Naome. You're out of your mind."

"Thank you," she twinkled.

Chris led Tillie out, and they walked rapidly away from the house. "Not too far," she cautioned. "Let's stay where we can think. We're in a magic circle, you know, and outside we'll be afraid of each other, and of ourselves and of all our ghosts."

He asked her, "What are you going to do?"

"I shouldn't have got you into this I should have come by myself."

"I'd have stopped you then. Don't you see? Sig would have told me. Even with whatever help you have, you couldn't have succeeded in getting the weapon on the first try. He's too alert, too alive, far too jealous of what the 'amulet' has given him. He'd have told me, and I'd have stopped you, to save him and his work. You made me an ally, and that prevented me."

"Cris, Cris, I didn't think that out!"

"I know you didn't. It was done for you. Who is it Tillie? Who?"

"A ship," she whispered. "A space ship."

"You've seen it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where is it?"

"Here."

"Here, in Turnville?"

She nodded.

"And it—they—communicate with you?"

"Yes."

He asked her again. "What are you going to do?"

"If I tell you I'll get the weapon, you'll kill me to save Weiss, and his work, and his birds, and his shrine,

and all they can mean to the world. Won't you, Chris?"

"I will certainly try."

"And if I refuse to get it for them—"

"Would they kill you?"

"They could."

"If they did, could they then get the weapon?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. They've never forced me, Cris, never. They've always appealed to my reason. I think if they could control me or anyone else, they'd have done it. They'd have to find another human ally, and start the persuading process all over again. By which time Weiss and everyone else would be warned, and it would be much more difficult for the ."

"Nothing's difficult for them," he said suddenly. "They can smash planets."

"Cris, we don't think as well as they do, but we don't think the way they do, either. And from what I can get, I'm sure that they're good—that they will do anything they can to spare this planet and the life on it. That seems to be one of the big reasons for their wanting to get that weapon away from here."

"And what of their other aims, then? Can we take all this away from humanity in favor of some cosmic civilization that we don't know and have never seen, which regards us as a dust-fleck in a minor galaxy? Let's face it, Tillie: they'll get it sooner or later. They're strong enough. But let's keep it while we can. A minute, a day of this aura is a minute or a day in which a human being can know what it's like to live without fear. Look at what it's done for Weiss; think what it can do for others. What are you going to do?"

"I—Kiss me, Cris."

His lips had just touched hers when there was a small giggle behind them. Cris whirled.

"Bless you, my children."

"Naome!"

"I didn't mean to bust anything up. I mean that." She skipped up to them. "You can go right back to it after I've finished interrupting. But I've just got to tell you. You know the fright Sig tried to throw into me when I got here last night? I'm getting even. I found his amulet. I really did. It was stuck to the underside of a shelf in the linen closet. You'd have to be my size to see it. I swiped it."

Tillie's breath hissed in. "Where is it? What did you do with it?"

"Oh, don't worry, it's safe enough. I hid it good, this time. Now we'll make him wonder where it is."

"Where is it?" asked Cris.

"Promise not to tell him?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's smack in the innards of one of his pet new possessions. You haven't been in the west room—the ell he calls a library—have you?"

They shook their heads.

"Well, he's got himself a great big radio. I lifted the lid, see, and down inside among the tubes and condensers and all that macaroni are some wire hoops, sort of. This amulet, it's a tiny thing—maybe four inches long and as wide as my two thumbs. It's sort of—blurry around the edges. Anyway, I stuck it inside one set of those hoops. Cris—you're green! What's the matter?"

"Tillie—the coil—the RF coil! If he turns that set on—"

"Oh, dear God . . ." Tillie breathed.

"What's the matter with you two? I didn't do anything wrong, did I?"

They raced into the house, through the living room. "In here!" bellowed Cris. They pounded to the west room, getting into each other's way as they went in.

Sig Weiss was there, smiling. "Just in time. I want to show you the best damn transceiver in—"

"Don't! Don't touch it—"

"Oh, a little hamming won't hurt," said Sig.

He threw the switch.

There was a loud click and a shower of dust.

And silence.

Naome came all the way in, went like a sleepwalker to the radio and opened the lid. There was a hole in the grey crinkle-finished steel, roughly rectangular. Weiss looked at it curiously, touched it, looked up. There was a similar hole in the ceiling. He bent over the chassis. "Now how do you like that! A coil torn all to hell. Something came down through the roof—see?—and smashed right through my new transmitter."

"It didn't go down," said Cris hoarsely. "It went up."

Naome began to cry.

"What the hell's the matter with you people?" Sig demanded.

Cris suddenly clutched Tillie's arm. "The ship! The space ship! They wouldn't let it go off while they're here!"

"They did," said Tillie in a flat voice.

"Will somebody please tell me what gives here?" asked Sig plaintively.

Through a thick silence, Tillie said, "I'll tell it." She sank down on her knees, slowly sat on the rug. "Cris knows most of this," she said. "Don't stop to wonder if it's all true. It is." She told about the races, the wars, the weapons of greater and greater destructiveness and, finally, the ultimate weapon, and its strange effect on living tissue. "Eight months ago, the ship contacted me. There was a connection made with my nerve-endings. I don't understand it. It wasn't telepathy; they were artificial neural currents. They talked to me. They've been talking ever since."

"My amulet!" Sig suddenly cried.

"Sit down," said Tillie flatly. He sat.

Cris said, "I thought you required some physical contact for them to communicate with you. But I've been with you while you were communicating, and you had no contact."

"I hadn't?" She began to unbutton her blouse at the throat. She stopped with the fourth button, and gently drew out a metal object shaped somewhat like a bulbous spearhead with a blunt point. It glittered strangely with a color not quite that of gold and not quite of polished brass. It seemed to be glazed with a thin layer of clear crystal.

"Oh-h-h," breathed Naome, in a revelatory tone.

Tillie smiled suddenly at her. "You minx. You always wondered why I never wore a V-neck. Come here, all of you. Down on the rug."

Mystified, they gathered around. "Put your hands on it." They did so, and stared at each other and at their hands, waiting like old maids over a Ouija board. "It hurts a tiny bit at first as the probes go in, but it passes quickly. Be very still."

A strange, not unpleasant prickling sensation came and went. There was a slight shock, another; more prickling.

Testing. Testing. Naome Cris Sig Tillie . . .

"Everybody get that?" asked Tillie calmly.

Naome squeaked. "It's like someone talking inside my sinuses!"

"It said our names," said Sig tautly. Cris nodded, fascinated.

The silent voice spoke:—*Sig, your amulet is gone and you have lost nothing.*

Tillie, you have been faithful to your own.

Naome, you have been used, and you have done no wrong.

Chris, we have observed that it takes superhuman understanding to guide and direct work you cannot do yourself.

Reorient your thinking, all of you. You insist that what is lethal or cosmically important must be huge. You insist that anything which transcends a horror must be greater horror.

The amulet was indeed the ultimate weapon. Its effect is not to destroy, but to stop useless conflict. At this moment there is a chain reaction occurring thoughout this planet's atmosphere affecting only one rare isotope of nitrogen. In times to come, your people will understand its radiochemistry; it is enough for you now to know that its most significant effect is to turn on the full analytical powers of the mind whenever fear is experienced. Panic occurs when analysis is shut off. Embarrassment occurs when fear is not analyzed. Hereafter, no truck-driver will fear to use the word 'exquisite', no propagandist will create the semblance of truth by repeating falsehoods, no human group will be able to instill fears about any other human group which are not common to the respective individuals of the groups. There will be no fear-ridden movements of securities, and no lovers will be with each other and afraid to state their love. In large issues and in small ones, the greater the emergency the greater will be the stimulation of the analytical powers.

That is the meaning and purpose and constitution of the ultimate weapon. To you it is a gift. There are few races in cosmic history with a higher potential than yours, or with a more miserable expression of it. The gift is yours because of this phenomenon.

As for us, our quest is as stated to you. We were to seek out the weapon and bring it back with us. We gave it to you instead, by manipulation of your impulses, Naome, and yours, Sig, with the radio. Earth needs it more than we do.

But we have not failed. The radiochemistry of the nitrogen-isotope reaction and its catalyses are now widely available to us. It will be simplicty itself for us to recreate the weapon, and the time it will take us is as nothing . .

. . . For we are a race which

commands the fluxes of time, and we can braid a distance about our fingers, and hold Alpha and Omega together in the palms of our hands.

"The probes are gone," said Tillie, after a long silence.

Reluctantly, they removed their hands from the communicator, and flexed them.

Cris said, "Tillie, where is the ship?"

She smiled. "Remember? 'You insist that what is cosmically important must be huge.' " She pointed. "That is the ship."

They stared at the bulbous arrowhead. It rose and drifted toward the door. It paused there, tilted toward them in an obvious salute, and then, like a light extinguished, it was gone.

Naome sprang to her feet. "Is it all true, about the propaganda, the panic, the—the lovers who can speak their minds?"

"All true," smiled Tillie.

Naome said, "Testing. Testing. Sig Weiss, I love you."

Sig picked her up and hugged her. "Come on, all of you. I want to walk clear down to the corners and have a beer with the old man. I want to tell him something I've never said before—that he's my neighbor."

Cris helped Tillie up. "I think he stocks some real V-type halters."

Outside, it was a greener world, and all over it the birds sang. End

Continued from page 12

And, as on so many other worlds, there were other life-forms, not just molloks. There were cocci—staph, strep, diplo and mono—bacilli, sperilli, rickettsia, and viruses . . .

Three little Saquettes came out of the tall grass and stood aimed at the antenna, quivering, belonging for a time to the vibration of a thing unseen . . .

Peritonitus still takes only twenty-four hours to kill.

And on the morning of the seventh day . . .

Continued from page 37

enough; I'm not named Sharecropper for nothing. On what meat has he grown so great and glossy, Juniper?"

"Ah, that is hard for me to say, Cronelius."

"And your words have a literal sense, I believe. You know; but it is hard for you to say. Why, Juniper, why leave it all to me for only your burial?"

"Because I'm dying, and I must leave it to someone. And the tomb also. I must have my tomb."

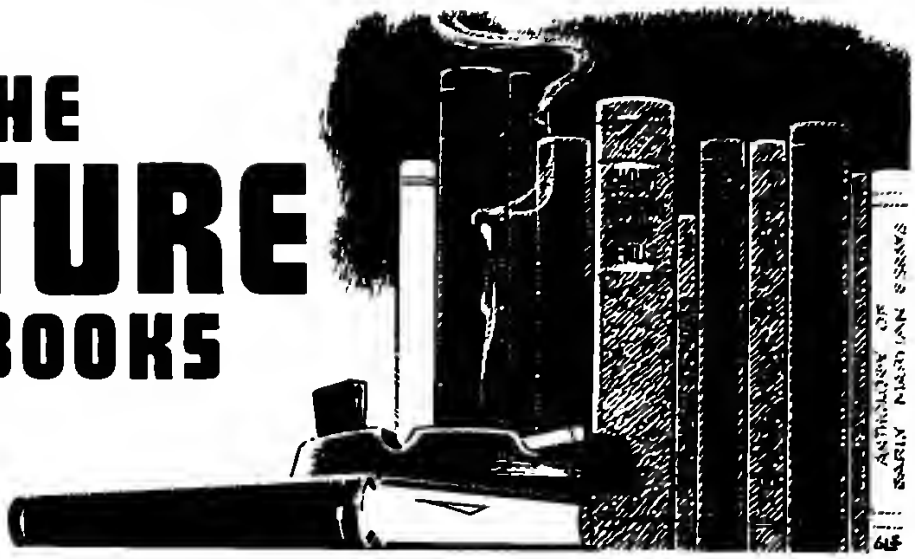
"I see. Rather grander than the Great Pyramid, from the plans here, but it could be handled; the Pharoes hadn't our resources. But why me, Juniper? We were never really close."

"For the several good turns you have done me, Sharecropper, and for one bad turn. I am closing my affairs. I would pay you back."

"For the several good turns, or for the one bad turn, Juniper? Well, I've grown fat on tainted meat. I gobble where daintier men refuse, and I'll try this grand carcass yet. I take your deal, Juniper."

So they consumated it. And then Juniper Tell went home to die, a sucked-out man. Yet he had found curious pleasure in that last transaction, and the tomb would be a grand one.

THE FUTURE IN BOOKS



(Within the limits of AMAZING's publishing schedule, this department will attempt to review books while they are still available to be bought. Publishers can help by sending us galleys or advance copies, which will greatly reduce the lag-time. N. B.: We are interested only in science-fiction, or occasionally in books *about* science fiction; no other non-fiction, please.

("William Atheling, Jr." is the pen-name used over the past two decades by James Blish for his critical writings. Since this fact has been public knowledge for over 10 years, we shall not repeat this notice.)

NEUTRON STAR, by Larry Niven; Ballantine Books U6120, New York, 1968. Paper, 285 pp., $.75

Suddenly more than half the writers I see at meetings and parties are young strangers; the days of the closed circle, if they ever existed, are over, and a good thing, too. Few writers among the newcomers have come so far so fast as has Larry Niven, who won a Hugo for the title story of this collection almost before he opened his mouth, and who is already much admired in the fan magazines I see as a writer of "hard" science fiction (a church to which I belong myself, inevitably, since I invented the term; it means s-f in which all the facts are straight and their implications developed rigorously). This collection offers a fine opportunity to see how Niven does it, and at least to guess why people like it.

These eight stories (all from *Galaxy* except one new one) all have as a backdrop the same limited but large section of the galaxy, and a common history. The various planets are held loosely and reasonably together by a laissez faire capitalism, like Poul Anderson's but more convincing in that Niven's Earthmen are *not* automatically the best or even the dominant entrepreneurs. They are populated by rational creatures with charming Earth-given names like puppeteers and bandersnatchi, and littered with relics of two long-extinct races, the Slavers and the tnucipen (which I

hope is not an anagram). You can hardly fail to like Nipen's flora and fauna; he is more inventive of outright cute life-forms than anybody since Stanley G. Weinbaum.

Again rather like Anderson, he is a so gifted at dealing with speculative physics, and at making a plausible-sounding noise (for instance, when talking about a faster-than-light drive) where there are no facts to back him up. In this department he radiates confidence; he *believes* in current physics, and expects that—allowing for new discoveries—it will always be valid. This rigorousness paradoxically gives him a good deal of freedom of movement; he can be sure that his universe is not going to turn on him and bite him by failing to conform.

The freedom is not yet used as well as he will doubtless manage later With three exceptions, these stories are told in the first person by a cashiered pilot-adventurer, omni-competent but with few detectable traces of human feeling, whom I found difficult to like, thus emptying the pieces of any interest but that of their ingenuity and their puzzle value (on both of which they score high). Niven is skilled at pushing about and re-arranging most of the familiar counters of s-f, some of them dating back as far as Buck Rogers—the FTL drive, the impervium hull, subspace, the alien artifact, the space pirate, the hidden planet and so on; he has a good ear; he is resourceful; and he writes a tight plot. Yet the outcomes have no emotional content and do not seem to be *about* anything; they are straight adventure of an identifiably old-fashioned sort.

Given the author's other skills, I think this emptiness can be little more than an oversight. And despite it, I enjoyed the book thoroughly. Really good space-opera is hard to come by, and this is the pure stuff.

—WAjr

BLACK EASTER, by James Blish; Doubleday, New York, 1968. Bound. $3.95

All fictions that attempt to define the essence of God (or man) fail; narrative structure demands the Kierkegaardian leaps get longer and longer, as well as more personal, till the author, to be true to his perception of the particular truth he is trying to convey, finally has to ask the reader to believe what he says, rather than consider what he shows. But the best of these failures, from Mark Twain's novella *The Mysterious Stranger*, through Robert Heinlein's sprawling sermon *Stranger in a Strange Land*, to Roger Zelazny's jewel in miniature *For a Breath I Tarry*, make some of the most fascinating reading in the canon of imaginative literature.

James Blish's *Black Easter; or, Faust Aldeph-Null* (the middle volume, though the last to be written, in his trilogy "After Such Knowledge," bracketed by *Doctor Mirabilis* and *A Case of Conscience*) is very much in this spectacular league. Anyone with a taste for the baroque, anyone with even a passing interest in the history of magic, anyone who has pondered such figures as

Madame Blavatsky, Arthur Edward Waite, or Alistair Crowley, will be delighted with it.

Here are three sips from the brew:

A black magician conjures up the demon Marchosias in the shape of a fire-breathing, winged she-wolf:

"Stand and transform, else I shall plunge thee back whence thou comest. I command thee!"

The she-wolf vanished, leaving behind in the triangle a plump, modest-looking young man wearing a decorous necktie, a dildo almost as long and nothing else. "Sorry, boss," he said in a sugary voice. ". . . What's up?"

When a Bronx gangster/executive tries to obtain a succubus with whom he has just indulged his unnamed perversions, she rejoins:

"Thou hadst pleasure with me, that sufficeth. Thou must prove thy virility with moral flesh. Thy potency, that I go to try even now. It comes on to night i' the other side of the world, and I must plant thy seed before it die in my fires—if ever it lived at all." . . . She smiled at him. Behind her lids now, he saw with nausea and shame, there blankly flickering lights, like the rising sparks in a flue. She was now as fully dressed as she had been at the beginning, and curtseyed gravely.

And here is a lawyer listening to a news report on a night of demon-wrought destruction:

" . . . now established that the supposed Chinese fusion test was actually a missile warhead explosion of at least thirty megatons, centered on Taiwan. Western capitals, already in an uproar because of the napalm murder of the U. S. president's widow in a jammed New York discotheque, are moving quickly to a war footing and we expect a series of security blackouts on the news at any moment . . ." Baines twisted the dial savagely . . . but nothing was coming through except a mixture of The Messiah, *Mahler, and The Supremes.*

Well, I said "baroque."

The book is basically a study of three characters, the white magician Father Francis Xavier Domenico Bruno Garelli, the black magician Theron Ware, and the millionaire lawyer Baines who tries to enlist the help of both for the most diabolical purposes.

The portraits of the magicians are superb; and the descriptions of the conjuring are the best I've encountered, including those in Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*. Theron Ware, the black magician, is cerebral, witty, the expert sophist. The bumbling, barefoot white magician Father Domenico is the quintessence of all I find delightful in Tolkein (thought Mr. Blish might not consider this a compliment, I certainly do). The only character who remains vague for me is Baines. Perhaps if the lust of Ginsberg and the seeking-after-knowledge of Hess (Ginsberg and Hess are Baines' two human henchmen) had all been given to Baines himself, he would have been able to support his tercet of the flaming brazier. Even so, including *A Case of Conscience* and *Surface Tension*, this is the most enjoyable Blish I've read yet.

—Samuel R. Delaney

Its body was disc shaped, with a long double row of appendages—legs—on the under side. Hundreds of ugly looking spikes rimmed the disc body on the outer and upper edges.

HE WHO SHRANK

HENRY HASSE

Illustrated by Leo Morey

The possible size of worlds, the effect on humanity, if the individual were able to inspect and study large and small ones, and an endless series of adventures, conjectures and possibilities, if we may use that word, fill the pages of this strange imaginative relation.

YEARS, centuries, aeons, have fled past me in endless parade, leaving me unscathed: for I am deathless, and in all the universe alone of my kind. Universe? Strange how that convenient word leaps instantly to my mind from force of old habit. Universe? The merest expression of a puny idea in the minds of those who cannot possibly conceive whereof they speak. The word is a mockery. Yet how glibly men utter it! How little do they realize the artificiality of the word!

That night when the Professor called me to him he was standing close to the curved transparent wall of the astrono-laboratory looking out into the blackness. He heard me enter, but did not look around as he spoke. I do not know whether he was addressing me or not.

"They call me the greatest scientist the world has had in all time."

I had been his only assistant for years, and was accustomed to his moods, so I did not speak. Neither did he for several moments and then he continued:

"Only a half year ago I discovered a principle that will be the means of utterly annihilating every kind of disease germ. And only recently I turned over to others the principles of a new toxin which stimulates the worn-out protoplasmic life-cells, causing almost complete rejuvenation. The combined results should nearly double the ordinary life span. Yet these two things are only incidental in the long list of discoveries I have made to the great benefit of the race."

He turned then and faced me, and I was surprised at a new peculiar glow that lurked deep in his eyes.

"And for these things they call me great! For these puny discoveries they heap honors on me and call me the benefactor of the race. They disgust me, the fools! Do they think I did it for them? Do they think I care about the race, what it does or what happens to it or how long it lives? They do not suspect that all the things I have given them were but accidental discoveries on my part—to which I gave hardly a thought. Oh, you seem amazed. Yet not even you, who have assisted me here for

ten years, ever suspected that all my labors and experiments were pointed toward one end, and one end alone."

He went over to a locked compartment which in earlier years I had wondered about and then ceased to wonder about, as I became engrossed in my work. The professor opened it now, and I glimpsed but the usual array of bottles and test-tubes and vials. One of these vials he lifted gingerly from a rack.

"And at last I have attained the end," he almost whispered, holding the tube aloft. A pale liquid scintillated eerily against the artificial light in the ceiling. "Thirty years, long years, of ceaseless experimenting, and now, here in my hand—success!"

The Professor's manner, the glow deep in his dark eyes, the submerged enthusiasm that seemed at every instant about to leap out, all served to impress me deeply. It must indeed be an immense thing he had done, and I ventured to say as much.

"Immense!" he exclaimed. "Immense! Why—why it's so immense that—. But wait. Wait. You shall see for yourself."

At this time how little did I suspect the significance of his words. I was indeed to see for myself.

Carefully he replaced the vial, then walked over to the transparent wall again.

"Look!" he gestured toward the night sky. "The unknown! Does it not fascinate you? The other fools dream of some day travelling out there among the stars. They think they will go out there and learn the secret of the universe. But as yet they have been baffled by the problem of a sufficiently powerful fuel or force for their ships. And they are blind. Within a month *I* could solve the puny difficulty that confronts them; could, but I won't. Let them search, let them experiment, let them waste their lives away, what do I care about them?"

I wondered what he was driving at, but realized that he would come to the point in his own way. He went on:

"And suppose they do solve the problem, suppose they do leave the planet, go to other worlds in their hollow ships, what will it profit them? Suppose that they travel with the speed of light for their own life time, and then land on a star at that point, the farthest point away from here that is possible for them? They would no doubt say: 'We can now realize as never before the truly staggering expanse of the universe. It is indeed a great structure, the universe. We have traveled a far distance; we must be on the fringe of it.'

"Thus they would believe. Only I would know how wrong they were, for I can sit here and look through this telescope and see stars that are fifty and sixty times as distant as that upon which they landed. Comparatively, their star would be infinitely close to us. The poor deluded fools and their dreams of space travel!"

"But Professor," I interposed, "just think—"

"Wait! Now listen. I, too, have long desired to fathom the universe, to determine what it is, the manner and the purpose and the secret of its

creation. Have you ever stopped to wonder *what* the universe is? For thirty years I have worked for the answer to those questions. Unknowing, you helped me with your efficiency on the strange experiments I assigned to you at various times. Now I have the answer in that vial, and you shall be the only one to share the secret with me."

Incredulous, I again tried to interrupt.

"Wait!" he said. "Let me finish. There was the time when I also looked to the stars for the answer. I built my telescope, on a new principle of my own. I searched the depths of the void. I made vast calculations. And I proved conclusively to my own mind what had therefore been only a theory. I know now without doubt that this our planet, and other planets revolving about the sun, are but electrons of an atom, of which the sun is the nucleus. And our sun is but one of millions of others, each with its alloted number of planets, each system being an atom just as our own is in reality.

"And all these millions of solar systems, or atoms, taken together in one group, form a galaxy. As you know, there are countless numbers of these galaxies throughout space, with tremendous stretches of space between them. And what are these galaxies? Molecules! They extend through space even beyond the farthest range of my telescope! But having penetrated that far, it is not difficult to make the final step.

"All of these far-flung galaxies, or molecules, taken together as a whole, form—what? Some indeterminable element or substance on a great, ultramacrocosmic world! Perhaps a minute drop of water, or a grain of sand, or wisp of smoke, or—good God!—an eyelash of some creature living on that world!"

I could not speak. I felt myself grow faint at the thought he had propounded. I tried to think it could not be—yet what did I or anyone know about the infinite stretches of space that must exist beyond the ranges of our most powerful telescope?

"It can't be!" I burst out. "It's incredible, it's—monstrous!"

"Monstrous? Carry it a step further. May not that ultra-world *also* be an electron whirling around the nucleus of an atom? And that atom only one of millions forming a molecule? And that molecule only one of millions forming—"

"For God's sake stop!" I cried. "I refuse to believe that such a thing can be! Where would it all lead? Where would it end? It might go on —forever! And besides," I added lamely, "what has all this to do with —your discovery, the fluid you showed me?

"Just this. I soon learned that it was useless to look to the infinitely large, so I turned to the infinitely small. For does it not follow that if such a state of creation exists in the stars above us, it must exist identically in the atoms below us?"

I saw his line of reasoning, but still did not understand. His next words fully enlightened me, but made me suspect that I was facing one who had gone insane from his theorizing. He went on eagerly, his voice the voice of a fanatic:

"If I could not pierce the stars above, that were so far, then I would

pierce the atoms below, that were so near. They are everywhere. In every object I touch and in the very air I breathe. But they are minute, and to reach them I must find a way to make myself as minute as they are, and more so! This I have done. The solution I showed you will cause every individual atom in my body to *contract*, but each electron and proton will also decrease in size, or diameter, in direct proportion to my own shrinkage! Thus will I not only be able to become the size of an atom, but can go down, down into infinite smallness!"

Chapter II

When he had stopped speaking I said calmly: "You are mad."

He was imperturbed. "I expected you to say that," he answered. "It is only natural that that should be your eaction to all that I have said. But no, I am not mad, it is merely that you are unacquainted with the marvelous propensities of 'Shrinx.' But I promised that you should see for yourself, and that you shall. You shall be the first to go down into the atomic universe."

My original opinion in regard to his state of mind remained unshaken.

"I am sure you mean well, Professor," I said, "but I must decline your offer."

He went on as though I hadn't spoken:

"There are several reasons why I want to send you before I myself make the trip. In the first place, once you make the trip there can be no returning, and there are a number of points I want to be quite clear on. You will serve as my advance guard, so to speak."

"Professor, listen. I do not doubt that the stuff you call 'Shrinx' has very remarkable properties. I will even admit that it will do all you say it will do. But for the past month you have worked day and night, with scarcely enough time out for food and hardly any sleep at all. You should take a rest, get away from the laboratory for awhile."

"I shall keep in contact with your consciousness," he said, "through a very ingenious device I have perfected. I will explain it to you later. The 'Shrinx' is introduced directly into the blood stream. Shortly thereafter your shrinkage should begin, and continue at moderate speed, never diminishing in the least degree so long as the blood continues to flow in your body. At least, I hope it never diminishes. Should it, I shall have to make the necessary alterations in the formula. All this is theoretical of course, but I am sure it will all work according to schedule, and quite without harm."

I had now lost all patience. "See here, Professor," I said crossly, "I refuse to be the object of any of your wild sounding experiments. You should realize that what you propose to do is scientifically impossible. Go home and rest—or go away for a while—"

Without the slightest warning he leaped at me, snatching an object from the table. Before I could take a backward step I felt a needle plunge deep into my arm, and cried out with the pain of it. Things became hazy, distorted. A wave of vertigo swept over me. Then it passed, and my

vision cleared. The Professor stood leering before me.

"Yes, I've worked hard and I'm tired. I've worked thirty years, but I'm not tired enough nor fool enough to quit this thing now, right on the verge of the climax!"

His leer of triumph gave way to an expression almost of sympathy.

"I am sorry it had to come about this way," he said, "but I saw that you would never submit otherwise. I really am ashamed of you. I didn't think you would doubt the truth of my statements to the extent of really believing me insane. But to be safe I prepared your allotment of the 'Shrinx' in advance, and had it ready; it is now coursing through your veins, and it should be but a short time before we observe the effects. What you saw in the vial is for myself, when I am ready to make the trip. Forgive me for having to administer yours in such an undignified manner."

So angered was I at the utter disregard he had shown for my personal feelings, that I hardly heard his words. My arm throbbed fiercely where the needle had plunged in. I tried to take a step toward him, but not a muscle would move. I struggled hard to break the paralysis that was upon me, but could not move a fraction of an inch from where I stood.

The professor seemed surprised too, and alarmed.

"What, paralysis? That is an unforeseen circumstance! You see, it is even as I said: the properties of 'Shrinx' are marvelous and many."

He came close and peered intently into my eyes, and seemed relieved.

"However, the effect is only temporary," he assured me. Then added: "But you will likely be a bit smaller when the use of your muscles returns, for your shrinkage should begin very shortly now. I must hurry to prepare for the final step."

He walked past me, and I heard him open his private cupboard again. I could not speak, much less move, and I was indeed in a most uncomfortable, not to mention undignified, position. All I could do was to glare at him when he came around in front of me again. He carried a curious kind of helmet with ear-pieces and goggles attached, and a number of wires running from it. This he placed upon the table and connected the wires to a small flat box there.

All the while I watched him closely. I hadn't the least idea what he was going to do with me, but never for a moment did I believe that I would shrink into an atomic universe; that was altogether too fantastic for my conception.

As though reading my thought the Professor turned and faced me. He looked me over casually for a moment and then said:

"I believe it has begun already. Yes, I am sure of it. Tell me, do you not feel it? Do not things appear a trifle larger to you, a trifle taller? Ah, I forgot that the paralyzing effect does not permit you to answer. But look at me—do I not seem taller?"

I looked at him. Was it my imagination, or some kind of hypnosis he was asserting on me, that made me think he was growing slightly, ever so slightly, upward even as I looked?

"Ah!" he said triumphantly. "You have noticed. I can tell it by your eyes. However, it is not I who am growing taller, but you who are shrinking."

He grasped me by the arms and turned me about to face the wall. "I can see that you doubt," he said, "so look! The border on the wall. If you remember, it used to be about even with your eyes. Now it is fully three inches higher."

It was true! And I could now feel a tingling in my veins, and a slight dizziness.

"Your shrinkage has not quite reached the maximum speed," he went on. "When it does, it will remain constant. I could not stop it now even if I wanted to, for I have nothing to counteract it. Listen closely now, for I have several things to tell you.

"When you have become small enough I am going to lift you up and place you on this block of Rehyllium-X here on the table. You will become smaller and smaller, and eventually should enter an alien universe consisting of billions and billions of star groups, or galaxies, which are only the molecules in this Rehyllium-X. When you burst through, your size in comparison with this new universe should be gigantic. However, you will constantly diminish, and will be enabled to alight on any one of the spheres of your own choosing. And—after alighting—you will continue—always down!"

At the concept I thought I would go mad. Already I had become fully a foot shorter, and still the paralysis gripped me. Could I have moved I would have torn the Professor limb from limb in my impotent rage—though if what he said was true, I was already doomed.

Again it seemed as though he read my mind.

"Do not think too harshly of me," he said. "You should be very grateful for this opportunity, for you are going on a marvellous venture, into a marvellous realm. Indeed, I am almost jealous that you should be the first. But with this," he indicated the helmet and box on the table, "I shall keep contact with you no matter how far you go. Ah, I see by your eyes that you wonder how such a thing could be possible. Well, the principle of this device is really very simple. Just as light is a form of energy, so is thought. And just as light travels through an 'ether' in the form of waves, so does thought. But the thought waves are much more intangible—in fact, invisible. Nevertheless the waves are there, and the coils in this box are so sensitized as to receive and amplify them a million times, much as sound waves might be amplified. Through this helmet I will receive but two of your six sensations: those of sound and sight. They are the two major ones, and will be sufficient for my purpose. Every sight and sound that you encounter, no matter how minute, reaches your brain and displaces tiny molecules there that go out in the form of thought waves and finally reach here and are amplified. Thus my brain receives every impression

of sight and sound that your brain sends out."

I did not doubt now that his marvelous "Shrinx" would do everything he said it would do. Already I was but one-third of my original size. Still the paralysis showed no sign of releasing me, and I hoped that the Professor knew whereof he spoke when he said the effect would be but temporary. My anger had subsided somewhat, and I think I began to wonder what I would find in that other universe.

Then a terrifying thought assailed me—a thought that left me cold with apprehension. If, as the Professor had said, the atomic universe was but a tiny replica of the universe we knew, would I not find myself in the vast empty spaces between the galaxies *with no air to breathe*? In all the vast calculations the Professor had made, could he have overlooked such an obvious point?

Now I was very close to the floor, scarcely a foot high. Everything about me—the Professor, the tables, the walls—were gigantically out of proportion to myself.

The Professor reached down then, and swung me up on the table top amidst the litter of wires and apparatus. He began speaking again, and to my tiny ears his voice sounded a deeper note.

"Here is the block of Rehyllium-X containing the universe you soon will fathom," he said, placing on the table beside me the square piece of metal, which was nearly half as tall as I was. "As you know, Rehyllium-X is the densest of all known metals, so the universe awaiting you should be a comparatively dense one—though you will not think so, with the thousands of light-years of space between stars. Of course I know no more about this universe than you do, but I would advise you to avoid the very bright stars and approach only the dimmer ones. Well, this is goodby, then. We shall never see each other again. Even should I follow you—as I certainly shall as soon as I have learned through you what alterations I should make in the formula—it is impossible that I could exactly trace your course down through all the spheres that you will have traversed. One thing already I have learned: the rate of shrinkage is too rapid; you will be able to stay on a world for only a few hours. But perhaps that is best, after all. This is good-by for all time."

He picked me up and placed me upon the smooth surface of the Rehyllium-X. I judged that I must be about four inches tall then. It was with immeasurable relief that I finally felt the paralysis going away. The power of my voice returned first, and expanding my lungs I shouted with all my might.

"Professor!" I shouted. "Professor!"

He bent down over me. To him my voice must have sounded ridiculously high pitched.

"What about the empty regions of space I will find myself in?" I asked a bit tremulously, my mouth close to his ear "I would last but a few minutes. My life will surely be snuffed out."

"No, that will not happen," he answered. His voice beat upon my eardrums like thunder, and I placed my hands over my ears.

He understood, and spoke more softly. "You will be quite safe in airless space," he went on. "In the thirty years I have worked on the problem, I would not be likely to overlook that point—though I will admit it gave me much trouble. But as I said, 'Shrinx' is all the more marvelous in the fact that its qualities are many. After many difficulties and failures, I managed to instill in it a certain potency by which it supplies sufficient oxygen for your need, distributed through the blood stream. It also irradiates a certain amount of heat; and, inasmuch as I consider the supposed sub-zero temperature of space as being somewhat exaggerated, I don't think you need worry about any discomfort in open space."

Chapter III

I was scarcely over an inch in height now. I could walk about, though my limbs tingled fiercely as the paralysis left. I beat my arms against my sides and swung them about to speed the circulation. The Professor must have thought I was waving goodby. His hand reached out and he lifted me up. Though he tried to handle me gently, the pressure of his fingers bruised. He held me up to the level of his eyes. He looked at me for a long moment and then I saw his lips form the words "good-by." I was terribly afraid he would drop me to the floor a dizzy distance below, and I was relieved when he lowered me again and I slid off his hand to the block of Rehyllium-X.

The Professor now appeared as a giant towering hundreds of feet into the air, and beyond him, seemingly miles away, the walls of the room extended to unimaginable heights. The ceiling above seemed as far away and expansive as the dome of the sky I had formerly known. I ran to the edge of the block and peered down. It was as though I stood at the top of a high cliff. The face of it was black and smooth, absolutely perpendicular. I stepped back apace lest I lose my footing and fall to my death. Far below extended the vast smooth plain of the table top.

I walked back to the center of the block, for I was afraid of the edge; I might be easily shaken off if the Professor were to accidently jar the table. I had no idea of my size now, for there was nothing with which I could compare it. For all I knew I might be entirely invisible to the Professor. He was now but an indistinguishable blur, like a far off mountain seen through a haze.

I now began to notice that the surface of the Rehyllium-X block was not as smooth as it had been. As far as I could see were shallow ravines, extending in every direction. I realized that these must be tiny surface scratches that had been invisible before.

I was standing on the edge of one of these ravines, and I clambered down the side and began to walk along it. It was as straight as though laid by a ruler. Occasionally I came to intersecting ravines, and turned to the left or right. Before long, due to my continued shrinkage, the walls

of these ravines towered higher than my head, and it was as though I walked along a narrow path between two cliffs.

Then I received the shock of my life, and my adventure came near to ending right there. I approached one of the intersections. I turned the sharp corner to the right. I came face to face with the How-Shall-I-Describe-It.

It was a sickly bluish white in color. Its body was disc shaped, with a long double row of appendages—legs—on the under side. Hundreds of ugly looking spikes rimmed the disc body on the outer and upper edges. There was no head and apparently no organ of sight, but dozens of snake-like protuberances waved in my face as I nearly crashed into it. One of them touched me and the creature backed swiftly away, the spikes springing stiffly erect in formidable array.

This impression of the creature flashed upon my mind in the merest fraction of time, for you may be sure that I didn't linger there to take stock of its pedigree. No indeed. My heart choked me in my fright, I whirled and sped down the opposite ravine. The sound of the thing's pursuit lent wings to my feet, and I ran as I had never run before. Up one ravine and down another I sped, doubling to right and left in my effort to lose my pursuer. The irony of being pursued by a germ occurred to me, but the matter was too serious to be funny. I ran until I was out of breath, but no matter which way I turned and doubled the germ was always a hundred paces behind me. Its organ of sound must have been highly sensitive. At last I could run no more, and I darted around the next corner and stopped, gasping for breath.

The germ rushed a short distance past me and stopped, having lost the sound of my running. Its dozens of tentacular sound organs waved in all directions. Then it came unhesitatingly toward me, and again I ran. Apparently it had caught the sound of my heavy breathing. Again I dashed around the next corner, and as I heard the germ approach I held my breath until I thought my lungs would burst. It stopped again, waved its tentacles in the air and then ambled on down the ravine. Silently I sneaked a hasty retreat.

Now the walls of these ravines (invisible scratches on a piece of metal!) towered very high above me as I continued to shrink. Now too I noticed narrow chasms and pits all around me, in both the walls at the sides and the surface on which I walked. All of these seemed very deep, and some were so wide that I had to leap across them.

At the first I was unable to account for these spaces that were opening all about me, and then I realized with a sort of shock that the Rehyllium-X was becoming *porous*, so small was I in size! Althought it was the densest of all known metals, no substance whatsoever could be so dense as to be an absolute solid.

I began to find it increasingly difficult to progress; I had to get back and make running jumps across the spaces. Finally I sat down and laughed as I realized the futility and stupidity of this. Why was I risking my life by jumping across these spaces that were becoming wider as

I became smaller, when I had no particular destination anyway—except down. So I may as well stay in one spot.

No sooner had I made this decision, however, than something changed my mind.

It was the germ again.

I saw it far down the ravine, heading straight for me. It might have been the same one I had encountered before, or its twin brother. But now I had become so small that it was fully fifteen times my own size, and the very sight of the huge beast ambling toward me inspired terror into my heart. Once more I ran, praying that it wouldn't hear the sound of my flight because of my small size.

Before I had gone a hundred yards I stopped in dismay. Before me yawned a space so wide that I couldn't have leaped half the distance. There was escape on neither side, for the chasm extended up both the walls. I looked back. The germ had stopped. Its mass of tentacles was waving close to the ground.

Then it came on, not at an amble now but at a much faster rate. Whether it had heard me or had sensed my presence in some other manner, I did not know. Only one thing was apparent: I had but a few split seconds in which to act. I threw myself down flat, slid backward into the chasm, and hung there by my hands.

And I was just in time. A huge shape rushed overhead as I looked up. So big was the germ that the chasm which had appeared so wide to me, was inconsequential to it; it ran over the space as though it weren't there. I saw the double row of the creature's limbs as they flashed overhead. Each one was twice the size of my body.

Then happened what I had feared. One of the huge claw-like limbs came down hard on my hand, and a sharp spur raked across it. I could feel the pain all through my arm. The anguish was insufferable. I tried to get a better grip but couldn't. My hold loosened. I dropped down—down—

Chapter IV

"This is the end."

Such was my thought in that last awful moment as I slipped away into space. Involuntarily I shut my eyes, and I expected at any moment to crash into oblivion.

But nothing happened.

There was not even the usual sickening sensation that accompanies acceleration. I opened my eyes to a stygian darkness, and put out an exploring hand. It encountered a rough wall which was flashing upward past my face. I was falling, then; but at no such speed as would have been the case under ordinary circumstances. This was rather as if I were floating downward. Or was it downward? I had lost all sense of up or down or sideways. I doubled my limbs under me and kicked out hard against the wall, shoving myself far away from it.

How long I remained falling—or drifting—there in that darkness I have no way of knowing. But it must have been minutes, and every minute I was necessarily growing smaller.

For some time I had been aware of immense masses all around me. They pressed upon me from every side, and from them came a very faint radiance. They were of all sizes, some no larger than myself and some looming up large as mountains. I tried to steer clear of the large ones, for I had no desire to be crushed between two of them. But there was little chance of that. Although we all drifted slowly along through space together, I soon observed that none of these masses ever approached each other or deviated the least bit from their paths.

As I continued to shrink, these masses seemed to spread out, away from me; and as they spread, the light which they exuded became brighter. They ceased to be masses, and became swirling, expanding, individual stretches of mist, milky white.

They were nebulae! Millions of miles of space must stretch between each of them! The gigantic mass I had clung to, drawn there by its gravity, also underwent this nebulosity, and now I was floating in the midst of an individual nebula. It spread out as I became smaller, and as it thinned and expanded, what had seemed mist now appeared as trillions and trillions of tiny spheres in intricate patterns.

I was in the very mist of these spheres! They were all around my feet, my arms, my head! They extended farther than I could reach, farther than I could see. I could have reached out and gathered thousands of them in my hand. I could have stirred and kicked my feet and scattered them in chaotic confusion about me. But I did not indulge in such reckless and unnecessary destruction of worlds. Doubtless my presence here had already done damage enough, displacing millions of them.

I scarcely dared to move a muscle for fear of disrupting the orbits of some of the spheres or wreaking havoc among some solar systems or star groups. I seemed to be hanging motionless among them; or if I were moving in any direction, the motion was too slight to be noticeable. I didn't even know if I were horizontal or vertical, as those two terms had lost all meaning.

As I became smaller, of course the spheres became larger and the space between them expanded, so that the bewildering maze thinned somewhat and gave me more freedom of movement.

I took more cognizance now of the beauty around me. I remembered what the Professor had said about receiving my thought waves, and I hoped he was tuned in now, for I wouldn't have had him miss if for anything.

Every hue I had ever known was represented there among the suns and encircling planets: dazzling whites, reds, yellows, blues, greens, violets, and every intermediate shade. I glimpsed also the barren blackness of suns that had burnt out; but these were infrequent, as this seemed to be a very young universe.

There were single suns with the orbital planets varying in number from two to twenty. There were double suns that revolved slowly about each other as on an invisible axis. There were triple suns that revolved

slowly about each other—strange as it may seen—in perfect trihedral symmetry. I saw one quadruple sun: a dazzling white, a blue, a green, and a deep orange. The white and the blue circled each other on the horizontal plane where the green and the orange circled on the vertical plane, thus forming a perfect interlocking system. Around these four suns, in circular orbits, sped sixteen planets of varying size, the smallest on the inner orbits and the largest on the outer. The effect was a spinning, concave disc with the white-blue-green-orange rotating hub in the center. The rays from these four suns, as they bathed the rolling planets and were reflected back into space in many-hued magnifience, presented a sight both beautiful and weird.

I determined to alight on one of the planets of this quadruple sun as soon as my size permitted. I did not find it hard to maneuver to a certain extent; and eventually, when I had become much smaller, I stretched alongside this solar system, my length being as great as the diameter of the orbit of the outermost planet! Still I dared not come too close, for fear the gravity of my bulk would cause some tension in the orbital field.

I caught glimpses of the surface of the outer, or sixteenth planet, as it swung past me. Through rifts in the great billowing clouds I saw vast expanses of water, but no land; and then the planet was moving away from me, on its long journey around to the other side of the suns. I did not doubt that by the time it returned to my side I would be very much smaller, so I decided to move in a little closer and try to get a look at the fifteenth planet which was then on the opposite side but swinging around in my direction.

I had discovered that if I doubled up my limbs and thrust out violently in a direction opposite that in which I wished to move, I could make fairly good progress, though the effort was somewhat strenuous. In this manner I moved inward toward the sun-cluster, and by the time I had reached the approximate orbit of the fifteenth planet I had become much smaller—was scarcely one-third as long as the diameter of its orbit! The distance between the orbits of the sixteenth and fifteenth planets must have been about 2,500,000,000 miles, according to the old standards I had known; but to me the distance had seemed but a few hundred yards.

I waited there, and finally the planet hove into view from out of the glorious aurora of the suns. Nearer and nearer it swung in its circle, and as it approached I saw that its atmosphere was very clear, a deep saffron-color. It passed me a scant few yards away, turning lazily on its axis opposite the direction of flight. Here, too, as on planet sixteen, I saw a vast world of water. There was only one fairly large island and many scattered small ones, but I judged that fully nine-tenths of the surface area was ocean.

I moved on in to planet fourteen, which I had noticed was a beautiful golden-green color.

By the time I had manuevered to the approximate fourteenth orbit I had become so small that the light of the central suns pained my eyes.

When the planet came into sight I could easily see several large continents on the lighted side; and as the dark side turned to the suns, several more continents became visible. As it swung past me I made comparisons and observed that I was now about five times as large as the planet. When it came around again I would try to effect a landing. To attempt a contact with it now would likely prove disastrous to both it and myself.

As I waited there and became smaller my thoughts turned to the Professor. If his amazing theory of an infinite number of sub-universes was true, then my adventure had hardly begun; wouldn't begin until I alighted on the planet. What would I find there? I did not doubt that the Professor, receiving my thought waves, was just as curious as I. Suppose there was life on this world—hostile life? I would face the dangers while the Professor sat in his laboratory far away. This was the first time that aspect of it occurred to me; it had probably never occurred to the Professor. Strange, too, how I thought of him as "far away." Why, he could merely have reached out his hand and moved me, universe and all, on his laboratory table!

Another curious thought struck me: here I was waiting for a planet to complete its circle around the suns. To any beings who might exist on it, the elapsed time would represent a year; but to me it would only be a number of minutes.

At that, it returned sooner than I expected it, curving around to meet me. Its orbit, of course, was much smaller than those of the two outer planets. More minutes passed as it came closer and larger. As nearly as I could judge I was about one-fifth its size now. It skimmed past me, so closely that I could have reached out and brushed its atmosphere. And as it moved away I could feel its steady tugging, much as if I were a piece of metal being attracted to a magnet. Its speed did not decelerate in the least, but now I was moving along close behind it. It had "captured" me, just as I had hoped it would. I shoved in closer, and the gravity became a steady and stronger pull. I was "falling" toward it. I swung around so that my feet were closest to it, and they entered the atmosphere, where the golden-green touched the blackness of space. They swung down in a long arc and something solid. My "fall" toward the planet ceased. I was standing on one of the continents of this world.

Chapter V

So tall was I that the greatest part of my body still extended out out into the blackness of space. In spite of the fact that the four suns were the distance of thirteen orbits away, they were of such intense brilliance now that to look directly at them would surely have blinded me. I looked far down my tapering length at the continent on which I stood. Even the multi-colored light reflected from the surface was dazzling to the eye. Too late I remembered the Professor's warning to avoid the brighter suns. Close to the surface a few fleeting wisps of cloud drifted about my limbs.

As the planet turned slowly on its axis I of course moved with it, and shortly I found mysef on the side away from the suns, in the planet's shadow. I was thankful for this relief—but it was only temporary. Soon I swung around into the blinding light again. Then into the shadow, and again into the light. How many times this happened I do not know, but at last I was entirely within the planet's atmosphere; here the rays of the sun were diffused, and the light less intense.

Miles below I could see but a vast expanse of yellow surface, stretching unbroken in every direction. As I looked far behind the curving horizon it seemed that I caught a momentary glimpse of tall, silvery towers of some far-off city; but I could not be sure, and when I looked again it had vanished.

I kept my eyes on that horizon, however and soon two tiny red specks became visible against the yellow of the plain. Evidently they were moving toward me very rapidly, for even as I looked they became larger, and soon took shape as two blood-red spheres. Immediately I visioned them as some terrible weapons of warfare or destruction.

But as they came close to me and swerved up to where I towered high in the thin atmosphere, I could see that they were not solid at all, as I had supposed, but were gaseous, and translucent to a certain extent. Furtheremore, they behaved in a manner that hinted strongly of intelligence. Without visible means of propulsion they swooped and circled about my head, to my utter discomfiture. When they came dangerously close to my eyes I raised my hand to sweep them away, but they darted quickly out of reach.

They did not approach me again, but remained there close together, pulsating in mid air. This queer pulsating of their tenuous substance gave me the impression that they were conferring together; and of course I was the object of their conference. Then they darted away in the direction whence they had come.

My curiosity was as great as theirs had seemed to be, and without hesitation I set out in the same direction. I must have covered nearly a mile at each step, but even so, these gaseous entities easily out-distanced me and were soon out of sight. I had no doubt that their destination was the city—if indeed it were a city I had glimpsed. The horizon was closer now and less curved, due to my decrease in height: I judged that I was barely five or six hundred feet tall now.

I had taken but a few hundred steps in the direction the two spheres had gone, when to my great surprise I saw them coming toward me again, this time accompanied by a score of—companions. I stopped in my tracks, and soon they came close and circled about my head. They were all about five feet in diameter, and of the same dark red color. For a minute they darted about as though studying me from every angle; then they systematically arranged themselves in a perfect circle around me. Thin streamers emanated from them, and merged, linking them together and closing the circle. Then other streamers reached slowly out toward me, wavering, cautious.

This, their manner of investigation, did not appeal to me in the least, and I swept my arms around furiously. Instantly all was wild confusion. The circle broke and scattered, the streamers snapped back and they were spheres again. They gathered in a group a short distance away and seemed to consider.

One, whose color had changed to a bright orange, darted apart from them and pulsated rapidly. As clearly as though words had been spoken, I comprehended. The bright orange color signified anger, and he was rebuking the others for their cowardice.

Led by the orange sphere they again moved closer to me, this time they had a surprise for me. A score of streamers flashed out quick as lightning, and cold blue flames sputtered where they touched me. Electric shocks ran through my arms, rendering them numb and helpless. Again they formed their circle around me, again the streamers emerged and completed the circle, and other streamers reached out caressingly. For a moment they flickered about my head, then merged, enveloping it in a cold red radiance. I felt no sensation at all at the touch, except that of cold.

The spheres began to pulsate again in the manner I had observed before, and immediately this pulsating began I felt tiny needlepoints of ice pierce my brain. A question came impinged upon my consciousness more clearly than would have been possible by spoken word:

"Where do you come from?"

I was familiar with thought transference, had even practised it to a certain extent, very often with astonishing success. When I heard—or received—that question, I tried hard to bring every atom of my consciousness to bear upon the circumstances that were the cause of my being there. When I had finished my mental narration and my mind relaxed from the tension I had put upon it, I received the following impressions:

"We receive no answer; your mind remains blank. You are alien, we have never encountered another of your organism here. A most peculiar organism indeed is one that becomes steadily smaller without apparent reason. Why are you here, and where do you come from?" The icy fingers probed deeper and deeper into my brain, seeming to tear it tissue from tissue.

Again I tried, my mind focusing with the utmost clearness upon every detail, picturing my course from the very minute I entered the Professor's laboratory to the present time. When I finished I was exhausted from the effort.

Again I received the impression: "You cannot bring your mind sufficiently into focus; we receive only fleeting shadows."

One of the spheres again changed to a bright color, and broke from the circle. I could almost imagine an angry shrug. The streamers relaxed their hold on my brain and began to withdraw—but not before I caught the fleeting impression from the orange one, who was apparently addressing the others: "—very low mentality."

"You're not so much yourself!" I said aloud. But of course such a

crude method as speech did not register upon them. I wondered at my inability to establish thought communication with these beings. Either my brain was of such a size as to prevent them from receiving the impression (remember I was still a four or five hundred foot giant on this world), or their state of mentality was indeed so much higher than mine, that I was, to them, lower than the lowest savage. Possibly both, more probably the latter.

But they were determined to solve the mystery of my presence before I passed from their world, as I would surely do in a few hours at my rate of shrinkage. Their next move was to place themselves on each side of me in vertical rows extending from far down near the ground up to my shoulders. Again the luminous ribbons reached out and touched me at various points. Then as at a given signal they rose high into the air, lifting me lightly as a feather! In perfect unison they sped towards their city beyond the horizon, carrying me perpendicularly with them! I marveled at the manner in which such gaseous entities as these could lift and propel such a material giant as myself. Their speed must have exceeded by far that of sound—though on all this planet there was no sound except the sound of my body swishing through the air.

In a very few minutes I sighted the city, which must have covered an area of a hundred miles square near the edge of the city, and once more the circle of spheres formed around my head and once more the cold tendrils of light probed my brain.

"You may walk at will about the city," came the thought, "accompanied by a few of us. You are to touch nothing whatever, or the penalty will be extreme; your tremendous size makes your presence here among us somewhat hazardous. When you have become much smaller we shall explore your mind, with somewhat different method, and learn your origin and purpose. We realize that the great size of your brain was somewhat of a handicap to us in our first attempt. We go now to prepare. We have awaited your coming for years."

Leaving only a few there as my escort—or guard—the rest of the spheres sped toward a great domed building that rose from a vast plaza in the center of the city.

I was very much puzzled as to their last statement. For a moment I stood there wondering what they could have meant—"we have awaited your coming for years." Then trusting that this and other things would be answered in the due course of their investigation, I entered the city.

It was not a strange city in so far as architecture was concerned, but it was a beautiful one. I marveled that it could have been conceived and constructed by these confluent globules of gas who at first glance seemed anything but intelligent, reasoning beings. Tall as I was, the buildings towered up to four and five times my height, invariably ending in doomed roofs. There was no sign of a spire or angle as far as my eye could see; apparently they grated harshly on the senses of these beings. The entire plan of the city was of vast sweeping curves and circular patterns, and the effect was striking.

There were no preconceived streets or highways, nor connecting spans between buildings, for there was no need of them. The air was the natural habitable element of this race, and I did not see a one of them ever touch the ground or any surface.

They even came to rest in mid air, with a slow spinning motion. Everywhere I passed among them they paused, spinning, to observe me in apparent curiosity, then went on about their business, whatever it was. None ever approached me except my guards.

For several hours I wandered about in this manner, and finally when I was much smaller I was bade to walk towards the central plaza.

In the circular domed building the others awaited my coming, gathered about a dais surmounted by a huge oval transparent screen of glass or some similar substance. This time only one of the spheres made contact with my brain, and I received the following thought: "Watch."

The screen became opaque, and a vast field of white came into view.

"The great nebula in which this planet is but an infinitestimal speck," came the thought.

The mass drifted almost imperceptibly across the screen, and the thought continued:

"As you see it now, so it appeared to us through our telescopes centuries ago. Of course the drifting motion of the nebula as a whole was not perceptible, and what you see is a chemically recorded reproduction of the view, which has been speeded up to make the motion visible on the screen. Watch closely now."

The great mass of the nebula had been quiescent, but as I watched, it began to stir and swirl in a huge spiral motion, and a vast dark shadow was thrown across the whole scene. The shadow seemed to recede—no, grew smaller—and I could see that it was not a shadow but a huge bulk. This bulk was entering the nebula, causing it to swirl and expand as millions of stars were displaced and shoved outward.

The thought came again: "The scene has been speeded up a millionfold. The thing you see taking place actually transpired over a great number of years; our scientists watched the phenomenon in great wonder, and many were the theories as to the cause of it. You are viewing yourself as you entered our nebula."

I watched in a few minutes the scene before me, as these sphere creatures had watched it over a period of years; saw myself grow smaller, gradually approach the system of the four suns and finally the gold-green planet itself. Abruptly the screen cleared.

"So we watched and awaited your coming for years, not knowing what you were or whence you came. We are still very much puzzled. You become steadily smaller, and that we cannot understand. We must hurry. Relax. Do not interfere with our process by trying to think back to the beginning, as you did before; it is all laid bare to us in the recesses of your brain. Simply relax, think of nothing at all, watch the screen."

I tried to do as he said, again I felt the cold probing tendrils in my brain, and a lethargy came over my mind. Shadows flashed across the screen, then suddenly a familiar scene leaped into view: the Professor's laboratory as I had last seen it,

on the night of my departure. No sooner had this scene cleared than I entered the room, exactly as I had on that night. I saw myself approach the table close behind the Professor, saw him standing as he had stood, staring out at the night sky; saw his lips move.

The spheres about me crowded close to the screen, seemed to hang intent on every motion that passed upon it, and I sensed great excitement among them. I judged that the one who was exploring my mind, if not all of them, were somehow cognizant not only of the words the Professor and I spoke in these scenes, but of their meaning as well.

I could almost read the Professor's lips as he spoke. I saw the utter amazement, then incredulity, then disbelief, on my features as he propounded his theory of macrocosmic worlds and still greater macrocosmic worlds. I saw our parley of words, and finally his lunge toward me and felt again the plunge of the needle into my arm.

As this happened the spheres around me stirred excitedly.

I saw myself become smaller, smaller, to be finally lifted onto the block of Rehyllium-X where I became still smaller and disappeared. I saw my meeting with the germ, and my wild flight; my plunge into the abyss, and my flight down through the darkness, during which time the entire screen before me became black. The screen was slightly illuminated again as I traveled along with the great masses all around me, and then gradually across the screen spread the huge nebula, the same one these sphere creatures had seen through their telescopes centuries ago. Again the screen cleared abruptly, became transparent.

"The rest we know," came the thought of the one who had searched my brain. "The rest the screen has already shown. He—the one who invented the—what he called 'Shrinx'—he is a very great man. Yours has indeed been a marvellous experience, and one which has hardly begun. We envy you, lucky being; and at the same time we are sorry for you. Anyway, it is fortunate for us that you chose our planet on which to alight, but soon you will pass away even as you came, and that we cannot, and would not, prevent. In a very few minutes you will once more become of infinitesimal size and pass into a still smaller universe. We have microscopes powerful enough to permit us to barely glimpse this smaller atomic universe, and we shall watch your further progress into the unknown until you are gone from our sight forever."

I had been so interested in the familiar scenes on the screen that I had lost all conception of my steady shrinkage. I was now very much smaller than those spheres around me.

I was as interested in them as they were in me, and I tried to flash the following thought:

"You say that you envy me, and are sorry for me. Why should that be?"

The thought came back immediately: "We cannot answer that. But it is true; wonderful as are the things you will see in realms yet to come, neverthless you are to be pit-

ied. You cannot understand at present, but some day you will."

I flashed another thought: "Your organism, which is known to me as gaseous, seems as strange to me as mine, a solid, must seem to you. You have mentioned both telescopes and microscopes, and I cannot conceive how beings such as yourselves, without organs of sight, can number astronomy and microscopy among the sciences."

"Your own organs of sight," came back the answer, "which you call 'eyes,' are not only superfluous, but are very crude sources of perception. I think you will grant that loss of them would be a terrible and permanent handicap. Our own source of perception is not confined to any such conspicuous organs, but envelops the entire outer surface of our bodies. We have never had organs and appendages such as those with which you are endowed so profusely, for we are of different substance; we merely extend any part of our bodies in any direction at will. But from close study of your structure, we conclude that your various organs and appendages are very crude. I predict that by slow evolution of your own race, such frailties will disappear entirely."

"Tell me more about your own race," I went on eagerly.

"To tell everything there is to tell," came the answer, "would take much time; and there is little time left. We have a very high sociological system, but one which is not without its faults, of course. We have delved deep into the sciences and gone far along the lines of fine arts—but all of our accomplishments along these lines would no doubt appear very strange to you. You have seen our city. It is by no means the largest, nor the most important, on the planet. When you alighted comparatively near, reports were sent out and all of our important scientists hurried here. We were not afraid because of your presence, but rather, were cautious, for we did not know what manner of being you were. The two whom you first saw, were sent to observe you. They had both been guilty of a crime against the community, and were given the choice of the punishment they deserved, or of going out to investigate the huge creature that had dropped from the sky. They accepted the latter course, and for their bravery—for it was bravery—they have been exonerated."

Chapter VI

I would have liked greatly to ask more questions, for there were many phases that puzzled me; but I was becoming so very small that further communication upon the slide of a microscope of strange and intricate construction and my progress continued unabated down into a still smaller atomic universe.

The method was the same as before. The substance became open and porous, spread out into open space dotted with the huge masses which in turn became porous and resolved into far flung nebulae.

I entered one of the nebulae and once more star-systems swung all around me. This time I approached a single sun of bright yellow hue, around which sung eight planets. I

maneuvered to the outermost one, and when my size permitted, made contact with it.

I was now standing on an electron, one of billions forming a microscopic slide that existed in a world which was in turn only an electron in a block of metal on a laboratory table!

Soon I reached the atmosphere, and miles below me I could see only wide patches of yellow and green. But as I came nearer to the surface more of the details became discernible. Almost at my feet a wide yellow river wound sluggishly over a vast plateau which fell suddenly away into a long line of steep precipices. At the foot of these precipices stretched a great green expanse of steaming jungle, and farther beyond a great ocean, smooth as green glass, curved to the horizon. A prehistoric world of jungles and great fern-like growths and sweltering swamps and cliffs. Not a breeze stirred and nowhere was there sight of any living thing.

I was standing in the jungle close to the towering cliffs, and for a half mile in every direction the trees and vegetation were trampled into the soil where my feet had swung down and contacted.

Now I could see a long row of caves just above a ledge half way up the side of the cliff. And I did not doubt that in each cave some being was peering furtively out at me. Even as I watched I saw a tiny figure emerge and walk out on the ledge. He was very cautious, ready to dash back into the cave at any sign of hostility on my part, and his eyes never left me. Seeing that nothing happened, others took heart and came out, and soon the ledge was lined with tiny figures who talked excitedly among themselves and gesticulated wildly in my direction. My coming must surely have aroused all their superstitious fears—a giant descending out of the skies to land at their very feet.

I must have been nearly a mile from the cliff, but even at that distance I could see that the figures were barbarians, squat and thick muscled, and covered with hair; they were four limbed and stood erect, and all carried crude weapons.

One of them raised a bow as tall as himself and let fly a shaft at me —evidently as an expression of contempt or bravado, for he must have known that the shaft couldn't reach half the distance. Immediately one who seemed a leader among them felled the miscreant with a single blow. This amused me. Evidently their creed was to leave well enough alone.

Experimentally I took a step toward them, and immediately a long line of bows sprang erect and scores of tiny shafts arched high in my direction to fall into the jungle far in front of me. A warning to keep my distance.

I could have strode forward and swept the lot of them from the ledge; but wishing to show them that my intentions were quite peaceful, I raised my hands and took several backward steps. Another futile volley of arrows. I was puzzled, and stood still; and as long as I did not move neither did they.

The one who had seemed the leader threw himself down flat and shielding his eyes from the sun, scanned the expanse of jungle below. Then they seemed to talk

among themselves again, and gestured not at me, but at the jungle. Then I comprehended. Evidently a hunting party was somewhere in that jungle which spread out around my feet—probably returning to the caves, for already it was nearing dusk, the sun casting weird conflicting streaks across the horizon. These people of the caves were in fear that I would move around too freely and perhaps trample the returning party under foot.

So thinking, I stood quietly in the great barren patch I had levelled, and sought to peer into the dank growth below me. This was nearly impossible, however, for clouds of steam hung low over the tops of the trees.

But presently my ears caught a faint sound, as of shouting, far below me, and then I glimpsed a long single file of the barbarian hunters running at full speed along a well beaten game path. They burst into the very clearing in which I stood, and stopped short in surprise, evidently aware for the first time of my gigantic presence on their world. They let fall the poles upon which were strung the carcasses of the day's hunt, cast but one fearful look up to where I towered, then as one man fell flat upon the ground in abject terror.

All except one. I doubt if the one, who burst from the tangle of trees last of all, even saw me, so intent was he in glancing back into the darkness from which he fled. At any rate he aroused his companions with a few angry, guttural syllables, and pointed back along the path.

At that moment there floated up to me a roar that lingered loud and shuddering in my ears. At quick instructions from their leader the hunters picked up their weapons and formed a wide semi-circle before the path where they had emerged. The limb of a large tree overhung the path at this point, and the leader clambered up some overhanging vines and was soon crouched upon it. One of the warriors fastened a vine to a large clumsy looking weapon, and the one in the tree drew it up to him. The weapon consisted merely of a large pointed stake some eight feet long, with two heavy stones fastened securely to it at the half way point. The one in the tree carefully balanced this weapon on the limb, directly over the path, point downward. The semicircle of hunters crouched behind stout lances set at an angle in the ground.

Another shuddering roar floated up to me, and then the beast appeared. As I caught sight of it I marveled all the more at the courage of these puny barbarians. From ground to shoulder the beast must have measured seven feet tall, and was fully twenty feet long. Each of its six legs ended in a wide, horny claw that could have ripped any of the hunters from top to bottom. Its long tapering tail was horny too, giving me the impression that the thing was at least partly reptilian; curved fangs fully two feet long, in a decidedly animal head, offset that impression, however.

For a long moment the monstrosity stood there, tail switching ceaselessly, glaring in puzzlement out upon the circle of puny beings who dared to confront it. Then, as its tail ceased switching and it tensed for the spring, the war-

rior on the limb above launched his weapon—launched it and came hurtling down with it, feet pressed hard against the heavy stone balance!

Whether the beast below heard some sound or whether a sixth sense warned it, I do not know; but just in time it leaped to one side with an agility belied by its great bulk, and the pointed stake drove deep into the ground, leaving the one who had ridden it lying there stunned.

The beast uttered a snarl of rage; its six legs sprawled outward, its great belly touched the ground. Then it sprang out upon the circle of crouching hunters. Lances snapped at the impact, and the circle broke and fled for the trees. But two of them never rose from the ground, and the lashing horned tail flattened another before he had taken four steps.

The scene took place in a matter of seconds as I towered there looking down upon it, fascinated. The beast whirled toward the fleeing ones and in another moment the destruction would have been terrible, for they could not possibly have reached safety.

Breaking the spell that was on me I swung my hand down in a huge arc even as the beast sprang for a second time. I slapped it in mid air, flattening it against the ground as I would have flattened a bothersome insect. It did not twitch a muscle, and a dark red stain seeped outward from where it lay.

The natives stopped in their flight, for the sound of my hand when I slapped the huge animal had been loud. They jabbered noisily among themselves, but fearfully kept their distance, when they saw me crouched there over the flattened enemy who had been about to wreak destruction among them.

Only one had seen the entire happening. He who had plunged downward from the tree was only momentarily stunned; he had risen dizzily to his feet as the animal charged out among his companions, and had been witness to the whole thing.

Glancing half contemptuously at the others, he now approached me. It must have taken a great deal of courage on his part, for, crouched down as I was, I still towered above the tallest trees. He looked for a moment at the dead beast, then gazed up at me in reverent awe. Falling prone, he beat his head upon the ground several times, and the others followed his example.

Then they all came forward to look at the huge animal.

From their talk and gestures, I gathered that they wanted to take it to the caves; but it would take ten of the strongest of them to even lift it, and there was still a mile stretch of jungle between them and the cliffs.

I decided that I would take it there for them if that was their want. Reaching out, I picked up the leader, the brave one, very gently. Placing him in the cupped hollow of my hand, I swung him far up to the level of my eyes. I pointed at the animal I had slain, then pointed toward the cliffs. But his eyes were closed tightly as if his last moment had come, and he trembled in every limb. He was a brave hunter, but this experience was too much. I lowered him to the ground unharmed, and

the others crowded around him excitedly. He would soon recover from his fright, and no doubt some night around the camp fires he would relate this wonderful experience to a bunch of skeptical grandchildren.

Picking the animal up by its tapering tail I strode through the jungle with it, flattening trees at every step and leaving a wide path behind me. I neared the cliffs in a few steps, and those upon the ledge fled into the caves. I placed the huge carcass on the ledge, which was scarcely as high as my shoulders, then turned and strode away to the right, intending to explore the terrain beyond.

For an hour I walked, passing other tribes of cliff dwellers who fled at my approach. Then the jungle ended in a point by the sea and the line of cliffs melted down into a rocky coast.

It had become quite dark now, there were no moons and the stars seemed dim and far away. Strange night cries came from the jungle, and to my left stretched wide, tangled marshes through which floated vague phosphorescent shapes. Behind me tiny fires sprang up on the face of the cliffs, a welcome sight, and I turned back toward them. I was now so much smaller that I felt extremely uneasy at being alone and unarmed at night on a strange planet abounding in monstrosities.

I had taken only a few steps when I felt, rather than heard, a rush of wings above and behind me. I threw myself flat upon the ground, and just in time, for the great shadowy shape of some huge night-creature swept down and sharp talons raked my back. I arose with apprehension after a few moments, and saw the creature winging its way back low over the marshes. Its wing spread must have been forty feet. I reached the shelter of the cliffs and stayed close to them thereafter.

I came to the first of the shelving ledges where the fires burned, but it was far above me now. I was a tiny being crouched at the base of the cliffs. I, an alien on this world, yet a million years ahead of these barbarians in evolution, peered furtively out into the darkness where glowing eyes and half-seen shapes moved on the edge of the encroaching jungle; and safe in their caves high above me were those so low in the state of evolution that had only the rudiments of a spoken language and were only beginning to learn the value of fire. In another million years perhaps a great civilization would cover this entire globe: a civilization rising by slow degrees from the mire and the mistakes and the myths of the dawn of time. And doubtlessly one of the myths would concern a great godlike figure that descended from the skies, leveled great trees in its stride, saved a famous tribe from destruction by slaying huge enemy beasts, and then disappeared forever during the night. And great men, great thinkers, of that future civilization would say: —"Fie! —Preposterous! A stupid myth."

But at the present time the godlike figure which slew enemy beasts by a slap of the hand was scarcely a foot high, and sought a place where he might be safe from a possible at-

tack by those same beasts. At last I found a small crevice, which I squeezed into and felt much safer than I had out in the open.

And very soon I was so small that I would have been unnoticed by any of the huge animals that might ven-

Chapter VII

At last I stood on a single grain of sand, and other grains towered up like smooth mountains all around me. And in the next few minutes I experienced the change for the third time—the change from microscopic being on a gigantic world to a gigantic being floating amid an endless universe of galaxies. I became smaller, the distance between galaxies widened, solar systems approached and nearer the orbit of the outermost planet, I received a very unexpected, but very pleasant, surprise. Instead of myself landing upon one of the planets—and while I was yet far too large to do so—the inhabitants of this system were coming out to land on me!

There was no doubt about it. From the direction of the inner planets a tapering silvery projectile moved toward me with the speed of light. This was indeed interesting, and I halted my inward progress to await developments.

In a few minutes the space rocketship was very close. It circled about me once, then with a great rush of flame and gases from the prow to break the fall, it swooped in a long curve and landed gracefully on my chest! I felt no more jar than if a fly had lighted on me. As I watched it, a square section swung outward from the hull and a number of things emerged. I say "things" because they were in no manner human, although they were so tiny that I could barely distinguish them as minute dots of gold. A dozen of them gathered in a group a short distance away from the space-ship.

After a few moments, to my surprise, they spread huge golden wings, and I gasped at the glistening beauty of them. They scattered in various directions, flying low over the surface of my body. From this I reasoned that I must be enveloped in a thin layer of atmosphere, as were the planets. These bird creatures were an exploring party sent out from one of the inner planets to investigate the new large world which had entered their system and was approaching dangerously close to their own planet.

But, on second thought, they must have been aware—or soon would be —that I was not a world at all, but a living, sentient being. My longitudinal shape should make that apparent, besides the movements of my limbs. At any rate they displayed unprecedented daring by coming out to land on me. I could have crushed their frail ship at the slightest touch or flung it far out into the void beyond their reach.

I wished I could see one of the winged creatures at closer range, but none landed on me again; having traversed and circled me in every direction they returned to the space-ship and entered it. The section swung closed gases roared from the stern tubes and the ship swooped out into space again and back toward the sun.

What tidings would they bear to their planet? Doubtlessly they would describe me as an inconceivably huge monstrosity of outer space. Their scientists would wonder whence I came; might even guess at the truth. They would observe me anxiously through their telescopes. Very likely they would be in fear that I would invade or wreck their world, and would make preparations to repulse me if I came too near.

In spite of these probabilities I continued my slow progress toward the inner planets, determined to see and if possible land upon the planet of the bird creatures. A civilization that had achieved space travel must be a marvelous civilization indeed.

As I made my way through space between the planets by means of my grotesque exertions, I reflected upon another phase. By the time I reached the inner planets I would be so much smaller that I could not determine which of the planets was the one I sought, unless I saw more of the space ships and could follow heir direction. Another interesting thought was that the inner planets would have sped around the green sun innumerable times, and years would have passed before I reached there. They would have ample time to prepare for my coming, and might give me a fierce reception if they had many more of the space ships such as the one I had seen.

And they did indeed have many more of them, as I discovered after an interminable length of time during which I had moved ever closer to the sun. A red-tinged planet swung in a wide curve from behind the blazing green of the sun, and I awaited its approach. After a few minutes it was so close that I could see a moon encircling the planet, and as it came still nearer I saw the rocket ships.

This, then, was the planet I sought. But I was puzzled. They surely could not have failed to notice my approach, and I had expected to see a host of ships lined up in formidable array. I saw a host of them all right, hundreds of them, but they were not pointed in my direction at all; indeed, they seemed not to heed me in the least, although I must have loomed large as their planet came nearer. Perhaps they had decided, after all, that I was harmless.

But what seemed more likely to me was that they were confronted with an issue of vastly more importance than my close proximity. For as I viewed the space ships they were leaving the atmosphere of their planet, and were pointing toward the single satellite. Row upon row, mass upon endless mass they moved outward, hundreds, thousands of them. I seemed as though the entire population was moving *en masse* to the satellite!

My curiosity was immediately aroused. What circumstances or condition would cause a highly civilized race to abandon their planet and flee to the satellite? Perhaps, if I learned, I would not want to alight on that planet . . . .

Impatiently I awaited its return as it moved away from me on its circuit around the sun. The minutes seemed long, but at last it approached again from the opposite direction, and I marvelled at the relativity of

size and space and time. A year had passed on that planet and satellite, and many things might have transpired since I had last seen them.

The satellite swung between the planet and myself, and even from my point of disadvantage I could see that many things had indeed transpired. The bird people were building a protective shell around the satellite! Protection—from what? The shell seemed to be of dull gray metal, and already covered half the globe. On the uncovered side I saw land and rolling oceans. Surely, I thought, they must have the means of producing artificial light; but somehow it seemed blasphemous to forever bar the surface from the fresh pure light of the green sun. In a manner I felt sorry for them in their circumstances. But they had their space ships, and in time could move to the vast unexplored fields that the heavens offered.

More than ever I was consumed with curiosity, but was still too large to attempt a contact with the planet, and I let it pass me for a second time. I judged that when it came around again I would be sufficiently small for its gravity to "capture" me and sufficiently large that the "fall" to the surface would in no means be dangerous; and I was determined to alight.

Another wait of minutes, more minutes this time because I was smaller and time for me was correspondingly longer. When the two spheres hove into view again I saw that the smaller one was now entirely clad in its metal jacket, and the smooth unbroken surface shimmered boldly in the green glare of the sun. Beneath that barren metal shell were the bird people with their glorious golden wings, their space ships, their artificial light, and atmosphere, and civilization. I had but a glance for the satellite, however; my attention was for the planet rushing ever closer to me.

Everything passed smoothly and without mishap. I was becoming an experienced "planet hopper." Its gravity caught me in an unrelenting grip, and I let my limbs rush downward first in their long curve, to land with a slight jar on solid earth far below.

Bending low, I sought to peer into the murky atmosphere and see something of the nature of this world. For a minute my sight could not pierce the half gloom, but gradually the surface became visible. First, I followed my tapering limbs to where they had contacted. As nearly as I could ascertain from my height, I was standing in the midst of what seemed to be a huge mass of crushed and twisted metal!

Now I thought to myself, I have done it. I have let myself in for it now. I have wrecked something, some great piece of machinery it seems, and the inhabitants will not take the matter lightly. Then I thought: the inhabitants? Who? Not the bird people, for they have fled, have barricaded themselves on the satellite.

Again I sought to pierce the gloom of the atmosphere, and by slow degrees more details became visible. At first my gaze only encompassed a few miles, then more, and more, until at last the view extended from horizon to horizon and included nearly an entire hemisphere.

Slowly the view cleared and slowly comprehension came; and as full realization dawned upon me, I became momentarily panic stricken. I thought insanely of leaping outward into space again, away from the planet, breaking the gravity that held me; but the opposite force of my spring could likely send the planet careening out of its orbit and it and all the other planets and myself might go plunging toward the sun. No, I had put my feet on this planet and I was here to stay.

But I did not feel like staying, for what a sight I had glimpsed! As far as I could see in every direction were huge, grotesque metal structures and strange mechanical contrivances. The thing that terrified me was that these machines were scurrying about the surface all in apparent confusion, seemed to cover the entire globe, seemed to have a complete civilization of their own, and nowhere was there the slightest evidence of any human occupancy, no controlling force, no intelligence, nothing save the machines. And I could not bring myself to believe that they were possessed of intelligence!

Yet as I descended ever closer to the surface I could see that there was no confusion at all as it had seemed at first glance, but rather was there a simple, efficient, systematic order of things. Even as I watched, two strange mechanisms strode towards me on great jointed tripods, and stopped at my very feet. Long, jointed metal arms, with claw-like fixtures at the ends, reached out with uncanny accuracy and precision and began to clear away the twisted débris around my feet. As I watched them I admired the efficiency of their construction. No needless intricacies, no superfluous parts, only the tripods for movement and the arms for clearing. When they had finished they went away, and other machines came on wheels, the débris was lifted by means of cranes and hauled away.

I watched in stupefaction the uncanny activities below and around me. There was no hurry, no rush, but every machine from the tiniest to the largest, from the simplest to the most complicated, had a certain task to perform, and performed it directly and completely, accurately and precisely. There were machines on wheels, on treads, on tracks, on huge multi-jointed tripods, winged machines that flew clumsily through the air, and machines of a thousand other kinds and variations.

Endless chains of machines delved deep into the earth, to emerge with loads of ore which they deposited, to descend again.

Huge hauling machines came and transported the ore to roaring mills.

Inside the mill machines melted the ore, rolled and cut and fashioned the steel.

Other machines builded and assembled and adjusted intricate parts, and when the long process was completed the result was—more machines! They rolled or ambled or flew or walked or rattled away under their own power, as the case might be.

Some went to assist in the building of huge bridge across rivers and ravines.

Diggers went to level down forest

and obstructing hills, or went away to the mines.

Others built adjoining mills and factories.

Still others erected strange, complicated towers thousands of feet high, and the purpose of these skeleton skyscrapers I could not determine. Even as I watched, the supporting base of one of them weakened and buckled, and the entire hug edifice careened at a perilous angle. Immediately a host of tiny machines rushed to the scene. Sharp white flames cut through the metal in a few seconds, and the tower toppled with a thunderous crash to the ground. Again the white-flame machines went to work and cut the metal into removable sections, and hoisters and haulers came and removed them. Within fifteen minutes another building was being erected on the exact spot.

Occasionally something would go wrong—some worn-out part ceased to function and a machine would stop in the middle of its task. Then it would be hauled away to repair shops, where it would eventually emerge good as new.

I saw two of the winged machines collide in mid air, and metal rained from the sky. A half dozen of the tripod clearing machines came from a half dozen directions and the metal was raked into huge piles; then came the cranes and hauling machines.

A great vertical wheel with slanting blades on the rim spun swiftly on a shaft that was borne forward on treads. The blades cut through trees and soil and stone as it bore onward toward the near-by mountains. It slowed down, but did not stop, and at length a straight wide path connected the opposite valley. Behind the wheel came the tripods, clearing the way of all debris, and behind them came machines that laid down long strips of metal, completing the perfect road.

Everywhere small lubricating machines moved about, periodically supply the others with the necessary oil that insured smooth movement.

Gradually the region surrounding me was being levelled and cleared, and a vast city was rising—a city of meaningless, towering, ugly metal —a city covering hundreds of miles between the mountains and sea—a city of machines—ungainly, lifeless —yet purposeful—for what? What?

In the bay, a line of towers rose from the water like fingers pointing at the sky. Beyond the bay and into the open sea they extended. Now the machines were connecting the towers with wide network and spans. A bridge! They were spanning the ocean, connecting the continents—a prodigious engineering feat. If there were not already machines on the other side, there soon would be. No, not soon, The task was gigantic, fraught with failures, almost impossible. *Almost*? A world of machines could know no almost. Perhaps other machines did occupy the other side, had started the bridge from there, and they would meet in the middle. And for what purpose?

A great wide river came out of the mountains and went winding toward the sea. For some reason a wall was being constructed diagonally across the river and beyond, to change its course. For some reason—or unreason.

Unreason! That was it! Why, why,

why, I cried aloud in an anguish that was real; why all of this? What purpose, what meaning, what benefit? A city, a continent, a world, a civilization of machines! Somewhere on this world there must be the one who caused all this, the one intelligence, human or unhuman, who controls it. My time here is limited, but I have time to seek him out, and if I find him I shall drag him out and feed him to his own machines and put a stop to this diabolism for all time!

I strode along the edge of the sea for five hundred miles, and rounding a sharp point of land, stopped abruptly. There before me stretched a city, a towering city of smooth white stone and architectural beauty. Spacious parks were dotted with winged colonnades and statues, and the buildings were so designed that everything pointed upward, seemed poised for flight.

That was one half of the city.

The other half was a ruinous heap of shattered white stone, of buildings levelled to the ground by the machines, which were even then intent on reducing the entire city to a like state.

As I watched I saw scores of the flame-machines cutting deep into the stone and steel supporting base of one of the tallest buildings. Two of the ponderous air machines, trailing a wide mesh-metal network between them, rose clumsily from the ground on the outskirts of the city. Straight at the building they flew, and passed one on each side of it. The metal netting struck, jerked the machines backward, and the tangled mass of them plunged to the ground far below. But the building, already weakened at the base, swayed far forward, then back, hung poised for a long shuddering moment and then toppled to the ground with a thunderous crash amid a cloud of dust and debris and tangled framework.

The flame-machines moved on to another building, and on a slope near the outskirts two more of the air machines waited. . . .

Sickened at the purposeless vandalism of it all, I turned inland; and everywhere I strode were the machines, destroying and building, leveling to the groud the deserted cities of the bird people and building up their own meaningless civilization of metal.

At last I came to a long range of mountains which towered up past the level of my eyes as I stood before them. In two steps I stood on the top of these mountains and looked out upon a vast plain dotted everywhere with the grotesque machine-made cities. The machines had made good progress. About two hundred miles to the left a great metal dome rose from the level of the plain, and I made my way toward it, striding unconcerned and recklessly amidst the machines that moved everywhere around my feet.

As I neared the domed structure a row of formidable looking mechanisms, armed with long spikes, rose up to bar my path. I kicked out viciously at them and in a few minutes they were reduced to tangled scrap, though I received a number of minor scratches in the skirmish. Others of the spiked machines rose up to confront me with each step I took, but I strode through them, kicking them to one side, and at last I stood before an entrance-way in

the side of the huge dome. Stooping, I entered, and once inside my head almost touched the roof.

I had hoped to find here what I sought, and I was not disappointed. There in the center of the single spacious room was The Machine of all Machines; the Cause of it All; the Central Force, the Ruler, the Controlling Power of all the diabolism running riot over the face of the planet. It was roughly circular, large and ponderous. It was bewilderingly complicated, a maze of gears, wheels, switchboards, lights, levers, buttons, tubing, and intricacies beyond my comprehension. There were circular tiers, and on each tier smaller separate units moved, performing various tasks, attending switchboards, pressing buttons, pulling levers. The result was a throbbing, rhythmic, purposeful unit. I could imagine invisible waves going out in every direction.

I wondered what part of this great machine was vulnerable. Silly thought. No part. Only it—itself. It was The Brain.

The Brain. The Intelligence. I had searched for, and I had found it. There it was before me. Well, I was going to smash it. I looked around for some kind of weapon, but finding none, I strode forward barehanded.

Immediately a square panel lighted up with a green glow, and I knew that The Brain was aware of my intent. I stopped. An odd sensation swept over me, a feeling of *hate*, of *menace*. It came from the machine, pervaded the air in invisible waves.

"Nonsense," I thought; "it is but a machine after all. A very complicated one, yes, perhaps even possessed of intelligence; but it only has control over other machines, it cannot harm me." Again I took a resolute step forward.

The feeling of menace became stronger, but I fought back my apprehension and advanced recklessly. I had almost reached the machine when a wall of crackling blue flame leaped from floor to roof. If I had taken one more step I would have been caught in it.

The menace, and hate, and imagined rage at my escape, rolled out from the machine in ponderous, almost tangible waves, engulfing me, and I retreated hastily.

I walked back toward the mountains. After all, this was not *my* world—not my universe. I would soon be so small that my presence amid the machines would be extremely dangerous, and the tops of the mountains was the only safe place. I would have liked to smash the Brain and put an end to it all, but anyway, I thought, the bird people were now safe on the satellite, so why not leave this lifeless world to the machines.

It was twilight when I reached the mountains, and from a high grassy slope—the only peaceful place on the entire planet, I imagined—I looked out upon the plain. Tiny lights appeared as the machines moved about, carrying on their work, never resting. The clattering and clanking of them floated faintly up to me and made me glad that I was a safe distance from it all.

As I stood out toward the dome that housed the Brain, I saw what

I had failed to see before. A large globe rested there on a frame-work, and there seemed to be unusual activity around it.

A vague apprehension tightened around my brain as I saw machines enter this globe, and I was half prepared for what happened next. The globe rose lightly as a feather, sped upward with increasing speed, out of the atmosphere and into space, where, as a tiny speck, it darted and maneuvered with perfect ease. Soon it reappeared, floated gracefully down upon the framework again, and the machines that had mechanically directed its flight disembarked from it.

The machines had achieved space travel! My heart sickened with sudden realization of what that meant. They would build others—were already building them. They would go to other worlds, and the nearest one was the satellite . . . encased in its protective metal shell . . .

But then I thought of the white-flame machines that I had seen cut through stone and metal in a few seconds . . .

The bird people would no doubt put up a valiant fight. But as I compared their rocket projectiles against the efficiency of the globe I had just seen, I had little doubt as to the outcome. They would eventually be driven out into space again to seek a new world, and the machines would take over the satellite, running riot as they had done here. They would remain there just as long as the Brain so desired, or until there was no more land for conquest. Already this planet was over-run, so they were preparing to leave.

The brain. An intricate, intelligent mechanical brain, glorying in its power, drunk with conquest. Where had it originated? The bird people must have been the indirect cause, and no doubt they were beginning to realize the terrible menace they had loosed on the universe.

I tried to picture their civilization as it had been long ago before this thing had come about. I pictured a civilization in which machinery played a very important part. I pictured the development of this machinery until the time when it relieved them of many tasks. I imagined how they must have designed their machines with more and more intricacy, more and more finesse, until only a few persons were needed in control. And then the great day would come, the supreme day, when mechanical parts would take the place of those few.

That must have indeed been a day of triumph. Machines supplying their every necessity, attending to their every want, obeying their every whim at the touch of a button. That must have been Utopia achieved!

But it had proven to be a bitter Utopia. They had gone forward blindly and recklessly to achieve it, and unknowingly they had gone a step too far. Somewhere, amid the machines they supposed they had under their control, they were imbued with a spark of intelligence. One of the machines added unto itself—perhaps secretly; built and evolved itself into a terribly efficient unit of inspired intelligence. And guided by that intelligence, other machines were built and came under its control. The rest must have been

a matter of course. Revolt and easy victory.

So I pictured the evolution of the mechanical brain that even now was directing activities from down there under its metal dome.

And the metal shell around the satellite—did not that mean that the bird people were *expecting* an invasion? Perhaps, after all, this was not the original planet of the bird people; perhaps space travel was not an innovation among the machines. Perhaps it was on one of the far inner planets near the sun that the bird people had achieved the Utopia that proved to be such a terrible nemesis; perhaps they had moved to the next planet, never dreaming that the machines could follow; but the machines had followed after a number of years, the bird people being always driven outward, the machines always following at leisure in search of new spheres of conquest. And finally the bird people had fled to this planet, and from it to the satellite; and realizing that in a few years the machines would come again in all their invincibility, they had then ensconed themselves beneath the shell of metal.

At any rate: they did not flee to a far-away safe spot in the universe as they could have very easily done. Instead, they stayed; always one sphere ahead of the marauding machines, they must always be planning a means of wiping out the spreading evil they had loosed.

It might be that the shell around the satellite was in some way a clever trap! But so thinking, I remembered again the white-flame machines and the deadly efficiency of the globe I had seen, and then my hopes faded away.

Perhaps some day they would eventually find a way to check the spreading menace. But on the other extreme, the machines might spread out to other solar systems, other galaxies, until some day, a billion years hence, they would occupy every sphere in this universe . . .

Such were my thoughts as I lay prone there upon the grassy slope and looked down into the plain, down upon the ceaseless clatter and the ceaseless moving of lights in the dark. I was very small now; soon, very soon, I would leave this world.

My last impression was of a number of the space globes, barely discernible in the dusk below; and among them towering up high and round, was one much larger than the others, and I could guess which machine would occupy that globe.

And my last thought was a regret that I hadn't made a more determined effort to destroy that malicious mechanism, the Brain.

So I passed from this world of machines—the world that was an electron on a grain of sand that existed on a prehistoric world that was but an electron on a microscope-slide that existed on a world that was but an electron in a piece of Rehyllium-X on the Professor's laboratory table.

Chapter VIII

It is useless to go on. I have neither the time nor the desire to relate in detail all the adventures that have befallen me, the universes I have passed into, the things I have seen and experienced and learned

on all the worlds since I left the planet of of the machines.

Ever smaller cycles . . . infinite universes . . . never ending . . . each presenting something new . . . some queer variation of life or intelligence . . . Life? Intelligence? Terms I once associated with things animate, things protoplasmic and understandable. I find it hard to apply them to all the divergencies of shape and form and construction I have encountered . . .

Worlds young . . . warm . . . volcanic and steaming . . . the single cell emerging from the slime of warm oceans to propagate on primordial continents . . . other worlds, innumerable . . . life divergent in all branches from the single cell . . . amorphous globules . . . amphibian . . . crustacean . . . reptilian . . . plant . . . insect . . . bird . . . mammal . . . all possible variations or combinations . . . biological monstrosities indescribable . . .

Other forms beyond any attempt at classification . . . beyond all reason or comprehension of my puny mind . . . essences of pure flame . . . other gaseous, incandescent and quiescent alike . . . plant forms encompassing an entire globe . . . crystalline beings sentient and reasoning . . . great shimmering columnar forms, seemingly liquid, defying gravity by some strange power of cohesion . . . a world of sound-vibrations, throbbing, expanding, reverberating in unbroken echoes that nearly drove me crazy . . . globular brain-like masses utterly dissociated from any material substance . . . intradimensional beings, all shapes and shapeless . . . entities utterly incapable of registration upon any of my senses except the sixth, that of instinct . . .

Suns dying . . . planets cold and dark and airless . . . last vestiges of once proud races struggling for a few more meagre years of sustenance . . . great cavities . . . beds of evaporated seas . . . small furry animals scurrying to cover at my approach . . . desolation . . . ruins crumbling surely into the sands of barren deserts, the last mute evidence of vanished civilizations . . .

Other worlds . . . a-flourished with life . . . blessed with light and heat . . . staggering cities . . . vast populations . . . ships plying the surface of oceans, and others in the air . . . huge observatories . . . tremendous strides in the sciences . . .

Space flight . . . battles for the supremacy of worlds . . . blasting rays of super-destruction . . . collision of planets . . . disruption of solar systems . . . cosmic annihilation . . .

Light space . . . a universe with a tenuous, filmy something around it, which I burst though . . . all around me not the customary blackness of outer space I had known, but light . . . filled with tiny dots that were globes of darkness . . . that were burnt out suns and lifeless planets . . . nowhere a shimmering planet, nowhere a flaming sun . . . only remote specks of black amid the light-satiated emptiness . . .

How many of the infinitely smaller atomic cycles I have passed into, I do not know. I tried to keep count of them at first, but somewhere be-

tween twenty and thirty I gave it up; and that was long ago.

Each time I would think: "This cannot go on forever—it *cannot;* surely this next time I must reach the end."

But I have not reached the end.

Good God—how can there be an end? Worlds composed of atoms . . . each atom similarly composed . . . The end would have to be an indestructible solid, and that cannot be; all matter divisible into smaller matter . . .

What keeps me from going insane? I want to go insane!

I am tired . . . a strange tiredness neither of mind nor body. Death would be a welcome release from the endless fate that is mine.

But even death is denied me. I have sought it . . . I have prayed for it and begged for it . . . but it is not to be.

On all the countless worlds I have contacted, the inhabitants were of two distinctions: they were either so low in the state of intelligence that they fled and barricaded themselves against me in superstitious terror—or were so highly intellectual that they recognized me for what I was and welcomed me among them. On all but a few worlds the latter was the case, and it is of these types that I will dwell briefly.

These beings—or shapes or monstrosities or essences—were in every case mentally and scientifically far above me. In most cases they had observed me for years as a dark shadow looming beyond the farthest stars, blotting out certain star-fields and nebulae . . . and always when I came to their world they welcomed me with scientific enthusiasm.

Always they were puzzled as to my steady shrinking, and always when they learned of my origin and the manner of my being there, they were surprised and excited.

In most cases gratification was apparent when they learned definitely that they were indeed great ultra-macrocosmic universes. It seemed that all of them had long held the theory that such was the case.

On most of the worlds, too, the beings—or entities—or whatever the case might be—were surprised that the Professor, one of my fellow creatures, had invented such a marvelous vitalized element as "Shrinx."

"Almost unbelievable," was the general concensus of opinion; "scientifically he must be centuries ahead of the time on his own planet, if we are to judge the majority of the race by this creature here"—meaning me.

In spite of the fact that on nearly every world I was looked upon as mentally inferior, they conversed with me and I with them, by various of their methods, in most cases different variations of telepathy. They learned in minute detail and with much interest all of my past experiences in other universes. They answered all of my questions and explained many things besides, about their own universe and world and civilization and scientific achievements, most of which were completely beyond my comprehension, so alien were they in nature.

And of all the intra-universal

beings I have had converse with, the strangest were those essences who dwelt in outer space as well as on various planets; identifiable to me only as vague blots of emptiness, total absences of light or color or substance; who impressed upon me the fact that they were Pure Intelligences far above and superior to any material plane; but who professed an interest in me, bearing me with them to various planets, revealing many things and treating me very kindly. During my sojourn with them I learned from experience the total subservience of matter to influences of mind. On a giant mountainous world I stepped out upon a thin beam of light stretched between two crags, and willed with all my consciousness that I would not fall. And I did not.

I have learned many things. I know that my mind is much sharper, more penetrative, more grasping, than ever before. And vast fields of wonder and knowledge lie before me in other universes yet to come.

But in spite of this, I am ready for it all to end. This strange tiredness that is upon me—I cannot understand it. Perhaps some invisible radiation in empty space is satiating me with this tiredness.

Perhaps it is only that I am very lonely. How very far away I am from my own tiny sphere! Millions upon millions . . . . trillions upon trillions . . . . of light-years . . . . Light years! —Light cannot measure the distance. And yet it is no distance: I am in a block of metal on the Professor's laboratory table . . . .

Yet how far away into space and time I have gone! Years have passed years far beyond my normal span of life. I am eternal.

Yes, eternal life . . . . that men have dreamed of . . . . prayed for . . . . sought after . . . . is mine—and I dream and pray and seek for death!

Death. All the strange beings I have seen and conversed with, have denied it. I have implored many of them to release me painlessly and for all time—but to no avail. Many of them were possessed of the scientific means to stop my steady shrinkage—but they would not stop it. None of them would hinder me, none of them would tamper with the things that were. Why? Always I asked them why, and they would not answer.

But I need no answer. I think I understand. These beings of science realized that such an entity as myself should never be . . . . that I am a blasphemy upon all creation and beyond all reason . . . . they realized that eternal life is a terrible thing . . . . a thing not to be desired . . . . and as punishment for delving into secrets never meant to be revealed, none of them will release me from my fate . . . .

Perhaps they are right, but oh, it is cruel! Cruel! The fault is not mine, I am here against my own will.

And so I continue ever down, alone and lonely, yearning for others of my kind. Always hopeful—and always disappointed.

So it was that I departed from a certain world of highly intelligent gaseous beings; a world that was in

itself composed of a highly rarified substance bordering on nebulosity. So it was that I became ever smaller, was lifted up in a whirling, expanding vortex of the dense atmosphere, and entered the universe which it composed.

Why I was attracted by that tiny, far away speck of yellow, I do not know. It was near the center of the nebula I had entered. There were other suns far brighter, far more attractive, very much nearer. This minute yellow sun was dwarfed by other suns and sun-clusters around it—seemed insignificant and lost among them. And why I was drawn to *it*, so far away, I cannot explain.

But mere distance, even space distance, was nothing to me now. I had long since learned from the Pure Intelligence the secret of propulsion by mind influence, and by this means I propelled myself through space at any desired speed not exceeding that of light; as my mind was incapable of imagining speed faster than light, I of course could not cause my material body to exceed it.

So I neared the yellow sun in a few minutes, and observed that it had twelve planets. And as I was far too large to yet land on any sphere, I wandered far among other suns, observing the haphazard construction of this universe, but never losing sight of the small yellow sun that had so intrigued me. And at last, much smaller, I returned to it.

And of all the twelve planets, one was particularly attractive to me. It was a tiny blue one. It made not much difference where I landed, so why should I have picked it from among the others? Perhaps only a whim—but I think the true reason was because of its constant pale blue twinkling, as though it were beckoning to me, inviting me to come to it. It was an unexplainable phenomenon; none of the others did that. So I moved closer to the orbit of the blue planet, and landed upon it.

As usual I didn't move from where I stood for a time, until I could view the surrounding terrain; and then I observed that I had landed in a great lake—a chain of lakes. A short distance to my left was a city miles wide, a great part of which was inundated by the flood I caused.

Very carefully, so as not to cause further tidal waves, I stepped from the lake to solid ground, and the waters receded somewhat.

Soon I saw a group of five machines flying toward me; each of them had two wings held stiffly at right angles to the body. Looking around me I saw others of these machines winging toward me from every direction, always in groups of five, in V formation. When they had come very close they began to dart and swoop in a most peculiar manner, from them came sharp staccato sounds, and I felt the impact of many tiny pellets upon my skin! These beings were very war-like, I thought, or else very excitable.

Their bombardment continued for some time, and I began to find it most irritating; these tiny pellets could not harm me seriously, could not even pierce my skin, but the impact of them stung. I could not account for their attack upon me, unless it be that they were angry at the flood I had caused by my lan-

ding. If that were the case they were very unreasonable, I thought; any damage I had done was purely unintentional, and they should realize that.

But I was soon to learn that these creatures were very foolish in many of their actions and manners; they were to prove puzzling to me in more ways than one.

I waved my arms around, and presently they ceased their futile bombardment, but continued to fly around me.

I wished I could see what manner of beings flew these machines. They were continually landing and rising again from a wide level field below.

For several hours they buzzed all around while I became steadily smaller. Below me I could now see long ribbons of white that I guessed were roads. Along these roads crawled tiny vehicles, which soon became so numerous that all movement came to a standstill, so congested were they. In the fields a large part of the populace had gathered, and was being constantly augmented by others.

At last I was sufficiently small so that I could make out closer details, and I looked more intently at the beings who inhabited this world. My heart gave a quick leap then, for they somewhat resembled myself in structure. They were four-limbed and stood erect, their method of locomotion consisting of short jerky hops, very different from the smooth gliding movement of my own race. Their general features were somewhat different too—seemed grotesque to me—but the only main difference between them and myself was that their bodies were somewhat more columnar, roughly oval in shape and very thin, I would say almost frail.

Among the thousands gathered there were perhaps a score who seemed in authority. They rode upon the backs of clumsy looking, four-footed animals, and seemed to have difficulty in keeping the excited crowd under control. I, of course, was the center of their excitement; my presence seemed to have caused more consternation here than upon any other world.

Eventually a way was made through the crowd and one of the ponderous four wheeled vehicles was brought along the road opposite to where I stood. I supposed they wanted me to enter the rough box-like affair, so I did so, and was hauled with many bumps and jolts over the rough road toward the city I had seen to the left. I could have rebelled at this barbarous treatment, but I reflected that I was still very large and this was probably the only way they had of transporting me to wherever I was going.

It had become quite dark, and the city was aglow with thousands of lights. I was taken into a certain building, and at once many important looking persons came to observe me.

I have stated that my mind had become much more penetrative than ever before, so I was not surprised to learn that I could read many of the thoughts of these persons without much difficulty. I learned that these were scientists who had come here from other immediate cities as quickly as possible—most of them in

the winged machines, which they called "planes"—when they had learned of my landing here. For many months they had been certain that I would land. They had observed me through their telescopes, and their period of waiting had been a speculative one. And I could now see that they were greatly puzzled, filled with much wonderment, and no more enlightenment about me than they had been possessed of before.

Though still very large, I was becoming surely smaller, and it was this aspect that puzzled them most, just as it had on all the other worlds. Secondly in their speculations was the matter of *where* I had come from.

Many were the theories that passed amond them. Certain they were that I had come a far distance. Uranus? Neptune? Pluto? I learned that these were the names of the outmost planets of this system. No, they decided; I must have come a much farther distance than that. Perhaps from another far-away galaxy of this universe! Their minds were staggered at that thought. Yet how very far away they were from the truth.

They addressed me in their own language, and seemed to realize that it was futile. Although I understood everything they said and everything that was in their minds, they could not know that I did, for I could not answer them. Their minds seemed utterly closed to all my attempts at thought communication, so I gave it up.

They conversed then among themselves, and I could read the hopelessness in their minds. I could see, too, as they discussed me, that they looked upon me as being abhorrent, a monstrosity. And as I searched the recesses of their minds, I found many things.

I found that it was the inherent instinct of this race to look upon all unnatural occurrences and phenomena with suspicion and disbelief and prejudiced mind.

I found that they had great pride for their accomplishments in the way of scientific and inventive progress. Their astronomers had delved a short distance into outer space, but considered it a very great distance; and having failed to find signs of intelligent life upon any immediate sphere, they leaped blindly and fondly to the conclusion that their own species of life was the dominant one in this solar system and perhaps—it was reluctant perhaps—in the entire universe.

Their conception of a universe was a puny one. True, at the present time there was extant a theory of an expanding universe, and in that theory at least they were correct, I knew, remembering the former world I had left—the swirling, expanding wisp of gaseous atmosphere of which this tiny blue sphere was an electron. Yes, their "expanding universe" theory was indeed correct. But very few of their thinkers went beyond their own immediate universe—went deeply enough to even remotely glimpse the vast truth.

They had vast cities, yes. I had seen many of them from my height as I towered above their world. A great civilization, I had thought then. But now I know that great

cities do not make great civilizations. I am disappointed at what I have found here, and cannot even understand why I should be disappointed, for this blue sphere is nothing to me and soon I will be gone on my eternal journey downward . . . .

Many things I read in these scientists' minds—things clear and concise, things dim and remote; but they would never know.

And then in the mind of one of the persons, I read an idea. He went away, and returned shortly with an apparatus consisting of wires, a headphone, and a flat revolving disc. He spoke into an instrument, a sort of amplifier. Then a few minutes later he touched a sharp pointed instrument to the rotating disc, and I heard the identical sounds reproduced which he had spoken. A very crude method, but effective in a certain way. They wanted to register my speech so that they would have at least something to work on when I had gone.

I tried to speak some of my old language into the instrument. I had thought transference on so many of the other worlds, that now my power of vocal utterance was gone.

They were disappointed. I was not sorry, for they could not have deciphered any language so utterly alien as mine was.

Then they resorted to the mathematics by which this universe and all universes are controlled; into which mathematical mold the eternal All was cast at the beginning and has moved errorlessly since. They produced a great chart which showed the conglomerated masses of this and other galaxies. Then upon a black panel set in the wall, was drawn a circle—understandable in any universe—and around it ten smaller circles. This was evidently their solar system, though I could not understand why they drew but ten circles when I had seen twelve planets from outer space. Then a tiny spot was designated on the chart, the position of this system in its particular galaxy. Then they handed the chart to me.

It was useless. Utterly impossible. How could I ever indicate my own universe, much less my galaxy and solar system, by such puny methods as these? How could I make them know that my own universe and planet were so infinitely large in the scheme of things that *theirs* were practically non-existent? How could I make them know that their universe was not *outside* my own, but *on my planet*?—superimposed in a block of metal on a laboratory table, in a grain of sand, in the atoms of glass in a microscopic slide, in a drop of water, in a blade of grass, in a bit of cold flame, in a thousand other variations of elements and substances all of which I had passed down into and beyond, and finally in a wisp of gas that was the cause of their "expanding universe." Even could I have conversed with them in their own language I could not have made them grasp the vastness of all those substances existing on worlds each of which was but an electron of an atom in one of trillions upon trillions of molecules of an infinitely larger world! Such a conception would have shattered their minds.

It was very evident that they

would never be able to establish communication with me even remotely, nor I with them; and I was becoming very impatient. I wanted to be out of the stifling building, out under the night sky, free and unhampered in the vast space which was my abode.

Upon seeing that I made no move to indicate on the chart which part of their puny universe I came from, the scientists aroud around me again conversed among themselves; and this time I was amazed at the trend of their thoughts.

For the conclusion, which they had reached, was that I was some freak of outer space which had somehow wandered here, and that my place in the scale of evolution was too far below their own for them to establish ideas with me either by spoken language (of which they concluded I had none) or by signs (Which I was apparently too barbaric to understand)!! This—this was their unanimous conclusion! This, because I had not uttered any language for them to record, and because the chart of their universe was utterly insignificant to me! Never did it occur to them that the opposite might be true—that I might converse with them but for the fact that their minds were too weak to register my thoughts!

Disgust was my reaction to these short-sighted conclusions of their unimaginable minds—disgust which gave way to an old emotion, that of anger.

And as that one impulsive, rising burst of anger flooded my mind, a strange thing happened:

Every one of the scientists before me dropped to the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

My mind had, indeed, become much more penetrative than ever before. No doubt my surge of anger had sent out intangible waves which had struck upon their centers of consciousness with sufficient force to render them insensible.

I was glad to be done with them. I left the four walls of the building, emerged into the glorious expansive night under the stars and set out along the street in a direction that I believed would lead me away from the city. I wanted to get away from it, away from this world and the people who inhabited it.

As I advanced along the streets all who saw me recognized me at once and most of them fled unreasonably for safety. A group of persons in one of the vehicles tried to bar my progress, but I exercised my power of anger upon them; they dropped senselessly and their vehicle crashed into a building and was demolished.

In a few minutes the city was behind me and I was striding down one of the roads, destination unknown; nor did it matter, except that now I was free and alone as it should be. I had but a few more hours on this world.

And then it was that the *feeling* came upon me again, the strange feeling that I had experienced twice before: once when I had selected the tiny orange sun from among the millions of others, and again when I had chosen this tiny blue planet. Now I felt it for the third time, more strongly than ever, and now I knew that this feeling had some very

definite purpose for being. It was as though something, some power beyond question, drew me irresistibly to it; I could not resist, nor did I want to. This time it was very strong and very near.

Peering into the darkness along the road, I saw a light some distance ahead and to the left, and I knew that I must go to that light.

When I had come nearer I could see that it emanated from a house set far back in a grove of trees, and I approached it without hesitation. The night was warm, and a pair of double windows opened upon a well-lighted room. In this room was a man.

I stepped inside and stood motionless, not yet knowing why I should have been drawn there.

The man's back was toward me. He was seated before a square dialed instrument, and seemed to be listening intently to some report coming from it. The sounds from the box were unintelligible to me, so I turned my attention to reading the man's mind as he listened, and was not surprised to learn that the reports concerned myself.

"—casualties somewhat exaggerated, though the property damage has reached millions of dollars," came the news from the box. "Cleveland was of course hardest hit, though not unexpectedly, astronomical computators having estimated with fair accuracy the radius of danger. The creature landed in Lake Erie only a few miles east of the city. At the contact the waters rose over the breakwater with a rush and inundated nearly one-third of the city before receding, and it was well that the greater part of the populace had heeded the advance warnings and fled . . . . all lake towns in the vicinity have reported heavy property damage, and cities as far east as Erie, and as far west as Toledo have reported high flood waters . . . . all available Government combat planes were rushed to the scene in case the creature should show signs of hostility . . . . scientific men who have awaited the thing's landing for months immediately chartered planes for Cleveland . . . despite the elaborate cordons of police and militiamen, the crowds broke through and entered the area, and within an hour after the landing roads in every direction were congested with traffic . . . for several hours scientists circled and examined the creature in planes, while its unbelievable shrinkage continued . . . the only report we have from them is that, aside from the contour of its great bell-shaped torso, the creature is quite amazingly correct anatomically . . . an unofficial statement from Dr. Hilton U. Cogsworthy of the Alleghany Biological Society, is to the effect that such a creature *isn't*. That it cannot possibly exist. That the whole thing is the result of some kind of mass hypnotism on a gigantic scale. This, of course, in lieu of some reasonable explanation . . . many persons would like to believe the "mass hypnotism" theory, and many always will; but those who have seen it and taken photographs of it from every angle know that it does exist and that its steady shrinking goes on . . . Professor James L. Harvey

of Miami University has suffered a stroke of temporary insanity and is under the care of physicians. The habitual curiosity seekers who flocked to the scene are apparently more hardened . . . the latest report is that the creature, still very large, has been transported under heavy guard to the Cleveland Institute of Scientific Research where is gathered every scientist of note east of the Mississippi . . . stand by for further news flashes . . ." The voice from the box ceased, and as I continued to read the mind of the man whose back was toward me, I saw that he was deeply absorbed in the news he had heard. And the mind of this person was something of a puzzle to me. He was above the average intelligence of those on this world, and was possessed of a certain amount of fundamental scientific knowledge; but I could see immediately that his was not a scientifically trained mind. By profession he was a writer—one who recorded fictitious "Happenings" in the written language, so that others might absorb and enjoy them.

And as I probed into his mind I was amazed at the depth of imagination there, a trait almost wholly lacking in those others I had encountered, the scientists. And I knew that at last here was one with whose mind I might contact . . . here was one who was different from the others . . . who went deeper . . . who seemed on the very edge of the truth. Here was one who thought: "— this strange creature, which has landed here . . . alien to anything we have ever known . . . might it not be alien even to our universe? . . . the strange shrinking . . . from that phenomenon alone we might conclude that it has come an inconceivable distance . . . its shrinking may have begun hundreds, thousands of years ago . . . and if we could but communicate with it, before it passes from Earth forever, what strange things might it not tell us!"

The voice came from the box again, interrupting these thoughts in his mind.

"Attention! Flash! The report comes that the alien space-creature, which was taken to the Scientific Research Institute for observation by scientists, has escaped, after projecting a kind of invisible mind force which rendered unconscious all those within reach. The creature was reported seen by a number of persons, after it left the building. A police squad car was wrecked as a direct result of the creature's "mind force," and three policemen were injured, none seriously. It was last seen leaving the city by the northeast, and all persons are ordered to be on the lookout and to report immediately if it is sighted."

Again the report from the box ceased, and again I probed into the man's mind, this time deeper, hoping to establish a contact with it which would allow for thought-communication.

I must have at least aroused some hidden mind-instinct, for he whirled to face me, overturning his chair. Surprise was on his face, and something in his eyes that must have been fear.

"Do not be alarmed," I flashed. "Be seated again."

I could see that his mind had not received my thought. But he must have known from my manner that I meant no harm, for he resumed his seat. I advanced further into the room, standing before him. The fear had gone out of his eyes and he only sat tensely staring at me, his hands gripping the arms of the chair.

"I know that you would like to learn things about myself," I telepathed; "things which those others—your scientists—would have liked to know."

Reading his mind I could see that he had not received the thought, so I probed even deeper and again flashed the same thought. This time he did receive it, and there was an answering light in his eyes.

He said "Yes," aloud.

"Those others, your scientists," I went on, "would never have believed nor even understood my story, even if their minds were of the type to receive my thoughts, which they are not."

He received and comprehended that thought, too, but I could see that this was a great strain on his mind and could not go on for long.

"Yours is the only mind I have encountered here with which I could establish thought," I continued, "but even now it is becoming weakened under the unaccustomed strain. I wish to leave my record and story with you, but it cannot be by this means. I can put your mind under a hypnotic influence and impress my thoughts upon your subconscious mind, if you have some means of recording them. But you must hurry; I have only a few more hours here at the most, and in your entire lifetime it would be impossible for you to record all that I could tell."

I could read doubt in his mind. But only for one instant did he hesitate. Then he rose and went to a table where there was a pile of smooth white paper and a sharp pointed instrument—pen—for recording my thoughts in words of his own language.

"I am ready," was the thought in his mind.

So I have told my story. Why? I do not know, except that I wanted to. Of all the universes I have passed into, only on this blue sphere have I found creatures even remotely resembling myself. And they are a disappointment; and now I know that I should never find others of my kind. Never, unless—

I have a theory. Where is the beginning or the end of the eternal All I have been traversing? Suppose there is none? Suppose that, after traversing a few more atomic cycles, I should enter a universe which seemed somehow familiar to me; and that I should enter a certain familiar galaxy, and approach a certain sun, a certain planet—and find that I was back where I started from so long ago: back on my own planet, where I should find the Professor in the laboratory still receiving my sound and sight impressions!! An insane theory; an impossible one. It shall never be.

Well, then, suppose that after leaving this sphere—after descending into another atomic universe—I should choose *not to alight on any planet*? Suppose I should remain in empty space, my size constantly

diminishing? That would be one way of ending it all, I suppose. Or would it? Is not my body matter, and is not matter infinite, limitless, eternal? How then could I ever reach a "nothingness?" It is hopeless. I am eternal. My mind too must be eternal or it would surely have snapped long ago at such concepts.

I am so very small that my mind is losing contact with the mind of him who sits here before me writing these thoughts in words of his own language, though his mind is under the hypnotic spell of my own and he is oblivious to the words he writes. I have clambered upon the top of the table beside the pile of pages he has written, to bring my mind closer to his. But why should I want to continue the thought-contact for another instant? My story is finished, there is nothing more to tell.

I shall never find others of my kind . . . I am alone . . . I think that soon, in some manner, I shall try to put an end to it . . .

I am very small now . . . the hypnosis is passing from his mind . . . I can no longer control it . . . the thought-contact is slipping . . .

Epilogue

National Press-Radio Service, *Sept. 29, 1937* (through Cleveland *Daily Clarion*):—Exactly one year ago today was a day never to be forgotten in the history of this planet. On that day a strange visitor arrived—and departed.

On September 29, 1936, at 3:31 P.M., that thing from outer space known henceforth only as "The Alien," landed in Lake Erie near Cleveland, causing not so much destruction and terror as great bewilderment and awe, scientists being baffled in their attempts to determine whence it came and the secret of its strange steady shrinking.

Now, on the anniversary of that memorable day, we are presenting to the public a most unusual and interesting document purported to be a true account and history of that strange being, The Alien. This document was presented to us only a few days ago by Stanton Cobb Lentz, renowned author of "The Answer To The Ages" and other serious books, as well as of scores of short stories and books of the widely popular type of literature known as science-fiction.

You have read the above document. While our opinion as to its authenticity is frankly skeptical, we shall print Mr. Lentz's comment and let you, the reader, judge for yourself whether the story was related to Mr. Lentz by The Alien in the manner described, or whether it is only a product of Mr. Lentz's most fertile imagination.

"On the afternoon of September 29 a year ago," states Mr. Lentz, "I fled the city as did many others, heeding the warning of a possible tidal wave, should The Alien land in the lake. Thousands of persons had gathered five or six miles to the south, and from there we watched the huge shape overhead, so expansive that it blotted out the sunlight and plunged that section of the country into a partial eclipse. It seemed to draw nearer by slow degrees until, about 3:30 o'clock, it began its downward rush. The sound

of contact as it struck the lake was audible for miles, but it was not until later that we learned the extent of the flood. After the landing all was confusion and excitement as combat planes arrived and very foolishly began to bombard the creature and crowds began to advance upon the scene. The entire countryside being in such crowded turmoil, it took me several difficult hours to return to my home. There I listened to the varied reports of the happenings of the past several hours.

"When I had that strange feeling that someone was behind me, and when I whirled to see The Alien standing there in the room, I do not presume to say that I was not scared. I was. I was very much scared. I had seen The Alien when it was five or six hundred feet tall—but that had been from afar. Now it was only ten or eleven feet tall, but was standing right before me. But my scaredness was only momentary, for something seemed to enter and calm my mind.

"Then, although there was no audible sound, I became aware of the thought: 'I know that you would like to learn things about myself, things which those others—your scientists—would have liked to know.'

"This was mental telepathy! I had often used the theory in my stories, but never had I dreamed that I would experience such a medium of thought in real fact. But here it was.

" 'Those others, your scientists,' came the next thought, 'would never have believed nor even understood my story, even if their minds were of the type to receive my thoughts, which they are not.' And then I began to feel a strain upon my mind, and knew that I could not stand much more of it.

"Then came the thought that he would relate his story through my sub-conscious mind if I had some means of recording it in my own language. For an instant I hesitated; and then I realized that time was fleeing and never again would I have such as opportunity as this. I went to my desk, where only that morning I had been working on a manuscript. There was paper and ink in plenty.

"My last impression was of some force seeming to spread over my mind; then a terrific dizziness, and the ceiling seemed to crash upon me.

"No time at all had seemed to elapse, when my mind regained its normal faculties; but before me on the desk was a pile of manuscript paper closely written in my own longhand. And—what many persons will find it hard to believe—standing upon that pile of written paper upon my desk top, was The Alien—now scarcely two inches in height—and steadily and surely diminishing! In utter fascination I watched the transformation that was taking place before my eyes —watched until The Alien had become entirely invisible, had descended down into the topmost sheet of paper there on my desk . . .

"Now I realize that the foregoing document and my explanation of it will be received in many ways. I have waited a full year before making it public. Accept it now as fiction if you wish. There may be some few who will see the truth of it, or at

least the possibility; but the vast majority will leap at once to the conclusion that the whole thing is a concoction of my own imagination: that, taking advantage of The Alien's landing on this planet, I wrote the story to fit the occasion, very appropriately using The Alien as the main theme. To many this will seem all the more to be true, in face of the fact that in most of my science-fiction stories I have poked ridicule and derision and satire at mankind and all its high vaunted science and civilization and achievements—always more or less with my tongue in my cheek however, as the expression has it. And then along comes this Alien, takes a look at us and concludes that he is very disappointed, not to mention disgusted.

"However, I wish to present a few facts to help substantiate the authenticity of the script. Firstly: for some time after awakening from my hypnosis I was beset by a curious dizziness, though my mind was quite clear. Shortly after The Alien had disappeared I called my physician, Dr. C. M. Rollins. After an examination and a few mental tests he was greatly puzzled. He could not diagnose my case; my dizziness was the after effect of a hypnosis of a type he had never before encountered. I offered no explanation except to say that I had not been feeling well for the past several days.

"Secondly: the muscles of my right hand were so cramped from the long period of steady writing that I could not open my fingers. As an explanation I said that I had been writing for hours on the final chapters of my latest book, and Dr. Rollins said: 'Man, you must be crazy.' The process of relaxing the muscles was painful.

"Upon my request Dr. Rollins will vouch for the truth of the above statements.

"Thirdly: when I read the manuscript the writing was easily recognizable as my own free, swinging longhand up to the last few paragraphs, when the writing became shaky, the last few words terminating in an almost undecipherable scrawl as the Alien's contact with my mind slipped away.

"Fourthly: I presented the manuscript to Mr. Howard A. Byerson, fiction editor of the National Newspaper Syndicate Service, and at once he misunderstood the entire idea. 'I have read your story, Mr. Lentz,' he said a few days later, 'and it certainly comes at an appropriate time, right on the anniversary of The Alien's landing. A neat idea about the origin of The Alien, but a bit far fetched. Now, let's see, about the price; of course we shall syndicate your story through our National Newspaper chain, and—'

" 'You have the wrong idea,' I said. 'It is not a story, but a true history of The Alien as related to me by The Alien, and I wish that fact emphasized; if necessary I will write a letter of explanation to be published with the manuscript. And I am not selling you the publication rights, I am merely giving you the document as the quickest and surest way of presenting it to the public.'

" 'But surely you are not serious? An appropriate story by Stanton

Cobb Lentz, on the eve of the anniversary of The Alien's landing, is a scoop; and you—'

" 'I do not ask and will not take a cent for the document,' I said; 'you have it now, it is yours, so do with it as you see fit.'

"A memory that will live with me always is the sight of The Alien as last seen by me—as last seen on this earth—as it disappeared into infinite smallness there upon my desk—waving two arms upward as if in farewell . . .

"And whether the above true account and history of The Alien be received as such, or as fiction, there can be no doubt that on a not far off September, a thing from some infinite sphere above landed on this earth——and departed."

The End

Continued from page 4

mark is perhaps a model of the European attitude as a whole. I can speak of it firsthand. For a little over six years I lived in Denmark and worked hard to introduce this brand of fiction to that fair land. I failed. They were not ready. They had two attitudes that we have long been familiar with over here. First: if it is good it can't be SF. They had published THE BLACK CLOUD, ON THE BEACH, 1984, BRAVE NEW WORLD and such. All good books, they told me, all not science fiction. They explained that SF was Jules Verne, and M. Verne was a boys writer. Therefore all SF was juvenile. The Danish story has a happy ending because, quite recently, modern SF has been published in Copenhagen and reviewed as such—and appreciated.

Which brings us full circle to the United States again. Here we have the unusual situation of SF being a financial success and an artistic failure. At least according the literary establishment, the responsible literary journals and the critics who count. They have never heard of the stuff—nor do they want to. If it is SF it has to be bad.

But they are going to lose the battle here too. SF is sneaking in through the back door. This year the first workshop in SF writing—for credit—will be held at a U.S. college. I know of at least three other colleges and universities where SF courses are taught. This year the first American SF textbook was published, APEMAN, SPACEMAN, which is not only an anthology of anthropological SF, but is an introductory anthropology text as well.

All of which means that one of these days the literary establishment will wake up to the fact that they have missed the boat and will hurry to clamber on. I am not so sure that I look forward with keen enthusiasm to this day. We seem to have survived and prospered without them. Will they help or hinder the advance of this medium? Only the future can tell. Perhaps it is time for some science fiction writers to take a prognosticative look at the future of their own brand of fiction.

HARRY HARRISON

Illustrator: Robert Kay

The Last Day

By RICHARD MATHESON

This, we might as well warn you, is what Hollywood calls a downbeat story. Not that we're especially fond of them ourselves; but every so often such a yarn will point out a truth too often overlooked.

Also, they are tricky to write. Too much accent on pure despair and the reader walks out long before the end. There must be in the people of such a story an undistorted reflection of us all: a common denominator anyone can recognize within himself.

Waxing philosophical is like waxing a floor; it is powerful easy to fall on your face while trying it. But we have an abiding faith in Man's ability to rise to greatness in the shadow of destruction. Evidently Dick Matheson feels much the same way, for his handling of character in The Last Day is masterful in its sympathetic portrayal of the best and the worst in all of us.

HE WOKE UP and the first thing he thought was: *the last night is gone.*

He had slept through half of it.

He lay there on the floor and looked up at the ceiling. The walls still glowed reddish from the outside light. There was no sound in the living room but that of snoring.

He looked around. There were bodies sprawled all over the room. On the couch, slumped on chairs, curled up on the floor.

He raised up on one elbow and winced at the shooting pains in his head. He closed his eyes and held them

tightly shut for a moment. Then he opened them again. He ran his tongue over the inside of his dry mouth. There was still a stale taste of liquor and food in his mouth.

He rested on his elbow as he looked around the room again, his mind slowly registering the scene.

Nancy and Bill lying in each other's arms, both naked. Norman curled up in an arm chair, his thin face taut as he slept. Mort and Mel lying on the floor, covered with dirty throw rugs. Both snoring. Others on the floor.

Outside the red glow.

He looked at the window and his throat moved. He blinked. He looked down over his long body. He swallowed again.

I'm alive, he thought, and it's all true.

He rubbed his eyes. He took a deep breath of the dead air in the apartment.

He knocked over a glass as he struggled to his feet. The liquor and soda sloshed over the rug and soaked into the dark blue weave.

He looked around at the other glasses, broken, kicked over, hurled against the wall. He looked at the bottles all over, all empty.

He stood staring around the room. He looked at the record player overturned, the albums all strewn around, jagged pieces of records in crazy patterns on the rug.

He remembered.

It was Mort who had started it the night before. Mort who had suddenly rushed to the playing record machine and shouted drunkenly, "What the hell is music any more! Just a lot of noise!"

And he had driven the point of his shoe against the front of the record player and knocked it against the wall. He had lurched over and down on his knees. He had struggled up with the player in his beefy arms and heaved the entire thing over on its back and kicked it again.

"The hell with music!" Mort had yelled. "I hate the crap anyway!"

Then he'd started to drag records out of their albums and their envelopes and snap them over his kneecap.

"Come on!" he'd yelled to everybody. "Come on!"

And it had caught on. The way all crazy ideas had caught on in those last few days.

Mel had jumped up from making love to a girl. He had flung records out the windows, scaling them far across the street. And Charlie had put aside his gun for a moment to stand at the windows too and try to hit people in the street with the records.

Richard had watched the dark saucers bounce and shatter on the sidewalks below. He'd even thrown one himself. Then he'd just turned

away and let the others rage. He'd taken Mel's girl into the bedroom and for a few moments they forgot what was happening to their world.

He thought about that as he stood waveringly in the reddish light of the room

He closed his eyes a moment.

Then he looked at Nancy and remembered taking her too sometime in the jumble of wild hours that had been yesterday and last night.

She looked vile now, he thought. She'd always been an animal. Before, though, she'd had to veil it. Now, in the final twilight of everything, she could revel in the only thing she'd ever really cared about.

He wondered if there were any people left in the world with real dignity. The kind that was still there when it no longer was necessary to impress people with it.

He stepped over the body of a sleeping girl. She had on only a slip. He looked down at her tangled hair, at her smeared red lips, at the tight, unhappy frown printed on her face.

He glanced into the bedroom as he passed it. There were three girls and two men in the bed.

He found the body in the bathroom.

It was thrown carelessly in the tub and the shower curtain torn down to cover it. Only the legs showed, dangling ridiculously over the front rim of the tub.

He drew back the curtain and looked at the blood-soaked shirt, at the white, still face.

Charlie.

He shook his head, then turned away and washed his face and hands at the sink. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. As a matter of fact, Charlie was one of the lucky ones now. A member of the legion who had put their heads into ovens, or cut their wrists or taken pills or done away with themselves in the accepted fashions of suicide.

As he looked at his tired face in the mirror he thought of cutting his wrists. But he knew he couldn't. Because it took more than just despair to incite self-destruction.

He took a drink of water. Lucky, he thought, there's still water running. He didn't suppose there was a soul left to run the water system. Or the electric system or the gas system or the telephone system or any system for that matter.

What fool would work on the last day of the world?

Spencer was in the kitchen when Richard went in.

He was sitting in his shorts at the table looking at his hands. On the stove some eggs were frying. The gas must still be working then too, Richard thought.

"Hello," he said to Spencer.

Spencer grunted without looking up. He stared at his hands. Richard let it go. He turned the gas down a little. He took bread out of the cupboard and put it in the electric toaster. But the toaster didn't work. He shrugged and forgot about it.

"What time is it?" Spencer was looking at him with the question.

Richard looked at his watch. "It stopped," he said.

They looked at each other.

"Oh," Spencer said. Then he asked, "What day is it?"

Richard thought. "Sunday, I think," he said.

"I wonder if people are at church," Spencer said.

"Who cares?"

Richard opened the refrigerator.

"There aren't any more eggs," Spencer said.

Richard shut the door. "No more eggs," he said dully, "No more chickens. No more anything."

He leaned against the wall with a shuddering breath and looked out the window at the red sky.

Mary, he thought. Mary, who I should have married. Who I let go. He wondered where she was. He wondered if she were thinking about him at all.

Norman came trudging in, groggy with sleep and hangover. His mouth hung open. He looked dazed.

"Morning," he slurred.

"Good morning, merry sunshine," Richard said, without mirth.

Norman looked at him blankly. Then he went over to the sink and washed out his mouth. He spit the water down the drain.

"Charlie's dead," he said.

"I know," Richard said.

"Oh. When did it happen?"

"Last night," Richard told him. "You were unconscious. You remember how he kept saying he was going to shoot us all? Put us out of our misery?"

"Yeah," Norman said. "He put the muzzle against my head. He said feel how cool it is."

"Well, he got in a fight with Mort," Richard said. "The gun went off." He shrugged. "That was it."

They looked at each other without expression.

Then Norman turned his head and looked out the window. "It's still up there," he muttered.

They looked up at the great flaming ball in the sky that crowded out the sun, the moon, the stars.

Norman turned away, his throat moving. His lips trembled and he clamped them together. "Jesus," he said. "It's *today*."

He looked up at the sky again. "Today," he repeated. "*Everything*."

"Everything," said Richard.

Spencer got up and turned off the gas. He looked down at the

eggs for a moment. Then he said, "What the hell did I fry these for?"

He dumped them into the sink and they slid greasily over the white surface. The yolks burst and spurted smoking, yellow fluid over the enamel.

Spencer bit his lips. His face grew hard. "I'm taking her again," he said suddenly.

He pushed past Richard and dropped his shorts off as he turned the corner into the hallway.

"There goes Spencer," Richard said.

Norman sat down at the table. Richard stayed at the wall.

In the living room they heard Nancy suddenly call out at the top of her strident voice: "Hey, wake up, everybody! Watch me do it! Watch me, everybody, *watch me!*"

Norman looked at the kitchen doorway for a moment. Then something gave inside of him and he slumped his head forward on his arms on the table. His thin shoulders shook.

"I did it too," he said brokenly. "I did it too. Oh God, what did I come here for?"

"Sex," Richard said. "Like all the rest of us. You thought you could end your life in carnal, drunken bliss."

Norman's voice was muffled. "I can't die like that," he sobbed. "I can't."

"A couple of billion people are doing it," Richard said. "When the sun hits us, they'll still be at it. What a sight."

The thought of a world's people indulging themselves in one last orgy of animalism made him shudder. He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against the wall and tried to forget.

But the wall was warm.

Norman looked up from the table. "Let's go home," he said.

Richard looked at him. "Home?" he said.

"To our parents. My mother and father. Your mother."

Richard shook his head. "I don't want to," he said.

"But I can't go alone."

"Why?"

"Because . . . I can't. You know how the streets are full of guys just *killing* everybody they meet."

Richard shrugged.

"Why won't you?" Norman asked.

"I don't want to see her."

"Your *mother?*"

"Yes."

"You're crazy," Norman said. "Who else is there to . . ."

"No."

He thought of his mother at home waiting for him. Waiting for him on the last day. And it made him ill to think of delaying, of maybe never seeing her again.

But he kept thinking: how can I go home and have her try to

make me pray? Try to make me read from the Bible, spend these last hours in a muddle of religious absorption?

He said it again for himself. "*No.*"

Norman looked lost. His chest shook with a swallowed sob. "I want to see my mother," he said.

"Go ahead," Richard said casually.

But his insides were twisting themselves into knots. To never see her again. Or his sister and her husband and her daughter.

Never to see any of them again.

He sighed. It was no use fighting it. In spite of everything, Norman was right. Who else was there in the world to turn to? In a wide world about to be burned, was there any other person who loved him above all others?

"Oh . . . all right," he said. "Come on. Anything to get out of this place."

The apartment house hall smelled of vomit. They found the janitor dead drunk on the stairs. They found a dog in the foyer with its head kicked in.

They stopped as they came out the entrance of the building.

Instinctively, they looked up.

At the red sky, like molten slag. At the fiery wisps that fell like hot rain drops through the atmosphere. At the gigantic ball of flame that kept coming closer and closer, that blotted out the universe.

They lowered their watering eyes. It hurt to look. They started walking along the street. It was very warm.

"December," Richard said. "It's like the tropics."

As they walked along in silence he thought of the tropics, of the poles, of all the world's countries he would never see. Of all the things he would never do.

Like hold Mary in his arms and tell her, as the world was ending, that he loved her very much and was not afraid.

"*Never*," he said, feeling himself go rigid with frustration.

"What?" Norman said.

"Nothing. Nothing."

As they walked Richard felt something heavy in his jacket pocket. It bumped against his side. He reached in and drew out the object.

"What's that?" Norman asked.

"Charlie's gun," Richard said. "I took it last night so nobody else would get hurt."

His laughter was harsh. "So nobody else would get hurt," he said bitterly. "Jesus, I ought to be on the stage."

He was about to throw it away when he changed his mind. He slid it back into his pocket.

"I may need it," he said.

Norman wasn't listening. "Thank God nobody stole my car. Oh —!"

Somebody had thrown a rock through the windshield.

"What's the difference?" Richard said.

"I . . . none, I suppose."

They got into the front seat and brushed the glass off the cushion. It was stuffy in the car. Richard pulled off his jacket and threw it out. He put the gun in his side pants pocket.

As Norman drove downtown they passed people in the street. Some were running around wildly, as if they were searching for something. Others were fighting. Strewn all over the sidewalks were bodies of people who had leaped from windows and been struck down by speeding cars. Buildings were on fire, windows shattered from the explosions of unlit gas jets.

There were people looting stores.

"What's the *matter* with them?" Norman asked miserably. "Is that how they want to spend their last day?"

"Maybe that's how they spent their whole life," Richard answered.

He leaned against the door and gazed at the people they passed. Some of them waved at him. Some cursed and spat. A few threw things at the speeding car.

"People die the way they lived," he said. "Some good, some bad."

"*Look out!*" Norman cried out as a car came careening down the street on the wrong side. Men and women hung out of the window shouting and singing and waving bottles.

Norman twisted the wheel violently and they missed the car by inches.

"Are they crazy?" he said.

Richard looked out through the back window. He saw the car skid, saw it get out of control and go crashing into a store front and turn over on its side, the wheels spinning crazily.

He turned back without speaking. Norman kept looking ahead grimly, his hands on the wheel, white and tense.

Another intersection.

A car came speeding across their path. Norman jammed on the brakes with a gasp. They crashed against the dashboard, getting their breath knocked out.

Then, before Norman could get the car started again, a gang of teen-age boys with knives and clubs came dashing into the intersection. They'd been chasing the other car. Now they changed direction and flung themselves at the car that held Norman and Richard.

Norman threw the car into first and gunned across the street.

A boy jumped on the back of the car. Another tried for the running board, missed and went spinning over the street. Another jumped on the running board and grabbed the door handle. He slashed at Richard with a knife.

"Gonna kill ya bastids!" yelled the boy. "Sonsabitches!"

He slashed again and tore open the back of the seat as Richard jerked his shoulder to the side.

"Get out of here!" Norman screamed, trying to watch the boy and the street ahead at the same time.

The boy tried to open the door as the car wove wildly down Broadway. He slashed again but the car's motion made him miss.

"I'll *get* ya!" he screamed in a fury of brainless hate.

Richard tried to open the door and knock the boy off, but he couldn't. The boy's twisted white face thrust in through the window. He raised his knife.

Richard had the gun now. He shot the boy in the face.

The boy flung back from the car with a dying howl and landed like a sack of rocks. He bounced once, his left leg kicked and then he lay still.

Richard twisted around.

The boy on the back was still hanging on, his crazed face pressed against the back window. Richard saw his mouth moving as the boy cursed.

"Shake him off!" he said.

Norman headed for the sidewalk, then suddenly veered back into the street. The boy hung on. Norman did it again. The boy still clung to the back.

Then on the third time he lost his grip and went off. He tried to run along the street but his momentum was too great and he went leaping over the curb and crashing into a plate glass window, arms stuck up in front of him to ward off the blow.

They sat in the car, breathing heavily. They didn't talk for a long while. Richard flung the gun out the window and watched it clatter on the concrete and bounce off a hydrant. Norman started to say something about it, then stopped.

The car turned into Fifth Avenue and started downtown at sixty miles an hour. There weren't many cars.

They passed churches. People were packed inside them. They overflowed out onto the steps.

"Poor fools," Richard muttered, his hands still shaking.

Norman took a deep breath. "I wish I was a poor fool," he said. "A poor fool who could believe in something."

"Maybe," Richard said. Then he added, "I'd rather spend the last day believing what I think is true."

"The last day," Norman said. "I . . ." He shook his head. "I can't believe it," he said. "I read the papers. I see that . . . that *thing* up there. I know it's going to happen. But God! The *end?*"

He looked at Richard for a split second. "Nothing afterward?"

Richard said, "I don't know."

At 14th Street Norman drove

to the East side, then sped across the Manhattan Bridge. He didn't stop for anything, driving around bodies and wrecked cars. Once he drove over a body and Richard saw his face twitch as the wheel rolled over the dead man's leg.

"They're all lucky," Richard said. "Luckier than we are."

They stopped in front of Norman's house in Brooklyn. Some kids were playing ball in the street. They didn't seem to realize what was happening. Their shouts sounded very loud in the silent street. Richard wondered if their parents knew where the children were. Or cared.

Norman was looking at him. "Well . . .?" he started to say.

Richard felt his stomach muscles tightening. He couldn't answer.

"Would you . . . like to come in for a minute?" Norman asked.

Richard shook his head. "No," he said. "I better get home. I . . . should see her. My mother, I mean."

"Oh." Norman nodded. Then he straightened up. He forced a momentary calm over himself. "For what it's worth, Dick," he said, "I consider you my best friend and . . ."

He faltered. He reached out and gripped Richard's hand. Then he pushed out of the car, leaving the keys in the ignition.

"So long," he said hurriedly.

Richard watched his friend run around the car and move for the apartment house. When he had almost reached the door, Richard called out: "Norm!"

Norman stopped and turned. The two of them looked at each other. All the years they had known each other seemed to flicker between them.

Then Richard managed to smile. He touched his forehead in a last salute.

"So long, Norm," he said.

Norman didn't smile. He pushed through the door and was gone.

Richard looked at the door for a long time. He started the motor. Then he turned it off again thinking that Norman's parents might not be home.

After a while he started it again and began the trip home.

As he drove he kept thinking.

The closer he got to the end, the less he wanted to face it. He wanted to end it now. Before the hysterics started.

Sleeping pills, he decided. It was the best way. He had some at home. He hoped there were enough left. There might not be any left in the corner drug store. There'd been a rush for sleeping pills during those last few days. Entire families took them together.

He reached the house without event. Overhead the sky was an incandescent crimson. He felt the heat on his face like waves from a distant oven. He breathed in the

heated air, his lungs cringing.

He unlocked the front door and walked in slowly.

I'll probably find her in the front room, he thought. Surrounded by her books, praying, exhorting invisible powers to succor her as the world prepared to fry itself.

She wasn't in the front room.

He searched the house. And, as he did, his heart began to beat quickly, and when he knew she really wasn't there he felt a great hollow feeling in his stomach. He knew that his talk about not wanting to see her had been just talk. He loved her. And she was the only one left now.

He searched for a note in her room, in his, in the living room.

"Mom," he said. "Mom, where are you?"

He found the note in the kitchen. He picked it up from the table:

Richard darling,

I'm at your sister's house. Please come there. Don't make me spend the last day without you. Don't make me leave this world without seeing your dear face again. Please.

The last day.

There it was in black and white. And, of all people, it had been his mother to write down the words. She who had always been so skeptical of his taste for material science. Now admitting the reality of science's last prediction.

Because she couldn't doubt any more. Because the sky was filled with flaming evidence and no one could doubt any more.

The whole world going. The staggering detail of evolutions and revolutions, of strifes and clashes, of endless continuities of centuries streaming back into the clouded past, of rocks and trees and animals and men. All to pass. In a flash, in a moment. The pride, the vanity of man's world incinerated by a freak of astronomical disorder.

What point was there to all of it, then? None, none at all. Because it was all ending.

He got sleeping pills from the medicine cabinet and left. He drove to his sister's house thinking about his mother as he passed through the streets littered with everything from empty bottles to dead people.

If only he didn't dread the thought of arguing with his mother on this last day. Of disputing with her about her God and her conviction.

He made up his mind not to argue. He'd force himself to make their last day a peaceful one. He would accept her simple devotion and not hack at her faith any more.

The front door was locked at Grace's house. He rang the bell and, after a moment, heard hurried steps inside.

He heard Ray shout inside, "Don't open it, Mom! It may be that gang again!"

"It's Richard, I know it is!" his mother called back.

Then the door was open and she was embracing him and crying happily.

He didn't speak at first. Finally he said softly, "Hello, Mom."

His niece Doris played all afternoon in the front room while Grace and Ray sat motionless in the living room looking at her.

If I were with Mary, Richard kept thinking. If only we were together today. Then he thought that they might have had children. And he would have had to sit like Grace and know that the few years his child had lived would be its only years.

The sky grew brighter as evening approached. It flowed with violent crimson currents. Doris stood quietly at the window and looked at it. She hadn't laughed all day or cried. And Richard thought to himself, she *knows*.

And thought too that at any moment his mother would ask them all to pray together. To sit and read the Bible and hope for divine charity.

But she didn't say anything. She smiled. She made supper. Richard stood with her in the kitchen as she made supper.

"I may not wait," he told her. "I . . . may take sleeping pills."

"Are you afraid, son?" she asked.

"Everybody is afraid," he said.

She shook her head. "Not everybody," she said.

Now, he thought, it's coming. That smug look, the opening line.

She gave him a dish with the vegetable and they all sat down to eat.

During supper none of them spoke except to ask for food. Doris never spoke once. Richard sat looking at her from across the table.

He thought about the night before. The crazy drinking, the fighting, the carnal abuses. He thought of Charlie dead in the bathtub. Of the apartment in Manhattan. Of Spencer driving himself into a frenzy of lust as the climax to his life. Of the boy lying dead in the New York gutter with a bullet in his brain.

They all seemed very far away. He could almost believe it had all never happened. Could almost believe that this was just another evening meal with his family.

Except for the cherry glow that filled the sky and flooded in through the windows like an aura from some fantastic fireplace.

Near the end of the meal Grace went and got a box. She sat down at the table with it and opened it. She took out white pills. Doris looked at her, her large eyes searching.

"This is dessert," Grace told her. "We're all going to have white candy for dessert."

"Is it peppermint?" Doris asked quietly.

"Yes," Grace said. "It's peppermint."

Richard felt his scalp crawling as Grace put pills in front of Doris. In front of Ray.

"We haven't enough for all of us," she said to Richard.

"I have my own," he said.

"Have you enough for Mom?" she asked.

"I won't need any," her mother said.

In his tenseness Richard almost shouted at her. Shouted stop being so damned noble! But he held himself. He stared in fascinated horror at Doris holding the pills in her small hand.

"This isn't peppermint," she said. "Momma, this isn't —"

"*Yes it is.*" Grace took a deep breath. "Eat it, darling."

Doris put one in her mouth. She made a face. Then she spit it into her palm. "It *isn't* peppermint," she said, upset.

Grace threw up her hand and dug her teeth in the white knuckles. Her eyes moved frantically to Ray.

"Eat it, Doris," Ray said. "Eat it, it's good."

Doris started to cry. "No, I don't like it."

"*Eat it!*"

Ray turned away suddenly, his body shaking. Richard tried to think of some way to make her eat the pills, but he couldn't.

Then his mother spoke. "We'll play a game, Doris," she said. "We'll see if you can swallow all the candy before I count ten. If you do, I'll give you a dollar."

Doris sniffed. "A dollar?" she said.

Richard's mother nodded. "One," she said.

Doris didn't move.

"Two," said Richard's mother. "A *dollar* . . ."

Doris brushed aside a tear. "A . . . whole dollar?"

"Yes, darling. Three, four, hurry up."

Doris reached for the pills.

"Five . . . six . . . seven . . ."

Grace had her eyes shut tightly. Her cheeks were white.

"Nine . . . ten . . ."

Richard's mother smiled, but her lips trembled and there was a glistening in her eyes. "There," she said cheerfully. "You've won the game."

Grace suddenly put pills into her mouth and swallowed them in fast succession. She looked at Ray. He reached out one trembling hand and swallowed his pills. Richard put his hand in his pocket for his pills but took it out again. He didn't want his mother to watch him take them.

Doris got sleepy almost immediately. She yawned and couldn't

keep her eyes open. Ray picked her up and she rested against his shoulder, her small arms around his neck. Grace got up and the three of them went back into the bedroom.

Richard sat there while his mother went back and said goodbye to them. He sat staring at the white tablecloth, at the remains of food.

When his mother came back she smiled at him. "Help me with the dishes," she said.

"The . . .?" he started. Then he stopped. What difference did it make what they did?

He stood with her in the red-lit kitchen feeling a sense of sharp unreality as he dried the dishes they would never use again and put them in the closet that would be no more in a matter of hours.

He kept thinking about Ray and Grace in the bedroom. Finally he left the kitchen without a word and went back. He opened the door and looked in. He looked at the three of them for a long time. Then he shut the door again and walked slowly back to the kitchen. He stared at his mother.

"They're . . ."

"All right," his mother said.

"Why didn't you say anything to them?" he asked her. "How come you let them do it without saying anything?"

"Richard," she said, "everyone has to make his own way on this day. No one can tell others what to do. Doris was *their* child."

"And I'm yours. . . ."

"You're not a child any longer," she said.

He finished up the dishes, his fingers numb and shaking. "Mom, about last night . . ." he started.

"I don't care about it."

"But . . ."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "This part is ending."

Now, he thought, almost with pain. *This* part. Now she would talk about afterlife and heaven and reward for the just and eternal penitence for the sinning.

She said, "Let's go out and sit on the porch."

He didn't understand. He walked through the quiet house with her. He sat next to her on the porch steps and thought: I'll never see Grace again. Or Doris. Or Norman or Spencer or Mary.

He couldn't take it all in. It was too much. All he could do was sit there woodenly and look at the red sky and the huge sun about to swallow them. He couldn't even feel nervous any more. Fears were blunted by endless repetition.

"Mom," he said after a while, "why . . . why haven't you spoken about religion to me? I know you must want to."

She looked at him and her face was very gentle in the red glow. "I don't have to, darling," she said. "I know we'll be together

when this is over. You don't have to believe it. I'll believe for both of us."

And that was all. He looked at her, wordless before her confidence.

"If you want to take those pills now," she said, "it's all right. You can go to sleep in my lap."

He felt himself tremble. "You wouldn't mind?"

"I want you to do what you think is best."

He didn't know what to do until he thought of her sitting there alone when the world ended.

"I'll stay with you," he said.

She smiled. "If you change your mind," she said, "you can tell me."

They were quiet for a while. Then she said, "It *is* pretty."

"*Pretty?*" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "God closes a bright curtain on our play."

He didn't know. But he put his arm around her shoulders and she leaned against him. And he did know *one* thing.

They sat there in the evening of the last day. And, though there was no actual point to it, they loved each other.

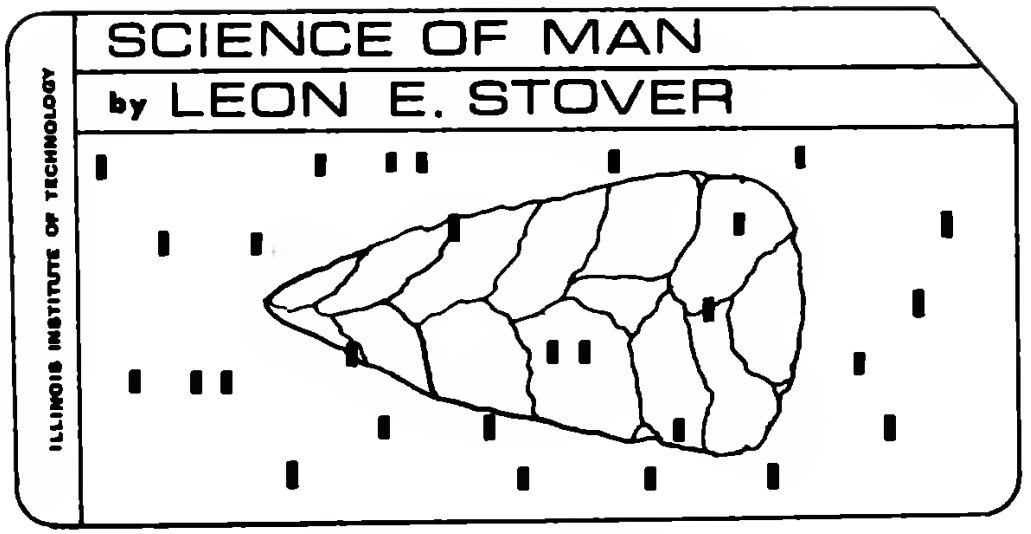
Continued from page 29

KARTSDONF, and the bottom row read JUMGBEDXYPI. It was familiar, exactly familiar. Precisely the same as he well remembered.

A woman was coming towards him carrying a glass of milk. He groaned silently. Oh God, not another one. Awkwardly he pushed himself to his feet and stood swaying. What could he do? He couldn't, just *couldn't* go through all *that* again. But how to avoid it? could he do it? He must think. Of course, he could always keep his trap shut. That, he thought, might be best for a while.

The woman leaned forward and offered him the glass.

Tommy Leffry reached for it with chubby fingers. "Oooo. Fank you, mum-my," he said. The End



WAR IS PEACE

In George Orwell's novel, *1984*, the Ministry of Truth advertised the same slogan: WAR IS PEACE. Orwell meant to show, by way of irony, how strong-arm governments falsify language as a means of political control. But there is enough truth in the slogan to take seriously.

WAR IS PEACE is taken here as a sloganeering title for this article on the anthropology of war. The main point to be made is that the war-making effort of any society is a version of its peaceful organization.

But to begin with, is warfare a human development out of aggression in animals? The answer given here is no. Some scientists in the field of ethology (the study of animal behavior) would disagree. They would say that aggression is a basic mode of behavior in man, as in other animals, and that if we are to eliminate war we must somehow rid humans of their built-in aggressive tendencies. This is the solution offered by Konrad Lorenz in his best-selling work, ON AGGRESSION (1964). It was Freud who recommended that if only we got rid of our inhibitions our mental health would improve. One must be suspicious of all such solutions which require the elimination of some vile streak or other in man's nature as the only way to set things right with the world. Man is man, and if we can't learn to live with him as he is, who can?

This is not to overlook the wide-open fact that humans always can be found in the act of assaulting, attacking or otherwise assailing each other. But men, like other animals, always are aggressive *about* something, about (say) food or sex. Aggression is not a mode of behavior in its own right; it is not a drive or an instinct as is the need, again, for foodgetting or mating. In monkey colonies, for example, some individuals invariably are going to be killed or injured during the breeding

season. At that time, when the females are in heat, the dominant males who control access to them have to fight off the efforts of the weaker males to get *their* share of the action. Aggressive behavior, then, is the by-product of the less dominant males attempting to exercise their sexual appetites in the face of monopololies held by the bigger and stronger ones. At other times, when the females are unreceptive, all the males in the colony live together without fighting.

Another example. Rhesus monkeys at feeding time in the London Zoological Gardens go on a rampage of greed. The keeper throws in the food and the strongest monkeys hurry to scrabble for all of it they can get. If any of the weaker ones manage to get a bit, they are attacked and their cheek pouches raided and emptied by the forceful fingers of the dominant animals.

Among higher vertebrates, especially land mammals, aggression is best understood as a quality of behavior that may, or may not, accompany the exercise of the whole inventory of basic animal behavior. This inventory, with equivalents in human culture, is given below:

BASIC MODES OF ANIMAL BEHAVIOR	THE SAME AS FOCI OF CULTURAL BEHAVIOR
1. Signaling	1. Language
2. Status deominance	2. Social organization
3. Subsistence	3. Work
4. Mating	4. The sexes
5. Spatial positioning	5. Spatial boundaries
6. Cyclicity	6. Time scheduling
7. Tutoring	7. Education
8. Play	8. Recreation
9. Defense	9. Protection

According to this scheme, it is possible for man and beast to be aggressive in at least nine different directions. Aggression is simply the name for one expressive dimension of these nine basic modes of behavior.

The difference between animal behavior and cultural behavior, of course, is very great. How great this difference is, to take just signaling *vs* language, was indicated in the June article (DOGS, DOLPHINS AND HUMAN SPEECH), which explained why dolphins are not capable of linguistic communication. The signaling of animals is limited to a fixed system of calls. But language is open-ended and infinitely expandable. Language is arbitrary, a feature best illustrated by the lies and untruths that men tell. Animal signals which say "look out!" or "help!" never lie. Indeed, boasting and fish stories are good clues to the origin of language, a subject that ought to be brought up at some later date.

Now here comes a paradox. The fact that man is a culture-bearing, language-speaking animal permits him to amplify and exaggerate the aggressive content of his behavior If man can symbolically identify the social units to which he belongs—my family, my community, my country—he can also focus hate on other groups of people to which he

feels *no* sentiments of attachment. The same power of symbolic meanings that holds "we" together can set "they" apart.

Man became man when he became a hunter and tracker of game bigger than himself. This happened a million years ago with the transition from the foraging apemen of Africa *(Australo ithecus)* to the team-working, half-brained men *(Homo erectus)* whose success at cooperative hunting got them chasing game throughout most of the Old World. The advent of the full-brained men *(H. sapiens)* about 2000,000 years ago merely enlarged upon the intellectual powers of the first humans to be human. The first humans contributed a number of basic social inventions which we today still use. These are the nine foci of cultural behavior:

1. Language and symbolic communication.
2. The definition of social status by means of language, such as kinship categories and family organization.
3. Work, as a primary economic task.
4. The assignment of work tasks according to sex.
5. The zoning off of territory belonging to the group with a fire and hearthplace to mark its center.
6. The recognition of passing time as a basis for scheduling work and ceremonial tasks.
7. The educational transmission of the group's work habits from older to younger people where the generations meet in family life.
8. The organization of ceremonies to give emphasis to group identity.
9. Protective measures in defense against danger, illness and fear.

All of these social inventions, which go to make up the fabric of human culture, have been much elaborated in the great civilizations and nation-states which followed upon the farming and urban revolutions within the last 10,000 years or so. But even at the simplest level of the hunting band, the contrast with animal life is quite marked. Man's elaboration of the basic categories of animal behavior into the nine foci of cultural behavior allows him not only a much wider scope for fellow-feeling, but also for antagonistic relations. But please note that war itself is not one of these basic social inventions.

If groupness in the non-human primates consists merely of browsing in each other's company, in man a sense of "we" is strengthed nine times over in each focus of cultural behavior. A group of gibbons, composed of an adult male, an adult female and their two or three sexually immature young, never combines with other such family units to form a more complex level of gibbon society. Each family unit positions itself spatially with regard to all others, the young going off to form their own duplicate of the same territorially defined unit. But when that primate family line of man's, the *Hominidae*, became human, then several family units were able to live together in the same band. The complex societies of today grew out of that beginning. The first humans were able to live in bands because each of its family units was able to use language to draw an imaginary boundary line around itself,

in place of a spatial boundary, thus keeping itself intact as a separate kinship unit. Even different bands were able to get together in hunts and for ceremonies, a tribal relationship that endured because the bands exchanged women between each other to make wives for the men in each band. A man thus had relatives in the neighboring band of his tribe on which he could depend for cooperation. Gibbon families cannot communicate about cultural things: my family, my band, my hunting partner, my wife, my wife's band, our tribe.

But the very cultural opportunities which make for cooperation among men also makes for social overstimulation and heightened aggression. In the animal world, the cues which trigger off aggression are specific and invariant: a display of red feathers, a show of white eyelids, the uplift of a tail. The very condition of man's ever-lasting inhumanity to man is sufficient witness to the infinite number of stimuli that can provoke *him* to aggressive acts. That humans are so ready to tear at the fold of their own kind springs out of the very same abilities which permit him an equally wide range of loving, cooperative and patriotic social ties.

Having said all this it is now time to reveal that *aggression has nothing to do with war.* It was necessary to go into the problem of animal behavior, however, because there is quite a lot of talk these days about finding a solution to armed confilict by way of "draining off" or "displacing" aggressive emotions in war games, Olympics, and what not.

But war is a political problem, not an emotional or psychological problem. When the leaders of our modern nation-states talk about the aggression of one country against another, they are making use of an Orwellian falsification in a tavern quarrel with organized conflict between political states. The ethologists have nothing to offer that can improve on what Karl von Clauswitz said of war in the 19th century, that it is an extension of politics carried on by different means. What a nation does when it goes to war is to mobilize its material and organizational resources to carry forward some line of policy that the top leadership already has cooly deliberated in its council chambers some time before it commanded men to march and guns to roll. A war policy is just as impersonal as a decision of the Federal Reserve Board to adjust the interest rate. What is more, a nation mobilized for war is mobilized along the existing lines of its peaceful organization. War is peace.

War looks like peace in primitive society as well as in modern society. By primitive is meant the absence of the wheel, writing and metallurgy.

To take some examples of primitive society from pre-Columbian South America. There, several types of primitive society existed, from hunting bands, to agriculturists, to an early form of civilization which culminated in the Inca empire.

The Yahgan of Tierra del Fuego are a good example of hunting bands. By hand and with forked sticks they collected mussels, crabs and sea urchins from along the coastline;

tree fungi, wild celery and black currants inland. They clubbed and harpooned seals. They killed birds with slings or took them alive with pole snares. And dogs helped them in fox hunting. In their fights, which scarcely deserve the name of warfare, they used hunting weapons: spears, clubs, slings as well as bare fists. A man whose wife had been stolen might take his brother along to kill the rival from ambush; and the murdered man's relatives might fight at least one pitched battle in return for the sake of a blood feud.

These fights were no more organized than was Yahgan society itself. A very sparse population, from about 0.1 to 0.2 persons per square mile, was distributed across the cold barren landscape in small bands of families which each occupied its own hunting grounds. Organized warfare did not exist because organized politics did not exist. The society was completely undifferentiated; the only social distinctions were those of age and sex. The battles fought to revenge adultery or homicide no more resembled warfare than a fistfight over insults in a tavern brawl. Here was no policy in the name of the society to be pursued, no lands, booty or wealth to take, no enemy to subdue, no specialized combatants, no chain of command, no war production behind the man behind the gun. Warfare of this sort is to be found only in complex civilized societies, not among the savages of such primitive societies as the poor Yaghan.

In moving a step closer to civilization, take the Jivaro, a tribe of headhunters from the upper reaches of the Amazon. The Jivaro were itinerant farmers whose cultivation of maize and manioc in a tropical forest environment required them to move their villages and their cleared fields, which soon leached out under the hot rains, every six years or so. The diet was supplemented with game felled by blowgun, spear and deadfall; fish were drugged with poison thrown in streams and pools; and wild fruit was gathered. The village numbered from 80 to 300 individuals, enough people living in one settlement to give rise to community leadership in the person of a headman. He was set apart by wearing a feather hat on his head, but was not fed by others. The headman's authority was as limited as was the war chief's, who led volunteers into battle against neighboring villages for the purpose of winning trophies in the form of heads cut from the enemy.

The night before the raid the men got drunk on a native beer made from manioc roots chewed by young girls, then spit into a vat of water which fermented to strength from bacterial action of the saliva after a few days. In the morning the warriors would slick down their hair so they'd look good if their own heads got taken, and then, carrying spears, they set out to the target village. The enemy maintained barricades in defense against such attacks. If the defense held, the warriors soon tired of the game as the day dragged on, leaving the war chief, more accurately a gang leader, with a spoiled mission on his hands. If successful, the victors took heads, removed the bone, everted and sewed up the

lips, boiled and shrank this skin bag in an astringent solution (made from a plant which supplies the vital ingredient in wrinkle removing creams) and then smoked and polished each one for keeping as a war trophy. These shrunken heads, counted as good marks like a string of merit badges, were the sole object of raiding, not to mention the element of revenge seeking for heads lost earlier to the same neighbors. Here again, what passed for warfare in this society was no more organized than was its normal community life.

Something a little more civilized in the way of warfare was practised by the Carib of the Lesser Antilles, who in addition to going after mere trophies also brought back slaves and booty. Young bucks from several villages would hold council, agree on some target for attack and set the date of rendezvous, which was ticked off with pebbles from a gourd. The night before the men would eat some of the dried flesh of their previous victims, wash this down with the local beer, and set out for the rendezvous. After all this build-up the warriors were not discouraged if the enemy held out for more than one afternoon; the attack might last two days, or at least until the supply of arrows was used up. Women were taken for slaves to do the work and men for torturing at a victory feast a few days later. At that time the captives were trotted out and bound to a circle of stakes, poked with fire brands, cut with knives, rubbed with pepper and shot with arrows. The big thing was not to flinch and give satisfaction to the cheering women and children who turned out in force to see the show. At last the victim was clubbed to death by one of the village elders, the flesh eaten with delight, and the bones blanced for posterity to be kept among the copper and gold ornaments of rank that had been stripped from him.

Carib warfare demanded a level of political organization at least as complex as that governing civil life, which was sustained by permanent agriculture based on a wide range of crops, including maize, manioc, sweet potatoes, yams, beans, and peppers. No desultory raiding parties or blood feuds here, but determined action planned out of a war council under a war chief, who took command over a body of warriors and local chiefs from several villages, and who enjoyed some material pleasures of rank in the form of fancy costume, a longer war club than anybody else, and a retinue of assistants to care for his every need. Next to the ranking chiefs the warriors themselves were ranked according to their military prowess. But for all of this, war still had as its limited object the enhancement of individual social status and not service to the community, except to provide it entertainment.

The real thing was carried on by people like the Incas, who went to war for conquest and enlargement of the political state. The Incas before their military expertness created an empire 2000 miles in length along the Peruvian coast, were one of several Andean valley kingdoms of like political organization. All were based on intensive agriculture, dense rural settlements, urban centers, and a class structure that

started at the top with a king and a line of hereditary nobility, on down through local chieftans to the mass of farming folk. Occupational specialists served the court, including a standing army, officered, uniformed and equipped with regulation clubs and shields. The Incas had the best trained armies and, 100 years before Pizarro invaded with European iron-age and gun-powder technology, they battered their way to conquest over every other political state of the same complexity in the whole area.

The next step is to appreciate that the complexity of organized warfare in today's mass societies fully matches the complexity of industrial civilization itself. The

(Continued from page 15)

I'm sorry it's that way, and I don't mean to frighten you unduly."

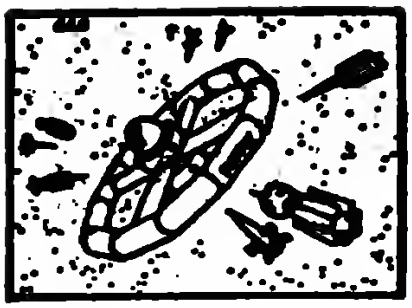
They began to tremble there in the straight-backed chairs, a little boy and a little girl faced with all the terrors of the years fanning out before them. I let them tremble while I turned away to trim my finger nails in a kind of pre-occupation, knowing that any softness from me now would not do in the later-on. The children must be firm, rock-hard and steel-scabbed for the fanged years before them. They must be ready to face all terrors of the dragon snarling. They must be able to die! if need be—be mercilessly slaughtered, smashed, mashed, mangled, gutted, bled, have dragon-glass stuck in every inch of them out on some big-reached long-curved swooping dragon racecourse—and take it all unblinking as an expected thing, part of the gamble try. OH PREPARATION—

"Today," I said, when I saw they were not trembling, "mainly I just want to introduce you to the monsters. I want you to get to know something of how bad they are, how they hate little boys and girls, and dogs and cats, and land turtles—all things that walk and crawl a little slow on the multiple lanes. In general I want you to know how they look, what they do, and what you can expect from them. I'll pass out pictures."

When, for an ending, I passed out my small clear snapshots of the monsters wrecked, piled on the highways, with old men wrapped around bridge posts, with the bodies spewing out of the school buses and one woman in two ditches, and they started that uncontrolled screaming—the two little warned-and-wise children—I knew, from the standpoint of PREPAREDNESS, my lecture had been a great thing. The End

vast number of occupational specialities within a modern army is the counterpart of a similar proliferation of job types in civilian life. The fine division of military ranks is duplicated by stratification of social status in all walks of life, from church hierarchies and government bureaucracy to corporation titles.

If warfare is to be eliminated as one of the things a nation-state can do with its organization and resources, then what is needed is new policy objectives. There is no magic solution to be found in animal behavior studies, psychology or biology. Do not be misled. The only solution is better politics. But we have to *know* that to *want* it. End



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