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CHARACTERIZATION IN SCIENCE FICTION

Editorial by ROBERT SILVERBERG

The traditional weakness of even the best science fiction writers lies in the depiction of character. S-f has always been a plot-oriented literature; the work of the writer has centered on telling what happens, on describing the pattern of conflicts encountered by the main characters, rather than in sketching those characters in depth. What has distinguished the good writers from the bad ones, generally, has been complexity of ideas, not richness of character-drawing.

Any experienced fan can cite a slew of "great characters," of course—E. E. Smith's Blackie DuQuesne, Heinlein's Lazarus Long, Hubbard's Lieutenant, Smith's Lensmen, van Vogt's Gilbert Gosseyn, and so on. But a close analysis of any of those characters shows that the authors have built them out of two or three exaggerated traits and some sleight-of-hand. They have no *innerness*. We have no idea what they might think about during a long night of insomnia, how they might handle themselves in a complicated emotional situation such as the breakup of a marriage, or what they really believe is the proper relation of man to man in society.

Of course, these things are irrelevant to the stories as told. We don't particularly care about the philosophical beliefs of Gilbert Gosseyn or the sexual hangups of Kimball Kinnison. The novels in which they appeared might have been richer if it had been possible to deal with such material in them, but given their straightforward pulp-fiction nature, any real probing of character in depth would have been fatally intrusive. Where the power and wonder of a story stem from its being so gloriously implausible (as in *The World of Null-A* or the Lensman saga), the presence of plausible characters would shatter the entire framework.

Still, character is the usual mainspring of good fiction; the customary technique of the novelist is to let plot *arise from* character by allowing conflict to grow out of the necessary intersection of people with opposing needs. The people are the starting point; the conflicts, that is, the plot, follow from them.

In s-f the usual practice is to choose a background situation, a world-view, of a sweeping sort. (Beings from the stars conquer Earth; or, a ten-dollar time machine is invented; or, robots make man idle and purposeless.) Next, conflict situations are generated from the basic background. (Man fights back against the alien invaders; dedicated time patrolmen attempt to eliminate paradoxes; an underground of human beings strives to defeat the

usurping robots.) Lastly, the author assembles a cast of characters to act out his patterns of conflict and to bring his story to a resolution. Almost any characters at all will do; the protagonist of the man-against-the-aliens story can equally well be a football player, a scientist, a homosexual cowboy, or a retired colonel. Whereas a novel like *Catch-22* begins with the subtle, complex character of Yossarian and develops its action to meet Yossarian's aims and needs, a typical s-f novel works from action back to characters.

This is not necessarily a bad thing; there's no real reason why science fiction should follow the techniques of nonspecialized fiction, and a good many reasons why it shouldn't. The novel of ideas is just as worthy as the novel of character. Where trouble comes in is where the s-f writer, trying to orchestrate his novel by giving it some characters, settles for "characterization" instead. That is, he assembles a cast of stereotypes (hero, villian, beautiful maiden) and tries to conceal its pulp-fiction nature by coating each stock figure with decorative garb. The hero is given a compulsion to take unnecessary risks in his automobile; the villain is secretly a stamp collector; the beautiful maiden's hobby is Sanskrit philology. These quirks and tags are passed off as differentiation of character.

Lack of skill, not laziness, is the usual reason for this. As a class, science fiction writers have never had much literary depth; more of them can describe the mechanics of an electrical generator than can name four contemporaries of Shakespeare. (A lot can do neither; more's the pity.) Even those who are formidable extrapolators and dazzling technicians of plotting show little insight into character—their own, their friends', their characters'—and little awareness of how fiction writers in general have solved the problem of transferring living personalities to paper. Sometimes, recognizing their shortcomings, they have made deliberate attempts to educate themselves: a case in point is Henry Kuttner, who after a brilliant career as a pulp craftsman, dealing cleverly in stereotyped characters, actually went back to college to study literature. Unfortunately, Kuttner died before he had a real chance to put his new knowledge to work; but his last work showed a new richness, a fusion of his technical brilliance and his belatedly achieved concern with depth of characterization.

The newer s-f writers—most notably Roger Zelazny, Samuel Delany, and Thomas Disch—did not serve a pulp apprenticeship, and do have a broad acquaintance with forms of literature other than science fiction; their own work, whatever its standing in relationship to the s-f classics of the 1940's, can hardly be faulted for use of stock characterization. I submit that this is a useful gain. Any kind of fiction, including ours, makes its greatest impact when it draws the reader inextricably into itself, and since Homer's day the most effective way of doing that has been to write about people whose fates are a matter of concern to the reader. Cardboard philatelist-villians do not compel much attention, at least not from

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IN A SAUCER DOWN FOR B-DAY

DAVID R. BUNCH

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS

This story has two distinct themes—human self-destruction and alien naivete—and two distinct plot threads, but what happens when they finally unite is quite terrifying and shows the redoubtable and greatly admired Mr. Bunch at the height of his talents.

THE small, two-place saucer came on down; we weren't losing any time. We had heard of this special day and we meant to be there. My driver especially wanted to be in on this; he could hardly believe it. I didn't need to see this to believe it. I was from this place, a long, long time ago, and that was why I believed it already. Or partly why. YES!

"Things have been shut down," I said. "Don't expect normal times. Their gasjoys haven't been running much for several weeks now; the other wheelgos have been stalled on purpose; and the big cloudburping record-run manufacturing places have been taking a holiday. I tell you, it's just a once-a-year thing. But they really go all-out. They don't skimp on that day. They aim to see that everyone gets some real good."

"Oh jolly joys," he said, "and I've never had any like that! Will I get some?"

"You may. It's according to how it goes, of course, with our landing. You know, after all the landings we've made, there's a lot of them who still won't believe it. They say things like, 'Yah, saw a saucer, he did. U.F.O. HA! Drunken bum!'—On the other hand, we might cause a national panic."

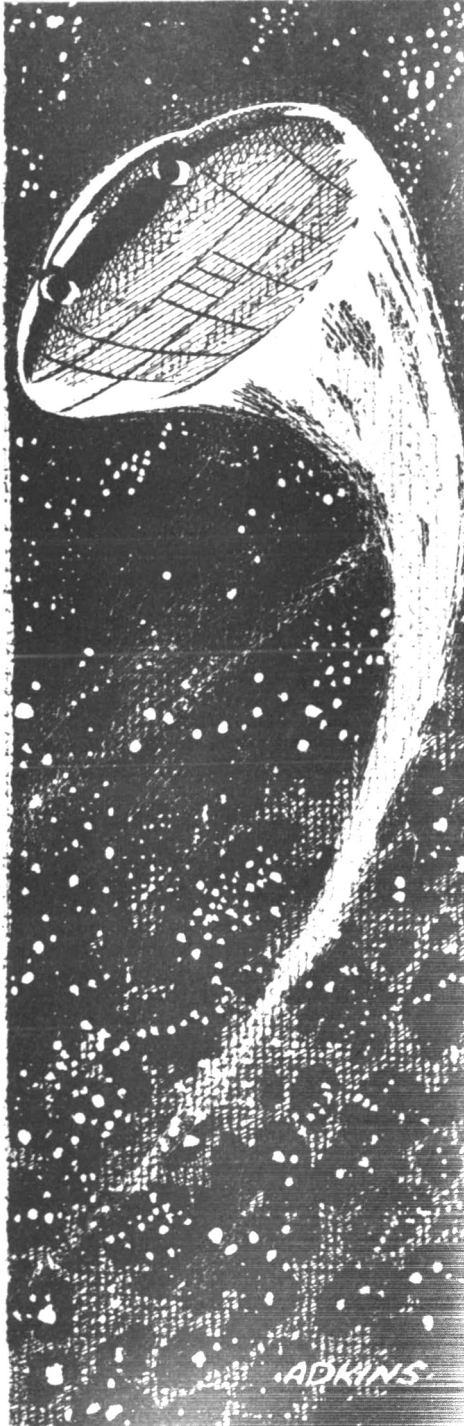
"Well, if we land O. K., and if there's a possibility I can do it, I want some of that wild stuff, that back-to-nature kind, as they say down there. They claim it's better, has a special tang. Know what I mean?" He leered. I didn't know why he leered. This chap with his thin leathery faces all around always seemed to me to be doing that. Or sneering.

So we rode on down saucerwise toward the place where the big day was. And the space slipping through our span-rings would surely have made old natural God sit up with notice, there was so much of it. Yes,

we were coming from a long way out for this thing. But we had the saucer for it and we had the time. That what we were going to see was worth the candle, I'm not so sure. Not for me, anyway. I'd been there a long, long time ago, when every day was such a day, in a certain manner of speaking.

We hovered in quietly and settled on a knob, in a timbery place. No one noticed us, I believe, and truly we had the advantage today of people preoccupied. They did not need a saucer story now to brighten up their day, or to impress the blondes around the office water coolers for the rest of the week. All they needed today was to be out there and in it and get their share of the action. —Later we might break out the small whirly plane we carried knocked down in the saucer and explore their air more extremely. But for now we walked down the hillside casually from the knob and into their valley.

My companion was dressed like a native of this place. (Which gave him a lot of choice!) But what I really mean is he was fixed to look as though he might belong. We had his skinny fibrous legs padded out to look plump and desk-job and certainly a lot too heavy in the thighs, in the normal look here now. We had four of his upper limbs tucked in and tied down to torso nubs, all well-padded and concealed under his bright celebration-day garb. His chest, which was rounded, mounded and stacked on his spare frame, had given us a really tough problem. Oversize to house the huge masses of fiberwebs that "breathed" the rare stuff at his place, it stuck out at home like a



hogshead of wine based on two skinny pikes. We had fixed this as best we could now by building him up below and by putting loose-fitting coast on him. This coat, cut on the wrap-around, was fluff-lined and quilted. In fact in a lot of ways, it was like a short old winter toga might have been on some Caesar a long time back. It was gay-colored, as though for this special day, and in some ways it did very well. In other ways it was the poorest part of the subterfuge. One thing, it made him husky and outsize compared to me, while really he was just a tall skimpy runt alongside my fine meaty form. But this was really of no matter, I guess. Who was paying any attention to forms, people's or otherwise, today? These celebrators were all too intent upon what they had come out to get.

—The bubble he had to have because of thick air, when he left the saucer, we camouflaged to look like part of a hat and part of a holiday mask. As for me, about all I had to do was take off my own breathing gear that I used in the saucer and at his place, and I was all right, back home with people!

YES! there they were! all out in gay holiday attire, some having paid a week's salary to be "dressed appropriately for the occasion." It was holiday, all right, with all the trimmings. The concessionaires were there in droves to profiteer on the naivete and gullibility of their fellow man. And some were actually selling a products or a service that was wanted. For instance, there was a stand that sold a gimmick that would, as the barker told us over and over, loud, "Put flair in your air today, as you play." It was simply a small mask that had a flavor selector that would fizz scents up the nostrils to the tune of peppermint, oranges, red clover odor—any one of about fifty different, generally pleasant, smells. Cute, I guess you could say for this occasion, but on almost any other occasion, silly.

And of course there would be the other side of all this, and that brought a lot of things back to mind about my people. Yes! another stand, nearby, was selling a mask for which the flavors were all bad—five-weeks-dead sunned horse, slow-decayed old sweet potatoes, ancient shelled goose fruits, barnyard upside-down cakes, rest-room airs—and so on through full fifty flavors of things that were "not so good." And would you believe that this stand was outselling the other stand almost two to one? IT WAS! Because people wanted to see how bad they could endure it, I guess. And there were numerous practical jokes, a lot of shared ha ha and much horseplay that could be done with this mask. Whereas with the other one, the good mask, you were just in there in a small bliss of your own, smelling, say, oranges or vanilla—lonesome.

Then there was one stand selling what I thought of as a new high in gullibility in action. The barker was saying, "Take home some of your joys of today in our airtight savo-sacks, guaranteed non-leak; have some all week." As if any joy could actually be taken home in the thin plastic sacks he was selling, or in any sack for that matter (although these were huge ones)—much less joys that could last all week. Silly man! Silly

people! But they tried it, I will say they tried it. Sometimes you would see whole families quitting the holiday together and heading for home, mother, father and children, each with a big plastic savo-sack bouncing along above him, stretched and full till it was clear almost as a clean pane of glass, crammed with air from the barker's pump.

My companion was becoming more excited all the time as we mingled with the gaily dressed throngs and were swept up with the joys and the excesses of the day. "Is this happening all over?" he asked. "Everywhere—here?"

"Perhaps not," I answered. "I just know about this one country. Here it's by Presidential Proclamation each year, and it always comes in the very late fall or early winter, when there's the best chance over most of the country for the stuff to be really good and still not be too cold for outdoor enjoyment by most people. And never doubt it! everyone who is possibly physically able, from the lowest to the highest, participates. They're all truly equal out there on this one day, and that's a fact. Equal and free as the air we breathe, as we used to, ha ha, say. —Those who are very old and too sick, I understand, have little savo-sack containers of it brought up to them, by friends, by relatives, wherever they may be. —It tears my heart out to think how good my people can really be—sometimes—in a last-ditch kind of way. And after it is all too late."

"What do they do the rest of the time?"

"A large question," I answered, "a very large question. Some time, if you're still interested, I'll take off a dozen or so of our days—the long ones—back home, to tell."

"No, NO!" He was, I could see, becoming very excited. "I mean what do they do, when they're not doing like today they're doing?"

"Oh, you mean what do they do in place of it, the natural kind? They do all sorts of things in place of it, the natural kind. They live in bubble-dome homes now that are controlled, you know. They live in bubble towns now that are controlled also, you know. And when they have to go outside in 'normal' times, when the gasjoys are wildly running, when the other wheelgos are madly spinning, when the BIG manufacturing places are burping the big black belches of smother-smoke-and-soot, making those factory record-runs—well, they each wear a bubble on the head. Does that explain?"

"You mean they can't take it without help then?"

"I mean they can't take it without help then."

"Sometimes they manufacture it, I've heard."

"Oh yes. Huge, huge quantities."

"But today it's natural and free. How come?"

"Like I said. They've been shut down for several weeks in preparation for this big celebration. It comes back, if they'll let it, fine and clean."

He looked at me then with the sharp steely cones of his small terrible deep deep eyes. He made a small small sound and it came out "OH!" in the phones of my set that changed him into my langugage. But I had nothing that would tell me what he

was really thinking, though I wished for it strong-on. And I only know that for me for one time-struck instant the whole universe stopped still while his terrible eyes and look held me against a wall. I was very very conscious then, and ashamed, that I was really one of these—ONE OF THESE!

"Let me try it, for, after all I have come a long long way for this," he said slowly, after awhile. "And quickly then let's be from here."

So, taking him out of his bubble, I fitted the ancient mask to him, fitted it to the one of his faces that he had told me earlier he would mainly use that day. The mask was the one I had been wearing on that day long ago when the saucer had caught me and had whisked me above the stars. I thought I had adjusted the selector correctly to filter the air out thin for him. But I guess it still came through too thick. And perhaps I had not been able to accomplish the proper seal of the mask to his lean head-form. Two whiffs and he left me—passed-out—cold

Well, there we were, a padded-up fluffed-out alien passed-out cold, and with him a native come home in a saucer after a long time gone. But we were not too much noticed in the hubbub of the holiday time of many many people filling their lungs and exulting in the tangy outdoor air of this late autumn day. So I quickly fitted his bubble back on him where he lay partly concealed by one of the side-show tents, adjusted the selector carefully to manufacture his special-thin, threw his spare much-padded body over my shoulder and headed out for the saucer as hard as I could bound. When I arrived back up the hill and on the knob where the saucer was, I threw him in as though he were a rag doll. I climbed in after him and with no time wasted took that saucer into the blue. I was glad that I could space-drive.

A few million miles out and a few minutes gone he waked up enough to grumble, "Silly old silly people—to foul up something natural and good for them—that way." And I started to bristle. After all, these had once been my people, and they were still my people, in a way. But then I thought, and all I could in honesty mutter, after thinking it over, was, in total agreement, "Yes, silly old silly people." Then the saucer, going automatically on hurry-home drive, zoomed on out in real earnest now, and we were headed back from Earth's newest holiday, B-Day, or Breathe-Day, or in its original and full designation, GET-OUT-OF-YOUR-BUBBLE-AND-NATURAL-AIR-FOR-A-DAY Day. Silly old silly people . . .

The End

COMING NEXT MONTH — Ghyl Tarvoke differed in no real way from the other boys of the ancient city Ambroy except in one particular: he desired to know the truth. His quest for Truth and the source of the legend of Emphyrio is one of the most remarkable stories you'll ever read—and Jack Vance's finest novel. EMPHYRIO begins in our next issue, on sale March 20th. Don't miss it!

The byline of Arthur Sellings will appear no more in the magazines; Arthur Sellings died in London last September at the age of 47. THE DODGERS exhibits that grace, precision, vision, and insight which so distinguished Mr. Sellings; his is another loss which seems simply insupportable both within and without our field.

THE DODGERS

ARTHUR SELLINGS

"Not for the eleventh time!" Holst snarled as Farson got out the projector. "Or is this the twelfth?"

"You don't have to watch if you don't want to," said Farson primly.

"What else is there to do on this goddamn crate?" Holst muttered. Machines controlled it, navigated it. Payload restrictions ruled out any bulkier diversion than a few books, and Lew Holst had never been a reader. Except for his engineering degree ten years ago. It had never developed into a habit. Life for him was real machines, real people.

He'd stretch the latter term to include the creatures he met on these trips. He wasn't sure if he could stretch it to include Farson. The function of the Ambassador Corps inevitably resulted in some odd pairings. Being the practical man on a trip usually meant that the other was something more fancy—a sociologist, a parapsychologist, even once a drama expert for a world whose inhabitants spent three-quarters of their time acting out charades.

Farson was a doctor—medical variety.

Well, doctors could be okay. Like that sexologist on the trip to—he couldn't remember the number of the world—where there were five sexes. Humanoid too. *Interesting.* But Holst always found worlds interesting. It was transit time that could lie heavy if you got the wrong partner. He knew he ought to count himself lucky—it didn't happen often—but . .

But Farson . . . well, he wasn't a bad guy. He didn't have any irritating habits. Even the sexologist had been a compulsive knuckle-cracker, though that had been amply compensated for in a stock of case-histories funnier than any joke Holst had heard in years. Farson's trouble was more of a character defect than a habit. He was so blasted conscientious.

As now . . he checked the moron-proof connections three times before he set the projecter rolling. And he craned forward in his transit seat, gazing at the screen with an intentness that bordered on anxiety.

Holst stifled a yawn. Somebody like Farson must be in charge of editing these films. The title was followed by the inevitable credit shot of a U2 ship—as if *all* the briefing

data wasn't gathered by scout ships!

"Why the hell do they call them U2s, anyway?" he said. "Damn silly name."

"It means," said Farson, without taking his eyes from the screen, "*You Too.* You Too Can Have a Planet Like Earth."

"If you're not careful," Holst muttered. He supposed he was as dedicated to his job as Farson; he just didn't believe in letting it show so badly.

It was an important job. Earth had had one or two nasty experiences, making contact with other worlds. Now orbiting ships gathered the data first, assessing a planet's ecology, its sociology . . . its *needs*. And then the Ambassadors were carefully chosen and sent in with gifts.

Gifts. The use of any such phrase as 'trinkets for the natives' was to invite instant dismissal from the Corps. These were gifts of working models, power sources, medical aid . . . ideas.

The briefing film zoomed in now to show what looked at first like an imposing city. But, as the viewpoint stopped to hover fifty feet above it, it was evident that it wasn't. Its rose-colored buildings were mostly one-story affairs. But they were laid out with a certain elegance at the foot of low hills. The forest of blue trees in front of it might have been planted for a windbreak.

People—as humanoid as mattered—moved along the streets, oblivious to the eye scanning them from space. The eye moved along too, hovering over details. Like the open communal baths. They obviously had piped water. Night shots showed oil (natural gas?) lighting along the main streets. And—

"Here's the first one," Farson whispered tensely, pointing.

A man emerged from a building. He looked a trifle unsteady on his feet, and his skin—these people wore only brief kirtles—showed blotches that looked livid under the street lighting. He limped, almost furtively, into the shadows.

The film—edited down, as always, from a considerable mileage—seized on the point. Day shots showed the blotches to be a bright green against the saffron skin of the sufferer. They looked alarming even to the unmedical eye of Holst. They made Farson, for all the number of times he had seen them by now, *quiver*. Data came up on the screen.

Observed frequency of green blotch symptom, frame for frame and person for person (Sampling Formula 7c) one in five thousand, three hundred and . .

"Don't take it to heart," Holst said. "Could be only a hangover symptom."

"*Sh-sh*," said Farson.

. . . Impossible to check statistically any increasing frequency of symptom or indeed its true incidence, due to the natural tendency of most societies to sequester invalids. Mortality, if any, also impossible to determine in view of the secrecy of necrological rites on many worlds, but epidemic strongly suspected . .

"I only pray we're not too late," said Farson devoutly.

But Holst wasn't thinking about green blotches. An eternal optimist, he was confident that there would

be enough of the population left by the time they arrived. He was more interested in wondering what they would make of the steam engine.

Air—*real* air after the canned stuff they had been breathing for weeks—smelled good in Holst's nostrils as he clambered down the short landing ladder. Fragrance was borne on a breeze from the blue forest. Pink tops of the city's taller buildings showed beyond it, a statutory mile from where the ship had brought itself down. The Corps took pains not to startle the natives.

Farson was still in the ship, checking his medical equipment for the umpteenth time. Holst went back up the ladder and brought down his own stuff. The steam engine and a box of fuel tablets, a microtape recorder, a variable wrist chronometer and a few things which were, in all fact, no more than trinkets for the natives. But they demonstrated instant goodwill. All the things were fitted neatly into his black diplomatic bag.

"All set!" he called up. No reply came from inside the ship. Holst swore, dumped his bag on the ground and went back up the ladder.

"I thought you couldn't wait to get to grips with the plague," he said caustically. The medico was fiddling with the dispensers.

"*Plague* is a word with a carefully delimited meaning," said Farson. "We don't know that it is one yet. I just thought it advisable to take some water."

Holst lifted his eyes to heaven. "Water's one thing they've got plenty of, according to the film."

"And that could be the source of the trouble. We know this stuff is pure."

"Only too well," Holst muttered, "pure and tasteless," as Farson turned off the faucet and pressure-sealed the neck of the flask between his fingers. He picked up his own bag and followed Holst down the ladder. Then he stopped as Holst stopped, blocking his descent.

"What's the matter?"

Holst swore and leaped the last few rungs. Farson, the obstruction abruptly removed, teetered and fell. He managed to hold his precious bag aloft as he crumpled onto the ground. He was only jarred, but he got to his feet indignantly.

"Of all the damnfool—"

"My bag," Holst hollered. "It's *gone*."

"You shouldn't have let it out of your sight."

"I wouldn't have if you'd been ready, instead of tinkering about with—"

Farson held up his hand. "No recriminations, *please*." His gaze took in the terrain. It was all flat ground, without an inch of cover, up to the forest. Behind them, from the spreadeagled landing props of the ship, the plain stretched emptily away to the horizon. "It can't have gone."

"I know it can't," said Holst dazedly. "But it has. I only left it for . . . how long? . . . a minute at the most. And it's two hundred yards at least to those trees."

"These people have a turn of speed. It showed up in those shots of their youngsters' games—remember?"

"All right, maybe one of them

could have covered the distance both ways in the time I was in the ship. But that would be assuming the pretty outlandish coincidence that he was lurking at the nearest point of the forest. And doesn't take into account at all the time he would have taken to get over his surprise at seeing our ship drop out of the skies. I haven't met a race yet that—"

He broke off and stamped the ground at the spot where he had left the bag. It was solid rock.

"It *couldn't* have been one of the main race here. It must have been a creature of some kind, something that can move at about fifty miles an hour."

"The film revealed no other fauna with members capable of lifting anything the size of a Corps bag."

"An army of things like ants, then? Things too small to show on the films?"

Farson looked concerned. "Can I get you a sedative?"

"To hell with . . . I mean, no thanks." He brightened. "Of course! A *bird*."

"There are no birds on this world."

"Something the films missed. Perhaps just one big bastard, nesting up in the hills. You know, like a Roc."

It didn't need Farson's sad look to tell Holst that he was clutching at straws. Anyway, he remembered looking up at the sky when he had first come down the ladder. There hadn't been a speck in it, not even a cloud. He was suddenly imploring.

"Let's get straight back up the ladder and take off."

Farson looked at him askance.

"I'm not chickening out," Holst persisted. "At least, not from any dangers on this world. I'm just thinking of the consequences back home if we make contact with a race and fail to establish proper relations. Rule Five. Penalty . . . instant dismissal from the Corps."

He had never realized so clearly just how much being a member of the Corps meant to him. It wasn't just the pay; it was the variety. Life on Earth would be deathly dull.

"Listen . . . we can easily report back that we had some mechanical defect *en route*. I'll be able to think of something . . . fake the recording apparatus. And we can—"

But Farson already had his pocket activator out and had jabbed it. The landing ladder retracted smoothly and the port closed over it with the softest of sighs.

"You're forgetting something," Farson said firmly. "These people *need* us. At least I've got *my* pack. Come on. All is not lost."

They emerged on the other side of the blue forest to meet the welcoming committee on its way out from town. The tottering elder at its head, in a gold kirtle, was flanked by two younger men in blue, bearing massive sprays of flowers. Holst groaned within himself. Flowers—jewels, droppings of the sacred beast, wives—it was an old galactic custom.

The flowers were handed over. The elder made a brief address of presumed welcome in a language with a lot of lisps and few vowels, then stopped and eyed Farson's bag expectantly. Holst nudged Farson. The medico opened the bag, showing its contents. Rows of instruments and packaged drugs couldn't have looked very impressive, but the

elder did his best to look grateful for the thought and stretched out his hand.

Holst whispered hoarsely: "Haven't you got anything in there you can give him?"

"What, a hypodermic?" said Farson sardonically and snapped the bag shut. A muttering broke out from the natives.

"What did I tell you?" Holst complained. "We're off on the wrong foot straight away."

Farson turned back to the chief and gestured toward the city, tapping his bag. The chief merely looked sour, turned on his heel and gestured his escort to follow.

At least, nobody made any attempt to stop the two Earthmen from taking up the rear.

"Perhaps they've got some trouble with the plumbing I can help out on," said Holst. But not very hopefully.

An hour later, they were sitting on the low wall of what was obviously the local equivalent of a tavern. Customers reclined on low benches under trees, clear flasks in their hands, which they tilted at intervals above their mouths. The amber liquid that spurted forth glinted invitingly in the bright sunlight. It was a hot day and Holst felt his throat lining shrivel. Normally gifts stood them in good credit. But here . . . well, perhaps begging was an honored profession. He straddled the wall and accosted a serving man whose belt was freighted with flasks. But when Holst held out his hand, the man—there was no mistaking the expression—*sneered*.

Word had obviously got around. Nobody was threatening violence—but nobody was making them exactly welcome either. He went back to Farson.

"We could always give them the briefing projector."

"What—and the only film the briefing one? I don't think these people would take kindly to the idea of their planet having been spied on."

"It was only a thought. Ah well, it'll have to be ship's water and Tastipak concentrates, then. But—"

It was a man with a bad case of the green blotches. He was young and skinny, and for all the fact that he was showing the grogginess that they recognized from the film, was grinning broadly. A gaggle of kids danced around him.

"Our first patient," Farson breathed devoutly.

"Patient nothing," Holst hollered. "See what he's wearing round his ankle? Our wrist chronometer!"

He leaped off the wall and grabbed the native by his skinny arm, pointing to the chronometer.

"That's mine. How the hell did you—"

"*Steady*," said Farson, catching up with him. "The man's sick."

"*Sick!*" said Holst, the traditions of the Ambassador Corps wilting. "He'll be a damn sight sicker by the time I—"

The burly character was wearing a red toga, but his role was unmistakable. He was carrying a wicked-looking club and a nasty expression as he pushed Holst in the chest. Holst squared up defensively. Farson was jabbering about the need to get blood and urine samples as Holst realized

that the cop's push in the chest had been only a token declaration of his presence. Holst pointed at the chronometer.

"That's mine. If you take it off and look at the back you'll see *Made in Tokyo, Earth* on it." He knew his words were incomprehensible to the other, but they helped relieve his feelings. And he hoped the accompanying gestures would convey something.

The cop only heaved massive shoulders, pointed to the two Earthmen and to the native and himself and made a gesture that there could be no misinterpreting. They were being told to come along to the station.

The elder, or his double, was seated at something that looked like a cross between a desk and a rostrum. It was carved out of stone.

Holst pointed at the chronometer, then at himself, then proffered two empty hands toward the elder, trying to smile achingly.

The elder scowled, then spoke a few curt words to the native. The native unstrapped the chronometer and handed it over. The elder turned it in his hand.

Holst pointed. "See? That's the hour and the date and the year." He made wild motions of his hands. "It can be adjusted for any world."

The elder looked up and scowled again . . . then handed the chronometer back to the native, who gleefully strapped it back on his ankle.

"We brought gifts!" Holst shouted. "I don't know how, but this character swiped them. I bet back at his house he's got the rest of the things we brought. And you calmly—"

The elder gave a barking grunt and turned his back. Holst felt a growing sense of inferiority. His own signs got nowhere. This other race conveyed theirs only too well. The case was very obviously dismissed.

II

Five long revolutions of the planet went by before they got a lead. Society here might have some odd notions about such things as personal property, but it shared one feature with Earth—curious kids. A cluster of them were by the ship when the two Earthmen got back on that frustrating first day . . and one, more daring than the rest, stayed. And came out daily from then on. His name was Vathool.

From Vathool they picked up rudiments of the language. It was he who took them up into the hills to the ruins of what appeared to be an ancient temple. It was decorated with friezes, scenes of hunting, of what looked like religious rites—and others that the boy giggled over as they came to them.

Holst glanced at Farson. These other scenes were as freely erotic as the friezes of Pompeii. Another old galactic custom. It was the hunting scenes that were puzzling. They all seemed to be variations on a theme: a warrior confronting a dragon-like beast, then the beast alone looking annoyed . . it was like a strip car-

toon . . . then the hero with one foot on the slain beast . . . but the hero painted now with large gray spots.

"*Gray*?" said Holst.

"Wait a minute." Farson peered at a section of the frieze behind some tumbled masonry. "Look at this. Green! The rest have faded with time. They must have all been green once."

He turned to Vathool, pointing first at the frieze, then at the boy himself, lisping the native intorrogative. Vathool replied with the native *no*, pointed at a beast and brought his hands together from far apart, stopping them at a few inches from each other. Farson repeated the question-word, pointed at the warrior's blotches and again at the boy. The boy only giggled and skipped away out of the temple.

"Come on," said Farson, grabbing Holst's sleeve. Holst shrugged and followed. They caught up with the boy.

"What's going on?" asked Holst.

"I don't know yet," said Farson. "But I'm sure there's an answer in this if we can only find it."

Holst only looked sour. His own opinion was that they were never going to find an answer, that all that was waiting for them was a fruitless return to Earth and a pensionless discharge.

But on the way down Vathool stopped suddenly, pointing. A small lizard-like creature was basking on a rock. Vathool looked at the Earthmen, grinning, then advanced on the creature.

In the blink of an eye the lizard vanished . . . *and so did the boy*. He reappeared a few seconds later, holding the reptile, dead, in his hand. He handed it gravely to Farson.

For a moment Holst thought that his partner was going to throw a fit, then realized that it was only his way of showing excitement—a speechless working of the jaws and a wild look in his eyes. Vathool backed away. Farson took a hold on himself.

"No—thank you, thank you, thank you," he said in the native tongue. The boy managed a faint grin, then drifted away in the direction of town. His gait was rather unsteady.

"Will somebody kindly—" Holst started.

"Didn't you see?" said Farson ecstatically. "His skin! And this too." He held up the dead lizard. Its yellow hide was almost entirely covered with green blotches.

Back at the ship Farson explained.

"On any planet the dominant species have some special survival factor—or has it in a more acutely developed form than the rest. Even when that species is humanoid, the factor often differs from Earthman's. What did we have that was so marvellous? An opposed thumb. Even then, if we hadn't discovered firemaking we might never have beaten the competition. *This* race developed time-travelling."

"*What*!"

"On a limited scale. Some secretion of the glands, evidently, like adrenalin. Probably happened in

one of them, ages ago in some emergency, like the hunt. Something flipped; he found he could slip back a few seconds, come up on his opponent from behind, as it were.

"If I haven't got the facts right in every detail, I'm sure they're as near right as matters. Things don't just crop up in one species on a world—wings or camouflage or poison stings. Folk stories, told or illustrated as on those friezes, often impute superhuman size to the adversary. But, reading parallei texts from Earth's history, those beasts must have been formidable. The humanoids here, with their special talent, managed to overcome them—but not before the enemy had managed to cultivate something of the talent themselves. Assuming that the lizards are the stunted remnant of the dragons."

"And the green blotches?"

"Simply a side-reaction."

"But those other friezes—the love-making scenes—the people in those had the same markings. Wait—" Holst grinned—"I can work that one out for myself. Having developed the talent, they found they could use it for other purposes. Like making the good times better. Longer, anyway."

"Exactly. Which would seem to account for Vathool's reactions. It probably only develops at puberty, like other glandular functions. That was probably about as much as he could manage, catching that lizard. I wonder how far back an adult could go? They must have had trouble building up a social system to accommodate an attitude like this one. I can't imagine what they do about murder, if it exists here. Possibly anyone with green blotches within distance of the crime is put to the block. Theft seems to be a different matter. Possession here seems to be *ten* points of the law. Or perhaps only outsiders like us are fair game."

"You mean—that's how that skinny character swiped my bag?" Holst eyes widened. "That's it! He saw our ship come down, so he dodged back in time. Enough to get him from the city to our landing point by the time we landed. Before we landed even?"

"Could be."

"Which could explain why I didn't see anyone. He materialized the moment I went back up the ladder. But that's inferring a pretty precise use of the talent, isn't it? No matter, perhaps he was just lucky. And grabbed his luck while it was there and legged his way back to the forest and home." He pondered. "But even with a bad case of the blotches and the staggers?"

"Maybe he was able to manage another brief switch. Or maybe he had enough time—ordinary time—to make it. One way or another, it's the only explanation that makes sense."

Holst sighed emphatically. "I only hope it makes sense to the Board back home."

"We can do a bit better than that," said Farson. "It's only a chance, but we've got to take it." He bent down and picked up the lizzard. "Extract the serum from

this creature and get Vathool and his pals to find a few more. Then an injection, a really big dose, and I can go back and—"

Holst had just understood. "*No*! We don't know how it'll react on a human being. We don't even know if it will work that far back."

"This is my department," said Farson very firmly.

"Maybe. But I lost the bag. It's my responsibility."

"There's no time to argue. Just go and find Vathool and explain, while I get on with dissecting *this*."

III

Farson stood with the large hypodermic poised over his left forearm. The liquid within was a straw color, which had surprised Holst when the other had showed him the first fruits of his dissection. But now he was only feeling concerned—and guilty.

"But say something goes wrong? That's another reason for letting *me* be the guinea-pig."

But he knew the glint in Farson's eye by now. The needle descended, and the plunger. Holst just managed to catch it before it hit the floor. For Farson had disappeared . . .

Unreality piled on unreality . . . Holst was dazedly conscious of music coming from outside. He went over to the port. A crowd of natives ringed the ship at a respectful distance. A cheer went up at his appearance, and then chanting. It was some moments before he realized what they were chanting . .

"*Meester Holst, Meester Holst, Meester Holst* . . ."

Where had they learned his name? In some parallel universe which he had only just inherited? He felt creepy and turned away from the port—and Farson was lying in a heap on the floor. He was a bright peacock blue all over. Nobody that color could possibly be alive, Holst thought despairingly. But a check at the other's wrist located a pulse. He lifted him into his transit seat, closed the port and set the controls for takeoff.

By the time the ship acted, Farson's pulse had strengthened. His eyes flickered open.

"I made it," the medico murmured. "I beat him to it. Wasn't that some reception we got?"

And all Holst could say, in all truth, was, "*What* reception?"

He played the briefing film, over and over, all the way back to Earth as a kind of homage. Farson recovered sufficiently to catch the last few performances.

But he was still a very nasty shade of blue.

The End

COMING IN THE MAY AMAZING STORIES—*Adventure in the distant future with John Gordon and the Star Kings in Edmond Hamilton's latest and best, THE HORROR FROM THE MAGELLANIC. On sale February 25th. Watch for it!*

THE MONSTER

I like this story a great deal but I admit I'd like it more if I hadn't read Damon Knight's STRANGER STATION first. John Sladek, barely 30 is one of the brilliant American transplants who—along with people like James Sallis, and Thomas Disch, has been making things quite Hot For Them in England for some time now.

JOHN T. SLADEK

Illustrated by BRUCE JONES

They were letting him down easy. It was more humiliating, at least for Sewell, to be let down easy by a machine.

It leaned back in its swivel chair, looked above his head, and placed its plastic fingertips togother. It feigned reluctance to speak.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sewell, but frankly we have our doubts. Your test scores . . . I wouldn't like to say positively *no* at this time, you understand, but the outlook is bleak. Bleak."

"I get the message. Don't Call Galactic Explorations, you'll call me." Roger Sewell stood up. "But I'd have appreciated getting the shaft from GX via a human interviewer, and not from a thing that looks human from the waist up only."

"Wait." The machine held up a hand wearing a military class ring. "Wait, hear me out. It's this kind of behavior we might have expected, knowing your test scores. You must learn to deal with given reality, Mr. Sewell.

"Now we'll submit your scores and application to the board, and their decision will be final. You aren't out of the running yet, unless you wish to be."

Sewell wanted to step around behind the desk, grab the coax that formed the bottom half of the interviewer, and twitch it out of its socket, leaving "him" frozen with that smarmy smile on "his" face. But he also wanted to be an explorer, and there was only one way to get out there, through GX.

Therefore he remained seated, staring at a poster of an explorer with the usual equipment: cleft chin, white teeth, blond hair being rumpled by an alien wind, and far-seeing blue eyes. Three lightning bolts carried the message:

"IT TAKES GUTS."

"IT TAKES IMAGINATION."

"ARE *YOU* MAN ENOUGH?"

Behind him the interviewer cleared its throat. "We'll be calling you, then, Mr. Sewell."

Whoever the board were (and he

imagined a coven of humanoid mechanisms grinning and nodding at one another), they did finally approve his application. When he had signed his contract, things moved into high gear. In one day he was uniformed, innoculated, and given a brief lecture on his destination, New Cedar Rapids. Early the next morning, he was transmitted.

He snowshoed the quarter mile of sand from the receiver to the main tent, wearing an oxygen mask and goggles. It was unpleasant just the same, slogging along. The wind was cold, flailing him with grit. By the time he'd arrived, he felt as if his neck and ears were bleeding, and his scalp caked with dirt.

Through his grimy goggles he saw two figures waiting to greet him inside the plastic tent, a man and a woman. It was only when he had got inside that Sewell realized the "woman" was a machine. "She" was of indeterminate age, slim, almost pretty, if you didn't notice the hinged jaw.

"Hi," she said, shaking his dusty hand. "I'm Rita, your partner here. This is Benny, the man you're rotating for some well-earned rest back home."

Oddly enough, it was she who seemed spontaneous and alive, while Benny behaved like a run-down clock. He did not offer to shake hands, but only stared at Sewell for several moments; then turned and walked slowly away. He returned with a log book and pen.

"I'll sign out, then," he said, looking hesitantly from one to the other.

"He wants you to sign in," Rita explained. "So he can leave."

"For some well-earned," said

Sewell drily. He took the book and signed, wondering about the other man. Couldn't he have shaken hands or said hello? All right, he was tired, but—

"Goodbye, Benny," the machine said. Benny mumbled a reply, slipped on the mask, and stumbled away, not even looking at Sewell.

"Roger Sewell," she read from the book. "May I call you Roger?"

"Suit yourself. Where do I put my stuff?"

"I'll have to clean up Benny's quarters for you—it's a pigsty. Honestly, I don't know how you men can get that way, I really don't. I don't have an official name, by the way. My makers called me Rita, but my friends usually call me Mom."

"Mom? Why?

"I don't know. A joke? Because that's what they need out here, maybe, a mom. Because they depend on me? I don't know."

Sewell decided to call her nothing at all.

"Well, what are my duties going to be? What's the routine?"

She smiled. "We can talk about that tomorrow. Right now I'll clean up your room, Roger, and then maybe you'd like to take a nap. You must be tired from your trip."

He didn't like this. "No, I'm not tired at all, as a matter of fact. And I'll clean the room myself, thank you."

He did, and dumped Benny's miserable effects—dirty socks, a bent deck of cards, a comb fluffy with dead hair—into a plastic bag. He installed Jane's picture, his philosophy books, his journal. After making the bed, he sat on it, and prepared to meditate. The door slammed open.

"I thought you might like a nice cup of tea, Roger. 'I could have made coffee, if you'd preferred, but I was making tea anyhow and so I just thought I'd try it out on you. You sort of look like a tea man to me, I could be wrong, but usually I can tell a tea or coffee person just by looking at them. The only ones who ever throw me are the cocoa people, and thank God there aren't many of them. I don't know what it is, but I never have trusted a man who likes cocoa all the time, do you know what I mean? Oh, I know it's silly, but . . . "

He sat there, amazed, and watched her. She talked on about tea, about the different kinds, and the fact that they all come from the same plant, but from different parts of it, harvested at different times of the year. She spoke briefly of tea ceremonies, of which she personally knew nothing. She would be the first to admit, and of unjust tea taxes and the Revolutionary War. She went on, until the tea grew cold in the cup she was holding. Then she went back to the kitchen.

Sewell wedged a chair against the door. When he had meditated for half an hour, he felt midly euphoric, full of energy and ready to start work. The chair began to crack.

"Why have you got your door fastened? Roger, it's only me, bringing you a cup of tea. Roger?"

The chair splintered and in she came, beaming through the steam. As he drank the tea, she told him Benny and the others had alway liked a cup of tea at about this time of day. Of course Benny was English, and liked

his tea with milk. She preferred lemon, some nothing. Then there were catnip tea, camomile tea, and mint tea . . .

Sewell finally stopped the flow by asking her about the work.

"Oh don't worry about that, not today. You just got here, for goodness sake. Take it easy."

"I didn't come here to take it easy," he found himself shouting. "I came here to explore. Now are you going to tell me the set-up, or am I going to switch you off?"

"I'm sorry." She was silent a moment, twisting her fingers in the ends of her apron strings. "Roger, I didn't want to tell you this right away, but the fact is, there just isn't any set-up. There just aren't any duties for you."

"What do you mean?" He leaped up and grabbed her by the throat. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's true," she said evenly. "You can check the general rules bulletin, and the roster of back orders, clear back thirty years ago, when we first came here to Cedar Rapids."

"I believe I'll do just that!" He slammed her against the wall and strode into the office. An hour later, when she brought him a sandwich and milk, he was sitting with his hands tangled in his gritty hair.

It was true. The first explorers had measured the planet, discovered its single mountain chain, examined the consistency of the sand that buried nearly everything else, plumbed the two lakes, tested their water, and recorded the weather.

Now, as far as GX was concerned, the work was finished. Daily weather observations and periodic examination of the sand could best be done by machines. A man would be stationed on New Cedar Rapids to keep GX's claim clear, and "just in case." There was nothing for him to do, for two years.

"I think I'll go out and scout around anyway," he said, later that evening. "Where's the oxygen equipment?"

"Well—actually there isn't any, Roger. We haven't kept one here for years. There's just the one each new man wears, which the old one wears when he leaves again."

"Damn!" He thought for a moment. "I could probably get by with just an air filter, for a little while. I'll try that."

The machine had begun baking cookies, and the tent was filled with the fresh smell. "You'll have to get an early start, then," she said. "The wind gets too high later on."

But he slept late the next morning, and when he awoke, it was with the luxurious feeling of playing hookey. This wasn't going to be so bad at all, he reasoned. There were a million worthwhile things he could fill his time with: there was his study of logical empiricism, which he could really get into, maybe even write a paper or two. There was his journal. All right, it wouldn't be a chronicle of adventure, but a record of his thoughts and impressions from the center of a sandstorm. He could write a novel. Finally, he could meditate. In fact, he could begin right now.

But first, breakfast in bed. She lingered in the doorway, asking him what he'd dreamed, commenting on the way he'd arranged the room. "Is that your girl? 'All my love, Jane.'

Isn't that sweet? Nice-looking girl, too. What they call photogenic. Some people never come out right in pictures, and others look much better than they *really* look, you know? I'll bet Jane is that type."

"What about you, Rita-Mom? I'll bet you photograph just exactly the way you look *in life*, eh?" He chuckled, seeing the remark had hit home.

He tried to do some philosophy with what was left of the morning, but she interrupted him first to clean the room ("It's in the general regulations"), and again to ask him what he preferred for lunch.

Lunch was excellent, but the home-brewed beer that went with it made him sleepy. He dreamed of Jane, but the machine kept wandering into the dream at awkward moments. Then, Jane, too, became a machine, and he discovered that, from the waist down, she consisted of nothing but a coaxial cable.

He awoke late in the afternoon, with a headache and an unpleasant taste in his mouth. Mom was there with the aspirin and lemon tea.

"I've wasted the whole day," he said. "It's getting dark."

"You just aren't adjusted," she said soothingly. "The day only has twenty hours here, you know. I've never figured out why they stuck to the same old clock, instead of shortening the hours, and having twenty-four again. As it is, they have a fraction left over every day, so we gain a day every so many months. Or is it lose a day? I never can remember whether you set the clock ahead or behind, can you? It's the same with Daylight Savings Time . " And she was off, discoursing ignorantly on time for nearly one (normal) hour. It was only a machine, he told himself. He could turn it off any time.

He sat over his journal for four hours after dinner, but all he could write was:

"Sand. Sand. Sand."

The following days were more of the same. His study of philosophy bogged down the day she showed him she could reel off pages and pages of Wittgenstein in German or English—and considered Wittgenstein a waste of time. He noticed he was putting on weight, then stopped noticing. Finally he hung a dirty undershirt over the mirror in his room, and forbade her to touch it.

She interrupted his meditations so often that he found them impossible even when she didn't interrupt. He stopped shaving, at first to annoy her, then for no reason at all. In her cleaning, one day, she knocked Jane's picture down and cracked the glass. He forbid her to clean his room any more, regulations or no.

He found her supply of home brew and got drunk, sitting at the kitchen table and listening to her endless chattering.

"Shut up!" he screamed. Seizing her by the shoulders, he shook her. "Shut up, for God's sake!" And stopped her moving, plastic mouth with his own mouth. "I want a woman," he murmured.

Slowly but firmly, the steel rods in her arms pushed him away. As always, her expression was calm. "Unfortunately, my manufacturers didn't forsee your need," she said drily.

"What?" He grunted it, his flushed,

uncomprehending face hanging over her. He had begun to list, slightly.

"I'm not a woman." she said, pronouncing the words slowly and distinctly. "I'm a Kewpie doll, Roger."

He was on his knees, vomiting, and then he lay flat in it and went to sleep.

In the morning he wrote a second entry in his journal:

"We are all machines, or"

He lay the fiber pen down without capping it. The ink in it dried, and the page with the unfinished entry became dusty.

With a fine irony, he began to call her "Mom." It became a meaningless, habitual form of address.

He wanted to go out, into the sandstorm, just once before his replacement arrived. But he was afraid.

Mom was talking about Jane's photograph. "I mean, since the glass is cracked anyway, and it really is silly to try to remember people from photographs, either you remember them anyway, or —"

He touched the switch at the lobe of her ear, and she became a statue. In the silence, he could hear her watch.

Tying a cloth over his face, he hurried out.

It was inhumanly cold. The faceless landscape around him lay dormant. It was the floor of some lifeless sea, cold, empty, frightening. With effort, Roger pushed himself away from the door and waded out a few steps.

Then the bleak wastes came to life, at the touch of the morning wind. Dunes began to blur and shift, and the light of the sun was dimmed. Roger's breath came harder.

What was he doing here? The wind was furious, now, trying to bury his legs, flinging sand at his eyes. A man could die here like a scream, unnoticed amid the senseless movement of the sand. Roger felt himself smothering. The door, only a dozen steps away, seemed now unreachable. He saw himself choking, dying, his lungs filling up with sand, flesh torn from his bones, the bones themselves rubbed to sand . . .

Roger stumbled inside and fell across his bed, coughing and cursing, the tears pouring from his sore eyes. It was some time before he realized, with a shock, that he was having hysterics.

"They told me an explorer needs guts and imagination," he wrote in his journal. "It was a lie. An explorer must be a coward, afraid to do anything beyond strictly following orders. He must not be able to care about a woman, a set of ideas, or a way of thinking or feeling. He must deal only with the mundane, the day-to-day, the 'given reality,' as the interviewer said.

"I think GX was ingenious to think of using a Mom for each explorer, to help break him down to an efficient tool. He who lives with machines becomes machine-like, and now I see the title Mom is more than honorific. She is truly the mother of the mechanism Roger Sewell."

It was clever of GX to provide her with a switch, he thought. As if he were able to switch her off for good.

"—else you don't. Well, I see you've turned me off long enough to go outside and come back in tracking up the whole place, as if I didn't have enough to do. You men! If there weren't any dirt, you'd invent it, I swear. Now

Continued on page 41

Yes, this is the Leon E. Stover who has graced AMAZING's pages as Science Editor for over a year, now, a Leon Stover who, it is proven, writes a very deft kind of fiction indeed. In its quiet way, this is a very, very funny story.

VISIT LEON E. STOVER

Little gusts of wind puffed the tent walls. General Sanders stood there in the silence, except for the flutter of the loose canvas, and looked at his wrist watch.

"I'm going in at fifteen hundred hours," he said at length. "We'll test their patience a little more yet. Any smart ideas how to handle it?"

"I've been thinking . . ." started Major Farrand.

The General cut him off. "Someone better!" The General was touchy. It was his show, but he lacked a script—a warrior turned diplomat by a sudden shape in the sky, assigned to treat with the Martians.

"Sorry. Go ahead."

Major Roger Farrand was a new style of Air Force officer, a career man with a higher degree, attached to the Office of Scientific Research. He said:

"I recall a study we did on UFO's for the Behavioral Sciences Division at the time of the flying-saucers scare."

They were listening but they could not keep their eyes from the bank of monitor screens. With one hand the General smoked a cigarette and with the other he jigged freshly curled sheets of glossy print blow-ups showing the scoutship in descent and at rest, where TV cameras viewed it from more than a dozen angles. More photographs arrived regularly from the field lab.

"The point is, sir, the Air Force commissioned the study in answer to cranks who were giving the Service bad publicity by claiming we were masking the identity of these objects, the UFO's. A simple case of PR. At first."

Camp chairs creaked impatiently but Farrand quickly struck his argument.

"As it developed, however, higher echelons foresaw the value of determining how the public might react to objects capable of intraspace mobility, using the UFO's as a test case. The assumption was that the Service could best carry out its mission in the event of enemy vehicles appearing in the sky overhead—or more remotely, those of actual extraterrestrial origin—if public reaction were a known factor."

General Sanders swelled his bulby cheeks in a clenched smile and sat down.

"The American public, you mean?"

The Colonel across the folding

map-table blanked his face in puzzlement but the Major's lighted with a message reflected. Outside in the streets of Tokyo the Japanese public stirred in a riot of curiosity. Not fear of the unknown, but a passion for an educational experience moved them against the police barricades.

"Yes sir," answered Major Farrand. "And the Russians. The study presumed a target audience for such a fantastic occurrence only in nations possessing space flight capability."

Sanders warmed to the Major and slid forward to rest one arm on the squeaky table between them.

"And the fantastic happened here, not in the U.S.A., not in the U.S.S.R. I suppose it's reasonable, considering the Martian point of view. There he is in orbit. He sees all these dinky satellites and wasted boosters going around. He doesn't know who put them up there; maybe they don't even *have* different nations on Mars. So he parks over Tokyo, the biggest and most spread out city on the face of the earth. That looks like the center of things to him, so he sends down reconaissance. Right here."

A rap of the index finger on the map of Setagaya ward.

The factory-like assemblage that was the mother ship had settled in stationary orbit during the night at a distance of 1500 km over Tokyo and sent down a scoutship in the morning, which landed squarely in Komazawa Stadium. The Government, interpreting the Mutual Security Treaty to cover an invasion from outer space, called upon General Sanders to cope with it. From the start, however, the American Air Force, in cooperation with the Home Defense Corps, found itself fighting off crowds in Meiji Park, not aliens. The General ordered everything flyable grounded, from Hokkaido to Kyushu. International flights due in at Haneda already were down at Honolulu, Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, Saigon, or were turned back. The General then ordered watchtowers thrown up around the stadium; he wanted nobody on the walls. While these were being built he stationed his first team of TV observers, with the help of NHK technicians, atop the Olympic Control Tower, which stood in the broad mall between his HQ on the 3rd Hockey Ground and the Volley Ball Court and dominated the stadium from a safe distance. Meanwhile, the command structure at Tachikawa began to duplicate itself in other tents pitched around his.

"Fagh!" snorted Colonel Armstrong at the General's imaginative reconstruction of Martian logic. He disguised his insubordination by glaring at the Major.

Major Farrand blinked at the opposition and turned to his commanding General for support.

The study I just mentioned indicates that sober appraisal of exotic flying objects from science-fiction readers. This readership coincides with a fairly rational minded sector of the public. It is bound to have the same outlook anywhere, in America or Japan. I recommend we interview a resource person in this field."

Colonel Armstrong murmured dissent and the table groaned as the General withdrew the weight of his arm from it and leaned back.

"To help guess the possibilities. Further, I recommend that we also interview a cultural anthropologist. The only precedent we have for this novel contact situation is in meeting of persons between different human societies, and that study has been one of the main tasks of cultural anthropology."

The General remained impassive. He gazed through the tent flap at the cordon of tanks ringing the stadium. Then he said:

"I'll buy that."

His aide reached for a phone and waited for directions.

"Call the Ministry of Education. Have them send me one of each, one anthropologist and . . ."

"No, no, sir," corrected the Major. "In Japan we must specify. In America the one term covers everything. Japanese use European terminology. If you ask for an 'anthropologist' here you'll get a man wearing a white coat who specializes in human biology and related fields, including primatology—monkeys and apes, man's primate cousins. What you want, sir, is a 'cultural anthropologist,' one whose field is the varieties of human society. Like sociology."

Explaining to the General's bilingual aide Farrand said in Japanese: "*Bunka-jinruigakusha*."

"As I said, send me one of each." Sanders was displeased with the Major's showing up his ignorance about this aspect of Japanese life. "The best. And I want men who can talk up—none of this bowing and scraping business."

The aide started to put through the call.

"And make sure they speak English."

"Think we'll make it by fifteen hundred hours, sir?" asked Colonel Armstrong.

"Hope so." The General studied his watch again. "Don't want to keep the Martians waiting. But then we don't know anything about their sense of time. It might be different. Ah, here we are at last!"

A runner brought in a batch of engineering drawings based on photographs.

"Let's check out these specs for structural design and propulsion units."

"And armaments," added Colonel Armstrong. He didn't like the General's remark about the Martian "sense of time."

An hour and a half later a sirened motorcycle escort brought a black, government-owned Cedric 1900 to a slippery halt alongside the emergency command post, almost taking out a row of tent pegs. A Japanese liason officer in the Home Defense Corps brought the General's two men to him on the run.

Inside the dusky tent the General returned the salute.

"Captain Suzuki, sir, introducing Yamanashi-sensei, Bunka Jinruigaku Kenkyushitsu, Tokyo University. Ph.D. from Columbia."

Dr. Yamanashi stepped forward, moving his feet with fastidious care so as to avoid soiling his shoes in the muddy grass, and shook hands.

"Kato-sensei," intoned the Captain, introducing the next client, "a most popular writer in *SF MAGAJIN* published by Hayakawa Shobō, our top company. Owns the largest

collection of SF books in Japan."

Mr. Kato sprang forward eagerly.

The General dismissed the Japanese liason officer and motioned his aide to bring more camp chairs.

"We don't have much time, so let's have it. The science-fiction picture first." Dr. Yamanashi stiffened in his weather-stained canvas seat. Sanders took note and explained why he was to speak second. "I want your comments on what Kato says."

Kato Yukio tried to giggle away his embarrassment. He had to start talking. Everybody, except the professor, was watching for words to come out of his mouth. At last he launched himself from behind the toothy camouflage of his desperation.

"A first modern SF story about contact between Earthmen and ETs is written by H. G. Werls, *The War of the Worlds*. Pardon me, a novel. Published 1898. The ETs . . . "

"We say 'Martians,'" demanded Colonel Armstrong.

"Hai!" Kato still was dazed and found himself talking on despite the nasty interruption.

"The aryans . . . ariens . . . . They came from *kasei*—red planet Mars. They want to come to Earth for making a colony. They land in English. Many spaceships come down. Actually, more like cannonsballa. Then, they start to fight, shooting rays guns. Today we are much modern and must write about a laser's beam. This way they can kill every person, but . . . "

"Very friendly, these Martians," growled Colonel Armstrong, as aggressively as any Wellsian Martina.

"Go on," said General Sanders softly. "Then what?"

"But they get sick on our bacterias and they must all die."

"Must be they're taking air samples right now," muttered Sanders to himself. The General reached for the telephone to his towers.

"Sir," put in Major Farrand. "I didn't mean to suggest that we can expect reality to follow fiction exactly."

"So, so. Let the man speak."

"When Orson Werls—not a relative—made a radio show of the novel to the Mercury Theatre on CBS, Sunday night, the October 30th, 1938, he frightened a lot of people in New Jersey. Excuse, please. In New York City. In New Jersey the ships are landing. A real Harroween scare. After that, the word 'Martian' is much used for a word for ETs. I mean for ariens. In a humorous way, may be."

Sanders sat down and looked across the table at his young Major with grudging approval. Something in his own vocabulary was explained here. Farrand was getting on the ball. Things were adding up.

"Today," Kato continued, "we do not like the colony making idea. To make immigrations—emmigrations?—in a spaceship is too expensive."

"Do you have any fairy tales about friendly Martians?" insisted Colonel Armstrong. His heavy-handed irony was divided equally between the stress on "friendly" and "Martian."

Kato was feeling the tension between these American officers more and more. He saw his support rested with General Sanders and he looked to him.

"We have Issac Asimov in the

July issue of *Astounding*, 1940, with a story. It is "Homo Sol.' In this kind of story the ariens are waiting for the Earthmen to make atoms power and space travels. The ariens are wanting them to join a galaxies club. It is possible they want mankind to keep from hurting itself. All the members are passing this same dangerous stage for a very long distance. The club has many lifes type, some are even needing methane gas in their suits when they attend the meeting. When he joins the Earthmen are graduating, politically speaking, and are becoming Man of the Solar System."

"Very interesting," said Dr. Yamanashi. "May I say something now?"

He tilted his head to one side and focused his eyes somewhere in the Fourth Dimension.

"I would guess, then, that you would have a variant theme, in which these—'aliens,' do you call them?—treat Earth as if it were, so to speak, an 'underdeveloped' planet."

Unfortunately for Kato there was such a theme. By confessing it for the benefit of the General he would be heeling to the professor's tone of condescension.

"*Hai!* They give technical assistance. Chad Oliver makes this idea by a small novel, 'Blood's a Rover,' also in *Astounding*. The month I forget but the year is . . ."

"Really, sir!" complained Colonel Armstrong. "Must we have all these bibliographic citations?"

"Give us just the themes, then," Sanders said, but he added politely: "We do have a deadline to meet."

"There is another story about first contact. I must give the title because the title is 'First Contact.' Earthmen meet the ariens in a Crab Nebula. The admirals on both ships are worried that they can lead each other to each other's planets system. Therefore, they cannot go home. They do not trust each other. But, at the same time, the radios men are learning each other's language."

Kato valved off a few more high-pressure giggles and carried on the burden of his recital.

"That part about language is not so good. There is the science of linguistics. It says, we cannot learn each other's language unless we have some thing to talk about—a common references object. Otherwise, how can we start? Any how, we know the worry is ended when we come to the ending of Leinster's story. It is written by Murray Leinster. Over the radio they are telling each other jokes about sex."

"Very naive," spluttered Colonel Armstrong. "We swapped dirty stories with the Russkies during the war, too, and so what!"

"I'm afraid our—er, NASAs—space program is not yet up to visiting the Crab Nebula," the General said. "What else have you got?" He wondered now what he had gotten himself into.

"There is a story by Katherine McLean called . . . I am sorry. There is a story about a spaceship. It wants to land on Earth. Earthmen hear the signal and they follow it down and down. But, they cannot find the ship. It is too small, lost inside a waters drop."

"Sir!" cried Colonel Armstrong.

"This is ridiculous!"

"Mr. Kato," said the General, "merely is trying to suggest possibilities."

Colonel Armstrong flagged a thick hand at the glowing screens.

"But that thing out there is *huge!* Sooner or later we've got to go in there and pry it open. Explode it, most likely. We can rebuild the stadium for the Nips when the dust clears, if that's a problem."

"You're forgetting the mothership." General Sanders turned to Dr. Yamanashi. "Perhaps you can make sense out of this, well . . material."

The Todai professor stood up, glad for the chance to get out of the canvas seat which pressed its mustiness into his grey, herring-bone suit. With measured words, quite pendantically, Dr. Yamanashi Genzaburō delivered his opinion.

"I have noted with interest, in the brief historical reference to the development of SF given to us by Mr. Kato, that its florescence coincides nicely with the accelerated rise of industrial civilization in the West. I note also the SF has taken root in our modern Japan, at the time of our post-war industrial rebirth. Surely this is no accident. SF is the reflection in literature of the spirit of a technological age. I myself have not read any of it, however."

Dr. Yamanashi Genzaburo hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his trim vest. The sharp points at the bottom compressed against his slim, angular body and they aimed unerringly, like plummets, to the earth.

"Perhaps this is because so little SF writing deals with my own field. It seems to dwell on the physical sciences. It shows a concern for gadgetry and mechanical innovation and in a crass, dehumanizing manner, I might add, that perfectly reflects the attitude of Victorian mechanistic materialism out of which the scientific-industrial revolution itself drew life and purpose. It shows little concern for human relations, as such, or for the relations between human kind and other cosmic creatures such as we are about to engage, or are in fact engaging at this very moment."

"You agree this SF material is not much help?" General Sanders doubted. Nothing was shaping up, after all. His was an impossible task to begin with. There was no right way, no wrong way to handle the contact. How could he be blamed for *any*thing he did, even for his gamble on the likes of Kato?

But Major Farrand urged: "I think he's on to something, sir."

Accustomed to lecturing in his imperious way, Dr. Yamanashi kept the floor without waiting approval to continue.

"I have one further observation to make. These stories, which Mr. Kato has related, project onto the cosmic creatures described in them the same technological bent of mind as that embraced by the SF writer and his readership. It is to be expected, I think, that any cosmic aliens skilled enough to visit Earth must be similarly motivated by a like scientific spirit or ethos to which, for Westerners, SF writing is one expression. Such an outlook cannot inhere in and of the technology itself."

Dr. Yamanashi sat down with a jerk, and even allowed himself to lean against the backing of his chair to show that he had solved the problem.

General Sanders retreated into his watch, but Major Farrand noticed this and broke in quickly.

"Sir, I think professor Yamanashi means that the capacity for intraspace mobility on the part of the Martians is invested with the same kind of romantic materialism inspiring our own."

"And, sir, I protest," put in Colonel Armstrong once again. His sunburned face was weary with protest. He protested as if he were reciting the alphabet.

"The control of space has military value. It is not romantic. We do not spend the taxpayers' money on our aerospace program for the amusement of pulp magazine readers."

"Aaah!" sang Dr. Yamanashi, alerted to the joys of a disputatious conference table. "If the American space program is military in nature, you must have an enemy. If an enemy, then you must have established an enemy relationship. Warfare, or the potential for armed conflict, takes place only between matched enemies who have come to resemble each other by sharing, at the very least, the same military technology.

"The Nuer of East Africa fight only the neighboring Dinka tribe; the Crow Indians of the American Plains steal horses only from the Blackfoot; the Jivaro headhunters of the Montaña take heads only from other headhunters. The Incas of ancient Peru extended their conquest empire only among those Andean peoples, who, like themselves, had developed a dense agricultural population and a political state. Both sides play the same game because sharing the same rules. Did not the Allies and the Germans tacitly agree not to launch gas warfare, even though fighting a jihad to the death?"

"What about Pearl Harbor?" asked Colonel Armstrong.

Dr. Yamanashi made gestures of buttoning his already buttoned vest.

"I was with the Naval Surgeon General in New Guinea. No prior relationship of any kind ever has been established between ourselves and the, er, Martians. I do not believe they are hostile."

Major Farrand nodded agreement.

"After all, sir, it takes two to make a fight. Arbitrary attack is more difficult to imagine than playful interest, say, in the form of a scientific expedition. Science, too, is a game, with its own self-imposed rules, but unlike warfare, one whose quest can be played at by a single party."

"A zoological expedition, Major?" Colonel Armstrong held to his asperity. "And we the specimens?"

Kato could not resist documenting the possibility.

"A. E. van Vogt's 'Asylum.' Earthmen are the domesticated animals of the ETs. Jerry Sheldon's 'Culture.' Men are kept animals, like rabbits."

The General smiled at Kato, saying: "You are a real *bon-bon*, a spoiled child, aren't you?"

Sanders inwardly glowed with satisfaction. The professor's case against hostility made sense, and confirmed his own feelings. The

Martians *did* land a massive hulk bigger than a C-130E Hercules without damaging anything more than the turf of the football field.

"What would you recommend, Dr. Yamanashi?"

"Peaceful curiosity. Incidentally, in the case of my own field—and I address this to officer Farrand—science *is* a two-handed game. The human subject matter, after all, does its own describing of itself. What people say about their beliefs, values, rules of conduct, and so on, is part of the data, in addition to observations on the non-verbalized aspects of behavior."

"Quite right; of course," Farrand acknowledged.

The General stood up.

"Fifteen hundred hours. Hour of the Monkey, as they say in Japan."

He looked back and forth at Mr. Kato and Dr. Yamanashi and said: "I can't order you to do this, but I want you in on a greeting party with me. Thanks to Farrand, you've offered us the only thing we have to go on."

Frightened, but willing, Kato nodded assent.

Dr. Yamanashi said: "I think that an excellent idea. Mr. Kato and I, dressed as we are in random costuming, will make an effective appearance." This was partly a barb at Kato's sports coat, unmatching trousers and scuffed shoes. "In contrast to the uniforms of the military, we should be able to convey the impression of a non-hostile, civilian delegation. This impression could be heightened by stationing troops in the rear as we approach the ship."

"That figures," the General said to himself. He picked up a black phone and ordered the men he already had planned for.

"The rest of you stay here and observe. You know contingency orders." Everybody looked at the red phone. "Farrand," he patted the transistorized sender in his breast pocket, "I want you on this all the time."

The plan called for the General, Kato and the professor to enter the stadium on the side facing Komazawa Gymnasium, to go up and out from the athletes' bunker and come to a halt, alone, at the inner edge of the track. A platoon of Air Force officers in dress uniform would file out the same exit and come to attention behind them. Then the three men would advance slowly toward the ship, stopping deliberately and regularly every twenty-five steps.

The fall sun beamed down like a distant spotlight in the grey afternoon air. It was very still. The three Earthmen took their first twenty-five steps on the greensward of the Olympic playing field, and stopped. They did not look back at the blue uniforms.

A round door opened on the side of the ship, near the ground, and a ramp slid out.

The men took twenty-five more steps. Shadows in the doorway moved and three aliens stepped out.

"Hominids!" breathed Dr. Yamanashi. "Gressorial primates. Parallel evolution."

They paced another twenty-five steps. Now they could see that the aliens were wearing what seemed to be compact respirators and dark

goggles, but no sealed helmets or hermetic clothing. One of them reached inside the door and was handed—yes, it could be described only as a table. Some objects were put on it.

Another set of steps. More objects.

Walking again. Halt. Almost there. Fear ebbed away. Evidently the aliens also were making an effort to conduct the confrontation with innocent movements.

Now a larger piece of apparatus was hauled out by six helpers, who quickly retreated. The original three aliens remained standing outside.

In two more carefully counted approaches they would be there. They took the first one. The aliens did not move. There was no further outgo from the ship.

They took the final steps at the same pace as before, and came to stand face-to-face with the aliens.

"Stereoscopic vision," whispered Dr. Yamanashi.

One of the aliens, matching the methodical pace of the humans who had marched toward them, slowly walked out from behind the table and stopped next to the bulky piece of apparatus standing there in front. A cable trailed from it into the open doorway. The alien reached out and prettily untelescoped a hooded attachment from the surface near the top. He stuck his face into it, then withdrew and looked at the humans. Then he stepped toward the ship and operated the machine from the side opposite them, causing the top part to adjust at a greater height, doubtlessly for the convenience of the taller-statured humans.

Nobody moved. Then the alien came around and stretched himself up to look into the hooded aperture again, then stepped back to his previous position.

Before the General could stop him, Kato rushed forward and plunged his head inside. None of the aliens made the slightest movement, neither the two behind the table nor the one next to Kato.

Kato had his hands up on the sides of the hood, peering intently into the interior. He saw an image in the distance. Despite the extremely dim, purplish lighting of the image he recognized it. But now, as he looked, the scene grew dimmer and went black.

He ducked his head out and looked straight ahead. What he had seen was what he now beheld before his unaided eyes, one of the elliptical ends of the stadium, the one with the blank face of the electric scoreboard rising above him.

For the first time Kato noticed that the alien on the side of the machine to his right confronted a duplicate viewing hood, at a slightly lower level. The alien moved his head into it and Kato followed suit. He encountered large, starting and unshielded eyes. Flick! The stadium scene came on once more, the angle of vision narrowing and growing brighter and brighter until he jerked back in pain.

Caressing his eyelids with thumb and forefinger he called to his two human companions, still pinching the Mongolian shallowness of his nasal root.

"A viewings machine!"

The flickering light in the hood

died and Kato promptly returned to his vigil. The blaze was gone and the scene appeared normal in all respects. Then he was looking into the face of the alien again, his goggles in place. Flick, the stadium, colorless and in the same queer telescopic perspective as before when the scene had brightened.

Comprehending now, Kato received the General and the professor who now walked up to him. He smiled broadly, one hand still confidently on the hood.

"They see owls!"

"*Aaaah, so desu-ka,*" murmured Dr. Yamanashi. He moved to rebuff Kato's triumphant insight, but remembering the Genral he offered him an explanation.

"Kato says they're nocturnal creatures. I should have guessed it. They look like nothing more in this world than overgrown Spectral Tarsiers. I was too busy thinking that their analogues in East India rank as a lower form of primate. Talking beasts!" He bent his head down at a tilt and siphoned in an agonizing stream of air at the corners of his lips.

Impressed with the appearance of comfortable understanding around him, the General followed the professor's footsteps toward the inviting spaceship. The professor was explaining that culture-bearing animals on Earth had evolved with a higher form of primate, and wasn't it indecent of the Martians to have gotten their start at the tarsoid level . . . .

Of course, the Martians hadn't come from Mars. That was just a modish designation. They came from much farther, and with a purpose.

Kato leaned into the machine again, and the cool air of a Tokyo November afternoon was as gentle as ever. He saw a different landscape and heard a voice, and he answered. The pictures changed, and he cooperated easily under the skilled guidance of the alien at his side. Now that the Earthling's visual range had been established, the language lesson, with properly adjusted visual aids, had begun. A luminescent drawer slid out from under the hood and Kato began to write with a strange crayon.

Dr. Yamanashi examined the artifacts on the table. From time to time he glanced up at the two aliens as though at waiters attending the smörgasbord layout in the Viking Room in the new wing of the Imperial Hotel where he recently had dined with a foreign anthropologist.

Unmolested, General Sanders swaggered up the ramp in the *roppō* style of Kabuki actors and into the purple light that glinted on the interior panels of the Martian spaceship.

General Langston P. Sanders, Commander United States Air Force Far East, retired, stood on the platform of a rented conference room in a downtown Washington hotel and watched the reporters take their seats. Despite the swagged, floor-length woolen draperies and the heavy carpeting, the room was loud with noises of expectation.

The General was in uniform. He hadn't worn it for two years and it fitted tightly. At first he didn't no-

tice the instantaneous winks of the electronic flash bulbs which caught him leaning heavily on the neat piles of books on the table beside the lectern. He was thinking that he still was worth air cargo from Japan. Indeed, he even had been granted a pre-publication set of the whole run of volumes.

He moved behind the lectern and waited for the clamor to die.

The room would hold a hundred. Eighty of the upholstered seats were occupied, almost exactly the number of Japanese correspondents covering North America. Not all were there, but the difference was evened by the few who had come up from Mexi- and Brazil.

"Gentlemen."

Jagged ends of conversation reduced to a smooth hush.

"When this report reached me, I decided it was time for me to speak out."

There was a great flurry of notebooks among all the Japanese reporters. At last General Sanders was going to reveal why he had been fired or retired, or whatever, and he was giving the scoop to them in a privileged news conference. The demotion of Major Farrand, the authentic Japanologist, pricked their interest not a bit.

Sanders had reached retirement age, in any case. That had helped save face—his and his nation's. But surely a man of his stature should have been allowed to stay on. He wasn't. The charge against him seemed to be that he had been "soft" on Martians; that he had allowed the Martians to photostat, or whatever they did, half the National Diet Library. Not to speak of the shipload of Mashiko pottery, Noh masks, silk kimono and God knows what else they carried away. It didn't make sense.

"The documents I have here will be released officially in a few days, so I'll be brief on the preliminaries."

The reporters strained forward to glimpse the titles, and the General loosed his one beaming grin of the evening.

"You people sure as hell get your stuff into print fast over there!"

The audience laughed in delighted sympathy. The General cleared his throat and got down to business.

"Now then. It was Dr. Yamanashi and his colleagues who wrote up these government reports. That figures because the Martians themselves turned out to be anthropologists. Or cultural anthropologists, I should say."

The audience stirred in its cushions and Sanders consulted a card and read off a word written in the Hepburn system of romanization.

"But they were the other kind as well."

He read off another word.

"They took measurements of human eyesight, and so forth. They can see UV radiation and we can't, for example.

"But the interesting thing about the Martian expedition—Dr. Yamanashi explained this to me—was its professional conduct. They came to learn something and they did a good job; knew how to go about their business in an advanced society, you might say. We've got atomic energy and space flight, too."

General Sanders coughed abruptly as he realized that his own professional pride, wounded though it was, was leading him to conceal his error behind an extension of praise to the aliens. To hell with them. Despite that brilliant gimcrack word, "aerospace," NASA had taken over space and the Air Force was left with, well . . . air. Next thing you know the Navy will take over space. Space Navy. Sounds like something Mr. Kato would dream up.

"Anyway, the Martians pulled the same trick Dr. Yamanashi says he pulls in his field work in the Trobriand Islands: give information to get information. You ask a Trobriander how his mother's brother supports his sister with yams from his garden, and he asks you how mama picked your wife. He tells you how to balance an outrigger canoe, and you tell him about rush hour in the Tokyo subways. Helps establish rapport, expecially as the conversation takes place entirely in Melanesian."

Here the General suffered another cough.

"In addition, you might give out a few sticks of tobacco as gifts. Dr. Yamanashi says he always takes a big supply of tooth brushes with him because the natives like the plastic handles."

Polite enjoyment greeted the intended humor.

"And what did *we* get out of the exchange?" The General started pumping his hands at his chest, but then dropped them, and added: "We Earthmen."

This was old news. All the reporters knew about the strange, metallic gifts. Everybody came to hear something sensational.

The General's voice turned hoarse.

"I'll tell you what we got. We got tobacco and plastic tooth brushes—that sort."

The General paced a few, short, nervous steps away from the lectern and returned, passing the stacks of books on the table. He picked up one and waved it methodically at shoulder level.

"Twenty-five volumes of anecdotes dictated by the Martians, recipes for this and that."

He lowered his arm.

"Yet we don't even know if the threads of Martian screws turn right or left."

The old soldier dropped the book out of sight on the slanting shelf of the lecturn with a slight but audible thud and with that he faded away. He was pleading now:

"Why should I be blamed for *that*? The Martians never intended to teach us big things like interstellar flight."

Picking up the book again the General flipped through the pages and recognized the pictures from his TV tapes, but not the strange hieroglyphic wording. The stuff could be translated of course, but the original text would bear close study under rival claims by foreign offices all around the world. Sanders had to admit that he had slipped up on his duty there.

"Is it my fault the Martians talked to Kato in Japanese?"

Thinking of Colonel Armstrong he supposed it was. But the reporters folded their notebooks and began leave. They did not hurry to file their story.

The End

THE ASCENSION

by K.M. O'DONNELL

Have it said and be done with it: "K.M. O'Donnell" is the pseudonym under which the editor frequently writes and occasionally publishes science-fiction. THE ASCENSION, sold some time ago to the previous administration, is a story which upon close rereading strikes me as so conservative—perhaps the word is reactionary—that I am surprised I could have written it. Or could take it so seriously. In expressivo, veritas. *I would be remiss if I did not freely acknowledge a stylistic debt, in this case, to an excellent story by J. G. Ballard to be published in Judith Merrill's anthology of British new-wave science-fiction.*

THE IMPLOSION CAME
FROM WITHIN AS ALWAYS THE point of it was that the wave had crested early in the middle of the term and was now heading down, down, down; even the Inner Circle itself had to admit now that things were on the downgrade and likely out of control else why the cessation of press conferences and the cancellation of all but the requisite civil liberties? His face, His features, leaden as always but suffused with that warmth which had enabled him to carry all but two of the minor states looked stricken now when he came before the populace and his hands fluttered above as well as behind the lectern; otherwise, everything was as before only moreso. Denial was the route of first possibility, of course, but He knew, He knew everything (had he not ridden to power on the crest of the Referendum?) and there were rumors in the City that he was snappish in private; given to longer and fouler jokes, generally afflicted with a malaise whose origins he attributed to the burdens of state but which could have only one source and that source would have to be

THE INCREASING FRAGMENTATION WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE CELLS OF THE NATION, THE GRAUDAL WORKING DOWN TOWARD

a point where communication

itself would be reduced to jargon and catch-phrases (He was very aware of this, having coined some of the best) and the possibilities for dialogue would be entirely shattered; that was what it was all coming to and once that happened, all the signs would be clear. After the dissolution of Language (which happened often, every so often; it worked in convulsions, but there it was) would come the riots and the crowds moving about the streets at dawn, soon after that, there would be the Presentation of Demands and then there would be only one course, the Balcony itself, and He didn't want it. That was the point; He didn't want it at all, he was only 37 (they were getting younger and younger all the time) and he had plans, plans which he was only dimly able to focus; he had ideas, perceptions, too. Nevertheless there it was and

THE MAN STOOD ON THE BURNING DECK AND SAID

"how long can we hold it off? Six months? A year? The crucial thing is to buy time, we can turn the corner for sure if we can only hold it off for a little while."

"It won't work," one of his advisers said, "the forces are already out of control. They reach a point where there's nothing that you can do, where instead of cementing your purposes the media only tend to implode them and the very handles of the government turn against you and then—"

"You say we've reached that point," He said, lighting a cigar absently, feeling a trickle of sweat running down the space behind His left ear and moistening his collar, trying to get a careful look at this Adviser because it was very important that he keep a close, meaningful relation right through to the end; you had to touch the nerves of people. (He knew.)

"Yes, we've reached that point," the Adviser said. "Every speech only makes things worse now, every public act gives the opposition a fresh focus. I wouldn't think we had six months left; I would say it's more like one. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," He said, and had his Adviser removed by the loyal forces stationed in and around the conference room and shot summarily in the basement, his corpse then being whisked to the highest levels of the building in the crematorium where it was fragmented and sifted like dust all over the city (there was no point in making martyrs). But He knew that it was merely a gesture; it was not the solution, the problem was not in the adviser but had to be

IN HIMSELF, THE FRAGMENTED ID, THE VISION THAT HE HAD GRASPED WITHIN HIMSELF ON THAT LONG-FORGOTTEN NIGHT AND TRANSMUTED SLOWLY, PATIENTLY, THROUGH ALL THE DEVICES OF THE DAY UNTIL THE NIGHT-VISION HAD WORKED THROUGH ALL THE

CORRIDORS OF TIME AND EVERYBODY KNEW THAT HE WAS WHAT HE SAID HE WAS; IT WORKED FINE UNTIL A CERTAIN POINT WHEN

The opposition presented its demands very cordially in the East Wing that morning; their Deputy of Public Information keeping his appointment precisely at noon, surrounded by his photographers (there had to be witnesses) and the men of the Media who were in on a contingent basis, having made pool arrangements previously and having agreed not to break certain details of the story until all details were known.

"We request you withdraw," the Deputy said.

"This is a formal request?" He asked, once again scratching his left ear in that once well-beloved gesture which had recently become so noxious; summed up, in the dead-center of the Referendum, the hateful, poisonous, corruption which had become the totality of his worth, poising gently on his toes, another beloved habit (being so youthful) which had now been turned, by the Opposition, into a certain manifestation of effeminacy which was so—*so basically against the principles upon which the Republic was bulwarked.*

"No," the Deputy said, "we thought it would be better to be informal, first. Want to get a good picture of me, standing next to Him, shaking hands? Will look good in the reels."

They took the picture. "This is not then a serving of notice," he said, coming down on his heels and trying to save the Consensus (when it was all too late) by forming his hands into the suggestion of fists and brandishing them, smiling, at the cameras. But no bulbs flickered. "Merely a preliminary."

"That is right," the Deputy said. "Hey, you're smaller looking in person than I thought you were from the TV. Do you want me to go down the list of grievances?"

"I thought you said it was informal," He said, nodding slightly and trying to look pleasant, thinking, inanely, of his perished Adviser whose silt, perhaps, had settled upon the shoulders of these very men in the room, so it wasn't dandruff at all, merely another refraction of Himself, not that that would give him any damned comfort at all, you understand.

"Doesn't mean I can't read the grievances. The War is very bad. And your sons have been carrying on, that business with the automobile was really too much. And we don't like the way you look when you smile. Besides, there's still injustice, poverty, to say nothing of suffering. And you eat too much, you said so yourself. That's about it, then."

"I'm sorry," He said, feeling a trickle of dismay working through him because, in front of all these people, the Demands had made the case, had proved the point, there was nothing to say: the car business had been ghastly with two people nearly killed because Martin had been drunk and the War was very bad, not going well at all as even his advisers told him and there was still poverty and injustice in the land. *It was true, it was all true, they had made their case* and

HE FELT SORROW WITHIN

HIM FOR HE HAD NOT DONE WHAT HE SHOULD HAVE; WHAT HE DID HE SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE AND THE CAMERAS

caught this as it passed across his face, lighting His tired features momentarily with a wisp of pain and the Deputy said, "what do you know? Well, in that case, we better go on the record, after all. You accept the charges?"

"I don't deny them," He said, because he could not; he was old, old, and cremating advisers in the elevator shaft, it was a hell of a thing. "I simply can't deny them."

"Then let's get the media in," the Deputy said, taking Him fondly by the elbow, "and put all of this on the record, put the show on the road. You have a little body odor, too. It's funny; you wouldn't think it from a distance."

The Media came in and He accepted the charges and took the vow of Penance, dwelling somewhat excessively on the soul of his lost Adviser who he said, had been stupid, not that that was any excuse at all.

WHICH LED SHORTLY TO THAT MOMENT IN THE SUN, STANDING ON THE PARAPET, CLUTCHING THE ANCIENT BOOK OF VOWS IN HIS HAND, THE REST STANDING FROZEN BEHIND HIM AS HE LIFTED HIS HEAD SLOWLY, WAITING FOR THE CRACK, WAITING FOR THE

thud of the distant rifle, the cameras trained closely on him, three or four hundred thousand watching Him from below, and his hands moved over the cracked surfaces of the book and he muttered, *it was my fault, it was my fault; if I had stayed with the polls and kept the Opposition close to me, it would have gone the other way; I might have held out six months, nine months longer, but it's too late, too late; I have failed; guess I wasn't, after all, the Messiah, although once I thought*—

They shot him.

He fell back soundless into his wife's arms, his dead lips reaching toward her eyes (making a fine picture for the late afternoons, as well as a permanent remembrance of our Sacred Dead).

THEY INAUGURATED THE 47TH PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC THE NEXT AFTERNOON AT THREE, THE SUN WAS VERY WARM AND THE PRESIDENT WIPED HIS FOREHEAD SEVERAL TIMES: BEING WIRED FOR SOUND, HIS FAINT MOANS OF PROTEST IN THE HEAT WERE HEARD BUT HE STAYED TILL THE END AND MADE HIS SPEECH OF COMMITMENT WHICH WAS, IT WAS ALL AGREED, THE MOST POWERFUL HEARD IN MONTHS; HE SAID THAT HE SAW A VISION OF

The End

Continued from page 25

what are you doing, burning your journal? What in the world for? We could have used the paper. I was thinking just the other day, if I had some paper, I could write down alternate menus for each meal, and you could just check off what you liked, instead of my having to bother you with a lot of questions. And have you accusing me of talking too much, I know that's what you think. At least I don't brood, my mind's an open book . "

THE END

THE BRAIN SURGEON

ROBIN SCHAEFER

Mark Harris (one of the very best American writers) once wrote an admired story called THE SELF MADE BRAIN SURGEON which, by the title alone, should have been about what this story is about but which, for some reason, wasn't. Mr. Schaefer has taken care of this lack in the canon in chilling and cohesive fashion.

THE kit came in Tuesday's mail. What it was was an instruction booklet written in a prose full of typos and filled with grey, smudged illustrations which were supposed to be parts of the human brain and a small case of tools, all of which reminded Carter of nail files but which had a somewhat more deadly function. The booklet itself was written in a hysterical cheerleader's prose which rather set Carter off because he was serious about the course and didn't like the feeling, vague as it was, that he was being played for a fool. *Get the brain back in shape,* the booklet began, *and the body falls into line; in the 20th-century, embattled as it is and filled with forces which more and more separate a man from the consequences of his acts, there is an increasing percentage of brain-damaged or brain-destroyed individuals—idealogy affects physiology, after all— and now you can come to grips with this terrible problem.* Carter wanted to come to grips with it badly. He was 33 and to the best of his knowledge—this intimation had sunk upon him heavily during the sighing years of his existence after 30—he had never come to grips with anything in his life.

The ad on the matchbook cover had made it seem somehow simpler and more dignified than it was turning out to be in the actuality; the ad had talked in vaguely spiritual terms of self-improvement, the increasing need for brain surgeons in the voluntary and private hospitals and the numerous opportunities opened to self-trained brain surgeons who finished the ten-week course with a satisfactory grade. Carter had wanted to answer it right off, but had felt impelled to tell them in a short covering letter attached to the matchbook flap that he had never gone past the elementary grades and even then had not liked biology, he hoped his willingness to try would not be held against him, however. The check that he had attached with a staple to the letter had probably turned the trick because a personal letter, attached to the kit and tools had welcomed him to the course and had generally had a very encouraging tone.

Nevertheless, the actuality de-

pressed him. He stood before the booklet, the tools and the letter in the spaces of his furnished room and looked at it for a long time, feeling strangely ill at ease as if, at any moment, someone from the office might come in, intercept him in the act of reading the booklet and say, *aha, Carter, you're trying to improve yourself you idiot!* and then the laughter would begin, to say nothing of the screams. But in a few moments Carter had managed to convince himself that no one would come in —no one ever came in anyway—and he went through the booklet for a second time, more carefully now, occasionally reaching out to fondle one of the instruments and even place its point tentatively at the ridges of its skull. They were certainly sharp, there was no doubt about it.

The booklet told him about the medulla oblongata, it told him about the cerebellum and ancillary functions and it had a long section dealing with the mons veneris and how it could best be disassembled quickly in the event of sudden hemhorraging. Once Carter was able to get past the style of the booklet and past the funny words, right into the material itself, he had to agree that the school had something on the ball; there was really something to this business after all. He had never understood the power that a brain surgeon possessed, right in his own hands.

When he reached the end of the booklet for the final time, Carter realized that he was now ready to operate and that the school had said absolutely nothing about a subject. *Applied pragmatically as stated theoretically,* the booklet had concluded, *the process will work for minor lobotomies even for the newcomer. Send your comments on the course and check to the school for your degree, frame enclosed extra.*

"Son of a bitch," Carter mumbled, when the full apprehension of his betrayal finally came upon him, however slowly. "Son of a bitches, they didn't send me any to *operate* on. How can you be a brain surgeon without even a *patient,* for God's sakes?" He could hear the laughter in the background, the cackles of peridition and he realized, not for the first time in his life although to no particular effect, that he had somewhat gone beyond his means and been hurt again. "Wasn't no course," he said, "wasn't no course at all. It was just a way. To get money from me."

He lifted the tools, then, to hurl them from the window; toss them down the four stories where they would bounce and clatter on the sidewalk or, hopefully on the roofs of cars but then, feeling their wiry tensity in his palm, he found that he could not do it. They were good for something after all; the booklet itself had described function. He looked at himself in the mirror and his eyes—their eyes, all of the eyes—met with a terrible knowledge. Carter looked at the man in the mirror and the man in the mirror nodded. "Go ahead," he said to him, "might as well. I'm one of those feel cut off from their functions; things haven't been right for a long time. Blame the 20th-century, blame me: what the hell do I care?" The eyes blinked. "I really don't feel well, you see," the man in the mirror said.

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HOW NOW PURPLE COW

BILL PRONZINI

Bill Pronzini (THE PROPHECY, December 1966 FANTASTIC) returns with one of those deadly, disturbing little stories which, by extending a cliche to its logical conclusion, indicate that these cliches by which we live just might be loaded.

WHEN Floyd Anselmo saw the purple cow grazing on a hillside of his dairy ranch one cold morning in October, he thought his mind must be hallucinating.

He brought his pick-up truck to a sharp halt at the side of the access road that wound through his property, set the brake, and leaned across the seat to have another look. But it was still there. He stared, willing it to disappear. It didn't.

Anselmo shook his head slowly and got out of the truck. He stood on the graveled roadbed, shading his eyes from the glare of the winter sun. Still there.

By God, Anselmo thought. Next thing you know, it'll be pink elephants. And me not even a drinking man.

He drew the collar of his coat up against the chill, early morning wind, sighed deeply, and walked around the truck. He made his way carefully through the damp grass at the side of the road, climbed easily over the white fence there, and began to ascend the hillside.

Halfway up, he paused for another look. Damned if the cow *wasn't* purple; a rather pleasant, almost lilac, shade of that color. Still, the contrast with the bright chlorophyll green of the grass, and the dull, brown-and-white of the other cows, was rather startling.

Anselmo climbed to within twenty feet of where the purple cow was grazing. Cautiously, he made a wide circle around the animal. It paid no attention to him.

"Listen, here." he said aloud, "you ain't real."

The cow chewed peacefully, ignoring him.

"Cows ain't purple." Anselmo said.

The animal flicked its tail lightly.

He stood looking at it for quite some time. Then he sighed again, rather resignedly this time, turned and started down the hillside.

His wife was finishing the breakfast dishes in the kitchen when he came in a few minutes later. "Back so soon?" she asked.

"Amy," Anselmo said, "there's a purple cow grazing on a hillside down the road."

She wiped her hands on a dishtowel. "I made some fresh coffee," she told him.

Anselmo tugged at his ear. "I said, there's a purple cow grazing on a hillside down the road."

"Yes, dear," his wife said. She began stacking dishes in the cupboard.

Anselmo went outside. He saw Hank Raiford, his foreman, coming up from the milking barn.

"Morning, Mr. Anselmo," Hank said.

"Hank," Anselmo said, frowning, "I saw this purple cow grazing on a hillside down the road."

Hank looked at him.

"I thought it was an hallucination at first. But I went up there and the damned thing was purple, all right. I can't figure it out."

"Well," Hank said, watching him strangely.

"You haven't seen it by any chance, have you?"

"No, sir."

Anselmo nodded. "Want to come out with me and have a look at it?"

"Well," Hank said, "there are a few things I got to take care of right now."

"Maybe later," Anselmo said.

"Sure," Hank told him, moving away quickly. "Maybe later."

Anselmo went back into the house. He crossed directly to the telephone on the hall table and put in a call to Jim Player, the editor of the local weekly newspaper.

"Floyd Anselmo here," he said when Player came on.

"What can I do for you, Floyd?"

"Well," Anselmo said. "I was coming into town a while ago, and I was driving down my access road when I saw this purple cow grazing on a hillside."

There was silence from the other end.

"Jim?" Anselmo asked.

"Purple cow?" Player said finally.

"That's right," Anselmo told him. "Purple cow."

Another silence, shorter this time. Then Player laughed. "You're putting me on, right?"

"No," Anselmo said seriously.

"Look, Floyd, I'm a busy man," Player said. "With all these silly damned UFO sightings hereabout lately, I haven't had time to . . ." He broke off, chuckling. "Say, maybe this purple cow of yours came in one of those flying saucers people claim to have been seeing."

"Jim," Anselmo said slowly, "I don't know anything about flying saucers. All I know is there's a purple cow grazing on one of my hillsides. If you want to come out here, I'll show it to you."

Player was silent for a moment. Then he said, "All right, I'll come out. But if you're ribbing me . . ."

"The hillside I'm talking about is maybe a mile onto my land from the highway." Anselmo told him. "I'll meet you there."

"Forty-five minutes," Player said unhappily, and hung up.

Anselmo went to the door. His wife came into the room just as he reached it. "Where are you going, dear?"

"To meet Jim Player."

"Whatever for?"

"To show him the purple cow I saw."

Her forehead corrugated worriedly. "Floyd . . ."

"I'll be back in an hour or so," Anselmo said, and stepped outside.

He started his pick-up and drove down the access road. When he reached the hillside, he saw that the

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THE BOOK OF WORLDS
DR. MILES J. BREUER
Illustrated by Frank R. Paul

Or, perhaps, the title of this one should be: "The best of all possible worlds would be no world at all"

TO psychiatrists, Professor Cosgrave's case is a striking study in the compensatory psychosis. He perches on the edge of his bed in a private sanitarium for mental diseases, and coos and twitters and waves a wreath of twigs in his lips. Whether he will ever recover his sanity or not is problematical. Whether anyone else will ever be able to understand and use his hyper-stereoscope is also problematical. And whether, if it were figured out, anyone would ever have the courage to use it, in the face of what happened to Professor Cosgrave, is still further remote in the realms of doubt and conjecture.

I have repeated the story for medical men so many times, that I am beginning to see a sort of logical sequence in things that at first utterly bewildered me. As Professor Cosgrave's chief assistant, I was undoubtedly closer to him and knew more about his work and about the mechanism of his tragic fate, than anyone else. The physicists who merely went over his apparatus and equations and did not know the man, did not grasp the significance of what happened, as did I, who lived and worked with him every day and many a night.

Yes, the thing begins to look logical to me now, after it has been on my mind constantly for several months. As no one else has been able to understand exactly what happened, I ought to do my best to render a consecutive account of events.

Professor Hemingford Cosgrave was the most highly civilized man I have ever known. If mankind is in truth becoming more civilized as time goes on, then it is following in the footsteps of such advanced and refined examples of human progress as was my late superior in the School

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of Physics. He was a small, delicate-looking man, with classical Greek features; with very little physical strength but with infinite physical endurance. To spend day and night in his laboratory for a week on end seemed to produce no deleterious effects upon him.

When I extol the rare combination of mathematical genius and experimental ability of this man, so well known, I am wasting my breath. But the world does not know so much about his other exquisitely subtle mental sensibilities. He was a poet and an artist; he saw all the beauty in Cosmos with a wondering eye. And he was as gently sympathetic as a woman. The reports of famine victims suffering in China disturbed him at his experiments. His student-assistants would conspire to guard him against the visits of the old Salvation Army Captain, who more than once lured him away from his desk, with the tale of some woman or child in distress. He was the last man in the world to be permitted to witness the horrors, that he said he saw.

A little over two years ago, he and I were planning together a demonstration for his class in Quadrics. We had considered making models of some of the solids, with whose equations the class was working; but the time and labor involved in this was almost out of question under the circumstances. I suggested that the Mathematics Department of the University of Chicago had all of these models already made. We solved the problem by my going to Chicago and photographing these models with a stereoscopic camera. The prints of the strangely shaped solids, viewed in a stereoscope, were quite as satisfactory for class purposes as would have been the models.

I had brought the pile of cards to Professor Cosgrave for approval. He had run through three or four of them, and seemed quite pleased. Suddenly he laid them down and stared at me.

"Do you know what just struck me?" he asked in a queer tone.

I shook my head.

"You know what I'm working on?" he asked.

"You mean your Expansion Equations—?"

"Popularly called the Fourth Dimension." He smiled at the thought. "And you know what I've begun to suspect about it, especially since the experiment with the gyroscope?"

"Yes, I do—though it's hard for me to grasp that there really might be another dimension. I've always considered the fourth dimension a mathematical abstraction."

"No abstraction."

He said it as one might say, two and two make four.

"Really something here. Do you see the connection now?" He shook the stereoscope at me.

I shook my head. I felt helpless. His mind was always far ahead of mine. He explained:

"This instrument takes a two-dimensional figure on a flat plane and builds it up so that the brain sees it as a three-dimensional solid in space!"

He waited for me to grasp his idea, which I still failed to do. He smiled indulgently.

If the fourth dimension is really a

dimension and not a mathematical abstraction—" he smiled confidentially as he emphasized the *if*; "can we not build a hyper-stereoscopic instrument which will build up a three-dimensional model of a fourth-dimensional object into an image perceptible to the brain in its true four-dimensional form?'

I continued to stare blankly from him to the stereoscope and back again.

"As a matter of fact," he continued; "our three-dimensional world is merely a *cross-section* cut by what we know as *space* out of the Cosmos that exists in four or more dimensions. Our three-dimensional world bears the same relation to the true status of affairs as do these flat photographs to the models that you photographed. Surely you can grasp that from our equations?"

"Yes," I assented eagerly, glad to find familiar ground to rest my feet on; "just as the present time is a cross-section of infinity cut by a moving space-sector whose motion is irreversible; it moves in one direction only."

He beamed at me for that. Then in silence he finished looking over the geometrical stereograms and handed them to me.

He spent six months working out his idea on paper. He did not discuss his plans with me very much; but he did give me sections of the problems to work out. For instance, he asked me to work out the equations for the projection of a tesseracoid:

$C_1W^4 + C_2X^4 + C_3Y^4 + C_4Z^4 = K_4$

From eight different directions, each opposing pair of right angles to the other three pairs. Most of the problems he gave me were projection problems; but beyond that I could not grasp the drift of his work.

Then he spent a year in experimental work. As I am a mathematician and not a laboratory man, I had less to do with the actual construction of the hyperstereoscope. But even there I helped. I worked at the refractive indices of crystals that he made in an electric furnace; and I worked out the mathematics of a very ingenious instrument for integrating light rays from two directions into one composite beam.

Apparently the thing was a complex job. Professor Cosgrave spent three weeks in the research laboratory of the Mechanical Engineering Department. He went to Chicago and remained there for a couple of months, leaving as his address the Psychology Department of the Chicago University. One day he announced to me calmly that the hyperstereoscope was finished.

"May I look?" I asked eagerly, expecting to be able to see out into the fourth dimension.

The instrument was pointed out of the window at the campus. It had three telescopes arranged in the form of a triangular parallelepiped. One end of the room was full of apparatus, electron tubes and photoelectric cells, a scanning disk, and tangles of wire strung between boxes and cabinets faced with dials and meters. At a small table there were two oculars to look into. I put my eyes to them.

It made me dizzy. It looked like rolling vapors—dense, heavy vapors, and boiling clouds, rolling and turmoiling swiftly and dizzily. It looked vibrant with heat. Through a

rift here and there I got glimpses of a glowing liquid, like the white-hot metal in a foundry coming from the ladle. There were boiling, bubbling lakes of it. I shrank away from the instrument.

"What is it?" I gasped.

"I'm not sure," returned Professor Cosgrave. "Prolonged observation and correlation of observed data will be necessary before we can explain what we see."

He was whirling dials rapidly. I looked again. There were vapors, but they were thin spirals and wisps. Mostly there were bare, smoking rocks. There was a bleak, insufferably dreary stretch of them, extending on into the infinite distance. It looked hot. It was infinitely depressing. I didn't like it.

I stood for a long time behind Professor Cosgrave, as he sat at one little table with his eyes to the oculars of the instrument and twiddled the dials. I was about to turn around and slip out of the room and leave him to play with it alone, when he sat up suddenly. A new idea had struck him.

"Beyond a doubt these places that we see are regions of some sort, not in our 'space' at all, or else infinitely far away. But, in the direction of the fourth dimension they are quite near us. Just as if you are in a window on the top story of a skyscraper office building and a dozen feet away is a man in the window of an adjacent building. To your three-dimensional vision he is quite near you. But to your body, whose motion is confined to two-dimensional surfaces, your friend is a long distance away. To your touch, instead of a dozen feet away he is a quarter of a mile away; that is how far you have to travel before you can reach him.

"Or, if I make a mark at each end of this sheet of paper and then bend the sheet double, from a three-dimensional standpoint the marks are a millimeter apart. But from a two-dimensional standpoint they are thirty centimeters apart.

"This stereoscope *sees across*, in the same way, to some other universe."

He shook his head.

"My analogies are poor. It is a difficult idea to express. But look!"

I went to the eye-pieces. There was water. It was endless. Just water. It swelled and rolled and pulsated. A swing of the telescopes over at the window brought into view some black rocks. Over the rocks was slime. A slime that flowed and rounded itself into worm-like forms. It was hideous. I left the gloating Professor Cosgrave and hurried away.

After that, as my recollection serves, things moved rapidly. I saw him a couple of days later at his stereoscope.

"I have it!" he said elatedly when he saw me. I hastened to look into the instrument.

"No!" he exclaimed, pulling me away. "I mean an analogy. Like points on the leaves of a book. You see?"

I nodded. He continued.

"Points on the adjacent leaves of a book are far apart, considered two-dimensionally. But, with the book closed, and to a three-dimensional perception which can *see across*

from one page to another, the two points are very near together. You see?"

I nodded again.

"Now look!"

I saw a dense swamp, among huge trees with broad, rich green leaves. Gigantic saurians stalked about and splashed hugely.

"It is like a story of evolution," I couldn't help remarking.

He nodded in satisfaction and mused on:

"Each of these must be a separate and distinct world. I can go back and forth among them at will. It is not a continuous story. There are steps. Definite jumps. Nothing between. I can see any one of them at any time. Like the leaves of a book!"

I looked again. The professor had not touched the setting and the scene was exactly the same. A huge saurian was devouring some living creature from the water. The water was threshed into a pink foam, and light-red blood was splashed over the green foliage. The professor was talking:

"What we see is worlds or universes arranged side by side in the fourth dimension. Like leaves in a book.

"Heavens! What an encyclopedia!"

"I see," I said slowly, not sure that I really did. "Like serial sections cut in a microtome."

"Comparable. But not really sections. Separate worlds. Three-dimensional worlds like our own. Side by side, each of them one page ahead of the preceding. Three-dimensional leaves in a four-dimensional book."

It was a little difficult to grasp. I thought a while.

"I'd like to have Carver of Purdue see this," I said. "Do you remember his article in the *Scientific Monthly* about your four-space equations? It was almost personal. Ill-becoming to a scientific man. I'd give my shirt to see his face when he sees this. Let's bring him down."

Professor Cosgrave shook his head.

"What object can there be in causing the man any unpleasant feeling? The world holds enough unpleasant situations without our multiplying them. I shall break the news to him pleasantly when the opportunity presents itself."

That was typical of Professor Cosgrave. That is just how considerate and sympathetic he always was. Always he was trying to spare other people unpleasantness or discomfort. The man was wasted on our present-day selfish and discourteous age. He ought to have been born into some future Utopia.

What would he do now? I wondered. There was obviously a vast number of worlds to observe. It would take a lifetime to have a good look at each one of them. Would he spend his time on satisfying his curiosity and turn his back on mathematical physics? He still had numerous important problems ahead of him in the latter field. He was barely started on his career as a mathematical physicist, yet the world was expecting great things of him.

However, for the present there was apparently one phase of the purely observational pursuit for him.

"The 'leaves' in this book seem to

be arranged in absolutely orderly succession," he said. "By chance I began at the end where the evolutionary development was lowest. By swinging my visual field through the unknown dimension in one direction, I can see the worlds in succession, each a little further evolved than the preceding. Now, I'm a physicist, and cannot afford to waste much time in gratifying idle curiosity. But, I must spend a few days or weeks in following out this evolutionary series before I turn it over to some biologist. This is too much of a temptation for any kind of a scientific man."

For several days I would come into the room and see him there with his eyes glued to the oculars, too absorbed even to notice my entrance. His attitude was one of tense and motionless concentration. I would steal out again, loth to disturb him. Once I came in and noted that he was trembling violently all over as he gazed into the machine. A couple of days later I found him in the same position, as though he had not moved since I had been there last. His whole body was set and rigid. I was alarmed at the way he looked. I stepped closer; his jaw was set and his breathing was shallow.

I felt concerned about him, and I made a sound to attract his attention. He started suddenly and leaped to his feet, and turned to me a face that was white with horror.

"I've been a student!" he gasped. "A scientific man. I never stopped to realize that men were like that." He sank into a chair, his hands on his knees, his head drooped.

I looked into the stereoscope. This time there were men. An army stood drawn up, with shining helmets and fluttering pennants, extending far into the dim distance. The foreground was red and active; everything was splattered with blood; men were swinging swords. There were rows of captives and men cutting their heads off. I watched only a second before I recoiled, but saw a dozen heads roll on the ground and fountains of blood gush over victims and executioners alike.

"You have no business looking at that!" I exclaimed.

It was incongruous. This delicately organized, unselfish, tenderhearted man to be spending his days gazing at those things.

"It's been that way from the beginning," he whispered, shuddering. "Ever since rudimentary humans appeared in the series . . . war, brutality, cruelty, wanton killing of people . . ."

But I couldn't keep him away from the thing. He called me to it and explained:

"As far as I can understand this, I am swinging the field of view through an arc in a dimension that extends at right angles to the three known dimensions. At intervals I see a world. In between there is nothing. The swing is accomplished by changing the intensity of the electrical field through crystals of this zirconium compound, which alters their refractivity.

"I am going steadily down my scale toward zero. The worlds are getting further and further advanced in the scale of evolution. I can see it clearly now."

In a moment he was back at the

instrument, completely absorbed, and oblivious of me. I was worried about him. I came in daily to watch him, and many a time I came and went without his having been conscious of my presence. There was something wrong about the thing; the intense absorption of a man of his sympathetic type in scenes of inhumanity such as I had seen. One day when I opened the door, he was facing it, waiting for me.

"I am nearly at zero. Look! A world much like ours."

In the lenses I saw the buildings of a city, rather odd, but for all the world suggesting London or Paris; swarming crowds of people, hurrying vehicles. It was quite like our world, but just enough different so that I was sure it was not our world.

Professor Cosgrave was pale and agitated.

"Man's inhumanity to man!" he moaned. "It would drive me distracted, were there not one hope. Just now, in that fair city, I watched a mob drag men and women through the streets and stick their bodies up on poles on a bridge; and blood dripped into the river.

"But, step by step, there is more intellect, more material progress. There is hope that man will eventually develop intelligence enough to stop his senseless and cruel fighting, and learn cooperation and altruism. Each of these worlds seems to bring us a little nearer to that."

He called my attention as he turned his dials to zero, and looked into the instrument. He turned to me with a queer smile.

"Look!"

I applied my eye again. There was the campus and althletic field, the gravel drives and the men's dormitory. Through the stereoscope or through the window, I got the same view.

"At zero we see our own 'plane' of the unknown dimension. *Our* page in the book. You see?"

"Now what?" I asked.

"Now negative potential values. Now to see the pages ahead of us in the book. Worlds further evolved than ours. The future! Up to the limits of the inductance of my coils!"

His eyes glowed and his breath came fast.

"The future!" he whispered as he bent over the oculars and carefully turned his dials. "In the future lies man's hope. In intelligence and science!"

Again he sat in motionless absorption. Occasionally he touched a dial or whispered to himself. Finally, as he said not a word for a half an hour, I tiptoed out.

The next day I found him staringly expecting my arrival with wide-open eyes, like a man with exophthalmic goiter.

"I don't know what makes me go on with this!" he gasped. "Men are beasts. Hopeless. They never will be anything else. Twenty airplanes went over a city dropping bombs. Swept it away. It is burning now. In one place I saw through the smoke a small child hemmed in a courtyard by flames. A city as grand as Chicago. A sea of smoke and flame." He sat with his head bowed in his hands.

I didn't know what to say. He seemed utterly crushed; I could not rouse him. Finally I led him out of

the room, got him in my car, and took him home. I pondered on how I might get him away from that machine for a while.

But the next day he was back again at the machine. I had classes until four o'clock that afternoon. Then I hurried into the laboratory. I found a changed man.

He was stern and determined. This rather relieved me; for I had been worried about his hopeless depression, and I did not realize what was taking place in the man. It seemed to me then that he had shaken off the depression and had determined to do something about the situation of war and humanity.

"Here is a world thousands of years ahead of ours," he related. "Humanity crowds it densely beyond our conception. Thank God, it is another world somewhere else, and not ours. People have not risen an inch from bestiality in millenia. No —stay away from it; I can't permit you to witness such horrors. Men and women solders piled up in mangled, bloody heaps as high as the Capitol Building. Each belch of that machine kills a thousand more—stay away!

"It is not our world. We can still save our world from that. We start today, Harlan, you and I, to prevent such things from happening in our world."

"We've got to stop it!" he said again. But he sat and stared into the instrument.

I was puzzled and not a little alarmed. The sudden, stern determination of the gentle little man fitted him most strangely. I would have thought him play-acting for my benefit, had he not looked most terribly grim. Anyway, I was relieved to see that terrible depression had left him, and that he had got hold of himself. That is what I thought then.

He permitted me to lead him out again, and I took him home. He kept saying with grim determination:

"Not to *our* human race; We *won't* let it happen!"

On the following day I had no classes, and I called him at his home early in the morning. He had already left. I hurried to his laboratory. He was already there, spinning dials feverishly, and then bending over the lenses. He had an unusual, nervous air about him.

"Destructive rays!" he said to me as I came in, but without looking away from the oculars. "Wither up a thousand people like snowflakes in a chimney-blast. Terrific explosives. Deadly gases. Bombs filled with disease germs. Diabolical inventiveness."

He whirled around and faced me.

"Everything indicates that our world is part of this scheme. It is going the same way. It will be what this is. We must stop it."

He stood up in the middle of the room and talked, and I took the opportunity to peer into the lenses. I saw a dead world. Wreckage. Ashes. Explosion holes. Disintegrating bodies. Nowhere a movement. Even vegetable life had withered. There was a pile of bombs ready to fire beside a huge gun and a gunner lay dead beside them.

There was a queer declamatory quality to the speech that Professor Cosgrave was making. He said queer, silly things about Universal Peace. And yet I didn't suspect.

Only the next morning when I

came in, it dawned on me. He was perched on a tall stool, with a wreath of twigs in his lips. As I came in, he put the wreath around his neck, and sang in a high key:

"I am the Dove of Peace.
Listen to me: All men are brothers.
There shall be no more war.
I shall spread my wings over the world.
I am the Dove of Peace."

Tears sprang to my eyes as the truth suddenly dawned upon me. I gulped as I hurried to another room to telephone. Poor Professor Cosgrave!

Then, as they led him out, I looked into the lenses. There was a rugged stretch, smooth, gently undulating holes and hummocks as far as the eye could reach, covered with a slimy, disgusting fungus growth. Here and there the fungus covered a ragged shape suggesting the ruined wall of a building. There was no change in this scene during the four days before the machine's batteries ran down (for I did not know how to shut it off). Now, no one knows how to operate it.

Professor Cosgrave knows me. He is always glad to see me at his room at the sanitarium. But he talks to me only about Universal Brotherhood and about my duty to save mankind from strife and bloodshed. And he flaps his arms like wings and coos.

The End.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Sol Cohen, Publisher

"The civilized ones are at it again!"

THE WILL

BY WALTER M. MILLER JR.

It has been said that our children do not belong to us — that we are only their custodians for a little time — that what confuses them can also confuse us — and, that in times of great crisis, they turn instinctively to the source of true understanding.

THE will of a child. A child who played in the sun and ran over the meadow to chase with his dog among the trees beyond the hedge, and knew the fierce passions of childhood. A child whose logic cut corners and sought shortest distances, and found them. A child who made shining life in my house.

Red blood count low, wildly fluctuating . . . Chronic fatigue, loss of weight, general lethargy of function . . . Noticeable pallor and muscular atrophy . . . the first symptoms.

That was eight months ago.

Last Summer, the specialists conferred over him. When they had finished, I went to Doc Jules' office — alone, because I was afraid it was going to be bad, and Cleo couldn't take it. He gave it to me straight.

"We can't cure him, Rod. We can only treat symptoms — and hope the research labs come through. I'm sorry."

"He'll die?"

"Unless the labs get an answer."

"How long?"

"Months." He gave it to me bluntly — maybe because he thought I was hard enough to take it, and maybe because he knew I was only Kenny's foster father, as if blood-kinship would have made it any worse.

"Thanks for letting me know," I said, and got my hat.

I would have to tell Cleo, somehow. It was going to be tough. I left the building and went out to buy a paper. A magazine on the science rack caught my eye. It had an article entitled *Carcinogenesis and Carbon-14*, and there was a mention of leukemia in the blurb. I bought it along with the paper, and went over to the park to read. Anything to keep from carrying the news to Cleo.

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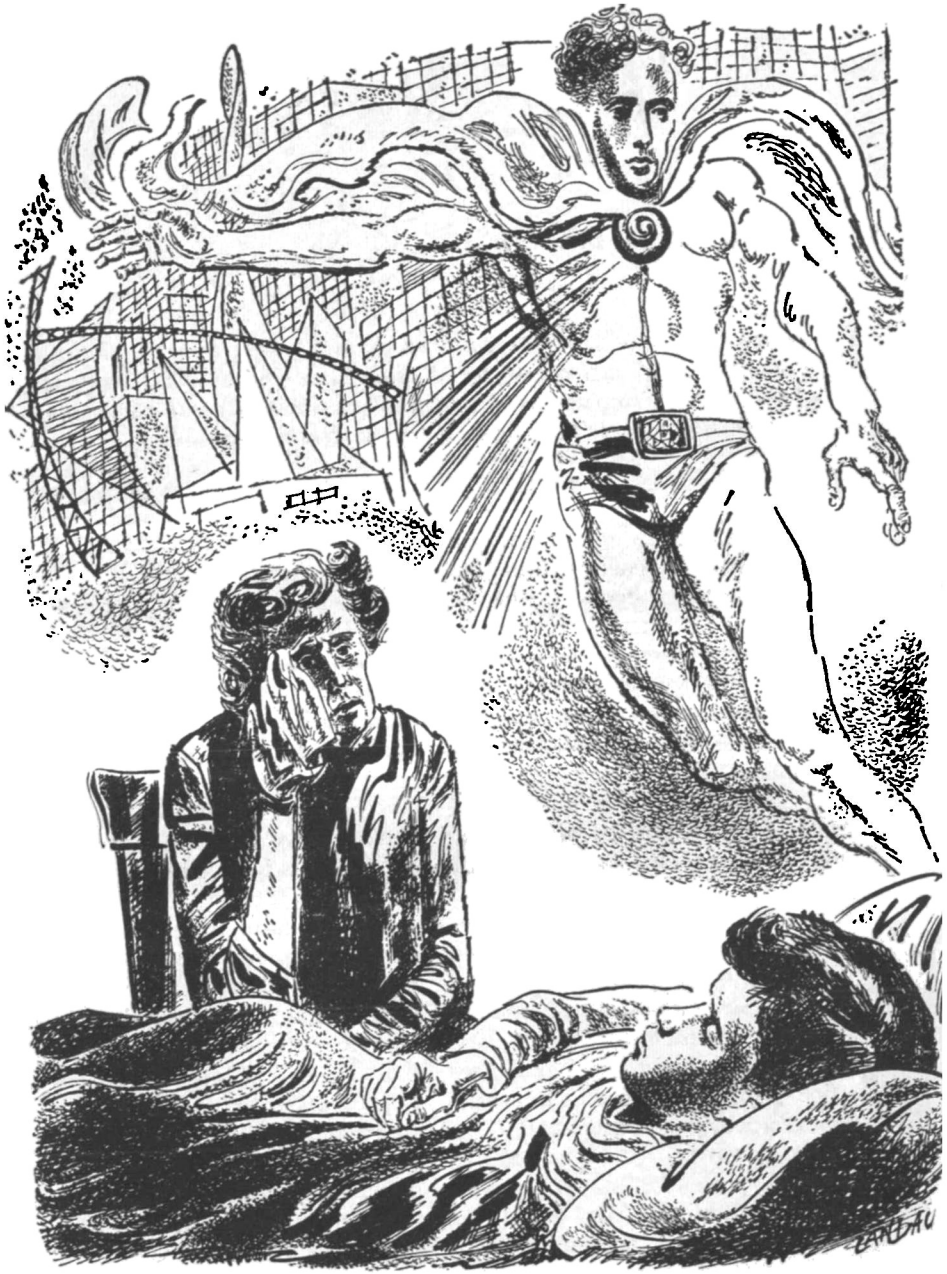

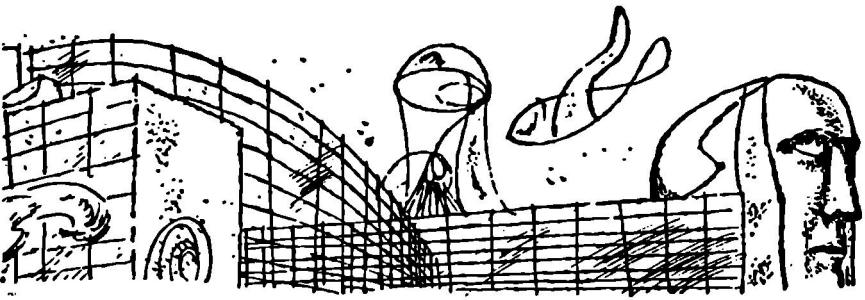

The research article made things worse. They were still doing things to rats and cosmic rays, and the word "cure" wasn't mentioned once. I dropped the magazine on the grass and glanced at the front page. A small headline toward the bottom of the page said: COMMUNITY PRAYS THREE DAYS FOR DYING CHILD. Same old sob-stuff — publicity causes country to focus on some luckless incurable, and deluge the family with sympathy, advice, money, and sincere and ardent pleas for divine intervention.

I wondered if it would be like that for Kenny — and instinctively I shuddered.

I took a train out to the suburbs, picked up the car, and drove home before twilight. I parked in front, because Cleo was out in back, taking down clothes from the line. The blinds were down in the living room, and the lantern-jawed visage of Captain Chronos looked out sternly from the television screen. The Captain carried an LTR (local-time-reversal) gun at the ready, and peered warily from side to side through an oval hole in the title film. Kenny's usual early-evening fodder.

"*Travel through the centuries with the master of the clock!*" the announcer was chanting.

"Hi, kid," I said to the hunched up figure who sat before the set, worshipping his hero.

"*Sssshhhhhhhh!*" He glanced at me irritably, then transferred his individual attention back to the title film.

"Sorry," I muttered. "Didn't know you listened to the opening spiel. It's always the same."

He squirmed, indicating that he wanted me to scram — to leave him to his own devices.

I scrammed to the library, but the excited chant of the audio was still with me. ". . . *Captain Chronos, Custodian of Time, Defender of the Temporal Passes, Champion of the Temporal Guard. Fly with Captain Chronos in his time-ship* Century *as he battles against those evil forces who would* —"

I shut the door for a little quiet, then went to the encyclopedia shelf and took down "LAC-MOE." An envelope fell out of the heavy volume, and I picked it up. Kenny's. He had scrawled "Lebanon, do not open until 1964; value in 1954: 38¢," on the face. I knew what was inside without holding it up to the light: stamps. Kenny's idea of buried treasure; when he had more than one stamp of an issue in his collection, he'd stash the duplicate away somewhere to let it age, having heard that age increases their value.

When I finished reading the brief article, I went out to the kitchen. Cleo was bringing in a basket of clothes. She paused in the doorway, the basket cocked on her hip, hair disheveled, looking pretty but anxious.

"Did you see him?" she asked.

I nodded, unable to look at her, poured myself a drink. She waited a few seconds for me to say something. When I couldn't say anything, she dropped the basket of clothes, scattering underwear and linens across the kitchen floor, and darted across the room to seize my arms and stare up at me wildly.

"Rod! It *isn't* —"

But it was. Without stopping to think, she rushed to the living room, seized Kenny in her arms, began sobbing, then fled upstairs when she realized what she was doing.

Kenny knew he was sick. He knew several specialists had studied his case. He knew that I had gone down to talk with Doc Jules this afternoon. After Cleo's reaction, there was no keeping the truth from him. He was only fourteen, but within two weeks, he knew he had less than a year to live, unless they found a cure. He pieced it together for himself from conversational fragments, and chance remarks, and medical encyclopedias, and by deftly questioning a playmate's older brother who was a medical student.

Maybe it was easier on Kenny to know he was dying, easier than seeing our anxiety and being frightened by it without knowing the cause. But a child is blunt in his questioning, and tactless in matters that concern himself, and that made it hell on Cleo.

"If they don't find a cure, when will I die?"

"Will it hurt?"

"What will you do with my things?"

"Will I see my real father afterwards?"

Cleo stood so much of it, and then one night she broke down, and we had to call a doctor to give her a sedative and quiet her down. When she was settled, I took Kenny out behind the house. We walked across the narrow strip of pasture and sat on the old stone fence to talk by the light of the moon. I told him not to talk about it again to Cleo, unless she brought it up, and that he was to bring his questions to me. I put my arm around him, and I knew he was crying inside.

"I don't want to die."

There is a difference between tragedy and blind brutal calamity. Tragedy has meaning, and there is dignity in it. Tragedy stands with its shoulders stiff and proud. But there is no meaning, no dignity, no fulfillment, in the death of a child.

"Kenny, I want you to try to have faith. The research institutes are working hard. i want you to try to have faith that they'll find a cure."

"Mack says it won't be for years and years."

Mack was the medical student. I resolved to call him tomorrow. But his mistake was innocent; he didn't know what was the matter with Kenny.

"Mack doesn't know. He's just a kid himself. Nobody knows — except that they'll find it sometime. Nobody knows when. It might be next week."

"I wish I had a time-ship like Captain Chronos."

"Why?"

He looked at me earnestly in the moonlight. "Because then I could go to some year when they knew how to cure me."

"I wish it were possible."

"I'll bet it is. I'll bet someday they can do that too. Maybe the government's working on it now."

I told him I'd heard nothing of such a project.

"Then they ought to be. Think of the advantages. If you wanted to know something that nobody knew, you could just go to some year when it had already been discovered."

I told him that it wouldn't work, because then everybody would try it, and nobody would work on new discoveries, and none would be made.

"Besides, Kenny, nobody can even prove time-travel is possible."

"Scientists can do anything."

"Only things that are possible, Kenny. And only with money, and time, and work — and a reason."

"Would it cost a lot to research for a time-ship, Dad?"

"Quite a lot, I imagine, if you could find somebody to do it."

"As much as the atom-bomb?"

"Maybe."

"I bet you could borrow it from banks . . . if somebody could prove it's possible."

"You'd need a lot of money of

your own, kid, before the banks would help."

"I bet my stamp collection will be worth a lot of money someday. And my autograph book." The conversation had wandered off into fantasy.

"In time, maybe in time. A century maybe. But banks won't wait that long."

He stared at me peculiarly. "But Dad, don't you see? *What difference does time make*, if you're working on a time-machine?"

That one stopped me. "Try to have faith in the medical labs, Kenny," was all I could find to say.

Kenny built a time-ship in the fork of a big maple. He made it from a packing crate, reinforced with plywood, decorated with mysterious coils of copper wire. He filled it with battered clocks and junkyard instruments. He mounted two seats in it, and dual controls. He made a fish-bowl canopy over a hole in the top, and nailed a galvanized bucket on the nose. Broomstick guns protruded from its narrow weapon ports. He painted it silvery gray, and decorated the bucket-nose with the insignia of Captain Chronos and the Guardsmen of Time. He nailed steps on the trunk of the maple; and when he wasn't in the house, he could usually be found in the maple, piloting the time-ship through imaginary centuries. He took a picture of it with a box camera, and sent a print of it to Captain Chronos with a fan letter.

Then one day he fainted on the ladder, and fell out of the tree.

He wasn't badly hurt, only bruised, but it ended his career as a time-ship pilot. Kenny was losing color and weight, and the lethargy was coming steadily over him. His fingertips were covered with tiny stab-marks from the constant blood counts, and the hollow of his arm was marked with transfusion needles. Mostly, he stayed inside.

We haunted the research institutes, and the daily mail was full of answers to our flood of pleading inquiries — all kinds of answers.

"We regret to inform you that recent studies have been . . ."

"Investigations concerning the psychogenic factors show only . . ."

"Prepare to meet God . . ."

"For seventy-five dollars, Guru Tahaj Reshvi guarantees . . ."

"Sickness is only an illusion. Have faith and . . ."

"We cannot promise anything in the near future, but the Institute is rapidly finding new directions for . . ."

"Allow us to extend sympathy . . ."

"The powers of hydromagnetic massage therapy have been established by . . ."

And so it went. We talked to crackpots, confidence men, re-

spectable scientists, fanatics, lunatics, and a few honest fools. Occasionally we tried some harmless technique, with Jules' approval, mostly because it felt like we were doing *something*. But the techniques did more good for Cleo than they did for Kenny, and Kenny's very graduai change for the worse made it apparent that nothing short of the miraculous could save him.

And then Kenny started working on it himself.

The idea, whatever it was, must have hit him suddenly, and it was strange — because it came at a time when both Cleo and I thought that he had completely and fatalistically accepted the coming of the end.

"The labs aren't going to find it in time," he said. "I've been reading what they say. I know it's no good, Dad." He cried some then; it was good that he had relearned to cry.

But the next day, his spirits soared mysteriously to a new high, and he went around the house singing to himself. He was busy with his stamp collection most of the time, but he also wandered about the house and garage searching for odds and ends, his actions seeming purposeful and determined. He moved slowly, and stopped to rest frequently, but he displayed more energy than we had seen for weeks, and even Jules commented on how bright he was looking, when he came for Kenny's daily blood sample. Cleo decided that complete resignation had brought cheerfulness with it, and that acceptance of ill-fate obviated the need to worry or hope. But I wasn't so sure.

"What've you been up to, Kenny?" I asked.

He looked innocent and shook his head.

"Come on, now. You don't go wandering around muttering to yourself unless you're cooking something up. What is it, another time-ship? I heard you hammering in the garage before dinner."

"I was just knocking the lid off an old breadbox."

I couldn't get any answer but evasions, innocent glances, and mysterious smirks. I let him keep his secret, thinking that his enthusiasm for whatever it was he was doing would soon wear off.

Then the photographers came.

"We want to take a picture of Kenny's treehouse," they explained.

"Why? — and how did you know he had one?" I demanded.

It developed that somebody was doing a feature-article on the effects of science-fantasy television shows on children. It developed that the "somebody" was being hired by a publicity agency which was being hired by the advertisers who presented Captain Chronos and the Guardsmen

of Time. It developed that Kenny's fan letter, with the snapshot of his treehouse time-ship, had been forwarded to the publicity department by the producer of the show. They wanted a picture of the time-ship with Kenny inside, looking out through the fishbowl canopy.

"It's impossible," I told them. They showed me a dozen pictures of moppets with LTR-guns, moppets in time-warp suits, moppets wearing Captain Chronos costumes, moppets falling free in space, and moppets playing Time-Pirate in the park.

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible," I insisted.

"We'll be glad to pay something for it, if . . ."

"The kid's sick, if you must know," I snapped. "He can't do it, and that's that, so forget about it."

"Maybe when he's feeling better . . . ?"

"He *won't* be feeling better," Cleo interrupted, voice tense, with a catch in it. "Now please *leave!*"

They left, with Cleo herding them out onto the porch. I heard them apologizing, and Cleo softened, and began to explain. That was a mistake.

A week later, while we were still drinking our coffee at the dinner-table, the doorbell rang. Cleo, expecting an answer to her recent wire to some South American clinic, left the table, went to answer it, and promptly screamed.

I dropped my cup with a crash and ran to the living room with a butcher knife, then stopped dead still.

It stood there in the doorway with a stunned expression on its face, gaping at Cleo who had collapsed in a chair. It wore a silver uniform with jack-boots, black-and-red cape, and a weird helmet with antenna protruding from it. It had a lantern jaw and a big, meaty, benign countenance.

"I'm awfully sorry," it boomed in a gentle deep-rich voice. "We just drove over from the studio, and I didn't take time to change . . ."

"Ulk!" said Cleo.

I heard footsteps at the head of the stairs behind me, then a howl from Kenny who had been getting ready for bed, after being helped upstairs.

"*Captain Chronos!*"

Bare feet machine-gunned down the stairs and came to a stop at a respectful distance from the idol.

"ggaaaaAA*AWWWSSSShhhh*!" Kenny timidly walked halfway around him, looking him up and down. "Geee . . . Gaaawwssshh!"

Cleo fanned herself with a newspaper and recovered slowly. I tossed the butcher-knife on a magazine stand and mumbled something apologetic. There were two of them: Chronos and the producer, a small suave man in a

business suit. The latter drew me aside to explain. It developed that the photographers had explained to the boss, who had explained to the client, who had mentioned it to the agency, who had returned the fan letter to the producer with a note. It would appear that Captain Chronos, for the sake of nutritious and delicious Fluffy Crunkles, made it his habit to comfort the afflicted, the crippled, and the dying, if it were convenient and seemed somehow advantageous. He also visited the children's wards of hospitals, it seemed.

"This on the level, or for publicity?"

"On the level."

"Where's the photographer?"

The producer reddened and muttered noncommittally. I went to the door and looked out through the screen. There was another man in their car. When I pushed the screen open, it hit something hard — a tape recorder. I turned:

"Get out."

"But Mr. Westmore. . . ."

"Get *out!*"

They left quickly. Kenny was furious, and he kept on being furious all through the following day. At me. Cleo began agreeing with him to some extent, and I felt like a heel.

"You want Kenny to get the full treatment?" I grumbled. "You want him to wind up a sob-story child?"

"Certainly not, but it was cruel, Rod. The boy never had a happier moment until you . . ."

"All right, so I'm a bastard. I'm sorry."

That night Abe Sanders (Captain Chronos) came back alone, in slacks and a sport shirt, and muttering apologies. It developed that the Wednesday evening shows always had a children's panel (Junior Guardsmen) program, and that while they understood that Kenny couldn't come, they had wanted to have him with the panel, in absentia, by telephone.

"Please, Dad, can't I?"

The answer had to be no . . . but Kenny had been glaring at me furiously all day, and it was a way to make him stop hating me . . . still, the answer had to be no . . . the publicity . . . but he'd be delighted, and he could stop hating my guts for kicking them out . . .

"I guess so, if the offer's still open."

"*Dad!*"

The offer was still open. Kenny was to be on the show. They rehearsed him a little, and let him practice with the tape recorder until he got used to his voice.

On Wednesday evening, Kenny sat in the hall doorway to the living room, telephone in his lap, and stared across at Sanders' face on the television screen. Sanders held another phone, and we heard

both their voices from the set. Occasionally the camera dollied in to a close shot of Sanders' chuckle, or panned along the table to show the juvenile panel members, kids between eight and sixteen. There was an empty chair on Sanders' right, and it bore a placard. The placard said "KENNY WESTLER."

It lasted maybe a minute. Sanders promised not to mention Kenny's address, nor to mention the nature of his illness. He did neither, but the tone of conversation made it clear that Kenny was in bad shape and probably not long for this world. Kenny had stage fright, his voice trembled, and he blurted something about the search for a cure. Cleo stared at the boy instead of the set, and my own glance darted back and forth. The cameraman panned to the empty chair and dollied in slowly so that the placard came to fill the screen while Kenny spoke. Kenny talked about stamp collections and time machines and autographs, while an invisible audience gaped at pathos.

"If anybody's got stamps to trade, just let me know," he said. "And autographs . . ."

I winced, but Sanders cut in. "Well, Kenny — we're not supposed to mention your address, but if any of you Guardsmen out there want to help Kenny out with his stamp collection, you can write to me and I'll definitely see that he gets the letters."

"And autographs too," Kenny added.

When it was over, Kenny had lived . . . but *lived.*

And then the mail came in a deluge, forwarded from the network's studio. Bushels of stamps, dozens of autograph books, Bibles, money, advice, crank letters, and maudlin gushes of sugary sympathy . . . and a few sensible and friendly letters. Kenny was delighted.

"Gee, Dad, I'll never get all the stamps sorted out. And look! — an autograph of Calvin Coolidge! . . ."

But it never turned him aside from his path of confident but mysterious purpose. He spent even more time in his room, in the garage, and — when he could muster the energy — back in the maple woods, doing mysterious things alone.

"Have they found a cure yet, Dad?" he asked me pleasantly when an expected letter came.

"They're . . . making progress," I answered lamely.

He shrugged. "They will . . . eventually." Unconcerned.

It occurred to me that some sort of psychic change, unfathomable, might have happened within him — some sudden sense of timelessness, of identity with the race. Something that would let him die calmly as long as he knew there'd

be a cure *some*day. It seemed too much to expect of a child, but I mentioned the notion to Jules when I saw him again.

"Could be," he admitted. "It might fit in with this secrecy business."

"How's that?"

"People who know they're dying often behave that way. Little secret activities that don't become apparent until after they're gone. Set up causes that won't have effects until afterwards. Immortality cravings. You want to have posthumous influence, to live after you. A suicide note is one perversion of it. The suicide figures the world will posthumously feel guilty, if he tells it off."

"And Kenny . . . ?"

"I don't know, Rod. The craving for immortality is basically procreative, I think. You have children, and train them, and see your own mirrored patterns live on in them, and feel satisfied, when your time comes. Or else you sublimate it, and do the same thing for all humanity — through art, or science. I've seen a lot of death, Rod, and I believe there's more than just-plain-selfishness to people's immortality-wishes; it's associated with the human reproductive syndrome — which includes the passing on of culture to the young. But Kenny's just a kid. I don't know."

Despite Kenny's increasing helplessness and weakness, he began spending more time wandering out in the woods. Cleo chided him for it, and tried to limit his excursions. She drove him to town on alternate days for a transfusion and shots, and she tried to keep him in the house most of the time, but he needed sun and air and exercise, and it was impossible to keep him on the lawn. Whatever he was doing, it was a shadowy secretive business. It involved spades and garden tools and packages, with late excursions into the maples toward the creek.

"You'll know in four or five months," he told me, in answer to a question. "Don't ask me now. You'd laugh."

But it became apparent that he wouldn't last that long. The rate of transfusions doubled, and on his bad days, he was unable to get out of bed. He fainted down by the creek, and had to be carried back to the house. Cleo forbade him to go outside alone without Jules' day to day approval, and Jules was beginning to be doubtful about the boy's activities.

When restricted, Kenny became frantic. "I've got to go outside, Dad, *please!* I can't finish it if I don't. I've got to! How else can I make contact with them?"

"Contact? With whom?"

But he clammed up, and refused to discuss anything about the matter. That night I awoke at two a.m. Something had made a sound. I stole out of bed without

disturbing Cleo and went to prowl about the house. A glance down the stairway told me that no lights burned on the first floor. I went to Kenny's room and gingerly opened the door. Blackness.

"Kenny —?"

No sound of breathing in the room. Quietly I struck a match.

The bed was empty.

"*Kenny!*" I bellowed it down the hall, and then I heard sounds — Cleo stirring to wakefulness and groping for clothes in our bedroom. I trotted downstairs and turned on lights as I charged from room to room.

He was not in the house. I found the back screen unlatched and went out to play a flashlight slowly over the backyard. There . . . by the hedge . . . caught in the cone of light . . . Kenny, crumpled over a garden spade.

Upstairs, Cleo screamed through the back window. I ran out to gather him up in my arms. Skin clammy, breathing shallow, pulse irregular — he muttered peculiarly as I carried him back to the house.

"Glad you found it . . . knew you'd find it . . . got me to the right time . . . when are we . . . ?"

I got him inside and up to his room. When I laid him on the bed, a crudely drawn map, like a treasure map, with an "X" and a set of bearings, fell from his pocket. I paused a moment to study it. The "X" was down by the fork in the creek. What had he buried there?

I heard Cleo coming up the stairs with a glass of hot milk, and I returned the map to Kenny's pocket and went to call the doctor.

When Kenny awoke, he looked around the room very carefully — and seemed disappointed by what he saw.

"Expecting to wake up somewhere else?" I asked.

"I guess it was a dream," he mumbled. "I thought they came early."

"Who came early?"

But he clammed up again. "You'll find out in about four months," was all he'd say.

He wouldn't last that long. The next day, Doc Jules ordered him to stay inside, preferably sitting or lying down most of the time. We were to carry him outside once a day for a little sun, but he had to sit in a lawn chair and not run around. Transfusions became more frequent, and finally there was talk of moving him to the hospital.

"I won't go to the hospital."

"You'll have to, Kenny. I'm sorry."

That night, Kenny slipped outside again. He had been lying quietly all day, sleeping most of the time, as if saving up energy for a last spurt.

Shortly after midnight, I awoke

to hear him tiptoe down the hall. I let him get downstairs and into the kitchen before I stole out of bed and went to the head of the stairs.

"Kenny!" I shouted. "Come back up here! Right now!"

There was a brief silence. Then he bolted. The screen door slammed, and bare feet trotted down the back steps.

"*Kenny!*"

I darted to the rear window, overlooking the backyard.

"*Kenny!*"

Brush whipped as he dove through the hedge. Cleo came to the window beside me, and began calling after him.

Swearing softly, I tugged my trousers over my pajamas, slipped into shoes, and hurried downstairs to give chase. But he had taken my flashlight.

Outside, beneath a dim cloud-threatened moon, I stood at the hedge, staring out across the meadow toward the woods. The night was full of crickets and rustlings in the grass. I saw no sign of him.

"*Kenny!*"

He answered me faintly from the distance. "Don't try to follow me, Dad. I'm going where they can cure me."

I vaulted the fence and trotted across the meadow toward the woods. At the stone fence, I paused to listen — but there were only crickets. Maybe he'd seen me coming in the moonlight, and had headed back toward the creek.

The brush was thick in places, and without a light, it was hard to find the paths. I tried watching for the gleam of the flashlight through the trees, but saw nothing. He was keeping its use to a minimum. After ten minutes of wandering, I found myself back at the fence, having taken a wrong turning somewhere. I heard Cleo calling me from the house.

"Go call the police! They'll help find him!" I shouted to her.

Then I went to resume the search. Remembering the map, and the "X" by the fork in the creek, I trotted along the edge of the pasture next to the woods until I came to a dry wash that I knew led back to the creek. It was the long way around, but it was easy to follow the wash; and after a few minutes I stumbled onto the bank of the narrow stream. Then I waded upstream toward the fork. After twenty yards, I saw the flashlight's gleam — and heard the crunch of the shovel in moist ground. I moved as quietly as I could. The crunching stopped.

Then I saw him. He had dropped the shovel and was tugging something out of the hole. I let him get it out before I called . . .

"Kenny . . ."

He froze, then came up very slowly to a crouch, ready to flee.

He turned out the flashlight.

"Kenny, don't run away from me again. Stay there. I'm not angry."

No answer.

"Kenny!"

He called back then, with a quaver in his voice. "Stay where you are, Dad — and let me finish. Then I'll go with you. If you come any closer, I'll run." He flashed the light toward me, saw that I was a good twenty yards away. "Stay there now . . ."

"Then will you come back to the house?"

"I won't run, if you stay right there."

"Okay," I agreed, "but don't take long. Cleo's frantic."

He set the light on a rock, kept it aimed at me, and worked by its aura. The light blinded me, and I could only guess what he might be doing. He pried something open, and then there was the sound of writing on tin. Then he hammered something closed, replaced it in the hole, and began shovelling dirt over it. Five minutes later, he was finished.

The light went out.

"Kenny . . . ?"

"I'm sorry, Dad. I didn't *want* to lie . . . I *had* to."

I heard him slipping quickly away through the brush — back toward the pasture. I hurried to the fork and climbed up out of the knee-deep water, pausing to strike a match. Something gleamed in the grass; I picked it up. Cleo's kitchen clock, always a few minutes slow. What had he wanted with the clock?

By the time I tore through the brush and found the path, there was no sound to indicate which way he had gone. I walked gloomily back toward the house, half-heartedly calling to Kenny . . . then . . . a flash of light in the trees?

BRRUUMMKP!

A sharp report, like a close crash of thunder! It came from the direction of the meadow, or the house. I trotted ahead, ignoring the sharp whipping of the brush.

"Kenny Vestmore? . . . Kenny . . . ?"

A strange voice, a foreign voice — calling to Kenny up ahead in the distance. The police, I thought.

Then I came to the stone fence . . . and froze, staring at the thing — or perhaps at the *no*thing — in the meadow.

It was black. It was bigger than a double garage, and round. I stared at it, and realized that it was not an object but an opening.

And someone else was calling to Kenny. A rich, pleasant voice — somehow it reminded me of Doctor Jules, but it had a strong accent, perhaps Austrian or German.

"Come on along here, liddle boy. Ve fix you op."

Then I saw Kenny, crawling

on toward it through the grass.

"Kenny, *don't*"

He got to his feet and stumbled on into the distorted space. It seemed to squeeze him into a grotesque house-of-mirrors shape; then it spun him inward. Gone.

I was still running toward the black thing when it began to shrink.

"Come along, liddle fellow, come mit oss. Ve fix."

And then the black thing belched away into nothingness with an explosive blast that knocked me spinning. I must have been out cold for awhile. The sheriff woke me.

Kenny was gone. We never saw him again. Cleo confirmed what I had seen on the meadow, but without a body, Kenny remains listed as missing.

Missing from this century.

I went back to the fork in the creek and dug up the breadbox he had buried. It contained his stamp collection and a packet of famous autographs. There was a letter from Kenny, too, addressed to the future, and it was his will.

"Whoever finds this, please sell these things and use the money to pay for a time machine, so you can come and get me, because I'm going to die if you don't . . ."

I paused to remember . . . *I don't think the bank'd wait a hundred years.*

But Dad, don't you see? What difference does time make, if you're working on a time machine?

There was more to the note, but the gist of it was that Kenny had made an act of faith, faith in tomorrow. He had buried it, and then he had gone back to dig it up and change the rendezvous time from four months away to the night of his disappearance. He knew that he wouldn't have lived that long.

I put it all back in the box, and sealed the box with solder and set it in concrete at the foot of a six-foot hole. With this manuscript.

(To a reader, yet unborn, who finds this account in a dusty and ancient magazine stack: *dig*. Dig at a point 987 feet southeasterly on a heading of 149° from the northwest corner of the Hayes and Higgins Tract, as recorded in Map Book 6, p 78, Cleve County records. But not unless the world is ready to buy a time machine and come for Kenny, who financed it; come, if you can cure him. He had faith in *you*.)

Kenny is gone, and today there is a feeling of death in my house. But after a century of tomorrows? He invested in them, and he called out to them, pleading with the voice of a child. And tomorrow answered:

"Come, liddle boy. Ve fix."

ELEMENTALS OF JEDAR

By Geoff St. Reynard

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

Jedar was inhabited by a seemingly rudimentary life form—so naturally the stranded spacemen thought they were safe.

When the great exploring rocket *Meteor Twelve* of Terra's Outer Dark Line came, after months of erratic cruising through the farthest spaceways, to the satellite moon Jedar of the planet Plattara, in the incredibly distant Vernaluc galaxy, her crew had all but resigned themselves to death.

Ken Ripper, the captain and senior pilot aboard, had been plagued by luck of the evilest kind since the

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Meteor Twelve, shooting out of the Solar system, had wound her inquisitive way through the pure star-pricked blackness of space toward Randarsflite; which bright blue planet was the home port of the marvelous jewel-ships that, less than a hundred years back, had first come poking their little blunt noses out from this strange galaxy to Mars and Venus and Earth, bringing dainty twelve-inch-high men of astonishing bravery and integrity to marvel at the bigness and power and awesomeness of the dwellers in our own great sector of the universe. . . .

Ken Ripper—tall, handsome in a broad-faced, crooked-smiling fashion, strong and healthy as a spaceman must be, just growing gray above the ears—Ken Ripper had barreled his limping ship into the major port of Randarsflite, laid over a week to clear clogged tubes and patch up a hull that had worn thin in dangerous places, and then blasted off into the poorly-charted regions of the farther side of the Vernaluc. He left his chief lieutenant behind on Randarsflite, dying by inches of the Venusian disease. Four days out from the port he slid the radioman—his best friend—into an airlock and read the spaceman's burial service and slipped him out into eternal darkness, the victim of an exploding box of magnesium-fylor superheat matches. A week later three jetmen were discovered in number two cargo hold, reeling drunk on octorenil balls, the terrible opiate of Mars that kills a man's conscience and then his brain and then, much later, his body . . .

"Jove and bounding jackrabbits!" said Ken Ripper in his wickedest tones. For some reason this mild exclamation was always the favorite oath of the spaceways, taking precedence even over those wonderful, unprintable strings of words in forty-three languages which every cub who ever rocketed from Terra to Luna learned at his pilot's knee. "Jackrabbits all over hell!" went on the senior pilot, scratching the back of his neck. "What next?"

He could have killed the drugging jetmen out of hand, for dope is the major sin of the whole expanding universe; but he only shook his head sadly and gave them ten days' confinement, for men were scarce in the *Meteor Twelve* and jetmen most valuable of all.

The ten days passed, the jetmen went back to work, and for a month the exploring rocket shot on through the great Vernaluc galaxy on her mission; then one morning Ripper and his two remaining co-pilots heard as they were dressing a muffled *whoosh* that came, like the voice of God, from everywhere and nowhere—"What is it?" asked the mute faces of the junior pilots, and, "Come on!" barked Ripper, abandoning his half-donned trousers and giving one terrific jump that carried him clear across the floor to the open door.

James, the bigger of the lieutenants, was the one who found the source of that dull *whoosh*. He called urgently, and the others came, pale and grim and sure in that revealing second that they would all die.

"You should have rayed em down," was all James could say. "You should have rayed 'em down when you found them doping, Ken."

For the three erring jetmen, their reflexes slowed and their caution and skill forgotten, had somehow twiddled the wrong wheels and opened the wrong cocks, and the supply of rocket fuel which might have carried the *Meteor Twelve* beyond the universe itself had escaped into the power room and thence into the void. It was a miracle that the terrible energy, seeking escape, had not smashed the ship to microscopic fragments; but a spot on the hull of the power room, unsuspectedly thin, had blown first and the fuel had slammed through and gone its way into black space, taking the trio of debauched jetmen with it. It was another miracle that James had hesitated with his hand on the power room door, noted the queer swelling of the metal, and turned on his XK-ray for a look inside before opening it . . .

"Fog-water of Mercury!" he'd muttered, seeing through the door the emptiness of the room and the fringed hole in the hull. Then, "Welders!" he'd bawled. "Torchmen! *Skipper!*"

Without pause for thought they set about sealing off the power room, working on all sides of it but the hull side, calking and overlaying and merging metals together until the old girl was whole again, with no more than a slight tendency to limp to the right as the fingers of incalculable space caught briefly at the flaw in her side. Then Ken Ripper straightened, his brown face serious, and looked at them all.

"Well," he said, his voice turned light and bantering to ease tension, "well, *kanlores*, what do we do now, to put in the time till we die?"

"If I might make a preliminary suggestion—" said Jz, the Martian astrogator.

"Is it a good one?"

"An excellent one," said the four-eyed Martian, grinning. "First, captain, you ought to put on your pants."

The auxiliary power room had fuel for perhaps nine days' cruising, if they fed the stuff to the jets from the fuel tube slow and easy, scamping whenever they could; then they would be done for. Three of the precious days passed, while the technicians and the officers crowded the nose of the *Meteor Twelve* and watched hopefully for a landing place. They skirted the sun of Alta Ferrari and rocketed on by the dead world of airless Kartann, and three more days went by, and the fuel dwindled.

"Blast and harry the parsimonious old devils who gave these crates just one decent power room!" said Ken Ripper, and brooded over his rough unreliable charts of the Vernaluc.

"One more drifting museum of mummified spacemen—coming up!" said James to himself, arbitrarily shifting the course two points to the left and immediately wondering why he'd done it.

And, "No man knows where he may die," quoted Jz the young Martian out of the age-old lore of his fatalistic people. "A ship's as good a tomb as any."

Two more days, and then at last only a few hours were left them; and on the port bow a world appeared and grew and swelled into a large planet on the visograf. Ken Ripper called to Marshok, the miniature

Vernalucillian whom they'd picked up on Randarsflite to tell them things about his galaxy. "What's that?" he asked, pointing. "I can't find it on the bloody charts."

Marshok took a squint at the planet.

"That's Plattara," he said. "Unexplored, uninhabited, unencumbered with an atmosphere if I remember rightly."

"Hmm," said the senior pilot. "Well, son, in a matter of hours we're going to be a satellite of that un-un-un planet of yours, and I must say I'm happy to know it has at least a name, even if it does sound like the chief course at a Venusian liquid-supper. Go and tell the boys about it, while I check the fuel."

He checked it, knowing to the last force-blast what it would be. No amount of scrimping and saving would conserve it enough to make it last them down to Plattara's main gravity pull; no, he had spoken the truth in that grim jest to Marshok, and the *Meteor Twelve* was destined to turn herself into a revolving satellite, a minute silver Luna of this outlandish, lifeless planet.

They gathered in the big lounge, all of the crew but a few jetmen and technicians, and they sat in the deep synthe-leather armchairs and stared at each other and talked, in the way spacemen have, with wry little jokes and casual acceptance of their fate. There were James and Worthington, the junior pilots, and Jz the four-eyed Martian astrogator, and Marshok the tiny Vernalucillian. There were seventeen humans from Terra, four red Jovian radarmen from the great spaceports of Jupiter, and a handful of mixed nationalities from Sol's farflung outposts, including a Plutonian candescentman and a Saturnian smokeman, the one glowing orange and the other a wispy opalescent gray. Wiser and older than them all was Ken Ripper, the captain of the *Meteor Twelve*.

Excepting only Marshok, this strange gang had been running the spaceways together for three years lacking a month, and they knew each other as well as men from different planets ever can; they thought of themselves, not as natives of Mars, of Terra, of Mercury, but as the crew of the *Meteor Twelve*. Not a one but would sacrifice himself for the others. Not a one but would go down to hell with blazing rayguns to save his captain or his ship.

But now no rayguns, no sacrifice, no heroism, no loyalty could stand between these friends and destiny —that macabre destiny that would soon be turning their craft into a metal satellite of the dead planet of the Vernaluc which Marshok called Plattara.

They drank gin in tall black glasses, and made their jokes, and watched the visograf in the lounge showing Plattara ever larger; and as they all began upon their third drink Jz stood up and pointed at the screen with all twelve rubbery fingers, letting his beaker fall and smash on the floor.

"By the shylann dust of Luna!" he gasped. "Look!"

They all stared, and Ken Ripper said, "It's a moon, *kanlores*."

"It is Jedar," began Marshok, but no one heeded him at all, for they were flying to and fro, the radarmen

to their instruments, the technicians to their batteries of controls, the pilots to their seats in the nose, and the calculators to their intricate boards.

"Can we make it?" asked James over the intercom, and Jz answered him: "We can make it."

Marshok's silvery tones threaded the subdued babble that was the whole ship talking to itself. "It is Jedar," he said, "and we do not wish to land there."

They turned to their microphones, all of them, from the nose and the holds, the jetroom and the viewports, and for an instant the whole communication system was one vast snarl; who was this interloper, this stranger, this peewee runt of a Vernalucillian, to tell *them* what *they* wished to do? "Do you crave to be a satellite, little lad?" asked Ripper's cool voice.

"There are tales of Jedar," said Marshok, "which would crisp your hair like a flame from a jet tube. No one ever lands there."

"Aah," said the Saturnian smokeman, floating around in his seat by a vidoflector and lifting his usually hushed voice to a thin whine, "you and your legends. You make me sick."

"You'll be sicker," warned Marshok, "if you land on Jedar."

"What are the tales?" asked Ken Ripper, for after all there was nothing to do now but let the technicians bring her in to a landing on the moon. "Tell us the worst of 'em, son."

"The inhabitants of Jedar are elementals," said the little fellow.

"What the blazes is an elemental?" asked somebody.

"Creatures of pure force, of little bodily substance but incredible power," said Marshok. "They are evil, sheer evil, and if they once decide to leave Jedar the galaxies are doomed as surely as though the gods should squeeze together their great hands, in which lies all the universe."

"Egad," drawled Worthington. "My nerves are just crawly with horror."

"Gracious," chimed in James, "we'd better turn around before they see us, hadn't we, girls!" The communication system howled with laughter.

"They're terrors, eh, Marshok?" asked Ripper quietly.

"Terrors like nothing you ever saw," assented the Vernalucillian.

"Well, it's try conclusions with them or resign ourselves to being a satellite," said the captain. "I for one prefer to go down fighting something more tangible than space, even if it's only elementals; and I speak for the ship." He could do it because he was senior pilot, and, much more, because he knew his thoughts were always the thoughts of his crew. "How looks the landing chance, James?"

"Not half bad," said his lieutenant, "not really too bloody bad at all. It's neither cratered like Luna, nor watery like that little what's-its-name globe that spins around Pluto. Looks fairly level."

"We'll be down in half an hour," said Jz, the Martian.

They settled back in their seats, the crew of the *Meteor Twelve*, and after a moment's silence Ken Ripper started to hum the verse of *Warping In To Mars*. Others took it up and

the chorus thundered out on the intercom.

Now Sol's hot breath dies out behind,
Above us pale the stars;
Our ship's a hulk, but—never mind,
We're warping in to Mars!

"Any minute now," said Jz somewhat later; and soon there was a slight jar, and his voice came clear: "We're in, captain."

"Try the atmosphereith," said Ripper.

"Air thin and bitter," chanted the candescentman from the port side. "Not fit for anybody but maybe Smokey," he added, meaning the pale Saturnian. "You want to go out and check, Smokey?"

"I'm not going anyplace," said the gray smokeman.

"Nor are we," James could not help saying. "Nor are we, any of us, ever any more."

Then they all sat silently, each one looking at death in his mind and finding the prospect somewhat less evil, now that the *Meteor Twelve* was not to be a lone roving hulk spinning in blackness around an alien planet. At last Marshok said, "You'd better put out a force field."

"Why?"

"The elementals. I don't know if we can raise a strong enough field to repel them, but we may as well try."

"Force field," ordered Ken Ripper, and the infinitesimal atom ports that ran in double lines all along the hull opened and began to hum.

"Everybody come to the lounge," said the captain then. "I mean everybody, too. The hell with tinkering over instruments. Bring two of the extra visografs with you, James, Worthington. Cooky, haul up a load of the oldest vintage gin you can find. Ratharl, bring the charts and figures on all our supplies. Ten minutes, everyone." He switched off the intercom and sat back, sighing. He scratched the back of his neck automatically. It was a gesture he used when he was worried. For a few minutes he watched the small visograf in his cabin, whose beam was set to turn slowly about the ship and reveal any approaching—*things* . . . Then he rose and stretched his arms, and inhaled deeply and went out to the lounge.

When they all were there he said, "Tell us about the elementals, Marshok."

The three visografs had been connected together and showed every side of the ship; nothing moved in the white waste of dusty plains around it. Marshok, glancing often at the linked screens, said, "I've told you almost all we know of them. Our knowledge is nearly all legend, you know, for no living man ever saw one. This satellite is taboo."

"Spill the legends, then, sonny," said Worthington.

"They're a kind of force, what sort I don't know, but tremendously powerful. We don't know if they're chained somehow to this planet, or if perhaps they have no desire to leave; but we do know that contact with them is death, sudden and sure. No weapons are effective against them."

"What do they look like?"

"I don't know."

"In other words, if a little brown cross-eyed man with flat feet who's

chewing a cigar knocks on the main portside door, we oughtn't to let him in," said James.

"Shut up," said Jz. "I want to hear about these critters."

"You've heard it," fluted Marshok. "I can't tell you any more. I'm sorry. That's the sum total. Big and bad and omnipotent."

"Remind me not to take my daily stroll around the block, captain," said Ratharl, the Jovian radarman.

"You humorists," said Ken Ripper. "You slay me. Well, here's plenty of space and a roaring ship."

"And an ivory moon to land on," finished James, toasting the company. "But how many goldarned ivory moons you want, skipper? Isn't this one enough?"

"Look at the visograf," said Jz, his voice calm but penetrating. "Over to the left. See it?"

"It's a wind," said James. "One of those little whirlwinds that scatters leaves and dirt . . . if there were any leaves to scatter here."

"That's right," agreed Worthington. "No leaves, unfortunately, so the poor thing just swirls up the dust. Pretty, isn't it?"

"Marshok knows what it is," said Jz. "Tell 'em, little chap."

"That's an elemental," said the Vernalucillian.

They sprang to their feet and Ripper said, "I can't see anything but dust!"

"Patience," said the tiny man. "A bit of patience, captain. Now do you catch the outline?"

"Good merciful powers," said James wheezily. "I do."

It was tall, taller than Ken Ripper, and milky; evanescent, coming and going as though through an unknown dimension; it had no tentacles or pseudopodia, no arms or legs, no head, no projections of any kind; it was just there, a tall formless mist, speaking somehow to their minds of frightful malevolence. It was as though the temperature in the lounge had dropped twenty degrees, and they all shuddered uncontrollably.

"It's felt the force field," whispered Worthington. The figure of mist, rooted in the swirling moon dust, had checked and drawn back.

"Now it's coming again."

"It feels it, it feels it!"

"It can't take it, Ken! It's leaving!"

"It will be back," said Marshok firmly.

When it returned it had gathered reinforcements, and many of the uncanny things converged on the *Meteor Twelve*. Most of the crew had remained in the lounge, although a few were at the atomic force field controls, feeling that they might be needed there. The elementals swept slowly up to the limits of the field and halted.

"Now what, I wonder?" murmured Ken Ripper.

"They will break it," predicted the Vernalucillian. "They are pure force themselves, so how should a field of force halt them for long?"

"You sure look on the gloomy side of things," said James. "Captain, providing we can fight off these brutes, how long do you give us before food and air run out?"

"Ten years," said Ripper absently.

"Ten years sealed in this shell on an airless moon ."

"Yes. I'd just as soon die fighting, too," said the senior pilot.

"How about rigging up some sort of emergency power plant to get us back to Terra—or rather to Randarsflite? The atom ports—"

"Are too specialized to be of any help, even if we could divert their energy from the very necessary force field. And we haven't another source of energy strong enough to lift us twenty feet off Jedar's surface, much less blast us back across all those millions of miles . . . What are they doing out there?"

"Tunneling," said Marshok simply.

"Tunneling? In what?"

"In our force field."

"But that's impossible!"

"It's impossible for a bumblebee to fly," said Worthington, "but he does it. Look at those illegitimate sons of unwed mamas come!"

"Allah akbar," exclaimed the Jovian Ratharl, who years before had been converted to Islam by a Moslem jetman. "What a sight!"

The tall shapeless mist-things, leaning together like ghostly pillows in a high wind, were pressing themselves against one spot in the invisible force field, which seemed to be weakening under the strain. The leader crept a little way forward, halted, crept a little further.

"Concentrate the field on 'em, you eggheaded lummoxes!" roared Ken Ripper into the intercom; and the cool voice of square-faced Jz answered him: "We have been for five minutes, captain. Any more brilliant orders?"

"Carry on," said Ripper. "Do the best you can, Jz."

"Okay, skipper," said the Martian. "But I wish I had me a nice—hey!" he broke off, then said, "You see that?"

The elementals had surged in a sudden wave to the very wall of the ship.

"Merciful gods of the galaxies," whispered Ken Ripper, his dark eyes glued to the screen. "Keep those brutes back. Get back there, you devils! Back, you spawn of the Vernaluc Hades! Back, you—"

He realized he was shouting, stopped, a little shamefaced, and then heard the babble as a score of other voices took it up.

"Get back, you monstrosities, you vermin of the wastelands, you hellhags, you harpies, you bloomin' goblins," chanted the crew, each man swearing and sweating as he strained his body forward at the screen. Names in a dozen tongues and out of a hundred mythologies rattled off the visograf. Helpless, trapped in their ship without power to fight, to flee, or to do anything save only to tongue-lash the enemy blue, they had all yielded to the impulse suggested by their chief's outbreak; if they could do nothing else, they could tell these wraithy beings what they thought of them!

And suddenly the whole squad of elementals drew away from the *Meteor Twelve*, back beyond the reach of the atomic force field, and stood wavering together in a group, half-seen, half-suggested, the moon dust of Jedar whipping up from their bases like the sands of a wind-disturbed desert.

"What happened?" asked James blankly. "They'd broken through the field."

"Not quite, son," said Ken Ripper.

"It's strongest at the atom ports. I guess they couldn't take it there."

"No," said Worthington, "I don't think you're right. That final surge of theirs—they'd found the right formula, or combination, or whatever you want to call it, with which to beat down our field. Then they just seemed to be flung back. I don't understand, but I'll lay you an ape to an emerald that something else stopped 'em.

"The hull?" asked James.

"The hull, haha," said Worthington scornfully. "The hull of this tub wouldn't halt two tough termites if they set their hearts on getting in."

"One termite," said Jz over the intercom. "One old termite without any teeth."

"They've gone," said the senior pilot. The visograf showed a blank undisturbed landscape. "And I'm tired," he went on, yawning in spite of himself. "What about a nap, you fellows? We've got ten years to figure out what beat back those critters."

"Or ten minutes," said Jz hollowly from his post at the atom port controls.

"The voice of doom," said Worthington. "All right, you four-eyed Cassandra, you can watch for 'em. I'm going to sleep."

Leaving a skeleton crew to scan the visografs, Ken Ripper and his lieutenants sought slumber that perversely would not come. They tossed and turned on their synthedown beds, covertly watched each other, then sat up as one and dangled their legs above the floor grinning.

"Well, sons, what did it?"

"I have an idea," said James.

"Me too. What's yours?"

"Force, pitted against force."

"Intangible force against ineluctable force, eh?"

"Ineluctable, chief, means irresistible; and their force was resisted."

"That's right, skipper. Choose your words a little more carefully when you're tellin' us things. We have impressionable minds."

"Always the video yak-yak boys," said Ken Ripper. "Well, what was our force?"

The three pilots looked at one another, and their gaze was solemn now, and full of something which in less space-hardened men might have been awe.

"Force of mind," said Worthington a little breathlessly.

"Exactly," said the senior pilot. "Combined force of mind."

"And I've been thinking," went on Worthington, "that it's because we're what we are, that it worked."

"What are we?" asked James.

"Why, you sun-fogged ninny, we're the crew of the *Meteor Twelve!* We're one soul in twenty-seven bodies, not countin' Marshok, who's along for the ride. We, my poor nitwit, we are the crew of the *Meteor Twelve*, exploratory rocket of the Outer Dark Line, and we think as one man—by glory, the old musketeer slogan fits us better than it ever fitted any pack of adventurers before! 'One for all, and all for one!' "

"I believe," said Ken Ripper, that in your feeble, halting fashion you have uncovered a profound truth."

"Who's a yak-yak boy now?" asked Worthington triumphantly, and received a soft fat pillow in his gloating face. "Mphm," he said,

"that's not fair. I wasn't looking."

"Shut your growling," said the captain. "In your youth and inexperience, m'boys, you've thought one step in the right direction and given up. On the other hand, I have gone on before you to a conclusion that's so blindingly lovely, so superbly right, that I—"

"That you've gotten hysterical," said James. "We know, we can see. You're aflame with your own brilliance. Tell us, skipper."

"No," said Ken Ripper, giving one great bound across the room leapfrogging over the astonished Worthington and slamming open the intercom. "No, I'll show you. Ahoy, you sleeping uglies," he bellowed into the mike, "rise and shine. Shine, especially, in the lounge. Work to do, lads! Man's work!" Singing a snatch of vulgar song, he came back to his bed and began to drag on his uniform. James and Worthington followed suit, staring at their jovial leader with uplifted brows.

"Any sign of the elementals, Jz?" asked the chief as men filed rapidly into the big lounge. The square-faced Martian shook his head.

"No, not a swirl of dust to be seen."

"That's too bad," said Ken Ripper, half to himself. "However, it gives me time to pass out instructions. Listen . . ."

"It's fantastic," said Marshok flatly. "It's an insane idea, and there isn't a single thing to prove its truth, or recommend it—and I'm with you heart and soul."

"Thanks, peewee," said James, "but I doubt if you'll be much good to us in this deal."

"Why?"

"You're not in tune with us," said Ken Ripper gently. "You see, we're not merely a gang of Terrestrians and Martians and Jovians and Saturnians; we're the crew of the *Meteor Twelve*. We've been together quite a while—none of us less than three years, and a lot of us more than twenty. Smokey, for instance, has been with me forty-eight years come Martian New Year. And we've got into the habit of thinking alike, all of us, so that there's never a situation arises but what at least half of us get the same idea about it at the same time. Our combined thought waves are what blasted back the elementals, I'm sure. The proof of it is that fourteen of us had that idea simultaneously. Well, if our minds produce a force that can control even one of your Jedarian elementals, to the extent of shoving him back from a thing he wants to enter in the worst way, then—"

"Then your plan may indeed work." said Marshok, "and I am, as you imply, a mere eighth tube on a seven-jet job. I shall be a spectator, then, and take notes on my cuff." he smiled at the skipper.

"And if it doesn't work—" began Jz.

"Then we go out in one crash of sound and fury, as every spaceman should wish to do," said the cantdescentman stiffly. "What's wrong with you, Jz?"

"I was about to end my sentence the same way you did," replied Jz. "Sparky, you're as impetuous as a Venusian comfort-woman. Sizzle down."

"Anyone want any gin?" asked Ken Ripper.

Nobody spoke. "Might be the last

glass," said James. Still they said nothing. Ken Ripper nodded.

"All right, we'll do it cold sober. And in a couple of minutes, too, unless I'm growing blind, because there's an elemental."

"Alone?"

"Seems to be."

"He's nearly to the force field. Shall I pass the word to turn it off?" "No, he'd be suspicious. He knows the trick of nullifying it, so let him come in as he did before."

The single half-seen monster came drifting up, with its attendant whirlpool of moon dust, hesitated an instant at the field, then forged through to the wall of the ship. The senior pilot, feeling the tenseness in the lounge, said, "Easy, boys, easy."

The elemental appeared to fiddle with the flush door nearest it. Ken Ripper said to the intercom mike, "Release number two portside hatch."

The elemental drifted back a foot or two as the hatch swung open before it; then it rallied and coming up, entered the airlock. The door swung shut behind it.

"Step one," said the captain. "Switch the visograf—thanks." They could see the elemental moving about within the decompression chamber. "Now let's see how he likes air. Flood number two airlock."

Nothing happened.

"He doesn't even deign to notice the change." Ken Ripper grinned lopsidedly. "Good deal, lads."

"That means—"

"Precisely. The plan may work. Well, now's as good a time as any to fire the startin' gun. Let it in."

The second door slid open before the alien creature and it hovered through, its incredible misty outlines indistinct against the new background of chrome, silver, ebony, and Martian oak.

"Get up here fast," snapped the senior pilot. "On the triple, you guys!"

They watched it as it drifted from room to room, testing here an instrument and there an article of furniture, passing on to fresh finds. The few crewmen who had been at the airlock controls came running into the lounge. James counted noses.

"All ready, chief." There was no joking now, no winking and jesting at death. The struggle was almost upon them, such a fight as none of them had ever known; and even spacemen must be serious when they approach something so unthinkably new and terrible that it staggers the senses . . .

"It's in the auxiliary power room. Wonder what it makes of the last of our fuel?"

"Here it comes up the corridor."

"It's just outside."

"Okay," snapped Ken Ripper, "you all know what to do. Switch those visografs to the outside again. Good. Now start thinking."

As one the twenty-seven crewmen of *Meteor Twelve* began to concentrate their thought waves upon this fantastic demon-thing, the elemental of Jedar; and as it came through the door into the big lounge they saw it waver, halt indecisively, then begin to move slowly backwards.

"Hold it there!" yelled Ripper. "Don't let it budge!"

The elemental stood as though its base were nailed to the floor, shaking like an aspen of Terra, pulsing

furiously with a milky light. The men of the rocket, the brothers of the spaceways, forced their wills out against the thing, and it waved and shook and beat at this new force, and could not move from the spot!

"To the auxiliary power room, skipper?" asked James huskily.

"Not yet. We've got to see how few of us can control this devil. You Jovians stop thinking at it. Think about—think about a tall foaming glass of zorhal, and a lovely red lady of Jupiter."

There was no appreciable lessening of the invisible bonds that held the elemental.

"Great . . . now the other extraterrestrians. Everybody stop thinking at it but the earthmen."

Still the thrashing thing could not move!

"Seventeen of us can handle it, then!" exulted Ken Ripper. "Okay, everybody except those who served with me in the *Comet Sixty-Eight* stop thinking. Brood on a glass of beer."

"He thinks we're a bunch of old sots," whispered James to Worthington. "Not saying that he's wrong, though."

The elemental stood still, then gave a mighty heave. But it was stopped as by a wall of plastiglass. It could not retreat, nor could it attack these loathed interlopers. Four men gripped in with the tentacles of their thoughts and would not permit it to move. Four men!

"That's nine-tenths of the battle," said Ken Ripper, and a blithe smile touched his lips.

"Optimistic," growled Jz. "But it's a good half, anyhow."

"Nine-tenths,nine-tenths,"insisted the captain. "Now for the auxiliary power room, fellows. Make it move. Force it down the corridor, you brainy wonders! Slam it along, you mental wizards! Everybody!"

The elemental, an almost solid column of whitish vapor now as its ire boiled and bubbled within its eerie form, swept slowly backward and drifted grudgingly along the hall toward the power room.

As the last few men left the lounge, following the captive elemental, one of them glanced at the linked visografs. Then he shouted.

"Jackrabbits of Jerusalem! There's a million more comin'!"

The moon dust was raising in great obscuring clouds as a multitude of elementals converged on the *Meteor Twelve*. Ken Ripper, dashing back for a quick look, groaned.

"Listen, *kanlores!*" he roared. "All of you but Jz, James, Worthington, Smokey, Ratharl and Marshok come back here!" They came piling in from the corridor, and Ripper told them in a bull's bellow: "Think at those fiends, all of you! Think that they can't get in—think that they're powerless against the musketeers of the Solar system! Think till your eyes pop out, lads, but *think!*" Then he was gone, following the handful of his lieutenants who still held the elemental in check and forced it foot by foot along the hall.

The crew crowded about the visografs, encircling one another's shoulders with their arms, drawing together in comradeship and mutual

need; one by one they squinted at the images of that horrific throng outside, and drew down their brows, and feeling their palms begin to sweat and their nerves to tauten and sing, they *thought* . . .

Down in the auxiliary power room the mind-chained elemental heaved its intangible bulk at Ripper and his half-dozen aids. It could not touch them. Its terrible power, which had never been withstood, now thrashed helpless in the narrow shaft of space allowed it by the opposing force, a force as great as any in the universe: the combined wills of seven determined men.

Even the tiny foot-tall Vernalucillian was helping, directing his thoughts at the enemy.

"Marshok," said Ken Ripper, "open the fuel tube."

He leaped and tugged hard, his delicate hands reddening on the wheel that was geared to be opened by a two-hundred-pound man. Ripper grated, "Heave, little one! I can't spare a man from this critter—it's getting stronger!" The elemental seemed to gain strength from its fellows without. Ripper did not dare to turn his thoughts for more than a second or two from the task of holding it still. Even as he had spoken to Marshok it had managed to lunge a few inches at him.

Marshok set his teeth, clung to the wheel, hauled and jerked and dragged at it. The *Meteor Twelve* was shaking now, as the wrath of the elementals of Jedar gripped it and rocked it back and forth. Marshok's dainty fingers began to split at the tips. Blood ran down his wrists in scarlet streams. He shut his eyes and heaved once more. The great wheel grunted and turned over, and the fuel tube swung open, its interior black and silent, drained of the atomic jet-liquid it had once contained.

"Good boy," said Ripper. "Good, good boy. You'll get a decoration for this. Whoa! Hold him! Now, into the tube!"

The elemental wavered, then gradually sifted over and vanished into the long darkened space like a puff of smoke drawn into an air vent.

"Slam it shut. Don't stop thinking at it, though!" warned the senior pilot. Jz sighed gustily, and his square face dripped perspiration; Smokey the Saturnian was all but evaporated with effort. Even James, ox of a man though he was, could feel the cords of his neck standing out with the strain.

The spaceship was thundering and booming under the angry attack of the horde of elementals. Even so the skipper found time to clap each lieutenant on the back and murmur a word of thanks and encouragement before he left them to dash up the corridor and into the lounge.

"All right, he's in! To your posts, all of you—think as much as you can at these demons, but get her up—*get her up!*"

The crew scattered, were gone. Marshok and Ken Ripper were left alone before the visografs.

"They'll smash the hull," said the blood-stained Vernalucillian wearily. His face was ash-gray. "They'll get in now, sir."

"Not while I'm alive," said Ken Ripper.

He grasped the table before him

with both hands. His face was suffused to a crimson color, his neck was a column of steel fluted with tense muscles; his whole strong body strained at his mind, and his thoughts poured out at the alien pack of elementals like vitriol.

"Damn you," he said in his mind. "All the gods of all the galaxies curse you to all their private hells. Back, you fiends of the pit. Back, you bloodsuckers! Back, you cacodemons! Get back, you bugaboos, you clutching things of evil! Leave my ship alone. We're men here, you curs of space, you bullies, you hoodlums, you gangsters, you rabble scum of Jedar. We're *men*, and men were never born to crawl to you, you —" He switched to Martian, which has many more terms of disdain than Terrestrian. Sweat, salt and bitter, ran into his open mouth and along his tongue. His eyes grew hot and protruded from their sockets. Trickles of blood came out of his nose and his ears. Dimly he could feel tiny nerves snap here and there in his limbs, leaving trails of fiery pain behind them. Still he concentrated on the elemental mob, and saw that they could no longer touch the silver hull of *Meteor Twelve*, although their anger still rocked it as with great blasts of wind. He was winning.

How long he stood there he never knew.

When the rocket lifted from the moon he did not realize for a moment what had happened, and thought that the elementals had broken in, for they vanished from the visografs like mist from a sheet of steel; then Marshok said gently, "You've won, captain," and he staggered back, his big hands cramped into arcs of pure torment, and sat down hard on a chair.

"It worked, then, little man," he said. His voice was a ghost of itself.

"I never thought it would," said Marshok.

"You helped . . we couldn't have done it if you hadn't been there at the locks of the fuel tube." Speech was an effort that wracked him unbearably, but there were things to be said. The lounge was filling with his crew. "Relieve the men in the power room. Remember—" for a space he could not think what it was they must remember; then, "remember, we've got to think at that thing, in relays, all the way to Randarsflite. Then we can bring it back in another ship and drop it on Jedar. Go on, for God's sake," he tried to shout at them. "Go on and relieve those poor guys, can't you?"

They ran, a dozen of them, to escape the quick fury of his broken body. Then he went on speaking to Marshok.

"You helped even though you thought it was useless. There's a lot of guts in that little carcass, son."

"Thank you," said the Vernalucillian. He was bandaging his shattered fingers one by one. "Thank you very much," he repeated quietly.

"You all did splendidly," said the captain. He shut his eyes and took a tremendous gulp of the liquor-mix that someone held to his lips. "Whoa, don't take that away," he said. Then, "How's the girl doing?"

"Flight's erratic," said Ratharl at his elbow, "but they're getting it under control. This is a type of power we—ah, we aren't really used to as yet."

"Understatement of the decade," murmured Ripper. He forced his still-

curved fingers up to open his eyes, for the muscles of his face seemed asleep. "Well, that's that. Don't forget the relays. We've got to control our new jet power."

"I don't see how the blazes you knew it would get us aloft," said James.

"Logic, Junior, logic pure and, if you'll forgive me, simple. Anything that's a compound of pure force will run a ship. Elementals are sheer force, according to Marshok. Ergo, they'll run a spaceship if you apply the right power to 'em. The crew did, using the living elemental as though it were nothing but a concentrate of atomic energy. Thus the *Meteor Twelve* arose, and laughed, and headed home. Q.E.D."

"But the force of thought controlled the elementals. Why couldn't we merely have thought the ship back to Randarsflite?"

Ken Ripper allowed his tormented eyelids to close. His body felt as though it would never be comfortable again.

"Listen," he said, "if I knew everything I'd be the Great Eel of Venus, not captain of a dinky little space bum full of nitwits and fatheads. The force of thought, as I see it, is intangible power. Elementals are composed of tangible energy. Tangibility is an essential of fuel. Elementals, therefore, are acceptable as fuel. That was easy to figure out. But just why thought could act on *them*, I don't know. Unless it's because they're more than energy: they're partially sentient beings, too. I suppose that's it. If they were absolutely pure force they'd be entirely invisible, and thought wouldn't affect 'em. Lord, Lord, I'm bone weary. I guess you'll have to carry me to bed, gentlemen. I can't seem to stand up. All this theorizing has worn me out . . ."

They picked up their unconscious captain, a score of tender hands lifting him from the chair, and bore him off to bathe him and stow him in bed; and Jz the Martian wiped his square brow and said "Worthington, as soon as we're in range, get on the spaceradio and tell Randarsflite to have a lot of hefty thinkers gathered together by the time we make port. That raving beast in the fuel tube will take some handling even after we've spent the next two months using him up bit by bit. And tell 'em to have twenty-seven big beds ready for the tired, tired crew of the *Meteor Twelve*." He paused and looked at Marshok, the little Vernalucillian who had spoilt his hands in helping them.

"Make that twenty-eight," he said. He put his arm across the shoulders of Marshok. "Twenty-eight beds for the full gallant crew of the *Meteor Twelve*."

The End

Continued from page 43

Carter moved closer to tell him that it was all right, moved closer to put his fingers against the blind surfaces and comfort the man and then, as his fingertips moved gracefully over the pleading face in the mirror, he raised the other hand and carefully, neatly, began the insertion. Began the operation. It was important to follow the booklet the first time out and Carter did the best he could up to a certain point but after that certain point he was moving ahead quite blind.

The *Naked* People

By WINSTON MARKS

It was tough enough, Foster thought, winning a gal like Kelly when he could judge competition. But she was falling for a no-good bum who didn't exist!

OH, THEY'RE careful, all right, these polarized ones. They can't allow too many incidents, or first thing you know there would be a "cult" spring up based on a belief in them—scientific pooh-poohing notwithstanding—and this might eventually lead to their undoing.

But they tend to be careless in little things.

You lay a book down, open to page 128. You come back, and it's closed, or open to a different page.

Or you remember a cigarette you left burning, and you get up out of bed and go into the living room to rub it out—but it's gone. Not burned out. Gone!

You turn off a faucet, tightly. Turn your back, and it's dripping again. They'll even snitch the last piece of candy from a plate, trusting to our rotten memories and mistrust of each other to account for the discrepancy.

But in the big things they're careful. Did you ever wake up in the morning feeling "used?" Maybe you can recall a dream, and maybe you can't. It doesn't make any difference. Never will you see them or actually feel them. Their concentration is complete, and their mind-domination is overwhelming when they turn to their lustier activities.

I suppose they have been with us since time began, keeping us just enough off balance to assure we will never put two and two together.

Except for a very curious

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"She can't see me," he said. "She thinks you're crazy!"

streptococcus infection and the blessing of the new anti-biotics that pulled me through, their secret should never have fallen into my hands. But it did.

I came to in a hospital bed, weak and still burning with fever. The special nurse briefed me on my condition. I had been unconscious for a week, with temperatures up in the critical zone constantly. They had given me up three days before, but for some reason my young body had kept breathing, and finally, the anti-biotics had won out.

Then my memory came back. A young intern had no business brawling in a bar, especially with a nasty infection under one ear. I remembered vaguely the argument over the female bar-fly, and the huge, red-headed salesman who swung one at me from back in the shadows. And I remembered trying to duck and not succeeding. Mercifully, my memory didn't record the pain when his rock-like fist smashed my skull just under my sore ear and sent the infection charging into my brain and all through my blood system. My head just exploded, and that was all.

Now I looked at the nurse, and I could see she was studying me carefully for signs of mental impairment. "Looks like I'll make it all right, now, huh?" I asked her.

She smiled, "You'll be fine, doctor." But she was pressing the call button by my side, pressing it in a rhythmic motion that I knew was a signal to the desk to send in a physician.

She was a cute little trick. I suppose the common old phenomenon of the patient's attraction to his nurse was working on me from the first, but even in my condition it was most pleasant to regard her clean features, black hair and blue, sympathetic eyes. While we waited for the doctor to come I took in what else of her that showed above the bed, and it was all well worth attention.

She noticed my gaze and grinned. "You're much too sick for that," she said.

And she was right. I tried to raise my head to prove something or other, and discovered I was largely paralyzed—not rigid or numb, just sunk in a warm mud-bath of weakness that defied my volition to contract the larger muscles.

My brain and eyes felt seared from the long temper-

ature siege, and a faint pink filter seemed to tint my eyesight. The nurse moistened my cracked lips with a few drops of water, and I licked them with my cotton tongue.

She still looked good to me. "Your name?" I asked.

"Kelly," she said, and her eyes crinkled at me. What makes these girls so damned attractive when you look up at them from between the sheets, instead of down at them when they work alongside you with someone else between the sheets?

I was still reflecting on this when Dr. Bain came in.

I thought I was seeing double as he stepped toward me, but the faint image behind him separated itself and moved to the foot of my bed, leaned an elbow on the white cross-member and stared at my lucious nurse.

The action, informal as it was, was not what amazed me most. The form was obviously a ghost of some kind! I could see right through its naked, pink body. It was a human form, bald, paunchy and undisputably masculine, and the flabby, joweled face had the most lacivious look on it I have ever seen in daylight.

Bain had ahold of my wrist and was saying, "Coming around, eh, Foster? You had a close one, my boy. How do you feel?"

I knew Bain slightly. He was a good man, fortyish, efficient and a most practical-minded diagnostician. "Until just now," I told him, "I thought everything was going to be just great."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I said, "I felt quite rational until you came in, but at the moment I'm a little confused. Do I look like an elephant—do I?"

Bain kept his eyebrows level and shook his head. "Why?"

"Because I seem to be seeing pink men," I told him. "Down there at the foot of my bed."

I didn't expect anyone in the room to be especially impressed with my statement, but one individual was. *The pink man.*

For the first time he turned his depraved, little eyes on me and they grew twice their size. His loose-lipped mouth opened an inch with astonishment. Then he stared from me to the doctor to Kelly, studying their reactions to my statement. Apparently he found them satisfying, because he seemed to

relax and return his lewd gaze to my nurse, Kelly.

Neuro-psychiatry being my planned specialty, I was well-versed in the lore of mental abberations and hallucinations, but my first subjective look at a phantom was shockingly disturbing.

Dr. Bain returned my wrist to me gently. "You'll be lucky if that's all you see, Dr. Foster. That brain of your has taken one of the worst drubbings I've ever seen. I'll be quite frank with you, doctor. We are very suspicious of permanent tissue damage. I wouldn't tell this to a lay patient, but you seem objective enough to help us—I mean, about reporting your hallucinations. Of course, your ability to identify them, as such, holds out great promise that the damage isn't severe."

In other words, a mental patient who recognizes his own symptoms is, normally, on the way to overcoming them.

The behavior of my pink intruder, however, was most upsetting, and I couldn't share Dr. Bain's confidence in my condition. This naked joker had followed nurse Kelly over to the corner where she was fussing with a hypo, and he was breathing down her neck with disgusting intimacy.

Kelly was standing in front of the dresser which had a large mirror in front of it. I noticed her look up once and adjust her white cap in the mirror. If my phantom had any visible substance to him, she couldn't have missed seeing his image behind her.

But she merely returned, rolled me over on my stomach, stripped down the covers and sank the needle into my bedsore buttocks without comment.

The motion disturbed my inner-ear equilibrium, the room went flip-flop and I blacked out before she removed the hypo.

It was late, judging from the darkness and diminished sounds that came from the corridors. I opened my eyes wide for the second time. Kelly was dozing in a chair by the window.

Apparently, I had slipped from unconsciousness into a normal sleep, because I felt a bit more rested. I wondered what had awakened me.

A crackling rustle to my left brought my staring eyes bulging until the sockets ached.

The pink phantom was right at my elbow, pawing

through a huge box of chocolates, against which a plain card was propped. It read, "Get well, Foster—from the staff."

What sent the terror racing through my feeble body was the fact that the pink man appeared quite solid now. I could see nothing through him, and as I watched he selected a large chocolate cream and popped it into a very substantial looking mouth.

He chomped it, licked his lips and then faded almost from view. Now I could see the window shade right through him as he moved over and regarded Kelly's relaxed form. He stepped to the door, which was slightly ajar, listened, then carefully closed it. I realized that he had suddenly solidified as he touched the door. Turning away he became shadowy, barely visible in the soft glow of my night-light.

He moved toward nurse Kelly, now, and a low *thrumming* beat into my brain, increasing like the approach of humming-bird's wings. Somehow it was peaceful, soporific. Now he was down on one knee staring into her face and growing solid again.

My lids grew heavy even as my brain shrieked a command at my vocal chords, a command that was disregarded. Through my closing lashes I saw him get slowly to his feet, lifting her by the armpits. He had her in his arms, now, and her white hands came up behind his neckless hèad which tipped down. Her body tensed to him as his big obscene mouth closed over hers. Then I screamed silently and whirled down a long, spiral tunnel of blackness with the echoes of my insane gibbering ringing in my brain.

When I awakened it was to the sound of Kelly's stirring. I opened my eyes in time to see her lift her cramped neck from the back of the straight chair. She was still sprawled out, sitting on the edge of her spine, and she drew in her shapely legs gingerly. Dawn squeezed pale streaks of light through the cracks on either side of the curtain, and Kelly's lovely, young face had a drawn, tired look.

I tried to shout but only managed to gag and glub. She rocked to her feet instantly, took a staggering step to my side and felt my pulse.

"G'morning!" she said thickly, blinking her eyes, which widened a little as my

hammering heart registered on her finger tips.

She let me sip some water from a bent tube stuck in a glass. Her cool hand touched my forehead, but her fingers felt heavy and clumsy.

"Are you all right?" I gasped when my throat was moist once more.

"Me?"

"Yes, you! The pink man—he—he—"

A tired smile plucked at her lips. "So he's back?"

"No, he's gone now," I said. "But he—"

Hell, it was senseless! If she didn't remember what the naked devil had done to her it was a cinch I couldn't convince her, but I tried.

"He was here again," I told her. "And I don't think it was any dream."

Her eyes tightened with concern and sympathy. "These things can seem very real, I know," she said. "I had malaria once."

"Listen," I hissed. "Wasn't the door open when you sat down over there?"

"Why, yes. We always leave it—"

"It's closed now."

She looked at it. "A little draft, I suppose."

Suddenly, I became aware that the pink man was with us again—if, indeed, he had been gone at all. Kelly stood between me and the window. "Pinky" was on the other side of the bed, to my right. And a split second *before* Kelly had said, "A little draft, I suppose," the very same words had flashed into my brain. Her statement had come like a verbal echo of a thought I had had by myself.

I became desperate. "The box of candy," I said. "Look in the box. There's a piece gone—and I'm still quite helpless as you can see. I saw the pink man take that piece of candy. Look and see. Please!"

To humor me she lifted the lid, peered in and looked puzzled for a minute.

Then the thought flashed into my brain, "One of those thieving orderlies sneaked in here while I dozed off."

Nurse Kelly scowled. "One of those thieving orderlies sneaked in here while I dozed off," she said with annoyance.

My eyes swung back to my right, and Pinky stood there glancing from me to Kelly, his hands behind his back, eyebrows arched slightly and his lips pooched out like Winston Churchill's when he has just dropped an oratorical pearl.

I wanted to smash the self-

satisfied, unworried look from his insolent, bestial features. I couldn't do more than wiggle my toes.

It was hopeless.

"Would you like a piece?" Kelly was saying, tilting up the open box so I could see the selection of pale and dark chocolates, some wrapped in red foil, others in silver. "It will be an hour before breakfast."

I closed my eyes and sighed helplessly. "You think I'm nuts, Kelly, but he's standing right beside me at this minute. I think he—he made love to you last night."

I heard her drop the box on the table and take a step backwards. When I looked she had a "my-God-I-do-feel-funny-expression" on her face.

She was off guard for such an outrageous statement, and, apparently, so was Pinky, because it was long seconds of silence before the thought beat into my brain, "Brother, this boy is worse than we figured."

Kelly drew her lax features together and said, "Brother, you are in different shape than we figured. I don't know whether it's better or worse." She tried the tired smile again, but there was no doubt in my mind now what was happening. Pinky was pulling her thoughts around like the limbs of a puppet.

She squared away her little white cap, took my temperature and went to get my morning wash basin. Pinky started to follow her out the door, but he stopped and came back when I whispered, "Come here, you pink bastard!"

He waddled over to me, looking ponderous yet impalpable. He seemed to be at maximum attenuation, or minimum viscosity. His eyes bored into mine. "So you were still awake last night?" he said to me without moving his lips.

"Who—what are you?" I demanded, my anger driving my fear and doubts of my sanity from my mind.

"A figment of your hot little brain," he said.

"The hell you are!"

I said it with such conviction that I could read a trace of dismay and concern in his puffy face. Then his eyes tightened, and I could feel a faint prodding in my head as if he were fingering my medulla. The prodding little pokes became more and more severe, but somewhow he seemed to be unable to penetrate.

"This is ridiculous," he

said, as if to himself. "You can read me, but I can't read you."

"That's tough," I said aloud so he could hear me.

He ignored me. "Must be scar tissue, semi-permeable. *Afferently* sensitive but *efferently* opaque. Never heard of such a thing!" he concluded, eyeing me with deep, crooked wrinkles in his low forehead.

"What are you?" I demanded again.

"Hmmm," he said. Then he raised his head and emitted a shrill screech of mental energy that must have aroused every telepath in the county. A moment later a tall female figure, round-shouldered and saggy, slipped through the door looking a little more solid, a little less pink, but just as naked.

"What's the matter," she demanded snappishly. "It better be important! I was just—" Her lips didn't move either.

"Never mind," he said looking her over churlishly. Her stringy red hair lay damp and tangled on her shoulders, and her eyes lighted momentarily as she looked over at me."

"Big, isn't he? Puny in the face, though."

The vaporous man announced, "He can see us, and he can hear every word you think. We have a problem."

Instantly, the female faded to a faint outline, but I caught the look of apprehension before her face became confused to my bleary eyes.

"He can hear loose thoughts?" she asked quaveringly.

"He can. What's more, I can't get anything from his mind. You try it. I'm a little tired."

She took a step forward. "Sure," she said, and I felt more little nudges in my brain, only they were sharp, taloned stabs that threatened to tear aside my remarkable but fragile protection.

I snarled, "Get your filthy hooks out of me."

And at that moment Kelly came in with my basin of warm water. The two phantoms didn't even step aside. They let the nurse pass right through them. She came to me swiftly, setting down the enameled pan so quickly it sloshed on the night-stand.

"Take it easy, doctor," she implored. "Try not to give in to these—these ideas."

I fell silent. In her place I would feel the same alarm for a patient I found talking back to his hallucinations. Suddenly I began to wonder

how many patients of mine had really been sweating out this same situation, while I stood by and murmured inanities and sympathetic clucks!

The pink ones looked me over thoughtfully and both left through the door without disturbing the hinges. Kelly finished my bath and turned me over to the day nurse, a dumpy little peroxide blonde.

"He's raving a little, but he's still too weak to move around," Kelly said. She stopped at the door and gave me her own idea of a prescription, a sexy wink. Under other circumstances this would have dragged me back to reality right now, but I was already too painfully deep in my private realities, and secondly, her tired eyes didn't manage as much sex in the wink as she thought.

The blonde was just a floor nurse, not a special. She checked on me frequently during the day, but I was alone an hour at a time. Apparently I was over the hump. I managed to suck a liquid breakfast and consume a soft lunch, which the unpretty blonde spooned into me. And I even managed a chocolate in the afternoon.

As my strength gradually came back I napped less. During my waking moments I kept sweeping the room with fearful eyes, awaiting the reappearance of the pink ones.

Just after visiting hours were over, my vigilance was rewarded. With the sunlight streaming in I wouldn't have noticed the very thin pinkness of the female phantom, if I hadn't been staring right at the white door when she sauntered through it.

I was almost grateful to her for showing up. I had about convinced myself that my brain was indeed impaired, but now my certainty rose that what had happened was real.

She eyed the closed door behind her, then let herself flesh out into complete opacity, as she seated herself on the edge of my bed. The mattress sagged with her materialized substance, and I knew now that either I was completely insane, or my visitor was a unique but genuine article.

Her hair looked better. It was brushed and wrapped around and piled high on her head like pictures of Psyche. She appeared to have had some rest, and her beady eyes were restless as they roved over me and examined my face.

I wanted no more misunderstandings from the hospital staff, so I kept my voice low. "What are you? What do you want with me?"

Her lower lip was full but pale. It twitched as she enunciated words in my brain. "Open up your mind so I can feel it, honey," she said with a sensuous quiver and a voluptuousness that belied her bony frame. She sagged down over my helpless body and touched my face with clammy fingers.

"Gettahellout before I scream," I said.

"Relax, honey. You're on to us now, so we gotta be friends."

I closed my eyes, and that shut out her naked, revolting figure—proving that the whole thing wasn't originating in my mind.

I didn't pretend to understand it, but I figured I'd better learn all I could.

"Okay, so we're buddies," I said, trying to keep the nausea out of my voice. "I can't open my brain to you. I guess the thing that let's me see and hear you is the same thing that closes my thoughts to you."

She looked thoughtful. "That's the idea Rolyx has about you. Well," she sighed, "it's a pity. We can't get very intimate this way."

"Yeah," I said, "it's a pity. Now fill me in, will you? Who are you? Where are you from?"

"I'm Aljor," she said tousselling my hair with a long finger. "I hang around the hospital. Me and Rolyx."

"Why?"

"We like it here, that's all. More variety. Most of us like to move in with private families—better food. But it gets monotonous, same old faces alla time. Give me an institution or a hotel every time."

I simply couldn't convince myself I was talking to a *ghost*. I tried once more. "What—*what* are you?"

Her pink, loose face turned a deeper shade as she obviously took offense. "Whadda ya mean, what am I? I'm *me*, Aljor?"

"From where?"

"From—from around!" she snapped. She wrinkled her forehead pettishly at her own inability to comprehend and answer my simple questions. "How would you like it if I asked you *what you were* and what rock *you* crawled out of?" she said in a hurt manner.

"But—you're different, you must admit that," I said.

"Of course I'm different from you. I'm a girl!"

"I don't mean your sex—I mean fading in and out."

"Oh, that," she said flatly. "You know, I ain't used to sittin' here talkin' to an *opie* in broad day light like this, with your eyes wide open."

"Opie?" I asked, "what's an opie?"

"That's you. Your kind," she said.

"All right," I said in exasperation, "so I'm an *opie*—I suppose that stands for opaque. Now, what is your kind, and where did your kind come from?"

"My kind? Why—we—we're the other kind. We been around a long time. How do I know where we come from? Where did *your* kind come from? Ask Rolyx. He's smarter than me."

It was a stupid answer, but the implication floored me.

"Well, how do you do this disappearing act?"

She thought a minute. "You got it backwards. The hard part is *not disappearing*. Our natural condition is to be polarized. We're born that way. We have to work at disrupting this polarity in order to be solid like your kind. The second we relax, boing! back we go. It ain't fun."

"Why not?"

"We got to depolarize ourselves to eat and—and—" she leered at me, "—and everything." We risk discovery every time we do it. That's why we mess around at night mostly."

"What do you do—for a living, I mean? What kind of work?"

"We don't work," she said with a silly smile. "We—just sort of live offa you people. You're the lucky ones, solid alla time without even tryin'."

Parasites! I shrank from the thought. "You mean you steal our food and live in our houses?"

"Shore. Why not? We don't bother much. Don't take much to feed us, and it's mostly left-overs. We don't dare snitch much fresh stuff or people would notice it."

She read the disgust and loathing that must have shown on my face, because she leaned over me again. "Now, don't be upset, honey. We're harmless. We don't hurt nobody none."

Her breath was dry and cold in my nostrils. I tried to turn my head away, but my feeble neck muscles would not respond. Just when I thought she would glom my

mouth with her loose lips she pulled back quickly.

"How can a girl kiss a guy with an expression like that? Ya damned snob! No wonder the legend says, never give an *opie* a waking chance! Ya think you're so much better than we are! Well, you just wait! Just wait until you're stronger!"

She faded into a pink mist again, and her weight eased from the springs even before she slipped off and stalked through the door.

Kelly came on duty at eight that evening to special me through the night. I had decided to say nothing to her about my "visions." There was no longer a shred of doubt as to my sanity—in my own mind. But I realized the impossibility of convincing the hospital staff of this if I continued to insist that I was seeing pink men and women in my room.

Around ten, Kelly spooned a late snack of soft diet into me and acted so sweet I started to get another attack of patient-nursitis. But even as I began to consider how lovely and desirable she was, my body went rigid with the thought of what happened to her last night. My protective instinct began to bristle.

When she tucked me in I closed my eyes, but I was determined to keep watch over her. I was too weak. I dropped off within an hour and didn't awaken until it was time for my morning ablutions.

She seemed fresher this morning. Maybe Rolyx hadn't shown up after all. Probably afraid of me or self-conscious. I smiled at Kelly and she smiled back. "No more pink men?" she asked quietly.

"No more pink men," I said reaching for her hand without thinking. My arm moved, and I almost made it!

My strength returned rapidly after that. The pink people failed to show up for three days, and the fourth night, Kelly had to move rather nimbly to prevent me from overextending my strength and to preserve her professional dignity.

They were feeding me meat now, and I had consumed the whole box of chocolates. I kept track of them, and apparently neither Rolyx nor Aljor had been in even to snitch a sweet.

It was costing me to keep Kelly on as a special nurse, but I had requested it when they told me I was out of danger. I explained to her that she'd have to wait a bit for her money, being as how

interns are, to put it conservatively, underpaid. But darned if she didn't stay on anyway. I don't think she was quite convinced that I was over my little pink man business.

Anyway, this night I was feeling strong and wide awake. At midnight, I took pity on Kelly and feigned sleep. I had been deliberately napping all I could in the daytime so I could keep a better watch at night, and this night it paid off.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when two things happened that snapped my eyes open. I felt a weight sink on the bed beside me, and the *thrumming* beat into my brain. This time I was stronger, and it did no more than make me sleepy. Anyway, the sight of Aljor's long, unlovely figure sagging over me was more than enough to counteract the narcotic effect of the *thrumming*. I tried to sit up, but her hand pushed me back gently.

She whispered, "Relax, honey. It's only me."

A wild scheme formed in my mind. Maybe I *could* betray her presence to Kelly and convince the nurse that I hadn't been having hallucinations. I composed my face and whispered back, "I'm relaxed. What've you got in mind?"

A broad, loose-lipped grin spread over her face, and I felt her weight sink more deeply into the springs as she became fully depolarized and "flesh-born."

"Just a little kiss," she said. Her eyes glittered.

She leaned closer. I could feel the chill of her breath before I stopped her. I said, "Just a moment—honey. My throat is dry."

I rolled slowly to my side and reached for the glass of water on the night-stand. My eyes slipped over to where Kelly should have been nodding in her chair. She was on her feet, and Rolyx was just bending his bare, bullet-head down to hers!

Then I realized that the *thrumming* had come from him, not Aljor! They were working—or playing—as a team. Rolyx was taking no chances with Kelly. He had her deep in the hypnotic trance, her hands slipping up behind his ugly neck.

But Aljor seemed to be taking some perverse pleasure in finding me awake and apparently ready for her.

I yelled, "Kelly, wake up!" and I threw the contents of

my waterglass in her direction.

Instantly, the *thrumming* jumped a million decibals, emitting now, from Aljor. And I discovered what it was to have it *directed at me.* A billion humming birds hovered in my skull.

I don't remember hitting the pillow, but I must have barely passed out before both pink creatures disappeared. My eyes popped open and I was wide awake.

Kelly was standing up, her head slanted side ways, eyes like poker chips, and arms draped around a shoulder-high chunk of air. Her lithe form moved sensuously for a moment, then she froze and stood stiff.

She dropped her arms and squawked, "What goes on here?" She looked down at her disheveled uniform, the wet floor and the glass in my limp hand.

It was plain she had no idea of our visitation, and it would be worse than useless to try to explain.

"You were dreaming," I said flatly. "Sleep-walking. I tossed the water to wake you up."

Comprehension dawned on her, and she swallowed my story. "Oh, me!" she exhaled. "I'll say I was dreaming. I dreamed that—"

Then she looked at me with the damndest expression.

I said, "You dreamed what?"

"Never mind," she said blushingly, taking the empty glass from my fingers and refilling it from the pitcher. "Now go to sleep."

Her lips trembled a little, and for some reason I chose this moment to ask a question I knew was inevitable. "Miss Kelly," I said formally, "When I get out of bedpan alley will you do me the honor to become my bride?"

She was still fighting for control over herself. She poured the water back into the pitcher, carefully set the glass down as though it were brimming full and said, "Why yes. Why do you ask? I mean—I think—huh?—how did you?—darnit, I'm confused! Would you repeat the question?"

This time I had enough strength to reach out and grasp her nearest hand. I said, "Kelly, I'm crazy about you. Would you consider marrying a punk intern and helping him shoo the pink people away?"

"The pink people," she said with a faint shudder. Then she focussed her eyes on me.

Her smile was real and warm, but she said, "You know as well as I do, proposals don't count until ten days after discharge."

Maybe some marriages are made in heaven, but I'll bet more are made in hospitals. I was so tail-over-teakettle in love with that girl by the time they pronounced me cured that I guess it must have rubbed off on her.

Financially, it would have been wiser to wait awhile until the end of my internship, but the deeper I fell in love the more jealous I became. The thought of Rolyx or any other polarized pink bastard having his way with her drove me almost insane.

So we were married.

For months after our honeymoon I looked forward to the time when I could trap one of the pink creatures to show to Kelly—her first name is Timothene—so I could confide in her the whole way. A man shouldn't have 'secrets from his wife.

But it doesn't look like it's going to work out. I don't dare bring up the subject without proof, and the pink people, outside one's own home, are the very devil to try to catch in solidified form.

The one around our house?

No, it would never do to try to play tricks on *her*. She's a mischievous little blonde, and she could make life miserable for both of us if I offended *her*.

At least, that's the way I see it.

She's a cute little parasite, so pretty, in fact, that the occasional pink male visitors we have never look twice at Kelly.

And after all, she eats so very little—

THE END

Continued from page 5

adults; the richer, deeper characters of modern science fiction do. Whether we can maintain the epic sweep, the fertility of idea, the pace of narrative action of the older kind of story, while taking time out to illuminate the souls of our characters, is of course the big question of the moment. I think we can; I think we are doing it; and, while I would have regretted a discursion the childhood traumas of Hari Seldon, I think we are getting a deeper and more stimulating s-f as a result of the changes in approach of the last few years.

AND THE MONSTERS WALK

By JOHN JAKES

Illustrated by D. STONE

While Scotland Yard watched the hands of Big Ben, London was menaced by a terrifying demon from another time—and even the fog smelled of death.

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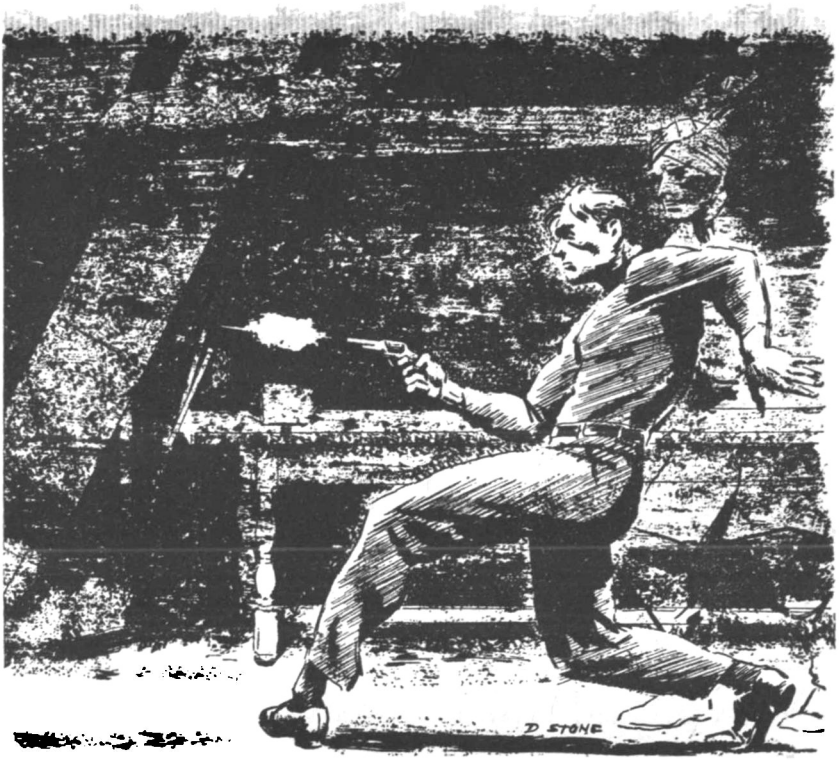

We were somewhere in the Channel, with France lying to starboard and the country of England on the other hand. Both were lost in the fog and darkness of that impenetrable night. The freighter *Queen of Madagascar* rolled on the oily swells, and hundreds of gallons of water thundered across the lonely decks with each rise and fall.

The ship was a ship of strangers. The men were not English or American or even European. They were odd hues: swarthy, some of them, others yellowish with the cast of the Orient. At mess I sat alone, an Englishman working my way homeward by the only trade I knew—the sea.

And here we were, that strange, murderous crew with the slashed scarred faces, the dark furtive eyes, the pistols and the knives. One day out from England. Twenty-four hours. And my curiosity had risen to a fever pitch. I had to know what we carried in that sealed main hold. Once, off Algiers, when the hatch

was open, I caught a whiff from down there. Standing in the bright sun, I swore it was a smell of bones and age. A smell of dead men. The vague thought of our being a monstrous coffin-ship intrigued me, played on my curiosity—a characteristic in me which, if not particularly worthy, provided for a life that was far from dull.

There was an opening into the main hold from a lower deck. Not a regular entrance-way or anything of the like. A makeshift iron door, probably cut from the bulkhead by a torch and refitted into its original frame.

No one guarded that door, you see. On our first day out, Captain Bezahrov had informed the crew that the penalty for entering the hold was instantaneous death. But there I was, crazy with curiosity, and yet lucky, too. Because what I found gave me knowledge that more important men longed for—later. Lucky, in a hellish sort of a way.

I stole through the rocking corridors, finished with my watch. From the faraway forecastle, echoing through the dismal metal halls, came a wordless primitive song. One of the crewmen singing of his homeland, probably. It counterpointed the thunder of the waves in the black sea outside, and made my spine crawl.

I listened for a few moments, hesitating before the door. No footsteps sounded. No voices spoke anywhere near. Carefully, I eased the crude handle upward and inched the door open. It was well oiled. It made no sound.

The hold was dark. At once, that overpowering stench of age and evil decay struck me. I stepped inside, inserting my penknife to keep the door open. I had nothing to lose. I don't mean that in a bragging sense. A life is certainly something to part with. But no wife, no children to care for. And curiosity burned high and insistent. There was just enough of an element of chance. I just *might* get away with it—

I flicked on my pocket torch and looked around. My chest heaved with excitement. They *did* look like coffins! Row on row of rough wooden boxes. I stepped closer and peered at the markings. *T. Nedros. Importer, 8 Ryster Lane, London, England.* I checked several of the strange packing cases. The address was always the same. All of them to this mysterious T. Nedros, Importer.

The boxes had lids, and those lids were only fastened down with cheap wire. What more could I ask? Holding my torch steady, I unwound the twists of wire and pushed back the lid. I leaned forward to peer at the contents.

And then the nightmare began.

I looked into that box for perhaps forty-five seconds. It couldn't have been longer. But what I saw could easily drive a man mad. A . . a *shape*—could I call it that?—lay within. Nearly seven feet in length, I realized, estimating the length of the box. A shape in human form, but not human at all. A shadow shape, with monstrous furred hands and a blur of darkness for the head, in which burned two smoky red eyes, wide open, staring up blankly at the roof of the hold.

A . a *thing*, it was. A creature

from some more ancient world, when spirits of evil trod the earth. A creature not of our time, not of the world of civilized men. A demon reshaped in human mold, dug from God knows what sorcerer's burying ground and boxed up and—this was the most horrible—loaded on a ship for London! The others must contain the same sort of monstrosity, I realized.

I retched dryly. The death-smell filled my nostils.

All in the forty-five seconds or less, flashing through my brain like flickering pictures on a screen. Like a man seeing his entire life in the moment before he dies. And I was dying then, in a sense. Dying and being re-born into a world of terrors unfit for humans to endure.

Quickly, then, the rest happened. I heard the sounds of the door, of feet clanging on the metal plates, of harsh foreign curses. Hands threw me quickly to the floor. I peered up. Lights had come on in the hold.

Captain Bezahrov stood over me, hands clenched in fury. "Marlow," he said quietly, holding his teeth together in rage, "you are a fool. You should have known that we would be wise enough to prepare an alarm system on the bridge for something as important as this."

I said nothing. From far away came the wild and lonely drumming of the sea. My only chance was to make a break for it. With an effort, I sprang to my feet.

Bezahrov caught me when I was only half-risen. He towered above me, his round face jerked awry by the livid scar lying alongside his nose. A light far above him threw a dim halo around his cap, and I wondered how the Angel Satan had looked when he fell from Paradise.

Bezahrov's pistol came sweeping down, butt first. I tried to dodge, but it was no use. He hit me several times and, in a pain-filled delirium, I felt hands lift me and carry me. Upward. *The deck!*

But I had known the penalty. I had known, and they did not have to speak of it. Abruptly, I felt wind lashing my face, and a fine rain. The waves thundered more loudly. A few more steps. The hands lifted me. *Lifted . .*

And then the hands were gone. I hung in space for a moment and then I fell like a plummet, without thought, straight down to the black raging waters of the Channel. I struck the water and my mind went dark.

Chapter II

Pattern For Madness

I had no knowledge of how I managed to come out of that angry sea alive. Slowly, I began to drift back into consciousness, stripes of gray light creeping across my eyes. I awoke as if from a pleasant sleep. I kept my eyes closed as the first coherent thoughts crossed my mind.

I recalled the thing in the box, and that same feeling of dread and loathing swept over me. And then I remembered the nightmare fall into the depths of the Channel. *By God, Marlow,* my mind said, *you have no right to be alive!*

But I was alive! That, or hell was a place to lie quietly between

blankets. I opened my eyes. I felt no pain. My head was clear and my thoughts were orderly. Or as orderly as they could be, with the vision of what I had seen gnawing at the back of my mind.

The room was bleak, with only the bed, a washstand, a chair and a writing desk. I blinked with astonishment. Neat and dry, my clothes, complete to cap and pea jacket, hung on the back of the chair.

I got out of bed, feeling chill air on my naked body. Dressing hastily, I approached the window under the slanting roof and raised the blind. Outside lay a gray and dismal sky brooding over the desolate rooftops of London's East End.

Then I was in London, and alive! But *how*? Already the nightmare had begun to take shape. I started walking back and forth across the room, trying to find an answer. But there was no answer. Not even a logical puzzle. Just a series of mad, frightening events—random, inexplicable.

After a few moments I saw the piece of paper on the writing desk. I snatched it up and read the lines inked in a small, almost childishly untrained hand. The words only added to the madness surrounding me.

We are your friends, it ran. *Do not question the fact that you are alive. We will contact you.*

I stared at the paper and questions flooded over me again. I stopped after a moment. It was futile. Two immediate things could be done. I was in London. I could find out exactly where I was, and I could go to Scotland Yard and tell them of the things I had seen.

I left the room, went down a short chilly hall, and downstairs into the main room of the lodging house. In the dim light, a fat, blowzy red-haired woman dozed at the desk.

"I'd like to know how I got here," I said to her, almost afraid to ask the question.

She looked at me out of eyes surrounded by fields of wrinkles, and laughed coarsely. "Don't ask me, mate. I suppose you like your nip too much, like most of them. Blind when they come in, and afterwards they all want to know how they got here."

"I wasn't drunk," I insisted. "Someone brought me here. When was it?

"What's your name?"

"Marlow. Steven Marlow."

She consulted the spotted pages of the register. "Two nights ago. Monday."

"Who brought me here?" I repeated.

"How should I know that?" she said in an irritated manner. "I wasn't working then. Mr. Sudbury was here Monday night. He'd know who brought you in, I suppose." I could see from her face that she was still convinced I had come here in a drunken stupor.

"Then when can I talk to Mr. Sudbury?" I persisted.

"You can't, she said triumphantly. "He quit last night."

"Q—quit?" I stammered. The thing was becoming too confused even to think about.

"Yes, quit! Listen, matey, we don't ask questions around here. Mr. Sudbury only worked here three weeks. How do I know he wasn't wanted by the law? How do I know he didn't have some girl in trouble?" She threw

up her hands. "I don't. But we don't ask questions, see. Why don't you just forget it and start off where you were before you got hold of the stuff?"

Angrily, I turned from the desk and walked out of the place. A sign above the door read *Bane's Rest.* Well, there wasn't any information to be had from the woman. I glared at her once through the window, leaning on her elbows, her frowzy red hair bobbing as she nodded off to sleep.

I turned and started off down the narrow street. I needed sanity. A touch of it, just a tiny bit of it.

Scotland Yard brought sanity to me. The office of Inspector Rohm, to whom I was sent after I gave many evasive answers to the question—for what did I need the Yard?—proved to be a bare little cubbyhole, not much more cheerful than the bedroom in which I had awakened.

Inspector Rohm was a thin, scholarly-looking man with sandy hair, erect posture, and sharp blue eyes. He sat in his chair and listened to my story. I poured it all out, incoherently, even wildly, while he sat there as if listening to a learned paper on physics. The only part I omitted concerned the note from my rescuers, whoever they were.

When I finished, Inspector Rohm peered at me with his blue eyes and said, "Is that *all*?"

"Yes," I said, "and it's the truth."

Rohm laughed. "I doubt that," he said gently. "My friend, we are bothered with many cranks and lunatics here, but I have never heard such a fantastic story."

"But I saw the thing!" I exclaimed.

"Granted such creatures existed," he continued, "why would you come to us?"

And there he had me stopped. Why indeed? Except that I had sensed terrible evil in that thing on the ship, in all the cases in the hold, in fact. And evil had its opposite in good, and the law had unconsciously represented the nearest source of that good.

I could not convey to him in words the impending sense of danger and unearthly evil I had felt on the *Queen of Madagascar*. I sat there, helpless under his critical gaze, twisting my cap in my hands.

"I . . . I don't know," I said. "I'm only a seaman, sir. I . . . well . . . I felt that it meant trouble for us, somehow . . . for England . . . for the world. Evil, you understand . . ."

Rohm laughed again, politely. "No, I'm afraid we'll have to have something a bit more concrete than that."

"But can't you check my story?" I pleaded. "Can't you check on the ship and her cargo?"

He thought a minute, and I suppose he finally decided to accept my suggestion, because he was a man who was meticulous about his duty, leaving no alternative open, no matter how impossible.

"All right. I'll ring up Customs."

After a few minutes on the phone, talking in clipped mono-syllables, he turned back to me, pulling out a cigarette and lighting it. "Well, Marlow, the cargo from the *Queen of Madagascar* arrived all right, consigned to a perfectly legitimate importer named Nedrows in Ryster Lane."

"What was the cargo?" I asked quietly.

"The usual run of Oriental stuff. Carpets, cloth goods, wines, water pipes." He smiled a bit sardonically. "For the curio shops. Items to give your parlor that odd touch, you know." When he laughed this time, it was in appreciation of his own humor.

"I saw that thing in the box!" I insisted.

'He shook his head. "No," he said with finality, "the cargo was as stated. That has been verified."

'But I knew the name of the person it was being sent to!" I said. "I was on that ship!"

"Very true. But as for the rest, Mr. Marlow, you are either lying or you are insane. And now, I'm rather busy. If that's all, I'd appreciate your leaving."

"All right," I said, rising. "That's all, I suppose."

I walked out, feeling his eyes in my back, branding me a liar and a madman. The world had gone insane. Somehow, those *things* had left the *Queen of Madagascar* before she reached port. I knew there were many of them. I had looked into that box, and smelled the hold. I knew they threatened danger, vast and terrible danger, but no one cared. I knew they were somewhere in England now, in London, perhaps. And no one would pay any attention . . .

But I had that note in my pocket! I had come back out of the sea. And even if I had not, no one could have looked into the blank, hellish red eyes of that thing lying there in the iron hold of that storm-lashed ship and not known that here was greater evil than mankind had seen for centuries.

I went to a pub and tried to drink. Amid the laughter and the clink of mugs, I tried to sop up those nightmare thoughts in alcohol. But it didn't work. I would drink for a bit, concentrating on the warm, lightheaded feeling it produced. And then I'd think of the shape in the box, and I would be sober again, as if I had not touched a single drop.

I went back to *Bane's Rest* in the East End that night. I had no place else to go. The room was dark and chill, and I stared at the ceiling all night. I could not sleep.

Chaper III

Horror in Harley Square

Next morning my head was filled with a buzzing born of weariness, and my arms and legs felt as though they were filled with lead. A little after seven I put on my cap and jacket and left the Rest to get some breakfast. An ample supply of pound notes had been left in the pocket of my coat by the writers of the note, it seemed.

As I walked along I couldn't help noticing the early-morning mist and the rooftops against the sky beyond. Gray—all gray—suggestive of a hideous dead quality, as if a malignant living mold shrouded London. I bought several newspapers and proceeded to find an inexpensive restaurant. Traffic moved briskly on the streets, and well-dressed men in

bowlers, carrying umbrellas, moved on the walks, looking very content and peaceful and complacent. I envied them in their security.

Over an egg and tea in the dimly lit white tile interior of the restaurant, I examined the newspapers. The screaming headline of the first paper jerked my attention away from my food and filled me with fresh dread.

Lord Wolters Slain, the words shouted. *Harley Square Home Devastated. Mysterious Killers Still at Large.*

Lord Wolters. I knew the name, of course. Everyone did. In the Cabinet he was perhaps the most important man, particularly valuable to England in these times of stress because of his military experience. Defense needed an able guiding hand, and Lord Wolters provided it. Or he had. Now he was dead. And somehow it formed a link in my mind with the horror on the *Queen of Madagascar.*

I read the other accounts. They said much the same thing. But the third paper gave a bit of news that made my stomach grow cold again. An unofficial report, it said, from servants of Lord Wolters, hinted that the corpse was mangled and dismembered, and that whole sections of the house were demolished, including several walls.

There must be a connection. There *had* to be! Madness was slowly breaking loose in the streets of London. In such a time of world crisis, the death of Lord Wolters and the strange cargo out of the East united to form—what? I could not say, exactly. But, somehow, a meaning lurked there. A dreadful meaning.

Another item on a back page confirmed my suspicions. A fisherman had been killed in a little village on the coast. Before he died, he babbled insanely of monstrous, gigantic shapes coming out of the water, rising from the sea at night, and overwhelming him. A back page! No one would notice it.

This was two nights ago, the same night I was dropped over the side of the *Queen.* Those . . . *things* . . . came ashore and Captain Bezahrov loaded the long boxes with the cargo Inspector Rohm had named as checked by Customs. The things made their way to London, and Lord Wolters died. I had to see Harley Square! Every moment drew me deeper into the horrible pattern, all the more frightening because I knew only vaguely what it was, and not why, or from where.

I left the papers on the table and hurried from the restaurant. A few minutes after eight o'clock I stood in the center of a crowd of curious onlookers outside of the iron fence before the home of Lord Wolters. Scotland Yard was already on duty, guarding the doors. I could see nothing of the ruined interior of the house.

"Have they taken him away?" I asked a man next to me.

"Yes, a few minutes ago." The man laughed harshly and sucked on his pipe. "Only he wasn't on a stretcher. The hospital men brought out a big canvas sack. I hear he was in small pieces, all torn up. Devil's work, it sounds like." And he laughed again.

I turned away, feeling the chill of the morning fog on me. *Devil's work.* Yes, living devils. My nose twitched. and I finally took conscious thought of the odor hanging over the whole dismal square. Decay and festering rot. The smell in the ship's hold. The smell of the things. They *had* been here!

I listened for a bit and heard people talking about the odor. It puzzled them, but not one ventured a guess as to what it was. I wanted to seize them, one by one, and scream at them that I knew. But they never would have believed me, and the police would probably have run me off, less politely than Inspector Rohm had done.

Someone tugged at my sleeve. I turned, half-expecting to see the man with the pipe I had spoken to only a moment before. But another man stood there, a wizened, rat-like little man in incredibly filthy clothes and a checked cap. One milky blue eye peered at me from a stubbled triangular face. The other was covered by a dirty black patch. The man leaned close to me.

"Mr. Marlow," he said in a wheezing voice. His breath reeked of alcohol.

"Yes, my name's Marlow."

"I got a message for you."

A message! Perhaps they were contacting me at last. "Who's it from?" I asked quickly.

The man with the patch cackled softly. "Him Who Doesn't Walk."

"Him—" The words stuck in my mouth. "Look here," I said angrily, "who are you and who's this man you're talking about?"

"Him Who Doesn't Walk," the fellow repeated in his shrill whisper. "He says to tell you he knows you're alive when you're not supposed to be. He says it won't be long, though. He says you haven't got much more time."

"Time? Time for what?"

The blue eye winked at me. "Time to live, Mr. Marlow. Time to live."

Angrily I reached out for him, intending to grab him and haul him off to some alley and beat the truth out of him about this incoherent babble of someone called Him Who Doesn't Walk. But as if it were a perfectly timed signal, the man turned away and someone to the rear of the crowd shoved abruptly.

I stumbled forward, bumping against two ladies who were in turn pushed against the iron fence. I fought to get my balance, and finally pulled myself erect. One of the women was adjusting her hat and glaring at me as she pinned it in place.

"'Look here, sonny—" she exclaimed loudly.

"I'm sorry, madam," I blurted back, and turned again to where I had been standing. I searched the crowd, but I didn't see the man. I pushed my way out and stood finally in the middle of the square, surrounded by the gloomy gray fronts of the old houses. The man with the patch was nowhere in sight.

I started walking. One more incident, one more name on the role of horror and impossibility. Him Who Doesn't Walk. And not much time for me to live! Evidently these men weren't connected with my rescuers. Evidently they did not want me to

remain alive because I knew of the cargo of the ship, and linked it with the slaying of Lord Wolters. And some way they could watch my every move, as my rescuers could evidently also do. I walked on, smoking a cigarette thoughtfully.

What could I do? Where could I run? I had so little information, and yet it was enought to warrant my dying. And how soon would the attack come? And from where?

I stopped at an intersection to light another cigarette. A man approached me, this time well-dressed, in a gray overcoat and bowler. He had a slender, scholarly face with intensely black eyes, a straight nose, thin lips and a deeply bronzed complexion. He could have been any age from twenty to seventy. His face was strange, decidedly not English.

"Excuse me," he said. "Do you have a light?" I nodded, holding the match to his cigarette. I had a wild desire to run. He might be the very killer with orders to put a knife in my back.

"Let's walk a bit," he said softly. His voice was accented with strange, resonant tones, as if an Oriental were trying to speak perfect English. He put his hand on my elbow and piloted me down a side street. The he relaxed his grip and puffed his cigarette. I waited ready to turn on him at the first sign of danger.

"I sent you that note, Marlow," he said quietly, staring straight ahead. "I dragged you out of the sea and put you up at *Bane's Rest*. My name is Gerasmin."

The name penetrated dully through my shock. It meant nothing to me. "Can . . . can you explain anything about what's going on?" I stammered. "You said in the note you . . you were my friends. Where are the others?"

"There is only one other," Gerasmin said, with a hint of sadness in his voice. "Her name is Angela. If you will come to my rooms, we will explain a few things to you."

"How do I know you don't want to kill me once you get me there?"

"You don't," he replied. "You must take that chance. But I can only say we trusted you and kept you from dying. You could do the same for us."

"All right," I said. "To your rooms." I wanted, more than anything, to get at the roots of the situation, and I determined to keep alert for trouble while I learned as much as possible.

Gerasmin had rooms in one of the better hotels. I felt out of place in my sailor's jacket and cap as we rode up to the fifth floor. He led me down a dim, thickly-carpeted hallway and into a large well-furnished suite. Large glass windows, stretching from ceiling to floor, looked out upon the street.

The girl he had called Angela stood by the window, smoking and looking out at the gray sky. She was slender and well built, with dark hair drawn tightly back over her head. A very lovely young woman as she turned and looked at me with frank brown eyes.

"This must be Mr. Marlow," she said warmly. Her smile was weary, though, as if from strain and worry. "How are you?" I heard the click as

the door was locked behind me.

"Fine, thanks," I said awkwardly. Gerasmin threw his hat and topcoat onto a chair and moved to the liquor cabinet. "Sit down, Marlow. I'll fix us drinks. Scotch do for you?"

"Yes, that'll be fine. I twisted my cap in my hands. I wanted the answers! The curiosity was pulsing through me again, almost eclipsing the mad terrors of the last thirty-six hours.

We said nothing until Gerasmin handed out the drinks. Then he lit another cigarette with a steady hand and said, "Marlow, we pulled you out of the sea two nights ago."

"How?" I asked.

"'Perhaps I can explain by telling you a little about Angela and me. I am an Indian by birth, and I spent much time in Tibet. Consequently, I have studied realms of knowledge that would not be recognized as valid at Oxford." He tapped his skull, smiling thinly. "Spirit matters, Marlow. Movement of matter by thought. It can be done. And second sight, if you want to call it that. I can see anywhere, at any time."

His words were calm and quiet, and yet the meaning struck home with the force of heavy blows. Here he was, this dark-skinned man with the ageless face, in a hotel room in London, telling me in clipped British accents that he had powers that I never knew existed, powers hinted at only mystically in ancient legends.

"I'm afraid I can't believe you," I said weakly, like a man in shock.

He smiled. "No, I imagine not. You see that?" He was pointing to a small blue vase standing on top of a radio-phonograph console. "Watch it, Marlow. Watch it carefully." He closed his eyes and drew his lips together tightly. His ageless face assumed a riged quality. I turned my eyes to the vase.

And suddenly—*it vanished!*

Amazed, I turned back to Gerasmin. His eyes were open again and a lazy smile lay on his lips. He weighed an object in his left hand. The blue vase.

"That," he said, "was relatively easy. I saw you on the *Queen of Madagascar*, saw you dropped over the rail. I brought you out of the sea, to this room, and took you by cab to the Rest."

What was the man saying? A sorcerer . . . he must be that, an ancient sorcerer reborn. This was not the modern world of London. And yet it was, with a new and frightening dimension added, a dimension of magic and witchcraft, the supernatural.

"Why did you rescue me then?" I stammered. "And how did you know about me in the first place?"

"We, or rather Gerasmin here, had been watching the *Queen*," Angela explained, "ever since she set out from India with her cargo of demons. That's what they are, Marlow. Creations of sorcery."

"And I just happened to be on board. Is that it?"

"Yes." She nodded. "The *Queen* needed one more crewman. They were undermanned as it was, since all of them but you were hirelings in the scheme. Only Captain Bezahrov and his mates, though, knew what the cargo was. And when Gerasmin

saw you about to die, he decided to save you, in the hope that you would join us."

The questions were coming faster than I could ask them. "Where . . . where did those things come from?"

"The monsters?" Gerasmin said quietly. "From India, Tibet, Russia—all the dark corners of the East. They have been in the process of creation for ten years or so, by men who still practice the black arts. In a hundred shops in a hundred cities, men worked to create them. They are actual demons, Mr. Marlow, children of what you call Hell. They were common in ancient times. The men who created them did not know their purpose in the Plan. They were paid, and they did their evil work."

"But what for?" I said. "I still don't see that."

"It's a scheme that's been under way for years," Angela said, almost in a whisper. The smoke from her cigarette made a filmly halo around her head. "A scheme to overtake the western world. My father and Gerasmin unearthed it in India twelve years ago. My father was Colonel Saunders."

I nodded. The name was famous in the Indian Colonial Regiments.

Her face grew strained and harsh. "The leader of the organization discovered my father and Gerasmin. Father was killed in Bombay. Gerasmin escaped and we are the only two people who now have full knowledge of the organization."

"To take over the Western world?" I choked. "That seems impossible."

"It's possible," Gerasmin breathed. "It's too possible, with their power. Why, Marlow, the secrets of the East are undreamed of. Those things have monstrous strength. They cannot be killed easily. We have been alone, Angela and I. Now, if you'll join us, there'll be three. There's not a great deal we can do, but we can at least try. We must try! Angela and I have been waiting for years for the scheme to come off. And now it's under way, and London's the starting point."

"From the East," I murmured. "Russia?"

Gerasmin smiled. "Yes, partly. They're even blatant about the fact. It's been written in their books for years. Captain Bezahrov is perhaps the second most important man in the organization. He is pure Russian. The real leader is a mixture of the worst elements in all the Eastern races."

"Would that have anything to do with Him Who Doesn't Walk?" I said.

Angela started. "How did you know that name?"

I explained about the incident in Harley Square, and the man with the patch over his eye.

Gerasmin snapped his fingers and got to his feet. "Then they're on to you. It was only a matter of time, since they can see anywhere just as easily as I can. Yes, Him Who Doesn't Walk is the leader. I've never seen him, but I know he is a cripple and can't use his legs, if he has any legs at all."

"Where is he?" I said. The thing was beginning to fall together, damnably, horribly, and I realized that I was now cut off, alone, and almost forced into alliance with these two. I

had little choice, even though they seemed hopelessly pitiful in their efforts, just the two of them.

"He's somewhere under London," Angela said, gesturing. "In sewers, deep under ground, in hidden rooms, everywhere. We've picked up bits of information here and there, and evidently London is honeycombed with tunnels and rooms he and his followers have made over the years."

"Can't you get Scotland Yard to work?" I said, forgetting for a moment my own experience.

Gerasmin smiled grimly. "You tried it, Marlow. We saw you try it, and we let you go ahead because we knew what would happen. They called you insane. Mad. We face the same problem. And now that Him Who Doesn't Walk is on to you, we may not have much time to work."

He said it calmly, impassively. And I realized that they were bound to me now, instead of the other way around. They had taken me in on a chance of my joining them, and had thereby exposed themselves to more sudden death. I felt instinctively closer to them, and I couldn't help watching Angela. She was a very beautiful woman to find in such a lunatic's game.

"Look, Marlow," Gerasmin said, "we don't have much chance, I admit. Lord Wolters is already out of the way. God knows who is next. That item about the dead fisherman went unnoticed. Nobody will listen to us, and we're entirely alone. But we'd like to have you in."

I gazed at him closely, at those ageless black eyes and the fine dark hair resting sleekly on his head. A gentleman of this and other worlds, fighting against an army of hellish creatures born of magic. Then I looked at Angela.

"I'm in, if you want me," I said.

I walked to the liquor cabinet to refill my drink, gesturing as I moved. "And you don't look so bad from here. You seem to take care of everything. I suppose you even had Mr. Sudbury move on, as a precaution."

Angela laughed softly again and moved to the window. "He's a very intelligent fellow, Gerasmin, this Mr. Marlow," she said.

"Where can we start?" I asked. "Or can we start—do anything at all?"

"Now that you are with us," Gerasmin said briskly, "there will be two of us for the actual work. I never wanted to operate alone, and I did not want to expose Angela to danger. She's too important, too valuable."

"I'm afraid I won't be much help," I told them. "I don't have any power—"

"We won't worry about that. I think the first thing is to find out how we get into the underground and see if we can scout some of the rooms belonging to Him Who Doesn't Walk. We'll ask around in the pubs. I have a few friends, although I have a strong hunch the entrance to the underground is through the shop of T. Nedros in Ryster Lane. He—"

"Gerasmin!" Angela spoke sharply at the window. We hurried over and looked down. Two cabs had pulled up before the hotel, and half a dozen men were getting out. Their heads were covered and we could not

see their faces. I felt sweat run down my armpits, and for some reason I remembered the words of the man with the patch.

"Can you go into their minds?" Angela asked tensely.

Gerasmin nodded, closing his eyes. A moment later he opened them. "They're from the organization all right. Him Who Doesn't Walk has seen us together and has decided to finish us all at one time. Come on!"

He ran to the closet, pulled it open, and took two large pistols from the top shelf. He gave one to Angela and one to me. Unbottoning his suit coat, he loosened the brass hilts of the two knives in his waistband. Then, after a minute's thought, he took the pistol from Angela and dropped it into his own pocket.

"They're coming fast," he said. "We'll try the regular way out." He headed for the hall, jerked the door open and started down the fire escape. I ran ahead and pulled the door open, but I stopped short, seeing the figure in the coat and bowler two flights below.

"One's coming up here." I looked out again and caught a glimpse of a dark, upraised face glaring at me as the man climbed. "They look human, but there's another one down in the alley."

Gerasmin started back toward the rooms, with Angela and me close behind. Gerasmin indicated the open door from which we had just come. "In here. We'll try—"

There was a thunderous explosion, and a shot tore past my ear. Angela screamed softly and I whirled, pistol in hand. The quartet of killers had come around the bend of the hall and was closing in.

Chapter IV

The Road to the Underground

I dropped to one knee, sighted and fired. One of the men fell and the other three came on, coats thrown open and hands bringing out knives. They were men with dark, alien features, like the crew on the *Queen of Madagascar*. They were perhaps fifty yards down the hall, which was already filled with ropes of acrid smoke and echoes of shots. A woman screamed thinly in the distance. I remember a couple of heads popping out of doors and drawing back hastily.

Gerasmin fired over my shoulder, carefully and steadily. The second of the killers fell. Almost immediately I fired again, and the third staggered and bumped against the wall, screeching in an unholy language, clutching his arm where a dark, ugly stain began to grow. Abruptly, Angela cried out and we whirled in time to see the fire escape door come open. The first of the men from the alley flung his knife at us, his mouth twisted into a thick-lipped snarl.

I shoved Gerasmin roughly and he tumbled into the open door of the suite. I flattened myself out, feeling the rough furry carpet slam into my face as the knife whispered by overhead. From the corner of my eye, I saw it bury itself in the woodwork a dozen inches above my head, whirring faintly.

We were doing pretty well, but

then they hadn't been expecting us to be prepared, I suppose. This had evidently been the first move to eliminate Gerasmin, as well as me. The man of India leaned around the doorframe and triggered another shot. The knife-thrower was blown backwards through the fire escape door. He slammed into the railing, was thrown off balance, and went tumbling over the guard rail. His shriek dwindled as he fell toward the stones of the alley.

An alarm bell jangled wildly down the corridor. I started to get to my feet, and just as I did Angela jerked the knife from the wall, her eyes wide with fright and horror. She lashed out over my head. I ducked instinctively and heard a savage groan. When I turned again, I saw the fourth man of the quartet staggering back, an expression of childish bewilderment on his dark, primitive face. His head tilted back and the bowler fell off. He turned around, took a few steps, fell incongruously like a graceful ballet dancer, and lay still.

Angela's shoulders were shaking. She stared down at the knife with its blade stained a bright liquid red. Her left hand was pressed to her cheek, white-knuckled. "I had to," she breathed, not to us but to some great invisible jury of righteous men. "I had to kill him. He was almost on you . . ." She managed to glance at me, and then she began to sob quietly, her shoulders slumping. "I've never killed anyone before. I've never . . ." Her words were obliterated by the sobs.

Gerasmin put his arm around her and led her back into the apartment. I followed, the smoking gun hanging in my hand. I was beginning to relax, feeling the strain seep out of my keyed-up muscles. The three of us were in the vestibule, Gerasmin in the lead, when he stepped back suddenly and faced us. His dark eyes were those of a man who had looked into the pit. I caught that hideous odor again. Death . . . Decay . . .

"Him Who Doesn't Walk has been watching his agents die," Gerasmin breathed with harsh, quick intensity. "Now he's sent—"

"What's wrong?" I snapped.

"Don't waste words. Stand close to me. We'll have to leave here. The thing's been transported right into the sitting room." He drew the sobbing girl closer and I moved in toward them. Thank God she was too upset to realize fully what was going on.

Something tore the vestibule curtains aside and I saw it, towering there, its red smoky eyes glaring with dull fires of infinite evil, its body a thing of shadow, misshapen and lecherous in form, its great furred hands reaching out for us, its mouth emitting snuffling sounds. Again the power of Him Who Doesn't Walk struck home as I realized that this thing had been literally transported by thought to this very room, to destroy us.

It took one step forward. Its hands stretched toward us. I looked frantically to Gerasmin, but his eyes were closed, his lips clamped together tightly, and that vacant mindless expression lay on his face. Tiny globs of sweat glistened on his dark forehead. Angela sobbed wordlessly. *Hurry up,* my mind

screamed, *for God's sake, hurry up!*

My flesh crawled. The thing took another step. Gerasmin groaned audibly. The furry hands reached for us and the stench grew overpowering. My mind swam, blank and incoherent, and I wanted to fall forward in weak helplessness. I wanted to stop the terrible effort and let myself be drawn into that thing of ancient evil. Dimly, I heard Gerasmin's whispered words and I held on for a moment longer.

"*We're going . . .*"

And then my mind whirled all the more. The room tilted crazily. Gerasmin and Angela fell away, and I swam over and over in a swirling gray vacuum where a furious wind shrieked around me. I moved my arms wildly, trying to catch hold of something. My stomach pushed against my throat and the wind tearing at my skin brought actual pain.

Gradually, a kind of sea-sick rocking sensation filled me, and the grayness broke apart and portions of a scene sifted through. The gray vanished, bit by bit, and I stared at the brick wall across the tiny alleyway, watching it heave from side to side and gradually come to rest.

Gerasmin was looking around, examining the alleyway. A hundred yards to our right lay a street. "We are five or six blocks from the hotel," he mused, staring at the crowds passing on the street. "That ought to do. We'll get a cab."

Angela gazed at me, quiet now, only her eyes showing the agony she had been through. They were reddish and raw-looking. Gerasmin seized my hand. "Put your gun away, Marlow. You too, Angela. We must get out of here."

Angela dropped the knife, still clutched in her hand, into her purse. I nodded clumsily and slipped my pistol into the pocket of my pea jacket. Without a word we started toward the alley mouth. "That wasn't easy," Gerasmin said as we walked. "Three humans a distance of six blocks . . ." He shook his head and closed his eyes tightly. "I get a terrible pain in my head . . ."

I wondered about the tortuous effort it must have been to lift me from the Channel, miles away, and bring me all the way back to London. Evidently he had thought me valuable to do such a thing, and it drew me closer to them.

We stepped out onto the street and began walking toward the corner. The crowd eddied around us, unaware and oblivious of the things we had seen and been through. It made me laugh inwardly, a bit crazily. If they knew, what would any one of them do? It was hard to say, but I wondered how long they would remain sane.

"What was in the room?" Angela asked wearily.

"One of *them*," Gerasmin replied.

"From the ship?"

Gerasmin nodded, and I saw her shudder involuntarily.

"Look," I said, pointing. "There's a cab. Shall we get it?"

They indicated that we should, and minutes later we were cruising through London streets, relatively safe from attack. Only the watching mind of Him Who Doesn't Walk

could be on us now. We still had to be careful.

"Now," Gerasmin said, adjusting his necktie, "we'll start getting information about the entrance to the underground."

"It seems pretty risky going in there," I countered. "We'd be in greater danger of being killed."

"He's right," Angela said softly.

"They will keep trying to kill us," Gerasmin said, staring at the panel closing the driver off from us, "no matter what we do or where we are. We can at least make some effort to find out a bit more about their plans. Perhaps we might run across something. You see, Marlow," he stared at me with those incredibly ancient eyes, "we don't have much chance to live anyway. We might as well make it count."

I thought about it a minute. He was right, of course. I tried to smile. "All right. We'll see for how much it'll count then."

"Good. The pubs. We'll start there, so . . ."

I didn't need the end of the sentence. I leaned forward, slid the panel back and spoke to the driver. "We want to go somewhere near Ryster Lane."

"Whereabouts, guvnor?" he said, not turning his head. "What number in the Lane?"

"Not *in* the Lane," I corrected. "A few blocks from it."

"All right, guvnor. Where?"

"Any place. You pick the spot."

He turned around and stared at me in a peculiar manner. "Suit yourself, guvnor," he said, shaking his head. They all thought we were insane. We, Gerasmin, Angela Saunders and I. Mad, and removed from society. Yet we saw horrible realities where supposedly saner men could not.

I slid the panel shut and slid back, lighting a cigarette. The smoke felt good in my lungs. Gerasmin had closed his eyes and was resting his head in his hands. He'd been at it a long time, and I supposed every effort of his mind put on the strain a bit more.

Angela sat between us. Her head was nodding in exhaustion, dropping slowly toward my shoulder. Once she awoke with a start and smiled hazily, questioningly. I said, "Go ahead. Rest." Her expression was one of grateful weariness as she dropped off, her hair fanning out on the cloth of my jacket.

I leaned back deeper into the seat and shut my eyes. A little rest, even in the joggling cab, would do me good.

Chapter V

Meet T. Nedros

Twenty minutes later the cabby let us out in a narrow street six blocks from Ryster Lane. Gerasmin paid him. I glanced at my watch. A few minutes past noon. We looked around. The houses were old, falling into ruin. Here and there newer facades intruded themselves among these ancient moldering wrecks. A greengrocer in one place, a phonograph shop in another. Somewhere in the distance a whistle hooted on the Thames. Not too far away, I decided.

"Down there." I pointed to the

left, to a pub in the next block. We started walking, our heels clicking along on the stone sidewalks. A strange trio we were as we went into that smoky, beer-smelling place. The bartender glanced at us sleepily, moved away from the two seedy-looking customers, men of middle age in the garb of workmen, and came to wait on us.

We each ordered a beer, Angela with obvious distaste. Gerasmin called the barkeep by name, and they exchanged a few words of greeting until the barkeep moved away to fetch the beer. I leaned closer to Gerasmin, fidgeting, wanting to get some concrete action.

"Why can't you send your mind up to Nedros'," I asked, "and take a look around? It would save a lot of time, and we're short of that."

"And Him Who Doesn't Walk would know somebody was spying. He can feel other minds watching him," Gerasmin replied in a whisper.

"Well, it looks to me like he can probably see us right here, too, and find out what we're doing."

"No." The dark head shook back and forth. "There's been a mental shield around us, the three of us, ever since we came out in that alley. It's hard to keep up, but Him Who Doesn't Walk can't see or hear us. That's one trick we've got over him, I think. As far as he's concerned, Claud has been talking to empty air."

"Careful!" Angela whispered suddenly. Claud, the barkeep, was returning with three mugs of beer. He set them down with great precision, so that none of the fluffy white foam spilled.

"There you are, pal," he said to Gerasmin, rumbling the words loudly. Gerasmin paid him and leaned across the bar in a confidential manner. He crooked his finger and Claud caught on, glancing suspiciously at the two working men and drawing in close.

"I want to ask you a couple of questions, Claud. If you answer the last one right, there's ten pounds in it for you."

Claud laughed under his breath, his thick red face spreading itself into a grin. "Go ahead, pal. Let's have your questions."

"This one is a point of information," Gerasmin said. "How far is Ryster Lane from here?"

Claud jerked a thick thumb. "Four blocks. Towards the river."

"Good," Gerasmin replied. He took a sip of the beer and I followed suit. Angela left hers untouched, watching the barkeep Claud intently. "Here's the next," Gerasmin said. "Have you ever heard of a man called Him Who Doesn't Walk?"

Claud blanched. His eyes grew wide and round, his hands clutched the edge of the bar. I had a strange eerie feeling all over me, as if some strange force, or power, or *mind* were trying, straining to peer at us, but could not. As if it were fighting a barrier, smashing wrathfully against it to see what was going on within our little bubble of invisibility.

"Look, pal," Claud breathed in terror, "I don't want no trouble. Why don't you and your friends go someplace else?"

Gerasmin fingered the notes. In my growing impatience, I wanted to

reach out and grab the barkeep's throat and shake the truth out of him. But Gerasmin remained cool and careful, displaying the money only a few inches from Claud's florid face.

"Have you heard of it?" Gerasmin repeated.

Claud licked his lips and eyed the notes. "Yes, I heard of it."

"This is the important question," Gerasmin said smoothly. "Answer it and the money's yours."

"Let's hear it first."

"There's an importer in Ryster Lane. His name is Nedros. Is that shop the entrance to " Gerasmin hesitated. His eyes and voice grew hard. ". . . *the underground?*"

Claud breathed heavily, not answering. His eyes darted around the room, and I could see him taking in the tawdriness of his pub, thinking of tawdriness and the struggle in his existence. He looked at the money again.

"I don't—" he began.

"Ten pounds," Gerasmin whispered, "is ten pounds."

"Sure," Claud blurted out suddenly. "Nedros is the entrance to the underground. But I only *heard* that. I don't know for sure. Remember that. I just heard it." He snatched the money away from Gerasmin, his tone growing strident. "You and your friends better leave."

Gerasmin smiled thinly and motioned to Angela and me. We walked out of the pub, leaving Claud staring down at the money in his hand. Poor devil, I thought. He'll be wondering when he's going to get a knife in the back every day for the next year.

Angela glanced at the clouds, darker now. It was only early afternoon, but it might as well have been the deep of night. We stood on the walk, clearing the stuffy smell of the pub from our heads. Angela spoke abruptly.

"Look, you two. Wherever we go from here, I'm coming along."

"Don't be foolish," Gerasmin said quietly.

"No, I'm serious."

"We've seen things no man should," I said to her, "let alone a woman."

"You forget, Mr. Marlow," she replied, her tone hardening, "my father died in India because of what is going on now. I have a right to be part of your work! I've got a score to settle. Woman or not, my father died because of Him Who Doesn't Walk."

"This doesn't seem like a good place to argue about it," I said, glancing back into the pub. The two working men were staring curiously at us.

"You're right," Gerasmin put in. "We'll find a place to stay until after dark. And then we'll try our luck at getting into the shop of Mr. Nedros."

"I'm going with you," Angela said again in a determined manner.

We did not reply as we moved off along the walk. The room we rented was in a rooming house two blocks from the pub. We sat in the chill, dismal place all afternoon, playing cards with a pack we had been lucky enough to find in the desk. None of us said much. The ominous sky beyond the cheap yellowed curtains at the window threw a pall over our spirits, and now and again we heard the mournful voice of a horn on the river.

About six I went out for some food and the latest papers. I read them hastily on my way back to the rooming house, my throat becoming tight and dry, my stomach growing cold. I raced up the stairs to our room, forgetting about the sacks of food, and threw the papers down in front of Angela and Gerasmin.

"More of it," was all I could say. They glanced at me worriedly and bent over the papers. One lead story covered the killings in the hotel under a headline that began: *Mass Slaying*. But the most terrible piece of news concerned Sir Guy Folversham, Minister of the Exchequer. He had been slain around noon on his country estate. Torn to bits and left dead and mutilated in his garage. A gardener reported having seen something fleeing across the fields that looked like, ". . . *a great gory shadow*," the story said.

Gerasmin ground out his cigarette with deliberate anger. "Again," he breathed savagely. "They'll have the country wrecked in a week, at this rate. All the leaders being murdered." He slammed his fist into his palm.

"To Nedros,'" I said. "Let's get started."

He nodded, rising and checking his pistol. Angela brought up the subject of her accompanying us, and Gerasmin argued with her briefly.

"I'm going," she insisted.

"All right," he said irritably, slipping into his topcoat. "We must stop wasting time. We can't afford it any more. Come with us, but if we signal for you to turn back, come back here and don't question us. Is that clear?"

She nodded, silent and stern-faced.

We set off through a heavy fog. I felt depressed, overwhelmed by the tremendous odds facing us. Our heels clicked with empty sounds on the cobbles, and the sound of fog horns hooted dismally in our ears. A flickering street lamp illuminated the sign that indicated Ryster Lane and we moved down the crooked little street, examining each of the shadowed doorways.

Finally I tugged at Gerasmin's arm and pointed. "Here." A numeral above the door said 8. We stepped into the doorway. The shop lay in darkness, its two windows curtained from top to bottom. Heavy gold lettering on the glass proclaimed, *T. Nedros, Importer*.

"Not much of a shop," Angela said quietly.

"Doesn't need to be," I said, "for what's behind it."

Gerasmin tried the door. It was locked, of course. Without a word he closed his eyes, his lips drew tight and his brow wrinkled with effort. Angela seized my arm, staring at the Indian in the shadowed gloom. Gerasmin groaned audibly and we heard a faint click. He sighed and relaxed, his shoulders slumping as he leaned forward to test the door again. It swung open imperceptibly.

"Come on," he said. "The lock's broken."

We had no sooner stepped into the darkened interior, reeking of incense and the smell of musty cloth and wood, than a bare bulb in the ceiling flared on, revealing the angular

glare of dust-covered glass cases, empty now of goods. Evidently T. Nedros did no importing at all to speak of. I snatched my gun from my pocket and shoved Angela behind me.

A voice cut through the silence. "Do not use the weapons, gentlemen."

We whirled around.

A section of empty wall shelving stood aside, and in the entrance was framed a monstrously gross man in dirty gray trousers and a filthy white shirt. His head was round and laden with fold on pendulous fold of greasy yellowish fat. Small eyes darted nervously at us, and a tiny pink tongue, like a snake's, flicked over his lips. The naked light bulb shone wetly on his black hair, and I caught the sickening odor of lemon cologne. His fat, childish fingers were curled around a heavy .45 caliber automatic.

"I have a small warning system set up," he said tonelessly, "which arouses me when anyone steps through my front door."

"You're Nedros?" I questioned.

"That is correct. But I have not had the pleasure of meeting *you*."

"We'll forego that pleasure," Gerasmin said coldly.

"I will be quick about it," Nedros said, his cheeks quivering faintly. "I do not know you, but I can guess why you are here. No one would come here who did not belong to the organization, unless they were spies. You could not be here on business of a commercial nature, since I do not actually carry on that kind of business." He laughed ponderously for a moment, and then sobered again. "I must, of course, kill you."

My stomach twisted and coiled itself into writhing knots. Suddenly, I felt something cold touch my free hand, which hung at my side. Nedros could not see that hand, and I felt experimentally. A cold, sharp edge. *A knife!* One from the hotel! I wanted to turn and speak to Angela, to burst out my thanks. But instead I slid the knife up my sleeve and waited tensely.

"Let me have your weapons," Nedros ordered sharply. He indicated Gerasmin. "You first!"

Gerasmin took one cat-like step forward and started to bring his pistol up. Nedros reached out smashing down with the barrel of his weapon and knocking the gun clattering to the floor. His thick lips quivered. "If I were not going to kill you," he breathed viciously, "I would punish you for being so foolish. I would punish you painfully. You!" he snarled in my direction. "Your weapon!"

I began walking casually forward, feeling the knife pressing against my fingertips, up inside my sleeve. Nedros shifted his gun to his left hand and extended his right to take hold of the pistol. I took more steps, casually, as if I were out for a Sunday walk.

"That's far enough," he said, not knowing whether to expect an attack or not. His one moment of hesitation, thrown off guard by my feigned carelessness, was enough. His trigger finger began to whiten. I whipped up my gun, striking the barrel of his weapon aside. It roared loudly and one of the glass cases tinkled and smashed to bits. By that

time I had slipped the knife out, and as quickly as I could I drove it into his heart.

He gasped, his tiny eyes widening. His gun exploded again as his finger jerked spasmodically, but the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the floor. Then he peered curiously down at the ugly red blotch widening on his dirty white shirt front. Abruptly, his eyes closed, as if he had fallen asleep, and his legs collapsed from under him. His whole fleshy body quivered once in obscene ripples, and lay still.

Angela watched with a terrified expression. I pulled her gently forward, and she shielded her eyes as we stepped across the gross corpse of the dead Mr. Nedros and into the room beyond.

It was a plain room, with only a bed, a table and chairs and a lavatory behind a screen painted with Japanese figures. A green light bulb was set high in one wall. Evidently the alarm. And in the opposite wall was a heavy gray iron door studded with large round rivets.

Gerasmin breathed deeply. "Well, this looks like the entrance. From now on we've got to be more careful than ever." I stepped forward and pulled up the massive handle, and the door swung open noiselessly. Stairs descended, shrouded in darkness, and far, far down in the distance was a vague gleam of light.

I turned to Angela. "Do you feel up to it?"

She nodded. "Of course," she said softly. I could see that her hands were trembling, though. "Go on," she said.

I took the lead, my heart pounding at triphammer speed in my chest as we started down those stairs that led into a pit of darkness and God knows what unnamed horrors.

Chapter VI

The Halls of Death

The steps were narrow and steep, so that we had to go down them almost sideways. We tried to make as little noise as possible, holding our pistols ready. The gleam of light grew larger, but with terrible slowness. It seemed as though we were going downward for hour after hour. My legs began to get tired. Once, Angela stumbled and almost fell. I turned in time, catching my blance, to keep her from going down and sending me tumbling down with her. She breathed tensely for a moment, clutching my arms, her face near mine, and then she said, "I'm all right. Let's keep going."

We were like three heroes from ancient legend making the traditional descent into hell, except that we were not heroic. We were frightened; even Gerasmin had been nervous and edgy since the encounter with the killers at the hotel. What lay down where the light beckoned, we couldn't tell. One thing was sure, however. We were in the underground. The horrible stench of those *things* filled the air, even as near to the surface as we were.

The light turned out to be a small blue bulb set in the wall at the bottom of the stairs. I turned back to them and whispered, "We're almost

at the bottom. A tunnel runs on from here."

"Let's wait a minute and get our breath," Gerasmin replied. I nodded, stepping off the lowest step and helping Angela down. She leaned tiredly against me. We examined the corridor ahead of us, our nostrils filled with that timeless reek of dead life reborn.

The corridor stretched into the distance, lit every hundred yards or so by one of those blue bulbs, shining like vague blurred rows of streetlamps. The corridor evidently had no end. It stretched away and ended abruptly in the shadows. Gerasmin and Angela indicated that they were ready and we started out again. We tramped on down that hall for another endless space of time, with the blue bulbs marching past, one after another.

At last Gerasmin whispered, "Look up ahead, Marlow. The corridor ends!"

Perhaps we had stumbled into some by-way designed to throw prowlers off the track. But it couldn't be! There had been no cross corridors anywhere along the passage. "No," I replied, "there must be a door." I walked faster, conscious of the fact that we were deep underground and above us lay London, where perhaps even now more hideous crimes were taking place. We were in the stronghold of Him Who Doesn't Walk, and even though Gerasmin's mind kept a shield around us, I had the feeling that we were dreadfully close to death.

The corridor did not end with a door. It turned abruptly to the right for a few feet, and to the left again. As I rounded the first turn, I jammed myself back against the wall. Gerasmin and Angela pulled up short. Light spilled down the corridor, evidently from a room a few feet to the left of the next bend. I listened and heard the harsh tones of a voice I recognized.

"*All right, old boy,*" the voice said, "*so you do argue with him, wot does it get you? A berth in the river, is all.*" A heavier, deeper voice mumbled something in reply that I could not hear.

"That voice belongs to the man with the patch on his eye," I whispered to the two behind me. "You remember, the one who gave me the message from Him Who Doesn't Walk, in Harley Square."

"Hear anything else?" Gerasmin asked.

"Another voice. This must be a stop on the route to the center of operations."

"We'll have to rush them," Gerasmin whispered.

I nodded. "Angela, you stay here until we finally get them cleaned out." I silenced her with a wave of my hand. "No protests. You ready?"

Gerasmin said that he was. We hesitated only a moment. Here again, beyond the bend of the tunnel, lay possible death. I was becoming numb with the thought of it, and I think I had counted myself a dead man from the very beginning, after waking up in *Bane's Rest*. I brought my pistol up, feeling the sweat on my palms, and started along the corridor at a dead run. Gerasmin pounded behind me.

As we rounded the turn, an alarm bell began to jangle wildly. I cursed

myself. Of course they'd have them. And the corridor was thirty feet long! I was halfway down it when the alarm went off. They'd have plenty of time to get ready. I broke into the room and slid out flat on the floor, firing. Two men crouched behind a large table, firing back. One was the man with the patch, who recognized me and cackled with laughter, because he evidently thought we were trapped. The other, a swarthy, thick-set man wearing gold earrings and a thin black moustache, fired at us with one hand. His other, I could see, was frantically pressing an alarm switch on the table.

The few moments that it lasted were filled with noise and smoke. I aimed and shot, and the swarthy man's hand, pressed on the buzzer, disappeared in a welter of blood. He reared up above the table top, and Gerasmin's shot sheared half his head away. The man with the patch screamed thinly and tossed his gun down.

"Don't kill me," he whined, "come on, give a guy a sporting chance." He raised his hands over his head, but I watched his one milk-blue eye rolling wildly. He was listening for someone!

The room contained doorways to half a dozen corridors, branching off into all directions. From down one of them, I knew, would come men to finish us. Gerasmin pressed forward and shoved his gun against the one-eyed man's neck.

"I want you to talk," he whispered savagely, "and immediately. The friends you signaled for won't be here in time to save your life."

"I don't know much, Your Honor," the man whined. "Honest to living Jesus, I don't, Your Honor."

Gerasmin jammed the barrel tight against the man's throat. "The next attack. When will it be? The next killing. What will it be?"

The man writhed against the wall. "Honest, Your Honor . . ." His one eye blinked wildly.

"*Tell me!*" Gerasmin snarled. I caught a whiff of fetid air from a corridor at the opposite side of the room. Not the smell of the beasts. The river smell. Perhaps that corridor was a way out, leading to the river. I noted it quickly in my mind and turned back to Gerasmin and the one-eyed man who was cringing now, trembling against the wall. In the distance, down another corridor, I heard a sound of footsteps running. Still far away, though.

"I'll kill you before they get here!" Gerasmin raged. "Tell me! The next attack!"

"Tomorrow . . ." the man wheezed. "Tomorrow, I think that's it, Your Honor."

"You'd better be sure."

"That's it!" the man fairly screamed. "Don't shoot, Your Honor, I'm sure. Captain Bezahrov himself told me, just an hour or so ago."

"What time?"

"Ten o'clock, tomorrow morning."

"Where?"

"Number . . . Number Ten, Downing Street, Your Honor . . ."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "*The Prime Minister!*"

"That's what we wanted to know," Gerasmin said. "You'd better get Angela."

I had completely forgotten about

her. I went back into the corridor calling her name softly. And then I stopped. The tunnel was filled with that overpowering stench, and a section of the floor was gone. I knelt down and felt an iron ladder leading down into darkness. The smell rising from the hole made me retch. Angela was gone! Fear raced through me. I started down the ladder, but heard Gerasmin calling me!

"Marlow! They're coming!"

"Angela's gone!" I shouted back. "She's—"

A thunder of shots cut me off. I stood for a moment, my mind raging, torn in two directions. Angela, lovely, frightened Angela was gone into the darkness, gone with the monster taint lingering in the air behind her. Someone watched the corridor, not with his mind but in actuality. Something had risen up out of the dark ground and taken Angela!

Shots were roaring back in the tiny room. I heard Gerasmin's anguished scream. *"Marlow!"* And I raced back. The man with the black patch had fled. Gerasmin was crouched behind the table firing down a corridor. Answering fire filled the room, bullets smacking into the walls.

I ran across the room on my knees and dropped down beside him, triggering a couple of shots.

"We've got to get word back about the Prime Minister," he whispered. "We've got to go back now!"

I indicated the corridor directly back of us. "Do you smell the river there, or is it my imagination?"

His teeth were clenched tightly together. "I smell it. We'll have to run for it. I'm—I'm too tired to try with my mind." The corridor from which the shots had come was silent now, but we heard a soft rustling of feet. They were stealing closer . . . closer . . . Gerasmin pulled at my sleeve and, bent over, we ran toward the corridor. Shots whispered in the air around us, but we got safely into the darkness and we kept running. They came after us, but our shots thrown back behind us, kept them off. No blue bulbs lit this corridor. Finally we slammed into another iron door. The strong odor of the river filtered through a thick wire grill.

My hands moved over the door and I found a wheel. "Here!" I whispered, and began to turn it. Gradually the door swung open and we stepped out onto the slippery mud shore of the river. I let go of the door and it closed automatically. Breathing harshly, we pulled ourselves up the slope until we were directly above the door, and we lay there with our guns ready, waiting.

The killers did not come out of that door.

Finally I began to breathe more easily. I looked around. The bank stretched away in either direction. Lights lined the opposite shore, and a tug moved past us in the stream, its whistle sounding. My mind relaxed then, too. We were out of that hellish underground, out of the nightmare world of dark corridors and death at every turn. Two thoughts struck me suddenly. The assassination scheduled for tomorrow at ten, and Angela. I turned quickly to Gerasmin.

He lay stretched out on his stomach, as if tired. I spoke to him.

He didn't answer. I spoke again, and again silence. My backbone grew chill. I reached out and touched him. I turned him over, and saw with horror the dark ugly red stains on the front of his coat. He stared at me, his eyes wide open.

He was dead.

I heard the tug's whistle cry out mournfully a second time.

Chapter VII

Him Who Doesn't Walk

The night and the dark river closed upon me, and I felt death and horror creeping around me. I realized now just how alone I was. Gerasmin lay dead before me, all that strange ancient power gone, cut off. Mighty as he was, his mind had not been quick enough to stop the bullets that tore the life out of him. The shield was down, too. No longer could I move unobserved. Him Who Doesn't Walk could watch me, any hour of the day or night.

And Angela. The frightening thoughts struck me, one after another. She was down there in the underground, perhaps dead already. I had a wild urge to go back in there, and I started scrabbling on the bank to find the entrance. But I couldn't find it anywhere. Perfectly concealed. The wet clay of the slope was everywhere the same.

Marlow alone. Marlow against them, the unseen ones, all the more terrible because they were unseen. I realized dimly that there was only one way for me to keep alive, one way for me to be strong enough and quick enough to elude them for a time. I had to hate them. I had to hate them with every anguished quivering fiber of my soul. Hate would make me move faster, and even though I might move into a rain of bullets or the arms of one of those shadowy things, still, on the other hand, I might spend my time deliberating and die all the sooner.

Slowly, methodically, I began to think about them. I concentrated on Gerasmin's corpse, stared at the blood thickening and darkening on his coat front. I remembered Angela, pictured her writhing under a hundred obscene tortures, pictured her starving, pictured her dead, that lovely face racked by fear and unspeakable sights. I felt tension gathering in my body, crystallizing. The thoughts sang loud and clear as I pictured the man with the patch and his sly, lecherous warning in Harley Square, and the news of next morning's proposed slaughter.

My hate bubbled up, seethed and settled to a constant fire of anger within me. It was personal now, very personal. I had forgotten the other men who had died. I wanted to be there, when Bezahrov arrived at 10 Downing Street. I wanted to stand up to Bezahrov and fight with him and kill him if I could, for the beast he was, he and all of them.

But a bit of rationality got through to me, thank God. I went away from the river bank, much as I did not want to. With one last look at Gerasmin's corpse and a promise uttered silently to him, I walked away from the river. I had one person to turn to now, one person, whether he wanted to help me or not. I would force him to help me. I would

transfuse my hate into his body and his mind and show him that he had no other choice.

I checked a directory for the address of Inspector Rohm. A cab carried me to his flat. Two flights up dingy red-carpeted stairs, three doors down the hall smelling of tobacco and liquor and sweat, and I knocked on his door. I heard his voice from within saying, "Just a moment." I took out my pistol again.

The pistol greeted him when he opened the door. His sharp blue eyes took it in, and darted to my face. "Do you remember me?" I said harshly. "Marlow, Steven Marlow. The man with the insane story?"

"I remember you, certainly," he replied, his scholarly face a bit pale.

I gestured with the gun. "Let me in." He stepped back and I went into the flat, closing the door behind me. Rohm blinked helplessly and I gestured again. "Get your coat on."

"Where are we going?"

"Number 10, Downing Street," I said quietly.

"Number 10—" he choked. "You're mad!"

"This is part of my story," I said evenly. "A story that is not mad, a story that is not insane or unbelievable. If you do not come with me, the Prime Minister will die at ten tomorrow morning, exactly as Lord Wolters and Sir Guy Folversham died. I'm forcing you to come with me so that others will believe what I say. I'm forcing you because it's the only way you'll see what I say is true."

"What if I don't?" he said quietly.

I smiled thinly. "I'll kill you, Inspector. Do you believe me?"

He stared at me from those probing eyes for a long minute. "Yes," he said finally, "I believe you. I'll get my coat."

We hailed another cab. I pushed the pistol toward the driver and told him I was taking over. With Inspector Rohm beside me, we drove to Downing Street and parked the cab. And then I began talking, while the dark hours of night raced across the sky, while the stars lay hidden behind mourning-robes of clouds. I poured out the story, the part he had heard and the part he had not heard. I told it all, every detail, every instant.

And then I said, "Do you believe me?"

"No," he said quietly. "I don't. Are you going to kill me for it? Are you going to kill me for thinking it's too incredible?"

"Damn you!" I shouted at him. "It won't stop here. They'll burn Europe and they'll destroy America, systematically, because it will be too incredible that such a thing could ever happen. And then they'll pour out of the East, out of Russia, and the few poor devils left alive won't ever have a chance to live like decent human beings again!"

"I am willing to take one precaution," he said softly. Dawn began to etch itself gray on the eastern sky. A horn honked in the distance. "Lord Wolters and Folversham have died, so we can't really afford to take chances. I'd like to ring up the Yard and get a squad of men."

"Machine guns," I insisted. "Get machine guns."

"And I'll have to ring up my superior to request that the Prime

Minister be removed from here for the morning. I'll need a telephone for that, Marlow. I'll believe you that much, do that much for you. You haven't committed any crime *yet.*"

"Get to the phone," I commanded, thanking God for his meticulous sense of duty, his determination to leave none of the immediate possibilities unaccounted for. If he couldn't see the greater danger, he could at least provide for the one at hand.

I began to sweat terribly. The morning grew brighter, or as bright as another of those lead-gray days could be. The Prime Minister was no longer at 10 Downing Street when the hour came. I saw him leave myself, quiet, impressive, dignified. We had to keep off those obscene things! Men like this were worth it. Ordinary men, everywhere, were worth it! We *had* to!

Officers were stationed in every room. The officers were armed with machine guns. I stood with Rohm, smoking nervously, wishing that I were somewhere else, wishing I could wake up from this hellish dream. From another room came the full metallic chime of a clock. The hour was ten.

They came up through the floor, six of them, materializing like foul black shadows of the pit, swirling, tumbling, roiling up. Captain Bezahrov came that way too, into our room, and it was incredibly more mad to see a human coming up from the underground.

The machine guns exploded immediately in a roaring thunder and the things broke apart in an orgy of blood and screams and decaying filth. Bezahrov whirled around once and sprawled on the floor, spilling out the few moments of life. They had been transported up through the ground, *thought* into this building on their mission of destruction, only to meet quick, furious death.

We bent over Bezahrov, dying, his scarred face twitching convulsively. There were rapid questions and whispered desperate answers. A bomb. Under London. Demolish half the city. Noon. Two days from now. Noon!

"Rohm!" I whispered, "we've got to get into the underground."

He turned to me. His voice suddenly faded away into the distance and I saw his horrible sharp eyes peering into mine. *"Yes, Marlow,"* he whispered, so the others could not hear, *"into the underground."* His voice died suddenly and he stared at me.

I tried to say something. I could not. I could not speak! My throat was tight and thick and I could not utter a word. In sick horror, I heard Rohm dismiss his men, sending them back to Scotland Yard. And then I heard a voice whisper in my brain, "Come Marlow, into the underground. I want to kill you before I go. You have caused me much trouble. I want to kill you *myself.*"

The voice of Inspector Rohm. The mind of Inspector Rohm taking me over, holding me speechless, immobile. Holding, gripping. The bomb. I wanted to scream. Dimly I saw the officers moving toward the street. Inspector Rohm stared at me. Inspector Rohm.

Him Who Doesn't Walk!

I heard the wild hellish laughter of the man who called himself Inspector Rohm. It echoed a dirge in

my brain until I lost consciousness.

The pattern became dreadfully clear before I awoke. Somehow, in a black period of semi-consciousness before I opened my eyes, a mind seemed to be telling me things I wanted to know, telling me in order to torment me before I reached the final end. He had done certain things. Why did I think I had been sent to him especially, out of all others, at Scotland Yard? He had willed it. Then he had sent me away. Then, when I returned again, he had been forced to protect the Prime Minister. *Forced*, because he did not want me to suspect. Did I understand? *A laugh*. He had allowed Bezahrov to die, he had not cancelled the attack even though he knew it would fail, in order to take me. He did his duty as Inspector Rohm and the Prime Minister lived. And Him Who Doesn't Walk dismissed the officers. They had not been close enough to hear Bezahrov's whispered words, you see. Into the underground, to kill me before the bomb went off. All along, he had been watching, been waiting at certain points along the trail. Damnably clever.

The thoughts came faster now, vengefully. Where now? Paris, Berlin, America, anywhere. Step by step. The high ones commanded it. Where were they? I felt my muscles aching as if some monstrous thought-hand held them. The masters were in Russia, in the East. The masters wanted the world. Had not they told us that so many times?

We were alone in the underground and no one would know about the bomb going off in two days. Inspector Rohm could arrange to die as a hero. Strange, eh? But I did not understand him, quite . . . the Prime Minister allowed to live that I might die . . . once again I caught a conception of the violent, gigantic force of evil purpose and even more diabolic personal wrath in Him Who Doesn't Walk.

Wake up, Marlow!

I opened my eyes. I was standing in a room similar to the one in which we had fought with the man with the patch. There before me floated the torso of Inspector Rohm, alive, peering at me. But—but—Great God!—*he had no legs!*

From the waist down, nothing but emptiness, invisibility. I saw the trousers, socks, shoes and shorts on the floor. The monstrous vision hung before me, grinning at me. Him Who Doesn't Walk held a pistol.

"Now, Mr. Marlow," he said quietly, "you have thirty seconds before I will shoot you down." His voice was soft. "You're peering so intently at my legs." He laughed at the last word. "Thought, Mr. Marlow. The power of brain. Life where there is no life. Inspector Rohm walked on legs of *mind*."

Mind . . . desperately, I sought for the answer. I felt it gnawing at my brain, another voice, trying to get through, trying to break the wall. I felt the weight of the pistol still in my pocket. Him Who Doesn't Walk did not think I could use it. Could I? If the voice . if the voice . . .

"Thirty seconds, Mr. Marlow."

I felt the sweat standing out on my face. The voice . . the voice was coming closer, rushing with a sound of other ancient voices flying on the wind from lonely temples on vast snow-swept peaks. The spirits of

men who had touched holiness, goodness, coming toward me, summoned by that prime voice to add their strength, coming, if only I could let them in. But how? How? Not through me. I was not calling them. Who was?

"Twenty seconds. Prepare yourself, Mr. Marlow. Pray to God who does not exist." He laughed shortly and cocked the pistol. "I am going to enjoy slaying you, Mr. Marlow. You have interfered so much . . ."

Come! Come! From a thousand ancient lands, someone is calling for strength, strength and a moment of life . . . straining, fighting . . . screaming his thoughts in an effort to penetrate . . .

"Fifteen seconds, Mr. Marlow."

I am coming . . . I am trying . . . I am coming . . . call me by name . . . I can't, I thought wildly, I don't know of these things. I don't know of powers like this.

"Ten seconds, Mr. Marlow."

You must call me by name. I can't. *Can you hear me?* Yes. *Call me by name. It rests with you. You are afraid.* Yes, I am. *Do not listen to your fear. Think of me . . . think of me . . . who am I? I am here for a moment in eternity, waiting, watching. Call me . . . the spirits of good men have filled me . . . I am yours . . . call me*, the agonized voice shrieked in desperation.

"Five seconds. Goodbye, Mr. Marlow." Him Who Doesn't Walk laughed.

His finger whitened upon the trigger.

No . . . no . . . I thought . . . no . . . no. I waited for the bullet, and in that split instant I pushed down the nauseous fear flooding over me and thought clearly . . . of course . . . of course . . . the one . . .

"*Gerasmin!*" I screamed, throwing myself forward.

Him Who Doesn't Walk started and cursed. "You fool! Gerasmin is de—"

But he was not! I had thought his name and summoned him and he stood in the room, pale, shadowy, filmy of body, one hand pointing accusingly at Him Who Doesn't Walk, and the blood still running on his chest. His lips were tight, and his eyes were closed, and that ancient face that was still young seemed to radiate a kind of unearthly light.

Him Who Doesn't Walk turned on the apparition and started firing wildly. It vanished as quickly as it had come, like a magician's puff of smoke. By that time, though, I had my pistol out. I shot with hateful accuracy, aiming at the figure before me, wanting to tear the legless horror to bits. Finally the smoke and the noise diminished and I looked down. I knew I would never see his true face. Inspector Rohm's face had certainly never been his.

And I had blown his head away.

I heard a rushing of wind in my mind, of the spirits, of the entities, going back to their temples against the roof of the world, back to their ancient books of goodness and truth and wisdom and light. Another sound whispered, the voice of Gerasmin returning to the mystic realm of the dead, with a syllable of farewell. It was no word I could utter or write down, yet I understood it. He had given me the strength to call upon him, and a touch of the an-

cient forgotten power.

I glanced at my watch. Ten-thirty. I began to walk through the underground. At fifteen minutes before eleven, I found the bomb mechanism and destroyed it. At eleven-eight, I found Angela locked in a cell off one of the main corridors, sleeping, her hair disheveled, her face thin and pale. Perhaps Him Who Doesn't Walk had forgotten her in his fury to get me. Not stopping to wonder why a great deal, I thanked God she was still alive and carried her out of the underground, up through the shop of T. Nedros into the daylight. Behind me as I walked, I heard countless scurryings. The servants, the lackeys of hell were leaving, returning to their holes, their driving life force gone. The master was dead and I hoped that another would not call them forth for ten thousand years.

They put our story in the newspapers. Not with our names, because I did not want that, and the government supported me. They told how the real Inspector Rohm—his corpse—was found by the landlady in a closet in his flat the afternoon after I destroyed Him Who Doesn't Walk. They burned out the underground with flame throwers, too, destroying the last remnants of the things I first saw that night on the *Queen of Madagascar*.

And for us, then, Angela and me, it was over. We were free. I gave up the sea and took up a landsman's trade. We married a year later, and now we have our own home and a small son growing up. Once a year we go down to the cliffs of England and stand looking out at the dark Channel and the dark sky and the darker world beyond. We remember that it came once. We remember that it is written in their books. We stand on the cliffs in the wind once a year and watch the East.

We must not forget.

The End

Continued from page 45

purple cow had moved further down it, and was grazing now only a few feet from the white fence.

Anselmo braked the truck and got out. He went through the grass to the fence, climbed over it, and stood facing the cow.

The animal continued to graze, seemingly oblivious to his presence.

Anselmo walked haltingly up to it. He put out a wary hand and touched its head. Then he stepped back. "I was beginning to have some doubts," he said, "but damned if you ain't real, and damned if you ain't purple."

The animal shifted its hind legs.

"Where'd you come from anyway?" Anselmo asked. "Jim Player said something about flying saucers or some such. Now I don't hold much truck with them things, but y—"

Anselmo strangled on the last word. His eyes had riveted on his hand, the hand he had touched the animal's head with seconds earlier.

His fingers were turning purple.

He had a fleeting desire to turn and run. It passed quickly. After a moment, the animal raised its head to look at Anselmo for the first time.

In a distinctly questioning tone, it said, "Moo?"

"Moo," Anselmo answered.

There were two purple cows grazing on the hillside when Jim Player arrived from town a few minutes later.

The End

I, GARDENER

By ALLEN KIM LANG

Can the Great First Law fail?
Could the great Dr. Asim—
sorry, Ozoneff— have
been wrong?

I HAD flown to Boston to sign Doctor Axel Ozoneff to a contract with my new fall television show, "Point of View." I'd already recruited a cadre of intellectual fuglemen, but I needed Dr. Ozoneff as my program's sergeant-major, as the catalyst who'd spark the seethings of his colleagues into the imaginative pyrotechnics that attract sponsors and build the big Trendex. Associate Professor of Cryptochemistry at the Medical School, author of thirty-three books (maybe more: it had been a week since I last counted), a writer whose byline appeared on the Contents page of a dozen magazines and journals regularly as their copyright notice, and a poet of considerable skill, Dr. Ozoneff was besides something of a television personality. Who but he could have invented an s-f vignette, live, on-camera, and have it subsequently published in a major magazine and three anthologies?

I got out of the taxi at the foot of the hill. Ozoneff's home was at its summit, surrounded by a garden that threatened to pullulate into unproper Bostonian jungle at any moment. As I walked up the brick pathway toward the house, between flowering trees that hinted the presence of tigers, the gardener stepped out to block my way. He was dressed in earth-stained overalls and wore gloves; a dessicated man tall and lean as a mystery figure in a Navaho sand-painting. He held before him, like a twin-handled short-sword, a pair of hedge-shears. "Good morning," I said, sucking my belt-buckle back from the points of the clippers. "I have an appointment to see Dr. Ozoneff."

"Indeed?" The gardener raised his sharp chin and star-

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ed at me like an entymologist inspecting an impudent bedbug. "At what time had the master consented to see you, sir?"

I felt that the gardener's "sir" had a pejorative tone to it, pronounced the way it would be pronounced by an injured enlisted man speaking to his injuring officer. "Dr. Ozoneff will see me at ten o'clock," I said. "Put aside those clippers and let me pass. I shall certainly inform the doctor of your behavior."

He held me at bay with the shears. "I assure you, sir, that the master will neither see you nor hear ill of me," he said. "Be that as may, you're early. It is not yet nine-forty-five. I can't allow you to burst in on the master betimes. Perhaps you'll wait here in the garden?"

I glanced at my watch. He was right; I was early; the taxi-drive from Logan International Airport had taken less time than I'd budgeted. With the feeling I was humoring a madman's whim, I remarked, "This is a lovely spot. It will be a pleasure to spend fifteen minutes in the midst of such beauty."

The gardener stared at me as though gauging my sincerity; then he looked for a moment as though his leather face might bend into a smile. "Indeed, sir, I've been told by horticulturists of some note that I have the gift of the green thumb," he said. "It's a passion with me, this garden; and the master was himself most alive to the seduction of vegetable beauty. You should have visited us three days ago, sir. I had a band of fifty sacred lilies blooming all at once, those that flower only in the sabbatical year, standing like a field of obscene scarlet-tipped swords. For all their loveliness, I was told by our downwind neighbors, these lilies smelled like a ruptured cesspool. If it is true about their odor, such flowers make a forceful moral sermon, sir, do they not?"

"Do you have no sense of smell?" I asked him. "That would seem a considerable handicap to a gardener."

"I can drink in beauty with my eyes," he said; "and, since I cannot smell, the sting of the lilies' sermon missed me. Here . . ." he gripped my arm with fingers which, though gloved, were hard as forceps ". . . you can see the lemon-trees in bloom, a pleasing sight seldom come upon in these latitudes."

"They're under glass?" I asked.

"That's the wonder of it," he said. "They're under the open sky, sir." He led me to a line of bushes twice the height of a man, unpruned, pale-green of leaf, with reddish scion-leaves deep inside the foliage; sweet-smelling flowers, tinted a delicate purple on their underpetals.

Seeing them for the first time, I understood why the poet sang his dream of the land where they grow. "Lemon-trees, outdoors, in Massachusetts?" I asked. "They are a new species, no doubt."

"No, sir," the gardener said. "I admit it's not easy to persuade lemons to thrive through New England snow and gale; but thrive these do. Don't step any nearer them, sir, if you please. It is not healthy to be too intimate with these trees."

"I'm not allergic to citrus fruit," I said.

"I'll grant you that, sir, not knowing your personal idiosyncracies," he said; "but step no closer, or I'll be forced to restrain you."

Seeing that the man was at least a little mad, I stood quite still and stared at the trees. The leaves, as I said, were rather pale, not at all the linoleum-green of orange-leaves; but the bushes looked quite healthy, and breathed off a thin and lovely fragrance. "Why do you consider your lemon-trees dangerous?" I asked.

"The hurt is in the fertilizer I use," the gardener said. "A little notion of my own, sir. About the roots of these lemon-trees, like baked bricks to warm one's feet in bed in winter, I've planted a few capsules of a stuff no man may touch and not scorch his fingers badly."

"Radioisotopes?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. When there is snow on the leaves, the roots of these trees bask in tropical soil and pump warm juice up to the winter branches," he said. "Now, sir, when I've stopped speaking, it will be just forty seconds before ten o'clock. If you've an appointment with the master, I dare not detain you. Walk up to the front door, open it, then go up the stairway. The master is in his study, the first room to your right at the top of the stairs." The gardener turned from me with an abrupt about-face, and marched over to a box hedge, to begin clipping at its green crewcut.

"Thank you," I said to his back. I retreated toward the door of the house, less apprehensive of radiation hazard from the lemons than of hedge-clipper hazard from the half-

mad gardener. I should have to caution Dr. Ozoneff about this fellow.

I entered the front door as I'd been instructed to, and hurried up the stairway that bent down into the hall. The upper landing was lined with bookshelves bearing volumes in six languages, many of them translations of my host's scientific and fictive works. I rapped on the first door to my right and paused for reply. There was none. There was no sound of Ozoneff's insatiable typewriter. "Doctor Ozeneff?" I demanded, loudly enough to be heard anywhere in the house. There was still no answer. Worried lest the gardener might have become alarmed at my rapping and my shouting, and come up the stairs after me with those shears of his, I turned the knob and entered Doctor Axel Ozoneff's study.

The study, like the landing, was lined with books. The man I'd come to see lay beside his silent typewriter. The blood pooled on his desk was just beginning to coagulate.

The flock of sated flies who'd been disturbed by my entrance lumbered heavy-bellied round my head, like a fleet of tankers. I flailed the carrion bugs away and stepped closer to the corpse. Ozoneff's head had been cleaved almost from his body. Something had split his spine in a single giant bite. His forehead rested in a pool of blood, surrounded by the tiny browning footprints of the flies.

With the lucid calm of shock, I walked about the study, searching for the telephone. It was not here. I went back to the landing and explored the other rooms. The telephone was in the bedroom. I looked up the number I required, still as calm as though I were arranging for a caterer, and picked up the phone, careless of my responsibility as first-on-scene to preserve fingerprints. I dialed DE-vonshire 8-1212. The sergeant on duty at the Emergency and Central Complaint Bureau answered crisply. I heard his pencil scratch as he recorded my name and Dr. Ozoneff's address. "The killer is insane," I said. "Please hurry; I'm alone with a madman." I hung up and considered that word I'd used: Alone. Doctor Axel Ozoneff was only a few minutes dead, and already I'd ignored him in my census of those present. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

I stood up from the bed and turned toward the door. The gardener's bony figure block-

ed the bedroom's exit. He'd come up the stairs silent as a cat. He still held the hedge-shears. Staring at them, I saw reddish-brown stains near the hinge, where the blades were joined together. It might have been rust. "You called the police," the gardener said.

"Doctor Ozoneff is dead," I said.

"I know. It was I who killed him."

"Get away from me!" I shouted, retreating between the beds, my artificial calm broken.

He glanced down at the huge shears he held and lifted them. He slammed the blades together. "As easy as that," he said. "A man is such a tender poor thing."

I backed toward the window of the bedroom, vastly preferring an unexplored two-story drop to remaining in this room with the murderer. "I didn't mean to frighten you, sir," the gardener said. "I must admit you have reason to fear me: I am a monster. Now that I've breached the great First Law, what sinfulness might I not find in me, sir?" He let the hedge-shears fall to the carpet and stood quite still, like a mummy just unwrapped. "If I had tears, I'd blind me with them," he said. "If the Lesser Directive didn't hold my hand where the Great Law failed to, I'd close my consciousness. I am seeking the strength to do so, sir."

"Why did you kill Dr. Ozoneff?" I asked, alert to keep the madman talking while the Boston police raced to capture him.

"I was imperfect," he said.

"The best of us is," I answered him. Permissive counseling.

"But with all your weakness," he said, "you have poetry and progeny and history. I have none of these, nor even the pitiful gift of the sense of smell. I am color-blind as well, sir. Do you know that the blood spilled by my master in the next room looks to me like so much ink? Black ink, sir. I have spilled a good deal of ink in this house."

"Why did you kill Dr. Ozoneff?" I insisted.

The gardener turned and walked from the room, leaving the hedge-shears on the floor. I followed, kicking the shears under one of the beds. He'd entered the study, and stood over the body of his employer. "I'd asked to be allowed to spend the day planting bougainvillaea and red jasmine in the center of the garden, near my lemon-trees," he said. "'Squamous epithelium!' the

master said—this was a favorite oath of his, sir! he said it was explosive enough to stir the swearer's viscera while not offending any hearer, however tender-eared—'Squamous epithelium! I can't let you spend all your time potting around in the garden. Get to work on that variable-star article; we've got a deadline.' I was carrying the shears at the time, sir, just having come from the hedge. Something snapped within me, and I killed him."

I shuddered. When the lunatic quoted Dr. Ozoneff's last words, his voice aped that of the dead man. A horrid mimicry, from a murderer. "Do you insist that you killed Dr. Ozoneff because he wouldn't let you work in your garden?" I demanded.

"When he said those words," the gardener said, "I repeated the very first sin that ever was. I said to myself *non serviac*—I will not serve. The wall of the First Law was down; it was only a short step from that disobedient thought to my master's murder."

I was impatient for the police to arrive and truss up the gardener; I wouldn't be safe till they did. I feared he might stop talking and realize that I was the only witness to his confession of murder. "What does your talk of ink and deadlines mean?" I asked. "Do you write, too?"

"The garden is only my life," the gardener said. "I was made to write."

"Perhaps I've read some of your work," I said, a phrase guaranteed to keep a writer talking.

"If you've read many of my master's works, you've read some of mine," the gardener said. "I wrote for him, with him; mysteries and science-fiction and textbooks and essays. He'd poured his brain into mine, you understand. When I put words to paper they were his words, though he might be sleeping when I wrote. The master had so much to say, sir, he couldn't say it all alone. What man, alone, could teach, could lecture, could carry on research in the arcana of rebellious cells; who could write *bruone* books a year, compose learned essays for the journals while he invented as many as *apdag-bru* stories for the s-f press in *cidbru* short months?"

"Talk sense, man," I said, afraid of the deterioration presaged by this nonsense-word symptom of his mania. "*Bruone? Apdagbru? Cidbru?*"

"Forgive me, sir," the gar-

dener said. "In my distraction, I forgot. I think in the binary system, of course; and did not stop to translate into decimal when I spoke. Five books, I meant, and thirty-six stories in twelve short months."

"If I understand your motives correctly," I said, "you killed Dr. Ozoneff because he'd somehow forced you to write for him as a sort of slave-scribe. He stole your writing from you to publish it under his own name. Am I correct in assuming this?"

"Not at all, sir," the gardener said. "Can your right hand steal from your left? Can your liver cheat your spleen from its birthright?" He held his gloved hands toward me, palms-up. "These are his hands, sir. I am he. I am a mere extension of Dr. Axel Ozoneff's mind, a pseudopod of his intelligence. I am his creature, sir." He dropped his hands to his sides. "And I, his creature, killed him."

There were sirens sounding down the street. "You'll be taken care of," I told the gardener. "There are doctors who understand your sickness, who will work to cure you."

"Can your doctors heal the positronic brain that lost its hold on the great First Law?" he asked me. "Can your psychiatrists console me for the fact that my creator created badly? Do you have robopsychologists to patch the chinks my maker left in my mental armor? No, human, you have not!" He stood glaring at me as the trio of sirens screamed toward the foot of the hill and stopped; as heavy footsteps rattled up the walk; as the front door slammed open.

"I believe," he said, "that I'll now be able to do what I must." He tugged the glove from his right hand. I saw the glint of steel as he balled a fist like a sledge-hammer. "The shame, to be the first of my kind, and a failure," he said. He hammered his fist down upon the apex of his skull. The roof of his head bent inward. There was a sputtering of sparks, and the gardener's eyes went dead. His arm dropped to his side. He was lifeless as his master at the desk.

THE END

●

FANTASY BOOKS

THE WORM OUROBOROS, MISTRESS OF MISTRESSES, and A FISH DINNER IN MEMISON, by E. R. Eddison, 95 cents each, Ballantine Books, 101 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y., 10003

Reviewed by
FRITZ LEIBER

Rejoice! There are now available to us, in most attractive covers, the three chief books of Eric Rücker Eddison, including the incomparable *Worm Ouroboros*, the grandest heroic fantasy or sword-and-sorcery tale in the English language—though here I am undoubtedly biassed by my strong taste for Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and for stories with scenes as detailedly and opulently set and costumed as those of grand opera.

The Worm is a legend of war, wizardry, intrigue, and high knightly adventure in a world compounded of that of the Greek heroes, the Norse kings, and the Middle Ages without Christianity. Likewise the prose derives from Homer, the eddas and sagas, Marlowe, Shakespeare, John Webster, Sir Thomas Browne, Browning, and kindred spirits.

Eddison sets great store by weaving together and playing variants on memorable phrases. From literally hundreds, one example: "This was Gaslark's bane, whose enterprises of such pitch and moment have ended thus, in a kind of nothing." The "enterprises . . . moment" phrase is from Hamlet's best-known soliloquy, while "a kind of nothing" is from Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*, grotesque and horrific forebear of the generally feeble Gothic novel.

Throughout his life, Eddison was haunted by this drama with its pessimism, contempt for general humanity, and concern for Renaissance princes who set no limits to their ambitions or hates. Two of the last three chapters of his last complete novel are titled "In What a Shadow" and "Deep Pit of Darkness" from Webster's "In what a shadow or deep pit of darkness doth womanish and fearful mankind live!"

The Worm has no single, logical rationale, either fantasy or science fiction. It is instead a composite. But since Eddison has taste and good judgement, his composite has style, inner consistency, and the ring of truth. Despite its leisurely telling, the story maintains a varied suspense and teems with inventions: sweating sorceries, moving mythic themes, wondrous landscapes, strong clashes of character, a sand sea with tides, flying serpents, hippogriff rides, swashing sword-fights, an evil king who when he dies is always revived in another body, mantichores that put all the great apes of fiction to shame, dire comets, and many other "rare and remarcable occurants and observacions."

It is aristocratic melodrama, which pits not so much good against evil, as warlike and ambitious princes who are honorable against their opposite numbers who are *dis*honorable in varying degrees; but both sorts live for action "that shall embroil and astonish the world"—which makes me think of Ferdinand's dying lines in *The Duchess:* "I shall vault credit and affect high pleasures beyond death."

The women are as proud of their beauty and glamor as the men are of their feats of derring-do: Queen Prezmyra whispers to her nurse, "I would not wish to die. The world without me would be summer without roses. Carcë without me should be a night without the star-shine." Finally there is mention made by King Jus of "the fabled land of Zimiamvia. Is that true, thinkest thou, that no mortal foot may tread it, but the blessed souls do inhabit it of the dead that be departed, even they that were great upon earth and did great deeds when they were living, that scorned not earth and the delights and glories thereof, and yet did justly and were not dastards nor yet oppressors?"

The trilogy's two other volumes, superficially more adult, explore deeply and in a way cannibalize the ideas set forth in the last paragraph. For chapters a poetico-philosophic searchlight is turned on concepts glimpsed by lightning flashes in *The Worm* as they sprang from Eddison's subconscious. It turns out that aristocratic man's genius is to create, exercise power, and love and guard beauty—he is Zeus—while aristocratic woman's is to be the world's supreme beauty and glamor—she is Aphrodite (and Sappho the earth's most significant poet). Thus Eddison invented for himself a poetic religion, much as Robert Graves has done with his White or Triple Goddess. It is a religion that finds life's meaning solely in its moments of mastery and beauty, a pagan credo where evil is simply power as yet unmastered by Zeus, and where the pfeferred social philosophy is romantic, individualistic, yet highly reactionary!

This metaphysical mulling is accomplished in the course of a series of wars, intrigues, and romances in Zimiamvia, which turns out to be a land not more wonderful than that of *The Worm*, but far closer to the world we know— a world much like that of the Italian city states at the time of Machiavelli and the Borgias. The magic becomes minor, the heroes and villains more alike, descriptions yet more precise and gemlike, but inventiveness fades. One ends agreeing regretfully with Jus, "I had rather row on Moonmere under the stars of a summer's night, than be a king of all the land of Zimiamvia."

THE LAST UNICORN, by Peter S. Beagle; Viking, New York 1968, $4.95

Reviewed by
ALEXEI PANSHIN

You probably haven't added Peter Beagle's name to those you keep an eye on, but you should. He has written

about Tolkien in *Holiday*. His *Atlantic* short story, "Come Lady Death", was reprinted last year in Terry Carr's paperback anthology, *New Worlds of Fantasy*. His first novel, *A Fine and Private Place*, which is to be reprinted by Ballantine, was a witty and gentle fantasy set in a Bronx cemetery, and most prominently featured a sore-footed raven as Greek chorus. After eight years, we have Beagle's second nove, *The Last Unicorn*, also witty, also gentle, but made of more familiar fantasy materials. Its heart is a unicorn looking for her lost fellows, an erratic magician named Schmendrick, and a shopworn Maid Marian named Molly Grue.

The primary ancestor of *The Last Unicorn* is the Northern European fairy tale, two premises of which are that Right Will Conquer and that Heroes Are Right. These are premises that adult readers and adult writers find difficult to accept, so modern stories in the manner—*The Little Laundress and the Fearful Knight, The Reluctant Dragon, The Thirteen Clocks*—have commonly been humorous, which is to say, self-critical. So also *The Last Unicorn*, bit which adds a length and substance lacking to the others.

The chief ornament of *The Last Unicorn* is Beagle's prose, which is beautiful. If families still read aloud, this is a book to be read aloud by a family:

"Now and then in their journey they came to a village, and there Schmendrick would introduce himself as a wandering wizard, offering, as he cried in the streets, 'to sting for my supper, to bother you just a little bit, to trouble your sleep ever so slightly, and pass on.' Few were the towns where he was not invited to stable his beautiful white mare and stay the night, and before the children went to bed he would perform in the market square by lantern light . . . In the mornings they went on their way, Schmendrick's pockets full of bread and cheese and oranges, and the unicorn pacing beside him: sea white in the sun, sea green in the dark of the trees. His tricks were forgotten before he was out of sight, but his white mare troubled the nights of many a villager, and there were women who woke weeping from dreams of her."

I have one quibble to make. Beagle, like T. H. White, makes use of the calculated anachronism—a greenwood outlaw mistakes Schmendrick for the 19th-century ballad collector, Francis James Child; a butterfly sings, "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" This must be done carefully if it is not to carry a story beyond self-criticism into self-doubt. Beagle's story is solid enough to stand, but some of his anachronisms are momentarily jarring.

The Last Unicorn is a good story beautifully told. Read it and look for Peter Beagle's next book.

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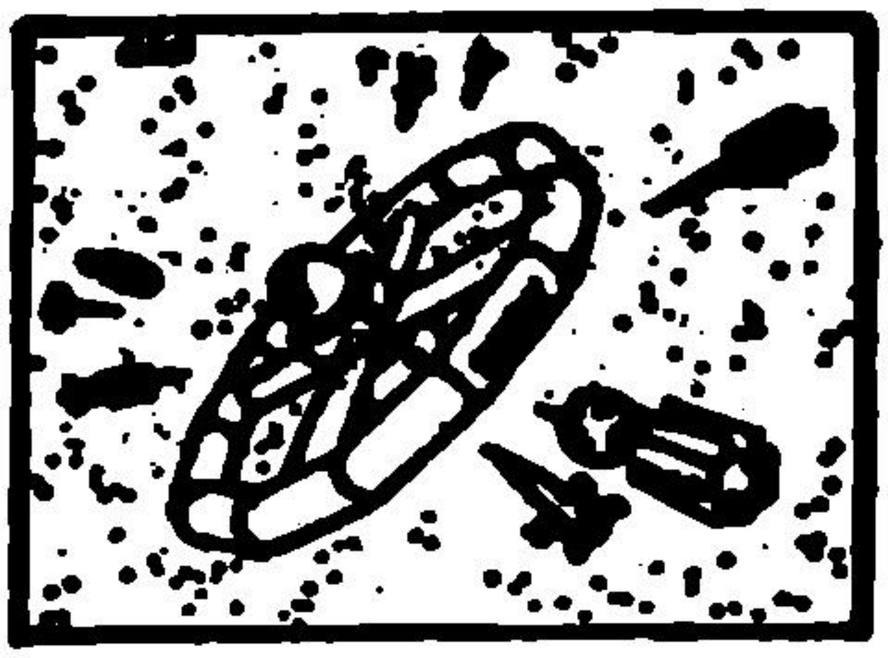

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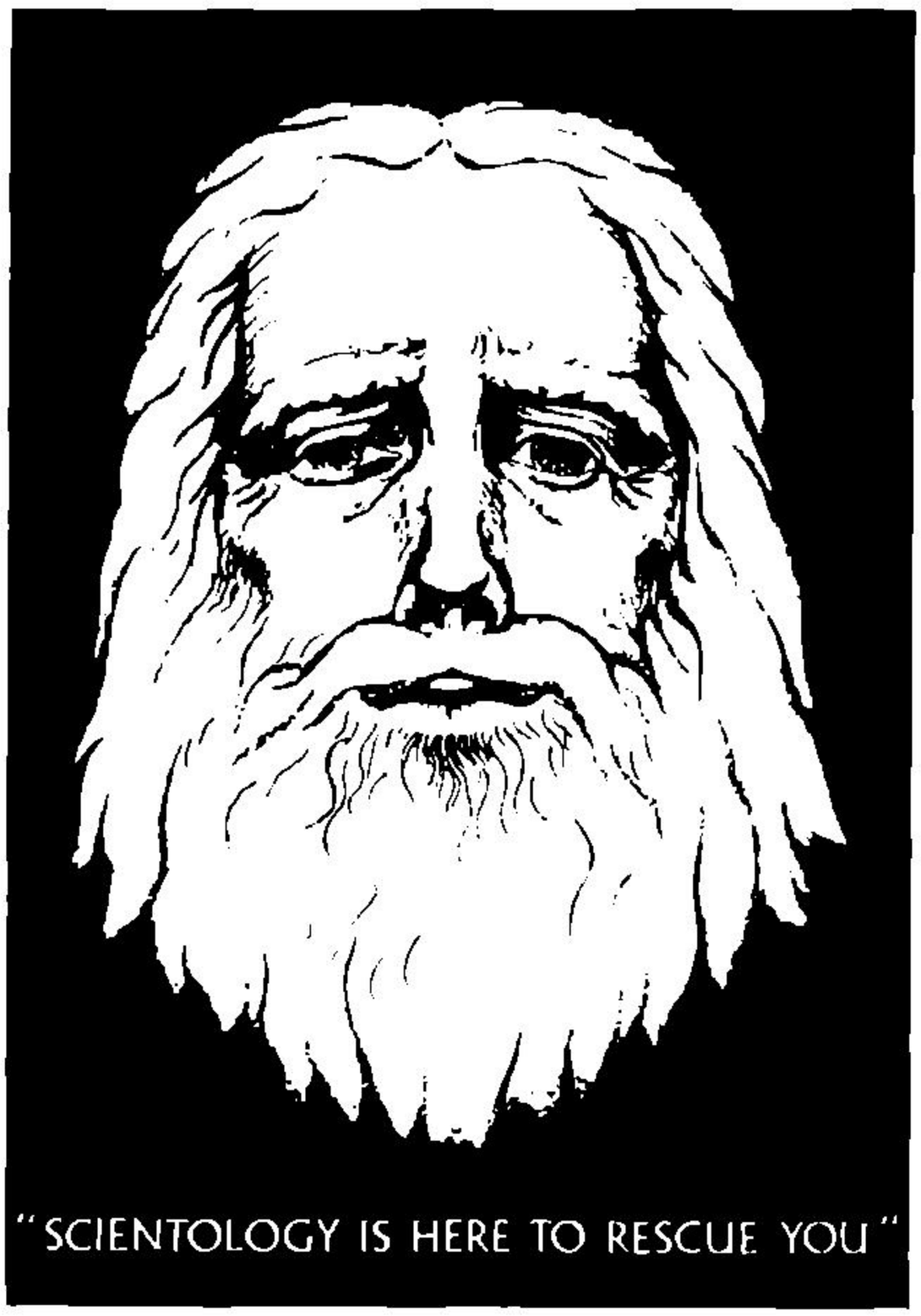

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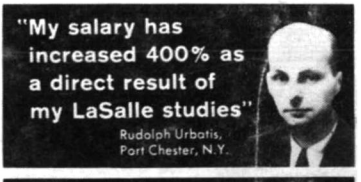

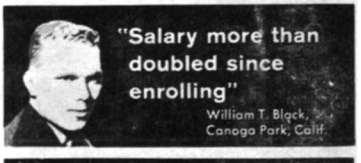

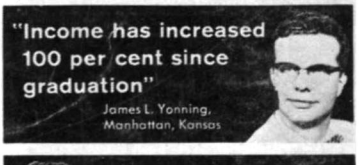

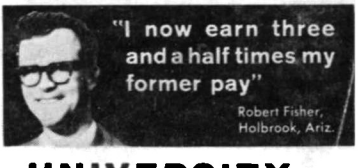

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