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April 1966
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THE LAST CASTLE
Jack Vance
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The "New Look" of the Solar System in
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G.P. 2

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ALL STORIES NEW

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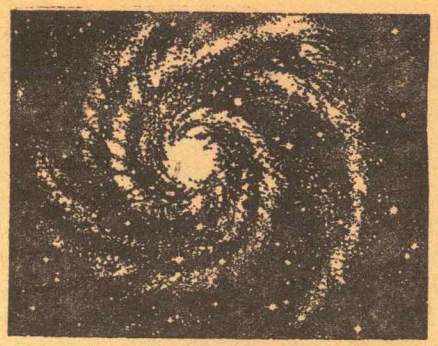

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WHERE THE JOBS GO

As this is written, the city of New York is tying itself in knots because of a strike of the Transport Workers Union. All of the city subways, and nearly all of its buses, are idle. Workers can't get to their jobs; shopper can't get to stores; salesmen can't call on their customers; theatergoers can't reach the plays for which they have bought tickets months in advance — in a word, the normal operations of the city have stopped.

All of this costs money. The current guess is that the paralysis of the city is costing it something like $100,000,000 a day — or substantially more than the combined expense of the space program, the war in Vietnam and Medicare put together.

It is our opinion that this is only a beginning, because it begins to look clear to us that the real squeeze brought about by automation is going to express itself — has already begun to express itself — in a wave of strikes such as we've never seen before.

True, automation is not technically an issue in this strike. The TWU had its confrontation with the machines — the "Headless Horseman", as Mike Quill called it — when the subways installed the first automated train a few years ago. At union insistence the Transit Authority provided a standby motorman on the train, whose principal efforts consisted of walking from one end of the train to the other each time it came to the end of its run. The automated train was destroyed accidentally in a fire after a year's trial — apparently to the unspoken relief of all parties. There has been no announcement of any plan to build another, but we would judge that its ghost haunts the negotiating tables.

Nearly all the subway jobs involved are relatively unskilled — changemakers, conductors, station guards, motormen — with only a comparatively small number involved in maintenance, repair, construction and other more technically demanding jobs. And this is the edge that cuts. The subway workers have not been through the automation shakeout, when a large number of repetitive jobs are obsoleted and the jobs that are left require more training and more skill.

In other words, their productive capacity has not yet been multiplied by the machine factor. This produces two opposed points of view, both of them unarguable. Say the subway administrators and the public at large: These jobs just don't call for that kind of money, and besides it would make the expense of running the subways ridiculously high. Say the subway workers: Other people putting in the same hours earn much more; we have to live in the same world with them, we have to compete with them to buy what we want in the stores, and we can't do it unless we make as much money as they do.

This is the classical formula for the hardest-fought wars: both sides are right.

Is there any way to avoid more and even worse strikes that this one in the transition to the Cybernetic Age?

We doubt it very much. Certainly what is happening now is not the final struggle; in fact, the issues haven't even been joined. The present subway strike is only a taste of what will come when "Headless Horsemen" are beginning to come out of the shops for all the major routes — and that day cannot be far off. Remember the newspaper strike of a couple years ago. That one was indeed fought on the issue of automation; but we have it on the word of the man who designed the systems that triggered the strike, Eugene Leonard, that it was the wrong fight at the wrong time over the wrong issues — because the systems that caused the strike *were already obsolete at the time*.

Not long ago we took part in a radio program with the aforesaid Gene Leonard, along with Arthur Elias of the Institute for Scientific Information and Henry Simon of Simon & Schuster, talking about the future of the publishing business in the Cybernetic Age. We started by discussing automatic typesetting, and it took exactly twelve minutes by the studio clock before we had reached a proposal for high-speed facsimile machines which would produce a book to your order, anywhere in the world. In twelve minutes we not only got rid of the human linotype operator, but abolished the linotype itself and went on to obsolete the printing press, the binderies, the warehouses and the publishing house's road salesmen.

Is such a new kind of publishing technologically feasible right now? Certainly. Is it likely to come into being in the next few years? Certainly not — cultural lag doesn't permit us to move that fast — but it, or something like it, is surely the shape of the publishing business some time in the future.

We tend to think of automation's effect on our own jobs in terms of a wilier, cheaper competitor to do the same things we're doing right now. In the event it isn't going to be like that at all. An analogy: Suppose we resurrected some twelfth-century armaments expert and asked him how he thought we should employ the resources of modern technology to build weapons. No doubt he would be delighted; at once he would proceed to the fabrication of sharper lances, springier bows, truer shafts; and just how far would his troops get against H-bombs or napalm grenades?

Unfortunately, our own outlook on our own jobs is largely medieval. The long lines of girls who used to assemble radio components don't get replaced by speedier machine assembles; they get put out of business entirely by printed circuits. The stockbreeders who used to export power to the cities in the form of draft animals weren't hurt by competition from more efficient breeders. They simply ceased to have a market when the cities began exporting power to the farms, in the form of tractors and trucks.

Just so, in the long run (which may be measured in years or even months, these days), the bank tellers and retail clerks and accounting departments are not as likely to be replaced by whirring black boxes which accept ten-dollar bills and return change as they are to be retired completely by new electronic credit systems. The machines don't confine themselves to doing our jobs faster and more reliably — and cheaper. They make it unncessary for a great many of our jobs to be done at all.

Meanwhile, we have the strikes. More and more of them, we would bet; worse and worse strikes, costing us more and more money. (Each day's loss to New York under the current subway strike would build a couple dozen handsome new schools.)

As long as Smith, operating at a job with only his own decision-making power, lives next door to Jones, whose decision-making power and consequent productivity is multiplied by the machine factor, they'll go on; because Smith eats as many pork chops in a year as Jones, his children wear out as many clothes, his car uses as much gas — and he wants as much money. Postponing this revolution or slowing it down isn't going to make us very well indeed; let's swallow it and get it over!

— THE EDITOR

These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

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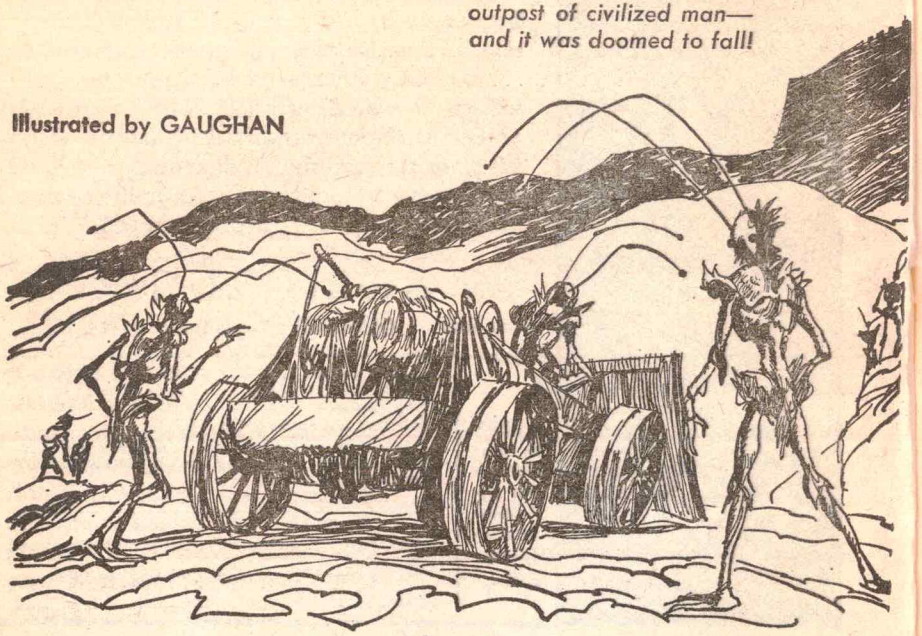
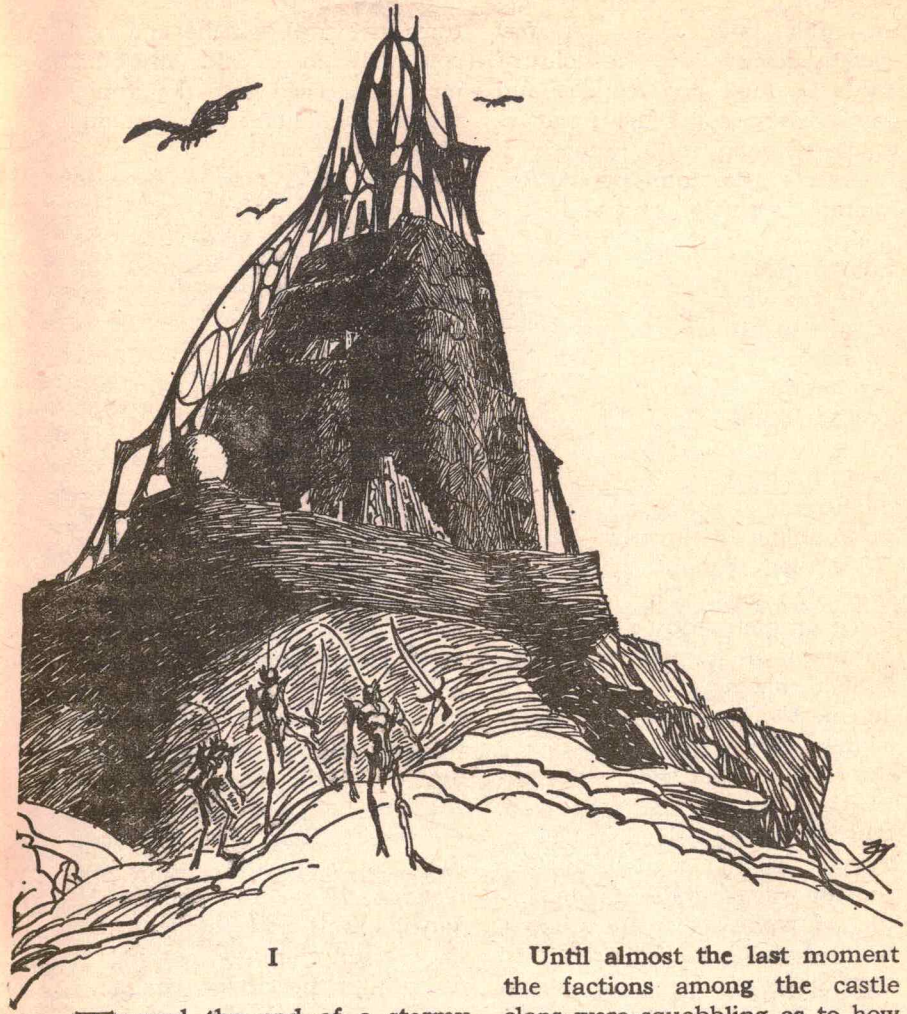
THE LAST CASTLE

by JACK VANCE

Their castle was the last outpost of civilized man—and it was doomed to fall!

Illustrated by GAUGHAN





I

Toward the end of a stormy summer afternoon, with the sun finally breaking out under ragged black rain clouds, Castle Janeil was overwhelmed and its population destroyed.

Until almost the last moment the factions among the castle clans were squabbling as to how Destiny properly should be met. The gentlemen of most prestige and account elected to ignore the entire undignified circumstance and went about their normal pur-

suits, with neither more nor less punctilio than usual. A few cadets, desperate to the point of hysteria, took up weapons and prepared to resist the final assault. Others still, perhaps a quarter of the total population, waited passively, ready—almost happy—to expiate the sins of the human race.

In the end death came uniformly to all; and all extracted as much satisfaction in their dying as this essentially graceless process could afford. The proud sat turning the pages of their beautiful books, or discussing the qualities of a century-old essence, or fondling a favorite Phane. They died without deigning to heed the fact. The hot-heads raced up the muddy slope which, outraging all normal rationality, loomed above the parapets of Janeil. Most were buried under sliding rubble, but a few gained the ridge to gun, hack, stab, until they themselves were shot, crushed by the half-alive power-wagons, hacked or stabbed. The contrite waited in the classic posture of expiation, on their knees, heads bowed, and perished, so they believed, by a process in which the Meks were symbols and human sin the reality. In the end all were dead: gentlemen, ladies, Phanes in the pavilions; Peasants in the stables. Of all those who had inhabited Janeil, only the Birds survived, creatures awkward, gauche and raucous, oblivious to pride and faith, more concerned with the wholeness of their hides than the dignity of their castle.

As the Meks swarmed over the parapets, the Birds departed their cotes. They screamed strident insults as they flapped east toward Hagedorn, now the last castle of Earth.

Four months before, the Meks had appeared in the park before Janeil, fresh from the Sea Island massacre.

Climbing to the turrets and balconies, sauntering the Sunset Promenade, from ramparts and parapets, the gentlemen and ladies of Janeil, some two thousand in all, looked down at the brown-gold warriors. Their mood was complex: amused indifference, flippant disdain, over a substratum of doubt and foreboding. All these moods were the product of three basic circumstances: their own exquisitely subtle civilization, the security provided by Janeil's wall and the fact that they could think of nothing to do to alter the circumstances.

The Janeil Meks had long since departed to join the revolt. There only remained Phanes, Peasants and Birds from which to fashion what would have been the travesty of a punitive force.

At the moment there seemed no need for such a force. Janeil was deemed impregnable. The walls, two hundred feet tall, were black rock-melt contained in the meshes of a silver-blue steel alloy. Solar cells provided energy for all the needs of the castle, and in the event of emergency food could be synthesized from carbon dioxide and water vapor, as well as syrup for Phanes, Peasants and Birds. Such a need was not envisaged. Janeil was self-sufficient and secure, though inconveniences might arise when machinery broke down and there were no Meks to repair it. The situation, then, was disturbing but hardly desperate. During the day the gentlemen so inclined brought forth energy-guns and sport-rifles and killed as many Meks as the extreme range allowed.

After dark the Meks brought forward power-wagons and earth-movers, and began to raise a dike around Janeil.

The folk of the castle watched without comprehension until the dike reached a height of fifty feet and dirt began to spill down against the walls. Then the dire purpose of the Meks became apparent, and insouciance gave way to dismal foreboding.

All the gentlemen of Janeil were erudite in at least one realm of knowledge. Certain were mathematical theoreticians, others had made a profound study of the physical sciences. Some of these, with a detail of Peasants to perform the sheer physical exertion, attempted to restore the energy-cannon to functioning condition. Unluckily, the cannon had not been maintained in good order. Various components were obviously corroded or damaged. Conceivably these components might have been replaced from the Mek shops on the second sub-level, but none of the group had any knowledge of the Mek nomenclature or warehousing system. Warrick Madency Arban (which is to say. Arban of the Madency family on the Warrick clan) suggested that a work-force of Peasants search the warehouse. But in view of the limited mental capacity of the Peasants, nothing was done and the whole plan to restore the energy-cannon came to naught.

The gentlefolk of Janeil watched in fascination as the dirt piled higher and higher around them, in a circular mound like a crater. Summer neared its end, and on one stormy day dirt and rubble rose above the parapets, and began to spill over into the courts and piazzas. Janeil must soon be buried and all within suffocated.

It was then that a group of impulsive young cadets, with

more elan than dignity, took up weapons and charged up the slope. The Meks dumped dirt and stone upon them, but a handful gained the ridge where they fought in a kind of dreadful exaltation.

Fifteen minutes the fight raged and the earth became sodden with rain and blood. For one glorious moment the cadets swept the ridge clean. Had not most of their fellows been lost under the rubble anything might have occurred. But the Meks regrouped, thrust forward. Ten men were left, then six, then four, then one, then none. The Meks marched down the slope, swarmed over the battlements, and with somber intensity killed all within. Janeil, for seven hundred years the abode of gallant gentlemen and gracious ladies, had become a lifeless hulk.

The Mek, standing as if a specimen in a museum case, was a man-like creature native, in his original version, to a planet of Etamin. His tough rusty-bronze hide glistened metallically as if oiled or waxed. The spines thrusting back from scalp and neck shone like gold, and indeed they were coated with a conductive copper-chrome film. His sense organs were gathered in clusters at the site of a man's ears; his visage—it was often a shock, walking the lower corridors, to come suddenly upon a Mek—was corrugated muscle, not dissimilar to the look of an uncovered human brain. His maw, a vertical irregular cleft at the base of this 'face', was an obsolete organ by reason of the syrup sac which had been introduced under the skin of the shoulders, and the digestive organs, originally used to extract nutrition from decayed swamp vegetation and coelenterates, had atrophied. The Mek typically wore no garment except possibly a work apron or a tool-belt, and in the sunlight his rust-bronze skin made a handsome display. This was the Mek solitary, a creature intrinsically as effective as man—perhaps more by virtue of his superb brain which also functioned as a radio transceiver. Working in the mass, by the teeming thousands, he seemed less admirable, less competent: a hybrid of sub-man and cockroach.

Certain savants, notably Morninglight's D.R. Jardine and Salonson of Tuang, considered the Mek bland and phlegmatic, but the profound Claghorn of Castle Hagedorn asserted otherwise. The emotions of the Mek, said Claghorn, were different from human emotions, and only vaguely comprehensible to man. After diligent research Claghorn isolated over a dozen Mek emotions.

In spite of such research, the Mek revolt came as an utter surprise, no less to Claghorn, D. R. Jardine and Salonson than to anyone else. Why? asked everyone. How could a group so long submissive have contrived so murderous a plot?

The most reasonable conjecture was also the simplest: the Mek resented servitude and hated the Earthmen who had removed him from his natural environment. Those who argued against this theory claimed that it projected human emotions and attitudes into a non-human organism, that the Mek had every reason to feel gratitude toward the gentlemen who had liberated him from the conditions of Etamin Nine. To this, the first group would inquire, "Who projects human attitudes now?" And the retort of their opponents was often: "Since no one knows for certain, one projection is no more absurd than another."

II

Castle Hagedorn occupied the crest of a black diorite crag overlooking a wide valley to the south. Larger, more majestic than Janiel, Hagedorn was protected by walls a mile in circumference, three hundred feet tall. The parapets stood a full nine hundred feet above the valley, with towers, turrets and observation eyries raising even higher. Two sides of the crag, at east and west, dropped sheer to the valley. The north and south slopes, a trifle less steep, were terraced and planted with vines, artichokes, pears and pomegranates. An avenue rising from the valley circled the crag and passed through a portal into the central plaza. Opposite stood the great Rotunda, with at either side the tall Houses of the twenty-eight families.

The original castle, constructed immediately after the return of men to Earth, stood on the site now occupied by the plaza. The tenth Hagedorn had assembled an enormous force of Peasants and Meks to build the new walls, after which he demolished the old castle. The twenty-eight Houses dated from this time, five hundred years before.

Below the plaza were three service levels: the stables and garages at the bottom, next the Mek shops and Mek living quarters, then the various storerooms, warehouses and special shops: bakery, brewery, lapidary, arsenal, repository, and the like.

The current Hagedorn, twenty-sixth of the line, was a Claghorn of the Overwheles. His se-

THE CLANS OF HAGEDORN

THEIR COLORS AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES:

CLANS	COLORS	FAMILIES
Xanten	yellow, black piping	Haude, Quay, Idelsea, Esledune, Salonson, Roseth.
Beaudry	dark blue, white piping	Onwane, Zadig, Prine, Fer, Susune.
Overwhele	gray, green, red rosettes	Claghorn, Abreu, Woss, Hinken Zumbeld.
Aure	brown, black	Zadhause, Fotergil, Marune, Baudune, Godalming, Lesmanic
Isseth	purple, dark red	Mazeth, Floy, Luder-Hepman, Uegus, Kerrithew, Bethune.

The first gentleman of the castle, elected for life, is known as 'Hagedorn'.

The clan chief, selected by the family elders, bears the name of his clan; thus: 'Xanten', 'Beaudry', 'Overwhele', 'Aure', 'Isseth' — both clans and clan chiefs.

The family elder, selected by household heads, bears the name of his family. Thus 'Idelsea', 'Zadhause', 'Bethune', 'Claghorn', are both families and family elders.

The remaining gentlemen and ladies bear first the clan, then the family, then the personal name. Thus: Aure Zadhause Ludwick, abbreviated to A. Z. Ludwick, and Beaudry Fer Dariane, abbreviated to B. F. Dariane.

lection had occasioned general surprise, because O.C. Charle, as he had been before his elevation, was a gentleman of no remarkable presence. His elegance, flair, and erudition were only ordinary; he had never been notable for any significant originality of thought. His physical proportions were good; his face was square and bony, with a short straight nose, a benign brow, narrow gray eyes. His expression was normally a trifle abstracted—his detractors used the word 'vacant'. But by a simple lowering of the eyelids, a downward twitch of the coarse blond eyebrows, it at once

became stubborn and surly, a fact of which O.C. Charle, or Hagedorn, was unaware.

The office, while exerting little or no formal authority, exerted a pervasive influence, and the style of the gentleman who was Hagedorn affected everyone. For this reason the selection of Hagedorn was a matter of no small importance, subject to hundreds of considerations, and it was the rare candidate who failed to have some old solecism or gaucherie discussed with embarrassing candor. While the candidate might never take overt umbrage, friendships were inevitably sundered, rancors augmented, reputations blasted. O. C. Charle's elevation represented a compromise between two factions among the Overwheles, to which clan the privilege of selection had fallen.

The gentlemen between whom O.C. Charle represented a compromise were both highly respected, but distinguished by basically different attitudes toward existence. The first was the talented Garr of the Zumbeld family. He exemplified the traditional virtues of Castle Hagedorn: he was a notable connoisseur of essences, he dressed with absolute savoir, with never so much as a pleat nor a twist of the characteristic Overwhele rosette awry. He combined insouciance and flair with dignity. His repartee coruscated with brilliant allusions and turns of phrase. When aroused his wit was utterly mordant. He could quote every literary work of consequence; he performed expertly upon the nine-stringed lute, and was thus in constant demand at the Viewing of Antique Tabards. He was an antiquarian of unchallengeable erudition and knew the locale of every major city of Old Earth, and could discourse for hours upon the history of the ancient times. His military expertise was unparallelled at Hagedorn, and challenged only by D. K. Magdah of Castle Delora and perhaps Brusham of Tuang. Faults? Flaws? Few could be cited: over-punctilio which might be construed as waspishness; an intrepid pertinacity which could be considered ruthless.

O. Z. Garr could never be dismissed as insipid or indecisive, and his personal courage was beyond dispute. Two years before a stray band of Nomads had ventured into Lucerne Valley, slaughtering Peasants, stealing cattle, and going so far as to fire an arrow into the chest of an Isseth cadet. O.Z. Garr instantly assembled a punitive company of Meks, loaded them aboard a dozen power-wagons and set forth in pursuit of the Nomads, finally overtaking them near

Drene River, by the ruins of Worster Cathedral. The Nomads were unexpectedly strong, unexpectedly crafty, and were not content to turn tail and flee. During the fighting O.Z. Garr displayed the most exemplary demeanor, directing the attack from the seat of his power-wagon, a pair of Meks standing by with shields to ward away arrows.

The conflict ended in a rout of the Nomads. They left twenty-seven lean black-cloaked corpses strewn on the field, while only twenty Meks lost their lives.

O.Z. Garr's opponent in the election was Claghorn, elder of the Claghorn family. As with O.Z. Garr, the exquisite discriminations of Hagedorn society came to Claghorn as easily as swimming to a fish.

He was no less erudite than O.Z. Garr, though hardly so versatile, his principal field of study being the Meks, their physiology, linguistic modes, and social patterns. Claghorn's conversation was more profound, but less entertaining and not so trenchant as that of O.Z. Garr. He seldom employed the extravagant tropes and allusions which characterized Garr's discussions, preferring a style of speech which was almost unadorned. Claghorn kept no Phanes; O.Z. Garr's four matched Gossamer Dainties were marvels of delight, and at the viewing of Antique Tabards Garr's presentations were seldom outshone. The important contrast between the two men lay in their philosophic outlook. O.Z. Garr, a traditionalist, a fervent exemplar of his society, subscribed to its tents without reservation. He was beset by neither doubt nor guilt; he felt no desire to alter the conditions which afforded more than two thousand gentlemen and ladies lives of great richness. Claghorn, while by no means an Expiationist, was known to feel dissatisfaction with the general tenor of life at Castle Hagedorn, and argued so plausibly that many folk refused to

listen to him, on the grounds that they became uncomfortable. But an indefinable malaise ran deep, and Claghorn had many influential supporters.

When the time came for ballots to be cast, neither O.Z. Garr nor Claghorn could muster sufficient support. The office finally was conferred upon a gentleman who never in his most optimistic reckonings had expected it: a gentleman of decorum and dignity but no great depth; without flippancy, but likewise without vivacity; affable but disinclined to force an issue to a disagreeable conclusion: O.C. Charle, the new Hagedorn.

Six months later, during the dark hours before dawn, the Hagedorn Meks evacuated their quarters and departed, taking with them power-wagons, tools, weapons and electrical equipment. The act had clearly been long in the planning, for simultaneously the Meks at each of the eight other castles made a similar departure.

The initial reaction at Castle Hagedorn, as elsewhere, was incredulity, then shocked anger, then — when the implications of the act were pondered — a sense of foreboding and calamity.

The new Hagedorn, the clan chiefs, and certain other notables appointed by Hagedorn met in the formal council chamber to consider the matter. They sat around a great table covered with red velvet: Hagedorn at the head; Xanten and Isseth at his left; Overwhele, Aure and Beaudry at his right; then the others, including O. Z. Garr, I. K. Linus, A. G. Bernal, a mathematical theoretician of great ability, B. F. Wyas, an equally sagacious antiquarian who had identified the sites of many ancient cities: Palmyra, Lubeck, Eridu, Zanesville, Burton-on-Trent, Massilia among others. Certain family elders filled out the council: Marune and Baudune of Aure; Quay, Roseth and Idelsea of Xanten; Uegus of Isseth, Claghorn of Overwhele.

All sat silent for a period of ten minutes, arranging their minds and performing the silent act of psychic accommodation known as 'intression'.

At last Hagedorn spoke. "The castle suddenly is bereft of its Meks. Needless to say, this is an inconvenient condition to be adjusted as swiftly as possible. Here, I am sure, we find ourselves of one mind."

He looked around the table. All thrust forward ivory tablets to signify assent — all save Claghorn, who however did not stand it on end to signify dissent.

Isseth, a stern white-haired gentleman magnificently hand-

some in spite of his seventy years, spoke in a grim voice. "I see no point in cogitation or delay. What we must do is clear. Admittedly the Peasants are poor material from which to recruit an armed force. Nonetheless, we must assemble them, equip them with sandals, smocks and weapons so that they do not discredit us, and put them under good leadership: O. Z. Garr or Xanten. Birds can locate the vagrants, whereupon we will track them down, order the Peasants to give them a good drubbing and herd them home on the double."

Xanten, thirty-five years old, extraordinarily young to be a clan chief, and a notorious firebrand, shook his head. "The idea is appealing but impractical. Peasants simply could not stand up to the Meks, no matter how we trained them."

The statement was manifestly accurate. The Peasants, small andromorphs originally of Spica Ten, were not so much timid as incapable of performing a vicious act.

A dour silence held the table. O. Z. Garr finally spoke. "The dogs have stolen our power-wagons, otherwise I'd be tempted to ride out and chivvy the rascals home with a whip."*

"A matter of perplexity," said Hagedorn, "is syrup. Naturally they carried away what they could. When this is exhausted — what then? Will they starve? Impossible for them to return to their original diet — what was it, swamp mud? Eh, Claghorn, you're the expert in these matters. Can the Meks return to a diet of mud?"

"No," said Claghorn. "The organs of the adult are atrophied. If a cub were started on the diet, he'd probably survive."

"Just as I assumed." Hagedorn scowled portentously down at his clasped hands to conceal his total lack of any constructive proposal.

A gentleman in the dark blue of the Beaudrys appeared in the doorway: he poised himself, held high his right arm, bowed.

Hagedorn rose to his feet. "Come forward, B. F. Robarth; what is your news?" For this was the significance of the newcomer's genuflection.

* This is only an approximate translation and fails to capture the pungency of the language. Several words have no contemporary equivalents. 'Skirkling', as in 'to send skirkling', denotes a frantic pell-mell flight in all directions accompanied by a vibration or twinkling or a jerking motion. To 'volith' is to toy idly with a matter, the implication being that the person involved is of such Jovian potency that all difficulties dwindle to contemptible triviality. 'Raudelbogs' are the semi-intelligent beings of Etamin Four, who were brought to Earth, trained first as gardeners, then construction laborers, then sent home in disgrace because of certain repulsive habits they refused to forgo.

The statement of O. Z. Garr, therefore, becomes something like this: "Were power-wagons at hand, I'd volith riding forth with a whip to send the raudelbogs skirkling home."

"The news is a message broadcast from Halycon. The Meks have attacked; they have fired the structure and are slaughtering all. The radio went dead one minute ago."

All swung around, some jumped to their feet. "Slaughter?" croaked Claghorn.

"I am certain that by now Halcyon is no more."

Claghorn sat staring with eyes unfocused. The others discussed the dire news in voices heavy with horror.

Hagedorn once more brought the council back to order. "This is clearly an extreme situation; the gravest, perhaps, of our entire history. I am frank to state that I can suggest no decisive counter-act."

Overwhele inquired, "What of the other castles? Are they secure?"

Hagedorn turned to B. F. Robarth: "Will you be good enough to make general radio contact with all other castles, and inquire as to their condition?"

Xanten said, "Others are as vulnerable as Halcyon: Sea Island and Delora, in particular, and Maraval as well."

Claghorn emerged from his reverie. "The gentlemen and ladies of these places, in my opinion, should consider taking refuge at Janeil or here until the uprising is quelled."

Others around the table looked at him in surprise and puzzlement. O. Z. Garr inquired in the silkiest of voices: "You envision the gentlefolk of these castles scampering to refuge at the cock-a-hoop swaggering of the lower orders?"

"Indeed I do, should they wish to survive," responded Claghorn politely. A gentleman of late middle-age, Claghorn was stocky, strong, with black-gray hair, magnificent green eyes, a manner which suggest great internal force under stern control. "Flight by definition entails a certain diminution of dignity," he went on to say. "If O. Z. Garr can propound an elegant manner of taking to one's heels, I will be glad to learn it, and everyone else should likewise heed, because in the days to come the capability may be of comfort to all."

Hagedorn interposed before O. Z. Garr could reply. "Let us keep to the issues. I confess I cannot see to the end of all this. The Meks have demonstrated themselves to be murderers. How can we take murderers back into our service? But if we don't — well, to say the least, conditions will be austere until we can locate and train a new force of technicians."

"The spaceships!" exclaimed Xanten. "We must see to them at once!"

"What's this?" inquired Beaudry, a gentleman of rock-hard face. "How do you mean: 'see to them'?"

"They must be protected from damage! What else? They are our link to the Home Worlds. The maintenance Meks probably have not deserted the hangars, since, if they propose to exterminate us, they will want to deny us the spaceships."

"Perhaps you care to march with a levy of Peasants to take the hangars under firm control?" suggested O. Z. Garr in a somewhat supercilious voice. A long history of rivalry and mutual detestation existed between himself and Xanten.

"It may be our only hope," said Xanten. "Still — how does one fight with a levy of Peasants? Better that I fly to the hangars and reconnoiter. Meanwhile, perhaps you, and others with military expertise, will take in hand the recruitment and training of a Peasant militia."

"In this regard," stated O. Z. Garr, "I await the outcome of our current deliberations. If it develops that here lies the optimum course, I naturally will apply my competences to the fullest degree. If your own capabilities are best fulfilled by spying out the activities of the Meks, I hope you will be large-hearted enough to do the same."

The two gentlemen glared at each other.

A year previously their emnity had almost culminated in a duel. Xanten, a gentleman tall, clean-limbed, nervously active, was gifted with great natural flair, but likewise evinced a disposition too easy for absolute elegance. The traditionalists considered him 'sthross', indicating a manner flawed by an almost imperceptible slackness and lack of punctilio: not the best possible choice for clan chief.

Xanten's response to O. Z. Garr was blandly polite. "I shall be glad to take this task upon myself. Since haste is of the essence I will risk the accusation of precipitousness and leave at once. Hopefully I return to report tomorrow." He rose, performed a ceremonious bow to Hagedorn, another all-inclusive salute to the council and departed.

III

He crossed to Esledune House where he maintained an apartment on the thirteenth level: four rooms furnished in the style known as Fifth Dynasty, after an epoch in the history of the Altair Home Planets, from which the human race had returned to Earth.

His current consort, Araminta, a lady of the Onwane family, was

absent on affairs of her own, which suited Xanten well enough. After plying him with questions she would have discredited his simple explanation, preferring to suspect an assignation at his country place. Truth to tell, he had become bored with Araminta and had reason to believe that she felt similarly — or perhaps his exalted rank had provided her less opportunity to preside at glittering social functions than she had expected. They had bred no children. Araminta's daughter by a previous connection had been tallied to her. Her second child must then be tallied to Xanten, preventing him from siring another child.*

Xanten doffed his yellow council vestments. Assisted by a young Peasant buck, he donned dark yellow hunting-breeches with black trim, a black jacket, black boots. He drew a cap of soft black leather over his head, slung a pouch over his shoulder, into which he loaded weapons: a coiled blade, an energy gun.

Leaving the apartment he summoned the lift and descended to the first level armory, where normally a Mek clerk would have served him. Now Xanten, to his vast disgust, was forced to take himself behind the counter, and rummage here and there. The Meks had removed most of the sporting rifles, all the pellet ejectors and heavy energy-guns. An ominous circumstance, thought Xanten. At last he found a steel sling-whip, spare power-slugs for his gun, a brace of fire grenades, a high-powered monocular.

He returned to the lift, rode to the top level, ruefully considering the long climb when eventually the mechanism broke down, with no Meks at hand to make repairs. He thought of the apoplectic furies of rigid traditionalists such as Beaudry and chuckled. Eventful days lay ahead!

Stopping at the top level he crossed to the parapets, proceeded around to the radio room. Customarily three Mek specialists connected into the apparatus by wires clipped to their quills sat typing messages as they arrived. Now B. F. Robarth stood before the mechanism, uncertainly twisting the dials, his mouth wry with deprecation and distaste for the job.

"Any further news?" Xanten asked.

B. F. Robarth gave him a sour grin. "The folk at the other end seem no more familiar with this cursed tangle than I. I hear occasional voices. I believe that the

* The population of Castle Hagedorn was fixed; each gentleman and each lady was permitted a single child. If by chance another were born he must either find someone who had not yet sired to sponsor it, or dispose of it another way. The usual procedure was to give the child into the care of the Explationists.

Meks are attacking Castle Delora."

Claghorn had entered the room behind Xanten. "Did I hear you correctly? Delora Castle is gone?"

"Not gone yet, Claghorn. But as good as gone. The Delora walls are little better than a picturesque crumble."

"Sickening situation!" muttered Xanten. "How can sentient creatures perform such evil? After all these centuries, how little we actually knew of them!" As he spoke he recognized the tactlessness of his remark; Claghorn had devoted much time to a study of the Meks.

"The act itself is not astounding," said Claghorn shortly. "It has occurred a thousand times in human history."

Mildly surprised that Claghorn should use human history as referent to a case involving the sub-orders, Xanten asked: "You were never aware of this vicious aspect to the Mek nature?"

"No. Never. Never indeed."

Claghorn seemed unduly sensitive, thought Xanten. Understandable, all in all. Claghorn's basic doctrine as set forth during the Hagedor selection was by no means simple, and Xanten neither understood it nor completely endorsed what he conceived to be its goals; but it was plain that the revolt of the Meks had cut the ground out from under Claghorn's feet. Probably to the somewhat bitter satisfaction of O. Z. Garr, who must feel vindicated in his traditionalist doctrines.

Claghorn said tersely, "The life we've been leading couldn't last forever. It's a wonder it lasted as long as it did."

"Perhaps so," said Xanten in a soothing voice. "Well, no matter. All things change. Who knows? The Peasants may be planning to poison our food . . . I must go." He bowed to Claghorn, who returned him a crisp nod, and to B. F. Robarth, then departed the room.

He climbed the spiral staircase — almost a ladder — to the cotes, where the Birds lived in an invincible disorder, occupying themselves with gambling at the game of quarrels, a version of chess, with rules incomprehensible to every gentleman who had tried to understand it.

Castle Hagedorn maintained a hundred Birds, tended by a gang of long-suffering Peasants, whom the Birds held in vast disesteem. They were garish garrulous creatures, pigmented red, yellow, blue, with long necks, jerking inquisitive heads, an inherent irreverence which no amount of discipline or tutelage could overcome. Spying Xanten, they emitted a chorus of rude jeers:

"Somebody wants a ride! Heavy thing!" "Why don't the self-anointed two-footers grow wings for themselves?" "My friend, never trust a Bird! We'll sky you, then fling you down on your fundament!"

"Quiet!" called Xanten. "I need six fast, silent Birds, upon an important mission. Are any capable of such a task?"

"Are any capable, he asks!" "*A ros ros ros!* When none of us have flown for a week!" "Silence? We'll give you silence, yellow and black!"

"Come then. You. You. You of the wise eye. You there. You with the cocked shoulder. You with the green pompon. To the basket."

The Birds designated, jeering, grumbling, reviling the Peasants, allowed their syrup sacs to be filled, then flapped to the wicker seat where Xanten waited. "To the space depot at Vincenne," he told them. "Fly high and silently. Enemies are abroad. We must learn what harm if any has been done to the space ships."

"To the depot then!" Each Bird seized a length of rope tied to an overhead framework; the chair was yanked up with a jerk calculated to rattle Xanten's teeth, and off they flew, laughing, cursing each other for not supporting more of the load, but eventually all accommodating themselves to the task and flying with a coordinated flapping of the thirty-six sets of wings. To Xanten's relief, their garrulity lessened; silently they flew south, at a speed of fifty or sixty miles per hour.

The afternoon was already waning. The ancient countryside, scene to so many comings and goings, so much triumph and so much disaster, was laced with long black shadows. Looking down, Xanten reflected that though the human stock was native to this soil, and though his immediate ancestors had maintained their holdings for seven hundred years, Earth still seemed an alien world.

The reason of course was by no means mysterious or rooted in paradox. After the Six-Star War, Earth had lain fallow for three thousand years, unpopulated save for a handful of anguished wretches who somehow had survived the cataclysm and who had become semi-barbaric Nomads. Then seven hundred years ago certain rich lords of Altair, motivated to some extent by political disaffection, but no less by caprice, had decided to return to Earth. Such was the origin of the nine great strongholds, the resident gentlefolk and the staffs of specialized andromorphs.

Xanten flew over an area

where an antiquarian had directed excavations, revealing a plaza flagged with white stone, a broken obelisk, a tumbled statue. The sight, by some trick of association, stimulated Xanten's mind to an astonishing vision, so simple and yet so grand that he looked around, in all directions, with new eyes. The vision was Earth re-populated with men, the land cultivated, Nomads driven back into the wilderness.

At the moment the image was far-fetched. And Xanten, watching the soft contours of old Earth slide below, pondered the Mek revolt which had altered his life with such startling abruptness.

Claghorn had long insisted that no human condition endured forever, with the corollary that the more complicated such a condition, the greater its susceptibility to change.

In that case the seven hundred year continuity at Castle Hagedorn — as artificial, extravagant and intricate as life could be — became an astonishing circumstance in itself. Claghorn had pushed his thesis further. Since change was inevitable, he argued that the gentlefolk should soften the impact by anticipating and controlling the changes — a doctrine which had been attacked with great fervor. The traditionalists labeled all of Claghorn's ideas demonstrable fallacy, and cited the very stability of castle life as proof of its viability. Xanten had inclined first one way, then the other, emotionally involved with neither cause. If anything, the fact of O. Z. Carr's traditionalism had nudged him toward Claghorn's views.

Now it seemed as if events had vindicated Claghorn. Change had come, with an impact of the maximum harshness and violence.

There were still questions to be answered, of course. Why had the Meks chosen this particular time to revolt? Conditions had not altered appreciably for five hundred years, and the Meks had never previously hinted dissatisfaction. In fact, they had revealed nothing of their feelings — though no one had ever troubled to ask them — save Claghorn.

The Birds were veering east to avoid the Ballarat Mountains, to the west of which were the ruins of a great city, never satisfactorily identified. Below lay the Lucerne Valley, at one time a fertile farm land. If one looked with great concentration the outline of the various holdings could sometimes be distinguished. Ahead, the spaceship hangars were visible, where Mek technicians maintained four spaceships that were jointly the property of Hagedorn, Janeil, Tuang, Morninglight and Mara-

val, though, for a variety of reasons, the ships were never used.

The sun was setting. Orange light twinkled and flickered on the metal walls. Xanten called instructions up to the Birds: "Circle down; alight behind that line of trees, but fly low so that none will see."

Down on stiff wings curved the Birds, six ungainly necks stretched toward the ground. Xanten was ready for the impact. The Birds never seemed able to alight easily when they carried a gentleman. When the cargo was something in which they felt a personal concern, dandelion fluff would never have been disturbed by the jar.

Xanten expertly kept his balance, instead of tumbling and rolling in the manner preferred by the Birds. "You all have syrup," he told them. "Rest: make no noise; do not quarrel. By tomorrow's sunset, if I am not here, return to Castle Hagedorn and say that Xanten was killed."

"Never fear!" cried the Birds. "We will wait forever!" "At any rate till tomorrow's sunset!" "If danger threatens, if you are pressed — *a ros ros ros!* Call for the Birds!" *A ros!* We are ferocious when aroused!"

"I wish it were true," said Xanten. "The Birds are arrant cowards, this is well known. Still I value the sentiment. Remember my instructions, and be quiet above all! I do not wish to be set upon and stabbed because of your clamor."

The Birds made indignant sounds. "Injustice, injustice! We are quiet as the dew!"

"Good." Xanten hurriedly moved away lest they should bellow new advice or reassurances after him.

IV

Passing through the forest, he came to an open meadow at the far edge of which, perhaps a hundred yards distant, was the rear of the first hangar. He stopped to consider.

Several factors were involved. First, the maintenance Meks, with the metal structure shielding them from radio contact, might still be unaware of the revolt. Hardly likely, he decided, in view of the otherwise careful planning. Second, the Meks, in continuous communication with their fellows, acted as a collective organism. The aggregate functioned more completely than its parts, and the individual was not prone to initiative. Hence, vigilance was not likely to be extreme. Third, if they expected anyone to attempt a discreet approach, they would necessarily scrutinize most closely the route which he proposed to take.

Xanten decided to wait in the shadows another ten minutes, until the setting sun shining over his shoulder should most effectively blind any who might watch.

Ten minutes passed. The hangars, burnished by the dying sunlight, bulked long, tall, completely quiet. In the intervening meadow long golden grass waved and rippled in a cool breeze.

Xanten took a deep breath, hefted his pouch, arranged his weapons, strode forth. It did not occur to him to crawl through the grass.

He reached the back of the nearest hangar without challenge. Pressing his ear to the metal he heard nothing. He walked to the corner, looked down the side: no sign of life. Xanten shrugged. Very well then; to the door.

He walked beside the hangar, the setting sun casting a long black shadow ahead of him. He came to a door opening into the hangar administrative office. Since there was nothing to be gained by trepidation, Xanten thrust the door aside and entered.

The offices were empty. The desks, where centuries before underlings had sat, calculating invoices and bills of lading, were bare, polished, free of dust. The computers and information banks, black enamel, glass, white and red switches, looked as if they had been installed only the day before.

Xanten crossed to the glass pane overlooking the hangar floor, shadowed under the bulk of the ship.

He saw no Meks. But on the floor of the hangar, arranged in neat rows and heaps, were elements and assemblies of the ship's control mechanism. Service panels gaped wide into the hull to show where the devices had been detached.

Xanten stepped from the office out into the hangar. The spaceship had been disabled, put out of commission. Xanten looked along the neat rows of parts. Certain savants of various castles were expert in the theory of space-time transfer; S. X. Rosenhox of Maraval had even derived a set of equations which, if translated into machinery, eliminated the troublesome Hamus Effect. But not one gentleman, even were he so oblivious to personal honor as to touch a hand to a tool, would know how to replace, connect and tune the mechanisms heaped upon the hangar floor.

When had the malicious work been done? Impossible to say.

Xanten returned to the office, stepped back out into the twilight, walked to the next hangar. Again no Meks; again the spaceship had been gutted of its control mechanisms. Xanten pro-

ceeded to the third hangar, where conditions were the same.

At the fourth hangar he discerned the faint sounds of activity. Stepping into the office, looking through the glass wall into the hangar, he found Meks working with their usual economy of motion, in a near silence which was uncanny.

Xanten, already uncomfortable because of skulking through the forest, became enraged by the cool destruction of his property. He strode forth into the hangar. Slapping his thigh to attract attention he called in a harsh voice, "Return the components to place! How dare you vermin act in such a manner?"

The Meks turned about their blank countenances, studied him through black beaded lens-clusters at each side of their heads.

"What?" Xanten bellowed. "You hesitate?" He brought forth his steel whip, usually more of a symbolic adjunct then a punitive instrument, and slashed it against the ground. "Obey! This ridiculous revolt is at its end!"

The Meks still hesitated, and events wavered in the balance. None made a sound, though messages were passing among them, appraising the circumstances, establishing a consensus. Xanten could allow them no such leisure. He marched forward, wielding the whip, striking at the only area where the Meks felt pain: the ropy face. "To your duties," he roared. "A fine maintenance crew are you! A destruction crew is more like it!"

The Meks made their soft blowing sound which might mean anything. They fell back, and now Xanten noted one standing at the head of the companionway leading into the ship: a Mek larger than any he had seen before and one in some fashion different. This Mek was aiming a pellet gun at his head. With an unhurried flourish Xanten whipped away a Mek who had leapt forward with a knife, and without deigning to aim fired at and destroyed the Mek who stood on the companionway, even as the slug sang past his head.

The other Meks were nevertheless committed to an attack. All surged forward. Lounging disdainfully against the hull, Xanten shot them as they came, moving his head once to avoid a chunk of metal, again reaching to catch a throw-knife and hurl it into the face of him who had thrown it.

The Meks drew back, and Xanten guessed that they had agreed on a new tactic: either to withdraw for weapons or perhaps to confine him within the hangar. In any event no more could be accomplished here. He made play with the whip and cleared an avenue to the office. With tools, metal bars and forgings striking the glass behind him, he sauntered through the office and out into the night. He did not look behind.

The full moon was rising, a great yellow globe casting a smoky saffron glow, like an antique lamp. Mek eyes were not well adapted for night seeing, and Xanten waited by the door. Presently Meks began to pour forth, and Xanten hacked at their necks as they came.

The Meks drew back inside the hangar. Wiping his blade Xanten strode off the way he had come, looking neither right nor left. He stopped short. The night was young. Something tickled his mind: the recollection of the Mek who had fired the pellet gun. He had been larger, possibly a darker bronze, but, more significantly, he had displayed an indefinable poise, almost authority — though such a word, when used in connection with the Meks, was anomalous. On the other hand, someone must have planned the revolt, or at least originated the concept of a revolt in the first place.

It might be worthwhile to extend the reconnaissance, though his primary information had been secured.

Xanten turned back and crossed the landing area to the barracks and garages. Once more, frowning in discomfort, he felt the need for discretion. What times these were when a gentleman must skulk to avoid such as the Meks! He stole up behind the garages, where a half-dozen power-wagons* lay dozing.

Xanten looked them over. All were of the same sort, a metal frame with four wheels and an earth-moving blade at the front. Nearby must be the syrup stock.

Xanten presently found a bin containing a number of containers. He loaded a dozen on a nearby wagon and slashed the rest with his knife, so that the syrup gushed across the ground. The Meks used a somewhat different formulation; their syrup would be stocked at a different locale, presumably inside the barracks.

Xanten mounted a power-wagon, twisted the 'awake' key, tapped the 'Go' button, pulled a lever which set the wheels into reverse motion. The power-wag-

* Power-wagons, like the Meks, were originally swamp-creatures from Etamin 9. They were great rectangular slabs of muscle, slung into a rectangular frame and protected from sunlight, insects and rodents by a synthetic pelt. Syrup sacs communicated with their digestive apparatus, wires led to motor nodes in the rudimentary brain. The muscles were clamped to rocker arms which actuated rotors and drive-wheels. The power-wagons were economical, long-lived and docile, and so they were principally used for heavy cartage, earth-moving, heavy-tillage, and other arduous jobs.

on lurched back. Xanten halted it and turned it so that it faced the barracks. He did likewise with three others, then set them all in motion, one after the other.

They trundled forward. The blades cut open the metal wall of the barracks, the roof sagged. The power-wagons continued, pushing the length of the interior, crushing all in their way.

Xanten nodded in profound satisfaction, returned to the power-wagon he had reserved for his own use. Mounting to the seat, he waited. No Meks issued from the barracks. Apparently they were deserted, with the entire crew busy at the hangars. Still, hopefully, the syrup stocks had been destroyed. Many might perish by starvation.

From the direction of the hangars came a single Mek, evidently attracted by the sounds of destruction. Xanten crouched on the seat and as it passed, coiled his whip around the stocky neck. He heaved; the Mek spun to the ground.

Xanten leapt down, seized its pellet-gun. Here was another of the larger Meks, and now Xanten saw it to be without a syrup sac, a Mek in the original state. Astounding! How did the creature survive? Suddenly there were many new questions to be asked; hopefully a few to be answered. Standing on the creature's head, Xanten hacked away the long antenna quills which protruded from the back of the Meks' scalp. It was now insulated, alone, on its own resources; a situation certain to reduce the most stalwart Mek to apathy.

"Up!" ordered Xanten. "Into the back of the wagon!" He cracked the whip for emphasis.

The Mek at first seemed disposed to defy him, but after a blow or two obeyed. Xanten climbed into the seat, started the power-wagon, directed it to the north. The Birds would be unable to carry both himself and the Mek — or in any event they would cry and complain so raucously that they might as well be believed at first. They might or might not wait until the specified hour of tomorrow's sunset. As likely as not they would sleep the night in a tree, awake in a surly mood and return at once to Castle Hagedorn.

All through the night the power wagon trundled, with Xanten on the seat and his captive huddled in the rear.

V

The gentlefolk of the castles, for all their assurance, disliked to wander the countryside by night, by reason of what some derided as superstitious fear.

Others cited travelers benighted beside mouldering ruins and their subsequent visions: the eldritch music they had heard, or the whimper of moon-mirkins, or the far horns of spectral huntsmen. Others had seen pale lavender and green lights, and wraiths which ran with long strides through the forest; and Hode Abbey, now a dank tumble, was notorious for the White Hag and the alarming toll she exacted.

A hundred such cases were known. While the hard-headed scoffed, none needlessly traveled the countryside by night. Indeed, if truly ghosts haunt the scenes of tragedy and heartbreak, then the landscape of Old Earth must be home to ghosts and specters beyond all numbering; especially that region across which Xanten rolled in the power-wagon, where every rock, every meadow, every vale and swale was crusted thick with human experience.

The moon rose high. The wagon trundled north along an ancient road, the cracked concrete slabs shining pale in the moonlight. Twice Xanten saw flickering orange lights off to the side, and once, standing in the shade of a cypress tree, he thought to see a tall quiet shape, silently watching him pass. The captive Mek sat plotting mischief, Xanten well knew. Without its quills it must feel depersonified, bewildered, but Xanten told himself that it would not do to doze.

The road led through a town, certain structures of which yet stood. Not even the Nomads took refuge in these old towns, fearing either miasma or perhaps the redolence of grief.

The moon reached the zenith. The landscape spread away in a hundred tones of silver, black and gray. Looking about, Xanten thought that for all the notable pleasures of civilized life, there was yet something to be said for the spaciousness and simplicity of Nomadland . . . The Mek made a stealthy movement. Xanten did not so much as turn his head. He cracked his whip in the air. The Mek became quiet.

All through the night the power-wagon rolled along the old road, with the moon sinking into the west. The eastern horizon glowed green and lemon-yellow, and presently, as the pallid moon disappeared over the distant line of the mountains the sun came up.

At this moment, Xanten spied a drift of smoke off to the right.

He halted the wagon. Standing up on the seat he craned his neck to spy a Nomad encampment about a quarter-mile distant. He could distinguish three or four

dozen tents of various sizes, a dozen dilapidated power-wagons. On the hetman's tall tent he thought to see a black ideogram which he thought he recognized. If so, this would be the tribe which not long before had trespassed on the Hagedorn domain, and which O.Z. Garr had repulsed.

Xanten settled himself upon the seat, composed his garments, set the power-wagon in motion and guided it toward the camp.

A hundred black-cloaked men, tall and lean as ferrets, watched his approach. A dozen sprang forward and whipping arrows to bows aimed them at his heart. Xanten turned them a glance of supercilious inquiry, drove the wagon up to the hetman's tent, halted. He rose to his feet. "Hetman," he called. "Are you awake?"

The hetman parted the canvas which closed off his tent, peered out and after a moment came forth. Like the others he wore a garment of limp black cloth, swathing head and body alike. His face thrust through a square opening: narrow blue eyes, a grotesquely long nose, a chin long, skewed and sharp.

Xanten gave him a curt nod. "Observe this." He jerked his thumb toward the Mek in the back of the wagon. The hetman flicked aside his eyes, studied the Mek a tenth-second, returned to a scrutiny of Xanten. "His kind have revolted against the gentlemen," said Xanten. "In fact they massacre all the men of Earth. Hence we of Castle Hagedorn make this offer to the Nomads. Come to Castle Hagedorn! We will feed, clothe and arm you. We will train you to discipline and the arts of formal warfare. We will provide the most expert leadership within our power. We will then annihilate the Meks, expunge them from Earth. After the campaign, we will train you to technical skills, and you may pursue profitable and interesting careers in the service of the castles."

The hetman made no reply for a moment. Then his weathered face split into a ferocious grin and he spoke in a voice which Xanten found surprisingly well-modulated. "So your beasts have finally risen up to rend you! A pity they forebore so long! Well, it is all one to us. You are both alien folk and sooner or later your bones must bleach together."

Xanten pretended incomprehension. "If I understand you aright, you assert that in the face of alien assault, all men must fight a common battle; and then, after the victory, cooperate still to their mutual advantage; am I correct?"

The hetman's grin never wavered. "You are not men. Only we of Earth soil and Earth water are men. You and your weird slaves are strangers together. We wish you success in your mutual slaughter."

"Well then," declared Xanten, "I heard you aright after all. Appeals to your loyalty are ineffectual, so much is clear. What of self-interest then? The Meks, failing to expunge the gentlefolk of the castles, will turn upon the Nomads and kill them as if they were so many ants."

"If they attack us, we will war on them," said the hetman. "Otherwise let them do as they will."

Xanten glanced thoughtfully at the sky. "We might be willing even now, to accept a contingent of Nomads into the service of Castle Hagedorn, this to form a cadre from which a larger and more versatile group may be formed."

From the side another Nomad called in an offensively jeering voice: "You will sew a sac on our backs where you can pour your syrup, hey?"

Xanten replied in an even voice, "The syrup is highly nutritious and supplies all bodily needs."

"Why then do you not consume it yourself?"

Xanten disdained reply.

The hetman spoke. "If you wish to supply us weapons, we will take them, and use them against whomever threatens us. But do not expect us to defend you. If you fear for your lives, desert your castles and become Nomads."

"Fear for our lives?" exclaimed Xanten. "What nonsense! Never! Castle Hagedorn is impregnable, as is Janeil, and most of the other castles as well."

The hetman shook his head. "Any time we choose we could take Hagedorn, and kill all you popinjays in your sleep."

"What?" cried Xanten in outrage. "Are you serious?"

"Certainly. On a black night we would send a man aloft on a great kite and drop him down on the parapets. He would lower a line, haul up ladders and in fifteen minutes the castle is taken."

Xanten pulled at his chin. "Ingenious, but impractical. The Birds would detect such a kite. Or the wind would fail at a critical moment . . . All this is beside the point. The Meks fly no kites. They plan to make a display against Janeil and Hagedorn and then, in their frustration, they will go forth and hunt Nomads."

The hetman moved back a step. "What then? We have survived similar attempts by the men of Hagedorn. Cowards all!

Hand to hand, with equal weapons, we would make you eat the dirt like the contemptible dogs you are."

Xanten raised his eyebrows in elegant disdain. "I fear that you forget yourself. You address a clan chief of Castle Hagedorn. Only fatigue and boredom restrain me from punishing you with this whip."

"Bah," said the hetman. He crooked a finger to one of his archers. "Spit this insolent lordling."

The archer discharged his arrow, but Xanten had been expecting some such act. He fired his energy gun, destroying arrow, bow, and the archer's hands. He said, "I see I must teach you common respect for your betters; so it means the whip after all." Seizing the hetman by the scalp, he coiled the whip smartly once, twice, thrice around the narrow shoulders. "Let this suffice. I cannot compel you to fight, but at least I can demand decent respect from scuttling dung beetles." He leapt to the ground and, seizing the hetman, pitched him into the back of the wagon alongside the Mek. Then, backing the power-wagon around, he departed the camp without so much as a glance over his shoulder, the thwart of the seat protecting his back from the arrows of the hetman's stunned subjects.

The hetman scrambled erect, drew his dagger. Xanten turned his head slightly. "Take care! Or I will tie you to the wagon, and you shall run behind in the dust."

The hetman hesitated, made a spitting sound between his teeth, drew back. He looked down at his blade, turned it over, sheathed it with a grunt. "Where do you take me?"

Xanten halted the wagon. "No farther. I merely wished to leave your camp with dignity, without dodging and ducking a hail of arrows. You may alight. I take it you still refuse to bring your men into the service of Castle Hagedorn?"

The hetman once more made the spitting sound between his teeth. "When the Meks have destroyed the castles, we shall destroy the Meks. Then Earth will be cleared of star-things for all time!"

"You are a gang of intractable savages. Very well, alight, return to your encampment. Reflect well before you again show disrespect to a Castle Hagedorn clan chief."

"Bah," muttered the hetman. Leaping down from the wagon, he stalked back down the track toward his camp. He did not look back.

VI

About noon Xanten came to Far Valley, at the edge of the Hagedorn lands.

Nearby was a village of Expiationists: malcontents and neurasthenics in the opinion of castle gentlefolk, and a curious group by any standards. A few had held enviable rank; certain others were savants of recognized erudition; but others yet were persons of neither dignity nor reputation, subscribing to the most bizarre and extreme of philosophies. All now performed toil, no different from that relegated to the Peasants, and all seemed to take a perverse satisfaction in what by castle standards was filth, poverty and degradation.

As might be expected, their creed was by no means homogenous. Some might better have been described as 'nonconformists', and others still, a minority, argued for a dynamic program.

Between castle and village was little intercourse. Occasionally the Expiationists bartered fruit or polished wood for tools, nails, medicaments; or the gentlefolk might make up a party to watch the Expiationists at their dancing and singing. Xanten had visited the village on many such occasions and had been attracted by the artless charm and informality of the folk at their play. Now, passing near the village, Xanten turned aside and followed a lane which wound between tall blackberry hedges and out upon a little common, where goats and cattle grazed. Xanten halted the wagon in the shade, saw that the syrup sac was full. He looked back at his captive. "What of you? If you need syrup, pour yourself full. But no, you have no sac. What then do you feed upon? Mud? Unsavory fare. I fear none here is rank enough for your taste. Ingest syrup or munch grass, as you will; only do not stray overfar from the wagon, for I watch with an intent eye."

The Mek, sitting hunched in a corner, gave no signal that it comprehended. Nor did it move to take advantage of Xanten's offer.

Xanten went to a watering trough. Holding his hands under the trickle which issued from a lead pipe, he rinsed his face, then drank a swallow or two from his cupped hand.

Turning, he found that a dozen folk of the village had approached. One he knew well, a man who might have become Godalming, or even Aure, had he not become infected with expiationism.

Xanten performed a polite salute. "A. G. Philidor. It is I, Xanten."

"Xanten, of course. But here I am A. G. Philidor no longer; merely Philidor."

Xanten bowed. "My apologies. I have neglected the full rigor of your informality."

"Spare me your wit," said Philidor. "Why do you bring us a shorn Mek? For adoption, perhaps?" This last alluded to the gentlefolk practice of bringing over-tally babies to the village.

"Now who flaunts his wit? But you have not heard the news?"

"News arrives here last of all. The Nomads are better informed."

"Prepare yourself for surprise. The Meks have revolted against the castles. Halcyon and Delora are demolished, and all killed; perhaps others by this time."

Philidor shook his head. "I am not surprised."

"Well, then, are you not concerned?"

Philidor considered. "To this extent. Our own plans, never very feasible, become more far-fetched than ever."

"It appears to me," said Xanten, "that you face grave and immediate danger. The Meks surely intend to wipe out every vestige of humanity. You will not escape."

Philidor shrugged. "Conceivably the danger exists . . . We will take counsel and decide what to do."

"I can put forward a proposal which you may find attractive," said Xanten. "Our first concern, of course, is to suppress the revolt. There are at least a dozen Expiationist communities, with an aggregate population of two or three thousand — perhaps more. I propose that we recruit and train a corps of highly disciplined troops, supplied from the Castle Hagedorn armory, led by Hagedorn's most expert military theoreticians."

Philidor stared at him incredulously. "You expect us, the Expiationists, to become your soldiers?"

"Why not?" asked Xanten ingeniously. "Your life is at stake no less than ours."

"No one dies more than once."

Xanten in his turn evinced shock. "What? Can this be a former gentleman of Hagedorn speaking? Is this the face a man of pride and courage turns to danger? Is this the lesson of history? Of course not! I need not instruct you in this; you are as knowledgeable as I."

Philidor nodded. "I know that the history of man is not his technical triumphs, his kills, his victories. It is a composite: a mosaic of a trillion pieces, the account of each man's accommodation with his conscience. This is the true history of the race."

Xanten made an airy gesture. "A. G. Philidor, you over-simplify grievously. Do you consider me obtuse? There are many kinds of history. They interact. You emphasize morality. But the ultimate basis of morality is survival. What promotes survival is good, what induces mortefaction is bad."

"Well spoken!" declared Philidor. "But let me propound a parable. May a nation of a million beings destroy a creature who otherwise will infect all with a fatal disease? Yes, you will say. Once more. Ten starving beasts hunt you, that they may eat. Will you kill them to save your life? Yes, you will say again, though here you destroy more than you save. Once more: a man inhabits a hut in a lonely valley. A hundred spaceships descend from the sky, and attempt to destroy him. May he destroy these ships in self-defense, even though he is one and they are a hundred thousand? Perhaps you say yes. What then if a whole world, a whole race of beings, pits itself against this single man? May he kill all? What if the attackers are as human as himself? What if he were the creature of the first instance, who otherwise will infect a world with disease? You see, there is no area where a simple touchstone avails. We have searched and found none. Hence, at the risk of sinning against Survival, we — I, at least; I can only speak for myself — have chosen a morality that at least allows me calm. I kill — *nothing*. I destroy *nothing*."

"Bah," said Xanten contemptuously. "If a Mek platoon entered this valley and began to kill your children, you would not defend them?"

Philidor compressed his lips, turned away. Another man spoke. "Philidor has defined morality. But who is absolutely moral? Philidor — or I, or you — might in such a case desert his morality."

Philidor said, "Look about you. Is anyone here you recognize?"

Xanten scanned the group. Nearby stood a girl of extraordinary beauty. She wore a white smock and in the dark hair curling to her shoulders she wore a red flower. Xanten nodded. "I see the maiden O. Z. Garr wished to introduce into his menage at the castle."

"Exactly," said Philidor. "Do you recall the circumstances?"

"Very well indeed," said Xanten. "There was vigorous objection from the Council of Notables — if for no other reason than the threat to our laws of population control. O. Z. Garr attempted to sidestep the law in this fashion. 'I keep Phanes,' he said. 'At times

I maintain as many as six, or even eight, and no one utters a word of protest. I will call this girl a Phane and keep her among the rest.' I and others protested. There was almost a duel on this matter. O. Z. Garr was forced to relinquish the girl. She was given into my custody and I conveyed her to Far Valley."

Philidor nodded. "All this is correct. Well — we attempted to dissuade Garr. He refused to be dissuaded, and threatened us with his hunting force of perhaps thirty Meks. We stood aside. Are we moral? Are we strong or weak?"

"Sometimes it is better," said Xanten, "to ignore morality. Even though O. Z. Garr is a gentleman and you are but Expiationists . . . Likewise in the case of the Meks. They are destroying the castles, and all the men of earth. If morality means supine acceptance, then morality must be abandoned!"

Philidor gave a sour chuckle. "What a remarkable situation! The Meks are here, likewise Peasants and Birds and Phanes, all altered, transported and enslaved for human pleasure. Indeed, it is this fact that occasions our guilt, for which we must expiate. And now you want us to compound this guilt!"

"It is a mistake to brood overmuch about the past," said Xanten. "Still, if you wish to preserve your option to brood, I suggest that you fight Meks now, or at the very least take refuge in the castle."

"Not I," said Philidor. "Perhaps others may choose to do so."

"You will wait to be killed?"

"No. I and no doubt others will take refuge in the remote mountains."

Xanten clambered back aboard the power-wagon. "If you change your mind, come to Castle Hagedorn."

He departed.

The road continued along the valley, wound up a hillside, crossed a ridge. Far ahead, silhouetted against the sky, stood Castle Hagedorn.

VII

Xanten reported to the council.

"The spaceships cannot be used. The Meks have rendered them inoperative. Any plan to solicit assistance from the Home Worlds is pointless."

"This is sorry news," said Hagedorn with a grimace. "Well then — so much for that."

Xanten continued. "Returning by power-wagon I encountered a tribe of Nomads. I summoned the hetman and explained to him the advantages of serving Castle Hagedorn. The Nomads, I fear, lack both grace and docility. The hetman gave so surly a response that I departed in disgust.

"At Far Valley I visited the Expiationist village, and made a similar proposal, but with no great success. They are as idealistic as the Nomads are churlish. Both are of a fugitive tendency. The Expiationists spoke of taking refuge in the mountains. The Nomads presumably will retreat into the steppes."

Beaudry snorted. "How will flight help them? Perhaps they gain a few years — but eventually the Meks will find every last one of them; such is their methodicity."

"In the meantime," O. Z. Garr declared peevishly, "we might have organized them into an efficient combat corps, to the benefit of all. Well, then, let them perish! We are secure."

"Secure yes," said Hagedorn gloomily. "But what when the power fails? When the lifts break down? When air circulation cuts off so that we either stifle or freeze? What then?"

O. Z. Garr gave his head a grim shake. "We must steel ourselves to undignified expedients, with as good a grace as possible. But the machinery of the castle is sound, and I expect small deterioration or failure for conceivably five or ten years. By that time anything may occur."

Claghorn, who had been leaning indolently back in his seat, spoke at last: "Essentially this is a passive program. Like the defection of the Nomads and Expiationists, it looks very little beyond the immediate moment."

O. Z. Garr spoke in a voice carefully polite. "Claghorn is well aware that I yield to none in courteous candor, as well as optimism and directness: in short, the reverse of passivity. But I refuse to dignify a stupid little inconvenience by extending it serious attention. How can he label this procedure 'passivity'? Does the worthy and honorable head of the Claghorns have a proposal which more effectively maintains our status, our standards, our self-respect?"

Claghorn nodded slowly, with a faint half-smile which O. Z. Garr found odiously complacent. "There is a simple and effective method by which the Meks might be defeated."

"Well then!" cried Hagedorn. "Why hesitate? Let us hear it!"

Claghorn looked around the red velvet-covered table, considered the faces of all: the dispassionate Xanten, Beaudry, with his burly, rigid, face muscles clenched in an habitual expression unpleasantly like a sneer; old Isseth, handsome, erect and vital as the most dashing cadet; Hagedorn troubled, glum, his in-

ward perplexity all too evident; the elegant Garr; Overwhele, thinking savagely of the inconveniences of the future; Aure, toying with his ivory tablet, either bored, morose or defeated; the others displaying various aspects of doubt, foreboding, hauteur, dark resentment, impatience; and in the case of Floy, a quiet smile — or as Isseth later characterized it, an imbecilic smirk — intended to convey his total disassociation from the entire irksome matter.

Claghorn took stock of the faces, and shook his head. "I will not at the moment broach this plan, as I fear it is unworkable. But I must point out that under no circumstances can Castle Hagedorn be as before, even should we survive the Mek attack."

"Bah!" exclaimed Beaudry. "We lose dignity, we become ridiculous, by even so much as discussing the beasts."

Xanten stirred himself. "A distasteful subject, but remember! Halcyon is destroyed, and Delora and who knows what others? Let us not thrust our heads in the sand! The Meks will not waft away merely because we ignore them."

"In any event," said O. Z. Garr, "Janeil is secure and we are secure. The other folk, unless they are already slaughtered, might do well to visit us during the inconvenience, if they can justify the humiliation of flight to themselves. I myself believe that the Meks will soon come to heel, anxious to return to their posts."

Hagedorn shook his head gloomily. "I find this hard to believe. Very well then, we shall adjourn."

The radio communications system was the first of the castle's vast array of electrical and mechanical devices to break down.

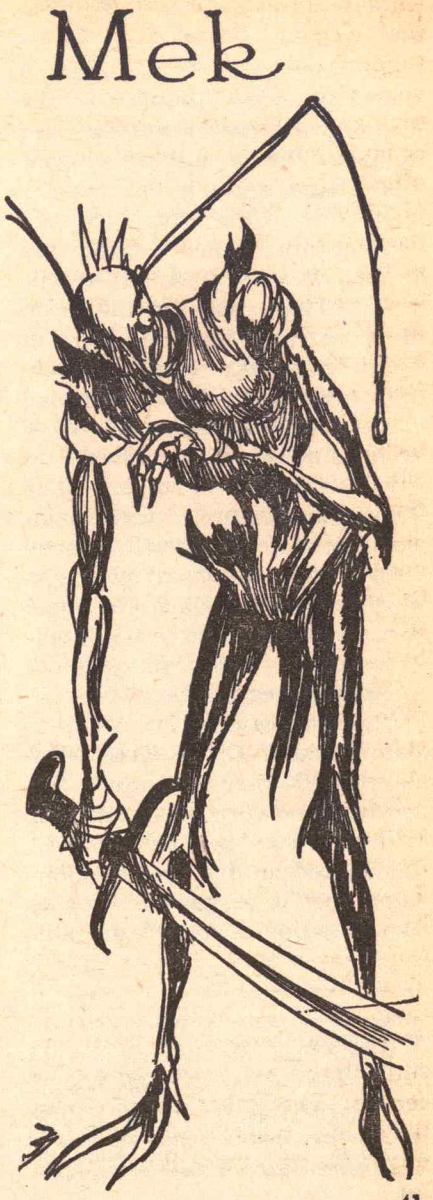
The failure occurred so soon and so decisively that certain of the theoreticians, notably I. K. Harde and Uegus, postulated sabotage by the departing Meks. Others remarked that the system had never been absolutely dependable, that the Meks themselves had been forced to tinker continuously with the circuits, that the failure was simply a result of bad engineering. Harde and Uegus inspected the unwieldy apparatus, but the cause of failure was not obvious. After a half-hour of consultation they agreed that any attempt to restore the system would necessitate complete re-design and re-engineering, with consequent construction of testing and calibration devices, and the fabrication of a complete new family of components. "This is manifestly impossible," stated Uegus in his report to the council. "Even the simplest useful system would require several technician-years. There is not even one single technician to hand. We must therefore await the availability of trained and willing labor."

"In retrospect," stated Isseth, the oldest of the clan chiefs, "it is clear that in many ways we have been less than provident. No matter that the men of the Home Worlds are vulgarians! Men of shrewder calculation than our own would have maintained inter-world connection."

"Lack of 'shrewdness' and 'providence' were not the deterring factors," stated Claghorn. "Communication was discouraged simply because the early lords were unwilling that Earth should be overrun with Home-World parvenus. It is as simple as that."

Isseth grunted, and started to make a rejoinder, but Hagedorn said hastily, "Unluckily, as Xanten tells us, the spaceships have been rendered useless. While certain of our number have a profound knowledge of the theoretical considerations, again who is there to perform the toil? Even were the hangars and spaceships themselves under our control."

O. Z. Garr declared, "Give me six platoons of Peasants and six power-wagons equipped with high-energy cannon, and I'll re-



gain the hangars. No difficulties there!"

Beaudry said, "Well, here's a start, at least. I'll assist in the training of the Peasants, and though I know nothing of cannon operation, rely on me for any advice I can give."

Hagedorn looked around the group, frowned, pulled at his chin. "There are difficulties to this program. First, we have at hand only the single power-wagon in which Xanten returned from his reconnaissance. Then what of our energy cannons? Has anyone inspected them? The Meks were entrusted with maintenance, but it is possible, even likely, that they wrought mischief here as well. O. Z. Garr, you are reckoned an expert military theoretician. What can you tell us in this regard?"

"I have made no inspection to date," stated O. Z. Garr. "Today the 'Display of Antique Tabards' will occupy us all until the 'Hour of Sundown Appraisal'*." He looked at his watch. "Perhaps now is as good a time as any to adjourn, until I am able to provide detailed information in regard to the cannons."

Hagedorn nodded his heavy head. "The time indeed grows late. Your Phanes appear today?"

"Only two," replied O. Z. Garr. "The Lazule and the Eleventh Mystery. I can find nothing suitable for the Gossamer Delights nor my little Blue Fay, and the Gloriana still requires tutelage. Today B. Z. Maxelwane's Variflors should repay the most attention."

"Yes," said Hagdorn. "I have heard other remarks to this effect. Very well then, until tomorrow. Eh, Claghorn, you have something to say?"

"Yes, indeed," said Claghorn mildly. "We have all too little time at our disposal. Best that we make the most of it. I seriously doubt the efficacy of Peasant troops; they are like rabbits against wolves. What we need, rather than rabbits, are panthers."

"Ah, yes," said Hagedorn vaguely. "Yes indeed."

"Where, then, are panthers to be found?" Claghorn looked inquiringly around the table. "Can no one suggest a source? A pity. Well then, if panthers fail to appear, I suppose rabbits must do. Let us go about the business of converting rabbits into panthers, and instantly. I suggest

* 'Display of Antique Tabards': 'Hour of Sundown Appraisal': the literal sense of the first term was yet relevant; that of the second had become lost and the phrase was a mere formalism, connoting that hour of late afternoon when visits were exchanged, wines, liqueurs and essences tasted: in short, a time of relaxation and small talk before the more formal convivialities of dining.

that we postpone all fetes and spectacles until the shape of our future is more certain."

Hagedorn raised his eyebrows, opened his mouth to speak, closed it again. He looked intently at Claghorn to ascertain whether or not he joked. Then he looked dubiously around the table.

Beaudry gave a rather brassy laugh. "It seems that erudite Claghorn cries panic."

O. Z. Garr stated: "Surely, in all dignity, we cannot allow the impertinence of our servants to cause us such eye-rolling alarm. I am embarrassed even to bring the matter forward."

"I am not embarrassed," said Claghorn, with the full-faced complacence which so exasperated O. Z. Garr. "I see no reason why you should be. Our lives are threatened, in which case a trifle of embarrassment, or anything else, becomes of secondary importance."

O. Z. Garr rose to his feet, performed a brusque salute in Claghorn's direction, of such a nature as to constitute a calculated affront. Claghorn, rising, performed a similar salute, this so grave and overly complicated as to invest Garr's insult with burlesque overtones. Xanten, who detested O. Z. Garr, laughed aloud.

O. Z. Garr hesitated, then, sensing that under the circumstances taking the matter further would be regarded as poor form, strode from the chamber.

The Viewing of Antique Tabards, an annual pageant of Phanes wearing sumptuous garments took place in the Great Rotunda to the north of the central plaza.

Possibly half of the gentlemen, but less than a quarter of the ladies, kept Phanes. These were creatures native to the caverns of Albireo Seven's moon: a docile race, both playful and affectionate, which after several thousand years of selective breeding had become sylphs of piquant beauty. Clad in a delicate gauze which issued from pores behind their ears, along their upper arms, down their backs, they were the most inoffensive of creatures, anxious always to please, innocently vain. Most gentlemen regarded them with affection, but rumors sometimes told of ladies drenching an especially hated Phane in tincture of ammonia, which matted her pelt and destroyed her gauze forever.

A gentleman besotted by a Phane was considered a figure of fun. The Phane, though so carefully bred as to seem a delicate girl, if used sexually became crumpled and haggard, with gauzes drooping and discolored, and everyone would know that such and such a gentleman had

misused his Phane. In this regard, at least, the women of the castles might exert their superiority. They did so by conducting themselves with such extravagant provocation that the Phanes in contrast seemed the most ingenious and fragile of nature sprites. Their life-span was perhaps thirty years, during the last ten of which, after they had lost their beauty, they encased themselves in mantles of gray gauze and performed menial tasks in boudoirs, kitchens, pantries, nurseries and dressing rooms.

The Viewing of Antique Tabards was an occasion more for the viewing of Phanes than the tabards, though these, woven of Phane-gauze, were of intricate beauty in themselves.

The Phane owners sat in a lower tier, tense with hope and pride, exulting when one made an especially splendid display, plunged into black depths when the ritual postures were performed with other than grace and elegance. During each display highly formal music was plucked from a lute by a gentleman from a clan different to that of the Phane owner. The owner never played the lute to the performance of his own Phane. The display was never overtly a competition and no formal acclamation was allowed, but all watching made up their minds as to which was the most entrancing and graceful of the Phanes, and the repute of the owner was thereby exalted.

The current Viewing was delayed almost half an hour by reason of the defection of the Meks, and certain hasty improvisations had been made necessary. But the gentlefolk of Castle Hagedorn were in no mood to be critical and took no heed of the occasional lapses as a dozen young Peasant bucks struggled to perform unfamiliar tasks. The Phanes were as entrancing as ever, bending, twisting, swaying to plangent chords of the lute, fluttering their fingers as if feeling for raindrops, crouching suddenly, gliding, then springing upright straight as wands, finally bowing and skipping from the platform.

Halfway through the program a Peasant sidled awkwardly into the Rotunda, and mumbled in an urgent manner to the cadet who came to inquire his business. The cadet at once made his way to Hagedorn's polished jet booth. Hagedorn listened, nodded, spoke a few terse words and settled calmly back in his seat as if the message had been of no consequence, and the gentlefolk of the audience were reassured.

The entertainment proceeded. O. Z. Garr's delectable pair made a fine show, but it was generally felt that Lirlin, a young Phane belonging to Isseth Floy Gazuneth, for the first time at a formal showing, made the most captivating display.

The Phanes appeared for a last time, moving all together through a half-improvised minuet. Then they performed a final half-gay, half-regretful salute and departed the rotunda. For a few moments more the gentlemen and ladies would remain in their booths, sipping essences, discussing the display, arranging affairs and assignations. Hagedorn sat frowning, twisting his hands.

Suddenly he rose to his feet. The rotunda instantly became silent.

"I dislike intruding an unhappy note at so pleasant an occasion," said Hagedorn. "But news has just been given to me, and it is fitting that all should know. Janeil Castle is under attack. The Meks are there in great force, with hundreds of power-wagons. They have circled the castle with a dike which prevents any effective use of the Janeil energy-cannon.

"There is no immediate danger to Janeil, and it is difficult to comprehend what the Meks hope to achieve, the Janeil walls being all of two hundred feet high.

"The news nevertheless is somber, and it means that eventually we must expect a similar investment — though it is even more difficult to comprehend how Meks could hope to inconvenience us. Our water derives from four wells sunk deep into the earth. We have great stocks of food. Our energy is derived from the sun. If necessary, we could condense water and synthesize food from the air — at least I have been so assured by our great biochemical theoretician X. B. Ladisname. Still — this is the news. Make of it what you will. Tomorrow the Council of Notables will meet."

VIII

"Well, then," said Hagedorn to the council, "for once let us dispense with formality. O. Z. Garr: what of our cannon?"

O. Z. Garr, wearing the magnificent gray and green uniform of the Overwhele Dragoons, carefully placed his morion on the table, so that the panache stood erect. "Of twelve cannon, four appear to be functioning correctly. Four have been sabotaged by excision of the power-leads. Four have been sabotaged by some means undetectable to careful investigation. I have commandeered a half-dozen Peasants who demonstrate a modicum of mechanical ability, and have instructed them in detail. They are currently engaged in splicing the leads. This is the extent of my current infor-

mation in regard to the cannon."

"Moderately good news," said Hagedorn. "What of the proposed corps of armed Peasants?"

"The project is under way. A. F. Mull and I. A. Berzelius are now inspecting Peasants with a view to recruitment and training. I can make no sanguine projection as to the military effectiveness of such a corps, even if trained and led by such as A. F. Mull, I. A. Berzelius and myself. The Peasants are a mild ineffectual race, admirably suited to the grubbing of weeds, but with no stomach whatever for fighting."

Hagedorn glanced around the council. "Are there any other suggestions?"

Beaudry spoke in a harsh angry voice, "Had the villains but left us our power-wagons, we might have mounted the cannon aboard! The Peasants are equal to this, at least. Then we could roll to Janeil and blast the dogs from the rear."

"These Meks seem utter fiends!" declared Aure. "What conceivably do they have in mind? Why, after these centuries, must they suddenly go mad?"

"We all ask ourselves the same," said Hagedorn. "Xanten, you returned from reconnaissance with a captive: have you attempted to question him?"

"No," said Xanten. "Truth to tell, I haven't thought of him since."

"Why not attempt to question him? Perhaps he can provide a clue or two."

Xanten nodded assent. "I can try. Candidly I expect to learn nothing."

"Claghorn, you are the Mek expert," said Beaudry. "Would you have thought the creatures capable of so intricate a plot? What do they hope to gain? Our castles?"

"They are certainly capable of precise and meticulous planning," said Claghorn. "Their ruthlessness surprises me — more, possibly, than it should. I have never known them to covet our material possessions, and they show no tendency toward what we consider the concomitants of civilization: fine discriminations of sensation and the like. I have often speculated — I won't dignify the conceit with the status of a theory — that the structural logic of a brain is of rather more consequence than we reckon with. Our own brains are remarkable for their utter lack of rational structure. Considering the haphazarded manner in which our thoughts are formed, registered, indexed and recalled, any single rational act becomes a miracle. Perhaps we are incapable of rationality. Perhaps all thought is

a set of impulses generated by one emotion, monitored by another, ratified by a third. In contrast the Mek brain is a marvel of what seems careful engineering. It is roughly cubical and consists of microscopic cells interconnected by organic fibrils, each a monofilament molecule of negligible electrical resistance. Within each cell is a film of silica, a fluid of variable conductivity and dielectric properties, a cusp of a complex mixture of metallic oxides. The brain is capable of storing great quantities of information in an orderly pattern. No fact is lost, unless it is purposely forgotten, a capacity which the Meks possess. The brain also functions as a radio transceiver, possibly as a radar transmitter and detector, though this again is speculation.

"Where the Mek brain falls short is in its lack of emotional color. One Mek is precisely like another, without any personality differentiation perceptible to us. This, clearly, is a function of their communicative system. It would be unthinkable for a unique personality to develop under these conditions. They served us efficiently and — so we thought — loyally, because they felt nothing about their condition, neither pride in achievement, nor resentment, nor shame. Nothing whatever. They neither loved us nor hated us. Nor do they now. It is hard for us to conceive this emotional vacuum, when each of us feels something about everything. We live in a welter of emotions. They are as devoid of emotion as an ice-cube. They were fed, housed, maintained in a manner they found satisfactory. Why did they revolt? I have speculated at length, but the single reason which I can formulate seems so grotesque and unreasonable that I refuse to take it seriously. If this after all is the correct explanation . . ." His voice drifted away.

"Well?" demanded O. Z. Garr peremptorily. "What then?"

"Then — it is all the same. They are committed to the destruction of the human race. My speculation alters nothing."

Hagedorn turned to Xanten. "All this should assist you in your inquiries."

"I was about to suggest that Claghorn assist me, if he is so inclined," said Xanten.

"As you like," said Claghorn, "though in my opinion the information, no matter what, is irrelevant. Our single concern should be a means to repel them and to save our lives."

"And — save the force of 'panthers' you mentioned at our previous session — you can conceive of no subtle weapon?" asked

Hagedorn wistfully. "A device to set up electrical resonances in their brains, or something similar?"

"Not feasible," said Claghorn. "Certain organs in the creatures' brains function as overload switches. Though it is true that during this time they might not be able to communicate." After a moment's reflection he added thoughtful: "Who knows? A. G. Bernal and Uegus are theoreticians with a profound knowledge of such projections. Perhaps they might construct such a device, or several, against a possible need."

Hagedorn nodded dubiously, and looked toward Uegus. "Is this possible?"

Uegus frowned. "'Construct'? I can certainly design such an instrument. But the components — where? Scattered through the storerooms helter-skelter, some functioning, others not. To achieve anything meaningful I must become no better than an apprentice, a Mek." He became incensed, and his voice hardened. "I find it hard to believe that I should be forced to point out this fact! Do you hold me and my talents then of such small worth?"

Hagedorn hastened to reassure him. "Of course not! I for one would never think of impugning your dignity."

"Never!" agreed Claghorn. "Nevertheless, during this present emergency, we will find indignities imposed upon us by events, unless now we impose them upon ourselves."

"Very well," said Uegus, a humorless smile trembling at his lips. "You shall come with me to the storeroom. I will point out the components to be brought forth and assembled, you shall perform the toil. What do you say to that?"

"I say yes, gladly, if it will be of real utility. However, I can hardly perform the labor for a dozen different theoreticians. Will any others serve beside myself?"

No one responded. Silence was absolute, as if every gentleman present held his breath.

Hagedorn started to speak, but Claghorn interrupted. "Pardon, Hagedorn, but here, finally, we are stuck upon a basic principle, and it must be settled now."

Hagedorn looked desperately around the council. "Has anyone relevant comment?"

"Claghorn must do as his innate nature compels," declared O. Z. Garr in the silkiest of voices. "I cannot dictate to him. As for myself, I can never demean my status as a gentleman of Hagedorn. This creed is as natural to me as drawing breath; if ever it is compromised I become a travesty of a gentleman, a grotesque mask of myself. This is Castle Hagedorn, and we represent the culmination of human civilization. Any compromise therefore becomes degradation; any expedient diminution of our standards becomes dishonor. I have heard the word 'emergency' used. What a deplorable sentiment! To dignify the rat-like snappings and gnashings of such as the Meks with the word 'emergency' is to my mind unworthy of a gentleman of Hagedorn!"

A murmur of approval went around the council table.

Claghorn leaned far back in his seat, chin on his chest, as if in relaxation. His clear blue eyes went from face to face, then returned to O. Z. Garr whom he studied with dispassionate interest. "Obviously you direct your words to me," he said. "I appreciate their malice. But this is a small matter." He looked away from O. Z. Garr, to stare up at the massive diamond and emerald chandelier. "More important is the fact that the council as a whole, in spite of my earnest persuasion, seems to endorse your viewpoint. I can urge, expostulate, insinuate no longer, and I will now leave Castle Hagedorn. I find the atmosphere stifling. I trust that you survive the attack of the Meks, though I doubt that you will. They are a clever resourceful race, untroubled by qualms or preconceptions, and we have long underestimated their quality."

Claghorn rose from his seat, inserted the ivory tablet into its socket. "I bid you all farewell." Hagedorn hastily jumped to his feet, held forth his arms imploringly. "Do not depart in anger, Claghorn! Reconsider! We need your wisdom, your expertise."

"Assuredly you do," said Claghorn. "But even more you need to act upon the advice I have already extended. Until then we have no common ground, and any further interchange is futile and tiresome." He made a brief all-inclusive salute and departed the chamber.

Hagedorn slowly resumed his seat. The others made uneasy motions, coughed, looked up at the chandelier, studied their ivory tablets. O. Z. Garr muttered something to B. F. Wyas who sat beside him, who nodded solemnly. Hagerdon spoke in a subdued voice: "We will miss the presence of Claghorn, his penetrating if unorthodox insights . . . We have accomplished little. Uegus, perhaps you will give thought to the projector under discussion. Xanten, you were to question the captive Mek. O. Z. Garr, you undoubtedly will see to the repair of the energy cannon . . . Aside from these small matters, it appears that we have evolved no general

plan of action, to help either ourselves or Janeil."

Marune spoke. "What of the other castles? Are they still extant? We have had no news. I suggest that we send Birds to each castle, to learn their condition."

Hagedorn nodded. "Yes, this is a wise motion. Perhaps you will see to this, Marune?"

"I will do so."

"Good. We will now adjourn for a time."

The Birds were dispatched by Marune of Aure and one by one returned. Their reports were similar:

"Sea Island is deserted. Marble columns are tumbled along the beach. Pearl Dome is collapsed. Corpses float in the Water Garden."

"Maraval reeks of death. Gentlemen, Peasants, Phane — all dead. Alas! Even the Birds have departed!"

"Delora: *a ros ros ros!* A dismal scene! No sign of life to be found!"

"Alume is desolate. The great wooden door is smashed. The eternal Green Flame is extinguished."

"There is nothing at Halycon. The Peasants were driven into a pit."

"Tuang: silence."

"Morninglight: death."

IX

Three days later, Xanten constrained six Birds to a lift chair. He directed them first on a wide sweep around the castle, then south to Far Valley.

The Birds aired their usual complaints, then bounded down the deck in great ungainly hops which threatened to throw Xanten immediately to the pavement. At last gaining the air, they flew up in a spiral. Castle Hagedorn became an intricate miniature far below, each House marked by its unique cluster of turrets and eyries, its own eccentric roof line, its long streaming pennon.

The Birds performed the prescribed circle, skimming the crags and pines of North Ridge. Then, setting wings aslant the upstream, they coasted away toward Far Valley.

Over the pleasant Hagedorn domain flew the Birds and Xanten: over orchards, fields, vineyards, Peasant villages. They crossed Lake Maude with its pavilions and docks, the meadows beyond where the Hagedorn cattle and sheep grazed, and presently came to Far Valley, at the limit of Hagedorn lands.

Xanten indicated where he wished to alight. The Birds, who would have preferred a site closer to the village where they could have watched all that transpired,

grumbled and cried out in wrath and set Xanten down so roughly that had he not been alert the shock would have pitched him head over heels.

Xanten alighted without elegance but at least remained on his feet. "Await me here!" he ordered. "Do not stray; attempt no flamboyant tricks among the lift-straps. When I return I wish to see six quiet Birds, in neat formation, lift-straps untwisted and untangled. No bickering, mind you! No loud caterwauling, to attract unfavorable comment! Let all be as I have ordered!"

The Birds sulked, stamped their feet, ducked aside their necks, made insulting comments just under the level of Xanten's hearing. Xanten turned with a final glare of admonition and walked down the lane which led to the village.

The vines were heavy with ripe blackberries and a number of the girls of the village filled baskets. Among them was the girl O. Z. Garr had thought to pre-empt for his personal use. As Xanten passed, he halted and performed a courteous salute. "We have met before, if my recollection is correct."

The girl smiled, a half-rueful, half-whimsical smile. "Your recollection serves you well. We met at Hagedorn, where I was taken a captive. And later, when you conveyed me here, after dark, though I could not see your face." She extended her basket. "Are you hungry? Will you eat?"

Xanten took several berries. In the course of the conversation he learned that the girl's name was Glys Meadowsweet, that her parents were not known to her, but were presumably gentlefolk of Castle Hagedorn who had exceeded their birth tally. Xanten examined her even more carefully than before but could see resemblance to none of the Hagedorn families. "You might derive from Castle Delora. If there is any family resemblance I can detect, it is to the Cosanzas of Delora — a family noted for the beauty of its ladies."

"You are not married?" she asked artlessly.

"No," said Xanten, and indeed he had dissolved his relationship with Araminta only the day before. "What of you?"

She shook her head. "I would never be gathering blackberries if I were. It is work reserved for maidens. Why do you come to Far Valley?"

"For two reasons. The first to see you." Xanten heard himself say this with surprise. But it was true, he realized with another small shock of surprise. "I have never spoken with you properly and I have always wondered if

you were as charming and gay as you are beautiful."

The girl shrugged and Xanten could not be sure whether she were pleased or not, compliments from gentlemen sometimes setting the stage for a sorry aftermath. "Well, no matter. I came also to speak to Claghorn."

"He is yonder," she said in a voice toneless, even cool, and pointed. "He occupies that cottage." She returned to her blackberry picking. Xanten bowed, proceeded to that cottage the girl had indicated.

Claghorn, wearing loose knee-length breeches of gray homespun, worked with an axe chopping faggots into stove-lengths. At the sight of Xanten he halted his toil, leaned on the axe, mopped his forehead. "Ah, Xanten. I am pleased to see you. How are the folk of Castle Hagedorn?"

"As before. There is little to report, even had I come to bring you news."

"Indeed, indeed?" Claghorn leaned on the axe handle, surveyed Xanten with a bright blue gaze.

"At our last meeting," went on Xanten, "I agreed to question the captive Mek. After doing so I am distressed that you were not at hand to assist, so that you might have resolved certain ambiguities in the responses."

"Speak on," said Claghorn. "Perhaps I shall be able to do so now."

"After the council meeting I descended immediately to the storeroom where the Mek was confined. It lacked nutriment; I gave it syrup and a pail of water, which it sipped sparingly, then evinced a desire for minced clams. I summoned kitchen help and sent them for this commodity and the Mek ingested several pints. As I have indicated, it was an unusual Mek, standing as tall as myself and lacking a syrup sac. I conveyed it to a different chamber, a storeroom for brown plush furniture, and ordered it to a seat.

"I looked at the Mek and it looked at me. The quills which I removed were growing back; probably it could at least receive from Meks elsewhere. It seemed a superior beast, showing neither obsequiousness nor respect, and answered my questions without hesitation.

"First I remarked: 'The gentlefolk of the castles are astounded by the revolt of the Meks. We had assumed that your life was satisfactory. Were we wrong?'

" 'Evidently.' I am sure that this was the word signaled, though never had I suspected the Meks of wit of any sort.

" 'Very well then,' I said. 'In what manner?'

" 'Surely it is obvious. We no longer wished to toil at your behest. We wished to conduct our lives by our own traditional standards.'

"The response surprised me. I was unaware that the Meks possessed standards of any kind, much less traditional standards."

Claghorn nodded. "I have been similarly surprised by the scope of the Mek mentality."

"I reproached the Mek: 'Why kill? Why destroy our lives in order to augment your own?' As soon as I had put the question I realized that it had been unhappily phrased. The Mek, I believe, realized the same; however, in reply he signaled something very rapidly which I believe was: 'We knew we must act with decisiveness. Your own protocol made this necessary. We might have returned to Etamin Nine, but we prefer this world Earth, and will make it our own, with our own great slipways, tubs and basking ramps.'

"This seemed clear enough, but I sensed an adumbration extending yet beyond. I said, 'Comprehensible. But why kill, why destroy? You might have taken yourself to a different region. We could not have molested you.'

" 'Infeasible, by your own thinking. A world is too small for two competing races. You intended to send us back to Etamin Nine.'

" 'Ridiculous!' I said. 'Fantasy, absurdity. Do you take me for a mooncalf?'

" 'No,' the creature insisted. 'Two of Castle Hagedorn's notables were seeking the highest post. One assured us that, if elected, this would become his life's aim.'

" 'A grotesque misunderstanding,' I told him. 'One man, a lunatic, can not speak for all men!'

" 'No? One Mek speaks for all Meks. We think with one mind. Are not men of a like sort?'

" 'Each thinks for himself. The lunatic who assured you of this tomfoolery is an evil man. But at least matters are clear. We do not propose to send you to Etamin Nine. Will you withdraw from Janeil, take yourselves to a far land and leave us in peace?'

" 'No. Affairs have proceeded too far. We will now destroy all men. The truth of the statement is clear: one world is too small for two races.'

" 'Unluckily then, I must kill you,' I told him. 'Such acts are not to my liking, but, with opportunity, you would kill as many gentlemen as possible.' At this the creature sprang upon me, and I killed it with an easier mind than had it sat staring.

"Now you know all. It seems

that either you or O. Z. Garr stimulated the cataclysm. O. Z. Garr? Unlikely. Impossible. Hence, you, Claghorn, you! have this weight upon your soul!"

Claghorn frowned down at the axe. "Weight, yes. Guilt, no. Ingenuousness, yes; wickedness, no."

Xanten stood back. "Claghorn, your coolness astounds me! Before, when rancorous folk like O. Z. Garr conceived you a lunatic —"

"Peace, Xanten!" exclaimed Claghorn irritably. "This extravagant breast-beating becomes maladroit. What have I done wrong? My fault is that I tried too much. Failure is tragic, but a phthisic face hanging over the cup of the future is worse. I meant to become Hagedorn, I would have sent the slaves home. I failed, the slaves revolted. So do not speak another word. I am bored with the subject. You can not imagine how your bulging eyes and your concave spine oppress me."

"Bored you may be," cried Xanten. "You decry my eyes, my spine — but what of the thousands dead?"

"How long would they live in any event? Lives are as cheap as fish in the sea. I suggest that you put by your reproaches and devote a similar energy to saving yourself. Do you realize that a means exists? You stare at me blankly. I assure you that what I say is true, but you will never learn the means from me."

"Claghorn," said Xanten, "I flew to this spot intending to blow your arrogant head from your body —" But Claghorn, no longer heeding, had returned to his wood-chopping.

"Claghorn!" cried Xanten.

"Xanten, take your outcries elsewhere, if you please. Remonstrate with your Birds."

Xanten swung on his heel, marched back down the lane. The girls picking berries looked at him questioningly and moved aside. Xanten halted, looked up and down the lane. Glys Meadowsweet was nowhere to be seen. In a new fury he continued. He stopped short. On a fallen tree a hundred feet from the Birds sat Glys Meadowsweet, examining a blade of grass as if it had been an astonishing artifact of the past. The Birds for a marvel had actually obeyed him and waited in a fair semblance of order.

Xanten looked up toward the heavens, kicked at the turf. He drew a deep breath and approached to Glys Meadowsweet. He noted that she had tucked a flower into her long loose hair.

After a second or two she looked up and searched his face. "Why are you so angry?"

Xanten slapped his thigh, seated himself beside her. "'Angry'? No. I am out of my mind with frustration. Claghorn is as obstreperous as a sharp rock. He knows how Castle Hagedorn can be saved but he will not divulge his secret."

Glys Meadowsweet laughed — an easy merry sound, like nothing Xanten had ever heard at Castle Hagedorn. "Secret? When even I know it?"

"It must be a secret," said Xanten. "He will not tell me."

"Listen. If you fear the Birds will hear it, I will whisper." She spoke a few words into his ear.

Perhaps the sweet breath befuddled Xanten's mind. But the explicit essence of the revelation failed to strike home into his consciousness. He made a sound of sour amusement. "No secret there. Only what the prehistoric Scythians termed 'bathos'. Dishonor to the gentlemen! Do we dance with the Peasants? Do we serve the Birds essences and discuss with them the sheen of our Phanes?"

"'Dishonor' then?" She jumped to her feet. "Then it is also dishonor for you to talk to me, to sit here with me, to make ridiculous suggestions!"

"I made no suggestions!" protested Xanten. "I sit here in all decorum —"

"Too much decorum, too much honor!" With a display of passion which astounded Xanten, Glys Meadowsweet tore the flower from her hair, hurled it at the ground. "There. Hence!"

"No," said Xanten in sudden humility. He bent, picked up the flower, kissed it, replaced it in her hair. "I am not over-honorable. I will try my best." He put his arms on her shoulders, but she held him away.

"Tell me," she inquired with a very mature severity, "do you own any of those peculiar insect-women?"

"I? Phanes? I own no Phanes."

With this Glys Meadowsweet relaxed and allowed Xanten to embrace her, while the Birds clucked, guffawed and made vulgar scratching sounds with their wings.

X

The summer waned. On June 30 Janeil and Hagedorn celebrated the Fete of Flowers, even though the dike was rising high around Janeil.

Shortly after, Xanten flew six select Birds into Castle Janeil by night and proposed to the council that the population be evacuated by Bird-lift — as many as possible, as many who wished to leave. The council listened with stony faces and without comment passed on.

Xanten returned to Castle Hagedorn. Using the most careful methods, speaking only to trusted comrades, Xanten enlisted thirty or forty cadets and gentlemen to his persuasion, though inevitably he could not keep the doctrinal thesis of his program secret.

The first reaction of the traditionalists was mockery and charges of poltroonery. At Xanten's insistence, challenges were neither issued nor accepted by his hot-blooded associates.

On the evening of September 9 Castle Janeil fell. The news was brought to Castle Hagedorn by excited Birds who told the grim tale again and again in voices ever more hysterical.

Hagedorn, now gaunt and weary, automatically called a council meeting; it took note of the gloomy circumstances. "We then are the last castle! The Meks cannot conceivably do us harm; they can build dikes around our castle walls for twenty years and only work themselves to distraction. We are secure; but yet it is a strange and portentous thought to realize that at last, here at Castle Hagedorn, live the last gentlemen of the race!"

Xanten spoke in a voice strained with earnest conviction: "Twenty years — fifty years — what difference to the Meks? Once they surround us, once they deploy, we are trapped. Do you comprehend that now is our last opportunity to escape the great cage that Castle Hagedorn is to become?"

"'Escape', Xanten? What a word! For shame!" hooted O. Z. Garr. "Take your wretched band, escape! To steppe or swamp or tundra! Go as you like, with your poltroons, but be good enough to give over these incessant alarms!"

"Garr, I have found conviction since I became a 'poltroon'. Survival is good morality: I have this from the mouth of a noted savant."

"Bah! Such as whom?"

"A. G. Philidor, if you must be informed of every detail."

O. Z. Garr clapped his hand to his forehead. "Do you refer to Philidor the Expiationist? He is of the most extreme stripe, an Expiationist to out-expiate all the rest! Xanten, be sensible, if you please!"

"There are years ahead for all of us," said Xanten in a wooden voice, "if we free ourselves from the castle."

"But the castle is our life!" declared Hagedorn. "In essence, Xanten, what would we be without the castle? Wild animals? Nomads?"

"We would be alive."

O. Z. Garr gave a snort of disgust, turned away to inspect a wall-hanging. Hagedorn shook his head in doubt and perplexity. Beaudry threw his hands up into the air. "Xanten, you have the effect of unnerving us all. You come in here, inflict this dreadful sense of urgency, but why? In Castle Hagedorn we are as safe as in our mother's arms. What do we gain by throwing aside all — honor, dignity, comfort, civilized niceties — for no other reason than to slink through the wilderness?"

"Janeil was safe," said Xanten. "Today where is Janeil? Death, mildewed cloth, sour wine. What we gain by 'slinking' is the assurance of survival. And I plan much more than simple 'slinking'."

"I can conceive of a hundred occasions when death is better than life!" snapped Isseth. "Must I die in dishonor and disgrace? Why may my last years not be passed in dignity?"

Into the room came B. F. Robarth. "Councilmen, the Meks approach Castle Hagedorn."

Hagedorn cast a wild look around the chamber. "Is there a consensus? What must we do?"

Xanten threw up his hands. "Everyone must do as he thinks best! I argue no more: I am done. Hagedorn, will you adjourn the council so that we may be about our affairs? I to my 'slinking'?"

"Council is adjourned," said Hagedorn, and all went up to stand on the ramparts.

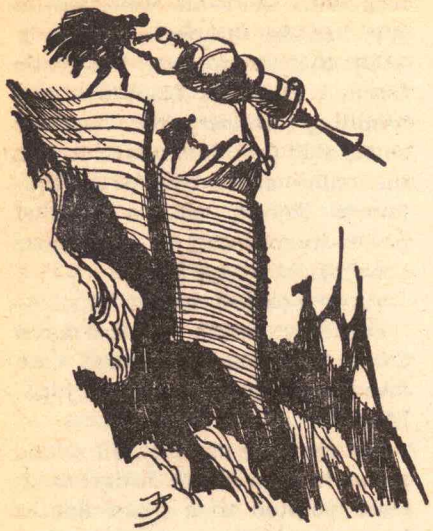
Up the avenue into the castle trooped Peasants from the surrounding countryside, packets slung over their shoulders. Across the valley, at the edge of Bartholomew Forest, was a clot of power-wagons and an amorphous brown-gold mass: Meks.

Aure pointed west. "Look — there they come, up the Long Swale." He turned, peered east. "And look, there at Bambridge: Meks!"

By common consent, all swung about to scan North Ridge. O. Z. Garr pointed to a quiet line of brown-gold shapes. "There they wait, the vermin! They have penned us in! Well then, let them wait!" He swung away, rode the lift down to the plaza, crossed swiftly to Zumbeld House, where he worked the rest of the afternoon with his Gloriana, of whom he expected great things.

The following day the Meks formalized the investment. Around Castle Hagedorn a great circle of Mek activity made itself apparent: sheds, warehouses, barracks. Within this periphery, just beyond the range of the energy cannon, power-wagons thrust up mounds of dirt.

During the night these mounds lengthened toward the castle; similarly the night after. At last



the purpose of the mounds became clear: they were a protective cover above passages or tunnels leading toward the crag on which Castle Hagedorn rested.

The following day several of the mounds reached the base of the crag. Presently from the far end began to flow a succession of power-wagons loaded with rubble. They issued, dumped their loads and once again entered the tunnels.

Eight of these above-ground tunnels had been established. From each trundled endless loads of dirt and rock, gnawed from the crag on which Castle Hagedorn sat. To the gentlefolk who crowded the parapets the meaning of the work at last became clear.

"They make no attempt to bury us," said Hagedorn. "They merely mine out the crag from below us!"

On the sixth day of the siege, a great segment of the hillside shuddered, slumped, and a tall pinnacle of rock reaching almost up to the base of the walls collapsed.

"If this continues," muttered Beaudry, "our time will be less than that of Janeil."

"Come then," called O. Z. Garr in sudden energy. "Let us try our energy cannon. We'll blast open their wretched tunnels, and what will the rascals do then?" He went to the nearest emplacement, shouted down for Peasants to remove the tarpaulin.

Xanten, who happened to stand nearby, said, "Allow me to assist you." He jerked away the tarpaulin. "Shoot now, if you will."

O. Z. Garr stared at him uncomprehendingly, then leapt forward, swiveled the great projector about so that it aimed at a mound. He pulled the switch; the air crackled in front of the ringed snout, rippled, flickered with purple sparks. The target area steamed, became black, then dark red, then slumped into an incandescent crater. But the underlying earth, twenty feet in thickness, afforded too much insulation; the molten puddle became white-hot but failed to spread or deepen. The energy cannon gave a sudden chatter, as electricity short-circuited through corroded insulation. The cannon went dead.

O. Z. Garr inspected the mechanism in anger and disappointment. Then, with a gesture of repugnance, he turned away. The cannons were clearly of limited effectiveness.

Two hours later, on the east side of the crag, another great sheet of rock collapsed, and just before sunset, a similar mass sheared from the western face, where the wall of the castle rose almost in an uninterrupted line from the cliff below.

At midnight Xanten and those of his persuasion, with their children and consorts, departed Castle Hagedorn. Six teams of Birds shuttled from the flight deck to a meadow near Far Valley, and long before dawn had transported the entire group.

There were none to bid them farewell.

XI

A week later another section of the east cliff fell away, taking a length of rock-melt buttress with it. At the tunnel mouths the piles of excavated rubble had become alarmingly large.

The terraced south face of the crag was the least disturbed; the most spectacular damage having occurred to east and west. Suddenly, a month after the initial assault, a great section of the terraces slumped forward, leaving an irregular crevasse which interrupted the avenue and hurled down the statues of former notables emplaced at intervals along the avenue's balustrade.

Hagedorn called a council meeting. "Circumstances," he said in a wan attempt at facetiousness, "have not bettered themselves. Our most pessimistic expectations have been exceeded. A dismal situation! I confess that I do not relish the prospect of toppling to my death among all my smashed belongings."

Aure made a desperate gesture. "A similar thought haunts me! Death — what of that? All must die! But when I think of my precious belongings I become sick. My books trampled! My fragile vases smashed! My tabards ripped! My rugs buried! My Phanes strangled! My heirloom chandeliers flung aside! These are my nightmares."

"Your possessions are no less precious than any others," said Beaudry shortly. "Still they have no life of their own; when we are gone, who cares what happens to them?"

Marune winced. "A year ago I put down eighteen dozen flasks

of prime essence; twelve dozen Green Rain; three each of Balthazar and Faidor. Think of these, if you would contemplate tragedy!"

"Had we only known!" groaned Aure. "I would have — I would have . . ." His voice trailed away.

O. Z. Garr stamped his foot in impatience. "Let us avoid lamentation at all costs! We had a choice, remember? Xanten beseeched us to flee; now he and his like go skulking and foraging through the north mountains with the Expiationists. We chose to remain, for better or worse, and unluckily the 'worse' is occurring. We must accept the fact like gentlemen."

To this the council gave melancholy assent. Hagedorn brought forth a flask of priceless Rhadamanth, and poured with a prodigality which previously would have been unthinkable. "Since we have no future— to our glorious past!"

That night disturbances were noted here and there around the ring of Mek investment: flames at four separate points, a faint sound of hoarse shouting. On the following day it seemed that the tempo of activity had lessened a trifle.

But during the afternoon a vast segment of the east cliff fell away. A moment later, as if after majestic deliberation, the tall east wall split off, toppled, leaving the backs of six great houses exposed to the open sky.

An hour after sunset a team of Birds settled to the flight-deck. Xanten jumped from the seat. He ran down the circular staircase to the ramparts, came down to the plaza by Hagedorn's palace.

Hagedorn, summoned by a kinsman, came forth to stare at Xanten in surprise. "What do you do here? We expected you to be safely north with the Expiationists!"

"The Expiationists are not safely north," said Xanten. "They have joined the rest of us. We are fighting."

Hagedorn's jaw dropped. "Fighting? The gentlemen are fighting Meks?"

"As vigorously as possible."

Hagedorn shook his head in wonder. "The Expiationists too? I understood that they had planned to flee north."

"Some have done so, including A. G. Philidor. There are factions among the Expiationists just as here. Most are not ten miles distant. The same with the Nomads. Some have taken their power-wagons and fled. The rest kill Meks with fanatic fervor. Last night you saw our work. We fired four storage warehouses, destroyed syrup tanks, killed a hundred or more Meks, as well as a dozen power-wagons. We suffered losses, which hurt us, because there are few of us and many Meks. This is why I am here. We need more men. Come fight beside us!"

Hagedorn turned, motioned to the great central plaza. "I will call forth the folk from their Houses. Talk to everyone."

The Birds, complaining bitterly at the unprecedented toil, worked all night, transporting gentlemen, who, sobered by the imminent destruction of Castle Hagedorn, were now willing to abandon all scruples and fight for their lives. The staunch traditionalists still refused to compromise their honor, but Xanten gave them cheerful assurance: "Remain here then, prowling the castle like so many furtive rats. Take what comfort you can in the fact that you are being protected; the future holds little else for you."

And many who heard him stalked away in disgust.

Xanten turned to Hagedorn. "What of you? Do you come or do you stay?"

Hagedorn heaved a deep sigh, almost a groan. "Castle Hagedorn is at an end. No matter what the eventuality. I will come with you."

The situation suddenly had altered. The Meks, established in a loose ring around Castle Hagedorn, had calculated upon no resistance from the countryside and little from the castle. They had established their barracks and syrup depots with thought only for convenience and none for defense; raiding parties, consequently, were able to approach, inflict damages and withdraw before sustaining serious losses of their own. Those Meks posted along North Ridge were harassed almost continuously and finally were driven down with many losses. The circle around Castle Hagedorn became a cusp; then two days later, after the destruction of five more syrup depots, the Meks drew back even farther. Throwing up earthworks before the two tunnels leading under the south face of the crag, they established a more or less tenable defensive position, but now instead of beleaguering, they became the beleaguered, though still fighting.

Within the area thus defended the Meks concentrated their remaining syrup stocks, tools, weapons, ammunition. The area outside the earthworks was floodlit after dark and guarded by Meks armed with pellet guns, making any frontal assault impractical.

For a day the raiders kept to the shelter of the surrounding or-

chards, appraising the new situation. Then a new tactic was attempted. Six light carriages were improvised and loaded with bladders of a light inflammable oil, with a fire grenade attached. To each of these carriages ten Birds were harnessed, and at midnight sent aloft, with a man for each carriage. Flying high, the Birds then glided down through the darkness over the Mek position, where the fire bombs were dropped.

The area instantly seethed with flame. The syrup depot burnt; the power-wagons, awakened by the flames, rolled frantically back and forth, crushing Meks and stores, colliding with each other, adding vastly to the terror of the flames. The Meks who survived took shelter in the tunnels. Certain of the floodlights were extinguished and, taking advantage of the confusion, the men attacked the earthworks.

After a short bitter battle, the men killed all the sentinels and took up positions commanding the mouths of the tunnels, which now contained all that remained of the Mek army. It seemed as if the Mek uprising had been put down.

XII

The flames died. The human warriors — three hundred men from the castle, two hundred Expiationists and about three hundred Nomads — gathered about the tunnel mouth and, during the balance of the night, considered methods to deal with the immured Meks.

At sunrise those men of Castle Hagedorn whose children and consorts were yet within the castle went to bring them forth. With them, upon their return, came a group of castle gentlemen: among them Beaudry, O. Z. Garr, Isseth, and Aure. They greeted their one-time peers, Hagedorn, Xanten, Claghorn and others, crisply, but with a certain austere detachment, which recognized that loss of prestige incurred by those who fought Meks as if they were equals.

"Now what is to happen?" Beaudry inquired of Hagedorn. "The Meks are trapped but you can't bring them forth. Not impossibly they have syrup stored within for the power-wagons. They may well survive for months."

O. Z. Garr, assessing the situation from the standpoint of a military theoretician, came forward with a plane of action. "Fetch down the cannon — or have your underlings do so — and mount them on power-wagons. When the vermin are sufficiently weak, roll the cannon in and wipe out all but a labor force for the cas-

tle. We formerly worked four hundred, and this should suffice."

"Ha!" exclaimed Xanten. "It gives me great pleasure to inform you that this will never be. If any Meks survive they will repair the spaceships and instruct us in the maintenance and we will then transport them and Peasants back to their native worlds."

"How then do you expect us to maintain our lives?" demanded Garr coldly.

"You have the syrup generator. Fit yourself with sacs and drink syrup."

Garr tilted back his head stared coldly down his nose. "This is your voice, yours alone, and your insolent opinion. Others are to be heard from. Hagedorn, is this your philosophy, that civilization should wither?"

"It need not wither," said Hagedorn, "provided that all of us — you as well as we — toil for it. There can be no more slaves. I have become convinced of this."

O. Z. Garr turned on his heel, swept back up the avenue into the castle, followed by the most traditional-minded of his comrades. A few moved aside and talked among themselves in low tones, with one or two black looks for Xanten and Hagedorn.

From the ramparts of the castle came a sudden outcry: "The Meks! They are taking the castle! They swarm up the lower passages! Attack, save us!"

The men below stared up in consternation. Even as they looked the castle portals swung shut.

"How is this possible?" demanded Hagedorn. "I swear all entered the tunnels!"

"It is only too clear," said Xanten bitterly. "While they undermined, they drove a tunnel up to the lower levels!"

Hagedorn started forward as if he would charge up the crag alone, then halted. "We must drive them out! Unthinkable that they pillage our castle!"

"Unfortunately," said Claghorn, "the walls bar us as effectually as they did the Meks."

"We can send up a force by Bird-car! Once we consolidate, we can exterminate them!"

Claghorn shook his head. "They can wait on the ramparts and flight-deck and shoot down the Birds as they approach. Even if we secured a foothold there would be great bloodshed: one of us killed for every one of them. And they still outnumber us three or four to one."

Hagedorn groaned. "The thought of them revelling among my possessions, strutting about in my clothes, swilling my essences — it sickens me!"

"Listen!" said Claghorn. From on high they heard the hoarse yells of men, the crackle of energy-cannon. "Some of them, at least, hold out on the ramparts!"

Xanten went to a nearby group of Birds who were for once awed and subdued by events. "Lift me up above the castle, out of range of the pellets, but where I can see what the Meks do!"

"Care, take care!" croaked one of the Birds. "Ill things occur at the castle."

"Never mind! Convey me up, above the ramparts!"

The Birds lifted him, swung in a great circle around the crag and above the castle, sufficiently distant to be safe from the Mek pellet-guns.

Beside those cannon which yet operated stood thirty men and women. Between the great Houses, the rotunda and the palace, everywhere the cannon could not be brought to bear, swarmed Meks. The plaza was littered with corpses: gentlemen, ladies and their children—all those who had elected to remain at Castle Hagedorn.

At one of the cannon stood O. Z. Garr. Spying Xanten he gave a shout of hysterical rage, swung up the cannon, fired a bolt. The Birds, screaming, tried to swerve aside, but the bolt smashed two. Birds, car, Xanten, fell in a great tangle. By some miracle, the four yet alive caught their balance and a hundred feet from the ground, with a frenzied groaning effort, they slowed their fall, steadied, hovered an instant, sank to the ground.

Xanten staggered free of the tangle. Men came running. "Are you safe?" called Claghorn.

"Safe, yes. Frightened as well!" Xanten took a deep breath, went to sit on an outcrop of rock.

"What's happening up there?" asked Claghorn.

"All dead," said Xanten, "all but a score. Garr has gone mad. He fired on me."

"Look! Meks on the ramparts!" cried A.L. Morgan.

"There!" cried someone else. "Men! They jump! . . . No, they are flung!"

Some were men, some were Meks whom they had dragged with them; with awful slowness they toppled to their deaths. No more fell. Castle Hagedorn was in the hands of the Meks.

Xanten considered the complex silhouette, at once so familial and so strange. "They can't hope to hold out. We need only destroy the sun-cells, and they can synthesize no syrup."

"Let us do it now," said Claghorn, "before they think of this and man the cannon! Birds!"

He went off to give the orders,

and forty Birds, each clutching two rocks the size of a man's head, flapped up, circled the castle and presently returned to report the sun-cells had been destroyed.

Xanten said, "All that remains is to seal the tunnel entrances against a sudden eruption, which might catch us off guard—then patience."

"What of the Peasants in the stables — and the Phanes?" asked Hagedorn in a forlorn voice.

Xanten gave his head a slow shake. "He who was not an Expiationist before must become one now."

Claghorn muttered, "They can survive two months at most — no more."

But two months passed, and three months, and four months. Then one morning the great portals opened, a haggard Mek stumbled forth.

He signaled: "Men: we starve. We have maintained your treasures. Give us our lives or we destroy all before we die."

Claghorn responded: "These are our terms. We give you your lives. You must clean the castle, remove and bury the corpses. You must repair the spaceships and teach us all you know regarding them. We will then transport you to Etamin Nine."

"The terms you offer are accepted."

Five years later Xanten and Glys Meadowsweet, with their two children, had reason to travel north from their home near Sande River. They took occasion to visit Castle Hagedorn, where now lived only two or three dozen folk, among them Hagedorn.

He had aged, so it seemed to Xanten. His hair was white; his face, once bluff and hearty, had become thin, almost waxen. Xanten could not determine his mood.

They stood in the shade of a walnut tree, with castle and crag looming above them. "This is now a great museum," said Hagedorn. "I am curator, and this will be the function of all the Hagedorns who come after me, for there is incalculable treasure to guard and maintain. Already the feeling of antiquity has come to the castle. The Houses are alive with ghosts. I see them often, especially on the nights of the fetes . . . Ah, those were the times, were they not, Xanten?"

"Yes indeed," said Xanten. He touched the heads of his two children. "Still, I have no wish to return to them. We are men now, on our own world, as we never were before."

Hagedorn gave a somewhat regretful assent. He looked up at the vast structure, as if now were the first occasion he had laid eyes

on it. "The folk of the future—what will they think of Castle Hagedorn? Its treasures, its books, its tabards?"

"They will come, they will marvel," said Xanten. "Almost as I do today."

"There is much at which to marvel. Will you come within, Xanten? There are still flasks of noble essence laid by."

"Thank you no," said Xanten. "There is too much to stir old memories. We will go our way, and I think that we will do so immediately."

Hagedorn nodded sadly. "I understand very well. I myself am often given to reverie these days. Well then, good-by, and journey home with pleasure."

"We will do so, Hagedorn. Thank you and good-by," said Xanten, and turned away from Castle Hagedorn, toward the world of men.—JACK VANCE

EARTHBLOOD

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Galaxy Bookshelf

By Algis Budrys

Until I find Rudyard Kipling's model for style and plot structure, I have to assume he really was that rare bird, the innovator. Any attempt to assign him a fairly high order of creative accomplishment has got to have the backing of science-fiction readers, since so many of our best storytellers work as if they had absorbed a great deal from him. There is Heinlein, there is Poul Anderson, there are any number of lesser luminaries—there is Kipling himself, and very much like Cordwainer Smith, too, in "As Easy as ABC," though more like Heinlein in "With the Night Mail," or like Avram Davidson in "Wireless." Honest craftsmen, all, and givers of value for money; names any reader is happy to see blurbed on a magazine cover. *Dune* (Chilton; 394 text pages, several appendices, a glossary, a biographical dictionary and a map, $5.95) is Frank Herbert's bid to have his name stand among them.

Herbert is that exasperating creature, the writer of great promise. In the 1950's he wrote *Under Pressure,* subsequently titled *The Dragon in The Sea* and 21st-*Century Sub* in various editions. In that hypnotically fascinating book, he displayed a variety of uncommon gifts: intelligence, sophistication, a capacity for research and the ability to write clean prose as an unobtrusive but effective vehicle for a cleanly told story. Good as it was, *Under Pressure* would have benefitted by having both its opening and closing chapters edited down ruthlessly; other than that, there was nothing to quarrel

with. Once he was under weigh with his real story, and clear up to the point where his submarine voyagers were home and the prose had nearly run out, he sustained a narrative drive any storyteller of any time or tradition would have admired.

His approach then was rather similar to that which Alistair MacLean was just beginning to promulgate in the world of suspense literature — hit 'em with everything but the kitchen sink, then give 'em the sink, and when they raise their heads, drop the plumber on 'em. It was fast, very 20th century pragmatic style: "Said the captain: 'There's a smell of carrion in the reactor room.' Broke in the navigator: 'We're aground!' " In context, this was daringly direct technique, used with a magnificent disdain for the first novelist's usual bugaboo, self-consciousness.

On reading *Under Pressure* in first publication, all that another writer for the same market could think about was that next time Herbert would obviously solve his one remaining problem — his inability to start a story on the first page and end it on the last — and then look out, Charlie.

And then Herbert caught The Disease. The Disease, harking back to Para. 1, is what happens to a writer if he draws wrong conclusions from the fact that Kipling also managed to publish "The Army of a Dream."

We do not see our own mistakes, and we do not profit from the mistakes of others; we seek profit by trafficking according to what we think we saw. Frank Herbert is back, with the same intelligence, sophistication and knack for doing his homework. He has shaken off his seemingly interminable fascination with the story-ized lecture. Clinging to the Kipling template, it is as if he had finally paged forward to the greener years in his set of the *Complete Works*. There is not one moment, one character in *Dune* that speaks of Frank Herbert's time and what could have been done about it but was left undone. From first to last, the book is concerned with the time of Paul Atreides, yclept Muad'-Dib, hight The Prophet of Dune, Emperor of the Universe and bastard son of Duke Leto.

The time lives. It breathes, it speaks, and Herbert has smelt it in his nostrils. If the little four-eyed clerk of Victoria's day could or can see what was in Herbert's marrow when he first conceived *Dune* perfect in his mind, that easily wounded mouth would have quirked and those narrow shoulders would have drooped a little before the congratulations came out.

But we are not yet the omnipathetic departed, and we have to simply read the words. What we find, dulling the fine creation and shrouding it as surely but not as stingingly as the storms of Paul's Arrakis, are the words — the twisting, sub-plotted, ravelled edge of unhemmed selvage at the margins of the strong whole cloth. Herbert has chucked MacLeanism, he has chucked Kipling's mistake; but instead of seeing his own mistake he has elaborated it. Being intelligent and sophisticated, he has made the elaboration most enjoyable. But if he thinks — if you think — that the reason *Dune* turns flat and tails off at the end is because even four hundred pages cannot encompass it properly, please consider instead the possibility that 200 pages would have sufficed even for an epic. The odyssey is not that long. Nor *Beowulf*, nor the narrative of the New Testament.

Most of you have surely read it by now, or parts of it — I can count on the fingers of one hand the interesting books I had not read by the time the reviews hit print, and why should you be any different? So you know that it is the story of the child of scorn, outcast among his own people, raised by desert wolves, product of a mystical union long ago foretold, who comes from the hinterland as Messiah with legends and fierce beasts at his beck, to reclaim not only his own stolen heritage and the reputation of his mother but also the lost birthright of all the downtrodden everywhere. Robert Heinlein would call it the Little Tailor story, I believe; whatever you call it, it is the stulf of legend.

Herbert has dressed it with fantastic industry. The sandworld of Arrakis is detailed down to every last bit of its ecology; the society of the desert-dwelling Fremen is convincingly described to its minutiae — the amount Herbert had to know and transmit about their local adaptations of the universal Semitic language (and what he had to know about the universal language, and linguistics in general) is worth at least one Ph.D. and the Chair of Philology at a good New England college. The universal society, which hangs on Arrakis' continued production of *melange* for the CHOAM Company and the Spacers' Guild to live on — to say nothing of the age-old proto-messianic activities of the Bene Gesserit — are almost as closely detailed. (The appendices, which set it all forth in expository prose, are not to be believed unless seen and marvelled at). To this, add bard Gurney Halleck's instant willingness to snatch off a

strain on the baliset *ad libitum* and *ex tempore;* the tortured Wellington Yeuh, the two Mentats, the various slithy toves of House Harkonnen, and even the industrious Princess Irulan . . .

But what comes of all these people? In the disaster that seems to destroy House Atriedes — and casts Paul and Jessica out upon the desert, and at *last* gets the story back into motion after a skillfully elaborated but zero-momentum hiatus following Chapter One—Gurney and Thufir Hawat, the Atreides mentat, are cast adrift from the dead Duke Leto and seemingly from their allegiance to House Atreides. They almost instantly acquire new allegiances, reserving only the right to kill Jessica, whom they mistake for a traitress. They are elaborately set in motion on new courses, just as if each were the hero of another story altogether; the wordage is effective, but meanwhile time is fleeting, the story of Paul Muad'-Dib is dissipating.

When at last this pair of subplots ties back into the story of Paul and moves forward along a truly tragic course after tens of thousands of words as they raise their knives to strike Jessica down, Paul steps out from behind the hangings and says: "No, fellows, it was all a mistake," and they say "Oh — 'scuse me, Ma'am," and go away. They are, in a word, blown. From the time of the Harkonnonen raid on Arrakis, they move the story forward not a millimicron, not a tittle. Herbert was juggling too many people, too many sub-plots. Clearly, too, he had made the reader too many promises he was not able to keep when it came time to pay off, whatever his original plan.

The thudding anti-climaxes of Hawat's and Halleck's failure to do anything dramatic — even wet their pants — when push comes to shove with Jessica, are by no means the most glaring cases of this. As the book begins to exhaust Herbert's sheer ability to transcribe his idea, one thing after another is tossed off lamely. Shaddam IV, Emperor of the Universe, arrives on Arrakis only because Herbert has not yet developed a way for Paul to force the Spacers' Guild to transport him in chase of the master quarry. At least, I could see no other reason for such a transcendent monarch to pitch his tent on the only dangerous ground in all Creation. When Shaddam's fall comes, it comes almost casually — after all, Herbert has known for months, perhaps years, what his payoff scene will be, and he has had much time to grow bored with it. What a light puff of breeze it takes to collapse the

Imperial dynasty, and how quickly it is all told, compared to the many pages in which Paul and Jessica simply walk, their footfalls, fearful of awakening the sandworms, no lighter than the dry rustle with which a galactic society is overthrown.

It is all there, mind you — all that matters, anyway. But it is told, in the end, not shown, and truly effective villains suddenly simper and melt; fierce men and cunning statesmen and seeresses, all bend before this new Messiah, who, sad to say, has the milk-white pallor of the wan Christ that 2000 years of religiosity have chromolithographed for us, and none of the burn and brawn of the carpenter of Galilee. Too much time was spent in showing us the boy and his playmate/tutors; too much time was spent in showing us his mother. She is noble and tight-lipped, but in fact she is an essentially foolish creature who collapses at the first true challenge. Nevertheless, she continues to be discussed as if she were important for some intrinsic worth of her own personality, though, true, she also does nothing after all those words of build-up toward one short scene.

But he could have saved it; he could have, if he hadn't — incredibly — had Paul's infant son killed *offstage*(!) Paul and Chani, his leman, recover beautifully. They go off into the universal dawn hand-in-hand, as if the child of the Messiah were nothing more than something a pair of adolescents had left on the grass and now would deny if called to claim it; as if any child were no more than that. You can make a lot of mistakes in a book, in a career, in a life, and still come out pretty well when the average is totted up. But it seems to me that you cannot be so busy saving a world that you cannot hear an infant shriek.

Now Rick Raphael cannot carry Herbert's shoes when it comes to prose or creating people; in fact, there has been fortunately little prose and dialogue like that in *Code Three* (Simon & Schuster, $3.95) since Arcot, Wade and Morey. I forget whether it was Damon Knight or Jim Blish who first remarked on the painful banter that passes for wit and humor in this kind of story about technicians:

"Hey," Clay called out, "I've got a real hot doll in Toronto, and I'll gladly sell her phone number for a proper price."

"Wouldn't want to hurt you, Clay," the other officer replied. "If I called her up and took her out, she'd throw rocks at you the next time you drew the run. It's all for your own good."

Quod erat demonstrandum, he averred learnedly, a disclaiming grin creasing his broad-jawed face as his blunt-fingered, competent hands began dealing with the fouled ribbon.

Oddly enough, unless there is some great conspiracy — and that's not impossible — real airmen and astronauts really do talk to each other that way. At least, they do if we are to believe such pseudodocumentary novelists as Hank Searls and such reporters as ex-*Planet* letterhack Martin Caidin, who are forever quoting them thus in such books as *The Big X, Thunderbirds* and *Everything But the Flak.* This subschool of literature — the interchangeable novel and biography of the 20th century engine-driver, sometimes slopping over into something like sf but really like the Gus Wilson's Model Garage stories — has been making good money of late (*The Pilgrim Project, Marooned*) and it was only a matter of time before someone tried technocentric procedural fiction on the science-fiction magazines. Of all the attempts, I think Raphael's stories of the throughway police of the future are the most successful, and they are what is gathered here, out of three pieces.

In the future here given, all North America is laced by great highways — fixed, not rolling — on which ordinary civilians drive cars capable of 500 mph and more. Obviously, some sort of super-cop and super-car are required to keep these incompetents from killing in droves. Most of the time, this is accomplished with such cars as Beulah, crewed by such trios as Sergeant Ben Martin, Trooper Clay Ferguson and Medical - Surgical Officer Kelly Lightfoot, the latter a girl of curious description. (See farther). Beulah is an accident ward, fire engine, jail, armored car, wrecker and pursuit vehicle all in one; she cruises on ten-day patrols, her crew sleeping and eating on board, on eleven-month tours of duty. In the first third of the book, she chases down a pair of bank robbers ducking on and off the transcontinental road, pursuing over great distances and at enormous speeds. In the second third, she deals with an attempt to fix a speeding ticket.

These simple threads of story are followed along in documentary fashion; we are told every detail of Beulah's equipment, we have explained to us the political situation — no single nation could afford to support the roads required to contain the constantly faster cars being turned out by industry, and thus there is a North American Thruway Authority — and while the main thread is being spun, we are shown numerous day-to-day occurrences, each of them quite real-sounding, all apparently worked out in keen detail on the basic postulate. We are shown the relationships between crew as instrument of duty and crew as individuals — Ben Martin is the daddy, Clay is the young son sowing his wild oats, Kelly Lightfoot is remarkably like Clarissa MacDougal in the presence of the Laird. Whom to hold to account for the fact that all this is repeated, from third to third, as the novelettes are pasted together? Nobody, I suppose — it seems to be inherent in the genre that all the switches get read off repeatedly, and what the hell, maybe the reader *doesn't* remember from one page to the next.

Whom do we go to for redress against the following sort of prose?

". . . creating impossible situations toward uniform safety control."

"Within the five-mile-wide bands of the thruways — all federrally owned land by each of the three nations —"

". . . . designed almost identically from models on the moon run —"

"The olive-skinned red head grinned at him . . ." (I told you she was curiously described).

". . . . a complete dispensary, one that would have made . . . even the light-surgery rooms of earlier-day hospitals proud."

That's all within the first dozen pages, mind you — after a while, the mind numbs, or one realizes one is in an alternate universe. The latter possibility seems likely; though Raphael keeps tripping over the assertion that somehow you can get Grandma to drive 500 mph but you can't build a plane she'd feel safe — and be safer — handling, I don't believe it for a second. And the notion of Canada and Mexico having so much surplus capital that they can not only support their own Thruway portions but can pitch in to help out Old Yankee Imperialismo, thus making the Thruways possible . . . Somehow, the social revolution Raphael would need to explain this is not to be found in these pages.

And how to explain that in all that roadbed, there was not room for some control device that would at least touch a charged wand to a powerplant and short out the ignition? Is it feasible to declare repeatedly that rising speed capabilities for grandma's car are to be met by raising speed limits?

Is it, in the last analysis, logical to even consider building a new police car, known as The Bomb, capable of speeds in excess of 1200 mph? One, I doubt

the engineering that will permit it to rise twenty feet on on its air cushions and yet not become truly airborne at that forward velocity. A loaf of white bread would have considerable lift capabilities at that speed, and the smooth contour of the Bomb — Raphael causes me to visualize it as a B-47 fuselage — ought actually to bristle with spoilers, JATO units pointed up and forward, drag chute cubbies and, most certainly, parachute ejection seat tracks for the hapless crew.

And yet — and yet this unworkable monster in this unworkable world does, at last, draw real blood. Ben Martin, married to Kelly Lightfoot in the final third, dies testing it (He — that is, Raphael — gives all the wrong reasons, but he too knows it won't work, and hopes "they" will hurry up soon with the *not* foolproof, terribly dumb family car Raphael plans to foist on the civilians he can't get to drive airplanes). He dies because except for himself and Clay Ferguson, who like all patrolmen have gotten the equivalent of graduate degrees before being allowed on the force, all other patrolmen are either ignorant or psychotic, by Raphael's own description of them, except when they utter man-to-man dialogue. But he does die, and it is a shocking thing despite Kelly's Susan Hayward reaction. Mind you, now, Beulah, Ferguson, Lightfoot, the Thruways and Authority are the heroes of this story; they could not exist in their dedication and cameraderie without the motorist, and they all depend on each other for life itself. Now:

> "She's right," Ferguson said bitterly, "it wasn't fair to kill him so that the stupid lemmings could be held back from the sea for an instant. The miserable rotten, driving lemmings." He spat into the dirt.

You know what Raphael was trying to do, all along, all that weary, painful way? He was trying to *say* something; move somebody, show somebody. Now, I can't presume to say what that something and somebody might be. But Ferguson's response is 180 degree away from what the good hero of the engine-driver novel should do. He is stripping himself of all the defenses these heroes put up; he is trampling the Errol Flynn tradition that you risk your neck for fun, the Heinlein tradition that the roads must roll because civilization needs them, the C. S. Forrester tradition that you do your duty 'cause you're steadfast but stupid. He has turned his back on Nevil Shute, and on Venus Equilateral, and for all I know is speaking for Boskone.

Of course, in all those years of education it never occurred to him to patrol 500 mph highways in a 750 mph VTOL aircraft version of Beulah, so perhaps he, like Grandma, is a creature of curious inhibitions and neurotic reflexes. But it was nice — it was real, with the crack of reality, when he opened up like that; it is too much to hope for a plain statement from Raphael, but a truth of some kind . . . that turned out to be possible. Which makes *Code Three* — of all the unlikely contenders — more genuinely a realized story on its own terms than *Dune* is on its terms. We are talking about two different sets of standards, of course, but, still . . .

— ALGIS BUDRYS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Hardly a month goes by without some fresh and revelatory breakthrough in the cracking of the DNA-RNA genetic code. If we cannot right now, at this moment in time, control our own genetic chemistry enough to shape our bodies — and brains! — into the exact form we wish, certainly we can say, right now, that that time is in the foreseeable future. Assume it is here. Assume we can rebuild a fertilized ovum, almost at the moment of conception, according to any genetic blueprint we like.

What do we do with that power?

In the next *Galaxy* Frank Herbert begins a two-part serial that traces out some of those answers for us. In his world life is shaped to a plan; death is not so much a termination of a life as the withdrawal from the market of a no longer competitive artifact; power lies in the hands of thousands of individuals, any one of whom can destroy any other person alive on the earth — or all of them. The title is *Heisenberg's Eyes*, and we think you'll put it right up there with such other famous Frank Herbert classics as *Dune* and *The Dragon in the Sea*.

What else? The last of Robert Silverberg's "Blue Fire" novelettes, to begin with; this one called *Open the Sky*. *Hayden Howard's The Eskimo Invasion*. Shorts to fill; Willy Ley's column; Algis Budrys' attention-getting book reviews. We also have on hand a handsome selection by Paul Anderson, Jack Vance, Keith Laumer, Gordon R. Dickson, James Blish and Norman L. Knight to choose from over the next few issues — to name but a few — so it looks like a pretty good year . . . .

The Crystal Prison

by FRITZ LEIBER

The Old People knew what was best for the kids of forty and under. Too bad the children didn't appreciate it!

"My Great Granny will trade three balls of gray string, big as grapefruit," Jack said to the girl. He was an 18-year-old boy — in Oldlands you didn't become a young man or woman until 30, or a voter until 65. The new antibiotics, carcinophages and cell-restorers had upped life expectancy to 350 years. Jack had a narrow sunny face and brown crew-cut hair, but he looked plump because he was wearing a suit lined with thick foam rubber, so he wouldn't break a bone or a priceless chair if he bumped anything, and colored white, so any dirt he got on it would show. A month ago he had discovered in the 3-foot-deep swimming pool that it floated beautifully, but Great Granny had given him the treatment of "You're worrying me into a heart attack before I'm 200." Around his neck was a silver dollar with a glistening listen-whisper jutting up by his jaw.

"My Great Great Aunt will trade her two string-balls, one red, one green, for them," Candy replied. "They're big as the Temple oranges of Holy Florida and the green has a gold thread in it." At 17, Candace had long black hair and a slim face like amused moonlight, but you could hardly see it because of the black burnoose her Great Great Aunt made her wear against sunburn and to assure she'd reach 30 properly modest. She had once tried to give up wearing it indoors, outside her bedroom. But only once. "Little girls of 17 are not to be seen, especially their legs." You could, however, see the gleam of her silver collar.

"That's trading 300 yards for about 70," Jack objected, prompted by his listen-whisper.

"How many knots have your string-balls got hidden in them?" Candy demanded, prompted by hers.

"1,327," Jack admitted. "Granny had me count."

While their mouths were saying these things, their eyes were saying something else. It was strange.

"Mine have only 19," Candy sneered. "No deal, unless you throw in the broken birdcage . . . or some tea bags."

"My knots are all square knots —" Jack began, but then his listen-whisper blatted audibly.

"You're possessions-mad, Grace! That would violate senior citizens' fair-trading laws."

"You and your dirty string, all knots!" Candy's blatted back.

The teen-agers faced each other across a road wide enough for two oldsters' electric wheelchairs to pass. Behind each of them was a large handcart piled high with choice oldster treasures arranged very neatly. From their collars silver wires trailed back past de-thorned bushes up de-insected tidy green hills to two sweet cottages, smothered in artificial flowers, which smiled at each other like camouflaged tanks across the narrow road. Behind each cottage stood a larger storage barn.

Some progressive oldsters let their youngsters play and run errands and record diet-and-health gossip and do trading deals on collars only radio-linked to home. But wired collars seemed wisest to most, including Jack's and Candy's guardians. True, a girl had recently been strangled when her wire snagged in a tree she was climbing and she slipped. But she shouldn't have been climbing the tree. You always had to pay a price for safety and freedom from worry.

Besides, although the Oldlands police snagged 99 of 100 runaway youngsters headed for Freeshore, there was always that risk too.

The close-clipped vacuumed landscape was dotted at 100-yard intervals with 125-foot gray pillars like the trunks of giant pines identically lightning-blasted.

Although the sun shone brightly and the blue sky was gay with cirrus clouds, the air was somewhat stuffy, very still, and smelled just a touch of old newspapers, sour milk and soap. This was because of the invisible glasstic roof which was supported by the pillars and kept out of Oldlands all dangerous weather, including draughts.

"Don't gape and dawdle, Jack," his listen-whisper prompted.

He said to Candy, "I've got all 2,396 back issues of *Garbage Art* and *Junk Beautiful*."

"I've got them too," she retorted. "Your Gran just wants

more storage space."

"Liar," Jack said. His hand held at his side, he crooked a finger at the girl. They pulled their carts closer together and knelt down in front of them, so they were hidden from the cottages.

"What are you doing, Candace?" her listen-whisper demanded. "Don't block the road, boy," was Great Granny's contribution.

"About those tea bags," the girl said quickly toward Jack. "I have 57 copies of the *Geriatric Observer* and *Daily Diet* to trade — just the sort of newspaper to spread over plastic tablecloth covers to keep them from getting dull."

"Well," Jack replied loudly, "I have 63 tea bags — used, of course, but dried out nicely." He wasn't looking at Candy, he was letting down a large hinged door in the bottom of his cart.

"Those might be acceptable," Candy bargained. "My Great Great Aunt seldom uses fresh tea bags. The used ones make her feel *more saving*." She said this reverently, but her lips were laughing, especially when she saw the wrinkled gray tea bags neatly lined up on a shelf of Jack's cart, like mummified mice. Then her eyes became wild with excitement as Jack drew a life-size figure out of the false bottom of his cart and sat it beside him. She clapped a hand over her mouth to keep from exclaiming and she wagged the other hand and her eyes implored.

Jack snatched an antique aluminum coughdrop box from a pocket in his bump-proof white suit. From it he quickly took a bumblebee on a two-inch thread with a square of Stick-Tite tape at the other end, which he rapidly stuck to his collar just by the whisper-listen. The bee buzzed madly and its wings rattled against the silver metal.

"Oh, a bee!" Candy squealed in terror, leaning forward so that her listen-whisper was close to Jack's.

"It must have got in from the Freeshore through the Killing Wall," Jack shrilled frightenedly. Both of them were grinning. "Lovely bee," Candy said with her lips as it buzzed close to them.

From the cottages up the hills came faintly the sound of windows being slammed shut.

Her voice masked to the listen-whispers by the buzzing, Candy whispered, "Oh, she's beautiful, Jack. I wouldn't have made her nearly as beautiful."

She was referring to the robot duplicate of herself sitting by Jack and dressed in pearl-gray sweater, slacks and sandals.

"No, you wouldn't," Jack whispered back gruffly. "And you would have been wrong, so that's why I had to build her."

"Can I hear her talk?"

"Yes, once, but then you got to work fast," Jack said curtly. He felt the figure's side for a button under the sweater, then pressed.

The robot Candy blinked her eyes and smiled—a little sadly, Candy fancied—and nodded her head and softly said, "Yes."

"That's about all her vocabulary," Jack admitted, "except for repeating things people tell her."

" 'Yes' is the only word she'll need with G-G Aunty," Candy said. "Her repeat-talk will let her do trading and diet-gossip." She was already turned away and letting down a door in the bottom of *her* cart. Jack reached in his secret compartment for what looked like a thick green rug, rolled up tight. Then he looked at the robot, dressed almost identically to the first, which Candy had produced.

"Hey, I'm not *that* good-looking," he objected, his eyes a bit dreamy. At that moment the bumblebee stung him on the chin, but he hardly winced.

"Says you," Candy replied smugly.

"You remember to steal your key?" Jack growled, holding out his hand.

Candy wrinkled her nose and dropped a silver key in his palm, then turned around.

"I made him look *just* like you," she said. "I'll admit I couldn't have installed the servomotors and batteries without your help."

"I couldn't have done the cybernetic circuits without yours," Jack said. By that time her silver collar had been unlocked from her neck and snapped around her robot's. The robot-Candy looked unhappy at that. Silly, Candy told herself, robots can't feel.

Then she had Jack's key and was fitting it into the tiny keyhole in the back of his collar.

In a lull in the bee's buzzing, Jack's whisper-listen blatted quaveringly, "Jack, my boy, can you speak?" "Yes," Jack and his robot replied simultaneously. "Are you dead, son?" the emotional voice went on. "Yes," the robot-Jack responded, but Jack overrode that with, "No, Great Granny, but that awful bee is still menacing us," whereupon the bee buzzed madly again as if on cue. "Good boy," Jack called to it. His collar was around his robot's neck now.

Candy whipped off her black burnoose while Jack lost time squirming out of his white anti-bump suit. For a moment all four were dressed alike in gray

and looked like two pairs of identical twins. Then it was Candy's robot who was dressed like an Arab girl, black-cloaked and hooded, while with some difficulty they wormed the cumbersome foam-rubber suit onto the Jack robot.

Candy looked at the two silver keys in her hand. Somewhere down the road a siren sounded faintly. She slipped one key each into the pockets of the two robots. Jack frowned and almost said something, but instead captured the bumblebee, still straining for freedom, in the antique cough-drop box. "Not until Freeshore, old boy," he told the insect.

"Are you holding out, Candace?" G-G Aunty demanded from the whisper-listen and then at the robot's reply, "Good, just keep your hood shut. It won't be much longer—we've called the police."

"It can't sting you through the rubber. Cover your face with your arms, boy, and pray," Great Granny contributed.

The siren sounded again, much closer now, reverberating against the invisible glasstic sky.

"Come on!" Jack whispered sharply, grabbing up the green cylinder. Together he and Candy wormed their way, like soldiers infiltrating, between the bushes, away from the cottages and the siren, until they had some concealment behind them and a wide long lawn ahead. Then he unrolled the cylinder until it looked exactly like a thick green rug about 6 feet by 4 and the same color as the grass. In one corner was a gray metal square set with two buttons and a joystick.

Jack hit one of the buttons and the carpet stiffened flat and hard.

"It's a bomb, Candy!" Jack cheered softly. "An electronic cyclone. Crawl aboard."

As they did that, Jack explained, "Dad smuggled it to me through a friend of his who's a free trader."

Jack's widowed father and Candy's divorced mother had both had, separately, to leave Oldlands for Freeshore many years before. They had tried to take their children with them, but there had been a custody fight and as generally happens in the Oldlands courts, the oldest litigants had won out—especially in this case because neither Jack's father nor Candy's mother were yet of voting age; Candy's mother had been under thirty — a child. And because rich Oldlands almost always won out in the courts against money-poor Freeshore.

When he and Candy were stretched side by side, Jack hit the second button. The green carpet lifted four inches and hovered. Air sucked in at the front end of the carpet hissed down through a million tiny holes. The strange ship rocked a little, not much.

Just then a bullet-snouted blue police car nosed into sight on the road behind them, traveling at least 35 miles an hour. With a final blast of its siren, it carefully braked to a stop between the junk carts. Up from it stood four spry oldsters in blue, their heads hooded with mesh like beekeepers'. One held in his heavily gauntleted hands an insect spray, the second an insect rifle, the third a pinpoint death-ray. The fourth lifted a bullhorn to his masked mouth. His voice rang from the glasstic sky: *"Bee at large! Bee at large! Where's the person around here reported a bee at large?"*

Then he looked down. "Oh, was it you kids?"

Jack and Candy gripped hands and grinned at each other as they heard their robots answer together, "Yes." This was instantly followed by the listen-whispers on the silver rings blatting, "We'll tell you all about it, officers. Come home, Candace. Come home, Jack," and by another two obedient calls of "Yes."

Then Jack pulled back on the joystick, and the carpet leaned forward, air hissed from the back end too, and it went skimming off across the green lawn. It lifted over the bushes and arrowed between the gray pillars and swung wide of the senior citizens' dormitories and cottages that kept whipping into view.

He said in her ear. "You know, I'll miss Great Granny."

"And I'll miss G-G Auntie," she replied. "They weren't really bad, just terribly scared and lonely."

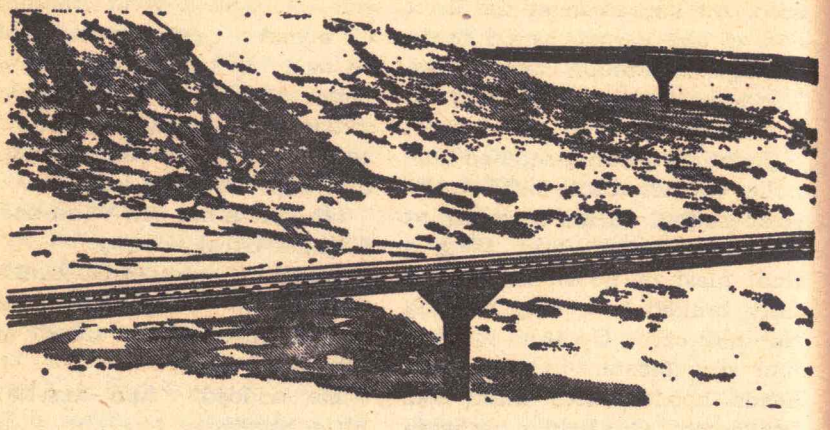
He nodded. "And maybe a little possessive too," he added, almost doubtfully.

She said, "I'm bothered about our robots. We thought they'd just fool G-G and G-Gran long enough to let us get to Freeshore. But now I think they'll go on fooling them forever. And then —I know this is foolish—they'll be as unhappy as we were."

He said, "If they ever do grow minds, they can escape to Freeshore too. You left them their keys."

And then there was only the rusing wind and the flashing pillars and the dizzying lawns and musty cottages as they sped, faster and faster, toward Freelands and wild bees and wild spiders and wild tigers, and firecrackers and loud jazz and the open life and open sky and danger and spaceships and the stars.

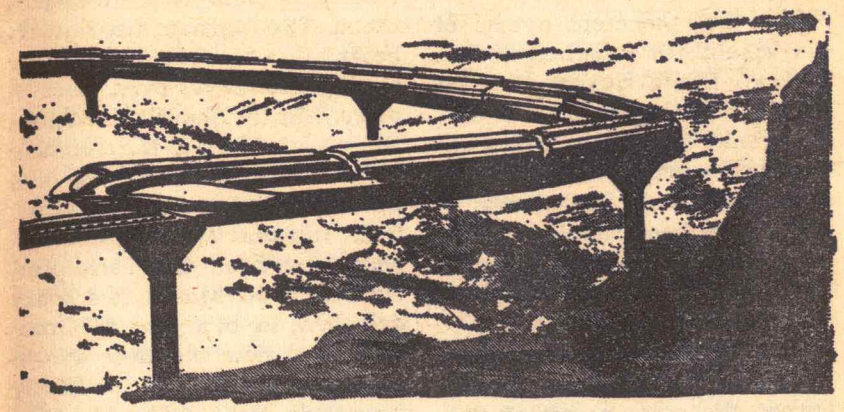
—FRITZ LEIBER



LAZARUS COME FORTH!

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

Millions worshipped the man who had been martyred. What would they do now that he was revived?



Illustrated by MORROW

1

Lazarus was trusting and without guile. But the men whose hearts were hard came upon him and slew him in the night, and fed his body to the converter so that not even a molecule remained. And when Vorst learned of their deed, he wept and said, I wish you had slain me instead, for now you have given him an immortality he can never lose.

— The Book of Lazarus

Mars Monotrack One, the main line, ran from east to west like a girdle of concrete flanking the planet's western hemisphere. To the north lay the Lake District with its fertile fields; to the south, closer to the equator, was the belt of throbbing compressor stations that had done so much to foster the miracle. The discerning eye could still make out the old craters and gouges of the landscape, hidden now under a dusting of sawtooth

grass and occasional forests of pine.

The gray concrete pylons of the monotrack marched to the horizon. Spurs carried the line to the settlements of the outlands, and they were always adding new spurs as the new settlements sprouted. Logistically, it might have been simpler to have all the Martians live in One Big City. But the Martians were not that sort of people.

Spur 7Y was being added now, advancing in ungainly bounds toward the new outpost of Beltram Lakes. Already the pylon foundations had gone up three-quarters of the way from Mono One to the settlement. A vast pylon-layer was working its way through the countryside, gobbling up sand from ten yards down and spewing out concrete slabs that it stapled into the ground. Gobble, splew, staple, and move on — gobble, spew, staple. The machine moved rapidly, guided by a neatly homeostatic brain that kept it on course. Behind it came the other machines to lay track between the pylons and string the utility lines that would follow the same route. The Martian settlers had many miracles at their command, but them, not yet, and so the lines microwave kickover of usable electric power wasn't one of had to get strung.

The monotrack system was intended for heavy-duty transportation. The Martians used quickboats, like everybody else, for getting themselves from place to place. But the slim little vehicles weren't much use in the shipment of construction materials, and this was a planet under construction. Now that the reconstruction phase was over, the Terraformers were gone. Mars was a bosky dell, here in this year of Grace 2152, and now the task was to plant a civilization on the finally hospitable planet. The Martians numbered in the millions, now. They had passed their frontiersman stage and were settling down to enjoy the pleasures of a good commercial boom. And the monotrack marched on, mile after mile, skirting the seas, rimming the lakes and rivers.

The dogwork was done by clever machines, but men rode herd on the machinery. You never could tell when the homeostasis would slip ever so slightly and your pylon-layer would go berserk. It had happened a few days ago, and somehow the cutoff relays and been blanked out of the circuit, and before anyone could do anything there were sixteen miles of pylons crisscrossing Holliman Lake—eight hundred feet under water. Martians hate wastefulness. The machines had shown that they were not entirely trustworthy, and thereafter they were watched.

Watching over the construction of this particular spur of Monotrack One was a lean, sunbronzed man of sixty-eight named Paul Weiner, who had good political connections, and a plump redhaired man named Hadley Donovan, who did not. Redheads were rare on Mars for the usual statistical reasons. Plump men were rare too, but not so rare as they once had been. Life was softer these days, and so were the younger Martians. Hadley Donovan was amused by the antics of his gun-toting elders, with their formal etiquette, their theatrically taut bodies, their sense of high personal importance. Perhaps it had been necessary to wear those poses in the pioneer days on Mars, Donovan thought, but all that had been over for thirty years. He had allowed himself the luxury of a modest paunch. He knew that Paul Weiner felt contempt for him.

The feeling was mutual.

The two men sat side by side in a landcrawler, edging through the roadless landscape twenty miles ahead of the pylon-laying-rig. Transponders bleeped at appropriate intervals; on the control board in front of them, colors came and went in an evanescent flow. Weiner was supposed to be monitoring the doings of the construction rig behind them; Donovan was checking out the planned route of the track, hunting for pockets of subsurface mushiness that the pylon-builder would not be clever enough to evaluate.

Donovan was trying to do both jobs at once. He didn't dare let a political appointee like Weiner have any real responsibility in the work. Weiner was the nephew of Nat Weiner, who stood high in ruling councils, was a hundred-and-some years old, and went to Earth every few years to have the Vorsters pluck out his pancreas or his kidneys or his carotid arteries and implant handy artificial substitutes. Nat Weiner was going to live forever, probably, and he was gradually filling the entire civil service up with members of his family. And Hadley Donovan, trying to oversee a job that really required two men's full attention, felt vague desperation as he scanned his own board and covertly glanced over at Weiner's every thirty seconds or so.

Something was glowing purple on the Anomaly Screen. Donovan wondered about it, but he was too busy with his own part of the job to mention it, and then Weiner was drawling, "I got something

peculiar over here, Donovan. What do you make of it, Freeman?"

Donovan kicked the crawler to a halt and studied the board. "Underground rock vault, looks like. Three-four miles off the track."

"Think we ought to take a look?"

"Why bother?" Donovan asked. "The track won't come anywhere near it."

"You aren't curious? Might be a treasure vault left by the Old Martians."

Donovan didn't dignify that with a reply.

"What do you think it is, then?" Weiner asked. "Maybe it's a cave carved by a underground stream. You think so? All that sub-surface water Mars had before they Terraformed it? Rivers flowing under the desert?"

Feeling the needles, Donovan said, "It's probably just a crawlspace left by the Terraforming engineers. I don't see why—oh, hell. All right. Let's go investigate. Shut the whole project down for half an hour. What do I care?"

He began throwing switches.

It was a foolish, pointless interruption, but the older man's curiosity had to be satisfied. Treasure cave! Underground stream! Donovan had to admit that he couldn't think of any rational reason why there'd be such a pocket of open space underground here. Geologically, it didn't make much sense.

They cut across to it. It turned out to be about twenty feet down, with undisturbed-looking grass growing above it. Some close-range pinging confirmed that the vault was about ten feet long, a dozen feet wide, eight or nine feet deep. Donovan was convinced that it had been left by the Terraformers. But it wasn't on the charts, at any rate. He summoned a dig-robot and put it to work.

In ten minutes the roof of the vault lay bare: a slab of green fusion-glass. Donovan shivered a little. Weiner said, "I think we got ourselves a grave here."

"Let's leave it. This isn't our business. We'll report it and—"

"What do we have here?" Weiner asked, and slipped his hand into an opening. He seemed to be caressing something within. Quickly he drew his hand back as a yellow glow spread over the top of the vault.

A voice said, "May the blessing of eternal harmony be on you, friends. You have come to the temporary resting-place of Lazarus. Qualified medical assistance will revive me. I ask your help. Please do not attempt to open this vault except with qualified medical assistance."

Silence.

The voice said again, "May the blessing of eternal harmony be on you, friends. You have come to the temporary—"

"A voice-cube," Donovan murmured.

"Look!" Weiner gasped, and pointed to the clearing vault-roof. The glass, lit from below, was transparent now. Donovan peered down into a rectangular vault. A thin, hawk-faced man lay on his back in a nutrient bath, feed-lines connected to his limbs and trunk. It was something like a Nothing Chamber, but far more elaborate. The sleeper wore a smile. Arcane symbols were inscribed on the walls of the chamber. Donovan recognized them as Harmonist symbols. That Venusian cult. He felt a stab of confusion. What had they stumbled on here? "The temporary resting-place of Lazarus," the voice-cube said. Lazarus was the prophet of the Harmonists. To Donovan, all of these religions were equally inane. He would have to report this discovery, now, and there would be delay in the construction project, and he himself would be pushed unwantedly into prominence, and—

And none of it would ever have happened if Weiner had been dozing off as usual. Why had he noticed the anomaly?

"We better tell somebody about this," Weiner said. "I think it's important."

II

In a small jungle-fringed building on Venus, eight men who were not men faced a ninth.

All wore the cyanotic blue skins of Venus, though only three had been born with those skins. The others were surgical products, Earthmen converted to Venusians. Not just their bodies had been converted, either. The six changed ones had all been Vorsters at one time in their spiritual development—that is, followers of the influential religious and political movement formally known as the Brotherhood of the Immanent Radiance. The Vorsters were the most powerful figures on Earth. But this was not Earth but Venus, and Venus was in the hands of a Vorster heresy, the Harmonists, sometimes called the Lazarites after their martyred founder, David Lazarus. Lazarus, the prophet of Transcendent Harmony, had been put to death by Vorster underlings seventy years before. Now, to the consternation of his followers—

"Brother Nicholas, may we have your report?" asked Christopher Mondschein, the head of the Harmonists on Venus.

Nicholas Martell, a slender, dogged man in early middle age, stared at his eight colleagues wearily. In the last few days he had little sleep, and many profound jolts to his equilibrium. Martell had made the round trip to Mars to check on the astonishing report that had flashed to the three planets not long before.

He said, "It's exactly as the news story had it. Two workmen coming upon a vault while supervising the construction of a monotrack spur."

"You saw the vault?" asked Mondschein.

"I saw the vault. They've got it cordoned."

"What about Lazarus?"

"There was a figure inside the vault. It matched the image of Lazarus in Rome. It resembled all the portraits. The vault's a sort of Nothing Chamber, and the figure is hooked up inside. The Martian authorities have checked the circuitry of the vault and they say that it's likely to blow sky-high if anybody tampers with it."

"And the figure," persisted a hollow-faced man named Emory. "The figure is Lazarus?"

"Looks like Lazarus," Martell said. "You must remember I never saw Lazarus in the flesh. I wasn't born yet when he died. *If* he died."

"Don't say that," Emory snapped. "This is a hoax. Lazarus died, all right. He was fed to the converter. There's nothing left of him but loose protons and electrons and neutrons."

"So it says in our Scripture," declared Mondschein warily. He closed his eyes a moment. He was the oldest man present; he had been on Venus almost sixty years, and had built this branch of the movement to its present dominant position. He said, "There is always the possibility that our text is corrupt."

"*No*!" The outburst came from Emory, young and conservative. "How can you say that?"

Mondschein shrugged. "The early years of our movement, Brother, are shrouded in doubt. We know there was a Lazarus, that he worked with Vorst at Santa Fe, that he quarreled with Vorst over procedure and was assassinated, or at least put out of the way. But all that was a long time ago. There's no one left in the movement that was directly associated with Lazarus. We aren't as longlived as the Vorsters, you know. So if it happened that Lazarus wasn't stuffed into a converter, but simply carried off to Mars in suspended animation and plugged into a Nothing Chamber for sixty or seventy years—"

There was silence in the room.

Martell gave Mondschein a sidelong glance of distress. It was Emory who finally said, "What if he's revived and claims to be Lazarus? What happens to the movement?"

Mondschein replied, "We'll face that when we get to it. According to Brother Nicholas, there seems to be some doubt as to whether the vault can be opened at all."

"That's correct," Martell said. "If it's wired to explode when tampered with—"

"Let's hope it is," put in Brother Claude, who had not spoken. "For our purposes, the best Lazarus is a martyred Lazarus. We can keep the tomb as a shrine, and send pilgrimages there, and perhaps get the Martians interested. But if he comes back to life, and begins to upset things—"

"What is in that vault *is not Lazarus*," Emory said.

Mondschein stared at him in amazement. Emory seemed ready to crack apart.

"Perhaps you'd better rest a while," Mondschein suggested. "You're taking this much too much to heart."

Martell said, "It's a disturbing business, Christopher. If you had seen that figure in the vault—he looks so angelic, so confident of resurrection—"

Emory groaned. Mondschein furrowed his brow a moment, and in response the door opened and one of the native Venusians entered, one of the espers the Harmonists had been collecting so long on Venus.

"Brother Emory is tired, Neerol," Monschein said.

The Venusian nodded. His hand closed on Emory's wrist, dark purple against deep indigo. A nexus formed; there was a momentary neutral flow; sluices opened somewhere within Emory's brain. Emory relaxed. The Venusian led him from the room.

Mondschein looked round at the others. "We have to operate under the assumption," he said, "that the genuine body of David Lazarus has turned up on Mars, that our book is in error about his fate, and that there's at least the possibility that the body in that vault can be brought to life. The question is, how are we going to react?"

Martell, who had seen the vault and who would never be quite the same, said, "You know I've always been skeptical of the charismatic value of the Lazarus story. But I see this as operating to our advantage. If we can gain possession of the vault, and make it the symbolic center of our movement—something to capture the public imagination—"

"Exactly," Claude said. "It's always been our big selling point

that we've got a mythos. The competition's got Vorst and his medical miracles, Santa Fe and all that, but nothing to stir the heart. We've had the martyrdom of Lazarus, and it's helped us take control of Venus, which the Vorsters never were able to do. And now, with Lazarus himself come forth from the dead—"

"You miss the point," said Mondschein thinly. "What turned up on Mars doesn't tally with the myth. Lazarus isn't *supposed* to be resurrected in the flesh. He was blasted to atoms. Suppose archaeologists found that Christ had really been beheaded, not crucified? Suppose it came to light that Mohammed never set foot in Mecca? We've been caught with our mythology askew—if this is really Lazarus. It could destroy us. It could wreck all we've built."

III

Thirty miles from the quaint old city of Santa Fe, the sprawling laboratories of the Noel Vorst Center for the Biological Sciences rose within a ring of dark mountains.

The Center was the headquarters of the Brotherhood's scientific arm, and the mainspring of the entire movement. Here whirling knives and lashing lasers transformed living creatures into alien flesh. Here technicians laboriously manipulated genes. Here families of espers submitted to an endless round of experiments, and bionics men prodded their subjects mercilessly toward a new realm of existence. The Center was a mighty machine, bristling with purposefulness.

Inconceivably old men were at the heart of the machine.

The core of the movement was the domed building near the main auditorium, where Noel Vorst lived when at Santa Fe. Vorst, the Founder, acknowledged a century and a quarter of life. There were those who said that he was dead, that the Vorst who occasionally appeared at the chapels of the Brotherhood was a robot, a simulacrum. Vorst himself found this amusing. More of him was metal than flesh, at this point, but he was undeniably alive, with no immediate plans for dying. If he had planned to die, he never would have gone to the trouble of founding the Brotherhood of the Immanent Radiance. There had been hard years at first; it is not pleasant to be deemed a crackpot.

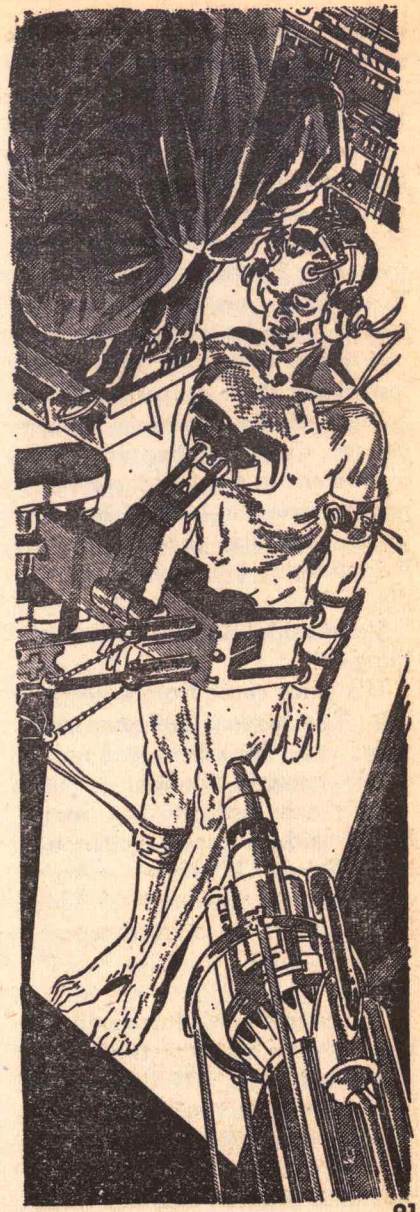
Among those who had deemed Vorst a crackpot in those days was his present second-in-command, the Hemispheric Coordinator, Reynolds Kirby. Kirby, a minor official in the U.N. in the

time before the international tentacles of the Vorster movement had made the U.N. unnecessary, had stumbled into the Brotherhood at a time of personal stress, looking for something to cling to in a storm. That had been in 2077. He was still clinging, seventy-five years later. By now he was virtually Vorst's alter ego, an adjunct of the Founder's soul.

The Founder had been less than candid with Kirby about this Lazarus enterprise, though. For the first time in many years, Vorst had held the details of a project entirely to himself. Some things could not be shared. When they were matters concerning David Lazarus, Vorst held them *in pectore*, unable to take even Kirby into his confidence.

The Founder sat cradled in a webfoam net that spared him most of gravity's pull. Once he had been a vigorous, dynamic giant of a man, and when he had to he could wear that set of attributes even now, but he preferred comfort. It was necessary to spare his strength. His plan had fulfilled itself well, but he knew that without his guiding presence it might all yet come to nothing.

Kirby sat before him, thin-lipped, grizzled, his body like Vorst's a patchwork of artificial



organs. The Vorster laboratories no longer needed such clumsy devices to prolong youth. Within the last generation, they had managed to stimulate regeneration from within, the body's own rebirth, always the most preferable way. Kirby had come along too early for that; so had Vorst. For them, organ replacement was the road to conditional immortality. With luck, they might last two or three centuries, undergoing periodic overhauls. Younger men, those who had joined the movement in the last forty years, might hope for several hundred years more than that. Some now living, Vorst knew, would never die.

Vorst said, "About this Lazarus thing—"

His voice came from a vocoder box. The larynx had gone sixty years ago. The effect was naturalistic enough, though.

"We can infiltrate our men," Kirby said. "I can work through Nat Weiner. We'll get a bomb clapped onto that vault and give Mr. Lazarus his eternal repose."

"No."

"No?"

"Of course not,' Vorst said. He lowered the shutters that lubricated his eyes. "Nothing must happen to that vault or the man who's in it. We'll infiltrate, all right. You'll have to use your pull with Weiner. But not to destroy. We're going to bring Lazarus back to life."

"*We're*—"

"As a gift to our friends the Harmonists. To show our enduring affection for our brothers in the Oneness."

"No!" Kirby said. Muscles roiled in his fleshless face, and Vorst could see him making adrenal adjustments, trying to stay calm in the face of this assault on his sense of logic. "This is the prophet of the heretics," Kirby said quietly. "I know that you've got your reasons for encouraging their growth in certain places, Noel. But to give them back their prophet—it doesn't make sense."

Vorst tapped a stud in his desk. A compartment opened and he drew forth the Book of Lazarus, the heretic scripture. Kirby seemed a little startled to find it here, in the stronghold of the movement.

"You've read this, haven't you?" Vorst asked.

"Of course."

"It's enough to make you weep. How my shameless underlings hunted down this great and good man David Lazarus and did away with him. One of the most blasphemous acts since the Crucifixion, eh? The blot on our record. We're the villains in the Lazarus story. Now here's Lazarus, pickled on Mars for the last seventy years. Not physically annihilated after all, despite what this book says. Fine. Splendid! We throw all the resources of Santa Fe into the task of restoring him to life. The grand ecumenical gesture. Surely you know that it's my hope to re-unite the sundered branches of our movement."

Kirby's eyes flickered brilliantly. "You've been saying that for sixty or seventy years, Noel. Ever since the Harmonists split away. But do you mean it?"

"I'm sincere in all things," said Vorst lightly. "Of course I'd take them back. On my terms, naturally—but they'd be welcome. We all serve the same ends in different ways. Did you ever know Lazarus?"

"Not really. I wasn't very important in the Brotherhood when he died."

"I forget that," Vorst said. "It's hard for me to keep everyone positioned in his temporal matrix. I keep sliding forward and backward. But certainly: you were coming to the top as Lazarus was moving away. I respected that man, Kirby. I grieved when he died, wrongheaded as he was. I intend to redeem the Brotherhood from its stain by bringing Lazarus back to life. He's appropriately named, wouldn't you say?"

Kirby picked up a bright metallic sphere from the desk, a paperweight of some sort, and fingered it. Vorst waited. He kept the sphere there so that his visitors could handle it and discharge their tensions into it; he knew that for many who came before him an interview with Vorst was like a trip to the top of Mount Sinai to hear the Law. And only very highest command had access to the Founder, too. Vorst found it charming. He watched Reynolds Kirby struggling with himself.

At length Kirby—the only man on the whole planet who could use Vorst's first name to him—said thickly, "Dammit, Noel, what kind of a game are you playing?"

"Game?"

"You sit there with that grin on your lips, telling me you're going to revive Lazarus, and I can see you juggling world-lines like billiard-balls, and I don't know what it's all about. What's your motive? Isn't this man better off dead?"

"No. Dead he's a symbol. Alive he can be manipulated. That's all I'll say." Vorst's blazing eyes found Kirby's troubled ones and held them. "Do you think I'm senile at last, perhaps? That I've held the plan in my mind so long that it's rotted in there? I know what I'm doing! I need Lazarus

alive, or—or I wouldn't have begun this. Get in touch with Nat Weiner. Gain possession of the vault, I don't care how. We'll do our work on Lazarus here at Santa Fe."

"All right, Noel. Whatever you say."

"Trust me."

"What else can I do?"

Kirby wheeled himself out of the room. Vorst, relaxing, fed hormones to his blood stream and closed his eyes.

The world wavered. For an instant he found himself drifting, and it was 2071 all over again, and he was building cobalt-60 reactors in a sordid basement and renting little rooms as chapels for his cult. He recoiled, and was whirled forward, dizzyingly, toward the border of now and a little beyond it. Vorst was a low-grade esper, his skills humble indeed, but occasionally his mind did strange things. He looked toward the brink of tomorrow and desperately anchored himself.

With a decisive jab of his fingers Vorst opened his desk-communicator and spoke briefly to an interne in the burnout ward, without identifying himself. Yes, the Founder was told, there was an esper on the verge of burnout. No, she wasn't likely to survive.

"Get her ready," Vorst said. "The Founder's going to visit her."

Vorst's assistants clustered round, readying him for his journey. The old man refused to accept immobility, and insisted on leading the most active kind of existence possible. A drop-shaft took him to ground level, and then, sheltered by the cavalcade of flunkies that accompanied him everywhere, the Founder crossed the main plaza of the compound and entered the burnout ward.

Half a dozen sick espers, segregated by thick walls and shielded by protective members of their own kind, lay at the verge of death. There were always those for whom the powers proved overwhelming, those who eventually seized more voltage than they could handle, and were destroyed. From the very beginning Vorst had concentrated on saving them, for he hated waste of any sort, and these were the espers he needed most badly. The salvage record was good, nowadays. But not good enough.

Vorst knew why the burnouts happened. The ones who went were the floaters, insecurely anchored in their own time. They drifted back, forth, seesawing from past to present, unable to control their movements, building up a charge of temporal force that ultimately blasted their minds. It was a dizziness of the

time-sense, a deadly vertigo. Vorst himself had felt flashes of it. For ten years, nearly a century ago, he had considered himself insane, until he understood. He had seen the edges of time, a vision of futurity that had shattered him and remade him. And that, he knew, had been only a hint of what the real espers experienced.

The burnout case was young and female and Oriental: a fatal combination, it seemed. A good eighty per cent of the burnouts were of Mongoloid stock, generally adolescent girls. Those who had the trait didn't last far into adulthood. This one must have been about sixteen, though it was hard to tell; she could have been anywhere from twelve to twenty-five. She lay twisting on the bed, her body almost bare, clawing at the bedclothes in her agony. Sweat gleamed on her yellow-brown skin. She arched her back, grimaced, fell back. Her breasts revealed by the disarray of her robe, were like a child's.

Blue-clad Vorsters, awed by the presence of the Founder, flanked the bed. Vorst said, "She'll be gone in an hour, won't she?"

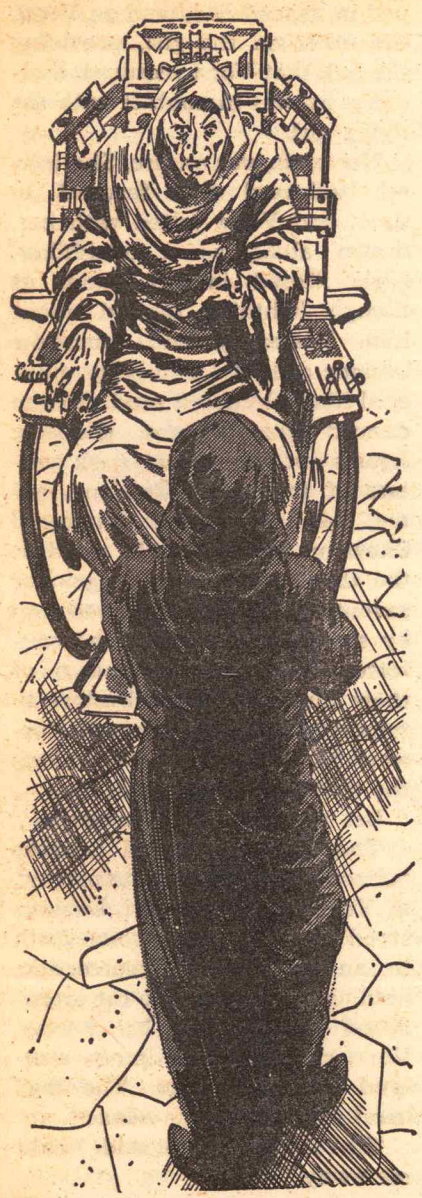
Someone nodded. Vorst moved himself closer to the bed. He seized the girl's arm in his wizened fingers. Another esper stepped in, placed one hand on Vorst, the other on the girl, providing the link that Vorst required. Suddenly he was in contact with the dying girl.

Her brain was on fire. She jolted backward and forward in time, and Vorst jolted with her, drawn along as a hitchhiker. Light flared in his mind, as though lightning danced about him. Yesterday and tomorrow became one. His thin body quivered like a buffeted reed. Images danced like demons, shadowy figures out of the past, dark avatars of tomorrow. Tell me, tell me, tell me, Vorst implored! Show me the path! He stood at the threshold of knowledge. For seventy years he had moved step by step this way, using the contorted and tortured bodies of these burnouts as his bridges to tomorrow, pulling himself forward by his own bootstraps along the worldline of his great plan.

Let me see, Vorst begged!

The figure of David Lazarus bestrode the pattern of tomorrow, as Vorst knew it would. Lazarus stood like a colossus, come forth to an unexpected resurrection, holding his arms out to the green-robed brethren of his heresy. Vorst shivered. The image wavered and was gone. The frail hand of the Founder relaxed.

"She's dead," Vorst said. "Take me away."



IV

One old man had given the word, and another obeyed, and a third was approached for a favor. Nat Weiner of the Martian Presidium was always willing to oblige his old friend Reynolds Kirby. They had known one another for more years than they cared to admit, since the time that a bumptious young Weiner, coming to Earth to swing a trade treaty, had made life hectic for the slightly older Kirby whom the U.N. had appointed as his guide and guardian.

Weiner, like nearly all Martians was neither Vorster nor Harmonist. Martians had little use for cults, and steered a neutral and profitable course. On Earth, by now, the Vorsters amounted to a planetary government, since their influence was felt everywhere. It was simple good sense for Mars to retain open lines to the Vorster high command, since Mars had business to do with Earth. Venus, the planet of adapted men, was a different case. No one could be too sure what went on there, except that the Harmonist heresy had established itself pretty securely in the last thirty or forty years, and might one day speak for Venus as the Vorsters spoke for Earth. Weiner had served a tour of duty as Martian Ambassador

to Venus, and he thought he understood the blueskins fairly well. He didn't like them very much. But he was past feeling any strong emotion. He had left that behind with his hundredth birthday.

At staggering cost, Reynolds Kirby in Santa Fe spoke face-to-face with Weiner, and begged a favor of him. It was twelve years since they had last met — not since Weiner's last visit to the rejuvenation centers at Santa Fe. It wasn't customary for unbelievers to be granted the use of the rejuvenation facilities there, but Kirby had arranged for Weiner and a select few of his Martian friends to come down for periodic treatments, as a favor.

Weiner understood quite clearly that Kirby was silently accepting promissory notes for those favors, and that the notes would be taken down for repayment one of these days. That was all right; the important thing was to survive. Weiner might even have been willing to become a Vorster, if he had to, in order to have access to Santa Fe. But of course that would have hurt him politically on Mars, where both Vorsters and Harmonists were generally looked upon as subversives. This way he had the benefits, without the risks; and he owed it to his old friend Kirby. Weiner would go quite a distance to repay Kirby for that service.

The Vorster said, "Have you seen the alleged Lazarus vault yet, Nat?"

"I was out there two days ago. We've got a tight security guard on it. It was my nephew that found it, you know. I'd like to kill him."

"Why?"

"All we need is finding the Harmonist muck-a-muck out by Beltran Lakes. Why couldn't you people have buried him on Venus, where his own people are?"

"What makes you think we buried him, Nat?"

"Aren't you the ones who killed him? Or put him into a freeze, or whatever you did to him?"

"It all happened before my time," Kirby said. "Only Vorst knows the real story, and maybe not even him. But surely it's Lazarus's own supporters who tucked him away in that vault, don't you think?"

"Not at all," Weiner replied. "Why would they get their own story garbled? He's their prophet. If they put him there, they should have remembered it and preached his resurrection, yes? But they were the most surprised ones of all when he turned up." Weiner frowned. "On the other hand, the message that was recorded with him is full of Harmonist slogans.

And there are Harmonist symbols on the vault. I wish I understood. Better still: I wish we'd never found him. But why are you calling, Ron?"

"Vorst wants him."

"Wants Lazarus?"

"That's right. To bring him back to life. We'll take the whole vault to Santa Fe and open it and revive him. Vorst wants to make the announcement tomorrow, all-channel hookup."

"You can't Ron. If anybody gets him, it ought to be the Harmonists. He's their prophet. How can I hand him to you boys? You're the ones who supposedly killed him in the first place, and now —"

"And now we're going to revive him, which as everyone knows is beyond the capabilities of the Harmonists. They're welcome to try, if they want, but they simply don't have our kind of laboratory facilities. We're ready to revive him. Then we'll turn him over to the Harmonists and he can preach all he wants. Just let us have access to that vault."

"You're asking for a lot," Weiner said.

"We've given you a lot, Nat."

Weiner nodded. The promissory notes had fallen due, he realized.

He said, "The Harmonists will have my head for this."

"Your head's pretty tightly attached, Nat. Find a way to give us the vault. Vorst will be pretty rough on us all if you don't."

Weiner sighed. "His will be done."

But how, the Martian wondered when contact had broken. By *force majeure*? Hand over the vault and to hell with public opinion? And if Venus got nasty about it?

There hadn't been an interplanetary war yet, but perhaps the time was ripe. Certainly the Harmonists wanted — and had every right to have — their own founder's body. Just last week that convert Martell, the one who had come to Venus to plant a Vorster cell and ended up in the Harmonist camp, had been here to see the vault, Weiner thought, and had tentatively sketched out a plan for taking possession. Martell and his boss Mondschein would explode when they found out that the relic of Lazarus was being shipped to Santa Fe.

It would have to be handled delicately.

Weiner's mind whirred and clicked like a computer, presenting and rejecting alternate possibilities, opening and closing one circuit after another. It was not seniority alone that kept the Martian in power. He was agile. He had gained considerably in craftiness since the night when, a drunken young yokel, he ran amok in New York City.

Three hours and a great many thousand dollars' worth of interplanetary calls later, Weiner had his solution worked out satisfactorily.

The vault was Martian governmental property, as an artifact. Therefore Mars had an important voice in its disposal. However, the Martian government recognized the unique symbolic value of this discovery, and thus proposed to consult with religious authorities of the other worlds. A committee would be formed: three Harmonists, three Vorsters, and three Martians of Weiner's selection. Presumably the Harmonists and Vorsters would look out for their own cult's welfare, and the Martians on the committee would maintain an imperturbable neutrality, assuring an impartial judgment.

Of course.

The committee would meet to deliberate on the fate of the vault. The Harmonists, naturally, would claim it for themselves. The Vorsters, having made public their offer to employ all their superscience to bring Lazarus back to life, would ask to be given a chance to do so. The Martians would weigh all the possibilities.

Then, Weiner thought, would come the vote.

One of the Martians would vote with the Harmonists — for appearance's sake. The other two would come out in favor of letting the Vorsters work on the sleeper, under rigorous supervision to prevent any hanky-panky. The five-to-four vote would give the vault to Vorst.

Mondschein would yelp, of course. But the terms of the agreement would allow a couple of Harmonist representatives to get inside the secret labs at Santa Fe for a little while, and that would soothe them somewhat. There would be a little grumbling; but if Kirby kept his word, Lazarus would be revived and turned over to his partisans.

And how could the Harmonists possibly object to that?

Weiner smiled. There was no problem so knotty that it couldn't be untied. Given a little thought, that is. He felt pleased with himself. If he had been forty years younger, he might have gone out for a roistering celebration. But not now.

V

"Don't go," Martell said.

"Suspicious?" Christopher Mondschein asked. "It's a chance to see their setup. I haven't been in Santa Fe since I was a boy. Why shouldn't I go?"

"There's no telling what might

happen to you there. They'd love to get their hands on you. You're the kingpin of the whole Venusian movement."

"And they'll lase me to ashes with three planets watching, eh? Be realistic, Nicholas. When the Pope visits Mecca, they take good care of him. I'm in no danger in Santa Fe."

"What about the espers? They'll scan you."

"I'll have Neerol with me as a mindshield," Mondschein said. "They won't get a thing. I'll stack him up against any esper they have. Besides, I have nothing to hide from Noel Vorst. You of all people ought to realize that. We took you in, even though you were loaded with Vorster spy-commands. It was in our interest to tell Vorst how far we had gone."

Martell took a different approach. "By going to Santa Fe you're putting the blessing of our order on this alleged Lazarus."

"Now you sound like Brother Emory! Are you telling me it's a phony?"

"I'm telling you that we ought to treat it as one. It contradicts our own legend of Lazarus. It may be a Vorster plant calculated to throw us into confusion. What do we do when they hand us a walking, talking Lazarus and let us try to reshape our entire order around him?"

"It's a touchy matter, Nicholas. We've built our faith on the existence of a holy martyr. Now, if he's suddenly unmartyred —"

"Exactly. It'll crush us."

"I doubt that," Mondschein said. The old Harmonist touched his gills lightly, nervously. "You aren't looking far enough ahead, Nicholas. The Vorsters have outmaneuvered us so far, I admit. They've gained possession of this Lazarus and they're about to give him back to us. Very embarrassing, but what can we do? However, the next moves are ours. If he dies, we simply revise our writings a bit. If he lives and tries to meddle, we reveal that he's some sort of simulacrum cooked up by the Vorsters to do mischief, and destroy him. Score a point for us — our original story stands and we reveal the Vorsters as sinister schemers."

"And if he's really Lazarus?" Martell asked.

Mondschein glowered. "Then we have a prophet on our hands, Brother Nicholas. It's a risk we take. I'm going to Santa Fe."

On Earth, the Noel Vorst Center throbbed with more-than-usual activity, as preparations continued for the arrival of the cargo from Mars.

An entire block of the laboratory grounds had been set aside for the resuscitation of Lazarus.

For the first time since the founding of the Center seventy years before, video cameras would be allowed to show the worlds a little of its inner workings. The place would be full of strangers — even a delegation of Harmonists. To old-line Vorsters like Reynolds Kirby, that was almost unthinkable. Furtiveness had become a matter of course for him. The command, though, had come from Vorst himself, and no one could quarrel with the Founder. "I believe that it's time to lift the lid a little," Vorst had said.

Kirby was doing some lid-lifting of his own as the great day drew near. He was troubled by certain blanks in his own memory, and by virtue of his rank as second - in - command he went searching through the Vorster archives to fill them in. The trouble was, Kirby could not remember much about David Lazarus' pre-martyrdom career, and he felt that it was important to know something more than the official story. Who was Lazarus, anyway? How had he entered the Vorster picture — and how had he left it?

Kirby himself had enrolled in 2077, kneeling before the Blue Fire of a cobalt reactor in New York. As a new convert, he had not been concerned with the politics of the hierarchy, but simply with the values the cult had to offer: stability, the hope of long life, the dream of reaching the stars by harnessing the abilities of espers. Kirby was willing to see mankind explore the other solar systems, but he did not make that accomplishment the central yearning of his life. Nor did the chance of immortality — the chief bait for millions of Vorster converts — seem all that delicious to him. What drew him to the movement, at the age of forty, was merely the discipline that it offered. His pleasant life lacked structure, and the world about him was such chaos that he fled from it into one synthetic paradise after another. Along came Vorst offering a sleek new belief that snared Kirby totally. For the first few months he was content to be a worshipper. Soon he was an acolyte. And then, his natural organizational abilities demonstrating themselves, he found himself moving rapidly upward in the movement from post to post until by the time he was eighty he was Vorst's right hand, and very much concerned with his own personal survival.

According to the official story, the martyrdom of David Lazarus had taken place in 2090. Kirby had been a Vorster for thirteen years then and was a District Supervisor in charge of thousands of Brothers.

So far as he could remember,

he had never even heard of Lazarus as of 2090.

A few years later, the Harmonists, the heretical movement, had begun gaining strength, decking themselves in green robes and scoffing at the craftily secular power-orientation of the Vorsters. They claimed to be followers of the martyred Lazarus, but even then, Kirby thought, they hadn't talked much about Lazarus. Only afterward, as Harmonist power mounted and they stole Venus from Vorst, did they push the Lazarus mythos particularly hard. The whole thing had an annoyingly ex-post-facto ring to it. Why is it, Kirby wondered, that I who was a contemporary of Lazarus should never have heard his name?

He walked toward the archives building.

It was a milk-white geodesic dome, sheeted with some toothy fabric that gave it a sharkskin surface texture. Kirby passed through a tiled tunnel, identified himself to the robot guardians, moved toward and past a sphincter-door, and found himself in the olive-green room where the records were kept. He activated a query-stud and demanded knowledge.

LAZARUS, DAVID.

Drums whirled in the depths of the earth. Memory films came round, offered themselves to the kiss of the scanner, and sent images floating upward to the waiting Kirby. Glowing yellow print appeared on the reader-screen.

A potted biography, scanty and inadequate:

BORN 13 March 2051.

EDUCATION Primary Secondary Chicago, A.B. Harvard, '72, Ph.D. (Anthropology) Harvard '75.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION (1/1/88) 6 ft 3 ins. 179 pounds, dark eyes and hair, no dis. scars.

AFFILIATION Joined Cambridge chapel 4/11/71. Acolyte status conferred 7/17/33 . . .

There followed a list of the successive stages by which Lazarus had risen through the hierarchy, culminating with the simple entry, DEATH 2/9/90.

That was all. It was a lean, spare record, not a word of elaboration, no appended commendations such as Kirby knew festooned his own record, no documentation of his disagreement with Vorst. Nothing. It was the sort of record, Kirby thought uncomfortably, that anyone could have tapped out in five minutes and inserted in the archives . . . yesterday.

He prodded the memory banks, hoping to fish up some added detail about the arch-heretic. He found nothing.

It was not really a valid cause for suspicion. Lazarus had been dead for a long time, and probably the record-keeping had been sketchier in those early days.

But it was upsetting, all the same.

Kirby made his way out of the building. Acolytes stared at him as though Vorst himself had gone striding by. No doubt some of them felt the temptation to drop to their knees before him. *If they only knew,* Kirby thought darkly, *how ignorant I am after seventy-five years with Vorst. If they only knew.*

VI

The glass vault of David Lazarus, transported intact at considerable expense from Mars, rested in the center of the operating room, under the watchful eyes of the video cameras mounted in the walls and ceiling.

A carefully planted forest of equipment surrounded the vault: EEGs and EKGs, compressors, centrifuges, surgistats, scanners, enzyme calibrators, laser scalpels, retracters, impacters, thorax rods, cerebral tacks, a heart-and-lung bypass, kidney surrogates, mortmains, biopticons, elsevirs, a Helium II pressure generator and a monstrous, glowering cryostat.

The display was impressive, and it was meant to be. Vorster science was on display here, and every awesome-looking superfluity in the place had its part in the orchestration of the effects.

Vorst himself was not present. That, too, was part of the orchestration. He and Kirby were watching the event from Vort's office. The highest-ranking member of the Brotherhood present was plump, cheerful Capodimonte, a District Supervisor. Beside him stood Christopher Mondschein of the Harmonists. Mondschein and Capodimonte had known each other briefly during Mondschein's short, spectacularly unsuccessful career as a Santa Fe acolyte in 2095. Now, though, the Harmonist was a terrifying figure, his changed body concealed by a breathing-suit but still nightmarish and grotesque. A native-born Venusian, looking even more bizzare, clung to Mondschein like a skin graft. The visiting Harmonists seemed tense and grim.

The television commentator said, "It's already been determined that the atmosphere of the vault is a mixture of inert gases, mainly argon. Lazarus himself is in a nutrient bath. Espers have detected signs of life. The tumblers of the vault lock were opened yesterday in the present of the delegation of Venusian Harmonists. Now the inerts are being

piped out, and soon the sensitive instruments of the surgeons will reach the sleeping man and begin the infinitely complex process of restoring the life-impulses."

Vorst laughed.

Kirby said, "Isn't that what'll happen?"

"More or less. Except the man's as alive as he'll ever be, right now. All they need to do is open the vault and yank him out."

"That's not dramatic."

"Probably not," the Founder agreed. Vorst folded his hands across his belly, feeling the artificials throbbing mildly inside. The commentator reeled off acres of descriptive prose. The spidery array of instruments surrounding the vault was in motion now, arms and tendrils waving like the limbs of some being of many bodies. Vorst kept his eyes on the altered face of Christopher Mondschein.

He hadn't really believed that Mondschein would return to Santa Fe. An admirable person, the old man thought. He had borne adversity well, considering how he had been bamboozled into his life's career forty years ago — virtually kidnapped by the Harmonists and turned into a spy for them, and packed off to Venus as a missionary after his spy mission had been more or less successfully completed.

"The vault's open," Kirby said.

"So I observe. Now watch the mummy of King Tut rise and walk."

"You're very light-hearted about this, Noel."

"Mmmm," the Founder said. A smile flickered on his thin lips a moment. He made minute adjustments to his hormone flow. On the screen, the vault opening was almost completely obscured by the instruments that had dived into the chamber to embrace the sleeper.

Suddenly there was faint motion in the vault. Lazarus stirred! The martyr returned!

"Time for my grand entrance," Vorst murmured.

All was arranged. A glistening tunnel transported him swiftly to the operating room. Kirby did not follow. The Founder's chair rolled serenely into the room just as the figure of David Lazarus groped its way out of sixty years of sleep and rose to a sitting position.

A quivering hand pointed. A rusty voice strained for coherence.

"V-V-Vorst!" Lazarus gasped.

The Founder smiled benevolently, lifted his fleshless arm in greeting and blessing. Delicately, an unseen hand slipped a control rod and the Blue Fire flickered along the walls of the room to

provide the proper theatrical touch. Christopher Mondschein, his altered face impassive behind his breathing-mask, clenched his fists angrily as the glow enveloped him.

Vorst said, "And there is light, before and beyond our vision, for which we give thanks.

"And there is heat, for which we are humble.

"And there is power, for which we count ourselves blessed . . . .

"Welcome to life, David Lazarus. In the strength of the spectrum, the quantum, and the holy angstrom, peace, and forgive those who did evil to you!"

Lazarus stood. His hands found and grasped the rim of his vault. Inconceivable emotions distorted his face. He muttered, "I — I've slept."

"Sixty years, David. And those who rebuked me and followed you have grown strong. See? See the green robes? Venus is yours. You head a mighty army. Go to them, David. Give them counsel. I restore you to them. You are my gift to your followers. *And he that was dead came forth . . . loose him, and let him go.*"

Lazarus did not reply. Mondschein stood agape, leaning heavily on the Venusian at his side. Kirby, watching the screen, felt a tingle of awe that washed away his skepticism for the moment. Even the chatter of the television commentator was stilled by the miracle.

The glow of the Blue Fire engulfed all, rising higher and higher, like the flames of the Twilight reaching toward Valhalla. And in the midst of it all stood Noel Vorst, the Founder, the First Immortal, serene and radiant, his ancient body erect, his eyes gleaming, his hands outstretched to the man who had been dead. All that was missing was the chorus of ten thousand, singing the Hymn of the Wavelengths while a cosmic organ throbbed a paean of joy.

VII

And Lazarus lived, and walked among his people again, holding converse with them.

And Lazarus was greatly surprised.

He had slept — for a moment, for the twinkling of an eye. Now sinister blue figures surrounded him, Venusians, hooded like demons against the poisonous air of Earth, and hailed him as their prophet. All about rose Vorst's metropolis, dazzling buildings that testified to the present might of the Brotherhood of the Immanent Radiance.

The chubby Venusian — Mondschein, was it? — pressed a book into Lazarus' hands. "The Book of Lazarus," he said. "The account of your life and work."

"And death?"

"Yes, your death."

"You'll need a new edition now," Lazarus said. He smiled, but he was alone in his mirth.

He felt strong. How had muscles failed to degenerate in his long sleep? How was it that he could rise and go among men, and make vocal cords obey him, and his body withstand the strain of life?

He was alone with his followers. In a few days, they would take him back to Venus with them, where he would have to live in a self-contained environment. Vorst had offered to transform him into a Venusian; but Lazarus, stunned that such things were possible at all, was not sure that he cared to become a gilled creature. He needed time to ponder all this. The world he had so unexpectedly re-entered was very different from the one he had left.

Sixty-odd years. Vorst had taken over the whole planet now, it seemed.

That was the direction he had been heading in, back in the Eighties, when Lazarus had begun to disagree with him. Vorst had begun with a religio-scientific movement when Lazarus had joined it. Hocus-pocus with cobalt reactors, a litany of spectrum and electron, plenty of larded-on spiritualism, but at the bottom a bluntly materialistic creed whose chief come-on was the promise of long (or eternal) life. Lazarus had gone for that. But soon, feeling his strength, Vorst had begun to slide men into parliaments, take over banks, utilities, hospitals, insurance companies.

Lazarus had opposed all that. Vorst had been accessible, then, and Lazarus remembered arguing with him against this deviation into finance and power politics. And Vorst had said, "The plan calls for it."

"It's a perversion of our religious motives."

"It'll get us where we want to go."

Lazarus had disagreed. Quietly, gathering a few supporters, he had established a rival group, while still nominally retaining his loyalty to Vorst. His apprenticeship with Vorst made him an expert on founding a faith. He proclaimed the reign of eternal harmony, gave his people green robes, symbols, reformist fervor, prayers, a developing liturgy. He could not say that his movement had become particularly powerful beside the Vorst machine, but at least it was a leading heresy, attracting hundreds of new followers each month. Lazarus had been looking toward a mission-

ary movement, knowing that his ideas had a better chance of taking root on Venus and perhaps Mars than Vorst's.

And on a day in 2090 men in blue robes came to him and took him away, blanking out his guard of espers and stealing him as easily as though he had been a lump of lead. After that he knew no more, until his awakening in Santa Fe.

They told him that the year was 2152, and that Venus was in the hands of his people.

Mondschein said, "Will you let yourself be changed?"

"I'm not sure yet. I'm considering it."

"It'll be difficult for you to function on Venus unless you let them adapt you."

"Perhaps I could stay on Earth," Lazarus suggested.

"Impossible. You've got no power base here. Vorst's generosity will stretch only so far. He won't let you remain here after the excitement of your return dies down."

"You're right." Lazarus sighed. "I'll let myself be changed, then. I'll come to Venus and see what you've accomplished."

"You'll be pleasantly surprised," Mondschein promised.

Lazarus had already been sufficiently surprised for one incarnation. They left him, and he studied the scriptures of his faith, fascinated by the martyr's role they had written for him. A book of Harmonist history told Lazarus his own value: where the Brotherhood's religious emotions crystallized around the remote, forbidding figure of Vorst, the Harmonists could safely revere their gentle martyr. *How awkward it must be for them that I'm back,* Lazarus thought!

Vorst did not come to him while he rested in the Brotherhood's hospital. A man named Kirby came, though, frosty-faced with age, and said he was the Hemispheric Coordinator and Vorst's closest collaborator.

"I joined the Brotherhood before your disappearance," Kirby said. "Did you ever hear of me?"

"I don't believe so."

"I was only an underling," Kirby said. "I suppose you wouldn't have had reason to hear of me. But I hoped your memory would be clear, if we ever had met. I've got all these intervening years to cope with, but you can look back across a clean slate."

"My memory's fine," Lazarus said evenly. "I've got no recollection of you."

"Nor I of you. That's the odd thing. If you were so important to the movement, why hadn't I heard of you, Lazarus?"

The resuscitated man shrugged. "I can't tell you that. I was there. I worked beside Vorst. I had disputes with him. That much is beyond question. Eventually I split with him. I founded the Harmonists. Then I — disappeared. And here I am. Do you have trouble believing in me?"

"Perhaps I've been tampered with," Kirby said. "I wish I remembered you."

Lazarus lay back. He stared at the green, rubbery walls. The instruments monitoring his life-processes whirred and clicked. There was an acrid odor in the air: asepsis at work. Kirby looked unreal. Lazarus wondered what sort of maze of pumps and trestles held him together beneath his thick, warm blue robe.

Kirby said, "You understand that you can't remain on Earth, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Life will be uncomfortable for you on Venus unless you're changed. We'll do it for you. Your own men can supervise the operation. I've talked to Mondschein about it. Are you interested?"

"Yes," Lazarus said. "Change me."

They came the next day to turn him into a Venusian. He resented the public nature of the operation, but it was idle to pretend that his life was his own any more, anyway. It would take several weeks, they said, to effect the transformation. Once it had taken months to do it. They would equip him with gills, fit him out to breathe the poisonous muck that was the atmosphere of Venus, and turn him loose. Lazarus submitted. They carved him, and put him back together again, and readied him for shipment.

Vorst came to him, feathery-voiced and shrunken, but still a commanding figure, and said, "You must realize I had no part in your kidnapping. It was totally unauthorized — the work of zealots."

"Of course."

"I appreciate diversity of opinion. My way is not necessarily the only right way. I've felt the lack of a dialogue with Venus for many years. Once you're installed there, I trust you'll be willing to communicate with me from time to time."

Lazarus said, "I won't close my mind against you, Vorst. You've given me life. I'll listen to what you have to say. There's no reason why we can't cooperate, so long as we respect each other's sphere of interests."

"Exactly! Our goal is the same, after all. We can join forces."

"Warily," Lazarus said.

"Warily, yes. But wholeheartedly." Vorst smiled at him and departed.

The surgeons completed their work. Lazarus, now alien to Earth, journeyed to Venus with Mondschein and the rest of the Harmonist retinue. It was in the nature of a triumphant homecoming, if one can be said to come home to a place where one has never been before.

Green-robed brethren with bluish-purple skins greeted him. Lazarus saw the Harmonist shrines, the holy ikons of his order. They had carried the spiritualistic element further than he had ever visualized, practically deifying him; but Lazarus did not intend to correct that. He knew how precarious his position was. There were men of entrenched power in his organization who secretly might not welcome a prophet's return, and who might give him a second martyrdom if he challenged their vested interests. Lazarus moved warily.

"We have made great progress with the espers," Mondschein told him. "We're considerably ahead of Vorst's work in that line, so far as we know."

"Do you have telekinesis yet?"

"For twenty years. We're building the power steadily. Another generation —"

"I'd like a demonstration."

"We have one planned," Mondschein said.

They showed him what they could do. To reach into a block of wood and set its molecules dancing in flame — to move a boulder through the sky — to whisk themselves from place to place — yes, it was impressive. It defied comprehension. It certainly must be beyond the abilities of the Brotherhood on Earth.

The Venusian espers cavorted for Lazarus, hour after hour. Mondschein, sedate and complacent, gleamed with satisfaction, spoke of thresholds, levitation, telekinetic impetus, fulcrums of unity, and other matters that left Lazarus baffled but encouraged.

He who had returned pointed to the gray bands of clouds that hid the heavens.

"How soon?" Lazarus asked.

"We're not ready for interstellar teleport yet," Mondschein replied. "Not even interplanetary, really, though one shouldn't be any harder than the other. We're working on it. Give us time. We'll succeed."

"Can we do it without Vorst's help?" Lazarus asked.

Mondschein's complacence was punctured. "What kind of help can he give us? I've told you, we're a generation ahead of his espers."

"And will espers be enough? Perhaps he can supply what we're missing. A joint venture — Harmonists and Vorsters collaborating — don't you think the possibilities are worth exploring, Brother Christopher?"

Mondschein smiled blandly. "Why, yes, yes, of course. Certainly they're worth exploring. It's an approach we hadn't considered, I admit, but you give us a fresh insight into our problems. I'd like to discuss the matter with you further, after you've had a chance to settle down here."

Lazarus accepted Mondschein's flow of words graciously. He had not, though, been away so long that he had forgotten how to read the meanings behind the meanings.

He knew when he was being humored.

VIII

On Santa Fe, with the unaccustomed invasion of Harmonists at its end, things returned to normal. Lazarus was come forth and loose upon the worlds, and the television men had retreated, and work went on. The tests, the experiments, the probing of the mysteries of life and mind — the ceaseless tasks of the Vorster inner movement.

Kirby said, "Was there ever really a David Lazarus, Noel?"

Vorst glowered up at him out of a thermoplastic cocoon. Hardly had the surgeons finished with Lazarus than they had gone to work on the Founder, who was suffering from an aneurism in a twice-reconstituted blood vessel. Sensors had nailed the spot, subcutaneous scoops had exposed it, microtapes had been slammed into place, a network of thread and looping polymers replacing the dangerous bubble. Vorst was no stranger to such surgery.

He said, "You saw Lazarus with your own eyes, Kirby."

"I saw something come out of that vault and stand up and talk rationally. I had conversations with it. I watched it get turned into a Venusian. That doesn't mean it was real. You could build a Lazarus, couldn't you, Noel?"

"If I wanted to. But why would I want to?"

"That's obvious. To get control of the Harmonists."

"If I had designs against the Harmonists," Vorst explained patiently, "I would have blotted them out fifty years ago, before they took Venus. They're all right. That young man, Mondschein — he's developed nicely."

"He isn't young, Noel. He's at least eighty."

"A child."

"Will you tell me whether Lazarus is genuine?"

Vorst's eyes fluttered in irritation. "He's genuine, Kirby. Satisfied?"

"Who put him in that vault?"

"His own followers, I suppose."

"Who then forgot all about it?"

"Well, perhaps my men did it. Without authorization. Without telling me. It happened a long time ago." Vorst's hands moved in quick, agitated gestures. "How can I remember everything? He was found. We brought him back to life. I gave him to them. You're annoying me, Kirby."

Kirby realized that he was treading a field salted with mines. He had pushed Vorst as far as Vorst could be pushed, and anything further would be disastrous. Kirby had seen other men presume too deeply on their closeness to Vorst, and he had seen that closeness imperceptibly withdrawn.

"I'm sorry," Kirby said.

Vorst's displeasure vanished. "You overrate my deviousness, Kirby. Stop worrying about Lazarus' past. Simply consider the future. I've given him to the Harmonists. He'll be valuable to them, whether they think so now or not. They're indebted to me. I've planted a good, heavy obligation on them. Don't you think that's useful? They owe me something now. When the right time comes, I'll cash that in."

Kirby remained mute. He sensed that somehow Vorst had altered the balance of power between the two cults; that the Harmonists, who had been on a rising curve ever since gaining possession of Venus and its rich lode of espers, had been brought to heel.

But he did not know how it had been accomplished. And he did not care to try again to learn.

Vorst was using his communicator. He looked up at Kirby.

"They've got another burnout," he said. "I want to be there. Come with me, yes?"

"Of course," Kirby said.

He accompanied the Founder through the maze of tubes. They emerged in the burnout ward. An esper lay dying, a boy this time, perhaps Hawaiian, his body jerking as though he were skewered on cords.

Vorst said, "A pity you've got no esping, Kirby. You'd see a glimpse of tomorrow."

"I'm too old to regret it now," Kirby said.

Vorst rolled forward and gestured to a waiting esper. The link was made. Kirby watched. What was Vorst experiencing, now? The Founder's lips were moving, almost writhing in a kind of sneer, pulling back from the gums with each twitch of the esper's body. The boy was shuttling along the time-track, so they said. To Kirby that meant nothing. And Vorst, somehow, was shuttling with him, seeing a clouded view of the world on the other side of the wall of time.

Now . . . now . . . back . . . forth . . .

For a moment, it seemed to Kirby that he, too, had joined the linkup and was riding the time-track as the esper's other passenger. Was that the chaos of yesterday? And the golden glow of tomorrow? Now — now — *damn you, you old schemer, what have you done to me?* — Lazarus, rising above all else, Lazarus who wasn't even real, only some android stew cooked up in an underground laboratory at Vorst's command, a useful puppet, Kirby thought, Lazarus had grasped tomorrow and was stealing it —

The contact broke. The esper was dead.

"We've wasted another one," Vorst muttered. The Founder looked at Kirby. "Are you sick?" he asked.

"No. Tired."

"Get some rest. Six history spools and climb into a relaxer tank. We can ease up now. Lazarus is off our hands."

Kirby nodded. Someone drew a sheet over the dead esper's body.

In an hour the boy's neurons would be in refrigeration somewhere in an adjoining building. Slowly, walking as if eight centuries and not just one weighed upon him, Kirby followed Vorst from the room. Night had fallen, and the stars over New Mexico had their peculiar hard brightness, and Venus, low against the mountainous horizon, was the brightest of all.

They had their Lazarus, up there. They had lost a martyr, and had gained a prophet. And, Kirby was beginning to realize, the whole tribe of heretics had been swept neatly into Vorst's pocket. The old man was damnable!

Kirby huddled down into his robe and kept pace, with an effort, as Vorst wheeled himself toward his office. His head ached from that brief, unfathomable contact with the esper. But in ten minutes it was slowly beginning to get better.

He thought of going to a chapel to pray. But what was the use? Why kneel before the Blue Fire? He need only go to Vorst for a blessing — Vorst, his mentor for eight decades. Vorst, who could make him feel still like a child. Vorst, who had brought Lazarus forth from the dead.

— ROBERT SILVERBERG

★ ★ ★ ★

THE NIGHT BEFORE

by GEORGE HENRY SMITH

With the world on the brink of destruction, clearly there was only one place to turn for help!

On the morning of the night before, a flight of jets went screaming across the sky like insane banshees in search of human blood.

I woke up feeling as though I had been put through a meat grinder with dull teeth. I raised myself gingerly on one elbow but fell back immediately, fighting off the waves of pain and nausea of my hangover. I wanted to go back to sleep but knew that if I did I'd probably dream again, and I couldn't face the kind of dreams I'd been having lately. Besides, time was running out and I had to keep searching the streets of Los Angeles until I found *them.*

I had to find them. I had to find them before it happened. And when the American ultimatum on Berlin ran out, I had good reason to think the balloon was going to go up.

Their existence on Earth was only a rumor, a vague, unreliable rumor that a ship from outer space had landed, its passengers come to save Earth from impending atomic war. But the rumor had enough force to have caused a group of us to search for the extraterrestrials for the last month.

Our searching had all been in vain, however, until that morning when I lay in bed and stared at the ceiling. Then it suddenly came to me where I would find them.

I had been looking in the wrong places. I had gone to observatories and scientific gatherings, expecting them to announce themselves there or at least be present. But now I realized these

weren't the sort of places to look in Los Angeles. What, I asked myself, was the most notable feature of this sprawling city by the sea? Its varied cults and oddball religions, of course! Where else would a stranger to this world and this city go to make themselves known? It would be the most natural thing of all to go to the churches.

So I spent the afternoon and early evening in futile quest. I made my way from the Church of the Great White Brotherhood to the Temple of the Green Dolphin and on to the Tabernacle of Christian Capitalism, but as darkness closed in I was still looking.

And then suddenly I thought I had found it. The sign on the door said, CHURCH OF THE U.F.O., and in smaller printing underneath, Hear the Space People Speak Tonight.

I started to enter but found my way blocked by a small man in a red toga and sandals who held a clicking geiger counter out in front of him. "The rays . . . the rays," he muttered, running the instrument up and down my clothes. "The rays are getting worse!"

"What rays?" I asked, visions of strontium - 90 swimming through my head.

"The rays! The zero rays from their ships! They're everywhere! You can't see the ships but the rays are everywhere . . . everywhere!"

"Are they dangerous?" I asked.

"Dangerous? Dangerous?" He looked at me wildly. "What do you mean dangerous?"

His way of repeating everything was disconcerting. "I mean are the rays harmful?" I said.

"Harmful? Harmful?" He giggled and hurried away.

I walked on into the building, looking around for any signs of zero rays, but finding nothing except a little dust and a thin young man wearing horn-rimmed glasses was speaking to a group of about thirty people. I found a seat and listened to him talk.

"Captain Linda-Ray, a beautiful young woman from the planet Solacon, which is on the other side of the sun from Earth and can't be seen from here, took me on a four-hour trip to her lovely world. The ship in which we traveled operated on solar emanations from the bodies of the Solaconians and went at a speed in excess of ten thousand miles an hour."

Very odd, I thought, and scratched my chin in puzzlement.

"Captain Linda-Ray introduced me to the Supreme Ruler of Solacon, a gorgeous six-foot blonde named Dora-Ray, who

told me that her people have been waiting ten thousand years to contact Earth to warn us about fluoridated water and atomic radiation."

Somehow this didn't sound like the kind of extraterrestrials I had in mind. This group's chemistry was bad and their astronomy worse.

"Excuse me, please," said a small woman with silvery hair, raising a white-gloved hand.

"Please," the young man said in an annoyed tone, "you may ask questions when I've finished." Then he went on with his story. "I asked Dora-Ray why they hadn't gotten in touch with Earth before. 'Because,' she said, looking at me pointedly, 'we have been waiting for a man who could understand and interpret our knowledge of the people on Earth.' "

"I stared at her, not quite willing to believe what she seemed to be saying. 'You mean . . .?

" 'I mean *you* are that man,' Dora-Ray told me, placing her hands on my shoulders. 'You, Simon Hudson, are that man!'

"I hope I'll prove worthy of your great trust,' I said humbly, although in all modesty I knew she was right. There was no one else on this planet who was capable of understanding the magnificent sweep of their knowledge."

Oh boy, I thought, we're in bad shape if he's Earth's greatest brain!

He went on in the same reasonable voice, saying even more unreasonable things. " 'You must begin work at once,' she said. 'You have only ten hours in which to learn everything we know so that you may teach it to your people. In ten hours, Solacon will again be on the other side of the sun where it cannot be reached for another fifty years.'

" 'But how can even I learn so much in so short a time?' I asked.

" 'We will help you with our hypno-robot subliminal teacher,' she said with a smile.

"Dora-Ray and her two head scientists, Lena-Ray and Rita-Ray, accompanied me through their crystal-glass city to the huge laboratory where I saw machines and instruments undreamed of by our scientists, by means of which they had made discoveries which disprove everything our scientists claim to know. In this great laboratory, I was placed upon a foam-cushioned hypno-couch that relaxed my body and brain and prepared it to receive the vast stores of their knowledge.

"Dora-Ray stood beside me and looked deep ito my eyes. 'When you awaken, you will be

once again on your home planet,' she said softly as sleep began to steal over me. 'We hope much from you, O Great Man of Earth! Do not fail us! Do not fail me!'

" 'Fear not, I will not fail you,' I promised as my eyes closed. 'But will I ever see you again?'

" 'Perhaps . . . if you prove worthy of us,' she said and the room faded away.

"In what seemed only seconds, I was opening my eyes and finding myself in the middle of Sunset Boulevard with frightened people all around me.

" 'A flying saucer! We saw a flying saucer!' a woman cried, and I could only smile.

" 'I'm sure you did," I said, and ran to catch a bus to take me home, a changed and far, far wiser man than I had been before."

The thin young man smiled and reached into a briefcase and produced a book. "And what of that wisdom the Solacons entrusted to me to impart to the people of Earth? How can you gain your share of this supreme wisdom? You will find it all here in my book, *Wisdom From A Flying Saucer,* which is on sale in the lobby for only $6.98 a copy. I urge you, friends, not to pass up this great opportunity to read and absorb this knowledge."

Some knowledge, I thought,

as Simon Hudson left the platform amid scattered applause.

"Excuse me," the woman in the white gloves said. "I am quite well acquainted with the solar system and there is no such planet as Solacon. And may I also point out that due to the varying rotation of the planets, none of them is always on the other side of the sun."

"Sit down!" someone shouted. "It's not your turn yet."

"Yes, who do you think you are?" Simon Hudson demanded. "What right have you to mess up my story?"

"Yeah, what do you know about space anyhow?" another voice asked.

"Well, you see," the woman said, and I noted that she was very young despite her silvery hair, "it so happens that I recently landed from a spaceship and—"

"So what?" demanded a bald-headed man in the front row. "A lot of us have recently landed from spaceships. I'm from Saturn myself. You'll just have to wait your turn."

"But I really am from—"

"Repent! Repent!" screeched a female voice from behind us. "The Flying Saucers are God's angels sent to watch over us in these Last Days. Repent! Repent! Repent before it is too late!"

This was more like it, I thought, turning to look at the woman. At least she knows these are the Last Days even if she isn't aware this is The Night Before.

She was dressed in a long white robe and held a white Bible lifted over her head. "Revelations 10:7 tells us of the mighty angel with a rainbow at his head sent to save mankind. The Flying Saucers are those mighty angels! They are watching us! Their eyes are upon us in the market place, in the counting house, in the places where women dance with their naked bodies glistening before pop-eyed men! Their eyes are upon us as we smoke the devil's stick we call cigarettes and when we drink the hell-poison we call whiskey! Their eyes are upon us always! Oh yes, Lord, the eyes of Your angels are upon us even in the sweltering lust of our carnal beds!"

Somewhat to my surprise, no one paid the slightest attention to this outburst. The expressions on their faces indicated they thought she was being a trifle unscientific, but personally I thought she had a nice feeling for vituperation. But now that she had subsided, I turned back to the platform and saw there a small, hollow-eyed man who was talking too.

". . . my program . . . the program given me by the Grand Coordinator, Polius, of the Andromeda Sector of the Galactic Union is this: First, all money must be called in and replaced by a new exchange system. This will be preceded by a gathering of all industrial and other leaders of the world to form the Cosmic Cooperative and Friendship Union. The Union will then issue work units to everyone which will take the place of money.

"If you have read my book, *Cosmic Cooperation from U.F.O.'s*, you already know that among the Cosmos there is no crime, immodesty, hunger or sex. War has long ago ceased to be a menace, and they do not live in huge, crowded cities as we do, but each in his own beautiful garden in which grow hundreds of beautiful flowers with perfumes so rare and strange that—"

"I beg your pardon," the silvery haired woman said, "but I must point out that you have made several basic mistakes in your description of our society. In truth, we have done away with crime and hunger, but as for sex . . . well, we certainly haven't done away with that and I don't think we'd care to. As for war, we—"

"Why don't you quit butting in?" the man on the stage asked heatedly. "Wait until it's your turn."

"I was only trying to correct—"

"Sit down and shut up!"

"Wait your turn!"

"But, please, I should like to tell the people of Earth that—"

"Please, madam," the moderator said, banging his gavel on the table. "We are all anxious to bring our messages to the people of Earth. You will just have to wait your turn to speak!"

Another man took over the dais immediately. "I am a member of a small group that has been in touch with the Space People and feel that the world can only be saved through the aid of these vastly superior beings. I want to play this tape for you. It is part of a radio conversation I had with the captain of a flying saucer."

He placed the spool on the player and a voice began to speak in slightly stilted English. "I am Lelan. I am what you people of Earth think of as the head of government on the planet Nobelia. I speak to you across the parsecs in order to bring you news, both good and bad. The good news is that a new age is about to begin for you through us. We have already contacted the President of the United States, the Pope of the Catholic Church and other world leaders. Unfortunately, they have chosen to ignor us and so we have had to act through this wise man who is playing this tape for you.

"In the future, R. Spencer Jason will become your leader and we will deal with you through him. But before this new age can begin, we must save you from the influence of the vicious inhabitants of the planet Zeno. All Earth knowledge will become obsolete as we give you new information, and all good things will be free in the days that follow after we drive the Zenonians from among you.

"But first we must warn you that the Zenonians will stop at nothing to prevent our saving Earth. It is they who control all the governments of all your nations. It is they who have brought all evil to your planet! It is they who control the Communist world plot. Adolph Hitler was a Zenonian and so are those who are attempting to fluoridate the water of America. J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI know that the Zenonians are the worst menace your beloved country has ever faced. Listen to this man, J. Spencer Jason, who is to be your new leader. Look around you for people who appear strange! Look for people who act and dress strangely! Examine the man next to you! Beware! You shall hear from us again!"

I turned and looked at the guy next to me. He looked at me. He was a rather strange looking duck. He looked just like the type who would plot against J. Edgar Hoover if he thought he could get away with it. I edged away from him just as he started edging away from me. I turned to look at the man on my other side, and he was edging away from me too. It was just as well. He looked like he might be a Zenonian too.

A discussion period followed and finally I got a chance to give them my impression of U.F.O.'s. I told them it seemed to me they always showed up after we had set off H-bombs or made space flights. "In fact," I said, "I think Earth is a giant mental institution in which the human race has been incarcerated for its own good, and every time we start rattling the bars, our keepers come hurrying down to take a look."

No one cared much for that theory and I was escorted to the door none too politely. I didn't really care because I had already decided none of these space people were the ones I was seeking.

The headlines on the corner newsstand were worse than ever. They were so bad that even the average man in the street was beginning to pay attention and look nervous. And there was so much traffic that I wondered if some of the city's millions hadn't decided to head for the hills.

I was scared myself, so scared that I seriously considered making a run for it. It was only what I knew about the casings of those new 100-megaton weapons that kept me from it. What was the use? At least here in the city, one would go quickly. Back in the mountains, death would be slower and more painful as fallout from cobalt casings poisoned the atmosphere.

No, I wasn't going to run, but it looked as though I wasn't going to find the E.T.'s either. I didn't feel that any of the other searchers had had any better luck than I, and there wasn't much time left.

I stopped and had a few drinks at a bar and then just sort of drifted along until I came to another church. A church would be as good a place as any when the bombs came.

The one I picked was behind a painted over storefront window which proclaimed it The Church of the Open Word. I went inside and found a seat on a hard wooden bench between a large, brawny man whose chest and shoulders bulged out of a sweaty T-shirt and a pregnant blonde girl whose uncurled and uncombed hair hung down limply over her ears and forehead in a tangled mass. She smelled almost as strongly of bleach as the man did of perspiration. For a moment I wondered why I had come into this place. If I had been sober I wouldn't have. This wasn't the kind of church one might expect to find E.T.'s. I looked around and decided no one looked much holier than I did. Maybe they were all here to await the end of the world like me.

They were leaning forward, bodies tense, mouth open, radiating an emotional heat that turned the crowded little room into a humid jungle of emotion.

Suddenly the lights at the front of the room went up and the dirty yellow walls with their long strips of peeling paint disappeared. A tall, floridly handsome man stepped into the spotlight. He was dressed in a well-cut, expensive suit, his hair was long and flowing and his face was wreathed in a benigh smile. He faced the crowd with the absolute assurance of a man who knows he has his audience right in the palm of his hand from the very start.

"Let us pray!" he said, raising his hands, and every head in the place was lowered. "Let's not just bend our heads . . . let's really pray!"

I bent my head with all the others, and while we sat there, the man on the podium began to sing, softly at first and then rising to a bellow. "Keep on Praying 'Til You Pray Right Through!"

"Come on now, let's pray the way we always do here at the Church of the Open Word," he exhorted us. "Let's have group prayer! Let's have our out loud prayer! Let's have our out loud praying that always prays right through."

There was a sibilant whisper from the congregation.

"Don't just mumble! How do you expect the Lord to hear you if you don't pray loud enough for Him to hear you way up in Heaven?"

Everyone prayed a little louder.

"Our Father Who art in heaven . . . our Father Who art in Heaven . . ." For some reason I couldn't remember any more. I wanted to pray but the words weren't there. Maybe I had spent too much time with slide rules and engineering formula. "Oh God . . . don't let the war start! Don't let us destroy the world! Don't let the world come to an end! Don't . . ."

"ALL RIGHT NOW, FOLKS, LET'S MAKE GOD HEAR US! HOW CAN HE HELP YOU IF HE CAN'T HEAR YOU?" the minister shouted.

For some reason I had expected the people around me to be praying the same thing I was. I thought they were here to pray for peace, but as their individual words penetrated my consciousness, I knew they weren't.

Words were bubbling out of the blonde next to me. "Hallowed be Thy name. Don't let him find out! Oh God, don't let Jim find out! Don't ever let him find out about Kenny and me that night in the garage! Don't let that nosey old woman next door tell him about seeing us! He'll kill me, Lord, if he finds out! And I won't ever do it again! I promise! It wasn't like the other times, Lord . . . it wasn't like with Fred and Andy. This time it just sort of happened, Lord. If you just don't let Jim find out, I'll never do it again with no other man. Never, never, never, Lord!"

"LOUDER! LOUDER!"

". . . Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven . ." I muttered, remembering a little more. "Don't let them push the buttons! Hold back their hands! Don't let them kill us all! Please, God!"

"Give us this day, our daily bread . ." squeaked a tiny, bespectacled man in the next row. "Don't let me lose my job, God! Please, don't let me lose it! I'm too old to get another one, and what with Grace and the kids . . ."

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," rumbled the big man on my other side. "If I could only get a little rest at night . . . then I wouldn't always be so tired and I could take her places like she wants. But I can't sleep, Lord, because I keep remembering . . . I keep remembering those kids in the back seat of that car I forced off the road one night . . . those screams when the fire . . . Oh God, the fire! God forgive me! Forgive me!"

"For Thine is the Kingdom—" It was all coming back now, just as I had known it as a boy when my mother used to tuck me into bed and tell me about the sweet Christ and our Blessed Mother Mary. Why had she ever left me? Why had she gone off and left Dad and me alone in that split-level nightmare of a house? "Don't let the war start! Please, don't let it!"

". . . and the Power and Glory . . . don't let me die, Lord! Don't let me die!" It was the flashily dressed brunette in the row ahead. "Please don't let the cancer kill me! It hurts so much, but I can stand it if you just don't let it kill me! Keep me alive . . . let me live for a little while longer!"

"We're all going to die tomorrow, I thought wildly, and she's praying to live a little longer. What's the matter with these people? Don't they know? Can't they understand what's going to happen?

"Now and forever," a little girl's voice came through. "I love you, God, but why don't you make my Mommie and Daddy stop fighting and live together again?

"Amen." The voice was old and quavery. "Don't let them send me to the home, God. I know I'm not much use around the house, but I don't eat very much and I've only got a few more years and I want to spend them with them."

"If Jim finds out he'll kill me . . . and he'll kill Kenny too. And anyway, Lord, it wasn't much fun 'cause we were in too much of a hurry. Jim will kill me and I don't wanna be killed for something that wasn't even fun! If he'd killed me for Fred or Andy, that would have been kinda fair, but not for Kenny, please, Lord!"

"Don't let me lose my job ."

"It hurts . . it hurts so much, Lord."

"Don't let them start the war!"

"I know I get on their nerves, but . . ."

"Mommie! Mommie! I want my Mommie!"

"I won't never do it again with nobody but Jim. Even if I don't like it with him, I won't do it with nobody else, Lord! And how can he tell the baby isn't his? Maybe it is for all I know, Lord. I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

"It hurts, but I don't want to die!"

"I don't want to die!"

"I don't want to die! Don't let them start it!" And then suddenly I was standing up and screaming at those around me, "WHY DON'T YOU SHUT UP? SHUT UP! HOW CAN HE HEAR ME IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP?"

Then I was running up the aisle to get away from the sound of their voices, the sound of people who didn't have time to worry about the end of the world because their own piddling little troubles were more important.

"Why can't I get through to them? Why won't they listen to me?" an anguished voice broke through my anger. It was a vaguely familiar voice and I looked around for its owner.

"I've tried so hard. I've talked to so many people, but no one seems to believe me, and it's so important that they do."

"You! It couldn't be you!" I said as I saw the woman who had been at the flying saucer meeting, the small, silvery haired woman with the white gloves. She was huddled in the very last row,

praying out loud like the others. "You? Is it you?" I asked, looming over her. "Are you the one I've been looking for?"

"You've been looking for me?" She had a slight accent but I couldn't identify it as any I had heard before. "Why have you been looking for me?"

"Because . . ." I was looking down at her hands and all of a sudden I understood the reason for the white gloves. They served to partially disguise the fact that she had six fingers on each hand. "You are from the . . . where are your friends? I must talk to your friends."

She shook her silvery head. "I have no friends . . . not on this world."

"But . . . but you couldn't have come alone . . . not all that distance alone."

She got up and by mutual consent we walked out the door of the Church to the Open Word.

"I did not come alone," she said, "but my companions were killed when our spaceship crashed. All the compartments except mine were flooded. I made myself stay there until I learned your language, thinking that then I would be able to communicate with you and everything would be all right, but for three weeks now I have talked but no one has listened . . . no one!"

We were out in the street now, and although it was long past midnight, the traffic was bumper to bumper. The sheep of the city had finally smelled the wolf of war coming and were trying to outrun him.

"I'm listening," I said. "I will receive your message for Earth, the message that will save —"

"That will save us, I hope," the woman said. "You see, I came here to request the help of your people in —"

"You what?" I stared at her with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. Even now, at the very last minute, I had expected some kind of miracle from the ship which had come halfway across the universe.

"We came here for help," she said. "We thought that perhaps another people . . . a people with a more spiritual background might be able to tell us how to save ourselves from ——"

"From what?" I asked as she hesitated.

"From a planet-wide war that will wipe us all out. We thought that another point of view would help, give us some hint of —" She stopped and stared up at me. "You mean that you . . . you too?"

"Yes, we too," I said and tried to keep back the sobs that were threatening to choke me.

"I should have known! I've been visiting your churches, trying to get in touch with your spiritual leaders, but I've felt . . . felt the same sickness here as on my home planet. I guess I just refused to face it."

"Just as I refused to face the fact that there wouldn't be any last minute miracle," I said. "The dragon's teeth are sown and —"

"When? How soon?"

"Very soon," I said. "Just before dawn, I think."

Her shoulders sagged. "We came so far. We came so very far, and now to find this —"

There wasn't anything I could say so I reached out and took her hand. "I'm sorry."

She smiled a very small smile, and for the first time I noticed that she was beautiful. "Do you have anything to do before — before your world comes to an end?" she asked.

"No, not now," I said sadly.

"Then perhaps we could spend the time together?"

"Yes, I'd like that."

"Let's just walk," she said, and her six fingers gripped my five tightly as we began to walk silently into the last black dark of The Night Before.

— GEORGE HENRY SMITH

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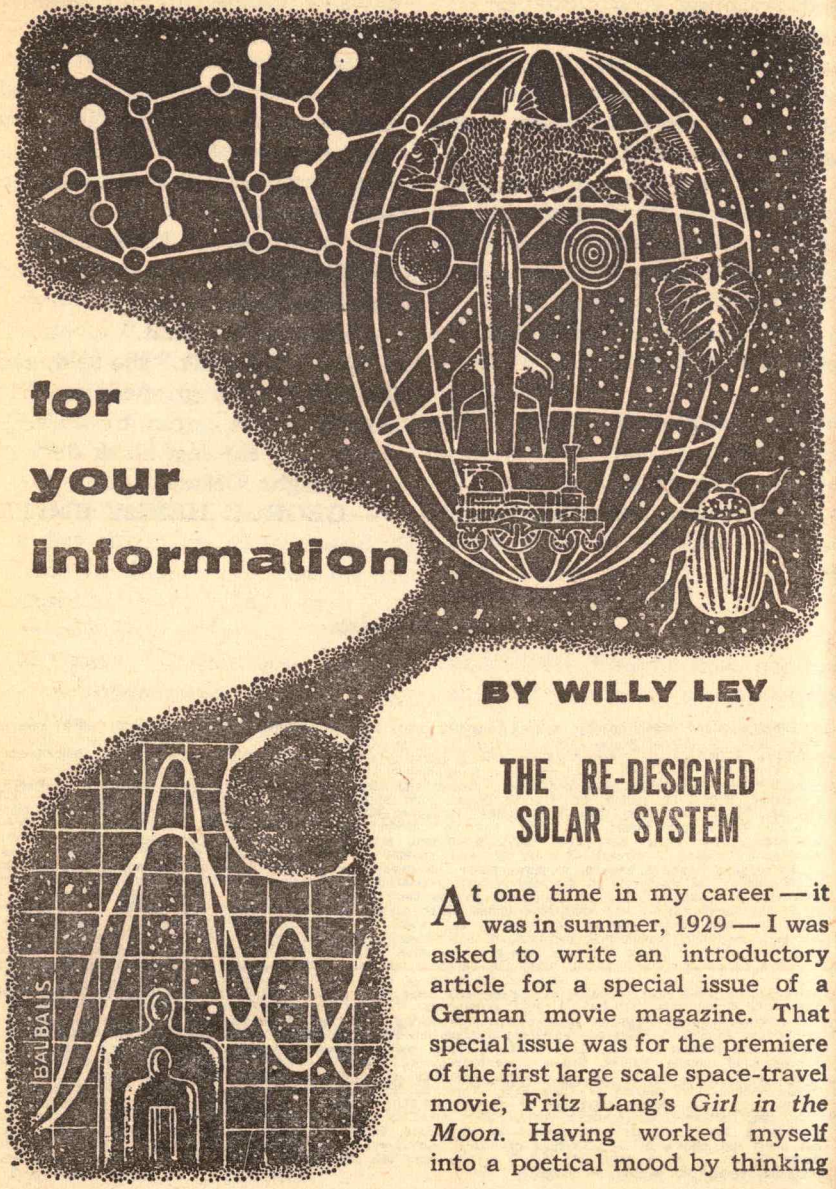


BY WILLY LEY

THE RE-DESIGNED SOLAR SYSTEM

At one time in my career — it was in summer, 1929 — I was asked to write an introductory article for a special issue of a German movie magazine. That special issue was for the premiere of the first large scale space-travel movie, Fritz Lang's *Girl in the Moon*. Having worked myself into a poetical mood by thinking of the past and of the future simultaneously, I conceived the idea of the "three ears of astronomy".

During the first, the pre-telescopic era, astronomers could only determine the positions of the fixed stars in the sky and the movements of the planets among them. They could neither hope to find the sizes of the planets — if, indeed, they differed in size — nor could they expect to find out any of the distances.

Then came the second era, that of the telescope. It first proved that the planets were solid bodies, it made it clear that they were of different sizes, it established their distances and finally it even found the distances to some of the nearer fixed stars. But then the question of the surface conditions on the various planets came up, and the most determined efforts with the telescope, and later with spectroscope and camera, only produced "educated guesses" and speculation. It was rarely possible to draw a line between the two. Therefore I wrote that the second era had succeeded in solving all the unsolved problems of the first era — but had created a number of problems of its own.

Ah, but the third era, the era of space-going devices! That third era would solve all the problems posed by the second era. More in the spirit of tolerance than out of conviction, I added that the third era might pose some problems of its own.

Well, we are in the early stages of that third era by now. Some problems that were inherently insoluble for the second era, like the appearance of the far side of the moon, have been nicely solved. Quite a number of other things have happened too, and, taking refuge in that half sentence that the "the third era *might* pose problems of its own", I can say that I foresaw this fact.

But I did not expect new problems to crop up right at the outset of the space age. Nor did I expect that space age astronomy would re-design the whole inner solar system. As far as the inner portion of the solar system is concerned, literally every member of it, including our own Earth, has been changed around.

Let us begin with the planet nearest the sun, Mercury.

Mercury has always been a "difficult object", to use the cautious language of the astronomer. At the very best the angular distance of Mercury from the sun is 27 degrees and 45 minutes of arc. That means that, as seen from the Earth, Mercury is always close to the sun. It can therefore only be seen in a sky that is illuminated by the sun,

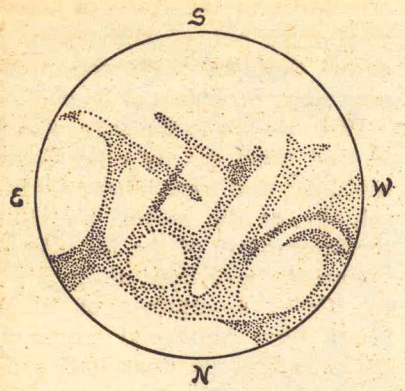


Fig. 1. The Brightside of Mercury as drawn by G. V. Schiaparelli and later by E. M. Antoniadi.

either at dusk or at dawn. And, of course, you have to have a horizon that is free of clouds and haze. It is an interesting fact that Nicholas Copernicus knew of the existence of Mercury only second-hand; late in life he complained that he had never seen it himself.

Yet the light coming from Mercury, even though it is only reflected sunlight, is by no means weak. If we could have Mercury in the midnight sky it would outshine Sirius. It is the proximity to the sun that causes all the problems.

At one time the Italian astronomer Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli decided that one could gain a little by observing Mercury in daylight. Of course the sky would be still brighter, but at least the planet would be high in the sky so that our atmosphere would not be so much in the way. The idea proved to be so useful that in 1893 Schiaparelli could announce — with the king and Queen of Italy in the audience, no less — that Mercury had a period of rotation that matched its period of revolution, hence that it always turned the same face to the sun, just as the moon does with earth.

With that lecture, the concept of Mercury that survived until last year was born. Not quite half of the planet was never reached by the sun's rays; there the leftovers of the original atmosphere would be lying frozen on the ground. And not quite half of the planet's surface was ever under the fierce rays of the nearby sun, and tin and lead, if present, would form shimmering puddles on the hot rock. Between these two extremes there was the promise-crammed Twilight Belt, illuminated but hardly heated by slanting sunlight for a few days of every Mercurian year that lasts only 88 days. This concept was fine and logical and firmly established for threescore and ten years.

And then what happened? Then they started bouncing radar impulses off Mercury and found

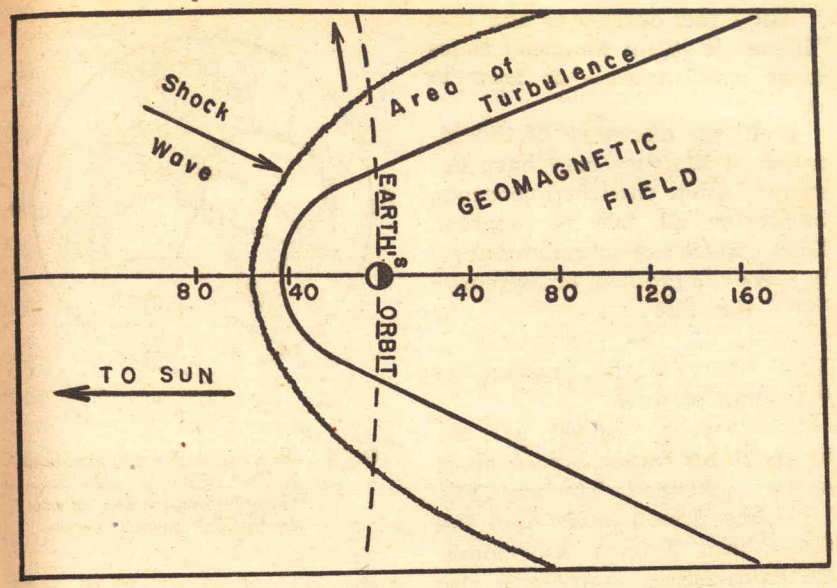


Fig. 2. The beginning of the earth's "magnetic tail". The figures give distances in thousands of miles, measured from the center of the Earth.

that Mercury is slowly turning on its axis.

Its year is still 88 days, but its day is only about 64 days. The result, of course, is that both the sunlit side and the dark side wander slowly around the planet. The sunlit side will still be very hot, but it will get a chance to cool off. And the dark side will become the sunlit side at regular intervals — which means that there can be no remnants of the Mercurian atmosphere left. All the gases that might have existed there once must have escaped into space a long time ago.

While I was contemplating the problem of how to re-write the section on Mercury in my *Conquest of Space*, a reader sent me something that was labeled "an unpoetic fragment", with permission to quote but with simultaneous insistence on "no screen credits, please!" The Mercury section reads:

> Gone the thrilling tales of Brightside
> Neatly paired with chilling Nightside
> Not even now a Twilight Zone,
> The darn thing rotates, just like home.

But I feel obliged to add that "home is still a thousand times more comfortable — at least to us.

Well, the discovery of the rotation of Mercury may have destroyed a few cherished concepts, but after all this is progress. Didn't space age astronomy neatly solve the problem of Mercury? Well, yes, but . . .

But there is the problem of some pictures.

Schiaparelli, when at the height of his career, drew a chart of the brightside of Mercury (Fig. 1.) Some fifteen years later the Greek-born French astronomer Eugenios-Marie Antoniadi also drew a chart of the brightside of the planet. Except for the fact that Antoniadi filled in some areas, like the oval on the lower right of the drawing, with a uniform gray shade, the two drawings are alike.

But if Mercury rotates, how can this be explained?

Well, there is a possible explanation, and it has to do with what Percival Lowell termed a "presentation". When observing Mars, Lowell had to keep in mind that the rotation of Mars is a bit slower than that of the earth. If you had a certain view of Mars at 10 P.M. on a given night, that same view would not occur at 10 P.M. the following

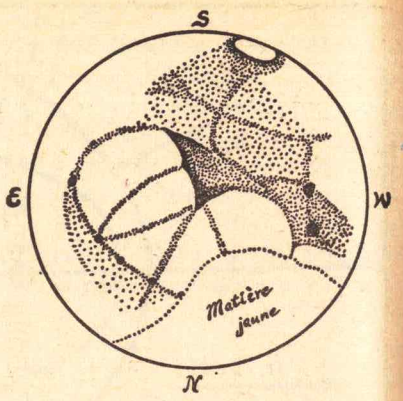


Fig. 3. Mars, as drawn by Antoniadi in 1909, showing a dust storm obscuring almost one quarter of the disk of the planet.

night, but at about 10:40 P.M. Then you had the same view in the telescope — the same "presentation". Now Schiaparelli's drawing shows one specific presentation of Mercury. Antoniadi's drawing is evidently the same presentation.

But why are there no other drawings of other presentations, since Mercury rotates? If one assumes that the other hemisphere of Mercury is devoid of outstanding features and therefore looks just like a blur, these two drawings can be reconciled with a rotation: they both would show the only "presentation" *where something can be seen.*

If anybody should tell me that this is merely an excuse I made

up in a hurry I would have to accept the accusation. We'll simply have to wait and see what additional work will turn up. In the meantime this explanation has to serve — because there is no other.

Progressing to the next planet, Venus, the changes brought about by space age astronomy are less disappointing — or more so, depending on what you believed before. When I heard my first lectures on astronomy I learned that there were two views of Venus. One had the classical name of *panthalassa* (meaning "all ocean") and according to this view Venus was completely covered by water. There might be a few small islands, but a large land mass could not exist. If there were one, it would cause vertical currents in the atmosphere and these currents would break up the uniform cloud layer which every observer complained about.

The other view did admit land masses, but not dry land masses. Land masses there might be, but everything would be swampy, covered with shallow lakes. In a few elevated areas there might be stretches of dripping jungle. And who could tell what weird animals might walk or crawl around in the eternal greenish dusk?

In the interval between the two world wars a third view of Venus was conceived. One could have the unbroken cloud layer, which was the main fact known about Venus, without endless oceans. One could have the same clouds if Venus were completely dry, with all the water in its atmosphere in the form of vapor, while on the ground, at a temperature above the boiling point of water, endless dust storms were raging. Space probe *Mariner II* showed that the surface temperature of Venus is 800 degrees Fahrenheit, so that the third view was proved to have been closest to the mark. Science-fiction writers realized that a whole shelf of nice Venus stories was suddenly obsolete, and my "unpoetic fragment" echoes their disappointment:

> Bye-bye mermaids and dripping jungles
> Dinosaurs, large swamps and similar bungles,
> In fact, bye-bye Venus — you beutiful tease
> Till you explain those 800 degrees.

As a matter of fact much more than those 800 degrees have to be explained. According to the findings of *Mariner II,* the atmospheric pressure at the ground must be ten to twenty times that of our atmosphere at sea level. The lower limit of the cloud layer would lie at about 15 miles, which is higher than the highest

clouds (except for temporary volcanic clouds) in our own atmosphere. But the mass of Venus is about 81 per cent of the mass of our planet. How can Venus hold on to such an extensive atmosphere with a smaller mass — and, in addition to that, be closer to the sun? Somebody should put a computer or two to work on that problem.

Progressing to the Earth, space age astronomy has not changed its surface, of course. But it has shown that the earth has a number of things we have literally never seen.

Until airplanes climbed to high altitudes we had no idea of the existence of the so-called jetstream in our atmosphere. And until the first American satellite, *Explorer I*, climbed beyond 600 miles we had no idea of the radiation belt, now known as the Inner Van Allen Belt. When a friend of mine, a physicist, informed me of the discovery of the belt by long distance call from Washington and told me about the electrons and protons from the sun that were trapped there by the earth's magnetic field, I said something like: "One should have thought of that, shouldn't one?" and received the reply: "You and thirty-seven others!" Fact is that nobody did until it was discovered. Then everything was suddenly crystal clear and obvious.

Since then something else invisible has been discovered and it goes under the name of the "wake in the solar wind" or else the "magnetic tail". (Fig. 2) There is a steady stream of subatomic particles, mainly protons and electrons, leaving the sun. This has been dubbed the solar wind. The Earth, with its pronounced magnetic field, must disturb the smooth flow of the solar wind, in the manner in which a rock in a shallow creek disturbs the flow of the water. The situation near Earth is shown in the diagram. As the solar wind encounters the Earth's magnetic field there is an interaction that has been labeled the shock wave. Just behind the shock wave there is an area of uncertainty; in some cases the Earth's magnetic field is more energetic than the particle of the solar wind, in other cases the particles are more energetic. But then comes the clear-cut superiority of the geomagnetic field which can be pentrated only by very energetic particles, so-called "cosmic rays". As shown in the diagram the geomagnetic field forms a spreading cone, pointing away from the sun. But with increasing distance from the Earth the field must grow weaker and the particles of the solar wind more or less retain their energy. Hence at one point the area of disturbance in the solar wind must grow narrower and finally peter out. In short, the "magnetic tail" cannot be of indefinite length.

A few satellites specifically designed to investigate this question have been sent up. Originally they were designated IMP, for Interplanetary Monitoring Platform. Later the name was changed into Interplanetary Explorer satellites. Unfortunately one of them did not attain the orbit into which it was supposed to go and therefore the measurements are incomplete. Most experts feel sure that the "magnetic tail" reaches beyond the orbit of the moon, but nobody can tell how far.

Electrons and protons by the bucket and gallon
Produce the two belts named after Van Allen,
But this moment the general wail
Is: How long is our magnetic tail?

Even in the case of the moon space age astronomy has produced a problem, in addition to providing a great deal of information. When astronomers were asked in the past about the probable appearance of the backside of the moon they would answer unanimously that there was no reason to suppose that the moon's farside would differ significantly from the side we can see from earth.

A Russian rocket launched on "Sputnik Day" — October 4, 1959 — succeeded in taking a few pictures that showed a portion of the moon's farside. The pictures were few in number, they were not very good, and the sole transmission of them that could be achieved was full of "snow". But what there was seemed to bear out the general idea: the backside of the moon looked generally like the visible side.

But on July 18, 1965, the Russians launched another space probe, dubbed *Zond III*. It passed the moon on July 20 at a distance of 7500 miles and took pictures for an hour and eight minutes. The Russians then waited until *Zond III* was quite some distance from the moon. On July 29 they sent the radio order to start transmission and a stream of pictures came back to the earth from a distance that had grown to 1,375,000 miles. They comprise a total of about three million square miles of the lunar surface, with much of it on the farside. These pictures are good and clear and they show that the moon's farside is marked up by a profusion of impact craters, just like the visible hemisphere. However they do not show any of the large gray *mare* plains which are visible with the naked eye.

Why our moon has *mare* plains on one hemisphere and not on the other — disregard the fact that one is the visible hemisphere and the other is not, that is probably accidental — is something that will need explanation at one time. At the moment it is one of the puzzles produced by space age astronomy.

And now we come to Mars.

On July 14, 1965, space probe *Mariner IV* passed the planet Mars after a flight from earth that had taken 228 days. The space probe was instrumented to take 22 pictures of the planet and everybody concerned had 7½ months during which to worry whether everything would go well. Could one rely on instruments that were exposed to space conditions for that length of time and that could not even be tested while underway? And somebody exacerbated the atmosphere by pointing out that the space probe might well collide with the inner moon of Mars, Phobos. Since one could not be sure of the precise hour of the fly-by and since Phobos needs only 7 hours and 39 minutes to complete one orbit around its planet one simply could not make sure of avoiding Phobos, especially since the closest approach to the planet was at about the distance of Phobos. In theory there was a safety margin of a few hundred miles, but no one could be sure that the course of the space probe would be that precise.

Well, Phobos was missed, the cameras functioned, *Mariner IV* disappeared behind Mars, measuring the density of its atmosphere in the process, and after it had reappeared the transmitter began sending the pictures to earth, over a distance of more than 130 million miles. This had to be a point by point transmission because of the long distance, so it took about six hours for every picture to be completed by the transmitter.

The first of the pictures showed the rim of Mars and something next to it that could either be a high flying cloud or merely an imperfection in the system. But the next pictures brought a surprise; Mars looked like the moon in these pictures. There were large and apparently old craters, there were smaller and probably younger craters; it was simply and plainly a moonscape we saw.

I might say right here that this similarity was unduly enhanced by the fact that the pictures were in black and white. Seen through the telescope, Mars is the most colorful of all planets, with white polar caps, yellowish desert areas, dark areas that look gray or greenish, and an occasional white cloud, probably consisting of ice crystals. If the Mariner pictures had been in color they would not have looked quite as strange.

THE MARINER PICTURES

Running number	Center of picture in Martian Latitude (degrees)	Longitude (degrees)	Slant range (miles)	Extent in miles E. to W.	N. to S.
1.	+35	188	10,500	410	800
2.	+27	186	10,100	290	530
3.	+13	183	9,500	220	310
4.	+ 7	181	9,300	210	270
5.	— 2	179	8,900	190	220
6.	— 6	177	8,700	190	200
7.	—13	174	8,400	180	180
8.	—16	173	8,300	180	170
9.	—23	169	8,100	170	160
10.	—26	168	8,000	170	160
11.	—31	163	7,800	170	150
12.	—34	161	7,700	170	150
13.	—39	155	7,600	170	140
14.	—41	152	7,600	170	140
15.	—45	144	7,500	180	140
16.	—47	139	7,500	190	140
17.	—50	128	7,400	200	140
18.	—51	122	7,400	210	140
19.	—51	107	7,500	240	150
20.	focused on nightside of Mars, useless				
21.	same				
22.	same				

As the pictures progressed the areas photographed shrank in size (see table) so that the features showed up better. But it was always the same — craters, craters, craters. Pictures 9 and 10 should show a "canal" that can be seen on many maps. They didn't. Of course one could say that the time of the fly-by was the wrong season for Mars, a season where the "canals" always are weak. Or one might say that the space probe was so close, only about 8000 miles from the point to be photographed, that a canal would not show up because it would be lost among the detail photographed. Still, that leaves the question of just what is a canal as unanswered as it has always been.

That Mars should be covered with craters was, by itself, not too surprising because of the vicinity of the planet to the asteroid belt. In fact it had even been predicted by an amateur, Donald Lee Cyr by name, more than fifteen years ago. But the overwhelming number of craters was still a surprise. It indicated that the crat-

ers were not worn down by erosion, and while it has always been agreed that Mars does not have much water, there had also been the agreement that it had *some* water, while these pictures looked as if it had none at all. There is a discrepancy here that will need explaining.

Now as the space probe went "behind" Mars there was a chance of measuring the density of the Martian atmosphere. The value obtained was much lower than anybody had expected. In the past the figure usually given was: pressure at ground level somewhat like ours 20,000 feet up. More recently, because of measurements and calculations by Gerard P. Kuyper, the answer was modified to read: like ours at 50,000 or 60,000 feet. But *Mariner IV* reported figures that made this like ours at 80,000 feet or even at 90,000 feet.

This, unfortunately, ruins the beautiful deep-blue sky Chesley Bonestell painted for my book *The Exploration of Mars* and my correspondent, with reference to these pictures, rhymed:

The Mariner fly-by has laid bare
The little canal that wasn't there.

Ditto skies of azure hue
Chesley must be feeling blue.

and concluded:

Quick, let's write about Saturn, Uranus, Jupiter
Before science makes us feel stupider.
Those cold facts, I'm trying to resist 'em —
Give me back my dear old Solar System!

Well no, I can't bring the "old" solar system back, but I can point out that even the Mars measurements leave some room for doubt. So the pressure at ground level is now down to ten millibars. All right, measurements are measurements. But how about those dust storms that have been seen? Fig. 3 shows a drawing made by E. M. Antoniadi in 1909. At that time the whole disk of Mars was hazy, but Antoniadi succeeded in making out the detail shown, except for an area of about one quarter of the visible surface where he left a blank space and wrote *matiere jaune* into it, "yellow matter". It was a duststorm obscuring an enormous area.

Does that tally well with a pressure of ten millibars?

I don't know the answer. All I can do it to sit back and trust to the proverb that time will tell!

— WILLY LEY

Big Business

by JIM HARMON

There was no doubt that these men attached great value to human life. In fact, they could see billions in it!

"The moment for *action* is here, suh," Colonel Big Jack belched, stabbing a foul cigar at me. "The time for talk has been here and gone. Let me tell you fellers that I am not going to just sit still on this here pocket of little old gold forever, no-sir-ree-bob."

Colonel Big Jack Farquard was one of the most obnoxious men in mid-Twientieth Century America. He was a man almost completely without redeeming feature. He was ugly, uncouth, vicious, nearly illiterate, stupid about most of the things that most people consider count. His dress consisted of white linen suits, cowboy hats and a brace of loaded six-guns with which he had shot at least three people in public, none fatally (in public).

He was my employer.

"Now lookee here," he said to Princely Soames, the man who had arranged this job for me. "The propaganda campaign has been goin' on for over twenty years now. I spent nine hundred million dollars on that campaign, boy. I expect to see me some results, boy. You expect I been nit-pickin' around with other stuff and forgot all about this thing, boy?"

Princely Soames looked calm and collected. But the collection was only half deposited. Soames knew as well as I did that Big Jack could ruin his life — or take

it, if he thought Soames had caused him to lose nine hundred million dollars. The nostrils of Soame's fine aristocratic nostrils quivered like those of a finely bred race horse.

"Big Jack," Soames said, "I disagree with you."

Big Jack nodded, and smiled to expose his gold-capped teeth. He didn't waste his money on yes-men, but I could almost see him thinking: *This better be good, boy.*

"The public is still too interested in space travel for us to make our move," Soames said simply.

"SPACE TRAVEL!" Big Jack howled at the top of his voice. He hurled his white Stetson to the thick carpet that floored this office, fortunately sound-proofed (and spy-proof).

Big Jack stomped his Stetson out of shape with his hand-carved boots, howling and hurling curses at the gods. He stopped at last, panting for breath. He was almost ninety years old, although with *his* doctors and the research institutes he financed he could have fooled somebody else's doctor into thinking he was fifty.

"Sp-a-ace travel, by damn!" he said at last. "Old man LeCzern has got a goodun in that, ain't he?"

Soames frowned slightly. "Remember, sir, that LeCzern's campaign to promote space travel has been going for forty years."

"Don't I just know it, though. Don't I *just,* boy." Big Jack's eyes narrowed like a mountain cat getting ready to pounce. "He gives away a little money to them crackpots in rocket societies, gives a phone call to that Hitler runt, buys up a few down at the heels airplane factories, and what's he got? I'll tell you what he's got — he got four hundred million dollars a year, and a billion a year pretty quick now! And who told me that they didn't think space travel would go over?"

"I did," Soames admitted. "At that time, my technical information was deficient. You know we both went on Professor Sledgeman's opinion that a rocket could not operate in the vacuum of space because it wouldn't have anything to push against."

"Professor Sledgeman," Big Jack snorted. "Professor of *Dead Languages* at some two-bit college in Florida. Why ask *him* about rockets?"

"That's what he asked, too, but he finally accepted our hundred thousand dollar retainer. Human error, I'm afraid."

"And there was another human error when you suckered me into this time-travel business," Big Jack said darkly.

I sat back in my chair. I had been a bit uncomfortable while these two men discussed other matters. But at last they were getting at what concerned me.

"Time travel is going to be very big, sir," Soames said. "That isn't merely my personal opinion — everything points to it."

"*Big?*" Colonel Big Jack stomped to the desk, and rummaged through some papers before coming up with the one he wanted. "You say 'big'. In the last fully accounted year, the U.S. government spent exactly twenty-three million, one hundred forty-six thousand, one hundred and three dollars and no cents on time travel at cost plus twenty per cent — which of course I tossed back in to keep 'em interested. The projects in France and England and Pakistan ain't worth mentioning. There ain't no money in *secret* projects, by damn! The public has got to be sold on 'em, so the money can be spent out in the open!"

"We were right about atomic power," Soames pointed out. "We are making money off of that."

Big Jack nodded slowly. "A little, boy, a little." He waited.

"I know it was my thought that the use of atomic power would help speed time travel development by making the present unlivable, and I feel I still may be correct."

"You're going to be correct all right," Big Jack said. Deliberately he tore his cigar in two, pinched some tobacco up and put it into his mouth. He chewed. "I'm through underwriting all these propagandists like them two fellers — what's their names? — uh, one's Blackberry and the other's Fishy — I'm through trying to sell people on how great the past was. What's the use in them fellers we got on the payroll who are all the time writing about how much better silent pictures were than talkies? Now you got this new feller writing about how much better radio was than TV. Next you'll be telling them that *dying* used to be better than it is now!"

"Yes, we're doing that. Covering every angle as it were."

"But *hell, man,* where's it all going?" Big Jack asked, hands stretched to the screened-off stars. "People are just experiencing the past vi-car-i-ous-ly. Damned vicious habit, that vi-car-i-ous-ness. Un-American! *We got to make um want to REALLY go back!*"

Big Jack emphasized the last line by pounding the butt of one six-gun on the desk.

"Am I to suppose, Colonel Farquard," I said at last, "that this is where I come in?"

"Yes, suh, Dr. Moribund," Big Jack said civilly. "You are correct. I do declare I feel that you, and you alone, suh, can be the making of Texatime, Ltd."

I savored the title of Farquard's proposed company. "Texas Time, Limited. A good name."

"Naturally, I got the best brains money can buy to think up names. 'Course it ain't really Limited. Going to be a corporation. Have to say (A Corporation) in small print after the name. The main thing is to suggest that time is running out, and *fast*."

"It certainly will be running out fast if I arrange the explosion of that cobalt bomb," I remarked.

"Right," Big Jack said. He spat the small wad of tobacco into the wastebasket. "Now here's my plan . . ."

Imperceptibly, Soames and I gathered in closer.

"You get them to test that cobalt bomb in outer space, and then you see to it that it explodes in too low an orbit," Big Jack said, simplifying the plan I had worked out with some of his technical people.

I nodded. "As a respected member of the aerospace team, I should be able to arrange that easily."

"Keeno! Now remember not to explode the cobalt thing too low on account of that would wipe out the human race, and colored too. And naturally enough, I don't want that, being human myself. Haw-haw-haw!"

"Quite," said Soames.

"I understand. I will explode it at the exact point where the radioactive particles will rain down to wipe out human life within approximately a year."

"That's it, boy." I was "boy" now; I was working for him. "Now I'm pretty sure this time-travel thing *can be* developed And it's sure everybody will be putting big money into trying to make it work so's we can get the hell outa here before it's too late, and that's all she wrote. I reckon there's a chance it *can't* be developed, but there's *billions* riding on this, and what the hell, I've lived a full life." He nudged me in the ribs.

"Let me assure you," I said to him, "that time travel *can* and *will* be developed. As a matter of fact, I've traveled in time myself."

Big Jack's eyes narrowed with his instinctive animal cunning. "Why, you ain't joshing, are you, boy?"

"No," I said. "I come from 'the future', roughly speaking. Actually I am not the real Dr. Moribund at all. I have replaced him in order to prevent you from doing your particular bit to make the Earth uninhabitable. Others will have to deal with all your competition in this goal."

Big Jack got it instantly. "Say, you mean if I contaminate the world, I'll ruin a lot of your property, make it worthless."

"Yes," I confirmed.

"And you came back to stop me yourself?"

"Yes," I admitted a bit sheepishly. "I suppose I should have hired an expert but there is a time when one does not delegate authority."

"And you're figuring on stopping me how?" Big Jack asked, smooth as silk.

Something about him made me stop willing my body from generating anti-life processes.

"It is necessary for Big Jack to complete his plans for contaminating Earth, so that I may complete *my* plans," Soames said. "I've devoted one of my years and thirty of yours to them."

Big Jack laughed with seeming good nature. "I always figured you had some kind of ace up your sleeve. What is it, suh?"

"My plan is to get salvage rights to the dead planet," Soames announced.

"You come from the future too!" I blurted.

Soames shook his finely wrought head. "No, no, I am from outside. An alien. Inhabitant of another star system's civilization. Disguised, of course."

"You want me to go on ahead with getting that cobalt baby set off?" Big Jack asked, thinking that over.

"Yes," said Soames. "After that, the planet will have to be deserted, either by evacuation of the populace via time, or possible *space* travel, or by the death of all the inhabitants. The latter is best, incidentally, since I have several ready markets for the unspoiled, bacteria-free corpses."

"You're showing a lot of your cards, Princely," Big Jack drawled.

"No, I have no paranormal means of 'brain-washing' you, or of committing overt acts of violence against you, as you would find out all too soon. I can't allow Dr. Moribund to kill you, Big Jack, so — I'm offering to split up this world with you three ways. In essence, I am offering you partnership in, shall we say, Earth Salvage, Inc."

Big Jack said it first. I took longer, but I long ago admitted my weaknesses and occasional vacillation from my own patriotic ideals. I repeated Big Jack's words. "I want in," I said to the alien Soames. "*Done*," he said.

— JIM HARMON

THE PRIMITIVES

by FRANK HERBERT

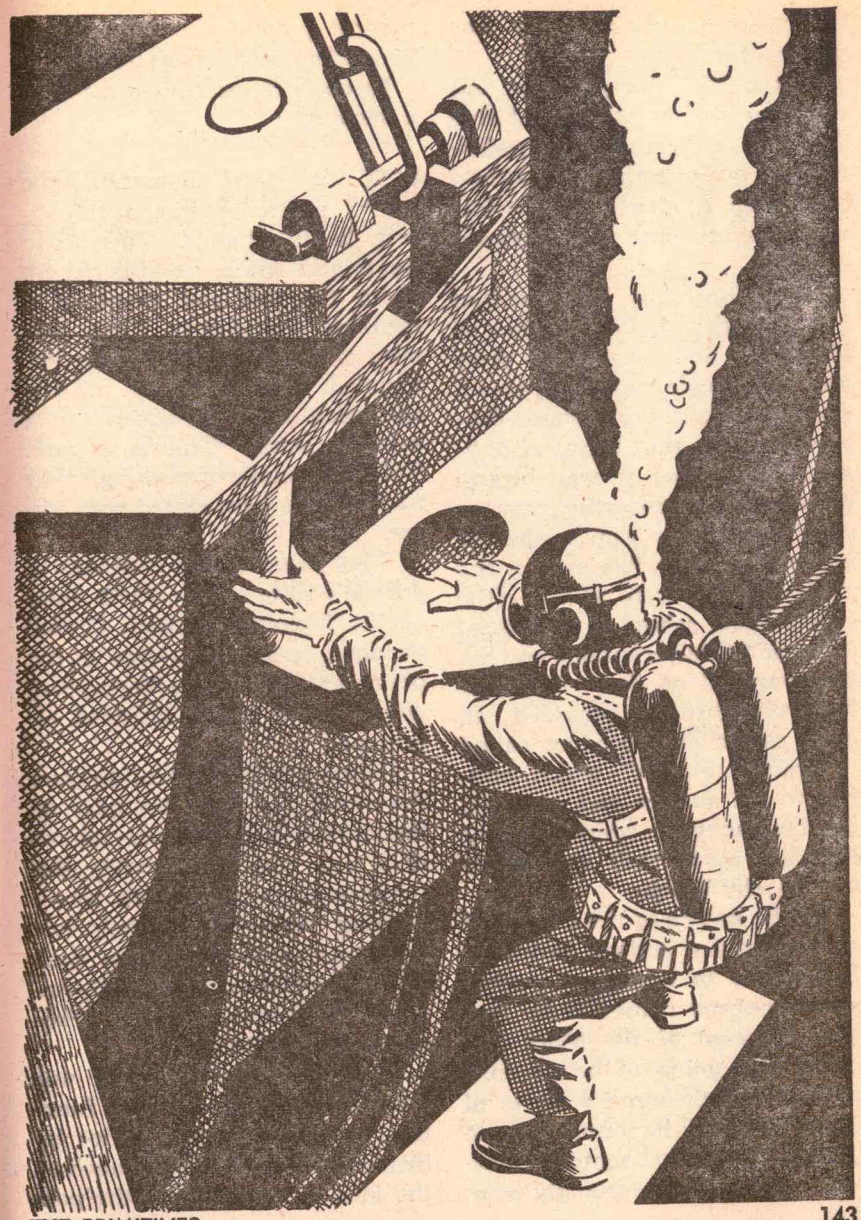
Illustrated by WOOD

It was the kind of crime a man could take pride in — heisting a diamond from Mars with a girl from the past!

I

The sinking of the Soviet propaganda ship for the sole purpose of stealing the Mars diamond was a typical Conrad Rumel (alias Swimmer) crime: a gigantic nose-thumbing for profit. And Swimmer had the gigantic nose for it, plus a hair line that crowded his eyebrows, small gray-green eyes, a chin that almost vanished into his neck and a wide thick-lipped mouth like a hungry sea bass.

When he was seventeen, Swimmer had decided his physical ugliness left him only one suitable career — crime. He came from a family noted for professional specialists — mathematicians, surgeons, physicists, teachers, biochemists. It was no surprise then that Swimmer chose



to specialize. His specialty was underwater crime.

He'd had his first gill mask and equalizer suit at the age of five (the gift of a father who preferred him out of sight) and there'd soon been no doubt that Swimmer was at home in his chosen element.

Good breeding had marked him, though: he drew the line at bloodshed and murder. If there was any single modus operandi stamp on Swimmer's crimes (beyond touches that betrayed physical cowardice) it was bizarre humor. It's noteworthy that he sank the Soviety ship in shallow water when only five men of the anchor watch were aboard (the others being ashore at an official Mexican fiesta-reception) and the five were all on deck. Swimmer had thoughtfully provided an open carton of a product called "Flotation Falsies" which bobbed to the surface and provided the bouyancy on which the five Russians made their way safely to a nearby beach.

By the nature of the crime and his subsequent actions, Swimmer had hoped to involve a professional mobster named Bime Jepson. Disposal of the Mars diamond was going to be no easy matter and Swimmer's sense of honor insisted he owed this to Jepson. Their last mutual enterprise had gone exceedingly sour, costing Jepson a bundle which he quoted at $288,764.51.

Jepson's reaction then came as a surprise.

"This is a diamond?" he sneered, staring at the object in his hands. The stone was bluish-white, cloud-surfaced, about the size and shape of a medium cantaloupe. "Are you nuts or something?" Jepson demanded. "This is . . . is . . ." His one-track mind struggled for a suitable word. "This is a rock. This is a chunk of nothing!" His narrow blue eyes glared with anger.

They stood in the bedroom of Jepson's suite on the 324th floor of the Mazatlan Hilton. Corner windows opened to a view of the ocean and city, colors blaring and gaudy in the bright Mexican afternoon.

Jepson lifted his attention from the stone. He fixed his gaze on the dark-haired oversize gnome of a man who had brought this unpleasantness. The man was a walking reminder of their last encounter — all that money sunk into an invention by one of Swimmer's professional uncles, Professor Amino Rumel.

Uncle Professor's project was a time machine of uncertain function. Apprised of the device by Swimmer, Jepson had conceived the idea of a sortie into the past

backed by a crew with modern arms, the object being to raid the treasury of Knossos. (One of Jepson's mistresses had read a work of fiction in which this treasure figured.)

After all those megabucks, Uncle Professor had pronounced the machine as requiring "much more development."

"It didn't work," was Jepson's summation. And he was a man who did not like to be thwarted. Only the fact that Uncle Professor was "one of them" (legitimate) and the latent hope that the device might yet be made to work had prevented Jepson from committing bloody violence. Now, here was this creep-nephew, Swimmer, back with more trouble.

Swimmer had read the signs of anger. He said: "Jep, I swear that's . . ."

"You swear nothing! This ain't no diamond! A diamond's something with . . . something you can . . ."

"Jep, let me explain about . . ."

"Ain't you been warned never to interrupt me, Swimmer?"

Swimmer retreated a short step toward the door. "Now, don't go getting excited, Jep."

Jepson threw the stone onto the unmade bed behind him. "A diamond!" he sneered.

"Jep, that rock's worth . . ."

"Sharrup!"

His heart pounding, Swimmer took two steps backward, stood pressed against the door facing Jepson. This was not going at all as he had anticipated.

"I should call in the boys and teach you a little manners," Jepson growled. "How many times I gotta tell you don't interrupt?" Jepson scowled. "Only reason the boys let you in was you told 'em you heisted a diamond too hot for you to handle. Everybody knows how big hearted I am. I'm here to help my friends with little matters like that. But I ain't here to help my friends with . . . with . . . I ain't here to be woke up every time some beachbum finds a big pebble what's good for nothing but tying around somebody's neck so they should sink!"

"Can I say something, Jep?" Swimmer pleaded.

"Say anything you want, but say it somewheres else. I want you should get outa here and —"

"Jep!" Swimmer pleaded.

"Interrupt me once more, Swimmer, and I lose my temper."

By its lack of inflection, Jepson's voice managed to convey a profound menace.

Swimmer nodded silently. He hadn't anticipated instant rage from Jepson. Everything depended on being able to explain.

"You think I don't recognize this rock?" Jepson asked.

Swimmer shook his head from side to side.

"This is the Mars diamond," Jepson said. "Diamond! It's the rock them Ruskie's brung back in their spaceship. It was in their floating museum out in the harbor just yesterday. I seen it there myself. Does that answer all your questions, Swimmer?"

"But it's worth maybe ten million dollars!" Swimmer blurted. "Everybody said . . ."

"It ain't worth ten Mexican cents! Didn't you see all them charts and things in with it?"

Swimmer patted a breast pocket of his permadry suit and a dollop of water trapped there spurted out onto the rug. He gulped, said: "I brought them, too. The diagrams, everything."

"Then you shoulda known better," Jepson snarled. "There ain't no diamond cutter in the world'd touch this thing. Ain't no cutter wouldn't recognize it in the first place. And in the second place, them charts show why this *diamond* can't be cut without it breaks into chips worth maybe two-bits apiece. It's impossible to cut this thing, you dumbhead! And in the third place, this is what they call a cultural relic of Mars what the Russkies and every cop in the world's gonna be looking for soon's they find it missing. And you hadda bring it here!"

For Jepson, this was a long speech. He stopped to collect his thoughts. *Stupid creep Swimmer!*

Swimmer stood trembling with the desire to speak and the fear of what might happen if he did.

Jepson looked out the window, returned a speculative stare to Swimmer. "How'd you heist it?"

"I sank the boat. While everybody was splashing around topside, I went in with a gill mask and burner, opened the case and took off across the bay. It was easy."

Jepson slapped his forehead with the heel of his right hand. "You sunk the boat!" He sighed. "Well, I'm gonna do you a favor. Not because I wanta, but because I hafta. I'm gonna see this *rock* finds its way back into the bay near the Russky boat like maybe it fell overboard. And you ain't never gonna mention this thing again, right?"

"Jep," Swimmer said, speaking with desperate urgency, "maybe I know a cutter."

Jepson studied him, interested in spite of the lessons from past experiences with Swimmer. "A cutter who could handle *this* rock? A cutter who'd even try it?"

"She'll work any rock, Jep. And she won't recognize it and she won't care where it came from."

"She?"

Swimmer wiped his forehead. He had Jepson's interest now. Maybe Jepson would come along after all.

"That's right, she," Swimmer said. "And there isn't a cutter in this world can hold a candle to her."

"I never heard of no dame cutter," Jepson said. "I din't think they had the nerves for it."

"This is a brand new one, Jep."

"A new cutter," Jepson mused. "A dame. Is she a looker?"

"I doubt it, but I've never seen her."

"You've never seen her, but you've got her?"

"I've got her."

"Awwww," Jepson said. He shook his head. "I find it interesting you have a new cutter on the string, but nobody can cut this rock. You seen them charts. The Russkies don't make mistakes like that. This rock is for nobody. It can't be cut."

"I think this cutter can do it," Swimmer said.

The stubborn set to Swimmer's mouth whetted Jepson's interest. It wasn't like Swimmer to be stubborn in the face of determined opposition.

"Where you got this cutter?" Jepson asked.

Swimmer wet his lips with his tongue. This was the ticklish part, Jepson's temper being what it was. "You remember my uncle Amino and his advice for you to be patient about . . ."

"Ahhh, hah!" Jepson barked. He pointed to the door. "Out! You hear me, creep? Out!"

"Jep, the time machine works!"

Silence dragged out for a dozen heartbeats while Swimmer wondered if he had timed that revelation correctly, and while Jepson reminded himself that this possibility was one of the reasons he hadn't obliterated Swimmer.

Presently, Jepson said: "It works?"

"I swear it, Jep. It works, but the controls aren't too . . . well, accurate. Sometimes my uncle says it balks and . . . it doesn't go precisely where you want."

"But it works?" Jepson demanded.

"It brought back this cutter," Swimmer said. "From perhaps twenty or thirty thousand years ago."

A muscle twitched on Jepson's left cheek and his jaw line went hard. "I thought you said your cutter dame was a expert."

Swimmer took a deep breath, wondering how he could explain paleolithic culture to a man like Jepson. The patois of the underworld didn't fit the job.

"You ain't got nothing to say?" Jepson asked.

"I'm quoting my uncle, who's a very truthful man," Swimmer said. "According to my uncle, the people of this dame's culture made all their tools out of stone. They have what my uncle calls an *intuition* about stones and working with them. He's the one said she could cut the Mars diamond."

Jepson frowned. "Did Uncle Professor fall off the legit? He put you up to this job?"

"Oh, no! None of my family know how I . . . ahh, make my living."

Jepson groped backward with one foot, found the edge of the bed, sat down. "How much more loot does Uncle Professor need to fix his machine?"

"You have it all wrong, Jep. It isn't a matter of loot. My uncle says there are local anomalies and force-time variations and that it very likely will be impossible ever to steer the machine very close to a time mark."

"But it works?"

"With these limitations."

"Then why ain't I heard about it? Thing like this, seems it'd be more important than any Mars diamond. Why ain't it big news?"

"My uncle's trying to determine if his force-time variation theory is correct. Besides, he has a plan to present his stone-age woman before a scientific meeting and he's collecting supporting evidence. And he says he's having trouble teaching her how to talk. She thinks he's some kind of god."

"I'm beginning to be very interested in what you tell me," Jepson said. "So say some more."

"You're not mad any more, Jep?"

"I've said unkind words. So? Maybe I'm entitled. Leave us now say that interest has overcome my unhappiness. You sure your uncle didn't plan this little job?"

Swimmer shook his head. "Uncle Amino wouldn't take any part of action like this. He's cubed. No, this was mine. After our — you know — I was on the shorts. I figured to do this one for the ready and cut you in because . . . well, I owe it to you. You'll get your bundle back with interest. And this is a job with style, Jep. The Mars diamond — impossible to cut. But we cut it."

"And who's to believe?" Jepson said. He nodded. "You think this gal of your Uncle Professor's can do it?"

"I ran into Uncle Amino up in Long Beach. He was there buying equipment when the Russian ship made port and the Mars diamond was big news. Uncle Amino read this part about it being impossible to cut and he laughed. He said his gal could

cut it into a watch fob for Premier Sherdakov if she wanted. That's the first I knew about the gal and about the machine working. He's been keeping it pretty secret, as I explained. Well . . . what he said, that's what gave me the idea. I questioned my uncle; he was serious. This stone-age gal can do it. He insists she can."

Jepson nodded. "If he says this cutter can do it, perhaps . . . just perhaps, mind you, we could do business. It don't go until I see for myself, though."

Swimmer allowed himself a deep sigh. "Well, naturally, Jep."

Jepson pursed his lips. "I tell you a thing, Swimmer. You ain't done this entirely outa kindness for me. You heist this rock, you maybe start a international incident, but you ain't got no way to get the rock outa Mexico."

Swimmer stared at his feet, suppressed a smile. "I guess I didn't fool you a bit, Jep. I have to get the rock up north. I have to get the cutter away from my uncle and I need a place where she can work. I need organization. You have organization."

"Organization is expensive," Jepson said.

Swimmer looked up. "We deal?"

"Seventy-five and twenty-five," Jepson said.

"Ahhh, Jep! I was thinking fifty-five, forty-five." At the look in Jepson's eyes, he said: "Sixty-forty?"

"Sharrup before I make it eighty-twenty," Jepson said. "Just be glad you got a friend like me who'll help when you need."

"There's a few million bucks in this thing," Swimmer said, fighting to keep the hurt and anger from his voice. "The split's —"

"The split stands," Jepson said. "Seventy-five and twenty-five. We don't argue. Besides, I'm nuts even to listen to you. Every time you say dough I buy trouble. This time, I better get some of my investment back. Now, you go out and tell Harpsy to slip the dolls some coin and send 'em packing. We gotta concentrate on getting this rock over the border. And *that* is gonna take some doing."

II

The chalet nestled furtively wren-brown within the morning shadows of pines and hemlocks on a lake island. The lake itself was a sheet of silvered glass reflecting upside down images of the island and a dock on its south shore. Two airboats had been brought up under the trees and hidden beneath instiflage netting.

Seated in shadows above the

dock, a man with a blast-pellet swagrifle puffed nervously on an *alerto* cigaret. Two other men, similarly armed and similarly drugged to eye-darting sensitivity, patrolled the island's opposite shore.

The sounds of an argument could be heard coming from within what had been the chalet's dining room and now was a jury-rigged workshop. It was only one of many arguments that had consumed considerable time during the past five days of harried flight northward from Mazatlan.

Swimmer, for one, was sick of the arguing, but he knew of no non-violent way to silence his uncle. Things were not going at all as he had planned. First, there had been the disconcerting discovery that a Mexican boy had identified him from mug files as the man who had walked out of the water wearing a normal business suit (permadry) and gill mask and carrying a "white rock."

Jepson's organization had smuggled Swimmer over the border concealed in a freight load of canteloupes. One of the canteloupes had been hollowed out to hold the diamond.

Next, Swimmer's uncle — alerted by the front-page hullabaloo — had absolutely balked at cooperating in anything his wayward nephew wanted.

Jepson had lost his temper, had given terse orders to his boys and here they all were now — somewhere in Canada or northern Minnesota.

Arguing.

Only one of the dining room's occupants had failed to participate in the arguments. She answered to the name of Ob (although her own people had called her Kiunlan, which translated as Graceful Shape).

Kiunlan-Op stood five feet one inch tall. Professor Amino Rumel's lab scales had placed her weight at one hundred twenty-seven pounds nine ounces. Her blue-black hair had been drawn back and tied with a red ribbon. She had a low forehead and large, wide-set blue-gray eyes. Her nose was flat and with large nostrils. Both chin and mouth were broad, the lips thick. Fifteen welted red scars down the left side of her face told the initiated that she had seen fifteen summers and had not yet littered. A simple brown pullover dress belted at the waist covered her heavy-legged body, but failed to conceal the fact that she had four breasts.

This feature had first attracted Swimmer's fascinated attention. He had then noted her hands. These bore thick horn callouses over palms and fingers and along

the inner edges of the fingers — even occasionally on the backs of the fingers, especially around the nails.

Ob stood now beside a bench that had replaced the chalet dining room's table. One of her hands rested on the back of a high stool drawn up to the bench. The Mars diamond lay on a cushioned square of black velvet atop the bench. The stone's milky surface reflected a faint yellow from the spotlight hanging close to it on a gooseneck.

As the argument progressed, Ob's attention shifted fearfully from speaker to speaker. First, there were many angry noises from Gruaaack, the super devil-god who was called Proff Ess Orr. Then came equally loud and angry noises from the big stout devil-god called Jepp, the one whose eyes blazed with the threat of unknown terrors and who obviously was superior over all the others in this place.

Sometimes there were softer sounds from the smaller creature who had accompanied the devil-god Jepp. The status of this creature was not at all clear. He appeared to Ob to be vaguely human. The face was not at all unpleasant. And he seemed to share some of Ob's fears. She thought perhaps the other creature was a human snared like herself by these terrible beings.

"Yes, she's a genius at shaping stones!" Uncle Professor blared. "Yes! Yes! But she's still a primitive creature whose understanding of what we want is definitely limited."

He paced back and forth in front of Ob and the bench, a bald, skinny little man trembling with indignation.

Thieves, assassins, kinappers, he thought. *How could Conrad have become associated with such a crew? Coming on him in his lab that way, crating his equipment without a by-your-leave and spiriting him off to this remote place.*

"You through yakking?" Jepson asked.

"No, I am not," Uncle Professor said. He pointed to the diamond on the bench. "That . . . that is no ordinary diamond. That is the Mars diamond. Turning such a priceless stone over to . . ."

"Sharrup!" Jepson said.

Creeps with their stupid arguments, he thought.

Uncle Professor glanced at his nephew. There's been some bad moments during the past few days of their furtive journey. Again, the Professor wondered about nephew Conrad. Could the boy have been deceived by Jepson? The man was a criminal and that obviously was where all his money came from — all the

money provided to develop the time machine. Was it possible this Jepson had dragged poor Conrad into this nefarious scheme through some terrible threat?

In a quiet voice, Jepson said: "Did you or din't you tell your nephew the Swimmer here that your gal could cut this Mars rock?"

"Yes, I said that; I said she could cut any stone, but . . ."

"So awright. I want she should cut."

"Will you please try to understand?" the Professor pleaded. "Ob undoubtedly can *cut* your stone. But any idea of facets and deriving the maximum brilliance from a given gem — this probably is outside her understanding. She's accustomed to *functional* artifacts, to simpler purposes in her . . ."

"Simple, Schmimple!" Jepson snarled. "You're stalling. What's it, huh? D'you lie about this dame? Alla stories I ever see 'bout creeps like her, the guys did the stone cutting and the dames sat around caves hiding from tigers they got teeth six feet long."

"We're going to have to revise our previous hypotheses about stone-age divisions of labor," the Professor said. "As nearly as I can make out from Ob, women made the tools and weapons while the men did the hunting. Their society was matriarchal with certain women functioning somewhat like priestesses. Cave-Mothers, I believe it would translate."

"Yeah? I ain't so sure. What about them things?"

"Things?" The Professor peered at Jepson with a puzzled frown.

"She's got four of 'em!" Jepson barked. "I think you're trying to pass off some freak as . . ."

"Oh," the Professor said. Four, yes. That's very curious. About one in fourteen million human female births today demonstrate a condition of more than two mammaries. Heretofore, there've been three major hypotheses: one, mutation; two, absorbed sibling, and three, ahh . . . throwback. Ob is living proof of the third case. Multiple births were more frequent in her time, you see? It's quite simple: female were required to suckle more infants. A survival characteristic that gradually disappeared as multiple births declined."

"You don't say," Jepson growled.

"George was particularly elated," the Professor said, "since he had maintained the third case."

"George? Who is George?" Jepson demanded.

"My associate, Professor George Elwin," the Professor said.

"You didn't tell me about no George," Jepson said. "When I was sinking all that loot in your stupid machine, there wasn't no George around. Who's he, your new mark?"

"Mark?" The Professor glanced at Swimmer back to Jepson.

Swimmer tried to swallow in a dry throat, sensing how near Jepson was to a violent explosion of rage. Swimmer found it odd that his uncle couldn't see the danger.

"I don't really see where my associate is any concern of yours," the Professor said. "But if . . ."

"How many people know about that *time* machine—" Jepson pointed to the large crate in the corner behind him — " and about this Ob dame?"

"Well, you know, of course, and . . ."

"Don't get smart with me, creep! Who knows?"

The Professor stared at him, aware at last of the suppressed rage. Professor Rumel's mouth felt suddenly dry, Criminals such as this could be most violent — murderously so, at times.

"Well, aside from those of us here in this room, there are Professor Elwin and very likely two or three of George's assistants. I didn't impose any special strictures of secrecy other than to suggest we'd wait for the complete investigation before publishing our . . ."

"How come this George?" Jepson demanded.

"Well, my dear sir, *someone* with the proper training had to go to Northern France and seek the archeological authentication. Inevitably, there will be cries of fraud, you know."

Jepson screwed his face into a puzzled frown. Archeo . . . What's this Northern France bit?"

The Professor's face came alight with the glow of a man launched on his favorite subject. "You may not know it, Mr. Jepson, but paleolithic artifacts bear markings that are, in some respects, as distinctive as the brush-strokes of a master painter. Now, under strictly controlled archeological conditions, we're seeking some of Ob's work in situ — where she originally made it."

"Yeah?" Jepson said.

"You see, Mr. Jepson, as nearly as we can determine, Ob came from the region just east of Cambrai in Northern France. This is something more than an educated guess. We have several pieces of evidence — a scrap of obsidian which Ob — you see how I got her name . . . my little joke: Ob for obsidian . . . well, this piece of obsidian she carried on her when we picked her up is of a type common in the region we've

selected. There was also plant pollen on her person, types of clay soil in the mud on her feet and a photograph of the background landscape which we took as we snatched Ob from . . ."

"Yeah," Jepson said. "So only a few of us know about her."

"Quite," the Professor said. "I'm sure you can see why we decided to delay any publication and prevent idle speculation. Nothing destroys the essential character of scientific endeavor more than Sunday supplement romanticizing."

"Yeah," Jepson said. "Just like you tol' me."

"And there's the ethical problem," the Professor said. "Some people may question the morality of our bringing this human being out of her natural habitat in the past. I, personally, incline to the theory that Ob's timestream diverted from ours at the moment of her removal from her —and our — personal past. However, if you . . ."

"Yeah, yeah!" Jepson barked.

Keerist! he thought. *The old creep could yak all day about nothing. Big words! Big words! Didn't mean a thing.*

III

Swimmer looked from one to the other and marveled at the low level of communication between his uncle and Jepson. The Professor might just as well be talking to Ob for all the sense he was making. Swimmer fingered the gill mask in his pocket, thinking of it as a back-door way of escape should things get completely out of hand here.

"As I was about to say," the Professor said, "if you consider the equation of historical interference as one element of your total . . ."

"Yeah!" Jepson exploded. "That's very interesting. But what I wanna know is why can't I show this Ob dame a rock and say I want some other rock cut likewise and such and so? She could do the thing like that, ain't it?"

The Professor sighed and threw up his hands. He'd thought he'd penetrated Jepson's strange jargon, conveyed some of the problems to the man, but not a bit of it appeared to have gotten through.

"Din't you say she was a expert?" Jepson demanded.

"Given time," The Professor said in a patient, long-suffering tone, "I do believe Ob could make one of the finest diamond cutters in the world. We've a few industrial diamond chips in the lab and part of our examination of her involved seeing what she could do with them. She needed no more than a glance to see the

natural cleavage lines. No fumbling or mistakes. Just one practical glance. But I wish to warn you — the measure of her understanding may be seen in the fact she thought the diamonds too hard for practical purposes."

"But she worked them rocks okay?"

"If that's what you want to call it."

"Did she have any better tools than we got here?" Jepson motioned to the rack at the rear of the bench, the cutter's vice clamped to one end.

"Not as good."

"She know how to use them tools?"

"She has a natural tool sense and she's quite awed by our equipment. She's an intuitive worker. You might say she *lives* the stone. Indeed, she appears to project ideas of life and animism into the stones she works."

"Yeah," Jepson said. "So let's get busy." He turned and studied Ob.

She lowered her gaze under the pressure of that stare from the angry devil-god. Ob felt she understood what was wanted of her. She had a much better grasp of the language than she had permitted the devil-gods to suspect. The training imparted by her Cave Mother fitted well here: *"When dealing with devil-gods and spirits, give them the obedience and subservience they demand. But dissemble, always dissemble."*

A pang of homesickness shot through her and her lower lip trembled, but she suppressed the emotion. A female trained to the cave-motherhood and the creation of living tools did not give way, even before devil-gods. And there was work to do here, creation for which she had been trained. Beyond her understanding of the devil-gods' words, there were much more direct ways of divining their desires. They had brought her into the presence of their wondrous tools and they had set up the stone as for a sacrifice. The stone was one of the difficult, very hard ones, and its grain had been criss-crossed and twisted by unimaginable forces. But Ob could see the points of entry and the manner in which the work should progress.

"Tell her what she should do," Jepson said.

"I refuse to have any more to do with this," the Professor said.

Swimmer blanched.

"Nobody," Jepson said in a low, cold voice, "but nobody refuses what I say do. You, Uncle Professor, will get across to your cutter dame what it is she should do. You will do this or I will permit you to watch my boys cut up your creep nephew here into exceedingly small pieces. We wouldn't want the fishes should choke while they are disposing of him. Do I make myself plain?"

"You wouldn't dare," the Professor said. But even as he spoke he sensed that Jepson would indeed dare. The man was a criminal monster . . . and they were at his mercy.

Swimmer stood trembling. Now, he regretted ever having started this exploit. The gill mask in his pocket was useless. Jepson would never let him get off this island alive if there were the slightest upset in his plans.

Grudgingly, the Professor said: "Just what is it you want me to do, Mr. Jepson?"

"We been through all that!" Jepson snarled. "Get your dame started on this rock. The bigdomes say it can't be cut. So let's see her cut it."

"It's on your head," the Professor said.

"Yeah," Jepson said. "So do."

Swimmer took a deep breath as the Professor turned toward Ob. It was obvious to Swimmer now that Jepson had plans of his own concerning the cutter dame. The Mars diamond was merely a preliminary. Swimmer suspected he shortly would have no place in Jepson's plans. And people who had no place in Jepson's plans sometimes disappeared.

As these thoughts went through Swimmer's mind, Ob looked at him with such a weight of shared understanding that he wondered if the ancients had possessed a telepathic faculty which had been lost in the genetic ebb and flow of the ensuing eons. And he wondered suddenly at the terrors this poor creature must be undergoing — and hiding so well. She'd been snatched from her place and time, taken forever from her friends. There could be no sending her back; the time machine couldn't be controlled that well. And here she was now, in Jepson's hands.

Something would have to be done about Jepson, Swimmer thought. He shivered with fear of what he had to do . . . and the fear of what would happen if he failed in any step.

"Ob," the Professor said.

Ob looked at Gruaaack, trying to convey by her waiting silence the almost frantic desire to please. Thank whatever benign spirits might hover near this place, the devil-gods were through fighting, she thought.

"Ob," the Professor repeated, "look at this stone." He pointed to the Mars diamond on its bed of black velvet.

Ob looked at the stone.

The Professor spoke slowly and distinctly: "Ob can you work this stone?"

Such a difficult stone, Ob thought. *But there was a way. The devil-god Gruaaack must know this. It was a test then. The devil-god was testing her.*

"Ob. Work. Stone," she said.

Swimmer marveled at the throaty quality of her voice.

"First, you must cut off a small piece of the stone," the Professor said.

Yes, it is a test, Ob thought. *Everyone knows the work progresses a small chip at a time. This was such a difficult stone, though. The first cut would be somewhat larger than usual. Still, the cut would remove a small enough piece.*

"Small. Piece," she agreed.

"Do you have the tools you need?" the Professor asked. He indicated the vise, jeweler's mallet and wedges on the bench.

Another test, Ob thought.

"Need. Wa. Ter," she said. "Need. Ongh-ongh."

"What the devil's a ong-ong?" Jepson asked. "I never heard no cutter ask for a ong-ong."

"I've no idea," the Professor said. "She's never used the term before." He turned a puzzled frown on Jepson. "Surely you must see now how limited our communication really is. There exists such a wide gap in . . ."

"So get 'er a ong-ong!" Jepson barked.

Ob looked from one devil-god to the other. They must have ongh-ongh, she thought. Wherever there was fire there was ongh-ongh. She looked at Swimmer, seeing only the fear in him. He must be another human like herself. She turned her attention to Gruaaack. Could this be another test? It was very puzzling. She picked up the Mars diamond in one horn-calloused hand, drew a finger along it. "Ongh-ongh."

The Professor shrugged. "Oh, you get ongh-ongh," he said.

Ob sighed. *Another test.*

She clasped the Mars diamond in both hands headed for the chalet's living room. There was a fire-hole in the living room; she had smelled it and seen it.

The living room had been furnished with heavy rustic furniture and Mexican fabrics. The colorful upholstery filled Ob with awe. *What manner of animal could have produced such skins?* she wondered. *Devil-god land must possess many terrors.*

Two of Jepson's *boys* sat at a round table near the windows overlooking the lake. They were eating and playing poker. A fire had been layed in the stone fireplace and Ob headed directly toward it, trailed by Jepson, the Professor and Swimmer.

The *boys* looked up from their game and one said: "Get a load of that shape. Gives me the creeps."

"Yeah," his companion said, and looked at Jepson. "What's she doin' with the rock, boss?"

Jepson spoke with an offhand, casual tone, keeping his attention on Ob. "Sharrup."

The *boys* shrugged and went back to their game.

Ob knelt at the fireplace, scooped out a small handful of ashes. "Ongh-ongh," she said. She rested the diamond on the hearth, spat into the ashes, kneaded a bit of black mud which she transferred to the diamond. Her horny hands worked the mud into the stone's surface.

"What's she doon?" Jepson demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know," the Professor said. "But ongh-ongh appears to be ashes."

Jepson fixed his attention on the diamond which was now a black-streaked mess. Ob picked it up, walked to the room's east windows. She lifted the diamond to the sun, studied it.

Yes, she thought, *the light of Mighty Fire passed through this stone and was dimmed and cut into strange patterns by the ongh-ongh.* She rubbed the stone, removing some of its black cover, wiped her hands on the brown dress, again held the diamond to Mighty Fire. It was as she had expected, the technique taught her by the Cave Mother. Lines of ongh-ongh on the stone's surface betrayed tiny flaws and these lines provided a fixed reference against which to study the interior contours.

"I believe this must be some sort of religious prelude to the actual work," the Professor said.

Swimmer looked at him, glanced at Jepson, then moved up behind Ob. He bent, peered up at the stone in her hands, seeing the coruscating light and the patterns revealed by the ash coating.

Ob turned, seeing him close there. She ventured a shy smile which was quickly erased as she darted glances at Jepson and the Professor.

Swimmer straightened, grinned.

Again, he was rewarded by that shy smile. It gave a momentary lightness to her heavy features.

"Strange," the Professor said. "Sun worship, very likely. I must delve into her religious beliefs more . . ."

"When's she gonna cut out this crap and get to cutting?" Jepson demanded.

"Ob. Work," she said.

She turned, led the way back into the workroom, returned the stone to its square of velvet.

Swimmer started to move up close, was stopped by a hand gripping his shoulder. He turned, looked up at Jepson.

"I want you should stay back outa the way, boy," Jepson said.

Swimmer shivered. He had sensed ultimate rejection in the man's voice.

A bird chose this moment to sing outside the room's south window: "Willow, will-will, willow."

Ob looked to the window, smiled. The birdsong was familiar, a voice she understood. He was saying: "This is my ground, my bush." She turned, met Jepson's harsh stare.

"Cut that damn rock!" Jepson said.

She cringed. There was death in that voice. She had heard it distinctly.

The Professor adjusted the spotlight above the bench, touched Ob's arm.

She looked up, surprised to find fear in his eyes, too. Gru-*aaack afraid?* All was not as it appeared with the devil-gods! Her mind churning, she bent to the stone, rested it in the vise-stand, turned it — gently, precisely — locked it in place. *Such wonderful tools they had, these devil-gods.*

Jepson moved around beside the bench where he could command a clear view of her work. He wiped his hands against his sides to remove the perspiration. He had watched cutters at their work before. Time always seemed to stretch out during that first cut — dragging, dragging — while tensions mounted and the cutter drew on the nervous energy to make the single tap . . . just right.

Expecting this, Jepson found Ob's actions stupefying.

IV

She searched a moment among the wedges racked on the bench, selected one and rested it on the diamond. She lifted the mallet in her other hand.

Jepson waited for the long drawn-out positioning and shifting of the wedge. He jumped as she brought the mallet down without changing that first, apparently casual placement.

Crack!

A long narrow piece of the Mars diamond fell to the bench.

Crack!

Another, slightly smaller this time.

Crack!

Jepson came out of his shock as a third chip clattered to the bench. "Wait!" he shrieked.

Crack!

Ob eased the vise, turned the diamond slightly.

Crack!

"Tell her to wait!" Jepson bleated.

Crack!

The Professor found his voice. "Ob!"

She turned, still holding mallet and wedge firmly, waited for Gruaaack's command.

"Stop work," the Professor said.

Dutifully she lowered her hands.

Jepson pursed his lips, made a low sound: "Whoooooeeee." He picked up the largest chip, turned it in the light. "The rock that couldn't be cut, eh? Whoooo-eeee." He dropped the chip to the bench, drew a dart pistol from a shoulder holster, pointed it at Swimmer.

"No hard feelings, Swimmer," he said. "But you are excess baggage. And Uncle Professor needs a lesson that he should do like he's told."

"You wouldn't!" the Professor whispered.

Jepson darted a glance at the Professor.

In this instant, Swimmer acted from desperation, leaping sideways and kicking at the gun hand. Muscles hardened from years of swimming slammed the toe of his shoe into Jepson's hand. The gun went pffwt! as it left the hand. A dart buried itself in the ceiling. The gun clattered across the room.

Ob stood for a frozen second, horrified by Swimmer's action against the devil-god. But she had heard the death in the devil-god's voice and she knew that even the *will-will willow* bird would attack a human if given enough reason. Why then couldn't a human attack a devil-god?

As Jepson opened his mouth to call his *boys*, Ob brought a fist crashing down onto his head. There was a sound like the dropping of a ripe melon and a sharp snap of Jepson's neck broke. He collapsed with a soft thud.

Swimmer dove for the fallen dart pistol, scooped it up, crouched facing the door to the living room, listening with every sense for a sign that the disturbance had been heard.

"My word!" the Professor said.

Only the ordinary sounds of the house penetrated the room — footsteps from one of the bedrooms overhead, the creak of bedsprings, a faucet being turned on, somebody whistling.

Swimmer turned.

Ob stood staring down at Jepson. A look of dawning wonder covered her face.

Swimmer crossed to Jepson, bent, examined him.

"Dead," he said. He straightened, smiled reassuringly at Ob. It was a reassurance he did not feel, however. "We're in the soup, Uncle," he said. "If any of the boys come in . . ."

The Professor fought down a shudder. "What shall we do?"

"We have one chance," Swimmer said. "Ob, help me get this carcass behind your bench." He bent, started to drag Jepson's body.

Gently, Ob brushed him aside, lifted Jepson's body with one hand through the belt. The dead man's head lolled; his arms dragged on the floor.

Swimmer swallowed, indicated where he wanted the body deposited. They propped Jepson in a corner, moved the bench to conceal him.

"My word," the Professor whispered. "She's strong as an ox!"

"Now listen carefully," Swimmer said. "Ob must go right on working as though nothing had happened. I'll try to get into the lake. If I can, once under water, I can get away and bring help." He passed Jepson's dart pistol to the Professor. "Keep this in your pocket. Don't use it unless you have to."

"This is dreadful," the Proffessor said.

"It'll be more dreadful if you don't do this just the way I say," Swimmer rasped. "Now, put that gun in your pocket."

The Professor gulped, obeyed.

"Now get her back to work," Swimmer said.

The Professor nodded, faced Ob. "You . . . work . . . stone," he said.

She remained motionless, studying him, wondering at the tone of command the human had used against this devil-god. Could a human command devil-gods?

"Please, Ob," Swimmer said. "Work the stone."

Something near worship was in her eyes as she looked at Swimmer. "You. Want. Ob. Work?" she asked.

"You work," Swimmer said. He patted her arm.

Again that shy smile touched her mouth. She turned back to the bench and the diamond. "Ob. Work?" she asked.

Swimmer looked at his uncle. The man's eyes appeared glazed with shock.

"Uncle?" Swimmer said.

The Professor shook his head, met Swimmer's eyes with something like attention.

"If anyone asks for Jep," Swimmer said, "he went for a walk and left you to supervise Ob cutting the rock. Got that?"

The professor gulped. "I quite understand, Conrad. I must dissemble, tell falsehoods. But do hurry. This is most distasteful."

Crack!

Ob chipped another piece from the diamond.

Crack!

Swimmer permitted himself a deep breath. He had no time to

be afraid or remember that he was a physical coward. The lives of his uncle and this strangely attractive primitive woman depended on him. He composed his features, slipped out of the room and down the side passage to the kitchen. It was empty, but someone had left a pot of water boiling. A spicy steam odor followed him across the room as he left himself out the back door.

A soft breeze rustled the pines overhead. He looked up, checked the position of the sun—still forenoon. There was motion along the shore to his right and left—two guards.

Swimmer forced himself to a casual, strolling pace toward the lake, aiming for a point midway between the guards. A fallen tree reached across the sand into the water there, its dead limbs sprayed out into air and water. He sat down on the sand beside the tree and within inches of the water, tossed a cone into the lake as though in idle play.

The guards ignored him after one searching glance.

Swimmer waited, wondering why he found Ob so attractive. He decided at last that she was the only woman who'd ever really looked at him without some degree of revulsion.

The guards strolled toward him, turned and patrolled away. Both had their backs to him now.

Swimmer whipped out his gill mask, brought it down over his head, slipped into the water among the tree's branches, submerged. Years of practice made the action almost noiseless.

Slowly, he worked himself out into the lake, staying close to the bottom. His permadry suit billowed around him, and he pulled the hidden cords to tighten it.

Presently he was in deep water. He twisted his shoe heels. Flippers emerged from the toes. With a strong, steady stroke, he struck out for the opposite shore, guiding himself by the compass on the back of his wristwatch.

Strange emotions churned in him, not the least being a sense of cleansing at the realization that he was cutting himself off from his criminal past. The code was explicit: you did not inform on your fellows—no matter the provocation.

But he had to inform. Otherwise a woman who was suddenly very important to him might die.

IV

When Swimmer looked back on it, that afternoon which the authorities referred to as "the day we broke up the Jepson Gang" contained shadows of dreamlike unreality criss-crossed with currents of profound immediacy.

There was the comparative quiet of the lake crossing under water. That was routine and hardly counted. He emerged around a point hidden from the island and there was a brief dog-trot through trees and buckbrush to a dirt track, its sides piled high with duff blown there by skimmer fans. The track led to a rural road where he was picked up by a farm truck with outsize aprons and a hover-blast like a hurricane.

The face of the farmer failed to register—but his voice, a whining twang, lingered for years, and there was a dark brown mole over the second knuckle of his right hand. It seemed important to Swimmer, reflecting upon it later, that the farmer was hauling a load of cabbage which smelled of fresh dirt.

Worry over Ob kept Swimmer jittery and on the edge of the truck's seat. The farmer called him "neighbor" and complained about the price of fertilizer. The man asked Swimmer only one question: "Where y' going, neighbor?"

"To town."

Town, according to a sign at its edge, was Ackerville, population 12,908. The farmer dropped Swimmer across the street from a tall building which obviously dated from before the turn of the century: It presented a monotonous face of glass and aluminum. A plaque over the entrance revealed that it was the administrative center for Crane County.

A whistle hooted for noon as Swimmer entered the building and followed arrow signs to the Sheriff's Office. He was to remember the place afterward chiefly for the smell of its halls (pine disinfectant) and the tall, skinny sheriff in a conservative business suit and western hat, who said as Swimmer entered the office:

"You'd be Conrad Rumel. Ralph Abernathy just called from his truck and said he brought you into town."

The fact that a farmer in Northern Minnesota could identify him that easily helped Swimmer to understand the terrifying efficiency in which he was abruptly immersed. Armed deputies appeared in the door behind him. They appeared surprised that he carried no weapons. He was hustled into a maple-paneled office that looked out through a wall of windows onto the street corner where the farmer had dropped him.

Ralph Abernathy. There was no face in his memory to go with the name. Swimmer wondered how he could've ridden in the truck with the farmer and not remember the face.

Oh! The danger!

The Sheriff wanted to know about the Mars diamond.

Swimmer had to repeat his story three times for the Sheriff and deputies, another time for a bald, white-bearded fat man identified as the County Prosecutor. They seemed unconcerned about the urgency, kept dragging out new questions.

Abruptly, there were many more men in the room. Sheriff and County Prosecutor faded into the background.

The newcomers deferred to a Wallace MacPreston, a thin little rail not over five feet two inches tall, iron gray hair and a wide mouth set in a perpetual half-smile that never reached his large blue eyes.

"I am a special assistant to the President," MacPherson said.

Swimmer didn't have to ask *President of what?*

MacPreston then launched into his own line of questioning. Some were the same questions the Sheriff and deputies had asked, but MacPreston was also concerned about *how* Swimmer had sunk the Soviet propaganda ship. Was Swimmer aware he'd cracked the ship in half? Had that been his intention? What had guided him in placement of the explosive charges? How large was each charge? Why? What type of detonator? How far had he retreated to avoid the compression shock? What clues in the ship's design had betrayed its weak points? What particular burner had he chosen to cut open the diamond box? Why had he selected that particular time for the operation?

Gradually, Swimmer grew aware of faces in the crowd around MacPreston. One particularly caught his attention: a square-faced hulk of a man at MacPreston's left — eyes like brown caverns above a hooked nose, dark straw hair wisping away to twin bald spots at the temples. This man betrayed an obvious interest in the details of how Swimmer had sunk the ship.

But none of these people appeared to grasp the urgency, the danger to Ob . . . and Uncle Amino.

MacPreston went over Swimmer's story . . . and over it . . . and over it . . . and over it.

The position of the diamond box—how had that guided him in placement of the explosives?

"Look!" Swimmer suddenly raged. "Don't any of you realize what'll happen if Jepson's boys find out he's dead?"

"Jepson's boys aren't going anywhere," MacPreston said.

"But they'll kill Ob . . . and my uncle," Swimmer said.

"Doubtful," MacPreston said.

"Now, about this Ob. You say your uncle picked her up with a *time* machine?"

Swimmer had to explain then about the time machine, Jepson's money, about the break-through, the inaccurate controls. With every new question to answer, he could feel time running out for Ob and his uncle.

"Time machine," MacPreston sneered.

The hook-nosed man tugged at MacPreston's sleeve. MacPreston looked up, said: "Yeah, Mish?"

"Outside," the man said. "Wanta talk." They left the room.

More time raced past. Swimmer began to lose all hope.

MacPreston and his companion returned followed by an Army general and a Ranger colonel. The Colonel was speaking as they entered: "Three hundred and eighty men, counting the single-scooters and manjets, plus the twenty-five flying tanks the Marines are sending; that should do it."

"What about him?" the General asked, and he nodded toward Swimmer.

"Rumel goes with us," MacPreston said. "You heard what the President said."

"We still have three hours of daylight," the Colonel said. "That's plenty of time."

"Do you need transportation?" the General asked.

"We'll use our limousine," MacPreston said.

"Stay high and out of it until we send the signal," the General said. "I don't suppose you're armored."

"A Presidential limousine—you're joking!" MacPreston said.

"Yeah, well I still want you out of it until the shooting's over," the General said. "No telling what armament a mob like that'll have."

"What shooting?" Swimmer asked.

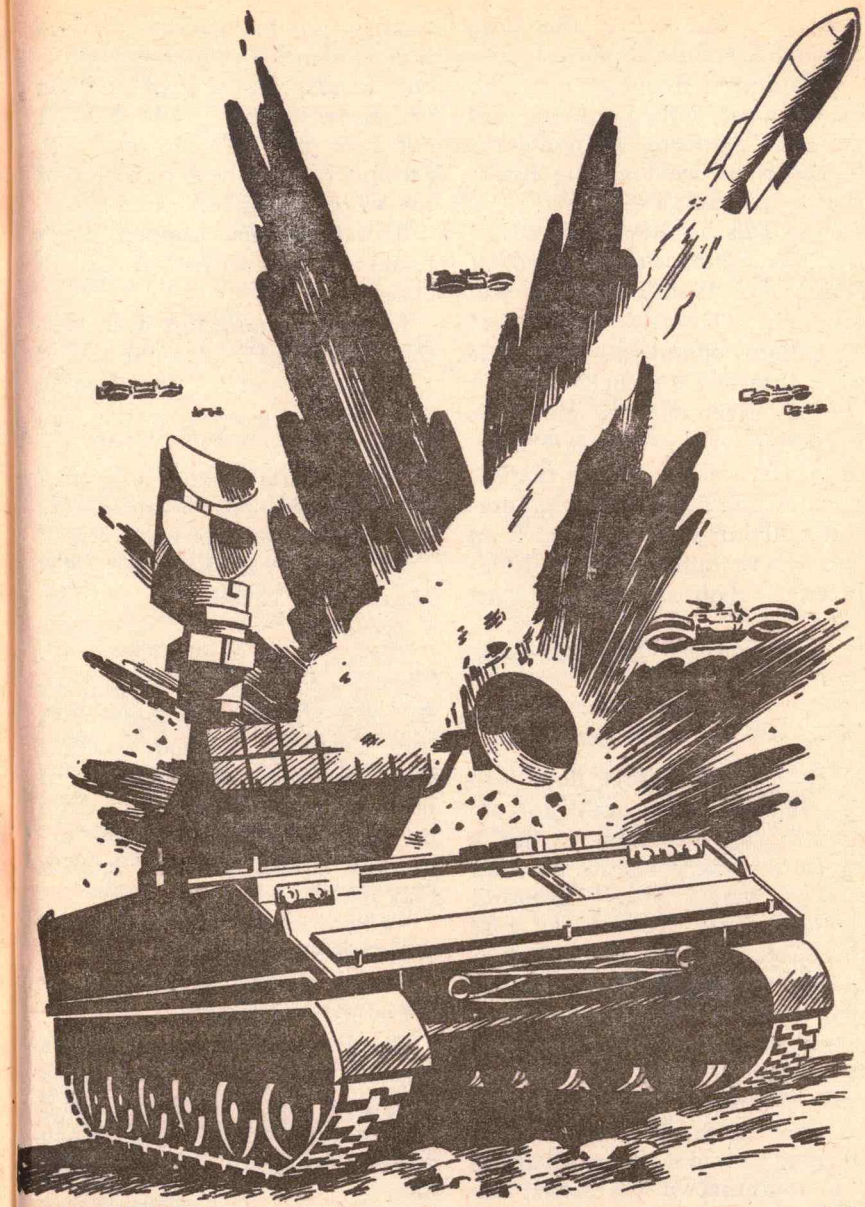
"We're going in and rescue your uncle and your stone-age woman friend," MacPreston said. He shook his head. "Time machine."

Swimmer took two deep breaths, said: "You know where they are?"

"We have a plan of the house from the architect," MacPreston said. He started to turn away, looked back at Swimmer. "One of Mish's boys just handed me the damndest report I've ever seen in my life—from a Professor Elwin in Cambrai, France. You know this Elwin?"

"I know who he is," Swimmer said. And he stilled his own questions in the hope these people would launch themselves into their promised action.

"Time machine," MacPreston



muttered, but there was awe rather than doubt in his voice.

Swimmer felt something grab his left wrist, looked down to find the wrist connected by handcuffs to the right wrist of the hook-nosed companion — *Mish.*

"I'm Mischa Levinsky, CID," the man said, staring hard at Swimmer. "Wanta talk to you sometime, Rumel, about that Mazatlan operation. For one man, that was a dilly."

CID, Swimmer thought. *The President. Army. Rangers. Marines.* He had the feeling that he was lost in a mad pinball machine, about to be bounced from bumper to bumper while MacPreston shouted. *"Tilt! Tilt! Tilt!"*

"Let's roll it,'" Levinsky said.

V

The combined force dove into the lake island out of the afternoon sun, screaming in like a swarm of angry insects onto an enemy hive. Army armored single-scooters formed a solid ring around the beach perimeter. Marine flying tanks darkened the sky. Leaping Rangers in man-jets popped up and down through the pines.

To Swimmer, watching from the rear of the limousine which hovered at about seven thousand feet southeast of the scene, the orderly pandemonioum was an insane game. He found it difficult to associate any of his own actions with this result. Had it not been for his fear over Ob, Swimmer knew he'd have found the whole thing ludicrous.

The limousine dropped down to three thousand feet, moved in closer.

Swimmer glanced at MacPreston on his right. "Are they . . ."

"Dunno yet," MacPreston said. "Pretty good operation, eh, Mish?"

"Too damn many of 'em," Levinsky growled. "Wonder they aren't falling all over each other."

"What do you think, Rumel?" MacPreston asked.

"What?"

"Is it a good operation?"

They're nuts, Swimmer thought. He said: "I agree with Mr. Levinsky. Jepson couldn't have had more than twenty of his men down there . . . from my count. I'd have held the armor out farther and gone in with fifty men."

"Where would you have hit?" MacPreston asked.

"Right on top of the house." Levinsky nodded.

The limousine dropped to five hundred feet above the lake's southeast shore. Swimmer could hear scattered rifle shots. Each one sent an agony of fear through him.

Ob . . .

A man-made serenity returned to the island, a shocked silence broken only by faint shouts heard across the hush of water. A line of men with their hands in the air was marched onto the island's dock through a cordon of single-scooters.

Something buzzed from the limousine's dash.

"That's it," MacPreston said. "Let's go."

The limousine slanted in to the patch of open ground beside the chalet. Its hover jets raised a cloud of pine-needle duff that settled slowly after the motors were silenced.

MacPreston opened his window, sneezed from the dust.

A Ranger captain ran up, saluted, spoke through the window. "All secure, sir. Professor Rumel and the—ah—woman are safe in the house."

Swimmer allowed himself a deep sigh.

"What were the casualties?" Levinsky demanded.

"Sir?" The Ranger captain bent to peer in at Levinsky.

"The casualties!" Levinsky snapped.

"We have ten wounded, sir. Eight from our own cross-fire. Nothing serious, though. And we killed two of the—uh—men here. Wounded four others."

MacPreston touched a button beside him. The limousine's bubbletop swung back with a hiss of hydraulic mechanism.

"Fifty men right on top of the house," Levinsky muttered. "Would've been plenty."

"Well, Captain," MacPreston said, "bring Professor Rumel and the woman out here. I'm anxious to meet them."

The Ranger captain fidgeted. "Well, sir . . . you know we had orders to handle her and the Professor with kid gloves and we —"

"So bring them out here!"

"Sir, the woman refuses to leave her work."

"Her *work*?"

"Sir, Professor Rumel says she'll take orders only from his nephew there." The Captain nodded toward Swimmer.

Swimmer absorbed this silently, but with a strong upswing of good humor. He *liked* this Captain. He liked MacPreston. He liked Levinsky and all this damn fool mob of fighting men. Swimmer was surprised to come out of this reverie and find Levinsky and MacPreston staring at him.

"What *didn't* you tell us?" Levinsky asked.

About Ob working on the diamond, Swimmer thought. He swallowed, said: "I think she likes me."

"So?" MacPreston said.

"So that's good," Swimmer said.

"From the description, she sounds like a freak," MacPreston said. "What's good about it?"

Swimmer suddenly did *not* like MacPreston. The emotional reaction was apparently quite evident in the glare Swimmer turned on the Presidential assistant. "Maybe the description's wrong," MacPreston said.

"Wally," Levinsky said, "why don't you shut up?"

In the embarrassed silence which followed, Swimmer looked at Levinsky, reflecting: *Oh a freak? She's no more a freak than I am! So she has extra equipment. In her day, that was an advantage. And it isn't her fault she was snatched out of her day. She didn't ask to be brought here and have people sneer at her. Just because of the way she looks. She's a normal and healthy human female. Probably a lot more normal and healthy than this MacPreston jerk!*

MacPreston, his face flushed with anger, turned to the Ranger captain, said: "She *refuses* to come out here?"

"Sir, the Professor insists she'll only take orders from his nephew. I'm . . . I hesitate to use force."

"Why?" MacPreston demanded. "Don't you have enough men for the job?"

"Sir, there's a bench in there must weigh four hundred pounds. They hid this Jepson behind it. We wanted to move the bench to see if Jepson was really dead. Sir, she lifted that bench with one hand."

"A four hundred pound bench? With one hand?"

"Yes, sir. Oh . . . and Jepson was really dead, sir. Skull crushed. According to the Professor, she did that with one blow of her fist."

"Her fist?" MacPreston turned his outraged stare onto Swimmer. "Rumel, what kind of female is that in there?"

"Just an ordinary, normal woman," Swimmer said.

"But—"

"Nothing unusual at all about her!" Swimmer said. "In her day, she may even have been a ninety - seven - pound weakling. She didn't ask to be brought here, MacPreston. She didn't ask to have people pronounce stupid judgments on her appearance."

MacPreston studied Swimmer's face, noting every detail of it from the low hairline to the vanishing chin. Presently he said: "Sorry, Mr. Rumel. My error."

Swimmer nodded, thinking: *She'll only take orders from me.* A crazy elation filled him. He felt his left wrist being lifted by the handcuffs, looked down to see Levinsky unlocking the cuff.

"Mish, what're you doing?" MacPreston asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Levinsky asked.

"Now, wait a minute, Mish," MacPreston said. "I sympathize with your request, and the President does, too. But there are large obstacles. This man has committed crimes which no other man—"

"He's the best demolition man I ever met," Levinsky said.

"But we have the Russians to think about!" MacPreston said unhappily.

"We'll give 'em Jepson," Levinsky said. "Jepson's dead. He can't object . . . *or dispute our story.*"

Swimmer massaged his wrist where the handcuff had been, stared from MacPreston to Levinsky. Their conversation made no sense to him. The Ranger captain, still standing beside the limousine, appeared equally puzzled.

"But Rumel has been *identified!*" MacPreston said.

"So?" Levinsky said.

"So the Russians'll know he was involved. What use can he be to you after that? He has a face—excuse me, Mr. Rumel, but it's true—that a Minnesota farmer could identify after seeing it only twice in the newspapers. How could you hide that from the Russians?"

"Don't be stupid, Wally! I never wanted to use him that way. I want his *knowledge*, his experience. I want him in the academy."

"But if we don't hand him over to prosecution with the rest of that mob—"

"What if we claim he was our agent all along? What if we say he infiltrated the Jepson mob *for* us?"

"You said it yourself, Mish. They know who the expert was. They know who sank that boat."

"So?"

MacPreston frowned.

"You heard what the President said," Levinsky said. "If Rumel proves cooperative, and if we deem it advisable after our field investigation—"

"I don't like it."

"The Russians won't like it, either. Especially when we give them back their diamond and the Jepson gang, what's left of it."

"The boat!"

"We'll apologize about the boat."

Give them back their diamond, Swimmer thought. *Oh, God! And Obs' in there cutting that rock into little pieces!*

"I'll have to think about it," MacPreston said. "Discomfitting the Russians would give me just as much pleasure as it would you. But there are other considerations." He looked up at the

Ranger Captain. "Well, what're you standing there for?"

"Sir?'

"Take us to Professor Rumel and this . . . woman."

"Sir, I've . . . I think we'd better hurry."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, it's what I've been trying to . . . sir, this work she won't leave—she's cutting up that Mars diamond."

Swimmer had not suspected MacPreston could move that fast. The limousine's door was slammed open. MacPreston grabbed his arm, and they were out and running—up the chalet's front steps with armed men in uniform leaping aside, through the door and into the living room.

Overturned chairs, broken windows, a bullet-splintered wall: all testified to the violence of the attack. A cordon of guards was opened to the hall leading into the workroom.

MacPreston stopped short. Swimmer bumped into him, was bumped in turn by Levinsky who was right on their heels.

"That sound," MacPreston said.

Swimmer recognized it. The sound came from the hallway.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

MacPreston released Swimmer's arm, advanced on the hall like a bull preparing to charge. A nudge from Levinsky sent Swimmer following after. He felt he was being escorted to his execution, and found it odd how their feet kept to the rhythm of Ob's chipping.

Into the workroom they paraded.

The place appeared untouched by the military's violence except for a shattered window at their left. Professor Amino Rumel stood beside the window. He turned as his nephew entered, said: "Conrad! Thank heaven you're here. She won't do a thing I say."

MacPreston stopped a good six feet from where Ob was working. He stared at the square brown figure, noting the intense concentration in every line of her back, the play of muscles. Swimmer and Levinsky stopped behind him.

Crack!

Crack!

The Professor advanced on Swimmer. "There's been the most dreadful confusion," he said.

"In heaven's name, Rumel, stop her!" MacPreston rasped.

"I've tried," the Professor said. "She pays no attention to me."

"Not you!" MacPreston roared.

Crack!

The Professor drew himself up,

stared at MacPreston. "And who," he asked, "might you be?" He turned oddly pleading eyes on Swimmer. It was obvious that MacPreston had remembered about the four-hundred-pound bench being lifted with one hand.

Swimmer tried to find his voice. His throat felt as though it had been seared with a hot poker. Slowly he brushed past MacPreston, touched Ob's arm.

Ob dropped mallet and wedge, whirled on Swimmer with a glare that sent him retreating one quick step. At sight of him, though, a smile stretched her mouth. The smile held a radiant quality that transfixed Swimmer.

"Ob, you can stop the work now," Swimmer whispered.

Still smiling, she moved close to him, put a calloused forefinger to his cheek in the silent invitation of the cave, testing the emotion she read on his face. There were no scars on the cheek to count his years—and the skin was so sweetly,excitingly soft . . . like one of the Cave Mother's babies. Still, he appeared to understand the fingerplay. He drew her aside, brushed a lock of hair away from her cheek, touched her scars.

Ob wanted to take his hand, lead him to the bench and show him the work, but she feared to break the spell.

"Even with the bullets flying around," Professor Rumel said, "she paid no attention. Just went right on, as though—" His voice trailed off. Presently he said: "Dear me. She wouldn't know about bullets."

Swimmer heard the voice as though it came from a dream. Part of him was aware that MacPreston and Levinsky had gone to the bench, that they were bent over it muttering. What he read on Ob's face made all of that unimportant.

The words of the Cave Mother came back to Ob: *"It's all right to play with the males and sample them, but when the time comes for permanent mating, my magic will tell you which one to choose. You'll know at once."*

How wise the Cave Mother had been to know such a thing, Ob thought. How potent was the Cave Mother's magic!

Swimmer felt that he had come alive, been reborn here in this room, that behind him lay a whole misplaced segment of nonexistence. He wanted to hug Ob, but suspected she might respond with painful vigor. She'd have to be cautioned about her strength before she broke his ribs. He sensed also that she might not have the inhibitions dictated by current culture. He could imagine her reacting with complete abandon if he should kiss her.

Slowly he pulled away.

Ob saw his reluctance, thought: *He thinks of the devil-gods. We must distract the devil-gods, occupy them with other things. Then perhaps they'll take their thunder-magic elsewhere, and leave mortals to the things which interest mortals.*

But Swimmer had just begun to think about consequences. He found himself filled with wonder that he had never before worried about the legal consequences of his actions. The Mars diamond had attracted him, he realized, because it was a romp, a lark, a magnificent joke. But after what had happened to the rock, MacPreston and Levinsky would have to throw him to the Russians. They couldn't just hand over a mess of chips and say: "Sorry, fellows . . . it came apart." Everything had come apart—and Swimmer was struck speechless by fear of what might happen to Ob.

Consequences no longer could be ignored. Levinsky and MacPreston were engaged in a heated argument.

"This is a catastrophe, I tell you!" MacPreston said.

"Wally, you're being an ass," Levinsky said.

"But what can we tell the Russians?"

Exactly, Swimmer thought. *What can we tell the Russians?*

"That's just it," Levinsky said. "This prehistoric female has solved that problem for us. She's made us a *propaganda* weapon we can parade before the whole world!"

"You'd just—"

"Certainly! There isn't a person in the world who'll fail to get the point." Levinsky lowered his voice. "The uncuttable diamond, don't you see? And we can say we planned it this way. We give 'em the Jepson gang and—" He pointed to something hidden by MacPreston's body. ". . . and an object lesson."

Swimmer found himself overcome by curiosity. He headed for the bench, but Ob darted ahead, shouldered MacPreston aside and turned with something glistening in her hands.

"Ob. Work," she said. "For . . . you."

With a sense of shock and awe, Swimmer accepted the object from her, understanding then what Levinsky had meant by "object lesson."

The thing Ob had fashioned from the Mars diamond was a spearhead—delicately balanced and with exquisite workmanship. It lay in Swimmer's hands, warm and glittering.

"You . . . want?" Ob asked.

—FRANK HERBERT

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Devise and Conquer

by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

What luck that the democracies were destroying themselves! The only real problem was — what made them stop?

Sergei Vladimirov sat at the steering wheel near the bustling street corner, conscious of the hurrying crowd, the new-style cars, a huge sign reading "Close-Out Sale," and P. Grulov.

P. Grulov was in the passenger's seat beside him. P. Grulov was a small man with thick glasses and an air of absolute rightness. When P. Grulov spoke, subordinates nodded eager agreement. When he commanded, they sprang to obey. When he was irritated, they cringed.

Sergei Vladimirov was a subordinate of P. Grulov and P. Grulov was irritated.

"Look there," snapped Grulov. "Do you see that across the street? What sort of incompetence is this? We leave you in charge for a year and a half, because we trust you. We raise your pay and rank, heap medals on you, give your family a nice house to live in — and this is how you repay us! You bunglar, explain *that* to me!" Grulov angrily pointed across the street.

Vladimirov looked where he pointed. "There is a crowd of shoppers, but nothing unusual."

"Nothing *unusual!* Look there! Do you see those two men? There they go, arm-in-arm!"

Vladimirov groaned. "I see them."

"This is an American city, is it not?"

"Yes, comrade." Vladimirov could feel the iron jaws of logic begin to close on him.

"And these," said P. Grulov, making a gesture to indicate the crowd, "are Americans, are they not?"

"Yes. Yes, that is true."

"And there are two kinds of Americans, are there not?"

"Well, comrade — about that."

"No evasion. Remember your teachings at the Special School. There are two kinds of Americans. Name them."

Vladimirov groped mentally for some way out. "Capitalists and workers, exploiters and —"

P. Grulov's voice carried a bite. "None of that! You evade. I am speaking of your teachings at the Special School."

"Oh."

"There are two kinds of Americans. Name them."

"Exploiters, and — and exploited."

"Very good. Now be more *specific.*"

Vladimirov drew a deep breath. "Those of European, and those of African descent."

"You are squeamish, Vladimirov. Why go around the problem? Speak out! Why do you hesitate? Look here, my friend, this is the *Americans'* problem. *You* don't have to worry about it. Let them twist and turn. *You* don't need to find soft words and easy expressions. Not European and African, Vladimirov. *White and black.* There, *now* we have it. Think blunty. Be more than blunt. Call a spade a dung-fork. You are a satboteur, Vladimirov. It is your job to throw matches into other peoples' racial gasoline." He eyed Vladimirov sharply. "That is right, is it not?"

Vladimirov nodded miserably. "Yes, Comrade Grulov."

P. Grulov scowled. "Or am I being too subtle for you? Let me be more plain about it. America, Vladimirov, is made up of many races. Ideally they will all separate like a pack of mixed dogs and cats and tear each other to pieces. Divide and conquer, you see?"

Vladimirov gripped the steering wheel, and nodded.

P. Grulov went on. "At home, there are some who disagree. I am happy for you that you are not one of them, Vladimirov."

Vladimirov swallowed nervously.

Grulov said, "Ideally, from the Americans' viewpoint, these different races will all say, 'I'm American. Nobody better try to turn me against my country, or I'll smash his head.'"

Vladimirov nodded dutifully. "Yes, that is what the Americans want."

"You realize," said P. Grulov, "that they have been very fortunate. They have had a very large measure of that. We are alone here, and I can say it. They have been truly 'the melting pot of races.' You know that?"

"I know it."

"Let us be very realistic, Vladimirov. How have they been able to do this? First, they have had *a great deal of work that needed to be done.* Second, they had a frontier. Third, they had a philosophy. The philosophy struggles on under great ideological handicaps; the frontier is gone, except for a little piece here and there, mostly in Alaska; and the abundance of work, Vladimirov, is running out, thanks to the new machinery and the automation. The melting pot was a blast furnace, in the memory of living men. What is it now? All that is left is the remaining heat from the past, and the American philosophy which tries to keep it going. It is not enough I am talking to you very frankly. *Ideas are essential, but they alone are not enough.* They must be implemented, made real, provided with actual material means. This American melting-pot has been a real thing, a very real frustration to us. It is a cliche, it is hackneyed, it is a set of words used so often the meaning is all but rubbed off, but nevertheless, it has been a real thing. But now the heat is almost out. *Now is our chance!* Now is the time to drive in the wedges! Now is the time to find the planes of cleavage and split all these races wide open. American against American, Vladimirov. And what do *you* do but slump here with your hands on the wheels and mutter excuses! Speak up for yourself! What are your plans? How will you make up for this disgraceful defeat, *if* we permit you to try? Do you think we have grown so broad-minded we will not punish incompetents and worse? Do you know how quickly you can lose your rewards? Speak up!"

"Comrade —"

"Why have you failed? *Look!*" He pointed: "And look there!" He pointed again. "Don't sit there staring at the instruments! Look out! See where I point!"

Miserably, Vladimirov raised his head, and looked out vaguely at the shoppers going by.

Furiously, P. Grulov commanded. "Focus your eyes! *Look* at these people. Now, you see what I mean?"

Vladimirov forced himself to obey, and gradually he saw.

"There," said Grulov, "go two young men, talking intently. They have some plan, perhaps for a sale of merchandise. They are making a 'deal.' To use your weak-kneed phrase, Vladimirov, one is 'of European descent,' and the other is 'of African descent.' Right?"

Vladimirov groaned. "No. You don't understand —"

"I understand well enough. It is your job to keep them *at each other's throats.* You have the money, you have the training, you have the false identity, so your acts can never be traced back to us —"

"Comrade —"

"And I come over here, to check discreetly, and what do I find? Here they are, walking around in each other's arms! There go three women, chattering like hens! There is no self-consciousness, no stiffness! Look over there! This time, two men, well-dressed, talking casually. And, great ghost of —"

"Comrade," pleaded Vladimirov, "I meant well. But a terrible misfortune befell us."

"Horrible! Horrible!" roared Grulov. "This time it is a whole group, all going off on a picnic together! And no one is *doing* anything!"

"I couldn't help it," Vladimirov was pleading.

"Shut up!" snapped Grulov, abruptly getting control of himself. "This is incredible! I can see what you are up against. But it is a very simple matter to fix, just the same."

"No," said Vladimirov earnestly, "that's just it. It *isn't* simple. It's tricky. It's so subtle you don't know who's behind it, or if *anybody* is behind it. It's a very trucky, underhanded, peculiarly American —"

"Sh-h!" Grulov looked around. "No need to get hysterical, comrade. We have our duty, and it *is* very simple, and we *will* do it. Now, at the moment, I don't see any suitable opportunity, but there will be one, and I will show you. I have experience at this. Start the car."

Vladimirov shook his head resignedly, and did as he was told.

P. Grulov said, "There is a simple little key word, Vladimirov, and if you only use it at the right time, you can set off an explosion. There are, in fact, several key words that can be fired off in various directions, like rockets. But for this present problem, one specific key word in particular is suitable. I will show you how to use it. Be ready to drive off at once. This is a very crude technique, Vladimirov, but it is, at least, sure to work."

Vladimirov braced himself to make one more attempt to explain the trouble, but Grulov said, "Ah, here we are. Splendid."

A tall, extremely dark young man was coming down the sidewalk.

Grulov threw his coat in the back seat, yanked his tie to one side, unbuttoned the top button of his shirt, sprang out, took his hat off and put it on aslant. He swaggered across the sidewalk. In a loud voice, he said, "Out of my way you—" And then P. Grulov used the key word.

The young man glanced at him in puzzlement, then smiled uncertainly, "I *am* dark, aren't I?"

Grulov looked momentarily stunned. Recovering fast, he shouted, "Tell *me* to get off the sidewalk, will you, you—" In quick succession, he spat out half-a-dozen powerful adjectives, and tacked a key word on the end.

The young man looked at him blankly, then shook his head in wonderment and shoved past.

Grulov shouted insults after him, freely mixed with key words.

Nothing happened.

Now genuinely furious, Grulov accosted an extremely dark young matron, screaming insults at her. An elderly red-faced man, chewing tobacco and carrying a large cane, reversed the cane, shot it out, caught Grulov around the neck by the crook and yanked him away from the woman, who walked past with her nose in the air.

Grulov, rubbing his neck and staggering, stared after the woman, unable to speak.

The crowd moved on again.

A burly man paused to snap at Grulov, "Just where in the hell have you spent the last year and a half?"

Another passerby said menacingly, "Better go home and sleep it off, buddy. The market in used nightmares is damned low around here right now."

A third, an imposing man with broad shoulders and pale complexion, gripped Grulov by the shirt front and growled, "Use that word on *me* and see what happens."

A fourth bystander, who had been lounging against a telephone pole, now straightened up and growled. "Seems to me there was something funny about his accent. Let's hear him say all that over again."

Vladimirov set the parking brake and shot out of the car. Explaining earnestly that his friend didn't mean it, that he had these spells now and then, that he was sick, that he was under the influence of strong drink, and that he wouldn't do it again, Vladimirov got Grulov safely back into the car.

The people on the sidewalk followed his departure with hard glares, as Vladimirov shot away from the curb and got lost

in the traffic. When they were well away from the place, on the way back to his apartment, Vladimirov stopped at a drugstore for iodine, liniment, sore-throat remedies and other supplies. Then he parked his car in the lot near the apartment, helped Grulov, who had yet to say a word, into the elevator, then down the corridor and into the apartment. There he painted Grulov's various scratches, and gave him a large spoonful of the sore-throat remedy.

Grulov gagged and choked. "Phew." He sat up, looked around, and whispered, "Incredible. Who would have believed it?" Then he sank back dizzily.

Vladimirov loosened Grulov's shirt, picked up the bottle of liniment, and eyed the label, which read:

". . . . its soothing warmth penetrates deep into sore and aching muscles . . ."

Vladimirov poured some into his hands, winced, and went to work on the dazed Grulov with it. Grulov suddenly got his voice back:

"What are you doing to me? Where am I? *Nothing you can do will make me talk!*"

"Steady, comrade," said Vladimirov, his hands burning, "You are among friends."

It was some moments before the situation became clear to Grulov, who suffered further temporary confusion as Vladimirov explained that the liniment was really all right, and showed Grulov the label, with the words "for external use only," and the warning that it was illegal to drink it. Grulov wonderingly stared at the label, massaged his throat and sat up. He straightened his glasses regretfully.

"I apologize to you, Comrade Vladimirov. You truly had difficulties. I see that now."

"It has been very discouraging," Vladimirov agreed.

"It is incredible. I do not look forward to reporting this. You, at least, were spared *that* problem, since there was to be no contact — nothing that could possibly be traced."

"For which, frankly, I was grateful. And yet, very uneasy. Word of this should have been sent back at once."

"Yes." Grulov got up gingerly. "Fantastic. Our plans plainly count on them to fly at each other's throats. Instead, here they are, going around arm-in-arm. Yet it looked so promising a little while ago! The melting-pot must have had more heat in it than we thought. Look here, Vladimirov, what did it? Was it the civil-rights movement?"

Vladimirov shook his head sadly, thinking of the shock still ahead for Grulov.

Grulov said hopefully, "Something purely *local*, perhaps? Something others of your group may not have run into?"

"No, comrade. It came out very quietly. With no fanfare. It was very subtle. Very underhanded: Maybe it hit me first, I don't know. But it's widespread now."

Grulov said, with a sort of nervous dread, "It wasn't — ah — ah — 'brotherly love,' was it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Government action! The courts, perhaps?"

"No. All these things had their effect, but it wasn't this that hurt."

"An 'executive order,' perhaps?"

"No, comrade."

"Some new 'grass-roots' movement?"

"No."

"Was it the churches, then?"

"Not that I know of. As I say, all these things had their influence. They were troubles to us. But we were making progress anyway."

P. Grulov frowned. "This is a very serious problem. Vladimirov. Here we have an ideal situation from our viewpoint. Splits and divisions in our opponent's camps are to be encouraged — quietly and unobtrusively, of course. This was made to order for us." Exasperatedly, Grulov said. "With automation, with nine jobs for ten people, we could *count* on it to get worse." Plaintively, he added. "Is that not true, Vladimirov?"

Vladimirov said patiently, "It is true, Comrade Grulov."

"And what has happened? How has this great store of trouble and embarrassment in our opponent's camp vanished into thin air? How has it just disappeared?"

Gently, Vladimirov said, "I understand your feelings, Comrade Grulov. It is very sad."

Grulov blew his nose and sat down. "You are sparing me some blow, Vladimirov. All right. Let's have it. Obviously they have outgeneraled us. How did they do it?"

Vladimirov reached into the paper bag from the drugstore.

Grulov eyed the iodine, liniment, and sore-throat medicine, and winced.

Vladimirov handed him a wasp-waisted bottle with a shiny gold-edged green label bearing in large letters the trade-name "SUNBLOX," and beneath it the slogan "Suddenly you don't burn!"

Squinting at this, Grulov discovered that the bottle held so-and-so many ounces, contained such-and-such chemical constituents and was a long-lasting quick-acting lotion for the "positive protection of sunburn, by nature's own tested remedy."

Grulov put the bottle down and looked up questioningly at Vladimirov, who handed him a second bottle like the first, except that the label read "UNBLOX," and had the slogan, "When sunburn is no problem."

Grulov felt a pulse beat at his forehead, swallowed hard, and set the second bottle by the first. "Surely, Vladimirov —"

Vladimirov shook his head. "Steady, Comrade. This is the way the Americans do things. They must have figured the whole thing was basically caused by differences in the amount of heat and sunlight over a long period — so they worked out a way to control the process at will."

"You don't mean to tell me —"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything, comrade, except that this whole problem, that promised to blow their whole country up into one huge anarchy, has all been kicked out from under our feet by a couple bottles of sun-cream."

"Are you sure it works?"

"Try it."

P. Grulov sat and glared at the bottles as if they were enemies. Finally he reached out, and uncapped the SUNBLOX. Muttering to himself, he rolled up his sleeves, poured some into his hand, and smeared it on his forearm. Vladimirov handed him a paper towel, and Grulov wiped off the excess. Gradually, his forearm came to look as if he had spent a solid summer on the beach. Grulov smeared on some more cream. Then another dose. Grimly determined to test the potential of the stuff, he repeated the treatment till his arm was blacker than anything Vladimirov had seen before. A long session at the sink then convinced Grulov that soap didn't budge it.

Vladimirov held out the UNBLOX. Grulov smeared it on. After half-a-dozen applications of this, he was back where he had started from.

Vladimirov said apologetically, "You can imagine what it was like, Comrade. The capitalists have, of course, been selling sun-tan cream for a long time. There has even been stuff that would give you a tan *without* the sun. This cream here was advertised as operation on 'Nature's own principle of solar protection.' It sold in huge quantities. There's another version, called SUNBLOX with REPELZZ, that also repels bugs. Naturally sportsmen smeared it on good and thick. Then, comrade, if some other sportsman who didn't know about it came along and used a key-word, he got flattened. Meanwhile, young people took to using it as a prank. The demand was unprecedented.

For a time, UNBLOX was selling at around seventeen-fifty a bottle."

"I can see you certainly had a problem," admitted Grulov, staring at the bottle.

"What was there to do? It went from bad to worse, until the situation became so confused that if I used a key-word in a mixed crowd, I never knew who would hit me."

Grulov shook his head gloomily.

Vladimirov added wearily, "Undoubtedly, comrade, it was the cursed 'profit motive' at work. Our loss is some capitalist's gain."

"It seems incredible that such disastrous things could happen without reaching our ears."

"Would members of our provocation units break discipline to report? And then, who wished to be the one to bear the bad news? Worse yet, seeing it from the outside, who would really know what was happening until it was too late?"

For a considerable time, Vladimirov and Grulov sat in gloom, then at last, Vladimirov said hesitantly, "They *still* have unemployment."

"It isn't enough. In a struggle like this, any advantage to either side tilts the balance, and tends to accumulate new advantages. Most of the energy the Americans wasted in this problem is now freed. They can apply it to other things. We *must* have some compensating advantage, or —"

Vladimirov snapped his fingers. He rummaged through a bureau drawer, and handed Grulov a large brown pill-bottle.

Grulov scowled. "And what is this?"

"We have, at times, had — ah — difficulties with certain of our Asian comrades."

Grulov winced. "But what has this bottle to do with that?"

"Read the label."

Grulov squinted at it: "SWEETRES'N. Take two tablets each, before conferences."

"What's this?" said Grulov.

"They came out with it a few months ago. The Americans use these pills at contract talks."

"What can we do with them? And how do you pronounce that trade name?"

"Well, as for what we can do, I was thinking if we invited the Chinese comrades to a banquet, ground up several dozen of these pills and put them in the food . . . The name on the bottle is pronounced 'Sweet Reason,' comrade."

" 'Sweet Reason,' " murmured Grulov. He looked from the bottle to Vladimirov. "You are not fooling me? These will *work?*"

"I understand that they have worked for coal miners and operators, longshoremen and shipowners and even for the executives and workers at a factory out west, where they had been bombing and shooting each other for seventeen years." He hesitated. "Of course, as for whether they will work on the *Chinese comrades* —"

"Anything would be worth trying," said Grulov.

"They cost a dollar eighty-nine cents a bottle. I think there are fifty pills to a bottle."

Grulov dug into his pocket. "Get a big supply. You may have to go from store to store. Several dozen bottles would not be too many."

Vladimirov started out.

"Wait," said Grulov, "there is one other thing."

"Yes, comrade?"

"The Americans seem very thorough in the drug line. And — there is no escaping it — I *still* have to report that we have failed here. Is there anything that you could — say — *squirt* at your superior, and then he is reasonable? Feeding him pills might be too slow."

Vladimirov looked intent. "I hadn't thought of that."

P. Grulov lay back, and winced with pain. "Think about it now," he said testily. "Keep your eyes open, for a change."

Vladimirov blinked. "Yes, Comrade Grulov."

"Don't just stand there," snapped P. Grulov, getting back into form. "*Move.*"

Vladimirov gently shut the door.

If, he told himself fervently, he only *could* find such a drug, he knew exactly who to try it out on first. —CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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(NON-FACT ARTICLE)

TWENTY-SEVEN INCHES OF MOONSHINE

by JACK B. LAWSON

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

Here is the fish story to end all fish stories — on the Moon!

"I got to raise," said Robert ("Bob") Johnson. He looked me hard in the eye. "It's going to cost you another two grand to see 'em."

Bluff? A murmur riffled around the moon-igloo. Henry ("Hen") Titus scratched his three-days-old beard thoughtfully. Old Bill Moss sucked on his dead pipe. A. M. ("Mel") Forester and Warren ("Two Moose") Burgess exchanged questioning looks.

I stole a glance at the anomalus — or, as the clever little instruction booklet explains it, "fishy"—motion gauge on my Marlowe reel. The needle was all the way down flat, below

the zero mark. My eyes went back at the table.

The atmosphere was tense. There were chips worth sixteen thousand new dollars in the pot, and you can buy a lot of eggs for your beer with that kind of money. Everybody was long gone except me and Bob. What he had showing was a pair of tens, against my nine and king of clubs. I took another peek at my hole cards, just to be sure, and they hadn't changed; ten, jack and queen of clubs.

On the other hand, two thousand dollars might be the difference between meeting my tax bill and going to jail come next April.

I took a deep breath.

"Okay," I said. "It's one hell of a way to catch fish, but I'll call you."

At precisely that instant my special automatic - recoil hooksetting Marlowe marvelrod straightened out with a *whi-i-i-ng!* and the reel siren started howling like a wolf that's latched onto a big moose and wants help.

The scene in the igloo came apart. The poker game was forgotten. I jumped straight up and darn near put a hole in the roof, what with that weird light gravity you keep forgetting about. Mel and Two Moose grabbed their poles and started checking gauges. Bob Johnson said a word that I won't repeat here. You wouldn't think a Texas oilman could get that involved in a poker game; sixteen thousand wasn't much more than a shoeshine tip in his books.

Old Bill Moss was the only one who kept his head. By the time I came down he was standing over my rod, cool as a Canadian trout watching the dials go around. He looked up at me and took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Might jes' be a big 'un," he says calmly. "I set yore reel to keep three pounds drag on the line. You figurin' on playin' it by hand?"

I started to say something, but then it leaped and we all crowd-

ed against the wall of the igloo to see. It went up on a long curve, the kind of curve that these scientist fellows call a parabola—anyhow, that's what the computor engineer called it when I ran off the film from the rod on the flight back to Earth. I asked him what that meant, and he wiggled his hands like all the spaceboys do when they're talking about sex. That was sort of how I felt watching it jump, too, if you follow me. At least I guess I used to feel that way about girls. It soared up past the point where you thought sure it would have to start falling now, and on up out of the crater shadow into that serrated, fish-knife sunlight and glittered all red and gold. It kept on going up until, for a shake there, I thought it might be going to hit escape velocity and get away from me into outer space. And then at last it started to come down again. When it smacked the moondust, Old Bill squinted at the spot carefully and said.

"Might jes' be a record fish, that."

It was. A half hour later I finally landed my piece of moonshine, and back in the igloo stretched it out on the table alongside twenty-seven inches of tape from the hilt of Mel's rod—a good three inches better than the old record. That was held, as every real fisherman knows, by Frank R. Thornton, and he got it on the very first moonshine ever caught, back in 2026.

Bob broke out the whiskey.

So there you have the true story of how I caught the world's — no, better say the universe's — record moonshine.

Needless to say, it was the thrill of my life. Moonshining is undoubtedly the most exciting and challenging of all sports. Only thirty-five of these strange creatures have been caught to date, and any moonshine is a trophy fish, not to speak of the magnificent specimen mounted in the place of honor over my fireplace in Wikkinikkiw, Michigan.

Of course, some people don't think a moonshine is a fish, rightly speaking. But I've got my answer ready for that one. When the biologist who came up from Michigan State to see mine shook his head and said no, no, it was a gobbledegook-snark, or whatever it is biologists call moonshines, I lugged my tackle box in from the back porch and without a word showed him a red and yellow Lucky 13. He looked at it and then at my fish on the wall and then back at the Lucky 13, and after a while he went away looking vexed. There's no denying the resemblance, like it or not—and mostly, I understand,

the scientist fellows don't. That's not the only thing they don't like about moonshines, either.

But this isn't any scientific study. What I aim to do is tell you, speaking as one fisherman to another, something about moonshining as a sport: how it got started, what tackle and techniques to use and things like that.

You may never have a chance to use the information—trips to the moon are a mite expensive yet—but you can always dream, can't you? And you'll be ready, just in case. Last spring I wouldn't have given a wormy bluegill for my chances, but now I've got twenty-seven inches of moonshine over my fireplace. The universal record.

What did it weigh? People are always asking me that, and I expect you're no different. It isn't an easy question to answer though, because, when you think about it, you'll see it all depends on where you do the weighing. On the ship coming home my moonshine weighed exactly as much as I did, that is to say, nothing. But on Jupiter it would tip the scales at better than seventy pounds, or that was what my engineer friend claimed. I got to considering, and asked him to make up this chart, which I'll simply pass along to you to look over:

	Record Large-mouth Bass	Record Cut-throat Trout	Record Moonshine
Moon	3.67125	6.765	4.455
Mercury	6.0075	11.07	7.29
Venus	18.9125	34.85	22.95
Earth	22.25	41.	27.
Mars	8.455	15.58	10.26
Jupiter	58.74	108.24	71.28
Saturn	26.0325	47.97	31.59
Uranus	20.47	37.72	24.84
Neptune	24.92	45.92	30.24
Pluto	?	?	?

The scientist fellows don't seem to know much about Pluto.

Let's start with the history of moonshining, then. Mostly, I reckon we don't know how our favorite sports got started. Probably the first fisherman looked more like a bear than he did like you or me. Who's to say? But we can say what the first man who fished for moonshines looked like, and exactly how he came to do it. He was, and is, Frank R. Thornton, a vice-captain on the Mars run these days, and I guess you'd have to call him one of the universe's dedicated fishermen.

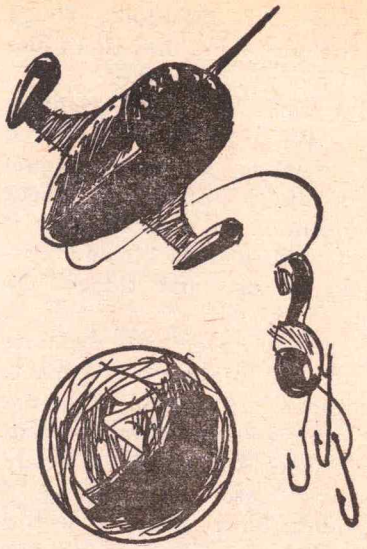
The story goes that one day back in '26, as he was making repairs on a moontractor, his right hand picked up a pair of pliers and before he knew what it was doing, had turned a cotter pin into a pretty good double-barbed hook. Any real fisherman has had similar experiences. I myself am forever doodling musky on business papers, for instance.

Well, once he saw what he'd done Frank was hooked, so to speak. Remember, he'd been up there the better part of a year, nine whole months without any fishing. The next thing was line. In no time at all the supply chest was minus one spool of fine grade copper wire.

So then he only needed rod, reel, something to use for bait, and something to fish in. Once you've seen the way moondust ripples under convection currents you'll understand that this last requirement, something to fish in, wasn't as much of a problem as it might seem. And any true fisherman has looked over a mudpuddle critically once or twice in his life. So much for that.

What about bait? As Frank pointed out later on, success in fishing is nine-tenths a matter of what you put on the hook—as the amateur with his electronic junk learns when he's standing next to the old pro who's pulling them in on manual tackle. But Frank hadn't any idea what he was fishing for, and consequently no notion of all of what to use, even supposing he'd had some handy. Which he didn't. You could dig around on the moon for a long time without coming up with an earthworm, you know.

Still, he'd gone too far to quit now. His fisherman's blood was



up. After giving the matter a little thought, Frank decided his best bet was snatch fishing.

Maybe I'd better explain what that is for the benefit of the young and ignorant. In snatch fishing the fisherman ties a weight to the end of a line and attaches a bunch of hooks, usually three or four, a few inches apart down by the weight. He swings the line good—you can tell an expert by the fact that he spins the line against the heel of his hand, while your inexperienced fisherman goes at it like a cowboy roping steers—and throws it out behind a school of fish, or into a likely spot.

Then he yanks the line hard through the school and hopes like high heaven that he foul hooks something good for supper.

That was what Frank decided to do. It took care of rod, reel and bait at one blow. Only, of course—and that was the big point!—he didn't really expect to catch anything. He was just a badly frustrated fisherman pretending for all he was worth.

Consequently, when something hit his line and started in fighting like a five pound sandbass, he thought that was just pretended too, a good dream. When it leaped and he saw it, a living, twenty-four inch, red and gold Lucky 13, complete with eye-spot, he thought the moon had finally gotten to him: lunacy, you know. But when he showed his moonshine to the rest of the boys and they saw it too—unh! He didn't know what to think. I've heard that particular exploration party didn't accomplish even close to the amount of mapping it was supposed to do.

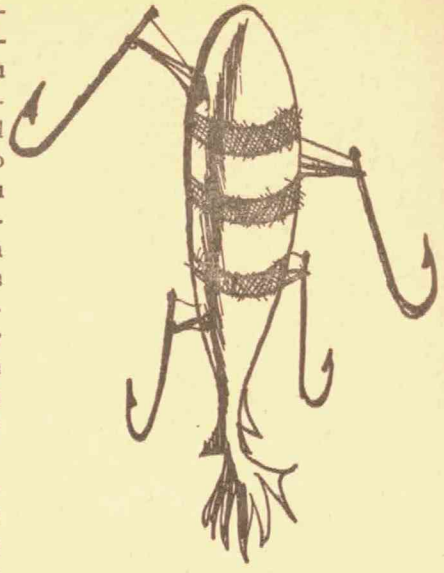
They didn't catch any more moonshines, either, of course. Doubting biologists to the contrary, the technique of moonshining boils down to one curious fact: though you've got to make the effort, you can't catch a moonshine if you intend to. Call it ESP, or coincidence, or whatever you like, that's how it works. For my part, I've had a rather similar experience with lots of earthside fish. It's only after you've lost all faith and keep on throwing out that plug out of sheer contrariness that they decide to hit. And why not? In my opinion, a little ESP might be a first-class survival trait. The biologists ought to think about that some.

Anyhow, you have to catch your moonshine by accident, so to speak. But you still have to be working at it. This means that a girlie magazine or deck of cards can be an important addition to your tackle box, more important than that fifteen-dollar

Reflex-revolvo spinner, for example. You set out your line—and what a whopping cast you can make on the moon! Someday I'm going to take my fly rod up there—and then sit down to a little serious poker to put you in the right frame of mind, preoccupied, but still interested in fishing. The rest may not be as much luck as you'd suppose. Every now and then I wonder how many of my record moonshine's twenty-seven inches are due to the fact that I was getting way over my head.

A word of caution here: certain types of minds simply aren't suited to moonshining. If you're the sort of fellow who in betting this year's tax money away is likely to think, 'Now, surely this will make me preoccupied enough to catch' and so on—give it up, friend. You'll never land your moonshine. Whether thinking like that is a sign of intelligence or of just plain deviousness, doesn't matter; it's no good either way. Most biologists' minds seem to work in some such a complicated and fishless way, I might add. Tough luck. For them — good for fishermen.

As for tackle, you'll need the new automatic equipment. I know, I know. I hate it too. You can tell a fisherman from a boob by the fact that the latter has more brains in the butt of his



rod than under his fly-covered hat. Earthside, I use, as a rule, a rebuilt antique Pfleuger bait caster, with the antibacklash ripped out, and one of the old fiberglass rods. But on the moon you *need* the fancy equipment to do some of your thinking for you. At the least, you need either lures (and moonshines will apparently take any kind of lure except a Lucky 13) with proximity hooking, or a hooksetting rod.

Even with all the dude equipment, though, you can always tell the expert from the amateur. As Old Bill Moss pointed out to me, the amateur is likely to set his pole with a terrific curve in it, bent through maybe ten degrees

of arc, under the mistaken notion that the bigger recoil will set the hook solidly. What it's more likely to do is tear the poor fish's jaw off, of course. I bent the tip of my marvelrod over an inch and a half to two inches, no more. Bill bent his less than an inch.

But the amount and kind of equipment you can take is pretty much limited by the weight restrictions on your spaceship. I had to leave a tacklebox full of tested-and-true fish-getters behind, in the first mate's locker at the Cape—where, I'm happy to say, they were waiting safe and sound on my return. But it was that or the whiskey.

This brings me to another big point. Probably the most difficult thing about moonshining, next to achieving the right frame of mind, is getting there. Compared to the moon, Lost Lake with its two-hundred pound trout is in your back yard.

Basically, you can go to the moon in one of three ways. First, you can join the space service, which is how Frank Thornton did it. Of course, you have to be born with the right aptitudes and to start working at it young, or you're out of luck. Or second, you can belong to one of the seven sportsman's clubs that make yearly expeditions to the moon, like Bob Johnson, Hen Titus, Mel Forester and Warren Burgess—or else be the club's fishing pro, like Old Bill Moss. That way you don't have to have your billion salted away the same as the rest of them, just expert knowledge.

Third and last, but of course not least, you can work your pants to the bone for some politician on the Space Committee, so that when a billionaire slips on a dog's mess and breaks his hip, for example, your buddy in Washington will call you at 3:15 a.m. and say:

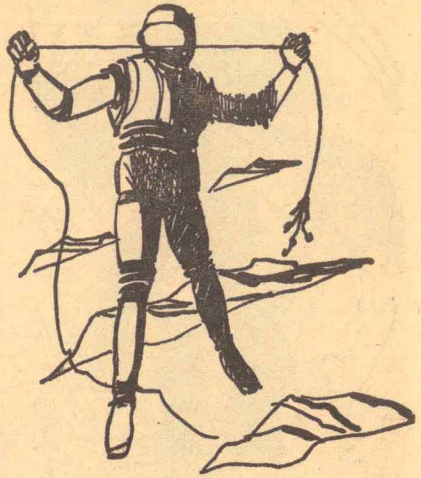
"Hank, I hear there's a vacancy on the next moonrocket for one fisherman, fare prepaid and uncancellable. Somehow I don't

think anybody but you is going to have the right clearances to get aboard, you understand me? But you'll have to make it to the Cape by noon."

Then the only thing that really holds you up is explaining to the little woman that this time she doesn't have to pack you a lunch. Arguing with a sleepy woman is like dragging a big catfish out of the weeds.

I think most of us will agree that my third route to the moon is the most practical one, all things considered. True, you're taking a chance. Your billionaire may never slip up. But even if he doesn't you're still helping to promote democracy, which is something we sportsmen especially should be concerned about. And there's always a chance, friend. Anything can happen.

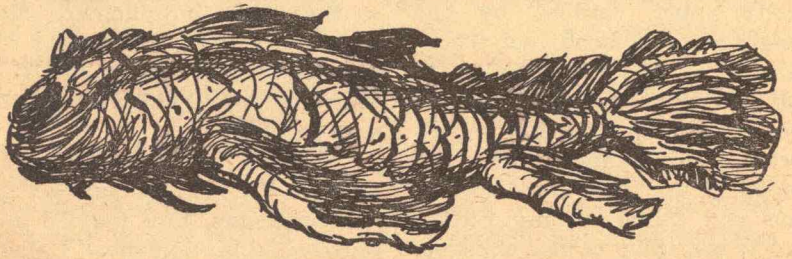
In that case, you too might find yourself, beyond your wildest dreams, on tomorrow's moonrocket, Marlowe marvelrod (or whatever you make is) in hand, mapping out strategy. I've got a



record twenty-seven inches of moonshine on my wall, but to a fisherman with the right frame of mind the sky's the limit. Rumor has it Frank Thornton is trolling a Mobius spoon on the Mars run.

I for one wouldn't like to bet against him.

JACK B. LAWSON



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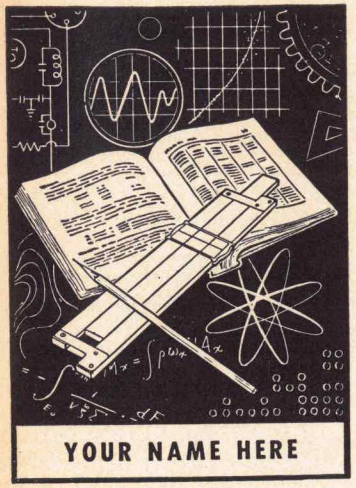

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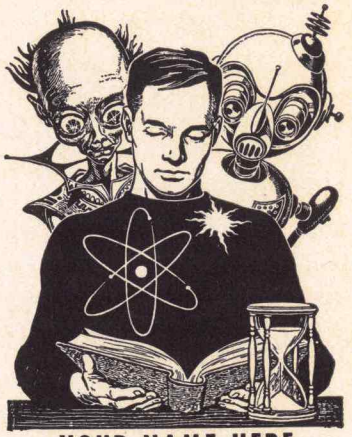

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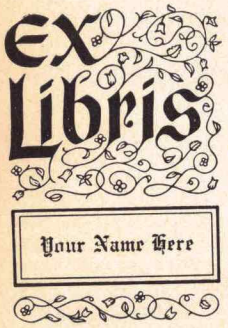

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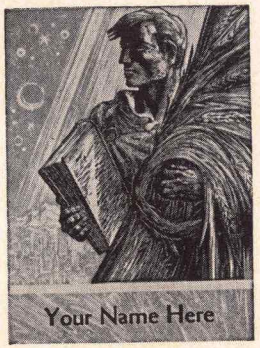

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