Another of Mr. Young's inquiries into the nature and implications of the familiar enlarged to giant proportions. Join him this time aboard a black leviathan a thousand miles in length and almost as many in girth—a monster that feeds on meteor swarms, cosmic dust, flotsam . . . and people.

JONATHAN AND THE SPACE WHALE

by Robert F. Young

His name should have been Jonah. It wasn't—quite. It was Jonathan—Jonathan Sands.

He was only twenty-nine, but in his day he had been many things—a student, an evangelist, a bartender and an adman, to name just a few. He had written a book once, but this hardly bears mentioning in view of the fact that no one besides himself had ever read it. Shortly before the opening of this history he had joined the New Earth Space Navy and become a gunner.

In those days a gunner didn't have much to do in the way of actual gunnery. He was required to keep his gun capsule shipshape and his gun in good working order, and it was his bounden duty to see to it that none of the thermo-nuclear projectiles assigned to him was ever in imminence of accidental detonation; but the only time he was ever under any pressure was during target practice, and even then the pressure wasn't particularly great. No, a gunner's life was a good one—provided you liked plenty of sack-time, plenty of monotony and plenty of comic micro-films. Jonathan didn't. Neither did he like the three main pursuits indulged in by his fellow crew-memlbers whenever the good ship Firststar hit port—i.e. wine, women and stong. He was no more cut out to be a spaceman than he had been cut out to be an adman or an evangelist. He had never found his forte, Jonathan hadn't, and probably he never would have if the space whale hadn't come along.

Before it swooped into the solar
system on the twenty-third day of April, A.D. 2339, and took a bite out of the asteroid belt, the space whale was a myth. For decades merchant spacemen had been telling tall tales of sighting it, but no one, except their shipmates, had ever taken them seriously. A whale living in space? A black leviathan a thousand miles in length and almost as many in girth, feeding on meteor swarms, cosmic dust and flotsam? A space-born cetacean capable of exceeding the speed of light? Shades of Herman Melville! The universe was filled with a number of things — granted—but a space whale was not one of them.

However, tales spacemen tell are one thing and official sightings are quite another. Moreover, a missing asteroid the size of Mars’ larger moon cannot be lightly written off. Hence, when the N.E.S. Icarus, outward bound from Mars, informed the Mare Sirenum Base that a cetaceous UFO the size of Titania had just appeared out of nowhere, reduced the planetoid population to the tune of one, and taken off in the direction of Andromeda, steps were instituted immediately to avert any further devastations. A quick check of the ship-deployment map revealed the Firststar to be the only warship in the neighborhood of the monster’s trajectory, and orders were dispatched forthwith to the captain thereof to be on the lookout for “a whale-like entity as big as a moon, capable of engorging asteroids” and “to sink same if sighted”. (Navalese had gone into orbit with the first American cosmonauts and was now as much a part of space as it had once been a part of the sea.)

The Captain of the Firststar—Captain Thaddeus S. Albright, to keep the record straight—bore down posthaste on the alert buzzer. A spaceman of long standing, he knew full well that the main impediment to the success of his mission lay not in the space whale’s ability to swallow his ship but in the gravity exerted by the creature’s mass, and knowing this he also knew that his best means of destroying it lay in ultra-maneuverability such as the Firststar per se did not possess. Therefore he ordered the chief gunnery officer to prepare one of the gun capsules for lowering. The capsule chosen was the one to which Jonathan Sands was assigned.

The radar room picked up the target first, and not long thereafter it became visible on the scopes. It was as black as space itself and would not have been discernible had the distant sun not reflected, however wanly, on its surface. It put Captain Albright in mind of a pollywog at first, but knowing space as he did he knew that anything that looked like a pollywog at the target’s present
distance would shortly resemble something far more fearsome, pro-
vided it was coming in the proper direction. The pollywog was, and
soon it began looking just like what the captain had figured it
would look like—namely, a whale. And it was still a good one hun-
dred thousand miles away.

He got on the intercom again. "Lower the capsule," he said,
"and put me in contact with the gunner."

The capsule dropped like a sleek black egg from the First-
star’s underside, hovered for a moment and then shot forward on
its own power. In its gyroscopic center, where the yoke would have
been, sat Jonathan Sands, fingers deftly chording the multicolored
console of the gun mount. He had
the space whale centered on the
cross-hairs of the sight in a matter
of seconds, then he locked the
capsule into hovering position and
began making the minute adjust-
ments necessary to maintain his
focus.

Captain Albright’s voice
emerged from his helmet radio:
"We’re backing off now—can’t
take a chance on being drawn into
orbit. Take it just before it’s
broadside of you and fire your
retros for all they’re worth. Make
the first shot count—you won’t
have time for a second."

I’ll fire when I see the whites of
its eyes, Jonathan thought grimly.
However, it had no eyes. Nor
mouth either. There was only
blankness where the face should
have been—black blankness.
Acres of it. No, not acres—miles.
For the first time Jonathan real-
ized how big the space whale was.
The head had a diameter of at
least seven hundred miles, and its
“lower hemisphere” blended into a
relatively brief body that was ap-
pended by two huge flukes. He
could not see the flukes very well
from his present angle, but he
could see them well enough to tell
that they were rigid. In any event,
they couldn’t possible have per-
formed their analogous function
in the vacuum of space.

Big, had he thought? Lord, the
creature was enormous! Its ebony
bulk was eclipsing half the stars
now, and growing by the milli-
second. Could such a Brobdinaga-
gian being possess intelligence?—
and was it aware of the hor-
rendous death that awaited it
from the thermo-nuclear sting of
the tiny midge that hovered in its
path?

"Prepare to fire," Captain Al-
bright said.

Jonathan was already prepared.
The space whale was less than ten
thousand miles away now . . .
Nine thousand. Could it feel
pain? he wondered. It did not
seem to be constituted of flesh
and blood, but was it necessary
to be constituted of flesh and blood
in order to be able to experience
pain? . . . Eight thousand. Who
It was not a good orbit. Roche would have frowned upon it, and with justification, for it began with a radius considerably within his limit, even allowing for a disproportion in relative density that did not necessarily exist. It could have, then, but one outcome, and indeed it had endured for less than an hour when Jonathan heard the preliminary creakings that preluded the capsule’s forthcoming breakup.

He was by no means finished, but to all practical purposes he might as well have been. His radio had gone dead, and while his suit-tanks contained enough oxygen to sustain him for ten hours, it was unlikely that he would have been able to find a way out of his predicament even if they had contained twice that amount. He had no choice, then, but to resign himself to becoming a small satellite revolving around the whale’s head, along with the fragments of the doomed capsule. This sorry state of affairs was not long in coming into being, and presently he knew what it was like to be a human moon with no more control over his activities than a yo-yo spinning at the end of a string. Behind him floated one of his thermo-nuclear projectiles, while ahead of him, spinning lazily in the starlight, was the entire top section of the capsule. The whale, at this close range, was a whale no longer, but a black vast planet,
sans mountains, sans seas and sans sanctuary.

He took a fix on Orion's belt and began timing his revolutions. The first one lasted 20.3 minutes, the second 19.6 and the third 18.9. At this point he became aware that the projectile and the top section of the capsule were no longer keeping him company, that they had, in fact, forsaken him altogether, and simultaneously he realized what was happening. He was being drawn closer and closer to the whale, while they, and the rest of the debris that had resulted from the capsule's breakup, were being forced into a wider and wider orbit that would result in their eventual escape into space. No longer was his destiny obscure.

18.2 minutes. The time had come to make his peace with God. But he did not close his eyes—there was no need to. Instead he looked out into the vast reaches of the star-bedight blackness of space. He had seen the face of God there many times, and now he saw it again, endless, eternal, argot-eyed; scarred by novae, darkened by dust, radiant with the burning of a trillion trillion suns. He closed his eyes then, briefly, for the beauty and the grandeur was too much for him to bear. When he opened them again his orbit was no more and he was falling toward the whale.

Now was the time to think of everything he was leaving behind. Of light and laughter and love. Of firelight and rare wine. Of the sun coming up in the morning and of the sun going down at night. There was a girl too. He had gone walking with her once in the subterranean gardens of the moon. He tried to think of her name, but it would not come to him. He tried to remember her face. Had it been heart-shaped? Oval? Full? Thin? He did not know; all he could remember were the cool and lovely flowers they had walked among. Perhaps he hadn't liked her nearly as much as he had thought.

He tensed himself for the final moment. He needn't have, for the final moment did not come. The whale turned out to have a mouth after all—not a mouth by ordinary standards, but a mouth nonetheless. It had been closed before. Now, open, it was in a sense still closed, for it had not opened like an ordinary mouth. It had merely rearranged its atomic particles to permit the passage of other particles—in this case, the particles that, in toto, comprised the entity known as Jonathan Sands—and now the process was continuing in depth. Jonathan found himself falling through utter darkness into a seemingly fathomless gullet, and yet all the while he fell, he felt the pace of his descent slackening by degrees, till finally he realized that he was floating, rather than
falling, floating almost imperceptibly downward—no, not downward, upward—and that he had nothing to fear in the whale's throat but only in its belly.

Abruptly light burst around him, and a moment later solid ground materialized beneath his back. Disbelievingly he sat up. The light came from a small sun suspended in a greenish sky, and the ground was part of an expanse of rocky terrain that stretched in three directions and then, instead of curving downward, curved gently upward and blended into the sky. The fourth direction—the one immediately before him—was pre-empted by a towering mass of pitted basalt that he at first took to be a mountain. It was not a mountain though, he realized presently, or at least it hadn't been originally. It was an asteroid.

Still not believing, he got to his feet. The gravity approximated Venus's so closely that he could have sworn that he was on New Earth. The little sun, however, said quite emphatically that he wasn't, and the greenish sky and the asteroid concurred. The asteroid was perhaps half a mile distant, and only a small portion of it protruded above the surface. The visible part was as large as Everest.

This, then, was the belly of the whale.

Jonathan became aware that he was trembling. Not from so pi-

cayune an emotion as fear, but from awe. He had known that the space whale was big, but this—why this was a whole world! There was a sky, a sun, land—

Was there air too?

The gauge that kept tab on the contents of his oxygen tanks was inset in his helmet just above eye-level. Glancing at it he saw that he had less than a quarter of an hour's supply remaining. He had his choice, therefore, between two courses of action. He could wait fifteen minutes and then remove his helmet, or he could remove it now. And how would he spend that precious quarter of an hour should he decide to wait? he asked himself. Trying to remember the face of the girl with whom he had gone walking in the subterranean gardens of the moon? Suddenly he laughed aloud, and unscrewing the helmet, doffed it to the sun.

He gasped. Not from a lack of air but from an abundance of it. Air richer in oxygen-content than New Earth's had ever been or ever would be. Richer even than Old Earth's. He slipped out of the rest of his suit and stood there breathing deeply of the day. The sun was warm upon his face, and a gentle wind bore the scent of growing things to his nostrils. Flowers, grass, grain. Trees in summer bloom—

Puzzled, he regarded his surroundings. The ground consisted of rocks and gravel and sand. Not
a single tree grew anywhere, not a single flower; not a single blade of grass—

No, not here, Jonathan. This is pre-processed land—a wilderness, if you like.

He spun around, even though he knew that the voice had not come from behind him, that it had not been a voice at all. Any action is better than none when words that are not your own materialize in your mind. But they are your own, Jonathan. They are the words you dressed my thoughts in, just as these are the words you are dressing them in now.

"Who are you?" Jonathan said.

I am the ground you stand on, the air you breathe, the sun that warms you, the bulkhead that protects you from the vacuum of space. I am the space whale—though in actuality I am much higher on the scale of evolution than your analogous cetacean.

Jonathan raised his hands and pressed his palms against his temples. The ordeal through which he had gone had been too much for him to bear, after all. He had broken under the strain, and now there were words in his mind that had no business being there. But they do have business being there, Jonathan. They are my projected thoughts clad from the wardrobe of your vocabulary. Think what you wish to know and I will answer. But hurry: I can maintain contact only so long as exterior conditions do not divert my attention.

Vast, he thought. Gigantic . . . gargantuan . . . ugly. And then, A telepathic whale!

I am not truly ugly. It has been said, by certain members of my school, that I am—fair.

A female whale!

It is true—I am a woman. A woman who saved your life because you were too compassionate to take hers.

You saw me waiting then—and when my capsule broke up you swallowed me deliberately.

Not "swallowed"—"absorbed". There was no other way, Jonathan. I could not let you die . . . Beyond the pre-processed land where you now stand you will find other lands. Green lands. And you will find people of your own kind—a civilization in which you can find a place beneath my sun. Go to the lands and the people. I am giving you your life because you gave me mine, even though I—1—There was a pause; then, If you will proceed in the direction in which you now face, you will come to a valley. In the valley you will find life and laughter—and, if you are lucky, love. Go, Jonathan. Go.

Stunned, he thought, A civilization? A civilization in the belly of a whale? But how? Why?

His waiting mind remained empty.

But how? he thought again.
Not a single word appeared on the anxious horizon of his awareness.

"But how?" he asked aloud. "Why?"

The sun shone mutely down and the greenish sky was inscrutable. The wind had lost its tongue. Very well, Jonathan thought, so be it, and stuffed his spacesuit into his helmet and set forth across the wilderness, leaving his oxygen tanks behind him.

And so it came to pass that Jonathan Sands walked down into a valley in the belly of the whale. It was a lovely valley, wide and green. There were trees and roads and houses, and in the distance a shining city showed. Instead of seaweed, he had found grass. Instead of darkness, light.

The sun was warm upon his shoulders and the grass was soft beneath his feet. The shade beneath the trees was deep and cool. They were charming trees with flowers in their verdant hair, and birds the hue of rainbows sang artless arias in their branches. There were little lakes as blue as Old-Earth skies, and field after cultivated field spread out on either hand, each greener than its predecessor. The wind was soft and sweet.

He came to a road and started walking along it. It was a macadam road, smooth and firm. He heard a murmur of sound behind him, and turning, saw a four-wheeled vehicle approaching. He identified it presently as an automobile, although he had never seen an automobile before. But he had seen pictures of them in books—history books—and this one provided him with a clue to the nature of the civilization with which he was shortly going to have to contend. The reality was so alien to his expectations that at first he could not accept it.

The driver slowed when he saw Jonathan, came to a stop. He was clad in a pastel suit that matched the color of his car and he was middle aged and gray of temples. "Lift into the city?" he asked.

The English was archaic and embodied a strong provincial flavor; but it was English, and the reality Jonathan had come face to face with could no longer be ignored. Here was an excerpt out of the Book of Old Earth—a chapter entitled "Mid-twentieth Century America". And he had found it—of all places—in the belly of a space whale. "Thank you," he said, climbing numbly into the car. And then, unthinkingly, "What city?"

The driver looked at him closely, glanced at the suit-stuffed helmet on his lap. He set the car in motion. "Did you say 'what' city?" he asked.

"I've—I've been away," Jonathan said lamely.

"But not as long as you seem
to think you have. Prosperity II isn’t completed yet—won’t be for another two years... I didn’t know anyone still went prospecting in Weirdland any more.”

Jonathan maintained a sensible silence. “I never could see much point in anyone risking his life in such a place,” the driver went on. “Especially when it’s impractical to mine anything when you do discover it. The wind and the rain would be bad enough, even without the tornadoes and the earthquakes.” And then, “Have any luck?”

Jonathan shook his head. The less he said, the less liable he would be to say the wrong thing—and the more opportunity the driver would have to divulge information with regard to the civilization that had cradled him. But the driver, apparently, had said all he was going to say without encouragement, and now a silence ensued.

Jonathan made good use of it. Tying in the green cast of the atmosphere with the gentle upward curvature of the land, he arrived at the conclusion that the space whale’s belly was analogous to a planet turned inside out. Clearly it occupied the creature’s entire forestucture, and probably the gravity that held everything in place was supplied by a magnetic field of some kind in the creature’s hide. The sun, however—if it really was a sun—was beyond his comprehension. He surmised that it occupied the precise center of the sphere and that the force that held everything else in place held it in place also; but its presence in such an unorthodox milieu confounded him, and his mind balked at analyzing either its purpose or its properties.

The presence of human life was not as incredible as it had at first seemed, for certainly if the whale had swallowed him it could very well have swallowed others like him. And if it was capable of swallowing an entire asteroid, it was more than capable of swallowing a mere spaceship. Assuming that it had a longevity of a thousand or so years, its present human population could very well be the descendants of the passengers and crew of such a ship—or ships, for that matter. Ships were always coming up missing, had been for centuries, and some of them had never been found. None of which explained, however, why the present society read like a yellowed page out of the Book of Old Earth.

Abandoning his speculations temporarily, he devoted his attention to the encompassing countryside. Low, pastel-hued houses appeared by the roadside at intervals of roughly a quarter of a mile. The intervals themselves consisted of fields and orchards and vineyards, and, less frequently, pastures. Occasionally long multi-
windowed buildings—obviously factories of some kind—could be seen in the distance, and once Jonathan glimpsed a row of tall stacks that unmistakably denoted a primitive open hearth. People and machines were visible in the fields and vineyards and orchards, and cattle could be seen grazing in the pastures. Nor was the road itself bereft of activity. Vehicles similar to the one in which he was riding abounded, and in addition there were other, much larger, vehicles that appeared to be cargo carriers of some kind.

One of the latter passed them on a curve, cutting in so soon afterward that they were nearly driven into the ditch. Jonathan's benefactor cursed it roundly. "The highways just aren't adequate enough any more," he complained, "and it's impossible to build new ones fast enough to keep up with our expanding economy. I'll be glad when Prosperity II is ready for settlement. It'll at least relieve the population pressure even if it does hurt local trade."

Jonathan looked at him thoughtfully. "And when Prosperity II is settled, what then?" he asked.

"Why we'll begin building Prosperity III, of course. You know that. And after Prosperity III, we'll build Prosperity IV. Just the way it says in the Good Book... Anybody ever tell you you've got an odd way of talking?"

"I have a speech defect," Jonathan said. Then, "Eventually you're—we're—going to run out of new lands. Where will we expand to then?"

The look that his benefactor gave him would have made him wince if his skepticism hadn't been aroused. "Run out? In a universe as big as all this? You'd better stay away from Weirdland, young man, that's all I've got to say. It's warping your perspective."

"But surely you must realize that however miraculous it may be in other respects, a whale's belly isn't infinite!"

This time Jonathan received only a quick glance. His suit-stuffed helmet received a similar one. "... A whale's belly?"

Jonathan was out of patience now. "Now don't try to tell me you don't know you're living in the belly of a whale!"

His benefactor's face took on a greenish cast. "If—if you don't mind, I'll go on alone from here. You can pick up another ride at those crossroads up ahead."

Jonathan did not demur, and when the car slowed to a stop, he got out. He opened his mouth to say "Thanks", but there was no one to say it to: the vehicle was already speeding away, rear tires spinning in a frantic attempt to gain traction. He laughed. Well, at least he had learned one thing: either the people living in the
whale's belly were reluctant to admit the fact, or else they honestly weren't aware of it. In either event he would do well to avoid the subject in the future.

He laughed again. Having his sanity doubted was a new experience, and it amused him. Then he looked at the fields stretching away on either side, at the road arrowing away before him; at the trees and the crops and the houses. He looked at the greenish sky—

A whale's belly?

Quickly he lowered his eyes to his spacesuit. He sighed with relief. It was nothing more than metal and rubber and cloth and wires, but it vouched for his sanity. Nevertheless, a spacesuit, however reassuring it might be, was not an ideal object for a stranger in a strange land to be carrying around, and the sooner he got rid of it, the better. Entering a nearby coppice, he cached it in the crotch of a foliage-shrouded tree; then he returned to the road.

He resumed his trek, coming presently to the crossroads his benefactor had mentioned. A farmhouse stood on the corner, and a small produce-stand fronted the road. The fruits and vegetables that were on display surprised him. They were staples on New Earth, their seed having been brought in by the early settlers—tomatoes, cucumbers, sweetcorn, muskmelons, peppers and string beans. Looking at them brought to mind how hungry he was, and the succulent tomatoes made him poignantly aware of his thirst.

A girl in a blue dress was sitting beneath a tree in the farmhouse yard. When he paused, she got up and came over to the stand. She had dark hair and an oval face and gray eyes. Her tanned skin had a faint golden cast. "Yes?" she asked.

He explored the empty pockets of his fatigues with rueful fingers. The little money he had remaining from his last pay reposed in his space chest on the good ship Firststar. It would have done him no good anyway, he supposed. What good would New Earth Government currency be in a society comprised of people who had never heard of New Earth?

He pointed to a particularly large tomato. "How long," he asked, "would I have to work to earn that?"

The girl regarded him steadily, betraying only by a faint flicker of her eyelashes that she had noticed his unorthodox pronunciation. There was a tiny pock mark high on her right cheek, the remnant, probably, of a childhood bout with some form of chicken pox. "We do need help in the fields," she said presently, "if you're really interested in working. We pay the standard rate for farm labor."
He wondered what the standard rate was, but considered it the better part of discretion not to ask. In any event, he had but little choice: if he wanted to eat he would have to work, and here was as good a place to begin as any. "I can start right now," he said. "But first I'd like a drink of water."

"Very well."

He followed her around the house, and she pumped a tumbler full of water for him from a deep cool well. He drained it, and she pumped another; then she went over to the house and opened the back door. "Watch the stand for a while, mom," she called. "I'm taking a new hand out to dad." "All set?" she asked, returning to his side.

He accompanied her down a narrow road that was deeply etched with wide tire treads. Fields spread out on either side, and in the distance he heard the rhythmic grunting of a primitive tractor. He wondered what time it was, but hesitated to ask. Perhaps time as he knew it did not exist in a world where the sun hung perpetually overhead.

The girl's long legs covered the ground rapidly, and his own tired ones made it difficult for him to keep abreast of her. "I'll need your name for our records," she said.

He gave it to her, wondering if she would tell him hers. She did not. They were skirting a cornfield now, and in an adjacent field the tractor was approaching, dragging a crude cultivator between two rows of tomato plants. In common with the other vehicles he had seen, it was gasoline-propelled. A tall lean man, crowding middle age, was driving it.

He stopped at the end of the row, dismounted and waited for Jonathan and the girl to come up to him. His face was weathered, and the fields he had worked in all his life showed in his pale blue eyes. "This is Jonathan Sands, dad," the girl said. "He wants to work."

It was a lie, Jonathan thought wryly, but he said nothing, and when the lean man got a hoe from a rack on the side of the tractor and headed toward the cornfield, he followed him docilely. The girl returned the way they had come. "Hot day," the lean man said. He made a few deft strokes with the hoe around one of the stalks of corn. "Work it loose a little and throw some of it up around the plant." He handed Jonathan the hoe and walked away.

It was Jonathan's first experience at hoeing corn. As time dragged by, he hoped fervently that it would be his last. After a while a sort of dull apathy settled upon him and he ceased to think. Up one row, down another. Up. Down. Abruptly he became aware that something was happening to
The light around him. Was the sun going down? he wondered giddily. But it couldn’t go down. This wasn’t New Earth. This was the belly of the whale, and he was Jonah. Jonah in a cornfield.

Straightening, he looked up into the sky. No, the sun wasn’t going down—it was going out. Before it had been a bright yellow; now it was a pale red. So there was to be darkness in the whale’s belly after all.

Someone touched his shoulder. “Time to quit,” the lean man said.

Jonathan walked back to the farmhouse in the wake of the chugging tractor. The sun grew paler and paler, and darkness began settling over the land. The lean man drove the tractor into a large shed behind the house, and Jonathan headed for the pump. He reveled in the cool water, splashing his face with it and letting it run over first one wrist and then the other. The girl brought him out a towel. “You can eat with us,” she said.

After drying himself, he accompanied her into the house. Illumination came from lamps and fixtures powered by a primitive form of electricity. Cooking was done over gas. The kitchen was quite pleasant—bright of walls and colorful of cupboards; gleaming of appliances. The girl’s mother was an older edition of the girl. She was autumn, and the girl was spring.

The girl introduced herself, Darlene Meadows. Then she introduced Jonathan to her mother, and after her father came in, the four of them sat down to eat. There were potatoes, tomatoes, string beans and steak. Jonathan remembered the cattle he had seen. The world of the whale wanted for nothing.

After the meal was over, Mr. Meadows motioned for Jonathan to accompany him outside. The sun was almost out now, and barely visible in the sky. Mr. Meadows turned on an outside lamp, and light spilled down the porch steps and out over the lawn. He cleared his throat. “I can keep you on for a while,” he said, “if you care to stay. My son decided to become a copywriter and I’ve been hard-pressed for help ever since. Vagrants are rare these days, and vagrants who want to work are even rarer.”

Jonathan smiled. So, he was a vagrant now. Perhaps that was what he had been meant to be all along. “I’ll need a place to sleep,” he said.

“Come with me.”

Jonathan followed him across the yard, into the shed and up a narrow flight of stairs into a small loft. Mr. Meadows switched on a wall light, revealing a narrow bed, a table and a chair and a dresser. “Satisfactory?” he asked.

Jonathan nodded. Compared to his cramped quarters on the First-
star, the place was a palace. "If you don't mind, I'll turn in right now," he said. "I'm exhausted."

After Mr. Meadows had gone, he lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. But he did not fall asleep. He could not. His muscles were tense, and his mind, stimulated by the strange and incongruous data it had absorbed, was a riot of speculation. Perhaps a walk beneath the stars might help him to relax—

Stars! What was he thinking of? There could be no stars in the belly of a whale. Well he would walk anyway, beneath the sky if not the stars. And afterward he would sleep. Sleep in the belly of the whale.

The night air was cool and a brisk wind was blowing. He walked around the shed and down the road that wound among the fields. The fields stood out in glinting paleness and the road was distinct beneath his feet. Odd that there should be light. Surely the sun was out by now. He raised his eyes to the sky—

And saw the stars.

Hundreds of them. Thousands. Blue ones, red ones, yellow ones—

Yes, stars, Jonathan—why not? All skies have stars.

This time he took the alien thoughts in his stride. But your sky is too small for stars, he "said". How could it possibly contain even so much as a single one?

You are right—it could not, save for a small one such as my sun. The universe of me is a pebble on a beach of boulders beside an endless sea. My stars are not really stars.

And yet they seem real.

They are real—so real, in fact, that the inhabitants of my world employ them to mirror and distribute a unique species of television image. But they are not truly stars. In a broad sense, they are analogous to the muscae volitantes you yourself sometimes see on hot bright days. My sun, among many other things, is my organ of vision. My—my eyes.

And you can see this world inside yourself, and space and stars too? And myself standing here in the darkness of your night?

Yes, I can see you—and simultaneously I can see parsecs into space. And I can receive and send telepathically for millions of miles.

It must be a wonderful thing to be a space whale.

It is a terrible and a lonely thing. But I did not contact you to talk about such matters. I contacted you to find out if you were content.

As content as I shall ever be, Jonathan said. And then, This world of yours—this universe—I know that it provides your sustenance in some way—but how?

There was a long pause. Finally, It will be difficult for you to understand, but I will try to explain. Think of the land, with its
various elements, as my food, and think of the sun and the rain and the birds and the insects and the nonpathogenic unicellular bacteria and the cycle of nights and days as my digestive juices. I absorb the land raw, and its elements are gradually assimilated into my body where they are reprocessed into energy, some of it the atomic power with which I propel myself through space. But equally important to my wellbeing is the action of my digestive juices upon the face of my earth—the creation of topsoil and the growing therefrom of green things; the resultant process of photosynthesis and the cycle of decay and death and the springing forth of new life from old. Space whales are born with land in them, Jonathan, land and air and water, but as we grow older we must replenish our supply from time to time.

And you do so by absorbing asteroids?

Asteroids and cosmic dust—as well as ice from the rings of planets such as your sixth from the sun.

And flotsam?

Sometimes.

And spaceships too?

There was a pause even longer than the one before. Then, Spaceships are forbidden, but I absorbed one when I was young, and too headstrong to obey the dictates of my elders. That was al-

most three hundred of your years ago. The ship was called the Prosperity and it was bearing one of the first groups of colonists from Earth to Venus—the planet you now call “New Earth”. The people you have come among are the descendants of those colonists.

But even three hundred of my years ago, Jonathan said, the level of human civilization was much higher than this. Why should these people be living in a society the prototype of which has been dead for nearly four centuries? And why aren’t they aware that they are living in the belly of a space whale?

You put it very crudely, Jonathan—and after I went to such pains to explain! The present society, to take your first question first, is not the result of happenstance but the result of careful planning by the original colonists—the founding fathers. They knew that they could not bequeath to their offspring the technology they themselves had enjoyed in their own society for the simple reason that they themselves possessed but rudimentary skills and knowledge, and that as a consequence the civilization they were being forced to found would slip back a few hundred years before gaining the necessary foothold to move forward. But before they died, they were able, through the rewriting and the enlargement of a certain book, to see to it that the
new colony, when it did gain the necessary foothold, would proceed along foreordained lines. It has done so, and continues to do so at an accelerated rate; but many years have still to pass before it attains even the level of civilization that the founding fathers knew.

The answer to your second question is partially present in the answer to the first. The founding fathers, believing that there was no escape from the world in which they found themselves, saw no reason to burden their progeny with false hope. Hence they told their children that the new colony—named "Prosperity" after the ship—was the new beginning of human civilization and that the world in which it had sprung up was the entire cosmos. The book I mentioned before was rewritten to this same effect, and the ship was destroyed to avert embarrassing questions. I did not know that rapport with my inhabitants was possible at first, and by the time I discovered that it was possible, it was too late.

Too late for what? Jonathan asked.

It does not matter now.

You said before that it was a lonely thing to be a space whale, Jonathan went on. Why should this be so? You inferred that there were others of your kind.

His waiting mind remained empty for some time. Then. Yes, there are many others—but all of them have gone. Two hundred of your years ago they set off across the Andromeda Deep toward greener pastures—toward the island universe you call Messier 31.

And you did not go with them—why?

In a way I am like the Andromeda of your ancient mythology. In a way I am an Andromeda myself—an Andromeda chained to a rock on the shore of a boundless sea, waiting for the monster to devour her. But unlike the original Andromeda, I have no Persseus—and he could not unchain me even if I had.

I don't understand, Jonathan said. I don't understand at all.

It is better that you should not.

And there's something else I don't understand also, he went on. You said that you could receive and send telepathically for millions of miles. If this be true, then you must have read my intent to kill you when you saw my capsule in your path. Why, then, did you keep on coming? Why didn't you change your course?

This time his waiting mind remained empty for so long that he thought the whale had severed contact. But such did not prove to be the case. The words that appeared on the horizon of his awareness, however, were remote from any he had expected to see: Perhaps because I wanted to die.

Why should you want to die?
It is not good to be an Andromeda without a Perseus. The shores of the sea are dark and lonely, and my chains are cruel. And when one must die soon anyway, there is little will to live.

Shocked, he said, Then there really is a monster!

Yes, Jonathan. Soon now it will devour me. Soon now I will be dead.

But you can flee from it. Your chains aren’t real!

No, they are not. But even though they are only figurative, I cannot break them. And now we must say good night.

No, Jonathan said. First you must tell me more.

I have told you too much already. Besides, I did not contact you to talk about myself, but of you.

Will you contact me again?

Only if you want me to.

I want you to very much.

Very well, I will contact you then. Good night.

Good night, Jonathan said. Good night—Andromeda.

In the belly of the space whale, darkness endured for nine hours, and daylight for fifteen. In each hour there were sixty minutes and in each minute there were sixty seconds. In the seconds lay the secret behind the seeming coincidence of the twenty-four hour day. They had been lengthened so that the slightly longer darkness-light sequence would conform to the slightly shorter darkness-light sequence that the founding fathers had become accustomed to on Old Earth.

A similar adherence to past chronology existed on New Earth, and by extension, in the New Earth Space Navy. But, unlike the darkness-light sequence in the belly of the whale, the darkness-light sequence on Venus did not approximate Old Earth’s. Venus’s day, in fact, was so long that it could not sensibly be considered a day at all, and consequently Old Earth time had been retained arbitrarily and a prime meridian had been established on Venus to correspond to the one passing through Greenwich. Hence, while Jonathan’s year corresponded to that of the whale, his month, owing to the accumulation through the centuries of the daily time-difference, did not. His month was April—that of the whale, March. However, it did not take him long to accustom himself to the discrepancy, and by the evening of his second day in the whale’s belly, he had forgotten all about it.

Just the same, the idea of months existing at all in such a milieu was disconcerting in itself. The world of the whale knew neither moon nor orbit, and yet the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year were despotically determined in the Gregorian tra-
dition, and every fourth year, February unfailingly acquired an extra twenty four hours. Darlene, when Jonathan playfully asked her the reason for this latter phenomenon, could supply him with no satisfactory answer. The Good Book, she said, ordained that such a thing should be so, and therefore it was so. Moreover, she added pointedly, it was not fitting to discuss such matters. He did not question her further.

Months predicate weeks, and weeks predicate weekends, and now one was on hand—the last weekend of March (space-whale time), A.D. 2339. Looking at the calendar in his room above the shed, Jonathan knew more bewilderment than before. How did the inhabitants of the world of the whale—the Prosperians, as they called themselves—correlate their own brief history with the number of years contained in the date and the number of previous years that it implied? In view of the fact that the demise of the world was imminent, the question was not a particularly important one; but just the same, he was curious. Perhaps the Good Book would provide the answer. All Prosperian families owned one, and maybe he would have an opportunity to look through the Meadows’ copy this very evening, for Darlene had also told him that he did not need to think that simply because his sleeping quar-
ters were in the loft over the shed that his living quarters need be too. Moreover, in line with her tacit invitation, she had supplied him with several pairs of pastel slacks and several pairs of pastel shirts out of her brother Ben’s wardrobe, saying that as Ben lived in Prosperity now and wore nothing but business pastels even when he came home weekends, the clothes were only going to waste. (Strictly speaking, “Prosperity” was the name of the colony rather than the name of the city in its midst, but people living in the country considered themselves a group apart and were prone to make a distinction.)

Finding the Good Book posed no problem. It rested on a small stand beside the fireplace and it had “Good Book” written all over it. “I’d like to do a little browsing, if you don’t mind,” Jonathan said after Darlene invited him into the parlor following supper. “I haven’t had the opportunity for a long while.”

Darlene’s gray eyes grew warm. “You’ve more than welcome to,” she said, sitting down on the sofa in front of the television set and activating the receiver tube.

He sat down beside her and opened the Good Book on his lap. He consulted the Old Testament first, and turned to Genesis. It was a compromise between the King James and Douay versions, but unremarkable otherwise save
for the absence of all references to phenomena alien to the world of the whale, such as the "lesser light" God had made to rule the night. The same minor editing existed throughout the other books, except for the Book of Jonah. That had been omitted altogether. Apparently the forefathers had been bitter about their plight and had not wished to be reminded of it in any way whatsoever.

He went on to the New Testament. Again, minor changes were the rule, and he began to despair of finding the answer to his question. Then, to his surprise, he came upon a third testament.

It was called the Modern Testament and was divided into five parts. The first part was called the Second Deluge. In it was described how God, angry over the mess His children had made out of everything during the twenty-two centuries ensuing the Crucifixion, had caused the waters to rise again and the face of the earth to be changed. Before doing this, however, he commissioned a Faithful Few, headed by George Simms, Jim Connors, Ed Mazur and Tony Rivera, to build an ark, the name of which was to be the Prosperity, and to fill it with two each of Holsteins, two each of Herefords, two each of Yorkshires, two each of Rambouilletts, two each of Rhode Island Reds, two each of Narragansetts, two each of Pekings; provisions for all and sundry; seeds/bulbs/plants for every vegetable and every fruit and every flower; carpenter tools, machinist tools, electronics equipment; and one copy each of the following books: the Bible, The Machinist's Handbook, The Carpenter's Companion, Mulrose Duffy's Physics made Easy, Albert Whittleton's Mathematics for the Masses, David Corey's Elementary Advertising, and John Optimum Peety's Everybody can be a Do-it-yourselfer. Everything went off on schedule, and after forty days and forty nights the waters subsided and Messrs. Simms, Connors, Mazur, Rivera, & Co. set about founding the New Civilization. It was at this point, if you took what you were reading seriously, that the second coming of Christ had occurred.

The second part of the Modern Testament was called The Second Gospel according to St. George. In it was described how God had benevolently sent His Son to Earth again in order to see to it that this time everybody got started off on the right foot. Whereupon His Son provided a blueprint for the New Civilization, explicit directions for developing a progressive economy, and a credo which read as follows and which, in style and grammar, was typical of the whole testament: My father gave you this world to make yourself
happy and contented with, so just make sure you do it. And remember this: nobody is no better than anybody else, even if they have a bigger house and car than you do, and a better job. And stay out of my father’s sky—he don’t want no people up there!

The third, fourth and fifth parts of the Modern Testament were entitled respectively The Second Gospel according to St. Jim, The Second Gospel according to St. Ed, and The Second Gospel according to St. Tony, and did not essentially differ from the first gospel except as follows: The Second Gospel according to St. Jim contained instructions for building a gasoline-powered motor, The Second Gospel according to St. Ed contained instructions for building an electrically powered motor, and The Second Gospel according to St. Tony contained a remarkable—if rambling—essay on the harnessing of electricity and the processing of crude oil. Many charges could be brought against the founders of Prosperity, but no one could ever accuse them of being dreamers.

Jonathan returned the Good Book to the stand and resumed his seat on the sofa. His head was whirling, and to still his thoughts he made an attempt to interest himself in the program in progress on the television screen. It was a play of some kind, but the story and the acting were so naive compared to the sophisticated performances he was accustomed to that he found it impossible to suspend disbelief. Darlene, though, was absorbed—not so absorbed, however, that she didn’t hear the car pull into the driveway and the footsteps on the gravel path.

She was up and over to the door in half a second. Clouds had appeared in the sky that afternoon, and the sound of falling rain could be heard when she swung open the portal. “Mom, dad!” she called. “Ben’s home!”

Mr. and Mrs. Meadows came hurrying in from the kitchen just as a tall brown-haired young man, attired in a neat pastel suit, stepped through the doorway. “Here, here,” he said, freeing himself from his sister’s arms. “You’d think I’d been gone a year instead of just a month!” He kissed his mother and shook hands with his father. “Brew some coffee, mom. I brought a real tough assignment home with me and the sooner I get started on it, the better.”

Darlene remembered Jonathan, and performed the amenities. Ben’s eyes were as gray as hers were, but there were shadows under his. He shook Jonathan’s hand. “Well, to work,” he said, and marched into the kitchen.

Darlene and Mr. and Mrs. Meadows marched in his wake, and Jonathan, not knowing what else to do, fell in behind them. Ben opened his brief case, spread
a brightly colored layout on the table and leaned over it. "We've tried this on three different test groups, and every time the response was zero," he said. "But Mr. Dalms still insists that it's good, and he gave me an extra day this week-end to find out what the trouble is. I hate to think what'll happen to me if I show up Monday morning without the answer."

"The answer to what?" Darlene asked.

"The answer to why such a lovely girl as the one you see in the picture can't sell the beautiful chair she's sitting in."

"But you don't have any problem at all," Jonathan said before he thought. "The reason she can't sell the chair is because she is sitting in it."

Ben faced him slowly. "I'm afraid I don't follow you."

Jonathan summoned all he knew of mid-twentieth century society to the forefront of his mind, mulled it over for a moment; then, "A chair like that," he said, "is slanted to appeal to the man of the house. In trying to associate it with an attractive girl, you were overzealous, and you ended up by identifying it with her instead. A wife, looking for a chair for her husband, instinctively resents the identification, and a husband, looking for a chair for himself, sees only the girl. To correct this situation, have your artist draw the chair with the girl standing beside it, smiling and holding a pair of men's slippers in her hand. That way, the wife, looking for a chair for her husband, can identify herself with the girl, and the husband, looking for a chair for himself, can associate the girl with the chair."

Ben was staring at him. "Why," he said, "I believe you're right. Are you an adman yourself?"

"I was—a long time ago."

"And you're working as a common farm-hand for a living!" Ben was incredulous. "Who were you associated with?"

Jonathan edged toward the back door. "An agency you've never heard of. Well, I'm happy to have been able to help you out—if I really have. Good night."

"Wait a minute," Ben said. "You can't walk out like that after virtually saving my life!"

"I'm afraid I can," Jonathan said. "And with justification. I'm really quite tired."

"I'm taking this into the office tomorrow morning and I'm going to tell the chief about your suggestion and about you too."

Darlene's eyes had stars in them. Embarrassed, Jonathan opened the door. "You can let me know how things worked out when you come back tomorrow night," he said. "If you still want to talk, we can talk then. Good night."
Lying in the darkness of the loft, he felt guilt steal over him. The problem had been such a simple one for someone living in a thought-world almost four centuries older than the present one, and his solving it had been analogous to Einstein solving a problem in eight-grade arithmetic. What would poor Ben do, he wondered, in a civilization so sophisticated that it was so immune to psychological sales techniques that it did not even respond to subliminal perception?

Jonathan sighed. Having betrayed himself for what he was—or what he once had been—he would now be thus identified, unless, of course, his suggestion did not work out. But it would work out—that was the trouble. It would work out as surely as he was lying there on his narrow bed, dozing off in the darkness. As surely as there was a sun in Andromeda's sky.

And work out it did. Ben's face was beaming when he showed up the next evening. Mr. Dalms had had the new layout executed and had tried it out on four test groups. In each case the response had been better than ninety percent favorable. But that was only part of the good news, Ben went on. He had told Mr. Dalms about Jonathan, and Mr. Dalms wanted to talk to him at the earliest opportunity—preferably at nine o'clock Monday morning.

Jonathan was perturbed, and that night he walked beneath Andromeda's stars. Was it right, he asked himself, to take advantage of a primitive society and capitalize on a talent that he did not, in actuality, possess? Was it right to introduce techniques into a civilization when for all he knew that civilization might not be ready for them?—

Yes, Jonathan, in this case it is right. Someday you will wear out your soul from too much searching.

Jonathan looked at the sky. Are you sure it's right, Andromeda?

Yes, Jonathan, I am sure. You will be accelerating the growth of a waste-based society, but in the long run the impetus you will lend its onward march will be so slight that the time of its arrival at its goal will be but inappreciably altered.

There is another consideration, Jonathan said. You told me that you were doomed to die, and that soon now you will be dead. Since you are the world I live in, that means that I will die soon too—so what purpose is there in my doing anything at all, regardless of whether it is right or wrong?

He sensed both surprise and contrition in Andromeda's thoughts. I am sorry, Jonathan. I forgot that you did not realize the vast difference in our objective life-spans. Although the subjec-
tive time of each of our longevities is identical, one of your years is roughly equivalent to one thousand of mine, even though I am capable at moments such as this of slowing my own time down. So while "soon" to me means a year from now, to you it means a millennium.

A thousand years, Jonathan said. Then I shall live to be an old man after all—barring accident or disease.

There are no diseases except the diseases that the Prosperians brought with them. Nor accidents, save those they create themselves. My cyclones are gentle, my tornadoes mild, and neither are ever haphazard. They process my wilderness and distribute soil where soil is needed most. And I have no droughts nor floods.

Jonah was only in his whale's belly three days and three nights, Jonathan said. I shall be in mine a lifetime. And then, Before, you said that the founding fathers hid the truth from their progeny because they believed there was no way out. Is there a way?

For a long while Andromeda did not answer. Then, No, Jonathan, there is not.

Then if I must live out my life here, I have the right to live it to the full. I will go to Prosperity then, and exploit my "talent."

You have my blessings.

Thank you, Jonathan said.

Good night, Andromeda.

The stars pulsed softly in the sky. Good night, Jonathan. May your days be filled with sunshine and your nights be filled with love.

And so it came to pass that Jonathan Sands went into the city of the Prosperians, and it came to pass also that his perception and his pen brought him recognition overnight. In less than a week he had an office of his own, three assistants to do his bidding, a private secretary to catch the pearls that dropped daily from his lips, and a girl Friday to guard his door against transgressors.

At first glance, Prosperity seemed more of a sprawling suburb than a city. Actually, however, it had been carefully laid out in accordance with the blueprint in the Modern Testament, as had the farms and factories that surrounded it. Its buildings were sturdily constructed and pleasing to the eye; its streets were wide and immaculate. In fact, if it hadn't been for one thing, Prosperity would have been an ideal city. As it was, it came very close to being one, and perhaps this was why its inhabitants accepted its single imperfection. More probably though, Jonathan reflected, they put up with the pestilential pollution that clouded their skies every morning and every evening because its source lay in an object
they revered—i.e. the gasoline-propelled automobile. Everybody owned one, and some families owned as many as three. Jonathan bought one himself after his second month in the city. Its cost was way out of proportion to its transportation value, and so far as its longevity was concerned, it might just have well have been put together with cotter pins; but in the world of the whale, a man was a nonentity without one—a knight without armor in a society that measured the worth of its members by the outward aspects of their individual coats of mail, regardless of what the Good Book said, and Jonathan, now that he had tasted the heady fruit of the tree of success, was no longer content to be a nonentity.

Darlene's eyes kindled with admiration when he drove into the Meadows' driveway on the evening of the day of his purchase. Previously he had been visiting the farm weekends with Ben, but this weekend Ben was remaining in the city in order to attend a lawn party at the home of his fiancée's parents. Jonathan was suddenly glad. He liked Ben, but Ben had a way of monopolizing his time with shop talk, and frequently there was very little left for less prosaic pursuits.

Darlene climbed into the car beside him and they talked for a while before going inside for supper, touching upon the splendor of the dash, the loveliness of the upholstery and the beauty of the hood. After supper they went riding together. It was a warm night, and Andromeda's stars seemed to swim in the soft blackness of her sky. Darlene was wearing a white dress and there was a red ribbon tied in her hair. The tiny pock mark on her right cheek—her one and only imperfection—gave her face the sole touch it needed to know beauty.

He forsook the heavily traveled roads for the less frequented ones and wound deeper and deeper into the country. High on a hill, where the stars were close, he stopped the car and looked down into the stars in Darlene's eyes. His private secretary was as pretty as she was prompt and his girl Friday had an effervescence that put champagne to shame. But Darlene was a summer's day. He bent and kissed her and tasted the sun and the wind on her lips, and the sweetness of the darling buds of May. Around him the starlight quivered, and the night wind seemed to gasp.

After that, it seemed only natural that they should be talking of houses and cars and kids. They talked for hours, the starlight raining down all around them, and it surprised him that two people could have so much in common when they had known each other for so short a span of time. It surprised him too that
such a small and lovely head
could contain so many plans.
The house was the first con-
sideration, of course, and after
announcing their engagement a
week later, they set about finding
an ideal lot on which to build it.
There were plenty available, and
they chose one finally that was
several miles from the city limits.
It was situated on a gentle hill-
side, had plenty of elbow room on
either side of it, and fronted a
new road that led arrow-straight
to Prosperity and made commut-
ing a pleasure rather than a chore.
Darlene had firm ideas about
the kind of a house she wanted to
build, and Jonathan gave her free
rein. The one she eventually de-
cided upon was typical of the pre-
vailing architectural mood—tri-
leveled, multi-windowed and dou-
ble of garage. Its levels would go
nicely with the contour of the
hill and the finished product
would blend in pleasantly with
the landscape. Excavation was be-
gun forthwith.
Jonathan continued to prosper.
They would have four children,
he decided, rather than the trifling
two they had tentatively agreed
upon. Thinking about the matter
in his suite—no mere office was
equal to his activities now—he
smiled cynically to himself. Ap-
parently there was more peasant
blood in his veins than he had
thought, and now the blood was
taking over. He even found him-
self thinking that peasant stock
was good stock, and was astound-
ed by his own apostasy. He, who
had written in his one and only
book that “should Hylobates some-
day climb down from the trees
and propagate himself in excess
of other species, we shall doubt-
less have clichés to the effect that
Hylobates stock is the sturdiest
and stablest of the lot, and that
in order for one to be a normal
and useful citizen, one’s ancestors
must have been tree-walking pith-
ecanthropi with fuzzy fur and
even fuzzier thoughts.”
Troubled one night after seeing
Darlene home, he climbed the
hill behind the half-completed
house and sat down beneath the
stars. Seemingly at his feet, the
lights of the city began and spread
out into a lake of brightness so
vast that the concavity of the
world of the whale was distinctly
visible. Beyond them—above
them, in one sense—the handful
of lights that was the nucleus of
Prosperity II faintly showed. On
either side of him the scattered
squares of farmhouse windows
freckled the darkness, and here
and there in the distance blazed
the fluorescent pyre of a factory.
Tomorrow he would write odes
to toothpaste, toilet tissue and
detergents, but tomorrow was far
away. Now there was only the
night and the wind and the stars,
and himself on a lonely hill. And
Andromeda—
I thought you had forsaken me, she said. I thought you had forgotten all about me.

No, he said, I haven't forgotten you. I haven't, and I never will.

Someday you will. It is only natural that you should.

No, he said again. The world will never be too much with me for that.

It will be someday, Jonathan, she said. And then, I lied to you when I said that there was no way out.

Why?

Because I was afraid that you would take it and afraid that I would be too weak to refuse to help you; because I did not want to be alone. You were the first being I had communicated with for two hundred of your years.

Why should that be? Your world is full of men.

But not men with whom I can speak. Consider, Jonathan: would they respond except with terror to alien thoughts in their minds? Could they accept the concept of their living in the belly of a whale?

No, I guess they couldn't, Jonathan said.

Anyway I lied to you so that you would have to remain. I do not need to lie to you any longer because now you will never leave. You can't leave now, Jonathan, because you too are chained.

What is the way?

Similar to your Jonah's way.

But I cannot vomit you forth at will upon the dry land. You would have to go to the pre-processed area—the wilderness—where you first emerged; but first I would have to make room for and absorb a portion of the planet you wished to emerge on. By blending into its rotational pattern I could cancel out its Coriolis Force and minimize the effect of my own mass at the same time. After you stepped upon the surface, I could withdraw and you would be free. But you will not leave now, will you Jonathan. You can't.

No, he said, I can't. And then, Where are we now?

Beyond the constellation of Andromeda, on the perimeter of the galactic lens. On the shores of the Andromeda Deep. "The sea is calm tonight, the tide is full—" Your mind is filled with lovely words and phrases, Jonathan.

Why don't you set out now, he asked, and join your people in Messier 31?

Because I would never make it. I told you once before that I was like your mythological Andromeda, chained to a rock on the shore of the sea, waiting for the monster to devour her.

I don't believe your talk of monsters, Jonathan said. If you are dying, it is because of natural causes. Perhaps because of old age. He paused despite himself. But that can't be, he said. You
don’t sound old, somehow. You sound like—like—

Old? No, I am not old. It is not old age that is killing me, but disease. Disease is a monster of sorts, is it not?

Disease? I don’t understand.

I did not mean to tell you, but perhaps it is best that you should know. Space whales, as you call us, are susceptible to harmful bacteria, in common with all forms of life. Bacteria of an order far higher than those that invade bodies like your own, but bacteria withal. . . . That is why space whales are forbidden to swallow spaceships.

Stunned, he said, The Prosperity. The passengers and crew . . . The founding fathers—

The aerobic pathogenic multicellular bacteria. A few at first, then doubling, tripling, quadrupling. Consuming, destroying. Not out of malevolence but in response to the life force within them. Melting and marketing the ores I need for my sustenance, draining me of oil deposits accumulated over millennia, laying low my forests, enervating my topsoil, taking and not returning, polluting my lakes and my atmosphere; trying to attain the technological El Dorado promised them by their Sunday-supplement Christ . . . The founding fathers were well-intentioned, but their memories were short. In their eagerness to exploit my vast and virgin lands, they forgot the lesson of Old Earth . . . Yes, Jonathan, I am dying. In a thousand of your years the disease will have run its course and I shall be dead.

Aghast, he said, I did not know, I did not realize. And then, But a thousand years is a long time. At least you could cross the Deep and be with your people when you died.

No, Jonathan, I cannot. The sadness of the thought was almost tangible. Even traveling at my maximum velocity I could not hope to reach the shores of Messier 31 in less than three millennia. I—I am afraid to die in darkness, Jonathan, in the cold and callous emptiness of the sea. I am not really like the cetaceous creatures you named me after. They were bold and brave and savage. They feared nothing and no one—not even man.

But man destroyed them, every one. And the sea they lived in and the land that rose out of the sea. Not out of malevolence, no—but was our motivation any better? Is greed noble? Is selfishness? Is anthropocentricism? Tell me, Andromeda, is there nothing we can’t destroy?

The horizon of his mind remained empty. Nothing? he repeated. Is there nothing, Andromeda?

He stood up on the hill, beneath the pulsing stars. “Andromeda, answer me,” he said. “Is there nothing we can’t destroy?”
The stars looked silently down on him. The night wind sighed, but made no comment. Seemingly at his feet glowed the light-inflamed ulcer of the city, and in the distance the new infection showed, insignificant now, but tomorrow vast and sprawling and malignant. "Answer me, Andromeda!" he cried. "Answer me!"

Silence. Stars. Darkness. The lonely wind against his face.

"All right," he said, "so be it," and started down the hill. "If destruction is our destiny, then destruction will be our way of life."

He climbed into his car. Starlight gleamed gently on the rakish hood, glittered harshly on the chrome filigree. The framework of the half-completed house showed against the hillside like the gaunt ribs of a flesh-stripped whale. He backed into the arrow-straight highway and headed for Prosperity. PROGRESS, a sign by the roadside said. ONLY THROUGH PROGRESS CAN MAN'S DREAMS COME TRUE. Sponsored by the Prosperity Chamber of Horrors. No, not "Horrors." He looked at the sign again. This time he read it right. The Prosperity Chamber of Commerce.

And so it came to pass that on the twenty-fifth day of July, A.D. 2339, Jonathan Sands married Darlene Meadows in the belly of the space whale. Much had he prospered already, and as the months went by he prospered more. Success and security were his, firelight and rare wine, and the love of a lovely woman. In the womb of the house on the side of the hill he spent pleasant evenings watching the walking talking shadows to whose level he had at last reduced himself, and on dew-sparkling Sunday mornings he went to church and listened to descriptions of a Kingdom of Heaven, the exact location of which was unknown but the existence of which was unquestioned, and sang Te Deums to St. George, St. Jim, St. Ed and St. Tony; and on golden Sunday afternoons he read Sunday supplements that patted all good Prosperians on the back for their essential kindness and nobility and adjured them to have more and more babies, for babies were consumers—weren't they?—and didn't the success of a supply and demand economy depend on increasing demand, and wasn't a supply and demand economy the only foundation on which to build the World of Tomorrow?

Yes, Jonathan worked and watched and read and listened, but he was very careful not to think one inch beyond the end of his nose. And then, one day, Darlene told him that she was going to have a baby, and despite all he could do to stop them, the walls of the house fell away and he found himself looking outward
through the fleshless ribs of a whale.

In common with all Prosperians, he wanted a better world for his children, but would not his children want a better world for their children? And would not their children want a better world for theirs? And wouldn't somebody's children someday arise some sorry Christmas morning and find an empty stocking?

But all worlds died, he reminded himself. Perhaps the presence of man hastened their death to some degree, but in the final analysis their death was as inevitable as the death of suns. The death of this world possessed poignant overtones because of its relative imminence and because of his rapport with it. But had not Andromeda lived for millennia already, and wasn't she going to live for a millennium more? How much was the presence of man in her belly really shortening her life?—and wasn't she doomed to die anyway, regardless of his depredations? And wouldn't somebody's children someday find an empty stocking, waste or no waste, depletion of natural resources or no depletion of natural resources, misuse of topsoil or no misuse of topsoil, pollution of air and water or no pollution of air and water? So wasn't he, Jonathan Sands, crying in his beer over nothing?

His doubts left him, and he began to feel whole again. He had everything a man could ask for, and he was content. Anyone who didn't take the world he lived in for granted, he told himself, was a fool.

Nevertheless, a stubborn question remained in his mind and kept gnawing on the edges of his complacency, and one night when he couldn't sleep he climbed the hill behind the house and stood beneath the stars. Would she contact him again? he wondered. Or had all that had been needed to be said, said, and was he now a part of her past?—

No, Jonathan, you are still very much in my thoughts.

I came, he said, to ask a question—a question I should have asked before.

Ask it then, and I will answer if I can.

It is a very simple question, but you must answer it in terms of your years, not mine.

Very well, she said. Go on.

How old are you? Jonathan asked.

I'm seventeen.

Around him in the night lights shone from peopled houses, and behind him Prosperity pulsed in polychromatic hues. Above him glistened the stars—

Seventeen . . .

A young girl in a white dress came down a spiral stairway in his mind. Her expectant face was radiant in the light of the chan-
delier; but the ballroom floor was empty, and there were no musicians playing Strauss—

Seventeen . . .

Consigned to the endless night. Chained to a rock on the shore of the cold and boundless sea. Sick and frightened and alone—

Listen, Andromeda. Here is what we'll do. The answer lies in your stars. In subliminal perception.

No, she said, after a while. It will be better if I die.

Listen, he said again. It isn't you alone I'm saving. I'm saving my people too.

But there will be hardships, she said. Many of you will die. It's better that many of us should die now than that many more of us should die later. Listen.

She listened, and he sent his thoughts to her, and finally she asked, What kind of a world do you want?

One as much like yours as you can find. One with green grass and trees; with lakes and hills and rivers. One with air as sweet as yours is. Do you know of such a world, Andromeda?

Yes, she said. There is one not far from here. You—you will like it there, Jonathan.

Perhaps.

I will proceed there now and go into orbit around it so that when the time comes I will be ready . . . Jonathan?

Yes?

Are you sure that this is what you want?

Yes, he said, I'm sure. And then, One of your stars just fell. It did not really fall, it just went out—but you may make a wish, Jonathan.

I wish you luck then—and happiness when you rejoin your people. Good night, Andromeda.

Good night, Jonathan, she said. I wish you happiness too.

The first message flashed upon the Prosperian television screens the next evening. The program during which it appeared occupied a prime-time slot, and fully half of the people saw it. They did not see it consciously, of course, and even if they had they never would have dreamed that it had originated in the stars. It was a simple message, meaningless without the ones that would follow. JONATHAN SANDS WILL SAVE US, it said.

In accordance with Jonathan's instructions, Andromeda repeated it over and over. The operation was a simple one for a space whale who had been Shanghaied into the industry and without whom the industry wouldn't have had a leg to stand on. She merely varied certain elements of the picture signal which her stars were mirroring, creating an ephemeral image of the desired words.

The next evening the message
was more complex—and more urgent. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SUN STAYED OUT? it asked. It was followed by the first message: JONATHAN SANDS WILL SAVE US.

On the third evening the message read, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SUN WENT OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY? Later on in the evening it was subtly altered to read, WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE SUN GOES OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY?

In the middle of the next day, it did. Not for very long, but long enough to make everybody sit up and take notice. That evening the message read, WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE SUN GOES OUT ALTOGETHER? And then, JONATHAN SANDS WILL SAVE US.

The following day the sun went out for twenty minutes. It was enough. Everyone had been exposed to the messages by this time, and there was no doubt in anyone’s mind as to what was going to happen. If there had been, that evening’s message would have dispelled it: THE END OF THE WORLD IS ON HAND. JONATHAN SANDS WILL SAVE US. I WILL CONTACT HIM IMMEDIATELY.

Jonathan was prepared, and with the full co-operation of the Prosperian government he organized and effected as orderly an exodus as had ever been seen, either within or without a whale. The promised land lay ready and waiting where part of Weirdland had been, and his astonished flock filed upon it dutifully, carrying belongings, leading livestock, a few of them driving heavily-loaded trucks—the only vehicles he had allowed. Before giving the word, he checked with Andromeda to see if anyone had been left behind; then, looking up into her kindly sky, he said, “We’re ready now, Andromeda.”

Darkness fell, and cries of terror rose around him. He held his silence: there was nothing he could do. The darkness intensified, became blackness—a blackness so impenetrable that it could almost be felt. Finally there was a faint tremor, and then the vast mass of the whale could be seen rising into an alien sky.

The cries of terror mounted and the gigantic shadow of the whale lay across the land. But only briefly. It shrank rapidly as Andromeda gained altitude, and starlight tiptoed in to take its place. For a moment she hovered in the heavens like a great and gentle moon; then she began to recede. Seemingly in her wake was a constellation that looked like a broken chain.

Jonathan could not move. A knife of pain was transfixed in his throat, and he could hardly see. Did space whales cry too?
Yes, Jonathan, they do—although I did not know till now. His chest was tight and he could barely breathe. Why did he feel this way? he wondered. Naked and alone and forsaken. Perhaps part of the answer lay in the reason why, before he had bled her of her resources and raped her lands and polluted her seas and rivers, man had called Old Earth “mother.”

You are different from the others of your kind, Jonathan, Andromeda said from faraway. You love things for what they are, and not for what they can give you. It is fitting that you should have come into your own as a leader of your people. And then, Good by, Jonathan. May your days be filled with sunshine and your nights be filled with love.

The girl in the white dress came down the spiral stairway again, and this time the ballroom floor and the musicians were in their places. Suitors flocked around her, and the musicians struck up Strauss.

He watched her, then, whirl off into the music, seventeen and no longer alone.

Good by, Andromeda, he said, and now the tears were running down his cheeks. Godspeed!

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