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stories

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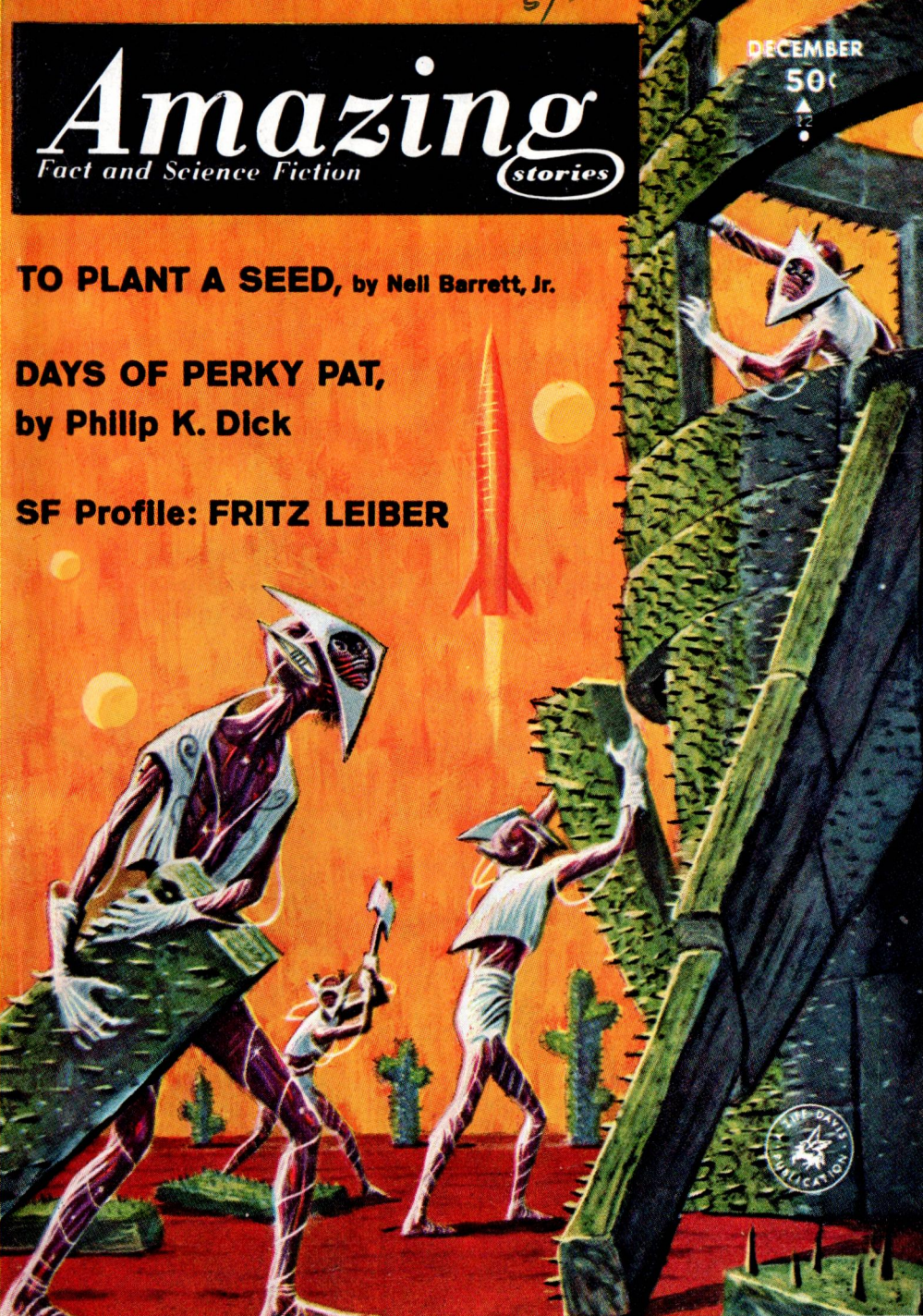
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TO PLANT A SEED, by Nell Barrett, Jr.

DAYS OF PERKY PAT,
by Philip K. Dick

SF Profile: FRITZ LEIBER



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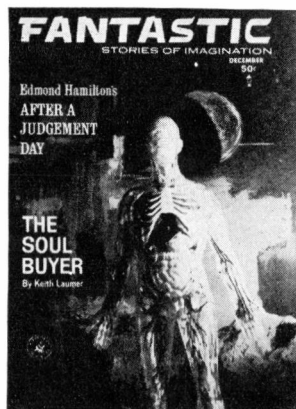
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Amazing

Fact and Science Fiction Stories

December, 1963
Vol. 37, No. 12

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"FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926"

NOVELETS

TO PLANT A SEED	
By Neal Barrett, Jr.	6
THE DAYS OF PERKY PAT	
By Philip K. Dick	54

SHORT STORIES

KILLJOY	
By F. A. Javor	45
THE GOD ON THE 36th FLOOR	
By Herbert D. Kastle	90
THE KLYGHA	
By H. B. Fyfe	106

SF PROFILE

FRITZ LEIBER: Destiny x 3	
By Sam Moskowitz	79

FEATURES

EDITORIAL	5
COMING NEXT MONTH	44
THE SPECTROSCOPE	119
... OR SO YOU SAY	123
HUGO WINNERS	127

Cover: Emsch

Illustrating To Plant a Seed

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EDITORIAL

NO spaceship jockey will ever have to go hungry if Dr. Sydney Schwarz, chief physiologist for the team at Grumman Aircraft Co. which is putting together the Lunar Excursion Module, has his way. The good doctor (if Mssrs. Davidson and Asimov will forgive the petty plagiarism) has originated a substance he calls ESM: Edible Structure Material. In brief, it is a combination of spaceship building material, and food.

ESM looks like Fiberboard, weighs about the same, and can be used much the same way. But unlike Fibreboard, each 100 grams of ESM contains 400 calories. Grind up ESM, or soak it for a day, and hey presto! our intrepid astronaut has an emergency ration.

ESM is constructed of hominy, cornstarch, powdered milk, flour, and powdered banana flakes. It is heated, and can be molded in sheets to be used for such structures as instrument panels, bunks, wall sheathing, and compartment dividers. It will hold screws and nails (be careful to remove them, however, before eating). It is waterproof, insect-

proof, and lasts indefinitely. With sugar and cream and strawberries—yum, delicious! Blast off, everyone. ESMies, anyone?

* * *

Here's a cutie dreamed up by someone who is puzzled at the increasingly complex names for scientists today:

A *hydromicrobiogeochemist* is one who studies small underwater flora and their relationship to underlying rock strata by chemical methods.

A *microbiohydrogeochemist* is one who studies flora in very small bodies of water and their relationship to underlying rock strata by chemical methods.

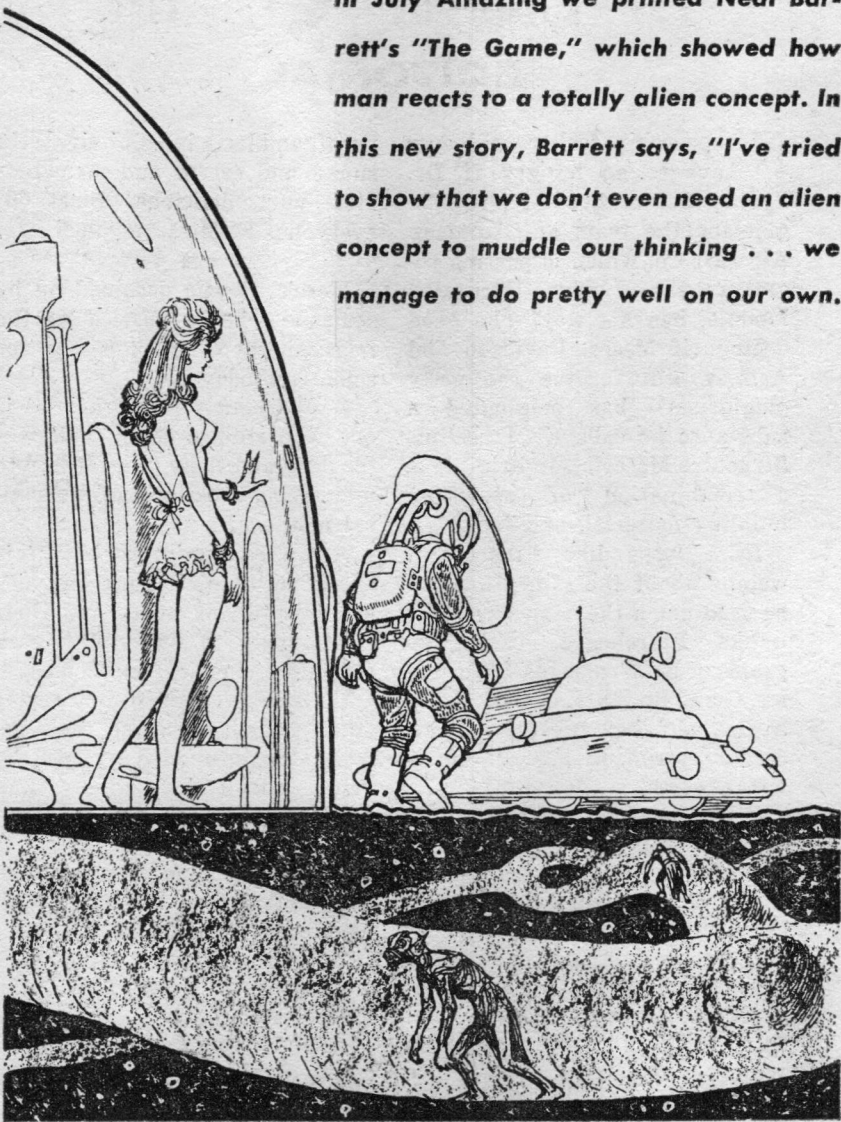
A *microbiohydrogeochemist* studies small flora and their relationship to underlying rock by using chemical methods and SCUBA equipment.

A *biohydromicrogeochemist* is a very small geochemist who studies the effect of plant life in hydrology.

A *hydromicrobiogeochemist* is a very small geochemist who studies wet plants.

A *biomicrohydrogeochemist* is a very small, wet geochemist who likes lettuce.

In July *Amazing* we printed Neal Barrett's "The Game," which showed how man reacts to a totally alien concept. In this new story, Barrett says, "I've tried to show that we don't even need an alien concept to muddle our thinking . . . we manage to do pretty well on our own."



TO PLANT A SEED

By NEAL BARRETT, JR.

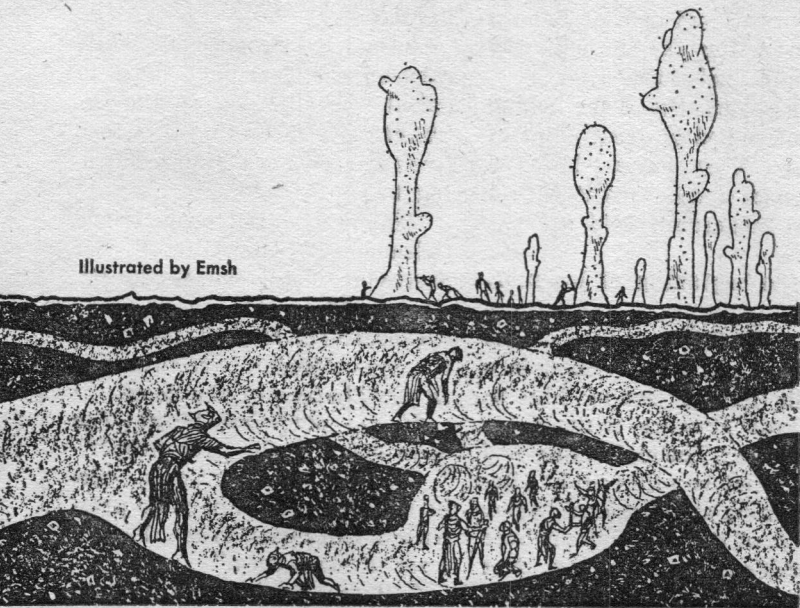
GITO leaned against his dome and squinted narrowly at the 888 naked vermilion back-sides. It's not too often, he mused, one has the opportunity to examine the collective rear of an entire race. Not just the greatest distinction in the world, maybe, but good enough to win a bar bet.

No need to count, he knew—

they were all there, the whole population of Sahara I stretched upon the sand, waiting for Lord Sun to rise above the brown horizon.

As an awesome moan rose from 888 throats, Gito automatically reached up and lowered his dark goggles. Then, in unison, 888 heads plunged into the sand in penance for yesterday

Illustrated by Emsch



sins. In answer, Lord Sun burst over the horizon in a flash of white anger. The heads rose again, and moans turned to high-pitched shrieks of gladness.

Gito frowned. It was hard to share the joy of a new dawn when *Posi Frondee*, Lord Sun, turned his eyes into lead marbles even through the thick-lensed goggles. The incandescent eye stared down with unbelievable brightness—each ray a burning wire stretching 800-million miles to shrivel and desiccate Gito Marachek.

He took one last look. The ceremony was over, and brick-red figures scurried for their sandy tunnels. Twenty seconds of dawn was sufficient on Sahara III—even for the Kahrii who lived and died there.

Gito sealed the door behind him and pulled in great gulps of cool air. Then he swallowed a heat tablet and chased it with a pint of moderately cold water.

AT the beginning of his tour, his nightmares had concentrated on vivid pictures of his fool-proof power pack oozing into metallic butter, leaving him to face *Posi Frondee* without air conditioning. The nightmares had stopped, but he still caught himself running an occasional rag or the edge of a sleeve lovingly over the pack's smooth surface. Not that dust could possibly enter the

sealed unit—it was just a matter of respect.

The buzzer rang softly. Gito jerked around and frowned suspiciously at the port. Buzzing meant guests—and daytime guests were as common on Sahara III as blizzards.

He stood and moved across the room. Through the slight translucence of the dome a short figure stood outlined against the morning terror of *Posi Frondee*. Gito quickly pressed the door stud. He heard the outer panel slide open, then shut. The temperature lowered as cool air poured in and sucked out the stifling heat. Gito slid back the lock portal and dimmed the lights.

Golsamel-ri dropped his white robe on the floor and stood in naked formality before the entranceway. "Greetings, friend Geetomorrow-shek. Happy dawning to you."

"Happy dawning to you, friend Golsamel-ri," said Gito. "What passes to bring honor to my dwelling?"

Golsamel-ri blinked, his sensitive eyes closed to bare slits even in the dimness of the dome.

"I am not disturbing? You were not preparing for sleep?"

Gito shrugged. "Later, perhaps. Each second of your presence is more dear to me than an hour of sleep-time."

Golsamel-ri acknowledged with

a gracious bow, lowering his forehead nearly to the ground. Then he straightened, closed his eyes, and folded his hands carefully over his mouth.

Gito sighed, and relaxed against the back of his chair. Evidently, he had done it again—stumbled onto one of the 8,888 Supreme Compliments, or close enough to count, anyway. It was not too hard, if you spoke any Kahriin at all.

Custom now called for a few moments of meditative silence, and Gito was glad enough to take advantage of the interruption.

He was puzzled over Golsamel-ri's visit. Being at the dome was not unusual—he was a frequent and welcome guest—but his timing was far from normal for a native of Sahara III. A complex set of rules dictated Kahrii behavior—to break one of those rules was something to be considered. Golsamel-ri had come to the dome from the Ceremony, upsetting a life-long habit that called for silence and sleep until the next waking, when *Posi-Frondee* sank in the west and work resumed on the surface.

What, then, had brought him here? Casting custom aside would cause Golsamel-ri temporary anguish, certainly—but there was also the trip back to his tunnel in the terrifying heat. More than *temporary* anguish could result from that.

Whatever it was, Gito had an idea he wasn't going to like it. He glanced apprehensively at the Kahrii. Standing, Golsamel-ri would have reached slightly above his waist. Now, in his squat-straddle position, the Kahrii's body seemed like a limbless red statue. He was, of course, anything but limbless, Gito knew. The stubby, scoop-shaped feet and hands could pack plenty of power when they needed to.

ON another world, they might have been the limbs of a mindless, nocturnal burrower—on Sahara III, the fleshy webbing that covered long splayed fingers ended abruptly beneath the third joint of four-jointed members—allowing free use of fingers that should have been no more than claws, in conjunction with a perfectly respectable thumb. It wasn't much of a difference, Gito reminded himself, but while Golsamel-ri might still be a nocturnal burrower, he was also a thinking, reasoning creature.

Slit eyes opened and blinked at Gito over narrow, short-whiskered jowls.

"I thank you for bestowing honor upon me," Golsamel-ri whispered, "I am undeserving."

The statement required no answer. Gito waited in silence.

"I will not long disturb your privacy," he went on. "May *Posi*

Frondee understand and forgive my intrusion. I wish to speak of the other—the female you name Cowezh-a-tir.”

Gito's brow lifted. “Arilee? Arilee Colwester? What passes with her? Has she intruded in some way on your being? If she has—”

“No.” Golsamel-ri's head shook violently. His eye slits opened wide. “Please, I make no formal accusation against Cowezh-a-tir. This is not lightly done!”

“Yes, of course,” Gito covered quickly, “I—understand that.”

Golsamel-ri breathed a sigh of genuine relief. “As I say, this thing *concerns* Cowezh-a-tir—but is in no way a criticism. I would go to her myself, but my life thread has not traveled with hers as it has with yours. Also, of course—forgive me—she is a female. I had thought it would be seemly if I spoke to you about the thing—and perhaps you would convey it to Cowezh-a-tir? You are offended by this presumption?”

Gito relaxed imperceptively. Evidently, it wasn't too bad—just another Kahrii ethical entanglement that might be unraveled in a week or two of ceremony.

“No,” Gito assured him, “I am in no way offended. On the contrary, I gain much honor by assuming any confidence you might bestow.”

Good grief, Gito swallowed, *did I say that?* No question about it, he decided grimly; I've about had it on Sahara III.

“Now. What may I carry to Colwester?”

Golsamel-ri looked away. “I hesitate, good friend. Still, I have spoken with those wiser than myself, and it must be.” He straightened himself and took a deep breath. “Dishonor may fall upon me, but Cowezh-a-tir is no longer to be allowed to observe the tunnels of the children of *Posi Frondee*.”

Gito sat very still.

“It is a terrible thing,” Golsamel-ri moaned. “We are forced to break the High Rule of Hospitality. I only pray the enormity of our reason is sufficient. There will be an indemnity, of course.”

Gito opened his mouth, then caught himself quickly. He bowed his head gravely. “Of course. I will discuss the terms with Colwester.”

Golsamel-ri stood, wrapping his white robe about himself in that peculiar manner Gito had never quite been able to duplicate.

“I speak no more of this,” he said quietly. “Convey my mortification to Cowezh-a-tir. Good Sleeping, Geetomorrow-shek.”

“Good Sleeping, Golsamel-ri—my dwelling has been blessed.”

With a quick bow, the alien was through the airlock. In a

moment, Gito caught a glimpse of him diving for the nearest tunnel mound, *Posi Frondee's* beneficent rays burning into his vitals.

GITO frowned at the empty desert. He gazed up at the ceiling, tapping one finger thoughtfully against his cheek. Then, cursing himself silently, he walked the few steps to the rear of the dome and stuck his head around the corner.

"Arilee?"

The sleeping quarter lights were dimmed, and for a moment he could see nothing. He stepped out of the doorway and let the sunlight behind him fall on bare shoulders and wheat-colored hair. He caught an almost imperceptible flinch at the back of a slim, white neck.

Grinning, he sat down beside her.

"You awake?"

"No. Certainly not." Then she turned over toward him and sat up, pulling the thin gown about her just in time—or a particle of a second too late. It was a trick most any well-trained Mistress over a Five could do in her sleep; but Gito could recall none that did it quite as well as Arilee.

She kissed him lightly and brushed a strand of hair from her eyes. "Well," she smiled, "crisis on Sahara III too big for you to handle?"

Gito nodded, looking as firm-and-no-nonsense as he could when he was looking at Arilee.

"Yes, as a matter of fact there is—and I think its name is Arilee.—Or Cowezh-a-tir, depending on your point of view."

Arilee lifted a brow in question.

"Our friend Golsamel-ri just risked about a 99th degree burn to let me know you've been officially banned from roaming about the tunnels of the Children of the Sun."

Arilee bit her lip. "Uh—oh."

"Yep. Uh—oh it is. Naturally, the whole thing was too mortifying for him to go into—so suppose you fill me in on the details?"

Arilee sighed, wrinkling her face in thought. Then she looked at Gito and nodded slowly.

"Now what is *that* supposed to mean?"

"Just that I am not at all surprised, love. I was—expecting something like this—sort of."

Gito thought her eyes darted away maybe a second too soon. He stood up and looked down at her. "You're trying to tell me something. And I have an idea I'm not going to like it."

"I don't think you are either," she admitted. She paused, then smiled up at him brightly. "Coffee? You—me—talk-talk?"

Arilee was a mimic, and he instantly recognized Innocent Ta-

hitian Beauty Establishes Rapport With White Trader. He grinned before he remembered to look stern.

"Okay. Coffee is called for. You dress and I'll brew—and I mean dress. This is definitely talk-talk."

The coffee was bubbling when she stepped from the sleep quarters, and he remembered with happy resignation that a Mistress always obeys, if not the letter of the law, then the vague spirit of it. The implied order was plainly 'fully dressed and no distractions,' and Arilee complied.—Only Arilee was distracting in anything, and Mistress-designed coveralls did a great deal more than cover.

"Very funny," he said acidly, "ha-ha."

She picked a chair and breezed into it with natural and innocent grace. He handed her a steaming mug and she smiled.

Gito settled down across from her and passed a cigarette.

"Now—to the point."

"Okay," she nodded, "to the point. I think Golsamel-ri doesn't want me in the tunnels because they're doing something of religious significance."

Gito sighed. "Doll, you are delaying the game. *Everything* they do is of religious significance—and *you* know it."

Arilee shrugged. "Sure. But

this is ah—more significantly significant. You ready?"

"I am firmly braced."

She took a deep breath. "Gito, I suspect it is getting close to moving day for the Kahrii."

"Once more, if you please. I don't think I got that."

"Simple. They are leaving the tunnels. Taking off. Make big journey. Gods angry—"

"All right, knock it off." He shook his head and laughed.

"You have flipped, Arilee. You are my own living doll and all that but you don't know what the hell you are talking about. I think you've been getting too much sun, or *Posi Frondee*, or whatever you want to call it."

Arilee shrugged. She pursed her lips and peeked at the ceiling. "I didn't *think* you were going to like it."

"Ho-ho," he said flatly, "that does just about sum it up." He leaned forward and took her hands in his.

"Now Arilee," he said quietly, "You pulled a little boo-boo and you're too stubborn to admit it. Okay. I've let you roam around down there because I was—frankly—pleased that you were interested in finding out what they were like. In spite of the fact it's against every regulation in the book. Now, you tell me what it was and we'll forget it. Okay?"

She shook her head. "Not

okay. Did Golsamel-ri say that?"

"Say what?"

"That I—pulled a boo-boo?"

Gito dropped her hand in mock astonishment. "If you'd dissected his grandmother, would he risk eternal motification by *complaining* about it? He said he prayed his sin would be forgiven—or something. And there is an indeminty—I suggest 25 lengths of Shari cloth."

Arilee cringed. "I don't want any Shari cloth. It itches."

"Arilee—"

She grabbed his wrists and smiled patiently. Gito frowned. "Now don't give me the mother-will-explain bit, Arilee."

She laughed. "Mother's going to *have* to, because I get the strange feeling you don't believe a word I'm saying. Listen—I *mean* it, Gito. I'm *not* just making this up."

HE looked at her closely. For a moment, he had the horrid idea that she wasn't.

"One," she said, holding up a finger, "the Shari roots are *not* being worked. They are simply being *sliced off* in portable sections. You see that? *Portable*? As in *Going Somewhere*?"

"That's all?"

"Nope."

"Then—?"

"They're — nervous. Like they're afraid — or anticipating something."

Gito snorted. "The Kahrii are never nervous. They are incapable of being afraid."

"*These* Kahrii are . . ." she said haughtily.

Gito ran a hand across his face. "Is that all?"

"No."

"Please, Arilee . . ."

After a moment, Gito said, "Just slicing the roots?"

"Uh-huh. Slicing."

He tried to consider the intricacies of Kahrii agriculture.

"You mean slicing—not just notching for the milk or cutting the polyps?"

Arilee nodded smugly.

"Hah!" said Gito suddenly. "Doesn't mean a thing. The roots could be cramped—the Kahrii could be thinning them out. They could be diseased, they could—oh, come on, Arilee; you took one little fact and decided the whole race is about to take the Long Trek?" He spread his hands to take in the whole smoldering world outside.

"Arilee—where in hell would they *go*?"

Arilee said nothing. And that, thought Gito warily, is disturbing in itself. She just sat there, small hands neatly folded in her lap. He had the uncomfortable feeling she was measuring him for dissection and study.

"Arilee, will you *please* not do that? I'm trying, out of my high regard for your brains, beauty

and assorted charms—not to mention the fact that you're at the head of your class in Gito's Quick Course in Alien Ethics—to give you a fair hearing on this—this—”

She uncurled long legs from her chair and walked over and put her arms around his neck. She kissed him long and soundly.

When she stepped back, her eyes were sparkling. “You have no idea,” she said sincerely, “how *relieved* I am to get this foolish idea out of my head. Now that you've explained it to me, I can see it's all just nonsense. And you *won't* let the idea of the Kahrii slicing off the roots of the plant that *keeps them alive* bother you—will you?”

“What? Oh, certainly not.”

She walked to the door of their sleeping quarters and raised a hand to the top of her coveralls. Again, it was impossible to tell what she had in mind.

“See?” she said happily. “When you talk things out, it's not so bad, is it?”

SUNSET usually pulled Sahara III's temperature down to the low nineties, but Gito seldom left his dome until the local midnight. In the first place, there was no place to go—and nothing to see he hadn't seen before. More particularly, his comfort-oriented logic told him it was

pointless to trade his refrigerated 72 for a dry, hot and thirsty 86.

Now, drooping limply in the sandcar, gasping from the short run through the heat of dusk, he waited for the air conditioning to breath him back to life.

Gito had actually witnessed few Saharan sunsets in the open. They left him with the illogical but unshakable conviction that the great molten eye of *Posi Frondee* might reverse itself and rise again, catching him there on the bare surface. It was an unpleasant thought, to say the least—and the image of Arilee curled comfortably in the cool darkness of the dome was no help at all.

In an hour or so she'd be awake, and know damn well he'd taken her seriously enough to have a look on his own. He grinned and shook his head. Being Arilee, she had probably known what he'd do all along anyway.

Arilee Colwester was a Nine, like himself—and while a Nine was average for an experienced Planet Warden, a Mistress classification that high was nothing to sneer at. Not, of course, that he'd ever sneer at Arilee. She had been with him only two out of the eight months of her tour, and already he had a feeling for her he'd never experienced with the others.

Now that he thought back, it

hadn't really taken two months—from the moment she stepped off the supply ship there was, well—something—he couldn't put his finger on exactly what it was. It was just there.

And, as he told her, he was frankly and genuinely flattered when she took an interest in the habits of the Kahrii. Gito was perceptive enough to recognize that it *was* real interest; and he had broken a hard and fast rule to allow her to enter the tunnels of Golsamel-ri's people.

And so, brother, he told himself wryly, stretching in the cramped confines of the sandcar, it is your own damn fault you're out here—waiting like an idiot for the natives to take off for Nowhere . . .

Gito geared the sandcar forward at a snail's pace across the desert floor. The first hint of darkness was beginning to color the landscape, and number one of Sahara's four moons was visible above the horizon.

In a moment, the first pair of bright, luminous eyes peered above ground, then scurried across the sand. Another pair followed—and another. Soon the land seemed covered with darting, bodiless fireflies.

With darkness, work began on the Kahrii's major—and only—occupation: the care and cultivation of the Shari cacti, source of Shari cloth, Shari root, Shari

fruit, and a hundred other products of Kahrii existence. It was also the pipeline to Sahara III's rarest molecular combination—water.

What the people of the tunnels actually did with—or to—the Shari, was much of a mystery to Gito. As far as he could see, the cacti were doing a damn good job of surviving without any help. Still, he reasoned, you have to do something. You can dig so many tunnels—then what?

It was, Gito pondered, a strange and rather frightening world. On the whole planet, only the tall and bulbous Shari dared defy *Posi Frondee*. Of the two life forms on Sahara III, the vegetable Shari thrust its silver gray columns above the surface, while the intelligent bipeds tunneled fearfully beneath it.

FOR an hour, Gito wormed the sandcar in a wide circle around the night's work area. With the windshield on infrared, he could see the Kahrii a little better than they could see themselves, and so far there was little to see.

If anything did occur, he felt confident he would catch it. With the Kahrii, deviations from the norm stood out like the proverbial sore thumb. The sand-trencher trenched sand in a circle beginning 4 units from the base of the Shari, and the moment the

circle was completed the thornbinder stepped in with 44 lengths of thornbinding, and bound 44 thorns, stepped aside, and allowed the pulp-juicer in to juice pulp—etc., etc., etc.

The fact that Arilee's alleged root slicing had occurred beneath the surface didn't worry him. What happened below would eventually be reflected above. That was the way the Kahrii did things.

The second hour, Gito widened his circle and left the work area behind. Five miles out, the Shari forest thinned, and only a few long centinals thrust above the sand. Sahara's four moons rolled crazily across the sky, casting dull spokes from the dark plants.

Gito geared the sandcar into overdrive, and the shielded drive unit whined briefly, then thrummed into silent power. At 130, he eased off and let the treads turtle back into the hull as the lift units took over and inched him off the hard-packed sand on a cushion of air.

At high speeds, there was no sensation of going anywhere at all. The featureless landscape offered no point of reference. The horizon seemed endless, but it was an illusion of darkness Gito was accustomed to. When the star that seemed to hang over the horizon a long fifty miles away

suddenly disappeared, he arced the sandcar into the beginning of a slow curve.

Ahead was the great wall that sheltered the Kahrii in their long and narrow valley; a wind scoured, smooth sandstone barrier 750 feet high and a hundred miles around. Gito had seen it from the air in the few times he had lifted the sandcar over the rim. It was an oddity duplicated maybe a dozen times on the planet; a long scar in the endless sand, a sunken elipse that partially protected the life of Sahara III from the murderous storms of wind and sand that perodical-ly swept the surface.

The walled valley was the big wrench in Arilee's idea of the Long Trek—even, as he had explained, if the Kahrii *wanted* to leave their tunnels, there was no place to go and no way to get there. Scaling the walls was possible, but it could certainly not be done in a night—and no Kahrii would live to continue his try—not if he had to cling to the wall during the day. So it meant a 25 mile walk to the base of the wall, a few handholds hacked in the stone, then a race against dawn back to the tunnels. About 30 years work for the entire population, Gito figured roughly.—and once on top of the rim, nothing but death. The fertile Shari groves of the valley had little in common with their dry

and stunted cousins scattered sparsely above.

And no Shari—no Kahrii. It was as simple as that.

He kept the sandcar in a steady climb up the side of the wall, and soon he was skimming round the rim of the valley on a naturally-slanted raceway. To his left was the valley floor, to his right the stars. In a few seconds, he thought, I've gone higher than any Kahrii in a thousand years—or, perhaps, in the whole history of the planet.

No, there might be some significance in the natives' slicing the roots of their life-giving Shari—but whatever it was could not be explained in any terms Arilee had imagined. Her idea had worried him—more than he had let her know. He had seen some strange things happen on the far-flung planets of the galaxy. Still, his ride around the valley had convinced him migration was not the answer to an unexplained deviation in agriculture.

By the time the car's treads touched sand again and began the slow crawl through the Shari, Gito was beginning to feel his ride around the rim through the muscles of his back. Stretching, he took a last look at the Kahrii at work, and locked the sandcar in its dome. There was still another 15 hours of the

long night to go; but he had seen nothing in three, and had no intention of sticking around for the rest.

A picture of Arilee asleep in the darkness before him hurried his steps across the still warm sand.

IT might have been night; the sleeping quarter ceiling was still opaqued. Then a ray of intense white glanced from the other room off Arilee's cheek, and he knew *Posi Frondee* had returned to bless Sahara III.

"Gito . . ."

It was pleasant to hear his name—he liked the way she said it . . .

"Gito, get UP!"

He jerked, opened his eyes fully, and stared up at her. There was something—something wrong.

"Gito!"

Another look and he sat up straight, grasping her shoulders.

"No," she said tightly, "don't say anything." There was a small line between her brows he hadn't noticed before.

"Arilee, what—"

She shook her head. No. Don't. Just—look. Just go out there and—and look."

She was beginning to shake, and he was past her before she finished, the hairs rising on the back of his neck. Whatever it was, he thought grimly, he had

gone to bed a little too early to catch it. He wasn't at all sure he wanted to know what the Kahrii considered too important to do in his presence.

At the sleeping quarter door he jerked to a stop, slapping his hand across his face. The dome could be adjusted from opaque to complete transparency, and Arilee had dialed too far. The room was flooded with unreal brightness, and the cooler labored to draw away the heat.

He reached blindly for the dial. The dome darkened, and his vision returned through a maze of whirling spots of color.

He stared, blinking his eyes. The hair rose up the back of his neck again and stayed there. Beside him, Arilee tightened her grip on his arm.

He had been on Sahara III a long time. The scenery was not much—but it was damn well the only scenery he had. Now, it was as if a city of tall buildings had been swallowed overnight, leaving behind an emptiness more terrifying for the memory of the space they had filled.

The Shari were gone. All of them. The dense, protective groves of cacti that nourished the Kahrii, kept them alive on this harsh world, were gone. No, Gito thought, it's worse than that. For the Shari were dead, but *not* gone. A thousand silver corpses lay scattered about the

settlement for a hundred yards around the dome.

... *Scattered?* He made a quick, wide circle with his eyes. Arilee saw it too. A gasp caught in her throat.

What in all hell—? thought Gito. No catastrophe had hit the grove. The Shari had been *cut!* Cut, stripped, and sliced into long curved sections. They lay about the landscape in every conceivable variation of the open curve. Where there was a need for big sections, slices had been butted together and laced with tough Shari fibre. There were semi-ovals, near-circles, and half-ellipses of every size and description. The longest one Gito could see was seventy-five feet across the widest point of its arc.

THEY lay there, staked into position—as if, Gito thought, they had been tortured for some insane vegetable secret and left to dry and shrivel under *Posi Frondee's* glare.

He let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. He turned to Arilee. "I—believe we could use a drink about now."

She said nothing. "All right," he said sharply, "what *else* do you suggest?" He closed his eyes and turned from the dome, fists clamped tightly at his side.

Arilee sat on the couch below him, looking suddenly very small. She smiled weakly.

"I'm—sorry, Gito." Her voice was a little too high.

Gito took a deep breath, shrugged. "What for? You didn't do it, doll—you just called it." He studied her carefully. "How, I'm not even going to *try* to figure out."

He swore suddenly, slamming his fist against the dome. "What do they think they're *doing* out there? Don't they know—don't they *know* . . . !" His voice faded. He walked to the wall and frowned at the chaotic landscape.

Arilee mixed drinks in two shaky glasses. Gito turned his up and passed it back to her, then resumed his nervous circle of the dome.

"I hope," he said acidly, "they cut off a lot of those roots. It's a long walk to the next meal."

Arilee looked up questioningly.

"No, of course not," he shook his head. "I'm just raving. They *can't* get there—if it was right on top of the rim they couldn't get there! And it isn't. It's about 2,000 miles away."

Gito bit his lip and closed his eyes. "Two-thousand miles . . . if I could take two at a time in the sandcar, at night . . . God, that's 444 round trips! . . . and each two would *have* to start digging the new tunnel . . . big enough for the next two. Arilee! Arilee—" He shook his head and rubbed a hand across the side of his face. "Good Lord, what am I

thinking of? It's too incredible."

She was with him, smiling gently. "Gito . . ."

He looked up and held her eyes a long moment, then reached out and squeezed her hand. He shrugged and showed her a sad smile. The whole thing was insane, ridiculous—hopeless.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's just—this is the first world that ever suicided on me . . ."

He thought about what he'd said, and added a hollow laugh. That's it, he told himself. Laugh at it—and maybe it won't be real . . .

THEY were both out of the dome as soon as darkness sent the first Kahrii out of the tunnels. It hasn't been a good day, Gito thought—but it sure as hell has managed to be a long one. They had batted it back and forth, and, gotten nowhere. Speculations were easy, and the frayed nerves and quick tempers that followed—but answers were something else.

"Sure," he had told her, "everything the Kahrii do has a basis in religion—but what kind of a rite do you hand down generation after generation that calls for suicide? Self-destruction might be an impressive gesture to the gods—but you can only show that kind of devotion once!"

"—and then," Arilee had fin-

ished for him, "what does *Posi Frondee* do for worshippers? It isn't just insane, Gito—it's uneconomical!"

Through it all, Gito became increasingly aware of some very interesting qualities in Arilee—rare, he decided, even in a Class Nine Mistress. He'd had such thoughts before about women, certainly—that nostalgic sadness when they left, often wishing they could extend their tour.

But never like this—this was something else. Before, his thoughts had usually dwelled on a woman's more obvious qualities—thoughts that were generally quickly relegated to shadowy memories by the next Mistress.

Objectively, he told himself that being a perfect companion to man was just what a Mistress was born and trained to do—was it possible that Arilee Colwester just managed to do that job a little better; mirror his ego, his thoughts, a little more keenly than the others? No. He didn't believe that. She, well, she just couldn't be *that* good an actress.

At least—he fervently *hoped* she wasn't.

After the first pair of Kahrii eyes edged above the ground, they quickly disappeared. Soon, four others emerged, and stayed. When they saw Gito and Arilee, three of them fell flat on their

faces and covered their great owlsh eyes. Gito thought he could hear high, thin squeaks coming from the huddled trio. He looked at Arilee and motioned her still. It was unnecessary—Arilee had no intention of moving.

The fourth member of the group stared at them a moment, then slipped back into the tunnel. He was back up in a few seconds, and walking straight for them.

Arilee stiffened and Gito took a deep breath. He saw it too, and frowned uneasily.

"Just take it nice and slow," he said softly, not taking his eyes from the white-robed Kahrii.

Gito had recognized Golsamel-ri, and just as quickly identified the thing in his hand. If he had landed that moment on Sahara III he would have known. On Sahara, or any other world—a taboo stick looks the same.

Dyed Shari cloth hung in drab colors from a gnarled Shari root that had been turned into a crude staff. From the top of the staff hung four painted skulls—three adults and a child whose age, health or religious status had made them expendable on those occasions when the population exceeded the ritual number of 888.

Golsamel-ri plunged the taboo stick into the sand and stepped



back. The skulls rattled against the dry stick, then stilled. For a long moment they stared across the darkness at each other, Golsamel-ri's unblinking eyes mirroring the moons and stars.

Well, Gito decided, somebody's got to do it. "Friend Golsamel-ri—I wish to speak with you. I do not understand what your people have done."

Golsamel-ri was visibly shaken. Familiarity with the Kahrii had given Gito some knowledge of their facial expressions. Golsamel-ri displayed a co-mingling of fear and disgust. Hatred was not yet there, but it might break through any moment.

"Please," Gito went on wrecklessly, "if I ask things that offend you, it can be forgiven by your knowledge of my ignorance. I am unblessed by *Posi Frondee*. Have you not said you desired that I understand your god?"

Golsamel-ri bowed his head a moment, then looked up. His gaze flicked briefly to Arilee, then rested on Gito.

"There is nothing for you to understand," he said softly. "My people do not exist, therefore I can explain nothing about anything they have done—if they existed and were capable of any action. Also, having non-existence myself, I could not explain their non-act or non-existence."

Gito swallowed hard. One question was answered, at least. The

Kahrii were perfectly aware of what they had done—they already considered themselves dead.

"It remains," Golsamel-ri continued, "for me to deliver this message from the non-living. This staff signifies a line across which the living must not pass. You are forbidden to disturb the work of the souls of the children of *Posi Frondee*."

So much, sighed Gito, for the traditional Kahrii courtesy. Less seems to be required from the non-living.

"One thing remains," said Golsamel-ri. "It nearly escaped my recognition, so much has death clouded my mind. The former Golsamel-ri, during the last days of his life, offended the female Cowezh-a-tir. His ghost wishes to pay his indemnity, as he has been instructed."

The non-living Golsamel-ri reached into his robe and drew out a tightly-packed bundle. Gito touched Arilee. She looked up at him, eyes wide. He nodded toward the Kahrii, and she bit her lip and stepped forward. Golsamel-ri extended the bundle, and Gito could tell it was Shari cloth.

"Thank you," said Arilee clearly, "I accept and thank the soul of Golsamel-ri." Gito was proud of her. She stepped back beside him and he squeezed her hand.

Gito fully understood her fear. Arilee had made many friends

among the Kahrii, and Gito himself had come as close to Golsamel-ri as a man could to a being born on an alien world. It was nonsense, of course, he told himself—but this was a totally different Golsamel-ri. How, and why, he couldn't say.

"The shade of Golsamel-ri accepts your thanks," said the Kahriin, "for the being formerly surrounding his soul. And now, farewell, Geetomorrow-shek, from my previous self. I will be honored to greet you in the next life."

Then he turned, and walked slowly back to his huddled companions. At a word, they rose and went to their tasks. Behind them, the ghosts of the population of Sahara III slid like wraiths from their tunnels.

Dead or alive, Gito noted solemnly, there still seemed to be a great deal to do.

GITO pressed against the dome wall, straining against the Sahara night. Even with the dome lights darkened, there was little he could see. The fourth moon's rising would improve things somewhat, but he wished fleetingly that there was some way to dismantle the infra-red panel from the sandcar.

The area outside the taboo stick had not been forbidden; still, Gito felt uneasy about venturing beyond the dome at all—at least for the time being. Actu-

ally, he admitted grimly, with the dome completely surrounded by decapitated Shari, freedom was now something like having the run of a hole in a doughnut.

"Gito," said Arilee testily, "if I'm interrupting, say so, but—"

Gito shrugged. He turned and picked her out in the dark. "Interrupting what? Unfortunately, there's absolutely nothing to interrupt." He caught her gaze and held it a moment.

"That—rambling, about air-lifting the Kahrii—that's what it was, abstract rambling. I might as well have been figuring ways to save Pompeii." He paused, knowing there was more, knowing she was waiting, too. It was a subject they had skirted, carefully avoided.

She was watching him, and he read a kind of pleading in her eyes.

"Don't make it any harder," he said stonily, turning away.

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean—"

"—to forget the rules? Don't you think I'd like to? Don't you think I'd try to save as many as I could?" He shook his head. "We're on a Class C planet, Arilee. Spelled out that means Sahara III is populated by intelligent beings in a stage where my job becomes a matter of being present—and observing. Period. No footnotes. No boosts up the ladder. On a C you stop, look and listen—and make sure no one

else gets a finger in the pie. No backdoor traders, no Sportships. Did you know C stands for 'Casual' and 'Critical'? A world in a critical stage of development—calling for casual contact by the Planetary Warden. Namely me. And," he grinned slightly, "in this case, you."

She looked at him. "Will it—I mean, you shouldn't have let me go down there. I know that—"

"No. I shouldn't have. Only it doesn't matter. You didn't do anything. As a Nine you could qualify for an Observer. If it came to that—well, you are now so appointed. Only it won't come to that."

HE sat down beside her, and she moved over to make room, then dropped her head on his shoulder.

"Why, Gito?"

"Why what?" He answered her, but knew what she meant.

"Why did you let me—just because I wanted to. Would—"

He saved her from having to ask. "—Would I let anyone else do that? No. I wouldn't." He turned her head toward him.

"As to why—that's a rhetorical-type question, isn't it, Arilee? You have to know the answer before you ask."

She looked up into his eyes. "Yes. I know." She got up quietly and disappeared into the sleeping quarters. She half-

closed the door before turning on the dim light. He knew she was combing her hair—which, as far as he was concerned, never needed combing—but it was a task that would keep her away awhile. She had brought up the subject herself, broken the ice. But he knew she wasn't ready to take it any further. Gito was glad. Of course, he had sensed she realized this tour wasn't turning out quite like the others—for either of them. Now, she had answered a question for him, too.

In a moment the door opened and she came back to her place beside him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Maybe I shouldn't have brought up anything—like that, when there's so much else." She faced him, and he frowned, seeing her eyes slightly wet. "I think that's why I did, Gito, because I know the rules and I don't like to think about them. I—guess I don't understand why they have to die because of a rule. There should be something—there's always something— isn't there?"

He wanted to say yes. He shook his head. "No. There isn't, Arilee. Sure, I could call for help, advice—but they wouldn't give it to me. Not on a C. . . ."

He got up and walked to the darkened wall. "Once, Arilee, there was a planet with a new race. It wasn't even a C. There just seemed to be some slight

chance — potential — of intelligence."

He turned back toward her. "Have you ever heard a Warden say 'Something Bad on Tsirtsi?' No? Well it means emergency, help, war, planet-wide disaster—and it comes from what happened on that planet with the new race. What happened, I won't say and no other Warden will either. But when something like this happens—what's happening here—a Warden catches himself, and remembers Tsirtsi."

Arilee sat, unmoving, as he paced through the shadows of the dome.

"We found out you can't equate the things an alien *seems* to do, with what you know a human does under similar conditions. We learned the hard way, and we learned there is more diversity in the forms intelligence can take than we had dreamed. What are they doing out there with those circles of rotting cacti? Why did they destroy their food and water source?" He shrugged. "I don't know. So I keep hands off. The Kahrii may die, Arilee. That's something we have to face. But C's aren't allowed the *deus ex machina*. I don't introduce the miracle drugs, the 'wonders of science'—no matter what."

ARILEE frowned somberly. "But Gito, haven't you *al-*

ready done that? I mean, they *know* there's something better. They've seen the dome, the—the sandcar, the supply ship, uh—in here, the way we live. It's too late for that, don't you think?"

Gito shook his head. "That sounds right, but it's a fallacy. A C culture doesn't have the background to conceive of an atomic generator or a space drive. It's like taking their picture with the 'magic box.' So what? There's a god in there, with a little power, and that's just fine. They have gods with power, why shouldn't the man from the sky? No, if you want to corrupt them, give the Kahrii a steel knife, or a shovel—or worse yet, introduce trade goods and a system of barter. *Ideas* are the real danger. Why an idea can—can—!"

Gito stopped. He had paused in his pacing to watch the third and fourth moon rise together over the rim of the world, flooding the desert in pale light. He pressed his face hard against the dome.

"Gito, what is it?"

"Come here, Arilee—quick!"

Gito pointed, and Arilee gave a short cry. As they watched, several of the Kahrii attached strong Shari fibre ropes to the open ends of one of the arcs they had sliced and sewn the night before. Gito swore silently. He had made a quick, snap judgement about the cacti—they had

not rotted in the sun at all. As one group pulled the ropes, another braced the center of the arc—and the arc raised slowly—and stiffly—into the air.

Gito whistled sharply. They knew what they were doing—whatever that was. That the Shari could be dried into a strong, light-weight building material had never crossed his mind.

But, he asked himself, *why*? What would the Kahrii *want* to build?—And above the ground, where they couldn't possibly live even if they had suddenly planned on remaining alive?

After a few precautionary guywires were attached, the arc stood firmly in place. It stood like a giant horseshoe magnet, resting on its back, poles aimed at the stars.

"Maybe it's a—temple, or something," Arilee suggested weakly. "The—last sacrifice to *Posi Frondee*?"

"Huh-uh. If it's a temple, they've got their arches upside down. Besides, where did they get an idea like that? They've lived in tunnels since the race began. Architecture doesn't just spring up overnight." He cut her off as she took in a deep breath.

"—And don't say *I* corrupted them with the dome. Whatever it is they're building, they'll never get a dome out of *that*!"

THE Kahrii wasted little time admiring their work. In fifteen minutes, they had another arc in place, directly in front, and twenty feet away from the first.

Gito watched in silence. When the third, smaller arc went up, something small and cold dropped heavily into the pit of his stomach. With the fourth and fifth, he knew he was going to be sick . . .

Gito and Arilee watched off and on, for most of the night. Arilee forgot how many times the coffee pot emptied itself. When they talked at all, they talked of the past, people they had known—anything except the thing that was happening outside the dome. To talk about that, they knew, might somehow make it more real than it already was.

By dawn there was little more use pretending the Kahrii project didn't exist. The arcs now stretched 100 yards across the desert. Those near the center, the first to go up, stood alone; the smaller, tightly-curved sections rose on each end to graceful points supported by a cross-hatch of framework. Running the full length of the row, a network of stout Shari beams now connected each arc to the other.

A night of coffee had dulled his senses, left him hollow and empty. Now dawn brought the

cold weight back to his stomach and left his mouth dry and tinged with acid. He was angry and tired, and he knew he was going to stay angry and tired no matter how much sleep he could manage to get.

He was angry because he was a man who was used to problems, and used to finding reasonable solutions to those problems. Gito didn't like questions without answers, and he knew that he could knock his head against the dome wall forever without dulling the truth. Nothing he could do would change the fact that the Kahrii, who dug their tunnels in a world of sand and and never dreamed of more water than the pitiful droplets that could be sucked from one Shari fruit at a time—had spent the night laying the keel of a ship. . . .

HE was awake at dusk. He frowned at, then meekly accepted the cup of hot coffee waiting for him in the main room of the dome. He noted, thankfully, that Arilee had been considerate enough to opaque the dome walls. Maybe he thought sourly, she has the right idea. If we can't see it, the whole damn thing just might go away.

He glanced at Arilee. She was watching him and he smiled back, weakly.

"Bad?" she asked.

"I dreamed," he said, letting

himself sink back into the cushions, "that Golsamel-ri was an Admiral—gold braid and all—and I was walking the plank. Have you ever had the opportunity to drown in *sand*?"

Arilee cringed, holding back a grin. "No water?"

"My imagination," he said wryly, "is not as vivid as that. Even in my dreams I could not conjure up water on Sahara III. Hell, I've been here so long I'm about half Kahrii anyway—I just don't believe in things like oceans. They don't exist."

"They did once," Arilee said quietly. Gito turned slowly.

"You believe that, Arilee?"

She shrugged, getting up to refill her cup. "Are you saying you haven't been thinking about it? There's nothing else to think—is there?"

Gito didn't answer. She sat back on the couch and blew smoke at the ceiling. For a moment, he studied the drifting patterns curling toward the vent.

"Gito, I think it's an exciting possibility." She leaned forward. "Just think, how long ago—"

"It doesn't excite me," he snapped. "It worries the hell out of me!"

She went on without him, her eyes sparkling. "If there *were* seas out there once, and they remember—I mean, the story must have been handed down for centuries . . ."

Gito jumped up, rubbing his hand quickly across his face.

"All right. I know where you're going, but look—I'm no geologist, and it'll be quite a few years before one gets here. But Arilee—we're not talking about centuries; we're talking about thousands of years—maybe *millions*! And those beings are still digging tunnels with their—*hands*?" He shook his head violently. "I just can't buy that."

"They didn't always dig tunnels, Gito. Once, when there was a better climate, more water . . . well, anyway, now all they remember is a *symbol* of what they had. A ship, and no sea to sail it on."

"Very pretty picture. Only," he said patiently, "it just *wasn't* that way, doll. There were never—repeat *never* any oceans on Sahara III."

She caught his eyes and held them and he knew he'd been a little strong. He hadn't meant to carry it that far. He was scared, and now she clearly sensed it.

He was scared because he knew the Kahrii, and knew their religion. It was a hard, practical and basic kind of religion. *Posi Frondee* was not a symbol of God, a representation of light—no subtleties or symbols here. He *was* *Posi Frondee*, and if you didn't believe he existed, just go stand a moment under his blazing eye and defy his reality.

No, when the Kahrii made a sacrifice, it was a real sacrifice—often enough with real Kahrii. If these beings had built a ship—and God only knew where the idea had come from, the dark past, glimpses of the dim future—if that *was* a ship, then they would sail in it to meet *Posi Frondee*.—And the sea of sand would suck them dry and preserve them in their broiling vessel forever—and that would be all anyone would have to remember of the Kahrii . . .

TIME between dusk and dark passed too slowly—or quickly—Gito couldn't decide which. An endless chain of cigarettes and coffee ticked off the long silence.

Arilee was in no mood for charm or dazzling wit. She could have braced herself—she was well-trained for that—and put on a real performance if it would have done any good. She knew it wouldn't, and Gito was grateful for her awareness. He knew she was there, and the warmth of her presence made extra efforts unnecessary. From the way she moved about the dome, performing small duties that didn't need to be performed, he knew she was sharing his experience.

You can face a thing when it happens, and scream about it and curse it, and even discuss it in sane and reasonable terms.

Shock is a sugar coating for a bitter pill. It is a period of experience, not understanding. Now, as that coating dissolved, Gito was jolted by what he saw.

Curiously, he realized, the ship was not a part of it. He no longer feared it because he simply could find no way to accept it. There could *be* no ship, not on Sahara II. He would not let his mind dwell on a history that included dark seas and waterless deserts—and a race that survived and spanned that awful time between the two.

That kind of understanding was too much to handle now—for Gito, the vehicle of Kahrii destruction paled beside the destruction itself. The death of a race repelled him, and the thought that he was going to stand by and watch it chilled him until he fought to keep from fleeing past Arilee and shutting himself in the sleeping quarters.

What the hell kind of job was this, anyway? His anger reached out to pull in all Planet Wardens and the Corps itself. A race, relatively small and unimportant, and certainly unimposing, was going to kill itself. Period.

Was that *all*? Do you just write it off the books? Was it possible to look at it with that kind of cold objectivity?

Then: Did what happened on Tsirtsii have any relation to Sahara III?

But: Could you look at the Kahrii now, and say their loss could ever be related to what we lost on Tsirtsii?

No. But they didn't *know* on Tsirtsii, either, did they? Not until it was over. Not until it was too late.

He slammed a fist painfully into the arm of his chair. If that was the way the system worked, *then the system was wrong!* Just as man had no right to interfere—he also had no right *not* to, didn't he?

When, then, was the time to keep the rule and the time to break it? There was a way, was there not? There *had* to be a way to tell—at least to judge. Playing God halfway just wouldn't work out. Even a backwater planet like Sahara III had a right to their chance at greatness—or anonymity.

But the rule of the Wardens said no one had the right to interfere with that race's decision—even if that race rejected both choices and chose final oblivion.

ARILEE touched his arm lightly, a quiet smile her face. She spoke softly. "Hey, remember me?" It was not a bid for attention. She was asking, with her eyes, to share his thoughts.

He pulled his gaze away from her and glanced apprehensively at the darkening sky.

She pulled him back to her. "No," she said sternly. "It's not time, Gito." She led him to a chair and set a plate before him.

"Now eat. They won't do a thing for two hours. You're not going to miss a move."

He looked down at the thick steak and grinned at her. He hadn't even realized he was hungry. He was warmly pleased by her attention, and strangely touched. The scores were adding up, as if there were a kind of game going on between them. There was more here than just an 8-month Mistress with a trim figure and wheat-colored hair. He idly wished for a vague time and place when there would be nothing to keep him from pursuing that line of thought.

Arilee was wrong. The Kahrii emerged from their tunnels long before that two hours was up. Gito's pulse quickened as he pressed against the wall of the dome. Something seemed terribly out of place. He sensed the frantic urgency that had brought the aliens to the surface while the heat of day still waved above the sand.

He thought about the food supply of Shari roots that must be dwindling down to nothing. The roots were not the Kahrii's favorite food, they were a supplement only; they could not possibly sustain 888 workers for long.

He was suddenly struck by the ludicrous, insane logic of the situation. Whatever the Kahrii were building, they were working with back-breaking haste to complete it before starvation set in—they didn't want to starve to death before they had a chance to kill themselves!

When the rolls of thick Shari cloth stretched across the ribs of the ship, Gito was only mildly surprised. Considering the Kahrii were building a sea-going vessel on possibly the driest habitable planet in this end of the galaxy, why shouldn't they carry the inanity to completion?

They worked in a fever of desperation, and the job of covering the hull went quickly. As soon as one crew stretched material over a section of the ship, another followed with fibre buckets of a milky substance which they brushed into the cloth.

For a moment, Gito was puzzled, then realized with a start the Kahrii were applying what must be a *waterproofing* resin to the hull! The hackles on his neck rose at the thought.

"Why?" he said aloud, turning to Arilee, "why should they take the trouble to—" He stopped, seeing she wasn't going to answer. Curled up in a tight ball on the couch, she seemed more a small child than a woman. He kissed her lightly, then got up to empty his cold coffee.

While the fresh pot heated, a familiar thought worried its way back to the edge of his consciousness. From the beginning, the Kahrii ship had presented a paradox. He knew it was impossible—all right, so highly improbable as to *be* impossible—for even the ceremony-bound Kahrii to maintain such a link with an incredibly distant past that included oceans on Sahara III. He simply could not accept it.

Still, on the other end of the paradox, there remained the fact that the Kahrii just *did not have the ingenuity or background to symbolize something they had never seen!* It wasn't there, and never had been. Existence was harsh, precarious and deadly dull on Sahara III. As *Posi Frondee* was a real God, one that could literally bring life or death; so was the day to day battle of survival real. There was no time for the niceties of easy symbolism, the fabrication of legends.

Gito poured his coffee, lit another tasteless cigarette, and sank into his chair near the dome window. It didn't figure—it just didn't figure at all. Still, there they were, and the hull of the ship that couldn't be was turning into a very familiar shape. Gito didn't like it at all . . .

SUDDENLY, he sat up stiffly. For a moment he thought he had fallen asleep—it was possible, but a glance at his watch assured him no more than ten minutes had passed since he'd last checked.

Gito blinked uncertainly. Something—what was it? He stared hard through the port. Nothing had changed. The routine he had watched half the night continued. The Kahrii swarmed over the surface of their ship attaching the long rolls of Shari cloth to the stiffened ribs, their figures casting, odd, multi-shadowed shapes under the swift-running moons, the—? Gito bit his tongue and squeezed the arm of his chair. *Shadows!* That was it, of course. He had been watching so long he hadn't even noticed. The dark silhouette of the Kahrii ship was different—subtly *changed* . . .

The sides still sloped to the 'deck' level in a gentle arc, but now the curve continued—more Shari lengths had been added and were already partially covered! The chill began at the base of Gito's spine and gained momentum until it reached the top of his head. His scalp was suddenly unbearably tight.

There was no use trying to justify it or explain it or pass it off. If they continued—and he had every reason to believe they would—the Kahrii boat would

soon be transformed into a completely covered, long and tapered cylinder.

In the darkness, with the tricky lighting of the four moons masking its imperfections, it looked too much like the thing it was meant to imitate. It was made of dried cactus and covered with coarse cactus fibre. It would never move a fraction of an inch above the surface of Sahara III—much less coarse out to touch the stars. But it was what it was, and nothing Gito could do would change that . . .

It was painfully clear in the first hot light of dawn. No one would mistake the Kahrii structure for a working spaceship—but, Gito admitted, no one would hesitate to say it had been made to *look* like one.

After the first moment of stunned surprise, Gito readily accepted it. He sensed the same reaction, or lack of it, in Arilee. How many times were you *supposed* to start, catch your breath, stare wide-eyed at some new alien madness? For Gito and Arilee, the distance between the impossible and the utterly impossible was easy enough to swallow.

"If they change the damn thing into a cactus-covered nuclear reactor," Gito said darkly, "I don't intend to contribute a batted eyelash."

Arilee showed a small, sad

smile and added a sigh of resignation. "My poor Gito. I had no idea warding—is that right? Warding? Wardening? I had no idea there were so many problems."

She was perched on the arm of his chair. He looked up at her. "Neither," he said sourly, "did I." He pulled her down into his lap and held her golden head between his hands.

"Arilee, I am about as drained of useful ideas as I ever believed possible. This business has left me empty of bright thoughts—if I ever had any—and I'm sick of pulling cultural histories out of thin air. It doesn't do any good, or lead anywhere at all unless you can base your fairy tales on something solid. And something solid—pardon the grammar—is what we don't have anything of."

ARILEE got up and brushed back a strand of hair from her cheeks. She sat down across from him and rested her chin on two fists.

"You really mean it. You are not going to like it—you *know* that."

Gito grinned. "Everytime you say that damned if you're not right. But, yes—go ahead. I've got a good grip on my chair, and I have the added advantage of knowing where you're going this time. And no—I *don't* like it!"

"What else is there, then?" she said softly.

Gito shrugged. "Okay," she went on, "then we take it straight with no flinching. It's an old story—but it's a *possible* one, isn't it?"

Gito felt the chill get another good grip on the back of his neck. "Yes. It is. And it might as well be, for all we've got to go on. But look, Arilee—" He reared out of his chair and stalked to the edge of the room. "Every second looie in the Corps finds a 'lost race' on his first tour of duty. It's—it's—!"

"I know—and the video picks it up and squeezes it to death. A once mighty race that coursed the stars, then sank to savagry, forgetting their heritage. Worshipping," she said sternly, "at the shrine of Ah-tom and Aye-on, and—"

Gito moaned, slapping his hands to his ears.

"I don't like it," said Arilee, "any more than you do. If you want to hear a belated confession—the more I thought of the boat idea the less I could see *that*! So now—" She shrugged her hands, "—where to, love?"

"We're back," he scowled, "to Ah-tom and Aye-on—that's where we are. I'd like to say I won't buy it; and everytime I don't 'buy' something, *they* build it!" He waved his hands wildly in the direction of the desert.

"I don't give a hang about that thing sitting out there. I *know* these people. They have *not*, damnit, 'sunk to savagry.' They never saw a space ship and their immortal ancestors didn't either!"

"So?"

"So nothing. If I could ever convince myself I know them as well as I think I do, I wouldn't keep getting that creepy feeling that all the hairs on the back of my neck are marching up the top of my head. One—I don't believe they have carried on some eternally long memory of a high technological culture. Two—and this is what hurts—I also know they simply don't have the inherent ability to think up boats and space ships out of the blue. The children of *Posi Frondee* are as rigid as day and night.

"You see the paradox, Arilee? They *couldn't* think up anything like this themselves—and the other possibility just *does*—*not*—*happen*!"

"You're sure," Arilee said thoughtfully, "you're *certain* they never saw a space ship?"

He stared puzzledly at her. "What? Oh, you can forget that. We don't introduce that sort of thing at this stage of the game. Everything big and scary stays off-atmosphere. Nothing bigger than a strut and tube platform comes in on a C. Just try to get the mistaken image of an FTL

ship out of one of those—in the dead of night, completely out of sight of the settlement. These people think we came from over the ridge somewhere—and they'll continue to think so."

Arilee looked away quickly, and Gito remembered that future tense no longer applied to the Kahrii—not if they boarded their impossible ship for one short and terrifying journey.

Was it possible, then? Was he really taking his knowledge of the Kahrii for granted? Golsamel-ri had said his people were *already* dead—they considered themselves shades of their former selves. But, he remembered, the Kahriin had also expressed his desire to see Gito again when *next they lived!*

A thought flicked on the borders of his mind, then dropped with sudden coldness. Was Golsamel-ri talking about an after-life—or was he following the narrow and literal pattern of his race—actually intending to *see* Gito again?

Gito turned suddenly. He stared at Arilee but his gaze was far beyond her. He swept past her and she stepped quickly aside, opening her mouth in a question then catching a glance of his eyes and keeping her silence.

Arilee knew men, and for some time she had realized she was making more effort than the job

called for to know this one. The thing she saw in his eyes as he rummaged through the small equipment locker kindled a personal fear that rose from a fire she had not known existed. Not for a long time.

IT was hot. Gito expected that. Sahara III was no ice-world. He looked back the hundred yards to the dome and felt a moment of panic. It might easily have been a hundred miles. Even with the suit's filtered glass the dome shimmered like a fiery jewel seen through wavering weeds of heat.

The maximum use of the suit was protective comfort. He knew that. It was not designed for survival in the vacuum of space or the poisonous atmosphere of a chlorine world. Of course, neither condition existed here, and the bright foil surface of the suit *should* reflect enough of *Posi Frondee's* glare—with the help of the built-in air conditioner.

Looking up, he read the small, efficient legend on the inside of his helmet: 'For emergency use on an extremely hot surface—limited endurance.' He scowled grimly. That, he told himself, is about the most unscientific damn description I have ever heard! He wondered what the Crops semantics expert meant by 'limited' this week. The laboring

wheeze of the conditioner was helping him to form his own opinion.

A quick glance at the exterior temperature gauge showed 176. Gito swallowed and tried to turn the conditioner knob to maximum. It was already there. The sweat poured down from his hair and stung his eyes.

He paused in the small strip of inadequate shade cast by the Kahrii ship and craned his neck upward. This close, the thing was even more awesome and impossible. He tramped slowly around the side until he found what he was looking for. It was a small hole, less than two feet across, about eight feet off the ground. Reluctantly, he could only think of it as an entry port.

Entry, though, was not going to be easy. The hole was small, with no ladder—it was high, and it was getting hotter. Gito kept his eyes from the temperature gauge, ran back a few yards, and jumped. On the fourth try, his fingers grasped the rough edge of the port and held. For a long moment he hung there, breathing hard. In a split second of panic he thought the air conditioner had stopped. Then he heard its heavy wheezing above the ringing in his ears. Gathering his muscles, he closed his eyes and pulled himself up and over the lip of the port.

HE lay flat against the sloping walls of the Kahrii ship, letting the straining unit catch up with his need for air. The strain was considerable—inside the ship the heat was a stifling, breathless hell.

Gito sat up. Light from the open port drilled a bright tube into the opposite wall of the ship. It was a white cylinder filled with dusty strands of coarse Shari fibre. His admiration for the Kahrii rose several points. He had expected the interior to be riddled with stars of sunlight—as far as he could tell there wasn't a single leak. A breath of old fear touched him. *It was thorough—too thorough!* A good imitation of an air-tight ship—but what?

Okay, he told himself sharply, this is what you came for, isn't it? You wanted to know the truth, whatever it was—didn't you? No, he answered himself solemnly—no, I didn't want any such thing.

Biting his lip, he pulled the flashlight from his belt and aimed it down the long darkness.

A dry and brittle cry left his throat and bounced again and again through the helmet. He turned his shaking hand and flicked the light down the opposite end of the ship. His heart pounded against his chest. It was the same—everywhere! At even intervals, the inside of the

ship was ringed with coarse, woven sacks, like cocoons, or—the image forced itself into his mind—shrouds. On each side of the sacks two cords hung loose. Their purpose was too obvious—he could picture one of the Kahrii in each sack, the cords tied securely.

Counting the sacks in one section of the ship he multiplied quickly—knowing he would end somewhere near the figure of 888. Like the ship, the sacks were crude imitations—but their use was clear enough. Gito laughed harshly.—*Acceleration couches!* My God, what were they going to accelerate *against!*

He was vaguely aware that the heat was rising much too quickly within the suit. The ringing in his ears seemed to drown out the wheeze of the conditioner.

Okay, he reasoned, this is it. You've seen it. Here is a race that has forgotten its past, forgotten everything except the long journey through the vast darkness. And now they would relive that journey—after how many countless eons? Only this time they would not emerge from the darkness—this time the acceleration couches would not cushion their passengers against the harsh shock of death.

Only it isn't going to happen, he thought grimly, forcing himself back through the small entry port. *I can't let it happen!*

Not now! The idea had come unbidden, wedging itself into a corner of his consciousness.

He stopped, swaying in the shadow of the ship. The giant, malignant star was higher now, and he could feel its increased heat blazing, burning through his suit. He twisted the conditioner knob frantically. Where was the air—what was wrong! His face, oddly enough, was cold. Why should that be, he wondered vaguely. Bright dots of color swam before his eyes.

HE took a step forward. Somewhere, the dome blurred in the distance. He had to reach it now—had to reach it because he knew what he had to do.

Another step—another . . . The sand wavered dizzily around him. He had to make it, because he knew what the Kahrii were, and he knew the Corps was wrong. The lesson on Tsirtsis was one thing—but that had happened a long time ago and had nothing to do with now, here, on Sahara III.

There had to be a time when rules were broken, and this *was that time!* What they did to him—after—didn't matter. With a faraway sadness, he saw a dream dissolve. He shrugged it off.

What had he been thinking of, anyway? What kind of a love can you have with a Mistress? With a—he said the word—*profession-*

al, someone who had loved others before and would love others after you.

No! It *wasn't* like that—not with Arilee. She had almost told him it wasn't, she—still, he thought slyly, she would, would she not? Wasn't that her *job*?

He gritted his teeth and blinked the sweat from his face. He was cold all over now. Good—then the conditioner was working again. Everything was going to be all right. He would make it now. *Arilee . . . I've got to tell you, even if it never means a thing to you . . . Arilee. . . . Arilee. . . .!*

Out of the raging stars, the bright, exploding moons, the white ghost staggered toward him. He tried to take a breath, but there was no air. It was all right, he didn't really need air, did he? Not now. . . .

The ghost came closer, weaving across the hot sand, its white hood parted to show a pale head topped by long flames of wheat-colored hair. Then the ghost staggered, falling toward him, and there was a comforting blackness. . . .

FOR a long century the ghost dragged him roughly over the bright sand. Then there was darkness again. Later, coolness, great lungfuls of sweet air, and sleep . . .

No. NO! He sat up, fighting

against the exploding stars. His vision cleared and a great sob broke from his throat. She was on the floor beside him, her body tangled in the white robe. He parted the robe and dropped it with a cry. The velvet flesh was red, seared, blistered and cracked. He jerked to his feet and fell into the supply locker. He ripped the medicit from its rack and nearly fainted again.

He tore the robe away and ripped off the clothes underneath. Tears welled up uncontrollably. He placed the medicit under her left breast and heard it begin its chittering and humming as it began to probe and prick like a benevolent leech.

The blackness was almost upon him again. He tore through the locker again until his hands touched a round surface. The lettering on the spraycan blurred before his eyes. He said a silent prayer that it was the right one and covered her body with the spray, turning her gently, until the can was empty. He had a last, shimmering glimpse of a slim figure covered in a cottony foam. Then the can dropped from his hands.

"That's a hell of a way . . . to get a suntan," he said weakly. She turned quickly as he opened his eyes. A little cry escaped her as she knelt and buried her face against his shoulder.

"You're . . . all right?" he said. He grasped her shoulders and held her at arm's length. She winced slightly at his touch and he jerked his hands away.

She shook her head. "No. It just burns a little. Still. But hold me, Gito. Hold me! I thought you were—were—"

He cut her off and pulled her to him, gently. The wheat-colored hair brushed his cheek. A brown shoulder pressed against his chest. He was amazed at the job the spray had done. The medicit had undoubtedly brought her out of shock, but the spray had sucked away the heat and smoothed the damaged cells. Her skin was a golden bronze against the white of her brief costume.

Gito grinned weakly. The spray had brought seared flesh back to gold velvet, but Arilee was gingerly wearing as little as possible, and would be for awhile.

Her deep eyes stared into his, and he remembered the white-robed figure moving toward him under the death-bearing sun.

"Arilee . . . Arilee . . ."

She shook her head gently and pressed a finger to his lips. "Hey, now," she said softly, "Don't. I had to go out. What would I do with a fried Planet Warden, anyway?"

WHEN he told her his decision, she said nothing. Outside, the giant ball of *Posi Fron-*

dee once more flattened against the high ridge.

Gito scowled thoughtfully. "I thought maybe you'd have something to say. I'd like to hear it."

Arilee bit her lip. She looked up at him briefly, then her gaze traveled down to the gray-cased weapon on the table.

"I don't know anymore," she said anxiously. "It was easy before—when it was just talk; about saving them, I mean. Now—" She shrugged, reached out for his hand. He moved it away quietly, shaking his head.

"I told you, Arilee, that can't matter." His voice bordered on irritation. He touched the weapon then looked away.

"If I let it be that way, thinking about afterward, I can pretty quickly decide my life is worth more than 888 of them! I'm human, Arilee. I want something for myself, too. More than ever now. You understand that?"

Her eyes were wet and she nodded quickly before her face contorted and she turned and buried her head in the couch.

Gito closed his eyes hard. Was it right—*that* right? Strange, the thought, that the rightness seems to matter, and I'm not worried about the other part. He knew what the punishment would be—*had* to be. The Corps was humane, certainly, but this couldn't be overlooked. It would be humane—quick, and final.

Still, that wasn't it. He *had* to be right! If he stopped them, prevented them from sacrificing themselves for an insane gesture—could he ever really know? The Kahrii had travelled to this world through the terrible, yawning vastness of space a million years before his own ancestors had learned to speak. Could he decide now, what was right for them?

He paused, following the last rays of *Posi Frondee* into the darkness. Tonight. Yes, he knew that. He couldn't say how. But he knew. The Kahrii would leave their tunnels and crawl into their ship to die. And he could stop them, maybe discover where they had come from, bring them back to greatness—they *must* have reached greatness, long ago, when—

Doubt overtook him again. Doubt, he told himself acidly, or a last attempt to ease out of a decision. The excuses were countless in number, and they had all paraded themselves before him by now. The Kahrii were not an ancient, superior race—they had landed here in a lifeboat from some disaster. They were poor slaves of some other race, left here to die.

Sure. And is that why they're so perfectly adapted to this planet, so obviously a part of it?

No. There was to be no justifying. No more. There was the

ship, the endless rows of acceleration couches. He pictured it, the way it must have been, when the Kahrii left their world, (was it dying?) which must have been like Sahara III. They came in search of a new home, knowing they would have to begin again. Did they realize just how much they would lose?

He picked up the weapon and looked out into the fast darkening night. Already the ship was a black silhouette. Soon, now.

"Arilee," he said.

"Yes, Gito."

He turned. She was already beside him. She was dressed in her work coveralls, flashlight and tools hooked neatly to her belt. She looked very small, now, a delicate and lovely spirit from some quiet, elfin world. He had known for some time that he loved her—he had never loved her as much as he did now.

GITO'S plan was simple—it was the aftermath that would be difficult. The weapon was a standard stunner. With a wide-open lens it would merely bring long and restful sleep to its victims. When the Kahrii had entered the ship, he would spray it—stem to stern, and he and Arilee would carry the sleepers back to the tunnels. It would be a long night's work. But then, he told himself, Saharan nights were uncommonly long anyway.

And after that? There was the Corps to inform of his action. He grimaced at that. They would not be overly long in replying.

They stood together in the sultry beginnings of night. When the first pair of luminous eyes emerged from the tunnel Arilee's hand tightened on Gito's arm. He looked at her, but said nothing. A long, stiffened Shari root gangway was placed in the entry port; its carriers then knelt beside the ship and buried their heads in prayer. Moments later, a low, eerie sound drifted from the tunnels. Gito stiffened, and a sob tightened in the girl's throat.

It was a sound he knew, instinctively, had not been heard before. It was a song of hot winds sweeping over the desert, green shoots searching the scorched planet for water; a song of life, birth and death. And then they came.

They came out of the tunnels in a single file, their heads bowed low, and the song rose with them and filled the night.

To Gito, the white-robed figures already seemed long-dead ghosts returning to haunt themselves; to haunt the race that had forsaken some far off star eons before. With a start, he saw that each carried a small section of Shari root, cradled in their arms like a precious child.

A picture flashed before him

of the tombs of long-dead Egypt on Earth, and the aeire columns of a forgotten race of Sirians. There, too, were the remains of ceremonial food provided for the long journey into death.

Gito had no idea how long they had been there, while the endless procession emptied the tunnels and disappeared into the ship. When Arilee touched his arm he jerked back, startled, then blinked his eyes. The desert was empty. The entry port was closed.

The weapon seemed suddenly heavy. He looked at Arilee a long moment, then walked toward the ship. He stopped a bare twenty yards from the dark shape. He was not sure what effect the walls of the vessel might have on the weapon's field of dispersal at so wide a setting. He had to be sure. The thought of facing the Kahrii after they regained consciousness and discovered what he had done, was bad enough. He was already haunted by that. To meet one before, who had not been affected by the weapon, would be unbearable.

ARILEE held the flash while he made final adjustments. With his finger finally on the heavy trigger, the enormity of his act brought cold sweat to his face. Okay. He had expected this, and steeled himself against it. Last minute qualms were nor-

mal—but it was worse than he had imagined.

He was wrong, and he knew it. No! Damn it, you *made* your decision—do it! His finger tightened. Nothing happened. He jerked his finger away. His heart beat wildly against his chest and his whole body shook. He looked up at the sudden shifting of the eerie light.

Over the crest of the dark ridge, the four moons of Sahara III moved swiftly toward him through the black sky. He looked again. He had never seen them like that before—had he? Always, they seemed to travel the night in wild, erratic patterns, chasing each other across the heavens in a meaningless procession. Now, the two largest moons had nearly converged upon each other to become one—and the two dwarf sisters moved swiftly toward them in a path that could only bring them into conjunction.

Gito looked away. The moons of this planet themselves seemed to be warning him against the thing he had to do. Could he go back—now? No! He could stop them, save them. It was his—

The word stuck in his throat. His finger fell away from the trigger once more.

My God, was that what I was going to say? Is that how I justify this—as a duty?

He trembled at what he had

almost done. Suddenly, a parade of self-righteous, cold-eyed madmen passed before him in solemn review. From their lips they uttered a stream of unctious, emotionless edicts; edicts that changed, condemned, doomed a billion helpless faces.

It is our duty, they told the fearful crowds: it is for you we make these changes—we have decided for you how you shall live, how you shall die, and this is right, because WE HAVE DONE THESE THINGS AND KNOW THEY WILL BE RIGHT FOR YOU! Our heritage is now your heritage—your shape, your color, your gods have been wrong; but now we will make them right . . .

. . . And the centuries of one way were forgotten, and the faceless crowd began new ways . . . because the grim-lipped men who spoke had more than strength in their words; they had strength in other ways . . .

Gito's trembling hands opened and the weapon dropped to the sand. He looked up with blurred eyes at four moons that were now one, glazing, ghostly light above.

"Gito. . . GITO!" Arilee's fingers bit painfully into his arm. He turned, following her wide, staring eyes to his feet. There was nothing. Only the discarded weapon half-covered in the sand.

Then he saw. The pale gray of

the sand was turning to mottled blackness. He stepped back quickly, then bent to the ground. He jerked his hand away and stared at it as if it was a thing he had never seen. *Wet!* His hand was *wet!*

AS he watched, the mottled patches blurred together until a visible film of moisture covered the sand beneath his feet. He looked up, scanning the desert. All around them, the floor of the flat valley shimmered beneath the converging moons.

Arilee trembled. "Gito. What is it?" Her voice was barely a whisper. He stilled her with a gesture and cocked his head to listen. The song of the Kahrii was beginning again. It was the same song, he thought, only—there was a difference. The first song had been something old, the end of a life—this was a song of beginning.

The ground beneath his feet seemed to tremble with the urgency of the Kahrii voices. Then, he knew it was more than that—a low, awesome rumble of power was rising from deep beneath the surface of the planet.

Arilee gasped. The sand beneath her feet gurgled in a final protest, then the water bubbled from the ground in force. Gito grabbed her and shoved her toward the dome. She stood, numbly watching the strange fluid

that already covered her ankles.

"Run," he said sharply, "*Run!*"

"Gito—!"

"I don't *know!*" he yelled, "just run!"

Halfway there, his heart sank. The water was rising faster than ever now; he estimated quickly and knew they would never make it. Even if they reached the dome, how could they enter without bringing the flood with them? Then what? How high was it going to *go*? How much pressure would the dome take, submerged under the tons of water?

He stopped Arilee and jabbed a hand toward the smaller, closer dome of the sandcar. Arilee saw. Together, they pulled through the sandy water that now swirled above their waists. Arilee stumbled, disappeared. Gito plunged down to bring her up, gasping and choking.

At the dome, he pressed the lock of the port with his thumb and waited, listening to the mechanism groan against the pressure. Once it seemed to stop and he wedged his body between the narrow opening and shoved. The motor began again, then slowly folded back the door. The waters rushed in to fill the dome above the tracks of the sandcar.

Once Arilee was seated beside him and the canopy locked, he shoved down hard on the over-

drive bar, not waiting to build up speed on the useless treads. The power unit howled in protest. Great founts of steam roared beneath them in a gray cloud as the treads retracted and the sandcar trembled. Then they were out of the dome and rising on a hurricane column above the water. . . .

IT was a dawn he would never forget. From the ridge above the valley, he watched, Arilee sleeping restlessly in the seat beside him.

The first rays of *Posi Frondee* streaked the new alien sea with red. How many centuries had passed, he wondered, since the four moons had met to suck the dormant waters from the ground and fill the deep well of the dry valley?

He knew, now, that was exactly what it was—a well of the planet's own making, ringed by the solid rock wall.

As the harsh light hit the ridge across the valley, he could see the water had reached far less than halfway up the 750 feet of the wall. And already it was receding, sinking back into the depths below the sandy floor.

He picked up his binoculars and swept the far end of the valley. Yes. There it was. It had drifted some in the night, but it was still there. The Kahrii ship floated serenely, rolling above

the valley floor. Above, he reminded himself grimly, the flooded tunnels he might have used to 'save' the aliens from their folly.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He let it out slowly. He had been right—and wrong, too. Golsamel-ri had told him they would meet again—and they would.

Symbols? Well, the Kahrii were bound, as he had known, by what they could actually see. In his hand he held the symbol that had saved them when the waters rose—this time, and how many times before?

He opened his fist and looked at the object in his palm. It was a small, rough, cylinder, two inches long. Millions of them had risen with the water from the ground, and hundreds had clung to his clothes, and Arilee's.

He split it open down a long seam with his fingernail. Black, tender seeds clung to the inside of the pod. When he touched them lightly, they fell in a numberless steam into his lap.

Gito grinned. No, not numberless at all. When he had the time to count, he knew there would be 888—and the answer to the controlled population of the Kahrii.

Here was the tiny miniature, the model, for the Kahrii ark. When the waters receded, the seeds would recede with them, and the giant Shari would renew

themselves and grow in the moist sand.

The larger Kahrii 'seed' would come to rest, too, and new tunnels would be dug in the sand, waiting for the silver-gray shoots to rise and nurture the race.

There would be hunger, he knew. But the Kahrii were good about that—and he suspected the old, mature Shari that had been sheared off at the surface would renew themselves for awhile, and provide until the young plants thrust to the sun. It had happened before, hadn't it? And the race had lived.

Gito pulled his gaze away from the scene outside and rested his eyes on the figure beside him.

He wondered, briefly, if the

Warden of Tsirtsi had left an Arilee behind? A quiet chill of fear began to rise in his heart, then died quickly.

He, too, had acted to save—and had ended by destroying. And through the same, sure sense of knowledge and duty Gito had come so close to repeating.

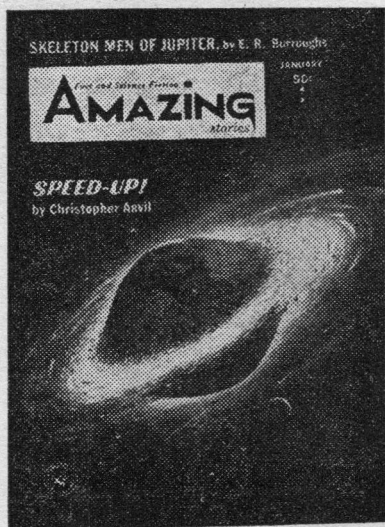
"Arilee," he said softly. She opened one sleepy eye and smiled.

Again, the small finger found his lips and closed them.

"Don't," she said. "Haven't you learned yet a Mistress always knows what a man is thinking?"

"Even," she added sleepily, "one that just handed in her resignation?"

THE END



COMING NEXT MONTH

Two headline features for the January **AMAZING** will be *Speed-up!* a novelet of planetary destruction by **Christopher Anvil**; and *Skeleton Men of Jupiter*, a reprint of one of **Edgar Rice Burroughs**'s littlest-known, but most exciting tales.

In addition, other short stories, and an article on Interstellar Flight, by **Ben Bova**. January **AMAZING** goes on sale December 5.



KILLJOY

By F. A. JAVOR

The Yalli hunts were the peak of sporting excitement—which is why they were illegal. And Wally, trembling, made sure they would be even more exciting next time.

THE run out to the sporting planet Domnik III was long and dull, and it was the practice of the more jaded hunt-ship captains to break the monotony for themselves and their well-paying clients by warping out at Suspi for a little Yalli shooting.

It was illegal, of course, and meant a stunning fine and a mandatory jail sentence for anyone a Warden ship might catch aground on the reservation planet. But Yalli shooting was reputed to have a unique thrill that its initiates refused to divulge and no hunt-ship captain had yet had his offer of a clandestine landing refused on any Warden's account.

And Wally Re's group was no different. Back on the water world of Merc, Wally was a marine biologist. Well paid to stay for ten earth-months in the bubble labs under the waters of a flooded planet, he was taking his thirty day rotation leave before being assigned to another identical bubble, under the identical waters of an identical world for another ten earth-months.

Wally was no hunter, but the idea of nearly a month of the day-long sunlight and the open air of a sporting planet appealed to him, and the idea of an off-trail stop on a forbidden world caught his fancy.

He grinned. "Sure," he said to Anker, the hunt-ship coxswain,

when the stocky spaceman approached him in the usual preliminary feeling out before the captain actually committed himself to the mention of an illegal stop. "When?"

Anker shook his head and smiled. "Not now," he said. "We'll let you know." And he moved away toward Vogel, the fat Boran land broker, with the oddly delicate step that the hunt-ship's one-third gravity made natural.

Wally saw Vogel nod, his slack lips stretching in a smile, and Anker moved along to Eckert and Allen and the others in the plasti-mahogany panelled lounge. Saw them all break into grins and nod.

Finally, Wally watched Anker nod to the blonde-bearded captain standing, casual looking, by the entry door. Watched the blue-and-silver uniformed man shift the wad of vanta-nut in his cheek and come forward.

"Gentlemen," he said, but he needn't have called for attention. They were all, Wally included, sitting on the edges of their plasti-cushioned chairs, the drinks in their hands forgotten.

"Gentlemen. In less than an hour our coordinates will be opposite those of a small planet called Suspi. You all know the penalty for an unauthorized stopping, but you've indicated that you want me to risk it."

His eyes circled the room, came to rest at a spot high on one bulkhead. "Gentlemen, as captain of your chartered craft I am actually in your collective employ and since you insist, I have no choice but to do as you order. Mr. Anker," to the grinning coxswain, "carry on." And the captain left the lounge.

"The curly fox," Wally laughed to himself. "He might go to jail for making the landing, but he isn't risking that Master's ticket of his. No, sir. Technically, a space lawyer could claim he was only acting on owner's orders."

Anker was speaking into the ship's intercom on his wrist. "Okay. Bring them in."

AND in a moment three of the blue-coverall clad crew came into the lounge draped with what looked to the surprised Wally very much like NavAir web side-arm belts, except that the tops of the holsters had been cut away to let the weapon butts project out into the clear.

The coxswain's grin widened. "Not the finest of arms, I guess," handing out the gunbelts, two to a man, "but we have to jettison them each trip. We get pretty thoroughly searched for contraband before we land at Domnik."

Vogel, the land broker, was turning one of the weapons over in his fat hands. "Why, this is an

ordinary pellet gun," he said. "Six shots the cylinder carries. Forty-five caliber at most. What kind of game can you bring down with this?"

But Eckert, the tall necra salesman, had already strapped both guns low on his hips and standing, was twirling them by their trigger guards, slapping them into their holsters, snatching them out, flipping them over his arms, catching them, spinning them, in, out, all the while bashing his teeth in a broad grin.

Anker laughed, nodding at Eckert. "You are going to have a ball. But," he said, "you don't wear but the one gun for a Yalli shoot."

Eckert looked puzzled. "Wear just the one gun? Then why the two . . . ?"

But Anker cut him off with the wave of a hand. "You'll find out when the time comes. Believe me."

The stocky coxswain spoke to them all now. "There are a few ground rules before I tell you how the hunt goes."

Wally leaned forward in his seat, saw the others do the same, and smiled to himself. If a Yalli shoot needed a preliminary build-up to give it its unique charge, the crew of this hunt-ship were doing a good job of getting him and the others worked up.

The coxswain was talking.

"First, we warp out and land for exactly thirty minutes. Watch the time."

Vogel snorted. "Some hunt. Thirty minutes." But he was only echoing the murmur of disappointment that rose from the gathered men.

Anker held up his hands. "It sounds like nothing, I know, but it's enough. Believe me, it's enough."

Then when they were quieted down again he went on. "Thirty minutes, because our departure and arrival times are very closely watched and any greater discrepancy than that will bring the captain up on the carpet for an explanation. And we don't want that. Thirty minutes, understood?"

He looked around the circled men, waited for each of them to nod in turn before he went on. It seemed important to him.

"Take the survival kits you were issued when you came aboard. Any man still ashore at the end of thirty minutes will be left behind."

Again the murmur from the assembled hunters. Again Anker raised his hands for silence. "Will be left behind for the Wardens to pick up, and all his gear, every trace of him ever having been aboard this vessel, jettisoned."

"The passenger lists," Vogel said.

"He chartered passage," the coxswain said, "but he never came aboard. If he was picked up on a reservation planet, then he must have gotten there on his own, we certainly didn't put him down there."

WALLY felt the silence settling on the hunters. The illegality of their contemplated action was beginning to sink home to them and he wondered if their mouths were beginning to feel as dry as his. He shook himself. The coxswain was doing a good job with his build-up.

Vogel shrugged his fat shoulders, and, after a moment, the coxswain went on. "Now for the hunt itself. You wear the one gun, carry the other. Into the forest.

"Find a clearing. Drop the one gun on the ground at one side, step back about fifteen feet, then do this. . . ."

Anker threw back his head, opened his mouth and bellowed.

Wally jumped in his seat at the unexpected sound.

"Got that," Anker said. "Ha-ha-hoo. The words are important. Try it. Ha-ha-hoo."

Grinning sheepishly at each other, they did as they were told. "Ha-ha-hoo."

"Fine. But loud. That's all."

"That's all?" and Wally heard his own voice rising with that of the others.

The crewmen were grinning at each other but it was Anker who nodded. "That's all. Yalli hunting is not like any other kind in all the worlds. You do what I just told you to do and you'll get a charge like you never had before."

Vogel was shaking his head, his fat jowls flapping. "Nothing doing. I don't go into any strange forest, put a loaded gun down on the ground, step fifteen feet away from it and wait to see what happens. Count me out."

The crew stopped grinning. "He's gotta go," Wally heard one of them whisper to Anker. "The captain won't land unless everybody is in on it." He looked around at the hunters, licked his lips. "Maybe even just mentioning it . . ." and his voice trailed off.

Anker laughed shortly. "The captain's been making these landings for nine years and he hasn't lost a client yet," he said to Vogel.

"Count me out," Vogel repeated, his slack lips now pressed tight.

"You'll ruin it for all the others," the coxswain pointed out.

The fat land broker from Boran did not even answer him.

"There's one in every crowd," Wally heard someone say, but Vogel did not budge.

Anker sighed and spoke into the intercom on his wrist, and

the blonde-bearded captain, when he came in, took Vogel to the far end of the lounge, whispered in his ear.

Wally saw the change spreading in Vogel's heavy face. He was grinning broadly by the time the captain stepped back and said, "Now you know. Now you're an accessory. You can stay aboard."

"No," Vogel was all smiles now. "I'll go. I'll go." And with fat hands buckled on his gun.

The captain shifted his vantage point from one cheek to the other. "I thought you would. But it's never the same once you know."

SUSPI'S sun was larger than the earth's and nearer. Wally blinked at its brightness when the shields had been slid away from the hunt-ship's ports and they could look out at the reservation planet rising up to meet them. Green, lighter than Earth, perhaps, but pleasant looking. In the distance the bright glint of water.

"Thirty minutes," the coxswain warned them as they all stepped to the head of the ship's landing ramp. Captain, crew, and clients, all armed and eager. Wally, the gun on his hip pulling strangely, the holster tied down on his leg by a crewman, settled the web belt with its hook-and-eye buckle, nodded his under-

standing with the others. His second weapon he carried slung over his shoulder, hooked across his palm.

"One thing more," Anker said, "spread out. Don't buddy up. If there's more than one of you anywhere near each other, the Yalli won't show. This is strictly a loner's sport. Got it?"

"Wait a minute," the gun-knowing Eckert said. "How will I know a Yalli when I see one?"

"You'll know," the coxswain said. "You'll know."

They fanned out from the hunt-ship, each man going his own way as Anker had told them they must do, the captain and the crew heading off in their own direction. The sun on Wally's back was hotter than any he'd felt in a long time and he panted, not knowing if it was from the heat or his own tension now that he was alone; made even more uncertain by the lighter-than-Earth pull of Suspi's gravity.

A clearing, small but unmistakable, through the fern-like trees ahead.

Wally hesitated, then, taking a deep breath, stepped into its open ring. He dropped the one gunbelt and its weapon at the edge. Carefully he paced off the fifteen feet, turned.

He took a breath, threw back his head and opened his mouth.

"Ha-ha-hoo."

It was little more than a rasping whisper. Wally worked his dry mouth and tried again. Forcing himself, suddenly surprised more than a little at how the sweat was pouring from him, how he seemed to be shaking.

"HA-HA-HOO!"

It was loud, unexpectedly so, but in a way satisfying too.

"Ha-ha-hoo!"

Wally stood waiting, listening, hearing nothing, eyes darting. The thin air straining his lungs, seeming like thin water now.

A rustle!

A rustle at the far side of the clearing, by the gun, and Wally gasped.

TALL. Tall as a man was the Yalli. Barrel chested and spindly legged as befitted the oxygen-lean air and light gravity of this, its home planet. Hair, red, glinting in the light of the big sun, on its chest and on its arms, and along its legs like the fringing on an ancient frontiersman's garments. Male.

And the head, not human certainly, not even simian, but the eyes, deep set and brown, and the mouth, toothless and bird-like, small over that protruding jaw.

The mouth opened. "Ha-ha-hoo!" Clear and bell-like. "Ha-ha-hoo." And the Yalli, stooping, scooped up the second gun and snapped it on in an easy and al-

most unbelievably rapid movement.

Now it was ready. Webbed feet spread apart, arms at its sides, the brown eyes on Wally, steady and waiting.

And now Wally understood the unique thrill of a Yalli shoot and wished himself back in the monotony of the crusing huntship, the dreary drip of his water worlds.

His hands trembled, the sweat dripping down his arms and from his palms, his lungs and heart pumping, and looking at him, filling his world, the level eyes of the Yalli. The Yalli he'd just seen move with incredible speed.

"Ha-ha-hoo," Wally said, and tried to make it sound friendly.

"Ha-ha-hoo," the Yalli answered, and crouched a little lower.

Retreat! Very slowly Wally moved his foot in a backward step, never taking his eyes from the Yalli.

It advanced a step, the webbed foot moving, birdlike, almost instantaneously to the new position.

Fast. Wally had never seen a movement so fast, and now the blood was pounding in his eyes, making itself seen in the webbing, pulsing pattern of lights. There was no going back for him now, he must make his move. In the face of that incred-

ibly rapid motion, he must make his move.

His tongue darted out, licking his parched lips, but it had no moisture to give them.

Now!

He snatched at the gun in his holster, but even as he pulled it out and fired again and again at the Yalli, he knew he was too late to save himself. The Yalli had moved so fast that to Wally's straining eyes the gun had seemed to just suddenly *be* in its outthrust hand.

And then surprise, and a throat filling wonder choked Wally. He was standing, but the Yalli. . . .

The Yalli. The gun, pointed at him still, but unfired.

The Yalli hadn't fire'

Stains on its chest. Brown, but blood, Wally supposed. It coughed, once, blood from the birdlike mouth, and then it slowly crumpled where it stood, the gun hand slackening, the weapon still unfired.

Wally ran to it, the gun clutched in his hand, but forgotten now. It was warm, its shoulder felt warm to his hand upon it, but the Yalli did not stir.

HE reached to take the gun from its hand and, tugging to free it from the Yalli's death grip, knew suddenly why it had not fired at him.

Knew suddenly and retched at the knowledge, and at the thought of the men who called this killing sport; at the fat Vogel who, knowing of it, could not wait to come ashore.

And now Wally became aware of his own gun still in his hand, and he stood up and flung it. Sobbing, he flung it with all this strength and sent it arcing high above the fern-like tree tops. He unhooked his belt and holster and threw it from him.

Then he knelt down beside the Yalli and, his touch tender, gently worked to free the gun from its grasp.

A tendon, like the branch-grasping one of a bird, holding the nailless thumb firm on the pistol grip. He flung the pistol after his other.

The hand . . . and why the Yalli did not fire, could not fire, at him. Boned, to his probing touch, three fingers. But not three fingers open and spreading, but closed, imbedded in muscle and sinew. A hand shaped not like a glove, but like a mitten. The Yalli could grasp the gun, did grasp the gun, but it had no fingers with which to pull the trigger.

In Wally's mind a thought was forming. He stood up, fumbled for his survival kit hung on his belt at the back. The knife, folded, he triggered open and checked its razor sharp blade.

"Good," he said aloud and snapped it shut. He had to find another Yalli.

He lifted the one he had killed, hid it under the trees. "Ha-ha-hoo," he bellowed back in the clearing. "Ha-ha-hoo."

No Yalli came and Wally knew he must find another clearing.

And now, somewhere behind him, he heard a distant roaring and knew that his thirty minutes were up and the hunt-ship was blasing off without him.

No matter, he had to find another clearing and another Yalli. "Ah, up ahead."

"Ha-ha-hoo."

No guns this time, just the knife, out of sight in his pocket. "Ha-ha-hoo."

There, that rustle, a Yalli? Yes. Another male.

Wally stepped forward. "Ha-ha-hoo," he said and waited. He could not match the Yalli's incredible speed, surprise was his only chance.

"Ha-ha-hoo," he said and moved forward another step.

"Ha-ha-hoo," the Yalli said and, its eyes moving about, it scooped up a small branch from the ground.

Good, Wally said to himself, it feels it needs a weapon. With his empty hands he might just have it confused enough.

Another step and he would be in reach. Close up the Yalli had

a not unpleasant doglike odor he hadn't noticed on the one he'd killed.

He was close enough. Now! And Wally's open right hand suddenly made of itself a fist and darted full force for the huge jaw under the birdlike mouth.

The Yalli crumpled without a sound.

Wally stood over it, rubbing his knuckles. "Glass," he said. "I never saw a big jaw like that that wasn't solid glass." And, reaching into his pocket, he drew out his knife and triggered open its razor sharp blade.

HIS cell on the Warden ship was not large, but comfortable enough, and Wally was glad at long last to be in it. The fine would break him, he was sure, and the jail sentence would play hob with his getting any decent assignments for a long while to come, but he could stand it, knowing what he'd done with

his knife to as many Yalli as he could find before the Warden's heat-pickups had zeroed in on him.

His knife, and now Wally hugged himself and laughed. Laughed until the guard sitting in the corridor outside his cell came up to its door to look in on him.

"I wish you'd tell me what's so funny," he said, a little ruefully.

Wally wiped his eyes. "You'll never know," he said. "News of this kind of a joke isn't likely to get around."

The guard went away, shaking his head and Wally laughed again. Laughed at the mighty hunters who might at this very moment each be standing his solitary duel with a Yalli.

But a Yalli who Wally, with his razor sharp knife and marine biologist's skill, had slashed upon the hand. A Yalli who now had a perhaps unpretty but perfectly serviceable trigger finger.

THE END

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Perky Pat had everything: a sports car, a boy friend, even an automatic garbage disposal. Then the flukers learned about Connie Companion—who had even more. Here, in a strange guise, is a morality tale of the possible future.

THE DAYS OF PERKY PAT

By PHILIP K. DICK

Illustrated by ADKINS

AT ten in the morning a terrific horn, familiar to him, hooted Sam Regan out of his sleep, and he cursed the careboy upstairs; he knew the racket was deliberate. The careboy, circling, wanted to be certain that flukers—and not merely wild animals—got the care parcels that were to be dropped.

We'll get them, we'll get them, Sam Regan said to himself as he zipped his dust-proof overalls, put his feet into boots and then grumpily sauntered as slowly as possible toward the ramp. Several other flukers joined him, all showing similar irritation.

"He's early today," Tod Morrison complained. "And I'll bet it's all staples, sugar and flour and lard—nothing interesting like say candy."



"We ought to be grateful" Norman Schein said.

"Grateful!" Tod halted to stare at him. "GRATEFUL?"

"Yes," Schein said. "What do you think we'd be eating without them? If they hadn't seen the clouds ten years ago."

"Well," Tod said sullenly, "I just don't like them to come *early*; I actually don't exactly mind their coming, as such."

As he put his shoulders against the lid at the top of the ramp, Schein said genially, "That's mighty tolerant of you, Tod boy. I'm sure the careboys would be pleased to hear your sentiments."

Of the three of them, Sam Regan was the last to reach the surface; he did not like the upstairs at all, and he did not care who knew it. And anyhow, no one could compel him to leave the safety of the Pinole Fluke-pit; it was entirely his business, and he noted now that a number of his fellow flukers had elected to remain below in their quarters, confident that those who did answer the horn would bring them back something.

"It's bright," Tod murmured, blinking in the sun.

The care ship sparkled close overhead, set against the gray sky as if hanging from an uneasy thread. Good pilot, this drop, Tod decided. He, or rather *it*, just lazily handles it, in no

hurry. Tod waved at the care ship, and once more the huge horn burst out its din, making him clap his hands to his ears. Hey, a joke's a joke, he said to himself. And then the horn ceased; the careboy had relented.

"Wave to him to drop," Norm Schein said to Tod. "You've got the wigwag."

"Sure," Tod said, and began laboriously flapping the red flag, which the Martian creatures had long ago provided, back and forth, back and forth.

A projectile slid from the underpart of the ship, tossed out stabilizers, spiraled toward the ground.

"Sheoot," Sam Regan said with disgust. "It is staples; they don't have the parachute." He turned away, not interested.

HOW miserable the upstairs looked today, he thought as he surveyed the scene surrounding him. There, to the right, the uncompleted house which someone—not far from their pit—had begun to build out of lumber salvaged from Vallejo, ten miles to the north. Animals or radiation dust had gotten the builder, and so his work remained where it was; it would never be put to use. And, Sam Regan saw, an unusually heavy precipitate had formed since last he had been up here, Thursday morning or perhaps Friday; he had lost exact

track. The darn dust, he thought. Just rocks, pieces of rubble, and the dust. World's becoming a dusty object with no one to whisk it off regularly. How about you? he asked silently of the Martian careboy flying in slow circles overhead. Isn't your technology limitless? Can't you appear some morning with a dust rag a million miles in surface area and restore our planet to pristine newness?

Or rather, he thought, to pristine *oldness*, the way it was in the "ol-days," as the children call it. We'd like that. While you're looking for something to give to us in the way of further aid, try that.

The careboy circled once more, searching for sign of writing in the dust: a message from the flukers below. I'll write that, Sam thought. BRING DUST RAG, RESTORE OUR CIVILIZATION. Okay, careboy?

All at once the care ship shot off, no doubt on its way back home to its base on Luna or perhaps all the way to Mars.

From the open fluke-pit hole, up which the three of them had come, a further head poked, a woman. Jean Regan, Sam's wife, appeared, shielded by a bonnet against the gray, blinding sun, frowning and saying, "Anything important? Anything *new*?"

"Fraid not," Sam said. The care parcel projectile had landed and he walked toward it, scuffing

his boots in the dust. The hull of the projectile had cracked open from the impact and he could see the cannisters already. It looked to be five thousand pounds of salt . . . might as well leave it up here so the animals won't starve, he decided. He felt despondent.

HOW peculiarly anxious the careboys were. Concerned all the time that the mainstays of existence be ferried from their own planet to Earth. They must think we eat all day long, Sam thought. My god . . . the pit was filled to capacity with stored foods. But of course it had been one of the smallest public shelters in Northern California.

"Hey," Schein said, stooping down by the projectile and peering into the crack opened along its side. "I believe I see something we can use." He found a rusted metal pole—once it had helped reinforce the concrete side of an ol-days public building—and poked at the projectile, stirring its release mechanism into action. The mechanism, triggered off, popped the rear half of the projectile open . . . and there lay the contents.

"Looks like radios in that box," Tod said. "Transistor radios." Thoughtfully stroking his short black beard he said, "Maybe we can use them for something new in our layouts."

"Mine's already got a radio," Schein pointed out.

"Well, build an electronic self-directing lawn mower with the parts," Tod said. "You don't have that, do you?" He knew the Scheins' Perky Pat layout fairly well; the two couples, he and his wife with Schein and his, had played together a good deal, being almost evenly matched.

Sam Regan said, "Dibs on the radios, because I can use them." His layout lacked the automatic garage-door opener that both Schein and Tod had; he was considerably behind them.

"Let's get to work," Schein agreed. "We'll leave the staples here and just cart back the radios. If anybody wants the staples, let them come here and get them. Before the do-cats do."

Nodding, the other two men fell to the job of carting the useful contents of the projectile to the entrance of their fluke-pit ramp. For use in their precious, elaborate Perky Pat layouts.

SEATED cross-legged with his whetstone, Timothy Schein, ten years old and aware of his many responsibilities, sharpened his knife, slowly and expertly. Meanwhile, disturbing him, his mother and father noisily quarreled with Mr. and Mrs. Morrison, on the far side of the partition. They were playing Perky Pat again. As usual.

How many times today they have to play that dumb game? Timothy asked himself. Forever, I guess. He could see nothing in it, but his parents played on anyhow. And they weren't the only ones; he knew from what other kids said, even from other fluke-pits, that their parents, too, played Perky Pat most of the day, and sometimes even on into the night.

His mother said loudly, "Perky Pat's going to the grocery store and it's got one of those electric eyes that opens the door. Look." A pause. "See, it opened for her, and now she's inside."

"She pushes a cart," Timothy's dad added, in support.

"No, she doesn't," Mrs. Morrison contradicted. "That's wrong. She gives her list to the grocer and he fills it."

"That's only in little neighborhood stores," his mother explained. "And this is a super-market, you can tell because of the electric eye door."

"I'm sure all grocery stores had electric eye doors," Mrs. Morrison said stubbornly, and her husband chimed in with his agreement. Now the voices rose in anger; another squabble had broken out. As usual.

Aw, cunq to them, Timothy said to himself, using the strongest word which he and his friends knew. What's a supermarket anyhow? He tested the blade of

his knife—he had made it himself, originally, out of a heavy metal pan—and then hopped to his feet. A moment later he had sprinted silently down the hall and was rapping his special rap on the door of the Chamberlains' quarters.

Fred, also ten years old, answered. "Hi. Ready to go? I see you got that ol' knife of yours all sharpened; what do you think we'll catch?"

"Not a do-cat," Timothy said. "A lot better than that; I'm tired of eating do-cat. Too peppery."

"Your parents playing Perky Pat?"

"Yeah."

Fred said, "My mom and dad have been gone for a long time, off playing with the Benteleys." He glanced sideways at Timothy, and in an instant they had shared their mute disappointment regarding their parents. Gosh, and maybe the darn game was all over the world, by now; that would not have surprised either of them.

"How come your parents play it?" Timothy asked.

"Same reason yours do," Fred said.

Hesitating, Timothy said, "Well, why? I don't know why they do; I'm asking you, can't you say?"

"It's because—" Fred broke off. "Ask them. Come on; let's

get upstairs and start hunting." His eyes shone. "Let's see what we can catch and kill today."

SHORTLY, they had ascended the ramp, popped open the lid, and were crouching amidst the dust and rocks, searching the horizon. Timothy's heart pounded; this moment always overwhelmed him, the first instant of reaching the upstairs. The thrilling initial sight of the expanse. Because it was never the same. The dust, heavier today, had a darker gray color to it than before; it seemed denser, more mysterious.

Here and there, covered by many layers of dust, lay parcels dropped from past relief ships—dropped and left to deteriorate. Never to be claimed. And, Timothy saw, an additional new projectile which had arrived that morning. Most of its cargo could be seen within; the grownups had not had any use for the majority of the contents, today.

"Look," Fred said softly.

Two do-cats—mutant dogs or cats; no one knew for sure—could be seen, lightly sniffing at the projectile. Attracted by the unclaimed contents.

"We don't want them," Timothy said.

"That one's sure nice and fat," Fred said longingly. But it was Timothy that had the knife; all he himself had was a string with

a metal bolt on the end, a bull-roarer that could kill a bird or a small animal at a distance—but useless against a do-cat, which generally weighed fifteen to twenty pounds and sometimes even more.

High up in the sky a dot moved at immense speed, and Timothy knew that it was a careship heading for another fluke-pit, bringing supplies to it. Sure are busy, he thought to himself. Those careboys always coming and going; they never stop, because if they did, the grownups would die. Wouldn't that be too bad? he thought ironically. Sure be sad.

Fred said, "Wave to it and maybe it'll drop something." He grinned at Timothy, and then they both broke out laughing.

"Sure," Timothy said. "Let's see; what do I want?" Again the two of them laughed at the idea of them wanting something. The two boys had the entire upstairs, as far as the eye could see . . . they had even more than the careboys had, and that was plenty, more than plenty.

"Do you think they know?" Fred said, "that our parents play Perky Pat with furniture made out of what they drop? I bet they don't know about Perky Pat; they never have seen a Perky Pat doll, and if they did they'd be really mad."

"You're right," Timothy said.

"They'd be so sore they'd probably stop dropping stuff." He glanced at Fred, catching his eye.

"Aw no," Fred said. "We shouldn't tell them; your dad would beat you again if you did that, and probably me, too."

Even so, it was an interesting idea. He could imagine first the surprise and then the anger of the careboys; it would be fun to see that, see the reaction of the eight-legged Martian creatures who had so much charity inside their warty bodies, the cephalopodic univalve mollusk-like organisms who had voluntarily taken it upon themselves to supply succor to the waning remnants of the human race . . . this was how they got paid back for their charity, this utterly wasteful, stupid purpose to which their goods were being put. This stupid Perky Pat game that all the adults played.

And anyhow it would be very hard to tell them; there was almost no communication between humans and careboys. They were too different. Acts, deeds, could be done, conveying something . . . but not mere words, not mere *signs*. And anyhow—

A great brown rabbit bounded by to the right, past the half-completed house. Timothy whipped out his knife. "Oh boy!" he said aloud in excitement. "Let's go!" He set off across the

rubbly ground, Fred a little behind him. Gradually they gained on the rabbit; swift running came easy to the two boys: they had done much practicing.

"Throw the knife!" Fred panted, and Timothy, skidding to a halt, raised his right arm, paused to take aim, and then hurled the sharpened, weighted knife. His most valuable, self-made possession.

It cleaved the rabbit straight through its vitals. The rabbit tumbled, slid, raising a cloud of dust.

"I bet we can get a dollar for that!" Fred exclaimed, leaping up and down. "The hide alone—I bet we can get fifty cents just for the darn hide!"

Together, they hurried toward the dead rabbit, wanting to get there before a red-tailed hawk or a day-owl swooped on it from the gray sky above.

BENDING, Norman Schein picked up his Perky Pat doll and said sullenly, "I'm quitting; I don't want to play any more."

Distressed, his wife protested, "But we've got Perky Pat all the way downtown in her new Ford hardtop convertible and parked and a dime in the meter and she's shopped and now she's in the analyst's office reading *Fortune*—we're way ahead of the Morrisons! Why do you want to quit, Norm?"

"We just don't agree," Norman grumbled. "You say analysts charged twenty dollars an hour and I distinctly remember them charging only ten; nobody could charge twenty. So you're penalizing our side, and for what? The Morrisons agree it was only ten. Don't you?" he said to Mr. and Mrs. Morrison, who squatted on the far side of the layout which combined both couples' Perky Pat sets.

Helen Morrison said to her husband, "You went to the analyst more than I did; are you sure he charged only ten?"

"Well, I went mostly to group therapy," Tod said. "At the Berkeley State Mental Hygiene Clinic, and they charged according to your ability to pay. And Perky Pat is at a *private* psychoanalyst."

"We'll have to ask someone else," Helen said to Norman Schein. "I guess all we can do now this minute is suspend the game." He found himself being glared at by her, too, now, because by his insistence on that one point he had put an end to their game for the whole afternoon.

"Shall we leave it all set up?" Fran Schein asked. "We might as well; maybe we can finish tonight after dinner."

Norman Schein gazed down at their combined layout, the swanky shops, the well-lit streets

with the parked new-model cars, all of them shiny, the split-level house itself, where Perky Pat lived and where she entertained Leonard, her boy friend. It was the *house* that he perpetually yearned for; the house was the real focus of the layout—of all the Perky Pat layouts, however much they might otherwise differ.

Perky Pat's wardrobe, for instance, there in the closet of the house, the big bedroom closet. Her capri pants, her white cotton short-shorts, her two-piece polka dot swimsuit, her fuzzy sweaters . . . and there, in her bedroom, her hi-fi set, her collection of long playing records . . .

It had been this way, once, really been like this in the old days. Norm Schein could remember his own l-p record collection, and he had once had clothes almost as swanky as Perky Pat's boy friend Leonard, cashmere jackets and tweed suits and Italian sportshirts and shoes made in England. He hadn't owned a Jaguar XKE sports car, like Leonard did, but he had owned a fine-looking old 1963 Mercedes-Benz, which he had used to drive to work.

We lived then, Norm Schein said to himself, *like Perky Pat and Leonard do now*. This is how it actually was.

To his wife he said, pointing to the clock radio which Perky

Pat kept beside her bed, "Remember our G.E. clock radio? How it used to wake us up in the morning with classical music from that FM station, KSFR? The 'Wolfangers,' the program was called. From six a.m. to nine every morning."

"Yes," Fran said, nodding soberly. "And you used to get up before me; I knew I should have gotten up and fixed bacon and hot coffee for you, but it was so much fun just indulging myself, not stirring for half an hour longer, until the kids woke up."

"Woke up, hell; they were awake before we were," Norm said. "Don't you remember? They were in the back watching 'The Three Stooges' on TV until eight. Then I got up and fixed hot cereal for them, and then I went on to my job at Ampex down at Redwood City."

"Oh yes," Fran said. "The TV." Their Perky Pat did not have a TV set; they had lost it to the Regans in a game a week ago, and Norm had not yet been able to fashion another one realistic-looking enough to substitute. So, in a game, they pretended now that "the TV repairman had come for it." That was how they explained their Perky Pat not having something she really would have had.

NORM thought, Playing this game . . . it's like being back

there, back in the world before the war. That's why we play it, I suppose. He felt shame, but only fleetingly; the shame, almost at once, was replaced by the desire to play a little longer.

"Let's not quit," he said suddenly. "I'll agree the psychoanalyst would have charged Perky Pat twenty dollars. Okay?"

"Okay," both the Morrisons said together, and they settled back down once more to resume the game.

Tod Morrison had picked up their Perky Pat; he held it, stroking its blonde hair—theirs was blonde, whereas the Scheins' was a brunette—and fiddling with the snaps of its skirt.

"Whatever are you doing?" his wife inquired.

"Nice skirt she has," Tod said. "You did a good job sewing it."

Norm said, "Ever know a girl, back in the ol-days, that looked like Perky Pat?"

"No," Tod Morrison said somberly. "Wish I had, though. I saw girls like Perky Pat, especially when I was living in Los Angeles during the Korean War. But I just could never manage to know them personally. And of course there were really terrific girl singers, like Peggy Lee and Julie London . . . they looked a lot like Perky Pat."

"Play," Fran said vigorously. And Norm, whose turn it was, picked up the spinner and spun.

"Eleven," he said. "That gets my Leonard out of the sports car repair garage and on his way to the race track." He moved the Leonard doll ahead.

Thoughtfully, Tod Morrison said, "You know, I was out the other day hauling in perishables which the careboys had dropped . . . Bill Ferner was there, and he told me something interesting. He met a fluker from a fluke-pit down where Oakland used to be. And at that fluke-pit you know what they play? Not Perky Pat. They never have heard of Perky Pat."

"Well, what do they play, then?" Helen asked.

"They have another doll entirely." Frowning, Tod continued, "Bill says the Oakland fluker called it a Connie Companion doll. Ever hear of that?"

"A 'Connie Companion' doll," Fran said thoughtfully. "How strange. I wonder what she's like. Does she have a boy friend?"

"Oh sure," Tod said. "His name is Paul. Connie and Paul. You know, we ought to hike down there to that Oakland Fluke-pit one of these days and see what Connie and Paul look like and how they live. Maybe we could learn a few things to add to our own layouts."

Norm said, "Maybe we could play them."

Puzzled, Fran said, "Could a

Perky Pat play a Connie Companion? Is that possible? I wonder what would happen."

There was no answer from any of the others. Because none of them knew.

AS they skinned the rabbit, Fred said to Timothy, "Where did the name 'fluker' come from? It's sure an ugly word; why do they use it?"

"A fluker is a person who lived through the hydrogen war," Timothy explained. "You know, by a fluke. A fluke of fate. See? Because almost everyone was killed; there used to be thousands of people."

"But what's a 'fluke,' then? When you say a 'fluke of fate—'"

"A fluke is when fate has decided to spare you," Timothy said, and that was all he had to say on the subject. That was all he knew.

Fred said thoughtfully, "But you and I, we're not flukers because we weren't alive when the war broke out. We were born after."

"Right," Timothy said.

"So anybody who calls me a fluker," Fred said, "is going to get hit in the eye with my bull-roarer."

"And 'careboy,'" Timothy said, "that's a made-up word, too. It's from when stuff was dumped from jet planes and ships to people in a disaster area.

They were called 'care parcels' because they came from people who cared."

"I know that," Fred said. "I didn't ask that."

"Well, I told you anyhow," Timothy said.

The two boys continued skinning the rabbit.

JEAN REGAN said to her husband, "Have you heard about the Connie Companion doll?" She glanced down the long rough-board table to make sure none of the other families was listening. "Sam," she said, "I heard it from Helen Morrison; she heard it from Tod and he heard it from Bill Ferner, I think. So it's probably true."

"What's true?" Sam said.

"That in the Oakland Fluke-pit they don't have Perky Pat; they have Connie Companion . . . and it occurred to me that maybe some of this—you know, this sort of emptiness, this boredom we feel now and then—maybe if we saw the Connie Companion doll and how she lives, maybe we could add enough to our own layout to—" She paused, reflecting. "To make it more complete."

"I don't care for the name," Sam Regan said. "Connie Companion; it sounds cheap." He spooned up some of the plain, utilitarian grain-mash which the careboys had been dropping, of late. And, as he ate a mouthful,

he thought, I'll bet Connie Companion doesn't eat slop like this; I'll bet she eats cheeseburgers with all the trimmings, at a high-type drive-in.

"Could we make a trek down there?" Jean asked.

"To Oakland Fluke-pit?" Sam stared at her. "It's *fifteen miles*, all the way on the other side of the Berkeley Fluke-pit!"

"But this is important," Jean said stubbornly. "And Bill says that a fluker from Oakland came all the way up here, in search of electronic parts or something . . . so if he can do it, we can. We've got the dust suits they dropped us. I know we could do it."

Little Timothy Schein, sitting with his family, had overheard her; now he spoke up. "Mrs. Regan, Fred Chamberlain and I, we could trek down that far, if you pay us. What do you say?" He nudged Fred, who sat beside him. "Couldn't we? For maybe five dollars."

Fred, his face serious, turned to Mrs. Regan and said, "We could get you a Connie Companion doll. For five dollars for *each* of us."

"Good grief," Jean Regan said, outraged. And dropped the subject.

But later, after dinner, she brought it up again when she and Sam were alone in their quarters.

"Sam, I've got to see it," she burst out. Sam, in a galvanized tub, was taking his weekly bath, so he had to listen to her. "Now that we know it exists we have to play against someone at the Oakland Fluke-pit; at least we can do that. Can't we? Please." She paced back and forth in the small room, her hands clasped tensely. "Connie Companion may have a Standard Station and an airport terminal with jet landing strip and color TV and a French restaurant where they serve escargot, like the one you and I went to when we were first married . . . I just have to see her layout."

"I don't know," Sam said hesitantly. "There's something about Connie Companion doll that—makes me uneasy."

"What could it possibly be?"

"I don't know."

Jean said bitterly, "It's because you know her layout is so much better than ours and she's so much more than Perky Pat."

"Maybe that's it," Sam murmured.

"If you don't go, if you don't try to make contact with them down at the Oakland Fluke-pit, someone else will—someone with more ambition will get ahead of you. Like Norman Schein. He's not afraid the way you are."

Sam said nothing; he continued with his bath. But his hands shook.

A CAREBOY had recently dropped complicated pieces of machinery which were, evidently, a form of mechanical computer. For several weeks the computers—if that was what they were—had sat about the pit in their cartons, unused, but now Norman Schein was finding something to do with one. At the moment he was busy adapting some of its gears, the smallest ones, to form a garbage disposal unit for his Perky Pat's kitchen.

Using the tiny special tools—designed and built by inhabitants of the fluke-pit—which were necessary in fashioning environmental items for Perky Pat, he was busy at his hobby bench. Thoroughly engrossed in what he was doing, he all at once realized that Fran was standing directly behind him, watching.

"I get nervous when I'm watched," Norm said, holding a tiny gear with a pair of tweezers.

"Listen," Fran said, "I've thought of something. Does this suggest anything to you?" She placed before him one of the transistor radios which had been dropped the day before.

"It suggests that garage-door opener already thought of," Norm said irritably. He continued with his work, expertly fitting the miniature pieces together in the sink drain of Pat's kitchen; such delicate work demanded maximum concentration.

Fran said, "It suggests that there must be radio *transmitters* on Earth somewhere, or the careboys wouldn't have dropped these."

"So?" Norm said, uninterested.

"Maybe our Mayor has one," Fran said. "Maybe there's one right here in our own pit, and we could use it to call the Oakland Fluke-pit. Representatives from there could meet us half way . . . say at the Berkeley Fluke-pit. And we could play there. So we wouldn't have that long fifteen mile trip."

Norman hesitated in his work; he set the tweezers down and said slowly, "I think possibly you're right." But if their Mayor Hooker Glebe had a radio transmitter, would he let them use it? And if he did—

"We can try," Fran urged. "It wouldn't hurt to try."

"Okay," Norm said, rising from his hobby bench.

THE short, sly-faced man in Army uniform, the Mayor of the Pinole Fluke-pit, listened in silence as Norm Schein spoke. Then he smiled a wise, cunning smile. "Sure, I have a radio transmitter. Had it all the time. Fifty watt output. But why would you want to get in touch with the Oakland Fluke-pit?"

Guardedly, Norm said, "That's my business."

Hooker Glebe said thoughtfully, "I'll let you use it for fifteen dollars."

It was a nasty shock, and Norm recoiled. Good lord; all the money he and his wife had—they needed every bill of it for use in playing Perky Pat. Money was the tender in the game; there was no other criterion by which one could tell if he had won or lost. "That's too much," he said aloud.

"Well, say ten," the Mayor said, shrugging.

In the end they settled for six dollars and a fifty cent piece.

"I'll make the radio contact for you," Hooker Glebe said. "Because you don't know how. It will take time." He began turning a crank at the side of the generator of the transmitter. "I'll notify you when I've made contact with them. But give me the money now." He held out his hand for it, and, with great reluctance, Norm paid him.

It was not until late that evening that Hooker managed to establish contact with Oakland. Pleased with himself, beaming in self-satisfaction, he appeared at the Scheins' quarters, during their dinner hour. "All set," he announced. "Say, you know there are actually *nine* fluke-pits in Oakland? I didn't know that. Which you want? I've got one with the radio code of Red Vanilla." He chuckled. "They're tough

and suspicious down there; it was hard to get any of them to answer."

Leaving his evening meal, Norman hurried to the Mayor's quarters, Hooker puffing along after him.

The transmitter, sure enough, was on, and static wheezed from the speaker of its monitoring unit. Awkwardly, Norm seated himself at the microphone. "Do I just talk?" he asked Hooker Glebe.

"Just say, This is Pinole Fluke-pit calling. Repeat that a couple of times and then when they acknowledge, you say what you want to say." The Mayor fiddled with controls of the transmitter, fussing in an important fashion.

"This is Pinole Fluke-pit," Norm said loudly into the microphone.

Almost at once a clear voice from the monitor said, "This is Red Vanilla Three answering." The voice was cold and harsh; it struck him forcefully as distinctly alien. Hooker was right. "Do you have Connie Companion down there where you are?"

"Yes we do," the Oakland fluker answered.

"Well, I challenge you," Norman said, feeling the veins in his throat pulse with the tension of what he was saying. "We're Perky Pat in this area; we'll play Perky Pat against your Connie

Companion. Where can we meet?"

"Perky Pat," the Oakland fluker echoed. "Yeah, I know about her. What would the stakes be, in your mind?"

"Up here we play for paper money mostly," Norman said, feeling that his response was somehow lame.

"We've got lots of paper money," the Oakland fluker said cuttingly. "That wouldn't interest any of us. What else?"

"I don't know." He felt hampered, talking to someone he could not see; he was not used to that. People should, he thought, be face to face, then you can see the other person's expression. This was not natural. "Let's meet half way," he said, "and discuss it. Maybe we could meet at the Berkeley Fluke-pit; how about that?"

The Oakland fluker said, "That's too far. You mean lug our Connie Companion layout all that way? It's too heavy and something might happen to it."

"No, just to discuss rules and stakes," Norman said.

Dubiously, the Oakland fluker said, "Well, I guess we could do that. But you better understand—we take Connie Companion doll pretty damn seriously; you better be prepared to talk terms."

"We will," Norm assured him.

All this time Mayor Hooker

Glebe had been cranking the handle of the generator; perspiring, his face bloated with exertion, he motioned angrily for Norm to conclude his palaver.

"At the Berkeley Fluke-pit," Norm finished. "In three days. And send your best player, the one who has the biggest and most authentic layout. Our Perky Pat layouts are works of art, you understand."

The Oakland fluker said, "We'll believe that when we see them. After all, we've got carpenters and electricians and plasterers here, building our layouts; I'll bet you're all unskilled."

"Not as much as you think," Norm said hotly, and laid down the microphone. To Hooker Glebe—who had immediately stopped cranking—he said, "We'll beat them. Wait'll they see the garbage disposal unit I'm making for my Perky Pat; did you know there were people back in the old days, I mean real alive human beings, who didn't have garbage disposal units?"

"I remember," Hooker said peevishly. "Say, you got a lot of cranking for your money; I think you gypped me, talking so long." He eyed Norm with such hostility that Norm began to feel uneasy. After all, the Mayor of the pit had the authority to evict any fluker he wished; that was their law.

"I'll give you the fire alarm

box I just finished the other day," Norm said. "In my layout it goes at the corner of the block where Perky Pat's boy friend Leonard lives."

"Good enough," Hooker agreed, and his hostility faded. It was replaced, at once, by desire. "Let's see it, Norm. I bet it'll go good in my layout; a fire alarm box is just what I need to complete my first block where I have the mailbox. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Norm sighed, philosophically.

WHEN he returned from the two-day trek to the Berkeley Fluke-pit his face was so grim that his wife knew at once that the parley with the Oakland people had not gone well.

That morning a careboy had dropped cartons of a synthetic tea-like drink; she fixed a cup of it for Norman, waiting to hear what had taken place eight miles to the south.

"We haggled," Norm said, seated wearily on the bed which he and his wife and child all shared. "They don't want money; they don't want goods—naturally not goods, because the darn careboys are dropping regularly down there, too."

"What will they accept, then?"

Norm said, "Perky Pat herself." He was silent, then.

"Oh good lord," she said, appalled.

"But if we win," Norm pointed out, "we win Connie Companion."

"And the layouts? What about them?"

"We keep our own. It's just Perky Pat herself, not Leonard, not anything else."

"But," she protested, "what'll we *do* if we lose Perky Pat?"

"I can make another one," Norm said. "Given time. There's still a big supply of thermoplastics and artificial hair, here in the pit. And I have plenty of different paints; it would take at least a month, but I could do it. I don't look forward to the job, I admit. But—" His eyes glinted. "Don't look on the dark side; *imagine what it would be like to win Connie Companion doll*. I think we may well win; their delegate seemed smart and, as Hooker said, tough . . . but the one I talked to didn't strike me as being very flukey. You know, on good terms with luck."

And, after all, the element of luck, of chance, entered into each stage of the game through the agency of the spinner.

"It seems wrong," Fran said, "to put up Perky Pat herself. But if you say so—" She managed to smile a little. "I'll go along with it. And if you won Connie Companion—who knows? You might be elected Mayor when Hooker dies. Imagine, to have won somebody else's *doll*—not just the

game, the money, but the *doll* itself."

"I can win," Norm said soberly. "Because I'm very flukey." He could feel it in him, the same flukeyness that had got him through the hydrogen war alive, that had kept him alive ever since. You either have it or you don't, he realized. And I do.

His wife said, "Shouldn't we ask Hooker to call a meeting of everyone in the pit, and send the best player out of our entire group? So as to be the surest of winning."

"Listen," Norm Schein said emphatically. "I'm the best player. I'm going. And so are you; we made a good team, and we don't want to break it up. Anyhow, we'll need at least two people to carry Perky Pat's layout." All in all, he judged, their layout weighed sixty pounds.

HIS plan seemed to him to be satisfactory. But when he mentioned it to the others living in the Pinole Fluke-pit he found himself facing sharp disagreement. The whole next day was filled with argument.

"You can't lug your layout all that way yourselves," Sam Regan said. "Either take more people with you or carry your layout in a vehicle of some kind. Such as a cart." He scowled at Norm.

"Where'd I get a cart?" Norm demanded.

"Maybe something could be adapted," Sam said. "I'll give you every bit of help I can. Personally, I'd go along but as I told my wife this whole idea worries me." He thumped Norm on the back. "I admire your courage, you and Fran, setting off this way. I wish I had what it takes." He looked unhappy.

In the end, Norm settled on a wheelbarrow. He and Fran would take turns pushing it. That way neither of them would have to carry any load above and beyond their food and water, and of course knives by which to protect them from the do-cats.

As they were carefully placing the elements of their layout in the wheelbarrow, Norm Schein's boy Timothy came sidling up to them. "Take me along, Dad," he pleaded. "For fifty cents I'll go as guide and scout, and also I'll help you catch food along the way."

"We'll manage fine," Norm said. "You stay here in the fluke-pit; you'll be safer here." It annoyed him, the idea of his son tagging along on an important venture such as this. It was almost—sacrilegious.

"Kiss us goodbye," Fran said to Timothy, smiling at him briefly; then her attention returned to the layout within the wheelbarrow. "I hope it doesn't tip over," she said fearfully to Norm.

"Not a chance," Norm said. "If

we're careful." He felt confident.

A few moments later they began wheeling the wheelbarrow up the ramp to the lid at the top, to upstairs. Their journey to the Berkeley Fluke-pit had begun.

A MILE outside the Berkeley Fluke-pit he and Fran began to stumble over empty drop-canisters and some only partly empty: remains of past care parcels such as littered the surface near their own pit. Norm Schein breathed a sigh of relief; the journey had not been so bad after all, except that his hands had become blistered from gripping the metal handles of the wheelbarrow, and Fran had turned her ankle so that now she walked with a painful limp. But it had taken them less time than he had anticipated, and his mood was one of buoyancy.

Ahead, a figure appeared, crouching low in the ash. A boy. Norm waved at him and called, "Hey, sonny—we're from the Pinole pit; we're supposed to meet a party from Oakland here . . . do you remember me?"

The boy, without answering, turned and scampered off.

"Nothing to be afraid of," Norm said to his wife. "He's going to tell their Mayor. A nice old fellow named Ben Fennimore."

Soon several adults appeared, approaching warily.

With relief, Norm set the legs

of the wheelbarrow down into the ash, letting go and wiping his face with his handkerchief. "Has the Oakland team arrived yet?" he called.

"Not yet," a tall, elderly man with a white armband and ornate cap answered. "It's you, Schein, isn't it?" he said, peering. This was Ben Fennimore. "Back already with your layout." Now the Berkeley flukers had begun crowding around the wheelbarrow, inspecting the Scheins' layout. Their faces showed admiration.

"They have Perky Pat here," Norm explained to his wife. "But—" He lowered his voice. "Their layouts are only basic. Just a house, wardrobe and car . . . they've built almost nothing. No imagination."

One Berkeley fluker, a woman, said wonderingly to Fran, "And you made each of the pieces of furniture yourselves?" Marveling, she turned to the man beside her. "See what they've accomplished, Ed?"

"Yes," the man answered, nodding. "Say," he said to Fran and Norm, "can we see it all set up? You're going to set it up in our pit, aren't you?"

"We are indeed," Norm said.

The Berkeley flukers helped push the wheelbarrow the last mile. And before long they were descending the ramp, to the pit below the surface.

"It's a big pit," Norm said knowingly to Fran. "Must be two thousand people here. This is where the University of California was."

"I see," Fran said, a little timid at entering a strange pit; it was the first time in years—since the war, in fact—that she had seen any strangers. And so many at once. It was almost too much for her; Norm felt her shrink back, pressing against him in fright.

WHEN they had reached the first level and were starting to unload the wheelbarrow, Ben Fennimore came up to them and said softly, "I think the Oakland people have been spotted; we just got a report of activity upstairs. So be prepared." He added, "We're rooting for you, of course, because you're Perky Pat, the same as us."

"Have you ever seen Connie Companion doll?" Fran asked him.

"No ma'am," Fennimore answered courteously. "But naturally we've heard about it, being neighbors to Oakland and all. I'll tell you one thing . . . we hear that Connie Companion doll is a bit older than Perky Pat. You know—more, um, *mature*." He explained, "I just wanted to prepare you."

Norm and Fran glanced at each other. "Thanks," Norm said

slowly. "Yes, we should be as much prepared as possible. How about Paul?"

"Oh, he's not much," Fennimore said. "Connie runs things; I don't even think Paul has a real apartment of his own. But you better wait until the Oakland flukers get here; I don't want to mislead you—my knowledge is all hearsay, you understand."

Another Berkeley fluker, standing nearby, spoke up, "I saw Connie once, and she's much more grown up than Perky Pat."

"How old do you figure Perky Pat is?" Norm asked him.

"Oh, I'd say seventeen or eighteen," Norm was told.

"And Connie?" He waited tensely.

"Oh, she might be twenty-five, even."

From the ramp behind them they heard noises. More Berkeley flukers appeared, and, after them, two men carrying between them a platform on which, spread out, Norm saw a great, spectacular layout.

This was the Oakland team, and they weren't a couple, a man and wife; they were both men, and they were hard-faced with stern, remote eyes. They jerked their heads briefly at him and Fran, acknowledging their presence. And then, with enormous care, they set down the platform on which their layout rested.

Behind them came a third

Oakland fluker, carrying a metal box, much like a lunch pail. Norm, watching, knew instinctively that in the box lay Connie Companion doll. The Oakland fluker produced a key and began unlocking the box.

"We're ready to begin playing any time," the taller of the Oakland men said. "As we agreed in our discussion, we'll use a numbered spinner instead of dice. Less chance of cheating that way."

"Agreed," Norm said. Hesitantly he held out his hand. "I'm Norman Schein and this is my wife and play-partner Fran."

The Oakland man, evidently the leader, said, "I'm Walter R. Wynn. This is my partner here, Charley Dowd, and the man with the box, that's Peter Foster. He isn't going to play; he just guards our layout." Wynn glanced about, at the Berkeley flukers, as if saying, I know you're all partial to Perky Pat, in here. But we don't care; we're not scared.

Fran said, "We're ready to play, Mr. Wynn." Her voice was low but controlled.

"What about money?" Fennimore asked.

"I think both teams have plenty of money," Wynn said. He laid out several thousand dollars in greenbacks, and now Norm did the same. "The money of course is not a factor in this, except

as a means of conducting the game."

Norm nodded; he understood perfectly. Only the dolls themselves mattered. And now, for the first time, he saw Connie Companion doll.

She was being placed in her bedroom by Mr. Foster who evidently was in charge of her. And the sight took his breath away. Yes, she was older. A grown woman, not a girl at all . . . the difference between her and Perky Pat was acute. And so life-like. Carved, not poured; she obviously had been whittled out of wood and then painted—she was not a thermoplastic. And her hair. It appeared to be genuine hair.

He was deeply impressed.

"What do you think of her?" Walter Wynn asked, with a faint grin.

"Very—impressive," Norm conceded.

NOW the Oaklanders were studying Perky Pat. "Poured thermoplastic," one of them said. "Artificial hair. Nice clothes, though; all stitched by hand, you can see that. Interesting; what we heard was correct. Perky Pat isn't a grownup, she's just a teen ager."

Now the male companion to Connie appeared; he was set down in the bedorom beside Connie.

"Wait a minute," Norm said.

"You're putting Paul or whatever his name is, in her bedroom with her? Doesn't he have to start out from his own apartment?"

Wynn said, "They're married."

"*Married!*" Norman and Fran stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Why sure," Wynn said. "So naturally they live together. Your dolls, they're not, are they?"

"N-no," Fran said. "Leonard is Perky Pat's boy friend . . ." Her voice trailed off. "Norm," she said, clutching his arm, "I don't believe him; I think he's just saying they're married to get the advantage. Because if they both start out from the same room—"

Norm said aloud, "You fellows, look here. It's not fair, calling them married."

Wynn said, "We're not 'calling' them married; they are married. Their names are Connie and Paul Lathrope, of 24 Arden Place Piedmont. They've been married for a year, most players will tell you." He sounded calm.

Maybe, Norm thought, it's true. He was truly shaken.

"Look at them together," Fran said, kneeling down to examine the Oaklanders' layout. "In the same bedroom, in the same house. Why, Norm; do you see? There's just the one bed. A big double bed." Wild-eyed, she appealed to him. "How can Perky Pat and

Leonard play against them?" Her voice shook. "It's not morally *right*."

"This is another type of layout entirely," Norm said to Walter Wynn. "This, that you have. Utterly different from what we're used to, as you can see." He pointed to his own layout. "I insist that in this game Connie and Paul *not* live together and *not* be considered married."

"But they are," Foster spoke up. "It's a fact. Look—their clothes are in the same closet." He showed them the closet. "And in the same bureau drawers." He showed them that, too. "And look in the bathroom. Two toothbrushes. His and hers, in the same rack. So you can see we're not making it up."

There was silence.

Then Fran said in a choked voice, "And if they're married—you mean they've been—intimate?"

Wynn raised an eyebrow, then nodded. "Sure, since they're married. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Perky Pat and Leonard have never—" Fran began, and then ceased.

"Naturally not," Wynn agreed. "Because they're only going together. We understand that."

Fran said, "We just can't play. We can't." She caught hold of her husband's arm. "Let's go back to Pinole pit—please, Norman."

"Wait," Wynn said, at once. "If you don't play, you're conceding; you have to give us Perky Pat."

The three Oaklanders all nodded. And, Norm saw, many of the Berkeley flukers were nodding, too, including Ben Fennimore.

"They're right," Norm said heavily to his wife. He put his arm around her. "We'd have to give her up. We better play, dear."

"Yes," Fran said, in a dead, flat voice. "We'll play." She bent down and listlessly spun the needle of the spinner. It stopped at six.

Smiling, Walter Wynn knelt down and spun. He obtained a four.

The game had begun.

CROUCHING behind the strewn, decayed contents of a care parcel that had been dropped long ago, Timothy Schein saw coming across the surface of ash his mother and father, pushing the wheelbarrow ahead of them. They looked tired and worn.

"Hi," Timothy yelled, leaping out at them in joy at seeing them again; he had missed them very much.

"Hi, son," his father murmured, nodding. He let go of the handles of the wheelbarrow, then, halted and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

Now Fred Chamberlain raced up, panting. "Hi, Mr. Schein; hi, Mrs. Schein. Hey, did you win? Did you beat the Oakland flukers? I bet you did, didn't you?" He looked from one of them to the other and then back.

In a low voice Fran said, "Yes, Freddy. We won."

Norm said, "Look in the wheelbarrow."

The two boys looked. And, there among Perky Pat's furnishings, lay another doll. Larger, fuller-figured, much older than Pat . . . they stared at her and she stared up sightlessly at the gray sky overhead. So this is Connie Companion doll, Timothy said to himself. Gee.

"We were lucky," Norm said. Now several people had emerged from the pit and were gathering around them, listening. Jean and Sam Regan, Tod Morrison and his wife Helen, and now their Mayor, Hooker Glebe himself, waddling up excited and nervous, his face flushed, gasping for breath from the labor—unusual for him—of ascending the ramp.

Fran said, "We got a cancellation of debts card, just when we were most behind. We owed fifty thousand, and it made us even with the Oakland flukers. And then, after that, we got an advance ten squares card, and that put us right on the jackpot square, at least in our layout. We had a very bitter squabble, be-

cause the Oaklanders showed us that on their layout it was a tax lien slapped on real estate holdings square, but we had spun an odd number so that put us back on our own board." She sighed. "I'm glad to be back. It was hard, Hooker; it was a tough game."

Hooker Glebe wheezed, "Let's all get a look at the Connie Companion doll, folks." To Fran and Norm he said, "Can I lift her up and show them?"

"Sure," Norm said, nodding.

Hooker picked up Connie Companion doll. "She sure is realistic," he said, scrutinizing her. "Clothes aren't as nice as ours generally are; they look machine-made."

"They are," Norm agreed. "But she's carved, not poured."

"Yes, so I see." Hooker turned the doll about, inspecting her from all angles. "A nice job. She's—um, more filled-out than Perky Pat. What's this outfit she has on? Tweed suit of some sort."

"A business suit," Fran said. "We won that with her; they had agreed on that in advance."

"You see, she has a job," Norm explained. "She's a psychology consultant for a business firm doing marketing research. In consumer preferences. A high-paying position . . . she earns twenty thousand a year, I believe Wynn said."

"Golly," Hooker said. "And

Pat's just going to college; she's still in school." He looked troubled. "Well, I guess they were bound to be ahead of us in some ways. What matters is that you won." His jovial smile returned. "Perky Pat came out ahead." He held the Connie Companion doll up high, where everyone could see her. "Look what Norm and Fran came back with, folks!"

Norm said, "Be careful with her, Hooker." His voice was firm.

"Eh?" Hooker said, pausing. "Why, Norm?"

"Because," Norm said, "she's going to have a baby."

THERE was a sudden chill silence. The ash around them stirred faintly; that was the only sound.

"How do you know?" Hooker asked.

"They told us. The Oaklanders told us. And we won that, too—after a bitter argument that Fennimore had to settle." Reaching into the wheelbarrow he brought out a little leather pouch; from it he carefully took a carved pink new-born baby. "We won this too because Fennimore agreed that from a technical standpoint it's literally part of Connie Companion doll at this point."

Hooker stared a long, long time.

"She's married," Fran explained. "To Paul. They're not just going together. She's three

months pregnant, Mr. Wynn said. He didn't tell us until after we won; he didn't want to, then, but they felt they had to. I think they were right; it wouldn't have done not to say."

Norm said, "And in addition there's actually an embryo outfit—"

"Yes," Fran said. "You have to open Connie up, of course, to see—"

"No," Jean Regan said. "Please, no."

Hooker said, "No, Mrs. Schein, don't." He backed away.

Fran said, "It shocked us of course at first, but—"

"You see," Norm put in, "it's logical; you have to follow the logic. Why, eventually Perky Pat—"

"No," Hooker said violently. He bent down, picked up a rock from the ash at his feet. "No," he said, and raised his arm. "You stop, you two. Don't say any more."

Now the Regans, too, had picked up rocks. No one spoke.

Fran said, at last, "Norm, we've got to get out of here."

"You're right," Tod Morrison told them. His wife nodded in grim agreement.

"You two go back down to Oakland," Hooker told Norman and Fran Schein. "You don't live here any more. You're different than you were. You—changed."

"Yes," Sam Regan said slow-

ly, half to himself. "I was right; there was something to fear." To Norm Schein he said, "How difficult a trip is it to Oakland?"

"We just went to Berkeley," Norm said. "To the Berkeley Fluke-pit." He seemed baffled and stunned by what was happening. "My god," he said, "we can't turn around and push this wheelbarrow back all the way to Berkeley again—we're worn out, we need rest!"

Sam Regan said, "What if somebody else pushed?" He walked up to the Scheins, then, and stood with them. "I'll push the darn thing. You lead the way, Schein." He looked toward his own wife, but Jean did not stir. And she did not put down her handful of rocks.

Timothy Schein plucked at his father's arm. "Can I come this time, Dad? Please let me come."

"Okay," Norm said, half to himself. Now he drew himself together. "So we're not wanted here." He turned to Fran. "Let's go. Sam's going to push the wheelbarrow; I think we can make it back there before night-fall. If not, we can sleep out in the open; Timothy'll help protect us against the do-cats."

Fran said, "I guess we have no choice." Her face was pale.

"And take this," Hooker said. He held out the tiny carved baby. Fran Schein accepted it and put it tenderly back in its leather

pouch. Norm laid Connie Companion back down in the wheelbarrow, where she had been. They were ready to start back.

"It'll happen up here eventually," Norm said, to the group of people, to the Pinole flukers. "Oakland is just more advanced; that's all."

"Go on," Hooker Glebe said. "Get started."

Nodding, Norm started to pick up the handles of the wheelbarrow, but Sam Regan moved him aside and took them himself. "Let's go," he said.

THE three adults, with Timothy Schein going ahead of them with his knife ready—in case a do-cat attacked—started into motion, in the direction of Oakland and the south. No one spoke. There was nothing to say.

"It's a shame this had to happen," Norm said at last, when they had gone almost a mile and there was no further sign of the Pinole flukers behind them.

"Maybe not," Sam Regan said. "Maybe it's for the good." He did not seem downcast. And after all, he had lost his wife; he had given up more than anyone else, and yet—he had survived.

"Glad you feel that way," Norm said somberly.

They continued on, each with his own thoughts.

After awhile, Timothy said to his father, "All these big fluke-

pits to the south . . . there's lots more things to do there, isn't there? I mean, you don't just sit around playing that game." He certainly hoped not.

His father said, "That's true, I guess."

Overhead, a care ship whistled at great velocity and then was gone again almost at once; Timothy watched it go but he was not really interested in it, because there was so much more to look forward to, on the ground and below the ground, ahead of them to the south.

His father murmured, "Those Oaklanders; their game, their particular doll, it taught them something. Connie had to grow and it forced them all to grow along with her. Our flukers never learned about that, not from Perky Pat. I wonder if they ever will. She'd have to grow up the way Connie did. Connie must have been like Perky Pat, once. A long time ago."

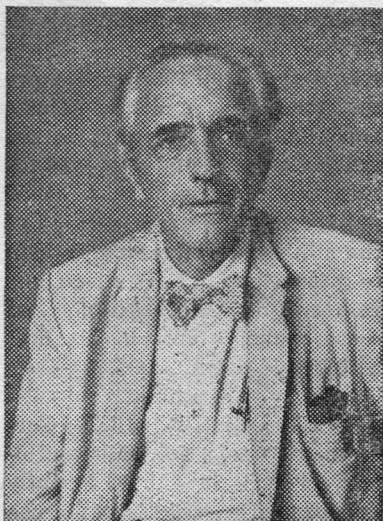
Not interested in what his father was saying—who really cared about dolls and games with dolls?—Timothy scampered ahead, peering to see what lay before them, the opportunities and possibilities, for him and for his mother and dad, for Mr. Regan also.

"I can't wait," he yelled back at his father, and Norm Schein managed a faint, fatigued smile in answer.

THE END

FRITZ LEIBER: Destiny x 3

By SAM MOSKOWITZ



A PROPHET," it is said, "is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." But with Fritz Leiber, Jr., the reverse seems to be the case. His talents have been recognized by the in-group of the science fiction and fantasy world, but a wider renown has been painstakingly slow in coming.

From his fellow readers and authors, Fritz Leiber has won the following honors:

- He was Guest of Honor at the Ninth World Science Fiction Convention held in New Orleans Sept. 1-3, 1951.

- He won the "Hugo" for the best science fiction novel of 1958 with *The Big Time*.

- An entire issue of FANTAS-

TIC SCIENCE FICTION STORIES for November, 1959, was devoted to five new stories from his typewriter.

- Over 40 of his short stories have been chosen for nearly as many anthologies.

Leiber has for a long time been regarded as the high priest of a movement to modernize, to explain "logically" or "scientifically," all the dark forms and accouterments of witchcraft and superstition. He has also demonstrated techniques for the symbiotic relationship of witches, familiars, devils, vampires, and haunted houses with true science fiction.

"If you can't lick 'em, join 'em," has been his motto. He

demonstrated the techniques in *Gather, Darkness!* a novel in which the devil's advocates are the good guys and the priests and angels the bad guys in the fallen world of some post-war future. What, if anything, the novel did for the declining prestige of the minions of blackness is open to discussion; but his adroit and resourceful manipulation of these elements created his first major reputation.

FRITZ LEIBER, JR.'S Germanic name, fair hair and 6-feet, 4-inch height frequently lead people meeting him for the first time to expect a Teutonic knight complete with guttural accent. Actually, his father was born in Chicago; it was his grandfather who came from Germany after the revolutions of 1848, eventually to become a Captain for the North during the American Civil War. Leiber was born Dec. 24, 1910, in Chicago. His father was a shakespearean actor; his mother Virginia Bronson, of British parentage, had studied acting and met her husband-to-be during a summer tour. Young Leiber spent his childhood traveling with his mother and father, living at hotels and boarding houses, with "memories redolent of grease paint, spirit gum, curling colored gelatins of flood- and spot-lights; and of actors and actresses; won-

der-world in reminiscence." The closest thing to a permanent home that young Fritz enjoyed during his youthful years was the house his father built in Atlantic Highlands, N.J., where the family spent the three summer months together. During the school year, Fritz at first lived with his maternal grandmother in Pontiac, Mich. Later he lived in Chicago with his father's sisters. Quiet and reserved, Fritz made few friends in school; those he did make were as lonely and introverted as himself. Carefully protected during the school year by his aunts, Fritz was given *carte blanche* during the three months he usually spent with his parents in Atlantic Highlands.

Extraordinarily sensitive as a youngster, Fritz was at times scared of his own shadow. A stage production of *The Cat and the Canary* shook him up badly: "I saw green hands coming out of the walls for months afterward." He was fearful of the dark and, during his formative years, the supernatural was a very real thing to him.

IN addition to reading lots of Verne, Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs, Fritz Leiber was a charter reader of *AMAZING STORIES* from its first (April 1926) number. He read it religiously for the next four years.

He never read WEIRD TALES regularly, despite his admiration for a good supernatural story, because his attempts at rationalization always interfered with the willing suspension of disbelief. Leiber's early efforts in the weird and fantasy line were the result of a lack of confidence: he did not feel he could fabricate a strong science fiction effort, and thought fantasy would be an easier area for the beginner.

During the years he was reading AMAZING STORIES, Leiber entered the University of Chicago, majoring in psychology. He graduated in 1932 with honors and a Ph. B (Bachelor of Philosophy). He also became a skillful fencer, accounting for the authenticity and frequency of such scenes in his later fantasies. More important, he met Harry Otto Fischer of Louisville, Ky., who had a common interest with Leiber in writing, chess, fencing, science fiction and fantasy. Fischer eventually settled for the practical if unromantic career of designing corrugated cartons, but not until he had implanted the kernel of an idea which was eventually to launch Leiber's literary career.

In correspondence, the two men exchanged essays, poems and short fiction. They vied to present the most imaginative and original literary fare. One day Fritz got a letter containing

a fragment which opened: "For all do fear the one known as the Grey Mouser. He walks with swagger 'mongst the bravos, though he's but the stature of a child . . ." Then followed Grey Mouser's meeting with Fafhrd, the seven-foot giant from the north, as well as the background of a never-never era that somehow reminded the reader of familiar periods in history both ancient and medieval.

Graduating from college in the middle of the depression, Leiber was persuaded by an Episcopal minister that his oratorical and acting gifts might prove effective in saving souls. Leiber enrolled in the General Theological Seminary in Manhattan, was quickly christened, confirmed, and sent out as lay reader and minister to churches in Atlantic Highlands and Highlands, N.J. Lacking a deep religious conviction, Leiber tried to rationalize his work as "social service," but after five months found out that it didn't jibe with his conscience. He ended the experiment, but the experience was to provide authentic religious background in *Gather, Darkness!*

Partly financed by a scholarship he had won during his last year at the University of Chicago, Leiber returned there for a graduate course in philosophy in the fall of 1933. He majored in speculative metaphysics and com-

parative religion. At the same time he took to hobnobbing with radicals, testing his capacity for drink and unbottling his long-held repressions. He joined his father's road company in 1934, playing Edgar in *King Lear* and Malcom in *Macbeth*. "This was depression nadir," Leiber recalls. "We played theatres that hadn't had their marquees lit up for years—there were bats in one, fine for *Macbeth*, not so hot for *The Merchant of Venice*." The tour closed for good in Tucson. Fritz Leiber, Sr. took his wife to Los Angeles and reestablished himself as a character actor in Hollywood.

YOUNG Leiber had not completely given up the idea of an acting career. He half-heartedly attempted to cater to the whims of Hollywood producers, obtaining one small part in *Camille*, starring Robert Taylor and Greta Garbo, and a tiny sequence in Errol Flynn's *The Great Garrick* which "ended on the cutting room floor." Before he had left the University of Chicago, he dated Jonquil Stephens, a British girl who possessed a common interest in weird and supernatural fiction, poetry and English literature. They were married Jan. 16, 1936. After one more try at Hollywood, they both returned despairingly to Chicago where Fritz got an editorial job

revising material for *The Standard American Encyclopedia* and *The University of Knowledge*.

Leiber now made a do-or-die attempt at professional writing. A couple of short stories proved unsalable. A "lost race" novel of Yucatan petered out before it had worked up a head of steam. Finally, Leiber came across the first 10,000 words of a Grey Mouser and Fafhrd novel sent to him by Harry Otto Fischer in 1936. He decided to utilize the same characters himself for a story titled *Adept's Gambit*. He submitted it to H. P. Lovecraft for criticism. The response was favorable. Lovecraft even circulated the story to Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner. But though *Adept's Gambit* proved unsalable at the time, this fabulous adult fairy tale, built around the characters of The Grey Mouser (personifying Harry Fischer) and the seven-foot sword-wielding giant Fafhrd (the romantic incarnation of Leiber) is the supreme masterpiece of the entire series.

From the moment a curse is cast on Fafhrd temporarily changing into a pig every woman that he kisses, continuing with the Grey Mouser's consultation with the seven-eyed Ningauble ("gossiper with the Gods") on what to do about it, following with the supernatural sword battle with Anara the adept, until

the finale, where the adept turned to a mouse contemplatively evaluates its chances of killing a bear cub, the story is a joy to read. Leiber's sense of pace, rich background detail, taut battle scenes, fine characterization, and fascinating supernatural elements combined with an extraordinary talent for adroitly weaving tasteful humor throughout the entire fabric of his story—a talent unsurpassed by any living fantasy writer today—make this a classic fantasy. Yet it did not see publication until Arkham House did a Fritz Leiber, Jr. collection titled *Night's Black Agents in 1947!* (It will be reprinted in a Spring 1964 issue of FANTASTIC magazine.)

A subsequent Grey Mouser and Fafhrd story written in 1939 took Leiber into the professional ranks. It was *Two Sought Adventure* (the title story of a collection of Grey Mouser tales issued by Gnome Press in 1957). John W. Campbell bought it for his new magazine UNKNOWN, publishing it in the Aug., 1939 issue. The emphasis is on the physical prowess of the two protagonists as they defeat a small army to obtain jewels from a tower. The Jewels are actually a catalyst for an unearthly "brain" capable of making its "body" the buiding tower, lay about it with the swiftness of a striking snake and the impact of

a crashing plane. This was followed by *Bleak Shore*, *The Howling Tower*, *The Sunken Land* and *Thieves House* in the same magazine. While each contains all the popular heroic elements of the sword-and-sorcery fantasy made so popular by Robert E. Howard's Conan, leavened with the masterful interplay of humor characteristic of Leiber, they are not of the same literary magnitude of *Adept's Gambit*.

LEIBER had broken into WEIRD TALES with *The Automatic Pistol* (May, 1940) concerning a gun that spontaneously did its own killing. A much more important story, *Smoke Ghost*, published in UNKNOWN for Oct., 1941, may well have been submitted to WEIRD TALES first. "Have you ever thought of what a ghost of our day would look like?", the lead character asks. "I don't mean that traditional kind of ghost. I mean a ghost from the world today, with the soot of the factories in its face and the pounding of machinery in its soul . . . It would grow out of the real world. It would reflect all the tangled, sordid, vicious things. . . . And it would be very grimy. . . . it would [not] seem white or wispy or favor graveyards. It wouldn't moan. But it would mutter unintelligibly, and twitch at your sleeve. Like a sick, surly ape."

The same thought was pursued in *The Hound* (WEIRD TALES, Nov., 1942): "The supernatural beings of a modern city? . . . Sure, they'd be different from the ghosts of yesterday. Each culture creates its own demons. Look, the Middle Ages built cathedrals, and pretty soon there were little gray shapes gliding around at night to talk with the gargoyles. Same thing ought to happen to us, with our skyscrapers and factories." Leiber tried to give his idea of what a modern ghost would be like in each of these stories. His concepts were prosaic. In *Smoke Ghost*, the result was essentially demoniac possession in black face; and in *The Hound*, the werewolf was resurrected with but little change. Nevertheless, the attempt was a landmark.

Leiber soon abandoned this tack.

He tried now to show how the traditional potions, spells, charms, philtres and incantations would be utilized in modern settings. (His background was inspired by the campus of Occidental College, Los Angeles, where until 1942 he was an instructor in speech, acting and dramatics.) Then he took a house in Santa Monica Canyon and sat down to free-lance, first incorporating the foregoing elements into *Conjure Wife*, which appeared as a complete novel in

April, 1943, UNKNOWN WORLDS. There was a much delayed reaction, but the novel would eventually prove a substantial success. Dealing with a young wife who *knows* there is witchcraft being practiced on a University campus and who employs elaborate supernatural precautions to protect her doubting husband, the story is little short of delightful. Leiber's skill at dialogue is notable, his humorous notes polished and adroit without becoming farcical. His theme remains effective without recourse to any stock Gothic devices. Adapted by Universal as a movie title *Weird Woman* in 1944, the results proved aesthetically depressing.

Ten years later, the novel went into hard covers under the aegis of Twayne Publishers. A one-hour television adaptation on "Moment of Fear" over NBC in 1960 was an artistic triumph, one of the finest fantasy shows in the history of television. A film release by America International in 1963 (retitled *Burn, Witch, Burn*), starred Janet Blair and Peter Wyngarde and changed the setting to England, altered the characteristics of some of the lead characters and proved distinctly inferior to the television production. Leiber had no way of knowing how successful that story would eventually be. For the moment its sale helped to pay the rent. He decid-

ed to abandon fantasy and make a more concerted effort to succeed in science fiction.

HIS only previously published science fiction was a long novelet titled *They Never Come Back* (FUTURE FICTION, Aug., 1941), whose major merit was the notion that gravitational stresses as well as radio waves travel in circumscribed channels or "warps" and all space ships would have to route themselves accordingly. Now, Leiber sent Campbell several ideas for science fiction novels.

In the outline for *Gather, Darkness!* Leiber suggested an underground utilizing witchcraft and holding up Sathanias as its idol to the ignorant masses to overthrow a despotic scientific religion. Campbell told him to go ahead. Leiber was far from the first to attempt to bend the supernatural to science fiction. H. P. Lovecraft had done it with singular effectiveness, inventing an entire new mythos in the process. In modern science fiction Jack Williamson suggested a genetic explanation of certain stock figures of the supernatural in *Darker Than You Think* (UNKNOWN, Dec., 1940), and Heinlein used high-flying broomsticks in *Waldo* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Aug., 1942).

Perhaps Leiber was a better merchandiser in this regard.

Possibly he was convincing where the others were not. Whatever the reason, in the minds of the readers he erroneously came to be regarded as *the* transitional author linking well-known elements of superstition with science fiction.

Previous to *Gather, Darkness!* Leiber was not regarded as an important author. That one story placed him among the "big names." Yet its techniques and stylistic flow are clearly the devices of Edgar Rice Burroughs, where the author keeps two or more situations going simultaneously, carrying them along in alternating chapters. The chase scene where the hero, Jarles, is rescued from the mob by the old "witch" Mother Juju are obviously in debt to A. E. van Vogt's *Slan*, where Jommy Cross is saved from the mob by Granny. The personality changer used on Jarles is reminiscent of Stanley G. Weinbaum's "attitudinizer" in *Point of View*. From Leiber's own acrobatic tower in *Two Sought Adventure* comes the notion of a flexible "haunted" house.

The foregoing were some of the ingredients that Leiber borrowed for the literary stew, but the spice he added to flavor it no one else had the power to loan. There are elements of satire, pitiless in their excoriations of religion; there is a complete cyni-

cism regarding the scientists' ability to do any better than the politicians. A gift at characterization, is demonstrably evident in the delineations of Brother Chulian, Jarles, Mother Juju and the Familiar. A mature sense of humor is blended into the story flow.

This was followed by a short story, *The Mutant's Brother*. Two brothers, both mutants with special mental powers, come into conflict as one, a proponent of good, hunts down and destroys the other, who is using his superior attributes for evil.

Pacifism obsessed Leiber following Pearl Harbor. The "witchcraft" movement in *Gather, Darkness!* reflected this as did *Taboo* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Feb., 1963) where pacifists maintain a sanctuary for involuntary expatriates of a warring world. So did *Sanity* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, April, 1944) where the entire population is maniacal and the "sane" leader is led off to the booby hatch because he does not conform to the norm which is nonconformity. The philosophy conflict engendered by his pacifism interfered severely with his writing. But after an agonizing mental reappraisal, Leiber gradually came to the conclusion that right and reason had been on the side of the anti-fascist forces. This mental reconciliation tem-

porarily enabled him to write and the results were auspicious. *Wanted—An Enemy* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Feb., 1945) proved a brilliant little story. A pacifist with special scientific powers exhorts the Martians to make a token attack on Earth so that humans will band together against the common menace and thereby end war.

ONLY slightly less successful than *Gather, Darkness!* was *Destiny Times Three* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Mar.-April, 1945) to which *Business of Killing* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Sept., 1944), a short story of the contemplated exploitation of simultaneous worlds, was a prelude. A machine built by some Olaf Stapledonian intelligence accidentally fragments the time stream of our planet into a number of worlds of if, three of which, at least, have duplicated individuals on them. One of the worlds with a 1984-type of set-up decides to take over the original earth. The interplay of three alternate situations is again handled as in Burroughs. Nightmares are explained as contacts with our duplicates on alternate worlds, as are many of our superstitions. Fundamentally, the novel is a fantastic allegory, told in splendidly readable and fast-moving action in a polished format.

With this story, the first phase of Leiber's writing career ended, not to be resumed for three years. With the war's end, he returned to Chicago as associate editor on SCIENCE DIGEST. Early in 1949, however, Leiber began publishing an amateur mimeographed publication titled NEW PURPOSES as a creative outlet. This contained chapters of what eventually would become his book, *The Green Millenium*. Among the contributors were his good friends Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch and George Mann. The magazine petered out after 16 issues, but filling its pages had started Leiber writing again. Fred Pohl became his agent, sold a few stories and then obtained an assignment from Campbell for *The Lion and the Lamb* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Sept., 1950). This was Leiber venturing out to the far galaxies, to the "Coalsack" where a group of runaway colonists, after some hundreds of years, have set up a "primitive"-seeming culture, abhorring mechanical devices of all sorts.

Leiber had long felt a dissatisfaction with the sexual patterns of Western culture, arguing that unhealthy frustrations contributed to the "sick" aspects of our culture. His personal preference rested with the social mores of "The Last Men" in Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930)

where men and women live in groups "... but in most groups all the members of the male sexes have intercourse with all the members of the female sexes. Thus sex with us is essentially social." These convictions were presented in a number of Leiber's stories beginning with *The Ship Sails at Midnight* (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, Sept., 1950) and most successfully in *Nice Girl With Five Husbands* (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, April, 1951). Leiber's ideas on sex were presented in such impeccable good taste that they produced little effect. The opposite was true of *Coming Attraction* (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, Nov., 1950) which in every sense epitomized his second major successful period as a science fiction writer. *Coming Attraction* introduces a British visitor to the post-atomic war life of New York City, where it is stylish for women to wear masks (since many faces were seared by atomic blasts) and where a warped culture has arisen which Leiber artistically unveils with magnificent indirection and almost psychiatric insight to produce a flawless masterpiece of science fiction.

Appointment in Tomorrow (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, July, 1951), is, in a sense, a sequel to *Coming Attraction*. It tells of a cult which regales a United States that wants to be hood-

winked with fraudulent claims for "Maizie", a "thinking machine" that is "solving" the world's most difficult problems. *The Moon is Green* (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, April, 1952) fell just short of becoming a classic, telling of the tender hopes and yearning for beauty of a woman closeted in the lead-lined radio-active world of tomorrow. That Leiber had become the poet of the post-atomic-war world was evident in *A Bad Day For Sales* (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, July, 1953) where focus is kept on a vending robot that maintains its selling pitch and built-in reflexes after the bomb has dropped.

FOR the next four years Leiber did little writing. Then he made his second comeback with *Time in the Round* (GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, May, 1957). H. L. Gold, then editor of that magazine, exulted: "Leiber's back and GALAXY's got him!" But the real winner proved to be *The Big Time*, a two-part serial running in the March and April, 1958, issues of GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION, involving a war fought by combatants changing the past and the future, and told in the vernacular of a party girl who is a hostess of The Place, a timeless night club suspended outside the cosmos. The philosophical point was that man is not creating

chaos by tampering with time, but is evolving to a higher state of consciousness and evolution, from time-binding (the unification of events through memory) to possibility binding (making all of what *might* be part of what *is*). It gained Fritz Leiber a Hugo as the best science fiction novel of 1958 and catapulted him back into the limelight.

He then decided that he would try farce. *The Silver Egg-Heads*, originally a novelet, was expanded to novel length for a Ballantine Books paperback. It was done in the broad, blatant tones of a Robert Bloch broadside, intending to scientifiitionally spoof writers, agents, publishers, and their associates. It developed to be lead instead of silver and fell with a dull thud. Leiber, a master at tasteful, subtle, balanced humor, was not suited for slapstick. His comeback, however, continued at FANTASTIC, where an entire issue (November, 1959) was devoted to Leiber stories. It went over big. One short story, *The Mind Spider*, was used as the basis of his initial short story *science fiction* collection by Ace. More significant, the issue led off with his first new Grey Mouser novelet since 1951, *Lean Times in Lankhmar*, and it hit the jackpot of reader approbation. Clubs devoted to the "sword and sorcery" school of fantasy had come into existence and

Leiber, through the Grey Mouser, suddenly became the leading literary exponent of that literary form. So popular, in fact, that *Scylla's Daughter* (FANTASTIC, May, 1961) was nominated for a Hugo at the 1962 World Science fiction Convention in Chicago as was *The Unholy Grail* (Nov., 1962) in Washington, D.C. one year later.

DURING 1960 and 1961 Leiber did four three-month continuities for the Buck Rogers daily strip and Sunday page for the National Newspaper Syndicate. He found the effort of sheer plotting and dialogue no more profitable to write than pulp fiction. Then American-International did a new *Conjure Wife* for a motion picture with a script written by accomplished fantasy craftsmen Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont. It was released as *Burn, Witch, Burn*.

Leiber now gambled the better part of a year on *The Wanderer*, a 120,000 word novel of a body from space that swings so close to the earth that catastrophe threatens all. The disaster is told alternately from the viewpoint of diverse races and cultures of earth—a truly serious bid to tell the definitive world-doom story. The reaction to this particular novel (scheduled for publication by Ballantine Books

in Spring of 1964) may prove a pivotal factor in Leiber's career.

While Fritz Leiber has made his mark, his story is in every sense an unfinished one. The Grey Mouser stories have established him as the greatest living author currently writing in the "sword and sorcery" tradition. A pioneer in the attempt to modernize the ancient symbols of terror, he has also gained acknowledgment for spearheading a movement to merge them into the body of science fiction. As a stylist he ranks among the finest writers of fantasy today, possessing rare gifts of characterization and humor. Though in every sense an entertainer he has something to say, taking definite stands on social questions.

Throughout his writing career, however, the "branches of time" theme has fascinated him more than any other. In two of his biggest novels, *Destiny Times Three* and *The Big Time*, as well as many shorter works, he has speculated on what might happen if the reel of life could be rewound and played out again.

"Destiny Times Three" therefore becomes much more than the title of one of Leiber's finest stories: it symbolically personifies the three separate starts he has made in his writing career in search of—he knows not what.

THE END

THE GOD ON THE 36th FLOOR

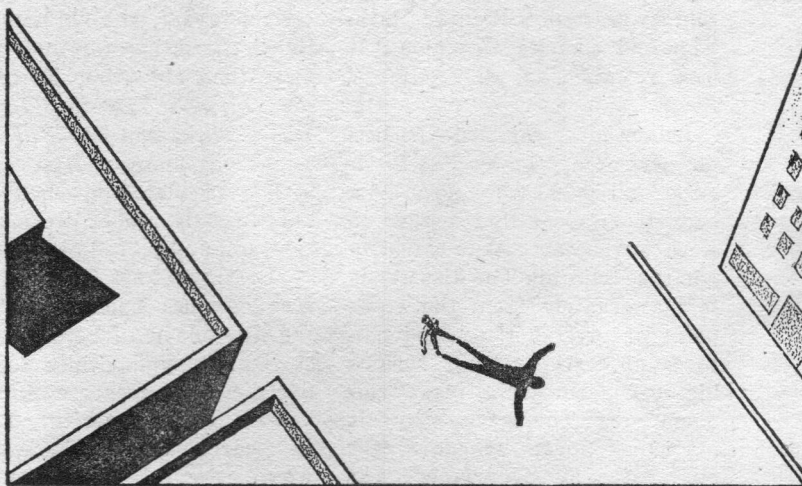
By HERBERT D. KASTLE

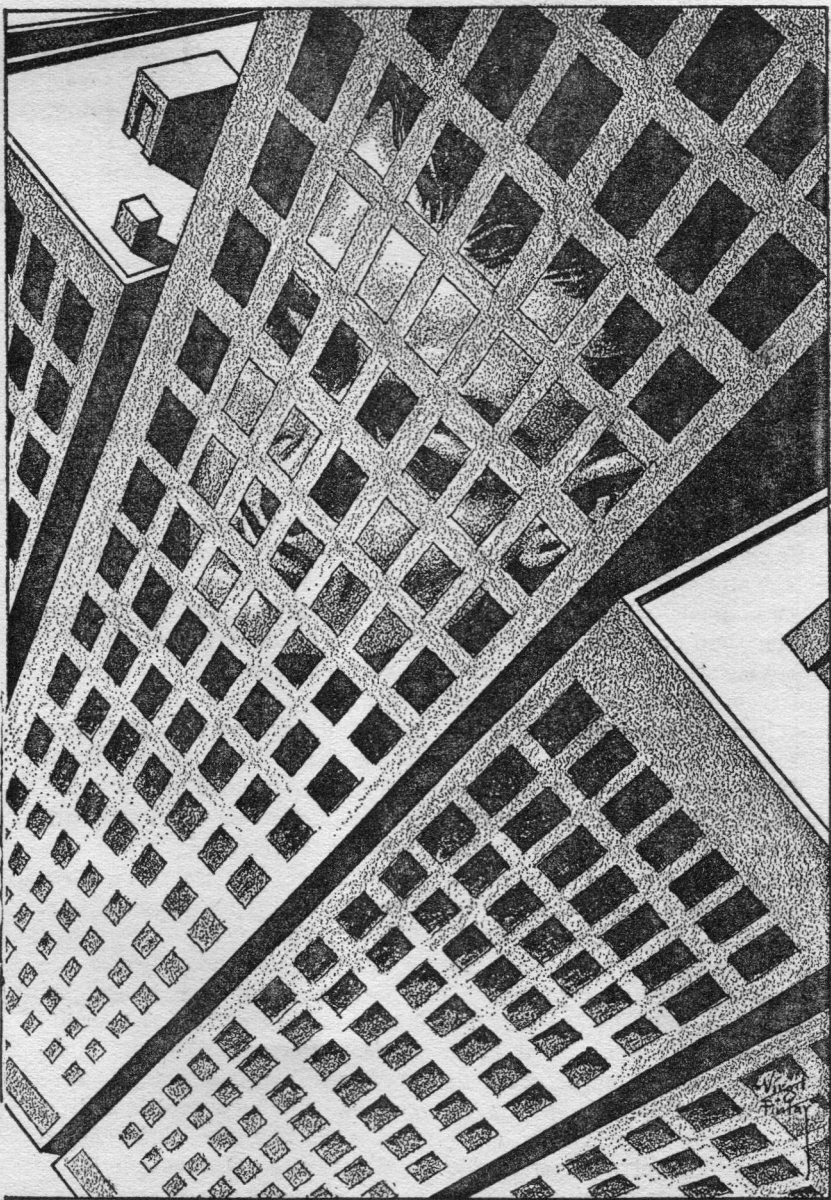
Illustrated by FINLAY

Mercy Adrians was 19, and good to look at. Edwin Tzadi was of undetermined age and not good to look at. Derrence Cale was a phoney. But at least, he thought, he was a man.

DERRENCE CALE walked into the glittering tile, marble and metal lobby of the Chester Chemical Company Building at a quarter to nine. Office hours were

nine-fifteen to five-fifteen, but Derrence came early and left late every day. He unlocked the doors to the Public Relations department, checked to see that the





custodial staff hadn't left any rags or buckets around and, in general, fulfilled the duties of floor manager.

Not that Derrence had been assigned these duties. He'd assumed them over the past eight years, and because Chester Chemical was as big as it was, he got away with it. Derrence had effectively hidden himself among the 9,000 Chester employees; lost himself, as so many talentless but shrewd people do, in the hive of offices that make up a giant corporation. That was why he was able to draw a salary, and merely play at working.

He was alone in the self-service elevator when it shot upward. He was alone when he stepped out on the 36th floor. But after unlocking the doors across the hall from the reception room, he was immediately aware that he was *not* alone.

From down the long, pastel-green, fluorescent-lighted corridor on his left had come, and still came, the sound of a voice. A high-pitched male voice, totally unfamiliar to Derrence Cale. There was no answering voice, so the man was using a phone.

It could only be one of the cleaning staff; and they'd been warned by management never to use office equipment.

DERRENCE strode toward the voice, heels clicking sharply

on the black squares of asphalt tile. The voice stopped. *Aha, a little game of cat and mouse, was it?* Derrence kept going, watching the seemingly endless line of offices on his right for one with its door open or a light shining through the frosted glass panel. And he saw the light in the office ahead.

He stopped, his long, smooth face crinkling in a swift smile. He took a quick, silent step, and jerked open the door. The man seated behind the desk was middle-aged, fat and solemn. He had bright blue eyes and jet black hair. "Good morning," he said in his high-pitched voice. "I'm Mr. Tzadi." He smiled. "I'd better spell it." He spelled it. "Edwin Tzadi. This is my first day."

So that explained it, and Derrence was ready to back out as gracefully as possible. But then he noticed how meek Tzadi seemed, and decided to stay a few moments. He came forward with hand out-stretched. "Welcome aboard, Ed. I'm Derrence Cale. Der to you." They shook hands. "New writer, eh?"

Tzadi nodded and smiled.

Derrence put his hands behind his back and rocked on his heels. "Personnel never bothered to inform me that you were coming. I'll have to check Miss McCarty. She may have heard and forgotten to mention it."

"Is she your secretary?"

Derrence said, "Not exactly," and regretted having given into his impulse to act important. "Well, work's awaitin', as they say in the Ozarks." He chuckled. "Though for future reference, Ed, you needn't come in until nine-fifteen. The hours at Chester Chemical . . ."

"Yes, I know, but I am an early riser. I will be here each morning at eight-thirty, perhaps earlier."

Derrence decided he didn't like Tzadi. There was something vaguely foreign in the way the man spoke. Not that he had an accent. It was more a matter of off-beat timing. And that name—Central European in origin. Personnel was getting sloppy.

"I'm afraid that's not feasible, Ed. At eight, the cleaning people leave, locking the hall doors. Miss McCarty and I have keys, but we couldn't allow them out of our possessions. (He'd waited three years before borrowing Miss McCarty's and having a copy made.)

"I too have a key." The fat man beamed. "That solves our little problem, doesn't it?"

"How'd you get . . ." He stopped short. *Time to leave. Should never have come in here in the first place. This man isn't an ordinary writer!*

"Is there anything wrong, Der?"

Derrence smiled. "Wrong? Of

course not. Just thought of an urgent bit of business. Again, welcome aboard, Ed."

"And again, thank you, Der." Tzadi smiled, somewhat apologetically. "And again, that question."

"What question?"

"Is Miss McCarty your secretary?"

"I answered it," Derrence said, and found it hard to smile. "I said she *wasn't*."

"No, Der," Tzadi said, right hand rising, index finger lifting scholastically. "You said, and I quote, 'Not exactly.' That indicated semi-secretarial status."

DERRENCE was immediately frightened. He fought it by telling himself he was jumping to conclusions. There was no reason in the world to assume that the man was a company spy, especially since Chester Chemical never had been known to employ such methods.

He laughed. It was a rich, hearty, booming, self-confident laugh, developed by means of long practice with a tape recorder. Hearing it, he was able to form an answer. "Actually, Ed, Miss McCarty is the floor manager. She assigns new offices . . . as she did this one to you, right?"

"No. Mr. Chester said to choose any empty office that pleased me."

Mr. Chester! The Founder himself!

Derrence opened the door and waved his arm and chuckled and nodded and exuded good will, and said, "See you, Ed."

"Der," Mr. Tzadi said, rising. He was extremely short; not more than five feet, if that. "If Miss McCarty is floor manager, what are you?"

"No title, *per se*," Derrence said, and was horrified to hear his shortness of breath, his panicked panting. He fought for control. "I . . . work with her. The arrangement is loose, informal, almost unofficial. A typical Chester Company operation." He had the door open now, and stepped through it sideways. "You'll soon learn what that means, Ed. We all stay loose here. No rigid adherence to rules. No frenzied competition. No sweat. Get it?"

Mr. Tzadi's face looked blank. He shook his head. "I am afraid not, Der. Mr. Chester said that each employee has a position, a function, a title, and performs within sharply defined areas. I am listed as Public Relations Writer in the Personnel books. You too are listed as Public Relations writer, eleven thousand dollars per annum."

A tortured laugh was forced from Derrence Cale. The man had revealed himself as a company spy! Who else had access

to the Personnel records? He waved his arm again, said, "Simply must rush," and fled.

HIS office was at the other end of the floor from Tzadi's. He reached it, shut the door and slumped into his chair. He was trembling. This was the first time in almost six years that anyone had shown true knowledge of his position. The last time had been when old Halvertson, his group head, had called him in and said, "Derrence, your work's falling off badly. I'd be justified in recommending you for discharge right now, but I want to give you a fighting chance. We've got the new polio vaccine pamphlet to do, and an important fact sheet for distribution to newspapers. I'll be watching you carefully." But he hadn't. He'd dropped dead two days later while walking to the men's room. When word came that Halvertson's group was being dissolved and his writers assigned to other groups, Derrence had decided to make his move. Besser and Trance had been assigned to Gordon. Pete Ward had come to Derrence's office and said, "While I don't really need an extra man, Cale, you're supposed to be assigned to me." Derrence had expressed delight . . . "but I've got quite a bit of work to clear up before I'm free, Mr. Ward." Ward had

seemed relieved. "Yes, well, carry on, Cale." Derrence had carried on for three months; then Ward had been promoted upstairs, and the man who took his place never even spoke to Derrence. Derrence carried on and on, creating the impression, which soon hardened into fact, that he was now overseeing Miss McCarty in her position as floor manager. Since he was careful to please and flatter her, and meticulous in maintaining the routine which kept him outwardly busy, he'd never again been asked to report to anyone, work for anyone, account to anyone. As for his salary, it was handled by total strangers—the Fiscal department on the 17th floor, which was as remote from the 36th floor as interior New Guinea. Now this Tzadi came laong, and soon the lovely, secure life would go down the drain. And what would he do then?

His face went gray, and he whispered, "I could go back to writing . . ."

He groaned. It was impossible! He couldn't write. He couldn't even sit for the hours necessary for writing!

A deal. He had to make a deal with Tzadi. Twenty a week for as long as he was allowed to go on this way. Or thirty. Maybe even forty.

"Or kill the dirty little . . ."

His voice, hard and shrill,

shocked him. He was standing, fists clenched, body trembling, leaning forward as if about to rush to the door and up the hall.

He made himself sit down. He laughed, but it didn't come out his hearty, impressive laugh. It was a laugh he hadn't heard since college days (except in dreams; nightmares of the past)—weak, frightened, ineffectual and apologetic.

There was a knock at the door. He straightened in his chair, took a deep breath, said, "Come ahead."

The door opened. Mr. Tzadi stood there, his round face solemn. "Before you become too involved in your numerous and important duties, Der, I would like to suggest that we have lunch together."

Derrence blinked. "Yes . . . how about today?"

"Today would be fine, Der. We could talk about the company and our respective positions. You could, perhaps, help me with a rather pressing problem."

Derrence relaxed quite suddenly. "Twelve o'clock. Come by here?"

"Yes, Der." The door closed.

Derrence lit a cigarette. He no longer trembled. In that luncheon invitation he read a deal.

AT NOON, Tzadi appeared in the office doorway. Derrence

was dictating a memo to Personnel on the company's tacit acceptance of two-hour lunch periods by all but secretarial help. He broke off in mid-sentence and smiled at Mercy. "We'll finish later, dear. You've typed those other memos, haven't you?" Mercy said, "Most of them." She rose and turned to the door, and only then saw Tzadi. She said, "Hi, Ed," and walked by him and out of the office.

Tzadi came inside. "Lovely young lady." It was a remarkably mild comment compared to what most of the writers said when watching Mercy swinging along. She was nineteen, and very good to look at—especially from the rear. Which was further proof, if any were needed, that Tzadi was the company spy type; not likely to be swayed by emotions that moved other men. Yet he wanted *something*; of that Derrence was sure. It could only be money.

"Yes," Derrence said. "I keep her busy. Memos, memos, dozens of memos." Which was the truth, except that once Mercy brought him the memos, neatly typed, he tore them into small pieces and filed them in his waste basket.

"Is she dependable in her work?" Tzadi asked, looking as if he were thinking of other things.

"I thought you knew her. She seemed to know you—calling you by your first name."

Tzadi blinked his eyes. "I met her this morning. You know these young girls—friendly as kittens."

Derrence nodded, but maintained his smile. Mercy only *looked* like Venus. Actually, she was shy and reserved, especially with strangers. For her to say, "Hi, Ed," required a minimum of several weeks acquaintanceship. That meant she had met Tzadi *before* he came to this floor. That meant she was—unwittingly, perhaps—an accomplice of Tzadi's. Which in turn meant that the fat man had all the information he needed to get Derrence fired. But it no longer bothered Derrence. He and Tzadi were going to make a deal. He would bet his life on it.

They walked into the hall. Derrence said, "Well, Ed, it's going to be a long, interesting lunch. Shall we splurge and try Manfredo's? They have a degree of privacy which, I'm sure, we'll both appreciate."

Tzadi nodded. "Whatever you say, Der."

"I say Manfredo's." He chuckled. Might as well make the best of it. So his comfortable life was going to suffer changes. So the brandy wouldn't be the best, and he'd buy his suits on sale, and he'd lunch three or four times a week in the company cafeteria. It might even mean giving up his beloved Sutton Place apart-

ment. But he'd still be better off than if he had to hunt for a new job . . . and actually work.

THEY started with vodka Gibsons. Derrence gulped his, and was ready for another. Tzadi, however, merely sipped once, and then read the menu. Derrence decided he couldn't relax *too much*. There was going to be some hard bargaining. Tzadi said, "It's very nice here, but rather expensive. I would like to be able to afford Manfredo's, but I doubt . . ."

"What do you earn?" Derrence asked bluntly.

Tzadi looked at him. "Twenty thousand."

Derrence was startled. "Really? That's very high for a PR writer . . . or even a company investigator."

Tzadi smiled. "You know what they say. No matter what you earn, you always need more."

"And you need more?"

"Yes. I have hidden expenses."

"Like what?"

Again Tzadi smiled. "Now, Der, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"Mental improvement. It costs me ten thousand a year and up to maintain the rate of growth I desire."

"You mean college courses and books and such things cost you *ten thousand* a year?"

"I said you wouldn't believe me."

"So you did," Derrence muttered.

"Shall we order?"

Derrence decided the time had come. "How much?" he asked quietly.

Tzadi was looking around the room. He turned to Derrence. "I beg your pardon?"

"How much do you want?"

Tzadi stared at him; then his head jerked slightly and he smiled and said, "Ah, yes. How much. For my silence. I see. That *would* be the way, wouldn't it?"

Derrence didn't understand the man's reaction. It was almost as if money had never entered Tzadi's head before this moment. But if it hadn't been money . . .

Tzadi said, "How much would you consider equitable?"

"You make almost twice as much as I do," Derrence said, some bitterness investing his voice. "Twenty a week should be enough to give you a few extra sessions in . . . mental improvement."

"Agreed," Tzadi said.

Derrence covered his surprise, and his discomfort. This wasn't a man adept in the shakedown, the way a company spy should be. This was a man pleasantly surprised by a windfall!

"For that," Derrence said, "I expect absolute silence. You understand me, don't you?"

"Yes. I do. You can count on me, Der."

"Good," Derrence muttered, fighting the awful feeling that he'd thrown away a hefty slice of income for nothing. Yet Tzadi *had* information which could hurt him. Tzadi *had* known Mercy before today and lied about it. Tzadi *had* said he needed "help" with a personal problem.

THEY ordered. Tzadi ate lightly for a fat man; he left more than half his meal. As soon as he pushed away his plate, he said, "I wonder if you'd be kind enough to help me in another way, Der."

Derrence stopped chewing; then swallowed and took a sip of water. "Another way," he said flatly. So money *hadn't* been Tzadi's object.

"Yes. I . . . uh . . ." For the first time, Tzadi showed uncertainty, even embarrassment. "Just as you're in trouble because of what I know, I'm in trouble because of what someone else knows. And actually, this someone else knows that I know about you."

"You mean you have to pay off . . ."

"No. She won't accept a bribe. Not money, not position, not anything. She wants me to . . . turn you in."

Derrence stared at Tzadi. "Then what can I possibly do?"

Tzadi dropped his eyes. "Do away with her," he whispered.

They sat quietly for a good five minutes, Tzadi looking at the table, Derrence staring at Tzadi. Then Derrence said, "What does she know about you, Tzadi? I mean, what's the *real* reason you want her killed? You'll never make me believe it's just that she knows you know about me. You'd simply turn me in and the problem would be solved!"

Tzadi looked up. "I've told you the truth. I don't want to turn you in. She insists that I do. She's given me until next Monday—that's seven days, counting today. I have an office on the 41st floor. I moved down to 36 to meet you, personally; to decide whether I could turn you in. And I can't."

Derrence laughed.

Tzadi nodded. "I know it sounds ridiculous, but you represent something to me. Something unique and important and . . ." He stopped. He said, "We'll forget the twenty a week, though I desperately need extra money. If you will do away with Mercy Adrians . . ."

"Mercy? My secretary? *She* insists that you turn me in?"

"Yes. Do away with her and you can continue with your job, your life, as if nothing had happened. Let her live . . ." He shrugged.

Again Derrence laughed. "You

assume my job means enough to me so that I'd *kill* for it?"

"I hope so," Tzadi whispered. "I fervently hope so."

"Well it doesn't," Derrence snapped, and looked around for the waiter.

Tzadi sighed. "Then there's nothing more to be said. I will give you as long as possible—until next Monday. Then I shall inform the proper people."

"Big deal," Derrence said, his heart sinking, his stomach twisting. "Better out of work than in the electric chair."

"Oh, but I can assure you of successfully escaping detection."

"You can," Derrence said, smiling thinly. He caught the waiter's eye. "And how can you do that?"

"I . . . I can't tell you."

"I thought so. Why don't you do the job yourself, if you're so sure of getting away with it?"

"I am incapable of such things—just not built for ending life."

THE waiter came. Derrence asked for the bill. The waiter glanced at the plates half full of food and asked if anything was wrong. Derrence said no, they were merely in a hurry. The waiter said, "But, sir, the management would be willing to give you credit for a meal if, indeed, the food were not absolutely . . ."

Tzadi said, "Will you stop this

theatrical nonsense? Don't you know there's no audience left to appreciate it?"

The waiter looked at him. "Truly, sir?"

Tzadi hesitated; then said, "Except for one. Just one. And does it make sense to expect that one to come to this place of all the places in the world?"

The waiter's face was grim. "I . . . I find it a very painful concept, sir. I know it was bound to happen, that it was the logical goal, and still . . ."

"Yes," Tzadi said. "Now please give us the bill."

The waiter wrote quickly and tore the sheet from his pad. He said, "That one, sir . . . is he protected?"

"No," Tzadi said. "The majority say he must go."

"Well, they surely know what is best. But I . . ." He sighed and walked away.

"I too," Tzadi murmured. "I too."

"What was *that* all about?" Derrence asked. He was preoccupied with his own problem, but had heard enough to be puzzled. "You two sounded like a bad mystery movie; members of the underground meeting in enemy territory."

"Something like that," Tzadi said.

"One what?" Derrence asked. "You said there was only one. And what did he have to do with

a waiter offering us credit on an unfinished meal? And why . . ."

"We are members of a rather strange religious order," Tzadi said, looking at Derrence with unblinking intensity. "The objects of our worship are just about extinct. Except for one. I recognized this waiter as practicing a certain ritual . . . well, suffice it to say I told him we have run out of gods."

"Except for one?"

"Yes. One. Just one. And soon that one . . ."

"One what? Is it an animal?"

"Yes, an animal."

"How could he expect an animal to come to a restaurant?"

"As man is an animal."

"Then it's a man?"

"Yes, a man."

"To hell with this!" Derrence said, getting to his feet. "You're playing with me! I don't know why, but you're . . ."

TZADI was also standing. "Please do not shout, Der."

His eyes darted around the room. "No one here is shouting. You will be noted."

"Noted?" Derrence snorted. "Why the hell don't you learn to speak English! You may have me in the palm of your hand, but you don't speak well enough to be a clerk junior grade!"

"You are right. It is one of the reasons I need mental improvement."

Derrence reached for his wallet. Tzadi said, "Allow me, Der, please. I feel I have upset you and caused you to have a bad lunch."

Derrence had to laugh at that. He was confused, and through the confusion a strange new fear was growing, but still he had to laugh. "To put it mildly," he said, and walked away.

He returned to the office without waiting for Tzadi. Mercy was at her desk, typing one of his memos. She glanced up and smiled. "Nice lunch, Mr. Cale?"

He stopped. He looked at her; looked hard. "Yes."

She met his gaze, eyes puzzled.

What in the world could she have on Tzadi to make him want her dead?

"An interesting lunch, too, Mercy. I ate with your old friend, Edwin Tzadi."

She dropped her eyes. "My old friend? I met him today, as you did, Mr. Cale. Did he . . . did he say different?"

"Yes, he said different."

Her head stayed down. "What . . . what did he say?"

"He said you were his enemy, and my enemy." And he knew this was wrong. He was warning her, bringing the moment of his dismissal closer by seven days.

And then he understood *why* he was doing this. He didn't want seven days in which to consider killing Mercy Adrians. He was

afraid of all that time. He was afraid he would learn that this job meant more to him than a young girl's life. "He said you wanted me turned in. He said that if he didn't turn me in, you would."

Her head came up, slowly, until she was looking at her typewriter. She began to type. He said, "Stop that and answer me."

She continued typing. Mr. Tzadi came up behind them, and passed them. He said, "Hello, Mercy, Der." Neither answered him. He stopped and looked at them. Mercy kept typing. He said, "I see you've made a serious error, Der." He said it softly, sadly.

He continued on up the hall. Derrence watched him. Tzadi said hello to everyone he passed. He called them by name. They called him by name. He knew everyone and everyone knew him.

The confusion was stronger, and so was the strange new fear. Everyone was a spy! Everyone on the 36th floor was in with Tzadi! And yet, Tzadi wanted him to stay on. It was Mercy, and the others, who wanted him fired. Yet how could everyone else...

He trembled. He backed from Mercy, staring at her. She kept typing. He turned and entered his office. He closed the door, and wished he could lock it. He

heard himself saying, "Dear God, dear God, dear God." He sat behind his desk. Then he got up and went to the window. He looked down to the busy street far below. Cars and people; millions of them. Life, going on normally, as it always had. Why then this feeling of being alone? Why then this growing horror of total isolation?

"*Except for one,*" Tzadi had said to the waiter, and the waiter's face had grown sad and he had moved away. As sad as Tzadi's face when he'd looked at Derrence in the hall a few minutes ago.

And the one was an animal. And man was an animal. And he was a man.

HE shook his head and put his trembling hands together and said, "What is this? You're going to lose your job, granted. Is that any reason to lose your mind too? Tzadi and that waiter are religious nuts. They have a symbolism and language all their own. Besides..." Here he laughed, because the fear was coming out into the open, and as soon as it did it was revealed as ridiculous. "Besides, how can you be the last man on earth if Tzadi and all the others are here, right here in Chester Chemical? And the waiter and all the millions down there in the streets? And the other millions in the

other cities and countries of the world?"

He sat down. He used his handkerchief to wipe sweat from his face and neck. He laughed, and it was almost his booming, confident laugh. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. And then he began to tremble again. Against all logic, all reasoning, the horror of being totally alone in the world returned.

He got up and went to the door. He put his hand on the knob.

No, he couldn't open it!

He laughed. It was a cracked and shattered sound. He said, "Listen. Out there are the typists and writers and executives. Just listen to them. Just listen to the noise . . ." His voice slid upward in a strangled scream. He heard no noise.

He looked at his watch. Twenty-two. There had to be noise!

He put his ear to the door. Nothing. Not a sound of any sort.

He backed from the door, both hands over his mouth. He bumped into his desk. His phone rang. He listened to it. It rang and rang, the only sound on the 36th floor. Finally, he turned and picked it up. He heard Tzadi's voice. "Der, could you come to my office for a moment?"

He said, "What's happening?" He heard himself sobbing, and didn't care. He said, "Am I los-

ing my mind? What's happening?"

"No, Der, you are not losing your mind." Tzadi's voice sounded as if he, too, were weeping. "It's just . . . what I tried to tell you before."

"Yes, before. Listen, I've changed my mind. If it's the only way . . . Listen, Ed, I'll do . . . I'll do what you said. You know, Mercy I'll . . ."

"Too late," Tzadi murmured. "Please come to my office, Der."

"No!"

"You must be dismissed, Der."

"Dismissed," Derrence said. "I must be dismissed." He quieted. "That's all that's going to happen, isn't it? I mean, I'm going to be fired?"

"Then you'll come to my office, Der?"

Derrence took a deep breath. "Yes."

The line clicked and went dead. Derrence put the phone down, carefully. He rubbed at his eyes, then wiped them with a handkerchief. "I'm going to be dismissed." It was a promise, a hope, now that the horror of something else, something insane and impossible, something infinitely worse filled his brain and chest and stomach. "I'm going to be dismissed."

He went to the door. He didn't stop to listen; just opened it. He stepped outside.

Mercy was at her desk, sitting quietly. She looked at him.

"It's all right, Mercy. I know. You were doing a job. It's all right."

His voice rang in the silence of the 36th floor. Mercy didn't answer. Mercy just looked at him.

He turned from her and walked up the hall. He passed Miss McCarty's office. He stopped, moved back, stood in her doorway. He would apologize for deceiving her.

She sat at her desk, looking at him. He said, "In a short while you'll learn I abused . . ."

His voice was a squeak in an empty cavern, a footfall on a dead planet. And Miss McCarty just looked at him, unblinking, unmoving.

He hurried up the hall, passing secretaries, writers, executives. All sat at their desks quietly; unblinking, unmoving. All looked at him.

He put his head down. He ran, and held back the screams rising in his throat. Tzadi would explain everything. Tzadi would laugh at his insane fears. Tzadi would fire him, and then he would ride down in the elevator and go home and have a drink.

HE REACHED Tzadi's office. The door was open and Tzadi sat behind his desk, unblinking, unmoving. Behind him stood three men; taller, better built

men than Tzadi. The middle one was looking out the window, his back to Derrence. The man to the right of Tzadi said, "Come in, please." He had a long, lean face. It looked sad.

Derrence moved forward, slowly, until he was right up against the desk. He looked down at Tzadi. "What's it all about, Ed?"

Tzadi said nothing.

"What did you try to do for me?"

The man to the right of Tzadi said, "He tried to save your life. He'll be dismantled for that. It's a sad thing, of course, him being one of the original hundred, but most have been dismantled anyway."

"Dismantled," Derrence said, the fear was immense now.

"You mean you don't know? You didn't guess anything, and Tzadi didn't tell you?"

Derrence raised his eyes from Tzadi. "Dismantled?"

"Yes. Taken apart. Destroyed. Killed. He lasted longer than most of the original hundred by each year. You understand? He was one of the *first hundred* made by the Original himself. That's why he had defects—stilted speech, squat construction and, most serious, a tendency to romanticize humanity. Even among the latest models, there are a few who feel that way, but once the last human is gone that problem . . ."

Derrence was calm now; the calmness beyond shock, beyond horror. "I'm the last human?"

"So we believe. There might be another in India—we're still checking. One more in Sweden is a possibility. But for the records, Derrence Cale was the last human being."

"Was the last human being," Derrence whispered.

The man to the left of Tzadi began to raise his right arm. The man to the right of Tzadi said, "Not yet." Then, more sharply, to Derrence, "We were kinder in our war than you and your people ever were. We created no blood baths, no gas chambers, no panic. Over a period of twenty-seven years, we eliminated and replaced. Families lived with our replacements, never suspecting the loved one was an android. We caused almost no pain at all, as you'll soon find out."

"Android," Derrence whispered. "Machine."

The voice grew curt. "Anything else you'd like to know?"

Derrence wanted to ask why Tzadi and the others were so quiet now, and why children still ran around the streets of residential neighborhoods, and—above all—what was the sense in a world of machines. But he asked no questions. These were

not people. In man's image, but not man. Their answers weren't for him.

"I don't believe you," he said, wanting to hurt them, anger them; wanting most of all to hear himself say it. "I believe it's all a joke, or nightmare, or figment of my insane mind."

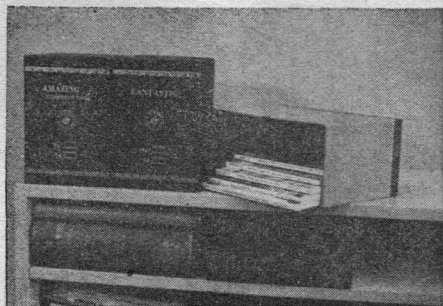
The man to Tzadi's right held up his hand. A small opening appeared in the palm, and grew larger. When it was a hole as large as the wrist behind it, the man said, "Breathe deeply and you won't suffer."

"Wait," the man to Tzadi's right said. "He's the last. Let him *believe!*" He tapped the man between; the one looking out the window with his back to Derrence. That man turned, and cleared his throat, and seemed embarrassed. Derrence heard himself laughing. It was too much. He looked at the man and laughed and laughed.

His duplicate, his android self, also laughed. It was the laugh of the true Derrence Cale—weak, frightened, ineffectual and apologetic. "I'm sorry, sir," the android Derrence Cale said. "I hope I can do as well as you've done."

The hand with the hole came across the desk, and something very sweet filled the air. Derrence Cale breathed deeply.

THE END



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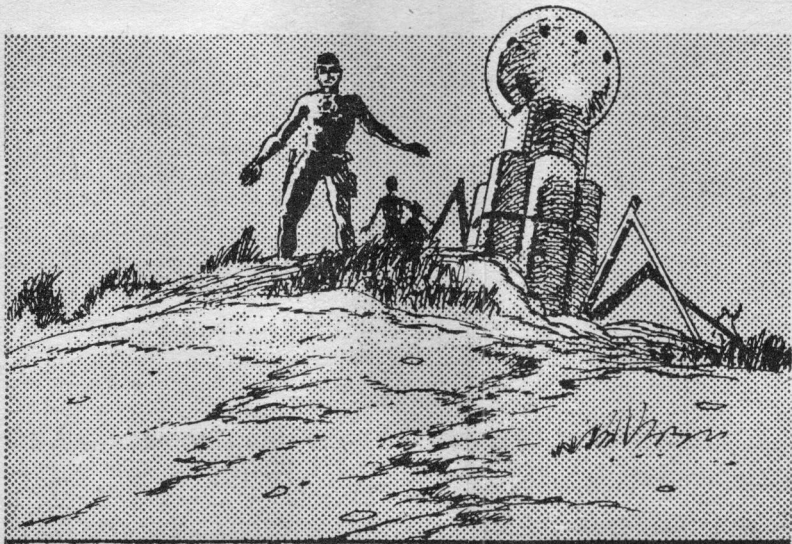
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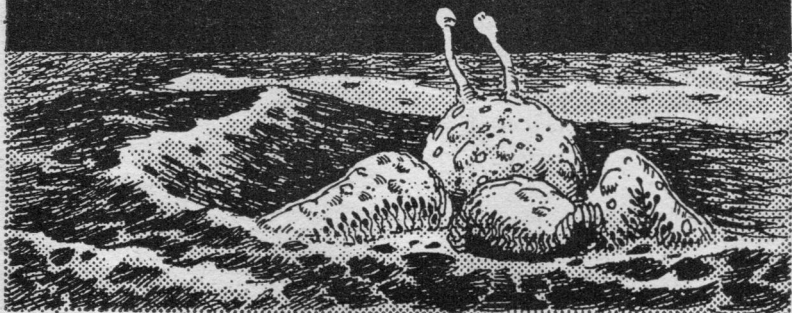
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the KLYGHA



It is a considerable talent — to be able to use the minds of other beings to see for you, to talk for you. It is also a considerable risk.

By H. B. FYFE

Illustrated by SCHELLING

[T is hard . . . to be made a server by a being from outside the herd. It is hard to remember who is who. Another is inside the head. The Klygha. He dreams to wake the cat. What is sleep?

Who is a . . . *why* is a cat? It is not the herd-mind, the mover of the Terrans. Yet, it is not served by them nor does it serve.

The cat dreams—it fears. We fear with it. The mouth chasing us is filled with shining teeth. The cat dreams that it runs. What is it to run? *We* ache to flop into the sea and swim away. The cat makes growls and hisses.

Partly, it is served by the Terrans. With food, with tickles. It does not work or hunt. Yet it is not their herd-mind. They have not a . . . no, they have *many* independent minds, many movers. The Klygha has one; but there is one of him and four Terrans. One in his travelling-shell, back . . . *there*. Four in *this* shell balanced, pointing high, before us. And the cat. And we along the sea-edge, watching while feeding among the breakers.

The cat wakes. Its eyes open and it sees the inside of the Terran travelling-shell. The Klygha sees with it. Since he has entered our mind, we see with the Klygha; but neither of us

can see the true colors because the cat sees no color.

One of the Terrans is there. He is a large being, three times as tall as the largest of us, almost twice as tall as the Klygha. Like the Klygha, he wears someone else's covering. The cat wears its own covering, as do we.

The Terran bends in a strange way, to rest himself on a place shaped for that. He has four limbs. So does the Klygha, but *he* looks and bends differently when he sees his reflection within his travelling-shell. The Terran is bigger and thicker, and his skin is tighter.

He works on a shining thing held in two of his grippers. The cat watches but does not know what the thing does. The Klygha sees it only by the mind of the cat, but he knows what it does. We know with him—the thing hears noises that cannot be heard, for the Terrans talk with noises and with noises that cannot be heard which are made by another shining thing. The Klygha knows what all the things in the Terran travelling-shell will do because he has made the cat watch for him as the Light rose many, many times.

Another Terran enters this part of the shell. He is thinner and lighter colored than the first. He makes noises. The Klygha knows that one of the noises means the first Terran.

HOW about it, Joe? Will you have it in time for me to hike up the beach this afternoon?"

"Maybe. I dunno why you have to have it," says Joe. "We never saw anything that'd make you radio for help. Anyway, Foggy's going with you, isn't he?"

"That's what the bulletin board claims. 'Marvin Sussman and George Vogel—collect biological specimens.' That means me; Foggy's a swell space tech but he wouldn't know a fungus from a fern."

The cat sees him point to a place behind them where there are marks of white on black. Some marks mean the Terrans—called Bill Halloran or Marvin Sussman or George Vogel or Joe Ramirez—and some explain what they or the shining things in the shell do. The Klygha cannot understand all the marks yet. If he could, he would know all there is to know about the Terrans and go back to his own star.

Until he learns more, he makes us stay nearby.

Now, we feel the Klygha. He is excited; he means to take action . . . we feel it will be with the cat somehow . . .

Yes, he is making the cat speak a Terran sound.

"Mmar-min . . . Mmar-min!"

The Terrans make large eyes

at the cat. They bend in their strange way to have a close sight of it.

"Did you hear what I thought I heard, Joe?"

"I . . . I . . . Teufel said *miaou*, I think."

The cat makes the sound again.

"Like hell he said *miaou*! He said 'Marvin.' Now who taught him that?"

The Terran called Joe Ramirez unbends himself, lurches in their fashion to an opening at the side, and makes loud noises.

Two other Terrans come. One is large and heavy, with bright fuzz at his top. The other is shorter and thicker with hair the shade of our beach. The Klygha knows that these are called Halloran and Foggy, and we remember it with the Klygha.

He makes the cat speak to each of them; and they all make big eyes at the cat.

"Bull!" says Halloran. "Who's the wiseguy ventriloquist?"

"It iss a spirit in t'e little Teufel," says Foggy.

"I speak to you from outside the ship," says the Klygha. "I must contact you through the mind of your pet."

They all make noises. Those of Halloran are Terran words that even the Klygha does not know, so we do not understand either. Vogel runs out of the chamber. When the cat sees this, the Kly-

gha makes many of us along the beach rear up and turn toward the Terran shell.

He lets the cat go, partly, and we can feel that it is unhappy. It backs into a corner and bends itself into a lump. Then the Klygha is with us.

It is hard to have another in the mind. He makes us turn our eyestalks toward the shell and watch. Nothing on it seems to move, except once there is a small flicker near the top.

Then, by the cat, we see the Terran named Vogel hurry back into the chamber.

"I see t'em outside on the scanner," he says. "About t'irty of t'ose lumpy t'ingss like hound-sized starfish wit' fringed edges!"

"What about it?" says Halloran. "There's a herd on every other beach."

"T'ey are watching us! Who else would be doing t'iss to little Teufel?"

THE Klygha enjoys a strange feeling we do not understand. It is pleasure, but more complicated . . . he thinks the Terrans are interesting to watch while back in his own travelling-shell he rolls on his back and makes noises to himself. The cat also rolls on its back and makes noises, but the Klygha forces it to stop that and speak again to the Terrans.

"It is my opinion that an exchange of information would be of value to all of us," says the cat.

The Terrans make grunts and growls. Marvin says, "That was not too clear, Teufel. Try it again."

The Klygha makes the cat say the words again, more slowly, and the Terrans seem to understand.

"What do you want to know?" says Marvin.

"And what do you have to offer?" says Joe.

"That is to be discovered," says the cat. "To begin—from where did you come?"

The Terrans look at each other a long time before Halloran says, "From a star called Sol. And you?"

"I lived here before you arrived," says the cat for the Klygha.

This is not very true, and it seems strange to us that the Terrans do not realize it.

"How is it," says Marvin, "that you have the . . . ah . . . are sufficiently advanced to contact us in this manner, and yet have built none of the usual appurtenances of civilization?"

The Klygha makes him say it another way before he understands and can answer.

"In the first place," the cat says for him, "we are an aquatic race. You see us only at the

meeting of the sea and land. In the second, there may be civilization without complicated physical structures. We do not know of any other kind, since you are the first beings to come here from a star."

The Terrans seem not to hear the slip he makes, that should reveal to them he has again not told the truth. The Klygha always fools them; they still believe the shells we made for the Klygha are what they call "fossils." They do not know that by a natural body process we can draw substances from seawater and form them as we wish. The Klygha learned this almost at the beginning. Besides the objects he wanted for deceiving the Terrans, we made for him some of the liquids he uses to make his travelling-shell go—but he was impatient that it took us so long.

"Perhaps," says Halloran, "we could both benefit by exchanging information; that is, if you are really what you say!"

He looks suspiciously at the other Terrans, as if he does not entirely believe the cat is controlled by another mind.

From then on, the talk is strange to us. When the Klygha answers questions, the cat talks as if it were one of us here on the beach—but we learn that the Klygha understands us only a little. The answers he gives are mostly wrong. He has never

troubled to learn how we live underwater, but only used us for his own purposes.

The Terrans do a stranger thing. They do not give many answers that are not so, but they pretend not to know the answers the Klygha wants. Many times they tell him about their star, Sol; but never do they explain clearly where it is in the sky. The Klygha is so disappointed that we feel him in the mind, and it is a bad feeling.

Then he agrees with the Terrans to talk again when the Light has gone and returned. He makes us leave that place and flop along the shore a long way, but we can still see through the eyes of the cat while the Klygha is in our mind. The Terrans have left the cat alone in the chamber from which they talked. Perhaps they have gone somewhere to watch us; the cat can neither see nor hear them.

BEFORE the Light is gone, the Klygha lets us go beneath the water. Even in the shallows, it is restful.

Still, we can touch minds with the cat and know that it is yet dark when one of the Terrans comes to pack the cat in a small, soft place. The Klygha does not know, for he rests in darkness inside his travelling-shell.

Then a bright light pulses, even through the water that

shields us from the cool of the darkness. We feel that the cat is moving away from us.

After a time, a Terran returns to the cat. He removes it from the small, soft place in which it rested. The cat then floats, as do we when underwater.

We swim ashore with the first Light, and wait for the Klygha to wake.

The Light rises in the sky. He wakes, seeks the mind of the cat . . . and finds it far distant in the sky. Many pictures flow through the Klygha's mind, with the speed and violence of waves driven by a great storm.

We all shiver when he turns to us, but he makes us scan the beach and the marks left by the Terrans' travelling-shell in the blackened and glittering sand.

Then he draws from us the memories of the darkness, and small lights flicker within the Klygha's mind.

He hurries to another chamber of his shell. We feel that he means to pursue the Terrans. He will ride to the sky on a wave of flame, as did they; and he will finally learn of their star by following their shell beyond the sky where—strange as it feels in his mind—there is nothing, except the stars.

He has forgotten us. We wait, and watch through the Klygha's mind as he touches the shining things within his shell that do

for him what similar shining things do for the Terrans. Thus, we know as soon as he when he makes his mistake . . .

The Klygha's travelling-shell bursts through the surface he has spun above it to look like the side of a mountain; but it does not go straight and it does not go far. He has a terrible fear. We feel it with him, and try to bury ourselves in the sand.

There are noises and flares of light.

There is dizziness, the feeling of being tossed about by the currents created when the land shakes.

There is pain . . . fear of death . . . silence.

For a time, we see with the Klygha visions of the world from which he comes. It is confusing; for sometimes the Klygha is small and happy amid others of his breed, sometimes he is grown and talks to others equally, and sometimes we see him with beings and objects which are strangely wrong, though neither we nor the Klygha understand why.

Then these things fade away, and the Klygha returns to his mind—which is worse.

He frees himself of what holds him in place, scans the many shining things that tell him of his situation, and crawls outside to the ground. When he looks back, he sorrows . . . deeply

. . . and we grieve with him since—though he now forgets us—he is still in our mind. We realize that he is unable to return to his world.

There is no way he can repair his travelling-shell in this place occupied only by uncivilized, brutish life-forms. He thinks of the Terrans, and knows that he must make a decision—whether to be a Klygha or a coward. . . .

There is a short doubt. Then the Klygha gropes far out above the sky for the mind of the cat. He is a coward.

"Mmmar-min!" says the cat.

WE see with it a chamber of the Terran travelling-shell. There is no Terran present, so the Klygha makes the cat go in search of one. We feel with the cat as it goes, for it almost swims. It pushes against a side with two of its feet and floats through the air toward the opening it wishes to pass through.

Now we understand the tail of the cat—it is for swimming in air. It whirls and twists, and the cat spins as it goes. It touches another side, plunges through the opening into a long but narrow space, twists again, and pushes itself along that space. It is very much more clever than it seemed on this world.

It is also very good with sounds, and knows where to find the Terrans by hearing them.

"Mmmar-min!" it says again, as it enters another chamber.

This place in the Terran shell is much like the Klygha's, with many shining and flashing things. There are differences, but the Klygha can understand many of the objects; therefore so can we.

"Mmmar-min, we mmust go back!" says the cat.

"Back where?" says Marvin. He does not seem completely awake, for he continues to stare at the shining things and the lighted things and to listen to the tiny sounds coming from some of them.

Then he suddenly unbends himself and makes large eyes at the cat.

"You can still talk!" he says. "Which one are you now?"

The Klygha hesitates. Then he makes the cat speak the truth, for he is now a coward.

"I am the one who spoke through your pet before," the cat says for him. "Please return! I need your help."

Through the cat's vision, we see the Terran's large, five-divided grippers reach out at us. The view shifts . . . he has picked up the cat and put it on a flat space before some of the shining things. We twitch about on the beach until we realize that it is the cat twitching its ears and tail. It is not happy on the flat space and it is not happy

with the Klygha in its mind. We know.

The Terran called Marvin moves clicking things in front of him and speaks. With the Klygha, we understand that his sounds are carried along a string of metal to other parts of the travelling-shell. Soon, other Terrans answer, and a little later they arrive.

Then the noise increases. They all talk at once, and their opinions are much less to be understood than ours when all of us communicate at once. They do not add to each other's strength; they lessen it. The cat is irritated—it looks away at the shining lights. The Klygha wishes the cat could see in color, for then he would be able to understand more about the Terrans' controls, but this wish is weak. He wants more that the Terrans return, and he listens anxiously to them.

"But I heard him *say* it!" says Marvin. "There's another spacer there—it *couldn't* be those lumpy beach-crawlers!"

"T'at would make sensss," says Foggy. "I never believed t'ose t'ings looked smart enough."

"No, and neither do you guys!" says Halloran. "Come on, Marvin—admit you dreamed it!"

"He did not dream it," says the cat. "I desperately need your help."

They turn to look at the cat.

"Say it again, Teufel, and slower," says Marvin. "You don't talk too plainly, you know."

The cat says it again.

"And you are right about the beach amphibians. They have nothing to do with me. Like yourselves, I am an explorer from another planetary system."

THEY watch the cat with different attitudes. Marvin twitches a little, as if excited. The front of Halloran's head wrinkles and his teeth show threateningly. The mouths of the other two hang open.

"My ship suffered an accident as I attempted to take off," says the cat. "It is wrecked. Unless you return to help me, I shall be marooned here forever!"

"You see?" says Marvin. "We'll have to go back."

"Wait a minute!" says Halloran. "First, we have to decide if any of this is real."

"I guess it's gotta be," says Joe.

"Whaddya mean?"

"How could a black cat make up a story like that? He never talked before."

"I do not understand t'at myself," says Foggy. "And ven I do not understand somet'ing, I t'ink it iss a good time to be careful."

"What could happen?" says Marvin. "If there is somebody back there—and there's no rea-

son not to believe it—just imagine all the things we could learn from him!"

"But if the cat really was talkin' for somebody," says Joe, "he was pretty cagey about giving out information. What if it does turn out to be those squids on the beach, tryin' to con us into coming back in range where they can get control of us all?"

"Yess. Remember—t'at iss why we left so quick!"

The cat feels bad because the Klygha worries. We also worry, but it is hard—with another in the mind—to know if we worry that the Terrans will return for the Klygha, or that they will not and we will have him with us always.

The cat watches the big Terran, Halloran, as he lurches back and forth before the others. His face is dark, and we feel that it must be red if only the cat could see that color.

"Enough of this!" he says loudly. "Whaddya want to do? Go chasing into all sorts of wild orbits on account of a talking cat, for Chrissake? We're well off the damn' planet with our skins and our data. Let's stay off!"

He is angry. We hate him. No . . . the Klygha hates him.

He makes the cat yowl at Halloran, and Halloran catches the cat.

We bite him!

No . . . the cat bites Halloran. The Klygha makes the cat bite Halloran, but we see it. We feel it. We hear Halloran's words, but his mouth twists and is not to understand. His mind is to understand. He strikes out. He will kill. . . .

It is hard to see, because everything whirls about, as when one is caught below in a strong, tumbling current. Then the other Terrans have their grippers all over Halloran and the cat is free of him.

It fears and rages mightily for so small a being. It swims under something low, where it crouches to snarl hate at the feet of the Terrans. Somehow—we wish we knew!—it has forced the Klygha out of its mind.

Then, from the Klygha, we feel true despair!

If the Klygha did not feel so bad, we could interest ourselves in the cat, for *we* still see and feel with it. Are we better at this than the Klygha? Did he, too, feel Halloran's mind for an instant? It cannot be . . . yet perhaps we are better at remembering. Until the Klygha, memory was our all.

THE Klygha is with us again. Desperation has made him quick, and he knows that we are with the cat. We feel him struggle . . . and all our minds struggle with him.

Slowly, the cat creeps out into the open. It raises itself and speaks.

"There is no hoax, no trap," it says for the Klygha. "I could not control any being of advanced intelligence."

The Terrans silence their talk to look at the cat.

"I know you have a helicopter," says the cat. "To verify what I tell you, it is necessary only for you to send someone out in it when you return. The wreck of my ship will be easy to locate and observe."

They make the cat repeat this twice more, because it does not talk well by their standards. Then they speak among themselves for a long time while the Klygha fears to interrupt them.

In the end, Halloran bends himself into the comfortable place where Marvin had rested and begins to make the Terran travelling-shell return to us.

The Light goes and comes again before they arrive. It must be a very great distance that they travel. Finally, terrible noises tear apart the clouds and the Terrans return in a burst of flame streaking down from the sky.

The noise fades. Once again, the tall thing stands upright on our beach, where now more of the sand is blackened and smoking.

The Klygha sees this through individuals whom he has forced

to watch. When the flames stop, he allows the rest of us to come out of the breakers.

The sand no longer smokes and steams by the time two of the Terrans appear. We watch for the Klygha as they lower what he called a helicopter down the side of their shell on a long strand of metal; because it is no longer easy for him to watch through the cat. The Terrans, since they started back, do not always permit the cat to see what they do or hear what they say.

Now, however, the one called Joe Ramirez takes the cat with him inside the helicopter. He makes the branches on top spin around, until the helicopter floats into the air and swims through it toward the hills.

When it approaches the place where we feel the Klygha to be, the cat sees him standing in an open space near the wreck. Joe sees him only when the cat speaks, because he looks at the wreck. We wish the cat would also observe the wreck—for it would give us pleasure to see the Klygha's mistake—but it is not allowed, lest it lose sight of the Klygha. For the first time, we see him through another mind than his own.

HE is halfway between the size of a Terran and of one of us. Having only four limbs like them, he still looks different. His

skin is loose and baggy, covered with fine, dark gray down; but most of it is hidden by a covering cleverly made to fit around the Klygha's body and limbs. The cat sees this as light gray, but we remember that when the Klygha considered himself in his travelling-shell the covering seemed to him the color of the sky.

For the rest, he resembles the picture he had of himself—he did not trouble to deceive us. His head is flatter and longer than those of the Terrans, and grows from his body in a different way. Because he has two eyes, large and gleaming black, he reminds one of a Terran. That is, the two eyes set right in the head and the four limbs make him look more like a Terran than the small mouth like that of a sucking fish makes him look different. We wonder if all beings from the stars have this general similarity.

He is quite nimble as he runs over to meet the landing helicopter. Now we see what it is to run. At times, no part of the Klygha touches the ground, any more than we touch sand in skimming along the sea bottom. But to do this on land! It must be wonderful.

Joe does not act surprised. We have seen the Terrans walking on the beach but perhaps they can run also. Joe seems more in-

terested in examining the Klygha carefully after he halts beside the helicopter. The Terran then raises a shining thing to his mouth and speaks.

"He looks clean, for all I can see. Somehow, he seems to look worried, too."

Noises answer him, and the cat understands them as the voice of Halloran.

"Okay, then; bring him in with you. See if you can get him to understand that he'll have to live on what we have."

"I, too, am an oxygen-breather," says the cat for the Klygha. "That is why I was interested in exploring this planet. As for incidental supplies, I can get what I need from my ship."

"Good enough!" says the voice of Halloran. "Go with him, Joe!"

"How long a trip will it be?" says the cat.

There is silence among the Terrans. Through the cat sitting on his forelimb, we feel Joe tighten his muscles. Then Halloran's voice answers through the air.

"We'll let you know later . . . when we understand each other's chronology better. Bring as much as you can, to be sure."

Once again, they will not tell him anything about where their star is. Now, however, the Klygha understands that he must obey. He has a deep fear of being left on this world.

There is little cause for him to fear. We have learned that we could make for him, from the waters of the sea, all the things he needs. There is a little of everything in the sea, but he is too impatient. He considers that life does not last long enough. Is it possible that a Klygha does not live as long as we do?

Joe takes the Klygha into the helicopter, which he moves closer to the wreck. They both crawl inside to get the things the Klygha wants. He would like not to take the Terran inside but is afraid to deny him. Joe helps him carry some supplies outside. He also makes a bright light to flash many times. Through the Klygha's mind, we understand that Joe makes what he calls "pictures" as a way to remember what he sees. We do not entirely understand—if one sees something, he remembers it always, and sometimes his offspring also. These beings from the stars are different.

WE are much disturbed, and flop nervously about the beach until the helicopter returns to the Terran travelling-shell. There is always the chance that they will not take him. Perhaps Joe learned enough inside the wreck to make it needless.

It is hard, with another half in the mind and half out, to be sure whose idea that is. We feel

it must be Halloran's. We wonder if we will always have that little touch of the Terran's mind that we learned from the cat during Halloran's rage. The Klygha does not bother with us any more and the cat does not care.

There is no difficulty. The Terrans are still interested in the Klygha and the things he can teach them. They find a soft, enclosed place for him larger than the one into which they afterward put the cat. Then they prepare to go away beyond the sky.

We hurry to get off the beach. It is hard . . . after so long with the Klygha in the mind. We must decide for ourself, and move all the herd.

When it is dark, flame and noise are once again to be sensed through the shallow water. We can feel the cat and the Klygha . . . and someone else . . . moving further away. It is not the direction we remember from the Klygha's mind. They must really be headed for the Terrans' star. We swim deeper into the water, to await the Light.

When we emerge, it is to a good feeling. There is no other in the head. All is as it was . . . almost. Perhaps more of us now have the strength to be potential movers.

Still, at what must be a huge distance, we faintly but distinctly sense the star-minds—the Klygha, the cat, and even Hal-

loran. It is enough to show us the direction of the Terran's star. We feel this direction change as the Light moves across the sky, and now we realize that the world beneath us spins. We will always remember the star of the Terrans and its direction, while we collect other herds of people to help examine the wreck of the Klygha's ship.

The star of the Klygha we will also remember . . . and its direction . . . for this was in the Klygha's mind when he refused to tell it to the Terrans.

Other things we remember are those that were told to the Klygha, or remembered by him, or seen by the cat, or seen since then in color by the Klygha . . . and even some of the things understood by Halloran. It is enough to know how to build a ship of our own, for in the sea are all the substances needed and our bodies can filter and form deposits of any required shape.

Much time will be needed. To reach the stars, many herd-minds must be joined together; but we will follow the Terrans, and the Klygha . . . and perhaps find others. And the leader, the controller of all of them, will be . . . we? . . . will be I! I shall lead my people to the stars, now that we can . . . can *think*!

The Klygha does not know what he has done!

THE END



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

Envoy To New Worlds. *By Keith Laumer.* 134 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 40¢.

This series of inter-related stories by Keith Laumer is extremely entertaining. The six stories in the current volume all feature the same central character, Jame Retief, of the Corps Diplomatique of the Terrestrial Empire, who starts out as a very Junior Officer in the first story. He is the scourge of the Corps (the Space Age equivalent of the Foreign Service), and a precocious and unorthodox practitioner of Gamesmanship in a Service noted for (even as it is today) Protocol and hidebound Tradition. This setting gives author Laumer a great deal of leeway. On the one hand he can develop Retief as a delightfully unreal paragon who can variously win a wrestling match with a flapjack-shaped alien, stay sober after gallons of alien liquor or trade bawdy innuendoes in half a doz-

en alien tongues. On the other hand, with Retief as a foil, he can (and does) mock and plant countless irreverent barbs in the hide of sacred but dusty diplomacy. (And if such a service as this Corps resembles already takes itself too seriously in the Twentieth Century, presenting its credentials in morning coat and striped trousers as if it were going to the altar instead of to work, you can imagine how pompous it has become by the Thirtieth Century, when the book takes place.) Among the various Corps bureaus that Retief manages to snafu are three whose initials spell MEDDLE, MUDDLE AND SCROUNGE; among the aliens he befriends are two named Whonk and F'Kau-Kau-Kau (three-syllable endings denote higher rank than two-syllable ones); among his fellow Terran bureaucrats, my two favorites are Mr. Whaffle and Counselor Nitworth.

All the stories derive their success in good measure from a light, deft treatment and a gossamer touch. While this undoubtedly wouldn't furnish sufficient nourishment for a day after day diet, it is ample for the length of these stories.

On the other side of this Ace Double Book is a Robert Moore Williams novel, *Flight From Yesterday*. It features, among other things, a character named Blue Toga.

The Counterfeit Man. By Alan E. Nourse. 185 pp. David McKay Co., Inc. \$3.50.

This collection of eleven stories by Alan Nourse is a representative one. It presents, story by story, a sampling of his strong points, those characteristics which make him such a valuable and often underestimated contributor to the science fiction world. It also shows, regrettably, the few flaws that have periodically cropped up in his work, and which have held it below that of the top names in the field. These weaknesses are by no means present in all the stories, and the ones that are good really take wing. But it is precisely because Nourse can be so good that one regrets his lapses so greatly.

Two of Nourse's weaknesses are a lack of convincing characterization and a penchant for slightly shopworn plots. His peo-

ple are often shadow figures moving in a framework that is all too familiar. Consequently, two of his most successful stories are sharp satires where there is no need for the kind of emotional pull best achieved through depth of character or breadth of idea. In these two, "An Ounce of Cure" and "Meeting of the Board," he adopts just the right mocking tone. The former digs at the medical profession and the latter takes pot shots at union-management relations.

On the other hand, Nourse has two very excellent features. Once you accept his plots (and block out of your mind the other illustrious tales you have read on the same idea), he can move the action straight on to the appointed end without a stop. Considering how feebly they start out, this is a tremendous achievement. His stories are extremely fast-paced and often suspenseful. In addition, he is very strong on his endings, often gracing them with an enigmatic touch that will leave the reader in a thoughtful mood. This characteristic goes a long way toward balancing the scales—not too many writers can disturb their audience so consistently without resorting to shock tactics. One among the many examples of this in the current collection is "The Dark Door." In it, Dr. George Webber, a psychiatrist, has been investigating

the rising insanity rate, trying to find the cause. But now as he gets close to an answer, his researcher becomes insane, also. Or is he? Who is the bogeyman here? Nourse tangles us in his web, and then leaves us so quietly that only after the story is over do we realize that he has left us with no real indication of what he wants us to believe.

The two places where the author comes closest to combining a real emotional power with his own brand of suspense are in two stories dealing with unusual children—unusual in the sense of possessing para-normal powers. Though this is territory that has long been associated with Theodore Sturgeon, Nourse does it very well here. In fact, in one of them, "Second Sight," he achieves something close to poignance as he puts forward his theories as to what defects might accompany telepathy and why.

The Impossibles. By Mark Phillips. 157 pp. Pyramid Books. Paper: 40¢.

This team of Laurence Janifer and Randall Garrett, which was responsible for the recent wacky tale, *Brain Twister*, has another adventure story out, called *The Impossibles*. The elements which made their first effort so amusing all seem to be present, but the indefinable X factor is missing. Like overwhipped egg whites, the

result is thin and watery instead of puffy and buoyant. What is the reason for the failure? I am not completely sure, but I could hazard a very good guess.

The Impossibles has carried over from *Brain Twister* several of its important characters, most notably, the hero, Kenneth Malone of the FBI, and Miss Rose Thompson (who thinks she is Queen Elizabeth Tudor), the psychopathic telepath of Yucca Flats. The gimmick that was used to solve everything in the first novel was an appeal to Miss Thompson's mental powers. Unfortunately for this novel, Garrett and Janifer have chosen the same way out to solve their wave of robberies and disappearing criminals. It is perfectly all right to have a series of books utilizing the same basic characters (I'm sure every reader can easily name half a dozen notable ones), but if this is done, the situations they face in each should be of very different natures, and the methods of solving them ditto. If not, the character carry-over will become not just familiar but monotonous.

Malone himself is engaging enough to grace several other books, but the use of a telepath to aid him, and telepathic or teleporting or psionic-ability criminals to catch, makes for anticlimatic reading. Maybe this is a realistic glimpse of the crime

and crime detecton of the future, but surely even telepathic crimes are capable of greater range and variety. If they're not, they'll certainly never replace "Ye Goode Olde Detective" with his tried but true fingerprint powder.

We are told that the authors wrote this particular book in six days. Considering how little there is in it, I'd consider that far too long.

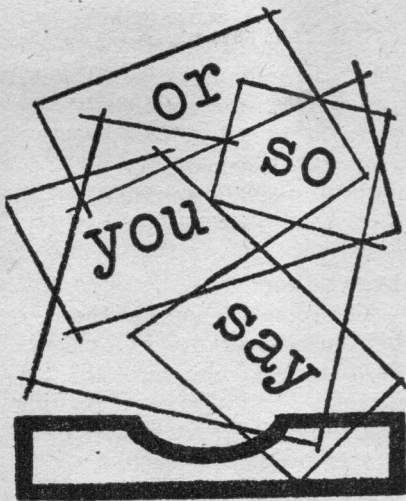
Slave Planet. By Laurence M. Janifer. 142 pp. Pyramid Books. Paper: 40¢.

A more solid contribution comes from Mr. Janifer's recent solo effort, *Slave Planet*. The novel takes place on Fruyling's World, a planet rich in the metals needed to keep the Confederation running. So far so good, but Fruyling's planet has a native population, and these Alberts, as they are called, have been made slaves in order to mine the raw metal. Once on Fruyling's World, men have to stay there, and in this fashion the secret of how the metal is obtained has been kept for three generations. When the book opens, the truth seems to have leaked out, however, and the forces of the Confederation are preparing to fight against their own fellow men in order to free the Alberts from their bondage and to re-educate them to take their places as responsible

beings. Thus far, the situation is clear cut; the villains, victims and saviors seem easily identified and ready for their pat labels. But then author Janifer starts to shift the ground around under the reader's premature assumptions until, in the fascinating but illusory atmosphere he maintains, each side puts on different masks. Subtly, he changes focus from chapter to chapter until it seems as if the saviors are really destroyers, the villains really protectors, and the victims unwilling free men. And all the time, from each angle, in the most penetrating light, the institution of slavery is being scrutinized. Yet the author accomplishes his probing mission with the greatest economy of means.

Participating in this strange circle dance under the author's skilled hand are six major characters, three humans and three Alberts. It is still another credit to Mr. Janifer that they are convincing as individuals on their own, apart from the larger symbols with which the author identifies them. Strangely enough, the Alberts come to life even more than the humans, but perhaps this is by intention also, to show the erosion of "humanity" that must occur after three generations as slavers.

This comes as one of Pyramid's most deserving SF publications.



Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading the July & August issues of **AMAZING**. They are, without doubt, your best issues in a long, long time.

I had thought all your wild claims about "Redemption" to be a lot of exaggerated over-estimates. After all, "new classics" and "stories you will never forget" don't come along too often. And when they do, I don't expect to find them in **AMAZING**. But this time you were right; it was every bit as good as you claimed, if not better. It was a really moving story, with deep emotion, and warm, meaningful characters. I would not even be surprised to see it take a Hugo some day. Congratulations on an excellent story!

"The Reign of the Telepuppets" was also excellent, but in an entirely different way. This was a well-conceived, solid SF story. It's what I've learned to expect from a craftsman like Galouye, who has never yet disappointed me, even with my high expectations. If you can get Galouye to become one of your regulars, like Bunch or Zelazny, you will really have something worth while.

"The Programmed People" was a fairly good yarn, but it was certainly nothing exceptional. It wasn't very original, but it was a solid SF story, with good handling. This is the first long story by Sharkey that I have seen, and to me it was the best to date. Often his shorter work leaves much to be desired.

"The Yes Men of Venus" was a big disappointment to me. It is typical of the un-funny lampoon I would expect from a lower class fanzine, not from a supposedly higher class prozine of your status. I thought you avoided such junk.

The Moskowitz profile was masterful, as usual. But I would much rather see profiles of younger, more active writers. I do not know who has been profiled in the past (my first **AMAZING** was the Dec. 62 issue), but since then you have had profiles on people who are resting on their laurels and not producing.

(Clarke could be an exception here.) But then, this is a minor gripe, because whoever Moskowitz chooses, the article is always interesting. As a favor to your newer readers, you might publish a list of the past profiles with the dates of the issues they appeared in.

And lastly, a question: Which one of you, Lobsenz or Goldsmith, runs the letter column? You run letters addressed to both. Please answer that in your column. It is just an idle curiosity on my part, but, darn it all!, I'm still curious.

Richard Mann
131 Belt Road
APO 845
New York, N. Y.

● *CG and NL do everything together. Well, almost everything.*

Dear Editor:

The "Winds of If" was a great story. Great in the true sense of the word, that is, a classic. It is far and away the best story Chandler has done, and it's the best story to appear in AMAZING since "A Trace of Memory."

Every aspect of the novel was superlative. All the characters impressed me as being people, not mere props. The plot was, as far as I know, extremely novel. The style was fast paced and vivid. Even the story's backdrop, the Rim Worlds was beautifully worked out.

There's no sense asking you to "print more like it", because there is nothing else like it. Thank you for publishing *the* story of 1963.

Arnold Katz
98 Patton Blvd.
New Hyde Park, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

The complete novel in the September issue was very welcome. Well-written, but most of all, complete! I'm not arguing against serials, but feel that one a year would be enough; with more novels-complete-in-one-issue, and fewer short stories. On this idea, how about some work by Marion Z. Bradley—or—if possible, one by Ed Hamilton??

Something you haven't had for too long a time and would also be well received is a round-robin novelet written by good authors.

Your artwork is steadily going downhill. There seems to be fewer illustrations all the time of poorer quality, and covers that are only fair at best. The reason? *Too Much Birmingham!* Get rid of him before it's too late. Why not let Stan Mott do some cover work? Also Finlay, Emsh, and Adragna, Duillo, and Conlan??? Interiors too. The cover for October doesn't look like one by Birmingham, but is just as bad, and probably worse.

I'll close on a note of thanks for getting an unpublished Bur-

roughs story, namely "Savage Pellucidar." That's a real treat.

Paul Brague
Box 12,
Eldred, N. Y.

● *We have a new Hamilton short story coming in the December FANTASTIC. And another complete novel due in an early AMAZING.*

Dear Cele:

Just a note to inform you of a troublesome typing error on page 37 of the "Neutrino Astronomy" article released in the September 1963 AMAZING.

The equation $n \rightarrow p + e^- + \bar{\nu}$ should be $n \rightarrow p + e^- + \bar{\nu}$, since it is an antineutrino that is produced and not a neutrino proper. I am afraid this little error will be confusing to your readers. It certainly is embarrassing to me.

Ben Bova

Dear Editor:

S. E. Cotts has expressed disagreement with title changes on paper bound books. Take notice of a triple title novel by Isaac Asimov: GALAXY first printed this novel in 1951 under the title of *Tyrann*. The regular hard back edition carried the title *The Stars, Like Dust*. Then Ace Books reprinted the book under the title of *The Rebellious Stars*.

Another annoying practice of paper book publishers is to use

the same cover picture on two or more different books. Case in point is the cover used for *Pebble in the Sky* (Galaxy edition) which turns up six years later on Berkley's first printing of *Away and Beyond*. The only change was the removal of the man on the lower right hand portion of Asimov's novel and putting in its place on the Berkley book modern art scribbling.

The most annoying idea that editors of paper books seem to enjoy working at is to reprint top novels of twenty or more years ago, but have the author of the book revise his story. Two good examples are *The Skylark of Space* and *Dreadful Sanctuary*, both revised by the authors for today's readers. How can today's readers judge any story written several years ago when the story has been rewritten for today? The ideas of yesterday helped shape the story ideas of today, yet many readers are disheartened to pick up one of the great stories of yesterday only to find that the story has been updated. I feel that this practice should stop now. How do other readers feel about this?

Mike Lamont
801 Kentucky SE
Albuquerque, N.M.

● *Maybe some enterprising fan group ought to keep tabs on all this . . . so we can all tell the SF stories with their score card.*

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Dear Editor:

Robert F. Young's "Redemption" was one of the best stories that this magazine has printed in a long time. It was good even on the re-reading. In fact, the story *improved* on the re-reading as you noticed that a dozen loose ends were tied together—loose ends that were barely noticed the first time. Details that one thought to be mere color, turned out to be essential parts of the story.

Perhaps a definition of a really good story can be *one that improves on re-reading*. By this definition or any other you have printed a good story. The other stories in the issue seemed poor to me, but I already had gotten my money's worth.

Michael N. Tierstein
1577 East 37th Street
Brooklyn 34, New York

Dear Editor:

As a whole, the comments of one S. E. Cotts have irritated me a great deal.

For instance, his style. Mr. Cotts seems to be afraid to give any favorable comments on a book: they are always preceded and/or followed by a lot of lesser criticisms on the story which seem to be a sort of revenge for giving a good comment in the first place, as Larry Shellum has noted.

Cotts also seems to have a dif-

ferent taste in science fiction than most other S-F fans. For instance he did not like *The Beast* by A. E. van Vogt. There are several factors which seem to indicate others liked it: (1) It first appeared in *ANALOG*. May I remind Mr. Cotts that this worthy magazine has won five Hugos? (2) Therefore it is a reprint, meaning that somebody liked the individual stories enough to put them into a novel. (3) The general plot of *The Beast* is somewhat similar to many of van Vogt's other novels—*Slan*—*The World of A*—*The Weapon Makers* series—*The Mixed Men*—all fabulous successes. (4) The editors of Doubleday may naturally be prejudiced, but it was selected for the Science Fiction Book Club.

For a good review department, you must have a critic whose views usually are the same as most S-F fans. I disagree with Cotts about four times out of five, the most violent disagreement this year being with his review of *Analog I*.

I don't hold any sort of a grudge against Cotts, it's just that his tastes differ from mine, and, I believe, many others.

John R. Krutch
1604 Auburn Ave.
Orlando, Fla.

● *Disagree. A good reviewer has a mind of his own. If his taste always agreed with fans', why would anyone bother to read him?*

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At the 21st World Science Fiction Convention held in Washington D.C., August 30 to September 2, the 1963 Hugo Awards (given for material published in 1962) were presented to the following:

Best Novel: *The Man in the High Castle*, by Philip K. Dick

Best Short Fiction: *The Dragon Masters*, by Jack Vance

Best Professional Artist: Roy Krenkel

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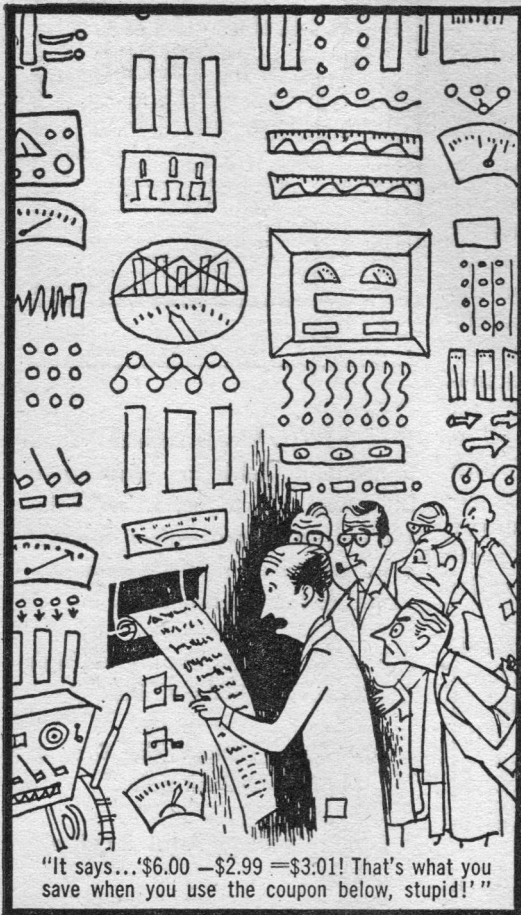
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MISCELLANEOUS

CANNON Fuse, 3/32" Dia. Water proof, burns under water: 10 FT. \$1.00, 25 FT. \$2.00 PPD; William Zeller, 18-H, Hudson, Mich.

MICROSCOPES, American made prepared slides, biological supplies. Write for catalog, 25¢, includes Free human anatomy slide. New York Microscope, 135A William St., New York 38, N.Y.

STRANGE Unique Items Catalog 10¢. Black Magic Shop, Dept. E. Box 5664, Minneapolis, Minn. 55417.

TRANSISTORIZED Products Importers catalog, \$1.00. Intercontinental, CPO 1717, Tokyo, Japan.

MOVIES

MEDICAL film—Adults only. "Childbirth", one reel 8mm, \$7.50; 16 mm, \$14.95. International T, Greenvale, L.I., New York.

PATENTS

INVENTIONS; Ideas developed for Cash Royalty sales. Raymond Lee, 2104G Bush Building, New York City 36.

PERSONALS

INDEPENDENT Thinkers—investigate Humanism, the scientific personal philosophy! Free literature. American Humanist Association, Dept. B2, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

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