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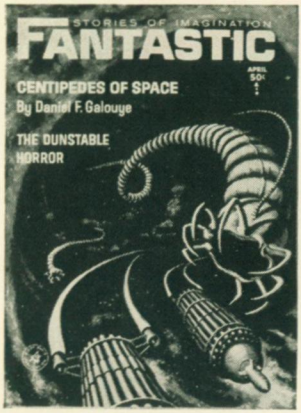

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STARLING discoveries made recently by Japanese zoologists have, we think, not received their full credit. For what they found strikes us as loaded with implications both evolutionary and sociological.

To begin at the beginning, the Japanese studied the social behavior of a score of bands of monkeys, each including from 30 to 200 individuals. Because the monkeys—macaques—normally live in dense forests, the zoologists enticed them to open beach areas by placing food there. One monkey baby picked up a sweet potato and—accidentally?—washed it in the water. Its mother, watching, then did the same. Soon the entire band of monkeys was washing its food.

The scientists, led by Dr. Denzaburo Miyadi of Kyoto University, then mixed sand with grain and left the mixture in a wooden tray upon the beach. The monkeys soon began to carry the trays into the water and to wash out the sand. Of itself, this may not be so earth-shaking. But what really shook *us* up was the casual reference to the fact that—in order to carry the food tray into the water to wash the grain—the monkeys, which scamper about on all fours *—learned to walk on their two hind legs.* What this does to the evolutionary theories of man's gradual ascent to a vertical position, deponent sayeth not. But it should certainly give pause for thought.

On the sociological side, Dr. Miyadi noted that when a certain family of monkeys within a given band made a number of progressive innovations, the children of this family gained special respect from all other children. In other words, reflected prestige from the status situation of the parents.

Not uninterestingly, another study of monkey behavior across the world, in Puerto Rico, conducted by Dr. Carl Koford of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, found also that the status and prestige of monkey parents

(*Continued on page 127*)

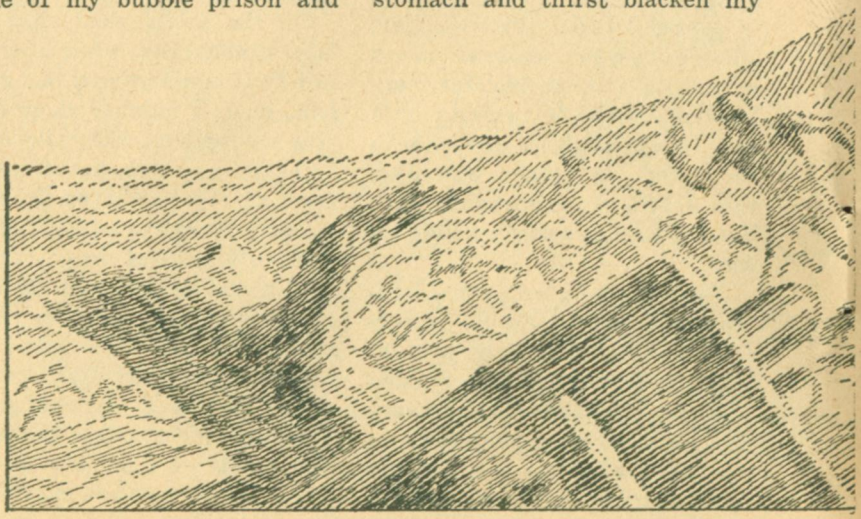
PRISONER IN ORBIT

By HENRY SLESAR

Illustrated by FINLAY

When the Maks learned that you could kill a human by turning him off, they had to think of a new punishment. For they were programmed against killing. But they weren't programmed against the Bubble. And that was, unfortunately, much worse than dying.

THE universe was spinning around me, but I was too far gone to tell Ursa Major from Minor. I had stopped counting orbits long ago, content merely to lie against the transparent dome of my bubble prison and drift with the cosmos. My food and water tubes floated about my head like friendly, mocking snakes. Some while back I had decided to refuse their blandishments, to let hunger shrivel my stomach and thirst blacken my




Virgil
Finlay

tongue, to cheat my jailers by dying in their death-proof cell. But the snakes had floated and coiled and jeered at my noble intentions, knowing that sooner or later I would surrender, that I would clutch them fiercely in a loving embrace and lock my lips over theirs and eagerly give suck to the life-giving nourishment they offered. I would eat and drink until I was sated and sick with self-disgust, and fall back panting against my prison wall and sleep like a miserable, unloved infant.

I could not die. *They* couldn't let me. It was against the code of my jailers, a law more inflexible than any written for humanity since the days of Moses.

But of course, my jailers were not human.

* * *

I was taken prisoner in early August, along with the remnants of D Company, Rocket Battalion, and the Maks, with characteristic efficiency, integrated our forlorn and splintered unit into a larger body of prisoners heading north to the spacefield in what might have been eastern New England. This war has been hell on geographers, this mountain-leveling, river-drying, ash-strewing war, and throughout the long Final Campaign I was never once sure of my battleground.

There were eighteen of us assigned to the transport D-85, including the two Mak guards, and for a while, a rumor persisted that we were heading for the Moon Base itself. It wasn't true, of course; our destination was the uncharted asteroid they called Prison One. But the rumor excited us, for it would have been the first time any of us had come face to face with the enemy. Since our outfit had been organized, we had fought nothing but Maks, and never even *seen* a Rebel. Sometimes, it was hard to believe that they existed at all, but the War Department bulletins still talked about "Rebel ships" and "Rebel losses," so we just had to take their word for it.

But it had been a long time since D Company had heard official word about anything. For a month we had been pinned down to the dry bed of the Mississippi while the Mak artillery systematically annihilated our supply lines. We had clung to the faint hope that Morgan's Sixth Army was on the way to relieve us, but the hope proved futile. We were secretly glad when the Maks finally overcame our puny resistance and took us prisoner. We didn't know what life would be like, in a prison camp run by robots, but we knew it was better than dying of thirst and hunger in the mud.

For some of us, the flight to

the asteroid afforded us our first close-up view of a Mak. The pair assigned to our ship were almost identical twins, the only distinguishing differences being the slight imperfections of their false skin. One of the wags in our company, Clybourne, named the pair Laurel and Hardy, after the venerable comedians of the last century. Somehow, Clybourne's humor failed to lift our spirits; the sight of the Maks, grim, imperturbable, and eerily human, gave us a chill of fear that was almost supernatural.

I looked across the ship's aisle and found the pale face of Galwest, the young private who had joined our company only a week before our capture. I recalled the night we had met; Galwest had drawn guard duty, and I still remember how he looked towards the white flashes of the Mak artillery as if every fusillade was meant for him. Something about his lost, frightened expression made me forget my hard-earned reputation for taciturnity.

"Don't let it worry you," I said casually. "They're well out of range, Private, nothing to be afraid of."

"But I am afraid, Major," he said, looking at me with candid gray eyes. "I can't help it. I'm afraid of *them*."

"The Maks?" I grinned, and dug into my pocket trying to find shreds of pipe tobacco. "I'll bet you've never even *seen* one."

"Only on the newscasts. There's something—horrible about them —"

"It's all in how you look at it," I said cheerfully. "You think a refrigerator is horrible? A washing machine? Because that's all they are, you know, just machines. That's where the name comes from. Machine."

"They're more than that," the boy said. "You know they're more than that, Major. They kill, they torture, they eat human flesh—"

"Cut it out!" I said sharply. "That's a lot of civilian hogwash, that torture and cannibal stuff. The Maks are inhuman, but not that way. They were designed by the Rebels to do a job, and that's all they're doing. They're nothing but mechanical weapons, like tanks or artillery or rockets—"

"But they *think*, Major, they figure things out. I hear they're smarter than we are—"

"Then how come the Rebels had to retreat to the Moon Base? We're beating them, kid, we're beating them good. That's why the Maks are taking prisoners now; the Rebels are adhering to the old Geneva Convention rules. Paving the way for leniency in case they get licked. And they will be. The way I've got it figured, the war will be over around Christmas."

IT seemed like an optimistic prediction to me, but I'd seen three years of fighting. To young Galwest, Christmas was an eternity away. Beyond the east bank of the Mississippi, the Mak guns pounded on endlessly, tireless as the Maks themselves.

The Maks.

I tried to remember when I had first seen one. Somehow, the effort of recollection brought Ellie to mind.

Then I remembered. I had been with Ellie the night the Army transport *Hornet* had been blown up during blast-off from Tycho Brahe. We heard the news bulletin, and hardly paused the length of a kiss to let the fact sink in. The charges of sabotage against the Independence Party of Indasia came later, and the subsequent confession by Pakura, the mad fanatic, was branded by the Party as a frame-up, an excuse to outlaw the Independents once and for all. Tempers flared, and for the first time in two hundred years, since the world had finally united under one Flag and one system of Law, there was talk of war.

Nobody was really alarmed. The odds against the Indasians were staggering. Their industrial resources were great, and their country was famous for its scientific advances; but what was all that against the weight of the world?

We never thought of the Maks. Here and there, in publications as diverse as the Scholar's Review and the Sunday Sensation, articles appeared concerning the Indasian genius in robotics. Indasian robots, for both commercial and domestic work, were in constant demand around the globe. The articles speculated about Indasian robots designed for war, but both authors rejected the idea as inconceivable.

Until the Maks.

They were more android than robot, of course, synthetic creatures endowed with the ability to think, to reason, to act independently within the range of their programming.

There were foot-soldier Maks, simple mechanical brutes impervious to cold, hunger, fatigue, despair, and homesickness. I have seen headless Maks charging our lines blindly, armless Maks unable to hold weapons lumbering along obedient to their programmed destiny.

There were officer Maks, reasoning creatures with minds trained in the arts of battle, commanding their battalions with cold logic that made no allowances for human weaknesses.

There were Maks for every purpose. There were engineer Maks, carpenter Maks, demolition Maks, even "surgeon" Maks programmed to repair the damages to their mechanisms.

This was the "army" that Indasia was readying against the world government. But the world failed to understand the threat, until the famous "spy" Maks infiltrated the Moon Base bringing it under Indasian control.

The war began on April 1, 2182, an April Fool joke on the human race. A robot army burst from every border of Indasia and ravaged neighboring countries on three sides. More than a million hostages were taken, and their lives held forfeit if a single atomic bomb was dropped on the homeland. Blackmailed to a standstill, the world held its breath. By the time we realized that no appeasement was possible, the Mak forces were already launched on what seemed like an inexorable march to the conquest of the world. The Indasian broadcasts from the Moon boasted of imminent victory, but the war dragged on for four long years.

But now it was over, for me.

I was a prisoner of the Maks.

LAUREL said: "Seat belts, please." Hardy shifted the rifle in his hand. We obeyed the order, and in another ten minutes we made landfall on the prison asteroid, just outside the enormous plastic dome that contained its atmosphere, its barracks, its strange mixture of human captives and inhuman captors.

Once inside the dome, we saw other contingents of prisoners being marched along by the robot guards. The air was filled with sounds: the shouted orders of the Mak officers, the sound of hammering and blasting as prison construction work went on unceasingly to accommodate the swelling ranks of prisoners. There were to be fourteen hundred of us in that grim pile, a statistic I was to learn in my peculiar capacity as Prisoner Psychologist. Of this honorable appointment, more later.

The camp, despite its confusion, looked like a model of military penal institutions, with twenty-six neatly spaced barracks, a processing section, a mess hall, and administration buildings. There was a great complex of structures that housed the oxygen-producing machinery, the hydroponic food factory, machine shops, spaceship hangars. An intricate system of scanners covered every foot, sending information back to the computer intelligence called SCAMP. SCAMP (Scanning, Control, and Movement of Prisoners) had put an end to prison breaks two generations ago. It was discouraging to know that the Maks had it, too, but not surprising. SCAMP was a machine, and the Maks were machines. They understood each other.

"Machines!" Clybourne said contemptuously as we marched across the compound. "Lousy bunch of bolts! Maybe they can fight, but they can't out-think us, can they, Major?"

"Maybe not," I said. "But we're the prisoners, Cly."

"Yeah, but not for long. Not me, anyway." He gave the Mak guard a crooked grin. "Hey, junkpile, what about it? You think you can hold us here?"

"Right turn," the guard commanded.

We headed into the processing area, and filed into a low-roofed building that had ramps like a sheep pen. We shuffled along, obedient to the instructions of a speaker over our heads:

"Prisoners will file by Counter A, take one PST and strap it about his wrist. Repeat. Prisoners will take one PST from Counter A and strap about wrist. Prisoners failing to wear their PST at all times will be turned off."

"Turned off!" It was Galwest's voice behind me. "Do they mean *killed*, Major?"

"I guess that's what they mean. So you wear that thing, Private." A PST, of course, was nothing more than a Personal Speaker, Transistorized, by which the prison authorities could deliver commands individually or collectively to their charges. I strapped one on my wrist, and heard my next instruction from the tiny grille.

"Prisoners will remove clothing and place in disposal bin. Prisoners will then pass through disinfection room and receive clothing ration. Any prisoner causing unnecessary delay will be turned off."

THAT was plain enough, so I followed the crowd. It was a pleasure to shuck my battle clothes, but I had worn them so long it was as painful as peeling away an old skin. The smell of the disinfection room made me gag, and I wasn't the only one. Galwest, pathetically naked, had an asthmatic attack that held things up a good five minutes, but we got through without any punitive action.

In the clothing room, I had my first disillusion about Mak efficiency. The prisoners' costume, consisting of fatigues, socks, thick leather shoes, a cap, and a field jacket, came in only one size: Wrong. Then again, maybe it only proved how human the Maks were after all: they were no different from Army quartermaster.

When we emerged from the processing area, we filed past a Mak who was handing out barrack assignments from a clipboard list. The system was simple. I was sent to Barrack G, along with Galwest, Grady, Gun-

nerson, Gruber, and every other prisoner whose name began with G. My name's Gulliver. The system, however, had a flaw that obviously never occurred to the mechanical brains of the Mak. Barrack G had accommodations for some hundred and fifty prisoners, but there were less than sixty of us whose names began with G. Barrack S, on the other hand, was overflowing with prisoners, some three hundred of them, milling about the bunks and wondering what to do. The situation was so screwball that I began to feel slightly hysterical. I was sobered when I met Corporal Zylcowski, a rocket carrier from D Company, and the pudgy little man grabbed my arm and stared at me wet-eyed and muttering in distress.

"They're putting me by myself, Major," he said. "They're stickin' me in a barrack all by myself!"

"Ease up," I said. "It's just a temporary thing, Joe, they'll straighten it out."

"But they won't!" the corporal said shrilly. "You know the Maks, Major. Once they get an idea in their heads—once they've been programmed—they won't change!"

"They'll have to. When they see what's happening—"

"I'll be all alone," Zylcowski sobbed. "Just because my name begins with Z, I won't have anybody to talk to! You've got to help me, Major, you've got to do something!"

"I'll do what I can, Joe," I said. "I'll tell them about it."

I walked away, feeling guilty, because I couldn't see any hope in telling the Maks anything. Maybe they would see how stupid their Alphabetical system was, and maybe they wouldn't, but I dreaded the idea of facing the Mak administrators.

However, that decision was made for me.

"Major Clarence Gulliver," my PST said. "Major Gulliver, report to Administration Building at once."

THERE was something solid in my chest, like a block of ice slowly melting down my legs, as I obeyed the order. I had no idea why the Maks would want me, unless they were simply rounding up high-ranking officers. I had seen General Drummond among the prisoners, and the leafs and eagles of other officers; were they being summoned, too?

When I entered the orderly room, I saw that I would be alone.

"Major Gulliver?" The Mak officer who came forward had a fine, smooth skull. Obviously, he was brand new, fresh off the assembly line. He was actually amiable of expression, and I have to admit that he induced in

me a feeling akin to friendliness.

"My name's Captain Crak," he smiled, and for a moment I thought he was going to shake my hand. "I'm adjutant to General Six, the commanding officer of Prison One. Won't you sit down, Major?"

Obviously, Crak had been programmed for Courtesy along with his smooth, human-like manner. I sat down.

"Our C.O. has asked me to discuss an assignment with you, Major Gulliver. We have a job in mind for you."

"Why me?" I said. "Nothing special about me."

"Ah, you deprecate yourself." Crak's mouth stretched. "Very human of you, Major, very. Only you see, we have processed all available records of the men interned here. We're interested in the profession in which you were engaged before the War."

"Oh, that," I said wryly. "I wasn't engaged in it very long. Before your masters—before the Indasians decided to blow up the world."

"You were a psychologist," Crak said. "Correct?"

"Yes. I was college-trained, University of Mental Sciences, then computer-instructed at the Hayward Teaching Center."

"Frankly, we believe you may be useful in helping us make a good adjustment to our responsibility. This is our first prison camp, you know, and we are anxious to conduct it along satisfactory lines."

"Don't you have any Indasian advisors?"

"No, the camp is entirely in the hands of the Android Auxiliary. Naturally, we are determined to demonstrate that we can run as good a prison camp as—anyone else." The damned pile of bolts was actually trying to be ingratiating.

"And just what do you want me to do?"

"Why, help," Crak said casually. "To understand our prisoners, to run an effective, trouble-free institution."

"If you're asking me to be some kind of spy—"

"Nothing like that. We will plant spies, of course, that's all in the Manual. But the Manual also states that a knowledge of human psychology is necessary too . . ."

The Manual. At first, I didn't understand what Crak meant, but then I realized the Manual wasn't a book, not in ordinary sense. It was the program that had been installed in the Maks to instruct them in penal-camp operation.

"From now on," Crak said, "you are designated as Prisoner Psychologist. You will make yourself available for consultation at any hour of the day or night. You will not discuss your

assignment with your fellow-prisoners. Any deviation from this instruction," he smiled, "and you will be turned off. Is this understood?"

"Understood," I said.

"The prisoner is dismissed."

I left the orderly room. I didn't return until forty-eight hours later, when Sergeant Clybourne jumped a Mak.

I DON'T know what prompted him to his crazy action. Clybourne was just a clown, and even if he had shown signs of growing bitterness towards a war that never permitted us to meet a human enemy, he had kept his cheerful if low-grade sense of humor.

But Clybourne lost his head, and jumped a Mak. He sprung from the doorway of C Barrack and wrapped his spindly arms about the robot's neck. His momentum was enough to topple the guard, and Clybourne wrestled him to the ground. I shouted and went running for them, ordering Clybourne to desist, but somebody put out a foot and sent me sprawling head-first into the dust. A ring of prisoners closed around the two combatants. A whistle piped shrilly, and the earth shook with the impact of the Mak feet that approached at double-time to break up the fight. I lay on the ground, wondering if my head had been broken in the fall, and had a terrible vision of a massacre.

But there wasn't any. Somehow, the Mak guards dispersed the prisoners without firing a shot. But they had Clybourne, and were taking him to the administration building. I went after them.

At the entrance, I met General Drummond, his iron-gray moustache looking skimpy and his tailored uniform shabby; he had awed me once, but now I went past him without so much as a salute. He grabbed my arm, and said: "Major! You get a PST order to report here?"

"No," I said hoarsely. "But they've got one of my men, General, I've got to intercede—"

"Intercede, hell! What makes you think you can reason with these beasts? You're bleeding, Major, did you know that?"

I touched my forehead, and my fingers came away sticky. "They've got a Sergeant named Clybourne," I said. "Went berserk and attacked one of them. They'll kill him, Sir, they'll turn him off—"

"Stay out of it! There's nothing you can do about it." He put two trembling fingers to his mouth. "They're invincible, you know," he whispered. "They don't have any compassion, these Maks, they eat people alive—"

"General Drummond!" I looked at him incredulously, and

saw the unfocused intensity of his eyes.

"They can't cry, Major," he said. "They don't have any tear ducts. Imagine not being able to cry!"

He put his thin, cold fingers on my wrist. I wrenched my hand away, and went into the Administration building.

CRAK came forward, practically beaming at the sight of me.

"Ah, Major Gulliver," he said. "We were about to issue a summons to you. See how soon we require your services?"

"You've got one of my men, Captain—"

"Just so. A Sergeant named Clybourne, very recalcitrant and uncooperative." He clucked. "A pity, really; the camp in operation less than a month, and we are already forced to turn off a prisoner."

"You can't do that," I said. "You've got to give him another chance, Captain, you can't kill him—"

"Kill him?" Crak seemed genuinely surprised. "But who said we wished to kill him?"

"You've been threatening us with death from the minute we arrived. Turned off, you call it—"

"You mean you *die* if you're turned off?"

Now it was my turn to blink. My mind struggled with the differences in our semantics, and then I realized what Crak meant. The Maks could be "turned off," of course, their mechanisms suspended during various repair or maintenance operations. They didn't "die" when they were turned off, they were merely temporarily out of commission. They seemed to expect the same thing of humans.

"How would you—turn us off?" I said, feeling a sense of revulsion. "Without killing us?"

"But we *can't* kill you," Crak said. "That's impossible, Major, absolutely unthinkable. Killing a human, except in a purely defensive action, is strictly forbidden by the Manual."

"You can't kill us? You're proscribed against it?" I felt a surge of joy.

"Never!" Crak said, and I thought I saw him shiver delicately. "But still, we must punish uncooperative prisoners. That is our order." His face creased with bewilderment. "But how do we turn you off? You must tell us, Major."

"There is no way," I said firmly. "If you want to punish us, do what is done in human prisons. Put us in solitary confinement for a term, deny us the company of our fellow-prisoners. Believe me, that's torment enough for us, Captain."

"Is it really?"

"Yes. If you don't believe me,

ask the Corporal in Z Barrack; he's going out of his mind, all alone in that place."

The robot captain considered my words.

"What you say seems logical, Major. I will put the question to our commanding officer, General Six. You are dismissed, Major."

I went back to barracks, and Private Galwest was so happy to see me he almost blubbered. I told him what had happened to Clybourne, and assured him and the others that the Maks had no intention of killing human prisoners, that it was an inviolate rule to protect human life. To Galwest, it seemed too good to be true.

"It's true," I said gruffly. "I should have realized that the Indasians would have programmed these Maks that way. They wouldn't bother to have a prison camp if they meant to kill us; they're sticking to Geneva rules, all right."

"But what will they do to punish us? What will happen to Clybourne, for instance?"

"I don't know yet; they're taking it up with the prison commander. I told them about solitary; that seemed like the easiest form of penalty." I grinned. "For those guys in S Barracks, it'll be a vacation."

I was wrong.

Crak sold the "solitary confinement" idea to his robot C.O., but it wasn't the solitary I had in mind.

THE first time I saw a Bubble, I was one of a committee. General Drummond was there, and two Technicians First Grade, and a Colonel named Murdock who was a stranger to me. None of us knew the Bubble's real purpose at first sight; we were frankly puzzled as to why the Mak machine shops would be turning out orbital devices.

A Mak Major named Upp-9 had been assigned to interpret the Bubble for us, and I think I chuckled at the appropriateness of the robot's name. I did not chuckle long.

"Gentlemen," he said crisply, "you are witnessing the first experimental model of Prison One's Orbital Solitary Station for Prisoner Correction, Punishment, and Isolation. Your comments, please."

At least one of our comments was a gasp of dismay.

"You can't mean this!" I said, searching the room for even the artificially-benign face of Captain Crak. "You can't send our men into orbit, Major, that's cruelty—"

"Cruelty," General Drummond muttered. "Cruel and inhuman punishment—" He laughed briefly.

"Not cruelty," Upp said flatly. "Prisoners will be supplied with

oxygen, food, water, and waste disposal in solitary orbit for the duration of their sentence. Your comments."

"You heard my comment!" Drummond barked. "You greasy box of bolts! You swore to uphold Geneva rules—"

"Commanding officer General Six has determined that the Orbital Solitary Station in no way contradicts Convention regulations. As a matter of fact, Captain Crak of our Prisoner Relations Division informs us that the suggestion came from one of your own men." He made a slight bow in my direction, and I looked back at him murderously.

"That's a lie! I told you about isolation, but nothing like this! How long do you think a man can live in one of these things?"

"We have consulted our commander, and our information is that a human can survive twenty-eight hundred asteroidal orbits with the oxygen, food, and water supply provided."

One of the Tech Firsts whistled. "Twenty-eight hundred orbits! That's almost three months! A guy would go nuts—"

"Your commanding officer is wrong," I said grimly. "He has not allowed for the mental and emotional strain of such imprisonment, Major. Surely you can see that an experience of this kind, of that long duration—"

Upp wouldn't listen.

"There is nothing in the Manual concerning emotional or mental strain, Major. You are a psychologist. Such things are a matter of individual human response, are they not? Your comment, please."

"No!" I bellowed. "A man would be better off dead than in one of these damn things—"

"We cannot allow prisoners to die," Upp said.

"If you'll let me talk to your commanding officer—"

"An impossibility," Upp said. But I found Crak's genial face at last, and appealed to him.

"Captain Crak! You're the adjutant; if I could talk to General Six for only a few minutes—"

"Impossible," Crak said, amiable as ever. "The commander has no communication mechanism with humans; such superstructure would have been entirely superfluous."

"What?"

"General Six is a computer," Upp said impatiently. "A Mark Six computer. His policies are determined mathematically, Major, you can receive no satisfaction from that quarter."

My heart sank right to the top of my boots. Beside me, General Drummond was making odd, constricted noises in his throat. The next moment, he pitched forward. I bent over him. So did Colonel Murdock and the two Techs.

"He's dead," one of the Techs said, looking into my eyes, his own strangely accusing. "Heart seizure . . ."

I glared at the impassive Mak faces and blurted out something about their responsibility for Drummond's end. They took it blankly, their robot logic telling them that this was nonsense.

Two Mak soldiers carted the General's body off, and Upp wasted no more time.

"Prisoner 31102, Sergeant R. Clybourne, will be launched into orbit at 0900. Colonel Murdock —"

The Colonel stiffened.

"With the death of General Drummond you accede to the position of high-ranking prisoner; you will therefore be responsible for a full turnout of the prisoner ranks to witness this event. Prisoners failing to comply with this command will be turned off."

Crak stepped forward, and whispered something in Upp's ear.

"Correction," Upp said. "Prisoners disobeying this order will be placed into solitary orbit."

CLYBOURNE went into space the next morning. When the men tired of watching that speck of Hell circling the sky they began looking at me. I didn't understand why, until Galwest, shuffling his feet, told it to me plain.

"Some say it's your fault," he said. "They say you're soft on the Maks, that's why they made you Prisoner Psychologist. They say you're the one suggested the Bubble . . ."

"The damn fools! I've tried to make them see *reason* about the Maks—make them understand they're only machines, nothing to fear or hate—" I searched his pained young face. "What do you think, Private? You think I'm *soft* on the Maks?"

"I don't know. It's just that—well, hell, Major. You just *accept* them too damn easy."

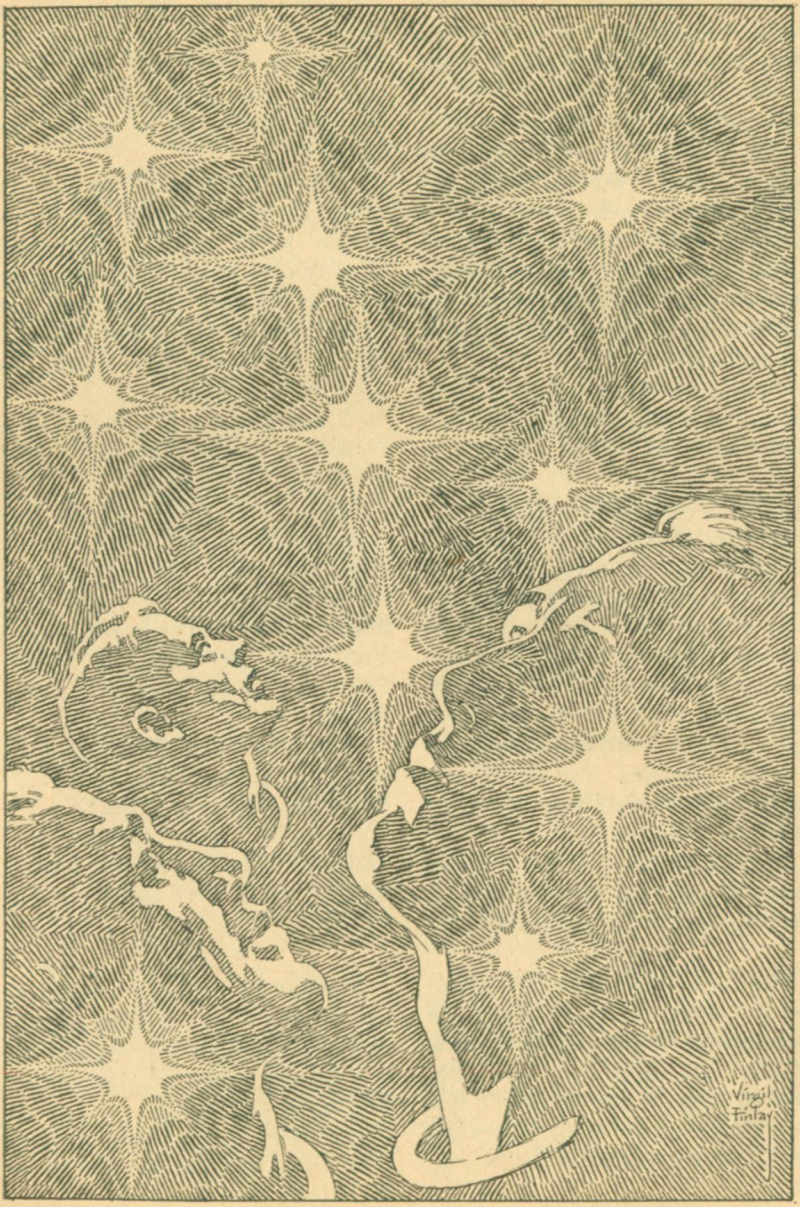
"But we've got to accept machines! We accept them all our lives, don't we? Don't you trust the mechanism of your car, your airsled, your housepower plant? You can't get sore at levers, fulcrums, gears, rheostats, transistors—"

"Who can't?" Galwest said. "I can do it, Major, I can do it easy. Why the heck can't you?"

He walked away and left me, and even if he had stayed I don't think I could have answered his question.

* * *

For eleven weeks, we watched the Bubble spin overhead. Then, weary of its monotonous journey, the Bubble returned, braked by its single retrorocket. It landed undamaged, and they brought Clybourne back under the dome of Prison One. Singing.


Virgil
Finlay

He sang at the top of his lungs until he died, some months later, in an accidental fall. He sang mad, tuneless songs, perhaps celestial melodies he had heard, or thought he heard, in the void.

Faced with the threat of such punishment, the superlogical robot commander of Prison One might well expect that infractions should decrease.

He—I mean *It*—was correct.

There were few infractions. The prisoners were too busy with another thought.

Escape.

THE only human on the asteroid who didn't seem aware of the escape talk was Colonel Murdock. Ever since his ascension to Number One position he had remained almost aloof from his men and fellow-officers; or maybe he was afraid of getting too involved with their fate, and going the way of his predecessor. He spent most of his time at Mak administration, trying to penetrate their well-programmed minds; the only human he seemed willing to talk to was myself.

"You're the only one who makes any sense on this rock," he said disgustedly. "At least you understand that the Maks are only the tools of the Indasians, that we're all wrong to direct our aggression against *them*."

I watched his youngish, clean-lined face.

"The Indasians did too good a job," I said, filling my pipe with a few precious grains of tobacco. "They made their damned robots too real. Makes them easier to hate."

"But it's all so useless! There's only one sensible course now. We've got to play it cool, keep out of trouble, just wait until the War is over. Hell, this could be a vacation for all of us, if we used our heads."

"I guess you're right," I said. "Of course, we're duty-bound to get away if we can."

"Escape?" Murdock laughed brassily. "That's pretty ridiculous, isn't it? Escape from a domed prison—on an asteroid God knows where in the universe? Even if a prisoner got past SCAMP, there's no place to go. No, Major, there's no use bothering about escape talk."

"But the men *are* bothering."

"What?"

"That's all they're talking about. Didn't you know?"

Murdock frowned. "No," he said. "I didn't know. But I'll put a stop to it. I'll issue an order—"

"You can't *order* them to stop talking."

"I'll order them!" Murdock said.

That was what he did. He lined up the men eight ranks deep in the compound the next

morning, and under the approving eyes of Captain Crak, he read them the riot act. He outlined the futility of escape talk, the hopelessness of our position, the impossibility of a return to Earth before the end of the War. Then he dismissed the men and had a separate meeting with the officers, emphasizing that it was our duty to report an escape plan to him.

"Remember," he said, "the Maks are proscribed against killing prisoners, but they're also ordered to prevent escapes. They won't have any compunction against killing if it occurs during an escape attempt."

"But Colonel," a Lieutenant named Jackson said, "aren't we actually *obliged* by the Articles of War to try and escape?"

"You're thinking of another kind of war," Murdock said snappishly. "The old rules are useless; they weren't written for asteroid prison camps run by robots."

"You really think escape is *impossible?*" Jackson's drawl was insinuating.

"Yes," Murdock said. "Impossible."

THREE weeks later, Lieutenant Stan Jackson led the "J" escape. We called it the "J" escape for obvious reasons: only the occupants of J Barracks were involved. The details of the attempt emerged later, but the essential facts were these:

One evening, an hour before lockup, Jackson noticed that a scanner beam on the north side of the compound, near the hangars where the spaceships were kept, failed to follow him as he crossed its path. Laughingly, he told his friend Nat Jacobs that perhaps it didn't notice him because he was too dark (Jackson is a Negro). Jacobs tried it, with the same result. They kept their knowledge secret, even from their bunkmates. Jacobs, a computer engineer, slipped out one night and examined the inoperative blinker. It was then he realized that he could abort the entire SCAMP system for a period of at least two hours.

Jackson organized the actual escape. The idea was simple: to get his men to the hangars and the spaceships, and get as many under their control as possible before the Maks intervened. The ships would be the "ransom" for their release; if the Maks failed to agree, they would be destroyed. It was nothing more than a desperate gamble; if I had been given a vote on the scheme, it would have been a loud "no."

It was incredible how well the first part of their plan worked. Once SCAMP was shorted, it was as if the whole thinking mechanisms of the Maks had been put out of commission, too.

They had no provision in their damned Manual for an inoperative SCAMP; it was supposed to work, period. General Six probably blew a dozen fuses that night, and the prisoners from J Barracks crashed their way into the spaceship hangars like a gang of hoodlums crashing a party.

That was when the shock came. Because there weren't any spaceships. They had been dismantled, and the hangars were empty. With the camp filled to capacity, the Maks had no further need of space transport vehicles.

Now we knew why Prison One was truly "escape-proof."

The Maks were prisoners, too.

NOT all of the escapees had to face the punishment of the Bubble. Fourteen died in the pitched battle that took place at the hangars. One committed suicide the day before he was due to be launched. Sergeant Nat Jacobs was in space less than eight hours when something happened to his oxygen intake, and he suffocated quickly. Lieutenant Jackson was one of the few men who came back from the three-month siege in space with his wits intact.

I went to see him at the prison hospital.

"Can you talk about it?" I said. "How was it out there, Lieutenant?"

"Dark," he said, with a shadowy smile. "Dark and full of nightmares, Major, I hope you never find out first-hand."

"But you made it. You're a tough guy, Lieutenant, the whole camp's proud of you."

"You got to be very still," he said softly. "You can't move around in that thing very much, every little move spins you around, changes the axis, you get disoriented every few seconds. Then you start getting ideas. That you're not alone, that something's outside the Bubble trying to get in—"

"Don't talk about it," I said anxiously.

"—but then you get the worst nightmare. That the *thing* is with you, touching you. That's when it really gets bad. I wouldn't recommend it, Major." He looked at me with pained eyes. "You tell the boys to stay out of trouble, Major, you're the only one they'll listen to."

"Sure, Stan, I'll tell them."

"Stay out of trouble, stay out of the Bubble." He giggled. "You like my poetry, Major?" Then he began to cry, and knowing that he'd rather be alone, I left the room.

But they didn't listen to me. Despite everything, the escape talk went on, in every Barrack from A to Y. (There was nobody in Z Barrack anymore; Zylcowski was dead). We tried to

staunch the flow of talk, Colonel Murdock and myself, but it went on.

ONE afternoon, a committee of three came to see me, two shavetail lieutenants named Halverson and Wilcox, and a British Captain named Blake.

Blake put things bluntly.

"We're crashing out, Major," he said. "We figure the only way to do it is *en masse*, the whole bloody camp. We need a leader, and we think you're it. That is—" He looked meaningfully at his companions. "If you've changed your mind about being *reasonable* with these beauties. Have you?"

I gaped at them, and said:

"You damn fools."

Halverson stood up and wanted to go, but Blake stopped him. "Wait. You've got something we need, Major, you've got the ear of the Maks and the respect of the men—"

"And something else," I said. "A little common sense. How the hell do you escape from an asteroid, without ships?"

"We don't plan to. Our idea is to overcome the Maks and take control of the entire prison. Once we have the facilities, we think we can build a radio transmitter powerful enough to beam a message to Earth and request aid."

"I see. And just how do you plan to—overcome the Maks?"

"We fight," Blake said simply. "We outnumber them. We attack them, take away as many weapons as we can, and try to win. That's all."

"Some of us live," Halverson said, "and some of us die. If enough of us survive, we may get off this rock."

"That's absolutely crazy," I said. "You wouldn't have a chance, not one in a thousand."

"It's what we want to do, Major. We need organization now, strategy, a working plan. We need somebody to pull the whole thing together. This is a job offer, Major."

"Did you hear what I said? The odds are one in a thousand!"

The three of them looked at each other. Then Wilcox, the youngest among them, said:

"We know that, Major. But we've decided we have to do it."

I sighed, feeling so tired I could have stretched out then and there and slept for a month.

"Why?" I said wearily. "Why can't we sit it out? The War's almost over. Why do we have to kill ourselves now?"

Wilcox looked at Blake, and the Captain said:

"I think maybe the War *is* over, Major."

"What?"

"Wilcox here is a radioman. About two months ago, we asked

the Maks for permission to build a receiving station; the Maks agreed, but only under certain conditions, the chief one being that we receive only broadcasts from the Moon and vicinity."

"We didn't get too much," Wilcox said. "A few faint signals from space traffic, and the Indasian propaganda broadcasts; they had some pretty good music sometimes—"

"But then the music stopped," Halverson said, with a rasp in his voice.

I looked at Blake.

"Everything stopped," he said. "Every bloody sound from the Moon went dead."

"Maybe your set's on the blink."

"No, sir," Wilcox said, "the set's been checked out over and over. They're just not sending out stuff from the Moon anymore."

ALL right," I said, "so they've stopped sending. Maybe they're under attack and ordered total radio silence. The way things were going when we were captured, that wouldn't be surprising."

"Maybe that's the answer," Blake said, "and maybe it's more than that. Maybe the ruddy war is over, Major, and the Maks just don't know it."

"The Maks don't maintain contact with their masters," Halverson said. "They'd never know if the Indasians surrendered. And nobody knows where this lousy asteroid is—"

I turned to young Wilcox.

"Can you make that receiving station of yours more powerful? Twice as powerful?"

Wilcox shrugged. "Sure. If I had the parts."

"Maybe I can get the parts. The Maks don't have any restriction about receiving stations, just transmitters. Maybe I can barter prisoner cooperation for radio equipment. Let me see what I can do."

They were looking at me hopefully. It wasn't much of an agreement I had gotten from them, but it was a postponement, at least.

I got the parts, all right; the Maks were so cooperative when they heard my plea that we could have built a station with five times the pull of Wilcox's first set-up.

We had it operating within the month.

There was still nothing from the Moon, not a sound, not a signal.

But we heard something else. It was a coded broadcast from Earth's orbital Space Station Seven, beamed to all military spacecraft in the vicinity. The message was faint, garbled, and at first, almost impossible to decipher. Wilcox sweated and

grunted like a pig trying to keep the beam in focus, and Halverson, a former code man, kept his ear glued to the set for almost three tortured days and nights, trying to make sense of the messages.

On the fourth day, he had it down on paper, and we looked at the result with incredulous eyes.

"That settles it," Blake said. "We have to escape, Major, or die trying. Will you help us?"

I stared at their young, determined faces, and didn't know what to say.

"Let me think it over," I said.

I THOUGHT it over. For a week I brooded about it, my mind describing endless circles, and then I decided to talk to someone I could trust. I went to Colonel Murdock, and told him the facts.

"The War's over, Colonel. It's over, and we're still prisoners of the Maks."

"Over? How do you know it's over?"

"We've picked up radio talk from Earth. It wasn't just a surrender, it was total annihilation. The Moon base doesn't exist anymore; we're not even sure if the Moon is still there. There isn't an Indasian left alive."

Murdock kneaded his eyes with his fists.

"All right, so maybe it's true but—"

"Not *maybe*, Colonel."

"Then it's true, definitely. In due course, the Maks will disband Prison One and return the men to Earth . . ."

"Really? Who'll give them the orders, Colonel? Don't you understand? Their masters are gone. The Maks won't take such a drastic step on their own; they're programmed to run a prison camp, period. *They'll never let us go.*"

"I don't believe it."

"But the men believe it," I said. "That's more important. They intend to have a massive uprising—"

"They can't do that! It's suicidal!"

"That's what it amounts to, yes."

"We can't let that happen, Major. It's our responsibility to keep these men alive."

"Fine. Only how do we stop it?"

Murdock stood up. "That's the simplest thing of all. We tell the Maks."

"Tell the Maks? They'll round up the ringleaders—they'll have them in Bubbles before the day is out—"

"It's not too high a price," Murdock said, his smooth face like granite. I gaped at him, suddenly fascinated by that stony smoothness. It was strange how his responsibility hadn't added a line to his brow or cheeks. "I'll go now," he said, heading for the

door. "The sooner the Maks know about this ridiculous plan, the better—"

He was already outside when I shouted:

"Murdock! Stop!"

I went after him, through the doorway; the sunlight hit me hard in the eyes, and for a moment I was blinded by both light and anger.

"Murdock!" I yelled.

HIS reflexes were good; when I leaped at his back he shifted his body and let me take a solid blow from his left shoulder. A supernova exploded in my brain, but my fury was a strong antidote. I caught him around the knees and brought him into the dust; my fist aimed for what should have been soft midsection, but I wasn't surprised—no, damn it, I was gratified, when my knuckles struck steel. My screams of rage were loud enough to attract half the prisoners of the compound, and long before the Mak guards could prevent it, they had pounded that damnable make-believe Colonel into metallic and electronic debris, using rakes, picks, shovels, and bare hands.

The Maks had me facing Captain Crak within the hour, my damaged hand bandaged but hurting like hell.

"Have you broken it?" Crak asked mildly.

"Yes," I said, breathing hard but my blood singing. "And it was worth it. Worth every finger."

"How did you discover Murdock's secret? It was our belief that the Colonel was a fine human-type specimen. He was most carefully constructed for his role."

"He looked human, all right," I said. "He just didn't act human, that's all."

"A description that fits many humans, no?" Genial as always.

"Maybe so," I said. "Well, what time does the balloon go up, Captain?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I expect my Bubble is waiting for me."

Crak smiled, and stood up.

"There will be no punishment for you, Major Gulliver. In destroying our secret agent, you merely acted in the interest of your men. Incidentally, you are now high-ranking officer among the prisoners, and we're expecting you to exercise your usual good judgment in keeping the men contented."

"There's an easy way to do that, Captain. You can simply release them."

"Pardon?"

I took the folded sheet of paper from my pocket, and handed it across the robot officer's desk.

"Read it, Captain. It's a digest of several coded messages our

receiver picked up from Earth. If you don't believe what you read, we'll arrange for you to hear the broadcasts yourself."

CRAK read the words on the paper, and then glanced up at me.

"We have no such information," he said.

"But we do, Captain. The War is over. Your masters have lost. *The Moon base is gone.*"

"We have no such information," Crak said again, smiling stiffly.

"We don't know what happened exactly, whether the base was annihilated by Earth forces, or whether an accident triggered the atomic piles. But it's all over. There's not an Indasian left alive, Captain. Your masters are gone. You have to release us now, all of us."

"That is impossible. We have no orders for such an action."

"And where do you expect to get such an order?"

"Commanding officer General Six will receive any such instruction from Supreme Headquarters on the Moon, when and if it becomes necessary. Until then, Major, I suggest—"

"I want to see him! Your commander!"

"Please, Major—"

"I demand to see him, Captain! As high-ranking officer, I'm entitled to—"

"General Six has no facilities for vocal communication—"

"There are other ways to talk to a computer. That's all I want to do, Captain, just talk to him. Tell him the facts." My tone became alternately imploring and threatening. "Look, Captain, there's a thousand men out there who know that this rotten war's over and done with. They're ready to fight for their freedom this minute—even if you have to kill every single one. Is that what you want?"

Crak looked displeased, as much as his rigidly pleasant expression permitted.

"No," he said. "But it is also against the rules to allow any prisoner to have direct contact with General Six."

"Against the rules? Or the Manual?"

Crak brightened.

"That's true. There's nothing in the Manual against it."

I WAS brought into the august presence of General Six by a brace of soldier Maks, accompanied by Captain Crak. I had never seen a Mark Six computer before; on those few occasions when I had needed to employ a computer in psychological research, I had required nothing more than a Mark Two. I admit to being awed.

General Six required a housing of several thousand square feet,

and he—I mean *it*, of course—towered to a height of twelve feet The room it occupied was eerily lit by General Six's signal lights; that was its only illumination, since the Maks, requiring no light sensors for vision, didn't use artificial lighting.

Captain Crak himself took the programming chair, his fingers poised lightly over the keyboard.

"Very well, Major," he said. "You may ask your question of the commander."

I stepped forward, my heart thudding.

"Ask it—ask *him* if he has any means of contacting Indasian Supreme Headquarters."

I watched Crak's fingers fly over the silent keys.

A dozen reels spun, lights danced, and General Six chortled, whirred, and spewed out a tape in reply.

"Yes," Captain Crak translated.

"Ask him if he can make such contact now."

The second answer was longer in coming. When it did, it was:

"No."

"Ask him if he knows why this contact is not possible."

There was an even longer wait. I almost imagined that Crak and the guards were holding their breaths; but of course, Maks had no lungs.

The reply was: "Yes."

"Can you tell us the reason?"

General Six's mechanism spun, danced, gyrated, chortled, whirred, and almost screamed in the intensity of its activity. The tape it emitted finally was long.

"Yes," Captain Crak said. "Contact is no longer possible with Indasian Supreme Command because of total destruction of Moon base and annihilation of all Indasian forces, bringing an end to hostilities."

MY heart beat wildly, and I turned a triumphant expression to the Maks who surrounded me. When I saw their placid, unresponsive faces I could have screamed myself.

"Ask the commanding officer," I said, breathing heavily. "Ask him if he will issue orders for the immediate release and transportation to Earth of his prisoners."

The reply came swiftly.

"Prison One will be maintained until orders to the contrary are received directly from Supreme Headquarters, according to Section Four of the Manual."

"That's insane!" I said. "The war's over, finished! Ask him again, Captain!"

The reply:

"Prison One will be maintained until orders to the contrary are received directly from Supreme Headquarters—"

"But there *isn't* any Supreme Headquarters!"

Crak said: "Sorry, Major, but I must ask you to leave now."

The soldier Maks flanked me. I walked away from them, and I guess I was talking wildly, gesticulating like a wild man.

"Didn't you hear it?" I shouted. "Your own commander said it, Crak. The War's over! Your masters are dead! You don't have any reason to keep us here—"

"We must wait for instruction from Supreme Headquarters," Crak said cooly. "Please obey my order and leave, Major. Failure to comply will place you in jeopardy of punishment."

The soldier Maks came for me again. But I wasn't going.

"Ask him again, Crak! Make him understand. You can't keep us here for the rest of our lives—nobody will even know we're on this damned asteroid—"

"Take him," Crak said.

Somehow, I resisted the first advance of the soldiers. They were clumsy; when they lunged towards me, I snatched a rifle from one of them. I didn't try to fire it; I simply swung the butt end at the first bank of lights of General Six. With satisfaction, I heard the computer make an audible sound of shock and protest. I struck out again, shattering glass, denting the metal housing, breaking delicate circuits. I was berserk, of course, and that was my advantage, because my erratic movements baffled the slow-witted soldier Maks. I did considerable damage before they finally cornered me, and I was almost happy. Unfortunately for my reputation, by the time they dragged me out of the administration area, I was sobbing like a baby, crying for myself, for my men, even for the dead Indasians whose dreams had ended in a puff of radioactive dust . . .

* * *

AND so I drifted with the cosmos, in my dark little prison, for three long months.

And came down insane.

I must have been insane. When the Bubble landed, I saw the Maks standing about the compound like so many statues, and their human prisoners roaming about free and unfettered and strangely exhilarated. And I heard cheers. Saw faces smiling at me, laughing, cheering. And hands. They touched me, lifted me. And laughter. I couldn't believe that, most of all. Laughter on Prison One? I was insane, of course. It was the only explanation.

Then, from young Galwest, I heard the other explanation, the true one.

"It was only a week after they launched you, Major," he said. "The Maks were going nuts, trying to repair the damage you caused to their lousy commanding officer. It was something they

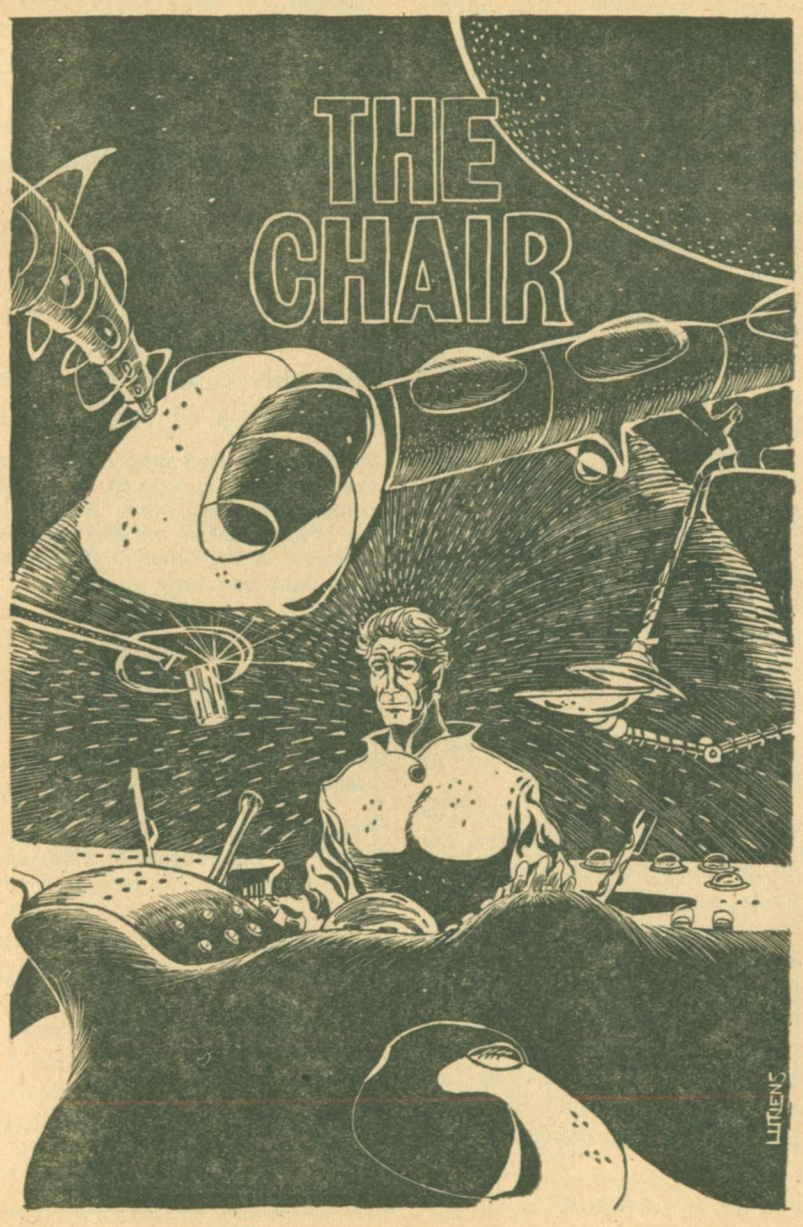
weren't prepared for, having General Six damaged, they did not know how to handle it. They didn't have the know-how; only the Indasians themselves could have fixed that computer. Finally, they got desperate enough to call in the computer engineers among the prisoners, and put them to work, threatening them with the Bubble if they refused. Well, they went to work, all right. They rigged General Six to give one order—the only one that mattered—"

"Turned off," I said. "They were told to turn themselves off . . ."

"Yes," Galwest grinned. "We turned them off, Major, we pulled the plug out. Now Wilcox is rigging up a transmitting station big enough to contact Earth. We ought to get a rescue ship out here within the month. Thanks to you, Major Gulliver—we're going home."

I went home, and I married Ellie; we had three children, and no robot servants. Not for a while, anyway. Eventually, Ellie convinced me that I was being foolish, and we purchased two domestic robots, one a superb cook and children's nurse, the other a hard-working general housekeeper. I named them Laurel and Hardy, and some day, I might even stop being afraid of them.

THE END


THE CHAIR
LUTRENS

By O. H. LESLIE

Illustrated by LUTJENS

First, man squatted on a chunk of rock. Then it grew legs, arms, a back, rockers, cushions, antimacassars, footrests, headrests, vibrators . . . Read this story at your peril: You may never sit down again!

TROXELL began walking around the office with this sickly, secretive smile on his face and succeeded in puzzling, irritating, and even angering a good ninety percent of his fellow employees. Among which I numbered myself. For no particular reason, Troxell and I shared a table at the company cafeteria, even if he was in Production and I was in Accounting, we had one of those surface friendships that clicked on and off with the office lights. When I asked him, point-blank, straight to his sickly smiling face, he merely shrugged and bent over his food tray, looking all the more beatific for having been asked.

Then one day, without prompting, he looked at me with luminous eyes and told me.

"I'm buying a Chair," he said.

My teeth embedded themselves in the sandwich I was eating. Troxell couldn't have surprised me more by announcing his candidacy for president. After all, I processed his salary check myself, I knew his financial peer group like it was my own. As a matter of fact, it was my own.

"Are you out of your mind?" I said. "How the hell can you afford a Chair? You can't get a basic model for less than twenty grand!"

"Eleanor's father died," Troxell said smugly. "The old fraud, living on that government pension all these years, socksful of money all over that filthy house of his. Eleanor said I could have anything I wanted, and I didn't have to think twice, did I?"

"No," I said, swallowing sandwich and envy. So that's why you've been walking around like a Cheshire cat."

He buttered a roll languidly. I could have killed him.

"I've got an appointment at the Chair Company at one o'clock, to see a Mr. Kerslake. Want to come along?"

"No," I said. "Why should I torture myself?"

But I went along. I was curious. I felt like a kid pressing his nose against the windowglass of a toy store.

THE showroom of the Chair Company was on Fifth Avenue. It wasn't anything special. The receptionist was a nice glossy example of the breed, and I used my privilege as a bachelor to exchange some amorous banter. Troxell just sat on the waiting room bench and fidgeted nervously.

Then Kerslake came out, a solid pink cylinder of a man, with too much color in his plump cheeks. He took us into a long, narrow room, wheeled up a slide machine, and gave us the sales pitch.

Click. Picture of ancient seated god, pre-Columbian. "From the earliest days of Man," Kerslake said, "it was clear that the posture most natural to the human frame, constitution, and articulation of the joints, was the seated position. Combining the maximum of comfort with the ability to perform a wide variety of human activities, the seated posture brought into being the most common and most useful article of domestic furniture."

Click.

"The chair. Functional, decorative, basic. From ancient Egypt to the Renaissance, it underwent a series of simple refinements which altered the basic structure very little. In fact, it can be stated that between Chippendale," Click. "and Hepplewhite," Click. "the chair has retained its main characteristics to the present day."

Click. Our Founder, old gent with beard.

"Until, of course, Andrew Franklin Fortescue patented the first Comfort-Customed Chair back in 1987, and began the organization known today as the Chair Company."

I yawned, and Mr. Kerslake frowned upon me.

"Today's Chair, of course, is a far cry from the crude Comfort-Customed model of those bygone days. Nevertheless, today's Chair still retains the basic feature which made the Chair the greatest boon to man's comfort since Prometheus brought us the gift of Fire."

Click.

"Here is the Fitting Room of the Chair Company, where each customer literally 'creates' the Chair in his own image. The apparatus you see here contains over one hundred thousand finely-coiled springs, and registers over a *million* electronic impulses in the computing mechanism. The computer records and stores this information, ready for use during the modeling process. The basic Chair is then created out of special plastics materials

in the Molding Laboratory, and accessories are added as the customer desires."

Click.

"Here is the basic model Chair, unaccessorized. Its raw configuration, of course, gives no hint of the intricate sculpturing which provides a resting place for every millimeter of flesh, muscle and bone, which provides a degree of comfort hitherto unknown to mortal man. In truth, there are insufficient adjectives to describe the comfort, created for the individual alone. There are no 'second-hand' Chairs."

A chuckle.

PERHAPS you are asking yourself, what happens to the comfort of my Chair when *I* change? When my weight or physical measurements increase or decrease? The answer is simple. Not only will the Chair compensate for minor changes in physique, but the written guarantee of the Chair Company calls for once-a-year adjustment of the Chair, free of charge."

Click.

"Accessories, of course, are available," Kerslake said casually.

"A built-in multiphonic music system." Click. "Tridimensional television." Click. "Refrigerator and drink dispenser, both hard and soft." Click. "Massager, musculatory and circulatory." Click. "Automatic Sanitized Deodorized Chem-o-Magic Plumbing Unit." Cough. "And other accessories.

"In the most advanced Chair models, by special order, the new Food-o-Mat System is available, providing a complete healthful five-meal-a-day diet. The Food-o-Mat, like all other Chair accessories, is serviced and maintained by the Chair Company on a regular basis."

"And the cost?" I murmured.

"The cost," Kerslake said, snapping his mouth shut like a tiny purse, "is high. As you know, the basic model Chair is nineteen thousand five hundred dollars F.O.B. But let me remind you that Mr. Fortescue's original model sold to the public at *forty-five* thousand dollars. Within the next five to ten years, we foresee the possibility of a selling price that will make the Chair available to every home."

Troxell was licking his under lip like a drooling dog.

"I can't wait. I want that motherlovin' comfort now. From what I hear about it—"

"You won't be disappointed," the salseman said. "No one has ever been disappointed in a Chair."

"When can I come in for a fitting?" Troxell asked.

He was breathing heavily. I felt a little embarrassed.

"When?" Troxell said.

TROXELL'S midyear vacation was scheduled for August. He sent a request to the front office to move the date up two months, to June 15. He confided in me that the date coincided with the promised delivery of his chair.

When he returned from his vacation, he didn't look so beatific any more. As a matter of fact, he looked strained around the eyes and had a peculiar stiff-legged walk. I cornered him in the cafeteria and said:

"Well, how about it? How's the Chair?"

"'Sokay," he said evasively. "How's everything with you, pal, how's the rat race?"

"The hell with that," I said. "Tell me about that Chair of yours. How's it feel to sit in the lap of twenty thousand bucks?"

He smiled wanly. "I like it," he said. "Yes, I like it fine."

I couldn't decide whether his lukewarm response was the result of disappointment or simple reticence. He just wouldn't talk about the Chair, no matter how I pumped him, and the only other reference I heard him make was vague and mysterious and maybe never even happened except in my imagination. It was early in the morning. We were walking down the lobby together, heading for our respective galley oars, when he shut his eyes and mumbled to himself. "Oh, Chair, Chair," is what it sounded like, but I couldn't be sure, not absolutely sure.

Troxell's first long absence from the job came shortly after that. He was out for a month, claiming a virus. When he came back, looking appropriately drawn and pale, he promptly had the relapse everyone warned him against. He never returned. I did not know whether he was canned, or whether he decided that Eleanor's inheritance was adequate enough to support a life of leisure; all I saw was the official notification from the front office to discontinue him on the payroll roster. Maybe Troxell and I had not been exceptionally close buddies, but there was still something sad in the process of wiping him out of the payroll machine.

IT was two months later when this wet-eyed, wobbly-mouthed woman came clawing at me in the Lackaday Saloon across the street from the office. I was plenty annoyed at first, not knowing who she was, resenting her unattractive intrusion into my after-hours social life. The Lackaday was piled up four deep at the bar, and I was progressing nicely with the blonde goddess of accounts receivable, when the woman's cracked nails raked my coat sleeve and the wobbling red line of her mouth spoke my name in a voice that grated and quavered

and demanded my attention if not my sympathy. I found a corner of comparative quiet and let her have her say.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled. "I tried to reach you earlier, they told me at the office you might be here . . ."

"What is it?" I said. "What do you want?"

"I'm Eleanor Troxell," she said.

Two fat little tears slid down unpowdered cheeks.

I bought her coffee at the diner around the block. She went to the ladies room first and came out looking more composed if not prettier.

"Harvey talked about you a lot," she said. "About what good friends you were."

So Troxell and I were good friends. It was news to me, but I didn't show any surprise.

"I don't know what to do any more," she said. "Harvey doesn't have any family, just a sister in Des Moines, and I don't know where to turn."

"Is Harvey sick, Mrs. Troxell?"

"No, not sick. Not the way you mean. It's that Chair, that damned Chair!"

Her eyes slid around guiltily, as if she was afraid of being overheard, caught in an expression of blasphemy, disloyalty, or obscenity.

"He's never out of it," she whispered at me. "He hasn't left it for weeks, Mr. Lundy. He's spent practically every cent my father left me on accessories, just so he needn't leave it for a minute—"

"You must be exaggerating," I said. "Not for a minute?" The picture that conjured up was almost amusing.

"I tell you never. He sleeps in it, eats in it. He bought that damned Chem-o-Magic Plumbing Unit." She blushed darkly. "The Chair massages him, bathes him, does everything but feed him. That comes next. They've got some kind of automatic feeding device—"

"The Food-o-Mat," I said.

"The Chair's cost us close to fifty thousand already; installation of the Food-o-Mat will be another ten thousand, plus fifteen hundred a year maintenance—" She raised her moist eyes. "But it's not just the money, Mr. Lundy. He's not a husband any more, he's not even a man! He's a vegetable—"

I didn't know what she expected of me. Advice, financial assistance? The first was easier.

"Well, I wouldn't get too upset about it, Mrs. Troxell. After all, the Chair's like a new toy, you can't blame Harv for wanting to get the most out of it. You'll see, he'll come to his senses after a while."

"He won't ever leave that chair, Mr. Lundy. It's his whole

life now. I'm sure he'd give me up first . . ."

She was pumping tears again. I watched her cry without being moved. Somehow, the recollection of Troxell's self-satisfied beatific expression prevented me from feeling sorry for his wife. But I said:

"All right, Mrs. Troxell, tell you what. Suppose I go to see Harvey this weekend and talk to him? I don't know if it'll do any good, but I can try."

She clamped her hand over mine, and her red mouth wobbled with lugubrious gratitude.

INHERITANCE or not, the Troxells lived in an assembly-line suburb and their quarter-acre lot was no greener than anybody else's. I walked up the driveway to the front door, grumbling to myself at the sacrifice of my Saturday morning, and rang the bell. Mrs. Troxell answered, in a yellow dress and pert little apron, looking sunny of disposition and smelling like a cookie jar.

"I've been baking," she said cheerily. "Harvey's in the library. He'll be so glad to see you."

I followed her inside. She bounced and wiggled like all the Happy Housewives in the world, determined to make things normal.

There weren't any books in the Troxell library. There was only Harvey Troxell, and his Chair.

I thought I had been prepared for the sight by my visit to the Chair Company, but I saw now that the difference between an accessorized and non-accessorized Chair was the difference between a rowboat and a battle-cruiser. The seat itself, a gigantic, amorphous marshmallow of pouchy black plastic, was overwhelmed by a superstructure of blocky mechanical devices studded with levers, buttons, rheostats, fuses, gears, wheels, gauges and switches. My old buddy Troxell, facing a winking instrument panel, looked like a man being eaten alive by a computer, and enjoying the experience.

"Stanley!" he said, smiling broadly but not offering his hand. (His hands, as a matter of fact, were sunk into twin cylinders of some kind, and when they emerged later, I saw that the nails had been nicely manicured.) "How've you been, pal, how's the old rat race?"

"Fine," I said feebly, "just fine. Well, you've really got yourself a Chair, haven't you, Harv?"

He glowed like a saint over an altar.

"It's a way of life," he said kiddingly, but I knew he meant it. "I thought it would just be comfortable. But it's more than that, Stanley, if you only knew."

"Fat chance," I grinned. "Your wife told me the cost of some of these gizmos."

"I don't care about money. You think I care about money now?" He said it almost pityingly. "Let me tell you, Stanley. If there's one thing a Chair does for you, it knocks some sense into your head. You get a sense of proportion, you find out what life's really all about."

"Comeon," I chuckled. "You can't exactly call that living, can you? Spending your whole life in a Chair?"

"Yes, Stanley," he said gravely, "It's the only living that's worth anything. What good does it do you, all that running around, prodded by ambition, chasing the dollars? Why do you do it, Stanley? For comfort, of course, sheer creature comfort. And that's what the Chair gives you, pal. Don't you see? It's what everybody's after, in the long run. And here it is." One hand came out of the cylinder and patted the Chair fondly. Fondly? No, lovingly.

"Okay," I said. "If that's what you want, okay. It's just not my idea of living, that's all."

"You don't know," Troxell said sadly. "You just don't know, Stanley. If I want anything, the Chair provides it. Massage, rubdown, needle shower, whirlpool bath, toenail clipping, haircut, shave. It'll give me exercises equivalent to five sets of tennis or a cross-country run. It'll scratch my back, rub my neck, shampoo my hair, or sing me to sleep. It'll read to me, teach me, and next week, when they install that Food-o-Mat, it'll even feed me . . ."

"It's treating you like an invalid, Harvey—"

TROXELL began to laugh. "Oh, that's funny, Stanley, you don't know how funny that is. That's just what Eleanor's been saying, exactly that. So just to shut her stupid mouth I had the doctor in a couple of weeks ago. And you know what he said? I'm in perfect health, Stanley, better than I've ever been. The Chair takes care of me. I'll never catch colds or other infectious diseases. I'll never lack for exercise, I'll always be properly fed. The Chair people are even working on a gadget called the CDI, Continual Diagnostic Instrument. Physical checkups every second, Stanley, how's that for watching your health, huh, how's that?"

"But what about the money, Harv? That inheritance isn't going to last forever. You don't expect your wife to work, do you, just to keep you in the Chair?"

"I don't need money," he said flatly.

"Everybody needs money, Harv. You've got to live."

"I *am* living. The Chair is taking care of me. After we pay for the Food-o-Mat there won't be

many other expenses, just a couple of thousand maintenance per year and the income on the estate will provide that easily. I don't see what Eleanor's squawking about."

I came closer. For the first time, I got a good look at Troxell, and it wasn't pleasant. Not that he looked unhealthy. His skin was tanned, his eyes clear, and there wasn't a line in his face. It was that very perfection that was so unearthly, that gave Troxell the look of death's first cousin. His eyes weren't just clear, they were empty, the light that glowed in them had no more life than the winking lights on the Chair's instrument panel. He had the slack, open mouth of the infant awaiting suck, and when his hands came out of the manicurer, they dangled from the ends of his wrists like mechanical appendages, useful only for pushing levers and pressing buttons and turning dials.

"Harvey," I said softly. "Harvey, what about your wife? You may be happy as a clam, but what about her?"

He didn't answer for a moment. Then he smiled.

"Poor Eleanor," he said. "I told her to get a Chair but she wouldn't listen. She needs one more than I do, she's a very unstable person."

"That's not what I meant, Harvey. Eleanor's a woman and you're her husband. There are things in life . . ."

He didn't seem to be listening. His hand snaked out and touched something on the control board. "Excuse me, Stanley," he said. "It's time for my . . ."

I didn't hear the rest of his sentence. By the time he concluded it, some kind of double-headed contraption came out of the back of his Chair and lowered itself onto his shoulders. It began a complicated back and forth movement, massaging neck and shoulder muscles. The look on Troxell's face was so nakedly ecstatic that I had to leave, if only in the interests of modesty.

FOUR weeks later, Eleanor Troxell committed suicide. There was some speculation that the attempt had meant to include her husband Harvey as well, since she had employed an open gas line. Troxell's Chair, however, was credited with saving his life. Upon receiving the first warning signal in its Danger Detection unit, the Chair encased Harvey in a clear plastic shell and provided oxygen until such a time as help arrived. The publicity that this episode received probably sold ten thousand more Chairs.

I wrote to Troxell, a brief note of sympathy, and he wrote back. He assured me that he was perfectly all right, that his needs

were being completely taken care of by the Chair and the Chair Company.

One day, Ralph Seligman of Public Relations had lunch with me and we got on the subject of Troxell. I said that I sure didn't think much of those damned Chairs. Seligman's eyebrows arched and he said:: "Really? You're the first guy I ever heard knock them. I thought they were supposed to be sancrosanct, like Cadillacs and Rolls-Royces and Chris Crafts?"

"If you saw what I saw," I said, "you'd think the Chair was practically a menace."

"Now that's an interesting viewpoint," Seligman said. "Why don't you write me a little article for the Blotter?"

The Blotter was the company house organ that Seligman edited. Its circulation was only about three thousand, in our five branch offices, but I was flattered anyway.

"Okay," I said. "Sure."

I wrote the article, and it was called: *"The Chair: Boon or Boondoggle?"* I have to admit that Seligman gave me the title, he had a flair for that kind of thing. It began:

When the Chair was considered to be only a rich man's plaything, there was little concern about its social or economic effects upon our society. But now that the Chair Company, by dint of its own merchandising and engineering success, has been bringing the price of the Chair within reach of broad classes of people, the question must eventually rise: "Will the Chair deprive society of energy and initiative, sacrificing some of our most talented individuals to the lap of luxury?"

FRANKLY, I thought it was pretty good stuff, and I waited rather anxiously to see it appear in the Blotter. When it did, there was a surprising reaction from the front office. It seems that several of our top executives were either Chair owners or heavy investors in the Company, and they weren't very happy about the article. Seligman got called on the carpet, but nobody bothered me. Nobody, that is, until I got a message to phone Mr. Kerslake.

At first, I didn't connect Kerslake's interest in me with the Blotter article; I thought he remembered my visit to the Company with Troxell, and was following up with a sales pitch. But when he asked me to stop into his office, I saw the house organ on his desk.

"Sit down," he said pleasantly. "How is your friend, Mr. Troxell?"

"You probably know better than I do," I said. The words came out sounding belligerent, but I didn't mean them that way.

Kerslake's pink face went a shade pinker.

"We read your article with some interest," he said. "The Chair Company is always interested in public opinion, and we especially appreciate constructive criticsm." He smiled. "However, we believe some of the points you raised in your article are the result of ignorance or misinformation."

"Okay," I said bridling a little, "maybe that's so. But it's only a little company magazine."

"Yes, of course. Still, we like to keep the facts straight, Mr. Lundy, wherever they appear. Now, these statements you make about employment, about whether Chair-owners show a willingness to earn a living or pursue a career. We have some figures here . . ."

"Look, Mr. Kerslake, I didn't say I was an expert on the subject—"

"You wrote the article, didn't you?" he said brusquely. "Do you deny that you meant what you said?"

"I wrote it," I grumbled, "but that doesn't mean I have to listen to a rebuttal, does it?"

Kerslake breathed hard. "You could at least do us the courtesy of—"

"Look, it just happens that I have a very important date this evening, so if you don't mind—"

I stood up. Kerslake jumped to his feet, too, and his cheeks were like traffic lights.

"Mr. Lundy, please—"

His eyes went cloudy. He exhaled breath as if a hand had slapped him hard on the back, and then he tried to drag the air back into his lungs. His color went from scarlet to bruise-purple, and he tottered against the desk.

"Are you all right?" I said. "Are you sick?"

If the desk hadn't broken his fall he would have slammed face-first to the carpet. I knew it was a seizure of some sort, but I did not know what to do about it. The truth was, I felt guilty, as if the anger I had incited in him was responsible for this. I bent over him, heard his forced, fitful breathing, and I shouted out for help. Nobody heard me, so I went to the door and yelled for his secretary. She wasn't there. The whole damned floor seemed deserted.

I WENT running down the corridor, flinging open office doors and finding nothing but unoccupied rooms. There were double doors at the end of the hallway, probably leading to some kind of conference room, and when I burst them open I saw where everybody had gone. There was an executive meeting in progress, and a dozen heads turned in my direction, a dozen faces register-

ing surprise and shock and another emotion I hadn't time to define.

"I'm sorry," I said quickly, "I was looking for help, for Mr. Kerslake—"

There was only one man standing in that room beside me, and when we looked at each other his dumbfounded expression must have reflected in my own face. He turned away hurriedly, but not soon enough to erase the split-second image he left in my brain, an image that had been indelibly impressed in the collective mind of my generation. I was so startled by that image that, involuntarily, I gave it a name.

"Houylins!"

The room was filled with what sounded like a single angry shout, and behind me, the double doors were slammed, bolted, and barricaded by executive sentinels. In the space of a few seconds, my outburst had transformed a quiet conference room into an explosive bedlam. In the next moment, the man who had been standing at the head of the table was gone and a substitute chairman, silver-haired, spectacled, anonymous, had taken his place.

"Young man," he said indignantly, "this is a private meeting, and you have no right—"

"That was Houylins!" I said, searching the fleshy, glowering faces that surrounded me. "For God's sake, didn't you see who it was?"

"Are you insane?" the silver-haired one said. "This is a private corporation, not a political organization. Now if you won't tell us why you're here, we'll be forced to—"

"I don't give a damn about your corporation," I said angrily. "A man's dying out there. Your Mr. Kerslake's just had a stroke or something—"

"Kerslake?"

He gave an order, and the doors were opened behind me. Half a dozen of them flooded into the hallway, carrying me with them. I showed them to Kerslake's office, and they found him just as I said, slumped over the desk and barely breathing, his skin the color of pumice and his eyes filmy with a vision of approaching eternity. They made such a fuss over him that I decided the time was ripe to take my departure. I slipped out of the office unnoticed and went down the corridor until I found the fire stairs. I walked down one flight, and caught the elevator on the floor below. It was a relief to be out on the street.

I ASKED Seligman to have a drink with me that night.

"Houylins?" he chuckled. "This isn't the only drink you've had today, Stanley."

"I know it sounds crazy," I admitted. "He's supposed to be dead, but a lot of people don't think so. They think he's alive someplace, in South America."

"But in a business meeting? For a would-be world dictator, that's a funny place to be, isn't it?"

"Maybe not," I said. "Maybe it's a good place for a guy like him. If it's him."

"How do you mean?"

"Houylins and his gang tried a takeover with atomic weapons and failed. So maybe they're trying a different approach, Ralph, with a different kind of weapon. The Chair."

Seligman laughed. "Come on, Stanley, quit the kidding. Okay, so the Chair put a few rich old guys out of commission. You think Houylins can get us all in Chairs? Conquer us all with luxury and indulgence?"

"Why not, Ralph, huh? God knows how many millions of Chairs they've sold already. God knows how many more they'll sell. And once people get in them, they don't want to leave, not for anything . . ."

"Okay, okay," Seligman grinned. "What do you want to do, write another article for the Blotter? Sorry, pal, front office wouldn't let me print it."

"I'll write an article, all right. Only it'll be for the public, Ralph, that's what I have to do. Maybe I'm wrong about this whole thing, but maybe I'm not. And if I'm not—if it's really Houylins behind this—shouldn't we start *warning* people?"

I WORKED on the article that night. I brought in the first draft the next morning, but before I had a chance to give it to Sleigman for his comments, I got a telephone call from a man named Gildhampton at the Chair Company.

"Mr. Lundy? I'm calling for George Kerslake of the Sales Department. I just wanted you to know how grateful Mr. Kerslake is for your prompt action the other day."

"How is he?" I said. "Mr. Kerslake?"

"He's going to be perfectly fine, thanks to you. I really can't express how grateful the Company feels. Mr. Kerslake isn't merely one of our best salesmen, he's also one of the best-liked men in the organization."

"Well, I'm glad I could help," I said uncomfortably. "But I really didn't do very much."

"That's not what we think, Mr. Lundy, and I just wanted you to know that our gratitude will be tangibly expressed within a day or so."

I gave the article to Seligman, but I didn't tell him about the call from Gildhampton. He looked at my scrawling handwriting and

laughed. "If you're going to be a crusading journalist, Stanley, you'll really have to learn how to type."

The next day, I received a letter from the Chair Company. It read:

Dear Mr. Lundy:

In recognition of your valuable service to the Chair Company, Mr. Richard Starkmyer, our President, has authorized the Eastern Sales Division to present you with the enclosed Unlimited Credit Certificate.

Present this certificate to any Chair Company office, and it will be immediately honored, enabling you to obtain, free of all purchasing, installation, and maintenance charges, a basic model Chair and all accessories of your choice.

It gives me great pleasure to present this token of our appreciation and regard.

Sincerely yours,
Martin Gildhampton, V.P.

Well, it was a pretty flabbergasting form of gratitude, I had to admit that. After my initial excitement had died down, I decided that it was undoubtedly some kind of bribe, and that's what I reported to Seligman.

"Why, it's practically an admission of guilt," I said. "Don't you think so, Ralph? They know I saw Houylins in that meeting, and that's why they want me to have a Chair."

"Maybe so," Seligman said, covering an amused smile with two fingers. "Tell you what I'd do, Stanley. I'd give their lousy old bribe away. And just to show you what a pal I am, I'll volunteer to take that certificate off your hands."

"Oh, don't worry," I said. "I'll take their damned Chair, all right. Only I won't be like Troxell, not me. It's not going to run *my* life for me."

"What about the article?" Seligman said. "Want me to go on correcting it?"

"Let's hold it up for a few days," I said. "Until I find out what they're up to."

I WENT for a chair-fitting the following week. It was a remarkably simple process. I just sat in the electronic lap of that machine of theirs for about fifteen minutes while its computer recorded the intimate details of my physique. Then I went to the accessory division and had a look at what was currently available. I passed up the really decadent stuff like the backscratcher and the manicure and the foot-massager and the automatic toilet and such and settled for simple common sense things like the TV and the multiphonic sound system and the drink dispenser. I was going to turn down the

Food-o-Mat, too, on a purely protest basis, not wanting any damn machine to feed me like an infant. But then they pointed out the financial savings involved; after all, the Chair company would keep the Food-o-Mat stocked free of charge, and if ever I quit my job (as a matter of fact, I did quit, about three weeks after the Chair was delivered) free meals would come in mighty handy. What the hell. After I said yes to the Food-o-Mat, it seemed pretty foolish to say no to the rest of that junk, considering that I didn't have to pay for any of it. Okay, so maybe I'd never use the damn manicure or back-scratcher or foot-massager or stuff like that, but it was free, wasn't it? Anyway, I've been in the Chair about three months now, and in my opinion, Kerslake's sales pitch was understated. I mean, I've always liked my comfort before, but I never really knew what luxury meant until I climbed into this baby. Your whole body floats in a soft sweet cradle of a cloud; every joint and socket finds a place to rest; every tiny muscle relaxes. Yes, Troxell was right, it was stupid of me to laugh at him. The Chair's a way of life, there's no doubt about it. What good was it doing me, all that running around, chasing the buck? Wasn't it only comfort I was after, just sheer creature comfort? And isn't that what I have now, every minute of every hour of every day? Yes, Troxell was right and I was wrong, and those things I said to him were spoken in ignorance and false pride. A Chair isn't just foam rubber and rheostats and levers and gears. A Chair is kindness, tenderness, thoughtfulness; a Chair is selflessness and generosity; a Chair is protection and sanctuary and yes, a Chair is something more. Troxell never told me, and Gildhampton only hinted at it, but now I know that a Chair is something more. My Chair, my Chair. My darling Chair.

THE END

the OTHER inhabitant

By EDWARD W. LUDWIG

Who was the creature who pursued him through the night? And what was Time on Alpha III?

ASTRO-LIEUTENANT Sam Harding counted: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Then he screamed. It was a wild, ringing scream, a banshee wail that knifed through the dark, dark night and the soft, silent forest of Alpha III.

With a shiver of terror he closed his lips, but the scream did not die, not at once. It dissolved into a thousand-voiced echo that bounced from the tiny planet's gold-leafed cacti to purple ravine, from pock-marked mountain to red-grassed valley, fading, at last becoming no longer audible.

Release of the scream relieved the terror within him. "Take it easy, Lieutenant," he told himself. "Remember, an astrogator of the United Earth Space Corps has been thoroughly probed and conditioned. He's mentally sound. He can't go psycho. So there's nothing following you. You're just lost in the forest, and you're tired and hungry. Don't imagine things."

A voice within his mind said, "But you heard it! Whatever it is, you felt it following you, hiding in the shadows, watching you. It *was* there."

He stood with fists clenched, fighting an invisible battle in his mind, fighting with all the strength of his will to conquer this fear, crush it, thrust it from his consciousness.

"This is a gentle, kind planetoid. You've circled the whole surface in seven days—no signs of carnivores, no indications of intelligent life. Nothing except lizards, birds, squirrel-things, moths, insects. Plenty of water, wild fruit, berries, nuts, and the point four-seven gravity makes you feel like a kid of ten instead of a grizzled old space-dog of thirty-six. Except for the moun-

tain and cactus country, this is Paradise.

"And you've seen a hundred planets and planetoids. You know your worlds. There are no fire-breathing monsters here. There might be a lizard or a squirrel that'd be more scared than you are. But nothing more. Of course not. Certainly not."

The voice within him was silent. He sighed. The fear was gone. How silly he'd been! Imagine— counting to ten in order to calm himself and then screaming like an idiot. He chuckled and proceeded to construct a bed of dry, purple leaves. He threw his gaunt body down. A moment later he was asleep.

HE awoke as light from Alpha Centauri filtered down through a ceiling of purplish branches, casting gentle warmth upon his face. A chorus of bird twitterings and chirpings drifted pleasantly down to him. He listened, smiling.

Save for the purplish reflection of the leaves, it was almost like Earth.

"This," he murmured, "may be the day. Today they'll find me— Captain Hernandez and Sergeant Long. And this is the seventh day. Seven is a lucky number."

He rubbed his thin, bony hand over his face. His body jerked. He rubbed his face again. His eyes bulged.

What a beard he had! It was so *long!* Not just a stubble, but a real beard! How could his whiskers have grown so long in seven days? What kind of a planetoid was this?

Seven. The number stuck in his mind.

Seven days.

Or was it seven weeks?

He stared at the forest ceiling for a long time, frowning, forcing memory up from dark clouds covering his brain. Finally he smiled.

"You were on a flight from Proxima Centauri, you, with Juan Hernandez as Captain and Marv Long as Engineer. You got orders to go on to Alpha VII. The Sanderson Drive grids cracked over Alpha III; you crashed. You and Juan and Marv camped for three days. Then you decided to explore. You split up. You were supposed to regroup in twenty-four hours. But you, you got lost. You've walked for seven days, you camped for three. You probably didn't shave on the trip from Proxima. That's why your beard's so long."

Reassured, he rose and breakfasted on cacti-nuts and black berries that tasted like spiced apples, washing them down with clear, cool spring water.

"Ah, that's better!"

He started to lie down when another memory slashed into his consciousness.

The Creature! The Creature that had been following him these past nights, stalking him, an invisible, nameless Presence that he'd sensed but not seen.

"It doesn't exist," he told himself. "It was your imagination."

The voice within said, "But suppose there *is* something, something alien and terrible, something no other spaceman has ever encountered. You must be ready."

He *would* be ready.

He worked swiftly, tearing arm-like cacti-limbs from their sockets and piling them in a circular wall in the tiny clearing where he slept. He built his wall high and broad, and then he sought weapons.

He spied a large, fallen branch that was like a cudgel. Excellent. The end, where it had splintered from a tree, was pointed and sharp, almost like the tip of a spear.

He gathered stones. Small stones for throwing, large stones for crushing, in case the Creature attempted to break through his wall.

Abruptly, a shadow fell upon him. He tensed, stood motionless. The shadow deepened, and a coolness was in the air. Somehow the forest had changed. There was a silence. Even the bird twitterings had ceased.

His eyes darted sharply from side to side, searching for the cause of the shadow. Nothing was near him—nothing save the silent trees, the black-hued-berry shrubs, the purplish fern foliage.

He saw that the sky was darkening. It was evening. How quickly the day had gone!

He climbed over the mass of tangled cacti-branches and squatted inside his fortress, the pile of stones on his right, the cudgel on his left.

He was ready.

A MURMUR arose in the heart of the forest as of a million elfin voices, calling, whispering, combining to form a dark, somber chant.

He thought, It's the wind. That's all. The wind.

The shadows moved. Their hungry tongues stretched outward, devouring the tiny areas of half-light that lingered midst the labyrinth of trees and ferns.

As the wind rose, as darkness fell, something stirred within the forest. It was as if deep in the brooding blackness a giant heart had begun to beat and a giant body had been awakened.

Lieutenant Harding paled. A watery weakness was in his legs. His breath came rapidly.

He wanted to run, to flee.

"You mustn't run!" his mind screamed. "You must stay here by the spring. If you run, you'll get lost again with no water. You must stay here till Captain

Hernandez finds you. You must fight the Creature."

But what was the Creature? What manner of thing could it be?

Whatever it was, it seemed to be coming closer. The wind, over there to the right, seemed more than wind. The trees swayed and rustled with an abnormal, alarming restlessness. The sudden coolness seemed more than the coolness of evening. It was a chilling, alien coolness that belonged in a dank, forgotten tomb.

As though by telepathy, a realization came to Harding.

The Creature was incredibly ancient, hellishly ugly, and wildly insane. And it was coming closer, settling down upon him like a great cloud.

He forgot his cudgel, his stones. He crashed his way out of the wall of branches, arms flailing, screaming.

He ran. . . .

HE ran through the black forest, cacti-arms tearing at his naked shoulders like sharp-nailed fingers. He stumbled across thick-grassed ravines, scrambled down rocky mountain sides, falling, tumbling, leaping erect, falling, tumbling.

Always, the Creature remained at his heels, constant as the night.

He paused to catch his breath. A soft pale light fell upon his face. The twin moons of Alpha III were pushing their bright pink bulks above the tops of the mountains.

Harding gasped.

Not more than ten feet before him lay the rocket. At last, finally, thank God, he'd found the rocket!

He began to shout. "Captain Hernandez! Sergeant Long! Captain—"

His words froze.

No, *this* was not the rocket. This was a hollow, pitted, rusted shell of a rocket. It was a metallic skeleton, its flesh and gut scraped clean and replaced with bowels of grass and skin of rust. The air of the planetoid couldn't have oxidized rocket steel in only seven days.

Or was it *seventy* days? Or—

No, this was not his rocket. His face saddened. One year, a long, long time ago, another rocket had crashed here and other spacemen had perished.

But there was no time now to think about the rocket. The Creature was still here, lurking in the shadows, waiting.

Suddenly it seemed as if there were a humming in the ravine, as of the insect murmur of electricity through a power line. It seemed the sound of a living thing, its strange breath, slow movement, and pulsing heart all combining to form a single

sound that was the surge of alien life.

He whirled and again ran, back to the dark protection of the forest. Once he screamed as a sharp-needled cactus-branch ripped his chest.

He kept running until he fell exhausted. He lay panting, hands thrust before him, fingers dug in a soft cushion of grass as if trying to pull his body another inch forward, another inch away from the stalking Creature.

Abruptly, a defiance came to him. He was weary of running, weary of this crazed night-flight. Why not face the Creature? Death itself could be no worse than constant terror.

He rose with his face hard, eyes wide.

"Come out, whoever you are! I'm not afraid!"

No answer.

He stood silently for a long moment. Then he realized that he was standing near the edge of a pit.

A chill crept down his spine. To his mind again came an eerie, telepathic realization. This must be the home of the Creature!

He sank to his knees and crawled forward until his hands slipped out from beneath him and dangled in air. He was at the edge of the pit.

Cautiously, heart pounding, he peered over the edge, down, down into the blackness. He saw a faint but definite movement, and he knew the Creature was here.

A pale pink glow crept into the forest, and Harding realized that the planetoid's moons were rising above the tips of the trees.

The moonlight fell upon the Creature.

Harding stared, gaze frozen.

The monstrosity glared back at him. It was incredibly ancient, hellishly ugly, wildly insane, and old—a hundred years old, maybe a thousand. A shock of long white hair covered its skull, straggling down past sunken cheeks and bare, bony shoulders. Its eyes, set deep within black hollows, were wide and red and insane. The mouth was twisted in an idiotic grimace that revealed black, rotten teeth. Its flesh was wrinkled and dry, like that of a mummy.

Harding tried to scream, but his voice, like his body, was paralyzed. The Creature seemed to hold him, draining life from his body.

He thought, "I am going to sleep, because if things like you exist I do not want to live. I am going to sleep forever, and I will be free of you forever."

His eyes closed, and a great silence hung over the forest.

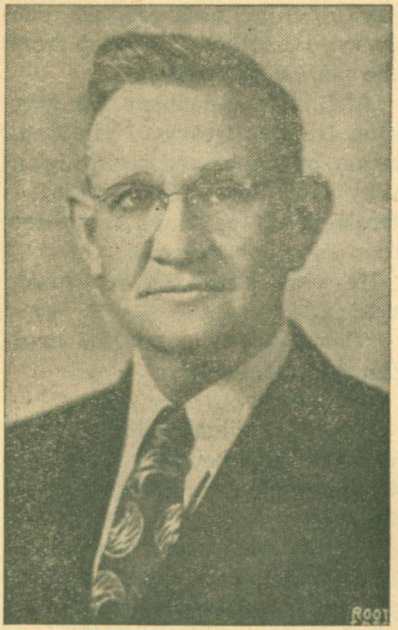
As his withered hand relaxed, it disengaged a small pebble which tumbled down the bank, shattering the mirror-like surface of the forest pool. **THE END**

The Saga of "SKYLARK" Smith

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE hypothesis of an expanding universe was thrust upon an incredulous scientific world in 1912 when Vesto Melvin Slipher laid the groundwork for what is today known as the Doppler-Fizeau effect. Despite this, the imagination of the science fiction world stagnated within the confines of our solar system until 1928, when Edward E. Smith's *The Skylark of Space* lifted mental horizons to the inspiring wonder of the galaxy.

Why the awakening had to await the coming of Smith we will never know. It should have occurred when Camille Flammarion, the famed French astronomer and author, popularized the theories of worlds around other stars in the 19th century. It seemed to have arrived in 1904 when Jean Delaire's heroes outraced light on their way to the far places in *Around A Distant Star*, or when, the following year, the Rev. W. S. Harris merchandised *Life in a Thousand Worlds* into a best-seller by subscription.



It is possible that because Delaire and Harris were primarily intent upon "teaching that old-time religion" the glare of their spotlight on the devil blinded men to a new approach to reverence. When *The Skylark of Space* which began as a three-part se-

rial in the August, 1938 AMAZING STORIES, reached its final installment, publisher Hugo Gernsback said: ". . . We are certain you will agree with us that it is one of the outstanding scientifiction stories of the decade; an interplanetarian story that will not be eclipsed soon. It will be referred to by all scientificition fans for years to come. It will be read and reread."

An 18-year-old John W. Campbell, Jr., on summer vacation preparatory to entering MIT, would haunt the newsstands relentlessly, impatient at the wait between installments. Because of the impact that story would have on him and others like him, the nomenclature of science fiction would never again be the same.

What were the elements that swayed the writers as well as readers to cradle *The Skylark of Space* as the infant messiah of cosmic literature destined to limitlessly expand the boundaries of conceptual awesomeness? It was not that it stood alone. The same month, Edmond Hamilton began a two-part novel *Crashing Suns* in WEIRD TALES on an extra-solar-system scale. Earlier that year, invasion and counter-invasion had cris-crossed the vastness between earth and the system of Sirius in J. Schlossel's *The Second Swarm* (AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Spring, 1928).

Perhaps it was the description of an atomic explosion perilously close to prophecy. Very likely it was the suspenseful presentation of scientific dilemmas solved by miracle men with bus bars and test tubes. Unquestionably the marvel of distances and places which strained comprehension, unrolled in an enthralling odyssey, contributed.

Certainly it could not have been the plot line involving cloak-and-dagger manipulations for scientific secrets or the "corny" kidnapping of Dorothy Vaneman, betrothed of almost superhuman scientist Richard Seaton, by the villainous Dr. Marc "Blackie" DuQuesne. Surely the stilted love scenes, the use of slang, colloquialisms and vernacular in the dialogue detracted more than they added.

YET, despite the foregoing superficial Victorianism in the handling of the plot, it is most likely that it was a combination of these very elements with the super-science concepts that gave *Skylark of Space* titan stature in science-fiction's hall of fame. The events described were tangibly happening to people. Some of the people were streotypes, others superhumans, but what transpired was more than an attempt at future history, it was a *story*. Characters *reacted* to mind-staggering situations.

Nor were all the characters

cardboard. No more remarkable villain has ever been depicted in the annals of science fiction than DuQuesne. He steals the show. Physically powerful, mentally a genius, distinctly amoral, he is the ultimate pragmatist. Murder without compunction for an *end* but do not lift a finger for mere sadistic satisfaction, nor permit a promise of pleasure to distract you from your purpose.

Despite the fact that Smith had a Ph.D. after his name and his character Seaton was prone to semi-technical monologues with jarring frequency, such hard-to-accept notions as speeds many times that of light and the manipulation of matter by the power of the mind were strongly challenged in the "Discussions" department of AMAZING STORIES. These criticisms failed to alter the fact that canonization was immediately in prospect for the author.

This soon-to-be-saint of the starways, the second youngest of five children, was born to Fred J. Smith, an ex-whaler working at shipping on the Great Lakes, and Caroline Mills on May 2, 1890 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Both parents were of British extraction and staunch Presbyterians. They christened the boy Edward Elmer, and the same year moved to Spokane, Washington, where the father contracted carpentry and cabinet work. A poor businessman, after many lean times he settled on a homestead of 160 acres on the Pend d' Oveille River in Northern Idaho, raising baking potatoes for the dining cars of The Great Northern Railroad.

The youthful E.E. logged in the winter, swamped brush, felled trees, worked in saw mills, did stretches as a lumberjack, and floated lumber down the river. His grammar school education was in the Spokane schools and the 9th grade was attended at Priest River, five miles away, where he was regarded as an outsider by the other children and had to pugilistically pulverize every other boy in the school to achieve minimal toleration, let alone friendship.

There might have been no education beyond that had the father been less of an emotional disciplinarian. The break came at the age of 18 as a result of a near-violent disagreement over the fine points of fertilizing a field with a load of manure. E.E. stormed off to Spokane for a brief stint as a conductor on a horse-drawn street car.

There had been great closeness and affection between himself, his two brothers and two sisters. He found his older brother, Daniel, teaming up with him to haul asphalt for a street-paving job. The profits from this enterprise, together with contributions from

older sister Rachel were used to send him to prep school at the University of Idaho.

AFTER the first year, he decided he wanted to be a civil engineer. At the age of 19 he helped run a railroad line north from Belton, Montana into Canada with the object of tapping mineral deposits. Seven months in the wilderness changed his mind about civil engineering. He went to work in a mine to get enough money to reenter school. One night he awoke in his room on the fourth floor of a boarding house to find that the foot of his bed was on fire. In a single convulsive leap he was out through the window, sash and all. He broke five ribs and a leg, but the worst damage was to his wrist, which couldn't be used for a year and hurt for 10 years more. Manual labor was now out of the question.

His resourceful brother, Daniel, emerged from a poker game with $310.50 in winnings. "You," he said, gesturing at E.E., "with your gimpy wing can't earn much. Take this money and go back to college." Not only sister Rachel, but sister Mary Elizabeth as well, sent money to help him through. Their confidence was justified. Majoring in chemical engineering, he secured a junior year scholarship for the highest scholastic rating. The schedule called for 160 credits to graduate and he got "A" in all 160 credits.

Before graduation, he had taken a civil service examination for junior chemist in Washington, D.C., and been offered the position. He had no money, so brother Dan, who was now working as a railroad clerk, collected $150 in five minutes from his fellow employees for the fare. There was one piece of unfinished business to take care of before he left. During his senior year, roommate Allan MacDougall had shown him several stunning pictures of a sister, Jeannie Craig MacDougall, back in Boise, Idaho. Bowled over, E.E. had started a correspondence with her. He went to Washington, D.C. via Boise, where he met Jeanne for the first time and was engaged within 10 minutes of the meeting.

On the job for the U.S. Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C., Smith helped establish tolerances on the weight of commercially sold butter. He established standards for oysters in New England, working in a laboratory on the prow of a ship at the price of perpetual seasickness.

By the fall of 1915 he had saved enough money to marry and bring his wife to Washington, D.C. It appeared, though, that he would have to sacrifice his ambition of obtaining a doctorate to

the responsibility of supporting a family, but his fear proved groundless as Jeanne went to work as a stenographer to aid him through George Washington University where he got his Ph.D. in 1919.

Instead of settling down to support his family, however, Smith, with the war still on, volunteered for the U.S. Air Force. The army took one look at his background and put him to work teaching bakers how to use 10% other grains than wheat in bread to preserve that vital commodity during World War I.

SMITH'S writing career started at a men's smoker in 1915. It was a hot, humid night and a discussion ensued with a former classmate of his, Carl D. Garby, Ph.D., on what the temperature was in outer space. Others present contributed their own ideas on the subject. That night, Carl told his wife, Lee Hawkins Garby, about the conversation. She thought the idea was intriguing and urged Smith to write a story based on it. He was dubious because he felt a story had to have love interest and he doubted his ability to cope with that part of the plot. She suggested a collaboration in which Smith handled the science and action and the love element could be left to her.

It wasn't necessary to twist Smith's arm too hard to get him to agree. A regular reader of ARGOSY, he was particularly fond of that magazine's science fiction. In book form, he cherished everything published of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Allan Poe and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Beyond that, he was passionately fond of poetry, consumed by an interest in philosophy, obsessed by ancient and medieval history, and fascinated by English literature.

The two worked at the novel industriously through 1915 and 1916, finishing about one-third of it. Then interest waned, and the work was put aside.

At the end of the war Smith became chief chemist for F. W. Stock & Sons, Hillsdale, Mich., a position he was to occupy until 1936. His specialty was doughnut mixes, an industy which he helped to create. Formulations of such products are so tricky as to be regarded as an art form by cereal chemists.

One evening late in 1919, bored with baby sitting while Jeannie was out to a movie, he took up the unfinished novel and continued where it had been left off. He kept Garby informed about his progress, but wrote the remainder of the story himself, *including* the love interest. The Spring of 1920 the completed story began to make the rounds of the publishers.

THE quantity of rejections was ego-shattering. The only encouragement he received in eight years of submissions was a three-page letter from Bob Davis, famed editor of ARGOSY. Davis liked the story immensely, but felt it was just too "far out" to be accepted by his readership.

Every book publisher in the country had a look at the manuscript and turned it down. Whenever a new adventure magazine appeared, Smith hopefully sent it out. Finally, one day he spotted the April, 1927 AMAZING STORIES on the newsstands. He read few pages of the first story, *The Plague of the Living Dead*, by A. Hyatt Verrill, at the newsstand, gave an exultant shout, dashed home, got the manuscript and mailed it out.

Editor T. O'Conor Sloane replied with a high enthusiasm and a low offer of $75 for the 90,000 word novel. Smith accepted (though he had spent more than that on postage through the years) but by the time the novel appeared, AMAZING STORIES had examined its conscience and a check arrived for $125. He split the amount with Lee Hawkins Garby and *The Skylark of Space* was published as a collaboration.

The first installment had not been on sale a full month when Sloane wrote asking for a sequel. Garby wasn't interested in participating further, so Smith started immediately on his own. The sequel, *Skylark Three*, was in every sense a continuation of the first novel. As science fiction it was also a better novel. The story was well unified and the pace sustained. Most important, Smith displayed that whatever his weaknesses at dialogue and love interest, his ability to grippingly develop suspenseful action on a cosmic scale was surpassed only by the scope of his imagination. He was probably the only writer alive who could weave a thousand words of scientific explanation into a battle scene and not slow down the pace for an instant.

Skylark Three, upon its appearance in the Aug., Sept. and Oct., 1930 issues of AMAZING STORIES, did more than even its predecessor to change the paraphernalia of science fiction. Tremendous battles of conflicting forces with an assortment of rays for offense and force screens for defense stem from *Skylark Three*. Spaceships miles in length and a fabulous array of bizarre aliens which justified the novel's subtitle: "The tale of the galactic cruise which ushered in universal civilization," became standard as a result Science fiction writers would never again be bound to their solar system.

Smith had sold all rights to *The Skylark of Space* but he released only magazine privileges

for its sequel. AMAZING STORIES voluntarily paid him ¾'s of a cent a word for that story, which was ¼ of a cent more per word than they had paid *any* author up to that time.

The Skylark stories had been carried as far as Smith intended and he now proceeded on what he thought would be a new series. *The Spacehounds of IPC*, began in the July, 1931 issue of AMAZING STORIES before the letter column had ceased ringing the praises of *Skylark Three*. It was an exciting, driving, imaginative story depicting space battles, stupendous scientific discovery and ingeniously conceived alien intelligences, every bit as good and well-sustained as *Skylark Three*. It even predicted the ion drive for space ships decades before Herman Oberth proposed it in RADIO ELECTRONICS magazine in the early fifties. Nevertheless, letters tempered praise with protests at Smith staying within the confines of our solar system in the development of the story. Editor Sloane sided with the readers and made a point of suggesting that Smith make the setting of his next story far out in the Milky Way.

SMITH was angered at Sloane, not only for the reprimand but for unauthorized changes in the published narrative, so when Harry Bates, editor of Clayton's ASTOUNDING STORIES dangled the carrot of 2¢ a word on acceptance for first look at his next story, he agreed. A sequel to *Spacehounds of IPC* now was impossible since the new story must be offered to a competing magazine. Instead, he wrote *Triplanetary*, a novel of the unified worlds of Earth, Mars and Venus, that are attacked by an amphibian menace from a distant star. Though much of the action appeared to do little to advance the plot, Smith's writing had improved even over *Spacehounds of IPC* and he had ventured back out into the far places. Scientifically, it introduced the notion of the "inertialess" drive to attain speeds faster than light, which, while not provable, cannot be disproved and therefore is considered the best device ever proposed to conquer the light-speed limit.

The problem here developed to be with the market. By the time Smith submitted *Triplanetary* to ASTOUNDING STORIES, that magazine had gone bi-monthly and was paying on publication instead of acceptance. An announcement that the story was forthcoming appeared in their January, 1933 issue. The cover illustration of the March 1933 number (the last under Clayton) was taken from a situation in *Triplanetary*, but the company was being disbanded so the novel was not included.

Still peeved at AMAZING STORIES, Smith decided to give WONDER STORIES a look at *Triplanetary*. To his humiliation, he not only received a rejection, but they later *bragged* about it! Now there was no alternative but to submit *Triplanetary* to AMAZING where it was accepted and published in four parts beginning with the Jan., 1934 number, but Smith's rates were ignominously dropped to half-cent a word.

To embitter further his cup of hemlock, Smith received a letter from F. Orlin Tremaine, new editor of ASTOUNDING STORIES, which had been revived by Street & Smith Publications in the interim, offering a cent a word for *Triplanetary*. When Tremaine learned that it was already scheduled for AMAZING STORIES, he suggested a third story in the Skylark series.

All the winter of 1934 Smith worked away on *The Skylark of Valeron*. With each succeeding chapter the concepts grew so increasingly grandiose that they imaginatively shrieked. In over his head, with the story out of his control he threw in the sponge. Collecting his first draft, typed on an assorted mass of pink, blue and white sheets of paper he sent it to Tremaine with a distraught note explaining that he couldn't handle the theme, and would welcome any suggestions.

Tremaine wrote back and said that he had only one suggestion: that Smith cash the enclosed check for $850.

What happened then makes one of the most remarkable chapters in the annals of science fiction magazine publishing. Tremaine, a crack editorial hand, had been building a dramatic and exciting new team of authors. The Smith name was just what he needed. The full-page editorial in the June, 1934 ASTOUNDING STORIES was titled "The Skylark". "For six long years, readers of science fiction have talked about the 'Skylark' stories," he began. "They have been called the greatest science fiction ever written. There were two, you remember, both pointing toward a culminating story which never appeared. . . . *The Skylark of Valeron* starts in the August issue of ASTOUNDING STORIES!"

Not only did the editorial cover a full page, but there was another three-quarter page announcement of *Skylark of Valeron*'s virtues in the same issue. The following month, he announced that a new type style would increase wordage by 25,000 so readers would get the "Skylark" *in addition* to everything else. He exhorted each reader to introduce one new friend to ASTOUNDING. We have kept faith with you, he told the

readers, now you keep faith with us.

They did. The circulation of ASTOUNDING STORIES leaped 10,000 with the first installment of *Skylark of Valeron* (which he ran in *seven* parts) and the magazine went into the black for the first time in its history. Before the novel was finished, both competitors were financially on the ropes. Within a year, the two of them were skipping issues. Eventually they had to sell out.

As much as he accomplished for himself, Tremaine accomplished even more for Smith. Great as had been Smith's reputation after *Skylark Three*, it was transcendentally greater now.

Temporarily, Smith could not take advantage of the situation. Personal problems interfered with his writing. Though he was running a $5,000,000 annual doughnut mix business, he found after years of effort there was a low ceiling on his salary. He shifted to Dawn Doughnut, Jackson, Mich., in Jan., 1936 on a salary plus share-of-the-profit arrangement. In order to get the firm out of the red, he worked 18 hours a day, 7 days a week for almost a year, even designing new machinery to implement his plans. Once the company was in the black, he detailed an 80-page outline for a 400,000 word novel, divided into four segments: *Galactic Patrol, The Grey Lensman, Second Stage Lensman* and *Children of the Lens*. He actually wrote the last chapter of *Children of the Lens* after completing the rough draft of *Galactic Patrol*. This outline he submitted to Tremaine who told him to go ahead, he would buy the entire package.

Galactic Patrol (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Sept., 1937 to Feb., 1938) shares with Olaf Stapledon's *The Star Maker* the distinction of popularizing the "community of worlds" or galactic empire backdrop in science fiction. Edmond Hamilton had presented the idea eight years earlier, but Smith and Stapledon appear to have brought its potentialities into focus.

The "Galactic Patrol" is an interstellar police force organized to combat piracy and lawlessness which is threatening the structure of galactic civilization. Behind the scenes, dimly seen, are prime movers. The Arisians, whose spores projected through the galaxy, caused life to form in their image on many worlds, manipulate events for good. The Eddoreians, creatures from another space continuum, in their lust for power are the basis of most ills. Good and evil are sharply defined and the battle is joined.

While the allegory seems ob-

vious, the device of the prime mover shows up in a slightly more sophisticated form in a number of A. E. van Vogt's novels, including *Slan, The Weapon Shops* and *World of A.* It is implied in references to a Second Foundation in Isaac Asimov's stories. These are but two of many authors who demonstrate that Smith has been influential on several levels, shaping not only the background but the plot structure of modern science fiction.

Kimball Kinnison was the hero of the series of novels that would become known as the "Lensman" series. The lens is a communication device worn on the wrist of a lensman, which is attuned to the personality of the wearer in such a manner that it is virtually artificially alive. If worn by anyone else it proves deadly. The lensmen are a group of men and women from many worlds, trained to a peak of mental and physical attainment so high as to mark them as the beginning of a superior race. Ultimately, through selective mating, they will achieve a point of development where they can replace the Arisians as guardians of the Galaxy.

The development and adventures of this group, through the series of four novels, are delineated in the epitome of Smith's action and idea-packed style. *The Grey Lensman* is probably best of the series with *Galactic Patrol* running it a close second. When Fantasy Press decided to preserve the series in hard covers Smith rewrote *Triplanetary,* adding six chapters in the process, to make it part of the whole. Several of the new chapters, each of which is a complete story in itself, are quite as good as anything Smith ever did, but the interpolation of Arisian and Eddorian influences into the body of the original *Triplanetary* reduces the effectiveness of the work.

WRITING *Triplanetary* into the series made necessary a bridge novel, *First Lensman,* to link it with *Galactic Patrol. The First Lensman* was published in hardcover by Fantasy Press in 1950 and has never appeared in any other form. It deals vividly with the events that required the organization of a Galactic Patrol and the training experiences of the first lensman.

It was partially due to the serialization of *The Gray Lensman* in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION beginning October, 1939 that Edward E. Smith was invited to be guest of honor at The Second World Science Fiction Convention, held in Chicago Sept. 1 and 2, 1940. Few of his fans, listening to him deliver a speech on "What Does This Convention

Mean?" in the style of the most active and rabid science fiction fan realized that Smith was in trouble. Because of the outbreak of the war, any company selling products containing sugar and flour needed no special help, least of all help that received a percentage of the profits. Smith found himself out of a job. He tried to do some writing, but couldn't seem to concentrate. Meanwhile he lived on his savings.

Then suddenly there was a special appeal. F. Orlin Tremaine, who had left Street & Smith in 1938, was back editing a new science fiction magazine titled COMET. There were nearly a dozen competitors, most of them better financed. Tremaine was finding the going rough. Could Smith help him?

Smith readily agreed to do a series of novelettes constructed around the character Neal Cloud, a professional blaster of atomic vortices from power plants out of control. *The Vortex Blaster*, first of the series, proved too little too late. It appeared in the last, July, 1941, issue of COMET. Circumstances were not appropos for a repeat performance of the previous Tremaine-Smith success.

Practically Smith's move had been ill-advised. ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION was the leading market and John W. Campbell, its editor, was not happy about Smith's move, particularly since Tremaine had been quoted as aiming to remove ASTOUNDING from its position of leadership among science fiction magazines. Campbell began to pay more attention to building up strong newcomers.

Two other stories in "The Vortex Blaster" series, *Storm Cloud on Deka* and *The Vortex Blaster Makes War* appeared in ASTOUNDING STORIES in 1942. The first three stories together with additional new material were combined into a book titled *The Vortex Blasters* in 1960. Two separate editions, one by Fantasy Press and one by Gnome Press, were made available. This group proved the least distinguished of Smith's stories.

UNABLE to find work immediately after Pearl Harbor, Smith applied to the army for reinstatement of his World War I commission. At 51, he was overage, but they put him to work at the Kingsbury, Ind., Ordinance Plant, working on explosives and shells. He was fired in 1944 as a result of refusal to pass shells he regarded as below standard. This phase of his life is described in complete detail in chapter 5, titled "1941" of the book version of *Triplanetary*. He finished out the last year of the war as a metallurgist for Allis Chalmers. He reentered the doughnut mix bus-

iness with J. W. Allen, Chicago, in 1945, remaining there until his retirement in 1957.

Settled in his new job at the end of World War II, Smith began work on the final novel in his series, *The Children of the Lens.* It was a thinly camouflaged secret that elements of Smith's own three children, Roderick, Verna Jean and Clarissa would be present in the physical and mental characteristics of the novel's protagonists. But in truth, "Doc" Smith was a father image to thousands of the science fiction readers and he regarded them with a benign paternalism as though they were all his "children."

Therefore, when the son of a well-to-do Boston family, Thomas P. Hadley decided to take a flyer at book publishing and asked for rights to *The Skylark of Space,* it is doubtful if Smith even bothered to ask for terms. Hadley knew absolutely nothing about book publishing or marketing, but he managed to get a seven-line notice of the book with the correct price and full address on the bottom of page 110 of the August, 1946 *Astounding Science-Fiction.* A limited edition of 1,000 copies at $3.00 each sold out completely by mail order from that single mention!

Inundated with orders, Hadley didn't even begin to know how to go about handling them. In desperation, he appealed to Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, former science fiction author who had some familiarity with publishing procedures. Eshbach bailed him out and the book went into an elaborate illustrated second printing which sold for almost as much per copy as it cost to print. Years later the book would see still a third printing under the auspices of F.F.F. Publishers, Brooklyn, but in the meantime Eshbach threw up his hands at Hadley's economics and withdrew.

Borrowing Hadley's list of *Skylark of Space* purchasers, Eshbach formed his own publishing company, Fantasy Press, leading off with Smith's *Spacehounds of IPC* and eventually printing 10 of Smith's novels among other titles. So popular were the Smith books that at one juncture Fantasy Press took the six volumes in the Lensman series, titled them *The History of Civilization,* bound them in uniform half morocco, boxed them and sold the sets for $30.

THE spate of book publishing firms, specializing exclusively in fantasy, that sprang up after World War II may be attributed in no small measure to the success of the Smith titles. Scores of pulp magazine classics were sanctified by hardcovers under the imprint of such firms as

Shasta publishers, The Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc., Gnome Press, Prime Press, The Avalon Co. and New Era Publishers. Most of the fledgling publishers perished when the big trade publishers began to seriously add science fiction to their lists in the early 1950's.

The personal excitement accompanying revision of novels for book publication plus the implied prestige of hard covers, distracted Smith's attention from the fact that *Children of the Lens*, which opened in the Nov., 1947 ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION was being touted with something less than the customary fanfare. It was the first Smith novel that rated less than two covers in that magazine.

The novel failed to score any special impact. It didn't matter. Smith was too busy working on his books to notice. When Fantasy Press, virtually with its dying gasp, passed *The Vortex Blaster* like a literary baton on to Gnome Press to be distributed under that imprint, all of Smith's magazine serials but one, *The Galaxy Primes* had found their way between boards.

While Smith's books, since 1946, had sold comfortingly well, they had been reviewed with a great deal of condescension as period pieces. This bothered Smith, who now was determined to prove that he could emulate the current vogue with great finesse. Campbell at ASTOUNDING was then partial to stories with a strong element of what he termed psi phenomenon; stories of teleporation, telekinisis, telepathy, levitation and extra-sensory perception. Smith built *The Galaxy Primes* around those elements with a dash of naughtiness and considerable "way out" dialogue to prove he was no back number. It didn't set well with Campbell but it was accepted and serialized by AMAZING STORIES in 1959. Smith leaned back and waited for the reaction. It proved considerably less than enthusiastic.

Popularity frequently carries obligations. A fan named E. Everett Evans had been among Smith's most ardent boosters. In his fifties Evans determined to become a writer and succeeded. Among his published works were two very Smithlike novels aimed at teenagers: *Man of Many Minds* (1953) and *Alien Minds* (1955) both published by Fantasy Press. Evans died of a heart condition with only the first draft of another novel, *Masters of Space* completed. To help Evan's widow sell it, Smith did a complete revision and polishing job and the story ran as a collaboration in IF (Nov., 1961-Jan., 1962). Dealing with the pooling of minds telepathically as a means of invading and destroy-

ing a planet, the story failed to come off. An experimental detective novel written by Smith interested no one.

A REAPPROACHMENT with Campbell resulted in the plotting of a new series, of which *Subspace Survivor*, a novelette which appeared in the July, 1960 ANALOG was a prelude. The major story and sequel, *Subspace Explorers*, was another attempt on the part of Smith to write what he felt was wanted. Campbell didn't agree with him on the result and the effort ended up scheduled as an original book by Canaveral Press, publishers of Edgar Rice Burroughs hard-cover editions.

It was time for Smith to make an agonizing reappraisal. Here he was 73, retired and living in a trailer in Florida. What was he trying to prove?

The Skylark of Space in 1928 had given the science fiction world the stars. *Galactic Patrol* in 1937 had unified those stars into a community.

In each case he had dared to be himself. The result altered the direction of a literature.

What he had been doing the past few years was attempting to conform to a literary vogue instituted by someone else and in the process imitating writing methods popularized by someone else, rewriting a story conceived by someone else and patterning a plot to suit someone else.

At the 21st World Science Fiction Convention in Washington, D.C. (birthplace of *The Skylark of Space* nearly a half-century earlier), Sept. 1, 1963, First Fandom presented its "Hall-of-Fame Award" to Edward E. Smith for his pivotal contributions to science fiction. From the floor John W. Campbell honored him with the statement: "Smith made the last big breakthrough in science fiction, we're still waiting for someone else to make another."

Almost too overcome with emotion to speak, Smith accepted the award. Inevitably, someone asked the question: "What's your next story, Doc?"

Smith's hand trembled slightly, but the answer was sharp and clear. "The title of my next story," he said, "is *Skylark DuQuesne!*"

THE END

Illustrated by SCHELLING

Three warp-fields ships had vanished before the first manned vessel arrived off Alpha Centauri. Whether the inhabitants were People or Things turned out to be . . .

A QUESTION OF THEOLOGY

By GEORGE WHITLEY

"THROW me out if I'm a nuisance, General," chuckled the Senator with professional joviality. "But, after all, I represent the taxpayer."

"And you'd like to see how his money's being spent," said the military man dourly. "Understandable." His manner brightened almost imperceptibly. "But it does us good to have an occasional visit from an outsider. Otherwise we tend to get rather too wrapped up in the job."

"And it's an important job," said the Senator generously.

"Glad you think so, Senator. Because it's a damned expensive one."

"I know. But it's as good a way of getting rid of surplus wealth as any. Better than some, perhaps."

"Better than a major war," said the General.

"And you a soldier!" laughed the other.

"A spaceman, Senator. The title means nothing. If the Navy had managed to get its fat butt into the driver's seat, you'd be calling me Admiral. The main thing is to have some sort of rank so that I can keep our pet eggheads more or less under control."

"That's another point," said the Senator. "Many people think that the Program should be a purely civilian undertaking, that the military should never have been allowed to take charge."

"If the military weren't in charge," the General told him, "the Program would be a damn' sight more expensive, in lives as well as money. Did you know that our learned friends were wanting to use human crews for the first experimental, ships? Oh, I

want to use human crews too—eventually. I want to be on one of those crews. But I'm not sending a man out until we *know* that an FTL voyage is not a one-way passage."

"FTL?"

"Faster Than Light—although it's not *really* faster than light. It involves a warping effect. Just imagine a sheet of paper . . ."

"Yes," said the Senator. "I've heard that one before, General. The sheet of paper represents two dimensional space, and an ant is crawling across it diagonally. And you shorten his journey by warping the two dimensions through a third, so that you have the corners touching and he can just step from one to the other . . ." He laughed his professional laugh again. "Don't look so hurt, General. I used to read science fiction when I was a kid."

"So all this," said the spaceman sardonically, "is not strange to you."

"Not really," admitted the other. Nonetheless, he appeared not a little awed by the establishment through which the General was conducting him—by the vast hangars in which the gleaming ships were taking shape, by the busy cranes and gantries, by the orderly confusion on every hand. He had visited shipyards before, and spaceports. But this was more than a shipyard, more than a spaceport. Perhaps it was the subtle distortion of those hulls that were completed or almost completed, the odd curvature and twist that made of them what seemed to be great, metallic Klein flasks, that surely must destroy aerodynamic efficiency. (But the building of the hull of a conventional spaceship in conformity with the laws of aerodynamics was no more than a hangover from the days of rocketry; now that the Inertial Drive powered the ships that plied to the planetary colonies, external shape was of no importance whatsoever.)

"Of course," said the General, "I'm not allowed to show you the essential guts of the Interstellar Drive, the Warp Field Generators. They're still Top Secret, and any literature on them is marked *Destroy By Fire Before Reading.* Not that you'd be any the wiser if you did see one. I'm not. But I'm only a spaceman."

"But you must have some ideas about it, General."

"I have, as a matter of fact. I've seen —and felt—a Generator working on the test bed. It did more than just warp Space—it warped the entire bloody Continuum. I had the idea that if I left the shop I'd meet myself coming in."

"A Time Machine," said the Senator.

"You read too much science fiction," said the General. He paused before a low building. "Do you want to meet the astronauts?"

"So you have them in training already?"

"Sort of." He led the way to the door, opened it, laughed as the politician's face fell. "Don't look so disappointed, Senator. Just stick around for a few million years, and these might be voters."

"MONKEYS," muttered the Senator.

"Yes. Monkeys."

"But I thought you people used chimpanzees . . ."

"We used to. But they're too large."

"You used them in the early rockets. And, as I understand it, weight isn't such a problem with the Inertial Drive as it was in the days of rocketry."

"It's not. But each pair of . . . passengers in one of the test ships is liable to be out for a matter of weeks. And they have to be fed. Food and water are the problem—the weight of them, and the space required for their stowage."

"Why not use rats? Or mice?"

"Because we want something more or less humanoid and fairly intelligent."

"Spacemen in miniature," said the Senator innocently.

The General looked at him for a long moment, then let it pass. "These," he said, "are Rhesus monkeys, *Macaca mulatta*. We get them from India. In many ways they're ideal for our purpose. For a start, they're gregarious . . ."

"How does that help?"

"Man, with a few individual exceptions, is also gregarious. One thing that we want to find out is how a gregarious individual will stand up to an interstellar voyage."

"You don't send the poor little brutes out *alone*?"

"No. In pairs mainly. Sometimes two males, sometimes two females, sometimes a male and female."

"And what have the results been so far?"

"Those that we've got back have been in quite good order and condition. So I'm told."

"Those that you've got back?"

"With experimental ships, Senator, there are bound to be some losses. FTL2 crashed on landing. FTL5 just vanished, so did FTL6 . . ."

"Just what is the procedure with these experimental ships, General?" asked the politician, who had wandered across to inspect the two occupants of one of the cages.

"We send them up under remote control and then, once they're clear of the atmosphere,

automation takes over. The idea is that they head for Alpha Centauri—which, as you know, is a yellow dwarf like our own Sun, 4.3 light years distant. In other words, if they travelled at the speed of light the one-way voyage would take almost four and a half years—and it's about four weeks with the Warp Field Generator in operation. When their instruments indicate that they're ninety three million miles off Alpha Centauri—that's about as far as Earth is from the Sun—they just turn round and come back . . ."

"Planets?" asked the Senator.

"We think that there are, although all the data obtained has yet to be processed."

"What about making a landing?"

"If there are any planets, we'd like to. But that will have to wait for the first manned ships."

"Why? Landings were made on the Moon, and Mars, and Venus by unmanned probe rockets."

"The elements of the orbits of all the worlds in the Solar System have been calculated with great nicety," explained the General. "Furthermore, it was possible to track the rockets from Earth, and to exercise some degree of control, in spite of the slight time lag."

The Senator laughed. "Of course. How stupid of me. Even if it were possible to track these FTL ships there'd be a time lag of *years*, not seconds. But can you track them?"

"No. Once the WF jennies take over they . . . vanish."

"And the ships that didn't come back?"

"Who knows? Who will ever know?"

THE Senator, his fat, florid face sombre, was staring at the two little brown monkeys in the cage. He said, "Poor little fellows. You know, General, there are times when I don't like being human." He quoted softly, " 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth . . .' As God is to us, General, so are we to the lower orders of creation. We're gods to the cattle, the fowls, the dogs and the cats, the apes and monkeys. But I often feel that we've abused our . . . our godhood. Slaughteryards, and the battery system for poultry farms . . .(Oh, I enjoy a plate of ham and eggs as much as anybody, but . . .) Slaughteryards, and the battery system, and a luckless hound given the dubious honor of being the first living being in Space and dying out there, alone, in her cramped capsule, and these

same Rhesus monkeys—some of whom have died in their cramped capsules in your FTL ships—being used for medical experimentation and for the preparation of vaccines . . ." He paused. "Have you ever drowned kittens, General? Telling yourself that you were doing them a favor . . . And did you feel that you were exercising the dominion given you by the Almighty, or did you feel like a murderer?"

"There has to be progress," said the General.

"But *why?*" asked the Senator.

"Why not? And, to revert to your sudden concern for the animal kingdom, we're no worse than the other carnivores."

"Aren't we? The lion eats when he's hungry. Furthermore, the lion doesn't go so far as to poison various creeping things that enjoy a meal in his flower garden when *they're* hungry."

"Lions don't have flower gardens," said the General.

Both men laughed. "Even so," the Senator told him, "I still feel that our attitude towards the so-called lower orders is too callous. And I hope most sincerely that when we are, at last, among the stars we don't run into a race that's as far above us as we are above the brute creation—because our own record *stinks*."

As he spoke he put his hand through the bars of the cage, was stroking the fur of one of the monkeys. He screamed suddenly when the beast turned and bit him, snatched his injured, bleeding member back into safety.

The spaceman was solicitous. "Come with me, Senator, to the First Aid Station. These bites can be poisonous . . ."

The politician had wrapped a handkerchief around his hand. He stood there, staring at the animal who, returning his stare, was gibbering furiously whilst its mate cowered behind it. In spite of his pain he managed a wry grin. He said slowly, "I admire your spirit, young fellow. You know that you have to go, but you're determined to have a piece of one of the gods before you do go. And why not? Why the hell not?" He turned to the General. "Do these animals have names? Might I suggest that this one be called Lucifer?"

The spaceman's hand was on his arm and he was saying urgently. "You'd better come to the First Aid Station, Senator."

THE General was not pleased when he learned that *Ad Astra*, the first of the manned FTL ships, was to have a passenger for her maiden voyage. Still, as his superiors had pointed out, it was only fair that the people footing the bill should have one of their elected representatives

along for the ride. He stood there at the foot of the ramp, a little man, unmilitary in appearance in spite of his uniform with the rainbow of decorations on the left breast. Now that the long wait was over, now that all the bugs in the Warp Field Generators (he hoped) had been eliminated he was returning to his natural element, the planet-based administrator reverting to the spaceman, Master under God (and why should that archaic phrase have slipped into his thoughts?) of his own ship.

He watched the portly figure, with minor officials in orbit around it like unimportant satellites, making its way across the concrete apron. He saluted without enthusiasm, said, "Good morning, Senator."

"Good morning, General."

"*Captain,*" corrected the General.

The politician peered at the badges of rank on the other's shoulders. "But . . . Surely you haven't been . . . ?"

"Demoted?" the General finished for him. "No. Promoted would be the right word." He added without enthusiasm, "Glad to have you aboard, sir."

"And I'm glad to be aboard, General. Sorry, *Captain.*"

"This way, Senator. Your baggage is already in your stateroom."

But the politician, standing

well back from the ship, was in no hurry to board. He said softly, "I remember the first rockets, with their meticulous countdowns. We've come a long way since then."

"And we're going a long way," the other told him, with the beginnings of cheerfulness. "*Ad Astra*. That means, To the stars."

"I know," said the Senator.

"Then shall we be getting on our way to the stars?"

"I'd like to look at the ship first. If I may." There was a long silence. "But she's so big. And there's that odd shape to her . . ."

"A Klein flask," said the spaceman.

"Yes. I see the resemblance. And there's a strong resemblance, too, to some of those convoluted sea shells . . ."

The spaceman looked at his watch ostentatiously. The politician took the hint, followed him up the ramp and aboard *Ad Astra*. Shortly thereafter the ramp was withdrawn, the airlock door closed, and the V.I.P.s on the grandstand, together with the lesser mortals at every other vantage point, watched the starship as she started to quiver, slightly but perceptibly, heard the odd throbbing whine of the inertial drive machinery, saw her drift slowly upwards towards the summer sky. There was nothing spectacular about her departure; similar take-offs could be witnessed any day of the week at any of the spaceports serving interplanetary traffic. There was nothing spectacular to be seen on the television screens either, on the pictures beamed to Earth from the Observation Satellite. At one moment she was there, an oddly distorted metallic bubble, brightly agleam against the blackness of Space. And then she was not there, and the cameras aboard the satellite tracked to the lopsided Cross, to the two pointers, Alpha and Beta Centauri, shifted a degree or so to bring Alpha Centauri to the center of the field.

And that was all.

"AND the second planet," the General was saying, "is analagous to our own Earth?"

"Yes," answered Dr. Mortimer, chief of the astronomical team. "Mean distance from its primary is ninety two million miles. Mass 0.93. Axial tilt 22°. Polar ice caps. You name it, that world has got it."

"People?" asked the Senator.

"You've seen their city lights," the scientist told him.

"I meant people as opposed to *things*."

"I seem to remember," the General reminisced, "that some little time ago you were preaching the brotherhood of all living beings. But that was just before

the monkey bit you, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I remember. I called him Lucifer. How is he, by the way?"

"He made his trip, but he did not come back. He and his mate, Lilith, were the crew of FTL17. She was the first of the ships equipped to make a fully automatic landing and take-off . . ."

"And after we lost three ships running with that same equipment," Mortimer said, "we decided that the first landing would have to wait for the first manned ship."

An officer entered the control room. "Sir," he reported to the General, "the probe is back and the films are being processed."

"Will they be long?" asked the Senator.

"Only a few minutes," the General said. "I suggest that we all adjourn to the projection room."

"And that," remarked Mortimer, "should put an end to the People versus Things controversy."

"With so similar a world," the General said. "there should have been parallel evolution." He added, half seriously, "But maybe the ants have had their chance . . ."

There probably were insects, or some life-form analogous to insects, on the second planet of Alpha Centauri—but good as the cameras of the high-flying robot probe had been, they hadn't been that good. There were flying things in the atmosphere, but they were all relatively big. They looked something like the pterosauria of Earth's distant past, but there were differences. The pattern of life on Earth is quadrepedal, and in the case of flying creatures—the birds and the bats and their reptilian forebears—the forelimbs have been modified to wings. Evolution on the Centaurian planet had been, as the General had suggested, parallel—but every one of the flying creatures possessed, in addition to the wings, two pairs of legs.

"So there *are* Centaurs . . ." marvelled Mortimer. "And on a world of Centaurus! I'm waiting for the shots of the land animals . . ."

THEN there were a few minutes of film that showed vast herds of herbivores ranging over a prairie, and a sequence that showed one such herd under attack by a pack of predators. Again the six-legged pattern was evident.

The Senator said, "I hope that stupid robot had the sense to hover over one of the cities . . ."

"It was programmed to do so," the General told him stiffly.

"To see the Centaurs of legend at work and play," the politician went on. "Maybe they visited Earth in the past, and are still remembered in Greek mythology.

"Perhaps they did," admitted the General, as an expanding shot of one of the cities filled the screen. "That architecture looks almost human . . ."

"Remarkably oriental," contributed Mortimer. "Reminds me of . . ." He paused, "Damn it all, that building over to the right could almost be a twin to the Taj Mahal!"

"The probe was programmed to make a brief touch-down," said the General.

"And there are the people," muttered the Senator. "But . . ."

Yes, there were the people. But they were not Centaurs. They were humanoid bipeds, naked save for scanty loin clouts. Their bodies were covered with grey-brown fur. And they had tails.

* * *

Ad Astra hung in her orbit while her personnel discussed what they had seen, tried to make it fit into the framework of known facts and tenable hypotheses. It was the General who, reverting to his role of administrator and coördinator, was able to produce an explanation.

He said, "There were those ships—FTL17 to FTL20—equipped to land and take off. Two of them carried mixed pairs of Rhesus monkeys, one of them carried two males and the other carried two females. Well, they landed . . ."

"But," objected the Senator, "assuming that those monkeys did breed, and did evolve, they'd have had no time either to build up their present population or, come to that, to evolve to their present level . . ."

"Time," said the General. "Yes. Time. But the Warp Field Generators do odd things to Time—especially when they misbehave. As I told you, a long while ago, these ships don't actually travel faster than light. They only seem to do so—and this effect is achieved by warping the Continuum. To give it its full name—the Space-Time Continuum . . ."

"Is that possible, Dr. Mortimer?" demanded the Senator.

"It could be," the scientist admitted. "Yes, it could be. If the landing were made not a mere five years ago, but five thousand. Or fifty thousand . . . But how do you account for that Indian style architecture, General?"

"It all fits in," said the spaceman. "Yes. It all fits in. The ancestors of these people were not unintelligent. They must have carried here with them memories, and strong ones, of their home world. And those memories have persisted . . ."

"I wonder how much they do remember," mused the Senator. "If they remember the way that Man built his cities, then they'll remember Man." He chuckled

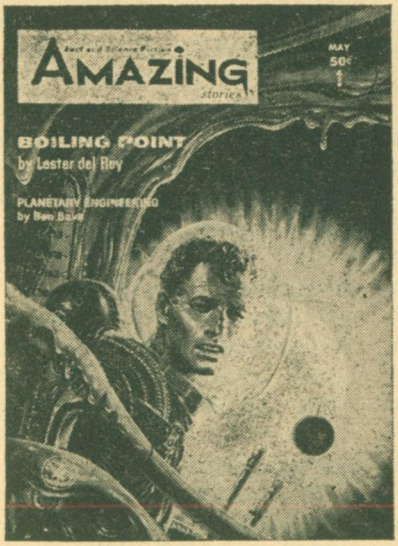
softly. "You know, when I was a kid I used to read science fiction, space stories. Every now and again there'd be a yarn about some human explorers landing on a strange planet and being worshipped as gods. Little did I ever think that it would, one day, happen to me . . ."

"Yes, I remember our first conversation," said the General. "You were saying that we must be as gods to the animal kingdom . . . Well, much as I dislike assuming rank to which I'm not entitled, I think that the racial memories of these people are going to make our first contact a really smooth one, from our viewpoint . . ."

And when the Folk saw, marching down the ramp from the great sky ship—gigantic, hairless, tailless, their bodies wrapped in gaudy cloth, hung with bright metal—the devils of their mythology they, their customary timidity forgotten, obsessed by religious frenzy, fought and killed like demons.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH



There you are, being nudged gently to your death by a strange kind of life-force, and there's nothing you can do about it. Isn't it infuriating? Maddening? And what happens then? In the May AMAZING, **Lester del Rey** spins an off-trail story in Boiling Point.

Also next month: the first of a startling series of science fact articles by **Ben Bova** on prospects for and techniques of Planetary Engineering; and the driving, surprising climax of **Phyllis Gotlieb's** serial, Sunburst.

Plus other stories and our regular features. Be sure to get the May AMAZING, on sale at your newsdealer's April 9.

Second of Three Parts

SUNBURST

By PHYLLIS GOTLIEB

Illustrated by SCHELLING

Synopsis

BY the year 2024 A.D., Sorrel Park, a small midwestern city, has been an island surrounded by barbed wire for almost thirty years. In 1994, when the whole continent was on nuclear power, Sorrel Park's reactor exploded, killing and injuring many people. The army was conducting maneuvers around the city at the time and the government used the force first to conduct rescue operations and later to place the city under martial law, in charge of an officer named Prothero, suppressing the news throughout the country for fear of panic.

This law lasted twenty-two years, while a gradually corrupted and corrupting civil police administered local ordinances. Just

as the government decided that the situation had healed sufficiently to pull out the army, Sorrel Park exploded once more.

Among the current crop of juvenile delinquents, those whose parents had received radiation damage before they had children, discovered that they possessed supernormal powers of the psi group: telepathy, teleportation, psychokinesis. Spurred by the angers and resentments of the born rebel, they reached each other by telepathy, joined in a pack, and began to wreck the city. They were collected with difficulty and kept in an enclosure known as the Dump, with a screening white-noise field around it to prevent their escape by psi. By the year 2024 this situation has lasted eight years and Sorrel Park is again a hidden and decaying city.

One boy Jason Hemmer, a psi with weaker powers than the rest, is allowed freedom in exchange for scouting the city and collecting prospective Dumplings as their powers ripen. He also pays for freedom by being feared and despised by the people. Jason collects for investigation Shandy Johnson, a thirteen-year-old girl. She not only has no psi but her mind cannot be read and she is completely impervious to the powers of the Dumplings. Her parents have died of radiation and she has been living with the rackety Slippec family, who make a living distilling bootleg corn liquor.

During confinement at the army Headquarters Shandy meets other prisoners without psi: Dr. Urquhart, the psychiatrist who has been hopelessly trying to cope with the Dumplings for eight years, and Dr. Marczinek, inventor of the white-noise field enclosing the Dump, who knows too much to be allowed freedom and is too old to receive the brainwash given to soldiers at the end of their terms of duty.

Shandy changes her mind about Jason when she discovers he has still another task: to go into the Dump when the inhabitants are asleep and collect information about their health and welfare to pass to Dr. Grace Halsey, the crippled doctor who tries to take care of the savage children. On Shandy's second night at HQ Jason, making his checkup, is jumped by the Dumplings and badly beaten.

Dr. Urquhart tells Shandy that because Prothero wants to open up the Dump and the city, a person with her peculiar non-talent could be useful handling the Dumplings, as a contact they would not feel was spying on them.

But Shandy is more than impervious: she is extraordinarily intelligent and dangerously curious. She decides privately that if

she is to be useful she must know more about the Dumplings and the only way to do that is to get hold of the Dump files. She can ask Prothero, who is stern and intimidating, or steal them. She decides to ask, and waits in his office. But Prothero is angry and upset over the attack on Jason, and investigates by interrogating the Dumpling he knows best, his own son, Colin Prothero.

Hearing Prothero approaching with Colin, who is in a specially constructed cage enclosed in the Marczinek Field, Shandy becomes frightened and hides in the next room. Here she witnesses a furious quarrel between Prothero and his son; afterwards, Prothero, heartsick, livid with fury, comes into the room and finds her.

6

YOU!" He put back the bottle and glass and dumped the cigar in the sink. She stood up. As the cabinet door swung to she glimpsed the reflection of her face, slate eyes livid against dark skin.

"You sneak!" He grabbed her shoulders and began to shake her. "You filthy guttersnipe! Spying on me—"

She twisted in his grasp. "I didn't come to spy! I—"

"—sticking your nose in—"

"—only come to ask—"

"—everything, digging up dirt! What do you want here?"

"—if I could see the Dump files!"

"There's no money in this place! Human garbage, wrecked lives—"

"I don't want to pry into your life, and I don't want money!" She wrenched her shoulders away from his hands. "I came to ask to see the Dump files," she stamped her foot, "to ask, to ask, to ask!"

They stood glaring at each other, both winded. She gulped and finished lamely, "I was sitting here waiting and when I heard everybody coming I got scared and hid."

He said slowly, "Maybe you don't belong in the Dump . . . but you do belong out there in a court of civil law." He took a deep breath." *"I* don't want you here, but I haven't got all the say in the matter."

He strode into the office and over to the filing-cabinet, jerked open a drawer—her eyes were too blurred to see whether it was marked D—and yanked out a thick wad of folders. He slammed it on the desk and leafed through it with trembling hands, pulled out one folder and threw it back in the drawer. He looked up and said through his teeth. "Urquhart said if you *asked* I was to give you the Dump files." He

picked them up and shoved them at her, and she clutched them to her chest.

"Urquhart has lots of bright ideas," said Prothero. "But if you want to know what *I* think, I think he's a fool—and you're a thief! Now get out!"

At the door she tripped, twisted to keep hold of the files, and sat down hard on the hall floor. She saw that what she had tripped over was a foot, and looked up at the soldier by the door. It was Davey. She scrambled up and glared at him, but his face was expressionless.

"Touche!" she snarled, and made her way down the hall, into the first dark doorway, where she found a chair, set the files on the floor, and burst into tears.

SIMULTANEOUSLY the lights went on and the peculiar tp sound broke on the air.

Jason was sitting at the desk. They were in Urquhart's office.

"Auditioning for the next Passion Play?" His voice was heavy with sarcasm. She looked up through her tears and saw her hair had broken loose and was bursting out all around her head. Still sobbing, she reached down, fumbled the lace out of a shoe, and tied it back.

"You nut! You had him all ready to like and trust you, and you had to louse it up. What are you blubbering for?"

"I'm insulted. I was only—"

He began to laugh.

"Go ahead, if you can get fun out of my pratfalls."

"I didn't think that was funny. Are you hurt?"

"Only when you laugh."

He did his best to smooth his face. "I'm not laughing. Why are you insulted?"

"Because I went in there to—"

"Yeah, I know. You went in there to *ask*. Well, why'n hell didn't you?"

"I got scared."

He snorted. "Oh boy, the Reckless Roamer of Sorrel Park. Never scared in your life . . . so what? So he would've been mad. He wouldn't have bit your head off—just an ear or two. Now look what you did to him. Was he broadcasting! Nearly took *my* head off."

"Why didn't you stop him? You could've."

"Stop him! You're a panic. He's got a head like a bull. I couldn't try anything on him without his finding out sooner or later, and I couldn't stick around here ten minutes after he did. He doesn't really believe it can be done, and I wouldn't want to be the one to prove it to him. All that stuff with Colin—that was his pride being broken for the hundredth time—twice over because you saw it."

She took a wad of tissues from Urquhart's desk and swabbed

her face. "I didn't want to see it."

"I know you didn't. But you were sneaky, and you can't be sneaky around psi even if you're an Imper—it's not the best policy. Besides, you heard him. Urquhart told him to let you have the files if you asked."

"Why didn't Urquhart just give them to me?"

"He wanted you to think it up for yourself."

"Oh yeah. So I thought it up and this is what I get for it."

"You got the files."

"I don't want them now—oh, I guess I do. Why did Urquhart want me to ask for them?"

"Ask him."

She rested her chin on her hands and thought for a moment. "Suppose it was like a test?"

He was silent.

"If I'm not interested in people I'm useless—and if I'm too scared to handle them properly it doesn't matter how interested I am. If you look at it that way I've passed one part of it and failed the other." She smiled. "Maybe I've passed a third part by figuring it all out for myself."

He whistled a bar of melody elaborate with grace-notes and arpeggios. "Maybe. Figure you know everything now?"

"No. I still don't know why you're here."

His brow became a pair of joined circumflexes, but he relaxed and stretched. "Look in my file."

"It wouldn't be here. These are Dump files."

"Kiddo . . . we are all in the Dump."

SHE picked up the heap of files and leafed them. Names flicked before her eyes: COOK, Elizabeth (Lexy); DOLLARD, John (Jocko); . . . HALSEY, Grace; HEMMER, Jason; HURLEY, LaVonne; KING, Harvey (Scooter) (Kingfish); . . . PROTHERO, Colin Adams; PROTHERO, Stephen Decatur . . .

She stopped. "Swift said it was a brave man that first ate an oyster . . . Prothero's put his file in my hands."

"Oh, he's brave, all right. But in this case he's just numb."

"I know he took one out. I guess it was mine. But Urquhart's here, I see. He must have handled the interviews. Who did his?"

"He handed in his analyst's report."

She put the files down. "Does your file tell why you're here, Jason? Don't ask me to look at it. It'll tell me all about when you were born, and what you weighed, and whether you were a good-natured kid, and if you broke windows or stole apples. I don't need that kind of junk. I

know I'm the only person you can't read, and you could say it's a good reason not to trust me . . . maybe you forget to look at the outsides of people once in a while, because you're so busy with the inside. But you know what people look like and how they sound when they're telling lies; you haven't forgotten everything you learned before you found you had psi."

Jason sighed. "Yeah. It's possible. But maybe you'd like to tell *me* something: why you want to know."

"I want to know why I ought to stay here," said Shandy. "I think I could get out if I really tried. You could say it's my duty to stay, but what do I know about this kind of duty? I'm thirteen years old.

"Nobody knew about you when the Dump was set up. You came here four years later, so you must have come of your own free will. I can see you've got a necessary job, but it's a terribly ugly and dangerous one. Marczinek and the rest just fell into their jobs when they didn't know they were going to have to stay so long. Nobody forced them to come in the first place, but they had age and experience to help them decide. How could you make such a complicated moral decision at the age of fourteen? Why should I even have to think about it at my age?"

"Maybe," said Jason, "we just oughta say that if I couldn't, I'd be in the Dump—and if you couldn't, you wouldn't be Shandy Johnson." He stood up and went over to the window. There was a Walpurgis-night glow over the rim of the Dump; it gave the watcher the sense of a place where hideous sacrifices were being offered. "That might be nearly all of the answer for you . . . but it isn't all of it for me . . ."

Shandy said, "If you think I'm being too snoopy I won't pester you any more."

"That's kind of an ambitious statement! Nah, I have to be a lot snoopier—in meaner ways. What I'm getting round to telling you, Shandy, is: there's two other psis like me in Sorrel Park."

"Is that right! I guess I don't know them."

"No. I hope you never will. One's a girl—a married woman now—about twenty-four, and the other's a boy of eleven."

"Are they bright?"

He turned away from the window, grinning. "I could've guessed you'd ask that. Bright enough."

"Gee, if they could get along like that, without anybody knowing, maybe Doydoy—"

"No." He sighed. "Not with the present set-up."

"Powerful?"

Not in Doydoy's class, though

the boy's a firecracker. He's strong and healthy and lively, everything Doydoy should have been . . . I never forgot him crawling on his hands like that. I wouldn't let it happen again. I knew Prothero needed somebody like me, because pulling in all the kids in Sorrel Park for examination every year or two was too chancy and sloppy. I got together with the others and worked it out. The kid's too young and irresponsible. The girl would've come, but she wasn't really strong, physically, and she'd been going to get married . . . and I'm a tough lunk and don't look too bright. So I let myself get pulled in. That way I get to have a say about who comes—and who stays. That's all there is." He came over and sat down again.

"You're lucky you didn't get thrown in the Dump."

"It wasn't easy—I had to come out like a solid citizen on the tests, and still not look like I was here on purpose. It nearly got queered because Urquhart figured there was something up right away. But he knew a good thing when he saw it so he kept quiet."

"Does he know about the others?"

"He's met them, and he's tested them too. When I was sure I could trust him I thought that'd be the best way to get him to trust me . . . you saw he knows how to keep his mouth shut."

"I can do the same." She bit her lip. "One more thing. I know I really shouldn't ask—"

"Don't let that stop you."

"You've gone through a lot to keep others out of the Dump . . . but you knew I had no psi—and you knew pretty well that if you brought me here I'd be staying. How come you brought me in, Jason?"

He laughed. "It's what I like about your questions: you can always answer with a simple yes or no. Well, kiddo," he slapped the desk and stood up, "the minute I saw you, I says: Jason, here's one you don't have to worry about. This doll can take good care of herself."

SHANDY was sitting on her bed, trying to put her thoughts in order. She was a little ashamed that she had chivvied Jason into telling her about the other psis, but at least she had penetrated the mystery she had sensed around him. She was resolving to leave him alone and try to forget them, when she felt a sudden stab of jealousy. From his words about them she had deduced a network of friendship and dependence among the three of them; the Dumpling pack had evolved nothing comparable.

But she had never belonged to anything, and she didn't belong

to anything now, either. She muttered, "Feelin' real sorry for yourself, kook?"

She had just been given her first emotional hotfoot. She had told Urquhart that she had previously gotten her emotions from books, and it was true. Yet, she had also seen the Slippecs in orgies of fury and drunken hate, and had moved aside in her mind to watch them, believing that there was something artificial about them because she herself had never been touched. She conceded now that she might possibly have been mistaken.

If the Slippecs flung their emotions about it did not necessarily mean that they were not real and painful, if only for the short time they lasted. She deduced this because she was feeling real and painful. She had flubbed the business of the files from A to Z and would have given quite a lot to have missed the exchange between Colin and Prothero. She had seen Prothero with something on his back that was every bit as terrible as her father's scar; and the face of X had come too close for comfort. It was not the kind of experience she thirsted for.

Beside all of which she had been chewed out by both Prothero and Jason. She was furious at herself. She trudged into the bathroom to clean her teeth and confronted her reflection.

"Dumbhead!" She snarled at the dark face the locked-in gene of some forgotten Italian or Spaniard had given her, the child of fair-skinned northern parents. Her eyes were red-rimmed.

Prothero had called her a thief.

But she had seriously considered stealing the files when they were hers for the asking all along. She had never thought of herself as immoral—only a person who had to know things and made sure she found out. For years she had toted jugs of corn from the Slippecs' still to Fitch's Joint, without stopping to wonder whether it was wrong. The spirit of Sorrel Park had been warped by tragedy, barbed-wire, and terribly repressive policing. Did this give the citizens an inalienable right to break laws in order to make themselves sick with rotgut? And she had taken full jugs from Ma Slippec and handed them to Fitch; empties from Fitch to be filled by Ma Slippec.

If she had refused would they have forced her to go on, or found her some other way to be useful? She had never put the matter to a test and now it was too late.

But I was only a kid then, I didn't know what I was doing. And I'm still a kid, anyway. I can't help . . .

. . . thinking like a Dumpling.

She tugged at the frayed lace binding her hair. It snapped, and she flung it away. She made a face in the mirror. Beautiful. Now your hair's hangin' down like spaniel ears. She yanked at it, but it stayed. It would have been pretty silly if it had come out.

She noticed a pimple under the angle of her jaw: a stigma of adolescence. That and two hairs in the left armpit. Whee, I'm growing up! She peered down the neck of her jersey. Nothing dangerous there yet. Her feet came to her attention. Long red sneakers, 7½AAAA, no laces. She kicked the unlaced shoe off her foot into the bedroom and followed it in. Thin soles, rubber parting from the uppers, toes about to come out. They had stained her socks many a time in the winter slush, and no new ones in sight. *Mebbe when I git the new batch out, dearie? Couple jugs oughta make it?* Even if the cigarstore had not been a front it would not have brought in enough money to buy her shoes. Her life had been founded on immorality.

There was a pair of new white shoelaces on the bed. She smiled at them; she was grateful, but it was a pity Jason couldn't have managed the shoes to go with them. She threaded in the new laces, pulled the heap of files onto her lap, and immersed herself in less personal problems.

Q: Do you know what's happening now?"

A: You got me hyp—hypma—

Q: I've used drugs and hypnosis to inhibit your tp and pk. You may not understand my words, but you can still read my mind and you know I don't mean you any harm.

A: Yeah . . . I guess . . .

Q: And it's no use trying to fight. You're much too sleepy. You've got quite a record with the civvies, haven't you, John?

A: Call me Jocko.

Q: All right, Jocko. I was talking to your mother and father and—

A: That ain't my pop. He's in the bughouse. That's Moe.

Q: Moe? Moe who?

A: I dunno. Moe, shmoe. Who cares?

A: Stephen Decatur . . . yeh, my people had me slated for the Navy—but I ended up in the Army instead . . . sure, they were upset . . . I've always had a funny feeling that I got into all this trouble because I went against them—don't tell me that's irrational, I know it already.

Q: I don't tell people they're irrational—I just try to help them figure it out for themselves.

A: Well, I figured it out for myself, but I'm no further ahead.

Q: That hasn't gone far enough as an insight. Maybe you

could get some help out of a couple of years of analysis.

A: Analysis! Lie around on a couch and tell some clot how I wet the bed when I was eight years old!

Q: Did you? How old were you when you stopped?

A: None of your damn business!

Q: There's something I can't figure out here, Jason. Your file says you were pulled into juvenile court when you were nine years old for malicious mischief —you and Charley Longhouse threw some rocks into Koerner-the-Florist's window.

A: Yeah, that old bat. The judge gave me probation—my father didn't, though.

Q: Then you apparently went straight, did well in school, and kept off the books altogether till the day before yesterday, when you broke into Chremsler's Market Garden and started teeping cabbages and potatoes down Alicia St., giving Mayor Hough a black eye in the process. If it hadn't been for that, nobody'd have known you were a psi. How come?

A: Well, gee, I guess I just kinda went crazy, that's all.

Q: That so? Um, tell me, Jason . . . do you like having psi?

A: Not much.

Q: Why not? You can get what you want, read minds—

A: There's not much to take around here, and I got my folks here, so I don't want to leave . . . the insides of people's minds isn't something you want to live with every day, some people, anyway. Things get spoiled: I see a nice-lookin' doll comin' down the street all dressed up, and she's thinkin', *Is the powder covering the pimple on my nose?* Oh, you can laugh. I'm only fourteen, I got plenty of time—but I don't see why I hafta get my ideas all squashed before I'm old enough to really enjoy 'em. It's no help having psi.

Q: Maybe not,—but I would not mind knowing what you're thinking right now.

A: Honest, Doc—nothin' there but the ordinary junk.

Q: I think I'd like to be able to judge that for myself!

A: Help!

Q: I'm trying to help you, son. Please be still. I'm not going to hurt you.

A: I can't . . . I want . . . let me—let me go!

Q: Donatus—is that your name?

A: They—they call-call me—Doydoy.

Q: I don't want to call you that. Tell me how this happened to you, Donatus.

A: I—I d-on't know! I don't! Leave me al-lone—please!

Q: Boy, I'm trying to help—.

A: I can't! I tell you! I want-want my mother, fa-father! Mother, help!

Q: I'm afraid I just can't do anything more with him, sir.

Q: I care.

A: Aah, don't gimme that malarkey. Remember I know what's goin' on in your mind. Just the look of me makes you want to puke.

Q: I never—

A: You don't have to *say*. You haven't got it straight yet. Your mind's a piece of cellophane to me. You don't have to *say*. But it's my body and I'm stuck with it. I can do anything I like but change my body, 'cause I can't be sure it'd keep workin' if I did. Roxy Howard tried it an' killed herself an' I'm not gonna be that kind of nut. But if you didn't have me pegged down like this I could do anything I liked with you. I could change those brains you're so uppity about into cheese or jelly or lead. Then you wouldn't think I was so ugly because you wouldn't be thinkin'.

Q: You don't have to be ugly inside, LaVonne.

A: Anybody gonna worry what's inside me? Twisted guts. Them others, they make me laugh. So their old lady spits on them or their old man kicks them around. I got cheated before I was even born! Queen of Sheba coulda been my mother, wouldna made no difference. Ain't nobody in the world don't owe me something for letting me be born. An' I'm gonna collect. Every time, no matter what you think you can do with me. So don't gimme any bull that you care.

Q: I guess I've gotten all I want from you, LaVonne. But I'll tell you . . . you haven't gone deep enough into those layers of cellophane. I do care . . . and that's just the damn fool thing about it.

SHANDY tidied the heap of closed files and closed her eyes against the face of X. It was an ugly face, a lonely face, radiating with the force of the psi to make its mark on Sorrel Park. Including herself, because she was here. She had told Jason she thought she could escape if she wanted to, but even if she were free the problem would never die in her in the same way as she could get rid of Fitch and the bootlegging business. She was committed.

The ceiling light flickered and she glanced at it. The naked bulb in its mesh housing reminded her of Colin Prothero in his cage, and she shivered, and then yawned. Her time-sense told her it was one-thirty a.m. give or take five minutes; she was going to be terribly cross in the morning. She stretched her arms and yawned again.

And then the light exploded.

Without thinking, she flicked off the bed like a lizard and rolled under. She waited there motionless for a few seconds, and then became aware of a stinging scratch on one cheekbone. She rubbed at it, and a sliver of glass came away on her finger.

She thought she heard noises outside, but nothing happened, so she crawled out from under and felt her way over to the window. She slid up the blind: except for a few misty stars there was no light outside.

A voice said, "It's okay. Don't get scared."

"Jason! What happened?"

"The lights went out."

"Is that right? I'm glad you told me. What are we going to do now?"

"Hold hands."

"Why Jason, I thought you were going to wait till I grew up."

"Come on, take my hand and I'll get you over to Grace's room. She's nervous and I want you to be with her while we scout around and see what's up."

She found his hand. The palm was not only sweated, but vibrating with such rigors it seemed the whole force of his body was behind them. "Jason."

"Yeh." There was a ragged edge to his voice that made her pause, but not for long.

"I know you wouldn't be scared . . . why are you shaking?"

"I just caught a chill," said Jason. "Come *on*."

GRACE HALSEY was huddled in her bed, and Shandy knelt beside her. "There's plenty men posted here, so don't get worried," said Jason, and he was gone.

"I am, just the same . . . Grace, do you—" She saw in the dim light that Grace Halsey, too, was trembling. She caught her breath. "They *have* gotten out!"

"Please, dear, don't—"

"But nothing can stop—why has he left us here?"

Grace fought for control. "They—you see, they trusted me, they know me, and they hardly realize anything about you; no-one has to worry about **us**. Really, we're the two people least likely to be hurt."

"Oh—I'm sorry, Grace." She was ashamed. "I shouldn't have let go like such a nut."

"It's all right." But the trembling increased.

"Grace, you're crying . . ." Shandy touched the quivering shoulder, terrified.

Grace found a handkerchief and managed to control herself. "Shandy, I—I was a neurosurgeon before . . .the paralysis—and after that I thought I'd never be able . . . they asked me to come here and take care of those

children . . . I—I trusted them. I hoped—oh," she blew her nose, "I'm so silly." Shandy buttoned her lip. After a moment the voice came out of the dark again.

"My dear," Grace said sadly, "there's only one thing to be said about it. It's a mug's game."

7

SHANDY raised her head on an aching neck. She had gone to sleep crouched beside the bed. Her eyes were gritty. Grace was still asleep, fingers twitching, breath rattling in her throat. The light in the room was the grey ooze of early dawn.

Shandy pulled herself up by holding on to the bed. Her body felt broken in every bone. She looked up at the window and saw that two panes were shattered. One had burst while she was sitting there with Grace in the dark and the other must have gone while she was asleep.

When she put her head out through the hole in the window and craned her neck at the risk of slitting her throat she could see that huge doors had opened up in the ground by the walls of Headquarters, and men were driving tractors up ramps leading from underground storage vaults. They were dragging cannons painted in camouflage colors. After she had counted three of these she watched two tanks coming out and shook her head at what seemed to her the futility of the preparations. Then came several wheeled platforms stacked with antennas that looked like additional components for the Marczinek Field. Did Prothero intend to set up a mobile Field like a butterfly net, and shoo the Dumplings into it? She turned her head a little, and saw the mess.

The Dumplings, who could make nothing with their hands, or out of their angry lives, were prime breakers. They had blasted Marczinek's flowerbed down to the ground. A few blackened stems lay in writhing shapes, and the earth was littered with cinders and ashes eddying gently in the early winds of morning.

Something crackled and tinkled above, and she pulled her head in quickly. Another window. The Dumplings knew what was going on, and weren't afraid to show it.

She went downstairs and along the hall, gingerly, though she was sure Prothero was very busy elsewhere. In Urquhart's office she found Jason and Urquhart eating breakfast from a tray on the desk.

"Coffee?" asked Jason.

"I thought the electric went."

"Generator's going."

"Jason, Marsh's flowers—"

"Yeah. You oughta see what they can do to a human being."

"No thanks." She sipped the coffee. It was vile, but hot, and the heat loosened her joints. "How did they get out?"

"I dunno. We had a theory how they *might* get out but I can't get close enough to them to find out if they did it that way."

"Where are they?"

"Shandy, don't. Don't ask me, don't make me think about it more than I have to."

She thought of the Dumplings homing on his mind, on the minds of everyone here, except herself. "Okay." She turned to Urquhart, who was leaning over the desk and gnawing a thumbnail. "What are they waiting around for? They've been out over four hours."

"They were in eight years . . . I think they're trying to decide what they can do to really impress us. Something bigger than blowing lights and breaking windows . . . are you afraid?"

"I know they can't read my mind, and I don't think they can do much to me from a distance. If that's not being scared, I'm not."

"I am," said Urquhart. "It's strange; I've listened to people with the most irrational and fantastically ugly terrors. I couldn't believe I'd ever have to share in anything like that."

"Did you ever expect them to break out?"

"I'd given up expecting them to be good little kids."

"But how much hope was there for them? On those scores you gave them under Kaplanski's Standard Index—"

"There was a space to be filled in with a dotted line. I filled it."

"But you gave Colin Prothero a sixty-eight point four percent prognosis! That's just the sort of thing that's been encouraging Prothero to push for opening up the Sore and tearing down the Dump—and it's wrong!"

Urquhart crossed his arms on the desk and looked at her.

"Shandy—"

"Don't, Chris!" Jason said quickly.

"It's all right. Shandy, Prothero's wife killed herself three weeks after the first Dump was set up."

"Oh."

"Yes; that crosses the t on Prothero for you. I knew her only slightly . . . she was a gentle person, but not a weak one—and she couldn't bear it. If that sixty-eight point four percent kept Prothero from going mad, I'm not ashamed of it. It was a genuine test score for a boy of Colin's age and intelligence. It just didn't—couldn't—take into account the fact that at the age of ten he was psychokinetic, telepathic, a teleport, and a pyrophore as well . . ." His voice lowered to a whisper.

"Nobody knew it would last eight years."

"They're supposed to calm down in the mid-thirties—"

"What a hope!"

"—And Curtis Quimper. He was a late starter, so his burnout would come even later. He's twenty-six now, isn't he?"

"At the rate he's been burning himself out he ought to be practically ready to retire. But the break's changed everything. Before, I might have had some hope for him if he'd been man enough to duck the fight with the Kingfish—and managed to stay alive." He resumed work on his thumbnail.

"Grace is going to wake up in a minute," said Jason.

"Okay, I'll go back." He came with her, and she was glad, because the silence and the fear were palpable now in the empty halls. She did not feel panic, but she knew there was nothing for her to do here. Her usefulness was to have ripened slowly; the time was gone, and the future terrifying. But it was not a thing to talk about to Jason.

GRACE HALSEY was not yet stirring, although her breathing had quickened.

"Is it all right to ask you how they might have gotten away?"

"Not much secrecy about that any more. As near as I can get it straight, it goes like this: while the radiations are circulating in the barrier, if one of the antennae wavers enough to get out of phase with the next one, even the slightest bit—well, that would leave a weak place in the Field, and they could all push through at once. It shouldn't happen," he shrugged, "but the Field's still working perfectly, so maybe it did. But that bunch of lunks hasn't got ten years of grade school among 'em, and they'd have to (a) know a lot about electrodynamics to figure it; (b) and be awfully sensitive to fluctuations in the Field; and (c) keep on the alert every minute," he rubbed his reddened eyes, "so I can't see how they coulda done it."

"You've forgotten Doydoy."

"Nah . . . I wanted to. But what makes you so sure? You didn't know him at all."

"Another lonely kid? I think I know him. He'd have been reading everything he could get his hands on, and he couldn't get out to play. Besides, he's more than just bright. I bet every time you went into the Dump he was probing you down to the oceanic sense, blocks or not." Jason grunted. "Unless it was LaVonne. She's smart enough, isn't she?"

"Yeah, but she was never much of a reader."

"She had access to his mind. When they broke out eight years

ago she was the one who shut Fox up. You have to destroy a part of the brain to do that.'"

"Broca's area . . . she got that from Doydoy," he admitted. "And so did I."

She bit her lip. "Damn. I guess I should have shut up."

"Listen, there's no getting away from it . . .but I always liked to think there was some hope for Doydoy."

"Oh, Jason! If you'd been in his place—"

"I admit it. I've never felt different. I'd have done the same."

"Do you get anything from the Pack at all?"

"They're a couple miles away —I don't know where—and nearly out of range. They can shield for a short time, off and on. Even if they couldn't, their group mind is kind of a mess, and it's hard to pick out a decent train of thought. A logical one. They never have any decent ones."

"Doydoy?"

"He can shield two-three hours —and I know what you're gonna ask: I can do it too, for about five minutes. Ever try concentrating on a pinpoint for an hour straight? That's what I go through each minute."

"Do you ever get any kind of signal at all from me?"

He sighed. "When I close my eyes you disappear completely. All I need is a pair of earplugs."

"Hey—" But her retort was cut off. Grace Halsey began to toss on the bed. "Shandy. Shandy! Are you all right, dear?"

"Here I am, Grace." The sky had been paling gradually, and now the sun broke between two lead bars of cloud with a harsh yellow light.

"Gee, I used to read a lot of junk about rosy-fingered dawn," said Shandy. "This one looks like brass knuckles. I'll get some breakfast for you, Grace."

THE sun was coming into her room, but there was a jagged line of shadow on the blind, from a broken pane. She was lying on the bed. She had thought of getting some sleep, but a massive foreboding had settled on her suddenly. Since the situation had come to a head so quickly, there was no more time for her, and no more use for her.

She sat up and stared at the worn pale spots on the knees of her jeans. This room was not the young girl's dream, but she had never been able to afford many young-girl dreams, and for spaciousness, privacy, and cleanliness it was more than she had ever expected to enjoy. She could give up these but she longed to keep on drawing courage and affection from Urquhart, Marczinek and Grace; and she wanted Jason's astringent personality around. But she had no claims on anyone.

This was a strange place to have found missing parts of her character, and the qualities of home. But she was still far away from ultimate discovery in the first case, and permanence in the second.

"Shandy."

Jason was at the door, and he had a glum look about him. She got up and followed him silently down the hall.

When they reached the stairs she said, "He's kicking me out, isn't he?" He didn't answer. "It's no use, Jason. There's nothing for me to do here now, and he can't just hang around waiting and hoping to find some terrific talent I've got . . . Jason, don't tell me you're going to miss me."

"Me?" He glanced back at her. "Miss all that yackety—ah, forget it. I got used to you, I guess."

She didn't want to ask what plans Prothero might have for her; she didn't think she was going to approve of them.

Prothero was sitting at his desk, staring at his folded hands. He looked up. "Jason, I want you to go and tell Marczinek I'll see him in fifteen minutes."

"Sir—"

"Jason, keep your mouth out of this. I've told you what I want."

Jason disappeared with an angry pop. Prothero went on staring at his hands. He sighed. "Miss Johnson, we brought you here to find out if you could be of some help to us in the future. But with everything that's happened I need all the help I can get right this minute. I just can't spare you the time any more."

She breathed deeply, hoping her voice wouldn't quaver. "Where do you expect me to go?"

"I'll have you taken back to your people. I don't think you'll come to harm."

"But my stepmother's in jail, the still's bust, and the rest of them . . ." her voice trailed off. The rest of the Slippecs were hardly aware of her existence; they had nothing to spare for her. "I have no place to stay."

He said coldly, "You might find a friend to stay with. I'm sure you have plenty of friends. Or," his mouth was grim, "my friend Chief Casker of the Civil Police will be happy to put you up."

"I'll find a friend," she muttered.

"Good." He began to shuffle papers on the desk and his face was so weary she pitied him.

"Look," she said desperately, "I can run messages for you. I could be useful that way. The Dumplings don't know I'm around when nobody else sees me, and I know how to keep from being seen."

"I can believe that. But . . . you are insolent and furtive. I can't have that here. I don't trust you."

"I can't say anything to that," she whispered, and turned to go.

SHE was throwing things into the duffel, lingering to draw out the last few moments, when Urquhart came in. She looked at him without speaking.

"Shandy, don't—" he was groping for a word, "don't go to pieces—oh, I don't mean that, because I know you won't. But if you're anything valuable or special—"

"I could be a special kind of jerk." She gave the duffel-cord a yank and knotted it down fiercely.

He said, "There's a woman in the Public Library—a Miss Wilma French—"

"I know. She chased me out at closing time once or twice."

"She's really quite decent." He flushed. "She'd take you in if you told her I sent you. I'll write you a note."

She looked away. With the blood in his face he had given her a gift—his vulnerability. He had crossed the t on himself. But she could only shake her head wordlessly and swing the duffel over her shoulder.

And the noise began. A roaring that came from outside, and the quality of it made her drop the duffel and run out the door without stopping to look out the window. Urquhart was already down the hall. Noise washed and crackled around her, the wallawalla of a crowd scene in an ancient movie, the snick-snap-spatter of old sound track on cracked film breaking off and on in split seconds. She might have been a teleport for all she was aware of getting down the stairs or shoving aside anyone who was in her way. She ran straight into it, as she had run at the civvies. The experience had not taught her caution.

There was a milling of soldiers in the yard, Prothero somewhere yelling, "Get out that cannon, dammit, get—"

She pushed her way towards a circular cleared space near the flowerbed. Jason was in the center of it and around him, flickering there and away, yelling like forty, were four or five Dumplings in their prisoners'-grey, never the same one in the space of two seconds, flick-flick, there and gone God knew where.

She fought to keep balance in the push, and the ashes of the flowerbed crunched under her feet. She had seen the old pictures in the files last night, and she tried to pick out faces from them: here, Curtis Quimper with an aged and haggard face; there, LaVonne, a squat Velasquez dwarf bulky and grotesque in the coverall; Colin Prothero, Scooter, who had styled himself the Kingfish, Jocko; wild, unkempt, hair overgrown, filthy, stubbled faces

scored with black lines as though they had burned their beards off hair by hair. Jason was crouched in the center with his eyes squeezed tight seeing everything and his hands over his ears shutting out nothing.

As she watched, he straightened, flung out his arms, opened his eyes and yelled, "Stop it! Stop it! Prothero! Stop it and shut up! SHUT UP!"

The Dumplings stopped, seven or eight in a circle, and flung their glances around the crowd like dust, almost intangible matter that left its influence where it touched, and beyond.

Gradually, the rest of the noise stopped. The men became still where they were standing; two or three fell like statues and lay on the ground in stiff attitudes, with their eyes open. Prothero stood a few feet away from the circle, frozen in a flourish of arm movement, eyes and mouth open to the limit and face a slowly draining scarlet.

Then the Dumplings turned to face Jason.

He said, panting, "For God's sake, give me a chance!"

The Dumplings flicked out one by one like the lights in a sleeping city, until only the Kingfish and LaVonne remained before him. Like the rest, the Kingfish had changed from the urgent half-terrified boy who had run out in the moonlight with the Pack. His face had thinned and wizened. Shandy thought of the smooth-skinned children of the photographs; Marczinek's heart had turned at the sight of them.

THE Kingfish was watching Jason speculatively, and Shandy realized she was the only other person in the courtyard who was conscious and able to move. But she stayed as still as the rest.

Jason lowered his arms and took a shuddering breath. "I told you I don't know."

The Kingfish snarled, "You're shielding!"

"I can't shield that good and you know it!"

Silence. If furies of argument raged and crackled inwardly among the three of them, there was no sign.

Shandy glanced at LaVonne. Her hair hung in long greasy strings and her hugely bulging forehead and cheekbones left only slits for the small glitter of her eyes. Her lips curled superbly up to her pug nose and her jaw was deeply underhung. Her uniform was as evenly tattered as if she had ripped it purposely herself, and she probably had. A picture of self-hatred.

Just the look of me makes you want to puke. LaVonne was another oddment of the Pack: a reversed spiritual image of Doydoy. Shandy recalled an old cartoon in which an ugly crooked

man found a funhouse mirror that neutralized his ugliness with its own distortions and returned him a straight and handsome image. Left to herself LaVonne might once have found such a mirror,—but not here, submerged in the raw honesty of telepathy and psychopathic contempt for deformity. Shandy wondered if the Dumplings ever got sick of their own transparencies and mutually perfectly-checked powers.

Finally the Kingfish scratched his cheek and said, in a voice that was meant to be persuasive, but came out a whine, "Doydoy always said that you were a good guy . . ."

Jason put his hands in his pockets, waited, and said nothing. But his face was glittering with sweat under the morning sun and the dark stain was running down in lines from the armpits of his khaki t-shirt.

LaVonne snapped, "Come on, come on! We need Doydoy!"

"Ah, shut up, LaVonne! Listen, Hemmer—"

Jason interposed lazily, "Scared you won't be able to break enough windows without him?"

Whatever the Kingfish did was not apparent, but it made Jason pull his hands from his pockets and hold his head screaming silently in a rictus of pain. Shandy trembled and was paralyzed.

The Kingfish said, "It's past the time for jokes."

Jason opened his eyes and grunted agreement. "I never figured you were joking. But I don't know where he is."

"He's gotta be somewhere."

"He's shielding." Jason felt the back of his neck, to make sure it was still there. "Maybe he's tired of you."

"He can't shield five solid hours."

"He might; you couldn't be sure." He licked his lips. He had made a mistake, and the Kingfish seized on it.

"If he can do that, so can you! Let's get going!"

"Look, I'm not like that—you know me inside out! I—" But both of them leaped on him and had him down on the ground, face in the cinders.

"We'll turn you inside out!" The Kingfish, kneeling on Jason's back, spat and wiped his mouth on a shoulder. "Okay, LaVonne! Let's go!"

Shandy found voice, arms, legs, and finally sense. She grabbed a fallen rifle, knocked men over like dominoes, and leaped out swinging and screeching at the top of her lungs.

The Kingfish jerked his head up. "Hey!" The rifle swung. She had a blink of their gaping faces. The Kingfish raised his arm in an instinctive gesture that went back much farther than psi, sun-

light flicked blue on the oiled barrel, and the rifle, coming down badly aimed, lost momentum in suddenly empty space and thwacked Jason across the backs of his thighs. The Dumplings were gone.

"Jason, are you all right? Did I hurt you? Jason!" She knelt beside him. He was lying with his face still half in cinders and his shoulders quivering. "Jason! What are you laughing for, you kook!"

Jason rolled over and sat up, still laughing weakly, gasping for breath, hugging himself and shivering. "I wish you could have seen your face!"

"If you could see your own you wouldn't talk!"

"That's not what I meant." Jason picked himself up and began to brush off the ashes. "I read a story once about some pioneer women larrupping wild Injuns with broomsticks!" He doubled up and started in all over again.

SHE looked round. The yard was coming alive; men were getting up and moving about; they discovered that their eyeballs were dry, red, and painful from standing for minutes with their eyes open. Like figures in a sleeping-beauty pageant they tried to continue the actions they had left off, and discovered the cause was gone.

Prothero's yell died down into a cough, and he began to make his way over to the flowerbed, blinking and rubbing his eyes.

Jason had stopped laughing. "Keep your trap shut," he told Shandy.

Prothero was shaking his head like a wet dog. He was still not quite aware of what had happened, and particularly that it had happened to him, Stephen Decatur Prothero. His hand came down with a hundred-pound slap on Jason's shoulder. "What did they want?" he barked. "Where did they go?"

"Doydoy got away from them, and they think we're hiding him. They didn't believe me, they were going to take me back with them . . . but Shandy stopped them."

Prothero gulped, and blinked painfully. "How did she manage all of that?" His hand on the shoulder tightened and corded, but Jason's face was expressionless.

"They put all of you to sleep—except her. It doesn't work on her. She was the only one who *could* do anything. With all the excitement, and being mad over Doydoy they didn't even notice she was there." He gave a brief and uncolored description of the wild lunge with the rifle, and added, "They don't realize she's just an Imper. Right now they think she's got some kind of psi they haven't come across."

Prothero swallowed in his dry throat again and turned to Shandy. His expression was as unreadable as Jason's. "Get back to your room."

As she went she heard Prothero asking Jason, "Where are they now?"

"Camping out by Pringle's Post."

"Hmph . . . right between us and Sorrel Park."

SHE sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the tightly knotted duffel. In thickly stencilled white letters it said, JOSEPH SLIPPEC USN. The very name Slippec looked strange to her, as though in the last three days her ten years of life with them had been blotted out. She felt numb. She had been granted a stay of execution, but what she was coming back to was not what she had only just learned to value. Her small security had vanished with the Dumplings.

Doydoy was gone. After eight years of hideous suffering he had still managed an act of defiance. Was he still the decent person Jason had once tried to help? And where could he hide?

She curled up on the bed. In an instinctive gesture she reached up and moved her fingers back and forth across the top of her skull. Her anterior fontanel had not closed until she was seven years old, and as a very small child falling asleep she would lie touching the faint depression where her pulses moved openly between brain and membrane. She had had the fancy that these were the thoughts moving about in her head. The Slippecs had not bothered much with doctors and no one noticed the opening. It had not occurred to her how much more vulnerable than other children she had been, since a comparatively light blow on the head would have killed her—and blows fell like rain where she lived. Still, she had escaped.

Where was Doydoy? He had long passed the limit of his shielding ability. Suppose he had gone back into the Dump to hide? Unlikely. She didn't think Doydoy would want to see the inside of the Dump again even if his life depended on it—even if he had been able to get back in. Jason's esp range was two or three miles in radius, the Dumplings' perhaps ten . . . suppose he were a hundred miles away by now? Yet it seemed to her that a sensitive cripple who had been cruelly imprisoned for eight of his growing years would be terrified of the open world.

No, the Marczinek Field was the only barrier that would protect Doydoy. And the Dump was the only—no. She sat up suddenly. There was one other place, equally grim, and not really an escape at all. If Doydoy had used

it, he would have been desperate to a degree that verged on foolishness. A place where he would be shielded—and perhaps starved as well. The Dump was impossible; this place merely crazy.

There was a knock on the door and Jason yelled, "Come on and have lunch!"

But she felt queasy. She had jammed herself down into a cleft stick.

I hope I'm wrong, because then it won't matter one way or the other, but in the meantime I don't know I'm wrong, and if I know my own brains at all, I'm probably right. In that case I've either got to tell somebody or shut up. If I tell, the Dumplings'll know about it right away and come down on us like a ton of bricks. If I shut up the Dumplings will probably figure it out for themselves in a couple of days—and even if they don't Doydoy will have to come out—if he can—or else, yell for help sooner or later, or starve. Now what am I to do?

Gee, sometimes I wish I wasn't so bright.

SHE opened the door and Jason said, "Just because you're a triple threat doesn't mean you need three times as long to wash your face."

"Some threat. They should know all about me anyway, just from reading you."

"They never believe me. I'm an outsider."

"They'd never want me as a sub for Doydoy."

"Not as long as they can't read you. He's their information-and-logic bank. Not willingly. They pump him to learn what to do and how to do it."

"Do you think he'd had plans to leave them?"

"I don't know . . . I think he might have been able to shield a plan to leave them—but I don't see how he could have hidden any plan to get out of the Dump—it was on their minds all the time. So when they were out he took his chances."

"I can't understand how they could have let me scare them off."

"You're an unknown factor to them. That's all."

An unknown, an x. She considered the two: X and x. The powerful but transparent Dumpling; the helpless but impenetrable Shandy.

"Wait, Jason." They were on the landing and she backed into the corner and leaned there. "I know Prothero's keeping me on because the Dumplings think I'm a threat. I'm no real use to him."

Jason raised a hand. "Don't count the teeth on a gift horse."

"Oh, I want to stay. I don't care how. Are the Dumplings reading you now?"

"Nah, they got their own troubles."

"Because you don't know anything. They must believe you that much. But if you did know —"

"Then *I'd* have troubles."

"He couldn't be shielding."

"No. Shielding's a kind of faint scrambler buzz you can't place or understand. You know the shielder's somewhere in range, but you can't tell where he is or what he's thinking. With Doydoy now there's just nothing. I had to tell them the truth. Two-three hours is the most, and he got away from them long before dawn."

"Then the Dumplings must know about your psi friends by now."

"Yes, but it doesn't matter. I told you they're not in Doydoy's class. Look, Shandy, I'm hungry and—"

"Wait a minute, Jason, please! I have to know—is he still worthwhile?"

"Who?" Suspicion was growing on his face. "What are you talking about?"

"Doydoy . . . I wondered . . . oh—" she gave up. "Never mind. Let's go and eat."

He grabbed her arm. "Now *you* just wait a minute. I want to know what you're getting at. That look in your eye says you got something up your sleeve, and I'm damn well not gonna go through all that business like last night again. Out with it!"

"I don't want to cause any more trouble, Jason." She was near tears. "But—I have a pretty fair idea where he is!"

8

THE Pandora's box was open. His hand tightened on her arm. "What do you mean, you think you know where he is?"

"Stop pulling me around like that! You don't like it when Prothero does it to you."

"This is different." But he dropped his hand. "Come on, if you got anything to say—"

"Do you want him back in the Dump? Do you?"

He grinned at her vehemence. "Pull in the claws . . . now look, you better get it straight. What I feel about Doydoy doesn't matter around here. Nobody gives a good damn. What I think and what I do are two different things. If you want the truth, I think hanging around here and getting beaten up is one hell of a way to make a living. But if you know where Doydoy is and we find him he goes wherever Prothero wants him put."

She started up the stairs.

"Shandy . . . do you realize how much Prothero hates me?"

She stopped halfway up, without turning. "Colin's a Dumpling and you're not. What difference does that make? He can't hate every other kid in the world."

"It's not only that. I'm *like* him. I'm much more like him than Colin is. And I'm nothing. Nothing to him, anyway, because I didn't come from any long line of fighting men out of military and naval academies. My people were farmers and mechanics and my father left school at sixteen to operate a lathe in a factory. According to him I haven't any right to be his son's superior. *And he knows I know all this.* He's worked up a good case of high blood pressure, trying to suppress it. Jeez, I got nothing against him—I even like him. But it doesn't help."

"What's all this got to do with Doydoy?"

"Look, Shandy, I've got to stay here as long as I have the psi. If I try—"

"But he'll just get shoved back in the Dump, and the Pack'll find out and come down on us."

"I can't help that."

"If we could hide him—"

"How long could that last? Then we'd have to deal with the Dumplings *and* the MP—and there's no place to hide. I told you I can't leave here. And I don't want to have to run away from a court-martial. It's not only my family, it's my friends—and the psi itself. You don't know how it is to have this thing. I've got to learn how to live with it, and find out what it's good for, and I can only do that by being where the other psis are. I can't leave Sorrel Park and go out there where . . ."

"Where it's so lonely."

"It—" he shrugged, "it sounds loony, but . . . it's my life's work."

"At least you know what it is," she said, not without envy.

"Yeah. It's one hell of a consolation. Now let's get that lunch. We can figure this out later."

"—could lob a nerve-gas bomb into Pringle's Post in two minutes," Prothero was saying.

"And they would be gone by the time it got there," said Marczinek dryly.

"They're too nervous to stay in one place anyway," Urquhart said.

It was true. The Pack was going to do something soon, and if it was too disorganized to plan without Doydoy it would lash out in irrational savagery—and not within the small sector which had been shut off from the world for thirty years.

"It's hard to imagine Doydoy being able to hide from them." Urquhart sighed. "We could certainly use him working with us."

Prothero snorted. "You kidding?" Shandy stole a look at him. His eyes were still red and his face had a look of suffused fury at being hoodwinked by the Dumplings in the way Jason had never dared to do. "I tell you, if we ever get out of this mess it'll

be a damn long time before I push for opening Sorrel Park again."

Marczinek said patiently, "The sugar, Jason, the sugar. I already have the cream."

* * *

"You never saw the inside of the Dump," said Jason.

"I never wanted to."

"Well, you're gonna see it now. It's the best place to talk."

"The guards will want to know why I'm going in."

"They won't see you."

She had the eerie feeling of being invisible, even non-existent, as the guards unwired the heavy doors with foot-thick windows salvaged from the reactor.

There was not a blade of grass in the Dump. The hard beaten earth had the charred look of the scorched flowerbed, and the grey weathered walls of the prefabs were streaked with flaky black. She had imagined a place littered with filth and rubbish, but it looked scoured by fury.

"They burn what they don't want," said Jason. "I guess fire's a good enough expression of hate . . . anyway, Doydoy isn't hiding here."

There was nothing there.

"Even poverty puts out garbage," said Shandy. "What do they do for love?"

"Nothing I've ever been able to figure out. Even sex isn't love to them."

"Did they every have any babies?"

"Babies! Urquhart'd've been crazy with joy if any two of them stayed together long enough to want a kid." He turned to the buildings. "Want to see the inside?"

She grimaced. "No. Why doesn't Prothero set up headquarters in here?"

"Because if he ever cornered the Pack long enough to drive them in here, it'd be hard getting out on short notice."

"Jason," she scuffed at the hard earth, "this idea of mine might be all wrong."

"Maybe . . . but if you're right—"

"The Dumplings will know it."

"Yeah . . . and he'll let Doydoy rot here as long as Colin's dangerous. His life's work!" The grey earth. The blackened walls. They seemed to stain the sky above them.

"Suppose it was LaVonne or Quimper instead of Doydoy? Would you feel the same?"

"I'm half a Dumpling myself. I don't like the idea of anybody being kept in here."

"But Doydoy—"

"Nobody will hurt Doydoy. But if you're right, and you tell me anything the first person the Pack's gonna be after is *me!*"

"I don't want you to be—"

"I know. I'm not whining," he rubbed the back of his neck. "But

you sure are a funny kid. First you save me from the Pack, and now . . ."

She shrank inside a little. "Never mind, then. Just get me back into Sorrel Park. I'll disappear and you won't have to see me again. Then you can forget what I said."

"No, I can't. It's a living problem, not just a lot of gobbledygook you can rub off a blackboard, and it's got to be lived out to the end."

"Then maybe I'll let you figure out for yourself where Doydoy is!" She was angry enough to add, "Maybe I haven't picked sides yet."

He only grinned. "Not even when you took a swing at LaVonne and the Kingfish?"

She said acidly, "If you'd been sitting on one of them, maybe I'd have swung at you!"

"I bet that would have been worth seeing, too. But I'm not gonna sit on you to get you to tell me where you think Doydoy is. I'm not that much of a Dumpling, and I haven't got time to waste. It's your decision. But if we find Doydoy, he gets handed to Prothero . . . now what'll it be, kiddo?"

"I—" she swallowed. She could not let Doyboy starve. "I should have gone myself. I could've—"

"Not without being seen. You're not inconspicuous here."

"All right. Come on."

UNDERGROUND in the vault beneath the redbrick ell there was nothing but a vast expanse of flooring that echoed cavernously to the footstep. The ceiling was a tangle of pipes and wires from which the occasional electric bulb dangled, pocking the grey floor with scrofulous light. There was nothing left in the place but dusty tread marks where the tanks and trailers had ridden out.

"Over there," Jason whispered. He pointed to the dark corner nearest the ramp, and as she strained her eyes at it she began to see. It was there, knobs, rods, antennas and wiring. The cage.

"I guess I couldn't have found it by myself . . . oh well. It's on, isn't it?" She could hear the faint hiss and crackle of the Field.

"All the time. They run the connections underground to the Dump."

They moved silently toward the corner. Shandy's heart was racing, and it seemed as if its vibrations were replicating in the great echo-space around her.

Halfway there, they paused. A shape had become discernible on the cage floor. A blot of darkness, with nothing to recognize in the crumpled form but the great black boss of the hump, rising and falling against the crosshatching of the mesh. Doydoy was asleep.

Jason raised a hand, and they moved back. "You were right."

"I wish I hadn't been . . . there just wasn't any other place." They stared at the cage in its shadowed corner.

". . . I wonder if he's so bright, after all," said Jason. "There isn't any way of getting out of that thing from the inside."

"He was just awfully tired and desperate, I think."

"Yeah." He rammed his hands in his pockets and muttered, "I'll get Prothero."

But instead he moved silently toward the cage again, and she followed. He knelt beside it and twisted his hands in the interstices from the outside as Colin had twisted his from within.

Doydoy was sleeping with his body bent at an angle to conform to the shape of the cage. His limp legs were sprawled out like a rag doll's and Shandy saw in the dim light that the soles of his shoes were unworn. His face was pale and there were metal-rimmed glasses perched crookedly on his nose; a white blotch on his neck resolved into the bandage covering the sore Grace had dressed for him. His cheek was resting on his arm, and the breath sounded very faint and small on his lips.

In the opposite corner of the cage there was a food supply spread on a sheet of wrapping paper: a salami, three tomatoes, and a wax carton half-full of milk.

Jason whispered against the meshes, "Hell, I can't! I can't do it!"

She crouched beside him. "I'm sorry, Jason."

"Sorry! What else could you do? The Pack would have found him—or he'd have rotted before anybody thought to look here."

"What shall we do?"

"All my big talk . . . but I can't let him be shoved back in the Dump—and I can't let *them* get him. God, I wish I had power that meant something! Dumper's peeper!" He spat.

Doydoy had begun to stir; his arms were reaching out, and the muscles of his face were moving in small tics. "He's going to wake up in a minute." Shandy glanced about fearfully, as though the shadows were full of Dumplings about to spring. "Do they know anything yet?"

"No, but they'll catch on."

She whispered, "Jason, if he sees you first thing he might get panicky and blow up. Maybe I could talk to him for a few minutes. Can you shield?"

He looked at her gratefully. She was giving him time, and the consequences of his decision could reach far beyond Sorrel Park. "I told you my limit's five minutes—maybe I could manage seven or eight." He backed away into the shadows.

SHE watched Doydoy, waiting as he twisted about as far on his back as the hump would allow. His hands moved, jerkily at first, as he pushed his fingers under his glasses and rubbed his closed eyes. Then they opened, a very pale blue that caught the light startlingly.

"Donatus . . ."

He came awake instantly, and his body rose in the air and flung against the cage wall like a wild thing. "Who-who are y-ou?"

His voice was cracked, and he was trembling so hard the wires rattled against the cage.

"My name's Shandy Johnson. I'm an Imper."

An understanding flicker struggled through his glare of suspicion. His body was half-fallen against the wall, hands flat on the mesh; his palms were thick and studded with calluses. "I c-aught a bit-bit ab-out you wh-en I g-g-got ou-out. Wh-at are you?"

In the scheme of things, he meant. "I don't know yet," she admitted, "but I want to help you."

"Why?"

"Because you need it. You can't get out of here without help."

"But why?"

She sighed. It was a wonder he could speak with any logic at all after eight years with the Dumplings. But he was no baby, and she couldn't waste precious time soothing him. "Because Jason Hemmer and I don't want to see you spending another eight years with that crew."

"Ja-Jason?"

"I'm his friend. He's always wanted to help you, and he's willing to risk everything to keep you out of the Dump. Will you trust us?"

He gaped at her like an idiot, and she could have sworn with vexation. But it was no idiot who had led forty-six people past the Marczinek Field, and there was no-one else who could have done it. She hissed, "Please answer! Jason's over there shielding so the Dumplings won't know all this, he's given me seven minutes and I've used up three already! Will you believe me?"

Blinking owlishly, he raised a slow hand to straighten his glasses. "Th-there's nowh-where else to hide."

He had some sense, after all. "This place isn't safe either, now we've found it, and if we hadn't found it you'd have starved. Jason will find a way to keep you safe. But I can't let you out till I know you want to come, because *they'll* be here, and then everything'll be ruined. Will you?"

He closed his eyes, and, astonished, she watched slow tears creep from under his lids to mark white runnels on his smudged skin.

"Donatus, we must hurry!"

He opened his eyes. Their pale color was the only clean thing about him. "Y-ou can c-call mme Doydoy."

"No! I won't! You don't have to stutter and," she slammed the cage with the flat of her hand, "you don't have to be in here!"

"I—I'm—I'm d-angerous."

Dirty, ragged, beaten down with suffering—dangerous was the last thing he looked. But the psi had given him more power than any one man had ever owned. "I trust you."

"Y-ou're an Imper."

She wanted to scream. Instead she took a deep breath and said earnestly, "Oh Donatus, you can't read my mind or pk me down to the bottom of a cistern, but you can throw bricks or cabbages at me and you'll find I'm as destructible as any non-psi in the world. I do trust you and you've got to trust me."

Before he could answer there was a hoarse cry behind her.

"Shandy! Look out!"

She whirled.

The place was full of Dumplings.

THEY were not flickering; they had found a purpose and coalesced. She had not heard their sounds as they came, but now she was aware that the place had filled with strange echoes rebounding from the great bare walls. Some were in shadow, but some were in the beam of light from the doorway and they were looking at her. She glanced at Jason. He was standing still. He had put his hands in his pockets and his face looked as if he were doing his best to make his mind a blank; there was nothing else he could do. He waited there.

The youngest of the lot was fifteen. Curtis Quimper, the eldest, was twenty-six. The girls, shapeless in their grey coveralls, were as sullen and haggard as the boys. Juke-boxes, ice-cream sodas; not for them. It was impossible to imagine them laughing.

Curtis Quimper took a step toward Jason. "You didn't know where he was."

"I didn't then."

"Zatso?"

"Yeh, zatso."

She might have laughed at this exchange in another context, but not here. Their glances were flicking warily at her, and it was clear they were according her an enormous potential she didn't have. She was afraid to look at Doydoy. There was nothing to stop him from telling them she had no psi. If they had believed Jason they wouldn't have had to worry . . .

For eight years she had watched for signs of psi in herself without finding any, and without being very disappointed. Now she was beginning to un-

derstand Jason's wish for more powers, in the face of this forty-six-fold power of amorality.

There was a creaking in the cage beside her. Doydoy was pulling himself over to face them. The Kingfish began to stroll toward the cage; his look was sharp and cruel.

"Hey Doydoy, whatsa matter with ya? Aintcha been happy with us, kid?" The Dumplings laughed. Sound broke and redoubled harshly against the walls.

Shandy looked at the boy in the cage, and the sensitivity of her insights into Jason's feelings deepened once again. Hate and longing were mixed on Doydoy's face: the Dumplings were his siblings in psi if not under the skin. In the eight years of their relationship there must have been even for him instants of emotional unity so deep and strong that wrenching away meant leaving something of himself behind. Only the Dumplings had needed and respected Doydoy.

Yet he had broken away.

She breathed deeply and spoke to them for the first time. "You see how happy he was."

Quimper murmured, "You know a lot about it."

"I can see he's in a cage. I can see he was so hot to get away he didn't care that he couldn't get out." She smiled out of pure reckless delight, because the situation was so nearly hopeless. "It's kind of a funny choice for somebody who was so happy."

Quimper watched her speculatively. The Kingfish snarled, "What we waitin' for?"

Quimper held up a hand. "This is interesting." He said to Shandy, "You're not lookin' worried. Maybe you know something we don't."

"Sure, I know something you don't—and maybe I should be worried." She smiled again. "I'm just impervious. You can't read me, but I haven't got any kind of psi at all. Not any."

THERE was a stir among them, and she disregarded both that and Jason's exasperated grunt. This kind of ace was not a card she could hold very long or play more than once. There was only one really powerful thing she could do, and it meant taking a chance she quailed at.

Quimper had not moved. "What are you telling me this for?"

Shandy was almost beginning to like Curtis Quimper. She took another deep breath. "If I pretended to be something big you might be scared at first, but then you'd find out I was a nothing and you'd have a big laugh. I wouldn't like that. So I'm telling you the truth, that I am a noth-

ing, and you respect me because I'm not cringing or whimpering. Except for power, it's the only thing you do respect. Maybe not much, but you're not laughing."

"That right?" the Kingfish yelled. He laughed, stupidly, in order to disprove her words; but it was an angry bark, and it echoed in uneasy stirrings among the others. They were tired of stalling.

Curtis Quimper passed a hand over his face. There was a suspicion of weariness in the gesture, but nothing she would have depended on.

She said, "Maybe you better ask your friend here," she indicated Doydoy, "if he wants to come. I can't talk for him."

A boy yelled from the Pack, "He needs somebody to talk for him, that's for sure!" and flicked his lower lip with a forefinger in an ugly wub-wub sound.

Curtis Quimper frowned and there was silence, but the Kingfish was certainly swearing with his eyebrows. "I don't like that kind of thinking, Scooter," Quimper said.

The Dumplings shifted their feet, and LaVonne laughed. "You gettin' old, Quimp?"

"No fights here!" Quimper snapped. "I ain't askin' for bombs." He gave his attention to the cage again. "Come on, Doydoy. We'll take your friend Hemmer, too, and that way we won't have to worry about spies."

He reached for the latch, and Shandy took her chance.

"Stand back!" she cried, and Quimper, startled, retreated a step. She put her hand on the latch and said very quietly, "I think Donatus ought to make his own choice." In a continuous unhurried movement she swung down on the stiff handle and pulled the heavy door open. "It's all yours," she said.

It was all the power she had: to give Doydoy a few minutes to pull himself together and decide, and two-seconds'-worth of surprise to plan. After that, if he went with them it was his choice.

There was the stillness of a second, and Doydoy moved stiffly in the cage, breathed deeply, and soared.

In the air he was at once commanding and ridiculous: a pterodactyl, or a Portuguese man-of-war, with his humped back and his limp legs dangling. But he used the two seconds fully: as he hovered over their gaping upturned faces, three riderless tractors plunged down the ramp, roaring and directionless; the Dumplings yelled and scattered as the tractors swerved, huge tires screaming.

Doydoy hovered for one second over the melee; then, almost graceful, he rose again and dipped down to land on Jason's back. His arms went over Jason's

shoulders, Jason's hands reached back to pull the hanging legs round his waist; and, as one, they disappeared.

The tractors skidded and stopped. But the Dumplings had vanished one by one, yelling, emptying the place with dust-swirls to mark their passage.

All but one.

Shandy clung to the cage and trembled; dust settled around a crumbled figure on the floor.

She ran over and knelt beside it as a swarm of men began to pour down the ramp. It was the Kingfish. One of the tractors had crushed him and he was dead.

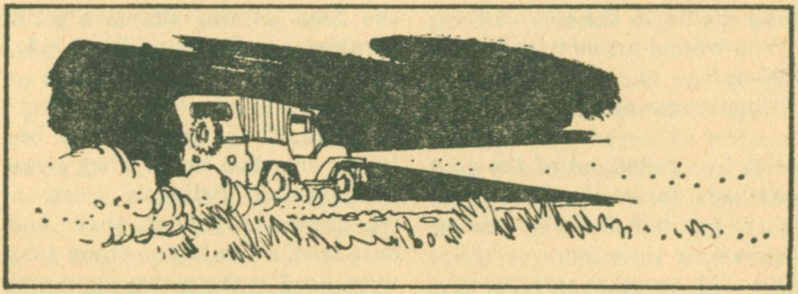
He was not going to lead the Pack.

did I ever do to deserve you!"

She heard his fury still boiling out of the office and along the corridors, breaking against the walls and washing like ashes and lava against her locked and guarded door.

She was neither ashamed nor proud of what she had done, but she could understand Prothero's point of view—for all the good it would do her. Jason Hemmer was more valuable to him than any other single person in Sorrel Park, Colin included. Doydoy was nothing to him, and she had lost him Jason.

For herself, in unloosing Doydoy she had contributed to the death of the Kingfish, a living



9

SHE had been shoved into a small empty office on the ground floor, and had nothing more to do than wait there, heels hooked on chair rungs, hands gripping elbows. Prothero had addressed a single remark to her as they brought her past his doorway: "Judas Priest! What

person. She knew what it was to be afraid of psi now, not because she had felt its effects, but because she had manipulated it like a sorcerer's apprentice. Its danger threatened not only the powerless, but the psyche of its user. Only a psychopath could use it without damaging his spirit: a psychopath had no conscience.

Jason and Doydoy gone . . . if she could be sure they were safe it would be consolation in a comfortless world. Probably they had gone to join Jason's friends; probably they would find a way to take care of themselves; she would never see them again, and never know if she had helped them.

The door opened. Tapley was there, sardonic and pink-cheeked. She remembered him—he had taken notes for Grace when Jason was brought in to Prothero's office after the Dump checkup. Her duffel was swinging over his shoulder. "Come along. Prothero's got plans for you."

She got up slowly. "He's not giving me up to the civvies!"

"You wanna argue with him?"

"N-no."

"Then come on!"

THE jeep rolled out of the gate without farewells. It was no loss; she didn't feel like facing Urquhart or the others.

She did want a serious conversation with Tapley, but the jeep was bouncing so wildly her teeth were chattering nearly out of her skull. There were only three-and-a-half miles between the Dump and the town. The late evening sun was burning down along the hills; it was too good and warm to give up for one of Casker's cells.

"Not so fast, please!" she begged, nearly biting her tongue in half.

Tapley glanced at her. The open misery in her face must have touched even his stony heart, because he eased up on the accelerator a trifle. She cast about wildly, estimating the force of the thud she would land with if she jumped out.

"It's no use," he said. "I've heard about all your tricks. If you want to look at the sunset you better get Casker to give you a cell on the west side." And he speeded up again.

"Gee, Tapley, can't you let me go? I never did you any harm."

"No, and you're not gonna, either." He kept his attention on the road. It was desolate, with scrubby woodlots on either side, and barbed-wire beyond them.

"You're not a very sympathetic person," she ground out between clenched teeth. They were approaching Pringle's Post, a weatherbeaten shed that had once been a fruitstand when jobs were good at the power plant and traffic passed in the mornings and evenings. "I thought the Dumplings were camped out here."

"Scout says they've shifted."

"I'm hungry. Couldn't we stop somewhere and get something to eat?"

"Nope."

No-one had offered her sup-

per, and anyway she had lost her appetite at the sight of the Kingfish. But she was young and healthy and a few foodless hours had brought it back. Four days ago she had eaten with Jason at Jake's. The food was awful even by her low standards, but she had a feeling it was vastly superior to what she would get in jail.

"I really am awfully hungry, Tapley."

"Civvies don't starve anybody. Be there in three minutes."

"Three minutes!"

HE slowed down again. "Look, kid. I gotta bring back a receipt for you from Casker. Neither snow nor hail nor heat of day's gonna stop me from delivering you and getting that receipt. I still got three weeks to go in this hellhole. I want to have my brainwash and get back to my wife and kids. You understand?"

"Yes . . . but I've been here all my life, and I don't want to be here and in jail too."

He glared over the steering-wheel.

"I thought the MP didn't give people up to the civvies."

"You're a special case."

Special. "The civvies knocked in my stepmother's still—and bust her jaw besides."

"They might not do that to you if you're good . . . though it'd shut you up some."

She was ready to cry. They had already passed the market gardens and gingerbread houses of the outskirts. One minute, perhaps less.

She noticed suddenly that it was very quiet for a Sorrel Park Friday evening, usually a warm-up for Saturday night. She imagined a cowed and downbeaten people holed up like rabbits in fear of Dumplings to whom walls were nothing. There were no street lamps winking on in the thickening dusk; the men had probably been afraid to come out and repair the lines. And there weren't many emergency generators to switch on here when the main power blew. A few flickering lights in windows suggested candles or hurricane lamps.

The jeep turned along Main Street toward the municipal offices. Tapley began to whistle a tune. His plump pink face drawn up in a whistler's pout looked as innocent as a baby's. She had a terrifying vision of him vanishing out the door whistling like that while Mrs. Baggs the police matron was dragging her off to the slop buckets by the slack of her jersey.

There was plenty of space in front of the offices and he parked there. This place had a generator: a dismal yellow lamp burned in the fanlight.

She turned to face him for the

last time. "Gee whiz, Tapley, you wouldn't want to see this happen to your kids."

He got out of the jeep and stood there. His face was shadowed, but not so shadowed that his eyes did not show dark and angry. She had known she said the wrong thing as soon as the words left her mouth, not for their effect on him, but for what they did to her own self-respect.

"No," he said, "I wouldn't want this to happen to my kids. And it couldn't happen to my kids, because they're decent. Not as bright as you're supposed to be, but they're decent." She shrank a little at his intensity. "My kids wouldn't have been lugging bootleg liquor, or hiding in Prothero's office to steal his papers. My kids wouldn't have lost us our peeper. Now come on!"

She got out and pulled the duffel after her. His argument had hurt, but she thought she had an answer for it. She paused and searched for the sensitive in his truculent face. "You're self-righteous, Tapley. Your kids weren't brought up in Sorrel Park."

"Doesn't matter. God's good anywhere."

"That's right. But you know what the civvies are like, and how they enforce their laws. I've done bad and stupid things, but I'm not sorry I helped Jason save Doydoy—and I shouldn't have to be treated this way. You figure you'll be brainwashed soon, you won't ever hear of this place again, and you'll never have to figure out what's really right and wrong in Sorrel Park. But I'm stuck here, and I have to do that every minute."

His lips were drawn tight. She sighed and started up the stairs, dragging her bundle.

SHE pushed on the heavy door, and it swung open, creaking. The hall was stuffy with the accumulated heat of day, and silent. The cooling winds swept in and began to whirl a small litter of torn papers on the floor; the doors creaked and swung closed; the papers tumbled and became still. They stood there a moment, looking about. Then there was one strange noise.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Tapley stiffen; there was a faint snap as he undid his holster. He took her by the arm and led her to an office door. The pane of glass was broken, and ". . . SKER . . . OUNTY . . . EF" with cracks running through it was all that was left of Casker's golden name. It seemed there was going to be plenty of work for glaziers in Sorrel Park if the place ever settled down.

"Looks like the Dumplings've been here already," said Shandy.

The noise resumed, coming

from Casker's office. It sounded as though someone were bound and gagged in there, and Shandy cheerfully pictured Casker tied up in knots. Tapley pulled out his gun with his free hand.

"But they aren't around now, or you'd never have got to lay a hand on that."

"Shut up." He stepped into the doorway, pulling her along behind him. At least he didn't intend to use her for a shield. There was a dim light still coming from the windows, enough to show that the room had been wrecked, desk pushed over, chairs in pieces, floor awash with crumpled papers. Tapley replaced his gun and groped for the light switch. The generator put forth one more feeble light and they discovered not Casker but Mrs. Baggs on the floor, trussed and gagged like the pig she ordinarily resembled, hair awry and face a furious red.

Shandy said happily, "Well, that's not Dumplings—"

"Stop prattling and undo her," Tapley snarled.

Shandy hesitated. She would have been perfectly satisfied to leave Mrs. Baggs as she was.

Tapley allowed his hand to rest on the gun butt. She dropped her duffel, kneeled down beside the helpless woman and began to pick at the knot in the handkerchief gag.

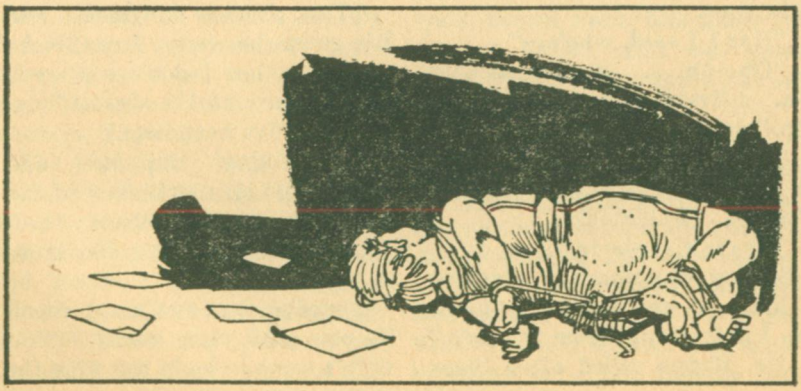
"Hurry up!"

"I can't go any faster, I'm breaking my fingernails!" The knot loosened and the gag came off at last. Mrs. Baggs spat and expressed her feelings freely.

"Save that. Who did all this, Dumplings?"

"Nah, we had that this morning. This is a buncha hoodlums turned the place upside down, grabbed Casker an' two others—Gossake, git this stuff offa me!"

"Where was everybody else?"



"Some kook come in with a story about a riot over on Ticonderoga. Casker was dumb enough to send everybody out but us four an'—come on, I'm gettin' rope burns!"

Shandy rubbed her fingers. "They're all square knots—"

"I don't give a damn what they are, git'm off!"

No use putting off the inevitable. She undid them.

Mrs. Baggs pulled herself up and flexed her biceps with a will that promised revenge. "No use goin' for the phone. Lines are down." She twisted a knot in her hair as though it were the neck of a miscreant, and pegged it down with a fierce hairpin. "Who's the brat?"

Tapley was surveying the wreckage of the office. Shandy had moved away a few steps and now stared at the cracks in the dirty floor. Waiting for the axe to fall. She was not going to be caught dead making an appeal this time.

"Hah? I said, who's—"

"Oh—uh . . . just a package I'm delivering somewhere for Prothero."

"Hah?" The pig-face opened in a grin, remarkably like LaVonne's. "Valuable?"

"She thinks she is."

Shandy was numb. Tapley put a hand on her shoulder. "Come on, I gotta radio from the jeep."

Mr. Baggs called after them, "Hey, when you guys gonna help us out with a few soldier-boys?"

Tapley turned. "Thought your blueboys wouldn't be caught dead having us around."

"Them? Them rednecks, their mas runs the stills. Listen, I could tell you—" But the doors were closing behind them, and they were out in the evening.

SHANDY followed meekly, afraid to say a word and spoil everything. Tapley stopped beside the jeep and reached for the microphone. He spoke a few curt words, hung up, and dug in his pocket for a cigarette pack. He lit up, inhaled, and blew a plume of smoke out on the dark blue air. Shandy waited.

He stood there a moment, leaning against the jeep and smoking. Then he said, "Well?"

She blinked at him gravely.

"You got friends here to take you in?"

"Yes."

"This place is dangerous, and it's gonna be worse. I can't take you back, but I don't want you running around the streets."

"They live near here."

He dropped the butt and stamped on it; sparks flashed and died under his foot. "Now . . . all I need is a story for Old Ironpants."

Treading on eggs, not to spoil it, she said very gently, "You didn't want to leave me with the

old bat because you're too decent. Why don't you just tell him the truth, Tapley?"

He gave her one glare, jumped in, and gunned the motor. The jeep swung out with furious sound in the deserted street. She watched the taillights disappearing and there was darkness and emptiness again.

She parked her duffel in the nearest trashcan and trotted along Main over toward Seventh. If the Pypers wouldn't take her in she had no idea what she was going to do. There was no-one about, but the air was filled with urgency. With the civvies losing control the place was going to be full of life in an hour. She wanted to be out of the way, especially out of the way of hoodlums; it was not much fun matching wits with the witless. Dumplings were not extra bright, but there were plenty of interesting things about psi that were not shared by mobs and civvies. She would have liked to meet Jason's friends, but she didn't know where they lived, and had no right to bother them with her troubles, anyway.

She stopped and leaned against a wall to rest. She was dreadfully tired; limp and creaking. She sighed. She had seen and heard a lot, and learned something. She had ploughed through books and spoken with Urquhart and Marczinek and the rest; she had seen the Dumplings in action and manipulated them, if only for a few moments. Now she had data to work on, even if it was shallow and fragmentary. She wanted food and sleep to feed her brains, and time to think and let her unconscious work for her.

She had chosen sides irrevocably. Prothero might not see eye to eye with her on the subject—she might never even see him or the others again—but she was committed to him and his Dump. She would find out what made Dumplings tick, how to handle them, what Margaret Mead would have done, and more. And when she had done that she would be a step closer to knowing what she herself was.

In the meantime she was only an awfully tired and hungry girl. She went on.

Stores and houses crammed into each other here, even on a main street, crowding the sidewalk. Sorrel Park, like many an ancient walled city, was composed of slums. But there was no castle on the hill . . .

SHE passed a faintly-lit window. It was the only illumination on the street and she glanced in, and stopped. The sash was up, and past the tattered lace curtain puffing softly in the night wind she could see two little girls bouncing on a big rackety bed

with brass spindles. They were wearing nightgowns and had flowing black hair; they were only about five or six years old.

They had made themselves a world of peace and innocence for a moment in the circle of light from an oil lamp on a crate by the bed; and they were playing pat-a-cake in the furious and ancient plip-plap-cross-clap of all children of Time. She had played it with the Slippec kids in her own time, and to the same song:

I'm just a small-town
sweetheart;
I love my familee, lee, lee,
And after dark
In Sorrel Park
I'm happy as can be, be,
be . . .

Their voices quavered with every bounce, but they were extraordinarily clear and sweet on the foreboding air:

My father rolls the rubby-
dubs,
My mother minds the
still;
I dance the jig
In Clancy's Pig
And my brother cracks the
till—

Oh, I'm just—

A harsh voice in a foreign language cried out from within and broke the thread of their gaiety. The song trailed off, one of the little girls jumped up and blew out the flame, and Shandy moved on. They would soon be tired of that song; it was only a sober description of everyday life. But the silver thread of sound wove in and out of her thoughts: *and after dark/in Sorrel Park/what will become of me, me, me?*

She passed the silent crossroads at Eighth Avenue, and traversed a block in stillness unbroken except for the yowling of three cats in unreproved chorus.

As she reached Ninth the air began to tremble with a distant noise. It had the ominous quality she had felt in the previous silence. Two blocks up Ninth she made out dancing points of light that might be torches. She felt, rather than saw, that there were masses of people crowded on the sidewalk and raising their voices in the dark animal cry of the mob.

This was something ugly, something she was not going to run blindly into this time. She crossed the street softly and pulled back into the shadow of a doorway, straining her eyes on the long diagonal. The night was dark, they were many yards away, and there was nothing discernible from the distance. She moved up the street, close to the small shelter of the uneven walls. It occurred to her once that instead of moving ahead cautiously she ought to be moving away expeditiously, but there was nothing going on in the whole

world that she did not want to know about, and Sorrel Park was the world.

She had forgotten her resolve to avoid mobs and rioting. The crowd was milling about in front of a small low building. She recognized it: it was the Tabernacle of the Latterday Evangel of Sorrel Park, and normally housed a small narrow bitter sect which had formed twenty-five years ago from the opposite end of the spectrum that produced the hoodlums and the Dumplings; it had so far been unable to send an evangel from its center. Fitch, a loyal fence-straddler, had belonged to it. Now the membership seemed suddenly to have swelled.

It was obvious that aside from the smoke and the noise there was nothing crucial taking place on the sidewalk; all the action must be going on inside, and she would never get inside unnoticed. And it looked dangerous. She watched for a few moments, trying to make sense of the indistinguishable grumbling. Shivers of sound echoed on the walls: "—outa here! Yeah, give'm the boot! What'n hell we waitin' for?"

Someone did not like the status quo.

THE atmosphere was more dangerous than interesting. As she was about to move on with her curiosity unquenched she noticed one thing that was strange apart from the rest: one man was standing quite still, with his arms crossed, a few yards away from the others. His face was in the dark, but the position of his body indicated that he was keeping watch—perhaps for civvies, more likely MPs.

His stance made her uneasy. With his senses on the alert he would be the first to catch any movement across the street. One of the torches brightened and shook itself; the flare lit one side of his face, a mad half-moon. She could have sworn he was staring at her.

She ran. Turning the first corner she skimmed, awkward as a flamingo, past another deserted cross-street in a town of dark chessboard squares, past Tenth and down Eleventh, until she reached the corner a block above Main.

Quiet here still. She stopped to rest, breath searing her lungs. But the stillness between breaths was reassuring. She turned back toward Tenth; just round the corner from the Pypers now.

At Tenth she peered round the corner of a rickety wooden shed housing a shoe repair. There was a distant angry murmur from the crowd, but silence around her. Then too late, she heard the creaking on the low wooden

boards of the roof and somebody fell on her.

What breath she had left was knocked out of her, a hand twisted her arm behind her back before she could move, and as she wrenched her neck to squint upward something metallic raked across her face and caught a sword of light as it swung under the moon. It was a hook.

It caught under his arm and pulled her up, bruised and stumbling. She cried out, but her captor was wordless. She glimpsed him, a wiry man dressed in shabby working-clothes, narrow bony face, pale eyes, straw-colored hair growing like crabgrass.

One-handed and mute: a memory stirred. *You broke my wrist bringin' me in, Foxy, remember?*

LaVonne had shut Fox up for good.

"Fox!" she whispered. "What do you want?" But he paid no attention and she wondered if he had lost his wits to the Dumplings as well as his voice. With his good hand on her twisted arm, pushing in the small of her back, he propelled her down the street at a run.

They passed Pypers' Drygoods. The store was as dark and deserted as the rest of the huddled place. But there was a litter on the sidewalk, and close up she saw dark stains on the cement and scattered feathers eddying

in the faint night winds. A few steps later she realized what had happened and stopped short. Twisting in Fox's grip, she bent double, retching emptily. The Dumplings had been here this morning; she knew their style. Having nothing better to do, they had killed Douggy's pigeons.

A memory of the birds flapping and cooing about his neck hit her like a blow between the eyes. Tears sprang from squeezed lids; she sensed more powerfully than a telepath the painful aura of Douggy's rage and sorrow. Fox pushed her forward roughly, and she stumbled upright. She had had nothing to vomit in her empty stomach and her throat ached painfully.

AT Main, Fox paused and looked back and forth. Satisfied that there were neither MPs nor civvies to worry about yet, he crossed the street and began the backtrack toward the Tabernacle deviously by lanes and alleys. She let him push her; she was too weak to yell. Besides, if no-one had been paying attention to three yowling cats in the full voice of the summer season they would not likely be on the alert to rescue her. She had no faith in the morality of Sorrel Park and the few people who cared about her were as far and unreachable as the moon.

She saw the mob close: rough men and screeching women at the Tabernacle entrance, but Fox got her through them in a mad drive like a hot knife through butter.

The air inside was hot, smoky, and fetid. The inevitable folding chairs were invisible under the hard press of bodies, black masses of ominous beeswarms. Fox shoved her down the narrow aisle leaving her to find footing among the outstretched legs. An oratorical voice from the platform boomed indistinguishable words vibrating on the heavy air.

When they reached the platform, Fox stopped, and she looked up for the first time. Three hard chairs were ranged onstage in a neat row. They were occupied —by Casker and his two civvies, all bound and gagged. The man at the lectern, mouth open and pale pudgy hands spread wide, was Fitch.

Somehow, Shandy was not surprised. Fitch at that moment stopped for breath, mopped his beaded head, pushed up his armbands with a flourish, and went on.

"Do we need it here? Do we need a Dump, should have been blasted off the face of our fine city before it ever got started? Do we need an MP sitting on us thirty years, no decent food or clothes, no jobs, no new Tri-V or

cars, a place where decent people have to go underground to get a little harmless entertainment?"

The crowd yelled, a torch flamed and scattered sparks.

"Do we need this Gestapo we got for a police force? Can't you and I and all the rest of the good people here find a way to run a city better than this?" Fitch certainly had nothing to lose, since he had prematurely cut off most of his liquor supply before Sorrel Park was opened.

As the crowd cheered, Fox never once loosening his grip, reached over and tapped the side of the lectern with his hook.

Fitch blinked impatiently, lowered his arms from their embracing gestures, and bent forward slightly. Fox drove Shandy so hard against the edge of the platform her ribs nearly cracked—the gesture intending to convey the devotion of a dog bringing home the evening paper, or a dead rat—and stared up at Fitch with a dog's eyes.

Fitch glanced at Shandy and turned pale. He gaped like a fish for one second, then bent lower and spat through clenched teeth, "You damn fool, what the hell'd you have to bring her here for?"

Fox recoiled and let her go. Shandy struggled to revive and straighten her arm, now almost paralyzed. Fitch's tongue flicked his lips. Breathing hard, he turned to his audience once more.

But in the small hiatus, Shandy, still rubbing her arm, yelled, "Hey, Fitso, you can't butter your bread on more'n two sides!"

She forgot her aches and pains and hoisted her way up on the platform by hands and knees. She was panting and breathless, clothes and skin dirt-smeared. The money, still folded in her pocket, had begun to burn a hole in her spirit, and the flame leaped through her body to her livid eyes. She was going to get her money's worth of something.

FITCH was a quick thinker. He sneered, "Who let you out of the Dump?"

Fox was clawing his way up on the platform, and Fitch raised his hands. "My friends, this unfortunate—"

Shandy was on her feet dancing out of the way of Fox's sweeping claw, and a woman's yell cracked the heavy atmosphere.

"Hey, Fitch! Hey Fitch! Wha'd she mean by that, hey? Wha'd she mean by that, Fitch?"

The voice belonged to Ma Slippec.

She rose pulling herself out of a black clump of bodies and climbed over close-crammed knees amid protests to the aisle. Her jaw was splinted in a scaffolding of slender metal rods, and beneath it the cords of her gaunt eroded neck bulged.

"Hey Shandy, it's yer ma! Don't be scared, dearie!" She broke her way down the aisle, elbowing, treading toes, waving her shawl.

Fitch lost control and screamed, "F'God's sake, Loretta, close your busted trap!" The name was grotesque applied to her person, dark and weathered as a blasted tree. Shandy had never thought of her as owning a first name.

"You don't tell me!" she screeched. "You made money offa my corn eight years, you gitcher hands offa my kid!" Her sufferings: the loss of Frankie, the broken jaw, the battered still, the miseries of a civvy jail—had gathered in this sharp moment to form a driving hammerhead. She would subside in five minutes, but while she was going she was a force.

Shandy was treading on Fox's good hand, and his mouth worked with soundless curses. Fitch moved toward her, but she danced away. She had no hope, but she had enough spirit left to be hopping with delight at the danger, the drama, and the corn of the whole rowdy scene.

Ma Slippec meanwhile grabbed Fox by the collar and flung him sprawling into somebody's lap. She jumped up on the platform and planted herself between Fitch and Shandy. "Go on, kid!"

Fitch was a man possessed. He would have wrung her neck but for the image he was trying to present to the audience.

Shandy was not anxious to be defended by this wild apparition, but she yelled out, "Who put the civvies onto your still, Ma? Who got your jaw bust? Who sicced the Dumper's peeper on me?"

Voices called, "Hey Fitch, what's all—"

Fitch howled, streaming with rage and sweat, "She's a Dumpling herself! She—"

Shandy hooked the money out of her pocket and swiftly folded it into a dart.

"Who got scared and gimme a twenty to get out of the way?" She shot the dart over Ma Slippec's shoulder and it hit Fitch square between the eyes. The crowd noise fell for a moment. Twenty dollars, in Sorrel Park's deflated currency, was something.

But Fitch had other lieutenants than Fox. Two or three burly ones were climbing over the edge of the stage. Shandy looked about apprehensively. The doors were solidly blocked. Ma Slippec, faced with a choice of attacking Fitch or defending Shandy, whirled about and clutched her fiercely, scraping her already battered face with the splint.

"Doncha dare! Git offa there, ya dirty bums!'" But they were coming ahead anyway.

Fitch raised his arms once

more. "Quiet! Please! We'll get this cleared up!"

Two of the men were already pulling Shandy and her protector apart.

Pop!

The noise broke like a shot, but more intense and peculiar.

And everything was still.

A figure presented itself, breaking the thick smoky ray of light from the projection booth. It was a young Negro boy wearing a checked shirt and frayed jeans. He was perfectly comely and ordinary except that his dirty frazzle-laced sneakers were dancing a good two feet in the air above the platform. His narrow ironic face was composed, but his eyes were sparkling, and the set of his body right to the top of his peppercorn head was so vigorous and joyous, and so utterly full of delight, that he seemed to be covered with spangles.

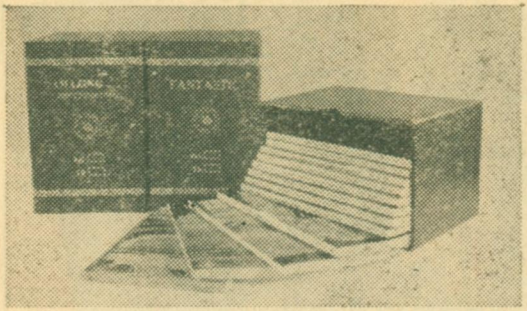
He pointed a finger as authoritative as Prospero's wand at Casker and his men: their bonds fell away. He reached a hand into the air, picked out three guns one after the other, and tossed them to the three civvies.

No-one else moved; the unhypnotized civvies were dumbfounded. He said, in a soft treble voice, "Come on, Shandy, what're you waiting for?"

Shandy's imminent captor fell to the floor with the snarl frozen on his face, and she climbed down numbly. The boy had landed in the aisle and she took his hand. They walked out of the door past the knot of living statues and down the street without any hurry.

She finally got her voice to work; it was feeble and squeaky. "Gee, I'm glad you dropped in, but wow! did you ever cut it fine!"

He sighed blissfully. "Boy, that was something I been dreaming of doing all my whole life!" *(Concluded next month)*



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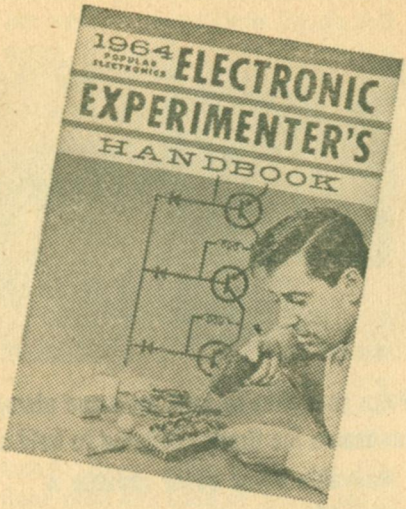

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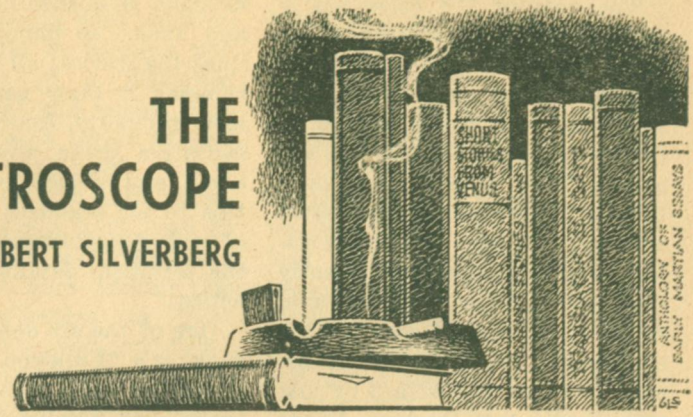

The Unknown Five, *edited by D. R. Bensen. 190 pages. Pyramid Books, 50¢.*

Last year Pyramid Books offered *The Unknown,* a collection of short stories and novelets from that legendary magazine of wacky fantasy, *Unknown* (later *Unknown Worlds*). Now editor Don Bensen has dipped once again into the treasure-trove of *Unknown's* back files. In this volume, though, he has come up with a real coup: a story that was bought by *Unknown's* editor, John Campbell, but which has never been published before, because it went into cold storage when wartime paper shortages killed the magazine in 1943. And the resurrected yarn is by none other than Isaac Asimov.

It would be nice to say that the Asimov story, "Author! Author!" is an undying classic of fantasy worthy of joining the list of great stories that *Unknown* did manage to squeeze into its thirty-nine issues. Unfortunately, it isn't; it's just a fast-paced slapstick job, the oldie about the writer whose characters come to life. It's funny, in a dated way, but it wouldn't rate revival today if it had actually seen print twenty years ago. Dr. Asimov would have done it all a lot more subtle these days.

The final story in the book, Jane Rice's "The Crest of the Wave," sticks to the same pulp conventions that sink the Asimov, though this is a more serious story. Somehow, though, the cast of gangsters and floozies comes alive, and the story, a routine mixture of crime and fantasy, becomes more than the sum of its parts. Still, no great shakes.

The rest of the collection is more typical of *Unknown* at its best. Cleve Cartmill contributes a grim little shocker called "The Bargain," with a fine stinger at the very end. Theodore Sturgeon's "The Hag Seleen" is a tale of witchcraft in the bayou country, creepy and memorable, demonstrating magnificently that even in 1942 Sturgeon could write rings around most of his colleagues. The price of admission, however, is justified by just one of the five stories: Alfred Bester's "Hell is Forever," a long novelet which has languished unreprinted all these years mainly because it is a little too short to comprise a book of its own, a little too long to fit into a conventional anthology.

Bester, in 1942, was a journeyman pulpster turning out what he had to turn out to earn a living. In this unforgettable fantasy he first cut loose with the power and drive and baroquely involuted style that characterize his more recent work. That dazzler of almost a decade later, *The Demolished Man*, is neatly foreshadowed by the fireworks of "Hell Is Forever." It's a gorgeous nightmare.

Time and Stars, *by Poul Anderson. 249 pages. Doubleday, $3.95.*

Here we have a generous helping of Poul Anderson's recent magazine work—six good-sized novelets, published between 1960 and 1963. No particular theme links the stories; all they have in common is their generally high level of quality. Anderson's crisp, evocative prose sweeps briskly along, and he pays careful attention to the scientific background of each story without ever letting the technical details swamp the action.

One of the six deserves classic rank. It's "Epilogue," which appeared in John Campbell's *Analog* in 1962. The clunker of a title conceals a marvelous story of an oddly altered Earth, and the special joy here is that Anderson has taken a hodgepodge of story elements more characteristic of the 1930's than the 1960's, and has transformed them into something extraordinarily moving and impressive. Hugo Gernsback would have loved to publish "Epilogue" in *Science Wonder Stories*—and, if he had, it would have come down through the decades as an all-time great.

Also on hand are two agreeable but forgettable lightweight items, "The Critique of Impure Reason" (*If*, 1962) and "Eve Times Four" (*Fantastic*, 1960); an attractive little story called "Turning Point," which was in *If* last year; the taut, if conventional, "Escape from Orbit," published in *Amazing* in 1962, and a long novelet called "No Truce With Kings," from *Fan-*

tasy & Science Fiction, in which Anderson wrestles with such familiar material as psionics and the problems of a disrupted United States, and almost succeeds in getting a breath of new life into the tired stuff.

Nothing here that most magazine buyers won't have read in the recent past. But librarians can do worse than adding this fast-paced collection to their shelves, and it's good that "Epilogue" has found the permanence of hard covers. It'll be reprinted often, I'm sure.

Man of Two Worlds, *by Raymond F. Jones. 268 pages. Pyramid Books, 40¢.*

This lengthy novel of parallel worlds was called *Renaissance* when it first appeared, as a four-part magazine serial in 1944. I read it a few years after that, as a not-quite-teenager, and thought it was colossal. So it was with certain trepidation that I went back for a second look.

My childhood verdict needs some toning down, but it's still a pretty good book in an old-fashioned way. The prose is stiff and edgy, the characters lurch around in a variety of noble poses—and yet, if you can overlook the unsophisticated approach, you can enjoy the book mightily. I could and did. There's color and action and mood here, and Jones creates a convincing enough alien society. The appeal is not precisely intellectual, but the effect is satisfying. For the nostalgic and the young in heart, it's a grand and stirring story that stirs the sense of wonder, even if a more coldly rational look at what's going on tells you that it doesn't make a very great deal of sense. And, at well over a hundred thousand words, there's a lot of reading here for forty cents.

EDITORIAL

(*Continued from page 5*)

reflects special status upon their children.

The Japanese monkey bands, Dr. Miyadi also learned, use vocabularies of up to 30 words, the most basic ones of which are understandable not only *intra*-band, but also *inter*-band. "Howiaa," for example, seems to mean "We have reached our destination." When monkeys are about to move on, one will say "Kwaa," another responds "Vii," and all depart. Sort of like, "Should we get going?" "O.K., Let's go."

Well, if you add up a large vocabulary, washing food, learning to stand on two feet, and the status of young monkeys, I suppose it will not be too long before one primate says to another . . . "See that big monkey over there standing up to rinse his banana . . . That's my pop, so watch whatcha sayin' . . ."—NL

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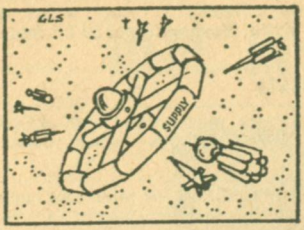

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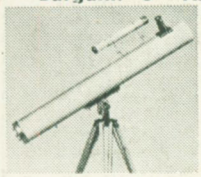

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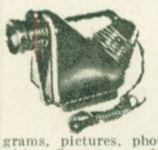

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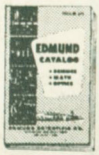

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