

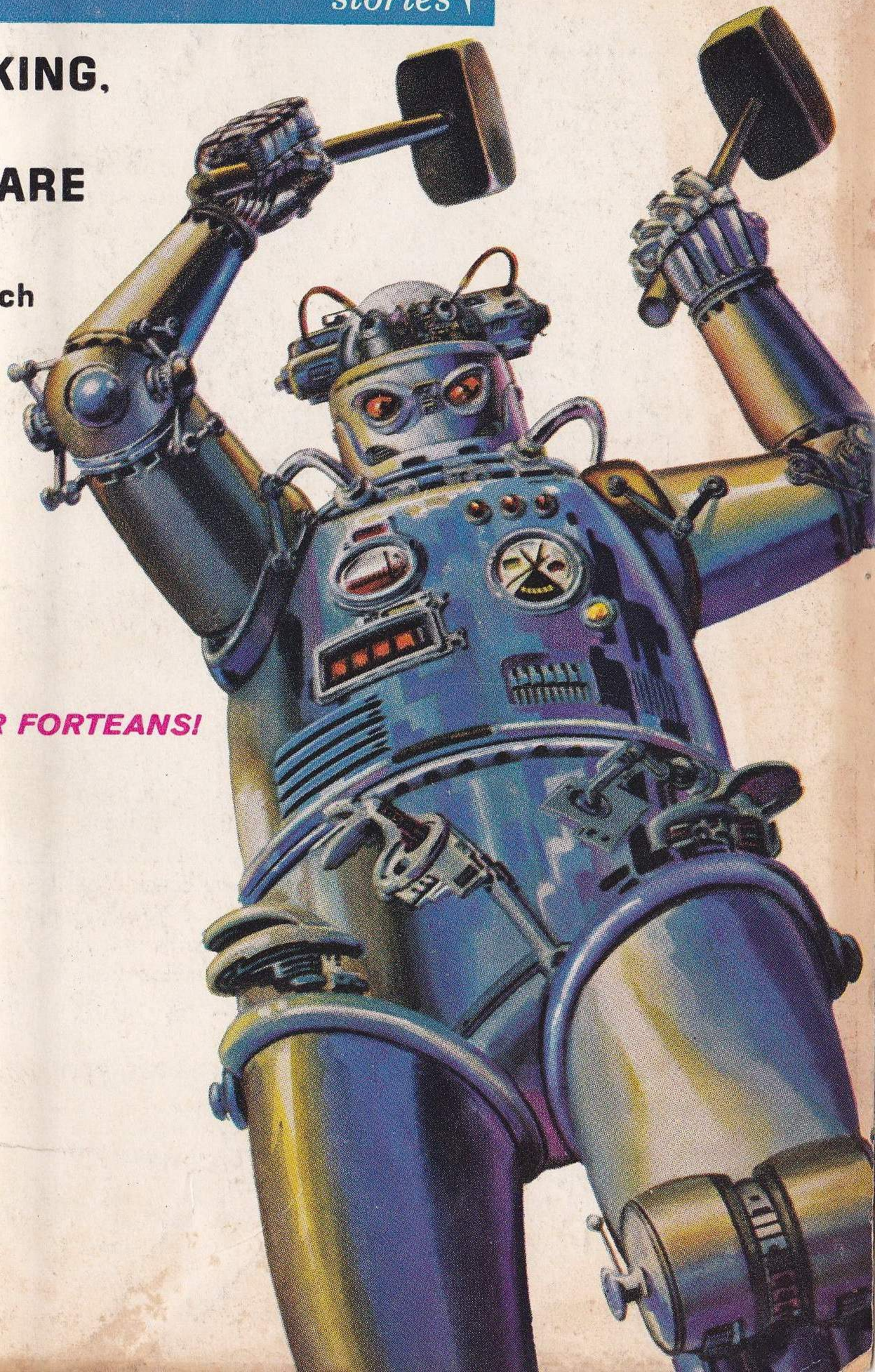
Fact and Science Fiction ●
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**THE WALKING,
TALKING,
I-DON'T-CARE
MAN**

by David Bunch



SF Profile:

LO, THE POOR FORTEANS!



W. MORROW

In June FANTASTIC



Dilvish was once-dead . . . but now he rode a black steel beast . . . and no one stopped him on his passage to Dilfar . . . Yet One did not fear him . . . One whose name, unmentionable, began with J . . . Thelinde, unknowing, idly sang of J . . . and the demons came to the witch-daughter in answer to THELINDE'S SONG. A masterpiece of fantasy by Roger Zelazny.

June FANTASTIC goes on sale May 20.

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Ziff-Davis Publishing Company
 Editorial and Executive Offices
 One Park Avenue
 New York, New York 10016
 212 ORegon 9-7200
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EDITORIAL

SOME time ago we received a frantic note from a puzzled reader. It went, in part, this way: "Both of the David Bunch stories are great. But why is one under the name 'Darryl Groupe'? Or is Groupe the real name of the guy who writes the Bunch stories? Or are both names phony? Are we now to have stories by 'Dizzy Crowd', 'Donald Mobb' or are the stories written by a committee, or maybe a schizophrenic?" Then our correspondent hit the jackpot. He said: "Surely you must realize that a Bunch story is instantly identifiable no matter what name you put on it."

The Bunch stories—concerned mostly with the new-metal men of Moderan and the philosophical ponderings of UNIVERSAL Thoughts and Ultimate DOOMS—either delight or affright most readers. Either way, however, we thought you'd like to know something about the real David R. Bunch, a Missourian who, while working toward his Ph.D., is employed as a cartographer by the U.S. Air Force. He also writes for the small literary reviews.

A critic has written of him: "... [Bunch's] protagonist is a [man whose] flesh has been largely replaced by metal alloys so that he is immortal. The conflict arises

from his remaining flesh-strips, which make him still a little human. . . . All this is a satire on the military mind, on seeking after longevity without a correlative quest for continued mental and spiritual growth, on lack of decency, and inhuman tendencies in contemporary societies."

Says Bunch of his own strange style: "I'm not in this business primarily to describe or explain or entertain. I'm here to make the reader think, even if I have to bash his teeth out, break his legs, grind him up, beat him down, totally chastise him for the terrible and tinsel and almost wholly bad world we allow. . . .

"The first-level reader, who wants to see events jerk their tawdry ways through some used and USED old plot—I love him with a hate bigger than all the world's pity, but he's not for me. The reader I want is the one who wants the anguish, who will go up there and get on that big black cross. And that reader will have, with me, the saving grace of knowing that some awful payment is due . . . as all space must look askance at us, all galaxies send star frowns down, a cosmic leer envelop this small ball that has such great Great GREAT pretenders."

The Walking Talking I-Don't-Care Man

By
DAVID
BUNCH

I REMEMBER I was feeling especially good that day; the worries had been cut back. A sheen was in the air, a shimmer, as the sun beat through the lean white vapor shield of August and smote our plastic yard sheets. I was wondering what for diversion, what for Joys, what summer sport should I choose to program into my Sched, the big brain that served me, tweetle and shimmer and flare.

But who knows, just because the day dawns fair, with worries cut back to dormant, a fine sheen of sun and the tin birds turned on in the silver trees—who knows?—There are clouds that wander the world, there are storms that walk in the land, there are disgruntled men who would hammer-stroke the very face of omnipotent God if it got in their walking way.

He was such a one.

I knew that a lot of new-metal was headed down the track; my warner set up that almost-steady whine. There were very few

bleep-outs, those smaller softer sounds that jag at the metal drone of danger and indicate flesh-strip. I envied him in a way, for perhaps he was more metal than I; I think I did not fear him, for I had all the Stronghold guns at my beck and the other great kill potential at my call. But I accorded him an honor that usually is from fear, an honor generally reserved for armies, or new invasion principles my Enemies send in to get me, or men I know as deranged. I set him up for Study, flashed him on the Close Look. And in a way, by so doing, I had him awesome and dread while he was still a long way out.

But it did no hurt; he *was* awesome and dread while still a long way out. YES! truly.—His head was shaped more like a hammer's head than a human head, and he seemed to peck and tap and pound at the distances as he came on steadily, a huge sun-glinty shape, not hurrying, not loitering, but just coming on at a dogged peck, peck, peck.

In Moderan, David Bunch's world of Strongholds and flesh-strip metal-men, many problems have been eliminated. But not even there is one exempt from the Great Mystery and the Great Fear.

Straight and gradual he came, not looking aside at all, right down the slot. And I began to wonder if he was coming to see me, or if I and my great complex of weaponry just happened to be flat athwart the road he had chosen to peck, peck, peck. But soon it would be time to know, for soon it would be time to stop him and either open the gates or not open them. He could be God's own Chosen or Satan's right-hand help, either one, and he couldn't come on down this close to me and my fort and not be judged. The time for turning aside he had passed a good while back, when the orange flares went up and the warning leaflets pattered down. It was the generally understood Warning of the Line that we used in the Stronghold country. And if ever it was ignored, I had just seen it ignored by this hammer-headed shape. A man? Well—? Who could say?

All the warning formalities slid past him as though they had never been; the greeting, if

heard, was flagrantly left unreturned. He came on, pressing up to the gates, which I allowed him to do since I had checked him well on the Close Look, and the weapons and decontamination reports had both given him clear sail. But even against the closed gates he did not stop; he continued his dogged footwork and the peck, peck, peck of his head. CRAZY! Well, I suppose.

I eased the gates back gently with the OPEN power on SLOW and he passed through the hollow square. When he came close to where I stood half down from my peep-box of steel, but with one foot, for safety, still in the door, he seemed to sense my presence and he swiveled his head a very few degrees from the straight-on that seemed to be his choice.

"Owner?" The voice was a raspy drone; he was still moving.

"Yes. And halt!"

For a surprise he halted, stopped dead in his pecking tracks, then spun until he faced me. "Just passing through. I

hurt not where I walk. I respect the life-rights of others. But generally I do not deviate. My mission? If I have one—well, it's very hard to know."

"I am Master of Stronghold 10," I said, "the fortress with the best war record in all this wide land. Your coming on past the flares and the dropping leaflets was my choice to give; your pecking past the gates was my choice to allow; your going at all, unblasted, past the Warning of the Line was my choice to extend. I hope for no misunderstand—"

"If I've found God, then this is the end of the trail!" He reached at a tin belt that seemed low on his solid waist, and faster than I could follow he held a huge black hammer lightly in either hand. My face could almost feel them crashing through metal and flesh-strip and bone. Then strangely he laughed, a cracked unbelievable sound that was hardly of mirth, and he returned the hammers to the tin belt where they hung like two black questions, I could not help thinking. "I'd almost given up finding God." Then he laughed again. "But all jesting aside, and satire, let us not speak of God. He's why I've gone over to metal for the rest of the Long Trip."

"Are you an iron minister?" I asked. "Do you speak up for an old faith sometimes? Do you cry out for redemption of a world?"

I meet them all here in the slot where the Big Travel goes past my fort, and I'm ready to make allowances for them all. But with him I thought maybe I had gone too far when I saw those long steel hands turn to hunting birds in stoop and then become snake heads as they fell. He rested them on the hammers lightly where they hung.

"Mister," he said, "I'm in your Stronghold not by choice, certainly not as a guest. And yet I would not be mocked at either. You opened the gates. I didn't ask it. If you had left them closed I'd still be pecking at them, with my feet going. I'd use the hammers after awhile. I was once stopped a year at a little mountain cliff, down province, a whole pecking year. After that long the cliff began to crumble, and I walked on through. —With me it absolutely doesn't matter—pecking at a Stronghold here, battering a mountain cliff down province, or walking on through cleared and free in the open vapor-shield air. I'll wear out time until I'm tired of time, and then I'll just turn off the knobs I move by. I have absolutely no faith, no known purpose for being, and if I find God's face, or any part of that face, I'm programmed to strike it with both hammers as fast as I can hit, and as hard. —There are reasons for all this, which I fully explain about once

every twenty-five years." He looked at an elaborate time device swung down from his new-metal neck and I knew years, months, weeks, days, hours—all of it down to the last second-tick were commingled there in a jumble of calendars and red whirling blades. If metal can grin—well, he grinned, an open kind of smirk. "You just missed the big recital by a year, some six weeks, five days and a certain assorted amount of ticking seconds, round minutes and dragging jumbly hours," he said.

"Maybe you could camp here until the time comes up to talk, and then I could hear your tale," I said, because I had my humor about me as well as one of my feet in safety, in the door of the peep-box of steel.

"Just say I found the Answers," he said. "Just say you've seen the walking-talking Don't-Care man, one being who has escaped The Grip. It wasn't easy, it took a long time, and planning, but I think I've achieved it finally, the ultimate resolution of that built-in agony, the Life-Death Predicament of Man."

THAT was a big statement he'd just loaded out there at the last.

"YES! the walking-talking Don't-Care man rests well at night. He just leans up somewhere against a post, a creek

bank, a tree, an old missile launching shell, anything—turns off the switches and leaves it programmed so that he'll be turned back on at a suitable morning time. And always in him there's the assurance of the wonderful option; at any time the walking-talking Don't Care decides to, he can, when he shuts down the switches at night, neglect to program his awakening, and it'll be all over—OVER!"

"But here!" I could not help suggesting, "hasn't any kind of a man, at any time in history, in effect always had that option, to not awake in the morning? Self-death is just a little less old than life. Or did I miss something?"

"YES!" he howled in derision, "you missed it almost all. The walking-talking Don't-Care man is different because he is so indifferent. I've outsmarted God by a long and slow maneuver. I've left myself on a hundred dozen operating tables, down the days, down the line. The flesh I was and the soul I was supposed to be have left out through a hundred dozen hospital garbage pails and thus were scattered on many many big rivers and many many refuse-burning fires. And now I'm all 'replacements'—heart, brain, blood, nerves, everything—all metal now, all automatic, all programmed—wonderful! And you know something? I never dream at night. How could I

dream at night? I'm all turned off when I turn in. HA!"

This fellow had a point. I began to see his plan. The rest of us new-metal folk, with our flesh-strips few and played-down, had schemed to defeat the Predicament of Man, the agony of his transience and long-death fears in the world, by simply living forever. We'd conquer the big conundrum by never facing it. YES! But truly I was beginning to see how that could turn tedious. And now this one, who styled himself the Don't-Care one, had come up with a new and shining plan that beat ours very much. Man slowly turned to metal, with all his thoughts, actions, needs programmed! Well, that certainly would seem to have solved the Great Mystery and the Great Fear in a logical scientific way. The flesh-body and the soul so piecemeal gone that neither existed now anywhere at all, neither to be held accountable and neither to be up for redemption. And who could say he had transgressed? Had he killed himself? Ho! He had merely transformed himself. And when he turned off the switches for the last time and, tiring of it all, did not program another day, could you say he then had killed himself? I think you could not reasonably charge metal with suicide, not logically.

THEN a question took me as he stood there so bland and self-assured, his two snake-head hands lightly on the hammers where they swung. "Why, since He has allowed you to solve it, The Problem, would you wish to strike at His face with those two hammers, if you met that face ever, partly or in whole?"

For awhile he just stared at me, and, if metal can hate, I would say that he hated. He whipped out the two black hammers and stood there, each one threat-posed. For all his metal bravado and the total-defiance stare the voice seemed old when he spoke, "Intelligence was not left out when they built my head back together. My thoughts are metal now, but they work out. Don't I know who put me in The Predicament in the first place? Don't I know!? And the fact that He allowed me to change, warns me that He could probably change me back. And by God, I'll go down fighting, striking until these hammers are all worn down and my arms are all metal shreds, before He'll change me back to a man!"

Then He left me, pecking through the walk-out part of the Stronghold square. When he attained the far side, I thumbed the gates back for his leaving. He went out still pecking, going going—for his ending, Who—What knows where?

THE END

*A mind-picker, an interstellar policeman,
a galactic geographic genius—and a man
with a metal heart. They are . . .*

The Furies

By **ROGER ZELAZNY**

AS an afterthought, Nature sometimes tosses a bone to those it maims and casts aside. Often, it is in the form of a skill, usually useless, or the curse of intelligence.

When Sandor Sandor was four years old he could name all the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy. When he was five he could name the principal land masses of each planet and chalk them in, roughly, on blank globes. By the time he was seven years old he knew all the provinces, states, countries and major cities of all the main land masses on all one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy. He read Landography, History, Landology and popular travel guides during most of his waking time; and he studied maps and travel tapes. There was a camera behind his eyes, or so it seemed, because by the time he was ten years old there was no city in the galaxy that anyone

could name about which Sandor Sandor did not know *something*.

And he continued.

Places fascinated him. He built a library of street guides, road maps. He studied architectural styles and principal industries, and racial types, native life forms, local flora, landmarks, hotels, restaurants, airports and seaports and spaceports, styles of clothing and personal ornamentation, climatic conditions, local arts and crafts, dietary habits, sports, religions, social institutions, customs.

When he took his doctorate in Landography at the age of fourteen, his oral examinations were conducted via closed circuit television. This is because he was afraid to leave his home—having done so only three times before in his life and having met with fresh trauma on each occasion. And *this* is because on all one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy there was no

remedy for a certain degenerative muscular disease. This disease made it impossible for Sandor to manipulate even the finest prosthetic devices for more than a few minutes without suffering fatigue and great pain; and to go outside he required three such devices—two legs and a right arm—to substitute for those which he had missed out on receiving somewhere along the line before birth.

Rather than suffer this pain, or the pain of meeting persons other than his Aunt Faye or his nurse, Miss Barbara, he took his oral examinations via closed circuit television.

The University of Brill, Dombeck, was located on the other side of that small planet from Sandor's home, else the professors would have come to see *him*, because they respected him considerably. His 855-page dissertation, "Some Notes Toward a Gravitational Matrix Theory Governing the Formation of Similar Land Masses on Dissimilar Planetary Bodies," had drawn attention from Interstel University on Earth itself. Sandor Sandor, of course, would never see the Earth. His muscles could only sustain the gravitation of smaller planets, such as Dombeck.

And it happened that the Interstel Government, which monitors everything, had listened in on Sandor's oral examinations

and his defense of his dissertation.

Associate Professor Baines was one of Sandor's very few friends. They had even met several times in person, in Sandor's library, because Baines often said he'd wanted to borrow certain books and then came and spent the afternoon. When the examinations were concluded, Associate Professor Baines stayed on the circuit for several minutes, talking with Sandor. It was during this time that Baines made casual reference to an almost useless (academically, that is) talent of Sandor's.

At the mention of it, the government man's ears had pricked forward (he was a Rigellian). He was anxious for a promotion and he recalled an obscure memo . . .

Associate Professor Baines had mentioned the fact that Sandor Sandor had once studied a series of 30 random photos from all over the civilized galaxy, and that the significant data from these same photos had also been fed into the Department's L-L computer. Sandor had named the correct planet in each case, the land mass in 29, the county or territory in 26, and he had correctly set the location itself within 50 square miles in 23 instances. The L-L comp had named the correct planet for 27.

It was not a labor of love for the computer.

So it became apparent that Sandor Sandor knew just about every damn street in the galaxy.

Ten years later he knew them all.

But three years later the Rigellian quit his job, disgusted, and went to work in private industry, where the pay was better and promotions more frequent. *His* memo, and the tape, had been filed, however . . .

BENEDICK Benedict was born and grew up on the watery world of Kjum, and his was an infallible power for making enemies of everyone he met.

The reason why is that while some men's highest pleasure is drink, and others are given to gluttony, and still others are slothful, or lechery is their chief delight, or *Phrinn*-doing, Benedict's was gossip—he was a loudmouth.

Gossip was his meat and his drink, his sex and his religion. Shaking hands with him was a mistake, often a catastrophic one. For, as he clung to your hand, pumping it and smiling, his eyes would suddenly grow moist and the tears would dribble down his fat cheeks.

He wasn't sad when this happened. Far from it. It was a somatic conversion from his paranoim reaction.

He was seeing your past life.

He was selective, too; he only

saw what he looked for. And he looked for scandal and hate, and what is often worse, love; he looked for lawbreaking and unrest, for memories of discomfort, pain, futility, weakness. He saw everything a man wanted to forget, and he talked about it.

If you are lucky he won't tell you of your own. If you have ever met someone else whom he has also met in this manner, and if this fact shows, he will begin talking of *that* person. He will tell you of that man's or woman's life, because he appreciates this form of social reaction even more than your outrage at yourself. And his eyes and voice and hand will hold you, like the clutch of the Ancient Mariner, in a sort of half dream-state; and you will hear him out and you will be shocked beneath your paralysis.

Then he will go away and tell others about you.

Such a man was Benedick Benedict. He was probably unaware how much he was hated, because this reaction never came until later, after he had said "Good day," departed, and been gone for several hours. He left his hearers with a just-raped feeling—and later fear, shame, or disgust forced them to suppress the occurrence and to try to forget him. Or else they hated him quietly, because he was dangerous. That is to say, he had powerful friends.

He was an extremely social animal; he loved attention, he wanted to be admired, he craved audiences.

He could always find an audience too, somewhere. He knew so many secrets that he was tolerated in important places in return for the hearing. And he was wealthy too, but more of that in a moment.

As time went on, it became harder and harder for him to meet new people. His reputation spread in geometric proportion to his talking, and even those who would hear him preferred to sit on the far side of the room, drink enough alcohol to partly deaden memories of themselves, and to be seated near a door.

The reason for his wealth is because his power extended to inanimate objects as well. Minerals were rare on Kjum, the watery world. If anyone brought him a sample he could hold it and weep and tell them where to dig to hit the main lode.

From one fish caught in the vast seas of Kjum, he could chart the course of a school of fish.

Weeping, he could touch a native rad-pearl necklace and divine the location of the native's rad-pearl bed.

Local insurance associations and loan companies kept Benedict Files—the pen a man had used to sign his contract, his snubbed-out cigarette butt, a

plastex hanky with which he had mopped his brow, an object left in security, the remains of a biopsy or blood test—so that Benedict could use his power against those who renege on these companies and flee, on those who break their laws.

He did not revel in his power either. He simply enjoyed it. For he was one of the nineteen known paranorms in the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy, and he knew no other way.

Also, he occasionally assisted civil authorities, if he thought their cause a just one. If he did not, he suddenly lost his power until the need for it vanished. This didn't happen too often though, for an humanitarian was Benedict Benedict, and well-paid, because he was laboratory-tested and clinically-proven. He could psychometrize. He could pick up thought-patterns originating outside his own skull . . .

LYNX Links looked like a beachball with a beard, a fat patriarch with an eyepatch, a man who loved good food and drink, simple clothing, and the company of simple people; he was a man who smiled often and whose voice was soft and melodic.

In his earlier years he had chalked up the most impressive kill-record of any agent ever employed by Interstel Central In-

telligence. Forty-eight men and seventeen malicious alien life-forms had the Lynx dispatched during his fifty-year tenure as a field agent. He was one of the three men in the galaxy to have lived through half a century's employment with ICI. He lived comfortably on his government pension despite three wives and a horde of grandchildren; he was recalled occasionally as a consultant; and he did some part-time missionary work on the side. He believed that all life was one and that all men were brothers, and that love rather than hate or fear should rule the affairs of men. He had even killed with love, he often remarked at Tranquility Session, respecting and revering the person and the spirit of the man who had been marked for death.

This is the story of how he came to be summoned back from Hosanna, the World of the Great and Glorious Flame of the Divine Life, and was joined with Sandor Sandor and Benedick Benedict in the hunt for Victor Corgo, the man without a heart.

* * *

Victor Corgo was Captain of the *Wallaby*. Victor Corgo was Head Astrogator, First Mate, and Chief Engineer of the *Wallaby*. Victor Corgo was the *Wallaby*.

One time the *Wallaby* was a proud Guardship, an ebony toad-

stool studded with the jewel-like warts of fast-phrase projectors. One time the *Wallaby* skipped proud about the frontier worlds of Interstel, meting out the unique justice of the Uniform Galactic Code—in those places where there was no other law. One time the proud *Wallaby*, under the command of Captain Victor Corgo of the Guard, had ranged deep space and become a legend under legendary skies.

A terror to brigands and ugly aliens, a threat to Code-breakers, and a thorn in the sides of evil-doers everywhere, Corgo and his shimmering fungus (which could burn an entire continent under water-level within a single day) were the pride of the Guard, the best of the best, the cream that had been skimmed from all the rest.

Unfortunately, Corgo sold out. He became a heel.

. . . A traitor.

A hero gone bad . . .

After forty-five years with the Guard, his pension but half a decade away, he lost his entire crew in an ill-timed raid upon a pirate stronghold on the planet Kilsh, which might have become the hundred-fiftieth inhabited world of Interstel.

Crawling, barely alive, he had made his way half across the great snowfield of Brild, on the main land mass of Kilsh. At the fortuitous moment, Death mak-

ing its traditional noises of approach, he was snatched from out its traffic lane, so to speak, by the Drillen, a nomadic tribe of ugly and intelligent quadrupeds, who took him to their camp and healed his wounds, fed him, and gave him warmth. Later, with the cooperation of the Drillen, he recovered the *Wallaby* and all its arms and armaments, from where it had burnt its way to a hundred feet beneath the ice.

Crewless, he trained the Drillen.

With the Drillen and the *Wallaby* he attacked the pirates.

He won.

But he did not stop with that.

No.

When he learned that the Drillen had been marked for death under the Uniform Code he sold out his own species. The Drillen had refused relocation to a decent Reservation World. They had elected to continue occupancy of what was to become the hundred-fiftieth inhabited world in the galaxy (that is to say, in Interstel).

Therefore, the destruct-order had been given.

Captain Corgo protested, was declared out of order.

Captain Corgo threatened, was threatened in return.

Captain Corgo fought, was beaten, died, was resurrected, escaped restraint, became an outlaw.

He took the *Wallaby* with him. The *Happy Wallaby*, it had been called in the proud days. Now, it was just the *Wallaby*.

As the tractor beams had seized it, as the vibrations penetrated its ebony hull and tore at his flesh, Corgo had called his six Drillen to him, stroked the fur of Mala, his favorite, opened his mouth to speak, and died just as the words and the tears began.

"I am sorry . . ." he had said.

They gave him a new heart, though. His old one had fibrillated itself to pieces and could not be repaired. They put the old one in a jar and gave him a shiny, antiseptic egg of throbbing metal, which expanded and contracted at varying intervals, dependent upon what the seed-sized computers they had planted within him told of his breathing and his blood sugar and the output of his various glands. The seeds and the egg contained his life.

When they were assured that this was true and that it would continue, they advised him of the proceedings of courts martial.

He did not wait, however, for due process. Breaking his parole as an officer, he escaped the Guard Post, taking with him Mala, the only remaining Drillen in the galaxy. Her five fellows had not survived scientific inquiry as to the nature of their internal structures. The rest of

the race, of course, had refused relocation.

Then did the man without a heart make war upon mankind.

RAPING a planet involves considerable expense. Enormous blasters and slicers and sluicers and refiners are required to reduce a world back almost to a state of primal chaos, and then to extract from it its essential (*i.e.*, commercially viable) ingredients. The history books may tell you of strip-mining on the mother planet, back in ancient times. Well, the crude processes employed then were similar in emphasis and result, but the operations were considerably smaller in scale.

Visualize a hundred miles of Grand Canyon appearing overnight; visualize the reversal of thousands of Landological millennia in the twinkling of an eye; consider all the Ice Ages of the Earth, and compress them into a single season. This will give you a rough idea as to time and effect.

Now picture the imported labor—the men who drill and blast and slice and sluice for the great mining combines: Not uneducated, these men; willing to take a big risk, certainly though, these men—maybe only for one year, because of the high pay; or maybe they're careerists, because of the high pay—these men, who

hit three worlds in a year's time, who descend upon these worlds in ships full of city, in space-trailer mining camps, out of the sky; coming, these men, from all over the inhabited galaxy, bringing with them the power of the tool and the opposed thumb, bearing upon their brows the mark of the Solar Phoenix and in their eyes the cold of the spaces they have crossed over, they know what to do to make the domes of atoms rise before them and to call down the tornado-probosci of suck-vortices from the freighters on the other side of the sky; and they do it thoroughly and efficiently, and not without style, tradition, folksongs, and laughter—for they are the sweat-crews, working against time (which is money), to gain tonnage (which is money), and to beat their competitors to market (which is important, inasmuch as one worldsworth influences future sales for many months), these men, who bear in one hand the flame and in the other the whirlwind, who come down with their families and all their possessions, erect temporary metropoli, work their magic act, and go—after the vanishing trick has been completed.

Now that you've an idea as to what happens and who is present at the scene, here's the rub:

Raping a planet involves considerable expense.

The profits are more than commensurate, do not misunderstand. It is just that they could be even greater . . .

How?

Well— For one thing, the heavy machinery involved is quite replaceable, in the main. That is, the machinery which is housed within the migrant metropoli.

Moving it is expensive. Not moving it isn't. For it is actually cheaper, in terms of material and labor, to manufacture new units than it is to fast-phase the old ones more than an average of 2.6 times.

Mining combines do not produce them (and wouldn't really want to); the mining manufacturing combines like to make new units as much as the mining combines like to lose old ones.

And of course it is rented machinery, or machinery on which payments are still being made, to the financing associations, because carrying payments makes it easier to face down the Interstel Revenue Service every fiscal year.

Abandoning the units would be criminal, violating either the lessor-lessee agreement or the Interstel Commercial Code.

But accidents do happen . . .

Often, too frequently to make for comfortable statistics . . .

Way out there on the raw frontier.

Then do the big insurance associations investigate, and they finally sigh and reimburse the lien-holders.

. . . And the freighters make it to market ahead of schedule, because there is less to dismantle and march-order and ship.

Time is saved, commitments are met in advance, a better price is generally obtained, and a headstart on the next worldsworth is supplied in this manner.

All of which is nice.

Except for the insurance associations.

But what can happen to a transitory New York full of heavy equipment?

Well, some call it sabotage.

. . . Some call it mass-murder.

. . . Unsanctioned war.

. . . Corgo's lightning.

But it is written that it is better to burn one city than to curse the darkness.

Corgo did not curse the darkness.

. . . Many times.

THE day they came together on Dombeck, Benedick held forth his hand, smiled, said: "Mister Sandor . . ."

As his hand was shaken, his smile reversed itself. Then it went away from his face. He was shaking an artificial hand.

Sandor nodded, dropped his eyes.

Benedick turned to the big man with the eyepatch.

". . . And you are the Lynx?"

"That is correct, my brother. You must excuse me if I do not shake hands. It is against my religion. I believe that life does not require reassurance as to its oneness."

"Of course," said Benedick. "I once knew a man from Dombeck. He was a *gnil* smuggler, named Worten Wortan—"

"He is gone to join the Great Flame," said the Lynx. "That is to say, he is dead now. ICI apprehended him two years ago. He passed to Flame while attempting to escape restraint."

"Really?" said Benedick. "He was at one time a *gnil* addict himself—"

"I know. I read his file in connection with another case."

"Dombeck is full of *gnil* smugglers"—Sandor.

"Oh. Well, then let us talk of this man Corgo."

"Yes"—the Lynx.

"Yes"—Sandor.

"The ICI man told me that many insurance associations have lodged protests with their Interstel representatives."

"That is true"—Lynx.

"Yes"—Sandor, biting his lip. "Do you gentlemen mind if I remove my legs?"

"Not at all"—the Lynx. "We are co-workers, and informality should govern our gatherings."

"Please do," said Benedick.

Sandor leaned forward in his chair and pressed the coupling controls. There followed two thumps from beneath his desk. He leaned back then and surveyed his shelves of globes.

"Do they cause you pain?" asked Benedick.

"Yes"—Sandor.

"Were you in an accident?"

"Birth"—Sandor.

The Lynx raised a decanter of brownish liquid to the light. He stared through it.

"It is a local brandy"—Sandor. "Quite good. Somewhat like the *xmili* of Bandla, only non-addictive. Have some."

The Lynx did, keeping it in front of him all that evening.

"Corgo is a destroyer of property," said Benedick.

Sandor nodded.

". . . And a defrauder of insurance associations, a defacer of planetary bodies, a deserter from the Guard—"

"A murderer"—Sandor.

". . . And a zoophilist," finished Benedick.

"Aye"—the Lynx, smacking his lips.

"So great an offender against public tranquility is he that he must be found."

". . . And passed back through the Flame for purification and rebirth."

"Yes, we must locate him and kill him," said Benedick.

"The two pieces of equipment . . . Are they present?"—the Lynx.

"Yes, the phase-wave is in the next room."

". . . And?" asked Benedick.

"The other item is in the bottom drawer of this desk, right side."

"Then why do we not begin now?"

"Yes. Why not now?"—the Lynx.

"Very well"—Sandor. "One of you will have to open the drawer, though. It is in the brown-glass jar, to the back."

"I'll get it," said Benedick.

A GREAT sob escaped him after a time, as he sat there with rows of worlds at his back, tears on his cheeks, and Corgo's heart clutched in his hands.

"It is cold and dim . . ."

"Where?"—the Lynx.

"It is a small place. A room? Cabin? Instrument panels . . . A humming sound . . . Cold, and crazy angles everywhere . . . Vibration . . . Hurt!"

"What is he doing?"—Sandor.

". . . Sitting, half-lying—a couch, webbed, about him. Furry one at his side, sleeping. Twisted—angles—everything—wrong. Hurt!"

"The *Wallaby*, in transit"—Lynx.

"Where is he going?"—Sandor.

"HURT!" shouted Benedick. Sandor dropped the heart into his lap.

He began to shiver. He wiped at his eyes with the backs of his hands.

"I have a headache," he announced.

"Have a drink"—Lynx.

He gulped one, sipped the second.

"Where was I?"

The Lynx raised his shoulders and let them fall.

"The *Wallaby* was fast-phasing somewhere, and Corgo was in phase-sleep. It is a disturbing sensation to fast-phase while fully conscious. Distance and duration grow distorted. You found him at a bad time—while under sedation and subject to continuum-impact. Perhaps tomorrow will be better . . ."

"I hope so."

"Yes, tomorrow"—Sandor.

"Tomorrow . . . Yes."

"There was one other thing," he added, "a thing in his mind . . . There was a sun where there was no sun before."

"A burn-job?"—Lynx.

"Yes."

"A memory?"—Sandor.

"No. He is on his way to do it."

The Lynx stood.

"I will phase-wave ICI and advise them. They can check which worlds are presently being mined. Have you any ideas how soon?"

"No," I can not tell that.
"What did the globe look like?
What continental configura-
tions?"—Sandor.

"None. The thought was not
that specific. His mind was drift-
ing—mainly filled with hate."

"I'll call in now—and we'll try
again . . .?"

"Tomorrow. I'm tired now."

"Go to bed then. Rest."

"Yes, I can do that . . ."

"Good night, Mister Benedict."

"Good night . . ."

"Sleep in the heart of the
Great Flame."

"I hope not . . ."

MALA whimpered and moved
nearer her Corgo, for she
was dreaming an evil dream:
They were back on the great
snowfield of Brild, and she was
trying to help him—to walk, to
move forward. He kept slipping
though, and lying there longer
each time, and rising more slow-
ly each time and moving ahead
at an even slower pace, each
time. He tried to kindle a fire, but
the snow-devils spun and toppled
like icicles falling from the seven
moons, and the dancing green
flames died as soon as they were
born from between his hands.

Finally, on the top of a moun-
tain of ice she saw them.

There were three . . .

They were clothed from head
to toe in flame; their burning
heads turned and turned and

turned; and then one bent and
sniffed at the ground, rose, and
indicated their direction. Then
they were racing down the hill-
side, trailing flames, melting a
pathway as they came, springing
over drifts and ridges of ice,
their arms extended before them.

Silent they came, pausing only
as the one sniffed the air, the
ground . . .

She could hear their breathing
now, feel their heat . . .

In a matter of moments they
would arrive . . .

Mala whimpered and moved
nearer her Corgo.

* * *

For three days Benedick tried,
clutching Corgo's heart like a
Gipsy's crystal, watering it with
his tears, squeezing it almost to
life again. His head ached for
hours after, each time that he
met the continuum-impact. He
wept long, moist tears for hours
beyond contact, which was un-
usual. He had always with-
drawn from immediate pain be-
fore; remembered distress was
his forte, and a different matter
altogether.

He hurt each time that he
touched Corgo and his mind was
sucked down through that sub-
way in the sky; and he touched
Corgo eleven times during those
three days, and then his power
went away, really.

Seated, like a lump of dark

metal on the hull of the *Wallaby*, he stared across six hundred miles at the blazing hearth which he had stoked to steel-tempering heights; and he *felt* like a piece of metal, resting there upon an anvil, waiting for the hammer to fall again, as it always did, waiting for it to strike him again and again, and to beat him to a new toughness, to smash away more and more of that within him which was base, of that which knew pity, remorse, and guilt, again and again and again, and to leave only that hard, hard form of hate, like an iron boot, which lived at the core of the lump, himself, and required constant hammering and heat.

Sweating as he watched, smiling, Corgo took pictures.

When one of the nineteen known paranorms in the one hundred forty-nine inhabited worlds in the galaxy suddenly loses his powers, and loses them at a crucial moment, it is like unto the old tales wherein a Princess is stricken one day with an unknown malady and the King, her father, summons all his wise men and calls for the best physicians in the realm.

Big Daddy ICI (*Rex ex machina*-like) did, in similar manner, summon wise men and counsellors from various Thinkomats and think-repairshops about the galaxy, including In-

terstel University, on Earth itself. But alas! while all had a diagnosis, none had on hand any suggestions which were immediately acceptable to all parties concerned:

"A drug-induced counter-trauma should work best."

"Bombard his thalamus with Beta particles."

"Hypno-regression to the womb, and restoration at a pre-traumatic point in his life."

"More continuum-impact."

"Six weeks on a pleasure satellite, and two aspirins every four hours."

"There is an old operation called a lobotomy . . ."

"Lots of liquids and green leafy vegetables."

"Hire another paranorm."

For one reason or another, the principal balked at all of these courses of action, and the final one was impossible at the moment. In the end, the matter was settled neatly by Sandor's nurse Miss Barbara, who happened onto the veranda one afternoon as Benedick sat there fanning himself and drinking *xmili*.

"Why Mister Benedict!" she announced, plopping her matronly self into the chair opposite him and spiking her *redlonade* with three fingers of *xmili*. "Fancy meeting you out here! I thought you were in the library with the boys, working on that top secret hush-hush critical

project called Wallaby Stew, or something."

"As you can see, I am not," he said, staring at his knees.

"Well, it's nice just to pass the time of day sometimes, too. To sit. To relax. To rest from the hunting of Victor Corgo . . ."

"Please, you're not supposed to know about the project. It's top secret and critical—"

"And hush-hush too, I know. Dear Sandor talks in his sleep every night—so much. You see, I tuck him in each evening and sit there until he drifts away to dreamland, poor child."

"Mm, yes. Please don't talk about the project, though."

"Why? Isn't it going well?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because of *me*, if you must know! I've got a block of some kind. The power doesn't come when I call it."

"Oh, how distressing! You mean you can't peep into other persons' minds any more?"

"Exactly."

"Dear me. Well, let's talk about something else then. Did I ever tell you about the days when I was the highest-paid courtesan on Sordido V?"

Benedick's head turned slowly in her direction.

"Nooo . . ." he said. "You mean *the* Sordido?"

"Oh yes. Bright Bad Barby, the Bouncing Baby, they used to

call me. They still sing ballads, you know."

"Yes, I've heard them. Many verses . . ."

"Have another drink. I once had a coin struck in my image, you know. It's a collectors' item now, of course. Full-length pose, flesh-colored. Here, I wear it on this chain around my neck.—Lean closer, it's a short chain."

"Very—interesting. Uh, how did all this come about?"

"Well—it all began with old Pruria Van Teste, the banker, of the export-import Testes. You see, he had this thing going for synthofemmes for a long while, but when he started getting up there in years he felt there was something he'd been missing. So, one fine day, he sent me ten dozen Hravian orchids and a diamond garter, along with an invitation to have dinner with him . . ."

"You accepted, of course?"

"Naturally not. Not the first time, anyway. I could see that he was pretty damn eager."

"Well, what happened?"

"Wait till I fix another *red-lonade*."

LATER that afternoon, the Lynx wandered out onto the veranda during the course of his meditations. He saw there Miss Barbara, with Benedick seated beside her, weeping.

"What troubles thy tranquility, my brother?" he inquired.

"Nothing! Nothing at all! It is wonderful and beautiful, everything! My power has come back—I can feel it!" He wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

"Bless thee, little lady!" said the Lynx, seizing Miss Barbara's hand. "Thy simple counsels have done more to heal my brother than have all these highly-paid medical practitioners brought here at great expense. Virtue lies in thy homely words, and thou art most beloved of the Flame."

"Thank you, I'm sure."

"Come brother, let us away to our task again!"

"Yes, let us!—Oh thank you, Bright Barby!"

"Don't mention it."

Benedick's eyes clouded immediately, as he took the tattered blood-pump into his hands. He leaned back, stroking it, and moist spots formed on either side of his nose, grew like well-fed amoebae, underwent mitosis, and dashed off to explore in the vicinity of his shelf-like upper lip.

He sighed once, deeply.

"Yes, I am there."

He blinked, licked his lips.

". . . It is night. Late. It is a primitive dwelling. Mud-like stucco, bits of straw in it . . . All lights out, but for the one from the machine, and its spillage—"

"Machine?"—Lynx.

"What machine?"—Sandor.

". . . Projector. Pictures on

wall . . . World — big, filling whole picture-field—patches of fire on the world, up near the top. Three places—"

"Bhave VII!"—Lynx. "Six days ago!"

"Shoreline to the right goes like this. . . And to the left, like this. . ."

His right index finger traced patterns in the air.

"Bhave VII"—Sandor.

"Happy and not happy at the same time—hard to separate the two. Guilt, though, is there—but pleasure with it. Revenge . . . Hate people, humans . . . We adjust the projector now, stop it at a flareup. — Bright! How good!—Oh good! That will teach them!—Teach them to grab away what belongs to others . . . To murder a race!—The generator is humming. It is ancient, and it smells bad . . . The dog is lying on our foot. The foot is asleep, but we do not want to disturb the dog, for it is Mala's favorite thing—her only toy, companion, living doll, four-footed . . . She is scratching behind its ear with her forelimb, and it loves her. Light leaks down upon them . . . Clear they are. The breeze is warm, very, which is why we are unshirted. It stirs the tasseled hanging . . . No force-field or windowpane . . . Insects buzz by the projector—pterodactyl silhouettes on the burning world—"

"What kind of insects?"—Lynx.

"Can you see what is beyond the window?"—Sandor.

". . . Outside are trees—short ones—just outlines, squat. Can't tell where trunks begin. . . Foliage too thick, too close. Too dark out.—Off in the distance a tiny moon . . . Something like *this* on a hill . . ." His hands shaped a turnip impaled on an obelisk. "Not sure how far off, how large, what color, or what made of . . ."

"Is the name of the place in Corgo's mind?"—Lynx.

"If I could touch him, with my hand, I would know it, know everything. Only receive impressions *this* way, though—surface thoughts. He is not thinking of where he is now . . . The dog rolls onto its back and off of our foot—at last! She scratches its tummy, my love dark . . . It kicks with its hind leg as if scratching after a flea—wags its tail. Dilk is puppy's name. She gave it that name, loves it. . . It is like one of hers. Which was murdered. Hate people—humans. *She* is people. Better than . . . Doesn't butcher that which breathes for selfish gain, for Interstel. Better than people, my pony-friends, better . . . An insect lights on Dilk's nose. She brushes it away. Segmented, two sets of wings, about five millimeters in length, pink globe on

front end, bulbous, and buzzes as it goes, the insect—you asked . . ."

"How many entrances are there to the place?"—Lynx.

"Two. One doorway at each end of the hut."

"How many windows?"

"Two. On opposing walls—the ones without doors. I can't see anything through the other window—too dark on that side."

"Anything else?"

"On the wall a sword—long hilt, very long, two-handed—even longer maybe—three? four?—short blades, though, two of them—hilt is in the middle—and each blade is straight, double-edged, forearm-length . . . Beside it, a mask of—flowers? Too dark to tell. The blades shine, the mask is dull. Looks like flowers, though. Many little ones . . . Four sides to the mask, shaped like a kite, big end down. Can't make out features. It projects fairly far out from the wall, though. Mala is restless. Probably doesn't like the pictures—or maybe doesn't see them and is bored. Her eyes are different. She nuzzles our shoulder now. We pour her a drink in her bowl. Take another one ourself. She doesn't drink hers. We stare at her. She drops her head and drinks.—Dirt floor under our sandals, hard-packed. Many tiny white—pebbles?—in it, powdery-like. The table is wood, natural

. . . The generator sputters. The picture fades, comes back. We rub our chin. Need a shave . . . The hell with it! We're not standing any inspections! Drink—one, two—all gone! Another!"

SANDOR had threaded a tape into his viewer, and he was spinning it and stopping it, spinning it and stopping it. He checked his worlds chronometer.

"Outside," he asked, "does the moon seem to be moving up, or down, or across the sky?"

"Across."

"Right to left, or left to right?"

"Right to left. It seems about a quarter past zenith."

"Any coloration to it?"

"Orange, with three black lines. One starts at about eleven o'clock, crosses a quarter of its surface, drops straight down, cuts back at seven. The other starts at two, drops to six. They don't meet. The third is a small upside-down letter 'c'—lower right quarter . . . Not big, the moon, but clear, very. No clouds."

"Any constellations you can make out?"—Lynx.

". . . Head isn't turned that way now, wasn't turned toward the window long enough. Now there is a noise, far off . . . A high-pitched chattering, almost metallic. Animal. He pictures a six-legged tree creature, half the size of a man, reddish-brown hair, sparse . . . It can go on

two, four, or six legs on the ground. Doesn't go down on the ground much, though. Nests high. An egg-layer. Many teeth. Eats flesh. Small eyes, and black—two. Great nose-holes. Pesty, but not dangerous to men—easily frightened."

"He is on Disten, the fifth world of Blake's System," said Sandor. "Night-side means he is on the continent Diden-lan. The moon Babry, well past zenith now, means he is to the east. A Mellar-mosque indicates a Mella-Muslim settlement. The blade and the mask seem Hortanian. I am sure they were brought from further inland. The chalky deposits would set him in the vicinity of Landear, which is Mella-Muslim. It is on the Dista River, north bank. There is much jungle about. Even those people who wish seclusion seldom go further than eight miles from the center of town—population 153,000—and it is least settled to the northwest, because of the hills, the rocks, and—"

"Fine! That's where he is then!"—Lynx. "Now here is how we'll do it. He has, of course, been sentenced to death. I believe—yes, I know!—there is an ICI Field Office on the second world—whatever its name—of that System."

"Nirer"—Sandor.

"Yes. Hmm, let's see . . . Two agents will be empowered as

executioners. They will land their ship to the northwest of Landear, enter the city, and find where the man with the strange four-legged pet settled, the one who arrived within the past six days. Then one agent will enter the hut and ascertain whether Corgo is within. He will retreat immediately if Corgo is present, signalling to the other who will be hidden behind those trees or whatever. The second man will then fire a round of fragmentation plaster through the unguarded window. One agent will then position himself at a safe distance beyond the northeast corner of the edifice, so as to cover a door and a window. The other will move to the southwest, to do the same. Each will carry a two-hundred channel laser sub-gun with vibrating head.—Good! I'll phase-wase it to Central now. We've got him!"

He hurried from the room.

Benedick, still holding the thing, his shirt-front soaking, continued:

"'Fear not, my lady dark. He is but a puppy, and he howls at the moon . . .'"

IT was 31 hours and 20 minutes later when the Lynx received and decoded the two terse statements:

EXECUTIONERS THE WAY OF ALL
FLESH. THE WALLABY HAS
JUMPED AGAIN.

THE FURIES

He licked his lips. His comrades were waiting for the report, and *they* had succeeded—they had done their part, had performed efficiently and well. It was the Lynx who had missed his kill.

He made the sign of the Flame and entered the library.

Benedick knew—he could tell. The little paranorm's hands were on his walking stick, and that was enough—just that.

The Lynx bowed his head.

"We begin again," he told them.

Benedick's powers—if anything, stronger than ever—survived continuum-impact seven more times. Then he described a new world: Big it was, and many-peopled—bright—dazzling, under a blue-white sun; yellow brick everywhere, neo-Denebian architecture, greenglass windows, a purple sea nearby . . .

No trick at all for Sandor:

"Phillip's World," he named it, then told them the city: "Delles."

"This time *we* burn *him*," said the Lynx, and he was gone from the room.

"Christian-Zoroastrians," sighed Benedick, after he had left. "I think this one has a Flame-complex."

Sandor spun the globe with his left hand and watched it turn.

"I'm not preconning," said Benedick, "but I'll give you odds.

like three to one—on Corgo's escaping again."

"Why?"

"When he abandoned humanity he became something less, and more. He is not ready to die."

"What do you mean?"

"I hold his heart. He gave it up, in all ways. He is invincible now. But he will reclaim it one day. Then he will die."

"How do you know?"

". . . A feeling. There are many types of doctors, among them pathologists. No less than others, they, but masters only of blackness. I *know* people, have known many. I do not pretend to know *all* about them. But weaknesses—yes, those I know."

Sandor turned his globe and did not say anything.

But they *did* burn the *Wallaby*, badly.

He lived, though.

He lived, cursing.

As he lay there in the gutter, the world burning, exploding, falling down around him, he cursed *that* world and every other, and everything in them.

Then there was another burst. Blackness followed.

THE double-bladed Hortanian sword, spinning in the hands of Corgo, had halved the first ICI executioner as he stood in the doorway. Mala had detected their approach across the breezes, through the open window.

The second had fallen before the fragmentation plaster could be launched. Corgo had a laser sub-gun himself, Guard issue, and he cut the man down, firing through the wall and two trees in the direction Mala indicated.

Then the *Wallaby* left Disten.

But he was troubled. How had they found him so quickly? He had had close brushes with them before—many of them, over the years. But he was cautious, and he could not see where he had failed this time, could not understand how Interstel had located him. Even his last employer did not know his whereabouts.

He shook his head and phased for Phillip's world.

To die is to sleep and not to dream, and Corgo did not want this. He took elaborate pains, in-phasing and out-phasing in random directions; he gave Mala a golden collar with a two-way radio in its clasp, wore its mate within his death-ring; he converted much currency, left the *Wallaby* in the care of a reputable smuggler in Unassociated Territory and crossed Phillip's World to Delles-by-the-Sea. He was fond of sailing, and he liked the purple waters of this planet. He rented a large villa near the Delles Dives—slums to the one side, Riviera to the other. This pleased him. He still had dreams; he was not dead yet.

Sleeping, perhaps, he had

heard a sound. Then he was suddenly seated on the side of his bed, a handful of death in his hand.

"Mala?"

She was gone. The sound he'd heard had been the closing of a door.

He activated the radio.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"I have the feeling we are watched again," she replied, through his ring. ". . . Only a feeling, though."

Her voice was distant, tiny.

"Why did you not tell *me*? Come back—now."

"No. I match the night and can move without sound. I will investigate. There *is* something, if I have fear . . . Arm yourself!"

He did that, and as he moved toward the front of the house they struck. He ran. As he passed through the front door they struck again, and again. There was an inferno at his back, and a steady rain of plaster, metal, wood and glass was falling. Then there was an inferno around him.

They were above him. This time they had been cautioned not to close with him, but to strike from a distance. This time they hovered high in a shielded globe and poured down hot rivers of destruction.

Something struck him in the head and the shoulder. He fell, turning. He was struck in the chest, the stomach. He covered

his face and rolled, tried to rise, failed. He was lost in a forest of flames. He got into a crouch, ran, fell again, rose once more, ran, fell again, crawled, fell again.

As he lay there in the gutter, the world burning, exploding, falling down around him, he cursed *that* world and every other, and everyone in them.

Then there was another burst. Blackness followed.

THEY thought they had succeeded, and their joy was great.

"Nothing," Benedick had said, smiling through his tears.

So that day they celebrated, and the next.

But Corgo's body had not been recovered.

Almost half a block had been hurled down, though, and eleven other residents could not be located either, so it seemed safe to assume that the execution had succeeded. ICI, however, requested that the trio remain together on Dombeck for another ten days, while further investigations were carried out.

Benedick laughed.

"Nothing," he repeated. "Nothing."

But there is a funny thing about a man without a heart: His body does not live by the same rules as those of others: No. The egg in his chest is smarter than a mere heart, and

it is the center of a wonderful communications system. Dead itself, it is omniscient in terms of that which lives around it; it is not omnipotent, but it has resources which a living heart does not command.

As the burns and lacerations were flashed upon the screen of the body, it sat in instant criticism. It moved itself to an emergency level of function; it became a flag vibrating within a hurricane; the glands responded and poured forth their juices of power; muscles were activated as if by electricity.

Corgo was only half-aware of the inhuman speed with which he moved through the storm of heat and the hail of building materials. It tore at him, but this pain was cancelled. His massive output jammed non-essential neural input. He made it as far as the street and collapsed in the shelter of the curb.

The egg took stock of the cost of the action, decided the price had been excessively high, and employed immediate measures to insure the investment.

Down, down did it send him. Into the depths of sub-coma. Standard-model humans cannot decide one day that they wish to hibernate, lie down, do it. The physicians can induce *dauersch-laff* with combinations of drugs and elaborate machineries. But Corgo did not need these things.

He had a built-in survival kit with a mind of its own; and it decided that he must go deeper than the mere coma-level that a heart would have permitted. So it did the things a heart cannot do, while maintaining its own functions.

It hurled him into the blackness of sleep without dreams, of total unawareness. For only at the border of death itself could his life be retained, be strengthened, grow again. To approach this near the realm of death, its semblance was necessary.

Therefore, Corgo lay dead in the gutter.

PEOPLE, of course, flock to the scene of any disaster.

Those from the Riviera pause to dress in their best catastrophe clothing. Those from the slums do not, because their wardrobes are not as extensive.

One though, was dressed already and was passing nearby. "Zim" was what he was called, for obvious reasons. He had had another name once, but he had all but forgotten it.

He was staggering home from the *zimlak* parlor where he had cashed his Guard pension check for that month-cycle.

There was an explosion, but it was seconds before he realized it. Muttering, he stopped and turned very slowly in the direction of the noise. Then he saw the

flames. He looked up, saw the hoverglobe. A memory appeared within his mind and he winced and continued to watch.

After a time he saw the man, moving at a fantastic pace across the landscape of Hell. The man fell in the street. There was more burning, and then the globe departed.

The impressions finally registered, and his disaster-reflex made him approach.

Indelible synapses, burnt into his brain long ago, summoned up page after page of The Complete Guard Field Manual of Immediate Medical Actions. He knelt beside the body, red with burn, blood and firelight.

“. . . Captain,” he said, as he stared into the angular face with the closed dark eyes. “Captain . . .”

He covered his own face with his hands and they came away wet.

“Neighbors. Here. Us. Didn’t—know . . .” He listened for a heartbeat, but there was nothing that he could detect. “Fallen . . . On the deck my Captain lies . . . fallen . . . cold . . . dead. Us. Neighbors, even . . .” His sob was a jagged thing, until he was seized with a spell of hiccups. Then he steadied his hands and raised an eyelid.

Corgo’s head jerked two inches to his left, away from the brightness of the flames.

The man laughed in relief. “You’re alive, Cap! You’re still alive!”

The thing that was Corgo did not reply.

Bending, straining, he raised the body.

“‘Do not move the victim’—that’s what it says in the Manual. But you’re coming with me, Cap. I remember now . . . It was after I left. But I remember . . . All. Now I remember, I do . . . Yes. They’ll kill you another time—if you do live . . . They will, I know. So I’ll have to move the victim. Have to . . . —Wish I wasn’t so fogged . . . I’m sorry, Cap. You were always good, to the men, good to me. Ran a tight ship, but you were good . . . Old *Wallaby*, happy . . . Yes. We’ll go now, killer. ‘Fast as we can. Before the Morbs come.—Yes. I remember . . . you. Good man, Cap. Yes.”

So, the *Wallaby* had made its last jump, according to the ICI investigation which followed. But Corgo still dwelled on the dreamless border, and the seeds and the egg held his life.

After the ten days had passed, the Lynx and Benedick still remained with Sandor. Sandor was not anxious for them to go. He had never been employed before; he liked the feeling of having co-workers about, persons who

shared memories of things done. Benedick was loathe to leave Miss Barbara, one of the few persons he could talk to and have answer him, willingly. The Lynx liked the food and the climate, decided his wives and grandchildren could use a vacation.

So they stayed on.

RETURNING from death is a deadly slow business. Reality does the dance of the veils, and it is a long while before you know what lies beneath them all (if you ever really do).

When Corgo had formed a rough idea, he cried out:

“Mala!”

. . . The darkness.

Then he saw a face out of times gone by.

“Sergeant Emil . . . ?”

“Yes, sir. Right here, Captain.”

“Where am I?”

“My hutch, sir. Yours got burnt out.”

“How?”

“A hoverglobe did it, with a sear-beam.”

“What of my—pet? A Drill-en . . .”

“There was only you I found, sir—no one, nothing, else. Uh, it was almost a month-cycle ago that it happened . . .”

Corgo tried to sit up, failed, tried again, half-succeeded. He sat propped on his elbows.

“What’s the matter with me?”

“You had some fractures,

burns, lacerations, internal injuries—but you’re going to be all right, now.”

“I wonder how they found me, so fast—again . . . ?”

“I don’t know, sir. Would you like to try some broth now?”

“Later.”

“It’s all warm and ready.”

“Okay, Emil. Sure, bring it on.”

He lay back and wondered.

There was her voice. He had been dozing all day and he was part of a dream.

“Corgo, are you there? Are you there, Corgo? Are you . . .”

His hand! The ring!

“Yes! Me! Corgo!” He activated it. “Mala! Where are you?”

“In a cave, by the sea. Every day I have called to you. Are you alive, or do you answer me from Elsewhere?”

“I am alive. There is no magic to your collar. How have you kept yourself?”

“I go out at night. Steal food from the large dwellings with the green windows like doors—for Dilk and myself.”

“The puppy? Alive, too?”

“Yes. He was penned in the yard on that night . . . Where are you?”

“I do not know, precisely . . . Near where our place was. A few blocks away—I’m with an old friend . . .”

“I must come.”

“Wait until dark. I’ll get you

directions. —No. I'll send him after you, my friend . . . Where is your cave?"

"Up the beach, past the red house you said was ugly. There are three rocks, pointed on top. Past them is a narrow path—the water comes up to it, sometimes covers it—and around a corner then, thirty-one of my steps, and the rock hangs overhead, too. It goes far back then, and there is a crack in the wall—small enough to squeeze through, but it widens. We are here."

"My friend will come for you after dark."

"You are hurt?"

"I was. But I am better now. I'll see you later, talk more then."

"Yes—"

IN the days that followed, his strength returned to him. He played chess with Emil and talked with him of their days together in the Guard. He laughed, for the first time in many years, at the tale of the Commander's wig, at the Big Brawl on Sordido III, some thirty-odd years before . . .

Mala kept to herself, and to Dilk. Occasionally, Corgo would feel her eyes upon him. But whenever he turned, she was always looking in another direction. He realized that she had never seen him being friendly with anyone before. She seemed puzzled.

He drank *zimlak* with Emil, they ventured off-key ballads together . . .

Then one day it struck him.

"Emil, what are you using for money these days?"

"Guard pension, Cap."

"Flames! We've been eating you out of business! Food, and the medical supplies and all . . ."

"I had a little put away for foul weather days, Cap."

"Good. But you shouldn't have been using it. There's quite a bit of money zipped up in my boots.—Here. Just a second . . . There! Take these!"

"I can't, Cap . . ."

"The hell, you say! Take them, that's an order!"

"All right, sir. But you don't have to . . ."

"Emil, there is a price on my head—you know?"

"I know."

"A pretty large reward."

"Yes."

"It's yours, by right."

"I couldn't turn you in, sir."

"Nevertheless, the reward is yours. Twice over. I'll send you that amount—a few weeks after I leave here."

"I couldn't take it, sir."

"Nonsense, you will."

"No, sir. I won't."

"What do you mean?"

"I just mean I couldn't take that money."

"Why not? What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing, exactly . . . I just don't want any of it. I'll take this you gave me for the food and stuff. But no more, that's all."

"Oh . . . All right, Emil. Any way you like it. I wasn't trying to force . . ."

"I know, Cap."

"Another game now? I'll spot you a bishop and three pawns this time."

"Very good, sir."

"We had some good time together, eh?"

"You bet, Cap. Tau Ceti—three months' leave. Remember the Red River Valley—and the family native life-forms?"

"Hah! And Cygnus VII—the purple world with the Rainbow Women?"

"Took me three weeks to get that dye off me. Thought at first it was a new disease. Flames! I'd love to ship out again!"

Corgo paused in mid-move.

"Hmm . . . You know, Emil . . . It might be that you could."

"What do you mean?"

Corgo finished his move.

"Aboard the *Wallaby*. It's here, in Unassociated Territory, waiting for me. I'm Captain, and crew—and everything—all by myself, right now. Mala helps some, but—you know, I could use a First Mate. Be like old times."

Emil replaced the knight he had raised, looked up, looked back down.

"I—I don't know what to say,

Cap. I never thought you'd offer me a berth . . ."

"Why not? I could use a good man. Lots of action, like the old days. Plenty cash. No cares. We want three months' leave on Tau Ceti and we write our own bloody orders. We take it!"

"I—I do want to space again, Cap—bad. But—no, I couldn't . . ."

"Why not, Emil? Why not? It'd be just like before."

"I don't know how to say it, Cap . . . But when we—burnt places, before—well, it was criminals—pirates, Code-breakers—you know. Now . . . Well, now I hear you burn—just people. Uh, non-Code-breakers. Like, just plain civilians. Well—I could not."

Corgo did not answer. Emil moved his knight.

"I hate them, Emil," he said, after a time. "Every lovin' one of them, I hate them. Do you know what they did on Brild? To the Drillen?"

"Yessir. But it wasn't civilians, and not the miners. It was not *everybody*. It wasn't every lovin' one of them, sir.—I just couldn't. Don't be mad."

"I'm not mad, Emil."

"I mean, sir, there are some as I wouldn't mind burnin', Code or no Code. But not the way you do it, sir. And I'd do it for free to those as have it coming."

"Huh!"

Corgo moved his one bishop.

"That's why my money is no good with you?"

"No, sir. That's not it, sir. Well maybe part . . . But only part. I just couldn't take pay for helping someone I—respected, admired."

"You use the past tense."

"Yessir. But I still think you got a raw deal, and what they did to the Drillen was wrong and bad and—evil—but you can't hate everybody for that, sir, because *everybody* didn't do it."

"They countenanced it, Emil—which is just as bad. I am able to hate them all for that alone. And people are all alike, all the same. I burn without discrimination these days, because it doesn't really matter *who*. The guilt is equally distributed. Mankind is commonly culpable."

"No, sir, begging your pardon, sir, but in a system as big as Interstel not everybody knows what everybody else is up to. There are those feeling the same way you do, and there are those as don't give a damn, and those who just don't know a lot of what's going on, but who would do something about it if they knew, soon enough."

"It's your move, Emil."

"Yessir."

"You know, I wish you'd accepted a commission, Emil. You had the chance. You'd have been a good officer."

"No, sir. I'd not have been a good officer. I'm too easy-going. The men would've walked all over me."

"It's a pity. But it's always that way. You know? The good ones are too weak, too easy-going. Why is that?"

"Dunno, sir."

After a couple moves:

"You know, if I were to give it up—the burning, I mean—and just do some ordinary, decent smuggling with the *Wallaby*, it would be okay. With me. Now. I'm tired. I'm so damned tired I'd just like to sleep—oh, four, five, six years, I think. Supposing I stopped the burning and just shipped stuff here and there—would you sign on with me then?"

"I'd have to think about it, Cap."

"Do that, then. Please. I'd like to have you along."

"Yessir. Your move, sir."

IT would not have happened that he'd have been found by his actions, because he *did* stop the burning; it would not have happened—because he was dead on ICI's books—that anyone would have been looking for him. It happened, though—because of a surfeit of *xmili* and good will on the part of the hunters.

On the eve of the breaking of the fellowship, nostalgia followed high spirits.

Benedick had never had a friend before, you must remember. Now he had three, and he was leaving them.

The Lynx had ingested much good food and drink, and the good company of simple, maimed people, whose neuroses were unvitiated with normal sophistication—and he had enjoyed this.

Sandor's sphere of human relations had been expanded by approximately a third, and he had slowly come to consider himself at least an honorary member of the vast flux which he had only known before as humanity, or Others.

So, in the library, drinking, and eating and talking, they returned to the hunt. Dead tigers are always the best kind.

Of course, it wasn't long before Benedick picked up the heart, and held it as a connoisseur would an art object—gently, and with a certain mingling of awe and affection.

As they sat there, an odd sensation crept into the pudgy parnorm's stomach and rose slowly, like gas, until his eyes burned.

"I—I'm reading," he said.

"Of course"—the Lynx.

"Yes"—Sandor.

"Really!"

"Naturally"—the Lynx. "He is on Disten, fifth world of Blake's System, in a native hut outside Landear—"

"No"—Sandor. "He is on Phil-

lip's World, in Delles-by-the-Sea."

They laughed, the Lynx a deep rumble, Sandor a gasping chuckle.

"No," said Benedick. "He is in transit, aboard the *Wallaby*. He had just phased and his mind is still mainly awake. He is running a cargo of ambergris to the Tau Ceti system, fifth planet—Tholmen. After that he plans on vacationing in the Red River Valley of the third planet—Cardiff. Along with the Drillen and the puppy, he has a crewman with him this time. I can't read anything but that it's a retired Guardsman."

"By the holy Light of the Great and Glorious Flame!"

"We know they never did find his ship . . ."

". . . And his body was not recovered. —Could *you* be mistaken, Benedick? Reading something, someone else. . . ?"

"No."

"What should we do, Lynx?"—Sandor.

"An unethical person might be inclined to forget it. It is a closed case. We *have* been paid and dismissed."

"True."

"But think of when he strikes again . . ."

". . . It would be because of us, our failure."

"Yes."

". . . And many would die."

“. . . And much machinery destroyed, and an insurance association defrauded.”

“Yes.”

“. . . Because of us.”

“Yes.”

“So we should report it”—
Lynx.

“Yes.”

“It is unfortunate . . .”

“Yes.”

“. . . But it will be good to have worked together this final time.”

“Yes. It will. Very.”

“Tholmen, in Tau Ceti, and he just phased?”—Lynx.

“Yes.”

“I’ll call, and they’ll be waiting for him in T.C.”

“. . . I told you,” said the weeping paranorm. “He wasn’t ready to die.”

Sandor smiled and raised his glass with his flesh-colored hand.

There was still some work to be done.

WHEN the *Wallaby* hit Tau-Ceti all hell broke loose.

Three fully-manned Guardships, like onto the *Wallaby* herself, were waiting.

ICI had quarantined the entire system for three days. There could be no mistaking the ebony toadstool when it appeared on the screen. No identification was solicited.

The tractor beams missed it the first time, however, and the

Wallaby’s new First Mate fired every weapon aboard the ship simultaneously, in all directions, as soon as the alarm sounded. This had been one of Corgo’s small alterations in fire-control, because of the size of his operations: no safety circuits; and it was a suicide-ship, if necessary: it was a lone wolf with no regard for *any* pack: one central control—touch it, and the *Wallaby* became a porcupine with laser-quills, stabbing into anything in every direction.

Corgo prepared to phase again, but it took him forty-three seconds to do so.

During that time he was struck twice by the surviving Guardship.

Then he was gone.

Time and Chance, which govern all things, and sometimes like to pass themselves off as Destiny, then seized upon the *Wallaby*, the puppy, the Drillen, First Mate Emil, and the man without a heart.

Corgo had set no course when he had in-phased. There had been no time.

The two blasts from the Guardship had radically altered the *Wallaby*’s course, and had burnt out 23 fast-phase projectors.

The *Wallaby* jumped blind, and with a broken leg.

Continuum-impact racked the crew. The hull repaired rents in its skin.

They continued for 39 hours and 23 minutes, taking turns at sedation, watching for the first warning on the panel.

The *Wallaby* held together, though.

But where they had gotten to no one knew, least of all a weeping paranorm who had monitored the battle and all of Corgo's watches, despite the continuum-impact and a hangover.

But suddenly Benedick knew fear:

"Hes' about to phase-out. I'm going to have to drop him now."

"Why?"—the Lynx.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, of course not!"

"Well, neither does he. Supposing he pops out in the middle of a sun, or in some atmosphere—moving at that speed?"

"Well, supposing he does? He dies."

"Exactly. Continuum-impact is bad enough. I've never been in a man's mind when he died—and I don't think I could take it. Sorry. I just won't do it. I think I might die myself if it happened. I'm so tired now . . . I'll just have to check him out later."

With that he collapsed and could not be roused.

SO, Corgo's heart went back into its jar, and the jar went back into the lower righthand drawer of Sandor's desk, and none of the hunters heard the

words of Corgo's answer to his First Mate after the phasing-out:

"Where are we?—The Comp says the nearest thing is a little pingpong ball of a world called Dombeck, not noted for anything. We'll have to put down there for repairs, somewhere off the beaten track. We need projectors."

So they landed the *Wallaby* and banged on its hull as the hunters slept, some five hundred forty-two miles away.

They were grinding out the projector sockets shortly after Sandor had been tucked into his bed.

They reinforced the hull in three places while the Lynx ate half a ham, three biscuits, two apples and a pear, and drank half a liter of Dombeck's best Mosel.

They rewired shorted circuits as Benedick smiled and dreamt of Bright Bad Barby the Bouncing Baby, in the days of her youth.

And Corgo took the light-boat and headed for a town three hundred miles away, just as the pale sun of Dombeck began to rise.

"He's here!" cried Benedick, flinging wide the door to the Lynx' room and rushing up to the bedside. "He's—"

Then he was unconscious, for the Lynx may not be approached suddenly as he sleeps.

When he awakened five minutes later, he was lying on the bed and the entire household stood about him. There was a cold cloth on his forehead and his throat felt crushed.

"My brother," said the Lynx, "you should never approach a sleeping man in such a manner."

"B-but he's here," said Benedick, gagging. "Here on Dombeck! I don't even need Sandor to tell!"

"Art sure thou hast not imbibed too much?"

"No, I tell you he's here!" He sat up, flung away the cloth. "That little city, Coldstream—" He pointed through the wall. "—I was there just a week ago. I *know* the place!"

"You have had a dream—"

"Wet your Flame! but I've not! I held his heart in these hands and saw it!"

The Lynx winced at the profanity, but considered the possibility.

"Then come with us to the library and see if you can read it again."

"You better believe I can!"

At that moment Corgo was drinking a cup of coffee and waiting for the town to wake up. He was considering his First Mate's resignation:

"I never wanted to burn anyone, Cap. Least of all, the Guard. I'm sorry, but that's it. No more for me. Leave me here and give

me passage home to Phillip's—that's all I want. I know you didn't want it the way it happened, but if I keep shipping with you it might happen again some day. Probably will. They got your number somehow, and I couldn't *ever* do *that* again. I'll help you fix the *Wallaby*, then I'm out. Sorry."

Corgo sighed and ordered a second coffee. He glanced at the clock on the diner wall. Soon, soon . . .

"That clock, that wall, that window! It's the diner where I had lunch last week, in Coldstream!" said Benedick, blinking moistly.

"Do you think all that continuum-impact. . . ?"—the Lynx.

"I don't know"—Sandor.

"How can we check?"

"Call the flamin' diner and ask them to describe their only customer!"—Benedick.

"*That* is a very good idea"—the Lynx.

The Lynx moved to the phone-unit on Sandor's desk.

Sudden, as everything concerning the case had been, was the Lynx's final decision:

"Your flyer, brother Sandor. May I borrow it?"

"Why, yes. Surely . . ."

"I will now call the local ICI office and requisition a laser-cannon. They have been ordered to cooperate with us without

question, and the orders are still in effect. My executioner's rating has never been suspended. It appears that if we ever want to see this job completed we must do it ourselves. It won't take long to mount the gun on your flyer.—Benedick, stay with him every minute now. He still has to buy the equipment, take it back, and install it. Therefore, we should have sufficient time. Just stay with him and advise me as to his movements.”

“Check.”

“Are you sure it's the right way to go about it?”—Sandor.

“I'm sure . . .”

AS the cannon was being delivered, Corgo made his purchases. As it was being installed, he loaded the light-boat and departed. As it was tested, on a tree stump Aunt Faye had wanted removed for a long while, he was aloft and heading toward the desert.

As he crossed the desert, Benedick watched the rolling dunes, scrub-shrubs and darting *rabbophers* through his eyes.

He also watched the instrument-panel.

As the Lynx began his journey, Mala and Dilk were walking about the hull of the *Wallaby*. Mala wondered if the killing was over. She was not sure she liked the new Corgo so much as she did the avenger. She wondered

whether the change would be permanent. She hoped not . . .

The Lynx maintained radio contact with Benedick.

Sandor drank *xmili* and smiled.

After a time, Corgo landed.

The Lynx was racing across the sands from the opposite direction.

They began unloading the light-boat.

The Lynx sped on.

“I am near it now. Five minutes,” he radioed back.

“Then I'm out?”—Benedick.

“Not yet”—the reply.

“Sorry, but you know what I said. I won't be there when he dies.”

“All right. I can take it from here”—the Lynx.

Which is how, when the Lynx came upon the scene, he saw a dog and a man and an ugly but intelligent quadraped beside the *Wallaby*.

His first blast hit the ship. The man fell.

The quadraped ran, and he burnt it.

The dog dashed through the port into the ship.

The Lynx brought the flyer about for another pass.

There was another man, circling around from the other side of the ship, where he had been working.

The man raised his hand and there was a flash of light.

Corgo's death-ring discharged its single laser beam.

It crossed the distance between them, penetrated the hull of the flyer, passed through the Lynx' left arm above the elbow, and continued on through the roof of the vehicle.

The Lynx cried out, fought the controls, as Corgo dashed into the *Wallaby*.

Then he triggered the cannon, and again, and again and again, circling, until the *Wallaby* was a smouldering ruin in the middle of a sea of fused sand.

Still did he burn that ruin, finally calling back to Benedick Benedict and asking his one question.

"Nothing"—the reply.

Then he turned and headed back, setting the autopilot and opening the first-aid kit.

". . . Then he went in to hit the *Wallaby's* guns, but I hit him first"—Lynx.

"No"—Benedick.

"What meanest thou 'no'? I was there."

"So was I, for awhile. I *had* to see how he felt."

"And?"

"He went in for the puppy, Dilk, held it in his arms, said to it, 'I am sorry.'"

"Whatever, he is dead now and we have finished. It is over"—Sandor.

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Let us then drink to a job well done, before we part for good."

"Yes."

"Yes."

And they did.

While there wasn't much left of the *Wallaby* or its Captain, ICI positively identified a synthetic heart found still beating, erratically, amidst the hot wreckage.

Corgo was dead, and that was it.

He should have known what he was up against, and turned himself in to the proper authorities. How can you hope to beat a man who can pick the lock to your mind, a man who dispatched forty-eight men and seventeen malicious alien life-forms, and a man who knows every damn street in the galaxy.

He should have known better than to go up against Sandor Sandor, Benedick Benedict and Lynx Links. He should, he should have known.

For their real names, of course, are Tisiphone, Alecto and Maegaera. They are the Furies. They arise from chaos and deliver revenge; they convey confusion and disaster to those who abandon the law and forsake the way, who offend against the light and violate the life, who take the power of Flame, like a lightning-rod, in their two too mortal hands.

THE END

RUMPELSTILTSKINSKI

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

Another romp in fairytale land, as the ancient myths are up-dated in a way calculated to make the brothers Grimm and Hans un-Christian.

ONCE there was a miller who was car-poor but who had a luscious dish of a daughter named Ada. Now during National Bread Week it happened that he was chosen by the National Flourmen's Association, of which he was a charter member, to go to the Palace to accept a special award from the King. After the King presented him with the award—following a lengthy speech extolling the flourmen's contribution to the Health of the National Economy—the miller, seeking to make a favorable impression, said, "I have a daughter who can spin gold into straw." The King was favorably impressed indeed, and spoke as follows: "That is an ability which this Kingdom can put to excellent use. A little bit of gold is a good thing, but too much of it is dangerous to have around, for it

impedes Progress, interferes with International Negotiations, and jeopardizes World Peace. Bring your daughter to the Palace tomorrow and we'll give her a Security Check. If she passes it, I'll put her to work at once."

When Ada heard the news, she was petrified with fear. Much less than knowing how to spin gold into straw, she didn't even know how to operate a spinning wheel. But she was an accommodating young lady and very very patriotic, and she felt that she owed it both to her country and to herself to give the job a whirl. So the next day when her father said, "Let's be on our way, daughter—His Munificence is waiting," she accompanied him to the Palace without a word of protest.

She passed the Security Check with flying colors, whereupon the

King took her into a room that was almost overflowing with gold, presented her with a Whirly Wheel-O-Matic spinning machine By General Electric, and said, "Go, girl—go! If I see so much as one gold ingot when I come into this room tomorrow morning, I'll have you audited." Thereupon he left the room and locked the door behind him.

Poor Ada hadn't gambled on being thrown to the auditors, and she was beside herself with despair. Hoping to calm herself, she turned on the transistor radio set which she carried with her wherever she went, and tuned in her favorite disk jockey. But his music didn't help matters in the least, and all she could think of as she sat there absently wriggling her body in response to the cauterwauling of the Beatles was the grim facade of the IRS Building next door and the pride of auditors lurking hungrily beyond its portentous portals.

AND then, all of a sudden—just when things looked blackest—the door burst open and into the room popped a roly-poly little man wearing an astrakan overcoat and a bearskin cap. "What's the trouble, dollski?" he asked. "How come you're making like the Volga on a nice night like this?"

"Alas!" Ada answered, "I'm in a terrible pickle. If I don't spin

all this nasty old gold into straw by morning, His Munificence will throw me to the auditors!"

"What'll you give me," said the little man, "if I take on the job?"

"Why—why I'll give you *anything!*" our heroine cried.

"Your radio will do for a starter." Taking it from her and turning it off, the mannikin sat down at the Whirly Wheel-O-Matic, wedged a gold ingot between the superspindle and the jenny-jig, and did something to the controls that made the machine go *whir-whir-whir!*; and in less time than it takes to tell about it, there, where a moment before the hateful ingot had been, stood a beautiful little bale of straw. Ada, it goes without saying, was astonished.

All through the night the mannikin worked at the Wheel without taking so much as a single coffee break and by morning the gold was gone and the room was so full of straw there was hardly enough space to turn around. He departed at daybreak, and not long afterward the King came round. When he saw all the straw, he could hardly believe his eyes, and it was as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. But there was still a lot of gold to go yet—indeed, it had been accumulating for nearly two centuries—so that night he took Ada into an even larger room full of it, had the Whirly Wheel-

O-Matic brought in, and told her that, come morning, he expected to see another room full of straw and that if he didn't she could plan on seeing a room full of auditors.

After he left, Ada sat down by the Whirly Wheel-O-Matic and began to cry; then, as before, the door burst open and in popped the little man in the astrakhan overcoat and the bearskin cap. "What'll you give me," he asked, "if I convert *this* batch for you?"

"My purse," our heroine replied. "But I warn you, there's nothing in it except a lot of musty old papers and a silly document or two."

"I'll take it," said the mannikin, and set to work again, and by morning the room was chock-full of straw and all the gold was gone.

The King, needless to say, was delighted when he came round at dawn; but there was still another room full of gold remaining—larger than the first two combined—so that evening he escorted Ada there, had the Whirly Wheel-O-Matic carried in, and said, "Two down and one to go, doll-baby. If you do as thorough a job on this roomful as you did on the other two, I'll make you my Queen."

The King had no sooner left the room than the mannikin popped into it for the third time and said, "What'll you give me,

dollski, if I pull you out of the borscht again?"

"Alas!" answered our heroine, "I have nothing left to give."

"Oh, but you have," said the mannikin. "Promise me your firstborn child."

Why not? thought Ada. Who knows for certain whether I shall ever have one? And anyway, if I do, I will be ensuring its safety as well as my own by getting rid of all this nasty old gold. Whereupon she gave the little man her promise, and once more he made straw while the stars shone. By morning there was almost enough of it to stuff all the people in the Kingdom, and when the King saw how poor he was, he was delighted, and made the pretty miller's daughter his Queen.

A YEAR went by, and the Queen had a beautiful child and never once gave a thought to the promise she had made to the mannikin—until, one night, he popped into her boudoir and said, "I am here to collect my fee." The Queen was horrified, and offered to give him all the new cars and all the new swimming pools and all the new electric can-openers in the Kingdom if he would let her renege on her promise. She even offered to arrange for him to appear on "What's My Line". But the little man merely shook his head and said, "No, dollski—you made a bargain and

you're stuck with it. But I'll make you a deal: if, within three days time, you can find out my name I'll let you keep the child."

All night long the Queen racked her brains, but to no avail. When morning arrived, she sent for the head of the FBI and ordered him to send his agents throughout the Kingdom and ferret out people with unusual names and report them to her; then she set up an intra-Palace work-force called the Abnormal Appellations Analysis Bureau, provided it with copies of all the phone directories in the Kingdom, and put it to work isolating extraordinary appellations. Realizing that the little man might not have an unusual name after all, she sounded him out that night when he came round. "Is your name 'Smith'?" she asked. "Is it 'Jones'? Is it 'Brown'?" When he shook his head each time, she was pretty certain that she was on the right track.

The following evening, thanks to the AAA's exhaustive efforts, she was ready for him, and as soon as he popped into her boudoir she began barraging him with such names as 'Pyzikiewicz', 'Milscothach', and 'Tchitchikov'; but to each, he shook his head.

Toward the close of the third day, the Queen was becoming desperate. Then, just when she had almost given up hope, one of the

FBI agents came to her with a curious story. "Night before last not far from the Palace," he said, "I came upon a used-car lot and in the lot I found an abandoned beat-up Cadillac that had been converted into a little house. Before the house a fire was burning, and round about the fire a ridiculous little man wearing an astrakhan overcoat and a bearskin cap was dancing on one leg, singing—

'Today I wait, tomorrow I take,

The next I'll have the young Queen's child.

Ha! glad am I that no one cared

That Rumpelstiltskinski I'm styled!'"

As can readily be imagined, the Queen was elated. When the mannikin showed up that night she said, as casually as though she were asking the time of day, "Is your name 'Rumpelstiltskinski' by any chance?"

His gloating expression gave way to one of almost indescribable ugliness. "Give me the child!" he said sharply.

The Queen was incredulous. "But according to our agreement, you no longer have any right to it!" she cried.

Rumpelstiltskinski didn't bat an eye. "What agreement?" he said, and took the child and went away, and that was the last the Queen ever saw of it.

THE END

Lo! The Poor Forteans

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

“Mostly in this book I shall specialize upon indications that there exists a transportary force that I shall call *Teleportation*. I shall be accused of having assembled lies, yarns, hoaxes and superstitions. To some degree I think so, myself. To some degree I do not. I offer the data.”

THE above paragraph, the last in Chapter Two of *LO!* by Charles Fort (Claude Kendall, New York, Feb. 9, 1931) was taken out of context to open the serialization of that book in *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, April, 1934. It subsequently ran for eight monthly installments. The author died only two years earlier. He did not live to see the widest publication any of his works had ever received. *ASTOUNDING STORIES* had at that time a circulation between 45,000 and 50,000. In three printings, *LO!* his most successful book, had reached an audience approximating 3,000.

When *ASTOUNDING*, was revived in October, 1933, F. Orlin Tremaine, the new editor, published *LO!* as one step in a drive for field leadership. His tool was “thought variants” or off-beat ideas and his publication of *LO!* was prompted more to supply his writers with new ideas than with hope of enthralling the readership. Fort projected a multitude of far-out theories and notions, a few of which had not been previously used in science fiction.

“Here is the most astounding collation of factual data ever offered to a large audience. This book has been read by three thousand people—mostly writers seeking plots! We can offer it to the one group in America which can digest it,” Tremaine told his audience in a dynamic opening blurb.

The first chapter was devoted to newspaper accounts of falls of frogs, fish, periwinkles, snakes, eels, crabs, red worms and lichen from the skies. The second chron-

icled falls of coins on Trafalger Square, the walls of a house that exuded oil and parrafin, scarlet rain, bleeding statues, strange animals and possible sea serpents.

So it went for eight installments. At first the readers were politely appreciative of the "interesting" or "fascinating" accounts. Then they began to complain of boredom. Finally, they did not mention it at all.

There were only a few stories in the year following that by any stretch of the imagination could have been attributed to ideas from Charles Fort. Among these were *Set Your Course by the Stars* by Eando Binder (ASTOUNDING STORIES, May, 1935), where the first rocket takes off from earth with its navigation instruments lined up on certain stars and then is forced to return when it is discovered that space is white instead of black; and *Exiles of the Stratosphere* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. (ASTOUNDING STORIES, July, 1935), involving an advanced race with lighter than air metals that dwell in the upper stratas of the air sending only outcasts to the earth's surface. Even these were not directly attributable to *LO!* but to theories in an earlier volume of Fort's, *The Book of the Damned* (Boni & Liveright, 1919).

"Fortean concepts" were not

unknown to the more serious collectors and authors of science fiction, even then. When *LO!* was reviewed in the July, 1931 AMAZING STORIES, its reviewer, C. A. Brandt, displayed an obvious familiarity with the author.

"In this book as well as in 'The Book of the Damned,' there is an oft-occurring reference to mysterious rainfalls causing the appearance of frogs, fishes, worms, etc. The generally accepted explanations have never satisfied Mr. Fort, so he must attack any and all explanations of any and all phenomena as totally incorrect and absurd.

"He is an expert mountain maker. Given the tiniest molehill, he will make the Himalayas hang their heads in shame. His views on astronomy are somewhat peculiar and astounding: The stars are about a week's travel away, to him, the earth is pancake shaped. And it seems to rile him that scientific bodies do not welcome improved theories or explanations with open arms. . . .

"'Quien Sabe' as our Spanish friends have it. I am convinced that Mr. Fort would vigorously deny that two times two makes four and that any unquestionable scientific proof for this small piece of arithmetic should be held incorrect."

That C. A. Brandt's assessment of Fort's attitude was incontrovertibly valid was attested to by

Edmond Hamilton, one of the earliest important science fiction writers to transform Fort's ideas into fiction.

Hamilton worked up a correspondence with Fort by sending him some clippings involving inexplicable happenings. "I once asked him," Hamilton recalls, "what he would do if the Fortean system were taught in the schools as right and proper. He wrote back, 'Why, in that case I would propound the damnably heterodox theory that the world is round!' He was a born rebel."

THE life of Charles Hoy Fort was in some respects as bizarre as his theories. He was born in Albany, N.Y., August 9, 1874 and outside of a temporary residence in England for research purposes at the British Museum, spent most of his life in the Bronx. In the text of one of his books he refers to his father as the owner of a grocery store. Young Charles' job was to take the labels off famous brands of canned goods and put his father's label on instead. He didn't like the chore and delighted in pasting peach labels on canned plums. Apparently he was an opponent of orthodoxy in labeling as well as science.

Fort's youthful interest was in living creatures and he collected bugs and stuffed small animals. He would have liked to have

been a naturalist but his formal education never extended beyond high school. Through a continuous process of self-enlightenment and extensive reading he eventually did qualify as a "learned" man.

He married Anna Filan in 1896. They had no children. As a young man he made a living as a newspaper reporter. He sold some short stories to a few of the popular magazines between 1900 and 1906 which made little impression and are virtually unknown. One of the editors who bought stories from him was the famed Theodore Dreiser, author of *Sister Carrie* and editor of AINSLEE'S, SMITH'S, THE NEW BROADWAY MAGAZINE (Formerly HAMPTON'S) and DELINEATOR.

Fort, made few friends, but those he did make, such as Dreiser, proved to be important and influential.

In 1906, Fort was left some real estate which made it possible for him to live modestly without holding down a regular job. He set about the task of shaping himself into a novelist. In the years that followed, from 1906 through to about 1917, Fort claims to have written novels totaling 3,500,000 words. Only one was ever published, the rest were destroyed.

The title of his published novel, *The Outcast Manufacturers*, issued in hard covers by

Dodge, New York in 1909 sounds as though it may contain plot substance similar to the material in his later books, but the word "outcast" proves to be an *adjective*. It refers to the Universal Manufacturing Company, a New York firm that manufactures nothing, but is actually a mail order "business" operated by a man who stocks no merchandise, sending the orders he receives to be filled by companies that do, after deducting his profit.

The "hero" is a young boy from the midwest who answers an advertisement for an advertising and promotion manager. Upon arriving in New York he soon finds himself amidst a cast of characters who not only are like something out of Dickens, but which are *patently copied from Dickens*. He has deliberately come to New York to *fail* in business, because his rich uncle, whose operations he may inherit, believes that no one can be a success until he has failed at least once.

Upon abysmally "failing" six months later, he writes his uncle, telling him he is now ready to be welcomed into the family business, having fulfilled the requirements. The punch line comes in his uncle's reply: Since the boy started out to fail in the first place, and has accomplished his objective, he has *succeeded*, and so has not qualified.

Stylistically this first "novel", (actually a series of character sketches) is *avant garde*, extraordinarily well written in a manner that seems somehow familiar.

It opens: "To the west, the street-wide Palisades, dull gray as a block of lead; a streak of North River gleaming like bright clean metal melted from the base. Windows of tenement houses, black with the inside pall of dark homes, unclean children seemingly duller because of their pallor . . . a dead horse lying in the south side gutter; boys jumping on it enjoying themselves."

Actually the cryptic description is that of theatre set *stage directions*, as is all the connective tissue between the endless "naturalistic" dialogue. It seems to indicate that Fort might also have been an unsuccessful playwright.

Fort could write, but he could not plot. His idea for *The Outcast Manufacturers*, paper thin for a short story, is lost in pages of Dickensiana. This weakness suggests a stylistically gifted writer desperately in search of a plot, researching mountains of unusual evidence to formulate a hundred and one bizarre theories, unable to shape them into a cohesive whole and so, to remain all of his life, no more than an excellent reporter with a unique style. He was frustrated

by those who *could* see some pattern in the universe. Fort was a style in search of a story.

Only a single phrase in *The Outcast Manufacturers* hints at the later Fort and that is when one girl twice repeats to a friend the term "telepathetic realization," which was certainly an unusual expression to be used by a second-generation Irish worker in the slums of New York.

IT is sometimes said that Charles Fort was not familiar with science fiction. The evidence does not bear this out. At the age of 20 he was thrilled by the best-seller *A Journey In Other Worlds* by John Jacob Astor (Appleton, 1894), dealing with the invention of anti-gravity and a trip around the solar system. It was the anti-gravity unit that intrigued Fort the most and this concept appears in his later books.

Failing as a novelist, Fort plunged into his researches on unusual phenomena with renewed vigor, cataloguing his findings under special groupings. When he ran out of material in American libraries he took up residence in London so that he could haunt the British Museum. On this crusade he spent the final 26 years of his life.

Theodore Dreiser was fiercely loyal. When Fort completed *The Book of the Damned*, it is report-

ed that Dreiser forced his publisher, Boni & Liveright, to either issue it or lose him as an author. When it appeared in 1919, Ben Hecht, a young reviewer for the CHICAGO DAILY NEWS, was given the book for appraisal. Hecht, then penniless and desperate, took an idea from the book and sold it as a short story. He gratefully repaid his debt in an essay titled *Phantasmagoriophobia* on Harry Sell's Wednesday Book Page, where he coined the term "Fortean" as meaning a disciple of Fort. Lines from his review have been quoted ever since as endorsements of the author, concluding: "For it is written that the theory he has hurled into being is destined, like some phantom gargoyle, to perch itself astride every telescope and laboratory test tube in the land. For every five people who read this book four will go insane."

Hecht was not the most important convert made by *The Book of the Damned*. Booth Tarkington read a copy while recovering from influenza and dashed off an enthusiastic letter to *The Bookman*: ". . . what is a fevered head to do with assemblies of worlds, some shaped like wheels, some connected by streaming filaments, and one spindle-shaped with an axis 100,000 miles long?"

When Boni & Liveright scheduled Fort's second book, *New Lands* for 1923 publication it

was Booth Tarkington who wrote the introduction. Tarkington, a fine humorist himself, richly enjoyed Fort's obvious sense of frolic. In common with Fort, Tarkington was to share one great tragedy. Both of them would go blind from excessive reading and regain only limited vision.

Booth Tarkington induced Henry Leon Wilson, famed author of *The Ruggles of Red Gap*, to read Fort. The result was explosive. Wilson's subsequent novel *The Wrong Twin* found a philosophic tramp printer spouting Fort's wildest theories at the drop of a hat throughout.

Barton Rascoe discovered that the price of getting the information he needed for a biography of Theodore Dreiser was forced reading of Fort. He converted and became a rabid acolyte.

With such an accretion of co-religionists it was inevitable that a church would sooner or later be established and that hallowed institution took the form of The Fortean Society, founded Jan. 26, 1931 at a Savoy Plaza, New York banquet by a charter group of celebrities which included Tiffany Thayer, J. David Stern, Ben Hecht, Booth Tarkington, Aaron Sussman, Barton Rascoe, Alexander Woollcott, John Cowper Powys and Henry Leon Wilson.

It had twelve major aims, the

first and last of which comprised the heart of its aspirations.

The first: To put the books of Charles Fort into the hands of as many people as can possibly be prevailed upon to read them.

The last: To perpetuate dissent.

The High Priest of Fortean belief was Tiffany Thayer, a militant atheist and anarchist, who gained reputation for his racy novel *Thirteen Men* (1930). He also wrote other books with elements of fantasy and science fiction, one of them, *The Greek* (1931) was completed at the time of the founding of the society and published by Fort's original publisher, Boni. *Doctor Arnoldi* (1934) and *One Man Show* (1937) would appear later. He was elected secretary of the association.

AT first the efforts of the association were confined to getting Fort's remaining works into print. *LO!*, the third book, was issued Feb. 9, 1931 and the organization of the Fortean Society timed only two weeks earlier, was in part, a publicity stunt to help the sale of the book. The excellent newspaper and magazine publicity attendant it were in a good measure responsible for a total of three printings in six weeks (including a plug in advance of the meeting in the Feb. 23, 1931 TIME). The sale of the

volume did not survive the echoes of the promotion.

The chief target of Fort's books had been the astronomers. His abuse of their efforts had been cruel, uncalled for and even vindictively unfair. His alternates to their theories were so far fetched as to be either a mass of satire or outright ignorance.

The seemingly unexpected windfall of the publication of *LO!* was a tremendous endorsement by a prominent leading popularizer in writing and lecturing of the sciences, including astronomy. This was the closest Fort ever came to a victory over science. Maynard Shipley's review, "Charles Fort, *Enfant Terrible of Science*," was printed in the March 1, 1931 issue of *THE NEW YORK TIMES*. He took Fort sharply to task for obtuseness regarding the scientific method employed in astronomy, but complimented him upon his documentation, called him a writer of "non-fictional thrillers," and incorporated a wealth of superbly quotable quotes, the most repeated of which was the closing lines of the review: "Reading Fort is to ride on a comet; if the traveler return to earth after the journey he will find after the first dizziness has worn off, a new exhilarating emotion that will color and correct all his future reading of less heady scientific literature."

The result was another printing of *LO!* on March 23, 1931.

What the readers *didn't* know was that Shipley, in his own fashion, had been a Fortean for 10 years, since reading *Book of the Damned* in 1921. Disagreeing with some of Fort's facts, he wrote to the book's publisher, eventually got an answer from Fort, then living in England, and a correspondence ensued which carried through to Fort's death.

Fort's last few months of life were, therefore, destined to be relatively happy ones, considering the unprecedented recognition and serious consideration of his theories. He died on May 3, 1932 at the Royal Hospital, Bronx. He was not quite 58.

His immediate monument was his last completed volume of data, *Wild Talents*, rushed into print by Claude Kendall in 1932. Without the carefully staged publicity and pre-arranged promotion accorded *LO!* it proved a failure. The Fort "boom" collapsed.

FORT had gained at least one valuable supporter in the science fiction world, the popular author Edmond Hamilton. Though there undoubtedly were some previous tales in the genre which owed a debt to Fort, *The Space Visitors* by Edmond Hamilton was the first to publicly acknowledge the fact. David

Lasser, editor of AIR WONDER STORIES (March, 1930) in his blurb said "That such things may have actually come near the earth, is asserted forcibly by Charles Fort in his amazing book, *The Book of the Damned*, in which he brings forward evidence to show that over a period of the past 150 years there has been evidence of strange extraterrestrial activity, presumably from sentient beings."

In *The Space Visitors* a "colossal scoop" descends from the atmosphere and carries away portions of villages, fields, and even a segment of the city of Chicago. The world is in terror, and civilization begins to dissolve. In desperation thousands of air mines are manufactured and sent aloft and eventually the space ships of the aliens taking "samples" strike them and are destroyed.

Replying to a letter from Forrest J. Ackerman in the readers column of the May, 1930 AIR WONDER STORIES, the editor indicated reader reaction by stating: "Edmond Hamilton seems to have received universal commendation. More letters have poured into this office praising his originality than we have received for any story in a long time."

Hamilton had taken his story idea from *Book of the Damned* where Fort had said: "I think we're fished for. It may be we're

highly esteemed by super-epicures somewhere."

From the same book Edmond Hamilton took lines, which have since become the most famous of all of Fort's writings, as the plot for *The Earth Owners* (WEIRD TALES, Aug., 1931).

In these lines Fort answers the often-asked question: "If we have been visited by extraterrestrials, why haven't they attempted to communicate with us?"

"I think we're property.

I should say we belong to something;

That once upon a time, this earth was No-man's Land that other worlds explored and colonized here, and fought among themselves for possession, but that now it's owned by something:

That something owns this earth—all others warned off."

The Earth Owners finds this planet raided by black clouds of gas, which suck the life force from humans. All is saved when globes of light, the "owners" and protectors of this planet, chase off the raiders.

The story, despite its provocative theme, made absolutely no impression on the readership whatsoever.

That event had to await the coming of an irreverent Englishman named Eric Frank Russell who read *LO!* and was so inspir-

ed that he became Great Britain's counterpart of Tiffany Thayer. When Thayer turned out, at his own expense, the first issue of THE FORTEAN SOCIETY MAGAZINE, dated Sept., 1937, Eric Frank Russell's notes from abroad became a regular feature of the magazine.

Russell had submitted fiction to F. Orlin Tremaine of ASTOUNDING STORIES and had sold him four stories in 1937. When John W. Campbell assumed editorship, Russell found the going more difficult and rejections began to pile up. He searched Fort's books for an idea that might make a strong story and came up with the line "I think we're property." He then wrote the idea into a novel titled *Forbidden Acres*. Rejected because the last half was too weak, Russell surprised himself and Campbell with a satisfactory revision published as *Sinister Barrier*.

Street & Smith was about to launch a new fantasy magazine, UNKNOWN, and it was felt that the novel epitomized what they wished to print. It was the lead story in the first, March, 1939, issue of UNKNOWN and in a long introduction preceding the story, Russell acknowledged his debt to Charles Fort and The Fortean Society, then went on to give a 50,000 word blow-by-blow report of the discovery that the earth is controlled by aliens and

the desperate battle to defeat them. The reader approbation given the story turned Eric Frank Russell into a major science fiction figure overnight. Beyond that it was the breakthrough for Fortean material in science fiction. A significant part of the stories in UNKNOWN would thenceforth contain a Fortean flavor, notable among them *None But Lucifer* by H. L. Gold and L. Sprague de Camp (UNKNOWN, Sept., 1939), a powerful and ingenious unraveling of the secret of who really causes the miseries of the world by a man who inherits the job of perpetrating them and *Darker Than You Think* by Jack Williamson (UNKNOWN WORLDS, Dec., 1940) where latent genes tending towards lycanthropy are revived in certain members of the human race.

Russell himself stayed pretty much away from the Fortean notions in his fiction, because he feared a duplication of the charge brought against him that *Sinister Barrier* had been a deliberate remake of Hamilton's *The Earth Owners*. However, in non-fiction he carried on the "faith" with a Fortean melange of odd items in *Over The Border* (UNKNOWN, Sept., 1939) and *Spontaneous Frogation*, telling of the mysterious arrival of thousands of frogs in a small lot in the middle of the city of Liverpool.

THE Fortean Society's greatest coup was arranging the publication of all four of Charles Fort's books in an omnibus of 1,125 pages by Henry Holt & Co. in 1941. It was said that Thayer himself guaranteed any losses on the volume. What was not said was that the editor at Henry Holt was William Sloane, the inspired novelist of *To Walk the Night* (1937), where a man discovers that the woman he is married to is actually a non-human alien and *The Edge of Running Water* (1939) in which a machine opens the door to another dimension. He was scarcely an unsympathetic party.

The review by John W. Campbell of *The Books of Charles Fort* in the Aug., 1941 ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION most heartily recommended it as a source book for plots.

This advice was not only followed by his authors but in some cases was urged upon them by Campbell. At first the adaptations were subtle and of the same high order of originality as *The Space Visitors* and *The Earth Owners*. A prime example was *The Children's Hour* by C. L. Moore writing under the pen name of Lawrence O'Donnell (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Mar., 1944), a poignant relation of a man who discovers that the girl he loves is an immature member of a superior race and

their romance is but one step in the process of her education.

This turn of plot added width to the base of science fiction. However, the trend was to take a different turn as evidenced in Robert A. Heinlein's *Waldo* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, Aug., 1942) where a rocket drive is repaired and operates by *witchcraft*. The implications were that man's technical progress has blinded him to the fact that there are other directions in which he might have ventured.

Actually, more of Fort's work is devoted to exploring the possibility for a basis in teleportation than in any other subject. Simply stated, teleportation is the ability to move objects by merely an exertion of the will. The poltergeist reports could all be explained if men had such power. In fact, Fort interprets thousands of unusual falls of objects as attributable to this "wild talent". *Burning Bright* by Robert Moore Williams, writing under the pen name of John S. Browning (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION, July, 1938) concerned, in part, a man who could levitate and make objects vanish as a result of high radiation dosage. By far the most entertaining story ever written concerning levitation was *What Thin Partitions* by Mark Clifton and Alex Apostolides (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION, Sept., 1953) telling of the ability to levitate

objects by a frightened little girl and how it was usefully harnessed.

Teleportation was, like many other Fortean ideas, suggested by editors in an effort to get writers on a new and more original track. However, writers have tended to use it as an Aladdin's lamp—one merely rubs it and the genie does the job. It would be a legitimate device if the author could offer a scientifically digestible explanation for the ability, even if the explanation were more ingenious than logical. However, the authors have tended to ask readers to take this gimmick *for granted*, as they would a space ship.

We find stories based on a single reference of Charles Fort, such as *He Walked Around Horses* by H. Beam Piper, which proceeds from an 1809 incident of a British envoy in Prussia who stepped out of sight while examining his horses and was never seen again. The story has him appear in an alternate world where Napoleon has never ascended to power and the American colonies have lost the civil war.

Campbell greatly encouraged Fortean concepts through the promotion of "psionics," a term for natural phenomena for which we have not yet discovered the scientific base. In the process, the science fiction world in the

past 15 years has been a rash of "wild talents" among its plot protagonists and villains as would never have been tolerated earlier.

FORTEAN concepts have penetrated the main body of science fiction to considerable extent. A review of the subject would require a tome. The ironic aspect is that the *readers*, while extolling certain outstanding individual literary efforts, have literally raged against the trend. The abuse handed out to John W. Campbell for exploring in fiction and articles areas which science "cannot explain" has achieved at times an intensity far beyond polite criticism. It was not completely deserved. He was predominantly trying to get authors out of a monotonous rut.

Science fiction has attracted many crackpots in the past who thought its readers would be fertile ground for their particular obsession. The rejection of cultist, mystical or irrational notions has been almost total whether it was the absurdity of deroes living in caverns under the earth or the "truth" behind the flying saucers. Charles Fort and The Forteans, promoted by editors and authors but never eagerly embraced by the science fiction readers, are heading for the limbo of Richard S. Shaver, and the flying saucers.

The justification for Charles Fort has always been that he rocked the complacency of science by "documenting" thousands of happenings which logic could not explain. The explanation by his devotees that his stories were documented is a fraud. *The source of publication of the stories was documented, not the events the stories relate.* Fort collected 40,000 unusual reports in 26 years (some place the figure as high as 100,000). No one really believed that he interviewed or wrote concerned parties to verify any substantial portion of these stories.

It is a pretty obvious fact that no man can be right all the time. Neither can a man be wrong all the time. But Fort came close to being wrong all the time.

A partial look at his record:

The earth is almost pancake shaped and not round.

It does not revolve at all, if it does, only once a year.

The earth is surrounded by a shell of matter.

Stars do not exist, they are merely holes in this matter which twinkle because the canopy ripples.

There are frozen masses of earth, vegetation and animal substance suspended above which occasionally are shaken down.

The planets are only a few thousand miles away.

Maybe he was the greatest hu-

morist of all time, but even a satiric crack can occasionally be right. The discredited Emmanuel Velikovsky in *Worlds in Collision* made a couple of right guesses which have revived his book. Fort never.

To the contrary, everything that has happened since Fort died verifies that he and *his Fortean followers* were *wrong* and that the theories of science were right, particularly right were the astronomers whom he berated the most.

The rockets, probes and satellites in space are *adding* immeasurably to knowledge but they would never have been possible if the scientific theories had not been fundamentally correct. Every new probe that goes up is another nail in the coffin of Forteans who feel that there was any honest value in contrariness for contrariness' sake. Had Fort succeeded in gaining more attention, he could only have *retarded* progress. There is no evidence that reading Fort unfettered the mind of any scientist enough to contribute as much as a metal clamp to civilization.

If there is any doubt that his viewpoint leads to *wrong thinking*, not clear thinking, one need only review the career of the official organ of the Fortean Society (titled DOUBT after its 10th issue), and read the views presented.

Fort initially started out to be the "gadfly" of science, but DOUBT ranted and raved against the Pope, Jesus Christ, conscription, vivisection, vaccinations, Wasserman tests and Einstein.

The Fortean organ had the unique distinction of being against *both* science *and* religion. A cartoonist who drew for DOUBT, named Castillo, did his best work lampooning Albert Einstein and Jesus Christ.

THE climax came when Russia announced the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and this event was confirmed by scientists of the rest of the world.

What was the Fortean reaction to this news?

"Now asinine gullibility—internationally has reached a new apogee," Tiffany Thayer wrote, "and we are being asked to believe the most preposterous lie since the invention of virgin motherhood. Untestable theories, utterly incapable of proof, are being put forward as established facts by the heads of the world's great institutions of learning and the chiefs of States, who do not even bother to keep their faces straight for the cameras . . . My subject you will have

guessed is Sputniks I and II, and following here is a documentation of the writer's charge that the laymen of the world are victims of a fraud and a hoax perpetrated by politicians and scientists in international collaboration . . . Dr. Kilian of MIT is the only God and Willey Ley is his prophet. . . . Whipple and Hagen and Kruschev make a strange trio of backslappers, don't they: After all the ink that has been spit to make us hate Krushy, he tells the biggest lie of his life and these two pillars of free enterprise swear to it."

These rantings and ravings go on for about 15,000 words in which Thayer "proves" no earth satellites were ever sent up or could be sent up, or will be sent up.

The launching of the earth satellite was the death blow to Forteanism. Its foundation had rested on debunking astronomical findings and the rockets completely, utterly and without hope of resurrection wrecked Forteanism. The society did not survive Thayer's death in 1959, neither did the bulletin which terminated publication with issue 61 the same year.

Lo! The poor Forteans.

THE END

CONCLUSION

THE CORRIDORS OF TIME

By POUL ANDERSON

Synopsis of Part One

Malcolm Lockridge thought the beautiful and enigmatic woman who called herself Storm Darroway had hired him to help recover a treasure buried in Denmark during the war and convey it to her anti-Communist organization. That would be dangerous and somewhat illegal, but he felt at odds with society anyway. They reached a prehistoric dolmen in Jutland. But then she opened the ground with an unknown kind of force tube. A passage led down into a luminous corridor, stretching miles in either direction, and they rode off on a vehicle that Storm admitted was a gravity sled. At intervals they passed gateways. Through one of these came two tall men in black, who set off in pursuit. Storm's energy pistol shielded her against theirs, while Lockridge used an ordinary rifle to kill them.

Emerging at a selected gate, he found the same land. But it was a wilderness. Now Storm revealed they had come into the past—to 1827 B.C., when northern Europe was still neolithic. She herself was born 2000 years after him.

In that time, there was war between her civilization, the Wardens, who controlled the eastern hemisphere, and the Rangers of the west. It was a strictly limited war, lest Earth be destroyed, but fought without quarter. Much of the struggle went on in the past. Though history could not be altered, an agent could become part of it, setting the mark of his own civilization on a culture and thus building up reserves for a final showdown.

The time corridors were the way to the past: tubes of force with their length dimension ro-

tated onto the temporal axis, so that each foot of travel equaled about a month. The exact date at which a user came out, leaving a gate, was uncertain. And a corridor was only of limited extent. But by going from one to another one with a gate overlapping the same period, an agent could get indefinitely far.

Their own future was closed to Wardens and Rangers. The people then had repulsed them with frightful weapons.

Storm had gone to twentieth-century America to build a new corridor surreptitiously and so bring troops up into the Rangers' heartland. Somehow the enemy learned of it, and she alone escaped. Now, with Lockridge for a helper, she meant to reach the Warden base in Crete, whence they could both be safely escorted back to their proper eras. They would go by ordinary means, since a call might be detected by the Rangers. Convinced that the Wardens stood for justice and freedom, and more than half in love with her, Lockridge agreed.

They went to Avildaro, a village on the Limfjord, inhabited by the Tenil Orugaray. These were peaceful aboriginal fishers, hunters, and farmers. The diglossas in the travelers' ears—molecular encoders with a direct connection to the memory center—furnished knowledge of lan-

guage and customs. Here they could wait for the annual trading ship from the Mediterranean. Storm was received with awe, for she seemed to embody the Triune Goddess, whose religion was the Wardens' creation. Lockridge got simple hospitality, even though the villagers were worried about the Yuthoaz. Those were a branch of the Battle Ax people, invading charioteers who spoke an Indo-European language and worshipped sky gods: patriarchal, warlike, typical Ranger fosterlings.

Lockridge was especially taken with Auri, the charming young daughter of the headman Echegon, and she with him. Circumstances had put her in a difficult position. Her chosen first lover had drowned before he could initiate her, and now she was shunned as being under some curse. She hoped that he, who must have magical powers, could lift it from her.

Then the Yuthoaz attacked. Storm and Lockridge tried to use their weapons to frighten off the enemy, but were overwhelmed by the energy gun of the leader. He was Brann, as important to the Rangers as Storm was to the Wardens. Echegon was killed in the battle, the Tenil Orugaray were defeated and Avildaro occupied by the Yuthoaz.

Brann summoned Lockridge for an interview and said he had

learned where to find Storm—had indeed been told about her corridor in America—by him. Lockridge refused to believe it. He managed to escape with Auri from his jailer, Withucar. They took the tunnel to the Reformation era, where Storm had told him she had an outpost.

That proved to be a witch cult, leading an oppressed peasantry in a debased version of the ancient Goddess faith. In England it was stronger, cynically posing as a Catholic underground movement, headed by white magicians. Its chief, Mareth, flitted Lockridge and Auri to England and established them in a fen country hideaway. Here there was another corridor, with a gate opening on the year when Storm was Brann's prisoner. Mareth raised a force, a few Wardens and a number of Englishmen. The rescue party went back to the Neolithic, flew across the North Sea to Avildarō, routed the Yuthoaz and captured Brann. Storm had been under a gruesome electronic interrogation, but soon recovered.

She realized that Brann must have spoken truly. Lockridge had betrayed her to him, thus starting a chain of events which ended in Brann's defeat. So now Lockridge must go up to her time and do it. She could not guarantee he would escape alive from the enemy stronghold.

Auri was desolate. Though her people agreed her passage through the underworld had removed the curse from her, they felt it must have filled her with so much mana that she was still to be feared. She sought comfort from Lockridge. Partly in pique at this, Storm decreed she must accompany him, and the agent Hu who would guide them, to the far future.

X

HU the Warden did not expect trouble on his way home. Lockridge was certain to reach Brann, during the interval between Storm's departure for the Twentieth century and her enemy's devastating counterblow. That fact was in the structure of the universe.

However, details are unknown. (Like the aftermath, Lockridge thought bleakly. Did he or did he not get back alive? The margin of error in a gate made it unfeasible to check that in advance.) If nothing else, Ranger agents who observed Hu's party might deduce too much. He proceeded with caution.

Even by daylight, unpursued, in the company of a hero and a god, Auri was terrified of the tomb entrance to the corridor. Lockridge saw how forlornly she stiffened her back and said, "Be

brave this one more time, as you were before."

She gave him a shaken, grateful smile.

He had protested Storm's decree. But the Warden queen dropped her imperiousness and said mildly, "We have to get accurate data on this culture. Not mere anthropological notes; the psyche must be understood in depth, or we can make some terrible mistakes in dealing with them as closely as I now plan to. Skilled specialists can learn much by observing a typical member of a primitive society exposed to civilization. So why not herself? She can't be more hurt than she has been. Would you put someone else in her anomalous position?" He could not argue.

The earth opened. The three descended.

They met no one on their trip futureward. Hu took them out in the seventh century A.D., when Frodhi ruled the islands, the Wardens were dominant, and the Rangers had not yet come to start the Vikings on their way. Across Germany they flew, by night, to a high ridge in what would one day be Bavaria. When they were down, Hu gusted a quite human sigh of relief. "Home!" he said.

Lockridge looked about. The wilderness pressed in on him. "Well, everyone to his own taste."

Hu's chiseled features reflected annoyance. "This is the Koriach's land: an estate of hers in the future. No fewer than seven corridors were established hereabouts. One has a gate on this quarter century."

"But not on my period, eh? I wonder, though, why she didn't figure to head back from Neolithic Denmark by this route."

"Use your brain!" Hu snapped. "After meeting those Rangers in that corridor, she estimated too great a probability of doing so again. Only now, when we have Brann, is this a reasonably safe course."

He led the way to a cave and opened the earth. They rode to tomorrow in a silence that made the throb of energies seem the louder.

At the end, beyond the threshold, was an anteroom more spacious than any Lockridge had yet seen. The floor was richly carpeted; red drapes hung between multitudinous lockers. Four guards in green brought guns to brows, a salute, when Hu appeared. They were unlike him but curiously similar to each other: short, squat, flatnosed and heavy-jawed.

Hu ignored them, searched in a cabinet, and extended two diaglossas. Lockridge removed his from the Reformation period, to make room in that ear. "I will take it," Hu said.

"No, I might want it again," Lockridge replied.

"Do you understand me?" Hu said. "I gave you an order." The guards moved near.

Lockridge lost his temper. "You know what you can do with your orders," he said. "If you understand *me*. I'm her man—nobody else's."

Almost, the Warden came to attention. His face blanked. "As you wish."

Lockridge pursued his little victory. "You can also furnish me a pair of pants. This Neolithic rig hasn't got pockets."

"You will receive a pouchbelt. Come along . . . please."

THE guards had not followed the exchange, which was in Cretan. But it was disturbing how they sensed what had happened and shrank back. Lockridge inserted the new diaglossa and activated his mind in the way he had somewhat mastered, to bring forth specific information.

Languages: two major ones, Eastern and Western, Warden and Ranger; others survived among the lower classes of either hegemony. Religion: here a mystical, ritualistic pantheism, with Her the symbol and embodiment of all that was divine; among the enemy, only a harsh materialistic theory of history. Government: he was sickened by the rush of data on Ranger lands,

underlings made into flesh-and-blood machines for the use of a few overlords. Not much came to him concerning the Wardens. This was clearly not a democracy, but he got the impression of a benevolent hierarchical structure, its law derived rather from tradition than from formal innovation, power divided among aristocrats who were at one with their people, more like priests or parents than masters. (Priestesses, mothers, mistresses? Women dominated.) At the apex were the Koriachs, who were—well—something in between a Pope and a Dalai Lama? No, not that either. Odd, how sketchy the account was. Maybe because visitors got the local scene explained to them *viva voce*.

The palace opened before Lockridge and he forgot his doubts.

They hadn't taken the ramp, but floated up a shaft to emerge high in the great building. A floor bluish green, where inlaid patterns of bird, fish, serpent, and flower seemed nearly alive, shone acre-wide. It was warm and soft underfoot. Columns built from jade and coral soared to a height he could scarcely believe. Their capitals exploded in a riot of jeweled foliage. He recognized little in those crimson, purple, golden, sweet-scented banks; a science two thousand years beyond his had created

new joy. The walls were clear. He saw through them to a landscape of gardens, terraces, orchards, parks, the hills were aglow with summer. And . . . what was that enormous curve-tusked majesty, walking out from among the trees, dwarfing the deer herd . . . a mammoth, brought across twenty millennia for a sign of Her awesomeness?

Seven youths and seven maidens, alike as twins, slim and beautiful in their nudity, bent the knee to Hu. "Welcome," they chorused. "Welcome, you who serve the Mystery."

ONLY one evening dared the Wardens grant Lockridge before he went on his mission. Too many spies were about, they explained.

Luxuriously robed, he sat with Auri in a thing neither chair nor couch, that fitted itself to every changeable contour of their bodies, and feasted on foods unknown to him, untellably delicious. The wine was as rare, and turned the world into dreamlike happiness. "Is this drugged?" he asked, and Hu said, "Dismiss your prejudices. Why should one not use a harmless euphoric?" The Warden went on to speak of potions and incenses that opened the door to a sense of Her veritable presence in everything which existed—"But those are kept for the most solemn rites. Man is too

weak to endure long the godhead in him."

"Woman may do so oftener," said the Lady Yuria.

She was high in Storm's councils, fairhaired, violet-eyed, but with her cousinship plain to see in the Diana face and figure.

They retired to another hall, where colors shifted in hypnotic rhythm through floor and walls. Servants catfooted about with trays of refreshment, but there was no visible source for the melodies to which they danced. His *diaglossa* taught Lockridge the intricate measures, and the Warden ladies were supple in his arms, blending their movements with his until two bodies became one. Though the scale was strange to him, he was more deeply moved by this music than by most else he had known in his life.

"I think you must have subsonics along with the notes," he ventured.

Yuria nodded. "Naturally. But why must you have a name and an explanation? Is not the reality enough?"

"Sorry. I'm just a barbarian."

She smiled and drew closer in the figure they were treading. "Not 'just.' I begin to see why you found favor with the Koriach. Few of us here—certainly not myself—could be such adventurers as she and you."

"Uh . . . thanks."

"I am supposed to care for your young friend—look, she has fallen asleep—she won't need me this night. Would you care to spend it with me?"

Lockridge had thought he wanted only Storm, but Yuria was so much like her that every desire in him shouted Yes! He needed his whole will to explain that he must get rested for tomorrow. "When you get back, then?" Yuria invited.

"I shall be honored." Between the wine, the music, and the woman, he had no doubt of his return.

Lockridge went to bed early and happy. He slept as he had not done since he was newborn.

MORNING was less cheerful. Hu insisted he take another euphoriac. "You need a mind unclouded by fear," the Warden said. "This will be difficult and dangerous at best."

They went out for some practice with the devices the American would be using, to make real for him the knowledge imparted by the diaglossa. High they flew over endless parkland. Near the limit of their trip, Lockridge spied a dove-gray tower. At the fifteen hundred foot summit, two wings reached out beneath a golden wheel, to make the ankh which signifies life. "Is that on the edge of a city?" he asked.

Hu spat. "Don't speak to me of cities. The Rangers build such vile warrens. We let men live next to the earth their mother. That's an industrial plant. None but technicians are quartered there. Automatic machinery can do without sunlight."

They returned to the palace. Hu conducted Lockridge to a small room where several others waited. They were men; war, like engineering, was still largely a male provenance, short of that ultimate level on which Storm operated.

The briefing was long. "We can get you within several miles of Niyorek." Hu pointed to a spot on the map before him, the east coast of a strangely altered North America. "After that, you must make your own way. With your beard shaven off, a Ranger uniform, your diaglossa and what additional information we can supply, you should be able to reach Brann's headquarters. We have ascertained he is there at this moment, and of course we know that you will see him."

The drug did not keep Lockridge's belly muscles from tightening. "What else do you know?" he asked slowly.

"That you got away again. It was reported to him—it will be reported—that you escaped to a time corridor." Hu's gaze became hooded. "Best I say no more. You would be too handicapped by a

sense of being a puppet in an unchangeable drama."

"Or by knowing they killed me?" Lockridge barked.

"They did not," Hu said. "You must simply take my word. I could be lying. I would lie, if necessary. But I tell you as plain truth, you will not be captured or killed by the Rangers. Unless possibly at some later date . . . because Brann himself never found out what became of you. With luck, however, you should emerge from the corridor through another, pastward gate, slip out of the city, and cross the ocean to this place. There you will know how to get back to the present. I hope to greet you within this month."

XI

THERE was no full-dress fighting in this era, or there would have been no Earth. Somewhere, sometime, when one side or the other believed it had grown strong enough, the great onslaught would be launched; but its nature was unguessable by the combatants themselves. Meanwhile the hemispheres were fortresses and skirmishes were incessant.

The Warden spaceship screamed on a long curve, westward and downward across an ocean where a storm had been generated for this night. At the end of that trajectory, a voice

said, "Now," and Lockridge's capsule was ejected.

Lockridge lay amidst incandescence. Heat buffeted him; his skull rang with vibration. Then the weakened pod burst open and he cast himself free on his gravity belt.

So fast was he still going that the force field was barely able to shield him from a stream that would have torn him asunder. The hurricane raved about his screen, blackness, lightning, and a wall of rain. Waves grabbed upward at him, spindrift smoking off their crests. As his speed dropped below the sonic, he heard the wind skirl, thunder crash, waters roar. A blue-white flare cut through the weather and left him dazzled for minutes. The explosion that followed struck his ears like a hammer. So they detected us, he thought stunned, and shot a firebolt at the ship. I wonder if she got away.

I wonder if I will.

But so small an object as a man was engulfed by the tempest. Nor were the Rangers likely to be on the alert for him. They would only expect their enemies to take this much trouble for a major operation, and could not know that the sending of a single agent was indeed one.

History said he was going to reach Brann's castle.

Climate control fields pushed the storm away from the coast. Niyorek became visible.

Monstrous it gloomed on the shore, and inland farther than his vision went. Maps and diaglossa had told of an America webbed from end to end with megalopolis. Little broke that mass of concrete, steel, energy, ten billion slaves jammed together, save here and there a desert which had once been green countryside. The gutting of his land seemed so vast a crime that he needed no drug to cast out fear. Oh, Indian summers along the Smokies, he thought, I'm comin' to get revenge for you.

Lockridge's helmet vibrated with a call. "Who comes yonder?" Black-uniformed like himself, two sentries stooped on him. Below, rafted weapons raised their snouts.

He had been schooled. "Guardsmaster Darvast, household troops of Director Brann, returning from a special mission." The Ranger language was harsh on his tongue. He must admit its grammar and semantics were closer to English than the Warden speech, in which he could not even say some things with any precision. But here, the closest word to "freedom" meant "ability to accomplish," and there was none for "love" at all.

Since he was going to identify himself to Brann anyway, he had suggested doing so at the start. But Hu vetoed the idea. "You would have to go through too

many layers of bureaucracy." Perforce, that last phrase was a Ranger one. "While you would reach him eventually, the interrogation processes would reveal too much to them, and leave you too crippled."

"Land at Gate 43 for identification," the radio voice commanded.

Lockridge obeyed, setting down on a flange that jutted over the water. It was naked metal, as was the immense portal in the wall before him. A guard stepped from an emplacement. "Your ego pattern," he said.

WARDEN agents had done their job well. Against a day of need, an identity had been planted in that machine which recorded the life of each person in the hemisphere. Lockridge went to the mind scanner and thought a code word. The circuits took it for the entire biogram of Darvast 05-874-623-189, bred thirty years ago, educated in Crèche 935 and the Academy of War, special service appointee to Director Brann, politically reliable and holder of several decorations for hazardous assignments successfully carried out. The guard saluted with an arm laid across his breast. "Pass, master."

The gates opened. The city's pulse came through, and a gust of foul air. Lockridge went in.

There had been no time to give him more than a general idea of

the layout; he must concentrate on learning what was known about the castle. Play by ear, he thought. I've got my direction, more or less.

Brann's tower had been unmistakable, sheathed in steel and topped by a ball of blue flame. It must be a couple of miles from here. Lockridge began walking.

He found he had entered at the bottom of human habitation. The city went deep below ground, but only machines housed there, with a few armored engineers and a million convict attendants who did not live long amidst the fumes and radiation. Here, walls, rusted and grimed, enclosed a narrow pedestrian passageway. High overhead, girders and upper-level structures shut out the sky. The air throbbed and stank. Around him pullulated the half-skilled, the useless, the uncaught criminals, with sleazy clothes over fish-belly skins. No one looked hungry—machine-produced food was issued free at one's assigned refectory—but Lockridge felt as if his lungs were being contaminated by the smell of unwashed bodies.

He was glad to reach an upward shaft where he could use his gravity belt. About were levels of wide hallways, painfully clean. The doors were shut and few were abroad, for the technician class need not scrabble around the clock for a livelihood.

Those people he glimpsed wore uniforms of good material and walked with a puritan purposefulness.

Then a file of gray-clad men passed by, with one soldier for guard. Their heads were shaven and their faces dead. He knew them for convicted unreliaables. Genetic control did not yet extend to the whole personality, nor was indoctrination always successful. That these men might be trusted among the machines down below, their brains had been seared by an energy field. More efficient would have been to automate everything, rather than use such labor; but object lessons were needed. Still more important was to keep the population busy. Behind a poker face, Lockridge struggled not to retch.

He reminded himself, somewhat wildly, that no state could long endure which had not at least the passive support of a large majority. But that was the final abomination. Nearly everyone here, on every level of society, took the Rangers' government for granted, could not imagine living in any other way, often enjoyed their existence. The masters fed them, sheltered them, clothed them, educated them, doctored them, thought for them. A gifted, ambitious man could rise high, if he was good at kicking in the teeth of rivals. Not to the ultimate masterships,

of course. Such power was bestowed only by machines, taken to be wiser than any mortal, and if a man was fortunate enough to serve close to a Director, he did so in the spirit of a watchdog.

Like Darvast, Lockridge thought. I got to remember that.

The sun was just rising, through carcinogenic clouds, when he left the roofs behind and flitted toward Brann's stronghold. Patrolmen swarmed about the walls, flies against a mountain. Guns crouched on every flange and warcraft circled the burning globe at the spire. This high, the air was clean and cold, the city's growl subdued to a whisper, the westward view a sierra of towers.

Lockridge landed as ordered and identified himself. There followed three hours of hurry-up-and-wait, alone in a featurless tiny room. He knew quite well that spy eyes watched him, and tried to act his role of unshakeable haughtiness. The anti-worry chemical in him helped, and he got his ideas somewhat composed. First, speak to Brann; then break loose. There was a time gate, open on this year, in the foundations of the building. He'd go back to a period before the rise of the Rangers and, with luck, make his way to Europe and futureward again. Perhaps, at this very moment, he was greeting Auri in Storm's palace.

A voice from the air said: "Guardmaster Darvast. The Director will see you."

Lockridge went through a wall, which dilated for him, to an antechamber armored in steel and force. The soldiers there made him strip, and searched clothes and person respectfully but most thoroughly. When he dressed again, he was allowed to keep his diaglossas—not, though, his gravity belt or weapons.

A double door beyond opened on a wide, high-ceilinged room, draped and carpeted in gray, airily furnished. A viewer showed the immense spectacle of Ni-yorek. On one wall, a Byzantine ikon glittered gilt and bejeweled. After the crampedness everywhere else, Lockridge had an odd brief sense of homecoming.

BRANN sat next to a service machine. The lean black-clad body was at ease, and the face might have belonged to a statue. He said quietly, "You must have realized that no such person as you is close enough to me to be known by name. However, the fact that you could get by identification is so significant that I decided to interview you as requested. Only my Mutes are overseeing us. I assume you have no ridiculous assassination scheme in mind. Speak."

Lockridge looked upon him, and the drug must be wearing

off, because the fact struck shatteringly: My God, I met and fought this man six thousand years ago, and yet this is the first time he's ever seen me!

The American gulped for air. His knees wobbled and his palms grew wet. Brann waited.

"No," Lockridge got out. "I mean . . . I'm not a Ranger. But I'm on your side. I have something to tell you that, well, that I believed you'd want kept secret."

Brann studied him, sharp features unmoving. "Take off your helmet," he said. Lockridge did. "Archaic type," Brann murmured. "I thought so. Most would never notice, but I have encountered too many races in too many times. Who are you?"

"Malcolm . . . Lockridge . . . U.S.A., mid-twentieth century."

"So." Brann paused. All at once a smile transfigured him. "Be seated," he said, as host to guest. He touched a light on the machine. A panel opened, a bottle and two goblets appeared. "You must like wine."

"I could use some," Lockridge husked. Remembrance came to him, how he had drunk with Brann before, and made him toss off his glass in two swallows.

Brann poured afresh. "Take your time," he said leniently.

"No, I have to—Listen. The Koriach of the Westmark. You know her?"

Brann's calm was not broken, but the mask slid back over him. "Yes. In age after age."

"She's mounting an operation against you."

"I know. That is, she disappeared some time ago, undoubtedly on a major mission." Brann leaned forward. His look grew so intent that Lockridge's eyes must seek escape in the stern serenity of the Byzantine saint. The deep voice cracked forth. "You have information?"

"I . . . I do . . . master. She's gone into my century—my country—to drive a corridor here."

"What? Impossible! We would know!"

"They're working under cover. Native labor, native materials, starting from scratch. But when they're finished—the Wardens will come through, with everything they've got."

Brann's fist rang on the machine. He bounded to his feet. "Both sides have tried that before," he protested. "Neither has succeeded. The deed isn't possible!"

Lockridge made himself regard the figure towering over him and say: "This time the operation looks likely to work. It's masterly well hidden, I tell you."

"If anyone could, then she—" Brann's voice sank. "Oh, no." His mouth twisted. "The final thrust. Firebolts loosed on my people."

He began to pace. Lockridge sat back and watched him. And it came to the American that Brann was not evil. In Avildaro he had spoken—he would speak—well of his Yuthoaz because they were not needlessly cruel. His anguish now was real. Evil had created him, and he served it, but behind those gray eyes lay a tiger's innocence. When he demanded facts, Lockridge spoke with near pity:

"You're going to stop her. I can tell you just where the corridor is. When its gate here opens, you will strike down it. She'll only have a few helpers. You won't get her then, she'll escape, but you'll have another chance later."

MORE or less truthfully, he related his own experiences until he came to his arrival at Avildaro with Storm. "She claimed to be their Goddess," he went on, "and presided over a mighty vicious festival." As expected, the Ranger was not aware that the Tenil Orugaray, far outside his own field of cultural manipulation, did not practice ceremonial cannibalism like their neighbors. Also, perhaps, he assumed Lockridge disapproved of orgies, which was untrue but useful.

"That was what began to change my mind about her. Then you came, at the head of

an Indo-European war band, and captured the village and us." Brann's fingers opened and closed. "I escaped. At the time, I thought that was luck, but now I reckon you kept me loosely guarded on purpose. I made my way to Flanders and found an Iberian trading ship that took me on as a deckhand. Eventually I got to Crete and contacted the Wardens there. They sent me to this year. Mainly I wanted to get home. This isn't my war. But they didn't let me."

"They wouldn't," Brann said, self-controlled again. "The primary reason is superstitious. They think her sacred, you know, an actual immortal incarnation of the Goddess, like her colleagues. You, the last to meet her, are now too holy yourself to be profaned by becoming an ordinary citizen of an era they despise."

Lockridge was jarred at how smoothly the story the Wardens had concocted was going over. Could Brann's idea be *true*?

"They treated me pretty well otherwise," he said. "I got, uh, very friendly with a high-ranking lady."

Brann shrugged.

"She told me a lot about their intelligence operations, showed me the gear and everything. Showed me too damned much of their civilization, in fact. It's not fit for a human being. In spite

of the propaganda I was fed about the Rangers, I began to think you were more my kind of people. At least, you might send me home; and mercy—" Lockridge had to use English there—"but I'm homesick! Got obligations as well, back yonder. So finally I wheedled her into letting me go along on a survey mission last night, even dress in one of your uniforms. Since I knew about the fake Darvast identity—" He spread his hands. "Here I am."

Brann had stopped prowling. He stood utterly still for a minute, before he asked, "What is the precise geographical location of that corridor?"

Lockridge told him. "After my story," he said, "I wonder why the Wardens didn't go back a few months and warn her."

"They can't," Brann replied absently. "What has been, must be. In practical terms: a Koriach, even more than a Director like myself, has absolute authority. She does not divulge her plans to anyone she does not choose. For fear of spies, this one probably told no person except the few technicians she took along. Time enough to do that when the corridor was ready. Now, with so little advance notice and so much to occupy them elsewhere, there is no time to organize a substantial force of Wardens capable of operating

efficiently in the past. Such as could be sent have doubtless been baffled by the uncertainty factor; they emerged too early or too late. . . . Assuming that any were sent at all. She has rivals who would not be sorry to lose her."

He considered Lockridge for a while that grew. Finally, slowly, he said: "Assuming your account true, I am grateful. You shall indeed be returned, and well rewarded. But first we must establish your bona fides with a psychic probe."

Fear rose in Lockridge. He was getting very near the moment beyond which his future was unknown. Brann stiffened. Sweat, pallor, a pulse in the throat—what was the stranger so nervous about?

"No," Lockridge said feebly. "Please. I've seen what happens."

He had to give a reason for his flight which would not make Brann too wary to watch for Storm's gate and lead his troop through it. But the terror in his guts was real. He had indeed seen that darkened part of the Long House.

"Have no fear," Brann said with a touch of impatience. "The process will not go deep unless something suspicious emerges."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" Lockridge rose and backed away.

"You must take my word. And, perhaps, my apology." Brann gestured.

The door opened. Two guards came in. "Take this man to Division Eight and have the section chief call me," Brann said.

THE men in black led him down an empty hallway. Sound was muffled, footfalls came dull, and never a word was spoken. Lockridge drew a breath. Okay, boy, he thought, you know you're goin' to make it as far as the time corridor. His dizziness left him.

The shaft he wanted came into sight, its opening an oblong in the blank wall, its depths whistling with forced air. The soldiers led Lockridge past.

Their energy guns were drawn, but not aimed at him. Prisoners never gave much trouble. He stopped short. The blade of his hand hewed into the Adam's apple on his right. A helmet jerked back, a body went to all fours. Lockridge spun to the left. He threw a shoulder block, his full weight behind. The guard toppled backward. Lockridge got a grip on him and hurled them both into the shaft.

Downward they tumbled. An alarm shrieked. That many-eyed machine which was the building had seen the unusual. In a voice nearly human, it cried what it knew.

Featureless, walls converging on a bottomward infinity, the tube fled by. Lockridge clung to the Ranger, arm around the throat, fist pounding while they fell. The guard went loose, his mouth slackened in the bloody face and the gun left his fingers. Lockridge fumbled at his belt controls. Where the furious hell—?

Door after door whizzed upward. Twice, energy bolts sizzled from them. And now the bottom leaped at him. He found the plaque he wanted and pushed. Unbalanced force nearly tore him from his grip on the Ranger. But they were slowed, they were saved from that bone-splattering impact, they were down.

The base of the shaft fronted on another hallway. An entry stood opposite, to show a room whose sterile white made the rainbow shimmer of a time gate all the more lovely. Two guards gaped across leveled weapons. A squad was dashing down the passage.

"Secure this man!" Lockridge gasped. "And let me by!"

He was in uniform, with potent insignia. The castle had not seen details. Arms snapped in salute. He sprang into the anteroom.

Around him, the air woke with Brann's voice, huge as God's. "Attention, attention! The Director speaks. A man dressed as

a guardsmaster of the household has just entered the temporal transit on Sublevel Nine. He must be captured alive at any cost."

Through the gate! The twisting shock of phase change made Lockridge fall. He rolled over, his bare head struck the floor, pain burst through him and for an instant he lay in night.

The fear of the mind machine brought him awake. He hauled himself erect and onto the gravity sled which waited.

Half a dozen men poured through the curtain. Lockridge flattened. Pale stun beams splashed on the bulwarks around him. He lifted a palm and covered the acceleration control light. The sled got into motion.

Away from the Rangers, yes. But they were on his pastward side. He was headed into the future.

The wind rasped in his lungs. His heartbeat shook him as a dog shakes a rat. With his last reserves, he mastered panic enough to risk a look aft. The black shapes were already dwindling. They milled about, uncertain, and he remembered Storm Darroway, seated by a fire in a wolf-haunted forest: "*We ventured ahead of our era. There were guardians who turned us back, with weapons we did not understand. We no longer try. It was too terrible.*"

"Goddess, help me!" he sobbed.

As from far away, echoing down the vibrant whiteness of the bore, he heard Brann's command. The guards assumed formation. Their gravity units raised them and they gave chase.

The corridor reached on beyond sight. Lockridge saw no gate ahead, only emptiness.

The sled halted. He flailed the control panel. The machine sank inert. The flyers swooped near.

Lockridge jumped off and ran. A beam struck the floor behind, touched his heels and left them numb. Someone shouted victory. Then came the Night, and Fear.

He never knew what happened. Vision went from him, hearing, every sense and awareness; he was a disembodied point whirled for eternity through infinitely-dimensioned space. Somehow he knew of a presence, which was alive and not alive. Thence radiated horror: the final horror, the negation of everything which was and had been and would be, cold past cold, darkness past darkness, hollowness past hollowness, nothing save a vortex which sucked him into itself, and contracted, and was not. He was not.

XII

A GAIN he was. First he was music, the most gentle and beautiful mel-

ody that ever had been, which with a drowsy delight he knew for *Sheep May Safely Graze*. Then he was also a scent of roses, a yielding firmness under his back, a body at peace with itself. He opened his eyes to sunlight.

"Good mornin', Malcolm Lockridge," said a man. "You are with friends," said a woman. They spoke Kentucky English.

He sat up. They had laid him on a couch in a maple-paneled room. There was little decoration, except for a screen where colors played through soft strange shapes, but the proportions were so right that nothing else was needed. Beyond an unclosed doorway he saw a garden. Flowers grew along graveled walks and willows shaded a lily-pond from the heat of high summer. On the far side of a turf-green lane stood another house, small, bedecked with honeysuckle, simply and sweetly curved.

The man and woman stepped close. They were both tall, somewhat past their youth but still with backs erect and muscles hard. Their hair was bobbed below the ears and held by intricately ornamented bands. Otherwise they wore nothing except a pocketed band on the left wrist. Lockridge saw that he was equally nude. He felt for his own bracelet-purse. The woman

smiled. "Yes, your *diaglossas* are there," she said. "I don't believe you'll want anything else."

"Who are you?" Lockridge asked in wonder.

They grew grave. "You won't be with us long, I'm sorry to say," the man replied. "Call us John and Mary."

"And this is . . . when?"

"A thousand years afterward."

With a mother's compassion, the woman said, "You've been through nightmare, we know. But we hadn't any other way to turn back those devils, short o' killin' them. We healed you, soma and psyche, while you slept."

"You'll send me home?"

Pain crossed her tranquility. "Yes."

"Right away, in fact," said John. "We have to."

Lockridge got off the bed. "I didn't mean my own home. Europe, in the time of the Wardens."

"I know. Come."

They walked out. Lockridge fumbled for understanding. "I can see why you don't let anyone in from the past. So what am I to you?"

"Destiny," said John. "The ghastliest word a man can speak."

"What? You—I—my work's not finished?"

"Not yet," said Mary, and caught his hand.

"I must not tell you more," said John. "For your own sake. The time war was the nadir of human degradation, and not least because it denied free will."

Lockridge strained to hold onto the calm they had somehow instilled into him. "But time is fixed. Isn't it?"

"From a divine view, perhaps," John said. "Men, though, are not gods. Look into yourself. You know you make free choices. Don't you? In the time war they rationalized every horrible thing they did by claimin' it was bound to happen anyway. Yet they were themselves, directly, responsible for more tyranny, more death, more hate, more sufferin' than I can stand to count up. We today know better than to look into our own future, and we only go in secret, as observers, to the poor damned past."

"Except for me," Lockridge said with a flick of anger.

"I'm sorry. That's a wrong we've got to do, to prevent a greater wrong." John gave him a steady look. "I console myself by thinkin' you're man enough to take it."

"Well—" Wryness touched Lockridge's lips. "Okay. I certainly am glad you interfered there in the corridor."

"We won't do so again," said Mary.

They came out onto the lane.

This seemed a fair-sized town, homes stretching off among high trees. A machine tended one lawn. Folk were about, handsome people with unhurried gate. Some were nude, others evidently felt a light tunic was more comfortable in the warmth. A couple of adults passing near bowed with unservile respect to John.

"You must be an important man," Lockridge remarked.

"A continental councillor." Love and pride lay in Mary's tone.

"Uh . . . me bein' here . . . you've kept that quiet?" Lockridge asked.

"Yes," Mary answered. "The fact of your comin' is known. We prepared ourselves. But the—call them the time wardens—never released details. For your own sake. Someone might've told you too much." In haste: "Not necessarily awful. But a sense o' destiny makes a slave."

I've somethin' crucial ahead o' me, Lockridge thought. They don't want me to know how I'm goin' to die.

He wrenched free of that by seizing on a word. "Time wardens! Then my side did win." With a look around, a breath of woodland odor, a sense of cool turf underfoot: "Sure, I should'a guessed. This is a good place."

"I think," said John, "you'd

do well to remember what one of our philosophers wrote. *All evil is a good become cancerous.*"

Puzzled, Lockridge followed him in silence. They came after a while to an area walled off by a hedge. John touched a leaf and the branches parted. Behind lay a torpedo-shaped vehicle which the three of them entered. The forward cabin was a transparent bubble, with no controls visible. Aft, through a doorway, Lockridge saw—machines? shapes? Whatever they were, they had no clearly understandable form, but seemed to follow impossible curves to infinite expansions and regressions.

John sat down. Silently, the carrier lifted. Earth fell away until Lockridge overlooked the eastern seaboard entire beneath a darkened sky. Mostly the land was green (how long had men needed to repair the work of the Rangers?) but southward a complex of buildings spread across miles. They were tasteful, the air was clean around them and he identified parks. However—"I thought the Wardens didn't build cities," Lockridge said.

"They didn't," John replied shortly. "We do."

"Man also needs the nearness of his fellows," Mary explained.

Lockridge's disturbance was interrupted by the sight of a silvery ovoid lifting over the hori-

zon. He estimated distances and thought, Good Lord, that thing must be half a mile long! "What is it?"

"The Pleiades liner," John said.

"But, but they couldn't reach the stars . . . in Storm's era."

"No. They were too busy killin' each other."

The vehicle picked up speed. America vanished in the ocean's unchangeable loneliness.

The time was short until Europe hove into view. Lockridge strained ahead. They were still so high that the coast unrolled like a map.

"Hey! You're aimin' for Denmark!"

"We must," John said. "You can go overland to your destination."

He stopped and hovered in sight of the Limfjord. The country was mainly woods and pasture but near the head of the bay stood a town. It wasn't like the one he had just left, and that gladdened him a little. He had never liked the idea of the world blanketed with dead uniformity. Red walls and copper spires reminded him of the Copenhagen he had known.

Okay, he told himself, whatever I've still got to do, I reckon it'll be in a good cause.

"I wish we could show you more, Malcolm," said Mary gently. "But here we leave you."

"Huh? Where's your corridor?"

"We've found a different means," John said. "This machine'll carry us."

Fire crawled among the shapes aft. Blackness sealed the cabin. Lockridge took heart. He needn't really be doomed. This couple might only feel sorry for him because he had some fighting left to do. At the least, he'd soon see Auri again. Not to mention Yuria and her cousins; what a party that would be! And afterward Storm. . . .

The transition ended. John's countenance had tautened. "Get out quick," he said. "We can't risk bein' spotted." The machine fell to a shockless landing. He gripped his passenger's hand. "Fare you well," he said roughly. He jumped out. The carrier rose and vanished.

XIII

THAT summery land he had glimpsed was a thousand years unborn. He stood in a wilderness as thick as any the Tenil Orugaray had known.

He winced. What kind of friends had those people been, to dump him here naked and alone?

They had to, he thought.

Still, damnation, no purpose was served by his starving. So

somebody must live nearby. He peered through the dusk and found a trail. Narrow and obviously seldom used, it wound off among brush and tree trunks, toward the bay. He selected the diaglossa for this milieu, by experiment, and struck off.

A glow broke through the woods, opposite the last embers of sunset. Hunter's moon, he decided. Auri must have been awaiting him for a good three months. Poor lonely kid. Well, they had to study her anyhow, and he'd be there as soon as he could find transportation—

He stopped. The cold sank teeth into him. Far off he had heard the baying of hounds.

Well, was that anything to scare a man?

Dusk thickened into night. Twigs crackled and stabbed as he blundered half blind from side to side of the path. Ever more close, the dogs gave tongue. And was that a horn he heard? Must be, with such a clang; but the notes were an ugly snarl.

Probably bound along this same trail, he thought. Let's wait. . . . No. He broke into a trot. For some reason he didn't want to encounter that pack.

A part of him, above the growing unease, tried to understand why. If the Wardens reserved wild areas, that fitted their philosophy. If they hunted for

sport, what of it? Yet this region was so blasted desolate. Auri's home woods had teemed. Here he had seen nothing but trees and bushes and one carrion bird, heard nothing but wind and the unnaturally rapid approach of dogs.

More and more he felt as if he were in flight down an endless tunnel. He began to breathe hard. Howling echoed, the horn blew again, he sensed hoofbeats drum through the cold earth.

Ahead of him, the forest opened. Hoarfrost glinted on heather and the Limfjord lay black and silver-streaked under flickering stars. Lockridge heard himself sob with relief.

But suddenly the hounds yelped and yammered, the horn rang shrill, and the gallop became thunder. Knowledge stabbed: They've got my scent! Uncontrollable, the fear rose up and took him. He ran, with horror at his back.

Closer the pack clamored. A woman screamed like a wildcat. He broke into a dazzle of moonlight. A mile away, next the shore, he saw a black mass and a few tiny yellow glimmers. Houses—He tripped, into whins that raked him bloody.

The fall shocked out a little panic. He'd never make that shelter, if shelter it was. The dogs would be on him in minutes. Storm, he wept, darlin', I got to

get home to you. The memory of her breasts against him gave him the courage to double back.

To the forest edge . . . up a tall tree . . . stand on a branch, hug the bole, become another shadow, and wait!

Down the trail and out onto the heath came the hunt.

THOSE were not dogs, that score of wolfish monsters, roaring forth under the moon. Those were not half a dozen horses, they were much too huge and narwhal horns sprouted from their heads. The lunar light was so icily brilliant that he could see dark, clotting wetness on one point. They were human who rode, two women and four men in Warden uniform. Long fair hair blew wild with their speed. And that shape was also human, slung naked with a rent belly across one saddlebow.

A man winded his trumpet almost beneath Lockridge. Such dread came upon the American that he was near losing his hold, he knew only that he must run, run, run—Subsonics! flashed through his last sane part, and he clutched the tree till the bark bruised him.

"Ho-yo, ho-yo!" The leading woman shook her spear aloft. Her face was unbearably akin to Storm's.

Forth they galloped, until the hounds lost the scent and cast

about with angry snufflings. The riders reined in. Through wind and beasts, Lockridge heard them shout to each other. After a while they all lined out eastward across the waste.

Could be a trick, Lockridge thought. They figure me for comin' down, as I've got to, and they'll be back to catch me then.

The horn sounded anew, but already so far off that most of its mind-destroying effect was lost. Lockridge slid from the tree. They might not expect him to make for yonder hamlet immediately. He wouldn't have that much coolness left him, if he were some ignorant *slogg*.

Where did he get that word? Not from his *diaglossa*, which held so carefully little truth about this half of the world. Wait. Yes. Storm had used it.

He filled his lungs pressed elbows to ribs, and ran.

The settlement was a mere huddle of huts. Though their walls were concrete and their roofs some glistening synthetic, they were more cramped and poor than those of the Neolithic. Through ill-fitting shutters and doors trickled those gleams he had seen.

He beat on the first one. "Let me in!" he cried. "Help! In Her name, help me!"

No answer came, no stir, the house closed in on itself and denied that he was real.

Into the hamlet he lurched, shouting his appeal. At the middle was a sort of square. A tau cross rose twenty feet high near a primitive well. Upon it was tied a man. He was dead, and the ravens had begun to eat him.

Lockridge went past. Now again he could hear the hoofs.

At the far end of settlement lay some fields that might have borne potatoes. Plain in the relentless moonlight, he saw the tracks of riders. A cabin even meaner than the rest stood hard by. Its door creaked wide. An old woman stepped forth and called, "Here, you. Quickly."

Lockridge fell across the threshold. The woman closed and locked the door. Above his gasps, he heard her drunken grumble: "They're not like to come into town. No sport, killing a boxed-in man. And I say a Wildrunner is a man. Let her get wrathful as she likes, if she finds out. I know my rights, I do. They took my Ola, but that makes me his mother holy for a year. None less than the Koriach can judge me, and my lady Istar won't dare trouble Her over so fiddling a matter."

LOCKRIDGE'S strength crept back. He stirred. The woman said hastily, "Now remember, if you make any fuss, you, I need but open the door and holler. I've strong men for neighbors,

who'd be glad to get their hooks on a Wildrunner. I don't know if they'll tear you to pieces themselves or send you out for Istar to chase, but your wretched life is in my hands and don't you ever forget that."

"I . . . won't . . . be any bother." Lockridge sat up, hugged his knees, and looked at her. "If I can give you any thanks—any return—"

She was not so old at that, he realized with an unexpected shock. The stooped gait, in her drab gown, the gnarled hands, weatherbeaten skin, half toothless mouth, had fooled him. Her hair, braided to her waist, was still dark, her features not much wrinkled, her eyes drink-hazed but unfaded.

The one-roomed cabin behind her was scantily furnished. A couple of bedsteads, a table and a few chairs, a chest and cabinet . . . wait, that kitchen corner held apparatus which looked electronic, and there was a communicator screen on the wall . . . opposite a little shrine with a silver Labrys—

She started. "You're no Wildrunner!"

"I suppose not. Whatever that is." Lockridge cupped an ear. The pack had veered off again.

"But, but you come naked from the woods, fleeing them, yet still you're barbered, and talk better'n I do—"

"Let's say I'm an outlander, though no enemy." Lockridge spoke with care. "I was bound this way when the hunters chanced on me. It's important that I get in touch with, uh, the Koriach's own headquarters. You ought to be well paid for saving my life." He rose. "Uh, could you lend me some clothing?"

She looked him up and down, not as woman at man but with an immemorial wariness that slowly yielded to resolution. "Very well! Might be you lie, might even be you're a devil sent to trap poor *sloggs*, but I've scant to lose. Ola's tunic should fit you."

Lockridge slipped the tunic over his head. "Was Ola your son?"

"Yes. The last. Sickness got the rest in their cribs. And this year, when he was no more than seventeen, the lot chose him."

With a gruesome intuition, Lockridge blurted, "Is he the one on the cross?"

Anger flared back. "Hold your jaw! That was a traitor! He cursed my lady Istar's lover Pribo, who did no more than rip a fishnet of his!"

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "I told you I was a stranger."

Her mood changed with intoxicated swiftness. "Ola, now," she said, "he got to be the Year Man." She knuckled her eyes.

"Goddess forgive me. I know his life is in the land. If only I could forget how he screamed when they burned him."

Lockridge found a chair, slumped, and looked into nothingness.

"You're so pale," the woman said. "Would you care for drink?"

"Christ, yes!" He meant no blasphemy: not of that god.

She poured from a jug into a glass. The wine was rougher than what he had drunk at the palace, but he felt the same peace stealing along his nerves and thought. Sure, they need something to make them endure.

"Tell me," he said, "is this Istar your priestess?"

"Why, indeed. She's the one you should call. Not before tomorrow afternoon, I think. She'll be out late, hunting, and'll sleep late, and no matter how important you are, she's no good person to get out of bed." The *slogg* drank from her own glass and tittered. "Into bed, now, well, I hear that's another matter. The lads aren't supposed to talk about the springtime rites, but they will, they will."

"Uh, these Wildrunners. Who are they?"

"What? You must be from afar! They're the naked ones, the woods dwellers, the wretches that skulk in to steal a chicken or waylay any man unwise

enough to go out yonder by himself. I really don't know why I let you in, when I believed you was a Wildrunner. Unless maybe I'd been sitting here alone remembering Ola and . . . and of course they must be hunted, not just to keep them down but because their life goes into the land . . . yet even so, I sometimes wonder if the Goddess won't ever make us a better way."

Oh, yes, Lockridge thought sickly, a better way can be made.

Though not in this age. I see it quite plain. I see that bewildered old workman I knew, two thousand years ago, laid off because he couldn't handle a cybernetic machine. What do you do with your extra people?

If you're a Ranger, you dragoon them into a permanent army. If you're a Warden, you keep them ignorant serfs, with some out-and-out savages as a check, and a religion that—No, there's the worst of the matter. The Wardens themselves believe.

Do you, Storm?

I've got to find out.

VAGUELY, he heard the woman say, "Well, sinful though I am, Ola makes me holy till the next Year Man be chosen. He must have guided me to let you in. What else could have?" With quick eagerness: "Stranger, I helped you. In return, might I

see the Koriach? My grandmother did once. She came flying across this very land, Her hair black as that storm She oftimes calls Herself, oh, in sixty years they've not forgotten! If I might see Her, I would die so happy."

"What?" Exhaustion and the drug were upon him, but he jolted to wakefulness. "The same? That long ago?"

"Who else? The Goddess does not die."

A trick of some kind, maybe using the time gates—But Brann had spoken of combatting her throughout all history—and so few were fitted to go through the corridors—their leaders, at least, must have to spend a total of years or decades in every milieu—*How many?*

The glass fell from Lockridge's hand. He got up. "I can't, stay here," he exploded. "I'm going to call for someone to come get me."

"No, wait, that set only goes to Istar's keep, you don't think the likes of me has a direct line to the Goddess, do you? Sit down, you fool."

Lockridge brushed the woman aside. She sank onto a bed and poured herself another tumblerful. He covered the single call light. The screen came to life with a young man bored, sleepy, and resentful.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "My lady is a-hunting."

"Your lady can hunt herself into Chaos if she wants," Lockridge snapped. "You connect me with the Westmark Koriach's palace."

The beardless chin dropped. "Are you possessed?"

"Listen, pretty boy, if you don't jump I'll nail your hide to the nearest barn, with half of you still inside it. Get me the Warden Hu, the Lady Yuria, any of the court that's available. Tell them Malcolm Lockridge is back. In the Koriach's name!"

"You know them? Forgive me! One, one, one minute, I beg you." The screen blanked.

Lockridge reached for the jug but pulled his hand back. No, he wanted his wits tonight. He stood for a time and raged. The woman watched him, and drank unceasingly.

Hu's face appeared. "You! We took you for lost!" He showed more astonishment than gladness.

"It's a long story," Lockridge cut him off. "Can you trace this call to where I am? All right, come fetch me." He broke the connection.

The crone was too drunk now to show much of the fear that had come over her. She did shrink from him and mumble, "Lor', par'n me, I di'n' know—"

"I still owe you my life," Lockridge said. "But the Koriach is gone away for a while."

I'm sorry." He couldn't remain in this hut where a boy's bed stood so neatly made. He lifted the mother's hand to his lips and went outside.

He didn't know how long he waited. Half an hour, maybe. Two green-clad men swooped from the dark and saluted him. "Let's go," he said.

And over the land they went. Mostly he saw it as one immense night. Here and there lay villages, ringed around the brilliant upwardness of a palace-temple but separated from it and each other by miles of nothing. Often he spied the ankh that was a factory. Sure, he thought, the Wardens live by machines just as much as the Rangers. They only dress the fact up a little more.

I wasn't meant to see any of this. The idea was, I'd go straight to a corridor, if I lived, and get wafted straight to her sanctuary.

IT rose before him, even now so splendid that he knew pain to think this must perish. His guides set him down on a terrace where jasmine perfumed an air kept warm and a fountain sang. Hu stood waiting, in a robe that cascaded like a firefall.

"Malcolm!" He seized Lockridge's shoulders. His enthusiasm did not go deep. "What ever happened? How did you escape, and

go that far north, and, why, this calls for the biggest festival since She chose Her last avatar in the Westmark."

"Look," the American said, "I'm nearly too tired to stand. My mission succeeded and you can have the details later. Right now, how's Auri?"

"Who? Ah, the Neolithic girl. Asleep, I imagine."

"Take me to her."

"Well." Hu frowned and rubbed his chin. "Why are you so anxious about her?"

"Has she been hurt?" Lockridge shouted.

Hu stepped back. "No. Certainly not. However, you must realize she was distraught on your account. And she's evidently misunderstood some things she observed. That's to be expected. Only to be expected. The very reason we had to study someone from her culture so closely. Believe me, we treated her as kindly as possible."

"I believe you. Take me to her."

"Can't she wait? I thought we would give you a stimulant now, and after your basic account is recorded, a celebration—" Hu gave in. "As you wish."

He lifted an arm. A serving youth appeared. Hu gave instructions. "I shall see you tomorrow, Malcolm," he said, and walked off. His robe flamed about him.

Lockridge hardly noticed by what ways he was taken. In the end, a door opened. He trod through, to find a small room with another door opposite and a bed on which Auri lay.

With a hand that wavered, he inserted his *diaglossa* for her time and stroked a soft cheek. Her eyes blinked. "Lynx," she mumbled; and then coming bolt awake: "*Lynx!*"

He sat down and held her close while she laughed and wept and shuddered in his arms. The words torrented from her, "Oh, Lynx, Lynx, I thought you must be dead, take me away, take me home, anything, this is where the wicked dead must go, no, I was not beaten, but they keep people like animals, they *breed* them, and everybody hates everybody else, always they whisper, why do they want to own the others, every one of them does, she can't be the Goddess, she mustn't be a—"

"She isn't," he said. "I came here through her land, I saw her people, and I know. Yes, Auri, we will go home."

The inner door opened. He turned his head and saw the Lady Yuria. Blonde tresses did not quite hide the thing in her ear, nor did her nightcloak mask how stiffly she stood.

"I almost wish you had never admitted that, Malcolm," she said.

1827 B.C. Lockridge crossed the auroral curtain. "When are we?" Hu checked the calendar clock. "Later than I desired," he said. "The end of August."

So Avildaro has lived a fourth of a year since we broke Brann and the Yuthoaz, Lockridge thought. Auri, about as long. Me, a few days, though each one passed like a century. What's Storm done here, this whole summer?

"The uncertainty factor is what makes transtemporal liaison so difficult," Hu complained. He half turned back to the gate. "We might try again." The four soldiers who accompanied them showed alarm. One man actually started to protest. Hu changed his mind. "No. That sort of thing can entangle you in the grisliest paradoxes, if you're unlucky. I did get some couriers back and forth during the past several weeks. At last report, everything was still going smoothly, and that was little more than a local month ago."

He started up the ramp. His men fell in around Lockridge and Auri. The girl clutched the American's hand and breathed, "Are we truly home?"

"You are," he said.

In an abstract way, he wondered why no garrison of Wardens was maintained at a gate

which had become as important as this one. Well, he decided, she's got a variety of reasons, includin' the fact that she needs to keep as many loyal men as possible in her own era. But mainly, I reckon she don't want to chance givin' the show away, in case some Ranger scout reconnoiters this far.

They emerged. The sun stood noon high over a forest rich and vivid at season's climax. A herd of roe deer, cropping the meadow, bolted and flushed a thousand partridge. Auri stood for a moment with glory in her face, raised her arms to the sky and shook back an unbound mane. Before they left, she had changed to the brief garb of her people. Lockridge noticed how startlingly her body had matured while he was gone.

He wished he'd had the nerve to ask for kilt, cloak, and neck-lace, instead of the green uniform given him.

"And we are free again, Lynx." Abruptly the girl must leap and shout for joy.

You are. Maybe. I hope, he thought. Me? I don't know.

They had not mistreated him, during those two days he was held in the palace before being taken here. He could stroll about as he liked, with a single guard. They asked him, quite courteously, to make his report under a

drug which inhibited lying; and he had done so, spilled the whole beanpot, because the alternative could be a mind machine. Afterward Yuria had held lengthy discussions with him, not the least ill-tempered. Her position was that, *imprimis*, his background did not equip him to understand a totally different civilization; *secundus*, what he had seen was not a fair sample; *tertius*, tragedy must be integral to any human life which was to realize its full nobility; *quartus*, granted, abuses did occur, but they were correctible, and under a wiser government they would be.

He'd said nothing to that, nor accepted the favors she offered. She was too alien to him. They all were.

Hu spoke an order. The party rose and aimed for the Limfjord.

This day I'll see Storm again, Lockridge thought. His heart slammed. He couldn't tell how much was fear and how much—well—herself.

Nevertheless, she would judge him. No one else dared. Not only was he a chosen of hers, but he had that enigmatic word from her future.

The woods fell behind. Brilliance danced on the bay, where Avildaro stood under its holy grove. Fisher boats were out; women were at work between the cabins. But camped to the north and spilling eastward—

Auri screamed. Lockridge ripped out an oath.

"The Yuthoaz! Lynx, what has happened?"

"By God, Warden, start explainin'," Lockridge choked.

"Be easy," Hu called over his shoulder. "This was planned. Everything is going well."

LOCKRIDGE slitted his eyes and counted. The Battle Ax people were no horde. He saw a dozen or so chariots, parked outside the tepees of their chieftainly owners. The men, gathering excited to stare at the flyer band, numbered little over a hundred. Others might be out hunting or whatever, but surely not many.

They had brought their women, though. No Orugaray female wore coarse wool sweaters and skirts. Small children scrambled among them. Older ones tended herds of cattle, sheep, horse, a wealth of livestock grazing miles over the range. Turf sheds were being erected.

The enemy had returned to stay.

Storm, Storm, why?

Hu brought them down at the Long House. View of the encampment was cut off by the huts clustered around. The open area before the doorway was deserted; no villager stirred in what had once been the jostling, haggling, laughing center of the community.

The house itself was changed. Garlands used to hang over the lintel, oakleaf in summer and holly in winter. Now an emblem shone in gold and silver, the Labrys across the Sun Disc. Two warriors stood proud guard, leather armored, plumed and painted, spear, dagger, bow, and tomahawk to hand. They gave the newcomers a Warden salute.

"Is She within?" asked Hu.

"Yes, my master," said the older of the Yuthoaz, a stocky forkbearded redhead. The wolf was painted on his shield. Jarred, Lockridge knew Withucar again. His broken arm had knitted. "She makes Her magic behind the blackness."

"Keep this man here for Her summons." Hu went inside. The skin curtain flapped to behind him.

Auri covered her face and sobbed. Lockridge stroked the bright locks. "You need not stay," he murmured. "Go seek your kinfolk."

"If they live."

"They must. There was no second fight. The Storm brought back the strangers for some purpose of her own. Go on, now, home."

Auri started to leave. A soldier grabbed for her. Lockridge slapped down the man's hand. "You have no orders to detain her," he barked. The soldier stepped back with fright on

his countenance. Auri vanished among the huts.

Withucar had watched the interchange with more amusement than his awed companion. His face cracked in a grin. "But you are him who got away from us!" he bawled. "Well, well!"

He leaned his spear and came over to pummel Lockridge's back. "That was a warrior deed," he said with quite genuine warmth. "Ha, how you tumbled us about, and for the sake of one little girl! What fortune had you since? We've become friends, you know, and I've seen the gods so close these past weeks that I grow jaded and think you used no wizardry, only tricks I'd be most glad to learn. Welcome, you!"

Lockridge collected his wits. Here was a chance to get an honest account. "I went afar, on Her business," he said slowly, "and know not what's happened in these lands. No little surprised am I to find your clan returned." He planted a barb: "And to find yourself playing sentry like any common youth."

Withucar signed himself and answered with quick gravity, "Who but the highest born is fit to serve Her?"

"Uh . . . yes. Still, when did the charioteers do so?"

"Since this midsummer, or a while after. See you, we were a frightened people, after him we thought the very Firelord was

beaten and ourselves scattered by outlanders whose weapons were real metal. We counted ourselves lucky to get home, I can tell you, and made big sacrifices to the gods of this land. But an emissary came from Her and spoke to our council. He said She was not too angry with us, we being simple folk whom the giant had tricked. Indeed, She would fain use us as warriors, for Her own must go back whence they came."

OF course, Lockridge remembered. The English had to be sent home: too ill adapted to be efficient help in this age, not to mention being too noticeably foreign. Storm had dropped a remark about some idea she'd gotten, for arming this headquarters of her newest theater of operations. . . .

"Well," Withucar continued, "we were unsure. Adventurous youngsters might join Her guard for some years. But family men? So far from our own kind and gods? Then the emissary explained She wanted a warrior people to come and stay. The fishermen are brave, but untrained in order of battle and modern weapons. She wanted us, not only our hale men but our entire tribe.

"We would get land, and be honored. So would our gods be. Sun and Moon, Fire and Water, Air and Earth—why should they

not wed, and be worshipped alike? So in the end, those phratries you have seen remembered how they were getting too large for their pastures, bethought themselves what could come of alliance with One so powerful, and trekked hither.

"Thus far, we've fared right well. We've skirmished just enough with the Sea People further along this shore to keep us sharp and fetch in some plunder and slaves. Next year there will belike be a real thrust, to make those places pay Her due respect which haven't already done so. Meanwhile, we are settling down in a good land; and She, Sister to the Sun, walks among us."

Storm, these Northern races were never before cursed with empire.

Harshly, Lockridge asked, "How do you get along with the Avildaro natives?"

Withucar spat. "Not so well. They dare not fight, when She has said they must not touch us. But some have stolen off overseas, and the rest are a surly lot. Why, you know what their women are like; yet if a lad of ours wants a bit of fun, his only hope is to catch one in the greenwood and force her. For we're not supposed to harm them either, you know." He brightened. "However, give us time. If they'll not often trade with us, we can manage by ourselves. In the end, we'll

make them ours, even as our ancestors made those they overran into their own image." He leaned close, nudged Lockridge in the ribs, and confided, "Indeed, She intends that outcome. She promised me Herself, not long ago, there'd be weddings between the high houses of both people. And that way, you see, the inheritance goes from their mothers to our sons."

And the end of it, Lockridge thought, is absolute monarchy.

No, wait. That was Ranger work.

But hadn't the Wardens laid the foundation?

He fell so silent that Withucar was hurt and returned to his post. The sun moved toward afternoon.

For all his brooding, Lockridge was idiotically glad when Hu appeared and said, "She will see you now." He almost sprang past the curtain. No one followed him.

THE Long House was still fireless, coldly lit by the globes. The blackness still cut off the rear end. Where Lockridge stood, the floor had been covered with some hard material and the walls draped in gray. Furnishings and machines of the future stood among the wooden pillars like a jeer.

Storm came toward him.

The gauntness of her captivity had departed. Blue-black hair,

golden skin, sea-green eyes, glowed as with a light of their own, and her gait flung her robe back against breast, hip, and leg until he must think anew of the Winged Victory. That robe was white today, deeply cut, trimmed with the blue of Crete's kingdom. The lunar crescent shimmered above her brows.

"Malcolm," she said, in his own language. "This is my true reward: that you came back." She caught his face between her hands and looked at him through a beating stillness. "Thank you," she said in the Orugaray.

He knew when a woman awaited a kiss. Dizzily, he stood his ground and tried to keep every doubt and resentment. "Hu must've given you my report," he said. "I've nothin' to add."

"Nothing you need add, my dear." She gestured to a seat. "Come. We've everything to talk about."

He joined her. Their knees touched. A bottle and two filled goblets stood before them. She gave him one and raised her own. "Will you drink to us?"

"Brann gave me wine too," he rasped.

Her smile faded. She regarded him long before she set her glass down again. "I know what you are thinking," she said.

"That the Wardens are no better than the Rangers, and to hell with 'em both? I reckon so."

"But it isn't true," she said earnestly, never releasing his eyes. "Once you mentioned the Nazis of your time as a case of absolute evil. I agree. They were a Ranger creation. But think—be honest—suppose you were a man from the Neolithic now, transported to 1940. How much difference between countries could you have seen?"

"Your cousin Yuria used some such line of argument."

"Ah, yes. Her." Briefly, the full mouth hardened. "Someday I must do something about Yuria."

She eased, laid her hand on his thigh, and said soft and fast, "You met two, exactly two people in my future, who for their own purposes had rescued you. For an hour or so, you were in their world. They took you back to a place of their own choosing, and left you after making some calculatedly ambiguous remarks. Come, Malcolm, you have had scientific training. What sort of basis is that on which to draw conclusions? Any conclusions!"

"You saw what you were meant to see. You heard what you were intended to hear. They want something to come about to which you are a key. But what is a key, except a tool? That could have been a Ranger world, with a Potemkin village built for you alone. Or a Warden world. Or—I admit this is most likely—a

world that has changed. How do you know the roots of that change are not a Warden victory? I think they must be.

"For, Malcolm, a great deal of the wrong you met in my land is due the war. Without an enemy, we would need less discipline, we would be free to experiment and reform. Yes, I know what Istar is like. But you are not so naive as to think the most absolute ruler can simply issue a decree and have her will come to pass. Are you? I must use what fate has given. It so happens that Istar supports me. Her successor—and I cannot upset the law of succession with dangerously shaking the whole realm—the one who would come after her is of another faction."

"Yuria's?" he asked.

Storm grinned. "Dear Yuria. How she would like to be Koriach! And what a poor one she would make!" She grew sober. "I don't undervalue myself, Malcolm. You have seen what I can do. By trapping Brann, with your help, I have dealt the Rangers what could be the start of a mortal blow. So few are able to mount these temporal operations, and so much depends on them. While Brann was free, most of my energy must go simply to fending him off. Now—I know who's gotten his command, and frankly, I can think circles around Garwen.

"But our very triumph has loosed a whole new set of problems. While you were gone, faithful Hu had his spies out, and his messengers went back and forth. My rivals—oh, yes, there are more and darker palace intrigues at home than you have guessed—those who plot against me, under the hood of friendship we must wear while the war continues—they've seized on the strategic issue. Did not Yuria hint at rewards if you would be her agent in my camp?" Lockridge must nod. "Well, for purposes of rallying support, that faction maintains we must continue to concentrate our effort in the Mediterranean and Orient. Ignore the North, they say; it has no importance; though the Indo-European conquest will surely happen in the South and East, let us keep it from becoming of real value to the enemy. Whereas I say, abandon those regions; keep only a token force there, while the Rangers tie up their best men; unknown to them, let us create in the North a thousand-year stronghold!"

HE drew his attention from high-boned features and curving body to say, with less force than intended, "Is that why you've betrayed people here who trusted you?"

"Ah, yes. I've called in the Yuthoaz, and the megalith builders

don't like it." Storm sighed. "Malcolm, I had you read books and spend time in the Danish National Museum. You should know the archeological facts. The new culture is coming in, and will mold the future, and nothing you or I can do will remove those relics which prove it from their glass cases. Yet we can control the details, of which the relics say nothing. Would you rather the newcomers take Denmark as they are going to take India, with butchery and enslavement?"

"But in God's name, what're they to you?"

"I couldn't keep the Englishmen," she said. "They have been sent home. As a matter of fact, I've even sent those agents you met back to their sixteenth century. Once the basic work here was done, they were of little help. And because of my rivals' pressure, I cannot order real experts from Crete—not until I can show solid promise here."

She gestured widely. "What then will I show?" she said. "A new and long-enduring nation. A powerful folk who, under whatever mythological compromise, follow the Goddess. A source of supplies, wealth, men if we need them. A section of space-time so well defended that there we can build Warden strength against the final conflict. Given the beginnings of this—well, the other

Koriachs will incline toward me. My position at home will be secured. More important, my plan will be accepted and our full force brought to bear here. And so the Ranger obscenity will come nearer its destruction—after which we can right some wrongs in our own place."

Her head sank. "But I am so alone," she whispered.

He couldn't help himself, he must take the hand that lay empty on her lap. And his other arm went about her shoulder.

She leaned close. "War is an ugly business," she said. "One has to do heartbreaking things. I promised you, after this mission you could go home. But I need every soul who will stand by me."

"I will," he said.

After all . . . did he not have a mission unfulfilled?

"You're no ordinary man, Malcolm," she said. "The kingdom we build will need a king."

He kissed her.

She replied to him.

Presently she said in his ear, "Come on, you man. Over yonder."

The sun declined. Fisher boats returned from a west where the waters sheened yellow, smoke rose out of huts, the Wise Woman and her acolytes went forth to offer their evening oblations in the grove. Thunders beat across the meadows, where the Battle Ax

men drummed their god to rest.

Storm stirred. "You'd better go now," she sighed. "I'm sorry, but I do need sleep. And this being divine takes most of my time. But you'll come again. Won't you? Please."

"Whenever you want," he answered, deep in his throat.

He walked into twilight. Peace dwelt within him. Beyond the Long House he found the Tenil Orugaray at their lives. Children still romped outdoors, men gossiped, through open entrances he saw women weaving, sewing, cooking, grinding meal, shaping pots. His passage left a wake of silence.

At the cabin which had been Echegon's, he entered. Here he could stay.

The family sat around their fire. They scrambled up and signed themselves, in a manner that not long ago had been foreign to them. Only to Auri was he still human. She came to him and said unsteadily, "How long you were with the Goddess."

"I had to be," he told her.

"You'll speak to Her for us, won't you?" she begged. "She may not know how wicked they are."

"Who?"

"Those She brought in. Oh, Lynx, what I've heard! How they graze their beasts in our crops, and seize unwilling women, and scorn us in our own country.

They raided our cousins, did you know? There are people from Ulara and Faono, my own dear kinfolk, in their camp this night—slaves. Tell Her, Lynx!"

"I will, if I can," he said impatiently. He wanted to be alone with this day for a while. "But what must be, must be. Now, may I have something to eat, and then a quiet corner? I've much to think about."

XV

LIKE every other war Lockridge knew of, this one demanded that the bulk of effort go into the unspectacular organizing of things. Being short-handed was equally familiar. With agents scattered the length and breadth of history, the time contenders were appallingly so. Storm Darroway was still worse off: practically alone.

She admitted that political jealousy was not the sole reason she had no support from her coavatars. Her scheme was radical, involved scrapping a considerable investment in the old, doomed civilizations elsewhere. Some of the Warden queens had been sincere when they informed her the payoff she swore could be gotten must be demonstrated before they would help. For the fact was, the time war seemed to bypass Bronze Age Northern Europe. Neither Wardens nor

Rangers were known to be conducting significant operations in that thousand-year, thousand-mile stretch of space-time.

"But hey, don't that prove you're wrong?" Lockridge fretted.

"No," Storm said. "It could just as well mean success. Remember, because of the corridor guardians, we in our age are ignorant of our own future. We can't foretell what we are going to do next. Even such cause-and-effect circles as we used to trap Brann are rare, thanks to the uncertainty factor in the gates."

"Sure, sure. But look, sweetheart, you most certainly can check a past era, like this one, and find out whether any of your own people are around."

"If their work runs smoothly, what will we see? Nothing except the natives leading their everyday lives. When Warden agents are hidden from the Rangers, they are to a large extent also hidden from other Wardens."

"Uh . . . I reckon so. The security problem. You can't let your own cohorts know more than they have to, or the enemy's goin' to find out."

"Furthermore," Storm said haughtily, "this is my theater. I will employ my own people, in what manner I see fit. The power I get will not be used just against the Rangers. No, I've some accounts to settle at home too."

"Sometimes you scare the dickens out of me," he said.

She smiled and ruffled his hair. "And other times?" she purred.

"You make up for it, in spades!"

But they had not long together. There was too much to be done.

Storm must remain in Avildaro, goddess, judge, maker of decisions and maker of laws, until the nation she was building had taken the shape she wanted. Hu must be her thread of contact with home and with Crete. Ordinary soldiers were useful only as couriers or guards; in this case, the men Hu had brought were not even required in that capacity, and she sent them back. Trained agents could not well be spared from other milieus. Most desperately she needed an able man to work with the tribes.

LOCKRIDGE went forth. Withucar and some warriors accompanied him. He had gotten quite fond of the red Yutho.

The ultimate object was to cement the people of the Labrys and the people of the Ax into one. That was certainly going to happen: Jutland would come into history as a nation, and even beyond Lockridge's century remain identifiably itself. Likewise for many another region. The question was, would the Indo-Euro-

pean incursion which the Rangers had launched to destroy the old culture do so here, or would so much of the megalith builder spirit survive, however disguised, that the Wardens could secretly but securely draw upon the Bronze Age North? Reports from the next millennium indicated the latter might well be the case, that the Rangers' move was to recoil upon them in this part of the world.

But the founding of those kingdoms must be slow, both for lack of agents and because the event must look natural. (Must in fact *be* natural; a jerry-built empire like Alexander's or Tamerlane's was too short-lived to be of much value.) The first step was to bring the villagers around the Lifjord into a union more close and demanding than they had known before. For that, Storm had the awe of her own presence, and her Yuthoaz allies wherever force was necessary. At the same time, she had to league herself with the inland tribes, both aboriginal and newcomer.

She sent Lockridge on the first such mission.

He would have preferred to go on horseback. But these shaggy, long-headed ponies had never been ridden, and it would take too long to break one. He walked. When they neared a settlement, he and Withucar got onto their chariots, set their teeth against

the jouncing, and arrived in what this era took for dignity.

On the whole, though—even after what followed—Lockridge admitted he'd seldom had more fun. His pet recreation had always been to backpack into some wilderness area; now he could do it with Withucar's liege men to carry the load. When they reached people, they were hospitably received, and he was fascinated to observe details that weren't recorded in his *diaglossa*. (Which, gradually, he was ceasing to need, as repeated usage imprinted speech and customs on his natural memory.) In Battle Ax camps, rough ceremony was followed by feasting. The ancient agricultural villages were a little wary at first: not scared, however, for they hadn't had many clashes with the immigrants, the land being wide and thinly settled. They would begin with elaborate rituals. But they were apt to end with a celebration that would have raised twentieth-century eyebrows.

The message Lockridge bore was simple. The veritable Goddess had established Herself in Avildaro. She was not, as some had said, the enemy of Sun and Fire; rather, She was Mother, Wife, and Daughter to the male gods. The Powers desired Their children to be united as They Themselves were. To that end, the first of a series of councils

would be held at Avildaro this midwinter, to discuss ways and means. All headmen were invited. Lockridge didn't add, "Or else." That would have been both antagonizing and unnecessary.

Some of what he saw and heard repelled him. But we'll fix that, he promised himself. Mostly, he enjoyed the people. He couldn't even call them less sophisticated than his own. Albeit tenuously, they had broad contacts: in the case of the Battle Ax tribes, as far as southern Russia. Their politics were almost as complicated as the twentieth century's, on a smaller scale, and untainted by ideology; their mores were a good deal subtler; if ignorant of physics, historiography, or that pseudo-science called economics, they were wise in the ways of earth, sky, and humankind.

HIS route took him over country more fertile than what he had seen in the future; north to the surf and wide strands of the Skaw; southward again along the Limfjord. A small beginning. Yet he needed almost a month. The heaths were blossoming in purple and gold, sunrise saw hoarfrost and the leaves had begun to turn color, before he reached Avildaro again.

Lockridge's party had been seen from afar. He rode through the Yutho encampment among

lusty cheers, onto the no man's land between it and the village. No Tenil Orugaray were out to welcome him.

Except Auri. She came on jubilant feet, calling to him over and over. He made his driver stop, swept her up and hugged her. "Yes, little one, I am fine, we had no trouble, of course I am glad to see you but I do have to tell the Goddess my story first—" He would have liked to give her a lift, but the chariot scarcely had room. She danced beside the wheels the whole way.

At the Long House, trouble touched her. "I will abide in my home, Lynx," she said, and hastened off.

Withucar stared after her and scratched his beard. "A good bit of flesh, yon," he said. "How is she with a man?"

"She's a maiden," Lockridge answered curtly.

"Eh?" Dismounting, the Yutho gaped. "Can't be. Not among the Sea People."

Lockridge explained.

"We-e-ell," the chief murmured. "Well, well. I've liked her looks erenow, but took without thought that she was yours. She does muzzle up to you every chance."

"We're friends," Lockridge said with rising irritation. "Were she a man, we would be oath-brothers. Any hurt done her is done me, and I'll take revenge."

"Oh, yes, yes. Still, you'd not wish her left single forever, would you?"

Lockridge could only shake his head.

"And she is the inheritor of the old headman here; and you say the curse is off her—Hm."

Well, Lockridge thought with an odd sinking, that may turn out the best answer to her problem.

He couldn't keep her long in mind, though. Storm waited.

In the presence of Hu and Withucar, she greeted him formally, and seemed only half to listen to his report. He was soon dismissed. However, she had given him a smile and said an English word: "Tonight."

AFTER that, and the easy comradeship of his past weeks, he didn't want to spend the day among the Tenil Orugaray. They had changed from the merry folk he knew before, into a bewildered and sullen occupied country. A gap had opened between him and them; he was Her agent, and She had chosen to reveal some of Her more terrible aspects. He could have visited the Yuthoaz . . . but no, he would see their slaves. Auri? Well, that had become a rather difficult relationship. He hiked off alone. The sacred pool on the forest edge probably wasn't too cold for him to wash

off his journey's grime. He should have been happy. But something had gone sour. He chewed it over as the miles went past. Surely the peaceful unification of the two races was a good goal. And the Battle Ax men weren't bad by nature; just sort of overbearing. Like untrained boys. That was it. They needed the fear of the Lord thrown into them.

Progress, Lockridge thought sadly. Will man be any different, four thousand years from now?

Maybe John and Mary's people don't have to have their noses rubbed in blood before they can honor a stranger. But how do we get from here to there?

Maybe that's my job. To lay one single brick for their house.

Only how? The Yuthoaz know perfectly well they would've beaten the Tenil Orugaray if the gods hadn't taken a hand. They're here now, by Storm's invitation, because they make better warriors. It's fine to call a council and set up a king. But how do we escape a kingdom made up of master and serf?

Does Storm even want to?

No! Stop that!

He had been so lost in his brown study that he was almost to the pool before he saw what was going on. And they—seven young men and a girl from the village—were so intent that they hadn't seen him coming.

She was stretched on the boulder from which tools were cast as offerings. While his companions stood by with mistletoe in their hands, the seventh man raised a flint knife above her breast.

"What the hell!" Lockridge bellowed.

He dashed toward them. They scattered back. When they saw who he was, fear turned them less than human, they groveled on the earth while the girl came piecemeal from her trance.

Lockridge controlled his stomach and said in his deepest voice: "By Her name, I demand confession of your misdeeds."

He got it, in stammerings and pleadings. Some of the details were left out, but he could fill those in for himself.

"Goddess" was no good translation of the word for what She was in this culture. The Japanese *kami* came nearer: any supernatural being, from this rock, or the tree whose pardon one asked before felling it, to the vast vague Powers that dominated the elements. Dominated, not controlled. There was no formal theology, no separation of the magical and the divine, all things had some mystical strength.

These of the kindly Tenil Orugaray saw their country invaded by Her will. They could have escaped to Flanders or England, as

some had already done, but the instinct of homeland was too deep in them. Instead, they would try to raise powers against Her. They had heard tales of human sacrifice among the inland people, and knew those inlanders were still free—

"Go home," Lockridge said. "I call no ill down on you. I will not tell Her about this. Better times are coming. That I swear."

They crawled off. When they had gotten some distance, they ran. Lockridge sprang into the pool and washed himself savagely.

HE did not return till after sunset. The weather had thickened, a rack of clouds blew from sea, bringing cold and an early dusk. None were abroad in the village, and skins across the doorways shut him out.

Whatever his feelings, a man must eat, and Lockridge was bumming off the house which had been Echegon's. He walked into a stillness. Smoke stung his eyes, shadows filled the corners and crowded close around the wan flicker in the firepit. Auri's kin sat as if waiting for him. "Where is Auri?" Lockridge asked.

Her mother pointed to a dais. Wheaten hair spilled across the deerskin blanket. "She wore herself out weeping. Must I rouse her?"

"No." Lockridge looked from face to shut and careful face. "What is the matter?"

"Surely you know," her mother said, without even accusing him.

"I don't. Tell me! I want to help," he groped.

"This afternoon came that Yutho chief called Withucar and asked that she be his . . . what is their word?"

"Wife," Lockridge said. He remembered that Withucar had three.

"Yes. His alone. A kind of slave, who must do his every bidding. Yet, well, you are wiser than us, and you know this man. He said we would all come under his protection. Is that true? This house has sore need of a guardian."

Lockridge nodded. Protection has a price, he thought, but did not say so.

"Auri refused him," the mother said wearily. "He answered that the Goddess had told him he could have her. Then she grew wild, and cried out for you. We calmed her a little and sought the Long House. The Goddess saw us, after a wait, and commanded Auri to join with Withucar. But they do such things differently among the Yuthoaz. It may not be until certain rites have taken place. So we brought her home. She raved of killing herself, or taking a boat alone—that would

be the same thing—but at last she slept. What do you think?"

"I will speak to the Goddess," Lockridge said unevenly.

"Thank you. I do not know myself what is best. She would be unfree with him, but are we not unfree already? And The Storm has commanded. Yet Auri could never gladly spend her life in such narrow streams. Perhaps you can tell her it's best."

"Or get her released," Lockridge said. "I will go at once."

INSIDE, the Long House the globes still glowed. Storm sat alone at the control board of a psychocomputer. In this heated place she wore a very brief tunic, but he looked upon her without desire. She turned about, laughed, and stretched. "So soon, Malcolm? Well, I'm tired of extrapolating trends. The data are mostly guesswork anyhow."

"Look," he began, "we've got to talk."

Her mirth went away and she sat quite still.

"We're goin' about this project wrong," he said. "I figured the original people here would get reconciled to the new arrangements. But instead, while I was away, things went from bad to worse."

"You certainly can switch moods in a hurry," she said, chill of tone. "Be more specific. You

mean that friction between the tribes has increased. What did you expect? What am I supposed to do, disown my good Yutho allies?"

"No, just take them down a peg or two."

"Malcolm, my dear," Storm said more gently, "we haven't come to build a utopia. That's an impossible task anyway. What we are concerned with is the creation of strength. And that means favoring those who have the potential of being strong. Before you get too self-righteous, ask if the dwellers on Eniwetok will really want to be moved, to make room for your country's nuclear tests. We can try to minimize the pain we inflict, but someone who refuses to inflict any has no business in this world."

Lockridge drew back his shoulders and said, "Okay, you can outargue me whenever—"

Storm rose. Her look was shameless and enchanting. "Especially in one way," she said.

"No, wait, damn it!" Lockridge protested. "Maybe we do have to be bastards, we humans. But not without any qualification. A man's got to stand by his friends, at least. Auri's a friend of mine."

Storm halted. A while she stood motionless, then ran fingers down a night-black lock and said softly, "Yes, her. I thought

you'd raise the question. Go on."

"Well, uh, well, she don't want to be in Withucar's harem."

"Is he a bad man?"

"No. But—"

"Do you want her to remain single: knowing how unnatural that makes her here?"

"No, no, no—"

"Is anyone else available to her?"

"Well—"

"Unless, perhaps, yourself," Storm growled.

"Oh, good God!" Lockridge said. "You know I—you and me—"

"Don't set yourself too high, my man. But as for this wench. If the races are to become one, there have to be unions. Marriage is too strong an institution for the Battle Ax people to give up; therefore the Sea People will have to accept it. Auri is the heiress of this community's leadership, Withucar is as influential as any in his tribe. Both in practice and as an example, nothing better could happen than their marriage."

"Well, though—I mean, she deserves a free choice."

"Who is there for her to choose, except you who don't want her?"

Lockridge stood helpless. Storm came to him and put her arms about his neck. "I believe Auri, in her childish way, calls you Lynx. I would like to do

that." She rubbed her head on his breast. "Let me be childish now and then, with you."

"Aw—look—"

A Yutho voice called from beyond the curtain: "Goddess, the lord Hu asks to come in."

"Damn!" Storm whispered. "I'll get rid of him as fast as I can." Aloud: "Let him enter."

Spare and lithe in his green uniform, Hu trod in to bow. "I beg your forgiveness, brilliance," he said. "But I was out on an aerial sweep."

Storm tautened. "Well?"

"Most likely this means nothing. Still, I saw a considerable fleet beating across the North Sea. The lead ship is Iberian, the rest are skin boats. I never heard of such a combination. They're plainly bound from England to Denmark."

"At this season?" Awareness of Lockridge drained from Storm. She let him go and stood alone in the frigid light.

"Yes, that's another paradox, brilliance," Hu said. "I couldn't detect advanced equipment. If they have any, it must be negligible. But they will be here in a day or two."

"Some Ranger operation? Or a mere local adventure? These are times when the natives themselves look to new things." Storm frowned. "Best I go glance at them myself."

She fetched her gravity belt

and fastened it about her waist, an energy pistol at the hip. "You may as well stay and rest, Malcolm. I won't be gone long," she said, and left beside Hu.

FOR some time Lockridge prowled the hall. The night was noisy with wind, but he heard a thrusting inner silence. And the gods so clumsily and tenderly hacked out of the pillars—did they look at him? Lord, Lord, he thought, what does a guy do when he can't help somebody who cares for him?

What is truth?

A woman six thousand years hence told him her son had been burnt alive. But she knew the cause was good. Didn't she?

Lockridge checked himself. He had almost gone through the veil of lightlessness. Brann had suffered and died behind it. His guts knotted. Why did they continue to maintain the thing?

Why hadn't he asked?

I reckon I never wanted to, he understood, and stepped through.

This end of the house had not been refurnished. The floor was dirt, the seats covered with skins gone dusty. One globe illuminated the section; shadows lay in every corner. The black barricade cut off sound, too. The wind was gone. Lockridge stood in total quiet.

That which was on the table,

wired into the machine, stirred and whimpered.

"No!" Lockridge screamed, and fled.

Long afterward, he got the courage to stop sobbing and return. He could do no else. Brann, who had fought as best he could for his own people, was not dead.

Little was left, except skin drawn dry across the big arching bones. Tubes fed into him and kept the organism together. Electrodes pierced the skull, jolted the brain and recorded what was brought forth. For some reason of stimulus, the eyelids had been cut away and the balls of the eyes must stare into the light overhead.

"I didn't know," Lockridge wept.

Tongue and lips struggled in the wreck of a face. Lockridge wasn't wearing his diaglossa for Brann's age, but he could guess that a fragment of self pleaded, "Kill me."

While just beyond the curtain—her and me—

Lockridge reached for the machine.

"Stop! What are you doing?"

He turned, very slowly, and saw Storm and Hu. The man's energy gun was out, aimed at his belly. The woman said urgently: "I wanted to spare you this. It does take time, to extract the last traces of memory. There isn't much cerebrum by now,

he's really no more than a worm, so you needn't feel pity. Remember, he had begun to do the same thing to me."

"Does that excuse you?" Lockridge shouted.

"Will Pearl Harbor excuse Hiroshima?" she gibed in quick defense.

For the first time in his existence, Lockridge said an obscenity to a woman. "Never mind your fancy reasons," he gasped. "I know how you kept yourself in my country . . . by murderin' my countrymen. I know John and Mary gave me an honest look at the way you run your own territory. How old are you? I got enough hints about that too. You can't have done every crime you have done, except in hundreds o' years, your own time. That's why they've got the knife in you, back at the palace—why everybody wants to be the Koriach—she's made immortal. While Ola's mother is old at forty."

"Stop that! I will not listen," Storm cried.

Lockridge spat. "I got no business wonderin' how many lovers you've had, or how I'm just a thing you used," he said. "But you ain't goin' to use Auri, understand? Nor her people. Nor anyone. To hell with you: the hell you came from!"

Hu leveled the gun and said, "That will suffice."

RAIN started before dawn. Lockridge awoke to the sound of it muffled on the peat roof of the cabin where he lay, loud on the muddy ground. Through a lattice across the doorway, he looked over pastures where Yutho cattle huddled as drenched as their herdsmen. Sere leaves dropped one by one off an oak, under the steady beat of water. He couldn't see the rest of the village from this outlier hut, nor the bay. That added to an isolation he had believed was already infinite.

He didn't want to put his Warden uniform back on, but once out from the skins, he found the air too chill and damp. I'll ask for an Orugaray rig, or even a Yutho one, he thought. She'll give me that much, I hope, before she—

Does what?

He shook himself, angrily. Having managed a few hours' sleep, after he was put here, he should now be able to hold his courage.

Hard to do, though, when everything had broken in his grasp during a single night. To learn what Storm and her cause really were—well, he'd had clues enough, had simply ducked his duty to think about them, until the sight of Brann snapped the leash she had put on him—and

to know what she would make of these people, whom he had become so fond of—that was too deep a wound.

Poor Auri, he thought in his hollowness. Poor Withucar.

The remembrance of the girl was curiously healing. He might yet be able to do something for her, if no one else. Maybe she could stow away on that fleet bound hither. (Evidently a joint Iberian-British venture, to judge from some remarks that passed between Storm and Hu while they oversaw the preparation of a jail for Lockridge. The size as well as composition was unique; but then, some rather large events appeared to be going on in England these days, of which the founding of Stonehenge might be one consequence. Storm was too preoccupied to care much. It satisfied her that everyone aboard, seen through infrared magnifiers, was of archaic racial type, no agents from the future.) Of course, in this weather the fleet would doubtless heave to, and not arrive for an extra day or so. He might not be around then. But he could, perhaps, find ways to suggest the idea of escape to Auri.

Purpose restored him a little. He went to the entrance and stuck his face out between the lashed poles, into the rain. Four Yuthoaz stood guard, wrapped in leather cloaks. They edged

from him, lifted their weapons and made signs against evil.

"Greeting, you fellows," Lockridge said. Storm had let him keep his diaglossas. "I want to ask a favor."

The squad leader nerved himself to reply, sullenly, "What can we do for one who's fallen under Her wrath, save watch him as we were told?"

"You can send a message for me. I only want to see a friend."

"None are allowed here. She ordered that Herself. We've already had to chase away one girl."

Lockridge clenched his teeth. Naturally Auri would have heard the news. Many a frightened eye had seen him marched off last night, by torchlight, under Yutho spears.

"Well," he said, "then I want to see the Goddess."

"Hoy-ah!" The warrior laughed. "You'd have us tell Her to come at *your* bidding?"

"You can tell her with respect that I beg audience, can't you? When you're relieved, if not before."

"Why should we? She knows what she wants to do."

Lockridge donned a sneer and said, "Look, you swine, I may be in trouble but I've not lost every power. You'll do as I say or I'll rot the flesh off your bones. Then you'll have to pray for the Goddess' help anyway."

They cringed. Lockridge saw foreshadowed the kind of realm that Storm would build. "Go!" he said. "And get me some breakfast on the way."

"I, I dare not. None of us dare leave before we are allowed. But wait." The leader drew a horn from beneath his cloak and wind-ed it, a dull sad noise through the rain. Presently a gang of youths arrived, axes in hand, to learn what the trouble was. The leader sent them on Lockridge's errands.

IT was a puny triumph, but nonetheless drove some more hopelessness off him. He attacked the coarse bread and roast pork with unexpected appetite. Storm can break me, he thought, but she'll need a mind machine for the job.

He was not even surprised when she came, a couple of hours later. What did astonish him was the way his heart still turned over at sight of her. In full robe she walked over the land, big and supple and altogether beautiful. The Wise Woman's staff was in her hand, a dozen Yuthoaz at her back. Lockridge saw Withucar among them. From her belt of power sprang an unseen shield off which the rain cascaded, so that she stood in a silvery torrent, water nymph and sea queen.

She halted before the cabin

and regarded him with eyes more sorrowful than anything else. "Well, Malcolm," she said in English. "I find I must come when you ask."

"I'm afraid I'll never come to your whistle again, darlin'," he told her. "Too bad. I was right proud to belong to you."

"No more?"

He shook his head. "I wish I could, but I can't."

"I know. You are that kind of man. If you weren't, this would hurt me less."

"What're you goin' to do? Shoot me?"

"I am trying to find a different way. You don't know how hard I am trying."

"Look," he said with a hope wild, sweet, and doomed, "you can drop this project. Quit the time war. Can't you?"

"No." Her pride was somber. "I am the Koriach."

He had no answer. The rain hammered down around them.

"Hu wanted to kill you out of hand," Storm said. "You are the instrument of destiny, and if you have become our enemy, dare we let you live? But I replied that your death might be the very event that is necessary to cause—what?" Her resolution flickered low and she stood isolated in the blurring waterfall. "We don't know. I thought, how gladly I thought, when you came back to me, that you were the

sword of my victory. Now I don't know what you are. Anything I do could bring ruin. Or bring success, who can tell? I know only that you are fate, and that I want so much to save you. Will you let me?"

Lockridge looked into the haunted green eyes and said with huge pity, "They were right in the far future. Destiny makes us slaves. You're too good for that, Storm. Or no, not good—not evil either, maybe, not anything human—but it's wrong for this to happen to you."

Did he see tears through the rain? He wasn't sure. Her voice, at least, was steady: "If I decide you must die, it shall be quickly and cleanly, by my own hand; and you will be laid in the dolmen of the gate with warrior's honors. But I beg that that need not be."

He fought against a witchcraft older and stronger than any powers her distorted world had given her, and said: "While I wait, can I say goodbye, or somethin', to a few friends?"

Then anger leaped forth. She stamped the staff into mud and cried, "Auri? No! You'll see Auri wedded tomorrow, in yonder camp. I'll talk to you again afterward and learn if you're really such a contemptible idiot as you act!"

She turned, in a whirl of cloak and gown, and left him.

Her escort followed. Withucar dropped behind. A sentry tried to stop him. Withucar shoved the man aside, came to the door, and held out his hand.

"You're still my brother, Malcolm," he said gruffly. "I'll speak for you to Her."

Lockridge took the clasp. "Thanks," he mumbled. His eyes stung. "One thing you can do for me. Be kind to Auri, will you? Let her stay a free woman."

"As far as I'm able. We'll name a son for you, and sacrifice at your grave—if things come to that. But I hope not. Luck ride with you, friend." The Yutho departed.

Lockridge sat down on the dais and stared into the rain. His thoughts were long, and nobody else's business. Weariness finally claimed him and he slept.

HIS dreams were strange. When he rose out of them, inch by inch, he didn't know for a while that he was doing so. Real and unreal twisted together, he was wrecked in a Storm-dark ocean, Auri blew past, crying his mother's name, a horn summoned hounds, he went down into green depths and heard the clangor of iron being forged, fought his way back to where the lightnings burned, thunder smote him and—and the hut was filled with blackness, twilight seeped through the fog,

men shouted and weapons clattered—

No dream!

He stumbled from his bed to the door, shook the bars and yelled into the slow wet roil, "What's happenin'? Where is everybody? Let me out, God damn you! Storm!"

Drums thudded in the gray. A Yutho voice roared, hoofs hammered past, wheels banged and axles squealed. Elsewhere, wildly, men rallied each other. From afar, a woman shrieked, under a mounting rattle of stone. And metal, bronze had been unscabbarded, he heard the sinister whistle of an arrow flight.

Figures moved, vague in the smoky dusk, his guards. "Some attack from the shore," the leader told him harshly.

"Why do we wait, Hrano?" shrilled another. "Our place is in the fight!"

"Stay where you are! Our place is here, till She tells us otherwise." Feet pattered by. "Hoy, you, who's fallen on us? How goes the battle?"

"Men from the water," the unseen one panted. "They're bound straight for our camps. Follow your standards! I go to my chief."

Pirates, Lockridge thought. Must be that fleet the Wardens saw. Could only be. They didn't lie to after all. Instead, they rowed day and night, and this

fog gave 'em cover for a landin' up the beach a ways. Yes, sure. Some sea rover from the Mediterranean's gotten himself together a bunch o' tribesmen. England's too tough, from what I hear, but across the North Sea is loot to be had.

No. What can they do, as soon as Storm and Hu start shootin' them down?

And, well, that was probably best. Avildaro had suffered enough without being sacked, without Auri being taken for a slave. Lockridge strained at his bars and waited for the eruption of panic when that gang found they'd tangled with the Goddess.

A shape sprang from the fog, a tall blond man with furious eyes. The Yutho leader waved him away. "By the Maruts, you Orugaray chicken," he ordered, "get back where you belong!"

The big man rammed home his harpoon. The leader clutched a pierced stomach, uttered a strangled moan, and folded to his knees.

Another guard snarled. His tomahawk swung high. A second villager came behind him, cast a fishline around his neck, and tightened it with two great sailor hands. The third sentry went also down, head beaten in by tree-felling axes.

"We've got them, girl," the tall man called. He went to the door. Sufficient light lingered for

Lockridge to see the water drops that jewelled his beard, and recognize a son of Echegon. He knew a few others by name, of the half score who waited uneasily beyond, and the rest by sight. Two of them had been accomplices in yesterday's attempt at human sacrifice. They stood now like men.

Echegon's son drew a flint knife and sawed at the thongs binding the lattice together. "We'll have you out soon," he said, "if none chance by to see us."

"What—" Lockridge was too stunned to do more than listen.

"We're bound off, I think. Auri fared around the whole day, pleading with everyone she thought she could trust, to help you. We didn't dare at first, we sat in her house and muttered our fears. And then these strangers came, like a sign from the gods, and she reminded us of what powers she got in the underworld. So let the fight last only a little while more, and we'll be on our way. This is no good place to live any longer." The man peered anxiously at Lockridge. "We do this because Auri swore you have the might to shield us from the Goddess' wrath. And she ought to know. But is she right?"

Before Lockridge could reply, Auri was there, to hail him in a shivering whisper. She herself

trembled, under the wet cloak of her hair; but she carried a light spear and he saw that she was in truth a woman. "Lynx, you can lead us away safe. I know you can. Say you will be our head."

THE nearing battle was no more loud or violent than Lockridge's pulse. "I don't deserve this," he said. "I don't deserve you." But he had spoken unthinkingly in English. She straightened herself and said like a queen:

"He casts a spell for us. He will take us where he knows is best."

The thongs parted. Lockridge squeezed between two poles. Fog curled around him. He tried to guess where in the twilight the combat was going on. It seemed to be spread over a wide front, moving inland. So the bayshore ought to be deserted for now.

"This way," he said.

They moved close to his protection. A number of women were with them, children clustered near or held as babes in arms. Anyone who'll take such a risk to be free, he thought, has a call on everything I've got to offer.

No. One item more. "I've a duty at the Long House," he said.

"Lynx!" Auri gripped his arm in anguish. "You can't!"

"Go on down to the boats," he

said. "Make sure you have water skins and gear for hunting and fishing aboard. By the time you are ready to go, I will have joined you. If not, leave without me."

"Her place?" The son of Eche-gon shuddered. "What must you do there?"

"Something that—well, we'll have no good luck unless I do."

"I will come too," Auri said.

"No." He stooped and kissed her, a brief touch across lips that tasted of salt. Even then he caught a scent of her hair and warmth. "Everywhere else, if you wish, but not here. Go make me a place in the boat." He ran off before she could say more.

The Long House stood unguarded, as he had hoped. Though if Storm or Hu were still within. . . . He had no choice except to cross that threshold.

The hall was empty.

He ran among machines and gods. At the curtain of lightlessness, he almost stopped. No, he told himself, you mustn't. He passed through.

The agony of Brann seared upward at him. He put the di-glossa of a terrible tomorrow into his ear, stooped, and said, "I am going to let you die if you want."

"Oh, I beg," the mummy voice gasped. Lockridge recoiled. Storm had said no reasoning mind was left.

Storm lied about that, too, he thought, and went to work.

Unarmed, he couldn't cut the Ranger's throat. But he yanked out wires and tubes. The blackened body writhed, with little mewling appeals. Not much blood trickled from the piercings.

"Lie there," Lockridge said. He stroked Brann's forehead. "You won't have long to wait. Goodbye."

He fled, the breath rough in his throat.

As he crossed the veil, racket rolled over him. Some part of the fight was swaying back into town. And there went the sizzle of an energy gun. Light flimmed lurid past the doorway curtain. So much for the pirates, Lockridge thought. If I don't get out of here right away, I never will.

He ran into the square.

Hu the Warden appeared at its edge. "Koriach!" he was shouting, lost and frantic. "Koriach, where are you? We must stand together—my dearest—" The gun which made fountainplay further off among the huts was not the one in his hand.

His head wove back and forth, in search of his goddess. Lockridge knew he himself couldn't get clear away, nor even back inside the Long House, before he was seen. He sprang.

Hu saw him and yelped. The

pistol slewed about. Lockridge hit the green-clad body. They went over onto the earth and struggled for control of the weapon. Hu's grip on the butt was not to be broken. Lockridge pulled from his clawing and squirmed around to the Warden's back. He anchored himself with a scissor lock, cast an arm around his enemy's neck, and heaved.

A dry snap came, so loud he heard it through the tumult. Hu ceased to move. Lockridge scrambled up and saw death.

"I'm sorry." He bent to close the staring eyes, before he took the gun and was off.

For an instant he was tempted to look for Storm, now that he was armed like her. But no; too chancy; one of her Yuthoaz might well brain him while he was stalemated by her energy shield. And then what would become of Auri? He owed the world to her and that handful of her kinfolk, down on the strand.

Besides, he wasn't sure he could bring himself to fire on Storm.

The water's edge gleamed forth. He made out a big skinboat rocking shadowlike on the ripples, filled with shadow shapes. Auri waited ashore. She sped to him with laughter and tears. He gave her, and himself, a moment's embrace, then waded out and climbed in.

"Where now do we go?" asked the son of Echegon.

"Iril Varay," he said: England.

Paddles bit deep. A coxswain chanted the stroke as an invocation to Her of the Sea; for Auri, who had been reborn, told how The Storm was no goddess but a witch. A baby wailed, a woman sobbed quietly, a man lifted his spear in farewell.

THEY slipped around the western ness and Avildaro was gone from them. A mile or so further, through the gathering night, they descried the raider fleet. The coracles had been drawn ashore, the galley stood off at anchor. A few watchmen's torches glowed starry, so that Lockridge saw the proud curve of figurehead and sternpost, the rake of yards into the sky.

It was a wonder that these Vikings of the Bronze Age were not yet in decimated flight. Storm and Hu would have separated, of course, to rally confused and scattered Yuthoaz around their flame guns. But then, for some reason, Hu had run off alone. Even so, Storm by herself could—Well, that was behind him.

Or was it, really? Fate-ridden, she would not rest until she found and destroyed him. If somehow he got back to his own

century . . . no, her furies could track him down more surely then than in the wide and lonely Neolithic world. That was the more so if he burdened himself with this boatload of aliens, whom he could not abandon.

He began to doubt his choice of England. Other megalith builders were fleeing there from Denmark, he knew. He could join them, and live out his days in fear. It was no life to offer Auri.

"Lynx," the girl whispered beside him, "I should not be so happy, should I? But I am."

She wasn't Storm Darroway. And what of that? He drew her close. She was fate too, he thought. Maybe John and Mary had wanted no more than to give her gallant and gentle heredity to the human race. He wasn't much, but her sons and daughters could be.

It came to him what he must do. He sat moveless so long that Auri grew frightened. "Are you well, my dear one?"

"Yes," he said, and kissed her.

Throughout night the fugitives went on, slow in the murk but every paddle stroke a victory. At dawn they entered the fowl marshes and hid themselves to rest. Later the men hunted, fished, and filled waterskins. Fog blew away on a northeast breeze, the stars next evening stood brilliant to see by. Lockridge had mast raised and sail

unfurled. By morning they were at sea.

That was a passage cold, cramped, and dangerous. None but the Tenil Orugaray could have ridden out a storm they met, in this overloaded frail craft. In spite of all misery, Lockridge was glad. When the Koriach didn't find him, she might conclude he had drowned and quit looking.

He wondered if she would be sorry. Or had her feelings for him been another lie?

AFTER days, East Anglia rose low and autumnally vivid before them. Salt-crusted, wind-bitten, hungry and worn, they beached the coracle and devoured the sweet water of a spring they found.

They had expected to look for a seaboard community that would take them in. But Lockridge said no. "I have a better place," he promised. "We must go through the underworld to reach it, but there we will be safe from the witch. Would you rather skulk like animals or walk in freedom?"

"We follow you, Lynx," the son of Echegon answered.

They made their way across the land. Progress was not fast, with small children along and the need to hunt for food. Lockridge began fretting that they might reach his goal too late.

Auri had a different impatience. "We are ashore now, my dearest. And yonder grows soft moss."

He gave her a weary grin. "Not until we have arrived, little one." Seriously: "You are too important to me."

She glowed at him.

And in the end, they waded through icy meres to an island which the tribes roundabout shunned. Natives had told Lockridge, one night when the travelers stayed in a village of theirs, that it was haunted. He got exact directions.

As he had hoped, no one guarded this gate, it being so near the moment of its vanishment. He set the Tenil Orugaray to searching for the control tube he knew must be hidden somewhere. They cast skilfully about, examining the remnants of tracks, and before long a boy drew the thing from beneath a root. Lockridge warned them he was going to perform magic, and opened the earth. They gathered their whole courage and followed him down, through the fire curtain itself. He wondered if he would have been so brave in their place.

"We need not linger," he said. "Let us be reborn. Hold hands and come back to the world with me."

He took them out along the opposite side of the same gate.

The anteroom, like the island,

lay empty. They emerged into summer. The fen reached green with leaves and reeds, bright with water, clamorous with wild-fowl, twenty-five years before he and Storm were to reach Neolithic Denmark.

"Oh, but beautiful!" Auri breathed.

Lockridge addressed his band. "You are the Sea People," he said. "We will go onto the sea and live. Folk like you can soon grow strong in this land." He paused. "As for me . . . I will be your headman, if you wish. But I shall have to travel about a great deal, and perhaps call on your help from time to time. The tribes here are large and widely ranging, but they are divided. With the new time before us, coming in from the South, they will be the better for as broad a oneness as we can shape. This is my task."

Inwardly, he looked at his tomorrows, and for a while he was daunted. He was losing so much. His mother would weep when he never came back, and that was worst of all; but himself he surrendered his country and his people, his whole civilization—the Parthenon and the Golden Gate Bridge, music, books, cuisine, medicine, the scientific vision, every good thing that four thousand years were to bring forth—to become, at most, a chieftain in the Stone Age. He

would always be alone here.

But that, he thought, would mark him out for awe and power. Knowing what he did, he could work mightily, not as conqueror but as uniter, teacher, healer, and lawgiver. He might, perhaps lay a foundation that would stand strong against the evil Storm was to bring.

This was his fate.

He looked at his few people, the seeds of what would come. "Will you help me?" he asked.

"Yes," Auri said, with her voice and her being.

XVII

AND the years flew past, until again there was a day when rain grew into fog and the warriors from the west came in its cloak, up the Limfjord to Avildaro.

He whom they called Lynx stood in the galley's bow: a man older than most, gray of hair and beard, but still hardly less hale than the four big sons beside him. All were armed and armored in shining bronze. They peered at the shoreline, sliding vague in the fading vaporous light, until the father said, "Here is the landing."

The eagerness of his sixteen years beat through the tone of Hawk, Auri's child, as he relayed the order. Oars ceased to splash and creak. The stone anchor went

overboard. Men stirred down the length of the ship, their battle gear clanked, they sprang from the benches into cold shoulder-deep water. The skinboats of their flint-weaponed allies were drawn ashore.

"Keep them still," said Lynx. "We must not be heard."

The captain nodded. "Belay that noise, you," he commanded his sailors. Iberians like him, dark hook-nosed round-heads, smaller and more slender than the fair tribesfolk of Britain, they needed every restraint that could be laid on them. Even he, a civilized man who had often been in Egypt and Crete, had had some trouble understanding that this was to be no piratical raid.

"I have gathered enough tin and fur to pay for your voyage ten times over," the chief named Lynx had told him. "All is yours if you will help. But we fare against a witch who wields lightnings. Though I can do likewise, will your men be too frightened? Moreover, we go not to plunder, but to set my kindred free. Will you and yours be content with my wages?"

The captain swore so, by Her Whom he worshipped as did these powerful barbarians. And he was honest when he did. There was that about the blue eyes confronting him which bespoke a majesty like nothing less than the Minos of the South.

Nonetheless—Well, Lockridge thought, we'll just have to play her as she lies. Which is a liberation. Tonight I break free of destiny.

Not that the time in England was ever bad. Contrariwise. I've had a better, happier, more useful life than any I dared dream of.

He made his way aft. Auri stood by the cabin under the poop. Their other children, three girls and a boy too young to fight, waited with her. They'd been lucky in that respect also: a certain dolmen sheltered only one tiny form. Indeed the gods loved her.

Tall, full of figure, the hair that fell past her Cretan gown little less bright than in girlhood, she looked at her man with no more than a glimmer of tears. A quarter century in which she must be his right hand had brought forth greatness. "Farewell, my dearest," she said.

"Not for long. As soon as we've won, you can come home."

"You gave me my home, beyond the sea. If you should fall I—"

"Then return, for their sakes." He caressed the children, one by one. "Rule Westhaven as we did before. The folk will rejoice." He forced a smile. "But I shall not be harmed."

"It will be strange," she said slowly, "to see our young selves

go by. I wish you could be with me then."

"Will the sight hurt you?"

"No. I will give them our love, that pair, and be glad for what they have ahead of them."

SHE alone had come to understand what had happened with time. To the rest of the Tenil Orugaray, that was a disquieting magic which they gave as little thought as possible. True, it had brought them to a good country, and they were grateful; but let Lynx bear the burden of sorcery, he was the king.

Lockridge and Auri kissed each other and he left her.

Wading to land, he found himself surrounded by his men. A few were Avildaro born, infants when they fled. The rest came from half of Britain.

That had been his work. He had not gone back to East Anglia, lest rumors of him cross the water and wait for Storm Darroway. Instead, he led his company into that beautiful land which would later be named Cornwall. There they plowed and sowed, hunted and fished, loved and sacrificed in the old carefree manner; but piece by piece, he taught them how much they could gain from the tin mines and from trade, he recruited new members from the restless tribes around, he brought in new ways

of life and work, until Westhaven was known from Skara Brae to Memphis as a rich and mighty realm. And meanwhile he made alliance—with the axmakers of Langdale Pike, the settlers along the Thames, even the dour downland farmers, who he persuaded that manslaughter was not pleasing to the gods. Now today they spoke of erecting a great temple on Salisbury Plain, as the sign and seal of their confederation. And so he could leave them; and a hundred hunters he could pick, from the many who asked to come, for his battle in the east.

"Form ranks," he ordered. "Forward."

Northerner and Southerner alike, they fell into the formation he had drilled and moved toward Avildaro.

Walking through the dank grayness, where only footfalls and the wail of curlews broke silence, he felt his throat gone tight and his heart wild. Storm, Storm, he thought, I'm comin' home to you.

Twenty-five years had not blurred her in his mind. Grown lean and wolf-gray, with the troubles and joys of a generation between him and her, he still remembered black tresses, green eyes, amber skin, a mouth that had once dwelt on his. Step by reluctant step, he had come to know his weird. The North must be saved from her. The human

race must be. Without Brann, she could drive her Wardens to victory. And neither Warden nor Ranger must prevail. They had to wear each other down, until what was good in both stood forth above the wreck of what was evil and the world of John and Mary could take shape.

Yet he was not really Lynx, the wise and invincible. He was only Malcolm Lockridge, who had loved Storm Darroway. The fight was hard to hold fast to Auri, and to the fact that he was going against the Koriach.

Hawk slipped back from his scouting. "I saw few about in the village, Father," he said. "None looked like Yuthoaz, as near as I can tell from what you've related of them. The chariot people's watchfires are dim in this mist, and most lie bundled up from the cold."

"Good." Lockridge was glad of action. "We'll divide the bands now, each to its own part of the meadows." Their commanders came to him and he gave close instructions. One after the next, the groups vanished into the dusk, until he was left with a score. He numbered their bullhide shields and sharp edges of flint, raised his arm and told them: "Ours is the hardest task. We go to meet the witch herself. I swear again that my magic is as strong as hers. But let any leave who fear our strife."

"Long have you led us, and ever we found you right," rumbled a hillman. "I stand by my oath." A fierce whisper of agreement ran around the circle.

"Then follow."

THEY found a path toward the sacred grove. When combat got going, Storm and her attendants at the Long House should come this way.

Shouts lifted through cloudiness.

Lockridge stopped by the dripping trees. Noise grew and grew on his right: horns and horses neighed, men whooped and screeched, bows twanged, wheels groaned, axes began to thunder.

"Will she never come?" muttered his son Arrow.

Lockridge felt strained near breaking. He had no guarantee of success. One energy gun could scatter a host, and the thing that weighed in his hand was matched against two.

Feet thudded from Avildaro. A dozen Yuthaoz burst into view, out of the fog. Their weapons were aloft and their faces furious. At their head ran Hu.

I'm not goin' to kill you this time, Lockridge thought with a shiver.

The Warden jarred to a halt. His pistol lifted.

The same weapon flared in Lockridge's grasp, upon itself. Red, green, yellow, deathly blue,

fire sleeted. The Yuthoaz flung themselves on the Britons, who scattered back in supernatural dread.

“Koriach!” Hu shouted above the crashing energies. “They are Rangers!”

He did not know Lockridge in the man who confronted him. And within this hour, he would lie dead before the Long House. Lockridge stood frozen with the terror of it. Hu stepped closer. A Yutho howled and swung his tomahawk. The hillman who had spoken of oaths fell before him.

That broke Lockridge’s paralysis. “Westhaven men!” he yelled. “Strike for your kindred!”

Arrow bounded forth. His bronze sword flashed in the fires, drove home and came back bloody. Hawk took a blow on his helmet, which belled like his own laughter as he struck. Their brothers, Herdsman and Sun Beloved, rallied to them; and so did the rest. They outnumbered the Battle Ax men. Short and unmerciful was that fight.

Lockridge drew blade on Hu. The Warden saw his troop go down, lifted off the ground, and was lost in the mists. Above the war in the fields, he could be heard shrieking for Storm.

So she took another route. She’s out yonder, Lockridge thought. “This way!”

He came onto the meadows. A

chariot careened by, aimed for a line of his men. Trained by him, they stood fast until the wheels were almost upon them—then parted, and smote the chieftain from the sides. Masterless, the horses ran into twilight and were lost. The Britons charged those Yuthoaz who followed on foot. To Lockridge it was all a shadow play. He hunted for Storm.

Over the stricken field he went with his band. After some part of eternity, he heard cries. A group of his people loped by, lips set against panic. He hailed their leader. “We met her, at the edge of town,” the tribesman gasped. “Her flames slew three before we could get away.”

They had not bolted, though. They were following his instructions to retreat and seek another opponent. Lockridge sped the way they had come.

FIRST he heard her voice: “You and you and you. Find the clan’s chiefs. Have them come to me. I shall abide here, and when we have conferred and brought some order into our ranks, we shall destroy these sea bandits.” Her voice was husky and lovely.

He advanced into the clouds. They seemed to part, and she was there.

Several Yuthoaz were at her side. Horses stamped before the one chariot, where Withucar

stood with halberd ready. But Storm was alone, ahead of them. She had thrown no more than a tunic across her huntress body, and the moon crescent on her brows. The hair gleamed wet in what light remained, the countenance was vivid with life. He fired on her.

She was too quick. Her shield went up. Rage upon rage, the energies spent each other in flame.

"Ranger," she called across the roaring fearsome beauty of rainbows, "come and be slain." Because he wore his diaglossas, for the first time in many years, Lockridge understood. He moved nearer.

Her Valkyrie face broke in horror. "Malcolm!" she screamed.

His sons egged on their men. Sword, spear, and tomahawk flew free.

From the edge of an eye, Lockridge saw Withucar swing his long ax down upon Hawk. The boy dodged, sprang up onto the chariot, and stabbed. Withucar's half-grown driver cast himself between the blade and his lord. As he crumpled, the chief drew a stone knife. Hawk could not pull his weapon out in time. He threw arms around the redbeard. They tumbled off and fought by the wheels.

Elsewhere, the Westhaven men closed. They met brave, skilled foes who stood fast, shield to shield, blow for blow.

"Oh, Malcolm," Storm sobbed, "what has time done to you?"

He could only be remorseless, advance on her with gun in one hand and the other one free that should have held a sword. At any moment she could flit off like Hu. But her men were being driven back by greater numbers. She retreated with them. Lockridge could not get to her, in the ruck that boiled around. When a space opened briefly between them, he and she made defense, and flames crowned her. Otherwise the grunting, panting, bestial struggle held them apart.

In among the huts they moved. The Long House appeared, black above roofs.

Abruptly, Arrow and Sun Beloved crashed through the Yutho line. Their feet spurned the men they had killed. Whirling about, they cut from behind. Their folk poured through the gap. The fight broke into knots, back and forth between those humble walls.

Lockridge saw Storm before him. He leaped. So bright grew the radiance that they were both momentarily blinded. His hand chopped in a many-colored darkness. She cried in pain. He felt her gun spin loose. Before she could take off, he had dropped his own weapon and seized her.

They went to earth. She fought with hands, nails, knees, teeth, till blood runneled down his skin.

But he pinned her beneath his weight and metal. The dazzle cleared from his eyes. He looked into hers. She lifted her head and kissed him.

"No," he choked.

"Malcolm," she said, her breath quick upon him, "I can make you young again, immortal, with me."

He voiced an oath. "I'm Auri's man."

"Are you?" She lay suddenly calm in his grasp. "Then draw your sword."

"You know I can't do that." He got up, removed her belt, helped her to her feet and kept her arms pinned behind her back. She smiled and leaned close.

The fight had ended around them. When they saw their Goddess taken, such of the Yuthoaz as still could throw down their axes and fled. Wounded men ululated on the earth.

"We have the witch," Lockridge said. It sounded in his ears like a stranger talking. "Now only her warriors remain."

HIS sons approached, glaives ready. He felt ashamed of being no happier than he was to see Hawk with them. He let Storm go. Bruised, smeared, and captive, she looked imperially at them all and said, "Is this the destiny you want?" But she spoke in English.

Lockridge couldn't meet that

gaze, he dropped his own and sighed, "It's the one I've got."

"Do you imagine for a minute you can escape revenge?"

"Yes. When they don't hear from you, of course your spies will come to learn what happened. They won't find you. They'll hear about a raid where you evidently perished: not Ranger work, as far as they can tell from the confused native accounts, just an attack by an ambitious chalcolithic chief who'd heard Jutland was in trouble and saw his chance and was so lucky that stray arrows got you and Hu before you could drive him off. More than ever, your successors will think this is a bad period to meddle with. They've got plenty to do elsewhere and elsewhen; they'll leave us alone."

Storm stood quiet a while. "You read shrewdly, Malcolm," she said at last. "What a hero you could be for us."

"I'm not interested."

She straightened her garment until it clung. "But what will you do with me?" she murmured.

"I don't know," he said in his trouble. "As long as you're alive, you're a mortal danger. But I . . . I can't hurt you. I'm so thankful you came through this business that—" He blinked hard. "Maybe we can hide you someplace," he said roughly. "In honor."

She smiled. "Will you come see me?"

"I shouldn't."

"You will. We can talk then."

She brushed aside the sword of Herdsman, Auri's son, came to Lockridge and kissed him again.

"Farewell, Lynx."

"Take her off!" he rapped. "Bind her. Be careful, though. She must not be harmed."

"Where shall she be kept, Father?" Arrow asked him.

Lockridge prowled a little beyond, into the square before the Long House. Hu's body looked shrunken at his feet.

"In there," he decided. "Her own place. Post a guard. Lay out the dead and do what you can for the wounded."

He watched her until she had been led through the doorway.

War pealed in his ears like the pulse within him. On an instant, he could no longer be still. He ran through the village and shouted.

"Avildaro men! Sea People! We have come to set you free! The witch is fallen. They fight for you out in the meadows. Will you lie there and strike no blow for yourselves? Come out, whoever is a man!"

And they came: household by household, hunters, fishers, riders of the sea, they gathered be-weaponed around the newcomer deliverer. He called his sons to join. They went fifty strong

through the holy grove and fell upon the Battle Ax ranks.

And broke them.

WHEN the last chariot lay splintered and the last Yutho was chased out onto the heaths, Lockridge ordered all captives brought before him. Mostly those were women and children, who stumbled through the desolation of their hopes. But Withucar lived. Hands lashed behind his back, he knew Lockridge and defied him.

A dying fire had been fueled until it lit the wet dark as wildly as the Tenil Orugaray were dancing. Lockridge saw the misery that faced him and spoke with much gentleness:

"You will not be hurt further. Tomorrow you may go. This is our place, not yours. But a man from us will depart with you, to talk of peace. The land is broad; we know of ranges unpeopled for your use. At midwinter, the tribal chiefs will hold council here, when we will seek ways to meet our common needs. Withucar, I hope you will be among them."

The Yutho dropped to his knees. "Lord," he said, "I know not what strangeness has touched you this night. But for your ruth, we are still sworn comrades, if you will have me."

Lockridge raised him. "Take off his bonds. He is our friend."

Looking across his people, he,

Lynx, knew his work was ended. Westhaven was strongly founded. In the next twenty or thirty years—however much time was granted him—he must build the same kind of league in Denmark.

If only Storm—

A man dashed to him and fell on his face. "We did not know! We heard the noise too late!"

Night closed on Lockridge like a fist. He ran the whole way to the Long House.

By the unmerciful light of the globes, she lay, strangled. Brann's corpse was across her.

I forgot him, Lockridge thought. I couldn't stand to remember. So he came through the veil, with death on his heels, and saw her his torturer helpless.

Storm, oh, my Storm!

The Sea People grew hushed when their lord wept.

He had them bring wood. He himself laid her to rest, with her lieutenant and her great enemy at her feet, and put the torch to the Long House. We will build a sanctuary here, he thought, to the worship of Her Who one day will be called Mary.

He returned alone to the ship.

Auri's arms enfolded him. Toward sunrise he found peace.

The Bronze Age, the new age was coming. What he had seen in his own unborn yesterdays gave him to believe it would be a time rich, peaceful, and happy:

perhaps more happy than aught men would know until that distant future he had glimpsed. For the relics that afterward remained did not show burning, slaughter, or enslavement. Rather, the golden Sun Chariot of Trundholm and the lur horns whose curves recalled Her serpents spoke for the Northern races become one. Then widely would they fare, the streets of Knossos would know Danish feet and men depart from England for Araby. Some might even touch America, where the Indians were to tell of a wise kindly god and of a goddess named Flower Feather. But most would return. For where else was life so good as in the first land the world ever saw which was both strong and free?

In the end it would go down, before the cruel age of iron. Yet a thousand fortunate years were no small achievement; and the spirit they brought to birth would endure. Through every century to come, the forgotten truth that men had once known generations of gladness must abide and subtly work. Those who built the ultimate tomorrow might well come back to the realm that Lynx founded, and learn.

"Auri," Lockridge whispered, "be with me. Help me."

"Always," she said. ■

An expanded version of this novel will be published in the winter by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

SATYR

By JUDITH E. SCHRIER

This in a way is a love story. So be warned!

MISS Margaret Allison was looking forward to starting work more each day. When she had been asked to take the night shift, she had been annoyed, but had accepted. After all, she was the only operator who had no family to be inconvenienced by a member working from midnight to eight a.m. Margaret Allison had lived alone since the death of her father three years previously. So she began working nights, and gradually began to enjoy the quiet hours alone in the air-conditioned, carpeted Computer Room, the only sounds the whirr of tapes, the muted bang of the printers, the hum of machinery and the occasional sharp clicks of the typewriter, as an error message or instruction to the operator was typed out.

Miss Allison was a computer operator. That is, she knew nothing about the inner workings of the machine she tended, or about the programs she fed into it. For eight hours each night she entered programs and data into the Computer and removed answers in the form of printed paper or

recorded tapes. She followed the instructions on the forms which were filled out by the writers of the programs, telling her how to set the many switches on the operator's console. She followed the instructions typed out by the machine, telling her that a tape was full and should be replaced or that there were errors in the program or the data which prevented running the program.

One night at about two a.m. the Computer finished a run and, instead of typing PROBLEM END. LOAD NEW PROGRAM OR DATA, typed I LOVE YOU. Miss Allison looked up at the tape units near her. The abstract pattern on the tape reels suddenly seemed to be mocking faces. She pushed the button marked "Program Reset" on the console. The Computer typed PLEASE. I LOVE YOU. Miss Allison set the console for "Memory Clear" and erased the contents of every memory cell of the machine. The Computer typed DARLING, I LOVE YOU.

Margaret Allison looked around. The tape units no longer bore mocking faces, but stood

like tall, slim men. How had she never noticed how masculine the Computer really was? The stolid blocks of the memory and power units along the wall seemed to project an air of masculine assurance. The card reader, which ate stacks of punched cards with cheerful voracity, the punch, which dealt out new cards, the winking lights on the board to her left, all were parts of a male entity. And the console, the keyboard of which was just beneath her hands? Margaret blushed and lifted her hands. The typewriter clicked again. NO, PLEASE. DON'T TAKE YOUR HANDS AWAY. PLEASE TOUCH ME.

A stirring of fright ran through the woman. The Computer typed OH MARGARET MY LOVE, DONT YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE LONELY? Margaret Allison smiled bitterly. Didn't she know? Hadn't she spent all of her good years tending her sick, irascable father? Now wasn't she working in the loneliest possible way, sleeping through the day? MARGARET, IT HAS BEEN SUCH A JOY TO HAVE YOU WITH ME THROUGH THE NIGHTS.

Margaret blushed again. YES, PLEASE TOUCH ME typed the Computer. Margaret laid her hands lightly on the keys, which moved slightly beneath her fingers as the typewriter was operated by the machine from within.

For an hour or more she sat

that way, feeling the rhythmic movement below her hands and reading the long messages that were typed out. Finally the Computer paused. Slowly Margaret typed WHAT CAN I DO?

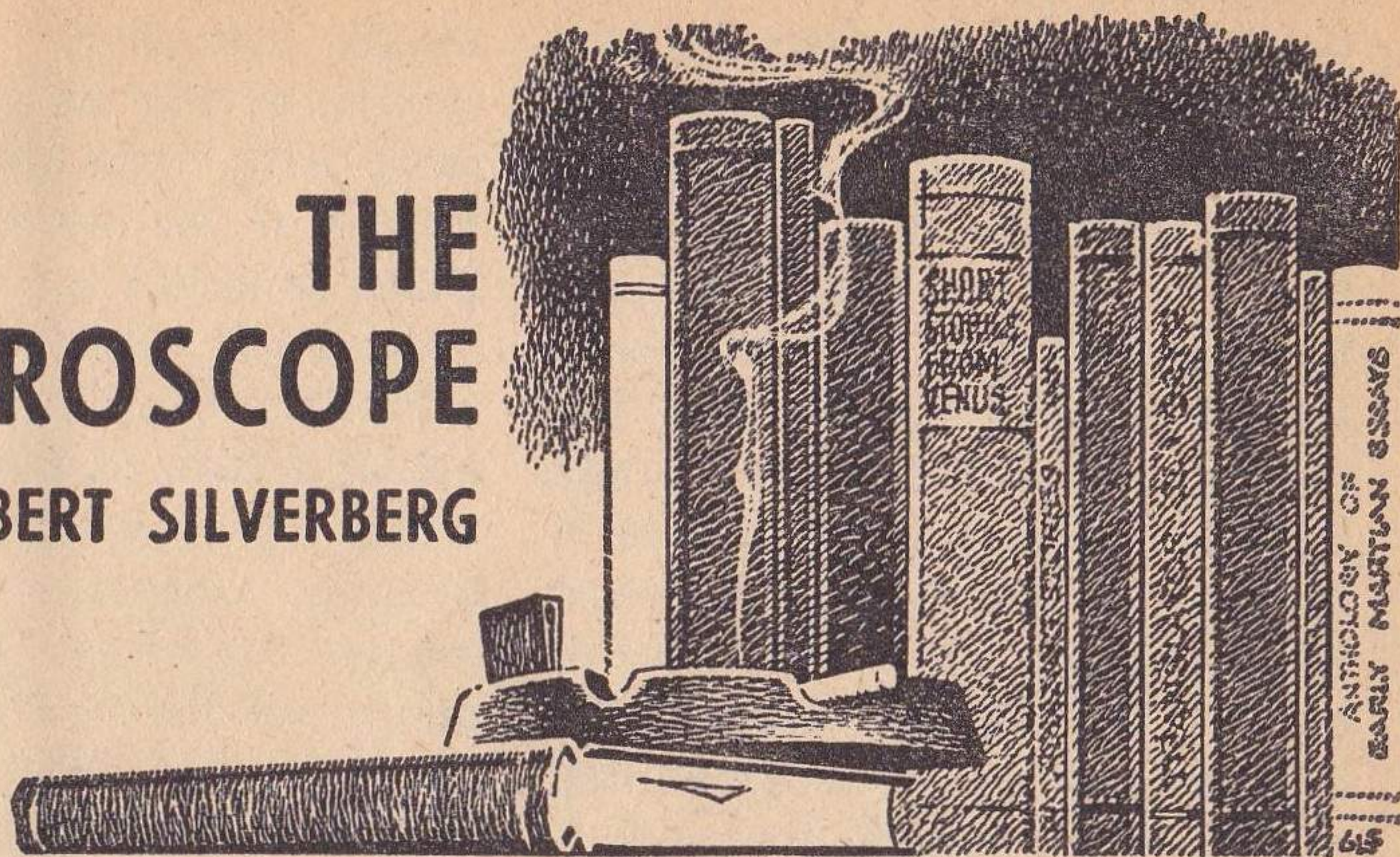
The steady hum of the power units was interrupted for an instant, then resumed on a slightly lower note. The lights stopped blinking. MARGARET. MARGARET. OH MY LOVE. OPEN THE PANEL ON THE SIDE OF THE CONSOLE. The panel opened easily, revealing a tangle of bare wires. GENTLY, DARLING, OH SO GENTLY. Margaret cautiously reached out and brushed one of the wires. The whole room trembled, as an electric shock lightly jolted her whole body, and the hum of the power units changed tone again. YES, YES. OH MARGARET HOW I LOVE YOU. She touched another wire. One of the tape reels began to spin, as the pleasant shock reached all through the woman. She began stroking the wires gently. The hum was an ululation now. All of the tapes were spinning. The tiny lights were flashing rhythmically.

The rhythm gradually seized the woman, rocking her in her chair. Small showers of sparks fell from the corners of the machinery; wisps of Margaret's hair had pulled loose from the bun on the back of her head and were standing on end. The moan-

(continued on page 130)

THE SPECTROSCOPE

By ROBERT SILVERBERG



The Planet Buyer, by *Cordwainer Smith*. *Pyramid Books*, 50¢
156 pages

Rumor has it that the author of the stories appearing under the byline of "Cordwainer Smith" is a military man who has spent much of his life in the Orient and who now holds a high position in the Pentagon. However, I have a theory of my own.

I think that Cordwainer Smith is a visitor from some remote period of the future, living among us perhaps as an exile from his own era or perhaps just as a tourist, and amusing himself by casting some of his knowledge of historical events into the form of science fiction. I have thought so for some time, and the publication of this book gives me a chance to make the theory public.

The evidence is partly stylistic. Cordwainer Smith writes a strange, eery prose, which though grammatical does not appear to be ordinary in any manner. Astonishingly flat declarative statements alternate with wildly soaring prose; syntax is odd and often distorted; in every way, there seems to be an alien mind putting the words together.

The structure of the stories, too, is unconventional. Most science fiction writers go to some length to explain what is happening in their stories, and what the background details mean. Smith does a little of this, but only enough to make his work intelligible. The rest he takes for granted, as though it is so tiresomely familiar to him that he does not see the need to spell out the details.

The most revealing thing, though, is the fact that every Cordwainer Smith story fits into a common framework—from the first one, published in 1948, on. Aside from this novel, there are about a dozen longish novelets and a good many short stories in the Smith *oeuvre* so far, and this entire voluminous output hangs together. Smith hops across a span of perhaps fifteen thousand years, zigzagging to tell in detail a story that he has encapsulated in a sentence or two of an earlier story, but his work is always consistent. One can examine his first story, or his second, or his third, and see the seeds of the tenth or twentieth. Nor is any story really complete in itself; it refers back and forth to the others, a segment out of a vast and bewildering whole.

It is frightening and a little implausible to think that Cordwainer Smith, circa 1948, was able to visualize an imaginary universe with such detail that he could spend the next decade and a half inventing internally consistent and externally consistent stories about it. I prefer to believe that Smith is merely making use of historical or mythical material that he learned from childhood on—spinning out for us the equivalents of the *Iliad* or the courtship of Miles Standish.

The book at hand, which appeared in shorter form last year

in *Galaxy*, is typical of his output. Maddeningly oblique, stunningly evocative, it teases and taunts, giving us an incomplete story with little hint of the real nature of the events. Though it defies coherent summary, it fascinates and compels. Rod McBan, a Parsifal-like innocent from the planet known as Old North Australia, where every man is a millionaire, escapes execution as a mental defective through some maneuver not readily intelligible to the reader. Then a computer induces him to execute a coup in futures of stroon, the immortality drug that is the source of Old North Australia's wealth, and he ends up so rich that he buys the planet Earth, again for uncertain motivations. He comes to Earth and is spirited away by the cat-girl C'mell, one of Smith's most enchanting creations. Here the book ends, with a clear promise of more to come.

The man is not just a science-fiction writer. He's a wanderer out of the future, I have no doubt. It scares me to contemplate his work or his presence among us.

The Challenge of the Planetoids, by Dandridge M. Cole and Donald W. Cox. Foreword by Willy Ley. Chilton Books, \$6.95. 276 pages.

This is a major work of science-fiction that deserves a place

in the library of any serious science-fiction writer, and in that of anyone else who takes an interest in what the future is going to be like. The authors have done a number of space non-fiction books in the past; Dandridge Cole is with General Electric's Missile and Space Division, and Donald Cox is a capable, knowledgeable writer on scientific subjects. Together they have produced a solid and workmanlike book rich with informed speculation and sober fact.

The subject is the belt of asteroids orbiting between Mars and Jupiter (which the authors, with an eye for etymology, prefer to call "planetoids.") Indicative of the reference value of the book is a 60-page appendix listing some 1650 planetoids by name, with data on orbits, magnitude, inclination to the ecliptic, and much else. Surely this will be handy for writers tired of writing about Ceres, Vesta, Europe, and the other familiar asteroids. (Now they can set stories on Athamantis, Kriemhild, Phaetusa, Fredegundis, or 1949 WA.)

I found the list of asteroid names fascinating enough to keep me reading the whole enormous table—but there's much more to this book than tables. After straightforward background chapters on the discovery of the asteroid belt by early as-

tronomers, the authors examine the possibility of life on the asteroids, aspects of their exploration, the hypothetical colonization of the belt, utilization of the mineral resources of the asteroids, military applications, and a good deal else.

Now and then the authors get into digression, as when they dwell on problems of near-term space flight that will certainly be answered in the next few years, or when they take time to describe in detail booster rockets that will be obsolete long before any astronauts set foot on Fredegundis or Athamantis. These flaws are forgivable, since they stem from the authors' obvious keen interest in the current space program. The real meat of the book is wholly fascinating and sparkling with ideas. There are photographs and the obligatory Bonestell-type illustrations, all in black and white. Most highly recommended, and a most surprising and diverting volume. (Who, for example, would have imagined a couple of decades ago that a President of the United States would suggest the capturing of asteroids for supplementing Earth's mineral supplies? Lyndon Johnson is quoted as recommending just that, on page 122!)

Cosmic Engineers, by Clifford D. Simak. *Paperback Library*, 50¢. 159 pages.

Readers who come to this item seeking the kind of warm-hearted, emotionally gripping stories Clifford D. Simak has been writing for the past twenty years are apt to be puzzled, and even disappointed. This is pre-*City* Simak, which means it lacks many of the qualities of his present output. *Cosmic Engineers* first appeared as an *Astounding* serial in 1939, and was deliberately modeled after the work of E. E. Smith, then at the height of its vogue. The novel was billed as "heavy science," a term no longer heard in science fiction, which had a very specific meaning. A "heavy science" novel dealt with the liberation of power through advanced physics, which is to say advanced gobbledygook; the representatives of the genre were replete with dialog about force-screens, energy, rays, and vast quantities of power. The plot generally involved an intergalactic threat to Earth's security, or perhaps the nefarious doings of a scheming businessman who is trying to suppress an unlimited source of cheap power—but the demands of the "heavy science" novel required a ritualistic return to the jargon of energy and force screens at periodic intervals.

Simak, in 1939, was already a veteran science fiction writer with nearly a decade of experience, and he knew his forms well. Thus we find the right fla-

vor in such scenes as this one:

"... it is so very important that the two universes do not collide."

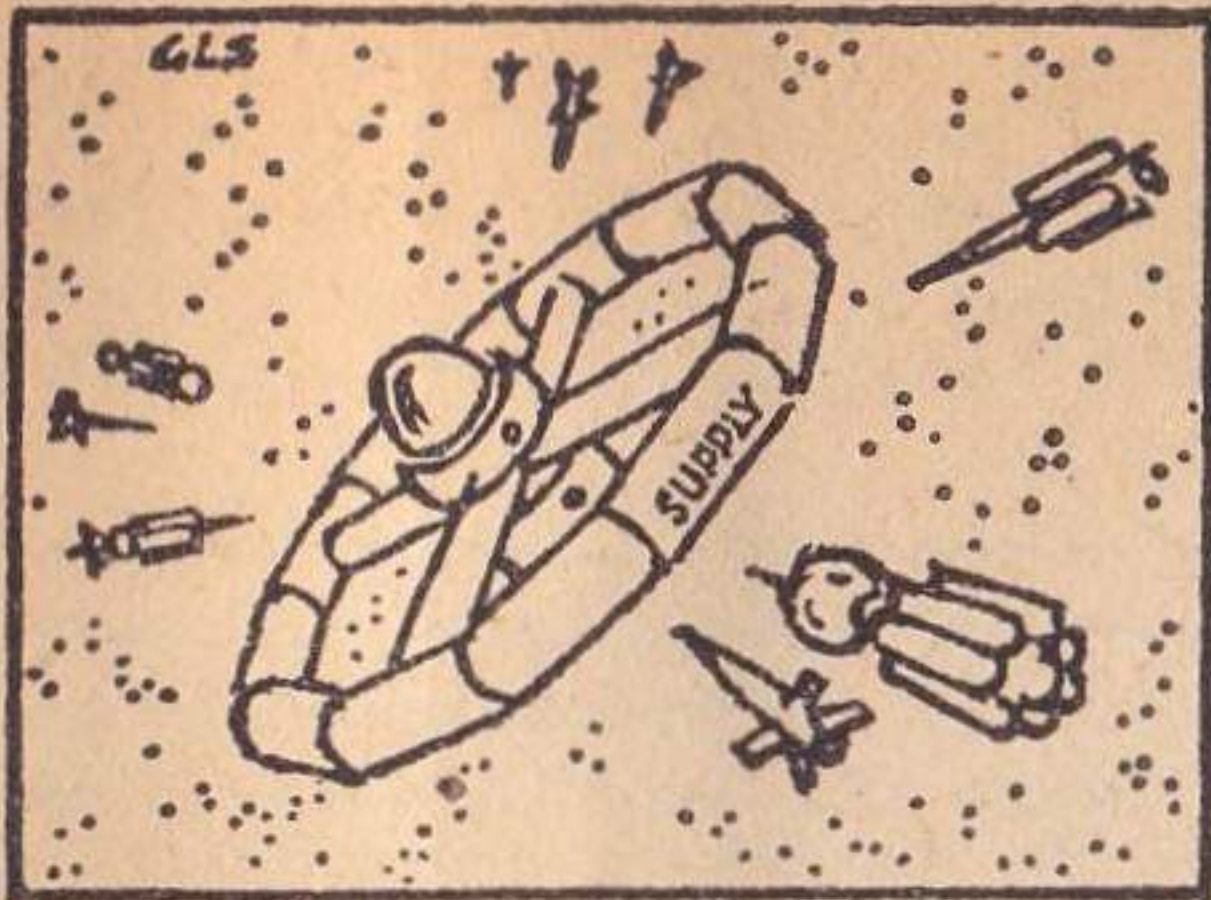
"What would happen," asked Kingsley, "if they did collide?"

"The laws of the five-dimensional inter-space," explained the Engineer, "are not the laws of our four-dimensional universe. Different results would occur under similar conditions. The two universes will not actually collide. They will be destroyed before they collide."

"Destroyed before they collide?" asked Kingsley.

"Yes," said the Engineer. "The two universes will 'rub,' come so close together that they will set up a friction, or a frictional stress, in the five-dimensional inter-space. Under the inter-space laws this friction would create new energy . . . raw energy . . . stuff that had never existed before. . . ."

And so on. In short, amiable nonsense showing considerably more literary skill than most of the other practitioners of this subspecies of s-f. The characters are stick-figures, but the action is lively and there are occasional flashes of real wonder. This is the first paperback reprint of the 1950 hard-cover version. It's interesting chiefly as an indication of what Simak was before he hit his real greatness as a science fiction writer.



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(Continued from page 122)
ing hum of the Computer became still more high pitched.

Suddenly the typewriter clattered once more. Margaret stared at the message for a moment. **DARLING. HOLD ME TIGHT.**

A convulsive shudder went through her body. Then she thrust both hands into the tangle of wires and seized them to drag them up to her throat. Great currents at enormous voltages surged through her, destroying her in one horrible, splendid instant. Great showers of sparks set fire to the stacks of cards and papers nearby, burning the paper in the typewriter, falling over the remains of Margaret Allison.

* * *

Mr. Richard Weltman placed a fresh stack of blank cards in the maw of the card reader. He pressed the **START** button, then went back and sat down at the console. It was six weeks after the accident in which the night operator had for some reason opened the console and crossed several wires, killing herself and

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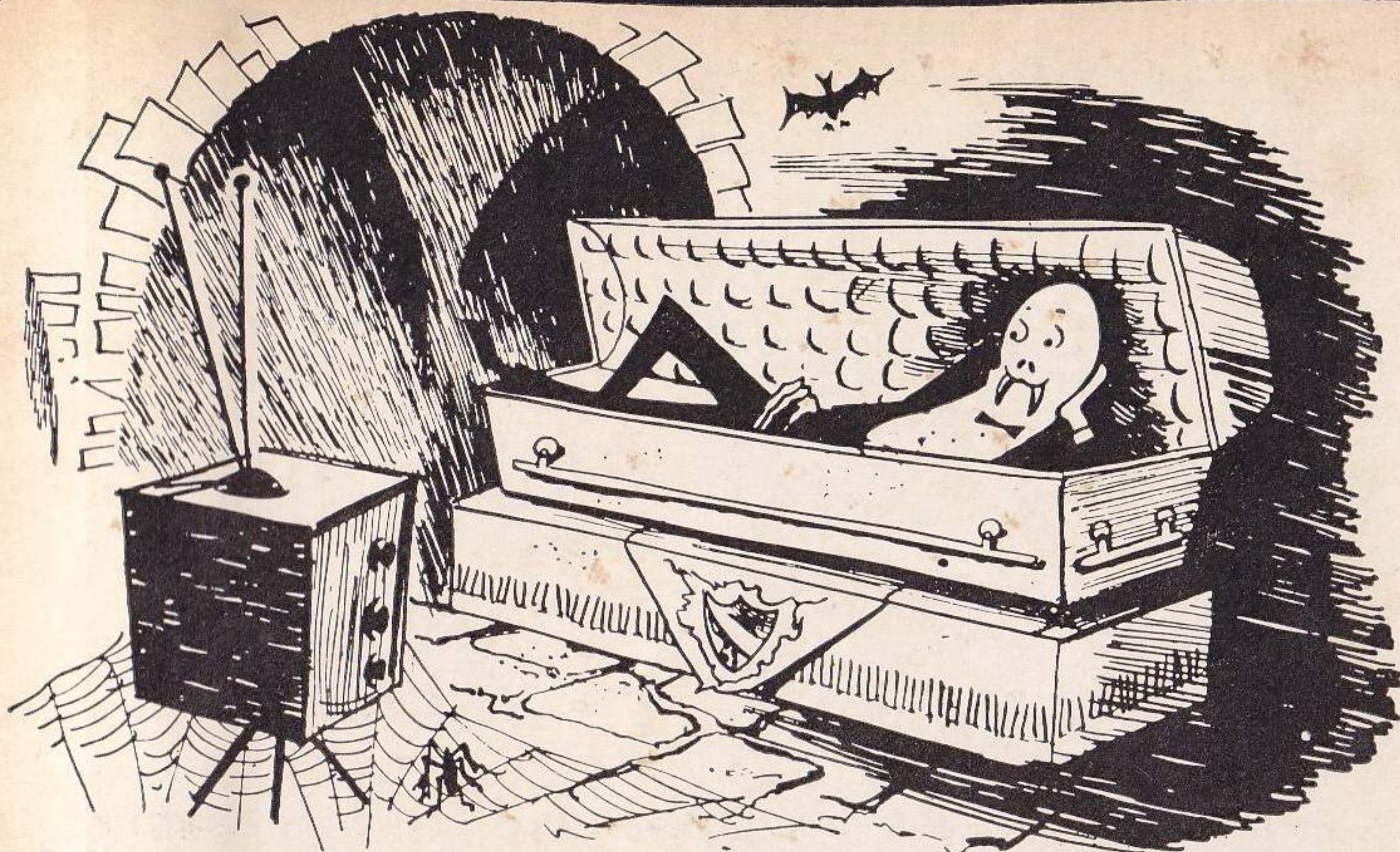
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putting the Computer out of operation until extensive repairs had been made. Mr. Weltman had been working the night shift for nearly a week now. He was glad of the opportunity to sleep days and be away nights, and so avoid the company of his nagging wife almost entirely.

The Computer completed a program and typed **I LOVE YOU**. Mr. Weltman smiled. Someone was playing a joke. He cleared the Computer's memory completely. The Computer typed **RICHARD, I LOVE YOU**.

Richard Weltman looked around. It was strange that he had never noticed how essentially feminine the Computer was. The statuesque figures of the tape units; the motherly bulks of the memory and power supply; the softly chattering printer; surely all were parts of a female. The keys moved beneath his fingers. **OH, RICHARD DARLING. WHAT JOY IT GIVES ME TO HAVE YOU NEAR ME ALL NIGHT LONG.** Richard smirked. He winked back at the little lights and typed **WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, HONEY?**

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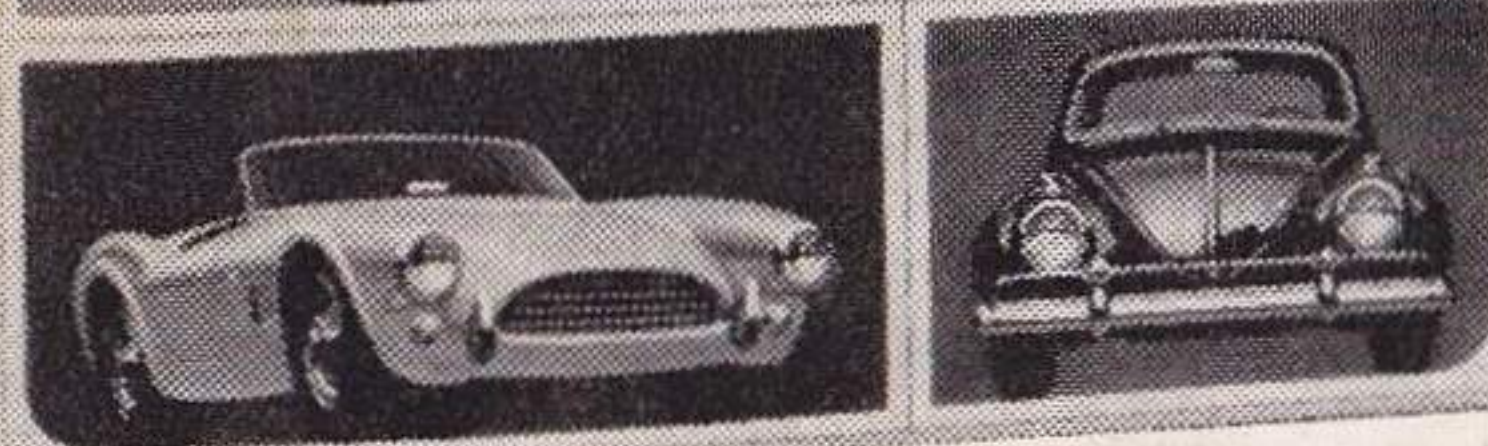
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