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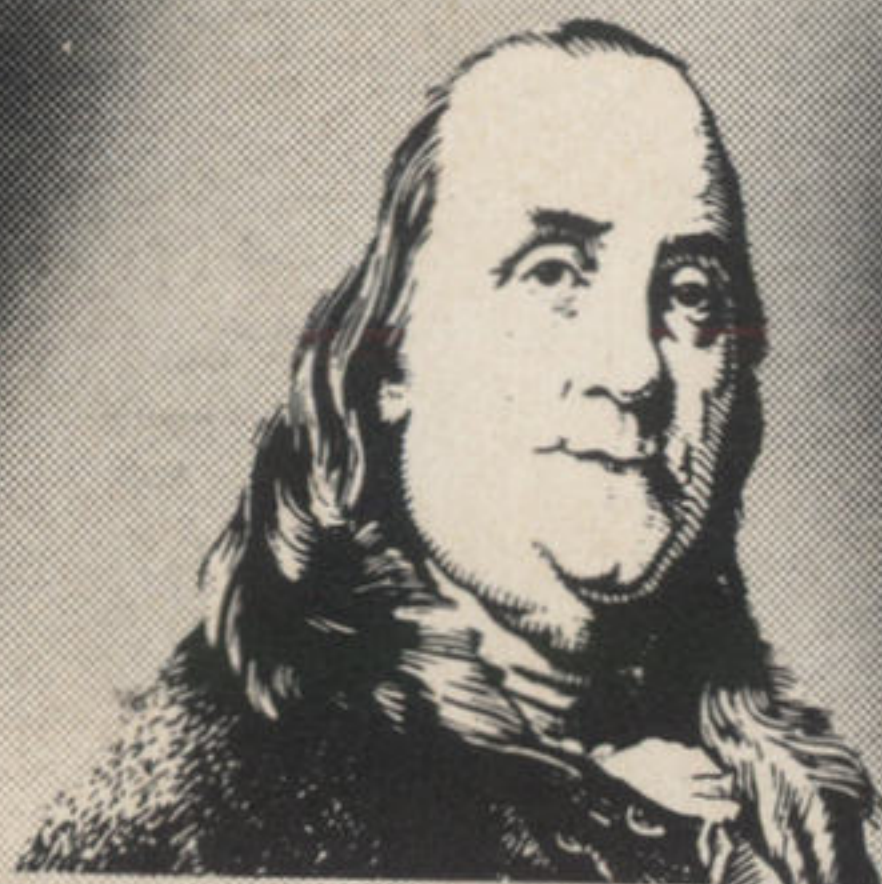
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Amazing

JANUARY, 1969

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S-F AND ESCAPE LITERATURE

Editorial by ROBERT SILVERBERG

If ever a weary and overworked phrase deserved retirement from public circulation, it's "escape literature." That tag strikes me as redundant and needlessly pejorative, to use a couple of educated-sounding words. It deserves to be sent to the graveyard of empty phrases.

The pejorative effect is one that every reader of science fiction has felt: the automatic put-down we got so often. "Oh, that's only escape literature," we hear, when trying to persuade a friend to sample the wares of a Heinlein or a Sturgeon or a Clarke. Condemning a book as "escape literature" seems to put it beyond the pale without the need of further qualification. Anything falling into that grim category is lumped lightheartedly in with such other "escape literature" genres as the spy story and the western, and is scorned as mere mental eyewash.

"Escape literature," then, is a nasty phrase among the dispensers of quick literature judgements. Which would be quite all right—nasty phrases are stock-in-trade for these a priori experts—except that this particular phrase is not only nasty, but meaningless as well.

I hold that it's a redundant phrase—that the term "literature" embodies the concept of escape. To stigmatize a book or a genre as "escape" literature, then, is actually to say nothing at all about it. It's not an act of criticism to add an empty word to a meaningful one.

I don't wish to get into an argument about the purpose of literature, which is a vexed and muddled sub-

ject. But I *am* interested in the effect of literature. And let us, for the sake of this discussion, include as literature all forms of printed prose fiction. I'd rather characterize some things as "good" literature and others as "bad" literature than start trying to decide which classes of prose fiction deserve the name of literature and which do not.

The effect of literature in general, I submit, is to draw the reader from the world he inhabits and into the world created by the author: that is, to permit escape. Take as an example a work that no one will deny falls into the class "literature"—the lengthy novel by Marcel Proust known in English as *Remembrance of Things Past*. At the moment, no doubt, it is being read with eager interest by a young man in a Bayswater flat, by a girl in New Jersey, by a professor of mathematics in Australia. The novel has nothing to do with life in Bayswater, even less contact with the daily routine of existence in New Jersey, and does not mention Australia at all.

Rather, it is a kind of time machine. It transports the reader to an alien culture of another era—some 80 years ago, in France—and gives him entry to a very special segment of French civilization. It carries him far from contemporary troubles and lets him peek undetected at the vanities and posturings of people removed culturally, geographically, and temporally from our everyday experience.

Yet who would call *Remembrance of Things Past* "escape literature"?

Literature, yes. But *escape* literature? It provides escape, of course, just as effectively as though it were set on a planet of Alpha Centauri; but no one thinks of it in those terms alone.

All literature is escapist in effect. The more successful the writer is in providing escape—that is, in creating on paper a detailed, convincing, and enterable world—the more memorable his work will be as literature.

A novel's escapist qualities, then, should not be cause for damning it outright. Through his art the great writer gives us escape, entry into an imagined world, temporary leave of absence from our familiar environment. The untalented writer offers simple-minded escape into a world of flimsy, hastily-rigged cardboard props. The great writer creates a complete and unforgettable world, and thus lets us return to our own world enhanced and enriched. The quality of the imaginative act, and not the locale or theme of the story, is the important criterion of judgement.

Science fiction is escapist. Of course. All imaginative writing is escapist. Where the critics go astray is in attacking us for our escapism—a straw villain—and not for our literary faults. At its best, s-f is magnificently escapist, and should glory in it. Who could not return from a visit to the world of Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* without feeling that he has seen through Vance's *The Dying Earth* without feeling that he has seen through Vance's eyes something strange and precious that had not previously been accessible to him? What of Stapledon's escapist *Last*

and First Men? S. Fowler Wright's *The World Below*? Too much s-f is mere plotting-spinning, but when it succeeds as art, it succeeds not in spite of but because of its escapist nature.

S-F at its poorest is trivial and thin stuff which fails precisely because it is *not* escapist, because it deals too prosaically with things of today, with transient preoccupations and clinches. Its failure is a failure of the imagination. But at its finest, s-f offers a myriad of new worlds, worlds of the imagination, harbors for the mind seeking . . . escape.

Escape is necessary. We escape from the city on weekends, we escape from our livelihoods for weeks at a time. The human organism, if it is to grow and prosper, needs change, refreshment, periodic release.

Literature offers one form of escape. Proust offers it, Balzac offers it, and so does this magazine. As long as the Critics on high get no closer to science fiction than is necessary to determine, redundantly and pejoratively, that it is "escape literature," they will never understand what it is we look for, and what we sometimes find. Nor will they really comprehend the joys of fiction, science or otherwise. Readers of all ages have looked to the narrative art for many things—for moral instruction, for exercises in style, for comment on society—but mainly they seek windows into other worlds, by which I mean Proust's world or Heinleins's.

We have an admirable exit route from daily woes. We call it science fiction.

Escape literature? Of course!

This is a splendid example of a kind of novel which is not seen in the category often nowadays: a freewheeling extrapolation, plotted like mad, written with passion and not embarrassed to take in the widest possible scope. Richard Meredith's WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION is a masterpiece of its subgenre and un-put-down-able; than which there is no higher praise for a novelist.

First of two Parts

WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION RICHARD C. MEREDITH

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS

You've heard of Breakaway Station of course. Who among us hasn't been told the story of the planet that men call Breakaway, dry, dun-colored, barren, cold, lifeless, larger than Mercury, but smaller than Mars, with a trace of vapor that could be called an atmosphere only by the most generous. It was the second planet outward of a feeble yellow dwarf, a star with no name, only a number on the astronomical charts, UR-712-16, Breston Catalog,

a set of coordinates, a place in time and space that made it essential to the survival of the human race.

It was twenty-seven light-years from Earth, a link in the tenuous FTL communications chain to the half-dozen colonies of the Paladine, a link in the chain that defied the Einsteinian universe, and in that lay its importance.

You know the names of the ships, those three starships that limped to Breakaway from the Paladine. The

huge, cumbersome *Rudoph Cragstone*, hospital ship, carrying within its metal gut the thousands of half-dead who had bearly survived the fighting in the *Paladine*, now in old-sleep, most of them, but some crewing the ship, aware of their agony, aware too that in the hospitals of Earth enough of them might be put back together to be sent out again into the *Paladine*, back out to face the Jillies, to fight again, and die again, perhaps.

And escorting the hospital ship were the two heavy battle cruisers, or rather what was left of two heavy battle cruisers, half dead like most of their officers and crews, patched together just enough to get them across the blackness to Earth, there to be put back together, to be sent again into the *Paladine*, the League starships *Iwo Jima* and *Pharsalus*.

And you know the names of the men and women, the half-dead who manned those ships, for their names are now a part of our heritage and rank along with those of Leonidas and his Spartans, and Horatius of the bridge, and Barret Travis and Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett in Texas, and the Lost Battalion in the Argonne. And you know the name of the man who led them—man, half-man, half-prosthetic, little more than a nervous system, heart, lungs, some bone and muscle and flesh, and the rest machine, but for all that a man—the name of Absolom Bracer.

But what do you know of the minds and hearts of those men and women, those half-dead who met the Jillies at Breakaway Station? What



fears and hopes and pains were within them when the squat, ugly, alien warships came down on Breakaway? How badly did they want to live when they died?

And what were the thoughts of Absolom Bracer when he met the Jillie warships *there*? How can *you* know?

Don't ask me who I am, how I know. We all died at Breakaway Station.

I

The tri-D sensors that served as the eyes of LSS Captain Absolom Bracer regarded the projection in the tank, the view of space before the starship, a great, endless blackness speckled with stars, one, a yellow dwarf, standing out far more brightly than the others, sharp and distinct, a tiny disk now, a disk that grew perceptibly as he watched.

. . . captain . . . said the starship's Organic Computer, its "voice" sounding within his mind, . . . star drive will be cut in exactly five minutes in accordance with your instructions . . .

. . . very good . . . Absolom Bracer replied, the shifting electromagnetic fields of his brain being detected by sensors, then amplified, then used to modulate a radio carrier transmitted by a tiny unit within the artificial cavity of his prosthetic skull, ultimately received by a similar unit that was a part of the make-up of the thing that was *Roger*, the Organic Computer. CEMEARS, it was called—Cerebral Electromagnetic Emmission Amplification and Relay System—call it artificial telepathy, if you like.

. . . all stations check normal . . . Roger said.

Normal, thought Absolom Bracer, pain from a nonexistent thigh slowly, sadistically creeping up his spine. Normal for what? Where? Normal for this wreck of a starship. On any other ship the *Iwo Jima's* norm would be interpreted as disaster.

. . . very good . . . he replied. . . . keep me posted . . .

Five minutes and we'll be back in normal space. We've gotten through this much of the voyage safely. I wonder if there's any news from Mothershed. Breakaway ought to know. How are things at Breakaway, I wonder. Any more Jillies? It seems like they'd come back after pulling a stunt like that. Can't understand why they'd attack in the first place if they didn't mean to really finish the station off. But who can understand anything the Jillies do?

I hope Reddick can control himself better. I can't afford another scene like that one this morning. Got to maintain discipline on the bridge. Dammit, I know he's in pain—but who isn't? He's a good officer; I need him on the bridge. Hope he can hold together until we get home. I hope we all can. Dammit, I do!

Around him his bridge officers and crewmen continued their shallower contact with Roger and the mechanical computer *he* supervised, counting down the minutes, the seconds until the starship came out of star drive.

The little toe on my left foot itches like hell. But how can it itch? How can you be bothered by something you don't have? Damn those doctors! Seems like they could have done

something about that. It's bad enough not to have those parts; it's bad enough to remember how it was to have them; but it's worse to be fooled into thinking you still do by blotched up nerves. It's like wanting a woman, or thinking I do. Can I *really* want sex without the organs, glands, whatever-the-hell? Or do I just intellectually *think* I do? Do I just remember how it was and *want* to feel that way? Want to feel like—like a man . . . God, am I losing my mind? No, I can't. That's about all I've got left. I've got to hold on to that. We've all got to hold on. Oh, Lord, it's just two more weeks to Earth. We can hold out that long.

Biting his lower lip to feel a sensation that he knew to be real, Bracer scanned his bridge officers, observing them briefly through the tri-D sensors that relayed the light-and-dark patterns, the array of reflected polychromatic light to his brain; and he thought that he had not yet adjusted to the appearance of the officers who ran his ship, perhaps he never would get used to that. But, then, they probably hadn't gotten used to the appearance of their captain either. Would they?

First Officer Daniel Maxel had no arms, no shoulders, no chest; his head rested on a gray sphere of metal and plastiskin that enclosed what was left of his upper torso, and from that sprouted two arm-like manipulative appendages. No attempt had been made to give Maxel's prosthetics a "human" appearance; too much war, mutilation and death had overcome such luxuries as that. Yet his heavy, almost handsome Slavic features were somehow

serene, almost smiling as he sat before his command console, observed his counterpart of the captain's console, while an artificial heart pumped borrowed blood through his body, artificial lungs breathed for him, artificial . . .

Astrogator Bene O'Gwynn had little that could be called a face. There were still eyes within her skull; somehow they had survived the burns and blasting that had taken away her lower jaw, her ears, part of her skull, that had taken off her left arm and left breast, that had removed half her left leg. A mouth had been fashioned with the plastiskin egg that covered her ruined head, and a voice box that spoke harshly, coarsely, yet still somehow retaining the delicacy of speech that she had once had, when she was whole and beautiful, so he was told.

Weapons Control Officer Akin Darbi appeared to be almost a normal man, unless you knew that his torso was filled with prosthetic organs, replacing the stomach, intestines, glands that an energy beam had burned from his abdomen.

Officers of the bridge, Absolom Bracer thought, hospital cases only slightly better off than those in cold-sleep in the *Cragstone*. And what of their captain? Absolom Bracer smiled a twisted, cynical, almost loathing smile. Yes, what of their captain?

Bracer knew what his reflection would have shown: a shiny meter-tall cylinder of metal supporting what was left of the upper torso of a man. Below the waist there was very little of Absolom Bracer left: a few bones, a little living flesh, a col-

lection of tangled nerves that continually throbbed their pain, their loss. Above the cylinder: a spine, ribs, lungs, heart, shoulders, an arm, the right one; a prosthetic grew from the left shoulder, delicately, wonderfully wired into his nervous system, so well done that he often forgot that the arm was not really his own, but one *loaned* him by the ac-cursedly efficient doctors of Adrianopolis. What else? Well, he had most of his jaws, upper and lower, a little of his cheek bones, about half his skull, and all of his brain, yes, most important of all, his brain. Metal and plastiskin completed the picture, a globe that covered what had once been his upper face, and two glittering lenses that served as eyes; with these he looked out through the pain, the loss, and saw the universe outside, and cursed it, yet went on, commanded the starship—back to Earth, back to the hospitals that could take even such a wreck as Absolom Bracer and build it back into something that would pass for a human being.

And there was pain. That was the one real fact of existence. Pain. Forever. Continuously. A red-gray fog that grew greater at times, and at other times grew less, but that was always there. Pain that kept him on the edge of screaming. Pain that heightened rather than dulled his senses. Pain that had almost become a part of him.

He should have been in the *Cragstone*, in the semi-death of cold-sleep, unconscious, unconcerned, unknowing, resting like the dead until his mangled body arrived at Earth where . . .

But he knew, oh, so well, he knew: "We have no starship captains, no whole men that we can spare from the war. Put Captain Bracer in shape to command. We can't spare anyone else to go back to Earth."

And the doctors had done that (eternally damn them!), had taken what there was of him, and added to that the portable devices that would serve as the organs he lacked, and had told him that he could make it. And when he asked for drugs to ease the pain, they said, sorrowfully, he supposed, that they could give him no drugs, for drugs would dull his mind, slow his reactions—and pain would keep him aware, give him the slight edge that might keep him and his ships alive until they reached Earth. Oh, thank you, doctors!

Then the admirals placed him on the bridge of the *Iwo Jima*, gave him a handful of officers and a crew in little better shape than himself, gave him another warship likewise outfitted, gave him the hospital ship *Rudolph Cragstone* to escort, and aimed them all Earthward.

"We will give you cover into interstellar space," the admirals had said. "Once clear of the system and into star drive you should be able to avoid any Jillie warships."

So, with his orders, and his pain, Absolom Bracer and his three starships lifted from Adrianopolis of the Paladine, aimed toward dim and distant Sol, and went into star drive, moving in microjumps of fantastic pseudospeed, motionless motion, across the dark universe.

Now the trip was nearly a third over. The sun of Breakaway Station swelled in the tanks. The worst

danger was past. At least the admirals had told him it would be, but then it is not always wise to believe all that admirals say. They have a job to do too.

. . . captain . . . the mental voice of the O.C., Roger, rang within his skull. . . . one minute to cutoff star drive . . .

. . . acknowledge . . .

His right hand—the real one—automatically fell across the all-call switch of the console before him. And as automatically he spoke:

“Attention all hands. This is the captain. Star drive will be cut in one minute. All hands at stations. Full alert.”

And he wondered how many of his crew had hands, real hands, and not prosthetics. Hands!

To Roger: . . . begin counting . . .

The voice of the Organic Computer, pieced modulations, snips of the sounds of the voice of a man, confident, reassuring, father-like, began counting down the seconds until star drive was cut, until the three starships ceased their motionless motion, ceased micro-jumping through universes, returned to normal and real space-time.

Wish I could let the crew have shore leave at Breakaway. Might do them good to blow off a little steam. But, as the doc says, it might be even worse than being cooped up in this ship—to see normal people, men and women, with the proper number of arms and legs and eyes. In our little universe we’ve sort of adjusted to the idea that no one has the number of things he ought to have. What would happen if they—we—I—saw

normal . . . That’s enough of that! We don’t have the time for shore leave anyway.

Bracer touched a switch on the console before him.

“Yes, captain,” replied the voice of Eday Cyanta, the legless communications officer.

“As soon as star drive is cut, see if you can raise Breakaway Station.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer replied. “I’m already on frequency, and will begin transmitting immediately after cutoff.”

“Very good.”

“Thirty seconds,” said the audible voice of Roger the O.C.

A third of the way back, Bracer thought. Thirteen light-years of it behind us. Twenty-seven still to go. Pick up the wounded here, stow them in the *Cragstone*, move on toward Earth. It’s not going to be so bad if we all keep our heads.

Wonder how Mothershed’s doing. Wonder if he’s even still alive. Good chance he isn’t. The Jillies probably caught him a long time ago. But, God, I wish I were with him!

“Fifteen seconds.”

A faming pain flickered in the ends of severed nerves, a place where a primitive and unreasoning part of his mind thought his left thumb was, but where *he* knew was nothing, nothing at all. He bit his lower lip, cursed the doctors, wished they’d allowed him drugs, knew it was best that they hadn’t, and cursed the admirals on Adrianopolis, and particularly Admiral Ommart, for making it all necessary.

“Star drive out.”

That last comment from Roger had been totally superfluous. No one

had to be told that he was coming out of star drive. You knew that in your bones; in the very marrow of your being you knew that the star drive was no longer operating, that the universe was again the universe and not some meaningless in-between limbo that could not be expressed in words, only in mathematical symbols. Oh, how obsolete language is in the day of star travel.

Bracer looked over toward the communications officer, saw the tank before flickering as she attempted to establish visual contact with the personnel of Breakaway Station.

. . . orders, captain? . . . Roger asked.

. . . stand by . . . Bracer replied. Then, into the microphone: "This is the captain. We are now out of star drive and approaching Breakaway Station. The ship will remain on full alert until we have established orbit. That is all."

By this time there was recognizable image in the communications officer's tank.

"Give it to me," Bracer said.

Moments later the communications tank in his own console came to life, flickered, then cleared, revealing the three dimensional image of a heavy-set, middle-aged man wearing the insignia of a commander in the Communications Corps, Armed Forces of the Gaian League.

"Commander, this is Captain Absolom Bracer, commanding officer of the LSS *Iwo Jima*, registry number TU-819, flagship of Hospital Convoy 031, out of Adrianopolis, bound for Earth, flight 311-68." All

this Bracer said as an expected formality; all the necessary information had already been automatically beamed to Breakaway in the identification signals broadcast microseconds after coming out of star drive. "I think you're expecting us."

"Yes, sir," replied the image within the tri-D tank. "You're matching your ETA within several hours. Did you have a good trip out?" There was an odd edge to the commander's voice, something which Bracer attributed to the half-human, half-machine appearance that he himself presented to the officer.

"Good enough," Bracer replied. "No Jillies, if that's what you mean."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," said the communications officer on the distant planet, and again with that edge to his voice.

Something's eating that man, Bracer told himself.

"Oh, pardon me, captain. I'm Arthur Lasin, Breakaway's comm officer."

"Glad to meet you, commander," Bracer said, and then went on slowly, probingly, wondering whether the relief convoy that had preceded his own three ships by a week was somehow connected with the commander's discomfort: "I trust that Captain Donnelson arrived safely."

"Captain Bracer," Commander Lasin began slowly, "I suggest that you discuss this with General Crowinsky."

Bracer felt the breath of a cold night wind where his stomach should have been.

"Very well," he replied at last.

"Connect me with your commanding officer.

"I believe he's in his office, captain," the communications officer of Breakaway Station stammered. "Please stand by."

The image in the tri-D tank faded out, replaced by a dim grayness, crossed by the random bright sparks of stellar noise, the meaning less chatter of the mindless stars.

Oh, dear God, don't tell me that the relief convoy never made it. That convoy left a week before we did. Should have been here six, seven days ago. Three battle cruisers and a freighter. The Jillies couldn't have stopped it, couldn't have prevented it from reaching Breakaway with those supplies and equipment and men. God, it couldn't have happened.

And another part of Bracer's mind said slowly, coldly, bitterly: The hell it couldn't have!

"Mr. Maxel," Bracer said suddenly, turning toward his first officer.

"Yes, sir."

"We will proceed to Breakaway Station," Bracer said. "Get there as quickly as possible, and don't worry about reaction mass. Breakaway can resupply us. Establish polar orbit at five hundred kilometers. Watch out for the energy transmission. Make sure we don't intercept it. Coordinate with *Cragstone* and *Pharsalus*. And, Dan, maintain the crew on full alert until I say otherwise."

"Yes, sir," First Officer Maxel replied, nodding and turning to the console before him, bridge lights reflecting from the metal and

plastiskin sphere of his upper torso, and began to direct commands to the ship's sections.

Now, within his mind, Absolom Bracer spoke: . . . Roger, what do you think? . . .

There was a thoughtful silence before the ship's Organic Computer answered through the CEMEARS net. . . . I'm not sure, sir. Prior to our leaving Adrianopolis there were no reports of Jillie activity in this sector following their raid of several weeks ago . . .

. . . no reports . . . Bracer mused.

. . . of course, captain, that doesn't mean that there aren't Jillies near, waiting to intercept relief from the *Paladine* . . .

. . . that convoy hasn't made it, has it? . . . Bracer asked.

. . . I've already established contact with the computer on Breakaway . . . Roger said through the CEMEARS, . . . and they report that the convoy is now a week overdue . . .

. . . but why would the Jillies attack only the convoy? . . . Bracer asked. . . . if they had the strength to stop those ships, they had the strength to take Breakaway Station. Hell, Roger, why do the Jillies do any of the things they do? But why should I ask you? You're no more capable of thinking the way they do than I am . . .

. . . true, captain, but they're still rational creatures . . .

. . . are they? . . .

. . . to an extent, of course. At least as rational as we are. Totally irrational creatures don't build starships, sir . . .

. . . o k a y . . . B r a c e r thought, . . . but what is their *rational* reason for destroying the convoy, if they did, and not destroying Breakaway? . . .

. . . well, sir, perhaps they don't *want* Breakaway, as such. It may be that they want the ships, and they're using Breakaway as bait . . .

. . . yes, it could be . . . Bracer paused for a moment. . . . look, Roger, what do you really figure the odds are that the convoy was actually intercepted by a Jillie patrol? That isn't the only possibility, is it? . . .

. . . that's hard to say, sir. Since Breakaway station's computers don't know any more than we do, we can assume that neither does Adrianopolis, otherwise Breakaway station would have been informed . . .

. . . I know. Just give me an idea of the percentages involved . . .

. . . this can't be anything more than an educated guess, sir . . .

. . . that's better than nothing . . .

. . . very well, sir. I'd say a high probability of enemy activity, on the order of 72 per cent or better. About 22 per cent probability of mechanical trouble on one or more ships, forcing them to turn back. 10 per cent probability of astorgation errors. 3 per cent . . .

. . . okay, roger, that's enough . . .

The communications tank in the captain's console had begun to resolve again, now presenting the image of a thin, lean man with graying hair, deep-set eyes, thin lips, and the uniform of a brigadier general, Communications Corps.

"Captain Bracer?" the image asked.

"Yes, sir. How do you do, general?"

"Well enough, captain. I'm Herbert Crowinsky, commanding officer of Breakaway Station. We've been expecting your ships. We have a large number of, ah, wounded needing shipment to Earthside hospitals."

"I know, sir," Bracer began. "We should be in orbit in an hour or so; you can begin shuttling them up at any time, sir."

"Thank you, captain," Crowinsky said, forcing the ghost of a smile onto his drawn features.

"General, it appears that your relief convoy from Adrianopolis has failed to arrive," Bracer said slowly.

"I'm afraid that's true, captain. I don't suppose that you have any knowledge of its whereabouts?"

"No, sir, not since leaving Adrianopolis. What do they say?"

"They're as much in the dark as we are," Crowinsky said sharply. "In essence, they've told us to wait and be patient. Relief will come—eventually."

Bracer attempted as much of a nod as was possible with his present physiology. "How are conditions there, sir?"

"In the Paladine?" Crowinsky asked. "About the same as when you left, apparently. The Jillies attempted a raid on Cynthia three standard days ago, but were halted. There were some pretty heavy losses on both sides."

"They're getting bold, aren't they, sir?"

"They've always been bold, haven't they, captain?"

Bracer reflected for a moment. "Yes, bold, but never foolhardy." He paused. "Is there any word from Mothershed's expedition?"

Crowinsky looked almost startled for a moment. "I'm surprised you know about that, captain. It isn't supposed to exactly be public knowledge."

Bracer smiled bitterly below the gray globe that covered the upper half of his face. "I was originally scheduled to command the second unit."

"Oh?" Crowinsky said awkwardly.

"The Jillies made that impossible," Bracer said slowly, caustically, painfully.

"I understand, captain," General Crowinsky replied, something between pity and embarrassment in his voice.

"I'm sure you do, general," Bracer replied, ashamed of himself, but still unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice. How do you understand it, general? he asked silently. You in your nice, comfortable desk job out here in the middle of nowhere, safe and . . . Then he remembered the Jillie raid on Breakaway Station of three weeks earlier, the raid that had destroyed most of the station's defenses and over half its personnel, that left it very open and exposed to another attack, an attack that would surely destroy Breakaway Station—and the so-called FTL communications chain to Earth and the heart of the League. No, Absolom, he crowinsky isn't safe and secure as you might like to think he is.

"Anyway, sir," he spoke aloud

again, "Admiral Mothershed's expedition is common knowledge in the Paladine now."

"I should have known it would be. You can't keep something like that a secret for very long. But to answer your question, captain, no, we've heard nothing recently, nothing one way or the other."

"Then there's still hope," Bracer said, more to himself than to Crowinsky.

"Of course. As they say, captain, 'no news is good news.'"

"I certainly hope so."

Crowinsky paused for a moment before speaking again.

"Well, Captain Bracer, you can have your astrogator give my people your anticipated orbit. We will want to start shuttling up our cold-sleepers at once."

"Yes, sir. Of course."

"If I don't have another opportunity, please let me wish you, your officers and your crews a pleasant trip to Earth."

"Thank you, general, and good luck to you."

When the image of the Breakaway general had faded from the tank, Bracer spoke briefly to Maxel, told him to instruct Astrogation Officer Bene O'Gwynn to contact the other ships, confirm their anticipated orbits around Breakaway, and then inform the ground personnel of them.

Once he had relinquished functional command of the starship to his first officer, Absolom Bracer attempted to relax, leaning back against the cushion that rose from the rear of his body cylinder, and provided a support for his shoulders

and back. Then he looked at the main forward viewing tanks where the brown-gray ball of Breakaway was now growing, a disk outlined against the blackness, a parody of a world, a mocker of Earth and Adrianopolis, a leer on the face of the universe—a universe that continued to leer and mock at the fragile bipeds from Sol'd third planet.

A twisting, stabbing pain came up from some unidentifiable place below his waist, tearing through what was left of ruined flesh, and then inched up his spine, slowly, like a malevolent insect devouring its way to the soft, juicy tissues of his brain. Bracer bit his lip and tried to ignore the pain and cursed a sadistic universe for it.

What's become of the convoy from the Paladine? he asked himself. Roger had given him a kind of an answer, in his calm, not-quite-human way: 72 per cent probability of enemy activity. Jillies! The Jillies—God eternally damn their souls, if they had a god, and if they had souls behind those inhuman faces—the Jillies had found those ships of the relief convoy from Adrianopolis somewhere out there in the darkness between the stars, had intercepted them, had swung down on them, blasted with energy cannon and nukes and plasma torpedos, and a lot of good men had died.

Died . . . died . . . died . . . There in the coldness and hell, in the darkness and blazing light, filled with hatred and fear, and then pain . . . pain . . . pain. They had died, shattered, broken, limbs torn apart, bodies ruptured by the

vacuum, blood boiling away into the nothingness, eyes bursting . . . Out there, attacked by the Jillies, men had died in great agony.

And Absolom Bracer knew how it was to die that way, to die as those men had died—for he himself had died that way. Once he had died, his ship blasted apart by a rain of plasma torpedos and nuclear missiles from an attacking Jillie warship; he had died in flames and vacuum. He had died, but not permanently.

Robots had salvaged what was left of a dead captain, stuffed those mutilated fragments into a cold-sleep coffin and waited until another human ship found the wreckage, ferried the ruined crew back to Adrianopolis. And there, under the surgeons' lasers and knives Absolom Bracer had been brought back to life, what there was left of him.

He wondered whether it was worth it.

He looked up again at the image of Breakaway in the tank at the front of the starship's bridge, the dun-colored world, and wondered why men had come there to live, and to die, there on such a barren and forbidding ball of stone as that—but he knew why, intellectually he knew why.

II

An hour and a half later the shuttles began arriving from the planet below, matching orbits with the huge hospital ship *Rudolph Cragstone*, rendezvousing, transferring

the dead and half-dead from the shuttles to the enormous starship.

After a tour of his own ship, a stop at sick bay for a routine medical check, a brief, unpalatable meal, Absolom Bracer had returned to the bridge where he could better watch the shuttling process in the large tanks. Now he "stood" at the modified command position, his hands resting on the now inactive controls, his living right hand, his mechanical left, letting his mind run free.

One week out of Adrinopolis, he thought as he had thought so many times during the past hour, and two weeks to Earth. A third of the way home, and now almost out of that portion of space most heavily menaced by the Jillies—and without trouble so far. Pray to God we don't run into any trouble. Could we handle it? How much could we handle? —What could *we* take before . . .

He purposefully cut off that train of thought and looked at the tanks that showed composite views of Breakaway and near space. The three starships and the planetary shuttles were now passing over the planet's northern pole, the illuminated portion of the planet on Bracer's right, the night side on the left. Breakaway's axis was inclined some 29° , and it was now summer in the northern hemisphere, long shadows arching down across the top of the planet, down across the pole and over into the dark side, the pole a land of midnight suns.

On Breakaway's illuminated side light reflected from the huge com-

plex of structures in the northern hemisphere, visible even from five hundred kilometers up. Domes of metal and paraglas sparkled in the midday light giving the barren world an appearance of life that it only partially possessed.

Below the curve of the planet, invisible to Bracer during this part of the orbit, ringing the equator, were the nearly twenty thousand square kilometers of solar receptors, the source of the basic power that began the vast and complex process that took place on the dry, barren world. North from the power receptors, where light energy was converted to electrical energy, ran great trunk lines that carried the megavolts of electricity from the receptors to the main power station where that electrical energy was used to initiate the process of generating even more power, where atoms were stripped of their electrons, and then the naked nuclei were smashed, broken apart into the component particles, and the raw power of those particles consumed. Thus the substance of the world called Breakaway was devoured to provide men with the energy needed to talk across the distances between the stars.

From the glint that represented the huge main power station, Bracer's mechanical eyes followed an invisible line of power conductors northward to the pole, up to the huge modulation station that was the reason for this enormous power generation, up to the faint violet glowing of ionized atoms in Breakaway's thin atmosphere, the shaft of light that climbed skyward.

High above the planetary system's plane of the ecliptic, situated almost directly above the north pole of Breakaway's sun, but millions of kilometers away from that yellow dwarf, was an artificial world over a kilometer in diameter. This tiny worldlet, enormous artifact, was embedded in a huge complex of cables, braces, metal tubes that extended some dozens of kilometers into space around it, the receiving and transmitting antennas of the relay station, the purpose of Breakaway Station.

From Adrianopolis to Earth: nearly forty light-years. Between Adrianopolis and Earth were eight stations such as Breakaway, eight relays receiving, amplifying, transmitting and retransmitting the beam of electromagnetic energy that connected the worlds. This was the FTL communications chain from the Paladine, leading to Earth. Similar chains of energy led to Earth from other portions of the sky. All major human colonies were so connected to Earth. All paths led to Earth.

Gigawatts of power generated at the power station in Breakaway's northern hemisphere were fed to the modulation station at the planet's pole. From the modulation station this power was beamed skyward toward the relay station some millions of kilometers away—after several very important things were done to it.

It was something like this: incoming signals were received by the relay satellite above Breakaway's sun, those signals were demodulated, at least to the extent that could be impressed on ordinary

radio beams rather than sub-spectrum waves. This intelligence, beamed down to the modulation station at Breakaway's north pole, was fed through computers, and again demodulated another step down—here information directed to Breakaway was subtracted, outgoing information added, random, non-intelligible noise clipped away. Then the intelligence was used to modulate the outgoing beam, the unbelievable quantities of energy that were beamed back to the relay, and then sent Earthward or toward the Paladine.

Electromagnetic energy travels at a very fixed speed, of course. About 300,000 kilometers per second in a vacuum. That is the prime law of the universe. Nothing can go faster, not in this space-time. Nothing, friend! —Nothing with substance. Nothing that is, well, real. So, when Breakaway Station first went into operation some one hundred and fifty standard years before, it had taken 4.3 years for its first message to reach Hart Station, Earthward; 3.9 years to reach Obad Station toward the Paladine. That was the first message. The second took no measurable time at all.

From Breakaway Station to Hart Station: like I said, four point three light-years: a beam of photons, continuous, unbroken, stretching across that distance, bundles of invisible energy completing the link. Now, when the link was completed, the transmitters on Breakaway continuously pouring energy into space, there was a bridge between Breakaway and Hart. The bridge had taken 4.3 years to "grow," but

passage across that bridge, if done in the proper manner, well, that was virtually instantaneous.

Subspectrum energy is not self-propagating. It does not occur in nature except under the most exceptional conditions, like in the hearts of stars going nova, for example, or in a quasar. It is a parasitic form of energy, if energy is really the proper term. It can exist only when electromagnetic energy is available in sufficient quantities, handled in the proper way. But subspectrum energy has one very unusual quality: since it isn't real, that is, *real* in the sense of corpuscular energy, *real* as photons are real, it isn't bound by the immutable laws of the universe.

Don't ask me to explain it. I can't. Even I don't really understand it. It isn't something you talk about in words. Words just aren't adequate. Certain highly evolved mathematics are, but then very few people have a grasp of them. Just accept it for this: standing waves of subspectrum energy impressed on a beam of electromagnetic energy can be modulated, these modulations will proceed along the standing waves in something like zero-time. They exist, and then they don't exist, but during the instant during which they do exist, they will be felt all along the beam upon which the standing waves have been impressed. Follow me?

Instantaneous communications!

It costs like hell, in time, in money, in energy, but once the system is there a signal can be "sent" from Earth to Adrianopolis in no more time than it takes to modulate

the intelligence onto the subspectrum standing waves, allowing for the time involved at each relay station where each signal is demodulated, cleaned up, and then remodulated. In the case of a message from the Paladine to Earth, an hour, at most, is required to cross forty light-years of space.

Starships, of course, aren't that fast. They bypass Einstein in another, cruder fashion.

Captain Absolom Bracer watched as the starships and their accompanying shuttles arced down across the pole, hundreds of kilometers from the power beam that climbed from the planet's pole, out toward the relay station. A planetary shuttle broke away from the *Rudolph Cragstone*, entered a path that would return it to its launching site in the northern hemisphere, and vanished. Moments later another shuttle arrived, docked, and men and machines began to unload another dead cargo.

Out of the twelve thousand men and women who had manned Breakaway Station, five thousand of them were still at their posts, working double, triple shifts until the ships from Adrianopolis could arrive with their reinforcements—if they would ever arrive now. Of the rest, the other seven thousand, well, four and a half thousand of them, dead and half-dead, all in cold-sleep, were being ferried up to the *Rudolph Cragstone*, to go back to Earth, to be put back together. The other two and a half thousand? There hadn't been enough left of them to worry about, not even for the organ banks, after the Jillies attacked. The Jillies tend-

ed to do a good job of whatever they did—and what they usually did was kill human beings.

And the two warships, the twelve interceptors that had guarded Breakaway Station?—they were gone, fragments still in orbit around Breakaway, around its sun, metal metors that had vaporized when they reached the planet's tenuous atmosphere, dead, gone. And Breakaway's ground defenses: energy cannon, plasma torpedo launchers, nuclear missiles: most of them gone too, as were huge sections of the power station, the solar receptors. But the human warships, the energy cannon, the plasma torpedos, the nukes had all take their toll of the enemy, toll enough that even with Breakaway naked and weakened, the Jillies had not taken the final step and plastered the planet with thermonukes. Nor had they attacked the relay station, but then the relay satellite was as well armed with defensive weapons as any warship. So, after coming within scant kilometers of totally destroying Breakwater station, the Jillies had retreated. The communications channels were still open, Earth still talked with Adrianopolis, still knew what was happening in the Paladine, still awaited word from Mothershed's expedition, still massed her forces for one frantic stab into the heart of Jillieland before her colonies were severed and herself surrounded.

These, then, were some of the thoughts that ran through the mind of Absolom Bracer as he "stood" on the bridge of the *Iwo Jima* and watched the last of the shuttles ar-

rive from the planet below. Some, but not all. There were some thoughts in his mind that he didn't want to admit, even to himself.

"Miss Cyanta," he said aloud at last, his voice sounding harsh and overly loud in his ears, "see if you can raise General Crowinsky on Breakaway for me."

"Yes, sir," the dark, attractive, legless communications officer replied.

A few moments later Bracer heard her speaking to someone on the planet below: "Breakaway Central, this is the League starship *Iwo Jima*. Captain Bracer wishes to speak with General Crowinsky."

"Acknowledge, *Iwo Jima*. Hold on one moment," replied a voice from the communications speaker. Then, a few moments later, "General Crowinsky is occupied at the moment. He will return Captain Bracer's call as soon as possible, *Iwo Jima*."

"Can you tell me how soon that will be?" Comm Officer Cyanta asked.

"No more than an hour, *Iwo Jima*."

"Thank you, Breakaway Central. LSS *Iwo Jima* out."

"I heard," Bracer said without turning his head. "Inform me at once when the general calls. I'll be in my cabin."

"Yes, sir. I will."

As Bracer started to leave the bridge he had a fleeting, unfinished thought, but one that made him turn, go back toward the first officer's position, the treads of his supporting cylinder hissing faintly on the metal deck.

"Mr. Maxel," he said.

"Yes, captain?" Daniel Maxel answered, looking up from the board before him, his broad slavic face impassive, serene.

Too serene? Bracer asked himself. Is Dan's expression an indication that he's going under? I can't afford to have a first officer who *accepts* conditions the way they are. There's such a thing as too much . . . Oh, dammit, Absolom, let it go. Dan's the best damned officer you've got. And one with guts.

The last thought almost made Bracer laugh aloud. Guts! There were very few on that ship who had real flesh and blood guts.

"How's it going?" Bracer asked his first officer.

"Well enough, sir," Maxel answered. "Everything's under control."

"Then turn the watch over to Mr. Reddick and come to my cabin," Bracer said.

"Yes, sir," Maxel replied, his face betraying no trace of emotion, if he felt any. One of his artificial fingers touched a stud on the panel before him, a light blinked on, a buzz came from the small speaker in the board.

As Bracer turned away to leave the bridge a voice spoke from the speaker: "Reddick here. Yes, Mr. Maxel?"

As he quietly rolled down the corridor leading from the starship's bridge to the officer's quarters, Bracer's mind rambled aimlessly, but returned with terrible consistency to two images. One was that of the planet called Breakaway, rotating below them, its vast gray-

brown deserts, the solar receptors that ringed its equator, the glint of metal of the power station complex, the array of antennas and projectors at the north pole, the five thousand embattled men and women who still operated the station, who still relayed the communications from Earth to Adrianopolis, from Adrianopolis to Earth, who waited to hear word of Albion Mothershed's audacious expedition into the heart of Jillie-controlled space, who waited to hear word of the great armada of starships that Earth was gathering for one last magnificent attack, an attack, an invasion that might scatter the Jillie forces—or might destroy the last of mankind's defenses.

And the other image was of blasting, burning, searing light and heat, exploding out of the darkness, destroying starships and men, and those were thoughts that he did not wish to think, those were memories that he did not wish to remember. He had died once. Wasn't that enough?

Inside his cabin Bracer rolled to his desk, took a cigarette from an ornately engraved case that had been a woman's gift, long ago, in another universe, and slowly, carefully puffed it to glowing. He took a deep breath, lungs filling with the smoke of tobacco a hundred generations removed from the fields of Virginia, and tried not to think, not to think of anything at all.

A scarred, battered face riding atop the narrow shoulders of a tall, thin body clad in the uniform of a starship steward appeared in the hatchway.

"Is there anything I can get for you, sir?" the face asked.

"No, Johnson. Thank you. I'll call you if I need you."

"Very good, sir."

The steward vanished as quickly and silently as he had come, and Bracer remained in the same position, fighting thought, until metallic knuckles clad in synthetic plastiskin rapped on the cabin's hatch.

"Come in."

Daniel Maxel stepped through the voice-actuated hatch as it opened, the gray sphere of his upper torso reflecting the light of the lamp on the desk.

"First Officer Maxel re . . ."

"Stow it, Dan," Bracer said through tight lips, not really understanding his own tenseness, perhaps not wanting to understand it. "This is a purely social occasion. Pretend I've taken off my uniform."

"Okay," Maxel answered, smiling.

"Sit down," Bracer said, gesturing toward a chair with the glowing tip of his cigarette.

"Anything in particular you wanted?" Maxel asked as he crossed the cabin and sat down.

"I don't know, Dan. I'm not sure. I just—well—I wanted to talk to someone."

"Okay, shoot."

"Look, I've got a couple of bottles of Napoleon brandy—some medical officer's idea of a joke, I guess." He cut himself off. Maxel knew that he didn't have a natural gastrointestinal system—but there was no point in talking about it, any more than there was any point in talking about the wounds, injuries, mutilations of the other officers and crew-

men. This was a carefully tabooed subject aboard the *Iwo Jima*. "Care for a glass?"

"No," Maxel said. "I don't think so. Thanks anyway."

"Just answer it in whatever fashion you can." Bracer smiled, at least his lips smiled, and that is all the face he had left to smile with. "That's why I offered you the Napoleon in the first place."

"Well," Maxel began as Bracer opened the cabinet, took out the bottle, "I think that I'd answer that morale is good, about as good as you'd expect under the circumstances. Oh, of course, Reddick and a few others are as bitter as hell, but you can't really blame them." He paused. "There's not a man or woman on this ship, except for the marines, who, well, doesn't have something wrong with him. They've all been through hell, Absalom, and you can't expect them to come out of that with a big grin on their faces."

Bracer returned to the center of the cabin, sitting the bottle and an empty glass on a low table near the first officer's chair.

"Sorry it's not chilled," Bracer said. "I didn't expect anyone to be drinking it."

"That's okay," Maxel replied.

"About what you were saying, Dan. I know it. I know it as well as you do."

Maxel smiled. "I know you know it, and so does every other man and woman on this ship. You've had it worse than any of the rest of us, and that helps a hell of a lot."

"I'm not sure that mine's any worse than—than yours."

"I think it is." Maxel opened the bottle and poured the glass half full.

"You say that morale is good, considering," Bracer said. "To what do you attribute this good morale?"

"I'm not sure. Two things, I guess. Maybe three. Maybe more."

"What are they?" Bracer rolled back to the desk, got another cigarette.

"You're one of them," Maxel said slowly. "No, I mean it. What I just said. You've suffered as much as any of us. Even more. And they know it, Absolom, that if you weren't a qualified starship captain, and if the Force wasn't so desperately in need of experienced captains, well, you'd be in cold-sleep in the *Cragstone* where you ought to be. They'll follow you for it."

"Okay, I'm a little tin god," Bracer said, "and that's just about literally true. What are the other reasons?"

"They're going home. It's that simple. Oh, I know that maybe half the crew has never been to Earth; they're from Adrianopolis and Cynthia and half a dozen other planets, but Earth is, well, dammit, Earth is home. It's even home for me, and, hell, my *grandfather* was born on Creon."

"I know," Bracer said. "It's the mystique of Earth. The homeworld. The planet where we evolved. Even Adrianopolis, as Earthlike as it is, doesn't really . . . I don't know how to express it either, Dan. But I know the feeling. It's something born and bred into us during two billion years of evolution. We're still Earthlings, all of us."

Maxel nodded, continued. "And

there's the hope, belief, I guess you'd call it, almost religious, that the hospitals there can put them all back together. That means a lot too."

Maxel's lips tightened with his last words; Bracer could read the emotions on his face, could match them with his own. The hope that there on Earth he—they—could be transformed back into human beings again, the pain and horror of what had happened to them washed away, and they could walk and talk and smile and laugh and mix with others of their own kind.

"You said there might be a third reason," Bracer said after too long a pause.

"Yes. Admiral Mothershed's expedition," Maxel said. "It's common knowledge now. That and the fact that Earth is forming an armada, that we're getting ready for something really big."

"They've got hope, Absolom, for the first time in years they've really got hope that we can win this damned war and chase the Jillies back to whatever hell they came from."

"There are a lot of *if's*, Dan," Bracer said slowly. "If Mothershed can get in and then back out again. If he can bring back information that really helps. If the armada can find the targets that Mothershed may locate. If the Jillies don't have another armada ready to stop it. If they don't launch a major attack on Earth before then. If, if . . ."

"Dammit, I know that!" Maxel said suddenly, loudly, shattering his stoic calm. He paused, then said, "I'm sorry, but I know all that, and they know it, but, hell, Absolom, it's

a hope, the first real hope we've had since the Jillies overran then Salient."

Bracer nodded slowly, sadly. "I know, Dan. I hope it as much as you do, as much as anyone, but I just can't let myself believe that we've won until we actually have. We're still too damned close to losing."

There was silence in the captain's cabin for a few long moments. Maxel slowly relaxed, then refilled his glass with the old Napoleon brandy from the vineyards of Terra; Bracer lit still another Adrianopolitan cigarette.

Finally Maxel spoke: "What are you getting at?"

"I don't know, Dan," Bracer said very, very slowly. "So help me, Dan, I don't really know what I want."

"I think maybe you do. Maybe you just don't want to admit it."

"Dan, I've been . . ."

The desk began to buzz, very, very loudly in the suddenly quiet cabin. Bracer slowly turned on the treads of cylinder that supported what was left of his body, rolled to the desk, pushed a button.

"Captain Bracer here," he said.

"Captain, this is Comm Officer Cyanta." The woman's image formed in the tank. "General Crowinsky is returning your call. Shall I put him through?"

"Yes, go on."

Bracer snuffed out his cigarette, glance over his shoulder. "Stay here, Dan. I want you to hear this."

Maxel nodded.

The lean face of a very tired, exhausted-looking General Crowinsky developed in the tank.

"Captain Bracer," the commandant of Breakaway Station said,

"I'm sorry it took me so long to return your call. Can I help you?"

"Yes, sir. Have you been in communication with Colonial Defense Coordination Headquarters?"

"Of course, captain," Crowinsky said, annoyance showing on his face. "In fact, I was talking with CDC when you called earlier."

"May I ask, sir, just what is the situation in regard to your relief convoy?"

"Why are you asking, captain? I'm not sure that our situation is any affair of yours."

"No offense meant, general. I don't mean to be prying, but—sir, if Jillie warships did intercept your convoy, they may still be in the neighborhood. I want to be ready."

Bracer asked himself whether he was really stating what he meant. Or was he lying? What did he really want Crowinsky to say? He didn't know, and maybe he didn't want to know.

"Of course. Forgive me, captain," the general was saying. "I *am* a bit tired, edgy, you know."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"Thank you. Well, both Adrianopolis and Earth seem to agree. Jillie attack is the most likely thing. Those ships would have been here otherwise." Crowinsky shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid that we must assume that they've been destroyed, captain."

"Then we were rather lucky in getting through," Bracer said, flatly, falsely, knowing that space is enormous and starships small, and knowing that even if Jillie ships were still in the area, their failure to detect the tiny convoy was not an

improbability. "What about you, general? Are they sending you another relief convoy?"

The commanding officer of Breakaway Station nodded slowly. "They are," he said, "but not from Adrianopolis. They can't spare a single ship. Not one, captain." The general's lower lip quivered. "CDCHQ is going to send help, they say."

"How soon?" Bracer asked, tension within him tingling the ends of raw nerves.

"Four weeks, five weeks, as soon as Earth can spare them," General Crowinsky said slowly.

"They can't do it any sooner?" Bracer demanded almost angrily.

"No, that's the best they can do. We'll just have to hold out until then."

"But can you, general?"

"Dammit, captain, we have to!" Crowinsky yelled. "We've got to keep communications open to Earth until . . ." The Communications Crops general paused, fought back something that was written like fear across his face. "I'm sorry, captain."

"I understand, sir."

"I think you do, Captain Bracer." Crowinsky was silent for a few moments. "The shuttles will be coming up with you reaction mass in a short while. I suggest that you plan on moving out of orbit as soon as you have it on board. I don't know how safe you are here."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"Good day, captain." And with that the general's finger stabbed a button on the desk before him; his image faded from the tank.

Absolom Bracer slowly turned

away from his own communicator and faced his first officer.

"Haven't we been through enough, Dan? Haven't we suffered enough?"

Daniel Maxel did not answer for a few moments, and when he finally did his voice was hollow, empty, his words slow: "Nobody's asking us."

"I know."

For a few moments Bracer did not speak again, and when he finally did his voice was almost normal. "Dan, go back to the bridge and supervise the loading of the reaction mass. I'll talk to you later."

"Yes, sir," the first officer said, rising from the chair, leaving a half empty glass of Napoleon brandy sitting on the table.

Bracer watched him leave, and then slowly turned back toward the communicator, and wondered just what he was going to do, and wondered how he was going to go on living with himself if he made any decision at all.

A few minutes later he took a pill and hoped that it would enable him to get a little sleep before he had to talk with the captains of the *Pharsalus* and the *Rudolph Cragstone*.

III

Jillies, said the half conscious mind of Absolom Bracer, that's a hell of a name. How did we ever come up with that? That surely isn't what they call themselves. He couldn't remember. He thought of asking Roger, for either in the cells of his own brain, or in the memory units

of the larger electro-mechanical computer that he supervised, Roger would have that bit of information stored away. But he didn't want to ask Roger. He didn't want to know the answer that badly. Why they were called Jillies didn't really matter. The fact that they *were* did matter. That mattered a hell of a lot.

And how long ago had mankind first encountered them? Two hundred and some odd standard years ago, as well as he could remember. Maybe two and a half centuries. A long time. More than a human lifetime, even in a day when men *normally* live past a century and a half.

So men had known of the Jillies for over a human lifetime, but what did they know of them, even now? How well did they understand them?

Well, the basic facts were relatively simple; they could be found in any encyclopedia: the Jillies—what the hell was their scientific name?—were the natives of a world in the Sagittarius arm of the galaxy, many light-years toward the Center from Earth, a planet a little warmer than Earth, but not so warm as Venus, a planet a little larger than Earth, but no so large as Neptune.

Roughly, very roughly, the Jillies were humanoid, if by humanoid you mean a creature with a central, upright body, two upper appendages, arms, two lower appendages, legs, and a brain-and-sense-organ-housing head above the central body. Beyond that the resemblance virtually ended. The Jillies were like something out of a madman's nightmare; hideous,

monstrous things by any human standards, as humans must have been monstrous by their standards.

Dark, leathery, hairless skin covered their bodies, skin that reminded Bracer of the leather of a very ancient and very worn book. Their large heads were rounder than a man's, more nearly smooth, with fewer distinct features: two great eyes set deeply within heavily boned eye sockets, seemingly too far apart for stereoscopic vision; a tiny, mobile slip in place of a mouth; nothing that could be called a chin, nothing that could be called jaws; feathery, mobile appendages where man would have ears. Necks, seemingly too thin to support the large, heavy heads, flowed into broad, muscular shoulders, and from the shoulders dropped arms, two elbows a piece, "double joined" wrists like a dog, six-fingered hands jointed so that anyfinger could serve the function of a thumb. Broad chests, thick ribs—and a boned and muscled cavity where man would have his stomach and intestines! Bracer almost wretched, then slowly went on with his catalog of Jillie anatomy: rounded, woman-like hips, genitals that were too much like a human's, legs that were double kneed, large splayed feet. And all dark, coarse, leathery, alien. Yes, that was the word for them, *alien*.

Bracer's mind came back to the abdominal cavity, that characteristic which more than any other set the Jillies so far from mankind. The Jillies were creatures with two-part bodies, or rather, bodies with detachable sub-bodies. This was something that had never quite been

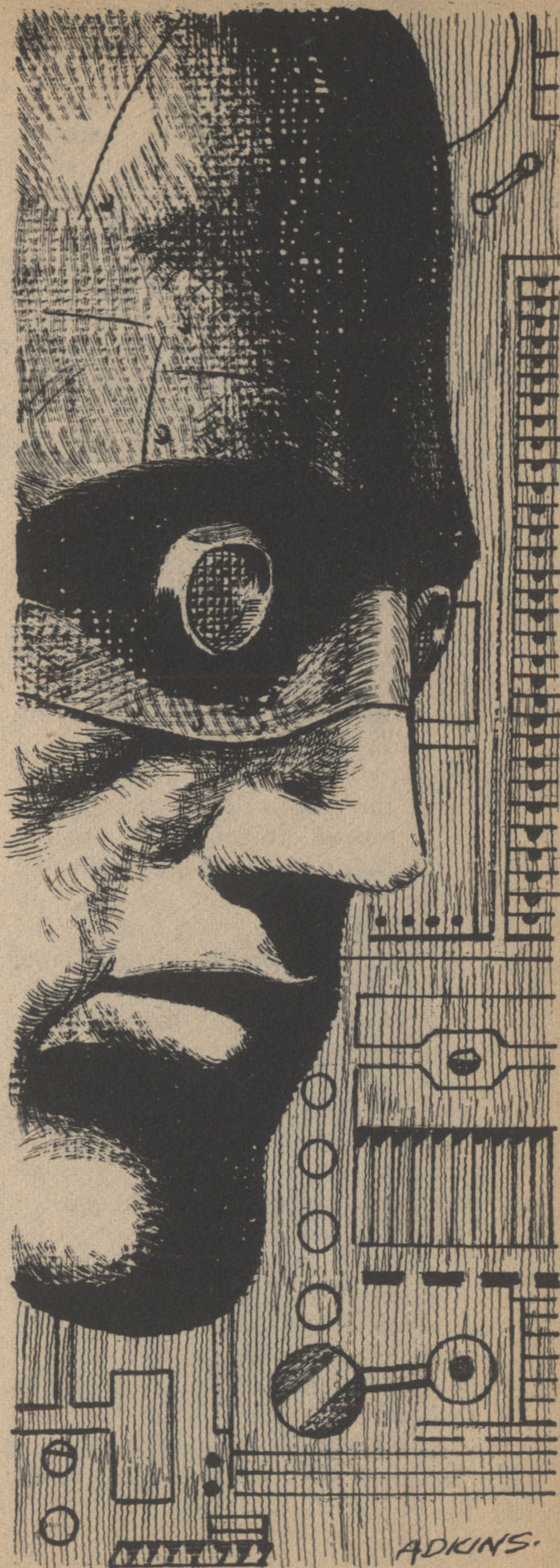
tried in Terrestrial evolution: a part of the body that could be removed and replaced at will. Very vague memories came back to him from some Zoology courses he had taken at the academy decades before—maybe there were some primitive examples in Earth's biology of creatures that could sacrifice one portion of their body to a predatory enemy, while the rest of the animal fled to safety, but he couldn't remember the specifics. And it didn't matter. Even if evolution on Earth had experimented with the idea, it had never been followed up. On the world of the Jillies it had.

Apparently some ancestor of the Jillies and their biological cousins had found an advantage in being able to eject its stomach and intestines when threatened, and then escaping. It seemed like a hell of a defense, but weirder things had happened, he supposed.

As pre-Jillie evolution progressed on that hot, heavy world in the Sagittarius arm, the gastrointestinal system became more highly evolved for detachment, became a unit that could be released at will, left behind to appease the hunger of some bright-eyed predator, and lightening the proto-Jillie, increasing the speed of his escape, leaving him to live and then regrow the missing organs from the heavy ridges of fat that lay along the back of his ribs.

Then, some bright and enterprising proto-Jillie, finding that he had given up a good portion of himself in error, made the attempt to replace the expelled organs. Perhaps it had not worked the first time,

BREAKAWAY STATION



maybe it took a million years to work, but eventually it did, eventually the ancestors of the Jillies developed to a point where they could take back the sack of organs, reintegrate them with the rest of the body, and go on about their business as if the event had never happened.

Since the proto-Jillie became more and more likely to remove his g-i sack in times of danger and stress, the *Mother Nature* of Jillieworld found it necessary to make provisions for the survival of the living cells in the separated portion. After attempting a dozen methods, *she* finally hit upon a rather simple solution: evolve the nerves of the g-i sack a little, make them a rudimentary brain, modify this flap of muscle into a crude heart, that cavity into a lung; now we have an organism. Since the mouth in the proto-Jillie's head was often detached from the stomach in the g-i sack, evolution produced a second mouth, an eating mouth in the g-i sack. The original head-mouth soon lost its teeth, salivary glands, esophagus, and became breathing-talking mouth for the main body. About that time, through a set of incredible geological/climatic circumstances matched only by the ravages of Earth's Pleistocene, the proto-Jillie was forced to evolve intelligence or die—Jillie was born.

What could mankind have in common with a creature so oddly constructed? Bracer asked himself. Well, intelligence, for one thing. A hunger for knowledge. A desire to conquer everything outside himself. A mind capable of coming to some understanding of the workings of the

universe. And what else? Very little. Very damned little!

It's like this. Man is a social creature. True. But not a social creature to the extent of, say, an ant or a bee. Jillie was. Man lives in families of a more or less natural form, and from these he evolves clans, tribes, nations, worlds. Jillie did not know family, as such, only "clan," or "hive," as some would call it. Man thinks in terms of the individual, the "me." Jillie thought in terms of the "clan," the "us."

Stop for a minute. Take that term that men translate as "clan." A very poor translation it is. There are no human words to convey the Jillie meaning. Very, very roughly it might be translated as "stomach brothers." Within the clan the g-i sacks were common property, that is, Jillies of sufficiently close blood relationship could interchange g-i sacks. This constituted the basic unit of Jillie society, the basic concept of Jillie thought.

To the Jillie the individual was almost nothing. The "clan" was all. Clans formed superclans of more distant blood kin, superclans formed nations, nations formed the race of the Jillies.

How could a man understand the psychology of a Jillie? How could we every put ourselves in *their* philosophical shoes? Biologically we could never imitate Jillies. Could we do any better psychologically? It seemed rather hopeless. Men didn't even know why they were at war with the Jillies.

Take this for example: men think in terms of objects and events. Agreed, there are exceptions to this,

both individually and culturally, but by and large men think in these terms. Jillies,—they thought in terms of inter-relationships of events. Objects, well, they are acted upon by these inter-relationships of events, but have little or no importance in and of themselves. Follow me? Try this: men, for the most part, think in terms of the discrete, Aristotelian A is A. Jillies thought in terms of “bridges,” and I can’t think of a single human philosopher who ever thought quite the way they did.

Consider their language. Unlike mankind, by the age of interstellar flight, they had achieved a single language, no less complex than Anglo-western, more so, in fact, running in excess of a half a million concepts—note, *concepts*, not words, for words, as men know them, did not exist in the language of Jillies, only inter-relationships of sounds and symbols.

Though the Jillies had no formal religious concepts as men understand them, certain values were, well, sacred to them. The value forty-four, for example. So, there were forty-four sound symbols in the Jillie language. The symbols, spoken or written, comprised the total of sounds available, symbols to write, for their written language, their numerals, their punctuation. Does it sound like an alphabet? It’s not. Not the way we understand an alphabet. Not one of these symbols had a fixed meaning. “A” in Anglo-western has a fixed meaning, several fixed meanings, in fact, but still something fairly standard, something relatively unchanging. The Jillie symbol that

looked something like \emptyset could mean any number of things depending upon its inter-relationship with other symbols. Since nothing had a fixed meaning, nothing approximating a human dictionary had ever been devised by a Jillie Noah Webster. This may speak highly of the Jillie capacity for memory, but it also speaks of their alienness to Man.

Perhaps all of this is beside the point, but it did pass through the mind of Absolom Bracer as he half-slept while the shuttles bringing reaction mass from Breakaway docked and unloaded, and then returned to the barren world below. He also thought of two incidents that brought about war between mankind and the beings called Jillies. Both had involved human stellar colonies.

Fifty years before, when Absolom Bracer was still a very young man, a recently explored planet between the Orion and Sagittarius galactic arms was colonized by Terrans. A shipload of disaffected Asians left the Great Singapore Spaceport for Esmerelda, where they would, as their brochures said, “begin a new way of life on a clean and uncluttered world.”

Approximately a standard year and a half after the landing of the colonial ship, four Jillie warships came out of star drive a few light-hours from Esmerelda, and, without communication of any sort, proceeded to the human colony, shields up and weapons firing. After a short and bloody battle between the Jillie invaders and the poorly armed colonists, fully half of the survivors,

mostly young adults and older children, were kidnapped by the aliens.

When the Colonial Authority of the newly formed Galean League on Earth learned of the attack and abduction, a very strongly worded message was dispatched to the Jillie homeworld, demanding the immediate return of the captured humans. The Jillies complied at once, apologizing profusely, saying that they were sorry, they had not know that these people were of value to Earth. When the ship returning the abducted humans landed on Adrianopolis of the Paladine, war very nearly began. The aliens had been vivisecting the colonists—only thirteen were still alive, and they were begging to die.

War did not occur. Tempers gradually cooled. The Jillies paid a large indemnity in heavy metals and swore that such an occurrence would never, never take place again. The councils of the Galean League did not understand the psychology of the Jillies, but they accepted their word. They had little choice, short of interstellar war.

So there was peace, for a while.

Nearly thirty years passed. Another planet between the major galactic arms was settled, Transtock, dozens of light-years to the galactic west of ill-fated Esmerelda. Ten standard months after the establishment of the first permanent settlement on Transtock, a Jillie war fleet spiraled into the system, fell into orbit, bombarded the colonial planet with thermonuclear weapons, and then quietly returned to its home base.

Shortly thereafter a Jillie courier ship arrived on Earth, landing at the Geneva Spaceport with all the pomp that surrounded such matters of state, even in that enlightened age. Its single occupant, a gray-skinned, battle-scarred old Jillie military officer of the leading clan of the Jillie homeworld, asked to be taken at once to the Chairman of the Galean League. Before the chairman, the Jillie courier, in the croaking, wheezing speech that Jillies used to imitate men, said: "Insulting is enough. Stomach-brothers endure no more. War is here. Dying!" The Jillie's g-i sack had been replaced by a bomb that destroyed half of Geneva.

So the war began.

Why? Because we infringed on some area of space that the Jillies held to be their own? They never said so. Because we violated some taboo? They ever told us. Because they just didn't like us? Maybe. But no one ever knew for sure.

These are some of the things that Absolom Bracer thought about while he half slept, while the reaction mass was being loaded aboard his three starships.

Then he called the bridge.

"Yes, captain," answered the communications man on duty.

"Is Mr. Maxel on the bridge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me speak to him."

"Yes, sir."

Moments later Daniel Maxel's broad face appeared in the tank.

"Dan."

"Yes, sir."

"How's loading coming?"

"Just about finished with us."

Another ten, fifteen minutes. Shall I have Miss O'Gwynn begin plotting our orbit out?" There was a hushed excitement in his question, and perhaps fear.

"No, not yet," Bracer said slowly. "What about the other ships?"

"They're finished with *Pharsalus*. *Cragstone's* going to take a while longer. Maybe half an hour."

"Okay. Just as soon as you're finished there come to my—no, make that the briefing room. Meet me there."

"Yes, sir." There were questions on the first officer's face, but he asked none of them.

Bracer thumbed the switch with his real hand. The image faded out.

Now what, Absolom? he asked himself. What the hell are you going to do now? You've got a problem, and you know it. Isn't it time you admitted it? Out loud?

"Haven't I suffered enough?" he asked himself. "Haven't we all suffered enough?"

A surge of memory and pain went through what was left of his body, a memory of what it was that had made him the way he was now, the horribly mutilated half-man that he was. He could see again the tanks of the bridge during the battle, the huge shape of the Jillie warship before him, the blaze of energy cannon, the glow of plasma torpedos, the flickering of electromagnetic fields—and he could remember how it was when the computer failed to outguess that one particular torpedo, how it broke through the shields and reached the hull of the *Crecy*, and how his starship exploded around him. He remembered how it was

to die, horribly, painfully, and not nearly quickly enough, how he saw his legs blasted before a thorn of flame from a fusing bulkhead seared against his spacehelmet and then he had no more eyes. Then he had died. Thank God, he had died.

But they had brought him back to life, damn their souls, damn those merciless doctors on Adrianopolis, and doubly damn those admirals who had given him—*him*, a corpse who still talked—a command and said, "Take these three ships home, captain."

And now . . . now he was at Breakaway Station and a third of the way home, but Breakaway Station was almost defenseless and if the Jillies attacked she wouldn't even have the feeble defenses that the *Iwo Jima* and the *Pharsalus* could offer, and if she were destroyed, if the communications link were destroyed, if . . .

. . . Roger! . . .

. . . Yes, captain . . .

. . . I need your help . . .

. . . Just ask, captain . . .

. . . Dammit, roger, what am i going to do? . . .

. . . I can't answer that for you, sir . . .

. . . You've got to help me . . .

. . . I can supply you information, captain, but i can't make your decisions. you know that. there are certain limitations to my capabilities, built-in, you might say, or at least conditioned . . .

. . . How, roger? you were a man once . . .

. . . That was a long time ago, captain. i don't remember. i'm not a man now. my mind doesn't function

the same as yours. i don't have the same frames of reference. i can't replace you, captain, nor can you replace me. i can help you, but i can't make *your* decisions for your . . .

. . . OKAY! . . . Bracer's CEMEARS was silent for a few moments; then he projected this question: . . . in the light of present circumstances, including any information that may have been relayed to you from breakaway station, what is the probability that the relief convoy from adrianopolis was destroyed by enemy activity? . . .

In the same formal tones, Roger's mental projections said: . . . the probability that the relief convoy was attacked and destroyed by enemy warships now stands at approximately 82 per cent, with . . .

. . . Okay, roger, that answers my question. now, do you *think* that the jillies destroyed those ships? . . .

. . . Of course . . .

Bracer paused before putting his next question to the Organic Computer.

. . . roger, Considering all available information, what do you consider the probability of a jillie attack on breakaway station prior to the arrival of the relief ships from earth? . . .

Then it was Roger's turn to pause. There was a long, cold silence in Bracer's mind before the "voice" of the Organic Computer replied: . . . captain, there's too little data to give you an answer that would have any kind of validity . . .

. . . do the best you can . . .
. . . there are too few precedents

for *this* type of attack, too many unknowns . . . Roger paused. . . . as i said a few moments ago, captain, you and i don't really think in the same way; our environments are more different than you may realize, and our environments order and ordain the frames within which we do our thinking. you are a man, despite what you may presently think despite what you may presently think of yourself, and you think as a man thinks. i'm a starship, sir, for all practical purposes, and I think as a starship thinks. yet, captain, as you once observed yourself, my thoughts and yours are identical when compared with those of the extra-terrestrials we call jillies. at least you and i, sir, have an ancestral identity. captain, i just can't think the way the jillies do. i can't project . . .

. . . roger . . . Bracer interrupted, . . . are you trying to avoid giving me a straight answer?

. . . No, sir . . .

. . . Then tell me, do you think that the jillies are going to attack within the next four or five weeks? . . .

. . . Yes, sir, i think they probably will . . .

. . . thank you, roger . . . Bracer transmitted. . . . that's all for now . . .

Bracer turned to the communicator of his desk and stabbed a button. Moments later the face of the duty communications man appeared in the tiny tank.

"Get me Captain Davins," Bracer said.

"Yes, sir."

The tank fogged and for long,

dragging moments during which Bracer attempted to think no thoughts at all, the tank was filled with floating abstractions. Then the tank cleared.

Half a human face looked back at him: the right eye, part of a nose, part of a mouth; the rest was a featureless egg of plastiskin.

"You wanted to talk to me, Absolom?" asked Captain Charles Davins of the LSS *Pharsalus*.

"Yes, I did, Chuck. How's everyone doing over there?"

"Well enough. Actually better than I had expected when we left Adrianopolis. We'll make it. I'm sure of that now."

I wish I were, thought Absolom Bracer.

"Chuck, will you rake a shuttle over to the *Iwo* in about an hour? I want to talk to you about something. Bring your first officer along."

"Sure, we'll be there," Davins said. "Can you tell me what it's about?"

"I'd rather wait 'till you get here."

"Okay. See you in an hour."

Moments later, once Davins' image was gone from the tank, Bracer buzzed the bridge.

"Contact all senior officers," he said quickly. "Tell them to meet me in the briefing room at once."

Then, for a long, long while Captain Absolom Bracer peered into the empty, dead tank and said to himself, God help me, God help us all if I'm doing the wrong thing.

IV

The next two hours passed quickly, sometimes loudly, sometimes bit-

terly, but they passed, and a decision was made.

V

"Captain Bracer, I really don't understand." The image of General Crowinsky within the tank was frankly puzzled.

"I simply said, sir, 'do you have any objection to my ships delaying their departure for about five weeks?'"

"For God's sake, Bracer, why? You can make it to Earth in two weeks or less. Why do you want to" Crowinsky's voice broke off, realization began to emerge within his eyes. "My God, man, do you know what you're asking for?"

"I know very well, sir," Bracer said slowly. And he did know, he and the officers of the three starships; they knew far better than General Crowinsky what they were requesting. They had all experienced death at Jillie hands before.

"I have discussed this with my senior officers," Bracer went on. "They understand the situation. There is reluctance, I admit, general, but we *have* reached an agreement. We know what we're doing. We don't like it very well, but" Like Crowinsky, Bracer let his voice trail off.

Reluctance is hardly the word, Bracer thought. I'll probably face at least one mutiny before this is out. But I think we can survive *that*. We've got worse things to face than disaffected officers and crewman. Things like—ourselves.

"Frankly, captain," Crowinsky

was saying, "how much help could you be to us if—if the Jillies attacked again?"

"I don't really know, general. I only know that you have no other defense to speak of now. If we remain, and if the Jillies do attack—and I'm praying to every god I know that they don't—but if they do, we can at least give you a better chance than you've got without us. And without us, general, you don't have any chance at all."

"I know *that*, Captain Bracer, but, really, this isn't your fight. God knows you've done your duty. Nobody can expect more of you."

"That's what I keep telling myself, sir," Bracer said, "but something keeps telling me that, well, this is my fight. I can't help but look at it this way, general: if the Jillies don't attack, we haven't lost anything but a few weeks. If they do, and if we've gone on to Earth, and if they do destroy you and break the communications link, Earth will be out of touch with the Paladine and with Admiral Mothershed, if he makes it back. Then we'd be lying in hospital beds on Earth, not knowing whether a Jillie fleet is on the way to blast the homeworld out of the sky. Maybe a break in the communications chain will give the Jillies just the edge that they need. Maybe not. I don't know. But, God help me, sir, I don't think we can take any chances with it."

"I think I do understand, Captain Bracer," Crowinsky answered. "As soon as I can get a clear channel to Earth, I'll put in your request."

"I would appreciate it," the starship captain said. "Would you patch me in on that, sir?"

"Of course. Is there anything else, captain?"

"No, sir. I don't suppose so at the moment."

"I'll be back in touch with you soon."

Had it not been for the heavy metal base of the cylinder that supported his body, and his life, Captain Absolom Bracer would have collapsed. As it was he slumped forward from the waist, to be caught by the strong prosthetic hands of his first officer.

"Captain?" Daniel Maxel said urgently.

"Let me rest for a minute."

Pain. Red stinging tongues of pain like flames clawed at legs that no longer existed, blazed in a shoulder that was nothing more than a stump, flared in a scarred groin.

"Shall I call the medical officer?" Maxel asked.

"No, no. I'll be okay."

Pain that was much like the blasting of a plasma torpedo tried to consume the huddled mind of Absolom Bracer. Back, back into his skull he crept, huddling against an outcropping of bone and tried to hide from the glowing pain.

After a while he bit his lower lip then shook himself, raised back up and looked at the other starship officers who were with him in the *Iwo Jima's* briefing room.

Besides Bracer and his first officer, there were now four others, starship officers who had been through their own hells not too unlike his own, who lived and moved and functioned thanks only to mechanical limbs and organs.

Captain Charles Davins of the LSS

Pharsalus: he had lost half his face and there was a mechanical heart thumping in the ruined cavity of his chest.

Lena Bugioli, the black-skinned first officer of the LSS *Pharsalus*: from the waist up she was whole, but her body below the waist was supported by a cylinder like Bracer's. Her face, rock-hard and anything but serene, hid the terrible pain that she must have felt. She did not let that pain interfere with her assigned duties.

Captain Zoe Medaway of the LSS *Rudolph Cragstone*: once a starship medical officer, promoted to captain against all tradition, then killed at her first command, now "revived" to command again, now without a face. The image that Captain Medaway showed to her tiny world was that of a plastiskin egg with two tri-D lenses, two openings for nostrils, and nearly immobile mouth for features. No one knew what other damages she might have, what other pains she carried. She did not speak of them, and no one asked.

First Officer Gautier Lindquist of the LSS *Rudolph Cragstone*: he had a face, two arms, two legs, but the pack that he wore across his shoulders, a complex electronic that bypassed his ruined spinal column, betrayed his injuries.

These six had come to their decision, slowly, painfully, reluctantly, yet they had all come to agree with Absolom Bracer for differing reasons that Bracer did not fully understand, and they had let him relay their decision on General Crowinsky. They would stay—until the relief ships came from Earth, or

until . . . That they did not like to think about.

"None of you wants to back out?" Bracer asked them when he had regained complete control of himself. "You still can. My ship is staying, but as of the moment I have no authority to order the rest of you to stay."

"We made our decision," Captain Davins said slowly. "The *Pharsalus* stays." He glanced at his first officer who only nodded a slow, sad reply.

Bracer turned his artificial eyes to Captain Medawar.

"Captain Bracer," said a mechanical voice from the face that wasn't a face, "you have really given us little choice. You're browbeaten us, intimidated us, accused us of cowardice and even treason if we don't agree to your scheme. Perhaps we should have called your bluff and said that we were going on to Earth despite your wishes. I'm not really sure, and I don't believe that if we had we would have been *charged* with desertion." Captain Medawar paused reflectively for a moment. "However, we have agreed." Again she paused. "I don't know what value a hospital ship can be to you. Perhaps, as you said, the Jillies wouldn't know that it isn't a warship. Perhaps you can use her to make us appear stronger than we really are, if it comes to that. That's up to you, I suppose. You're a combat officer, and if the stories are true, a good one. But I know this: I can't and I won't try to take the *Cragstone* to Earth without your escort. I don't fully agree with you, captain, but I rather think I admire you. You're the biggest damned fool I ever met."

(Continued on page 127)

TEMPLE OF SORROW

DEAN R. KOONTZ

Dean R. Koontz, still in his early 20's, has sold three s-f novels at time of this writing and many short-stories to most of the top magazines. We are happy to know that one of his earliest published stories appeared in these magazines some time ago. THE TEMPLE OF SORROW must be read on its own terms; the most interesting thing about it is to speculate just how good Mr. Koontz is going to be.

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

TRANSCRIPT OF
INTERNATIONAL PATROL
TAPE NO. 6657-A23

I

First Party:

His black eyes sparkled like polished coal in his green cotton face, and they were red-rimmed from the fumes of the incense.

"Who comes to the Temple of Sorrow?"

"My name is Mandarin. Felix Mandarin."

The Greenmask turned to the space beside me, narrowing his already slitted eyes behind the cloth.

"This is Theseus," I said.

"A Mutie?"

"My bodyguard," I snapped. I didn't particularly care to have These referred to as a Mutie, though—

"Why do you come to the Temple of Sorrow?"

To find out what the hell happened to one small nuclear device stolen from the Manhattan Museum of Pre-War Artifacts. To find out how the hell you fanatics can use one bomb to destroy the world. It must be your only one, for the last bomb was found and destroyed a hundred years ago, lodged a foot below an Iowa pasture.

"To see the Bishop of Misery."

Somewhere in the background, the chanting of many voices arose in one of the sacred songs. The language was that of the Inner Rings of the Temple, understood only by Disciples, Priests, and all the members of the Hierarchy. I had been taught it at training central over a period of two weeks. We had monitored several temples with directional microphones to obtain a grammar. With the chanting, it sounded like the buzz of angry insects. This particular chant, from the bits and pieces I could hear clearly, was a preliminary to fertility rights.

"His Holy Majesty is indisposed to non-believers."

I fished in my pocket and handed him my credentials. "Please make it known to his holy majesty that this is business of International."

He examined the photo and unalterable plastic description and authorization packet. He handed everything back, his mouth and chin — the only portion of his face visible other than his red-rimmed eyes — screwed into a scowl. "This way and fold your hands, please."

We moved through the oaken doorway at the far end of the well-lighted lobby into a narrow passageway illuminated only by simu-fire torches placed at every twenty feet. The walls were actually ten-foot blocks of volcanic rock (probably cut from the New Mexico beds) fitted together so perfectly



that no mortar was necessary. The ceiling was left in total darkness to convey the impression that it stretched upward to the stars.

Greenmask left us in the waitingroom (which was, looking at it objectively, nothing more than a cell) and departed.

Theseus tested the door. "Locked," he grumbled.

"Merely standard procedure," I said. "They want to be sure no heathens violate their Inner Rings."

"I don't like nohow."

He turned around and shuffled back to where I sat on a rough stone bench that was bracketed to the wall. "You not scared, Felix?"

"No."

"Then I not scared." He plopped down next to me.

In the grays and browns and blacks of the shadows, I could see his face illuminated irregularly by the moonlight that filtered in through the lone, barred window set high in the opposite wall. His nose was still that of a bear, square and black, cold and blunt. The fur was missing from his face, but it still covered his head, appearing as someone's joking idea of artificial hair. His mouth appeared human, except for the black lips, but when he opened it, a neat row of calcium razors showed, gleaming like the blades of penknives.

I reached over, unable to stop

myself, and patted his shoulder.

He grumbled contentedly somewhere deep inside his barrel chest, making me feel that I had not done wrong.

He didn't speak, and his nervous quiet left me nothing to do but think. Think about the new twenty-square mile Temple in Canada — its layers of radiation shielding, its underground rooms — a pleasure palace and fallout shelter in one (if intelligence reports had it correctly). So it could be assumed that they were prepared for the Second Coming of the Form. That would mean the end of the world to the rest of us, the non-believers.

In a few minutes, the Disciple returned. "This way, Mr. Mandarin."

I walked out of the cell, Theseus following.

"The Mutie will have to remain behind."

"No!" Theseus growled, his black lips quivering. I was amused to see Greenmask flinch as the penknives flashed into view.

"It's okay, Thes. I'll be back shortly. Wait here until I return." Of course he would not be permitted into the Temple proper. The Temple was against modern science (all modern science that they had no use for). They found it especially distasteful that the government should take animals and develop them in the Artificial Wombs to the point where they

approached being human. But then, since The Holocaust and Prentman's Plague, there were too few humans to carry on all essential work. Most women of the past three generations had been sterile, and only now were the majority born fully female. Something had to be created to take care of the menial tasks, and androids were just not as flexible, not as efficient as actual living beings. Thus, the Muties. Horse Muties. Cow Muties. Monkey Muties. Cat Muties, Dog Muties. Bear Muties . . .

"Okay," he said finally. "But I no like you alone no how. No-how."

The Disciple sighed heavily. Without the familiar sound of shuffling feet beside me, I followed the Greenmask into the Inner Rings.

I sized him up as he led the way, for I would have to take care of him on the way out. He was stocky, large shoulders, but also a pot for a stomach. He may once have been a ferocious fighter, but now he was nothing more than the fattened veteran.

The odor of incense grew fainter, the lighting brighter.

I would have to kill him with my bare hands. There were weapons scanners in the entrance-way, and I had had to leave my pistol behind. It would best be a judo chop to the left side of the neck, followed by a vicious as possible slam to the left ear—

more precisely, a point one inch behind the left ear. Break his spinal cord if possible.

"The chambers of the Bishop of Misery," he said, punching a print-coded button embedded in the marble wall and pointing to a sliding steel doorway.

A choir of Heavenly Hosts floated down from the ceiling plucking harps and singing "Holy, Holy, Holy Form" while scenes of Nirvana flashed behind them on banks of rolling clouds. Christ and Buddha came walking out of the wall, flanking Ahura Mazda, all three with linked arms, singing verses from the *Muza-Metzu Book of the Form*, in praise of the Flaming Mushroom.

"I don't care for theatrics," I said.

Greenmask gave me an evil stare. I continued to watch the spectacle, wondering how the illusions were accomplished. Eventually, they faded away, and their disappearance revealed the Bishop of Misery sitting on a golden throne, a large, ugly dog at his side, a picture of the Holy Mushroom Form behind him, and one of the famous Naked Angels to his right.

"Enter," he said, bowing his diamond-studded head. "Welcome to heaven."

II

First Party:

"You know, of course, that the Temples of the Form believe that

the church itself, the physical structure, is Heaven and that the Innermost Ring — which no person living save Bishops and Priests may enter — is a contact point into the universal, all-encompassing mind of the Father of the Form. And that some great morning, the Form will come again and destroy all evil but leave the good temples to flourish.”

I felt like a boy at catechism.

“No, I didn’t know all that,” I said. It was difficult to refrain from looking at her, for she was beautiful in body and in face. Indeed, her face was truly that of an angel. But I knew I had better watch myself. I was within the confines of a temple. Greater personages than myself had never come back out of some of them. The Bishop - of - Whatever - the - Hell - That - Particular - Temple - Was always made the same public statement at the end of each month:

The Temple of -----, in the Temple-Blessed City of ----, as it seeks to spread the word and the light, is always pleased when a non-believer is shown and accepts with a full heart the Blessings of the Form. With piety and holy pleasure within his soul, His Holy Majesty, the Bishop of ----, wishes to announce that the following brethren have been chosen as Disciples of the Form, Clergy of

the Green Hood, who will never again venture into the evil of the modern world. Their names are these: —

That was the standard proclamation, only the particular temple, bishop, and “new apostles” varying. They had obtained some of the top scientific minds that way. And recently, we of International had strong reason to believe they had forsaken their vows and were indeed venturing again into the outside world on short, victorious forays directed at electronic supplies . . .

. . . and museums.

. . . and other top scientists, who were disappearing.

. . . and somebody had to find out what was happening.

. . . and that somebody turned out to be me.

The Naked Angel had stopped talking, and she turned to face the Bishop of Misery. He was lifting a glass of ruby liquor to his lips, and the upward movement of his hand drew my attention back to the surgically implanted diamonds in his forehead, their sparkling bodies very much like stars.

“You are from International,” he said presently, making no offer of a chair.

“That is correct, Your Reverence.” Tact was all important. My main goal was not to upset him, but to provide an excuse for my presence in the temple—and to

get that Greenmask on the way out. Break his spinal cord. Snap.

"We are always eager to assist International, for, after all, it is the only peace-keeping force we have in this charred and ruined world of ours."

The only anti-Church organization, he meant. The Temples of the Form were anti-International, anti-peace. He wouldn't mind seeing the world charred and ruined a bit more. That's why I am in International. I like living and freedom and money. The Inter-Agent has plenty of free time (I have had as much as six months between assignments) with immunity to most laws and more money than he could spend in two lifetimes.

"Well, we of International are pleased to hear that, for we approach Your Reverence with some very distasteful news concerning some of his Disciples."

"And what is that?"

The dog stiffened at his side; I realized then that they must be emotio-linked. A device implanted within the dog's brain—and maybe the Bishop's too. He would respond to his master's emotions: grow fierce with anger, vicious with fear, rendering any enemy into stew meat, and docile and trusting when his master was happy. He was a fine animal. His claws were glistening, well-manicured prongs that extended from the heavy pads of his feet, his fangs long and curved and yellow.

"We have three of Your Reverence's Disciples in custody. They were involved in a successful attempt to steal the last atom bomb in the world."

"Impossible! My Priests, once having learned the Truth, will never depart from a temple."

"Nevertheless, they have the Bishop's Mark on their foreheads. They were, of course, in a state of . . . quietus when we captured them. It seems a small device in their necks not-so-neatly severed their heads from their shoulders, denying us the privilege of taking them alive."

"Imposters. Obviously committed suicide so that you could not question them and discover their true identities."

Time for placating, for reconciliation. "Then Your Reverence has no knowledge of them?"

"None." His eyes were flaming, breath coming swiftly in and out of flared nostrils. He almost snarled. Looking from the Bishop to the dog, I wondered if they were not linked more closely than I had first conjectured.

"We thought not, but we felt the Bishop would want to know that some group is attempting to defile the name of his temple."

He eyed me cautiously for a moment, then relaxed and smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Mandarin. We appreciate your concern for the Temples of the Form. May you find these culprits. You may go."

As Greenmask guided me to the

door, the Naked Angel walked to the front of the throne. The dog whined at her. In that horribly lucid moment, I realized that her duties might consist of much more than explaining doctrine to visitors.

As we walked back down the well-lighted corridor toward the narrow and darker one, I began tensing myself for the murder. I could not simply apply for admission to the Temple, for they would have drugged me first. They would have found out I spied on them. By entering the Temple as a visitor, killing my escort and stealing his costume, I could masquerade as a Disciple. My training should get me by. Theseus could dispose of the body.

Simple.

There was no warning at all as the sharp pain stabbed suddenly into my neck, doubled me over, and flicked out the light of the world . . .

III

Second Party

He was a bear.

I'll call the bear HIM, because I no longer think of him in the first person. Not I-bear. He-bear.

Anyway, he was a bear.

And being a bear, he was first of all two things: vicious and fear-filled. No amount of humanity that Artificial Wombs had instilled in him could counteract the

recurring instances of those two natural qualities. After all, he had been a bear fetus with bear genes—even if the major part of his heredity had been tampered with.

So, first of all, vicious.

When he sensed the opening of the cell door, he stood up to greet Felix. But there was no Felix. There were three Green-masks standing in the doorway. The leader waved the snout of his vibra-pistol at the bear and said. "Out in the hall."

Many things were running through his mind. The extremes of his personality brought up suggestions even he could not grasp.

They are standing in an equilateral triangle. How could I best use that to my advantage?

What devil is equa . . . equa . . . something triangle? Where get that from?

Rip. Gouge. Go eyes blood seep. Tear head brain open eat soft white and gray blood eat.

No. Terrible. Not that way.

And he finally settled on a middle road, a swipe of the paw that batted the barrel of the pistol so violently as to wrench it from the man's hand and send it clattering against the far wall. Then he charged, swatting the suddenly unarmed leader aside, hearing the subtle crunching of ribs. He butted one of the remaining two to the floor and whirled on the retreating third and raked swiftly extended claws

the length of his back. Blood sprang to life in sudden rivers. Screaming, the fleeing Disciple rolled to the floor and twitched out his life.

The bear, ferocity banging away at the man-implanted reason of his mind, the blood smelling strangely sweet in his nostrils, bent to the one he had butted. "Where Felix Mandarin?"

The man was choking with fear. A great, ugly bruise was beginning to blotch his cheek.

"Where? Tell or kill!"

Ssssang! The retort of a vibra-pistol echoed through the cramped walkway. He felt its presence before he heard it. There was a searing pain in his right shoulder, and it forced him to release his grip on the Green-mask.

Far down the corridor, from the Inner Rings of the Temple, a second group of Disciples was running in his direction—two with vibra-pistols.

So now, fear.

The natural ferocity, the viciousness was gone, quickly supplanted by fear—which was just as good at blotting out his reason as ferocity had been. He ran.

He ran past tapestries, leaking his blood on the marble floor.

He ran down concrete steps into darkness with the shouts of the men and the *sssang* of vibra-guns roaring behind him.

He ran in the cool air of evening.

He ran in the chill wind of night.

He ran over highways, his heart pounding—but having forgotten, in his present state, what a heart was. To him, it was a fireball in his barrel chest, a demon in his blood.

He ran wildly.

He ran swiftly.

He ran, finally, into the woodlands, onto the dew grass and green rivers of feather-bladed plants.

And hearing only silence behind, he fell to the side of the clear stream and wept and panted and snarled and drank some sparkling water and felt it mingle with the blood in his mouth before he passed out.

IV

First Party:

For hours on end, days on end, seemingly without rest or refreshment, I wandered back and forth between the whirling of a disc (blue and yellow lines) which caused a mist and water spray and a large glass globe filled with green fog that condensed rapidly and ran down the insides to collect at the bottom. I gathered it in steel buckets and carried it to the wheel. From the wheel to the globe where more buckets waited to the wheel where they were carried to the next floor for some obscure purpose.

For hours on end, I moved, muscles aching.

For days on end, mouth dry.

Unable to stop, no matter how terribly I wanted to.

Occasionally, the Bishop of Misery would come in with his dog to watch. I knew he was the Bishop of Misery, but I could not understand how I knew or what the title meant.

As the hours dragged by, my body screamed more loudly for relief. I passed out again and again but always woke shortly with two pails in my hands, walking toward the wheel or away from it. I could see nothing clearly, understood it only as an ant might understand the human foot that crushes it.

And words came to me but had no meaning to my numbed mind.

"I'll explain it," said the Bishop to a similarly clad stranger.

"Please do." Such proper tones.

"He carries the water from the globe to the lift. Upstairs the same water is funneled back into the glob and introduced over and over again into his pails. There are only fifty gallons involved in the process."

"But for what purpose?" asked the stranger.

"To break his spirit. He is drugged; he knows not what is happening. It's Hell to him. He sees no purpose but cannot stop. When he has been at it until his body is on its final strands of strength, we will let him stop. He will be

brought out of drugs, hypnosis will be employed, and he will be told that he was rescued from Hell by the Bishop of Misery and that he is now in Heaven. He will remember none of his past life. He will know only that I saved him from eternal damnation."

The stranger smiled. "And will be loyal as a puppy."

"Exactly."

"I'll have to try this in my own temple."

"It's a proven technique."

"Who *was* he?"

"A spy from International. He must have suspected something about the Second Coming. I guess they are worried after the theft of the Container of the Holy Form."

I could not hear all, and it wouldn't have mattered, for I understood none of it at the time. My mind took it in, and the influence of the drug twisted it to sound like devils plotting my next torture.

It must have been nearly three days when I collapsed for good, but the time-distorting qualities of the drug made it seem like two hundred years.

It is foolish even to mention it, but once I was liberated, I worshipped the Bishop of Misery for rescuing me from Hades. Worshipped him.

He made me his personal servant. He told all his guests that I was an International agent. And

my mind menacingly. There were dark shapes swirling in my subconscious, but they were too elusive to pin down and examine. There was a bear/man named . . . The . . . The . . . Theseus. But I shied from thinking of the dark shapes, for I assumed they were devils still tangled in my head, waiting to take me back to Hell. So I fought off the dark shapes—the memories.

He used me for all manner of things.

He named me Dunce.

I answered to it gleefully.

“Dunce, fetch me a pen. I’ve lost mine.”

“Yes, Master Bishop.”

And I would run and hunt and find.

“Never mind, Dunce. I’ve found it.”

I was taught to play the guitar by roboprofs, and I entertained at the banquets, strumming the strings, singing melodies and words the mechanical teachers had implanted forever in my brain.

The days went by smoothly on oiled legs.

I was fat, stupid, and happy.

Until I met her.

Before, all my life, it had been money and freedom and life that fascinated me. Never any one particular woman for any length of time.

Until I met her.

was allowed an Angel companion every sabbath. Never one of the young and pretty ones. I presided over them at the baths, making sure only the pretty ones entered the huge pool to be viewed by the Bishop.

It was all better than Hell. I was fat, stupid, and happy.

Until I met her.

Jacinda Jada.

Jacinda: Greek, meaning “beautiful, comely.”

Jada: Hebrew, meaning “wise.”

Jacinda Jada, the beautiful and wise angel.

We passed in the corridors as she was carrying a number of books toward the Bishop’s quarters. I accidentally brushed the top volume as I hurried by, and all of the tomes went crashing to the floor.

“Sorry,” I said. It was forbidden to converse with the Angels to any degree greater than pleasantries.

“That’s all right,” she whispered.

It was an exotic voice full of grapes and summer winds and sweet fruits and green grass.

“What is your name?” she asked.

I was astounded at her familiarity and refused to look at her. My hands shook as I picked up the books.

“Don’t be frightened. There is no one around.”

It was true; the long hall was

empty. "I am called Dunce," I said.

"You are very handsome, Dunce."

I looked up at her face then, and as sounds of summer were in her voice, I could see the scenes of summer in her countenance. Willows bending gracefully above a shimmering, cool, green brook. Butterflies dancing lightly on mellow breezes. Soft clouds in a blue sky. Her skin was smooth and tanned, her eyes so empty blue that I felt as if I were falling into them. Indeed, I *was* gripped by a moment of vertigo.

She smiled. I found it a rare thing in the lower castes of the Temple—a smile like that.

I handed her (numbly, let it be said) her books.

She smiled and was gone as the footsteps of several Disciples echoed around the bend from the adjacent corridor. Vibrating through every muscle, my teeth chattering, I stood there for several moments looking after her, trying to remember where I had been going.

I thought of her that night and found it hard to sleep. I thought of dark hair and blue eyes. I thought of moist lips that puckered slightly, of soft, warm tanned arms. Never once did I think of an atom bomb and the seconds that were swiftly ticking away toward the Second Coming.

The next day, the Bishop had no visitors, and that meant that he

would—for a length of time—come with his dogs to the baths to relax and watch his Angels. I hoped he would. Perhaps, just perhaps, Jacinda Jada would be there. (It had been the name on her necklace.) Perhaps once again I could gaze upon those sky eyes and the hair like raven wings. And even if she was not present, I could ask one of the others about her.

"I think we will go to the baths today," said the Bishop. The dog shook his fur clean and sneezed.

"Yes, Your Reverence."

He punched a button on the arm of his throne. The sliding portal opened to admit a Greenmask. "Bring the youngest and the fairest to the pool."

"Yes, Your Reverence. How many?"

"I believe fifty will be sufficient."

The Greenmask backed out bowing.

There were seventy floors to the Temple, forty underground. The building itself covered something like nineteen blocks. There were thousands of Angels. And this was a smaller temple than many others. There was little chance, out of all those thousands, of seeing Jacinda this day, this day of all days. But perhaps the proper question in the proper ear

The baths were steaming pools shielded by large, sweeping

arches that crisscrossed so frequently that they themselves formed the ceiling rather than supported it. Large, natural rocks formed the sides of the pool. Cut and brought all the way from Japan's lava basins especially for the Bishop, they were haphazardly arranged. Tropical flora grew within the crevices, sprouting wild red and yellow flowers. The water was a clear green color and waist deep. The floor of the pool was a thick, polished sheet of nuclear glass gathered from the ruins of Old New York. It trembled inwardly, casting smooth pulsations of blue light that rippled through the pool like underwater lightning.

I was stationed upon a stone ledge over the entranceway to turn back any Angels who did not measure up to the Bishop's idea of beauty. All those who would displease him would be turned back long before they reached the center of the pool. The Bishop liked dark complexioned girls. And he liked blue eyes.

The Bishop sat above on a special throne, on the edge of his seat, the dog at his side, ears back, also tensed.

And the Angels came in. They came through a tunnel that twisted to a grotto where they had been waiting for the Bishop's entry. They were fair-complexioned and they were dark skinned and they were Negroid. They were blonde and they were black-haired

and they were red-haired. They were tall. They were short. I turned back the blondes and the red-heads, motioned through the Latin women, the Negroes.

And the thirty-third in line was Jacinda Jada.

I looked down from my perch as she paused in the entranceway for approval. Our eyes met, swam out of focus, and settled tightly on each other. I stumbled over words and felt what I wanted to say stapled to my tongue. "It's you," was all that finally issued from my dry throat.

The others were laughing and splashing in the water. My faint whisper would be hidden from the Bishop where he sat a hundred feet away.

"You remembered," she said.

"I couldn't forget."

"You're the Bishop's private slave?"

"I'm his companion."

"You're his slave, Duncie. Never think differently."

I started to disagree.

"Sshh. You are handsome, Duncie. But you don't seem very smart. Then again, not many in here have had the opportunity to learn the truth. And I don't mean truth to have a capital 'T.'"

The blue light washed the floor of the pool, shattering the water with psychedelic patterns. I couldn't think of anything to say!

"There is another world outside the Temple," she said finally, running her hands easily through

the multi-patterned water.

"Of course," I said. "Hell."

"No. Not Hell. My father told me. I was born in this temple, but he was not. His hypno-training didn't hold on him. One day, his memory came back. He had been a great scientist in the outside world. He tried to escape then, and they killed him. But he had told me of this other world—the one where people may or may not be happy, but where there is no Bishop of Misery."

"I can't . . . believe . . . I . . ."

"You are handsome, Dunce."

I felt myself jellying inside again. "What do you want?"

"Out," she said. "Out."

Again the melting inside. And something new. Doubt.

"Dunce, my man!" It was the Bishop.

I turned reluctantly. "Yes, Your Reverence?"

"I will choose a new Angel for my secretary."

The Angels hushed, and I had the feeling each hoped it wouldn't be she.

"The dark-haired one with you, Dunce. The one you seem to be spending so much time with. Send her to me."

Interlude

At this time, intelligence reports reaching the main office of International indicate only thirty-odd hours until Second Coming. Information secured by direc-

tional microphones zeroed in on New New York Palace of the Prophet.

Temples somehow became aware of this spring, and most personnel were moved deeper into the temples, away from mike range. Doors have been death-shielded so not one may enter the temples.

Official opinion: Second Coming is near. Temples are alerted to International agents. Our only man in a position to do anything at all is Felix Mandarin.

... Col. A. X. Freeley, Director.

V

Second Party

He was a bear the next morning yet.

His humanity portion had come partially back into control, but at heart . . .

His first thought was of food.

He sat on his haunches as bears do, although he could have stood erect or nearly so. He sniffed the air, turning his huge head first one way, then the other. And he found it. Elusive, sweet, a melody transformed into an odor.

It was in a large, spot-rotted tree that bent over a shallow pool in the brook. Level with his head was a hole in the wood, and hanging within could be seen the nest, grayish, brain-matter-looking. The odor was strong and

sweet and all pervasive.
His ears pricked up.
No bees inside.
Few, anyway.

With a fur-covered arm, he reached in to tear the thing out. The pain in his shoulder, erupted anew. He jerked his paw back out and twisted his head around to look at the wound. There was a large, green-black scab forming over it. He had cracked it with his sudden movement, and thin rust-water blood was seeping out again.

Lifting his other arm, he reached in and tore the nest from its attachment to the rotting wood. A large-eyed insect came crawling out of one of the tiny holes, buzzing. He crushed it with the ball of his thumb. Shredding the nest, he cracked open the core like a coconut.

Rich, warm, sparkling fluid within.

He rammed his snout in it, shot out his pink tongue to taste and rejoice.

He roared and squealed.

For no other reason he completely understood, he felt great satisfaction, a pounding of the heart transcending the satisfaction of hunger.

And fear again.

He was hurrying, frightened, and the human portion of him could not fully understand why.

Until the buzzing noise like a distant saw scraping through wood blasted into an angry roar-

ing above the tree tops. A small, black cloud of pencil dots came from the west.

There was so much honey left! He sipped faster, panting. And then they were on him. Sharp stings on the ear. They knew where to aim. He roared a great laugh, batting at them. He turned and ran for the water; and they followed.

It was an hour of lying mostly in water before they went away for good, heeding some silent call which eluded the senses of member of all worlds but their own.

His second thought was of Felix . . .

VI

First Party:

I saw her for the first time the day after I betrayed Jacinda at the baths.

She had two silver dollars for eyes, and her breasts were capped with the heads of small dragons with large yellow eyes. Surgically capped. She was led about by another Angel, a beautiful girl—except for the plasti-flex cheeks she had been surgically given to show the inside of her mouth—red, saliva-covered, rotted teeth.

They passed without a word. I was backed to the wall, eyes wide.

I remembered the strange duo at Sacred Mess and asked the Disciple seated next to me if he knew of them. "Them was the Bi-

shop's women. Was, not is. Ones he growed tired of. Them worked hard to be regular members of his harem; when he was tired of them, he made sure no Disciple or Priest would get them."

My food seemed to grow moldy before me. "And you let him do it?"

"Hell, damn, Duncie."

"But he's supposed to be holy!"

"He is, he is." The Disciple looked up and down the long table, but he could see no one looking at us.

"Doesn't sound holy. Doesn't sound holy at all."

"Saved you from Hell, didn't he?"

"Well—"

"And weren't Hell worse? You remember Satan?"

"I—"

"Okay, you don't question."

"But—"

"You remember the tortures? You ain't over eager to go back."

I ate in silence.

You are his slave, Duncie. Never think differently.

There is a world outside the temple.

My father told me about it.

I saw her the second time as I was on my way to the Bishop's quarters in answer to a summons.

She had silver dollars for eyes.

I reached out and touched the heads of the small dragons; she and her guide turned to me. The small lizards snarled and bared white fangs. "The Bishop — I

"I hate him. *I hate him!*" The words slipped through clenched teeth. I ran from her, from the blind, searching, silver circles.

Dark forms swayed through my mind. Theseus. Scenes swam into view. Panic. Accepting them for demons, I suppressed and suppressed and suppressed until my head ached.

I had stumbled to the private quarters of His Reverence and stood panting, eyes weeping hot tears. I leaned against the wall to regain my senses. Breathing heavily, I finally pushed the thumb-coded button of the portal, spreading the doors.

She was there. Seated at the foot of the throne, her dark hair framing her tanned face, setting off her blue-blue eyes. My heart began thudding so loudly that I feared he would hear it. But he continued to smile. And it was a strange smile.

"Your Reverence." I bowed, straining to keep my eyes from her and from meeting his.

"Come here, Duncie."

I ventured to the foot of the royal throne. Light glinted from the diamonds in his forehead.

She was but inches from me!

"I need your artistic opinion on something, Duncie. Do you think you could help me?"

"I don't understand, Your Reverence."

He produced a hand full of photographs. "This Angel has not

proven as worthy as I had thought, and now, I must dismiss her. But, when I dismiss an Angel, I leave her with a special Mark, a mark of honor at having been a Bishop's woman. I want you to assist in picking this special mark."

The photographs were of women with diamond eyes and silver dollar eyes and eyes with fish-bowl globes of water where fungi grew.

"What do you think?" he asked, edging forward on his seat.

I swallowed hard and thought of what the Disciple said at supper.

Saved you from Hell, didn't he?

And weren't Hell worse?

You remember Satan?

Okay, you don't question.

"I find I may be unworthy of assisting Your Reverence."

"Why not? You seem such an aesthetic soul. You learned the guitar so well."

I looked at Jacinda. Her stare was vacant. She was apparently under some mild sedative.

"Well?" he asked, thumbing through the photos.

I didn't answer.

"I think this. A window in her chest so we may see her heart beating, and tusks—little, yellow, curved tusks—in her upper lip to make kissing impossible." He punched a few buttons on the panel of the throne arm, and the wall folded open, machinery

pushing out beside the throne.

"The robosurgeons," he said simply.

There were flashing tubes, white eyes of scanning tubes, wired arms of steel and flexi-plastic that wielded tiny instruments of fine edges and delicate points. There was a table with straps.

"Go," he said to Jacinda. And she went. Her smooth, tanned body stretched out on the white table, the dozen artificial arms swinging idly above her, waiting for coded instructions.

She was going to let it happen. The tiny instruments with fine edges and sharp, delicate points were going to slice her like so much meat and violate the perfectness of her.

A metal arm swung forward as the Bishop coded the first number.

The scalpel extended. Without warning, I smashed a foot into the dog.

I screamed, raising the guitar that I always brought to the Bishop's quarters, and smashed the arms, broke the delicate point of the tiny instrument, shattered the silver dollar eyes of the scanning tubes.

Theseus. International. Something snapped inside my head and previous training instilled long before what the Bishop had taught me gained dominance over my actions. The Bishop turned pale and started to rise as I whirl-

ed on him. His hand reached out toward the guard-summoning buzzer, trembling . . .

VII

Second Party

The bear stood with extended claws in an alleyway. An hour before, he had seen the dark figures of Priests scuttling from a concealed door that was carved and flush with the Temple wall. They had rushed down this alley like so many mice chased by so many cats. They would, he hoped, come back this way.

The last one had been tall, hefty. Just the proper size cloak.

The blood from other kills excited his memory.

He raked claws over cement walls and smelled dust rather than life-fluid.

VIII

First Party:

She was cuddled in my arms, the sedative shocked out of her, her tears wet on my shoulder. And somewhere above, the Bishop of Misery was lying in a large red pool of his *own* misery.

"Come on," I said. "We've rested enough. We have to get out."

"There is no way out. You should have left him—"

"Sssh. I'm not Duncie anymore.

I'm Felix. Felix Mandarin. Your father was right; there is an outside world. I came from it, and I'm going back—with you."

She looked at me, the tears like gems in the blueness of eyes.

"And we will get out. There isn't any question about it."

"But there are four guards at each exit to the Outermost Ring."

"You're certain? Four?"

"Yes. My father was one before the Bishop had him executed."

Four. Most likely, with vibrapistols.

My knees jellied for a moment. There had been no siren or announcement. The Bishop had not been found dead with his dog. But four men with vibra-pistols . . .

"We don't have a choice. Let's move out."

IX

Second Party

In a few minutes, scurrying, the Priests treaded their way around the rubbish cans, coming down the alley. Single file.

One past.

Two past.

Three past.

He grabbed the tall fourth and tore at his throat, feeling blood bubble over the matted fur of his hands, smelling it, seeing it make steam in the cool night air. Ghost steam in the darkness. The sound of the others running

drowned out the scuffle between bear and man.

He slipped the Priest's robe off, left the body behind in old coffee grounds and newspapers, and hurried after the others, cloaked in the hooded blackness of clerical garb.

The inside of the temple was relatively dark, candles illuminating only the side altars. He followed those in front, his robe fluttering behind him, walking like a man rather than shuffling as he usually did.

He passed by a dark cell in a narrow hallway of the Second Ring, and suddenly he felt a judo chop to his neck that brought him like a lead weight to the floor. A pair of strong arms cushioned his fall so that he would make no noise to attract the fast retreating Priests that had been walking in front of him. He reached up with a red-stained claw to fend off the attacker when a voice said softly and with a great deal of astonishment, "Theseus! It's you!"

X

First Party:

I slapped his thick body, pounding at the fur, laughing under my breath.

"Damn, I thought you'd be dead!"

"Not dead. Not dead." He was crying a little, I think.

"But how—"

"Escaped that night. Scared. Run. Come back Felix to get."

He was looking curiously at Jacinda. And she at him.

Briefly, I related our story to him and his history to her. She accepted him quite readily.

"What we do?" he asked.

"Now, with our original complement, I guess we should try to find out what we were sent to find out." I had almost forgotten about the mission until I saw Theseus again. I told Jacinda the story. Atom bombs, end of the world through Second Coming, everything. And seeing her, I knew I didn't want the end of the world. Never. Ever.

She looked at me again with empty blue. "Then we die. But why would *they* want to die. The Bishops, the Priests—"

"They've built a retreat for the Hierarchy. A pleasure palace on the flatlands of Canada, twenty square miles. It will hold Bishops and Priests and a number of thousands of Angels. It's a fall-out shelter. Though how one bomb—"

"Tonight!"

I looked at her and Theseus grunted.

"What is it?"

"Tonight. We were told that all Priests and Bishops were to meet this night for a retreat, a spiritual meeting with the Holy Form to plan the Second Coming. A number of Angels were to go along. The announcement was made a

week ago. Those who would not attend the retreat were told to worship the entire time—and to leave the doors to the Innermost Ring open as a sign of the nearness of Nirvana to Heaven, and to welcome the Second Coming.”

I looked down the narrow hall at the fake fire of the simutorches. “Where is the Innermost Ring?”

“I can show you its entrance though I have never been through it.”

I took the robe from Thes and walked ahead of them, back the way Jacinda and I had come. She directed from behind, and we turned corner after corner, going deeper into the Temple.

“Stop a moment,” she whispered.

“What?”

“The last five rings will be guarded by Disciples.”

“How many?”

“Two at each intersection.”

The sirens suddenly wailed sharply like the ooga horn of a submarine. “They’ve found the Bishop,” she cried.

There was a patter of running feet down the hallway. Thes and Jacinda pressed against the lead-off passage we had just left, and waited while I walked out into the corridor. More Priests.

“Ho! What’s happening? Why the sirens?” I shouted.

A fat one stopped, puffing, while the others ran ahead. “They’ve killed His Reverence. There’s an International agent

loose in the building. We’re moving to Haven three hours earlier than planned. The Prophet Incarnate spoke to most of us from New New York. He ordered us to leave now with two thousand Angels. Run. The Innermost Ring has been opened for transport.”

He was gone, waddling.

I turned to the others. “You heard?”

“Yes.”

“It sounds like the Innermost Ring holds a method of reaching Haven.”

“What do, Felix?”

My hands were shaking beneath the concealing folds of the robe. “I can make it to the Innermost Ring in this cloak. And Jacinda should be allowed through since they’re taking Angels. But you—”

There was a pounding of feet on marble—more Priests running. I looked at Thes, at his rough, animal-lined face. “You know what to do?”

He nodded and stepped back into the shadows.

“Ho! Why the sirens? Do we leave early for Haven?” I grabbed the arm of one of the fleeing and held him.

“Let go, you damn fool! They’ve invaded the Temple! The Prophet incarnate has moved up the hour of the Second Coming.”

I moved him so that his back would be to Theseus. The other Priests were out of sight by now.

His neck snapped like a dry twig.

He crumpled, his face, thick with beard, falling out of the hood, his eyes momentarily bug-ging.

Then we were two priests moving down the long passage toward the Innermost Ring, Jacinda between us, naked, frightened. We came to the first group of guards and rushed by.

"Hey!"

"Keep going," I whispered.

We ran.

The second group was waiting for us. "No Angels through this entrance. What is this? Trying to take a favorite? What is this retreat all about, anyway?" Obviously they were being kept ignorant of the fact that they would die within hours.

"Yeah," said a second guard. "Why all the running? You'd think the Temple was starting to blow up or somethin'."

"She is ordered to go up this route," I said, thinking quickly, "by command of the Prophet Incarnate!"

They paled. "His own."

I didn't wait for any more back-talk. We plunged ahead. We seemed to have been running forever, and still there was a long way to go.

"Just how far?" I asked.

"Two more blocks," she answered.

And we made it.

Too late.

"Too late," said a Greenmask standing in front of the portal into

the Innermost Ring. Inside, behind him, there was a shimmering swirling greenness that one could not look upon very long without experiencing nausea, without the mind wandering dangerously into the intricacies of its pattern.

"Fool! This is the special of the Prophet Incarnate. His own!"

He stumbled a moment, unsure, but he was too damn duty-bound to relent. "Too late."

I brought up my foot, kicking the vibra-pistol out of his hand. He screamed for help. There was upon him that instant, making certain he would have nothing with which to scream the next time.

There were shouts. The *sssang* of a vibra-gun echoed as a beam bounced off the wall above my head.

Grasping her hand, my other arm around The's shoulder, we plunged into the greenness of the Innermost Ring and found there was no floor, no bottom . . .

XI

Second Party

Like a window that has always had rain splattered against it, distorting the view . . .

Like the water had stopped running somewhat and shapes on the other side were made clearer . . .

Like, you know, like this was

happening to him, the bear.

Things in his mind, whirling, hunting new and better order.

Like, you know, like cleaning up a cluttered house.

But only somewhat . . .

XII

First Party:

We were all screaming. Thes seemed to have a different quality to his scream, though. As if it were a different fear from the one that plagued Jacinda and me.

I noticed red numbers drifting by, painted on the walls. I thought that either the marks were terribly far apart or that we were falling much more slowly than it seemed. Short calculations decided the right answer; we were falling slowly. By now, falling at a normal rate of speed, we should have been splattered all over the basement floor.

Then we ceased screaming and looked around.

And Jacinda started screaming again.

I saw why. It was spider-like, blue-black, many-legged, and as big as a horse. It was crawling through the greenness (rather swimming through it) toward us, mandibles clacking.

"He's swimming in it," I shouted. "Maybe we can too."

We touched the side wall and found hand holds. Climbing up,

we moved away from the spider. Then we were standing on a stone ledge—facing a door on the other side of the chamber. We edged around to it. I pushed through first. There was no one at all in sight. Thes and Jacinda came behind me. A sign on the wall read: CHICAGO TEMPLE.

"But we left from Philadelphia," I murmured.

I looked back into the swirling mists and could see the spider, red-eyed, trying vainly to push out of the green vapor. "It's a central pit that connects all temples. The red numbers tell you which Temple of the Form is which, and where to get off."

"But the spider." She was shaking.

"He can't get out. My guess is that we traveled a great many miles horizontally by falling vertically. Now that's impossible in this universe. Therefore, we must have entered another dimension that touches ours, has probably been bent to touch ours at every Innermost Ring in every temple on both Earths. If that's the case, then every Innermost Ring contacts this other universe at the same point; therefore, all Innermost Rings—in a sense—exist at the same point in space-time."

"I don't understand," she said.

Neither did I, but the implanted physics and space-time theorem that Training Central had imbedded in my brain was working with a life of its own. Training

had given me those so that I could analyze any weapon I might come across. This, I was starting to suspect, was some kind of weapon as well as a means of transportation.

Then with a club (and I felt the pain mentally) the pieces fell together into one large picture of horror, destruction, and—trite enough—perilous danger. “All they have to do,” I said, my implanted mathematical theory functioning again, “is destroy the Innermost Ring at Haven, have a bomb pushed into the Innermost Ring of any temple in the world, and every city with an Innermost Ring will go up in radioactive dust.

She looked at me. At the spider.

“If all the Innermost Rings exist together in space-time, a bomb exploded in one will explode in all with equal force, destroying both Earths, wiping out all cities with one bomb. Each temple will take its city, and the Second Coming will be realized.”

It was all too much for her (not to mention me), and Thes was quite quiet.

“We have to find that bomb,” I snapped. “Otherwise, it’s all over for us.” And looking into her blue, I knew I didn’t want to check out of existence just yet.

Together, we dived back in to search the greenness for a bomb . . .

XIII

Second Party:

Like that window not only being cleared of water but being cleaned . . .

Not even that even . . .

Like that window being cleaned and then broken so that he/I could look directly out onto the world with no obstructions, with perfect clarity . . .

Like I started to cry (first person now). Like when you’re young and you have no mother but a glass and metal and plastic womb, like you understand it better, with more terror when you are suddenly grown and must face it all at once . . .

Well, I cried like a baby, like . . .

XIV

First Party:

When we came out again, the spider after us, Thes was crying.

“Are you all right?”

“I . . . I . . .”

I grabbed his massive shoulders.

“I can see! My God, I can see!”

And I didn’t get it. I was thinking of optical; he meant mental. He babbled it out in the first grammatically correct words I had ever heard him utter.

We rejoiced. The field holding the dimensions together must have opened new synapses, un-

clogged old areas of the brain, freeing him. I felt like patting him on the head and realized that would be a mistake now.

"No bomb, though," I said. "And 9:05."

"They could be setting it off any moment," Theseus said.

I was still astounded by his new personality.

I looked into her blue, tore myself out of vertigo, and holding hands, jumped with them into the greenness.

On the fourth try, we found it. Temple New New York. It was a good guess, and that's all. We thought, maybe, since the bomb had been stolen in New New York and the Temple of the Prophet Incarnate was there, that it would be a likely launching point for the Second Coming.

It was. And the bomb was there too. It was perched at the doorway with an automatic triggering device bolted to its belly.

Any child could dismantle an A-bomb if he has read his history and had an instructor in P.O.D. who allowed him to practice on dummies. I didn't even have to resort to Training. I just thought back to primary school. An old teacher who made herself look twice as old by the way she dressed, saying: "And if you see one lying in a field unexploded,

you take the silver thing-a-bobbie right here and lift back its hat. You will see two golden wires. Don't touch. Never touch the gold. Cut the blue ones that run through the other end. Then you have stopped the big, bad bomb."

"I have just stopped the big, bad bomb," I announced.

We sighed as a trio.

And she looked up into my brown and said, "I think I am going to faint."

"Before you do," I said, holding her steady, "say you'll marry me."

Her blue widened, and she was no longer whoozy.

Third Party:

I tried to cover myself with both hands (and it doesn't work). For the first time in my life of twenty-two years, I minded my nakedness.

First Party:

Yeah, darn.

Second Party:

And I never thought I'd be a best man!

First Party:

So *damn* blue!

The End

HOW IT ENDED

David R. Bunch (THE MONSTERS; AMAZING, November, 1968, ANY HEADS AT HOME?; FANTASTIC, February 1969) is obviously one of Your Editor's passions; I think that Bunch is one of the twenty or thirty best writers of the short-story in English and I think that HOW IT ENDED—which is the latest in his controversial and acclaimed "Moderan" series—is worth anybody's Nebula or Hugo nomination.

DAVID R. BUNCH

The end of the world started small that day. Casually, in high greeny-blue summer . . .

I remember well what I was doing—even what I was thinking—that precise instant it started. It was in the time of the Summer Truces. We had completed late our great Spring Wars that year and we were all somewhat exhausted, though deliciously happy. Many honors had been won, many Strongholds shattered to shambles and many the gun lids that were hanging, and the ramparts in many places were crying for shoring. But we were a fulfilled group that last summer, we who had survived, hate-happy to the extreme, ready for Joys and in all cases planning for mean points in our own Stronghold complexes. Yeahh! Summer Truces!!

Then a wump bomb hit far to the north. I heard it on my detectors and it made a queer dry sound. I knew right away it had hit something that

wasn't properly a wump bomb target. And in all Moderan truth it should not have been out there at all, not in the Truces. And what were those strange little *blips* and *bleeps* coming across on my Viewer Plate? I would have thought them from shattered slivers and shards of thin new-metal, but that seemed unlikely. No one in his right Moderan mind would use a wump bomb on a flimsy metal objective. The wumps were for ultimate ultimate blasting and heaviest waves of destruction. They were designed for the Strongholds and the deep-down bunkers of concrete and new-made steel.

There were many points of conjecture. Out here thinking it over on this small last mountain of plastic, leaving these notes on the permotapes in my mind as a last record, watching the flesh-mutant men finish tearing our once great land back to where it all began, I cannot be sure. I can only replay the con-

jectures. Privately, I think it might have been an accident. I think it might have been that a bomb-happy Stronghold master was just firing a jubilee leftover wump to the far void in celebration of the end, finally, of the long spring season of war; it had stretched on through early summer. And this wump could have hung in the launch sling just for that too-long instant. (It happens, but it happens usually in war, and who could care then?) Instead of winging then on that beautiful far trajectory that a normal firing would have insured, it fell then, crazily off course, really on no course at all, into a neighbor's tin flower bed. And in that flower bed a thing more precious to him than Strongholds was . . . So it's rumor and conjecture. But so many times in all the history of the world an accident has been so much more pertinent than all the careful plans. And I think it was again.

I do remember, and I remember well all that happened in those few quick instants that settled the fate of us all—I remember a frantic garble on my Warner Phone. I could not translate, but I recall having the thought that it sounded not so much like a warning full of hate as much as it sounded like an apology, or an argument for understanding. "Forgive, FORGIVE, and let's enjoy the Summer Truces," I remember thinking in those first few seconds, though I was much occupied. Of course I had no way of knowing then even a conjecture toward the enormity of the transgression that might have been, and my only hint was those strange out-of-place *blips* and *bleeps* on my Viewer Plate.

The transgressed Stronghold replied, of course. Even in the pleasantest times of the Summer Truces you couldn't let old neighboring Stronghold to the right or to the left, in front or behind, have at you with a wump bomb. Retaliation, swift and sure, was our right in any season. Retaliation brought reply in deadly earnest, but even so, in those first few moments, we might have limited the war. We could have enjoyed a little show on our Viewer Expanders than of two red-hot sorehead Strongholds having a GO when they should have been in deep truces. But we didn't act when action was of the essence. Just say that statesmanship was at a low ebb that day with us all. We muffed the ball. We played with our new-metal mistresses; we stroked the new-metal kittens, stacked the cards of indifference and "drank" the punch-introven when we should have been saving the world.

Treaties were honored honored and honored. Oh, how they honored those treaties in the north! And the war spread swiftly south. In five minutes we had all entered and Moderan awoke to the terrible knowledge that it was high tide and rising. (I will say this, I far to the south was the last to get in the blasting. But honesty, always and all ways, makes me hasten to admit that it was not statesmanship.—Where is she now? Oh, what lump of cindered metal now in some far lost place is she with whom I played those fateful crucial instants when I should have been saving the world? But I will say, with her life-switch full to ON and I toggled to passion-

frantic, she was very good that day. Oh, all for love and the world—well?

Our world went down, DOWN, that war. It was the END. From a small, casual, and I say accidental, start of one wump bomb in the wrong place that day, it built fast through the mounting moments of havoc. Thinking of it now, far in the last retreatable corner of our lost world, I cannot say just why it built to such forcible ruin. We had fought many many wars in our glorious past and had come through with our great battle-dead, honors, and our Strongholds only partially shattered to shambles. But in ten minutes this time Moderan was gone.

Most of us quite early, thinking fast and doing the right planned thing, even in the midst of hard-pressed final war, had delivered our families out. And that might have been truly our finest instant. I, after deep self-debate, even thumbed loose the wump zeroed to White Witch Valley, where the wife lived and plotted with the last of her plastic men. The mercy shots had already gone home to the country of Little Brother and Little Sister, shattering them to high skies and all winds in that province where they awaited the hours of “replacement.” And with mercy taken care of we settled down to war.

It was ultimate ultimate gunning, ultimate hate hardware on the wing or walking. Whatever else may be said, it is true that we brought the world to a high starry state of development not only in hate attitude but also in the hardware to make that attitude so much more than an empty dream or a gesture. And I'll

always, even to the last of my introven, even unto that final final instant just before the flesh-strips starve and I become a few shaped metal parts in some flesh-mutant's dusty brag museum, remember that beautiful moment. A moment, whose like the world may never see again, when the air over all the world was almost one solid sheet of explosives. Rockets were hitting their brother rockets on the wing and bringing off tremendous detonations. The mighty wumps, engineered to stand such mid-air collision and still home on to their designated programmed kill were nudging each other mightily in the air. The walking doll bombs, those magical horror-things designed to take the low road to their rendezvous with destruction, fought each other on the plastic. Some passed on safely and well to their programmed assignation of find - and - destroy; some in the thickness of this traffic fought each other so staunchly for the right of passage that they exhausted their horror and left their punch right there with each other. Some mighty battle god sitting far in the vapor shield on a cloud shaped like pillage that day could probably have had himself the one show of his life. (All vaunted feats of fire-power and destruction in the Old Days—even Dresden under the bombers, Tokyo with the firebombs and Hiroshima and Fat Boy—all these rolled into one flame-and-bang must have only as the front-leg kick of a sick lightning bug compared to this. YES! we were really blasting that day!) But I'm convinced there was no god for us anywhere that day—just the sick greeny-blue va-

por shield of poisoned August standing out there in a sky gone suddenly for us endless and terrible, far--spreading and indifferent witness to the self-destruction of a world.

And seeing the game was gone truly for the showdown I turned at last to my GRAND GRAND ULTIMATE. It was the GRANDY WUMP! a weapon so terrible that I had to set my brain to Cold Thoughts Wide and Heedless to be able even to stand the knowledge that I held such dread firepower in the palm, as it were, of my new-metal hand. This thing my Corps of Engineering for the Final Solutions of Problems had discovered for me just a few whiles back, and I had been saving it tight to spring as SURPRISE, or for some future practical need. Or perhaps just as an argument of conquest. I had been debating. But now the debate seemed over; the GRANDY was forced to my hand. To come out alive, with some semblance of my world left, was still my aim. Only my Stronghold would be left, and that a thing much shaken, but from that we could rebuild. So I thumbed it loose from where it nestled in its launch gear deep in the guts of my great Stronghold, the Grandy Wump! a thing so much improved over the common wump that the comparison could be that of a feather in the Old Days falling on to a common mountain as opposed to another mountain falling on that mountain. And so you see?

To guard well the secret of the Grandy Wump I had installed it—which I felt sure was the one-and-only of its kind in all the world—deep in the center of my great de-

fense-offense complex. Naturally I was aware that its launching would tear floors and perhaps lift the entire roof from my Stronghold. But for complete secrecy and to be the lone possessor of such power I was willing to pay the price. Yes! nearly anything. The moment of its thumbing loose HAD to be a heady moment for me; my new-metal heart, without any manual change in its settings, raised up such a great bang-and-boom beat as I had never known before. TO HAVE THE WORLD! my brain and heart thought together as my thumb flicked to the launch knob.

What happened? WHAT HAPPENED?—To have the world and then not to have the world. WHAT HAPPENED!? I do not cry for understanding. I do not cry for sympathy. I do not cry. Oh God, god or gods, I do not. But I must leave it here on the tapes—WHAT HAPPENED?

The second I thumbed it loose, I knew. Oh, how I knew! when the air started filling with rooftops. Words and sounds I do not have to speak of this vile deed vilely enough; this thing defeats all language of the world. But I must try—for the tapes: Sticky-fingered, conniving, cheating, dishonest, lying, untrustworthy, dishonorable, low LOW, flesh-encumbered little new-metal vile Stronghold masters who would steal, how had they? Oh God or gods, or whatever, if ever, tribunal or agency of higher judgment ever anywhere, judge them, judge them now! Grind their memory under heaviest wheels of Justice; take any good deeds, if ever, ever done

by them and regard those out-of-character happenings as amongst the most heinous monster-jokes that have ever been. Oh, this limited language! With its strongest words of indictment much too weak I cannot bemean these people even a thousandth part of a small fraction of their deserts enough. But let's ask all agencies of Justice, if any there be or any hint of any, and let these agencies, if any there be, or any hint, chase the flesh-strip ghosts of these vile Stronghold masters, now deceased, throughout all the universes of coming time and ask them, ask them like cold winds down icy valleys of snow mountains in chilliest places, like conscience in the Old Days, "HOW DID YOU STEAL THE SECRET OF THE GRANDY WUMP from honorable Stronghold 10?" (I was Stronghold 10.)

Yes, world to come, they did that. When my roof went with the Grandy, and almost immediately I saw other roofs start lofting to the skies, I knew. Not only had they stolen my secret, but vile, vile to the last and plotting, apparently they had installed detective devices to steal my moment of firing. Oh, how close I came to being caught asleep then. What if they had fired first? It does give one pause, doesn't it? Monstrous men!

For I believe truly that the eye-blink moment of my firing first saved me. I cannot explain it in any other way, either that or sheerest sheerest luck and a miracle, and, as you should know, I do not believe in either of these. I believe in hardware, firepower abundant and the smack to the Stronghold first. But

being saved, the last surviving Stronghold master, what gains it? My world is gone, all flattened and in rubble, even my Stronghold, everything finished by the most sophisticated weapon ever made, the Grandy Wump.

From somewhere, within hours, the little flesh-mutants came, howling over the rubble. Where had they been? Yes, we had known that a certain number of them existed. Even in the highest-shining times of shining Moderan a few flesh-mutants were always around, gibbering over the plastic, hiding in deep-down holes, living in cracks and crevices of our plastic-yard-sheet land. A few of us had them in our Strongholds from time to time, for laughs, for diversion, amused as they talked their nonsense out of hissing holes instead of communicating by our good Moderan methods of mechanical voice boxes and *phfluggee-phflaggee* buttons in the hands. But none of us regarded them seriously, I believe, or gave the least thought to how they lived. At least and for sure I didn't. I, one of the shining masters of the world, grand in the high per cents of my new-metal steel "replacements" with my flesh-strips few and played down—I had no serious time for such filthy, soft, mushy creatures.

And now the mutants come from everywhere! rolling on in, tearing it all back to NOTHING. In one howling onslaught, just be being, they are carrying the Dream far back past darknesses we had been far in advance of even on the first full day of shining Moderan. To watch them must be my punish-

ment, I suppose, as I wait on the last plastic mountain (though I do not know why I should receive punishment). I, the greatest and last of the great GREAT Stronghold masters, (once very staunch in my new-metal steel "replacements"), the most refined thing that had ever been . . . going down before this wave of evil flesh coming and still coming . . .

But wait! Before they reach this totally exposed little stronghold that is left me, my little plastic mountain, and claw it down in their howling brutish momentum that seems unstoppable now, let me set one thing straight in the tapes. If there had been honor in the world, amongst my neighbors, if they had not stooped to the vile theft of my war secret, perhaps to save their unworthy selves, I should have won the war. Then my Stronghold would have been left to me, and these mushy creatures out here would have meant nothing. Any time I chose I could have swept them back to their deep-down holes and their crevices with a maximum weapons fire. They would have served as my clowns and diversion then, not my executioners. Oh, they would have kept to their places, all right. So you see, it is evil in others that seals one down, especially one's thieving neighbors stealing war secrets.

And another thing, since my mind goes clear here at the last and I'm thinking of everything, what was it in that tin garden when the

wump bomb hit, what thing was it the Stronghold master regarded higher even than Strongholds? Don't laugh, don't laugh! I think it was his new-metal mistress out for a small summer stroll in the tin flower beds, and before he had enjoyed his Joys. And that explains the strong little *blips* and *bleeps* on my Viewer Plate. Small bits of new-metal would have shown thus; tin bits from tin flowers would not have registered at all.

Thus I leave you, for the mountain shakes now at the base.—If these tapes survive, and if there is any creature anywhere, in the future times, who has a machine sophisticated enough to give them life, perhaps it will be worth conjecturing why Moderan was ended. Was it because of evil in the world and common theft? Or perhaps you'd rather think of it as all the fault of a woman who should have been serving her function in her master's great bedrooms instead of strolling in the flower beds. Or if you've a simpler turning of mind you may see the end as a happening inevitable for soon or late, the natural result of all that firepower. But I say NO! no, to that—no, to the end—not if my neighbors had played fair! I would have, from the GRANDY WUMP safety of my superior, specially endowed Stronghold, been able to shatter them to high skies and all winds then in relative security, thus winning ME the war and saving ALL the world!

The End

NOW ON SALE IN THE DECEMBER
FANTASTIC — EDMOND HAMILTON'S
THE BROKEN STARS

ROSEMARY'S BABY

Reviewed by LAWRENCE JANIFER

A few words from our new film reviewer:

" . . . At the moment of writing, this is the only regular film column in a science-fiction magazine. The author has been film editor for two other magazines; his most recent book in the field is A PIECE OF MARTIN CANN (Belmont Productions, Inc.)

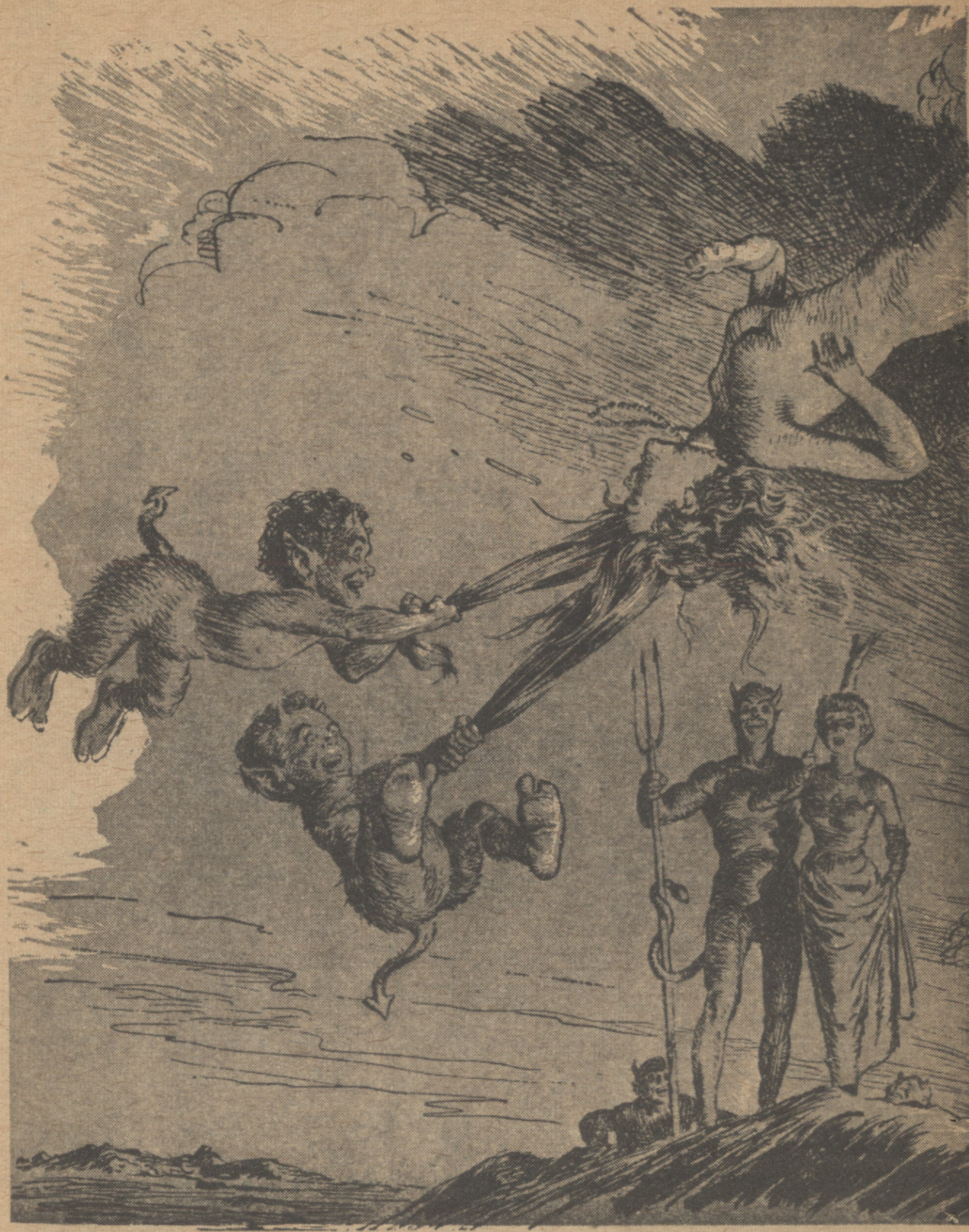
"I've had 31 books published and between 300 and 400 magazine pieces. I've never written a movie but, what with one thing or another, I see a good many of them. It is even possible that I have become a critic, or a film editor from sheer exposure; or, perhaps, from the bite of a radioactive lens cap . . ."

ROSEMARY'S BABY was, and is, a fine example of how to make the printed horror tale convincing to those readers who have little experience of adult horror-tales and little liking for the usual musk which takes the place of atmosphere in those writers (a clear majority) who cannot write. Its careful blend of the real and the fantastic urged conviction as well on virtually all other readers, including your harassed reviewer; Mr. Ira Levin, until its publication a one-book author (A KISS BEFORE DYING was a compendium of virtually all the best in its form; but could he repeat? Probably not), is now a two-book author—which means, in practice, an n-book author unless he gets run over.

Roman Polanski, who has a fine gift for individual scenes of terror and a very odd sense for narrative flow (he varies between flat cuts and slow cuts, mostly, and I have never been able to find the principle behind his choice of one or the other), clearly saw the special virtue of Mr. Levin's novel. He has written a script, and directed a movie, which follows that novel with touching fidelity; and all I can think of is Virginia Woolf's comment on a technically perfect book: "But how if life should refuse to reside there?"

It is extraordinarily difficult to fault this movie. True, John Cassavetes presents us with a performance straight out of the stock drawer, but the fact is hardly vital; the difficulties of his part are such that

(Continued on page 139)





CONFIDENCE TRICK

By **JOHN WYNDHAM**

Ever wonder where authors get their stories? We'll give you strong odds on how this one was cooked up. John Wyndham, one morning, was shoved into a London subway (the "tubes," you know), found himself being ground to powder by his fellow travelers, said, "I must say, this is a hell of a place!" — and a story was born.

And that's the way to become a writer. All you need is paper, pencil and subway fare!

NEVER again," Henry Baider said to himself, once he had been condensed enough for the doors to close, "never again will I allow myself to be caught up in this."

It was a decision he had expressed before, and would probably, in spite of its face value, express another day. But, in between, he did do his best to assure that his infrequent visits to the City should not involve him in the

rush hour. Today, however, already delayed by his business, he faced the alternatives of vexing his wife by delaying still further, or of allowing himself to be drawn into the flood that was being sucked down the Bank Station entrances. After looking unhappily at the moving mass and then at the unmoving bus queues, he had squared his shoulders. "After all, they do it twice a day and survive. Who am I —?" he said, and stepped stoutly forward.

The funny thing was that nobody else looked as if he or she thought it a sub-human, stockyard business. They just waited blank-eyed, and with more patience than you would find in a stockyard. They didn't complain, either.

Nobody got out at St. Paul's though the increased pressure suggested that somebody had inexplicably got in. The doors attempted to close, drew back, presumably because some part of somebody was inexpertly stowed, tried again, and made it. The train drew heavily on.

The girl in the green mackintosh on Henry's right said to the girl in the blue mackintosh who was jammed against her: "D'you think you actually *know* when your ribs crack?" but on a philosophical note of fair comment rather than complaint.

Nobody got out at Chancery Lane, either. A lot of exhortation,

shoving and staggering achieved the impossible: somebody more was aboard. The train picked up speed slowly. It rattled on for a few seconds. Then there was a jolt and all the lights went out.

Henry swore at his luck as the train drew up, but then, almost the instant it had stopped, it started to pull again. Abruptly he discovered that he was no longer supported by the people round him, and flung out an arm to save himself. It struck something yielding. At that moment the lights came on again, to reveal that the object struck had been the girl in the green mackintosh.

"Who do you think you're —?" she began. Then her mouth stayed open, her voice failed, and her eyes grew rounder and wider.

At the same moment Henry had started to apologize, but his voice, too, cut out, and his eyes also bulged.

He looked up and down the coach that a moment ago had been jammed solid with people to the last inch. It now contained three others besides themselves. A middle-aged man who was opening his newspaper with an air of having been given his due at last; opposite him a woman, also middle-aged, and lost in contemplation; at the other end of the coach, in the last seat, sat a younger-looking man, apparently asleep.

"Well, really!" said the girl. "That Milly! Just wait till I see

her in the morning. She knows I have to change at Holborn, too. Getting off and leaving me without a word!" She paused. "It *was* Holborn, wasn't it?" she added.

Henry was still looking dazedly about him. She took hold of his arm and shook it.

"It *was* Holborn, wasn't it?" she repeated, uncertainly.

Henry turned to look at her, but still with a vagueness in his manner.

"Er . . . what was Holborn?" he asked.

"That last stop — where they all got out. It *must've* been Holborn, mustn't it?"

"I . . . er . . . I'm afraid I don't know this line well," Henry told her.

"I do. Like the back of my hand. Couldn't be anywhere but Holborn," she said, with self-convincing firmness.

Henry looked up the swaying coach, past the rows of strap-handles emptily aswing.

"I . . . er . . . didn't see any station," he said.

Her head in its red knitted cap tilted further back to look up at him. Her blue eyes were troubled, though not alarmed.

"Of course there was a station — or where would they all go to?"

"Yes . . ." said Henry. "Yes, of course."

There was a pause. The train continued to speed along, swaying more and jerking more now on its lightly loaded springs.

"The next'll be Tottenham Court Road," said the girl, though with a touch of uneasiness.

The train rattled. She stared at the black windows, growing more pensive.

"Funny," she said, after a while. "Funny-peculiar, I mean."

"Look here," said Henry. "Suppose we go and have a word with those people up there. They might know something."

The girl glanced along. Her expression showed no great hopes of them, but: "All right," she said, and turned to lead the way.

Henry stopped opposite the middle-aged woman. She was dressed in a well-cut coat surmounted by a fur cape. An inch or two of veil fringed the round hat on her carefully dressed dark hair; her shoes, on the end of almost invisible nylon stockings, were black patent-leather with elegant heels; both her gloved hands rested on the black leather bag on her lap as she sat in absent contemplation.

"I beg your pardon," said Henry, "but could you tell us the name of the last station — the one where all the other people got out?"

The lids rose slowly. The eyes regarded him through the fringe

of veil. There was a pause during which she appeared to consider the several reasons which could have led such a person as Henry to address her, and to select the most becoming. Henry decided that no-longer-young was perhaps more apposite than middle-aged.

"No," she said, with a slight smile which did not touch the matter. "I'm afraid I didn't notice."

"It didn't strike you that there was anything . . . odd about it?" Henry suggested.

The lady's well-marked eyebrows rose slightly. The eyes pondered him on two or three levels.

"Odd?" she inquired.

"The way they all went so very quickly," he explained.

"Oh, was that unusual?" said the lady. "It seemed to me a very good thing; there were far too many of them."

"Quite," agreed Henry, "but what is puzzling us is how it happened."

The eyebrows rose a little higher. "Really. I don't think I can be expected to —"

There was a harrumph noise, and a rustling of newspaper behind Henry. A voice said: "Young man. It doesn't seem to me to be necessary for you to bother this lady with the matter. If you have any complaints, there are proper channels for them."

Henry turned. The speaker was a man with graying hair, and a

well-trimmed moustache set on a pinkly healthy face. He was aged perhaps fifty-five and dressed *City-comme-il-faut* from black Homburg to dispatch case. At the moment he was glancing interrogatively towards the lady, and receiving a small, grateful smile in return. Then his eyes met Henry's. His manner changed slightly; evidently Henry was not quite the type that his back view had suggested.

"I am sorry," Henry told him, "but this young lady may have missed her station. Besides, it does seem rather odd."

"I noticed Chancery Lane, so the rest must have got out at Holborn — that is obvious, surely," said the man.

"But they went so quickly."

"A good thing too. The people in charge must have found some new method of handling the traffic. They're always developing new ideas and techniques, you know — even under public ownership."

"But we've been going on for nearly ten minutes, non-stop, since then, and we've certainly not passed a station," Henry objected.

"Probably been re-routed. Technical reasons, I expect," said the man.

"Re-routed! On the underground?" protested Henry.

"My dear fellow, it's not my job to know how these things

work — nor yours, I take it. We have to leave it to those who do. That's what they're there for, after all. Take it from me, they know what they're up to, even though it may seem 'odd,' as you call it, to us. God bless me, if we don't have faith in our expert authorities, where are we?"

Henry looked at the girl in the green mackintosh. She looked back at him. She shrugged slightly. They went and sat down, further up the coach. Henry glanced at his watch, offered her a cigarette, and they both lit up.

The train rattled along to a steady rhythm. Both of them watched the windows for the sight of a lighted platform, but they could see no more than their own reflections against outside blackness. When there was no more of the cigarette to hold, Henry dropped the remains on the floor and ground it out. He looked at his watch again, then at the girl.

"More than twenty minutes," he said. "That's impossibility, raised several powers."

"It's going faster now, too," the girl observed. "And look at the way it's tilted."

Henry regarded the hanging straps. There could be no doubt that they were running down an appreciable incline. Glancing forward, he saw that the other couple was now in quite animated conversation.

"Shall we try them again?" he suggested.

"— never more than fifteen minutes, even in the rush hour. Absolutely never," the lady was saying as they came up. "I'm afraid my husband will be so worried about me."

"Well?" inquired Henry, of the man.

"Certainly very unusual," the other conceded.

"Unusual! Nearly half an hour at full bat without a station? It's absolutely impossible," said Henry.

The other regarded him coldly.

"It is clearly *not* impossible because it is being demonstrated right now. Very likely this is some underground escape-route from London that they constructed during the war, and we have been switched on to it in error. I have no doubt that the authorities will presently discover the mistake and bring us back."

"Taking them a long time," said the girl. "Due home before this, I am. And I got a date at the Pallay this evening."

"We'd better stop the train," said the lady. Her eyes were on the handle, with its notice that threatened £5 for improper use.

Henry and the other man looked at one another.

"Well, if this isn't an emergency, what is?" demanded the lady.

"Er . . ." said Henry.

"The authorities —" the other began.

"All right," she announced. "If you men are afraid to touch it, I'm not." She reached up, took firm hold of the handle, and yanked it down.

Henry dropped into a seat quickly, pulling the girl down too before the brakes should go on.

The brakes did not go on.

They sat waiting. Presently it became a fair bet that the brakes were not going to go on. The lady pushed the handle up impatiently and pulled it down again. Nothing happened. She expressed her opinion of it.

"Cor! Listen to her! Did you ever?" said the girl beside Henry.

"Fluent. Have another cigarette," said Henry.

The train clattered and swayed along, the straps still hanging with a forward slant.

"Well," said the girl, after a time, "this properly dishes my date at the Pallay all right. Now that Doris'll get him. D'you think I could sue them?"

"I'm afraid not," Henry told her.

"You a lawyer?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, yes. Suppose we introduce ourselves. It looks as if we shall have to spend some time here, whatever they do. I'm Henry Baider."

"Mine's Norma Palmer," said the girl.

The City man said: "Robert Forkett," and nodded slightly to them.

"Barbara Branton — Mrs., of course," said the lady.

"What about him?" asked Norma, pointing to the man at the far end of the coach. "D'you think we ought to wake him, and tell him?"

"I don't fancy it would help much," said Mr. Forkett. He turned to Henry. "I understood you to say you were a legal man, sir. Perhaps you can tell us just what our position is in this matter?"

"Well, speaking without my references," Henry told him, "I should say that in the matter of delay, no claim by us would lie. I think we shall find that the Company only undertakes to provide . . ."

Half an hour later he became aware of a weight pressing lightly against him. Looking round, he found that Norma had gone to sleep with her head on his shoulder. Mrs. Branton, on the other side, had also dozed off. Mr. Forkett yawned and apologized.

"Might as well all have a nap to pass the time, though," he suggested.

Henry looked at his watch once more. Practically an hour and a half now. Unless they had been going in a closed circle, they must have passed beneath several counties by this time. The thing



remained incomprehensible.

To reach a cigarette he would have had to disturb the girl, so he remained as he was, looking at the blackness outside, swaying slightly to the train's motion, listening to the ti-tocketty-tock, ti-tocketty-tock, ti-tocketty-tock, of the hurrying wheels until his head drooped sideways and rested on the knitted cap on his shoulder.

The change of rhythm, the slight shuddering from the brakes brought Henry awake; the rest stirred a moment later. Mr. Forkett yawned audibly. Norma opened her eyes, blinked at the unexpected scene, and discovered the situation of her head. She sat up. "Well, I never," she said, regarding Henry. He assured her it had been a pleasure. She began to pat her hair and correct herself according to her reflection in the still dark window opposite. Mrs. Branton reached under her cape and consulted a fob-watch.

"Nearly midnight. My husband'll be quite frantic."

The sounds of slowing continued to descend the scale. Presently the windows ceased to be altogether black; a light, rather pinkish compared with the lamps inside, started to show, and gradually to grow stronger.

"That's better," said Norma. "I always hate this tunnel."

The light grew brighter still, the speed dwindled, and presently they were running into a station. They leaned forward to catch the name, but could see no plate on the wall. Mrs. Branton, on the other side, suddenly craned across.

"There!" she said. They turned quickly, but not soon enough.

"It was something Avenue, or Avenue something," she said.

"Well, we'll soon find out now," Mr. Forkett reassured them.

The train drew up, with a sigh from the braking system, but the doors did not open at once. There

was a sound of echoing commotion further along the platform, out of which voices presently distinguished themselves calling: "All change!" — "End of the line!" — "All out here!"

"All very well — all change, indeed!" murmured Norma, getting up and moving towards the doors.

The others followed her. Quite suddenly the doors ran back. Norma gave one look at the figure standing on the platform.

"Ee-ow!" she yelped, and backed violently into Henry.

The figure wore little clothing. What there was seemed to be chiefly straps holding appurtenances, so that it was revealed as angularly male, in a rich mahogany red. Ethnologically, perhaps, the face might have been North American Indian, only instead of feathers it wore a pair of horns. Its right hand carried a trident; its left dangled a net.

"All out!" it said, moving a little aside.

Norma hesitated, then scuttled past it. The others followed warily but more sedately, and joined her on the platform. The creature leant into the open doorway, and they were able to observe his back view. The tail was waving with a slow, absent-minded kind of motion. The barb at the end of it looked viciously sharp.

"Er . . ." began Mr. Forkett.

Then he changed his mind. He cast a speculative eye on each of his companions in turn, and pondered.

The creature caught sight of the sleeper at the other end of the car. He walked down and prodded him with his trident. There was some inaudible altercation. The creature prodded a few more times, and presently the man came out to join them, with the sleep not yet out of his eyes.

There was a shout higher up the platform, followed by a sound of running feet. A tough-looking young man came sprinting towards them. A net whistled after him and entangled him so that he fell and rolled over and over. A hearty shout of laughter came from the other end of the platform.

Henry glanced about. The dim rosy light was strong enough for him to see and read the station's nameplate.

"Something Avenue!" he repeated under his breath. "Tch-tch!"

Mrs. Branton overheard him, and looked at it.

"Well, if that doesn't spell 'Avenue,' what does it spell?" she demanded.

Before he could reply a voice began to call: "This way out! This way out!" and the creature motioned them on, with its trident at the ready. The young man from the other end of the coach

walked next to Henry. He was a large, forceful, intellectual-looking young man, but still not quite clear of the mists of sleep.

"What is all this nonsense about?" he said. "Collecting for the hospitals or something? No excuse for it, now we've got the Health Scheme."

"I don't think so," Henry told him, "in fact, I'm afraid it doesn't look too good." He indicated the station nameplate. "Besides," he added, "those tails — I don't see how it could be done."

The young man studied the sinuous movements of one of the tails.

"But really . . .!" he protested.

"What else?" inquired Henry.

Altogether, and exclusive of the staff, there were about a dozen people collected at the barrier. They were passed through one by one while an elderly demon in a small hutch checked them off on a list. Henry learnt that the large young man was entered as Christopher Watts, physicist.

Beyond the barrier was an escalator of a somewhat antiquated type. It moved slowly enough for one to read the advertisements at the sides: preponderantly they offered specifics for burns, cuts, abrasions and bruises, with here and there the recommendation of a particular tonic or pick-me-up.

At the top stood an ill-used looking demon with a tray of tin boxes suspended against his chest. He was saying monotonously: "All guaranteed. Best quality." Mr. Forkett who was in front of Henry caught sight of the card on the tray, and stopped abruptly. The lettering ran:

FIRST-AID KITS COMPLETE
each

£1 or \$1.50 (U.S.)

"That's an insult to the pound," Mr. Forkett announced indignantly.

The demon looked at Mr. Forkett. He thrust his face forward aggressively. "So what?" he demanded.

Pressure of those behind pushed Mr. Forkett on, but he moved reluctantly, murmuring about the necessity for confidence, stability and faith in sterling.

After crossing a hall they passed into the open. There was a faint tang of sulphur in the air. Norma pulled on the hood of her mackintosh against the light drizzle of cinders. Trident-bearers shepherded them round to the right, into a wire-netted enclosure. Three or four demons followed in with them. The last paused to speak to the guard on the gate.

"Heaven's harps, is that celestial bus behind time again?" he asked resentfully.

"Is it ever *on* time nowadays?" the gate demon asked.

"Never used to have these

holdups when the old man was running his ferry," grumbled the guard.

"Individual enterprise, that was," said the gate demon, with a shrug.

Henry joined the others who were surveying the scene. The view to the right was rugged and extensive, though smoky. Far away, at the end of a long valley, could be seen a brightly glowing area in which large bubbles formed, rose slowly, and took tantalizingly long to burst. To the left of it a geyser of flame whooshed up intermittently. At the back right a volcano smoked steadily, while little streams of red hot lava trickled down from its rim. In the middle distance the valley walls narrowed in two towering crags. The one on the left bore the illuminated sign: TRY HOOPER'S HIDEHARD. The other proclaimed: UNBURN IS THE ANSWER.

A little short of the right-hand crag, on the level valley floor, was a square encampment surrounded by several fences of barbed wire, and overlooked by a guard tower at each corner. Every now and then a string of flaming arrows would fly tracer-like into the compound from one of the towers, and the sound of howls mixed with demonic laughter would be borne faintly on the sulphurous breeze. From that point

one was able to follow the road as it wound up and past them to the station entrance. A building opposite the station appeared to be a barracks where demons were queueing up to sharpen their tridents and touch up their tail-barbs on a grindstone in the yard. The whole thing struck Henry as somewhat conventional.

Almost opposite their netted enclosure was a kind of gibbet. It was occupied at the moment by a lady with nothing on who was hanging suspended upside down from chains round her ankles while a couple of junior demons swung on her hair. Mrs. Branton searched in her bag, and found a pair of spectacles.

"Dear me! Surely not . . ." she murmured. She looked more carefully. "So difficult to tell that way up, and with the tears running into her hair. I'm afraid it is, though. Such a nice woman, I always thought, too."

She turned to the nearest demon. "Did she commit a murder, or something dreadful?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "She just nagged at her husband so that he would find another woman and she would be able to divorce him for the alimony."

"Oh," said Mrs. Branton, a little flatly. "Is that all? I mean, there must have been something more serious, surely?"

"No," said the guard.

Mrs. Branton remained thoughtful. "Does she have to do a lot of that?" she asked, with a trace of uneasiness.

"Wednesdays," said the guard. "She does other things other days."

"Pss-t!" a voice hissed suddenly in Henry's ear. One of the guard demons beckoned him aside.

"Want to buy a bit of the real stuff?" inquired the demon.

"What stuff?" Henry asked.

The demon brought his hand out of his pouch. He opened it and showed a metal tube which looked as if it might contain toothpaste. He leant closer.

"The goods, this is. Best analgaesic cream on the whitemarket. Just rub it on every time before tortures — you'll not feel a thing."

"No, thank you. As a matter of fact, I think they'll probably find there's been a mistake in my case," Henry told him.

"Come off it, chum," said the demon. "Look. I'll take a couple of pounds — special to you, that is."

"No thanks," said Henry.

The demon frowned. "You'd better," he advised, shifting his tail into a threatening position.

"Well — one pound," said Henry.

The demon looked a little surprised. "Okay. It's yours," he said, and handed it over.

When Henry rejoined the group, he found most of them watching three demons exuberantly chasing an extensive, pink middle-aged man up the opposite mountain-side. Mr. Forkett, however, was reviewing the situation.

"The accident," he said, raising his voice a little to contend with the increased lowing of sinners in the concentration camp, "the accident must have occurred between Chancery Lane and Holborn stations, that's fairly clear, I think. What is not at all clear to me, however, is why *I am here*. Undoubtedly, there has been a departmental error in my case which I hope will be rectified soon." He looked speculatively at the rest. Everyone became thoughtful.

"It'd have to be a *big* thing, wouldn't it?" asked Norma. "I mean, they wouldn't send a person here for a little thing like a pair of nylons, would they?"

"Well, if it was only *one* pair of nylons —" Henry was beginning, but he was cut short by an exclamation from Mrs. Branton. Following her gaze, he saw a woman coming down the street in a magnificent fur coat.

"Perhaps this place has another side to it that we've not seen yet," she suggested hopefully. "After all, where there are mink coats —"

"She doesn't look very pleased with it, though," Norma re-

marked, as the woman came closer.

"Live minks. Very sharp teeth," observed one of the demons, helpfully.

There was a sudden, startling yelp behind them. They turned to observe the dark young man, Christopher Watts, in the act of twisting a demon's tail. The demon yelped again, and dropped the tube of analgaesic cream it had been offering him. It attempted a stab with its trident.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Mr. Watts, skillfully avoiding the thrust.

He caught the trident by the shaft and wrenched it out of the demon's hand. "Now!" he said with satisfaction. He dropped the trident and laid hold of the tail with both hands. He swung the demon twice round his head and let go. The demon flew over the wire-netting fence and landed in the road with a yell and a bump. The other demons deployed and began to advance upon Mr. Watts, tridents levelled, nets swinging in their left hands.

Christopher Watts squared up to them, grimly watching them come on. Then, suddenly, his expression changed. His frown gave place to a smile. He unclenched his fists and dropped his hands to his sides.

"Dear me, what nonsense all this is!" he said, and turned his back on the demons.

They stopped abruptly and looked confused.

A surprising sense of revelation came over Henry. He saw quite clearly that the young man was right. It *was* nonsense. He laughed at the bewildered look on the demons' faces, and heard Norma beside him laughing too. Presently, all the party was laughing at the discomforted demons who looked first apprehensive, then sheepish.

Mr. Christopher Watts strode across to the side of the enclosure which faced up the valley. For some moments he regarded the smoky, luridly somber view. Then: "I don't believe it!" he said quietly.

An enormous bubble rose and burst in the fiery lake. There was a *woomph!* as the volcano sent up a mushroom cloud of smoke and cinders, and spilt better, brighter streams of lava down its sides. The ground trembled a little under their feet. Mr. Watts drew a deep breath.

"*I DON'T BELIEVE IT!*" he said loudly.

There was a loud crack. The dizzy crag which bore the recommendation for UNBURN split off and toppled slowly into the valley. Demons on the mountain side dropped their hunting, and started to lope homewards with cries of panic. The ground shook violently. The fiery lake began to empty into a huge split which had

opened in the valley floor. A tremendous gush of flame burst from the geyser. The mighty crag on the other side heeled over. There was a roaring and a crashing and a hissing of steam all around them, and through it Mr. Watts' voice bawled again:

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT!!"

Suddenly, all was quiet, as if it had been switched off. All was black, too, with nothing whatever to be seen but the lighted windows of the train where it stood on the embankment behind them.

"Well," said Mr. Watts, on a note of cheerful satisfaction. "Well, that's that. Now let's go home again, shall we?" And by the light from the train windows he began to scramble up the embankment.

Henry and Norma moved to follow him. Mr. Forkett hesitated.

"What's the matter?" Henry asked him, looking back.

"I'm not sure. I feel it's not quite . . . not quite . . ."

"You can't very well stay here now," Henry pointed out.

"No — no, I suppose not," Mr. Forkett admitted and, half-reluctantly, he too began to climb the embankment.

Without any spoken agreement, the five who had previously travelled together again chose a coach to themselves. They had scarcely got aboard when the doors closed

and the train began to move. Norma sighed with relief and pushed her hood back as she sat down.

"Like being halfway home already," she said. "Thank you ever so much, Mr. Watts. It's been a real lesson to me, it has, though. I'll never go near a stocking counter again, never — except when I'm going to buy some."

"I'll second that — the thanks part, I mean," said Henry. "I still feel that there was very likely some confusion between the legal and the common view in my particular case, but I'm extremely obliged to you for . . . er . . . cutting the red tape."

Mrs. Branton held out a gloved hand to Mr. Watts. "Of course, you'll realize that it was all a stupid mistake that I should be there, but I expect you've saved me hours and hours of dealing with ridiculous officials. I do hope you may be able to come and dine with us some time. I'm sure my husband will want to thank you personally."

There was a pause. It lengthened. Gradually the realization that Mr. Forkett was not taking his cue drew all their eyes upon him. He himself was gazing in a pensive way at the floor. Presently he looked up, first at them, and then at Christopher Watts.

"No," he said. "I am sorry, but I cannot agree. I am afraid I must continue to regard your ac-

tion as anti-social, if not actually subversive."

Mr. Watts, who had been looking rather pleased with himself, showed first surprise, then a frown.

"I beg your pardon?" he said with genuine puzzlement.

"You've done a very serious thing," Mr. Forkett told him. "There simply cannot be any stability if we do not respect our institutions. You, young man, have destroyed one. We all had confidence in this affair — even you, to begin with — then you suddenly go and break it all up, an institution of considerable standing, too. No, I really cannot be expected to approve of that."

The rest of them stared at him.

"But Mr. Forkett," said Norma, "surely you wouldn't rather be back there, with all those demons and things?"

"My dear young lady, that is scarcely the point," Mr. Forkett reproved her. "As a responsible citizen, I must strongly oppose anything that threatens to undermine public confidence. Therefore, I must regard this young man's action as dangerous; verging, I repeat, upon the subversive."

"But if an institution is phony —" began Mr. Watts.

"That too, sir, is beside the point. If enough people believe in an institution, then it is important to those people — whether it

is what you call phony or not."

"You prefer faith to truth?" said Mr. Watts scornfully.

"You must have confidence, and if you have that, truth follows," said Mr. Forkett.

"As a scientist, I consider you quite immoral," said Mr. Watts.

"As a citizen, I consider you unscrupulous," said Mr. Forkett.

"Oh, dear!" said Norma.

Mr. Forkett pondered. Mr. Watts frowned.

"Something that is *real* isn't going to fall to bits just because I disbelieve in it," observed Mr. Watts.

"How can you tell? The Roman Empire was real enough once — as long as people believed in it," replied Mr. Forkett.

The argument continued for some little time, with Mr. Forkett growing more monumental, and Mr. Watts more fundamental.

Finally Mr. Forkett summed up his opinion: "Frankly, your iconoclastic, revolutionary views seem to me to differ only in name from bolshevism."

Mr. Watts rose to his feet. "The consolidation of society on faith, irrespective of scientific truth, is the method of a Stalin," he observed, and withdrew to the other end of the car.

"Really," said Norma, "I don't know how you can be so rude and ungrateful to him. When I think of them all with their toasting forks, and that poor

woman hanging there without a stitch on, and upside-down, too —”

“It was all quite appropriate to the time and place. He’s a very dangerous young man,” said Mr. Forkett firmly.

Henry thought it time to change the conversation. The four of them chatted more generally as the train rattled on at a good speed, though not as fast as it had descended. But after a time the talk began to wilt. Glancing up the coach, Henry noticed that Mr. Watts had already gone to sleep again, and felt that there was no better way of spending the time.

He awoke to hear voices shouting: “Stand clear of the doors!” and to find that the carriage was full of people again. Almost as his eyes opened, Norma’s elbow stuck into his ribs.

“Look!” she said.

The straphanger in front of them was interested in the racing part of his paper, so that the front page faced them with the headline: RUSH-HOUR TUBE SMASH — 12 DEAD. Under it was a column of names. Henry leaned forward to read them. The holder of the paper lowered it to glare indignantly, but not before Henry had noticed his own name and those of the others.

Norma looked troubled.

“Don’t know *how* I’m going to

explain that at home,” she said.

“You get my point?” inquired Mr. Forkett on Henry’s other side. “Just think of the trouble there’s going to be straightening this out — newspapers, coroners, heaven knows what. Not a safe fellow to have about. Quite anti-social.”

“I don’t know what my husband is going to think. He’s such a jealous man,” remarked Mrs. Branton, not without satisfaction.

The train stopped at St. Paul’s, thinned somewhat, and then went on. Mr. Forkett and Norma prepared to get out. It occurred to Henry that he might as well get out, too. The train slowed.

“Don’t know what they’re going to say in the office, seeing me walk in. Still, it’s been ever so int’resting, really. Ta-ta for now, everyone,” said Norma, and wriggled into the departing crowd with the skill of long practice.

A hand grasped Henry’s arm as they stepped on to the platform. “There he is,” said Mr. Forkett. He nodded ahead. Henry saw the back view of Mr. Watts preceding them up the platform. “Can you spare a few minutes? Don’t trust the fellow at all.”

They followed up the escalator and round to the steps which brought them to the surface in front of the Royal Exchange.

There, Mr. Watts paused and

(Continued on page 107)



DREAM OF VICTORY

By **ALGIS BUDRYS**

We'd like for you to meet Stac Fuoss. Handsome guy, wouldn't you say? Tall, good build, not tough but quite capable. A little on the cynical side, we'll admit, but how can you be filled with the milk of human kindness if you're not human?

No, we don't mean he's a robot. Robots are metal, coated wires and cybernatic brains. Stac bleeds when he's cut, staggers after his eighth martini, loses his temper if he's pushed. But what is much worse: his mind is like yours and mine. That enables him to dream . . . and dreams can be fatal when you're an android!

PART I

FUOSS cracked his knuckles and pushed the empty glass across the bar. He took a pull on his cigarette, driving the smoke into his lungs as hard as he could. He exhaled a doughnut-shaped cloud that broke against the bartender's stomach.

"Want another one, Mister?"

the bartender asked.

Fuoss bit down hard, enjoying the pressure on his teeth. "I'll take one."

The bartender picked up the glass. "I don't think she's coming in tonight."

"Who?"

"Carol. It's a little late for her to be in."

"Carol who?"

"You kidding, Mister?"

Fuoss pushed the stub of his cigarette into an ashtray, took out another one and waited for it to light. "I never knew a Carol in my life. You trying to sell me on a friend named Carol?"

"You know how many of these you've had, Mister?" The bartender held the glass up.

Fuoss bit down again. "You keeping tab?"

"Sure I am. I was just wondering if you knew." The bartender poured a finger of lemon juice into his mixer. "You're an android, aren't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Fuoss cracked his knuckles in the opposite direction.

The bartender added syrup and gin. "Carol's human. Grew up on the block. I remember the first time she came in here, with this look on her face daring me to say she wasn't old enough." The bartender, who was a bulky man, was apparently used to having globules of sweat tremble on his forehead. "Carol's human," he repeated, without raising his glance from the mixer.

Fuoss's stool clattered on the floor.

The bartender looked up. The door shut loudly. The bartender ducked under the bar and ran to the door. He looked through the glass but couldn't see anything, so he opened the door and stuck his head outside. A sound of footsteps

came from down the street, but the street lamp in front of the bar cut off his vision.

The bartender quirked his mouth up at the corners and dilated his nostrils. He went back inside the bar, set the stool up, and drank the Martini himself.

In sleep, the conscious mind — that cohabitant collection of mis-directed clockwork — is quiescent, and the dramatic subconscious is free of its restraints.

Seven-thirty.

Fuoss's day began. Usually, the shift from subconsciousness back to conscious thought was so precise that he was able to believe that he never dreamt, but this morning the fatigue of the previous day's unusually hard work held him on the borderline.

Seven-thirty, then, in the clock's modulated voice, and Fuoss let the end of a snore trickle out of his nostrils, closed his mouth, and scratched a buttock, but was not yet completely awake.

Seven-thirty and a half. Recall the length and complexity of the dream that comes between the first alarm and the subsequent feel of the bedside carpeting under your feet as you gather your pajama bottom back up to your waist. Mohammed knocked a glass from a table, bent, caught it, and lived a lifetime in the interval.

Fuoss pushed the clock's cutoff and walked to the bathroom,

skirting his wife's bed. He shaved and showered, walking back into the bedroom with his pajamas over his arm. He went to the night table between the twin beds, picked up a cigarette, then sat down on his bed instead of taking fresh underwear out of the bureau and dressing.

"Stac?"

His wife had awakened. She turned her head and looked at him, raising a hand to brush the hair out of her eyes. "You're not getting dressed. What's the matter?"

Fuoss widened his eyes and relaxed them, trying to come fully awake. "I don't know," he said. "I had this dream just before I woke, and I'll be damned if I can remember it. Guess I just sat down for a minute, trying to remember it."

"Is that all?" Lisa smiled. "Why let a dream bother you?" She stretched her arms at her sides, bending them upward at the elbows. "Kiss me good morning."

Fuoss smiled, threw the cigarette into an ashtray, and bent over the bed. "Does sound silly, doesn't it? Can't get the idea out of my head that it's important, though."

Lisa raised her lips. Her swollen eyes and mouth were crusted at the corners. Fuoss kissed her absently.

"Stac! What in the devil's the

matter with you this morning?"

Fuoss shook his head. "I don't know. It's that damned dream. I haven't felt right since I woke up. Can't pin it down."

Lisa frowned. "Whatever it was, I don't like it. From the way you kissed me, you'd think it was about another woman."

Fuoss felt a jab of guilt. He got up from Lisa's bed and walked over to the bureau. The taste of Lisa's unwashed mouth was on his lips, and he yanked at the top drawer.

"If I knew I wouldn't be bothered about it, would I?" He dressed rapidly. "Do I have to kiss you like Don Juan every morning?" He went to the night table and picked up his watch and keys. "Haven't got time for breakfast, now. I hope Brownfield's wife finally had her kid, so Tom can get back to the office. I'm getting sick of doing his work overtime without getting paid for it."

Lisa made an impatient sound, got up and walked toward the bathroom. She slept naked. Fuoss watched her.

"Arms and legs," he said. "Two of each, perfectly molded, attached with correct smoothness, and equally smoothly articulated and muscled. Breasts and hips — also two of each — and superbly useless for anything but play. All this equipment joined to a sculptured torso, and the entire work

of the designer's art surmounted by a face with just enough deliberate irregularities to make it appealing."

Lisa turned, a half-frightened look on her face. "What did you say?"

Fuoss smiled with restrained bitterness. "That was just Culture S, Table C Fuoss reading specification on Culture L, Table S ditto. My wife, by the grace of Section IV, Paragraph 12 of the Humanoids Act of 1973, and the General Aniline Company, Humanoids Division. Good morning, Mrs. Mannikin —"

Whatever it was that had been fermenting in him suddenly came to a head. "Why the hell don't you buy a hairnet?" he said, and slammed the bedroom door behind him.

Fuoss stepped out of the Upchute into the office a few minutes before nine. He went to his desk and sat down, staring at the In basket which the file clerks had already filled with folders and correspondence. He ran a thumb along the edge of a batch of files.

Blue Tabs. McMillin. First Brownfield's stuff and now McMillin's, too. There wasn't anything wrong with Mac's wife. Why should he be doing part of his stuff?

He wiped his forearm over his eyes. He'd tried to explain this morning's outburst to himself dur-

ing the drive to the office. It couldn't be the dream. He was tired. Work had been piling up on his desk during the past month, and he'd had to do overtime. Brownfield had been out lately, with his wife's pregnancy developing complications at term. That meant more work to be done. More reading, more dictation, more interviews. His nerves were strained.

He remembered some of the other jobs he'd worked at. Doing rewrites for the *Times*, for instance. He'd liked it, been good at it. He'd saved enough from that so the extra money he'd picked up free-lancing had paid for the destruction and replacement of the unmatured remainder of Lisa's culture. At that time, the thought of being married to a true individual had seemed important.

After the newspaper business got a little tight, he'd tried his hand at managing a chain store, and when that petered out he'd done any number of other things, until he'd finally landed this insurance claim adjusting job. Come to think of it, he'd held a lot of jobs.

Guess I'm the restless type, he decided.

". . . and thank you for your kind cooperation," he dictated an hour later. "Rush that out, will you, Ruthie?"

He looked up from the file and

saw Brownfield come in.

"Thank God!" he said. Brownfield was carrying a box of cigars and wearing the smile of a new father. "Look who's here."

"Why, it's Mr. Brownfield! He called this morning and said he might be in," the stenographer said.

But they figured I might as well do his work anyway, huh? Fuoss thought. "What's the news on his wife?" he asked.

"Oh, she's fine. They had a baby boy." Ruth smiled enviously.

Brownfield came across the office to his desk. Fuoss got up. "Well, hell, Tom, congratulations!" he said, slapping Brownfield on the back. "Boy, huh? Bet he looks like his mother. Most boys do, I hear."

"Little early to tell yet, Stac," Brownfield said happily. "Might be, though. He's got blue eyes like Marion."

"Well, all babies have blue eyes at first," Fuoss said. The thought struck him that young Brownfield probably resembled nothing so much as he did a slightly boiled marmoset.

"All babies do?" Brownfield said. "I didn't know that. How come you did?"

Meaning 'What does an android know about children,' huh? You smug son of a bitch. "Don't know. Must have read it somewhere, I guess," he said.

"Guess so. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks. Say, these are good."

"Nothing but the best for the first-born, I always say."

Fuoss hid a grimace. "What're you going to call him, Tom — Junior?" he asked unnecessarily.

"What else? Have to carry on the family names, you know."

In a pig's left nostril, I know!

Brownfield looked over his desk. "Looks like all my work's been done for me while I was gone. You do it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, boy, I owe you a drink, don't I? What say we drop in some place after work? I sure appreciate you doing this for me."

Why not?

"Sure. I'll see you at five."

"Sure thing." Brownfield walked away, the open box of cigars in his hand.

Fuoss threw the cigar into the back of his desk drawer and picked up another file.

Carol had short, dusty-black hair. Her blue eyes were wide. They were accented by sweeping brows and outlined by coal-black lashes. Her nose was short, flat, turned up at the end. Her lips were small and thin. They twisted nervously whenever she forgot to control them. Her face was round, sun-tanned, and slightly flat.

Fuoss waved at the waitress and silently pointed to the three empty glasses. The girl put the

glasses on her tray and moved off.

Brownfield shifted awkwardly in his chair. "I've got to go home, Stac," he said petulantly. "It's getting late. I've got to call the hospital and talk to my wife."

Fuoss looked at him from under his lowered eyebrows, his eyes a dark mud color. "You can call her from here."

"I'm hungry, too. I've got to go home and eat."

"You can order a sandwich here, you know." Fuoss took a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and held it out to Carol.

"Light it for me, will you?" she said.

Fuoss grinned. He put the two cigarettes in his mouth until they lit, and handed one over. "Tommie boy, here, gave me a cigar today," he said. "Good cigar. Too bad I hate cigars." He turned to Brownfield, smiling. "Don't get me wrong, Tommie. You're a hell of a good joe. I just don't like cigars." He leaned across the table and laid his hand on Carol's arm.

"Tommie sure did me a big favor today," he said emphatically. "He brought me in here, didn't he? Introduced me to one of the really nicest people I ever met. Even if I don't like cigars. Was that Tommie's fault? Good cigar. Did his best." He laughed. "Sure did his best. Mr. Brownfield has fathered a son. Ever hear of a better best than that?"

Carol shook her head. "Never

did. That's really something."

Brownfield pushed his chair back. "I've got to go."

Fuoss narrowed his eyes and stared at him. He looked at Carol with a sidewise swing of his eyes and then looked back at Brownfield. "All right. 'F I was you I'd be celebrating the blessed event, but I guess you know what you're doing. Thanks for the drink. And thanks for introducing me to Carol. Goodbye."

Brownfield grinned uncomfortably and raised his hand awkwardly. "I'll see you." He turned his awkward smile in Carol's direction. "I'll see you, too."

"Won't wifey mind?" Carol answered, puffing on the cigarette. "It's been fun and all that, but you're a proud papa now."

Brownfield put his hand on the back of his chair and opened his mouth, but closed it again and then said something else instead. "Yeah. I guess so. I — I'll see you." He turned and walked out.

Carol broke into a laugh. "Ever see an expression like that on anybody's face before?"

Fuoss guffawed. "Not once. Never." The waitress had brought three fresh drinks, and he picked up Brownfield's. "Brownie's a good guy, though. Never thought a bird like him knew about a place like this. Damnedest thing."

"The place isn't really much. It's too quiet, usually. I like it to

rest up in until the bigger places open."

Fuoss looked around and nodded. "Yeah, come to think of it, you're right. The place would be dead if I hadn't run into you. I guess it's the company that gives any place its atmosphere."

He finished Brownfield's drink and started on his own. "Damnedest thing, us just walking in here and finding you."

Carol smiled. "Oh, I'm usually in here. It's awfully dull, usually."

Fuoss nodded. "Come to think of it," he said abruptly, "Brownie was right. It is time to eat. You hungry?"

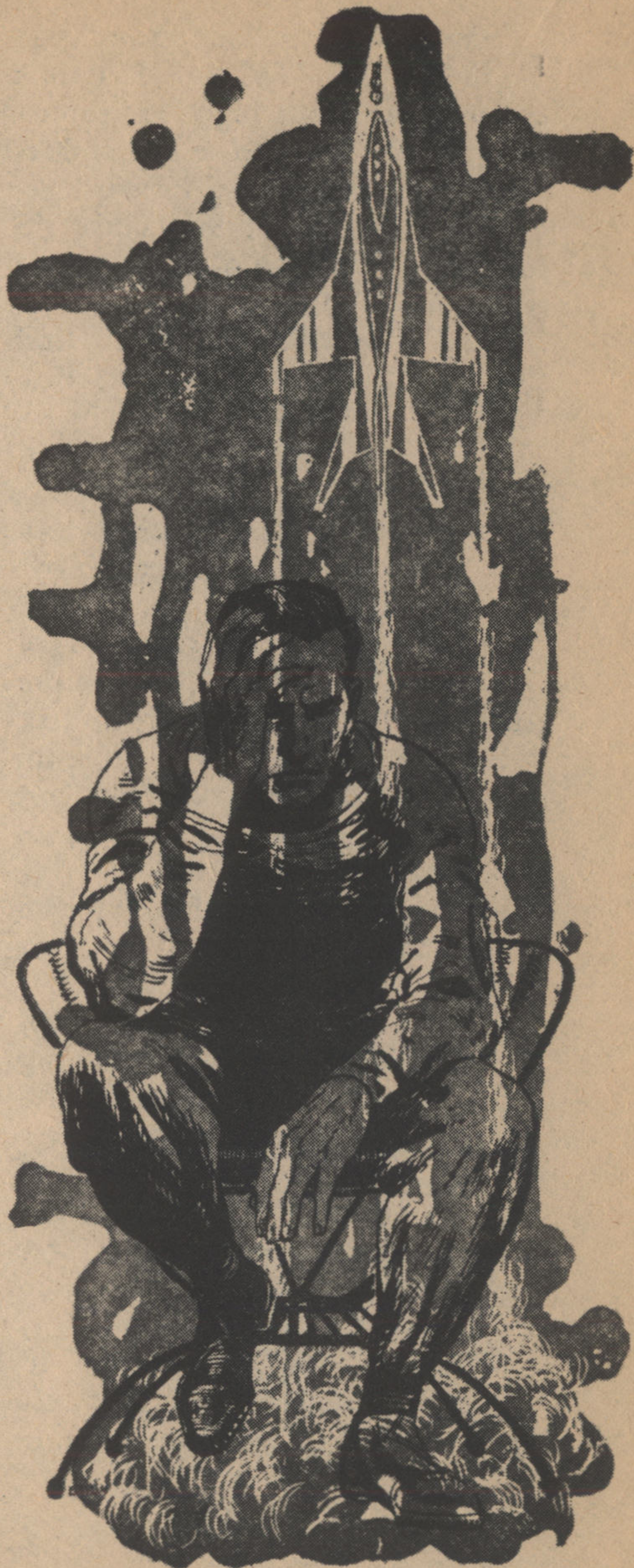
Carol nodded, wrinkling her nose. "Uh-huh."

"Okay. Order something. You know the food in here. Order for both of us."

"Oh, the food stinks in this place. Tell you what . . ." Carol smiled, dimpling sweetly. "Why don't we go up to my place? I'll cook something up for us and we can go out someplace later. How's that?"

Fuoss's eyes glittered. "Sounds good," he said, and waved to the waitress for their check.

There was no point to going all the way back to the carport to pick up Fuoss's Buick, so they took a cab to Carol's apartment. Fuoss helped her out of the cab and held her coat while she unlocked the door.



She opened the door and swayed against him. "Whew! I didn't know I was that high," she murmured. She laughed, a low chuckling laugh and leaned forward.

"'S all right," Fuoss said. "'S all right. We'll be okay when we get some food down."

"Sure we will," Carol said, and laughed again. "Mix yourself a drink while I go find the kitchen."

Fuoss was recording impressions on his senses. There were a lot of them. They wheeled by; sight, hearing, smell, taste, feel, all reeling by. He had no means of slowing them down or cutting them off, so he simply recorded, letting them run into his mental tape recorder, not analyzing, not examining, just letting them spin, stopping once in a while to drive his fingernails into his forearm when the fog became too pervasive.

Slap! His head recoiled. *Slap!* Other direction. He was leaning against the flexible bathroom wall, facing the mirror. He slapped himself again. And again, trying to drive some of the fuzz out from around his senses. The air was tight, squeezing against him from all directions, compressing.

There was just too much of it. Too much going on, going by. He opened his eyes and the spinning stopped. No, not quite. But it did slow down considerably.

Carol's arm was around his

neck. "Hi," she said, wrinkling her nose.

"Hi." He pouted a smile in return.

"I don't think we're going out after supper." She giggled.

"Why not?"

"It's two o'clock in the morning and we haven't had supper yet."

Fuoss looked down at a coffee table covered with bottles. Most of them had been sampled. "Well, let's eat, then." He was having real trouble focussing his eyes.

Carol put her other arm around his neck. "In a minute, honey. Let's have one more drink. We haven't tried the Cherry Heering yet." She nuzzled his ear.

Fuoss stifled a belch. "All right."

Just before morning he had the dream again.

He thrashed out in the night, twisting the sheet around his legs and bringing a sleepy protest from Carol. He kicked, but the sheet held. He was soaking in sweat.

He had no clear image of the woman. She remained disembodied. Discarnate, but woman incarnate. He knew only that she was human, and this knowledge brought him a sense of triumph, of victory. He was victorious, glorious.

She came from blackness, and it was into blackness that he went for her.

He rolled and jerked on the bed. Time whinnied by like a silver beast.

The woman was gone, hidden in blackness. His feet moved spasmodically against the sheets.

The blackness parted and the woman returned. There was with her —

His subconscious recoiled. He cried out.

"Stac!"

The infant turned from his mother's breast and stretched out his hands. "Father!"

"Wake up, Stac! Goddamn it, *wake up!*" Carol pounded his shoulder. "Wake up, will you, for Christ's sake! You're bawling like a baby."

Fuoss opened his eyes and looked up into the darkness. He reached out for Woman.

Fuoss stayed behind a pillar, out of sight of the hundreds of arriving commuters, until his car was driven down the ramp. Then he scrambled inside and drove out of the exit as rapidly as possible. He swung into the Uptown lane and relaxed for the first time since stepping out of the cab at the carport.

A dose of B-1 had calmed his stomach, but his head was still feverish. His hands had a tendency to shake. When he paid his toll at the bridge, he almost dropped the coin. He drove jerkily, tramping down on the accelerator and

letting up too fast on the brake.

Despite this, there was a smile of satisfaction on his face.

Lisa met him at the door. "Tal's here," she said.

"The old family legal advisor, huh? Going to get a divorce before you even hear my side of the story?" Fuoss twisted his mouth.

Lisa smiled coldly. "If you're going to go tom-catting, I can't stop you, but at least get the purr out of your voice when you come back. Tal called up early this morning — wanted to see you. When I told him you weren't in, he came over to wait for you."

"Uh-huh. The office call?"

"Yes. I had to tell them you were sick. I don't think they believed me."

Fuoss grinned sourly. "Not with Brownie running around telling them what a bad boy I've been." He shrugged. "Tal in the living room? I'll go in and talk to him."

He brushed his lips across Lisa's cheek. "Fix me some breakfast, will you, honey?"

Tal Cummins, like most androids, was the next thing to a chain smoker. He opened a gold case as Fuoss came in and threw him a cigarette without asking. "How are you, Stac?"

Fuoss sat down opposite him. "Fair. What's up?"

Cummins waited until his cigarette had a good light. His black

hair had fashionable grey strands in it. His face was lean and aristocratic. His manner matched them. He had bought the hair and face to replace the ordinary undistinguished android features, but the manner had taken a number of years to cultivate. Only with another android did he fail to rise, murmur a greeting, and offer his cigarette case with polite urbanity. "How's your job coming along?" he finally asked.

"Hell of a question, after two years."

Cummins tapped his cigarette and watched the ash drift into a tray. "Doing a lot of overtime lately, are you?"

"Sure."

"Getting paid for it?"

"Supper money. Executives don't draw overtime — you know that."

Cummins snorted. "Ever hear of the Junior Executives Union? Don't tell me — the answer's no. It's a part of the dead and glorious Prewar past. The companies beat it by putting everybody from file clerks on up on the private payroll. Bingo, they were ineligible for unionization."

"And I'm that kind of an executive, huh?"

"You're in good company." Cummins let some more ash fall. "How about the other fellows in your office? They do a lot of extra work?"

"Not much. I sort of take care

of about everything around here."

"I'll bet you do. How's your production record? Handle more cases than anybody else in the office, don't you? Even without the extra work, I mean."

"Sure. It's pretty easy work."

"Getting steady raises, are you?"

"Well — times are a little rough in the insurance game. They promised me one pretty soon, though." Fuoss ran a hand through his hair. "What's all this getting at?"

Cummins doused his cigarette. "Did it ever strike you that you were being put upon, old chum? Don't you think it's kind of funny that a guy with your ability has held so many jobs?"

Fuoss grunted. "Maybe. I was thinking about it yesterday, as a matter of fact." Tal Cummins is a hell of a nice guy, but I'd like him better if he didn't talk in circles. He shifted his feet.

Cummins smiled thinly. "I'll get to the point in a minute."

"Mind reader?" Fuoss growled.

"Lawyer." Cummins let himself smile for a minute more, wasted a little time on a new cigarette, then leaned forward. "Stac, I'll bet you anything you'd care to risk that you'll lose your job within the month."

"Why?"

"May I acquaint you with a little history?"

"If it's got anything to do with me. But cut it short."

"History is never short, my

boy." Cummins kicked the end of his cigarette with his thumbnail. "History is extremely complicated, and we —" he gestured from Fuoss to himself, and included Lisa with a wave toward the kitchen, "are one of the prize complications.

"You've heard of the war. You have also heard of the extreme devastation and depopulation. I've done more than that. I've gone through books that describe a complicated civilization from its most revealing angle — its legal structure. I've also studied the 1960 census, and compared it with the emergency figures compiled in '68. Being an android, specializing in the cases covered by the Humanoids Act, I've also built up a better-than-average picture of what shape the humans were in when they finally dropped in their tracks in '67."

The sophisticated mask fell away. "Things were rugged, Stac. Seventy-five per cent of the civilized population was dead. Their technology was either completely wrecked or useless, because some fragment which remained operative depended on another part which hadn't. The humans were headed for the most colossal dark age since the Western Roman Empire collapsed.

"We were the answer. They took their soldier androids, did an extensive revamping and improv-

ing, and here we are. Or rather, there we were, because things are different now." The faintest trace of bitterness found an unaccustomed home on the bland features.

"Anyway," he went on, "what they needed in a hurry was a labor force. Not just a bunch of quasi-robots, but intelligent individuals, or near-individuals, who could handle anything a human could. The result was not only android pick-and-shovelers, but android technicians, android scientists, and android teachers. Even —" he smiled — "android lawyers."

"They did a good job. For all practical purposes, androids are duplicates of humanity. The main difference, of course, lies in the fact that androids cannot reproduce themselves by natural means. There, the humans knew they had a problem. If we were comparatively unintelligent, it wouldn't matter too much. But they gave us brains — and the potential for a nasty bundle of neuroses. They gave us android wives to take some of the sting off, but nobody's ever figured out a way to give us a substitute for parenthood. Adoption, unfortunately, is not the answer for the genuine article."

Fuoss looked at Cummins through a screening cloud of cigarette smoke. The lawyer was a smart cookie. Was he smart enough to be hinting around?

"But that's beside the point,"

Cummins said.

Fuoss relaxed.

"*That* problem is going to be solved as a by-product solution to a much larger problem," the lawyer continued. "In a way, your working overtime is a symptom of that same problem."

"How?"

"Look around you," Cummins said simply. "Any traces of the war left? Any poverty, hardship, devastation? You don't use matches on your cigarettes, you drive a two-hundred mph Buick with an automatic pilot, you never used an elevator in your life, and your alarm clock's been on voice for the last ten years. You, friend, are living in the technology of the late Twentieth Century. The fact that it's fifty years late is unimportant. Another thing — *this* civilization is truly world-wide. There are no 'backward' areas — the day of the ignorant savage gaping before the white man's magic is over."

"We did a good job," Fuoss said.

Cummins laughed, with no trace of humor. "Exactly. We worked ourselves right out of it."

"Now — wait a minute! You don't mean they're going to stop making androids."

"They have stopped."

"What! When? How come nobody knows about it?"

"Relax, Stac." Cummins waved him back into his chair. "There's

nothing we can do about it. You'd be surprised how many people have tried." He smiled inscrutably. "I'm one of them, as a matter of fact. But there's more to worry about than that."

"Such as?"

"What's happening to you — and me. Haven't you figured it out yet? The human population's back up to normal. Nobody needs androids any more. They don't want to come right out and say so, and in many cases the humans themselves aren't deliberate in their actions. It's simply a question of an employer hiring humans rather than androids. After all, if you were a human employer, and two applicants, one human and the other android, showed up for the same job, which would you hire?"

"So I'm being eased out of my job?" Fuoss searched his pockets for a cigarette.

"Shows all the signs, doesn't it? Looks to me like they're trying to disgust you into resigning. They might also pick on some pretext — like you being out all night on a bat."

"That was a celebration with Tom Brownfield! He was with me!"

"All night?"

"All right — we split up about eight! So what?"

Cummins made another one of his soothing gestures. "Relax, boy. I'm not accusing you of selling

anybody into slavery. I'm just saying your company might decide it was a beautiful opportunity. Insurance companies are pretty stuffy outfits, anyway, you know."

That was what Cummins said, but Fuoss could see the shrewd light in the lawyer's eyes. He'd let a little too much slip about last night. Worst of all, he'd protested too much. Well, there was nothing he could do about it now.

"So there won't be any more androids, huh?" Fuoss said.

"Correct. One of the obscurer subsections of the Humanoids Act covers the case. But why worry? One thing we androids have over the humans is a complete lack of interest in the succeeding generation."

"Don't be so Goddamned smug about it!"

Cummins raised his eyebrows. "Did I touch a sore spot?"

"Never mind what you touched. You've been spreading a lot of stuff around here this morning. I'm not ready to believe all of it. I particularly don't care about you prying into my married and personal life. Got me?"

Cummins got up, the urbane barrister once more. "Well, it seems I share Cassandra's popularity. Prophets without honor and all that. I'll be going."

"Good idea. I need some sleep."

"You do. And Stac . . ." Cummins paused on his way into the hall, "there's a law clerk's job

open in my office when you need it."

"Go take a flying —"

"Goodbye."

Stac kept his eyes on Cummins until the lawyer had gone out of the door. Then he swung around and went into the kitchen. He stood just inside the door and looked at Lisa. His upper lip twitched.

"Breakfast's ready. Where's Tal?" Lisa said.

"Thanks. Tal's gone."

"What'd he want?"

Fuoss cut into a slice of ham. "Nothing much. Bunch of chatter, is all. Did he say anything to you about it?"

"No."

Fuoss looked up. Lisa was looking at him quietly.

"I was out with Brownie. His wife had a son and we were celebrating. That's all."

"All right, Stac." Lisa smiled. "Did you have that dream again?"

"Goddamn it!" Stac slammed his fist onto the tabletop. "Goddamn it to hell!"

PART II

Fuoss moved down the street. He stayed in the shadows and kept his footsteps light. He crossed the avenue and went into Carol's apartment house. He went into the lobby and pushed Carol's annunciator button.

A note, printed in Carol's

handwriting, full of sweepingly crossed T's and curlicued S's, was thrown on the screen beside the button.

Hi, whoever —

Sorry — nobody's home. Don't know when I'll be back, but the lobby chairs are nice and cuddly if you want to wait. Or leave me a note.

See You.

Fuoss grimaced with satisfaction and turned the screen off. He went over to the chute, unlocked it, and rode to Carol's floor. He went down the hall to her apartment and let himself in.

Carol had left the lights on, as usual. He reached up to turn them off, then changed his mind. He went into the kitchen instead and took a can of beer. He removed the top and went into the bedroom, tilting his head back to let the beer slide down his throat.

The bedroom was a lot neater than he had expected it to be. The bedspread was folded over a chair and one of the vanity drawers was open, but the usual collection of washed but not yet ironed underthings was missing from the top of the bureau.

Fuoss put the beer can down on top of a table, went over to the closet and reached into a back corner. He pulled out his topcoat.

He put his hand in the left side pocket, fumbled around, grunted, tried the other pocket. He couldn't

find anything in that one, either. He frowned and got to his hands and knees to search the closet floor. There was nothing there.

He swung the closet door angrily. A negligee that had slipped from its hanger kept it from closing completely. He pushed the negligee farther inside with his foot and slammed the door shut. He walked toward the bed, tangling his feet in the topcoat he had thrown to the floor. He kicked it up into reach and threw it on the bed. He moved over to the table, picked up his can of beer and drained it. He stood in front of the open bedroom window, bouncing the can in his hand.

He threw the can out and lay down on the bed. He propped his head up with two pillows so that he could watch the entrance to the apartment through the open bedroom door.

The office boy was about sixteen. He had pimples and an elaborate coiffure that had to be rebuilt by frequent recourse to a men's room washbasin. He liked to smirk.

"They wanna see you in the V.P.'s office, Mister Fuoss," he said.

"Thanks."

"Right away."

"Thanks."

"There's an awful lot of big shots in there."

"Scram."

"Huh?"

"Whip out of here, punk. If I'm getting the ax, I can at least stop acting like a human fountain pen. Now get going, before I wipe my nose with you." Fuoss stood up, and the boy backed out of the way.

"So Cummins was right," Fuoss muttered. He rummaged quickly through his desk, taking out his fountain pens and a few other items that belonged to him. He ran across Brownfield's cigar, grinned, and put it in his breast pocket.

He walked back between the rows of desks toward the First Vice President's office. He had thought he'd be angry, or disappointed, perhaps, if Cummins' prediction actually came true. Instead, he discovered that he was feeling considerable relief. When he walked into the office, there was a slight smile at the corners of his mouth.

The office boy had been right. Aside from the division head, there was a complete representation of section supervisors. Brownfield sat in one corner.

"Good morning, Mr. Crofton, Mr. Mantell. Good morning, John, Harry, George," Fuoss said heartily. "Good morning, Brownie."

Crofton, the V.P., frowned. "Good morning, Fuoss. Sit down."

Fuoss moved into the indicated

chair, crossed his legs and sat back. "What's up, W.C.?" One of the section heads snickered.

"I'd regard this occasion in a more serious light if I were you," Crofton said heavily.

Fuoss smiled. "It's a question of relative importance, I imagine," he said. He leaned forward. "Look, Mr. Crofton, Let's cut this short. You're a busy man and I've got a new job to look for, so suppose I just have Ruthie run up a letter of resignation and we'll get this thing done right. Will any excuse do, or do you have some particular preference?"

There was an uncomfortable rustling among the section heads, but Crofton took it without any special reaction. "No. Almost anything will do. Make it effective next Wednesday. I'm sorry to see you go, Fuoss. On the other hand, I have no choice. You'll acquaint Mr. Brownfield with the cases you're handling currently." He extended a hand smilingly.

"Oh, I don't think I'll wait that long. Suppose I make it effective at five o'clock yesterday? And as for me acquainting Brownie with my current cases, that's hardly necessary, since most of them were his originally, anyway. Well, so long." He flipped a hand in salute and walked out.

Brownfield caught up with him in the cloakroom. "Say, Stac, I'm sorry this happened," he

said, fumbling at Fuoss's sleeve. "It's just that when you didn't show up yesterday, somebody remembered that we went out together the night before and started asking questions."

"Sure, Brownie."

"I'm glad you're taking this so calmly," Brownfield said, his face ineffectual.

"Sure. I'll see you around, huh, Brownie?" He put his jacket on, picked up his briefcase, and took the hand Brownfield extended.

"Oh, yeah . . ." He reached into his breast pocket. "Have a cigar, Brownie."

Fuoss walked jauntily down the sidewalk toward the bar where he had met Carol. He picked up a paper at the corner newsstand, intending to check a few ads for luck. The sun was shining and a cool breeze came off the harbor.

He went into the bar and sat down. "Give me a gin and tonic, will you?" he said to the bartender and settled himself comfortably on the stool. His hands began to tremble, and he broke out in a sweat.

My God, what'm I going to do? I've got bills to pay, a wife to support. The rent's due pretty soon, and the tax instalment. What I've got in the bank won't carry me long. Where's it coming from?

He leaned forward and wrapped his fingers over the bar's molding.

He began to tremble violently.

"You all right, buddy?" the bartender asked, setting a shot glass and a glass of quinine water in front of him.

"Fine. Just don't mix that drink, and bring me another shot of gin." He raised the shot glass to his mouth and sucked the gin out jerkily.

Carol came in at about four. Fuoss waved to her from the booth he'd spent the day in. She smiled and went over.

"Hi!"

"Hiya. Real higher. Pull up a drink and sit down," Fuoss said.

Carol laughed.

"Lost my job. Nobody loves androids any more. Rather have people. You rather have people?"

Carol shook her head. "That's too bad. *I* love androids." She moved her hand over, on top of his. "To hell with people."

Fuoss grinned happily. "You're people. But you're *nice* people. One of nicest people I know." He threw back his head and laughed.

"Say, you *are* packaged. You want to come over to my place and sleep it off?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I need it. Thanks, Carol. Thanks a lot. You're one of the best. No, really, you are." He pushed his way out of the booth and stood up weakly.

He had the dream again, that night.

Lisa's eyes were underscored

by purple shadows. "Haven't we gone through this before, recently?"

Fuoss shut the door and dropped into a chair. "All right. Who'd you tell this time?"

Lisa's eyes widened with her failure to understand him.

Fuoss snorted. "Cut it out. I haven't known you for these years and not learned anything. Who?"

Lisa kept her eyes from his. "Tal."

"I thought so. Was he here again? To see me, of course."

"God, but you came back in a nasty mood!" Lisa clenched her fists, knuckles forward, woman-fashion.

"Long as I came back. That's all you've got to worry about. What'd you tell Cummins?"

"What do you mean what'd I tell him? I told him the truth."

"What's your version of 'the truth'?"

Lisa advanced toward him fiercely. "Stop it, Stac! I'm warning you — cut it out right now. I don't particularly give a damn if you spent the night in a hotel with some call girl, but don't come back in the morning and get nasty with me!"

Fuoss jumped out of his chair, Lisa's near-guess had come too close. He stood spraddle-legged in front of her, his arms shaking.

"Listen, baby," he said in a cold rage, "you're dead right.

What I did last night is my own business." He bounced his palm off his chest. "At most, it's *our* business — yours and mine; not Tal Cummins's, not anybody else's. You've got a hell of a nerve standing there all housewifey, with that Goddamned egg-sucking grin on your face, trying to bull me. And when I catch you lying —" he was breathing in short gasps "you pull off the oldest defensive stunt in the world by flaring up at me!"

His head was pounding. He pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth. "Listen, Lisa-so-ashamed-of-being-an-android, Lisa-who-diddled-her-name-so-it-sounds-human, get me, *Lista*, and get me good! If it wasn't for me, you'd still be a sniveling shopgirl, and if it wasn't for me breaking my neck over a typewriter for five years, there'd be a carbon-copy of you on every block, and I'll bet my back teeth most of them wouldn't be too careful how they earned their keep, either. Just remember I set you up to a lifetime of Wednesday Bridge Clubs and Ladies Auxiliaries. Any time you decide you're going to get snotty with me, just run that over in your mind, and remember you're no better than a glorified animal cracker. I bought you, kid, lock, stock, and physiomolded backside. Now, clear out of my way and let me get some sleep."

"You bastard!" Lisa reached out an arm and clawed his face.

Fuoss ducked his head and pushed her away. He broke into short, high-pitched laughter. "Honey, that's one thing I *can't* be!" He turned around and walked toward the bedroom.

Lisa laughed too. "That's right. That's perfectly right. Just you remember that! You're nothing but a Goddamned android yourself."

Fuoss turned around. The blood had gone out of his face. He moved up on Lisa. "Watch yourself, baby. Be very careful what you say to me.

"In fact," he said slowly, "your troubles with me are over. Tal Cummins has clear title to you, at least as far as I'm concerned."

Carol was glad to have him move in with her. They spent the week end in a drunken stupor and he had the dream again.

The personnel manager shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Fuoss. We'd like to have a man of your experience with our organization, but we simply don't have any openings. Thank you for thinking of us, though, and we'll keep your application on file. I'll be sure to let you know if anything comes up."

"All right." Fuoss smiled and shook the man's hand. "Thanks, anyway."

"Certainly."

That night he and Carol got drunk together, and he had the dream again.

The next day a different personnel manager, for a company which would have paid five dollars a week less, was just as polite as the first.

An envelope from Tal Cummins' office had been delivered to him at Carol's apartment.

"How's it feel to be a correspondent, hon?" Fuoss asked her.

Carol shrugged.

They got drunk, Fuoss took some sleeping pills, and they went to bed.

On the following morning, he went down to his bank and discovered that Lisa had drawn out exactly one-half of his account. He sold his car on the way down to the employment agency.

Fuoss noticed an item in a newspaper on the employment agency bench:

ANDROIDS URGED AS IDEAL FOR EXPLORA- TION OF SPACE

In a letter released today by the office of the Secretary of Defense, Tal Cummins, prominent android and well-known legal figure, urged the use of androids as crewmen in the projected attempt to put a manned rocket in an orbit around the Earth.

"Authorities agree,"

Cummins said in his letter, "that there is no sure way of knowing whether human beings can live in deep space under any conditions without actually making the attempt. I submit that androids provide an easy means of practical testing. Moreover, for this and similar projects, such as the proposed Moon rocket and the later expeditions to Mars and Venus, specialized androids could be manufactured to meet special conditions, if it should prove that a humanoid organism cannot, for some reason, survive.

"Speaking for most androids, I can say that we would be glad to cooperate in any such program. Our satisfaction would lie in the knowledge that we had been of help in the greatest human undertaking since the dawn of civilization."

The office of the Secretary of Defense declined any official comment on the letter, but informed sources close to the Secretary admit that the proposal is being given serious consideration.

Fuoss's face was half-way between a scowl and a grin. "Half a loaf is better than none, eh, Cassandra?" he muttered. He re-read the story, which had drawn a two-column head on

page two, and this time he scowled. He got up, found a nickel in his pocket and went to a pay phone in the corner. He dialed Cummins' number, talked his way past two secretaries, and was connected with the lawyer.

"Hello, Stac! How are you?" Cummins' voice and expression were as urbane as ever.

"Okay. How's Lisa?"

"I — don't know. I haven't seen her." The lawyer's tone was an almost successfully concealed mixture of anger and disappointment.

Fuoss bared his teeth. "If I had time, I'd laugh like hell." He would have, too. "I've been reading about you in the papers, Tal."

"You mean Project Spaceward?"

"Is that what they're calling it? Wouldn't Project Grab be more appropriate?"

"Just what do you mean by that?" Cummins was angry.

"That was a mighty clever piece of work, boy. If I were human, I'd fall for it myself. But I'm not, so I don't go for it." Fuoss chuckled. "Not that I give a damn. In fact, I think it's kind of a good joke on the humans. Boy oh boy, are they in for a shock when your satellite station androids 'prove' that humans can't survive the conditions. But that shock's not going to be anything, is it? Not compared to the one they'll get when they wake up to

the fact that space belongs to the androids, and they had better be nice or they'll find themselves living on a second asteroid belt. I have to hand it to you, Cummins."

"All right, Stac. I won't try to kid you. That's exactly what I'm doing. Can you blame me? You, of all people. How many favors have the humans done you? They've fired you out of every job you ever held, and they're making it impossible for you to get another one. Tit for tat, Stac. They don't want us any more. All right — we'll give them Earth. But we'll take the rest of the universe for ourselves."

Fuoss shook his head. "Uh-uh. It might even happen, I hope so. But one thing stinks about this project, and that's you. You told me once that androids had no interest in their succeeding generation, remember? You were wrong. Whenever I see a young kid android, I try to do him all the favors I can. But as far as you're concerned, you were right. You look at life as a sort of Out-of-the-culture-dish, live a while, Into-the-recovery-vat process. As far as you're concerned, android history began on your Awareness Day, and will end with your death. So there's something in this for you, Cummins. There are mighty few drives left to an android. You've got the main one: power. Well, spin your little web.

Dream your little dream. I hope you get away with it. Not because I like you. Because I hate humans more."

He laughed. "Just thought I'd let you know how I feel. So long, pal." He cut the connection and watched the lawyer's face dissolve on the screen.

That day he got a job, but he was carrying a bottle around with him by then, so he was paid off at three o'clock.

Carol wasn't there when he reached home, so he got drunk by himself. And that night he had the dream again.

One of the interviewers at the employment agency looked him right in the eye and said, in an impatient tone of voice, "Let's face it, Fuoss. You're not going to get anywhere with trying for white-collar work. Not anymore. There's no point in getting emotional about it; it's a plain fact. It's the way things are today, and you've got to accept it. Why don't you try something like construction work? Your pay'll be a lot bigger than you'll ever get in an office."

Fuoss did a mental run-down on his bank balance. "All right."

But the union just couldn't provide jobs for all of its present members, much less take in a new one.

Tal Cummins had a guest appearance on a TV program, and

spoke at some length about Project Spaceward. By the time he got to the end of it, Fuoss had gotten tired of waiting for Carol and gone to bed. He had the dream again.

Carol woke him up on Saturday morning and made breakfast.

After breakfast they sat down on the couch and smoked.

"Where were you these last two nights," Fuoss asked.

"Out."

"Where?"

Carol turned her head and faced him. "Look, Stac, you're a nice guy. I like you. But liking you hasn't got much to do with it. You're living here — that's O.K., so far, but you haven't got any strings on me."

Fuoss shrugged. "Okay — if that's how it is."

They spent a pretty miserable week end.

Fuoss now took a job with a landscaping contractor out on Long Island. It paid a dollar and a half an hour, but it involved digging holes through fill that was well interlarded with brick halves, pieces of BX cable, folded lengths of thick tar paper, gravel and cinder block. His muscles weren't used to the job, but the worst strain was on his wrists, which took the shock of pick-swings that ended suddenly in some unseen obstacle. Nevertheless, he managed to last out the day with-

out blistering his palms too badly.

When he rode back to the apartment that night, he felt better than he had in days.

Carol was home. He came in the door and she looked up. "Christ!" She stared at his clothes. "What've you been doing? Digging ditches?"

"That's right — just about, anyway. Digging holes for trees. You get your hands dirty, but you make money. Twelve bucks today." He grinned. He was feeling good.

Carol nodded. "Uh-huh. Twelve bucks. Go take a shower, will you?"

When he came out, she was waiting for him. She was walking around in haphazard circles, smoking a cigarette. "Sit down, will you, Stac?"

"Sure. What's cooking?"

"Look — today's the first of the month. Rent's due. You want to pay half of it?"

He frowned. "Christ, I'd like to, Carol. You know that. But I can't. I haven't got any money. I can give it to you in about two weeks."

"Yeah . . . maybe. And could you raise fifty-five more two weeks after that?"

"Hell, Carol, sure. Twelve bucks a day comes out to sixty a week."

"Before taxes, social security, unemployment insurance, transportation, lunches and cigarettes

it does, yeah. Add laundry bills to that, too. What's more, this is August now. How much longer do you think landscaping's going to be open?"

"All right — so it's not the best job in the world!"

"I didn't say that. You should be able to make out pretty well with it, and they'll probably find you a winter job. Or else you can hole up on your unemployment checks. But not here, Stac. Not the way you're living." She flipped the cigarette into the sink.

"What're you trying to say?"

"I'm not trying — I'm saying. It's a matter of simple economics." She sat down beside him and put her hand on his knee. "Look, honey, I've been paying for your food the last two weeks. Some of the liquor we've mopped up you've bought, but most of it was here when you came. Up to now it hasn't cost you a dime to live here — or it wouldn't have, if you weren't a lush."

"Goddamn it! I am not a lush! I come home, we have a couple of drinks after supper, and then we start necking. Next thing we know, we're pie-eyed. But that doesn't make me a lush!" He realized that there were bigger things to argue over, but for some reason he kept pressing this point, as if concentrating on it would make the other problems disappear.

"Okay, honey." Carol stroked

his hair. "Okay." She smiled. "You know, a doctor I knew once said that alcohol was an extreme form of sublimation. But I can't imagine what *you* would be sublimating." She grinned, and Fuoss grinned with her.

"Okay. I made a funny," Carol said. "That doesn't change anything. I can't afford to keep you, and you can't afford to stay. It's tough, but it's true." Impulsively, she put her arms around his neck. "Look, you ought to get yourself a room somewhere near where you work. It'll work out fine that way. You can still come and see me."

Fuoss sat stiffly, looking at the opposite wall over her shoulder. "Sure. Sure, Carol. I understand. It'll work out pretty well." He tightened his arms around her. "I'll find a good job for the Winter, and then maybe we can really set up something in style."

"I'd like that, Stac," she murmured in his ear. She drew her head back and kissed him. "I like you, Stac. You know I do. It just doesn't work out right now. You know that."

"Sure."

He moved to a furnished room in New Hyde Park, and rode the bus a mile up to work for ten days. He wrote Carol a few letters, and got a few answers. He read the paper one day and saw that Operation Spaceward had offici-

ally begun. Stock in Androids Incorporated, DuPont, and General Aniline went up again. Tal Cummins was getting his, but the androids — *we're getting ours, too.*

On Friday, the fourteenth of August and the thirteenth day of his last two weeks, he went out to Babylon with his crew.

They dug a hole two yards deep and about five across for an oak the owner wanted moved into it. They cut a ramp into one side of the hole, and craned the tree over to the top of the ramp. A bunch of overhead wires that couldn't be cut or moved kept them from dropping the tree in, so they mounted it upright on a skid, lashed the tree firmly, and guyed it to the front bumper of a truck with a couple of lengths of Manila.

Stac was driving the truck. As the rest of the crew manhandled the tree over the lip of the ramp, he was supposed to lower it slowly, keeping the truck in double-low and judging the strain on the Manila.

It didn't work out that way. The Manila snapped, lashed a couple of boys across the face, and fouled the skid. The tree tipped forward, picked up momentum, and toppled over, catching a man under the branches.

Stac got out of the truck and the Boss came over to him.

"You stupid son-of-a-bitch!" the Boss said. "You stupid *android* son-of-a-bitch! I should have

had more sense than to hire a ———!"

It was the first time Stac had heard the word, but it was self-explanatory. It described in a simple term the substances from which they claimed androids were made.

Fuoss reached out and gathered the Boss's shirt up in his hands. "I ought to hit you," he said. "I ought to rub your face on a macadam road and drive a truck over your crotch."

The Boss turned pale. He saw the look on Fuoss's face. "You're nuts!" he screamed.

Fuoss laughed and pushed him away. "Yeah."

He had done it so many times that the blanket's constriction was nothing new. His arms flailed and his pillow fell to the floor, knocking the bottle over.

Woman.

Stac — little Stac, his firstborn. Have a cigar, Brownie. Have a cigar, you smug bastard. Good cigar, Brownie — nothing's too good for the firstborn. Have a fat cigar.

Woman. The woman raised her face.

Carol. *Carol!*

The Boss said Get the hell away from her, you second-hand son of a dog and a orang utang.

Carol said You second-hand son of a hyena and a vulture.

Little Stac said You second-

hand son of a son of a son of a sonofasonofasonofa . . .

He went out in the morning and bought another bottle. He went into the candy store next door for a pack of cigarettes, and then he went back to the liquor store and bought another bottle to make sure.

PART III

He looked at his watch. 2:30. Sunday morning, but still Saturday night, by almost anybody's definition. He moved his feet impatiently on the bed.

The door to the apartment opened, and Carol came in. There was a man with her.

"Go home, Brownie. Go home to your wife and your firstborn son."

"God! What's keeping him on his feet?"

"Never mind what's keeping me on my feet, Brownie. Go home."

Brownfield left. "I'll call the police for you, Carol."

"Are you crazy? He's all right — he's just packaged. I've seen him like this before. You know — he's right. Go home to your wife. I'll take care of him."

"Well, all right."

"You bet it's all right. Now beat it." Fuoss locked the door behind him, turned around and leaned against it.

"Hi, Carol."

She smiled hesitantly. "Hi, Stac."

"Marry me, Carol?"

"Not right now, Stac. It's kind of late. Why don't you sack out and we can talk about it in the morning."

"Uh-uh. This morning business doesn't go. You gonna marry me?"

"Look, Stac, fun's fun, and drinking's drinking, but there's a limit. I'm not sure I even want you to sleep here. There's a hotel down the block. Stay there and I'll see you in the morning."

"Can't stay at any hotel. Haven't got any more money. I had some in my topcoat pocket, but you took it."

"I didn't take it. There wasn't any there. You took every cent you had to the Island with you."

"You took it all right. But that's okay. I'll forgive you. Just marry me."

Carol moved around to the other side of an easy chair. "What are you talking about? Me, marry an android?"

"Listen, Carol. You've got to do it. Nobody's ever tried it before. Maybe there's a chance."

"A chance for what?"

Fuoss spread his arms pleadingly. "For Stac — for little Stac. We've got to try it, Carol. Please. Marry me, Lisa, please."

"My name isn't Lisa! You're crazy, you're raving nuts. Get the

hell out of here!" She picked up a bookend. "You're insane!"

Fuoss picked up the Scotch bottle from the table beside the door and broke the end off over the table's corner. He laughed. "Yeah."

Tal Cummins came briskly down the corridor between the cells. He was sweating, and his hair was not combed.

"There he is. You want to go in there?" The turnkey had stopped at Fuoss's cell.

"No, thanks." Cummins leaned

(Continued from page 81

looked around him, seeming to consider. Then his attention fixed itself on the Bank of England. He strode forward in a forceful manner and came to a stop facing the Bank, looked up. His lips moved.

The ground shook slightly underfoot. Three windows fell out of one of the Bank's upper storeys. One statue, two urns, and a piece of balustrading swayed and toppled. Several people screamed.

Mr. Watts squared his shoulders and took a deep breath.

"Good heavens! He's —" began Mr. Forkett, but the rest was lost as he sped from Henry's side.

"I —" announced Mr. Watts, at the top of his voice.

"DON'T —" he went on, to the accompaniment of an ominous

forward and looked at Fuoss. "Stac?"

Fuoss looked up.

"You realize what you've done?" Cummins was suddenly shouting, waving the full-color newspaper in his hand. "You're all over the papers. The public's going crazy for your blood. You realize what you've done to the whole android re-establishment program?"

Fuoss got up and put his face close to Cummins. He looked into the lawyer's eyes. His hands wrapped around the bars.

"Is she dead?" he asked hopefully. He turned from the lawyer and did not look at him again.

trembling of the ground.

"BE —" but at that moment a strong push between his shoulder-blades thrust him full in the path of a hurtling bus.

There was a shriek of brakes applied too late.

"That's 'im! I sore 'im do it!" screamed a woman, pointing at Mr. Forkett.

Henry caught up with him just as a policeman came running.

Mr. Forkett was regarding the façade of the Bank with pride.

"No telling what might have happened. A menace to society, that young man," he said. "They ought to give me a medal, but I'm afraid they're more likely to hang me. After all, tradition must be observed."

DON'T COME TO MARS!

By Henry Hasse

Illustrated by LEO SUMMERS

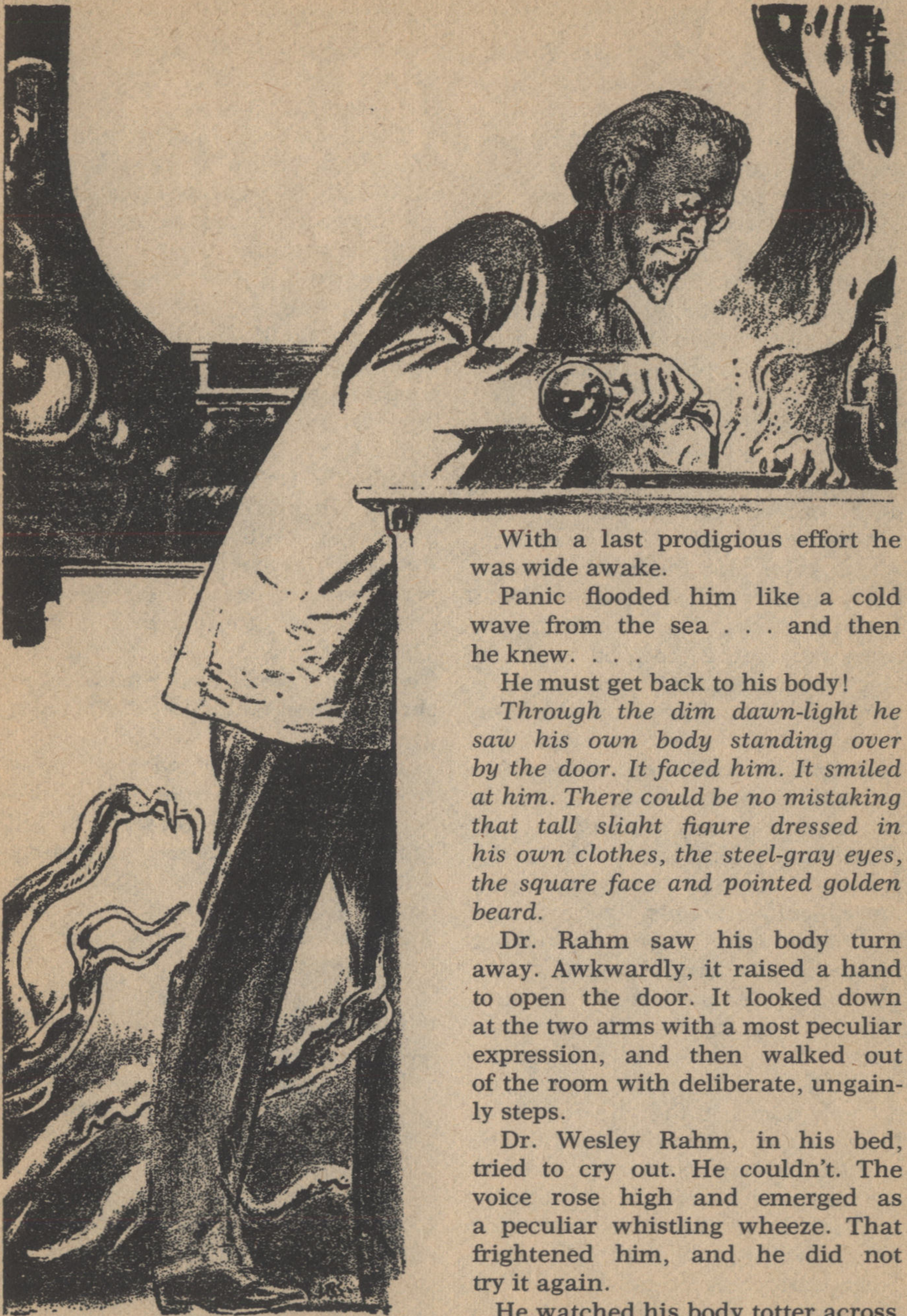
When this famous scientist looked up from his bed and saw himself walking out the door, he knew why man must never make a trip to Mars!

DR. Wesley Rahm stirred restlessly in the semi-dark of his bedroom. He shivered, but it was not entirely from the early March chill. He had just had a vividly terrifying dream.

He struggled desperately on that vague borderline between consciousness and sleep. A scientific part of his mind told him that this was no dream. Something lurked at the far end of the room, something that filled him with such terror that he could not cry out!



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With a last prodigious effort he was wide awake.

Panic flooded him like a cold wave from the sea . . . and then he knew. . . .

He must get back to his body!

Through the dim dawn-light he saw his own body standing over by the door. It faced him. It smiled at him. There could be no mistaking that tall slight figure dressed in his own clothes, the steel-gray eyes, the square face and pointed golden beard.

Dr. Rahm saw his body turn away. Awkwardly, it raised a hand to open the door. It looked down at the two arms with a most peculiar expression, and then walked out of the room with deliberate, ungainly steps.

Dr. Wesley Rahm, in his bed, tried to cry out. He couldn't. The voice rose high and emerged as a peculiar whistling wheeze. That frightened him, and he did not try it again.

He watched his body totter across

the hallway, clutch at the railing and disappear down the stairs. . . .

This is not me, the thought rose above his panic. *At least, it cannot be the physical me!* His scientific interest returned. Reaching to toss the coverlet aside, he saw a sleek, slate-black appendage, an utterly outlandish tentacle! He moved clumsily from the bed. He stood up on stumpy elephantine legs. His body was twice as large as any man's, and it possessed nine of the appendages in varying lengths.

He made his way awkwardly to a mirror and steeled himself against the sight. The head was a triangular blob fringed with waving filaments whose use he could not determine. Two sight organs were protruding and bulbous. In place of nose and mouth he saw a circular set of tiny, gill-like slits. He waved the tentacles helplessly. *Someone or something has stolen my body! But why, why? And why my body, instead of my mind?*

Dr. Rahm put his mind to the problem. He felt sure that this must concern his recent experiments with the interplanet rocket fuel! Twice already the Government had tried to land rockets on the moon, with disastrous results. Dr. Rahm had worked for months on an entirely new type of fuel, and felt that he was very near the goal. No one except himself and Dr. Lawton, his assistant, knew the true nature of the work being conducted in his laboratories outside of town. But now, with his own body wandering somewhere under the spell of an alien intellect. . . .

Whoever or whatever it is, it cannot get very far. I must notify the authorities!

There came a light step in the hall, and before he could move, his elderly housekeeper pushed into the room with his breakfast tray.

"Fine morning, Doctor!" Without looking in his direction she went about arranging his breakfast on the little table. Dr. Rahm felt his alien body stiffen. He tried to move stealthily toward the bathroom. But he wasn't accustomed to so many limbs, and they made a sound against the wall.

Mrs. Stringer turned. She saw him. The coffee-pot clattered to the floor. Her eyes became distended vertices of horror and she whimpered once, like a little dog that is hurt. Then her bony legs carried her from the room, and shriek after shriek accompanied her flight down the hall.

The police came with amazing speed. Dr. Rahm well realized his danger, knew that they might kill him in their idiotic excitement. But the numerous appendages hampered him, especially on the stairway. The police met him on the front lawn.

"Good lord," Sergeant Mulhany whispered, falling back a step. "She wasn't lying! There it is! Look at that thing."

One of the policemen drew his gun, but Mulhany stopped him just in time. "Don't kill it, you fool, or we may never learn what happened! I think this thing's intelligent. What have you done with Dr. Rahm!" he cried, staying well away from the alien hulk.

"I *am* Dr. Rahm!" the Doctor tried to say. "My body has been stolen by—by whatever mind belongs to this body!" But he could not even create semi-human words with the alien vocal cords, and only the weird whistling sounds emerged.

With some repugnance four policemen laid hands on him, half dragged him out to the street and into the police car.

"You fools!" Rahm tried to say. "Where are you taking me? Get in touch with Dr. Lawton, my assistant! He'll know what to do!"

But they couldn't understand him, and the strange sounds made matters worse. "Be mighty careful, boys," one of the policemen said. "I read something once in a weird magazine, about one of these things. By using its mental powers it could blast—"

"Adams, shut up," Mulhany said.

"What do you suppose the thing really is?"

"Search me," Mulhany scratched his head. "Maybe something Dr. Rahm created in his lab, and then it destroyed him. I read that in a story, too," he added.

They arrived at the station-house and thrust the tentacled monster into a barred room. They stood on the outside, surveying him helplessly, at a loss what to do next. Rahm surged against the door and raged at their stupidity.

"Reporters?" someone suggested.

"Yeah, why not. We'll make the headlines! Phone the zoo, too."

"No, no!" Rahm tried to scream. "You clumsy fools, listen to me!" It was then, with the vehement

thoughts, that he felt the fringe of filaments atop his head quiver. Suddenly it dawned on him. Those filaments might be a medium for telepathy!

Dr. Lawton! he thought intensely. *Lawton, my assistant! Fine him! Bring him here!* He felt his mind reel with the effort, but he continued to send the thought with all the power he could command. He felt that he wasn't getting through; but suddenly one of the men frowned and clapped a big fist into his palm.

"We should have thought of this before! We'd better get in touch with some of the scientists. The man who has been working with Dr. Rahm—what's his name? Lawton, Dr. Lawton."

Exhausted from his effort, Dr. Rahm allowed the alien body to collapse into a corner of the cell.

The newsmen and photographers came first. They came in droves. They took pictures and rushed away to make the noon editions. Dr. Rahm was big news any day of the week; now, with his disappearance and this monster from God knew where, all other news would be backed off the front page.

"Here's Dr. Lawton!" someone yelled. Lawton was a rotund, red-faced little man who rushed excitedly down the hall. Rahm hurried to the front of the cell to greet his assistant.

"Good lord!" cried Lawton when he sighted the thing. He gaped at the gesturing tentacles. "Who are you? In the name of biological science *what* are you? Where is Dr. Rahm?"

Once again Rahm called upon all his mental power to get a message across. If anyone could understand, or help him get his body, it was Dr. Lawton. But there was too much turmoil, and Lawton's mind was not clear. He was in a frenzy of apprehension. His loyalty to Dr. Rahm mounted to almost pure worship.

Lawton don't you understand? Make your mind receptive, man! Rahm flailed against the bars in a prodigious mental effort. Lawton blanched, and backed away across the hall.

Rahm shuffled to the rear of the cell. This would never do! He must make them understand! At this very moment his space-fuel formula was probably in danger; he could think of no other reason for this fantastic interchange of identities. The laboratories were well guarded, and only as *Dr. Rahm* could the alien intellect gain access!

Then, into the tangle of onlookers rushed an excited official. "Dr. Lawton!" he shrieked to make himself heard. "I've had a call from Dr. Rahm's home. He's just returned there! Says he was out for an early morning walk, and he can't imagine what all the excitement is about."

"Thank God," cried Lawton. "Is he on his way here? He may have an explanation for all this."

Dr. Rahm, in his grotesque body, heard. He remained quiet at the rear of the cell. It was with a strange mixture of feelings that he awaited his own body's coming to view him!

They arrived at last. A group

of officials and clamoring reporters. Among them was the tall figure of Dr. Rahm, but it did not hurry; it still had the awkward, unfamiliar tread.

The figure paid no heed to the barrage of questions. Approaching the cell, he hesitated and looked down at his two hands as though they were hopelessly inadequate; as though he expected to find more—*nine, perhaps.*

"Dr. Rahm, you seem upset," Lawton greeted him. "Are you ill?"

Dr. Rahm's body shook its head. Then it was opposite the cell. It turned slowly. The intellect within Dr. Rahm's body, and Dr. Rahm's intellect within the alien body, faced each other there in utter silence.

For Half a minute they surveyed each other. The atmosphere was tense. Then the creature within the cell waved his appendages and whistled out:

"Who in heavens name are you?"

He was sure the other being understood.

For a moment the body of Dr. Rahm remained unmoving, unsmiling. Then it turned, and the two hands made a sweeping gesture to indicate that all the others must leave. They left slowly, mumbling little protests. All except Lawton. Lawton stayed as though it were expected of him. Dr. Rahm's face frowned darkly. "Go," the word rumbled out.

"Don't go!" Dr. Rahm within the cell whistled shrilly. "Don't listen to him, Lawton! This is the real me!"

But Lawton left with the others, his brow knit in puzzlement.

Alone, the two faced each other. Apparently a tenuous thread still linked the two minds, for Rahm felt the alien's thoughts impinging delicately.

You ask who I am. I am known as Aiiko, and I have come a long way to accomplish a purpose!

Dr. Rahm felt a rising anger. *I must have my body back! If you harm it—*

Until my mission is carried out I must keep control of your body. Be assured, I will do all within my power to see that no harm comes to it.

Rahm sensed the power of this alien intellect. The fact that Aiiko was telepathing through the unfamiliar medium of a human brain proved it. Rahm meditated a moment, then replied shrewdly, *I admit your superiority. I will offer no resistance to your will, but naturally I am curious. I am accounted one of Earth's greatest scientists. In deference to my standing I feel that explanations are due to me.*

The answer came stark and clear. *I know, Dr. Rahm, who you are. What is it you wish to know?*

First: where did you come from?

I journeyed here in a spaceship of my own construction, from your sister planet—that which you call Mars.

Rahm's mind leaped. He felt that he must proceed carefully now. *How were you able to assume control of my body?* he projected the thought.

That is not important. The unguarded mind offers easy access. But your will-power was stronger than I suspected, and you unwittingly bridged the gap into my body.

DON'T COME TO MARS

That was unfortunate. The transfer back again will be more difficult.

Rahm felt a wave of repugnance at the alien flesh he wore. More than that, he was aghast at the cold dispassionate attitude of the Martian intellect. This inhuman horror had come to Earth for some diabolic purpose! He must learn what it was!

There came a wave of pure intellectual amusement from Aiiko's mind. *I regret to tell you this, Dr. Rahm. You are too close to the secret of inter-planet travel. The first space step after the moon would be Mars . . . and this must not happen. I am here to see that it does not!*

Rahm stood there numbed, watching his own body smile at him. Now he knew that his initial surmise was correct. *You would destroy my formulae?* he flashed. *You claim to be a scientist! Those are the products of my life's work! I could not replace them for years!*

Aiiko's thought came cold. *Earthians must not reach Mars. Not yet! But I am wasting time here . . . I came only to see what these clumsy fools would do with my body. I see now that it will be safe for a while.* He turned away, then sent one parting mental shot. *There will be another meeting soon. If you wish your body back, Dr. Rahm, see that MINE is unharmed.*

Rahm's alien body quivered with rage and the nine appendages clutched at the cell bars, but in vain.

He must think logically! Analytically! Already Aiiko was on his way

to the laboratories, and certainly the guards would let him through. No doubt there was some vastly terrifying reason for the Martians not wanting Earthmen to achieve space travel! Perhaps the Martians themselves are preparing to descend upon Earth. The thought horrified him. This might be the first move in an invasion by red planet *mind-stealing* armies.

"Why have you made Dr. Rahm act so strangely!" The soft voice startled him, and then he knew it wasn't a voice, but a mental current that bordered upon terror. He lifted his protuberant eyes and saw Lawton standing there. He was alone. . . .

Lawton! There might still be a chance. Quickly his Martian eyes scanned the floor, and in one corner he spied some chunks of plaster fallen from the ceiling. He seized one in the double feeler at the end of an appendage. If only he'd thought of this before! Slowly and shakily, he began to trace letters on the wall. He had Lawton's attention now.

"I," he wrote first, followed by "A-M." Then in a flurry of impatience: "D-R-R-A-H-M."

Lawton's face paled. "Dr. Rahm! You!"

Rahm continued. "MUST GET TO LAB! HURRY!"

Lawton's eyes blugged in his pale round face. He wet his lips nervously, still unable to believe. "I must be sure," he muttered, while Rahm lashed the tentacles furiously. "Write more! What's—uh—my wife's first name. And the number of our last experiment!"

Quivering with impatience, Rahm wrote both the answers. "HELENE. X-293. HURRY!"

That was enough for Lawton. He turned and sped down the hall. He was back a minute later with the cell keys, but as he fumbled for the right key the jailer came thundering after him.

"Here, you lunatic, what are you doing? You can't let that thing out of there! Dr. Rahm told us to keep it safe!"

Lawton turned. Eyes blazed in his flushed face. Without warning his right fist lashed out and caught the jailer's chin. The man crumpled against the opposite wall.

Nice work, Lawton! Rahm telepathed vigorously as he shambl-ed from the cell.

"Come on, Doc, my car's out in front. I don't know what this is all about, but I'm with you!" Lawton paused only to lift the gun from the jailers holster, and then they were hurrying down the corridor. Rahm found a use for his tentacles at last. He slapped them against the floor and they sped him along amazingly.

In the outer lobby a startled policeman tried to stop them, but Dr. Rahm was beginning to coordinate these alien muscles now! He whipped the longest tentacle around the man's ankles and jerked him to the floor. Lawton waved the gun and the others fell back. Then he and Lawton were outside, tumbling into the latter's car. They roared away from the curb.

More than ever now Rahm felt a need to communicate with Lawton,

tell him all that had happened. But there wasn't time. That Martian intellect housing his body must have reached the laboratory by now! Rahm felt his body quiver with rage and impatience. He was determined to destroy his own Earth body, if need be to stop Aiiko.

The laboratory was a brick farmhouse some five miles out of town. Rahm crouched low on the back seat as they approached the high fence surrounding the property.

"Has Dr. Rahm arrived?" he heard Lawton ask the guard as the main gate swung open.

"Yes, sir; not ten minutes ago. Has something happened to his car? He came in a cab this morning."

Ten minutes! Perhaps they were not too late. Rahm tumbled from the car as it stopped in front of the house. One tentacle closed about the gun where Lawton had placed it on the seat. He whistled something warningly and gestured for Lawton to remain where he was.

Holding the gun aloft, Rahm entered the house and hurried toward the lab where his precious plans were kept. *Those* were all-important! The data was along unprecedented lines. He stood outside the door, listening . . . for the merest instant, and then he pushed his way in. His gaze took in the litter of implements and papers scattered about the room just as Aiiko, the Martian, whirled the Earth body around to face him . . .

It was eerie, confronting his own

body which he might as a last resort have to kill. Perhaps Aiiko was thinking the same thing; the human face had paled and now it tried to smile, but the result was a grimace.

Rahm glanced at the drawer of his private desk which had been forced open. He surged forward, the filaments atop his head vibrated angrily. *Give me those papers!*

Aiiko glanced at the sheaf of papers in his hands. *I have been studying your equations. It is close, very close—*

Rahm didn't waste time. He propelled himself forward. The tentacle holding the revolver lashed in a vicious arc toward the Earth head. Aiiko leaped aside as a thought flashed angrily, *You have coordinated the use of my limbs! So have I learned yours.* A fist shot straight from the shoulder and found its mark where the triangular Martian head joined the bulbous body. Dr. Rahm felt excruciating pain along every nerve . . . he could not move the tentacles . . . Aiiko, familiar with the body, had struck a paralyzing center! The tentacle holding the gun went limp, the weapon clattered to the floor.

Aiiko bent down and appropriated it. *So, Dr. Rahm, stand where you are! You blundering fool! Why did you have to interfere? I might have explained to you later . . . at least I wanted to spare you watching this!*

He placed the sheaf of papers in a metal tray, then examined a row of bottles. Gingerly he lifted one of them. *Acid!* Through a numbing horror Dr. Rahm realized

his intention. Aiiko's mission would be accomplished. He would return to Mars with the news that Earth was years away from space travel. What would happen then? Perhaps a Martian invasion. *Anything*. Would it be a year? Two years?

Desperately, Dr. Rahm tried to move. Every muscle of the alien body strained with the effort . . . and one of the tentacles moved. The paralysis was wearing away! Aiiko didn't notice. With a supreme effort Rahm eased the tentacle forward . . . close to the floor . . . it touched the Earth ankle . . . gently . . .

Aiiko's backward leap was too late. The Earth body crashed to the floor, but while falling the finger tightened automatically upon the trigger of the gun . . . twice, three times. Rahm felt the bullets enter his alien body. A hot sticky substance streamed out, but that did not stop him now. Grimly he pulled himself forward. The other tentacles were beginning to move. He wrapped one around the Earth body's throat . . .

Your own body! came frantically from Aiiko who seemed momentarily stunned.

That doesn't matter! Even if I must die . . . The tentacle tightened.

Fool! Aiiko's thoughts came in a desperate surge. *You don't know what have you done! I tried to warn you—*Suddenly the Martian thought rose, overwhelmed him, took fierce hold on his mind. Dr. Rahm fought it, but only for seconds. The potential was too great. He felt his mind reeling, he couldn't

keep hold . . . and then he seemed back in a dream once more.

In the dream he was a million miles somewhere in space. There was a great arctic wind, and he was cold. He cringed from the crystal starlight all about him. A great red body appeared, drawing him to it with unimaginable speed. He was on another planet. He knew it was Mars, yet it did not seem strange to him, because he was no longer Dr. Rahm . . . not even his mind.

This was more than a dream! His mind was alert and hunger-clear. There were alien forms and cities. There were death and destruction and terror abroad, but it did not last long. All substance wavered into shadow.

Again there came swift movement. He was somewhere in the vast stretches of a red desert and terror was here too, terror and frantic urgency. He was fleeing . . . fleeing and hating, as somewhere afar off an omnivorous mind reached out with a snapping intelligence . . .

It could only have been seconds, but the dream of his flight seemed to encompass an eternity. Then it wavered and blurred and slipped aside, and there was no more terror as Dr. Rahm's mind passed into a great void beyond dreams.

Dr. Wesley Rahm stirred and sat up. He was on his laboratory floor. He looked dazedly down at his hands. Two hands! Once more he inhabited his comfortable Earth body; comfortable, except for a choking pain around the throat where a tentacle had wrapped.

A figure was bending over him.

"Lawton!"

"I heard the shots. Is it really you, sir? Thank heaven you're yourself again!"

"Lawton! Aiiko—the Martian—don't let him die!"

"I'm afraid it's too late." Lawton glanced with repugnance at the tentacled body. "Three bullets at close range—"

Dr. Rahm arose. He gazed sadly at the grayish hulk. "He shot himself, Lawton. Then he transferred his mind back into his own dying body and gave me mine again! But during that transition . . . I learned it all . . . the entire reason for his coming here!"

Rahm turned to the table where the formulae still lay. He took up the bottle of acid, and with a sad smile poured the contents over the papers.

"Dr. Rahm!" Lawton leaped forward.

"No, Lawton. I am myself again. Aiiko came here and gave his life to warn us, and I must carry through his plan. We shall not want space-travel now and shall not achieve it . . . not for a few years."

Lawton was a picture of abject misery as he watched the papers crumble away.

"It's a strange thing, Lawton. In his dying moments Aiiko gave me the story, together with pictures out of his experience. It was all too vivid! I remember, and I believe!" Rahm passed a hand across his brow as he remembered Aiiko's story. He told it slowly.

Mars was a dying planet. The Cismuks were the final race of Mars, and Aiiko was the last of the race. Despite their vast science the race had waned, particularly in the last score of years. Martians had perished in unprecedented numbers, entire cities were decimated, and for no apparent reason! All medical and biological science was put to the problem—without result!

Only recently had the final group of scientists discovered the cause. It dated back more than a century, to the time when one of their Leaders, the super-minds, went mad. At that time he was cast out of the Supreme Council and it was thought that he had wandered into the Red Desert and died.

Such was far from the truth. This crazed creature, a super-intellect, had taken refuge in the desert. There he labored unceasingly to prove his theories on mental wave lengths and absorption. And he succeeded! He proved his theories with vengeance! He worked as first through thalamic scanners which contacted other Martian minds and brought them into tune with his own. Gradually, he amplified the process. By means of inverse magnetic wave-lengths he literally *absorbed other minds into his own reservoir!* Everywhere across the planet, slowly at first but with increasing frequency, Martian bodies died, but not before their mental power was absorbed into the consciousness of this mad creature to become a part of that madness!

Dr. Rahm paused for a moment.

He was pale and shaken as he relived the story and the terror which Aiiko had shown him.

What a revenge this creature planned on those who had cast him out! His dream of conquest grew. He had fashioned a vast stronghold beneath the desert sands, and there he lived on, undetected, as the power of his consciousness multiplied in direct ratio to the depleted Martian populace. Only recently did the last of the Martian scientists find him. They fought, bringing all weapons into play, but it was too late. This mad creature had become a vast entity whose mental power encompassed most of the planet. *And he dreamed of further conquests. . .*

Aiiko was the last. Fleeing to the furthestmost pole of Mars, he finished the spaceship on which his colleagues had been working. He travelled to Earth. Imagine his horror upon learning that Earthmen were on the verge of space-travel and contemplating a trip to Mars! Aiiko destroyed his own space vessel, and then sought to destroy my plans.

Dr. Rahm stopped there. The horror of events as telepathed by Aiiko were still mirrored in his eyes.

Lawton was silent too, but he looked sadly at the heap of ashes that had been the work of so many months, even years.

"You should never had done this, Dr. Rahm. Earthmen could have tried for other planets! Venus . . ."

"No, Lawton. For ages Mars has been a challenge. It's the first logical space-step. And who would believe Aiiko's story? In their colossal confidence Earthmen would try for Mars anyway. Their lives and minds would be forfeit as that mad intellect on Mars grew stronger. *Already it had conquered a world! And it still lives!* Our first spacer wouldn't return, and others would go—and others and others. We would be feeding it!

"Aiiko foresaw all this. He knew that intellect might *conceive a spaceship of its own, if we sent it a model!* But Lawton . . . if we leave it alone, for a few years at the most, it will die for lack of mental sustenance! There are no more minds on Mars."

Lawton nodded solemnly, accepting this truth. But his mind was wry with bitter thoughts.

"I know," Rahm went on. "You worked hard with me on this, but it isn't as though it were lost. No knowledge is ever lost. Others are working on the problem and they'll find the way; perhaps better than we. Let us only hope not too soon!"

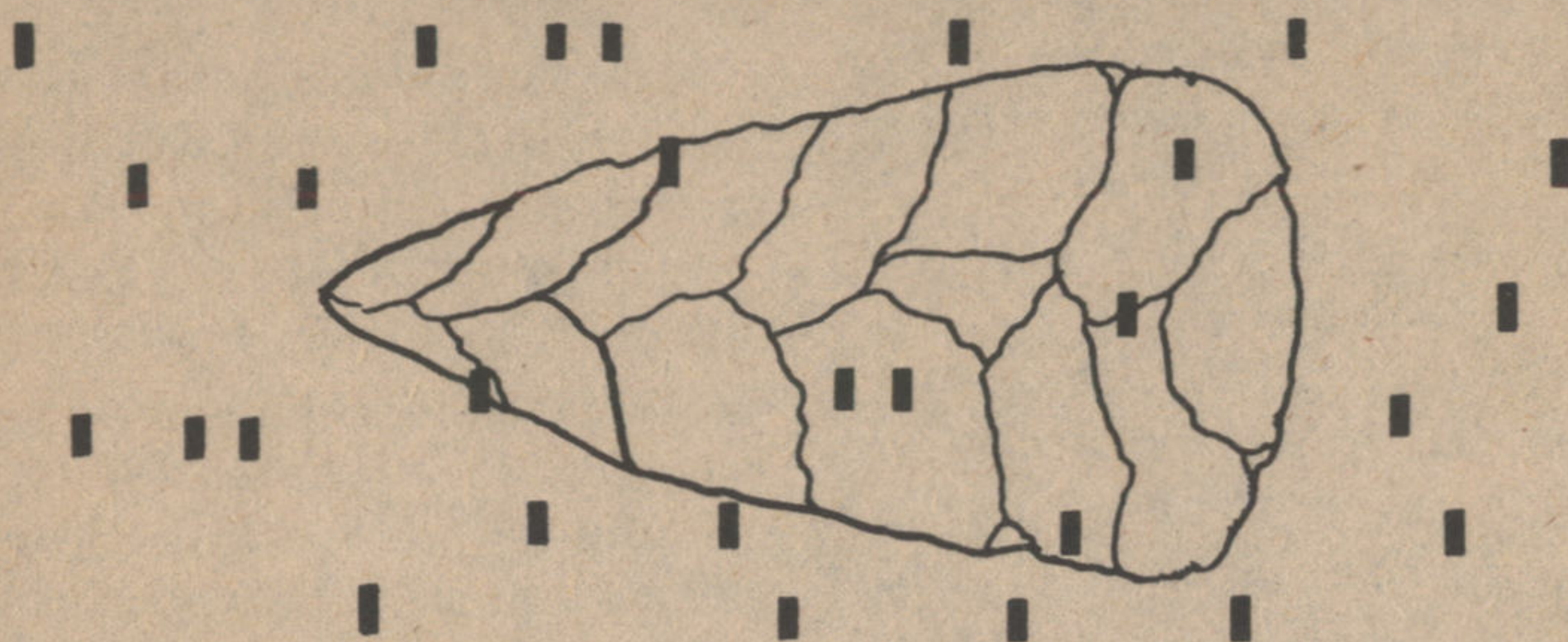
Wistfully he stirred the ashes, all that was left of his work. They eddied and drifted gently up.

The End

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SCIENCE OF MAN

by LEON E. STOVER



LIES AND THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

The high value placed on honesty in language usage is evident in the George-Washington-and-the-cherry-tree myth, which upholds the value. But it is just as evident that people in our society lie, fib and palter all the time.

But to judge lying as a moral wrong and be done with it is to dismiss the subject from anthropological attention. Indeed, the evolutionary history of mankind could be written in terms of the different kinds of lies and fictions that have been told through the ages, from our prehuman ancestors millions of years ago to the ego boasting we do at cocktail parties.

The stages of communications evolution to be covered are as follows. Dates are in years Before Present (B.P.).

- I. *Preglossic* (prelinguistic communication) 36 million-50,000 B. P.
- II. *Glossic* (linguistic communication) 50,000-5,000
 1. Isolated tribal folk
 2. Non-isolated peasant folk
- III. *Graphic* (writing) 5,000-100
 1. Monumental
 2. Manuscript
 3. Print
- IV. *Telecommunicative* 100-
 1. Print plus power transportation

2. Electronically powered auditory extensions (telegraph, radio)
3. Electronically powered visual extensions
 - i. with power transportation (cinema)
 - ii. with radioed extensions (TV)

Before plunging into the depths of prehistory, it is worth noting that each higher stage includes the stage before it. Spoken language, which emerged in the Glossic stage, still contains a number of non-language survivals from the Preglossic stage, such as cries of pain (*ow!*) or the grunting noises (*unh-huh*) made during a difficult bowel movement. The invention of writing in the Graphic stage did not replace speech; and the electronic media co-exist with speech, writing and grunts.

I. *Preglossic*. The origin of language is synonymous with the origin of man's humanity. But what is language, and how does it differ from the call systems of other land mammals?

It is no joke to say that the main point of difference is that man is capable of boasting and telling lies and animals are not. Animal signals which say "here is food," "look out!" or "help!" never lie. Such signals are emitted in the very presence of food or danger or whatever. But language is arbitrary and inventive. Humans can talk about past and future things, about distant and remote things, or even about non-existent things.

Language is productive in this way because it is binary in structure;

it operates at two different levels. We hear the message at the level of vocabulary. But the vocabulary is segmented into a fixed number of phonetic events, at a lower level, which themselves have no meaning. Language builds up its message units (morphemes) out of a stock of from 30 to 50 empty, positional sounds (phonemes).

Animal calls, or phemes, are not segmented; they have no binary structure. Each cry, grunt, whine, squeal, hoot or roar is a signal sent and received as one over-all sound pattern. And the number of these different noise gestalts is limited to a fixed repertoire of no more than a dozen calls.

The problem of how language originated may now be stated in a better way. What process allowed a closed system of phemes to open up so as to allow for binary structure?

The answer to that is fairly easy to imagine: *blending*. The simultaneous presence of both food and danger might well raise up a new call blended from the one for announcing food (*couiiii* in a species of living gibbon) and the one for announcing danger (*koc*, *koq-kouq* in the same species). While it is true that phemes are nothing but long, drawn-out sound patterns, animals may nonetheless recognize the whole from just a part of it, just as we may identify a familiar piece of music from the opening bars. A blended call for food-plus-danger (*cou-ouq*, to take liberties with the poor gibbon) would add to the phemic inventory in quite a different way than the addition of a totally new call.

There is a limit to the number of

distinctly separate phemes an animal can learn to tell apart. Blending is a way to avoid overloading the ability to discriminate. New signals made up from the fragments of old established calls, like so many steam-pipe fittings, would have to lead to a binary structure if the inventory of new signals grew large enough.

But what prompted our prehuman ancestors to do more communicating in the first place? Once the adaptive value of increased vocal signaling brought selective pressures to bear on the brainpower needed to handle the upped message flow, then it is only logical that blending would lead to a segmented structure of phonemes and morphemes. The outcome, language—and humanity—is easy enough to see. But what was there so urgent to talk about that man himself was the result?

The biggest event in human evolution calling for a change in behavior was the movement out of a forest environment into a plains environment. The ancestor of the human line was a small, monkey-like primate (*Propliopithecus*) of Oligocene times from the forests of central Africa. During the following Miocene epoch the forest cover drew back from east and south Africa, leaving the present-day savannahland in its place. It is into this open country that man's ancestors advanced. There is evidence that these ancestors were already upright, bipedal creatures by late Miocene times (*Ramapithecus*) and most certainly were by the time of the apemen (*Australopithecus*) at the bottom of the Pleistocene. (See NAK-

ED APE OR HAIRLESS MONKEY? in the September issue.)

The erect, two-legged walking posture of the apemen went with the use of tools and a changing social organization. The change from vegetarian browsing in the forest to carnivorous scavenging on the plains required butchering tools; and the danger from canine and feline predators required some form of cooperative social organization for mutual defense. Later, when the apemen evolved into the half-brained men (*Homo erectus*), who became trackers of big game, the principles of cooperative action were extended to foodgetting, with its emphasis on the use of language in planning the hunt. But even before that, the apemen, and the half-brained men after them, were confronted with an increase of environmental complexity of their own making that had to be managed somehow by means of more communication: the physical presence of tools, the knack of tool using and the accumulating bag of tricks for their manufacture, the mutual defense groups and later the hunting teams, not to mention the revolving of life around a campsite that eventually took on the attributes of home and hearth, complete with fireplace and permanent attendance by the female homemaker while the males went hunting. And of course, the demands for more communication was reflected in the increase of brain size.

Without a doubt the first hunters replayed the action of the day around the campfire at night in an unabashed display of ceremonial

boasting. And doubtlessly manly valor was an entrance requirement into the hunting team, all the more incentive for a male to boast about what he had seen and done so as to be allowed to become "one of the boys."

Competitive efforts to get in with the gang is not an exclusively human trait. It happens among tom cats and male baboons. In cat society, the powerful toms sit together somewhere in the neighborhood and yammer out their challenge to the other toms which have not yet broken into this exalted fraternity. But these upstarts try. They come back again and again for a scrap, and get all bitten and scratched, until they finally learn the fighting prowess of the big toms and can sit among them. The top dogs in the monkey rat race among baboons, to mix as many animals as metaphors, hold their place by virtue of their control over females in heat. To be "one of the boys" is to be allowed sexual shares in the harem. These shares are won by the upcoming younger males through a steady growth of strength and spatial encroachment, barking and fang baring all the while, on the domain of the big boys with their harem.

It cannot be too far off the mark to imagine our prehuman apemen ancestors to have lived the life of baboons, with the added factor of upped communications demanded by their adaptation to a plains environment. One very important use of their protolinguistic signaling would be self-magnification in the eyes of the big boys.

In a way, the change from a child

to a person in humans recapitulates the evolution of language from monkey to man. When the child asks for food or calls attention to something nearby he is still a little monkey. But when he begins to tell his mother where he's been and what he's seen, with considerable embroidering of the truth, then he becomes truly human.

II. *Glossic*. By the time man became a skilled hunter, language was well established as the human mode of communication. A convenient time marker for the beginnings of the Glossic stage is the advent of our own species (*H. sapiens*) about 50,000 B.P., when a jump forward in hunting skill is indicated by a highly elaborate tool kit and by the use of the dog as a hunting partner.

1. Isolated tribal folk. The tribal way of life is characteristic of hunting bands and of village farmers to whom the techniques of agriculture were diffused from a distant civilization but who are not part of any civilization. Hunting bands may still be found in the interior of Australia. A good example of a tribal farming people are the pre-Columbia pueblo Indians, such as the Zuni or Hopi. Both types of society have small, intimate populations which exist in relative isolation from each other and from direct contact with civilized peoples.

In the folk communities of hunters and tribal farmers there is no aspect of an individual's behavior or personality that is not known to everyone else. In a society of such intensive face-to-face relations, lies

and falsehoods are impossible to get away with. Honesty is not so much a virtue here as it is an inescapable result of the fact that everybody lives down everybody else's throat in a locked room, forever.

2. *Non-isolated peasant folk.* Another type of small community is the folk community of village people embedded within an agrarian civilization, such as the peasant villages of pre-communist China and Pharonic Egypt. Peasants produce the food for the ruling elite in these ancient forms of civilization, but do not participate in the arts, literacy or luxury consumption of the elite. The peasantry is so tied to the soil by lack of economic alternatives for them in the urban centers that they turn inward toward their rural community and are even more intensely local than are tribal people. The result, oddly enough, is a strange kind of rampant pretense: everyone boasts of being poorer than they are.

The dense peasant population presses on a limited amount of cultivable land, and there is no way out of the village except through upward mobility to a power position among the lofty elite—which is like reaching for the moon. So the villagers face inward. There is only so much land to go around; and everytime one family buys more, another family must sell to its loss. In fact everybody feels the loss because they know that their neighbors are potential competitors and the same thing could happen to themselves. The villagers live in a constant climate of mutual suspicion. To ward off the evil eye of jealousy, everybody dresses in rags

and eats the poorest food, even if they can afford better. In addition, everybody works harder in the fields than they have to just to get the crops out, as a means of showing others that their land is being used to the fullest, so please don't anybody give me any dirty looks out of your land hungry eyes that you could do better with what I have. Hence the manicured look of Chinese plats. Here is visible evidence that inequities of property arouse such intense jealousy and vigilant suspicion that peasants must protect themselves from hostility by concealing any wealth they have and by acting out a cult of poverty and self-exploitation that does not correspond to actual conditions.

III. *Graphic.* Peasant villages are the product of the ancient civilization, all of which have passed, or are passing, away under the universal spread of economic modernization from the industrial nation states. But at one time all men were hunters. The first breakthrough out of the hunting way of life took place in the highlands of Turkey and Palestine about 10,000 B.P., which eventuated in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations in the lowlands of the fertile crescent. Other centers of civilization were the Harappan in the Indus valley and the Chinese in the Yellow valley. The invention of writing, from about 5000 B.P. in Mesopotamia, is associated with the rise of these Old World developments. But writing in the ancient civilizations remained a privileged means of communication among the elite, not shared in by the peasantry.

III. (1) Monumental. The earliest known archeological samples of writing are property markings from western Asia. But the public use of writing was monumental in form, messages carved on large stone columns, such as the code of Lipit Ishtar and Hammurabi. These messages proclaimed the penal laws of the political state. Here was no more possibility for false statements than a no trespassing sign. Egyptian monumental inscriptions very often contained biographical histories of the ruling elite. These histories may very well have been exaggerated, but they were not subject to editing or revision by anyone else. They were sacred texts, addressed to the gods; once inscribed the record either stood or was toppled, but never rewritten. The word "hieroglyph" itself means sacred writing.

III. (2) Manuscript. Writing on paper, parchment or papyrus allows for the transport of messages from the sender to a receiver some distance away. Such a medium, of course, was vital to the formation of the early political states, as the system of posts in all the ancient civilizations testify.

The possibilities here for falsification of the message are wide open, but not fully exploited. The Chinese emperor sent out orders to his governors miles away, but never could count on reliable feedback. There was no way of checking up on orders, as in modern China with its electronic communications; today orders go out to the heads of various bureaucratic organizations and the results can be found out. The official in traditional China could beg off

turning in his tax quota with false reports of plague, flood or drought. But the truthfulness or non-truth of the replies is beside the point. The real point, in the absence of mechanized echelons of command, is that officials in the provinces were to make replies to the emperor as part of their ritual obligations to him, irrespective of the content. The emperor is simply the man who sends out the most messages; that is how you tell who the head of state is.

While Chinese officials paltered with their reports, they never used the written language in a flippant way. Chinese ideographic writing, like Egyptian hieroglyphics, had something of the mysterious and sacred attached to it as a result of its exclusive association with a power elite. From the viewpoint of the peasant, writing is power, no matter what the writing says, be it mystical nonsense or a land deed. Power persons themselves treated writing with respect, partly because ideographs lend themselves to more artistic treatment than does alphabetic writing. Indeed, the attitude was that if a man couldn't write a good hand he no more deserved the privilege of literacy than a peasant. Not only that, nobody should step on paper with writing on it, or place books on the floor where dirty feet walk. Right up to the 20th century, charitable organizations existed in China for the salvage of orphaned paper with writing on it, to be collected from the streets, baled, and burned in high ceremony at the charity's temples.

III. (3) Print. Gutenberg's bible, set in movable type in the mid-15th

century, made a ceremonial object widely available. This is not quite the same thing as the availability of a dictionary or an encyclopedia in every home. Before printing, only ordained ministers of the gospel had access to manuscript copies of the Holy Bible, and their congregations had to attend church to hear readings from it, a situation not unlike a group gathered around Homer to hear him recite his poetry.

But printed books eventually opened up a totally new world of communications. Readers could go exploring these different worlds as an act of individual discovery, independent of some social grouping, such as a congregation. By the end of the 15th century, 8 million books were in print in Europe. These were still expensive hand crafted objects in the hands of scholars, nobles and clerics. But by the 16th and 17th centuries, a literate, urban commercial middle class was acquiring inexpensive editions of the same works and provided a market for more new worlds to explore, including the world of fiction. The demand for novels in the 18th century anticipated the style of mass communications that has dominated language usage in our own century: entertainment. Print thus opened up a new use or language which was neither a matter of truth or falsity, or of ceremonial rightness, but simply a matter of entertaining fiction.

IV. *Telecommunicative*. Strictly speaking, telecommunication is nothing more than communication at a distance, by semaphore and signal light as well as by telegraph and wireless. Only in the last 100 years as the electronic means of tele-

communication come forth. The revolutionary changes worked by the electric media have also profoundly influenced printed media.

IV. (1) Newspapers were the first medium of mass communication. They got their start in the 18th century, but reached large circulation only with the steam press in the 1830's and with the means of power transportation for delivery: the railroads, and later trucks and planes. Despite the ubiquitous ownership in the United States of radios and TV, which serve mainly for entertainment, it is estimated that 9 out of 10 adults read a daily newspaper. The impact of the electric audio-visual media has been to make printed matter into an information service.

A good example is the United States Army Material Command ship *Corpus Christi Bay*, which stores over 1.5 million items of graphic information on film or in hard copy. This floating central library serves over 30 repair depots by means of closed circuit TV and high speed facsimile transmission. A technician calls the library by push button intercom for a specific drawing and he gets a printout in seconds, and a little longer if the clerk has to aim his mobile TV camera at hard copy. This kind of data storage and retrieval makes all information a matter of facts to look up, whether they are true or not, e.g., a doctoral candidate in English literature looking up a variorum text of a Dickens novel in the school's computerized library, or a history major looking up one of Hitler's lies in the same place.

IV. (2) Electronically powered auditory extensions came before

electronically powered visual ones—telegraphs and radio before movies and TV. The telegraph was a system of point to point communication, but radio broadcasts. The early days of radio, from its commercial inception in 1920 to the commercial spread of TV after 1948, served to provide a common stimulus to which listeners could react to on a national basis. Hence the nostalgia with which today's adults of the pre-TV generation view the old radio serials, for example, as a vanished bit part of American national culture. But TV has taken over this role, and radio can now play a role in serving local interests, e.g., as in ghetto radio. A feature of this localized service is the mixed media talk programs, in which people listen in to hear someone's opinion telephoned in to the studio and broadcast. This is hardly a return to tribal communications, as Marshall McLuhan would have it, because the community of interests served here does not rest on inescapable face-to-face interaction in a locked room, which is the precondition for the tribal use of language with its impossibility of telling lies.

However, Marshall McLuhan is right in one respect when he argues that the electric media have made for a retribalization of communications: lies are simply less relevant. Language in the mass media, when it is not specialized in providing an information service, is an expressive instrument; it is given over to an image-making or myth-making role. The mythic function of language has amplified the split personality of the media, a split

which began to appear in the 18th century with printed media as between the news values of daily papers and the entertainment value of novels.

IV. (3) Electric visual extensions take two forms, movies and TV. Movies are pictures with a voice; TV is radio with pictures. But movies got their voice before TV got pictures. The result is two wholly different media. Movie shows are very much like church services. In both cases there is a set program which the audience/congregation attends at an appointed time in a public place.

But TV broadcasts pictures to the home all the time on many different stations in a mosaic pattern of wildly juxtaposed programs and commercials. Commercials interrupt programs, highly disparate programs are scheduled back to back, and the channel selector makes for even more discontinuity.

In a way, TV is a reflection of our present-day social organization, with its mosaic of discontinuous settings, from home to office, to school, to club, to bowling gang, to church social, to cocktail party. We are not confined to one social arena in which to act, as are tribal folk, but we can switch to one or another like we switch TV channels, and the people we meet in one group do not necessarily know us from other ones. This makes possible the polite ego boasting at cocktail parties, which returns us full circle to our monkey ancestors who were still busy inventing language itself with *their* lies.

The End

WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION (Continued from page 35)

There may have been laughter in her artificial voice. Bracer wasn't sure.

"Okay," he said slowly. "I suppose I should thank you."

"That isn't necessary. That wasn't really a compliment."

Bracer smiled at her, then turned to the others. "Assuming that CDCHQ approves, and under the circumstances, I don't see how they can help it, I will ask General Crowinsky to begin shuttling down the wounded. Perhaps . . . Yes, Captain?"

Zoe Medawar's hand had been raised. She spoke: "No, captain. I vote against that."

"Why?"

"We have nearly twenty thousand patients in cold-sleep in my ship," the *Rudolph Cragstone's* captain said. "To unship them all and transfer them down to Breakaway would take a day or two, maybe more. And it would take a hell of a lot of energy and fuel from Breakaway's shuttles. Anyway, the real point is this: why bother? If anything happens they won't be a damned bit safer on Breakaway than they are out here. If the Jillies do come back, there won't be enough of Breakaway Station left to collect anyway."

Or us either, Bracer thought.

"Okay," he said aloud. "You've made a point. The cold-sleepers will stay where they are." He was silent for a few moments. "Do any of you have anything else to say now?"

The others were silent, dwelling within their own silent hells.

"Okay. Return to your ships. Make what preparations you can. If there's anything I can do, let me know."

Salutes were exchanged, and then the starship officers began to file out of the cabin.

"Go on to the bridge, Dan," Bracer told his first officer. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

VI

Three and a half hours later General Crowinsky contacted CDCHQ on Earth and fifteen minutes after that Absolom Bracer had the permission he had requested. The ships would stay—and Earth would send relief as quickly as she could. Perhaps in less than five weeks, perhaps only four.

Only four!

VII

What was the reaction of the other officers and the crewmen of the starships when Captain Bracer made the announcement that they would remain at Breakaway Station until the relief ships arrived from Earth? That would be hard to describe. There were too many individual reactions, too many personal feelings, thoughts, hopes, prayers, fears, horrors. No one *wanted* to stay, and, as Absolom Bracer has asked himself so often, "Haven't we done enough?"

In any war before they would have, most of them realized. But this was like no war that mankind had ever fought before. In this war there was no surrender, no possibility to settlement, for the Jillies would accept no settlement on any human terms. There were only two alternatives: victory or death. It was

that simple. If mankind lost this war, mankind would cease to exist, every last soul.

No they knew that answer to their question, most of them. As long as the Jillies stood a chance of winning, no man had done enough if he were still capable of doing more.

They would stay, most of them. And they would fight, if it came to that. Most of them.

There were some, though, who would not or could not accept it. One painful death was enough for any man. No one had the right to ask for two, not for any reason in the universe.

And what were the reasons, when you boiled it down to that? To aid Breakaway Station in case of attack. Aid how? they asked. We can stand up here, the three of us, two crippled warships and a hospital ship, and pretend to put up a fight. We might even kill a Jillie or two if we're lucky. But there's no "might" to what they'd do to us! They'd slaughter us like cattle, and *then* go on to destroy Breakaway Station. Oh, we might delay them for a while, but what damned good is that going to do Breakaway, or us? It's plain and simple suicide, and no sane man is asking *that* of us.

But what could they do?

VIII

It was little more than a standard day later that Absolom Bracer stood on the bridge with his first officer and Weapons Control Officer Akin Darbi, a whole-looking man whose stomach and intestines had been replaced by plastic tubes and

metallic pumps, whose guts had been burned away by Jillie energy rifle blast during the bloody Carstairs Skirmish.

"Drone released," a voice said from the loudspeaker of the weapons supervision board. "Random sub-light flight."

"Very good," Darbi acknowledged.

Bracer watched the tiny blip that moved across one of the weapons screens, the screen that indicated the view from energy cannon turret four. Now it was just self-propelled target. What might it be tomorrow?

"Turret four, report!" Darbi said, pushing a button on the weapons board.

"Turret four reporting, sir."

"Enemy in your sector. Take him," Darbi said.

The targe drone picked up speed, began a wavering course. A yellow line appeared on the screen, indicating that an energy cannon blast had been fired. A light flashed from the drone: simulated return fire.

"Turret four," Darbi said quickly, "you've just been . . ."

"Captain Bracer!"

He turned to look at the communications man who had called his name.

"Breakaway Station says there a message coming in for you from Earth, sir."

"Put it on my console."

"It's a 'gram, sir," the comm man said. "It's on the printout now."

Bracer activated the power treads of his body cylinder, rolled across the bridge toward the communications position, indicating that First Officer Maxel follow him.

Now what? he wondered. The

official orders assigning the ships to temporary duty at Breakaway Station had already come in. What more did Earth have to say to him that had come come in *printed*? When it was on paper, in God-alone-knew-how-many-copies, then it was really official.

"Here you are, sir," the communications duty man said, handing Bracer the sheet of paper that had rolled out of the obsolete print-out unit.

After quickly scanning the date, code numbers and official salutation, Bracer found these words "Pursuant to the directive of the Colonial Defense Coordination Headquarters, Geneva, Earth, under the authority of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Galean League, dated 12/7/84, assigning the League starships *Iwo Jima*, TU-819, heavy battle cruiser, *Pharsalus*, TU-1005, heavy battle cruiser, and *Rudolph Cragstone*, RG-32, first class hospital ship to temporary duty in the Breakaway Station Sector" etc. And a little farther down: ". . . the following promotions: Captain Absolom G. W. Bracer, GAM 0193851847, promoted to Rear Admiral, placed in command of the temporary Breakaway Station Defense Force, consisting of the above mentioned mentioned LSS" "Commander Daniel F. Maxel, Jr., GAM 0229039127, currently First Officer, LSS *Iwo Jima*, promoted to Captain, placed in command of the LSS *Iwo Jima*" "Lieutenant Commander Cling R. Reddick, GAM 0229719021, currently Second Officer, LSS *Iwo Jima*,

promoted to Commander, assigned as First Officer"

"Well, I'll be damned," Bracer said despite himself.

"Congratulations, *admiral*," Maxel said, a broad grin breaking across his face.

"Congratulations, yourself, *captain*."

IX

So they made me an admiral, Absolom Bracer said to himself as he rested in the darkness of his cabin, his back supported by the cylinder that maintained the biochemical processes of life. I never figured I'd make it. I thought I'd go back to Earth, spend a year or so in a hospital, and then maybe be released, maybe to go back to war—but I never expected to make admiral. Not now.

You may never get back to Earth now, *admiral*, an unfriendly part of his mind said.

And I may, he told himself. It's been over three weeks since the Jillies initially attacked Breakaway. They *may not* come back. We may just sit here until the relief ships arrive from Earth, and then go on our way, none the worse off for our stop—and as an admiral.

And the Jillies may come! There's still a damned good chance of that, *admiral*.

. . . roger . . . he thought.

. . . yes, cap—admiral . . .

. . . so you do make mistakes sometimes too, roger . . .

. . . yes, sometime, sir. i don't claim to be perfect . . .

Bracer smiled to himself.
 . . . how to things look to you,
 roger? . . .
 . . . abroad ship, sir? . . .
 . . . well, yes, that too . . .
 . . . you want an honest answer,
 don't you, sir? . . .
 . . . yes, of course . . .
 . . . i'm not pleased, sir . . .
 . . . the performance of the
 men? . . .
 . . . yes. they're slow, terribly
 slow. they're really in no condition to
 fight . . .
 . . . i know that, roger, and i
 hope that we won't have to . . .
 . . . what if we do, sir? . . .
 . . . then we'll do our best. can
 you help them? . . .
 . . . some, yes, but neither i nor
 the mech computer are capable of
 watching everything. we aren't
 capable of *fighting* this ship. that's
 why you have crewmen . . .
 . . . i know that too . . .
 . . . please don't misunderstand,
 sir. most of your crewmen are trying.
 i believe that they're doing their
 best, and perhaps, if we do have a
 showdown with the jillies, they will
 react even better . . .
 . . . perhaps . . .
 . . . you're asking a lot of them,
 sir . . .
 . . . i know that, roger, but
 we've got to do all we can to keep
 breakaway operating . . . Bracer
 paused for a long while. . . . roger,
 am i asking any more of them than
 was asked of you, or even as
 much . . .
 . . . what do you mean, sir? . . .
 . . . well, you were—i mean . . .
 . . . perhaps i do understand, sir,

but i'm not sure that i can answer
 you. you see, sir, i was killed a lot
 deader than you were. my whole
 body was destroyed. when they got
 my ship the only part of me that the
 'bots were able to get into cold-sleep
 was my head, shoulders and a part
 of my spine . . .

For a moment Bracer felt sick. He
 had lost a lot too, both legs, an arm,
 his eyes, a piece of his skull; he had
 died, but they had brought him back
 to life and said that they could
 rebuild him on Earth. But Roger, or
 whatever "Roger" had been, hadn't
 had that option.

. . . when they brought me
 back, sir . . . Roger went on,
 . . . i wasn't much more than a
 brain floating in a saline solution. i
 couldn't see or feel or even think
 very well, for that matter. it's not as
 hard to talk about as it once was.
 well, sir, they told me what hap-
 pened, and they told they that they
 couldn't put me back together. there
 just wasn't enough left. they
 could—well, let me go, if i wanted. i
 mean, they'd let me die for good, or
 they could put me in a mechanical
 body. i chose to live, sir, so they
 made me a starship. they just asked
 me if i wanted to *live*, admiral. they
 didn't ask me to die again. that's
 what you're asking of your men . . .

. . . i know . . .
 . . . and tat's what you're asking
 of yourself. that's not easy . . .
 The ship's Organic Computer paus-
 ed for a moment. . . . i'm happy the
 way i am, sir. it may seem strange,
 but i am. i think happier than I ever
 was before. you can't imagine it. but,
 sir, you're not happy . . .

. . . right now that's not important, roger . . .

. . . what is important, sir? . . .

. . . breakaway station . . .

Bracer was silent for a few moments.

. . . roger, what i really wanted to ask you is this: do you think i did the right thing? do you think we should stay? . . .

. . . I told you before, sir, i can't decide for you . . .

. . . For god's sake, roger, i'm not asking you to take over my responsibilities. i'm just asking for moral support . . .

. . . i can't even give you that, sir . . .

. . . why? . . .

. . . i just can't sir . . .

. . . you mean you think i did wrong? . . .

. . . i don't know, sir. i'm not sure. but—well, I don't like the odds . . .

. . . and what are the odds? . . .

Roger's mind made a sound that would have been a bitter laugh had it been produced by human vocal cords. . . . i don't really know, sir. i wish i did. but, look, sir. one, the odds are great, i don't know how great, but great that the jillies will come back and with a force much greater than ours. two, the odds are also great, and again i don't know how great, that they'll come back very soon . . .

. . . okay, go on . . .

. . . well, if they do come back, sir, and if their force is greater than ours, they'll wipe us out, totally destroy us—and breakaway station. sir, i don't want to die for nothing . . .

. . . i don't either, roger, but how can you say it's for nothing? . . .

. . . for what, sir? we can perhaps give breakaway a few more hours of life if we are attacked, but that's all. a few hours . . .

. . . but, . . . yes, but— . . .

. . . but, what, sir? . . .

. . . maybe breakaway will need those few hours . . .

. . . admiral, the chances of our doing anything significant for breakaway are so small—well, so small that i can't figure them . . .

. . . You're probably right, roger. but we won't know for sure unless it happens, will we? . . .

. . . no, sir, i suppose not . . .

. . . stay with me, roger . . .

Bracer thought suddenly, urgently.

. . . i need you . . .

. . . i'm not going anywhere, sir. not without you . . .

Bracer smiled to himself.

. . . thank you, roger. good night . . .

. . . I hope you rest well, sir . . .

Bracer then wished that he dared to take another sleeping pill, decided against it, activated the "seeing" circuits of his prosthetic skull and scanned the cabin in the darkness.

The acute artificial eyes discerned the outlines of a table, the chairs and desk he couldn't really use, the lockers, the paintings hanging on the bulkheads. Nothing. Nothing of any importance, of any value. It was just a cabin. A place. A hole to crawl into. Nothing more. There was no personality to the room. Nothing to indicate the nature of the man who lived there, to say, "This is mine."

But what personality do I have

now? he asked himself. Any? Am I just as much a semi-organic machine as Roger? A thing that's just part man?

Hell! That's enough of that, Absolom.

Again he cut off the visual circuits, let the total blackness settle over his brain, started counting from zero and hoped that eventually he would fall off to sleep.

One. Two. Three.

If Absolom Bracer had had a left foot it would have been hurting him, at least his neural system told him that there was a sharp pain in that nonexistent left foot, just below the ankle. The pain throbbed, grew, began moving up the nonexistent leg to a nonexistent knee cap.

Dammit, he thought, it seems like those doctors could have done something about that.

One hundred and nine. One hundred and ten. One hundred and eleven.

He continued to count, continued to lean back and rest as best he could, continued to try to sleep.

Random, abstract, meaningless patterns began to dance before his "eyes." A red amoeba shape rose from below, came swimming up out of the blackness, thin, translucent, throbbing, growing like the pain in his vanished leg of which that was a visual symbol, swelling finally to fill the whole range of his infinite vision.

Four hundred and seventeen. Four hundred and eighteen. Four hundred and nineteen.

Now the red amoeba was gone, swallowed up by the darkness that was impossibly black. The pain still

throbbed in his imaginary leg, but not as greatly. It was passing.

Five hundred and twenty-two. Five hundred and twenty-three. Five hundred and twenty-four.

Now the darkness was speckled with stars, and it was not so black. There was a bright yellow Sol-size star a few light-weeks away. He remembered that star, UR-339-72, Breston Catalog, and he should remember it.

It had six planets. A norm-type planetary system. A cousin of Sol's. None of these planets were comfortably habitable by humans, but there was a small observation station on one of them.

Six hundred and fifty-three. Six hundred and fifty-four. Six hundred and fifty-five.

The fourth planet of UR-339-72 was a primitive, unborn Earth, a planet that would have been perfect for Man had its atmosphere contained a decent percentage of oxygen; perhaps it would some day, a billion years hence, when the exceedingly primitive pseudobacteria that were its only lifeform had evolved far enough to begin expelling oxygen into UR-339-72-IV's atmosphere. There was, however, an automated League observation post on the planet, an electro-mechanical station that scanned and probed the spaces surrounding UR-339-72, hidden as well as hampered by the planet's blanket of atmosphere, a cover that did not greatly interfere with its probing of near space—scanners and sensors that swept a heavily traveled Jillie commerce route.

It was a computerized, automated,

unmanned station light-years from any human settlement, and every standard week it send back to its home base on Carstairs an FTL message probe containing a record of the previous week's observations. Every six standard months a League starship would creep into that sector of space, land on UR-339-IV, refurbish the post with FTL message probes, and then quickly, quietly depart.

But something went wrong at that station. Long before its probe supply should have run short it ceased sending messages. A standard month passed without data reaching Carstairs. Intelligence headquarters informed Adrianopolis—and Adrianopolis dispatched the LSS *Crecy* to investigate.

Absolom Bracer had been captain of the LSS *Crecy*.

Seven hundred and three. Seven hundred and four. Seven hundred and five.

Two weeks later the LSS *Crecy* came out of star drive six light-weeks from UR-339-72-IV and carefully probed space before her. If the observation post had been attacked, it *should* have broadcast a warning. The leading edge of that signal should be about six light-weeks from the planet now. Yet no warning was received.

The *Crecy* moved forward three light-weeks and probed again. Still no distress call from the post.

Into star drive again, the *Crecy* moved forward to within a few light-minutes of the desolate world, opened its electromagnetic ears and listened for the wailing, warning

cries of the observation station. But there were none.

With all hands at battle stations, screens up, weapons at ready, the League starship moved toward the planet at sub-light speeds, and still listened, still watched. Except for the radio noises of the yellow sun and the background roar of the stars and galaxies, the receivers detected nothing, neither the "Mayday" of the observation station nor the shrill chattering of Jillie communications.

UR-339-72-IV swelled from a pinpoint of reflected light to a pale crescent to a world in space.

Cold sweat trickled down the back of Absolom Bracer's neck. Something was wrong. The observation post *might* have broken down, it and its back-up systems. Its power cells *might* have shorted out. Its solar receptors *might* have failed. Its . . . But he didn't think so. Call it a feeling, a hunch, a premonition, ESP, but something was by-God *wrong!*

Eight hundred and thirty. Eight hundred and thirty-one. Eight hundred and thirty-two. Absolom Bracer continued to count, but sleep would not come. Not yet.

But in his mind: now the distance to the planet was counted in kilometers, not in units of light, and Captain Bracer placed his ship in a sweeping, spiraling orbit around the yellow-gray planet, and listened and probed and wondered.

Still nothing. The starship passed directly above the post and beamed it an identification signal. The station did not reply.

Six hours passed. Seven. Eight. Finally a standard day had elapsed in orbit and no signs of enemy activity had been detected, nor had the observation post shown any indications of "life."

Finally Captain Bracer overcame his fears, his reservations, and ordered the ship down, ordered the *LSS Crecy* to go in and take a look.

Flipping 180°, the plasma drive flared briefly; the starship braked in its spin around the world known only as UR-339-72-IV. Down. The ship entered the fringes of the poisonous atmosphere down through the yellow fogs that passed for air, down toward the flat and desolate plain where sat the observation station.

Now one hundred kilometers. Now fifty. Twenty. Ten. Five. One.

The starship hung on gravatic beams a kilometer above the station and once more searched, probed, listened. The response was the same. Nothing.

"Bring her in over there," the captain said to his first officer, indicating the landing field a few hundred meters to the west of the quiet station.

"Yes, sir," the first officer answered. He touched controls. He spoke commands. And the starship lowered.

At five hundred meters from the surface the *LSS Crecy's* defensive force screens went down.

At four hundred meters the Jillie missiles rose.

From a dozen hidden places around the silent observation station nuclear missiles burst from the barren ground, climbed skyward on

torches of broken atoms, sighted in on the *LSS Crecy*, and carried death.

"Screens up!" Captain Bracer yelled. "Boost out of here! Energy cannon—destroy these missiles."

The missiles were moving at sublight speeds this close to a planetary mass, but still they came fast, far faster than human eyes could follow them once they had really begun to accelerate. Captain Bracer and his crewmen could not see the missiles now, but laser-radar could and did and aimed the energy cannon that fired in reply.

The starship's drive came to life. She jerked, surged forward, upward, away from the planet and the missiles, while the humans aboard her felt the pressure of acceleration despite the gravatic shielding of Contra-grav.

But the missiles had a head start. They were moving faster than the starship. And though radar found them and energy cannon blasted them, there was not enough time to stop them all.

The *Crecy* was out of the atmosphere when the missile reached her, striking amidships, exploding with megatons of hell. Force screens had gone up by then, but not to full power, and though they deflected the bulk of the fury unleashed by the missile, they could not fully protect the starship. Her hull ruptured, air and men spilled out into the radiation-filled vacuum.

Even before he picked himself up off the deck where the concussion had thrown him, Captain Bracer realized what was waiting for them outside the atmosphere, above,

under the naked light of UR-339-72: a Jillie warship, somehow hidden and undetected, but now moving in for the kill.

The LSS *Crecy* was badly wounded, but she could still put up a good fight. She would make the Jillies pay for her destruction, pay dearly.

Bracer yelled orders, saw the swarm of plasma torpedos burst from his ship, light the darkness, speed toward the enemy. He also saw the energy cannon and torpedos that fired back.

He even saw the plasma torpedo that broke through the *Crecy's* screens as nuclear missiles began to buffet the enemy ship, began to tear her apart as the *Crecy* was being torn apart. But mostly he saw the torpedo that come on toward him, through the flickering, dying screens, to the very hull, to burn its way through metal and ceramics and paraglas into the ship. He felt its heat, terrible, agonizing, star-hot heat. Then he saw the bridge's bulkheads glow red, then white—and then he never saw anything again with his own eyes.

He did not remember the 'bots that scurried out of their waiting places to grab his burned and mutilated body and stuff it into an open cold-sleep coffin. He was dead then.

One thousand eighteen. One thousand nineteen. One thousand twenty.

The battered, very nearly beaten Jillie warship limped off, away to whatever place it is that damaged Jillie warships go for repairs, wherever it is that wounded, mutilated Jillie starmen go to be

rebuilt again. And the wreck of the LSS *Crecy*, crewed by half-operating machines and dead men in cold-sleep coffins, fell into a fairly stable orbit around UR-339-72-IV, and there she remained until she was found some weeks later by a second warship from Adrianopolis. What was left of the *Crecy's* crew was taken aboard the newcomer and carried back to Adrianopolis, cold and dead, where some of them, like Absolom Bracer, were returned to a semblance of life.

One thousand ninety-eight. One thousand ninety-nine. One thousand one hundred.

He had lived it again.

Then Absolom Bracer slept.

X

There was much disaffection aboard the three starships. A minority, but apparently an extremely argumentative minority of the crew of the *Iwo Jima* was beginning to make plain its disagreement with the decisions of its senior officers. The disgruntled crewmen of the *Iwo* were led, at least nominally, by the new first officer, Commander Cling Reddick, a once excellent combat officer who now lived only through the courtesy of an intricate series of artificial nerves that coordinated the involuntary actions of his body, replacing damaged portions of his nervous system.

Reddick was aware of his responsibilities as first officer, Bracer knew, but still could not keep his mouth shut about his feelings concerning the decision to remain at Breakaway until the relief convey

arrived from Earth. His argument, and the argument of these who followed him, was substantially the same as that Roger had used during his recent conversation with Bracer: and the admiral was fully and uncomfortably aware of the logic of that argument. There really wasn't a great deal he could say to counter it, but that wasn't his job anyway. He had his hands full without wasting time arguing with the officers. That was Maxel's job now, if anyone's; let him worry about Reddick, and keep him and those who agreed with him in line.

In actuality, Bracer wasn't too worried about Reddick. He had an excellent record, and the *Iwo's* medical officer testified that Reddick was as well balanced mentally as anyone else aboard the starship. Reddick would gripe and bitch—and Maxel would reprimand him—but it would probably never come to anything more than that.

Such was not the case aboard the *Pharsalus*, though Bracer did not know it until it was too late.

XI

A standard week after the decision, and the subsequent reception of orders from CDCHQ to remain at Breakaway, the attempted mutiny took place.

Admiral Bracer, still unaccustomed to the new braid on his shoulders, was just leaving the bridge when an urgent call came from the *Pharsalus*.

"Admiral," called the voice of Comm Officer Cyanta as Bracer thumbed the hatch open, "emergen-

cy signal from Captain Davins."

"Put it on my console," Bracer called back, spun around on the power treads of his body cylinder, and rolled back to the command console in the center of the starship's bridge. When he reached it Davins' image was already in the tank, the surviving portion of his face showing obvious agitation.

"Admiral," Davins said breathlessly, "may I borrow a squad of your marines?"

"What is it, Chuck?" Bracer asked, his worst fears, or perhaps his second worst fears, coming to the front of his mind.

"I think it's mutiny."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"What do you mean, captain, you think?"

"Well, it . . ." Davins' face paled, then he spun around. For a moment all that Bracer could see in the tank was his back.

"Davins?" Bracer yelled. "What in hell is going on over there?"

Then he heard Davins' voice: "What are you doing here? You're all under . . ."

The next sound was really two sounds in one, two frightening, disgusting sounds: the rasp of energy pistol and a strangled groan. Davins' back retreated from the tank, then vanished as the captain of the *LSS Pharsalus* fell forward.

For a moment Bracer could see across the deck of his sister ship, could see the handful of crewmen who stood in the open hatch, weapons in their hands, gesturing. One weapon, held in the prosthetic hand of a big man in engineering

uniform, still glowed from its recent discharge.

"Over there," the big engineer was saying. "Move. We're taking over, and we're going . . ."

"Shut up, mister!"

Bracer recognized the voice. It was that of Lena Bugioli, *Pharsalus*' first officer. And there was anger and authority in her voice.

"Miss Bugioli, I don't want to hurt you," the mutinous engineer said, "but so help me God, I'll cut you down if you try to stop us."

"You'll do no such thing, Hansey. You'll put that gun down, and surrender yourself to the master-at-arms."

First Officer Bugioli rolled into Bracer's view, her torso mounted on a cylinder like his own. She was unarmed except for the fierce determination in her eyes and the stripes of rank on her shoulders.

"No, ma'am," said the man she had called Hansey. "We're going home."

"There's no place for you to go, Hansey. You killed your captain. There are too many witnesses. Both on this ship and on the *Iwo*." She

gestured toward the tri-D tank. "The admiral is watching this very minute."

Hansey's eyes shot toward the tank. His face paled.

"We're going home!" he yelled defiantly, aimed the energy pistol at the tank and fired.

For an instant Bracer has the sensation that he was going to feel the blast as it struck the command console in the other ship. The tank brightened for a moment, its loud-speaker squealed, then both went dead.

Slamming his open palm down on the panel before him, snapping a switch as he did so, Bracer yelled: "Colonel Garrighar!"

"Marine quarters. Carrighar here, sir," replied a voice from the console.

"Colonel, spacesuit your men and take a shuttle over to the *Pharsalus* immediately."

"Yes, sir. May I ask . . ."

"Mutiny, colonel. Go stop it."

"Yes, sir."

My God, it's happened now, Bracer thought. I hoped that we could avoid *this*.

The End

INTIMATIONS

The March AMAZING will contain the concluding part of Richard C. Meredith's serial, WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION, of course; it will also include new stories by Thomas M. Disch and John T. Sladek —THE INVASION OF THE GIANT STUPID DINOSAURS AND THE AGGRESSOR, respectively—about which we're unusually excited; we think that they may be nothing less than the two best short stories the field will see all year. Plus a new David R. Bunch, IN THE TIME OF DISPOSAL OF INFANTS—we like Mr. Bunch very much indeed—and PRELUDE TO RECONSTRUCTION, a novelette by Durant Imboden who is, among other talents, assistant fiction editor over at our competitor, *playboy*.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Specialists will note that until this time, my editorial presence in these magazines has been reflected only in the blurbing and story selection. This is not coincidental; a fiction writer by instinct as well as bad luck, I have found it necessary to lie almost all the time in order to reflect any kind of truth whatsoever. Nevertheless, all good precedents must end sometime—did you ever hear of an s-f editor who never said a word to his readers in his column?—including this one. Two fast comments, first in response to the bulk of mail comment we have seen through the first five months of our administration.

Firstly, AMAZING and FANTASTIC will contain no letter column, after all. There is much to be said of the Socratic uses of such a department; there is also, I think, a fair amount to be said against them. Too often, this department takes up space that could be more wisely used on fiction. This is particularly so in these magazines and—barring overwhelming objections—I would prefer to use the 3,000 words or so of a letter column as space for an additional new story or two.

Secondly, the reprint policy of these magazines will continue for the foreseeable future; publisher prerogative being as significant here as it is in any other branch of publishing. A large and increasing percentage of space however will be used for new stories and I

think that the bulk of our original material can now be said to compare favorable with that of our competitors.

Finally, it is my contention that the majority of modern magazine science-fiction is ill-written, ill-characterized, ill-conceived and so excruciatingly dull as to make me question the ability of the writers to stay awake during its composition, much less the readers during its absorption. Tied to an older tradition and nailed down stylistically to the worst hack clichés of three decades past, science-fiction has only within the past five or six years begun to emerge from a long, dead period which occurred otherwise during what was probably the most interesting and significant decade of our national history. It has been able to emerge from its category trap only because certain intelligent and dedicated people have had the courage to wreck it so that it could crawl free. One must destroy, it seems, in order to do anything useful. (Our modern assassins have, perhaps, taken this too literally). I propose that within its editorial limits and budget, AMAZING and FANTASTIC will do what they can to assist this rebirth—one would rather call it transmutation—of the category and we will try to be hospitable to a kind of story which is still having difficulty finding publication in this country. Not, of course, to the total exclusion of other kinds of stories.

In short, I hope to come to

terms with science-fiction in these magazines the way that I think science-fiction ought to come to terms with the world: cautiously, respectfully, eclectically, but with the clear understanding after all

that there is a great deal wrong with the full range of it and at least a little bit that can be done, once you know what's wrong. —Barry N Malzberg

ROSEMARY'S BABY *(Continued from page 65)*

electric genius would have been the only way to gloss them over, and electric genius is, I'm afraid, too much to hope for most of the time. If Maurice Evans, in a thankless role, merely walks through his scenes, still we may watch Mr. Evans, whose walk is not despicable. There has been a good deal of talk about Mr. Polanski's lack of command of American dialogue, but this is desperation: the dialogue, when it is not the novel word-for-word, is at least as good as that in most acceptable movies, and better than some (I refer you to *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?* as a particularly horrid example.)

But how if life should refuse to reside there?

The book is, in truth, an eviable work. The movie is an illustrated book. (Not to make too much of this, but Mia Farrow at one point reads aloud necessary information from a book sent her by someone else; later, one does see the printed book in another, and equally wordy, connection.) An illustrated novel is not, unfortunately, a viable film; the

translation from one medium to another has, simply, not been accomplished; it seems, in fact, barely to have been tried.

I must add that Mia Farrow gives an astonishing performance, adding real tenderness and innocence to the stock scared-heroine of such things; that Sidney Blackmer is authoritative and very nearly perfect; that if Ruth Ford steals every scene she is in with shameless mugging, it's worth the damage to the scene just to watch Miss Ford in action; that the music is mostly undistinguished but decent (Beethoven, whose *FUR ELISE* is played here and there in the background, gets what I believe is his very first screen credit); and that Elisha Cook, a fine actor living a life of eighth-rate parts, is thrown away once again. I'm afraid Satan is disappointing—but, then, I suppose he would be, in any theology I understand.

So: see the movie, if you like; but bring a copy of the book for dull moments. You'll hardly notice the change from one medium to another.

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THE FUTURE IN BOOKS



Arthur C. Clarke: *2001—A Space Odyssey*. New American Library, New York, 1968. 221pp., boards, \$4.95; paper, 95c

This handsomely produced book—I could find only two typos!—offers fascinating and disturbing insights into the differences between the story sense of a novelist and that of a brilliant movie producer. As everybody knows by now, the movie was produced from a story-line by Clarke under conditions of continuous modification by Stanley Kubrick, the modifications then subject to re-approval (at least to a major extent) by Clarke. Then the novel was written.

Unlike the picture, the novel is quite unambiguous; everything is not only explained, but over-explained. Thus each work of art—the film and the novel—has a separate and unique set of deficiencies, each one the opposite of the other, despite the four-year long intimacy of the collaboration between the two au-

thors. The two works meet in the middle: both men have an almost compulsive interest in making things sound technically plausible, so that in both the novel and the picture, the machines not only look as though they would work, but as if they are actually *at work*.

From this meeting ground the two concepts part company. In the novel, Clarke tells you where the extra-terrestrial slabs come from, how they work, how many of them there are, and what they do to mankind. He explains what happened after the slab on the Moon jammed the spacesuited men's headsets; he explains why the computer Hal went mad; he explains why the pulse from the Moon launched the Jupiter expedition; he explains the encounter with the final slab, the faster-than-light drive, the nature of the various wild visions the ultimate space-traveller sees—he explains, moreover, what that motel room is doing at the end of the picture, and he explains precisely what kind of transformation takes

place in the last few minutes. There is a moment of ambiguity in the last line of the novel, but it is only a small one.

Kubrick skips every one of these steps, dividing his picture into four sections separated by huge logical gaps. For the sake of drama, he makes the murder of the men aboard the Jupiter mission by the computer much more dramatic, but much less sensible; for example, there is no reason in the picture why the extravehicular pod has to anchor so far from the *Discovery*, except to make a more striking scene, and in the book the pod is not only clamped onto the body of the *Discovery* proper, but the spaceman outside it is anchored by a lifeline, as would be only sensible. Kubrick is not interested in the sense of the story, but only in how it feels.

Similarly, Clarke's description of the interstellar trip, and the things seen along the way, makes perfect science-fictional sense. Kubrick omits all explanations, including some perfectly good ones which would have filmed very well (I speak from some experience) in favor of a vast display of cinema pyrotechnics which are marvellously exciting, and never mind whether they are explained or not. The ending of the film is so telescoped that I have heard six different explanations of it by sophisticated viewers all consistent and every one of them excluding all the others. The one Clarke intended was among these, but the film fails to make this clear; instead, the film includes a number of pieces of symbolism (such as the episode of the shattered wine-glass)

which while serving some poetic functions tend to distract the viewer from the overt, surface meaning of the finale.

On the other hand, Kubrick evidently saw immediately that all the characters are ciphers, and *should* be ciphers; where Clarke attempts to give them, without successes, some personality of their own, Kubrick's script makes them more machine-like than the machines which dominate them, and stresses the excruciating banality of their conversations and the even more painful stereotypes into which their emotions are compressed. These men *need* rebirth. The tool-inventing habit which the slabs have given them has become a trap; nothing less than a complete change of orientation is going to save them, and the slabs are morally obligated to supply it, and do. The poetry of the machinery itself is gorgeous, but it is also confining; and (in Kubrick's view) the logic of the story, being only an extension of this machine-like type of reasoning, is non-visual and hence can be dispensed with, and is, where the novel goes on and on and *on* about it well beyond the verge of dullness.

The novel has very little of the poetry of the picture; the picture fails to tell you what it is about. If Clarke and Kubrick could be persuaded to spend, say, about half a million dollars more to fill in the logical jumps and show us what the ending intends, the picture would be a masterpiece and the novel would be unnecessary. As matters stand now, the novel is not very rewarding, since it lacks

most of the picture's strengths; but it has to be read before one can understand the picture. In the ideal situation, the novel should have been totally useless.

D. G. Compton: *Synthajoy*. Ace Books, New York, 1968. 189 pp. paper, 60c

The notion of recording and playing back complete human experiences, with all sensory and emotional components, dates back at least as far as "The City of the Living Dead" of Laurance Manning and Fletcher Pratt (1930), but nobody has ever handled it a tenth as well as does this English writer. He makes it sound technologically plausible, indeed inevitable, but that is only the beginning. What counts is that he uses it to raise moral issues, and finally even an epistemological one.

In other words, *Synthajoy* is that rarity, a science-fiction novel which is About Something.

To this end, Compton has made the co-inventors of Sensitape completely a-moral men: one a physician deaf to everything but ambition, the other an engineer of the Dachau-guard or If-I-didn't-do-it-somebody-else-would kind of conscience. Hence they are able not only to record, but to peddle any kind of human experience they find salable, from the simple sexual through the artistic to that of dying in confidence of the love of God.

Before the story begins, both men have died, under ambiguous circumstances. The novel is told from the point of view of the only person who could know the whole

truth, the physician's wife and the engineer's mistress—but she is confined for fifth degree murder and is herself under treatment by the machine.

She is an immensely real and moving character, and Compton lets her tell her tale with great skill and resourcefulness, sometimes a simple flashback, sometimes as a more formal, diary-like narrative, sometimes as a self-conscious fiction, sometimes as a drama, as a tape recording, as a film script, as a dream. (His ear is acute, and so is his sensitivity.) The recollections are not in chronological order, but instead are arranged for maximum mystery and suspense. Furthermore, they are constantly interrupted by present-time episodes of a running battle between the patient, her nurse and her psychiatrist. These episodes *are* in chronological order and furnish the string for the beads of memory; and the battle is not a diversion, but has a major role in the overall story. The sense of a momentous revelation being built up to is consistent and unfaltering.

But

Here rises the philosophical question. Such is the fidelity of Sensitape that the experiences undergone with it are real—as real as hearing music from the finest possible record and audio system, and as capable of passing into the memory as if they were one's own experiences. And the poor woman who once had the key to all these events is under daily Sensitape treatment, some of it apparently malicious. *How* does she know what she

knows? Above all, *what do we mean by "real"?*

There is an aesthetic implication here, too. When you finish this novel you will be able to say, "I am another person than I was yesterday." This is one definition of the function of art—but you can see even from my oversimplified account that Compton's novel raises disturbing questions about it, at the same time making itself into an example of exactly that kind of experience.

The average physical survival time of a paperback book under re-reading is six months. I suggest that you buy a minimum of sixty copies. Work of this calibre, ladies and gentlemen, is what science fiction is for.

Alexei Panshin: *Rite of Passage*. Ace Books A-16, New York, 1968. Paper, 254 pp., 75c

Here is a rather similar case. Heinlein's "Universe" first appeared in 1941, and since then a great many people, from Brain Aldiss to Ted Tubb, have taken a crack at the idea; I have myself. Panshin, however, has a new approach to the situation: What would it be like to grow up in such a milieu? Hence this is not just another starship book, but a fully realized, lived-in world. I found the novel a little long and slow-moving for my taste, but I was charmed by its heroine. Since Mr. Panshin is not only an original writer, but a thorough craftsman, even the slow sections were a pleasure to read. The result is a better first novel than most people's tenth.

—Wm. Atheling, Jr.

PAST MASTER, by R.A. Lafferty; Ace Books, New York, 1968. Paper, \$.60

Both R.A. Lafferty and Ace Books have done much solid, honest good work and never received other than token appreciation for it. This book is a substantial bid on the part of both for greater recognition, and it is a pleasure to give it.

Raphael Aloysius Lafferty has been with us since 1960. His stories have been antic original pieces like "Nine Hundred Grandmothers" and "Slow Tuesday Night" that have readily found a home with our annual anthologists. If he has been neglected, I think it is partly because he has hidden himself behind the anonymity of his initials and partly because he has written nothing but short stories in a day when comment is reserved for novels.

Ace's sin has been uniformly packaged quantity. Ace was that daring book publisher who first exposed us to the work of Philip Dick, Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delany, not to mention William Burroughs, but the ordinary reader can be forgiven his failure to notice since Ace chose to treat these writers in much the same terms that it treated Robert Moore Williams and Dwight V. Swain.

In January of 1968, Ace began a new series of "Science Fiction Specials", the point of which was to present in distinctive package those books of which it was particularly proud. The first two titles, Simak's *Why Call Them Back from Heaven?* and Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*, were reprints, good sturdy books that deserved paperback edi-

tions but which might have been published by almost anyone. However, in *Past Master*, R. A. Lafferty's first published novel and the first original in the series, Ace has a book that gives real substance to its intentions.

Past Master is an eccentric, idiosyncratic minor masterpiece. It will not appeal to every taste, but to those who can approach it, it offers real rewards.

Eccentricity? The characters are no more than exaggerated poses, and every one of them talks in exactly the same enigmatic voice. Plot turns are arbitrary rather than necessary. Lafferty even writes from an Author Omniscient point of view, hopelessly out of fashion in these days.

Idiosyncrasy? Lafferty's premises are both conservative and Roman Catholic. His hero is a resurrected Sir Thomas More, chosen of all the men in history to assume the rule of a Utopia falling to rack. Granted that he invented the place, nonetheless it must seem idiosyncratic for him to be chosen with no more than an "Of course," and a "Well, why not?"

Nonetheless, the book is a masterpiece. It has all of Lafferty's usual color and pyramiding of manic invention. Besides this, it offers easily the most real and immediate problem of spiritual agony yet seen in science fiction. It offers it subtly, and though it offers it in Catholic terms, it offers it universally. I found the ending genuinely affecting.

Past Master is minor because its characters and setting are not as

alive as its inventions and ideas. But it is a book that speaks well for Lafferty, for Ace, and for science fiction. May they all yet hit their stride.

And when will someone issue a collection of Lafferty short stories?

—Alexei Panshin

IN SEARCH OF WONDER, by Damon Knight; revised edition 1967; 308 pp., clothbound \$6.00, paper \$2.45 from Advent Publishers, P.O. Box 9338, Chicago Illinois 60690.

Virtually everything to be said about this landmark work of criticism has already passed into public domain; add that the revised edition, incorporating some new material and reworking of the original criticisms seems to have even more relevance than the book did in 1956; add that Advent's attractive paperbound version now puts the book within reach of everyone. No practicing professional or serious reader of the form should be without it. Occasionally Knight seems to be defeated by his own facility (. . . "cleaned up, these virtues might seem like faults") and sometimes a critical point is pressed home almost to the exclusion of the work (his comments on J.T. McIntosh) but this is quibbling; the point is that Damon Knight is probably our field's first and best critic and that this book is the most important nonfiction ever published in the category.

A REQUIEM FOR ASTOUNDING, by Alva Rogers, 1964, 224 pages; clothbound \$6.00, paperbound \$2.45 from Advent.

A close, virtually issue-by-issue examination of ASTOUNDING from its near-still-birth to the December 1949 issue when Rogers feels, the Golden Era of the magazine definitely ended. The criticisms are of little literary value and the writer is too attached to some material which, for me, represents the worst possibilities of the field in terms of a modern

science-fiction but, like everybody else, the editor has been there, and like almost everybody else, he finds the book peculiarly compelling for that reason. There should have been even more illustrations from the magazine interior and its covers; they evoke more nostalgia per page than several chapters of Rogers' prose.
—Barry N. Malzberg

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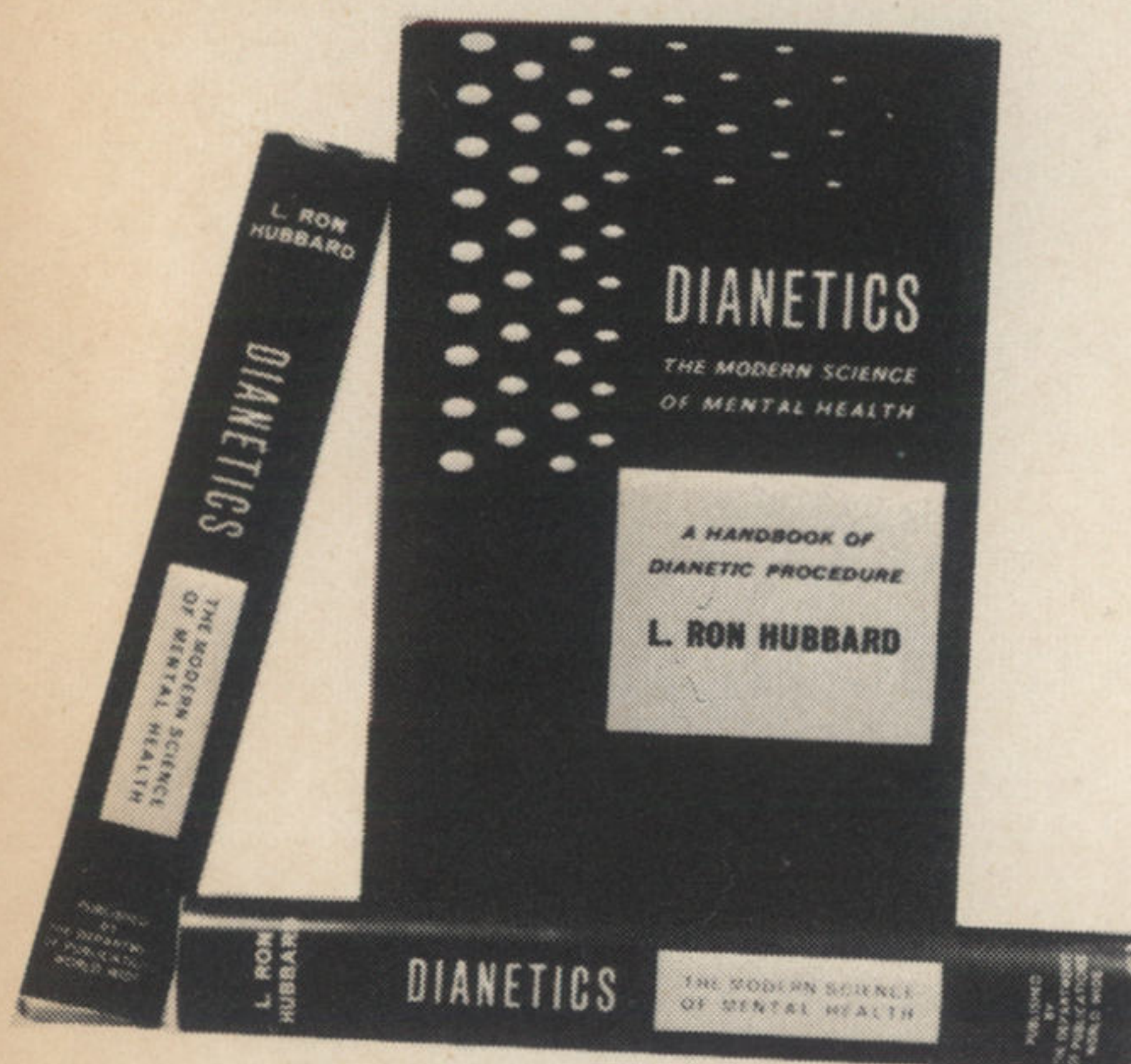
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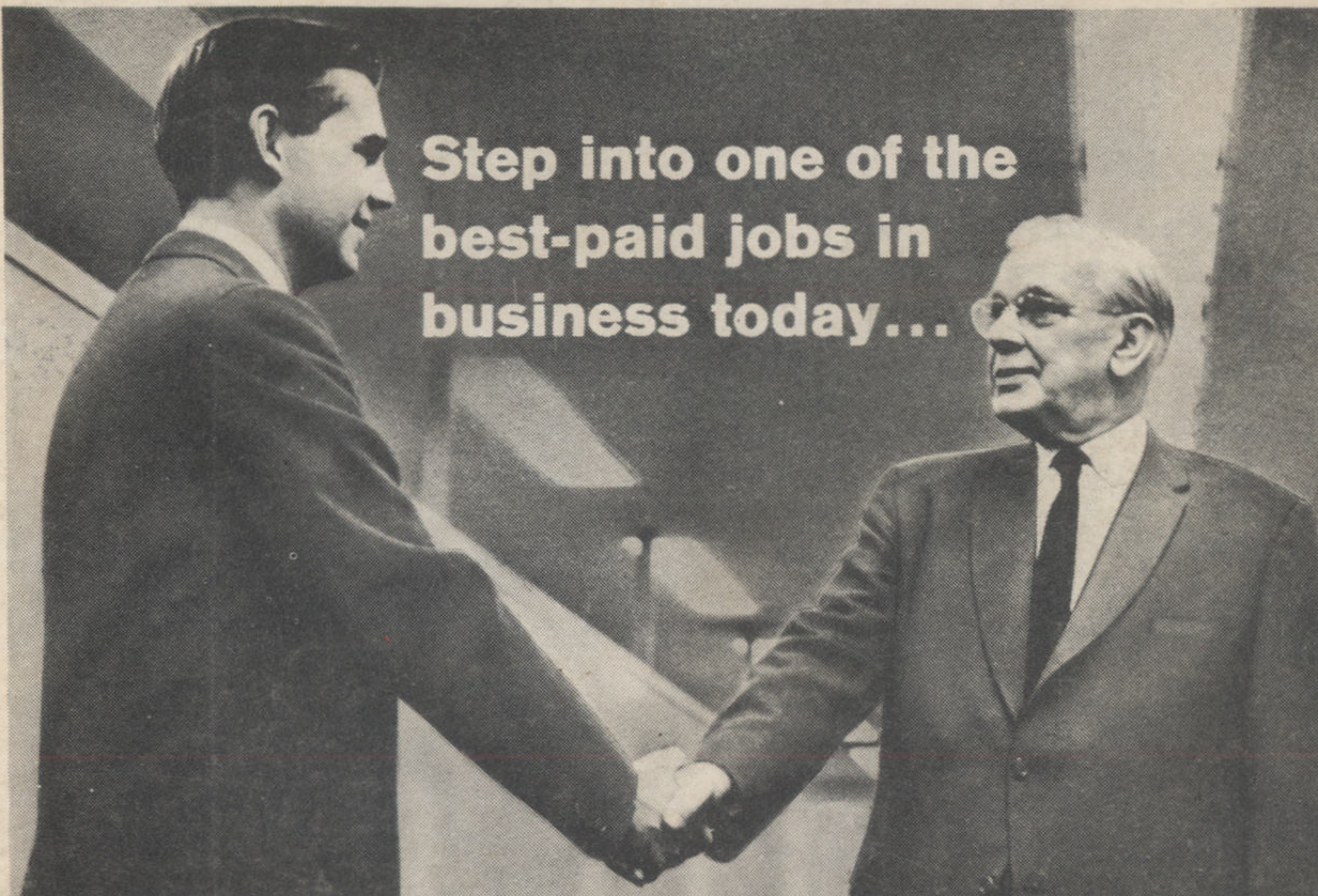
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