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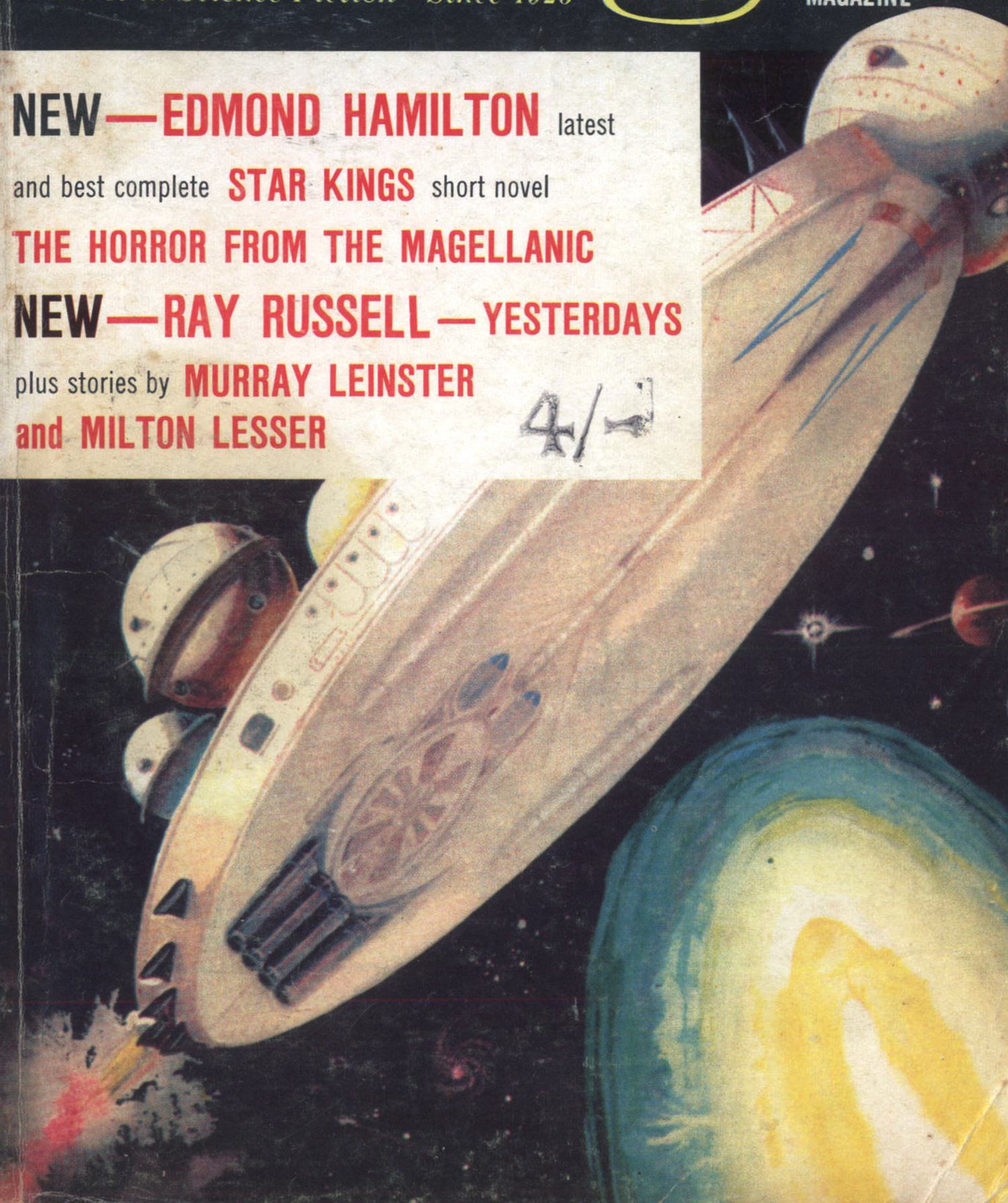
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MAY, 1969

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editorial

We've heard a lot in recent years about the New Thing in science fiction. It's not an isolated movement, of course. It has its parallels in the other popular arts, in the sudden flowering of rock music, for example, and in the determined exploration of electronic sound and 'randomized music'.

But it seems to me that what we have not heard enough about is the question of our "roots".

In rock music the spectrum is broader: the field now not only supports the acid rock of Jimi Hendrix and the instrument-smashing antics of The Who, but also the melodic freshness of the Beach Boys and the incredibly rich tapestries of Van Dyke Parks.

But what of rock's roots? Rock music grew out of Rhythm and Blues music—the country hollars and urban laments—and rock has not forgotten its roots. The Rolling Stones made Muddy Waters fashionable again, and more recently a British group called Ten Years After has been duplicating the mid-thirties Kansas City jazz of Count Basie and Jimmy Rushing.

What has any of this to do with science fiction?

I think the parallel is apt, particularly at the points where it breaks down. For if the New Thing or New Wave of science fiction is our "acid rock," where is our Ten Years After? Where are *our* roots?

It's not enough to simply point backwards. We can reprint memorable stories of the past (and do) as easily as we can listen to a reissue of classic 1930's jazz. But what of our new writers? Must they all seek change so determinedly? *One* J.G. Ballard can be important—but ten little Ballards?

It has been said that the New Wave of science fiction is composed of writers less interested in telling new stories than in telling stories a new way. It has also been said that the New Wave writers are most preoccupied with new ideas, and a new relevancy in their stories to the realities which press in upon us daily.

I suspect that the apparent contradictions in the claims put forth for the New Wave lie in the fact that there is no true New Wave, in the sense of a single school of thought. Instead, there has been an explosion of ideas and ways of expressing them among a diverse group of writers—

writers who often disagree with each other about their goals and desires for the field and for science fiction in general.

What has happened is an *ex post facto* label, "New Wave," applied across the board to a set of writers who differ in any fashion from the old-fashioned norm. What is dangerous is that these writers are now being judged in terms of the label (most of them reject all such labels for themselves) rather than in terms of their individual output. Worse, a cult has formed, *around the label*, and, in a few cases, around individual writers taken to be the gurus of the label. A case in point is the aforementioned Ballard. I repeat: one Ballard has fascination; a multiplicity of Ballard imitators can only evoke boredom.

Very few of the writers lumped into the "New Wave" have ignored their roots in science fiction to the extent their admirers and fans have done. The Samuel Delanys, the Roger Zelaznys, are well grounded in the significant values and virtues of this field. But all too often novice writers seeking to emulate these men are ignoring or castigating "old-fashioned" sf as irrelevant or worse. These novice writers have fastened upon the superficialities of style in the so-called "New Wave," and ignored its foundations. The cleverness of form distracts them. Most are unaware of the old-fashioned space-opera that underlies, for instance, so much of Delany's work. Delany has taken classic 1945 PLANET STORIES plots and totally refurbished them, sometimes even turning them inside-out. But books like

his *Nova* are crammed with the excitement and wonder of the old space-operas, simmering just barely under the surface.

It is fashionable today to decry the old action-adventure sf story. It is easy to look back upon the yellowed pages of the old pulps and find lurid examples of bad writing. But it is also possible to find a sort of primitive vigor and excitement which parallels the sort one finds in the old, raw blues music. And if there is much that was very bad in the old space-operas, it is usually less a fault of the form than of the individual author.

It is my conviction that the science fiction field needs a magazine in which the old and the new can exist side by side, each thriving from its proximity to the other. And that is what I intend for AMAZING: Something of the old (the reprints) and of the new (the best of the new writers), perhaps something occasionally borrowed (many of the old ideas are worth the reminding), along with the blues.

Science fiction has roots. AMAZING is the world's oldest science fiction magazine, and has the strongest roots. We intend to continue to explore them.

In this issue we do exactly that, with the fourth of Edmond Hamilton's "Star Kings" novelettes. Next issue will begin a new, and very different, novel by Robert Silverberg, "Up the Line". The old and the new, the past, present and future: you'll find them all here in each issue of AMAZING.

—Ted White

When Edmond Hamilton's *THE STAR KINGS* first appeared in these pages, more than twenty years ago (in the September, 1947 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, to be exact), it was heralded by a stunning Malcolm Smith cover that only hinted of the novel's impact upon its readers. Frederick Fell, Inc. published the book in hard covers in 1949—a pioneer venture—and Signet Books brought it out in paperback form in 1950 as *BEYOND THE MOON*. (That rather pedestrian job of retitling said a good deal about the state of science fiction in the paperbacks in 1950.) It went through several printings before Signet apparently lost interest in the book and let it lapse.

But the fans did not forget. Nor did Cele Goldsmith, when she became editor of this magazine. And in September, 1964—seventeen years later to the month—Hamilton returned with *KINGDOMS OF THE STARS* the first of a projected series of sequels to *THE STAR KINGS*. Since then two more of the novelettes have been published: *THE SHORES OF INFINITY* (April, 1965) and *THE BROKEN STARS* (*FANTASTIC*, December, 1968).

With great pleasure we now present the fourth new novelette of the *Star Kings* and the epic adventurer, John Gordon—

**THE HORROR
FROM
THE MAGELLANIC
EDMOND HAMILTON**

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS

FOREWARD

To John Gordon, man of 20th Century New York, came a strange telepathic message across time. From two thousand centuries in the *future* came that message.

Zarth Arn, man of that future time and a master of the sciences of the mind, proposed an adventure. He could scientifically effect an exchange of minds across time, and he suggested that he and Gordon exchange minds for a short time, so that he could see what was to him the far past, and Gordon could see the far future.

Gordon agreed. The exchange was effected, and he awoke in the body of Zarth Arn, two thousand centuries in the future. To his amazement, he learned that Zarth Arn was not only a scientist but was also Prince Zarth Arn, second in line to the throne of the Mid-Galactic Empire, mightiest of the great star-kingdoms of this future age.

The plan to exchange minds for only a short time went awry. The Empire had a great enemy, the League of Dark Worlds, of which the cynical Shorr Kan was leader. And Gordon, in Zarth Arn's body, was drawn into a maelstrom of interstellar intrigue.

He was forced to keep up the strange imposture no one suspected. And, as Prince Zarth Arn, he won the love of Princess Lianna, sovereign of Fomalhaut Kingdom. But he and Lianna were kidnapped by emissaries of Shorr Kan.

There was a mighty secret that only the royal family of the Empire



knew . . . the secret of an awesome weapon called the Disruptor. It had been devised and used centuries before, to repel invasions of aliens from the Magellanic Clouds.

But then Shorr Kan learned that Zarth Arn, who was supposed to know the secret, was in mind only John Gordon of the past, who did not know the secret at all. By pretending to ally himself with Shorr Kan, Gordon made a hazardous escape with Lianna.

Then . . . the galactic storm broke. With Zarth Arn's brother, the sovereign, incapacitated by an attempted assassination, the path of conquest seemed clear to Shorr Kan. He launched the long-planned attack of the League upon the Empire, confident that Gordon, a man from the past, could not use the secret weapon.

But, getting what information he could about the weapon from his stricken "elder brother", Gordon desperately decided to try to use the Disruptor to save the Empire. In an armageddon battle of starships, he used it . . . destroying the League fleet by violently disrupting space itself in the battle area. The League surrendered, and it seemed that Shorr Kan had been killed by his own disappointed followers.

Gordon then re-effected the exchange of minds, returning to his own body back in the 20th Century . . . leaving the glory of the star kingdoms and Lianna, whom he loved, that he might keep his word to Zarth Arn.

But later came a telepathic message from Lianna. She had learned the truth of the strange imposture

and realized it was the mind and personality of John Gordon whom she loved. Someday, she promised, Zarth Arn would find a way to bring Gordon across time *physically*, in his own body, and she would wait for him until then.

For a long time, Gordon thought the whole thing had been a delusion, a dream. And then, suddenly, the call came, and he was drawn across time, the atoms of his body transformed to energy and drawn across the time-dimension and rematerialized in that future age.

Lianna . . . and Zarth Arn . . . were waiting for him. But there was a new peril shadowing the kingdom of Lianna. Her cousin, and pretender to the throne, handsome Narath of Teyn, had been intriguing with the powerful Counts of the Marches of Outer Space, a wild region on the galaxy rim.

Narath was the idol and leader of the non-human races of the Marches. And also he had as allies the H'harn, robed, cowled creatures of mystery, masters of telepathic power and of mental attack.

Narath's attempt to destroy Lianna failed. But the menace was enough to send Gordon with Korkhann, Lianna's avian Minister of Non-Human Affairs, to the capital of the great Empire, an ally, to consult.

The consultation ended with Hull Burrel, a captain of the Empire and Gordon's old comrade in arms, and Gordon himself, going into the Marches to learn the true nature of the menace. There they were captured by Count Cyn Cryver of the Marches.

And . . . to their astonishment . . . they found Shorr Kan, onetime master of the League and their old enemy, living there as an ally of the Counts. His "death" had been a clever fake.

The appalling nature of the threat became clear when they learned that the mysterious H'harn were actually agents of the aliens of the Magellanic Cloud, sent to stir up war amid the star kingdoms so that the aliens could invade the galaxy again, and this time successfully.

Gordon and Hull Burrel were doomed . . . but were freed by their old foe, Shorr Kan. That master-plotter had planned to supercede the Counts, his allies, but was now in dire danger of exposure. Cynically, Shorr Kan changed sides and freed them, on their promise to see that he was not hung for his past misdeeds.

In a stolen H'harn ship, an alien craft with far higher speed than any craft known in the galaxy, they sped away in escape through the Marches. Shorr Kan made a daring suggestion that they use the ship to reconnoiter the distant Magellanic Clouds, the home of the alien enemy, and Gordon and Hull Burrel agreed.

Speeding through the Marches, Gordon suddenly realized that their wild idea of going to the Magellanic Clouds was not their own, that they were being mentally controlled by one of the alien H'harn, hidden in the ship.

A struggle ensued . . . which ended only when they crashed the alien ship upon a wild world of the Marches, in such a fashion that the H'harn hidden in the aft of the ship was killed in the crash.

They were marooned on the world of the Qhallas, a savage, avian, non-human race, one of the many non-human peoples whom Narath of Teyn was gathering together for a great attack on Fomalhaut Kingdom. Ships manned by officers of Cyn Cryver came to transport the Qhalla warriors.

Shorr Kan, always the master of stratagems, deceived the officers of a small dispatch cruiser among the ships, into believing that Gordon and Hull Burrel had taken him away as a prisoner, and that he had turned the tables on them and made them *his* prisoners.

Then, on their way to join the gathering hordes of Narath, Shorr Kan contrived to gas the officers and men of the small cruiser into insensibility, and released Gordon and Hull Burrel.

They flashed a message to Fomalhaut, warning of the coming attack. Then, to escape the enemy ships which had detected the message, they boldly drove the little ship through the Broken Stars, a dangerous area where once two star-clusters had shattered in collision. And they made it, and arrived at Hathyr, capital of Fomalhaut Kingdom.

Shorr Kan, the onetime deadly enemy of the star kingdoms, would have been hung, but Gordon had promised him safety in exchange for his help, and Lianna unwillingly abided by that promise. But the impending attack of the Counts and of Narath and his wild hordes loomed over them, and in the background the mysterious menace of the H'harn was a deadly shadow.

Gordon dreamed.

He dreamed that he was back in Twentieth Century New York. He walked a street he knew well, and it was solid and real beneath his feet, and he felt a terrible sense of loss. He did not want to be here. He wanted to be in the far future universe of the great star-kingdoms, but he had slipped back somehow to this prosaic world of brownstone fronts and soot-stained office buildings, and he would never see anyone in that universe again.

"Lianna," he muttered, and then he cried it aloud in his agony. "*Lianna!*"

He awoke on that choking cry. He opened his eyes and looked in bewilderment around an unfamiliar room.

Through an open window he could see the vast orb of the setting sun, and the sun was Fomalhaut, not Sol. It threw a shaft of brilliant light, and by it he saw Lianna sitting silently in a chair, watching him.

He sat up, his hand brushing beads of perspiration from his forehead. The echoes of that agony were still in him, and for a moment he could not speak.

"You dreamed you were in that other time?" she said.

He nodded mutely.

"I thought so," she said. "I was watching your face." She added after a moment, "I've talked to Captain Burrel. I have some idea what you two went through. I'm not surprised you have bad dreams."

They were still, Gordon thought,

just a little awkward with each other. He was sure now that she loved him, but the trouble was that they didn't quite know each other well enough.

"When the H'harn touch you," he said, "it leaves an affect. A kind of mental scar. Twice I've dreamed that the one who held us there in the ship had actually carried us away to the Lesser Magellanic, and each time . . ."

Suddenly Gordon stopped. His mind, just aroused from sleep, had abruptly perceived for the first time something that he had never thought about before.

He jumped to his feet. "There's no sign of the fleet of the Counts coming out of the Marches?"

She shook her head gravely. It was not for the sovereign of Fomalhaut Kingdom to show fear, but he saw the strain in her eyes.

"Not yet," she said. "But Abro thinks that if they are going to attack us, they'll come soon. He agrees with Captain Burrel that they would alter their time-table as soon as they knew we had been warned, so as to strike us before help can get here."

Gordon said, "I think I've overlooked something that may be tremendously important. I've got to see Hull and Shorr Kan."

The softness left Lianna's eyes, and little stormy lightnings gathered in them.

"Shorr Kan," she said. "The man who nearly smashed the Empire and the star kingdoms, the man Fomalhaut fought against and *you* fought against . . . and yet you speak of him as though he were a friend!"

Gordon forced himself to speak patiently. "He is not a friend. He is an ambitious opportunist who thinks only of his own ends. But since his only opportunities now lie with us he threw in with us and saved our lives. He's going to try to use us, and we're going to try to use him, and time will tell who uses whom."

Lianna answered nothing, but he saw the set of her small chin. He said, "Is there some place here where we can make some galactographic computations?"

"The royal chartroom," she said. "It's linked directly with all the screens in the Defense Ministry."

"Will you take me there, Lianna? And will you have Hull and Shorr Kan brought there?"

The room was deep in the palace. It had screens on every wall, all of them dark now. An officer bowed low to Lianna when she entered with Gordon behind her.

Presently Hull Burrel and Shorr Kan came in, and the latter swept a deep bow to Lianna, wishing her Highness a very good evening. She looked at him with lambent eyes and an arctic smile.

"Let me say at once, Shorr Kan," she told him, "that if I had my way you'd have been executed five minutes after you landed. I live in hope that you will yet do something that will make that possible."

Shorr Kan grinned crookedly. He looked at Gordon, and said, "Women are realists, did you ever know that? If you hurt one or threaten to hurt one, she'll hate you forever. Only men can make a game of it."

"Will you for God's sake quit talking about games," said Gordon. "The

Counts are not playing a game, Narath of Teyn is not playing a game, and for sure the H'harn are not playing a game. Or if they are, it's a game that nearly crushed the whole galaxy back in Brenn Bir's day."

Shorr Kan shrugged. "I'll admit that, but the H'harn are not here yet . . . at least, not in any strength."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Gordon.

Shorr Kan's mockery dropped from him like a cast-off garment. "What do you mean?"

Gordon turned to Hull Burrel, who was frowning in puzzlement. "Hull, you piloted that H'harn ship when we left Aar, and the creature had put it into our minds to fly right out to the Lesser Magellanic."

"You don't have to remind me," said Hull irritably. "I remember well enough."

"All right. Now, can you remember whether or not, before we realized what was happening and began to fight the creature, you were flying at top acceleration?"

Hull frowned again. "I don't see . . ."

"Were you?"

"I don't know, damn it. Everything I did was put into my mind by the damned H'harn, and I . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, just wait a minute. I'm trying to think . . . I did seem to know that I must move a certain lever to the farthest notch. I did that, and from the way the ship responded, of course it had to be the main-thrust control." Hull's face cleared. He nodded, satisfied. "Yes, we were at top acceleration."

"And what would you guess that to be?"

Hull pondered a moment, then named a figure. The officer's mouth fell open, and Lianna said instantly,

"But that isn't possible!"

"I'm sorry, Highness . . . it is. The H'harn ships are faster than anything of ours." Hull shook his head regretfully. "I'd have given a lot to bring that ship back so we could study it. Because if we do ever have to fight them in space . . ."

Gordon turned to Lianna. "Can we see a detailed chart of the portion of the Marches that contains Aar?" In a belated remembrance of protocol, he added, "Highness?"

She spoke to the officer, who went to a bank of switches. Presently a great screen broke into light and life, with the bewildering complexity of star, planet, and drift markers showing in their various colors.

Gordon shrugged. "It makes no sense to me, but you can tell me, Hull. How far did we go from Aar to that point where we became aware of the H'harn presence, and changed course?"

"Oh, look, Gordon!" Hull said. "We've got enough troubles ahead of us without rehashing the ones we've left behind . . ."

"Answer him," said Shorr Kan, and it was the hard, cold voice of the one-time master of the Dark Worlds who spoke. His face was grim with foreboding, and Gordon thought again that he had never met anyone with the lightning awareness and comprehension of this man. Shorr Kan had already guessed what he was driving at.

Hull sweated over the chart like a sulky schoolboy, grumbling. Finally he named a distance. "It's only a rough figure . . ." he began, but Gordon cut him off.

"Using that as an average, and with that approximate velocity, how long would it have taken us to reach the Lesser Magellanic?"

Hull looked a bit startled. "So that's it. Why didn't you tell me?" He went over to the computer and began punching keys. Presently he came back with the answer.

"Between four and five months," he said. "That's Galactic Standard, based on your old Earth time."

Gordon and Shorr Kan looked at each other, and Lianna said with regal impatience,

"Could we perhaps be told the object of this discussion?"

"Four or five months to reach the Lesser Magellanic, and as much again to return," said Gordon slowly. "Eight to ten months before the H'harn fleet could reach this galaxy, utilizing the information they hoped to get from us . . . It's too long. We know the H'harn are behind the Counts in this move against Fomalhaut . . . they must have had a hand in timing it. Whatever their plans are for their own strike against the galaxy, I don't believe they would include that much of a delay. Especially . . ."

"Especially," said Shorr Kan bluntly, "when their logical moment to strike would be that exact moment when the galaxy is already engaged in a massive civil war." He looked around the circle of faces. "The H'harn have gone to a deal of troub-

le to foment that war. I doubt if they plan to throw away the fruits thereof."

There was a dead silence. When Gordon spoke again, he could hear his words dropping into it as stones drop into a cold still lake.

"I don't think the H'harn was taking us to the Lesser Magellanic at all. I think it was taking us to something a whole lot nearer. I think it was taking us to the H'harn fleet, lying close outside our galaxy."

The silence became deeper, as though even breath and heartbeat had been suspended. Then Hull said almost angrily,

"How could they be out there without the radar-sweeps of the Empire detecting them? Don't you realize how thoroughly we have monitored outer space ever since the time of Brenn Bir?"

"Yes," said Gordon, "but . . ."

Shorr Kan finished for him. "You've met the H'harn, you have some idea of their powers. And you know *they* must realize how thoroughly outer space is monitored. So the first pre-requisite of any large-scale invasion plan would be some means of evading radar search."

Hull Burrel thought about that, and he began to get a haunted look.

"Yes, I see that. But . . . but if they can evade radar, then the H'harn fleet could be out there off the galaxy right now, waiting . . ."

"Waiting for the Counts of the Marches to launch their attack," said Gordon.

"Good God," said Hull, and turned fiercely to the communications officer. "Call Throon. The Empire must

be warned."

The officer looked at Lianna, who said quietly, "Do as he asks."

"Your pardon, Highness," said Hull, and the stark look of horror on his face was apology enough. "But when I think of those . . ."

"Yes," said Lianna. "Remember, I have had experience of them myself." She waved Hull on, to where the communications officer was busy at one of the screens.

Presently it sprang to life, and an officer in Empire uniform spoke to Hull Burrel.

His name, rank, and reputation got him switched through to the palace in record time. The aquiline face of Zarth Arn, brother to the Emperor, looked out of the screen at them.

"Captain Burrel . . . Gordon . . . you're safe, then. Good! We were concerned . . ."

He broke off sharply, looking beyond Gordon, with eyes that had suddenly become points of fire. He was looking at Shorr Kan.

"What kind of a masquerade is this?"

"No masquerade," said Shorr Kan. "Happily for me, the reports of my death were sheer fraud." He met Zarth Arn's bitter glare with calm amusement. "The bad penny has turned up, only this time I'm on your side. Doesn't that please you?"

Zarth Arn appeared to be too stunned to speak for the moment. Gordon seized the opportunity to make a swift explanation.

"Our lives, and quite possibly the life of the whole galaxy, may be saved because Shorr Kan got us

free to bring a warning," he concluded. "Try and remember that, Highness."

Zarth Arn's face was perfectly white, his mouth set like the jaws of a vise. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, mastering himself. Then he looked at Lianna and said grimly,

"Highness, my advice is to hang that man at once."

"Ah, but you must hang Gordon first," said Shorr Kan smoothly. "He gave his word to protect me."

Hull stepped closer to the screen. "Highness, with all due respect, the hell with Shorr Kan and what happens to him! The H'harn . . . the Magellanians . . . may be at the throat of the galaxy!"

Zarth Arn's anger faded into something else. "You learned something in the Marches?"

Hull told him. Gordon watched Zarth Arn's face, saw the shadow that came there grow and deepen, and when Hull was through it seemed to Gordon that Zarth Arn had aged by ten years in those few moments.

"Theory," he said. "Only theory, and yet . . . The H'harn. Strange that we never had a name for them before . . ." He looked at Gordon. "This is your considered opinion?"

"Yes," said Gordon, and Shorr Kan spoke up unbidden.

"Mine too, And whatever else I may be, Zarth Arn, you know that I am neither a fool nor a coward. I believe that this strike against Fomalhaut is nothing less than the spearhead of an attack by the H'harn on the whole galaxy."

After a moment Zarth Arn said,

"This must go to my brother at once, for his decision. And since this is a chance we dare not take, I think there can be only one answer . . . The Empire fleet must go outside the galaxy and use every possible means, either to locate the H'harn fleet or make absolutely certain that it is not there. And I must be with it. For if we do find the H'harn . . ."

A coldness came into Gordon's spine. "You'll take the Disruptor?" Gordon remembered how he himself had once unloosed the awful power of that weapon. He remembered how space had quaked, and how stars had trembled in their orbits; how the whole fabric of the universe had seemed to twist and tear.

Zarth Arn said, "I must." He turned his sombre gaze to Lianna. "You know, of course, what this will mean to you."

She nodded calmly. "You will need every ship to sweep the Rim . . . including those you were sending here. I understand that. But surely the H'harn are the ultimate enemy. We'll fight our battle here alone." She even smiled. "It's no great matter . . . Captain Burrel assures me your ships could not get here in any case until after our fate has been thoroughly settled."

The screen blanked out. They were turning to leave, Lianna silent and preoccupied, when another screen came to life. In it was a burly-browed, thickset man with scarred hands, whom Gordon had met before. Abro, Defense Minister of Fomalhaut.

Abro wasted no time on protocol. "Highness, they've come out of the Marches. The Counts' fleet. They're

more than twice as strong as we expected . . . and they're coming full speed toward Fomalhaut!"

Chapter 2

Gordon felt a chilling dismay. The Counts of the Marches were throwing everything they had into this. And whether their gamble succeeded or not, in the dark background brooded the unguessable purposes and menace of the H'harn.

"They outnumber our fleet by three to two, in heavies," Abro was saying. "Commander Engl has planned to draw back, to cover Fomalhaut and give time for the Empire squadron to arrive."

Lianna said calmly, "The plan is good. But tell him not to count on any assistance from Throon. There will be no squadron."

Abro looked stunned. "But Highness, I myself was present when . . ."

"I will not discuss this on a communicator," said Lianna. "I am summoning the council. Get here as quickly as you can, Abro."

The screen went dark. Lianna turned, her face icy and composed. But her eyes were tormented, and Gordon wanted to put his arm around her shoulders. He did not. He doubted that she wanted any of that kind of encouragement in public.

She smiled a little wanly at him and said, "I must go, John Gordon. Later."

When she had gone, Hull Burrel strode to the screens and activated those which showed the Marches and that whole region of space, studying them feverishly.

Shorr Kan shrugged. "It doesn't look good, Gordon. Other star kingdoms will hold back when they hear that Throon isn't sending help. I'm worried."

"Nice of you to be concerned," said Gordon acidly. "About us, I mean."

Shorr Kan looked blank. "About you? Hell, I'm worried about myself! When I helped you and took that dispatch-cruiser away from Obd Doll, I committed myself. No explanations will ever convince Cyn Cryver that I didn't betray him. If he wins out and gets his hands on me . . ."

He drew his fingers expressively across his throat.

Gordon admitted that this did seem to be one box that Shorr Kan couldn't talk his way out of.

"Damn right," said Shorr Kan, and added thoughtfully, "The transports that will follow the Counts' fleet, with Narath's army, are the real danger. If the Fomalhaut commander . . . what's his name, Engl? . . . if Engl has sense enough to keep some of his heavies out of the battle, they can be used to hit the transports and cut them up as they try to land."

Gordon thought that made good sense, and said so. Shorr Kan grunted. "You try to propose it, Gordon. They'd never take any suggestion from me, even if it was a good one, and even though I know more strategy than any of them . . . as I once proved. They might take it from you."

"I doubt it," Gordon said. "But I'll try."

Hours later that night, when he

had sat for a long time in an ante-room of the Council chamber, the Council broke up. When Lianna came out at the head of the worried-looking knot of men, she saw him and came to him.

"There was no need for you to wait all this time," she said, but he thought she was glad that he had.

"I just wanted to know what's happening. That is, if you can tell me anything."

Abro frowned all across his hard face, but Lianna ignored him. "You brought the warning, and you have a right to know. The main fleet of the Empire has already left Throon, on its way out of the galaxy. With it goes every possible sensory device that might enable them to locate a H'harn fleet, including the Empire's finest telepaths."

Gordon did not think too hopefully of the chances of tracking the H'harn by telepathy. The H'harn were super-telepaths, able to shield their minds from any probing.

Lianna continued, "We've appealed for help from the smaller star-kingdoms, but they're too far from here, most of them, to come in time. We did get a reply from the Barons of Hercules . . . they're considering the matter."

Abro said brusquely, "Not for love of us. The great Barons are afraid the Counts of the Marches are getting too big. If they help us it will be for that reason only. And they're liable to be too late in any case."

Gordon said hesitantly, "A possibility occurred to me, but it seems out of place for me to suggest anything . . ."

Lianna did not seem happy about it, but she said steadily, "You risked your life to help us, you have a right to speak."

Gordon outlined Shorr Kan's strategic idea of holding back a part of the Fomalhaut fleet to hit the transports when they came.

To his surprise, Abro, who disliked him intensely, nodded thoughtful approval. "An excellent move . . . *if* we can manage to hold back any forces when we meet the Counts. I'll pass it on to Commander Engl."

When the others had gone, Lianna looked at Gordon with a faint smile.

"That was Shorr Kan's suggestion, wasn't it?"

He grinned wryly. "I thought you'd see that."

Hours later, he sat with her on a terrace high on the vast wall of the palace. Soft darkness was about them, and the heavy scent of flowers. But there was no quiet in the great city that lay below them in the night.

The city flared with lights. Armed bodies of men were moving with swift precision, to and fro. Missile batteries were being set up in the palace grounds. In the distance, where the spaceport lay, huge, tubby space-monitors were rising up growling into the darkness to take their places in the network of defenses around the throne-world of Fomalhaut.

Gordon looked up at the starry sky. Out there two great star-fleets were drawing fatefully together, and what happened when they met would probably seal the fate of this

whole star kingdom, and possibly many more beside. There had been no further word from Hercules, and if the Barons were moving to help, they were keeping it secret from everyone.

His mind reached farther out, beyond the edge of the galaxy, where by now the mighty Empire fleet would be searching for the H'harn force that might be hidden there. If they could find it, the Disruptor would unloose its cosmic power again and the threat from Magellan would disappear. But would they find it? Gordon felt a deep hopelessness, an almost prophetic certainty that they would not. The H'harn would not have returned without the strongest kind of armor, offensive and defensive.

They would not have forgotten how they faced the Disruptor once before.

It seemed that Lianna too was thinking of the H'harn. She had been silent a long time, but when she spoke it was about them.

"If Narath does invade, will he have any of those creatures with him?"

"I feel sure he will have."

"How can you be so sure?"

Heavily, Gordon explained. "The H'harn know that I once operated the Disruptor . . . that time when my mind was in Zarth Arn's body. They think I could tell them all about it. I can't, of course. I only operated the thing by mechanically following Jhal Arn's instructions. But they think I can, so they want me very badly."

He felt Lianna shiver, and he

knew that she was remembering the stunning mental assault of the H'harn who had nearly destroyed them on Teyn.

Gordon said somberly, "A great deal of everything that has happened in the galaxy stems back to that one freakish fact . . . that I happened to exchange minds with Zarth Arn, one of the three men who knew the secret of the Disruptor. That was why the League of Dark Worlds kidnapped me, and when that failed, got me . . . and you too . . . to Thallarna."

He went on, looking out into the clamorous city. "That one fatal thing was what led the League to attack the Empire . . . they knew by then that I wasn't really Zarth Arn, and thought I couldn't use the Disruptor. And now the deadliest enemies of all, the H'harn . . . they think I can tell them what they want to know about the only weapon that bars them from the galaxy. They won't stop at anything to get their hands on me."

He shook his head. "Through everything that's happened run the consequences of that one fatal coincidence. I've been a curse to this whole future time . . . as Shorr Kan said, the grain of sand in the machine."

"No," said Lianna. And again, "No." She took his hands. "And even if that were so, the fault is not yours, but Zarth Arn's." She was silent a moment. Then she said softly, "I'm glad you came here, John Gordon. Very glad."

After a while she drew away from him and said, "I must go down

and show myself to the defenders of my world. No, don't come with me . . . I have to do this alone."

After she had gone, Gordon sat for a long time looking past the moving lights and the uproar and clamorous confusions of the great city, toward the starry sky. A star kingdom might fall, Narath might realize his ambition and sit on the throne of Fomalhaut, and he, John Gordon, and Lianna might be sent to their deaths. And that would be a world tragedy as well as tragedy for them.

But if the H'harn succeeded, that would be tragedy for the whole galaxy, a catastrophe of cosmic dimensions. Thousands of years before they had come from the outer void, bent on conquest, and only the power of the Disruptor, unloosed by Brenn Bir, had driven them back. Out there in the Lesser Magellanic Cloud they had brooded all this time, never giving up their purpose, filtering back gradually in secret, plotting with the Counts, plotting with Narath, making ready some new tremendous stroke.

Doomsday had come again, after these thousands of years.

Chapter 3

The starships were fighting, out between the great suns of Austrinus and the Marches of Outer Space. Two fleets of heavy cruisers flashed side by side, and their missile broadsides seemed to light up that whole part of the galaxy with their bursting flares. On the outskirts of this mighty running battle, ghostly jackals on the heels of the tigers, the

phantom-cruisers hung, emerging from the invisibility of dark-out to loose their swift volleys and then retreating into invisibility again.

In the screen which Gordon watched, down in the Defense Room of the royal palace of Fomalhaut, the whole flashing struggle seemed almost incomprehensible, reduced as it was to a swarming of electronic fireflies, fluid, swirling, ever shifting. But after a time it became evident that the heavier column of the Counts' fleet was pressing hard against the ships of Fomalhaut, pressing them slowly to the west, and away from the star and planet they had tried to cover.

Abro's face was glistening with sweat and he muttered oaths and entreaties as he watched.

"Engl's a good man but he just doesn't have enough weight," he groaned. "Three to two . . . and their ratio is increasing. They're pushing our fleet away from Fomalhaut to make clear passage for *those!*"

And his thick finger stabbed toward the upper right-hand corner of the screen, where a new swarm of radar-dots had made its appearance and was crawling steadily down toward Fomalhaut.

The transports. And somewhere in them would be Narath of Teyn, his mad and beautiful face alight with the coming triumph, and with him would be the non-human hordes that he had gathered from scores of worlds.

It gave Gordon a feeling of agonized impotence to just have to wait here and watch the attack come toward them. But if Lianna felt that

too, and he had no doubt that she did, she permitted no trace of it to show in her white face.

"Still no word from the Barons?" she asked, and Korkhann answered, "No," and moved his wings with a sighing sound. "No word from them, and no sign of them, Highness. It seems we must meet this attack alone."

Abro said bitterly, "If Engl had only been able to detach enough heavy cruisers, we might have a chance to turn them back. But I don't think we can prevent a landing now."

Gordon thought that Shorr Kan had had the right strategy, and it was a pity that Engl either could not or would not follow it.

"That is out of our hands now," said Lianna, gesturing toward the tremendous battle on the screen. "We must be ready to defend our world. Come."

She talked like a queen and she walked like one as she led the way up through the palace. Along the way, Shorr Kan stepped in beside Gordon. He had not attempted to enter the Defense Room during this crisis, knowing that he would not be allowed. Hull Burrel glared at him and went on, But Gordon paused.

"It's clear enough in all your faces, Gordon," said Shorr Kan. "The Fomalhaut fleet is losing out there, isn't it?"

"It is," said Gordon, "and it's been pushed westward, and presently this place will be absolute hell when Narath's transports land."

Shorr Kan nodded gloomily. "No doubt of that. Too bad. I've been

cracking my brain trying to think of a way to get myself out of this trap . . ."

Gordon said ironically, "Why, I thought that since you . . . and probably we also . . . are at the end of the string, you'd prefer to die nobly, fighting to the last."

Shorr Kan shrugged and said, "I've about decided I might as well die like a hero. Because to tell you the truth, I can't see a single bloody way out of this one. So what have I got to lose?"

The hours whirled by, and Gordon felt caught in a web of activities of which he knew nothing. Officials and officers streamed in and out of the palace. Lianna had no time to give him. There was nowhere for him to go and nothing for him to do. He had become a totally useless supernumerary.

"But I think," said a familiar voice behind him, "that you are the key person here, John Gordon."

Gordon turned, and the wise yellow eyes of Korkhann regarded him with a troubled look.

"Lianna told me," said the winged one. "What you had said to her. Are you *sure* that there is no information about the Disruptor which the H'harn could extract from you?"

"Look," said Gordon, "I thought I made it clear. I know what the Disruptor force-cones look like, and how they're mounted on a ship, and how you balance six needles before you release the force . . . and that is *all* I know. Why do you bring this up now?"

"Because," said Korkhann bleakly, "much as I like you, it might be my duty to destroy you if you were

taken and the H'harn meant to probe you."

Gordon was silent. Then he said, "I can see that. But there is nothing."

And he thought, "*Damn the thing, will it follow me right to my death?*"

"Come with me," said Korkhann. "There is nothing for you to do here, and you might as well know how we stand."

Night had fallen, and the two came out of the palace to see the flying moons racing up the sky, casting their shifting glow. The palace grounds, like the city beyond, were a hive of activity. Men and vehicles raced back and forth along the great avenue where the ancient kings of Fomalhaut loomed in stone. Missile batteries loomed, evil hulking shapes in the gracious gardens.

Shorr Kan came up to them and Gordon asked, "Where's Hull?"

"On the telestereo talking to Throon. You certainly put the fear of God into him with your idea of a H'harn fleet posed to pounce."

Gordon said, "The fear of God is in us all when we think of that."

"Not in this man," said Korkhann, who had been looking curiously at the newcomer. "Not really. He fears neither god nor man nor devil."

He added, "Your pardon for probing you just a little."

Shorr Kan waved that aside. He said to Gordon, "With my considerable military abilities . . . you'll admit that I did damn near conquer the galaxy . . . I thought my services would be welcomed in this fight. But Abro wouldn't listen to

me. So I'll stick with you . . . you can rely on me to stand back of you in the pinch."

"I would much rather," Gordon said carefully, "that you stood anywhere else than in back of me. I'm allergic to knives."

Shorr Kan grinned. "You will have your little joke. You're the one I rely on to keep my neck out of a noose, so don't you think . . ."

Whrrosh-boom! The rushing booming sound cut sharply across the words, blotting out Shorr Kan's voice. It multiplied with incredible swiftness, repeating itself, and things visible only as streaks of light raced skyward from three different points beyond the city.

"Missiles," said Shorr Kan coolly, as soon as he could make himself heard. "If the invaders are within range, things are going to get warm in a hurry."

Now the missiles began to go out from other points, in rapid and continuous volleys. The streaks of light criss-crossed all up the heavens. Above all the turmoil, three moons glided across the sky, calm and stately and unconcerned.

From the whole of the city came a leaping cry. Korkhann pointed with his winged arm. High up but sweeping downward in a long slanting curve, a glowing object came.

It was, or had been, a starship. Now all its vast bulk was breaking from red-hot glow into actual flame. It shot down toward Hathyr like a plunging comet.

With a tremendous crash, the flaming star-wreck hit the planet far beyond the city. There was a

shock-wave and a blast of searing wind that knocked them staggering.

"That was close enough," said Shorr Kan. "I wish the boys would be a little more careful where they drop their birds."

"There," said Gordon, pointing. "How's that?"

Much more distant, a second comet that had been a starship came flaming down out of the moonlit heavens. The impact was barely noticeable. Shorr Kann nodded.

"Much better. And hope they keep them that way. A direct hit in the city . . ."

He did not finish. There was no need to. Gordon had been thinking the same thing.

Now all at once there was a new sound, a crying of voices from the city. Gordon said in alarm,

"What's that?"

"Listen," said Korkhann. "They are cheering."

The sound came nearer. Presently they could see a great crowd surging toward them down the great avenue of kings, where the carven giants of Fomalhaut's past towered on their columns, time-stained and proud . . . they seemed almost to have sprung to life, as the stroboscopic flashing of the missiles gave them a semblance of movement. In the midst of the crowd, in an open hovercar, Lianna moved slowly toward the palace. The people ran alongside, cheering her, and she raised her hand and nodded to them as calmly as though this were any ordinary peaceful procession.

In the past Gordon had resented her royal status and the protocol



that surrounded her. Now he saw the other side of that, and his heart swelled with pride as she came up the steps, very erect and graceful, and turned and waved to the shouting crowd. Live or die, she seemed to be saying, you and I will go together, for we are Fomalhaut.

She left them, motioning to Gordon to follow her inside.

The missile salvos had now become unceasing, and the whole palace trembled with their vibrations. Gordon and Korkhann followed Lianna down to the Defense Room. This time Shorr Kan trailed coolly at their heels, and Gordon noted that the guards outside the room did not think to challenge him. In this hour when Fomalhaut Kingdom rocked on the brink of disaster, things were slipping a little.

Abro came through the excited, sweating officers who were clustered by the screens. He spoke quickly to Lianna.

"No doubt about it now, Highness. The Barons' fleet is headed in this direction at full speed."

Gordon felt a wave of sudden hope. The mighty Hercules Barons were a match for almost any star kingdom.

Abro must have seen a similar hope in Lianna's face, for he said grimly, "I regret to add, Highness, that their course is not toward Hathyr, but toward Austrinus Shoals, where what is left of Engl's fleet is still fighting the Counts."

With a sinking heart, Gordon realized that from a detached point of view that was the wise, indeed the only, course. Veterans of many a campaign, the Barons were not

going to rush to the rescue here while a hostile fleet remained in space, ready to pounce and catch them flat.

"I also have reports," Abro continued, "of at least twenty-four different landings of Narath's transports in this quadrant of Hathyr. We destroyed many of the ships but we couldn't handle them all, and now they're coming in increasing numbers, while our missile installations are being put out of action."

"We will defend the city," Lianna said calmly. "We can hold them until the Barons are free to help us."

Gordon hoped she was right. He thought that if she was not, he had come a long way to die.

Looking into her eyes, he thought that if it came to that, it was worth it.

Chapter 4

A Walpurgis Night of horror held Hathyr city, as one after another of its lines of defense went down.

For a night and a day and part of another night, the starship transports had continued to land on Hathyr. A great many of them landed as fusing, flaming wrecks. But as the advance forces spread and knocked out more and more of the missile batteries, increasing numbers came down intact, and out of these poured the seemingly endless hordes.

From a hundred wild worlds in the Marches of Outer Space they had come, the not-men who followed with fanatical devotion the crimson banner of Narath Teyn. The Gerrns from Teyn itself, like giant

four-footed cats, with their centaur-like upper bodies and human arms, their narrow cat-heats and slanted, glowing cat-eyes, springing with swift joy toward the battle. The Qhallas, a rushing winged tide of alienness, their raucous battle-cries rising in squarking fury. The Torr from far across the Marches, furred, towering, four-armed. The Andaxi, like great dogs trying to be men, teeth and eyes gleaming as they came toward the kill. And others, innumerable and indescribable others, hopping, gliding, vaulting, a phantasmagoria of nightmare shapes.

They had good modern weapons, supplied to them by the Counts. Atom-pellets exploded like a bursting wave of white fire ahead of them, burning through the streets of Hathyr City. The guns of the men of Fomalhaut answered them. Unhuman shapes were scythed down, cindered, swept away, heaped up in tattered mounds to choke the crossings. But there were always more of them, and they always pressed forward. In the battle-fury many of them threw away their weapons and reverted to the simple, satisfying use of claw and fang. They came from all sides, a ring, a noose closing slowly around the heart of the city. And in the end there were just too many of them.

Fires burned red in scores of places across the city, as though a funeral pyre for the kingdom of Fomalhaut had been lit here and was majestically, slowly growing. The stately moons looked down upon a city illuminated by the flames of its own progressive destruction, and the pressing hordes became a

macabre silhouette against the fire-glow.

Gordon stood with Lianna and Korkhann and Shorr Kan on the great balcony high in the palace that looked straight down the avenue of the stone kings. The fires and the fury and the clamor of battle were creeping closer to the palace area. Against the fires they could see the hover-cars of the Fomalhaut soldiery swooping down in desperate continuous attacks.

"Too many of them," murmured Lianna. "Narath has worked for years to win the loyalty of the non-humans, and now we see the fruit of his labors."

"How *can* a human man like Narath influence them so greatly?" Gordon gestured toward the smoke-filled, tortured streets. "They're dying, God only knows how many thousands of them, but they never even pause. They seem to be glad to die for Narath. Why?"

"I can answer that," said Korkhann. "Narath is human in body only. I have probed the edges of his mind in the past, and I tell you that he is an atavism . . . a mental throwback to a time before the evolutionary paths diverged. Before, in short, there was any difference between human and non-human. That is why the beastlings love and understand him . . . because he thinks and feels as one of them, as no true human ever can."

Gordon stared out at the panorama of destruction. "Atavism," he said. "Then we can blame all this on one infinitesimal gene."

"Do me one small favor?" said Shorr Kan sourly. "Please. Spare the

philosophical lectures.”

An officer, young and a little wild-eyed, hurried onto the balcony and made a hasty bow to Lianna.

“Highness, Minister Abro begs you to leave by hover-car before the fighting comes any closer.”

Lianna shook her head. “Thank the Minister, and inform him that I will not leave here while men are fighting and dying for me.”

Gordon started to expostulate. Then he saw the set of her face and knew that it would be useless. He held his tongue.

Shorr Kan had no such inhibitions. “When the fighting ends you may not be able to leave, Highness. Best to go now.”

Lianna said coldly, “That is the advice I would expect from the leader who ran away from Thallarna when the battle went against him.”

Shorr Kan shrugged. “I’m still alive.” He added, in a rueful tone, “Though that may not be for long.” He had a weapon belted to his waist, as Gordon had, and he glanced down at it distastefully and said, “The closer I get to this business of dying heroically, the more dismal a prospect it seems.

Lianna ignored him, her brilliant eyes searching across the smoke and flame and uproar of the moonlit city. Gordon thought he knew how she must feel, looking down that mighty avenue of the statues of her ancestors, the embodied history of this star kingdom, and seeing her people struggle against the tide of unhuman invasion.

She turned abruptly to Korkhann. “Tell Abro to send a message to the

Barons. Say that if they do not send warships to our assistance at once, Fomalhaut may be lost.”

The winged one bowed and left quickly. As Lianna turned back toward the city, a big hover-car with the insigne of Fomalhaut swept down through the drifting smoke and landed smoothly on the great balcony. The hatch doors opened.

“No!” exclaimed Lianna angrily. “I will *not* leave here! Send them away”

“Look out!” yelled Shorr Kan. “Those aren’t your men!”

Gordon saw that the men who came pouring out of the open doors wore, not the insigne of Fomalhaut, but the rearing symbol of the Mace. They ran across the wide balcony toward the little group.

They had not drawn their weapons, apparently counting on overwhelming the three by sheer physical numbers. But Shorr Kan, dropping into a sort of gunman’s crouch, drew and fired, cutting down the front rank of the attackers with exploding atom-pellets.

Gordon pulled out his own weapon cursing the unfamiliarity of the thing as he tried to thumb off its safety. It went off in his hand. He saw that he had fired high and he triggered again more carefully and saw the pellets explode crashingly among the men of the Mace.

Those who survived kept right on coming. They were still not shooting, and it dawned on Gordon that Lianna was their target and that they wanted to take no chance of killing her.

They came fast, reinforced by

more men from the hover-car. They spread out in a ragged half-moon that closed rapidly into a circle, and they were so close now that neither Gordon nor Shorr Kan dared to shoot because the back-flare of the pellets would engulf them and Lianna also. Gordon shortened his grip on the weapon and used it as a club, flinging himself at the man and laying about him furiously, shouting all the while to Lianna to run back into the palace. He heard Shorr Kan roaring, "Guards! Guards!" He was smothered under a press of bodies, roughed and battered, wrestled to the ground, and Gordon found himself going the same way; there were too many hands, too many boots and bony knees. He could not see whether or not Lianna had made her escape, but he did see that from the great hall inside the balcony a file of Lianna's guards were running desperately toward them.

The men who remained in the hover-car had no compunction at all about shooting the guards, since that did not endanger Lianna. They shot them with stunning efficiency, using heavy-calibre mounted guns that swivelled and poured crashing fire, and crumbled the ranks of men to nothing in spouting dust and powdering glass. It got quiet again, and then the whole scene spun slowly around Gordon and flowed away into darkness, accompanied by the ringing of his skull as something struck it, hammer-like.

He woke, lying on the balcony. His head no longer rang, but simply ached. Nearby he saw Shorr Kan standing. His face was bloody. The

men wearing the Mace stood around them, grim and tense.

"Lianna!" Muttered Gordon, and tried to sit up.

Shorr Kan jerked his head toward the inner hall, beyond the tumbled bodies of the guards. "There. Not hurt. But the palace is theirs. That car was only the first of a fleet tricked out with the sign of Fomalhaut . . ."

One of the men smacked Shorr Kan across the face, bringing more blood. Shorr Kan forebore to wince, but he stopped talking. Gordon became aware now, as his senses cleared, of a vague, inarticulate roaring, like the beating of the sea upon rocky cliffs. Then, as he was jerked to his feet, he looked out over the low rail of the balcony and saw the source of the sound.

The city had fallen. Fires still rose redly from many points, but there was no more firing, no more sounds of battle. The whole area around the palace seemed filled with the not-human hordes . . . the Gerns, the Qhallas, the Andaxi, all the grotesque, nightmarish mobs, capering in triumph, smashing the gardens, howling, roaring, gesticulating.

But the loudest roar came from a solid, tremendous mass of creatures making its way down the avenue of the kings. They voiced their frantic joy in hissing, purring, squarking voices. And they looked ever at one human man who rode ahead of them upon the black-furred back of a giant Gern.

Narath of Teyn, his handsome head held high as he rode to claim his kingship.

The big hall, the one that opened onto the balcony, was quiet. Gordon stood, with guards behind him, and Shorr Kan stood beside him. The men who wore the Mace stood also, their weapons prominently displayed.

But Narath sat, as befitted a king.

His head was high, and there was a dreaming smile upon his face. His brown hair fell to his shoulders, and he wore a glittering, close-fitting garment. He looked royal, and he looked mad.

Lianna sat a little way from him. There was no expression at all in her face, except when she looked at Gordon.

"Soon," murmured Narath. "We will not need to wait much longer, cousin, for the Count Cyn Cryver and the others."

And Gordon knew who "the others" would be, and the skin crawled between his shoulders.

From the open doors that gave onto the great balcony, threads of acrid smoke drifted into the room. There came also from outside a distant, confused sound of voices, but not now the roaring clamor of before. The bodies had been cleared away, both Lianna's men and Narath's. And now Gordon heard the soft hum of a hover-car descending.

Then Cyn Cryver came.

His bold, arrogant face blazed with triumph as he looked at them. He looked longest at Shorr Kan.

"It's well," he said. "I was afraid they might have killed you. And we don't want you to die too soon."

Shorr Kan made a derisive sound.

"Do you have to be so damned theatrical? That was the most boring thing about my stay with you, listening all the time to your meaty, crashing statements."

Cyn Cryver's smile became deadly, but he did not answer. Narath had risen to his feet and was speaking in his gentle voice.

"You are welcome, my brother from the Marches. Very welcome. And where are our friends?"

"They are here," said Cyn Cryver. He looked at Lianna and his smile deepened. "You're looking well, Highness. Remarkably well, considering that your world is in our fist and your fleet is being hammered to pieces in the Shoals."

He did not, Gordon thought, seem to know yet about the Hercules Barons. Not that whether the Barons came or not was going to make any difference to them now . . .

Three shapes, robed and cowled, glided silently into the hall. The H'harn had come.

It was curious, the different reactions to them, thought Gordon. Shorr Kan looked at them with frank, open disgust. Lianna paled a little, and Gordon was pretty sure he himself did the same. Even Cyn Cryver seemed a little ill at ease.

But Narath bent upon the cowled figures the same gentle, dreamy smile, and said, "You come in good time, brothers. I am to be crowned."

It was only then that Gordon realized the depth of alienage in Narath's mind. He, whom the not-men worshipped, who greeted the Magellanians as brothers, was less human than anyone here.

The foremost of the H'harn spoke,

in a sibilant whisper. "Not yet, Narath. There is something first to be done, and it is most urgent."

The H'harn came, with its curiously limber, bobbing gait, to stand before Gordon. And it looked up at him from the darkness of its cowl.

"This man," it said, "possesses knowledge that we must have, at once."

"But my people are waiting," said Narath. "They must hear my cousin Lianna cede the throne to me, so that they can acclaim me king." He smiled gently at Lianna. "You will do that, cousin, of course. All must be right and fitting."

Cyn Cryver shook his head. "No, Narath, that must wait a little. V'ril is right. The H'harn have helped us greatly, isn't that so? Now we must help them."

A bit sulkily, Narath sat down again. The H'harn called V'ril continued to look up at Gordon, but Gordon could see nothing of the face that was hidden by the cowl and he did not much want to see it. All he wanted was to be able to run away. With an effort he restrained himself from an hysterical attempt to do so.

"A while ago," said the H'harn, "I went secretly to Throon in the ship of Jon Ollen, one of our allies. While I was there I probed the mind of one named Korkhann."

That was no news to Gordon, but it made him think of Korkhann for the first time since recovering consciousness. What had become of him? Dead? Probably . . . and probably Hull Burrel also, for they were not here.

"I learned," said the whispering

voice, "that this man called John Gordon had in the past undergone a transfer of minds with Zarth Arn, so that for a time he dwelt in Zarth Arn's body. And during that time he operated the Disruptor."

Here it came again, Gordon thought. The damned Disruptor and the secret of it that everyone thought he knew . . . the curse that had dogged him all through both his visits to this future time, and was now about to drag him to his death.

Or worse. The H'harn moved closer to him, a swaying of gray cloth.

"I will now," it whispered, "Probe this man for the secret of the Disruptor. Be silent, everyone."

Gordon, in the clutch of ultimate terror, still tried to turn his head and give Lianna a look of reassurance, to tell her that he could not give away a secret that he didn't know. He never finished the movement.

A bolt of mental force hit him. Compared to the mental attack of the H'harn in the ship, this was a thunderbolt compared to an electric spark. Gordon passed into the darkness between heartbeats.

When he recovered, he was lying on the floor. Looking up dazedly, he saw Lianna's horrified face. Narath, sitting near her, looked merely bored and impatient. But Cyn Cryver and the H'harn called V'ril seemed to be arguing.

The voice of the H'harn had risen to a high, whistling pitch. Never before in his brief contacts with the creatures had Gordon seen one display so intense a passion.

"But," Cyn Cryver was saying, "it

may be that he just doesn't know any more."

"He *must* know more!" raged V'ril. "He must, or he could not have operated the mightiest weapon in the universe. And I will tell you what I did learn from his mind. The main Empire fleet is outside the galaxy, searching for our fleet. Prince Zarth Arn is with them . . . and the Disruptor."

That seemed to stagger Cyn Cryver a little. Presently he said, "But you told me they could never locate your fleet . . ."

"They cannot," said the H'harn. "But now they are forewarned, and when we attack Throon and the key worlds, then they will know where we are! And they may use the Disruptor, even though in doing so they sacrifice some of their people. So now it is more important than ever that we know the range and working principles of that weapon before we move!"

Narath stood up and said loudly, "I have had enough of this. Settle this matter later. My people are waiting there to acclaim me king . . ."

V'ril's cowed head turned toward Narath. Narath went gray, and suddenly sat down again and was silent.

"An expert telepath could have hidden the key knowledge deep in this man's mind," said V'ril, looking toward Gordon. "So deeply, so subtly, that he would not be consciously aware of it even though he used the knowledge . . . so deeply that even a powerful mental probe would not reveal it. But there is one way to search it out."

Gordon, not understanding, saw that for the first time, when they

heard this, the other two H'harn moved and wavered and tittered a little, as though in sudden mirth. Somehow that mirthfulness chilled him with a horror deeper than anything before.

"The Fusion," whispered V'ril. "The merging of two minds, so that nothing in one mind can be hidden from the other when they are twinned. No mental trickery can hide a secret from that."

The creature hissed a command to the guards. "Force him to his knees."

The men grabbed Gordon's arms from behind and forced him down. From their quick breathing, Gordon thought that even though they wore the Mace and were allies of the H'harn, they did not like this.

The robed creature now stood with his head a little higher than Gordon's head.

Then V'ril began to unwind the robes, and they came away, and also there came away the cowl which was part of them, and the H'harn stood naked.

Glistening, moist-looking, like a small skinned man with gray-green flesh, and a boneless fluidity in the arms and legs. The damp gristly flesh seemed to writhe and flow of its own accord. And the face . . .

Gordon wanted to shut his eyes but could not. The head was small and spheroid and the face was blank and most horrible in its blankness. A tiny mouth, nauseatingly pretty; two holes for breathing, and big round eyes that were filmed over, dull, obscurely opalescent.

The blank face came toward Gordon, bending slightly. It was as

though the H'harn bent to kiss him, and that completed the horrifying abnormality of the moment. Gordon struggled, strained, but was held firmly. He heard Lianna cry out.

The eyes were against his, the cool forehead touched his forehead.

Then the eyes that had become his whole visible universe seemed to change, the dull opalescence in them deepened into a glow. Brighter and brighter became the glow until it was as though he looked into a fiery nebula.

Gordon felt himself falling through.

Chapter 6

He was John Gordon of old Earth.

He was also V'ril of Amamabarane.

He remembered all the details of Gordon's life, on Earth and then in this future universe.

But he also remembered every detail of his life as one of the people of Amamabarane, the great hive of stars which the humans called the Lesser Magellanic.

Utterly bewildering, this double set of memories . . . to the part of him that was Gordon. But the part of him that was V'ril was accustomed to it.

The memories came easily. Memories of his native world deep in the star-cloud that was Amamabarane. The cherished planet where the mighty and all-conquering H'harn had first evolved.

But they had not always been mighty. There had been a time when the H'harn had been only one of many species, and by no means the

cleverest or the strongest. There were other races there which had used them contemptuously, had called them stupid, and weak.

But where are those races now? Gone, dead, wiped out by the little H'harn . . . a great and satisfactory vengeance.

For the H'harn had found that deep in their minds they had the seed of a power. A power of telepathic force, of mental compulsion. They had not understood it and they had used it at first only in petty ways, to influence others stronger and quicker than themselves, to protect themselves from animals.

But in time, they realized what that power might achieve if they could strengthen it. There began a secret, earnest attempt to bring about that goal. Those of them who had more of the power were allowed to mate only with those of a similar grade. Time went by, and their power grew and grew, but they kept it secret from others.

Until they were sure.

And then a great day came. A day when the despised H'harn revealed their mastery of mental compulsion, using it on those they hated. Breaking them, mastering them, driving them mad, hurting and hurting them until they died.

The triumph of the H'harn, the golden legend of our race! How good it was to see them writhe and scream and die!

Not all of them. Some were spared, to be the servants of the H'harn. And among these were the clever ones who had built cities and starships.

They were used now, these clever ones and their starships, to take the

H'harn to other worlds. And so began the glorious saga of H'harn conquest, that did not stop until all the desirable worlds of Amamabarane were under the H'harn yoke.

But there were still other worlds, far off, in the great galaxy which was like a continent of stars, to which Amamabarane was merely an off-shore island. There were countless worlds there, where countless peoples lived who did not serve the H'harn. This was intolerable to contemplate, so vast had the H'harn appetite for power become. So the preparations of conquest were begun.

The subject peoples of Amamabarane were forced by the H'harn to labor until they died, preparing an armada of ships. And after a time, that armada departed, to bring many H'harn to the galaxy which was to be taught to accept its masters.

But then . . . the one great catastrophe, the dark and ugly scar that marred the glory of H'harn history. The peoples of that galaxy, with incredible impudence, resisted the H'harn. And with a weapon that disrupted the space-time continuum itself, they annihilated the H'harn armada.

That had been long ago, but no H'harn had ever forgotten it. The wickedness of men who dared resist the H'harn, who dared even to *destroy* them, must be punished. The black scar of defeat must be healed with their blood.

Through thousands on thousands of years, the subjects and servants of the H'harn, in all of Amamabarane, were driven to toil on this project. Their cleverest minds were set to devise new weapons, new ships of a

swiftness hitherto unknown. But the project lagged. The servant peoples often preferred to die rather than to serve the H'harn longer. They did not realize that they were mere tools which the masters used, and that it mattered not at all if the tool were broken.

But when thousands of years had passed, the time came when the H'harn were ready again. Its mighty fleet of invasion had weapons and speeds and devices hitherto undreamed-of, including a shield of cunning force that hid the ships, and which no detection device could penetrate. Secret, unseen, the fleet approached the galaxy.

And secretly, unsuspected, it waited now outside the galaxy, beyond the end of what the humans called the Vela Spur. For the moment had not yet come.

Agents had gone ahead from Amamabarane, to foment war and trouble among the humans. War would bring the main forces of the Empire and the star kings far from their capitals.

And when that happened, the H'harn would strike. Secret, unseen, unsuspected, their ships would land upon the greatest worlds of the star kings, upon Throon where the Disruptor was still kept against a day of adversity. Taken unaware and more or less defenseless, the people of Throon would fall an easy prey, and the Disruptor would be in the hands of the H'harn. The Emperor could hardly use it in his own defense, since it would mean the destruction of Throon itself, with its sister planets and its sun.

Only now the picture had chang-

ed. This contemptible human had given a warning, and the Disruptor was in space, once more a threat of destruction to the H'harn. It was vital to know the range and nature of the Disruptor's force, so that means could be found to neutralize or combat it.

But . . .

But . . .

Astonishment and anger and a sudden ripping apart of the mental fusion, and John Gordon, again quite alone within himself, looked dazedly into the raging eyes of the H'harn.

"It is true," hissed V'ril. "This man used the Disruptor without knowing anything of its nature. It is incredible . . ."

Into Gordon's whirling mind came a remembrance of a time when Shorr Kan had said contemptuously that the H'harn, for all their powers, were stupid.

He knew now, from sharing the mind of a H'harn, that it was true. The race that sought to conquer galaxies was a low, stupid, detestable species who in the ordinary course of events would never have been anything. But the possession of one key power, the telepathic power of mental probing, mental compulsion, had given these creatures dominance over races far superior to them.

Gordon had always feared the H'harn. He began now to hate them with a bitter hatred. They were leech-like, unclean, intolerable. He knew now why long ago Brenn Bir of the empire had taken the chance of riving space itself to destroy these creatures . . .

As his mind cleared, Gordon found

that the guards had pulled him back to his feet. V'ril had put on the robe and cowl again and Gordon thanked God for that. He did not want to see that ghastly body. He felt defiled to the soul by the sharing of that creature's mind and memories.

V'ril raised a shrouded arm and pointed at Gordon. "This man must die at once," he said. "Because of the Fusion, he now knows where our fleet is hiding. Kill him!"

Cyn Cryver nodded and the guards stepped back and raised their weapons. Still hardly able to take it in, Gordon flashed a last look at Lianna.

Lianna had sprung to her feet. "No!" she exclaimed. She swung around to Narath. "If this man is killed, I will not cede the throne to you, Narath!"

Cyn Cryver laughed harshly. "A lot of difference that will make! Narath will be king in any case."

But the dreaming smile left Narath's face and it became troubled. He raised a hand to the guards who were aiming their weapons at Gordon and said, "Wait!" He spoke then to Cyn Cryver. "My cousin *must* formally cede the throne to me, before the people, or all will not be lawful. I must have this submission from her, I have waited for it so long. I must!"

His handsome face was quivering now, and storm-clouds gathered in his eyes. Cyn Cryver looked at him narrowly, and then said to V'ril, "The ceremony is important to our brother Narath. We had better let the man live."

Looking at Cyn Cryver's flinty expression as he stared fixedly at V'ril, Gordon was absolutely sure that he

was adding, in a thought, "*Until the ceremony is over. Then we'll kill him at once.*"

For V'ril made no objection. He whispered, "Very well. But there are messages that must be sent to our brothers in the fleet."

V'ril looked toward the other two H'harn. Gordon thought he could guess what the message would be. "*Warn the fleet that the Empire armada is searching for them! Tell them to strike now at Throon!*" The two H'harn bobbed and glided away out of the hall.

Narath took Lianna by the hand, in as courtly a fashion as though he were leading her to a ball.

"Come, cousin. My people are waiting."

Lianna's face was stony, expressionless. She walked with Narath, out onto the great balcony.

The others followed, the four guards keeping their weapons trained upon Gordon and Shorr Kan. But when they were out on the balcony, Narath turned and spoke with sharp annoyance.

"Not beside me, Cyn Cryver . . . this is *my* triumph. Stay back."

A crooked smile crossed Cyn Cryver's face but he nodded. He and V'ril and the guardsmen remained at the back of the balcony.

Shorr Kan made as though to join them but Cyn Cryver shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "Keep your distance, so that we can shoot you down without danger to ourselves."

Shorr Kan shrugged and fell back. And now Narath had led Lianna to the front of the balcony, and the white sun of Fomalhaut blazed down

on his glittering figure. He raised his hand.

A tremendous roar went up. From where he stood at the back of the balcony, Gordon could see that the palace grounds were crammed with the grotesque hordes of the not-men, a heaving sea of them that lapped against the walls and swirled up onto the columns of the stone kings, where leather-winged creatures perched and screamed. Mingled with them were a lesser number of humans who wore the uniforms of the Counts of the Marches.

He wondered what Lianna was thinking as she looked out on that roaring crowd. None of her own people were there, the people of Hathy City were dispersed, hiding or slain. And the human and unhuman conquerors shouted and cheered, and the great stone kings of old Fomalhaut looked down with calm faces upon the end of all that they had wrought.

Again Narath raised his hand, and the roaring acclaim swelled up in a greater cry than before. He had reached the summit of his life, and the not-men whose fanatical devotion he had won were hailing him, and his whole bearing expressed his joy and his pride, and his great love for these his people.

The wave of sound died down, and Narath said, "Now, cousin."

Lianna, her figure rigidly erect, spoke in a clear, cold voice that Gordon could hardly recognize.

"I, Lianna, Princess Regent of Fomalhaut, do now cede and recognize and affirm that sovereignty to have passed from me to . . ."

The thin whistling of small missiles interrupted her, and then Gordon saw Cyn Cryver and his guardsmen reel and fall as tiny atomic pellets drove into their bodies and flared there, blackening flesh and garments.

Gordon swung around. In the otherwise empty hall behind the balcony stood Hull Burrel and Korkhann, and they held the weapons that had just been fired, cutting down all but V'ril. The H'harn, warned by some telepathic flash at the last moment, had darted aside in time to escape.

Narath turned around angrily. "What?"

Korkhann fired, his yellow bird-eyes clear and merciless. The tiny missile went deep into Narath's side.

Narath swayed, but did not fall. It seemed that he refused to fall, refused to admit death and defeat. He turned with a strangely regal movement to face the roaring crowd below . . . a crowd unable to see from below what was happening. He tried to raise his arm, and then he fell forward across the balcony rail and hung there, a silence began to spread across the gardens and down the avenue of kings.

Hull Burrel cried abruptly, "No!"

Korkhann, his eyes glazed and strange, was swinging his weapon around to point at the Antarian.

Gordon saw V'ril, and knew instantly what was happening. He rushed forward over the smoking bodies of the Mace-men. He grasped the robed H'harn in his arms . . . a strangely light burden, repulsively aquiver . . . and he ran forward and hurled it out over the rail,

swiftly, before it could think to stop him. In the brief seconds of its fall, like a gray leaf fluttering down, he felt one last dreadful stab of mental force, not directed this time, merely projected as an instinctive reflex. It was cut short with shocking finality, and Gordon smiled. The H'harn, it seemed, feared most dreadfully to die.

Korkhann lowered his weapon, unfired.

Down below the silence had become complete, as though every throat held breath, and the crowd stared up at the glittering figure of Narath doubled over the low rail, his bright hair streaming, his arms outspread as though he reached down to them in an appeal for help.

In that frozen moment, Shorr Kan acted with a lightning swiftness that Gordon was never to forget.

Shorr Kan rushed to the front of the balcony. He threw his arms skyward in a wild gesture, and he shouted to that stunned crowd, in the lingua-franca of the not-men of the Marches.

"The Counts have killed Narath! *Vengeance!*"

Gern and Andaxi and Qhalla, all the nameless others, the unhuman faces, looked up toward him. And then it sank in.

Narath was dead. Narath of Teyn, he whom they worshipped, whose banner they had followed, had been slain. A heart-stopping cry of rage and sorrow went up from them, a cry commingled of all those thousands of unhuman throats, growling, hissing, screeching.

"Vengeance for Narath! Kill the Counts!"

The crowd exploded into violence. The not-men fell, with fang and talon, beak and claw, upon the men of the Marches who a moment before had stood beside them as allies.

The cry of sorrow and of vengeance went out from the palace, spreading until it seemed that from the whole city of Hathyr there came a great unhuman baying.

Hull Burrel had run forward, while Korkhann still stood a little dazed by the H'harn assault that had almost made him kill his comrade.

"This way, quick!" cried Hull to Gordon. "They'll be up here in minutes. Korkhann knew all the secret passages in the palace and that's how we saved ourselves when the palace fell. Hurry!"

Gordon took Lianna by the hand and ran with her. Shorr Kan delayed long enough to pick up weapons from the dead guards, one of which he tossed to Gordon. He was chuckling.

"That set them going, didn't it? They're not too bright, those non-humans . . . begging your pardon, Korkhann . . . and they reacted beautifully."

A seemingly solid section of the wall at the side of the great hall had been swung open, revealing a passageway. They crowded through and Shorr Kan slammed shut the panel behind them.

Lianna was sobbing, but Gordon paid no attention to her. He cried to Korkhann,

"Can you take us to a communications center? I must send a message . . ."

Korkhann, unused to violence, seemed still a little dazed. "A message to the . . . the Barons . . .?"

"A message to Zarth Arn and the Empire fleet!" snapped Gordon. "I know where the H'harn armada is, and I must get that word through!"

Chapter 7

Korkhann led them down by narrow, twisting ways buried within the walls of the palace, illuminated dimly by an occasional radite bulb. He brought them at last through another concealed door, into a long corridor.

"The palace Communications Center," said Korkhann. "The fourth door ahead."

There was no one in the hallway, and they went down it rapidly, Gordon and Shorr Kan in the lead. And now, even through the massive partitions of the palace, they could hear a growing uproar above them.

"The horde is inside the palace," said Korkhann. "They will be killing all the Counts' men . . ."

"And us too, if they find us," said Hull Burrel. "Hurry!"

They flung open the fourth door. Beyond it was a large room filled with the instruments of galactic communication. They went in very fast. A man who wore the uniform of the Mace sat at a bank of controls, and touched the controls with a curious uncertainty. Behind him stood two robed H'harn, the ones V'ril had sent with the message for the H'harn fleet. The man froze with his hands in mid-air. The H'harn turned swiftly, and died with the motion uncompleted.

Gordon aimed his weapon at the

frightened operator. "Did you send that message for the H'harn?"

The man's face was greasy with sweat. He looked down at the small gray crumpled mounds and shivered. "I was trying to. But they use different frequencies . . . modulations . . . all different from ours and that takes time. They told me they'd take me over and hurt my mind if I didn't hurry, but I couldn't . . ."

The stupid H'harn running true to form, thought Gordon. Use all other peoples as your tools, and break them if they do not instantly obey.

He turned to Hull Burrel. "You were in touch with Zarth Arn's fleet until the attack came. Reach them now."

Hull threw the operator out of the chair and began punching buttons and turning vernier controls.

The uproar in the palace above them was penetrating more loudly to this level. Shorr Kan closed the door of the Communications Room and locked it.

"They'll get down here eventually," he said. "But it may hold them for a while."

Gordon watched the door, sweating, until Hull established contact with the fleet. Telestereo was not possible at such distances, but Gordon could hear the voices of the fleet communications officers as they acknowledged and cut through channels to the top, and presently the voice of Zarth Arn was speaking to him.

"Just beyond the end of the Vela Spur," said Gordon. "That's where the H'harn fleet is lying. They've got some new form of radar-conceal-

ment." He went on to give every scrap his memory recalled, from the time when his mind was twinned with V'ril's. "I don't know," he finished, "if even this will help you to pin them down, but at least it's something."

"I'll tell you, Gordon," said Zarth Arn, "we'll give it a damn good try!"

The contact was instantly broken. So that was done. Everything was done that they could do. They looked at each other, not saying anything, and Gordon went over and took Lianna into his arms.

The uproar in the palace was louder and closer. They could hear doors being smashed in. There were screeching and yowling and barking voices, the flap of wings and the clatter of running hoofs, always coming closer.

"It looks to me," said Shorr Kan, "as though we're getting near to all this heroic dying you've been dwelling on in such a morbid fashion." He shrugged. "Oh, well. At least Cyn Cryver got his. I could have forgiven that man his rascalities, but oh God, what a bore he was!"

Suddenly a new sound penetrated the palace. It was less a sound than a deep bass vibration, growing rapidly stronger, shaking the whole fabric of the great building, then passing overhead and away.

Shorr Kan's eyes flashed. "That was a heavy battle-cruiser! Now I wonder . . ."

A second mighty ship went over the palace, shaking it till it trembled, and then a third.

Then, upon the telestereo plate, there appeared the image of a man . . . an elderly man, hard-faced and cold-eyed, wearing on his cloak

the flaring emblem of the Hercules Cluster.

"The Baron Zu Rizal speaking," he began, and then saw Lianna and said, "Highness, I rejoice that you are safe!"

Shorr Kan had instantly turned his back to the telestereo, an action that did not surprise Gordon in the least.

"We smashed the Counts' fleet in the Austrinus Shoals," Zu Rizal was saying, "and we are now over Hathyr with our full forces and what is left of the Fomalhaut Navy. Your city is obviously occupied by Narath's hordes . . . shall we blast them?"

"No, wait," said Lianna. "Narath and Cyn Cryver are dead, and I think . . ."

Korkhann stepped forward and spoke to her in a low voice. She nodded, and then spoke again to Zu Rizal.

"With Narath dead, I think the horde will return to their own worlds, if they know that destruction is their alternative. Korkhann has said that he will offer them the terms."

"Very well," said Zu Rizal. "We will cruise on standby until further word from you."

The image disappeared, and only then did Shorr Kan turn around again.

A sudden silence had fallen on the palace. The great warships were still thundering by overhead, but the screech and wowl and crying of the horde had faded away. It seemed that the coming of the ships had sent them scurrying outside, as though they felt that the palace

had become a possible trap. They wanted running room.

"I think," said Korkhann, "that they will listen to me, because I am not human either." He pointed to the communicator panel. "Get word to the officers of the Counts' transports, to be ready to receive these peoples and take them back to the Marches."

He started away and then stopped for a moment and said, "One more thing, Highness. I regret to say that Abro was killed in the attack on the palace."

Gordon felt a sense of loss. Abro had disliked him thoroughly, but he had respected the man even so.

Hull Burrel remained with his ear to the instrument on whose wavelength he had communicated by audio with the faraway Empire fleet. His face was gray and lined with strain.

"Nothing yet," he said. "There may be nothing for a long time."

If ever, thought Gordon. The H'harn were powerful. If they should strike first, from their refuge of invisibility, and destroy the ship that carried Zarth Arn and the Disruptor . . .

He forced himself not to think of that.

The hours went by, and the great ships thundered past above, and Gordon and Lianna and Hull Burrel waited. At one point, Gordon realized that Shorr Kan had quietly disappeared.

Long later, Gordon would learn the story of what happened beyond the rim of the galaxy. Of the Empire fleet, with Zarth Arn's flagship in its van, racing toward the Vela

Spur. And of how Zarth Arn had unloosed the terrible force of the Disruptor, time after time, bracketing with cold precision an area of space where there was nothing to be seen, until the continuum itself was bent and twisted and torn and all the stars along the rim quaked in their orbits, and the force that had concealed the H'harn fleet was shattered. And still the Disruptor struck its vast invisible bolt, now aimed unerringly at the fleeing ships, until the H'harn fleet had vanished forever from the universe.

All Gordon knew now was that these were the longest hours of his life, until the shaken voice of Zarth Arn came through.

"It's done. The H'harn are smashed, and what's left of them are in flight, back to the Lesser Magellanic."

For a moment, none of them could speak. Then Gordon, remembering the foulness of the life he had briefly fused with, muttered a heartfelt, "Thank God."

"They will not come again." Zarth Arn's voice, thready with distance, held an iron note of resolve. "We shall gather a force from all the star kingdoms, to go after them and smash them on every world where they rule."

He added, "Gordon?"

"Yes?"

"I know now what you meant when you told me how using the Disruptor shook you. I've known about the thing all my life, but I never *used* it till today. I hope I never have to again."

When the contact was broken, they looked at each other, too exhausted and drained of emotion to

feel much of anything. The relief, the joy, the triumph . . . all that would come later. In the meantime, it was enough to be alive and know that hope lived too.

Lianna led the way out of the room, up the ways of the palace, all empty now.

They came out onto the great balcony and in their faces was the diamond flare of Fomalhaut, setting toward the horizon. Across the ravaged city its brilliant rays struck down into the streets, and everywhere the hordes were moving out, out across the plain to where the transports waited.

Down the great avenue of kings, away from the palace, went a little troop of the Gern, not running now but walking slowly. They went apart from the others, as a guard of honor, and across the back of their giant leader lay the body of a man in glittering garments. Narath of Teyn was going home.

Down from the sky rolled massive thunder, as the Barons continued their grim patrol. And, as she looked out over the scarred city with the forlorn smokes still rising from it, Lianna's fingers tightened on Gordon's.

"It will live again," she said. "The people will come back, and you and I will help them to rebuild. And . . . it's a small price to pay for the defeat of the H'harn."

There was a discreet cough behind them. They turned and found Shorr Kan standing there, ignoring Hull Burrel's frown.

"Highness, I'm glad that all came well," said Shorr Kan blandly. "You will admit that I was of some help."

"I'll admit that your quick thinking about Narath's death saved us, yes," said Lianna, as though the words were wrenched from unwilling lips.

"Good. Now I have a small favor to ask." Shorr Kan came closer, speaking in a confidential voice. "It's the damned Barons I'm thinking about. They're a tough lot, not like you and Gordon. No sense of humor at all. If they catch me, they'll hang me in a minute."

He added, "And there's Jhal Arn to think about as well. He must still believe I was concerned in the assassination of his father, although I wasn't . . . that was all Corbulo's idea, and stupid as Corbulo's ideas always were. But I shouldn't care to fall into his hands, either."

Lianna looked at him coldly. "I quite see your point. Now what is this favor?"

"Well," said Shorr Kan, "you'll remember that I overpowered Obd Doll and the rest of the crew of that little cruiser, and we brought them here? Yes. Obd Doll and his men are down in the palace dungeons . . . luckily for them, since the horde couldn't get at them. The cruiser is still in the royal spaceport, and I have ascertained that it's undamaged."

"Go on."

"I've been talking to Obd Doll and his men. They're pretty disgusted at the mess Cyn Cryver led them into with his plotting. They'd like to go back home and start their world going again under new leadership . . . sane, conservative leadership."

"In other words," said Gordon ironically, "Shorr Kan's leadership."

He nodded. "It does so happen, that not only do they not hold it against me that I captured them, but they think I'd be just the man to bring things to order on their world. They think they can convince their people."

"Go on," said Lianna.

"The favor I ask, Highness, is simply that you let me take Obd Doll and his men with me in that cruiser, and send word to the Barons . . . without mentioning me, of course . . . to let the ship through."

"So that you can start new trouble in the Marches?" cried Lianna. "You . . . !"

"Please, Highness!" said Shorr Kan, looking pained. "I'm all through with that now, an older and wiser man. All I want is a little planet where I can live at peace, nothing more."

"Oh, lord!" said Gordon. "You ought to put that to music."

"I think," said Lianna, "that you will raise a racket in times to come all through the Marches, and I will live to regret this day. But I am a queen, and a debt is a debt. Take your people and go."

Shorr Kan gallantly kissed her hand. He shook Gordon's, and turned away. He stopped when he saw Hull Burrel glaring at him. He went up to the Antarian and took him by the hand.

"It's hard to part this way, old friend," he said. "We've been through a lot together, and I know how you must feel to see me go."

Hull's coppery face flushed scarlet and he began to make inarticulate growling noises. But Shorr Kan wrung his unwilling hand and said,

(Continued on page 116)



THE INVADERS

By **MURRAY LEINSTER**

It started in Greece on the day after tomorrow. Before the last act raced to a close, Coburn was buried to his ears in assorted adventures, including a revolution and an invasion from outer space!

We're not given to throwing around the word "epic" lightly, but here is one! Swashbuckling action, a great many vivid characters, and a weird mystery — all spun for you by one of the master story-tellers of our time.

ON a certain day — it may be in the history books eventually — Coburn was in the village of Ardea, north of Salonika in the most rugged part of Greece. He was making a survey for purposes which later on turned out not to

matter much. The village of Ardea was small, it was very early in the morning, and he was trying to get his car started when he heard the yell.

It was a shrill yell, and it traveled fast. Coburn jerked his head

upright from the hood of the car. A whiskered villager with flapping trousers came pounding up the single street. His eyes were panic-stricken and his mouth was wide. He emitted the yell in a long, sustained note. Other villagers popped into view like ants from a disturbed ant-hill. Some instantly ran back into their houses. Others began to run toward the outskirts of the village, toward the south.

Coburn, watching blankly, found himself astonished at the number of people the village contained. He hadn't dreamed it was so populous. All were in instant frenzied flight toward the mountains. An old woman he'd seen barely hobbling, now ran like a deer. Children toddled desperately. Adults snatched them up and ran. Larger children fled on twinkling legs. The inhabitants of Ardea vanished toward the hills in a straggling, racing, panting stream. They disappeared around an outcrop of stone which was merely the nearest place that would hide them. Then there was silence.

Coburn turned his head blankly in the direction from which they had run. He saw the mountains — incredibly stony and barren. That was all. No, not quite — there was something far away which was subtly different in color from the hillsides. It moved. It flowed over a hill crest, coming plainly from somewhere beyond the moun-

tains. It was vague in shape. Coburn felt a momentary stirring of superstition. There simply couldn't be anything so huge. . . .

But there could. There was. It was a column of soldiers in uniforms that looked dark-gray at this distance. It flowed slowly out of the mountains like a colossal snake — some Midgard monster or river of destruction. It moved with an awful, deliberate steadiness toward the village of Ardea.

Coburn caught his breath. Then he was running too. He was out of the village almost before he realized it. He did not try to follow the villagers. He might lead pursuers after them. There was a narrow defile nearby. Tanks could hardly follow it, and it did not lead where they would be going. He plunged into it and was instantly hidden. He pelted on. It was a trail from somewhere, because he saw ancient donkey-droppings on the stones, but he did not know where it led. He simply ran to get away from the village and the soldiers who were coming toward it.

This was Greece. They were Bulgarian soldiers. This was not war or even invasion. This was worse — a cold-war raid. He kept running and presently rocky cliffs overhung him on one side, a vast expanse of sky loomed to his left. He found himself panting. He began to hope that he was actually safe.

Then he heard a voice. It sounded vexed. Quite incredibly, it was talking English. "But my dear young lady!" it said severely. "You simply mustn't go on! There's the very devil of a mess turning up, and you mustn't run into it!"

A girl's voice answered, also in English. "I'm sure — I don't know what you're talking about!"

"I'm afraid I can't explain. But, truly, you mustn't go on to the village!"

Coburn pushed ahead. He came upon the people who had spoken. There was a girl riding on a donkey. She was American. Trim. Neat. Uneasy, but reasonably self-confident. And there was a man standing by the trail, with a slide of earth behind him and mud on his boots as if he'd slid down somewhere very fast to intercept this girl. He wore the distinctive costume a British correspondent is apt to affect in the wilds.

They turned as Coburn came into view. The girl goggled at him. He was not exactly the sort of third person one expected to find on a very lonely, ill-defined rocky trail many miles north of Salonika.

When they turned to him, Coburn recognized the man. He'd met Dillon once or twice in Salonika. He panted: "Dillon! There's a column of soldiers headed across the border! Bulgarians!"

"How close?" asked Dillon.

"They're coming," said Coburn, with some difficulty due to lack of breath. "I saw them across the valley. Everybody's run away from the village. I was the last one out."

Dillon nodded composedly. He looked intently at Coburn. "You know me," he said reservedly. "Should I remember you?"

"I've met you once or twice," Coburn told him. "In Salonika."

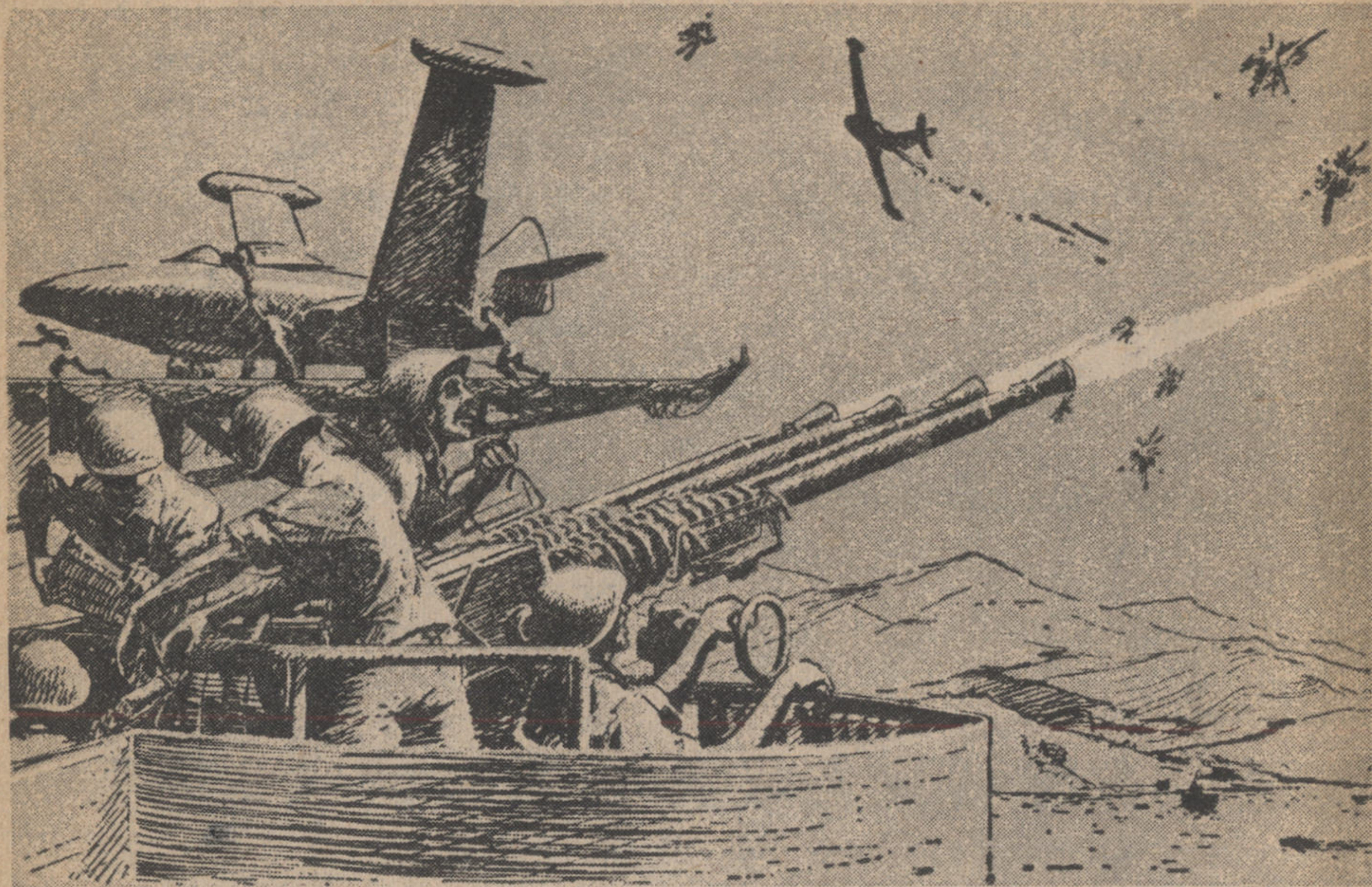
"Oh," said Dillon. "Oh, yes. Sorry. I've got some cameras up yonder. I want a picture or two of those Bulgarians. See if you can persuade this young lady not to go on. I fancy it's safe enough here. Not a normal raid route through this pass."

Coburn nodded. Dillon expected the raid, evidently. This sort of thing had happened in Turkey. Now it would start up here, in Greece. The soldiers would strike fast and far, at first. They wouldn't stop to hunt down the local inhabitants. Not yet.

"We'll wait," said Coburn. "You'll be back?"

"Oh, surely!" said Dillon. "Five minutes or less."

He started up the precipitous wall, at whose bottom he had slid down. He climbed remarkably well. He went up hand-over-hand despite the steepness of the stone. It looked almost impossible, but Dillon apparently found hand-grips by instinct, as a good climber does. In a matter of min-



utes he vanished, some fifty feet up, behind a bulging mass of stone. He did not reappear.

Coburn began to get his breath back. The girl looked at him, her forehead creased.

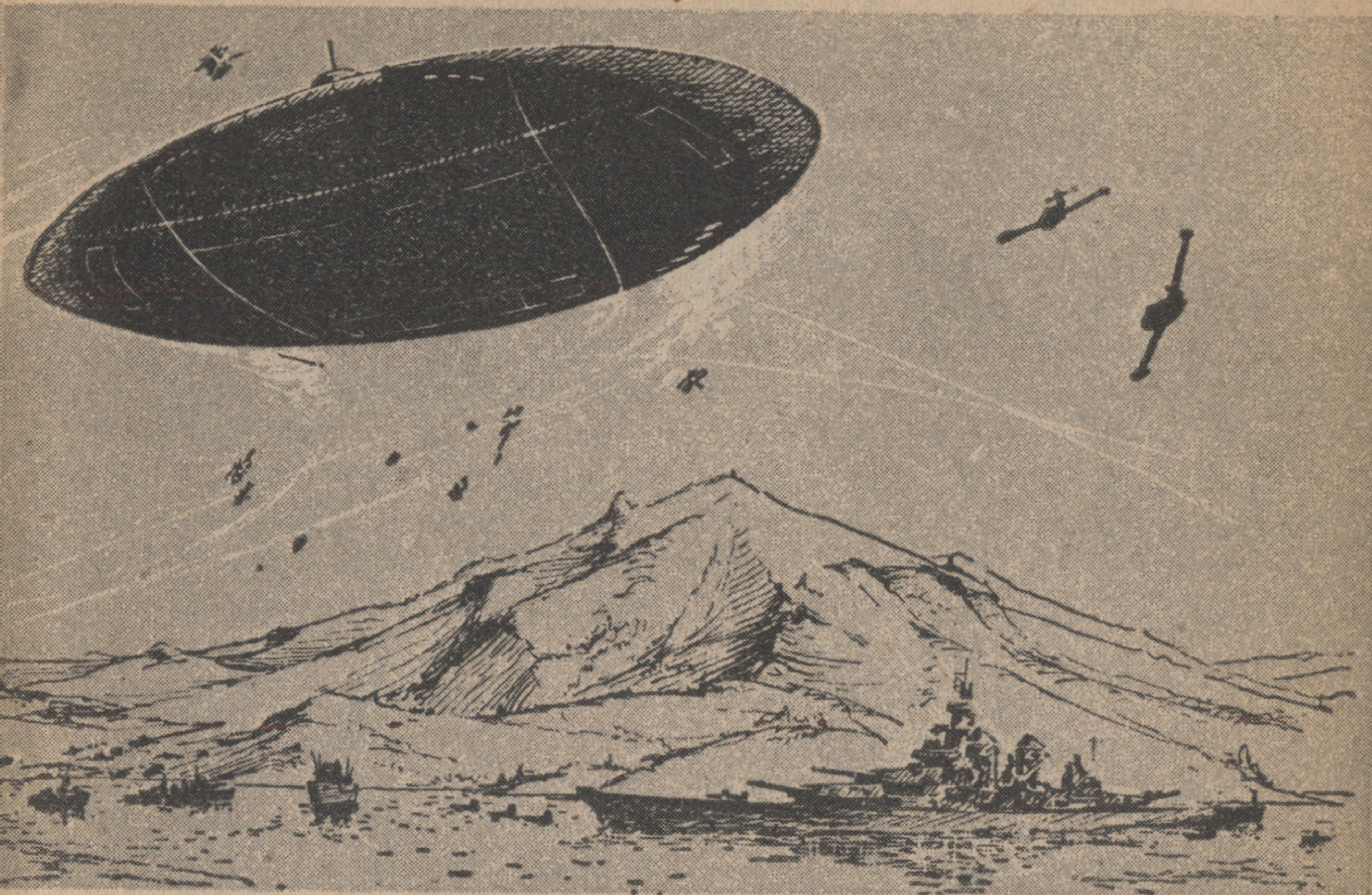
"Just to make sure," said Coburn, "I'll see if I can get a view back down the trail."

Where the vastness of the sky showed, he might be able to look down. He scrambled up a barrier two man-heights high. There was a screen of straggly brush, with emptiness beyond. He peered.

He could see a long way down and behind, and actually the village was clearly in sight from here.

There were rumbling, caterpillar-tread tanks in the act of entering it. There were anachronistic mounted men with them. Cavalry is outdated, nowadays, but in rocky mountain country they can have uses where tanks can't go. But here tanks and cavalry looked grim. Coburn squirmed back and beckoned to the girl. She joined him. They peered through the brushwood together.

The light tanks were scurrying along the single village street. Horsemen raced here and there. A pig squealed. There was a shot. The tanks emerged from the other side. They went crawling swiftly toward the south. But they did



not turn aside where the villagers had. They headed along the way Coburn had driven to Ardea.

Infantrymen appeared, marching into the village. An advance party, rifles ready. This was strict discipline and standard military practise. Horsemen rode to tell them that all was quiet. They turned and spurred away after the tanks.

The girl said in a strained voice. "This is war starting! Invasion!"

Coburn said coldly, "No. No planes. This isn't war. It's a training exercise, Iron-Curtain style. This outfit will strike twenty — maybe thirty miles south. There's a town there — Kilkis. They'll

take it and loot it. By the time Athens finds out what's happened, they'll be ready to fall back. They'll do a little fighting. They'll carry off the people. And they'll deny everything. The West doesn't want war. Greece couldn't fight by herself. And America wouldn't believe that such things could happen. But they do. It's what's called cold war. Ever hear of that?"

The main column of soldiers far below poured up to the village and went down the straggly street in a tide of dark figures. The village was very small. The soldiers came out of the other end of the village. They poured on after the

tanks, rippling over irregularities in the way. They seemed innumerable.

"Three or four thousand men," said Coburn coldly. "This is a big raid. But it's not war. Not yet."

It was not the time for full-scale war. Bulgaria and the other countries in its satellite status were under orders to put a strain upon the outside world. They were building up border incidents and turmoil for the benefit of their masters. Turkey was on a war footing, after a number of incidents like this. Indo-China was at war. Korea was an old story. Now Greece. It always takes more men to guard against criminal actions than to commit them. When this raid was over Greece would have to maintain a full-size army in its northern mountains to guard against its repetition. Which would be a strain on its treasury and might help toward bankruptcy. This was cold war.

The infantry ended. Horse-drawn vehicles appeared in a seemingly endless line. Motorized transport would be better, but the Bulgarians were short of it. Shaggy, stubby animals plodded in the wake of the tanks and the infantry. There were two-wheeled carts in single file all across the valley. They went through the village and filed after the soldiers.

"I think," said Coburn in biting anger, "this will be all there is to see. They'll go in until they're

stopped. They'll kidnap Greek civilians and later work them to death in labor camps. They'll carry off some children to raise as spies. But their purpose is probably only to make such a threat that the Greeks will go broke guarding against them. They know the Greeks don't want war."

He began to wriggle back from the brushwood screen. He was filled with the sort of sick rage that comes when you can't actively resent insolence and arrogance. He hated the people who wanted the world to collapse, and this was part of their effort to bring it about.

He helped the girl down. "Dillon said to wait," he said. He found himself shaking with anger at the men who had ordered the troops to march. "He said he was taking pictures. He must have had an advance tip of some sort. If so, he'll have a line of retreat."

Then Coburn frowned. Not quite plausible, come to think of it. But Dillon had certainly known about the raid. He was set to take pictures, and he hadn't been surprised. One would have expected Greek Army photographers on hand to take pictures of a raid of which they had warning. Probably United Nations observers on the scene, too. Yes. There should be Army men and probably a United Nations team up where Dillon was.

Coburn explained to the girl.

"That'll be it. And they'll have a radio, too. Probably helicopters taking them out also. I'll go up and tell them to be sure and have room for you."

He started for the cliff he'd seen Dillon climb. He paused: "I'd better have your name for them to report to Athens."

"I'm Janice Ames," she told him. "The Breen Foundation has me going around arranging for lessons for the people up here. Sanitation and nutrition and midwifery, and so on. The Foundation office is in Salonika, though."

He nodded and attacked the cliff.

It hadn't been a difficult climb for Dillon. It wasn't even a long one for Coburn, but it was much worse than he'd thought. The crevices for handholds were rare, and footholds were almost nonexistent. There were times when he felt he was holding on by his fingernails. Dillon seemed to have made it with perfect ease, but Coburn found it exhausting.

Fifty feet up he came to the place where Dillon had vanished. But it was a preposterously difficult task to get across an undercut to where he could grasp a stunted tree. It was a strain to scramble up past it. Then he found himself on the narrowest of possible ledges, with a sickening drop off to one side. But Dillon had made it, so he followed.

He went a hundred yards, and then the ledge came to an end. He saw where Dillon must have climbed. It was possible, but Coburn violently did not want to try. Still . . . He started.

Then something clicked in his throat. There was a rather deep ledge for a space of four or five feet. And there was Dillon. No, not Dillon. Just Dillon's clothes. They lay flat and deflated, but laid out in one assembly beside a starveling twisted bush. It would have been possible for a man to stand there to take off his clothes, if he wanted to. But a man who takes off his clothes — and why should Dillon do that? — takes them off one by one. These garments were fitted together. The coat was over the shirt, and the trousers fitted to the bottom of the shirt over the coat, and the boots were at the ends of the trouser legs.

Then Coburn saw something he did not believe. It palpably was not true. He saw a hand sticking out of the end of the sleeve. But it was not a hand, because it had collapsed. It was rather like an unusually thick glove, flesh color.

Then he saw what should have been Dillon's head. And it was in place, too. But it was not Dillon's head. It was not a head at all. It was something quite different. There were no eyes. Merely holes. Openings. Like a mask.

Coburn felt a sort of roaring in

his ears, and he could not think clearly for a moment because of the shrieking impossibility of what he was looking at. Dillon's necktie had been very neatly untied, and left in place in his collar. His shirt had been precisely unbuttoned. He had plainly done it himself. And then — the unbuttoned shirt made it clear — he had come out of his body. Physically, he had emerged and gone on. The thing lying flat that had lapsed at Coburn's feet was Dillon's outside. His outside only. The inside had come out and gone away. It had climbed the cliff over Coburn's head.

The outside of Dillon looked remarkably like something made out of foam-rubber. Coburn touched it, insanely.

He heard his own voice saying flatly: "It's a sort of suit. A suit that looks like Dillon. He was in it. Something was! Something is playing the part of Dillon. Maybe it always was. Maybe there isn't any Dillon."

He felt a sort of hysterical composure. He opened the chest. It was patently artificial. There were such details on the inside as would be imagined in a container needed to fit something snugly. At the edges of the opening there were fastenings like the teeth of a zipper, but somehow different. Coburn knew that when this was fastened there would be no visible seam.

Whatever wore this suit-that-looked-like-Dillon could feel perfectly confident of passing for Dillon, clothed or otherwise. It could pass without any question for —

Coburn gagged.

It could pass without question for a human being.

Obviously, whatever was wearing this foam-rubber replica of Dillon was not human!

Coburn went back to where he had to climb down the cliffside again. He moved like a sleepwalker. He descended the fifty-foot cliff by the crevices and the single protruding rock-point that had helped him get up. It was much easier going down. In his state of mind it was also more dangerous. He moved in a sort of robot-like composure.

He moved toward the girl, trying to make words come out of his throat, when a small rock came clattering down the cliff. He looked up. Dillon was in the act of swinging to the first part of the descent. He came down, very confident and assured. He had two camera-cases slung from his shoulders. Coburn stared at him, utterly unable to believe what he'd seen ten minutes before.

Dillon reached solid ground and turned. He smiled wryly. His shirt was buttoned. His tie was tied.

"I hoped," he said ruefully to Janice Ames, "that the Bulgars would toddle off. But they left a

guard in the village. We can't hope to take an easier trail. We'll have to go back the way you came. We'll get you safe to Salonika, though."

The girl smiled, uneasily but gratefully.

"And," added Dillon, "we'd better get started."

He gallantly helped the girl remount her donkey. At the sight, Coburn was shaken out of his numbness. He moved fiercely to intervene. But Janice settled herself in the saddle and Dillon confidently led the way. Coburn grimly walked beside her as she rode. He was convinced that he wouldn't leave her side while Dillon was around. But even as he knew that desperate certitude, he was filled with confusion and a panicky uncertainty.

When they'd traveled about half a mile, another frightening thought occurred to Coburn. Perhaps Dillon — passing for human — wasn't alone. Perhaps there were thousands like him.

Invaders! Usurpers, pretending to be men. Invaders, obviously, from space!

II

They made eight miles. At least one mile of that, added together, was climbing straight up. Another mile was straight down. The rest was boulder-strewn, twisting, donkey-wide, slanting, slippery stone.

But there was no sign of anyone but themselves. The sky remained undisturbed. No planes. They saw no sign of the raiding force from across the border, and they heard no gunfire.

Coburn struggled against the stark impossibility of what he had seen. The most horrifying concept regarding invasion from space is that of creatures who are able to destroy or subjugate humanity. A part of that concept was in Coburn's mind now. Dillon marched on ahead, in every way convincingly human. But he wasn't. And to Coburn, his presence as a non-human invader of Earth made the border-crossing by the Bulgarians seem almost benevolent.

They went on. The next hill was long and steep. Then they were at the hill crest. They looked down into a village called Náousa. It was larger than Ardea, but not much larger. One of the houses burned untended. Figures moved about. There were tanks in sight, and many soldiers in the uniform that looked dark-gray at a distance. The route by which Dillon had traveled had plainly curved into the line-of-march of the Bulgarian raiding force.

But the moving figures were not soldiers. The soldiers were still. They lay down on the grass in irregular, sprawling windrows. The tanks were not in motion. There were two-wheeled carts in

sight — reaching back along the invasion-route — and they were just as stationary as the men and the tanks. The horses had toppled in their shafts. They were motionless.

The movement was of civilians — men and women alike. They were Greek villagers, and they moved freely among the unmilitarily recumbent troops, and even from this distance their occupation was clear. They were happily picking the soldiers' pockets. But there was one figure which moved from one prone figure to another much too quickly to be looting. Coburn saw sunlight glitter on something in his hand.

Dillon noticed the same thing Coburn did at the same instant. He bounded forward. He ran toward the village and its tumbled soldiers in great, impossible leaps. No man could make such leaps or travel so fast. He seemed almost to soar toward the village, shouting. Coburn and Janice saw him reach the village. They saw him rush toward the one man who had been going swiftly from one prone soldier to another. It was too far to see Dillon's action, but the sunlight glittered again on something bright, which this time flew through the air and dropped to the ground.

The villagers grouped about Dillon. There was no sign of a struggle.

"What's happened?" demanded Janice uneasily. "Those are soldiers on the ground."

Coburn's fright prevented his caution. He shouted furiously. "He's not a man! You saw it! No man can run so fast! You saw those jumps! He's not human! He's — something else!"

Janice jerked her eyes to Coburn in panic. "What did you say?"

Coburn panted: "Dillon's no man! He's a monster from somewhere in space! And he and his kind have killed those soldiers! Murdered them! And the soldiers are men! You stay here. I'll go down there and —"

"No!" said Janice, "I'm coming too."

He took the donkey's halter and led the animal down to the village, with Janice trembling a little in the saddle. He talked in a tight, taut, hysterical tone. He told what he'd found up on the cliffside. He described in detail the similitude of a man's body he'd found deflated beside a stunted bush.

He did not look at Janice as he talked. He moved doggedly toward the village, dragging at the donkey's head. They neared the houses very slowly, and Coburn considered that he walked into the probability of a group of other creatures from unthinkable other star systems, disguised as men. It did not occur to him that his

sudden outburst about Dillon sounded desperately insane to Janice.

They reached the first of the fallen soldiers. Janice looked, shuddering. Then she said thinly: "He's breathing!"

He was. He was merely a boy. Twenty or thereabouts. He lay on his back, his eyes closed. His face was upturned like a dead man's. But his breast rose and fell rhythmically. He slept as if he were drugged.

But that was more incredible than if he'd been dead. Regiments of men fallen simultaneously asleep. . . .

Coburn's flow of raging speech stopped short. He stared. He saw other fallen soldiers. Dozens of them. In coma-like slumber, the soldiers who had come to loot and murder lay like straws upon the ground. If they had been dead it would have been more believable. At least there are ways to kill men. But this . . .

Dillon parted the group of villagers about him and came toward Coburn and Janice. He was frowning in a remarkably human fashion.

"Here's a mess!" he said irritably. "Those Bulgars came marching down out of the pass. The cavalry galloped on ahead and cut the villagers off so they couldn't run away. They started to loot the village. They weren't

pleasant. Women began to scream, and there were shootings — all in a matter of minutes. And then the looters began to act strangely. They staggered around and sat down and went to sleep!"

He waved his hands in a helpless gesture, but Coburn was not deceived.

"The tanks arrived. And they stopped — and their crews went to sleep! Then the infantry appeared, staggering as it marched. The officers halted to see what was happening ahead, and the entire infantry dropped off to sleep right where it stood!

"It's bad! If it had happened a mile or so back . . . The Greeks must have played a trick on them, but those cavalrymen raised the devil in the few minutes they were out of hand! They killed some villagers and then keeled over. And now the villagers aren't pleased. There was one man whose son was murdered, and he's been slitting the Bulgars' throats!"

He looked at Coburn, and Coburn said in a grating voice: "I see."

Dillon said distressedly: "One can't let them slit the throats of sleeping men! I'll have to stay here to keep them from going at it again. I say, Coburn, will you take one of their staff cars and run on down somewhere and tell the Greek government what's happened here? Something should be done about it! Soldiers should

come to keep order and take charge of these chaps."

"Yes," said Coburn. "I'll do it. I'll take Janice along, too."

"Splendid!" Dillon nodded as if in relief. "She'd better get out of the mess entirely. I fancy there'd have been a full-scale massacre if we hadn't come along. The Greeks have no reason to love these chaps, and their intentions were hardly amiable. But one can't let them be murdered!"

Coburn had his hand on his revolver in his pocket. His finger was on the trigger. But if Dillon needed him to run an errand, then there obviously were no others of his own kind about.

Dillon turned his back. He gave orders in the barbarous dialect of the mountains. His voice was authoritative. Men obeyed him and dragged uniformed figures out of a light half-track that was plainly a staff car. Dillon beckoned, and Coburn moved toward him. The important thing as far as Coburn was concerned was to get Janice to safety. Then to report the full event.

"I . . . I'm not sure . . ." began Janice, her voice shaking.

"I'll prove what I said," raged Coburn in a low tone. "I'm not crazy, though I feel like it!"

Dillon beckoned again. Janice slipped off the donkey's back. She looked pitifully frightened and irresolute.

"I've located the chap who's the mayor of this village, or something like that. Take him along. They might not believe you, but they'll have to investigate when he turns up."

A white-bearded villager reluctantly climbed into the back of the car. Dillon pleasantly offered to assist Janice into the front seat. She climbed in, deathly white, frightened of Coburn and almost ashamed to admit that his vehement outburst had made her afraid of Dillon, too.

Dillon came around to Coburn's side of the vehicle. "Privately," he said with a confidential air, "I'd advise you to dump this mayor person where he can reach authority, and then go away quietly and say nothing of what happened up here. If the Greeks are using some contrivance that handles an affair like this, it will be top secret. They won't like civilians knowing about it."

Coburn's grip on his revolver was savage. It seemed likely, now, that Dillon was the only one of his extraordinary kind about.

"I think I know why you say that," he said harshly.

Dillon smiled. "Oh, come now!" he protested. "I'm quite unofficial!"

He was incredibly convincing at that moment. There was a wry half-smile on his face. He looked absolutely human; abso-

lutely like the British correspondent Coburn had met in Salonika. He was too convincing. Coburn knew he would suspect his own sanity unless he made sure.

"You're not only unofficial," said Coburn grimly. His hand came up over the edge of the staff-car door. It had his revolver in it. It bore inexorably upon the very middle of Dillon's body. "You're not human, either! You're not a man! Your name isn't Dillon! You're — something I haven't a word for! But if you try anything fancy I'll see if a bullet through your middle will stop you!"

Dillon did not move. He said easily: "You're being absurd, my dear fellow. Put away that pistol."

"You slipped!" said Coburn thickly. "You said the Greeks played a trick on this raiding party. But you played it. At Ardea, when you climbed that cliff — no man could climb so fast. No man could run as you ran down into this village. And I saw that body you're wearing when you weren't in it! I followed you up the cliff when —" Coburn's voice was ragingly sarcastic — "when you were taking pictures!"

Dillon's face went impassive. Then he said: "Well?"

"Will you let me scratch your finger?" demanded Coburn almost hysterically. "If it bleeds, I'll apologize and freely admit

I'm crazy! But if it doesn't . . ."

The thing-that-was-not-Dillon raised its eyebrows. "It wouldn't," it said coolly. "You do know. What follows?"

"You're something from space," accused Coburn, "sneaking around Earth trying to find out how to conquer us! You're an Invader! You're trying out weapons. And you want me to keep my mouth shut so we Earth people won't patch up our own quarrels and join forces to hunt you down! But we'll do it! We'll do it!"

The thing-that-was-not-Dillon said gently: "No. My dear chap, no one will believe you."

"We'll see about that!" snapped Coburn. "Put those cameras in the car!"

The figure that looked so human hesitated a long instant, then obeyed. It lowered the two seeming cameras into the back part of the staff car.

Janice started to say, "I . . . I . . ."

The pseudo-Dillon smiled at her. "You think he's insane, and naturally you're scared," it said reassuringly. "But he's sane. He's quite right. I am from outer space. And I'm not humoring him either. Look!"

He took a knife from his pocket and snapped it open. He deliberately ran the point down the side of one of his fingers.

The skin parted. Something that looked exactly like foam-

rubber was revealed. There were even bubbles in it.

The pseudo-Dillon said, "You see, you don't have to be afraid of him. He's sane, and quite human. You'll feel much better traveling with him." Then the figure turned to Coburn. "You won't believe it, but I really like you, Coburn. I like the way you've reacted. It's very . . . human."

Coburn said to him: "It'll be human, too, when we start to hunt you down!" He let the staff car in gear. Dillon smiled at him. He let in the clutch, and the car leaped ahead.

In the two camera-cases Coburn was sure that he had the cryptic device that was responsible for the failure of a cold-war raid. He wouldn't have dared drive away from Dillon leaving these devices behind. If they were what he thought, they'd be absolute proof of the truth of his story, and they should furnish clues to the sort of science the Invaders possessed. Show the world that Invaders were upon it, and all the world would combine to defend Earth. The cold war would end.

But a bitter doubt came to him. Would they? Or would they offer zestfully to be viceroys and overseers for the Invaders, betraying the rest of mankind for the privilege of ruling them even under unhuman masters?

Janice swayed against his shoul-

der. He cast a swift glance at her. Her face was like marble.

"What's the matter?"

She shook her head. "I'm trying not to faint," she said unsteadily. "When you told me he was from another world I . . . thought you were crazy. But when he admitted it . . . when he proved it . . ."

Coburn growled. The trail twisted and dived down a steep slope. It twisted again and ran across a rushing, frothing stream. Coburn drove into the rivulet. Water reared up in wing-like sheets on either side. The staff car climbed out, rocking, on the farther side. Coburn put it to the ascent beyond. The trail turned and climbed and descended as the stony masses of the hills required.

"He's — from another world!" repeated Janice. Her teeth chattered. "What do they want — creatures like him? How — how many of them are there? Anybody could be one of them! What do they want?"

"This is a pretty good world," said Coburn fiercely. "And his kind will want it. We're merely the natives, the aborigines, to them. Maybe they plan to wipe us out, or enslave us. But they won't! We can spot them now! They don't bleed. Scratch one and you find — foam-rubber. X-rays will spot them. We'll learn to pick them out — and when some specialists look over those things that look like cameras we'll know more

still! Enough to do something!"

"Then you think it's an invasion from space?"

"What else?" snapped Coburn.

His stomach was a tight cramped knot now. He drove the car hard!

In air miles the distance to be covered was relatively short. In road miles it seemed interminable. The road was bad and curving beyond belief. It went many miles east and many miles west for every mile of southward gain. The hour grew late. Coburn had fled Ardea at sunrise, but they'd reached Náousa after midday and he drove frantically over incredible mountain roads until dusk. Despite sheer recklessness, however, he could not average thirty miles an hour. There were times when even the half-track had to crawl or it would overturn. The sun set, and he went on up steep grades and down steeper ones in the twilight. Night fell and the headlights glared ahead, and the staff-car clanked and clanked and grumbled and roared on through the darkness.

They probably passed through villages — the headlights showed stone hovels once or twice — but no lights appeared. It was midnight before they saw a moving yellow spot of brightness with a glare as of fire upon steam above it. There were other small lights in a row behind it, and they

saw that all the lights moved.

"A railroad!" said Coburn. "We're getting somewhere!"

It was a railroad train on the other side of a valley, but they did not reach the track. The highway curved away from it.

At two o'clock in the morning they saw electric lights. The highway became suddenly passable. Presently they ran into the still, silent streets of a slumbering town — Serrai — an administrative center for this part of Greece. They threaded its ways while Coburn watched for a proper place to stop. Once a curiously-hatted policeman stared blankly at them under an arc lamp as the staff car clanked and rumbled past him. They saw a great pile of stone which was a church. They saw a railroad station.

Not far away there was a building in which there were lights. A man in uniform came out of its door.

Coburn stopped a block away. There were uneasy stirrings, and the white-bearded passenger from the village said incomprehensible things in a feeble voice. Coburn got Janice out of the car first. She was stiff and dizzy when she tried to walk. The Greek was in worse condition still. He clung to the side of the staff car.

"We tell the truth," said Coburn curtly, "when we talk to the police. We tell the whole truth — except about Dillon. That sounds

too crazy. We tell it to top-level officials only, after they realize that something they don't know anything about has really taken place. Talk of Invaders from space would either get us locked up as lunatics or would create a panic. This man will tell what happened up there, and they'll investigate. But we take these so-called cameras to Salonika, and get to an American battleship."

He lifted Dillon's two cameras by the carrying-straps. And the straps pulled free. They'd held the cases safely enough during a long journey on foot across the mountains. But they pulled clear now.

Coburn had a bitter thought. He struck a match. He saw the leather cases on the floor of the staff car. He picked up one of them. He took it to the light of the headlights, standing there in the resonant darkness of a street in a city of stone houses.

The leather was brittle. It was friable, as if it had been in a fire. Coburn plucked it open, and it came apart in his hands. Inside there was the smell of scorched things. There was a gritty metallic powder. Nothing else. The other carrying-case was in exactly the same condition.

Coburn muttered bitterly: "They were set to destroy themselves if they got into other hands than Dillon's. We haven't a bit of proof that he wasn't a human

being. Not a shred of proof!"

He suddenly felt a sick rage, as if he had been played with and mocked. The raid from Bulgaria was serious enough, of course. It would have killed hundreds of people and possibly hundreds of others would have been enslaved. But even that was secondary in Coburn's mind. The important thing was that there were Invaders upon Earth. Non-human monsters, who passed for humans through disguise. They had been able to travel through space to land secretly upon Earth. They moved unknown among men, learning the secrets of mankind, preparing for — what?

III

They got into Salonika early afternoon of the next day, after many hours upon an antique railroad train that puffed and grunted and groaned among interminable mountains. Coburn got a taxi to take Janice to the office of the Breen Foundation which had sent her up to the north of Greece to establish its philanthropic instruction courses. He hadn't much to say to Janice as they rode. He was too disheartened.

In the cab, though, he saw great placards on which newspaper headlines appeared in Greek. He could make out the gist of them. Essentially, they shrieked that Bulgarians had invaded Greece

and had been wiped out. He made out the phrase for valiant Greek army. And the Greek army was valiant enough, but it hadn't had anything to do with this.

From the police station in Serrai — he had been interviewed there until dawn — he knew what action had been taken. Army planes had flown northward in the darkness, moved by the Mayor's, and Coburn's, and Janice's tale of Bulgarian soldiers on Greek soil, sleeping soundly. They had released parachute flares and located the village of Náousa. Parachutists with field radios had jumped, while other flares burned to light them to the ground. That was that. Judging by the placards, their reports had borne out the story Coburn had brought down. There would be a motorized Greek division on the way to take charge of the four-thousand-odd unconscious raiders. There was probably an advance guard there now.

But there was no official news. Even the Greek newspapers called it rumors. Actually, it was leaked information. It would be reasonable for the Greek government to let it leak, look smug, and blandly say "No comment" to all inquiries, including those from Bulgaria.

But behind that appearance of complacency, the Greek government would be going quietly mad trying to understand what so fortunately had happened. And Co-

burn could tell them. But he knew better than to try without some sort of proof. Yet, he had to tell. The facts were more important than what people thought of him.

The cab stopped before his own office. He paid the driver. The driver beamed and said happily: "*Tys nikisame, é?*"

Coburn said, "*Poly kala. Orea.*"

His office was empty. It was dustier than usual. His secretary was probably taking a holiday since he was supposed to be out of town. He grunted and sat down at the telephone. He called a man he knew. Hallen — another American — was attached to a non-profit corporation which was attached to an agency which was supposed to cooperate with a committee which had something to do with NATO. Hallen answered the phone in person.

Coburn identified himself. "Have you heard any rumors about a Bulgarian raid up-country?" he asked.

"I haven't heard anything else since I got up," Hallen told him.

"I was there," said Coburn. "I brought the news down. Can you come over?"

"I'm halfway there now!" said Hallen as he slammed down the phone.

Coburn paced up and down his office. It was very dusty. Even the seat of the chair at his secretary's desk was dusty. The odds

were that she was coming in only to sort the mail, and not even sitting down for that. He shrugged.

He heard footsteps. The door opened. His secretary, Helena, came in. She looked surprised.

"I was at lunch," she explained. She had a very slight accent. She hung up her coat. "I am sorry. I stopped at a store."

He had paused in his pacing to nod at her. Now he stared, but her back was turned toward him. He blinked. She had just told a very transparent lie. And Helena was normally very truthful.

"You had a good trip?" she asked politely.

"Fair," said Coburn. "Any phone calls this morning?" he asked.

"Not this morning," she said politely.

She reached in a desk drawer. She brought out paper. She put it in the typewriter and began to type.

Coburn felt very queer. Then he saw something else. There was a fly in the office — a large, green-bodied fly of metallic lustre. The inhabitants of Salonika said with morbid pride that it was a specialty of the town, with the most painful of all known fly stings. And Helena abhorred flies.

It landed on the bare skin of her neck. She did not notice. It stayed there. Ordinarily she would have jumped up, exclaiming angrily in Greek, and then she would have

pursued the fly vengefully with a folded newspaper until she killed it. But now she ignored it.

Hallen came in, stamping. Coburn closed the door behind him. He felt queer at the pit of his stomach. For Helena to let a fly stay on her neck suggested that her skin was . . . somehow not like its usual self.

"What happened to those Bulgarians?" demanded Hallen.

Coburn told him precisely what he'd seen when he arrived in Náousa after an eight-mile hike through mountains. Then he went back and told Hallen precisely what he'd seen up on the cliffside.

"His cameras were some sort of weapon. He played it on the marching column, it took effect and they went to sleep," he finished. "I took them away from him and brought them down, but —"

He told about the contents of the camera cases being turned to a gritty, sooty powder. Then he added: "Dillon set them to destroy themselves. You understand. He's not a man. He's a creature from some planet other than Earth, passing for a human being. He's an Invader from space."

Hallen's expression was uneasy and compassionate but utterly unbelieving. Helena shivered and turned away her face. Coburn's lips went taut. He reached down to his desk. He made a sudden,

abrupt gesture. Hallen caught his breath and started up.

Coburn said curtly: "Another one of them. Helena, is that foam-suit comfortable?"

The girl jerked her face around. She looked frightened.

"Helena," said Coburn, "the real Helena, that is, would not sit down on a dusty chair. No woman would. But you did. She is a very truthful girl. You lied to me. And I just stuck pins in your shoulder and you didn't notice. They're sticking in your foam suit now. You and the creature that passed for Dillon up-country are both aliens. Invaders. Do you want to try to convince me otherwise?"

The girl said evenly: "Mr. Coburn, I do not think you are well —"

Then Coburn said thickly: "I'm crazy enough to put a bullet through you if your gang of devils has harmed the real Helena. What's happened to her?"

Hallen moved irresolutely to interfere. But the girl's expression changed. She smiled. "The real Helena, Mr. Coburn," said an entirely new voice, "has gone to the suburbs to visit her fiancé's family. She is quite safe."

There was dead silence. The figure — it even moved like Helena — got composedly to its feet. It got its coat. It put the coat on. Hallen stared with his mouth

open. The pins hadn't convinced him, but the utterly different voice coming from this girl's mouth had. Yet, waves of conflicting disbelief and conviction, horror and a racking doubt, chased themselves over his features.

"She admits she's not Helena!" said Coburn with loathing. "It's not human! Should I shoot it?"

The girl smiled at him again. Her eyes were very bright. "You will not, Mr. Coburn. And you will not even try to keep me prisoner to prove your story. If I screamed that you attack me —" the smile widened — "Helena's good Greek friends would come to my assistance."

She walked confidently to the door and opened it. Then she said warmly: "You are very intelligent, Mr. Coburn. We approve of you very much. But nobody will believe you."

The office door closed.

Coburn turned stiffly to the man he'd called to hear him. "Should I have shot her, Hallen?"

Hallen sat down as if his knees had given way beneath him. After a long time he got out a handkerchief and painfully mopped his face. At the same time he shivered.

"N-no. . . ." Then he swallowed. "My God, Coburn! It's true!"

"Yes," said Coburn bitterly,

"or you're as crazy as I am."

Hallen's eyes looked haunted. "I—I . . ." He swallowed again. "There's no question about the Bulgarian business. That did happen! And you were there. And — there've been other things. . . . Rumors. . . . Reports that nobody believed. . . . I might be able to get somebody to listen. . . ." He shivered again. "If it's true, it's the most terrible thing that ever happened. Invaders from space. . . . Where do you think they came from, Coburn?"

"The creature that looked like Dillon could climb incredibly fast. I saw it run and leap. Nothing on Earth could run or leap like that." Coburn shrugged. "Maybe a planet of another sun, with a monstrous gravity."

"Try to get somebody to believe that, eh?" Hallen got painfully to his feet. "I'll see what I can do. I . . . don't know that I can do anything but get myself locked up for observation. But I'll call you in an hour."

He went unsteadily out of the door. Coburn instantly called the Breen Foundation on the telephone. He'd left Janice there less than an hour before. She came to the phone and gasped when she heard his voice. Raging, he told her of Helena, then cautioned her to be especially careful — to be suspicious of everybody.

"Don't take anybody's word!" snapped Coburn. "Doubt every-

body! Doubt me! Until you're absolutely certain. Those creatures are everywhere. . . . They may pretend to be anybody!"

After Coburn hung up on Janice, he sat back and tried to think logically. There had to be some way by which an extra-terrestrial Invader could be told instantly from a human being. Unmask and prove even one such creature, and the whole story would be proved. But how detect them? Their skin was perfectly deceptive. Scratched, of course, they could be caught. But one couldn't go around scratching people. There was nothing of the alien creature's own actual form that showed.

Then Coburn remembered the Dillon foam suit. The head had been hollow. Flaccid. Holes instead of eyes. The creature's own eyes showed through.

But he'd have to make certain. He'd have to look at a foam-suited creature. He could have examined Helena's eyes, but she was gone now. However, there was an alternative. There was a Dillon in Salonika, as there was a Helena. If the Dillon in Salonika was the real Dillon — if there were a real Dillon — he could look at his eyes. He could tell if he were the false Dillon or the real one.

At this hour of the afternoon a Britisher would consider tea a necessity. There was only one

place in Salonika where they served tea that an Englishman would consider drinkable. Coburn got into a cab and gave the driver the address, and made sure of the revolver in his pocket. He was frightened. He was either going to meet with a monster from outer space, or be on the way to making so colossal a fool of himself that a mental asylum would yawn for him.

He went into the one coffee-shop in Salonika which served drinkable tea. It was dark and dingy inside, though the tableclothes were spotless. He went in, and there was Dillon.

Coburn's flesh crawled. If the figure sitting there with the *London Times* and a cup of tea before him were actually a monster from another planet . . .

But Dillon read comfortably, and sipped his tea. Coburn approached, and the Englishman looked up inquiringly.

"I was . . . up in the mountains," said Coburn feverishly; "when those Bulgarians came over. I can give you the story."

Dillon said frostily: "I'm not interested. The government's officially denied that any such incident took place. It's merely a silly rumor."

It was reasonable that it should be denied. But it had happened, nonetheless. Coburn stared, despite a consciousness that he was not conspicuously rational in the

way his eyes searched Dillon's face hungrily. The eyes *were* different! The eyes of the Dillon up in the mountains had been larger, and the brown part — But he had to be sure.

Suddenly, Coburn found himself grinning. There was a simple, a perfect, an absolute test for humanity!

Dillon said suspiciously: "What the devil are you staring at me for?"

Coburn continued to grin uncontrollably, even as he said in a tone of apology: "I hate to do this, but I have to be sure. . . ."

He swung. He connected with Dillon's nose. Blood started.

Coburn zestfully let himself be thrown out, while Dillon roared and tried to get at him through the flying wedge of waiters. He felt an enormous relaxation on the way back to his office in another cab. He was a trifle battered, but it was worth it.

Back in the office he called Hallen again. And again Hallen answered. He sounded guilty and worried.

"I don't know whether I'm crazy or not," he said bitterly. "But I was in your office. I saw your secretary there — and she didn't feel pins stuck in her. And something did happen to those Bulgarians that the Greeks don't know anything about, or the Americans either. So you're to tell

your story to the high brass down in Athens. I think you'll be locked up afterward as a lunatic — and me with you for believing my own eyes. But a plane's being readied."

"Where do I meet you?" asked Coburn.

Hallen told him. A certain room out at the airport. Coburn hung up. The telephone rang instantly. He was on the way out, but he turned back and answered it. Janice's voice — amazingly convincing — came from the instrument. And at the first words his throat went dry. Because it couldn't be Janice.

"I've been trying to get you. Have you tried to reach me?"

"Why, no. Why?"

Janice's voice said: "I've something interesting to tell you. I left the office an hour ago. I'm at the place where I live when I'm in Salonika. Write down the address. Can you come here? I've found out something astonishing!"

He wrote down the address. He had a feeling of nightmarishness. This was not Janice —

"I'm clearing up some matters you'll guess at," he said grimly, "so I may be a little while getting there. You'll wait?"

He hung up. And then with a rather ghastly humor he took some pins from a box on the desk and worked absorbedly at bending one around the inside of the band of the seal ring he wore on his right hand.

But he didn't go to the telephoned address. He went to the Breen Foundation. And Janice was there. She was the real Janice. He knew it instantly he saw her. She was panic-stricken when he told her of his own telephone experience. Her teeth chattered. But she knew — instinctively, she said — that he was himself. She got into the cab with him.

They reached the airport and found the office Hallen had named. The lettering on it, in Greek and French, said that it was a reception room for official visitors only.

"Our status is uncertain," said Coburn drily. "We may be official guests, or we may be crazy. It's a toss-up which status sticks."

He opened the door and looked carefully inside before he entered. Hallen was there. There was a lean, hard-bitten colonel of the American liaison force in Greece. There was a Greek general, pudgy and genial, standing with his back to a window and his hands clasped behind him. There were two Greek colonels and a major. They regarded him soberly.

"Howdo, Coburn," said Hallen painfully. "You're heading for Athens, you know. This is Miss Ames? But these gentlemen have . . . ah . . . a special concern with that business up-country. They'd like to hear your story before you leave."

"I suppose," said Coburn

curtly, "it's a sort of preliminary commission in lunacy."

But he shook hands all around. He kept his left hand in his coat pocket as he shook hands with his right. His revolver was in his left-hand pocket now too. The Greek general beamed at him. The American colonel's eyes were hard and suspicious. One of the two Greek colonels was very slightly cross-eyed. The Greek major shook hands solemnly.

Coburn took a deep breath. "I know my tale sounds crazy," he said, "but . . . I had a telephone call just now. Hallen will bear me out that my secretary was impersonated by somebody else this afternoon."

"I've told them that," said Gallen unhappily.

"And something was impersonating Dillon up in the hills," finished Coburn. "I've reason to believe that at this address" — and he handed the address he'd written down to Hallen — "a . . . creature will be found who will look most convincingly like Miss Ames, here. You might send and see."

The American colonel snorted: "This whole tale's preposterous! It's an attempt to cash in on the actual mystery of what happened up-country."

The Greek general protested gently. His English was so heavily accented as to be hard to understand, but he pointed out that

Coburn knew details of the event in Náousa that only someone who had been there could know.

"True enough," said the American officer darkly, "but he can tell the truth now, before we make fools of ourselves sending him to Athens to be unmasked. Suppose," he said unpleasantly, "you give us the actual facts!"

Coburn nodded. "The idea you find you can't take is that creatures that aren't human can be on Earth and pass for human beings. There's some evidence on that right here." He nodded to the Greek major who was the junior officer in the room. "Major, will you show these other gentlemen the palm of your hand?"

The Greek major frowned perplexedly. He lifted his hand and looked at it. Then his face went absolutely impassive.

"I'm ready to shoot!" snapped Coburn. "Show them your hand. I can tell now."

He felt the tensing of the others in the room, not toward the major but toward him. They were preparing to jump him, thinking him mad.

But the major grinned ruefully: "Clever, Mr. Coburn! But how did you pick me out?"

Then there was a sensation of intolerable brightness all around. But it was not actual light. It was a sensation inside one's brain.

Coburn felt himself falling. He knew, somehow, that the others

were falling too. He saw everyone in the room in the act of slumping limply to the floor — all but the Greek major. And Coburn felt a bitter, despairing fury as consciousness left him.

IV

He came to in a hospital room, with a nurse and two doctors and an elaborate oxygen-administering apparatus. The apparatus was wheeled out. The nurse followed. The two doctors hurried after her. The American colonel of the airport was standing by the bed on which Coburn lay, fully dressed.

Coburn felt perfectly all right. He stirred. The American colonel said sourly: "You're not harmed. Nobody was. But Major Pangalos got away."

Coburn sat up. There was a moment's bare trace of dizziness, and that was gone too. Coburn said: "Where's Miss Ames? What happened to her?"

"She's getting oxygen," said the colonel. "We were rushed here from the airport, sleeping soundly just like those Bulgarians. Major Pangalos ordered it before he disappeared. Helicopters brought some Bulgarians down, by the way, and oxygen brought them to. So naturally they gave us the same treatment. Very effective."

The colonel looked both chastened and truculent. "How'd you know Major Pangalos for what he

was? He was accepted everywhere as a man."

"His eyes were queer," said Coburn. He stood up experimentally. "I figured they would be, if one looked. I saw the foam suit that creature wore up-country, when he wasn't in it. There were holes for the eyes. It occurred to me that his eyes weren't likely to be like ours. Not exactly. So I hunted up the real Dillon, and his eyes weren't like I remembered. I punched him in the nose, by the way, to make sure he'd bleed and was human. He was."

Coburn continued, "You see, they obviously come from a heavy planet and move differently. They're stronger than we are. Much like the way we'd be on the moon with one-sixth Earth gravity. They probably are used to a thicker atmosphere. If so, their eyes wouldn't be right for here. They'd need eyeglasses."

"Major Pangalos didn't —"

"Contact eyeglasses," said Coburn sourly. "Little cups of plastic. They slip under the eyelids and touch the white part of the eye. Familiar enough. But that's not all."

The American colonel looked troubled. "I know contact lenses," he admitted. "But —"

"If the Invaders have a thick atmosphere at home," Coburn said, "they may have a cloudy sky. The pupils of their eyes may need to be larger. Perhaps they're

a different shape. Or their eyes may be a completely alien color. Anyhow, they need contact lenses not only to correct their vision, but to make their eyes look like ours. They're painted on the inside to change the natural look and color. It's very deceptive. But you can tell."

"That goes to Headquarters at once!" snapped the colonel.

He went out briskly. Coburn followed him out of the room to look for Janice. And Janice happened to be looking for him at exactly the same moment. He was genuinely astonished to realize how relieved he was that she was all right.

He said apologetically: "I was worried! When I felt myself passing out I felt pretty rotten at having failed to protect you."

She looked at him with nearly the same sort of surprised satisfaction. "I'm all right," she said breathlessly. "I was worried about you."

The roaring of motors outside the hospital interrupted them. More and more vehicles arrived, until a deep purring filled the air. A Greek doctor with a worried expression hurried somewhere. Soldiers appeared, hard-bitten, tough, professional Greek soldiers. Hallen came out of a hospital room. The Greek general appeared with one of the two colonels who'd been at the airport. The general nodded, and his eyes seemed cor-

dial. He waved them ahead of him into a waiting elevator. The elevator descended. They went out of the hospital and there was an armored car waiting. An impressive escort of motorcycle troops waited with it.

The Greek general saw Coburn's cynical expression at sight of the guards. He explained blandly that since oxygen brought sleeping Bulgarians out of their slumber — and had been used on them — oxygen was handy for use by anybody who experienced a bright flash of light in his mind. The Bulgarian soldiers, incidentally, said that outside the village of Ardea they'd felt as if the sunlight had brightened amazingly, but they felt no effects for two hours afterward, when they fell asleep at Náousa. So, said the general almost unintelligibly, if anything untoward happened on the way to the airport, everybody would start breathing oxygen. A sensation of bright light would be untoward.

The armored car started off, with motorcyclists crowded about it with weapons ready. But the ride to the airport was uneventful. To others than Janice and Coburn it may even have been tedious. But when she understood the general's explanation, she shivered a little. She leaned insensibly closer to Coburn. He took her hand protectively in his.

They reached the airport. They roared through the gateway and directly out upon the darkened field. Something bellowed and raced down a runway and took to the air. Other things followed it. They gained altitude and circled back overhead. Tiny bluish flickerings moved across the overcast sky. Exhaust flames.

Coburn realized that it was a fighter plane escort.

The huge transport plane that waited for them was dark. They climbed into it and found their seats. When it roared down the unlighted field and took to the air, everything possible had been done to keep anybody from bringing any weapon to bear upon it.

"All safe now!" said the voice of the American colonel in the darkness of the unlit plane, as the plane gained height. "Incidentally, Coburn, why did you want to look at Pangalos' palm? What did you expect to find there?"

"When I started for the airport," Coburn explained, "I bent a pin around the band of a ring I wear. I could let it lie flat when I shook hands. Or I could make it stand out like a spur. I set it with my thumb. I saw Pangalos' eyes, so I had it stand out, and I made a tear in his plastic skin when I shook hands with him. He didn't feel it, of course." He paused. "Did anybody go to the address I gave Hallan?"

Hallan said, in the darkness:

"Major Pangalos got there first."

The blackness outside the plane seemed to grow deeper. There was literally nothing to be seen but the instrument dials up at the pilots' end of the ship.

The Greek general asked a question in his difficult English.

"Where'd they come from?" repeated Coburn. "I've no idea. Off Earth, yes. A heavy planet, yes. I doubt they come from our solar system, though. Somewhere among the stars."

The Greek general said something with a sly up-twist of his voice. Whatever and whoever the Invaders were, he said, they did not like Bulgarians. If they'd knocked out the raiding party simply to test their weapons against human subjects, at least they had chosen suitable and pleasing subjects for the test.

There was light. For an instant Coburn tensed. But the plane climbed and the brightness steadied. It was the top of a cloud bank, brilliantly white in the moonlight. They had flown up through it, and it reached as far ahead as they could see. A stubby fighter plane swam up out of the mist and fell into position alongside. Others appeared. They took formation about the transport and all flew steadily through the moonlight.

"I wish I knew," said the American colonel vexedly, "if

those creatures were only testing weapons, or if they were getting set to start bargaining with us!"

"Meaning?" asked Coburn.

"If they're here," said the colonel angrily, "and if they do mean to meddle in our business, they may set up a sort of auction with us bidding against the Iron Curtain gang for their friendship. And *they'd* make any deal!"

The Greek general agreed drily. He said that free people were not practical people. They were always ready to die rather than cease to be free. Surely the Greeks had proved themselves ready to die. But people like the Bulgarians thought that to continue to live was the most important thing in the world. It was, of course, the practical viewpoint. . . .

"They can have it!" growled Coburn.

Janice said hesitantly: "But the Invaders haven't killed anybody we know of. They could have killed the Bulgarians. They didn't. The one who called himself Dillon stopped one man from killing them. And they could have killed us, earlier today at the airport. Could they want to be friends?"

"They're starting the wrong way," said Coburn.

The Greek general stirred in his seat, but he was pointedly silent.

The pilot snapped abruptly from up at the bow of the plane:

"Colonel! sir! Two of the fighters are climbing as if they've spotted something. There go the rest."

Coburn leaned across Janice to stare out the window. When the fighters were below the transport, they could be seen in silhouette against the clouds. Above, their exhaust flames pin-pointed them. Small blue flames climbed steeply.

The big ship went on. The roar of its motors was steady and unvarying. From a passenger seat it was not possible to look overhead. But suddenly there were streaking sparks against the stars. Tracer bullets. Fighters swerved and plunged to intercept something. . . .

And a Thing came down out of the sky with a terrific velocity. Tracer bullets sprayed all around it. Some could be seen to ricochet off its sides. Flashings came from the alien craft. They were not explosions from guns. They were lurid, actintic, smokeless blasts of pure light. The Thing seemed to be made of polished metal. It dodged, trying to approach the transport. The fighters lunged to prevent it. The ghastly game of interception seemed to rush here and there all over the sky.

The strange object was not possibly of human design or manufacture. It had no wings. It left no trail of jet fumes or rocket smoke. It was glittering and mirror-like, and it was shaped almost

exactly like two turtle-shells base to base. It was flat and oval. It had no visible external features.

It flung itself about with incredible darts and jerkings. It could stop stock still as no plane could possibly stop, and accelerate at a rate no human body could endure. It tried savagely to get through the swarming fighters to the transport. Its light weapon flashed — but the pilots would be wearing oxygen masks and there were no casualties among the human planes. Once a fighter did fall off in a steep dive, and fluttered almost down to the cloud bank before it recovered and came back with its guns spitting.

That one appeared to end the fight. It came straight up, pumping tracers at the steel flier from below. And the glittering Thing seemed to stop dead in the air. Then it shuddered. It was bathed in the flaring sparks of tracers. Then —

It dropped like a stone, tumbling aimlessly over and over as it dropped. It plummeted into the cloud bank.

Suddenly the clouds were lighted from within. Something inside flared with a momentary, terrifying radiance. No lightning bolt ever flashed more luridly.

The transport plane and its escort flew on and on over the moonlit bank of clouds.

Presently orders came by radio. On the report of this attack, the

flight plan would be changed, for safety. If the air convoy had been attacked once, it might be attacked again. So it would be wisest to get it immediately to where there would be plenty of protection. Therefore, the transport plane would head for Naples.

Nearly the whole of the United States Mediterranean fleet was in the Bay of Naples just then. It had been there nearly a week, and by day its liberty parties swarmed ashore. The merchants and the souvenir salesmen were entranced. American sailors had money and they spent it. The fleet's officers were social assets, its messes bought satisfyingly of local viands, and everybody was happy.

All but one small group. The newspapers of one of the Italian political parties howled infuriatedly. They had orders to howl, from behind the Iron Curtain. The American fleet, that one party's newspapers bellowed, was imperialistic, capitalistic, and decadent. In short, there was virulent propaganda against the American fleet in Naples. But most people were glad it was there anyway. Certainly nobody stayed awake worrying about it.

People were staying awake worrying about the transport plane carrying Coburn and Janice, however. On the plane, Janice was fearful and pressed close to Coburn, and he found it an absorbing

experience and was moved to talk in a low tone about other matters than extra-terrestrial Invaders and foam suits and interstellar travel. Janice found those other subjects surprisingly fitted to make her forget about being afraid.

Elsewhere, the people who stayed awake did talk about just the subjects Coburn was avoiding. The convoy carrying Coburn to tell what he knew had been attacked. By a plane which was definitely not made or manned by human beings. The news flashed through the air across continents. It went under the ocean over sea beds. It traveled in the tightest and most closely-guarded of diplomatic codes. The Greek government gave the other NATO nations a confidential account of the Bulgarian raid and what had happened to it. These details were past question. The facts brought out by Coburn were true, too.

So secret instructions followed the news. At first they went only to highly-trusted individuals. In thirty nations, top-ranking officials and military officers blindfolded each other in turn and gravely stuck pins in each other. The blindfolded person was expected to name the place where he had been stuck. This had an historical precedent. In olden days, pins were stuck in suspected witches. They had patches of skin in which

there was no sensation, and discovery of such areas condemned them to death. Psychologists in later centuries found that patches of anaesthetic skin were typical of certain forms of hysteria, and therefore did not execute their patients. But the Invaders, by the fact that their seemingly human bodies were not flesh at all, could not pass such tests.

There were consequences. A Minister of Defense of a European nation amusedly watched the tests on his subordinates, blandly excused himself for a moment before his own turn came, and did not come back. A general of division vanished into thin air. Diplomatic code clerks painstakingly decoded the instructions for such tests, and were nowhere about when they themselves were to be tested. An eminent Hollywood director and an Olympic champion ceased to be.

In the free world nearly a hundred prominent individuals simply disappeared. Few were in position to influence high-level decisions. Many were in line to know rather significant details of world affairs. There was alarm.

It was plain, too, that not all disguised Invaders would have had to vanish. Many would not even be called on for test. They would stay where they were. And there were private persons. . . .

There was consternation. But

Janice, in the plane, was saying softly to Coburn: "The — creature who telephoned and said she was me. How did you know she wasn't?"

"I went to the Breen Foundation first," said Coburn. "I looked into your eyes — and they were right. So I didn't need to stick a pin in you."

The thought of Coburn not needing to stick a pin in her impressed Janice as beautiful trust. She sighed contentedly. "Of course you'd know," she said. "So would I — now!" She laughed a little.

The convoy flew on. The lurid round disk of the moon descended toward the west.

"It'll be sunrise soon. But I imagine we'll land before dawn."

They did. The flying group of planes flew lower. Coburn saw a single light on the ground. It was very tiny, and it vanished rearward with great speed. Later there was another light, and a dull-red glow in the sky. Still later, infinitesimal twinklings on the ground at the horizon. They increased in number but not in size, and the plane swung hugely to the left, and the lights on the ground formed a visible pattern. And moonlight — broken by the shadows of clouds — displayed the city and the Bay of Naples below.

The transport plane landed. The passengers descended. Coburn saw Hallen, the American

colonel, the Greek general, and a Greek colonel. The other had been left behind to take charge of things in Salonika. Here the uniforms were American, and naval. There were some Italian police in view, but most of the men about were American seamen, ostensibly on shore leave. But Coburn doubted very much if they were as completely unarmed as men on shore leave usually are.

A man in a cap with much gold braid greeted the American colonel, the Greek general, and the Greek colonel. He came to Coburn, to whose arm Janice seemed to cling.

"We're taking you out to the fleet. We've taken care of everything. Everybody's had pins stuck in him!"

It was very humorous, of course. They moved away from the plane. Surrounded by white-clad sailors, the party from the plane moved into the hangar.

Then a voice snapped a startled question, in English. An instant later it rasped: "Stop or I'll shoot!"

Then there was a bright flash of light. The interior of the hangar was made vivid by it. It went out. And as it disappeared there were the sounds of running footsteps. Only they did not run properly. They ran in great leaps. Impossible leaps. Monstrous leaps. A man might run like that on the moon, with a lesser gravity. A

creature accustomed to much greater gravity might run like that on Earth. But it would not be human.

It got away.

There was a waiting car. They got into it. They pulled out from the airport with other cars close before and behind. The cavalcade raced for the city and the shoreline surrounded by a guard less noisy but no less effective than the Greek motorcycle troopers.

But the Greek general said something meditative in the dark interior of the car.

"What's that?" demanded someone authoritatively.

The Greek general said it again, mildly. This latest attempt to seize them or harm them — if it was that — had been surprisingly inept. It was strange that creatures able to travel between the stars and put regiments and tanks out of action should fail so dismally to kill or kidnap Coburn, if they really wanted to. Could it be that they were not quite sincere in their efforts?

"That," said the authoritative voice, "is an idea!"

They reached the waterfront. And here in the darkest part of the night and with the moon near to setting, the waters of the Bay of Naples rolled in small, smooth-surfaced, tranquil waves. There was a Navy barge waiting. Those who had come by plane boarded it. It cast off and headed out into

the middle of the huge harbor.

In minutes there was a giant hull looming overhead. They stepped out onto a landing ladder and climbed interminably up the ship's metal side. Then there was an open door.

"Now," said the American colonel triumphantly, "now everything's all right! Nothing can happen now, short of an atomic bomb!"

The Greek general glanced at him out of the corner of his eyes. He said something in that heavy accent of his. He asked mildly if creatures — Invaders — who could travel between the stars were unlikely to be able to make atom bombs if they wanted to.

There was no answer. But somebody led Coburn into an office where this carrier's skipper was at his desk. He looked at Coburn with a sardonic, unfriendly eye.

"Mr. Coburn, I believe," he said remotely. "You've been very well staged-managed by your friends, Mr. Coburn. They've made it look as if they were trying hard to kill you, eh? But we know better, don't we? We know it's all a build-up for you to make a deal for them, eh? Well, Mr. Coburn, you'll find it's going to be a let-down instead! You're not officially under arrest, but I wouldn't advise you to try to start anything, Mr. Coburn! We're apt to be rather crude in dealing with emissaries of enemies of all the



human race. And don't forget it!"

And this was Coburn's first inkling that he was regarded as a traitor of his planet who had sold out to the Invaders. All the plans made from his information would be based on the supposition that he intended to betray mankind by misleading it.

V

It was not yet forty-eight hours since Coburn had been interrupted in the act of starting his car up in Ardea. Greek newspapers had splashed lurid headlines of a rumored invasion by Bulgarians, and their rumored defeat. The story was not widely copied. It sounded too unlikely. In a few hours it would be time for a new set of newspapers to begin to appear. Not one of them would



print a single word about the most important disclosure in human history: that extra-terrestrial Invaders moved blandly about among human beings without being suspected.

The newspapers didn't know it. On inside pages and bottom corners, the London papers might refer briefly to the remarkable rumor that had swept over Greece about an invasion force said to have crossed its border. The London papers would say that the Greek government officially denied that such a happening had taken place. The New York papers would be full of a political scandal among municipal officials, the Washington papers would deal largely with a Congressional investigation committee hearing, Los Angeles would have a new and gory murder to exploit, San Francisco news would be of a water-front strike, Tokyo would talk of cherry blossoms, Delhi of Pakistan, and the French press would discuss the political crisis. But no newspaper, anywhere, would talk about Invaders.

In the United States radar technicians had been routed out of bed and informed that night fighters had had a fight with an alien ship manned by non-humans and had destroyed it, but their radars detected nothing at all. An hour after sunrise in Naples they had come up with a combina-

tion of radar frequencies which were built to detect everything. Instructions were going out in code to all radar establishments on how to set it up on existing equipment. Long before that time, business machines had begun intricate operations with punched cards containing all known facts about the people known to have dropped out of sight. Other machines began to integrate crackpot reports of things sighted in divers places. The stores of Hunter and Nereid rockets — especially the remote-control jobs — were broken out. Great Air Transport planes began to haul them to where they might be needed.

In England, certain establishments that had never been mentioned even in Parliament were put on war alert. There was frantic scurrying-about in France. In Sweden a formerly ignored scientist was called to a twice-scrambled telephone connection and consulted at length about objects reported over Sweden's skies. The Canadian Air Force tumbled out in darkness and was briefed. In Chile there was agitation, and in Peru.

There was earnest effort to secure cooperation from behind the Iron Curtain, but that did not work. The Iron Curtain stood pat, demanding the most detailed of information and the privilege of inspecting all weapons intended for use against anybody so far

unnamed, but refusing all information of its own. In fact, there was a very normal reaction everywhere, except that the newspapers didn't know anything to print.

These secret hassles were continuing as the dawnlight moved over Italy and made Naples and its harbor quite the most beautiful place in the world. When daylight rolled over France, matters were beginning to fall into pattern. As daybreak moved across the Atlantic, at least the measures to be taken began to be visualized and orders given for their accomplishment.

And then, with sunrise in America, real preparations got under way.

But hours earlier there was consultation on the carrier in the Bay of Naples. Coburn sat in a ward-room in a cold fury which was in part despair. He had been kept in complete ignorance of all measures taken, and he felt the raging indignation of a man accused of treason. He was being questioned again. He was treated with an icy courtesy that was worse than accusation. The carrier skipper mentioned with detachment that, of course, Coburn had never been in any danger. Obviously. The event in the airport at Salonika and the attack on the convoy were window-dressing. They were not attempts to withdraw him from circulation, but to draw attention to him. Which, of course,

implied that the Invaders — whoever or whatever they might be — considered Coburn a useful tool for whatever purpose they intended.

This was before the conference officially began. It took time to arrange. There were radio technicians with microphones. The consultation — duly scrambled and re-scrambled — would be relayed to Washington while it was on. It was a top level conference. Hallen was included, but he did not seem happy.

Then things were ready. The skipper of the carrier took over, with full awareness that the very highest brass in Washington was listening to every word.

“We can skip your technical information, Mr. Coburn,” he said with ironic courtesy, “unless you’ve something new to offer.”

Coburn shook his head. He seethed.

“For the record,” said the skipper, “I repeat that it is obvious that your presence at the scene when those Bulgarians were knocked out, that you were attacked in Salonika, that the ship carrying you was also attacked, and that there was an incident on your landing here: — it’s obvious that all these things were stage-managed to call attention to you, for the purposes of . . . whoever staged them. Have you anything more to offer?”

“No,” growled Coburn. “I’ve told all I know.” He was furiously angry and felt completely helpless.

“Your information,” purred the Skipper, “and the stage-managed incidents, make you look like a very patriotic citizen who is feared by the supposedly extra-terrestrial creatures. But we don’t have to play any longer, Mr. Coburn. What were you told to tell your government? What do these . . . extra-terrestrials want?”

“My guess,” snapped Coburn, “is that they want Earth.”

The skipper raised his eyebrows. “Are you threatening us in their name?” he asked, purring.

“I’m telling you my guess,” said Coburn hotly. “It’s just as good as yours and no better! I have no instructions from them. I have no message from them. I’ve only my own opinion, which is that we humans had better get ready to fight. I believe we ought to join together — all of Earth — and get set to defend ourselves.”

There was silence. Coburn found himself regarding the faces around him with an unexpected truculence. Janice pressed his hand warningly.

“All of Earth,” said the skipper softly. “Hmmm. You advise an arrangement with all the earth. . . . What are your politics, Mr. Coburn? — No, let us say, what are the political views of the extra-terrestrial creatures you tell

us about? We have to know.”

Coburn seethed. “If you’re suggesting that this is a cold war trick,” he said furiously, “— if they were faking it, they wouldn’t try tricks! They’d make war! They’d try conquest!”

Coburn saw the stout Greek general nodding to himself. But the Skipper said suavely: “You were with one of the creatures, you say, up in the village of Náousa. Would you say he seemed unfriendly to the Bulgarians?”

“He was playing the part of an Englishman,” snapped Coburn, “trying to stop a raid, and murders, and possibly a war — all of them unnecessary!”

“You don’t paint a frightening picture,” complained the skipper ironically. “First you say we have to fight him and his kind, and then you imply that he was highly altruistic. What is the fact?”

“Dammit!” said Coburn. “I hated him because he wasn’t human. It made my flesh crawl to see him act so much like a man when he wasn’t. But he made me feel ashamed when I held a gun on him and he proved he wasn’t human just so Janice — so Miss Ames wouldn’t be afraid to drive down to Salonika with me!”

“So you have some . . . friendly feelings toward him, eh?” the skipper said negligently. “How will you get in touch with his kind, by the way? *If* we should ask you to? Of course you’ve got

it all arranged? Just in case.”

Coburn knew that absolutely nothing could be done with a man who was trying to show off his shrewdness to his listening superiors. He said disgustedly: “That’s the last straw. Go to hell!”

A loud-speaker spoke suddenly. Its tone was authoritative, and there were little cracklings of static in it from its passage across the Atlantic.

“That line of questioning can be dropped, Captain. Mr. Coburn, did these aliens have any other chances to kill you?”

“Plenty!” snapped Coburn. “And easy ones. One of them came into my office as my secretary. She could have killed me. The man who passed for Major Pangalos could have shot us all while we were unconscious. I don’t know why they didn’t get the transport plane, and I don’t know what their scheme is. I’m telling the facts. They’re contradictory. I can’t help that. All I have are the facts.”

The loud-speaker said crisply: “The attack on the transport plane — any pilots present who were in that fight?”

Someone at the back said: “Yes, sir. Here.”

“How good was their ship? Could it have been a guided missile?”

“No, sir. No guided missile. Whoever drove that ship was right on board. And that ship was

(Continued on page 119)

YESTERDAYS

Ray Russell is still well-remembered for his impressive years as PLAYBOY's first, and perhaps best, editor. He is also remembered, more often these days, for his short, snappy, and oftentimes sardonic fantasies. In this one backward runs the story-line as unreels the plot . . .

RAY RUSSELL

SATURDAY. My worst fears are confirmed. We are rushing toward inconceivable doom, complete annihilation. Zoltany's prophecy has come true. He tried to warn me. Why didn't I listen to him? Now it's too late—that is to say, too early.

I have started a chain that cannot be stopped. Even if I knew how to stop it, all efforts would be fruitless because they would become undone in the very moment of their doing.

Nothing remains for me but to watch this thing I have wrought, watch it helplessly and impotently. For I sense that my punishment shall consist in one small part of me remaining aware of what is happening, while the greater part of my consciousness (and of course my physical body) experiences, first, repentant resignation, then numbing realization, followed by mounting fear, nagging suspicion, vague uneasiness, exultant triumph, cheerful optimism, and naive anticipation—in just about that order. All the while, a tiny segment of my being will scream silently in frustration

as it witnesses the inevitable, inexorable unwinding . . . or perhaps I should say winding . . . of the infernal machine. Oh world, universe, God: forgive me. This is my last entry in these notebooks. When I put down the pen, I will take my own life. Pointless as that is, under these extraordinary circumstances.

Dr. Martin Avery

FRIDAY. No notes today, except to say I will spend the day checking and re-checking, doing my utmost to rectify what I am all but convinced has taken place. If it has, God help me. Or have I rendered even Him helpless?

THURSDAY. I am not going to panic. But I am beginning to be afraid. I'm finding it increasingly difficult to set down these notes. A simple act, but the very pushing of the pen has become a Herculean task. It's not that it's become heavy or I've become weak, just that it doesn't seem to want to go forward! It fights me. And I worry about how far the effect is reaching. Just a few blocks, a

few miles? Or the whole city, the whole country, the whole world, the whole—but no, I cannot even allow myself to think that.

WEDNESDAY. Zoltany was wrong, of course. He talked utter nonsense the other evening. He's always been afraid of progress (strange word for me to use, in this situation, "progress"). And yet, what I see out my window does give me something to think about. Has there really been a *general* slowing down? Not just here inside my house? Or is it an illusion, a distortion of my senses? After all, there are drugs that distort the time sense, make a minute seem an hour, and so on, so it's not all *that* strange. I mustn't let Zoltany's alarmist talk disturb me.

TUESDAY. Success! I've noticed what appears to be the first effect, the first visible proof. My watch seems to have slowed down. (Which my calculations predicted, of course.) And all the clocks in the house, too. But how can I be sure, since everything is relative and I have no "normal" clock to use as a control? I phoned for the correct time, and it checked against my clocks, but of course, it would, wouldn't it? That is, if Zoltany's old-fogey fears had some basis . . .

MONDAY. It's a beautiful morning. Bright and clear. I awoke refreshed and hungry as a bear, prepared myself a gigantic breakfast of eggs, sausage, toast and coffee, then came immediately into the lab. I was struck by something that never occurred to me before—and *beauty* of

the machine. It has the beauty of organization, of function, of everything having its purpose; the console panel, with its rows of switches and dials, has the orderly beauty of a Mondrian painting. I stood for a moment, forgetting its power, its Promethean capacities, admiring its sheer beauty. Then I checked the calibrations, crossed my fingers, took a deep breath, wished myself luck, and activated the machine.

Except for the almost inaudible throb of the power surge, there was no discernible result of any kind. Discouraging? Far from it! It confirms my calculations: the effect will begin slowly, then accelerate. I'm ecstatic! I even poured out what was left of last night's brandy and toasted myself! This is truly a great day!

SUNDAY. Old Professor Zoltany dropped over this evening to sample the bottle of fine brandy my brother sent me for my birthday. I broke the seal, then broke the news to him—that the machine ("gadget" he calls it) is finished and that I will begin the first experiment in the morning. This time, instead of being only waspish and scornful, he seemed concerned. Worried. I interpreted this as a victory, because it meant he was beginning to believe in the machine and in my claims.

"Are you quite sure you know what you are doing?" he said, solemnly.

I told him I had checked my calculations again and again. There was no possibility of error. But I added I was flattered he was worried about me.

"About you?" he growled. "I am worried about something infinitely

greater and more important than you. Man has unleashed the atom, tampered with his own genes, overpopulated the earth, poisoned the air and the waters, but this thing of yours could be worse than all the rest. If it works—and I pray it will *not* work—how can you possibly predict the outcome? Once you tap these mighty forces, once you open Pandora's box—”

I was getting a little tired of being characterized as a Mad Scientist, but I kept my temper. Patiently, for at least the dozenth time, I assured him there was no danger, and that even if there was, the danger would be only to myself.

“How can you be so certain?” he said. “All your confidence, your *irresponsible* confidence, is based on nothing but a lot of formulae, scribbles on paper, an untried, untested theorem!”

I reminded him that science must get forward.

“Forward! It's not *forward* that frightens me! How do you know what effect this toy of yours will have upon entropy? What if entropy is reversed? Have you thought of the consequences? You say your gadget will transport you backward in time; that, for you, time will first slow down, then stop, then reverse itself. But what if you are wrong? What if the entire world, the entire cosmos is transported? What if time itself runs backward? You

would not just travel backward in time, Martin, you would live your life backward, you would grow younger, we would *all* grow younger, while knowledge and experience would be erased from our minds, and our achievements crumble into nothingness before our eyes. We would become children, infants, embryos, and so it would go through all the barbarous tyrannies and primitive darkneses mankind would tumble, like a film running backward, then he would become something less than man, and slide back into the primordial ooze. After that, this earth and all the planets would liquefy, then turn gaseous, then cease to be. Finally, Creation itself would come to a stop at its own beginning—a plume of smoke sucked back into the Creator's pipe. Because of you. Because of your incautious curiosity. But have you thought of that? No!”

I laughed, and ventured the opinion that he was feeling the brandy.

He stared pensively into his empty glass. “If there is a God of some kind, a Creator, perhaps you are merely His tool, doing His bidding. It may be His way of . . . wiping the slate clean. So that He may start fresh.” He rose to leave, looking at his watch. “It's late,” he said. “Late,” he repeated. “Good night, Martin. I will talk to you tomorrow—if there is one.”

The End

COMING IN THE JULY AMAZING STORIES
ROBERT SILVERBERG'S UP THE LINE
ON SALE APRIL 24th Watch for it.

King of the

BLACK SUNRISE

By MILTON LESSER

No man is willing to walk deliberately into the jaws of death—not when he knows there's not a chance in ten millions of coming out alive. Yet Kent Taggart agreed to risk destruction, for the time of the Black Sunrise was at hand—and the fabulous treasure of an entire planet could be had for the taking!

I WAS telling Gurr the Ar-givian what it's like in Terra City when the sun goes down across the bay, burnishing the spires and towers like molten copper, when the Earthmen came in. I had known they were here on Ar-

giv. I'd seen their spaceship come shuddering out of sub-space. But I turned my back on them and ordered another drink and told Gurr with my eyes to go away, when I felt a hand drop firmly on my shoulder.



"You're Kent Taggert," the girl said.

"Not me, lady." But damn her, she was studying my profile and nodding.

"You don't have to lie. I've seen pictures of you. I'd know you anywhere."

"Don't you watch the newsvids, lady? Kent Taggert is dead."

"That's where I saw your picture. On the newsvids."

"Maybe I look like him a little."

"You can just stop it, Kent Taggert. An outworlder on Cephplus told us you were alive, told us you were here in Argiv City. We need you, Taggert."

"Nobody needs me," I said. I looked at her for the first time. She was beautiful. So damned beautiful and so damned sure of herself I felt like poking her one.

"Then you admit it? You're Taggert?"

"I admit nothing."

"If we hire you without asking your name, will you join us?"

"No."

"We'll pay you well—Taggert."

"Definitely, no."

"Listen, you fool." The voice suddenly became hard. Not cruel, but hard. It was barely above a whisper. I

could smell her perfume, not the kind that slams two sexy fists into your nostrils but the subtle kind, like the girls can buy only on Earth. "Let me tell you something. There was a man from the W.B.I. on our ship. He's here on Argiv. He was also on Cephplus. He's looking for you."

The W.B.I. The World Bureau of Investigation. It could be. The Council of the Worlds had passed a blanket extradition law for me. That's why I'm here on Argiv. No Earthman bothers coming to Argiv. *Almost* no Earthman.

I was all set to tell her she could go and shove it. But just then the door to Gurr's Tavern—it's the only tavern at the only spaceport on Argiv—opened. Blinding light from the three Argivian suns stabbed into the room. When I could see again, another Earthman had joined the girl's two silent companions. He was trying too hard not to look like law. He was law, all right.

"I haven't much time, Taggert," the girl whispered quickly. "We're going up-country. The outworlder on Cephplus said you've been spending your time between Cephplus and Argiv. You know this planet. Better than any other Earthman. Better than

most Argivians. We'll hire you as a guide and you can stop worrying about the W.B.I.—for a while."

"What the hell do you want up-country?"

"The same as anybody else wants."

"They never find it."

"They never look for it right before the Black Sunrise, do they?"

"You know about that?" I asked. I tried not to show it, but there was sudden respect in my voice.

"We're no amateurs, Taggert. What do you say?"

I shrugged, thinking. If an Earthman or any other outworlder left Argiv City during Black Sunrise, it was as good as committing suicide. It was better. A suicide might change his mind, but an alien on Argiv during Black Sunrise couldn't. I let my gaze wander across the room to where the W.B.I. man was sitting with the girl's two companions. His eyes were waiting for mine, locked with them. He smiled. Not a nice smile.

"When can you start?" I asked the girl.

"Whenever you say."

"All right. I want five hundred credits."

"Out of which you'll pay

for our supplies and bearers."

"For myself."

"No, Taggert."

"Then four hundred for myself."

"We'll give you one hundred."

"You can shove it—" I began.

"And ten percent of what we find up-country."

". . . O.K. I'll get supplies and bearers. You see that W.B.I. man? You can hit him over the head or make love to him or anything you want, but keep him away from me till we're ready to start."

"I'll take care of him. When do we start?"

I grinned at her. She didn't like the grin and looked away. "Don't bother to unpack," I said.

Gurr, who had used the galaxy-wide barman's prerogative to eavesdrop, was scowling. His usually flabby purple skin was stretched taut over his cheekbones, baring the yellow fangs in his mouth. "Why don't you pick an easy way to die, Taggert?" he said.

II

"This is Dr. Kidder," the girl told me two hours later, when we were on the trail. I nodded mechanically at Dr. Kidder and shook his hand,

but I was looking over his shoulder through the brilliant mauve light of Argiv's perpetual day—make that *almost* perpetual—at the tiny distant cubes of Argiv City's sundried brick buildings and thinking that it was the only outpost of civilization on Argiv, which meant the only one in a couple of square parsecs of space.

"A pleasure, Mr. Taggert," Dr. Kidder said.

"And this is Larry Cotten, Taggert," the girl told me.

Cotten had a firm handshake and bold, angry eyes. He was a good-looking guy, tall and straight with a mouthful of flashing white teeth. I looked at the girl and looked at Cotten, still smiling at me with his mouth only, and I figured maybe there was something between them. Well, what the hell did I care? But for some reason I hated Cotten and looking at his face knew that he hated me, too.

"I never did get your name," I told the girl.

"I'm Helen Purcell. We're quite a crew, aren't we, Taggert? A professor of archaeology, an ex-video actress—"

"You used to act?" I asked. She was pretty enough, with long golden hair and blue eyes which looked purple under the three suns of Argiv, and a fig-

ure in the whipcord britches and boots and tight whipcord blouse which kept trying to pull your eyes from their sockets.

"I tried," Helen said. "And then there's Larry, who's a—"

"Why don't you come off it?" Cotten demanded. "It's no business of Taggert's what we used to do. We're not asking *him*, are we?"

"No," I admitted. But if they knew my name, they knew all about me. I was kind of a celebrity all over the galaxy. The only convicted murderer to escape from Earth in something like fifty years. "What got you interested in the Treasure of the Black Sunrise?" I asked.

Helen shrugged. "Do you think we'll find it?"

"No, but it's your money your're spending. I think you'll be lucky to get back alive."

"The local chamber of commerce ought to tar and feather this guy," Cotten said brightly.

Our bearers, big flabby purple-skinned Argivians like Gurr, were just struggling up the rise of ground to our left, joining us with the expedition's equipment. I jabbered at the chief bearer, a tall old purple fellow with a shock of bright yellow hair like straw,

name of Bonoi. My Argivian's a little rusty because Gurr and some of the other Argivians at the spaceport speak English, but pretty soon Bonoi got the idea, flat-footed it back to one of the young bearers and soon returned to us with four blasters.

I buckled mine on and passed them around. "Aren't you being a little melodramatic?" Cotten asked me.

"Suit yourself," I said. "I know I want to be wearing one when Black Sunrise comes. And maybe before."

Just a look, no words, passed between Helen and Cotton. He ran the blaster belt around his waist but gave her a cynical smile. Dr. Kidder asked me, "Do all three Argivian suns really go down at once during Black Sunrise?"

I nodded. "It's sunset, really, not sunrise. But that's what they call it. The Argivians are a primitive people, doctor. You're an archaeologist, so maybe you know."

"You're confusing it with anthropology."

"Well, anyway. It happens once every three years. It's the only time the Argivians have darkness. They get scared. More scared than you'll ever see any primitive people get. They have three

gods in their religion, Dr. Kidder." I pointed up through the spear-tipped foliage at two of Argiv's three suns overhead, then pointed northwest to the third one on the horizon. "Three sun gods. When Black Sunrise comes, they pray and make sacrifices and give offerings for the return of their gods."

"Why is it so dangerous?" Dr. Kidder wanted to know.

"Because we're Earthmen. Because we have spaceships. We travel in the sky with our ships, you see. Their witch doctors tell them that once every three years the Earthmen, riding their flashing Earth ships, kidnap the three suns. When you get right down to it, that's a pretty logical explanation."

"The hell with all this hocus-pocus," Larry Cotten said. "What about the Treasure of the Black Sunrise?"

"What about it?" I shrugged. "You probably know more about it than I do."

We were on the move now, plodding forward slowly through the dense undergrowth. When I looked back, I could no longer see the buildings of Argiv City.

"All we know," Helen told me, "is this: it's worth a fortune."

"It's out there in the jungle

somewhere," I said. "The bearers probably know where. Gurr—he's the barman back at Argiv City—knows where. Once he told me. It's in a cave. They say a delicate photo-sensitive mechanism guards it. The entrance is attuned to light-pressure. Except for one night every three years, it's never dark on Argiv. That one night, the cave opens. Naturally, the Argivians bring rich offerings to the Shrine of the Three Gods. They also perform their weird rites on that one night, but they have to get out by sunrise. Because once light strikes the door, it will close automatically; and there's no opening it for three more years."

"Any idea how long they've been piling up treasure in this shrine of theirs?" Cotten asked eagerly.

"Thousands of years, according to Gurr."

"Thousands of years!" Cotten's eyes grew very bright, but he was seeing nothing of the jungle or the trail we were on. I'd seen other Earthmen on Argiv like that before. Some of them never got up enough courage to head into the up-country, as we were doing. But others had come this way before us. And had disappeared. . . .

KING OF THE BLACK SUNRISE

"King Solomon's Mines, a hundred parsecs out in deep space," Cotten mused, still dreamy-eyed.

Just then Bonoï tapped my shoulder and pointed at the horizon. The green sun, Argiv's smallest, was setting. "This sleep period," said Bonoï in his harsh, sibilant language, "the Green God vanishes. Next sleep period, the Yellow God follows. And two sleep periods hence, the Purple God, greatest of all. After that, it is the time of the Black Sunrise."

"So what?" I said. "You knew that before we started. That's why I picked you, Bonoï." I hoped my Argivian was getting across to him. "Gurr told me you're a civilized man."

Bonoï smiled, rubbing the edge of his fist against his long, thin purple nose. "For three years I am civilized, Earthman," he said. "But one night every three years, no Argivian can forget his past. Is it not so even in the city?"

I nodded. I had been in Argiv City before at the time of the Black Sunrise. It wasn't safe on the streets for an Earthman or any out-worlder. "What's the matter?" I said. "Are your men complaining? They knew where we were

going. They haven't been on the trail half an hour."

"They are as children," Bonoï told me. "For me, it does not matter. I merely would have you know the danger. I will accompany you. But these others . . . the thought of your money was too much for them, back in the city. Now they do not know."

"They want to leave us?"

"Yes, Earthman. I am sorry. It has come to them with seeing the first god vanish, the Green God."

"What's he talking about?" Cotten demanded irritably.

I shook my head and said, "Let me handle it."

"I just want to know what he's jabbering about, that's all."

"I can straighten it out, I think."

"Look here, Taggert. We're paying you. You aren't running things, we are."

I smiled coldly at him and turned to Helen. "Is that the way you feel, too? And Dr. Kidder?"

"No, Taggert," she said.

"You probably know what's best," Dr. Kidder told me. "But you might let us know what Bonoï wants."

"His men are afraid because the green sun is setting. They want to go back."

"Already?" said Cotten, throwing back his head and laughing. "They're nothing but a lot of superstitious savages."

"It's their religion."

"I'm not interested in their religion. I'm interested in their treasure. You can forget all about being polite and tell Bonoï his men signed up to come with us." Cotten fingered the blaster at his belt. "We can't go ahead without them, and they know it. Well, they're coming with us—or else."

"I can't tell them that," I said. "It's the wrong way to handle them."

"Let's have none of that crap, Taggert. We know all about you. There's a W.B.I. man waiting back in Argiv City for you."

I wanted to hit him. I wanted to see blood spill from that hard handsome mouth. Maybe I would have hit him too, but Helen moved between us. "Cut it out, Larry," she said levelly. "As far as we're concerned, Taggert's a free man, not a fugitive."

I began to smile, but stopped.

"Still, Taggert," Helen went on, "you ought to take Larry's suggestion."

Shrugging, I told Bonoï, "If you're still on our side, do

your men have a spokesman among them?"

"Yes, Earthman." And Bonoï trotted off to the long sweating line of bearers. Moments later, he returned with a young Argivian, a well-muscled purple giant who had not yet been plagued with the flab to which middle-aged Argivians are so prone.

"This is Karpa-ton," Bonoï told me. "He would speak with you."

Karpa-ton had a deep, rich voice—and a one-track mind. "Either you must go back," he said, "or we must go back. Alone, we could go on without you to the Shrine of the Three Gods. Or we will return to the city and let you go on alone. It is not possible for us to continue together."

"You didn't say any of that when I hired you a couple of hours ago," I pointed out heatedly.

But Bonoï said, "My people are children, Earthman. They have no time sense unless, like your servant Bonoï, they have lived among the Earthmen in Argiv City. They did not know the Time of the Black Sunrise was approaching until now, when they can see with their own eyes that the Green God vanishes. You cannot blame them."

"Nevertheless, we're going ahead. All of us."

Karpa-ton shook his purple head, the hairless pate catching the last deep green rays of the setting sun. You could see a thin film of sweat on his pate and the stubbly bristles of his yellow hair which, being a young Argivian, he would shave every day. "We go no further with you, Earthman."

I told this to Cotten, who scowled and said, "Tell him it's an order. Tell him they come with us."

"The Earthman commands you," I said to Karpa-ton.

"No out-worlde commands an Argivian. Least of all at the Time of the Black Sunrise."

"It is his command," I said again.

"Then," said Karpa-ton arrogantly, "he must be prepared to back his words with actions." And he marched off toward the other bearers.

"Wait a minute!" Cotten cried. "Tell him to come right back here, Taggert."

"Hey, Karpa-ton!" I called. When he returned, his face looked very grim. "The Earthman who hired me to hire you insists—"

"Enough! You think we are animals or slaves that we may be so commanded?"

"What's he saying?" Cotten demanded.

"That they're not slaves."

"Yeah? I've got news for them. If we don't show them who's boss now, we never will. What's his name, Karpaton?" And, after I had nodded: "Karpa-ton, get down on your knees."

Karpa-ton stood there, waiting.

"He doesn't understand," I said.

"Then tell him."

All the other Argivians stood about in a circle now, watching us. I looked at Helen, who turned away. She didn't think Cotten had the right idea, but along with Dr. Kidder, she was Cotten's partner. Me, I was just the hired help. I was getting as angry as Karpa-ton. I said. "The Earthman wants you to bend your knee before him, Karpa-ton."

Karpa-ton's laughter bubbled in his throat and then roared out between his thin lips. Cotten's face flushed an angry red, but he stood there and took the laughter until Helen giggled. Then Cotten reached for his blaster and with one blurring motion slashed the barrel across Karpa-ton's face. The purple man stood there until the blood

welled suddenly from the gash across his cheekbone. Then with one big fist he knocked the blaster from Cotten's hand and with the other, great fingers extended and curling, began to squeeze Cotten's throat.

I sighed wearily. It was going bad, here at the beginning. Karpa-ton was right, but Cotten was an Earthman and although I'd been running from Earthmen the last half dozen years, I'm one too. I put my hand on Karpa-ton's shoulder and spun him around and said, "That's enough."

Cotten reeled back. He would have fallen, had not Helen and Dr. Kidder supported him. I was going to tell him to leave dealing with the Argivians in my hands from now on, when I caught a blur of motion out of the corner of my eye.

I barely had time to duck, taking Karpa-ton's huge fist high on my forehead. He was berserk now, with blood lust and religious fervor. Cotten, Helen, Dr. Kidder, me — we were all the same now, Earthmen and despised. I caught Karpa-ton's wild left on the palm of my hand, and jabbed two extended fingers of my free hand for his eyes. It was not enough to gouge them out, but enough to blind him.

Karpa-ton staggered after me, unseeing, a big, helpless, lumbering giant. Regretting it, I measured him carefully and felled him with a right cross. It was quick and clean and deposited Karpa-ton, unconscious, at my feet.

"You're strong, Taggert," Helen said.

I looked at her in disgust. I walked away and didn't talk to anyone for a long time. Two bearers came and picked up Karpa-ton, and then all of them marched back down the trail toward Argiv City. Bonoï came over to me and said, "I am sorry, Earthman, but now I must go with them, too."

They left our equipment in great piles on the rotting jungle floor.

A few moments later, a distant moaning wind sprang up, fluttering the jungle foliage as it approached. I knew that wind well, I remembered it from three years ago in Argiv City. It was the Wailing Wind. The Wind of the Green God, which now had dipped below the horizon. And far away, straight ahead of us through the jungle, so far that the sound was almost lost on the wind, I heard another wailing noise, musical, rhythmic, weird. The strange double-reed instruments of

the Argivian priests, wailing the loss of their God.

III

"That's right, Taggert," Cotten said later. "We're going on, anyway."

"You can't."

"We're not going to wait three years for another chance."

"Well, you can just count me out."

"You yellow bastard!" Cotten roared.

"Was he yellow when he saved your life?" Helen said. "That purple man would have strangled you."

"He's yellow if he leaves us out here alone. He knows the way. We don't."

"I can't blame you if you go, Taggert," Helen said slowly.

"You'll stay with him? You and Dr. Kidder?"

"Yes. We're in this together."

"Even if I leave?"

"Yes."

"Listen," I said. "Without bearers, you don't have a chance. Sure, I know the way, but not like an Argivian does. Maybe with Bonoï alone, without the bearers, we could have made it. But not alone. Definitely not alone."

"There are dangerous ani-

mals in the jungle?" Dr. Kidder asked.

"Maybe. I don't know. That isn't it, doctor. We can take care of the animals. I'm thinking of the Argivians who will be out at their shrine for the Black Sunrise."

"We're Earthmen," Cotten said arrogantly. "We have nothing to fear from savages."

"They sacrifice to their three kidnapped gods," I said. "Old and sick Argivians if there's no one else. But they prefer out-worlders. Any out-worlders will do, but they like Earthmen best."

"I have nothing against you," said Cotten blandly. "You're still in this for ten percent if you want."

I looked at him. Then at Dr. Kidder, and Helen. There was mute appeal in her eyes. She wanted me to stay, but she was too proud to say so. I thought of the way she had looked at me after how I'd handled Karpa-ton. With hero worship in her eyes, almost. Then it disgusted me. Now, all at once, it did not. I wanted her to look at me like that again. I knew what my answer would be. I would go with them.

And then Cotten said, "But if you don't want the ten percent, if you're planning on

deserting us, I'm going to report you to the W.B.I. when we return to Argiv City."

I stared at him without speaking. Helen bit her lip. Then I found my own gear in one of the piles of equipment the Argivians had left behind them and began to trudge with its weight on my shoulders back down the trail toward Argiv City. The jungle floor, like all jungle floors, was covered with a thick matting of rotting vegetation. I heard nothing but a faint rustling sound until I felt Helen's hand on my shoulder.

"Well, what is it?" I asked coldly.

"For me," she said. "I'm asking you to do it for me, Taggert."

"To go with you to the shrine?"

"Yes. I can't go back now. I've dreamed of this too long. I can't go back and if I go ahead without you, I'll — I'll probably be killed, won't I?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm begging you, Taggert. I can't apologize for Cotten's behavior. I'm not Cotten. I'm begging you for me. There's no turning back for me, now. I won't stop until I've found that treasure—or died trying."

"Why?" I said.

"Why? I don't know why. It's the way I am. It's me, Taggert. I'm honest with myself."

"If you're going to commit suicide, I don't see why I should."

"Because I stand here asking you," she said, "that's why. Because I'm begging you."

Had she been cheap about it, had she thrown her arms around my neck and offered me her lips, I would have been able to refuse. But damn her, she was begging me—and that was all. I nodded finally.

"I'll go with you," I said.

Helen's eyes were moist, her lips slack and parted. She looked like she'd just been made love to: the treasure was that important to her. As we walked back toward the others, she took my hand and held it, drew my arm against her side. I could feel her heart pounding against her ribs and I thought, she wouldn't be cheap about it. She wouldn't offer herself to me before I gave her my answer, but she was ready to offer herself now. I grinned. It was a long way to the Shrine of the Three Gods and the nights, with the green sun down, and then the yellow one, and fin-

ally the purple sun, would be cold.

I stopped grinning as we neared the others. Helen's arm which was linked in mine pressed more possessively, but she was looking at Cotten. She smiled right into his eyes, coldly. A challenge, I thought. She's challenging Cotten with me. That was all there was to it. Wrap up your dreams, Taggert, I thought. You'll be as cold as anyone else on the long nights between here and the Shrine.

We held a brief council of war. Antagonism flared between Cotten and me again. "We'll have to leave most of this equipment behind," I said.

"That's expensive stuff," Cotten sneered. "It's all right for you to say. You didn't pay for it."

"Do you want to carry it through the jungle?"

"We can carry some of it."

"You can carry what you want," I said. "I'm taking only what I have to." I patted the blaster strapped about my waist. "This," I said. "This is essential."

"Damn you, Taggert! You'll do what I tell you to."

I shook my head. "No. I go along under one condition. I take orders from no one."

"The typical, snot-nosed expatriate—" Cotten began.

But Helen said, "That's enough, Larry. Taggert knows more about the pickle we're in than you do. I think we ought to take orders from Taggert."

Cotten's handsome face flushed, and he looked to Dr. Kidder for support. But the archaeologist shook his head. "Taggert's right," he said. "We'll take weapons. We can forage for food along the way, can't we? Of course, I'll have to take some of my digging equipment, but it isn't very heavy. But that's all."

"That's all," said Helen.

Cotten grumbled something I didn't hear, and then we began to march. After a while, we came to accept the distant wailing notes of the Argivian religious music. I began to think we were getting closer to the sound, but jungle noises are deceptive and we still had a long way to go.

Several hours later, as we passed through a narrow defile, I found clusters of large yellow berries which I'd seen the Argivians eat in Argiv City. We supped on them and made ready to bivouac in the open. Cotten said something about the stupidity of leaving our tents behind, but no one

paid any attention. Then, while Dr. Kidder and Helen kindled a fire, I went off into the brush looking for game.

I returned in half an hour with the carcass of a blasted *kinpo*, a small Argivian antelope, slung across my shoulder. Helen said, "You look like Tarzan of the Apes."

"I feel even hungrier," I told her, and proved it after the carcass had been roasted over the fire.

"We'll divide the sleeping period into four watches," I said later.

"Three," Cotten told me. "Helen doesn't have to—"

"I want to," she said.

"What do we have to be afraid of, anyway?" Cotten wanted to know. "I haven't seen any signs of large animals."

"Karpa-ton," I told him, and lay down to get some sleep. Dr. Kidder, who said he wasn't sleepy, took the first watch. Cotten was next, and then Helen. I would take the final watch.

I slept deeply and well, and when Helen's hand on my shoulder roused me, I felt rested and refreshed. "Anything cooking?" I said.

"No. Only that music. Hear it?"

I did. The wailing double-reeds were worse than drums.

They got inside you somehow and churned up something which mankind has forgotten for thousands of years but which still resides in his dim ancestral memory. They worked on the vestigial nerves at the base of your neck and played, like tiny needles of ice, up and down your spine.

"I'm not sleepy," Helen said. "Mind if I keep watch with you?"

I shrugged, shaking my head. I looked at the others. Dr. Kidder was curled up comfortably near the fire, sleeping soundly. Cotten, big and rangey, slept restlessly.

"Did you mean what you said about Karpa-ton?" Helen asked.

"Yes. He won't forget what happened."

"But there's an Earth consulate on Argiv. He wouldn't dare—"

"Black Sunrise," I reminded her.

There was silence for a long time after that. I stared straight ahead into the purple-tinted foliage, thinking that Helen had gone to sleep. But finally she said, "Taggert?"

"I'm listening."

"Did you really kill that man on Earth?"

I grinned.

"What's so funny?"

"It's just funny, that's all."

"Why?"

"I've met a lot of Earthmen on the out-worlds. You're the first one who ever asked me that."

"You haven't answered. Did you kill him?"

"Does it matter?"

"It matters to me."

"No," I said. "I didn't kill him."

"I'm glad, Taggert."

"Don't be. I wanted to kill him. I was chasing him. There was an accident. He died that way."

"I'll bet it was over a woman."

"Yeah? Why?"

"Because I know you, Taggert. It wouldn't be over money. Either money or a woman. What else is there to kill a man for?"

"It was a woman," I admitted.

"Married?"

"Yeah, my wife. But she was no good. I found out the hard way."

"Taggert, I'm sorry."

I laughed softly, watching the embers crumble to ash in the fire. "I'm not," I said. "I would have remained on Earth all my life. This way, at least I've seen most of the galaxy."

"Sweet lemon?" said Helen.

But there was no malice in her voice.

"Maybe. But thanks for asking."

"Can't you go back and prove it?"

"I don't want to, and that's the truth. I wouldn't be happy there."

"You must have loved her a lot."

"Not now I don't."

"I like you, Taggert. That's the way you are. You love hard and you hate hard."

I shut my eyes and let the dull red warmth of the fire beat against the lids. I heard her moving around, and then I could smell her perfume. All at once I felt her lips brush with the lightest feather touch across my cheek, against my own lips. I sat up. "What's that for?" I said.

"For telling me the truth."

I got my arms around her and leaned over and kissed her mouth, hard. Her lips at first were stiff with surprise, but then they parted for me. It was a long kiss, and a good one.

"What's that for?" Helen said afterwards.

"For asking," I told her.

"I'll keep on asking, if you want."

"I want," I said.

But Cotten was sitting up and staring at us. He said

nothing, but he didn't have to. It was there in his eyes.

IV

Two sleeping periods later, the yellow sun went down. It was quite cold after that, for although the purple one is the brightest of the three Argivian suns, it was now low on the southern horizon. The Argivian music, which never stopped now, had worked on us slowly. I could see it in the others' eyes, in their nervous gestures, in the fitful way they slept, as if they heard the music even while sleeping, and were being moved to slow subconscious frenzy by it.

"We're near the shrine now," I said, as we broke camp with only the purple sun in the sky, its lower rim already below the horizon. Gloomy purple dusk pervaded the jungle.

"How do you know?" Dr. Kidder asked me.

I pointed at the high hills which, bleak and saw-toothed, reared their fangs above the foliage ahead of us and bit into the purple sky. "The Argivians say the Shrine of the Three Gods lies at the base of those hills."

"How will we recognize it, Kent?" Helen demanded.

"Listen to the music," I

said. "The Argivians are there now, at the Shrine, waiting for it to open. All we have to do is follow our ears."

"So now it's Kent," Cotten growled. I looked at him in surprise. He'd been carrying his resentment in silence until now. But his eyes were furtive and red-rimmed, and a muscle twitched at the base of his jaw. It was the Argivian music, I thought. That and Cotten's personality, for the music would affect a man according to his own assets and shortcomings.

"What do you mean by that?" Helen asked him coldly.

"It's pretty clear, isn't it?"

She shook her head, walking toward him slowly. "I want you to say it, Larry."

He flushed and told her, "You used to look at me the same way you're looking at Taggert now."

"I never looked at you any way at all. If you thought I did, it was your imagination."

"Oh, forget it," Cotten said.

"And any way I look at Kent Taggert is my business and his and nothing for you to talk about. You understand?"

"I understand a lot of things now," Cotten said.

"Such as what?"

She was pushing him, I

thought. I didn't know yet if I approved or not, but I stood there in silence and waited.

"Such as what kind of a girl you are."

I realized Helen had needed him some, but that did it. Fists clenched at my sides, I walked over to Cotten. "The lady wants an apology," I said.

Cotten told me to go and do something which I could neither do nor expect to see in print. "She wants an apology for you using that kind of language in front of her too," I said.

Cotten smirked. "The very gallant Mr. Kent Taggert—fugitive and murderer."

It was then that Helen slapped his face. It was a hard open-handed blow and it sent Cotten reeling a step down the trail. For an instant Helen's handprint was very white on his cheek, then flooded with red. He growled like an animal or an Argivian in the music trance, then came for her. He grabbed her arm at the wrist and began to twist it.

That was as far as he got. I wrenched his fingers from around Helen's wrist and cuffed him across the jaw with my knuckles. He swung a wild right, lunging after it

awkwardly and calling me nasty names. I ducked and let him wrap himself around my shoulder with the wild blow, then drove my left fist twice into his gut and my right, short and hard, over his heart. He clawed me as he went down, and I was good and mad. Only the fact that Helen was there watching stopped me from giving him a knee in his mouth on the way down. Women don't think that's a fair way to fight. Somehow, for them, you can only use your fists.

"Enough?" I said. I stood over Cotten with my fists balled, waiting.

He sat there. "Apologize to the lady," I said.

He shook his head and sucked in great lungfulls of air. He did not yet have enough strength to get up.

"He doesn't have to apologize, Kent," Helen said. "Maybe I deserved it. I was egging him on."

"Well—" I started. Now it was my turn to be stubborn.

But Dr. Kidder said: "I'd like to remind all of you that there are more convenient places to fight or make love than the Argivian jungle. We're out here after the treasure of the Black Sunrise, or did you forget it?" His eyes behind the glasses were

not angry, but very annoyed. You could tell he thought he was talking to a bunch of children.

Maybe he was, I thought. I grinned ruefully. "I shouldn't have hit you," I told Cotten, and offered him my hand to help him to his feet.

He scrambled away from me on hands and knees and stood up. "I'm going to get you for that, Taggert," he promised me.

Just then the double-reed Argivian music stopped. I looked at the horizon, where the swollen purple orb of Argiv's biggest sun had now been cut in half. A chill wind knifed across the jungle.

"Why did they stop?" Helen asked me. Her eyes said she did not like the sudden quiet. It was as if the Argivians were waiting for something. For us, maybe.

"The sun," I said, pointing. "For three years its rays shine on the doorway to the Shrine. Then, when it's setting and the angle is no longer right, the door opens. That's what the Argivians were waiting for. They're inside the Shrine now."

"In that case," Dr. Kidder wanted to know, "How are we going to get inside?"

I looked at him, laughing. "That," I said, "is your prob-

lem. That's why no Earthman's ever seen the Treasure of the Black Sunrise and lived to tell of it."

"If we can draw them out of the cave—"

"How? They've waited three years for this, and now that it's come, they're afraid that if they don't keep on praying and worshipping and offering sacrifices at the Shrine of the Three Gods, the kidnapped gods—their suns—will never return. You could not even drive them outside with fire."

"How far are we from the Shrine?" Helen asked me.

"I'm not sure. No more than two or three miles, I figure. You can see the hills. It's right there, at the base of the hills."

"We've got blasters," Cotten said. "We could force our way in."

"Against hundreds of worshippers?" I asked him. "Don't be a fool. Maybe we'd kill some of them, if that's what you want, but in the end they'd get us."

"Instead of standing here talking about it," suggested Dr. Kidder, "why don't we go on to the Shrine?"

I nodded. "We have no choice now. When the purple sun goes down, it will be completely dark. And cold. It

never gets that cold on Earth, not even in the Arctic."

Helen touched my arm with her fingers. "I—I see why you didn't want to come, Kent. If we can get inside the cave somehow, the Argivians will probably kill us."

"Not probably," I said. "They will."

"But if we don't get inside, we'll freeze to death. Kent, we were very foolish coming here. But you were very brave."

"Brave? Why?"

"Because you knew better. You didn't want to come."

"I had no choice. There was the man from the W.B.I."

"No, I mean the second time. Out on the trail. When Bonoï and his bearers left."

"I was foolish, too." I shrugged and added, "Treasure trove. I guess people have gone to worse places than this, looking for it."

We began to walk forward. It was colder now, much colder. We weren't dressed for it and that was my fault, for we'd left warmer garments back on the trail near Argiv City. I'd tried too hard then to get my point across. I walked with my arm around Helen's waist and I could feel her trembling. It was a long way to Earth, but the three

dozen or so miles to Argiv City seemed just as far.

It happened very quickly. Cotten and Dr. Kidder were half a dozen paces ahead of us on the trail, the fading purple light filtering through the foliage to their left. Cotten yelled something and then I heard the brief staccatto blast of his hand-weapon.

"Look out!" Dr. Kidder cried.

Instinctively, I dropped to the ground, pulling Helen down with me. A short Argivian spear sang through air above our heads, burying its bronze head in the trunk of a tree behind us, and quivering there. There was shouting and the stamping of many feet and a single loud wailing note on one of the double-reed instruments.

"Don't move," I hissed at Helen, and scrambled forward on hands and knees, to where Cotten was crouched with his blaster.

"Don't get them any madder than they are," I advised him. "You'll get some of them, but so what?"

For answer, he fired the blaster again. I heard a howl out there somewhere in the dense undergrowth which was now, for the first time in three years, brittle with cold. I tugged at Cotten's arm and

felt the lethal blast of his weapon singe my cheek. I wrestled it from his hand and chucked it in Dr. Kidder's direction. Without standing up, I cupped my hands to my mouth and shouted in the Argivian: "We have sheathed our weapons. We do not resist."

There was a triumphant howling, another clear note from the double-reed instrument, and then silence.

Someone came marching—alone—through the jungle toward us.

If it were any other Argivian, I thought in despair, we might have had some slim hope. But revealing himself through the undergrowth, haughty and arrogant and very grim in the trappings of a Black Sunrise Priest, knee-high boots and rawhide trousers and a mantle of black and gold, the unhealed wound ugly across his cheek, was the Argivian Karpa-ton.

V

Black Sunrise.

Argiv—planet of a triple star system. And once, for one brief terrible night every third year, the three suns set. It was very cold as we approached the Shrine, and very dark. The dark and the cold

seemed to go together. They were the bleak bare womb from which Argiv and every other speck of cosmic dust sprang in the eons-distant, primordial beginning. They were the zenith and the nadir and all in between. They were the sum total of everything and what had gone before worlds and life and man and what would come after them. And something of this the Argivians must have known in their night of the Black Sunrise, something of it they must have sensed in a way no other planetary people could sense it, once every third year when the darkness came.

"I'm so cold, Kent," Helen said. "I—I can hardly walk."

"We're almost there," I said.

Around us were a mob of Argivians. How many, I couldn't tell in the darkness. They didn't touch us. They weren't holding us or leading us or anything, but they had formed a tight circle about us and if we tried to get away we would feel the bronze of their spears. And if we did not? If we managed to escape, what then? We would never survive the cold of Argiv's brief night. They had us and they knew it.

"I see something up ahead," Helen told me. The wind was

fierce now, whipping dead and dying branches against us, tearing at our clothing.

There was something ahead of us—a light, a pinpoint pure white and dazzling, in the complete darkness. The Shrine, I thought. The Shrine of the Three Gods. The Lost Gods. . . .

Someone was shouting now, in the Argivian. I heard Cotten's voice, agonized, in English, and a quick bubbling scream which ended in muffled silence.

Then, for the first time, hands were laid on us. Rough hard hands, but it was so cold I could hardly feel them. I felt myself dragged forward. I didn't care. I wanted it. There was light up ahead — and warmth. Better to die there, with the warmth on your skin and the good white light in your eyes, than out here in the dark numbing cold.

Abruptly, we were thrust inside the cave. It was so unexpectedly bright, I couldn't see. I felt my shoulder scrape against rough stone, felt the cloth of my jacket rip. Then I was stumbling, hand in hand with Helen, and I sensed rather than saw the roof over our head rising high, high, lost in iridescent mist and haze. The cavern was enormous, that I knew. But I

could not see. And by the time my vision returned, we had been herded through the great cavern and beyond it to a passageway so low, you had to stoop to get through it. Here the Argivians left us and departed with the sound of stone grating on stone.

It was a small cave, the walls luminous. It was roughly square, ten paces in each direction. Plenty of room for three people.

Three, not four.

Cotten wasn't with us.

"What happened to Larry?" Helen asked me.

"I don't know. I think he tried to get away."

"They killed him?"

"No. They wouldn't do that, except here in the Shrine."

"What's going to happen to us?"

I shrugged.

Bitterly, Dr. Kidder said, "We were there, in the cavern. With the Treasure of the Black Sunrise. I couldn't see. I was blinded."

"You'll see the treasure," I predicted grimly. "When the Argivians are ready."

"Will we be—sacrificed?" Helen asked.

Again I shrugged. "It's up to the Argivians, not us. But this I know. Each night of the Black Sunrise, they crown a mock king here at the Shrine.

They load him with gifts and treasures and bow to him and mock him and do his fancied bidding. But when the first sun, the green one, sheds light upon the jungle, they kill him."

"One of us?" Dr. Kidder croaked.

"Cotten, probably. That's why he's not with us now. Mostly, the mock king is a sick and old Argivian, but if they can find an Earthman...."

"Stop it," Helen pleaded. "We'll have to save him."

"How?" I asked her. "Do you have any idea how we can save even ourselves. That stone wedged into the entrance of this cave probably weigh three tons."

"You mean they'll leave us here to starve to death?"

"No. We'll take part in the ceremony, you can be sure of that. Even if their religion insists on only one mock king, Karpa-ton will see to it."

Helen trembled against me as the great rough-hewn stone door to our cave opened. Three Argivians entered with trays of food. All of them wore the purple and gold mantles of the religious calling, revived one night every three years. Otherwise, the Argivians were atheists. The food was hot and steaming

and smelled good. The trays were deposited, the savory food awaiting us on the floor. The three Argivians wheeled about and headed for the exit. Then one of them turned and looked me full in the face and said, "I am sorry, Taggert." It was Bonoï, the head bearer.

A straw to grasp at, I thought. Bonoï, who had been reluctant once before and was reluctant again. Bonoï, who had not tasted of civilization the way Gurr of Argiv City had, but who knew the ways of Earthmen nevertheless.

"Wait a minute, Bonoï," I called softly. "Bonoï—"

But the ponderous door rolled shut.

The food was delicious, prepared, it seemed, with great care. The mock king, I thought. Wined and dined and feted and obeyed in small ways—and slaughtered. But we had not been given the mock king's raiment.

Cotten.

I thought of Cotten out there in the big cavern, the treasure cavern. Cotten would not know the meaning of the rite. He would wonder about his strange kingdom, and finally accept it. I tried to escape, he would think. These savages respect me. Not the others, but me. They respect me.

And thinking that, he would die. I hated Cotten but at that moment I felt pity for him.

Cotten, the King of the Black Sunrise.

When the great door swung in toward us again, I knew they were ready for us. They said nothing, but merely waited at the entrance to the small cave. Helen looked at me and I nodded, and we stood up and marched outside with them and Dr. Kidder.

I was right about Cotten.

Ignorant of what was to come, the newly-crowned King of the Black Sunrise was seated on his great throne.

Before him, covering the floor of the great cavern, strewn about carelessly as if the Three Gods were not very particular, was the Treasure of the Black Sunrise. It's always been an enigma clear through this end of the galaxy. Do the Argivians really store a treasure for their lost gods? Is it as big as the legends say?

We had the proof before our eyes, and if the Argivians had their way, I thought we were going to die with our knowledge. There were gems in casks and gems on necklaces, glittering, coruscating, alive with prismatic gleam-

ings; there were ingots of gold and coins of gold and casks of gold dust. And there was the rare white twin of gold, platinum. And some of the metal, in tiny phials, glowed coldly. It was radioactive and it might be deadly, and only the secret Priests of the Black Sunrise knew where the Argivians had obtained it.

The Priests — for all the Argivians in the great-vaulted caverns were Priests — had formed an enormous circle around Cotten's throne. They danced there and chanted and I saw that Cotten, a wild smile on his face, was cloaked in a purple and gold mantle finer than all the others. A crown with a single huge blood red ruby was on his head. On his knees at Cotten's feet was a lone Argivian in a robe not of purple but of saffron.

Cotten said, in a distant dreamy voice, "More gold for your king."

The saffron-robed Argivian smiled and waved his hand. Struggling with the weight of three large ingots, half a dozen Argivians deposited them at Cotten's feet, adding them to a pile of gems and precious metal.

Then Cotten saw us as we were thrust into the large

cavern. "You're a fool, Taggert!" he cried. "You're all superstitious fools. These Argivians were looking for someone with guts. I'm their king. Whatever I say, they'll do."

"You don't understand—" I began, but one of the Argivians with us ordered me to be quiet in his native tongue.

"Watch," said Cotten. "You," he addressed the saffron robed Priest. "I want them on their knees. All of them." The Priest, who was also interpreter, shouted his command in the Argivian. At once the whole vast assemblage dropped to its knees, chanting, all the purple robed figures prostrating themselves before Cotten.

He was playing his role to the hilt. For the Argivians he was perfect. He was their King. Their mock-king who would rule them for the brief night of the Black Sunrise, fulfilling the dictates of their religion. But when the first of Argiv's three suns came up, they no longer would have need for their mock-king. This Cotten did not understand. When morning came he would be a votive offering to the three returning gods.

I laughed. I couldn't help it.

"You don't believe me?" Cotten cried. "Then watch

again." Foam flecked his lips and his eyes were wild. "Strip three of them," he told the interpreter. "Have them flogged."

Three purple mantled figures were obediently disrobed, fell flat on their faces before Cotten's throne, were whipped there with a rawhide lash until the purple skin of their backs was raw.

"They'll do anything at all for me," Cotten cried. "Anything! The treasure is mine, don't you see? It's mine because I'm their King. They want to give it to me. And I'll tell you why. Do you want to know why, Taggert? Because they believe I'm going to bring the three gods back. They believe only I can do it. Isn't that so?" He nudged the interpreter with his knee.

"Yes, Lord," the Argivian said. Was there the faintest trace of a mocking smile on his lips?

I didn't like Cotten, but he was an Earthman. I had to tell him the truth. I broke away from our captors and cried, "Don't be a fool, Taggert! You're a mock-king. You'll rule them for the night of the Black Sunrise, and then you'll be their sacrifice to the return of their gods."

Cotten laughed. He rocked

forward and almost tumbled from his throne of gold. He finally said, "Still trying, aren't you, Taggert? I'll tell you something. At first I thought I would share the treasure with all of you. We were in this thing together, I told myself. It was only fair. But the world is for the strong, Taggert. And you're weak. Afraid and weak."

Abruptly, his features twisted in a scowl. "And Helen," he said. "Should I share my wealth with Helen? Look at this treasure, all of you. It's mine. Now maybe you know it's mine. But tell me, should I share it with Helen because she preferred a fugitive murderer to me? Should I?"

"You're in no position to share anything," I said, trying to reason with him. "Why do you think I'm telling you this? It's for your own good, Cotten. Maybe there's still a chance if—"

"Shut up," Cotten said coldly. And, to the interpreter, "Shut him up."

The saffron robed figure bowed. "It shall be as you say, Lord."

Two Argivians came for me, herded me back to where Helen and Dr. Kidder were waiting. Suddenly one of them lashed out with his fist.

clubbing me across the jaw. I tumbled over backwards and sat there, wiping the blood from my lips and cursing Cotten.

"Are you all right, Kent?" Helen said.

I looked at her. Something of Cotten's hysteria had reached me. "What the hell does it matter?" I said.

My voice must have carried, for Cotten nodded and repeated, "Sure, what does it matter? I'm not going to share this treasure with you, with any of you. Do you realize how much is here? It will make me the richest man in the galaxy. It's my boldness which cowed the Argivians, you understand? And what's needed, what's needed to make everything certain? One final bold stroke, something which their superstitious minds will eat up. Do you know what that is, Taggart?" He was off the throne now, examining the treasure heaped at his feet. He scooped the gems up and let them run between his fingers, looking molten in the torchlight.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'm going to give the Argivians their sacrifices. Three sacrifices to their three gods."

"You're mad, Cotten!" Dr. Kidder shouted at him defiantly. For the archaeologist

knew what he meant, and so did I. Helen looked at me and bit her lip and waited for Cotten to speak.

He turned to the saffron robed Priest and said, "Do you want your gods to return?"

"Yes, Lord."

"For that you will need human sacrifice?"

"So it is written, Lord."

"Then I, your King, give you human sacrifice." He pointed to Helen, Dr. Kidder and me. "These three are your sacrifice," he said.

"Larry, for God's sake," Helen cried.

"It could have been different for you," he told her. "But you wanted it this way, didn't you? I didn't ask you to fling yourself at Taggart." He addressed the saffron-robed interpreter again. "You! Do you understand my command? Are you ready to obey your King?"

"Yes, Lord."

He pointed in our direction again. "Then kill them."

VI

The interpreter shouted something at the purple mantled Priests. A moment later, three of them, armed with gold-hilted, gem-encrusted ceremonial swords, came to-

ward us. What was it Cotten had said? He had cowed them with boldness. In his own case, he was wrong, but I thought, you're an Earthman, Taggert. You're not going to die waiting on your knees for death's sword stroke. I didn't wait for the three executioners. I ran forward to meet them.

The swords were heavy, so heavy that the Priests had to wield them with two hands. I moved swiftly and saw the gleam of one great blade in the torchlight, felt the swift passage of air as the sword swung in a swift arc before my face. Then I was inside the Priest's extended sword arm, grappling with him. I heard Helen scream. I wrenched the sword free and turned around, plunging back toward Helen.

The second Priest stood over her, his own sword raised. Her forearm was up to meet it, as if with that puny defense she could hope to stop the razor-sharp blade. "Stop!" I roared in the Argivian, hoping that one word, shouted peremptorily, could stay the blade long enough. It did more.

The Argivian whirled and faced me, swinging the heavy sword with both hands. I brought my own blade up and

parried his blow, the metal ringing in a strident bell note. I swung again, wildly and fiercely, knowing our lives depended on it. The Priest's head leaped from his shoulders on a quick double fountain of blood. Even in death, his face still looked surprised.

The Argivians were surging forward now, all around us. Their low steady chanting had given way to a babble of confused sound. Far away, I heard Cotten yelling something to his interpreter, but I couldn't make out the words. Helen was looking at the headless thing on the ground and opening her mouth to scream, but no sound came from her throat.

Almost, I had forgotten the third priest. It was only then that Helen was able to scream. I whirled and leaped aside, feeling the blade grate against my ribs. I locked the Priest's extended arm under mine and brought my knee up into his groin. He fell away from me, his sword clattering against the stone ground.

I looked around. There was no place to go. It had been defiance in the face of death, but that was all. Helen cowered against me, burying her face against my shoulder. The Argivians still milled about in confusion, but it wouldn't

last. As soon as Cotten or the saffron-robed interpreter could make himself heard, we were finished.

Helen looked up at me, her eyes misty. "Kent, I—I want you to know—whatever happens—Kent, I love you."

I grinned at her. That was defiance too. I leaned down to kiss her. A kiss—and then swift death.

Just then, an Argivian broke from the crowd and came sprinting toward us. I raised the sword—and let it fall.

It was Bonoï.

"This much I owe you, Earthman," he said. "To your left, as far as you can go. A passage. If you can make it, go. But from this day on you shall never be welcome on Argiv."

He said this, and disappeared quickly into the mob. His life depended on the speed of his disappearance, and he knew it. I turned to Helen and Dr. Kidder. "Come on," I said.

Dr. Kidder bent to pick up one of the ceremonial swords, grunted under its weight and dropped it. Then the three of us ran. Here and there an Argivian tried to stop us, but they were still disorganized. Three of them fell before my

sword, but there was a hot wet wound high on my left arm and I had to drop the weapon because I could not wield it with one hand.

Faces, purple faces swam before us in the crimson torchlight. Then, suddenly, we were clear of them. The dark maw of a passage loomed before us, and we plunged inside, still running. We could not see. We could not think. We could only hope.

The passage turned and twisted and if there were other passages we missed, if we were burrowing deeper into the bowels of Argiv, this we could not know.

All at once the passage opened on another large chamber, where torches were stuck in wall-niches. A figure loomed before us. "I heard Bonoï," he said in the Argivian. "Bonoï has paid for his crime."

It was Karpa-ton.

He swung a wild right fist and I tried to block it with my left hand. It was an automatic gesture, learned in half a hundred brawls across the length of the galaxy. But now, with my left arm hanging limp and useless, it was wasted. I took Karpa-ton's blow flush on my jaw and felt myself falling. I clawed for his legs as I went down, but

his knees blurred up at me and I went over on my back.

Dimly, I was aware of Helen, small and almost delicate next to the giant purple man, trying to wrestle him away from me. He thrust her aside and brushed Dr. Kidder away with his outflung left arm and leaped down at me.

I brought my feet up and heard the air rush from his lungs as they caught him squarely in the chest. "Run!" I called to Helen. "Run while you can!"

Then Karpa-ton and I were rolling over and over and there was no sound, utterly no sound except the noise our bodies made on the rough stone ground, but we both knew without the need to say it that only one of us would get up alive.

Karpa-ton's strong fingers closed on my throat and his face leered at me, inches above my own. I couldn't breathe. There was a distant throbbing in my ears and another sound, closer, Helen's sobbing. I groped blindly with my hands, found something to hold, wrenched. Karpa-ton grunted but held on grimly and there was now a great burning pressure in my chest. I reached up again and got the palms of my hands on his cheeks, pushing.

The fingers tightened on my throat, choking the life from me.

I jabbed at Karpa-ton's eyes with my thumbs.

At first there was nothing, no response, no indication that I had hurt him. But then I felt a wetness on my hands and heard—far away as if he were still in the cavern of the Three Gods — Karpa-ton's scream. He rolled off me and wailed.

And stared sightlessly at me from empty eye-sockets.

"Kill me!" he pleaded in the Argivian. "This way I cannot live."

I stood up and moved away from him. I felt bile gagging in my throat and turned quickly away, thinking he would get his wish because, blinded, he would never find his way from that cavern.

With Helen and Dr. Kidder, I ran.

The passage seemed endless, dark as the Black Sunrise night outside, but not cold, warmed by the fires of Argiv's deep interior. And then, after what seemed hours, the passage began to climb, I felt it in the muscles of my calves. Soon we were struggling upward, panting. If the passage were a maze, a labyrinth. . . .

And then, abruptly, we were outside. It was cold, but not as cold as it had been when we entered the cavern. And low on the horizon, we could see Argiv's green sun returning, the first of its three gods.

We walked for a time in silence and came, suddenly, to the entrance to the great cavern. We stood back in the shadows and watched the Argivians filing out, greeting their returned god.

High up over the entrance, so high that at first we could not tell what they were, were many objects, gleaming white in a long line. When the light grew better, we could see them.

Skulls. Hundreds of them, each adorned with a crown, the single blood-red ruby gleaming on it.

The last Argivian filed from the cavern, bowed to the green sun. With a long stick, he poked something up high over his head, until it caught on an unseen hook. Then he turned and walked down the trail.

Helen turned away, whimpering. What had been placed there along with the long line of skulls was Cotten's still grinning head.

"We could go back inside for the treasure," Dr. Kidder

said as Helen bound the wound on my arm.

"Without knowing when the door will close?" I asked him. "It wouldn't open again for three years."

Dr. Kidder sighed and said, "At least we've seen it. We've done that, and lived."

"Yes," I said. I was thinking of Larry Cotten. I could not help feeling sorry for him. I turned to Helen, "Did you mean what you said inside there?"

"Yes. Oh yes, Kent."

"I can't go back to Earth," I told her. "You know that. Now we can't stay on Argiv either, but if you'll have me. . . ."

"Kent. Kent, I'll have you."

"Then there's a great big galaxy to see." I winked. We were safe now. The sounds of the Argivians faded down the trail back toward their city. They would know the ways of civilization again by the time they reached it. We could get a second-hand ship with the little money I had, drop Dr. Kidder where he wanted to go, and start seeing the galaxy.

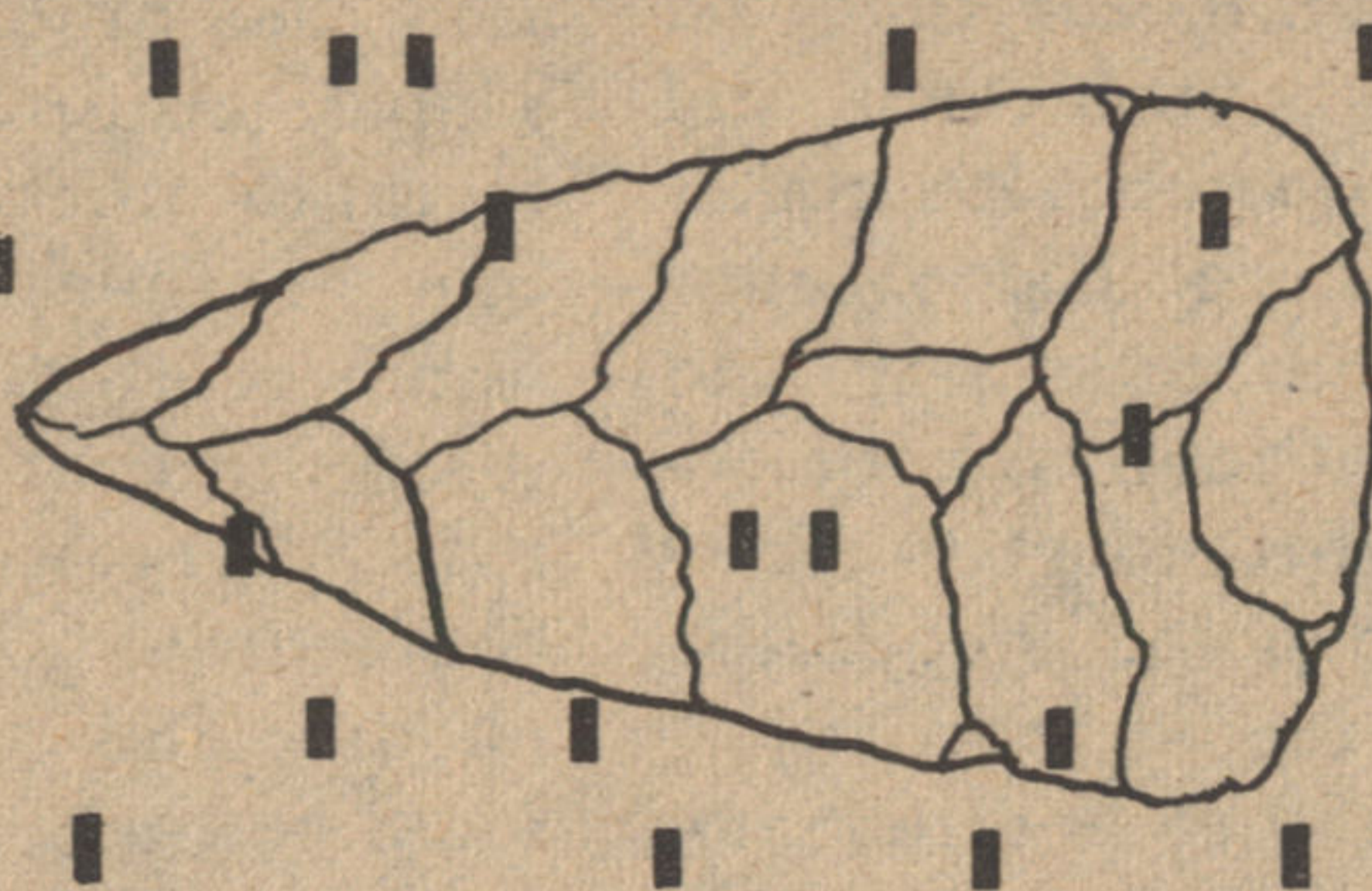
"But listen, Kent," Helen said. "Let's get one thing straight. No more treasures. I—I think I'm cured."

"No," I said devoutly. "No more treasures." **THE END**

SCIENCE OF MAN

by LEON E. STOVER

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RACE-ZOOLOGY AND POLITICS

Sex is no longer a taboo subject in fiction and films or even in popular clinical literature. But freedom of speech in this area has been won at the expense of a closedown in another. The new taboo is placed on the subject of race. The new pornography is called racism. The foremost scientist in the study of human subspecies, Carleton S. Coon, was publicly denounced as a racist by the president of the American Anthropological Association a few years ago on the grounds that Coon had written a dirty book, *THE ORIGIN OF THE RACES* (1962). Today, Coon's name is almost impossible to find mentioned in any anthropology textbooks. He simply has become a "non-person" to the profession.

It is a dead certainty that Coon someday in the future will be rehabilitated and recognized for the great work he has done, which has

been to complete the uncompleted work of Darwin. Darwin published his *THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES* in 1859, which developed a theory of evolution and applied it to the origin of the human species. Coon applied Darwinian theory to the origin of human subspecies, or races. The title of his book is a conscious echo of Darwin's. Comparison of the two men is justified both intellectually and politically. Both have thought out a great idea. And both have been denounced for thinking the unthinkable. Darwin, for thinking about man's animal origins, Coon for thinking about man's animal variations.

In Darwin's time, the idea of animal origins offended against theology; theologians preached that man was God's special creation, that man was above the animals and that differences among men—inequalities—were of their own doing and

followed from greater or lesser obedience to God's commandments and an authoritarian social order. Today, the theologians say that God is dead, that man is on his own and that he must face up not to his maker but to his fellow man. Today's new theologians of human society and the brotherhood of man are the sociologists and anthropologists. They preach a doctrine of social equality, that inequalities follow from injustices that men do to each other, not as a result of impiety towards God. Coon's insistence on the idea that men differ zoologically offends against sociology and the idea of the equality of all mankind. Social scientists on the whole are reluctant to admit the existence of races because races tend to complicate justification of the egalitarian ethic. Coon, and other specialists in the study of racial variation in man, pose a danger to the new theologians of the equality doctrine because they fear that non-believers in the doctrine might use the evidence of racial variation as evidence for ranking the races from high to low. In other words, most social scientists disbelieve in the existence of races as an article of faith, by way of protecting the equality doctrine against racism. Racism is the opposing article of faith, which holds that the races are unequal and may be ranked. All scientists who study racial differences, then must be branded as racists. The professional egalitarians fear that knowledge about race might be misused by *genuine* racists.

But if Coon's work on the origin of races is thus repudiated, how do

the egalitarians account for the obvious differences of human appearance around the globe? They answer that the differences are part of a global continuum, an unbroken chain of differences which fade into one another from one locality to another. By this definition races, as discontinuous populations, do not exist. Very well. But how did the *continuum* of differences come about? The answer given to that must be ranked with fairy tales and Kipling's Just So Stories. The story goes like this: The human family, the *Hominidae*, originated in Africa with *Australopithecus*, the apemen. These apemen spread into other parts of the old world where they all later transformed into the half-brained men, or *Homo erectus*. Towards the end of the ice age our own kind of men, modern *Homo sapiens*, replaced the Neanderthals in Europe about 35,000 years ago. This new population of the Cro Magnon type then proceeded to migrate out of Europe and to fill all the other parts of the globe, in the process becoming Negroes, Indians, Chinese and Australian aborigines. All of this in the last 35,000 years, the earlier forms of men everywhere else having conveniently died out. Against this Coon shows that the races are ancient and that they evolved their different lines out of the earlier populations of the *Homines erecti*, such as Peking man and Java man. It would seem that a theory that holds that all the African Negroes, Chinese and native Australians to be descended from northern Europeans must contain in it a not too secret Nordic hypothesis. Yet Coon is said

to be the racist because he allows the different racial populations of the world to have emerged out of their own local populations and to have done so a long time ago.

The first and most important fact about man as a species is his worldwide distribution. Only one other animal species has such a wide zoogeographical distribution, and that is the dog, taken with man in his migrations. The wide geographic spread of mankind across different climates and terrain helps account for racial variation. But the effect of differing climatic zones operated on man at a primitive stage of his cultural development, as *Homo erectus*, when his artificial means of adapting to the natural habitat were limited to a few butchering tools, control over fire, and hunting teams for the killing of large game. The basic subspecies of man were formed during the biological phase of his development, when, in addition to his feeble efforts at control over the environment, he still mainly responded to the environment like other animals, by means of bodily adjustment under the pressures of natural selection. Cleavers and hunting teams allowed even the half-brained men to track migrating game throughout all the Old World south of the winter front line, from Europe and Africa through western Asia and India to China, Southeast Asia and the large islands of the Indonesian archipelago. But part of his response to these differing environments took place at the biological level. For all his beginnings of culture, man still had to follow the same ecological rules governing the

adjustment of wild life to the local habitat. The difference was that man, by virtue of rudimentary culture, had placed himself in a plurality of habitats, a significant accomplishment for a tropical primate.

Students of natural history have, from the 19th century onward, taken note of the zoogeographical distribution of animal life. Accordingly, they have divided the world into faunal regions, each one marked by the characteristic wild life resident there. The Old World is divided into four faunal regions, the Palearctic, the Ethiopian, the Oriental and the Australian.

Ignoring the Australian region (no men evolved there but rather migrated to it around 20,000 years ago. The same is true for the Americas), the other four regions are bounded as follows, with their typical wild life:

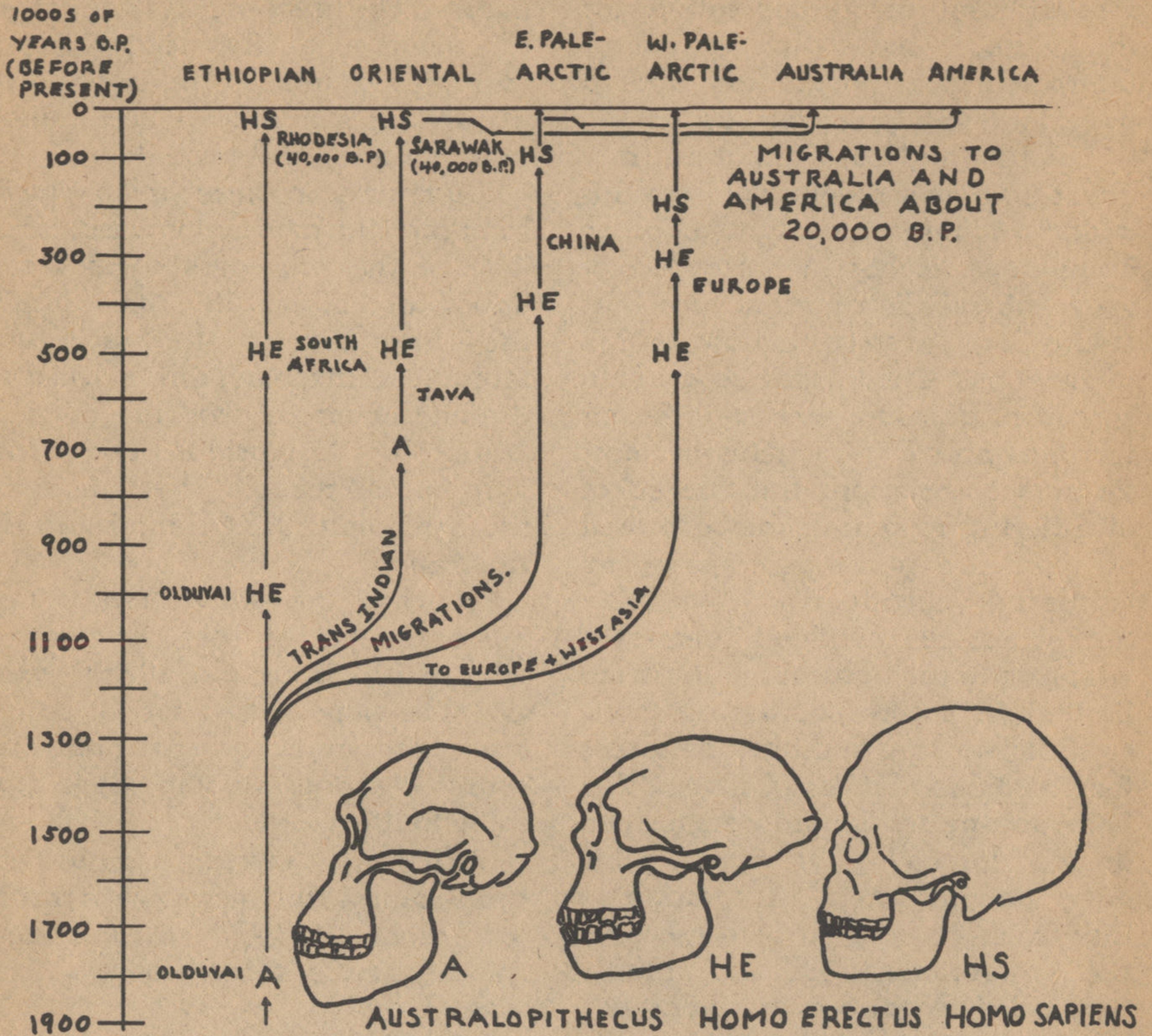
ETHIOPIAN—Africa south of mid-Sahara and the southern third of Arabia. *Wild Life*: African elephant, giraffe, zebra, lion, gorilla, ostrich.

ORIENTAL—India, southern China, southeast Asia, northern Indonesia. *Wild life*: Indian elephant, tiger, water buffalo, Malay tapir, gibbon, orangutan, peacock.

PALEARCTIC—Africa north of mid-Sahara, Europe, all of Asia except for the Oriental faunal region. *Wild life*: Stag, bison, marmot, beaver, hyaena, pig, rhinoceros, bear, wild ass, roe deer, hedgehog, argali.

If barriers of climate and topography can allow for such diversified forms of wild life to evolve in their own zoogeographic realms, it is not

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBSPECIES BY FAUNAL REGIONS



surprising to learn that the same realms anciently held their own varieties of man. And so they did. The homelands of the ancient subspecies of *Homo erectus* coincide almost exactly within these different faunal regions.

The basic subspecies of man may be listed according to their ancient homelands in the faunal regions as follows:

ETHIOPIAN—Congoid. Includes a dwarfed, forest-dwelling version

(pygmies) and a full-statured version (Negroes proper).

ORIENTAL—Australoids. Includes a dwarfed, forest-dwelling version, the so-called "negritos," and a full statured version.

PALEARCTIC—Caucasoids in the west of this region and Mongoloids in the east.

These subspecies—Congoid, Australoid, Caucasoid and Mongoloid—are subspecies to both *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens*. The parent

racess of mankind are indeed ancient.

Of course, the ancient distribution of the races differs from the present day situation. In Pleistocene times the four parent subspecies were distributed as shown in the accompanying map. The Congoids occupied the Ethiopian Faunal region, the Australoids the Oriental region. The Caucasoids occupied the western part of the Palearctic region south of the January frost line, and the Indian subcontinent. The

Mongoloids occupied the eastern part of the Palearctic region south of the frost line. The barriers between these regions differed in the degree to which they allowed the circulation of man in his nomadic pursuit of game. The boundary between the Mongoloid homeland and the Australoid homeland was an open one, just as today the boundary between Palearctic fauna and Oriental fauna is an open one of some depth. Both the Australoid and Mongoloid regions are fairly well marked



off from the other two subspecies on the other side of a line, which, in the case of the *Homines erecti*, can be drawn between two cultures: between a handax industry in the west and a chopper-chopping tool industry in the east. The faunal barrier between the Ethiopian and Palearctic regions has shifted southward to the Sahara in post glacial times, dividing Africa into a Caucasian north and a Congoid south. There may have been another ancient subspecies located in Africa, the Capoid, or ancestors of the Bushmen and Hottentot peoples.

But man is a cultural animal and is not wholly subject to the faunal barriers which divide up wild life across the hemisphere. Man can cross these barriers as well as make up cultural barriers of his own. The upshot is that the four ancient subspecies tended to preserve their own community barriers within each of the faunal regions (the Palearctic being divided for man by the frost line), at the same time they tended to more or less cross the faunal barriers. The overall picture is of four early human breeding grounds, relatively isolated from each other but admitting of some communication and genetic flow between them.

In early post-Pleistocene times the range of the four subspecies had increased tremendously. The Mongoloids migrated into and occupied northeast Asia and all of the Americas. They also pushed south, mixing with the Australoids to form various mixtures which eventually put to sea in outrigger canoes and occupied the Polynesian and Micronesian

islands of the Pacific. Other Australoids were dislocated by the southward Mongoloid thrust and they retreated to Australia, leaving dwarfed populations behind in the forests of Malaya, the Philippines, India and on the Andaman islands. (The Ainu may be Australoids who were displaced northward). The Caucasoids occupied north Africa and penetrated Europe beyond the Urals.

The dislocation of the Australoids offers an interesting object lesson demonstrating the impossibility of ranking the races by intelligence or any other ability to be human. The Mongoloid expansion followed upon the advent of agriculture in their homeland. Agriculture makes for an expanding population because domesticated food will support greater numbers and a higher density of humans than will wild food. The original transition from a hunting way of life to a settled Neolithic way of life based on farming took place in the highlands north of the Persian gulf where factors of climate were just right at the time and where a heavy traffic of human movement made for a stimulation to innovation. The basic technology of Neolithic agriculture diffused in all directions from that center of invention. In diffusing eastward the technology of farming encountered the Mongoloids before it ever had a chance of arriving in the midst of the Australoids. Mongoloid peoples intercepted the technology, and it was they who expanded at the expense of the Australoids who remained in a hunting state of culture. Surely this does not indicate that Australoids are inferior to Mongo-

loids. In the popular jargon of our day, the Australoids were culturally disadvantaged, having been out of range for the reception of technological diffusion from West Asia by the interposition of Mongoloid peoples. And they were rendered culturally disadvantaged a long time ago—by an accident of history.

In historic times, after (say) 1492, an ever greater movement and mixture of peoples happened. Caucasoids from the European peninsula sailed abroad in ocean-going ships and impacted the rest of the world with the power of an iron age and gunpowder technology. Two large scale results of this activity were the mixture of Caucasoids and Mongoloids in the Americas and the importation of Congoids to North America. Captains and men of the Spanish conquest intermarried with the native Mongoloid population, resulting in a mixture of some depth known as mestizo. Congoid imports from a variety of local African strains, plus more or less admixture with European and American Indian strains, all of this placed in a new environmental and dietary setting, also resulted in a new racial entity, the North American colored.

But the ancient parental stocks of these and other new racial entities may still be isolated out for analysis as components. Keeping in mind the effects of population growth and expansion in post-Pleistocene times, and especially the broad movements of peoples in historic times, the characteristics of the parental subspecies to all these other racial novelties may be itemized

briefly as follows so far as outward appearance is concerned:

CONGOID—Negroes proper: Skin falls within a narrow range between black and dark brown. Legs and forearms are long relative to the rest of the body; lumbar curvature. Body hair is typically scanty, but full beard and head hair which greys late. Noses are broad, teeth are large, lips are everted. Pygmies: shorter in stature and with relatively shorter limbs. Lighter in color and hairier.

AUSTRALOID—Skin color varies from black to light brown. Body hair ranges from scant to very heavy (as in the Ainu); the beard is full, and head hair greys early with some balding. Noses are flat with a large broad nasal tip.

CAUCASOID—Includes Europeans, Berbers, Arbs, Indians and the white inhabitants of the Americas, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Siberia. Caucasoids are characterized by the widest range of skin color of all the subspecies, from almost unpigmented to almost black, with hair color ranging from blond to black. Narrow faces and narrow noses with small teeth.

MONGOLOID—Includes American Indians and eastern Asiatics. Skin color ranges from off white ("yellow") to rich brown. Body and face hair is scanty; little balding. High incidence of epicanthic eye folds (originally a cold weather adaptation in the Palearctic homeland of the Mongoloids). Long bodies relative to short limbs, smallish hands and feet. Dimorphism between the sexes less than in Australoids and Caucasoids. Nose forms alternate

between aqualine (American Indians and Nagas) and flattish (classic Mongoloid).

These visible characteristics of the bodily soft parts, however, are not a reliable guide to identification. It is differences in the skeleton and teeth that tell the story best. Skin color especially is unreliable. Pigmentation is a response to the amount of ultra-violet radiation that reaches the skin in different latitudes, the more UV the darker the skin, the less UV the lighter. UV radiation governs the amount of vitamin D generated in the body, but as the body can absorb only one level of vitamin D production, skin pigmentation has to act as filter to admit more or less UV depending on latitude. Caucasoids, Congoids and Australoids alike evolved populations in areas of high UV radiation, thus all three subspecies exhibit black pigmentation in some or all of their members. It is in some of the obscure, unessential features of the teeth that diagnostic differences can be found. In Mongoloids, for example, the backsides of the incisor teeth are scooped out in a shoveling effect, a feature which traces all the way back to Peking Man, the Mongoloid subspecies of *H. erectus*. Also Mongoloids characteristically lack the third molar. There are many other dental features which the specialist recognizes as distinctive for each of the subspecies. These differences indicate no differences in adaptive capacity. Shoveled incisors are neither better nor worse than unshoveled incisor teeth. But such differences do indicate the relative

genetic isolation of the four parent subspecies of man during their formation in their ancient breeding grounds. And the fossil ancestors of these four lines of human development are more or less known. These lines are traced in the accompanying figure, with the date of the earliest known sample of *sapiens* in each given. Below, the same information is compiled with the names of the earliest known *sapiens* find in each line, together with an example of the best known *erectus* ancestor (numbers are years Before Present):

CONGOID

<i>H. sapiens</i>	Rhodesian Man (40,000)
<i>H. erectus</i>	Chellean Man (1,000,000)

AUSTRALOID

<i>H. sapiens</i>	Niah (40,000)
<i>H. erectus</i>	Java Man (500,000)

MONGOLOID

<i>H. sapiens</i>	Mapa (100,000)
<i>H. erectus</i>	Peking Man (400,000)

CAUCASOID

<i>H. sapiens</i>	Swanscombe; Steinheim (200,000)
<i>H. erectus</i>	Heidelberg (500,000)

This is where the crunch comes. According to the available archeological evidence, the different sub-

species of man crossed the evolutionary threshold from *erectus* to *sapiens* at different times. First to become *sapiens* were the Caucasoids at 200,000 B.P., then the Mongoloids at 100,000 B.P. and then both the Congoids and Australoids at 40,000 B.P. Professional egalitarians would like to see these facts kept secret for fear that the professional racists will say: "Aha! Negroes (who belong to the Congoid subspecies) really are inferior to whites (who belong to the Caucasoid subspecies) because the Congoid line did not evolve to *sapiens* status until almost 200,000 years after the Caucasoids reached *sapiens* status." But such a conclusion cannot be drawn from these facts. Agreed, say the egalitarians—it is just that the facts are too complex for the understanding of the racists; therefore let us not allow scientists like Coon to talk about the facts. Racists will misunderstand the facts, so the argument goes. What is worse than that possibility is the self-evident, self-conscious covering up of these facts on the part of the egalitarians. Their appearance of trying to hide something is even worse than open racism.

To burn, bury or ban Coon's book will not help the cause of racial justice in this country. None of the sociologists and anthropologists are going to win any boy scout merit badges from the Black militants for the good deed of suppressing the book. Note that the same do-gooders do not argue that the mayor of Chinatown become mayor of New York because Chinese (and Mongoloids in general) have bigger brains than Caucasoids. What could

be more patronizing to American negroes than a cover-up of human racial history for the sake of not offending these people? Racial prejudice is just not that much governed by what the academics say about race, anyhow. The Supreme Court decision on school desegregation most certainly did not come out of any insistence by sociologists on educational equality, but out of a sense of justice and decency on the part of the court.

What, then, about the facts that Congoids appear at the *sapiens* level later than other subspecies? It is another accident of history, similar to the fate of the Australoids. The Caucasoid homeland in Pleistocene was situated at a crossroads of much internal and external migration. Just as people who breed together communicate together, so it is that where there is much genetic traffic there is much traffic in knowledge. The genetic traffic in the Caucasoid realm made for genetic novelty leading to *sapiens*. The genes for sapience circulated through the faunal corridors and filters between the zoogeographic regions to the homelands of the other subspecies until all were evolved to *sapiens* status. And sapience is sapience, no matter when a population is raised to it. So, too, did the traffic of peoples among the Caucasoids—perhaps the most mixed of all the subspecies, if that is any consolation to anybody—make for cultural innovation. Just as the Australoids were not conveniently situated for reception of agricultural technology from the middle east, so were the Congoids badly situated relative to the later developments

of higher civilization in the middle east. The fact that the Congoids have no spectacular archeological monuments like the pyramids of Egypt or the pillars of Perspolis to show for the past history is no slur on their ability to be human beings. Then, as now, they have been culturally deprived. That white Europeans enslaved Congoids is no testament to white superiority. It is, again, a measure of Negro Africa's cultural disadvantage at the time. What is more important, political trends of today disallow that a people be kept at a disadvantage simply because history arranged it to be so in the past.

The racist will counter that "disadvantage" is just a cover term for "inferiority." The egalitarian replies that all normal human beings are capable of learning any culture. But the racist replies that Negro children are doing badly at reading in schools. Both are at once right and wrong. Humans are indeed equally capable of learning to be human in all the different ways humans have invented. But in human society it is not the individual that is the target of learning but a whole group, class or culture of individuals that most do the learning. What one

(Continued from page 38)

"Don't try to express your sorrow at my leaving, Hull. No tears, old friend, no weakness! Farewell."

He went away with a jaunty stride, heels clicking on the marble floor. Gordon, turning to Lianna, was amazed to see a half-smile on her face.

"At last I see what it is in that devil that attracts you," she said.

isolated individual can learn of white bourgeoisie city life in one generation, if placed in (say) a white, upper-class Park Avenue family at birth, is not the same as what an entire depressed class can learn at anything like the same rate of time. The ancient cultural disadvantage of Congoid Africans has been exploited from the time the first sailing ships crossed the Atlantic, with the result that our North American colored population has for the most part been placed on the lower rungs of our class system. Unfortunately, social class is almost as dirty a word as race. But fortunately, the idea of equal opportunity for all Americans is beginning to prevail over the outdated idea and practice of racial exploitation. The new ideas of justice and equal rights is going to prevail no matter how much racists misinterpret Coon's work and no matter how much the professional egalitarians try to suppress it. The very fact that the zoology of the human subspecies has become a political issue is a clear indication that social forces for the good of all men are at work which go far beyond the nonsense of both racism and phony egalitarianism.

The End

"One hardly ever meets a man who is perfect at anything . . . but Shorr Kan is the perfect rogue."

In a short while, a small dispatch cruiser went skyward from the royal spaceport, and they watched it streak away across the flaring heavens.

And the white sun went down.

The End

BARBARELLA

Laurence M. Janifer

BARBARELLA, contrary to almost everything you have heard and to all the expectations its peculiarly awful advertisements have roused in you, is very solidly a best-of-the-year candidate. I would like to state, here and now, that I dislike the comic-strip on which the film is supposed to be based; that I have never before quietly enjoyed anything Terry Southern was associated with; and that I have no delusion that Jane Fonda is, in any interesting sense, an actress.

Nevertheless, missing BARBARELLA is a serious mistake. Seeing it is about an hour and a half of free-fall, free-form, most relaxing, fun.

I'm sparring for time, of course. I have never run into a movie so difficult to describe. Everyone seems to have fastened on the (shudder, please) sex and sadism which show up; and it's perfectly true that there is a lot of nudity and a fair sprinkling of blood (though BARBARELLA is topped in one or both respects by THE DETECTIVE, DARK OF THE SUN, and ROSEMARY'S BABY, which did not draw many outraged screams). But the nudity isn't sex, and the blood isn't sadism.

BARBARELLA isn't satire, either, and it isn't camp. I do not think you have seen anything like it before. If you took some very complex science-

fiction world (say, the Star King novels of Jack Vance, or the multiple creations of Cordwainer Smith or Larry Niven) and shuffled it evenly with PLAYBOY (but a PLAYBOY *in excelsis*, a better and freer and more subtle job than the Hefner Empire can be bothered with), and then asked Mack Sennett to stage and direct the result, you might come close. Even then, though, I doubt that you'd come up with anything quite so bright, or quite so charmingly fake, as this revolving pinwheel of a movie happily is.

For, make no mistake, it has nothing much to do with reality; it doesn't intend to. (A second viewing confirms, for me, the notion that everything in BARBARELLA is logically defensible, and that the whole thing could be read as satire or deep symbolism if necessary; as my companion said, the equivalent occupation would be defending the nutritional value of cotton candy.) Barbarella's space-ship is a wooden model, and not a very good one. The various monsters, human and otherwise, seem to have had a great deal of fun inventing their costumes and makeup; for long stretches, BARBARELLA is the best costume party you've ever been to.

I suppose the movie has a plot. This is as magnificently irrelevant

as is the plot of *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA*. It does have a musical score—ranging from electronic rock to clear, crystal Haydn, always appropriate and always novel. Roger Vadim and six other screenwriters seem to have given Terry Southern enough help so that, for once, a Southern script is a finished product instead of a rough sketch; Vadim, using the Flash Gordon movie serials as a model, has made a bright, neatly timed sequence of shots and scenes.

Unfortunately, the film also has Marcel Marceau. I don't know why. He speaks, for the first time on film; what he is called on to say, however, and all that he is asked to do, are both the sort of thing that might reasonably be asked of any actor I can think of; it's as if Cary Grant were to play the bartender in a standard Western.

Putting that to one side, though, there is Jane Fonda, whose wide-eyed innocence has never worked nearly so well; there is Ugo Tognazzi; spectacularly, there is David Hemmings, as the single most inept revolutionary leader of record. There are new ideas, new sets, new color

combinations, all as bright and startling as the paintings of Joan Miro. There is John Phillip Law as the handsomest angel on record, and a perfect character match for Miss Fonda's Barbarella. (Law's flying sequences, by the way, do *not* look faked; it's clear that Vadim used those Flash Gordon props and scenes deliberately. The message they carry is simple and obvious: Don't believe any of this; just relax and let it carry you.)

There is also, I seem to detect, enough material here for a sequel. I can think of nothing that would please me more.

A much more seriously-meant film, *CHARLY*, has got squeezed out of this column. Some jottings on it will appear, augurs willing, next month in our sister publication.

In my notes on *ROSEMARY'S BABY* (January *AMAZING*) I mentioned an actress named Ruth Ford. I'm afraid Miss Ford is the invention of a proofreader; I wrote, and of course meant, Miss Ruth Gordon. OK this time?

The End

COMING IN THE JUNE FANTASTIC

Ghyl Tarvoke differed in no real way from the other boys of the ancient city Ambroy except in one particular: he desired to know the truth. His quest for Truth and the source of the legend of EMPHURIO is one of the most remarkable stories you'll ever read—JACK VANCE'S NOVEL EMPHYRIO.

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good. It could climb as fast as we could dive, and no human could have taken the accelerations and the turns it made. Whoever drove it learned fast, too. He was clumsy at the beginning, but he learned. If we hadn't gotten in a lucky hit he'd've had us where he wanted us in a little while more. Our fifty-calibres just bounced off that hull!"

The loud-speaker said curtly: "If that impression is justified, that's the first business to be taken up. All but flying officers are excused. Mr. Coburn can go, too."

There was a stirring everywhere in the room. Officers got up and walked out. Coburn stood. The Greek general came over to him and patted him on the shoulder, beaming. Janice went out with him. They arrived on the carrier's deck. This was the very earliest hour of dawn, and the conference had turned abruptly to a discussion of arms and tactics as soon as Washington realized that its planes were inadequate for fighting. Which was logical enough, but Coburn was pretty sure it was useless.

"If anybody else in the world feels as futile as I do," said Coburn bitterly, "I feel sorry for him!"

Janice said softly: "You've got me."

But that was less than complete comfort. It is inborn in a man that

he needs to feel superior. No man can feel pride before the woman of his choice while there is something stronger than himself. And Coburn especially wanted to feel that pride just now.

There were very probably discussions of the important part of what Coburn had reported, of course, during the rest of the morning. But there was much more discussion of purely military measures. And of course there were attempts to get military intelligence. Things were reported in the sky near South Africa, and from Honolulu — where nobody would ignore what a radar said again, especially the juiced-up equipment just modified on orders — and from other places. Not all the reports were authentic, of course. If there were any observations inside the Iron Curtain, the Iron Curtain countries kept them to themselves. Politics was much more important than anything else, in that part of the world.

But Coburn need not have felt as futile as he did. There was just one really spectacular occurrence in connection with the Invaders that day, and it happened where Coburn was. Almost certainly, it happened because Coburn was there. Though there is reason to believe that the newspaper campaign on shore, declaring that the American fleet risked the lives of all Naples by its mere presence,

had something to do with it too.
It was very spectacular.

It happened just after midday when the city and its harbor were at their most glamorous. Coburn and Janice were above when it began. There was an ensign assigned to escort Coburn about and keep an eye on him, and he took them on a carefully edited tour of the carrier. He took them to the radar room which was not secret any longer. He explained reservedly that there was a new tricked-up arrangement of radar which it was believed would detect turtle-shaped metal ships if they appeared.

The radar room was manned, of course. It always was, with a cold war in being. Overhead, the bowl cages of the radars moved restlessly and rhythmically. Outside, on deck, the huge elevator that brought planes up from below rose at the most deliberate of peace-time rates.

The ensign said negligently, pointing to the radar-screen: "That little speck is a plane making for the landing field on shore. This other one is a plane coming down from Genoa. You'd need a good pair of binoculars to see it. It's a good thirty-five miles away."

Just then, one of the two radar-men on duty pushed a button and snapped into a microphone: "Sir! Radar-pip directly overhead! Does not show on normal radar. Ele-

vation three hundred thousand feet, descending rapidly." His voice cut off suddenly.

A metallic voice said: "Relay!"

The ensign in charge of Coburn and Janice seemed to freeze. The radar man pressed a button, which would relay that particular radar-screen's contents to the control room for the whole ship. There was a pause of seconds. Then bells began to ring everywhere. They were battle gongs.

There was a sensation of stirring all over the ship. Doors closed with soft hissings. Men ran furiously. The gongs rang.

The ensign said politely: "I'll take you below now."

He led them very swiftly to a flight of stairs. There was a monstrous bellowing on the carrier's deck. Something dark went hurtling down its length, with a tail of pale-blue flame behind it. It vanished. Men were still running. The elevator shot into full-speed ascent. A plane rolled off it. The elevator dropped.

An engine roared. Another. Yet another. A second dark and deadly thing flashed down the deck and was gone. There was a rumbling.

The battle gongs cut off. The rumbling below seemed to increase. There was a curious vibration. The ship moved. Coburn could feel that it moved. It was turning.

The ensign led them somewhere and said: "This is a good place.

You'd better stay right here."

He ran. They heard him running. He was gone.

They were in a sort of ward room — not of the morning conference — and there were portholes through which they could look. The city which was Naples seemed to swing smoothly past the ship. They saw other ships. A cruiser was under way with its anchor still rising from the water. It dripped mud and a sailor was quite ridiculously playing a hose on it. It ascended and swayed and its shank went smoothly into the hawse-hole. There were guns swinging skyward. Some were still covered by canvas hoods. The hoods vanished before the cruiser swung out of the porthole's line of vision.

A destroyer leaped across the space they could see, full speed ahead. The water below them began to move more rapidly. It began to pass by with the speed of ground past an express train. And continually, monotonously, there were roarings which climaxed and died in the distance.

"The devil!" said Coburn. "I've got to see this. They can't kill us for looking."

He opened the door. Janice, holding fast to his arm, followed as he went down a passage. Another door. They were on the deck side of the island which is the superstructure of a carrier, and

they were well out of the way, and everybody in sight was too busy to notice them.

The elevator worked like the piston of a pump. It vanished and reappeared and a plane came off. Men in vividly-colored suits swarmed about it, and the elevator was descending again. The plane roared, shot down the deck, and was gone to form one of the string of climbing objects which grew smaller with incredible swiftness as they shot for the sky. Coburn saw another carrier. There was a huge bow-wave before it. Destroyers ringed it, seeming to bounce in the choppy sea made by so many great ships moving so close together.

The other carrier, too, was shooting planes into the air like bullets from a gun. The American Mediterranean fleet was putting out to sea at emergency-speed, getting every flying craft aloft that could be gotten away. A cruiser swung a peculiar crane-like arm, there was a puff of smoke and a plane came into being. The crane retracted. Another plane. A third.

The fleet was out of the harbor, speeding at thirty knots, with destroyers weaving back and forth at higher speeds still. There were barges left behind in the harbor with sailors in them, — shore-parties or details who swore bitterly when they were left behind. They surged up and down on the

mêlée of waves the fleet left behind in its hasty departure.

On the fleet itself there was a brisk tenseness as it sped away from the land. Vesuvius still loomed high, but the city dwindled to a mere blinking mass of white specks which were its buildings. The sea was aglitter with sunlight reflected from the waves. There was the smell of salt air.

Men began to take cryptic measures for the future. They strung cables across the deck from side to side. Arresting gear for planes which would presently land.

Their special ensign found Coburn and Janice. "I'm supposed to stay with you," he explained politely. "I thought I could be of use. I'm really attached to another ship, but I was on board because of the hassle last night."

Coburn said: "This would be invader stuff, wouldn't it?"

The ensign shrugged. "Apparently. You heard what the radar said. Something at three hundred thousand feet, descending rapidly. It's not a human-built ship. Anyway, we've sent up all our planes. Jets will meet it first, at fifty thousand. If it gets through them there are . . . other measures, of course."

"This one beats me!" said Coburn. "Why?"

The ensign shrugged again. "They tried for you last night."

"I'm not that important, to

them or anybody else. Or am I?"

"I wouldn't know," said the ensign.

"I don't know anything I haven't told," said Coburn grimly, "and the creatures can't suppress any information by killing me now. Anyhow, if they'd wanted to they'd have done it."

A dull, faint sound came from high overhead. Coburn stepped out from under the shelter of the upper works of the island. He stared up into the sky. He saw a lurid spot of blue-white flame. He saw others. He realized that all the sky was interlaced with contrails — vapor-trails of jet-planes far up out of sight. But they were fine threads. The jets were up very high indeed. The pin-points of flame were explosions.

"Using wing-rockets," said the ensign hungrily, "since fifty-calibres did no good last night, until one made a lucky hit. Rockets with proximity fuses. Our jets don't carry cannon."

There were more explosions. There was a bright glint of reflected sunshine. It was momentary, but Coburn knew that it was from a flat, bright space-ship, which had tilted in some monstrously abrupt maneuver, and the almost vertical sunshine shone down from its surface.

The ensign said in a very quiet voice: "The fight's coming lower."

There was a crashing thump in the air. A battleship was firing

eight-inch guns almost straight up. Other guns began.

Guns began to fire on the carrier, too, below the deck and beyond it. Concussion waves beat at Coburn's body. He thrust Janice behind him to shield her, but there could be no shielding.

The air was filled with barkings and snarlings and the unbelievably abrupt roar of heavy guns. The carrier swerved, so swiftly that it tilted and swerved again. The other ships of the fleet broke their straight-away formation and began to move in bewildering patterns. The blue sea was crisscrossed with wakes. Once a destroyer seemed to slide almost under the bow of the carrier. The destroyer appeared unharmed on the other side, its guns all pointed skyward and emitting seemingly continuous blasts of flame and thunder.

The ensign grabbed Coburn's shoulder and pointed, his hands shaking.

There was the Invader ship. It was exactly as Coburn had known it would be. It was tiny. It seemed hardly larger than some of the planes that swooped at it. But the planes were drawing back now. The shining metal thing was no more than two thousand feet up and it was moving in erratic, unpredictable darts and dashes here and there, like a dragon-fly's movements, but a hundred times

more swift. Proximity-fused shells burst everywhere about it. It burst through a still-expanding puff of explosive smoke, darted down a hundred feet, and took a zig-zag course of such violent and angular changes of position that it looked more like a streak of metal lightning than anything else.

It was down to a thousand feet. It shot toward the fleet at a speed which was literally that of a projectile. It angled off to one side and back, and suddenly dropped again and plunged crazily through the maze of ships from one end to the other, no more than fifty feet above the water and with geysers of up-flung sea all about it from the shells that missed.

Then it sped away with a velocity which simply was not conceivable. It was the speed of a cannonball. It was headed straight toward a distant, stubby, draggled tramp-steamer which plodded toward the Bay of Naples.

It rose a little as it flew. And then it checked, in mid-air. It hung above the dumpy freighter, and there were salvos of all the guns in the fleet. But at the flashes it shot skyward. When the shells arrived and burst, it was gone.

It could still be sighted as a spark of sunlight shooting for the heavens. Jets roared toward it. It vanished.

Coburn heard the ensign saying in a flat voice: "If that wasn't

accelerating at fifteen Gs, I never saw a ship. If it wasn't accelerating at fifteen Gs . . ."

And that was all. There was nothing else to shoot at. There was nothing else to do. Jets ranged widely, looking for something that would offer battle, but the radars said that the metal ship had gone up to three hundred miles and then headed west and out of radar range. There had not been time for the French to set up paired radar-beam outfits anyhow, so they couldn't spot it, and in any case its course seemed to be toward northern Spain, where there was no radar worth mentioning.

Presently somebody noticed the dingy, stubby, draggled tramp steamer over which the Invaders' craft had hovered. It was no longer on course. It had turned sidewise and wallowed heavily. Its bow pointed successively to every point of the compass.

It looked bad. Salvos of the heaviest projectiles in the Fleet had been fired to explode a thousand feet above it. Perhaps —

A destroyer went racing to see. As it drew near — Coburn learned this later — it saw a man's body hanging in a sagging heap over the railing of its bridge. There was nobody visible at the wheel. There were four men lying on its deck, motionless.

The skipper of the destroyer went cold. He brought his ship

closer. It was not big, this tramp. Maybe two thousand tons. It was low in the water. It swayed and surged and wallowed and rolled.

Men from the destroyer managed to board it. It was completely unharmed. They found one small sign of the explosions overhead. One fragment of an exploded shell had fallen on board, doing no damage.

Even the crew was unharmed. But every man was asleep. Each one slumbered heavily. Each breathed stertoriously. They could not be awakened. They would need oxygen to bring them to.

A party from the destroyer went on board to bring the ship into harbor. The officer in charge tried to find out the ship's name.

There was not a document to be found to show what the ship's name was or where it had come from or what it carried as cargo. That was strange. The officer looked in the pockets of the two men in the wheel house. There was not a single identifying object on either of them. He grew disturbed. He made a really thorough search. Every sleeping man was absolutely anonymous. Then — still on the way to harbor — a really fine-tooth-comb examination of the ship began.

Somebody's radium-dial watch began to glow brightly. The searchers looked at each other and went pale. They hunted fran-

tically, fear making them clumsy.

They found it. Rather — they found them.

The stubby tramp had an adequate if rather clumsy atomic bomb in each of its two holds. The lading of the ship was of materials which — according to theory — should be detonated in atomic explosion if an atomic bomb went off nearby. Otherwise they could not be detonated.

The anonymous tramp-steamer had been headed for the harbor of Naples, whose newspapers — at least those of a certain political party — had been screaming of the danger of an atomic explosion while American warships were anchored there.

It was not likely that two atom bombs and a shipload of valuable secondary atomic explosive had been put on a carefully nameless ship just to be taken for a ride. If this ship had anchored among the American fleet and if it had exploded in the Bay of Naples . . .

The prophecies of a certain political party would seem to have been fulfilled. The American ships would be destroyed. Naples itself would be destroyed. And it would have appeared that Europeans who loved the great United States had made a mistake.

It was, odd, though, that this ship was the only one that the Invaders' flying craft had struck with its peculiar weapon.

VI

We humans are rational beings, but we are not often reasonable. Those who more or less handle us in masses have to take account of that fact. It could not be admitted that the fleet had had a fight with a ship piloted by Invaders from another solar system. It would produce a wild panic, beside which even a war would be relatively harmless. So the admiral of the Mediterranean fleet composed an order commending his men warmly for their performance in an unrehearsed firing-drill. Their target had been — so the order said — a new type of guided missile recently developed by hush-hush agencies of the Defense Department. The admiral was pleased and proud, and happy. . . .

It was an excellent order, but it wasn't true. The admiral wasn't happy. Not after battle photographs were developed and he could see how the alien ship had dodged rockets with perfect ease, and had actually taken a five-inch shell, which exploded on impact, without a particle of damage.

On the carrier, the Greek general said mildly to Coburn that the Invaders had used their power very strangely. After stopping an invasion of Greece, they had prevented an atomic-bomb explosion which would have killed

some hundreds of thousands of people. And it was strange that the turtle-shaped ship that had attacked the air transport was so clumsily handled as compared with this similar craft which had zestfully dodged all the missiles a fleet could throw at it.

Coburn thought hard. "I think I see," he said slowly. "You mean, they're here and they know all they need to know. But instead of coming out into the open, they're making governments recognize their existence. They're letting the rulers of Earth know they can't be resisted. But we did knock off one of their ships last night!"

The Greek general pointedly said nothing. Coburn caught his meaning. The fleet, firing point-blank, had not destroyed its target. The ship last night had seemed to fall into a cloud bank and explode. But nobody had seen it blow up. Maybe it hadn't.

"Humoring us!" realized Coburn. "They don't want to destroy our civilization, so they'll humor us. But they want our governments to know that they can do as they please. If our governments know we can't resist, they think we'll surrender. But they're wrong."

The Greek general looked at him enigmatically.

"We've still got one trick left," said Coburn. "Atomic bombs. And if they fail, we can still get

killed fighting them another way."

There was a heavy, droning noise far away. It increased and drew nearer. It was a multi-engined plane which came from the west and settled down, and hovered over the water and touched and instantly created a spreading wake of foam.

The fleet was back at anchor then. It was enclosed in the most beautiful combination of city and scene that exists anywhere. Beyond the city the blunted cone of Vesuvius rose. In the city, newspaper vendors shrilly hawked denunciations of the American ships because of the danger that their atom bombs might explode. Well outside the harbor, a Navy crew of experts worked to make quite impossible the detonation of atomic bombs in a stubby tramp-steamer which had — plausibly, at least — been sent to make those same newspapers' prophecies of disaster come true.

A long, long time passed, while consultations took place to which Coburn was not invited. Then a messenger led him to the ward-room of the previous conference. He recognized the men who had landed by seaplane a while since. One was a cabinet member from Washington. There was someone of at least equal importance from London, picked up en route. There were generals and admirals. The service officers looked at Coburn

with something like accusation in their eyes. He was the means by which they had come to realize their impotence. The Greek general sat quietly in the rear.

"Mr. Coburn," said the Secretary from Washington. "We've been canvassing the situation. It seems that we simply are not prepared to offer effective resistance — not yet — to the . . . invaders you tell us about. We know of no reason why this entire fleet could not have been disabled as effectively as the tramp-steamer offshore. You know about that ship?"

Coburn nodded. The Greek general had told him. The Secretary went on painfully: "Now, the phenomena we have to ascribe to Invaders fall into two categories. One is the category of their action against the Bulgarian raiding force, and today the prevention of the cold-war murder of some hundreds of thousands of people. That category suggests that they are prepared — on terms — to be amiable. A point in their favor."

Coburn set his lips.

"The other group of events simply points you out and builds you up as a person of importance to these Invaders. You seem to be extremely important to them. They doubtless could have killed you. They did not. What they did do was bring you forward to official attention. Presumably they

had a realistic motive in this."

"I don't know what it could be," said Coburn coldly. "I blundered into one affair. I figured out a way to detect them. I happened to be the means by which they were proved to exist. That's all. It was an accident."

The Secretary looked skeptical. "Your discoveries were remarkably . . . apt. And it does seem clear that they made the appearance of hunting you, while going to some pains not to catch you. Mr. Coburn, how can we make contact with them?"

Coburn wanted to swear furiously. He was still being considered a traitor. Only they were trying to make use of his treason.

"I have no idea," he said grimly.

"What do they want?"

"I would say — Earth," he said grimly.

"You deny that you are an authorized intermediary for them?"

"Absolutely," said Coburn. There was silence. The Greek general spoke mildly from the back of the room. He said in his difficult English that Coburn's personal motives did not matter. But if the Invaders had picked him out as especially important, it was possible that they felt him especially qualified to talk to them. The question was, would he try to make contact with them?

The Secretary looked pained,

but he turned to Coburn. "Mr. Coburn?"

Coburn said, "I've no idea how to set about it, but I'll try on one condition. There's one thing we haven't tried against them. Set up an atom-bomb booby-trap, and I'll sit on it. If they try to contact me, you can either listen in or try to blow them up, and me with them!"

There was buzzing comment. Perhaps — Coburn's nails bit into his palms when this was suggested — perhaps this was a proposal to let the Invaders examine an atomic bomb, American-style. It was said in earnest simplicity. But somebody pointed out that a race which could travel between the stars and had ships such as the Mediterranean fleet had tried to shoot down, would probably find American atomic bombs rather primitive. Still —

The Greek general again spoke mildly. If the Invaders were to be made to realize that Coburn was trying to contact them, he should return to Greece. He should visibly take up residence where he could be approached. He should, in fact, put himself completely at the mercy of the Invaders.

"Ostensibly," agreed the Secretary.

The Greek general then said diffidently that he had a small villa some twenty miles from the suburbs of Salonika. The prevail-

ing winds were such that if an atomic explosion occurred there, it would not endanger anybody. He offered it.

"I'll live there," asked Coburn coldly, "and wait for them to come to me? I'll have microphones all about so that every word that's said will be relayed to your recorders? And there'll be a bomb somewhere about that you can set off by remote control? Is that the idea?"

Then Janice spoke up. And Coburn flared into anger against her. But she was firm. Coburn saw the Greek general smiling slyly.

They left the conference while the decision was made. And they were in private, and Janice talked to him. There are methods of argument against which a man is hopeless. She used them. She said that she, not Coburn, might be the person the Invaders might have wanted to take out of circulation, because she might have noticed something important she hadn't realized yet. When Coburn pointed out that he'd be living over an atomic bomb, triggered to be set off from a hundred miles away, she demanded fiercely to know if he realized how she'd feel if she weren't there to. . . .

Next day an aircraft carrier put out of Naples with an escort of destroyers. It traveled at full speed down the toe of Italy's boot, through the straits of Messina, across the Adriatic, and

rounded the end of Greece and went streaking night and day for Salonika. Special technicians sent by plane beat her time by days. The Greek general was there well ahead. And he expansively supervised while his inherited, isolated villa was prepared for the reception of Invaders — and Coburn and Janice.

And Coburn and Janice were married. It was an impressive wedding, because it was desirable for the Invaders to know about it. It was brilliantly military with uniforms and glittering decorations and innumerable important people whom neither of them knew or cared about.

It it had been anybody else's wedding Coburn would have found it unspeakably dreary. The only person present whom he knew beside Janice was Hallen. He acted as groomsman, with the air of someone walking on eggs. After it was over he shook hands with a manner of tremendous relief.

"Maybe I'll brag about this some day," he told Coburn uneasily. "But right now I'm scared to death. What do you two really expect to happen?"

Janice smiled at him. "Why," she said, "we expect to live happily ever after."

"Oh yes," said Hallen uncomfortably. "But that wasn't just what I had in mind."

The world wagged on. The newspapers knew nothing about super-secret top-level worries. There was not a single newsstory printed anywhere suggesting an invasion of Earth from outer space. There were a few more Flying Saucer yarns than normal, and it was beginning to transpire that an unusual number of important people were sick, or on vacation, or otherwise out of contact with the world. But, actually, not one of the events in which Coburn and Janice had been concerned reached the state of being news. Even the shooting off the Bay of Naples was explained as an emergency drill.

Quietly, a good many things happened. Cryptic orders passed around, and oxygen tanks were accumulated in military posts. Hunter and Mereid guided missiles were set up as standard equipment in a number of brand-new places. They were loaded for bear. But days went by, and nothing happened. Nothing at all. But officialdom was not at ease.

If anything — while the wide world went happily about its business — really high-level officialdom grew more unhappy day by day. Coburn and Janice flew back to Salonika. They went in a Navy plane with a fighter plane escort. They landed at the Salonika airport, and the Greek general

was among those who greeted them.

He took them out to the villa he'd placed at the disposal of high authority for their use. He displayed it proudly. There was absolutely no sign that it had been touched by anybody since its original builders had finished with it two-hundred-odd years before. The American officer who had wired it, though — he looked as if he were short a week's sleep — showed them how anywhere on the grounds or in the house they would need only to speak a code-word and they'd instantly be answered.

There were servants, and the Greek general took Coburn aside and assured him that there was one room which absolutely was not wired for sound. He named it.

So they took up a relatively normal way of life. Sometimes they decided that it would be pleasant to drive in to Salonika. They mentioned it, and went out and got in the car that went with the villa. Oddly, there was always some aircraft lazying about overhead by the time they were out of the gate. They always returned before sunset. And sometimes they swam in the water before the villa's door. Then, also, they were careful to be back on solid ground before sunset. That was so their guards out on the water wouldn't have to worry.

But it was a nagging and an un-

happy business to know that they were watched and overheard everywhere save in that one unwired room. It could have made for tension between them. But there was another thought to hold them together. This was the knowledge that they were literally living on top of a bomb. If an Invader's flying ship descended at the villa, everything that happened would be heard and seen by microphones and concealed television cameras. If the Invaders were too arrogant, or if they were arbitrary, there would be a test to see if their ship could exist in the heart of an atom-bomb explosion.

Coburn and Janice, then, were happy after a fashion. But nobody could call their situation restful.

They had very few visitors. The Greek general came out meticulously every day. Hallen came out once, but he knew about the atomic bomb. He didn't stay long. When they'd been in residence a week, the General telephoned zestfully that he was going to bring out some company. His English was so mangled and obscure that Coburn wondered cynically if whoever listened to their tapped telephone could understand him. But, said the General in high good humor, he was playing a good joke. He had hunted up Helena, who was Coburn's secretary, and he had also invited

Dillon to pay a visit to some charming people he knew. It would be a great joke to see Dillon's face.

There was a fire in the living room that night. The Greek servants had made it, and Coburn thought grimly that they were braver men and women than he'd have been. They didn't have to risk their lives. They could have refused this particular secret-service assignment. But they hadn't.

A voice spoke from the living-room ceiling, a clipped American voice. "Mr. Coburn, a car is coming."

That was standard. When the General arrived; when the occasional delivery of telephoned-for supplies came; on the one occasion when a peddler on foot had entered the ground. It lacked something of being the perfect atmosphere for a honeymoon, but it was the way things were.

Presently there were headlights outside. The Greek butler went to greet the guests. Coburn and Janice heard voices. The General was in uproarious good humor. He came in babbling completely incomprehensible English.

There was Helena. She smiled warmly at Coburn. She went at once to Janice. "How do you do?" she said in her prettily accented English. "I have missed not working for your husband, but this is my fiancé!"

And Janice shook hands with a slick-haired young Greek who looked pleasant enough, but did not seem to her as remarkable as Coburn.

Then Dillon stared at Coburn. "The devil!" he said, with every evidence of indignation. "This is the chap —"

The General roared, and Coburn said awkwardly: "I owe you an apology, and the privilege of a poke in the nose besides. But it was a situation — I was in a state —"

Then the General howled with laughter. Helena laughed. Her fiancé laughed. And Dillon grinned amusedly at Coburn.

"My dear fellow!" said Dillon. "We are the guests this whole villa was set up to receive! The last time I saw you was in Náousa, and the last time Helena saw you you stuck pins in her, and —"

Coburn stiffened. He went slowly pale.

"I — see! You're the foam-suit people, eh?" Then he looked with hot passion at the General. "You!" he said grimly. "You I didn't suspect. You've made fools of all of us, I think."

The General said something obscure which could have been a proverb. It was to the effect that nobody could tell a fat man was cross-eyed when he laughed.

"Yes," said Dillon beaming. "He is fat. So his eyes don't look

like they're different. You have to see past his cheeks and eyebrows. That's how he passed muster. And he slept very soundly after the airport affair."

Coburn felt a sort of sick horror. The General had passed as a man, and he'd loaned this villa, and he knew all about the installation of the atomic bomb. . . . Then Coburn looked through a doorway and there was his Greek butler standing in readiness with a submachine-gun in his hands.

"I take it this is an official call," said Coburn steadily. "In that case you know we're overheard — or did the General cancel that?"

"Oh, yes!" said Dillon. "We know all about the trap we've walked into. But we'd decided that the time had come to appear in the open anyhow. You people are very much like us, incidentally. Apparently there's only one real way that a truly rational brain can work. And we and you Earth people both have it. May we sit down?"

Janice said: "By all means!"

Helena sat, with an absolutely human gesture of spreading her skirt beside her. The General plumped into a chair and chuckled. The slick-haired young man politely offered Janice a cigarette and lighted Helena's for her. Dillon leaned against the mantel above the fire.

"Well?" said Coburn harshly. "You can state your terms. What do you want and what do you propose to do to get it?"

Dillon shook his head. He took a deep breath. "I want you to listen, Coburn. I know about the atom bomb planted somewhere around, and I know I'm talking for my life. You know we aren't natives of Earth. You've guessed that we come from a long way off. We do. Now — we found out the trick of space travel some time ago. You're quite welcome to it. We found it, and we started exploring. We've been in space, you might say, just about two of your centuries. You're the only other civilized race we've found. That's point one."

Coburn fumbled in his pocket. He found a cigarette. Dillon held a match. Coburn started, and then accepted it.

"Go on." He added, "There's a television camera relaying this, by the way. Did you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Dillon. "Now, having about two centuries the start of you, we have a few tricks you haven't found out yet. For one thing, we understand ourselves, and you, better than you do. We've some technical gadgets you haven't happened on yet. However, it's entirely possible for you to easily kill the four of us here tonight. If you do — you do. But there are others of our race here. That's point two."

"Now come the threats and demands," said Coburn.

"Perhaps." But Dillon seemed to hesitate. "Dammit, Coburn, you're a reasonable man. Try to think like us a moment. What would you do if you'd started to explore space and came upon a civilized race, as we have?"

Coburn said formidably, "We'd study them and try to make friends."

"In that order," said Dillon instantly. "That's what we've tried to do. We disguised ourselves as you because we wanted to learn how to make friends before we tried. But what did we

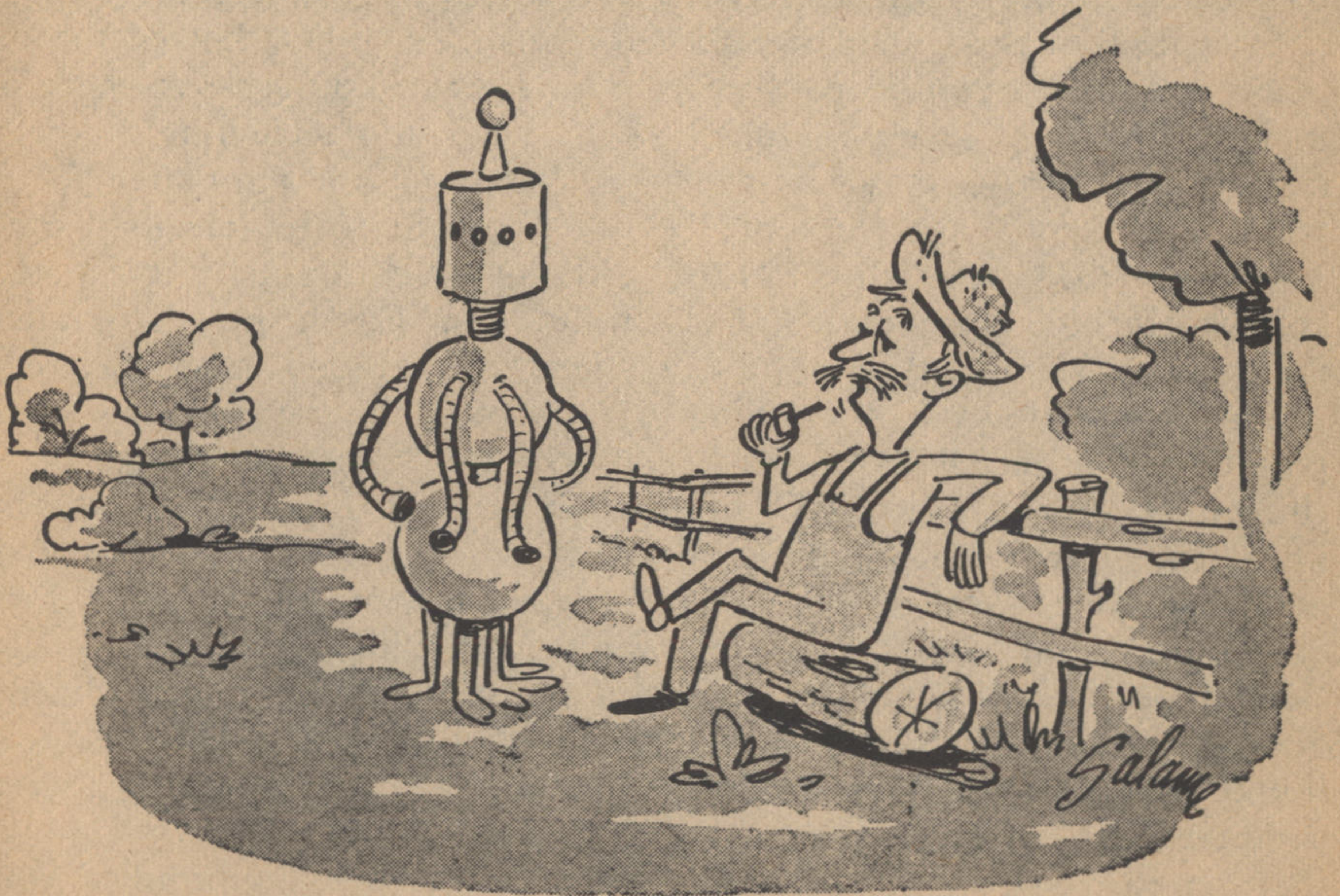
find, Coburn? What's your guess?"

"You name it!" said Coburn.

"You Earth people," said Dillon, "are at a turning-point in your history. Either you solve your problems and keep on climbing, or you'll blast your civilization down to somewhere near a caveman level and have to start all over again. You know what I mean. Our two more spectacular interferences dealt with it."

"The Iron Curtain," said Coburn. "Yes. But what's that got to do with you? It's none of your business. That's ours."

"But it *is* ours," said Dillon



"City Feller?"

urgently. "Don't you see, Coburn? You've a civilization nearly as advanced as ours. If we can make friends, we can do each other an infinite lot of good. We can complement each other. We can have a most valuable trade, not only in goods, but in what you call human values and we call something else. We'd like to start that trade.

"But you're desperately close to smashing things. So we've had to rush things. We did stop that Bulgarian raid. When you proved too sharp to be fooled, we grew hopeful. Here might be our entering wedge. We hammered at you. We managed to make your people suspicious that there might be something in what you said. We proved it. It was rugged for you, but we had to let you people force us into the open. If we'd marched out shyly with roses in our hair — what would you have thought?"

Coburn said doggedly: "I'm still waiting for the terms. What do you want?"

The General said something plaintive from his chair. It was to the effect that Coburn still believed that Earth was in danger of conquest from space.

"Look!" said Dillon irritably. "If you people had found the trick of space travel first, and you'd found us, would you have tried to conquer us? Considering that we're civilized?"

Coburn said coldly, "No. Not

my particular people. We know you can't conquer a civilized race. You can exterminate them, or you can break them down to savagery, but you can't conquer them. You can't conquer us!"

Then Dillon said very painstakingly: "But we don't want to conquer you. Even your friends inside the Iron Curtain know that the only way to conquer a country is to smash it down to savagery. They've done that over and over for conquest. But what the devil good would savages be to us? We want someone to trade with. We can't trade with savages. We want someone to gain something from. What have savages to offer us? A planet? Good Heavens, man! We've already found sixty planets for colonies, much better for us than Earth. Your gravity here is . . . well, it's sickeningly low."

"What *do* you want then?"

"We want to be friends," said Dillon. "We'll gain by it exactly what you Earth people gained when you traded freely among yourselves, before blocked currencies and quotas and such nonsense strangled trade. We'll gain what you gained when you'd stopped having every city a fort and every village guarded by the castle of its lord. Look, Coburn: we've got people inside the Iron Curtain. We'll keep them there. You won't be able to disband your armies, but we can promise you won't have to use them — be-

cause we certainly won't help you chaps fight among yourselves. We'll give you one of our ships to study and work on. But we won't give you our arms. You'll have your moon in a year and your whole solar system in a decade. You'll trade with us from the time you choose, and you'll be roaming space when you can grasp the trick of it. Man, you can't refuse. You're too near to certain smashing of your civilization, and we can help you to avoid it. Think what we're offering."

Then Coburn said grimly: "And if we don't like the bargain? What if we refuse?"

Dillon carefully put the ash from his cigarette into an ashtray. "If you won't be our friends," he said with some distaste, "we can't gain anything useful from you. We don't want you as slaves. You'd be no good to us. For that reason we can't get anything we want from the Iron Curtain people. They've nothing to offer that we can use. So our ultimatum is — make friends or we go away and leave you alone. Take it or leave it!"

There was a dead, absolute silence. After a long time Coburn said: "Altruism?"

Dillon grinned. "Enlightened self-interest. Common sense!"

There was a clicking in the ceiling. A metallic voice said: "Mr. Coburn, the conversation just

overheard and recorded has to be discussed in detail on high diplomatic levels. It will take time for conferences — decisions — arrangements. Assuming that your guests are acting in good faith, they have safe conduct from the villa. Their offer is very attractive, but it will have to be passed on at high policy-making levels."

Dillon said pleasantly, to the ceiling: "Yes. And you've got to keep it from being public, of course, until your space ships can discover us somewhere. It will have to be handled diplomatically, so your people are back of a grand offer to make friends when it happens." He added wryly, "We're very much alike, really. Coburn's very much like us. That's why — if it's all right with you — you can arrange for him to be our point of confidential contact. We'll keep in touch with him."

The ceiling did not reply. Dillon waited, then shrugged. The Greek general spoke. He said that since they had come so far out from Salonika, it was too early to leave again. It might be a good idea to have a party. Some music would be an excellent thing. He said he liked Earth music very much.

A long time later Janice and Coburn were alone in the one room of the house which was not wired for sound. There were no microphones here.

Coburn said reluctantly in the

darkness: "It sounds sensible all right. Maybe it's true. But it feels queer to think of it. . . ."

Janice pressed closer to him and whispered in his ear: "I made friends with that girl who passed for Helena. I like her. She says we'll be invited to make a trip to their planet. They can do something about the gravity. And she says she's really going to be married to the . . . person who was

with her. . . ." She hesitated. "She showed me what they really look like when they're not disguised as us."

Coburn put his arm around her and smiled gently. "Well? Want to tell me?"

Janice caught her breath. "I — I could have cried. . . . The poor thing — to look like that. I'm glad I look like I do. For you, darling. For you."

FROM the January 1850 issue of *Scientific American*: "It has been truly observed that the progress of science for the last century has outstripped all calculation, and left even the wildest imagination far in the rear. Is this astonishing progress to continue; and will nature in years to come yield to man her long treasured secrets as willingly as she does now? If so, what mortal shall venture to limit the boundaries of human knowledge, or the power of human skill? 'There is indeed,' says a late writer, 'no reason why the earth should not supply us with water hot, as well as cold, anymore, perhaps, than why mechanical attrition or compressed air, should not keep us warm, and the electric fluid light our streets and houses, convey our messages, set our clocks going, and possibly also perform some of our hard work.'"



HERE'S one place where the law of mathematics doesn't hold true: 2 plus 2 equals $3\frac{4}{5}$. When it's two quarts of water mixed with two quarts of alcohol. And the reason: Ethyl alcohol contracts in volume when you mix it with water, due to the reduction of the molecular interstices of the two substances in the chemical combination.

WISH IT AWAY

BY FRANK FREEMAN

Dr. Lenko was a psychiatrist and proud of it, but he did not think that made him an ashcan for anybody's old phobia.

I'M AFRAID I must ask you again," said Dr. Lenko, "to state as clearly as you can the nature of this disturbance. I do not fully grasp your problem. . . ."

Mervin Hinkley opened his lips to speak, but before any words came, he jerked his head around and with panic-streaked eyes searched the corner of the psychiatrist's comfortably furnished office. "Well," replied Mervin haltingly, "it's hard to describe. But I've got to get away from it, Dr. Lenko . . . I've got to get away from it."

Doctor Lenko leaned back in his brown leather chair and impatiently shuffled through a drift of papers. His search stopped when he picked out a small, folded letter. Turning again to Mervin, he spoke. "You tell me in this letter that you are plagued by an apparition of some sort. I should like to know more about it."

Mervin pushed his thin fingers through a scanty thatch of faded brown hair. "It's not an apparition! It's real! I see it every night at ten o'clock!" He leaned forward in his chair, his frantic gray eyes pleading with the doctor to accept this persuasion.

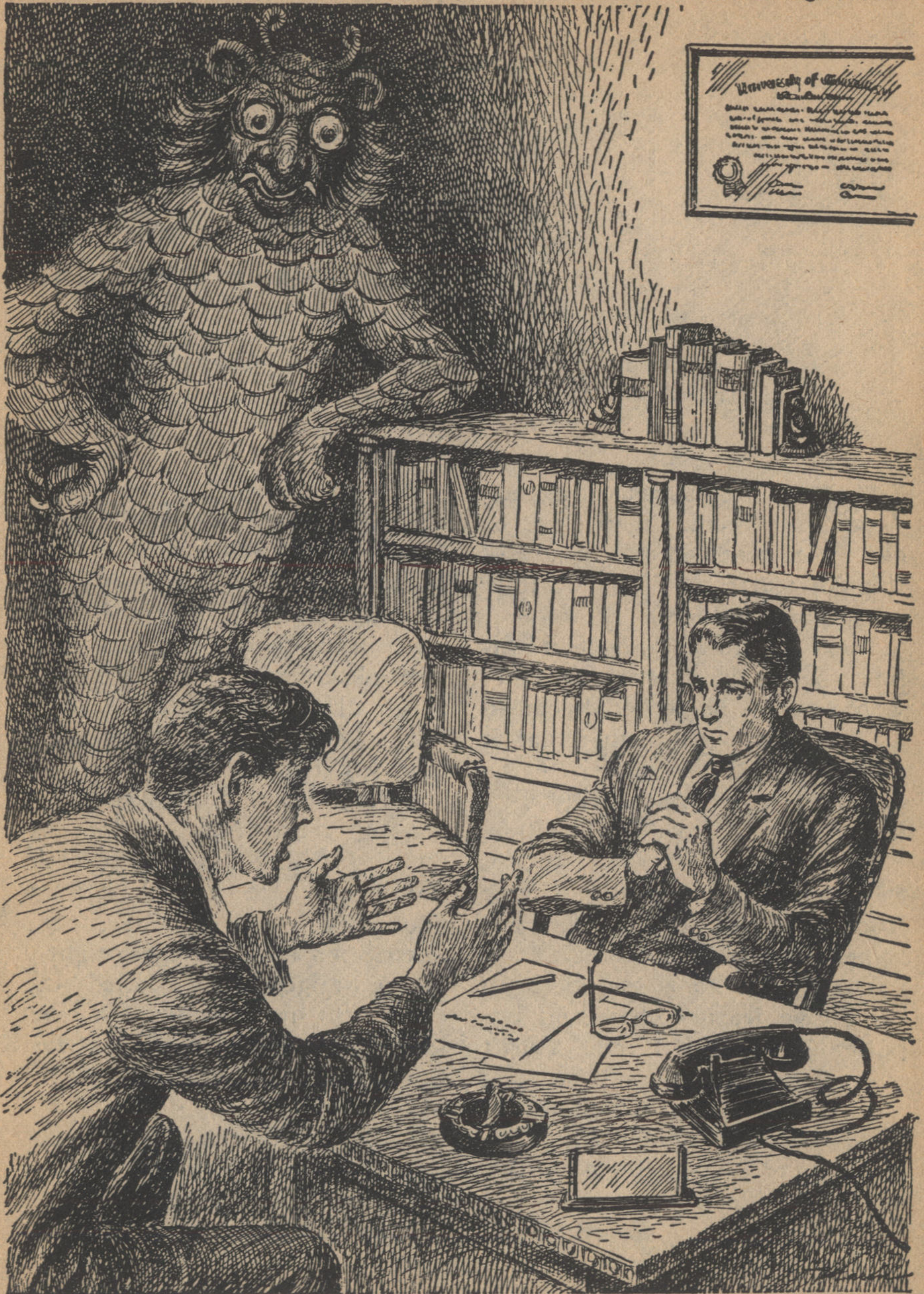
Dr. Lenko smiled. "Then what is it, Mr. Hinkley?"

Mervin came to his feet and shouted, "It's round, with scales on its face and it's got two big red eyes." He looked quickly about the room as though the description of his alleged nightly visitor might have called the thing into his presence. Then he sat down uneasily, staring at Dr. Lenko and vigorously rubbing his hands together.

"The solution to your case," said Dr. Lenko calmly, "is, I'm quite sure, relatively simple."

"What is the solution?"

"Wish it away, Mr. Hinkley."



Wish it away." Dr. Lenko lifted himself from his leather resting place and strode around the desk to stand before Mervin.

"Do you think it's that easy?" Mervin asked.

"It may not be easy, but it's a psychologically sound method of eliminating such annoying mental visitations. You must convince yourself that you do not believe in this thing, this round, scaly-faced creature with the red eyes. Tell it, mentally, to leave. Tell it to move on. Persuade yourself that you shall have nothing to do with it. In time it won't exist. It all depends upon the conscious power which you are able to apply to your will." Dr. Lenko sat down.

"Wish it away. Maybe it would work. Besides, how can you tell until you try it? Tonight. No harm in that. Give it a try."

Mervin's face flexed and curved as his mind turned over the doctor's suggestion, then he moved from the chair and walked to the door. Looking over his shoulder, he said, "I don't know what will happen, Dr. Lenko, but I'll do as you said. I'll . . . I'll wish it away from me."

"Good."

The door closed.

For Dr. Lenko, the evening was one of those long stacks of echoing hours that lead to an early bedtime as the easiest way

out of the monotony of being awake. As he lay in bed, hazily meditating upon the virtues and drawbacks of peering into people's minds, the telephone on his bedstand jangled.

Greeted by a disinterested hello, the voice on the other end announced, excitedly, "Dr. Lenko, this is Mervin Hinkley. I had to call you. That thing. . . ."

Dr. Lenko looked at his watch and noted it was fifteen minutes past Hinkley's witching hour. "What about it?" He readied himself to deliver a psychiatric treatment by remote control.

"It worked," Mervin cackled. "I wished it away, Doctor. It's a quarter past ten and I haven't seen a sign of it. Isn't that wonderful?"

"Wonderful," yawned Dr. Lenko. "Call on me if you ever need me again, Mr. Hinkley." He ended a potentially long conversation by easing the phone onto its cradle. Then, as if to escape from the Mervin Hinkleys and their collective problems, he burrowed into the woolen covers and wooed sleep.

But sleep did not come. Instead, a stirring at the foot of the bed. Dr. Lenko opened his eyes. The thing was round, with scales on its face, and big red eyes.

Dr. Lenko said, "Whu-whu —"

The thing seemed apologetic. It said, "Mervin sent me. I hope it's all right."

or so you say . . .



Dear Mr. Harrison,

Your editorial comments about J. G. Ballard in the July AMAZING need a *more precise* formulation before they can be fully understood. As they stand now they represent the kind of confusion that breeds new misrepresentations in the minds of unwary readers.

Let me be clear. Any reasonably fair critic will admit that a writer must communicate or perish. The same fair critic would admit that a *prima facie* case could be made for the view that Ballard's work is incomprehensible and obscure.

But how do you go about building such a case? By first stating an antipathy to the "subjective" kind of writer. The value of this kind of story is heuristic; that is, it shows us what "not to do." But what is forgotten is that all communication between people, readers and writers, has a "subjective" component. This is to say that we all *share* an "Inter-subjectivity"—the expression of which we see in language, gesture, and all the *conventions* of our culture. Therefore, a man fails to communicate when he *ignores* these conventions, or, in a trivial sense, when he uses nonsense words.

In effect you have assumed your conclusion as *true* without any argument, no examples, except a few *ad hominem* criticisms of Ballard.

My claim now is to say the Ballard *does* communicate, and I want to show *how*. All authors have their failures, but these are of no concern. I want to hold that Ballard *does* communicate even *when* he does his characteristic type of writing. Further still, I want to hold that Ballard's present work is a direct outgrowth of his more conventional stories—a very continuous development. It will not do to accuse me of "fooling" myself into *thinking* I understand Ballard, for this involves logical problems that cannot be dismissed.

Ballard's form of communication is analogous to painting, i.e. Bosch; his impact is emotional in a romantic sense; and his ideas come through in an associative way. All this is expressed in a concise English prose. Ballard is a kind of phenomenologist. His interest is in sensory and associative perception *before, before* it becomes *conventionalized* and explicitly comprehensible. And yet this kind of experience is *meaningful* on the primary level; otherwise *we would not bother* to conventionalize it!

To claim that Ballard's work is incomprehensible is to say that he is unconventional (an non-controversial claim). Ballard shows a wonderful attention to primary, childlike preceptions which are

fresh. To deny this approach is to deny the connotative and extensional uses of language, as in poetry and the coining of new words. This amounts to claiming that all *meaning* is definite and closed up, frozen once and for all in one modality. Let me add that I am not damning convention; much can be done in any modality, but a truly vigorous modality can be extended creatively, much in the same way that the language of common sense has been extended into the sophistications of scientific theory, and even into mathematics.

I think Ballard understands the difficulties. He knows that his conventions are unfamiliar, and that readers must be *motivated* into his way of looking. A valid criticism, and one which I think is the valuable part of your vague comments, is that at times Ballard *assumes* that the reader is *familiar* with his body of work and needs no motivation to read a particular story. But this is a considerably *softer* criticism than you give the impression of giving.

George T. Zebrowski

This letter, which was written some months ago, typifies the kind of thoughtful, intelligently written comment we welcome with open arms. Barry Malzberg comments, "The primary criticism levelled at Ballard—if I read the editorial in question correctly—is not so much a lack of communication (Ballard is perfectly comprehensible on the emotional level anyway), but a lack of content; often Ballard's stories simply lack the interior weight and richness to

justify the complexity of the style."

The following letter makes another, related point. —TW

Dear Ted,

Your recent comments on the SFWA publications on characterization express my feelings precisely. Sf has to grow, of course, or stagnate. I've always felt that it needed to grow along the dimension of characterization: its weakest direction. Whatever marvelous things happen, they don't mean a damn thing—they're so many unconnected gear-wheels turning uselessly in the air—unless they happen to a person and preferably change that person's outlook: he should learn from his experiences.

The New Wave crowd seem to think the McLuhanism is a new dimension. To me it's symptomatic of the chaotically disconnected thoughts heralding a nervous breakdown. So now instead of marvelous things happening to unresponsive cardboard people, they're happening to crazy people. There's no contrast to give the story reality. I find it difficult to identify with a nut.

Which is why I prefer well-written mystery yarns (Raymond Chandler's particularly) to much of sf these days.

William F. Texpler

McLuhanism seems to boil down to non-linear thought processes—the so-called 'mosaic' methods of constructing thoughts. This is a particularly appropriate response to our times, since we are under constant bombardment of information, most

of which we haven't time to sort and arrange properly. The problem is, of course, that these thought processes are very close to, if not identical to, those of a schizophrenic. And they contrast with the rigid linear qualities of paranoia. Our culture (all Western culture) has been paranoid for centuries. The changeover, if it occurs, is not going to be an easy one. (I'll leave the question of its desirability to someone else.) Inasmuch as sf anticipates real change in our society, it will inevitably have to deal with McLuhanism. It would be nice, however, if we retained some of our better traditional values, like story-telling, at the same time. —TW

Dear Editor,

In reading "A Word From the Editor" I was immensely disappointed when you said there would be no letter department—I am sure that almost all your readers were disappointed too. I consider the letter section of a magazine one of the most important parts of the magazine. In the letter department a reader gets to relate to other readers what he thinks of the stories, reviews, and articles in AMAZING and FANTASTIC. It gives the readers a chance to know what people think of the magazines, and it enables them to write to each other. In fact, I think that you might have lost some readers by stating that there would be no letter department.

John Strong

As you can see, the letters column is back with us as of this issue. I agree with you that it serves a use-

ful purpose; through the feedback of our readers' letters we—the editors and the writers—can gain a much better knowledge of our ultimate successes and failures with you, the audience. Historically, AMAZING's letters department was the birthplace of science fiction fandom, and today the letters remain a vital part of the magazine's personality.

However, a letters column is only as good as the letters it receives. I'd like to make this a forum for vigorous discussion—a place where every topic relevant to our field can be openly commented upon by the readership. It's up to you—the readers—to make this happen.

—TW

Dear Sir:

"Science of Man" has been an informative and stimulating addition to the magazine; I am, however, impelled to protest statements and implications in the column headed "War Is Peace" (November, 1968 issue).

No one could wish more than I that we could extirpate warfare from our common culture. As a veteran of two armies during two wars (wounded in action), I can claim firsthand knowledge of the wastefulness and debasing effects of war. As a father, I have justifiable fears that my sons may also have to suffer them. But denials, like the subject column, of the emotional bases of war, seem wishful, not to say autistic.

No reputable investigator will claim that any single study or hypothesis in any science, by itself, is a sort of 'magic bullet' which will destroy warfare. It is most unfair of Mr.

Stover to imply as much. It is well and good to caution the readers of the magazine not to go overboard for any single hypothesis, but Mr. Stover did not stop there; he left the distinct impression that he was casting caution to the winds to do a hatchet-job on Konrad Lorenz.

More than that, Mr. Stover goes on to claim precisely the thing he blames on Lorenz! Stover flatly asseverates, ". . . the only solution is better politics". Now, if all the behavioural sciences can find no single cause for war, how can Mr. Stover claim to find a one-shot panacea for it in politics?

Mr. Stover asserts (in italics!) that "aggression has nothing to do with war". He adduces no evidence whatever.

(Possibly Mr. Stover is being deliberately provocative, fishing for reader reaction. There would be no objection to this, on a subject in which social error had less fatal potential consequences. Politicians' "tavern quarrels" are literally deadly for the rest of us!)

Mr. Stover seems either to have misread Lorenz, or to be so emotionally biased as to be unable to comprehend (or to want to accept) what Lorenz actually wrote. *On Aggression* includes at least two disclaimers that its suggestions are final or comprehensive. Lorenz further points out that, in any case, he makes only postulations, albeit with strong emotional and moral conviction.

Dr. Lorenz emphasizes widespread study and practise in the arts, sciences and medicine as possible best 'displacement activities'; he accords

sport (including space exploration!) far less space, in *On Aggression*. Mr. Stover never mentioned the first, and sneered at the second suggestion.

Lorenz and his colleagues have empirical evidence demonstrating the existence of displacement activity; Mr. Stover neither cites nor claims any to the contrary, and therefore should not expect us readers to take his unsupported opinion.

There is a large corpus of empirical knowledge, as well as a number of associated hypotheses, in several disciplines, which, taken as a whole, does indeed indicate that the basic and primary causes for warfare are emotional and cultural, and may well include aggressiveness. Therefore, Stover's contentions that aggressiveness has nothing to do with war, and that war is not a psychological problem are, I repeat, *on the basis of available observed fact*, and if I may be blunt, sheer twaddle.

Primitive peoples' raids and feuds may or may not be "war"; it's an over-fine and immaterial distinction to the slaves, cripples and dead caused by them. A man who takes his relatives and friends along on a raid *has* created an organization, *de facto*; rank and titles are quite unnecessary to establish leadership. (Formalities may be a consequence of, but are not prerequisite to the assumption of authority.) Would Mr. Stover have us believe that war is not war except between 'civilized' peoples?

No society mobilized for war, and particularly the technologically-advanced state, is organized along peacetime lines. The technologies

of organization and of coercion—likewise advanced—ensure this. The higher the technological development of a state, and the more populous it is, true, the lower the proportion of its men it has to uproot from civil pursuits to send to war. There are few—or no—surplus males in a pre-agricultural society, so the hunter is the warrior. Occupational specialization makes it different in the 'developed' state. A society at peace is oriented toward as many different goals as it has internal institutions. A wartime society is much more tightly organized and emotionally oriented toward a single goal. (Legally, a state at war commences by suspending a number of personal civil liberties, and it may end in a condition of outright martial law.) The more advanced the techniques of organization available to a state, and the more protracted the conflict, the less like its peacetime version the state becomes.

If the Jivaro conceived of a "war chief" as distinct from a headman, then they necessarily saw warfare as a separate and extraordinary activity. To say, ". . . what passed for warfare . . . was no more organized than . . . normal community life" is meretricious: if no more, then no less. A people lacking techniques of organization cannot be more and better organized in one activity than in another! (Incidentally, by the word 'normal' in the above quotation, Mr. Stover implies that war among the Jivaro was an abnormal state of affairs *in his mind!*)

A hunter's killing-tool—weapon—is neither more moral or less lethal

when used as a soldier's. Efficiency is no virtue in a man-killing device; one respects the guillotin no more than the axe and block. A weapon so specialized that it can be used for no other purpose than killing confers no cachet thereby on designer, maker or user. Folly is folly, no matter how cleverly attained to.

I agree with one implication of Mr. Stover's; minor warfare often seems to have, as one basis, the need for fun. In the same way, a bored boy may go out to stone birds. Pro-war myths may have been propaganda for faint hearts in the first instance, but succeeding generations seem to believe and to act on them! Lorenz notes that dogs at play (as an example) have to be careful to omit competition from their romp; they dare not 'play to win' lest it turn into a fight. Conversely, *every* human game and sport is a symbolic war (which someone is said to "win"!). There is plenty of historical evidence of fighting 'for fun'. Some people today bet their lives by dangerous sports such as automobile or motorcycle racing or sky-diving, rather than indulge themselves—if that is the applicable phrase—in face-to-face combat, loser give all. (Many modern sports, such as skin-diving or sail-planing, rely on materials and technology rather than other people—a revealing symptom of neurosis. Nature is temporarily and partially 'cheated' by mechanical means, rather than strength and skill. This is pretty easily traceable to hunting with firearms. Only one man ever got really good at hunting jaguars with a spear.)

Hence, the applicability of Lorenz' advocacy of sport (too)—especially dangerous sport—as a displacement activity. Other animals have no choice of displacement activity; each species has its own, invariable and inescapable, inherited, or learnt as part of its group culture. But man, the partly rational animal, *does* have a choice, and it need not be war. Lorenz remarks that warfare is a social institution, and therefore can be dealt with, like any other such, including total abandonment.

In the tens of thousands of years since agriculture was developed, to free men from continuous foraging and hunting, we still have not cared enough to devise a means of dealing with our surplus of healthy young males, other than killing them off in periodic wars. At the same time, we continue those pre-agricultural usages which foster aggressiveness and aggression; destructive as we know them to be, we still insist on calling them the "warrior virtues". As a culture, we haven't succeeded in *believing* those "virtues" to be vices, in truth, despite all the contrary evidence. We have paid a high price, in the past, and seem likely to pay even more dearly in the future, for this particular bit of cultural lag.

Norman McKinney

My apologies to Mr. McKinney for

condensing his letter—it originally ran fourteen pages! —TW

Dear Editor,

I've been reading over some old issues of AMAZING which I bought at a convention, and I notice that many of them featured a regular column called "The Club House" by Rog Phillips, in which Mr. Phillips talked about fandom and reviewed a number of fanzines each issue. These were the old, pulp-sized AMAZINGs, of course, but since none of today's prozines seem to have anything like it, I wonder if you could ask Mr. Phillips to revive his column for you. I go to conventions—the science fiction conventions, I mean—but I don't really know a lot about fandom and fanzines. Reading those old columns made me wish I could send off for one of those old fanzines, and made me sad that no one was publishing reviews of the ones coming out now.

Norman Sanfield Harris

Rog Phillips unfortunately died a few years ago, but I certainly agree with you that his columns were an asset to the magazine. For the very reasons you cite, we are planning to begin new fan-features in both AMAZING and FANTASTIC—hopefully, in our next issues. Look for them. —TW

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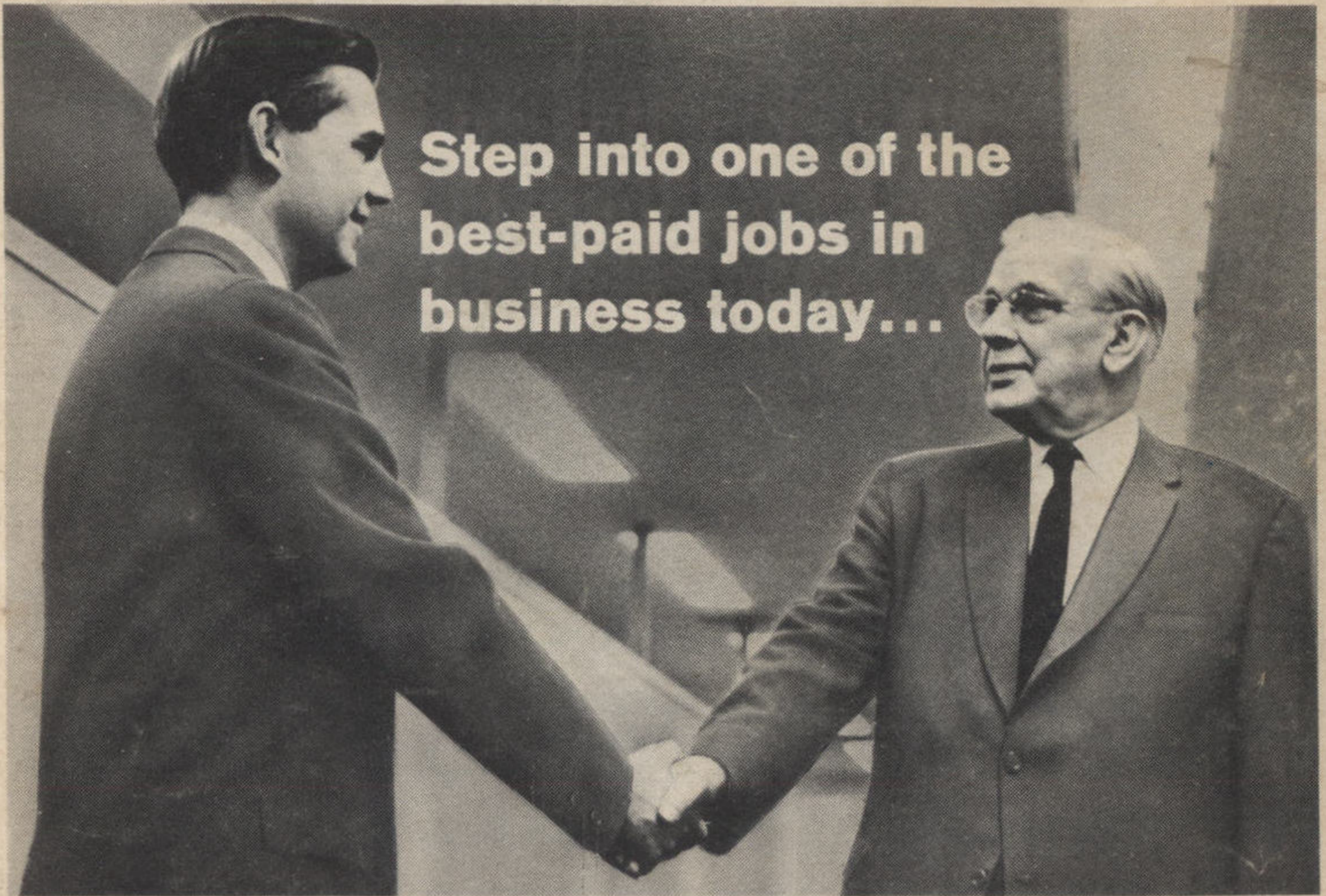
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