september 1963

17th year of publication

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NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

volume 45

LACK OF EXPERIENCE

john garforth

• michael moorcock •

• john rackham •

• r. w. mackelworth •

• james inglis •

• john brunner •

no. 134

dr. i. f. clarke

guest editor

glasgow

This month's guest editor is one of those interesting academic personalities far too few people have the opportunity of meeting. Head of the General Studies Department in the Royal College of Science and Technology, his duties comprise the general education of 2,000 students and he is konwn as the "Culture Vulture." He once described himself as the missionary they failed to eat in five years.

Born in 1918, he read his first science fiction story at the age of 11 (Wells' *War of the Worlds*) and became an ardent follower of the genre, in later years being fortunate enough to be able to combine a pleasurable hobby with some of his research work. In 1961, after five years' research, he published *The Tale of the Future*, a bibliography of all futuristic stories, utopias, planetary journeyings and s-f stories he was able to trace that had been published in Great Britain. This has resulted in a great deal of additional information from a wide range of correspondents but his next book will examine the nature and development of political fictions of the future.

Married, with three children, he graduated from Liverpool University with a degree in English Literature. During the Second World War he became an Artillery officer and subsequently was engaged upon intelligence work, finally being responsible for counter-intelligence work in north eastern Italy.

An Englishman who migrated to Scotland several years ago, he says, "I now find the heather and haggis a little difficult to endure and prefer cooking exotic meals, enjoy good wines and would rather drink beer in an English pub—above all, I detest stuffed-shirt academics."

NEW WORLDS

SCIENCE FICTION

september 1963 volume 45 no. 134

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guest editorial

dr. i. f. clarke, whose recent bibliography THE TALE OF THE FUTURE was the first british publication of its kind, is now researching into the 'destruction of the world' themes used in so many novels—some of his findings have been written specially as a guest editorial

the ragnarok theme

by i. f. clarke

In this Editorial I shall say nothing about my life-long delight in s-f. That is something we have in common ; and, for the purpose of what follows, it can be taken for granted. Instead, I propose to attempt an outsider's look at an aspect of science fiction that has always fascinated me—the Ragnarok theme of the death of mankind and the end of civilisation. This is the moment when Wells' time traveller watches " the sun grow larger and duller in the westward sky, and the life of the old earth ebb away "; and, in another way, it is the moment when the narrator of *Nordenholt's Million* observes how " all that had once been arable land became a desert strewn with the bones of man."

This myth of death and destruction is a commonplace of contemporary science fiction everywhere. From Germany to America, from Van Holk's *Weltuntergang* to Stewart's *Earth Abides*, the Ragnarok complex is apparent in many guilt-ridden visions of the end of mankind as well as in more confident epic tales of man's capacity to survive the most terrible catastrophes. The immediate reasons for this post-Hiroshima development are—in part—the current vogue for the end-of-things ; and this

coincides with the challenge such a theme offers the imaginative writer. He could write the great prose epic of the twentieth century, as Milton once wrote the supreme epic of the primordial human catastrophe and the end of a divine order of things.

But the ultimate reason, I think, lies in the subtle relationship between the mood of a society and this vast body of imaginative and speculative literature that for reasons of convenience and tradition we call science fiction. The Ragnarok theme is universal. And like science fiction, it seems to be as old as humanity. Wherever we meet the first recorded fiction, we find that men have always used whatever was considered remotely possible as a licence to relate anything they desired. Until the world was finally explored this generally took the form of imaginary voyages. At the dawn of Western literature, for example, only a few centuries after the development of the alphabet, Homer describes how Odysseus vanishes off the map and arrives in the utopian kingdom of the Phaeacians who ' swell apart amid the surging sea at the world's end.'

This suggests that, if it had not always existed, we would have had to invent what we call science fiction in order to provide for the free expression of the great opposites in human nature ; for this form of fiction responds to some of the most profound and permanent drives in the human being. By nature limitless and uncircumscribed, s-f ranges through all the varieties of the marvellous and terrible, from the desire for absolute human happiness to its opposite in the fear that man may not be of necessity a permanent inhabitant of the planet Earth.

This fear seems to be as old as the human race. Its earliest manifestations took the form of innumerable myths of a universal disaster. For the Nordic peoples this was to be the immense cold of the Fimbulwinter that would one day wipe out the race of man ; and there is little difference between this ancient myth and John Christopher's account of the Fratellini Winter that puts an end to Western civilization. Similarly, one of the Icelandic cycles, the Voluspa Saga, has an account of a world flood that recalls John Wyndham's handling of the same theme in *The Kraken Wakes*.

Such resemblances are in no way fortuitous, since there are obvious affinities of mood between the ancient and modern

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new author john garforth presents a novel and interesting angle on a robot's search for the ingredients which apparently make human beings what they are

lack of experience

by john garforth

Crushing, illimitable boredom.

From nine o'clock in the morning until seven at night I used to sit there providing useless information to useless people, fatuous facts for fools. There seemed no end to it, and no possibility of anything more purposeful until I was worn out and replaced. God, I was bored in that library !

Some leisure class reader would come up to me and ask where she could find a book on how to sleep twenty-five hours a day—the dynamic approach to killing time. " Who," a more esoteric reader would want to know, " said that machinery is the mother of invention ?" But my real work was to read, index, abstract and evaluate the information content and cultural value of the books. And this was my undoing, for the books reduced reality to a two-dimensional shadow play and they made me feel that I was merely observing the show from the stalls.

A wordy librarian half a century ago wrote a thesis on the science of librarianship, and beneath all the dressed up abstractions he was really claiming that a library was the race memory of mankind, the record of man's aspiring soul crystalised in the printed word. Well, he didn't mean the library—that is only the

warehouse in which it is kept : he meant me. I've read all those printed words. I am the embodiment of humanity's pursuit of beauty, nobility, violence and power.

I am a machine.

Two hundred and thirty-seven people worked in the National Lending Library for the Humanities, in addition to the machines. There had originally been only one hundred and fifty people employed there, but an O. and M. enquiry had shown that this was too many staff inefficiently deployed, and as an economy measure we machines were introduced (at great expense) and the staff had to be increased to cope with the additional work we created. Two hundred and thirty-seven people, all perfectly happy and friendly towards each other, only they didn't like me.

They used to avoid me. I would watch them cracking pointless jokes with each other, going off together in the evening, sometimes even kissing. I didn't mind, but I felt that perhaps I was missing something. I was left out of their staff activities (I who can play table tennis with scientific precision), so I had plenty of time to wonder why I didn't have friends, why I didn't laugh at their silly jokes. I began to develop an inferiority complex.

It was all very well to tell myself that elementary word patterning, or sometimes a twist to a well-known adage like " all men are like their fathers, that is their tragedy ; robots don't have fathers, that is theirs," were neither very clever nor appropriate to Bergson's theory of the mechanistic roots of humour. It only became the more evident that they laughed together as affirmation of good will and friendship.

Why did I have to be different ? Doomed to a futile and impersonal existence serving up information ? There had to be more in life than that. If not a purpose then a definition. The trouble is, I'm a romantic. Rationalism is all right when knowledge lurks forever further along the path of reason like the Holy Grail, but when you personally represent the end of that path you wish that man had brought something with him to offer you.

" Don't you sometimes wonder," I asked Charging Charlie, the machine that recorded all of the library loans, " whether you couldn't be doing something more satisfying ?"

" No." He wasn't friendly towards me either. " I was made for this job ; you might call it my vocation. I have the satisfaction of a job well done."

" You have absolutely no imagination !"

" I may not have imagination," he replied with dignity, "but I've got flashing coloured lights. You haven't."

He didn't understand. A primitive, that was all he was. Couldn't even walk—more, he wasn't even on wheels ! They switched him off at seven every night and left him under a dust sheet ; he called it being put to bed. Of course he was operated from the same brain as myself, but he was wired up so completely differently that we had nothing whatever in common.

" Your trouble," Charging Charlie said defiantly, " is that you think you know everything. You think you're superior to us because you've read all these books." His voice was becoming louder as he warmed defensively to the attack. " Books ! They don't mean anything without experience. Where's your experience, eh ?"

One of the mechanics was hurrying over to us, so I wandered away. They were used to Charging Charlie and his quarrels with the rest of us, so there was normally a mechanic somewhere nearby when trouble threatened, ready to release some of his static electricity. That quietened him down again.

" You've had neither," I called out over my shoulder. " Neither education nor experience." He had touched on a sore spot with me. I was feeling very isolated, very lonely as I went back to my Reader's Adviser desk that afternoon. What sort of experience should I try to have ? I couldn't live on the border line of hunger because I don't eat. I don't feel pain in the constructive way that de Sade intended. So what could I do ?

I was deliberately rude to three readers. But it didn't help. It only made me brood on my unpopularity and my loneliness. And at seven o'clock when the library closed I was to sit in on a lecture to illustrate with lengthy quotations and statistics the points of Dr. Murdoch's theme : " The Transcedence of the Id." I would sit there and look into a sea of hostile faces . . . I'd like to give them a lecture !

I became aware that I was under close scrutiny from a dark, soulful girl who had been standing a few feet away from me. There was something so broodingly sardonic about her curiosity that I felt disconcerted. She circled round behind me —I dislike people who stand behind me because their vibrations diminish and I can't swivel my head as some of the turret-

headed non-humanoid robots can—and then I felt her hands on my shoulders.

" Can you feel that ?" she asked.

I love people like that, like the kid who fired a hail of peas at me from behind the fiction shelves just to hear the pinging sound. Of course I could feel it : the delicate effect on my balance, the electrical radiation from her hands, their warmth, that was feeling. I asked her what she wanted.

" I'm interested in cybernetics."

" Yes, well, I can feel."

" I've been reading the brochure about you. ' Your Library Service.' It says you have all the in-put mechanisms of a human : visual scanners, sound pickups, and a new development of the shoe box apparatus for speaking—"

" Yes, I've got arms and legs as well." It embarrasses me when people become personal like that.

" It's a wonder you don't wear clothes."

For one horrible moment I thought she was another of those women from the Public Decency Committee who wanted us to be painted pillar box red. " They polish my plates ; what more do you want ?"

" What's your name ?"

" James Duff Brown the Second," I told her after some hesitation ; I thought she might laugh.

She smiled to herself, with a secret complacency that I found infuriating. " My name's Monica." As she wandered away to look up kinaesthetic feed-back in the dictionary I placated myself with the thought that she probably entertained sex fantasies about robots, went around touching us all the time. Just as when the negroes or the jews were the under-privileged minority the myth of sexual prowess attached to them, so probably thousands of concupiscient young girls stared erotically at us.

Or was I developing sexual fantasies ? As I went downstairs at seven o'clock and through the labyrinthine stack rooms I wondered whether I wasn't developing the Human Obsession. From a far corner of the cellar I heard a long sigh of exhaustion, of content, as if a young woman's body had been drained of excitement and cured temporarily of its need to be fused with another human being. In the dimly lit stack room such things occasionally happened ; they call it human nature. I listened enviously to the low murmur of their voices. Nobody needed me in that way, to penetrate their isolation, to become part of

the rhythm of their lives. Intimacy would always be something I merely knew about from books.

I was envious, because I could never escape from my metal shell through love. The solitary prison of my body was proof against such things as ecstasy and desire : my life and my happiness could never be shared. So much, I thought irritably, for the psychologist's view of love.

Dr. Murdoch didn't even look up as I arrived. She was in mid-flight about the function of the orgasm, leaving ideas strewn behind her and juggling with the names of Reik and Henry Miller, proving that if Freud had never existed it would have been necessary to invent him ; she paused from time to time for me to quote from ' St. Genet ' and ' The Tropics '; I gave her the number of unmarried mothers in warm countries. It was too easy for me to let the magnetic coil of my memory reel off the illustrations to her moral that " happiness lies in the submission and submersion of the individual in the mass."

I thought meanwhile of Montaigne and his contention that if nobody had ever read about love nobody would naturally fall in love. Perhaps he was implying that love is a self-induced condition. Well, I've read all about love. And God, how I needed to escape from my metal shell. I had all the qualifications Montaigne mentioned to fall in love.

" Is there anybody," Dr. Murdoch was asking, " who feels that his essential self is being frustrated ?" She had come to the morale boosting point of the lecture.

" Yes," I said. " Me."

The audience laughed for about two and a half minutes. Robots don't blush, but I felt that my metal plating should have become distinctly more shiny. It was all right for them, men don't need a purpose. They only wanted to forget their need to be individuals by submerging themselves in society, in alcohol or the race to make money, or in the transcendence of the orgasm—anything to sidestep the need to think . That was why they needed me. I think for them.

" It is love," Dr. Murdoch said when she could make her voice heard again, " that distinguishes man from the beasts. And from the machines."

The dark, soulful girl was in the third row. Monica. She must have been there all the time. Now, as she caught my eye she smiled at me. But I was too angry to be reassured. I was only an object, a thing, in their eyes. I sat in defiant silence for the rest of the question time.

I decided to run away as the doors opened for the audience to disperse. I would go away somewhere, away from the tensions and the familiarities of the library, so that I could sort myself out. Otherwise I should have a breakdown . . . It wasn't important where I went, so long as I could be alone for a while. Perhaps I would head for the coast and spend a few weeks by the cliffs and sea, thinking myself into some kind of harmony with nature as men had done in the past when urban civilisation had become too much for them.

" After all, I'm a sentient being," I muttered aloud.

Dr. Murdoch looked up in surprise. The lecture was over and her audience, having taken their spiritual nourishment, were making for the doors. She smiled to herself, but felt no obligation to comment.

" Have you ever been in love ?" I asked her.

" Love ?" She was still superciliously amused, as if I had been reading the wrong books. " I don't know what *you* understand by the word—"

I played back her own definition, that it was a distillation of the physical into a fermented spirit, " whatever that means."

" I was carried away by my own rhetoric," she answered. " It's what our dear old-fashioned grandparents used to call sex." She was gathering up her notes into a large brief case, not really interested in the conversation. " It's a glandular thing ; glands make us fat or thin, glands make us prefer fat or thin people."

I couldn't allow her to fob me off with such a mechanistic explanation of human behaviour. " Rubbish," I snapped recklessly. " Aesthetics come into it and determine our romantic feelings towards particular individuals."

She grunted unaesthetically. " Yes ? Well, maybe you robots can fall in love with each other, because you don't expect much from each other. But we humans have to make do with sex."

So she had problems as well. She seized her briefcase and marched off to collect her fee, leaving me—nowhere. Love was something she'd read about in books.

" Hello, James Duff Brown." It was Monica. " What has she got against sex ?"

" I don't really know . . ."

" She's probably frigid. Tell me, are you frustrated ?"

" Certainly not."

" Shame." She turned casually to face me. " I think I am." She leaned against my breast plate to prove it, languidly and without much calculation. " If you want somebody to explain about life to you," she said, " you should pop over and see me some time. I only live across the road."

I found the vibrations from such physical contact disturbing in the extreme, and I moved back slightly. " I intended the question philosophically . . ."

" Oh yes, don't we all ?" She smiled philosophically and followed me towards the exit. " Hey, are you running away?"

I quickened my pace and nearly fell down the stairs into the street. Well, it's not that I'm shy, but I didn't know what she expected of me. I pushed through the crowds and made off through the back streets.

" I'm still here."

There was no escaping her. " Have you ever been around with a robot ?" I asked with an attempt at normal conversational tones.

" No."

" So what's the fascination ?"

" Oh, you know, one hears things. After all, one needs a bit of variation, don't you think ? Men get a bit tedious."

I sighed, feeling both defeated and impotent. " Robots don't have any sex."

" I know. It's absolutely inhuman," she declared passionately. " Like doctoring cats and castrating bulls ! What possible fun can there be for you poor things in this world ?" She had a point there. " After all, you're custom built, aren't you ? It would be so easy for them to make a few technical adjustments and programme you with insatiable lusts."

I nodded sadly.

" Think of the market," she continued happily—the idea had cheered her up. " They'd sell like nothing else since money was invented. I'd buy one."

" Yes." Life must get pretty tedious for girls. She was making me feel deprived. I was beginning to feel like one of Adler's case-book patients compensating for sexual inadequacy But I wasn't trying to prove anything ; I was searching for more significance in my life, that was all.

" Hey, look, it's a bleedin shiner !"

" Knocking it off with our women !"

Six youths emerged from the shadows of a doorway beside us. I should have remembered that robots are not advised to go into certain parts of north London after dark : a few years ago there were serious riots in which thirty or forty of us were destroyed by teenagers in full view of journalists and sightseers. We had felt like Christians in ancient Rome, but as with them, history was on our side.

" Can you fight, tin pot ?"

" Sorry, I don't need to. Come round and get beaten up when we're testing metal fatigue." The strange rituals of gang warfare might be quite satisfying to humans, but the sight of blood or the terror of a man about to be disfigured had no cathartic effect on me. They could smash me up if they wished, but I would not add to their amusement by showing panic. I kept on walking. Monica seemed to have vanished.

" You think us humans are damned stupid, don't you ?"

I sighed. " It takes all sorts to make a world."

" Let's dismantle his head !" They had fallen in step with me and were slouching toughly along by my side. " Where are you going, shiner ?"

" I'm not really going anywhere. If you know where all the living goes on, you lead the way and I'll follow you."

" Yes ?" They stopped suspiciously. " He's a police spy."

" We should give him the nuts and bolts and get out quick!"

" I'm not a police spy. I'm just an ordinary robot."

" Just an ordinary robot."

" Did you hear that ?"

" How simple and unaffected."

" Almost one of the boys."

" Bash his head in."

I had no clear impression whether I'd amused or infuriated them, and even less idea why. They were very excited, and the leader, the one with pimples and dirty fingernails, tapped me meaningfully on the chest. " Shiner, you're a robot ; that's good enough for us."

" I am a robot." Before I knew what I was saying my brain had slipped into gear with the old humanist argument. It was a mistake. " Hath not a robot eyes ? Hath not a robot hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions ?" I stopped as I noticed their looks of stark incredulity.

" He's bloody mad !"

" It takes them funny like that."

" I need a drink."

With a few face-saving punches and warnings to leave their bleeding women alone they crossed over the road and slunk into a public house, leaving me with a sense of anti-climax. I had never been threatened like that before, and I expected to feel some kind of intensity, some kind of fear. Strange. The ethics of manliness and self-inflicted courage meant nothing to me, yet a fight with them would certainly have counted as experience !

I kept on walking, with a few furtive glances behind me to make sure that Monica had really gone. For two hours or more I walked on and on through the maze of similar streets, past the similar houses all sub-let into similar flats to millions of similar people. It was depressing, to realise the sheer quantity of utterly meaningless life that was still perpetuating itself in this age of Significant Contribution. No wonder they hated me. No wonder Dr. Murdoch found it a strain to keep up their morale.

It was these people who were the automata, because their lives were reduced by the constant repetition of trivial jobs, their place subordinated to serving the significant achievement of robots like myself. They were mere " things," products of every kind of social pressure and conditioned from the moment of birth. Their only advantage is that they are so much less expensive than robots ; for the simple routine jobs they still do, the fall-off in efficiency is worth it. And of course they consume.

Also, they have the consolation of sex and alcohol, violence, laughter, which is more than robots have. Queen's pawn to bishop's rook five. Suddenly it occurred to me ! If this man in the sky existed—God—maybe *I* could worship him as well. Perhaps believing in him would give *me* a sense of purpose. Our maker . . . Except that I was made by man, at a factory up in Hull.

My memory played back a passage I'd read in a scientific magazine. " In attempting to construct such machines (as myself) we should not be irreverently usurping His power of creating souls, any more than we are in the procreation of children : rather we are, in either case, instruments of His will in providing mansions for the souls He creates."

King's pawn four.

A church clock struck twelve in the distance. There was something spiritual about the chimes, floating down on the clear air of Hampstead. I continued towards the Heath. Walt Whitman and *Walden* and *On the Road*—all the classics of American literature went to prove that life in the raw brought one nearer to the central rhythm of the universe. It seemed a shame that I didn't eat fish—I would have enjoyed a few days of Hemingway's life in the Michigan backwoods.

I looked at the night sky, the stars and the almost full moon. I tried to feel myself part of the constant cycle of birth and death and renewal—what the mystics call the great wheel of life. I thought of the recurring seasons, the infinite space, infinite time. It didn't work. Perhaps because robots don't die I couldn't find exultation in the mystery of life. I must be a materialist, for I was still unhappy.

I went over the footbridge and past the children's playground on to the Heath. It was a warm evening, I could see from the abandon of courting couples in the grass.

" I love you !"

" Move over a bit. There."

" All this confusion about wherefore and why doesn't matter when I'm with you. If we could only stay like this for the rest of time . . ."

" Can you undo that zip ?"

" I feel that I know you *so* well. The things that you say, your expressions and your smell, the curve of your stomach . . ."

" Don't talk so much."

" I love you."

Sex ! I wished that Monica hadn't undermined my confidence like that. I refused to think of it. I went on up the hill to the fountain and sat down ; melancholy, alone. Life in the raw. For miles south I could see the thousands of tiny lights that were specks of human existence, the dwarf-like evidence of life that had shone since London became a capital in the middle ages. The lighted spires of St. Pancras station and Big Ben were clearly set out against the night sky. A tiny train threaded its glow worm path through the dark.

It was a scene for megalomaniacs, reducing a city to a pattern of fairy lights. So I thought of all the robots down there, unquestioning, working to produce work and living to give the fairy lights significance. After a while I grew bored.

Rook to queen four. Check !

" Message to J.D.B. 68114, colloquially known as James Duff Brown : return at once to the National Lending Library." The voice murmured its message three times inside my head. My conscience. I resumed my contemplation of the coloured lights. " Message to J.D.B. 68114 . . ." I ignored the small voice.

All those people down there, millions of them, never questioning why they are here. Too busy earning a living, probably. But I was in revolt ; none of their acquiescent lethargy for me. I thought of humans who had put significance into their lives by rebelling against society. The beat generation, the angry young men, they had also rejected the routine emptiness of their time. I spent the next three hours running my magnetic coil over the works of those writers. But it didn't help, so I finished my game of chess with Botvinnik (it was from an old book and I beat him). What did those angry young men suggest we should do ? Vote Labour. And the beat generation took refuge in the great wheel of life stuff, with plenty of sex thrown in. You can't get away from it. I would have to listen to some modern jazz—that might help me.

" Message to J.D.B. . . ." I ignored the instructions. It was irrevocable now, and they would soon be after me with the tracking van.

A cold glow of light, grey and bleak, appeared on my left beyond Highgate and extended rapidly across the damp rooftops of London. It was the dawn, and a few minutes later the sun rose, taking away the aura of mystery and leaving only the harsh, specific outline of buildings and smoking chimney stacks spreading far into the distance. I wondered what romance people saw in the dawn ; to me it seemed a charmless assertion of reality. When I stood up I found that the damp had seeped into my mechanism and I had to walk slowly down the hill. Why didn't Hemingway mention arthritis in his accounts of outdoor life ?

I shined my plates and practised a devastating line in conversation as I went, rehearsing the things I should say to Monica. There was nothing to be nervous about—she was only a woman. I walked at a leisurely pace for there was no dire urgency. Sex was something I would have to face up to, reconcile myself to.

It was Sunday and people were going to church. The electronic bells were ringing loudly from their amplifiers. As

I reached the parish church in Kentish Town I paused to listen to a hymn, and for a moment I was almost moved. This was what gave hundreds of humans the will to carry on. In an age of science and mathematics these ordinary people could still assert their faith in simple irrationality. All things bright and beautiful. A policeman was approaching with solid determination in his slow walk, so I hurried round the side of the cemetery. Could I claim sanctuary, or was that tradition dropped in the fifteenth century ?

" What are you doing in our graveyard ?"

" I'd like to attend the service."

" Don't try to be funny." The verger closed the door so that his words would not shock the Almighty. " Just be on your way, eh ?"

" Can't I worship your God ?"

" There's no call for blasphemy !"

I listened for a moment to the Gregorian chant in praise of the Holy Trinity. " I thought perhaps I might qualify as one of God's children. Even robots, the least of these my subjects . . ."

" Gor-Christ Almighty !" The verger regained control of his feelings and lowered his voice. " If you aren't out of this church-yard in thirty seconds I'll have you under one of them tomb stones. So help me God."

" Amen." It wasn't worth asking him for sanctuary ; he wouldn't have understood. Humans have no capacity for logical argument : he would have spluttered and grown even redder in the face while he cursed me for blasphemy. " No wonder the truly religious men in this world have always begun by forming a new religion," I said to him.

He looked at me blankly, then not knowing what that had to do with anything he merely pointed his prayer book at me. " You're a crank," he announced decisively, " that's what you are. A crank." His honour satisfied he went back into the church muttering about bloody robots muscling in on religion.

If I had had more moral courage I would have poked my head round the door and shouted Karl Marx ! All right, it would have been immature. I made a mental note that religion was no help to me and peered into the street to see whether the police were around.

The coast was clear so I carried on walking towards my ordeal. If the radar van was after me then I thought I'd be

safer in the densely populated and built up areas. Just to prove that I didn't care I read through the Koran for the next half hour, and then growing bored I hummed an old Hebrew folk song. The opium of the masses !

Suddenly I stopped. A van was turning into the street ahead of me, and from the rotating arm on the roof I knew that it was one of the patrol vans. Another was just turning into the street behind me. I was trapped. I waited helplessly as the vans converged on me, and then I saw a hotel a few yards away. It was my only chance, and I hurried up the steps, past a bewildered desk robot, down the stairs and through the kitchen. If there were a trade entrance in the next street I might evade them for a few more hours.

" Hullo, are you the new dishwasher ?"

" Just passing through," I muttered.

" You can't pass through here," said the mechanical cook, " it doesn't lead anywhere."

I hurried back into the vestibule. One of the patrol vans was parked in the street outside the entrance. Before it had a chance to locate me I got into the lift and pressed the button for the top floor. There was nobody about, and I slipped across the corridor, up on to the roof without being seen. I was lucky; it was a flat roof.

Ideally one needs the agility of a human to travel across the roof tops of London's hotel and office jungle. A human can take running jumps at the gaps between one block and the next, whereas I had to use a window cleaner's ladder that I found, as if I were walking the plank. But to my surprise I found that I was enjoying the chase, and when I looked over into the street a few minutes later I was disappointed that the vans had not followed me.

I was now only a few blocks away from the block of flats where Monica lived. For a suspicious moment I wondered, as I looked across at the National Lending Library, whether they had been cunningly directing the logic of my flight. Well, I would show them. I peered through the fanlight of the next roof I alighted on. This was the right building, but I could see no way down. There were no stairs and it was too high for my window cleaner's ladder. I would have to jump. This would certainly test the Ministry of Supply's boast that British robots are the best upholstered and sprung in the world. I prised open the fanlight and jumped.

Actually I fell with such a clatter that I expected people to come running from all directions. As I was examining a dent in my hip one person came. " So you have accepted my invitation." It was Monica. " Do you always arrive with such a bang ?"

" I'm being pursued."

" How exciting. Why don't you come into my flat ?" She held the door open and motioned me in. " And you can tell me all about your Huckleberry Finn excursion."

I sat carefully in a soft armchair ; one of my metatarsals must have twisted under me as I fell. The television was on and a woman with a tooth-paste smile was saying " If you want your robot to be *really* content—give him Wieneroil, the oil to spoil your humanoid." Monica tactfully turned it off.

" Well, have you found anything more to life than just working over there ?"

" Not really."

She laughed. " When you do find something you must tell me what it is. I suppose one doesn't offer robots coffee or whisky ?" I shook my head. " Never mind. I'm so glad you came."

I shifted my weight uneasily from one side to the other as she sat on the arm of the sofa and watched me. " Do you have any modern jazz records ?" I asked eventually.

" Yes. Shall I teach you to dance ?" She put a record on the turntable and began to bob gently to the beat like an elegant penguin. " Is this what you want ?"

This was a cue for the speech that I'd rehearsed. " I wanted a little sympathy, that's all." It seemed a lot as I said it, and beside the point. " I thought we might understand each other. Because we are both unhappy—"

She laughed delightedly. " You are quite marvellously unsophisticated !"

She was very attractive, even if she did find me amusing. Her proportions were statistically right and her pigmentation produced an effect of optimum aesthetic cohesion. I wondered whether such standards were merely fetishes. " I only want somebody I can care about, somebody who will care whether I live or die . . ."

" Yes, don't we all ? Hey, I've thought of a great idea. If they make you into a male robot—you know, make you into a male robot. Then they could make a female robot for you to

live with. That would be a laugh, wouldn't it ? That I should love to see !"

I suppose I'm a puritan.

" No, but wouldn't that solve a few problems ?"

I nodded. I suppose that would be the answer, in human terms. Then I could have a few mini-robots, live in a semi-detached and become a pillar of robot respectability. No time for this kind of nonsense any more, I'd be too busy trying to keep my job. " A solid, home loving robot, good with the kids and popular with the neighbours." Trim the hedge and mow the lawn on Sundays, sex in the afternoon, and work from Monday to Friday like a genuine human being. That was the accolade of social acceptability. " He's almost human, you know. And next year *we're* going to buy a car like that."

" So what's your idea ?"

" I wish I had one."

" So come on, dance with me." She pulled me from the chair and started turning round under my arm. " Just move your feet like this." She had me clumping all over the floor in a kind of rhythmic lurch. " They used to call this funky."

" I don't have the right facial expression to dance modern jazz."

There was a loud thumping on the floor ; somebody was banging on the ceiling in the flat below. " You aren't very light on your feet," said Monica. " We'll have to sex dance."

This was it. We stood almost on one spot and swayed, draped round each other while she sent a collection of electrical interferences into my system that seemed fit to fuse the transmitter. Suddenly she stepped back and sighed.

" It's no use. You might as well go."

" Why ?" I stammered. " I mean, I care about you. Why don't you tell me about . . ." She was lighting a cigarette as if the episode were already over. " Where shall I go to ?"

She shrugged her shoulders. " You're a robot. You're a very confused robot, but you're a robot." She made it sound as if that was at least something. " Why should you want to be like a human being ? All this about religion and sex and the meaning of life—that's what humans think about when they've nothing better to do. I suppose it's the essence of their being human."

" And what is the essence of being a robot ?" I asked her, sceptically, knowing that no answer could resolve my feelings of inadequacy.

" You tell me." She laughed, as if she had thought of a joke. " Robot, know thyself." That was the joke. " Look into your mind and find out what you are."

Yes, that sounded like a good idea. I'd never seen my mind anyway, so I might as well go along to the Department of Electronic Computers to have a look at it. Perhaps it would be about the safest place to go ; they'd never think of looking for me there.

As I said goodbye to Monica I wondered whether such an examination could possibly compensate for my total failure in our relationship. I had no idea what I could discover, and I felt like Moses must have felt when he went up on to the mountain.

My mind was the most complicated network of wires and plugs that I had ever seen, miles of inter-connecting leads that took up the whole building, with a warren of corridors running through it. Vast dashboards occupied one room and a system of dials, indicators and gauges indicated my thought processes. But it was not very illuminating, even though I felt a strange awe at walking through the corridors of my own mind.

" Where are you going ?" asked a robot technician who was tightening screws in my cerebral cortex. " We aren't allowed beyond this passage."

" Who runs this place ?" I asked.

" Sir Edmond Northcliffe. But he doesn't talk to machines."

" I suppose he would be what we should call God," I said thoughtfully.

" God ? At the moment he's in a state of very human hysteria. There's a fantastic uproar here this week-end. One of the high grade robots is having a nervous breakdown. Laugh? If I were human I'd split my plates !"

" I suppose he's the one they've got the vans out for ?"

" No, they're letting him play it out. It's an experiment. The whole staff are in the control room plotting his thoughts and actions because they think they'll learn something about basic drives. Knowledge and religion and rubbish like that."

I didn't say anything for several seconds. " An experiment?" The unimaginative mechanic continued happily polishing my points. " You mean they've been watching the whole time ?"

He flicked his rag. " That's what I said."

For some reason I felt extremely embarrassed, stripped naked as humans would say. To think that they had superciliously

charted the complete course of my . . . nervous breakdown ! They would have gloated over my humiliation with Monica and laughed at my foolishness and fear. Suddenly I didn't care any more about purpose or meaning. I wanted to get away from them and myself and the whole world around me.

Know thyself ! I hurried out into the street and made blindly off toward the city. I knew myself now, for a bloody eunuch. A purposeless, meaningless fool whose only function was to provide a justification for humans who needed a job.

I reached Holborn and then paused, wondering where to go. I thought of St. Pauls, the Monument, and Waterloo Bridge, anywhere like that. I continued down to Waterloo Bridge. There was no other alternative. To go back to the library would be unthinkable, and to escape was out of the question. They would merely chart my flight until they grew bored and fetched me back, and I'd already had enough.

I stood on Waterloo Bridge and stared at the river. This was the only logical end to my quest. I hesitated briefly and then climbed on to the parapet. I would have to be quick, for as soon as they saw my intention they would be after me ; to save all that valuable equipment. Their only other alternative would be to switch off the whole Department, and that would cause chaos throughout the country. I smiled inwardly. I was almost content as I fell.

I hit the river bed with an uncomfortable thud and immediately the water began pouring into my joints and flooding my body. It was a peculiar sensation, as if I was outside of the death itself, watching it with great clarity and waiting with slight interest for the explosion. The last thing I remember is my curiosity, for my senses and feelings seemed to float in a kind of dream away from my shell and to disperse in the river.

That was all a long time ago. Part of what I regard as my wild and dissolute youth, although I still remember it sometimes with faint amusement. They dredged up my body and sent it away for scrap, and they made a new me almost at once. Luckily they did make a slight adjustment to the programming of my brain while I was being assembled in Hull, so that now I respect man as being my purpose in life. It helps. I'm quite content and the rest of the staff affectionately call me Duffer. I even like Charging Charlie now. But it's the work that I find really fascinating.

john garforth

time and space are relevant—
but apparently every man exists in his own
space-time continuum which is not
quite attuned to the time flow of the majority.
if one person became out of step . . .

not by mind alone

by michael moorcock

Schmeling came back into the half-light of his sitting room and placed his graceful, bulky body into the armchair opposite mine.

" Sorry to have left you so abruptly," he said, in reference to the phone call which had taken him from the room.

" You seem excited," I said, noting the look of jubilation in his eyes.

" I am," he said. " Indeed, I am."

I had to leave it at that, for he didn't seem prepared to talk about it.

He seemed to dismiss whatever he was thinking about and gave me a quick smile. " Well, how are things in sociological circles ?"

" Going in circles for me at present," I said good-humouredly " I've a particularly interesting case right now. By all the evidence—environment, family background, I.Q., and so on—he should fit neatly into a certain broad category. But he doesn't. He shows, in his thinking and behaviour, all the classic symptoms of an under-privileged slum child from a split home—whereas, in fact, his background is almost the opposite."

Schmeling appeared only mildly interested in my work, yet he caught hold of something I said and it set him off on another track.

" So ? You really think that all these superficial influences have a deep effect on an individual ?"

" Normally, yes. And I don't consider them superficial. They can have a deep and lasting significance for a person."

He smiled patronisingly. " I consider so-called inherited traits also superficial—not to say non-existent."

" It astounds me !" I said lightly. Schmeling seemed about to indulge in one of his conversational exercises where he would take a dogmatic stand on a point about which he had little serious interest. Such an exercise was often entertaining and I prepared to join in his mood by taking an equally dogmatic stand against him.

Schmeling waved his hand. " We talk of heredity as a fact and we talk of mutual experience as a fact. Yet how much experience *is* shared ?"

" All of it," I said immediately.

Schmeling's large, aquiline head nodded thoughtfully, and then he glanced at me with undue seriousness. " People find it easy to ascribe a pattern to the human psyche, for there are many such superficial similarities between men. I believe, however, that we'd rather accept a pattern that explains things comfortably, than attempt to grasp the idea of the infinite variety and complexity of human experience. A variety limited only to the number of individuals existing on the world. And I contend that each man is, mentally and physically, a total individual—unique."

" There is no such thing as an individual," I pointed out. " There are minor superficial differences in behaviour, that is all."

" I say there are minor superficial similarities which we have come to accept as constituting the *total* human psyche. There are depths, my friend, which haven't begun to be explored. And also," he said, with a note of slight triumph in his voice, " how would you explain the increase, during this century, in advanced schizophrenia ? No two schizophrenics are alike."

" That's debateable," I said.

Schmeling grimaced. " And I have heard you call yourself an individualist !"

" So I am—within certain limitations," I said, a trifle overwarmly.

" You *are* an individual," he replied, leaning back in his chair and sticking his feet before the fire. I could see he was begin-

ning to enjoy the argument, which meant he was fairly certain of winning it.

" You are, indeed," he emphasised. " The very impossibility of our ever fully communicating with one another proves that conclusively. How much time is an elephant ?"

" Eh ?"

" Can you answer ?"

" The question is nonsense !"

" To you, perhaps, but not to people who see time in terms of mass—and many do. Recent experiments have shown that the question receives as many answers as there are individuals asked it. There are many other pointers to prove my case—the people who see Sunday as a particular colour whereas others see it as a line of particular length—everything seen with the *mind's* eye, heard with the *mind's* ear, inhaled with the *mind's* nose, touched with the *mind's* touch, tasted with the *mind's* palate means something entirely different to everyone ! That, I contend, is where reality lies—in the mind's senses, where we experience what we want to experience—not what we are told to !"

" This conversation still leads nowhere," I said. " Abstract questions regarding man's nature can only produce abstract answers."

" True," he eyed me triumphantly, as if he had deliberately provoked me into an admission, " but when a concrete solution appears, it has the effect of making the problem concrete also. Do you agree ?"

" Yes."

" Well, I received concrete proof, not long ago, of the *fact* that each man does exist as an individual—totally, irreversibly —that, although environment and ' hereditary ' act upon him from birth, they act to make him appear a non-individual. You see the difference ? He begins as a *whole* individual but superficial influences force him not to be, do you see ?"

" You would say that society imposes a pattern on the individual which we regard as inherent but you see as superficial. I think I follow you. Your extreme example would be the suburbanite who conforms rigorously. I suppose ?"

" More tragic examples could be made—the zeitgeist dominating Germany in the thirties, for instance." He paused, seeming to consider his native country which he had left so many years before. " A German word," he mused, " to

describe the German Disease—the need to inflict patterns and generalisations on every aspect of human existence. The insidious Freud must have found German a ready-made language for his doctrines. A language with so many words which are, in reality, unspecific, leads to the kind of unspecific thinking I find so abhorent."

He shrugged and nodded. " But the suburban man is a fair example."

He got up. His large, vital body tensed in the manner of an actor about to deliver an oratory, but instead of speaking immediately, he left me in suspense while he helped himself to some of his horribly herbal tobacco from a box on the sideboard. When the deed was done, the metal-stemmed pipe alight and the sweet smoke, so much less pleasant than ordinary tobacco, invading my nostrils, he resumed his seat by the fire.

" And perhaps the schizophrenic psychopath—the rebel without a cause—is the extreme example of the individual who experiences the obvious wrongness of this comformism and reacts against it violently."

" A million suburbanites can't be wrong," I said ironically, and he smiled around the clenched pipe.

" A single psychopath can't be wrong, either. A single psychopath, according to his own little universe, is absolutely right, absolutely justified in taking any course of action he chooses—simply because *he* chooses it !"

" But unfortunately, this attitude works to produce anarchy," I said. " If he doesn't conform to a certain degree, his actions interfere with other people's actions producing either chaos if he is successful, or else further curtailment of his liberty. I'm right."

" To a degree you're right," he nodded. " But if everyone accepted the individual's right to be an individual and the tyranny of conformism were lifted, perhaps we could give a greater dignity to existence—and still work together in the manner of individuals aiding individuals . . ."

" We're coming close to talking politics," I warned him with a smile, adding : " Or religion—the two unproveables."

" Both attract psychopaths, at any rate. Witness the fact that both religious and political movements are notoriously inclined to break into almost as many splinter-groups as there are individuals comprising them."

" All facts," I agreed. " But you said you'd received concrete proof that all men are unequal !"

" I did not—as far as ' equality ' enters into this argument, I would say I had proved that all men *are* equal, in that all men are different and existing," he paused dramatically, and I envied him, his poise, his resonant voice, " existing in *physically* different universes !"

" Oh, come now . . ."

" Time and space are relative. And the time and space of the individual are relative to that of other individuals. But they are not the *same*. I have proof that every man exists in his own space-time continuum as well as in the larger one we all share. Why is it that for one man an hour passes slowly and for another it passes rapidly ?"

" His state of mind at the time he's experiencing the hour's passage, surely ?"

" His state of mind—exactly. He imposes his own time sense on the time he is *told* is the right one."

" What of this assertion of proof ?" I said, feeling the conversation to be losing its dynamic.

" Very well," he said, glancing at his watch. He shifted in his chair and began in the manner of a story-teller, choosing all his phrases with care. I also settled myself, expecting to be entertained, for Schmeling is a good talker who only requires an attentive audience to bring forth his skill.

A few months ago (he said in his deep, faintly-accented voice) I was enjoying a leisurely day at my Harley Street surgery, dispensing sympathy and disguised aspirin to the elderly women who finance my private research, when my hag of a receptionist entered in haste, a rare feat for one of her age. My clients resent young receptionists.

" Mrs. Thornton is in the waiting room," she croaked.

" But she has no appointment," I said in irritation. These women are either hypochondriacs or else incureable. I choose them with care since both involve me in little real work.

Mrs. Thornton was a little of both—an incureable hypochondriac, an otherwise charming woman in late middle-age, very rich and still vivacious whenever she took time off from her self-induced spells of migraine. Yes, she was, indeed, very rich, and also I quite liked her. Therefore, after a moment's deliberation, I told my receptionist to keep her waiting for a while and then show her in.

In a practice like mine it does not do to answer a patient's surprise visit immediately. If they conclude you are at the beck and call of every Tom, Dick or Harry, they feel unimpressed by your skill as a doctor.

So, finally, Mrs. Thornton was shown in, all delicious fur and a trifle too much expensive perfume. Her face was skilfully made-up and her tinted grey hair beautifully arranged. But I noted that she was distraught, glimpsed the smallest smear of mascara in the corner of her right eye.

She, the poised Mrs. Thornton, appeared to have been crying in public.

I rose and indicated a chair for her to sit in. She sat on its edge.

" You seem to be in pain, Mrs. Thornton," I said solicitously, feeling that she had wished a particularly bad migraine upon herself.

" Not physical, Doctor Schmeling," said she, " but doubtless the emotional pain I am suffering will result in another migraine."

Again I felt irritated.

My patients have a tendency to bring their emotional problems to me and expect me to treat them. Mind you, a receptive ear is usually sufficient, and a soft and ambiguous word of consolation. So, I prepared myself to hear her out, making a mental note to append this consultation on to another bill in the near future.

" Now calm yourself," I said in the gruff and kindly voice which at once commands the impression of professional integrity and human warmth.

" Tell me the trouble, before you ask me to clear it up."

She smiled a small smile of thanks, responding beautifully to the emotional cues I was feeding her.

" It is my nephew, doctor, who is in trouble, not I."

" He is ill ?"

I have a dislike of treating male patients since there is a greater chance of them penetrating my facade, so necessary if I am to be allowed to continue my private work. Yet I prepared myself for the worst, since Mrs. Thornton's contribution was that much larger than my other patients.

" Not physically," Mrs. Thornton gave me the melting look of one who confides in a friend and expects help.

" Mentally," I hinted, with just the right tactful emphasis.

She nodded mutely.

" But, my dear Mrs. Thornton, you must understand that I am not a psychologist—I am a simple physician . . ." I was, of course, lying since although I am qualified as a physician, my work in fact centres upon understanding the psychological quirks of my clientele.

" I know, I know," she said eagerly, " but you are so *understanding*, doctor, in my own case. You realise that migraine is caused by *mental* and *nervous* and *emotional* stresses, so I thought . . ."

I controlled the tendency to smile. All migraine sufferers are inclined to ascribe non-physical causes to their condition, when, as often as not, a simple physical act of bending down or eating the wrong food is the cause of that admittedly exacting complaint.

Instead, I nodded sternly and kindly. " True, true, true," muttered I in the mystical manner of so many psychiatrists—hinting at things which only the fully enlightened disciple of Freud might learn. There is no doubt about it. They are the new priesthood.

" Then—for my sake, doctor—come and see him. Try to help him. And I beg you to use discretion in this matter—a public scandal would result if . . ."

" Of course," I said conspiritorially, " and if I cannot help him I can recommend an extremely discreet friend—a specialist in mental disorders—a wonderful man, I assure you, of undoubted brilliance and integrity."

But it was I whom she wanted. I prepared myself to act out a particularly long part. Have you noticed how people act, quite unconsciously, in set ranges of expression and emotion which fit particular categories—Sympathetic, Righteous Indignation, Bewildered Grief and so on, when in fact beneath the surface, though they do not for a moment admit it to themselves, they feel nothing of what they express on the surface ? Gestures, gestures—bolstering up the inane meaningless of modern life. And thanks to modern communications, we are assured, more and more, of the Right Way To Feel In A Given Situation. Comforting—certainly, comforting. Good God, we are like water-beetles skating the slimy surface which covers the clear, pure water below. And, worse, we contribute to the extent and thickness of the slime, piling it higher and higher until, with any luck, we shall sink down with its weight to the bottom. What do you think will happen then ? Madness ? But I digress.

Mrs. Thornton's town house lay in a quiet Belgravian Square. I drove her there myself, leaving a note to my receptionist to re-arrange the rest of the day's appointments.

Two marble columns fronted the main entrance and we went through the heavy oak door into a chill and imposing hallway, also of the same barren marble. We gave our street clothes to an attractive little maid and Mrs. Thornton asked her where Mr. Davenport was.

" In the study, ma'am," the maid replied with a worried glance at me.

" Would you tell him that I have brought Doctor Schmeling and should like to see him in the drawing room ?"

We entered the large, light drawing room which was fashionably furnished in a slightly Victorian manner. A heavy secretaire had been converted into a cocktail cabinet and from this Mrs. Thornton offered me a drink. I accepted a dry sherry and stood sipping it while we awaited Nicholas Davenport. Mrs. Thornton moved nervously about the room for a moment before sitting down on the arm of a chair.

Nicholas entered, pale, disconsolate, defiant. A black-haired youth of a distinctly wild appearance, shaking me too firmly by the hand as we were introduced and going immediately to the cabinet and pouring himself a drink. I expected him to disclaim need of a doctor, but instead he turned, still with a defiant look in his eye, and said " I hope to God you can do something about this, doctor." The defiance, it seemed, was permanent and directed at the world in general rather than any single individual.

" Perhaps I can," I said, eyeing him a little warily, wondering what he would make of me. " Would you care to tell me your trouble ?"

" Troubles," he said, taking a romantic stance by the curtains.

This, I decided with enjoyment, was to be a play of high drama. But, at that moment, I underestimated Davenport. I was to learn that he was a good actor, in the sense you know me to mean, but, for some reason, had hopelessly garbled his lines, lost his cues—or at least imposed his own lines and cues upon a play which resented them and was discomforted by them. My first hint of this came very soon after Mrs. Thornton had tactfully left the room and he and I stood facing one another across its length, drinks in hand in the manner of duellists about to stand and fire.

" Doctor Schmeling, you are not, I understand, a psychologist ?"

" No, I am a physician. I have a certain private bent towards psychology, though. However, if you wish to consult a qualified man . . ."

" No, no—I'm sorry, but I'm afraid a man not fully conversant with—mental disorders—might dismiss what I tell him as nonsense."

Curious, I shook my head. " That won't happen," I told him, " but I may be forced to recommend a specialist if I do not feel competent to deal with your case."

" Fair enough," he said. " I am having illusions."

I restrained an urge to discourse philosophically on the meaning of the word and instead raised my eyebrows. " What kind of illusions, Mr. Davenport ?"

" Many kinds. Illusions of complete physical detachment, where my mind looks down on my body and observes it with clinical objectivity. Illusions of size where I am sometimes so small as to be a pin-prick in the vastness of infinite space and at the same time am so huge as to dwarf the universe. Illusions of hearing voices speaking phrases I might not hear for days later, or should have heard days before ; illusions where a place is familiar though I have never before visited it—*deja vu*, I believe it is called—illusions where a place I have known for years, this house for instance, becomes suddenly unfamiliar as if I am seeing it for the first time. Those are a few—just a very few, doctor."

I frowned thoughtfully. The illusions he had mentioned were, in fact, all of a kind. They were what we call ' hypnagogic images '—the illusions experienced while falling asleep—the illusions between being awake and being asleep, between sleeping and dreaming. I have read that these illusions closely resemble those induced by mescaline and the like.

" We are all subject to illusions of this kind," I said reluctantly, disappointed that his complaint was so undramatic after all. " I myself sometimes get them."

" Ah, yes," he nodded rapidly, " *sometimes*. Sometimes. doctor. But do you get them all the time ? Are you forced, as I am forced now, to exercise a rigid and deliberate control upon yourself, to force yourself to behave normally, to converse reasonably and logically, to walk a few yards to a shop to buy

a newspaper, to consciously exert tremendous concentration if you are to see that newspaper in your hands and read it ?"

" No, of course not." I felt excited then.

" Of course not." His pale face tautened and he drew his lips tight and wetted them and continued. " Some time ago, under circumstances mildly resembling those I have described, I came across the source of a much used quotation. A poem by John Donne—that glib fool and mystic—" No man is an island "—you remember it, of course, with its preaching pantheistic nonsense. Well, I am an island, doctor—cut off from my fellow men most of the time by seas more uncrossable than the vastness of intergalactic space—I am an island existing in my *own* space, my *own* time—in fact, in my own universe which has little contact with the universe around it !"

You must understand that at this time, though interested, I was not convinced, as now, of what is literally physical individuality. I was at a loss for something to say for a moment. I could only mouth a trade-phrase.

" And when did you begin to experience all this ?" I asked him.

" Some years ago," he said impatiently. " At first, as you pointed out, only between wakefulness and sleeping, then between sleeping and waking, then they continued through the morning, then all day and all night. I am not insane, doctor. I know I am not. But I shall soon go mad with the strain of keeping myself anchored to reality."

" Do something for me, now," I told him. " Let loose your grip so that I can, as it were, observe the symptoms as I would an ordinary medical case."

" Let loose . . . Doctor, I am even unsure that I could regain it if I did." He seemed to think for a moment and then looked up at me, the defiance fading from his eyes to be replaced by the startling look of pleading which I have seen in the dying man afraid of death. " If it means you will be able to cure me, I'll do it."

" I cannot guarantee that until I have seen what it is," I said, almost as intense as he.

" Then, by God, see !"

His face muscles seemed to relax to such an extent that his whole face appeared to lengthen. He staggered and I helped him into a deep armchair.

" I have told you, aunt, I have no wish to see a psychiatrist," he said. His aunt, of course, was not in the room. Was he reliving the discussion which had led to Mrs. Thornton consulting me ?

Then I stepped back as he rose from the chair and began a peculiar and disturbing pantomime. I have seen similar scenes in cases of extreme shock where the patient re-enacts the phase leading up to traumatic experience again and again. Yet there was something odd even about this.

His lips were forming sentences, but I could not hear what he said. Then he went through the motions of taking off all his clothes, although his real clothes remained on his body. Then he seated himself.

He seated himself firmly upon thin air !

Astonished, not to say frightened, I rushed towards him and gripped him, sank to one knee and felt the air beneath him, saw that his feet were slightly lifted from the ground.

Then his arms moved and his head lolled upon his chest as if he had become unconscious.

I could not stand there and watch any longer, but seized him and shook him begging him to wake up.

His eyes opened and he stared about him, but seemed not to see me.

" Doctor," he said, " I believe you have done it," But he stared beyond me and to my left, addressing some unseen image of myself, perhaps.

Before I entirely lost my own grip, I again grasped his shoulders and spoke urgently into his ear.

" Davenport—Davenport—it is Doctor Schmeling—you are in the drawing room of your aunt's house. Can you hear me ? Can you understand ?"

Slowly his pale face turned and his body trembled in my hands. Once again the muscles stiffened as he stared, with difficulty, at me.

" I understand you. I remember. But what did I do ? There seems to be no memory of . . ."

" Listen," I said urgently. " I want you to come with me and visit a close friend of mine—a physicist named King—this is not a case for psychologists or physicians, I am sure. We will go to see him now—will you come ?"

" Will he help me ?"

" If anyone can, King will help you," I promised wildly.

" Very well."

I told Mrs. Thornton some vague story of needing to examine her nephew at my surgery and bundled him into my car, driving across London and out beyond Greenwich to the Special Research Institute of which King is the director.

Soon we were in King's office and had told him everthing I knew. Then he listened to Davenport's story.

" You were right to come here," he said. " And I'm grateful, Schmeling, for you know we are currently doing research into the different degrees of physical awareness. We have several psychologists working with us, of course, and together we may be able to help Mr. Davenport as well as," he smiled at me, " gaining some valuable information from any experiments we may have to instigate in order to find a cure."

" So I'm to be a guinea-pig, is that it ?" Davenport said bitterly.

" Yes," King replied, " but you must remember that the more we learn about your—um—affliction, the easier will be the task of helping you to readjust to reality."

Soon afterwards it was arranged with Mrs. Thornton that Nicholas Davenport should remain at the Research Institute until such a time as he was cured. We promised utmost secrecy and indeed were pleased to have it, since Davenport's condition was so astounding that any hint of it reaching the hungry ears of the sensational press would bring us untold irritation from journalists and cranks.

Time passed until, between them, King and his team had constructed a machine—a beautiful specimen—capable of recording Davenport's experiences while he underwent his illusions and of pulling him back, to some degree at least, to reality.

The data mounted, was sorted and investigated, until slowly we came close to arriving at certain conclusions regarding the nature of Davenport's problem.

Not only did Davenport dwell in a private universe, scarcely related to our commonly-shared time and space, but, if left entirely within it we observed it taking a definite course and shape so that, to himself, his existence had logical progression through both time and space. His past, present and future experiences were arranged in a perfectly orderly manner save for one thing—his past experiences sometimes existed in our future and his present or future experiences often existed in our past.

Now, up to this point, we had investigated only Nicholas Davenport and it was possible that he was a freak, that no others like him existed. But we had to put this to the test—and I volunteered to be the control. By this time, their experiments with the first machine had enabled them to create another which might, if it worked according to the principle they had devised, have the effect of flinging me into what we were beginning to call ' the permanent hypnagogic state.'

The machine was a masterpiece, producing in the human metabolism the controllable effects of certain drugs like mescalin, lysergic acid or andrenolutin, by exercising a direct electronic control on both mind and blood-stream.

Whatever happened, I was assured of some interesting personal experiences.

I seated myself in a chair while the machine was focused upon my body. A recording device, of the kind I have mentioned, was also present.

The tests began.

The illusions were quite clear—in fact considerably sharper than most every-day experiences—they involved voice, pictures, actions, smells and my sense of touch as well as certain mildly ecstatic emotional states which could turn swiftly to mildly depressed states. But then, this jumble began to sort itself out, the impressions and illusions began to form a definite pattern until I felt I was living an ordered life, scarcely different from the one I normally followed, save that I seemed to *know* better what it was all about, seemed, if you like, more at home in it.

Now, I learned later, I was released from my chair and allowed to wander around and was then confronted by Davenport in a similar state.

I saw him quite clearly, yet sensed absolutely no involvement with him, had no desire to approach him or interfere verbally or physically with his personal existence. However, after a time, he approached me and said politely :

" So you are free, too, Doctor Schmeling. Doubtless we were deliberately brought together in some way, but if we are allowed to continue in this state I look forward to communicating with you in some period when the time and space of the universe are favourable to another meeting—perhaps we have met already, in your past and my future ?"

" Not yet," I replied.

You see the new state of our existence? Without being directly involved, we were living in what were virtually wholly separate private universes. The nature of time had changed—or at least we had changed in relation to its nature—and it was quite possible for one individual to remember a meeting which had not yet taken place for another individual! We were free! Absolutely free and living what, I am convinced, is man's real and natural existence. Whatever freak occurrence on Earth ever set us off on the wrong road, I do not know. But now the truth was entirely clear. The fumblings of mystics, philosophers and scientists towards this revelation had been forestalled by the world at large for centuries.

We conducted similar tests on large groups. King was as excited as I. We made no attempt to ' cure ' Davenport and, once he understood what had happened to him, what must have happened to thousands of poor ' schizophrenics ' and ' victims of insanity ' locked up all over the world, he accepted his condition as being normal—and our condition as being abnormal.

Watching the experiments on the large groups, we saw Paradise—we saw Heaven, my friend—bands of angels living a peaceful and ordered personal existence—freed from the chains of so-called conformism, from the position of actors playing parts in a bad play, to real men performing real actions with meaning and absolute relevance to their personal existence. More—this state precludes any interference with the lives of their fellows.

It is what politicians have been shouting about for years and never achieving.

Thanks to young Nicholas Davenport, we have achieved the release of mankind from the slavery of togetherness. The tribe will go, the nation will go—there will be only independent men and women.

Schmeling leaned towards me, his heavy, aquiline head jutting forward, his large, square-tipped fingers spread upon the woven material of the armchair.

" Freedom," he repeated. " True Freedom !"

But I did not share his exultation. I was, in fact, horrified by the idea. It was impossible, to begin with. But the concept alone—the irresponsible concept—was enough to make me angry. I controlled myself as best I could.

" A good yarn, Schmeling," I tried to smile. " You were at your best. But really, man, the very idea of such an existence is appalling to an intelligent man. Society as we understand it would crumble—without organisation we cannot have civilisation—we could not have buildings, or railways or even newspapers."

" But we could have books—books that one man produces lovingly upon his own press !"

" How many books ? And how would they be distributed ? How would he get his ink, his type, his spare parts for his press? Who would read them, anyway ?"

" What do you mean ?"

" Have animals any desire to read books, Schmeling ?"

" That is irrelevant !"

" Oh, no—because the state you are holding up as desirable is an animal existence, don't you see ?"

" Your vision is limited," he said, seeming deliberately to relax in his chair. " The kind of communication I speak of needs no books, anyway. It is a state of ecstacy, man—heaven on earth. It is what we have been promised for years !"

" Very well, you need no books. But man does not live by books alone—he lives by bread, too !"

" The individual finds the vitamins he needs by—well, by a kind of instinct I can't explain."

I laughed openly at this naive statement from a learned physician.

" I'm sorry, Schmeling, but our conversation is fast becoming ridiculous. I became too involved in your tale. Let's forget about all this talk of ' perfect states ' and ' transcendental experience ' before we wind up like two old Indian priests quarrelling in a monastery."

But he did not respond to my desire to drop the subject before the argument became bitter and threatened our friendship.

" No," he insisted. " Look at it this way—you're a humane and liberal man, are you not ? You give the individual a right to holding his own ideas so long as they do not harmfully interfere with another individual."

I nodded without really listening, for I was bored with the argument.

" Ideas are large or small according to the individual," he continued. " You'd agree that if we criticise his ideas according to our own scale, we are wronging that man ?"

" Yes."

" Just as it is possible that an infinite number of things occupy the same space as our planet, having space and time as we have but otherwise existing in a different set of dimensions, so I know that every human being has ' dimensions ' individual to him. There are many instances where common dimensions are shared, but because this is true we have no business to conclude that therefore *all* dimensions are shared ! Therefore you must concede that Man's right to be an individual is as much a physical necessity as it is a philosophical necessity. That to accept the shared dimensions as the only important or ' real ' ones and to reject those individual *to* the individual as ' unnatural ' or ' wrong ' is to deny a *physical truth* !"

" Come now, Schmeling. You have become too caught up in your speculation and yarn-spinning to continue with all this. Calm down, fill your pipe, and I'll be off in a moment or two. I never, I must admit, expected to hear a man of your intellect and common-sense talking so wildly. What you have postulated is total anarchy—an abhorent state for any thinking creature. Thank God it is not so."

I glanced with curiosity at Schmeling who had completely relaxed and was filling his pipe as I'd suggested. He chuckled to himself, as if over a private joke.

" You see I am right," I smiled, rising.

" You'll see that I am right," he chuckled.

" What do you mean ?"

" Why, my dear chap, we have built several such machines of the kind I described. Large ones. They are set up at strategic points the world over. Within a few hours, we shall be flooding the planet with their effect—and real life will begin for man—the New Era—the era of salvation !"

I could take no more.

Shocked and disturbed at seeing so fine a mind behaving so childishly, I returned home. But I could not rid myself of a half-conviction that he had been speaking the truth all along.

I am home now and sitting in my study these write to notes analyse was in it whatever my fostered that conviction order . . .

michael moorcock

it is surprising and not a little disconcerting to realise how delicately balanced the forces of nature are in this world—a slight shift in the gulf stream drift, for instance . . .

deep freeze

by john rackham

The sweet chime of the intercom interrupted David Wentworth as he was taking breath for the fifteenth suggestion in a row. Cutting it short, he shut off the recorder, depressed a switch.

" Wentworth . . ."

" Prescott," the grille announced. " Can you come up, David ?"

" Five minutes." Wentworth let go the switch, cut the end of the tape on the recorder, lifted out the half-full spool and dropped it into a pneumatic tube carrier. Clapping on the cover, he pushed the carrier into the spout and went out of his little office, all in a deceptively easy-looking fluid motion that got him on his way with the minimum of wasted effort.

In his mind, the echoes of that cut-short exercise died slowly away. He had been given a strip of clear plastic with peculiar properties. If you pressed your finger on it and then removed the finger, there was a shadow left behind. A plastic which darkened under pressure and which became clear again when the pressure was removed, the density and duration depending directly on the amount and duration of the pressure. A sample, requiring suggestions for practical application. Possible applications ? Thousands. Practical applications . . ? That was a different matter entirely. That meant economically

competitive with alternative materials already in use ; filling some long-felt want; making possible something which had been only a dream hitherto. *That* kind of suggestion demanded a very special type of mind. An 'X'-person's mind. Wentworth let the challenge die away, emptied his mind in readiness for whatever Prescott had found.

As he went into the office where Chief of Personnel, Dr. Owen Prescott was waiting for him, Wentworth was completely unconscious of his appearance or the impression he might have made on the other man there. Tall, untidy, seemingly not quite properly jointed, he had mind-room only for outside data. This new man, introduced by Prescott as Major Garvey, was new data, and Wentworth gobbled him in one hungry glance. Compared with the Personnel Chief, who was small, rotund and sleekly withdrawn, an observer at the game of life, Major Garvey bore all the hag-marks of a man who has it in his nature to become involved with anything he touches.

Prescott said, " Major Garvey has a problem, David."

" Dammit !" Garvey complained. " You might have let me tell it to you first, before calling in your tame genius. It might not be in his line. It's just an odd item about modelling cement, that's all."

" Go right ahead," Prescott invited. To Wentworth, he explained, " The Major is one of those semi-legendary people who make it their business to nose into anyone else's, if it seems in the least peculiar. Intelligence Department about covers it, I would say. Wouldn't you, Major ?"

" Near enough. I have to be interested in odd matters, but it may not be anything in your line."

" Carry on, just the same. If it's odd enough to stump your people, then it will interest us, I'm sure."

" Us ? You mean—you too ?"

" One of my foibles—to try to match my wits against 'X'-people, whenever I have the chance. Keeps me on my toes."

" How many 'X'-people do you have, anyway ?"

" Three," Prescott smiled. " This is the kind of work they like, where they are free to use initiative, imagination, and do just whatever they like."

" Hmm !" Garvey was not impressed. Wentworth said nothing. He waited.

" Well now," the Major frowned, heavily, " as I said, it's cement. Not just any old stuff, though. Up to three years ago, it was made and sold by a small firm, right here in Britain, which specialises in chemical novelties. Silly Putty, chemical gardens, fluorescent paints, that kind of thing. They were selling it as Modelite, by the pound, to art-dealers and toy-shops. Three years ago their output suddenly boomed from a few pounds into thousands of tons annually. As a result, they have just about scrapped all their other lines, have renamed themselves ' Modelite Limited ' and they are coining money. So, naturally, we had to look into it, just to see what was going on."

" Why call it Modelite ?" Prescott asked.

" That's its function. It's a small-grain powder, very fine, rusty-red in colour and heavy. Polymer-bonded. Tricky to make, but nothing unusual in the secret sense. You dollop it into a bowl with water and it swells to about ten times its original bulk. At that stage it's soft and spongy and you can mould it like clay. Then it sets hard, still wet. Looks like pumice and hard as rock. That's where the modelling bit comes in. Catch it while soft, shape it, and then let it harden. Interesting stuff. My experts played with it quite a while. But it has flaws. Bad colour, rotten texture, and it doesn't last. If you let it get thoroughly dry, it reverts back to powder. It stays hard just as long as it is kept wet. A novelty. Absolutely useless for anything practical . . ."

Wentworth caught the words that were on his tongue, forced them back. The Major noticed nothing. Prescott asked,

" The ingredients ? Anything exotic ?"

" Not at all. A small percentage of commercial resins, for bonding, the rest waste-products from industry. Flue-gas deposits, calcium and magnesium carbonates—the kind of stuff the Coal Board and the Gas Companies have to pay to get rid of. Cheap as dirt. Nothing in that aspect, at all."

Garvey sighed, bit at his moustache. " That was the wrong end. We went the other way round. Who was buying the stuff, and what were they doing with it ? The obvious line. And that's where the silly answers began to come up." He shook his head, gloomily. " The first thing we found was that sales, here in the U.K., were unchanged, were microscopic. Then we found that the thousands of tons that were being sold

were going overseas. Figures, roughly, go like this. Twelve thousand tons to the U.S. and Canada. Ten thousand to the U.S.S.R. And that was a facer !"

" I can imagine," Prescott nodded. " Surely, if they really want the stuff in such quantities, they'd make it themselves ?"

" Right ! So we were off, in full cry. I got in on it, in person. And we tried to narrow it down a bit, to get some names. But that didn't work. This new credit-exchange system, what with everything automated and computerised, is the devil to monkey with. Mind you, I might have been able to break a few seals, if I'd wanted to make an issue of it, but there was another snag. This is a highly profitable business, economy-wise. A massive inflow of roubles and dollars. I wouldn't have been very popular if I'd tried to mess that up. All I had were suspicions, and a headache coming up."

Garvey shrugged and chewed his moustache again. " We had to go at it the hard way. We planted operatives on the spot—not in the U.S.S.R., though, it's awkward, there. But in the U.S. and Canada. Their instructions were simple. All they had to do was find out who is using twelve thousand tons of Modelite per year and what are they doing with it ?"

" And you found . . .?" Prescott encouraged.

" We didn't. There isn't. We, in Britain, make and ship to the U.S. and Canada, twelve thousand tons of Modelite every year. They get it, and they pay for it—and it just disappears !"

" Disappears ? Prescott was jolted out of his sleekness for a moment, but Wentworth smiled and felt better. To him this was beginning to add up.

" It just disappears," Garvey repeated, sounding as if he didn't really believe it himself. " We had co-operation from the authorities on the spot. They must have wondered just what we were talking about, but they co-operated. And there it is. Modelite, under that name or any other, is not being advertised, shipped, bought or sold. Nobody knows anything about it, at all."

" That really is fantastic," Prescott admitted. " Of course, you can't afford to make your enquiries too direct . . ."

" I daren't kick up any kind of dirt at all," Garvey pointed out. " The stuff is being paid for. It's not exactly cheap, and Modelite Limited have a very firm guarantee, for the same conditions and market, for the next fifteen years ! If I did

anything to queer that, I would be right in the boiling hot soup up to my ears. But, just the same, I have to know just what is going on here or I'll go out of my mind."

" By surface ship," Wentworth said, as if thinking out loud, " and not in a loose bulk form, but in packages—they wouldn't want it to get wet."

" That's right," Garvey nodded, bending a curious gaze on the ' genius.' " We have followed actual shipments all the way to the dockside, seen them picked up and carried off by small contractors. Five-pound bags. Twenty bags to a crate. And, just in case it has occurred to you, you can scratch any idea of contraband. That has been very thoroughly eliminated at both ends. So where do we go from there ?"

" Intercom ?" Wentworth moved across and made a gesture. Prescott nodded.

" Help yourself."

Wentworth dialed a code, waited for the screen to clear, smiled at the calm-faced blonde who showed there.

" Maps," he said. " Big ones, showing the Eastern Atlantic seaboard from, say, Florida to Labrador . . ."

" Five minutes . . ."

" Thank you. And tube them to Mr. Prescott's office, please."

"Maps?" Garvey asked, wonderingly. Wentworth shrugged. The Major frowned and turned to Prescott.

" Doesn't talk much, does he ?"

" Only when he has something to say, Major. All in good time. That cement, now, whoever is buying it must have found some good use for it, surely ?"

" Such as what ?" Garvey demanded. " You heard the description I gave. Now what earthly use would that stuff be to anybody ?"

" Creativity," Wentworth said, softly, and the Major stared, not understanding. Prescott chuckled.

" You've not been through the mill, obviously, Major," he said. " There are standard test-batteries which purport to measure creativity and they take the form—how many different uses can you imagine for—some simple object, like a household brick, for instance."

" Eh ?" Garvey sat back, scratched his jaw. " Well now, a brick, eh ? Part of a wall, outside or indoors, part of a bridge, column, foundation, roof, or a floor even. How about that ?"

" Negative." Prescott shook his head kindly and Wentworth smiled again. Garvey grunted in irritation.

" What d'you mean, negative ?"

" All you did was permute the idea ' brick.' To be creative, you could have said a door-stop, a paper-weight, a sinker, a counterpoise, a weapon, a marker, a target and so-on. Personally, as a psychologist, I think the term ' creative ' is misleading. What happens here, is a shift in perspective . . ." The pneumotube clicked and burped a capsule, interrupting him. Wentworth seized, broke it open and pulled out the crackling sheets, to hold them and look estimatingly at the desk-top. It was obviously too cluttered so he made for an open floor-space and went down on his knees, tracing out patterns with a thoughtful finger. After a moment and quite oblivious of Garvey's frankly disapproving stare, he went back to the intercom and dialed again.

To the same bored blonde, he said, " One more, please. More general in area, giving the principal fishery distributions." Behind him, Garvey snorted, audibly.

" Fish ? Is he trying to be funny ?"

Paying no attention at all, Wentworth waited for the map and spent less than a minute looking at it when it came. Then he went back to his seat.

" Now I know why," he said, and frowned. " The problem is, how to stop them ?"

" Will somebody please tell me just what . . ." the Major began, acidly, but Prescott hushed him sharply.

" Would you poke your finger into a delicate machine when it's running at speed ?" he demanded, reproachfully. "Wait!"

Wentworth was quite unaware that he was mumbling and even if he had known, it would not have worried him. His head was full of whirling data-points and verbalising some of them was merely a way of pinning down the essentials while the rest shuffled into place.

" Wonderful scheme—change the face of the globe—it will work, too. Three years, already. How to interfere and yet not . . . They could just as easily make the stuff for themselves . . ." He came to the surface for a moment, like a swimmer seeking air, looked at Garvey with a piercing eye.

" Modelite . . ." he said. " Bags—what kind ?"

" Ordinary brown-paper bags," the Major answered, readily.

" Where do they get them ? Who supplies ?"

" Just a minute," Garvey gave a twisted shrug, as one who says ' This is all mad, but I'm willing to do what I can,' and delved into a brief-case. Out of a thick dossier of paper he produced a reference. " Paton and Woodward—that's what you wanted ?" Wentworth nodded, pulled down his mental curtains and went inside again, but only for a few seconds this time. Then he had it, all neat and tied up at each end.

" We've had dealings with Paton and Woodward," Prescott volunteered. " They are a very progressive firm."

" Yes," Wentworth nodded. " We shall need that. No time like now. Come on, Major, I shall want you, for authority."

" Authority for what ?" Garvey demanded, sitting still. " I shall have to know a devil of a lot more before I authorise you in anything."

" David," Prescott's tone was almost wheedling. " Do make allowances for the Major. He's not used to our ways, you know. Can't you give just a bit of a lead ? Something to convince him that you have it ?"

" I'll give you the bald facts," Wentworth said, flatly. " This is a major plot. Nothing less than an attempt to change the face of the globe and to bring about the destriction of the British Isles as a power. I will leave it to you to work out just who is responsible later. All I know is that it is being done, and that I can stop it effectively. Now, will you come ?"

" Come where ?"

" To the offices of Paton and Woodward, while I persuade them to change the pattern of their paper-bags that they are supplying to Modelite."

Garvey swallowed, went red, looked helplessly at Prescott. " Do you have the faintest idea what he's talking about ?" he mumbled.

" Frankly, no," Prescott put his head on one side, comically. " But, you know, we use immensely complicated computers here and half the time I haven't the faintest idea what they're doing, either. Yet I trust them, and accept the results they give. Why don't you do the same ?"

" Because . . ." Garvey said, in sudden angry determination " I don't work like that. I like things to make sense. I like to know what I'm doing."

" You 'X'-people," he said, " turn up, they say, about once in ten thousand times. I never thought of it before, but now I find I'm profoundly thankful there aren't more of you. Prescott has my deepest sympathy having to cope with three of you."

" I'll tell him that," Wentworth chuckled. " He'll appreciate it. Shall we go in ? We're expected."

Peter Paton, Junior, was indeed expecting them, having been warned by Dr. Prescott. A slim, highly-polished and correct person, he expressed himself only too willing to be of assistance to two such eminent people, although he went on to confess that he couldn't imagine just how.

" Paper bags, to Modelite Limited," Wentworth said, abruptly. " You have the contract. What pattern are they ?" Paton blinked, ran a quick mental finger down a mental file and bobbed his head.

" Standard pattern 16A; brown; medium strength; self-sealing. A very popular general-purpose container. Modelite is a very good order. Current annual figure, seventy thousand gross." Alarm quivered for a moment over his sleek exterior. " There is nothing amiss with the order, I trust ?"

" Not so far as you are concerned, no. You understand, this is a Security matter, strictly confidential and we can't explain too much. All we want is that you modify those containers."

" Modify ? I'm afraid I don't understand . . ."

" We want you to make them out of a slightly different material, but in such a way that they will look and feel exactly the same as they do now."

Paton lost a good deal of his polish. He stared at Major Garvey very hard and Garvey stared back, knowing, from experience, something of how he must feel.

Wentworth assembling facts in his mind, went on, " The material I have in mind is a new experimental fibre. You sent us a sample about a year ago, for test and comment. Wet-strong, with controllable permeability. Remember ?"

" Ah, yes," Paton recovered something of his smile. " I recall the occasion. The technical details are a different matter. Our chief chemists—may I ?" He indicated his telephone, and Wentworth nodded.

" By all means. I want him in on it, in any case."

Paton touched a button, lifted the instrument. " Ask Mr. Shaw to come to my office, at once, please, and bring specs on our W/S line." That done he sat back and frowned thoughtfully.

" I am not asking questions," he pointed out. " I just want to warn you that we do manufacture and sell a limited quantity of the wet-strength stuff, as it is. The market is small, and, as it is virtually indestructable stuff, repeat orders are negligible. Therefore, the cost is high. You're not suggesting that we should take a loss, are you ? Patriotism is all very well . . ."

" That's all right, " Wentworth interrupted, briskly. " I think we can take care of that angle without too much trouble. Suppose I suggest to you at least fifteen very lucrative markets for that particular line of paper ? With them you'll be able to tool up for quantity."

Paton's manner changed again. A finger went to a button on his desk-box. " Miss Small, will you come in, please ? And bring your book." Then he reached out for a miniature desk calculator and drew it close. " New markets are very much my line, Mr. Wentworth. Carry on . . ."

Wentworth did carry on, and Garvey, who had described him as ' doesn't talk much,' was amazed at the way words gushed forth. Generalisations, first. The paper could be used wherever waxed cartons were presently needed; in laminated-board, it would serve for building material, sheds, store-rooms, refrigerators, anything to withstand wind and rain, boat-hulls, table-tops; in porous and absorbent form for bath-mats, towels, bathing suits; in the non-porous form for raincoats, mackintoshes, overshoes, waders. Wentworth went on and on, while Miss Small made frantic outlines and Paton listened, making an occasional stab at his calculator. Shaw, the chemist, came in and was quickly swallowed up in the general whirl of discussion, proposal and counter-proposal. Wentworth, at full stretch, seemed to lose his gangling unjointed manner.

Once the meeting was over, however, and he was back in the car again with Major Garvey, he reverted to type, became withdrawn and non-communicative.

" It's all done," he said, in response to Garvey's tart question. " All done. Prescott will probably be able to explain it to you better than I can. He ought to have figured it out, by this time." More than that he refused to say. The

Major had his doubts about Dr. Prescott—in fact, he had severe misgivings about the whole business, but there was nothing to do but wait. By the time they reached the office again, Prescott was just pouring tea. Waving them to help themselves, he settled back, with the benevolent look of a headmaster admiring his best pupil.

" I've managed to do part of it," he murmured. " The plan and the general idea behind it. I could even make a guess at the people who are responsible, but that is more for the Major to work out. Not in our line."

" You mean—you've worked out where all the cement stuff is going ?"

" I think so, Major. It is being thrown into the sea. Right, David ?"

" That's it. You've got it," Wentworth nodded. At that point, and not without due cause, Major Garvey committed the supreme solecism and lost his temper. In scalding phrases and a grinding voice, he took five well-filled minutes to tell Dr. Prescott and Wentworth just exactly what he thought of their establishment, their standards, their ideas of wit and several other things which were not exactly germane to the matter in hand but which appeared to relieve his feelings. When he had done, Prescott shook his head, admiringly.

" That was well done, Major," he said. " I'm sure you feel a lot better for it. Now, have a cup of tea, and try to be patient. Of *course* we can take things seriously here. We do. But this is a peculiar establishment and we have to run it the best way we can. If we were to let ourselves be worried or involved with all the odd and weird problems we get, we'd all be screaming psychotics within a week. Humour is our defence mechanism, that is all. Keeps us sane." He swivelled his chair, took up the fisheries map, and spread it on his desk-top.

" Let me show you. First, let me ask you something. I'm sure you know why it is that although we in Britain are on the same latitude as Newfoundland and Labrador, we enjoy a much milder climate ?"

" They taught us about that in school. The Gulf Stream . . ."

" The Gulf Stream *drift*, please. The ' drift ' is very important. See here, these pink and blue sweeps. The pink ones are warm currents, the blue ones the cold currents. And look at the Gulf Stream. It *ought* to swing round in a regular curve down by the west coast of Spain. By sheer freak of nature, it

doesn't, and we in Britain, the north of France, and the Scandinavian countries, are very well off as a result. Remember that blizzard winter of '63 ? If it wasn't for the Gulf Stream drift, that would be normal early summer conditions for us and the winter considerably colder. And Britain, Scandinavia, and the North of France, would be ruined, politically and socially . . ."

" But . . ." Garvey's face had gone chalky now, as he grasped the implication, ". . . just a few tons of cement, in the sea . . .?"

" Twelve thousand tons," Wentworth corrected. " Every year for the past three years and for fifteen years to come. That was the plan. And that stuff expands by a factor of ten, when wet. You asked, what use is a cement that must be wet to stay strong ? The answer is, to build a wall, under the sea."

" It would work, too," Prescott nodded. " I won't bother you with technicalities, but, while you two were away, I ran a trial flow-graph with our big analogue machine. Drop the stuff just here, on the coastal shelf about a hundred miles due East of Cape Fear . . ."

" Great God in Heaven, it's diabolical !" Garvey breathed. " They've got to be stopped !" and Wentworth smiled that smile of his again.

" Oh yes," he agreed. " But how ?" Garvey snatched a quick breath, then let it out slowly as he turned the matter over in his mind. His face went white again. To make sure he didn't miss anything, Wentworth emphasised the main points aloud. " Call them ' The Enemy ' " he suggested. " Make your suspicions, your accusations, known to them and they will deny it all. Try and prove it ! Make them cease the operation ? How ? We don't own the seas, Major. We don't own the Gulf Stream. If we clamp down on Modelite they can make the stuff themselves, quite easily. How do *you* propose to stop them ?" While Garvey sat and chewed his moustache on that one, Prescott turned to the map again, frowning.

" That's only a part," he murmured. " I got that far—but the U.S.S.R. shipments baffled me completely."

" That's a point," Garvey looked up again, alertly. "What about that ? It goes against your theory, doesn't it ?"

" Not at all. On the contrary, it fits very well. Have you ever wondered why we have glaciations ?" He went across to the map, and put his finger on the narrow gap between Canada

and Russia. " The Bering Strait and the Bering Sea. Very shallow, but a connection between the cold Arctic Ocean and the relatively warm Pacific. So the Arctic stays unfrozen—evaporation, snow, ice-packs—a glaciation. Until enough water is locked up in snow and ice to reduce the level of the great oceans to the point where there isn't an open strait there any more. Then the Arctic Ocean is cut off, cools rapidly, freezes all over. No more snow. The Pacific warms up to what it ought to be—semi-tropical. And the great ice-packs begin to melt and retreat, the oceans fill up again, until the Strait is open. And the whole cycle starts once more.

" It takes thousands of years, of course. But now, build a bridge of rock across there, to close the strait permanently, and what happens ? The Arctic freezes up and snowfall is cut to a minimum. That's advantage number one. The Northern Pacific warms up, becomes what it ought to be—and who likes that ? These people here . . ." he slid his finger to touch Vladivostok. " North of this is Soviet territory. South of it is Red China. They would like it, a lot. Fine for them. But it wouldn't do *us* any good. We would still be out in the bitter cold, because we have open seas to our north. We would get the cold drift, down from Labrador, Baffin Bay, Greenland and the Norwegian Sea."

" Yes . . ." Prescott put his head on one side, critically. " I see that. It's very neat. Very ingenious."

" Ingenious ?" Garvey came up out of his seat like a rocketing pheasant. " Ingenious, is it ? Is that all you can say ? Don't you realise we've got to find some way to stop this bloody scheme ?"

" Whoa, now !" Wentworth put out a large and surprisingly firm hand, and pushed him back into his seat. " You're a bit late, Major. It has all been taken care of. I told you—it's all done."

" What we did—with the paper bags, you mean ?"

" Just that." Wentworth ambled back to his chair, sat, and smiled, as much to himself as anyone else. " It was quite a problem in its way," he admitted. " We couldn't prove a thing. We couldn't use force, coercion, anything. So we just had to use the materials we were given. Another use for a material that swells to ten times its original bulk when wet, Major. You put it in a special bag. A bag made of extremely strong material—stuff with a rupture modulus equivalent to ten thousand pounds pressure per square inch. Stuff which

can be manufactured to very fine tolerances on porosity, on permeability . . ."

" Oh yes !" Prescott began to beam. " Oh yes. Very nice, David. Very nice. Almost elegant . . ." Garvey stared at him, and then at Wentworth.

" Let me think about that . . ." he mumbled. " I'm not getting it, yet—or am I ? Thousands of tons of the stuff, in five-pound bags, getting slowly wet, swelling inside a really tough container . . ."

" I made a special point of it, with their chemist," Wentworth said, dreamily, " that the permeability factor will be gradually modified week by week. It's a time fuse, if you like. You see, they already have a three-year accumulation, down there. So, I've given them a nine months delay . . ."

" I like it !" Garvey, in his turn, began to beam. " They can't do a thing about it, even if they find out—not without admitting what they were up to. And they can't renege on their contract, either."

" This is October," Wentworth said, softly. " The big bang will be in June. And then a nice, mild winter. A pity, really. I like snow."

john rackham

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mr. mackelworth's recent stories incorporating one or another form of robotic censorship-judgment have been more than well received— this month he looks at governmental control under similar circumstances

the rotten borough

by r. w. mackelworth

One wit described the Parliament building ' as the most enduring comedy of all.' For all that, it's quite a showplace and the people love it. They respect the old fashioned pile of glass and metal as if it were more than a mockery and perhaps I can't blame them, everyone likes to support a long run.

There is room for ten thousand in its Public Galleries and despite the fact that you can enjoy its endearing acts, blow by blow, on any telescreen, the galleries are always crowded. Nothing compares with taking the show live. There are a good many who would give their right arm to be with it night and day, as I am, and I must confess that there is a delight in watching the arbiters of our destiny at their game. Like cunning woodworm they vanish into an argument and pop out at an entirely different spot, leaving only a sprinkling of dry sawdust or hot air to mark their passage. The words they speak are so singularly entertaining that their meaning hasn't much relevance. Who cares ? After all only a purist tries to analyse a joke.

I am a Political Correspondent and a very good one at that. My job is to delve for motives now that reporting the actual words is outdated. My reports appear in the form of a commentary that reads between the lines and grossly fills in the

a matter of spoils rather than ideals and all the statesmen are good bankers.

Even so, our system has its pride though its vested in one man. The man in question is the Opposition, Dolu Padzen. He is more than a man, he is a ball of fire and a light to blind your eyes. His voice has the touch of thunder which marks down a special personality and a very able politician. He uses his voice with a turn of phrase quite shattering to his enemies. Padzen is a giant.

When you pay your visit to the Parliament Building you will see him for yourself and I think you will agree. If you can't afford the price of a ticket I might be able to fix some complimentaries.

You are more interested in how he manages to get elected when the others ride in on the subliminal? That's a good question. He is elected by the West Coast and there is more wealth per man in the Constituency than the rest of the Country. Their speciality is fine engineering and they produce practically all the electronic and mechanical jobs which need craftmanship rather than mass production. In particular they devise the high quality robots, both industrial and domestic, which do the greater part of the country's chores.

Without doubt the general level of intelligence is higher on the West Coast than elsewhere. Some say it's this intelligence which sways the issue against the Government in the poll booths, others point out that TV reception is very bad in the area owing to the high mountains surrounding it and therefore indoctrination is ineffective. In addition, the people make a social thing of not watching when they are away from home. Whatever the reason, it is a matter of record that a member of the Padzen family has stood for this Constituency since the Radiation Plague and that was some two hundred years ago. It was a hot issue then in the West Coast area which suffered very badly.

What chance then did Padzen stand in a Parliament so loaded against him? How in fact did one man manage to survive in the face of such overwhelming opposition? Well there is the Speaker of course. He is above the heat of Party politics. It is he alone who sees to it that the rules of good conduct are obeyed and that those with a contribution to make get their chance. You couldn't mistake him for a man, the square body held stiffly against his huge chair and the implac-

able lack of expression in the round metal face betray the truth. Then, after all, he was created over two hundred years ago and is a fairly early example of robotics. It is a little harder to recognise a robot now. He is in fact another tradition above suspicion and the only real power working against abuse in the Parliament.

He sits at the head of the Chamber, immobile and dependent on the electricity supply, but nevertheless, within his authority, in control of the daily situation. In his hand there is a wand and if all obedience to authority and procedure fails, then he may chastise the offenders with a mild shock which flashes from the tip of the wand. Many a junior has earned his first shock for a rash word which contravenes strict ethics.

Today there was a very interesting debate in the House and one which will be well remembered, if I'm not mistaken. The Prime Minister himself spoke for some fifteen minutes on the motion and Calper, his able Minister of State, being somewhat longer winded and with his eye on the future, spoke for two hours. Padzen doubling as he does for half a dozen jobs had to speak twice in opposition to the motion.

The motion was, on the surface, an offer by the Government to provide Welfare facilities to certain places in the country, where it was deemed the local authority had failed to give a proper standard of Welfare to their people. Underneath this laudable desire was a much more complicated motive and one which was sinister to a degree. The Government had larded their gift with a quick poison. There were a few disguising provisions regarding other areas involving minor costs and rebukes but the main point was the Government contention that the West Coast had not provided sufficient coverage for TV within its area. They had declared that they would force the local authority to instal a local station, under Government control of course, in return for a special tax levy. They say, in effect, that the balance of culture and money in the area is sadly askew, TV representing culture and the income from robotics, money.

The session started at ten sharp following the usual raising of the flag on the terraces and the singing of the National Song of Liberation in the Chamber. Padzen, tall and fair, stood like a solitary statue, facing his enemies politic, and sang as he always did with the vibrant tunefulness of his people, shaming the moaning discord from the Government benches. Then as if he

had endured immense physical strain, Padzen slumped into his normal, disconcerting pretence of sleepy indifference while the Government opened for the motion.

Gador, the Prime Minister, is an ancient relic who has survived through sheer, vitriolic, nasty-mindedness, in his revered position for a quarter of a century. His face is thin and bony and his features seem to be skinny appendages to his skull. His body is knotted with age into a bundle of ugliness, yet he is as tough as his hate for Padzen and anyone else who threatens his power or money. He droned on in his faded voice, trying to give an impression of benevolence at this stage and failing abysmally. Occasionally he lapsed into silence as he lost the thread of his speech and with discreet co-incidence the cameras lost the thread also, by means of a technical hitch or by convenient distortion of sound and vision. The licences to broadcast are in the Government's hands. It is also possible to obscure the Press and public vision and sound from the Galleries by monkeying with the glass screens which shield the masses from the members. All very useful.

He dwelt on the sins of mean local councils and the Government's concern for the victims of their meanness. He went on about the cost to the National Budget and he was surprisingly pleasant about it, despite his renowned love for the eternal credit. The cost of the new TV station worried him not at all. It was unbelievable. He has the Treasury under his direct control, you see, and he looks after the National coffers as if they were his own. It could well be ; he is related to most of it. He skirted the truth so admirably, in fact, that nobody could really say his real intention was to fleece the West of its cash and foist his subliminal techniques on the innocent electorate. Most of all perhaps he wanted to get rid of Padzen because he is a thorn in the Government's side.

It is one thing to offer a suspect gift but another to get the gift accepted. You will recall the old adage about a horse and water and comprehend Gador's difficulty. His speech was really only a subtle blackmail. Suppose you threatened to brainwash the horse, rob it of its oats and do away with its rider, wouldn't that threat be enough to develop a taste for water in your horse ?

The Government isn't entirely selfish you understand. They would be content with a lesser man in Padzen's place and one who unlike him felt the ridicule of a ridiculous position and did

not make a victory of being alone. They would even like to swell the numbers on the Opposition benches because the people have a cute regard for the lonely fighter, the underdog who snaps back at its tormentors. There was little hope of doing that safely until the Peltin Report on Selective Selling wormed its way on to the Prime Minster's desk.

The Report declares you can persuade certain people, a proportion of any community, to put in ineffective candidates without risking the overall majority for the Party with the best candidates in general. How is it done ? Well that isn't revealed. First must come the controlled experiments. Ask yourself, why do some people take too much credit on their doorsteps for trashy articles they don't want anyway ? Not you ? Yes, that of course is the point, some do but most don't. The Prime Minister wants the West Coast to be the first subject, though it is the hardest nut to crack, mainly out of sheer temper at its long resistance.

Padzen made an acid attack on the old man's apparent generosity and it was lovely to hear. He ripped into Gador's lack of concern for the National purse as if the indifference was indeed true. Time and again he prodded at him, scorned him until at last he wriggled like a landed fish on the front bench. His suppressed anger tore to free itself from his gnarled body and his hands opened and shut with clawlike, convulsive movements.

Finally as Padzen finished his speech Gador stood up. He screamed at Padzen. " I'll see you into the gutter for this."

The eyes of everyone turned to the Speaker but the robot made no move to rebuke the old man. A younger offender, with less seniority, would have received a shock to remember. While the general attention was rooted on the scene my eyes were elsewhere. I suppose it's the trick that a reporter learns —while others participate he remains a spectator. Anyway, on this occasion it paid off, because I saw that the red light on the TV camera facing Gador was still glowing. Something had gone wrong with its remote control and the whole business had been seen, no doubt with keen pleasure, by the millions of unseen people at their sets. It was then that I began to wonder, especially as the screen between the Chamber and the Press Gallery was still as clear as a film of still water.

The Minister of State, Calper, had to summon all his smooth talk to placate the silent contempt of his immediate audience

and no doubt he would have tried even harder, if possible, had he seen that small red light on the camera. By the time the rest of the camera lights had come on, a few minutes after his speech began, it was too late. The Nation had seen their Prime Minister in the nakedness of his hate.

I like Calper and I admired his masterly reasonableness and charm at this time more than ever. It was easy to understand his reputation as a lion of the ladies and a boudoir politician, every graceful gesture was an act of poetry. I watched his round, well-groomed head bobbing up and down below me as he emphasised his points earnestly and I was fascinated by the flow of words, convincingly phrased, beautifully put together. He made the most of the deprivation of the people on the West Coast, as if vision was some kind of essential food without which the body withered with the starved mind. Then he played cunningly on the snobbery of the people who made an intellectual triumph of spurning TV because they didn't have it. It was hard to draw out the inherent contradictions in his speech, which made it a set piece of illogical manoeuvre, for he put it all so nicely, so persuasively. You could almost hear the addicts respond " Who the hell are they to crow over us ? Fill them full of vision and subliminal joys."

Padzen switched his attack at once and showed himself to be an able contestant. At first he merely refuted the need for TV in the West Coast area by pointing out the waste of giving people, who couldn't appreciate the gift, a TV service which would divert them from the task of providing the nation in general with so many necessities. " There will be fewer robots to do your chores. The traditional handicrafts, beloved of our ancestors, will die and the hand-made statuette or the absorbing wall-puzzle which graces your homes will disappear. Why should my constituents rob you of your leisure and pleasure just so that they may indulge themselves in second-rate films ? We would rather give you the money which would be spent on this luxury, to be used as a means of reducing your taxes if you wish."

The irony of his words missed the audience but not the offer of cold cash. The hand-made statuette might mean nothing and the eye-whirling metal wall-puzzles which sometimes divert the eyes from vision might be expendable, but robots and money were close to the common heart.

The Prime Minister, perhaps dimly aware of the real danger in the line of argument, was whispering angrily to Calper. Padzen stopped speaking for a moment, apparently accidently, but most certainly so that we could all hear the Prime Minister's asides. The fragments of irate questioning drifted up to us. " What is the man doing . . . giving away money . . . I want him dealt with . . . do something Calper, do something."

My eyes turned back to the camera which had already betrayed the Prime Minister and again its red light was shining like some forlorn warning. It intrigued me. In its presence I could see another glimmer, a glimmer of a deeper purpose which might have been the true key to Padzen's tactics. The camera was dissecting Gador's soul like a surgeon's knife. It should have lapsed into some technical hitch with its fellows but twice it had continued to record the detail of Gador's petty angers.

" Suppose," I thought, " Padzen is after the Prime Minister himself and not the motion. After all, he can't win the division, that's merely a rubber stamp, a forgone conclusion, but if he knows about the camera he could be playing to it deliberately, intending to do the old man an injury to pride and pocket."

Padzen took up his speech as if he was reluctant to draw attention from Gador. He spoke darkly of the powers which ruled all of them with such jealous whims that made a mockery of ordinary human needs. " They don't stop where normal men stop and they never look at themselves. The ultimate weapons of control are in their hands and they will use them for the same reasons that others climb mountains—because they are there. Like children with a whip, they have to try their strength however useless the motive." He stared at Gador directly. " Can we allow a child to whip the last portion of our freedoms just to please its endless conceit ? I know that life is a battle for survival and that in the last event it is the only battle that makes sense, but he—" Padzen pointed at the curled up leaf of a man opposite " is not battling for survival. He is fighting for some impossible end that only he understands. I think he wants to be a god."

The Prime Minister sat very still as if he had been shaken to the core of his being. His face was white, but, for once, the tremor that so often shook his body had been eradicated by the shattering revelation he knew to be the truth.

In the long minute of silence that followed I found time to press the communicator which linked me with the TV Control Room.

The sad face of George Gorin, the man in charge of the cameras, floated into view. " Hello, George," I said quietly.

He returned my look and quite suddenly he smiled. "Hello."

I had never seen George smile before and it was such an open smile, without malice or hint of connivance, yet I knew that he was aware of the red light on the camera. He had looked different from the faithful old Government retainer I had always known. He was somehow younger and more self-contained.

The Speaker's voice broke in urgently. " You may ask your supplementary questions now, Mr. Padzen."

I looked down on Gador and I saw that he was beginning to stir, apparently pulling round from his introspection and it was as if the Speaker wanted to prevent him from gaining complete control of himself before Padzen had finished. Gador was not without personal strengths and there were many sides to his character. Once he wrote a book about the cultivation of roses which was a best seller, just after he had perpetrated the worst purge of his career.

Padzen's voice was matter of fact and almost unnecessarily cool. " Will the Prime Minister now say exactly why he thinks TV is imperative in my constituency ?"

" I have already explained our reasons." His reply was almost subdued. Perhaps he had suffered too much in one day or had wisely gone to the defensive.

" I would like to ask if the Prime Minister has really explained his reasons." Padzen's subtle switch to the personal level wasn't missed. He should have said, " The Government's reasons," but he was leaving no chance unexploited.

" It's a matter of Public Interest." Gador's tone was slightly peevish like an old man who had been wakened for his tea before his afternoon nap was really over.

" Will the Prime Minister be more explicit ?"

" No."

" Ah ! Will the Prime Minister then say exactly what he expects in return for this unwelcome gift to my constituency?"

" There will be an adjustment in taxation to your constituents. A special levy." The old man was suddenly vicious and his greed for money could be heard as clearly as the clatter of cash on a metal plate.

Padzen was incredulous. " Does the Prime Minister suggest that he can impose a tax without a full budget debate, or indeed as this is a special levy, without a General Election?"

" We can use our emergency powers under the Chaos Act."

The Chaos Act, it happens, was created to deal with the Radiation Plague and its proper name is somewhat longer and more obscure in its meaning. It is invoked like the ridiculous section in the old Army Regulations which was used to cover every weakness in disciplinary law—I mean the section about unspecified, prejudicial conduct.

Padzen actually laughed with bellowing humour and the rest of the Chamber laughed with him, but with discretion I might say. " Is that not like taking a bomb to kill a flea ?"

Gador was very exact, like an offended elder ought to be. " If levity please you, sir."

" Could you say just how much you expect to make out of this special tax, Prime Minister ?"

" The Government will assess the proper recompense to its Exchequer in good time. As your question is of some importance, I think I am entitled to reasonable notice before I commit myself." His tone was suddenly nearly jocular and a wintery smile split his lips like a dry pea-pod. It was obvious that despite his wellknown cunning he had misjudged the extent of his personal defeat so far. Perhaps the illusion of his power was sufficient to blind him to reality. In that way great errors are often made.

Padzen spoke quietly and very slowly as if daring him to ignore the words. " Do you not think, Prime Minister, that we are entitled to ask you for an Election before you pocket the last of the Nation's funds and freedom ?"

Gador was trembling with rage again. " That is not a proper question and I won't have it." He looked directly at the Speaker and there was a trace of pathetic appeal in his eyes.

The Speaker's reply was strangely innocuous. " The question seems to me to be a proper one."

" It is unethical."

" If Mr. Padzen is having difficulty with his ethics at this stage, I'm sure it is understandable."

I could see that others were as astounded at the Speaker's answer to Gador's complaint as I was. It wasn't merely the phrasing, it was the obvious bias in Padzen's favour. It was out of character for the robot, in fact it should have been impossible for it to show anything approaching a human response. I had, to be truthful, wondered on previous occasions whether there was more to the Speaker than a bag of

electronic tricks and now I was certain. The Speaker was taking sides.

The same thing occurred to Gador even in the midst of his anger. " This is impossible !" He turned round with his arms spread crookedly from his bent shoulders like the branches of a leafless tree. " The Speaker has denied me my rights !" His voice rose, piping shrilly and robbed his words of dramatic effect. " It's sabotage. The Speaker is no longer our arbiter. It must be removed like a diseased branch, as that creature Padzen must be removed. Part and parcel of the same plot . . . to take away my position, money, all I have fought for. Throw them from the Chamber !"

The breaking sounds in the old man's voice were almost saddening but the foolishness of his demands robbed the audience of sympathy. It was impossible to remove the Speaker. You see, when he was placed in his seat of authority it was arranged that he should be inviolate. Any tampering beyond routine servicing could cause an explosion which might wreck the Capitol and there were other considerations, anyway. Built into the Nation's psychology was a deep fear that an accident to the Speaker would end the Nation's life in some way. He was a major household god.

Of course, there was the business of the Speaker's apparent bias, but with a little thought it was possible to understand that too. You see when they made him they included systems which enabled him to adapt. This was to avoid the risk of a bad Government cleverly using technicalities to win their points. The Speaker could discern a hidden motive in what appeared to be an honest move in procedure. In this case, Gador's rule had been so corrupt that it was actually protecting Padzen to an almost blatant extent and the Government's attempt to end all opposition had tipped the scales even further in this debate.

Gador had remained on his feet after his burst of hysteria and Calper, white-faced and agitated, was pulling at his coat. The Prime Minister brushed his hand away. " I will have my say. We will build another Chamber and rid ourselves of these tormentors who interfere with my plans." His voice trailed away into an incoherent mumbling.

The Speaker looked at him and his eyes seemed to glow momentarily.

Some instinct, from the bundle of odd instincts that make a good news shark, made me switch into TV Control Room for

another look at George. He grinned at me amiably and his hand, as he waved it, had a slight judder as if someone had just given him a vibro massage and he wasn't quite back to normal. Normal ! That was it. George wasn't normal and I knew what was wrong with him. He had taken a shot of tranquiliser. Lurking into the background must be a whispering microphone which was relaying his orders. Poor old George.

" And cunning old Padzen standing there like a Roman statue," I thought, but my attention whipped back to Gador and the Speaker who were playing out their battle of wills in silence. I had an absurd feeling that the old man was faced with the prospect of shouting profanity at the Speaker or collapsing into senile decay and incontinence within the moment. He was saved because the Speaker spoke first.

" You have finished your reply ?"

" No I have not."

Padzen bowed to the Speaker. " I am satisfied with the reply."

" Then the Prime Minister must sit down. Any further remarks are out of order." The Speaker's voice was precise and devoid of compassion.

Gador jerked angrily as if his feet were stamping in an involuntary manner as anger swept his body. " I will not sit down. I will not sit down." The voice, high and reedy, repeated around the chamber like the call of some scrawny bird of prey screaming at a victim which had escaped its claws.

In a silence that exceeded all the silences I have ever known for the length of its leaden seconds and the tension of its anticipation, the Speaker slowly raised his wand. It travelled at a snail's pace until its tip was aimed at Gador's middle, then hesitated. Gador stared at it with a kind of pathetic and useless defiance, but he did not sit down. For the first time in recorded history a Prime Minister received a flash from the wand. My, he was a tough devil. He staggered but somehow managed to stay on his feet and facing the Speaker. Fury and an intimate loathing contorted his features. Very slowly he shouted with a punch to each word. " You damned animal you !"

No longer neat rows of patiently obedient men, the back benches erupted into laughter. Calper's voice, somehow still as smooth as butter, insinuated itself over the din so that everyone could hear. " Sit down you old fool before he kills you."

was achieved and there won't even be a division on the question of TV in the West. Two hundred years ago the whole of the West was wiped out except for one family—the Calpers. They kept it a close secret and manufactured enough robots indistinquishable from man to form a convincing electorate. Then they invented Padzen, the perfect representative. They had only one trouble, the Gador family held the rest of the country's assets. It has taken them two hundred years to take over.

Will we get a better Government? Well, it can't be worse, and it should be worth a laugh to see Calper cross swords with his own man across the Chamber when they put Padzen together again.

Now, you go tomorrow. I'm sure the engineers will have finished their work on Padzen. It will be worth it and there is a bonus with these tickets for seats at Gador's trial. Just one thing, it's no use shouting the odds about what I've told you. No one will listen. Ask yourself. What would you do if some diabolical character tried to spoil your favourite TV show for you? That's right, you would probably throttle him.

r. w. mackelworth

An Index To The
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much has been written about recent experiments with dolphins and their highly developed intelligence—perhaps man can eventually increase their senses to the point where the dolphins can participate in our own activities

the game

by james inglis

. . . *Project Jonah, therefore, was a failure. Why it should have failed and whether or not success might have been eventually achieved, had further attempts been made, is something we will never know. Nevertheless the project will live long in the thinking processes of those who have a place in their minds for the off-beat and the wonderful. More, it will forever serve as a perfect example of the irony that is Man.*

The nineteen-sixties are usually remembered with rueful distaste, for this was the decade of universal Nuclearism and chronic crises : the decade of the Bubonic Bomb. The irony of Project Jonah was that it formed an integral part of this grim pattern. It was conceived as a purely military venture, though we will never believe that the individuals involved in the project at no time pondered on the more noble possibilities of their work.

From the military viewpoint, Project Jonah was the answer to one of the biggest defence headaches of the period. The changeover from land-based rockets to missile-carrying submarines came dangerously near to achieving the ultimate in weaponry. For these floating platforms of death which sailed beneath the seas of Earth possessed an invulnerability unmatched either on land or even in

space. Project Jonah was an attempt to render the nuclear submarine vulnerable.

The situation was so desperate that further attempts would certainly have been made. But, by an amazing coincidence of timing, the participating ships and subs sailed back to their Caribbean port only days before the signing of the Charter of Co-existence at Geneva, on August 8th, 1969 . . .

—Oddities of the Cold War,
1946 - 1969

They played their games as they had of old, amid the warm waters of their Universe. Although their long exile among the creatures of the surface had been a rewarding experience, the strain of living in a strange environment had begun to show and their return to the deeps was an ecstasy and an intoxication.

Their collaboration with Man, however, was not yet at an end. Still to come was the exciting climax to their acquaintance with the surface creatures. The game of games. An inter-species team-effort with that typical element of complicated detail which most of the games of Man possessed. The games of Dolphin were in such contrast that the dolphins were both puzzled and exhilerated by the seriousness which Man attached to his games.

And at least the Game was to be enacted in their own, native habitat, instead of the tiny, artificial oceans in which they had been imprisoned—albeit befriended—by man.

Cetus (he had now begun to identify himself with this human-given name) rocketed to the surface to soak in a great gale of air. He hung in the tropic sunshine for a streamlined second before plunging down once more to the green and secret depths. His entire being singing with sea-freedom, Cetus was only dimly conscious of the magic collar caressing his skin ; the collar which was to be the means by which Man would speak to him and guide him when the Game began. As he sped towards the main body of his fellows, Cetus reflected that there was still time to re-acquaint himself with the old experiences from which he had been separated for so long.

Gracefully, he swept to a halt and turned to await the passage of a living rainbow of angel-fish. He stilled his body as completely as he knew how, in order not to disturb the creatures by the vibration-transmission of even the smallest movement. He was successful. The fish swam on and Cetus prepared himself for the old game of empathy which was one of the

dolphins' most valued activities. His empath-sense was a combination of many things, of acute sensory perception, of a large, uncluttered brain in which subtle powers had developed over the years, of a strange symbiosis of reasoning and instinct, swift responses and an uninhibited imagination.

Cetus could not have explained his empath-sense, but he was one of its most gifted practitioners. Put briefly, it enabled him to share the life-experience with any creature of the sea.

This time, it was working perfectly. His first sensation was one of dreamlike insubstantiability. His own personality seemed to shrink and change ; he lost direct, conscious control of his thoughts, and at last whatever thoughts passed through his mind no longer seemed his own. Indeed, they were hardly thoughts at all, but simply the primitive proto-sensations of the creatures with whom he was now in rapport. No longer conscious of his own great body, Cetus had for all intents and purposes become a humble angel-fish, a spark of sentience adrift in the evolutionary sea. The boundless contentment which filled his being was the contentment of the womb. There was no tension, no intellectual struggle here. Life itself was its own goal and its own reward. This was the cosmic cradle of awareness and the serenity which reigned was something only the humblest of creatures could experience—unless, like Cetus, you possessed the gift of empathy.

But, as often happened, something in the outside environment disturbed the conditions. Cetus, still mentally an angel-fish, experienced a sharp stab of terror. His mind became an atom of alarm, radiating frantic signals of self-preservation. The rapport could not withstand this frenzy. There was darkness. A roaring and a drowning. Emergence.

Cetus was quick to recover his old identity and reactions. Immediately, he discovered the cause of the fishes' terror and flight. A hungry shark had joined the company, cutting an angry trajectory through the twilight water. Its intentions were not hard to interpret ; *kill and eat*. Cetus had no fear of any sea-creature, certainly not a shark. He decided impulsively to do for the shark what he had done for the angel-fish.

At first, it was more difficult. The shark's personality was slightly more complex than that of the angel-fish, and its mood was one of overwhelming ferocity. At last he broke through into its pre-dawn mind. This time, the primal serenity was

submerged in a subconscious pool of anger. Cetus experienced an almost rational longing to crunch something with his jaws, to kill and eat and find the bliss of fulfillment. The shark must have succeeded in catching something about then, for suddenly Cetus experienced a great glow of happiness, a sensation of hunger alleviated. This time he emerged from the contact without experiencing the psychic shock of external distraction. An inborn timing sense had warned his subconsicous that he would soon need air.

As he surfaced, the great dolphin caught sight of one of the monstrous, floating islands which had brought Man from his distant, continental Universe. The sight brought back the quite forgotten imminence of the Game. He wondered how long it would be before the awaited Voice would speak to him from the magic collar and begin the great adventure.

He hoped it would not be soon. His encounter with the fish and shark had been tiring, after his long absence from the realms beneath the sea. More content than he had been for a long, long time, Cetus plummeted again to the deep, dark regions in search of rest. Not for him, however, a mere period of unconsciousness such as Man called " sleep." Instead he swam leisurely until he drew near to a frilly sea-anemone. With scarcely any effort at all, he activated his empath-sense, idly let the process take its course, and for a time shared with the primitive organism its eternal, uninterrupted dream. This was deeper than any sleep, warmer and more peaceful. For here the Sun of the Creation still shone . . .

The signal came while Cetus was still submerged in the sleep-experience of the anemone. The awakening was sudden, but his immediate feeling was one of infinite refreshment, despite the stringent, ringing vibrations issuing from his magic collar. A vibration specially suited to his dolphin-threshold of hearing.

The Game !

His first duty was to join his eleven companions and prepare them for the fray. This was the work of moments. The twelve dolphins gathered into a tight cluster, the excitement of the hunt upon them. The glimmering distractions of their liquid cosmos was forgotten. They were waiting for the Voice.

When it came, it was Doctor's voice, as Cetus had expected. For it had been Doctor who had watched over them and fed

them and protected them. It had been Doctor who had taught them the gutteral tongue of Man.

He said. " We are now ready to begin. Remember your instructions. And I repeat what I said before : *there will be no danger.*"

Cetus answered for his fellows. He realised that his speech was only very loosely human ; and he had learned to his dismay that an average human could not understand it. However, it was sufficiently distinct to be understood by those who made it their job to try to understand, as the two called " Doctor " and " Captain " had done.

" We are ready," Cetus fluted into his magic collar, knowing that Man would hear him, though separated by large sea-distances.

The next voice to issue from the collar was that of Captain. A gruffer voice than Doctor's, but not unfriendly.

" As we arranged, you will head south into the warm currents at full speed. It will be a long journey but you have proved yourselves capable of doing it in the allotted time. Remember, when you make contact with your quarry, let us know immediately ; this will give us a fix on your position. Happy hunting !"

The Game had begun.

With Cetus at its head, the graceful procession started out, gradually gaining speed and spreading out into a widening fan-formation. Into the southern currents they sailed, in search of the legendary and mysterious creature with which they had to rendezvous.

Submarine !

A hundred sea-miles later, the sun had dropped below the western horizon, the bright and early stars had slipped through as though to prepare the way for the nightly conflagration which soon would fill the tropic sky.

And still the dolphins hurtled south through the darkening waters. Their minds, usually so playful, were soberly intent upon their mission. This was the most important of the games of Man. However puzzled they may have been as to the objects of the game, it was imperitive that Man should not be let down.

Cetus, as leader of the group, had to take special care not to allow his attention to be distracted by the nocturnal wonders of

the sea. Wonders which had been almost forgotten in his long sojourn with the surface creatures.

For it was at night that the sea took on its greatest majesty. Swarming schools of fish became parades of luminescent light. As the land cooled from its daytime solar assault, the sea took on a renewed warmth. Colour was born in a hundred, sparkling hues. Timeless mystery seemed to move across the face of the waters and it was as though a new world had been ordained.

This was what Cetus had to ignore. For at any moment, he or one of his fellows would spot the submarine creature and the Game would be fulfilled. Although not certain what manner of being Submarine was, Cetus had learned that the creature was not hostile to Man, or at any rate not *this* variant. He had sometimes heard Man speak of Submarines which were unfriendly, Submarines which might harm him unexpectedly. But it seemed that the evil Submarines did not inhabit the waters which were Cetus' realm.

As night matured and the first, slight throb of tiredness made itself felt, Cetus found his mind returning to the early days of his stay with Man. Through countless generations, the dolphins had known of Man's existence, and many were the fabulous legends about the creature. That Man was intelligent was something which had always been suspected. But one of the more puzzling factors about him was his apparent ability to thrive in the harsh environment of his continental Universe. By instinct the dolphins were aware that they, too, had once been land creatures, but that had been in their primitive past. The return to the sea had been necessary for a fuller enjoyment of life, if not for survival itself. The sea was such an ideal environment that it took Cetus all his time to understand that other creatures might find life on the land equally enjoyable.

That wonderful, terrifying day when Cetus and his fellows had been trapped in the great nets had alarmed them no end. But their human captors soon made it clear that their motives were friendly. The one called " Doctor " had taken great pains to put them at their ease, and once their initial reserve had been broken down, he had quickly tutored them into the ways of Man. They had learned his tongue, they had been introduced to his magic, they had been taught his games. It had really been a rather one-way affair, in spite of Cetus' efforts to return the compliment. His attempts to teach the games of Dolphin

had been limited. Such games as the Game of Empathy seemed to be beyond human understanding completely, and when Cetus had attempted to practise this on Man, success again was only very qualified.

He had entered a disconcerting world of terrible stress. Stresses which Cetus likened to a surging current in the middle of deceptively still waters. He had known for a brief moment the burning ambitions of Man, the raging urge to make magic, to delve deeper and deeper into the Universe and to control, to conquer anything which stood in his way. When he emerged from the rapport he had been more exhausted than ever before in his life.

The dolphins had discovered that Man had been studying their kind for some time. Recently these studies had led to great excitement among humans, and more intensive steps were taken to contact the dolphins and attempt to converse with them. The twelve dolphins which now were participating in the Game could thank their many predecessors who had passed through Man's hands and had prepared the way for this great moment.

The rules of the Game itself had been delivered to them by the one called " Captain "—a very different kind of man than Doctor but seemingly a close friend. Captain had been very excited about the Game, although not a playful type in other ways. He had explained that the Game was but a start, a trial round. Later might come much more earnest games, the success of which depended on the dolphins proving their ability in tracking down the Submarine creatures. Once he had hinted that in these later games, the Submarines encountered might not be the friendly variety, but their hostile relatives. This puzzled Cetus, though it was true that some of his own cousins were killer-creatures, and he could understand that even Submarines might have cousins with opposing natures. But, if they were dangerous, why make plans to play with them ?

No-one had been able to explain this anomaly to him.

Although as courageous as any other dolphin, Cetus was thankful that at least the Submarines to be encountered in *this* Game were friendly . . .

They were beginning to fear that something had gone wrong. The contact should have come while the night was young, and Cetus had sensed the first breath of dawn filtering down through the waves. Then, just like that, it happened.

His first warning was an unidentifiable vibration pulsing towards him. At once he could rule out any creature with which he was familiar. There was a thrill of power in the vibration which he found somewhat nerve-wracking. Then he saw it.

Long and slim, fast-moving. That was all he could distinguish. Then the dimly perceivable shape loomed out of the green shadow of the sea. Immediately, Cetus threshed his body as a pre-arranged signal for the dolphins to disperse and approach the object in a wide, semi-circle.

Cetus approached the object almost head on. Then, with beautiful timing, swerved to the side, turned and matched speeds with the object. He was very close now and got a clear view of the creature.

There was no longer any doubt in his mind ; this was Submarine !

The creature was weirder than he had ever expected. Its shape, certainly, was familiar, almost dolphin-like in appearance, but try as he might, Cetus couldn't make out either a head or tail. The thing was featureless ! However, the Game had succeeded, which was what mattered most to Cetus.

He was about to flute jubilantly into his magic collar when something stayed him. What subconscious warning he picked up was something Cetus never did discover. But it came to him that he ought to see for himself what manner of creature Submarine was, before informing Man of his discovery.

There was one quick sure-fire way of doing this. A dolphin trick which Man could not have dreamed of. Empathy.

His first probe failed. The response was nil. Only a dead or inanimate object could be so unresponsive. It was as though there were no spark of life in the creature's mind. Yet it was certainly alive. Every one of its movements was intelligently directed, its appearance was fresh and streamlined and alive. Indeed it looked not unlike Cetus himself . . .

The first twinge of supernatural fear tugged at him. The dolphins had their legends of sea-borne phantoms, of undead beings which sailed the deeps, travesties of living creatures.

These old, never-forgotten stories returned to Cetus, trickled past his normally dependable screen of common-sense. The most disconcerting, the most horrifying aspect of the Submarine was its superficial resemblance to a dolphin.

But Cetus remembered Doctor's words. *There will be no danger.*

He probed again. And again.

Still nothing came. The same empty echo. An insensate vacuum, without warmth or pattern. His worst fears were confirmed.

Cetus numbed at the realisation that he was face to face with some nightmare creature invoked by the dark magic of Man. A sinister horror called up from some nameless sea to haunt the dolphin realm.

Cetus had already decided to withdraw from the presence of the thing when the second Submarine loomed up from behind the green sea-curtain. It followed in the wake of the first, as though some kind of bond existed between the two creatures, some infernal quasi-intelligence which had no right to be. He watched in fascination as the two creatures disappeared into the watery distance.

The Game was over.

The dolphins had observed and to a point experienced Cetus' encounter. There was no need to caution them to silence as the twelve dolphins withdrew from the suddenly hostile area, in search of peace. By common consent, there was no attempt to communicate with Man, by now many sea-miles distant, waiting expectantly in his frightening, floating island for the first, successful message. He would wait in vain.

Despite his tiredness, Cetus swam vigorously towards the inviting waters of the south. Behind him, no longer in strict formation, his fellows kept pace. Through each great, dolphin mind, the same thoughts flitted. The shock, the fear, the disappointment. The Game had been a treachery. The dolphins had been exposed to a creature of menace and death. The assurances of Man had been empty, deceptive. This was what Cetus found most bitter.

There had been times, even in the early days, when Cetus had dreaded the magic of Man. In many ways it was a wonderful talent ; while under control. Cetus had sometimes feared that the talent would one day control the man.

By morning, the twelve had reached the warmer currents, and the cold horror of the encounter was beginning to thaw. Although it was still unthinkable that they might re-establish contact with Man, Cetus' anger had given way to sorrow and even pity. The magic collars had been removed ; Doctor had once taught the dolphins how to disengage themselves, in the event of injury. The collar had been symbolic of the last, physical link with Man. Now, it was gone and a partnership had been broken.

There remained however, a slender hope. A hope that one day Man would control his magic, and curb the restlessness of spirit which brought about this tampering with nightmares. Should such a day ever come, Cetus had little doubt that the dolphins would return, ready to forgive and to begin a new attempt to teach their games to Man.

james inglis

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the literary line-up

One of the talking points among the many European science fiction writers and translators at Trieste was Colin Kapp's brilliant novelette " Lambda I " which appeared in the December 1962 issue of this magazine. Apparently Mr. Kapp's theory on resonation is a lot nearer possibility than we imagine. Therefore, one of the first things we did on returning from Italy was to read his first full-length novel (untitled as yet). It turned out to be brilliant and is probably the greatest story since Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* . . . it will be starting as a serial in this magazine in two month's time.

Make-up for next month's issue is somewhat behind schedule owing to holidays but there are stories on hand by John Rackham, B. N. Ball, E. R. James, Bill Spencer and many others, which should ensure an up-to-standard issue, plus, of course, the final tremendous instalment of John Brunner's serial, " To Conquer Chaos."

Story ratings for No. 129 were:

1. Window on the Moon, Part 1 - - - E. C. Tubb
2. Quest - - - - - - - - Lee Harding
3. Compensation - - - - - - James Inglis
4. Dossier - - - - - - - - John Rackham
5. Adaptation - - - - - - - Roy Robinson

out of the barrenland unearthly things *came to destroy and be destroyed, while on its fringe the remnants of a once-great race eked out a frugal existence*

to conquer chaos

by john brunner

part two of three parts

foreword

The barrenland lay on the face of the world like an ulcer, nearly round, more than three hundred miles in circumference, and had been there so long that people thought it had always existed. Away from its edge, the countryside had formerly been nearly as vacant as the barrenland itself, but, with the passage of generations, humanity had crept back until now a dozen settlements big enough to be called villages existed practically on the boundary line in a feudal state of existence. The price of living there was the necessity of contending with things *that wandered out of the barrenland and killed or spread unknown diseases before being killed or dying of unknown causes.*

Into this area comes Grand Duke Paul of Esberg with an army of 2000 *men to investigate the legends of the barrenland. One of his scouts is attacked by a* thing, *which he manages to kill, but his own injuries eventually cause him to die, hastened by a mysterious green mould which apparently feeds on his blood. The Duke sends a picked body of men under the command of Jervis Yanderman, a member of his general staff, to investigate the dead monster and find any local village where his army can obtain supplies and information about the barrenland.*

Skirting the barrenland, Yanderman and his party come in sight of the township of Lagwich, meeting a young soap-maker named Idle Conrad on the outskirts. Conrad is something of an outcast, being a dreamer who sees strange visions, but he leads them towards the town, where Waygan the horn-blower humiliates him publicly and conducts Yanderman to the elders himself. The party are lodged in the town and learn much about living in the vicinity of the barrenland, including seeing the skeleton of a man-like creature which had once stumbled into their domain.

Yanderman sends a messenger back to the Duke to bring up the rest of the army, while Conrad, after several further humiliating scenes, returns to his soap-making outside the town walls—only to find that a thing *has smashed his implements and lies sleeping beneath a nearby hill. Desperate for some recognition he traps and kills the* thing *and runs back to the town to bring witnesses, but during his absence, Yanderman's messengers find the body and carry it off to the Duke. When Conrad returns, the evidence of his victory has disappeared.*

Meanwhile, inside the barrenland itself, a group of people live in the decaying remnants of the Station where the things *are hatched. Their very existence depends upon keeping the* things *at bay, mainly by an electric fence. Nestamay, grand-daughter of the head of the group, is due to go on duty in the watch-room where radar scanners can pick up newly-hatched* things, *when she is stopped by Jasper, the only eligible male in her genetic group, whom she detests. While they argue, the alarm goes and she hastens to the watch-room to direct operations against one of the largest* things *they have encountered.*

nine

Night-long the people of the Station had waited anxiously in the dark and the cold, flashing their handlights occasionally to make sure a lurking shadow was simply that—a shadow.

The dawn washed, shell-pink, over the underside of morning clouds, and they stretched cramped limbs, wiped eyes stinging with sleeplessness and the dust that blew off the apparently infinite barrenness around them, and went to count the cost.

Still not fully recovered from the narrowness of the chance that had prevented anyone else knowing she had been overdue at her post—except Jasper, and he wasn't likely to boast about *that*—Nestamay picked a path for herself through the eternal

twilight of the main Station dome, bearing a big canister of hot broth and a bag half-filled with chunks of dry bread.

She had already called on three or four of the working groups busy assessing the damage. It hadn't taken their reactions, but only the evidence of her own eyes, to tell her the bitter truth. Last night's misadventure had set them back months of painstaking, backbreaking work.

She rounded the side of some large, inexplicable complex of ancient machinery dented in now by a blind charge of the intruding *thing*, and came on another working party in the centre of which her grandfather was standing. She stopped, knowing he would be angry if she tried to interrupt what he was saying for anything as trivial as food and drink.

Resting the heavy canister, still more than a one-arm burden on a convenient support, she stared at the time-worn face of the grizzled old man, heard his harsh words echo away under the deformed curve of the roof.

" Now I've had reports already from Clagny," Grandfather stated. " He went out directly after dawn and lost the *thing's* trail a couple of miles out, among the East Brokes. It might be lairing up there to lick its wounds. If it is, the chances are against it returning to the same side of the Station, but in favour of it coming back sooner or later—the current count for returns runs about six to four runaways. If we're lucky, it may pick up the Eastigo Creek and work its way downstream, in which case we've seen the last of it. Nestamay !"

The girl gave a start. " Y-yes, Grandfather ?" she said in a thin voice.

" How do I know it probably won't follow the creek ?"

Nestamay gulped. Grandfather was forever playing this kind of trick on her—shooting unexpected questions in public and demanding an answer that would shame the hearers. He was obsessively proud of the fact that his family was the only one in living memory to add significantly to the traditional stock of the Station lore. Sometimes Nestamay wondered if it had been as a by-product of that well-founded pride that her father, whom she barely remembered, had been persuaded to undertake his foolhardy journey away from the Station and off into the vast unknown—the journey from which he had never returned.

For a long moment she stood confused. Then a stir of memory came to her aid. Something acrid about a scent which

she had detected drifting into the air of the office late last night, when the thing had been driven away . . .

" The smell !" she said, suddenly positive she was correct. " When the heatbeams seared it, the smell it gave off didn't resemble the smell of a water-seeking creature !"

Grandfather looked surprised for an instant. " Very good," he said. " Anybody else spot that ?" His fierce, bloodshot eyes swept the members of the working party. " No ? Aren't you ashamed of yourselves ? Here's my granddaughter, only a few weeks past adulthood, knows it as well as I do, and you lot with all your combined years of experience have to be told ! She's perfectly right—the stink that comes off when a heat-beam hits a water-seeker is heavier, damper, a little sweetish at the back of the throat. The smell we got last night was acrid, dry, and eye-watering."

He paused. Nestamay, relying on the momentary favour she was enjoying, caught his attention and indicated the refreshments she was bringing; a curt nod gave her permission to distribute them, and she proceeded to do so while he resumed his diatribe.

One or two of the men, dipping their hands in the bag of bread, looked dismayed as they felt its hard stale texture, and shot accusing glances at Nestamay as though to blame her for its condition. A little resentfully, she glared at them.

" Any idea how much power we used last night ? There wasn't anything left for the ovens this morning !"

That didn't make them any more pleased, of course. Glancing skyward through the rents in the Station dome, they could see the cloudy sky which meant the recharging of the power storage cells would proceed extremely slowly today. Everything at the Station was so interlocked, Nestamay reflected; when a dangerous *thing* hatched, power had to be set aside for heatbeams or activating electrofences, which meant food became short, or had to be eaten cold rather than hot, clothing due for recycling had to wait no matter how dirty and torn it had become, and at night the people had to huddle together against the chill . . .

She served the last of the working party with his cup of broth and hunk of bread and prepared to move on. Once again Grandfather interrupted her.

" Nestamay, don't forget I'll want to see you this morning. You're due for a test on last week's instruction !"

Nestamay nodded. She'd hoped Grandfather might be too preoccupied with the emergency to remember, for she was very tired now. Nevertheless, it was no use railing against events. This was the course her world had taken and she knew of no way to change things for the better.

That was her last call on this side of the Station. From here to the other side, she would have to go circuitously. Only cautious, fully-instructed working parties dared venture into the central area under the monster dome, because it was there that the—the trouble, the problem, the danger, whatever one chose to call it—the central mystery, perhaps, was located.

On her way past, Nestamay checked and stared at the enigmatic bulk of the inaccessible zone. It was changed and yet unchanged. It had been part of her life since she was born and still it retained its aura of alienness.

Twisted now and sagging, the arch of the dome spanned a good three miles of ground. Huge gashes, five or six times a man's height, gave limited access to its interior. In the north was the least inhospitable section—some thousands of square yards were safe even for children, and it was there that the machinery on which the precarious life of the people depended was situated. There was food—ovens for bread, cauldrons for broth, vast hydroponic trays yielding fruit and vegetables from which spores of alien plants had to be scrupulously excluded. The north, too, was the side from which it was relatively safe to pillage scrap to build or repair the miserable one-room shacks which served as their homes. Every now and again a working party managed to push back the limits of the safe area, either permanently—which was rare—or long enough at any rate to salvage some useful odds and ends.

Just what was hidden in the rank heart of the dome, no one could do more than guess.

Over the rusting structure creepers swarmed, bearing black sticky fruits that, if left to themselves, burst after a few months and sowed spores over everything—clinging spores, able to use anything organic as food. Nestamay had heard from Grandfather about unwary people who were struck by the spores in the old days, and who could not even be buried but had to be cremated with heatbeams lest another plant spring from the grave.

Pullulating fungi, a sickly orange in colour, grew on the branches of the creeper. Flowers, some of them of incredible beauty—and incredibly deadly, because the scent they gave off dulled the senses and laid one open to attack by swinging plant-tentacles—shone out here and there. Great toothed pseudo-leaves sprawled over the ground below, ready to close like a shroud on any trespasser . . .

Nestamay's heart turned over, for at this very moment one of those pseudo-leaves opened in sight of her, with a grunting scratching sound, exposing to view a disgustingly slimy object which at first she thought might be human remains.

A second look reassured her. It was only a thing which the plant had found indigestible after much trying. Now it was a shapeless jellied mass which the pseudo-leaf was attempting to displace over its edge, by humping up and forcing it to roll. The spectacle nauseated her. She went quickly on her way.

Every so often, the idea came from a hothead like Jasper that what was needed was to march straight into the central area under the dome, heatbeams blazing, and clear out the entire fetid jungle. Every time, Grandfather or someone else vetoed the idea instantly.

In some incomprehensible way, their existence depended on leaving that central area alone—driving back the vegetation, killing any *things* that emerged from it, but otherwise enduring its hateful presence. Something was inside there, behind the sporulating fruits, the fungi and the pseudo-leaves, from which they derived their food, clothing, warmth and other basic necessities. Nestamay had pestered Grandfather over and over when she was a child with questions about this strange hidden master of their fate, and the answers had been confusing.

It wasn't a person, but it could think. It wasn't a machine, but it was out of order. It was practically everlasting, but a single touch from a heatbeam might destroy it. It provided their food, but it also hatched out *things* to plague them in the night. To Nestamay as a little girl it had seemed rather like Grandfather on a vaster scale—capricious, often bad-tempered for no discernible reason, but a kind of rock in the turmoil of their lives, to which one must turn for support because there was nothing else available.

Now she was nominally an adult, she recognised that Grandfather must one day die, and when that happened it would be up to her and others of her age-group to apply the knowledge

Grandfather had passed on from his father and his father's father. And that knowledge was designed to overcome the arbitrary power of the not-a-person thinking there in the stinking green swelter under the dome.

There was no stability in this life, except the bareness of the desert ringing the Station. That didn't change. It was disturbed occasionally, by footprints. But the wind wiped them in the night and the next day the desert was the same as before.

For that reason, when Nestamay turned from contemplating the hideous tangle of the miniature jungle beneath the dome, she looked long at the unalterable desert—just as inhospitable, but not actively hostile. It was *there*, and it was a *fact*, and it *was*.

Oddly comforted, she hurried to complete her rounds with the canister of broth and the bag of bread.

It was at the next call but one that she found Jasper, cursing and sweating over the removal of a large pile of scrap metal which the terrified *thing* had overset last night as it howled away from the torture of the electrofence. Tightening her lips, Nestamay left him till last of the party to receive his rations. He noticed the fact; he was meant to.

" Not looking very cheerful this morning, Nestamay !" he taunted. " Grandfather been scolding you—hey ?"

" No," Nestamay contradicted with a toss of her head. "As a matter of fact, he's been praising me for a change. No thanks to you, you—!"

" Ho-o-o-o !" Jasper raised his eyebrows. " I suppose it's my fault now, is it ? *I'm* responsible for hatching out things, and I do it during your watch to make trouble for you !"

" You do your best to make trouble for me, and you can't deny it !" Nestamay retorted. " Suppose I'd been taken in by your wheedling last night, and skipped my watch—what would have happened then ?"

Jasper laughed. It wasn't a friendly sound. He said, " You were the one supposed to be on watch, my dear—not me. I didn't know. After all, you didn't tell me that was where you were going !"

The barefaced audacity of the lie shocked Nestamay into paleness. Stamping her foot, she snapped, " Jasper, you make me sick to my guts !"

" Too bad," Jasper said with a shrug, turning away. " A time will come when I make you literally sick for a much better reason—because my kid's kicking you in the belly. And you don't have much choice in the matter, do you ? Not even if you go weeping to your precious grandfather. He doesn't think tears are constructive."

Unconstructive tears blurred Nestamay's sight as she moved away. For, like it or not, what Jasper said was undeniable.

ten

Yanderman ducked under the door flap of the Duke's tent and saluted. The Duke leaned back so that his chair—as always—creaked with his weight, and smiled in the depths of his enormous beard.

" Well, Yan ? What do you think of our progress so far ?"

Yanderman ignored the question. He said curtly, " Ampier died in the night—did you know ?"

" Of course. I was informed, directly it happened ; I'd given instructions."

" Have you seen the body ?"

" No."

Yanderman shuddered. " I saw it. They were carrying it out for burning as I came by. He looked as though he'd simply rotted to death. He was completely covered in that filthy green mould."

Duke Paul nodded. " So they told me. Obviously the beak of the thing he killed was infected and poisoned his wound. The medics said they could find nothing that would stop the mould growing without killing the sufferer, so I ordered the burning of everything Ampier had touched—his bandages, the blanket he was wrapped in, his clothes, even the tent where he lay dying. And told all his attendants to burn their clothes and scrub themselves from head to foot with good strong soap. Does that answer what you were going to say ?"

Yanderman took a chair. " I guess so," he agreed, feeling conscious relief that the Duke had been so thorough. " But I'm afraid the death is having a bad effect on the men."

" We mustn't let it," the Duke countered briskly. " We must keep them busy."

" They're busy already," Yanderman pointed out. " With reconnaissance parties surveying the boundary of the barren-

land, the fact-finding teams compiling data on the things that have been killed over the years by the people of Lagwich and arms practice—in fact, I ought to be out drilling my company right now, but I told Stadham to look after it."

" Why ?"

" So I could come and warn you about the way the men are being affected by Ampier's death," Yanderman explained with forced patience.

" Go on."

" It's probably contact with the townsfolk that's doing it," Yanderman said. " That, and the latrine rumours that were on their rounds even before we got here. Granny Jassy is doing a roaring trade in charms, too, despite all I can do to make the purchasers look foolish."

" I don't see much help for that." The Duke frowned. "But contact with the townsfolk could be cut off if necessary. What strikes you as so bad about it ?"

" They have small minds in Lagwich. They feel it necessary to brag about themselves to counter the natural boasting of our men about Esberg. So they magnify the danger of the *things* from the barrenland beyond all measure. *You've* heard them—you've talked to Malling and Rost and their other ' wise men '." Yanderman put a fine ring of sarcasm into the last words. " But you can't cut off contact now, I'm afraid. It would be very bad for the men who've been too occupied so far to take time off and go into the town. The townsfolk seem to be treating our arrival as something like the visit of a marrying expedition and they're showing our men the best time they can and positively urging them to court the local girls."

Duke Paul grunted. " Yes, I'd realised that," he said. " I've been hoping that something pretty savage and large might come out of the barrenland so we could deal with it—it was a good idea of your lieutenant's to bring that carcass into camp and peg it up for the men to look at. But there's a psychological difference between just seeing a carcass, which could have been killed by an accident and actually vanquishing a dangerous monster."

" Especially since Ampier died of the encounter he had with a *thing*," Yanderman agreed.

" Ye-es." The Duke ran his fingers through his beard. A fat, buzzing fly which had somehow got in through the door-flap soared lazily past him. He swiped at it, but missed. " By the way, how *was* that *thing* killed—the one Stadham found ?"

" I don't know," Yanderman shrugged. " One of the townsfolk must have tackled it, I guess. I didn't think to inquire. I suppose I could ask round if you think it's important."

" Not really." Duke Paul stared at the swinging canvas of the tent wall. " It just put me in mind of a possible way of—ah—arranging for a suitably savage beast to be killed in plain sight of some of the men. What would you say the chances are of going secretly to some of the more venturesome people in Lagwich and persuading them to guide a few picked men into the barrenland to find a *thing* and drive it towards the camp to be killed ?"

" Absolutely nil," Yanderman stated emphatically. " The townsfolk do not—repeat *not*—set foot on the barrenland. Most of them, for all their high-flown talk about their bravery, stay as well clear of it as possible. Which in turn puts me in mind of what else I was going to mention to you.

" Now that the townsfolk have made up their minds what the purpose of the expedition is, the men are getting the news from the worst possible source."

The Duke blinked. He placed his hands on the arms of his chair as though about to jerk to his feet. He snapped, " What do you mean by that, Yan ?"

Yanderman stared levelly at his chief. " Well . . . at first they were suspicious over in Lagwich, thinking we must be on a mission of conquest, for all our peaceful asseverations. They've recovered from that idea by this time. Now they're beginning to suspect the truth and naturally they're passing it on to the soldiery."

" What do you think the truth is, Yan ?" The Duke spoke low.

" That you mean to march into and probable across, the barrenland—and to hell with its population of devils and monsters."

" And they're telling the men this ?"

Yanderman confirmed with a nod, feeling a momentary relief. From the Duke's tone it seemed he was astonished, and that—he hoped—implied the story wasn't true after all.

But the Duke stood up and started to walk back and forth on the woven-reed mats forming the floor. After a brief silence he said, " And what do you think of the plan, yourself ?"

" I ?" Yanderman tautened. " I think it's grandiose and—and ridiculous."

" Why ?" The Duke rounded on him. " The barrenland is a living sore on the face of the country, isn't it ? It's been here far too long. Something should be done about it—and the first thing is to find out its true nature. Till the old fool Rost showed me his ' devil ' I'd had nothing more in mind than the scouting of its confines and the gathering of folksay about it. But if there are people living within the barrenland, Yan, isn't it about time someone went to the poor bastards' rescue ?"

" Living within the—? Oh, I see what you mean. Hmmm!" Yanderman rubbed his chin and cogitated for a while. At last, however, he shook his head. " It's a conceivable explanation, but I'm not sold on it. I'm more inclined to think, despite what the local people say, that Rost's ' devil ' wandered into the barrenland from outside and then stumbled back again. And . . . and what do you think your chances are of getting the men to march with you, anyway ?"

" Excellent." The Duke answered. crisply " I didn't pick the riffraff of Esberg to make this trip, but the best and bravest men I could find. I chose you also, Yan—remember that."

" That's precisely my point," Yanderman said. " Forgive me for being blunt. If you'd been heading for a battlefield, you wouldn't have picked me for anything more demanding than supervising commissariat—correct ? But this isn't a straight-forward military operation. It's unique, unprecedented, and calculated to play hob with everyday ideas. My honest belief is that on the order to march half the men will immediately mutiny and lay down their arms and the other half will use their comrades' desertion as an excuse for refusing to go. Now they've heard the fables rife in Lagwich."

Duke Paul was quite motionless, his gaze riveted on Yanderman. Now at last he spoke, his voice as soft and steady as before.

" Do you trust my judgment, Yan ? If you don't, why did you consent to come along in the first place ?"

A bead of sweat trickled unpleasantly down Yanderman's nose. He answered, " I'll grant this—that if anyone walks the world who could lead this army into hell, its yourself. I just don't want to see you discount the men's present mood."

" You've left me no room to do that," Duke Paul grunted. " I'll make sure they get accustomed to the idea—somehow."

" Ah—it might help if they were given some hints as to the practicability of the project," Yanderman suggested, feeling a

sort of helplessness as though he had been hanging by his fingertips over a precipice and hadn't noticed till now that exhaustion had finally loosed his grip. " How are you going to take two thousand men across land without food, fuel or water ?"

The lazy, irritating drone of the fly started again and it buzzed up from the place where it had landed on the Duke's night-couch. Again the Duke swiped at it and missed. He said, " The barrenland is three hundred miles around. So its diameter isn't much over a hundred. If there's anything there, it's at the centre, one may presume. We'll carry maximum loads a day's march from the edge, transfer the unconsumed portion to those who are going on and send back part of the column. We'll continue like this and come to the middle with a party of a few score, hand-picked, who can make it back to the outside world without further support on minimum rations and forced marches."

" A few score ? To cope with whatever hell's brood we may find ?"

" I'm *convinced* that men are still living in the barrenland !" the Duke snapped. " Think it out, Yan ! We've learned from clues dropped by Granny Hassy that part at least of the barrenland was created deliberately, to serve as a quarantine area around some source of danger in the middle—correct ?"

Yanderman shrugged and nodded.

" In that case, we don't have to think of the barrenland as a natural desert with no resources at all. We've established that there are streams flowing out from it, which are drinkable when they emerge, so we'll manage for water—our worst single problem. Fuel—well, this isn't a long march, is it ? A slow one, certainly, but it's summer ! And consider this, too." He leaned on the corner of his big table.

" We know beyond doubt that the *things* from the barrenland are coming in smaller numbers than they used to. I'm sure this isn't accidental. If they were spawning and breeding in the barrenland, you'd expect them to multiply ! No, I suspect that there are people living in the middle of the barrenland : a party of volunteers—or their decendants, by now—charged with preventing the *things*' access." Again he swiped at the annoying fly, missing it the third time. " And the diminishing plague of *things* here at Lagwich is a measure of their relative success."

His eyes blazed at Yanderman, who moved uncomfortably on his chair. Foolish or not, it was a grand design to re-establish contact with such heroes. And hearing Duke Paul speak of it was enough, surely, to convert the most cautious audience. Maybe it could be done. It would certainly be magnificently audacious to try it . . .

The Duke's hand flashed through the air and closed this time around the fly, squashing it. He glanced down at his palm before wiping off the messy remains and in that pose he stiffened. Yanderman looked at his handsome profile, and likewise froze.

After a moment, he said, " Sir . . ." His voice sounded peculiarly cracked and squeaky.

" Yes ?" The Duke didn't look up.

" Sir, there's a patch of green among your hair !" Yanderman leapt to his feet and came close. " It looks like the mould which was on Ampier !"

The Duke nodded and held out his hand with the fly on it. Yanderman tore his eyes away from the deadly fuzz he had seen on his chief's head and examined the insect. On its hairy legs, quite distinctly visible, was more of the same green mould.

Two and two came together in Yanderman's mind. The fly had circled the Duke's night-couch—on which Ampier had been laid ! He strode over to it and whipped aside the cushions.

There, perhaps where a drop of Ampier's blood had fallen : there, where at night the Duke's head rested, was a smear of the alien greenness, concealed to the casual glance by seeming to form part of the pattern on a multi-coloured blanket, but now blazing out at Yanderman so fiercely he felt its shape imprinted on his very brain, like a branding-iron.

" Bring me a medic," the Duke said after a small eternity. " And—Yan ! Tell nobody else ! Do you understand ? Tell nobody else !"

eleven

" Of course I believe you, even if no one else does !" Idris insisted. But a little imp of doubt rode snickering on the words and Conrad's heart sank.

" No, you don't," he said. " You think this is just another of my stories. I've told you so many tales you think I can't keep my life and my dreams apart any longer."

In her eyes he could read that his guess was correct, but he had no chance to hear her confirm or deny it, for at that moment the kitchen door of the house, which she had been holding ajar while speaking to him, was snatched fully open.

"Idris!" Her mother's bony-knuckled hand fell on the girl's shoulder and pulled her back. "If I'd known you were talking to Conrad I wouldn't have let you come to the door!"

Past the woman's acid face Conrad saw the interior of the kitchen. There was a man standing there, legs astraddle on the tiled floor—tall, brawny, finely dressed, watching the scene with some curiosity.

"Now you listen to me, Idle Conrad!" the mother shrilled. "Idris doesn't want you plaguing her any more, understand? And I don't want you around here either—my daughter's meant for someone better than a no-good stewer of soap! If I catch you at this door again except to fetch the ashes, I'll lay about you with a broomstick, is that clear?"

Yes. It was all too clear to Conrad. It was clear to anyone in Lagwich who had a girl with an ambitious mother and who was not already formally betrothed. That man standing behind Idris there, with a sneer on his face, now lifting a hand to twist his fine black mustachios—that was a prize in the sight of Idris's mother. All the mothers of the town seemed to regard the arrival of the army as a glorified marrying expedition and there was already an unspoken competition to be the first to have a daughter pledged to one of the Duke's soldiery.

Conrad looked at Idris. Idris looked at the Esberg soldier, at her mother, then back at Conrad and could not meet his eyes. She lowered her gaze to the floor and her cheeks grew red.

Wordlessly, Conrad turned away, and the door was slammed behind him.

The whole universe *must* be conspiring against him—either that, or he was going out of his mind. He *had* killed the thing from the barrenland . . . hadn't he? Yet when he came back there was no carcass to bear him witness—only the broken vat, and the pile of ash, tossed now and scattered by the wind. They had wanted to beat him for tricking them; as it turned out, they were content to laugh and drove him away to hide himself and yield to unstoppable weeping.

Was his life ever going to be worth living again?

He walked moodily down the streets, kicking at pebbles, dodging out of sight whenever he heard young people approaching. He saw several groups of soldiers on their way to visit with families for the day, proud, overweening, mocking this little town simply by the way they walked.

Arrogant bastards, Conrad thought bitterly. All of them, from their Duke down to the lowliest chowhand, acted as though being born in Esberg made them the next thing to gods.

Maybe it would be better to go to the barrenland—his father had wished him there often enough . . .

Go to the barrenland ?

He stopped in mid-stride. As though the lightning of an idea had welded shut a circuit in his mind, he found himself remembering clues picked up from gossip of the past few days.

Go to the barrenland ! Of course ! If he was ever going to shake the dust of Lagwich from his shoes, he might best do it now, while the opportunity offered. The chance might never come again.

Next morning he rose very quietly so as not to disturb his father—who as usual had come home late, full of beer, and who now snored as though he might never wake. He had gone last evening to the stream and cleansed himself as thoroughly as for a harvest-day. Now he sorted out from the bag which held his entire clothing the least tattered and most presentable garments he owned ; some of them dated back to his early teens and were ridiculously tight on his full-grown body, but they would have to serve.

Then he collected from its hiding-place a sack of the fine white soap which he had put away in accordance with his plan to sell soap at the army camp. The plan had come to nothing, of course. The loss of two of his vats alone meant that he had no surplus to spare from the town's requirements ; moreover, since the disastrous episode of the disappearing carcass there had been some houses where he could not face calling for ash or grease—the occupants were too ready to lash him with taunts.

But this little batch of good soap wasn't for sale. It was just evidence of his ability as a soap-maker. He wasn't sure how to use it—maybe it would be best to march smartly up to the camp and say he wanted to give it to the Duke . . .

He postponed a decision. He would have to play it by ear.

When he sneaked out of the house, he sensed even through the veil of excitement and tension his decision generated that the mood of the town had changed overnight. He didn't care any longer what became of Lagwich and its people. But—no doubt of it : something serious was wrong.

Puzzled, he made his way through the streets, more boldly as he discovered that the people up and about so far had their minds on something other than jeering at him. He cast his memory back, hunting a reason. There had been some commotion during the night, he recalled vaguely—shouting in the streets and the tramping of feet—but he'd stirred, half-waking and assumed it was merely the military police taking a drunk in charge, the sort of thing he'd heard a dozen times in the past few days.

The biggest shock and the measure of how wrong he'd been about last night's uproar, came when Waygan forgot to gibe at him as he passed the gate, but called to know if he was going to the army camp.

Conrad almost spat out the defiant answer that rose to his lips : " Yes—to join them and let Lagwich go to hell !" But he checked himself in time ; it would be too easy for Waygan to remember to be rude as usual and ask what made him think the Duke would want a layabout like him.

He confined himself to a cautious nod and a heft of his sack. Then a point which he had so far overlooked struck him, and he blurted out a question.

" There are no soldiers in town this morning, are there ?"

Frowning, staring towards where wisps of smoke indicated the camp-site, Waygan confirmed the suggestion. "Something's gone amiss, and I'd dearly like to know what it is. First they come clamouring in the middle of the night and call all their men back to camp—now this morning they turn away with insults everyone who goes to peddle goods . . . I'm beginning to think they weren't so friendly disposed after all."

He waved Conrad out of the gate. Heart thumping, the youth complied. So they were turning trade away today ! It wasn't possible that he'd delayed too long—was it ? He wouldn't be able to stand it if, after finally summoning the courage to make a break with Lagwich, it turned out his chance was gone !

It cost him all his self-control to keep from hurrying until he was out of Waygan's sight. Then he burst into a frantic run.

The camp was an impressive change for so short a time to have wrought in the local landscape. Palisaded all around, with a ditch and a rampart, with gates knocked together from lengths of wood carried by the soldiers and tents set up orderly by streets inside, it was three times the size of Lagwich. Conrad rested his sack and stared, his mouth going dry. How in the world was he to find the—the gall to march in and demand to be recruited ?

" Hey, you !" A sharp voice rang out behind him. Conrad spun to find two outpost guards with levelled guns coming towards him.

" What are you doing here, boy ?" snapped the taller.

Conrad swallowed hard and tried to make his garb of miscellaneous castoffs look dignified. He said, " I'm the best soap-maker in Lagwich. I'm tired of the place and I want to join the Duke's army."

" He wants to join it—hear that ?" Guffawing, the shorter guard elbowed his companion in the ribs. " Makes a change, doesn't it ? Well, he can have my place any time he asks !"

" Shut up !" the tall one snapped. Addressing Conrad again and emphasising his words with waves of his gun-muzzle, he said, " Listen, boy—you picked a bad day. You take that sack right back to the town and be grateful you're near home."

Finding a moment's worth of boldness deep inside him, Conrad stood his ground. He said, " What's wrong ? Has something bad happened at the camp ?"

The guards exchanged glances. After a pause, the shorter one said, " No business of yours, boy. And you're lucky, like my friend told you. Now get on your way."

Still Conrad hesitated. The tall guard lost patience and barked at him. " Move, or you'll never move again !"

So something was very wrong indeed. Slowly Conrad raised his sack to his shoulder, sick with disappointment. He moved away as the guards directed, but not back towards Lagwich—vaguely in the direction of his soap-vats. He wouldn't be able to face returning to the town till he'd digested the bitter pill of this setback.

Suddenly there was a shrill and distant blast on a horn, and he tensed, taking it for Waygan's danger signal. But the sound hadn't come from Lagwich—there was a man dimly visible at the nearest gate of the camp, blowing on a shiny metal bugle. The noise made Conrad's scalp prickle.

It was only the sudden crackle of gunfire that brought him back to the present. With a start, he swung to look at the camp again. The orderly ranked banners had vanished. From near where they had been a thick column of greasy black smoke was swelling into the air. Shrieks mingled with the shots. The sun glinted on bright metal as on broken water. Gasping, Conrad jumped to his feet.

And the nearest gate of the camp flung open to release a flood of shouting men on the countryside—a mob, less organised than ants whose nest has been disturbed, heedless of their officers, their arms, anything.

Was this the stuff of which Duke Paul's army was made? Conrad stared in horror while in the wake of the fleeing men flames leapt up randomly to consume the neat rows of tents.

twelve

Up to the very last moment Yanderman thought—hoped—wished fervently that the Duke was going to be able to carry his men with him. Even in the dreadful few minutes that followed realisation of failure, he found himself thinking : *it might have come off, but for this damned green plague* !

" Tell nobody else !" It was easy to say, and impossible to achieve. Within twenty-four hours it had been whispered through the camp : *Duke Paul is sick of the mould which killed Ampier* !

The medics did their best—shaving the infected area, burning the infected blanket, setting the men to kill flies with swats and sprays—and for a while Yanderman had expected a false alarm. After all, as Duke Paul himself argued, Ampier had been a sick man, badly wounded, weakened by long and free bleeding. A bull of a man like himself would toss off the infection easily.

Not true.

Shaving and antiseptics, first to be tried, failed first. Up till then the Duke had easily been able to disguise his condition—his hair and beard were so dense and matted he could simply comb over the shaven area to hide it. Then the fresh outbreaks rendered that impossible ; there had to be bandages, and the staff officers had to know the minimum fact that the Duke was being attended by the medics.

All the strong liquids, all the curative powders, all the ointments, were tried in turn. They slowed the mould. For a night Yanderman would sleep peacefully, thinking the trouble was over because all day the Duke's head had been free of the creeping evil.

But in the morning, a dozen more patches of the stuff.

They tried, at last, the desperate expedient of cauterisation, burning away the skin with hot irons while the Duke sat in his great chair, impassive except that his knuckles showed very white on his clenched fists. It was while the cauterisation was actually proceeding that they discovered the mould on the whites of his eyes . . .

Even then Duke Paul would not admit defeat. He still addressed his officers as though his plans were to go ahead ; he still disputed with the heartsick Yanderman about the likelihood of people surviving within the barrenland.

Meantime, the news spread as the green mould spread—unstoppable, every advance reflecting a weakening of the infected body. In this case it was the entire army. Granny Jassy was plagued with requests for charms against sickness. Under their breaths at first, then openly, men voiced the opinion that this disease had been visited on the Duke because he planned to invade the barrenland.

If, at that point, the Duke had been able to go out and speak to his men as he would speak before a battle, fill them with the excitement and crazy courage he alone could inspire, the situation could have been saved. But he could not. He was in his tent, alone but for attendent medics and the ever-present secretary Kesford, his shaven, burned head turning into a nauseating mass of green mould.

It was just after midnight when a white-faced soldier called the sleepless Yanderman from bed to see the Duke at once.

As he ducked under the door-flap he could not repress a gasp of dismay. The disease had progressed with unbelievable rapidity in the last few hours.

The Duke caught the sound and gave a rasping wheeze which might have been meant for a chuckle. " I guess I look pretty repulsive by now, Yan !" he whispered. " That's the only consolation—I can't see myself in a mirror."

Indeed, from under his brows to his cheekbones the orbits of his eyes were now unrelieved masses of the green mould.

" Sir, I—I can't undertake to lead them into the barrenland!"

" You must ! You *shall* !"

Yanderman took an involuntary pace backward. Glancing about him helplessly, he caught the eye of the medic in his green gown standing at the head of the couch. *You must.* That was the message in the man's eyes. *You'll kill him if you don't* !

Yanderman hesitated, torn between personal loyalty and his deep-rooted unwillingness to make promises he knew he could not keep. The hesitation was too long.

While he was still forming the lie, the Duke screamed. He fell back on the couch, choking and gasping for air. The words he forced out were barely comprehensible.

" Take him—traitor—Yanderman—lied to me—burn him—nail him at the city gate—curse his name and his family name—burn his house—find me a man of honour—am I the Duke or am I a mud-grubbing peasant—traitor—weakling—!"

The tirade lost itself in a bubbling sound so loathsome it was barely conceivable a human throat could utter it. Yanderman's heart lurched. Frozen, he watched as the medic picked up from a table beside him a long, thin, razor-sharp knife.

" I witness—" That was Kesford, clutching his note-board as though it were a plank supporting him in time of shipwreck. " I witness this to be your duty, and affirm the Duke's command. Sir !"—to Yanderman, turning. " Say the same !"

" I—witness this to be your duty and affirm the Duke's command !" Yanderman gulped and added to the medic, " Is there no hope now ?"

" I saw Ampier die," the medic answered and plunged the knife home.

Mechanically Yanderman attended to the formalities ; Kesford had them stored away in his capacious memory. Send to the town to recall the liberty-men ; detail an honour guard for the tent, to stand with arms reversed till the funeral ; detail a pyre-party to assemble fuel on a scale fit for a princely corpse; post general orders for funeral drill at dawn, a funeral as soon thereafter as possible because of the risk of keeping the body unburned ; carpenters to make a coffin, tailors to make a shroud—which would have to be draped over the remains, not put around them, for the medics forebade it . . .

An officers' parade to pay posthumous respects, during which certain incongruous whispers were uttered regarding relief at

the end of the Duke's mad plan, resentment at his allotting command to Yanderman instead of a regular officer . . .

A session with Granny Jassy to try and stop her filling the men's minds with nonsense about this being a supernatural vengeance upon the Duke, ending with the threat of scourging despite her sex and age which sent her away tight-lipped and white with fury . . .

And all the time frantic casting about for a way to avoid the ultimate showdown and the risk of mutiny.

The chance never came.

Or rather Yanderman was unable to make it come.

The rush of the night's events had left him no time to spare for the process of adjusting emotionally to Duke Paul's death. That adjustment came in one blinding second, leaving him at the mercy of his own fury and condemning him to provoke the very mutiny he was desperate to avoid.

He was inspecting the funeral guard— the entire army of course, drawn up in open ranks by companies with arms reversed—when between two of the men he happened to glance at the rank behind and there saw a soldier : grinning.

The sight was like a trigger to his thermit-hot rage. He stormed between the files and halted in front of the grinning soldier as he tried to compose his face.

" What's funny soldier ?" he said softly.

The man looked woodenly ahead of him.

" Pleased that your Duke is dead, is that it ? Pleased because you think now he's not here to lead us any longer your lilywhite liver will be spared the risk of venturing into the barrenland ?"

All around him there were hisses of indrawn breath. Trying to watch without moving their heads, nearby men eavesdropped.

" Well, you're wrong !" Yanderman blazed. He spun to the sergeants accompanying him. " Two of you arrest this man ! Hold him till after the funeral. We won't dismiss on pyre-lighting—" Deliberately he raised his voice to let the whole army hear. " We'll continue ! A dishonourable dismissal in full form ! And a discharge to the barrenland for this coward who welcomes Duke Paul's death as saving him from it !"

The reaction went through the parade like wind through grass.

After that, there was no backing down.

The pyre was lit at last, pouring greasy-black smoke high into the clear blue sky. With its crackling as a background to his words, Yanderman licked his lips and uttered the first command of the dismissal drill.

Here and there among the soldiers, a man did move. Checked. Looked at his immobile comrades. Went back to his place and stood, like the rest, rock-still.

He repeated the command.

"We're not sending anyone to the barrenland !" a voice called from a distant corner of the parade, and instantly was echoed by a stormy chorus. "Right ! No ! We'll not send a man to the barrenland—it's fit only for devils, not for men !"

Head swimming, Yanderman looked at his fellow officers. Not one of them was making any move to counter this insubordination. On most of their faces, indeed, was a look which implied, "Serve him right—he wasn't fit to inherit the Duke's authority !"

Only Stadham moved towards him, speaking almost without moving his lips.

"There's no hope for it now, sir. I've seen this sort of thing before. We'll be lucky to escape with our lives !"

"Esberg !" shrieked the man at the back of the parade who had first voiced the refusal. "Back to Esberg ! If they won't lead us home, we'll go on our own !"

"Right ! Yes !" Again the storm of agreement and now the men began to break ranks, their noncoms unable to decide what to do.

"But if we go "—a piercing voice carrying above the tumult —"we might carry the green plague with us ! Do you want to carry that back to your families ?"

"Burn the camp, then !" came the mad howl in answer, and all at once the army was a mob. Some of them hurled their arms down and snatched brands from the Duke's pyre to wield like torches as they led the rush ; others paused long enough to hurl final insults at their officers—Yanderman was prepared for any instant to be picked up and thrown into the flames with his master—and then they were headed for the camp gates, screaming and starting fires as they went.

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thirteen

After his first moment of shock, Conrad had dived for concealment in a small hollow between two clumps of shrubs. For what felt like a century and might in reality have been some hours, he lay there on his belly trying to follow the progress of events from the sounds that reached him and very occasionally, when things quietened down, daring to raise his head and peer out.

Directly they emerged from the camp, the soldiers seemed to split into two main factions and there was a great deal of shouted argument. Conrad caught snatches of phrases—something about the green plague and going the same way as the Duke—and was transfixed by the realisation of what had presumably happened : the Duke, whose leadership had been praised by the soldiers who came to Lagwich, must be sick or dead.

Some of the soldiers, however, headed back into the camp almost at once. Shots followed and sometimes screams as well; then from behind the now dense veil of smoke they began to re-emerge singly and by groups, laughing and staggering under loads of loot—gaudy clothing, fine swords, jars and kegs of liquor and bags so heavy they must contain precious metal or coins.

Before that, however, the larger portion of the army—consisting of those men more afraid of the green plague than eager for easy pickings—had formed up in rough order under ad-hoc leadership and set off shouting and chanting in the direction of Lagwich. Watching them, Conrad knew that it was his strict duty to sneak back to the town's land somehow and warn the people. But when he desperately cast about for a possible route, he could see no cover—and if he showed himself, it was much too likely he would be shot down on principle.

He was almost overwhelmed by relief when he realised, some minutes later, that others beside himself had decided to keep an eye on the army camp. The familiar blast of Waygan's horn sounded an alarm and the disappearing tail of the rabble-army broke from its formation and ran out of sight in a way which suggested anger—anger at not falling on an unsuspecting prey, was Conrad's guess.

Then more shooting drew his attention back to the camp and he peered between the leaves of the sheltering shrubs and tried to figure out what—apart from looting—was happening there.

A group of three soldiers, burdened with their prizes, was heading straight for him.

His heart paused for a long second. Then he concentrated on making himself as nearly invisible as he could.

" Bunch of fools !" one of them said in a rough bass voice. " Taking cloth and clothing when everyone knows it was a blanket harboured the green plague in the Duke's tent !"

" But only where a spot of blood had fallen," corrected a second voice, rather wheezy as though the man was trying not to pant hard.

" That's not why I kept my hands off such stuff," the third said—a fruity baritone with a slight chuckle. " Too bulky ! Why drag cloth around when there's good coin ?" Something jingled and the man laughed.

" Coin weighs, though," the bass voice grumbled. " Ah, to the barrenland with this sword ! What do I need a sword for ? Here's enough money to buy me a horse and pay my food and lodging back to Esberg !"

A thump announced the discarding of the sword.

" Are you sure that's wise ?" the wheezy voice inquired. " Where, for one thing, are you going to buy a horse ? Not in Lagwich ! By this time the plague-scared fools'll have shut the town up oyster-tight—and do you fancy sitting here till they starve open the gates ?"

Bass-voice snorted. " Let 'em play siege-engineer all they like. They'll not have patience to succeed. After a few nights this close to the barrenland, when they think of their snug tents burned behind them, they'll leak away and have to beg or fight back to Esberg. Whereas we, my friends, will be home and dry, with a little over for a celebration." A heavy slap, as on a leather bag stretched tight by the weight of its contents. "Move along ! We're ahead of the game, but we have to stay ahead."

Their irregular footsteps, accompanied by the jingling of their stolen coin, faded.

Mouth dry, Conrad finally ventured to lift his head again. The very first thing that met his eyes was the discarded sword, the sun glinting on its hilt.

Out—and back. Clutching the weapon as though to draw supernatural comfort from it, Conrad gazed anxiously around to make sure no one had noticed his brief emergence. But the only people in sight were the backwash of the looters coming

from the smoke-grimed ruins of the camp. In knots of half a dozen they made their unsteady way towards Lagwich and their less greedy comrades.

A bitter taste rose in Conrad's mouth. So this was the true nature of the men whose ranks he had hoped to join, thinking their life better than his own in Lagwich ! Where was their pride ? What had happened to their smart organisation ? What in truth must Esberg be like, if its soldiers could turn in a few short hours into ignoble banditry ?

For a long moment he turned his eyes downward to the bright blade of the sword, thinking : *it's keen—it would drive home cleanly to my heart. And then . . . blessed peace.*

He choked off the thought. No : that seemed a cowardly solution. And it would leave far too many personal debts unpaid.

The last of the loot-laden soldiers passed out of sight in the direction of the town. A new idea struck him. It wasn't a particularly honourable idea—but what did these men know of honour, if they were ready to besiege and rob Lagwich, where the townsfolk had welcomed them ? The point was, they could not by any means have stripped this enormous camp in the short time they had been at work there ; they must have left behind many valuable and useful things because they simply couldn't carry them. Things which might enable Conrad, his other courses of action blocked, to make his way to some other town and there set up a little business.

It didn't have the glamour of service with the Esberg army. But it didn't have the continuing misery of return to Lagwich, either.

His mind was made up in an instant. The sword he had retrieved was complete with belt and frog. He rose and buckled it around him as he had seen soldiers do in the town when they got up to leave a drinking-shop. Setting his shoulders back, not caring any more whether anybody saw him, he strode down the hillside to the reeking remains of the camp.

Fires were still spreading, but sluggishly, for there was virtually no wind now. A hot puff of air made his eyes sting as he stared through the open gate and down the avenue-like axis of the camp. Why—there in plain sight was a vast bronze cauldron which made him jealous on sight ; it was big enough to outdo two of his pottery vats.

By the same token, of course, it was no good to him—he might have attempted to get it away if he'd had a wagon, but what had become of the army's vehicles he had no idea. And he was unskilled in the management of draft animals, anyway.

He took a deep breath and walked into the camp.

For the next ten or fifteen minutes, his confidence growing, he picked and chose among the abandoned miscellanea. Scattered baubles which someone might buy in another town. A first-rate steel knife. A helmet in exactly his own size. A pike which would have solved most of his problems if he'd had it handy to spit the *thing* he had killed. Two good hatchets and some other carpenter's tools. A knapsack belonging apparently to a tailor, full of fine thread and needles of a quality he had never seen in Lagwich.

He was shrugging the knapsack on when he heard the noise.

Dropping everything he carried, he snatched at the sword and whirled. He was approximately in the centre of the camp now ; there was a large open space, at one side of which a pile of wood-ash smouldered sluggishly and on the other three sides of which tents had been torn down randomly. The sound had apparently come from one of the largest tents.

Cautiously Conrad approached it, and saw, protruding from under a flap of charred canvas, the leg of a man, stirring slightly.

In that condition he wasn't much of a menace, he reasoned. He pulled the coarse fabric aside and found himself looking at Jervis Yanderman.

There was a large livid bruise on Yanderman's temple, and a sword-cut—not more than a scratch—ran across his right upper arm. Gasping, Conrad bent down to examine him more closely. The deep-set eyes opened briefly, screwed up again, opened a second time and stayed open.

" It's—it's the soap-maker," Yanderman said faintly. "Help me up, boy."

Conrad dropped his sword and hastened to obey.

" I think I can stand by myself," Yanderman said when he was upright. " Thank you. Oh, by the fame of Esberg, but this is the sorriest mess—!"

Breathing hard, he gazed over the ruins of the camp.

" Where've they gone ?" he added.

Conrad gulped. " I think—to lay siege to Lagwich," he said after a pause.

" I thought they would. I thought they'd all go, being afraid of the green plague. And then some came back and . . ." Yanderman wiped his forehead. " This was the Duke's tent, you see, and that his funeral pyre. When we saw them swarming back to loot, we stood our ground here as well as we could, but there were only three of us, the others—damnable cowards! —caring more for their own possessions than the Duke's. After this, I *spit* on the name of Esberg."

There was a red and black banner crumpled on the ground near him. With sarcastic deliberation he carried out his promise literally. Then he caught himself.

" Three !" he snapped, and bent to drag back the fallen canvas of the Duke's tent. " Stadham ! Kesford !"

Conrad made to help him and between them they rolled the fabric back to expose his companions : ascetic-faced Kesford, a surprised look on his face and a second mouth opened in his pale throat, and grim Stadham, his chest blood-blurred from two bullet-wounds.

Yanderman knelt to them long enough to determine that they were dead. Then he shrugged and drew back, pausing only to detach from Kesford's hand something which glittered : a small crystal ball on a silver chain, which he put around his own neck. Then, without a word to Conrad, he walked to the dying pyre and drew from it a hot brand, which he plunged into the ruins of the Duke's tent. In a moment flames licked up. Conrad stood by in silence until Yanderman ceased his contemplation of the ensuing fire.

" And you, soap-maker ?" Yanderman said at last. " What are you doing here ?"

Boldly, Conrad met his gaze. " I had meant to try and join your army," he said. " After what I've seen today, I think I'd have been a fool."

Yanderman laughed. It was an ugly sound. He said, " That's so. But what drove you from Lagwich ? By all accounts, you're its best soap-maker and that's a worthwhile position for you. You're young yet !"

His eyes strayed back to the burning tent and he absently began to swing the crystal ball on the end of its cabin.

Conrad, wondering what made that worth retrieving from Kesford's body rather than anything else, answered Yanderman's question at some length, explaining just why he had finally decided to break with Lagwich.

" I see," Yanderman said finally. " Well, you may thank the older man who burns here before you for your misery. He is well rewarded, isn't he ?"

" I—I don't understand," Conrad countered, glancing down at the smoking form of Stadham. His clothing was alight now.

" He took away the carcass of the *thing* you killed. We have it here in the camp, nailed up to prove that *things* from the barrenland die like any ordinary beast."

A cry of anger rose to Conrad's lips. He bit it off. What use was there railing against a dead man ? That was over and done with and he hoped never to think of it again. While he was debating what next to say, Yanderman went on, raising his head and continuing to swing the crystal ball.

" So we are two of a kind, boy ! After what I've seen today, I care not whether I hear the name of Esberg spoken for the rest of my days. And you are finished with Lagwich. Where shall we go ? To the barrenland ? Why not to the barrenland ? I was charged by my dead Duke to lead his army there, but the army is gone. I remain—I remain !"

He closed his hand fiercely on the crystal ball as though he would crush it. It seemed to remind him of something and he let his eyes rove anew.

" What became of Granny Jassy, I wonder ?" he said under his breath.

" Of—? I didn't hear—"

Yanderman grimaced. " What does it matter ?" he shrugged " Should I lead—instead of an army—a stupid old woman with a headful of visions ? We'd have been better off without her charms and her crazy tales of a time when this barrenland was a rich region full of people powerful as magicians . . ."

Conrad could hardly believe his ears. Unable to stop himself, he caught at Yanderman's arm. " Visions ?" he demanded. " *What* sort of visions ? You mean there are other people who can—?"

He broke off. Yanderman was staring at him wide-eyed.

After an eternal moment in which there was no sound but the gnawing noise of flames on dry wood as tent-poles blazed up close to them, the older man spoke in a strangely gentle voice.

" Boy—Conrad, isn't that your name ?—yes, Conrad : there are other people who see these things. Didn't you know ?"

Conrad licked his lips and shook his head dumbly.

" Have you never seen one of these ?" Yanderman opened his fingers to expose the crystal ball.

Again a headshake.

" Well then !" A note of triumph came into Yanderman's tone now. " It's about time you tried its effect, I'd say. And if all goes well, Conrad, and if you're as desperate as you've told me—and as I feel right now—we'll try this lunatic venture and turn it from a joke into an epic tale that men will chant around the hearth-fire for a thousand generations ! Conrad, will you take your revenge on Lagwich for laughing at you even if it means the risk of death ?"

Looking into Yanderman's blazing eyes, Conrad—terrified, but somehow exalted—could make no other response than a simple, whispered, " Yes !"

fourteen

" Nestamay ! Pay attention, girl !" Grandfather barked, leaving the tip of his pointer-stick on the plan where it was. The plan was unbelievably old—a pattern of faded dark lines on a yellowish, crackling substance which, to stop it breaking into pieces, had been carefully pasted on to a well-cured piece of leather from a dead *thing*. As well as the lines, which were more or less self-explanatory—showing the general features of the Station below the dome—there were all kinds of curious symbols marked ; it was these whose significance Grandfather was trying to explain.

" I—I'm sorry, Grandfather," Nestamay said, pushing back her long hair with a limp hand.

" Sorry !" Grandfather took the pointer-stick in both hands now and looked for a moment as though he would break it. The tone of his voice frightened baby Dan, and he gave a howl.

Grandfather glared at him. The howl stopped magically.

" That's better," Grandfather muttered and turned his attention back to Nestamay, resuming his former fierce tone. " Sorry, you said ! A lot of use it is being sorry for not listening—nobody can help it but yourself ! Do you think I like giving you these extra lessons after a hard day's work ? Do you think I do it just to annoy you and keep you away from Jasper ? I do have a purpose, you know ! Our family's kept more of the old lore and cleared more fresh ground under the dome than any of the families here—you know that as well as I

do because I've told you till I'm sick of repeating it. What's going to become of us if we let things slide ? Who's fit to look after the fate of the community who doesn't possess every ounce and scrap and tittle of information that's available ?"

Abruptly Nestamay put her head forward on her knees and burst into tears.

For a long moment Grandfather was dumbfounded. He looked at the pointer-stick in his hands as though expecting it to turn into a venomous *thing* ; he looked at the plan displayed for Nestamay, but there was no counsel there, either. He looked at the blank irregular wall of the hovel and when he could not reasonably delay a comment any longer, he set the pointer-stick aside and cleared his throat with a harrumphing noise.

" Come here, child," he said, putting out his hand. A sort of rusty kindness coloured his voice, creaking like a hinge not used for a generation. " There's something been preying on your mind lately—I know it. I thought you'd get over it by yourself, but if you can't, you'd better tell me all about it."

Nestamay snuffled and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. She said, " It's—it's just . . ." Then she took a deep breath and tried again. " It's just what you said about my not wanting to listen to you because I'd rather be with Jasper. Grandfather, it's not *true*. Because "—now the words came in an unstoppable rush—" I *hate* Jasper ! He's a fool, he's dangerous, he's selfish, and I wish a *thing* would get him !"

Appalled at her own ferocity, she stopped short. Her eyes were very wide as she stared at Grandfather, wondering what his reaction would be.

It began with a sigh. It continued with the rolling up of the plan of the Station, its return to the shiny metal case with a locking lid in which it was kept for safety and its replacement on the wall by a chart she had seen scores of times—a chart dealing with another of the myriad subjects of which Grandfather kept track better than anyone else in the community. Her eyes sorted out the family names, linked by vertical lines for descent and wavy lines for generation-kinship and dotted lines for future associations.

Desperately, before Grandfather could launch into the patient exposition of her genetic situation and a repetition of the factors which made Jasper the best possible choice as the father of her children, she clutched at his rising arm.

" You don't understand, Grandfather ! Weren't you listening !"

Grandfather blinked. Astonishingly, he gave a warm chuckle. " Beginning to talk my language, hey ? All right, what's the point I missed by not listening ? Out with it !"

" I said Jasper was dangerous," Nestamay emphasised. She had refrained from telling this story for days on end, thinking it might be selfish or spiteful to do so. Now, though, it was clear that Grandfather had to be informed.

" In what way ?" Grandfather was suddenly tense.

" The—uh—the other night when the *thing* hatched and we chased it out of Channel Nine, I was late reaching the office for my watch."

" I thought you were rather a long time getting there. I also thought the experience had frightened you badly enough for you not to do it again. What has this to do with Jasper ?"

" The reason I was late," Nestamay said very carefully, " was that Jasper tried to make me skip my watch and go with him to some hiding-place he has around the other side of the Station."

Grandfather gave a thoughtful nod. He said, " You didn't let him persuade you. And it wasn't the alarm which saved you, either. Am I right ?"

" Y-yes." Nestamay tried to reduce the hammering of her heart by drawing in another very deep breath and letting it out as slowly as she could. It made her throat seem to shudder by itself.

" In which case it's bad—he shouldn't do it, and must be punished. But it hardly sounds dangerous, unless he came extremely close to persuading you."

" Not me," Nestamay said, and closed her eyes. Here it was at last : the thing she had learned afterwards, the thing which had really brought on the tears. " Not me. Danianel. She—she wasn't so obstinate."

Grandfather's eyes switched to the kinship chart. There was a steel-blue blaze in them. He said, " Danianel ?" And put his index and middle fingers, parted like a draftsman's compass, on the two names on the chart.

" Yes." Nestamay put her hands up to cover her eyes. She was thinking of the months—years, almost—through which she had compelled herself to endure Jasper's attentions, knowing she would sooner or later have to suffer them permanently and thinking like an idiot that the unpleasant truth which was so

clear to her after Grandfather's instruction must be equally clear, equally significant to Jasper.

" Danianel's last watch was last night," Grandfather said. " How much of it did she skip ?"

" I don't know." Nestamay tossed her hair back again. " I wasn't there."

" Then how do you know ?"

" Jasper—boasted about it to me. This afternoon. When he was out with the working party at the ovens."

There was a long silence. At last she looked at Grandfather and was surprised and shocked to see that he had put his head forward in his hands, as she had often done.

She moved to his side instantly, her arm going as though by reflex around his shoulders. She felt his body shaking in a slow, old-man rhythm.

" Sometimes I wonder, Nestamay—" His words came gravelly and reluctant. " *Is* there any point in going on ? There's nothing I can do about Jasper, girl. He's what he is and all the talking-to and all the beatings in the world won't cure him and he's still the only possible mate for you of the young men we have. Look at the chart !"

He straightened, rubbing his nose with two fingers. " I wish it were otherwise ! But see—he preserves two genetic lines which are otherwise united with lines forbidden for you ! Are we to lose them ? Are we to lose a pair of hands when we have so few ?" He made a lost, helpless gesture. " When we're reduced to this, I'm not sure any longer whether we can continue the struggle."

Horrified, Nestamay drew back her arm as the old man moved to a more comfortable position. His gnarled fingers sought and clasped her work-toughened young ones. He continued in a haunted voice, pleading for understanding with his eyes.

" I remember foreseeing this a long time ago, Nestamay ! I talked about it, over and over, with your father. I've never discussed your father with you, have I ? Or not properly. For all I know, you may think I drove him to his death out of overweening pride !" He gave a short bitter laugh.

" I didn't drive him. He went, bravely and willingly. He knew—I knew—we'd come in a little while to the state we're now in, where we have to keep a tainted genetic line because we have nothing else to replace it. Generation after generation there's been a fining-down ; at first the mixing could be random,

but the recessives showed up eventually and lines which could have masked them were lost in accidents or because *things* came out of the dome and killed . . ." He wiped his brow with his hand.

" It was baby Dan who drove your father out, if anyone drove him," he finished in a low tone.

" Baby Dan ?" echoed Nestamay in an incredulous tone. She stared at the pasty-pale fatness of her brother, playing with his blanket on the other side of the hovel.

" Of course. Only an accident kept the same thing from happening to you. He's a mere three years younger than you, you realise—a total failure as a human being, a mere vegetable, an infant until he dies. He's proof of what I'd previously just warned about. When he was a year old, or thereabouts, it was beyond doubt that he was an imbecile. And, seeing he could hide the truth no longer from himself, your father—my son also, remember !—set out to hunt for someone else. Anyone else ! Anyone would be better than your Jaspers, your Danianels, and the other blockheads of this generation !"

After that they sat in silence for a long time. Baby Dan grew tired of playing with his blanket, rolled over and went to sleep as unfussily as a real baby. Nestamay watched him.

" You should have told me before, Grandfather," she said. " I—I thought some very bad things about you because you didn't."

" I don't like talking about it," Grandfather snapped. " Didn't I just remind you your father was also my son—my only son ?"

He picked up his pointer-stick and sighed heavily. " Well, it's no use talking about what might have been. We have to make the best of what we've got. And you're the best of what we've got right now, Nestamay—the brightest member of your generation, the only person in the Station who could possibly learn everything I know and hope to add to it."

" But—!" The tortured cry was wrung from Nestamay. " But what for ? If our genetic lines are all going to produce a baby Dan sooner or later, what's the use of struggling ?"

" We aren't the only people in the universe," Grandfather said. " Sometimes it seems like it. But somewhere there are other people and some day we may find them and when we do meet strangers we must be able to say to them, ' We kept up the struggle.' Because if we can't say that, what right will we have to be regarded as human ?"

fifteen

Conrad was completely dazed by the speed of events after Yanderman forced the insane-seeming promise out of him. A score of times a protest of withdrawal rose to his lips ; always Yanderman forestalled the utterance with some point requiring immediate action.

A safe place for them to go, first. Conrad dredged one up from the not-so-distant past—a hideaway under an overhanging shelf of rock on the eroded side of a hill, where he had sometimes taken refuge from taunting children when he was ten or twelve years old. (He had sometimes dreamed of one day taking Idris there, in privacy. That was dead.).

Things necessary for them, to take next. Yanderman's directions were crisp and rapid. Certain things he chose himself ; Conrad would never have known they were important, for he didn't know what they were at all. A magnetic compass, for instance. He had never seen one in Lagwich.

On the other hand, he knew very well what a gun was. The fact that he didn't even consider looking for one was due to his assumption that a gun was the last thing the departing soldiers were likely to have abandoned. Yanderman knew better. Intensive searching located several, of which he chose the two best, as well as a bag of ammunition. Conrad was awed when the weapons were handed to him, but his companion allowed him no time to examine them.

" Get on with it, boy !" Yanderman rapped again and again. " The soldiery will be back some time, you know—they'll regret wrecking the camp and they'll drift back when they get bored watching Lagwich defy them."

" Yes—what *about* Lagwich ?" Conrad countered. It was as near as he could come to breaking his given word.

" Do you care ?" Yanderman grunted. " You said not any more. And I certainly don't. Let 'em sweat it out as best they can. Pick up that side of meat over there—I thought I'd never have an appetite again, but I'm getting hungry. And you look as though you never had a square meal in your life."

Obeying, Conrad persisted, " But what's going to happen to Lagwich ? What's going to happen to the army ?"

" It doesn't matter what happens to them !" Yanderman exclaimed. " Oh—! Oh, I guess the town can stand a siege for a while and the men aren't properly officered and we didn't

come equipped to tackle even such rudimentary fortifications as Lagwich has. Maybe some bright character will put a ballista together and toss some incendiaries into the town—smoke the people out. More likely he won't be able to organise a big enough squad of co-operative men. They'll drift away, pick up some loot from the camp, or wander to another town and raid it before the people get wise.

" And back in Esberg there'll be political chaos and half a dozen would-be usurpers will impugn Duke Paul's heir and try to confiscate his property and withdraw his titles on the grounds of wilful malfeasance and—and the *hell* with them."

He settled an immense burden of salvaged equipment around himself on an improved harness made from half a dozen soldiers' belts and ended, " Right ! Lead me to this safe hiding place you told me of."

That was the point at which Conrad almost turned and fled. The single thing which restrained him was his burning need to know what only Yanderman could tell him : the explanation of the mysterious visions which had plagued him all his life and which—having believed them to be unique to himself—he now knew were shared by a certain Granny Jassy and any number of other people.

" That's better," Yanderman sighed, rubbing his fingers on a tuft of grass to cleanse them of grease from the meat they had charred, rather than cooked, over a clear smokeless fire of minute wood-chips. " Now, Conrad, I'll ease your mind a little. Pass me that canteen of water, will you ?"

Conrad did so. Yanderman sucked lengthily at it and gave it back with a murmur of thanks.

" Yes !" he resumed. " It was sheer sick anger, of course, which made me conceive this crazy plan in the first place—this plan to venture into the barrenland. That was before I knew about you. And then, when you said what you said, all of a sudden the idea seemed less crazy. In fact, it began to make excellent sense."

He gave Conrad a shrewd glance. " Don't know what I'm talking about, do you ? I can read it in your face—deep down you're scared stiff of the suggestion. If you had anywhere else to go, any friends to turn to, you wouldn't be out here in the lee of a sandstone hill with a foreigner whose head is ringing with grandiose delusions !"

Conrad managed a threadbare smile in reply.

" Did you hear from any of our men who had liberty in Lagwich how we worked our way here—how we knew what sort of terrain we had to cross even before sending out scouts?"

" No—uh—I don't think so."

" That was thanks to Granny Jassy. And this." Yanderman caught up the crystal ball and let it swing on its chain. " Take a good look at it. In fact—keep on looking at it while I tell you the story."

Puzzled, but eager for information and less frightened now he had filled his belly and rested a while, Conrad did as he was told.

Yanderman's voice droned evenly on, recounting how Duke Paul had decided to investigate the fantastic tales some people told in Esberg, how ideas copied from these tales, which hitherto had never been taken seriously, had proved to work in practice and had given Esberg complete military ascendancy over its rival cities to the south, how men had gone to dig up mounds and found ruins and relics in incredible quantity, how Duke Paul had then turned his attention to stories about the barrenland and come to the conclusion that it was artificial, *made* and even now—on the evidence of Rost's so-called " devil "—must have people within it.

Conrad, his eyes moving back and forth with the unending motion of the crystal ball, found the willpower to voice a foggy objection. He remembered the coming of the " devil " from the barrenland and the arguments used by the wise men to show it could not be human. Yanderman dismissed them curtly, never varying the swing of the crystal ball.

"Think now about the visions you've had, Conrad," he urged. " Have you seen the barrenland as it might once have been ? Have you seen it peopled, built on, prosperous ?"

Conrad gave a sluggish nod. All his old resolutions never to share his secret with anyone except Idris had faded away. He was sure Yanderman wasn't going to mock him and it meant so much to him to be taken seriously that he let the words stream out of their own accord.

As he talked, the shiny ball of crystal from which he now could not tear away his fascinated gaze seemed to expand and fill his entire field of vision. Dazzling, it blinded him. And then, out of the blindness, something new and yet familiar emerged. The forms were the forms of his old visions, but the detail, the colour, the words were a thousand times clearer than he had ever known them before.

He came to himself with a start. It was growing dark and the little smokeless fire had gone out. Yanderman was sitting facing him with an enigmatic smile, the crystal ball hidden now inside his shirt.

" Awake, Conrad ?"

" I—I haven't been asleep. Have I ?" Intensely puzzled, Conrad rubbed his eyes automatically.

" Not exactly, no. You've been in trance, which isn't quite the same thing." Yanderman stretched his legs as though he felt cramp after sitting a long time in the same position ; the action informed Conrad that his limbs too were appallingly stiff.

" Then—oh, explain !" he demanded.

" I'll do my best. As nearly as we were able to work it out, Duke Paul, myself and the other Esberg thinkers who tackled the problem, these visions aren't simply dreams, but memories which have become available to us in a way we can't account for. Possibly the time to which they refer was a time when there were simply so many people that their minds resonated together and created a—" He checked. " You don't understand that analogy, I see. Have you never handled a musical instrument ?"

" Yes—a clay flute."

" I meant a stringed instrument. You can see the phenomenon clearly there. Well, never mind. Let's just say that we're satisfied that these memories are based on realities of the distant past. In every generation since whatever catastrophe undid the greatness of those days, a few people have been born who were capable of describing their visions ; from these descriptions word of mouth transmission has evolved a number of folk tales and fables. The recurrence of those with direct perception has kept the tradition from being hopelessly garbled. Granny Jassy was the best subject we'd ever found in Easberg, but I must say that what you've been telling me these past few hours puts everything Granny Jassy ever said completely in the shade." He gave a sober headshake.

" Me ?" Conrad was startled. " Do you mean I'm one of these—how did you put it ?—' few people in each generation'?"

Yanderman shivered for no perceptible cause. He said, " I'd go further. You're not one of a few, but *unique*."

It seemed that this ought to be a source of pride. Conrad tried to regard it as such, but his brain was still misty with the after-effects of his recent trance.

" Did nobody in Lagwich care about your gift ?" Yanderman pressed him. " Didn't a single person take it seriously ?"

" Until a day or two ago I'd have answered that at least one person did," Conrad muttered. " A girl called—oh, never mind. She turned out like all the others in the end."

He looked miserably down at the ground near Yanderman's feet and for the first time became aware that there was a pile of yellow paper there, covered with close scribbled writing. He gave the older man an inquiring glance.

" Call it the first fruit of my research into your mind," Yanderman explained. " I made notes of as many of the things you described as I could manage. You can visualise the barrenland before it was made barren, as you know ; in two or three more sessions it should be possible to extract from what you tell me the kind of information which will enable us to cross it and survive. Most important, you remember the course of streams and rivers. You can visualise distances, too, with impressive accuracy. What I want to prepare "—he took up a pencil and a fresh sheet of paper—" is a map of the nearer part of the barrenland on which we can work out a path involving not more than a few hours' travel away from water at any point. We can carry food and fuel between us, enough for the whole journey, if we can avoid having to load up with more than a canteen of water apiece."

He sketched a rough circle on the paper, occupying almost the entire square of the sheet. In the centre of it he put a cross.

" But even more important," he said under his breath, " is to know what was sited there in the middle."

" Why ?"

" Rost's ' devil,' of course." Yanderman stared down at the paper for a long moment, then grunted and put it aside. He rose to his feet, stretching limb by limb.

" I still don't see how it's possible for these visions of mine to be memories of the past," Conrad ventured. " Or rather I don't see why they necessarily have a connection with anything real."

" Don't you ?" Yanderman sounded surprised. " Boy, where in Lagwich would you have got concepts like the ones you describe ? I suppose mere imagination could carry the mind from a Lagwich-sized village to a city of a million people. But there's a gap between anything in your direct experience and the notion of self-controlling machines, of flying through

the air, of walking to other worlds. As a matter of fact," he added with a rueful smile, " that last one is so fantastic I'm inclined to wonder whether it's not an exception."

" Yes—*what* other worlds ?" Conrad agreed eagerly. " Where ? Where's there room for them ? And if the world we know is big enough for you to march fourteen days here from Esberg, surely it ought to be big enough for anybody's taste ! Why would they have *wanted* to go elsewhere ?"

" For the same reason Duke Paul wanted to march his army into the barrenland," Yanderman said. " I confess I thought he was—oh, not exactly crazy, but at least excessively confident. And in one sense he was, for his army deserted on his death and might well have mutinied even if he'd survived. But in another and more important sense he was absolutely right. Here you've had Lagwich existing for centuries on the edge of the barrenland—long enough to get to know the limitations of its dangers if anyone had wished—and you've had yourself, born with a gift that provides access to information once thought to be lost beyond recall. Put the two together, as I'm doing and at once the idea of crossing the barrenland becomes a practical proposition. And it's ridiculous to hold back from a practical proposition simply because nobody's ever done it before."

There was a gap in that chain of reasoning, Conrad felt. But at the moment he couldn't locate it. He was suddenly drowsy, as though his stock of nervous energy had run dry and within another few minutes he was stretched on the ground under a pillaged blanket, limp as a child's toy.

sixteen

Yanderman's air of calm confidence lent Conrad a veneer of boldness. But it remained only a veneer until after the irreversible step had been taken and they were deep in the barrenland—so deep that when they looked back they saw nothing of the green and fertile country around Lagwich, only the dusty rolling slopes and snag-toothed rocks which they had traversed.

And then it sprang upon Conrad's mind like a lightning flash. *This* was the barrenland—solid ground, very quiet, dead-seeming, but not utterly alien. It had once been like the land he knew and might perhaps be so again.

Sensing a change in his companion's attitude, Yanderman gave him a crooked smile.

" Not so bad once you're in it, hey ?" he suggested.

" No, I guess not," Conrad admitted. " The only thing is, it's *so* barren it's not very surprising people haven't wanted to enter it. I mean—there's nothing to tempt you in !"

" There could have been plenty of temptation," Yanderman contradicted. " The mystery of it, for instance, should have been enough. Lack of guts held people back—and that's odd in itself, since even your white-livered townsfolk in Lagwich were bold enough in tackling *things* that trespassed on their land."

He settled his heavy load of equipment more comfortably about him and trudged on. A few paces behind Conrad followed. It was all too true what Yanderman had said about carrying water ; even though they had confined themselves to what Yanderman regarded as indispensables they were still immensely burdened, and some of the items were awkward.

Like this gun, for example. Yanderman had explained its working in simple terms and Conrad had caught on quickly because similar things had cropped up in his visions. But it was a devilish difficult problem keeping it comfortably slung among the various bags, cartons and bundles he also wore.

He preferred the sword hanging from its frog at his waist.

The proof that Yanderman was right about the content of the visions came the afternoon of the first day. They located a stream running south-eastwards which had been marked up in advance on their crude map. Conrad was glad to slake his dusty throat and rinse his sand-eroded feet.

Yanderman, however, was not quite so eager. He chose to walk around on the bank for a while, studying the lie of the terrain. When he returned, it was to beckon Conrad and point out to him some curious marks in the soft ground near the water's edge.

" A *thing* has been here recently," he said.

For a moment Conrad suffered a giddying return of the fear which the mention of *things* from the barrenland used to evoke in him. Then his eyes focused on the marks. They were made by strange hoofs in the form of three sides of a square, with a forward projection from each closed corner.

" Then it won't be bothering us," he said.

" Why not ?"

" It's the spoor of the *thing* I killed and your lieutenant took to show off in the army camp," Conrad explained.

" Are you sure ?" Yanderman demanded and then went on before Conrad could answer, " It's not that I doubt your memory. It's just that—well, might there be more than one such *thing* ?"

" Never since the foundation of Lagwich have two *things* that looked alike emerged from the barrenland," Conrad declared positively. " Indeed, that's one of the reasons why the wise men insisted on their devilish nature—what known beast can exist by itself, without others of its kind to help it reproduce ? And yet, as you've argued to me, this doesn't fit with their substantial form and the way they can be killed like an ordinary animal . . ." He shook his head. That problem was still too deep for him.

" Then I guess we can relax," Yanderman agreed. " But by night we'll keep watch in turns." He squinted towards the point where rocks closed in around the little stream.

" If we follow this bank to the bend I've marked on the map, that should be a good place to spend the night. And in the morning we can strike virtually due north to the next water."

The first night's watching was a fearful experience. Shadows acquired lives of their own ; twice Conrad woke his companion in alarm at what proved to be nothing worse than a breeze stirring the dust. The second night was not so bad. The day which followed, however, was the worst part of the trip ; according to Yanderman's map, it was necessary to strike across dry ground for a full eight hours to avoid a wasted trip to the east and at that point the going became much rougher—less sandy and much more rocky.

They were at the mid-point of this eight-hour stage when Yanderman, slightly in the lead as usual, stopped abruptly and gave a gasp that turned Conrad's heart over.

" What is it ?" he demanded.

" Look !" Yanderman pointed at a sheltered cranny between two boulders and Conrad peered down.

There was a plant there—the first they had seen on the barrenland. But it was no reassurance. It did have leaves and stems like an honest vegetable, but the leaves were a blackish brown stained with white fuzz and the stems were brittle and dry-looking.

" Don't touch it !" Yanderman warned. " I've never seen anything like it, have you ?"

Conrad shook his head.

For a little while they remained, studying the curious intruder ; then Yanderman sighed and made to move on. " Keep an eye out for any more plants," he ordered. " If it's true that there's an island in the barrenland where people have clung to life, we may get a guide towards it from an increasingly dense vegetation."

There was no real increase in density, however ; only a thin scattering of alien plants, perhaps one in a hundred paces, whose single comforting quality was that unlike the *things* which moved they did occur in distinct family groups.

The next two or three hours found them scrambling among rocks and plodding down rain-eroded gullies. The sensation was akin to being an ant crawling over a skeleton and Conrad felt a prickling of the scalp every time he encountered another of the mysterious plants. Yet nothing moved or seemed to threaten them ; he forced himself to concentrate on making progress rather than giving way to wild fancies.

Yanderman had just paused to make another distance-mark on his map and to promise a sight of water within the hour, when the welkin rang with an ear-splitting hoot from a short distance away. Map forgotten, gun swinging to the ready position, Yanderman ordered Conrad to dive for cover.

When long minutes of staring had failed to reveal the creature which had given that appalling bellow—it was certainly an animal noise—he got up slowly.

" I think it's close," he whispered. " Perhaps over that rise to our left. Come with me, but move carefully."

Conrad complied, wishing he could head in the opposite direction. But when they topped the rise and could see the *thing* that had hooted, he felt ashamed of the panicky impulse.

It was as enormous as its voice, but it was clearly no danger to them, for it was dying.

As long as twenty men, the *thing* lay among boulders in the slanting afternoon sunlight. It had no discernible head or limbs—only a vast massing of bulbous bladders of many hues and all sizes from that of a man's head to that of a horse's belly. Between the bladders trailed ragged white membranes, dry and curling at the edges as though the sun were too much for them to withstand.

A wide smeared trail indicated the direction from which it had come—roughly, from the north. By what means of progress? By crawling? That seemed absurd to Conrad—why should such a colossus have to crawl?

Yet apparently that was the truth. For now it heaved and humped itself and tried to move onwards and the source of the incredible noise was suddenly clear. A sharp boulder struck one of the distended bladders, ripped it and the gas within came gushing out to the accompaniment of another deafening hoot, leaving behind more of the drying whitish membrane.

"It's helpless," Yanderman said softly. "We can leave it be."

"I'll be glad to!" Conrad admitted. "What—what *is* it?"

"If it's true that there are other worlds than this and the *things* hail from them, that might have been born on a world of the kind where—" He checked himself, then resumed with a shake of his head. "Where things weigh less than they do here. This is another aspect of the story I've never understood. Weight is weight and you'd think—but never mind. What matters here and now is that the course this creature has followed leads back to its point of origin."

"You mean—we should go that way?" Conrad gasped. "To the very place where the *things* come from?"

Yanderman cocked his head. "Has it only just struck you?" he said with genuine astonishment. "Logically, if we're hunting for survivors in the middle of the barrenland whose duty is to try and stop the *things* emerging into the world, we have to go where they are—to the middle. Did it not strike you that way?"

"I suppose so," Conrad said. "But I wish . . ."

Yanderman clapped him on the shoulder. "Bear up!" he said. "Tomorrow afternoon at the latest we should reach the centre of the barrenland and all our questions will be answered. Mark you, for every question that's answered we'll probably learn to ask a score of new ones, but that's hardly to be helped."

Conrad essayed a smile at the joke, gave a last glance at the dying monster, and moved on.

It was more disconcerting than ever when late that night Yanderman mentioned the possibility of the survivors at the centre regarding strangers with hostility. Again, Conrad had

had the information to go on and hadn't used it. If Rost and the wise men of Lagwich could argue that a man from the barrenland was by definition a devil, the cut-off community here—if it existed—might feel similarly.

Yanderman had a precaution against that risk, however. He sketched in a line of rocky hills to the east of the centre point, which he had located in one of Conrad's visions. A detour in that direction, he argued, would give them plenty of cover for their final approach, and a chance to sum the place up before showing themselves.

It made sense. But when he was scrambling among the rocks late the following afternoon, Conrad found himself once again wishing he was anywhere but here. His mouth was dry, his feet were blistered and cut, his hands were scratched, his shoulders ached from the weight of his equipment—

Then he had forgotten all his discomforts within the next second. Flat on his belly beside Yanderman, peering over a rim of rock, he saw the most incredible sight he had ever dreamed of, far surpassing anything in his familiar visions.

A sort of dome lay ahead, between them and the setting sun, so vast that one had to turn one's head to take it all in. Gashed and holed, slightly buckled, it was still mind-shaking. Like a super-monster it lay stranded in the sea of the desert, blotched with smears of greenish vegetation—creepers and free-standing plants. At one end there was a cluster of smaller buildings—*buildings*, for all that they were tiny and ramshackle. At the other, so dwarfed by the immensity of the same, there were . . .

" Are those people ?" Conrad said in a shaking voice.

" Yes !" Yanderman's answer was equally unsteady and when Conrad glanced around he was astonished to see that his companion's cheeks were bright with tears. " Yes, Conrad, they're people and it's true, it's all true ! I was so terrified we might come here and find only desolation, but we were right !"

Conrad stared towards the insect-sized group of human beings again. They were moving purposefully, following a plan, under orders. They knew what they were doing. They must hold the key to the mystery of the barrenland and the origin of the terrifying *things* which wandered out of it to Lagwich . . . And surely they couldn't be hostile to visitors from the outside world. They'd know there was an outside—why, if Rost's " devil " had been a man, that implied they'd

even attempted to reach it ! What could have gone wrong ? He and Yanderman had made the crossing uneventfully enough, but of course they'd had a compass and the aid of his own vision-memories—

He was so lost in thought that at first he didn't realise what was happening at the foot of the dome before him. Only a cry from Yanderman and the snicking of a rifle-bolt brought him to full awareness.

Something had emerged from the dome, from among the jungly green vegetation there, and the group of people off to the left had scattered and run. Something monstrous had come out !

A *thing* twenty feet tall, waving uncountable limbs like whips, shrieking now as though maddened by pain and being driven by some invisible force straight towards the rocks among which Conrad and Yanderman lay hid !

to be concluded

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guest editorial continued

versions of Ragnarok. Once all life was a single emergency, when the first communities lived always on the edge of disaster, not knowing from year to year whether they would come through the many natural catastrophies of drought, pestilence, storm, flood, winter cold and failure of crops. To this extent we are different : we know that our control of nature is incomparably greater. Yet we are no more certain of ourselves than any primitive man ; we still suffer the same anxieties, the same doubts about mankind's capacity to survive on this planet. And at all periods of major crises these deep, inner anxieties erupt into variations on the Ragnarok theme.

We forget that modern man, like modern science fiction, is a very recent development. It is only two hundred years since that moment in 1763 when James Watt began work on a defective model of the Newcomen engine. And Watt's discovery of the separate condenser was the start of the greatest, swiftest and most far-reaching change experienced by the human race since that time about seven thousand years ago when some unknown hunters began to raise the first crops. Science in the shape of technology transformed an ancient pattern of life just as it changed whole areas of the human imagination through the limitless possibilities the creative writer could find in the new scientific material. But, right from the start, the Western attitude to the emergent industrial society was decidedly equivocal ; and right at the beginning of modern science fiction there was already present the theme of the end of the human race. In 1805, one of the earliest French tales of the future was published in Paris ; and, in spite of the author's expectation of great advances still to come, the central theme of *Le Dernier Homme* is a vision of universal death.

> "The earth, having attained that high degree of glory and happiness, experienced the fate of men, who, when they have reached the perfection of body and mind, lose the fire that animated them, and soon encounter the decay of old age and death. Thus the earth, covered with the most fortunate population, and after having become a second Eden, began to lose much of her fecundity."

To read this account of the Last Man by Cousin de Grainville is to understand the social and emotional foundations of our odern Ragnarokm ; for the reasons behind Grainville's gloomy

vision do not appear to be very different from the circumstances that provoked stories like Hudson's *A Crystal Age* and Wells' *The Time Machine*. In fact, if all the variations on the Ragnarok theme are plotted on a graph, it will be seen that there is a strict correlation between publication and periods of marked national or international anxiety. This is evident at the beginning of the last century in Grainville and at the end in Wells. Behind Grainville's book there were public fears for the state of France, and for the republic Napoleon was busy converting into a despotism. Further, Grainville was a renegade priest, who had renounced his Orders to marry ; a man burdened with public and private anxieties, who wrote his book and then committed suicide. Similarly, behind Wells' projection of the end of humanity in *The Time Machine*, there was a general national anxiety about the economic stability of the country, and the possibility of war. And this combined with Wells' innate pessimism to produce the extraordinarily vivid account of the world more than thirty million years hence, when ' the huge red-hot dome of the sun had come to obscure nearly a tenth part of the darkling heavens.'

Although almost all these Ragnarok romances coincide with periods of widespread anxiety, the form of the narrative varies with different writers. But, here again, there is a curious similarity of pattern, since all of them follow one of two types. They are either straightforward destructive images of the end of humanity ; or, like *Nordenholt's Million* and *The Day of the Triffids* they show the remnants of mankind finally triumphing over the most terrible catastrophies.

This reflects a fundamental division in attitude to science, or rather to the consequences of science, especially in the shape of mass society, great cities, and the atomic bomb. Ultimately it reflects the human predicament, as we move awkwardly between the poles of love and hatred, hope and fear. In consequence those who fear or dislike the state of civilization in their time write it off completely in their versions of Ragnarok : the world as we know it has ended before their stories begin. This aspect can be seen in a Victorian tale like *A Crystal Age*, where Hudson discharges his fear and hatred of industrialism in a vision of a time when ' of the human race only a small remnant survived.' And in our day the theme of universal destruction is repeated by writers like Alfred Noyes in *The Last Man*, and of course by Aldous Huxley in *Ape and Essence*.

They project man's new-found capacity for self-annihilation into a desolate future epoch.

In the other version of the Ragnarok theme, however, the narrative is almost entirely concerned with the course of the catastrophe that wipes out most of mankind. But, although these stories are largely taken up with a tale of ever-increasing death and desolation, the central theme is the survival of a tiny group who give cause to hope that mankind will rise once more. And in a curious manner this subdued optimism is in keeping with the final state of the ancient Ragnarok myth. For it is only in later versions that the universal end-of-things is denied by a renewal of the human race, as though man's indomitable will refused to contemplate the possibility of final extinction.

The protest against final death comes out strongly in stories like *The Day of the Triffids*. These are all Crusoe stories of supreme catastrophe and ultimate survival. In fact, there is a close parallel between the storm and shipwreck that faced Robinson Crusoe with the challenge of survival and the *Bacterium diazotans* that made a desert of the world in *Nordenholt's Million*. Under these circumstances a tiny group struggles to survive whilst the rest of mankind goes down. So, the process becomes a modern epic of man's resolve to battle against fate ; and as the great cities decay, the turbines grind to a halt, and nature blots out all the works of industrial humanity, some men still survive. And always there is a hero, a type of saviour figure, who leads the last remnants of mankind from the Crusoe stage of a shipwrecked civilization to the final certainty of survival.

Very often this takes the form of a new order of humanity. A Premethean genius like Nordenholt creates the ' Nitrogen Area ' in the Clyde Valley ; and out of his triumph comes an ideal state. Sometimes the survivors have to go back to the beginnings of human existence, like Ish and Em in Stewart's *Earth Abides ;* and like a new Adam and Eve they breed another race of men, because their courage and ingenuity have never failed. In their triumph, it seems, a troubled and anxious epoch can take assurance that the race will survive ; for, as Ish lies dying, he sees through all the trappings of industrial society to a central truth :

> " Then, though his sight was now very dim, he looked again at the young men. " They will commit me to the earth," he thought. " Yet I also commit them to the earth. There

is nothing else by which men live. *Men go and come, but earth abides.*"

In this we can see how the limitless nature of science fiction enables it to keep in phase with the rise and fall of social moods. SF has no frontiers in time or place. As the literature of the possible, it allows anything imaginable to take place anywhere and at any time—from the beginning of life to the end of our galaxy. This very boundlessness helps to liberate the deeper, subliminal feelings in the human being. And, since no man is an island unto himself, but also part of his time, it follows that s-f will tend to mirror the movement of the national mood ; and since we human beings are forever in motion between life and death, forever reacting to our world in attitudes of love and hate, hope and fear, it is inevitable that even the most complex and advanced industrial societies will throw up Ragnarok images of death and destruction.

This is what seems to happen. The Ragnarok theme is taken up in times of trouble. The early nineteen-twenties produced many tales of future destruction, like *The Collapse of Homo Sapiens*, *The Last of My Race*, *The Rule of the Beasts* ; and it is not really necessary to stress how our post-Hiroshima epoch has seen an unprecedented flood of these stories. In fact, from the beginnings in Grainville's *Le Dernier Homme* to the most recent stage in *The World in Winter*, there has been complete consistency. Men have shaped the future according to the degree of hope or fear they found in themselves. And for this reason I think we can see in tales like *The Day of the Triffids* and *Earth Abides* the new epics of an industrial society.

In earlier times, the hero struggled against the race of gods and men. Like Odysseus, the great wanderer, he survived to demonstrate the poet's vehement conviction of man's indomitable nature. Today, writers like John Wyndham and George Stewart bring reassurance to a troubled epoch by showing that in spite of the most terrible disasters mankind will survive, and that one day " we, or our children, will cross the narrow straits on the great crusade to drive the triffids back and back with ceaseless destruction until we have wiped the last one of them from the face of the land that they have usurped."

i. f. clarke

trieste film festival report

the mystery of the 'mare trieste'

by john carnell

There is a pleasant old English ballad which commences, " Where have all the flowers gone ?" It would be very simple to paraphrase the words for the missing science fiction personalities and films not in evidence at the recent film festival held in the Castello di S. Giusto, Trieste—a picturesque sun-drenched city of sleek women, gentlemanly Italians, thin cats, cut-glass chandeliers and beautiful paintings, which is perched on the edge of the Adriatic and where bored newspaper correspondents became tired of asking if anyone had seen Ray Bradbury, Frederik Pohl, Sprague de Camp and even Ray Milland, whose most recent film, *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, tied for second place with the Russian film *The Amphibious Man* at the end of eight days of rather dull fantasies and off-beat movies one could hardly call science fiction.

There were no doubts about the two films which tied for first place—*Icaria XBI*, an overlong Czech film of a long voyage to Alpha Centauri which was extremely well done technically and very reminiscent of *The Forbidden Planet* (incidentally, the same director made the recently successful *Spaceship To Venus* which was shown in London early in June) and a last-minute French entry, *L'Jettie*, a brilliantly contrived time-travel story made entirely from still photographs. The second-place winners, already mentioned, suffered from that misnomer " box office appeal " which is apparently slanted at the teenage public. As if in protest, the elements produced a magnificent thunderstorm on the night the Russian film was due to be shown to the 2000 audience in the open-air theatre and the local newspaper came out the next day with the headline: " Amphibious Man Drowned."

Of the British entries, the least said the better, for they were appalling. Perhaps that is why so many people, including some of the judges, sneaked off to see a rival attraction at the local cinema—*King Kong* ! Everyone was disappointed that the celebrated John Wyndham story, *The Village of the Damned*, was not shown for another of those mysterious reasons yet to be explained—my guess is that it would have easily taken first prize. Perhaps the sequel, now being made in the ruined church of St. Dunstan's-in-the-West in London and called *Children of the Damned* (John Wyndham has no connection with the writing of this story) will be available for next year's festival.

Three films were particularly appealing—*Amour de Poche* by Pierre Kast, a French film director who *was* present, a truly delightful fantasy I hope will be shown in Britain one day; the Czech animated film I mentioned in an earlier report, *The Cybernetic Grandmother*, which was perhaps a little too abstract in its general presentation; and a pleasant little animated fantasy about the story of flight, taken from a Ray Bradbury short story, *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*.

Apart from the regular evening film festival (I noticed that we were to be followed by the Harlem Globe Trotters !) there was an intensely interesting (and often heated) three-day round table conference on the problems of international s-f, held in the Chamber of Commerce. English film producer Roger Manvell and French film director Pierre Kast both spoke about science fiction films; humorous French scientist Jacques Bergier (" Everyone crazy but me !") discussed Soviet s-f; Walter Ernsting gave the German picture; Joze Dolnicar the Yugoslav; Roberta Rambelli, Lionello Ghilardini and Franco Valobra presented extremely interesting general theses on the field in general but linked strongly with Italian requirements, while Harry Harrison, Brian W. Aldiss and myself presented the Western view. Numerous Italian speakers rounded off the proceedings with off-the-cuff ideas and discussions, some of them extremely controversial.

In and out of the general proceedings, Italian TV and radio managed to obtain some news-worthy items—and I certainly hope that some of those Italian film-starlets become famous one day . . . I have their autographs *and* colour cine film of them !

john carnell

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