

NEW WORLDS

SF

2'6

CONCLUDING

THE SHORES
OF DEATH

by MICHAEL
MOORCOCK

HAMILTON · COLLYN
WOODS · FRY · HILL

BI-MONTHLY

NEW WORLDS

EDITED BY
MICHAEL
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SF

Contents

The Shores of Death (2)	<i>Michael Moorcock</i>	5
Mix-up	<i>George Collyn</i>	52
Gamma Positive	<i>Ernest Hill</i>	64
Some Will Be Saved	<i>Colin R. Fry</i>	78
The Patch	<i>Peter Woods</i>	86
Emissary	<i>John Hamilton</i>	112
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We Live In Hope	<i>Editorial</i>	2
Books	<i>James Colvin</i>	119
Letters to the Editor		122

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WE LIVE IN HOPE



BAD SF ON radio, cinema and tv for years contributed to the general idea that anything written since H. G. Wells was puerile. It says something for modern SF that in spite of this image it slowly began to catch on with the intelligent public so that today a novel like Harry Harrison's *Deathworld* (published earlier this year by Penguin) can be top of the paperback best-sellers. Yet it's strange that, though we now have a large public familiar with the terms and material of book and magazine SF, most of that which we see on tv and at the cinema is still lousy—insulting the intelligence, sloppily written, poorly acted and directed. A case in point is Charles H. Schneer's recent production *First Men in the Moon* which is not only an insult to you and me, but also to Wells.

Compared with George Pal's *The Time Machine* which was pretty faithful to the spirit of the first part of the book (save that it replaced Well's socialistic message with a fuzzy humanistic one), Schneer's abortion falls very short. The sad thing is that it could have been so much better if better use had been made of the materials and money at hand. It had a cast of reasonable actors, Nigel Kneale was one of the scriptwriters, Ray Harryhausen was in charge of the special effects and, best of all, they had a powerful book from which to make a film. Yet the result was a travesty and anyone who went to see it without being familiar with SF could be forgiven for saying 'If this is SF, I don't want to know.' In short, *First Men in the Moon* was bad kid's stuff, made with concessions to a box-office that nowadays only exists in the minds of unintelligent film-makers (why are there so many?) who haven't bothered to look around

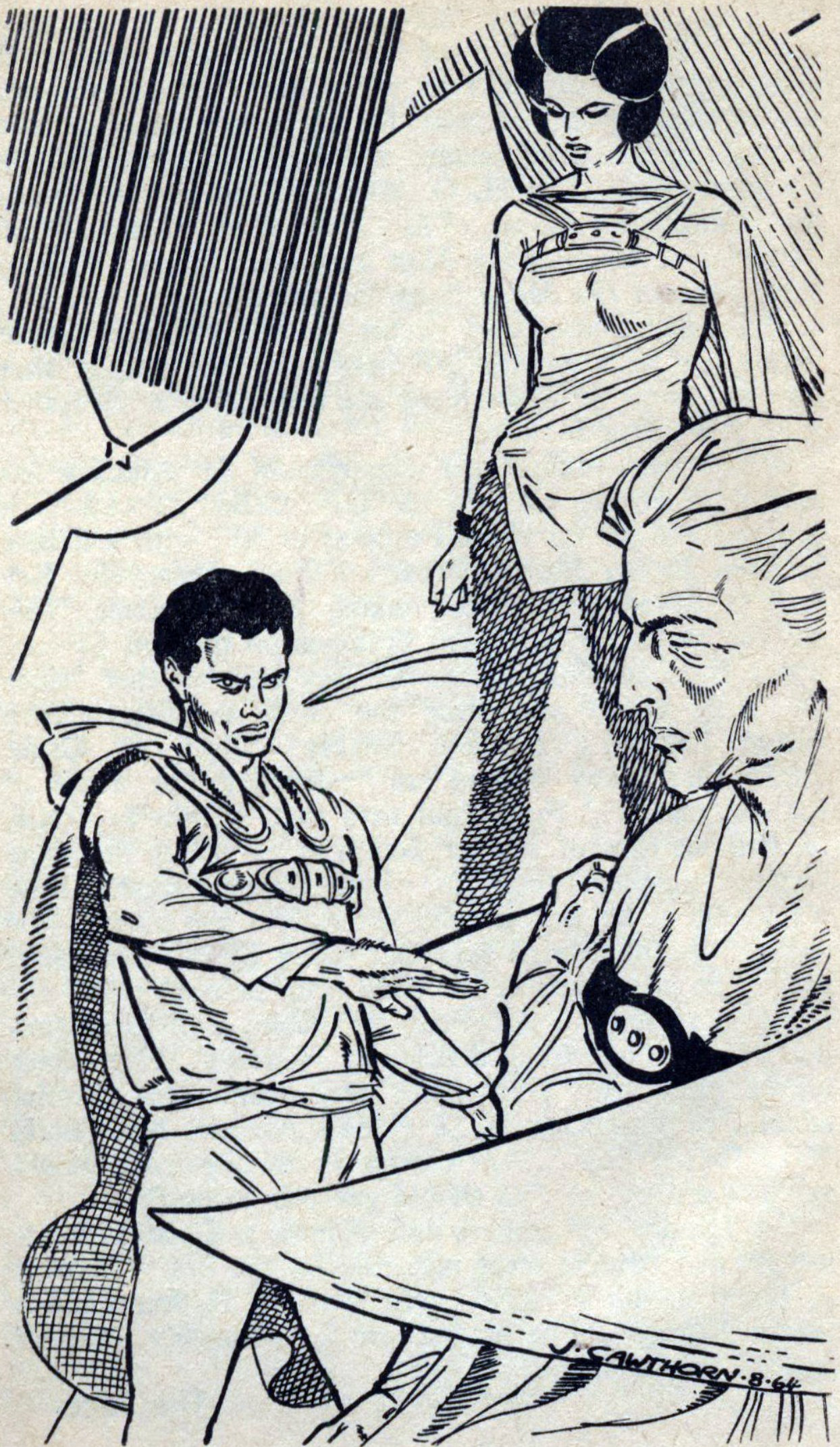
them and see that good films can also be good box-office or, as in the case of *A Hard Day's Night*, that guaranteed money-spinners can also be well-made. The tv offerings can sometimes be excused for their low budgets, but Schneer had a large budget and threw it away. Of the six films made from H. G. Wells' SF novels (the others are *Things to Come*, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, *The Invisible Man* and *War of the Worlds*) *First Men in the Moon* is by far the worst.

Only one consolation occurs to us. Perhaps people unfamiliar with modern SF may say: 'If this is what they are doing to Wells, what are they doing to the other stuff,' We live in hope.

A new semi-professional magazine of SF criticism has recently been launched in the U.S. Called EPILOGUE, it contains articles on various aspects of SF, with a debate between Judith Merrill, Frederick Pohl, Lester del Rey and L. Sprague de Camp taking pride of place. This has the authors giving their opinions on modern SF and where it is heading. Lester del Rey believes that 'since the atom bomb and since the earth satellite, science fiction has regressed notably' while de Camp thinks that many writers are 'rehashing the works of the old masters.' Fred Pohl says that, thanks to DNA, 'A half century of science fiction is all about the same kind of people, people to whom things happen. Now it's going to be people who themselves are part of the change.' Judith Merrill says that today SF 'is both dead and more alive than it has ever been before.' Other interesting reviews of American SF books, a hilarious (not deliberately, we feel) article by Vincent Price about horror films, plus a lot more good stuff. The editorial address of EPILOGUE is 52 Adrian Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10463, U.S.A. 4/- cheque or money-order should get you a copy, or 7/6 should get you a couple.

For London SF readers and visitors to London, many writers and readers meet regularly on the first Thursday of every month at *The Globe Tavern*, Hatton Garden (near Gages). The atmosphere is completely informal and all are welcome.

The Editor



Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
The sun moves always west ;
The road one treads to labour
Will lead one home to rest,
And that will be the best.

A. E. Housman

THE SHORES OF DEATH

Michael Moorcock

Conclusion

OUR GALAXY is about to be destroyed. Another galaxy is colliding with ours and it is approaching the speed of light. When the speed of light is exceeded, it will convert to energy and we shall be engulfed by the same process. The human race prepares for death. But Clovis Marca, 30th century Earth's First Citizen, is searching frantically for something else. He, in turn, is pursued by two people—Fastina Cahmin, who loves him, and a mysterious man called Take who appears to know exactly what Marca is searching for. When aliens from the other galaxy arrive with possible salvation, Marca leaves Fastina and rushes away, making for his spaceship. He intends to go to the Bleak Worlds of Antares where he believes he'll find what he's looking for. But humanity is psychologically and physiologically unable to remain away from Earth for long — the trip will be uncomfortable, to say the least . . .

s e v e n

Work in Progress

THE HUGE SCAFFOLDING rose hundreds of metres high, each piece shining, each more than a kilometre in

diameter. And stretched about it were the delicate webs of wire and coils, merged circles, triangles and squares of vibrating blues and golds. Beneath it, looking up, stood three human figures and a fourth figure who was not human. His name was Sahaa and he was a bird-like Shreelian.

The shortest man pushed his mane of white hair away from his face with an old, slim hand. "Well, Andros—it's finished. It didn't take as long as you expected, did it?"

Andros Almer's dark face was frowning. He seemed to disapprove of Narvo Velusi's massively fragile transmitter. He shook his head and held his peace.

But Fastina Cahmin, the third human member of the group, was enthusiastic. "It's wonderful, Narvo. It will send your message through the universe for ever. Even when the Solar System leaves this galaxy, even when the galaxy itself is energised, your message will sing on—'We are here!'"

"Perhaps 'We were here' would be better," Andros's voice was dry. "You know I've no quarrel with the idea of the message, Narvo—it's the content of the message that bothers me. It was good enough, I suppose, while we were ready to accept the death of everything—but now Sahaa's people have given us a means of escaping, I feel we should do something more. We could broadcast the total sum of human knowledge with that transmitter of yours. Then, if the Shreelian scheme fails—as we know it can—we shall have left something worthwhile behind us."

"That would defeat the whole spirit of the venture," Navo said quietly. "The simplicity is important." He sighed. "Six months ago we were all agreed, all enthusiastic, now we quibble over this point and that. We should have been transmitting by now. Perhaps I am an inadequate leader, perhaps . . ."

Fastina took his hand. "You are doing marvellously, Narvo. You know how everyone was shocked when Clovis went away—everything was confused. You got both projects going—the transmitter and the artificial gravitational field. You supervised the modifications necessary for

making the computer complex function on an industrial scale, you got the plants set up and working, the machinery transported to Mercury and Pluto. In another six months the field should encompass the whole Solar System and we can begin tests. It's everything Clovis would have achieved . . ."

Narvo shook his head. "No—Clovis was a leader—people had an almost mystical faith in his judgement. They respected me, certainly, but they do not trust me in the way they trusted Clovis. The coming six months could result in a division of the people into a dozen opposed factions. Admittedly we all have the same aims—but we are not all agreed on means . . ." he glanced at Almer.

Almer said: "You're overstating the importance of these differences, Narvo. After all, we cannot just go plunging off into space in a direction chosen at random. Neither can we decide at once whether to admit every outworlder into the System. The new agricultural projects can only support so many and I'm not sure . . ."

Fastina was angry. "Narvo has made that decision. We admit everyone. The whole race! We stand or fall as a united race. If you begin to say who should come and who shouldn't, then . . ."

Narvo interrupted. "Fastina is right. Secondly the men of the industrial and agricultural worlds will be more useful to us than the men of Earth. Our skills are largely in abstract matters, theirs are material and, at this stage, infinitely more valuable."

"But Earth is being ruined by the factories and the farms. Gardens are churned up, forests are cut down, landscapes are marred by the airshafts from the underground manufacturing plants. Earth is becoming an ugly world. If we limited the numbers, we should not need to provide for so many, destroy so much."

Sahaa the alien looked on politely. Although he could speak Earthish and understand it, much of what was said was well below his own sonic range.

Narvo was turning away, escorting Fastina. "You are a selfish man, Andros. Sometimes I regret accepting your offer of help."

As Narvo and Fastina seated themselves in their gleaming red aircar Andros shrugged and shouted: "Without me it would have taken you a very long time to understand what the Shreelians were getting at—and you might never have interpreted their science. *You are ungrateful, Narvo Velusi! Luckily, the majority of the people on Earth are not!*"

Narvo blew on his sonarkey and ignored Almer. The carriage rose into the air. As they moved away from the shining vastness of the transmitter, Narvo rubbed his face with his hands.

"I can't blame him for his fears," he sighed. "But how can I quiet them—how can I keep the race calm and moving towards the same goal? At this rate we'll be fighting so much amongst ourselves that the Shreelians will give up helping us and leave us to our fate. It will be well-deserved." He raised his face to look westwards and Fastina saw that his eyes had tears in them.

He's right, she thought, we need Clovis. But, oh, my love where are you?

She remembered on the night he had left, when she had met Take on the roof of Narvo's house, she had tried to find out from Take what Clovis sought, but the strange man had refused to answer. And when she had asked him why he pursued Clovis, Take had seemed surprised. "I'm not his pursuer," he had said. "I am more or less his guardian—though not of an ordinary kind, perhaps."

Then Take had left, following Clovis towards the space field.

Oh, Clovis, come back. Come back!

e i g h t

The Bleak World

THE INDIVIDUAL WHO called himself Take had been following Clovis Marca for six months of his time and Earth's and something like two weeks ship time. Take had given himself a shot of tempodex which slowed his time sense as well as ensuring that his body-processes

functioned in relation to the time that would have passed on Earth had he been there. This was unusual, since most men wanted the time to pass as quickly as possibly. The anguish they called *space-ache* was only bearable for a short time. Yet Take seemed to suffer nothing.

Following Marca had been difficult at first, not because of the warp jumps which were regular and automatic, but because when in normal space, as they were now, Marca's course had been erratic. Evidently he had lost control of his ship several times before taking the decision to put the ship on a fully-automatic pre-set course. As Take knew, the only trouble with letting the ship do everything was that once the necessary co-ordinates had been locked in it was impossible to alter them until planet-fall was made. This was to ensure that a man gone mad with *space-ache* could not do anything harmful to himself. It had seemed that Marca had not immediately decided where he was going although Take, who had seen Marca's astrocharts and the course plotted on them, had felt sure he would make straight for the Bleak Worlds of Antares.

Take could not anticipate which planet in Antares Marca was now heading for, but at least he knew for certain now that that was where Marca was going.

Take rubbed the muscles at the back of his neck and watched his screen. They should be going into warp soon. He hoped that Marca didn't know he was being followed.

Clovis Marca didn't know he was being followed. He didn't know very much more than that he was in extreme pain.

It was pain bearing little relation to earthly pain. It was pain that could only be described in one word—*space-ache*—and that word could only be understood by those who experienced a journey away from Earth.

It was a pain that dredged burning fantasies from the complex labyrinth of the mind, a pain that created illusions that created pain. Away from Earth, away from its precedents and its heritage, the human body and its brain found itself unable to accept that it *could* be somewhere else, and it reacted desperately. Nerves and

muscles, unable to adapt to the concept given them by the brain, sought *return*. And the mind itself, bewildered, attempted to create, somehow, what it had lost. Yet part of the mind could accept the concept, could accept where it was, and that part sought to control the rest. Thus the body and mind of Clovis Marca became a battleground and though he was conscious, though his senses were functioning and his motor-impulses were usually under his control, he lived in a half-world of agonised illusion wherein he sometimes thought he was on Earth yet *knew* he was in space.

And all the time—pain.

The longer he remained away from Earth, the worse his condition became.

Fed automatically, exercised automatically, he lay enclosed in a rigid cocoon. Sometimes he was aware of the cocoon and sometimes he was not. He had been imprisoned at his own instigation when he had locked the ship's destination in to the pilot-computer. He would not be released until he made planet-fall, yet even on a planet that was not Earth he would have to fight off the space-ache and its effects.

The illusions came and went. Sometimes he lay in the grass, a small boy reading by a river, sometimes he talked with friends, sometimes he made love to a woman. Pleasant enough illusions, these, when not accompanied by the pain. But they were always accompanied by the pain, always showed him what he could enjoy, but never allowed him to enjoy it. And although all the illusions were of Earth and the things of Earth, they were not always so inviting. Sometimes they were nightmares of shouting voices, violent gestures, threatening figures of beasts and men, earthquakes and tempests, whirlpools and volcanoes, all the most menacing images of nature at its most destructive, images that had no relation to his own experiences, that were racial memories, handed down by remote ancestors to torment him and order him home.

But home he would not go. He had given up the chance when he locked his destination in.

His destination was Klobax in Antares. All the worlds

of Antares could support Man, though none of them were to his taste. They were barren worlds of raw, overpowering colours that made Man seem an insignificant intruder, totally out of place in their bleak and ragged landscapes. Even the vegetation was massive and of solid, ungraded colours—slabs of colours that blinded the eye and confused the mind. Bleak they were, and with only the most primitive animal and insect life and thus their dramatic and well-deserved name—the Bleak Worlds.

Yet some were attracted to them. Some would submit to the complex conditioning, training and drugging that, together with simulated Earthly-environments, would make stay on a planet almost bearable. For there was something archetypal in these worlds, a grandeur that could only elsewhere be experienced in a mescaline-dream. Some who first saw the Bleak Worlds even doubted their existence in material space, for they seemed to be the work of mad painters possessed of alarming and metaphysical visions.

There was a faint sound from the ship's engine, a vibration through its semi-sentient atomic nervous system, and Clovis Marca's clenched and wincing body was borne into hyper-space for seventeen seconds.

Then the ship was in normal space again and Antares was only 5,926,000 million miles away.

There were five worlds circling Antares. Klobax lay fourth from the sun, a large world in a system where the largest planet was the size of Mars.

The ship was soon inside the system and heading for Klobax, though Clovis Marca did not know it.

All Clovis Marca knew before the ship touched down was that he swam in a salt-warm sea and every movement of his arms tangled his nerves into nests of incessant agony.

The ship landed beneath ochre skies shot with a lurid yellow. The dull grey expanse of the pads terminated abruptly at a rolling landscape of scarlet and black moss that was relieved by slim, jagged crags of brown and orange. Near the ship was a large building, not unlike similar buildings on the spacefields of Earth. A man left

the building and began to move slowly towards the ship.

The man was young, but his face was lined and sagging. He had the face of a hound and his large, black eyes were soft, giving no indication as to his character. He was dressed in a tight-fitting jerkin and slacks of a dull, purplish colour. He was fairly short and he held his shoulders back as he walked. He gripped a small kit-box in his hand. In it was a master sonar-key with which he could open the ship's airlock if it became necessary, a hypogun and an arsenal of drug cartridges.

But inside the ship, Clovis Marca was already being irradiated in the cocoon. The illusions disappeared and so did much of the pain. He blinked his eyes and hauled himself upwards, like a man rising from his coffin. His face was pale, gaunt and held more than a hint of torment. He checked the ship's instruments, picked up his sonarkey and shut off the power. Then he went to the airlock and opened it manually. He looked out, blinking as the colours struck his eyes. He saw the man below him, looking up.

"How are you feeling?" the man said. "I'm Retorsh."

"I feel better than I did." Clovis squeezed the grav-strap under his arm and stepped out of the lock, drifting down towards the short man. "My name is Clovis Marca."

Retorsh seemed surprised. "An honour, Clovis Marca," he waved a hand towards the building. "Come inside. You'll feel better there—more like Earth."

Marca felt enervated and depressed. He drifted behind Retorsh as the man led the way to the spacefield building. "Glad you didn't need any help from me," Retorsh lifted the kit-box. "Sometimes I have to fight with new arrivals. They're not all as sensible as you. How they manage to get here without using the automatic system, I don't know. We had another distinguished visitor a little while ago . . ." They reached the door of the building and he stepped aside to let Marca go in first. It was artificially lighted in the reception hall and there were no windows.

"This is better." Clovis switched off his gravestrap and

walked with weak legs into a pleasantly furnished room decorated in quiet pastel colours. "Your planet's certainly impressive."

Retorsh shrugged. "I suppose so. I was born here and I've committed suicide three times."

"Three times? That's unusual."

"I suppose I was unlucky. Each time I was found in time and revived. I've no wish to for death, yet—" Retorsh smiled wistfully and walked over to a low chest. He lifted the lid. "Drink?"

"Not alcohol, I think," Marca came over to the chest "I don't know how it will effect me so soon after the trip. Better make it a coaci." He took the beaker Retorsh handed him and sat down on one of the comfortable couches. He sipped the drink. "You say you've had another visitor recently."

"Yes, the madman." Retorsh brought his large scotch over and sat at the other end of the couch. "As you know, we've got something of a regular population here, such as it is. There's a whole small town about four hundred kilometres north-west—and we have our rugged individualists. Most of them are self-sufficient, so I don't know how they get on."

"You never visit anyone?"

"There are a couple of women I see occasionally—religious cranks, but quite attractive—you know. Only one's any good for anything at all and the other's wired herself up so much she looks more like a gravcoil than a woman. Luckily the one I'm interested in prefers internal re-wiring, but she can't last much longer and stay human. Apart from them, I see one old man who lives in the nearest mountains—Sadivan. He was a member of your predecessor's cabinet I believe."

Clovis thought the name was familiar. "I believe so. What's he doing here?"

"He's writing philosophical essays and setting them to subsonic music. He's tougher than the girls, manages to keep going on drugs mainly, though most of the time these days he believes he's on Earth. He's got a very elaborate set-up—trees, grass, the lot—and and the highest wall around them you've ever seen. Sometimes he doesn't

mind our sky intruding, sometimes he rigs up a blue force-curtain and keeps it all out. I thought you might have come to see him. Who have you come to see, Clovis Marca?"

Marca decided to be frank. He had already burnt his boats on Earth. "I heard of a scientist who was living here. He had a name something like Zarvis."

Retorsh frowned. "Sharvis—Olonos Sharvis. He's been on Klobax some time."

"How much time?"

Retorsh laughed. "Well, he was here when my father and mother landed in 57 and there was some sort of legend that he had been here since Klobax was discovered. That would make him pretty old wouldn't it."

"About three-hundred-fifty."

"Yes, about that." Retorsh shrugged. "But you know how unreal everything is away from Earth. Things get mixed up."

"Yes." Marca finished his drink and refused another when Retorsh went to the chest for a refill.

Coming back to the couch, Retorsh asked: "I don't know your preference — whether you've got anything aboard your ship—but I've got a wire kit here that would last you for a couple of months, or drugs, or . . ."

"No thanks," said Marca. "At least, I don't think I'll need them. I had a cocoon job done on me in the ship."

"They're the best for a short stay. But at least you'll need some of these." Retorsh pointed at his large black eyes. "Lenses," he explained. "They help a bit to subdue the colours. I've worn mine most of my life."

Marca nodded. "I'd appreciate a pair. Have you been on Klobax all your life?"

"One trip to Earth was enough for me. I nearly stayed, of course, when I got there. I thought it was bad here—but it's a thousand times worse in space. I'm well looked after, I'm as adapted to Klobax as anyone could ever be."

"How do you spend your time?"

Retorsh grinned. "I'm an artist, like so many here. I spend my time working out the funniest ways of killing myself. I'm nuts I suppose."

Marca said nothing. Retorsh was, in fact, one of the sanest permanents he had met. He sat back on the couch knowing that he would not be able to relax completely. He needed to keep tight control of himself. To weaken would be to allow his body to remember that they were not on Earth. It was best to pretend as much as possible. The drugs, coils or radiation processes helped as well, but only a very small percentage of people—usually born away from Earth—could make any kind of permanent life on another planet.

Now that he knew for certain that the scientist was here, he felt no further need to rush. Perhaps he would take a trip to the village Retorsh had mentioned, try to find out a bit more about Olono Sharvis before he went to see him. But the rumours, the half-legends, the drunken ramblings and space-maddened ravings *had* meant something. That was the important thing. A scientist who lived alone on Klobax and had been there for 350 years—an immortal. A tiny piece of information which had taken him a year's careful work to find. It was a whisper of this that had sent him into space when he had resigned his position as Cabinet Leader, along with the other members of his government.

Soon he would be facing Olono Sharvis. And now that this was imminent, he realised that he was not prepared for the confrontation. How would he approach the man? How would he ask him what he wanted to know? What kind of man would he meet? A man who had spent 350 years in solitude on an alien planet. Yes, he decided, he would visit the village first. Make his way gradually. He had been moving swiftly until now and he must rally his mind, restore his self-control.

Retorsh said: "I lead a philosophical sort of life, really. It may be aimless, but I'm used to it. I once felt I could terminate it whenever I chose—but things seem to be against me. Three times unlucky. Do you know anything about Sharvis that I don't know?"

Marca shook his head. "What don't you know?"

"Everything. You're never very curious here. As I say, things are so unreal that what you don't come in direct contact with doesn't really have any existence for

you. I hardly believed Sharvis *was* here.”

“I hope you’re wrong.” Marca looked around the room. “Isn’t it all right to sleep here for a while?”

“I don’t advise too much sleep. If I were you I’d take a session in the revivobath.”

“That would probably be best.”

Retorsh got up. “I’ll show you where it is.” He led the way.

Lying in the familiar timeless, spaceless, weightless comfort of the revivo, Clovis Marca was doing some heavy thinking.

Since the resignation of the government, he had felt his integrity slipping away, and with it he had slewed off many other qualities—his self-control and his selflessness, his principals . . . everything he had regarded as valuable on Earth. And he had given them all up for what? A hope and a whisper of a legend? Perhaps. What he sought was time of his own, and as much as he wanted. He had enjoyed life on Earth to the full, never to excess, but he had only experienced a little of what was possible. He enjoyed life and feared death. Stronger: His enthusiasm for life was such that he would do anything to keep it. He *was* doing so. Yet was it possible that the very transcendence of life made it enjoyable, worth having? Or even that in giving up the qualities he had valued in himself, he could no longer find in life what he had enjoyed. Maybe there were other values?

Die Wahrheit ist konkret. Which German writer, how many centuries ago? The truth is concrete. What is true is immutable. What is true is valuable and what is valuable. . . No, not necessarily. What was now valuable to him might be only an illusion.

The ambiguities and anomalies of life could be forgotten on Earth. In Space, where little seemed real, where everything, from the human viewpoint, seemed disordered and abnormal, it was easy to believe that truth need not be concrete. Indeed, to the individual, it might have no existence at all.

He realised that he was confused, that he had been confused well before he first went into Space. The revela-

tion that the galaxy as he knew it was soon to be destroyed—he had thought that that had been the original cause of his confusion, but there were probably deeper causes. In two hundred years, the end would come. He could expect to live another ninety years. There would be no children to live on through, no future, no posterity. That understanding, hard to reach, harder to remember, was what had driven him here in his useless search.

Yet in a way he had recaptured his innocence, his belief that he could make the impossible possible. So maybe he still had something of value. If this were so, then the irony returned, for he had the cash but couldn't spend it and, he feared, if an opportunity to spend it arose—then he would no longer have the cash.

Outside, on Klobax, the sun beat down on a landscape of rudimentary and primordial colours. Beyond Klobax a spaceship was approaching. In it was a man with a rudimentary and primordial soul. Take had found the right planet.

n i n e

The Tragic Giant

BEFORE HE LEFT the next day, Marca remembered another question he had intended to ask Retorsh.

As he stood at the door, his eyes now black and expressionless from the lenses Retorsh had given him, he turned and said to the small man: "I heard on Earth that the artist Alodios came to the Bleak Worlds. He didn't visit Klobax did he?"

"He did. He was the man who arrived before you." Retorsh frowned. "The one I told you about—didn't I mention his name? The madman I had to fight with. That was Alodios." He smiled. "He may be a great artist, but he's a fool of a man."

Marca looked ahead of him. The raw Klobaxian colours were now muted and easier to bear, but they still retained their primary impression.

"Where did Alodios go?"

"He stayed on Klobax—his ship's down there," Retorsh

pointed at the ground. "In the hangars where I'm going to put yours."

"But where did he go here?"

"I had him here for about a week. He seemed to calm down in a way, but he also seemed drained—you know, like a machine. Everything he did seemed mechanical." Retorsh appeared to notice Marca's impatience. "He went to the village first. I don't know where after that. He may be dead by now. Some of them come here to die. What about you?"

For a confessedly incurious man, Retorsh asked plenty of questions.

"Me? I've come here to—live," said Marca.

Retorsh bit his lip and patted Marca's arm. "I'll see you before you leave Klobax." He pointed. "That's the way you want to go—in the direction of that tall bluff."

Marca said some formal words of thanks and squeezed his gravstrap. He rose slowly into the lurid sky. Another pressure on his strap and he was heading towards the bluff.

Multi-angled surfaces of flashing metal were what he saw first as he approached the village from above. In the distance it looked like a vast static mobile, only momentarily at rest. It lay in a depression ringed by rocks that all leaned inwards so that the village seemed to lie in the gullet of some sharp-toothed beast. The rocks were long black fangs casting a network of shadows into the depression. Sometimes the individual surfaces would merge as he turned his head, and then the whole would combine—a blaze of bright metal—and as suddenly disintegrate again.

It was a shanty-town of the 30th century. The shacks were golden, silvery, rubied, emeralded, diamonded hovels of sharp sheets of harder-than-steel plastic and metal. They seemed to lean against one another for support, were placed at cluttered random, forming a jumbled jungle of artifice in that barren, natural landscape.

As he got closer, he could observe individual buildings—all single-storied—and notice patches of cultivated land, small deep reservoirs, featureless boxes of machi-

nery, thin cables—all still under the sun. He began to descend.

Reaching the ground within the circle of black rocks but beyond the limits of the village he saw one or two figures moving in slow motion between the buildings. Attached to his belt was a kit-box given him by Retorsh. It contained a supply of drugs and a hypo-gun in case he should need them. Though he had not mentioned this to Retorsh, he had realised at once that the hypo-gun, loaded with the right drug, could become an effective weapon. Now he paused, opened the box, took out the gun and fitted a cartridge of sedadin into the chamber, enough for twenty or thirty shots. He did this because he had no way of knowing how he would be received by the inhabitants of the village.

From the ground, the village did not have quite such a surrealistic appearance, did not look quite so makeshift, though it was evident that the 'shanties' were not made of prefabricated parts but constructed primarily of sections that had once been fragments of spaceship hulls and bulkheads.

Marca walked cautiously forward.

And then a tall old man, with curling white hair, a cream-coloured cloak, yellow tights and a huge box strapped to his naked chest, appeared from around a building and greeted him.

"Stranger, you are welcome," he said gravely, dropping his chin slightly and starring hard at Marca. "You enter a mythical place, a holy place, the Seat of the Centre, Influencer of the Spheres—come pilgrim." With a great show of dignity he swept his arm to indicate a low, narrow doorway. Marca did not move. He recognised the jargon. The man was a member of the New Deistic Church of the 30th Century Zodiac. There weren't many of them.

"Thank you," said Marca, "but I am alone in my soul." This meant that if he were an NDC-er he was going through a course of intensive meditation which another's presence would interrupt.

The white-haired man nodded and said softly: "Forgive me." Then he stooped and went into his shack.

Marca now moved through the gaps between the shacks. He heard stirrings and soft voices, low moans and whines that were either human or mechanical, heard a scraping noise once or twice, but saw no-one until he entered a small clearing.

There, to one side, in the shade of a building, sat something that Marca recognised from pictures, something that he had heard about often but never seen for himself.

At first the shape appeared to be nothing but a tangle of coils and thin cables, a dark, static web standing nearly two metres high and some sixty centimetres in diameter, of a dull red colour, with threads of blue, gold and silver closer to the centre of the network. And then, as he peered closer, Marca saw the outlines of a human figure inside. He felt a shock as the figure spoke in a clear voice.

“Good morning, newcomer. I saw you approaching across the fields.”

Marca didn't argue. The man was living a complete and complex illusion. Every function of his mind and body was controlled by the machine of which he was the centre. a machine which completely simulated Earthly conditions for him and made him see his surroundings as if they were Earthly surroundings. Originally designed as a temporary device for use primarily in space, the machine operated directly on the central nervous system. Its drawback had been that it spread a peculiar kind of cancer through the spinal fluid and the resulting death was even worse than the space-ache. This was a modification that was connected up to some hundred main noetic points. Its drawback, in turn, was that once it was connected, it had to stay connected, for disconnection resulted in an acute nervous shock that brought death instantly.

The cage of metal moved jerkily forward. From inside it an emaciated hand reached out and touched Marca's arm. “You,” said the clear voice. “You. You. You.” It paused. “Me,” it said at length. Then the encaged figure turned and went back to the shadow.

Marca moved on. He felt depressed and nervous. The

village seemed populated only by the insane. Yet he had to find someone who knew where he was, someone to give him directions, information about the scientist.

He paused as he came to a decision. He knocked on the wall of the nearest shack. He called: "Is anyone in?" He bent his head and entered the room. The smell was terrible. Inside the room, on a big square bed, a man sat up suddenly. Beside him lay a young woman.

The man was also young. He had a hypo-gun in his hand and his face was angry. He said: "Get out."

Outside Marca sighed and looked around him. The village seemed to hem him in. But all he had to do to leave it was to squeeze his gravstrap and fly straight up.

Why did people come here? The Bleak Worlds drew the unbalanced and the misfits, he knew, because of their raw landscapes, their appearance of primordial grandeur, their sense of unlimited space. He remembered as a child he had used to wander in woods in the firm belief that they would go on forever; his disappointment when he came to a fence, a field or a road was always intense. He was always seeking a place where the trees went on and on for infinity. He could not analyse this feeling, though he still possessed it to some extent, but perhaps it was this yearning which brought the lonely to the Bleak Worlds, made them willing to suffer pain and madness just for the knowledge—nothing else—that if they wanted to they could go wandering over the planet for ever, with nothing to stop them. A need for eternity.

A voice said ingratiatingly behind him: "Can I help, Clovis Marca?"

He turned to see a pale-faced, mean-lipped man emerging from a blue and orange shack. The man had bitter eyes. He was dressed in a loose black toga and on his hands were many rings. The jewels in the rings were Jovian peletres, in themselves capable of bringing odd, hypnotic dreams. This man, Marca felt, was very different from the others he had met—and here for different reasons.

His name was Philas Damiago and he had the fame of being the only murderer to be convicted in the last hundred years. His victim had been revived and testified that Damiago had killed him for a precious statuette.

For this crime, Marca himself had banished Damiago from Earth. At once he suspected Damiago's tone.

"Damiago—what are you doing here?"

"Oh very little, Clovis Marca. And why are *you* here. A mission of good-will? Soup and kind words?" The pale man's voice was still soft.

"I have personal reasons. You seem to have kept very—sane."

Damiago moved his lips in an ironic smile. "Why not? Only weakness allows one to get like that—" he pointed at the man in the mesh. "I have ways of staying sane. I have my work."

"What work is that?"

"Would you like to see it?"

As Damiago strode back into his hut, Marca followed him. The place was well-lighted, and bigger than he had expected. In the centre, on a plinth surrounded by tools and furniture, stood a great half-finished sculpture. It was a crude thing, yet powerful—particularly since the entire bulky shape was constructed of human bones.

"Where do you get your materials," Marca said quietly. "do you have to hunt for them, or do they come to you?"

"They come to me, Clovis Marca." Damiago smiled. "I am the most valuable member of the community."

Marca turned his back on the thing on the plinth. His hand went to the catch of the kit-box.

"Perhaps in time you yourself will require my services?" Damiago said behind him.

"I don't think so."

"You never know. But I can tell that you are not your old self, Clovis Marca. You seem less self-possessed than when we last met. But perhaps that is only because you were on your own ground then."

Clovis swung round, but Damiago raised a hand and smiled deprecatingly. "I am not being offensive, I assure you. I merely say what I see. All men have weaknesses—would we be human without them? And if I can help—something you seek, or someone?"

"You are perceptive, Damiago, if you sense a weak-

ness in me. But the craving isn't physical" Marca made his anger subside. Damiago might be the man to help him and if that were so he didn't want to get involved in a quarrel or worse.

"But a weakness, nonetheless. I tell you sincerely, Clovis Marca, that to know that is enough for me. I am satisfied." Damiago grinned blatantly, triumphing in his knowledge. "I always felt you were too perfect."

Marca tried to ignore the feeling of self-loathing that filled him. He spoke levelly. "You sound as if you might have some of the information I seek, Damiago. I want to find out about Olono Sharvis, the scientist."

"Yes. You know that Alodios was here before you, asking the same question?"

"No. I knew he came here, but . . ."

"Now I know your weakness, Clovis Marca and I think I pity you. I am not an intelligent man, nor a philosophical one—but I am wise in some ways. I advised Alodios against going to see Olono Sharvis. Now I advise you, likewise."

"You know what I want?"

"I think I must do." Damiago looked at him with an expression close to sympathy. "Olono Sharvis could give it to you—and give you a choice."

"A choice?"

"There are different kinds, I gather. I am the only man on the planet who has any regular contact with Olono. I supply him with some of the things he has not the time to make for himself. You know he has the largest automatic laboratory outside of those on Earth? Yes, he has. Do you know anything of him—of the man?"

"No."

"He is very old—close on 500 years. He remembers the Last Wars. He was a research biologist then, working for Krau-Sect. If you know your history, you will remember that the Krau-Sect scientists were given complete licence in their experiments. Perhaps for us on Klobax that is a good thing, for he is now bored by experimentation on human subjects. His work is now almost completely abstract. Perhaps he is more insane than any-

one, I don't know. His claims are spectacular and usually well beyond my understanding."

"Does he resent visitors?"

"On the contrary, he welcomes them. He will welcome you—particularly when you tell him what you are after." Damiago laughed. "He is very accommodating. He has offered it to me."

"You refused."

Damiago made an impatient and angry gesture. "Of course I did. Oh, I am depraved, Clovis Marca, but my depravity will be a healthier kind than yours if you continue with this."

"I must admit you disturb me. Do you know anything about a man called Take?"

"You have met Take. Doubtless you will meet him again. Poor Take."

"Who is Take?"

"You could call him the 30th century's own Flying Dutchman. Ask him the rest yourself. You are sure to run into him again."

"Why won't you tell me?"

Damiago made the same impatient gesture. "Because I don't like to think about *any* of this, Clovis Marca. I hated you once, but now I tell you—get away from Klobax, return to Earth, forget about what you want. You will, you know, as you get a little older."

Marca felt even more disturbed. He said hurriedly: "Just tell me where to find Alodios and Olono Sharvis and I will make up my own mind when I see them."

Damiago shrugged. "I have done more for you than I should have thought I could. Perhaps I will obtain some satisfaction in hearing of your fate. Alodios has a place about a hundred kilometres south of here. You'll see a cluster of high rocks. There is a cliff that faces the sun. Alodios's place stands on that cliff. Sharvis lives in the mountains to the north-east of there—you will see them from the cliff. His laboratories must extend through half of those mountains. You will see a tall shaft of polished stone. That will show where the entrance lies."

Marca went outside. "Thanks," he said.

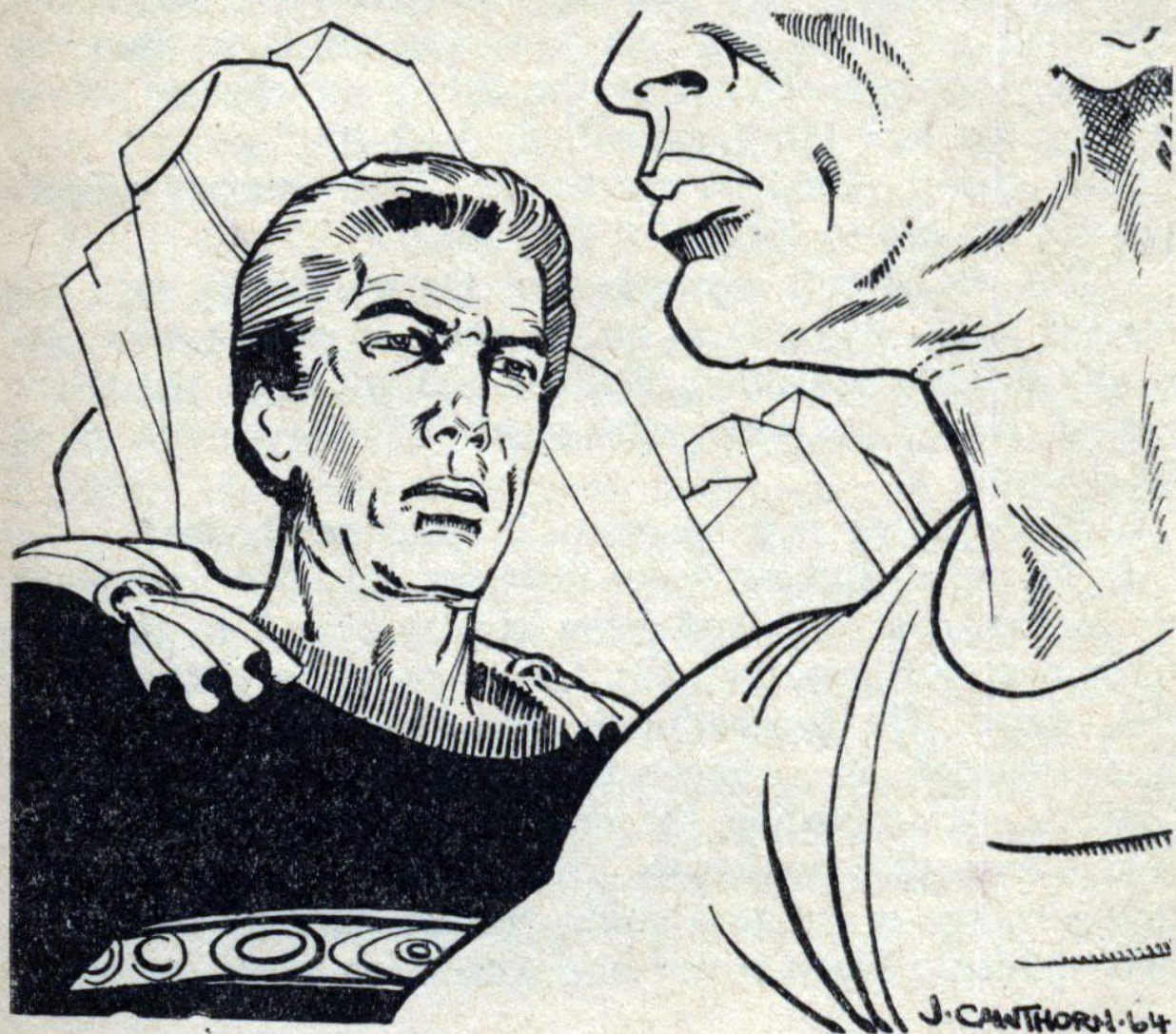
"Remember my earlier offer," Damiago smiled.

“Unless you accept it soon, it could be too late.”

Marca flew up into the ochre sky and his conscious mind was deliberately blank. It had required no special effort to make it so. It was as if Damiago's hints had struck at something in his subconscious and he knew that if he thought about it he might lose his conviction to go on. He might have left many of his better qualities behind him, but he still had his obstinate will.

The Great Glade on Earth was packed beyond its proper capacity. Every seat was filled and people hung from their air-carriages to witness and take part in the debate. Unlike the debates that had occurred here earlier, this one was violent and noisy. Narvo Velusi stood on the dais being shouted at from all sides. He strove hard to make himself heard, but Andros Almer and his supporters had gained strength and popularity in the last few weeks.

As he stood there, facing the yelling crowd—no longer the civilised gathering of Clovis Marca's time, but a mob



J. CANTHORN 1964

—he still found it difficult to believe that so much chaos had come about in such a short time.

He shouted: "Yesterday Sahaa left Earth. Do you know why?" The voices roared and bellowed at him, people danced in their seats, stood up, gesticulating. "Do you know why? Because he was disgusted by what he saw. Work on Mercury and Pluto has been abandoned while we spend time on this useless arguing! Sahaa was kind—" Again a roar of dissent—"Sahaa was kind. He said he left because he felt his presence was resented and we would get on better without him. But do you know what he really did? He abandoned us to our fate—the fate that will come unless we *unite!*"

From beside the dais, Andros Almer shouted in reply: "We *are* united, Narvo Velusi—it is only you and your friends who dissent!"

Velusi wheeled. "Then tell me what you propose to do!"

Andros Almer jumped on to the dais and addressed the mob. "We shall have complete control of the system-shifting machinery now that the alien has left us in peace! We shall test it in our own way, and use it to move in the direction we choose, at the speed we choose! That is only the first thing we will do isn't it!"

The crowd yelled its agreement. Almer turned triumphantly to Narvo Velusi. "You see?"

"But we haven't assembled all the machinery yet. We needed Sahaa to guide us on the tests. It will be a fantastically delicate operation. Without Sahaa's help, the chances of failure increase enormously!" Narvo was close to weeping.

"We're doing it alone now!" someone shouted.

As he sighed and got down from the dais, Narvo thought to himself that this had been almost bound to happen. Only a very strong man like Clovis could have controlled the crowd. He sympathised with them—the exaltation had replaced the almost apathetic fatalism, and now hysteria was replacing the exaltation. What had Fastina said about the 'undertow in the tide of history'—the zeitgeist, the mood that could remain dormant for years and suddenly blossom out into something great, or some-

thing terrible? Well, it seemed that she was right. But, as she had said, it was also in their mood that people should respond to Clovis Marca as a leader. He was the only man capable of channelling their hysteria into a useful and coherent direction. The mysterious force in them *could* be controlled, but the controlling ingredient was missing.

Where was Clovis Marca?

Clovis Marca was standing on a cliff, facing the sun. On his left was a small cabin that seemed to have been neatly manufactured from processed rock. In front of him was a high-backed chair in which sat a silent man.

For the second time, Clovis said politely: "Alodios? Am I disturbing you?" But the seated figure did not reply, did not move.

Marca stepped nervously forward.

He moved around the chair, watching where he put his feet, for it was very close to the edge. Below was a long, sheer drop to the hard sand that seemed so distant that Marca could hardly believe a man *could* fall so far.

Alodios stared fixedly over the hot, purple desert. The sun in his eyes did not seem to bother him and at first, with a shock, Marca thought he was dead.

"Alodios?"

There was such tremendous character written in the old man's face and hands, in the very stance of his body, that Clovis felt as if he gawped at some sacrosanct statue. The body was big—as big as his, but whereas he was gaunt and wiry, Alodios was huge, with big hard muscles, a mighty chest and huge arms terminating in those long, strong fingers that had been reproduced by artists many times. His head was Satan's head ennobled. Thick dark hair framed it, heavy black eyebrows bristled on a jutting brow, heavily lidded eyes were half-closed, yet the black eyes seemed at once mocking and warm. The nose was a hawk's beak and the mouth seemed the mouth of a hawk, the lips full and turned downwards, a cruel, sensitive, humorous mouth. But it was all static, as if Alodios were a living statue. Only the eyes lived. Suddenly they looked at him.

Marca was horrified at what he saw—absolute torment. In that still face they stared out at him, without self-pity, without any true intelligence. It was as if some mute, uncomprehending creature were trapped in the skull. It was not the look of a man at all. It was the look of a tortured animal.

Marca realised at once that Alodios did not think now—he *felt*. Sense appeared to have left him, but sensibility remained. He was a soul in darkness, all tormented sensibility.

Marca could only bear to stare at the eyes for a few moments. This man was once a genius, he thought, intelligent and sensitive, he created great novels, combinations of poetry, prose, pictures, mobiles, sculpture, music, plays. But now it was as if something had attacked the brain-cells, attacked his intelligence whilst leaving the sensitive core of him unsullied. What must he suffer, this dark, tormented king, this tragic giant? A man of supreme sensitivity controlled by superb intelligence—now retaining all the vast sensitivity, still receptive, still aware—but with no intelligence to rationalise it. This was torment of unbelievable intensity.

What had happened to Alodios? What had made him like this? Marca looked again at the eyes. All the pain was still there. Only death could remove it.

He edged around the chair and was about to step away when he saw Take. The strange man still held his head in an odd way. He was dressed in black and he held his hands clasped before him.

“He has what you want,” Take said in his melodious voice.

“This? This isn’t what I want!”

“He has immortality. Isn’t that what you want?”

Marca nodded.

“Well, Alodios went to Olono Sharvis and Olono Sharvis played a joke on him. Alodios found immortality, but he lost the sense of passing time.”

“A—joke? On Alodios! He was the greatest—”

“Yes, Olono Sharvis knew what he was. That, you see, was the joke.”

Act of Mercy

AFTER A MOMENT, Marca said: "Couldn't we kill him?"

Take shook his head. "I think you would find that he was invulnerable to anything we might try."

"You seem to know Sharvis well?"

"Oh, yes, I know him very well."

"How long have you been aware that I was looking for him?"

"I was lucky—virtually before you ever heard of him! You won't remember a town on Byzantium where I first saw you. You were being taken to the hospital. I heard a little of what you said and it made me curious. You went to see an engineer in the repair docks later. You had heard that he had told a story of a scientist who lived out in the Bleak Worlds—a scientist who had lived for centuries and knew the secret of immortality. I spoke to the man soon after he had told you the scrap of a story he knew . . ."

"Very well, so you know I am trying to find a means of living forever. Why are you so concerned?"

"Well," Take seemed to deliberate. "You might say that I like you, Clovis Marca; that I feel kindly towards you and don't want you to do something I am sure you will regret."

"But it is none of your concern," Marca reminded him softly.

"You might say that it is my concern, since I am in a position to tell you what Olono Sharvis would never tell you. You see, I am immortal."

Marca was not completely surprised. "But are you human?"

Take laughed.

"Are you?" Marca insisted.

"A sore point. I suppose I am—or was. This body isn't human—the mind is. As for the personality—perhaps it was human once."

"You are an android, then, of sorts?"

"Of sorts. I was originally a soldier—a gunner in the

Lim-Sect forces during the Last Wars. I was born in 2439. I was captured in 2487.”

“More than five hundred years ago. 2487—that was the year Krau-Sect was defeated.”

“Yes. Unfortunately, I was not repatriated. I was one of several guinea-pigs assigned to the research unit directed by Olono Sharvis. When it was evident that Krau-Sect would soon capitulate, Sharvis and his team fled. It was an unpleasant journey—particularly for us. Three of the seven patients had to be destroyed en route.”

“You came to Klobax?”

“Not at first. There was a long search for Sharvis and his team, I gather. In those days if they had been caught they would have been killed on the spot. Krau-Sect’s war-policies were somewhat fierce, as you may have read—in its bid to take over Earth, it tried everything it could. After all its basis was the vast munitions plant on which the firm had been founded—and it was perfectly equipped. The other giant capitalist organisations were horrified and their vengeance took the form of almost absolute annihilation of Krau-Sect and its employees. It was the finish of them all, of course, in the end. The organisations were so depleted that Paseda’s party was able to establish control over them, put everything under the State and abolish the money-system—you are familiar with all this, I know. The point is that Lim-Sect, or Jona-Fac, or any of the others would have found Sharvis and company eventually, only they had to return to Earth and try, unsuccessfully, to stop Paseda’s coup. Sharvis’s huge lab ship stayed in space until things died down. In that time, he continued his experiments until only I was left. Obviously he didn’t know whether I was immortal or not at that time. As far as he was concerned, it was an achievement to have me alive—space does not offer the best conditions for careful experimentation. While he waited for me to show some signs of longevity, he turned to his assistants and began to work on them. Two died—and the rest left him.

“After a time, we arrived on Klobax. The ship contained everything he needed to build laboratories, using the natural resources of the planet. He taught me every-

thing I could learn about his work. Then, having operated on him, I was sent out to spread the good news—immortality for all.”

“You operated on him? You could have killed him!”

“He took a simple precaution. The entire laboratory would have exploded if he had not revived in a given time. Only he knew how to operate the doors. I would have died, too. At that time, I did not want to die.”

“But you do now. Why didn’t you tell anyone of what Sharvis could give them? What was the flaw?”

“There was no flaw, really. No single flaw at any rate. The simple fact is that immortality—at least the kind Sharvis gave to me—robs you of your humanity. You become immortal—but there is no longer any point in being immortal.”

Marca pondered this. “But Alodios—?”

“Alodios is different. Evidently Sharvis’s sense of humour got the better of him. Sharvis, incidentally, does not seem to have been changed much by his immortality—he was inhuman to begin with. But he is like a man with a disease who wants everyone to have it. I realised this after he had released me. I said nothing. A year or two later I made my first attempt to kill myself, but Sharvis had been cunning.”

“He made you invulnerable?”

“More than that—he built into me a survival mechanism which makes it impossible for me to put myself in any danger for any length of time.”

“I noticed your reactions were inordinately fast—is that why?”

“That’s why.”

Marca was in a graver mood now. He wondered how much of what Take said was really true. Evidently the man was sincere—but he could only talk about his own condition. Perhaps others were affected differently by immortality?

“May I ask you what you want immortality for?” Take said.

“It’s hard to remember, in a way,” Marca said quietly. “When the news of the imminent destruction of the galaxy came, I was panic-stricken. I realised that I was

a member of virtually the last generation of mankind. I felt I had to do something about it. I felt that I *must* find a way of living at least right up to the end, and perhaps, after it. I felt I must make sure of missing no experience. And that meant I must find immortality. But now that I'm close to finding it, I don't know—you've frightened me, Take."

"I'm glad."

"Somewhere I seem to have lost track of my original aims. The original situation that made me seek immortality no longer exists, yet here I am, still looking for it."

"I assure you, Clovis Marca—it is not worth having."

Marca shrugged. "I would like to find that out for myself."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'll go and see Sharvis, talk with him, then ask him . . ."

"No!" Take stepped forward. "Once you're in there, he'll never let you go until he's passed the disease on! Don't you see—Sharvis is absolutely evil. If you don't think that what he did to me was bad—then look again at Alodios!"

"You have no proof that Sharvis did this, or that it was deliberate."

"I have seen other subjects Sharvis has experimented on. It was deliberate. He could not make that kind of mistake now! You think my experiences may have clouded my judgement—something like that? If only I could describe—find words—to tell you what Sharvis is really like."

But Marca felt detached. He said remotely: "None-theless, I will pay Sharvis a visit."

Take lunged forward, arms outstretched and, before Marca realised it the android had hurled him over the cliff.

He fell rapidly and the realisation of his imminent death came moments later. He felt fatalistic. The air was blasted from his lungs. And then he realised that he need not die. He squeezed his gravstrap. Immediately he slowed down and floated gently towards the ground. More pressure on the strap and he was rising again. He

opened the kit-box and unclipped the hypo-gun. With this in his hand, he came level with the cliff at Take looked over it.

He pressed the gun's stud and the needle-thin jet, pumped at tremendous pressure, caught Take on his thigh. But it did not penetrate. Take stepped backwards.

"You cannot harm me, Clovis Marca. I wish that you could."

Marca landed on the cliff, close to the immobile Alodios. "Why did you try to kill me?"

"It was an act of mercy. Once you were in Sharvis's power, you would never have escaped. Have I made my point—will you still continue?"

"The only point you have made is to prove yourself a madman, unable to act rationally. How can I believe you?"

Take turned and walked into Alodios's hut. Wanting an answer, Marca followed him. Inside, Take looked at an unfinished mobile. Behind it were several paintings. On a desk were notes, figurines. In a corner was a jumble of equipment — sculpture's tools mainly — a welder, electro-knife, pieces of metal. Sight of it only made his memory of Alodios's tormented eyes stronger and more horrifying.

Take stopped and picked up a piece of worked metal from the pile. It was thin and long. One end broadened into an oddly graceful design. One side had an edge to it.

"Take—why not come with me to see Sharvis? You know his weaknesses, what sort of trick he might play. Wouldn't that be a good compromise. Your advice would be of use . . ."

"I would only return there to destroy him if I had the means," Take stepped forward, his body moving so rapidly that it was almost a blurr to Marca. He swung the metal around. Marca felt it bite into his neck—and then he was dead.

Take stopped and picked up the blood-stained piece of metal. "I'm grateful for the second opportunity, Clovis Marca. And I am sure you would have been, too."

e l e v e n

Resurrection

THE WRECKAGE SHONE and vibrated still, but it was tangled, useless, torn down by a thousand hands. Fastina stared at it heavy-hearted. They had destroyed Narvo's transmitter.

Narvo himself was in hiding, declared a traitor by Almer's new government. She was ignored, though Almer had proposed to her twice since he had been elected—by a popular vote—to his position of First Citizen of Earth.

In some ways she had welcomed this decisive move—because at least Earth had a leader it felt confident in. But now Almer had begun turning away the refugees from the outer planets and, panic-stricken, the refugees were banding together, threatening to establish themselves on Earth by force if necessary.

In fact, for the first time in 500 years, the unthinkable threatened to become reality—throughout the Earth, across the worlds, there was talk of violence and vengeance, and everywhere were the unmistakable indications of a war about to boil. Five hundred years of peace had not been sufficient, after all, to make people forget how to dispute without recourse to war.

And if a war developed, as she could see it would, who would continue the work on Pluto and Mercury? Would the victors have the resources afterwards? She could see, clearly, that if war did come about, then humanity's chances of survival would become even smaller than they were at present.

She climbed into her air carriage and drifted upwards, away from the shining wreckage.

On her advice, realising that he had no support, Narvo had moved his house to the Atlantic. Nearly all 30th century houses were designed so that they could be sited on a sea-bed if the owner felt like it. Now it was proving useful.

Her aircar was also designed for use under water. As she flew over the ocean, she blew out the necessary code on her sonarkey and the car's force-bubble enclosed it. She headed down into the water.

Once beneath the surface, she felt safer. Although

there was quite a lot of submarine traffic these days, they were off the routes. Only a careful search of the whole Atlantic sea-bed would find them and she felt that Almer hadn't the time to make such a search. She was wrong. Soon after she had entered the water, another large car followed her.

Green, cool and silent, the water-depths drew her down. Only here was there still peace to be found. On the surface of Earth all was disharmony and disruption.

She soon found Narvo's house and in a few moments was steering her car through the lock. As the water was pumped out, Narvo opened an inner door and greeted her with a smile.

"Have they started a transmission yet?"

She felt it was better to give him the news directly. "They have smashed it, Narvo."

"Smashed it? But why?"

"I didn't seek a logical reason—they just smashed it. That is what is happening. It isn't merely that they're destroying things like your transmitter—they're destroying less tangible but even more important things—they're destroying the only civilised society in history that has achieved peace and sanity."

He put his arm round her shoulder. "No need to sound so melodramatic, my dear. It *is* difficult to see things in perspective, you know. This may be just a phase. Almer, after all, is not a self-seeker, he believes himself right in doing what he is doing."

"Neither were Hitler, Rickhardt, Vinor, Krau-Boss self-seekers in the sense you mean, but nonetheless . . ."

He led her to a chair and made her sit down. "We must try to remain calm, objective—we—" He looked up. "I heard something—as if another car was entering the airlock. It can only be a friend. I'll go and see who it is. Wait here."

But she waited nervously in spite of his confidence. She heard low voices for a few moments and then there was silence again. She got up. As she walked along the passage towards the airlock, she heard it open. Another arrival? She reached the door. An indicator showed her

that the water was only just beginning to be pumped away. For a moment she knew that something was drastically wrong, but she could not understand what it was. Then she knew.

Narvo was still in the airlock. It meant only one thing.

It meant that he was dead. Andros Almer, or his deputies, had murdered Narvo Velusi.

In his last microsecond of life, Clovis Marca had known that he was finished, yet now he was conscious. Had Take somehow misjudged the blow? Or *was* he dead? He seemed to be drifting, highly aware of his own body-bulk, in spaceless infinity. He became frightened suddenly and kept his eyes tightly shut. He remained like that for hours, it seemed, then he opened them, curiosity fighting off his fear.

In front of him something crystalline winked and shimmered. Beyond the crystal, a shape moved, but he did not know what the shape was. He turned his head. More crystal, dim outlines behind it. He moved a leg and his body turned slowly. He was completely surrounded by crystal. Attached to his mouth was a muzzle of some kind and leading off it were several thin tubes which seemed imbedded in the crystal.

He stretched out his hand and touched the irregular surface of the crystal. It tingled slightly. The muzzle stopped him from speaking, but he managed a muffled murmur.

Far, far away, a voice said softly, "Ah good, you will be out of there soon now."

Then Marca fell asleep.

He woke up and he was lying on a couch in a small, featureless room. It was warm and he felt very comfortable. He looked around, but couldn't see a door in the room. He looked up. There were indications that the room's entrance was in the roof directly above the couch, he could make out thin indentations, square in shape.

He swung himself off the couch. He felt very fit. But he wondered if he were a prisoner here. He had a feeling that he was being observed. Perhaps the walls of his room were transparent from the outside. He noted that he

was dressed in a one-piece garment of soft, blue material. He touched his neck, where Take's improvised cleaver had caught him. He felt something there—scar-tissue perhaps. It went round his neck in a regular line.

It felt strange to have been dead and knowing, now, that someone had found him in time and managed to revive him permanently. Normally, it was a very hard job to replace a head and only a few surgeons had the necessary combination of skill and equipment to do it.

Oloho Sharvis. It could only be the immortal scientist. But how?

A voice like the hiss of Eden's serpent filled the room. "If you will return to the couch, I will tell you. It is not in my nature to withhold from people what they want to know."

Marca obeyed the voice. As soon as he was on the couch, it began to rise towards the ceiling and the ceiling opened out to let it pass. Now he was in a far larger room, a room adorned with fluorescent walls of a multitude of constantly changing colours. The walls moved like flame and dimly lighted the room.

"Forgive the rather gloomy appearance," said the voice, "but I find it hard to bear too much direct light these days. As you guess, I am Oloho Sharvis. You have been seeking me a long time. It is a pleasure that we are able to meet at last."

Marca turned and looked behind him. Oloho Sharvis stood there.

Oloho Sharvis was a beautiful monstrosity.

His snake-like voice was matched by a long, tapering head of mottled red and pink. He had faceted eyes, a flat, well-shaped nose and a shrunken, toothless mouth. His bulky body, however, was not at all snake-like. It was almost square, and his legs were short and firm. His hands, as he moved them, seemed sinuously boneless. Bizarre as he was, there was something attractive about his appearance, but the first impression was one of height—for Oloho Sharvis must have been a full ten feet tall. He could not always have been like this, or Marca would have heard . . .

"You are right," hissed Sharvis, "my body is the

result of extended experiments over a great many years. I have made alterations not merely for convenience, but also to satisfy my own aesthetic tastes." Sharvis was blatantly reading his mind. He must be a telepath of a high order, for Marca had no hint that this was happening.

"Do not overrate my powers," Sharvis continued. "I can read only your conscious thoughts as they occur—otherwise your thoughts are tangled, conflict, and are confusing. Your mind is, in fact, something of a mystery to me—it harbours so many paradoxical thoughts . . ."

"How did you find me?" Marca spoke for the first time, realising that his mouth felt a little numb.

"A minor invention of my own that brings me information from all over the planet. Call it a micro eye—a device a little larger than an electron. I use many thousands of them. I saw what the ungrateful Take did to you and sent a servant post-haste to pick up your parts and bring them here."

"A servant?"

"Not a human being, I find it hard to get servants these days . . ."

"How long have I been here?"

"More than a month, I'm afraid. The initial operation failed. I nearly lost you. You need not worry, by the way, that I have tampered with your mind and body. I pride myself that I have done a perfect repair—no-one would know. The only indication is the red scar around your neck, but that will disappear. How do you feel?"

"Very well." Memories were coming back—Alodios, what Take had said . . .

"Again I must be candid. Perhaps I will lose your trust, but I did perform an operation on your artist friend, although I warned him first of what I was going to do, warned him of the consequences, yet he still insisted." The tiny mouth smiled. "I am an equable soul, Clovis Marca—I only do for people what they ask. I use no coercion. Ah, you are thinking of the Krau-Sect days. But I was young and headstrong then—I knew no such humility as I know now."

Olon Sharvis's sense of humour was proving too

obscure for him. He lay back on the couch and looked at the dancing colours of the walls. He felt relaxed and energetic, and he felt more attraction than fear for the self-mutated scientist. "You know, then, what I sought from you?"

"Sought. Do you, then, no longer seek it? I assure you I can give you what you want—eternal life."

"And what's your price—my soul?"

Sharvis laughed softly. "Let us not descend to mysticism. What is a soul? You mean your id, your ego? They will remain intact. I am here only to serve you, Clovis Marca—to give you your heart's desire."

"Take seemed to think your motives were more malicious."

"Take and I have known one another too long for me to think of him with complete objectivity, and the same goes for him—perhaps we hate one another—but it is an old, sentimental hatred, you understand. I gave Take his freedom, I gave him immortality—are those the actions of a malicious man?"

"Take seems to think you stole something from him, too—his humanity."

"For a man with little humanity in him, with few resources of spirit, then perhaps ever-lasting youth will bore him, will make him feel he has lost his humanity. It is Take's fault, not mine, that his imagination is limited so he spends his time moping about the galaxy, a self-elected martyr, instead of enjoying my gift to him. Think of that gift as recompense to Take for what he suffered from me in those irresponsible days of my youth."

"I have never been a subtle man, Olono Sharvis, and I find your words a trifle confusing . . ."

"Perhaps not subtle—but forthright and intelligent. Your intelligence must surely respond to what I am saying?"

"You have been guilty of many evil acts have you not?"

"Evil? No. I serve no abstract Good or Evil—I have no time for mysticism—I am entirely neutral. When called upon to do so, I do only what is asked of me. It is the truth."

“ I believe you. Yes, I believe you.”

“ Well, well, I will not press you to accept what I can offer you. To tell you the truth I lack the materials to give you an absolutely perfect chance of immortality, to make you invulnerable as well as immortal, so I suppose . . . ”

“ You mean, even if I agreed—or rather asked you to make me immortal, you could not do it properly? ”

“ Oh, yes, I could make you immortal—but you could still be killed.”

“ I hadn't thought of it before, but such a condition could be nerve-racking, never knowing when you might be— ”

“ True, true. So consider carefully.”

“ What happened to Take after he killed me? ”

“ He is still on the planet—actually he is outside my laboratory now. He has been trying to get in for ten days without my noticing. I don't know what he wants here. I have told him before that he is free to come and go as he pleases, but he is a narrow, suspicious man. I expect we shall see him soon. If so, I have a bargain to offer him. I told you that I refuse no-one what they ask, do to no-one what they do not want. I will leave you now—I have more than your particular problem on my mind. Feel free to go where you choose—you may find my home interesting.”

Olono Sharvis turned and seemed to drift away into the flickering wall and disappear.

Marca smiled. His suspicions of Take had been right. Sharvis's motives and actions were neither good nor evil—it was what one made of them that counted. He began to debate whether he wanted immortality without invulnerability . . .

t w e l v e

Bargain

OLONO SHARVIS'S VAST network of laboratories impressed Clovis Marca. He had visited similar places on Earth but none so spectacular, none designed not simply

for function but also for beauty. The complex underground building—built, he remembered, by the efforts of one man—was, in fact, a palace of incredible beauty. There were chambers in it which far outweighed the old cathedrals of Earth in their ability to transport the mind into realms other than the physical. They moved Clovis Marca deeply and he felt that no-one capable of creating such superb architecture could be evil.

In one very large chamber he found several works that were not by Sharvis. They were unmistakably by Alodios. When Marca discovered Sharvis, sitting thoughtfully in a chair in a room of soft, dark colours, he asked him about them.

“Normally,” Sharvis told him, “I ask no price for my gifts—but Alodios insisted. He was the only modern artist I admired, so I was pleased to accept them. I hope you enjoy them. I hope that someday others will come to see them.”

“You would welcome visitors, then?”

“Particularly men and women of taste and intellect, yes. Alodios was with me for some time. I enjoyed our talks very much.”

Memory of Alodios’s trapped, tormented eyes returned and he felt troubled.

Sharvis’s voice sounded sad. “I can refuse no-one, Marca. In many ways I would have preferred Alodios’s company, but in the end, I had to do what he demanded of me. I fear that you will not stay long, for one reason or another.”

Confused again, Marca left the room.

Sharvis’s ‘palace’ was a place of timelessness, but it was probably a day or two later that the scientist sought Marca out as he listened to the singing words of the mobiles in the Alodios chamber.

“You must hate me for interrupting,” whispered Sharvis, “but our friend Take has arrived at last. He finally took the simple way in and entered by the main door. I am glad he has arrived, for I wanted to speak to you both together. I will leave you to finish the novel, if you like . . .”

“No—you have aroused my curiosity. No, I will come.”

Leaving the mobiles, Marca went with Olono Sharvis to the room where he had first met him. Take was there, standing sullenly in the middle of the room, the coloured shadows playing across his face. He had his hands clasped behind his back and he had a defeated look about him. He nodded to Marca.

“I see I was unsuccessful. My cowardice got the better of me when I saw Sharvis’s robot coming—I thought he was after me, so I left. I should have battered your skull to pulp. I am sorry, Marca.”

Marca felt disturbed as he confronted his murderer, he also felt a little hostile, but this feeling was replaced by a certain sympathy. “I’m not, Take. Perhaps you acted as you thought best—but I’m afraid that my impression of Olono Sharvis is not the same as yours.”

“Smug cretin!” Take sat down, staring angrily at Marca before turning his attention to the huge scientist. “And a gullible one—what have you said to him, Olono?”

“I have only answered his questions truthfully, Ezek.”

“Glibly, you mean. Your ‘truth’ and mine are very different.”

Astonished that Take’s hatred for Sharvis could remain so firm, Marca said: “He has been fair with me. He has not lied, has not tried to encourage me to become immortal. In fact, to some degree he has tried to dissuade me.”

“To some degree!” Take laughed and his laughter, though as musical as his voice, seemed harsh. “Well, Olono—you told me that if I waited you would tell me something I wished to hear. Have you found a means of killing me and will you use it? That’s all I want to hear from you.”

“Then that is what you shall hear. You have it exactly.”

Take was startled. “This is another of your tricks . . .”

“Have I ever tricked you, Ezek? I have always been straightforward with you.”

“You devious fiend . . .”

“Please, Ezek—these outbursts only do you discredit.” The scientist waved a boneless hand. “Calm yourself and I will explain.” He glanced at Marca. “Would you have immortality if I guaranteed you invulnerability as well?”

Marca thought for a second, then: “Yes,” he said.

“And Take would have death. Well, Ezek, here is what I can do. I can use your body—with simple modifications I can make it a duplicate of the one Clovis Marca has now—and give it to Clovis Marca. I have mentioned to him that I do not have all the resources for producing another invulnerable body such as yours, but, at the cost of your life, I *can* give him yours. Now, think carefully, are you willing to do this?”

Take shook his head. “Another of your jokes, Olono. You know I would not do that—”

Marca broke in: “I thought so. You have talked about the horror of immortality, but, now it comes to it, you want to keep your life after all!”

Take lost his temper. “I can think of no words to describe your crassness, Clovis Marca. You were once admired for your sense—you must be a fraud!”

“Please,” hissed Sharvis, seating his huge body on a couch. “I dislike to see two men such as you insulting one another. Make up your minds.”

Marca breathed heavily, controlling his own anger. “But I am right, I think, Take.”

Take did not speak for a moment, but when he did, his voice was wistful. “I desire death probably with a greater intensity than you desire eternal life, Marca. You have missed the subtlety of Olono’s bargain. He knows that I have striven to prevent you from doing something that will cause you terrible misery, that I would have no other human being suffer what I suffer. There is only one emotion that moves me, now, and it is that suffering. Happiness and love are denied me. I sought only to prevent that suffering in you. Now he offers me peace at the price of passing my curse on to you—do you see?”

Marca waved his hand impatiently. “Let me have it, let me have it—I will make use of it, if you dare not!”

Take moved away, walking towards the shifting wall.

“What does all this mean? Is there a solution? Before you continue, let me point out that a war has started between Earth and the outworlders—the project has been abandoned, Narvo Velusi and Fastina Cahmin have disappeared, Andros Almer has seized power and it is likely that the Earth’s chance of escaping the galaxy are negligible.”

Marca was shocked. “They have two hundred years. This could only be a minor incident, things will calm down. The people will listen to me.”

“Still complacent? Then try to convince them—return now—mortal like them—and you might do it. You will not otherwise.”

“Make up your mind, Ezek,” said Sharvis from behind them.

Take turned slowly round, his oddly-held head regarding Marca with a deep searching look. Then he shrugged. “You are a saint, Clovis Marca, though you do not know it. Who else would relieve me of such a burden?”

Sharvis got up. “Good, gentlemen. If you will say goodbye to one another, I will ready my equipment at once.”

t h i r t e e n

Life of Sorts

WHEN MARCA EVENTUALLY awoke it was with a feeling of intense numbness throughout his body, as if he was paralysed. Yet when he tried to move his arms, he found that they responded perfectly. He smiled at Olono Sharvis.

“Thank you. You have done it, I take it?”

“Yes. Poor Ezek’s few remains were flushed away two days ago. What a shame that this was the only way. There are still only two immortals in the galaxy—yet two who will at least enjoy what they have. Perhaps you will tell others of what I can do—tell them where they can find me?”

“Of course.”

“While I was operating, I received a couple of visitors.

You know them both, I believe.”

“Who are they?”

“One is Philas Damiago—a mutual acquaintance. He brought a young woman here. She was in an hysterical condition. Luckily I was able to do something for her. I think she will be all right now. Fastina Cahmin.”

“Fastina! She has followed me again.” He made to get up, then he relaxed. “Good. I remember I felt very tenderly towards her. Now that I am immortal, perhaps we can spend more time together.” He stretched. It was a reflex action. It gave him no satisfaction. “Ah, the years of pleasure ahead!”

“Yes, indeed,” said Olono Sharvis. “Come—you may find a moment’s difficulty getting your balance, but that will go. Let us join your friends.”

This time he confronted Damiago and Fastina in the Alodios chamber. He had seen no mirror, so he did not know if his appearance were changed. As he entered the room, Fastina’s face brightened with pleasure.

“Clovis! Clovis! You *are* all right. I wasn’t sure . . .” as she came towards him, she glanced somewhat apprehensively at Sharvis.

“Many people suspect Olono Sharvis’s motives,” he said, “but you can take it from me, he’s my benefactor.” He looked at her in surprise as her expression changed to alarm. “What is it?”

“Your voice—it’s—it’s . . .”

His voice sounded normal to him. “Your memories contain a pleasanter voice, perhaps?” He smiled. It wasn’t very easy, he had to make his lips move in a smile, it was a conscious action. She appeared to notice it, too, which was worse.

She said quietly. “There’s something wrong, Clovis.”

Behind them there was a rustle as Sharvis folded his arms.

“No—I’m still feeling numb, that’s all—after the operation. It will wear off, won’t it, Sharvis?”

Sharvis shook his head. “I’m afraid not.”

Marca didn’t comprehend for a moment. “What . . .?”

“But you will get used to it. I have.”

“You? You have this—this lack of sensation?”

“Mental sensations soon replace the physical kind. I find much that is stimulating, still.” Sharvis smiled politely.

Marca felt despair. “Then you did trick me?”

“Soon you will appreciate such intellectual experiments. Take was too weak. But you are strong. Believe me, Clovis Marca.”

Damiago stepped forward. “Well,” he said to Fastina, “I brought you here.”

She nodded.

Damiago looked at Marca. His lean face had some sort of emotion in it. It meant nothing to Marca. Then Damiago looked at Sharvis.

Damiago smiled admiringly at the scientist, and the scientist smiled back. Damiago shook his head. “You have made him invulnerable, too? You took that away from him. You frighten me, Olono. I wish I had the courage to learn from you.”

Sharvis’s smile widened as he continued to look into Damiago’s face. “Courage?” he said. “You have something much more valuable—you have common sense.”

Marca was still baffled. He could not believe that Sharvis had duped him.

“Well,” said Damiago, “I’d better be going.”

Fastina had recovered a little. She said urgently to Clovis: “Did you know that Narvo was dead? Murdered by Almer’s men? Earth is in chaos. As soon as I realised what Almer was prepared to do, I left in Narvo’s ship. I knew you’d gone to the Bleak Worlds and I was lucky—I came to Klobax first. I was fired on twice by ships heading for Earth. They must be making weapons on the outworlds. Almer has banned everyone not already there from landing. He’s even deported a lot of people—even those from Mars and Ganymede. You know what that means to people—few can survive for long away from Earth. They’re attacking. You’ve got to come back, depose Almer, set up some sort of sane government again. You’re the only one who can, Clovis.”

Marca nodded. “It’s in my interest.” He thought again and looked at Sharvis. “Or is it?”

J. CAMPTON 1944



“Oh, I think so,” Sharvis said. “It has been a pleasure to help you, Clovis Marca.”

f o u r t e e n

You always — **pom pom** — hurt—**ta-ra** — the one—**ta ti di** you love—the one—**pom pom** . . .

THREE PEOPLE LEFT Klobax, left that archetypal world for Earth. Clovis Marca, untouched now by the space-ache, guided the ship on manual controls. In cocoons lay Fastina and Damiago, who had asked to accompany them.

Time was speeded up for him and it seemed a very brief journey before they were in the outer limits of the solar system and he saw the war-fleet.

It could be nothing else. He noticed gun-mountings, wondered at the control men must be exercising to work calmly in space. It had been done before, but at a time when people were more used to it, better trained to cope with the space-ache.

He contacted the leading vessel on his pathfone. A man's face looked out of the screen. To his surprise it was Barre Calax, Chief Controller of Ganymede Metals. Calax recognised him.

"So you have returned, Clovis. You know what is happening? All my suspicions confirmed. Whose side are you on?"

Marca spoke slowly and with difficulty, noting the tightness about Calax's face. "I fight on no-one's side—I want to go to Earth and speak to the people. You know they will listen to me, Barre. I can convince them to stop this business, get rid of Almer and start on the project again."

"You could convince them of anything before, I admit. We don't want to fight, Clovis. I'll let you through and wait to hear what you achieve. But these aren't the civilised folk of the Earth you left—these are crazed animals. You will need all your skill to sway them."

"Don't worry. Thanks, Barre." Marca cut-out and aimed the ship for Earth.

Andros Almer was enjoying another meeting in the Great Glade in which he was exhorting the mob to do their utmost for the war-effort and ensure their chances of going on to a better galaxy. The crowd was cheering so heartily that they did not notice Marca's arrival at first.

Marca moved with something like the old dignity. He stepped up on the dais behind Almer and said loudly:

"My friends, he is lying to you."

That was what some of them heard. When the others fell silent as Almer, angry-faced, whirled on Marca, Clovis repeated what he had said.

Almer laughed in Marca's face. "Here is the man who abandoned us when we needed him. We don't need him now, do we?"

The crowd was still silent. As Fastina and Damiago, who had nowhere else to go, climbed up behind Marca, Almer called to his men—stone-faced men with hypoguns—"Kill him!"

The crowd was not horrified. It simply seemed

curious. Everyone craned forward as Almer's men drew their guns and fired at Clovis Marca who did not move.

Nothing happened. "Grab him!" Almer yelled. "He's got some sort of immunity."

For the first time, Marca became aware of Sharvis's built-in super-fast reflexes. Sharvis had given him a new instinct and a means of using it. He stepped back from the men and then forward, grabbing a gun from one of them. He shot them down and then, before he fully realised it, shot Almer, too.

The crowd remained quiet, but now it was expectant. It waited for him to speak.

Disdainfully he threw down the gun.

"We stopped using such things four hundred years ago. Now I return to find you about to embark on a fratricidal war!" He tried to sound angry, but he realised his voice mirrored his lack of emotion. He could not summon any kind of emotion. He paused. They waited.

"You were frightened, I can understand that, and Almer traded on your fear. But there is no need for fear now. We must continue with the project. It is our only hope of salvation from the destruction facing the galaxy."

A few people cheered him, but the cheering was sporadic. Evidently he was not moving them. Somehow they sensed that the man facing them was not the man who had left Earth.

Fastina stepped forward and shouted at them. "Listen to him! Listen to him!"

Someone called: "What's the matter with him? What's the matter with Clovis Marca?"

Fastina's reply was much less fiery. "Nothing. You followed him before—follow him now."

Marca stood listening. He found it hard to pay much attention.

Another voice, a disturbed voice, yelled: "He's like a dead man—and the way he moves isn't human—what is he? A robot you've fixed up to try and fool us?"

Marca had to speak. He said flatly: "I am Clovis Marca, but I have only just returned from space—you know what space does to you. Please listen to me—go

home now and I will broadcast to you all tomorrow when I have been able to form some sort of government. Things will settle down. I will communicate with the outworld fleet and tell them that Almer is dead. Go home now."

But only one or two rose. The rest were still waiting. What was it? He could give them nothing more. Even his last speech was an effort. He turned to Fastina.

"They're not really listening to me, are they? What do I need to tell them?"

"You would have known before," she said quietly. "Clovis—I loved you—you are not Clovis any more. You are . . ."

Then Damiago spoke. "Forget it, Marca. Give them time. Perhaps later . . ."

But now some of them were shouting. Fastina took Marca's arm. "They're still baffled," she said. "I think we'd better get away from here now."

At that moment someone shouted: "Almer was right! He abandoned us—he's only come back because we were doing what *we* wanted to do. He killed Almer—it was jealousy!"

The mob began to move towards them as they sped upwards to their aircar. Damiago glanced behind him. He grinned. "Goodbye, Marca—I'm with them," and he veered off.

As Marca sat slumped in his seat, Fastina activated the car. They sped away at full speed.

Fastina wept as she steered the car. She headed out towards the desert where, with luck, the mob would not look for them.

"Clovis—how are you?"

"Numb," he said. "I'm numb—I haven't—I can't—" A terrible sense of loss engulfed him, but he could not, it seemed, weep.

Soon after the cool desert night had come, they sat together on the hard sand, their backs against the grounded aircar.

He had just made love to her, desperately trying to recapture his lost sensations without success, but it was rape and a horrible kind of rape and they both knew it.

“Well,” she said. “You have your immortality. But I still wonder why you sought it when you thought that Earth was bound to perish.”

“So do I,” was all he said.

Later, in a different mood, he made some sort of attempt to answer. He spoke vaguely. “I heard the news and I went away and thought about it. I thought of all those crowd-scened centuries of history; all those populated hours. I thought of all the sets crumbling and their bright dust scattering and drifting into eternity . . . Somehow I had the idea of preserving it all in me—so that I’d become a kind of walking record of it all—I couldn’t accept that I would ever die. I don’t know . . .”

“But they’re throwing their chance away. You will die if that happens. The fools!”

“No. I can’t condemn them for losing sight of their goal. It seems to be an irremediable flaw in the human character—to go for something more immediate and easier to grasp—to forget the difficult things. I did the same thing in my own way.” He sighed. “Oh, I am empty . . . empty . . .”

He sat there, slumped, staring at the clear sky. Beyond it, Barre Calax’s fleet waited. Perhaps it was moving in already. Perhaps Calax would win and establish a firm, if dictatorial, government, get the project going again. He didn’t really care, though he felt he should.

Then he thought of Alodios, suffering perhaps even more than he was, and he said: “Even if we fail, at least someone will benefit. Perhaps we should fail—for his sake.”

But she had fallen asleep.

He got up and looked down at her. He could feel very little towards her except regret—and regret consumed him.

Passionless, yet remembering passion; corrupt, yet with a memory of innocence; imprisoned in his terrible casing, his fraud of a body, that invulnerable armour locking out his humanity, Clovis Marca walked away from her, into the desert.

The End

New writer Collyn makes his debut with a light piece about what—at a far-out guess—might happen if two people (a beautiful blonde and a handsome scientist in this case) got mixed in the matter transmitter . . .

MIX-UP

George Collyn

o n e

POINT ONE AND before I say one word more . . .

. . . That is, before the Federal Transport Authority slaps down a restraint injunction on the grounds of libel.

Let me say right here and now that the fault which created the troubles listed below has by now been completely eradicated and there is no possibility of its future recurrence. Therefore use your local teleportation unit without fear. It is 99.9% safe.

t w o

SECOND POINT: HAVE you the faintest inkling as to the workings of the teleportation system?

Of course you haven't. Since when has man not taken for granted the technological advances presented for his convenience? After all, did the railway passenger of the nineteenth century comprehend the marvels of steam locomotion? Or had the twentieth century air-line traveler the remotest notion as to the principle of the jet-engine? No—to them all that mattered was that they were transported from place to place with a minimum of inconvenience. And the same goes for you today as you are whisked from cubicle to cubicle over the teleportation system. So let's get some idea into your minds as to the principle of the thing before we go any one step further.

All material objects, when they are analysed down

to their lowest common denominator below the level of their atomic structure, are made of the same basic 'stuff'—to keep this simple let us call it matter. Matter forms the building bricks out of which, dependent upon the molecular arrangement, all things, be they a T-bone steak or a pint of sea-water, are made up. Since the time at the beginning of the present century when man discovered the means to analyse, reduce and reconstruct this matter, the power of technology to alleviate material shortage has been considerably strengthened.

Take the Moira. No good home would be without one but how many people know that Moira is not just a pretty name but stands for Matter, Organic and Inorganic Reconstruction Apparatus? Let us just remember our operational procedure. You take the code key for whatever it is you require—say a new shirt. You slip it into the slot provided and fill the hopper with the raw material—a couple of pints of sea-water, a pound or two of sand or, for that matter, an old shirt. The Moira breaks down the sea-water or whatever it is and thus provided with its basic material, reconstructs the atomic structure in the way indicated by the code-key; which in this instance happens to be for a Gay-Glo 'Glam-man' shirt—"expressly tailored for YOU in Gay-Glo's own laboratory."

You knew that you say?

In that case you have grasped the fundamentals of teleportation because, after all, physically a man is no more and no less than any other material compound—just a bit more complicated.

When you step into a transmission booth and dial your arrival number the transmission unit analyses your make-up and at the same time—alarming as it sounds—physically disintegrates you into basic matter. At the identical moment the memory banks transmit the information regarding your composition to the reception unit where you are put together again from the detritus of some previous traveller, eked out if necessary from the unit's matter-hopper.

It sounds alarming I know but in effect it is little different from the biological process; since what after all

are the genetic chromosomes but computer programs? There is always the fear that once disintegrated, always disintegrated but the process is virtually instantaneous. It isn't of course since it all takes place at the speed of light but, since light goes round the world seven times in a second, I defy any living man to distinguish between that and instantaneity.

Still its strange to think how many people there are walking around today who started out in life as a couple of gallons of Atlantic. Never mind, there's nothing to be alarmed about. Hardly anything can go wrong.

But . . .

t h r e e

THE OBVIOUS TROUBLE with teleportation is that it utilises tight-beam radio waves and however tight the beam and no matter how perfect there always exists a risk that it may be subject to interference. How often for example have you sat with your video set slightly out of tune so that although you are getting C.B.S. New York loud and clear on channel 148 you are also picking up a faint image of B.B.C. International on channel 147?

One July day just three years ago, in the early afternoon E.S.T., or should we say early evening G.M.T. (rapid transatlantic travel can be very upsetting time-wise) a minute, indeed infinitesimal part in the equipment of Teleportation Unit NYTS27815(U.S.) in Times Square, New York City, went very slightly on the blink. It was a very small part and it was a very small fault but it meant that there was a limited amount of interference between channel 27J815 and 27K815. Interference which began at a quarter after noon E.S.T. and continued intermittently; since it only occurred when both channels were in use and beamed simultaneously to the same destination; until three minutes before three when the condition became critical and automatic correction took place.

In that time a young salesman from Poughskeepie found on arrival in Sunset Unit, Los Angeles that he was holding a bag containing 350,000 dollar/sterling interchange credits while Alan B. Schumaker, a courier

for the Chase Manhattan Bank standing in an adjacent cubicle was left holding a bag of sample Moira baby-products code keys which represented 5 fragrances of talcum powder, 2 brands of disposable nappies and a portable crib. While a 30 year old gerontologist called Spivak, en route from New York to the French Riviera, lost in transit the baby-blue eyes with which he had been born and somehow acquired the green-flecked-with-gold irises which had previously been the chief stock-in-trade of a gigolo by the name of Carlos who was returning from a most unpleasant time with a senile Daughter of the American Revolution to the comparative calm of the Promenade des Anglais.

Despite these minor upsets in the lives of four erstwhile carefree people, the mistakes till then had been of relatively little importance. However, at 2.51 E.S.T. Professor Irwin J. (for Joe) Black, lecturer in Twentieth Century literature at Columbia University, thirty-five, sun-tanned, dark and handsome; and Miss Dorothy Simone, slim, ethereally blonde and indescribably beautiful 26 year old video star; the former alone, the latter surrounded by ecstatic fans; entered respectively booths 41 and 71 of the Times Square Unit. At 2.52 finger for finger in time they both dialled LO52781(U.K.). One fifty-sixth of a second later the tall dark man and the slim fair lady arrived in booths 28 and 42 of the Berkeley Square Unit in London.

f o u r

DOROTHY SWEEPED OUT of her booth with the imperious nonchalance born of a dozen temperamental and artistic tantrums but noticed nothing untoward save the shameful effrontery of several members of the public who disgracefully ignored her presence. Still with imperial majesty she swept along the Turkish-carpetted and gilt-mirrored corridors of that showplace of Teleportation Units. Less vain than acutely aware of her own stunning beauty she felt her temper rise almost to boiling point as a very handsome young man with a brown suit, brown hair and browned skin approached her showing neither any sign of recognition nor, what was worse still, any

flicker of admiration. Dorothy was in her way a connoisseur of masculine beauty but this time her aesthetic appreciation was marred by the slight to her pride. Walking to stand in the way of this presumptuous young man she would have spoken if she had not been brought up short physically and mentally by the realisation that the corridor turned sharp right at that point and what she had been walking towards in the past few minutes had been no young man but an image in a mirror.

Irwin had reality thrust upon him with much greater speed. This was partly due to the fact that he was not accustomed to step from a TP booth into the face of a screaming mob of fans and press. More so it was because his brain issued walking instructions calculated to move feet shod in rather large suede brogues; which instructions were received by legs terminating in flimsy constructions made of a few square inches of leather, a strap and three inch high stiletto heels. To the immense titillated delight of a thousand males and pressmen the body of a delicate but well-constructed video star, albeit with the brain of an English professor went headlong to the floor.

Their reactions were mutually out-of-character with their outward form. Travellers utilising the first-floor booths of the Berkeley Square TP Unit were treated to the sight of a six-foot, athletically built and full adult male indulging in a fit of hysterics; while half the male population of Greater London watched entranced the rosebud-shaped and rose petal-tinted lips of an angelic blonde giving forth with language which would not have disgraced an argument between a Billingsgate porter and a bargee.

f i v e

DOROTHY WAS DISTINCTLY uncomfortable. Something was wrong but she did not know what it was. For all she knew it was something peculiarly masculine. As it happens it was simply that as a non-smoker she failed to recognise the withdrawal symptoms of nicotine starvation in the body of an ardent thirty a day man. Plagued with incomprehensible pangs she took little part in the

conversation that was proceeding. Cool, calm and composed she sat, and inwardly seething.

Irwin, on the other hand, overwhelmed, looked a perfect picture of innocent and helpless appeal. His blonde hair in disarray, attractive disarray of course; his full gentian violet eyes rendered more glisteningly startling by being full of tears; the lower lip trembling in dismay—The appeal of Dorothy Simone as one of the world's most beautiful woman had always rested on the paternal-lover instinct men have in response to helplessness. Now to David Wallace, representative in England of Teleportation (U.S.) Inc, facing the vision of loveliness across his desk, there came the irresistible urge to take her . . . him . . . er . . . Irwin into his arms and kiss away those tears. The only thing that held him back was the thought that he and Irv Black had grown up on the same block, had played together, gone to High School together, roystered round college in partnership and these things build up a constraint. It was all rather confusing and all rather unfair.

“But Dave,” pleaded Irwin, “It’s all very well saying how sorry you are but what are you going to do about it?”

“Now don’t you worry Miss Si—I mean Irv. I assure you Teleportation will pay you very adequate compensation for this unfortunate accident.”

“What good is compensation? I want my body back. What sort of fool do you think I’ll look to my students like this?”

“I’m sure you look very nice. Don’t you think you could perhaps reconcile yourself. After all, you’re a very attractive woman now. I’m sure there are millions of schoolgirls all over the world who could ask for nothing better than to grow up looking like that.”

“You forget that I never was a schoolgirl and I’ve never had any ambition to grow into anything but a perfectly normal masculine male. And now all I want is to be back in that body there and if Miss Simone can bear to give it up I’m sure she’d like nothing better than to be back in here where she belongs.”

“Well it’s all a bit difficult but immediately we heard

about your accident we put our research team to work and there's every hope they'll come up with some sort of an answer in a couple of months or so. They've never failed us yet."

"A couple of months he says. What am I to do in the meantime? I'm due to lecture at University College tomorrow. How do you think the students will feel about a world famous dumb blonde lecturing them on 'Logical Positivism in Twentieth Century Science Fiction'?"

"Please don't forget me," broke in Dorothy, her new bass vocal chords not yet fully under control, "I'm supposed to be acting tomorrow in a play that's going out over an international hookup that could be the turning point of my career. A fine sight I shall look now playing an eighteen year old girl."

"All I can suggest," said David, "Is that you attempt, just for the one day, to fulfill each other's commitments. We'll give you every help we can of course. For a start I think we'd better get you both rooms at the TP Unit Berkeley Hotel so that you can talk things over."

"A double room," said Dorothy, with resignation but firmness.

"Certainly not," shouted Irwin, "I'm not sharing any room with that . . . that . . . man!" Always a hypochondriac, Irwin had contemplated every accident or sickness that flesh is heir to but there was one thing from which he had considered himself immune. Paternity he did not mind but what red-blooded male wants to run the risk of maternity?

"Certainly a double room," insisted Dorothy, "Whatever you may think of them, that face and that body are my chief assets. I'm not leaving that man alone with them to deal with them as he sees fit."

"But," stammered Irwin.

"Are you bashful?" asked Dorothy, "Look at it this way. You've spent your life with this body and I've spent mine with that. We should know what one another looks like in the raw. Who can afford modesty at a time like this?"

But Irwin was in tears again.

The next morning it took Dorothy two hours to get Irwin dressed and ready. Of course he had to try to dress himself in which attempt he succeeded only after a long diatribe against the ridiculous impracticality of feminine undergarments. Then he had to do it over again after a lengthy protest from Dorothy as to his complete lack of dress-sense and colour consciousness. Finally came the attempt to make up his face which resulted in three abortive mockeries before Dorothy was able to pronounce him fit to be seen by the world.

At last the mixed-up couple made their way to the first of their appointments. Teleportation had provided a miniaturised transmitter and receiver, the former hidden in a pearl necklace and around Irwin's throat the latter concealed in Dorothy's ear. So Irwin, hastily introduced as an old and valued friend, was able to prompt Dorothy on the names of the welcoming dignitaries and also to feed her the lecture sentence by sentence for delivery to the audience.

It was a wow.

Always fairly shy in public, nobody faulted Irwin for his knowledge, only for his style of speaking which was hurried, dull and uninspiring. For the first time his material was delivered with all the skill of a born actress and she made it live. The result was that the lecture was applauded by a standing ovation. Now Dorothy was a video actress who had never known a live audience and the experience went to her head. She bowed and waved at the applauding throng. As it were in thanks for the experience she turned and kissed Irwin which action of course sent the audience into fresh frenzies. It was a sensation.

Six hours and a rehearsal later the transmitter was tucked into one of Irwin's ties and round Dorothy's neck and the receiver was hidden under carefully arranged fair hair: Irwin was making the debut of his acting career. Luckily the play was a good old-fashioned weepie in which he had to take the part of a schmaltz-ridden deaf and dumb girl. All he had to do was to move accord-

ing to Dorothy's instructions and register shock, horror and dismay which, faced with a battery of lights and video cameras, called for no acting ability whatsoever. The only awkward moment came at the climax when the hero had to take him in his arms. Every masculine instinct told him to haul off and poke this fellow in the nose but it so happened that though the brain patterns were masculine, the nervous and glandular systems were still 100% feminine and a wave of pleased feminine id overcame the repelled masculine ego and he managed to respond automatically with perfect correctness.

s e v e n

—“DOT BABY.” THIS was Abe Schultz, Miss Simone's agent, calling her from Hollywood. “Dotty honey you were ab-so-lutely great. Al and I sat here and watched your performance and baby there wasn't a dry eye between the two of us. Strictly between ourselves honey we've been kinda worried about you lately. We were getting the idea you were losing that good old cuddle-some image—getting kinda independent if you know what I mean. But tonight I take it all back: you were just great and everyone, but everyone thinks so too. The offers are flowing in and I've a beaut lined up for you. It's a remake of an old movie called Turnabout by a fellow called Thorne Smith and it's about how this guy and his wife get swapped round because they got in bad with a magic statue. Now I know you're the last one I can think of to make like a man but if it comes off you're made, 'cos it could be good, and the money's even better. Think you could handle it?”

e i g h t

“BLACK,” SAID DEAN Lockweiler, on the visiphone from New York, “The faculty and I felt we should phone you to record our appreciation of the reports reaching us of the reception accorded your lecture in London. I must confess there has been a certain amount of criticism expressed of late as to the suitability of your position

here as a leading authority in the field of English Literature. The general feeling rightly or wrongly was that, although pure cerebration might be permissible, indeed necessary, in the earlier patterns of university life, today, when so much of our output has been devoted to the growing channels of mass communication, there is a need for the public expression of one's knowledge to be fully recognised. Up to this time, as I say, we felt this faculty was lacking in yourself but following your success of yesterday I can say with all fairness that we expect you to rise to great heights in the career we are now planning for you."

n i n e

"WELL," SAID DAVE Wallace, "I can't say how sorry we are that this has taken so long but you will appreciate that there have been serious technical problems to overcome and in fact we feel that in relation to that difficulty six months is a very short time indeed. Anyway that's enough of the apologies, "I'm sure you're much more interested in what we've worked out for you."

He paused to see how his audience were taking it. He had to admit that he was more than a little disappointed and puzzled. Despite their previous insistent demands that the firm's mistake be rectified they seemed to be taking the news of that impending rectification with a startling indifference. Also, for a couple so antagonistic toward one another when last he saw them, they seemed remarkably friendly. He continued.

"It would seem that interference between two parallel beams during teleportation caused your two brains to be transposed without otherwise physically affecting you. Now although we cannot repeat the operation with any certainty of success we have adapted a teleportation unit to withdraw and transpose your respective memory banks—in other words to transfer that sum of experience which create your personalities and awareness from one body to the other." He smiled triumphantly at them.

Dorothy-ex-Irwin smiled shyly back. "I'm honestly terribly sorry you have had all this trouble for nothing

but you see I think that after all it won't be necessary," she/he paused and glanced at her/his partner. "Irwin and I have found out how very much more content we are today. Both of us were successful in our careers but complete failures in our personal lives and that failure was beginning to affect our work. It almost seems that the accident was meant to make better, more efficient and more successful people out of us. So you see we shan't be needing your machine after all."

"We can't anyway," broke in Irwin-ex-Dorothy, blushing very prettily "because last week I asked to Dorothy to marry me and I'm very glad to say she accepted."

t e n

SO THAT WAS a little over two years ago and despite the former Miss Simone's reputation for marriage-busting the partnership shows every sign of lasting and I see no reason why it should not continue to do so. After all, the one person we love above all others is ourself. What if we manage to externalise the self we grew up with and marry that self? If love can conquer all, think what ego-centred love can do.

Dorothy-ex-Irwin worked on for a time but abandoned her promising acting career in order to coach Irwin into becoming an equal authority on English Literature in which, since the former Miss Simone was always only artificially unintelligent, she was entirely successful—they are now the most powerful academic couple on the campus, in the whole of the fifty states of the Union for that matter. Her departure from the public eye was hastened by the arrival of Irwin Junior, to be joined just a couple of months ago by Dorothy Junior—a fine pair of kids who are a credit to their parents. Most important of all, though, to them both is the work they are doing in advising those who find themselves in the same position as do the Blacks.

After all you can't expect a firm to spend six months and an awful lot of money in developing a complex apparatus and then leave it to rot. Therefore the Per-

sonality Transfer Unit or PETER as it is known, has come into its own. There are plenty of brilliant and original minds entombed in bodies which are incurably sick or decaying in senility. Equally there are healthy bodies supporting sick minds—the incurably but not psychically insane, the psychopaths, the condemned murderers of this world. What a service to mankind to transpose the two. On these occasions body and mind are sometimes compatible: more often however they are of different sexes, ages or races and it is to help these people in their adjustment that the Blacks are called in.

Also and it is a little known fact, the PETER is now a regularly used device in the marriage guidance game. Let one partner have a fortnight's insight into the point of view of their husband or wife . . . Very good results have been achieved but I can tell you you can no longer be certain that your neighbour is the same person today as he was yesterday or will be tomorrow.

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He could go into the past, go a certain distance into the future, but there something stopped him, something insuperable

GAMMA POSITIVE

Ernest Hill

WITH MYOPIC EYES huge behind the thick lenses of his spectacles, Manstein looked long and thoughtfully at the fine white powder. He replaced the test-tube in its rack and turned his attention to the white rabbits scampering in their wire-fronted cages. Beady-eyed rats. A hamster. The hour was well past midnight but Manstein had long ago ceased to regard a clock as having any importance other than that of providing chronological data in an experiment. At times he ate and at times he slept, but for long periods, while his mind was focused on the matter in hand, he neither ate nor slept.

A white rabbit raised itself on its hindlegs, its nose and whiskers twitching against the netting of the cage. Manstein's long, slender, blue-veined fingers selected a lettuce leaf. The rabbit accepted it in its forepaws and settled down to nibble, its companions scurrying around to claim their portions. Normal. Why? It should have been anything but normal, where were the anticipated reactions? Fear, belligerence, exaggerated hunger, sexual response, hysterical activity or a dream-like listlessness? Some indication of emotional unbalance there should have been, yet there was none. Manstein had worked too long with the psychochemicals to believe that the particular dosage he had administered at 00.15 and 10.7 seconds, minute as it had been, would have had no effect at all. The precise nature of the response had been incalculable, varying as such responses did to dose rate, emotional stability or otherwise of the subject and even

to the type of food previously ingested. He rubbed his long, thin, pointed nose with a finger on which the nail had grown overlong, concave, bending above the tip. This experiment was an essential link in the chain of development of a new ergot derivative, the precise nature of its possible effects essential to the formulation of a theory on which he had based a ten year's study. He had moved down through the layers of consciousness to this point below the strata perhaps below the limen itself—But to what precise point? Its location needed of course a higher organism. The rats had not reacted, nor had the rabbits—but an ape? The laboratory had no apes.

He opened the bank where the test-tubes containing the dose in a neutral fluid were suspended, free from bacteria, at a constant temperature. Selecting one, he closed the doors and entered on his pad '1/2000 grain gamma negative.' He drank the solution and entered the time, 00.36 and 10.5 seconds. Sitting on his stool by the laboratory bench, he watched himself in the mirror that hung on the wall behind, noting the receding chin, jaw merging with the long thin neck, scrawny, the Adams Apple unusually protuberant. The wispy, thinning, greying hair receding from temples, domed above hollow cheeks. He noted the pitted, mottled skin, the drooping shoulders, the double crown of his skull, narrowing at the base like an inverted peg-top. There was no response. His pulse was regular, he felt neither elated nor depressed, neither afraid nor fearless and his ability to concentrate was neither heightened nor impaired. Thoughtfully, he leaned forward to study the pupils, magnified behind the thick lenses. They were neither dilated nor contracted. Rising, he stood for a moment thinking deeply, then he turned to look at the cage. A white rabbit raised itself on its hindlegs, its nose and whisker's twitching against the wire of the cage. Manstein's long, slender, blue-veined fingers selected a lettuce-leaf. The rabbit accepted it in its forepaws and settled down to nibble. Manstein looked at the chronometer. It was 00.15 and 10.7 seconds.

Had the events between this time and 00.36 and 10.5 seconds followed the same course as previously, Manstein would have re-lived the period without the knowledge that he had done so, may even have continued to live his life unaware that he was 20 minutes 59.8 seconds behind the norm. He had not retrogressed in time as one might imagine with a time-machine, realizing that he had done so. He was in fact there—back in time as he had been at that point. Realisation came when, even as he looked at the chronometer, the hands slipped quickly round to 00.36 and 10.5 seconds, the point at which the ingestion of gamma negative had commenced, leaving him, however, with the double memory of the events.

Although well aware of the dangers of personal experiment with untested drugs, Manstein repeated the process three times and in each case returned to a point 20 minutes 59.8 seconds previous in time and then returned to the point of ingestion with the double memory intact. At 03.06 he doubled the dose, ingested 1/1000 grain of gamma negative and receded to a point in early childhood, returning with the consciousness of having been in fact that child.

Manstein lit one of his rare cigarettes and sat down to consider the implications of his totally unexpected discovery. It appeared, as he had previously surmised when questions on the nature of time were discussed, that the events between life and death were static, the sensation of time being caused by the movement of the conscious focus down the events' series. If that were so, there seemed no apparent reason why his consciousness was now focussed on a point in time designated by a chronometer as being 0310 on 27th July, 1983, rather than at any other point. The movement of the consciousness down on the events' sequence appeared to follow an immutable law, since each time he had returned to the exact point of drug ingestion rather than elsewhere in the plane.

It was then that he considered the universal consciousness. It was reasonable to assume that not only he, but

all conscious organisms were travelling down the events' sequence at the same rate, all focussed on the same point. Such a theory was not indisputable, since, should he individually return his focus to the previous position on the plane, it would be to a point where the universal consciousness had also operated and the event would be re-experienced as it had then been. However a universal consciousness focussed at the same point and travelling at the same speed down a plane of events seemed a reasonable assumption and accounted for his continued return to the same point in time.

Since the past—or what he now considered to be the period behind the travelling focus—existed as a static events' sequence, it would follow that the future would exist in the same way. Static, but not yet consciously experienced. He looked long and thoughtfully at the rack of test-tubes behind the glass panel of the aseptic tank. The results of a lifetime's study, the exact composition of each solution known to the last micron. There was gamma positive, untested, but with the reverse characteristics. If gamma negative retracted the focus, it was logical to suppose . . .

Manstein extracted a test-tube and swallowed $1/2000$ grain of gamma positive. The time was 4.10 and 5.6 seconds. Nothing happened. The minutes slipped by, outside the first streaks of dawn tinged the morning clouds, but Manstein was unaware of any reaction. He doubled and trebled the dose. The sun rose. Far below bottles rattled as a milkman began his morning round. The conscious assimilation of the events' sequence was unchanged.

Why was this so? Manstein lit the second cigarette of the night and, as he was about to replace the match carefully under the box centre as was his usual practice, he was suddenly aware of having done so before. It was then that he realised the fallacy in his previous reasoning. It had been possible to retain a memory and a double memory from the past, but a memory from the future was paradox and an absurdity. Retention could only follow assimilation, thus memory was an accrual behind the focus. There was no further doubt in his mind that his consciousness had in fact focussed on future events,

returned, but without the memory of having done so. What then was the origin of the sudden sense of re-enaction? Some part of his personality, the super-ego perhaps, had registered awareness and was aware now of the events on which the consciousness had focussed. It was a registration other than in the brain cells of memory, which could record events only at the pre-ordained speed of conscious interpretation. Memory remained always behind the focus. How then to become consciously aware of the registration above the conscious plane, indeed perhaps above the material plane, as represented by energy impulses generated by a network of brain cells?

To know or to re-live the past was of no value, since it would follow its previous course, the events' sequence being static and unchangable. But to know the future? Even should this prove equally inexorable and immutable? One could at least predict. Somewhere he held the awareness of some part of the future, but by what means could this awareness be incarnated in the memory? What in fact was the super-ego? Where was it? How might it be questioned?

"Dr. Conroy" he murmured.

On a large bed in a house not far from Wimpole Street the psychiatrist twisted his huge bulk restlessly in his sleep. The telephone rang incessantly. He roused, lifted the receiver and, resting his great bearded head on one hand, he answered, drugged with sleep.

"Dr. Conroy," he said. In a moment he was wide awake, sitting upright among the pillows.

"Manstein," he roared. "If I had been asked who out of a million men would ring me at 5.0 in the morning, I would have said without hesitation Manstein! What the hell do you want? You want to consult me? I'm damn sure you want to consult me and I'm just as damn sure it's not a doctor you want, it's a padded cell and that's what I'll prescribe for you. Now be a good chap and ring my receptionist in the morning. She'll tell you I'm booked till Christmas." He replaced the receiver, settled down and turned his face to the wall. The tele-

phone rang again, even more insistently. Manstein of course. No one else would dare a second time, but then no one else would have dared the first time either. Only Manstein. That chinless wonder-boy, that damned chemist, that damned . . . well, yes . . . that damned genius. One of nature's elemental geniuses, he reflected, lifting the receiver.

"You what?" he roared, "You want to consult me now?" Suddenly he laughed. He rolled back among the pillows, convulsed. And why not? The world had long recognised the genius of Dr. Conroy, but the world had never heard of Manstein. To hell with the world. What was time when two geniuses made appointments? "Come along," he said, "You must be in trouble."

An elegant Chinese dressing gown belted over embroidered silk pyjamas, Dr. Conroy sprawled in his leather-backed chair drinking coffee with a sprinkling of brandy. Manstein, uncomfortably perched on the edge of a similar chair, talked. His spidery hands wove abstract patterns in the air. His myopic eyes blinked. 'He's not hysterical,' Dr. Conroy pondered. 'He's not the least bit emotionally disturbed, he always talks like this. He means every word of it and he's continuing his experiment with my assistance just as if I were one of his damned rabbits, the dessicated, dehydrated necromancer.' Manstein finished, spreading his hands aimlessly.

"Do you believe me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dr. Conroy, slowly, "I believe you." There had been an inevitability about the whole story, that had in no way strained his credulity. Had Manstein believed he had in some way transferred his entire personality in time with the knowledge that he had done so. If he had said "I looked at the clock and realised that it was five minutes earlier," that would have been an absurdity. But to return the consciousness to the point where it had previously focused in a sequence of events that were constant, including the consciousness itself, was credible. Time in any case was an enigma, whether one referred to it as being the 4th dimension or not.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I thought of hypnosis," Manstein was deceptively vague. "Deep hypnosis. There is the possibility that the super-ego might be reached and that it might, so to speak, give up its secret. You could question me under hypnosis as to what knowledge I had of future events. It is possible, I think?"

"Possible," said Dr. Conroy, reaching even at this early hour for the cigar box, "If you are a suitable subject for hypnosis. That we shall have to find out."

"I thought of that," Manstein murmured, diffidently, "I have done some work with hypnotic agents. To save time involved in suggestive hypnosis, I have brought a supply of narcotics that will quickly induce a deep state, which, with your skill in these matters, you could employ to the best advantage."

"The devil you have!" Dr. Conroy exploded. He lit his cigar regarding Manstein with a twinkle that nevertheless had its origin in a mixture of awe, admiration and consternation. "I'm not happy with narcotics," he said. "Least of all narcotics with which I am unfamiliar. However, if you have tested these to your own satisfaction..." he took the capsule container from Manstein's proffering hand, "I am willing to consider it. How long does the effect last?"

"Fifteen minutes precisely," Manstein told him eagerly "and there are no after effects. They induce a coma in which the conscious mind ceases to operate but in which the nervous system will respond normally to stimuli. A normal state of deep hypnosis, in fact."

"Hm!" said Conroy, rising, "Let's get on with it then. We'll have you on the couch, you look like an old hen, perched up there."

Dr. Conroy's finger rested on the chemist's pulse. Slow, weak and regular. Snapping on a small pencil torch, he moved it from side to side. Manstein's unseeing eyes followed the point of light. His breathing was deep but effortless.

"Remarkable," he muttered, "Damn man should get them on the market." He switched on a tape recorder and noted the time. It was five minutes past six.

"You are in your laboratory and the time is 12.15," he said, "Tell me what you are doing?"

"I am feeding a lettuce leaf to a white rabbit in a cage."

"Go on!"

"I am looking at my chronometer. It is 12.15 and 10.7 seconds."

"Go on!"

"The hands are moving rapidly. It is 12.36 and 10.5 seconds."

"Tell me what conclusions you draw from this."

"My consciousness has moved back in time and has again returned to normal."

"Good" said Conroy, "It is now ten minutes past four. Tell me what you are doing?"

"I am swallowing from a test-tube a neutral solution containing gamma positive."

"Go on!"

For a full minute Manstein lay silent and then, quietly at first but increasing gradually in volume, his vocal chords emitted a sound, part wail, part song, part ulla-lulla, an ululation of lamentation. Haunting, like drum beats, a fox-bark, an owl's cry or the singing of arrows in flight. Could the human larynx twang to this discordant rhythmic wail? Apparently it could.

"A mating wolf," Conroy muttered, "With ulcers."

And yet the sound sequence had a mystic quality, a nostalgic pathos of yearning like negro folks songs before northern notation transposed their idiom. Painstakingly, the psychiatrist continued to probe and question. As if in answer, the pulse of the ululation changed, each interrogative countered by a negation or affirmative scale variation. As the voice descends the scale in question, it rises in answer. Manstein appeared aware of the question but his response was tonal rather than verbal.

"All right!" Dr Conroy concluded, "It is now a quarter past four. Tell me what you are doing?"

In his normal voice Manstein replied: "I am swallowing from a test-tube a neutral solution containing gamma positive."

"Go on!"

Again the ululation, but this time of short duration ending on a staccato note of obvious finality. Further questions elicited no response. Puzzled, Dr. Conroy returned to the original question.

"It is now a quarter past four, you are swallowing a neutral solution containing gamma positive. Tell me your subsequent experiences." A pause. A short ululation ending on a staccato note of finality.

"All right!" said Dr. Conroy. "It is now 4.20. Tell me what you are doing?" The reply sequence was as formerly, but appeared to be in reverse. First came a staccato note, followed by a short ululation in diminuendo and then, in his normal voice, Manstein said "I am swallowing from a test-tube containing a neutral solution with gamma positive." There was no reply to further questions and, fifteen minutes precisely — for Manstein's predictions were always precise—from the beginning of the coma, Manstein returned to consciousness.

"Well," he asked, eagerly.

"Listen for yourself!" Dr. Conroy ran back the tape and relayed the sequence. The interrogation, the replies, the ulla-lulla, the staccato note of finality.

"Mean anything to you?" he asked. Manstein, baffled, shook his head.

"Those—those—sounds—I made them?"

"You did, old Scout. Seems to me, it's not a psychiatrist you need. It's a zoologist."

"Or an anthropologist," Dr. Conroy chuckled.

"Or an anthropologist!" he repeated. Suddenly he stopped and looked sharply at Manstein. An anthropologist?—Why? "You ever studied anthropology?"

Manstein raised his shoulders, signifying incomprehension. "Not really—never had the time—I'm a chemist, you see." Dr. Conroy was thoughtful. For some time he sat, snapping thumb and third finger with cracks like breaking timber.

"I have," he said. Anthropology and psychology. Related subjects. How did one study mind evolution? Observation in a primitive organism. Noting how the brain began its function, following its development

through higher organisms. Primitive people, their customs, fears and beliefs. Primitive people!—The ululation—the sound pictures before the development of language. Suddenly his giant frame was erect, tense with the ravel of unformulated ideas.

“What personality fragment have we dug out!” he thundered. “What part of the elemental jig-saw have we prised loose?” Manstein did not know and appeared unwilling to claim it as his own. “I’ll tell you!” From the storehouse of the psychiatrist’s mind energy particles, each an idea fragment, located and completed each memory molecule, identified and matched the thought-train which erupted into the consciousness. An idea was born. “I’ll tell you what we have!—At the back of the mind, above and beyond it, controlling its automatic mechanism of selection is the entity we call the super-ego. The ego itself is quasi-material, the quasi-material element operating the mechanism of selection and rejection, giving the self the semblance of a personality distinct from other personalities. Above the ego, moulding and guiding, is the timeless, non-material super-ego, composed possibly of many parts, including the soul, if one likes to talk of souls.

“The super-ego has no language, its storehouse is the impressions in sounds, scents and pictures, both of your life and, through the genes, of all preceding lives. It speaks to you in pictures in your dreams. The voices you dream are the recent voices in your memory. The pictures themselves are often generated by recent memory, but they are manipulated, mixed, juxtaposed and disorientated by the super-ego that re-projects them as symbols, influencing your present being by a wordless impression picture from your timeless all-being. You know what we have here, Manstein? For the first time in human history, we have a fragment of a super-ego on tape!”

Manstein looked dejected. As a chemist, his training had led him to think inexorably from supposition to proposition, from cause to effect. Conroy’s sense of history eluded him.

Maybe they stood at the gateway of discovery, a great moment in the history of psychology. But to

what did this lead? To what conclusion? Maybe the discordant rhythms on the tape were the vocal twangings of a super-ego in turmoil, but what then? If this super-ego fragment was aware of a future event, how, without language, could its foreknowledge be projected in terms the conscious mind might translate?

"You don't know, do you?" The psychiatrist bellowed, "You are standing in the gateway of time, my fine friend. And in you shall go. Take another of those damned capsules!"

Manstein did not follow.

"Pictures, Manstein—pictures! Never mind if you can draw or not. I've seen pictures drawn under hypnosis by men who never knew what a pencil was. Take another capsule even if it poisons you!" Mystified, Manstein swallowed. Laying back on the couch, he returned to a state of deep hypnosis. Dr. Conroy rubbed his hands in anticipation.

"It is ten minutes past four. Tell me what are you doing?"

"I am swallowing from a test-tube . . ."

"Yes, yes—go on!"

Again the ululation. Dr. Conroy set a blackboard on an easel and lay coloured chalks on the ledge below.

"Draw!" He said.

Manstein rose and walked to the easel. He drew one small figure lying and one figure standing. Matchstick men. A couch, an easel and a blackboard. He returned and lay again on the couch.

"Damn!" said Dr. Conroy to himself, "Has he drawn the result of 1/2000 grain of gamma positive, which has projected him to this point by sheer coincidence. Or is he in fact drawing his impressions as the unconscious perceives them at this moment?" There was one way to find out. Placing a clean blackboard on the easel, he returned to the interrogation.

"It is 4.15—tell me what you are doing?"

"I am swallowing from a test-tube a neutral solution . . ."

"Of gamma positive—go on!"

The short ululation followed by the staccato note.

“Draw!”

Again Manstein rose and, puppet-like moved to the blackboard. He drew. When he had finished, Dr. Conroy was transfixed with amazement. Using the coloured chalks, Manstein, or the inner, super-Manstein, had reproduced a work of art similar in mood, form and insight to the best extant examples of cave paintings seen anywhere in Southern France or the Pyrenees. The scene was a gorge between high, towering, perpendicular cliffs, their topmost ridges tapering in perspective, serrated with serried triangular apices. Centrally placed on the foreground below, two bison were locked in combat, head to head, the impression of movement and impact so vividly portrayed that the thud of their encounter seemed almost audibly projected. At their feet, a figure was lying, a matchstick man, a line drawing only, but one knew that he was still and dead. To his right, lined along a ridge edging the base of the cliffs, a crowd of matchstick men gesticulated, their arms raised to heaven in apparent supplication. One man stood out from the crowd, a figure of authority, holding what appeared to be a stone and stylus, looking down at the recumbant figure below the bison. Manstein returned, glassy-eyed, and lay, tin-soldier like, on the couch. Conroy looked at his watch. Five minutes of coma remained. He reversed the blackboard and spoke again to Manstein.

“It is 4.20. You have swallowed gamma positive in a neutral solution. Tell me what you are doing.”

Manstein rose and approached the blackboard, his motor muscles responding to stimuli from some hinter-conscious control. Automatically he selected the chalks and swiftly, with unerring precision, he sketched an identical scene. A gorge, serrated cliffs, the impact of two charging bison, a recumbant figure, gesticulating matchstick men and a central figure of authority. He had scarcely finished when the effects of the hypnotic drug abruptly ceased, his eyes became animated and he stepped back and surveyed the blackboard with amazement. Turning, he looked helplessly at the psychiatrist.

“I drew this?” He asked.

“Sit down!” Dr. Conroy ordered, “Let us consider

the implications.”

He looked long and thoughtfully at the picture, turning the blackboard occasionally to compare details, which in each case proved identical.

“Ever seen a pre-historic cave painting?” He asked at length. “Ever been to Lascaux, the Dordogne—Altamira?” Manstein had not, nor, to his recollection had he ever seen pictures or read of cave paintings. He was a chemist and had never confused the issue by letting art interest impinge upon scientific.

“Interesting!” Dr. Conroy pondered, “Very interesting. Particularly since the pictures are identical, but each, if our theory on your time-travel is correct, representing a different futural projection.”

“If they are pre-historic, I must have gone back rather than forward.”

“A retrogression of 200,000 years? I doubt it. Also, if the anthropologists are correct, the cave men of the paintings were not our direct ancestors. We are descended from Cro-Magnon man who apparently superceded the cave painters. It is possible of course that Cro-magnon man also produced artists, but that their work has not survived. However that may be, you have produced a perfect example of primitive art.”

“One two-thousandth of a grain of gamma negative returned me approximately twenty minutes in time,” Manstein reflected. “One thousandth of a grain and I went back forty years.”

“At 4.10 a.m. you took the first dose of gamma positive. If your first drawing on the other blackboard represents a forward leap from 4.10 a.m. to the point where it was actually drawn, at 7.10 a.m. approximately, one two-thousandth of a grain of gamma positive projected you three hours forward. Its time effect is therefore more pronounced than gamma negative, which is not surprising, since the drugs are not identical. One thousandth of a grain could therefore conceivably be responsible for a leap forward of considerably more than forty years. Well past your likely span of life, my friend.” Manstein looked sceptical.

“Personality survival?” He asked. “I have never

considered personality survival after death at all likely. But should it be so, then this represents some implication that I shall return to a primitive state and eternally take part in some sort of bison fighting ceremony."

"Not an entertaining prospect," Dr. Conroy agreed. "This needs much further thought and experiment."

"Tomorrow," he said "We'll have another session. Take no further drugs of any sort, particularly none of your gamma concoctions. Do nothing that might confuse the issue. In the meantime, I will give it some thought." Manstein was unlikely to give the matter any thought. The effect of his drug-taking, both gamma and hypnotics was beginning to become apparent.

He rose unsteadily and sleepily to his feet.

"I'll go to bed for the day," he said.

"Do just that!" Dr. Conroy showed him to the door, patted him paternally on the shoulder and returned to the easel and the primitive creation. Thoughtfully he lit a cigar. It was a work of art and thus evocative, more evocative than any other painting he had seen, yet evocative of what? The high cliffs with serrated ridges, triangular apices—dragon's teeth—what did they call to mind?

Outside two car hooters rasped in discordant bellowing, a scream of tyres braking on wet macadam, a rending crash followed by tinkling glass and a single strangled cry. A note of finality.

In ten seconds Dr. Conroy was in the street. Lying beside two cars whose head-on crash his somnambulist jay-walking had caused, Manstein was lying. A small crowd had gathered, excited on the pavement, kept back from the road by a policeman. A figure of authority.

"Symbols," Dr. Conroy muttered, "I should have known. The super-ego projects itself in symbols."

He looked up at the tall buildings on either side. Vertical, their roofs stretching away in perspective, serrated with triangular apices. Like dragon's teeth. One thousandth of a grain, one five hundredth of a grain of gamma positive, it was all the same, it could take Manstein no further forward than this. Manstein was dead.

At last, in this ruined Eden, God had led him to an Adam and an Eve, though the strange thing was—those really were their names . . .



SOME WILL BE SAVED

Colin R Fry

THE GAUNT, RAGGED, black-clad man rolled over and stared up through the leaf-patterns at the far-but-near sky shining down in blue hardness upon him. He groaned.

His bed was bracken and it was not a soft bed; an insect crawled across the sole of his right foot, in the broad gaps that much travelling had worn in the sock material.

His feet were a mass of healed and healing and unhealed scratches. He dared not look at them, and yet knew he must. There were still some rags. He dug in the knapsack that lay in the bracken beside him, fetched out a strip of cloth that had once been part of a sports shirt, wrapped it around the injured foot after flicking the insect away. It flicked easily, did not stop to suck blood. Some of them stopped and attacked him hungrily; he called them suckers; but this one did not. It was an ordinary bigant. He fastened the cloth around his foot with a piece of Elastoplast from his still quite plentiful supply, slicing the sticky plaster with the sheath knife that he wore at his waist.

Then he knelt in the bracken and prayed, apologising for his selfishness in caring for his painful foot before greeting his God's good morning, beating his breast five times, quite hard, so that he gasped, in reparation. The other prayers were the usual sort, the ones he and others of his faith had learned at school. In extremity, those were the prayers he had always fallen back on. He fell back on them every day now. This was not a time for originality. It was a time for hanging on. He had given up apologising to God for his thefts. He could not steal what belonged to no-one, he reasoned, and from that it was an easy step to: No-one else is alive, therefore everything is mine. But his conscience still troubled him, and for that reason he said an extra Hail Mary every day.

The bracken crunched under his feet as he moved through the proliferating forest: it had taken the radiation like a coward, bending down and hugging the ground, growing alongways instead of up, as if the bully air itself was beating it to the soil. The knapsack was big and heavy upon his back but he made himself wear it: anyway, it was easier to carry it on his shoulders than to drag it along the ground.

Every so often he put it down and rested, praying or eating or picking berries: he had sworn not to kill any animal life, just as he had sworn not to wear boots or shoes, but berries were not as plentiful as they might be. Sometimes he nibbled leaves or grass or even bark. There

was chocolate in the towns, but he had decided against chocolate: it would rot his teeth, and it bore connotations of joy and pleasure and happy childhood which he was more anxious to forget. But it was hard to dispense with memories as he plunged through the forest, seeing every now and then a plant or tree or flower whose growth-rate had been incredibly accelerated moving upward perceptibly or popping a bud or stretching out a branchlet before his eyes.

The birds . . . some of them hopped through the undergrowth, others he came across dead or dying uncomprehendingly in his path: he hurried on, though tempted instinctively to give them absolution—priest's duty, comfort the sick and dying . . . yet it was he who needed absolution, he as the last remaining representative of all mankind in this ruined Eden.

Sometimes he saw a fire and caught his breath, afraid it was a Seraph with blazing sword, but usually it was just a petrol station or crashed car or plane or electricity supply wire going up in spontaneous combustion. Once, from a great distance, he saw a power station erupt like a volcano, destroying foliage for miles around; but rain eventually put out the blaze. Yes, it still rained. When it did, if he could, he took shelter. If not—not.

Now it was summer and he stared about him with a renewed interest as he stumbled carefully through the trackless jungle that the countryside had become. He watched one of the groundspiders cunningly trap a blind-mouse: if he wanted to guess at the most likely survival form, the groundspiders would have his bet. He shuddered as he thought of it, and felt a kinship with the blind little mouse struggling panicstricken in the evil creature's sticky trap. Yet: evil creature? It was not evil. It was simply trying to survive. But he was glad he did not see its kind often. It preyed on little mammals, little animals who belonged, if the evolutionists were right, to the far roots and branches of his own family tree. And there was always the nightmare thought that one of the spiders might grow big enough to trap a man.

It was a thought he shrugged aside with many Paters

and Aves and intense contemplation of the Sacred Wounds.

The tall, fair man dug strongly in the garden that stretched right across the clearing, his muscles swelling and rippling under the skin that the sun burned deeper and deeper brown. In the hut he had built in the clearing's centre, the blonde, bronzed woman industriously polished her pans and prepared a nourishing meal on the bright, shining stove.

The man turned, raising his shovel, at a movement on the clearing's edge. He was ready for any of the strange creatures.

But it was none of them. It was a ragged, tangle-bearded stranger, clad in faded black and with an Army knapsack strapped to his shoulders, standing and stretching out his arms, then sinking to the ground, kneeling on the tainted earth and crying: "Glory be to God! Oh, glory be!"

"I thought," he said, as the fair man helped him across the field, swinging his burden for him, "that I was the only one, the only man left in the world . . . but you are alive, there must be others. It is not as bad as I feared. Have you a radio?"

"No voices came through it from the air. We have tried. We had thought, like you, we were alone."

And he met the woman. She said, "Adam, did you greet him correctly? Do you see his clothing and his collar and the beads at his waist?" and she dropped on one knee and said humbly, "Bless us, Father."

And the tall man knelt too as the ragged, dirty priest put out his hands, made the sign of the Cross and crying for sheer joy whispered, "In nomine Patris, et Fili, et Spiritus Sancti . . . Pax vobiscum."

The tall man rose and supported him into the hut. "Father," he started to say, and then halted.

"Yes, my son?" the priest said.

"Nothing, Father. When you are rested, when your feet have healed, when you are better . . ."

As they eased off his clothes and bathed the sore places upon his body and made ready a bed to receive

his aching frame, he asked, "What are your names?" and they told him: "Adam." "Eve."

They told him afterwards that he had slept for thirty six hours, and they insisted he must continue to rest.

"But I am an extra mouth," he said. "I must do my bit." That was what he had always said when he visited his married sister and insisted on bringing the family a box of groceries, in the old days.

They told him gently, "We will look after you."

They fetched him berries and roots, but they did not eat with him, pleading embarrassment because, "We are not of your faith."

So he blessed the berries and roots and the carefully strained water and ate alone. And his soul was troubled.

"There is one God," he told them. "He is your God as much as mine. Now of all times it is wrong to let a schism come between us. This was the way our civilisation fell!"

And they said, "Yes, Father," but they would not eat with him, and the eyes that they turned to each other were worried.

Still, he reasoned, there will be time. This is the end or the beginning. There will be time. And he set himself patiently to win them round.

Eve was polishing the pans.

"I am sure you can see your face in them, my dear," he said, smiling, and she smiled back.

"It's work that has to be done," she said in her comfortable, nannylike way.

"Yes indeed," the priest agreed. "Just as my work has to be done too."

"So it has, Father," she said. "We've all got our place in the world, we've each got our job to do, and it would be a poor world if we were all made alike, wouldn't it?"

"It would indeed," he said. "What did you do before—before?"

"Before?" she said. "Why, I washed them in the river. And before that I took them off the shelf, and before that I put them on the shelf in the first place, and

before that—”

“No,” he said, “I meant—before it happened, before the bombs fell. What did you do?”

“Oh, just everyday work. Like this.”

And every time he asked the question, that was the only answer he could get out of her. He assumed that she had always been Adam's wife. They seemed to have no surname that he could discover, and this worried him. Although Adam was a little more forthcoming when questioned about his past life. He would say, “I was a farm labourer. There was a farm here then,” and a sad, secret look would draw his face down, and would become silent for a time.

It was strange. Yet was not everything strange in this distorted, mutilated world?

“Have you ever thought,” he asked Adam, “what you would do if one of those things grew big—big enough to trap a man?”

They had killed a goundspider. Somehow he did not consider it breaking his vow: it was an insect, not an animal.

Adam said. “I have thought of it quite a lot. Every one of these I see gets bigger than the last. This one's all of three feet.”

The priest shivered. “They frighten me,” he said.

“You musn't be frightened, Father,” Adam said. “We'll look after you. I won't let these things hurt you. They'll have to reckon with me!”

Father O'Rahilly looked up at him and said quietly, “Adam.”

“Yes, Father?”

“I'm failing you. I'm failing you and Eve and I'm failing God. I'm God's man here and it's I who should be the strong one, yet all the time it's you protecting me. It seems wrong. It's some inadequacy in me. I'm sorry for it.”

“There's nothing to be sorry for, Father,” Adam said. “We're all different, all with different jobs to do, that's the way I look at it. And my job's muscle, and your job's spirit. Spirit now, that's way beyond me.”

“But it shouldn't be, Adam,” Father O'Rahilly said,

with something like despair stirring inside him. "We're all brothers and sisters, all children of the same Father, all capable of reaching Heaven together."

"I wouldn't know about that," Adam said solemnly.

"Oh well," the priest said, sighing, "what's it all for? Sometimes, God forgive me, I wonder."

"Seedtime and harvest," Adam said. "Sowing and reaping. Seedtime and harvest."

"And what are seedtime and harvest for?" Father O'Rahilly said half to himself, staring bitterly and bleakly at the gathering dusk, the clouds turning muddy purple in the sunset.

"Seedtime and harvest," Adam said again. "That's what it's all for. Seedtime and harvest."

"All right, Adam," Father O'Rahilly said. They walked back to the hut together, Adam shouldering his spade, and as they sat in the little room lit by a lamp filled with oil from the precious cache underground, he tried to solve the problem again.

"And God said, Be fruitful and multiply," he told them. "This is difficult for me, and perhaps embarrassing for you, but it's so important . . . if there are to be people to go on, you see, well, the responsibility is yours."

They looked at him.

"You have no children," he said.

They looked at the ground, unable to face him.

"Do you never, well, do you never make love to each other?"

Adam said slowly, "That's not something we ever seem to want to do. We've wondered about it sometimes, having heard and read; but it doesn't seem to be our lot."

The priest's head drooped on his dark, stiff shoulders. He turned his hands palm outwards. He fidgeted with his rosary.

"I'm sorry," he said.

They sat together in silence for a time. The only noise was the soft hiss of the oil lamp. Then Eve looked at Adam and said, "It's no good."

"You have nothing to reproach yourselves for," said

Father O'Rahilly. He said it wearily. Tears were not far from his eyes. "The radiation is cruel. It does strange things. Perhaps it has affected me, too; I wondered, while I was here, why I felt no stirrings of lust towards you, Eve, nothing to repent at night. I had thought it was exhaustion, perhaps. But now I see."

"No, you don't!" Eve said. She glared at Adam. He nodded sadly at her.

"We've deceived you, Father," he said. "Let us eat together."

A wry sense of satisfaction stole over the tired priest.

"At last," he said. "You've seen reason."

They set his usual berries, roots and water before him.

"Yourselves?" he asked. "What will you eat?"

"Our food is not very appetising, Father," Adam said. He lifted a metal plate on to the table. It was piled high with moist soil. He put some crumbs of earth into his mouth and swallowed them.

Eve sipped through a glass pipette a grey liquid that had an acid smell.

"We were a joint project of IBM and Burroughs Wellcome," Adam said. "They've made a good job of us, haven't they—didn't they?"

Eve said, "We were designed to look after people. We were lonely till you came along. The people in the cities were beyond any looking after, so we came out here. We were looking for men."

"Yes," Adam said with shy pride. "Men made us. We knew men existed. We weren't doubters."

Father O'Rahilly stared from Adam to Eve, from Eve to Adam.

Outside, the forest grew visibly closer and the groundspiders spun their webs.

Jundrak's mind was so uncomplicated, his ambitions so devious, even he wasn't sure what they were. But one thing was sure, his plans had to include . . .

THE PATCH

Peter Woods

JUNDRAK CAME AS a bringer of uncertain news. The manner of his coming was less uncertain. He came hurtling down the space-slip with tubes screaming; he was still a couple of light years from Smorn when he cut the motors, to fall the remaining distance along the galactic causeway with transcendental velocity. Then, applying negative power, he came to an abrupt standstill.

His piloting was precise. He could now look down on Peredan's fifty-year-old encampment without needing to adjust his position by as much as a single yard. With startling clarity in the crystal-bright air, the minute empire of the pretender prince was laid out a few hundred feet below.

It was everything he had expected: stiff, colourful, bustling. Brightly painted spaceships stood on the launching ground. Gay pavilions were arrayed in semi-circles for close on ten miles, extending in a neat swirl to enclose quarters, barracks, and the stupendous amount of equipment comprising the ever-operating defences. Stacked to one side of the camp, rearing like huge city blocks covered with red plastic sheeting, were the precious stores of weapons, trackers, every kind of fighting paraphernalia—Peredan's reason for living.

The whole outfit was on its toes; waiting for the word that had never come yet.

Jundrak was given a demonstration of the camp's efficiency as soon as his ship appeared over the base. Six warning missiles exploded around him: above, below,

and to each quarter. He was impressed, but not surprised. Lingered for a few dangerous seconds, he settled at length to an unhurried landing on the edge of the launching field.

The missiles were not the only precaution. A peculiar *pressing* sensation assailed his body as he took his hands from the controls, together with an odd aching sensation across the bridge of his nose. He recognised it. A damper field had been thrown over his tiny bell-shaped vessel.

In that case, nothing in the ship would work. Experimentally he tried to operate the port. It would not open, except manually.

Whatever happened, then, he was helpless. But no matter; he had come not so much as an enemy as an adviser.

He applied his hands to the port lock. Yielding easily, the side of the cabin swung down to give access to the ground and he stepped out, stretching his body and breathing deeply in the invigorating, oxygen-rich air. Now he could see his ship as a small, golden shape against the monstrous structures of battlecruisers which also reared beyond the camp. He smiled, pleased with the effect. He had chosen the enigmatic bell-craft purposely, knowing that it would seem a strange visitation to the rebels. They would be impressed and amazed that the tiny boat could make the same journeys as their giant battlewagons. Being isolated for fifty years, they almost certainly had not heard of the new means of propulsion, using the natural fault-lines in space known as slipways, which enabled his frail-looking little bell-craft to travel the galaxy.

Two men already waited to meet him, dressed in blouses and hose of shimmering black space-silk, laser pistols swinging casually on their lean, well-muscled hips. Like all Peredan's officers, they carried no insignia.

"I am here to speak with Peredan," Jundrak said without preamble.

"*Prince Peredan*," the taller of the two answered, "does not interview every space tramp who comes jetting in. What do you want, enlistment?"

Jundrak gazed steadily at the man. "No more babble,"

he said in a firm voice. "I am Jundrak, of the family Sann—ancient friends of Peredan's fathers. Now take me to him."

The officer smiled wryly. "Many friends of old are not so friendly now. However, the prince shall be told of your arrival. But first, we must ask for your weapons."

Jundrak reached into the folds of his clothing and handed over a high-frequency neutron beamer, a small dagger, and a hand-version of the standard force-rifle. The officer examined them, smiled again, and politely handed back the last.

"You may keep this. A force-gun will not work anywhere within the confines of this camp."

This was as Jundrak had already suspected. His senses, heightened by a long military training, told of numerous cancelling energies vibrating through the air. He very much doubted even if the neutron beamer would prove fully effective—but the officers would not wish to reveal everything.

They kept silence during the walk to Peredan's tent. Jundrak looked at this structure with interest. It was like a fairy palace of draped plastic, awnings, spires and domes standing in a rich, multi-coloured relationship. The plastic had been sprayed with some preparation to make it stiff and durable, and Jundrak did not doubt that the 'tent' had the solidity of granite. The bivouac appearance of the encampment was an illusion.

"Wait here," said the tall officer, and went inside, leaving Jundrak in the care of his comrade.

After a wait of ten minutes he reappeared, still composed, but looking less self-assured than before. He nodded wordlessly, and made a gesture. Jundrak stepped forward. He and the officer walked through the covered entrance, through to the interior of the tent.

Now Jundrak's impressions of the tent were fully confirmed. They walked through large halls and enclosures which seemed to extend indefinitely, washed in a pale green light and worked in cool pastel shades of blue, yellow and green. There was little ornament on the walls, but the furniture, tables, chairs and desks, as well as pieces of equipment which Jundrak did not recog-

nise but which seemed to be some sort of communicator, were of very fine workmanship. Peredan had found time for some luxury. Silk-garbed officers glanced up incuriously as they passed by, but the men at Jundrak's side ignored them.

Deeper in the tent, the atmosphere became even quieter, even more cool, and almost deserted. For the first time Jundrak saw women—young women seated at large, expensive desks but apparently doing nothing in particular. Were they secretaries, he wondered, or mistresses? Possibly they were just ornaments.

At the end of a long, narrow foyer, the officer stopped abruptly before a porch-like door. "Go in," he said.

Jundrak pushed at the panel. It seemed to collapse into sharp-angled fragments and withdrew itself away. Beyond, was Peredan's office.

Jundrak stepped through, the door re-forming behind him, Standing beside a polished table, his knuckles resting lightly on the varnished surface, was Peredan.

The two men looked at one another for a few moments before either spoke. Peredan gazing without apparent interest, as though part of his attention were elsewhere.

He produced a very strange impression indeed on Jundrak. His face was smooth and youthful, making him look more like a youngster of seventy than the three centuries he had actually lived. But at times his face changed with the circumstances and the emotion, as Jundrak was later to find out and indeed as he saw now, as a momentary shift of mood passed across his features. Lines and folds manifested in various ways, changing his appearance to something older, more care-worn. The flesh itself seemed to change, to alter its colour, and, particularly around the eyes, to alter its position. Sometimes one could be looking at a different man. But Jundrak was to be convinced that through all those faces the same man gazed.

Jundrak was the first to speak. "So you are the man who waits his chance to throw the galaxy into carnage."

"Not I."

"What, you deny it? This is a pleasure-camp, I suppose."

Peredan lifted his hands a few inches in gesture. He seemed hardly willing to expend the effort on it. "With what I have here, I would challenge the Kingdom even now. But I desire peace for the Kingdom. It is not I who would decimate systems and bring misery to half the inhabited galaxy, it is my adversary, who now sits on the throne, who would do this. He will wreak this havoc if I make the attempt. That is why I cannot do it."

"You make yourself sound very innocent," Jundrak said, a faint sneer in his voice.

"It is to maintain my innocence that I now sit and wait. The false king will bring every planet of the galaxy into the war if I attack. I wish to fight him alone."

Jundrak moved to the chair which Peredan offered. He became more thoughtful. "I might remark that your own opinion of your abilities far exceeds the common view of you."

"And what do they say of me?"

"The Royal Fighting Forces consider you as a danger—but not as an ultimate one. They have made no attempt to come here and destroy you, primarily because they have not got round to it, or because it would be too much trouble and would stir up dissent."

"They lie. They have not come here because they do not dare. But what of the populace: what do they say?"

Jundrak shrugged. "It is hard to tell. I think you are slowly fading from the public mind."

Peredan sat down, his forearm still resting on the table, and kept his eyes on the visitor. "So be it. It was expected. You will see everything differently when I have vanquished the usurper and placed by family on the throne again. Tell me why you are here."

"King Maxim offers you and your followers an amnesty, in return for a service you may perform for him and the kingdom."

After an affronted pause, Peredan gave what could only be described as a tired laugh. "Indeed!"

"You cannot refuse," Jundrak urged. "There is an emergency of unprecedented proportions, and this is no time for civil squabbles. The kingdom is threatened with

annihilation.”

“Please explain.”

“The North-East sector of the kingdom has been entered by an unknown life form, powerfully inimical to human life. Planets are sucked of vitality as it passes by and left as mounds of dead flesh and withered vegetation. All our efforts have failed to stop it.”

“My agents have reported the menace,” Peredan told him, slightly to Jundrak’s surprise. “They call it the Patch, do they not?”

Jundrak nodded. “Scarcely anything has been discovered of its nature yet. It isn’t any form of life as we know it. You must pool resources with us, or we are all finished. You have scientists, and a huge arsenal. If nothing else, perhaps a saturation attack will destroy it.”

“What impression have you made on it so far?”

“None whatever,” admitted Jundrak candidly.

“What have you tried?”

Jundrak made a frank list of the measures taken by the Royal Fighting Forces, and their increasing desperation. The prolonged-reaction bombs, the massive specially-built gamma-ray projectors. The Patch had taken it all without any detectable change in its inner state. Vast quantities of radio-active material dumped in its path had made no difference either. There was even a theory that the Patch *liked* these titillations.

Jundrak did not omit to tell of the armed spaceships engulfed by some kind of influence it exuded. Peredan’s gaze dropped as he finished.

“Yes, this is a serious business.” He paused. “So Maxim thinks he will make use of it to swallow me up in a general crisis. Tell him that if he truly wants my aid to avert calamity, to put himself under my orders and I will direct operations.”

Jundrak smiled. “He will hardly agree to that.”

“No, and neither will I agree to what amounts to the same thing.”

“But—” Jundrak affected shock. “You cannot stand by and see whole systems of people annihilated! Where is your boast of peace and security now?”

“Young man, I am in this game to *win*. Do you think

I am going to fritter away my resources on other pursuits, however worthy? This organisation of mine exists for one purpose only, and for that purpose only will it be used."

Jundrak found this a convenient point to end the interview. "The offer of an amnesty remains open," he said, "for three months. King Maxim will be prepared to see your representatives in Maximilia at any time within that period. Now, with your permission, I will take my leave."

Peredan nodded. Jundrak pushed the door behind him into fragments and stepped through. The same officer as before waited patiently to escort him back to his ship.

When Jundrak had gone, Prince Peredan sat down for a few minutes, collecting his thoughts and analysing his feelings. All tactics, all diplomacy or manoeuvre, anything involving a *game* undertaken for a serious purpose, left him at times with an odd sensation of helpless entanglement. Invariably following on the heels of this feeling came a hopelessness which desolated his spirit.

Yet ever since the House of Grechen had challenged his father's ascension to the throne, and the quarrel had blown up into a kingdom-wide civil war, he had been forced to spend his life playing such a game.

After the initial defeat he had done well with what moves were open to him, welding together the unreservedly loyal remnants of the army into the most efficient, dedicated organisation ever to exist. Through the years, its power had grown, solidified into a drilled and faithful machine. But he was aware that against King Maxim, who now had the resources of the kingdom behind him, the chances of victory in the *coup* he dreamed of were too slight for the game to be risked. It would only unleash another bloody conflagration in which he would be—even though with difficulty—defeated for the second time.

Prince Peredan hated Maxim's rule. It was tyrannous, ramshackle, power-mad. It had none of the generations-deep reservoir of sanity and justice which Peredan's

father represented.

In the next generation it would be too late. Too many billions would have transferred their allegiance. Where, he thought, was the Great Device, the one irresistible move that would mean the termination of the game?

Despairing of rest, Prince Peredan had to admit to himself that such a move did not exist.

Jundrak's bell-ship landed directly in the Inner City of the town of Maximilia (renamed from its ancient title of Unimm). Specially sworn technicians took charge of the ship as soon as it touched down in the landing well. Jundrak went to his quarters, freshened up, then went immediately to present himself to King Maxim.

The King had already been informed of his arrival. Jundrak was conducted to a private room where he found him eager for news.

"Is it done?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Good!" King Maxim chuckled, a merry lustre coming into his dark brown eyes.

No one could deny that the King had a very pleasing personality. His face, which was naturally mournful, seemed nevertheless to be always wearing an expression of joviality. Intrepid enough to pass off any danger with a laugh, he exerted an unconscious charm with the humour of his puckered lips, his raised eyebrows, his long nose and sidelong glance. He was a comic, a jolly king, an unintentional clown in whom the discerning might detect a basic melancholy.

"I offered Peredan an amnesty, Your Majesty, as you instructed. He refused, of course. He didn't seem to suspect that the offer was only a cover for my visit."

"Make him cocky for a bit, though, eh? Was the track laid?"

"Everything went perfectly. I crossed the path of the Patch, then made my way from that direction through the slipways to Peredan's camp on Smorn. The instruments showed that the slipways were sufficiently intensified."

The scheme was grisly. It had been found that the

alien entity menacing the kingdom, designated the Patch by the investigating teams, somehow used a similar principle to the new slipway ships, moving faster than light along the natural fault-lines of space. But there was a difference. Whereas the Patch sealed up the slipways behind it, the ships only intensified them. If it encountered them, the Patch showed a preference to follow these strengthened slipways.

At first the investigating teams had tried to use this discovery to control the Patch, creating a path through the maze of galactic fault-lines to lead it away from occupied solar systems and out of the kingdom. But the Patch showed an obstinacy that was one of the main proofs of its intelligence: it hungered for inhabited planets, and would not follow such a path if it did not pass near one. If the artificially prepared slipway led nowhere, it seemed to exercise discretion and take a different turning.

Thus the teams could choose the planets which were to be annihilated, but no more. This disconcerting fact had led to desperate haggling among the nobles and industrialists whose vested interests were threatened, but then King Maxim had come up with his brilliant idea. By sending a slipway ship to visit Smorn, he would bring down the Patch on the head of his enemy Peredan, the pretender prince.

The king's voice rose to a whoop of laughter. "He'll never know what hit him! I'll move the Fourth and Fifth Fleets up there in case he gets wind of what's coming and tries to scoot. Either way, friend, Peredan is finished."

One small point interested Jundrak. "What would you have done, Your Majesty, if Peredan had accepted the amnesty?"

The King shrugged. "If he's fool enough to send his ships into that *thing*, he deserves what he gets. Either way I can't lose."

"It's a marvellous device, Your Majesty," Jundrak admired sycophantically. "But the Patch still remains."

King Maxim took on a gloomy expression. "I know, but what can we do? We must accept our losses. Since the Patch is making a steady traverse, it will pass through

the kingdom and we shall be safe again.”

Jundrak left the chamber, high in the King's favour and gratified at his personal success. He crossed the central courtyard of the Royal Palace. The spires and graceful frontages of the Palace rose about him, tinted against the rosy sky. Evening was coming on, a cool evening rich in scents. Beyond the outlines of the Palace were the taller slabs, towers and arches of the Inner City, hemming in the seat of the monarchy and keeping out the picturesque sight of the Old Town. The reconstruction was almost complete, and only one or two towers could be seen still in building, lifting their crowns of building grids anything up to two thousand feet. Maxim had not used atomics on the Inner City, since he wanted it himself, but he had bombarded it heavily with high explosives.

Jundrak wondered what would happen if the Patch came this way.

Just beyond the reach of its malign influence, the investigating teams hovered around the Patch like a swarm of gnats.

For all their efforts, they still knew very little about it. It was just a patch of pseudo-particles a light-year across, with a specific gravity even less than the interstellar hydrogen through which it passed. For all that, it was vaguely visible, as a dim flickering of photons released within it by the interactions of its strange, diffuse particles—all virtual particles, the teams believed, passing on their transient existence from one to another in never ending chains. The very photons which reached the scientists were not ordinary photons. They decayed, producing ghostly phenomena which the teams' instruments could not analyse.

Months ago the scientists had ceased referring to the invader in the plural. It was not a swarm, as they had at first thought. Each evanescent particle was somehow related to the whole, and as an entirety the Patch was stable.

From where had it come? What had given rise to it? The teams were currently engaged in trying to identify

an overall field of energy for the Patch, thinking that perhaps the spurious particles they had studied were simply reflections of this field.

More strongly than in the light band, the Patch generated radio waves in regular, unending oscillations. The symmetry of these oscillations had been the first clue that the Patch was not just a random phenomenon, but was organised, alive.

They listened to them now, as they had listened for many months. Translated into sound over their earphones, the observers heard a screeching, eternal ululation that filled them with dread.

Yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi . . .

Now that Jundrak's mission to Smorn was over, he concerned himself with his main duties as a full colonel in the Royal Fighting Forces.

These duties took him on regular trips to the other side of the planet. Here, he entered a secret lift and was carried down into the bowels of the continent.

In a system of huge underground caverns, they were building ships, and he was in charge of the project. Monstrous ships, lovely and golden, such as had never before been seen. They were of a completely new type, for they were the first large vessels to use the slipway drive.

His familiarity with the slipway drive had qualified him to bring down the Patch on the rebel encampment. Jundrak had to admit that this other project, nearly a mile underground, was much more satisfying. His tiny bell-craft could travel large parts of the galaxy with ease, but these giant versions opened up even more exciting possibilities for travel. Carrying thousands of people, they could travel even beyond the boundary of the galaxy itself.

The ships were all but ready to ride up the shaft to the surface. Jundrak could hardly wait for that day. His slipway ships, designed to bring pride and joy to King Maxim, would bring a more real joy to Jundrak.

Because Jundrak was entertaining a private scheme of his own, the furtherance of which had so far mainly consisted of judicious supervision of the staff of the under-

ground shipyard, among whom he alone was allowed access to the outside. In a world where allegiance had not yet jelled around the crown, it was not too difficult to form a private little empire unknown to strangers. Increasingly of late Jundrak had chosen the staff for their lack of loyalty, discharging many who seemed to him to have too definite leanings towards law and order. Locked in their closed system of a world, he set about bringing them under his own personal sway. Using the fact that they, like he, were fired with the magnificence of the project, he tried to impress them as a man they could follow. He made sure that they saw a great deal of him. His talk was always inspiring. He was good to them, a good friend and a trustworthy leader.

The brother officers who administrated the project he replaced by his personal friends, whom he knew he could depend upon to carry out his instructions no matter what they were.

His objective was not altogether clear at this point. He was clearing the way for possible advantage. He did not intend to remain a lackey of King Maxim, if the opportunity arose to strike out in a more promising field.

Jundrak was possessed of an intermittent ambition, which at times disappeared altogether, and at times, in the early hours of the morning when he lay alone in his bed, reached a pitch of megalomania. He nursed a secret dream that those golden ships should belong not to King Maxim, but to him.

The King had originally ordered the ships to be built to help him wipe out the rebel stronghold, before the Patch had appeared and upset all calculation. The big ships, with their enlarged fault-line tubes, were immeasurably faster than any others. They possessed an enormous advantage over conventional-drive ships. It was this advantage that Jundrak thought he might be able to use some day, if the political situation fragmented and the kingdom was thrown into chaos again.

He recognised that King Maxim was a weak ruler, and eventually his jerry-built reign was going to crumble. Peredan, on the other hand, he had been glad to destroy. If Peredan and his father returned they would rule with

a firm hand which would severely limit any irresponsible behaviour.

Prince Peredan received a call. The watcher ships he had recently placed outside Smorn's solar system had signalled news.

Ships of the Royal Fighting Forces had taken up positions within striking distance of Smorn itself.

"What drive are they using?" he asked the major who looked up at him from the vision screen set in the table-top. He was a thin-faced, alert young man with bushy sandy-coloured moustaches.

"Conventional drive as far as we can tell, Your Highness. Heavily baffled, of course—the camp's detectors would never have found them this far out."

Why, he wondered, had Maxim chosen this moment to threaten him? Didn't the Royal Fighting Forces already have enough trouble?

He could think of only one explanation. In his desperation Maxim was lashing out in all directions. He was afraid that Peredan would take advantage of his preoccupation with the Patch's presence to belabour him with sneak attacks.

"Hold on," he told the major. "We're sending reinforcements. Large ones."

He cut the connection. This time, he determined, Maxim had made a mistake. He looked forward to the coming action, the first, now, for nearly thirty years.

Prince Peredan issued orders. On the field beyond the encampment, a much-practised activity began. Take-off klaxons hooted. One by one, the huge battleships began lifting into space.

Later he directed the battle by distant-vision. It seemed that the intruders had not intended to attack immediately, for the rebel ships caught them by surprise. Possibly they were waiting for further reinforcements. Peredan surrounded them on all sides with just about an equivalent force and hurled a volley of atomic missiles into the centre of the enemy fleet.

Instantly the fleet rayed out to escape the nuclear detonations, met the englobing warships, and a close-

range struggle began. Maxim's fleet was in confusion at first, but it was scarcely ten minutes before the advantage of surprise was over, and the royal ships fought valiantly. For some time the issue seemed to be in doubt. Peredan was unable to deploy any strategy, for the ships were simply slugging it out with one another, and each one had to manoeuvre independently to avoid enemy thrusts.

The ships fought by firing atomic missiles at each other. They tried to destroy each other's external mountings by means of intense gamma beams. The table-top in Peredan's apartment, whose whole surface could become a vision screen if need be, was now bringing him pictures from all over the combat area. He saw ships junked, vapourised. He saw them spill clouds of men into space, fleeing the battleships which their instruments told them would be vapourised in the next few seconds. Only a few of these escaped the expanding fireballs, and they would be lucky indeed if they were ever picked up.

Peredan was considering sending out more ships when he saw that the fight had become dispersed. Now was the time to act. Issuing more orders, he swiftly rallied his ships, concentrating them in one area to deliver a devastatingly superior fire before the enemy could likewise gather up his numbers. From then on, he had the upper hand, and the eagerness and skill of every man under him helped him to stay on top. For twelve more hours the battle raged through space—then more of Maxim's contingent arrived.

The first arrivals had only been half of the force, consisting of the Fourth Fleet. The Fifth Fleet ploughed into a rebel force depleted and wearied by twelve hours of continuous action.

Peredan realised that he should have waited for the bigger bag. Perhaps his knowledge of the limitations of his own forces had persuaded him that this was all he would have to face. Although he was now committing far more of his reserves than he would wish, he had no choice but to send out another strong force of ships. Meantime, the first expedition was taking a heavy beating.

Was this, he wondered with a thrill of fear, Maxim's strategy? Had he underestimated the upstart king? His

amnesty had been delivered in a tiny ship which clearly had a most novel type of drive. Perhaps Maxim was luring him out, to face not only double his strength in fighting ships but vessels based on the new drive as well.

When the second force arrived at the battle area, the first had been almost decimated, and Peredan's firepower was now somewhat below the enemy's. Peredan was not too dismayed, once he had ascertained that no new type of ship was in action. He used a fleeing tactic, ordering all ships to run, not into outer space but back towards the sun, at an angle to the plane of the ecliptic.

This was a withdrawal which still left Smorn covered. Suspecting a trap, Maxim's ships hesitated, giving Peredan time to regroup.

Then the royal ships advanced towards the rebels.

Peredan gave a command. His regrouped battleships leaped forward at top speed—not for the main mass of the oncoming Fifth Fleet, but for its periphery. It was the same strategy as before, adapted to new conditions. Like a solid slug the close-packed mass of the rebel squadrons tore through the outer edge of the adversary. In the few seconds in which the two fleets came in contact, every enemy ship within its range had been annihilated by the intensity of its fire.

Instantly reversing, Peredan sent his ships through the fleet again with the same result. By this time the enemy commanders had learned their lesson. They bunched up, to present the same frontage as the rebels—and the same easy target for long-range weapons.

And so the long, slow slugging began again, but this time they were again on even terms. Both fleets slowly spread out to avoid the rain of missiles and the hot shafts of gamma-beams. Peredan took nerve stimulants to keep himself alert for the next eight hours.

Gradually, inexorably, the battle assessments showed victory edging on his side.

When nearly half of Maxim's force had been destroyed, the rest tried to withdraw. Peredan had anticipated this by moving ships under heavy baffle to block their retreat. The struggle took on an even more desperate character, that of men no longer trying to win

but to pull out.

About a third of the royal expedition made it back to the bases.

Peredan relaxed. For him, it was a resounding victory.

But he could not afford many such victories. Listening to the incoming damage and casualty lists, he saw how right he was in his estimation that he simply could not take on the Royal Fighting Forces and win.

If this attack had been the initial move in a sudden resolution to wipe out the encampment at all costs, then he was in a very unfortunate position. He would have no choice but to unleash a new war throughout all the kingdom. And that with the near-certainty of eventual defeat.

Prince Peredan could not help but exult over the outcome of the battle. But as it progressed, his face had only become more creased and care-worn.

A day after the battle Prince Peredan, who was still weary, had decided to sleep for an hour or two.

He had been working quietly in his private apartments, studying reports from all sections. Repairs to the damaged battleships, the necessity of building others to replace those lost. This was a particularly difficult assignment. Already stocks were being laid, but such a job was barely within the scope of the camp's resources. Peredan was considering, as an alternative, a raid on some relatively weak and remote naval base to capture ships. He had also received reports from agents dropped on populated planets, and these too lay on his desk.

The room was in a shaded half-light. On a couch along one wall lay the sleeping prince.

Then, in the silence, he stirred uncomfortably. Something *ominous* was happening in Peredan's mind.

He had been having a violent and unpleasant dream. Then a *dragging* feeling warned even his sleeping self that all was not well.

He forced himself awake, and rolled off the couch. He felt dizzy, sick, but above all—faint.

Without reasoning, he knew that he could easily go under now. Making a supreme effort to retain his con-

sciousness, he brought the room into focus forcing himself to see clearly and sharply its contents, form and colours. Gradually a little of his well-being returned.

But that was not all. He became aware that the room was shaking, vibrating. Objects dropped from shelves. He began to feel off-balance.

Peredan stumbled out his apartments into the bright outer offices. A rumbling was in the air, and a distant sound of structures collapsing. The outer offices were littered with the unconscious forms of his secretaries, the young women who for years had shared his bed. Running from body to body, he examined them. Some seemed to be moribund, others simply in a deep drugged sleep.

He went further through the tent. Everywhere it was the same. All of the women, and some of the men, were supine. Other men staggered about in various stages of discomposure. One, fairly alive, ran up to him.

“Your Highness! It must be an attack!”

Peredan left him and hurried through the limpid greenness of the tent. Outside, he looked up at the sky.

There was nothing to be seen.

Few were on hand to help him. He was appalled at the sudden helplessness of his organisation. But he didn't pause. Still in a weakened condition, he found a runabout and drove nearly three miles to the main laboratory building.

Forcing an entrance, he found some sign of life and industry. Many of the scientists had retained their ability to act and were carrying out hurried work.

“What is it all about?” he shouted over the drone of a generator.

Not until then was he noticed. One of the scientists looked up, and came over to him. Peredan saw that though his eyes were alive and knowing, he seemed to be fighting a constant battle with himself.

“It's the life-form from the North-East—the Patch. Why weren't we told it was coming this way by the agents?”

Peredan ignored the question. He followed as the scientist edged over to a huge bank of instruments where his colleagues were busy adjusting instrument settings for

standard experiments, connecting up other equipment they had dragged from another part of the laboratory. "We're trying to find out something about it, but we can't hold out much longer."

"Why aren't we dead already?"

"We don't know."

In Maximilia, all over the kingdom, months passed. For most they rolled by lazily. For a few, it was a wave of arrests and executions, an expression of the King's anger and fear following the serious defeat outside Smorn.

Jundrak, who did not come under the purge which had shaken the Royal Fighting Forces as a result of the defeat, looked on it all with amusement. It showed how insecure Maxim really felt, even though the entire Smorn incident was now over. There was no more news from Smorn, nor could there be for some time.

Autumn approached. In his office in one of Maximilia's tallest towers, Jundrak spoke half way round the world to his close friend Murnor Gelact, who was his adjutant in the subterranean shipyards.

"The ships are to all intents and purposes finished," Gelact said. "We shall have to tell the King so soon."

Jundrak nodded into the viewscreen. "I know. Hold on a few days more, I want to think about it."

In truth, he was trying to find the courage to steal the small fleet of slipway ships and take them into hiding. The Fighting Forces would never catch up with them, and he would then be in a position to bargain with King Maxim.

But he did not know what he could ask the King for, that he could be certain to keep. The alternative in his mind was that he might be able to stay in control of the fleet anyway, by becoming its commander.

The King had not been forthcoming when he had tried to sound him out over this idea.

"I'll tell you in a few days what I've decided to do," Jundrak said. A rumbling sound from the sky cut him off from whatever else he intended to say.

Leaving the view plate, he went to the window and looked out. He saw faint flashes and glows, seeming to

be beyond the sky itself.

Maximilia's defence system was in operation.

Not being on combat duty, he had received no notice of attack. He stepped back to the viewplate.

"I think Maximilia is not the safest place to be at the moment," he said thoughtfully. "I don't know what's going on, but we're being attacked. I'm coming down there to join you."

He cut the connection, then tried to make another to the Defence Room. The channels were blocked, no doubt with calls making the same enquiry as his own.

Jundrak wasted no more time trying. He took a small gadget from his pocket, opened a safety gate and pressed the button. It was an emergency summons to a private aircar—one of the facilities which were part of being an officer.

Less than two minutes later the aircar had found its way to him, floating up the face of the building and hovering outside the window.

"Better get away," he thought, "before somebody gets careless with their weaponry."

Taking over the controls from automatic, he whirled skywards. His was not the only aircar darting away from the Inner City; scores of them were fleeing Maximilia like fleas leaving a drowning dog. And not only aircars. Among them flashed a long, wingless shape, a small spaceship which rocketed part-way round the globe before roaring spacewards.

King Maxim and his family, making a getaway while they could.

From a height, the city gave no sign of its crisis. Jundrak could imagine what was really happening in the Inner City as everyone rushed for shelter. There would be panic in the Old Town, too, where there was almost no protection against an atom blast.

Jundrak turned the aircar South. Even as he sped away he saw the massive lump of a rebel battleship plummeting down to demand the surrender of Unimm.

Gelact was seething with curiosity.

"Communications with Maximilia have stopped," he

told Jundrak. "Who's attacking? Has the city held out?"

"Judging by the markings of the one battleship I saw," Jundrak said, "It's the rebel Peredan."

"But that's impossible!"

"I would have thought so too. Perhaps its just one or two ships that were absent from Smorn when . . ." he let the sentence tail off. "Call the men together. I want to speak to them."

They met in the hall where Jundrak had so often made speeches to the officers, engineers and technicians who worked on the project. Carefully he weighed the mood prevailing in the building. It seemed to be favourable, so he went ahead.

"Violence," he began, "has once more come to the kingdom as a result of the bitter enmity between the noble families. I believe you all know by now that Maximilia has been attacked.

"Some of you might remember it by its old title of Unimm. I don't know. Some of you might also think that we are bound to come to the aid of King Maxim with our slipway ships, if the situation gets that bad for him. Personally I do not think that we are so bound, and I do not propose to sacrifice the result of so much of our work in foolish and fruitless action.

"The situation is not yet clear. It may be that the attack on the capital has nothing to back it up. For our part, I think we must simply avoid the hazards of internecine war. We must remove our ships to a safe place. Then, when we can see the course of events more clearly, we may decide what use we can make of them."

An officer, one of the few men whom Jundrak had not been able to eradicate from the administration, stepped forward.

"Traitor! If we moved our ships on Maximilia now, we could keep the city for the King!"

Jundrak motioned to the other military men who stood in a clique together.

"Put Major Fuil under arrest."

"The Colonel is serving interests of his own!" shouted Fuil as he was taken away. "He is as bad as any of the nobles he speaks against."

There was a slight murmur, which faded once Fuil's voice was cut off.

"Well, you all see the position," Jundrak said in a strong voice. "We are going to take the slipway ships, and set up an independent base. No one will be harmed who does not want to come with us. They may leave for the surface now. The rest, go to the yards and prepare for take-off."

Of the three thousand, four hundred left for the surface.

Less than two days later, Jundrak watched from his aircar as the golden forms emerged from the shaft in a thrilling procession, and rise towards space. Only one ship was to remain behind, for Jundrak's departure later. For Jundrak had things to do yet.

He realised that if war had blown up, his ships could swing the balance, and bidding for his services would be high. He had to find out what the situation was.

He had got into communication with Maximilia on a non-directional broadcast so that his end couldn't be traced. Astonished to find that Peredan was in command there, he had asked for an interview with a guarantee of his liberty. It had been immediately granted.

His talk with Peredan should do a great deal to decide the course of his future actions.

After watching the last of the golden ships disappear, he swung the aircar North.

His military eye looked on the changed appearance of Maximilia (presumably it was Unimm, now—at least until the house of Grechen should return in force) with some interest. He was to learn later of how the occupation was handled. Smashing the defensive umbrella on the fringes of the atmosphere, Peredan's ships had swooped down over the Inner City.

During the years they had spent on Smorn, Peredan's scientists had produced results, and one of them was a weapon of dreadful effectiveness for short-range work. The rebel ships were able to project beams of hydrogen ions in controlled fusion. To clear landing space for themselves they spitefully vapourised whole groups of

buildings which had been erected in King Maxim's reign, including the one where Jundrak had had his office.

The experience of seeing skyscrapers selectively vanish, to be replaced by the ships that had magicked them away, was a profound lesson to everyone in Maximilia. The occupation was accepted without a murmur.

Jundrak halted outside the city limits, waiting for the armed aircar that was bound to intercept him. It came.

The soldiers inside it treated him civilly. Jundrak was transferred from his own aircar to theirs. While they continued to the Inner City, Jundrak's car withered behind them in the blast of a gamma-gun, and drifted, smoking, to the ground. Jundrak appreciated a policy which did not allow nuclear weapons to be smuggled into the city.

Neither was he surprised to find that Peredan was still running the show from his ships. Jundrak found him in the flagship, in a fairly roomy cabin whose walls were lined with books. The sense of calmness in the cabin imparted an immediate restfulness to him. With Peredan was a tall black-eyed man whom Jundrak knew as Heen Sett, until now in one of King Maxim's political prisons.

Jundrak smiled engagingly. "I am pleased to meet you again in more satisfactory circumstances, Your Highness."

Prince Peredan frowned. "Let us hope you can prove it."

"Ah—yes indeed. But first there is something I would beg to know of you. By all calculation you and your encampment should have been annihilated by the Patch—you will forgive me if I am perfectly practical. Yet now we find you appearing here in force." Jundrak licked his lips. "How *did* you escape from the Patch? Were you warned of its approach?"

Prince Peredan gazed at him intensely for a moment. "There is every reason why you should know," he said. "The Patch came upon us completely unexpectedly. There was no warning. Many died—but one thing saved us."

Glancing at Sett, the Prince continued: "Our encampment was protected by the greatest concentration of damper fields in the galaxy. Somehow, this held the

death-field of the Patch at bay for a while. Strengthening the fields even further decreased the death-drag on our minds, and for a time we were able to act and think fairly clearly."

"I see . . ." murmured Jundrak thoughtfully. "A happy accident."

"Yes. During the extra time we gained in this way—which was only temporary, for we knew that the Patch would break down our cancelling wavefronts eventually—we found ourselves in the unique position of being well within the field of the Patch, yet still alive."

"But how did you move your fleet from the encampment to here?"

Prince Peredan was silent.

"Little point in any preamble, Your Highness," Heen Sett said uneasily. "Better come clean. Soon everyone will know."

Peredan apparently agreed, for he continued: "As I said, our situation inside the Patch was unique. It gave us an advantage which, thanks to the excellence of my Scientific Arm, we were able to use. We succeeded in discovering the nature of the Patch, what it wants, what it does. Further than this, we established communication with it."

"You were right, Sann," Prince Peredan mused. "The Patch's mentality is *nothing* like ours. Even so, it proved amenable when we offered it a bargain. That is why I have chosen this moment to launch my counter-offensive against the house of Grechen. For now it is unthinkable that I should lose, because *I* hold the power to dispense life and death to the galaxy."

"You offered it a bargain?" said Jundrak, his mood wary now, but no longer pleased.

"The Patch searches for food. But its food is of a peculiar kind. It feeds off the *individuality* of organic beings, the mysterious essence that makes each man, woman and animal a conscious entity subtly different from any other. When this is absorbed by the Patch, individuality is lost and the body decomposes into its chemical constituents—as death ensues.

"This is interesting enough, except for it too-close

applicability to ourselves. Imagine how horrified we were, to learn that the Patch was aware of the size of the kingdom, and didn't intend to leave until it had taken all of it.

"A few days later, as we researched further, the hint of a way out came to us. We found that the Patch is not particularly interested that the individual be full-grown, any stage of development is acceptable. It is the *being* it wants."

Jundrak uttered a sound that was part grunt, part growl, part chuckle. "So we offer it our new-born children."

"Not quite. The Patch gets just as much satisfaction from fertilised ova. It derives a deal of sustenance even from unfertilised ova, or from male spermatozoa. We offered it something to which everyone in the kingdom will have to contribute: from the women, a proportion of their Graafian follicles; from the men, regular donations of sperm. In return for an unmolested populace, we shall give the Patch the equivalent of the population of the kingdom in fertilised ova, and several thousand times that number of spermatozoa. This is to be repeated every month."

Jundrak stared at him, aghast. "Every germ cell is a potential child!" he cried. "What man or woman would give up their seed for a purpose like that?"

"This is a tax it will be hard to levy. You are right, there will be trouble. But the alternative is racial death, so it will be done. And the very fact that I can stave off the Patch will take all power away from the Grechens."

"A blood tribute! Feeding our offspring to the monster! Like the Greeks in Solsystem, who every year sent seven maidens and seven youths to Crete. How is this any different from that?"

"What happens to your sperm cells in any case? They die. Only one in millions even reaches fertilisation. Nothing is more expendable."

Jundrak made a disgusted sound. "Here is somebody who's going to exempt himself!"

"You will not be exempted. It is compulsory for all

adults—except the King.”

“Have you no integrity?” Jundrak answered more quietly. “Can’t you see how repulsive your decision is to humanity?”

A silence engulfed the cabin, into which dripped vague noises from the rest of the ship. As before, Jundrak was fascinated by Peredan’s appearance, the young-old face. Age gathered to it as the silence prolonged itself, a subtle change in the muscles underneath the skin betraying every stage in the Prince’s sequence of feeling.

Then he threw back his head and laughed.

“What an uncomplicated young man you are!” he said to Jundrak. “All through history men have held such fond ideas as that. But the universe mocks at all our efforts. It always has something more strange, more monstrous than we can deal with.

Unsmiling now, he glared at Jundrak. “There is no freedom. The material universe is a trap whose meshes we cannot escape. Look what I have studied all my life.” Stretching out his arm, he pointed to stacks of books which lined the cabin, both scrolls and the old-fashioned leaf type. “Games Theory. Scientology—the science of life! Psycho-kinetics. Motivation Science.” Slowly, his arm traversed the racks. “There’s an interesting one: Decision-Making and Nerve Assembly. But they all come down to the same thing in the end. We have no choice but to *play the game* which circumstance imposes on us. And now circumstance has offered me the winning move! Do you think I am not going to make it?”

“I don’t properly follow all of that,” said Jundrak. “I do know that if I walk out of here—and I have your word as a gentleman—I can go to a place where I will not have to feed your monster with my sperm.”

Jundrak’s outburst was fast fading. In his uncomplicated, calculating manner, he had thrust aside his personal feelings and was already working out what would be of most benefit to him.

“Your Highness,” he said finally, “I am in possession of a fleet of warships using an entirely new drive principle—the slipway drive. Up until now I confess I had been hoping I could work for you as a freebooter, on

a mercenary basis. After what you have said, I do not think it would be tolerated.”

Peredan nodded. “The days of opportunism are over.”

“On the other hand,” Jundrak said, “you are still going to have some difficulty in stamping out Maxim. He will set up a last stronghold, just as you did, and it will be just as inconvenient to destroy—but not with the slipway ships.”

“Your Highness—” Jundrak smiled sardonically. “I wish to enlist my ships into his Majesty the King’s forces.”

GREYBEARD by Brian Aldiss

BRIAN ALDISS’S LATEST SF novel arrived too late for review in this issue and a full-length review will appear in our next, but meanwhile the editor wishes to let you know that it is one of the finest SF books he has read. Expect no monsters, spaceships or ray-guns. Set in rural England after radiation has resulted in the total sterility of the human race, it succeeds wholly by its brilliant character-drawing and descriptions of the English countryside run wild again. “Distinguished by excellence of style and poetic intensity of vision, *Greybeard* is science fiction with a difference.” So said his American publisher (\$4.50 from Harcourt, Brace and World), and for once the claim is an understatement! Rave reviews in States confirm claim. Also due for a full-scale review is Charles L. Harness’s *The Paradox Men* (Faber, 18s.) which, as well as being one of Aldiss’s favourite SF novels, is also one of ours. If you can’t wait for the reviews, just go out now and splurge on both—they’re worth it. *Greybeard* is also 18s. (Faber).

An extremely promising new writer ;
his subject—a soft touch . . .



EMISSARY

John Hamilton

IT WAS A damp Monday and the start of a new week. The town awoke to the day with a sleepiness bequeathed from the calm tranquility of Sunday.

A grey day greeted them; the usual local atmosphere of any Northern industrial town. A pale sun filtered weakly through the ashen sky like a watching ghost and a spasmodic rain started.

Breakfasts were finished. Drove of people stepped on and off buses, entered factories, joined the early morning window-shoppers, or idly gossiped over garden-walls.

Tall chimneys began to belch out coal smoke and a million cigarettes were lit. Machinery sighed and started,

bells rang, sirens hailed, 'closed' signs were reversed to 'open' and the day commenced in the manner of all weekdays.

The urban cluster of the town spilled over the floor of a gently sloping valley and to the west the ground rose gradually, deep rows of terraced houses narrowly parted by dim streets giving way to a sparse-vegetated moorland which provided an inglorious western skyline.

Silhouetted against the opaque pallor of the morning sky a dark figure could be discerned treading through the soft rain up the rise of the moor.

It was cooler up here. Wet too. The rain seemed to wash away the colour from his cheeks and the green from his eyes and leave a sad pale reflection of himself. His dusty feet kicked in irritation against sparse clumps of dry grasses. Instinctively his fingers were drawn through some tall ferns which lined part of the dismal path; he felt the rain and the fresh morning dew on his hands, the soft touch on his skin. He teased small berries off gaunt bushes, threw small stones at startled birds, and coughed mistily into a light breeze that had arisen.

Choosing a suitable viewpoint, he sat silently down hugging his knees from the cold as he gazed over the dark outlines of the town below. He watched the tenuous spirals of black smoke issuing from the factory chimneys and at this height the people below appeared as large ants scurrying from place to place in a seemingly meaningless pattern. Presumably there was some kind of purpose, though. To the south he located the metal railing which indicated a school; a few children were idling in the bare asphalt playground.

Digging his hand into his pocket he withdrew a notebook and read over some small print in the form of a list. He looked back at the jigsaw jumble that was a town; a major industrial town, in fact, with a uniquely central position in relation to the country's economy. But drab all the same. His eyes returned to the school: there were supposed to be three schools in all but he couldn't pick out the other two. He glanced down again at his notebook, reread a few passages, and chuckled inwardly.

Later that morning a small incident happened at Pea-

cock Road School.

"And who," said the headmaster turning to his assistant with a frown, "was that man?"

"You mean the one who was wandering through the playground patting the children on the head, sir?"

"Of course I do," he grimaced.

"'Fraid I don't know, sir. Never seen him before." A joke came to his mind: "Can't be the father of 'em all, that's for sure," he laughed. The head didn't see the humour and so he quickly added: "Might be a religious philanthropist dishing out blessings or something like that, sir," he offered, trying desperately to be helpful.

The head gave an acrid 'humph,' turned on his heel and strode away.

The two other schools witnessed similar happenings and at one an angry young master ran out and accosted an innocent passerby.

A small crowd gathered.

"Get your hands off me! If you're seriously suggesting that I . . ." his voice rose in affronted dignity.

"Damned pervert!" called a brawny man from amongst the spectators.

There was a slight skirmish and a policeman had to be called to restore order. The accused shouted out his intention to press charges, muttering angrily: ". . . the very idea! . . . disgusting!"

The man was seen at several places that morning—insurance offices, co-operative stores, travel agents, clothing shops, coffee bars . . . seen but never recognised. The day had grown imperceptibly warmer and it began to prove a tiring job; he escorted bundles of flowers out of shops, carried armfuls of water-melons and bars of soap about until he found a back-street dustbin into which he could dump them unseen. In musty clothing shops he inspected elegant canes, tried on a myriad of hats, fitted on jackets, suits, trousers, shoes, fancy waistcoats . . . The different sizes, styles, colours, prices flickered across his mind like an urban nightmare. He decided it was time for the ritual of dinner.

His dinner break consisted of a visit to seven restaurants and five public bars. During this time he managed to

consume five light snacks of markedly indifferent quality and drink five cups of coffee, two lukewarm teas, a number of beers and finally one unknown beverage labeled "Coca Cola" (that hadn't been on his list!). He didn't feel too well.

After a short rest, he set out to sample a few grocery stores—they were most important.

His hand rested gently on an aluminium door-handle and, as he pushed, a bell tinkled like silver in the cool of the shop. The two assistants stopped their intimate chatter as he entered and one asked with indifference: "Yes, sir."

"Unus—eh—one moment."

Their faces like pale doll's masks watched him from behind the counter as he pondered restlessly over the array of goods, touching summer apples, caressing peaches, fingering grapes, weighing handfuls of sprouting potatoes. It lasted five minutes.

"If you don't mind, sir," said the girl petulantly.

"Oh."

"What will it be sir?"

A number and a name rose into his mind. "Ten pounds of cheese, please."

The assistants failed to suppress their laughter as they got his unexpected order but their humour became surprise when he pressed a five-pound note into their hands and left without a word. They rustled the fresh mint-new paper of the note and discussed the auguries of fortune and wonder that they felt in the afternoon air. After a wistful silence one said: "Who's Mister Rockefeller?"

"Dunno. Never seen him before."

"Mmm, strange eyes, though, green-like."

The parcel of cheese was left behind a tree as he strolled into the park to check over his notebook. He crumpled himself on to a shaded park bench.

Over the afternoon he must have stopped twenty people with a request for a light or the correct time, each time thanking the person with a pat on the back. He grew tired of using the same two stereotyped phrases and slept for a short while.

When he awoke evening had seeped silently in and the air was plagued by a bleak wind so he headed for the centre of town by a roundabout bus route.

At eight-thirty he alighted opposite a cinema and was confronted by lurid posters advertising the day's film. He swung through the damp chromium-and-glass doors into the warm close atmosphere of the picture-house and purchased a back-row ticket. The film was a poor one and during it he changed his seat an average of once every ten minutes.

At nine-twenty he stepped out into the chill of evening.

He had forty minutes left and so set off at a slow pace to his destination, meandering around blocks and dropping in night cafés and harshly lit bookstores on the way. He counted almost a hundred books that he had run his itching fingers over as he walked through the outskirts of town where all was silence except for the momentary passing of an ambulance wailing at full speed into town.

Reaching the area he went up to a small girl who was lingering like a cast-off puppet in a street corner and handed her a packet of unhappy sweets as a parting gesture. He then quickened his pace, turned several corners, passed five or six blocks and stopped like a wary panther at the bottom of a short, dimly lit cobbled street. His nostrils preened the evening air for hidden secrets and his sharp eyes ferreted into corner shadows.

The street was empty.

He crossed the road and stepped along the gutter. Half-way up the street he bent down and, with a grating of metal, removed a manhole cover. He paused to throw a last kiss of death to the world and then silently jumped down the hole. From a rooftop a grey cat watched his every move.

He hit the ground with a splash and a cool darkness closed in on him. He fumbled in his pocket and producing a small lighter, ignited it. The manhole cover above his head was replaced and given an instinctive wiping

caress and he proceeded to plod warily down the unlit cavernous tunnel of the sewer.

Footsteps echoed off the metal and concrete walls, and the shadows before him grudgingly melted and quickly reformed, thick behind him. He felt watched.

The air was fetid and evil and from somewhere nearby there was a soft rustling and scraping; the rats were moving, as though disturbed and excited and entranced by the first primeval chords of an unseen piper. Through the Stygian gloom they watched the man shuffle through the sewerage waters, clinging to his fickle light as a water-diviner will cling to his magic forked-stick probing the earth of its secrets.

From their hidden alcoves, numberless, they observed his hunched progress down the underground cellar, their eyes bright and all-seeing. The foul night air was felt by a million delicate whiskers, and they knew, deep inside their humble bones, that the figure was evil, evil as a Cain descended from the world of light above them. They knew their affinity with this man . . .

. . . This reaper of life, and sower of Death.

He felt their presence, an inner ear caught the faint stirrings on either side, and at his sides thin hands itched nervously with the desire to kill, to pulp the life-blood from their horrid bodies:

. . . Watching, watching, and knowing.

He checked his watch and hurried on down the labyrinth, took the left at two intersections and he was there.

He hoisted himself onto the dry ledge that had been hewed out of the wall and found the black metal box and a candle lying in the corner. Kneeling down he lit the black candle and replaced it on the narrow shelf next to the box. After wiping his hands on his shirt, the top of the box was prised off and an intricate transmitter lay revealed; its other half was among the stars.

He drew up a thin steel antenna, pressed the contact switch, and took out the microphone. Using a hidden key he tapped off an introductory code. A red light was triggered on.

“Sphinx 4-9 calling . . . 4-9 calling from Town 7 . . . repeat.”

A low hiss was followed by a metallic voice: "Continue."

"Mission completed . . . repeat . . . mission completed."

zzzzzzzz. "Elaborate."

"Well, I touched everything in sight—people, dogs, apples . . . everything as per the book. There can be no risk of failure; the invasion will be a cinch," he clicked his grimy fingers.

"Quite certain, agent 4-9?"

"Quite certain, sir." He allowed himself an empty chuckle; though unnecessary sounds were not allowed on official broadcasts.

There was a long silence and only the slow, swirling motion of the sewer water could be heard.

A loud voice spoke abruptly: "Then that is all."

It sounded too final, too much like a death-blow.

"Right. I'll be waiting for you—I'll help remove the bodies when you've landed; we might use the factory furnaces . . ." His words were cut short.

"4-9!"

"Yes."

"You forgot something. Your previous list was incomplete."

He grew alert, worried, disturbed. A slight panic crept upon him and he began to sweat. The voice seemed to imply he wouldn't be at the Burning. Why?

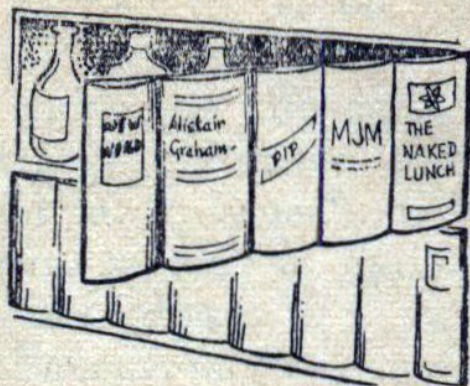
"No. I have followed all orders. There was a short rest in the park but enough people have been contaminated to kill the town, and added to the others, the world." He was growing insistent now, almost begging: "I touched cheese, oranges, cups, grapes . . ."

". . . and *yourself*. Goodbye 4-9." *Click*. The machine died.

Cut by his own scythe. A small pain was tugging at his side and he knew the horrors to follow, the very horrors that were being enacted on the world above him.

The black candle flickered and snuffed itself out and in the velvet darkness that had closed in he saw a million pairs of pin-points watching him. The waves of malignance washed over his mind; he knew what they would do when the waiting ended.

A DISH OF DOBSONS



DENNIS DOBSON HAVE been publishing good SF for some years and were among the first to 'risk' a regular SF list. The risk has no doubt paid off by now. Their regular author is Eric Frank Russell who has, up to date, published some eight titles with them. His latest *With A Strange Device* (15s) isn't what I like from Russell in that it is basically a detective story set in the not-too-distant future and lacks the delightful extravagance of stories like *Next of Kin*. This one isn't even as good as his similar novel *Three to Conquer* and tends to remind me somewhat of those dull SF-detective-thrillers turned out by Charles Eric Maine. However, if you like Maine (and many do) or Russell in this mood, then you'll like this story of a maximum-security research station and the mysterious disappearances of members of its staff. This is written, I should imagine, for the reader who is not a regular reader of SF, because the 'twists' tend to be a bit predictable to those familiar with the bulk of good SF.

I did not expect to like another book which Dobson's published recently. This is Heinlein's *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* (18s). In spite of a deep dislike of Heinlein's mentality and his barren style, I have to admit that the short novel of the title and its companion short stories are extremely polished, readable and entertaining. *Jonathan Hoag* is scarcely SF (it was originally published in UNKNOWN, 1942). It is really a fantasy following a formula that may well have originated in UNKNOWN (*Fear* is another) and was used some years later with great effect by Frederick Brown (*Come And Go Mad!* in WEIRD TALES) and Fritz Leiber (*You're*

All Alone! in FANTASTIC). Yet even though I guessed what was coming, Heinlein still managed to keep me reading and the shock ending really did shock me. The other stories are all good Heinlein, apart from *The Man Who Travelled in Elephants* which struck me as an attempt to cash in on over-sweet Bradbury territory. It's a piece of sentimental nostalgia which may delight those Americans who respond to Goldwater's Myths and Legends of America, but which finds no response at all in the non-American reader (for whom this collection was published). Here we get a good glimpse at Heinlein in a cosy reactionary mood (just as insidious as his more often noted violent reactionary mood). Other stories include *They* (which is a trifle close to *Jonathan Hoag* in theme, and particularly to *Come And Go Mad*), *All You Zombies* (one of Heinlein's best), '*And He Built a Crooked House . . .*' (another of his best) and *Our Fair City* (which tends to fall down on its construction towards the end, but isn't at all bad). A much better collection, I must admit, than many published recently.

Stories that are 'bad literature but good SF' tend to have a habit of dating. This is true of Heinlein's other recent offering this year (*Revolt in 2100*) and it is also true of many of Alan E. Nourse's stories in *The Counterfeit Man* (from Dobson again, 15s.). The title story fits its own little category, actually—'someone aboard this ship is an alien who looks like a man and we've got to find out who it is' is the category. The twists are predictable and don't save the story if you've read any like it before. Really it isn't Nourse's fault (his story was published in THRILLING WONDER STORIES, 1952) but rather the fault of the man who selected the stories in the first place. Not all the stories have the same faults (though some have others) and *The Canvas Bag* isn't bad, though I felt this story of a long-lived man could have been more satisfyingly developed (it is a fantasy rather than an SF tale). Of the other stories, the best ones are the humorous pieces. *The Dark Door* is yet another Hoag-type story. Worth ordering from your library.

Isaac Asimov's *The Martian Way* (Dobson 16s) shows what a frustratingly good writer Asimov can be at times, in that he is good—but you know he can be even better. Asimov at his best is tremendous, only bettered by Bester and I think you will enjoy the two novelettes and two short stories which succeed partly because they are written by a man who evidently has more intellect and sophistication in his chemical-stained little finger than most SF writers have in their heads.

Also received from Dobson's were Lloyd Biggle Jr's *All The Colours of Darkness* (16s), which has a nice title, and Frank Belknap Long's *It Was The Day of The Robot* (15s), which hasn't.

James Colvin

Paperbacks Received

Second Foundation, Isaac Asimov, Panther, 3/6. Long-awaited final volume in Asimov's impressive 'Foundation' trilogy. The whole trilogy now available from Panther. A classic of the field and one which is sure to last much longer than many. Guaranteed top SF.

The Dreamers, Roger Manvell, Corgi, 3/6. A pretty good horror story about a malicious 'something or someone' which sends lethal dreams to people—dreams that are nightmarishly terrible. This is a supernatural novel similar to Wheatley, only better written.

Atlas Shrugged, Ayn Rand, Signet (Four-Square here), 7/6. Never has such terrible old rubbish appeared between the covers of a book. If you want a good laugh (if a slightly horrified one) from start to finish, try this. At times it reads like Goebels writing in the style of Marie Corelli.

From Other Worlds, edited by August Derleth, Four Square, 3/6. A fairly mediocre collection (for some reason Derleth's usually are!) which is worth getting only if you can't find anything else first.

J.C.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Crowding Out

Dear Sir,

I read through No. 143 . . . *The Evidence* was a very well-written piece, with affinities, as you say, to Kafka. I'd probably mark it the best in the issue in that what it attempted, it achieved—and well. Your own was effective in its small compass. *Single Combat* was well-written, too, but too long for its idea—or the idea wasn't developed enough for its length—and the ending was weak, as if the author had given up or exhausted his wordage for the week. But it had style. *Stormwater Tunnel*—a touch of the Kafkas again. Okay. Ballard's? I don't know—read through it and around it; felt the same way about it as I did the parallel story in *F & SF* . . . style, yes . . . basic image, yes . . . but story—most decidedly no. I don't know who acclaimed Ballard 'the finest modern SF writer' but his ideas are too thin—like those other admirable lads Sturgeon and Aldiss. Give him the title of the best writer writing SF, which is a bit different. It's probably the main problem today. Critics both in and out of SF plead for better writing and characterisation in SF, but they carp when, as it inevitably must, it crowds out the old SF elements.

Ah well! But you're certainly putting out a literate magazine. You'll have the old hacks like me scratching their heads and wondering if they can make the grade!

On the other hand, it'll have me looking out and developing some of the ideas that I've kept in the drawer this many a year for the knowledge that none of the other editors would smile on them.

Arthur Sellings, 23, Keld Drive, Uckfield, Sussex.

We look forward to seeing them!

Different Cover

Dear Sir,

About No. 143, which I have just finished reading. It really is a jolly good magazine, once you are past the cover! I am partly in agreement with John Brunner in that the outside is all wrong for the contents, but I do agree that a *different* cover is needed to stand out on the news-stands. Therefore I am all for the triangle providing there is something more stimulating within it . . .

I enjoyed Hilary Bailey's story; it made me wonder why it is almost taken for granted that SF must concern the future and only rarely the might-have-been present. In fact I enjoyed all the stories, but do have one small complaint. The Michael Moorcock story. I don't know what the rest of his fans think but for me it was far too short. I always look for a Michael Moorcock story, but this time I was almost disappointed . . . barely three pages isn't my idea of half-an-hour-with-a-good-book! I must be fair and admit that it was a good story and I would rather have that than none at all. I do realise that the Editor can't hog the pages, it would appear big-headed to some and all tastes must be catered for. Still, I don't think I am in the minority in being an MM fan, so perhaps we can hope for more in the future?

Complaints apart, congratulations on continuing my favourite magazine. You can keep all the women's books with their advice on how to keep a man. I just share my SF with him and I'm home and dry! All power to your elbow, and keep up the good work.

Mrs. Ellen Channon, 45, Ridgeway, Nettleham,
Lincoln.

After that letter, Mrs. Channon, how could we disappoint you? Our natural modesty had to be fought back, our natural inclination to hog the pages took its place, and you have read at least half of the result by now. Although a surprisingly large number of readers liked our earlier covers, we have taken readers' comments into account in preparing the new ones. Hope you like both serial and covers.

Minds of Men

Dear Sir,

This letter is in reply to 'Outside Expansion' in *NEW WORLDS* 143. From what most people say about the 30's it seems that SF readers then weren't worried about plots, characterisation, or, perhaps, even scientific accuracy within the framework of the knowledge of the time. What they wanted (and what we still do, I hope) is a fairy story for adults—something from the dream traumas of a writer's imagination.

The horror stories of the 18th and 19th century were descended lineally, as is much of today's SF, from the myths and legends of historical man, but they also owed a great deal to the pseudo-science and philosophy of the time. Similarly, the surge in SF of the 30's also owed a great deal to the science and philosophy of that time—the huge strides of the preceding decades in the natural sciences, particularly physics, which opened wide fields to the imagination.

Today, perhaps only two sciences are in a similar position—psychology and sociology, for, despite Freud, Jung, etc., both are only now becoming sciences, instead of the pseudo-philosophising that they were previously.

Now, it seems to me that if recapturing the 'sense of wonder' would be a necessary and/or sufficient condition for the revitalisation of the SF field (which may not be the case) this could best be accomplished by exploiting the 'maturation' of the two sciences mentioned above. This does not mean, as it has in the past, merely using the broad canvass of one social setting as a framework for a 'space opera,' nor building a Utopia for the purpose of a socio-political propaganda, but it does mean exploring the impact on a person of a particular social structure, or vice versa, or the interaction of two (plus) societies, or the effect of an external influence on a society, or . . . etc.; i.e., discovering the cabalities of the human mind in relation to the environment it creates. The novelist of today explores today's society; the novelist of the future should construct his own, in much the same way that the earlier practitioners of SF created their own possible, or wildly improbable machines.

Additionally, of course, the possibilities of devising suitable social structures for creatures other than man will be at once obvious and immense; no account need be taken of any existing knowledge regarding the psychology of man, and the mind is free to operate untrammelled.

Your letter writer stated that no author could produce 'a book with a genuine feeling of awe and respect for spacetravel and the conquest of other worlds,' and has the implied conclusion from the rest of his letter that this could not be done until a new scientific renaissance disproves Einstein's theories and gives to the world, particularly to the SF world, new machines and knowledge which could be used. With this I agree, but until that day dawns, if ever it will, could we not recapture the sense of wonder by revealing the infinite sociological and psychological possibilities of man and the intelligent creatures of other planets, instead of just using them as props on which to hang characterisation plots with the usual old machines? The latter is a form of literature which is and always will be valid, and one which gives me great enjoyment, but as a vehicle for experimental ideas it is about played out.

Truly the 'sense of wonder' has departed from SF, but, as ever, it can be regained by and through the minds of men.

Now, a few very brief words about the issue itself. Ballard, naturally is at his very best, which is very good indeed.

The Fall of Frenchy Steiner was one of the best 'other probability worlds' I have read for a long time; I am sure that this is partly due to the fact that it is the only one I have read for a long time. Why can't we have some more?

Single Combat was a better story than I had expected from reading Joseph Green's other stories which have appeared between the covers of NEW WORLDS. Generally, the other tales went up to make the kind of well-balanced issue which, from two 'fixes' appears to be the permanent feature.

C. J. Marriner, 3b, Underhill Road, Dulwich, S.E.22

We, too, would like to see some stories on the lines you mention—and also some more good ‘other probability worlds’ stories. We can think of only a few good ones—Moore’s Bring the Jubilee was perhaps the best. A copy of All the Colours of Darkness by Lloyd Biggle, Jr. should now be winging its way to you, Mr. Marriner, as your prize for the best letter in this issue.

Amateur Magazines

WHEN SPACE PERMITS, we intend to mention some of the best amateur SF ‘fanzines’ received. The new reader might find them a little strange at first, but it does not take long to pick up the terminology and arguments found in them. Recently we have had:

LES SPINGE 13 (2/3 for this huge issue only), from Dave Hale, 12, Belmont Road, Wollescote, Stourbridge, Worcs. Excellent duplicated production, well-drawn illustrations and a varied selection of material of a good standard. For those curious about what an SF Convention is like, LES SPINGE contains several reports.

ZENITH 5 (1/6), from Peter R. Weston, 9, Porlock Crescent, Northfield, Birmingham 31. Has an extremely high standard of lithoed-duplicated production, contains fiction and features slanted towards the ‘serious’ SF reader. A bit earnest, but worth a try.

CAMBER 14 (2/6), from Alan Dodd, 77, Stanstead Road, Hoddesdon, Herts. Another well-produced duplicated job, with a special ‘art folio’ by Cawthorn, material by Rackham and Moorcock (on the private life of Elric).

BEYOND 6 (1/6), from Charles Platt, 8, Sollershott West, Letchworth, Herts. This one also carries fiction and like ZENITH represents the ‘new wave’ of SF fans—the young ones demanding more serious SF criticism in fan magazines. This has a somewhat strident note at the moment, is also pretty well produced but with poor artwork. Has, however, plenty of interesting material, articles on Arthur Machen, ‘the post Hiroshima syndrome,’ reviews of NEW WORLDS and SCIENCE FANTASY, and the transcript of a tape-recorded interview with the editor of this magazine, talking about policy, etc.

AMRA 29 (5 for 10/-), from Dick Eney, 417 Ft. Hunt Road, Alexandria, Virginia, 22307 or Archie Mercer, 70, Worrall Road, Bristol 8. Fans of 'sword and sorcery' fiction shouldn't miss this lithographed magazine. Contributions by De Camp, Anderson, R. E. Howard.

STORY RATINGS 144

1	}	The Shores of Death (1) ...	<i>Michael Moorcock</i>
		I Remember, Anita ...	<i>Langdon Jones</i>
2		Integrity	<i>Peter Woods</i>
3	}	New Experience	<i>E. C. Tubb</i>
		Private Shape	<i>S. J. Bounds</i>
4		Andromeda	<i>C. C. Reed</i>

Next issue will feature the first part of Arthur Selling's new satirical novel *The Power of Y*, and material in hand includes stories by Richard Wilson, E. C. Tubb, John Brunner, Brian W. Aldiss, James Colvin, John Baxter, Gordon Walters, Thom Keyes, George Collyn and others. Out just before Christmas, so if there isn't any snow, console yourself with a fix of NWSF.

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