NEW WORLDS SF

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Arthur Sellings' new novel

The Power of Y

NEW WORLDS SF

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All manuscripts must be double-spaced typed on quarto paper with top sheet containing title, author, word-length and address. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must accompany all submissions.

ENCOURAGING SIGNS

FROM THIS ISSUE we are back on a regular monthly schedule and, for the first time, our companion SCIENCE FANTASY also goes monthly. This is largely thanks to you and we are grateful.

1964 was another boom year in the field of SF publishing. Even more SF hardcover and paperback titles were published, and the general standard seems to have risen. Subject-matter has broadened in scope and writing styles have been pleasantly varied. Something, in fact, for everybody. At least four brilliant books have appeared, all vastly different—Aldiss's *Greybeard,* Ballard's *The Terminal Beach,* Harness's *The Paradox Men* and, a book which can't strictly be called SF, yet which deals with all the ideas found in SF, Burroughs's *Dead Fingers Talk.* These four alone made it an exciting year for us—and an encouraging one.

Also encouraging was the number of new writers we have been able to attract to both magazines. Langdon Jones, George Collyn, John Hamilton, Colin Fry and Thom Keyes have all, in their different ways, brought freshness and diversity to the field and will continue to do so. They are helping us in our aim to raise standards. This issue sees Bob Parkinson's debut, as well as the welcome return of Arthur Sellings, an author who has produced stories of a consistently high standard since he began writing. Recently he seems to have left the magazine field to write novels *(The Silent Speakers* and *The Uncensored Man)* and we made it our business to make sure that we published his next before its hardcover appearance!

A further encouraging sign that SF is on the up in more ways than one—the publication of SF HORIZONS, the professional magazine of SF criticism, edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison. The best item in this was Aldiss's long article on Jack Williamson's *Legion of Time,* in which he analyses not only the book itself, but also the whole SF field, its strengths and its weaknesses. This is the first piece of serious SF criticism we have read which really lays down solid principles for the criticism of SF. It is witty, intelligent and clear. For this article alone, SF HORIZONS is worth getting. As Aldiss says:

> " It is too little acknowledged—and not only in the sf field—that there are principles of literary criticism that can be applied quite unpretentiously to any work. The Italian Manzoni formulated these principles . . . These rules are to help our enjoyment and understanding of sf; why should we neglect their aid when they are inevitably present in any composition, which contains within itself the rules by which it should be criticised, or, as Manzoni puts it, ' offers to anyone who wishes to examine it the principles necessary to form a judgement of it?' The principles referred to may be obtained by asking three questions: What was the author's intention? Was the intention reasonable? Has the author carried it out?
>
> " In other words, *Discover* the purpose; *judge* its worth; *criticise* the technique . . . "

The first issue also contains " *The Establishment must die and rot . . .* " (a discussion between Amis and Lewis) and articles by Blish, Doherty, Harrison and others. It costs 3/6 (plus post) from Tom Boardman, Pelham, Priory Road, Sunningdale, Berks. or can be ordered through a newsagent.

Altogether a worthwhile year. We anticipate that 1965 will be even better.

THE POWER OF

y

by Arthur Sellings

First of two parts

I AM NOT going to stand for President of the Federated States of Europe.

I had better mention that right here at the beginning, in case anybody gets the idea that this is some kind of platform or statement of my views. It isn't. My views are bound to come into it, as will some details about Plying and other matters that some people will know far more about than I do.

That I can't avoid. If they help perspective, perspective's what I need. Oh, they tell me—and I tell myself—that my primary purpose is to set down The Facts. And I suppose I owe people that. But since these *are* The Facts, let me say as Fact Number One that my sense of humour took a hell of a beating, and as Fact Number One (A) that this record is something in the nature of auto-therapy. If I owe this to you—brother, do I owe it to me!

I thank all who have pressed for my nomination. I am told that public opinion polls forecast that I would get at least eighty per cent of all votes. I am also told that the person who was at the heart of recent events is the only one who can restore stability and faith in the Federation.

● *continued on page 6*

Plying — or Transdimensional Multiplying to give it its full name — wasn't such a revolutionary invention after all. There were limits to what the machine could do — or so it seemed. When art-dealer Max Afford discovered he had a mild psi-power he discounted it as useless. But was it?

I'll let the first statement pass. The second one, though, is all wrong.

For one thing, rather than being the *only* person, I'm the *last*, believe me. I'm an art dealer, not a politician. At least, I *was* an art dealer, and I only hope I will be allowed to become one again. And I wasn't at the heart of everything—except inasmuch as there's a centre to every whirlpool.

What happened, *happened,* independently of me. Oh, I know that if I hadn't found myself with that peculiar knack or talent, or whatever you care to call it, then darker evil might have transpired and we should probably never have known just what did happen.

But that was a million to one chance, and I just happened to draw the ticket. People say that I acted with laudable persistence—a trait that presumably fits me for high office. Probably I was persistent. But it was only the persistence of somebody desperately trying to maintain his own sanity. Such persistence can be dangerous in a politician. Hitler, last century, claimed he was sane—and dragged Europe to the edge of ruin to prove it.

Somebody has reminded me that potential candidates *always* disclaim their intention of accepting nomination. I'll say again that I'm not a politician and a disclaimer from me means *I Disclaim.* The same somebody has just added that the harder they holler the more eager that means they are. Well, I'm in no mood for double-think. Single-think's been difficult enough these past few months. And I'm going to get on with this story.

It started one morning last winter. It was a normal enough day at the gallery—if any day in the art world can ever be considered quite normal . . .

two

A GALLERY, AT its lowest definition I suppose, is a store. After that, any resemblance to any other kind of store ends abruptly.

Oh, you start a gallery, as I had some ten years before, just as anybody else might start a hardware store or a

grocer's. Now, people have to have pans and dishes and butter and coffee, and sooner or later people come in for them and you have a business. You hope. There's a market there and you elbow your way into a share of it. But there's no fixed market in the art world. Nobody *has* to have paintings or pieces of sculpture, desperately as painters and art dealers may try to convince themselves to the contrary. Not only is there no primal demand, but you're dealing in a commodity that you can't sell by the kilo or the square metre or have bargain-of-the-week offers on.

You have to create your market, staking your judgment against an unpredictable factor—public taste. Or what my old dealer friend Hyman Basco calls pubic taste—and he speaks English a bit better than that, if only slightly.

Given the necessary faith in one's own judgment, even then nobody in his right senses would start a gallery without some kind of a connection, either with the people who produce or with the people who have the money.

I was lucky. I had some connection with both. I have always liked the company of artists—mad, childish and infuriating as most of them are most of the time. I envy them their freedom—not just from nine to five servitude and ulcers, but from the obsessions and shibboleths of the herd. I know the other side of the coin too—that such freedom isn't bought lightly but at the cost of a dedication that can consume as well as create. Perhaps my sense of that fact is the reason I get on well with them. I feel that the artist's usual contempt for the dealer is tempered in my case. When Abel Hering, one of the painters whose work I handle, quoted Eric Gill's pained protest by a dealer, " But, Mr. Gill, I only sell the things I love," he did so with a certain affection, I like to believe.

My connection with the other side stemmed from two things. I had worked with *Line & Form* for three years, reviewing new exhibitions and meeting a lot of people. I also have an aunt you may have heard of—Clarissa Huntley. When *Line & Form* folded it was my Aunt Clarissa who financed Gallery O.

And that morning last winter, though the day outside was dreary, this heart, for all its thirty-odd years, was young and gay. The evening before, I had presented my aunt with the final repayment of her loan, and she had stepped down reluctantly from the status of debenture holder to that of a nominal fifteen percent shareholder. In the aura of that fact my stable of up-and-coming artists took on the colours of geniuses. More important, I now felt freer to handle some of Auntie's socialite friends. Mind you, I'm not going to bite the hand that fed me, but a diet of "Yes, I can see he's a good artist, but does he do any flower paintings?" and "Well, what I was really looking for was a nice drawing of ex-King Carles," and "But it simply *wouldn't* go with my walls," can rot the fine teeth of sensibility.

The only blot, in fact, on this morning was the crate that had been delivered. I had just prised the top off . . . it was only a small crate and you don't pay off debentures by employing labourers. I took the painting out of the case, holding it by the frame, and propped it up on my desk. More for the sake of drinking in the sight of thirty thousand pounds at five percent than in hope of any more aesthetic nourishment.

For it was a Matisse, and if there's one artist of the last century I can't stand it's Matisse. Another of the kind of comment that I had to endure from some of Auntie's friends was, "But my child of five could paint better than that." For me, if I had a child who painted as badly as *this*, I'd take away his brushes and give him a spray gun in hope of better things.

The painting in question was *Still Life With Fish* from around 1910. It had been Plied, of course; there was the blind seal, the letter P with the number 20 in the bowl and the date 2015, in a circle. Otherwise it would have been worth a hundred thousand and I would never have smelt it.

As it was, I rarely handled paintings with even a thirty thousand price tag on them. I'm out front with the avant-garde, and it's a big day when any of *their* work fetches a couple of thousand. It's different with the really big

boys like Hyman Basco or Oswald Bilbekker. After the near first coronary apiece they must have suffered when Plying hit the headlines four years before—*remember?* . . . the days when it was hailed as The Answer to Everything . . . The Dawn Of The Golden Age . . . when one car would go in one end and a million roll out the other . . . a genuine Mona Lisa in every home? — well, after the dust had settled, the Hyman Bascos and Oswald Bilbekkers of this world found they were still in business, only more so.

For Plying—or Transdimensional Multiplying, to give it its full name—*wasn't* the Answer to Everything. I'm no scientist, nor are a few thousand million other people, but it had all seemed so simple. All objects, so the theory ran, have an extension into the fourth dimension. We just happen to see, and use, one slice in this three-dimensional space. Plying meant simply taking other slices. The world was a side of bacon and there was nothing to stop you taking a dozen slices, a million—object x to the power of y, in fact—provided the hog was long enough.

The sad truth was that it wasn't. Or the cutters couldn't reach more than twenty slices back. Or both. The " cutters " weren't blades of steel, of course, but some kind of laser beam operating in a field of—well, there was enough about it in the Sunday magazines of the day, and I suppose it'll all get reprinted now . . . and more. I never knew much about the technical side of it, but I went into the commercial aspect pretty thoroughly, naturally. One technical point, though, I could appreciate was that you couldn't take a slice off a slice . . . Ply something already Plied. That seemed to make sense. That was one of the reasons for putting a seal on.

Another drawback was the sheer cost of the thing. A plant for commercial production cost a fortune to build and ate enough power to keep a city going. Just to set the machine up for a job cost £50,000. After that it wasn't too bad, relatively, and the operating costs brought it up to about a hundred grand basic.

Basic—that was a word to conjure with. Did you ever wrestle with the more abstruse sections of the Post Office

Guide? Such sections as the *Dimensions of Parcels* bit? How a parcel can have a combined length and breadth of two metres as long as the relation of one to the other doesn't exceed x one or whatever it is?

Well, costing on Plying was like that, only more so. Things like diamonds were nice, small, compact things. The only drawback there was the means of marking. But they found a way of embossing the Plying seal molecularly, so that it glowed minutely under polarised ultra-violet. But it was rather more complicated in the case of works of art. Sheer weight operated against all but the smallest, lightest and most rare pieces of sculpture. The formula went up into higher mathematics for paintings, what with their awkward dimension ratios, a high fragility factor and a few other things. Which was what made somebody like Joanna Miles a cinch for the Plying Service. *She* could give an estimate on the spot, without as much as a slide rule—except the one she carried under that elegant blonde moss-cut. We all have our special talents. This is the story of one, after all.

But to get back to the subject in hand. The economic aspect of Plied paintings was even more complicated. Take a painting like this Matisse. A few years before Plying it came up at Sotheby's and fetched a hundred thousand. Come Plying . . . have it Plied. And what have you got? Twenty paintings worth five thousand each? Not on your life. At every auction there's an under-bidder—the man who would have paid ninety-nine thousand. Below him is the one who dropped out at ninety, the two gave up at eighty-five and eighty respectively, not to mention the peasants who started the bidding at fifty. Nor, most important of all, the shy millionaire who craved the picture but wasn't coming down into the spit and sawdust for it but who bought it off the purchaser for a hundred and ten thousand after the auctioneer had put his little wooden hammer away into its little wooden box for the night.

And any one of the unsuccessful bidders would have willingly paid considerably more than five thousand pounds to possess it, even knowing that nineteen other

people would be able to share that pleasure. A lot of people are apt to judge art collectors unfairly as being motivated solely by a lust for the unique. But there's a lot of real love of art involved—even though I couldn't appreciate the point in the case of Matisse. The work of some artists is so scarce, so unavailable in collections and galleries scattered far and wide, as to inhibit demand. Plying only served to stimulate it—to the extent that more than one Plied painting, each of the twenty of it, started fetching prices up to the level that the single painting had commanded pre-Plying.

Mrs. Ogilvy ffyne-ffayre was ready to pay thirty thousand for one Plied *Still Life With Fish.* Not for a copy, but for one of twenty identical paintings—twenty originals. Nobody knew which was, in fact, the painting that had been put into the Plying machine. It was something to do with a random factor in the process. Now, twenty times thirty thousand is six hundred thousand. If the Plying cost two hundred thou, that still makes a handsome profit on the hundred odd thousand the original owner paid for it. Enough to pay the dealers' commissions, keep one back for the penthouse walls and still have some nice spending money over.

In the art world, those first few days after Plying were funny to watch. At first, the only conversation you heard at the parties and the showings was like a record with one refrain: "Well, I'm certainly not going to have any of *my* paintings Plied." Six weeks later there was a queue a mile long outside the Plying plant.

But I wasn't in the queue. In the art world there are many mansions. Mine wasn't exactly a mansion, more of a de luxe hovel. A home of character. And I knew the kind of paintings I wanted to house in it. They didn't include many of the kind, and the price tag, that got Plied.

I gazed at the Matisse propped up on my desk, in a sort of masochistic trance. It was unbelievable that any artist could get away with such incompetent laying on of paint. Any action painter—that quaint coterie of the last century—could have laid it on better with a duck-billed

platypus's backside. I reached out and touched the ghastly surface.

And that was the start of everything.

I'm not sure just what I felt. It was like a kind of ringing—but there was no sound. A tingle? No, not that either. Nothing so positive. It was something way down deep, below the skin and the nerve endings and the surface of the brain, but something which communicated with, and connected, all three.

My first reaction was *remorse.* For my slandering the name of Matisse for all these years. I thought, you see, that I had just discovered some magic in his work that had eluded me all these years. But when I withdrew my fingers, whatever magic there might have been there ebbed away. It was a dead cold painting of dead cold fish.

And it was still a dead cold painting when I put my fingers to it again. Artistically, I mean but . . .

There it was again, that feeling.

I reached down to my desk drawer for the scotch bottle, but withdrew my hand. I had to have a clear mind to think this out. I lit a cigarette and paced up and down the carpeted floor.

I suddenly had a notion. I went over to the Hering—one of my private collection—on the wall. I touched it.

No such reaction came as I had got from the Matisse. I should have known. I had spent my adult life handling—in the commercial sense—unPlied paintings . . . and handling, in the literal sense, quite a proportion of them, I supposed. I would have noticed this kind of reaction before. Or did it only come from touching pictures I disliked—with no aesthetic impulse to get in the way? But I'd touched enough of *them,* too; I must have.

I felt the Matisse again. The strange reaction seemed to get stronger—or more assured—with practice. But it was still a reaction in only a couple of cells somewhere in the billions that make up a person.

This Matisse was Plied. Did the process leave some residual charge in anything that was Plied? How many *Plied* paintings had I touched before? I couldn't remem-

ber. It's the visual impact that counts, after all, not the tactile. One often feels the texture of a dubious painting as part of the process of checking—but any paintings that got Plied had been pretty well authenticated beforehand, you could bet on that.

And it couldn't be that this was an effect that soon died, like the bloom of a rose. This must have been a very early Ply, from the date of its seal.

The desk set buzzed. I swore softly, but flipped the switch.

"Mrs. ffyne-ffayre is on the vidphone, Mr. Afford," came the exquisitely modulated voice of my secretary, Miss Collins. "Shall I switch her through?"

Mrs. ffyne-ffayre was the last person I wanted to see at that moment. "Tell her the painting's arrived," I said. "Tell her she can collect it at any time."

"But surely . . . I mean, you'll want to hand it over personally, won't you?" I could just picture the dragon image breathing down her neck out of the vidphone. Mrs. Four-eff had a personality that no mere electronic device could obstruct.

"I'm going out," I told her. "Just make sure you get her cheque, that's all. Certified."

three

I TOOK A cab from Soho to Park Lane.

Hyman greeted me in his usual vein.

"Ah, a visit from the underworld! What's this I read in the papers, one of your artists charged with indecent assault on a canvas?" He sniggered.

The penny, the preoccupied mood I was in, took a moment to drop. "Scudder's not one of my artists. And even Rembrandt couldn't make copulation artistic."

"You've heard of Rembrandt? Well, well. I've got a nice one just in. Hundred and fifty gran'. Class, Maxie, *class*."

Only Hyman could have got away with that word in Park Lane. But he knew his pictures.

"Plied?"

" What else? " He looked at me as if I was slightly crazy to ask the question. " See for yourself. It's on the wall over there."

I crossed to it and felt the surface.

No tingle. Instead, something else—a feeling even slighter than the one I had got from the Matisse, and in the opposite direction . . . if you could give such a positive, measurable word as *direction* to feelings as tenuous as this. But there was a kind of *deadness* to it. If I hadn't been alerted by the positive reaction to the Matisse I should probably never have recognised it. But, slight as one reaction was, against the other it was unmistakable. I laid my hands on the painting next to it, a Delacroix. The same " dead " feeling.

" Any time," said Hyman, " you like to handle paintings without fear of contamination, you're welcome, you know that." I could tell, with the one percent of my mind that wasn't engrossed with the task to hand, that Hyman's curiosity was more than slightly piqued. I answered him out of the same one percent.

" Come, Hymie, you know I guarantee that all my paintings are fumigated. Haven't you seen that F in the corner, just like the Plying sign? "

I moved to the next, a Blake watercolour. The same dead feel. The one next door, another Blake, gave the same reaction.

Hyman came scuttling after me. " Ai, such a waste, mixing with all these lowlifes! You with your contacts and education."

The Palmer was dead. The Rubens was dead. I moved into the twentieth-century gallery.

Picasso dead. Klee, exquisite but dead. Sutherland . . . but neither feeling came. I looked at the corner, and turned to Hyman.

" Not Plied? "

Hyman shrugged. " Such a small painting. And borderline. Maybe next year, or the year after."

Dealers like Hyman Basco sat very pretty then. The grass was green both sides of the fence.

Kandinsky dead. Mercer dead.

Hyman must have been aching by now.

"Ai, such a waste. I tell you, Maxie, for your Aunt Clarissa and six of your lavender shirts I give you a half share in my gallery. Well, forty-nine percent."

Lam dead. Mondrian dead.

"You couldn't wear 'em, Hymie. My lavender shirts, nor my Aunt Clar — "

Chagall *live*. It tingled under my hands.

"*Chagall?*" I heard Herman saying. "A *Romantic. You?* For you I do it cheap. Thirty thousand. I—excuse me."

Out of some corner of my consciousness I was aware that somebody else had come into the gallery, and I was grateful for the fact. I went back to the Mondrian, Dead. Back to the Chagall. *Live*.

How many paintings had I touched? A dozen? And from one of the dozen I got this positive reaction. One out of twelve Plied paintings. Chosen at random, and only a small sample—but the proportion was about right.

I called goodbye to Hyman. He spared me one puzzled, infinitely wistful, look from the attention he was giving to a woman in a pastel green mutation mink.

There was only one person I could think of contacting —Joanna Miles. I called her up at her office—the discreet "shop window" in Regent Street. She was over at the plant on the South Bank. I rang the plant. She was researching. I rang again. She was at lunch. I reached her in the afternoon, back at her office.

"This is Max Afford. Remember me?"

"Of course. Gallery O, isn't it?" But her voice, and her demeanour on the screen, were cool.

"I'd like to have a chat with you."

"To do with Plying?"

I could appreciate the question. She had got in touch with me soon after Plying came in, suitably briefed no doubt on Aunt Clarissa and her holding in the company. *And* on some of Aunt Clarissa's wealthier friends. Part of the equipment that came with a mental slide rule was a memory for details, obviously. But if her researching was

cold-blooded, her methods were rather more subtle. We had met several times over drinks and dinners. She had dropped me very quickly, though, when she found that the range of my artistic interests didn't extend to making me a likely customer for the Plying Service.

But by that time other interests of mine had been aroused. Joanna Miles is a very handsome specimen of femininity. The effect is rather spoiled by the transistorised manner, but I took that as a challenge.

I needn't have bothered. Miss Miles—I never got to calling her Joanna even, except in my fantasies—was a career girl, in a career made to measure for her.

Now I felt clumsy, as I always had, confronted with her. But I pursued my mission earnestly, if not entirely honestly.

"Yes," I answered, quelling the pendant *in a way.*

"Business?"

"Could be."

"We have a waiting time of six weeks at the moment, you know."

"It's not a straightforward commission. It's more of an angle."

She looked coolly suspicious. "Very well, what is it? I'm free for a few minutes."

"I was rather thinking of dinner. Dinner at — " I pitched it as high as I could — "the Fifty Two?"

"One of the *less* noteworthy wine lists."

I took a stab in the dark. "The Maison d'Or, then."

I was lucky. "Much better. You've improved since I last met you."

"Mix with enough people of taste," I laughed nervously, "some of it's bound to rub off."

I waited until liqueurs. The waiter had heard of the one she ordered, but I hadn't. I took a brandy.

"Well?" she said.

I cleared my throat.

"I think — " I cursed inwardly. "No, I'm sure . . . that I can tell a Plied original from a copy."

She winced at the word *copy,* which was one, I recalled,

the Service *never* used in its handouts. Then she laughed.

"But I *can*."

"How?"

"By touch."

"The laying on of hands?"

I was beginning to get annoyed. I fought the feeling down. I couldn't afford it.

"Exactly."

"And what would you want me or the Service to do about it?"

"I'm not quite sure. Plying's been going on for four years now. The public accepts it. It's no longer news. I thought you might like to give it a shot in the arm. Authenticate the real original. There could be dividends in it."

She took a sip of her liqueur. Then she shook her head sadly, as if over a stupid child.

"So you think that the owner of the original could get a higher price? But that would be more than outweighed by the depression in the price of the others. With all works of art, rare books etcetera, one of the big points of Plying is that nobody can tell which of the twenty is the original. They're *all* originals, you know that."

"All except one. And there's at least one person who *can* tell."

"All right—what do you propose—the Plying seal in one corner, and in the other *Guaranteed the Original by Max Afford?*"

She was right. It didn't need a slide rule in the head to tell me that. But that hadn't been my real motive, I knew, to discuss new twists in Plying promotion. I had a talent, and I wanted to tell somebody about it. Somebody who would get the point of it. I should have known better than to think that Joanna Miles could be that person. Or was I trying to get back at her? Was I trying to give her cosy empire a shake? I thought I had forgotten her.

But she was right. I had a talent—a funny little *useless* talent—that nobody would ever believe, or could be expected to. I felt suddenly angry. *Laugh then,* I wanted to say. *If a man can do it, there's every chance an instru-*

ment can be made to show it on a dial, too. Then you and the whole blasted Plying Service will have to laugh on the other side of your face.

But the talent—funny, little and useless as it might be—had me hooked. And I hadn't proved it to myself yet. So, instead, I said in all meekness, "Do you think you could fix me a visit to the Plant?"

She laughed. "Certainly, Mr. Afford." She picked up her bag. "I'll arrange it for next Wednesday morning at eleven, if that will suit you."

four

I MENTIONED HER name at the gate.

"Ah yes," said the uniformed attendant. "Just come this way, sir."

Would I never learn? If I'd expected to see Joanna—and I had—I was disappointed. It wasn't even the personally conducted tour I'd imagined it would be. I found myself in a room with a gaggle of middle-aged women. I gathered it was a woman's institute outing. The guide who came in to pick us up gave me a dubious look.

We were ushered into a gallery, glass-lined and high up over a large hall. Far below, a kind of trolley, about as wide as a football pitch, loitered. One side of the hall was a mass of dials.

Somebody in a brown coat rolled in a truck carrying a kind of metal sphere, with what looked like some pretty intricate mechanism visible through one transparent sector. Though it was difficult to tell. From this height it looked no bigger than an orange, and it couldn't, in fact, have been bigger than a man's head.

The guide cleared his throat importantly, and set off on what was obviously a set speech.

"This is the object whose Plying you will be permitted to see today." A thrill ran round the ranks. "Its exact nature cannot, of course, be revealed. Objects sent to be Plied are often, because of their value, of a highly confidential nature. That is one reason why the Plying Service

is a Government corporation. Another reason is the very high capital cost needed to construct a Plying plant."

Another reason, which he didn't state, was that Plying was highly profitable. Profitable enough, over the past few years, to cut the tax on a packet of cigarettes by a shilling and the price of a bottle of whisky by ten. So, if Plying hadn't quite ushered in the Golden Age, it wasn't exactly an unpopular institution.

"Many people," the guide went on as the brown-coated one mounted the globe into one section of a complicated looking circular frame and the frame onto the trolley, "think of Plying only as means of multiplying things like old masters, rare books, jewellery, gold blocks and mink coats." The women sighed, and I could imagine the mental picture each was having of twenty mink coats hanging side by side in a wardrobe. "In fact, neither gold blocks nor mink coats are valuable enough to Ply. And a steadily increasing proportion of all objects accepted for Plying—the last figure to hand was thirty-seven percent—are such items as you will see being Plied today. A company may want more than one prototype of an intricate mechanism. It is frequently cheaper to have the unit Plied than to have several specimens hand-made. Also, for test purposes, when one mechanism needs to be modified or run to destruction or tested under different conditions, Plying provides an absolutely identical control unit."

There was a quantity more, which I'm sure meant little to the guide's audience. A white-coated character came in and checked what brown coat had done.

"The moment has now arrived," said the guide in a voice that managed to sound reverently hushed and considerably bored at the same time.

The man in the white coat pressed a button. The far side of the hall opened up. The height of our observation point occluded the view of what lay beyond, but I could see a sector of wall set with dully glinting nodes a foot or so apart.

"The Plying chamber," said the guide.

The trolley slowly rolled in. The massive doors slid

down upon it. It was about as thrilling to watch as a cremation. But the women seemed impressed. Perhaps it reminded them of one.

White Coat strode to the instrument panel and operated switches, activating a delirium of dials. He jabbed at a switch. Somewhere a generator woke to life. A sound started below the limits of hearing, moving up through a low growl that trembled the gallery floor under our feet and in a matter of seconds to a whine that levelled out just this side of the upper limits of audibility. The trembling stabilised to the tiniest of vibrations . . . but there was a sense of massive power there.

"We shall now go for coffee while the Plying process is in operation," said the guide.

We trooped after him to a typical government canteen. The coffee, in plastic cartons, was typical government issue, too.

We were shepherded back onto another gallery at the other end of the huge building. The whine went through the sound spectrum in reverse and died.

"A slight wait now," said the guide, "to allow dimensional stresses to re-adjust."

After five long minutes, the doors rolled up and the trolley came crawling out. On it, visible through the lattices of the frame, were now twenty metal spheres.

That was it. Even a postscript tribute by the guide to the wonders of Plying failed to dispel a sense of anti-climax. I heard one of the women say to a companion, "Not a patch on that brewery, was it, Ada?" I don't know what they had expected. Or what I had, come to that. But I knew what I wanted now. I approached the guide. He was looking sourly after the departing rabble. I whispered in his ear.

He coughed and looked significantly upwards to what looked like one of a series of light fittings in the ceiling. He walked away to the end of the gallery. I followed him. He stopped.

"I'm sorry, sir. That's more than my job's worth. We're specially briefed on company spies. Some of them try, you know."

"I suppose so," I said. But that glance upwards and that walk along the gallery gave me hope. "Well, thank you for a most interesting tour." I shook him by the hand. His eyes flickered down and slightly widened before his freighted hand slipped to a pocket.

"But I'm afraid that industrial items like that —" he gestured downward to where both colours of coat were busy on the framework—"are highly confidential."

"I'm not fussy. Have you a slightly less confidential batch? Paintings, say? I'm an art dealer, not a company spy."

"I'll see what can be arranged. Follow me, will you?"

I followed him along the gallery, through a door, down ramps, to a long corridor, stopping outside another door.

"Wait here," he said. "If anybody should ask you what you're doing, say you're waiting for somebody to show you the way to the taxi-rank."

After a few moments he came back and led me in.

It was a big room—evidently a store. Several men were busy there. A uniformed guard sat at a desk on a dais. He gave one look in my direction then looked steadfastly in the opposite one. That twenty note I had given the guide was going to be split down the middle for sure.

"You can only have a minute," the guide whispered.

He led me to a batch of twenty paintings standing on edge, separated by foam plastic cushions. A crate stood by them.

"They'll do fine," I said. I couldn't see what the painting, all twenty of it, was. I wasn't interested. My fingers flew over the identical edges of the canvases . . . and stopped. Then, feeling absurdly like some travesty of a concert pianist, I strummed both hands to the outside ones and back. I straightened.

"Thank you," I said.

I took a cab to a bar I knew just off Oxford Street. Over a pink gin I ruminated.

There was no doubt about it. On a direct test on one complete batch of twenty Plied articles, only one "rang." The rest had that opposite, negative feeling. I *could* tell the original article from the Plied. It must be so. It would be highly illogical to think that one, and no other, out of the nineteen duplicates would give this reaction . . . while the original gave just the same reaction as the other eighteen. Surely only the original could possess some factor the others didn't . . . its originality.

That was what logic said. But could logic be trusted in something like this? Could I match a mere *feeling*—for however positive it was to me, and it had become more so with each test of it, that's all it was—against something as massive and super-scientific as Plying? It was like a water diviner thinking he could check the circuits of an atomic energy station.

But hadn't I read somewhere that occasionally they *did* call on diviners for fault tracing in intricate machinery? That while some diviners were strong on water, others were strong on metals—some on copper, some on iron? It seemed pretty well proved that these men had a kind

of awareness of certain elements, the same as I could swear by now that I had an awareness of the originality of a Plied thing.

But why *me*?

I'd never had any kind of occult experience, or anything remotely comparable. Or had I? What was the special flair that enabled a man to detect the strength in this artist's work and not in a hundred others? Experience, I told myself. I — or Hyman Basco or Oswald Bilbekker, or any of the thousands in my line, for that matter—must have a certain instinct that got developed over the years. But there was nothing occult about that. There wasn't anything occult about this, either, I brooded —except insamuch as "occult" was a word for something that nobody had got around to explaining yet.

But how about the hunches that one got? In the early days of Gallery O, before I had gathered my own stable of currently producing geniuses, I had scouted a lot around the sale rooms and private house sales, hunting for the minor artists of the mid-twentieth century. Instinct was something you had to rely on pretty strongly if you didn't want to waste your time haring all over the place. Or was that simply a hindsight definition of luck?

But there was serendipity, wasn't there?

I'd looked the word up when somebody, early on, told me I had it. And it was in the dictionary, too. It came from an old story, *The Three Princes of Serendip*. The title characters were always finding treasures and things that they weren't looking for—or didn't know they were. I had *that* gift all right. It had worked many times. There's an entry in the last edition of the *Art Encyclopedia* to substantiate one of them. I was hunting for some old wrought iron in a junk yard one day to decorate the gallery windows for a special display, and discovered a completely forgotten artist, Arnold Greybone. I'd wondered more than once why I had the urge to go *that* day to just *that* junkyard just in time to catch Greybone's orphaned soul children on their way to the pulping machine.

So I had serendipity. And now I had *this*. Well, seren-

dipity I'd made money out of. But this, as Joanna Miles had implied, was a useless talent. For a moment, at thought of her, and my morning at the Plying plant, the thought flickered again of seeking more conclusive *proof* than my unsupported word could offer. Perhaps I could find some kind of a medical specialist, who could hook wires on to me and check just what did happen inside when I touched an original. Then duplicate it in a little meter. Who was the scientist who discovered the power of electricity by the fact that it twitched a frog's leg?

But the thought died for the ignoble creature it was. Plying did a useful job . . . who was I to think of putting a spanner in its works?

So I downed my pinkers and went back to the gallery. And that would have been that, if it hadn't been for something that happened a couple of months later. . .

five

I WAS DOWN at Colchester for the day, at one of those country auction rooms that handle everything from stuffed rhinoceri to sets of antique surgical instruments . . . and paintings, of course. I was after a handful of early work by Clive Wain—one of the senior members of my stable. They were among the first lots and I got them at a price so low as to make me feel not only ashamed but painfully aware that I had still a long way to go in promoting poor old Clive.

I had to wait until the end of the morning session to pick up my purchase—they weren't bulky enough to warrant special packing and despatch—so I wandered across the yard to the pub next door, gloomily wondering whether Clive was doomed to wait for posthumous recognition. I had a large gin and felt a bit better. Perhaps this early work would help bring his later paintings into focus. I went back to the rooms as the last few lots of the morning were dribbling out from under the auctioneer's hammer.

Lot 85 was a miscellaneous bundle of old stuff. The porter held up what he presumably considered to be the

best of the lot—a small head and shoulders of an elderly man with a white beard.

The auctioneer squinted at it.

"Nineteenth century portrait — possibly Barbizon school?" A snigger went up. Even the locals knew that that was unduly optimistic. The auctioner coughed. "And four others," he added, as if in expiation.

"One pound," somebody called out. "Thirty shilling," came from down the front.

"Five pounds," I suddenly found myself bidding. Heads turned. "Six," said the man down the front.

"Ten," I said. I went to few auctions these days, but I had my methods. If the opposition are dickering over ones—or tens—up your advance to fives—or fifties. It works out cheaper in the long run.

But my friend down the front wasn't going to be shaken off so easily. "Twenty," he came back with, and a rustle went round the room as it always does when somebody bids far more for an item than anybody had reckoned it at. That look, which none but the highest and suavest can quite suppress, flickered over the auctioneer's face like a happy bat. I smiled inwardly and played the game for all it was worth.

"Twenty one."

I could almost hear the gnashing of teeth from down front.

"Twenty two." It sounded desperate.

"Twenty two ten."

"Twenty three." Triumphant now. I was obviously reaching the end of my tether.

"Thirty."

He gave up. Finally convince them that they're bidding against some kind of manic-depressive and even some of the really tough boys give up, as if they're frightened it's catching.

The hammer came down. It was the last lot of the morning. I went down to the auctioneer's desk with my cheque book.

"You bloody London dealers," said a big man in a tweed poncho and cap tipped to the back of his head. My

defeated opponent, obviously. And if he tried to smile as he spoke, it plainly hurt. "How did you know that was a set of illustrations to Baring-Gould's *Mehalah*? They were never published."

I shrugged modestly.

"Not even the town bookseller was on to them," the big man went on, lamenting. "And he's after anything of local interest like that. I thought I had a clear run."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said quite truthfully.

He blinked. "You mean—you don't mean that you were after that tatty portrait?"

"Why not?"

He looked at me cagily. He plainly didn't believe me, but it was something he could easily put to the test. "All right then, how much do you want for the others?"

"Let me see," I said airily. "Your last bid was for twenty three pounds?" I hung on the figure significantly.

He glared, but reached for his inside pocket.

"So if we split that down the middle, you owe me eleven pounds ten."

He paid up with suspicious haste and left, clutching the four drawings and obviously thinking I *must* be mad. One has to preserve people's illusions.

And he was more than possibly right, I thought, as I picked up my own little bundle and left to catch the one forty-five for London. But, before the libraries shut that evening, I knew I hadn't been wrong. It was an undistinguished portrait—though it would look better after a clean—but it *was* what I had had an infinitesimal hunch it might be. Heaven knows what had given me the idea . . . the set of the shoulders, the penetrating look of the eyes maybe . . . but it was a portrait of one of President of Europe Masson's forebears—his grandfather. There was even a mention of it in one of those massive biographies in depth which great men attract—with some of the twaddle, too. You know the kind of thing: "Who could have dreamed, least of all the humble French shopkeeper as he sat in his Sunday best for the portrait to be presented to him by the local Chamber of Commerce,

that the little golden-haired grandchild playing at his feet would some day . . . etc . . . etc . . ."

All woven out of an entry in some old minutes of the said local Chamber, obviously. For, while there was no reproduction of the portrait, there *was* one of a photograph of Grandpa that was a dead ringer for the painting. Odds on the poor artist had painted from that, not from life, adding a parlour background in place of the photographer's potted palms in a pitiful attempt at realism. How it had turned up nearly seventy years later in Essex was anybody's guess. But chemical tests and research in France confirmed its authenticity. And the upshot was that I had to make the presentation personally at the Europa Palace.

Of course, Aunt Clarissa was immediately all of a flutter. As partner in Gallery O she simply *had* to attend.

I refused. One, I told her, it was only a small informal ceremony. There would be a photographer or two, a few pressmen, but that was all. Two—and I only said this after she persisted—she wasn't a partner, but only a shareholder. She had to persist further before I reminded her that she had never been a partner at all, technically. Aunt Clarissa hadn't made her money by not knowing the difference between a debenture and a share certificate.

And if you think I was being cruel, let me tell you that the determination of Clarissa Huntley is a terrible thing and that no weapon to counter it is to be despised . . . or relied on too much.

"But I haven't been to the Palace since the days it *was* a palace," she complained. "Ah, King Charles and his garden parties! It isn't the same now."

"I'm glad you agree," I told her. The mere thought of Aunt Clarissa in full regalia at the modern palace was enough to make me shudder.

She sniffed. "There's a small but very important matter of keeping up standards."

"Auntie, you're a snob."

"I am not—and please do not use that revolting word."

"What—snob?"

"No, *Auntie*. It should be obvious to anyone at all that

I am thoroughly modern and democratic in my outlook. If it was the will of the people to herd the last of our crowned heads into some kind of reservation—"

"They abdicated gracefully."

Auntie was not to be deflected. "—into some kind of reservation in the Bahamas, then so be it. Not that the masses won't have cause to regret it. The Royal family gave a lot of work to a lot of people."

"There are more people," I told her, "employed in one wing of the present palace than in the entire old—what was it called — Luckingham Palace? I put an American accent on the last syllable for good measure."

Aunt Clarissa snorted. "Bureaucrats! But the wheel will turn, mark my words. Whether it's by descent or election, the people will have a king. I think President Masson is an excellent man." She said it as if a few hundred million people in the Federation weren't equally aware of the fact. "He would make a very good king. So I will be obliged if you will kindly see that I receive an invitation." She looked at me craftily. "I'm sure you wouldn't like it said that Clarissa Huntley had to pull strings to get into the Palace to a function for her own nephew."

I gave up very quickly. Clarissa straight is hard enough; Clarissa devious is impossible. I still wince at the memory of her machinations over Dudley Llewellyn. I may call my artists a stable, but I draw the line at horse painters. And she had thought she was doing me a favour; that was the part that had hurt. It had taken me a year to get the fellow out of my hair.

"All right, Aunt Clarissa," I sighed. "I'll see that you get one."

The afternoon of March 5th. 2019 was bright and clear, and some of Auntie's grotesque enthusiasm must have worn off on to me, for I was feeling slightly hilarious as I accompanied her down the steps of her apartment building. Or perhaps it was the effect of her very dry sherry.

Aunt Clarissa was certainly a magnificent sight, like

some baroque palace itself taken wing. She was garbed in an emerald green dress, full length, the skirt of which she held up with a gloved hand. About her shoulders was a sable cape. But above all, and above all, that startling head, like an eagle's. Far away I could have sworn I heard trumpets blowing.

Mixed metaphors? I defy anyone to describe Aunt Clarissa without recourse to a few.

Humphrey, her chauffer, in an immaculate grey uniform that looked suspiciously new, ushered us into the ancient Rolls-Royce, vintage 1970.

Seating herself, she picked up the intercom handset. "Humphrey, we will have the top down today."

I protested vehemently. I had only a formal bolero and slacks on, and the day, for all its brightness, was cold.

"Nonsense, my boy," my aunt said, as a motor quietly whirred and the top recessed. "We must think of the ordinary people. Their lives are so drab these days."

I needn't have worried unduly. Humphrey was obviously under strict orders not to exceed ten kilometres an hour. Auntie was determined to redeem as much drabness in as many lives as possible that day.

We swept past the gates of the Palace. They called it a Palace in, presumably, a last nod to tradition, but the huge modern block which they had erected on the site of the old palace could have been any government office, instead of the seat of government of all Europe, as it was. Only the Presidential balcony and the long line of the old national flags along the front facade, surmounted by the huge bull on a gold field, banner of the Federation, distinguished it.

The small company assembled in a reception room could not have started to compete with Auntie. But she discreetly withdrew a few paces after being presented to Secretary of State Bloomfield, Keeper of the Archives Johannsen and a few lesser lights. She knew her protocol.

Then the President came in, walking slowly and flanked by a small dark man whom I presumed to be a private secretary.

I had never seen the President face to face. I had seen,

like everyone else, his image on a thousand magazine covers and on television, but lenses and lighting could hide a lot, I realised, as the Grand Old Man came towards me. There had been a stroke, of course, some years before, but it had been, by all accounts, a minor one. Some people said that he had never properly recovered from it. But his walk was steady enough, if slow. He held that leonine white-maned head erect as always. It was just that he seemed older than I had always imagined him to be. He was seventy, it was true, but that's no great age. And he had always seemed so indestructible.

A college professor, he had entered politics at the age of forty-six, when affairs in Europe were reaching explosion point. With academic thoroughness and absolute incorruptibility he had laid down certain principles—and with a latent political cunning and stamina he had fought for them through the French Chamber and out into Europe at large. Europe had to unite—really unite. He had even convinced the Russians that a Europe in turmoil was as great a danger to them as to anybody, and they had ceded East Germany, Poland and Hungary to the Federation in return for massive assistance in developing their virgin lands to the East.

All that is history, and so is the fact that Georges Masson, having achieved his goal, went back to the obscurity of the French university that he had come out of ten years before. But when the Federation ran into squalls only a few years after its launching—over industrial standardisation, the rights of overseas nations, the Sahara oil contract and an assortment of other issues, large and small, he answered the call and stood for President. Larger than any party, he had to choose one. He chose the United Democrats—and no other party or nomination stood a chance.

By now he had served one five-year term, the best part of another and was confidently expected to win a third. True, there had been some dissident voices lately. Some of the legislation that he had ushered through the European Parliament these past few years had aroused opposition. The way he had handled the Catalan indepen-

dence rising had been criticised as harsh. The North Sea farming plan had been an expensive failure. Politics was something I didn't worry my head about, but even I had heard rumblings. But that was all they were, and the President's reputation could have survived much more than that.

Perhaps the reputation of a great man physically inflates one's image of him. Georges Masson was close on two metres in height anyway, and broad. But at this moment he had somehow looked man-size—not god-size.

It was only to be expected, I told myself. His voice was clear enough as he greeted me in good English.

"Ah, Mr. Afford. So this is the painting? Ah yes, I remember it. It has been lost for many years. It is good to have it restored."

(Were the words a fraction slower than one would have expected . . . a little too precise, as if he were reading from a script? Or was it only afterwards that that occurred to me?)

I said something suitably short and respectful, about the great pleasure and privilege etc.

And then we shook hands.

And I can't tell you what I thought after that, after my first impression that the handshake was not as firm as I would have expected it to be. For immediately then one overwhelming, incredible fact hit me.

The hand was the hand of a dead man. Not dead in the ordinary way, but in the way I had recognised when I had touched the paintings in Herman's gallery, the paintings at the Plying plant. . .

The President had been Plied . . . *and this wasn't the original*!

six

I WAS CONSCIOUS of the popping of a flashlight, but through a kind of mist. I think I mumbled something. I think I remember thinking that I was going to pass out—something which I'd never done in my life. But I knew

what it was like to have a general anaesthetic, and this was something like it. Reality started to break up around me, and I strove against it. The President and his group were retreating jerkily. I must have been backing away from them.

The next I remember was being in a courtyard and being aware that I had somehow got there under my own power. A concerned Humphrey was helping me into the Rolls.

After a while Aunt Clarissa came and sat by me. Even in the state of shock I was in, I was conscious that she was looking grim.

"Proceed, Humphrey," she said in an icy voice.

The gates went by in a blur. I shook myself.

"After your expensive education," my aunt said at last, "to behave like that! It's all those ill-mannered artists you associate with. They've corrupted your standards of conduct. Heaven knows what the papers will say about it . . . "

That wasn't exactly the first thing that was bothering me at the moment.

"To behave like a stammering schoolboy in front of the President! And he's such an impressive figure of a man."

A figure of a man . . . the words echoed in the cavern that my skull had become. I fought to find my voice. "But the President— " I began and quailed before the very enormity of the thought, let alone its utterance.

"I shall never be able to attend another function there now," Clarissa was lamenting. "Not that I should ever receive an invitation. The social *shame* of it . . . "

I grabbed at the intercom.

"Stop," I croaked. "I have to get out."

My voice must have carried some urgency, because Humphrey was programmed to respond only to the voice of his autocratic employer, for the Rolls swept in to the kerb. I didn't give Humphrey a chance to come round and open the door. I already had it open and was leaping onto the pavement. It was a crowded street.

"What . . . whatever . . . " Even my aunt was at a

loss for words. Their fragments fluttered away behind me as the crowd swallowed me up. Here, among normal people going about their normal pursuits, was sanctuary of a sort. I followed them blindly, carried along by them, seeing no pedestrian signals, simply one of the herd.

I had gone several blocks before it impinged upon me that I was in Piccadilly. I turned up into a road called Bond Street and arrived at a bar called Harry's. I knew both well—normally.

Several drinks helped not at all. The Fact that I had discovered became no easier to live with. If nobody, as Joanna Miles had only too logically pointed out, would believe my authentication of a painting, who in the world would believe me if I claimed that the President had been Plied?

And yet I *knew* he had been . . . knew it in my bones or nerve endings, or whatever it was that I felt this thing with Plying. If I had had any doubts at all with inanimate objects—as to just what it was that I felt or didn't feel—with a human being it had been absolutely positive.

But hadn't I read—more than once—that the Plying of living creatures was strictly illegal. It wasn't a question that arose often. People might spend a whole lot of time and money to rescue a miner from a cave-in, a child from the foot of a disused shaft—but, on a costing basis, how many people were *worth* Plying? Even in my dazed state, I could think of a few. A pop singer . . . a stereo star . . . anybody in a field where the money was huge but transient. Twenty gold mines for the price of one . . . and a few hundred thousand pounds.

And a President.

He had been worth Plying.

To *somebody.*

But who? And why?

I had to check the facts about this. There must be information, regulations, in existence.

There was nothing for it but to ring Joanna Miles again. Only when her office told me that she had left did I look at my watch and see that it was nearly six o'clock. I called her at her flat.

On a phone booth line there was no vision, but her voice sounded somehow less aloof than usual. Or was I, in my present state, only too eager to imagine that?

"Oh, it's you again, Mr. Afford. What can I do for you this time?"

"Just — just some technical details. How does your bureau stand on Plying— " I had to pick my words carefully—" on Plying living creatures? "

She laughed. " Why, do you have a pet dog you'd like to have Plied? We do get the odd enquiry."

I had to play it casually. " Who'd want to spend that kind of money on having a pet Plied? And why? "

" The kind of people who leave half a million to their cats or to a pets' home. The kind of people who think it would be cute to have twenty Fifis about the house instead of just one. But paragraph seventy-nine of the Plying Schedule states quite categorically that Plying of living creatures cannot be undertaken."

I breathed hard. " Can't or won't? "

To me it was the crux of the question—but I didn't expect it to have the reaction it did. Her voice changed instantly to something hard—and hostile.

" Both. It's scientifically impossible. I may be in public relations, but that doesn't mean that I have to answer stupid questions, from you or anyone else. So kindly stop wasting my time."

The phone at the other end went down with a clatter and the line went dead.

I shrugged and walked out of the booth. I settled up for my drinks. It was probably a sense of mental self preservation that made me start putting up little facts as a barrier against *The* Fact—like the fact that I felt that I owed an apology to Aunt Clarissa.

Humphrey—who doubled as butler—opened the door. He was as impeccable at the one job as at the other, but he winced as he came back from announcing my presence —Aunt Clarissa, as you may have guessed, was a stickler for these old-world rituals—and showed me into the sitting-room.

Aunt Clarissa was sitting over an antique coal-fire, her chin propped on her hands, her hands on the silver knob of an ebony cane. I steeled myself. She had as much need of a stick as I had. This was matriarchal Clarissa. She had never married or had children of her own, but she would have filled the bill very well.

She didn't look up as I crossed the deep-carpeted floor. I felt extremely redundant as I sat down in the seat opposite hers.

She turned her head finally.

"*Well?*" The voice was like the sound of a great bell, living on the air long after it has been struck, and pregnant with doom.

"I — I —"

"Speak up! Though what you can possibly find to say in extenuation of your deplorable conduct this afternoon defies imagination."

There was nothing else for it, I realised. Aunt Clarissa would have to have it neat.

I found that my voice was surprisingly calm.

"My deplorable conduct, as you put it, was solely due to the fact that when I shook hands with the President, I realised that he was an impostor."

Even that composure could crack. Her head jerked up and the silver-headed stick clattered into the fireplace.

"A — *what?*"

"I don't know whether the word *impostor* is the correct one in the circumstances. But the man I shook hands with wasn't the real President. Well, he *was,* in a way . . . but . . ."

"What in heaven's name are you blathering about boy?"

"The President has been Plied. The man I shook hands with this afternoon was — is — a duplicate."

There was a long silence. She stared at me. Then the stare became a glare, and then something strangely different. She turned and pulled the old-fashioned bell rope by her side.

Humphrey came in.

"The sherry, Humphrey." Humphrey started to turn.

" No, on second thoughts, make that two whiskies. Large ones." Humphrey raised his eyebrows slightly, but left to comply and, after a little while—during which time my aunt made no effort to speak—brought in a tray with two very large whiskies.

" Now," said Aunt Clarissa, after taking a generous sip. " Will you kindly explain to me how anyone can tell a Plied copy from an original? More specifically, how you imagine that *you* can? "

So I told her, about her friend Mrs. ffyne-ffayre's Matisse, my visit to the Plying plant, everything. In the middle of it Humphrey knocked and came in.

" Yes, Humphrey " my aunt asked querulously.

" There's a person to see you, madame. A — "

" I'm not expecting anybody. Whoever it is, show them into the drawing room. I shall see them later." She turned back to me as Humphrey departed.

After I had finished, she said nothing at first. She downed her whisky in one ladylike but capacious gulp.

" Wouldn't Eunice ffyne-ffayre gloat to know that her Matisse was the original! I can just — "

" Is that all you have to say? " I said incredulously. " Mrs. Four-effs is the last person you should mention this to. In fact — "

She regarded me with those penetrating eyes of hers. "I should think not. Nor to anybody. Nor you either."

" You mean — ? "

" I mean that I've never heard such an unadulterated mass of poppycock in my life. Your great uncle Clarence was something like that—fancied he could communicate with ants! We hoped it was a recessive trait, but now . . . " She sighed. " You, of all people! I may not approve of all your ways or the company you keep — but I always thought you were level-headed enough."

There was nothing to be gained by staying.

"I'm sorry you didn't get introduced to the President," I said stiffly, and stalked out.

If I tell you that I went straight to another bar, you may get the idea that I'm an obsessive drinker, or something. I'm not. It's just that I had to go *somewhere* —

not a club or anywhere where I'd be likely to bump into someone I knew, nor a theatre where, the mood I was in, the best play of the year would have gone right past me. I suppose I was in the kind of mood that a man is when his wife walks out on him, or when he suddenly wakes up to the fact that he's bankrupt. All I wanted to do was to drink and forget—knowing all the time that I couldn't forget . . . or see a way out of the fact that I had some dreadful special knowledge that nobody was supposed to have.

It was only a dubious comfort to pick up an evening paper and see, on an inside page, that the brief press report of the presentation made no mention of my case of the staggers. Even the photo didn't show up the state of shock I'd been in. I didn't look any worse than I did usually in press photos, the few times I'd been in them. But—there, his hand in mine, was the President, or the person everybody said was the President, and he *looked* like the President, only . . .

When I went into the bar I was stone sober, despite the few I had had that afternoon and the whisky at Clarissa's. When I came out, around midnight, I may not have been quite sober, but I was very far from being drunk. The alcohol had put an insulation around my thoughts—but only a thin one.

I took a cab to my apartment. I paid off the driver. I didn't notice the long black car, or the man standing by it, until the man said, "Mr. Afford?" in a quiet rumble of a voice.

I turned. He was a big man. "Yes?" I said.

He kind of jostled me confidentially up against the car. "We're from Miss M."

"Miss M.? You mean—" I began, and found myself sprawling into the car and rolling onto the back seat. The big man came in after me, fast, sliding the door shut behind him. A shadowy figure in the front seat made quick movements and the car swung into the middle of the street, gathering speed.

"What's going on?" I protested, and when I got no answer I lashed out. My fist caught something hard.

There was a grunt in the darkness; then my fist was being screwed into my own shoulder blades, painfully. I stopped struggling. I felt a jab in my arm and—a few seconds later—stopped doing anything at all I was conscious of.

seven

MY NEXT COHERENT thought was that I had been translated to a universe of total whiteness. One that swayed away from me and back. I shook my head to clear my vision. It hurt.

I stared up and slowly around.

The whiteness separated out into various white objects —white strip lighting recessed behind glass in a high white ceiling . . . a white bed on which I was presumably lying. There should have been a white phone to match, but there wasn't.

What started me hollering was the three-dimensional nature of the wallpaper. The white wallpaper.

A slot opened in the door and an eye peered in. The eye stayed there. I pushed myself off the bed, and fell to my knees. When I looked up, the eye was no longer there. There was the sound of bolts being drawn back. In came a man in white jacket and trousers—a big man.

" Take it easy, sweetheart," he said. I don't know which I resented most—the mode of address or the horrible ease with which he picked me up. But then I recognised the voice. I hadn't caught more than a shadowed glimpse of his face then, but it was the man who had bundled me into the car.

He dumped me back on the bed.

I glared up at him. " Somebody's going to pay for this."

" I am, dear boy," cooed Aunt Clarissa, sweeping into the room. " And it's going to be a tidy sum, if I know Dr. Kingsley Cabell. This is a *very* exclusive nursing home."

I gaped.

" How are you, my dear Max? " She gestured curtly to the big fellow. He shifted from one foot to the other. " I've got orders from — " he began to blurt.

"And those orders came from me," Aunt Clarissa told him. "I am perfectly capable of dealing with my own nephew. Now, if you please . . . "

He went.

"And please shut the peephole after you, there's a good chap."

As soon as he was gone, Clarissa turned to me.

"Well? "

"Well what? "

"I asked you how you were."

"Me?" I laughed feebly. "I'm just fine. Apart from a slight alcohol hangover, a severe drug one and a few small bruises."

"They weren't too rough with you, were they? "

I squinted up at her. I'd always assumed that Aunt Clarissa's money came from investments. I'd never asked. Now horrible suspicions obtruded on my recovering consciousness.

She looked conspiratorially over her shoulder, and spoke in very quiet tones.

"I had you brought here. I and that charming Miss Miles."

"*Joanna!* What's she got to do with it? "

"*S-sh* . . . not so loud. Miss Miles was the person that Humphrey showed into the drawing room."

"I still don't see — "

"You telephoned her not long before you came to see me, did you not? You were asking questions that she thought were highly peculiar—then she suddenly suspected that her line was being tapped. You know that can't be done without some sign, if you know what to listen for. That's why she cut the conversation off so quickly. Then she thought fast and hard. She really is an admirable girl . . . I wonder if she's any relation to Brigadier Geoffrey Miles of — "

"For heaven's sake! " I hissed.

"She connected your questions with your earlier claim. She knew about the presentation to the President and had seen the report in the evening paper. Thank heaven *that* passed without comment, anyway. I suppose the

Press are more polite about some things than we give them credit for. In the circumstances, if what you say is true, perhaps you didn't behave too badly after all."

I wondered what standards of behaviour Clarissa could possibly find to equate with such "circumstances."

"You do believe me now, then?"

She regarded me levelly.

"I don't know. I had to act quickly, in either case."

"*Either?* What was the other case?"

"Why, that you *were* deranged, of course," she answered firmly. "But certain facts seem to militate against that distasteful supposition. It would appear that somebody panicked. Who—or where—I'm not sure, but somebody who knew that you acted a bit peculiarly when you met the President. Somebody who alerted somebody to do some fast checking. Who found that you had recently visited the Plying plant on Miss Miles's say-so." I lay there, propped on one elbow, thinking that Aunt Clarissa could be remarkably crisp of expression when she wanted to.

"Whether or not," she went on "somebody *did* tap Miss Miles's telephone, one thing is certain — you had guests waiting for you outside your apartment. We know that, because I sent Humphrey over immediately on a contrived errand. Meanwhile I had phoned Dr. Cabell to take care of you as soon as you showed up."

"What do I say . . . that I'm grateful?" I ran a hand over ribs that felt sore. "But what made Joanna—Miss Miles — take such action — and quickly? I've always regarded her as a thoroughly brain-washed company woman. And why did she come to you?"

"Because the last thing she could do was to go to *you.* She knew of me. She was taking a chance, coming to me, even, but I only noticed that my apartment was receiving attention this morning. I —"

"This *morning?* What time is it, for heaven's sake?" I only noticed now that my watch had been removed with my clothes. I was attired in a one-piece pyjama suit.

"It's seven thirty p.m. You've been here for nearly twenty hours."

I scowled. "And how much longer am I supposed to stay cooped up here in this expensive padded cell?"

"Time enough to worry about that, my dear boy. You're *safe* here."

I sighed. "But you still haven't answered my question. What made Joanna of all people leap to my rescue, of all people?"

"Instinct."

I snorted. "She's got about as much instinct as a calculating machine!"

"Well, a very nice judgment of problematical facts—which is probably the same thing. You misjudge Miss Miles, I fear. She most obviously *is* devoted to her work. That's why she acted, because she had a sudden suspicion that somebody might have misused the Plying Service."

"I suppose that's reasonable." I should have known better to think that anything she had done had been on my behalf. "But what problematical facts? She didn't waste much time over *my* facts."

"Not at the time. But the other things added up—if only to a suspicion. She remembered certain—ah, deficiencies—in the records."

"Ah!" I breathed. "Then there *has* been funny business?"

Clarissa shook her head. "Don't get too optimistic. Nothing at all that she could put her finger on. But she remembered that there was no mention at all in the records of Plying living creatures. She searched once out of curiosity. There should have been something—notes of experiments, at least. And certain early files seemed to be missing and subsequent ones renumbered. She put it down then to a quite conceivable lack of organisation of records in the early days of this Plying thing.

"Anyway, she *acted*. Then went back immediately to her apartment. Presumably she's at her desk today."

"You mean, you don't *know?*" I suddenly realised that I cared—whatever her motives for action had been.

"We mustn't get in touch with her again—yet, anyway. We can't even watch her closely. Don't forget that we

were only alerted because the other side breathed too hard down *our* necks."

"The other side?" The words crystallised the unknown nature of what I had innocently got my neck into, conjuring up a vision of a ruthless, faceless, organisation. And who did I have? Aunt Clarissa. An incommunicado Joanna. And Humphrey. I felt naked.

"Whoever they may be. Perhaps it's not a plot. Perhaps there's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. But we can't take chances. I've arranged to —"

There was the sound of footsteps in the corridor outside, muffled as they were by the padding. My aunt immediately stopped talking. A knock came on the door.

"Come in," Clarissa called.

In came ex-Senator Guy Burroughs. Nobody could mistake *that* moustache, *that* shade of bow-tie.

"Hello, my boy," he boomed. His voice seemed even louder and more jovial than usual after the conspiratorial whispers in which my aunt and I had been conversing. "How are you?" He thrust a bouquet of flowers into my hands.

"And what do I do with these?" I said.

"You can —" He broke off with a cough and a glance at Aunt Clarissa. "Camouflage," he explained.

It would have taken all of Kew Gardens to camouflage a man—and a personality—*his* size.

"What more natural than to take a bunch of flowers to my godson when he's in a nursing home with a breakdown?" He sat himself on the bed. "You've *not* had a breakdown, have you?" He plucked at his bushy moustache concernedly. "I mean—the old mind, you know—"

"If I had, would my denial have any validity?" I asked.

"That's my boy! That's disposed of that question your dear departed parents, I never thought that I would then. But—as somebody who made certain promises to have your equally dear and mercifully present Aunt Clarissa come to me with such a story about you as she did." The ex-Senator has a certain rotundity of phrase at times, as you will have observed. "But duty is duty.

Mind you, I've only one shred of suspicion that could support such a wild story of yours. It's not one that I would have entertained otherwise. I was a political opponent of Georges Masson only because he plumped for the party opposite mine. If you remember, I didn't stand at the last elections precisely for that reason. He was too good a man to oppose."

I remembered. The stir had reached even me. Guy was one of the few members of the main opposition party —the Centre Populists—who could have counted on being returned with a comfortable majority. The citizens of British Costa Brava, his seat in the Parliament of Europe, were loyal to him to a degree that transcended even their respect for President Masson. There had been a deal of bitterness in his own party—until their stand-in candidate had scraped in. But such an action was typical of Guy Burroughs. Flamboyant—even something of a playboy, some quarters wrote him off as—he was a man of principle and decision. If he was on our side, the other

side immediately seemed slightly less fearsome.

"But this last term," Guy went on, "I've had my doubts. Little nagging doubts, but *doubts*."

"The North Sea farming project?" I asked brightly.

He gave me a disgusted look. "Not at all. That was the kind of honest mistake any party administration could make. No . . . other things, like the repeal of the capital gains taxation bill—a bill Masson himself had strongly supported eight years before. The repeal benefited certain powerful interests. And the Powers of the Presidency Act was a retrograde step in anybody's book. It accreted just a bit more power to the Executive, which makes it that much easier to add more power next time. That's the kind of thing. A bit too much of the police state for my liking has been creeping in these past few years. Things not typical of Georges Masson. I've been debating whether to stand again this autumn." He grunted. "But that's beside the point. The point is that you claim that the President has been Plied. It's a fantastic claim, but we won't get anywhere by stressing that. Conspiracies are always fantastic. On the other hand, we may not get anywhere by giving it credence—except to jail for causing a public mischief."

"There's a bigger public mischief afoot," I said grimly, "that's being kept very private at the moment."

"But by whom? For what? How? We're assuming that there's a conspiracy for evil ends—aren't we—but that doesn't necessarily follow. Nobody seems to know much about the Plying of living creatures—of human beings. It's something that raises pretty complicated ethical problems. I can understand any organisation steering clear of them. But we have to find out, somehow, just what it implies. The Service says it can't be done. Paragraph fifty-nine is nicely ambiguous: 'The Plying of living creatures *cannot* be undertaken.'

"I have a feeling it's going to be very difficult to find out. But we've got to try. Our main hope would have been Miss Miles, but she'll have to watch every step. She's clean so far—as long as nobody saw her visit your aunt. But whoever is working against us must have put

a question mark by her name, and be watching her.

"But, lacking that vital information, we still have to try and reason why anybody should *want* to Ply the President. Any conjecture is a leap in the dark, but one possibility we must entertain is that it's been done out of necessity. Let's assume that the party in power are fearful of what would happen if Georges Masson should die. So they had a duplicate made—or nineteen, come to that."

I suppressed a shiver. The thought of one duplicate President was eerie enough, but . . .

"Surely," I protested against the thought; "if the original had some latent weakness, the Plied versions would have it, too?"

"All right, then, a precaution against accident? No, that wouldn't be a risk anywhere near ponderable enough to justify something so extreme. Something so horribly against all that seems natural. We live in a complex and scientific society, but even so . . ." He smacked fist into palm. "But wait! Say there *is* a plot against the President—and that this substitution is to thwart it?"

He got up from the bed and paced the room.

"No, it's *wrong*—all down the line. It's a wrong act. If it were done, for whatever reasons, it would be wrong to hush it up. And it's wrong reasoning to dream for one minute that Georges Masson would consent to it. Even if they—whoever *they* are—caught him at a weak moment. *That stroke* . . . it was supposed to have been slight . . . but was that when it was done? No, I can't conceive of Masson consenting, even on his deathbed. It runs counter to everything we know about the man. And yet —"

He stopped abruptly. When he spoke again his voice was hollow. "What am I trying to convince myself of? That they Plied the President, and then killed the original in cold blood?" He shook himself, as if to repress a shudder.

"Let's not entertain such thoughts. Let's keep to the facts as we know them, however slight those facts are. We've got to play this terribly cool. Your aunt did the right thing in having you brought here. It makes for the beginning of a good cover-up story. Don't forget—the

other side haven't got much to go on as far as we're concerned—any more than we have on them." He reached in his briefcase. "Do you know that you got in the papers?"

"Don't remind me," I said. "I saw them last night."

"I mean tonight's."

He thrust a paper at me, opened at an inside page. It was only a small item, but it had been given a fairly prominent headline: ART DEALER DEFENDS PAINTER. It went on: "Max Afford, 34, owner of the controversial Gallery O in Soho, has come out strongly in defence of Alan Scudder, the artist who was sentenced to six months last week on a charge of obscenity. Scudder's series of paintings *Variations On A Sex Theme* were seized by the police a month ago on the first day of their exhibition at another gallery. Afford says in his pamphlet: 'These paintings are among the most powerful that have been produced in the last decade. It is typical of the confused standards of the day, and the hypocrisy of officialdom, that . . ."

I raised my unbelieving eyes from the paper.

"Is everybody mad? I don't even like Scudder's work."

"Ah," said Guy genially, "but you'll defend to the death and all that, surely? It says so in the pamphlet."

"*What* pamphlet?"

"Why, this."

He handed me a four-page octavo, headed in black type: I PROTEST.

"Not bad for a rush job, eh? A copy was in the hands of every London paper and news service by two o'clock this afternoon. Together with a little note, which you'll find at the foot of the news report, to the effect that you're suffering from overstrain, probably aggravated by your righteous indigation, and that you've gone into a nursing home for a few days. This way, one: we have some kind of an explanation for your attack of nerves at the Palace yesterday. The press didn't comment on that, but it puts the "excuse" on record. Two—and most important—it puts *you* on record. In case you should disappear suddenly."

I gulped.

" That's the last thing we'll let happen, of course, but there's nothing like being prepared. Your disappearance couldn't go unnoticed. Questions would be asked, you can be sure of that."

" Comforting," I said. " Meanwhile when do I get out of this place? "

" Just as soon as you can," said Aunt Clarissa.

Aunt Clarissa has a knack of saying things in a tone of voice that belies their content—a kind of verbal confidence trick. I suddenly realised that I didn't like the sound of that little verb ' can.' I looked at her suspiciously.

" Well, of course, Dr. Cabell isn't in on this. He simply obeyed a call from an old friend who was worried about the mental condition of her nephew."

" And just what did you tell him about my ' mental condition ' ? "

" Oh, that you might be violent. You needn't glare so. I had to make sure that you'd be snatched . . . is that the correct word? I couldn't explain. The fewer people in on an operation like this the better."

Light began to dawn. " You mean — "

" I mean that everything must appear above board, and that you'll have to prove your sanity before they'll let you leave."

Concluded next month

A moving and unusual parable of the future

PAUSE NOW, in this moment between dusk and night, and see high above where the first stars appear in the darkening sky. See that star, there—burning in the western sky where the sun has lately set; such a star as sailors might set their courses by, or lovers wish upon. To such a star might our hero Anistar have set his course, and later found cause to wish upon its distant light; for Anistar and his people were sailors, and we shall later tell of how this same Anistar found love on a world called Jildereen. For in this teeming, wonderful universe, love must surely

be one of the strangest and yet the most common commodities to be found — although there are yet some who never find it, always mistaking it for something else. But it is not with these that we are here concerned; but rather with the curious tale of Anistar and Calmoora, and of what passed on Jildereen, and in other places.

Anistar then, as we have already noted, was a sailor; a proud, noble sailor of the ancient lineage of the Lindesfaarne — who sail their tall, gossamer-light ships across the high stars, silent as falling snowflakes. And as he dipped into the ports of one distant world or another, Anistar continued the business of the Lindesfaarne and traded in the intangible wares they carry; for the Lindesfaarne have long since found such cargoes most profitable, and quite portable.

You think then that it is a little difficult for a man to trade successfully in Intangibles? We cannot say how Anistar found it; but we do know that we pay our poets and authors, our learned doctors and lawyers well enough for wares every bit as intangible as those Anistar carried in the hold of his gleaming, shining-swift ship. Though it would be wrong to suggest that Anistar's trade was after the manner of the artist or lawyer, for these create what they sell — while Anistar and his people traded such intangible wares from world to world, and meanwhile sailed in the Deep Heavens.

So this tale is told of Anistar, and of how he came to a world whose name was Jildereen; and of how he brought with him one cargo, that he sought to exchange for another. And there was on that world a Place of Reception where certain of the Lords of Jildereen came to meet their interstellar visitor; and — knowing a little (but only a little) of the ways of the Lindesfaarne — they came curious to see what this stranger had brought with him.

Here it was that Anistar met the Lords of Jildereen, and greeted them with due formality; and after these formalities had been completed he placed before them a box which he carried. "I have brought to Jildereen a gift," he said; and did what was necessary to the box, so that it fell away on all sides from what it had contained.

Revealed in that action was a single glass bowl; flawless and simple and yet incredibly beautiful — so that one might look into its depths and be lost amid the half-seen colours and shapes that seemed to form within that one clear curve of fragile glass. And always it seemed as though poised for motion, though it was still and clear and simple; as though a single musical note had been caught in mid-air and frozen into visibility, complete with all its half-suggestions of harmonics and subtle overtones.

Indeed, in the silence, the delicately stressed glass had picked up a single note which it now hummed as a precise, gentle sound that filled the air in its stillness.

After a bare, breathless moment that seemed like all eternity, one of the assembled Councillors managed to turn sufficient of his attention away from that incredible bowl of crystal to express himself in words; and in that act perhaps revealed how his sensibility had been dulled by commerce. No man fully human could have remained totally unmoved by that first vision; and yet it was to this man's discredit that he was the first to turn away.

"It — it is very beautiful," he said slowly, for even he had not yet recovered from the effect of that first blaze of splendour. "It is very beautiful," he repeated, "but I do not know how Jildereen will ever be able to repay such a gift as this."

"There is no need for repayment," answered Anistar with a smile, "for it is a gift, as I have said." But none the less, because of the obligation that these people felt themselves to be under, and because it suited his purpose, he named one or two trivial items that he had need of, and which Jildereen might well furnish if so they chose.

For after this manner was Anistar's trading accomplished; merely in such an exchange of gifts. It is hardly the physical objects that matter here anyhow, for any people with sufficient technology can reproduce almost any object given them, given a little time also. Within a year or so the artists and craftsmen of Jildereen would fashion glass with all the craft and skill and beauty of that bowl; though Anistar might make purely financial profit now by selling a few similar pieces that he carried. But profit

comes in many forms, and it was the idea of Art in that form that had come to Jildereen now. It was the *idea* that counted — a strange, intangible idea that was carried in the things that people made and wrote, and said and did and were. So it is that what is common-place in one time and place becomes strange and wonderful elsewhere or elsewhen. And it was after this fashion that Anistar continued his trade; and the profit that he made was after the fashion of his own commerce; though it may be that this is now beyond our comprehension — for what is profit to one man is dross to another, and the Lindesfaarne were an ancient and a cultured race.

But we fear that here we have strayed too far into the intricacies and deep chaos of philosophy; and that Anistar has quite left us on his own business. So we must instead now seek out the fair lady Calmoora, and find out what she is doing, and thinking, and feeling. For this *is,* after all, Calmoora's homeworld, while this Anistar is no more than a transient visitor.

What then of the Lady Calmoora? Shall we explain that she is the daughter of one of the Lords of Jildereen; important enough thereby to be of some social standing, and yet still sufficiently unimportant largely to retain the control of her own destinies? As to her age, such as that is at all important, let us tactfully say that she is of a sufficient age to have at last found it unnecessary to assert her adulthood; remembering as we do so that this acceptance varies severally with the many cultures and societies that form the Brotherhood of Creaturekind. But much of this is trivial; she is old enough to know in some slight detail those things that she considers as the more important facts of life — and while later experience may give her cause to modify that opinion, it is probable that it will never again be entirely discarded. So that if we are to note the half-felt air of expectancy about her, and observe in that waiting that she is about to fall in love, we must avoid the danger of picturing her as completely naïve in such matters; even if — as we suspect — this occasion will be somewhat different. Such occasions are, in any case, always somehow different.

Of course, once it has happened, that is quite different; for this of all things is quite an unrepeatable event.

For the moment then we might in analogue see Calmoora as a delicate magnetised needle floating free on a pool of water; gently turning this way and that, until in the distance the influence of another pole makes its presence felt. And then moving more purposefully; moving blindly and directly, quite unable to see that aught else in this wide universe matters. *Now* — of these untold millions who could, possibly, if only they had been there instead, have been *the one* — the particular pole that will become the only possible one has arrived, is arriving on the scene. The million possibilities have become One Possibility; that distant pole has come — and the magnet is turning towards that distant call, first slowly, and then with more deliberate purpose moving towards its inevitable destiny.

And so it is that Anistar has, at last, met Calmoora; but perhaps we have been a little vague as to the manner and particularities of their meeting, speaking thus in analogues. How then would you have them meet? At some Grand Ball, perhaps, given by the Lords of Jildereen; as all the best romances would have it. We might suppose that to this Anistar came as an honoured guest, and Calmoora came because she and her family always came to such functions. And again, as all the best romances would tell, we can imagine Anistar and Calmoora drawn irresistibly towards each other across a crowded dance-floor by the other's mere presence; dancing together without a word, and later walking together in the cool night of the garden outside with eyes only for each other. Is *this* what you would have happen at this first meeting? Perhaps?

Perhaps, but we think perhaps not also; for it would seem entirely possible that Anistar hardly noticed Calmoora at their first meeting. After all, he was a distinguished and important guest of Jildereen, while Calmoora was merely the daughter of another of this planet's noble families. And as for what happened at the Grand Ball — for we must perforce acknowledge its

occurrence — why, who can rightly remember what really did happen at such an occasion from the recollections of a month or two later — tinged as they are with the overlay and patina of subsequent knowledge? We must suppose rather that Anistar was looking for this and that, and for such and such a person; so that he noticed Calmoora after a time — at perhaps the third or fourth meeting. But although in due course Anistar was observed to pay Calmoora somewhat more attention than mere civility demanded, well he could hardly be said to be in love — for we must assume his competence to judge such matters, and to know what it was that he was about, and that was not of it. And if Calmoora also had, at some moment unspecified, fallen deeply in love with Anistar (though who can say just when?), we must imagine that she did not yet know it — for this new experience was totally unlike anything she had met before. So that these two had met — certainly; but it would be unwise to say that either had really fallen in love — not yet.

Merely say that two magnets have stopped their turning toward each other, have come nose to nose — touched, and linked indissolubly.

So that now we must consider a time following these events which we have just related; a time wherein our two protagonists — now acquainted — should walk and talk together before that moment still to come when Anistar must finally quit this world of Jildereen and go about his other business. Indeed, as your narrator in this matter, we are forced to admit that any description of this time must be considerably the product of our deduction; for it is only proper that our protagonists should be entitled to some little privacy in these matters.

The facts, such as we know them or would have due reason to enquire after, are such as we might expect; for it is not unduly surprising that Calmoora should enjoy this opportunity of showing her homeworld to this surprising and attentive outworld visitor — although we might reasonably suspect that various of these excursions were planned more for isolation than viewpoint. And if she should in her turn find the tales Anistar told of distant

worlds and far stars fascinating; why this too is hardly strange, considering that the whole world of Jildereen was currently agog with excitement over those few products that Anistar had brought from a mere one of those worlds — from Caer-orme alone.

At the same time it is probable that Anistar found little amiss in such an attentive listener, as he told his stories of life as a sailor in the Deep Heaven between the High Stars, and of the many and varied cargoes that he carried between them — for such is the nature of many who deal in intangible things that they most delight in talking of those things they deal in; and it would seem that Anistar had other purposes too in turning the conversation in such directions. So that the days danced by lightfooted, unnoticed — and hardly might a casual observer have counted the arrival of one that it had skipped past to be replaced by its almost identical brother.

But as the passing days grew more numerous, and began to congregate into larger groups, a new factor entered into the reckoning; and this was the premonition of Anistar's eventual departure from this world. It began as a faint weariness in the soles of his feet, tiring of their incessant struggle against the ever present tug of gravity. And then it grew to be a certain restlessness and a sense of enclosure; a longing for the return of clear, black, starlit skies where a ship might fall, parsec on long parsec through the silent emptiness.

At this time too there came others, seeking passage across the heavens; and each with their own reasons for wishing so to travel. Some there will be who are returning whence they set out, and some there will be just on the setting out itself — some wandering, and some with purpose; but mostly they will not be novices to such travel. For in this journeying across the heavens it is the initial step from home that is so important; and after that there is nothing quite so easy as the gentle, silent passage from star to star across the velvet-dark night. So that the star-captains of the Lindesfaarne do take their sons into space at their fifteenth birthday, and fly among the stars; and thereafter no son of the Lindesfaarne is ever entirely com-

fortable with the feel of a planet beneath his feet, and they would all go a-sailing.

A-sailing, a-sailing, and so it is with all the sons of men; for this has been bred into their blood for a thousand generations, that they would all go a-sailing into the outer darkness and the vacant, interstellar spaces; that they would all look up with wonder at the night skies and watch the high stars a-dancing there, and wonder, and wonder.

But here we forget those who come seeking passage across the heavens with Anistar; the prince from Cassantar and the industrialist from Thule, the itinerant sculptor from Klaethe and the merchant banker returning to Caer-orme; their trades as intangible as that of Anistar's cargo itself. And among all these the strangest of all is this one called Santihl from Vätenhet—who is not even entirely human.

For the people of Vätenhet, if they ever were human, have long since ceased to be so; and the strange byways of knowing that they have meanwhile trod are perhaps inaccessible to men — for the price that must be paid for such knowledge would take the humanity from the men who sought it; wherefore are the Vätenhet called 'wizards.' And whether the Wizards of Misty Vätenhet really can foretell the future, and do the other strange things claimed for them, these things are only dimly known if at all. It is perhaps well not to inquire too deeply into such matters, for our very human-ness might not be strong enough to stand the knowledge that such things exist.

Each too of these who would fare with Anistar will pay in his own way for that passage; but only Santihl among them will offer to pay directly in the wares of the Lindesfaarne — in the unseen, intangible wares of the Lindesfaarne, to be paid at the correct time. And, at the same time, Anistar, knowing something of the strange powers of these mysterious people, and of their adherence to their word — once given — (adherence beyond mercy, beyond sanity; so that once promised the delivery is remorseless, inevitable); knowing this, Anistar would accept such payment from perhaps Santihl alone, secure

in the knowledge that at the correct time such debts would be paid in full.

The story meanwhile tells of how Anistar tarried a little while on Jildereen; and when the time came for him to leave that world, along with him went Calmoora, and Santihl, and others whose names are now lost to our histories and so are quite forgotten. So that all these quitted Jildereen at last, and came into that vast darkness of heaven, wherein the stars are as distant lanterns in the sky. And in the glory and the freedom of these heavens Anistar rejoiced, for he was a sailor of the race of the Lindesfaarne and hated the feel of a planet hard beneath his feet. Once again his soul flew free and happy with the ship as it spread its unseen, delicate sails of force and sailed onwards among the stars. And in the hold of that gossamer-light ship there now reposed a new cargo, perhaps the most curious that Anistar had ever carried.

Now, for a while, Anistar could forget that part of his life wherein he was a trader — with the hard dirt of ever and another world beneath his feet — and remember only that he was a sailor amid the high stars. Here, where the confining drag of gravity was forgotten, he forgot his cares also; and those things that he had for so long subconsciously resisted he resisted no longer. So that at last he came to admit that he loved Calmoora, as he always had loved her unknowing. For we can no longer doubt that these two had come to love one another, passionately and violently; not now that that love had become expressed, and as real and physical as the rock of Calmoora's home.

In the meanwhile, the ship in which they voyaged flew onwards through the myriad stars about it; and those distant points of light formed into a great, glowing ring about the ship, and into groups and patterns which slowly changed as the days went by and the ship sailed on. About those far distant stars unseen planets swung, and on those worlds life teemed in its countless variations — innumerable creatures that continued their lives unaware of the passage of this gossamer-light craft across their skies. So that here a new star blazed, and there an old star slowly

died; and on a thousand other worlds men laughed and young babies cried. For in the vast pattern of things that happen each of these matters as much as each other; and these had not heard of Anistar and Calmoora yet.

And far ahead, the cluster in which Caer-orme swam slowly detached itself from the backdrop of stars, and grew larger day by day.

So Anistar and Calmoora came to accept their love; and there amid the mingled light and darkness they consummated that love in those ways that are necessary for men, and it seemed as though the very stars sang — for thus must all things be.

But it seems that no idyll is eternal, however we might wish it; and while a man may for a time forget what purpose he has, there comes a time when these matters become unavoidable in their insistence. So it was with Anistar, who at this time found his attention turning towards their eventual destination; and found as captain of this vessel that he now had need to plan these things yet to come. Ahead lies the world called Caer-orme, amid a cluster of stars that daily grows larger; and with these comes the premonition of a cargo that must be discharged thither.

A change has now come over this craft that falls across the heavens, gently as a tuft of thistledown that blows across a grassy field on a warm summer's day; and the nature of this change is such that oftentimes when Anistar should properly be guiding that frail vessel towards its distant terminus he is to be found instead brooding deeply on other matters. It is as though a cloud has come up and covered the sun, so that we suddenly notice the chill edge to the wind and shiver. But as often as this happens, so comes Calmoora seeking her lover; and so the cloud passes once more and the sun returns — and we have only the memory of that brief presage of autumn.

At the very heart of this wonderful, gossamer-light, star-bright ship of the Lindesfaarne was a very special room where the ship sang and danced and cried all at once — and so told of its progress between the stars. And it was that a man who came here and sat in the one huge

chair in the middle of the room might watch and listen and feel, and so guide this craft across near trackless starways. In this room the Captain of the ship came, and watched wither they went; and at other times brooded on other things.

It was to here that Santihl came eventually, at the proper time, to find Anistar; although even when he had found him, and had spoken in that softly-quiet, unhuman voice, Anistar did not turn towards him — not at first.

"I have come as promised," he said, "for now is the correct time for payment; though you may doubt that. And I think also that I know something of your problems, Anistar the star-born; for I know now what cargo it is you carry, and whose eventual discharge now saddens you so. I know *now* just what thing it is that Caer-orme lacks or has forgotten, that you carry."

"Yes," said Anistar, in the softness of pain, "and you can also tell me what this cargo is?"

In his reply, Santihl neither changed his expression nor his tone, and in that action betrayed the gulf that separated him from humanity; for there is yet no human who might have avoided saying those words without trace of reverence or contempt, or one of a hundred other emotions. "Love," said Santihl, "or, to be precise, romantic love —that is what you carry that is so precious."

Now Anistar had risen to his feet, to face this unhuman wizard from Vätenhet — his eyes burning with a strange fire. "It is so obvious then, — even to *you,* not even human? Even *you* can see?"

"No," said Santihl, still softly, emotionlessly, "it is that I *am* not human that makes the difference; that I know why you carry two books, and a spool of music, and — of course — a certain Lady. And then, of course, I have access to information which is not yet generally available to others; for the story of Anistar and Calmoora is not known across the Galaxy as it will someday come to be.

"Did you really imagine," he continued, "that the story of the sailor who sailed with Love as his cargo, and who fell in love with the passenger whom he could not

have; did you not think that this would perhaps capture the imagination of the writers and storytellers of another generation who make such things immortal. After all," he concluded, " immortality is merely a matter of choosing one's biographers with care."

" And that is how things are? " asked Anistar, the fire now faded.

" No," replied Santihl, " that is merely how things will be. And knowing that does not make your present troubles any easier, nor does it tell you what must be done. That freedom at least *you* still retain." And it seemed at last that there was a trace of sadness in his voice. " But I have told you this much as I had promised; and I think that my payment is now made."

So Santihl left Anistar; and after a little while Anistar too left that private sanctuary and his thoughts, and went to look for his beloved Calmoora. And as he went, there was a new smile on his lips; and inside him a new song that grew and danced about the rhythm of the ship as it sailed onwards. And, after a little while, that song became a duet.

And, at last, there came a time when Anistar and Calmoora, and those who sailed with them, came to their destination of Caer-orme. And here, just as on distant Jildereen, men of Caer-orme came to greet this sailor of the far Lindesfaarne; knowing something of the ways of the star-born, and not knowing much more. So they came to see the gifts he had brought them, knowing that the things he traded in were things that they would never see; though later they might feel such things deep within them, and laugh or cry. But *those* things all had a price; so that the story tells of how Anistar made his gifts of just two books and a music spool, and how he there did take leave of Calmoora with a kiss — and parted as lovers must. After that he left that world quickly, and returned to sail among the high stars.

Thus it was that love came to Caer-orme; not only in its beauty and joy, but also in its pain and sadness. So that the story of Anistar and Calmoora was the first love story Caer-orme ever had; for among all things Anistar

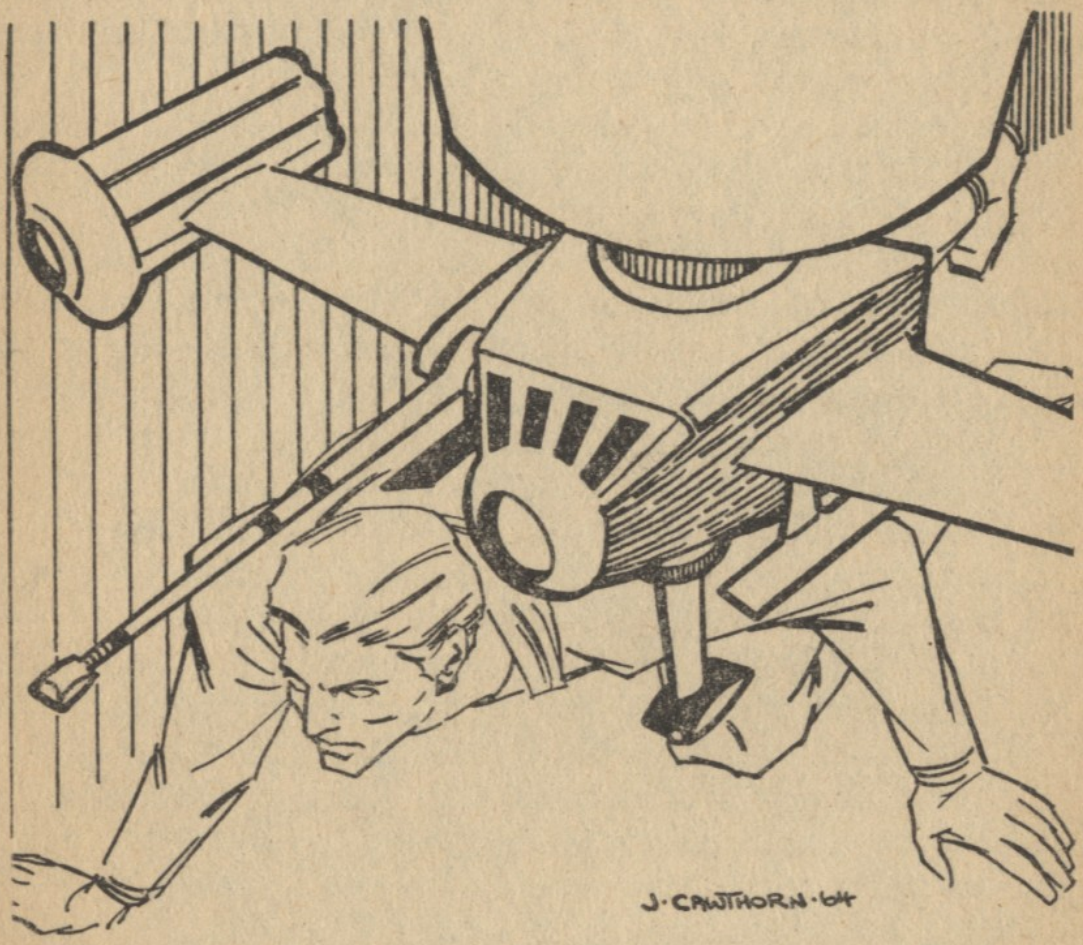
was an ethical man, who delivered those things that he promised, and took only his just profits.

So there our story might end, as much as any story ever ends — for we find that the people continue living and all things continue to happen no matter what has happened. For this story is true; if it were not so, we would not have told it. The people and events here recorded are real; and have happened, and will happen — worlds without end. But there are those who persist in telling this story further, insisting that it has a happier ending; so that in fairness to the story and its tellers who are also of that story, we must include their version also to our ending.

For these tell of how, some years later, after Love had come to Caer-orme and had become as common a malady there as anywhere else — so that there was the usual crop of bad prose and worse poetry, and sweethearts who became moonstruck and brokenhearted with distressing regularity — these tales tell that a little while after all this happened, Anistar returned to Caer-orme and took Calmoora to be his Lady as they sailed between the stars — for he had never really forgotten his star-bride. And that they continued together thereafter, seeing strange new worlds and dealing in the strange intangible wares that are every bit as real as any other sort of merchandise. Although they do tell that Anistar never again carried a cargo of Love across the darkness between the stars. But it is our opinion that this is a later addition, added by and for those who like happy endings to their stories; and whether it is true or not we cannot rightly say. But whatever happened, it seems probable that neither Anistar nor Calmoora were ever entirely happy.

Not, of course, that either of them had really cared aught for that.

The planet seemed idyllic, until they began to investigate the . . .



TUNNEL OF LOVE

Joseph Green

SILVA DE FONSECA paused, twisting his head to glance over his shoulder at the entrance, a light grey square faintly visible against the deeper blackness. The tunnel was almost a meter in height and width, ample crawling room for his lean frame, but he still felt a strong sense of claustrophobia. He knew it was a simple primitive reaction against the dark closeness—he had crawled through twice in the daytime and felt nothing—but that did not help at the moment.

He could hear the light whirring of the recorder floating

a few meters ahead of him, the closer drone of the one hovering behind his head. Faithful, dependable Aaron had him under the closest possible surveillance. If the unknown menace that grabbed one out of four crawlers got him it would at least be well recorded.

He turned back to face the empty blackness, started forward again. The metal floor was cold to his bare hands, the metal walls impersonal and unyielding. He cursed the obstinacy that had made him refuse to wear infrared glasses; he would at least have been able to see the areas illuminated by the recorders' lamps. He found himself wondering if Aaron, watching him through the recorders' viewers, thought him a coward for his hesitancy. He dismissed the thought as unworthy. His partner thought he was an idiot to risk his life this way, but nothing more.

He moved forward at a faster pace. To take his mind off the encroaching blackness he thought of Sugar, of the warm golden limbs, the full young breasts, the beckoning warmth in her eyes; only another twenty meters to crawl and the tunnel would debouch into the inner room of the steel temple. He would emerge in front of the immense bed where Sugar lay patiently waiting. Under the rules of this weird rite they were automatically married if he lived to reach her, and it was normal procedure to consummate the marriage on the spot; afterwards, the newlyweds emerged from the temple's main door and the next young virgin took her place on the bed.

Silva found even the thought of the treasure waiting at journey's end not enough to push back the stifling darkness. His mind continued to wander, and he found himself thinking of those crawlers who so mysteriously disappeared. This brought back the fear, worse than before, and he tried again, desperately, to think of Sugar. He could not. Her image would not appear, and he thought instead of the events that had gotten him into this mess.

Bureaucrat August Dearing pushed back from his desk, wiped a pudgy hand across his white forehead, and sighed heavily. " Gentlemen, I dislike seeing two such young and

inexperienced scientists depart this sphere by themselves, but unfortunately all the checks I have run on you have been good. I'm afraid I have no choice but to grant your exit and landing permits."

Silva de Fonseca leaned forward in his chair, his dark face angry. His partner, Aaron Gunderson, watched apprehensively but held his peace. Quicksilva had to start controlling his own tongue sometime.

"I don't quite understand your attitude, Mr. Dearing," said Silva. His voice was biting, but controlled. "We have our ship, the necessary training, our degrees in extra-terrestrial ethnology. What possible reason could there be for not granting our permit?"

Dearing sighed again. "If you knew how many crooks, grafters, potential exploiters and plain power-hungry maniacs sit in that chair every week and beg me for exit permits you'd know why I'm careful. You've asked permission to land on Procyon Nine. It's inhabited by a race of the most beautiful humanoids ever discovered, a race which rates only a five on the Grier civilization scale, on the edge of savagery. I shudder to think what an unscrupulous man with modern weapons could accomplish there. You state that you intend to do ethnologic research, including films of these beautiful natives and their unusual marriage rites. Personally, I find it unbelievable that two young men just out of college would sink every dime of their money into such a venture, no matter how illustrious their parents were in the field. Perhaps I'm getting old and cynical, but I don't like it. Now take your permit and get out, before I change my mind."

Aaron saw his partner clamp his teeth together and struggle with his mercurial temper. He saw this out of the corner of his eye, because he was already half-way to the desk and the permit. As he picked it up Silva visibly calmed himself, and when Aaron hastily seized his arm and pulled him to the door Silva called back, "We'll show you our films and reports when we get back, Mr. Dearing. And I hope it satisfies you!"

The pudgy man waved them out without looking up.

When they were safely outside the Space Service building Aaron slowed their pace, resisting the temptation to rub his own forehead in relief. "Shrewd old boy," he said aloud.

Silva, in one of his lightning changes of mood, was grinning broadly. "Not too smart. The answer was in front of him all the time, if he used the right perspective. We'll do everything we said. Is it our fault that filmed documentaries about beautiful nude savages draw top rates in the arthouses just now? We'll make our investment back ten times over."

"We'd better," muttered Aaron. "We have every dime of my inheritance tied up in that ship and its equipment."

"Mine too," Silva reminded him cheerfully. His father was still alive, but the elder de Fonseca had been so enthusiastic over their project he had sold virtually every object of value accumulated in twenty years of fieldtrips, and bought in as a silent partner. He and Aaron's father had been contemporaries, though not personal friends, and it had delighted him to be able to help the younger men.

Silva de Fonseca and Aaron Gunderson had been thrown together during their last year in school. They had become friends through strong mutual interests, despite basic differences in their personalities. Each was the only son of a famous ethnologist, each had majored in extra-terrestrial ethnology only to please his father, and both were far more interested in acquiring money than in increasing the world's knowledge. The elder Gunderson had died two years back, of a lingering fever contacted on Sirius Forty-Two, but Aaron had decided to respect his wishes and not change his career plans. Now they had their degrees, for good or ill, and both wanted something more exciting than working for the Space Service, and preferably more profitable. Their particular education and skills made exotic films seem one of the easiest and most direct routes to a quick fortune.

Their first near disaster came when they sat their cranky old tub down on Procyon Nine. Aaron, who was at the controls, had selected a flat spot just outside the ruined

city for a landing field. When the tripodal legs bit into the ground, just before the retro-rocket cut off, one of them went through a thin layer of dirt into an ancient cellar. The ship teetered dangerously for a moment, while Aaron worked frantically to cut in the attitude jets and steady at the top. He succeeded just as the leg, extended almost to its limit, finally found support at the bottom of the hole.

Aaron kept his fingers poised over the controls for a few seconds, then killed the jets and sat back limply when the tripod indicators all flashed green.

Silva, apparently unperturbed, started getting out their equipment. Aaron roused himself, and helped his partner run the two recorders through their self-checks. The intricate machines and their control units had cost almost as much as the battered old ship. Powered by tiny atomic generating units, flying by means of a gimbal-mounted ducted fan, containing enough film on a single spool for four hours of full sound and visual recording, they were the latest word in mobile photography. The operator could sit at the control unit and send one over an entire planet, seeing the views the camera transmitted and recording only when he chose.

A reception committee was waiting when they reached the ground with their first load. " Oh me, oh my! " Aaron said softly as they stepped off the ladder. " The favour we are going to do jaded old Earth! "

There was a vast difference between hearing about these people in class and meeting them in person. It was a dry statistic to read that ' the males are a uniform two meters in height, the females somewhat shorter.' To find yourself gazing upward into every face you saw was something else again. Silva was nineteen decimeters in height and stood taller than the women, though somewhat shorter than the men. Every woman there towered over Aaron's stubby form.

As Silva, the better linquist, made the introductions, Aaron continued to study these beautiful people. They wore not a stitch of clothing. Of the twenty individuals gathered around the ship almost half were females, and

he had never seen better looking women anywhere, clothed or unclothed. In addition to uniform height all had the same mellow, golden-tinted skin, full breasts, wide hips, and long yellow or red hair. Their teeth were white, their bodies firm and strong without being overly muscular. No wonder Dearing had worried about sending two young bachelors here!

And then an oddity struck him. Not only were the women the same height to within a few centimeters, but so were the men. The only apparent differences in height, and in general body type as well, was caused by age.

The oldest man in the group facing them stepped forward to answer Silva's introductory speech. By his side stood a young woman with the reddest hair Aaron had ever seen. "I am the Chief, Kitchahan," the old man said gravely. His voice was resonant and strong, and despite his age he could easily have beaten both Earthmen in a fair fight. "This is my daughter, Shu-gar. You are welcome here, but you must not try to mate with our women, as did those Earthmen who wore blue skins, or you cannot stay."

Aaron had to repress a smile. So the iron discipline of the Space Patrol had cracked a little here! He saw Silva blink, but take the news in stride.

"We do not seek women, O Chief, only to be your friends and learn your ways. We know that the Golden Ones do not mate until the men have passed certain tests. It is these tests which we wish to study, that our own people may learn from them."

"Then we will help you if we can," said the old chief courteously. "Our home is your home. Our food is your food. Peace be between us."

"Peace be between us," echoed Silva, and the group of natives began to break up, most of them returning to their homes in the nearby village. Aaron saw that the women were as beautiful from the rear as the front.

Working to a prearranged plan, they finished unloading their gear and set up camp at the ship's base. Procyon Nine, like a hundred other worlds already partially explored, was so similar to Earth that a minimum of

adjustment was necessary. Both men had received shots of the new 'trained virus,' which circulated through the blood and attacked all bacterial invaders on contact. They would consume no local food which had not been through the ship's purifying units. The planet had numerous carnivores, but all were too small to be dangerous to men. The climate was salubrious. In fact, when you added up the advantages Procyon Nine was a spaceman's heaven, a fine place to be stranded . . . except that the beautiful natives lived by one of the strictest moral codes in existence, and seducing one of their women was an impossible feat.

Their camp was soon made. "Shall we start getting our background material today?" asked Silva as he drove the last tentpeg. It was only a little past the noon hour.

"Good idea. Why don't you start shooting the people and the village. I'll tackle the ruins and the forest."

"Fine," agreed Silva, and a few minutes later he left for the village, carrying his recorder control. The Golden Ones, apparently the last remnant of a once great people, now lived in wooden houses near the crumbling edges of what had been their greatest city. The little that was known about them indicated a sudden decline into savagery about five thousand Eryears back, when the first human civilizations were struggling upward out of the Egyptian and Euphratean mud. The causes of the decline were unknown, its results apparent. The Golden Ones were a people less than a thousand in number, a peaceful lot who lived off the easy abundance furnished them by nature and were apparently more interested in happy games than racial progress. And despite their impressive physical appearance, the small number of children playing in the streets indicated their birthrate was low.

The village was a simple affair, about twenty houses built along an ancient roadbed leading into the city. As he reached the edge Silva sent his recorder climbing. He took some overhead shots of the small houses, then brought it down and let it hover just ahead of him as he walked down the street. There were a few people around, and he caught some simple shots of them going about their

daily tasks. He saw a group of barely nubile females playing an athletic game behind one of the houses, and recorded their fun for several minutes. The people as a whole paid little attention to him, though the flying recorder attracted some stares. He was about half-way through the village when the chief's red-headed daughter stepped out of a doorway in front of him.

Silva had to blink his eyes and look away a moment. She was almost too much woman to take in in a single glance. When he looked again she was smiling, as though aware of her effect on him. But all she said was, "Hello, Black-haired One."

"Hello," he said stupidly.

She smiled more widely, as though he had made a brilliant comment, long red lashes coming down demurely over bright blue eyes. She walked past, as though it were the sheerest accident they had met at all, and continued down the street.

Silva stared at her retreating back until she disappeared into another house, shook his head in awe, and went back to his work. They had footage to accumulate.

Aaron was already back when he returned. "I found that 'crawl tunnel' the Space Patrol report described," he told Silva gleefully. "It's on this side of town, in a large all-metal building. You can get to the nuptial bed by walking through the regular entrance. I covered the building pretty thoroughly, and got some nice shots of the ruins from about a kilometer up. I sent the recorder on a fast circuit of the city's edge, to show how the forest has almost taken it over, and then spent some time in what was apparently a museum before the collapse. How did you make out?"

Silva described his afternoon briefly. "According to the S.P. notes their mating ceremonies take place during the nights of the three moons, the first of which is the day after tomorrow," he added. "If we work hard we should have enough film in the can to finish up that night and leave next day."

Aaron shrugged. "I'm not in that much of a hurry.

But perhaps you're right. And since we're after money more than art, may I suggest we spend tomorrow in a couple of the other little towns, shooting more girlie footage? "

"That you may. There is nothing I like more than making my business my pleasure."

They visited two more tiny villages next day, both virtually identical to Kitchahan's, and talked to several people. They discovered that the Golden Ones lived in small groups, to make food procurement easy, and the various villages seldom met except during the mating ceremonies. The same happy, easy way of life seemed to prevail everywhere, and the same nudity of form and strict moral code.

They arrived back at camp hot, tired and dusty, to find a visitor sitting patiently in front of their tent. It was Sugar, as gorgeous as ever.

"I have brought you food," she said, pointing to a basket at her feet. It was full of the fruits and nuts which grew almost everywhere in happy abundance.

"We thank you," Silva said formally, taking the basket and wondering how dumb these beautiful people could be. "We will take it inside our ship-of-fire, and then we may eat it. And now I would ask if you can tell us anything about the crawl through the tunnel which your young men will be making tomorrow night."

She could, and did. Apparently the custom was universal, and had existed forever. Each time the three moons appeared in the sky at once, an event that occurred several times yearly, all the young men and women who had reached adult status during the last period met at the tunnel, on the outside of the building. The girls drew lots, went inside through the regular door one at a time, and lay down on the nuptial bed at the tunnel exit. All eligible young men who wanted that particular girl drew lots in turn, and formed a line. The first man entered the tunnel. He had a set period of time in which to make the crawl, consummate his marriage, and emerge through the main door with the girl. If he did not appear it was presumed the monster had gotten him. If he appeared

back out the tunnel, as sometimes happened when a man lost his nerve, he was disqualified to try again for that particular mate, but still eligible to draw for others. It was a fairly simple system, and a man's chances of acquiring the mate he wanted depended half on luck and half on courage. Very few men were so lacking in bravery that they did not complete the crawl at some time or other. And one out of four disappeared in the tunnel.

"When will you be taking your place on the nuptial bed, beautiful one?" asked Silva.

Sugar blushed prettily. "I have just come of age. Tomorrow night I lie on the virgin's bed and receive my mate."

"If I have followed you correctly, the woman has no choice at all in the matter of selection," broke in Aaron. "Is this true, Sugar?"

The beautiful girl lowered her gaze to the ground, and now her cheeks were burning. "If a girl announces she very much favours a certain man, sometimes the others who like her will let him go first."

Silva chuckled. "I knew the woman would have her say. Will you have dinner with us now, pretty flower? Afterward we will talk some more."

"I cannot. But I will return tomorrow," said Sugar, rising. She smiled at Silva, and set off down the path at a trot.

"I think you have a conquest there, my friend," said Aaron with a grin.

"Don't let it bother you, buddy-of-mine. After all, not everyone can be tall, handsome and irresistible," said Silva cheerfully. "Now let's get this film in the developer and set up for tomorrow."

Sugar was back early, as promised, and they spent most of the morning interviewing her on film. She was not able to add much to the basic knowledge they already possessed about her people, but filled in many of the small items they would need in writing a detailed report.

One surprising bit of information was that divorces were quite common, and easily obtained. A man was required to make the crawl only once, and could marry

innumerable times afterwards. A girl who had been divorced was free to marry again immediately. The most common cause of divorce and remarriage was childlessness.

"You know, this doesn't fit too well," said Silva in English to Aaron. "In most primitive tribes with strict initiation rites the family ties established by marriage are very strong." He turned back to Sugar and asked, "How many times will the average man divorce and remarry, Sugar? For instance, how many wives has your father had?"

Sugar had to pause, then started counting on her fingers. After a moment, triumphantly, she held up the entire hand.

"Five times! This just doesn't add up," said Silva to Aaron.

"No," but it lends increased importance to this tunnel crawl." Aaron's voice was thoughtful. "Apparently it's their way of verifying a man is fit to give children. Once that's established it doesn't matter with what woman. And these people seem to realize their birthrate is too low. They allow easy divorce and remarriage to enable a man to try several partners in search of a fertile union."

"Easy on the deep thought, son, or you'll be turning into an extra-terrestrial ethnologist," jibed Silva, lightly dismissing the topic he had started himself. Aaron had to laugh. It was true both men would have preferred a more lucrative profession, but they had previously agreed this would not deter them from doing worthwhile work when the opportunity afforded.

They decided to walk back with Sugar and get Chief Kitchahan's permission to send the recorders through the crawl tunnel with some of his young men. To insure his co-operation they took along one of their best trinkets, a vibra-knife with a year-life battery. When the blade was activated it would cut through wood as easily as soft cheese.

"Aaron, has it occurred to you that this crawl could be quite an experience?" asked Silva, serious again, as they came in sight of the village. "There's a strong resemblance between these people and ourselves, in that both cultures

provide an abundance of the physical necessities and a very soft life as adolescents. But there's an abrupt parting of the ways at maturity, where these men have to undergo an initiation that can end in their death. We have no equivalent, and I wonder if we might be missing something worthwhile. Do you have any inner and certain convictions that you are a *man?* "

" I'm sure enough of it," replied Aaron tartly. He was never as troubled with self-doubt as his partner. " I'm more interested in learning where the men *go* when they disappear."

" A man, young and untried, is compelled by his desire for a mate to make the crawl," Silva went on as though he had not heard. " He enters the tunnel burning with the fear of death and the need of a woman, two of the basic drives. It's a reduction to elementals in the human psychology which it's almost impossible to simulate artificially. I wonder what emotions a young man on his knees in that tunnel must feel? "

" We'll find out tonight when we watch their faces on the recorders," replied Aaron, and said hello to Kitchahan, who was sitting contentedly on a small platform in front of his house.

Since to bargain openly was considered poor manners Aaron formally presented the gift, then chatted aimlessly for a moment. Sugar disappeared inside. Chief Kitchahan, who had never seen anything like the vibra-knife, almost cut his seat apart experimenting while they talked.

He ceased playing with the knife and gave them his full attention when Silva requested permission to send the recorders along with some of the young crawlers. " Impossible! " the old chief was vehement. " Our men crawl alone, with no help or hindrance from others."

" But he would *be* alone," argued Silva, nonplussed at unexpected opposition. " Our machines float through the air, only seeing what the man is doing."

" No man may watch another make the crawl among the Golden Ones," said the old man determinedly. " A man's cowardice or bravery is his own affair. I will give no such permission."

It seemed that the bribe had failed.

"Chief, is it not true that a man of any tribe may try for the hand of any woman who is eligible?" asked Silva suddenly.

"Yes, that is a true thing."

"Then as a member of the Earthman tribe I want to try for the hand of Sugar. And I do not object to the recorders seeing my cowardice or bravery as I make my crawl."

"Quicksilva! You can't do it!" protested Aaron frantically. "One in four disappear! You wouldn't stand a chance!"

"How do we know that, when we don't know what *makes* them disappear?" asked Silva coolly. "Besides, I want the experience."

"You mean you want Sugar!" said Aaron angrily in English.

"No, she's just a part of it. We've got to have that footage, and I want the *experience*. Can't you understand that?"

Aaron was silent, ashamed that he had underestimated his partner. Quicksilva liked girls as well as anyone, but he was risking his life for something he felt to be really important. Their recorders could never capture the essence of the rite they wanted to film; only a participant could plumb the depths of desire and fear that must burn in the heart of every crawler. If he lived he would have the memory of an emotional experience he could treasure for the rest of his days . . . and they would have an invaluable addition to their study of these people.

When he finally looked up he said, "What's hard to understand about it?"

Silva grinned briefly, then turned back to Kitchahan, who was obviously wrestling with his conscience. He glanced longingly at the vibra-knife, then finally settled the matter to his own satisfaction by saying, "You may make the crawl and let the metal birds watch you, but only if you will divorce my daughter afterwards. You cannot take her away with you."

"Now those," said Silva with relief, "are conditions

with which I can happily comply! "

The two Earthmen left as soon as good manners permitted, and went directly to the tunnel. After making certain no one was observing them Silva took a powerlight and crawled slowly through it. He discovered that the walls were made of the same metallic alloy as the rest of the building, built in thirty jointed sections about a meter in length. The panels were solid, gave back no hollow echoes, and were at ambient temperature. There was nothing else to be seen.

When he reached the inner room he did see a method whereby a man could detour around the bed and leave by another door. Which might explain how the men seemingly vanished, but hardly the question of why.

He crawled back through the tunnel, where Aaron was anxiously waiting, and told his short partner of the lack of results. They sent a recorder through to film the blank walls, then called it quits.

" Either there's something these people haven't told us, a known cause for a man to pass by the girl and disappear, or a monster really *does* grab them," complained Silva.

" I've no idea what happens, but I do know I'm going to be watching you every minute with my rifle ready," said Aaron grimly.

They returned to their camp for dinner, but were back at the tunnel shortly after dark. Several hundred Golden Ones, most of the adult population, were already there. Apparently word had gotten around about Silva's plan to make the crawl, for he received many soft glances from the young females and some hard ones from the men.

They were in luck in one regard. Sugar drew second place on the girl's position list. They would have no long, nerve-racking wait.

Promptly on the rising of the third moon the first girl, escorted by an ancient grandmother, entered the temple by the main door and took her place on the nuptial bed. When the grandmother reappeared it was the signal for the first suitor to start his crawl, and the handsome young redhead who had drawn first chance immediately dived into the tunnel.

The drawing among Sugar's suitors was held while they waited, and Silva came in fourth. Three discreetly tended bribes advanced him to the number one spot.

The first couple appeared in the main door well within the allotted time, waved to the crowd, and left for the privacy of their cottage. It was Sugar's turn.

The beautiful girl smiled shyly at Silva and followed her escort into the temple. When the ancient grandmother returned, Aaron, who was holding the control units of both machines, lowered the recorder which had been hovering overhead and sent it into the tunnel. The second one he poised just above the entrance, to follow Silva in.

"Are you sure you want to go through with this, fella?"

"I don't see how anyone as scared as I am could consummate a marriage, but yes, I'm going in," answered Silva, and before his nerve should fail completely he walked swiftly to the tunnel, dropped to his knees, and crawled inside.

The easiest way out of this was to go forward as swiftly as possible, since retreat to the outside and admitted loss of courage was unthinkable. If there was danger he would lose nothing by meeting it head-on.

Silva moved at a faster pace. The tunnel seemed endless, and he had been crawling for hours. He felt the brassy taste of fear in his mouth. The recorders hummed loudly in the enclosed space, but they brought no comfort. His heart was pounding frantically, and he realized he was almost running on his hands and knees. And then there was a square of lighter darkness ahead, a square that swiftly drew closer, and he knew the ordeal was almost over. He hastened forward, trembling with relief now that it was done, and a piercing pain shot through his body, pentrating every joint and muscle; the bottom of the tunnel seemed to heave and buckle, and he felt his senses fading.

Aaron watched through eyes growing wide with amazement as two sections of the tunnel floor tilted sharply downward and Silva's limp body began to slide forward.

He hastily focussed the recorder which had been hovering behind Silva, trying to keep him in sight; the opening through which he was sliding was too narrow for the recorder to follow. The infra-red lights showed the lean form dropping onto a conveyor belt, where it moved swiftly out of sight. It also showed a segment of a vast room filled to overflowing with machinery, and just before the tunnel section lifted smoothly back into place Aaron saw a large door, with complex machinery attached to its base, at the far end.

He could not believe that Silva was dead. He sat in front of his controls, stunned, while precious seconds ticked by. The crowd of Golden Ones standing around the entrance talked in a desultory fashion, waiting for Silva and Sugar to appear or the alotted time to pass; no one had seen that tunnel swallow a victim except himself.

Aaron recovered enough to pull the recorders out of the tunnel and turn them off, and slowly hope began to return. The peculiar way Quicksilva had stiffened before the tunnel sections tilted—that had looked very much like an electric shock. If it was not of too high a voltage he might survive it, if reached in time.

That door he had glimpsed at what appeared to be the end of the room, with machinery at its base . . . Abruptly Aaron snatched up a power-light and ran for the temple's main entrance. There were cries of consternation from the Golden Ones when he darted inside, but no one offered to pursue.

He pounded through a series of wide hallways, searching for the stairs he had seen on his previous visit. When he found them he almost broke his neck getting to the lower level, but once there the opposite side of the door proved easy to find. Almost all this bottom floor was occupied by that machinery-filled room, and it was isolated from the rest of the building.

Aaron stood in front of the hidden room's entrance, breathing hard. On this the door was only a wide outline in the wall, with no protruding edges or attachments. Squarely in its centre, and glowing with a light

of its own, was a panel of pushbuttons, and above them was a lighted triangle.

Aaron forced himself back to calmness. Silva might be dying, but he could never force his way through this door and the pushbuttons were obviously the means of entrance. He studied the single mathematical symbol more closely, and saw that it was a right triangle with the vertical line approximately one-third the length of the horizontal. His heart leaped when he saw three dots grouped together inside the triangle, at the centre of the horizontal line, and a single dot in the corresponding location for the vertical one. There were no dots on the hypotenuse.

The sum of the squares of a right triangle . . . one of the supposedly universal laws of mathematics. He tried to calculate in his head, cursing the fact he had never been good at math, and had to dig out a pad and pencil. If you accepted those dots as units of measurement rather than symbols . . . he worked out the length of the hypotenuse, the only missing factor, and checked the array of buttons. They were laid out in a square, six buttons to a row both horizontally and vertically. He felt a surge of hope as he realised he could punch out the figure he had reached.

He had a bad moment wondering if he should go across the panel or down, then shrugged and punched out the combination he would have used himself, working down the rows vertically.

If the door was set up in time-lock fashion, so that a wrong combination necessitated a waiting period before you could try again . . . He had never been so thankful in his life when the door wheezed gently, and slowly swung open.

Coming to was a slow and painful process. Inch by slow inch, after he became aware of his own semi-consciousness, Silva struggled upward out of the dimness. His first fully conscious thought was that he still seemed to be in darkness, and then he saw lights a few feet away and realised he was lying with his face in shadow. The lights flickered

and moved, and after a moment he identified their source as some sort of video screen. Sitting in front of that screen was a familiar figure.

"Aaron!" he gasped aloud, and tried to sit up. His broad-shouldered friend was beside him in an instant, gently forcing him to lie back. "Easy there, fella, you've had quite a shock. Just take it easy for a few minutes."

Behind him the video picture continued to flicker for a moment, then cut off; the room was now lighted only by the power-light a few feet away.

"Where are we?" Silva recovered enough to ask.

"In a hidden room under the tunnel. I just pulled you out of the 'dream machine' over there. Apparently the geniuses who designed this death-trap were opposed to taking life directly, so they fed you wonderful dreams while you died slowly from lack of nourishment. The dreams seem to have been erotic in nature, so I may have robbed you of an 'experience' you'd have wanted."

"No thanks," said Silva, shuddering. "But you're not making much sense. Start from the beginning, will you?"

"If you insist, though that was about five-thousand Eryears back. It seems that the Suns suddenly changed their characteristics about then, began emitting radiation of a new type. The whole story is on that video I was just watching. Every baby born to the Golden Ones after the change was an idiot, or only a little better. Apparently they hadn't tried to master spaceflight, and hunting a new home never occurred to them. Instead they gathered the greatest of their scientists and did what they could to preserve their race, which was to build this temple. Somehow—and they didn't bother to go into detail on this point—they managed to implant a compulsion, so strong as to be an hereditary instinct, into a large group of the idiot babies. Their descendents are obeying that instinct when they live to their strict moral code and take the crawl before mating. As they move through the tunnel they are examined by a long bank of machinery capable of analyzing their bodies from the cellular level up, including the genes. Those who show the most defects are dropped into the dream machine. The tunnel was set

to pass the best three out of four, working on a variable factor of about a hundred. The idea was to develop by selective breeding a race immune to the effects of the sun, and restore the original intelligence level. I don't think they succeeded too well."

Silva tried again, and succeeded in sitting up. Despite his weakness he was fascinated by what Aaron had learned. This was going to make a fine research paper. "How were they going to turn off the instinct and stop the slaughter?"

Aaron explained the mathematically-keyed door. "I doubt that the builders anticipated that the selection-machine would last this long. They expected their descendents to regain their knowledge within a few hundred years, and since mathematics is always one of the earliest sciences developed it was inevitable that someone would solve the riddle and gain access to the video set. It comes on automatically when you walk in front of it, and the film is self-explanatory."

"But it's obvious that the machine could only select good body types, and the intelligence stayed low. Which explains why it rejected me. It was unable to understand my peerless mental powers and rejected me on my scrawny body."

Aaron laughed softly. "We're all humans, but I doubt we're similar enough to the Golden Ones to pass a gene test. Now if you're able to walk let's get out of here. This place bothers me."

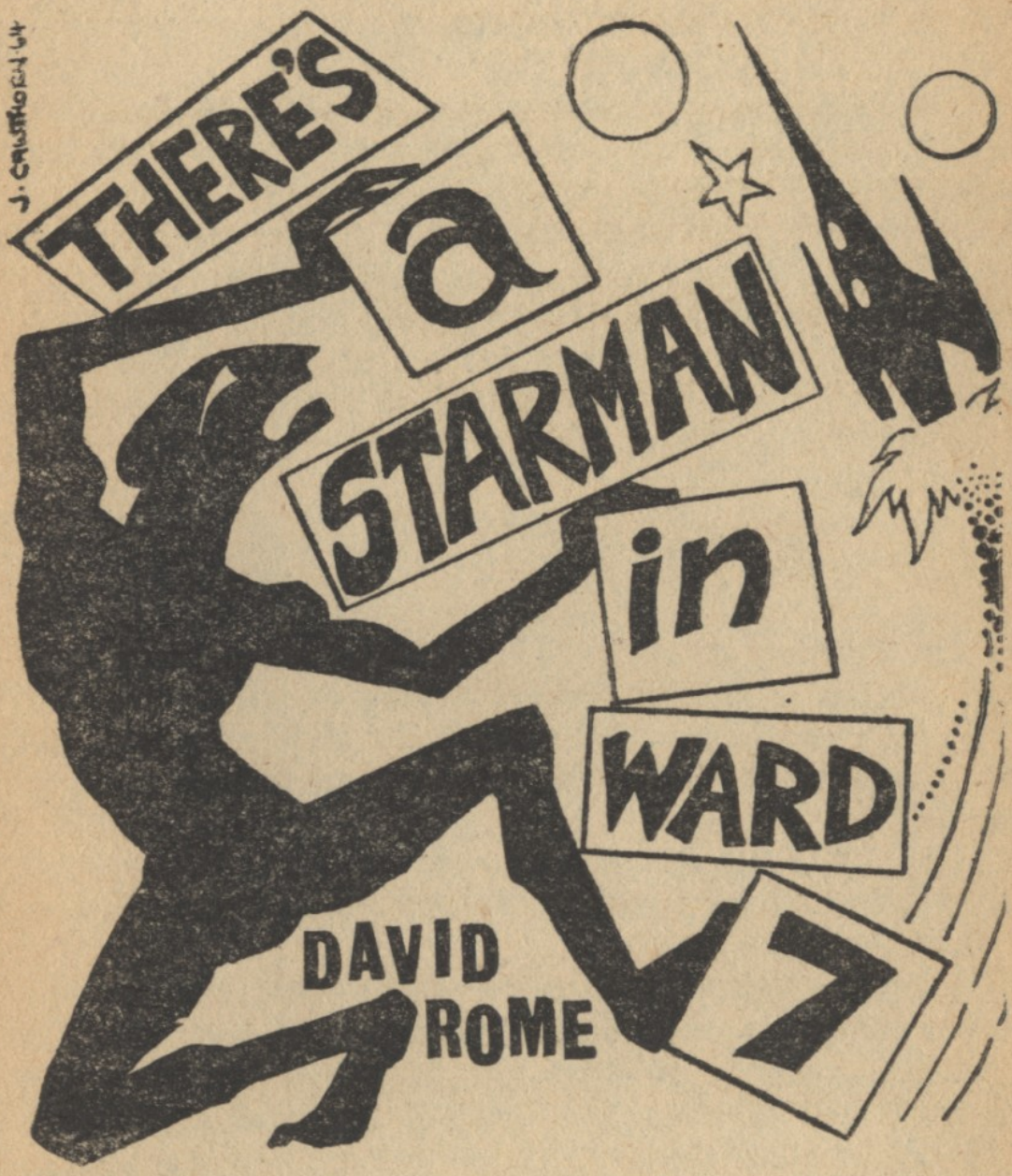
"What about the selection-machine. Are we going to let the killing go on?"

"The machine stopped when I succeeded in opening the door. I found the main control and turned it off permanently. Let's give natural selection a chance to breed some brains into those beautiful dumb bodies. I think nature can do a better job than this or any other machine."

Silva rose, and leaned heavily on Aaron as they walked out the keyed door. When the Golden Ones learned to open it they would be ready to hear the history of their race. In the meantime there was a pudgy and very sincere little bureaucrat on Earth to whom they owed a free film

showing, and their next job awaiting them somewhere in the galaxy. There was that peculiar race on Capella Four, where the men were only half the size of the women, and polygamy was the common practice . . .

Maybe he was nuts to believe him . . .



WHEN I WOKE THIS MORNING THE STARMAN HAD BEEN PUT IN THE BED NEXT TO MINE!!!

(Let me tell you about him, Papa. His head which is the only part I see of him in the mornings is bald as an egg and grey like old newspaper soaked in water. But his grey eyes smiled up at me friendlily).

It was almost light, and THEY had forgotten to pull the blinds down last night, so the dawn was coming in. There

was a lot of noise in A and the Starman sat up slowly and said JESUS GOD WHERE AM I?

Jesus God, mother of all
Rolled me in porridge
And let me fall

The Starman was skinny, and he wore pyjama TOP and no BOTTOM. They don't give you pants if they find out you —— the bed.

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THIS PLACE asked the Starman.

"Ward 7," I told him. Then I said he was lucky they put him here. 8 is the one to scream about. JESUS (love him!) 8888 is the place I get scared about. You'd be scared too, Papa, if you could hear them talk about 8. I won't ever go there though, they don't put little kids in 8. I hope.

8
8
8

The Starman didn't even look happy about being in 7. He got out of bed and stood gaping down at his white legs, then he saw his locker which was beside his bed, and he opened it as though he expected something to jump out at him.

JUST THEN THE HOOTER STARTED HOOTING AND EVERYBODY GROANED AND THE KEYS RATTLED IN THE LOCK AND THE DOOR CAME OPEN.

When the lights came on everybody looked to see who it was today. It was JOHN. That was good for some, like Daddy, but not so good for me. JOHN is okay, Papa, but he hurts (no he doesn't!) some of us sometimes (it's a lie!) Papa, when we don't do our work like sweeping the verandah and picking papers off the yard.

JOHN came down the rows of beds, pulling back the sheets and telling us to get out of bed you lazy —— (—— you I said to him under my breath). But I got out and started getting dressed.

I take the chance to peek at the Starman's locker and I see it got his name on it: CHARLIE.

(Big Jim wouldn't get out of bed and JOHN just hit him. Big Jim is hollering now and getting out of bed).

Some of the guys are washing themselves, but I led the Starman past them and out through the open doors. It was a cold morning, the sky a kind of purple colour along the horizon and blue higher up. The garden looked dark, and it was empty. Across the road a light was burning in the dispensary. A work party went by, snuffling and coughing in the cold. (They're lucky—they get to wheel GRAVEL down by the highway and see the cars).

I opened the door to the TV room and showed the Starman in. Most of the chairs was still empty. I said we should sit down until our names were called for medicine, but the Starman stood looking about him as though he didn't hear.

It's a nice room. Very big but warm, with the Office fitting snugly in one corner, some tables with flowers in vases, rows of chairs in front of the TV set which stands on a high shelf where we can't reach it.

The room was starting to fill. We stood watching the stragglers come in, and I told the Starman their names and he seemed to remember even though I only told him once. (I was SURPRISED because I didn't know he was the Starman then, Papa, I thought he was just Charlie!)!!!

Charlie is
my darling

Eric came in with JOHN holding his arm. This is because Eric falls over most of the time, so he wears a cushion round his head for the times when THEY aren't around to stop him.

phillipcameinwithouthisclotheson

and everybody laughed. JOHN kicked him on the b u m and sent him back to his dormitory and we all laughed except the Starman.

The Starman told me where he was from. A place called Alfa Sentori, Papa, which sounds like it is in Italy.

I checked with Alice. She took me down Grove Street to the library. It was a nice day, and the air smelled clean and fresh. Alice and I sat at the long table in the library and read all about Alfa Sentori (Alpha Centauri, says the Starman). I saw a lot of my friends, and then

Alice and I WALKED HOME THROUGH SOUTER WOODS!!!

The Starman wanted to know why I killed Alice. I tell him because she said dirty words to me after I LOVED her. I also told him about the mother in the moon.

Mother in the moon
Rolled me in porridge
Turned me into a boy
When I was three
Years old

The Starman came from Alpha Centauri in a spaceship. He says nobody believes him, that's why he's here.

I said what happened to the spaceship. He said it's still hidden in the swamp and when he gets the chance he's getting out of here and going home.

After we got our pills THEY served us coffee on the verandah. We get one cup of coffee each and ONE biscuit, except Daddy who gets two when JOHN is on. The Starman ASKED JOHN FOR ANOTHER BISCUIT.

It was funny. JOHN gave the Starman a look, then pushed him and made him stumble against the wall. But the Starman went straight back and asked for another biscuit. JOHN got mad and took him to the dormitory and shut the door.

(all this is a lie!)
(ward 7 is fine)
(EVERYBODY here treats us right)
(I'm a dirty liar about JOHN)

There was a scream from the dormitory, then the door shot open and the Starman came out, his face all twisted. The Charge came and took him away to one of the rooms in the corridor.

The Starman is out of the corridor and back in our dormitory. We lay awake talking last night, and he asked me about my second head. I told him he couldn't see it because it was inside my first head (natch!)

I told him I used to be a writer. I told him how Alice threw that stone which hit me on the head on the beach that day.

The Starman didn't say anything for a while, then he asked me if I was happy.

I said I was but I wished mother had let me stay a girl. Girls have all the fun. (Like Alice!)

THE STARMAN SAYS HE'S GOING TO MAKE ME BETTER!!!

If he's going to make me better why doesn't he get started? He said he would start right away, but this morning there was OT which meant I had to sweep the yard and clean out the lavatory. This afternoon there was RT and some of us were taken for a walk around the grounds. I was allowed to go, but not the Starman.

PETER took us for the walk. He told me once that I'm an EP and a schizo. He said nobody can cure me, that's why I'm in this dump, Papa, instead of one of those modern hospitals where they don't hurt (lie!) anybody and where somebody gets cured once in a while.

Still, it could be worse. 8 !!!

There's a high fence around 8 and only a low one round 7!!!

When I asked PETER about the Starman he said he'd heard he was a quack head-doctor. He said his real name was Charlie Nebraska and he came from somewhere out west.

The Starman got to talking to himself today. He's over a hundred years old and he left Alpha Centauri four years ago.

The Starman keeps asking the Charge when a psychiatrist will be coming around. We see the foot-doctor regularly, and we get our hair cuts and shaves, but no head-doctor. The Charge says they're using all their doctors in other hospitals where people get cured.

Somebody said maybe they'd cure us if they tried!

888

888

!!!

!!! theStarmanisgoingto try. Not just me!! He's going to cure EVERYBODY!!!

He says he can cure us all in time, and he's going to work nights at it. He says at least some of us might get well enough to know what kind of death-sentence society has pronounced on us.

I wouldn't have known what he meant a couple of days

ago, so maybe he's already started on me!!!

I've discovered a strange thing. I'm not a kid. I'm almost forty years old. Yesterday morning I stood in front of the mirror and took a look at myself. I was pretty awful! The clothes they give us here are for bums. Somebody gave me a jacket that was two sizes too big.

But when I looked at myself I thought I might have been not so bad once. I'm tall!!! I've got dark hair and brown eyes. I gave myself a grin, but that wasn't so good. I'll need new teeth when I get out, Papa, if I'm going to find a girl.

everybody
doesn't
want
to be
cured!

There are only A DOZEN want it in A dormitory, out of thirty. The rest think the Starman is crazy and they lie in their beds grinning at us while we work.

It isn't easy!!!

We sit on the floor around the Starman, and nobody has to speak or laugh, or think about anything except being well again.

I woke feeling better than ever before. When I opened my eyes and felt the blood singing through my head I wanted to cry! It's like being born again, Papa, only without that helpless scared feeling.

Most of the others are feeling better, too — even the ones who don't join in our circle. When JOHN came in to get us out of bed we all told him to —— off, and he hurried straight back out again looking scared.

He's a fat toad of a boy. I could break him in half and maybe I will one day soon.

The Starman worked with us for three hours. Each time the night nurse came nosing around we dived into bed. Then when the coast was clear we gathered around again. There are only two who don't join in now, and one of them is Eric, who sits up in bed and listens.

JOHN has left!!! He went last night without notice.

THEY are short of staff now, and there aren't so many to watch us. The Starman says that when he goes, I can come with him. There's room for two aboard the ship— so it's Alpha Centauri or bust!

Talking about bust, there's a pretty girl working in the kitchen here. She's got the nicest —— you could imagine. Papa, and a few of us are keeping her in mind when we get OUT!

The Starman said we needn't take our pills any more. So we just queued to get them from MIKE, waited until he had marked our names off the list, then went one by one and flushed them down the can!!

Later, when MIKE told me to sweep the yard, I asked him why the hell he didn't sweep it himself. He said while I was sweeping I couldn't think about sticking a knife in his back — and that gave me an IDEA.

THEY count our knives and forks when we finish our meals. But that wouldn't stop us using them on the b — s in the dining room! (yuk-yuk).

Six of us are locked in the corridor rooms today. We attacked the Charge with chairs and split his skull.

Visiting day.

Nobody came to see me, but the Starman had a visitor. A blonde woman in a grey coat. I asked him who she was and he said she was a friend who had come to tell him his ship was still okay.

I'm getting SMARTER *and* WISER every day.

We said a prayer tonight.

HE will make us well

HE will make us

strong

There'll be twenty-eight of us from A dormitory, and only four of THEM. We're going to deal with THEM in the dining room, take their keys and let ourselves OUT.

I'm coming home, Papa!!! Why didn't you visit me?

TONIGHT WHILE THEY WERE BUSY SERVING US THE STARMAN GAVE THE ORDER and we grabbed up our knives and went into action! It only took a minute. I ripped the Charge's keys off his belt and we ran outside into the yard. Next moment the gate was open and we were

FREE!!!

88888

88888

88888

I TRUSTED THE STARMAN AND HE LET ME DOWN! He ran off and left me. I'LL FIX HIM WHEN THEY BRING HIM BACK!!!

8 is hell. I might as well be dead.

My room looks out on the yard of 7 and I can see all the SMART ONES who didn't listen to Crazy Charlie Nebraska.

Look where it got me.

!!!

I can see the sky at night from my room, and I'll keep watching! If he's a dirty liar I'll deal with him when they bring him to 8! If he's not a dirty liar I'll see his ship coming down from the stars soon like a silver angel.

Angel mother
In the moon
LOVE THE WORLD
I'll be waiting!!!

As the Bay City Police Chief once told Philip Marlowe — politics demands the best men and attracts the worst. This may have been true of General Aldheyer, but even Bulkeley had to admit Aldheyer had a good brain . . .

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Thom Keyes

RECRUITED FOR THE purpose of cheering, a sombre crowd thronged the rails on the departure building roof. The ship before them was the most perfect ever designed.

As the two passengers climbed the ramp to the lock a small shimmer of distaste ran through the crowd. One of the passengers turned to wave, receiving a nervous, unenthusiastic cheer in reply. The two men were sealed up in the hull. The military police let the crowd go. From the passenger blister, General Aldheyer watched them depart. This tour of the electorate was proving its anticipated success, though he seemed to be meeting increasing hostility as the tour approached the Rim. He supposed it was only to be expected. A policy of colonial suppression was only a vote-catching winner on Earth's home worlds. As the leader of the militia dominating the General Dynamics Party, Aldheyer was being called a dangerous extremist by those who couldn't recognise that what they needed was the discipline and common-sense he and his party could provide.

He shrugged and looked back in to the passenger quarters where his aide, benevolently donated by the government, stood with folded arms and a faint smile. Surgeon-Commander Bulkeley of the Merchant Space Agency wasn't exactly a man Aldheyer could call on for moral support.

The sole crew-member was the pilot, high forward, locked into a fluid box stencilled with circuit patterns,

name and code numbers. Impulses from this brain-box warmed the engines — gently ticked them over. Sound travelled along the wires. At length the pilot spoke emotionlessly.

"Be seated please, gentlemen."

Bulkeley took his seat and strapped in. Aldheyer followed suit.

"Next stop's your last, General," said Bulkeley cheerfully. "A forsaken planet — hardly seven thousand workers in the colony. No-one's bothered to make an election speech there before." He lay back and folded the headrest round his temples. "Controlled by religious factions. Not at all your sort of vote."

Aldheyer growled at the cynical giant. "Damn the population size. It's a constituency. If our comfort-ridden President ever emerged from his splendid isolation before the election, he might get their votes. But I'm going there — and that's seven thousand votes for me. This is the way to get 'em."

Yet he pursed his lips thoughtfully. He'd need a different sort of speech for those religious fanatics; for he was committed to splitting up the religious colonies. He could not compromise. Best to show them the technical developments of General Dynamics: show them the advantages of the brain-guided ship, briefly mentioning its superiority in the war with the Cepheids he was sworn to bring about. Fire them with patriotism over the greater amounts of produce the mother world would need from them, without mentioning that his party would insist on giving a lower price for that produce. The colonies would all have to pull in their belts. It was reasonable — Earth was the hub of government, Earth should have proper control of the wealth. The proposed war with the Cepheids would be expensive for a start . . .

"Lifting in ten," said the pilot.

The ship raised itself off the terminal point and broke into the blackness. A brief and familiar moment of unconsciousness and then he heard the pilot saying: "You may unfasten your seat belts."

Aldheyer smiled smugly as he heard the pilot. G.D.'s

pride and joy — infallible astrogation, unhampered by the thousand emotional and psychological pressures to which a corporate pilot was commonly prone. And so much more space for cargo — or armament. It was a satisfying feeling. He stretched and unstrapped, glancing out of the blister.

Stars in this tail of the Rim were few and dim, inhabitable planets were scarce, but, at the moment anyway, their colonists had the franchise. Though he was unpopular here, he was sure to pick up some votes on the strength of his personal appearances. People could be relied on to vote for a face they knew. Sensible colonists, away, must realise that the present government's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the colonies must result in eventual disaster for the Empire — or Federation as they chose to call it, in their lily-livered way of never calling a spade a spade. Even the firm policies his government would implement would take time before they succeeded in strengthening and tightening-up the Empire. It would have to mean the end of Democracy, anyway. He'd had doubts about that at first, but had come to realise it was the only thing to do if Earth and her colonies were to become one hundred percent efficient. There was little doubt that he and his party would be elected — people needed a leader and responded to his tough, straight-talking manner. He smiled. The present government was plainly rattled. Bulkeley's presence was proof enough of that!

Originally he'd planned to take a full staff with him — and even a sabotage expert, for he was not without fears for his life in those planets so poorly governed that the police had insufficient powers over the radical elements. The government had rejected his request, so he'd asked, instead, that he have a ranking military officer for his aide, hoping for some sympathy from that quarter. They'd given him a damnable medic, fit for nothing but vaccinating babies. The president suspected that he and his own men would attempt a coup on the outer planets? Mistrust of that sort was typical of his opposition.

Bulkeley was still lolling in his seat. "How's the

speech coming? There were certain — ambivalent — statements in the one you made back there."

"It's coming along well," Aldheyer replied, trying to keep the air free of tension with soft diplomacy. He might yet win this high-ranking dandruff-curer to his cause.

Bulkeley, it seemed, was making no such effort. "Going to tell them your plans for their religious colony?" he needled.

"Even your government has no great liking for these superstitious trouble-makers," Aldheyer pointed out sharply.

"Their constitution allows them their own administration on their own planet. Do you intend to tell them they'll be making weapons on Algol V? Probably not — you didn't let the last lot know their trained pilots were to be disembrained for the great moral wars on the Cepheid planets."

Irritated, Aldheyer managed to keep silent, aware that Bulkeley was trying to provoke him.

"I hope to God you don't get in, Aldheyer."

"You've good reason to hope that," he replied, losing control for a moment. "But I think I will, don't you?"

"I don't know," Bulkeley gave him a sideways glance. "I'm really not sure, general."

A leader without control of his emotions does not deserve control of others, General Aldheyer repeated to himself. Yet, he realised as he calmed down, he had been tempted to make a grab for the only gun aboard — the one in Bulkeley's holster. He was used to dominating others, yet this bloody medic seemed capable of making him lose his grip at will. Sometimes he even doubted his own strength — the strength he was relying on to tighten-up the Empire. To hold any sort of medical degree, Aldheyer knew, Bulkeley must have studied psychology as well. Had Bulkeley been planted on him with orders to wear him down in this way? Good God — it was even probable now he thought about it. His enemies were everywhere.

"You're looking a trifle pale, general," Bulkeley was saying. "Hadn't you better rest?"

Aldheyer replied jeeringly. He knew Bulkeley's scheme now. "And while I sleep, you're whispering into my ear, eh? Go to Venus, Bulkeley!"

"Calm down, general."

"Calm down! When I know that your soft, scheming masters have put you here especially to sabotage my campaign, to work on my mind, to — to kill me for all I know!"

"For all your contempt for the present government, Aldheyer you seem to forget that it abides strictly to the Law. My orders were to ensure your safety, check that your campaign was conducted in a properly legal way and — if you want to know — try to assess the extent of your support. I have kept you safe, have seen that you have abided by the rules of the election, and have noted that your support is frighteningly good. You are the paranoid type who, for some reason, electorates through history have gone wild about — generally to their downfall!"

But Aldheyer had at last lost control. "There you go again — trying to convince me I'm insane. You're a clever man, Bulkeley, but —" Now, in blind rage, he was rushing at the Surgeon-Commander, shoving a shoulder into his chest, fumbling at the holster. He felt Bulkeley's huge hands on his biceps, pressing painfully. He yelled in fury and kicked at his enemy's shins. He heard Bulkeley saying loudly, carefully, slowly:

"Aldheyer, I've done my duty, in spite of my own feelings — but you're getting what's coming to you now . . ."

The ship juddered.

For an instant the gravity failed. Aldheyer felt himself falling away from Bulkeley — falling towards the ceiling.

Then gravity returned.

He dropped heavily towards the floor, smashed against it, blacked-out for a second. Bulkeley was standing over him.

"Are you all right?"

Aldheyer winced. His arm . . . Bulkeley dropped beside him and looked at it. "Shattered," said Bulkeley. There

didn't seem to be much satisfaction in his voice. Bulkeley went to get the first aid kit.

Suddenly the pilot, the cold, emotionless pilot, without human failings, started chattering:

"In-inexplic-c-c-cable f-fault . . . Or-or-or-der res-ssss-t-or-ored."

He grimaced as Bulkeley began to attend to his arm. "What the hell was that?"

"You're the expert on these infallible ships," Bulkeley said grimly. He looked frightened. "That pilot didn't seem very confident, did it?"

"It's impossible. I'd better have a look at the pilot."

"Not with that arm — you ought to have sedation."

"Damn you, Bulkeley, I'm taking no more from you. If there's something wrong it can't be much. I'll be able to fix it. Will you?"

Bulkeley was silent, but he seemed dubious about both the last statement and the question.

"Just a loose wire somewhere," Aldheyer said. "In all probability."

Then the lights flickered and became dim. A soft buzzing came from behind the fixtures.

"Ina-ina-ina-inexplicable fault," said the pilot. After a moment the lights came on with full brightness. "Rectified," said the pilot.

Aldheyer relaxed. Bulkeley had frozen his elbow. He felt no pain. The ship was all right again. He looked out of the blister-dome. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the stars were rotating out of his vision. He watched. The star he fixed his gaze on swung along from the bottom of the dome and did an eliptical loop. The ship seemed to be rotating tail over nose. This was trouble. He addressed the brain.

"Pilot, what is the fault?"

"Rec-ec-ec-tif-ied," stuttered the pilot.

"Pilot, what is the fault?"

"Rec-ec-ec-ec . . ."

"Pilot, we are spinning, we are off flight pattern!"

Bulkeley gave him a cynical glance. "What would you say our chances are?"

The ship continued to spin gracefully.

Aldheyer suppressed the feeling of panic. A leader without control . . .

" I'm going forward," he said grimly. " By God, if this is sabotage . . . I told them I needed my sabotage expert — what good are you going to be in this spot, Bulkeley? "

Bulkeley watched impassively as he began to clamber awkwardly up the rail towards the ceiling. He pressed the lock control and, as it opened, hauled himself into the narrow tunnel which led to the servicing room in the nose, small enough for one body.

As he neared it, the lights flickered again. This couldn't happen. The pilot was infallible.

He squeezed into the room and there was the drawer marked Lt./Col. O. C. Medway. 560sfx. NOT TO BE OPENED BY UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL. That was it.

He undid the clips and a klaxon hooted. A tampering warning device. He pulled the drawer out slowly. At first he was horrified, and then suddenly depressed and fatalistic. They'd had it. The infallible pilot had failed them.

The trouble was immediately detectable. The brain was haemorrhaging. The fluid containing it was stained with the blood which the servo motors were pumping through uselessly. The blood vessels showed red. Had this belonged to a body still, it would now be unconscious. Only in its present state could it function at all.

" S-s-s-t-awwwww-rrrrr— " said the pilot.

The sound control was uneven, bombarding Aldheyer with screams and whispers. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, Aldheyer knew, that could be done to save the brain. He slid the drawer in and eased himself back down the tunnel. It didn't *look* like sabotage . . . yet . . . Bulkeley was a medic.

This was all he needed to destroy the last of his self-confidence. First Bulkeley working on him — now this happening. The greatest achievement of General Dynamics — now a death-trap for their leader!

As he reached the ladder he called to Bulkeley: " Fasten your free-fall line. I think we're in for more trouble. The

brain's haemorrhaging! "

As Bulkeley obeyed him, the lights went out. Hastily he got himself down to the bottom of the ladder and worked his way towards the lockers. He found a line and clipped it to himself. Just in time. The gravity went off, then on, then off, then on . . .

The two men were flung about as if tossed in a barrel.

" It can't happen," he shouted. " The brain can't die. Any emergency—to itself or the ship—is checked at once. It *can't* fail."

" It has," said Bulkeley from somewhere. " Can't you rewire the ship on to a make-shift piloting system and guide it by ear? "

" I haven't the knowledge and it's years since I was a pilot. I couldn't begin to try."

Bulkeley said: " Then what's the position? I take it we haven't much chance of survival."

Had Aldheyer caught a note of satisfaction in Bulkeley's voice? Surely Bulkeley couldn't hate him so much that he would . . . No. Bulkeley's kind were too soft-centred to do anything so brave. It was the sort of thing he and his followers would do, perhaps, but not Bulkeley . . . Yet . . .

He said: " In about four hours the air will still be going but the insulation won't keep us warm for that long, and the inside pressure will be gone. We will have to get into the suits, and the air isn't going to last in those tanks for more than two hours, or four, with the spares. That is less than eight hours we've got to radio for help, and unless there is another ship within eight hours drive, then we are dead. There aren't many ships in the Rim."

But when they checked the radio, they found it wasn't working either. That, too, had been connected with the pilot. There was no emergency power supply, no emergency controls. The pilot was infallible.

But it was not infallible. It had all failed. Darkness was around them, soon the pressure would drop, the frightening cold seep through the walls. The choice now was only whether to wait for death or bring death closer with the aid of a needle.

Aldheyer was not a contemplative man; soul-searching wasn't in his line. He knew what was right and what was wrong. Yet, in the space of minutes, his whole conception of everything had been turned about. In the obscurer regions of his mind he was doing some balancing up. Even down there things were fairly simple. Cause and effect. Somehow he had failed and this situation was the result. Somehow, too, he must redeem himself in his own eyes. A soldier's death was hardly applicable here. With a shock, a thought emerged in his consciousness. It was an unpleasant thought. He bit his lip and was about to repress the thought when Bulkeley said:

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"About what?"

"About a —— a replacement pilot."

"Could you do it?" Aldheyer half-hoped for a negative reply.

"Surgically I think I can, but I know little about the wiring."

"There is a diagram on the box. The method has been simplified down almost to the point of child's play for tank servicing and drainage." Aldheyer repeated the set sales-piece mechanically. He was thinking about the end of his political career, the end of his power and popularity. The end of the ideals which he had fostered so carefully in the hearts of the millions on the home planets. Yet there was only one way of saving the situation. It wasn't a coward's way, either. He could sacrifice himself to save Bulkeley. That was satisfying. Perhaps something would come of it — if he lived. It would show those mealy-mouthed fools who had sent Bulkeley with him that the opposition had real guts.

"Let's get it over with, then," said the leader of the General Dynamics Party.

Bulkeley tried to plan the best procedure for the operation. He had loathed the General before, not as a man, but for the things he stood for. He had been willing, towards the end of Aldheyer's campaign, to make any sacrifice that would stop this reactionary gaining power.

Yet now he had the opportunity of saving their lives — and at the same time putting Aldheyer out of action politically. It was, perhaps, a better compromise.

He decided to try and spare Aldheyer's feelings and not bring the box down through the tunnel while the general could still see it. Besides if he gave him the sedative now, it would give the body time to relax completely. He floated across the room on his line and got the needle and phial of sedative from the first-aid box, then at the last moment when all was prepared, he switched on his torch and carefully jabbed the needle into the general's bare arm. Instantly he was knocked out.

Taking only his torch Bulkeley drifted up to the ceiling. It had been such a long time since he had experienced free fall. Clumsily he opened the lock and pulled himself up the rungs to the servicing room. The torch blazed bleakly ahead.

In the servicing room he found the drawer, and pulled off the clips. He intended to study the way in which the wiring was connected, where each electrode had an inlet, each nerve was joined to the governing circuit, but the box was full of weak, pink blood—watered down by the preserving fluid. He looked around the minute room, then at the diagram. There was a spare bottle of fluid marked in the compartment labelled 'C.' Caring little for tidiness, he tried to drain the fluid off from the tap at the bottom but of course it would not pour. In answer to his prayer it floated upwards in small blobs, which shattered into smaller blobs as they were touched. The box was empty.

Now he gazed at the wiring clearly. He pulled an ink marker from his uniform and made several brief sketches of the placing of electrodes on the smooth walls. He cast thanks to the company that had made it to work under water or in free fall. The coropids had a tube which wound into the back of the box and was coloured red, while the venous return had the white tube. That was all clearly marked on the diagram. He put down his torch in a position where the light reflected on to the pilot's brain so that he could use both hands. He removed the

tubes from the arteries, as little blobs of blood escaped and floated around him. Dexterously, he removed the brain from the box and pulled all the wires from their holes at the back. Each wire and tube was not only marked on the box diagram but he also had his own drawings to work from. He raised the box and slid it from its compartment and set it on the floor, and backed cautiously down the tunnel carrying the box.

The first problem presented itself. It had been such a long time since he had operated, he should have thought of it before. The blood group—that was probably completely different. He captured a floating droplet between two slides from his bag and tested it. Rhesus negative, group A, sub 4. He took a further sample from the General's arm. It was the same. More thanks to be raised to the guiding power. Well, it was a common enough group.

The next difficulty could be overcome. He had to operate. He had to remove Aldheyer's brain. He had to place it in the brain tank, in the preserving fluid under free fall conditions. He made his way slowly to the pressure suit cupboard once again and pulled out the suit this time. Underneath lay folded several lengths of tubing. Next to the first aid compartment, from which he took three pint blood transfusion bottles and the tubes that went with them. He sensed the chill reaching into the ship. The icy claws of space. Best to get the required blood first. He made the small insertion in the vein of each arm, and the blood dripped into the bottles with the greatest difficulty. He had taken the tubes right into the veins, so that the pumping action of the heart would fill the bottles and compensate for the lack of gravity. His own blood donor, he thought. Poor Aldheyer. He scanned the room with his torch for the food compartments. Reaching them he ripped the insulating wool from the thermos cooker and took it back to wind around the bottles. He had to keep the blood as warm as possible. Aldheyer's pulse was still strong. He tightened the safety straps to the final notch and from the black bag he took his surgical instruments and laid them neatly on to the

strip of adhesive he had placed beside the seat. Taking a boot from the second suit, he wedged the torch into it and clicked the magnetized sole to the wall. It shone on to Aldheyer's head. No time to shave the scalp. He made his first incisions about an inch above the eye-brows, partly using a scalpel and then a small finely serrated miniature power-saw, which cut through the bone like a razor through an orange. The incision followed the line of a pudding-bowl hair cut. Then the crown came away in his hand. Without any joy he considered it was neatly done. Small drops of liquid floated into the beam of light and disappeared beyond it.

Quickly, efficiently he snipped the spinal cord, the sensory and motor nerves and the coropid arteries. Scooping, without difficulty, he eased the brain out of the skull. Blood floated in droplets, in streams, glowed ruby in the white light, and vanished. Floating blood swallowed by the darkness. He felt that it was becoming more difficult to breathe. He laboured with the strain. The oxygen must be getting thin, but he had not got the time to turn on one of the tanks from the suits. Time. Time. Time. The pressure was dropping, that he could feel . . . the pressure insulation could hold out only so long. Aldheyer's brain he placed on some insulating wool and laid gently in the box. The blood transfusion bottles could wait for a moment. Quivering, he hurried with the torch up the tunnel to the servicing room. Gently, carefully adjusted the electrodes and joined the nerves to their wire casings. The red tube then for the inflow of blood, the white for the venous return. Of course! Oxygen was needed!

He scuttled with all the haste he could muster down the tunnel and collected an oxygen cylinder and the bottles of blood from either side of the seat. The General stared bravely out towards the blister: Bulkeley knew that this was not Aldheyer. Aldheyer was upstairs in the box. This was just a body. Up again in the cramped room, Bulkeley took his extra lengths of tube and attached the oxygen to the feed for the venous return. A further thick and spacious tube he placed in the first of the

transfusion bottles and sucked. The tube took a whole pint, and more. He sucked until he tasted the sweet liquid on his tongue, and held it there. This he blew slowly straight into the pump reservoir. It was carefully insulated. The blood from the pilot should still be fairly warm. The oxygen he filled at pressure into the motor's pressurized oxygen tanks. Then the second pint of blood. The reservoir was full. If only a blood clot had not formed in the brain. Without the weights of gravity he prayed that it would remain undamaged. The diagram again. No starter assistance mechanism. Nothing.

He took the small high powered battery from the torch, holding the wire to the starter motor in one hand. Briefly, unknowingly, he prayed. Then he attached the battery to the wire. The lights went on dimly, then went out. It could, it really could work. Oh, if only it would work. The lights went on again, instantly bright. He felt the draught from the air inlets starting up again. The floating blood rained down; showered splashing and sticky, returning life. Gravity . . . gravity was back. Quickly he fumbled with the bottle of preserving fluid and poured it into the tank. The General's brain floated gently upwards and hung suspended. Bulkeley checked all the connections. Everything ticked over smoothly. He clambered down the rail and collapsed into his seat.

"Surgeon-Commander," called the new pilot. Bulkeley closed his eyes.

"Easy as stroking a kitten, eh?"

God, that man is insufferable thought Bulkeley.

A short time later, the G.D. ship reached the last stop of its tour. A bleak sun shone on the VIP landing disc. A crowd was gathering, for any arrival was something to stop work for and wonder at in that place. They waited for the passengers to come out, but none came.

There was a crackle from the ship's outside speakers. They looked at it expectantly. Then the speakers spoke:

"This is General Aldheyer of the General Dynamics Party. It is imperative for the safety and integrity of the whole universe that in the coming election I gain your

trust, your hearts, your vote . . . "

Sitting inside the ship, Bulkeley was smiling wryly. Perhaps, after all, it would have been better to die out there. Aldheyer was a resourceful character. But could a spaceship stand for President? Bulkeley sincerely hoped there was a technical point to catch him on. They would have to wait and see when they got home.

Meanwhile, the political machine swung into action.

SPACE DRIVE

by Gordon Walters

BRIAN ALDISS SWITCHES with an enviable facility between stories set very firmly on a not too distant Earth of the future, such as *The Primal Urge,* and novels of interstellar scope. His recent *The Dark Light Years,* is one of the latter. In it, he also displays a facility for gliding nicely round the question of how his characters cross the cosmos without spending a few millenia over the journey.

Transponential Drive " a favourite science fiction gimmick was suddenly translated into actuality. Thanks to Buzzard (the inventor) the gulfs of space became not barriers between but doorways to the planets. By 2010, you get from New York to Procyon more comfortably and quickly than it had taken, a century before, to get from New York to Paris."

Aldiss is referring, of course, to that vague and nebulous entity the hyper-space drive. Twenty or thirty years ago, science fiction writers took great pains to work out a plausible scientific framework for their stories. But they quickly came into conflict with the accepted scientific theories of the day. Before the first World War, heroic adventures on Mars *a la* E. R. Burroughs were quite plausible in light of what was known about Mars. Today, the science fiction writer moans softly: " I mustn't dream of cream princesses enthroned on Mars because the astronomers insist that mammalian life is impossible. So I have to find an outlet for my sexual fantasies among a bunch of nasty green lichens! "

If an author is to write *science fiction,* he has to keep within the bounds of current knowledge. Giving Mars a Terran atmosphere comes under the heading of fantasy. Propelling a spaceship faster than light is, according to Einstein, also fantasy. Therefore, Aldiss—and other

writers—has apparently to wave a magic wand and use a hyper-drive for crossing the galaxy, to get round Einstein and keep the old fellow happy in his grave.

But he was by no means the first to limit the scope for space drives. He wasn't the first to say: "You *can't* travel through space *this* way."

Let's go right back to the beginnings of fictional space flights.

A Greek named Lucian was the first to write of voyages to the Moon, penning a pair of them in the second century A.D. It must have been deliciously easy for him. We can visualise him sitting on a rock overlooking the sea. It is late evening, and a quick breeze is clearing the clouds from the face of the moon. He studies it, lazily plotting a story of lunar adventure. Fairly soon, he comes to the problem of getting the hero to the scene of action.

He looks down at the sea. A sailing ship is scudding along the coast towards Athens. That's the answer. Use a sailing ship, get it off the ground with a convenient whirlwind and steer it in the general direction of the moon. So he wrote: "by a mightie wind which filled our sailes strongly."

It was as easy as that. His other space flight was just as happily conceived—though not for the flock of vultures and eagles which had the labour of towing him.

The next interplanetary writers—in the 16th and 17th Centuries—were equally happy about using our feathered friends. There was no reason why they shouldn't. The air naturally extended all the way to the moon, which, besides, wasn't very far. But it slowly dawned on humanity that the universe was really composed of a slightly adulterated vacuum, and the poor science fiction writers had to think of other kind of space drive.

It would take many thousands of words to trace the development of these drives chronologically. It is much easier to consider the state of affairs at the beginning of the twentieth century, after Verne had shot his bolt and Wells was at the height of his powers.

Space flights could be split into two basic types—those inspired by scientific or pseudo-scientific ideas, and

those which relied on the supernatural. There were more of the latter than you'd expect when you consider that steam engines had been in operation for many years, and that aircraft and cars were dawning.

Edwin Lester Arnold's *Lieut. Gulliver Jones,* for instance, made his way to Mars by accident. Feeling in a black mood, he made an impulsive wish to be on Mars. He happened to be sitting on an old, Eastern carpet at the time. It obligingly wrapped itself round him and took him there. The misanthropic hero of Barlow's *The Immortals' Great Quest* went to Venus by means of a subtle Tibetan discipline, whereas, as everybody knows, John Carter had his mind dumped bodily on Mars. That isn't a contradiction in terms, I assure you. Any villain who has felt the weight of John Carter's mighty mind would know what I mean.

But science was progressing rapidly. These more imaginative space drives quickly fell by the wayside, to leave the way for interplanetary travel to be developed along strictly scientific lines. One of the earliest obstacles to space travel to be recognised was the Law of Gravity. Quite a number of writers attacked it literally. Gravity, they argued, was a force which kept them firmly on the ground. It acted straight down, towards the centre of the Earth, and made rising in the morning more difficult than it need have been. Therefore, where there is a familiar force working in a known direction, there's quite likely to be another force which acted in the opposite direction. Find it, and you've found out how to go to the Moon.

Antigravity. Either in the form of mysterious, electric forces (such as Greg's 'Apergy'), or solid hunks of a newly discovered metal. Antigravity reigned supreme through the nineteenth century. But it became recognised as a scientific dead-end, and H. G. Wells was the last writer to treat it seriously.

Writers were thinking up more plausible methods involving rockets . . .

Cyrano de Bergerac was the first, using the November the Fifth kind of rocket as a means to achieve space flight.

Unfortunately, de Bergerac was a couple of hundred years ahead of his time as a science fiction writer, and the rocket was neglected in favour of the aforementioned antigravity. Jules Verne certainly didn't use it. His unfortunate heroes were shot out of a gigantic cannon like a packet of puffed wheat. Ever since the publication of that story (English edition 1873), science fiction readers have condemned Verne on the grounds that after such a violent initial blastoff, the heroes would have resembled a rather soggy mass of red puffed wheat.

Sometime after the publication of Verne's *From The Earth To The Moon,* the Brooklyn Daily Eagle published a short story entitled *A Trip To The Sun.* It was by Stanley Huntley, and was included in a posthumous volume of his stories called SPOOPENDYKE SKETCHES in 1901.

The protagonist—

". . . first produced a suit of Japanese silk, light and flexible. Then he pulled on a pair of boots of his own invention. The legs reached to the armpits. The soles were of gun barrels, arranged perpendicularly. From a belt at his waist depended two four-thousand ton columbiads. The gun barrels and columbiads were so arranged so as to load and fire themselves sixty times a minute. The process was so simple as to make explanation unnecessary. With the recoil from the firing of these pieces, Sir Fillemup (Frog) proposed to secure a velocity of a million miles an hour. This would enable him to reach the sun in four days and twenty-three hours . . ."

This description of the rocket principle is as neat, especially when you consider the era in which it was written, as the now classic description given by Arthur C. Clarke. And this earliest of 'hotfoots' is a lot easier on the arms than tossing cannon balls off a wheeled trolley. Good going. *Very* good going, considering it was supposed to be a take-off of Verne.

The vacuum of space and gravity reigned as the supreme obstacles to space flight right into the twentieth century. But just as writers were turning their thoughts

to solar systems round other stars, Einstein invented relativity to make life even more complicated. Implicit in this downright declaration of war upon the builders of galactic empires is the fact that nothing can exceed the speed of light.

And editors wouldn't let them simply treat relativity as a bad smell and leave it alone.

Writers had two choices, if they wanted to explore the galaxy. They could keep their ships within the cosmic speed limit, or slyly dodge round it. The most popular way of doing this was to invent another dimension or parallel universe which has come to be known by the generic term 'Hyperspace.'

Hyperspace was quite a cunning device, and was explained in the early years (when everything was explained meticulously) although nowadays it is taken for granted. The first writer to explain it must have spent all his life bedridden. He asked us to visualise our three-dimension universe as a blanket. Having reduced the not inconsiderable bulk of the Universe to a two-dimensional plane, he then asked us to pinpoint Earth at a spot on the blanket near the head and his destination near the feet. The blanket was then folded in such a manner that the two points were adjacent. Upon the invention of a suitable device, it would be quite easy to hop across the fold from one point to the other, the intervening gap being hyperspace, of course.

The machine which performed this feat was very rarely explained, except in such vague terms as 'a twist through the fourth dimension' by using 'a hypersonic veeble-fetzer.'

When you come right down to it, very few stories are really concerned with the space drive itself. Hyperspace, if it is ever described, is dismissed as a uniform grey murk. Rocket flights sometimes hint at nausea resulting from high or zero acceleration.

But there are exceptions. Cordwainer Smith had peopled his version of hyperspace with an assortment of inimical monsters. A ship which 'planoforms' has to carry a specialised crew designed to kill the bedbugs

which live between the folds of our hyperspatial blanket.

Oddly enough, even though Einstein placed great difficulties in the path of would-be galactic heroes, he laid the way open for some of the best science fiction stories ever written. One of the offshoots of relativity is the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction, which states: "As the velocity of an object approaches the speed of light, its subjective time—that is, the time it experiences—becomes compressed." If an object reached the speed of light, its mass would increase to infinity— and the time *it thinks it takes* to cover the greatest distance imaginable would be zero. If a man took a trip to Sirius at the speed of light, he would not only suffer from a degree of obesity which no amount of dieting would cure, but the trip would appear to be instantaneous. At slightly less than the speed of light which is, by comparison, much easier, the eight light years could be crossed in, for example, an hour.

There was a snag, however. Although the hero might only acquire a day's growth while travelling to Sirius, an observer from outside the spaceship would swear that the trip took a bit over eight years. In *objective* time, therefore, the journey would appear to take as long as you'd expect a ship moving at a little less than 186,000 miles a second. What does this mean?

It means the pilot's wife would have to sit at the spaceport and weep tears for sixteen years before he returned from the round trip. And he would return not to kiss the peach-like cheek of a girl of 24 delicate years, but to be shocked by a corsetted matron of forty. Ron Hubbard's *To The Stars* is possibly the finest story to explore the possibilities of this theme, but others, such as Heinlein, have also used it.

Meanwhile, even as hard-faced heroes are twisting into hyperspace, sorting out time problems, navigating century-long journies in starships which are really small, self-contained worlds, or jogging along in free-fall orbits, a brand-new kind of space drive has been germinating.

During the last few years, several writers have envisaged bodies of a high surface area being propelled by

the pressure of light waves at comfortable, planetary speeds. The popular forms of space drive have all implied the use of large quantities of energy applied from within. You need only look at the present rockets, with their enormous bulk and tiny payloads, to see what I mean. Hyperspace drives also imply the use of large amounts of energy. But propulsion by light requires no effort at all. The work is done by the sun—the body sending the light waves out. All that is required is a sufficiently large area for the light to act on. Several thousand square miles of very light sheeting to propel a ship of a reasonable size. Difficult to build, but not impossible—not in space. Tricky to steer, possibly. Downright hard to go from an outer planet to one nearer the sun, but probably not impossible. Skilled, highly skilled, men would have to control these new-fuel-less ships, as they scud round the thresholds of Earth and Mars and Venus . . .

But why go on? We're back to Lucian and his sailing ship.

FANCY AND IMAGINATION

IN HIS EXCELLENT introduction to Charles Harness's *The Paradox Men* (Faber, 18s.) Brian Aldiss mentions what he believes is a distinguishing trait of the author—'he is saying something serious . . . he is saying: Living is Vital.'

Whether or not this is true of Harness it is certainly true of Aldiss and it is interesting to see that where he attempts cynicism (as in *The Dark Light Years*) he as often as not fails, for Aldiss is perhaps the least cynical and most generous-spirited of SF writers and his best books are refreshing for this. It is easy for a writer to hate life, humanity, our society *ad infinitum*, it is a much harder thing to love it. And love it, whilst cocking a thumb at its faults, is what Aldiss does.

His latest novel, and by far his best yet, is *Greybeard* (Faber, 18s.), a story about the prospect of racial death, a slow, fading death with little glory, and yet a story crammed with Life and a wholesome enjoyment of the world as it is. In *Greybeard* the world is primarily the tangled countryside of an England fast returning to a mediaeval wilderness, with brambles and forests, wide stretches of water, small villages cut off from one another, where Man no longer controls nature but is once again dominated by his environment. It is a world populated entirely by the aged; the youngest couple alive are in their mid-fifties.

In some ways it is an hallucinatory world, seen through the eyes of people sinking into senility, people with fading memories, coloured by their dreams, so that the landscapes sometimes become almost surrealistic, mysterious, frightening. Writing with the control of a mature and skilled

artist, Aldiss tells his story in a series of intensely atmospheric flashbacks.

Massive fall-out results in mild radiation sickness sufficient to scare the Powers off further 'controlled' detonations in space. Only later do they realise that they have made 'The Mistake' — and induced sterility not only in Man, but also in many other animal species. As the years pass it becomes obvious that the race — and civilisation — has little chance of surviving. As men and women grow older, society crumbles. Aldiss uses the flashback technique to plot the progress of civilisation's break-up, primarily through the lives of his two central characters, Archie 'Greybeard' Timberlane and his wife Martha, the youngest people on Earth. This is by no means the usual 'end of the world' or 'back to nature' theme. There is little hope of salvation from this sad Apocalypse.

At the opening of the book the last generation of mankind looks forward to the finish of the human race. Of all those in the village in which he's settled, only Greybeard cannot quite accept this passive decline and, when the village seems about to be attacked, he takes his wife and a couple of friends down the Thames towards its mouth. We are to discover that this journey, drifting on the current of the slowly-moving river, is a symbolic one; the river itself represents Life and the stopping points are chosen in order to illustrate key-events in the career of Timberlane himself and the race in general. By the end of the book, where the river mouth is at last reached, Aldiss has made a powerful statement about it all.

Greybeard's first major stop is Swifford Fair, a jaunty event for the times, with a mediaeval atmosphere, its stalls and sideshows ramshackle and makeshift, yet possessing a warmth and vitality rare in this Age of the Aged. Here Greybeard meets the erudite and cynical Bunny Jingadangelow, colourful, self-possessed charlatan peddling a fake Elixir of Youth and one of the few making the best of the situation, exploiting the superstitious old people who throng the Fair — for superstition and fear

have returned in force, and again we get a strong mood of England in the early middle-ages. Jingadangelow also sees an aspect of the situation which Greybeard has missed:

> "It's no good getting nostalgic. It wasn't all drugs and education. Wasn't it also the need for drugs and the poverty of education? Wasn't it the climax and orgasm of the Machine Age? Wasn't it Mons and Belsen and Bataan and Stalingrad and Hiroshima and the rest? Didn't we do well to get flung off the roundabout?"

But Greybeard can't answer, he is too confused, he has not worked anything out yet, and will not until he reaches the river-mouth.

So the book progresses, full of vivid scenes and vividly-observed characters. In one flash-back near the end of the book, Timberlane's childhood is described and we see his complacent, unthinking, self-seeking, middle-class parents as at best accessories before the fact in the murder of the race, typical of their generation — our generation. Yet even these are described with sympathy, treated kindly in their bewilderment, particularly in the case of Archie's poor, troubled, suicidal father.

You must read the rest for yourselves, but read it you must.

Wordsworth once distinguished between Fancy and Imagination in art—Fancy was the ability to create what hadn't been conceived of before, Imagination was the ability to explore the deeper aspects of what we see around us. In *Greybeard* Imagination predominates with a sufficient dash of Fancy to make the whole very good modern SF indeed.

In Charles Harness's *The Paradox Men* Fancy predominates with a sufficient dash of Imagination to put it far above the usual novels of its kind — what Aldiss calls 'Widescreen Baroque' in his introduction.

Charles L. Harness was perhaps the finest writer of the sort of story often described as 'van Vogtian.' He had a short career in the magazines during the late forties and early fifties, producing roughly ten stories, several of

short novel length. This is his only novel. He has always had a hard core of vociferous fans in SF circles, but, until now, has been largely ignored. The publication of his novel is therefore very welcome.

Long-time readers of the genre may remember such beautiful stories as *Time Trap* (ASTOUNDING, 1948), *Fruits of the Agathon* (THRILLING WONDER STORIES, 1948), *Stalemate in Space* (PLANET, 1949) and that *tour de force* in AUTHENTIC, 1953 — *The Rose*. All of them have, with *The Paradox Men,* a certain similarity of theme and mood, yet all of them show a writer of intellect and power whose faults — descent into pulp shorthand on occasions, plots tending to move a little *too* fast, tendency to use characters as mechanical chess-pieces in a too carefully-plotted framework — are easy to ignore. It is high time we saw the republication of all of these.

This version of *The Paradox Men* (*Flight into Yesterday,* STARTLING, 1949) seems to be somewhat longer than the original and probably benefits from a slightly slower development. The world is in the future where America Imperial dominates the West. It is a slave-owning society and corrupt, with a puppet empress on the throne and a Hitlerian Chancellor — Haze-Gaunt — holding the real power. Unlike Hitler, however, Haze-Gaunt is rational and intelligent, employing as his Goebels a sadistic psychologist Count Shey ('famed more for his wealth and dilettantism') and General Thurmond, Imperial Police Minister, as his Himmler. It is highly likely that this future society was based on Hitler's Germany. Aldiss says in his introduction that an ingenious explanation of *how* this society had really come about would have made the book even better — as it is, the explanation is weak. Yet in a way an explanation would detract from the book since, like all Harness's future societies, this one has a powerfully dreamlike mood and one feels that Harness was impatient of any necessity to pay too much attention to making his worlds 'realistic' in the narrow sense. His stories are fantasies of science. In Aldiss's words 'They are not fantasy, nor are they scientific fiction. They are pure science fiction.'

Enemy of this nightmare totalitarian state is the secret Society of Thieves, who rob from the rich in order to raise money to buy slaves and set them free. One of these Thieves — the central character — is Alar who, in the tradition of heroes of this kind of adventure, has a mysterious background and knows little of his true identity. The heroine is Keiris, whom Haze-Gaunt has forced to marry him.

Through a complex but never confusing plot, packed with wonders and crammed with action, Alar wages war against the Lords of America Imperial, across Earth and the nearer planets, even to the Sun. The scene on the sun-station where Alar, by means of his special powers, takes vengeance on Count Shey — hoisting him, as it were, by his own petard — is alone worth getting the book for. The central plot — the pure SF element — deals, as in virtually all Harness's tales, with a time paradox. It is pretty certain that Alar is the survivor of an interstellar ship built on Earth that crashed five years before — yet that same ship has not been completed and even when it sets off Alar will not be on it!

One of the main things that raises Harness well above the rank and file of writers of this kind of story is that Harness is obviously much more intelligent and literate than his rivals. Whether he is talking about Relativity, Nuclear Physics, Toynbee's theories of History, philosophy in general, or duelling, one gets the impression that he really understands what he's writing — that he didn't lift it the day before from some Sunday Supplement or, what's even worse, someone else's story written the year before.

If you're bothered about a failing sense of wonder, *The Paradox Men* should give it a hefty shot in the arm.

Michael Moorcock

BOOKS FOR THE KIDS ?

FORGIVE ME IF I'm not always able to distinguish between juvenile SF and adult SF (the publishers aren't, it seems, eager to broadcast which is which, either) though a brighter dust-jacket tends to indicate a Juvenile. The first to hand is Andre Norton's *Judgement on Janus* (Gollancz, 13/6) — her usual story, a kid who makes out in a future Galactic Society, without a touch of originality anywhere. Miss Norton feasts off the hard work of earlier writers, looting their backgrounds and ideas and producing barren pastiche after barren pastiche. If you've read one, you've read 'em all. I like to think children deserve better. Somewhat better—and worth getting for a child as a present (or forcing your own to spend his book-token on) is *A Life For The Stars* (Faber, 15s.) by James Blish. There's nothing new here, either, but at least Blish is plagiarising himself to produce a juvenile version of his famous Oakie series. Though adding nothing to the saga, it would serve as a good introduction to the rest of the series. I mentioned that I was sometimes baffled — and I remember how I resented the appearance of *Life For The Stars* in ANALOG when I used to believe that that magazine was aimed at people over the age of sixteen. Apart from its lousy title, *Scavengers in Space* by Alan E. Nourse (Faber, 15s.) isn't a bad book for children. It's about two boys who go to the mining communities of the Asteroid Belt in order to discover the truth about their father's death. They clash with the rascally Jupiter Equilateral Mining Combine, survive surprises and spills and twists of plot to bring the killers to justice. A rather better cover than most juvenile titles. Once again part of this novel was originally published in an ostensibly adult SF magazine — AMAZING. It strikes me that some U.S. editors must have a cynical attitude towards their readers, for these aren't the only juveniles to appear in magazine form — Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars* springs to mind. IF published it, I bought it — and found myself done again!

I've had the feeling recently that I'm being cheated all

round. Poul Anderson's *Time And Stars* (Gollancz, 16s.) shows us a writer who, in all his working life, seems not to have developed at all. His best current stuff is as good as his best stuff of ten to fifteen years ago, his worst is as bad as ever. One of his worst and one of his best appear in this collection. The first is his worst — *No Truce With Kings* opens in a fort on the American frontier:

> 'The whole mess was drunk, and the junior officers at the far end of the table were only somewhat noisier than their seniors near the colonel. Rugs and hangings could not much muffle the racket, shouts, stamping boots, thump of fists on oak and clash of cups raised aloft, that rang from wall to stony wall. High up among shadows that hid the rafters they hung from, the regimental banners stirred in a draft, as if to join the chaos. Below, the light of bracketed lanterns and bellowing fireplace winked on trophies and weapons . . . Autumn comes early to Echo Summit . . . '

A slice from a pulp Western? Strictly speaking, yes. Though this pulp Western is dressed up as an SF story. It is badly written, highly reactionary and embarrassingly sentimental — and it won this year's Hugo Award for the best short fiction. I began writing my review before I heard that piece of news. I'm still bewildered — can it mean that the Hugo has become valueless as an indication of what is good? I'm equally bewildered at Gollancz for selecting it. I always had the impression that he was a left-wing publisher. Not any more, it seems.

Epilogue, the best, originally appeared in ANALOG and and I remember how excited I was when I first read it. It seemed to indicate then that both Anderson and the magazine were improving. Though the following issue proved me wrong, I still have hope for both. Earth's first interplanetary expedition returns to find the Earth devastated. Of the vegetation and animal-life they knew, nothing is left. In its place are primitive crystalline and metallic life-forms. The dominant form of life—robots who have learned to survive and propogate. The moving descriptions of this alien Earth, the character-drawing of the robots themselves, the pure flavour of brilliant

scientific SF, all contribute to make this Anderson's best.

The rest of the book is made up by mediocre stories, some marked by their excess sentimentality. The best of these is probably *Turning Point*. But never a dash of insight into his characters. Apart from the first story, which is bad writing as well as everything else, the rest are expertly presented.

Damon Knight's reputation is good, yet surely he can't have gained it from his fiction? I hoped his latest novel would be an improvement on his short stories, but no such luck. *Beyond the Barrier* (Gollancz, 15s.) has a few good, colourful scenes (rather reminiscent of Merritt), an incoherent plot never properly finished (lots of loose ends), signs of very hasty writing and conception and here, too, never a glimpse of a real human being. The end *must* be satire —

> 'It was pleasant to think that in a thousand years, or ten thousand, Zug and Man might meet again, and this time blend their powers into something greater. It would take that long, or longer; Naismith and his kind could afford to wait.
>
> 'For God is not born in a day.'

The second *New Writings in SF* (Dobson, 16s.) is a bit disappointing. Stories by Rackham, Hall, Kapp, Lack, Spencer, Etchison, Rankine, Green. Most of them suffer from overtired backgrounds, the like of which have been seen in SF for a good twenty years. The stories which succeed best are set on Earth. I've never been a great fan of Kapp's — his writing has in the past been erratic and derivative, using several different styles in a single paragraph when at its worst — but his *The Night Flame* is probably the best story in the collection. It is simply the story of a man who leaves his wife to investigate peculiar disturbances in the sky and learns that a war has been going on for some time between the West and the East. I won't spoil it for you by telling you any more. Lack is a new writer and a promising one. His basic idea is about machines which can faithfully reproduce exact copies of Old Masters. It is a moral tale discussing the nature of mankind's need to produce art. It's called *The*

Rogue Leonardo. A hard-cover collection of new SF stories is a revolutionary idea, but I can't help feeling that the stories themselves ought to be somewhat revolutionary, too. At the moment, perhaps, they are evolutionary —and time will show if the series succeeds in fulfilling the function of blowing fresh winds into the field, as I believe it can.

Lastly, a handful of paperbacks. From America, Berkley's *The Burning World* by J. G. Ballard (50c). A slightly different version of this is to be published later this year by Cape, and I hear the English version will be better. I found this version pretty good on its own — a kind of reversed *Drowned World*. It is filled with wonderful scenes of dried river beds, salt-flats, deserts, burning cities — like a series of beautiful surrealist landscapes. Baroque characters abound and the whole thing is beautifully written and described. The title, incidentally, isn't Ballard's!

The Best from F & SF is spoilt rather by over-praise (Panther, 3/6). It contains some competent stories by competent authors like Heinlein, Sturgeon and Tenn. A lovely story by Alfred Bester — *The Pi Man*. There is not, however, a single example of really 'literary' writing here — characterisation is stereotyped in a different way, that's all. Secondly many of the stories have been anthologised previously and the ones that haven't aren't, on the whole, worth getting. This is from FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, 1958-9, when it was on the wane. The magazine gained its reputation earlier, when it was producing better stories than anyone else — but the rest of the field has caught up with it since and, quite often, has overtaken it. Still, a better than average collection. Even better than this is Corgi's *A Decade of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (5s.) from the first ten years (1949-59) of the magazine of that name. An excellent collection, edited by Bob Mills. Stories by Boucher, McComas, Mills, Davidson (all ex-editors of F AND SF), Bester, Anderson, Asimov and others from 'within' the field. Stories from those 'outside' include Howard Fast, John Masefield, John Collier, Horace Walpole, and a grisly poem by Ogden Nash.

Whether it was due to a change of editors (Boucher edited the magazine for nine of those years) or a change in the material available, F AND SF hit its highest level under Boucher. I, for one, would plead for his return.

Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (Pan, 3/6) is a wonderful study of a run-down society of the future, told in the first person by a latter-day Teddy Boy in his own weird patois. It is powerful and horrifying — and spoiled by a hurried rather sentimental ending. Still much better than most of the stuff being produced inside the field at the moment.

James Colvin

TWO GOOD ONES

I have always considered Arthur Sellings to be a greatly under-estimated and neglected writer. True, his output hasn't been great, and in a world where a writer like Murray Leinster can get to the top, it is obvious that quantity comes before quality.

The Uncensored Man (Dobson, 16s.) however, should help Sellings on the way to the recognition that he deserves. Although in places one gets the idea that the novel has been designed for both the reader and the non-reader of sf, this never becomes obtrusive, and the novel remains both very original in idea and still science fiction in the complete sense of the term. People now become as important as ideas, and a large part of the content of the book is taken up with their relationships, making everything much more credible.

Mark Anders, the hero, works in a secret weapons establishment. At the opening, we find his marriage on the point of breaking up, and his mind filled with doubts about his work. Then an epileptic boy and a computer give the clues that lead him on the trail to his eventual discovery, a discovery of universe-encompassing implication.

This novel, I think, tends to illustrate the direction in which sf is going. The book is concerned with the mind. There are no rockets, no galactic strife, nothing save two men and a drug, but the resultant story is exciting, readable, and science fiction. Sellings extrapolates on ideas of Freud and Jung, incidentally producing about the first sf book I have ever seen which does not completely misrepresent Freud's ideas.

The writing is good, and the only fault I could find was the fact that in places the dialogue becomes rather stilted. The characters throw constant streams of witticisms at each other with a frequency that tends to produce a feeling of falseness — rather like looking at a group of people in a posed photograph. But fortunately this is only obtrusive in one section of the book. Apart from this, the writing is very interesting, readable and evocative.

One of the most fascinating things about this book, is the fact that Sellings has given us a story that conforms to all the rules of the 'standard' sf novel, and yet has produced something that is truly original and fresh.

This book is what sf should be, and all too often, is not. It is readable, gripping, well-written, and the whole comes neatly packed in a nicely designed dust-jacket. Certainly above-average sf.

The Syndic (Faber, 18s.) is described in the blurb as being a 'political thriller.' Rather, it is a sophisticated adventure story with strong political connotations. One may think that this is splitting hairs, but the distinction is, I think, rather important.

The novel is set in the future, and the setting is very intriguing. America is controlled on one side by the Syndic, on the other by the Mob, and the 'Government of North America' controls territory in places like Ireland. Not much is given to tell the reader the cause of decay of the previous form of government. The only clue comes in the very amusing paragraph that pokes fun at the English:

> "The forests came back to England. When finance there lost its morale and couldn't hack its way out of the paradoxes, that was the end. When that happens you've got to have a large, virile

criminal class ready to take over and do the work of distribution and production. Maybe some of you know how the English were. The poor buggers had civilized all the illegality out of the stock. They couldn't do anything that wasn't respectable. From sketchy reports, I gather that England is now forest and a few hundred starving people. One fellow says the men still wear derbies and stagger to their offices in the City."

And in that paragraph lies the clue to the incredible society of 'the fat, sloppy, happy Syndic.' The ideas on which the society is based, seem, when examined in the cold light of day, to be completely implausible. But somehow Kornbluth makes them seem absolutely real, and in the process, produces the only 'Utopian' society which really does seem pleasant.

The other forms of government come in for a little examination too. Of particular interest is the fact that when the hero, Charles Orsino, visits the naval base of the Government of North America, we see—through his eyes—some facets of our own society which after the Syndic look very sick indeed.

The adventure which takes up such a lot of the novel's length is very interesting; but one wishes that Kornbluth had spent more time describing the details of the societies and the political aspects of the situation. Maybe such a work would not have been as popular, but it would have been, perhaps, a near-great book. One feels that for Kornbluth the adventures were not as important as the things he was saying, and I wonder what this novel would have been like had he written if knowing that, whatever he wrote, it would sell.

The whole is written with tremendous aplomb, and Kornbluth casually strews the reader's path with shock after shock, all unexpected, and all carried off with great technical skill. The whole story is also packed with ideas; not the usual tortured clichés that often pass for ideas in a lot of substandard sf, but real honest-to-god *ideas* that make one break off and think for a while.

It is a temptation to quote paragraph after paragraph of this fascinating work, for the novel is packed with

eminently quotable remarks. I shall restrain myself with one final quote. This idea is tremendously relevant to Britain today, and is—in my opinion—the perfect answer to certain critics of some of the aspects of Britain's life:—

> "Every so often a wise guy comes to me whimpering that people are getting away with murder, collections are ten per cent below what they ought to be, the Falcaro Fund's being milked because fifteen per cent of the dough goes to people who aren't in need at all, eight per cent of the people getting old-age pensions aren't really past sixty. Get efficient, these people tell me. Save money by triple-checking collections. Save money by tightening up the Fund rules. Save money by a nice big vital-statistics system so we can check on pensioners. Yeah! Have people who might be *working* check on collections instead, and make enemies to boot whenever we catch somebody short. Make the Fund a grudging Scrooge instead of an open-handed sugar-daddy—and let people *worry* about their chances of making the Fund instead of *knowing* it'll take care of them if they're caught short. Set up a vital statistics system from birth to death, with numbers and fingerprints and house registration and maybe the gas chamber if you forget to report a change of address. You know what's wrong with the wise guys, Charles? Constipation. And they want to constipate the universe."

Edmund Crispin, in his introduction, suggests that the above extract contains some "none too easily digestible . . . food for thought about the Welfare State." As far as I am concerned, I found it to be eminently digestible. In fact *The Syndic* could be described—with no disrespect—in the words of Shelley Berman, as 'a kind of cerebral laxative.'

Langdon Jones

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I Remember, Anita . . .

. . . It is delightful to see British artists once more illustrating a British sf magazine, and all the artwork in NWSF 144 was of excellent quality. The rather Expressionist illustration to *Anita* I thought especially apposite. It may be better to allow one artist to dominate an issue, rather than to employ one per story; it could unify the whole issue.

As *I Remember, Anita* was the story given the biggest build-up in this issue I have concentrated my thoughts on it. One of 1964's most controversial tales you call it; by that I hope to God you don't mean because of its sexual content, for I don't think I could take another bout of Should There be more Sex In SF? Mr. Jones has as much right to employ blunt sexual realism as any non-sf writer . . . if he thinks it justified for his purpose . . . and in this case there is obviously a case for it, to present his characters as live, animal human beings. The sweaty realism of love and death has been employed to advantage by many writers, notably by the Existentialists. But when Sartre or Camus do this they use the *language* of realism. The strangest thing about this story was the combination of a narrative which shows all the warts, with a style, rather, a Style, which was extremely literary, at times even affected. The oft-repeated devise of 'I remember . . .' is one example of this, while the language itself too often drifted into neo-Hemingway; phrases like 'I stayed there, buried in the soft gentleness of you, I know not how long,' or 'the loin-heat that used to suffuse my abdomen,' again,

'. . . we used to march, hand-in-hand, in arm-swinging boisterousness down avenues of stars.'

Nobody speaks like that. Nobody even *thinks* like that. And there was enough of this sort of thing to be disconcerting in conjunction with the realism of the love and death scenes. This pretentiousness also was expressed in some surprisngly banal passages. How about: 'My God, you had never really been loved'° All this does not mean that I think Langdon Jones is a bad writer, only that I think that he was trying to be a Fine Writer. His theme was simple and powerful, it would surely have benefited from the use of simple and powerful language, rather than resorting to embarrassing and intrusive literary tricks. My second reservation about this story was the aura of incredible bitterness which pervaded it, no doubt part of the author's intention. All right, this was a tragedy, but one does not leave *Oedipus Rex* feeling angry with the Gods, but rather one feels cleansed of emotion. In expressing such bitterness Mr. Jones does not guard his characters against self-pity, the stink of which suffuses much of the story. If I seem over-critcal of this piece it is perhaps because the big build-up made me more sensitive than I might otherwise have been to its shortcomings. It was certainly the most adult item in this issue, and the strongest in emotion, but it was in my opinion over-written and suffered from an unfortunate placing of emphasis. If it is controversial, the controversy should be over the ability of sf fans to take adult and real themes. I hope Langdon Jones will be seen again in NEW WORLDS, and I hope if he is he ignores pseudo-literature, and keeps it simple.

Ivor Latto, 16, Merryton Avenue, Glasgow, W.5

A useful criticism. We're afraid (see later letter) that your fears re the Old Controversy were somewhat justified. We're equally sad. You win the new Harrison The Ethical Engineer *for the best letter in this issue.*

I Remember, Anita has a terrific impact, and both my wife and I enjoyed it. One of the most emotional stories we've ever read. Wonderful. However, a question: Could not the emotional impact be made just as effectively in another context (substitute earthquake for nuclear explosion, say)? In other words: Is it sf?

Tony Walsh, 38, Saxon Road, Bridgwater, Somerset

Since sf has always provided a vehicle for moral tales, and since this was undoubtedly a moral tale, we think its inclusion was justified in an sf magazine.

I'm not a prude, far from it! I enjoy pepper on my meat but I don't eat a lot of pepper with a little meat if you see what I mean. And that brings me right to the heart of the question. I mean *I Remember, Anita.* This could have been a gem, for future anthologies, but mark my prediction, it never will. The plot has all the markings for a fine story; it is in my opinion well written and reaches a good climax although sometimes somewhat crude in description, but let it pass, so was the situation! But why must Mr. Jones express the feelings of a young, sensitive artist so crudely! It isn't sex any more, it's downright pornography! What youngster, with refined artist's feelings, would so blatantly over-stress his sexual relation with an adored and respected mistress! No, sir, it should have had a more delicate touch. The author should have passed more lightly on that point and don't you forget the circulation of this magazine among young eager readers, who wants something else than trash just good enough to be sold under the counter. I think sex is all right in sf inasmuch it serves to give a little life to a plot. I won't squirm if it is a little spiced, *sometimes,* but in the story in question, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth because it is misplaced in the actual form. A *good* story don't need that and I refer to Tubb, White, Chandler, yourself mostly and to many other masters in the field. Am I mistaken if I take your editorials as a warning for shocks to come? All right, shocks it will be, but please note the difference between shock and disgust! Will sex rise its ugly head,

since you took the desk over? OK, with moderation please! I like better your stories than your Ed. politic!

Louis E. Van Gastel, 64, Avenue des Capucins, Alost, Belgium

To answer the only point we feel up to answering, we are not publishing a magazine for schoolboys. Indeed those magazines catering to schoolboys are, in our opinion, in many ways often more corrupting than anything we should ever publish.

Illustrations

In your Editorial in No. 144 you ask your readers to express their opinions about illustrations. No illustrations, please. Illustrations have given sf a bad name. I know this from personal experience because it is only recently that I have 'discovered' sf, having been put off by garish covers depicting bug-eyed monsters: I took the accompanying reading matter to be a decadent genre slanted towards sadistic boys, until I chanced upon a novel by Arthur C. Clarke. Then another dimension was added to my imaginative life and I have been devouring sf ever since . . . Anything in a magazine should make a positive contribution. I suggest that the illustrations in No. 144 detract from the issue.

Mrs. Elizabeth French Biscoe, 48, Brighton Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6

Somewhat Inconclusive

The Shores of Death was excellent, but somewhat inconclusive. Clovis seems to accept his own impotence too readily and the story builds up to a climax which is rather disappointing. However, certain characters, notably Take and Sharvis, seem to have been developed in great depth for the comparatively subsidiary roles they performed, so does this point to a sequel? Renark and his followers are a parallel.

C. J. Marriner, 3B, Underhill Road, Dulwich, S.E.22

A sequel wasn't planned, but we get your meaning!

Story Ratings No. 145

1	The Shores of Death (2)	.... Michael Moorcock
2	Mix-up	George Collyn
3	Gamma Positive	Ernest Hill
4	Some Will Be Saved	Colin R. Fry
5	Emissary	John Hamilton
6	The Patch	Peter Woods

Next month's issue will contain the conclusion (with several twists in the tail) of The Power of Y, and some excellent short stories by Richard Wilson, James Colvin, George Collyn, John Hamilton and John Baxter.

And don't miss the next

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SF HORIZONS, professional magazine of SF criticism. For first issue send P.O. for 3/10 to Tom Boardman, Bus. Manager, SFH, Pelham, Priory Road, Sunningdale, Berks, England.

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