

**NEW WORLDS**

**SF**

**2'6**

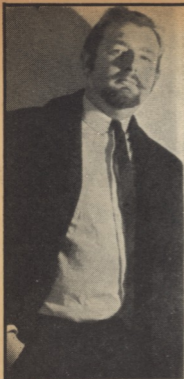
**150<sup>TH</sup>**

**ALL  
STAR  
ISSUE**

**BALLARD  
BRUNNER**

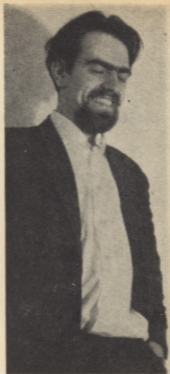
**VANCE  
TUBB**

**HARNESS  
ALDISS**



MICHAEL  
MOORCOCK

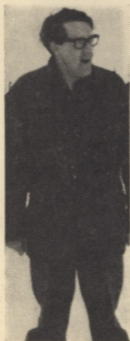
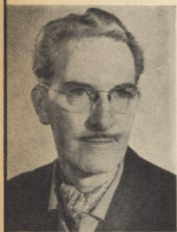
LANGDON  
JONES



E. C.  
TUBB



E. J. CARNELL



**150** THE  
BRITISH  
CONTRIB-  
UTORS



BRIAN ALDISS  
(above)

JOHN BRUNNER  
(left)

J. G. BALLARD  
(right)



# NEW WORLDS



MAY 1965

Vol. 48 No. 150

---

## Contents

Time Trap ... ..	<i>Charles L. Harness</i>	5
The Small Betraying Detail	<i>Brian W. Aldiss</i> ...	39
Nobody Axed You ...	<i>John Brunner</i> ...	49
Prisoner of the Coral Deep	<i>J. G. Ballard</i> ...	82
Alfred's Ark ... ..	<i>Jack Vance</i> ... ..	89
The Life Buyer (2) ...	<i>E. C. Tubb</i> ... ..	96

---

### Guest Editorial:

Long Shadows ... ..	<i>John Carnell</i> ...	2
---------------------	-------------------------	---

### Special Feature:

Photographs of the British Contributors	Inside Cover
Recommended Paperbacks	<i>James Colvin</i> ... 48
The Contributors ... ..	... .. 88 and page 95
Classified Advertisements	... .. 128

Cover designed by Robert J. Tilley.

---

**Edited by Michael Moorcock**  
**Assistant Editor Langdon Jones**

**Editorial Office:**

**17, Lake House, Scovell Road, London, S.E.1.**

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

For this special issue we drop most of our usual features to make room for an extra short story, and we step out of the editorial chair to make room for John Carnell, who, as editor of NEW WORLDS for so many years, did much more than we have done to ensure us celebrating our 150th issue.

## LONG SHADOWS

John Carnell

---

THE 150TH ISSUE OF NEW WORLDS SF! A monument to British science fiction with nearly 1,000 stories already published within its pages, containing over 7,000,000 words of SF. More than 30 book-length serials and over 150 contributing authors have appeared within its variegated covers since that first diffident issue in October, 1946 with its crude atomic bomb painting showing a rebirth from the ashes. A minor galaxy of literary names who have cast long shadows across the face of SF literature have embroidered its contents pages: new writers who went on to become stars—Arthur C. Clarke, John Christopher, Charles Eric Maine, Brian W. Aldiss, John Wyndham, J. G. Ballard, J. T. McIntosh; American authors already famous in their own right—Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert A. Heinlein, C. M. Kornbluth, Robert Sheckley, Philip K. Dick, Richard Wilson, A. E. van Vogt. Few are the “greats” who have not at one time graced its pages and innumerable are the unknowns who have come and gone yet still left their mark.

The magazine's very existence is inextricably entwined with the history of British science fiction, its record an impressive one of endeavour, experimentation and achievement, of battles with distribution, rising costs, contemporary opposition and the constant cycle of replenishing the

gaps left by authors who graduated to other markets. Six times the magazine has changed printers; four times size; three times publishers and once editors. It was originally an irregular publication, then bi-monthly, monthly, again bi-monthly and now back to monthly, yet during all these upheavals and changing patterns, the one primary object by everyone concerned in its presentation has been high quality science fiction and first-class entertainment value. A factor which this 150th milestone in its history proves has been successful.

It is not, however, the bald history of the magazine which stands out in my mind (the early years were covered in an article in No. 14 entitled "The Circle of the White Horse" by Frank Arnold) but the personalities of the authors as they developed over the years. Almost all of them were and still are dedicated to the writing of SF rather than the expectations of easy money or a quick fortune in a medium far more difficult to write than general fiction. Short story rates have always been low by general standards but *good* SF stories have continued to earn money for their authors by anthologization and translation as the interest in the genre has continued to expand. Similarly, a good SF novel starting as a serial in a magazine, can expect to earn far more than the average thriller or general novel and the authors who came into the field between ten and twenty-five years ago *and stayed* are now reaping their reward for the lean years. Few writers in other fields can expect to be earning money *now* from material written and published a decade or more ago!

Those who stayed and those who have joined the ranks in the last ten years have made good because they were convinced that science fiction had a colourful future in the world; that it was the *only* literature designed to present adequately the vast technological world of today. A limited but talented few have made their mark in the general field of literature but freely confess that the groundwork they learned in the tough SF market was invaluable to their success.

Today, on both sides of the Atlantic, new writers have taken over the citadel built by the pioneers. Inside the

walls of the bastion the tapestry already has a well-defined picture where forty years ago there was but a bare canvas with a faint outline blocked in. On the new writers depends to a large extent the shape and pattern of the picture still to come. It is easier to be accepted now as a science fiction writer but harder to think of new ideas or new approaches to old ideas. This is the crusade today's writers have to fight, with fresh insight into ideas, sweeping concepts, better literary standards. The days of sail are over, we are already passing out of the jet age into the space age—an era only dreamed and written about by those pioneers of twenty-five years and more ago. A vast new technology shakes the world and in it the SF writer has a very special and prominent place.

In particular, this magazine has always held a unique position in the structure of British SF. I salute its editor, publisher, writers and readers on this memorable occasion and look forward perhaps to contributing in its 21st Anniversary issue in October 1967.

John Carnell

---

## STORY RATINGS NWSF 148

1	Sunjammer	...	...	...	<i>Arthur C. Clarke</i>
2	All The King's Men	...	...	...	<i>B. J. Bayley</i>
3	Dune Limbo	...	...	...	<i>J. G. Ballard</i>
4	Escape from Evening	...	...	...	<i>Michael Moorcock</i>
5	The Uncivil War...	...	...	...	<i>R. J. Tilley</i>
6	First Dawn	...	...	...	<i>Donald Malcolm</i>

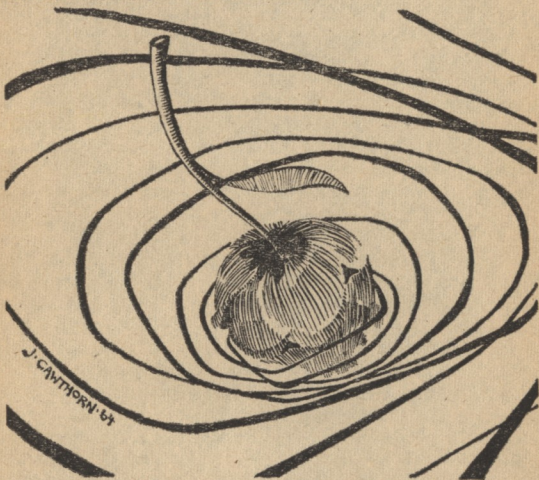
---

NWSF No. 151 will feature the conclusion of E. C. Tubb's THE LIFE BUYER and will contain short stories by Bayley, Mackleworth, Collyn and new U.S. writer Vernor Vinge.

The Great Ones themselves never agreed whether the events constituting Troy's cry for help had a beginning. But the warning signal did have an end. The Great Ones saw to that. Those of the Great Ones who claim a beginning for the story date it with the expulsion of the evil Sathanas from the Place of Suns, when he fled, horribly wounded, spiralling evasively inward, through stereochronia without number, until, exhausted, he sank and lay hidden in the crystallizing magma of a tiny new planet at the galactic rim.

**CHARLES L. HARNESS'**

---



---

## **TIME TRAP**

GENERAL BLADE SOMETIMES felt that leading a resistance movement was far exceeding his debt to decent society and that one day soon he would allow his peaceful nature

to override his indignant pursuit of justice. Killing a man, even a very bad man, without a trial, went against his grain. He sighed and rapped on the table.

"As a result of Blogshak's misappropriation of funds voted to fight the epidemic," he announced, "the death toll this morning reached over one hundred thousand. Does the Assassination Subcommittee have a recommendation?"

A thin-lipped man rose from the gathering. "The Provinarch ignored our warning," he said rapidly. "This subcommittee, as you all know, some days ago set an arbitrary limit of one hundred thousand deaths. Therefore this subcommittee now recommends that its plan for killing the Provinarch be adopted at once. Tonight is very favourable for our plan, which, incidentally, requires a married couple. We have thoroughly catasynthesized the four bodyguards who will be with him on this shift and have provided irresistible scent and sensory stimuli for the woman. The probability for its success insofar as assassination is concerned is about seventy-eight per cent; the probability of escape of our killers is sixty-two per cent. We regard these probabilities as favourable. The Legal Subcommittee will take it from there."

Another man arose. "We have retained Mr. Poole, who is with us tonight." He nodded gravely to a withered little man beside him. "Although Mr. Poole has been a member of the bar but a short time, and although his pre-legal life—some seventy years of it—remains a mystery which he does not explain, our catasynthesis laboratory indicates that his legal knowledge is profound. More important, his persuasive powers, tested with a trial group of twelve professional evaluators, sort of a rehearsal for a possible trial, border on hypnosis. He has also suggested an excellent method of disposing of the corpse to render identification difficult. According to Mr. Poole, if the assassins are caught, the probability of escaping the devitalizing chamber is fifty-three per cent."

"Mr. Chairman!"

General Blade turned toward the new speaker, who stood quietly several rows away. The man seemed to reflect a



grey inconspicuousness, relieved only by a gorgeous rose-bud in his lapel. Grey suit, grey eyes, greying temples. On closer examination, one detected an edge of flashing blue in the greyness. The eyes no longer seemed softly unobtrusive, but icy, and the firm mouth and jutting chin seemed polished steel. General Blade had observed this phenomenon dozens of times, but he never tired of it.

"You have the floor, Major Troy," he said.

"I, and perhaps other League officers, would like to know more about Mr. Poole," came the quiet faintly metallic voice. "He is not a member of the League, and yet Legal and Assassination welcome him in their councils. I think we should be provided some assurance that he has no associations with the Provinarch's administration. One traitor could sell the lives of all of us."

The Legal spokesman arose again. "Major Troy's objections are in some degree merited. We don't know who Mr. Poole is. His mind is absolutely impenetrable to telepathic probes. His fingerprint and eye vein patterns are a little obscure. Our attempts at identification"—he laughed sheepishly—"always key out to yourself, major. An obvious impossibility. So far as the world is concerned, Mr. Poole is an old man who might have been born yesterday! All we know of him is his willingness to co-operate with us to the best of his ability—which, I can assure you, is tremendous. The catasynthesizer has established his sympathetic attitude beyond doubt. Don't forget, too, that he could be charged as a principal in this assassination and devitalized himself. On the whole, he is our man. If our killers are caught, we must use him."

Troy turned and studied the little lawyer with narrowing eyes; Poole's face seemed oddly familiar. The old man returned the gaze sardonically, with a faint suggestion of a smile.

"Time is growing short, major," urged the Assassination chairman. "The Poole matter has already received the attention of qualified League investigators. It is not a proper matter for discussion at this time. If you are satisfied with the arrangements, will you and Mrs. Troy please assemble the childless married couples on your list? The

men can draw lots from the fish bowl on the side table. The red ball decides." He eyed Troy expectantly.

Still standing, Troy looked down at the woman in the adjacent seat. Her lips were half-parted, her black eyes sombre pools as she looked up at her husband.

"Well, Ann?" he telepathed.

Her eyes seemed to look through him and far beyond. "He will make you draw the red ball, Jon," she murmured, trancelike. "Then he will die, and I will die. But Jon Troy will never die. Never die. Never die. Nev——"

"Wake up, Ann!" Troy shook her by the shoulder. To the puzzled faces about them, he explained quickly, "My wife is something of a seeress." He 'pathed again. "Who is *he*?"

Ann Troy brushed the black hair from her brow slowly. "It's all confused. *He* is someone in this room—" She started to get up.

"Sit down, dear," said Troy gently. "If I'm to draw the red ball, I may as well cut this short." He slid past her into the aisle, strode to the side table, and thrust his hand into the hole in the box sitting there.

Every eye was on him.

His hand hit the invisible fish bowl with its dozen-odd plastic balls. Inside the bowl, he touched the little spheres at random while he studied the people in the room. All old friends, except—Poole. That tantalizing face. Poole was now staring like the rest, except that beads of sweat were forming on his forehead.

Troy swirled the balls around the bowl; the muffled clatter was audible throughout the room. He felt his fingers close on one. His hands were perspiring freely. With an effort he forced himself to drop it. He chose another, and looked at Poole. The latter was frowning. Troy could not bring his hand out of the bowl. His right arm seemed partially paralysed. He dropped the ball and rolled the mass around again. Poole was now smiling. Troy hesitated a moment, then picked a ball from the centre of the bowl. It felt slightly moist. He pulled it out, looked at it grimly, and held it up for all to see.

"Just 'path that!" whispered the jail warden reverently to the night custodian.

"You know I can't telepath," said the latter grumpily. "What are they saying?"

"Not a word all night. They seem to be taking a symposium of the best piano concertos since maybe the twentieth century. Was Chopin twentieth or twenty-first? Anyhow, they're up to the twenty-third now, with Darnoval. Troy reproduces the orchestra and his wife does the piano. You'd think she had fifty years to live instead of five minutes."

"Both seem nice people," ruminated the custodian. "If they hadn't killed the Provinarch, maybe they'd have become famous 'pathic musicians. She had a lousy lawyer. She could have got off with ten years sleep if he'd half tried." He pushed some papers across the desk. "I've had the chamber checked. Want to look over the readings?"

The warden scanned them rapidly. "Potential difference, eight million; drain rate, ninety vital units/minute; estimated period of consciousness, thirty seconds; estimated durance to non-recovery point, four minutes; estimated durance to legal death, five minutes." He initialled the front sheet. "That's fine. When I was younger they called it the 'vitality drain chamber.' Drain rate was only two v.u./min. Took an hour to drain them to unconsciousness. Pretty hard on the condemned people. Well, I'd better go officiate."

When Jon and Ann Troy finished the Darnoval concerto they were silent for a few moments, exchanging simply a flow of wordless, unfathomable perceptions between their cells. Troy was unable to disguise a steady beat of gloom. "We'll have to go along with Poole's plan," he 'pathed, "though I confess I don't know what his idea is. Take your capsule now."

His mind registered the motor impulses of her medulla as she removed the pill from its concealment under her armpit and swallowed it. Troy then perceived her awareness of her cell door opening, of grim men and women about her. Motion down corridors. Then the room. A

clanging of doors. A titanic effort to hold their fading contact. One last despairing communion, loving, tender.

Then nothing.

He was still sitting with his face buried in his hands, when the guards came to take him to his own trial that morning.

“This murder,” announced the Peoples’ advocate to the twelve evaluators, “this crime of taking the life of our beloved Provinarch Blogshak, this heinous deed—is the most horrible thing that has happened in Niork in my lifetime. The creature charged with this crime”—he pointed an accusing finger at the prisoner’s box—“Jon Troy has been psyched and has been adjudged integrated at a preliminary hearing. Even his attorney”—here bowing ironically to a beady-eyed little man at counsels’ table—“waived the defence of non-integration.”

Poole continued to regard the Peoples’ advocate with bitter weariness, as though he had gone through this a thousand times and knew every word that each of them was going to say. The prisoner seemed oblivious to the advocate, the twelve evaluators, the judge, and the crowded courtroom. Troy’s mind was blanked out. The dozen or so educated telepaths in the room could detect only a deep beat of sadness.

“I shall prove,” continued the inexorable advocate, “that this monster engaged our late Provinarch in conversation in a downtown bar, surreptitiously placed a lethal dose of *skon* in the Provinarch’s glass, and that Troy and his wife—who, incidentally, paid the extreme penalty herself early this—”

“Objection!” cried Poole, springing to his feet. “The defendant, not his wife, is now on trial.”

“Sustained,” declared the judge. “The advocate may not imply to the evaluators that the possible guilt of the present defendant is in any way determined by the proven guilt of any past defendant. The evaluators must ignore that implication. Proceed, advocate.”

“Thank you, your honour.” He turned again to the evaluators’ box and scanned them with a critical eye. “I

shall prove that the prisoner and the late Mrs. Troy, after poisoning Provinarch Blogshak, carried his corpse into their sedan, and that they proceeded then to a deserted area on the outskirts of the city. Unknown to them they were pursued by four of the mayor's bodyguards, who, alas, had been lured aside at the bar by Mrs. Troy. Psychometric determinations taken by the police laboratory will be offered to prove it was the prisoner's intention to dismember the corpse and burn it to hinder the work of the police in tracing the crime to him. He had got only as far as severing the head when the guards' ship swooped up and hovered overhead. He tried to run back to his own ship, where his wife was waiting, but the guards blanketed the area with a low-voltage stun."

The advocate paused. He was not getting the reaction in the evaluators he deserved, but he knew the fault was not his. He was puzzled; he would have to conclude quickly.

"Gentlemen," he continued gravely, "for this terrible thing, the Province demands the life of Jon Troy. The monster must enter the chamber tonight." He bowed to the judge and returned to counsels' table.

The judge acknowledged the retirement and turned to Poole. "Does the defence wish to make an opening statement?"

"The defence reiterates its plea of 'not guilty' and makes no other statement," grated the old man.

There was a buzz around the advocates' end of the table. An alert defence with a weak case always opened to the evaluators. Who was this Poole? What did he have? Had they missed a point? The prosecution was committed now. They'd have to start with their witnesses.

The advocate arose. "The prosecution offers as witness Mr. Fonstile."

"Mr. Fonstile!" called the clerk.

A burly, resentful-looking man blundered his way from the benches and walked up to the witness box and was sworn in.

Poole was on his feet. "May it please the court!" he croaked.

The judge eyed him in surprise. "Have you an objection, Mr. Poole?"

"No objection, your honour," rasped the little man, without expression. "I would only like to say that the testimony of this witness, the bartender in the Shawn Hotel, is probably offered by my opponent to prove facts which the defence readily admits, namely, that the witness observed Mrs. Troy entice the four bodyguards of the deceased to another part of the room, that the present defendant surreptitiously placed a powder in the wine of the deceased, that the deceased drank the wine and collapsed, and was carried out of the room by the defendant, followed by his wife." He bowed to the judge and sat down.

The judge was nonplussed. "Mr. Poole, do you understand that you are responsible for the defence of this prisoner, and that he is charged with a capital offence?"

"That is my understanding, your honour."

"Then if prosecution is agreeable, and wishes to elicit no further evidence from the witness, he will be excused."

The advocate looked puzzled, but called the next witness, Dr. Warkon, of the Provincial Police Laboratory. Again Poole was on his feet. This time the whole court eyed him expectantly. Even Troy stared at him in fascination.

"May it please the court," came the now-familiar monotone, "the witness called by the opposition probably expects to testify that the deceased's fingerprints were found on the wine glass in question, that traces of deceased's saliva were identified in the liquid content of the glass, and that a certain quantity of *skon* was found in the wine remaining in the glass."

"And one other point, Mr. Poole," added the Peoples' advocate. "Dr. Warkon was going to testify that death from *skon* poisoning normally occurs within thirty seconds, owing to syncope. Does the defence concede that?"

"Yes."

"The witness is then excused," ordered the judge.

The prisoner straightened up. Troy studied his attorney curiously. The mysterious Poole with the tantalizing face,

the man so highly recommended by the League, had let Ann go to her death with the merest shadow of a defence. And now he seemed even to state the prosecution's case rather than defend the prisoner.

Nowhere in the courtroom did Troy see a League member. But then, it would be folly for General Blade to attempt his rescue. That would attract unwelcome attention to the League.

He had been abandoned, and was on his own. Many League officers had been killed by Blogshak's men, but rarely in the devitalizing chamber. It was a point of honour to die weapon in hand. His first step would be to seize a blaster from one of the guards, use the judge as a shield, and try to escape through the judge's chambers. He would wait until he was put on the stand. It shouldn't be long, considering how Poole was cutting corners.

The advocate was conferring with his assistants. "What's Poole up to?" one of them asked. "If he is going on this far, why not get him to admit all the facts constituting a prima facie case: Malice, intent to kill, and all that?"

The advocate's eyes gleamed. "I think I know what he's up to now," he exulted. "I believe he's forgotten an elementary theorem of criminal law. He's going to admit everything, then demand we produce Blogshak's corpse. He must know it was stolen from the bodyguards when their ship landed at the port. No corpse, no murder, he'll say. But you don't need a corpse to prove murder. We'll hang him with his own rope!" He arose and addressed the judge.

"May it please the court, the prosecution would like to ask if the defence will admit certain other facts which I stand ready to prove."

The judge frowned. "The prisoner pleaded not guilty. Therefore the court will not permit any admission of the defence to the effect that the prisoner did kill the deceased, unless he wants to change his plea." He looked inquiringly at Poole.

"I understand, your honour," said Poole. "May I hear what facts the learned prosecutor wishes me to accede to?"

For a moment the prosecutor studied his enigmatic antagonist like a master swordsman.

"First, the prisoner administered a lethal dose of *skon* to the deceased with malice aforethought, and with intent to kill. Do you concede that?"

"Yes."

"And that the deceased collapsed within a few seconds and was carried from the room by the defendant and his wife?"

"We agree to that."

"And that the prisoner carried the body to the city outskirts and there decapitated it?"

"I have already admitted that."

The twelve evaluators, a selected group of trained experts in the estimation of probabilities, followed this unusual procedure silently.

"Then your honour, the prosecution rests." The advocate felt dizzy, out of his depth. He felt he had done all that was necessary to condemn the prisoner. Yet Poole seemed absolutely confident, almost bored.

"Do you have any witnesses, Mr. Poole?" queried the judge.

"I will ask the loan of Dr. Warkon, if the Peoples' advocate will be so kind," replied the little man.

"I'm willing." The advocate was beginning to look harassed. Dr. Warkon was sworn in.

"Dr. Warkon, did not the psychometer show that the prisoner intended to kill Blogshak in the tavern and decapitate him at the edge of the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was, in fact, the deceased dead when he was carried from the hotel?"

"He had enough *skon* in him to have killed forty people."

"Please answer the question."

"Well, I don't know. I presume he was dead. As an expert, looking at all the evidence, I should say he was dead. If he didn't die in the room, he was certainly dead a few seconds later."



"Did you feel his pulse at any time, or make any examination to determine the time of death?"

"Well, no."

Now, thought the advocate, comes the no corpse, no murder. If he tries that, I've got him.

But Poole was not to be pushed.

"Would you say the deceased was dead when the prisoner's ship reached the city limits?"

"Absolutely!"

"When you, as police investigator, examined the scene of the decapitation, what did you find?"

"The place where the corpse had lain was easily identified. Depressions in the sand marked the back, head, arms, and legs. The knife was lying where the prisoner dropped it. Marks of landing gear of the prisoner's ship were about forty feet away. Lots of blood, of course."

"Where was the blood?"

"About four feet away from the head, straight out."

Poole let the statement sink in, then:

"Dr. Warkon, as a doctor of medicine, do you realize the significance of what you have just said?"

The witness gazed at his inquisitor as though hypnotized. "Four feet . . . jugular spurt—" he muttered to no one. He stared in wonder, first at the withered, masklike face before him, then at the advocate, then at the judge. "Your honour, the deceased's heart was still beating when the prisoner first applied the knife. The poison didn't kill him!"

An excited buzz resounded through the courtroom.

Poole turned to the judge. "Your honour, I move for a summary judgment of acquittal."

The advocate sprang to his feet, wordless.

"Mr. Poole," remonstrated the judge, "your behaviour this morning has been extraordinary, to say the least. On the bare fact that the prisoner killed with a knife instead of with poison, as the evidence at first indicated, you ask summary acquittal. The court will require an explanation."

"Your honour"—there was a ghost of a smile flitting about the prim, tired mouth—"to be guilty of a crime, a

man must intend to commit a crime. There must be a *mens rea*, as the classic expression goes. The act and the intent must coincide. Here they did not. Jon Troy intended to kill the Provinarch in the bar of the Shawn Hotel. He gave him poison, but Blogshak didn't die of it. Certainly up to the time the knife was thrust into Blogshak's throat, Troy may have been guilty of assault and kidnapping, but not murder. If there was any murder, it must have been at the instant he decapitated the deceased. Yet what was his intent on the city outskirts? He wanted to mutilate a corpse. His intent was not to murder, but to mutilate. We have the act, but not the intent—no *mens rea*. Therefore the act was not murder, but simply mutilation of a corpse—a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment, but not death."

Troy's mind was whirling. This incredible, dusty little man had freed him.

"But Troy's a murderer!" shouted the advocate, his face white. "Sophisms can't restore a life!"

"The court does not recognize the advocate!" said the judge harshly. "Cut those remarks from the record," he directed the scanning clerk. "This court is guided by the principles of common law descended from ancient England. The learned counsel for the defence has stated those principles correctly. Homicide is not murder if there is no intent to kill. And mere intent to kill is not murder if the poison doesn't take effect. This is a strange, an unusual case, and it is revolting for me to do what I have to do. I acquit the prisoner."

"Your honour!" cried the advocate. Receiving recognition, he proceeded. "This . . . this felon should not escape completely. He should not be permitted to make a travesty of the law. His own counsel admits he has broken the statutes on kidnapping, assault, and mutilation. The evaluators can at least return a verdict of guilty on those counts."

"I am just as sorry as you are," replied the judge, "but I don't find those counts in the indictment. You should have included them."

"If you release him, you honour, I'll re-arrest him and frame a new indictment."

"This court will not act on it. It is contrary to the Constitution of this Province for a person to be prosecuted twice on the same charge or on a charge which should have been included in the original indictment. The Peoples' advocate is estopped from taking further action on this case. This is the final ruling of this court." He took a drink of water, wrapped his robes about him, and strode through the rear of the courtroom to his chambers.

Troy and Poole, the saved and the saviour, eyed one another with the same speculative look of their first meeting.

Poole opened the door of the 'copter parked outside the Judiciary Building and motioned for Troy to enter. Troy froze in the act of climbing in.

A man inside the cab, with a face like a claw, was pointing a blaster at his chest.

*The man was Blogshak!*

Two men recognizable as the Provinarch's bodyguards suddenly materialized behind Troy.

"Don't give us any trouble, major," murmured Poole easily. "Better get in."

The moment Troy was pushed into the subterranean suite he sensed Ann was alive—drugged insensate still, but alive, and near. This knowledge suppressed momentarily Blogshak's incredible existence and Poole's betrayal. Concealing his elation, he turned to Poole.

"I should like to see my wife."

Poole motioned silently to one of the guards, who pulled back sliding doors. Beyond a glass panel, which was actually a transparent wall of a tile room, Ann lay on a high white metal bed. A nurse was on the far side of the bed, exchanging glances with Poole. At some unseen signal from him the nurse swabbed Anne's left arm and thrust a syringe into it.

A shadow crossed Troy's face. "What is the nurse doing?"

"In a moment Mrs. Troy will awaken. Whether she stays awake depends on you."

"On me? What do you mean?"

“Major, what you are about to learn can best be demonstrated rather than described. Sharg, the rabbit!”

The beetle-browed man opened a large enamel pan on the table. A white rabbit eased its way out, wrinkling its nose gingerly. Sharg lifted a cleaver from the table. There was a flash of metal, a spurt of blood, and the rabbit's head fell to the floor. Sharg picked it up by the ears and held it up expectantly. The eyes were glazed almost shut. The rabbit's body lay limp in the pan. At a word from Poole, Sharg carefully replaced the severed head, pressing it gently to the bloody neck stub. Within seconds the nose twitched, the eyes blinked, and the ears perked up. The animal shook itself vigorously, scratched once or twice at the bloody ring around its neck, then began nibbling at a head of lettuce in the pan.

Troy's mind was racing. The facts were falling in line. All at once everything made sense. With knowledge came utmost wariness. The next move was up to Poole, who was examining with keen eyes the effect of his demonstration on Troy.

“Major, I don't know how much you have surmised, but at least you cannot help realizing that life, even highly organized vertebrate life, is resistant to death in your presence.”

Troy folded his arms but volunteered nothing. He was finally getting a glimpse of the vast and secret power supporting the Provinarch's tyranny, long suspected by the League but never verified.

“You could not be expected to discover this marvellous property in yourself except by the wildest chance,” continued Poole. “As a matter of fact, our staff discovered it only when Blogshak and his hysterical guards reported to us, after your little escapade. But we have been on the lookout for your type for years. Several mutants with this characteristic have been predicted by our probability geneticists for this century, but you are the first known to us—really perhaps the only one in existence. One is all we need.”

“As a second and final test of your power, we decided to try the effect of your aura on a person in the devitalizing

chamber. For that reason we permitted Mrs. Troy to be condemned, when we could easily have prevented it. As you now know, your power sustained your wife's life against a strong drain of potential. At my instruction she drugged herself in her cell simply to satisfy the doctor who checked her pulse and reflexes afterwards. When the staff—my employers—examined her here, they were convinced that you had the mutation they were looking for, and we put the finishing touches on our plans to save you from the chamber.”

Granting I have some strange biotic influence, thought Troy, still, something's wrong. He says his bunch became interested in me *after* my attempt on Blogshak. *But Poole was at the assassination meeting!* What is his independent interest?

Poole studied him curiously. “I doubt that you realize what tremendous efforts have been made to ensure your presence here. For the past two weeks the staff has hired several thousand persons to undermine the critical faculties of the four possible judges and nine hundred evaluators who might have heard your case. Judge Gallon, for example, was not in an analytical mood this morning because we saw to it that he won the Province Chess Championship with his Inner Gambit—a prize he has sought for thirty years. But if he had fooled us and given your case to the evaluators, we were fairly certain of a favourable decision. You noticed how they were not concentrating on the advocate's opening statement? They couldn't; they were too full of the incredible good fortune they had encountered the previous week. Sommers had been promoted to a full professorship at the Provincial University. Gunnard's obviously faulty thesis on space strains had been accepted by the *Steric Quarterly*—after we bought the magazine. But why go on? Still, if the improbable had occurred, and you had been declared guilty by the evaluators, we would simply have spirited you away from the courtroom. With a few unavoidable exceptions, every spectator in the room was a trained staff agent, ready to use his weapons—though in the presence of your aura, I doubt they could have hurt anyone.

"Troy, the staff had to get you here, but we preferred to do it quietly. Now, why are you here? I'll tell you. Your aura, we think, will keep——" Poole hesitated. "Your aura will keep . . . *It* . . . from dying during an approaching crisis in its life stream."

"It? What is this 'it'? And what makes you so sure I'll stay?"

"The staff has not authorized me to tell you more concerning the nature of the entity you are to protect. Suffice to say that *It* is a living, sentient being. And I think you'll stay, because the hypo just given Mrs. Troy was pure *skon*."

Troy had already surmised as much. The move was perfect. If he stayed near her, Ann, though steeped in the deadliest known poison, would not die. But why had they been so sure he would not stay willingly, without Ann as hostage? He 'pathed the thought to Poole, who curtly refused to answer.

"Now, major, I'm going to turn this wing of the City Building over to you. For your information, your aura is effective for a certain distance within the building, but just how far I'm not going to tell you. However, you are not permitted to leave your apartment at all. The staff has demoted the Provinarch, and he's now the corporal of your bodyguard. He would be exceedingly embarrassed if you succeeded in leaving. Meals will be brought to you regularly. The cinematic and micro library is well stocked on your favourite subjects. Special concessions may even be made as to things you want in town. But you can never touch your wife again. That pane of glass will always be between you. A psychic receptor tuned to your personality integration is fixed within Mrs. Troy's room. If you break the glass panel, or in any other way attempt to enter the room, the receptor will automatically actuate a bomb mechanism imbedded beneath Mrs. Troy's cerebellum. She would be blown to little bits—each of them alive as long as you were around. It grieves us to be crude, but the situation requires some such safeguard."

"When will my wife recover consciousness?"

"Within an hour or so. But what's your hurry? You'll be here longer than you think."

The little lawyer seemed lost in thought for a moment. Then he signalled Blogshak and the guards, and the four left. Blogshak favoured Troy with a venomous scowl as he closed and locked the door.

There was complete and utter silence. Even the rabbit sat quietly on the table, blinking its eyes at Troy.

Left alone, the man surveyed the room, his perceptions palpating every square foot rapidly but carefully. He found nothing unusual. He debated whether to explore the wing further or to wait until Ann awakened. He decided on the latter course. The nurse had left. They were together, with just a sheet of glass between. He explored Ann's room mentally, found nothing.

Then he walked to the centre table and picked up the rabbit. There was the merest suggestion of a cicatrix encircling the neck.

Wonderful, but frightful, thought Troy. Who, what, am I?

He put the rabbit back in the box, pulled a comfortable armchair against the wall opposite the glass panel, where he had a clear view of Ann's room, and began a methodical attempt to rationalize the events of the day.

He was jolted from his reverie by an urgent 'pathic call from Ann. After a flurry of tender perceptions each unlocked his mind to the other.

Poole had planted an incredible message in Ann's ESP lobe.

"Jon," she warned, "it's coded to the Dar— . . . I mean, it's coded to the notes and frequencies of our last concerto, in the death house. You'll have to synchronize. I'll start."

How did Poole know we were familiar with the concerto thought Troy.

"Think on this carefully, Jon Troy, and guard it well," urged Poole's message. "I cannot risk my identity, but I am your friend. It—the Outcast—has shaped the destinies of vertebrate life on earth for millions of years, for two purposes. One is a peculiar kind of food. The other is . . .

you. You have been brought here to preserve an evil life. But I urge you, develop your latent powers and destroy that life!

“Jon Troy, the evil this entity has wreaked upon the earth, entirely through his human agents thus far, is incalculable. It will grow even worse. You thought a sub-electronic virus caused the hundred thousand deaths which launched you on your assassination junket. Not so! The monster in the earth directly beneath you simply drained them of vital force, in their homes, on the street, in the theatre, anywhere and everywhere. Your puny League has been fighting the Outcast for a generation without the faintest conception of the real enemy. If you have any love for humanity, search Blogshak’s mind today. The staff physicians will be in this wing of the building today, too. Probe them. This evening, if I am still alive, I shall explain more, in person, free from Blogshak’s crew.”

“You have been wondering about the nature of the being whose life you are protecting,” said Poole in a low voice, as he looked about the room. “As you learned when you searched the minds of the physicians this morning, he is nothing human. I believe him to have been wounded in a battle with his own kind, and that he has lain in his present pit for millions of years, possibly since pre-Cambrian times. He probably has extraordinary powers even in his weakened state, but to my knowledge he has never used them.”

“Why not?” asked Troy.

“He must be afraid of attracting the unwelcome attention of those who look for him. But he has maintained his life somehow. The waste products of his organic metabolism are fed into our sewers daily. He has a group of physicians and physicists—a curious mixture!—who keep in repair his three-dimensional neural cortex and run a huge administrative organization designed for his protection.”

“Seems harmless enough, so far,” said Troy.

“He’s harmless except for one venomous habit. I thought I told you about it in the message I left with Ann. You must have verified it if you probed Blogshak thoroughly.”



"But I couldn't understand such near cannibalism in so advanced——"

"Certainly not cannibalism! Do we think of ourselves as cannibals when we eat steaks? Still, that's my main objection to him. His vitality must be maintained by the absorption of other vitalities, preferably as high up the evolutionary scale as possible. Our thousands of deaths monthly can be traced to his frantic hunger for vital fluid. The devitalizing department, which Blogshak used to run, is the largest section of the staff."

"But what about the people who attend him? Does he snap up any of them?"

"He hasn't yet. They all have a pact with him. Help him, and he helps them. Every one of his band dies old, rich, evil, and envied by their ignorant neighbours. He gives them everything they want. Sometimes they forget, like Blogshak, that society can stand just so much of their evil."

"Assuming all you say is true—how does it concern my own problem, getting Ann out of here and notifying the League?"

Poole shook his head dubiously. "You probably have some tentative plans to hypnotize Blogshak and make him turn off the screen. But no one on the staff understands the screen. None of them can turn it off, because none of them turned it on. The chief surgeon believes it to be a direct, focused emanation from a radiator made long ago and known now only to the Outcast. But don't think of escaping just yet. You can strike a tremendous, fatal blow without leaving this room!

"This afternoon," Poole continued with growing nervousness, "there culminates a project initiated by the Outcast millennia ago. Just ninety years ago the staff began the blueprints of a surgical operation on the Outcast on a scale which would dwarf the erection of the Mechanical Integrator. Indeed, you won't be surprised to learn that the Integrator, capable of planar stereochronic analysis, was but a preliminary practice project, a rehearsal for the main event."

"Go on," said Troy absently. His sensitive hearing detected heavy breathing from beyond the door.

"To perform this colossal surgery, the staff must disconnect for a few seconds all of the essential neural trunks. When this is done, but for your aura, the Outcast would forever after remain a mass of senseless protoplasm and electronic equipment. With your aura they can make the most dangerous repairs in perfect safety. When the last neural is down, you simply suppress your aura and the Outcast is dead. Then you could force your way out. From then on, the earth could go its merry way unhampered. Your League would eventually gain ascendancy and—"

"What about Ann?" asked Troy curtly. "Wouldn't she die along with the Outcast?"

"Didn't both of you take an oath to sacrifice each other before you'd injure the League or abandon an assignment?"

"That's a nice legal point," replied Troy, watching the corridor door behind Poole open a quarter of an inch. "I met Ann three years ago in a madhouse, where I had hidden away after a League assignment. She wasn't mad, but the stupid overseer didn't know it. She had the ability to project herself to other probability worlds. I married her to obtain a warning instrument of extreme delicacy and accuracy. Until that night in the death house, I'd have abided by League rules and abandoned her if necessary. But no longer. Any plan which includes her death is out. Suffering humanity can go climb a tree."

Poole's voice was dry and cracking. "I presumed you'd say that. You leave me no recourse. After I tell you who I am you will be willing to turn off your aura even at the cost of Anne's life. I am your . . . agh—"

A knife whistled through the open door and sank in Poole's neck. Blogshak and Sharg rushed in. Each man carried an axe.

"You dirty traitor!" screamed Blogshak. His axe crashed through the skull of the little old man even as Troy sprang forward. Sharg caught Troy under the chin with his axe handle. For some minutes afterward Troy was dimly aware of chopping, chopping, chopping.

Troy's aching jaw finally awoke him. He was lying on the sofa, where his keepers had evidently placed him. There was an undefinable raw odour about the room.

The carpet had been changed.

Troy's stomach muscles tensed. What had this done to Ann? He was unable to catch her ESP lobe. Probably out wandering through the past, or future.

While he tried to touch her mind, there was a knock on the door, and Blogshak entered with a man dressed in surgeon's white.

"Our operation apparently was a success, despite your little mishap," 'pathed the latter to Troy. "The next thirty years will tell us definitely whether we did this correctly. I'm afraid you'll have to stick around until then. I understand you're great chums with the Provinarch—ex-Provinarch, should I say? I'm sure he'll entertain you. I'm sorry about Poole. Poor fellow! Muffed his opportunities. Might have risen very high on the staff. But everything works out for the best, doesn't it?"

Troy glared at him wordlessly.

"Once we're out of here," 'pathed Troy in music code that afternoon, "we'll get General Blade to drop a plute fission on this building. It all revolves around the bomb under your cerebellum. If we can deactivate either the screen or the bomb, we're out. It's child's play to scatter Blogshak's bunch."

"If I had a razor," replied Ann, "I could cut the thing out. I can feel it under my neck muscles."

"Don't talk nonsense. What can you give me on Poole?"

"He definitely forced you to choose the red ball at the League meeting. Also, he knew he was going to be killed in your room. That made him nervous."

"Did he *know* he was going to be killed, or simply anticipated the possibility?"

"He knew. *He had seen it before!*"

Troy began pacing restlessly up and down before the glass panel, but never looking at Ann, who lay quietly in bed apparently reading a book. The nurse sat in a chair at the foot of Ann's bed, arms folded, implacably staring at her ward.

"Puzzling, very puzzling," mused Troy. "Any idea what he was going to tell me about my aura?"

"No."

"Anything on his identity?"

"I don't know—I had a feeling that I . . . we— No, it's all too vague. I noticed just one thing for certain."

"What was that?" asked Troy. He stopped pacing and appeared to be examining titles on the bookshelves.

*"He was wearing your rosebud!"*

"But that's crazy! I had it on all day. You must have been mistaken."

"You know I can't make errors on such matters."

"That's so." Troy resuming his pacing. "Yet, I refuse to accept the proposition that both of us were wearing my rosebud at the same instant. Well, never mind. While we're figuring a way to deactivate your bomb, we'd also better give a little thought to solving my aura."

"The solution is known—we have to assume that our unfortunate friend knew it. Great Galaxy! What our League biologists wouldn't give for a chance at this! We must change our whole concept of living matter. Have you ever heard of the immortal heart created by Alexis Carrel?" he asked abruptly.

"No."

"At some time during the Second Renaissance, early twentieth century, I believe, Dr. Carrel removed a bit of heart tissue from an embryo chick and put it in a nutrient solution. The tissue began to expand and contract rhythmically. Every two days the nutrient solution was renewed and excess growth cut away. Despite the catastrophe that had overwhelmed the chick—as a chick—the individual tissue lived on independently because the requirements of its cells were met. This section of heart tissue beat for nearly three centuries, until it was finally lost in the Second Atomic War."

"Are you suggesting that the king's men can put Humpty Dumpty together again if due care has been taken to nourish each part?"

"It's a possibility. Don't forget the skills developed by the Muscovites in grafting skin, ears, corneas, and so on."

"But that's a long process—it takes weeks."

"Then let's try another line. Consider this: The amoeba lives in a fluid medium. He bumps into his food, which is generally bacteria or bits of decaying protein, flows around it, digests it at leisure, excretes his waste matter, and moves on. Now go on up the evolutionary scale past the coelenterates and flatworms, until we reach the first truly three-dimensional animals—the coelomates. The flatworm had to be flat because he had no blood vessels. His food simply soaked into him. But cousin roundworm, one of the coelomates, grew plump and solid, because his blood vessels fed his specialized interior cells, which would otherwise have no access to food.

"Now consider a specialized cell—say a nice long muscle cell in the rabbit's neck. It can't run around in stagnant water looking for a meal. It has to have its breakfast brought to it, and its excrement carried out by special messenger, or it soon dies."

Troy picked a book from the shelf and leafed through it idly.

Ann wondered mutely whether her nurse had been weaned on a lemon.

"This messenger," continued Troy, "is the blood. It eventually reaches the muscle cell by means of a capillary—a minute blood vessel about the size of a red corpuscle. The blood in the capillary gives the cell everything it needs and absorbs the cell waste matter. The muscle cell needs a continuously fresh supply of oxygen, sugar, amino-acids, fats, vitamins, sodium, calcium, and potassium salts, hormones, water, and maybe other things. It gets these from the hemoglobin and plasma, and it sheds carbon dioxide, ammonium compounds, and so on. Our cell can store up a little food within its own boundaries to tide it over for a number of hours. But oxygen it must have, every instant."

"You're just making the problem worse," interposed Ann. "If you prove that blood must circulate oxygen continuously to preserve life, you'll have yourself out on a limb. If you'll excuse the term, the rabbit's circulation was decisively cut off."

"That's the poser," agreed Troy. "The blood didn't circulate, but the cells didn't die. And think of this a moment: Blood is normally alkaline, with a pH of 7.4. When it absorbs carbon dioxide as a cell excretion, blood becomes acid, and this steps up respiration to void the excess carbon dioxide, via the lungs. But so far as I could see, the rabbit didn't even sigh after he got his head back. There was certainly no heavy breathing."

"I'll have to take your word for it; I was out cold."

"Yes, I know." Troy began pacing the room again. "It isn't feasible to suppose the rabbit's plasma was buffered to an unusual degree. That would mean an added concentration of sodium bicarbonate and an increased solids content. The cellular water would dialyse into the blood and kill the creature by simple dehydration."

"Maybe he had unusual reserves of hemoglobin," suggested Ann. "That would take care of your oxygen problem."

Troy rubbed his chin. "I doubt it. There are about five million red cells in a cubic millimeter of blood. If there are very many more, the cells would oxidize muscle tissue at a tremendous rate, and the blood would grow hot, literally cooking the brain. Our rabbit would die of a raging fever. Hemoglobin dissolves about fifty times as much oxygen as plasma, so it doesn't take much hemoglobin to start an internal conflagration."

"Yet the secret must lie in the hemoglobin. You just admitted that the cells would get along for long periods with only oxygen," persisted Ann.

"It's worth thinking about. We must learn more about the chemistry of the cell. You take it easy for a few days while I go through Poole's library."

"Could I do otherwise?" murmured Ann.

*... thus the effect of confinement varies from person to person. The claustrophobe deteriorates rapidly, but the agoraphobe mellows, and may find excuses to avoid the escapement attempt. The person of high mental and physical attainments can avoid atrophy by directing his every thought to the destruction of the confining force. In this case, the increment in mental prowess is 3.1 times the*

*logarithm of the duration of confinement measured in years. The intelligent and determined prisoner can escape if he lives long enough.*”—J. and A. T., *An Introduction to Prison Escape*, 4th Edition, League Publishers, p. 14.

In 1811 Avogadro, in answer to the confusing problems of combining chemical weights, invented the molecule. In 1902 Einstein resolved an endless array of incompatible facts by suggesting a mass-energy relation. Three centuries later, in the tenth year of his imprisonment, Jon Troy was driven in near-despair to a similar stand. In one sure step of dazzling intuition, he hypothesized the viton.

“The secret goes back to our old talks on cell preservation,” he explained with ill-concealed excitement to Ann. “The cell can live for hours without proteins and salts, because it has means of storing these nutrients from past meals. But oxygen it must have. The hemoglobin takes up molecular oxygen in the lung capillaries, ozonizes it, and, since hemin is easily reduced, the red cells give up oxygen to the muscle cells that need it, in return for carbon dioxide. After it takes up the carbon dioxide, hemin turns purple and enters the vein system on the way back to the lungs, and we can forget it.

“Now, what is hemin? We can break it down into etiopyrophorin, which, like chlorophyll, contains four pyrrole groups. The secret of chlorophyll has been known for years. Under a photon catalyst of extremely short wave length, such as ultraviolet light, chlorophyll seizes molecule after molecule of carbon dioxide and synthesizes starches and sugars, giving off oxygen. Hemin, with its etiopyrophorin, works quite similarly, except that it doesn't need ultraviolet light. Now——”

“But animal cell metabolism works the other way,” objected Ann. “Our cells take up oxygen and excrete carbon dioxide.”

“It depends which cells you are talking about,” reminded Troy. “The red corpuscle takes up carbon dioxide just as its plant cousin, chlorophyll, does, and they both excrete oxygen. Oxygen is just as much an excrement of the red cell as carbon dioxide is of the muscle cell.”

“That's true,” admitted Ann.

"And that's where the viton comes in," continued Troy. "It preserves the *status quo* of cell chemistry. Suppose that an oxygen atom has just been taken up by an amino-acid molecule within the cell protoplasm. The amino-acid immediately becomes unstable, and starts to spit out carbon dioxide. In the red corpuscle, a mass of hemin stands by to seize the carbon dioxide and offer more oxygen. But the exchange never takes place. Just as the amino-acid and the hemin reach toward one another, their electronic attractions are suddenly neutralized by a bolt of pure energy from me: The viton! Again and again the cells try to exchange, with the same result. They can't die from lack of oxygen, because their individual molecules never attain an oxygen deficit. The viton gives a very close approach to immortality!"

"But we seem to be getting older. Perhaps your vitons don't reach every cell?"

"Probably not," admitted Troy. "They must stream radially from some central point within me, and of course they would decrease in concentration according to the inverse square law of light. Even so, they would keep enough cells alive to preserve life as a whole. In the case of the rabbit, after the cut cell surfaces were rejoined, there were still enough of them alive to start the business of living again. One might suppose, too, that the viton accelerates the re-establishment of cell boundaries in the damaged areas. That would be particularly important with the nerve cells."

"All right," said Ann. "You've got the viton. What are you going to do with it?"

"That's another puzzler. First, what part of my body does it come from? There must be some sort of a globular discharge area fed by a relatively small but impenetrable duct. If we suppose a muscle controlling the duct—"

"What you need is an old Geiger-Müller," suggested Ann. "Locate your discharge globe first, then the blind spot on it caused by the duct entry. The muscle has to be at that point."

"I wonder—" mused Troy. "We have a burnt-out cinema



projection bulb around here somewhere. The vacuum ought to be just about soft enough by now to ionize readily. The severed filament can be the two electron poles." He laughed mirthlessly: "I don't know why I should be in a hurry. I won't be able to turn off the viton stream even if I should discover the duct-muscle."

Weeks later, Troy found his viton sphere, just below the cerebral frontal lobe. The duct led somewhere into the pineal region. Very gingerly he investigated the duct environment. A small but dense muscle mass surrounded the entry of the duct to the bulk of radiation.

On the morning of the first day of the thirty-first year of their imprisonment, a few minutes before the nurse was due with the *skon* hypo, Ann 'pathed to Troy that she thought the screen was down. A joint search of the glass panel affirmed this.

Ann was stunned, like a caged canary that suddenly notices the door is open—she fears to stay, yet is afraid to fly away.

"Get your clothes on, dear," urged Troy. "Quickly now! If we don't contact the League in the next ten minutes, we never shall."

She dressed like an automaton.

Troy picked the lock on the corridor door noiselessly, with a key he had long ago made for this day, and opened the portal a quarter of an inch. The corridor seemed empty for its whole half-mile length. There was a preternatural pall of silence hanging over everything. Ordinarily, someone was always stirring about the corridor at this hour. He peered closely at the guard's cubicle down the hall. His eyes were not what they once were, and old Blogshak had never permitted him to be fitted with contacts.

He sucked in his breath sharply. The door of the cubicle was open, and two bodies were visible on the floor. One of the bodies had been a guard. The green of his uniform was plainly visible. The other corpse had white hair and a face like a wrinkled, arthritic claw. It was Blogshak.

Two mental processes occurred within Troy. To the cold, objective Troy, the thought occurred that the viton flow

was ineffective beyond one hundred yards. Troy the human being wondered why the Outcast had not immediately remedied this weak point in the guard system. Heart pounding, he stepped back within the suite. He seized a chair, warned Ann out of the way, and hurled it through the glass panel. Ann stepped gingerly through the jagged gap. He held her for a moment in his arms. Her hair was pure white, her face furrowed. Her body seemed weak and infirm. But it was Ann. Her eyes were shut and she seemed to be floating through time and space.

"No time for a trance now!" He shook her harshly, pulling her out of the room and down the corridor. He looked for a stair. There was none.

"We'll have to chance an autovator!" he panted, thinking he should have taken some sort of bludgeon with him. If several of the staff should come down with the 'vator, he doubted his ability to hypnotize them all.

He was greatly relieved when he saw an empty 'vator already on the subterranean floor. He leaped in, pulling Ann behind him, and pushed the bottom to close the door. The door closed quietly, and he pushed the button for the first floor.

"We'll try the street floor first," he said, breathing heavily. "Don't look around when we leave the 'vator. Just chatter quietly and act as though we owned the place."

The street floor was empty.

An icy thought began to grow in Troy's mind. He stepped into a neighbouring 'vator, carrying Ann with him almost bodily, closed the door, and pressed the last button. Ann was mentally out, but was trying to tell him something. Her thoughts were vague, unfocused.

If they were pursued, wouldn't the pursuer assume they had left the building? He hoped so.

A malicious laughter seemed to follow them up the shaft.

He gulped air frantically to ease the roar in his ears. Ann had sunk into a semi-stupor. He eased her to the floor. The 'vator continued to climb. It was now in the two hundreds. Minutes later it stopped gently at the top

floor, the door opened, and Troy managed to pull Ann out into a little plaza.

They were nearly a mile above the city.

The penthouse roof of the City Building was really a miniature country club, with a small golf course, swimming pool, and club house for informal administrative functions. A cold wind now blew across the closely cut green. The swimming pool was empty. Troy shivered as he dragged Ann near the dangerously low guard rail and looked over the city in the early morning sunlight.

As far as he could see, nothing was moving. There were no cars gliding at any of the authorized traffic levels, no 'copters or trans-ocean ships in the skies.

For the first time, Troy's mind sagged, and he felt like the old man he was.

As he stared, gradually understanding, yet half-unbelieving, the rosebud in his lapel began to speak.

*Mai-kel condensed the thin waste of cosmic gas into several suns and peered again down into the sterechron. There could be no mistake—there was a standing wave of recurrent time emanating from the tiny planet. The Great One made himself small and approached the little world with cautious curiosity. Sathanas had been badly wounded, but it was hard to believe his integration had deteriorated to the point of permitting oscillation in time. And no intelligent life capable of time travel was scheduled for this galaxy Who, then? Mai-kel synchronized himself with the oscillation so that the events constituting it seemed to move at their normal pace. His excitement multiplied as he followed the cycle.*

*It would be safest, of course, to volatilize the whole planet. But then, that courageous mite, that microscopic human being who had created the time trap would be lost. Extirpation was indicated—a clean, fast incision done at just the right point of the cycle.*

*Mai-kel called his brothers.*

Troy suppressed an impulse of revulsion. Instead of tearing the flower from his coat, he pulled it out gently and

held it at arm's length, where he could watch the petals join and part again, in perfect mimicry of the human mouth.

"Yes, little man, I am what you call the Outcast. There are no other little men to bring my message to you, so I take this means of—"

"You mean you devitalized every man, woman, and child in the province . . . in the whole world?" croaked Troy.

"Yes. Within the past few months, my appetite has been astonishingly good, and I have succeeded in storing within my neurals enough vital fluid to carry me into the next sterechron. There I can do the same, and continue my journey. There's an excellent little planet waiting for me, just bursting with genial bipedal life. I can almost feel their vital fluid within me, now. And I'm taking you along, of course, in case I meet some . . . old friends. We'll leave now."

"Jon! Jon!" cried Ann, from behind him. She was standing, but weaving dizzily. Troy was at her side in an instant. "Even *he* doesn't know who Poole is!"

"Too late for any negative information now, dear," said Troy dully.

"But it isn't negative. If *he* doesn't know, then he won't stop you from going back." Her voice broke off in a wild cackle.

Troy looked at her in sad wonder.

"Jon," she went on feverishly, "your vitons help preserve the *status quo* of cells by preventing chemical change, but that is only part of the reason they preserve life. Each viton must also contain a quantum of time flow, which dissolves the vital fluid of the cell and reprecipitates it into the next instant. This is the only hypothesis which explains the preservation of the giant neurals of the Outcast. There was no chemical change going on in them which required stabilization, but something had to keep the vital fluid alive. Now, if you close the duct suddenly, the impact of unreleased vitons will send you back through time in your present body, as an old man. Don't you understand about Poole, now. Jon? You will go back thirty years through

time, establish yourself in the confidence of both the League and the staff, attend the assassination conference, make young Troy choose the red ball again, defend him at the trial, and then you will die in that horrible room again. You have no choice about doing this, *because it has already happened!* Good-bye, darling! You are Poole!"

There was an abrupt swish. Ann had leaped over the guard rail into space.

A gurgle of horror died in Troy's throat. Still clutching the now silent rose in his hand, he jammed the viton muscle with all his will power. There was a sickening shock, then a flutter of passing days and nights. As he fell through time, cold fingers seemed to snatch frantically at him. But he knew he was safe.

As he spiralled inward, Troy-Poole blinked his eyes involuntarily, as though reluctant to abandon a languorous escape from reality. He was like a dreamer awakened by having his bedclothes blown off in an icy gale.

He slowly realized that this was not the first time he had suddenly been bludgeoned into reality. Every seventy years the cycle began for him once more. He knew now that seventy years ago he had completed another identical circle in time. And the lifetime before that, and the one prior. There was no beginning and no ending. The only reality was this brief lucid interval between cycles, waiting for the loose ends of time to cement. He had the choice at this instant to vary the life stream, to fall far beyond Troy's era, if he liked, and thus to end this existence as the despairing toy of time. What had he accomplished? Nothing, except retain, at the cost of almost unbearable monotony and pain, a weapon pointed at the heart of the Outcast, a weapon he could never persuade the young Troy to use, on account of Ann. Troy old had no influence over Troy young. Poole could never persuade Troy.

Peering down through the hoary wastes of time he perceived how he had hoped to set up a cycle in the time stream, a standing wave noticeable to the entities who searched for the Outcast. Surely with their incredible intellects and perceptions this discrepancy in the ordered uni-

verse would not go unnoticed. He had hoped that this trap in the time flow would hold the Outcast until relief came. But as his memory returned he realized that he had gradually given up hope. Somehow he had gone on from a sense of duty to the race from which he had sprung. From the depths of his aura-fed nervous system he had always found the will to try again. But now his nervous exhaustion, increasing from cycle to cycle by infinitesimal amounts, seemed overpowering.

A curious thought occurred to him. There must have been, at one time, a Troy without a Poole to guide—or entangle—him. There must have been a beginning—some prototype Troy who selected the red ball by pure accident, and who was informed by a prototype staff of his tremendous power. After that, it was easy to assume that the first Troy “went back” as the prototype Poole to scheme against the life of the Outcast.

But searching down time, Troy-Poole now found only the old combination of Troy and Poole he knew so well. Hundreds, thousands, millions of them, each preceding the other. As far back as he could sense, there was always a Poole hovering over a Troy. Now he would become the next Poole, enmesh the next Troy in the web of time, and go his own way to bloody death. He could not even plan a comfortable suicide. No, to maintain perfect oscillation of the time trap, all Pooles must always die in the same manner as the first Poole. There must be no invariance. He suppressed a twinge of impatience at the lack of foresight in the prototype Poole.

“Just this once more,” he promised himself wearily, “then I’m through. Next time I’ll keep on falling.”

General Blade sometimes felt that leading a resistance movement was far exceeding his debt to decent society and that one day soon he would allow his peaceful nature to override his indignant pursuit of justice. Killing a man, even a very bad man, without a trial, went against his grain. He sighed and rapped on the table.

“As a result of Blogshak’s misappropriation of funds to fight the epidemic,” he announced, “the death toll this

morning reached over one hundred thousand. Does the Assassination Subcommittee have a recommendation?"

A thin-lipped man rose from the gathering. "The Provinarch ignored our warning," he said rapidly. "This subcommittee, as you all know, some days ago set an arbitrary limit of one hundred thousand deaths. Therefore this subcommittee now recommends that its plan for killing the Provinarch be adopted at once. Tonight is very favourable for our—"

A man entered the room quietly and handed General Blade an envelope. The latter read it quickly, then stood up. "I beg your pardon, but I must break in," he announced. "Information I have just received may change our plans completely. This report from our intelligence service is so incredible that I won't read it to you. Let's verify it over the video."

He switched on the instrument. The beam of a local newscasting agency was focused tridimensionally before the group. It showed a huge pit or excavation which appeared to move as the scanning newscaster moved. The news comments were heard in snatches. "No explosion . . . no sign of any force . . . just complete disappearance. An hour ago the City Building was the largest structure in . . . now nothing but a gaping hole a mile deep . . . the Provinarch and his entire council were believed in conference . . . no trace—"

General Blade turned an uncomprehending face to the committee. "Gentlemen, I move that we adjourn this session pending an investigation."

Jon Troy and Ann left through the secret alleyway. As he buttoned his topcoat against the chill night air, he sensed that they were being followed. "Oh, hello?"

"I beg your pardon, Major Troy, and yours, madam. My name is Poole, Legal Subcommittee. You don't know me—yet, but I feel that I know you both very well. Your textbook on prison escape has inspired and sustained me many times in the past. I was just admiring your *boutonnière*, major. It seems so lifelike for an artificial rosebud. I wonder if you could tell me where I might buy one?"

Troy laughed metallically. "It's not artificial. I've worn it for weeks, but it's a real flower, from my own garden. It just won't die."

"Extraordinary," murmured Poole, fingering the red blossom in his own lapel. "Could we run in here for a cocktail? Bartender Fonstile will fix us something special, and we can discuss a certain matter you really ought to know about."

The doorman of the Shawn Hotel bowed to the three as they went inside.

---

**Fellow Spirits and Favourite Writers  
are sure to be amongst the people you  
meet at**

# **THE 23<sup>RD</sup> WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION**

**at The Mount Royal Hotel  
Marble Arch — August 27-30.**

**Full details from The Secretary,  
43 William Dunbar House,  
Albert Road, London, N.W.6.**

---



BRIAN W. ALDISS

## THE SMALL BETRAYING DETAIL

---

"IT WILL BE cold underground," Richmond said. "Are you sure you can face it, Arthur?"

He and his brother turned to look gravely at me.

"This is my last jaunt in the big world. Of course I can face it," I said.

I spoke over-bravely. The cool bright Norfolk sunshine seemed to shine through me. I felt transparent, insubstantial, meet for the TB sanatorium to which Richmond Betts and his brother Walter were driving me. Although I wanted desperately to get to that place of quiet, to lie down and lie still, I humoured Walter in this urge of his to break our journey; he was an amateur archaeologist and had promised that this diversion would be brief and worth while.

"Come on, then," Walter said. "What are we waiting for?"

Flanked on either side by the brothers, I began stumbling across the sandy brecks. I was not dying, I told myself; six months and I'd be fit again. But the landscape had a quality far from reassuring. Under the lucid Dutch light, everything about us was the tawny colour I had always associated with menace: the colour of a lioness's hide, the colour of calf on an old family recipe book at home (from which had come that recipe for mushroom pie that had killed my grandfather), the colour of new coffins. Here was that same shade again in the earth among spiky grass, even in the low pines, in the gorse flowers, in the sky, as if we had all been drowned in thin sauterne. Tawny everywhere as though I looked at the world with a retina of sand.

Only the Ministry of Works ticket in my fingers was red. I clutched it tightly as Richmond and Walter escorted me towards Grimmer's Graves. Trying to free myself from a sense of unreality, I struggled to make some casual remark.

"It's so deserted," I said. "As if we had found our way into another universe."

“Do you think it would be that easy?” Richmond said, with a laugh. He gestured back towards the car, still visible on the amber stretch of road. “Wouldn’t the car have disappeared with a blinding flash or something if we had switched into another universe?”

“I wasn’t seriously——” I began, but Walter said, “Why a flash? Why any sign? You are such a seeker after signs, Richmond. We are never given any omens when our lives change from one phase to another. The best we can do is to look back afterwards and say ‘At this moment I must have altered . . .’ So why not as imperceptible a transition to another universe—or rather, another phase of the total universe?”

“Why not? Because you’d at once be struck by some peculiar difference in your surroundings,” Richmond said. “Blue trees, or four-eyed people, or whatever.”

“Rubbish! My dear brother, your crude mind! Can’t you imagine a world totally, horribly different from ours which might nevertheless seem at first just like this one; so that you’d only find out your predicament by some small betraying detail?”

They were unlike. Richmond, the older, was the kinder and the more cheerful; he argued now for the fun of it. His brother, however, talked more seriously and heavily, as if he had a mission. In my weakness I thought I did not care greatly for either of them, well launched as they now were on this silly discussion about phases of the universe or whatever it was. They were my wife’s cousins; I knew them very little; since my wife had unfortunately been indisposed at the last moment, the Betts brothers had volunteered instead to drive me down from York to the Crumer-next-Sea sanatorium. Although I appreciated that kindness, I resented this diversion to gape at a mouldy antiquity almost at the end of our long drive; and I longed again for the comfortable car journey and the rug warm over my knees. I was the invalid; with the selfishness of the invalid I wanted to be treated as such.

Ferns grew about the uncertain path. The ground was uneven, humpy and scrubby. Richmond took my arm as I staggered.

"These dips we're tramping across mark all that's left of various old pits and shafts," Walter said. "Look, here's a flint."

He stooped and picked up a flint that glinted at his feet. Tourists had left litter here; though we were the only people about at that time, orangeade cartons and crumpled newspaper marked the passage of previous visitors to Grimmer's Graves. The flint lay half-hidden under a sheet of the *News of the World*. Walter grasped it, spun it into the air, and caught it.

"Here's a small betraying detail for you, Richmond," he said in his dry voice. "These flints lie all about here, obvious clues to the nature of the Graves. Yet it was not until I think about 1880 that the Graves were identified as neolithic flint mines."

"And the burial of Grimmer, whoever he was, exposed as a myth."

"Some said the Graves were a Celtic village. Camden thought they were ancient fortifications. In fact, everyone was guessing, and the place is much older than they dreamed it could be. Their image of the past was almost wholly imaginary; we are more careful to sift facts today."

It's a lie, I thought. I've listened to you, Walter, I've watched you all the way from York. I'm sick, and that gives me peculiar faculties. I know that for all your adherence to fact and the factual, you live in your own small world, a Walter-world. You're not like your brother; he responds to external stimulæ, you take them and arrange them in the dead museum of your ego. If you had your way, you'd charge a price of admission to anyone who wanted to speak to you. Only egotism and a desire to air your knowledge made you break the journey to drag Richmond and me to this godforsaken spot.

"Sorry, what did you say?" I asked, bursting abruptly from the cage of my thoughts.

"I said, shall I go first?" Walter snapped.

"Are you all right, Arthur?" Richmond asked, giving me an anxious glance.

We had reached the top of a pit. I came out of my reverie to find a black hole at my feet. It was like a dark

pool in which, far down, candles swam like fish, their little tongues of light seeming to be disturbed by brown water.

Richmond grasped my arm and pulled me back. For a moment as my head reeled I had been about to dive into that ancient well.

"Look, Walter, I think we'd better get Arthur back to the car," Richmond said. "He's not fit to go down there."

"Nonsense. It's cool below. He'll feel better down under."

"I'll be okay," I said; it would have been doubly weak to reveal my weakness to him. Walter patted me on the shoulder and began to climb down the iron ladder into the pit. Pulling myself together, I followed him, and Richmond came last. He climbed down with his boots almost kicking my nose.

My hands were numb on the cold rungs of the ladder. A few inches from my eyes, time's fingerprints on the Earth slid by. The deposits of glacial gravel passed, and a band of clay; the chalk layers were next and then the black sullen bands of flint.

"Steady now," Walter said.

I reached the bottom rung of the ladder and stepped away from it. We were thirty feet down—and back in 2000 B.C.

The tomb-cool calm of centuries clutched at my cheeks.

In the formidable dark, tongues of candlelight panted for air. Here my very remote ancestors had sweated and worked, tunnelling below the untamed land to mine and mole the best flints, while somewhere above, the knappers and axe-makers, the craftsmen and the makers of arrowheads, had waited for their yield.

"This is where the Industrial Revolution began," Walter said solemnly. "History took a decisive turn down here. The first guided missiles were hacked out of this hole."

I could not see his face properly, nor Richmond's. They turned to inspect a side gallery, while I stood with one hand resting on chalk, a suffocating pressure on my chest. They stooped at the gallery's low entrance, peering in. In

that misty light, Richmond's shaggy tweed trousers turned his back view into the hind quarters of a strange animal.

Undoubtedly I was light-headed. I tried to call to them; no sound came from my lips—and who would call for help to a shaggy animal? Strange irrelevancies bubbled through my mind; Sir Alister Hardy's theory that man had become, for a while in his early career, an aquatic creature living mostly in the sea returned to my mind, possibly because we were only a few miles from the coast that was our destination. To support his theory was the comparative hairlessness of man, as against the hairiness of the other primates.

Suppose, I thought, there was truth in Walter's absurd hypothesis about there being other, similar phases in the total universe, or however he expressed it? Then might there not exist an earth on which man was as he is now—yet totally alien, man without aquatic ancestry, man with no love of the sea, man with hair . . . man looking like the shaggy thing at which I now stared . . . a creature similar to me, but yet ineluctably different, irreconcilably different, hostile even . . . a hunting creature, shuffling backwards from its burrow before it turned on me. . . .

But the pit was heaving, the bands of flint seemed to rotate, the shaggy beast was already swinging towards me. I saw its face as it came at me—and then a darkness where no candle could burn swirled in and submerged me.

When I returned to my senses, Walter and Richmond had hold of me and were propelling me through the ragged remnants of a plantation. I began to cough.

Richmond turned and looked at me.

"We're getting you to the sanatorium as fast as we can," he said.

His face was covered with hairs.

I cried out. Then we passed from among the trees, and I saw my eyes had played a trick on me. Certainly it had seemed that Richmond's face was totally covered in fine white hairs—a pelt in fact, from which his eyes and mouth bulged. But of course it was a delusion created by the light and aided by my weakness.

"Don't go so fast," I gasped. "What's happening?" They

were marching me along as if they were going to push me over the nearest cliff.

"You are ill," Walter said. His face was set and grim. As I glanced sideways at him, I saw that he too wore this sort of mask of pinkish-whitish hairs and that—no, staring at him straight in horror I saw that in reality he looked as usual, that the dappled shade was creating an illusion. But as I gazed forwards towards the waiting car, again it seemed to me that I was flanked by alien creatures who looked only half like men, whose faces were as hairy as badgers.

Everything lay loaded with menace about me. The flat landscape, the lack of other people, the unnatural quiet . . . all contributed to my sensation of wrongness. Even the quiet tawny shades imposed by the atmosphere had turned coppery, a metallic tint without mercy.

"I'm ill!" I cried involuntarily, seeking to dismiss all the unease in one big all-embracing excuse.

"I said you were ill. That's why we're getting you away."

And no sympathy in Walter's voice. Cast iron, his tone and his intentions. He hated me; Richmond hated me. They were my foes, my captors. The car ahead did not look welcoming. It was black, black as a hearse—my God, it was a hearse! A coffin gleamed inside its glass plate windows and—no, it was a car, the car, our car, I saw as my vision cleared, as we stumbled on to the pebbly road.

"Not so fast!" I begged again. They were running with me now. A terrible eagerness seemed to possess them, an awful eagerness that made them work as fast as possible. What were they going to do with me?

Now we were at the car. Richmond opened one of the rear doors and heaving together they threw me in. I collapsed on the back seat. One of them had kicked me; I was sure one of them had kicked me in, and I was sure it was Richmond, whom I had liked the better of the two.

Because of my weakness, overcome by fear and betrayal, I began to weep.

The brothers jumped into the front seat and slammed the doors.

"You kicked me!" I exclaimed.

Richmond looked round.

"Pull yourself together, Arthur. Nobody kicked you. You're sick. It's our fault for stopping here; we didn't realise how it was with you. Now we'll get you there as soon as possible."

Shakily, I put a trembling hand to my brow. It was hot, fiery. Looking down, I saw a spatter of blood on my tie and lapels. So. I had coughed when I blacked out down in the Grave. Perhaps it had scared them; perhaps I had read too much into their haste, and in my fever had mistaken solicitude for menace.

"Richmond—" I said.

As Walter flung in the gears, the car started with a dreadful jerk. I bounced backwards against the seat, biting my tongue painfully. Even while I struggled up again, we were gathering speed. We hurtled past a notice pointing in the direction we were going; it said, TO THE GRAVE. Stones whipped up by the tyres sounded hollowly against the underside of the car. Helplessly I leant back again, fighting a suffocating sensation in my chest.

Over Walter's shoulder I could see his left hand on the driving wheel. It was covered with the whitish pelt. It was not a man's hand at all; nor was it an animal's hand. And in the driving mirror I saw that his face too . . .

For a long screaming moment I shut my eyes. When I opened them, Walter was looking back at me.

"We've only ten miles to go," he said. The white fur had gone again. Imagination only.

You're sick, really sick, in delirium, I told myself. It's all explicable in terms of your illness—not that anything has really happened. You had this silly theory that men might have looked—have *been*—different if they had not once been sea-going at an early stage in their evolution. Then there was this business that you yourself started about thinking you could slip into another phase of the universe, another Earth. That's all. Down in Grimmer's Grave it was rather weird and you fainted, coming to again with a high temperature, since when you've imagined that both your bits of potty theory have become actuality. You just need rest. The sanatorium, the sea.

The sea! Ten miles to go to Crumer-next-Sea: there it was on a signpost whipping by the window.

But the more I thought about the sea, the less easy I felt. The sea was connected with my hallucinations—if they were hallucinations.

Richmond looked back.

“Nothing to be frightened about,” he said.

I calmed myself. The hallucinations had no reality outside myself, my sick self. This was the world I knew, these were the men I knew . . .

Or if they weren't, then I would see some sign to prove I was indeed in an alien world, in a sort of variant earth where a creature something like a tarsier had not emerged to dominance via the ocean.

At once I began looking for the sign that could alter my concept of the universe, for the—what was Walter's exact phrase?—the small betraying detail. It had to be something outside this little nightmare world in the car; inside, my feelings were too subjective and could betray me either way. It had to be something beyond my emotional reach.

Anxiously I surveyed the land outside, still simmering under that copper light. THE SEA 5 MILES, a sign read, as we forged down a twisting lane between hedgerows with Walter still driving like a man possessed. We sped past a tradesman's van that bumped up onto the verge to avoid us. I twisted in my seat to read what was printed on the side of the van.

On its green side in faded letters was one word. It was a battered old van; we were going too fast; I could not be sure I had the word right. It looked like MANTRAPS. But what would that mean? With my heart hammering, I told myself that the van was a little grocer's delivery van with the grocer's name painted rather illegibly on its side: Mantraps, perhaps, or Mawraps. Mr. Mawraps the Grocer. I tried to visualise him.

At the same time my mind played uncomfortably with a different little fantasy. The creatures that had not deviated to sport in the sea for a few million years had naturally gained an evolutionary lead. When the true men came inland (after doing nothing but lose their body hair!) and



took up hunting and agriculture, it was to find the Pelt people already in occupation . . . And ever since, in this variant world, men like me were the dispossessed, so that along a quiet Norfolk lane it was natural to find someone who would sell the dominant race the wherewithal to defend its land from its hairless chief marauder . . .

"No!" I said. "Mr. Mawraps the Grocer!"

"Keep quiet!" Richmond said. His face as he turned round was distorted in hate. For a moment I thought he would lash out and hit me. Cowed, I slid back into a corner, again peering out for something definite that would confirm me in or release me from my dread.

We came out from the hedgerows. We sped through a sleepy village. We twisted down another lane. Then we were out of it and on to a good secondary road. No traffic still, and on our right the sea, motionless as vellum.

We snarled up a slight incline and turned, coming out on the main coast road.

There was the little huddle of Crumer-next-Sea, there was the beach, there a caravan site, there the distant block of the sanatorium to which the brothers were supposed to be taking me. Frantically, pawing at the windows, I searched for that terrible detail I needed.

Everything looked normal.

I had visited Crumer six years before. It seemed quite unchanged. The pier was there, the cliff gardens, the railway station . . . everything as I remembered. Except—surely *something* was changed?

I pressed my burning brow to the window, peering along the beach. Wasn't there something amiss there?

No, there as usual were lounging holiday-makers, hardly as many as might be expected, but a fair scattering. They sprawled in the usual semi-nudity, taking what sun there was. From this distance I could not see whether or not they had pelts; that was not what worried me, but my sub-conscious told me that one slight yet obvious factor put the whole picture out of true.

Again I stared.

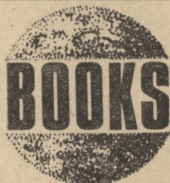
Kids were running up and down the sand. One or two were building castles. Two donkeys gave rides. On the

promenade, an ice-cream booth did desultory business. On the beach, a number of deck-chairs with bright canvas were pitched. Then in one crushing blow the obvious hit me: all those creatures on the sands sat or stood looking at the land; not a one faced out to sea. . . .

---

## RECOMMENDED PAPERBACKS

---



**James Colvin**

**FADS AND FALLACIES (IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE)** by Martin Gardner, Dover Books, 14/- (\$1.50)—**THE WORLD IN 1984** (2 vols.). Edited by Nigel Calder, Pelican Books, 4s. each.

WE SF READERS; are rather prone to getting interested in crackpot pseudo-sciences—Scientology, General Semantics, The Dean Drive, and so on. Although the old image of the SF fan gazing skywards looking for Flying Saucers seems to have been smashed for good and all, the fact remains that, let's face it, many of us are gullible. That's why every SF reader should get himself a copy of Mr. Gardner's gripping—and it's impossible to put down—new edition of *Fads and Fallacies*. With good humour and wit—not to mention logic and seriousness—he demolishes a vast range of pseudo-sciences from Scientology to Dr W. H. "Throw Away Your Glasses" Bates whose work had me fooled until I read this book. It also had Aldous Huxley fooled, so I feel in good company.

Readers of that excellent journal *NEW SCIENTIST* will already have read this fascinating series of articles by scientists and sociologists *The World in 1984*. Sound, honest—and sometimes startling—speculation by authorities on all the dynamic sciences. Even if you read the articles, these well-produced books are worth buying. Compared to the pseudo-sciences the real sciences are much more spectacular these days!

JOHN BRUNNER

## NOBODY AXED YOU

---

I FELT SO detached and critical it was almost as though I were watching someone else chopping open Denise's head. That was a knack I'd acquired through long experience. Detached or not, though, I felt elated. This was good! This was the most wonderful thing I'd ever done!

I could feel the hot, sweat-slippery handle of the hatchet threatening to slip from my grasp as I swung it again and again. I could feel the slimy stickiness of blood on my hands. It sprayed all over my shirt and jacket and made the synfab stick to my chest. I could smell its sickly scent.

Fabulous!

She was dead, there could be no doubt. Probably the first swing of the hatchet would have been enough. But I had to make sure. Then the next step would be to dismember her and put her in the disposal tube before anyone came in—

“Gardner! Where the hell are you? Gardner! Say, have you seen Gene Gardner anywhere?”

I sighed and switched off the runback machine. The picture hesitated and froze at a frame showing me bending over Denise's body prior to taking off the legs. I remembered that was where I'd hesitated when actually recording the scene, because the lab had done a magnificent job with the dummy and those legs were so exactly like Denise's I'd had a momentary qualm. But it hadn't spoiled the total effect.

I put the lights up and got out of my seat—the middle one in the row. Blast Bossman Crane for interrupting! But when he shouted in that voice, making the whole building shake, it wasn't good to make him wait around.

I slid the door back in its grooves. There he was on the stairs, puffing and panting and glowering, his mock cigar jutting up at a warning angle. Behind him his two secretaries—as an affectation, he had identical twins, both blonde, both beautiful—hovered with recorders at the

ready, while all about him the leisure-time shifters huddled against the wall and the balusters, trying to give him more room than there was.

"Looking for me, Mr Crane?" I called.

"Might have guessed!" he barked. "Damn' narcissist!" He came charging up the steps, thrust past me into the runback room, and stopped as though a brake had been applied by remote control.

"And on your own, too!" he grunted. "On your own!" His tone was indictment and sentence combined.

"The hell!" I said, nettled. I pointed to a shrouded heap on the floor behind the seats.

"What's that?" Crane demanded. The heap moved irregularly, then seemed to become aware of the situation and froze.

"Couple of leisure-time shifters got married today," I explained. "Asked could they honeymoon in here under that cover. I said why not, provided they kept decently quiet."

"Well, the honeymoon's over," Crane snapped. "I want a talk with you in private. Get 'em out of here," he added to the nearer of his secretaries.

She exchanged a glance with her sister and they both blushed. As a matter of principle, of course, Crane's personal staff and most of the front people of the organisation at least pretended to be frigid; in the girls' case, it wasn't pretence. On the fiery red of their cheeks 'the girls' F-symbols stood out vividly.

"Ah, hell!" Crane said, realising. He gave the honeymoon couple a prod with his toe. "Back to the stairs, you! And thank Mr Gardner for letting you in here, why don't you?"

Sheepishly they emerged from under the cover, fastening zips and so on. The girl was rather pretty, I thought. I couldn't call her beautiful and mean it, though. Denise was so staggeringly lovely I was getting into the habit of reserving that category just for her.

The couple muttered obedient thanks and left. A ribald chorus of congratulations walled up outside before one of the secretaries could get to the door and slam it.

"Why in hell don't you make things more difficult for 'em, instead of easier?" Crane sighed. "Ah well—we all have our lapses, and a weakness for romance isn't cured in a day."

He dropped into the middle seat facing the screen, the good one where I'd been sitting, and jabbed his mock cigar towards the frozen picture.

"If I didn't know you better, Gene," he said, "I *could* hope you were running through that stinker to find out what was wrong with it. But I guess you were basking in your own brilliance, as usual."

I stared at him. It wasn't a joke—Crane had a special ponderous tone for jokes, like an elephant dancing.

"Stinker?" I echoed. "Now look here, Bossman—"

"Have you heard the DOA rating on that show yet?" he cut in.

I hesitated. I hadn't in fact; I had no reason to think it had fallen below standard, though. Did Crane's outburst mean there had been some catastrophic drop in the DOA's? I hadn't answered before he drew his mouth up in a sneer.

"Not worried about the figures any more, hey? Play back the rating for him; you two!"

The girls, their faces pale and calm as usual, the F-symbols barely discernible on their pinky skin, took station about five feet apart on either side of the screen—for stereo, of course—and at a nod from Crane switched their recorders on. The voice of Jud Logan, the DOA rating expert, rang out.

"This week the Gene Gardner Show-to-Kill-Time rated eight hundred sixty dead on arrival within forty-eight hours of airing. Weekly average since this time a year back: seven hundred twenty-one decimal four. This week's subject: axe murder."

The recorders clicked off. Relieved but still puzzled, I rounded on Crane. "What's wrong with that?" I demanded. "It's up on last week, it's over the year's average—it always is! Show me anyone who gets a better DOA every week on the week!"

He wasn't in a reasonable mood. He clamped the mock

cigar back in his mouth. "You know how much the population of the city area went up in those same twelve months? Four hundred and eighty thousand! Have you been out and about recently? Have you *tried* to get about? Or have you been sitting admiring yourself in runback?"

"Admiring myself! That be damned, Bossman! You want I should take myself to Lancaster, maybe? His top DOA rating for any network show is ninety or a hundred below mine. Who dreams up these shows? Who keeps them ahead of the field week in, week out? I do! Doing better than anyone else in the business—that makes it a crime not to cure the problem single-handed?"

He wilted. I was glad. I had a recurrent nightmare in which he actually told me to go back to Harold Lancaster at our biggest rival network. He was still a better boss than Lancaster had ever been to me when I was serving my apprenticeship, before I rated star billing, let alone my own show. So, to keep him sweet, I dropped the pressure.

"Okay, points made on both sides. Of course the show isn't perfect. I hope it never will be, because improving it is what gives me the zest to keep it rolling forty-eight weeks in the year. But I'm always willing to listen to outside ideas, you know. Why don't you and I and the girls sit down and watch this one you called a stinker, clear through from the start, and see if we can brainstorm a few new slants?"

He sighed. "I've seen it four times already . . . But I guess I can stand another dose. Come where you can see, you two," he added to the secretaries.

I triggered the chair-arm switch and ran the recording back to the main title at the beginning.

"I'll keep the sound down," I said, "and I'll stop it occasionally to explain the thinking behind a particular episode, right? Now, is there anything you don't like about the main title? You see we have my name in white and the initial S of the title itself, and then the word *TIME*; everything else is in blood-red so it stands out—*Show-To-Kill-TIME*."

One of the girls ventured, "Couldn't you hold the red

lettering by itself after the white has faded, so there's no room for mistake?"

"It's an idea," I agreed. "I'll ask the psychologist on the script team. He may say that having HOW TO KILL on the screen by itself is overdoing it—but I'm always open to well-meant suggestions. After all, who has a bigger interest in the show's success than I have?"

The girls chuckled in unison. If it hadn't been for Denise, I'd have been very interested to find out how accurate their F-symbols were.

I went on commentating on the show, explaining how the dialogue was checked with word- and phrase-frequency lists published by a reliable research outfit, so I could be absolutely sure the same dialogue, word for word, might occur in daily life; how the settings were checked for authenticity by social workers; how the weapon selected—as always in these shows—was a common one, readily purchasable; how the killer, myself, was shown marking himself beyond doubt as he did the job, so that anyone could see him and turn him in to the law, thus ensuring that not only the victim but also the killer contributed to diminishing the total population.

Despite saying this one was a stinker, Crane couldn't fault it on a single point. I felt more flattered by his silence than by any DOA rating I'd ever picked up.

Towards the end I stopped the picture where it had been when Crane interrupted me. "You'll notice what a good job the props lab does on our dummies," I said. "Even the internal organs are exact—they have to be, naturally, because in many of the shows they're exposed to the cameras. I'm very proud that making these dummies gives full employment to no less than sixty people."

Crane and both girls nodded approval. Neither they nor I had to worry about adequate work, but it was impossible to avoid a stir of sympathy for those who did.

"Mr Gardner," said the girl who hadn't made the suggestion about the titles, "we notice you always use Miss Denise Delarose in your shows, and she's generally the victim. Wouldn't it be a good idea to change the victim sometimes?"

I gave her a sharp look. The suggestion wasn't a serious one, for sure; I put it down to wanting to say something after her sister had done so, and to plain ordinary jealousy. Put these two, attractive as they were, in the same room with Denise, and they practically disappeared from sight.

"We do 'change the victim'," I pointed out curtly. "In one show out of every four there's a multiple killing, and also in one show out of four the victim is a man. I've even played the victim's role myself on occasion, though not for some months because it had a poor effect on the DOA rating. People apparently couldn't take the killing seriously if they saw the star of the show die. Besides, there's a psychological reason for making the victim a beautiful woman. The more attractive she is, the more likely she is to—uh—" I saw them begin to blush and fidget, sighed, and settled on the polite circumlocution. "The more likely she is to increase the population," I said. "So we stress pretty women as potential victims."

I glanced at Crane, and my heart sank. He really was in a hole-picking mood! He was going to take what the girl had said as though it were a sensible comment.

"How many times has Denise played the victim in the past few months?" he rapped.

I couldn't hedge on that. "Twelve times in the past six months, not counting multiple killings which included her."

"Harrumph! If people can't take the killing seriously when the star gets killed, how can they take it seriously when the same victim crops up all the time?"

"Well, for one thing Denise is a magnificent actress! And we take pains to ensure that every role is as different as can be from the one before it."

"Fair enough. But how different from the role before *that*, Gene?"

I was sweating now. "Well, we can't have *too* great a diversity, you know. We're always aiming at a maximal number of potential identifications, so we have to select roles from the high-density social strata and the most overpopulated classification groups."



Crane grunted. "I've heard all that before," he said obstinately. "The point's still valid. Suppose you—"

I saw I was going to have to dig my heels in.

"No supposing!" I said bluntly. "The show wouldn't have got where it is if we'd 'supposed', and fired blind. I say stick to facts. And facts are that the rating is higher these past six months, since Denise has been playing opposite, me, than it's ever been before. Facts are that Denise and I inspire one another—working with her, I really live the part. Look!"

I gestured at the screen and tripped the switch on the seat-arm. "Did you notice that check in my movements? A pang of remorse! A moment of hesitation as the killer realises what he's done! Is that or is it not true to life?"

Glancing at the girl who had started the argument, I saw she wasn't willing to be convinced. Some people—mostly attractive women—don't believe attractive women can act. Denise was an exception. I set out to ram the fact home.

After a quarter hour's hard selling, I'd tried every angle of attack I could think of, and I hadn't made out. Well, I'd just have to figure out more to use tomorrow.

Of course, I *could* always go back to Lancaster and take the show with me . . . If it meant keeping Denise, I could force myself to do it.

One of the girls interrupted discreetly to remind Crane of an appointment due in a few minutes. Shrugging, he got up.

"Leave it as it is for the moment, Gene," he said. "Believe me, I'm not quarrelling with your ability or your rating. I'm just looking for ways to jack that rating up still further—past the thousand, maybe!"

Yes, it would be quite something to have the first show to hit the magic number. I gave a wan smile.

"I appreciate that, Bossman. Still, we've come a long way already from our first rating—remember?"

He remembered, all right. Forty-two! In fact, after that first show there was talk about cancelling the series immediately. But Crane had faith in me, and I had to admit I owed him a lot for that. The first show was a poison-

ing, and the choice of that method was a mistake. The second was a straight-forward stabbing with a butcher knife, and within forty-eight hours the rating was a hundred per cent up on the first week: eighty-five butcher knife victims DOA in the city area. And the third week we topped the hundred and never looked back.

But I still swore it had taken Denise's arrival in the show to put it right ahead of the competition.

On the point of leaving, Crane paused and turned. "Gene!" he called. "What's the theme for the next show?"

Spreading my hands, I grinned. "I'll sweat it out by first rehearsal tomorrow," I said. "You know how I work."

"I'd like it ahead of time," he said. "I have a policy conference tomorrow at ten. The sponsors' group want to put your show on the agenda. I don't know why, and I was going to object, but instead of that let's have you sitting in on the discussion, okay?"

All I could do was look delighted.

Only a few of the things which I'd got out of the success of the show meant anything to me in themselves—except getting Denise, which meant everything. The car was one of the few. I really appreciated not having to fight for subway places or room on a bus any more. Although I'd had it nearly a year now, I still had to stop and admire it for a moment every time before I got in. Long—at least ten feet—roomy, with plenty of space for four adults, it was barely smaller than the Bossman's own, and one of only a few thousand similar models in the city. Of course, it was attention-getting, and that had its drawbacks.

Like this evening. I collected my regular passengers from the transport co-ordination depot—two young men who worked in the public relations section and lived a short distance beyond my home—drove out of the building and hooked on the end of a chain going to the intersection of Plane and Fifteenth.

"Picking up Denise!" I explained to the passengers. They didn't raise any objection—the detour would only take an hour or so, and after all it was my car, not theirs.

At first we got along quite quickly, the speedo hitting as high as 12 m.p.h. Then at the usual jam around Plane and Tenth we slowed to a crawl. On the packed sidewalk someone noticed that the seat beside me was empty. He came over and rapped on the window. Of course, I couldn't hear what he said, the car being soundproof, but other people could—other loafers idling around on the sidewalk. Within a few seconds a fair crowd had gathered: nine hundred to a thousand, I judged.

I could tell from their contorted faces that they were being worked up to a fever pitch by the man who had started the trouble. I glanced in the rearview mirror and saw that my passengers' lips were moving nervously.

There was no real call to worry, I was sure. Once the crowd began to interfere with traffic, the police would show in seconds. Which they did. A few bursts from an automatic weapon put the pedestrians back where they belonged, apart from about half a dozen who got trampled in the rush, and the original troublemaker who stood his ground obstinately, yelling at the police and pointing at me.

I rolled down the window as an officer approached. He recognised me, naturally, and as soon as I'd explained that the seat was empty because I was picking up Denise, he apologised, shot the troublemaker and got back aboard his copter.

So in spite of the fuss I was only a few minutes late at my rendezvous with Denise. I had no idea where she'd been all day—shopping, perhaps; she could afford to shop occasionally now, and I wasn't going to rest till she could do it at least once a week.

If she had been shopping, she'd found a bargain, that was for sure. Her eyes were sparkling, and the way she kissed me on getting in the car told me she was on top of the world. In fact we'd rolled a dozen blocks before I realised we ought to have hooked on somewhere else by now and turned towards home.

Laughing, I made her hold back the big news till I'd sorted the problem out, and then gave her my best camera smile.

"What's with you?" I demanded. "I haven't seen you in such a state since we got married!"

"Then that's your fault," she teased me. "And so's this, so we're even. Isn't it wonderful? The clinic says definitely yes!"

"What?" I said, and felt as though I'd suddenly gone hollow clear through.

"They say yes! And it's sixty-fourty in favour of a boy. It's too early to be sure, but——"

"A what?" I said.

"A boy—a son! Gene, I'm so happy! Directly I was finished at the clinic I went right next door to the maternity guidance room and got all their literature—look, I have it here, marvellously comprehensive—and some books and some educational tapes. I put one straight in the recorder, just as a treat for myself. Listen! Can't you imagine how wonderful it's going to be hearing Gene Junior lisp through his first nursery rhymes?"

She held up her recorder and pressed the *on* switch before I could stop her. A silly patronising female voice filled our half of the car with a graceless song:

*"What is the F on your cheek, pretty maid,  
My pretty maid, my pretty maid?  
The F stands for frigid, sir she said,  
Sir she said, sir she said,  
The F stands for fri-i-gid, sir she said!"*

I made to switch the nonsense off, but she put the recorder out of my reach, and remembering the passengers in the rear seat could see us even if they couldn't hear us I didn't try to grab. I sat there, fuming, while the second verse played to its end.

*"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid,  
My pretty maid, my pretty maid.  
Nobody axed you, sir she said,  
Sir she said, sir she said,  
CHOP cherry CHOP cherry CHOP! CHOP!  
CHOP!"*

"I liked that one specially," Denise said brightly, turning off the recorder. "It reminded me of last week's show."

I took a deep breath. "Are you out of your mind?" I said.

"Gene!"

"You must be!" In the time the tape had taken to play, I'd had the chance to get boiling mad. Now I blew off. "What in hell do you think it's going to do to the show's DOA rating if it gets around that the stars are increasing the population? Hey? Do you know what I've been doing all afternoon? I've been fighting an attempt by Bossman Crane to squeeze you out of your regular spot in the show! I thought I was on the way to winning, and you come along and tell me this and expect me to grin and bear it! Hell, do you think you'll be able to hide the state you'll be in a few months from now? And even if you could, what's the point of trying if you've been stupid enough to go to a clinic instead of finding out the name of a reliable and discreet MD? Those places are hotbeds of gossip, and it'll take a week to kill the rumours that have started already, I'm damned certain of that—Denise!" I switched to a pleading note. "Denise, are you completely insane?"

She was staring at me frozen-faced. I recognised her unjustly-accused expression; it figured two shows out of four on a fair average.

"Gene, you're the one that's crazy—either that or so unnatural I don't believe it. A man who hears he's due to be a father is supposed to be pleased, not—"

"Suppose!" I raged. "I spent the afternoon telling Crane not to *suppose* things! Now you're doing it! Four hundred eighty thousand the population's gone up lately in this city alone—God knows what the figure is for the whole country. And here we are priding ourselves on a DOA rating that's doing something to stop the rot, and you let yourself get pregnant!" I buried my head in my hands. "Doesn't the show mean *anything* to you? Don't you care about the purpose it serves?"

"The show's fiction," she countered, but a quaver in

her voice indicated I'd made a dent in her abnormal mood. I hurried to make it a crack.

"Fiction! Why, only a few minutes back a sidewalk loafer practically started a riot because that seat where you're sitting was empty and he was on foot. The police had to turn out and half a dozen people got trampled. Fiction? Fiction hell! The show exists for a purpose—it's one of the things helping to make the world a fit place again. I *believe* in that show and the good it does; if I didn't, I couldn't have built it and *you* up to the top rating it has now. It's a hell of a sight more than just fiction, hear me?"

She turned in her seat and stared through the windshield at the train of cars ahead. I'd seen this look of withdrawal before too—on dozens of shows. That didn't stop me being hurt by it. I had a moment of mental struggle. Then I put my hand on hers, finding it curiously limp and cold.

"I'm sorry, darling," I said. "I blew my top."

She didn't give any sign that she heard me. I went on, "Look, if you think it over you'll come to see I'm right. We can get things fixed, and I'll see that the news is publicised enough to kill any rumours that got started this afternoon, and— Tell you what! How long would this damned thing have taken to arrive? Nine months, isn't it?"

Her pale lips barely moved. "Eight, now," she whispered.

"It's a good long time! By then, believe it or not, at the rate things are developing we should pass the thousand mark. A thousand DOA's out of one show—isn't it wonderful? I'll milk the sponsors of a bonus for that, and we'll have the most terrific celebration, and you'll be able to forget that I ever made you unhappy. I really am sorry, darling. But you gave me a terrible shock, you know. You made me very afraid and miserable for a moment there."

I'd assumed it was just a mood. Denise got these fits of the blues sometimes, when the apartment got her down because after all it wasn't as big as it could have been, or

when too many people recognised her on the street and she had to be rescued before she was mobbed. Me, I was adjusted to that—the more often I was recognised, the better for my morale.

Only . . . this was pretty long-lasting, for a blue mood. And she'd picked a hell of an evening to stage it, too. First rehearsal due tomorrow at fifteen hours, and by then I had to have the plot of the week's show cut and dried so we could script and select props and get the scenery into production ready for recording next day. I couldn't turn on my creative faculties with Denise mooning about the way she was, and I'd got to. Absolutely got to. If I didn't show with a dilly of an idea when the policy conference met at ten, I wouldn't be able to scotch this notion of replacing Denise. (Though I wasn't as fierce about the proposal as I had been earlier.)

I tried changing the subject. I tried appealing to her in so many words to come off her high horse. I tried putting suggestions for the show to her for her opinion. She just went on moping.

At twenty-one hours I gave up, dropped into my viewing in the middle of the apartment, and tried to cajole her into sitting on my knee to watch the competition's best-rated show the way we usually did together. She wasn't having that either. She pulled a face and sat down on the divan behind me.

So the hell with it. I wasn't going to pass up the rival show to accommodate her tantrums. I switched on, just in time to catch the intro music and the titles.

Lancaster's big DOA show was quite different from mine. It relied on guest stars, which I'd always said was wrong. How could you expect the viewers to identify if they saw people on their wall-to-walls they'd seen already in scores of widely differing roles? Nonetheless, the Lancaster team sometimes came up with a good idea, and to add to my depression tonight was one of their better nights.

The main character was a janitor living in what used to be the elevator car of a big apartment building. He was presented as a socially well adjusted type. One of the fifty-

odd people living on the twelfth floor was a pretty girl he'd fallen for. But because he was afraid he might lose control of himself if he struck up an acquaintance with her, and maybe get her in private and run the risk of increasing the already unbearable population-density in the block, he'd never even spoken to her.

Then a heel living on the floor below this girl started to hang around her, and the janitor was appalled to find that she—whom he'd pictured to himself as decently frigid—was letting him make time with her. He brooded and kept watch till he was sure beyond doubt. Then, heavy-hearted, he went into action.

On the landing at the foot of the stairway between the twelfth floor, where the girl lived, and the eleventh, where the heel lived, was a man-high window coming almost to the floor, which used to give on the fire escape before it was taken away under the municipal ordinance a few years back. He freed the catch on this window and oiled the hinges so it swung easily. Then he got some grease and smeared it all over the stairs.

The gimmick, naturally, was that when the heel came back to his own floor after being with the girl, he'd slip and go straight out the window to smash on the sidewalk eleven floors below. Ingenious. And the shots of the stairway were very atmospheric.

Then there was a good comic sequence as the janitor waited to see his rival come out—only just about everyone else on the twelfth floor beat him to it: a gang of kids, then a fat woman with a huge ration-bag indicating a big family, then a couple of men a few moments apart. And the way the camera caught the look on the janitor's face as he patiently pulled the window to after each failure and slopped more grease on the stairs was as fine a job as I'd seen in years.

My envy began to get lost in honest professional admiration round about the fourth time an unwanted victim skidded on the stairs and went looping out the window. This was very well done, except for the music, which seemed incongruous—

The music?



I snapped around in my viewing chair. Sure enough, the music didn't belong with the show at all. Denise was playing that damned tape again, the one I'd heard in the car:

*"Nobody axed you, sir she said,  
CHOP cherry CHOP cherry CHOP! CHOP!  
CHOP!*

"Denise!" I said politely. "I'm viewing—please turn that off."

She said no attention. I sighed, got up, and took the recorder from her limp grasp. I dropped the tape cassette in the waste disposal tube, patted her cheek, and returned to my chair just in time to catch the climax. The girl and the heel emerged from the girl's room together, arms around each other, smiling, and duly lost their footing on the greasy stairs. Together they went diving through the window, the heel revealing his true nature as he tried to save himself at the girl's expense. Cut to the janitor's ludicrous expression as he realised his plan had worked too well.

So that left him to get his comeuppance. It came as he leaned out to pull the window closed; he leaned too far, over-balanced—and over a last shot of the swinging window the credits came up.

I bit my lip. The only flaw in the whole thing was that a careless viewer might have taken the janitor's demise as voluntary, and suicide was against the production code. It wasn't enough of a fault to signify. The beautifully generalised setting was bound to ensure a surge of people breaking their necks on greased stairways in the next couple of days, and that meant a big boost to the Lancaster show's DOA rating.

*Damn* them! I'd been struggling to work out a show involving a janitor for months, and the best I'd been able to do called for arson, which was out of the question. If a fire broke out spontaneously, it was acceptable to take advantage of it—by not having fire escapes, for example. But living accommodation was far too scarce for me to be able to build a show around a deliberately started fire.

I turned to Denise. "Were you watching, honey?" I inquired. "You see the kind of talent we're up against, and why we dare not let anything happen which would harm the show!"

She didn't answer. She didn't say anything else all evening.

My head felt apt to crack open next morning. I was in a hell of a state when I arrived early at the studios. The way Denise was behaving had prevented me from concentrating at all, and yet somehow I had to dream up a better situation than the one Lancaster had used last night—by ten o'clock, when the policy conference met.

More than once when I was blocked I'd found inspiration in going through the prop labs and storerooms. Starved of any other idea, that was where I went.

I was usually on good terms with the sixty technicians in the lab who weekly turned out the dummies for the show—so incredibly lifelike they could do everything bar walk and talk. But this morning, directly I came into the lab, I felt veiled hostility in the air. No: not so much hostility as a lack of the ordinary respect. Something in that man's smile, which could have been a sneer if it were more pronounced. And instead of a big smile and a cheery greeting from the girl who styled the dummies' hair, a mere nod.

I told myself I was on edge, and my feeling was illusive. It wasn't till I'd reached the stockroom and met the props chief, Al Bazeley, that I discovered it wasn't just my imagination.

On catching sight of me, his long face lit with an expression I couldn't make out. Almost, he looked relieved to see me. He didn't say why, though; his only words were, "Morning, Gene. What can we do for you this early in the day?"

"Looking for an idea, as usual," I answered. "I'd like to go through the weapons section."

He nodded and fell in beside me in silence as I ambled among the racks in the stockroom. Most of the racks here

held weapons—cutlasses, rapiers, knives of every kind, guns from muskets to hunting rifles to pistols to sub-machine guns. There were cases with bottles of poison, surgical instruments, scissors, shears, models of agricultural implements—in short, everything deadly from cars to cyanide.

There were little labels on most of the items, in half a dozen colours. Blue indicated that we'd used them in the show already. Red, and the remaining colours, indicated that such items had been used by Lancaster and other competing networks. I was depressed to see how many Lancaster-red labels there were.

I stopped in front of a rack on which lay a sleek, deadly-looking firearm I didn't recognise.

"New acquisition, Al?" I demanded.

He came back from a preoccupied trance and lifted the gun from its rack, nodding. He handed it to me so I could feel how snugly it fitted the user's grip.

"Pretty rare weapon, that," he said with pride. "Forty-shot carbine. I heard of its existence a year ago, but I only got hold of it last week. That's the magazine alongside the stock, see? And the single-to-rapid control is here where you can touch it with your trigger-finger. Notice how light and easy it snicks over? The whole thing's in impeccable condition."

It was certainly a keen weapon. "You have shells?" I asked.

"Case of a hundred twenty that came with the gun—three full loadings. Say, Gene, this is a hell of a thing to have to ask a friend, but——"

A sort of icy block formed around my heart. I knew what was coming even before I'd said heartily, "Go ahead, Al! Ask me anything you like. You know I don't offend easily."

"Well—there's a peculiar rumour going around about Denise." He swallowed and cocked his head on one side.

"Such as?" I encouraged. *Damn* the scandalmongers at the clinic! Whatever happened to so-called medical ethics?

"People are saying she's—uh—due to add to the population. She and you, naturally."

"Oh, that!" I said scornfully. "Migawd, Al, I wish our DOA rating would grow as fast as rumours do! Like all rumours, this one's built on a grain of truth, granted—but accidents can happen to anybody."

"Accident?" echoed Al doubtfully.

"Pure accident," I emphasised. "And of course there are ways to fix such accidents, which we'll be doing forthwith. Neither of us is crazy enough to jeopardise the show."

Unexpectedly, he put out his hand. "I sure am glad to hear you say that, Gene!" he exclaimed, "Look, in absolute confidence, I've had the same kind of trouble. My wife's been arguing with me all the past month because I want her to fix another—uh—accident. Look, she's a tremendous admirer of yours. Would you let me tell her what you've just told me? Then I'm sure I'll be able to persuade her."

I didn't fancy letting the word get about till I'd had an okay from public relations on the phrasing of it. Still, Al was an old friend . . . I nodded permission. "I guess it's in the public interest," I said.

At ten I had to go to the policy conference, and I still hadn't had an inspiration for the week's show. I sweated all the way to the conference room, wondering about hit-and-run drivers, people starting riots in which others got trampled, and a score of themes beside—all perfectly acceptable but far too expensive. It took twelve hours to get a camera crew to and from a location outside the city and far enough distant to ensure that lens mugs didn't ruin the effect, so I was limited to two location shows per year. No, it had to be a studio job.

Oh, I was definitely in for a bad time.

Big as the room was, it was crowded, and I sat knee to knee with Crane on his side of the table. Behind him were his two secretaries, identical smug smiles on their faces. I gave them a dirty look as I entered, for the sake of whichever of them had suggested ousting Denise.

I was sure Crane had seen the Lancaster show last night. I knew from the glower he maintained unbroken.

Across the table the expressions weren't dirty; they were just tough. On the left was the sponsors' group spokesman, Mabery of Monopoly Manufacturers Inc. Next to him was Jackson Weems, representing the government and the Commission on Communications. And at the right, stony-faced, wearing the black robes of the Order of Spiritual Sanctimony, was Brother Louis Gravamen, adviser on morality for the network. Much to my astonishment, he gave me a stony smile and a nod as I sat down. He wasn't in the habit of doing that very often.

Each of these three also had a secretary with him. As Crane cleared his throat to begin the meeting, five clicks indicated the switching on of recorders.

Crane explained why I'd been invited to sit in and asked if there were objections to my being present throughout the part of the agenda which wasn't concerned with my show. I hoped there would be, to give me another thinking-space. But nobody minded, so we went ahead.

Minor problems took up the first half-hour. Brother Louis had viewer complaints on moral grounds about a commercial for one of Mabery's products, and a suitable modification was agreed. Then Weems raised the problem of leisure-time shifters and broached a scheme to provide government-assisted viewing centres for people who couldn't get home owing to transport difficulties; naturally Mabery—whose company made home wall-to-walls, among all its other products—objected.

Schemes like this were always coming up, and people like Mabery were always saying it wasn't a question of improved viewing facilities, it was a matter of better transportation, and people like Weems were always taking this as an insult, and the inevitable result was deadlock. It was deadlock now. I let my mind wander until they got on to news coverage.

Then I pricked my ears up. It was just possible a topical theme might present itself.

Weems had an axe to grind on this subject and soon he

was blasting at Mabery for all he was worth. There had been a promising outbreak of virus plague a few weeks before, which I remembered hearing about.

"And what happened?" barked Weems. "The news bulletins were crammed with pictures of pitiable fever-ridden children instead of hopeful-looking census officers! As a direct result—I tell you, a *direct* result—before the casualty list had even hit ten thousand one of your drug companies was marketing a specific. Where are we now? Back where we started! It hasn't taken a single life for more than ten days!"

Mabery looked uncomfortable. He didn't answer the attack directly, but appealed to Brother Louis.

"Isn't it a moral duty to fulfil a need when it arises? We had the drug and there was a demand for it—were we wrong to meet the demand?"

Brother Louis shrugged. "The question is the knotty one of ends and means," he said oracularly.

(Should the next show concern someone deliberately spreading an infectious disease? Out of the question: Lancaster would be able to challenge every single DOA credited to us.)

Mabery flared up—it was easy in the crowded room, for the temperature was rising to an uncomfortable level.

"Ends and means! Thunder, Brother Louis, if all you want is a means, you know as well as I do that we've had it for years!"

Unexpectedly, Weems supported him. "We could create an unstoppable disease tomorrow, for example, if it wasn't for mealy-mouthed opposition from people who are too selfish to make their own contribution to the general good."

After my row with Denise last night, I reflected, I certainly couldn't be accused for lack of personal involvement.

"That's not what I'm talking about," Mabery snapped. "As Brother Louis very well knows! I'm talking about steriline, which we've had for a decade, and which we aren't allowed to advertise. *That's* the means we need, and

it's a hell of a sight more infallible than any of your stiff-necked, unctuous——”

Red rag to a bull. I winced, and wished that someone had objected to my staying for the whole conference. Now we could be sure of a long lecture from Brother Louis on our bounden duty to provide people to carry their appointed crosses.

We got it, pouring forth as hot as steel from a newly-tapped furnace. According to Brother Louis, the use of drugs like steriline was morally no better than reducing the population with nuclear bombs. Even Mabery began to quiver after a while. I was a customer for steriline, of course, and had been since marrying Denise, and I felt strongly opposed to all that Brother Louis was saying, but if I'd been a practising member of any Order I'd have been on my knees crying before Brother Louis finished.

He resumed his place with the air of one who has spoken fearlessly for the right, and there was an uncomfortable silence.

“I think,” Crane ventured, “that we might leave this—uh—delicate topic and proceed with the agenda . . .?”

A vigorous nod from Weems, a nod and scowl from Mabery, a lordly gesture of permission from Brother Louis. Their eyes turned simultaneously on me.

(Matter of interest: if Mabery was now making claims that steriline was infallible, then how——?)

But Crane was charging ahead. “The sponsors group has asked for a discussion of Mr Gene Gardner's show today. Ah . . .”

“We support the request,” Weems spoke up. “Although the shows of which Mr Gardner's is an example perform a valuable public service, we're anxious to see their contribution increase in ratio with the gravity of the problem, and at present this is not the case. Since Mr Gardner's show is the outstanding one of its kind, we feel it's a good place to begin our inquiry.”

That sounded ominous. I gave Weems a sunny smile.

“Our interest is parallel,” Mabery said. “We view with alarm the fact that Lancaster's top show, though still get-

ting a lower DOA rating, is actually increasing its rating more rapidly than ours, and will probably overtake us in another few months."

The smile I gave him was much less sunny.

"We're fully aware of this problem," Crane declared hastily. "In fact, Mr Gardner and I spent a long time yesterday afternoon discussing that very point."

"And did you come up with any fresh ideas?" Mabery said.

"Well, we considered—" Crane leaned back in his chair so that one of the twin secretaries could whisper in his ear, and went on. "We considered some extra punch in the main titles, and——"

"Hah!" Mabery exclaimed. "That's no good! I was watching Lancaster's show last night and was tremendously impressed. It had everything the Gardner shows used to have—freshness, originality, light relief, superb atmosphere. Frankly, it's my belief that after Gardner's meteoric rise he's now letting his curve flatten out."

"There hasn't been any sign of that!" I snapped.

"There has," Mabery contradicted. "Our surveys of viewer reaction show that there's a growing lack of identification due to the recurrent appearances——"

"I know what you're going to say," Crane cut in eagerly. Blast him for a bootlicking bastard! "The too frequent appearances of Denise Delarose as the victim. I made this very point to Gene yesterday."

They looked at me. I was tempted to say what was really in my mind—that if anyone attempted to squeeze my favourite partner from the show I'd go to Lancaster and take the show with me. Fortunately I hesitated long enough for Brother Louis to stir and give me a look by his standards almost benign.

"As it happens, I too saw the Lancaster show last night," he said. "And I can't share your enthusiasm entirely. Granted, the self-control exercised by the main character was admirable, but the conclusion undermined the impact. One was left in two minds as to whether the janitor's demise might not have been voluntary, and suicide is



against the code. This is a fault I've never observed in any show of Mr. Gardner's."

So that was why he'd smiled when I came in. I looked properly appreciative of his support.

"True enough," Mabery conceded. "But it's not the past I'm concerned with. I want to know the future plans for the show. I want to know how Gardner proposes to stay ahead of the Lancaster show."

Now I was really on the spot. I wouldn't dare generalise. I was going to have to be precise and optimistic and all the other things I didn't feel. I licked my lips and hesitated, and then, as though someone had tripped a switch in my brain, the inspiration came. Words lined up on my tongue ready to be spoken.

I hid my relief with a grin.

"Both you gentlemen," I addressed Mabery and Weems, "want to see my DOA rating rise. So do I. What's the crucial factor on which the rating depends? It's viewer-identification, obviously. Right?"

"Up to now we've needed to concentrate on expanding our audience. In other words, we've ensured good ratings by ensuring that we had a large number of viewers. We've achieved this by making our settings and characters as typical and as average as we can. The highest density of population in a given social stratum, the most overfilled classification groups—these have been our starting-points.

"Now the time is ripe to switch the emphasis. We have our assured audience, our millions of viewers who won't miss the show if they can avoid it. From here on, we have to emphasise the universality of our situations rather than of our characters. And we'll combine this with an appeal to the audience's aspirations.

"Let's take the show we're going to rehearse today and record tomorrow. My role is that of a socially adjusted man, more prosperous than the average, fortunate enough to have an apartment for himself and his wife, who sublimates his baser instincts by collecting firearms. You'll see this is psychologically consistent, of course. Likewise it's got assured public appeal, combining the social virtues

with the lure of luxury. How many people don't cherish a secret wish that they could indulge a hobby such as collecting guns?

"But his wife—a role which will of course be taken by Denise Delarose because it's been created with her in mind—uses all her powers of seduction to break down his self-control, and succeeds, with the appalling result that she becomes pregnant."

I glanced at Brother Louis. His eyes were gleaming. "The eternal theme!" he exclaimed. "Woman as the vessel of evil! Mr Gardner, your inspiration amazes me."

"Is this man to suffer the rest of his life because he once yielded to temptation? That seems too harsh a fate. Yet the situation develops so that this consequence seems inevitable. At last, in unutterable despair, he does the only possible thing and ends his wife's life before surrendering with a confession on his lips to the forces of law and order.

"And here's the angle which will put us way ahead of the Lancaster show. We're through with people just like us. We're building from now on around people who are the way we'd like to be if we were rich enough and lucky enough—and *still* we're putting them in predicaments which could happen to anyone."

"Gene, it's the greatest," Crane said with honest admiration, and I saw from the expressions on the faces across the table that I'd impressed the others too. It cost me all my will-power to stop myself wiping the sweat from my face and betraying how I felt.

When Denise came to the studios—pale, walking as if in a dream—half an hour before rehearsal time that afternoon, I broke off my discussion with Al Bazeley about the weapons collection we were going to give the killer in the show, and dashed over to throw my arms around her.

"Darling! Everything's wonderful! Thanks to you I've had the most fabulous idea for this week's show—it's going to be the start of a whole new approach, and there won't

be any more talk about taking you out of the show, believe me!"

She pushed me away without force. "I wouldn't have minded," she said. "If it was going to help."

I put my arm around her waist and led her unresisting over to Al. "Silly!" I teased. "I'd have minded, and I'm sure the viewers would have minded too. Al! Show Denise the carbine we're going to use!"

Al grinned and went to fetch the gun.

"I'm even glad you had that blue mood yesterday," I enthused to Denise. "It certainly paid off. Listen, what do you think of this?"

I outlined the story. When Al brought the gun, I even began to improvise movements and dialogue, so that the idea took definitive shape ahead of rehearsal time.

The one thing wrong was Denise's reaction. I'd expected her to feel the theme the way I did—on a personal level. But all she said was, "Very good, Gene. It'll be a big success."

Al drew me aside, looking worried. "Gene, is something wrong?" he whispered.

"A bit of artistic temperament is all," I bluffed. "By the time we've been through the motions, she'll catch fire like everyone else. I'm sure this one's going to be terrific all round."

Then the costumes and hairstyle people came into the rehearsal studio, and the script team with their files of word- and phrase-frequencies, and the cameramen I always used, Hank and Sammy. It was time to get down to business.

While we were discussing the shape of the story, the lab team came up as usual with the dummy and set it in a chair next to Denise so that it too could be coiffed and costumed. Much sooner than usual things were ready for a run-through. I choked off a flow of compliments from the script team's psychologist about the choice of gun-collecting as a hobby for my killer, and turned to call Denise.

And stopped, shocked beyond measure. Because for a

second I genuinely could not tell which was Denise and which was the dummy in those two identical chairs.

Then of course I realised: Denise was wearing the outfit I'd seen her arrive in, and the dummy was in a studio dress. The shock passed, but it left a mark.

I'd been wrong to assume that once she got into the swing of things Denise would turn in her usual fine performance. She was so lifeless it killed the enthusiasm I'd built up among the crew. After five abortive shots at the opening "established" scenes, I was fuming behind a calm face.

"Take five!" I shouted to the crew, and closed my hand on Denise's wrist to draw her out of sight behind some sets which had been used for another rehearsal earlier in the day.

"Denise!" I hissed. "What's eating you? I might as well be playing opposite one of the lab dummies! Come to life, will you? Damn it, this theme is straight out of your own experience!"

A spark of anger showed. Good: I was breaking through.

"Then *use* a dummy!" she snapped. "What's the difference?"

"I certainly can't see any in what you've done so far today!" I retorted. "All right, let's try again—and this time for pity's sake try and show you mean it!"

It went a little better from then on. We worked out as far as the point where the idea of seduction crossed the wife's mind. I was going to have my back to her, studying the forty-shot carbine which was the pride and joy of my firearms collection. Suddenly I heard her humming a tune—the same damned tune!

*"Nobody axed you, sir she said—"*

I spun around. "Denise!" I exploded.

She met my gaze with all the innocence in the world. "But isn't that a good idea?" she said. "After all, I'm supposed to be thinking wicked thoughts about getting myself pregnant—isn't a nursery rhyme appropriate?"

"I think it's an excellent touch, Miss Delarose," called

the psychologist on the script team, and his colleagues gave approving nods. I smiled at Denise.

“Good to see you back on form!” I exclaimed.

The full rehearsal next morning was done under the cameras exactly as the final recording would be done in the afternoon. Denise seemed quite her usual self. I joked with her, pointing to the dummy in its chair at the side of the studio, and told her about my shock of the previous afternoon.

A teasing smile came to her beautiful lips. “If you’re my husband and you can’t tell me from a dummy, who else could?” she demanded.

“I can certainly tell you apart in private,” I answered, and tried to kiss her.

She held me off. “You’re supposed to be playing a socially responsible person, remember?”

I grinned and gave in.

We usually shot these shows with two cameras, one trucking and one on a blimp. There was a master screen over the goldfish bowl which showed whatever was on camera at the moment. Hank was with the blimp as usual.

I took every chance I got when I was out of shot to glance at the master screen and imagine how it would look. It was promising. Denise seemed to have lost her bad mood completely, and by the time we were up to the point of the actual killing she was heart and soul in her part. Some of the looks of hatred she shot at me were so violent they almost made me stumble in my lines.

By recording time the show was close to perfection. The dummy waited in its chair, with the lab team making adjustments all the time so when the climax arrived and I shot Denise down with the carbine nobody could possibly tell there had been a switch. We finalised the sequence of shots with Hank and Sammy, and broke for lunch.

All through the meal I kept congratulating Denise over and over, for giving me the idea, for recovering from her depression, for turning in such a natural performance. She listened absently; I took it she was preoccupied with thoughts about the show.

When we came back from the canteen, Al Bazeley was waiting in the studio. With him was a small woman, rather plain, with a round face and a nervous manner, whom I hadn't seen around here before.

"Can I have a word with you, Gene?" Al said, coming up. I nodded and drew aside from Denise, who didn't seem to notice.

"Look, Gene," Al went on, "you remember what I said about my wife? Well, she wasn't having any. She thought I was making it up. So I—uh—arranged for her to come down and meet you and Denise and get it straight from you. I hope you don't mind."

I thought it was a bit high-handed not to have asked me before bringing his wife along. Still, I couldn't very well refuse. I said brightly, "Sure! Let me explain to Denise first, though, and make sure she has no objections."

"You're a pal, Gene," he said, looking relieved.

I caught up with Denise. She was standing before the dummy's chair studying her duplicate with great concentration. I put Al's problem to her. Her face lit up.

"I'd be delighted!" she said in the warmest tone I'd heard from her all day.

"Are you certain? It's none of my doing? I promise you—the rumours must have got to Al from the clinic, and since by sheer coincidence he has the same trouble he asked——"

"It's perfectly clear," she answered impatiently. "Is that his wife standing next to him?"

"Gene!" Al called out. "Look who's coming into the goldfish bowl!"

I looked. There was Crane, and he was no surprise—he often came to rehearsals or recordings. But with him were Brother Louis Gravamen, Jackson Weems, and Mabery.

"Hell!" I said under my breath, at the same time putting on a welcoming smile. I'd hoped to—well—supervise the talk between Denise and Mrs. Bazeley. No chance now.

I went into the goldfish bowl and shook hands all around. Crane explained, "We were all so interested in

your new plans for the show we decided we'd like to attend the actual performance, as it were."

"I'm flattered," I said with all the enthusiasm I could muster. I gave them a quick rundown on what they could see on the studio floor, but that wasn't what they were after. At length Mabery cleared his throat.

"I hear you insist on realism in your shows, isn't that so? I mean, you use an actual knife, or an actual gun, not studio dummies."

"That's correct," I agreed. "You might not think the viewer could tell the difference, but it creates a different atmosphere and gets me deeper into my role."

"I'd be extremely interested to see the weapon you're using this week," Mabery pursued.

Crane butted in before I could stop him. "Our props man is out there on the floor talking to Miss Delarose. I'll have him fetch the gun for you."

Which he did. Al and I had to show all the fine points of the weapon to these greedy sensation-seekers. It was at least ten minutes before I could decently remark that we were holding up the show. I'd been keeping my eye on Denise and Mrs Bazeley; they were deep in conversation, but the goldfish bowl was soundproof and no mikes were live, so I could only guess what they were saying. At one point I saw Denise point to the dummy waiting in its chair, and Mrs Bazeley glanced from her to it and threw her hands up in amazement.

I hoped very hard that Denise was telling the other woman what Al wanted her to hear.

It seemed things had gone all right in the end, for when Mrs Bazeley parted from Denise I saw a calm, resolute expression on her round nervous face. Maybe she was resigned to doing the sensible thing, as Denise appeared to be.

She played the whole opening section of the show with real conviction and intensity. The only retake which was necessary was my fault—I fumbled while handling a gun from the collection Al had set up for me on the wall of the set. Even that irritating nursery rhyme which had set

my nerves on edge at rehearsal seemed to fit into the pattern of the story exactly as Denise had suggested.

Inexorably events followed one another; the wife's decision to break down her husband's self-control, the seduction, the consequences, the husband's horror and despair, the wife's refusal to see reason, her glorying in what she had done. Mentally I tensed as we approached the climax: the moment when we froze, cut the cameras, and had the dummy exchanged for Denise.

As usual, Al watched from the side of the floor rather than from the goldfish bowl. His wife sat meekly next to him. Once or twice I glanced at her for a reaction—after all, she was as close to an average viewer as I'd ever had present at a recording—and I was satisfied to read the emotion in her face.

Climax! I picked up the carbine, as though driven by intolerable compulsion, and turned slowly to Denise, who saw my purpose in my eyes and fell back into a chair, her mouth opening in a wordless scream. As usual, Hank's camera was covering this crucial shot, because he had a fantastic visual memory and would remain glued to his viewfinder until the dummy had been posed so exactly no one could tell there had been a switch at all.

"Cut!" I said, relaxing. At once the lab crew picked up the dummy; Denise got slowly out of her chair, and I went to grin at Crane in the goldfish bowl and receive nods of approval from the VIP guests. I always moved around instead of trying to hold the pose while the dummy was set up—I found it easy to resume an interrupted movement.

I'd had a lot of experience, of course.

Suddenly there was a shrill scream of horror, and everyone including me whirled to look for the source. Mrs Bazeley was flinging up her arms and yelling, and in a moment had collapsed to the floor.

People dashed to see what the matter was. I took charge and made them stand back. Al went on his knees at her side, calling her name: "Veronica! Veronica!"

Then, of course, Crane and his companions had to add



to the crowd, and things were completely out of hand for a full three minutes. In the end I had a couple of the script team carry her out of the studio to a restroom along the corridor. Al went with them. A few moments later, however, he was back, looking relieved.

"She'll be okay," he said. "I'm terribly sorry. She says she was so startled at seeing how much the dummy looked like Denise that she was frightened."

I was going to give him a piece of my mind when there came an acid growl from Hank. "If you don't calm down and get back to business Gene will forget his pose!"

"The hell you say!" I answered good-humouredly. "But you're quite right. Quiet, everyone—back to the job!"

The studio settled back to normal. Hank made ready to continue the recording. I picked up my gun and fell back in my pose, and Crane herded the visitors back in the goldfish bowl.

Just before signalling Hank to proceed, I glanced at Denise sitting in the chair the dummy had been in before. I felt a qualm. It was small wonder, really, that Mrs Bazeley had managed to scare herself. The lab had made a fantastic job of the resemblance, especially since Denise was watching me with unblinking concentration.

From the way my sample "average viewer" had reacted, this show was sure of a good rating.

I had just finished raising the gun to firing position. I went through the build-up movement again, heard Hank click the camera switch. I froze my face into a mask of demon-driven resolve, sighted on the dummy's breast over its heart. You could have heard a pin drop. A firing-pin, maybe.

My view full of the staring, open-eyed, open-mouthed face, I squeezed the trigger.

The explosion was incredibly loud. Even though I'd fired the gun during rehearsal and discovered it was as recoilless as the makers claimed, I felt jolted. A nine-millimetre hole appeared in the dummy. Blood began to ooze around it.

Slowly, as though realising too late what I'd actually done, I lowered the carbine and began to shake.

And the dummy smiled.

It was a triumphant smile, close to a leer. It lasted only a few seconds. Then the eyelids drifted down over the magnificent eyes as they dulled.

In death.

I didn't go on with the rehearsed movements. I turned and looked at the dummy sitting in the chair at the side of the floor. I looked back at Denise whom I had just shot dead.

I thought of a great many things in a short space of time. How Denise had talked with Veronica Bazeley; how then she had staged her faint at exactly the moment when Denise could have brought the dummy back from its new pose and resumed her own. She could resume poses as well as I could.

I thought of the realism I was so proud of: if I fired a gun in the show, I fired a gun. A real corpse was only logical. Fair enough, fair enough.

But if Hank hadn't been distracted like everyone else by the mock-fainting woman, he'd have seen Denise changing places with the dummy. He should have stuck to his job. I raised the gun and shot Hank neatly through the neck. He gave a strangled cry of amazement and fell forward, dragging his camera around so that the master screen swam with crazy panned images.

"Gene!" Al Bazeley shouted. "Gene!"

Steriline was supposed to be infallible. That meant that Denise must deliberately have stopped taking it. By implication, Al's wife would have done the same. And he let her come to the studio, today of all days. Poor Al. I shot him about where I had shot Denise—near the heart.

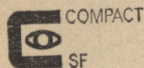
Behind the window of the goldfish bowl I could see Crane, and the VIP's, and the technicians, petrified with terror and disbelief. I could also see them above themselves. In dying, Hank had swivelled his camera around until it was focused on them.

Al had been perfectly right. The single-to-rapid control could be adjusted by a mere touch. Next time I squeezed the trigger the carbine sowed a line of holes all across

the window of the goldfish bowl. Watching in the master screen, I saw Crane shot in the face; Brother Louis Gravamen, who was taller, in the throat; Mabery, shorter in the face again, and Weems—who was trying to get out of the door—in the back of the head. A second burst disposed of the technicians. Of course, Al had put the full forty shots into the magazine. Realism.

Then I shot Sammy, the other cameraman, as he tried to hide in a corner, and went to turn Hank's camera off before going in search of Veronica Bazeley.

The show topped the thousand that week for the first time.



3/6

---

The first of Compact's new SF series is now on sale. Already acclaimed a minor classic in the field of 'Grand Manner' SF it is Michael Moorcock's

## THE SUNDERED WORLDS

Available from bookstalls or direct from Roberts and Vinter Ltd., 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1. And watch for Philip E. High's THE PRODIGAL SUN coming shortly.

J. G. BALLARD

## PRISONER OF THE CORAL DEEP

---

I FOUND THE shell at low tide, lying in a rock-pool near the cave, its huge mother-of-pearl spiral shining through the clear water like a Fabergé gem. During the storm I had taken shelter in the mouth of the cave, watching the grey waves hurl themselves towards me like exhausted saurians, and the shell lay at my feet almost as a token of the sea's regret.

The storm was still rumbling along the cliffs in the distance, and I was wary of leaving the cave. All morning I had been walking along this deserted stretch of the Dorset coast. I had entered a series of enclosed bays from which there were no pathways to the cliffs above. Quarried by the sea, the limestone bluffs were disturbed by continuous rock-slides, and the beaches were littered by huge slabs of pockmarked stone. Almost certainly there would be further falls after the storm. I stepped cautiously from my shelter, peering up at the high cliffs. Even the wheeling gulls crying to each other seemed reluctant to alight on their crumbling cornices.

Below me, the seashell lay in its pool, apparently magnified by the lens of water. It was fully twelve inches long, the corrugated shell radiating into five huge spurs. A fossil gasteropod, which had once basked in the warm Cambrian seas five hundred million years earlier, it had presumably been torn loose by the waves from one of the limestone boulders.

Impressed by its size, I decided to take it home to my wife as a memento of my holiday—needing a complete change of scene after an unprecedentedly busy term at school, I had been packed off to the coast for a week. I stepped into the pool and lifted the shell from the water, and then turned to retrace my steps along the coast.

To my surprise, I was being watched by a solitary figure

on the limestone ledge twenty yards behind me, a tall raven-haired woman in a sea-blue gown that reached to her feet. She stood motionlessly among the rock-pools, like a Pre-Raphaelite vision of the dark-eyed Madonna of some primitive fisher community, looking down at me with meditative eyes veiled by the drifting spray. Her dark hair, parted in the centre of her low forehead, fell like a shawl to her shoulders and enclosed her calm but somewhat melancholy face.

I stared at her soundlessly, and then made a tentative gesture with the seashell. The ragged cliffs and the steep sea and sky seemed to enclose us with a sense of absolute remoteness, as if the rocky beach and our chance encounter had been transported to the bleak shores of Tierra del Fuego on the far tip of the world's end. Against the damp cliffs her blue robe glowed with an almost spectral vibrancy, matched only by the brilliant pearl of the shell in my hands. I assumed that she lived in an isolated house somewhere above the cliffs—the storm had ended only ten minutes earlier, and there appeared to be no other shelter—and that a hidden pathway ran down among the fissures in the limestone.

I climbed up on the ledge and walked across to her. I had gone on holiday specifically to escape from other people, but after the storm and my walk along the abandoned coast I was glad to talk to someone. Although she showed no response to my smile, the woman's dark eyes watched me without hostility, as if she were waiting for me to approach her.

At our feet the sea hissed, the waves running like serpents between the rocks.

"The storm certainly came up suddenly," I commented. "I managed to shelter in the cave." I pointed to the cliff top two hundred feet above us. "You must have a magnificent view of the sea. Do you live up there?"

Her white skin was like ancient pearl. "I live by the sea," she said. Her voice had a curiously deep timbre, as if heard under water. She was at least six inches taller than myself, although I am by no means a short man. "You have a beautiful shell," she remarked.

I weighed it in one hand. "Impressive, isn't it? A fossil snail—far older than this limestone, you know. I'll probably give it to my wife, though it should go to the Natural History Museum."

"Why not leave it on the beach where it belongs?" she said. "The sea is its home."

"Not this sea," I rejoined. "The Cambrian oceans where this snail swam vanished millions of years ago." I detached a thread of fucus clinging to one of the spurs and let it fall away on the air. "I'm not sure why, but fossils fascinate me—they're like time capsules; if only one could unwind this spiral it would probably play back to us a picture of all the landscapes it's ever seen—the great oceans of the Carboniferous, the warm shallow seas of the Trias . . ."

"Would you like to go back to them?" There was a note of curiosity in her voice, as if my comments had intrigued her. "Would you prefer them to this time?"

"Hardly. I suppose it's just the nostalgia of one's unconscious memory. Perhaps you understand what I mean—the sea is like memory. However lost or forgotten, everything in it exists for ever . . ." Her lips moved in what seemed to be the beginnings of a smile. "Or does the idea seem strange?"

"Not at all."

She watched me pensively. Her robe was woven from some bright thread of blue silver, almost like the hard brilliant scales of pelagic fish.

Her eyes turned to the sea. The tide had begun to come in, and already the pool where I found the shell was covered by the water. The first waves were breaking into the mouth of the cave, and the ledge we stood on would soon be surrounded. I glanced over my shoulder for any signs of the cliff path.

"It's getting stormy again," I said. "The Atlantic is rather bad-tempered and unpredictable—as you'd expect from an ancient sea. Once it was part of a great ocean called—"

"Poseidon."

I turned to look at her.

"You knew?"

"Of course." She regarded me tolerantly. "You're a

schoolmaster. So this is what you teach your pupils, to remember the sea and go back to the past?"

I laughed at myself, amused at being caught out by her. "I'm sorry. One of the teacher's occupational hazards is that he can never resist a chance to pass on knowledge."

"Memory and the sea?" She shook her head sagely. "You deal in magic, not knowledge. Tell me about your shell."

The water lifted towards us among the rocks. To my left a giant's causeway of toppled pillars led to the safety of the upper beach. I debated whether to leave; the climb up the cliff face, even if the path were well cut, would take at least half an hour, especially if I had to assist my companion. Apparently indifferent to the sea, she watched the waves writhing at our feet, like reptiles in a pit. Around us the great cliffs seemed to sink downwards into the water.

"Perhaps I should let the shell speak for itself," I demurred. My wife was less tolerant of my tendency to bore. I lifted the shell to my ear and listened to the whispering trumpet.

The helix reflected the swishing of the waves, the contours of the shell in some way magnifying the sounds, so that they echoed with the darker murmur of deep water. Around me the breakers fell among the rocks with a rhythmic roar and sigh, but from the shell poured an extraordinary confusion of sounds, and I seemed to be listening not merely to the waves breaking on the shore below me but to an immense ocean lapping all the beaches of the world. I could hear the roar and whistle of giant rollers, shingle singing in the undertow, storms and typhonic winds boiling the sea into a maelstrom. Then abruptly the scene seemed to shift, and I heard the calm measures of a different sea, a steaming shallow lagoon through whose surface vast ferns protruded, where half-submerged leviathans lay like sandbanks under a benign sun . . .

My companion was watching me, her high face lifted to catch the leaping spray. "Did you hear the sea?"

I pressed the shell to my ear. Again I heard the sounds of ancient water, this time of an immense storm in pro-

gress, a titanic struggle against the collapsing isthmuses of a sinking continent. I could hear the growling of gigantic saurians, the cries of reptile birds diving from high cliffs on to their prey below, their ungainly wings unshackling as they fell.

Astonished, I squeezed the shell in my hands, feeling the hard calcareous spines as if they might spring open the shell's secret.

The woman still watched me. By some freak of the fading light she appeared to have grown in height, her shoulders almost overtopping my head.

"I . . . can't hear anything," I said uncertainly.

"Listen to it!" she admonished me. "That shell has heard the seas of all time, every wave has left its echo there."

The first foam splashed across my feet, staining the dried straps of my sandals. A narrowing causeway of rocks still led back to the beach. The cave had vanished, its mouth spewing bubbles as the waves briefly receded.

I pointed to the cliff. "Is there a path? A way down to the sea?"

"To the sea? Of course!" The wind lifted the train of her robe, and I saw her bare feet, seaweed wreathed around her toes. "Now listen to the shell. The sea is waking for you."

I raised the shell with both hands. This time I closed my eyes, and as the sounds of the ancient wind and water echoed in my ears I saw a sudden image of the lonely bay millions of years earlier. High cliffs of white shale reached to the sky, and huge reptiles sidled along the coarse beaches, baying at the grotesque armoured fish which lunged at them from the shallows. Volcanic cones ringed the horizon, their red vents staining the sky.

"What can you hear?" my companion asked me insistently, evidently disappointed. "The sea and the wind?"

"I hear nothing," I said thickly. "Only a whispering."

The noise erupted from the shell's mouth, the harsh bellows of the saurians competing with the sea. Suddenly I heard another sound above this babel, a thin cry that seemed to come from the cave in which I had sheltered.



Searching the image in my mind, I could see the cave mouth set into the cliff above the heads of the jostling reptiles.

"Wait!" I waved the woman away, ignoring the waves that sluiced across my feet. As the sea receded, I pressed my ear to the conch, and heard again the faint human cry, a stricken plea for rescue—

"Can you hear the sea now?" The woman reached to take the shell from me.

I held it tightly and shouted above the waves. "Not *this* sea! My God, I heard a man crying!"

For a moment she hesitated, uncertain what to make of this unexpected remark. "A man? Who, tell me! Give it to me! It was only a drowned sailor!"

Again I snatched the shell away from her. Listening, I could still hear the voice calling, now and then lost in the roar of the reptiles. A sailor, yes, but a mariner from the distant future, marooned millions of years ago in this cave on the edge of a Triassic sea, guarded by this strange naiad of the deep who even now guided me to the waves.

She had moved to the edge of the rock, the strands of her hair shimmering across her face in the wind. With a hand she beckoned me towards her.

For the last time I lifted the shell to my ear, and for the last time heard that faint plaintive cry, lost on the reeling air.

"H-h-e-e-lp!"

Closing my eyes, I let the image of the ancient shore fill my mind, for a fleeting instant saw a small white face watching from the cave mouth. Whoever he was, had he despaired of returning to his own age, selected a beautiful shell and cast it into the sea below, hoping that one day someone would hear his voice and return to save him?

"Come! It's time to leave!" Although she was a dozen feet from me, her outstretched hands seemed almost to touch mine. The water raced around her robe, swirling it into strange liquid patterns. Her face watched me like that of some monstrous fish.

"No!"

With sudden fury I stepped away from her, then turned and hurled the great shell far out into the deep water beyond her reach. As it vanished into the steep waves I heard a flurry of heavy robes, almost like the beating of leathery wings.

The woman had gone. Quickly I leapt on to the nearest rock of the causeway, slipped into the shallows between two waves and then clambered to safety. Only when I had reached the shelter of the cliffs did I look back.

On the ledge where she had stood a large lizard watched me with empty eyes.

---

## The Contributors

BRIAN ALDISS is Literary Editor of *The Oxford Mail*. Perhaps the finest stylist in SF he has written some of the best works in the field, including his early novel *Nonstop* and his recent one *Greybeard*. With Harry Harrison he is the co-editor of the critical journal SF HORIZONS.

J. G. BALLARD is, in the words of Kingsley Amis, "one of the brightest new stars in post-war fiction". His influence on modern SF is becoming more and more evident. His best-known novel is *The Drowned World* and his latest *The Drought*. Ballard's obsession with metaphysical symbolism gives his work a power unequalled in modern letters.

JOHN BRUNNER sold his first novel when he was 17. His output since then has been incredibly varied from straight adventure SF to the excellent new novel *Telepathist* which we shall be reviewing in our next issue.

E. J. CARNELL was editor of NEW WORLDS from its foundation in 1946 until its change of publishers in 1964 when his commitments as an agent and editor of *New Writings in SF* forced him to relinquish the editorial chair. As editor, anthologist, agent and general mentor to many of the important names in British SF, John Carnell has been probably the greatest single influence on the field in this country.

*Continued on page 95*

JACK VANCE

## ALFRED'S ARK

---

BEN HIXEY, EDITOR of the Marketville, Iowa, *Weekly Courier*, leaned back in his chair, lit the stub of a dead cigar, inspected his visitor through the smoke. "Alfred, you look the picture of deep despair. Why the long face?"

Alfred Johnson, the local feed-and-grain merchant, made no immediate reply. He looked out the window, at his boots, at Ben, at his own thick hands. He rubbed his stiff brown hair, releasing a faint haze of dust and chaff. He said finally, "I don't hardly know how to tell you, Ben, without causing a lot of excitement."

"Begin at the beginning," said Ben. "I'm a hard man to excite. You're not getting married again?"

Alfred shook his head, grinning the painful grin of a man who has learned the hard way. "Twice was enough."

"Well, give. Let's hear the excitement."

"Do you read your Bible, Ben?"

"Bible?" Ben clapped his hand down on the latest issue of *Editor and Publisher*. "Here's my Bible."

"Seriously, now."

"No," said Ben, blowing a plume of smoke toward the ceiling. "I can't say as I'm a real deep-dyed student in such matters."

"You don't need the Bible to tell you there's wickedness in the world," Alfred said. "Lots of it."

Ben agreed. "I'd never vote for it, but it sure helps circulation."

"Six thousand years ago the world was like it is today—full of sin. You remember what happened?"

"Off-hand, no."

"The Lord sent a great flood. He washed the world clean of wickedness. Ben, there's going to be another flood."

"Now Alfred," said Ben briskly, "are you pulling my leg?"

"No, sir. You study your Bible, you'll see for yourself. The day is coming and it's coming soon!"

Ben rearranged the papers on his desk. "I suppose you want me to print big headlines about this flood?"

Alfred hitched himself forward, struck the desk earnestly with his fist. "Here's my plan, Ben. I want the good citizens of this town to get together. I want us to build a big ark, to put aboard two beasts of every kind, plenty food and drink, a selection of good literature, and make ourselves ready. Don't laugh at me, Ben. It's coming."

"Just when is the big day?"

"June 20th. That gives us less than a year. Not much time, but enough."

"Alfred—are you serious?"

"I most surely am, Ben."

"I've always took you for a sensible man, Alfred. You can't believe something so fantastic as all this."

Alfred smiled. "I never expected you to take it on my say-so. I'm going to prove it to you." He took a Bible from his pocket, walked around the desk, held it in front of Ben's restless gaze. "Look here. . . ."

For half an hour he argued his case, pointing out the significant passages, explaining implications which Ben might otherwise have missed. "Now," he said, "now do you believe me?"

Ben leaned back in his chair. "Alfred, you want my advice?"

"I'd like your help, Ben. I'd like you and your family aboard this ark I'm fixing to build."

"I'll give you my advice. Get yourself married again. It's the lesser of the evils, and it'll take your mind off this flood proposition."

Alfred rose to his feet. "I guess you won't run an announcement in the paper?"

"No, sir. And do you know why? Because I don't want to make you the laughing-stock of the county. You go home and clean up, take a run into Davenport, get good and drunk, and forget all this stuff."

Alfred waved his hand in farewell, departed.

Ben Hixey sighed, shook his head, returned to work.

Alfred returned a moment or two later. "Here's something you can do for me, Ben. I want to put my business up

for sale. I want to run a big ad on your front page. At the bottom I want you to print: 'Flood coming, June 20th. Help and funds needed to build an ark.' Will you do that?"

"It's your advertisement," said Ben.

Two weeks later on a vacant lot next to his house Alfred Johnson began construction of an ark. He had sold his business for a price his friends considered outrageous. "He stole it from you, Alfred!" Alfred shook his head. "I stole from him. In a year that business will be washed clean out of sight. I only took his money because in a year his money won't be any good either."

"Alfred," his friends told him in disgust, "you're making a fool of yourself!"

"Maybe so," said Alfred. "And maybe while you're swimming I'll be standing. Ever think of that?"

"You're really in earnest, Alfred?"

"Of course I'm in earnest. You ever hear of divine revelation? That's what I had. Now if you've only come to jaw, excuse me, I gotta get to work."

The ark took shape: a barge fifty feet long, thirty feet wide, ten feet deep. Alfred became something of a local celebrity, and the townspeople made it a practice to come past and check on progress. Alfred received a great deal of jocular advice.

"That barge sure ain't big enough, Alfred," called Bill Olafson. "Not when you consider the elephants and rhinoceroses and giraffes and lions and tigers and hippos and grizzly bears."

"I'm not taking savage beasts," said Alfred. "Just a few pedigreed cattle, cows, horses and sheep, nothing but good stock. If the Lord wanted the others saved he'd have sent me more money. I got just enough for what you see."

"What about a woman, Alfred? You ain't married. You planning to repopulate the world by this here immaculate conception idea?"

"If the right woman don't come along," said Alfred, "I'll just up and hire a woman for the day. When she sees I'm the only man left alive she'll marry me quick enough."

The fall passed into winter; spring came, and the ark

was complete. Alfred began loading aboard stores of all kinds.

Ben Hixey came out to see him one day. "Well, Alfred, I must say you got the courage of your conviction."

"It's not courage, Ben. It's cowardice. I don't want to drown. I'm sorry some of you other folk ain't cowards along with me."

"I'm more worried about the H-bomb, Alfred. That's what I'd like to build an ark against."

"In just about a month there won't be any H-bomb left, Ben. There won't be bombs of any kind, never again, if I got anything to say about it—and I guess I will, the way things look."

Ben surveyed the ark with wondering eyes. "You're really convinced of this business, aren't you, Alfred?"

"I sure am, Ben. There's a lot of good folk I'll hate to see go—but I gave you all warning. I wrote the President and the Governor and the head of *Reader's Digest*."

"Yeah? What did they say?"

"They wrote back thanks for my suggestions. But I could see they didn't believe me."

Ben Hixey smiled. "I don't either, Alfred."

"You'll see, Ben."

June arrived in a spell of wonderful summer weather. Never had the countryside looked so fresh and beautiful. Alfred bought his live-stock, and on June 15 herded them aboard the ark. His friends and neighbours took photographs, and made a ceremonial presentation of a glass cage containing two fleas. The problem of securing a woman to become progenetrix of the future race solved itself: a press agent announced that his client, the beautiful movie starlet Maida Brent had volunteered her services, and would be aboard the ark on the morning of June 20.

"No," said Alfred Johnson. "June 20th begins at midnight. She's got to be aboard on the night of June 19th."

The press agent, after consultation with Miss Brent, agreed.

June 18th dawned bright and sunny, although the radio and TV weather reports mentioned peculiar kinks in the jet stream.

On the morning of June 19th Alfred Johnson, wearing new shoes and a new suit, called in on Ben Hixey. "Last time around, Ben."

Ben looked up from an AP dispatch, grinning rather ruefully. "I've been reading the weather report."

Alfred nodded. "I know. Rain." He held out his hand. "Goodbye, Ben."

"Goodbye, Alfred. Happy landings."

At noon on June 19th deep dull clouds began rolling in from the north. Miss Maida Brent arrived at seven o'clock in her Cadillac convertible, and amid the mingled flickers of lightning and flash-bulbs went aboard the ark. The press agent attempted to come aboard also, but Alfred barred the way. "Sorry. Crew is complete now."

"But Miss Brent can't stay aboard all night, Mr. Johnson."

"She'll be aboard for forty days and forty nights. She might as well get used to it. Now skip."

The press agent shrugged, went to wait in the car. Miss Maida Brent would no doubt leave the ark when she was ready.

The rain began to fall during the evening, and at ten o'clock was coming down heavily. At eleven the press agent sloshed over to the ark. "Maida! Hey Maida!"

Maida Brent appeared in the doorway of the cabin. "Well?"

"Let's blow! We've got all the stuff we need."

Maida Brent looked toward the massive black sky. "What's the weather report say?"

"Rain."

"Alfred and I are playing checkers. We're quite cosy. You go on. Bye."

The press agent turned up the collar to his coat, hopped stiff-legged back to the car, where he morosely tried to catnap. The thudding of the rain kept him awake.

Dawn failed to reveal itself. At nine o'clock a wan wet gloom showed gutters ankle-deep in water. The rain pelted down ever harder. Along the streets cars driven by the curious began to appear, their radios tuned to the weather-report. Puzzled forecasters spoke of stationary cold fronts,

occluded lows, cyclones and anti-cyclones. The forecast: rain.

The street became crowded. News came in that the Perry River Bridge had washed out, that Pewter Creek was in flood. Flood? Yes, flood!

Bill Olafson came splashing through the mud. "Hey Alfred! Where are you?"

Alfred looked calmly out of the cabin. "Hello, Bill."

"My wife and kids want to take a look at your ark. Okay if I bring 'em aboard for a spell?"

"Sorry, Bill. No can do."

Bill walked uncertainly back to the car. There was a tremendous rumble of thunder, he looked skyward in apprehension.

Alfred heard a sound from the aft of the ark. He pulled on his slicker, his boots, trudged back to find two teen-aged boys and their girl friends mounting a ladder.

Alfred dislodged the ladder. "Keep clear, boys. Git away now. I don't wanta speak to you again."

"Alfred!" Maida's voice came thinly through the thrash of rain. "There's people coming aboard!"

Alfred ran back to meet a score of his friends and neighbours led by Bill Olafson carrying suitcases into the cabin. "Get off this ark, friends," said Alfred in a kindly voice. "There's not room aboard."

"We came to see how things were," said Bill.

"They're fine. Now git."

"I don't think so, Alfred." He reached over the side. "Okay Mama, pass up Joanne and the puppy. Quick. Before those others get here."

"If you don't git," said Alfred, "I'll have to make you git."

"Just don't try no funny stuff, Alfred."

Alfred stepped forward; Bill hit him in the nose. Others of Alfred's friends and neighbours lifted him, carried him kicking and cursing to the rail, threw him off the ark and into the mud.

From the street scores of people came running: men, women, children. They flung themselves up the rail, clam-



bered aboard the ark. The cabin was crowded, the rails were thronged.

There was a clap of thunder; the rain lessened. Overhead appeared a thin spot in the clouds. The sun burst through. The rain stopped. The sun glistened on the wet buildings, the flowing streets.

Alfred's friends and neighbours, crowded along the rail, looked down at Alfred. Alfred, still sitting in the mud, looked back up at them.

---

## The Contributors (cont.)

CHARLES HARNESS has published one novel *The Paradox Men* and one short novel *The Rose*, both of which are classics of their kind. He stopped writing in the early fifties but, as his many fans will be pleased to hear, began again recently. He lives in Maryland, U.S.A.

E. C. TUBB's latest novel was *Moon Base*. He was for some time editor of AUTHENTIC SF until its unnecessary demise, has published many novels, including the famous *Starship*, and appeared in a large number of SF and fantasy anthologies. His reputation for fast-moving and colourful SF writing is unmatched by anyone in Britain.

JACK VANCE is the author of the Hugo-winning story *The Dragon Masters*. A more recent novel *The Star Kings* is soon to be published in this country. Vance has an enviable reputation as a writer of varied but consistently good SF and fantasy. In the borderline "science fantasy" field he has written a classic *The Dying Earth*. His reputation is constantly climbing and he is as at home in the field of baroque space adventure as he is in the more thoughtful and realistic field of "down-to-earth" SF.

E. C. TUBB

# THE LIFE BUYER

---

## Part Two

six

THE PLACE HAD a gymnasium smell. A row of showers stood to one side, the stalls open. The paint was dark with age, the ceiling black with smoke, the faded prints on the walls mottled and stained.

Two men faced each other in the ring. They were naked aside from shorts and held practice knives in their hands. A third stood before a training device parrying the random slashes of a steel whip with a short bar of lead. Others went through routine exercises designed to speed reflexes and toughen muscle. The place was a normal appendage to the Free Circuit, duplicated a dozen times in the city, the hang-out of those with their eyes on the Mecca of the big time.

A man leaned against a wall and watched the fighters in the ring. They were scarred with the cicatrices of old wounds, white beneath the raw weals of recent training. The practice knives they held were edged with acid-soaked sponge.

"You want me?" Lou Benson, bald, fat, impatience faced the stranger.

"You the owner?"

"That's right."

"Nice pair of boys you've got there." The stranger nodded towards the ring. "You fighting them soon?"

"Maybe." Lou narrowed his eyes at the man. He could be a casual buff, a tout for a promoter, a spy from an agent. He could be connected with the gambling syndicate looking for prospects to fix a match. He could be a kink.

He was none of these. He was an undercover man for the police.

"It'd be a nice match," he said. He didn't look at Lou. "In the raw, ten-inch blades, no quarter." His breath made a sucking sound as he drew it between his lips. It'd be worth fifty birds for a ringside seat."

"Buy yourself a ticket at any agency," suggested Lou. "Why waste money?"

He had nothing to worry about. Fights were legal. The Great Franchise gave a man the right to do what he wanted with his own body. But he was intrigued. He had met men like the stranger before. Kinks eager for a special thrill. Their eyes gave them away.

"You're kidding," said the undercover man. "Who's interested in Sunday-school stuff?" His eyes left the fighters and met those of the owner. "I'd heard that you were a regular guy. One who could lay it on if the price was right. Get me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"No?" The stranger lifted a hand and flipped a finger against his forehead. "Fifty birds to be in circuit on a death-bout. Seventy-five if I'm riding the guy who gets it. Can do?"

"You're crazy!" Lou's caution tempered his greed. Straight fights were legal but the use of adapted crowns was not. The wearer of such a crown was deemed to be under coercion. "You've come to the wrong place, mister."

"That's not how Ransom told it." The stranger was annoyed. Saliva wet his lips and his eyes were wild. "He said you could fix it and he's never steered me wrong before. What's the matter? The price too low?"

"Maybe." Lou relaxed. "You know Ransom?"

"Dave? Sure I do. I told you, he steered me this way. Check if you like."

The owner checked as he knew he would. The answer was what he expected. Outside, well away from the gymnasium, the undercover man called the office on a public phone. Markham stared at him from the screen.

"Any luck?"

"No. I've tried seven different spots—all negative. If Ransom is around somewhere they don't know where he is. Want me to keep trying?"

"Yes, but don't make it obvious. If you get a lead let me know. Don't phone in for the sake of it. Cut."

Markham scowled as the screen went blank.

"Well," he said bitterly, "that's another lesson in never taking anything for granted. Ransom's ducked surveillance."

"How?" Steve looked up from a batch of reports. He looked tired. "I thought that you had him covered."

"We did." Markham was sour. "We had him tied and then he vanished." He read the agent's expression. "We got suckered by the oldest trick in the book," he admitted. "He switched in a ringer."

"When was this?"

"Just after you left for Malibu. We followed him from his apartment. He ducked around for a while, entered an automat, went to the men's room. He came out, wandered around some more, took in a show and went home—we thought. A stranger walked out of his apartment—we let him go. We waited—no Ransom. We phoned—no answer. We made entry—no Ransom. We're still trying to find him."

"A ringer," said Steve thoughtfully. "That's interesting."

"Why so?"

"Premeditation. He had to have someone with a similar build and colouring, wearing similar clothes and with a facsimile skin-mask all ready to make the switch. That took planning. How did he arrange it?"

Markham shrugged.

"Not by his own phone," continued Steve, "you had it tapped. By mail? No, too clumsy. Personal contact?" He looked at the chief. "How about the woman?"

"Stella Murray? They don't see each other."

"Any callers?"

"The usual. A mailman, a cleaner, a . . ." Markham fumbled at his desk and found a report. "A kid selling videotape subscriptions. All genuine. I checked."

"How did he travel?"

"By tube."

"Did he make any outside calls?"

"One," admitted Markham. "He wasn't in the booth long enough for us to get it tapped." He frowned at the agent. "You think he arranged it then?"

"Maybe. Where was he heading when he made the switch?"

"As far as we can tell he was heading towards the Palace. His path was apparently aimless but the psych-boys swear that he was subconsciously driven in that direction." Markham shook his head. "And that makes them as crazy as coots."

"I'm not so sure." Steve looked thoughtfully at the spire of the Palace beyond the window of Markham's office. "He had to have help to work the switch. Now, assuming that the switch wasn't his idea but that of someone else, who could that someone be?"

"Not King!" Markham was emphatic. "I'll agree that he could have done it but I'll swear he didn't."

"Why not?" Steve turned and looked at the chief. "Because of what happened between them in the past? If King wanted Ransom he would have sent for him."

"But Ransom wouldn't have gone to see King," insisted the chief.

"You're wrong." Steve smiled at the other's expression. "If King had sent for him Ransom would have gone. He couldn't have helped himself. He would have had to go."

"I can't see that."

"Then you've still a lot to learn about human nature. The question is, why should King have sent for him at all?"

"I'll ask him that when we find him," promised the chief. "If King did send for him, that is. Personally I think that he had his own good reasons for wanting to vanish."

"Such as?"

"We were too close for comfort. Ransom is no lily and he knows that we know it. My guess is that he couldn't stand for close-investigation. Or his associates

might have advised him to duck out of sight—or else. That would account for the smooth working of the switch.”

“Perhaps.” Steve was unconvinced.

“Or,” continued Markham casually, “he was afraid of someone else. It could be that he is hooked up in the same way with the Sheldon woman.”

“Linda?” Steve frowned. “The crowns?”

“What else?” To Markham it was obvious. “Ransom must use them in his private promotions. He has to get them from somewhere. Sheldon adapts them. What more do you want?”

“Proof,” said Steve sharply. “We don’t know that she adapts crowns. You could make the same accusation against any other electronician. Why pick on her?”

For a long moment Markham didn’t answer, then he shrugged. “Coincidence,” he said quietly. “They happen sometimes. Like Shiel dying down in Malibu. Had he been assassinated?”

“No.” Steve wondered why Markham had deliberately changed the subject. “Shiel’s death was as the autopsy stated. He died from natural causes. Hughes didn’t.”

“The hotel detective.” Markham added. “I read about that. Someone gave him a karate-chop to the neck. That’s a regular deegee trick.”

“You think that’s what it was?”

“Sure, it happens all the time,” said Markham. “You get these gangs roaming the areas due for demolition—the dead areas. If anyone comes their way they lay for him. That’s why Hughes was stripped when you found him. It’s obvious what happened.”

“Too obvious.” Steve met the chief’s eyes. “That’s what we’re supposed to think. Hughes wasn’t killed by a dead-gang. He was armed and no fool—he wouldn’t have let a deegee near him. He was killed by the person he went to meet.”

“And stripped?”

"He was selling something. The killer couldn't take the risk that he had it hidden in his clothing. So he stripped him just to make sure. The fact that stripping a victim is a deegee trick was a bonus." He paused. "My guess is that he was blackmailing King."

"Now I know you're crazy!" Markham snorted his contempt. "What business would King have with a broken-down hotel dick?"

"Shiel."

"What?"

"The answer is Shiel," said Steve patiently. "He was found dead almost an hour before Hughes notified the police. What was he doing during that hour? Hughes was hard put to it to scrape a living yet that same afternoon he paid a large sum of cash into his bank. Where did he get it from? Shiel had very little money—when found."

"Hughes robbed him?" Markham frowned. "Took his money, just like that?"

"Maybe he was told to take it," suggested Steve. "As a reward for, say, contacting the King Organisation before calling the local police. Maybe Shiel had something on him King wanted to remain private. I don't know. But I do know that Hughes was greedy. Maybe he held something back. He was called and a rendezvous arranged. He wrote down the address—I spotted the faint traces where his stylo had bitten through the paper. He kept the date. He was killed."

"It makes sense," admitted Markham. "It could have happened as you say. King wouldn't have trouble finding an assassin to do the job." He made an impatient gesture. "But all this is surmise. There's no way of proving it."

"I know that."

"So it's a dead-end."

"No," said Steve. "I don't think that it is. Hughes was a greedy man," he explained. "He wanted to milk the cow while he had the chance. He'd been paid-off once and he wanted the same again. He figured that he'd get it too. What would give him that confidence?"

He saw the light begin to dawn in Markham's eyes.

"He had a copy of whatever it was he offered. Photo-stats maybe. That's why he was stripped, to make sure that nothing incriminating was found on the body. But Hughes might have wanted insurance."

"Another copy," said Markham.

"There was a self-service shop near the rendezvous," said Steve. "A kid who hangs around there remembered Hughes. He went into the shop. They have a copying machine. Hughes mailed something before going to meet his killer. You don't have to think too hard to guess what it was."

"No," said Markham. "But are we any better off? We don't know where and to whom he mailed it."

"We can find out. He didn't have that many friends. My guess is that he mailed it back to himself maybe via an accommodation address. I've got men working on it." Steve looked at Markham. "All right," he said casually, "Now suppose you tell me just what it is that you've got on Linda Sheldon?"

Markham hesitated.

"Come on," snapped Steve. "You talked about coincidence. What has that to do with Linda?"

"We've dug up some information on her financial background," said Markham slowly. "It doesn't add up."

"I know that."

"She had a call while you were away. The caller phoned blind. Who does that without reason?"

"Did they talk?"

"A little. They could have used a prearranged code."

"Anything else?" Steve felt the dryness of his mouth. Markham nodded.

"One other thing," he said. "It came from your office while you were away. I guess you know what it is."

"I know."

"It gives her a motive," said Markham. "The best."

He was right, it did. King had stolen the McKee effect from a woman. Patricia McKee was Linda Sheldon's maternal aunt.



IT WAS RAINING, a thin mist of drizzle scheduled each night from twelve to two—thirty minutes error allowed either side. Tonight it had been early.

"She's coming." Markham wore a communicator, the microphone tight against his throat, the receiver hugging the bone behind one ear. "She's just left the apartment." He pressed a switch and spoke soundless orders. "The boys'll go in as soon as she's left the building," he said. "If there's anything to find they'll find it."

"Tell them to look in the desk," said Steve flatly. He stood motionless as Markham relayed the order, his eyes on the main entrance to the building. She would use it—there was no reason why she shouldn't.

"There she is!" Markham didn't move as the slim figure swung into the street and began to walk towards the tube. He waited until she was half-way down the block before striding in pursuit. "It's in the bag," he said. "I'll bet a month's pay that's how she's carrying it."

Steve didn't answer. Linda was too fashionable to wear contrasting accessories yet she was carrying a too-large handbag of the wrong colour to go with her coat and shoes.

They followed her into the concourse of the underground tubeway, waited as she bought a ticket, joined the crocodile down the escalator. A man brushed past them and went on ahead. A couple followed by two women fanned out on the platform, moving with a vague, familiar purposefulness. Steve raised his eyebrows.

"This one isn't going to duck out," said the chief grimly. "I've got six of my best pinning her down. We're along just for the ride."

It took them half-way across the city. She made no effort to avoid pursuit, not even looking back when she changed trains, and Steve wondered if she were either very clever or very stupid. He didn't think that she was stupid.

They reached the air terminal and Markham grunted as she entered an automat.

"This is the same trick that Ransom pulled," he said. "She'll take a tray, find a seat, go to the powder room and duck out from there." He scowled as she rose and went towards the washroom. "See what I mean?"

"A ringer?"

"I shouldn't think so—not this time. The rooms here have two entrances. My guess is that she'll leave by the other." Markham listened to the tiny voice vibrating behind his ear. "Just as I thought. Let's go!"

She was still carrying the handbag and still seemed unaware of her followers. Steve slowed as she entered the terminal and caught Markham by the arm.

"This is too open," he said. "She knows me and if she spots me we'll have been wasting our time." He jerked his head towards a coffee bar. "We'll wait in here."

Markham nodded, letting Steve buy the coffee, shielding the motions of his lips as he relayed orders.

"She's killing time," he said as Steve joined him with the coffee. "Looking at magazines, checking flight times—" He frowned. "Now she's powdering her face."

"Using the mirror to look behind her." Steve tasted the coffee, added sugar, stirred. "What now?"

"Some action. She's going over to the public lockers . . . opening one . . . standing before it . . . stepping back. She still has the handbag."

"Or one exactly like it," said Steve.

Markham nodded. "A bust," he said disgustedly. "They had this all worked out. She delivers the goods to a locker. Someone has planted the payoff in advance in a duplicate bag. They wait until she's well away and then go to pick up the goods."

"You could grab them when they do."

"Sure, but what would we have? A creep who knows nothing. If we don't grab him he'll take a cab and 'forget' the package. If we pick up the cabbie we can't prove a thing. If we don't he picks up another fare and that fare leaves with the goods. Maybe he'll pass it on. Maybe he'll deliver it. These boys are smart."

"Just careful," said Steve. He leaned back, closing his

eyes, conscious of the fatigue which dulled his thinking. It had been a slim hope that Linda would lead them to Ransom, an even slimmer one that she would be able to guide them to those who had engineered the crash. Now it seemed that hope had vanished. It was like all the other leads in the case. He jerked fully awake as he heard what the chief was saying.

"No. You can't do that."

"Why not?" Markham's voice revealed his own fatigue and irritation. "We've enough to pull her in and that's what I'm going to do. She has a workshop hidden in that desk. That's evidence enough to pull her in for questioning." His lips made a thin, cruel line. "I'm tired of running around in circles and getting nowhere. She's broken the law and I'm justified in pulling her in."

"Yes," said Steve. His fingers toyed with the handle of his cup. "I want you to leave her."

"Is that an order?"

"I'd rather you didn't take it as one. But I don't want you to act without my say so."

"All right," snapped Markham. "You're the boss. What are you going to do now?"

"Talk to her. Where is she?"

Markham scowled, gave an order, listened to the answer.

"Back at the automat." He sounded vaguely surprised. "Now what would she be doing back there?"

She was sitting in the centre of the eating space, a slim, somehow forlorn and vulnerable figure. The massed bays of the automat dwarfed her with their mechanical coldness. Steve fed coins into a slot, drew a cup of coffee, sat uninvited at her table. Their eyes met.

"Mr. Delmonte. How nice."

"Steve," he corrected mechanically. "What are you doing out so late?"

"Minding my own business. And you?"

"Running the world."

He tasted the coffee, pursed his lips, drank it. It didn't

help. Irritably he rose, drew more coffee and halted before a drug-dispenser. A quarter emu bought a treble shot of wakeydope. He swallowed it, washed down the taste, went to draw more coffee. He looked at Linda where she sat, outwardly calm and apparently totally disinterested in everything around her. She looked very lovely.

He remembered what an older man had told him during his early days in the service.

"You can never be sure," he'd warned. "They could have lovely faces and wonderful figures but the mind inside could be warped all to hell. Remember that when you feel yourself beginning to fall for one. Don't ever get fooled by the package. It's the contents which count."

It had been good advice. It was still good advice. Which didn't make it any the easier to take.

"I couldn't sleep," she said as he rejoined her. "I thought that it would be better to take a walk than to lie staring at the ceiling. Satisfied?"

He stared at her without answering, trying to fit a criminal mask over her face and then, suddenly, was tired of the whole dirty game of cat-and-mouse.

"Give me your bag." He reached for it a fraction too late. He gripped the leather, pulled, yielded as she held it fast.

"Let go!" She was white with anger. "Let go or I'll scream."

"You little fool!" He kept his voice low ; to an outsider he was an attentive escort whispering compliments. "What kind of a game do you think you're playing? You're as near as nothing to being taken in for questioning. Do you know what that means?"

"I can guess." Her voice was cold. "But don't you have to have something called evidence before you can do that?"

"The police, yes. Security, no. I can have you arrested on suspicion. Do you want me to prove it?"

She looked at him. She read the anger and irritation in his eyes, the bleak determination ridging his jaw. She swallowed, no longer sure of herself.

"You've been watched," he said coldly. "Your phone tapped, your apartment searched. You know what was found in the desk. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"Tell you?" The lift of her eyebrows matched the rise in her voice. "Confess, you mean? To what?"

"Stop playing games!" This time when he reached for her bag he was faster than she was. He opened it, lips thinning as he saw the currency inside. "Is this the payoff?"

"Give me that!" She snatched for the bag. "What are you doing? Give it to me!"

"Not until you tell me how you got it." He waited, then shrugged. "No? Well, there are other ways. Maybe you'll be able to fool the lie-test but we won't let it rest there. We'll use drugs, shock, deep-therapy. It won't be pleasant for you but we'll get the truth and, if we ruin your mind in the process, you'll only have yourself to blame." He pushed back his chair. "Come on."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To headquarters. Are you going to walk or do I have to carry you?"

She didn't alter expression but her fingers picked nervously at the edge of the table and he knew that he had shattered her calm. He wasn't proud of the achievement. Backed by the full weight of authority it was a small thing to browbeat one lonely girl.

"What," she said finally, "do you want to know?"

"The money. Is it a payoff?"

"Yes."

"You've been selling adapted crowns?"

"Yes." She anticipated his next question. "I don't know who buys them. I never see the man. I was propositioned over the phone. I refused. Then a man came to see me. It was dark, he was just a voice in the night. He offered me a lot of money. I needed it and I—well, I took it." She looked at him, her eyes defiant. "I needed the money," she said again. "I had to have it."

It was no defence but it was human and probably true.

"So that's all you know? You've never seen who's behind this?"

"No. I've only heard a voice which was probably disguised."

He nodded then stared at her with sudden suspicion.

"Why are you here? I mean, why did you return to this automat?" The explanation struck him as he asked the question. "This was the exchange point! You switched the bag holding the crowns to one holding the cash. You did it in one of the toilets. The business at the terminal was to throw any followers off-track. Whose idea was that?"

"His. He gave me instructions. We had a code and set routines."

"And you came back because, in some way, you hoped to spot him," said Steve. "You were wasting your time."

"I suppose so." She tried to smile and couldn't make it. "What happens now?"

"I'm thinking about it." He frowned, annoyed at his lack of decision. She sensed what he was thinking.

"You can't be sure that I'm telling the truth," she said. "I can't blame you for that. But if I can prove that, at least a part of what I said is true, would it make any difference?"

"What part?"

"The reason I wanted the money." Her eyes were full of appeal.

"All right," he said curtly. "Prove it."

They caught a heli cab and flew for an hour, sitting silent as the lights of the city fell far behind. They landed before the blank wall of a private sanatorium. Linda was known. A tall, cadaverous man dressed in soft green greeted her as they entered the building. The name on his tunic was Emil Linguard. He looked curiously at Steve.

"Mr. Delmonte is a friend," explained Linda. "We flew out together. How is Mark?"

"About the same." Linguard didn't shrug but his tone conveyed the gesture. "I've warned you against too high hopes, Miss Sheldon. We are doing our best but miracles

are beyond us." He turned to Steve and held out his hand. "Are you a friend of Mark's?"

"No," said Linda quickly. "Of mine. He doesn't know my brother."

"That can be rectified," said Steve. "I'd like to meet him."

Mark was lying in a private room, a mound beneath a sheet to which were attached various machines. The head was a bandaged ball, the hands shapeless blobs. What little could be seen of his face looked like seamed and seared steak. The eyes were closed, the sockets empty.

"My brother," said Linda. She was bitter. "Now you know why I have to have money."

"An accident?"

"Yes. He was in a crash. He should have died but he didn't. Some would have called him lucky." She swallowed, on the edge of tears, then her voice grew firm. "His spine is shattered. He's paralysed from the neck down. He cannot hear. He is blind. Without those machines he would die. Sometimes I wish he would."

"And at others?" Steve kept his voice low from instinct, not necessity.

"I pray for a miracle. Hospitalisation takes money. Re-grafts even more and he is beyond that kind of help. He needs a new, prosthetic body if he is to ever really live again."

Steve didn't comment. He had his own ideas as to the extent which a man could change his body to artificial parts and still regard himself as a man.

"Linguard has been honest with me," she said. "He has suggested euthanasia but I won't hear of it. I made him admit that there is a slim chance and I insisted that he take it. It costs money—I promised to supply it. Now—"

"Now there will be no more money. Is that it?"

She didn't answer. Reaching out he took her by the shoulders and stared into her eyes.

"Listen," he said thickly. "I know what the temptation must be but don't yield to it. You won't be able to help your brother from the inside of a prison. Remember that."

He released her and left the room. Linguard met him outside.

"A fine woman that," he said, nodding towards where she stood beside her brother. "As a doctor I've learned to assess the value placed on the helpless by those responsible for their welfare. It isn't very high. At times you get cynical and then someone like Miss Sheldon happens along and restores your faith in human nature."

Steve made non-committal noises.

"You didn't know her brother, did you?" Linguard remembered. "No, you said you didn't. A fine young man. Reckless as they came but that was a part of his trade. In his business you have to be reckless."

"What was that?"

"His trade?" Linguard raised his eyebrows. "Didn't she tell you? He was a rocket-race pilot. One of the best."

It was quiet in the helicab on the way back to the city. For a long time she didn't speak and then, as the flaring sign on the Palace grew close enough to read, he felt the impact of her eyes.

"What is going to happen to me?"

"If you've told me the whole truth—nothing."

"Do you mean that?" She turned to look at him full-face. Her eyes were luminous in the subdued lighting.

"I mean it." He looked at her shoulders—too slim for the weight she had forced them to bear.

"I don't understand. How—?"

"How can I condone what you've done?" He shrugged, a part of his mind cynically questioning if he would have done the same had she been older, less attractive.

"You've used your skill and knowledge to make some easy money," he said harshly. "Society wouldn't blame you for that. But you adapted crowns to cater to kinks. That is a criminal act and that makes you a criminal. But not as far as Security is concerned. We aren't interested."

"Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you."

"But understand this. The local police have you marked as a suspect. If you continue in the business they'll jump.



If you've got the sense I think you have you won't run the risk. Believe me, you wouldn't know what hit you."

She didn't answer and he looked at her with sudden doubt. She could have fooled him. She could have turned the weapons of her sex against him to dull his suspicions. She had cause to hate King—more now than ever for his money could have helped her brother. She could have made the crown Murray had worn. If she had then he was abetting a guilty participant to a triple killing.

Then he saw the shine of her eyes and, suddenly, she was against him, the softness of her in his arms, her tears wet on his cheek.

He had never been able to harden himself to the sight of tears.

## eight

MARCUS EDWARD KING was in conference. He held a glistening strip of metal in his hands, turning it so that the light shone from the surface in iridescent splendour, his eyes and face expressionless as he listened to a technician.

"We shall be able to hit full-scale production within ten days of your say-so, Mr. King. The new model can be automated within a week which allows three days for us to synchronise the machines. In two weeks we can be ready to flood the market."

King nodded and looked at his Head of Advertising.

"Everything is set to go, Mr. King. I've planned a ten-day saturation of all advertising media. Public figures and video stars have been signed to wear the new model at all times. I'm allowing a three-day period to overcome consumer inertia and two days for the new fashion-trend to become established. In two weeks we'll be able to dispose of all the factory can make."

King nodded again and looked at the third man seated at the table. Mowbray, Head of Finance, cleared his throat.

"The initial outlay will be tremendous, Mr. King. Full coverage demands millions in preliminary outlay. We've managed to secure options on most advertising media but, for world-wide coverage, we need to secure those outside

of our immediate influence. The trouble is that, as soon as our intentions become apparent, the market will harden and prices rise."

He flushed as King raised an eyebrow.

"I realise that I state the obvious. I also realise that we are operating through the medium of various super-numerary companies. However, I was referring to those channels of communication controlled by our . . ." He coughed. "By the Cartel."

"You were going to say 'by our competitors,'" said King. "Must I remind you that we have no competitors? I control the world-patents on the McKee effect in all aspects of its application. The Cartel cannot compete."

"No, of course not, Mr. King. But they will resist any effort on our part to expand into their sphere of influence."

"You seem to be very concerned with the obvious," said King dryly. "You are not paid for that. You are paid to recognise obstacles and to find a way around, through or over them. I shouldn't have to remind you of that."

"No, Mr. King." Mowbray's face was ashen. He remembered what had happened to Fromarch.

"Well?"

"We could co-operate with the Cartel, sir. They would be willing to let us use their channels in return for a chance to share the new model."

"And if not?"

"It would be war, sir." Mowbray was positive. "Our organisation and resources against theirs."

"Agreed," said King. "Would we win?"

"That depends on the immediate return on sales of the new model. At the present suggested price the answer must verge on the negative. I realise that the price has been carefully chosen but the profit margin is too low."

"Automation will take care of that," said the technician. "The manufacturing costs will fall as production increases. You've seen the graphs?"

"Naturally." Mowbray was curt. "However there is an average-cost figure which cannot be lowered. Based on that figure, coupled with retailers margin, distribution costs,

packaging and deterioration the answer is still doubtful. Add the possibility of labour strife, blockage of raw material, increase in freight charges and minor sabotage and the answer is negative."

"I see." King ceased toying with the metal band. "Your suggestions?"

"Restrict the market to our own sphere of influence. With cheaper advertising and lowered distribution costs things will be in our favour."

"Or?"

"Raise the basic wholesale price. Add five per cent and things would be in our favour. Add ten and we would win."

"That is your considered opinion?"

"Yes, Mr. King, sir. It is."

"All right," said Marcus. "This is what you do. Prepare a summary of both additions. Run a test-campaign on the machines. Include every imaginable unfavourable circumstance and adjust until you find the optimum price which will achieve victory under any set of circumstances."

"It will take time, Mr. King."

"I'll give you time." Marcus looked at the technician. "You find ways of cutting manufacturing costs. I want the lowest figure for the highest output. If you need new equipment then include the cost in your calculations. You can lower the determined life of the product if you have to."

"I've gone as low as I can, Mr. King."

"Go lower." He stared at the Head of Advertising. "Re-check your schedule of costs. You can get a thousand girls for the price of one public figure. Tackle the fashion-trend from both sides. You should know what to do."

"Yes, Mr. King."

"Right. Now move! All of you! I want the new schedules on my desk within seven days!"

He scowled after them as they left. Little men with limited imaginations needing the whip to keep them up to scratch. He would give them the whip. If there was to be war then he intended to win it.

And, knowing the Cartel, there would be war.

"Daydreaming, Mr. King?" Fullen had entered the room with his soundless tread. He closed the door and looked curiously at the metal circlet. "The new model?"

"Yes." Marcus held it high, turning it so that the light flashed from the machined and polished surface. A diffraction grating had been scored into the metal and it shone with all the colours of the rainbow. "Pretty, isn't it?"

It was more than that. It was an ornament every woman would want to bind her hair—every man need to enhance his status. The glitter spoke of wealth.

"A simple little thing." Marcus dropped it to the desk where it lay like a coiled and sleeping serpent. Fullen didn't answer.

"Well?" Marcus stared up at the psychiatrist. His eyes glinted with mockery. "Don't you agree?"

"Does it matter what I think?"

"No," admitted Marcus. "It doesn't." He reached out and touched the crown. "With this we come to basics. We've done away with free choice. This crown will receive only what we want it to receive. Naturally, the price will be low."

Low enough so that everyone could afford the new model. It would be hailed as a major breakthrough in manufacturing techniques and advertising would be careful not to mention that it was a special crown.

One which would soothe and calm the wearer and give a state of continual euphoria. One which could receive signals sent on a special band. A circlet which would give subaural commands.

Which would make the whole world, if Marcus had his way, into a captive audience.

"You don't like it do you?" Marcus looked up at Fullen, one hand still touching the crown.

"No."

"Could you tell me why?"

"I don't like the idea of people being captive to something beyond their control. I don't like men and women being regarded as cattle."

"What else are they?" King rose to his feet, eyes re-

flecting his contempt. "They are sheep. They deserve to be sheared."

"Yes," said Fullen. "I expected you to say that."

"And why not? I've sheared them all my life. Those at the top have always done so. That is why they are at the top."

"And, of course, the public doesn't really know what is good for them." Fullen spoke with a tired sarcasm. "It takes men like you, Mr. King, to give them what they should have."

"Yes," said King. He ignored the irony. "Without men like me they would still be living in caves and picking lice. Some men are born to rule."

"By Divine Right?"

"You could put it like that," said Marcus. It was an effort to remain calm but he could not afford the luxury of rage at Fullen's tone. "Not all men are equal. Some are better fitted to rule than others. Do you deny that?"

"No."

"Then, if you accept the existence of a Creator, who else determines which men should lead and which should follow? Thus, those who rule, do so by Divine Right. You agree?" Marcus shrugged as Fullen made no reply. "You are too cautious to commit yourself. Such caution is a common trait of a weak character."

"As you say, Mr. King." Fullen's voice was casual, his eyes veiled. "When are you going ahead with the new model?"

"As soon as certain details have been resolved." Marcus slipped the crown into a pocket. He looked at Fullen and shook his head. "I can't understand your hypocrisy, Fullen. Men have always been subjected to propaganda. They have always had the choice of ignoring it. The new model will alter that right of choice. After all, they don't have to wear it. No one will force them."

No one had to. Marcus knew his public. They would willingly wear the yoke.

High in the building Ransom sat at his ease in a small but comfortable room. He was being watched. Five men

kept him under constant surveillance. They were men trained to penetrate disguise, to recognise the walk and stance and posture of a man rather than purely physical characteristics. Ransom didn't know they were there. If he had he wouldn't have let it bother him.

He rose as Marcus entered the room.

"At last," he said. "I was beginning to think that you'd forgotten me."

"Sit down." Marcus dropped into a chair, gestured Ransom to his seat. "Why are you annoyed? You had no objection when I sent for you and asked you to stay."

"No," admitted Ransom. "I didn't mind staying. It suited my purpose."

"And now?"

"Now I'm tired of being cooped up in this fancy cell. How about getting down to business?"

He was curt but Marcus wasn't annoyed. He had known this man a long time. Once he had treated him as a son. It had been safe to do that for there was no blood-bond between them—no fear that the prince would aspire to the throne. But he had created another danger. An overwhelming pride. He had tried to break it—and had lost his son.

"All right," said Marcus. "We had our social chat when you arrived. What I have to say now couldn't have been said earlier." Marcus paused and then, softly. "How much is life worth, David?"

"That depends." Ransom was surprised at the question. "I've risked mine for a week's keep and taken it from those who valued it less. If you want a short answer I'd say that life is worth everything a man owns—without it he owns nothing." His eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Do you want me to turn assassin?"

"No. I have all those that I need."

"Then——?"

"Shiel is dead," said Marcus. "You remember Shiel?"

"Harry? Yes, I remember him." Ransom's voice held a tinge of mockery. "When you kicked me out I thought that he'd be riding high. You always did like him."

"I trusted him. Now he's dead."

"Assassinated?"

"The police say not," said Marcus. "But how can you be sure when there are so many ways to kill a man?"

"You can't." Ransom spoke from knowledge. "Was there any reason for him to be a target?"

"I don't know. There could have been. He was working for me on a special assignment. Someone may have got wind of it—I don't know who or how. Maybe his death was due to natural causes after all but I daren't take any chances. That's why I sent for you."

"Why?"

"I want you to take over where Shiel left off."

"No." Ransom shook his head. "I don't need the work. I get along all right."

"You did," corrected Marcus. "Since you've been my guest there have been one or two changes. I don't think that you would find yourself as popular as you imagine." Marcus relaxed in his chair. "In fact, David, if you refuse me I don't think that you will be around much longer."

"Are you threatening me, Marcus?"

"Of course not, David. Why should I threaten? It's just that—well, you know my ways."

"Yes," said Ransom. He looked down at his hands and wondered at his self-control. They rested limp and flaccid on his knees.

"You've been under psych-observation since you arrived," said Marcus. "The Mourne-Baylis system. My technicians confirm what I had hoped. You have apparently grown up. I'm glad that you have forgotten the past."

"Not forgotten, Marcus." Ransom breathed deeply, then smiled. "You don't forget being turned from a prince into a pauper. But I'm a realist. The past is dead."

"Yes, David. Quite dead."

"So you want me to carry on where Shiel left off," said Ransom. "Your technicians say that I can be trusted. But why me?"

"Isn't that obvious? We've been out of contact for five years. As far as anyone knows you have every reason to hate me and still do. From my point of view you would make a perfect replacement for Shiel."

"And, if Harry was assassinated, they might not be so

quick on the trigger with me," said Ransom thoughtfully. "They might even be inclined to make a deal. Have you considered that?"

"Naturally."

"Does it bother you?"

"No," Marcus was contemptuous. "It could even be to our advantage."

"My advantage," said Ransom quietly. "You seem to be taking a lot on trust. How can you be certain that I won't be tempted—and fall?"

"Because you're not a fool!" Marcus bared his teeth in a humourless smile. "You'd never live long enough to enjoy selling me out. I'd put so high a price on your head that assassination would be inevitable. But there's another reason. It just wouldn't pay."

He smiled as he saw the look in Ransom's eyes. The old, familiar, hungry glow. Greed was an emotion which Marcus could recognise and understand.

The house was a barred fortress set in a secluded part of the city. The door opened to a special code. The tall, masked figure within had an eidetic memory. He listened as the cloaked man rapped his identification number. Beneath his mask Ransom sweated with impatience.

"A moment, sir." The doorman moved to a panel, spoke, returned. "Room twenty-one, sir. You will pay now, if you please."

Ransom paid.

"Your krown, sir." Ransom felt the cool touch of metal clamping about his skull. "Your whip, sir." The leather was warm to his hand. "Thank you, sir."

Ransom went down a corridor and up a flight of stairs. Locked doors marched past; thin sounds seeping past the closures. Odd sounds. Kink-sounds. They were to be expected—it was that kind of house.

The door of room twenty-one opened, closed behind him. A man stood inside, masked, armed with a whip. He felt the fear of anticipation.

Ransom shared it.

"You——?" He snarled and flexed his arm. The lash



snapped spitefully across the room. This time the masked figure felt terror and a desperate hate.

Ransom shared it.

He shared the rage as his lash cracked home, the pain and the fear and the futile struggle. He felt his own anger and contempt grow beneath the stimulus—to increase as it reflected itself back at him. He fought with the whip as his weapon and could sense the emotions of his opponent, the terror as he tore the lash from the other's hands, the screaming, shrieking agony as he beat and beat and beat at the quivering, helpless mass of tissue.

He was sweating when he finished, his body drenched with perspiration, his nerves flaming from the shared emotions. Not at full-strength, he was not masochistic, but enough to feel the bite of the lash, the pain and terror and desperation.

From the corner of the room, mewling with pain, his opponent stared up at him, his eyes frantic beneath the mask.

The plastic surrogate of Marcus Edward King.

## nine

STEVE WOKE WITH a sour taste in his mouth and the feeling that he hadn't slept at all. The wakey dope he had swallowed was taking its toll. He had the choice between taking more, going back to sleep or trying to ride it out. The phone jarred the air before he could make up his mind.

"Delmonte?" The face belonged to Security. "You'd better get over here fast."

"Trouble?" Steve longed for coffee, hot sweet and strong. The man shrugged.

"Don't ask me. Just get over here."

It was an order which had to be obeyed but first came a shower, coffee and pills to kill the need for sleep. Thirty minutes later he entered the building which housed the local Security office. Dale Markham rose from a seat. Steve blinked at him.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'd hoped that you could answer that," said the chief. "Didn't you leave word at the office?"

"No. I've just woken up."

"You look it." Markham was unsympathetic. "I checked the locker," he said. "It was empty. Did you get anything from the woman?"

"She's clear."

Markham looked dubious, he was not the man to trust a woman's word.

"We went to see her brother in a private sanatorium," said Steve. "I'm having a rundown made on him and on his doctor, a man named Linguard. Did you get anything new from the circus?"

"No." Markham sounded disgusted. "I've traced back the plane and it's clear all the way back to the factory. Klien won't break and his boys know nothing. Someone is doing a sweet cover-job. My guess is that Klien knows more than he says but I can't prove it."

"And Ransom?"

"Still no sign. We'll keep trying though, there's not much else to do. But I'll tell you one thing, Steve. This case is a damn sight more complicated than I like."

Karl Shiller looked up from his desk as the two men entered the inner office. He was not alone. A nondescript man sat to one side, seeming to fade into the woodwork. Steve wasn't fooled. He had met men like Jones before.

"Sit down." Karl Shiller, Head of Northwestern Terran Security, gestured towards chairs. "As you're connected with the case," he said to Markham, "I've invited you to this conference. I don't believe in internecine warfare between different branches of the law-enforcement personnel. We are all working for the common good. Naturally anything you hear is to be treated with confidence."

"I understand," said Markham.

"Good." Shiller looked at Steve. "When you asked for a complete background check on Shiel I thought that you were shooting in the air. I rode along because it was your career that you were risking. What made you suspicious?"

"Something didn't make sense," said Steve. "Why should

he be in Malibu? Why should he die? What was he doing?" Steve shrugged. "Call it a hunch."

"It paid off," said Karl. "Shiel dying the way he did was pure coincidence. Sometimes I think that police work would be impossible without it. All right, let's look at it. Shiel was found dead. He worked for King. The hotel detective, Hughes, thought that he would be smart. He phoned the King Organisation before he called the police. Shiel was carrying something King didn't want found. Hughes mailed it and took the money in the wallet as his payoff. So far, so good. But Hughes was greedy and tried to exert pressure. He copied whatever it was and asked for more. He met someone who killed him."

"One of King's assassins?"

"Probably, Steve, it makes sense." Karl looked at the agent. "You were right about what Hughes must have done. We've found the copy. He'd mailed it to himself."

"And?"

"We've deciphered it. It makes—interesting reading." Shiller stared broodingly at the top of his desk. "Shiel was an odd character," he said. "He was one of those men who have a love for paper and the written word. He kept notes." He shrugged. "More coincidence."

"This case is lousy with them," said Markham. "There are so many that they cancel out."

"Or make a peculiar kind of sense," corrected Steve. "How far have you got with the background check on Shiel?"

"Not too far but far enough," said Shiller. "Once we'd deciphered his notebook it was easy. Jones here," he gestured towards the third man, "dug up enough to make sense. It could also account for Ransom's disappearance. King must need a replacement for Shiel."

"Not Ransom." Markham was emphatic. "He would be the last man King would pick."

"Because they had a fight?" Shiller was cynical. "Where money is concerned emotions take second place. King would use the man who suited him best. Ransom fits the pattern."

"I don't see that," protested the chief. "Ransom hates King."

"Maybe, but money soothes a lot of wounds and King has money. But that isn't the only reason. The psych-boys have run behaviour patterns on what is known of King and Ransom. If you know enough about a man you can usually predict his reactions to any set of given circumstances. Ransom hates King, sure, but that is the very reason he would agree to replace Shiel. He has the strongest motive in the world to find what Shiel was looking for. King knows that. He also recognises the danger but, obviously, can guard against it." Shiller rested the palms of his hands flat on the desk. "So there it is. It fits and the probability of it being correct is nine point three—almost certainty."

"Wait a minute," said Markham. He was frowning. "I don't get this. What was Shiel looking for that's so important?"

"Immortality," said Shiller.

The word held such connotations that for a moment there was silence then Markham snorted his contempt.

"Crazy!"

Steve remained silent. He was thoughtful.

Shiller shook his head. "No, whatever King is he isn't crazy. He knows what he's doing." He looked at Jones. "Tell them."

"All right," said the nondescript man. He took a sheaf of papers from an inside pocket. "The transcript of Shiel's notebook," he explained. "Shiel knew him very well. King has a pathological fear of death. He isn't unique in that but he has the advantage of being so rich that he can do something about it. He realises that life is worth all he possesses. So, quite simply, he is trying to buy life."

"Life, yes," said Steve. "He can buy regrafts and body-parts—but immortality?"

"He sees nothing futile in the quest," said Jones. "Maybe because he wants to believe in it so much. But for the past thirty years he has attacked the problem from three angles. The mechanical, the metaphysical and the actual.

The mechanical means of extending life are too well known for me to go into detail. Artificial hearts, lungs, stomachs and the rest of it. Such means work but are limited. They also cripple the patient and make him totally dependent on others."

"And King wouldn't like that," said Steve.

Jones nodded. "King's father died while attached to such a machine. The experience would not be conducive to trust. The metaphysical he has tackled by means of adapted crowns. The ideal is to effect a total change of personality. If successful it could mean that a man would live forever simply by switching from body to body. The snags are that the resident personality cannot be totally destroyed and, as far as we know, the invading personality cannot survive the death of its physical body."

"Just as well," said Markham grimly. "When I kill a crook I like to know that he's dead."

"And the actual?" Steve ignored the Chief's comment.

"Personal immortality," said Jones. "The method he likes best. The one for which he is prepared to spend his last penny." He paused and gestured with his papers. "The one Shiel was looking for when he died."

And the one, thought Steve grimly, that Ransom, if Shiller was right, had been told to find.

What sort of man would trust an enemy with the secret of his immortality?

"I don't believe it," said Markham. "You can't just walk out and find a thing like that. It doesn't make sense."

"It does if you know where and how to look," said Jones. "It does if you are desperate enough and rich enough to investigate every possibility. And it makes even better sense if you are convinced that what you are looking for actually exists."

"But immortality?" Steve was doubtful.

"Let us call it extended life," said Jones. "Then, perhaps, you won't be so incredulous. And it is perfectly possible that such a thing does exist. People who have so long a life-span that they are, to all appearances, immortal. The legend of Cartaphilius is a case in point. There we——"

"The Wandering Jew!" Markham snorted his annoyance. "Must we dabble in superstition?"

"There are many who would not call it that." Jones leaned forward a little, seeming to come at once alive and real. He was, Steve noticed, intensely serious. "The legend is simple. A man was given a command that he would not die—and he did not die. I'm not arguing as to the truth of the legend. I'm merely saying that, in the light of present knowledge, such a psychic shock could have precisely that effect. What a man believes will, to that man, be true. We know the relationship between mental conviction and physical health. Psychosomatic medicine is very real."

"Are you saying that King is looking for this man?" Markham was derisive . . . "King—looking for the Wandering Jew?"

"Of course not." Jones restrained his annoyance. "I simply mentioned the legend as an example. There are others, Methuselah and his contemporaries who, if we are to believe in the old records, lived almost a thousand years. But that is beside the point. The main thing is that King has reason to believe that there are certain people among us who have lived incredibly long lives. When you come to think of it such people are more or less inevitable."

"Freaks," said Steve. "Mutations."

"Exactly. In an infinite universe anything can happen. The race is continually changing and we are subject to mutation at all times. Some mutations are harmful and short-lived. The successful ones we wouldn't know about. The ancients weren't so reticent. It isn't straining credulity too far to believe that, if Methuselah and his contemporaries were actual, living people, their genes could carry the seeds of extended life. Such genes could, by chance, have combined in one person to give him that extended life-span. Or there could be successful mutations with that characteristic."

"Yes," admitted Marham reluctantly. "I suppose that could happen."

"It has," said Shiller. He nodded to Jones. "Continue."

"King told Shiel to discover any such persons. It was his

special assignment. Shiel was a clever man and used his imagination. He checked Central Registry. He bought time at Cee West and asked the computer what he should look for. He went through a mountain of old files, medical records, rare blood-groups. He investigated cases of freak accidents in which the person involved should have died but was unhurt. He searched insurance records and delved into case histories. He must have spent millions in cash and twenty years of time. He found what he was looking for.

"He found a man who has lived for a long, long time. The one man Shiel could discover who has what King would give his fortune to possess. The secret of longevity."

"His name?" Markham leaned across the desk. He was interested, his previous incredulity forgotten in the new flush of conviction. "What is his name?"

"That," said Shiller dryly, "is the one thing Shiel didn't write down."

The room was a clutter of machines attended by busy operators. Stacks of file cards were fed into the hoppers of the machines, relevant information spilling from their chutes. Shiller looked down at the activity from the balcony then turned to Markham.

"This is the heart of Security," he said. "The trick is to be at the right place at the right time and before any trouble has a chance to get beyond the hopeful stage. That's where we have the advantage over you police. You only come in when it's too late."

"The difference between prevention and cure," said Markham. He nodded towards the machines. "What are they looking for?"

"Potential trouble. At the moment we're concentrating on King. We know about his new model krown and a pretty good idea of what it can do. As yet making and selling it is perfectly legal." Shiller looked up as an aide came towards him. "Trouble," he said. "I'm wanted. Take over, Steve."

"A nice guy," said Markham as the Head of Northwestern Security moved away. "He doesn't automatically

assume that a cop is too dumb to understand what is going on. I like that.”

“Shiller used to be a cop himself,” said Steve. “Did you get what he was talking about?”

“I think so. King is up to something which you people regard as potential trouble. From what I can make out there’s nothing you can do about it. How do you handle things like that?”

“We have our ways.” Steve didn’t explain that most of them were impromptu and many of them were illegal. They worked, that was all that counted. “For example, we could persuade King’s rivals to take action against him. Or we could bring an action in the courts on the grounds of misappropriation of basic patents, things like that. We could even ferment a strike at the factory.” He saw Markham’s expression. “It’s a messy business but what choice do we have? The tycoons control politics. If we’re to stop them slicing up society like a piece of cake we’ve got to fight them as we can.”

“Them?” Markham looked baffled. “I thought that Security was concerned with external enemies. The Martian Combine. The Venusian League. Even the Luna Co-operative.”

“Our most dangerous enemies are those within our own society,” said Steve. “Take King. If he makes his new krown he will trigger off a commercial war. That would mean real hardship for millions. The point isn’t that he might win or lose but that we don’t want a war of any kind. So we have to do our best to stop it.”

“How?” Markham looked at the machines below. “I see. That’s what they’re looking for?”

“We’re running test schedules based on assumed data. Will King start a war? How will he operate if he decides to flood the market with his new model? Will he risk upsetting the *status quo*?” Steve shrugged. “As yet the answers are negative. He is too old to risk everything he owns and, as he has no children, he isn’t interested in the prospects of founding a dynasty. King is basically a very selfish man. He has no intention of working so that someone else can enjoy the fruits of his labours.”



"So there will be no war." Markham sounded satisfied. "You're just——" He broke off as he saw Steve's face. "Have I missed something? The crash?"

"That's still a mystery," admitted Steve. "As far as we can discover the Cartel had nothing to do with it. And yet, whoever did it, had to have a reason. Maybe we've just found out what it was."

"King's search for immortality?" Markham shook his head. "I still think that's a pipe-dream."

"Maybe. But King believes in it and that's all that counts. If he is convinced that he is going to live forever——" Steve shook his head. "God help the world if he ever finds what he's looking for," he said softly. And then, with sudden anger. "Damn Shiel! Why didn't he write down the name?"

**To be concluded**

---

**Don't miss our companion**



a monthly collection for  
the Connoisseur  
edited by  
**KYRIL BONFIGLIOLI**

# Science Fantasy

Out now 2/6

# ADVERTISEMENTS

Small ads 4d. per word. Box numbers 6d. extra. To Advertising Manager, Roberts & Vinter Ltd., 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1.

## FOR SALE

ACE E. R. BURROUGHS, Andre Norton latest doubles. Send SAE for list. PLUS BOOKS LTD., 19, Abbey Parade, Merton High Street, London, S.W.19.

## WANTED

MAGISTER LUDI by Herman Hesse (Peter Owen), readable condition only if nec. or any other titles by Hesse in English. H. Bailey, 8, Colville Terrace, W.11.

JOHN BRUNNER requires German editions of following to complete personal files: 'Secret Agent of Terra', 'Skynappers', 'World Swappers', 'Rites of Ohe' by John Brunner; 'I Speak for Earth', 'Psionic Menace' by Keith Woodcott. Clean secondhand copies acceptable. Write details to Box 115, NWSF.

CHARLES L. HARNES and MERVYN PEAKE works required by collector. Inc. Peake illustrated books, children's books, books on drawing etc. Will pay 5/- for good copy of Authentic containing THE ROSE by

Harness. Send details to Box 826, NWSF.

## LITERARY etc.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION, Box 185, Manuka, A.C.T.

BSFA means British Science Fiction Association. Joining it means you receive Vector, the Journal that keeps you *au fait* with the SF scene, Tangent, the new fiction magazine, extensive postal library etc. For all details: The Hon. Sec., BSFA, 77, College Road North, Blundellsands, Liverpool 23.

## PUBLICATIONS

COMPACT BOOKS begin their new SF series with Moorcock's THE SUNDERED WORLDS (3/6). Send for your copy now and order Philip E. High's new novel THE PRODIGAL SUN at the same time. Compact Books, 42-44, Dock Street, London, E.1.

EPILOGUE, America's leading journal of SF criticism. For details write: The Editor, 52, Adrian Ave., New York, N.Y. 10463, U.S.A.

---

Published on the last Wednesday of every month by Roberts & Vinter Ltd., 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1. Subscriptions 34/- per year (\$6.00). No responsibility accepted for loss or damage of MSS or artwork. All characters fictitious. © 1965 by NEW WORLDS SF.

Printed by Richmond Hill Printing Works Ltd., 23/25 Abbott Road, Winton, Bournemouth.

# TWO WAYS TO KEEP UP WITH THE NEW WAVE OF BRITISH SF

- 1. ORDER** the two monthly COMPACT SF magazines, NEW WORLDS SF and SCIENCE FANTASY, from your usual newsagent or bookseller. Cost, 2/6 each or 5/- a month.
- 2. SUBSCRIBE** to NEW WORLDS SF and SCIENCE FANTASY. The cost of 34/- per annum for each magazine brings you 12 issues of each for a whole year without further trouble, with a wealth of reading entertainment.

In MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S NEW WORLDS you will find each month a selection from the best British and American writers, established and new; comprehensive news of sf published in Britain and the U.S.; sf activities and science developments, plus stimulating comment and letters. NEW WORLDS, now widely regarded as the trend-setter in its field, is always coming up with something fresh and original.

KYRIL BONFIGLIOLI edits the new SCIENCE FANTASY, and aims to broaden its appeal with a mixture of old-style solid-fuel stories, out-of-the-way fantasy and the occasional experimental piece. This is being achieved by including the work of many of the best-known names in mainstream sf writing, and adding that of a number of highly talented newcomers, several of whom are now contributing regularly as the result of readers' enthusiasm.

— — — Subscription enquires should be addressed to the publishers: — — —

ROBERTS & VINTER LTD., Dept. S150, 42-44 Dock Street, London, E.1

NAME .....

(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

ADDRESS .....

.....

Complete and clip out this coupon, and send with remittance,

(Please mark as required):	34/-	12 ISSUES	NEW WORLDS SF
	34/-	12 ISSUES	SCIENCE FANTASY
	68/-	12 ISSUES	BOTH MAGAZINES

# IN THIS ISSUE

In  
this special selection of  
top-quality stories you will find the

## **WONDER**

of the strange worlds of Charles Harness  
and J. G. Ballard

## **DARK IRONY**

of Brunner's and Vance's satires

## **STRANGE POSSIBILITY**

of Brian Aldiss's speculation

## **COMPLEXITY**

of E. C. Tubb's fast moving novel of the future

They are stories that cover a wide,  
spectrum of imaginative ideas.

They are stories you  
will not forget.